

*Complete Works of*  
**JOSEPH CONRAD**



**DELPHI CLASSICS**

**THE COMPLETE WORKS OF  
JOSEPH CONRAD**

(1857-1924)



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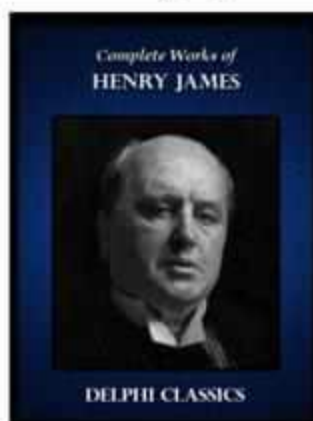
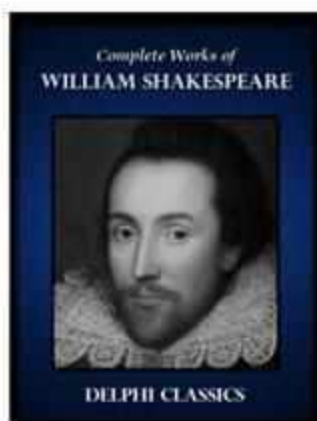
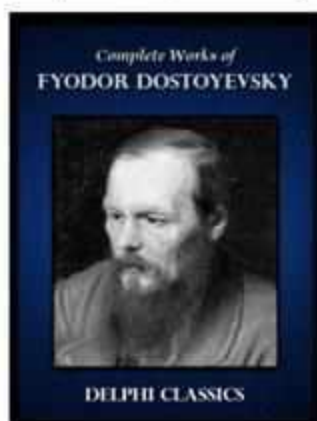
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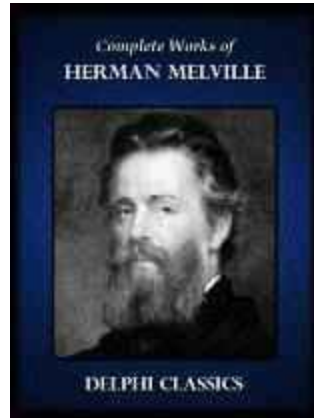


**THE COMPLETE WORKS OF**  
**JOSEPH CONRAD**



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# The Novels and Novellas



*Berdichev, the site of the hospital where Conrad was born*



*Conrad as a child*



*Apollo Korzeniowski, the author's father*





*Conrad's mother*

# ***ALMAYER'S FOLLY***

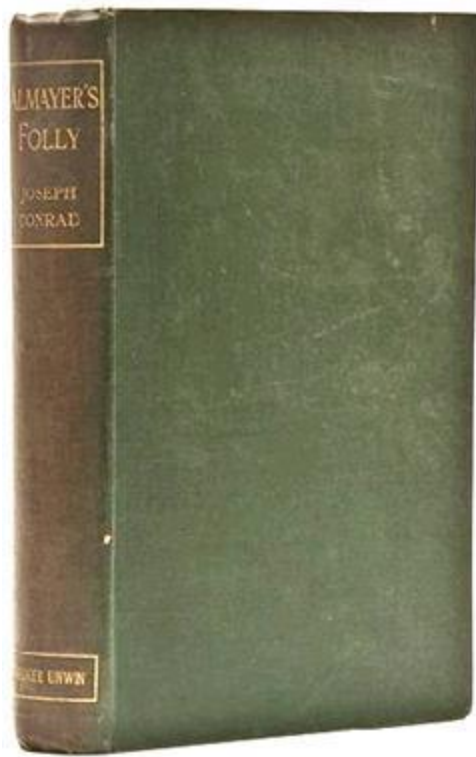


## **A STORY OF AN EASTERN RIVER**

*Almayer's Folly* was first published in 1895 and is Conrad's first novel. Set in the late 19th century, it concerns the life of the Dutch trader Kaspar Almayer in the Borneo jungle, largely based on the author's own exotic experiences in the East.

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*The first edition*

Qui de nous n'a eu sa terre promise, son jour d'extase et sa fin en exil? — Amiel.

*To the memory of T. B.*

## CHAPTER I.

“Kaspar! Makan!”

The well-known shrill voice startled Almayer from his dream of splendid future into the unpleasant realities of the present hour. An unpleasant voice too. He had heard it for many years, and with every year he liked it less. No matter; there would be an end to all this soon.

He shuffled uneasily, but took no further notice of the call. Leaning with both his elbows on the balustrade of the verandah, he went on looking fixedly at the great river that flowed — indifferent and hurried — before his eyes. He liked to look at it about the time of sunset; perhaps because at that time the sinking sun would spread a glowing gold tinge on the waters of the Pantai, and Almayer’s thoughts were often busy with gold; gold he had failed to secure; gold the others had secured — dishonestly, of course — or gold he meant to secure yet, through his own honest exertions, for himself and Nina. He absorbed himself in his dream of wealth and power away from this coast where he had dwelt for so many years, forgetting the bitterness of toil and strife in the vision of a great and splendid reward. They would live in Europe, he and his daughter. They would be rich and respected. Nobody would think of her mixed blood in the presence of her great beauty and of his immense wealth. Witnessing her triumphs he would grow young again, he would forget the twenty-five years of heart-breaking struggle on this coast where he felt like a prisoner. All this was nearly within his reach. Let only Dain return! And return soon he must — in his own interest, for his own share. He was now more than a week late! Perhaps he would return to-night. Such were Almayer’s thoughts as, standing on the verandah of his new but already decaying house — that last failure of his life — he looked on the broad river. There was no tinge of gold on it this evening, for it had been swollen by the rains, and rolled an angry and muddy flood under his inattentive eyes, carrying small drift-wood and big dead logs, and whole uprooted trees with branches and foliage, amongst which the water swirled and roared angrily.

One of those drifting trees grounded on the shelving shore, just by the house, and Almayer, neglecting his dream, watched it with languid interest. The tree swung slowly round, amid the hiss and foam of the water, and soon getting free of the obstruction began to move down stream again, rolling



slowly over, raising upwards a long, denuded branch, like a hand lifted in mute appeal to heaven against the river's brutal and unnecessary violence. Almayer's interest in the fate of that tree increased rapidly. He leaned over to see if it would clear the low point below. It did; then he drew back, thinking that now its course was free down to the sea, and he envied the lot of that inanimate thing now growing small and indistinct in the deepening darkness. As he lost sight of it altogether he began to wonder how far out to sea it would drift. Would the current carry it north or south? South, probably, till it drifted in sight of Celebes, as far as Macassar, perhaps!

Macassar! Almayer's quickened fancy distanced the tree on its imaginary voyage, but his memory lagging behind some twenty years or more in point of time saw a young and slim Almayer, clad all in white and modest-looking, landing from the Dutch mail-boat on the dusty jetty of Macassar, coming to woo fortune in the godowns of old Hudig. It was an important epoch in his life, the beginning of a new existence for him. His father, a subordinate official employed in the Botanical Gardens of Buitenzorg, was no doubt delighted to place his son in such a firm. The young man himself too was nothing loth to leave the poisonous shores of Java, and the meagre comforts of the parental bungalow, where the father grumbled all day at the stupidity of native gardeners, and the mother from the depths of her long easy-chair bewailed the lost glories of Amsterdam, where she had been brought up, and of her position as the daughter of a cigar dealer there.

Almayer had left his home with a light heart and a lighter pocket, speaking English well, and strong in arithmetic; ready to conquer the world, never doubting that he would.

After those twenty years, standing in the close and stifling heat of a Bornean evening, he recalled with pleasurable regret the image of Hudig's lofty and cool warehouses with their long and straight avenues of gin cases and bales of Manchester goods; the big door swinging noiselessly; the dim light of the place, so delightful after the glare of the streets; the little railed-off spaces amongst piles of merchandise where the Chinese clerks, neat, cool, and sad-eyed, wrote rapidly and in silence amidst the din of the working gangs rolling casks or shifting cases to a muttered song, ending with a desperate yell. At the upper end, facing the great door, there was a larger space railed off, well lighted; there the noise was subdued by distance, and above it rose the soft and continuous clink of silver guilders

which other discreet Chinamen were counting and piling up under the supervision of Mr. Vinck, the cashier, the genius presiding in the place — the right hand of the Master.

In that clear space Almayer worked at his table not far from a little green painted door, by which always stood a Malay in a red sash and turban, and whose hand, holding a small string dangling from above, moved up and down with the regularity of a machine. The string worked a punkah on the other side of the green door, where the so-called private office was, and where old Hudig — the Master — sat enthroned, holding noisy receptions. Sometimes the little door would fly open disclosing to the outer world, through the bluish haze of tobacco smoke, a long table loaded with bottles of various shapes and tall water-pitchers, rattan easy-chairs occupied by noisy men in sprawling attitudes, while the Master would put his head through and, holding by the handle, would grunt confidentially to Vinck; perhaps send an order thundering down the warehouse, or spy a hesitating stranger and greet him with a friendly roar, “Welgome, Gapitan! ver’ you gome vrom? Bali, eh? Got bonies? I vant bonies! Vant all you got; ha! ha! ha! Gome in!” Then the stranger was dragged in, in a tempest of yells, the door was shut, and the usual noises refilled the place; the song of the workmen, the rumble of barrels, the scratch of rapid pens; while above all rose the musical chink of broad silver pieces streaming ceaselessly through the yellow fingers of the attentive Chinamen.

At that time Macassar was teeming with life and commerce. It was the point in the islands where tended all those bold spirits who, fitting out schooners on the Australian coast, invaded the Malay Archipelago in search of money and adventure. Bold, reckless, keen in business, not disinclined for a brush with the pirates that were to be found on many a coast as yet, making money fast, they used to have a general “rendezvous” in the bay for purposes of trade and dissipation. The Dutch merchants called those men English pedlars; some of them were undoubtedly gentlemen for whom that kind of life had a charm; most were seamen; the acknowledged king of them all was Tom Lingard, he whom the Malays, honest or dishonest, quiet fishermen or desperate cut-throats, recognised as “the Rajah-Laut” — the King of the Sea.

Almayer had heard of him before he had been three days in Macassar, had heard the stories of his smart business transactions, his loves, and also of his desperate fights with the Sulu pirates, together with the romantic tale

of some child — a girl — found in a piratical prau by the victorious Lingard, when, after a long contest, he boarded the craft, driving the crew overboard. This girl, it was generally known, Lingard had adopted, was having her educated in some convent in Java, and spoke of her as “my daughter.” He had sworn a mighty oath to marry her to a white man before he went home and to leave her all his money. “And Captain Lingard has lots of money,” would say Mr. Vinck solemnly, with his head on one side, “lots of money; more than Hudig!” And after a pause — just to let his hearers recover from their astonishment at such an incredible assertion — he would add in an explanatory whisper, “You know, he has discovered a river.”

That was it! He had discovered a river! That was the fact placing old Lingard so much above the common crowd of sea-going adventurers who traded with Hudig in the daytime and drank champagne, gambled, sang noisy songs, and made love to half-caste girls under the broad verandah of the Sunda Hotel at night. Into that river, whose entrances himself only knew, Lingard used to take his assorted cargo of Manchester goods, brass gongs, rifles and gunpowder. His brig Flash, which he commanded himself, would on those occasions disappear quietly during the night from the roadstead while his companions were sleeping off the effects of the midnight carouse, Lingard seeing them drunk under the table before going on board, himself unaffected by any amount of liquor. Many tried to follow him and find that land of plenty for gutta-percha and rattans, pearl shells and birds’ nests, wax and gum-dammar, but the little Flash could outsail every craft in those seas. A few of them came to grief on hidden sandbanks and coral reefs, losing their all and barely escaping with life from the cruel grip of this sunny and smiling sea; others got discouraged; and for many years the green and peaceful-looking islands guarding the entrances to the promised land kept their secret with all the merciless serenity of tropical nature. And so Lingard came and went on his secret or open expeditions, becoming a hero in Almayer’s eyes by the boldness and enormous profits of his ventures, seeming to Almayer a very great man indeed as he saw him marching up the warehouse, grunting a “how are you?” to Vinck, or greeting Hudig, the Master, with a boisterous “Hallo, old pirate! Alive yet?” as a preliminary to transacting business behind the little green door. Often of an evening, in the silence of the then deserted warehouse, Almayer putting away his papers before driving home with Mr. Vinck, in whose

household he lived, would pause listening to the noise of a hot discussion in the private office, would hear the deep and monotonous growl of the Master, and the roared-out interruptions of Lingard — two mastiffs fighting over a marrowy bone. But to Almayer's ears it sounded like a quarrel of Titans — a battle of the gods.

After a year or so Lingard, having been brought often in contact with Almayer in the course of business, took a sudden and, to the onlookers, a rather inexplicable fancy to the young man. He sang his praises, late at night, over a convivial glass to his cronies in the Sunda Hotel, and one fine morning electrified Vinck by declaring that he must have "that young fellow for a supercargo. Kind of captain's clerk. Do all my quill-driving for me." Hudig consented. Almayer, with youth's natural craving for change, was nothing loth, and packing his few belongings, started in the Flash on one of those long cruises when the old seaman was wont to visit almost every island in the archipelago. Months slipped by, and Lingard's friendship seemed to increase. Often pacing the deck with Almayer, when the faint night breeze, heavy with aromatic exhalations of the islands, shoved the brig gently along under the peaceful and sparkling sky, did the old seaman open his heart to his entranced listener. He spoke of his past life, of escaped dangers, of big profits in his trade, of new combinations that were in the future to bring profits bigger still. Often he had mentioned his daughter, the girl found in the pirate prau, speaking of her with a strange assumption of fatherly tenderness. "She must be a big girl now," he used to say. "It's nigh unto four years since I have seen her! Damme, Almayer, if I don't think we will run into Sourabaya this trip." And after such a declaration he always dived into his cabin muttering to himself, "Something must be done — must be done." More than once he would astonish Almayer by walking up to him rapidly, clearing his throat with a powerful "Hem!" as if he was going to say something, and then turning abruptly away to lean over the bulwarks in silence, and watch, motionless, for hours, the gleam and sparkle of the phosphorescent sea along the ship's side. It was the night before arriving in Sourabaya when one of those attempts at confidential communication succeeded. After clearing his throat he spoke. He spoke to some purpose. He wanted Almayer to marry his adopted daughter. "And don't you kick because you're white!" he shouted, suddenly, not giving the surprised young man the time to say a word. "None of that with me! Nobody will see the colour of your wife's skin.

The dollars are too thick for that, I tell you! And mind you, they will be thicker yet before I die. There will be millions, Kaspar! Millions I say! And all for her — and for you, if you do what you are told.”

Startled by the unexpected proposal, Almayer hesitated, and remained silent for a minute. He was gifted with a strong and active imagination, and in that short space of time he saw, as in a flash of dazzling light, great piles of shining guilders, and realised all the possibilities of an opulent existence. The consideration, the indolent ease of life — for which he felt himself so well fitted — his ships, his warehouses, his merchandise (old Lingard would not live for ever), and, crowning all, in the far future gleamed like a fairy palace the big mansion in Amsterdam, that earthly paradise of his dreams, where, made king amongst men by old Lingard’s money, he would pass the evening of his days in inexpressible splendour. As to the other side of the picture — the companionship for life of a Malay girl, that legacy of a boatful of pirates — there was only within him a confused consciousness of shame that he a white man — Still, a convent education of four years! — and then she may mercifully die. He was always lucky, and money is powerful! Go through it. Why not? He had a vague idea of shutting her up somewhere, anywhere, out of his gorgeous future. Easy enough to dispose of a Malay woman, a slave, after all, to his Eastern mind, convent or no convent, ceremony or no ceremony.

He lifted his head and confronted the anxious yet irate seaman.

“I — of course — anything you wish, Captain Lingard.”

“Call me father, my boy. She does,” said the mollified old adventurer. “Damme, though, if I didn’t think you were going to refuse. Mind you, Kaspar, I always get my way, so it would have been no use. But you are no fool.”

He remembered well that time — the look, the accent, the words, the effect they produced on him, his very surroundings. He remembered the narrow slanting deck of the brig, the silent sleeping coast, the smooth black surface of the sea with a great bar of gold laid on it by the rising moon. He remembered it all, and he remembered his feelings of mad exultation at the thought of that fortune thrown into his hands. He was no fool then, and he was no fool now. Circumstances had been against him; the fortune was gone, but hope remained.

He shivered in the night air, and suddenly became aware of the intense darkness which, on the sun’s departure, had closed in upon the river,

blotting out the outlines of the opposite shore. Only the fire of dry branches lit outside the stockade of the Rajah's compound called fitfully into view the ragged trunks of the surrounding trees, putting a stain of glowing red half-way across the river where the drifting logs were hurrying towards the sea through the impenetrable gloom. He had a hazy recollection of having been called some time during the evening by his wife. To his dinner probably. But a man busy contemplating the wreckage of his past in the dawn of new hopes cannot be hungry whenever his rice is ready. Time he went home, though; it was getting late.

He stepped cautiously on the loose planks towards the ladder. A lizard, disturbed by the noise, emitted a plaintive note and scurried through the long grass growing on the bank. Almayer descended the ladder carefully, now thoroughly recalled to the realities of life by the care necessary to prevent a fall on the uneven ground where the stones, decaying planks, and half-sawn beams were piled up in inextricable confusion. As he turned towards the house where he lived — "my old house" he called it — his ear detected the splash of paddles away in the darkness of the river. He stood still in the path, attentive and surprised at anybody being on the river at this late hour during such a heavy freshet. Now he could hear the paddles distinctly, and even a rapidly exchanged word in low tones, the heavy breathing of men fighting with the current, and hugging the bank on which he stood. Quite close, too, but it was too dark to distinguish anything under the overhanging bushes.

"Arabs, no doubt," muttered Almayer to himself, peering into the solid blackness. "What are they up to now? Some of Abdulla's business; curse him!"

The boat was very close now.

"Oh, ya! Man!" hailed Almayer.

The sound of voices ceased, but the paddles worked as furiously as before. Then the bush in front of Almayer shook, and the sharp sound of the paddles falling into the canoe rang in the quiet night. They were holding on to the bush now; but Almayer could hardly make out an indistinct dark shape of a man's head and shoulders above the bank.

"You Abdulla?" said Almayer, doubtfully.

A grave voice answered —

"Tuan Almayer is speaking to a friend. There is no Arab here."

Almayer's heart gave a great leap.



“Dain!” he exclaimed. “At last! at last! I have been waiting for you every day and every night. I had nearly given you up.”

“Nothing could have stopped me from coming back here,” said the other, almost violently. “Not even death,” he whispered to himself.

“This is a friend’s talk, and is very good,” said Almayer, heartily. “But you are too far here. Drop down to the jetty and let your men cook their rice in my campong while we talk in the house.”

There was no answer to that invitation.

“What is it?” asked Almayer, uneasily. “There is nothing wrong with the brig, I hope?”

“The brig is where no Orang Blanda can lay his hands on her,” said Dain, with a gloomy tone in his voice, which Almayer, in his elation, failed to notice.

“Right,” he said. “But where are all your men? There are only two with you.”

“Listen, Tuan Almayer,” said Dain. “To-morrow’s sun shall see me in your house, and then we will talk. Now I must go to the Rajah.”

“To the Rajah! Why? What do you want with Lakamba?”

“Tuan, to-morrow we talk like friends. I must see Lakamba to-night.”

“Dain, you are not going to abandon me now, when all is ready?” asked Almayer, in a pleading voice.

“Have I not returned? But I must see Lakamba first for your good and mine.”

The shadowy head disappeared abruptly. The bush, released from the grasp of the bowman, sprung back with a swish, scattering a shower of muddy water over Almayer, as he bent forward, trying to see.

In a little while the canoe shot into the streak of light that streamed on the river from the big fire on the opposite shore, disclosing the outline of two men bending to their work, and a third figure in the stern flourishing the steering paddle, his head covered with an enormous round hat, like a fantastically exaggerated mushroom.

Almayer watched the canoe till it passed out of the line of light. Shortly after the murmur of many voices reached him across the water. He could see the torches being snatched out of the burning pile, and rendering visible for a moment the gate in the stockade round which they crowded. Then they went in apparently. The torches disappeared, and the scattered fire sent out only a dim and fitful glare.

Almayer stepped homewards with long strides and mind uneasy. Surely Dain was not thinking of playing him false. It was absurd. Dain and Lakamba were both too much interested in the success of his scheme. Trusting to Malays was poor work; but then even Malays have some sense and understand their own interest. All would be well — must be well. At this point in his meditation he found himself at the foot of the steps leading to the verandah of his home. From the low point of land where he stood he could see both branches of the river. The main branch of the Pantai was lost in complete darkness, for the fire at the Rajah's had gone out altogether; but up the Sambir reach his eye could follow the long line of Malay houses crowding the bank, with here and there a dim light twinkling through bamboo walls, or a smoky torch burning on the platforms built out over the river. Further away, where the island ended in a low cliff, rose a dark mass of buildings towering above the Malay structures. Founded solidly on a firm ground with plenty of space, starred by many lights burning strong and white, with a suggestion of paraffin and lamp-glasses, stood the house and the godowns of Abdulla bin Selim, the great trader of Sambir. To Almayer the sight was very distasteful, and he shook his fist towards the buildings that in their evident prosperity looked to him cold and insolent, and contemptuous of his own fallen fortunes.

He mounted the steps of his house slowly.

In the middle of the verandah there was a round table. On it a paraffin lamp without a globe shed a hard glare on the three inner sides. The fourth side was open, and faced the river. Between the rough supports of the high-pitched roof hung torn rattan screens. There was no ceiling, and the harsh brilliance of the lamp was toned above into a soft half-light that lost itself in the obscurity amongst the rafters. The front wall was cut in two by the doorway of a central passage closed by a red curtain. The women's room opened into that passage, which led to the back courtyard and to the cooking shed. In one of the side walls there was a doorway. Half obliterated words — "Office: Lingard and Co." — were still legible on the dusty door, which looked as if it had not been opened for a very long time. Close to the other side wall stood a bent-wood rocking-chair, and by the table and about the verandah four wooden armchairs straggled forlornly, as if ashamed of their shabby surroundings. A heap of common mats lay in one corner, with an old hammock slung diagonally above. In the other corner, his head wrapped in a piece of red calico, huddled into a shapeless

heap, slept a Malay, one of Almayer's domestic slaves — "my own people," he used to call them. A numerous and representative assembly of moths were holding high revels round the lamp to the spirited music of swarming mosquitoes. Under the palm-leaf thatch lizards raced on the beams calling softly. A monkey, chained to one of the verandah supports — retired for the night under the eaves — peered and grinned at Almayer, as it swung to one of the bamboo roof sticks and caused a shower of dust and bits of dried leaves to settle on the shabby table. The floor was uneven, with many withered plants and dried earth scattered about. A general air of squalid neglect pervaded the place. Great red stains on the floor and walls testified to frequent and indiscriminate betel-nut chewing. The light breeze from the river swayed gently the tattered blinds, sending from the woods opposite a faint and sickly perfume as of decaying flowers.

Under Almayer's heavy tread the boards of the verandah creaked loudly. The sleeper in the corner moved uneasily, muttering indistinct words. There was a slight rustle behind the curtained doorway, and a soft voice asked in Malay, "Is it you, father?"

"Yes, Nina. I am hungry. Is everybody asleep in this house?"

Almayer spoke jovially and dropped with a contented sigh into the armchair nearest to the table. Nina Almayer came through the curtained doorway followed by an old Malay woman, who busied herself in setting upon the table a plateful of rice and fish, a jar of water, and a bottle half full of genever. After carefully placing before her master a cracked glass tumbler and a tin spoon she went away noiselessly. Nina stood by the table, one hand lightly resting on its edge, the other hanging listlessly by her side. Her face turned towards the outer darkness, through which her dreamy eyes seemed to see some entrancing picture, wore a look of impatient expectancy. She was tall for a half-caste, with the correct profile of the father, modified and strengthened by the squareness of the lower part of the face inherited from her maternal ancestors — the Sulu pirates. Her firm mouth, with the lips slightly parted and disclosing a gleam of white teeth, put a vague suggestion of ferocity into the impatient expression of her features. And yet her dark and perfect eyes had all the tender softness of expression common to Malay women, but with a gleam of superior intelligence; they looked gravely, wide open and steady, as if facing something invisible to all other eyes, while she stood there all in white, straight, flexible, graceful, unconscious of herself, her low but broad

forehead crowned with a shining mass of long black hair that fell in heavy tresses over her shoulders, and made her pale olive complexion look paler still by the contrast of its coal-black hue.

Almayer attacked his rice greedily, but after a few mouthfuls he paused, spoon in hand, and looked at his daughter curiously.

“Did you hear a boat pass about half an hour ago Nina?” he asked.

The girl gave him a quick glance, and moving away from the light stood with her back to the table.

“No,” she said, slowly.

“There was a boat. At last! Dain himself; and he went on to Lakamba. I know it, for he told me so. I spoke to him, but he would not come here to-night. Will come to-morrow, he said.”

He swallowed another spoonful, then said —

“I am almost happy to-night, Nina. I can see the end of a long road, and it leads us away from this miserable swamp. We shall soon get away from here, I and you, my dear little girl, and then — ”

He rose from the table and stood looking fixedly before him as if contemplating some enchanting vision.

“And then,” he went on, “we shall be happy, you and I. Live rich and respected far from here, and forget this life, and all this struggle, and all this misery!”

He approached his daughter and passed his hand caressingly over her hair.

“It is bad to have to trust a Malay,” he said, “but I must own that this Dain is a perfect gentleman — a perfect gentleman,” he repeated.

“Did you ask him to come here, father?” inquired Nina, not looking at him.

“Well, of course. We shall start on the day after to-morrow,” said Almayer, joyously. “We must not lose any time. Are you glad, little girl?”

She was nearly as tall as himself, but he liked to recall the time when she was little and they were all in all to each other.

“I am glad,” she said, very low.

“Of course,” said Almayer, vivaciously, “you cannot imagine what is before you. I myself have not been to Europe, but I have heard my mother talk so often that I seem to know all about it. We shall live a — a glorious life. You shall see.”

Again he stood silent by his daughter's side looking at that enchanting vision. After a while he shook his clenched hand towards the sleeping settlement.

"Ah! my friend Abdulla," he cried, "we shall see who will have the best of it after all these years!"

He looked up the river and remarked calmly:

"Another thunderstorm. Well! No thunder will keep me awake to-night, I know! Good-night, little girl," he whispered, tenderly kissing her cheek. "You do not seem to be very happy to-night, but to-morrow you will show a brighter face. Eh?"

Nina had listened to her father with her face unmoved, with her half-closed eyes still gazing into the night now made more intense by a heavy thunder-cloud that had crept down from the hills blotting out the stars, merging sky, forest, and river into one mass of almost palpable blackness. The faint breeze had died out, but the distant rumble of thunder and pale flashes of lightning gave warning of the approaching storm. With a sigh the girl turned towards the table.

Almayer was in his hammock now, already half asleep.

"Take the lamp, Nina," he muttered, drowsily. "This place is full of mosquitoes. Go to sleep, daughter."

But Nina put the lamp out and turned back again towards the balustrade of the verandah, standing with her arm round the wooden support and looking eagerly towards the Pantai reach. And motionless there in the oppressive calm of the tropical night she could see at each flash of lightning the forest lining both banks up the river, bending before the furious blast of the coming tempest, the upper reach of the river whipped into white foam by the wind, and the black clouds torn into fantastic shapes trailing low over the swaying trees. Round her all was as yet stillness and peace, but she could hear afar off the roar of the wind, the hiss of heavy rain, the wash of the waves on the tormented river. It came nearer and nearer, with loud thunder-claps and long flashes of vivid lightning, followed by short periods of appalling blackness. When the storm reached the low point dividing the river, the house shook in the wind, and the rain pattered loudly on the palm-leaf roof, the thunder spoke in one prolonged roll, and the incessant lightning disclosed a turmoil of leaping waters, driving logs, and the big trees bending before a brutal and merciless force.

Undisturbed by the nightly event of the rainy monsoon, the father slept quietly, oblivious alike of his hopes, his misfortunes, his friends, and his enemies; and the daughter stood motionless, at each flash of lightning eagerly scanning the broad river with a steady and anxious gaze.



## CHAPTER II.

When, in compliance with Lingard's abrupt demand, Almayer consented to wed the Malay girl, no one knew that on the day when the interesting young convert had lost all her natural relations and found a white father, she had been fighting desperately like the rest of them on board the prau, and was only prevented from leaping overboard, like the few other survivors, by a severe wound in the leg. There, on the fore-deck of the prau, old Lingard found her under a heap of dead and dying pirates, and had her carried on the poop of the Flash before the Malay craft was set on fire and sent adrift. She was conscious, and in the great peace and stillness of the tropical evening succeeding the turmoil of the battle, she watched all she held dear on earth after her own savage manner, drift away into the gloom in a great roar of flame and smoke. She lay there unheeding the careful hands attending to her wound, silent and absorbed in gazing at the funeral pile of those brave men she had so much admired and so well helped in their contest with the redoubtable "Rajah-Laut."

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The light night breeze fanned the brig gently to the southward, and the great blaze of light got smaller and smaller till it twinkled only on the horizon like a setting star. It set: the heavy canopy of smoke reflected the glare of hidden flames for a short time and then disappeared also.

She realised that with this vanishing gleam her old life departed too. Thenceforth there was slavery in the far countries, amongst strangers, in unknown and perhaps terrible surroundings. Being fourteen years old, she realised her position and came to that conclusion, the only one possible to a Malay girl, soon ripened under a tropical sun, and not unaware of her personal charms, of which she heard many a young brave warrior of her father's crew express an appreciative admiration. There was in her the dread of the unknown; otherwise she accepted her position calmly, after the manner of her people, and even considered it quite natural; for was she not a daughter of warriors, conquered in battle, and did she not belong rightfully to the victorious Rajah? Even the evident kindness of the terrible old man must spring, she thought, from admiration for his captive, and the flattered vanity eased for her the pangs of sorrow after such an awful

calamity. Perhaps had she known of the high walls, the quiet gardens, and the silent nuns of the Samarang convent, where her destiny was leading her, she would have sought death in her dread and hate of such a restraint. But in imagination she pictured to herself the usual life of a Malay girl — the usual succession of heavy work and fierce love, of intrigues, gold ornaments, of domestic drudgery, and of that great but occult influence which is one of the few rights of half-savage womankind. But her destiny in the rough hands of the old sea-dog, acting under unreasoning impulses of the heart, took a strange and to her a terrible shape. She bore it all — the restraint and the teaching and the new faith — with calm submission, concealing her hate and contempt for all that new life. She learned the language very easily, yet understood but little of the new faith the good sisters taught her, assimilating quickly only the superstitious elements of the religion. She called Lingard father, gently and caressingly, at each of his short and noisy visits, under the clear impression that he was a great and dangerous power it was good to propitiate. Was he not now her master? And during those long four years she nourished a hope of finding favour in his eyes and ultimately becoming his wife, counsellor, and guide.

Those dreams of the future were dispelled by the Rajah Laut's "fiat," which made Almayer's fortune, as that young man fondly hoped. And dressed in the hateful finery of Europe, the centre of an interested circle of Batavian society, the young convert stood before the altar with an unknown and sulky-looking white man. For Almayer was uneasy, a little disgusted, and greatly inclined to run away. A judicious fear of the adopted father-in-law and a just regard for his own material welfare prevented him from making a scandal; yet, while swearing fidelity, he was concocting plans for getting rid of the pretty Malay girl in a more or less distant future. She, however, had retained enough of conventual teaching to understand well that according to white men's laws she was going to be Almayer's companion and not his slave, and promised to herself to act accordingly.

So when the Flash freighted with materials for building a new house left the harbour of Batavia, taking away the young couple into the unknown Borneo, she did not carry on her deck so much love and happiness as old Lingard was wont to boast of before his casual friends in the verandahs of various hotels. The old seaman himself was perfectly happy. Now he had done his duty by the girl. "You know I made her an orphan," he often concluded solemnly, when talking about his own affairs to a scratch

audience of shore loafers — as it was his habit to do. And the approbative shouts of his half-intoxicated auditors filled his simple soul with delight and pride. “I carry everything right through,” was another of his sayings, and in pursuance of that principle he pushed the building of house and godowns on the Pantai River with feverish haste. The house for the young couple; the godowns for the big trade Almayer was going to develop while he (Lingard) would be able to give himself up to some mysterious work which was only spoken of in hints, but was understood to relate to gold and diamonds in the interior of the island. Almayer was impatient too. Had he known what was before him he might not have been so eager and full of hope as he stood watching the last canoe of the Lingard expedition disappear in the bend up the river. When, turning round, he beheld the pretty little house, the big godowns built neatly by an army of Chinese carpenters, the new jetty round which were clustered the trading canoes, he felt a sudden elation in the thought that the world was his.

But the world had to be conquered first, and its conquest was not so easy as he thought. He was very soon made to understand that he was not wanted in that corner of it where old Lingard and his own weak will placed him, in the midst of unscrupulous intrigues and of a fierce trade competition. The Arabs had found out the river, had established a trading post in Sambir, and where they traded they would be masters and suffer no rival. Lingard returned unsuccessful from his first expedition, and departed again spending all the profits of the legitimate trade on his mysterious journeys. Almayer struggled with the difficulties of his position, friendless and unaided, save for the protection given to him for Lingard’s sake by the old Rajah, the predecessor of Lakamba. Lakamba himself, then living as a private individual on a rice clearing, seven miles down the river, exercised all his influence towards the help of the white man’s enemies, plotting against the old Rajah and Almayer with a certainty of combination, pointing clearly to a profound knowledge of their most secret affairs. Outwardly friendly, his portly form was often to be seen on Almayer’s verandah; his green turban and gold-embroidered jacket shone in the front rank of the decorous throng of Malays coming to greet Lingard on his returns from the interior; his salaams were of the lowest, and his hand-shakings of the heartiest, when welcoming the old trader. But his small eyes took in the signs of the times, and he departed from those interviews with a satisfied and furtive smile to hold long consultations with his friend and ally, Syed

Abdulla, the chief of the Arab trading post, a man of great wealth and of great influence in the islands.

It was currently believed at that time in the settlement that Lakamba's visits to Almayer's house were not limited to those official interviews. Often on moonlight nights the belated fishermen of Sambira saw a small canoe shooting out from the narrow creek at the back of the white man's house, and the solitary occupant paddle cautiously down the river in the deep shadows of the bank; and those events, duly reported, were discussed round the evening fires far into the night with the cynicism of expression common to aristocratic Malays, and with a malicious pleasure in the domestic misfortunes of the Orang Blando — the hated Dutchman. Almayer went on struggling desperately, but with a feebleness of purpose depriving him of all chance of success against men so unscrupulous and resolute as his rivals the Arabs. The trade fell away from the large godowns, and the godowns themselves rotted piecemeal. The old man's banker, Hudig of Macassar, failed, and with this went the whole available capital. The profits of past years had been swallowed up in Lingard's exploring craze. Lingard was in the interior — perhaps dead — at all events giving no sign of life. Almayer stood alone in the midst of those adverse circumstances, deriving only a little comfort from the companionship of his little daughter, born two years after the marriage, and at the time some six years old. His wife had soon commenced to treat him with a savage contempt expressed by sulky silence, only occasionally varied by a flood of savage invective. He felt she hated him, and saw her jealous eyes watching himself and the child with almost an expression of hate. She was jealous of the little girl's evident preference for the father, and Almayer felt he was not safe with that woman in the house. While she was burning the furniture, and tearing down the pretty curtains in her unreasoning hate of those signs of civilisation, Almayer, cowed by these outbursts of savage nature, meditated in silence on the best way of getting rid of her. He thought of everything; even planned murder in an undecided and feeble sort of way, but dared do nothing — expecting every day the return of Lingard with news of some immense good fortune. He returned indeed, but aged, ill, a ghost of his former self, with the fire of fever burning in his sunken eyes, almost the only survivor of the numerous expedition. But he was successful at last! Untold riches were in his grasp; he wanted more money — only a little more to realise a dream of fabulous

fortune. And Hudig had failed! Almayer scraped all he could together, but the old man wanted more. If Almayer could not get it he would go to Singapore — to Europe even, but before all to Singapore; and he would take the little Nina with him. The child must be brought up decently. He had good friends in Singapore who would take care of her and have her taught properly. All would be well, and that girl, upon whom the old seaman seemed to have transferred all his former affection for the mother, would be the richest woman in the East — in the world even. So old Lingard shouted, pacing the verandah with his heavy quarter-deck step, gesticulating with a smouldering cheroot; ragged, dishevelled, enthusiastic; and Almayer, sitting huddled up on a pile of mats, thought with dread of the separation with the only human being he loved — with greater dread still, perhaps, of the scene with his wife, the savage tigress deprived of her young. She will poison me, thought the poor wretch, well aware of that easy and final manner of solving the social, political, or family problems in Malay life.

To his great surprise she took the news very quietly, giving only him and Lingard a furtive glance, and saying not a word. This, however, did not prevent her the next day from jumping into the river and swimming after the boat in which Lingard was carrying away the nurse with the screaming child. Almayer had to give chase with his whale-boat and drag her in by the hair in the midst of cries and curses enough to make heaven fall. Yet after two days spent in wailing, she returned to her former mode of life, chewing betel-nut, and sitting all day amongst her women in stupefied idleness. She aged very rapidly after that, and only roused herself from her apathy to acknowledge by a scathing remark or an insulting exclamation the accidental presence of her husband. He had built for her a riverside hut in the compound where she dwelt in perfect seclusion. Lakamba's visits had ceased when, by a convenient decree of Providence and the help of a little scientific manipulation, the old ruler of Sambir departed this life. Lakamba reigned in his stead now, having been well served by his Arab friends with the Dutch authorities. Syed Abdulla was the great man and trader of the Pantai. Almayer lay ruined and helpless under the close-meshed net of their intrigues, owing his life only to his supposed knowledge of Lingard's valuable secret. Lingard had disappeared. He wrote once from Singapore saying the child was well, and under the care of a Mrs. Vinck, and that he himself was going to Europe to raise money for the great enterprise. "He

was coming back soon. There would be no difficulties," he wrote; "people would rush in with their money." Evidently they did not, for there was only one letter more from him saying he was ill, had found no relation living, but little else besides. Then came a complete silence. Europe had swallowed up the Rajah Laut apparently, and Almayer looked vainly westward for a ray of light out of the gloom of his shattered hopes. Years passed, and the rare letters from Mrs. Vinck, later on from the girl herself, were the only thing to be looked to to make life bearable amongst the triumphant savagery of the river. Almayer lived now alone, having even ceased to visit his debtors who would not pay, sure of Lakamba's protection. The faithful Sumatrese Ali cooked his rice and made his coffee, for he dared not trust any one else, and least of all his wife. He killed time wandering sadly in the overgrown paths round the house, visiting the ruined godowns where a few brass guns covered with verdigris and only a few broken cases of mouldering Manchester goods reminded him of the good early times when all this was full of life and merchandise, and he overlooked a busy scene on the river bank, his little daughter by his side. Now the up-country canoes glided past the little rotten wharf of Lingard and Co., to paddle up the Pantai branch, and cluster round the new jetty belonging to Abdulla. Not that they loved Abdulla, but they dared not trade with the man whose star had set. Had they done so they knew there was no mercy to be expected from Arab or Rajah; no rice to be got on credit in the times of scarcity from either; and Almayer could not help them, having at times hardly enough for himself. Almayer, in his isolation and despair, often envied his near neighbour the Chinaman, Jim-Eng, whom he could see stretched on a pile of cool mats, a wooden pillow under his head, an opium pipe in his nerveless fingers. He did not seek, however, consolation in opium — perhaps it was too expensive — perhaps his white man's pride saved him from that degradation; but most likely it was the thought of his little daughter in the far-off Straits Settlements. He heard from her oftener since Abdulla bought a steamer, which ran now between Singapore and the Pantai settlement every three months or so. Almayer felt himself nearer his daughter. He longed to see her, and planned a voyage to Singapore, but put off his departure from year to year, always expecting some favourable turn of fortune. He did not want to meet her with empty hands and with no words of hope on his lips. He could not take her back into that savage life to which he was condemned himself. He was also a little afraid of her.

What would she think of him? He reckoned the years. A grown woman. A civilised woman, young and hopeful; while he felt old and hopeless, and very much like those savages round him. He asked himself what was going to be her future. He could not answer that question yet, and he dared not face her. And yet he longed after her. He hesitated for years.

His hesitation was put an end to by Nina's unexpected appearance in Sambir. She arrived in the steamer under the captain's care. Almayer beheld her with surprise not unmixed with wonder. During those ten years the child had changed into a woman, black-haired, olive-skinned, tall, and beautiful, with great sad eyes, where the startled expression common to Malay womankind was modified by a thoughtful tinge inherited from her European ancestry. Almayer thought with dismay of the meeting of his wife and daughter, of what this grave girl in European clothes would think of her betel-nut chewing mother, squatting in a dark hut, disorderly, half naked, and sulky. He also feared an outbreak of temper on the part of that pest of a woman he had hitherto managed to keep tolerably quiet, thereby saving the remnants of his dilapidated furniture. And he stood there before the closed door of the hut in the blazing sunshine listening to the murmur of voices, wondering what went on inside, wherefrom all the servant-maids had been expelled at the beginning of the interview, and now stood clustered by the palings with half-covered faces in a chatter of curious speculation. He forgot himself there trying to catch a stray word through the bamboo walls, till the captain of the steamer, who had walked up with the girl, fearing a sunstroke, took him under the arm and led him into the shade of his own verandah: where Nina's trunk stood already, having been landed by the steamer's men. As soon as Captain Ford had his glass before him and his cheroot lighted, Almayer asked for the explanation of his daughter's unexpected arrival. Ford said little beyond generalising in vague but violent terms upon the foolishness of women in general, and of Mrs. Vinck in particular.

"You know, Kaspar," said he, in conclusion, to the excited Almayer, "it is deucedly awkward to have a half-caste girl in the house. There's such a lot of fools about. There was that young fellow from the bank who used to ride to the Vinck bungalow early and late. That old woman thought it was for that Emma of hers. When she found out what he wanted exactly, there was a row, I can tell you. She would not have Nina — not an hour longer — in the house. Fact is, I heard of this affair and took the girl to my wife. My

wife is a pretty good woman — as women go — and upon my word we would have kept the girl for you, only she would not stay. Now, then! Don't flare up, Kaspar. Sit still. What can you do? It is better so. Let her stay with you. She was never happy over there. Those two Vinck girls are no better than dressed-up monkeys. They slighted her. You can't make her white. It's no use you swearing at me. You can't. She is a good girl for all that, but she would not tell my wife anything. If you want to know, ask her yourself; but if I was you I would leave her alone. You are welcome to her passage money, old fellow, if you are short now." And the skipper, throwing away his cigar, walked off to "wake them up on board," as he expressed it.

Almayer vainly expected to hear of the cause of his daughter's return from his daughter's lips. Not that day, not on any other day did she ever allude to her Singapore life. He did not care to ask, awed by the calm impassiveness of her face, by those solemn eyes looking past him on the great, still forests sleeping in majestic repose to the murmur of the broad river. He accepted the situation, happy in the gentle and protecting affection the girl showed him, fitfully enough, for she had, as she called it, her bad days when she used to visit her mother and remain long hours in the riverside hut, coming out as inscrutable as ever, but with a contemptuous look and a short word ready to answer any of his speeches. He got used even to that, and on those days kept quiet, although greatly alarmed by his wife's influence upon the girl. Otherwise Nina adapted herself wonderfully to the circumstances of a half-savage and miserable life. She accepted without question or apparent disgust the neglect, the decay, the poverty of the household, the absence of furniture, and the preponderance of rice diet on the family table. She lived with Almayer in the little house (now sadly decaying) built originally by Lingard for the young couple. The Malays eagerly discussed her arrival. There were at the beginning crowded levées of Malay women with their children, seeking eagerly after "Ubat" for all the ills of the flesh from the young Mem Putih. In the cool of the evening grave Arabs in long white shirts and yellow sleeveless jackets walked slowly on the dusty path by the riverside towards Almayer's gate, and made solemn calls upon that Unbeliever under shallow pretences of business, only to get a glimpse of the young girl in a highly decorous manner. Even Lakamba came out of his stockade in a great pomp of war canoes and red umbrellas, and landed on the rotten little jetty of Lingard and Co. He came,



he said, to buy a couple of brass guns as a present to his friend the chief of Sambir Dyaks; and while Almayer, suspicious but polite, busied himself in unearthing the old popguns in the godowns, the Rajah sat on an armchair in the verandah, surrounded by his respectful retinue waiting in vain for Nina's appearance. She was in one of her bad days, and remained in her mother's hut watching with her the ceremonious proceedings on the verandah. The Rajah departed, baffled but courteous, and soon Almayer began to reap the benefit of improved relations with the ruler in the shape of the recovery of some debts, paid to him with many apologies and many a low salaam by debtors till then considered hopelessly insolvent. Under these improving circumstances Almayer brightened up a little. All was not lost perhaps. Those Arabs and Malays saw at last that he was a man of some ability, he thought. And he began, after his manner, to plan great things, to dream of great fortunes for himself and Nina. Especially for Nina! Under these vivifying impulses he asked Captain Ford to write to his friends in England making inquiries after Lingard. Was he alive or dead? If dead, had he left any papers, documents; any indications or hints as to his great enterprise? Meantime he had found amongst the rubbish in one of the empty rooms a note-book belonging to the old adventurer. He studied the crabbed handwriting of its pages and often grew meditative over it. Other things also woke him up from his apathy. The stir made in the whole of the island by the establishment of the British Borneo Company affected even the sluggish flow of the Pantai life. Great changes were expected; annexation was talked of; the Arabs grew civil. Almayer began building his new house for the use of the future engineers, agents, or settlers of the new Company. He spent every available guilder on it with a confiding heart. One thing only disturbed his happiness: his wife came out of her seclusion, importing her green jacket, scant sarongs, shrill voice, and witch-like appearance, into his quiet life in the small bungalow. And his daughter seemed to accept that savage intrusion into their daily existence with wonderful equanimity. He did not like it, but dared say nothing.

### CHAPTER III.

The deliberations conducted in London have a far-reaching importance, and so the decision issued from the fog-veiled offices of the Borneo Company darkened for Almayer the brilliant sunshine of the Tropics, and added another drop of bitterness to the cup of his disenchantments. The claim to that part of the East Coast was abandoned, leaving the Pantai river under the nominal power of Holland. In Sambir there was joy and excitement. The slaves were hurried out of sight into the forest and jungle, and the flags were run up to tall poles in the Rajah's compound in expectation of a visit from Dutch man-of-war boats.

The frigate remained anchored outside the mouth of the river, and the boats came up in tow of the steam launch, threading their way cautiously amongst a crowd of canoes filled with gaily dressed Malays. The officer in command listened gravely to the loyal speeches of Lakamba, returned the salaams of Abdulla, and assured those gentlemen in choice Malay of the great Rajah's — down in Batavia — friendship and goodwill towards the ruler and inhabitants of this model state of Sambir.

Almayer from his verandah watched across the river the festive proceedings, heard the report of brass guns saluting the new flag presented to Lakamba, and the deep murmur of the crowd of spectators surging round the stockade. The smoke of the firing rose in white clouds on the green background of the forests, and he could not help comparing his own fleeting hopes to the rapidly disappearing vapour. He was by no means patriotically elated by the event, yet he had to force himself into a gracious behaviour when, the official reception being over, the naval officers of the Commission crossed the river to pay a visit to the solitary white man of whom they had heard, no doubt wishing also to catch a glimpse of his daughter. In that they were disappointed, Nina refusing to show herself; but they seemed easily consoled by the gin and cheroots set before them by the hospitable Almayer; and sprawling comfortably on the lame armchairs under the shade of the verandah, while the blazing sunshine outside seemed to set the great river simmering in the heat, they filled the little bungalow with the unusual sounds of European languages, with noise and laughter produced by naval witticisms at the expense of the fat Lakamba whom they had been complimenting so much that very morning. The younger men in an access of good fellowship made their host talk, and Almayer, excited by

the sight of European faces, by the sound of European voices, opened his heart before the sympathising strangers, unaware of the amusement the recital of his many misfortunes caused to those future admirals. They drank his health, wished him many big diamonds and a mountain of gold, expressed even an envy of the high destinies awaiting him yet. Encouraged by so much friendliness, the grey-headed and foolish dreamer invited his guests to visit his new house. They went there through the long grass in a straggling procession while their boats were got ready for the return down the river in the cool of the evening. And in the great empty rooms where the tepid wind entering through the sashless windows whirled gently the dried leaves and the dust of many days of neglect, Almayer in his white jacket and flowered sarong, surrounded by a circle of glittering uniforms, stamped his foot to show the solidity of the neatly-fitting floors and expatiated upon the beauties and convenience of the building. They listened and assented, amazed by the wonderful simplicity and the foolish hopefulness of the man, till Almayer, carried away by his excitement, disclosed his regret at the non-arrival of the English, "who knew how to develop a rich country," as he expressed it. There was a general laugh amongst the Dutch officers at that unsophisticated statement, and a move was made towards the boats; but when Almayer, stepping cautiously on the rotten boards of the Lingard jetty, tried to approach the chief of the Commission with some timid hints anent the protection required by the Dutch subject against the wily Arabs, that salt water diplomat told him significantly that the Arabs were better subjects than Hollanders who dealt illegally in gunpowder with the Malays. The innocent Almayer recognised there at once the oily tongue of Abdulla and the solemn persuasiveness of Lakamba, but ere he had time to frame an indignant protest the steam launch and the string of boats moved rapidly down the river leaving him on the jetty, standing open-mouthed in his surprise and anger. There are thirty miles of river from Sambir to the gem-like islands of the estuary where the frigate was awaiting the return of the boats. The moon rose long before the boats had traversed half that distance, and the black forest sleeping peacefully under her cold rays woke up that night to the ringing laughter in the small flotilla provoked by some reminiscence of Almayer's lamentable narrative. Salt-water jests at the poor man's expense were passed from boat to boat, the non-appearance of his daughter was commented upon with severe displeasure, and the half-finished house built for the reception of

Englishmen received on that joyous night the name of “Almayer’s Folly” by the unanimous vote of the lighthearted seamen.

For many weeks after this visit life in Sambir resumed its even and uneventful flow. Each day’s sun shooting its morning rays above the tree-tops lit up the usual scene of daily activity. Nina walking on the path that formed the only street in the settlement saw the accustomed sight of men lolling on the shady side of the houses, on the high platforms; of women busily engaged in husking the daily rice; of naked brown children racing along the shady and narrow paths leading to the clearings. Jim-Eng, strolling before his house, greeted her with a friendly nod before climbing up indoors to seek his beloved opium pipe. The elder children clustered round her, daring from long acquaintance, pulling the skirts of her white robe with their dark fingers, and showing their brilliant teeth in expectation of a shower of glass beads. She greeted them with a quiet smile, but always had a few friendly words for a Siamese girl, a slave owned by Bulangi, whose numerous wives were said to be of a violent temper. Well-founded rumour said also that the domestic squabbles of that industrious cultivator ended generally in a combined assault of all his wives upon the Siamese slave. The girl herself never complained — perhaps from dictates of prudence, but more likely through the strange, resigned apathy of half-savage womankind. From early morning she was to be seen on the paths amongst the houses — by the riverside or on the jetties, the tray of pastry, it was her mission to sell, skilfully balanced on her head. During the great heat of the day she usually sought refuge in Almayer’s campong, often finding shelter in a shady corner of the verandah, where she squatted with her tray before her, when invited by Nina. For “Mem Putih” she had always a smile, but the presence of Mrs. Almayer, the very sound of her shrill voice, was the signal for a hurried departure.

To this girl Nina often spoke; the other inhabitants of Sambir seldom or never heard the sound of her voice. They got used to the silent figure moving in their midst calm and white-robed, a being from another world and incomprehensible to them. Yet Nina’s life for all her outward composure, for all the seeming detachment from the things and people surrounding her, was far from quiet, in consequence of Mrs. Almayer being much too active for the happiness and even safety of the household. She had resumed some intercourse with Lakamba, not personally, it is true (for the dignity of that potentate kept him inside his stockade), but through the

agency of that potentate's prime minister, harbour master, financial adviser, and general factotum. That gentleman — of Sulu origin — was certainly endowed with statesmanlike qualities, although he was totally devoid of personal charms. In truth he was perfectly repulsive, possessing only one eye and a pockmarked face, with nose and lips horribly disfigured by the small-pox. This unengaging individual often strolled into Almayer's garden in unofficial costume, composed of a piece of pink calico round his waist. There at the back of the house, squatting on his heels on scattered embers, in close proximity to the great iron boiler, where the family daily rice was being cooked by the women under Mrs. Almayer's superintendence, did that astute negotiator carry on long conversations in Sulu language with Almayer's wife. What the subject of their discourses was might have been guessed from the subsequent domestic scenes by Almayer's hearthstone.

Of late Almayer had taken to excursions up the river. In a small canoe with two paddlers and the faithful Ali for a steersman he would disappear for a few days at a time. All his movements were no doubt closely watched by Lakamba and Abdulla, for the man once in the confidence of Rajah Laut was supposed to be in possession of valuable secrets. The coast population of Borneo believes implicitly in diamonds of fabulous value, in gold mines of enormous richness in the interior. And all those imaginings are heightened by the difficulty of penetrating far inland, especially on the north-east coast, where the Malays and the river tribes of Dyaks or Head-hunters are eternally quarrelling. It is true enough that some gold reaches the coast in the hands of those Dyaks when, during short periods of truce in the desultory warfare, they visit the coast settlements of Malays. And so the wildest exaggerations are built up and added to on the slight basis of that fact.

Almayer in his quality of white man — as Lingard before him — had somewhat better relations with the up-river tribes. Yet even his excursions were not without danger, and his returns were eagerly looked for by the impatient Lakamba. But every time the Rajah was disappointed. Vain were the conferences by the rice-pot of his factotum Babalatchi with the white man's wife. The white man himself was impenetrable — impenetrable to persuasion, coaxing, abuse; to soft words and shrill revilings; to desperate beseechings or murderous threats; for Mrs. Almayer, in her extreme desire to persuade her husband into an alliance with Lakamba, played upon the whole gamut of passion. With her soiled robe wound tightly under the

armpits across her lean bosom, her scant grayish hair tumbled in disorder over her projecting cheek-bones, in suppliant attitude, she depicted with shrill volubility the advantages of close union with a man so good and so fair dealing.

“Why don’t you go to the Rajah?” she screamed. “Why do you go back to those Dyaks in the great forest? They should be killed. You cannot kill them, you cannot; but our Rajah’s men are brave! You tell the Rajah where the old white man’s treasure is. Our Rajah is good! He is our very grandfather, Datu Besar! He will kill those wretched Dyaks, and you shall have half the treasure. Oh, Kaspar, tell where the treasure is! Tell me! Tell me out of the old man’s surat where you read so often at night.”

On those occasions Almayer sat with rounded shoulders bending to the blast of this domestic tempest, accentuating only each pause in the torrent of his wife’s eloquence by an angry growl, “There is no treasure! Go away, woman!” Exasperated by the sight of his patiently bent back, she would at last walk round so as to face him across the table, and clasping her robe with one hand she stretched the other lean arm and claw-like hand to emphasise, in a passion of anger and contempt, the rapid rush of scathing remarks and bitter cursings heaped on the head of the man unworthy to associate with brave Malay chiefs. It ended generally by Almayer rising slowly, his long pipe in hand, his face set into a look of inward pain, and walking away in silence. He descended the steps and plunged into the long grass on his way to the solitude of his new house, dragging his feet in a state of physical collapse from disgust and fear before that fury. She followed to the head of the steps, and sent the shafts of indiscriminate abuse after the retreating form. And each of those scenes was concluded by a piercing shriek, reaching him far away. “You know, Kaspar, I am your wife! your own Christian wife after your own Blanda law!” For she knew that this was the bitterest thing of all; the greatest regret of that man’s life.

All these scenes Nina witnessed unmoved. She might have been deaf, dumb, without any feeling as far as any expression of opinion went. Yet oft when her father had sought the refuge of the great dusty rooms of “Almayer’s Folly,” and her mother, exhausted by rhetorical efforts, squatted wearily on her heels with her back against the leg of the table, Nina would approach her curiously, guarding her skirts from betel juice besprinkling the floor, and gaze down upon her as one might look into the quiescent crater of a volcano after a destructive eruption. Mrs. Almayer’s thoughts, after these

scenes, were usually turned into a channel of childhood reminiscences, and she gave them utterance in a kind of monotonous recitative — slightly disconnected, but generally describing the glories of the Sultan of Sulu, his great splendour, his power, his great prowess; the fear which benumbed the hearts of white men at the sight of his swift piratical praus. And these muttered statements of her grandfather's might were mixed up with bits of later recollections, where the great fight with the "White Devil's" brig and the convent life in Samarang occupied the principal place. At that point she usually dropped the thread of her narrative, and pulling out the little brass cross, always suspended round her neck, she contemplated it with superstitious awe. That superstitious feeling connected with some vague talismanic properties of the little bit of metal, and the still more hazy but terrible notion of some bad Djinns and horrible torments invented, as she thought, for her especial punishment by the good Mother Superior in case of the loss of the above charm, were Mrs. Almayer's only theological luggage for the stormy road of life. Mrs. Almayer had at least something tangible to cling to, but Nina, brought up under the Protestant wing of the proper Mrs. Vinck, had not even a little piece of brass to remind her of past teaching. And listening to the recital of those savage glories, those barbarous fights and savage feasting, to the story of deeds valorous, albeit somewhat bloodthirsty, where men of her mother's race shone far above the Orang Blanda, she felt herself irresistibly fascinated, and saw with vague surprise the narrow mantle of civilised morality, in which good-meaning people had wrapped her young soul, fall away and leave her shivering and helpless as if on the edge of some deep and unknown abyss. Strangest of all, this abyss did not frighten her when she was under the influence of the witch-like being she called her mother. She seemed to have forgotten in civilised surroundings her life before the time when Lingard had, so to speak, kidnapped her from Brow. Since then she had had Christian teaching, social education, and a good glimpse of civilised life. Unfortunately her teachers did not understand her nature, and the education ended in a scene of humiliation, in an outburst of contempt from white people for her mixed blood. She had tasted the whole bitterness of it and remembered distinctly that the virtuous Mrs. Vinck's indignation was not so much directed against the young man from the bank as against the innocent cause of that young man's infatuation. And there was also no doubt in her mind that the principal cause of Mrs. Vinck's indignation was the thought

that such a thing should happen in a white nest, where her snow-white doves, the two Misses Vinck, had just returned from Europe, to find shelter under the maternal wing, and there await the coming of irreproachable men of their destiny. Not even the thought of the money so painfully scraped together by Almayer, and so punctually sent for Nina's expenses, could dissuade Mrs. Vinck from her virtuous resolve. Nina was sent away, and in truth the girl herself wanted to go, although a little frightened by the impending change. And now she had lived on the river for three years with a savage mother and a father walking about amongst pitfalls, with his head in the clouds, weak, irresolute, and unhappy. She had lived a life devoid of all the decencies of civilisation, in miserable domestic conditions; she had breathed in the atmosphere of sordid plottings for gain, of the no less disgusting intrigues and crimes for lust or money; and those things, together with the domestic quarrels, were the only events of her three years' existence. She did not die from despair and disgust the first month, as she expected and almost hoped for. On the contrary, at the end of half a year it had seemed to her that she had known no other life. Her young mind having been unskilfully permitted to glance at better things, and then thrown back again into the hopeless quagmire of barbarism, full of strong and uncontrolled passions, had lost the power to discriminate. It seemed to Nina that there was no change and no difference. Whether they traded in brick godowns or on the muddy river bank; whether they reached after much or little; whether they made love under the shadows of the great trees or in the shadow of the cathedral on the Singapore promenade; whether they plotted for their own ends under the protection of laws and according to the rules of Christian conduct, or whether they sought the gratification of their desires with the savage cunning and the unrestrained fierceness of natures as innocent of culture as their own immense and gloomy forests, Nina saw only the same manifestations of love and hate and of sordid greed chasing the uncertain dollar in all its multifarious and vanishing shapes. To her resolute nature, however, after all these years, the savage and uncompromising sincerity of purpose shown by her Malay kinsmen seemed at last preferable to the sleek hypocrisy, to the polite disguises, to the virtuous pretences of such white people as she had had the misfortune to come in contact with. After all it was her life; it was going to be her life, and so thinking she fell more and more under the influence of her mother. Seeking, in her ignorance, a better side to that life, she listened with avidity



to the old woman's tales of the departed glories of the Rajahs, from whose race she had sprung, and she became gradually more indifferent, more contemptuous of the white side of her descent represented by a feeble and traditionless father.

Almayer's difficulties were by no means diminished by the girl's presence in Sambir. The stir caused by her arrival had died out, it is true, and Lakamba had not renewed his visits; but about a year after the departure of the man-of-war boats the nephew of Abdulla, Syed Reshid, returned from his pilgrimage to Mecca, rejoicing in a green jacket and the proud title of Hadji. There was a great letting off of rockets on board the steamer which brought him in, and a great beating of drums all night in Abdulla's compound, while the feast of welcome was prolonged far into the small hours of the morning. Reshid was the favourite nephew and heir of Abdulla, and that loving uncle, meeting Almayer one day by the riverside, stopped politely to exchange civilities and to ask solemnly for an interview. Almayer suspected some attempt at a swindle, or at any rate something unpleasant, but of course consented with a great show of rejoicing. Accordingly the next evening, after sunset, Abdulla came, accompanied by several other grey-beards and by his nephew. That young man — of a very rakish and dissipated appearance — affected the greatest indifference as to the whole of the proceedings. When the torch-bearers had grouped themselves below the steps, and the visitors had seated themselves on various lame chairs, Reshid stood apart in the shadow, examining his aristocratically small hands with great attention. Almayer, surprised by the great solemnity of his visitors, perched himself on the corner of the table with a characteristic want of dignity quickly noted by the Arabs with grave disapproval. But Abdulla spoke now, looking straight past Almayer at the red curtain hanging in the doorway, where a slight tremor disclosed the presence of women on the other side. He began by neatly complimenting Almayer upon the long years they had dwelt together in cordial neighbourhood, and called upon Allah to give him many more years to gladden the eyes of his friends by his welcome presence. He made a polite allusion to the great consideration shown him (Almayer) by the Dutch "Commissie," and drew thence the flattering inference of Almayer's great importance amongst his own people. He — Abdulla — was also important amongst all the Arabs, and his nephew Reshid would be heir of that social position and of great riches. Now Reshid was a Hadji. He was possessor of

several Malay women, went on Abdulla, but it was time he had a favourite wife, the first of the four allowed by the Prophet. And, speaking with well-bred politeness, he explained further to the dumbfounded Almayer that, if he would consent to the alliance of his offspring with that true believer and virtuous man Reshid, she would be the mistress of all the splendours of Reshid's house, and first wife of the first Arab in the Islands, when he — Abdulla — was called to the joys of Paradise by Allah the All-merciful. "You know, Tuan," he said, in conclusion, "the other women would be her slaves, and Reshid's house is great. From Bombay he has brought great divans, and costly carpets, and European furniture. There is also a great looking-glass in a frame shining like gold. What could a girl want more?" And while Almayer looked upon him in silent dismay Abdulla spoke in a more confidential tone, waving his attendants away, and finished his speech by pointing out the material advantages of such an alliance, and offering to settle upon Almayer three thousand dollars as a sign of his sincere friendship and the price of the girl.

Poor Almayer was nearly having a fit. Burning with the desire of taking Abdulla by the throat, he had but to think of his helpless position in the midst of lawless men to comprehend the necessity of diplomatic conciliation. He mastered his impulses, and spoke politely and coldly, saying the girl was young and as the apple of his eye. Tuan Reshid, a Faithful and a Hadji, would not want an infidel woman in his harem; and, seeing Abdulla smile sceptically at that last objection, he remained silent, not trusting himself to speak more, not daring to refuse point-blank, nor yet to say anything compromising. Abdulla understood the meaning of that silence, and rose to take leave with a grave salaam. He wished his friend Almayer "a thousand years," and moved down the steps, helped dutifully by Reshid. The torch-bearers shook their torches, scattering a shower of sparks into the river, and the cortege moved off, leaving Almayer agitated but greatly relieved by their departure. He dropped into a chair and watched the glimmer of the lights amongst the tree trunks till they disappeared and complete silence succeeded the tramp of feet and the murmur of voices. He did not move till the curtain rustled and Nina came out on the verandah and sat in the rocking-chair, where she used to spend many hours every day. She gave a slight rocking motion to her seat, leaning back with half-closed eyes, her long hair shading her face from the smoky light of the lamp on the table. Almayer looked at her furtively, but

the face was as impassible as ever. She turned her head slightly towards her father, and, speaking, to his great surprise, in English, asked —

“Was that Abdulla here?”

“Yes,” said Almayer — “just gone.”

“And what did he want, father?”

“He wanted to buy you for Reshid,” answered Almayer, brutally, his anger getting the better of him, and looking at the girl as if in expectation of some outbreak of feeling. But Nina remained apparently unmoved, gazing dreamily into the black night outside.

“Be careful, Nina,” said Almayer, after a short silence and rising from his chair, “when you go paddling alone into the creeks in your canoe. That Reshid is a violent scoundrel, and there is no saying what he may do. Do you hear me?”

She was standing now, ready to go in, one hand grasping the curtain in the doorway. She turned round, throwing her heavy tresses back by a sudden gesture.

“Do you think he would dare?” she asked, quickly, and then turned again to go in, adding in a lower tone, “He would not dare. Arabs are all cowards.”

Almayer looked after her, astonished. He did not seek the repose of his hammock. He walked the floor absently, sometimes stopping by the balustrade to think. The lamp went out. The first streak of dawn broke over the forest; Almayer shivered in the damp air. “I give it up,” he muttered to himself, lying down wearily. “Damn those women! Well! If the girl did not look as if she wanted to be kidnapped!”

And he felt a nameless fear creep into his heart, making him shiver again.

## CHAPTER IV.

That year, towards the breaking up of the south-west monsoon, disquieting rumours reached Sambir. Captain Ford, coming up to Almayer's house for an evening's chat, brought late numbers of the Straits Times giving the news of Acheen war and of the unsuccessful Dutch expedition. The Nakhodas of the rare trading praus ascending the river paid visits to Lakamba, discussing with that potentate the unsettled state of affairs, and wagged their heads gravely over the recital of Orang Blanda exaction, severity, and general tyranny, as exemplified in the total stoppage of gunpowder trade and the rigorous visiting of all suspicious craft trading in the straits of Macassar. Even the loyal soul of Lakamba was stirred into a state of inward discontent by the withdrawal of his license for powder and by the abrupt confiscation of one hundred and fifty barrels of that commodity by the gunboat Princess Amelia, when, after a hazardous voyage, it had almost reached the mouth of the river. The unpleasant news was given him by Reshid, who, after the unsuccessful issue of his matrimonial projects, had made a long voyage amongst the islands for trading purposes; had bought the powder for his friend, and was overhauled and deprived of it on his return when actually congratulating himself on his acuteness in avoiding detection. Reshid's wrath was principally directed against Almayer, whom he suspected of having notified the Dutch authorities of the desultory warfare carried on by the Arabs and the Rajah with the up-river Dyak tribes.

To Reshid's great surprise the Rajah received his complaints very coldly, and showed no signs of vengeful disposition towards the white man. In truth, Lakamba knew very well that Almayer was perfectly innocent of any meddling in state affairs; and besides, his attitude towards that much persecuted individual was wholly changed in consequence of a reconciliation effected between him and his old enemy by Almayer's newly-found friend, Dain Maroola.

Almayer had now a friend. Shortly after Reshid's departure on his commercial journey, Nina, drifting slowly with the tide in the canoe on her return home after one of her solitary excursions, heard in one of the small creeks a splashing, as if of heavy ropes dropping in the water, and the prolonged song of Malay seamen when some heavy pulling is to be done. Through the thick fringe of bushes hiding the mouth of the creek she saw

the tall spars of some European-rigged sailing vessel overtopping the summits of the Nipa palms. A brig was being hauled out of the small creek into the main stream. The sun had set, and during the short moments of twilight Nina saw the brig, aided by the evening breeze and the flowing tide, head towards Sambir under her set foresail. The girl turned her canoe out of the main river into one of the many narrow channels amongst the wooded islets, and paddled vigorously over the black and sleepy backwaters towards Sambir. Her canoe brushed the water-palms, skirted the short spaces of muddy bank where sedate alligators looked at her with lazy unconcern, and, just as darkness was setting in, shot out into the broad junction of the two main branches of the river, where the brig was already at anchor with sails furled, yards squared, and decks seemingly untenanted by any human being. Nina had to cross the river and pass pretty close to the brig in order to reach home on the low promontory between the two branches of the Pantai. Up both branches, in the houses built on the banks and over the water, the lights twinkled already, reflected in the still waters below. The hum of voices, the occasional cry of a child, the rapid and abruptly interrupted roll of a wooden drum, together with some distant hailing in the darkness by the returning fishermen, reached her over the broad expanse of the river. She hesitated a little before crossing, the sight of such an unusual object as an European-rigged vessel causing her some uneasiness, but the river in its wide expansion was dark enough to render a small canoe invisible. She urged her small craft with swift strokes of her paddle, kneeling in the bottom and bending forward to catch any suspicious sound while she steered towards the little jetty of Lingard and Co., to which the strong light of the paraffin lamp shining on the whitewashed verandah of Almayer's bungalow served as a convenient guide. The jetty itself, under the shadow of the bank overgrown by drooping bushes, was hidden in darkness. Before even she could see it she heard the hollow bumping of a large boat against its rotten posts, and heard also the murmur of whispered conversation in that boat whose white paint and great dimensions, faintly visible on nearer approach, made her rightly guess that it belonged to the brig just anchored. Stopping her course by a rapid motion of her paddle, with another swift stroke she sent it whirling away from the wharf and steered for a little rivulet which gave access to the back courtyard of the house. She landed at the muddy head of the creek and made her way towards the house over the trodden grass of the courtyard. To the left, from

the cooking shed, shone a red glare through the banana plantation she skirted, and the noise of feminine laughter reached her from there in the silent evening. She rightly judged her mother was not near, laughter and Mrs. Almayer not being close neighbours. She must be in the house, thought Nina, as she ran lightly up the inclined plane of shaky planks leading to the back door of the narrow passage dividing the house in two. Outside the doorway, in the black shadow, stood the faithful Ali.

“Who is there?” asked Nina.

“A great Malay man has come,” answered Ali, in a tone of suppressed excitement. “He is a rich man. There are six men with lances. Real Soldat, you understand. And his dress is very brave. I have seen his dress. It shines! What jewels! Don’t go there, Mem Nina. Tuan said not; but the old Mem is gone. Tuan will be angry. Merciful Allah! what jewels that man has got!”

Nina slipped past the outstretched hand of the slave into the dark passage where, in the crimson glow of the hanging curtain, close by its other end, she could see a small dark form crouching near the wall. Her mother was feasting her eyes and ears with what was taking place on the front verandah, and Nina approached to take her share in the rare pleasure of some novelty. She was met by her mother’s extended arm and by a low murmured warning not to make a noise.

“Have you seen them, mother?” asked Nina, in a breathless whisper.

Mrs. Almayer turned her face towards the girl, and her sunken eyes shone strangely in the red half-light of the passage.

“I saw him,” she said, in an almost inaudible tone, pressing her daughter’s hand with her bony fingers. “A great Rajah has come to Sambir — a Son of Heaven,” muttered the old woman to herself. “Go away, girl!”

The two women stood close to the curtain, Nina wishing to approach the rent in the stuff, and her mother defending the position with angry obstinacy. On the other side there was a lull in the conversation, but the breathing of several men, the occasional light tinkling of some ornaments, the clink of metal scabbards, or of brass siri-vessels passed from hand to hand, was audible during the short pause. The women struggled silently, when there was a shuffling noise and the shadow of Almayer’s burly form fell on the curtain.

The women ceased struggling and remained motionless. Almayer had stood up to answer his guest, turning his back to the doorway, unaware of

what was going on on the other side. He spoke in a tone of regretful irritation.

“You have come to the wrong house, Tuan Maroola, if you want to trade as you say. I was a trader once, not now, whatever you may have heard about me in Macassar. And if you want anything, you will not find it here; I have nothing to give, and want nothing myself. You should go to the Rajah here; you can see in the daytime his houses across the river, there, where those fires are burning on the shore. He will help you and trade with you. Or, better still, go to the Arabs over there,” he went on bitterly, pointing with his hand towards the houses of Sambir. “Abdulla is the man you want. There is nothing he would not buy, and there is nothing he would not sell; believe me, I know him well.”

He waited for an answer a short time, then added —

“All that I have said is true, and there is nothing more.”

Nina, held back by her mother, heard a soft voice reply with a calm evenness of intonation peculiar to the better class Malays —

“Who would doubt a white Tuan’s words? A man seeks his friends where his heart tells him. Is this not true also? I have come, although so late, for I have something to say which you may be glad to hear. To-morrow I will go to the Sultan; a trader wants the friendship of great men. Then I shall return here to speak serious words, if Tuan permits. I shall not go to the Arabs; their lies are very great! What are they? Chelakka!”

Almayer’s voice sounded a little more pleasantly in reply.

“Well, as you like. I can hear you to-morrow at any time if you have anything to say. Bah! After you have seen the Sultan Lakamba you will not want to return here, Inchi Dain. You will see. Only mind, I will have nothing to do with Lakamba. You may tell him so. What is your business with me, after all?”

“To-morrow we talk, Tuan, now I know you,” answered the Malay. “I speak English a little, so we can talk and nobody will understand, and then —”

He interrupted himself suddenly, asking surprised, “What’s that noise, Tuan?”

Almayer had also heard the increasing noise of the scuffle recommenced on the women’s side of the curtain. Evidently Nina’s strong curiosity was on the point of overcoming Mrs. Almayer’s exalted sense of social proprieties. Hard breathing was distinctly audible, and the curtain shook

during the contest, which was mainly physical, although Mrs. Almayer's voice was heard in angry remonstrance with its usual want of strictly logical reasoning, but with the well-known richness of invective.

"You shameless woman! Are you a slave?" shouted shrilly the irate matron. "Veil your face, abandoned wretch! You white snake, I will not let you!"

Almayer's face expressed annoyance and also doubt as to the advisability of interfering between mother and daughter. He glanced at his Malay visitor, who was waiting silently for the end of the uproar in an attitude of amused expectation, and waving his hand contemptuously he murmured —

"It is nothing. Some women."

The Malay nodded his head gravely, and his face assumed an expression of serene indifference, as etiquette demanded after such an explanation. The contest was ended behind the curtain, and evidently the younger will had its way, for the rapid shuffle and click of Mrs. Almayer's high-heeled sandals died away in the distance. The tranquillised master of the house was going to resume the conversation when, struck by an unexpected change in the expression of his guest's countenance, he turned his head and saw Nina standing in the doorway.

After Mrs. Almayer's retreat from the field of battle, Nina, with a contemptuous exclamation, "It's only a trader," had lifted the conquered curtain and now stood in full light, framed in the dark background on the passage, her lips slightly parted, her hair in disorder after the exertion, the angry gleam not yet faded out of her glorious and sparkling eyes. She took in at a glance the group of white-clad lancemen standing motionless in the shadow of the far-off end of the verandah, and her gaze rested curiously on the chief of that imposing cortège. He stood, almost facing her, a little on one side, and struck by the beauty of the unexpected apparition had bent low, elevating his joint hands above his head in a sign of respect accorded by Malays only to the great of this earth. The crude light of the lamp shone on the gold embroidery of his black silk jacket, broke in a thousand sparkling rays on the jewelled hilt of his kriss protruding from under the many folds of the red sarong gathered into a sash round his waist, and played on the precious stones of the many rings on his dark fingers. He straightened himself up quickly after the low bow, putting his hand with a graceful ease on the hilt of his heavy short sword ornamented with brilliantly dyed fringes of horsehair. Nina, hesitating on the threshold, saw



an erect lithe figure of medium height with a breadth of shoulder suggesting great power. Under the folds of a blue turban, whose fringed ends hung gracefully over the left shoulder, was a face full of determination and expressing a reckless good-humour, not devoid, however, of some dignity. The squareness of lower jaw, the full red lips, the mobile nostrils, and the proud carriage of the head gave the impression of a being half-savage, untamed, perhaps cruel, and corrected the liquid softness of the almost feminine eye, that general characteristic of the race. Now, the first surprise over, Nina saw those eyes fixed upon her with such an uncontrolled expression of admiration and desire that she felt a hitherto unknown feeling of shyness, mixed with alarm and some delight, enter and penetrate her whole being.

Confused by those unusual sensations she stopped in the doorway and instinctively drew the lower part of the curtain across her face, leaving only half a rounded cheek, a stray tress, and one eye exposed, wherewith to contemplate the gorgeous and bold being so unlike in appearance to the rare specimens of traders she had seen before on that same verandah.

Dain Maroola, dazzled by the unexpected vision, forgot the confused Almayer, forgot his brig, his escort staring in open-mouthed admiration, the object of his visit and all things else, in his overpowering desire to prolong the contemplation of so much loveliness met so suddenly in such an unlikely place — as he thought.

“It is my daughter,” said Almayer, in an embarrassed manner. “It is of no consequence. White women have their customs, as you know Tuan, having travelled much, as you say. However, it is late; we will finish our talk to-morrow.”

Dain bent low trying to convey in a last glance towards the girl the bold expression of his overwhelming admiration. The next minute he was shaking Almayer’s hand with grave courtesy, his face wearing a look of stolid unconcern as to any feminine presence. His men filed off, and he followed them quickly, closely attended by a thick-set, savage-looking Sumatrese he had introduced before as the commander of his brig. Nina walked to the balustrade of the verandah and saw the sheen of moonlight on the steel spear-heads and heard the rhythmic jingle of brass anklets as the men moved in single file towards the jetty. The boat shoved off after a little while, looming large in the full light of the moon, a black shapeless mass in the slight haze hanging over the water. Nina fancied she could distinguish

the graceful figure of the trader standing erect in the stern sheets, but in a little while all the outlines got blurred, confused, and soon disappeared in the folds of white vapour shrouding the middle of the river.

Almayer had approached his daughter, and leaning with both arms over the rail, was looking moodily down on the heap of rubbish and broken bottles at the foot of the verandah.

“What was all that noise just now?” he growled peevishly, without looking up. “Confound you and your mother! What did she want? What did you come out for?”

“She did not want to let me come out,” said Nina. “She is angry. She says the man just gone is some Rajah. I think she is right now.”

“I believe all you women are crazy,” snarled Almayer. “What’s that to you, to her, to anybody? The man wants to collect trepang and birds’ nests on the islands. He told me so, that Rajah of yours. He will come tomorrow. I want you both to keep away from the house, and let me attend to my business in peace.”

Dain Maroola came the next day and had a long conversation with Almayer. This was the beginning of a close and friendly intercourse which, at first, was much remarked in Sambir, till the population got used to the frequent sight of many fires burning in Almayer’s campong, where Maroola’s men were warming themselves during the cold nights of the north-east monsoon, while their master had long conferences with the Tuan Putih — as they styled Almayer amongst themselves. Great was the curiosity in Sambir on the subject of the new trader. Had he seen the Sultan? What did the Sultan say? Had he given any presents? What would he sell? What would he buy? Those were the questions broached eagerly by the inhabitants of bamboo houses built over the river. Even in more substantial buildings, in Abdulla’s house, in the residences of principal traders, Arab, Chinese, and Bugis, the excitement ran high, and lasted many days. With inborn suspicion they would not believe the simple account of himself the young trader was always ready to give. Yet it had all the appearance of truth. He said he was a trader, and sold rice. He did not want to buy gutta-percha or beeswax, because he intended to employ his numerous crew in collecting trepang on the coral reefs outside the river, and also in seeking for bird’s nests on the mainland. Those two articles he professed himself ready to buy if there were any to be obtained in that way. He said he was from Bali, and a Brahmin, which last statement he made

good by refusing all food during his often repeated visits to Lakamba's and Almayer's houses. To Lakamba he went generally at night and had long audiences. Babalatchi, who was always a third party at those meetings of potentate and trader, knew how to resist all attempts on the part of the curious to ascertain the subject of so many long talks. When questioned with languid courtesy by the grave Abdulla he sought refuge in a vacant stare of his one eye, and in the affectation of extreme simplicity.

"I am only my master's slave," murmured Babalatchi, in a hesitating manner. Then as if making up his mind suddenly for a reckless confidence he would inform Abdulla of some transaction in rice, repeating the words, "A hundred big bags the Sultan bought; a hundred, Tuan!" in a tone of mysterious solemnity. Abdulla, firmly persuaded of the existence of some more important dealings, received, however, the information with all the signs of respectful astonishment. And the two would separate, the Arab cursing inwardly the wily dog, while Babalatchi went on his way walking on the dusty path, his body swaying, his chin with its few grey hairs pushed forward, resembling an inquisitive goat bent on some unlawful expedition. Attentive eyes watched his movements. Jim-Eng, descrying Babalatchi far away, would shake off the stupor of an habitual opium smoker and, tottering on to the middle of the road, would await the approach of that important person, ready with hospitable invitation. But Babalatchi's discretion was proof even against the combined assaults of good fellowship and of strong gin generously administered by the open-hearted Chinaman. Jim-Eng, owning himself beaten, was left uninformed with the empty bottle, and gazed sadly after the departing form of the statesman of Sambir pursuing his devious and unsteady way, which, as usual, led him to Almayer's compound. Ever since a reconciliation had been effected by Dain Maroola between his white friend and the Rajah, the one-eyed diplomatist had again become a frequent guest in the Dutchman's house. To Almayer's great disgust he was to be seen there at all times, strolling about in an abstracted kind of way on the verandah, skulking in the passages, or else popping round unexpected corners, always willing to engage Mrs. Almayer in confidential conversation. He was very shy of the master himself, as if suspicious that the pent-up feelings of the white man towards his person might find vent in a sudden kick. But the cooking shed was his favourite place, and he became an habitual guest there, squatting for hours amongst the busy women, with his chin resting on his knees, his lean arms clasped

round his legs, and his one eye roving uneasily — the very picture of watchful ugliness. Almayer wanted more than once to complain to Lakamba of his Prime Minister's intrusion, but Dain dissuaded him. "We cannot say a word here that he does not hear," growled Almayer.

"Then come and talk on board the brig," retorted Dain, with a quiet smile. "It is good to let the man come here. Lakamba thinks he knows much. Perhaps the Sultan thinks I want to run away. Better let the one-eyed crocodile sun himself in your campong, Tuan."

And Almayer assented unwillingly muttering vague threats of personal violence, while he eyed malevolently the aged statesman sitting with quiet obstinacy by his domestic rice-pot.

## CHAPTER V.

At last the excitement had died out in Sambir. The inhabitants got used to the sight of comings and goings between Almayer's house and the vessel, now moored to the opposite bank, and speculation as to the feverish activity displayed by Almayer's boatmen in repairing old canoes ceased to interfere with the due discharge of domestic duties by the women of the Settlement. Even the baffled Jim-Eng left off troubling his muddled brain with secrets of trade, and relapsed by the aid of his opium pipe into a state of stupefied bliss, letting Babalatchi pursue his way past his house uninvited and seemingly unnoticed.

So on that warm afternoon, when the deserted river sparkled under the vertical sun, the statesman of Sambir could, without any hindrance from friendly inquirers, shove off his little canoe from under the bushes, where it was usually hidden during his visits to Almayer's compound. Slowly and languidly Babalatchi paddled, crouching low in the boat, making himself small under his as enormous sun hat to escape the scorching heat reflected from the water. He was not in a hurry; his master, Lakamba, was surely reposing at this time of the day. He would have ample time to cross over and greet him on his waking with important news. Will he be displeased? Will he strike his ebony wood staff angrily on the floor, frightening him by the incoherent violence of his exclamations; or will he squat down with a good-humoured smile, and, rubbing his hands gently over his stomach with a familiar gesture, expectorate copiously into the brass siri-vessel, giving vent to a low, approbative murmur? Such were Babalatchi's thoughts as he skilfully handled his paddle, crossing the river on his way to the Rajah's campong, whose stockades showed from behind the dense foliage of the bank just opposite to Almayer's bungalow.

Indeed, he had a report to make. Something certain at last to confirm the daily tale of suspicions, the daily hints of familiarity, of stolen glances he had seen, of short and burning words he had overheard exchanged between Dain Maroola and Almayer's daughter.

Lakamba had, till then, listened to it all, calmly and with evident distrust; now he was going to be convinced, for Babalatchi had the proof; had it this very morning, when fishing at break of day in the creek over which stood Bulangi's house. There from his skiff he saw Nina's long canoe drift past, the girl sitting in the stern bending over Dain, who was stretched in the

bottom with his head resting on the girl's knees. He saw it. He followed them, but in a short time they took to the paddles and got away from under his observant eye. A few minutes afterwards he saw Bulangi's slave-girl paddling in a small dug-out to the town with her cakes for sale. She also had seen them in the grey dawn. And Babalatchi grinned confidentially to himself at the recollection of the slave-girl's discomposed face, of the hard look in her eyes, of the tremble in her voice, when answering his questions. That little Taminah evidently admired Dain Maroola. That was good! And Babalatchi laughed aloud at the notion; then becoming suddenly serious, he began by some strange association of ideas to speculate upon the price for which Bulangi would, possibly, sell the girl. He shook his head sadly at the thought that Bulangi was a hard man, and had refused one hundred dollars for that same Taminah only a few weeks ago; then he became suddenly aware that the canoe had drifted too far down during his meditation. He shook off the despondency caused by the certitude of Bulangi's mercenary disposition, and, taking up his paddle, in a few strokes sheered alongside the water-gate of the Rajah's house.

That afternoon Almayer, as was his wont lately, moved about on the water-side, overlooking the repairs to his boats. He had decided at last. Guided by the scraps of information contained in old Lingard's pocket-book, he was going to seek for the rich gold-mine, for that place where he had only to stoop to gather up an immense fortune and realise the dream of his young days. To obtain the necessary help he had shared his knowledge with Dain Maroola, he had consented to be reconciled with Lakamba, who gave his support to the enterprise on condition of sharing the profits; he had sacrificed his pride, his honour, and his loyalty in the face of the enormous risk of his undertaking, dazzled by the greatness of the results to be achieved by this alliance so distasteful yet so necessary. The dangers were great, but Maroola was brave; his men seemed as reckless as their chief, and with Lakamba's aid success seemed assured.

For the last fortnight Almayer was absorbed in the preparations, walking amongst his workmen and slaves in a kind of waking trance, where practical details as to the fitting out of the boats were mixed up with vivid dreams of untold wealth, where the present misery of burning sun, of the muddy and malodorous river bank disappeared in a gorgeous vision of a splendid future existence for himself and Nina. He hardly saw Nina during these last days, although the beloved daughter was ever present in his

thoughts. He hardly took notice of Dain, whose constant presence in his house had become a matter of course to him now they were connected by a community of interests. When meeting the young chief he gave him an absent greeting and passed on, seemingly wishing to avoid him, bent upon forgetting the hated reality of the present by absorbing himself in his work, or else by letting his imagination soar far above the tree-tops into the great white clouds away to the westward, where the paradise of Europe was awaiting the future Eastern millionaire. And Maroola, now the bargain was struck and there was no more business to be talked over, evidently did not care for the white man's company. Yet Dain was always about the house, but he seldom stayed long by the riverside. On his daily visits to the white man the Malay chief preferred to make his way quietly through the central passage of the house, and would come out into the garden at the back, where the fire was burning in the cooking shed, with the rice kettle swinging over it, under the watchful supervision of Mrs. Almayer. Avoiding that shed, with its black smoke and the warbling of soft, feminine voices, Dain would turn to the left. There, on the edge of a banana plantation, a clump of palms and mango trees formed a shady spot, a few scattered bushes giving it a certain seclusion into which only the serving women's chatter or an occasional burst of laughter could penetrate. Once in, he was invisible; and hidden there, leaning against the smooth trunk of a tall palm, he waited with gleaming eyes and an assured smile to hear the faint rustle of dried grass under the light footsteps of Nina.

From the very first moment when his eyes beheld this — to him — perfection of loveliness he felt in his inmost heart the conviction that she would be his; he felt the subtle breath of mutual understanding passing between their two savage natures, and he did not want Mrs. Almayer's encouraging smiles to take every opportunity of approaching the girl; and every time he spoke to her, every time he looked into her eyes, Nina, although averting her face, felt as if this bold-looking being who spoke burning words into her willing ear was the embodiment of her fate, the creature of her dreams — reckless, ferocious, ready with flashing kris for his enemies, and with passionate embrace for his beloved — the ideal Malay chief of her mother's tradition.

She recognised with a thrill of delicious fear the mysterious consciousness of her identity with that being. Listening to his words, it seemed to her she was born only then to a knowledge of a new existence,

that her life was complete only when near him, and she abandoned herself to a feeling of dreamy happiness, while with half-veiled face and in silence — as became a Malay girl — she listened to Dain's words giving up to her the whole treasure of love and passion his nature was capable of with all the unrestrained enthusiasm of a man totally untrammelled by any influence of civilised self-discipline.

And they used to pass many a delicious and fast fleeting hour under the mango trees behind the friendly curtain of bushes till Mrs. Almayer's shrill voice gave the signal of unwilling separation. Mrs. Almayer had undertaken the easy task of watching her husband lest he should interrupt the smooth course of her daughter's love affair, in which she took a great and benignant interest. She was happy and proud to see Dain's infatuation, believing him to be a great and powerful chief, and she found also a gratification of her mercenary instincts in Dain's open-handed generosity.

On the eve of the day when Babalatchi's suspicions were confirmed by ocular demonstration, Dain and Nina had remained longer than usual in their shady retreat. Only Almayer's heavy step on the verandah and his querulous clamour for food decided Mrs. Almayer to lift a warning cry. Maroola leaped lightly over the low bamboo fence, and made his way stealthily through the banana plantation down to the muddy shore of the back creek, while Nina walked slowly towards the house to minister to her father's wants, as was her wont every evening. Almayer felt happy enough that evening; the preparations were nearly completed; to-morrow he would launch his boats. In his mind's eye he saw the rich prize in his grasp; and, with tin spoon in his hand, he was forgetting the plateful of rice before him in the fanciful arrangement of some splendid banquet to take place on his arrival in Amsterdam. Nina, reclining in the long chair, listened absently to the few disconnected words escaping from her father's lips. Expedition! Gold! What did she care for all that? But at the name of Maroola mentioned by her father she was all attention. Dain was going down the river with his brig to-morrow to remain away for a few days, said Almayer. It was very annoying, this delay. As soon as Dain returned they would have to start without loss of time, for the river was rising. He would not be surprised if a great flood was coming. And he pushed away his plate with an impatient gesture on rising from the table. But now Nina heard him not. Dain going away! That's why he had ordered her, with that quiet masterfulness it was her delight to obey, to meet him at break of day in



Bulangi's creek. Was there a paddle in her canoe? she thought. Was it ready? She would have to start early — at four in the morning, in a very few hours.

She rose from her chair, thinking she would require rest before the long pull in the early morning. The lamp was burning dimly, and her father, tired with the day's labour, was already in his hammock. Nina put the lamp out and passed into a large room she shared with her mother on the left of the central passage. Entering, she saw that Mrs. Almayer had deserted the pile of mats serving her as bed in one corner of the room, and was now bending over the opened lid of her large wooden chest. Half a shell of cocoanut filled with oil, where a cotton rag floated for a wick, stood on the floor, surrounding her with a ruddy halo of light shining through the black and odorous smoke. Mrs. Almayer's back was bent, and her head and shoulders hidden in the deep box. Her hands rummaged in the interior, where a soft clink as of silver money could be heard. She did not notice at first her daughter's approach, and Nina, standing silently by her, looked down on many little canvas bags ranged in the bottom of the chest, wherefrom her mother extracted handfuls of shining guilders and Mexican dollars, letting them stream slowly back again through her claw-like fingers. The music of tinkling silver seemed to delight her, and her eyes sparkled with the reflected gleam of freshly-minted coins. She was muttering to herself: "And this, and this, and yet this! Soon he will give more — as much more as I ask. He is a great Rajah — a Son of Heaven! And she will be a Ranee — he gave all this for her! Who ever gave anything for me? I am a slave! Am I? I am the mother of a great Ranee!" She became aware suddenly of her daughter's presence, and ceased her droning, shutting the lid down violently; then, without rising from her crouching position, she looked up at the girl standing by with a vague smile on her dreamy face.

"You have seen. Have you?" she shouted, shrilly. "That is all mine, and for you. It is not enough! He will have to give more before he takes you away to the southern island where his father is king. You hear me? You are worth more, granddaughter of Rajahs! More! More!"

The sleepy voice of Almayer was heard on the verandah recommending silence. Mrs. Almayer extinguished the light and crept into her corner of the room. Nina laid down on her back on a pile of soft mats, her hands entwined under her head, gazing through the shutterless hole, serving as a window at the stars twinkling on the black sky; she was awaiting the time

of start for her appointed meeting-place. With quiet happiness she thought of that meeting in the great forest, far from all human eyes and sounds. Her soul, lapsing again into the savage mood, which the genius of civilisation working by the hand of Mrs. Vinck could never destroy, experienced a feeling of pride and of some slight trouble at the high value her worldly-wise mother had put upon her person; but she remembered the expressive glances and words of Dain, and, tranquillised, she closed her eyes in a shiver of pleasant anticipation.

There are some situations where the barbarian and the, so-called, civilised man meet upon the same ground. It may be supposed that Dain Maroola was not exceptionally delighted with his prospective mother-in-law, nor that he actually approved of that worthy woman's appetite for shining dollars. Yet on that foggy morning when Babalatchi, laying aside the cares of state, went to visit his fish-baskets in the Bulangi creek, Maroola had no misgivings, experienced no feelings but those of impatience and longing, when paddling to the east side of the island forming the back-water in question. He hid his canoe in the bushes and strode rapidly across the islet, pushing with impatience through the twigs of heavy undergrowth intercrossed over his path. From motives of prudence he would not take his canoe to the meeting-place, as Nina had done. He had left it in the main stream till his return from the other side of the island. The heavy warm fog was closing rapidly round him, but he managed to catch a fleeting glimpse of a light away to the left, proceeding from Bulangi's house. Then he could see nothing in the thickening vapour, and kept to the path only by a sort of instinct, which also led him to the very point on the opposite shore he wished to reach. A great log had stranded there, at right angles to the bank, forming a kind of jetty against which the swiftly flowing stream broke with a loud ripple. He stepped on it with a quick but steady motion, and in two strides found himself at the outer end, with the rush and swirl of the foaming water at his feet.

Standing there alone, as if separated from the world; the heavens, earth; the very water roaring under him swallowed up in the thick veil of the morning fog, he breathed out the name of Nina before him into the apparently limitless space, sure of being heard, instinctively sure of the nearness of the delightful creature; certain of her being aware of his near presence as he was aware of hers.

The bow of Nina's canoe loomed up close to the log, canted high out of the water by the weight of the sitter in the stern. Maroola laid his hand on the stem and leaped lightly in, giving it a vigorous shove off. The light craft, obeying the new impulse, cleared the log by a hair's breadth, and the river, with obedient complicity, swung it broadside to the current, and bore it off silently and rapidly between the invisible banks. And once more Dain, at the feet of Nina, forgot the world, felt himself carried away helpless by a great wave of supreme emotion, by a rush of joy, pride, and desire; understood once more with overpowering certitude that there was no life possible without that being he held clasped in his arms with passionate strength in a prolonged embrace.

Nina disengaged herself gently with a low laugh.

"You will overturn the boat, Dain," she whispered.

He looked into her eyes eagerly for a minute and let her go with a sigh, then lying down in the canoe he put his head on her knees, gazing upwards and stretching his arms backwards till his hands met round the girl's waist. She bent over him, and, shaking her head, framed both their faces in the falling locks of her long black hair.

And so they drifted on, he speaking with all the rude eloquence of a savage nature giving itself up without restraint to an overmastering passion, she bending low to catch the murmur of words sweeter to her than life itself. To those two nothing existed then outside the gunwales of the narrow and fragile craft. It was their world, filled with their intense and all-absorbing love. They took no heed of thickening mist, or of the breeze dying away before sunrise; they forgot the existence of the great forests surrounding them, of all the tropical nature awaiting the advent of the sun in a solemn and impressive silence.

Over the low river-mist hiding the boat with its freight of young passionate life and all-forgetful happiness, the stars paled, and a silvery-grey tint crept over the sky from the eastward. There was not a breath of wind, not a rustle of stirring leaf, not a splash of leaping fish to disturb the serene repose of all living things on the banks of the great river. Earth, river, and sky were wrapped up in a deep sleep, from which it seemed there would be no waking. All the seething life and movement of tropical nature seemed concentrated in the ardent eyes, in the tumultuously beating hearts of the two beings drifting in the canoe, under the white canopy of mist, over the smooth surface of the river.

Suddenly a great sheaf of yellow rays shot upwards from behind the black curtain of trees lining the banks of the Pantai. The stars went out; the little black clouds at the zenith glowed for a moment with crimson tints, and the thick mist, stirred by the gentle breeze, the sigh of waking nature, whirled round and broke into fantastically torn pieces, disclosing the wrinkled surface of the river sparkling in the broad light of day. Great flocks of white birds wheeled screaming above the swaying tree-tops. The sun had risen on the east coast.

Dain was the first to return to the cares of everyday life. He rose and glanced rapidly up and down the river. His eye detected Babalatchi's boat astern, and another small black speck on the glittering water, which was Taminah's canoe. He moved cautiously forward, and, kneeling, took up a paddle; Nina at the stern took hers. They bent their bodies to the work, throwing up the water at every stroke, and the small craft went swiftly ahead, leaving a narrow wake fringed with a lace-like border of white and gleaming foam. Without turning his head, Dain spoke.

"Somebody behind us, Nina. We must not let him gain. I think he is too far to recognise us."

"Somebody before us also," panted out Nina, without ceasing to paddle.

"I think I know," rejoined Dain. "The sun shines over there, but I fancy it is the girl Taminah. She comes down every morning to my brig to sell cakes — stays often all day. It does not matter; steer more into the bank; we must get under the bushes. My canoe is hidden not far from here."

As he spoke his eyes watched the broad-leaved nipas which they were brushing in their swift and silent course.

"Look out, Nina," he said at last; "there, where the water palms end and the twigs hang down under the leaning tree. Steer for the big green branch."

He stood up attentive, and the boat drifted slowly in shore, Nina guiding it by a gentle and skilful movement of her paddle. When near enough Dain laid hold of the big branch, and leaning back shot the canoe under a low green archway of thickly matted creepers giving access to a miniature bay formed by the caving in of the bank during the last great flood. His own boat was there anchored by a stone, and he stepped into it, keeping his hand on the gunwale of Nina's canoe. In a moment the two little nutshells with their occupants floated quietly side by side, reflected by the black water in the dim light struggling through a high canopy of dense foliage; while

above, away up in the broad day, flamed immense red blossoms sending down on their heads a shower of great dew-sparkling petals that descended rotating slowly in a continuous and perfumed stream; and over them, under them, in the sleeping water; all around them in a ring of luxuriant vegetation bathed in the warm air charged with strong and harsh perfumes, the intense work of tropical nature went on: plants shooting upward, entwined, interlaced in inextricable confusion, climbing madly and brutally over each other in the terrible silence of a desperate struggle towards the life-giving sunshine above — as if struck with sudden horror at the seething mass of corruption below, at the death and decay from which they sprang.

“We must part now,” said Dain, after a long silence. “You must return at once, Nina. I will wait till the brig drifts down here, and shall get on board then.”

“And will you be long away, Dain?” asked Nina, in a low voice.

“Long!” exclaimed Dain. “Would a man willingly remain long in a dark place? When I am not near you, Nina, I am like a man that is blind. What is life to me without light?”

Nina leaned over, and with a proud and happy smile took Dain’s face between her hands, looking into his eyes with a fond yet questioning gaze. Apparently she found there the confirmation of the words just said, for a feeling of grateful security lightened for her the weight of sorrow at the hour of parting. She believed that he, the descendant of many great Rajahs, the son of a great chief, the master of life and death, knew the sunshine of life only in her presence. An immense wave of gratitude and love welled forth out of her heart towards him. How could she make an outward and visible sign of all she felt for the man who had filled her heart with so much joy and so much pride? And in the great tumult of passion, like a flash of lightning came to her the reminiscence of that despised and almost forgotten civilisation she had only glanced at in her days of restraint, of sorrow, and of anger. In the cold ashes of that hateful and miserable past she would find the sign of love, the fitting expression of the boundless felicity of the present, the pledge of a bright and splendid future. She threw her arms around Dain’s neck and pressed her lips to his in a long and burning kiss. He closed his eyes, surprised and frightened at the storm raised in his breast by the strange and to him hitherto unknown contact, and long after Nina had pushed her canoe into the river he remained motionless,

without daring to open his eyes, afraid to lose the sensation of intoxicating delight he had tasted for the first time.

Now he wanted but immortality, he thought, to be the equal of gods, and the creature that could open so the gates of paradise must be his — soon would be his for ever!

He opened his eyes in time to see through the archway of creepers the bows of his brig come slowly into view, as the vessel drifted past on its way down the river. He must go on board now, he thought; yet he was loth to leave the place where he had learned to know what happiness meant. "Time yet. Let them go," he muttered to himself; and he closed his eyes again under the red shower of scented petals, trying to recall the scene with all its delight and all its fear.

He must have been able to join his brig in time, after all, and found much occupation outside, for it was in vain that Almayer looked for his friend's speedy return. The lower reach of the river where he so often and so impatiently directed his eyes remained deserted, save for the rapid flitting of some fishing canoe; but down the upper reaches came black clouds and heavy showers heralding the final setting in of the rainy season with its thunderstorms and great floods making the river almost impossible of ascent for native canoes.

Almayer, strolling along the muddy beach between his houses, watched uneasily the river rising inch by inch, creeping slowly nearer to the boats, now ready and hauled up in a row under the cover of dripping Kajang-mats. Fortune seemed to elude his grasp, and in his weary tramp backwards and forwards under the steady rain falling from the lowering sky, a sort of despairing indifference took possession of him. What did it matter? It was just his luck! Those two infernal savages, Lakamba and Dain, induced him, with their promises of help, to spend his last dollar in the fitting out of boats, and now one of them was gone somewhere, and the other shut up in his stockade would give no sign of life. No, not even the scoundrelly Babalatchi, thought Almayer, would show his face near him, now they had sold him all the rice, brass gongs, and cloth necessary for his expedition. They had his very last coin, and did not care whether he went or stayed. And with a gesture of abandoned discouragement Almayer would climb up slowly to the verandah of his new house to get out of the rain, and leaning on the front rail with his head sunk between his shoulders he would abandon himself to the current of bitter thoughts, oblivious of the flight of

time and the pangs of hunger, deaf to the shrill cries of his wife calling him to the evening meal. When, roused from his sad meditations by the first roll of the evening thunderstorm, he stumbled slowly towards the glimmering light of his old house, his half-dead hope made his ears preternaturally acute to any sound on the river. Several nights in succession he had heard the splash of paddles and had seen the indistinct form of a boat, but when hailing the shadowy apparition, his heart bounding with sudden hope of hearing Dain's voice, he was disappointed each time by the sulky answer conveying to him the intelligence that the Arabs were on the river, bound on a visit to the home-staying Lakamba. This caused him many sleepless nights, spent in speculating upon the kind of villainy those estimable personages were hatching now. At last, when all hope seemed dead, he was overjoyed on hearing Dain's voice; but Dain also appeared very anxious to see Lakamba, and Almayer felt uneasy owing to a deep and ineradicable distrust as to that ruler's disposition towards himself. Still, Dain had returned at last. Evidently he meant to keep to his bargain. Hope revived, and that night Almayer slept soundly, while Nina watched the angry river under the lash of the thunderstorm sweeping onward towards the sea.

## CHAPTER VI.

Dain was not long in crossing the river after leaving Almayer. He landed at the water-gate of the stockade enclosing the group of houses which composed the residence of the Rajah of Sambir. Evidently somebody was expected there, for the gate was open, and men with torches were ready to precede the visitor up the inclined plane of planks leading to the largest house where Lakamba actually resided, and where all the business of state was invariably transacted. The other buildings within the enclosure served only to accommodate the numerous household and the wives of the ruler.

Lakamba's own house was a strong structure of solid planks, raised on high piles, with a verandah of split bamboos surrounding it on all sides; the whole was covered in by an immensely high-pitched roof of palm-leaves, resting on beams blackened by the smoke of many torches.

The building stood parallel to the river, one of its long sides facing the water-gate of the stockade. There was a door in the short side looking up the river, and the inclined plank-way led straight from the gate to that door. By the uncertain light of smoky torches, Dain noticed the vague outlines of a group of armed men in the dark shadows to his right. From that group Babalatchi stepped forward to open the door, and Dain entered the audience chamber of the Rajah's residence. About one-third of the house was curtained off, by heavy stuff of European manufacture, for that purpose; close to the curtain there was a big arm-chair of some black wood, much carved, and before it a rough deal table. Otherwise the room was only furnished with mats in great profusion. To the left of the entrance stood a rude arm-rack, with three rifles with fixed bayonets in it. By the wall, in the shadow, the body-guard of Lakamba — all friends or relations — slept in a confused heap of brown arms, legs, and multi-coloured garments, from whence issued an occasional snore or a subdued groan of some uneasy sleeper. An European lamp with a green shade standing on the table made all this indistinctly visible to Dain.

"You are welcome to your rest here," said Babalatchi, looking at Dain interrogatively.

"I must speak to the Rajah at once," answered Dain.

Babalatchi made a gesture of assent, and, turning to the brass gong suspended under the arm-rack, struck two sharp blows.



The ear-splitting din woke up the guard. The snores ceased; outstretched legs were drawn in; the whole heap moved, and slowly resolved itself into individual forms, with much yawning and rubbing of sleepy eyes; behind the curtains there was a burst of feminine chatter; then the bass voice of Lakamba was heard.

“Is that the Arab trader?”

“No, Tuan,” answered Babalatchi; “Dain has returned at last. He is here for an important talk, bitcharra — if you mercifully consent.”

Evidently Lakamba’s mercy went so far — for in a short while he came out from behind the curtain — but it did not go to the length of inducing him to make an extensive toilet. A short red sarong tightened hastily round his hips was his only garment. The merciful ruler of Sambir looked sleepy and rather sulky. He sat in the arm-chair, his knees well apart, his elbows on the arm-rests, his chin on his breast, breathing heavily and waiting malevolently for Dain to open the important talk.

But Dain did not seem anxious to begin. He directed his gaze towards Babalatchi, squatting comfortably at the feet of his master, and remained silent with a slightly bent head as if in attentive expectation of coming words of wisdom.

Babalatchi coughed discreetly, and, leaning forward, pushed over a few mats for Dain to sit upon, then lifting up his squeaky voice he assured him with eager volubility of everybody’s delight at this long-looked-for return. His heart had hungered for the sight of Dain’s face, and his ears were withering for the want of the refreshing sound of his voice. Everybody’s hearts and ears were in the same sad predicament, according to Babalatchi, as he indicated with a sweeping gesture the other bank of the river where the settlement slumbered peacefully, unconscious of the great joy awaiting it on the morrow when Dain’s presence amongst them would be disclosed. “For” — went on Babalatchi — “what is the joy of a poor man if not the open hand of a generous trader or of a great — ”

Here he checked himself abruptly with a calculated embarrassment of manner, and his roving eye sought the floor, while an apologetic smile dwelt for a moment on his misshapen lips. Once or twice during this opening speech an amused expression flitted across Dain’s face, soon to give way, however, to an appearance of grave concern. On Lakamba’s brow a heavy frown had settled, and his lips moved angrily as he listened to his Prime Minister’s oratory. In the silence that fell upon the room when

Babalatchi ceased speaking arose a chorus of varied snores from the corner where the body-guard had resumed their interrupted slumbers, but the distant rumble of thunder filling then Nina's heart with apprehension for the safety of her lover passed unheeded by those three men intent each on their own purposes, for life or death.

After a short silence, Babalatchi, discarding now the flowers of polite eloquence, spoke again, but in short and hurried sentences and in a low voice. They had been very uneasy. Why did Dain remain so long absent? The men dwelling on the lower reaches of the river heard the reports of big guns and saw a fire-ship of the Dutch amongst the islands of the estuary. So they were anxious. Rumours of a disaster had reached Abdulla a few days ago, and since then they had been waiting for Dain's return under the apprehension of some misfortune. For days they had closed their eyes in fear, and woke up alarmed, and walked abroad trembling, like men before an enemy. And all on account of Dain. Would he not allay their fears for his safety, not for themselves? They were quiet and faithful, and devoted to the great Rajah in Batavia — may his fate lead him ever to victory for the joy and profit of his servants! "And here," went on Babalatchi, "Lakamba my master was getting thin in his anxiety for the trader he had taken under his protection; and so was Abdulla, for what would wicked men not say if perchance — "

"Be silent, fool!" growled Lakamba, angrily.

Babalatchi subsided into silence with a satisfied smile, while Dain, who had been watching him as if fascinated, turned with a sigh of relief towards the ruler of Sambir. Lakamba did not move, and, without raising his head, looked at Dain from under his eyebrows, breathing audibly, with pouted lips, in an air of general discontent.

"Speak! O Dain!" he said at last. "We have heard many rumours. Many nights in succession has my friend Reshid come here with bad tidings. News travels fast along the coast. But they may be untrue; there are more lies in men's mouths in these days than when I was young, but I am not easier to deceive now."

"All my words are true," said Dain, carelessly. "If you want to know what befell my brig, then learn that it is in the hands of the Dutch. Believe me, Rajah," he went on, with sudden energy, "the Orang Blanda have good friends in Sambir, or else how did they know I was coming thence?"

Lakamba gave Dain a short and hostile glance. Babalatchi rose quietly, and, going to the arm-rack, struck the gong violently.

Outside the door there was a shuffle of bare feet; inside, the guard woke up and sat staring in sleepy surprise.

“Yes, you faithful friend of the white Rajah,” went on Dain, scornfully, turning to Babalatchi, who had returned to his place, “I have escaped, and I am here to gladden your heart. When I saw the Dutch ship I ran the brig inside the reefs and put her ashore. They did not dare to follow with the ship, so they sent the boats. We took to ours and tried to get away, but the ship dropped fireballs at us, and killed many of my men. But I am left, O Babalatchi! The Dutch are coming here. They are seeking for me. They are coming to ask their faithful friend Lakamba and his slave Babalatchi. Rejoice!”

But neither of his hearers appeared to be in a joyful mood. Lakamba had put one leg over his knee, and went on gently scratching it with a meditative air, while Babalatchi, sitting cross-legged, seemed suddenly to become smaller and very limp, staring straight before him vacantly. The guard evinced some interest in the proceedings, stretching themselves full length on the mats to be nearer the speaker. One of them got up and now stood leaning against the arm-rack, playing absently with the fringes of his sword-hilt.

Dain waited till the crash of thunder had died away in distant mutterings before he spoke again.

“Are you dumb, O ruler of Sambir, or is the son of a great Rajah unworthy of your notice? I am come here to seek refuge and to warn you, and want to know what you intend doing.”

“You came here because of the white man’s daughter,” retorted Lakamba, quickly. “Your refuge was with your father, the Rajah of Bali, the Son of Heaven, the ‘Anak Agong’ himself. What am I to protect great princes? Only yesterday I planted rice in a burnt clearing; to-day you say I hold your life in my hand.”

Babalatchi glanced at his master. “No man can escape his fate,” he murmured piously. “When love enters a man’s heart he is like a child — without any understanding. Be merciful, Lakamba,” he added, twitching the corner of the Rajah’s sarong warningly.

Lakamba snatched away the skirt of the sarong angrily. Under the dawning comprehension of intolerable embarrassments caused by Dain’s

return to Sambir he began to lose such composure as he had been, till then, able to maintain; and now he raised his voice loudly above the whistling of the wind and the patter of rain on the roof in the hard squall passing over the house.

“You came here first as a trader with sweet words and great promises, asking me to look the other way while you worked your will on the white man there. And I did. What do you want now? When I was young I fought. Now I am old, and want peace. It is easier for me to have you killed than to fight the Dutch. It is better for me.”

The squall had now passed, and, in the short stillness of the lull in the storm, Lakamba repeated softly, as if to himself, “Much easier. Much better.”

Dain did not seem greatly discomposed by the Rajah's threatening words. While Lakamba was speaking he had glanced once rapidly over his shoulder, just to make sure that there was nobody behind him, and, tranquillised in that respect, he had extracted a siri-box out of the folds of his waist-cloth, and was wrapping carefully the little bit of betel-nut and a small pinch of lime in the green leaf tendered him politely by the watchful Babalatchi. He accepted this as a peace-offering from the silent statesman — a kind of mute protest against his master's undiplomatic violence, and as an omen of a possible understanding to be arrived at yet. Otherwise Dain was not uneasy. Although recognising the justice of Lakamba's surmise that he had come back to Sambir only for the sake of the white man's daughter, yet he was not conscious of any childish lack of understanding, as suggested by Babalatchi. In fact, Dain knew very well that Lakamba was too deeply implicated in the gunpowder smuggling to care for an investigation the Dutch authorities into that matter. When sent off by his father, the independent Rajah of Bali, at the time when the hostilities between Dutch and Malays threatened to spread from Sumatra over the whole archipelago, Dain had found all the big traders deaf to his guarded proposals, and above the temptation of the great prices he was ready to give for gunpowder. He went to Sambir as a last and almost hopeless resort, having heard in Macassar of the white man there, and of the regular steamer trading from Singapore — allured also by the fact that there was no Dutch resident on the river, which would make things easier, no doubt. His hopes got nearly wrecked against the stubborn loyalty of Lakamba arising from well-understood self-interest; but at last the young man's generosity, his

persuasive enthusiasm, the prestige of his father's great name, overpowered the prudent hesitation of the ruler of Sambir. Lakamba would have nothing to do himself with any illegal traffic. He also objected to the Arabs being made use of in that matter; but he suggested Almayer, saying that he was a weak man easily persuaded, and that his friend, the English captain of the steamer, could be made very useful — very likely even would join in the business, smuggling the powder in the steamer without Abdulla's knowledge. There again Dain met in Almayer with unexpected resistance; Lakamba had to send Babalatchi over with the solemn promise that his eyes would be shut in friendship for the white man, Dain paying for the promise and the friendship in good silver guilders of the hated Orang Blanda. Almayer, at last consenting, said the powder would be obtained, but Dain must trust him with dollars to send to Singapore in payment for it. He would induce Ford to buy and smuggle it in the steamer on board the brig. He did not want any money for himself out of the transaction, but Dain must help him in his great enterprise after sending off the brig. Almayer had explained to Dain that he could not trust Lakamba alone in that matter; he would be afraid of losing his treasure and his life through the cupidity of the Rajah; yet the Rajah had to be told, and insisted on taking a share in that operation, or else his eyes would remain shut no longer. To this Almayer had to submit. Had Dain not seen Nina he would have probably refused to engage himself and his men in the projected expedition to Gunong Mas — the mountain of gold. As it was he intended to return with half of his men as soon as the brig was clear of the reefs, but the persistent chase given him by the Dutch frigate had forced him to run south and ultimately to wreck and destroy his vessel in order to preserve his liberty or perhaps even his life. Yes, he had come back to Sambir for Nina, although aware that the Dutch would look for him there, but he had also calculated his chances of safety in Lakamba's hands. For all his ferocious talk, the merciful ruler would not kill him, for he had long ago been impressed with the notion that Dain possessed the secret of the white man's treasure; neither would he give him up to the Dutch, for fear of some fatal disclosure of complicity in the treasonable trade. So Dain felt tolerably secure as he sat meditating quietly his answer to the Rajah's bloodthirsty speech. Yes, he would point out to him the aspect of his position should he — Dain — fall into the hands of the Dutch and should he speak the truth. He would have nothing more to lose then, and he would speak the truth. And if he did return to Sambir,

disturbing thereby Lakamba's peace of mind, what then? He came to look after his property. Did he not pour a stream of silver into Mrs. Almayer's greedy lap? He had paid, for the girl, a price worthy of a great prince, although unworthy of that delightfully maddening creature for whom his untamed soul longed in an intensity of desire far more tormenting than the sharpest pain. He wanted his happiness. He had the right to be in Sambir.

He rose, and, approaching the table, leaned both his elbows on it; Lakamba responsively edged his seat a little closer, while Babalatchi scrambled to his feet and thrust his inquisitive head between his master's and Dain's. They interchanged their ideas rapidly, speaking in whispers into each other's faces, very close now, Dain suggesting, Lakamba contradicting, Babalatchi conciliating and anxious in his vivid apprehension of coming difficulties. He spoke most, whispering earnestly, turning his head slowly from side to side so as to bring his solitary eye to bear upon each of his interlocutors in turn. Why should there be strife? said he. Let Tuan Dain, whom he loved only less than his master, go trustfully into hiding. There were many places for that. Bulangi's house away in the clearing was best.

Bulangi was a safe man. In the network of crooked channels no white man could find his way. White men were strong, but very foolish. It was undesirable to fight them, but deception was easy. They were like silly women — they did not know the use of reason, and he was a match for any of them — went on Babalatchi, with all the confidence of deficient experience. Probably the Dutch would seek Almayer. Maybe they would take away their countryman if they were suspicious of him. That would be good. After the Dutch went away Lakamba and Dain would get the treasure without any trouble, and there would be one person less to share it. Did he not speak wisdom? Will Tuan Dain go to Bulangi's house till the danger is over, go at once?

Dain accepted this suggestion of going into hiding with a certain sense of conferring a favour upon Lakamba and the anxious statesman, but he met the proposal of going at once with a decided no, looking Babalatchi meaningly in the eye. The statesman sighed as a man accepting the inevitable would do, and pointed silently towards the other bank of the river. Dain bent his head slowly.

"Yes, I am going there," he said.

"Before the day comes?" asked Babalatchi.

"I am going there now," answered Dain, decisively. "The Orang Blanda will not be here before to-morrow night, perhaps, and I must tell Almayer of our arrangements."

"No, Tuan. No; say nothing," protested Babalatchi. "I will go over myself at sunrise and let him know."

"I will see," said Dain, preparing to go.

The thunderstorm was recommencing outside, the heavy clouds hanging low overhead now.

There was a constant rumble of distant thunder punctuated by the nearer sharp crashes, and in the continuous play of blue lightning the woods and the river showed fitfully, with all the elusive distinctness of detail characteristic of such a scene. Outside the door of the Rajah's house Dain and Babalatchi stood on the shaking verandah as if dazed and stunned by the violence of the storm. They stood there amongst the cowering forms of the Rajah's slaves and retainers seeking shelter from the rain, and Dain called aloud to his boatmen, who responded with an unanimous "Ada! Tuan!" while they looked uneasily at the river.

"This is a great flood!" shouted Babalatchi into Dain's ear. "The river is very angry. Look! Look at the drifting logs! Can you go?"

Dain glanced doubtfully on the livid expanse of seething water bounded far away on the other side by the narrow black line of the forests. Suddenly, in a vivid white flash, the low point of land with the bending trees on it and Almayer's house, leaped into view, flickered and disappeared. Dain pushed Babalatchi aside and ran down to the water-gate followed by his shivering boatmen.

Babalatchi backed slowly in and closed the door, then turned round and looked silently upon Lakamba. The Rajah sat still, glaring stonily upon the table, and Babalatchi gazed curiously at the perplexed mood of the man he had served so many years through good and evil fortune. No doubt the one-eyed statesman felt within his savage and much sophisticated breast the unwonted feelings of sympathy with, and perhaps even pity for, the man he called his master. From the safe position of a confidential adviser, he could, in the dim vista of past years, see himself — a casual cut-throat — finding shelter under that man's roof in the modest rice-clearing of early beginnings. Then came a long period of unbroken success, of wise counsels, and deep plottings resolutely carried out by the fearless Lakamba, till the whole east coast from Poulo Laut to Tanjong Batu listened to

Babalatchi's wisdom speaking through the mouth of the ruler of Sambir. In those long years how many dangers escaped, how many enemies bravely faced, how many white men successfully circumvented! And now he looked upon the result of so many years of patient toil: the fearless Lakamba cowed by the shadow of an impending trouble. The ruler was growing old, and Babalatchi, aware of an uneasy feeling at the pit of his stomach, put both his hands there with a suddenly vivid and sad perception of the fact that he himself was growing old too; that the time of reckless daring was past for both of them, and that they had to seek refuge in prudent cunning. They wanted peace; they were disposed to reform; they were ready even to retrench, so as to have the wherewithal to bribe the evil days away, if bribed away they could be. Babalatchi sighed for the second time that night as he squatted again at his master's feet and tendered him his betel-nut box in mute sympathy. And they sat there in close yet silent communion of betel-nut chewers, moving their jaws slowly, expectorating decorously into the wide-mouthed brass vessel they passed to one another, and listening to the awful din of the battling elements outside.

"There is a very great flood," remarked Babalatchi, sadly.

"Yes," said Lakamba. "Did Dain go?"

"He went, Tuan. He ran down to the river like a man possessed of the Sheitan himself."

There was another long pause.

"He may get drowned," suggested Lakamba at last, with some show of interest.

"The floating logs are many," answered Babalatchi, "but he is a good swimmer," he added languidly.

"He ought to live," said Lakamba; "he knows where the treasure is."

Babalatchi assented with an ill-humoured grunt. His want of success in penetrating the white man's secret as to the locality where the gold was to be found was a sore point with the statesman of Sambir, as the only conspicuous failure in an otherwise brilliant career.

A great peace had now succeeded the turmoil of the storm. Only the little belated clouds, which hurried past overhead to catch up the main body flashing silently in the distance, sent down short showers that pattered softly with a soothing hiss over the palm-leaf roof.

Lakamba roused himself from his apathy with an appearance of having grasped the situation at last.



"Babalatchi," he called briskly, giving him a slight kick.

"Ada Tuan! I am listening."

"If the Orang Blanda come here, Babalatchi, and take Almayer to Batavia to punish him for smuggling gunpowder, what will he do, you think?"

"I do not know, Tuan."

"You are a fool," commented Lakamba, exultingly. "He will tell them where the treasure is, so as to find mercy. He will."

Babalatchi looked up at his master and nodded his head with by no means a joyful surprise. He had not thought of this; there was a new complication.

"Almayer must die," said Lakamba, decisively, "to make our secret safe. He must die quietly, Babalatchi. You must do it."

Babalatchi assented, and rose wearily to his feet. "To-morrow?" he asked.

"Yes; before the Dutch come. He drinks much coffee," answered Lakamba, with seeming irrelevancy.

Babalatchi stretched himself yawning, but Lakamba, in the flattering consciousness of a knotty problem solved by his own unaided intellectual efforts, grew suddenly very wakeful.

"Babalatchi," he said to the exhausted statesman, "fetch the box of music the white captain gave me. I cannot sleep."

At this order a deep shade of melancholy settled upon Babalatchi's features. He went reluctantly behind the curtain and soon reappeared carrying in his arms a small hand-organ, which he put down on the table with an air of deep dejection. Lakamba settled himself comfortably in his arm-chair.

"Turn, Babalatchi, turn," he murmured, with closed eyes.

Babalatchi's hand grasped the handle with the energy of despair, and as he turned, the deep gloom on his countenance changed into an expression of hopeless resignation. Through the open shutter the notes of Verdi's music floated out on the great silence over the river and forest. Lakamba listened with closed eyes and a delighted smile; Babalatchi turned, at times dozing off and swaying over, then catching himself up in a great fright with a few quick turns of the handle. Nature slept in an exhausted repose after the fierce turmoil, while under the unsteady hand of the statesman of Sambir the Trovatore fitfully wept, wailed, and bade good-bye to his Leonore again and again in a mournful round of tearful and endless iteration.



## CHAPTER VII.

The bright sunshine of the clear mistless morning, after the stormy night, flooded the main path of the settlement leading from the low shore of the Pantai branch of the river to the gate of Abdulla's compound. The path was deserted this morning; it stretched its dark yellow surface, hard beaten by the tramp of many bare feet, between the clusters of palm trees, whose tall trunks barred it with strong black lines at irregular intervals, while the newly risen sun threw the shadows of their leafy heads far away over the roofs of the buildings lining the river, even over the river itself as it flowed swiftly and silently past the deserted houses. For the houses were deserted too. On the narrow strip of trodden grass intervening between their open doors and the road, the morning fires smouldered untended, sending thin fluted columns of smoke into the cool air, and spreading the thinnest veil of mysterious blue haze over the sunlit solitude of the settlement. Almayer, just out of his hammock, gazed sleepily at the unwonted appearance of Sambir, wondering vaguely at the absence of life. His own house was very quiet; he could not hear his wife's voice, nor the sound of Nina's footsteps in the big room, opening on the verandah, which he called his sitting-room, whenever, in the company of white men, he wished to assert his claims to the commonplace decencies of civilisation. Nobody ever sat there; there was nothing there to sit upon, for Mrs. Almayer in her savage moods, when excited by the reminiscences of the piratical period of her life, had torn off the curtains to make sarongs for the slave-girls, and had burnt the showy furniture piecemeal to cook the family rice. But Almayer was not thinking of his furniture now. He was thinking of Dain's return, of Dain's nocturnal interview with Lakamba, of its possible influence on his long-matured plans, now nearing the period of their execution. He was also uneasy at the non-appearance of Dain who had promised him an early visit. "The fellow had plenty of time to cross the river," he mused, "and there was so much to be done to-day. The settling of details for the early start on the morrow; the launching of the boats; the thousand and one finishing touches. For the expedition must start complete, nothing should be forgotten, nothing should —"

The sense of the unwonted solitude grew upon him suddenly, and in the unusual silence he caught himself longing even for the usually unwelcome sound of his wife's voice to break the oppressive stillness which seemed, to

his frightened fancy, to portend the advent of some new misfortune. "What has happened?" he muttered half aloud, as he shuffled in his imperfectly adjusted slippers towards the balustrade of the verandah. "Is everybody asleep or dead?"

The settlement was alive and very much awake. It was awake ever since the early break of day, when Mahmat Banjer, in a fit of unheard-of energy, arose and, taking up his hatchet, stepped over the sleeping forms of his two wives and walked shivering to the water's edge to make sure that the new house he was building had not floated away during the night.

The house was being built by the enterprising Mahmat on a large raft, and he had securely moored it just inside the muddy point of land at the junction of the two branches of the Pantai so as to be out of the way of drifting logs that would no doubt strand on the point during the freshet. Mahmat walked through the wet grass saying *bourrouh*, and cursing softly to himself the hard necessities of active life that drove him from his warm couch into the cold of the morning. A glance showed him that his house was still there, and he congratulated himself on his foresight in hauling it out of harm's way, for the increasing light showed him a confused wrack of drift-logs, half-stranded on the muddy flat, interlocked into a shapeless raft by their branches, tossing to and fro and grinding together in the eddy caused by the meeting currents of the two branches of the river. Mahmat walked down to the water's edge to examine the rattan moorings of his house just as the sun cleared the trees of the forest on the opposite shore. As he bent over the fastenings he glanced again carelessly at the unquiet jumble of logs and saw there something that caused him to drop his hatchet and stand up, shading his eyes with his hand from the rays of the rising sun. It was something red, and the logs rolled over it, at times closing round it, sometimes hiding it. It looked to him at first like a strip of red cloth. The next moment Mahmat had made it out and raised a great shout.

"Ah ya! There!" yelled Mahmat. "There's a man amongst the logs." He put the palms of his hand to his lips and shouted, enunciating distinctly, his face turned towards the settlement: "There's a body of a man in the river! Come and see! A dead — stranger!"

The women of the nearest house were already outside kindling the fires and husking the morning rice. They took up the cry shrilly, and it travelled so from house to house, dying away in the distance. The men rushed out excited but silent, and ran towards the muddy point where the unconscious

logs tossed and ground and bumped and rolled over the dead stranger with the stupid persistency of inanimate things. The women followed, neglecting their domestic duties and disregarding the possibilities of domestic discontent, while groups of children brought up the rear, warbling joyously, in the delight of unexpected excitement.

Almayer called aloud for his wife and daughter, but receiving no response, stood listening intently. The murmur of the crowd reached him faintly, bringing with it the assurance of some unusual event. He glanced at the river just as he was going to leave the verandah and checked himself at the sight of a small canoe crossing over from the Rajah's landing-place. The solitary occupant (in whom Almayer soon recognised Babalatchi) effected the crossing a little below the house and paddled up to the Lingard jetty in the dead water under the bank. Babalatchi clambered out slowly and went on fastening his canoe with fastidious care, as if not in a hurry to meet Almayer, whom he saw looking at him from the verandah. This delay gave Almayer time to notice and greatly wonder at Babalatchi's official get-up. The statesman of Sambir was clad in a costume befitting his high rank. A loudly checkered sarong encircled his waist, and from its many folds peeped out the silver hilt of the kriss that saw the light only on great festivals or during official receptions. Over the left shoulder and across the otherwise unclad breast of the aged diplomatist glistened a patent leather belt bearing a brass plate with the arms of Netherlands under the inscription, "Sultan of Sambir." Babalatchi's head was covered by a red turban, whose fringed ends falling over the left cheek and shoulder gave to his aged face a ludicrous expression of joyous recklessness. When the canoe was at last fastened to his satisfaction he straightened himself up, shaking down the folds of his sarong, and moved with long strides towards Almayer's house, swinging regularly his long ebony staff, whose gold head ornamented with precious stones flashed in the morning sun. Almayer waved his hand to the right towards the point of land, to him invisible, but in full view from the jetty.

"Oh, Babalatchi! oh!" he called out; "what is the matter there? can you see?"

Babalatchi stopped and gazed intently at the crowd on the river bank, and after a little while the astonished Almayer saw him leave the path, gather up his sarong in one hand, and break into a trot through the grass towards the muddy point. Almayer, now greatly interested, ran down the steps of the

verandah. The murmur of men's voices and the shrill cries of women reached him quite distinctly now, and as soon as he turned the corner of his house he could see the crowd on the low promontory swaying and pushing round some object of interest. He could indistinctly hear Babalatchi's voice, then the crowd opened before the aged statesman and closed after him with an excited hum, ending in a loud shout.

As Almayer approached the throng a man ran out and rushed past him towards the settlement, unheeding his call to stop and explain the cause of this excitement. On the very outskirts of the crowd Almayer found himself arrested by an unyielding mass of humanity, regardless of his entreaties for a passage, insensible to his gentle pushes as he tried to work his way through it towards the riverside.

In the midst of his gentle and slow progress he fancied suddenly he had heard his wife's voice in the thickest of the throng. He could not mistake very well Mrs. Almayer's high-pitched tones, yet the words were too indistinct for him to understand their purport. He paused in his endeavours to make a passage for himself, intending to get some intelligence from those around him, when a long and piercing shriek rent the air, silencing the murmurs of the crowd and the voices of his informants. For a moment Almayer remained as if turned into stone with astonishment and horror, for he was certain now that he had heard his wife wailing for the dead. He remembered Nina's unusual absence, and maddened by his apprehensions as to her safety, he pushed blindly and violently forward, the crowd falling back with cries of surprise and pain before his frantic advance.

On the point of land in a little clear space lay the body of the stranger just hauled out from amongst the logs. On one side stood Babalatchi, his chin resting on the head of his staff and his one eye gazing steadily at the shapeless mass of broken limbs, torn flesh, and bloodstained rags. As Almayer burst through the ring of horrified spectators, Mrs. Almayer threw her own head-veil over the upturned face of the drowned man, and, squatting by it, with another mournful howl, sent a shiver through the now silent crowd. Mahmat, dripping wet, turned to Almayer, eager to tell his tale.

In the first moment of reaction from the anguish of his fear the sunshine seemed to waver before Almayer's eyes, and he listened to words spoken around him without comprehending their meaning. When, by a strong

effort of will, he regained the possession of his senses, Mahmat was saying

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“That is the way, Tuan. His sarong was caught in the broken branch, and he hung with his head under water. When I saw what it was I did not want it here. I wanted it to get clear and drift away. Why should we bury a stranger in the midst of our houses for his ghost to frighten our women and children? Have we not enough ghosts about this place?”

A murmur of approval interrupted him here. Mahmat looked reproachfully at Babalatchi.

“But the Tuan Babalatchi ordered me to drag the body ashore” — he went on looking round at his audience, but addressing himself only to Almayer — “and I dragged him by the feet; in through the mud I have dragged him, although my heart longed to see him float down the river to strand perchance on Bulangi’s clearing — may his father’s grave be defiled!”

There was subdued laughter at this, for the enmity of Mahmat and Bulangi was a matter of common notoriety and of undying interest to the inhabitants of Sambir. In the midst of that mirth Mrs. Almayer wailed suddenly again.

“Allah! What ails the woman!” exclaimed Mahmat, angrily. “Here, I have touched this carcass which came from nobody knows where, and have most likely defiled myself before eating rice. By orders of Tuan Babalatchi I did this thing to please the white man. Are you pleased, O Tuan Almayer? And what will be my recompense? Tuan Babalatchi said a recompense there will be, and from you. Now consider. I have been defiled, and if not defiled I may be under the spell. Look at his anklets! Who ever heard of a corpse appearing during the night amongst the logs with gold anklets on its legs? There is witchcraft there. However,” added Mahmat, after a reflective pause, “I will have the anklet if there is permission, for I have a charm against the ghosts and am not afraid. God is great!”

A fresh outburst of noisy grief from Mrs. Almayer checked the flow of Mahmat’s eloquence. Almayer, bewildered, looked in turn at his wife, at Mahmat, at Babalatchi, and at last arrested his fascinated gaze on the body lying on the mud with covered face in a grotesquely unnatural contortion of mangled and broken limbs, one twisted and lacerated arm, with white bones

protruding in many places through the torn flesh, stretched out; the hand with outspread fingers nearly touching his foot.

“Do you know who this is?” he asked of Babalatchi, in a low voice.

Babalatchi, staring straight before him, hardly moved his lips, while Mrs. Almayer’s persistent lamentations drowned the whisper of his murmured reply intended only for Almayer’s ear.

“It was fate. Look at your feet, white man. I can see a ring on those torn fingers which I know well.”

Saying this, Babalatchi stepped carelessly forward, putting his foot as if accidentally on the hand of the corpse and pressing it into the soft mud. He swung his staff menacingly towards the crowd, which fell back a little.

“Go away,” he said sternly, “and send your women to their cooking fires, which they ought not to have left to run after a dead stranger. This is men’s work here. I take him now in the name of the Rajah. Let no man remain here but Tuan Almayer’s slaves. Now go!”

The crowd reluctantly began to disperse. The women went first, dragging away the children that hung back with all their weight on the maternal hand. The men strolled slowly after them in ever forming and changing groups that gradually dissolved as they neared the settlement and every man regained his own house with steps quickened by the hungry anticipation of the morning rice. Only on the slight elevation where the land sloped down towards the muddy point a few men, either friends or enemies of Mahmat, remained gazing curiously for some time longer at the small group standing around the body on the river bank.

“I do not understand what you mean, Babalatchi,” said Almayer. “What is the ring you are talking about? Whoever he is, you have trodden the poor fellow’s hand right into the mud. Uncover his face,” he went on, addressing Mrs. Almayer, who, squatting by the head of the corpse, rocked herself to and fro, shaking from time to time her dishevelled grey locks, and muttering mournfully.

“Hai!” exclaimed Mahmat, who had lingered close by. “Look, Tuan; the logs came together so,” and here he pressed the palms of his hands together, “and his head must have been between them, and now there is no face for you to look at. There are his flesh and his bones, the nose, and the lips, and maybe his eyes, but nobody could tell the one from the other. It was written the day he was born that no man could look at him in death and be able to say, ‘This is my friend’s face.’”



“Silence, Mahmat; enough!” said Babalatchi, “and take thy eyes off his anklet, thou eater of pigs flesh. Tuan Almayer,” he went on, lowering his voice, “have you seen Dain this morning?”

Almayer opened his eyes wide and looked alarmed. “No,” he said quickly; “haven’t you seen him? Is he not with the Rajah? I am waiting; why does he not come?”

Babalatchi nodded his head sadly.

“He is come, Tuan. He left last night when the storm was great and the river spoke angrily. The night was very black, but he had within him a light that showed the way to your house as smooth as a narrow backwater, and the many logs no bigger than wisps of dried grass. Therefore he went; and now he lies here.” And Babalatchi nodded his head towards the body.

“How can you tell?” said Almayer, excitedly, pushing his wife aside. He snatched the cover off and looked at the formless mass of flesh, hair, and drying mud, where the face of the drowned man should have been. “Nobody can tell,” he added, turning away with a shudder.

Babalatchi was on his knees wiping the mud from the stiffened fingers of the outstretched hand. He rose to his feet and flashed before Almayer’s eyes a gold ring set with a large green stone.

“You know this well,” he said. “This never left Dain’s hand. I had to tear the flesh now to get it off. Do you believe now?”

Almayer raised his hands to his head and let them fall listlessly by his side in the utter abandonment of despair. Babalatchi, looking at him curiously, was astonished to see him smile. A strange fancy had taken possession of Almayer’s brain, distracted by this new misfortune. It seemed to him that for many years he had been falling into a deep precipice. Day after day, month after month, year after year, he had been falling, falling, falling; it was a smooth, round, black thing, and the black walls had been rushing upwards with wearisome rapidity. A great rush, the noise of which he fancied he could hear yet; and now, with an awful shock, he had reached the bottom, and behold! he was alive and whole, and Dain was dead with all his bones broken. It struck him as funny. A dead Malay; he had seen many dead Malays without any emotion; and now he felt inclined to weep, but it was over the fate of a white man he knew; a man that fell over a deep precipice and did not die. He seemed somehow to himself to be standing on one side, a little way off, looking at a certain Almayer who was in great trouble. Poor, poor fellow! Why doesn’t he cut

his throat? He wished to encourage him; he was very anxious to see him lying dead over that other corpse. Why does he not die and end this suffering? He groaned aloud unconsciously and started with affright at the sound of his own voice. Was he going mad? Terrified by the thought he turned away and ran towards his house repeating to himself, I am not going mad; of course not, no, no, no! He tried to keep a firm hold of the idea.

Not mad, not mad. He stumbled as he ran blindly up the steps repeating fast and ever faster those words wherein seemed to lie his salvation. He saw Nina standing there, and wished to say something to her, but could not remember what, in his extreme anxiety not to forget that he was not going mad, which he still kept repeating mentally as he ran round the table, till he stumbled against one of the arm-chairs and dropped into it exhausted. He sat staring wildly at Nina, still assuring himself mentally of his own sanity and wondering why the girl shrank from him in open-eyed alarm. What was the matter with her? This was foolish. He struck the table violently with his clenched fist and shouted hoarsely, "Give me some gin! Run!" Then, while Nina ran off, he remained in the chair, very still and quiet, astonished at the noise he had made.

Nina returned with a tumbler half filled with gin, and found her father staring absently before him. Almayer felt very tired now, as if he had come from a long journey. He felt as if he had walked miles and miles that morning and now wanted to rest very much. He took the tumbler with a shaking hand, and as he drank his teeth chattered against the glass which he drained and set down heavily on the table. He turned his eyes slowly towards Nina standing beside him, and said steadily —

"Now all is over, Nina. He is dead, and I may as well burn all my boats."

He felt very proud of being able to speak so calmly. Decidedly he was not going mad. This certitude was very comforting, and he went on talking about the finding of the body, listening to his own voice complacently. Nina stood quietly, her hand resting lightly on her father's shoulder, her face unmoved, but every line of her features, the attitude of her whole body expressing the most keen and anxious attention.

"And so Dain is dead," she said coldly, when her father ceased speaking.

Almayer's elaborately calm demeanour gave way in a moment to an outburst of violent indignation.

"You stand there as if you were only half alive, and talk to me," he exclaimed angrily, "as if it was a matter of no importance. Yes, he is dead!

Do you understand? Dead! What do you care? You never cared; you saw me struggle, and work, and strive, unmoved; and my suffering you could never see. No, never. You have no heart, and you have no mind, or you would have understood that it was for you, for your happiness I was working. I wanted to be rich; I wanted to get away from here. I wanted to see white men bowing low before the power of your beauty and your wealth. Old as I am I wished to seek a strange land, a civilisation to which I am a stranger, so as to find a new life in the contemplation of your high fortunes, of your triumphs, of your happiness. For that I bore patiently the burden of work, of disappointment, of humiliation amongst these savages here, and I had it all nearly in my grasp."

He looked at his daughter's attentive face and jumped to his feet upsetting the chair.

"Do you hear? I had it all there; so; within reach of my hand."

He paused, trying to keep down his rising anger, and failed.

"Have you no feeling?" he went on. "Have you lived without hope?" Nina's silence exasperated him; his voice rose, although he tried to master his feelings.

"Are you content to live in this misery and die in this wretched hole? Say something, Nina; have you no sympathy? Have you no word of comfort for me? I that loved you so."

He waited for a while for an answer, and receiving none shook his fist in his daughter's face.

"I believe you are an idiot!" he yelled.

He looked round for the chair, picked it up and sat down stiffly. His anger was dead within him, and he felt ashamed of his outburst, yet relieved to think that now he had laid clear before his daughter the inner meaning of his life. He thought so in perfect good faith, deceived by the emotional estimate of his motives, unable to see the crookedness of his ways, the unreality of his aims, the futility of his regrets. And now his heart was filled only with a great tenderness and love for his daughter. He wanted to see her miserable, and to share with her his despair; but he wanted it only as all weak natures long for a companionship in misfortune with beings innocent of its cause. If she suffered herself she would understand and pity him; but now she would not, or could not, find one word of comfort or love for him in his dire extremity. The sense of his absolute loneliness came home to his heart with a force that made him shudder. He swayed and fell

forward with his face on the table, his arms stretched straight out, extended and rigid. Nina made a quick movement towards her father and stood looking at the grey head, on the broad shoulders shaken convulsively by the violence of feelings that found relief at last in sobs and tears.

Nina sighed deeply and moved away from the table. Her features lost the appearance of stony indifference that had exasperated her father into his outburst of anger and sorrow. The expression of her face, now unseen by her father, underwent a rapid change. She had listened to Almayer's appeal for sympathy, for one word of comfort, apparently indifferent, yet with her breast torn by conflicting impulses raised unexpectedly by events she had not foreseen, or at least did not expect to happen so soon. With her heart deeply moved by the sight of Almayer's misery, knowing it in her power to end it with a word, longing to bring peace to that troubled heart, she heard with terror the voice of her overpowering love commanding her to be silent. And she submitted after a short and fierce struggle of her old self against the new principle of her life. She wrapped herself up in absolute silence, the only safeguard against some fatal admission. She could not trust herself to make a sign, to murmur a word for fear of saying too much; and the very violence of the feelings that stirred the innermost recesses of her soul seemed to turn her person into a stone. The dilated nostrils and the flashing eyes were the only signs of the storm raging within, and those signs of his daughter's emotion Almayer did not see, for his sight was dimmed by self-pity, by anger, and by despair.

Had Almayer looked at his daughter as she leant over the front rail of the verandah he could have seen the expression of indifference give way to a look of pain, and that again pass away, leaving the glorious beauty of her face marred by deep-drawn lines of watchful anxiety. The long grass in the neglected courtyard stood very straight before her eyes in the noonday heat. From the river-bank there were voices and a shuffle of bare feet approaching the house; Babalatchi could be heard giving directions to Almayer's men, and Mrs. Almayer's subdued wailing became audible as the small procession bearing the body of the drowned man and headed by that sorrowful matron turned the corner of the house. Babalatchi had taken the broken anklet off the man's leg, and now held it in his hand as he moved by the side of the bearers, while Mahmat lingered behind timidly, in the hopes of the promised reward.

“Lay him there,” said Babalatchi to Almayer’s men, pointing to a pile of drying planks in front of the verandah. “Lay him there. He was a Kaffir and the son of a dog, and he was the white man’s friend. He drank the white man’s strong water,” he added, with affected horror. “That I have seen myself.”

The men stretched out the broken limbs on two planks they had laid level, while Mrs. Almayer covered the body with a piece of white cotton cloth, and after whispering for some time with Babalatchi departed to her domestic duties. Almayer’s men, after laying down their burden, dispersed themselves in quest of shady spots wherein to idle the day away. Babalatchi was left alone by the corpse that laid rigid under the white cloth in the bright sunshine.

Nina came down the steps and joined Babalatchi, who put his hand to his forehead, and squatted down with great deference.

“You have a bangle there,” said Nina, looking down on Babalatchi’s upturned face and into his solitary eye.

“I have, Mem Putih,” returned the polite statesman. Then turning towards Mahmat he beckoned him closer, calling out, “Come here!”

Mahmat approached with some hesitation. He avoided looking at Nina, but fixed his eyes on Babalatchi.

“Now, listen,” said Babalatchi, sharply. “The ring and the anklet you have seen, and you know they belonged to Dain the trader, and to no other. Dain returned last night in a canoe. He spoke with the Rajah, and in the middle of the night left to cross over to the white man’s house. There was a great flood, and this morning you found him in the river.”

“By his feet I dragged him out,” muttered Mahmat under his breath. “Tuan Babalatchi, there will be a recompense!” he exclaimed aloud.

Babalatchi held up the gold bangle before Mahmat’s eyes. “What I have told you, Mahmat, is for all ears. What I give you now is for your eyes only. Take.”

Mahmat took the bangle eagerly and hid it in the folds of his waist-cloth. “Am I a fool to show this thing in a house with three women in it?” he growled. “But I shall tell them about Dain the trader, and there will be talk enough.”

He turned and went away, increasing his pace as soon as he was outside Almayer’s compound.

Babalatchi looked after him till he disappeared behind the bushes. "Have I done well, Mem Putih?" he asked, humbly addressing Nina.

"You have," answered Nina. "The ring you may keep yourself."

Babalatchi touched his lips and forehead, and scrambled to his feet. He looked at Nina, as if expecting her to say something more, but Nina turned towards the house and went up the steps, motioning him away with her hand.

Babalatchi picked up his staff and prepared to go. It was very warm, and he did not care for the long pull to the Rajah's house. Yet he must go and tell the Rajah — tell of the event; of the change in his plans; of all his suspicions. He walked to the jetty and began casting off the rattan painter of his canoe.

The broad expanse of the lower reach, with its shimmering surface dotted by the black specks of the fishing canoes, lay before his eyes. The fishermen seemed to be racing. Babalatchi paused in his work, and looked on with sudden interest. The man in the foremost canoe, now within hail of the first houses of Sambir, laid in his paddle and stood up shouting —

"The boats! the boats! The man-of-war's boats are coming! They are here!"

In a moment the settlement was again alive with people rushing to the riverside. The men began to unfasten their boats, the women stood in groups looking towards the bend down the river. Above the trees lining the reach a slight puff of smoke appeared like a black stain on the brilliant blue of the cloudless sky.

Babalatchi stood perplexed, the painter in his hand. He looked down the reach, then up towards Almayer's house, and back again at the river as if undecided what to do. At last he made the canoe fast again hastily, and ran towards the house and up the steps of the verandah.

"Tuan! Tuan!" he called, eagerly. "The boats are coming. The man-of-war's boats. You had better get ready. The officers will come here, I know."

Almayer lifted his head slowly from the table, and looked at him stupidly.

"Mem Putih!" exclaimed Babalatchi to Nina, "look at him. He does not hear. You must take care," he added meaningly.

Nina nodded to him with an uncertain smile, and was going to speak, when a sharp report from the gun mounted in the bow of the steam launch

that was just then coming into view arrested the words on her parted lips. The smile died out, and was replaced by the old look of anxious attention. From the hills far away the echo came back like a long-drawn and mournful sigh, as if the land had sent it in answer to the voice of its masters.

## CHAPTER VIII.

The news as to the identity of the body lying now in Almayer's compound spread rapidly over the settlement. During the forenoon most of the inhabitants remained in the long street discussing the mysterious return and the unexpected death of the man who had become known to them as the trader. His arrival during the north-east monsoon, his long sojourn in their midst, his sudden departure with his brig, and, above all, the mysterious appearance of the body, said to be his, amongst the logs, were subjects to wonder at and to talk over and over again with undiminished interest. Mahmat moved from house to house and from group to group, always ready to repeat his tale: how he saw the body caught by the sarong in a forked log; how Mrs. Almayer coming, one of the first, at his cries, recognised it, even before he had it hauled on shore; how Babalatchi ordered him to bring it out of the water. "By the feet I dragged him in, and there was no head," exclaimed Mahmat, "and how could the white man's wife know who it was? She was a witch, it was well known. And did you see how the white man himself ran away at the sight of the body? Like a deer he ran!" And here Mahmat imitated Almayer's long strides, to the great joy of the beholders. And for all his trouble he had nothing. The ring with the green stone Tuan Babalatchi kept. "Nothing! Nothing!" He spat down at his feet in sign of disgust, and left that group to seek further on a fresh audience.

The news spreading to the furthestmost parts of the settlement found out Abdulla in the cool recess of his godown, where he sat overlooking his Arab clerks and the men loading and unloading the up-country canoes. Reshid, who was busy on the jetty, was summoned into his uncle's presence and found him, as usual, very calm and even cheerful, but very much surprised. The rumour of the capture or destruction of Dain's brig had reached the Arab's ears three days before from the sea-fishermen and through the dwellers on the lower reaches of the river. It had been passed up-stream from neighbour to neighbour till Bulangi, whose clearing was nearest to the settlement, had brought that news himself to Abdulla whose favour he courted. But rumour also spoke of a fight and of Dain's death on board his own vessel. And now all the settlement talked of Dain's visit to the Rajah and of his death when crossing the river in the dark to see Almayer.



They could not understand this. Reshid thought that it was very strange. He felt uneasy and doubtful. But Abdulla, after the first shock of surprise, with the old age's dislike for solving riddles, showed a becoming resignation. He remarked that the man was dead now at all events, and consequently no more dangerous. Where was the use to wonder at the decrees of Fate, especially if they were propitious to the True Believers? And with a pious ejaculation to Allah the Merciful, the Compassionate, Abdulla seemed to regard the incident as closed for the present.

Not so Reshid. He lingered by his uncle, pulling thoughtfully his neatly trimmed beard.

"There are many lies," he murmured. "He has been dead once before, and came to life to die again now. The Dutch will be here before many days and clamour for the man. Shall I not believe my eyes sooner than the tongues of women and idle men?"

"They say that the body is being taken to Almayer's compound," said Abdulla. "If you want to go there you must go before the Dutch arrive here. Go late. It should not be said that we have been seen inside that man's enclosure lately."

Reshid assented to the truth of this last remark and left his uncle's side. He leaned against the lintel of the big doorway and looked idly across the courtyard through the open gate on to the main road of the settlement. It lay empty, straight, and yellow under the flood of light. In the hot noontide the smooth trunks of palm trees, the outlines of the houses, and away there at the other end of the road the roof of Almayer's house visible over the bushes on the dark background of forest, seemed to quiver in the heat radiating from the steaming earth. Swarms of yellow butterflies rose, and settled to rise again in short flights before Reshid's half-closed eyes. From under his feet arose the dull hum of insects in the long grass of the courtyard. He looked on sleepily.

From one of the side paths amongst the houses a woman stepped out on the road, a slight girlish figure walking under the shade of a large tray balanced on its head. The consciousness of something moving stirred Reshid's half-sleeping senses into a comparative wakefulness. He recognised Taminah, Bulangi's slave-girl, with her tray of cakes for sale — an apparition of daily recurrence and of no importance whatever. She was going towards Almayer's house. She could be made useful. He roused

himself up and ran towards the gate calling out, "Taminah O!" The girl stopped, hesitated, and came back slowly.

Reshid waited, signing to her impatiently to come nearer.

When near Reshid Taminah stood with downcast eyes. Reshid looked at her a while before he asked —

"Are you going to Almayer's house? They say in the settlement that Dain the trader, he that was found drowned this morning, is lying in the white man's campong."

"I have heard this talk," whispered Taminah; "and this morning by the riverside I saw the body. Where it is now I do not know."

"So you have seen it?" asked Reshid, eagerly. "Is it Dain? You have seen him many times. You would know him."

The girl's lips quivered and she remained silent for a while, breathing quickly.

"I have seen him, not a long time ago," she said at last. "The talk is true; he is dead. What do you want from me, Tuan? I must go."

Just then the report of the gun fired on board the steam launch was heard, interrupting Reshid's reply. Leaving the girl he ran to the house, and met in the courtyard Abdulla coming towards the gate.

"The Orang Blanda are come," said Reshid, "and now we shall have our reward."

Abdulla shook his head doubtfully. "The white men's rewards are long in coming," he said. "White men are quick in anger and slow in gratitude. We shall see."

He stood at the gate stroking his grey beard and listening to the distant cries of greeting at the other end of the settlement. As Taminah was turning to go he called her back.

"Listen, girl," he said: "there will be many white men in Almayer's house. You shall be there selling your cakes to the men of the sea. What you see and what you hear you may tell me. Come here before the sun sets and I will give you a blue handkerchief with red spots. Now go, and forget not to return."

He gave her a push with the end of his long staff as she was going away and made her stumble.

"This slave is very slow," he remarked to his nephew, looking after the girl with great disfavour.

Taminah walked on, her tray on the head, her eyes fixed on the ground. From the open doors of the houses were heard, as she passed, friendly calls inviting her within for business purposes, but she never heeded them, neglecting her sales in the preoccupation of intense thinking. Since the very early morning she had heard much, she had also seen much that filled her heart with a joy mingled with great suffering and fear. Before the dawn, before she left Bulangi's house to paddle up to Sambir she had heard voices outside the house when all in it but herself were asleep. And now, with her knowledge of the words spoken in the darkness, she held in her hand a life and carried in her breast a great sorrow. Yet from her springy step, erect figure, and face veiled over by the everyday look of apathetic indifference, nobody could have guessed of the double load she carried under the visible burden of the tray piled up high with cakes manufactured by the thrifty hands of Bulangi's wives. In that supple figure straight as an arrow, so graceful and free in its walk, behind those soft eyes that spoke of nothing but of unconscious resignation, there slept all feelings and all passions, all hopes and all fears, the curse of life and the consolation of death. And she knew nothing of it all. She lived like the tall palms amongst whom she was passing now, seeking the light, desiring the sunshine, fearing the storm, unconscious of either. The slave had no hope, and knew of no change. She knew of no other sky, no other water, no other forest, no other world, no other life. She had no wish, no hope, no love, no fear except of a blow, and no vivid feeling but that of occasional hunger, which was seldom, for Bulangi was rich and rice was plentiful in the solitary house in his clearing. The absence of pain and hunger was her happiness, and when she felt unhappy she was simply tired, more than usual, after the day's labour. Then in the hot nights of the south-west monsoon she slept dreamlessly under the bright stars on the platform built outside the house and over the river. Inside they slept too: Bulangi by the door; his wives further in; the children with their mothers. She could hear their breathing; Bulangi's sleepy voice; the sharp cry of a child soon hushed with tender words. And she closed her eyes to the murmur of the water below her, to the whisper of the warm wind above, ignorant of the never-ceasing life of that tropical nature that spoke to her in vain with the thousand faint voices of the near forest, with the breath of tepid wind; in the heavy scents that lingered around her head; in the white wraiths of morning mist that hung over her in the solemn hush of all creation before the dawn.

Such had been her existence before the coming of the brig with the strangers. She remembered well that time; the uproar in the settlement, the never-ending wonder, the days and nights of talk and excitement. She remembered her own timidity with the strange men, till the brig moored to the bank became in a manner part of the settlement, and the fear wore off in the familiarity of constant intercourse. The call on board then became part of her daily round. She walked hesitatingly up the slanting planks of the gangway amidst the encouraging shouts and more or less decent jokes of the men idling over the bulwarks. There she sold her wares to those men that spoke so loud and carried themselves so free. There was a throng, a constant coming and going; calls interchanged, orders given and executed with shouts; the rattle of blocks, the flinging about of coils of rope. She sat out of the way under the shade of the awning, with her tray before her, the veil drawn well over her face, feeling shy amongst so many men. She smiled at all buyers, but spoke to none, letting their jests pass with stolid unconcern. She heard many tales told around her of far-off countries, of strange customs, of events stranger still. Those men were brave; but the most fearless of them spoke of their chief with fear. Often the man they called their master passed before her, walking erect and indifferent, in the pride of youth, in the flash of rich dress, with a tinkle of gold ornaments, while everybody stood aside watching anxiously for a movement of his lips, ready to do his bidding. Then all her life seemed to rush into her eyes, and from under her veil she gazed at him, charmed, yet fearful to attract attention. One day he noticed her and asked, "Who is that girl?" "A slave, Tuan! A girl that sells cakes," a dozen voices replied together. She rose in terror to run on shore, when he called her back; and as she stood trembling with head hung down before him, he spoke kind words, lifting her chin with his hand and looking into her eyes with a smile. "Do not be afraid," he said. He never spoke to her any more. Somebody called out from the river bank; he turned away and forgot her existence. Taminah saw Almayer standing on the shore with Nina on his arm. She heard Nina's voice calling out gaily, and saw Dain's face brighten with joy as he leaped on shore. She hated the sound of that voice ever since.

After that day she left off visiting Almayer's compound, and passed the noon hours under the shade of the brig awning. She watched for his coming with heart beating quicker and quicker, as he approached, into a wild tumult of newly-aroused feelings of joy and hope and fear that died away with

Dain's retreating figure, leaving her tired out, as if after a struggle, sitting still for a long time in dreamy languor. Then she paddled home slowly in the afternoon, often letting her canoe float with the lazy stream in the quiet backwater of the river. The paddle hung idle in the water as she sat in the stern, one hand supporting her chin, her eyes wide open, listening intently to the whispering of her heart that seemed to swell at last into a song of extreme sweetness. Listening to that song she husked the rice at home; it dulled her ears to the shrill bickerings of Bulangi's wives, to the sound of angry reproaches addressed to herself. And when the sun was near its setting she walked to the bathing-place and heard it as she stood on the tender grass of the low bank, her robe at her feet, and looked at the reflection of her figure on the glass-like surface of the creek. Listening to it she walked slowly back, her wet hair hanging over her shoulders; laying down to rest under the bright stars, she closed her eyes to the murmur of the water below, of the warm wind above; to the voice of nature speaking through the faint noises of the great forest, and to the song of her own heart.

She heard, but did not understand, and drank in the dreamy joy of her new existence without troubling about its meaning or its end, till the full consciousness of life came to her through pain and anger. And she suffered horribly the first time she saw Nina's long canoe drift silently past the sleeping house of Bulangi, bearing the two lovers into the white mist of the great river. Her jealousy and rage culminated into a paroxysm of physical pain that left her lying panting on the river bank, in the dumb agony of a wounded animal. But she went on moving patiently in the enchanted circle of slavery, going through her task day after day with all the pathos of the grief she could not express, even to herself, locked within her breast. She shrank from Nina as she would have shrunk from the sharp blade of a knife cutting into her flesh, but she kept on visiting the brig to feed her dumb, ignorant soul on her own despair. She saw Dain many times. He never spoke, he never looked. Could his eyes see only one woman's image? Could his ears hear only one woman's voice? He never noticed her; not once.

And then he went away. She saw him and Nina for the last time on that morning when Babalatchi, while visiting his fish baskets, had his suspicions of the white man's daughter's love affair with Dain confirmed beyond the shadow of doubt. Dain disappeared, and Taminah's heart, where lay useless and barren the seeds of all love and of all hate, the possibilities of all

passions and of all sacrifices, forgot its joys and its sufferings when deprived of the help of the senses. Her half-formed, savage mind, the slave of her body — as her body was the slave of another's will — forgot the faint and vague image of the ideal that had found its beginning in the physical promptings of her savage nature. She dropped back into the torpor of her former life and found consolation — even a certain kind of happiness — in the thought that now Nina and Dain were separated, probably for ever. He would forget. This thought soothed the last pangs of dying jealousy that had nothing now to feed upon, and Taminah found peace. It was like the dreary tranquillity of a desert, where there is peace only because there is no life.

And now he had returned. She had recognised his voice calling aloud in the night for Bulangi. She had crept out after her master to listen closer to the intoxicating sound. Dain was there, in a boat, talking to Bulangi. Taminah, listening with arrested breath, heard another voice. The maddening joy, that only a second before she thought herself incapable of containing within her fast-beating heart, died out, and left her shivering in the old anguish of physical pain that she had suffered once before at the sight of Dain and Nina. Nina spoke now, ordering and entreating in turns, and Bulangi was refusing, expostulating, at last consenting. He went in to take a paddle from the heap lying behind the door. Outside the murmur of two voices went on, and she caught a word here and there. She understood that he was fleeing from white men, that he was seeking a hiding-place, that he was in some danger. But she heard also words which woke the rage of jealousy that had been asleep for so many days in her bosom. Crouching low on the mud in the black darkness amongst the piles, she heard the whisper in the boat that made light of toil, of privation, of danger, of life itself, if in exchange there could be but a short moment of close embrace, a look from the eyes, the feel of light breath, the touch of soft lips. So spoke Dain as he sat in the canoe holding Nina's hands while waiting for Bulangi's return; and Taminah, supporting herself by the slimy pile, felt as if a heavy weight was crushing her down, down into the black oily water at her feet. She wanted to cry out; to rush at them and tear their vague shadows apart; to throw Nina into the smooth water, cling to her close, hold her to the bottom where that man could not find her. She could not cry, she could not move. Then footsteps were heard on the bamboo platform above her head; she saw Bulangi get into his smallest canoe and take the lead, the

other boat following, paddled by Dain and Nina. With a slight splash of the paddles dipped stealthily into the water, their indistinct forms passed before her aching eyes and vanished in the darkness of the creek.

She remained there in the cold and wet, powerless to move, breathing painfully under the crushing weight that the mysterious hand of Fate had laid so suddenly upon her slender shoulders, and shivering, she felt within a burning fire, that seemed to feed upon her very life. When the breaking day had spread a pale golden ribbon over the black outline of the forests, she took up her tray and departed towards the settlement, going about her task purely from the force of habit. As she approached Sambir she could see the excitement and she heard with momentary surprise of the finding of Dain's body. It was not true, of course. She knew it well. She regretted that he was not dead. She should have liked Dain to be dead, so as to be parted from that woman — from all women. She felt a strong desire to see Nina, but without any clear object. She hated her, and feared her and she felt an irresistible impulse pushing her towards Almayer's house to see the white woman's face, to look close at those eyes, to hear again that voice, for the sound of which Dain was ready to risk his liberty, his life even. She had seen her many times; she had heard her voice daily for many months past. What was there in her? What was there in that being to make a man speak as Dain had spoken, to make him blind to all other faces, deaf to all other voices?

She left the crowd by the riverside, and wandered aimlessly among the empty houses, resisting the impulse that pushed her towards Almayer's campong to seek there in Nina's eyes the secret of her own misery. The sun mounting higher, shortened the shadows and poured down upon her a flood of light and of stifling heat as she passed on from shadow to light, from light to shadow, amongst the houses, the bushes, the tall trees, in her unconscious flight from the pain in her own heart. In the extremity of her distress she could find no words to pray for relief, she knew of no heaven to send her prayer to, and she wandered on with tired feet in the dumb surprise and terror at the injustice of the suffering inflicted upon her without cause and without redress.

The short talk with Reshid, the proposal of Abdulla steadied her a little and turned her thoughts into another channel. Dain was in some danger. He was hiding from white men. So much she had overheard last night. They all thought him dead. She knew he was alive, and she knew of his

hiding-place. What did the Arabs want to know about the white men? The white men want with Dain? Did they wish to kill him? She could tell them all — no, she would say nothing, and in the night she would go to him and sell him his life for a word, for a smile, for a gesture even, and be his slave in far-off countries, away from Nina. But there were dangers. The one-eyed Babalatchi who knew everything; the white man's wife — she was a witch. Perhaps they would tell. And then there was Nina. She must hurry on and see.

In her impatience she left the path and ran towards Almayer's dwelling through the undergrowth between the palm trees. She came out at the back of the house, where a narrow ditch, full of stagnant water that overflowed from the river, separated Almayer's campong from the rest of the settlement. The thick bushes growing on the bank were hiding from her sight the large courtyard with its cooking shed. Above them rose several thin columns of smoke, and from behind the sound of strange voices informed Taminah that the Men of the Sea belonging to the warship had already landed and were camped between the ditch and the house. To the left one of Almayer's slave-girls came down to the ditch and bent over the shiny water, washing a kettle. To the right the tops of the banana plantation, visible above the bushes, swayed and shook under the touch of invisible hands gathering the fruit. On the calm water several canoes moored to a heavy stake were crowded together, nearly bridging the ditch just at the place where Taminah stood. The voices in the courtyard rose at times into an outburst of calls, replies, and laughter, and then died away into a silence that soon was broken again by a fresh clamour. Now and again the thin blue smoke rushed out thicker and blacker, and drove in odorous masses over the creek, wrapping her for a moment in a suffocating veil; then, as the fresh wood caught well alight, the smoke vanished in the bright sunlight, and only the scent of aromatic wood drifted afar, to leeward of the crackling fires.

Taminah rested her tray on a stump of a tree, and remained standing with her eyes turned towards Almayer's house, whose roof and part of a whitewashed wall were visible over the bushes. The slave-girl finished her work, and after looking for a while curiously at Taminah, pushed her way through the dense thicket back to the courtyard. Round Taminah there was now a complete solitude. She threw herself down on the ground, and hid her face in her hands. Now when so close she had no courage to see Nina.



At every burst of louder voices from the courtyard she shivered in the fear of hearing Nina's voice. She came to the resolution of waiting where she was till dark, and then going straight to Dain's hiding-place. From where she was she could watch the movements of white men, of Nina, of all Dain's friends, and of all his enemies. Both were hateful alike to her, for both would take him away beyond her reach. She hid herself in the long grass to wait anxiously for the sunset that seemed so slow to come.

On the other side of the ditch, behind the bush, by the clear fires, the seamen of the frigate had encamped on the hospitable invitation of Almayer. Almayer, roused out of his apathy by the prayers and importunity of Nina, had managed to get down in time to the jetty so as to receive the officers at their landing. The lieutenant in command accepted his invitation to his house with the remark that in any case their business was with Almayer — and perhaps not very pleasant, he added. Almayer hardly heard him. He shook hands with them absently and led the way towards the house. He was scarcely conscious of the polite words of welcome he greeted the strangers with, and afterwards repeated several times over again in his efforts to appear at ease. The agitation of their host did not escape the officer's eyes, and the chief confided to his subordinate, in a low voice, his doubts as to Almayer's sobriety. The young sub-lieutenant laughed and expressed in a whisper the hope that the white man was not intoxicated enough to neglect the offer of some refreshments. "He does not seem very dangerous," he added, as they followed Almayer up the steps of the verandah.

"No, he seems more of a fool than a knave; I have heard of him," returned the senior.

They sat around the table. Almayer with shaking hands made gin cocktails, offered them all round, and drank himself, with every gulp feeling stronger, steadier, and better able to face all the difficulties of his position. Ignorant of the fate of the brig he did not suspect the real object of the officer's visit. He had a general notion that something must have leaked out about the gunpowder trade, but apprehended nothing beyond some temporary inconveniences. After emptying his glass he began to chat easily, lying back in his chair with one of his legs thrown negligently over the arm. The lieutenant astride on his chair, a glowing cheroot in the corner of his mouth, listened with a sly smile from behind the thick volumes of smoke that escaped from his compressed lips. The young sub-lieutenant,

leaning with both elbows on the table, his head between his hands, looked on sleepily in the torpor induced by fatigue and the gin. Almayer talked on —

“It is a great pleasure to see white faces here. I have lived here many years in great solitude. The Malays, you understand, are not company for a white man; moreover they are not friendly; they do not understand our ways. Great rascals they are. I believe I am the only white man on the east coast that is a settled resident. We get visitors from Macassar or Singapore sometimes — traders, agents, or explorers, but they are rare. There was a scientific explorer here a year or more ago. He lived in my house: drank from morning to night. He lived joyously for a few months, and when the liquor he brought with him was gone he returned to Batavia with a report on the mineral wealth of the interior. Ha, ha, ha! Good, is it not?”

He ceased abruptly and looked at his guests with a meaningless stare. While they laughed he was reciting to himself the old story: “Dain dead, all my plans destroyed. This is the end of all hope and of all things.” His heart sank within him. He felt a kind of deadly sickness.

“Very good. Capital!” exclaimed both officers. Almayer came out of his despondency with another burst of talk.

“Eh! what about the dinner? You have got a cook with you. That’s all right. There is a cooking shed in the other courtyard. I can give you a goose. Look at my geese — the only geese on the east coast — perhaps on the whole island. Is that your cook? Very good. Here, Ali, show this Chinaman the cooking place and tell Mem Almayer to let him have room there. My wife, gentlemen, does not come out; my daughter may. Meantime have some more drink. It is a hot day.”

The lieutenant took the cigar out of his mouth, looked at the ash critically, shook it off and turned towards Almayer.

“We have a rather unpleasant business with you,” he said.

“I am sorry,” returned Almayer. “It can be nothing very serious, surely.”

“If you think an attempt to blow up forty men at least, not a serious matter you will not find many people of your opinion,” retorted the officer sharply.

“Blow up! What? I know nothing about it,” exclaimed Almayer. “Who did that, or tried to do it?”

“A man with whom you had some dealings,” answered the lieutenant. “He passed here under the name of Dain Maroola. You sold him the

gunpowder he had in that brig we captured.”

“How did you hear about the brig?” asked Almayer. “I know nothing about the powder he may have had.”

“An Arab trader of this place has sent the information about your goings on here to Batavia, a couple of months ago,” said the officer. “We were waiting for the brig outside, but he slipped past us at the mouth of the river, and we had to chase the fellow to the southward. When he sighted us he ran inside the reefs and put the brig ashore. The crew escaped in boats before we could take possession. As our boats neared the craft it blew up with a tremendous explosion; one of the boats being too near got swamped. Two men drowned — that is the result of your speculation, Mr. Almayer. Now we want this Dain. We have good grounds to suppose he is hiding in Sambir. Do you know where he is? You had better put yourself right with the authorities as much as possible by being perfectly frank with me. Where is this Dain?”

Almayer got up and walked towards the balustrade of the verandah. He seemed not to be thinking of the officer’s question. He looked at the body laying straight and rigid under its white cover on which the sun, declining amongst the clouds to the westward, threw a pale tinge of red. The lieutenant waited for the answer, taking quick pulls at his half-extinguished cigar. Behind them Ali moved noiselessly laying the table, ranging solemnly the ill-assorted and shabby crockery, the tin spoons, the forks with broken prongs, and the knives with saw-like blades and loose handles. He had almost forgotten how to prepare the table for white men. He felt aggrieved; Mem Nina would not help him. He stepped back to look at his work admiringly, feeling very proud. This must be right; and if the master afterwards is angry and swears, then so much the worse for Mem Nina. Why did she not help? He left the verandah to fetch the dinner.

“Well, Mr. Almayer, will you answer my question as frankly as it is put to you?” asked the lieutenant, after a long silence.

Almayer turned round and looked at his interlocutor steadily. “If you catch this Dain what will you do with him?” he asked.

The officer’s face flushed. “This is not an answer,” he said, annoyed.

“And what will you do with me?” went on Almayer, not heeding the interruption.

“Are you inclined to bargain?” growled the other. “It would be bad policy, I assure you. At present I have no orders about your person, but we

expected your assistance in catching this Malay.”

“Ah!” interrupted Almayer, “just so: you can do nothing without me, and I, knowing the man well, am to help you in finding him.”

“This is exactly what we expect,” assented the officer. “You have broken the law, Mr. Almayer, and you ought to make amends.”

“And save myself?”

“Well, in a sense yes. Your head is not in any danger,” said the lieutenant, with a short laugh.

“Very well,” said Almayer, with decision, “I shall deliver the man up to you.”

Both officers rose to their feet quickly, and looked for their side-arms which they had unbuckled. Almayer laughed harshly.

“Steady, gentlemen!” he exclaimed. “In my own time and in my own way. After dinner, gentlemen, you shall have him.”

“This is preposterous,” urged the lieutenant. “Mr. Almayer, this is no joking matter. The man is a criminal. He deserves to hang. While we dine he may escape; the rumour of our arrival — ”

Almayer walked towards the table. “I give you my word of honour, gentlemen, that he shall not escape; I have him safe enough.”

“The arrest should be effected before dark,” remarked the young sub.

“I shall hold you responsible for any failure. We are ready, but can do nothing just now without you,” added the senior, with evident annoyance.

Almayer made a gesture of assent. “On my word of honour,” he repeated vaguely. “And now let us dine,” he added briskly.

Nina came through the doorway and stood for a moment holding the curtain aside for Ali and the old Malay woman bearing the dishes; then she moved towards the three men by the table.

“Allow me,” said Almayer, pompously. “This is my daughter. Nina, these gentlemen, officers of the frigate outside, have done me the honour to accept my hospitality.”

Nina answered the low bows of the two officers by a slow inclination of the head and took her place at the table opposite her father. All sat down. The coxswain of the steam launch came up carrying some bottles of wine.

“You will allow me to have this put upon the table?” said the lieutenant to Almayer.

“What! Wine! You are very kind. Certainly, I have none myself. Times are very hard.”

The last words of his reply were spoken by Almayer in a faltering voice. The thought that Dain was dead recurred to him vividly again, and he felt as if an invisible hand was gripping his throat. He reached for the gin bottle while they were uncorking the wine and swallowed a big gulp. The lieutenant, who was speaking to Nina, gave him a quick glance. The young sub began to recover from the astonishment and confusion caused by Nina's unexpected appearance and great beauty. "She was very beautiful and imposing," he reflected, "but after all a half-caste girl." This thought caused him to pluck up heart and look at Nina sideways. Nina, with composed face, was answering in a low, even voice the elder officer's polite questions as to the country and her mode of life. Almayer pushed his plate away and drank his guest's wine in gloomy silence.

## CHAPTER IX.

“Can I believe what you tell me? It is like a tale for men that listen only half awake by the camp fire, and it seems to have run off a woman’s tongue.”

“Who is there here for me to deceive, O Rajah?” answered Babalatchi. “Without you I am nothing. All I have told you I believe to be true. I have been safe for many years in the hollow of your hand. This is no time to harbour suspicions. The danger is very great. We should advise and act at once, before the sun sets.”

“Right. Right,” muttered Lakamba, pensively.

They had been sitting for the last hour together in the audience chamber of the Rajah’s house, for Babalatchi, as soon as he had witnessed the landing of the Dutch officers, had crossed the river to report to his master the events of the morning, and to confer with him upon the line of conduct to pursue in the face of altered circumstances. They were both puzzled and frightened by the unexpected turn the events had taken. The Rajah, sitting crosslegged on his chair, looked fixedly at the floor; Babalatchi was squatting close by in an attitude of deep dejection.

“And where did you say he is hiding now?” asked Lakamba, breaking at last the silence full of gloomy forebodings in which they both had been lost for a long while.

“In Bulangi’s clearing — the furthest one, away from the house. They went there that very night. The white man’s daughter took him there. She told me so herself, speaking to me openly, for she is half white and has no decency. She said she was waiting for him while he was here; then, after a long time, he came out of the darkness and fell at her feet exhausted. He lay like one dead, but she brought him back to life in her arms, and made him breathe again with her own breath. That is what she said, speaking to my face, as I am speaking now to you, Rajah. She is like a white woman and knows no shame.”

He paused, deeply shocked. Lakamba nodded his head. “Well, and then?” he asked.

“They called the old woman,” went on Babalatchi, “and he told them all — about the brig, and how he tried to kill many men. He knew the Orang Blanda were very near, although he had said nothing to us about that; he knew his great danger. He thought he had killed many, but there were only

two dead, as I have heard from the men of the sea that came in the warship's boats."

"And the other man, he that was found in the river?" interrupted Lakamba.

"That was one of his boatmen. When his canoe was overturned by the logs those two swam together, but the other man must have been hurt. Dain swam, holding him up. He left him in the bushes when he went up to the house. When they all came down his heart had ceased to beat; then the old woman spoke; Dain thought it was good. He took off his anklet and broke it, twisting it round the man's foot. His ring he put on that slave's hand. He took off his sarong and clothed that thing that wanted no clothes, the two women holding it up meanwhile, their intent being to deceive all eyes and to mislead the minds in the settlement, so that they could swear to the thing that was not, and that there could be no treachery when the white-men came. Then Dain and the white woman departed to call up Bulangi and find a hiding-place. The old woman remained by the body."

"Hai!" exclaimed Lakamba. "She has wisdom."

"Yes, she has a Devil of her own to whisper counsel in her ear," assented Babalatchi. "She dragged the body with great toil to the point where many logs were stranded. All these things were done in the darkness after the storm had passed away. Then she waited. At the first sign of daylight she battered the face of the dead with a heavy stone, and she pushed him amongst the logs. She remained near, watching. At sunrise Mahmat Banjer came and found him. They all believed; I myself was deceived, but not for long. The white man believed, and, grieving, fled to his house. When we were alone I, having doubts, spoke to the woman, and she, fearing my anger and your might, told me all, asking for help in saving Dain."

"He must not fall into the hands of the Orang Blanda," said Lakamba; "but let him die, if the thing can be done quietly."

"It cannot, Tuan! Remember there is that woman who, being half white, is ungovernable, and would raise a great outcry. Also the officers are here. They are angry enough already. Dain must escape; he must go. We must help him now for our own safety."

"Are the officers very angry?" inquired Lakamba, with interest.

"They are. The principal chief used strong words when speaking to me — to me when I salaamed in your name. I do not think," added Babalatchi, after a short pause and looking very worried — "I do not think I saw a

white chief so angry before. He said we were careless or even worse. He told me he would speak to the Rajah, and that I was of no account."

"Speak to the Rajah!" repeated Lakamba, thoughtfully. "Listen, Babalatchi: I am sick, and shall withdraw; you cross over and tell the white men."

"Yes," said Babalatchi, "I am going over at once; and as to Dain?"

"You get him away as you can best. This is a great trouble in my heart," sighed Lakamba.

Babalatchi got up, and, going close to his master, spoke earnestly.

"There is one of our praus at the southern mouth of the river. The Dutch warship is to the northward watching the main entrance. I shall send Dain off to-night in a canoe, by the hidden channels, on board the prau. His father is a great prince, and shall hear of our generosity. Let the prau take him to Ampanam. Your glory shall be great, and your reward in powerful friendship. Almayer will no doubt deliver the dead body as Dain's to the officers, and the foolish white men shall say, 'This is very good; let there be peace.' And the trouble shall be removed from your heart, Rajah."

"True! true!" said Lakamba.

"And, this being accomplished by me who am your slave, you shall reward with a generous hand. That I know! The white man is grieving for the lost treasure, in the manner of white men who thirst after dollars. Now, when all other things are in order, we shall perhaps obtain the treasure from the white man. Dain must escape, and Almayer must live."

"Now go, Babalatchi, go!" said Lakamba, getting off his chair. "I am very sick, and want medicine. Tell the white chief so."

But Babalatchi was not to be got rid of in this summary manner. He knew that his master, after the manner of the great, liked to shift the burden of toil and danger on to his servants' shoulders, but in the difficult straits in which they were now the Rajah must play his part. He may be very sick for the white men, for all the world if he liked, as long as he would take upon himself the execution of part at least of Babalatchi's carefully thought-of plan. Babalatchi wanted a big canoe manned by twelve men to be sent out after dark towards Bulangi's clearing. Dain may have to be overpowered. A man in love cannot be expected to see clearly the path of safety if it leads him away from the object of his affections, argued Babalatchi, and in that case they would have to use force in order to make him go. Would the Rajah see that trusty men manned the canoe? The thing must be done



secretly. Perhaps the Rajah would come himself, so as to bring all the weight of his authority to bear upon Dain if he should prove obstinate and refuse to leave his hiding-place. The Rajah would not commit himself to a definite promise, and anxiously pressed Babalatchi to go, being afraid of the white men paying him an unexpected visit. The aged statesman reluctantly took his leave and went into the courtyard.

Before going down to his boat Babalatchi stopped for a while in the big open space where the thick-leaved trees put black patches of shadow which seemed to float on a flood of smooth, intense light that rolled up to the houses and down to the stockade and over the river, where it broke and sparkled in thousands of glittering wavelets, like a band woven of azure and gold edged with the brilliant green of the forests guarding both banks of the Pantai. In the perfect calm before the coming of the afternoon breeze the irregularly jagged line of tree-tops stood unchanging, as if traced by an unsteady hand on the clear blue of the hot sky. In the space sheltered by the high palisades there lingered the smell of decaying blossoms from the surrounding forest, a taint of drying fish; with now and then a whiff of acrid smoke from the cooking fires when it eddied down from under the leafy boughs and clung lazily about the burnt-up grass.

As Babalatchi looked up at the flagstaff over-topping a group of low trees in the middle of the courtyard, the tricolour flag of the Netherlands stirred slightly for the first time since it had been hoisted that morning on the arrival of the man-of-war boats. With a faint rustle of trees the breeze came down in light puffs, playing capriciously for a time with this emblem of Lakamba's power, that was also the mark of his servitude; then the breeze freshened in a sharp gust of wind, and the flag flew out straight and steady above the trees. A dark shadow ran along the river, rolling over and covering up the sparkle of declining sunlight. A big white cloud sailed slowly across the darkening sky, and hung to the westward as if waiting for the sun to join it there. Men and things shook off the torpor of the hot afternoon and stirred into life under the first breath of the sea breeze.

Babalatchi hurried down to the water-gate; yet before he passed through it he paused to look round the courtyard, with its light and shade, with its cheery fires, with the groups of Lakamba's soldiers and retainers scattered about. His own house stood amongst the other buildings in that enclosure, and the statesman of Sambir asked himself with a sinking heart when and how would it be given him to return to that house. He had to deal with a

man more dangerous than any wild beast of his experience: a proud man, a man wilful after the manner of princes, a man in love. And he was going forth to speak to that man words of cold and worldly wisdom. Could anything be more appalling? What if that man should take umbrage at some fancied slight to his honour or disregard of his affections and suddenly “amok”? The wise adviser would be the first victim, no doubt, and death would be his reward. And underlying the horror of this situation there was the danger of those meddlesome fools, the white men. A vision of comfortless exile in far-off Madura rose up before Babalatchi. Wouldn't that be worse than death itself? And there was that half-white woman with threatening eyes. How could he tell what an incomprehensible creature of that sort would or would not do? She knew so much that she made the killing of Dain an impossibility. That much was certain. And yet the sharp, rough-edged kriss is a good and discreet friend, thought Babalatchi, as he examined his own lovingly, and put it back in the sheath, with a sigh of regret, before unfastening his canoe. As he cast off the painter, pushed out into the stream, and took up his paddle, he realised vividly how unsatisfactory it was to have women mixed up in state affairs. Young women, of course. For Mrs. Almayer's mature wisdom, and for the easy aptitude in intrigue that comes with years to the feminine mind, he felt the most sincere respect.

He paddled leisurely, letting the canoe drift down as he crossed towards the point. The sun was high yet, and nothing pressed. His work would commence only with the coming of darkness. Avoiding the Lingard jetty, he rounded the point, and paddled up the creek at the back of Almayer's house. There were many canoes lying there, their noses all drawn together, fastened all to the same stake. Babalatchi pushed his little craft in amongst them and stepped on shore. On the other side of the ditch something moved in the grass.

“Who's that hiding?” hailed Babalatchi. “Come out and speak to me.”

Nobody answered. Babalatchi crossed over, passing from boat to boat, and poked his staff viciously in the suspicious place. Taminah jumped up with a cry.

“What are you doing here?” he asked, surprised. “I have nearly stepped on your tray. Am I a Dyak that you should hide at my sight?”

“I was weary, and — I slept,” whispered Taminah, confusedly.

“You slept! You have not sold anything to-day, and you will be beaten when you return home,” said Babalatchi.

Taminah stood before him abashed and silent. Babalatchi looked her over carefully with great satisfaction. Decidedly he would offer fifty dollars more to that thief Bulangi. The girl pleased him.

“Now you go home. It is late,” he said sharply. “Tell Bulangi that I shall be near his house before the night is half over, and that I want him to make all things ready for a long journey. You understand? A long journey to the southward. Tell him that before sunset, and do not forget my words.”

Taminah made a gesture of assent, and watched Babalatchi recross the ditch and disappear through the bushes bordering Almayer’s compound. She moved a little further off the creek and sank in the grass again, lying down on her face, shivering in dry-eyed misery.

Babalatchi walked straight towards the cooking-shed looking for Mrs. Almayer. The courtyard was in a great uproar. A strange Chinaman had possession of the kitchen fire and was noisily demanding another saucepan. He hurled objurgations, in the Canton dialect and bad Malay, against the group of slave-girls standing a little way off, half frightened, half amused, at his violence. From the camping fires round which the seamen of the frigate were sitting came words of encouragement, mingled with laughter and jeering. In the midst of this noise and confusion Babalatchi met Ali, an empty dish in his hand.

“Where are the white men?” asked Babalatchi.

“They are eating in the front verandah,” answered Ali. “Do not stop me, Tuan. I am giving the white men their food and am busy.”

“Where’s Mem Almayer?”

“Inside in the passage. She is listening to the talk.”

Ali grinned and passed on; Babalatchi ascended the plankway to the rear verandah, and beckoning out Mrs. Almayer, engaged her in earnest conversation. Through the long passage, closed at the further end by the red curtain, they could hear from time to time Almayer’s voice mingling in conversation with an abrupt loudness that made Mrs. Almayer look significantly at Babalatchi.

“Listen,” she said. “He has drunk much.”

“He has,” whispered Babalatchi. “He will sleep heavily to-night.”

Mrs. Almayer looked doubtful.

“Sometimes the devil of strong gin makes him keep awake, and he walks up and down the verandah all night, cursing; then we stand afar off,” explained Mrs. Almayer, with the fuller knowledge born of twenty odd years of married life.

“But then he does not hear, nor understand, and his hand, of course, has no strength. We do not want him to hear to-night.”

“No,” assented Mrs. Almayer, energetically, but in a cautiously subdued voice. “If he hears he will kill.”

Babalatchi looked incredulous.

“Hai Tuan, you may believe me. Have I not lived many years with that man? Have I not seen death in that man’s eyes more than once when I was younger and he guessed at many things. Had he been a man of my own people I would not have seen such a look twice; but he — ”

With a contemptuous gesture she seemed to fling unutterable scorn on Almayer’s weak-minded aversion to sudden bloodshed.

“If he has the wish but not the strength, then what do we fear?” asked Babalatchi, after a short silence during which they both listened to Almayer’s loud talk till it subsided into the murmur of general conversation. “What do we fear?” repeated Babalatchi again.

“To keep the daughter whom he loves he would strike into your heart and mine without hesitation,” said Mrs. Almayer. “When the girl is gone he will be like the devil unchained. Then you and I had better beware.”

“I am an old man and fear not death,” answered Babalatchi, with a mendacious assumption of indifference. “But what will you do?”

“I am an old woman, and wish to live,” retorted Mrs. Almayer. “She is my daughter also. I shall seek safety at the feet of our Rajah, speaking in the name of the past when we both were young, and he — ”

Babalatchi raised his hand.

“Enough. You shall be protected,” he said soothingly.

Again the sound of Almayer’s voice was heard, and again interrupting their talk, they listened to the confused but loud utterance coming in bursts of unequal strength, with unexpected pauses and noisy repetitions that made some words and sentences fall clear and distinct on their ears out of the meaningless jumble of excited shoutings emphasised by the thumping of Almayer’s fist upon the table. On the short intervals of silence, the high complaining note of tumblers, standing close together and vibrating to the shock, lingered, growing fainter, till it leapt up again into tumultuous

ringing, when a new idea started a new rush of words and brought down the heavy hand again. At last the quarrelsome shouting ceased, and the thin plaint of disturbed glass died away into reluctant quietude.

Babalatchi and Mrs. Almayer had listened curiously, their bodies bent and their ears turned towards the passage. At every louder shout they nodded at each other with a ridiculous affectation of scandalised propriety, and they remained in the same attitude for some time after the noise had ceased.

"This is the devil of gin," whispered Mrs. Almayer. "Yes; he talks like that sometimes when there is nobody to hear him."

"What does he say?" inquired Babalatchi, eagerly. "You ought to understand."

"I have forgotten their talk. A little I understood. He spoke without any respect of the white ruler in Batavia, and of protection, and said he had been wronged; he said that several times. More I did not understand. Listen! Again he speaks!"

"Tse! tse! tse!" clicked Babalatchi, trying to appear shocked, but with a joyous twinkle of his solitary eye. "There will be great trouble between those white men. I will go round now and see. You tell your daughter that there is a sudden and a long journey before her, with much glory and splendour at the end. And tell her that Dain must go, or he must die, and that he will not go alone."

"No, he will not go alone," slowly repeated Mrs. Almayer, with a thoughtful air, as she crept into the passage after seeing Babalatchi disappear round the corner of the house.

The statesman of Sambir, under the impulse of vivid curiosity, made his way quickly to the front of the house, but once there he moved slowly and cautiously as he crept step by step up the stairs of the verandah. On the highest step he sat down quietly, his feet on the steps below, ready for flight should his presence prove unwelcome. He felt pretty safe so. The table stood nearly endways to him, and he saw Almayer's back; at Nina he looked full face, and had a side view of both officers; but of the four persons sitting at the table only Nina and the younger officer noticed his noiseless arrival. The momentary dropping of Nina's eyelids acknowledged Babalatchi's presence; she then spoke at once to the young sub, who turned towards her with attentive alacrity, but her gaze was fastened steadily on her father's face while Almayer was speaking uproariously.

“ . . . disloyalty and unscrupulousness! What have you ever done to make me loyal? You have no grip on this country. I had to take care of myself, and when I asked for protection I was met with threats and contempt, and had Arab slander thrown in my face. I! a white man!”

“Don’t be violent, Almayer,” remonstrated the lieutenant; “I have heard all this already.”

“Then why do you talk to me about scruples? I wanted money, and I gave powder in exchange. How could I know that some of your wretched men were going to be blown up? Scruples! Pah!”

He groped unsteadily amongst the bottles, trying one after another, grumbling to himself the while.

“No more wine,” he muttered discontentedly.

“You have had enough, Almayer,” said the lieutenant, as he lighted a cigar. “Is it not time to deliver to us your prisoner? I take it you have that Dain Maroola stowed away safely somewhere. Still we had better get that business over, and then we shall have more drink. Come! don’t look at me like this.”

Almayer was staring with stony eyes, his trembling fingers fumbling about his throat.

“Gold,” he said with difficulty. “Hem! A hand on the windpipe, you know. Sure you will excuse. I wanted to say — a little gold for a little powder. What’s that?”

“I know, I know,” said the lieutenant soothingly.

“No! You don’t know. Not one of you knows!” shouted Almayer. “The government is a fool, I tell you. Heaps of gold. I am the man that knows; I and another one. But he won’t speak. He is — ”

He checked himself with a feeble smile, and, making an unsuccessful attempt to pat the officer on the shoulder, knocked over a couple of empty bottles.

“Personally you are a fine fellow,” he said very distinctly, in a patronising manner. His head nodded drowsily as he sat muttering to himself.

The two officers looked at each other helplessly.

“This won’t do,” said the lieutenant, addressing his junior. “Have the men mustered in the compound here. I must get some sense out of him. Hi! Almayer! Wake up, man. Redeem your word. You gave your word. You gave your word of honour, you know.”

Almayer shook off the officer's hand with impatience, but his ill-humour vanished at once, and he looked up, putting his forefinger to the side of his nose.

"You are very young; there is time for all things," he said, with an air of great sagacity.

The lieutenant turned towards Nina, who, leaning back in her chair, watched her father steadily.

"Really I am very much distressed by all this for your sake," he exclaimed. "I do not know;" he went on, speaking with some embarrassment, "whether I have any right to ask you anything, unless, perhaps, to withdraw from this painful scene, but I feel that I must — for your father's good — suggest that you should — I mean if you have any influence over him you ought to exert it now to make him keep the promise he gave me before he — before he got into this state."

He observed with discouragement that she seemed not to take any notice of what he said sitting still with half-closed eyes.

"I trust — " he began again.

"What is the promise you speak of?" abruptly asked Nina, leaving her seat and moving towards her father.

"Nothing that is not just and proper. He promised to deliver to us a man who in time of profound peace took the lives of innocent men to escape the punishment he deserved for breaking the law. He planned his mischief on a large scale. It is not his fault if it failed, partially. Of course you have heard of Dain Maroola. Your father secured him, I understand. We know he escaped up this river. Perhaps you — "

"And he killed white men!" interrupted Nina.

"I regret to say they were white. Yes, two white men lost their lives through that scoundrel's freak."

"Two only!" exclaimed Nina.

The officer looked at her in amazement.

"Why! why! You — " he stammered, confused.

"There might have been more," interrupted Nina. "And when you get this — this scoundrel will you go?"

The lieutenant, still speechless, bowed his assent.

"Then I would get him for you if I had to seek him in a burning fire," she burst out with intense energy. "I hate the sight of your white faces. I hate the sound of your gentle voices. That is the way you speak to women,

dropping sweet words before any pretty face. I have heard your voices before. I hoped to live here without seeing any other white face but this," she added in a gentler tone, touching lightly her father's cheek.

Almayer ceased his mumbling and opened his eyes. He caught hold of his daughter's hand and pressed it to his face, while Nina with the other hand smoothed his rumpled grey hair, looking defiantly over her father's head at the officer, who had now regained his composure and returned her look with a cool, steady stare. Below, in front of the verandah, they could hear the tramp of seamen mustering there according to orders. The sub-lieutenant came up the steps, while Babalatchi stood up uneasily and, with finger on lip, tried to catch Nina's eye.

"You are a good girl," whispered Almayer, absently, dropping his daughter's hand.

"Father! father!" she cried, bending over him with passionate entreaty. "See those two men looking at us. Send them away. I cannot bear it any more. Send them away. Do what they want and let them go."

She caught sight of Babalatchi and ceased speaking suddenly, but her foot tapped the floor with rapid beats in a paroxysm of nervous restlessness. The two officers stood close together looking on curiously.

"What has happened? What is the matter?" whispered the younger man.

"Don't know," answered the other, under his breath. "One is furious, and the other is drunk. Not so drunk, either. Queer, this. Look!"

Almayer had risen, holding on to his daughter's arm. He hesitated a moment, then he let go his hold and lurched half-way across the verandah. There he pulled himself together, and stood very straight, breathing hard and glaring round angrily.

"Are the men ready?" asked the lieutenant.

"All ready, sir."

"Now, Mr. Almayer, lead the way," said the lieutenant

Almayer rested his eyes on him as if he saw him for the first time.

"Two men," he said thickly. The effort of speaking seemed to interfere with his equilibrium. He took a quick step to save himself from a fall, and remained swaying backwards and forwards. "Two men," he began again, speaking with difficulty. "Two white men — men in uniform — honourable men. I want to say — men of honour. Are you?"

"Come! None of that," said the officer impatiently. "Let us have that friend of yours."



“What do you think I am?” asked Almayer, fiercely.

“You are drunk, but not so drunk as not to know what you are doing. Enough of this tomfoolery,” said the officer sternly, “or I will have you put under arrest in your own house.”

“Arrest!” laughed Almayer, discordantly. “Ha! ha! ha! Arrest! Why, I have been trying to get out of this infernal place for twenty years, and I can’t. You hear, man! I can’t, and never shall! Never!”

He ended his words with a sob, and walked unsteadily down the stairs. When in the courtyard the lieutenant approached him, and took him by the arm. The sub-lieutenant and Babalatchi followed close.

“That’s better, Almayer,” said the officer encouragingly. “Where are you going to? There are only planks there. Here,” he went on, shaking him slightly, “do we want the boats?”

“No,” answered Almayer, viciously. “You want a grave.”

“What? Wild again! Try to talk sense.”

“Grave!” roared Almayer, struggling to get himself free. “A hole in the ground. Don’t you understand? You must be drunk. Let me go! Let go, I tell you!”

He tore away from the officer’s grasp, and reeled towards the planks where the body lay under its white cover; then he turned round quickly, and faced the semicircle of interested faces. The sun was sinking rapidly, throwing long shadows of house and trees over the courtyard, but the light lingered yet on the river, where the logs went drifting past in midstream, looking very distinct and black in the pale red glow. The trunks of the trees in the forest on the east bank were lost in gloom while their highest branches swayed gently in the departing sunlight. The air felt heavy and cold in the breeze, expiring in slight puffs that came over the water.

Almayer shivered as he made an effort to speak, and again with an uncertain gesture he seemed to free his throat from the grip of an invisible hand. His bloodshot eyes wandered aimlessly from face to face.

“There!” he said at last. “Are you all there? He is a dangerous man.”

He dragged at the cover with hasty violence, and the body rolled stiffly off the planks and fell at his feet in rigid helplessness.

“Cold, perfectly cold,” said Almayer, looking round with a mirthless smile. “Sorry can do no better. And you can’t hang him, either. As you observe, gentlemen,” he added gravely, “there is no head, and hardly any neck.”

The last ray of light was snatched away from the tree-tops, the river grew suddenly dark, and in the great stillness the murmur of the flowing water seemed to fill the vast expanse of grey shadow that descended upon the land.

“This is Dain,” went on Almayer to the silent group that surrounded him. “And I have kept my word. First one hope, then another, and this is my last. Nothing is left now. You think there is one dead man here? Mistake, I ‘sure you. I am much more dead. Why don’t you hang me?” he suggested suddenly, in a friendly tone, addressing the lieutenant. “I assure, assure you it would be a mat — matter of form altog — altogether.”

These last words he muttered to himself, and walked zigzagging towards his house. “Get out!” he thundered at Ali, who was approaching timidly with offers of assistance. From afar, scared groups of men and women watched his devious progress. He dragged himself up the stairs by the banister, and managed to reach a chair into which he fell heavily. He sat for awhile panting with exertion and anger, and looking round vaguely for Nina; then making a threatening gesture towards the compound, where he had heard Babalatchi’s voice, he overturned the table with his foot in a great crash of smashed crockery. He muttered yet menacingly to himself, then his head fell on his breast, his eyes closed, and with a deep sigh he fell asleep.

That night — for the first time in its history — the peaceful and flourishing settlement of Sambir saw the lights shining about “Almayer’s Folly.” These were the lanterns of the boats hung up by the seamen under the verandah where the two officers were holding a court of inquiry into the truth of the story related to them by Babalatchi. Babalatchi had regained all his importance. He was eloquent and persuasive, calling Heaven and Earth to witness the truth of his statements. There were also other witnesses. Mahmat Banjer and a good many others underwent a close examination that dragged its weary length far into the evening. A messenger was sent for Abdulla, who excused himself from coming on the score of his venerable age, but sent Reshid. Mahmat had to produce the bangle, and saw with rage and mortification the lieutenant put it in his pocket, as one of the proofs of Dain’s death, to be sent in with the official report of the mission. Babalatchi’s ring was also impounded for the same purpose, but the experienced statesman was resigned to that loss from the very beginning. He did not mind as long as he was sure, that the white men believed. He

put that question to himself earnestly as he left, one of the last, when the proceedings came to a close. He was not certain. Still, if they believed only for a night, he would put Dain beyond their reach and feel safe himself. He walked away fast, looking from time to time over his shoulder in the fear of being followed, but he saw and heard nothing.

"Ten o'clock," said the lieutenant, looking at his watch and yawning. "I shall hear some of the captain's complimentary remarks when we get back. Miserable business, this."

"Do you think all this is true?" asked the younger man.

"True! It is just possible. But if it isn't true what can we do? If we had a dozen boats we could patrol the creeks; and that wouldn't be much good. That drunken madman was right; we haven't enough hold on this coast. They do what they like. Are our hammocks slung?"

"Yes, I told the coxswain. Strange couple over there," said the sub, with a wave of his hand towards Almayer's house.

"Hem! Queer, certainly. What have you been telling her? I was attending to the father most of the time."

"I assure you I have been perfectly civil," protested the other warmly.

"All right. Don't get excited. She objects to civility, then, from what I understand. I thought you might have been tender. You know we are on service."

"Well, of course. Never forget that. Coldly civil. That's all."

They both laughed a little, and not feeling sleepy began to pace the verandah side by side. The moon rose stealthily above the trees, and suddenly changed the river into a stream of scintillating silver. The forest came out of the black void and stood sombre and pensive over the sparkling water. The breeze died away into a breathless calm.

Seamanlike, the two officers tramped measuredly up and down without exchanging a word. The loose planks rattled rhythmically under their steps with obtrusive dry sound in the perfect silence of the night. As they were wheeling round again the younger man stood attentive.

"Did you hear that?" he asked.

"No!" said the other. "Hear what?"

"I thought I heard a cry. Ever so faint. Seemed a woman's voice. In that other house. Ah! Again! Hear it?"

"No," said the lieutenant, after listening awhile. "You young fellows always hear women's voices. If you are going to dream you had better get

into your hammock. Good-night.”

The moon mounted higher, and the warm shadows grew smaller and crept away as if hiding before the cold and cruel light.

## CHAPTER X.

“It has set at last,” said Nina to her mother pointing towards the hills behind which the sun had sunk. “Listen, mother, I am going now to Bulangi’s creek, and if I should never return — ”

She interrupted herself, and something like doubt dimmed for a moment the fire of suppressed exaltation that had glowed in her eyes and had illuminated the serene impassiveness of her features with a ray of eager life during all that long day of excitement — the day of joy and anxiety, of hope and terror, of vague grief and indistinct delight. While the sun shone with that dazzling light in which her love was born and grew till it possessed her whole being, she was kept firm in her unwavering resolve by the mysterious whisperings of desire which filled her heart with impatient longing for the darkness that would mean the end of danger and strife, the beginning of happiness, the fulfilling of love, the completeness of life. It had set at last! The short tropical twilight went out before she could draw the long breath of relief; and now the sudden darkness seemed to be full of menacing voices calling upon her to rush headlong into the unknown; to be true to her own impulses, to give herself up to the passion she had evoked and shared. He was waiting! In the solitude of the secluded clearing, in the vast silence of the forest he was waiting alone, a fugitive in fear of his life. Indifferent to his danger he was waiting for her. It was for her only that he had come; and now as the time approached when he should have his reward, she asked herself with dismay what meant that chilling doubt of her own will and of her own desire? With an effort she shook off the fear of the passing weakness. He should have his reward. Her woman’s love and her woman’s honour overcame the faltering distrust of that unknown future waiting for her in the darkness of the river.

“No, you will not return,” muttered Mrs. Almayer, prophetically.

“Without you he will not go, and if he remains here — ” She waved her hand towards the lights of “Almayer’s Folly,” and the unfinished sentence died out in a threatening murmur.

The two women had met behind the house, and now were walking slowly together towards the creek where all the canoes were moored. Arrived at the fringe of bushes they stopped by a common impulse, and Mrs. Almayer, laying her hand on her daughter’s arm, tried in vain to look close into the girl’s averted face. When she attempted to speak her first words were lost

in a stifled sob that sounded strangely coming from that woman who, of all human passions, seemed to know only those of anger and hate.

“You are going away to be a great Ranee,” she said at last, in a voice that was steady enough now, “and if you be wise you shall have much power that will endure many days, and even last into your old age. What have I been? A slave all my life, and I have cooked rice for a man who had no courage and no wisdom. Hai! I! even I, was given in gift by a chief and a warrior to a man that was neither. Hai! Hai!”

She wailed to herself softly, lamenting the lost possibilities of murder and mischief that could have fallen to her lot had she been mated with a congenial spirit. Nina bent down over Mrs. Almayer’s slight form and scanned attentively, under the stars that had rushed out on the black sky and now hung breathless over that strange parting, her mother’s shrivelled features, and looked close into the sunken eyes that could see into her own dark future by the light of a long and a painful experience. Again she felt herself fascinated, as of old, by her mother’s exalted mood and by the oracular certainty of expression which, together with her fits of violence, had contributed not a little to the reputation for witchcraft she enjoyed in the settlement.

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“I was a slave, and you shall be a queen,” went on Mrs. Almayer, looking straight before her; “but remember men’s strength and their weakness. Tremble before his anger, so that he may see your fear in the light of day; but in your heart you may laugh, for after sunset he is your slave.”

“A slave! He! The master of life! You do not know him, mother.”

Mrs. Almayer condescended to laugh contemptuously.

“You speak like a fool of a white woman,” she exclaimed. “What do you know of men’s anger and of men’s love? Have you watched the sleep of men weary of dealing death? Have you felt about you the strong arm that could drive a kriss deep into a beating heart? Yah! you are a white woman, and ought to pray to a woman-god!”

“Why do you say this? I have listened to your words so long that I have forgotten my old life. If I was white would I stand here, ready to go? Mother, I shall return to the house and look once more at my father’s face.”

“No!” said Mrs. Almayer, violently. “No, he sleeps now the sleep of gin; and if you went back he might awake and see you. No, he shall never see

you. When the terrible old man took you away from me when you were little, you remember — ”

“It was such a long time ago,” murmured Nina.

“I remember,” went on Mrs. Almayer, fiercely. “I wanted to look at your face again. He said no! I heard you cry and jumped into the river. You were his daughter then; you are my daughter now. Never shall you go back to that house; you shall never cross this courtyard again. No! no!”

Her voice rose almost to a shout. On the other side of the creek there was a rustle in the long grass. The two women heard it, and listened for a while in startled silence. “I shall go,” said Nina, in a cautious but intense whisper. “What is your hate or your revenge to me?”

She moved towards the house, Mrs. Almayer clinging to her and trying to pull her back.

“Stop, you shall not go!” she gasped.

Nina pushed away her mother impatiently and gathered up her skirts for a quick run, but Mrs. Almayer ran forward and turned round, facing her daughter with outstretched arms.

“If you move another step,” she exclaimed, breathing quickly, “I shall cry out. Do you see those lights in the big house? There sit two white men, angry because they cannot have the blood of the man you love. And in those dark houses,” she continued, more calmly as she pointed towards the settlement, “my voice could wake up men that would lead the Orang Blanda soldiers to him who is waiting — for you.”

She could not see her daughter’s face, but the white figure before her stood silent and irresolute in the darkness. Mrs. Almayer pursued her advantage.

“Give up your old life! Forget!” she said in entreating tones. “Forget that you ever looked at a white face; forget their words; forget their thoughts. They speak lies. And they think lies because they despise us that are better than they are, but not so strong. Forget their friendship and their contempt; forget their many gods. Girl, why do you want to remember the past when there is a warrior and a chief ready to give many lives — his own life — for one of your smiles?”

While she spoke she pushed gently her daughter towards the canoes, hiding her own fear, anxiety, and doubt under the flood of passionate words that left Nina no time to think and no opportunity to protest, even if she had wished it. But she did not wish it now. At the bottom of that passing desire

to look again at her father's face there was no strong affection. She felt no scruples and no remorse at leaving suddenly that man whose sentiment towards herself she could not understand, she could not even see. There was only an instinctive clinging to old life, to old habits, to old faces; that fear of finality which lurks in every human breast and prevents so many heroisms and so many crimes. For years she had stood between her mother and her father, the one so strong in her weakness, the other so weak where he could have been strong. Between those two beings so dissimilar, so antagonistic, she stood with mute heart wondering and angry at the fact of her own existence. It seemed so unreasonable, so humiliating to be flung there in that settlement and to see the days rush by into the past, without a hope, a desire, or an aim that would justify the life she had to endure in ever-growing weariness. She had little belief and no sympathy for her father's dreams; but the savage ravings of her mother chanced to strike a responsive chord, deep down somewhere in her despairing heart; and she dreamed dreams of her own with the persistent absorption of a captive thinking of liberty within the walls of his prison cell. With the coming of Dain she found the road to freedom by obeying the voice of the new-born impulses, and with surprised joy she thought she could read in his eyes the answer to all the questionings of her heart. She understood now the reason and the aim of life; and in the triumphant unveiling of that mystery she threw away disdainfully her past with its sad thoughts, its bitter feelings, and its faint affections, now withered and dead in contact with her fierce passion.

Mrs. Almayer unmoored Nina's own canoe and, straightening herself painfully, stood, painter in hand, looking at her daughter.

"Quick," she said; "get away before the moon rises, while the river is dark. I am afraid of Abdulla's slaves. The wretches prowl in the night often, and might see and follow you. There are two paddles in the canoe."

Nina approached her mother and hesitatingly touched lightly with her lips the wrinkled forehead. Mrs. Almayer snorted contemptuously in protest against that tenderness which she, nevertheless, feared could be contagious.

"Shall I ever see you again, mother?" murmured Nina.

"No," said Mrs. Almayer, after a short silence. "Why should you return here where it is my fate to die? You will live far away in splendour and



might. When I hear of white men driven from the islands, then I shall know that you are alive, and that you remember my words.”

“I shall always remember,” returned Nina, earnestly; “but where is my power, and what can I do?”

“Do not let him look too long in your eyes, nor lay his head on your knees without reminding him that men should fight before they rest. And if he lingers, give him his kriss yourself and bid him go, as the wife of a mighty prince should do when the enemies are near. Let him slay the white men that come to us to trade, with prayers on their lips and loaded guns in their hands. Ah!” — she ended with a sigh — “they are on every sea, and on every shore; and they are very many!”

She swung the bow of the canoe towards the river, but did not let go the gunwale, keeping her hand on it in irresolute thoughtfulness.

Nina put the point of the paddle against the bank, ready to shove off into the stream.

“What is it, mother?” she asked, in a low voice. “Do you hear anything?”

“No,” said Mrs. Almayer, absently. “Listen, Nina,” she continued, abruptly, after a slight pause, “in after years there will be other women — ”

A stifled cry in the boat interrupted her, and the paddle rattled in the canoe as it slipped from Nina’s hands, which she put out in a protesting gesture. Mrs. Almayer fell on her knees on the bank and leaned over the gunwale so as to bring her own face close to her daughter’s.

“There will be other women,” she repeated firmly; “I tell you that, because you are half white, and may forget that he is a great chief, and that such things must be. Hide your anger, and do not let him see on your face the pain that will eat your heart. Meet him with joy in your eyes and wisdom on your lips, for to you he will turn in sadness or in doubt. As long as he looks upon many women your power will last, but should there be one, one only with whom he seems to forget you, then — ”

“I could not live,” exclaimed Nina, covering her face with both her hands. “Do not speak so, mother; it could not be.”

“Then,” went on Mrs. Almayer, steadily, “to that woman, Nina, show no mercy.”

She moved the canoe down towards the stream by the gunwale, and gripped it with both her hands, the bow pointing into the river.

“Are you crying?” she asked sternly of her daughter, who sat still with covered face. “Arise, and take your paddle, for he has waited long enough. And remember, Nina, no mercy; and if you must strike, strike with a steady hand.”

She put out all her strength, and swinging her body over the water, shot the light craft far into the stream. When she recovered herself from the effort she tried vainly to catch a glimpse of the canoe that seemed to have dissolved suddenly into the white mist trailing over the heated waters of the Pantai. After listening for a while intently on her knees, Mrs. Almayer rose with a deep sigh, while two tears wandered slowly down her withered cheeks. She wiped them off quickly with a wisp of her grey hair as if ashamed of herself, but could not stifle another loud sigh, for her heart was heavy and she suffered much, being unused to tender emotions. This time she fancied she had heard a faint noise, like the echo of her own sigh, and she stopped, straining her ears to catch the slightest sound, and peering apprehensively towards the bushes near her.

“Who is there?” she asked, in an unsteady voice, while her imagination peopled the solitude of the riverside with ghost-like forms. “Who is there?” she repeated faintly.

There was no answer: only the voice of the river murmuring in sad monotone behind the white veil seemed to swell louder for a moment, to die away again in a soft whisper of eddies washing against the bank.

Mrs. Almayer shook her head as if in answer to her own thoughts, and walked quickly away from the bushes, looking to the right and left watchfully. She went straight towards the cooking-shed, observing that the embers of the fire there glowed more brightly than usual, as if somebody had been adding fresh fuel to the fires during the evening. As she approached, Babalatchi, who had been squatting in the warm glow, rose and met her in the shadow outside.

“Is she gone?” asked the anxious statesman, hastily.

“Yes,” answered Mrs. Almayer. “What are the white men doing? When did you leave them?”

“They are sleeping now, I think. May they never wake!” exclaimed Babalatchi, fervently. “Oh! but they are devils, and made much talk and trouble over that carcass. The chief threatened me twice with his hand, and said he would have me tied up to a tree. Tie me up to a tree! Me!” he repeated, striking his breast violently.

Mrs. Almayer laughed tauntingly.

“And you salaamed and asked for mercy. Men with arms by their side acted otherwise when I was young.”

“And where are they, the men of your youth? You mad woman!” retorted Babalatchi, angrily. “Killed by the Dutch. Aha! But I shall live to deceive them. A man knows when to fight and when to tell peaceful lies. You would know that if you were not a woman.”

But Mrs. Almayer did not seem to hear him. With bent body and outstretched arm she appeared to be listening to some noise behind the shed.

“There are strange sounds,” she whispered, with evident alarm. “I have heard in the air the sounds of grief, as of a sigh and weeping. That was by the riverside. And now again I heard — ”

“Where?” asked Babalatchi, in an altered voice. “What did you hear?”

“Close here. It was like a breath long drawn. I wish I had burnt the paper over the body before it was buried.”

“Yes,” assented Babalatchi. “But the white men had him thrown into a hole at once. You know he found his death on the river,” he added cheerfully, “and his ghost may hail the canoes, but would leave the land alone.”

Mrs. Almayer, who had been craning her neck to look round the corner of the shed, drew back her head.

“There is nobody there,” she said, reassured. “Is it not time for the Rajah war-canoe to go to the clearing?”

“I have been waiting for it here, for I myself must go,” explained Babalatchi. “I think I will go over and see what makes them late. When will you come? The Rajah gives you refuge.”

“I shall paddle over before the break of day. I cannot leave my dollars behind,” muttered Mrs. Almayer.

They separated. Babalatchi crossed the courtyard towards the creek to get his canoe, and Mrs. Almayer walked slowly to the house, ascended the plankway, and passing through the back verandah entered the passage leading to the front of the house; but before going in she turned in the doorway and looked back at the empty and silent courtyard, now lit up by the rays of the rising moon. No sooner she had disappeared, however, than a vague shape flitted out from amongst the stalks of the banana plantation, darted over the moonlit space, and fell in the darkness at the foot of the

verandah. It might have been the shadow of a driving cloud, so noiseless and rapid was its passage, but for the trail of disturbed grass, whose feathery heads trembled and swayed for a long time in the moonlight before they rested motionless and gleaming, like a design of silver sprays embroidered on a sombre background.

Mrs. Almayer lighted the cocoanut lamp, and lifting cautiously the red curtain, gazed upon her husband, shading the light with her hand.

Almayer, huddled up in the chair, one of his arms hanging down, the other thrown across the lower part of his face as if to ward off an invisible enemy, his legs stretched straight out, slept heavily, unconscious of the unfriendly eyes that looked upon him in disparaging criticism. At his feet lay the overturned table, amongst a wreck of crockery and broken bottles. The appearance as of traces left by a desperate struggle was accentuated by the chairs, which seemed to have been scattered violently all over the place, and now lay about the verandah with a lamentable aspect of inebriety in their helpless attitudes. Only Nina's big rocking-chair, standing black and motionless on its high runners, towered above the chaos of demoralised furniture, unflinchingly dignified and patient, waiting for its burden.

With a last scornful look towards the sleeper, Mrs. Almayer passed behind the curtain into her own room. A couple of bats, encouraged by the darkness and the peaceful state of affairs, resumed their silent and oblique gambols above Almayer's head, and for a long time the profound quiet of the house was unbroken, save for the deep breathing of the sleeping man and the faint tinkle of silver in the hands of the woman preparing for flight. In the increasing light of the moon that had risen now above the night mist, the objects on the verandah came out strongly outlined in black splashes of shadow with all the uncompromising ugliness of their disorder, and a caricature of the sleeping Almayer appeared on the dirty whitewash of the wall behind him in a grotesquely exaggerated detail of attitude and feature enlarged to a heroic size. The discontented bats departed in quest of darker places, and a lizard came out in short, nervous rushes, and, pleased with the white table-cloth, stopped on it in breathless immobility that would have suggested sudden death had it not been for the melodious call he exchanged with a less adventurous friend hiding amongst the lumber in the courtyard. Then the boards in the passage creaked, the lizard vanished, and Almayer stirred uneasily with a sigh: slowly, out of the senseless annihilation of drunken sleep, he was returning, through the land of dreams, to waking

consciousness. Almayer's head rolled from shoulder to shoulder in the oppression of his dream; the heavens had descended upon him like a heavy mantle, and trailed in starred folds far under him. Stars above, stars all round him; and from the stars under his feet rose a whisper full of entreaties and tears, and sorrowful faces flitted amongst the clusters of light filling the infinite space below. How escape from the importunity of lamentable cries and from the look of staring, sad eyes in the faces which pressed round him till he gasped for breath under the crushing weight of worlds that hung over his aching shoulders? Get away! But how? If he attempted to move he would step off into nothing, and perish in the crashing fall of that universe of which he was the only support. And what were the voices saying? Urging him to move! Why? Move to destruction! Not likely! The absurdity of the thing filled him with indignation. He got a firmer foothold and stiffened his muscles in heroic resolve to carry his burden to all eternity. And ages passed in the superhuman labour, amidst the rush of circling worlds; in the plaintive murmur of sorrowful voices urging him to desist before it was too late — till the mysterious power that had laid upon him the giant task seemed at last to seek his destruction. With terror he felt an irresistible hand shaking him by the shoulder, while the chorus of voices swelled louder into an agonised prayer to go, go before it is too late. He felt himself slipping, losing his balance, as something dragged at his legs, and he fell. With a faint cry he glided out of the anguish of perishing creation into an imperfect waking that seemed to be still under the spell of his dream.

"What? What?" he murmured sleepily, without moving or opening his eyes. His head still felt heavy, and he had not the courage to raise his eyelids. In his ears there still lingered the sound of entreating whisper. — "Am I awake? — Why do I hear the voices?" he argued to himself, hazily. — "I cannot get rid of the horrible nightmare yet. — I have been very drunk. — What is that shaking me? I am dreaming yet — I must open my eyes and be done with it. I am only half awake, it is evident."

He made an effort to shake off his stupor and saw a face close to his, glaring at him with staring eyeballs. He closed his eyes again in amazed horror and sat up straight in the chair, trembling in every limb. What was this apparition? — His own fancy, no doubt. — His nerves had been much tried the day before — and then the drink! He would not see it again if he

had the courage to look. — He would look directly. — Get a little steadier first. — So. — Now.

He looked. The figure of a woman standing in the steely light, her hands stretched forth in a suppliant gesture, confronted him from the far-off end of the verandah; and in the space between him and the obstinate phantom floated the murmur of words that fell on his ears in a jumble of torturing sentences, the meaning of which escaped the utmost efforts of his brain. Who spoke the Malay words? Who ran away? Why too late — and too late for what? What meant those words of hate and love mixed so strangely together, the ever-recurring names falling on his ears again and again — Nina, Dain; Dain, Nina? Dain was dead, and Nina was sleeping, unaware of the terrible experience through which he was now passing. Was he going to be tormented for ever, sleeping or waking, and have no peace either night or day? What was the meaning of this?

He shouted the last words aloud. The shadowy woman seemed to shrink and recede a little from him towards the doorway, and there was a shriek. Exasperated by the incomprehensible nature of his torment, Almayer made a rush upon the apparition, which eluded his grasp, and he brought up heavily against the wall. Quick as lightning he turned round and pursued fiercely the mysterious figure fleeing from him with piercing shrieks that were like fuel to the flames of his anger. Over the furniture, round the overturned table, and now he had it cornered behind Nina's chair. To the left, to the right they dodged, the chair rocking madly between them, she sending out shriek after shriek at every feint, and he growling meaningless curses through his hard set teeth. "Oh! the fiendish noise that split his head and seemed to choke his breath. — It would kill him. — It must be stopped!" An insane desire to crush that yelling thing induced him to cast himself recklessly over the chair with a desperate grab, and they came down together in a cloud of dust amongst the splintered wood. The last shriek died out under him in a faint gurgle, and he had secured the relief of absolute silence.

He looked at the woman's face under him. A real woman! He knew her. By all that is wonderful! Taminah! He jumped up ashamed of his fury and stood perplexed, wiping his forehead. The girl struggled to a kneeling posture and embraced his legs in a frenzied prayer for mercy.

"Don't be afraid," he said, raising her. "I shall not hurt you. Why do you come to my house in the night? And if you had to come, why not go behind

the curtain where the women sleep?"

"The place behind the curtain is empty," gasped Taminah, catching her breath between the words. "There are no women in your house any more, Tuan. I saw the old Mem go away before I tried to wake you. I did not want your women, I wanted you."

"Old Mem!" repeated Almayer. "Do you mean my wife?"

She nodded her head.

"But of my daughter you are not afraid?" said Almayer.

"Have you not heard me?" she exclaimed. "Have I not spoken for a long time when you lay there with eyes half open? She is gone too."

"I was asleep. Can you not tell when a man is sleeping and when awake?"

"Sometimes," answered Taminah in a low voice; "sometimes the spirit lingers close to a sleeping body and may hear. I spoke a long time before I touched you, and I spoke softly for fear it would depart at a sudden noise and leave you sleeping for ever. I took you by the shoulder only when you began to mutter words I could not understand. Have you not heard, then, and do you know nothing?"

"Nothing of what you said. What is it? Tell again if you want me to know."

He took her by the shoulder and led her unresisting to the front of the verandah into a stronger light. She wrung her hands with such an appearance of grief that he began to be alarmed.

"Speak," he said. "You made noise enough to wake even dead men. And yet nobody living came," he added to himself in an uneasy whisper. "Are you mute? Speak!" he repeated.

In a rush of words which broke out after a short struggle from her trembling lips she told him the tale of Nina's love and her own jealousy. Several times he looked angrily into her face and told her to be silent; but he could not stop the sounds that seemed to him to run out in a hot stream, swirl about his feet, and rise in scalding waves about him, higher, higher, drowning his heart, touching his lips with a feel of molten lead, blotting out his sight in scorching vapour, closing over his head, merciless and deadly. When she spoke of the deception as to Dain's death of which he had been the victim only that day, he glanced again at her with terrible eyes, and made her falter for a second, but he turned away directly, and his face suddenly lost all expression in a stony stare far away over the river. Ah! the

river! His old friend and his old enemy, speaking always with the same voice as he runs from year to year bringing fortune or disappointment happiness or pain, upon the same varying but unchanged surface of glancing currents and swirling eddies. For many years he had listened to the passionless and soothing murmur that sometimes was the song of hope, at times the song of triumph, of encouragement; more often the whisper of consolation that spoke of better days to come. For so many years! So many years! And now to the accompaniment of that murmur he listened to the slow and painful beating of his heart. He listened attentively, wondering at the regularity of its beats. He began to count mechanically. One, two. Why count? At the next beat it must stop. No heart could suffer so and beat so steadily for long. Those regular strokes as of a muffled hammer that rang in his ears must stop soon. Still beating unceasing and cruel. No man can bear this; and is this the last, or will the next one be the last? — How much longer? O God! how much longer? His hand weighed heavier unconsciously on the girl's shoulder, and she spoke the last words of her story crouching at his feet with tears of pain and shame and anger. Was her revenge to fail her? This white man was like a senseless stone. Too late! Too late!

“And you saw her go?” Almayer's voice sounded harshly above her head.

“Did I not tell you?” she sobbed, trying to wriggle gently out from under his grip. “Did I not tell you that I saw the witchwoman push the canoe? I lay hidden in the grass and heard all the words. She that we used to call the white Mem wanted to return to look at your face, but the witchwoman forbade her, and — ”

She sank lower yet on her elbow, turning half round under the downward push of the heavy hand, her face lifted up to him with spiteful eyes.

“And she obeyed,” she shouted out in a half-laugh, half-cry of pain. “Let me go, Tuan. Why are you angry with me? Hasten, or you shall be too late to show your anger to the deceitful woman.”

Almayer dragged her up to her feet and looked close into her face while she struggled, turning her head away from his wild stare.

“Who sent you here to torment me?” he asked, violently. “I do not believe you. You lie.”

He straightened his arm suddenly and flung her across the verandah towards the doorway, where she lay immobile and silent, as if she had left



her life in his grasp, a dark heap, without a sound or a stir.

“Oh! Nina!” whispered Almayer, in a voice in which reproach and love spoke together in pained tenderness. “Oh! Nina! I do not believe.”

A light draught from the river ran over the courtyard in a wave of bowing grass and, entering the verandah, touched Almayer’s forehead with its cool breath, in a caress of infinite pity. The curtain in the women’s doorway blew out and instantly collapsed with startling helplessness. He stared at the fluttering stuff.

“Nina!” cried Almayer. “Where are you, Nina?”

The wind passed out of the empty house in a tremulous sigh, and all was still.

Almayer hid his face in his hands as if to shut out a loathsome sight. When, hearing a slight rustle, he uncovered his eyes, the dark heap by the door was gone.

## CHAPTER XI.

In the middle of a shadowless square of moonlight, shining on a smooth and level expanse of young rice-shoots, a little shelter-hut perched on high posts, the pile of brushwood near by and the glowing embers of a fire with a man stretched before it, seemed very small and as if lost in the pale green iridescence reflected from the ground. On three sides of the clearing, appearing very far away in the deceptive light, the big trees of the forest, lashed together with manifold bonds by a mass of tangled creepers, looked down at the growing young life at their feet with the sombre resignation of giants that had lost faith in their strength. And in the midst of them the merciless creepers clung to the big trunks in cable-like coils, leaped from tree to tree, hung in thorny festoons from the lower boughs, and, sending slender tendrils on high to seek out the smallest branches, carried death to their victims in an exulting riot of silent destruction.

On the fourth side, following the curve of the bank of that branch of the Pantai that formed the only access to the clearing, ran a black line of young trees, bushes, and thick second growth, unbroken save for a small gap chopped out in one place. At that gap began the narrow footpath leading from the water's edge to the grass-built shelter used by the night watchers when the ripening crop had to be protected from the wild pigs. The pathway ended at the foot of the piles on which the hut was built, in a circular space covered with ashes and bits of burnt wood. In the middle of that space, by the dim fire, lay Dain.

He turned over on his side with an impatient sigh, and, pillowing his head on his bent arm, lay quietly with his face to the dying fire. The glowing embers shone redly in a small circle, throwing a gleam into his wide-open eyes, and at every deep breath the fine white ash of bygone fires rose in a light cloud before his parted lips, and danced away from the warm glow into the moonbeams pouring down upon Bulangi's clearing. His body was weary with the exertion of the past few days, his mind more weary still with the strain of solitary waiting for his fate. Never before had he felt so helpless. He had heard the report of the gun fired on board the launch, and he knew that his life was in untrustworthy hands, and that his enemies were very near. During the slow hours of the afternoon he roamed about on the edge of the forest, or, hiding in the bushes, watched the creek with unquiet eyes for some sign of danger. He feared not death, yet he desired ardently

to live, for life to him was Nina. She had promised to come, to follow him, to share his danger and his splendour. But with her by his side he cared not for danger, and without her there could be no splendour and no joy in existence.

Crouching in his shady hiding-place, he closed his eyes, trying to evoke the gracious and charming image of the white figure that for him was the beginning and the end of life. With eyes shut tight, his teeth hard set, he tried in a great effort of passionate will to keep his hold on that vision of supreme delight. In vain! His heart grew heavy as the figure of Nina faded away to be replaced by another vision this time — a vision of armed men, of angry faces, of glittering arms — and he seemed to hear the hum of excited and triumphant voices as they discovered him in his hiding-place. Startled by the vividness of his fancy, he would open his eyes, and, leaping out into the sunlight, resume his aimless wanderings around the clearing. As he skirted in his weary march the edge of the forest he glanced now and then into its dark shade, so enticing in its deceptive appearance of coolness, so repellent with its unrelieved gloom, where lay, entombed and rotting, countless generations of trees, and where their successors stood as if mourning, in dark green foliage, immense and helpless, awaiting their turn. Only the parasites seemed to live there in a sinuous rush upwards into the air and sunshine, feeding on the dead and the dying alike, and crowning their victims with pink and blue flowers that gleamed amongst the boughs, incongruous and cruel, like a strident and mocking note in the solemn harmony of the doomed trees.

A man could hide there, thought Dain, as he approached a place where the creepers had been torn and hacked into an archway that might have been the beginning of a path. As he bent down to look through he heard angry grunting, and a sounder of wild pig crashed away in the undergrowth. An acrid smell of damp earth and of decaying leaves took him by the throat, and he drew back with a scared face, as if he had been touched by the breath of Death itself. The very air seemed dead in there — heavy and stagnating, poisoned with the corruption of countless ages. He went on, staggering on his way, urged by the nervous restlessness that made him feel tired yet caused him to loathe the very idea of immobility and repose. Was he a wild man to hide in the woods and perhaps be killed there — in the darkness — where there was no room to breathe? He would wait for his enemies in the sunlight, where he could see the sky and feel the breeze. He

knew how a Malay chief should die. The sombre and desperate fury, that peculiar inheritance of his race, took possession of him, and he glared savagely across the clearing towards the gap in the bushes by the riverside. They would come from there. In imagination he saw them now. He saw the bearded faces and the white jackets of the officers, the light on the levelled barrels of the rifles. What is the bravery of the greatest warrior before the firearms in the hand of a slave? He would walk toward them with a smiling face, with his hands held out in a sign of submission till he was very near them. He would speak friendly words — come nearer yet — yet nearer — so near that they could touch him with their hands and stretch them out to make him a captive. That would be the time: with a shout and a leap he would be in the midst of them, kriss in hand, killing, killing, killing, and would die with the shouts of his enemies in his ears, their warm blood spurting before his eyes.

Carried away by his excitement, he snatched the kriss hidden in his sarong, and, drawing a long breath, rushed forward, struck at the empty air, and fell on his face. He lay as if stunned in the sudden reaction from his exaltation, thinking that, even if he died thus gloriously, it would have to be before he saw Nina. Better so. If he saw her again he felt that death would be too terrible. With horror he, the descendant of Rajahs and of conquerors, had to face the doubt of his own bravery. His desire of life tormented him in a paroxysm of agonising remorse. He had not the courage to stir a limb. He had lost faith in himself, and there was nothing else in him of what makes a man. The suffering remained, for it is ordered that it should abide in the human body even to the last breath, and fear remained. Dimly he could look into the depths of his passionate love, see its strength and its weakness, and felt afraid.

The sun went down slowly. The shadow of the western forest marched over the clearing, covered the man's scorched shoulders with its cool mantle, and went on hurriedly to mingle with the shadows of other forests on the eastern side. The sun lingered for a while amongst the light tracery of the higher branches, as if in friendly reluctance to abandon the body stretched in the green paddy-field. Then Dain, revived by the cool of the evening breeze, sat up and stared round him. As he did so the sun dipped sharply, as if ashamed of being detected in a sympathising attitude, and the clearing, which during the day was all light, became suddenly all darkness, where the fire gleamed like an eye. Dain walked slowly towards the creek,

and, divesting himself of his torn sarong, his only garment, entered the water cautiously. He had had nothing to eat that day, and had not dared show himself in daylight by the water-side to drink. Now, as he swam silently, he swallowed a few mouthfuls of water that lapped about his lips. This did him good, and he walked with greater confidence in himself and others as he returned towards the fire. Had he been betrayed by Lakamba all would have been over by this. He made up a big blaze, and while it lasted dried himself, and then lay down by the embers. He could not sleep, but he felt a great numbness in all his limbs. His restlessness was gone, and he was content to lay still, measuring the time by watching the stars that rose in endless succession above the forests, while the slight puffs of wind under the cloudless sky seemed to fan their twinkle into a greater brightness. Dreamily he assured himself over and over again that she would come, till the certitude crept into his heart and filled him with a great peace. Yes, when the next day broke, they would be together on the great blue sea that was like life — away from the forests that were like death. He murmured the name of Nina into the silent space with a tender smile: this seemed to break the spell of stillness, and far away by the creek a frog croaked loudly as if in answer. A chorus of loud roars and plaintive calls rose from the mud along the line of bushes. He laughed heartily; doubtless it was their love-song. He felt affectionate towards the frogs and listened, pleased with the noisy life near him.

When the moon peeped above the trees he felt the old impatience and the old restlessness steal over him. Why was she so late? True, it was a long way to come with a single paddle. With what skill and what endurance could those small hands manage a heavy paddle! It was very wonderful — such small hands, such soft little palms that knew how to touch his cheek with a feel lighter than the fanning of a butterfly's wing. Wonderful! He lost himself lovingly in the contemplation of this tremendous mystery, and when he looked at the moon again it had risen a hand's breadth above the trees. Would she come? He forced himself to lay still, overcoming the impulse to rise and rush round the clearing again. He turned this way and that; at last, quivering with the effort, he lay on his back, and saw her face among the stars looking down on him.

The croaking of frogs suddenly ceased. With the watchfulness of a hunted man Dain sat up, listening anxiously, and heard several splashes in the water as the frogs took rapid headers into the creek. He knew that they

had been alarmed by something, and stood up suspicious and attentive. A slight grating noise, then the dry sound as of two pieces of wood struck against each other. Somebody was about to land! He took up an armful of brushwood, and, without taking his eyes from the path, held it over the embers of his fire. He waited, undecided, and saw something gleam amongst the bushes; then a white figure came out of the shadows and seemed to float towards him in the pale light. His heart gave a great leap and stood still, then went on shaking his frame in furious beats. He dropped the brushwood upon the glowing coals, and had an impression of shouting her name — of rushing to meet her; yet he emitted no sound, he stirred not an inch, but he stood silent and motionless like chiselled bronze under the moonlight that streamed over his naked shoulders. As he stood still, fighting with his breath, as if bereft of his senses by the intensity of his delight, she walked up to him with quick, resolute steps, and, with the appearance of one about to leap from a dangerous height, threw both her arms round his neck with a sudden gesture. A small blue gleam crept amongst the dry branches, and the crackling of reviving fire was the only sound as they faced each other in the speechless emotion of that meeting; then the dry fuel caught at once, and a bright hot flame shot upwards in a blaze as high as their heads, and in its light they saw each other's eyes.

Neither of them spoke. He was regaining his senses in a slight tremor that ran upwards along his rigid body and hung about his trembling lips. She drew back her head and fastened her eyes on his in one of those long looks that are a woman's most terrible weapon; a look that is more stirring than the closest touch, and more dangerous than the thrust of a dagger, because it also whips the soul out of the body, but leaves the body alive and helpless, to be swayed here and there by the capricious tempests of passion and desire; a look that enwraps the whole body, and that penetrates into the innermost recesses of the being, bringing terrible defeat in the delirious uplifting of accomplished conquest. It has the same meaning for the man of the forests and the sea as for the man threading the paths of the more dangerous wilderness of houses and streets. Men that had felt in their breasts the awful exultation such a look awakens become mere things of to-day — which is paradise; forget yesterday — which was suffering; care not for to-morrow — which may be perdition. They wish to live under that look for ever. It is the look of woman's surrender.

He understood, and, as if suddenly released from his invisible bonds, fell at her feet with a shout of joy, and, embracing her knees, hid his head in the folds of her dress, murmuring disjointed words of gratitude and love. Never before had he felt so proud as now, when at the feet of that woman that half belonged to his enemies. Her fingers played with his hair in an absent-minded caress as she stood absorbed in thought. The thing was done. Her mother was right. The man was her slave. As she glanced down at his kneeling form she felt a great pitying tenderness for that man she was used to call — even in her thoughts — the master of life. She lifted her eyes and looked sadly at the southern heavens under which lay the path of their lives — her own, and that man's at her feet. Did he not say himself is that she was the light of his life? She would be his light and his wisdom; she would be his greatness and his strength; yet hidden from the eyes of all men she would be, above all, his only and lasting weakness. A very woman! In the sublime vanity of her kind she was thinking already of moulding a god from the clay at her feet. A god for others to worship. She was content to see him as he was now, and to feel him quiver at the slightest touch of her light fingers. And while her eyes looked sadly at the southern stars a faint smile seemed to be playing about her firm lips. Who can tell in the fitful light of a camp fire? It might have been a smile of triumph, or of conscious power, or of tender pity, or, perhaps, of love.

She spoke softly to him, and he rose to his feet, putting his arm round her in quiet consciousness of his ownership; she laid her head on his shoulder with a sense of defiance to all the world in the encircling protection of that arm. He was hers with all his qualities and all his faults. His strength and his courage, his recklessness and his daring, his simple wisdom and his savage cunning — all were hers. As they passed together out of the red light of the fire into the silver shower of rays that fell upon the clearing he bent his head over her face, and she saw in his eyes the dreamy intoxication of boundless felicity from the close touch of her slight figure clasped to his side. With a rhythmical swing of their bodies they walked through the light towards the outlying shadows of the forests that seemed to guard their happiness in solemn immobility. Their forms melted in the play of light and shadow at the foot of the big trees, but the murmur of tender words lingered over the empty clearing, grew faint, and died out. A sigh as of immense sorrow passed over the land in the last effort of the dying breeze, and in the deep silence which succeeded, the earth and the heavens were

suddenly hushed up in the mournful contemplation of human love and human blindness.

They walked slowly back to the fire. He made for her a seat out of the dry branches, and, throwing himself down at her feet, lay his head in her lap and gave himself up to the dreamy delight of the passing hour. Their voices rose and fell, tender or animated as they spoke of their love and of their future. She, with a few skilful words spoken from time to time, guided his thoughts, and he let his happiness flow in a stream of talk passionate and tender, grave or menacing, according to the mood which she evoked. He spoke to her of his own island, where the gloomy forests and the muddy rivers were unknown. He spoke of its terraced fields, of the murmuring clear rills of sparkling water that flowed down the sides of great mountains, bringing life to the land and joy to its tillers. And he spoke also of the mountain peak that rising lonely above the belt of trees knew the secrets of the passing clouds, and was the dwelling-place of the mysterious spirit of his race, of the guardian genius of his house. He spoke of vast horizons swept by fierce winds that whistled high above the summits of burning mountains. He spoke of his forefathers that conquered ages ago the island of which he was to be the future ruler. And then as, in her interest, she brought her face nearer to his, he, touching lightly the thick tresses of her long hair, felt a sudden impulse to speak to her of the sea he loved so well; and he told her of its never-ceasing voice, to which he had listened as a child, wondering at its hidden meaning that no living man has penetrated yet; of its enchanting glitter; of its senseless and capricious fury; how its surface was for ever changing, and yet always enticing, while its depths were for ever the same, cold and cruel, and full of the wisdom of destroyed life. He told her how it held men slaves of its charm for a lifetime, and then, regardless of their devotion, swallowed them up, angry at their fear of its mystery, which it would never disclose, not even to those that loved it most. While he talked, Nina's head had been gradually sinking lower, and her face almost touched his now. Her hair was over his eyes, her breath was on his forehead, her arms were about his body. No two beings could be closer to each other, yet she guessed rather than understood the meaning of his last words that came out after a slight hesitation in a faint murmur, dying out imperceptibly into a profound and significant silence: "The sea, O Nina, is like a woman's heart."

She closed his lips with a sudden kiss, and answered in a steady voice —



“But to the men that have no fear, O master of my life, the sea is ever true.”

Over their heads a film of dark, thread-like clouds, looking like immense cobwebs drifting under the stars, darkened the sky with the presage of the coming thunderstorm. From the invisible hills the first distant rumble of thunder came in a prolonged roll which, after tossing about from hill to hill, lost itself in the forests of the Pantai. Dain and Nina stood up, and the former looked at the sky uneasily.

“It is time for Babalatchi to be here,” he said. “The night is more than half gone. Our road is long, and a bullet travels quicker than the best canoe.”

“He will be here before the moon is hidden behind the clouds,” said Nina. “I heard a splash in the water,” she added. “Did you hear it too?”

“Alligator,” answered Dain shortly, with a careless glance towards the creek. “The darker the night,” he continued, “the shorter will be our road, for then we could keep in the current of the main stream, but if it is light — even no more than now — we must follow the small channels of sleeping water, with nothing to help our paddles.”

“Dain,” interposed Nina, earnestly, “it was no alligator. I heard the bushes rustling near the landing-place.”

“Yes,” said Dain, after listening awhile. “It cannot be Babalatchi, who would come in a big war canoe, and openly. Those that are coming, whoever they are, do not wish to make much noise. But you have heard, and now I can see,” he went on quickly. “It is but one man. Stand behind me, Nina. If he is a friend he is welcome; if he is an enemy you shall see him die.”

He laid his hand on his kriss, and awaited the approach of his unexpected visitor. The fire was burning very low, and small clouds — precursors of the storm — crossed the face of the moon in rapid succession, and their flying shadows darkened the clearing. He could not make out who the man might be, but he felt uneasy at the steady advance of the tall figure walking on the path with a heavy tread, and hailed it with a command to stop. The man stopped at some little distance, and Dain expected him to speak, but all he could hear was his deep breathing. Through a break in the flying clouds a sudden and fleeting brightness descended upon the clearing. Before the darkness closed in again, Dain saw a hand holding some glittering object extended towards him, heard Nina’s cry of “Father!” and in an instant the

girl was between him and Almayer's revolver. Nina's loud cry woke up the echoes of the sleeping woods, and the three stood still as if waiting for the return of silence before they would give expression to their various feelings. At the appearance of Nina, Almayer's arm fell by his side, and he made a step forward. Dain pushed the girl gently aside.

"Am I a wild beast that you should try to kill me suddenly and in the dark, Tuan Almayer?" said Dain, breaking the strained silence. "Throw some brushwood on the fire," he went on, speaking to Nina, "while I watch my white friend, lest harm should come to you or to me, O delight of my heart!"

Almayer ground his teeth and raised his arm again. With a quick bound Dain was at his side: there was a short scuffle, during which one chamber of the revolver went off harmlessly, then the weapon, wrenched out of Almayer's hand, whirled through the air and fell in the bushes. The two men stood close together, breathing hard. The replenished fire threw out an unsteady circle of light and shone on the terrified face of Nina, who looked at them with outstretched hands.

"Dain!" she cried out warningly, "Dain!"

He waved his hand towards her in a reassuring gesture, and, turning to Almayer, said with great courtesy —

"Now we may talk, Tuan. It is easy to send out death, but can your wisdom recall the life? She might have been harmed," he continued, indicating Nina. "Your hand shook much; for myself I was not afraid."

"Nina!" exclaimed Almayer, "come to me at once. What is this sudden madness? What bewitched you? Come to your father, and together we shall try to forget this horrible nightmare!"

He opened his arms with the certitude of clasping her to his breast in another second. She did not move. As it dawned upon him that she did not mean to obey he felt a deadly cold creep into his heart, and, pressing the palms of his hands to his temples, he looked down on the ground in mute despair. Dain took Nina by the arm and led her towards her father.

"Speak to him in the language of his people," he said. "He is grieving — as who would not grieve at losing thee, my pearl! Speak to him the last words he shall hear spoken by that voice, which must be very sweet to him, but is all my life to me."

He released her, and, stepping back a few paces out of the circle of light, stood in the darkness looking at them with calm interest. The reflection of a

distant flash of lightning lit up the clouds over their heads, and was followed after a short interval by the faint rumble of thunder, which mingled with Almayer's voice as he began to speak.

"Do you know what you are doing? Do you know what is waiting for you if you follow that man? Have you no pity for yourself? Do you know that you shall be at first his plaything and then a scorned slave, a drudge, and a servant of some new fancy of that man?"

She raised her hand to stop him, and turning her head slightly, asked —

"You hear this Dain! Is it true?"

"By all the gods!" came the impassioned answer from the darkness — "by heaven and earth, by my head and thine I swear: this is a white man's lie. I have delivered my soul into your hands for ever; I breathe with your breath, I see with your eyes, I think with your mind, and I take you into my heart for ever."

"You thief!" shouted the exasperated Almayer.

A deep silence succeeded this outburst, then the voice of Dain was heard again.

"Nay, Tuan," he said in a gentle tone, "that is not true also. The girl came of her own will. I have done no more but to show her my love like a man; she heard the cry of my heart, and she came, and the dowry I have given to the woman you call your wife."

Almayer groaned in his extremity of rage and shame. Nina laid her hand lightly on his shoulder, and the contact, light as the touch of a falling leaf, seemed to calm him. He spoke quickly, and in English this time.

"Tell me," he said — "tell me, what have they done to you, your mother and that man? What made you give yourself up to that savage? For he is a savage. Between him and you there is a barrier that nothing can remove. I can see in your eyes the look of those who commit suicide when they are mad. You are mad. Don't smile. It breaks my heart. If I were to see you drowning before my eyes, and I without the power to help you, I could not suffer a greater torment. Have you forgotten the teaching of so many years?"

"No," she interrupted, "I remember it well. I remember how it ended also. Scorn for scorn, contempt for contempt, hate for hate. I am not of your race. Between your people and me there is also a barrier that nothing can remove. You ask why I want to go, and I ask you why I should stay."

He staggered as if struck in the face, but with a quick, unhesitating grasp she caught him by the arm and steadied him.

"Why you should stay!" he repeated slowly, in a dazed manner, and stopped short, astounded at the completeness of his misfortune.

"You told me yesterday," she went on again, "that I could not understand or see your love for me: it is so. How can I? No two human beings understand each other. They can understand but their own voices. You wanted me to dream your dreams, to see your own visions — the visions of life amongst the white faces of those who cast me out from their midst in angry contempt. But while you spoke I listened to the voice of my own self; then this man came, and all was still; there was only the murmur of his love. You call him a savage! What do you call my mother, your wife?"

"Nina!" cried Almayer, "take your eyes off my face."

She looked down directly, but continued speaking only a little above a whisper.

"In time," she went on, "both our voices, that man's and mine, spoke together in a sweetness that was intelligible to our ears only. You were speaking of gold then, but our ears were filled with the song of our love, and we did not hear you. Then I found that we could see through each other's eyes: that he saw things that nobody but myself and he could see. We entered a land where no one could follow us, and least of all you. Then I began to live."

She paused. Almayer sighed deeply. With her eyes still fixed on the ground she began speaking again.

"And I mean to live. I mean to follow him. I have been rejected with scorn by the white people, and now I am a Malay! He took me in his arms, he laid his life at my feet. He is brave; he will be powerful, and I hold his bravery and his strength in my hand, and I shall make him great. His name shall be remembered long after both our bodies are laid in the dust. I love you no less than I did before, but I shall never leave him, for without him I cannot live."

"If he understood what you have said," answered Almayer, scornfully, "he must be highly flattered. You want him as a tool for some incomprehensible ambition of yours. Enough, Nina. If you do not go down at once to the creek, where Ali is waiting with my canoe, I shall tell him to return to the settlement and bring the Dutch officers here. You cannot escape from this clearing, for I have cast adrift your canoe. If the Dutch

catch this hero of yours they will hang him as sure as I stand here. Now go."

He made a step towards his daughter and laid hold of her by the shoulder, his other hand pointing down the path to the landing-place.

"Beware!" exclaimed Dain; "this woman belongs to me!"

Nina wrenched herself free and looked straight at Almayer's angry face.

"No, I will not go," she said with desperate energy. "If he dies I shall die too!"

"You die!" said Almayer, contemptuously. "Oh, no! You shall live a life of lies and deception till some other vagabond comes along to sing; how did you say that? The song of love to you! Make up your mind quickly."

He waited for a while, and then added meaningly —

"Shall I call out to Ali?"

"Call out," she answered in Malay, "you that cannot be true to your own countrymen. Only a few days ago you were selling the powder for their destruction; now you want to give up to them the man that yesterday you called your friend. Oh, Dain," she said, turning towards the motionless but attentive figure in the darkness, "instead of bringing you life I bring you death, for he will betray unless I leave you for ever!"

Dain came into the circle of light, and, throwing his arm around Nina's neck, whispered in her ear — "I can kill him where he stands, before a sound can pass his lips. For you it is to say yes or no. Babalatchi cannot be far now."

He straightened himself up, taking his arm off her shoulder, and confronted Almayer, who looked at them both with an expression of concentrated fury.

"No!" she cried, clinging to Dain in wild alarm. "No! Kill me! Then perhaps he will let you go. You do not know the mind of a white man. He would rather see me dead than standing where I am. Forgive me, your slave, but you must not." She fell at his feet sobbing violently and repeating, "Kill me! Kill me!"

"I want you alive," said Almayer, speaking also in Malay, with sombre calmness. "You go, or he hangs. Will you obey?"

Dain shook Nina off, and, making a sudden lunge, struck Almayer full in the chest with the handle of his kriss, keeping the point towards himself.

"Hai, look! It was easy for me to turn the point the other way," he said in his even voice. "Go, Tuan Putih," he added with dignity. "I give you your

life, my life, and her life. I am the slave of this woman's desire, and she wills it so."

There was not a glimmer of light in the sky now, and the tops of the trees were as invisible as their trunks, being lost in the mass of clouds that hung low over the woods, the clearing, and the river.

Every outline had disappeared in the intense blackness that seemed to have destroyed everything but space. Only the fire glimmered like a star forgotten in this annihilation of all visible things, and nothing was heard after Dain ceased speaking but the sobs of Nina, whom he held in his arms, kneeling beside the fire. Almayer stood looking down at them in gloomy thoughtfulness. As he was opening his lips to speak they were startled by a cry of warning by the riverside, followed by the splash of many paddles and the sound of voices.

"Babalatchi!" shouted Dain, lifting up Nina as he got upon his feet quickly.

"Ada! Ada!" came the answer from the panting statesman who ran up the path and stood amongst them. "Run to my canoe," he said to Dain excitedly, without taking any notice of Almayer. "Run! we must go. That woman has told them all!"

"What woman?" asked Dain, looking at Nina. Just then there was only one woman in the whole world for him.

"The she-dog with white teeth; the seven times accursed slave of Bulangi. She yelled at Abdulla's gate till she woke up all Sambir. Now the white officers are coming, guided by her and Reshid. If you want to live, do not look at me, but go!"

"How do you know this?" asked Almayer.

"Oh, Tuan! what matters how I know! I have only one eye, but I saw lights in Abdulla's house and in his campong as we were paddling past. I have ears, and while we lay under the bank I have heard the messengers sent out to the white men's house."

"Will you depart without that woman who is my daughter?" said Almayer, addressing Dain, while Babalatchi stamped with impatience, muttering, "Run! Run at once!"

"No," answered Dain, steadily, "I will not go; to no man will I abandon this woman."

"Then kill me and escape yourself," sobbed out Nina.

He clasped her close, looking at her tenderly, and whispered, "We will never part, O Nina!"

"I shall not stay here any longer," broke in Babalatchi, angrily. "This is great foolishness. No woman is worth a man's life. I am an old man, and I know."

He picked up his staff, and, turning to go, looked at Dain as if offering him his last chance of escape. But Dain's face was hidden amongst Nina's black tresses, and he did not see this last appealing glance.

Babalatchi vanished in the darkness. Shortly after his disappearance they heard the war canoe leave the landing-place in the swish of the numerous paddles dipped in the water together. Almost at the same time Ali came up from the riverside, two paddles on his shoulder.

"Our canoe is hidden up the creek, Tuan Almayer," he said, "in the dense bush where the forest comes down to the water. I took it there because I heard from Babalatchi's paddlers that the white men are coming here."

"Wait for me there," said Almayer, "but keep the canoe hidden."

He remained silent, listening to Ali's footsteps, then turned to Nina.

"Nina," he said sadly, "will you have no pity for me?"

There was no answer. She did not even turn her head, which was pressed close to Dain's breast.

He made a movement as if to leave them and stopped. By the dim glow of the burning-out fire he saw their two motionless figures. The woman's back turned to him with the long black hair streaming down over the white dress, and Dain's calm face looking at him above her head.

"I cannot," he muttered to himself. After a long pause he spoke again a little lower, but in an unsteady voice, "It would be too great a disgrace. I am a white man." He broke down completely there, and went on tearfully, "I am a white man, and of good family. Very good family," he repeated, weeping bitterly. "It would be a disgrace . . . all over the islands, . . . the only white man on the east coast. No, it cannot be . . . white men finding my daughter with this Malay. My daughter!" he cried aloud, with a ring of despair in his voice.

He recovered his composure after a while and said distinctly —

"I will never forgive you, Nina — never! If you were to come back to me now, the memory of this night would poison all my life. I shall try to forget. I have no daughter. There used to be a half-caste woman in my house, but she is going even now. You, Dain, or whatever your name may

be, I shall take you and that woman to the island at the mouth of the river myself. Come with me."

He led the way, following the bank as far as the forest. Ali answered to his call, and, pushing their way through the dense bush, they stepped into the canoe hidden under the overhanging branches. Dain laid Nina in the bottom, and sat holding her head on his knees. Almayer and Ali each took up a paddle. As they were going to push out Ali hissed warningly. All listened.

In the great stillness before the bursting out of the thunderstorm they could hear the sound of oars working regularly in their row-locks. The sound approached steadily, and Dain, looking through the branches, could see the faint shape of a big white boat. A woman's voice said in a cautious tone —

"There is the place where you may land white men; a little higher — there!"

The boat was passing them so close in the narrow creek that the blades of the long oars nearly touched the canoe.

"Way enough! Stand by to jump on shore! He is alone and unarmed," was the quiet order in a man's voice, and in Dutch.

Somebody else whispered: "I think I can see a glimmer of a fire through the bush." And then the boat floated past them, disappearing instantly in the darkness.

"Now," whispered Ali, eagerly, "let us push out and paddle away."

The little canoe swung into the stream, and as it sprung forward in response to the vigorous dig of the paddles they could hear an angry shout.

"He is not by the fire. Spread out, men, and search for him!"

Blue lights blazed out in different parts of the clearing, and the shrill voice of a woman cried in accents of rage and pain —

"Too late! O senseless white men! He has escaped!"



## CHAPTER XII.

“That is the place,” said Dain, indicating with the blade of his paddle a small islet about a mile ahead of the canoe — ”that is the place where Babalatchi promised that a boat from the prau would come for me when the sun is overhead. We will wait for that boat there.”

Almayer, who was steering, nodded without speaking, and by a slight sweep of his paddle laid the head of the canoe in the required direction.

They were just leaving the southern outlet of the Pantai, which lay behind them in a straight and long vista of water shining between two walls of thick verdure that ran downwards and towards each other, till at last they joined and sank together in the far-away distance. The sun, rising above the calm waters of the Straits, marked its own path by a streak of light that glided upon the sea and darted up the wide reach of the river, a hurried messenger of light and life to the gloomy forests of the coast; and in this radiance of the sun’s pathway floated the black canoe heading for the islet which lay bathed in sunshine, the yellow sands of its encircling beach shining like an inlaid golden disc on the polished steel of the unwrinkled sea. To the north and south of it rose other islets, joyous in their brilliant colouring of green and yellow, and on the main coast the sombre line of mangrove bushes ended to the southward in the reddish cliffs of Tanjong Mirrah, advancing into the sea, steep and shadowless under the clear, light of the early morning.

The bottom of the canoe grated upon the sand as the little craft ran upon the beach. Ali leaped on shore and held on while Dain stepped out carrying Nina in his arms, exhausted by the events and the long travelling during the night. Almayer was the last to leave the boat, and together with Ali ran it higher up on the beach. Then Ali, tired out by the long paddling, laid down in the shade of the canoe, and incontinently fell asleep. Almayer sat sideways on the gunwale, and with his arms crossed on his breast, looked to the southward upon the sea.

After carefully laying Nina down in the shade of the bushes growing in the middle of the islet, Dain threw himself beside her and watched in silent concern the tears that ran down from under her closed eyelids, and lost themselves in that fine sand upon which they both were lying face to face. These tears and this sorrow were for him a profound and disquieting mystery. Now, when the danger was past, why should she grieve? He

doubted her love no more than he would have doubted the fact of his own existence, but as he lay looking ardently in her face, watching her tears, her parted lips, her very breath, he was uneasily conscious of something in her he could not understand. Doubtless she had the wisdom of perfect beings. He sighed. He felt something invisible that stood between them, something that would let him approach her so far, but no farther. No desire, no longing, no effort of will or length of life could destroy this vague feeling of their difference. With awe but also with great pride he concluded that it was her own incomparable perfection. She was his, and yet she was like a woman from another world. His! His! He exulted in the glorious thought; nevertheless her tears pained him.

With a wisp of her own hair which he took in his hand with timid reverence he tried in an access of clumsy tenderness to dry the tears that trembled on her eyelashes. He had his reward in a fleeting smile that brightened her face for the short fraction of a second, but soon the tears fell faster than ever, and he could bear it no more. He rose and walked towards Almayer, who still sat absorbed in his contemplation of the sea. It was a very, very long time since he had seen the sea — that sea that leads everywhere, brings everything, and takes away so much. He had almost forgotten why he was there, and dreamily he could see all his past life on the smooth and boundless surface that glittered before his eyes.

Dain's hand laid on Almayer's shoulder recalled him with a start from some country very far away indeed. He turned round, but his eyes seemed to look rather at the place where Dain stood than at the man himself. Dain felt uneasy under the unconscious gaze.

"What?" said Almayer.

"She is crying," murmured Dain, softly.

"She is crying! Why?" asked Almayer, indifferently.

"I came to ask you. My Ranee smiles when looking at the man she loves. It is the white woman that is crying now. You would know."

Almayer shrugged his shoulders and turned away again towards the sea.

"Go, Tuan Putih," urged Dain. "Go to her; her tears are more terrible to me than the anger of gods."

"Are they? You will see them more than once. She told me she could not live without you," answered Almayer, speaking without the faintest spark of expression in his face, "so it behoves you to go to her quick, for fear you may find her dead."

He burst into a loud and unpleasant laugh which made Dain stare at him with some apprehension, but got off the gunwale of the boat and moved slowly towards Nina, glancing up at the sun as he walked.

“And you go when the sun is overhead?” he said.

“Yes, Tuan. Then we go,” answered Dain.

“I have not long to wait,” muttered Almayer. “It is most important for me to see you go. Both of you. Most important,” he repeated, stopping short and looking at Dain fixedly.

He went on again towards Nina, and Dain remained behind. Almayer approached his daughter and stood for a time looking down on her. She did not open her eyes, but hearing footsteps near her, murmured in a low sob, “Dain.”

Almayer hesitated for a minute and then sank on the sand by her side. She, not hearing a responsive word, not feeling a touch, opened her eyes — saw her father, and sat up suddenly with a movement of terror.

“Oh, father!” she murmured faintly, and in that word there was expressed regret and fear and dawning hope.

“I shall never forgive you, Nina,” said Almayer, in a dispassionate voice. “You have torn my heart from me while I dreamt of your happiness. You have deceived me. Your eyes that for me were like truth itself lied to me in every glance — for how long? You know that best. When you were caressing my cheek you were counting the minutes to the sunset that was the signal for your meeting with that man — there!”

He ceased, and they both sat silent side by side, not looking at each other, but gazing at the vast expanse of the sea. Almayer’s words had dried Nina’s tears, and her look grew hard as she stared before her into the limitless sheet of blue that shone limpid, unwavering, and steady like heaven itself. He looked at it also, but his features had lost all expression, and life in his eyes seemed to have gone out. The face was a blank, without a sign of emotion, feeling, reason, or even knowledge of itself. All passion, regret, grief, hope, or anger — all were gone, erased by the hand of fate, as if after this last stroke everything was over and there was no need for any record.

Those few who saw Almayer during the short period of his remaining days were always impressed by the sight of that face that seemed to know nothing of what went on within: like the blank wall of a prison enclosing

sin, regrets, and pain, and wasted life, in the cold indifference of mortar and stones.

“What is there to forgive?” asked Nina, not addressing Almayer directly, but more as if arguing with herself. “Can I not live my own life as you have lived yours? The path you would have wished me to follow has been closed to me by no fault of mine.”

“You never told me,” muttered Almayer.

“You never asked me,” she answered, “and I thought you were like the others and did not care. I bore the memory of my humiliation alone, and why should I tell you that it came to me because I am your daughter? I knew you could not avenge me.”

“And yet I was thinking of that only,” interrupted Almayer, “and I wanted to give you years of happiness for the short day of your suffering. I only knew of one way.”

“Ah! but it was not my way!” she replied. “Could you give me happiness without life? Life!” she repeated with sudden energy that sent the word ringing over the sea. “Life that means power and love,” she added in a low voice.

“That!” said Almayer, pointing his finger at Dain standing close by and looking at them in curious wonder.

“Yes, that!” she replied, looking her father full in the face and noticing for the first time with a slight gasp of fear the unnatural rigidity of his features.

“I would have rather strangled you with my own hands,” said Almayer, in an expressionless voice which was such a contrast to the desperate bitterness of his feelings that it surprised even himself. He asked himself who spoke, and, after looking slowly round as if expecting to see somebody, turned again his eyes towards the sea.

“You say that because you do not understand the meaning of my words,” she said sadly. “Between you and my mother there never was any love. When I returned to Sambir I found the place which I thought would be a peaceful refuge for my heart, filled with weariness and hatred — and mutual contempt. I have listened to your voice and to her voice. Then I saw that you could not understand me; for was I not part of that woman? Of her who was the regret and shame of your life? I had to choose — I hesitated. Why were you so blind? Did you not see me struggling before

your eyes? But, when he came, all doubt disappeared, and I saw only the light of the blue and cloudless heaven — ”

“I will tell you the rest,” interrupted Almayer: “when that man came I also saw the blue and the sunshine of the sky. A thunderbolt has fallen from that sky, and suddenly all is still and dark around me for ever. I will never forgive you, Nina; and to-morrow I shall forget you! I shall never forgive you,” he repeated with mechanical obstinacy while she sat, her head bowed down as if afraid to look at her father.

To him it seemed of the utmost importance that he should assure her of his intention of never forgiving. He was convinced that his faith in her had been the foundation of his hopes, the motive of his courage, of his determination to live and struggle, and to be victorious for her sake. And now his faith was gone, destroyed by her own hands; destroyed cruelly, treacherously, in the dark; in the very moment of success. In the utter wreck of his affections and of all his feelings, in the chaotic disorder of his thoughts, above the confused sensation of physical pain that wrapped him up in a sting as of a whiplash curling round him from his shoulders down to his feet, only one idea remained clear and definite — not to forgive her; only one vivid desire — to forget her. And this must be made clear to her — and to himself — by frequent repetition. That was his idea of his duty to himself — to his race — to his respectable connections; to the whole universe unsettled and shaken by this frightful catastrophe of his life. He saw it clearly and believed he was a strong man. He had always prided himself upon his unflinching firmness. And yet he was afraid. She had been all in all to him. What if he should let the memory of his love for her weaken the sense of his dignity? She was a remarkable woman; he could see that; all the latent greatness of his nature — in which he honestly believed — had been transfused into that slight, girlish figure. Great things could be done! What if he should suddenly take her to his heart, forget his shame, and pain, and anger, and — follow her! What if he changed his heart if not his skin and made her life easier between the two loves that would guard her from any mischance! His heart yearned for her. What if he should say that his love for her was greater than . . .

“I will never forgive you, Nina!” he shouted, leaping up madly in the sudden fear of his dream.

This was the last time in his life that he was heard to raise his voice. Henceforth he spoke always in a monotonous whisper like an instrument of

which all the strings but one are broken in a last ringing clamour under a heavy blow.

She rose to her feet and looked at him. The very violence of his cry soothed her in an intuitive conviction of his love, and she hugged to her breast the lamentable remnants of that affection with the unscrupulous greediness of women who cling desperately to the very scraps and rags of love, any kind of love, as a thing that of right belongs to them and is the very breath of their life. She put both her hands on Almayer's shoulders, and looking at him half tenderly, half playfully, she said —

“You speak so because you love me.”

Almayer shook his head.

“Yes, you do,” she insisted softly; then after a short pause she added, “and you will never forget me.”

Almayer shivered slightly. She could not have said a more cruel thing.

“Here is the boat coming now,” said Dain, his arm outstretched towards a black speck on the water between the coast and the islet.

They all looked at it and remained standing in silence till the little canoe came gently on the beach and a man landed and walked towards them. He stopped some distance off and hesitated.

“What news?” asked Dain.

“We have had orders secretly and in the night to take off from this islet a man and a woman. I see the woman. Which of you is the man?”

“Come, delight of my eyes,” said Dain to Nina. “Now we go, and your voice shall be for my ears only. You have spoken your last words to the Tuan Putih, your father. Come.”

She hesitated for a while, looking at Almayer, who kept his eyes steadily on the sea, then she touched his forehead in a lingering kiss, and a tear — one of her tears — fell on his cheek and ran down his immovable face.

“Goodbye,” she whispered, and remained irresolute till he pushed her suddenly into Dain's arms.

“If you have any pity for me,” murmured Almayer, as if repeating some sentence learned by heart, “take that woman away.”

He stood very straight, his shoulders thrown back, his head held high, and looked at them as they went down the beach to the canoe, walking enlaced in each other's arms. He looked at the line of their footsteps marked in the sand. He followed their figures moving in the crude blaze of the vertical sun, in that light violent and vibrating, like a triumphal flourish

of brazen trumpets. He looked at the man's brown shoulders, at the red sarong round his waist; at the tall, slender, dazzling white figure he supported. He looked at the white dress, at the falling masses of the long black hair. He looked at them embarking, and at the canoe growing smaller in the distance, with rage, despair, and regret in his heart, and on his face a peace as that of a carved image of oblivion. Inwardly he felt himself torn to pieces, but Ali — who now aroused — stood close to his master, saw on his features the blank expression of those who live in that hopeless calm which sightless eyes only can give.

The canoe disappeared, and Almayer stood motionless with his eyes fixed on its wake. Ali from under the shade of his hand examined the coast curiously. As the sun declined, the sea-breeze sprang up from the northward and shivered with its breath the glassy surface of the water.

“Dapat!” exclaimed Ali, joyously. “Got him, master! Got prau! Not there! Look more Tanah Mirrah side. Aha! That way! Master, see? Now plain. See?”

Almayer followed Ali's forefinger with his eyes for a long time in vain. At last he sighted a triangular patch of yellow light on the red background of the cliffs of Tanjong Mirrah. It was the sail of the prau that had caught the sunlight and stood out, distinct with its gay tint, on the dark red of the cape. The yellow triangle crept slowly from cliff to cliff, till it cleared the last point of land and shone brilliantly for a fleeting minute on the blue of the open sea. Then the prau bore up to the southward: the light went out of the sail, and all at once the vessel itself disappeared, vanishing in the shadow of the steep headland that looked on, patient and lonely, watching over the empty sea.

Almayer never moved. Round the little islet the air was full of the talk of the rippling water. The crested wavelets ran up the beach audaciously, joyously, with the lightness of young life, and died quickly, unresistingly, and graciously, in the wide curves of transparent foam on the yellow sand. Above, the white clouds sailed rapidly southwards as if intent upon overtaking something. Ali seemed anxious.

“Master,” he said timidly, “time to get house now. Long way off to pull. All ready, sir.”

“Wait,” whispered Almayer.

Now she was gone his business was to forget, and he had a strange notion that it should be done systematically and in order. To Ali's great dismay he

fell on his hands and knees, and, creeping along the sand, erased carefully with his hand all traces of Nina's footsteps. He piled up small heaps of sand, leaving behind him a line of miniature graves right down to the water. After burying the last slight imprint of Nina's slipper he stood up, and, turning his face towards the headland where he had last seen the prau, he made an effort to shout out loud again his firm resolve to never forgive. Ali watching him uneasily saw only his lips move, but heard no sound. He brought his foot down with a stamp. He was a firm man — firm as a rock. Let her go. He never had a daughter. He would forget. He was forgetting already.

Ali approached him again, insisting on immediate departure, and this time he consented, and they went together towards their canoe, Almayer leading. For all his firmness he looked very dejected and feeble as he dragged his feet slowly through the sand on the beach; and by his side — invisible to Ali — stalked that particular fiend whose mission it is to jog the memories of men, lest they should forget the meaning of life. He whispered into Almayer's ear a childish prattle of many years ago. Almayer, his head bent on one side, seemed to listen to his invisible companion, but his face was like the face of a man that has died struck from behind — a face from which all feelings and all expression are suddenly wiped off by the hand of unexpected death.

\* \* \* \* \*

They slept on the river that night, mooring their canoe under the bushes and lying down in the bottom side by side, in the absolute exhaustion that kills hunger, thirst, all feeling and all thought in the overpowering desire for that deep sleep which is like the temporary annihilation of the tired body. Next day they started again and fought doggedly with the current all the morning, till about midday they reached the settlement and made fast their little craft to the jetty of Lingard and Co. Almayer walked straight to the house, and Ali followed, paddles on shoulder, thinking that he would like to eat something. As they crossed the front courtyard they noticed the abandoned look of the place. Ali looked in at the different servants' houses: all were empty. In the back courtyard there was the same absence of sound and life. In the cooking-shed the fire was out and the black embers were cold. A tall, lean man came stealthily out of the banana plantation, and went away rapidly across the open space looking at them with big,



frightened eyes over his shoulder. Some vagabond without a master; there were many such in the settlement, and they looked upon Almayer as their patron. They prowled about his premises and picked their living there, sure that nothing worse could befall them than a shower of curses when they got in the way of the white man, whom they trusted and liked, and called a fool amongst themselves. In the house, which Almayer entered through the back verandah, the only living thing that met his eyes was his small monkey which, hungry and unnoticed for the last two days, began to cry and complain in monkey language as soon as it caught sight of the familiar face. Almayer soothed it with a few words and ordered Ali to bring in some bananas, then while Ali was gone to get them he stood in the doorway of the front verandah looking at the chaos of overturned furniture. Finally he picked up the table and sat on it while the monkey let itself down from the roof-stick by its chain and perched on his shoulder. When the bananas came they had their breakfast together; both hungry, both eating greedily and showering the skins round them recklessly, in the trusting silence of perfect friendship. Ali went away, grumbling, to cook some rice himself, for all the women about the house had disappeared; he did not know where. Almayer did not seem to care, and, after he finished eating, he sat on the table swinging his legs and staring at the river as if lost in thought.

After some time he got up and went to the door of a room on the right of the verandah. That was the office. The office of Lingard and Co. He very seldom went in there. There was no business now, and he did not want an office. The door was locked, and he stood biting his lower lip, trying to think of the place where the key could be. Suddenly he remembered: in the women's room hung upon a nail. He went over to the doorway where the red curtain hung down in motionless folds, and hesitated for a moment before pushing it aside with his shoulder as if breaking down some solid obstacle. A great square of sunshine entering through the window lay on the floor. On the left he saw Mrs. Almayer's big wooden chest, the lid thrown back, empty; near it the brass nails of Nina's European trunk shone in the large initials N. A. on the cover. A few of Nina's dresses hung on wooden pegs, stiffened in a look of offended dignity at their abandonment. He remembered making the pegs himself and noticed that they were very good pegs. Where was the key? He looked round and saw it near the door where he stood. It was red with rust. He felt very much annoyed at that, and directly afterwards wondered at his own feeling. What did it matter?

There soon would be no key — no door — nothing! He paused, key in hand, and asked himself whether he knew well what he was about. He went out again on the verandah and stood by the table thinking. The monkey jumped down, and, snatching a banana skin, absorbed itself in picking it to shreds industriously.

“Forget!” muttered Almayer, and that word started before him a sequence of events, a detailed programme of things to do. He knew perfectly well what was to be done now. First this, then that, and then forgetfulness would come easy. Very easy. He had a fixed idea that if he should not forget before he died he would have to remember to all eternity. Certain things had to be taken out of his life, stamped out of sight, destroyed, forgotten. For a long time he stood in deep thought, lost in the alarming possibilities of unconquerable memory, with the fear of death and eternity before him. “Eternity!” he said aloud, and the sound of that word recalled him out of his reverie. The monkey started, dropped the skin, and grinned up at him amicably.

He went towards the office door and with some difficulty managed to open it. He entered in a cloud of dust that rose under his feet.

Books open with torn pages bestrewed the floor; other books lay about grimy and black, looking as if they had never been opened. Account books. In those books he had intended to keep day by day a record of his rising fortunes. Long time ago. A very long time. For many years there has been no record to keep on the blue and red ruled pages! In the middle of the room the big office desk, with one of its legs broken, careened over like the hull of a stranded ship; most of the drawers had fallen out, disclosing heaps of paper yellow with age and dirt. The revolving office chair stood in its place, but he found the pivot set fast when he tried to turn it. No matter. He desisted, and his eyes wandered slowly from object to object. All those things had cost a lot of money at the time. The desk, the paper, the torn books, and the broken shelves, all under a thick coat of dust. The very dust and bones of a dead and gone business. He looked at all these things, all that was left after so many years of work, of strife, of weariness, of discouragement, conquered so many times. And all for what? He stood thinking mournfully of his past life till he heard distinctly the clear voice of a child speaking amongst all this wreck, ruin, and waste. He started with a great fear in his heart, and feverishly began to rake in the papers scattered on the floor, broke the chair into bits, splintered the

drawers by banging them against the desk, and made a big heap of all that rubbish in one corner of the room.

He came out quickly, slammed the door after him, turned the key, and, taking it out, ran to the front rail of the verandah, and, with a great swing of his arm, sent the key whizzing into the river. This done he went back slowly to the table, called the monkey down, unhooked its chain, and induced it to remain quiet in the breast of his jacket. Then he sat again on the table and looked fixedly at the door of the room he had just left. He listened also intently. He heard a dry sound of rustling; sharp cracks as of dry wood snapping; a whirr like of a bird's wings when it rises suddenly, and then he saw a thin stream of smoke come through the keyhole. The monkey struggled under his coat. Ali appeared with his eyes starting out of his head.

"Master! House burn!" he shouted.

Almayer stood up holding by the table. He could hear the yells of alarm and surprise in the settlement. Ali wrung his hands, lamenting aloud.

"Stop this noise, fool!" said Almayer, quietly. "Pick up my hammock and blankets and take them to the other house. Quick, now!"

The smoke burst through the crevices of the door, and Ali, with the hammock in his arms, cleared in one bound the steps of the verandah.

"It has caught well," muttered Almayer to himself. "Be quiet, Jack," he added, as the monkey made a frantic effort to escape from its confinement.

The door split from top to bottom, and a rush of flame and smoke drove Almayer away from the table to the front rail of the verandah. He held on there till a great roar overhead assured him that the roof was ablaze. Then he ran down the steps of the verandah, coughing, half choked with the smoke that pursued him in bluish wreaths curling about his head.

On the other side of the ditch, separating Almayer's courtyard from the settlement, a crowd of the inhabitants of Sambir looked at the burning house of the white man. In the calm air the flames rushed up on high, coloured pale brick-red, with violet gleams in the strong sunshine. The thin column of smoke ascended straight and unwavering till it lost itself in the clear blue of the sky, and, in the great empty space between the two houses the interested spectators could see the tall figure of the Tuan Putih, with bowed head and dragging feet, walking slowly away from the fire towards the shelter of "Almayer's Folly."

In that manner did Almayer move into his new house. He took possession of the new ruin, and in the undying folly of his heart set himself to wait in anxiety and pain for that forgetfulness which was so slow to come. He had done all he could. Every vestige of Nina's existence had been destroyed; and now with every sunrise he asked himself whether the longed-for oblivion would come before sunset, whether it would come before he died? He wanted to live only long enough to be able to forget, and the tenacity of his memory filled him with dread and horror of death; for should it come before he could accomplish the purpose of his life he would have to remember for ever! He also longed for loneliness. He wanted to be alone. But he was not. In the dim light of the rooms with their closed shutters, in the bright sunshine of the verandah, wherever he went, whichever way he turned, he saw the small figure of a little maiden with pretty olive face, with long black hair, her little pink robe slipping off her shoulders, her big eyes looking up at him in the tender trustfulness of a petted child. Ali did not see anything, but he also was aware of the presence of a child in the house. In his long talks by the evening fires of the settlement he used to tell his intimate friends of Almayer's strange doings. His master had turned sorcerer in his old age. Ali said that often when Tuan Putih had retired for the night he could hear him talking to something in his room. Ali thought that it was a spirit in the shape of a child. He knew his master spoke to a child from certain expressions and words his master used. His master spoke in Malay a little, but mostly in English, which he, Ali, could understand. Master spoke to the child at times tenderly, then he would weep over it, laugh at it, scold it, beg of it to go away; curse it. It was a bad and stubborn spirit. Ali thought his master had imprudently called it up, and now could not get rid of it. His master was very brave; he was not afraid to curse this spirit in the very Presence; and once he fought with it. Ali had heard a great noise as of running about inside the room and groans. His master groaned. Spirits do not groan. His master was brave, but foolish. You cannot hurt a spirit. Ali expected to find his master dead next morning, but he came out very early, looking much older than the day before, and had no food all day.

So far Ali to the settlement. To Captain Ford he was much more communicative, for the good reason that Captain Ford had the purse and gave orders. On each of Ford's monthly visits to Sambir Ali had to go on board with a report about the inhabitant of "Almayer's Folly." On his first

visit to Sambir, after Nina's departure, Ford had taken charge of Almayer's affairs. They were not cumbersome. The shed for the storage of goods was empty, the boats had disappeared, appropriated — generally in night-time — by various citizens of Sambir in need of means of transport. During a great flood the jetty of Lingard and Co. left the bank and floated down the river, probably in search of more cheerful surroundings; even the flock of geese — "the only geese on the east coast" — departed somewhere, preferring the unknown dangers of the bush to the desolation of their old home. As time went on the grass grew over the black patch of ground where the old house used to stand, and nothing remained to mark the place of the dwelling that had sheltered Almayer's young hopes, his foolish dream of splendid future, his awakening, and his despair.

Ford did not often visit Almayer, for visiting Almayer was not a pleasant task. At first he used to respond listlessly to the old seaman's boisterous inquiries about his health; he even made efforts to talk, asking for news in a voice that made it perfectly clear that no news from this world had any interest for him. Then gradually he became more silent — not sulkily — but as if he was forgetting how to speak. He used also to hide in the darkest rooms of the house, where Ford had to seek him out guided by the patter of the monkey galloping before him. The monkey was always there to receive and introduce Ford. The little animal seemed to have taken complete charge of its master, and whenever it wished for his presence on the verandah it would tug perseveringly at his jacket, till Almayer obediently came out into the sunshine, which he seemed to dislike so much.

One morning Ford found him sitting on the floor of the verandah, his back against the wall, his legs stretched stiffly out, his arms hanging by his side. His expressionless face, his eyes open wide with immobile pupils, and the rigidity of his pose, made him look like an immense man-doll broken and flung there out of the way. As Ford came up the steps he turned his head slowly.

"Ford," he murmured from the floor, "I cannot forget."

"Can't you?" said Ford, innocently, with an attempt at joviality: "I wish I was like you. I am losing my memory — age, I suppose; only the other day my mate —"

He stopped, for Almayer had got up, stumbled, and steadied himself on his friend's arm.

“Hallo! You are better to-day. Soon be all right,” said Ford, cheerfully, but feeling rather scared.

Almayer let go his arm and stood very straight with his head up and shoulders thrown back, looking stonily at the multitude of suns shining in ripples of the river. His jacket and his loose trousers flapped in the breeze on his thin limbs.

“Let her go!” he whispered in a grating voice. “Let her go. To-morrow I shall forget. I am a firm man, . . . firm as a . . . rock, . . . firm . . .”

Ford looked at his face — and fled. The skipper was a tolerably firm man himself — as those who had sailed with him could testify — but Almayer’s firmness was altogether too much for his fortitude.

Next time the steamer called in Sambir Ali came on board early with a grievance. He complained to Ford that Jim-Eng the Chinaman had invaded Almayer’s house, and actually had lived there for the last month.

“And they both smoke,” added Ali.

“Phew! Opium, you mean?”

Ali nodded, and Ford remained thoughtful; then he muttered to himself, “Poor devil! The sooner the better now.” In the afternoon he walked up to the house.

“What are you doing here?” he asked of Jim-Eng, whom he found strolling about on the verandah.

Jim-Eng explained in bad Malay, and speaking in that monotonous, uninterested voice of an opium smoker pretty far gone, that his house was old, the roof leaked, and the floor was rotten. So, being an old friend for many, many years, he took his money, his opium, and two pipes, and came to live in this big house.

“There is plenty of room. He smokes, and I live here. He will not smoke long,” he concluded.

“Where is he now?” asked Ford.

“Inside. He sleeps,” answered Jim-Eng, wearily. Ford glanced in through the doorway. In the dim light of the room he could see Almayer lying on his back on the floor, his head on a wooden pillow, the long white beard scattered over his breast, the yellow skin of the face, the half-closed eyelids showing the whites of the eye only. . . .

He shuddered and turned away. As he was leaving he noticed a long strip of faded red silk, with some Chinese letters on it, which Jim-Eng had just fastened to one of the pillars.

"What's that?" he asked.

"That," said Jim-Eng, in his colourless voice, "that is the name of the house. All the same like my house. Very good name."

Ford looked at him for awhile and went away. He did not know what the crazy-looking maze of the Chinese inscription on the red silk meant. Had he asked Jim-Eng, that patient Chinaman would have informed him with proper pride that its meaning was: "House of heavenly delight."

In the evening of the same day Babalatchi called on Captain Ford. The captain's cabin opened on deck, and Babalatchi sat astride on the high step, while Ford smoked his pipe on the settee inside. The steamer was leaving next morning, and the old statesman came as usual for a last chat.

"We had news from Bali last moon," remarked Babalatchi. "A grandson is born to the old Rajah, and there is great rejoicing."

Ford sat up interested.

"Yes," went on Babalatchi, in answer to Ford's look. "I told him. That was before he began to smoke."

"Well, and what?" asked Ford.

"I escaped with my life," said Babalatchi, with perfect gravity, "because the white man is very weak and fell as he rushed upon me." Then, after a pause, he added, "She is mad with joy."

"Mrs. Almayer, you mean?"

"Yes, she lives in our Rajah's house. She will not die soon. Such women live a long time," said Babalatchi, with a slight tinge of regret in his voice. "She has dollars, and she has buried them, but we know where. We had much trouble with those people. We had to pay a fine and listen to threats from the white men, and now we have to be careful." He sighed and remained silent for a long while. Then with energy:

"There will be fighting. There is a breath of war on the islands. Shall I live long enough to see? . . . Ah, Tuan!" he went on, more quietly, "the old times were best. Even I have sailed with Lanun men, and boarded in the night silent ships with white sails. That was before an English Rajah ruled in Kuching. Then we fought amongst ourselves and were happy. Now when we fight with you we can only die!"

He rose to go. "Tuan," he said, "you remember the girl that man Bulangi had? Her that caused all the trouble?"

"Yes," said Ford. "What of her?"

“She grew thin and could not work. Then Bulangi, who is a thief and a pig-eater, gave her to me for fifty dollars. I sent her amongst my women to grow fat. I wanted to hear the sound of her laughter, but she must have been bewitched, and . . . she died two days ago. Nay, Tuan. Why do you speak bad words? I am old — that is true — but why should I not like the sight of a young face and the sound of a young voice in my house?” He paused, and then added with a little mournful laugh, “I am like a white man talking too much of what is not men’s talk when they speak to one another.”

And he went off looking very sad.

\* \* \* \* \*

The crowd massed in a semicircle before the steps of “Almayer’s Folly,” swayed silently backwards and forwards, and opened out before the group of white-robed and turbaned men advancing through the grass towards the house. Abdulla walked first, supported by Reshid and followed by all the Arabs in Sambir. As they entered the lane made by the respectful throng there was a subdued murmur of voices, where the word “Mati” was the only one distinctly audible. Abdulla stopped and looked round slowly.

“Is he dead?” he asked.

“May you live!” answered the crowd in one shout, and then there succeeded a breathless silence.

Abdulla made a few paces forward and found himself for the last time face to face with his old enemy. Whatever he might have been once he was not dangerous now, lying stiff and lifeless in the tender light of the early day. The only white man on the east coast was dead, and his soul, delivered from the trammels of his earthly folly, stood now in the presence of Infinite Wisdom. On the upturned face there was that serene look which follows the sudden relief from anguish and pain, and it testified silently before the cloudless heaven that the man lying there under the gaze of indifferent eyes had been permitted to forget before he died.

Abdulla looked down sadly at this Infidel he had fought so long and had bested so many times. Such was the reward of the Faithful! Yet in the Arab’s old heart there was a feeling of regret for that thing gone out of his life. He was leaving fast behind him friendships, and enmities, successes, and disappointments — all that makes up a life; and before him was only the end. Prayer would fill up the remainder of the days allotted to the True Believer! He took in his hand the beads that hung at his waist.



“I found him here, like this, in the morning,” said Ali, in a low and awed voice.

Abdulla glanced coldly once more at the serene face.

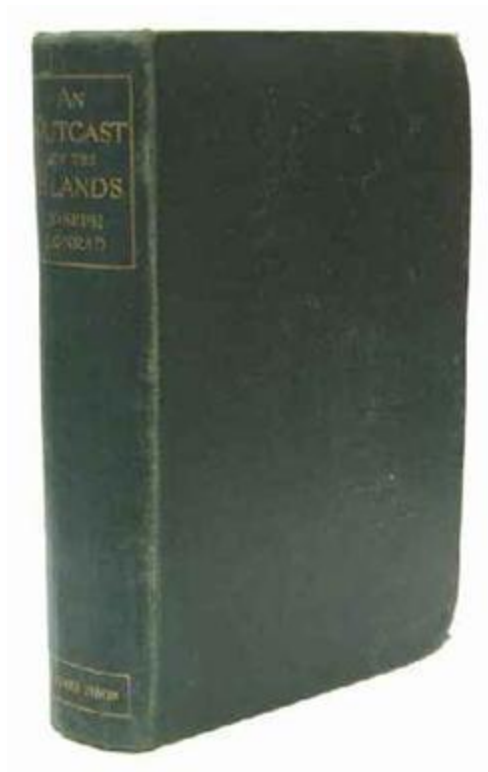
“Let us go,” he said, addressing Reshid.

And as they passed through the crowd that fell back before them, the beads in Abdulla’s hand clicked, while in a solemn whisper he breathed out piously the name of Allah! The Merciful! The Compassionate!

## ***AN OUTCAST OF THE ISLANDS***



This is Conrad's second novel, published in 1896, and inspired by his experiences as a mate of the steamer the *Vigar*.



*The first edition*

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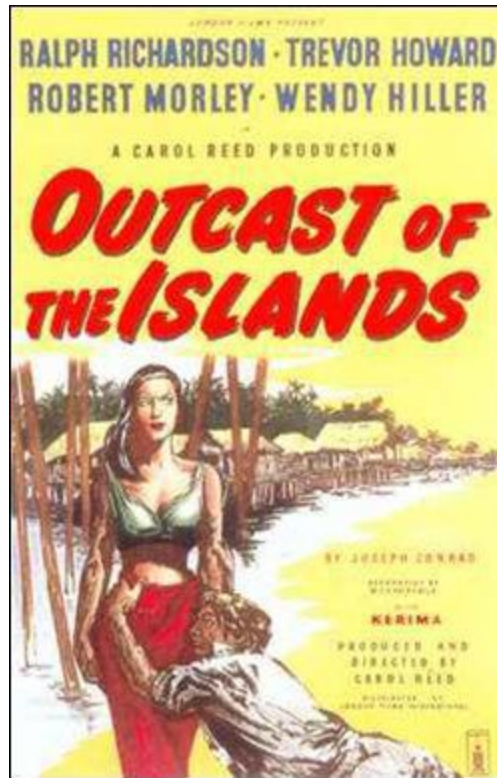
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*The 1951 film adaptation*

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

“An Outcast of the Islands” is my second novel in the absolute sense of the word; second in conception, second in execution, second as it were in its essence. There was no hesitation, half-formed plan, vague idea, or the vaguest reverie of anything else between it and “Almayer’s Folly.” The only doubt I suffered from, after the publication of “Almayer’s Folly,” was whether I should write another line for print. Those days, now grown so dim, had their poignant moments. Neither in my mind nor in my heart had I then given up the sea. In truth I was clinging to it desperately, all the more desperately because, against my will, I could not help feeling that there was something changed in my relation to it. “Almayer’s Folly,” had been finished and done with. The mood itself was gone. But it had left the memory of an experience that, both in thought and emotion was unconnected with the sea, and I suppose that part of my moral being which is rooted in consistency was badly shaken. I was a victim of contrary stresses which produced a state of immobility. I gave myself up to indolence. Since it was impossible for me to face both ways I had elected to face nothing. The discovery of new values in life is a very chaotic experience; there is a tremendous amount of jostling and confusion and a momentary feeling of darkness. I let my spirit float supine over that chaos.

A phrase of Edward Garnett’s is, as a matter of fact, responsible for this book. The first of the friends I made for myself by my pen it was but natural that he should be the recipient, at that time, of my confidences. One evening when we had dined together and he had listened to the account of my perplexities (I fear he must have been growing a little tired of them) he pointed out that there was no need to determine my future absolutely. Then he added: “You have the style, you have the temperament; why not write another?” I believe that as far as one man may wish to influence another man’s life Edward Garnett had a great desire that I should go on writing. At that time, and I may say, ever afterwards, he was always very patient and gentle with me. What strikes me most however in the phrase quoted above which was offered to me in a tone of detachment is not its gentleness but its effective wisdom. Had he said, “Why not go on writing,” it is very probable he would have scared me away from pen and ink for ever; but there was nothing either to frighten one or arouse one’s antagonism in the mere

suggestion to “write another.” And thus a dead point in the revolution of my affairs was insidiously got over. The word “another” did it. At about eleven o’clock of a nice London night, Edward and I walked along interminable streets talking of many things, and I remember that on getting home I sat down and wrote about half a page of “An Outcast of the Islands” before I slept. This was committing myself definitely, I won’t say to another life, but to another book. There is apparently something in my character which will not allow me to abandon for good any piece of work I have begun. I have laid aside many beginnings. I have laid them aside with sorrow, with disgust, with rage, with melancholy and even with self-contempt; but even at the worst I had an uneasy consciousness that I would have to go back to them.

“An Outcast of the Islands” belongs to those novels of mine that were never laid aside; and though it brought me the qualification of “exotic writer” I don’t think the charge was at all justified.

For the life of me I don’t see that there is the slightest exotic spirit in the conception or style of that novel. It is certainly the most tropical of my eastern tales. The mere scenery got a great hold on me as I went on, perhaps because (I may just as well confess that) the story itself was never very near my heart.

It engaged my imagination much more than my affection. As to my feeling for Willems it was but the regard one cannot help having for one’s own creation. Obviously I could not be indifferent to a man on whose head I had brought so much evil simply by imagining him such as he appears in the novel — and that, too, on a very slight foundation.

The man who suggested Willems to me was not particularly interesting in himself. My interest was aroused by his dependent position, his strange, dubious status of a mistrusted, disliked, worn-out European living on the reluctant toleration of that Settlement hidden in the heart of the forest-land, up that sombre stream which our ship was the only white men’s ship to visit. With his hollow, clean-shaved cheeks, a heavy grey moustache and eyes without any expression whatever, clad always in a spotless sleeping suit much be-frogged in front, which left his lean neck wholly uncovered, and with his bare feet in a pair of straw slippers, he wandered silently amongst the houses in daylight, almost as dumb as an animal and apparently much more homeless. I don’t know what he did with himself at night. He must have had a place, a hut, a palm-leaf shed, some sort of hovel

where he kept his razor and his change of sleeping suits. An air of futile mystery hung over him, something not exactly dark but obviously ugly. The only definite statement I could extract from anybody was that it was he who had “brought the Arabs into the river.” That must have happened many years before. But how did he bring them into the river? He could hardly have done it in his arms like a lot of kittens. I knew that Almayer founded the chronology of all his misfortunes on the date of that fateful advent; and yet the very first time we dined with Almayer there was Willems sitting at table with us in the manner of the skeleton at the feast, obviously shunned by everybody, never addressed by any one, and for all recognition of his existence getting now and then from Almayer a venomous glance which I observed with great surprise. In the course of the whole evening he ventured one single remark which I didn’t catch because his articulation was imperfect, as of a man who had forgotten how to speak. I was the only person who seemed aware of the sound. Willems subsided. Presently he retired, pointedly unnoticed — into the forest maybe? Its immensity was there, within three hundred yards of the verandah, ready to swallow up anything. Almayer conversing with my captain did not stop talking while he glared angrily at the retreating back. Didn’t that fellow bring the Arabs into the river! Nevertheless Willems turned up next morning on Almayer’s verandah. From the bridge of the steamer I could see plainly these two, breakfasting together, *tete a tete* and, I suppose, in dead silence, one with his air of being no longer interested in this world and the other raising his eyes now and then with intense dislike.

It was clear that in those days Willems lived on Almayer’s charity. Yet on returning two months later to Sambir I heard that he had gone on an expedition up the river in charge of a steam-launch belonging to the Arabs, to make some discovery or other. On account of the strange reluctance that everyone manifested to talk about Willems it was impossible for me to get at the rights of that transaction. Moreover, I was a newcomer, the youngest of the company, and, I suspect, not judged quite fit as yet for a full confidence. I was not much concerned about that exclusion. The faint suggestion of plots and mysteries pertaining to all matters touching Almayer’s affairs amused me vastly. Almayer was obviously very much affected. I believe he missed Willems immensely. He wore an air of sinister preoccupation and talked confidentially with my captain. I could catch only snatches of mumbled sentences. Then one morning as I came along the



deck to take my place at the breakfast table Almayer checked himself in his low-toned discourse. My captain's face was perfectly impenetrable. There was a moment of profound silence and then as if unable to contain himself Almayer burst out in a loud vicious tone:

“One thing's certain; if he finds anything worth having up there they will poison him like a dog.”

Disconnected though it was, that phrase, as food for thought, was distinctly worth hearing. We left the river three days afterwards and I never returned to Sambir; but whatever happened to the protagonist of my Willems nobody can deny that I have recorded for him a less squalid fate.

J. C. 1919.

# **AN OUTCAST OF THE ISLANDS**

## **PART I**

## CHAPTER ONE

When he stepped off the straight and narrow path of his peculiar honesty, it was with an inward assertion of unflinching resolve to fall back again into the monotonous but safe stride of virtue as soon as his little excursion into the wayside quagmires had produced the desired effect. It was going to be a short episode — a sentence in brackets, so to speak — in the flowing tale of his life: a thing of no moment, to be done unwillingly, yet neatly, and to be quickly forgotten. He imagined that he could go on afterwards looking at the sunshine, enjoying the shade, breathing in the perfume of flowers in the small garden before his house. He fancied that nothing would be changed, that he would be able as heretofore to tyrannize good-humouredly over his half-caste wife, to notice with tender contempt his pale yellow child, to patronize loftily his dark-skinned brother-in-law, who loved pink neckties and wore patent-leather boots on his little feet, and was so humble before the white husband of the lucky sister. Those were the delights of his life, and he was unable to conceive that the moral significance of any act of his could interfere with the very nature of things, could dim the light of the sun, could destroy the perfume of the flowers, the submission of his wife, the smile of his child, the awe-struck respect of Leonard da Souza and of all the Da Souza family. That family's admiration was the great luxury of his life. It rounded and completed his existence in a perpetual assurance of unquestionable superiority. He loved to breathe the coarse incense they offered before the shrine of the successful white man; the man that had done them the honour to marry their daughter, sister, cousin; the rising man sure to climb very high; the confidential clerk of Hudig & Co. They were a numerous and an unclean crowd, living in ruined bamboo houses, surrounded by neglected compounds, on the outskirts of Macassar. He kept them at arm's length and even further off, perhaps, having no illusions as to their worth. They were a half-caste, lazy lot, and he saw them as they were — ragged, lean, unwashed, undersized men of various ages, shuffling about aimlessly in slippers; motionless old women who looked like monstrous bags of pink calico stuffed with shapeless lumps of fat, and deposited askew upon decaying rattan chairs in shady corners of dusty verandahs; young women, slim and yellow, big-eyed, long-haired, moving languidly amongst the dirt and rubbish of their dwellings as if every step they took was going to be their very last. He heard their shrill quarrellings, the squalling of their

children, the grunting of their pigs; he smelt the odours of the heaps of garbage in their courtyards: and he was greatly disgusted. But he fed and clothed that shabby multitude; those degenerate descendants of Portuguese conquerors; he was their providence; he kept them singing his praises in the midst of their laziness, of their dirt, of their immense and hopeless squalor: and he was greatly delighted. They wanted much, but he could give them all they wanted without ruining himself. In exchange he had their silent fear, their loquacious love, their noisy veneration. It is a fine thing to be a providence, and to be told so on every day of one's life. It gives one a feeling of enormously remote superiority, and Willems revelled in it. He did not analyze the state of his mind, but probably his greatest delight lay in the unexpressed but intimate conviction that, should he close his hand, all those admiring human beings would starve. His munificence had demoralized them. An easy task. Since he descended amongst them and married Joanna they had lost the little aptitude and strength for work they might have had to put forth under the stress of extreme necessity. They lived now by the grace of his will. This was power. Willems loved it. In another, and perhaps a lower plane, his days did not want for their less complex but more obvious pleasures. He liked the simple games of skill — billiards; also games not so simple, and calling for quite another kind of skill — poker. He had been the aptest pupil of a steady-eyed, sententious American, who had drifted mysteriously into Macassar from the wastes of the Pacific, and, after knocking about for a time in the eddies of town life, had drifted out enigmatically into the sunny solitudes of the Indian Ocean. The memory of the Californian stranger was perpetuated in the game of poker — which became popular in the capital of Celebes from that time — and in a powerful cocktail, the recipe for which is transmitted — in the Kwang-tung dialect — from head boy to head boy of the Chinese servants in the Sunda Hotel even to this day. Willems was a connoisseur in the drink and an adept at the game. Of those accomplishments he was moderately proud. Of the confidence reposed in him by Hudig — the master — he was boastfully and obtrusively proud. This arose from his great benevolence, and from an exalted sense of his duty to himself and the world at large. He experienced that irresistible impulse to impart information which is inseparable from gross ignorance. There is always some one thing which the ignorant man knows, and that thing is the only thing worth knowing; it fills the ignorant man's universe. Willems knew all about himself. On the day when, with

many misgivings, he ran away from a Dutch East-Indiaman in Samarang roads, he had commenced that study of himself, of his own ways, of his own abilities, of those fate-compelling qualities of his which led him toward that lucrative position which he now filled. Being of a modest and diffident nature, his successes amazed, almost frightened him, and ended — as he got over the succeeding shocks of surprise — by making him ferociously conceited. He believed in his genius and in his knowledge of the world. Others should know of it also; for their own good and for his greater glory. All those friendly men who slapped him on the back and greeted him noisily should have the benefit of his example. For that he must talk. He talked to them conscientiously. In the afternoon he expounded his theory of success over the little tables, dipping now and then his moustache in the crushed ice of the cocktails; in the evening he would often hold forth, cue in hand, to a young listener across the billiard table. The billiard balls stood still as if listening also, under the vivid brilliance of the shaded oil lamps hung low over the cloth; while away in the shadows of the big room the Chinaman marker would lean wearily against the wall, the blank mask of his face looking pale under the mahogany marking-board; his eyelids dropped in the drowsy fatigue of late hours and in the buzzing monotony of the unintelligible stream of words poured out by the white man. In a sudden pause of the talk the game would recommence with a sharp click and go on for a time in the flowing soft whirr and the subdued thuds as the balls rolled zig-zagging towards the inevitably successful cannon. Through the big windows and the open doors the salt dampness of the sea, the vague smell of mould and flowers from the garden of the hotel drifted in and mingled with the odour of lamp oil, growing heavier as the night advanced. The players' heads dived into the light as they bent down for the stroke, springing back again smartly into the greenish gloom of broad lamp-shades; the clock ticked methodically; the unmoved Chinaman continuously repeated the score in a lifeless voice, like a big talking doll — and Willems would win the game. With a remark that it was getting late, and that he was a married man, he would say a patronizing good-night and step out into the long, empty street. At that hour its white dust was like a dazzling streak of moonlight where the eye sought repose in the dimmer gleam of rare oil lamps. Willems walked homewards, following the line of walls overtopped by the luxuriant vegetation of the front gardens. The houses right and left were hidden behind the black masses of flowering shrubs. Willems had the

street to himself. He would walk in the middle, his shadow gliding obsequiously before him. He looked down on it complacently. The shadow of a successful man! He would be slightly dizzy with the cocktails and with the intoxication of his own glory. As he often told people, he came east fourteen years ago — a cabin boy. A small boy. His shadow must have been very small at that time; he thought with a smile that he was not aware then he had anything — even a shadow — which he dared call his own. And now he was looking at the shadow of the confidential clerk of Hudig & Co. going home. How glorious! How good was life for those that were on the winning side! He had won the game of life; also the game of billiards. He walked faster, jingling his winnings, and thinking of the white stone days that had marked the path of his existence. He thought of the trip to Lombok for ponies — that first important transaction confided to him by Hudig; then he reviewed the more important affairs: the quiet deal in opium; the illegal traffic in gunpowder; the great affair of smuggled firearms, the difficult business of the Rajah of Goak. He carried that last through by sheer pluck; he had bearded the savage old ruler in his council room; he had bribed him with a gilt glass coach, which, rumour said, was used as a hen-coop now; he had over-persuaded him; he had bested him in every way. That was the way to get on. He disapproved of the elementary dishonesty that dips the hand in the cash-box, but one could evade the laws and push the principles of trade to their furthest consequences. Some call that cheating. Those are the fools, the weak, the contemptible. The wise, the strong, the respected, have no scruples. Where there are scruples there can be no power. On that text he preached often to the young men. It was his doctrine, and he, himself, was a shining example of its truth.

Night after night he went home thus, after a day of toil and pleasure, drunk with the sound of his own voice celebrating his own prosperity. On his thirtieth birthday he went home thus. He had spent in good company a nice, noisy evening, and, as he walked along the empty street, the feeling of his own greatness grew upon him, lifted him above the white dust of the road, and filled him with exultation and regrets. He had not done himself justice over there in the hotel, he had not talked enough about himself, he had not impressed his hearers enough. Never mind. Some other time. Now he would go home and make his wife get up and listen to him. Why should she not get up? — and mix a cocktail for him — and listen patiently. Just so. She shall. If he wanted he could make all the Da Souza family get up.

He had only to say a word and they would all come and sit silently in their night vestments on the hard, cold ground of his compound and listen, as long as he wished to go on explaining to them from the top of the stairs, how great and good he was. They would. However, his wife would do — for to-night.

His wife! He winced inwardly. A dismal woman with startled eyes and dolorously drooping mouth, that would listen to him in pained wonder and mute stillness. She was used to those night-discourses now. She had rebelled once — at the beginning. Only once. Now, while he sprawled in the long chair and drank and talked, she would stand at the further end of the table, her hands resting on the edge, her frightened eyes watching his lips, without a sound, without a stir, hardly breathing, till he dismissed her with a contemptuous: “Go to bed, dummy.” She would draw a long breath then and trail out of the room, relieved but unmoved. Nothing could startle her, make her scold or make her cry. She did not complain, she did not rebel. That first difference of theirs was decisive. Too decisive, thought Willems, discontentedly. It had frightened the soul out of her body apparently. A dismal woman! A damn’d business altogether! What the devil did he want to go and saddle himself. . . . Ah! Well! he wanted a home, and the match seemed to please Hudig, and Hudig gave him the bungalow, that flower-bowered house to which he was wending his way in the cool moonlight. And he had the worship of the Da Souza tribe. A man of his stamp could carry off anything, do anything, aspire to anything. In another five years those white people who attended the Sunday card-parties of the Governor would accept him — half-caste wife and all! Hooray! He saw his shadow dart forward and wave a hat, as big as a rum barrel, at the end of an arm several yards long. . . . Who shouted hooray? . . . He smiled shamefacedly to himself, and, pushing his hands deep into his pockets, walked faster with a suddenly grave face. Behind him — to the left — a cigar end glowed in the gateway of Mr. Vinck’s front yard. Leaning against one of the brick pillars, Mr. Vinck, the cashier of Hudig & Co., smoked the last cheroot of the evening. Amongst the shadows of the trimmed bushes Mrs. Vinck crunched slowly, with measured steps, the gravel of the circular path before the house.

“There’s Willems going home on foot — and drunk I fancy,” said Mr. Vinck over his shoulder. “I saw him jump and wave his hat.”

The crunching of the gravel stopped.

“Horrid man,” said Mrs. Vinck, calmly. “I have heard he beats his wife.”

“Oh no, my dear, no,” muttered absently Mr. Vinck, with a vague gesture. The aspect of Willems as a wife-beater presented to him no interest. How women do misjudge! If Willems wanted to torture his wife he would have recourse to less primitive methods. Mr. Vinck knew Willems well, and believed him to be very able, very smart — objectionably so. As he took the last quick draws at the stump of his cheroot, Mr. Vinck reflected that the confidence accorded by Hudig to Willems was open, under the circumstances, to loyal criticism from Hudig’s cashier.

“He is becoming dangerous; he knows too much. He will have to be got rid of,” said Mr. Vinck aloud. But Mrs. Vinck had gone in already, and after shaking his head he threw away his cheroot and followed her slowly.

Willems walked on homeward weaving the splendid web of his future. The road to greatness lay plainly before his eyes, straight and shining, without any obstacle that he could see. He had stepped off the path of honesty, as he understood it, but he would soon regain it, never to leave it any more! It was a very small matter. He would soon put it right again. Meantime his duty was not to be found out, and he trusted in his skill, in his luck, in his well-established reputation that would disarm suspicion if anybody dared to suspect. But nobody would dare! True, he was conscious of a slight deterioration. He had appropriated temporarily some of Hudig’s money. A deplorable necessity. But he judged himself with the indulgence that should be extended to the weaknesses of genius. He would make reparation and all would be as before; nobody would be the loser for it, and he would go on unchecked toward the brilliant goal of his ambition.

Hudig’s partner!

Before going up the steps of his house he stood for awhile, his feet well apart, chin in hand, contemplating mentally Hudig’s future partner. A glorious occupation. He saw him quite safe; solid as the hills; deep — deep as an abyss; discreet as the grave.



## CHAPTER TWO

The sea, perhaps because of its saltiness, roughens the outside but keeps sweet the kernel of its servants' soul. The old sea; the sea of many years ago, whose servants were devoted slaves and went from youth to age or to a sudden grave without needing to open the book of life, because they could look at eternity reflected on the element that gave the life and dealt the death. Like a beautiful and unscrupulous woman, the sea of the past was glorious in its smiles, irresistible in its anger, capricious, enticing, illogical, irresponsible; a thing to love, a thing to fear. It cast a spell, it gave joy, it lulled gently into boundless faith; then with quick and causeless anger it killed. But its cruelty was redeemed by the charm of its inscrutable mystery, by the immensity of its promise, by the supreme witchery of its possible favour. Strong men with childlike hearts were faithful to it, were content to live by its grace — to die by its will. That was the sea before the time when the French mind set the Egyptian muscle in motion and produced a dismal but profitable ditch. Then a great pall of smoke sent out by countless steamboats was spread over the restless mirror of the Infinite. The hand of the engineer tore down the veil of the terrible beauty in order that greedy and faithless landlubbers might pocket dividends. The mystery was destroyed. Like all mysteries, it lived only in the hearts of its worshippers. The hearts changed; the men changed. The once loving and devoted servants went out armed with fire and iron, and conquering the fear of their own hearts became a calculating crowd of cold and exacting masters. The sea of the past was an incomparably beautiful mistress, with inscrutable face, with cruel and promising eyes. The sea of to-day is a used-up drudge, wrinkled and defaced by the churned-up wakes of brutal propellers, robbed of the enslaving charm of its vastness, stripped of its beauty, of its mystery and of its promise.

Tom Lingard was a master, a lover, a servant of the sea. The sea took him young, fashioned him body and soul; gave him his fierce aspect, his loud voice, his fearless eyes, his stupidly guileless heart. Generously it gave him his absurd faith in himself, his universal love of creation, his wide indulgence, his contemptuous severity, his straightforward simplicity of motive and honesty of aim. Having made him what he was, womanlike, the sea served him humbly and let him bask unharmed in the sunshine of its terribly uncertain favour. Tom Lingard grew rich on the sea and by the sea.

He loved it with the ardent affection of a lover, he made light of it with the assurance of perfect mastery, he feared it with the wise fear of a brave man, and he took liberties with it as a spoiled child might do with a paternal and good-natured ogre. He was grateful to it, with the gratitude of an honest heart. His greatest pride lay in his profound conviction of its faithfulness — in the deep sense of his unerring knowledge of its treachery.

The little brig Flash was the instrument of Lingard's fortune. They came north together — both young — out of an Australian port, and after a very few years there was not a white man in the islands, from Palembang to Ternate, from Ombawa to Palawan, that did not know Captain Tom and his lucky craft. He was liked for his reckless generosity, for his unswerving honesty, and at first was a little feared on account of his violent temper. Very soon, however, they found him out, and the word went round that Captain Tom's fury was less dangerous than many a man's smile. He prospered greatly. After his first — and successful — fight with the sea robbers, when he rescued, as rumour had it, the yacht of some big wig from home, somewhere down Carimata way, his great popularity began. As years went on it grew apace. Always visiting out-of-the-way places of that part of the world, always in search of new markets for his cargoes — not so much for profit as for the pleasure of finding them — he soon became known to the Malays, and by his successful recklessness in several encounters with pirates, established the terror of his name. Those white men with whom he had business, and who naturally were on the look-out for his weaknesses, could easily see that it was enough to give him his Malay title to flatter him greatly. So when there was anything to be gained by it, and sometimes out of pure and unprofitable good nature, they would drop the ceremonious "Captain Lingard" and address him half seriously as Rajah Laut — the King of the Sea.

He carried the name bravely on his broad shoulders. He had carried it many years already when the boy Willems ran barefooted on the deck of the ship Kosmopoliet IV. in Samarang roads, looking with innocent eyes on the strange shore and objurgating his immediate surroundings with blasphemous lips, while his childish brain worked upon the heroic idea of running away. From the poop of the Flash Lingard saw in the early morning the Dutch ship get lumberingly under weigh, bound for the eastern ports. Very late in the evening of the same day he stood on the quay of the landing canal, ready to go on board of his brig. The night was starry and clear; the

little custom-house building was shut up, and as the gharry that brought him down disappeared up the long avenue of dusty trees leading to the town, Lingard thought himself alone on the quay. He roused up his sleeping boat-crew and stood waiting for them to get ready, when he felt a tug at his coat and a thin voice said, very distinctly —

“English captain.”

Lingard turned round quickly, and what seemed to be a very lean boy jumped back with commendable activity.

“Who are you? Where do you spring from?” asked Lingard, in startled surprise.

From a safe distance the boy pointed toward a cargo lighter moored to the quay.

“Been hiding there, have you?” said Lingard. “Well, what do you want? Speak out, confound you. You did not come here to scare me to death, for fun, did you?”

The boy tried to explain in imperfect English, but very soon Lingard interrupted him.

“I see,” he exclaimed, “you ran away from the big ship that sailed this morning. Well, why don’t you go to your countrymen here?”

“Ship gone only a little way — to Sourabaya. Make me go back to the ship,” explained the boy.

“Best thing for you,” affirmed Lingard with conviction.

“No,” retorted the boy; “me want stop here; not want go home. Get money here; home no good.”

“This beats all my going a-fishing,” commented the astonished Lingard. “It’s money you want? Well! well! And you were not afraid to run away, you bag of bones, you!”

The boy intimated that he was frightened of nothing but of being sent back to the ship. Lingard looked at him in meditative silence.

“Come closer,” he said at last. He took the boy by the chin, and turning up his face gave him a searching look. “How old are you?”

“Seventeen.”

“There’s not much of you for seventeen. Are you hungry?”

“A little.”

“Will you come with me, in that brig there?”

The boy moved without a word towards the boat and scrambled into the bows.

“Knows his place,” muttered Lingard to himself as he stepped heavily into the stern sheets and took up the yoke lines. “Give way there.”

The Malay boat crew lay back together, and the gig sprang away from the quay heading towards the brig’s riding light.

Such was the beginning of Willems’ career.

Lingard learned in half an hour all that there was of Willems’ commonplace story. Father outdoor clerk of some ship-broker in Rotterdam; mother dead. The boy quick in learning, but idle in school. The straitened circumstances in the house filled with small brothers and sisters, sufficiently clothed and fed but otherwise running wild, while the disconsolate widower tramped about all day in a shabby overcoat and imperfect boots on the muddy quays, and in the evening piloted wearily the half-intoxicated foreign skippers amongst the places of cheap delights, returning home late, sick with too much smoking and drinking — for company’s sake — with these men, who expected such attentions in the way of business. Then the offer of the good-natured captain of Kosmopoliet IV., who was pleased to do something for the patient and obliging fellow; young Willems’ great joy, his still greater disappointment with the sea that looked so charming from afar, but proved so hard and exacting on closer acquaintance — and then this running away by a sudden impulse. The boy was hopelessly at variance with the spirit of the sea. He had an instinctive contempt for the honest simplicity of that work which led to nothing he cared for. Lingard soon found this out. He offered to send him home in an English ship, but the boy begged hard to be permitted to remain. He wrote a beautiful hand, became soon perfect in English, was quick at figures; and Lingard made him useful in that way. As he grew older his trading instincts developed themselves astonishingly, and Lingard left him often to trade in one island or another while he, himself, made an intermediate trip to some out-of-the-way place. On Willems expressing a wish to that effect, Lingard let him enter Hudig’s service. He felt a little sore at that abandonment because he had attached himself, in a way, to his protege. Still he was proud of him, and spoke up for him loyally. At first it was, “Smart boy that — never make a seaman though.” Then when Willems was helping in the trading he referred to him as “that clever young fellow.” Later when Willems became the confidential agent of Hudig, employed in many a delicate affair, the simple-hearted old seaman would point an admiring finger at his back and whisper to whoever stood near at the moment, “Long-

headed chap that; deuced long-headed chap. Look at him. Confidential man of old Hudig. I picked him up in a ditch, you may say, like a starved cat. Skin and bone. 'Pon my word I did. And now he knows more than I do about island trading. Fact. I am not joking. More than I do," he would repeat, seriously, with innocent pride in his honest eyes.

From the safe elevation of his commercial successes Willems patronized Lingard. He had a liking for his benefactor, not unmixed with some disdain for the crude directness of the old fellow's methods of conduct. There were, however, certain sides of Lingard's character for which Willems felt a qualified respect. The talkative seaman knew how to be silent on certain matters that to Willems were very interesting. Besides, Lingard was rich, and that in itself was enough to compel Willems' unwilling admiration. In his confidential chats with Hudig, Willems generally alluded to the benevolent Englishman as the "lucky old fool" in a very distinct tone of vexation; Hudig would grunt an unqualified assent, and then the two would look at each other in a sudden immobility of pupils fixed by a stare of unexpressed thought.

"You can't find out where he gets all that india-rubber, hey Willems?" Hudig would ask at last, turning away and bending over the papers on his desk.

"No, Mr. Hudig. Not yet. But I am trying," was Willems' invariable reply, delivered with a ring of regretful deprecation.

"Try! Always try! You may try! You think yourself clever perhaps," rumbled on Hudig, without looking up. "I have been trading with him twenty — thirty years now. The old fox. And I have tried. Bah!"

He stretched out a short, podgy leg and contemplated the bare instep and the grass slipper hanging by the toes. "You can't make him drunk?" he would add, after a pause of stertorous breathing.

"No, Mr. Hudig, I can't really," protested Willems, earnestly.

"Well, don't try. I know him. Don't try," advised the master, and, bending again over his desk, his staring bloodshot eyes close to the paper, he would go on tracing laboriously with his thick fingers the slim unsteady letters of his correspondence, while Willems waited respectfully for his further good pleasure before asking, with great deference —

"Any orders, Mr. Hudig?"

"Hm! yes. Go to Bun-Hin yourself and see the dollars of that payment counted and packed, and have them put on board the mail-boat for Ternate.

She's due here this afternoon."

"Yes, Mr. Hudig."

"And, look here. If the boat is late, leave the case in Bun-Hin's godown till to-morrow. Seal it up. Eight seals as usual. Don't take it away till the boat is here."

"No, Mr. Hudig."

"And don't forget about these opium cases. It's for to-night. Use my own boatmen. Transship them from the Caroline to the Arab barque," went on the master in his hoarse undertone. "And don't you come to me with another story of a case dropped overboard like last time," he added, with sudden ferocity, looking up at his confidential clerk.

"No, Mr. Hudig. I will take care."

"That's all. Tell that pig as you go out that if he doesn't make the punkah go a little better I will break every bone in his body," finished up Hudig, wiping his purple face with a red silk handkerchief nearly as big as a counterpane.

Noiselessly Willems went out, shutting carefully behind him the little green door through which he passed to the warehouse. Hudig, pen in hand, listened to him bullying the punkah boy with profane violence, born of unbounded zeal for the master's comfort, before he returned to his writing amid the rustling of papers fluttering in the wind sent down by the punkah that waved in wide sweeps above his head.

Willems would nod familiarly to Mr. Vinck, who had his desk close to the little door of the private office, and march down the warehouse with an important air. Mr. Vinck — extreme dislike lurking in every wrinkle of his gentlemanly countenance — would follow with his eyes the white figure flitting in the gloom amongst the piles of bales and cases till it passed out through the big archway into the glare of the street.

## CHAPTER THREE

The opportunity and the temptation were too much for Willems, and under the pressure of sudden necessity he abused that trust which was his pride, the perpetual sign of his cleverness and a load too heavy for him to carry. A run of bad luck at cards, the failure of a small speculation undertaken on his own account, an unexpected demand for money from one or another member of the Da Souza family — and almost before he was well aware of it he was off the path of his peculiar honesty. It was such a faint and ill-defined track that it took him some time to find out how far he had strayed amongst the brambles of the dangerous wilderness he had been skirting for so many years, without any other guide than his own convenience and that doctrine of success which he had found for himself in the book of life — in those interesting chapters that the Devil has been permitted to write in it, to test the sharpness of men's eyesight and the steadfastness of their hearts. For one short, dark and solitary moment he was dismayed, but he had that courage that will not scale heights, yet will wade bravely through the mud — if there be no other road. He applied himself to the task of restitution, and devoted himself to the duty of not being found out. On his thirtieth birthday he had almost accomplished the task — and the duty had been faithfully and cleverly performed. He saw himself safe. Again he could look hopefully towards the goal of his legitimate ambition. Nobody would dare to suspect him, and in a few days there would be nothing to suspect. He was elated. He did not know that his prosperity had touched then its high-water mark, and that the tide was already on the turn.

Two days afterwards he knew. Mr. Vinck, hearing the rattle of the door-handle, jumped up from his desk — where he had been tremulously listening to the loud voices in the private office — and buried his face in the big safe with nervous haste. For the last time Willems passed through the little green door leading to Hudig's sanctum, which, during the past half-hour, might have been taken — from the fiendish noise within — for the cavern of some wild beast. Willems' troubled eyes took in the quick impression of men and things as he came out from the place of his humiliation. He saw the scared expression of the punkah boy; the Chinamen tellers sitting on their heels with unmovable faces turned up blankly towards him while their arrested hands hovered over the little piles of bright guilders ranged on the floor; Mr. Vinck's shoulder-blades with the fleshy

rim of two red ears above. He saw the long avenue of gin cases stretching from where he stood to the arched doorway beyond which he would be able to breathe perhaps. A thin rope's end lay across his path and he saw it distinctly, yet stumbled heavily over it as if it had been a bar of iron. Then he found himself in the street at last, but could not find air enough to fill his lungs. He walked towards his home, gasping.

As the sound of Hudig's insults that lingered in his ears grew fainter by the lapse of time, the feeling of shame was replaced slowly by a passion of anger against himself and still more against the stupid concourse of circumstances that had driven him into his idiotic indiscretion. Idiotic indiscretion; that is how he defined his guilt to himself. Could there be anything worse from the point of view of his undeniable cleverness? What a fatal aberration of an acute mind! He did not recognize himself there. He must have been mad. That's it. A sudden gust of madness. And now the work of long years was destroyed utterly. What would become of him?

Before he could answer that question he found himself in the garden before his house, Hudig's wedding gift. He looked at it with a vague surprise to find it there. His past was so utterly gone from him that the dwelling which belonged to it appeared to him incongruous standing there intact, neat, and cheerful in the sunshine of the hot afternoon. The house was a pretty little structure all doors and windows, surrounded on all sides by the deep verandah supported on slender columns clothed in the green foliage of creepers, which also fringed the overhanging eaves of the high-pitched roof. Slowly, Willems mounted the dozen steps that led to the verandah. He paused at every step. He must tell his wife. He felt frightened at the prospect, and his alarm dismayed him. Frightened to face her! Nothing could give him a better measure of the greatness of the change around him, and in him. Another man — and another life with the faith in himself gone. He could not be worth much if he was afraid to face that woman.

He dared not enter the house through the open door of the dining-room, but stood irresolute by the little work-table where trailed a white piece of calico, with a needle stuck in it, as if the work had been left hurriedly. The pink-crested cockatoo started, on his appearance, into clumsy activity and began to climb laboriously up and down his perch, calling "Joanna" with indistinct loudness and a persistent screech that prolonged the last syllable of the name as if in a peal of insane laughter. The screen in the doorway



moved gently once or twice in the breeze, and each time Willems started slightly, expecting his wife, but he never lifted his eyes, although straining his ears for the sound of her footsteps. Gradually he lost himself in his thoughts, in the endless speculation as to the manner in which she would receive his news — and his orders. In this preoccupation he almost forgot the fear of her presence. No doubt she will cry, she will lament, she will be helpless and frightened and passive as ever. And he would have to drag that limp weight on and on through the darkness of a spoiled life. Horrible! Of course he could not abandon her and the child to certain misery or possible starvation. The wife and the child of Willems. Willems the successful, the smart; Willems the conf . . . . Pah! And what was Willems now? Willems the. . . . He strangled the half-born thought, and cleared his throat to stifle a groan. Ah! Won't they talk to-night in the billiard-room — his world, where he had been first — all those men to whom he had been so superciliously condescending. Won't they talk with surprise, and affected regret, and grave faces, and wise nods. Some of them owed him money, but he never pressed anybody. Not he. Willems, the prince of good fellows, they called him. And now they will rejoice, no doubt, at his downfall. A crowd of imbeciles. In his abasement he was yet aware of his superiority over those fellows, who were merely honest or simply not found out yet. A crowd of imbeciles! He shook his fist at the evoked image of his friends, and the startled parrot fluttered its wings and shrieked in desperate fright.

In a short glance upwards Willems saw his wife come round the corner of the house. He lowered his eyelids quickly, and waited silently till she came near and stood on the other side of the little table. He would not look at her face, but he could see the red dressing-gown he knew so well. She trailed through life in that red dressing-gown, with its row of dirty blue bows down the front, stained, and hooked on awry; a torn flounce at the bottom following her like a snake as she moved languidly about, with her hair negligently caught up, and a tangled wisp straggling untidily down her back. His gaze travelled upwards from bow to bow, noticing those that hung only by a thread, but it did not go beyond her chin. He looked at her lean throat, at the obtrusive collarbone visible in the disarray of the upper part of her attire. He saw the thin arm and the bony hand clasping the child she carried, and he felt an immense distaste for those encumbrances of his life. He waited for her to say something, but as he felt her eyes rest on him in unbroken silence he sighed and began to speak.

It was a hard task. He spoke slowly, lingering amongst the memories of this early life in his reluctance to confess that this was the end of it and the beginning of a less splendid existence. In his conviction of having made her happiness in the full satisfaction of all material wants he never doubted for a moment that she was ready to keep him company on no matter how hard and stony a road. He was not elated by this certitude. He had married her to please Hudig, and the greatness of his sacrifice ought to have made her happy without any further exertion on his part. She had years of glory as Willems' wife, and years of comfort, of loyal care, and of such tenderness as she deserved. He had guarded her carefully from any bodily hurt; and of any other suffering he had no conception. The assertion of his superiority was only another benefit conferred on her. All this was a matter of course, but he told her all this so as to bring vividly before her the greatness of her loss. She was so dull of understanding that she would not grasp it else. And now it was at an end. They would have to go. Leave this house, leave this island, go far away where he was unknown. To the English Strait-Settlements perhaps. He would find an opening there for his abilities — and juster men to deal with than old Hudig. He laughed bitterly.

"You have the money I left at home this morning, Joanna?" he asked. "We will want it all now."

As he spoke those words he thought he was a fine fellow. Nothing new that. Still, he surpassed there his own expectations. Hang it all, there are sacred things in life, after all. The marriage tie was one of them, and he was not the man to break it. The solidity of his principles caused him great satisfaction, but he did not care to look at his wife, for all that. He waited for her to speak. Then he would have to console her; tell her not to be a crying fool; to get ready to go. Go where? How? When? He shook his head. They must leave at once; that was the principal thing. He felt a sudden need to hurry up his departure.

"Well, Joanna," he said, a little impatiently — "don't stand there in a trance. Do you hear? We must. . . ."

He looked up at his wife, and whatever he was going to add remained unspoken. She was staring at him with her big, slanting eyes, that seemed to him twice their natural size. The child, its dirty little face pressed to its mother's shoulder, was sleeping peacefully. The deep silence of the house was not broken, but rather accentuated, by the low mutter of the cockatoo, now very still on its perch. As Willems was looking at Joanna her upper lip

was drawn up on one side, giving to her melancholy face a vicious expression altogether new to his experience. He stepped back in his surprise.

“Oh! You great man!” she said distinctly, but in a voice that was hardly above a whisper.

Those words, and still more her tone, stunned him as if somebody had fired a gun close to his ear. He stared back at her stupidly.

“Oh! you great man!” she repeated slowly, glancing right and left as if meditating a sudden escape. “And you think that I am going to starve with you. You are nobody now. You think my mamma and Leonard would let me go away? And with you! With you,” she repeated scornfully, raising her voice, which woke up the child and caused it to whimper feebly.

“Joanna!” exclaimed Willems.

“Do not speak to me. I have heard what I have waited for all these years. You are less than dirt, you that have wiped your feet on me. I have waited for this. I am not afraid now. I do not want you; do not come near me. Ah-h!” she screamed shrilly, as he held out his hand in an entreating gesture — “Ah! Keep off me! Keep off me! Keep off!”

She backed away, looking at him with eyes both angry and frightened. Willems stared motionless, in dumb amazement at the mystery of anger and revolt in the head of his wife. Why? What had he ever done to her? This was the day of injustice indeed. First Hudig — and now his wife. He felt a terror at this hate that had lived stealthily so near him for years. He tried to speak, but she shrieked again, and it was like a needle through his heart. Again he raised his hand.

“Help!” called Mrs. Willems, in a piercing voice. “Help!”

“Be quiet! You fool!” shouted Willems, trying to drown the noise of his wife and child in his own angry accents and rattling violently the little zinc table in his exasperation.

From under the house, where there were bathrooms and a tool closet, appeared Leonard, a rusty iron bar in his hand. He called threateningly from the bottom of the stairs.

“Do not hurt her, Mr. Willems. You are a savage. Not at all like we, whites.”

“You too!” said the bewildered Willems. “I haven’t touched her. Is this a madhouse?” He moved towards the stairs, and Leonard dropped the bar

with a clang and made for the gate of the compound. Willems turned back to his wife.

“So you expected this,” he said. “It is a conspiracy. Who’s that sobbing and groaning in the room? Some more of your precious family. Hey?”

She was more calm now, and putting hastily the crying child in the big chair walked towards him with sudden fearlessness.

“My mother,” she said, “my mother who came to defend me from you — man from nowhere; a vagabond!”

“You did not call me a vagabond when you hung round my neck — before we were married,” said Willems, contemptuously.

“You took good care that I should not hang round your neck after we were,” she answered, clenching her hands, and putting her face close to his. “You boasted while I suffered and said nothing. What has become of your greatness; of our greatness — you were always speaking about? Now I am going to live on the charity of your master. Yes. That is true. He sent Leonard to tell me so. And you will go and boast somewhere else, and starve. So! Ah! I can breathe now! This house is mine.”

“Enough!” said Willems, slowly, with an arresting gesture.

She leaped back, the fright again in her eyes, snatched up the child, pressed it to her breast, and, falling into a chair, drummed insanely with her heels on the resounding floor of the verandah.

“I shall go,” said Willems, steadily. “I thank you. For the first time in your life you make me happy. You were a stone round my neck; you understand. I did not mean to tell you that as long as you lived, but you made me — now. Before I pass this gate you shall be gone from my mind. You made it very easy. I thank you.”

He turned and went down the steps without giving her a glance, while she sat upright and quiet, with wide-open eyes, the child crying querulously in her arms. At the gate he came suddenly upon Leonard, who had been dodging about there and failed to get out of the way in time.

“Do not be brutal, Mr. Willems,” said Leonard, hurriedly. “It is unbecoming between white men with all those natives looking on.” Leonard’s legs trembled very much, and his voice wavered between high and low tones without any attempt at control on his part. “Restrain your improper violence,” he went on mumbling rapidly. “I am a respectable man of very good family, while you . . . it is regrettable . . . they all say so . . .”

“What?” thundered Willems. He felt a sudden impulse of mad anger, and before he knew what had happened he was looking at Leonard da Souza rolling in the dust at his feet. He stepped over his prostrate brother-in-law and tore blindly down the street, everybody making way for the frantic white man.

When he came to himself he was beyond the outskirts of the town, stumbling on the hard and cracked earth of reaped rice fields. How did he get there? It was dark. He must get back. As he walked towards the town slowly, his mind reviewed the events of the day and he felt a sense of bitter loneliness. His wife had turned him out of his own house. He had assaulted brutally his brother-in-law, a member of the Da Souza family — of that band of his worshippers. He did. Well, no! It was some other man. Another man was coming back. A man without a past, without a future, yet full of pain and shame and anger. He stopped and looked round. A dog or two glided across the empty street and rushed past him with a frightened snarl. He was now in the midst of the Malay quarter whose bamboo houses, hidden in the verdure of their little gardens, were dark and silent. Men, women and children slept in there. Human beings. Would he ever sleep, and where? He felt as if he was the outcast of all mankind, and as he looked hopelessly round, before resuming his weary march, it seemed to him that the world was bigger, the night more vast and more black; but he went on doggedly with his head down as if pushing his way through some thick brambles. Then suddenly he felt planks under his feet and, looking up, saw the red light at the end of the jetty. He walked quite to the end and stood leaning against the post, under the lamp, looking at the roadstead where two vessels at anchor swayed their slender rigging amongst the stars. The end of the jetty; and here in one step more the end of life; the end of everything. Better so. What else could he do? Nothing ever comes back. He saw it clearly. The respect and admiration of them all, the old habits and old affections finished abruptly in the clear perception of the cause of his disgrace. He saw all this; and for a time he came out of himself, out of his selfishness — out of the constant preoccupation of his interests and his desires — out of the temple of self and the concentration of personal thought.

His thoughts now wandered home. Standing in the tepid stillness of a starry tropical night he felt the breath of the bitter east wind, he saw the high and narrow fronts of tall houses under the gloom of a clouded sky; and

on muddy quays he saw the shabby, high-shouldered figure — the patient, faded face of the weary man earning bread for the children that waited for him in a dingy home. It was miserable, miserable. But it would never come back. What was there in common between those things and Willems the clever, Willems the successful. He had cut himself adrift from that home many years ago. Better for him then. Better for them now. All this was gone, never to come back again; and suddenly he shivered, seeing himself alone in the presence of unknown and terrible dangers.

For the first time in his life he felt afraid of the future, because he had lost his faith, the faith in his own success. And he had destroyed it foolishly with his own hands!

## CHAPTER FOUR

His meditation which resembled slow drifting into suicide was interrupted by Lingard, who, with a loud "I've got you at last!" dropped his hand heavily on Willems' shoulder. This time it was the old seaman himself going out of his way to pick up the uninteresting waif — all that there was left of that sudden and sordid shipwreck. To Willems, the rough, friendly voice was a quick and fleeting relief followed by a sharper pang of anger and unavailing regret. That voice carried him back to the beginning of his promising career, the end of which was very visible now from the jetty where they both stood. He shook himself free from the friendly grasp, saying with ready bitterness —

"It's all your fault. Give me a push now, do, and send me over. I have been standing here waiting for help. You are the man — of all men. You helped at the beginning; you ought to have a hand in the end."

"I have better use for you than to throw you to the fishes," said Lingard, seriously, taking Willems by the arm and forcing him gently to walk up the jetty. "I have been buzzing over this town like a bluebottle fly, looking for you high and low. I have heard a lot. I will tell you what, Willems; you are no saint, that's a fact. And you have not been over-wise either. I am not throwing stones," he added, hastily, as Willems made an effort to get away, "but I am not going to mince matters. Never could! You keep quiet while I talk. Can't you?"

With a gesture of resignation and a half-stifled groan Willems submitted to the stronger will, and the two men paced slowly up and down the resounding planks, while Lingard disclosed to Willems the exact manner of his undoing. After the first shock Willems lost the faculty of surprise in the over-powering feeling of indignation. So it was Vinck and Leonard who had served him so. They had watched him, tracked his misdeeds, reported them to Hudig. They had bribed obscure Chinamen, wormed out confidences from tipsy skippers, got at various boatmen, and had pieced out in that way the story of his irregularities. The blackness of this dark intrigue filled him with horror. He could understand Vinck. There was no love lost between them. But Leonard! Leonard!

"Why, Captain Lingard," he burst out, "the fellow licked my boots."

"Yes, yes, yes," said Lingard, testily, "we know that, and you did your best to cram your boot down his throat. No man likes that, my boy."

“I was always giving money to all that hungry lot,” went on Willems, passionately. “Always my hand in my pocket. They never had to ask twice.”

“Just so. Your generosity frightened them. They asked themselves where all that came from, and concluded that it was safer to throw you overboard. After all, Hudig is a much greater man than you, my friend, and they have a claim on him also.”

“What do you mean, Captain Lingard?”

“What do I mean?” repeated Lingard, slowly. “Why, you are not going to make me believe you did not know your wife was Hudig’s daughter. Come now!”

Willems stopped suddenly and swayed about.

“Ah! I understand,” he gasped. “I never heard . . . Lately I thought there was . . . But no, I never guessed.”

“Oh, you simpleton!” said Lingard, pityingly. “‘Pon my word,” he muttered to himself, “I don’t believe the fellow knew. Well! well! Steady now. Pull yourself together. What’s wrong there. She is a good wife to you.”

“Excellent wife,” said Willems, in a dreary voice, looking far over the black and scintillating water.

“Very well then,” went on Lingard, with increasing friendliness. “Nothing wrong there. But did you really think that Hudig was marrying you off and giving you a house and I don’t know what, out of love for you?”

“I had served him well,” answered Willems. “How well, you know yourself — through thick and thin. No matter what work and what risk, I was always there; always ready.”

How well he saw the greatness of his work and the immensity of that injustice which was his reward. She was that man’s daughter!

In the light of this disclosure the facts of the last five years of his life stood clearly revealed in their full meaning. He had spoken first to Joanna at the gate of their dwelling as he went to his work in the brilliant flush of the early morning, when women and flowers are charming even to the dullest eyes. A most respectable family — two women and a young man — were his next-door neighbours. Nobody ever came to their little house but the priest, a native from the Spanish islands, now and then. The young man Leonard he had met in town, and was flattered by the little fellow’s immense respect for the great Willems. He let him bring chairs, call the waiters, chalk his cues when playing billiards, express his admiration in



choice words. He even condescended to listen patiently to Leonard's allusions to "our beloved father," a man of official position, a government agent in Koti, where he died of cholera, alas! a victim to duty, like a good Catholic, and a good man. It sounded very respectable, and Willems approved of those feeling references. Moreover, he prided himself upon having no colour-prejudices and no racial antipathies. He consented to drink curacoa one afternoon on the verandah of Mrs. da Souza's house. He remembered Joanna that day, swinging in a hammock. She was untidy even then, he remembered, and that was the only impression he carried away from that visit. He had no time for love in those glorious days, no time even for a passing fancy, but gradually he fell into the habit of calling almost every day at that little house where he was greeted by Mrs. da Souza's shrill voice screaming for Joanna to come and entertain the gentleman from Hudig & Co. And then the sudden and unexpected visit of the priest. He remembered the man's flat, yellow face, his thin legs, his propitiatory smile, his beaming black eyes, his conciliating manner, his veiled hints which he did not understand at the time. How he wondered what the man wanted, and how unceremoniously he got rid of him. And then came vividly into his recollection the morning when he met again that fellow coming out of Hudig's office, and how he was amused at the incongruous visit. And that morning with Hudig! Would he ever forget it? Would he ever forget his surprise as the master, instead of plunging at once into business, looked at him thoughtfully before turning, with a furtive smile, to the papers on the desk? He could hear him now, his nose in the paper before him, dropping astonishing words in the intervals of wheezy breathing.

"Heard said . . . called there often . . . most respectable ladies . . . knew the father very well . . . estimable . . . best thing for a young man . . . settle down. . . . Personally, very glad to hear . . . thing arranged. . . . Suitable recognition of valuable services. . . . Best thing — best thing to do."

And he believed! What credulity! What an ass! Hudig knew the father! Rather. And so did everybody else probably; all except himself. How proud he had been of Hudig's benevolent interest in his fate! How proud he was when invited by Hudig to stay with him at his little house in the country — where he could meet men, men of official position — as a friend. Vinck had been green with envy. Oh, yes! He had believed in the best thing, and took the girl like a gift of fortune. How he boasted to Hudig of being free from prejudices. The old scoundrel must have been laughing in his sleeve at his

fool of a confidential clerk. He took the girl, guessing nothing. How could he? There had been a father of some kind to the common knowledge. Men knew him; spoke about him. A lank man of hopelessly mixed descent, but otherwise — apparently — unobjectionable. The shady relations came out afterward, but — with his freedom from prejudices — he did not mind them, because, with their humble dependence, they completed his triumphant life. Taken in! taken in! Hudig had found an easy way to provide for the begging crowd. He had shifted the burden of his youthful vagaries on to the shoulders of his confidential clerk; and while he worked for the master, the master had cheated him; had stolen his very self from him. He was married. He belonged to that woman, no matter what she might do! . . . Had sworn . . . for all life! . . . Thrown himself away. . . . And that man dared this very morning call him a thief! Damnation!

“Let go, Lingard!” he shouted, trying to get away by a sudden jerk from the watchful old seaman. “Let me go and kill that . . .”

“No you don’t!” panted Lingard, hanging on manfully. “You want to kill, do you? You lunatic. Ah! — I’ve got you now! Be quiet, I say!”

They struggled violently, Lingard forcing Willems slowly towards the guard-rail. Under their feet the jetty sounded like a drum in the quiet night. On the shore end the native caretaker of the wharf watched the combat, squatting behind the safe shelter of some big cases. The next day he informed his friends, with calm satisfaction, that two drunken white men had fought on the jetty.

It had been a great fight. They fought without arms, like wild beasts, after the manner of white men. No! nobody was killed, or there would have been trouble and a report to make. How could he know why they fought? White men have no reason when they are like that.

Just as Lingard was beginning to fear that he would be unable to restrain much longer the violence of the younger man, he felt Willems’ muscles relaxing, and took advantage of this opportunity to pin him, by a last effort, to the rail. They both panted heavily, speechless, their faces very close.

“All right,” muttered Willems at last. “Don’t break my back over this infernal rail. I will be quiet.”

“Now you are reasonable,” said Lingard, much relieved. “What made you fly into that passion?” he asked, leading him back to the end of the jetty, and, still holding him prudently with one hand, he fumbled with the other for his whistle and blew a shrill and prolonged blast. Over the smooth

water of the roadstead came in answer a faint cry from one of the ships at anchor.

“My boat will be here directly,” said Lingard. “Think of what you are going to do. I sail to-night.”

“What is there for me to do, except one thing?” said Willems, gloomily.

“Look here,” said Lingard; “I picked you up as a boy, and consider myself responsible for you in a way. You took your life into your own hands many years ago — but still . . .”

He paused, listening, till he heard the regular grind of the oars in the rowlocks of the approaching boat then went on again.

“I have made it all right with Hudig. You owe him nothing now. Go back to your wife. She is a good woman. Go back to her.”

“Why, Captain Lingard,” exclaimed Willems, “she . . .”

“It was most affecting,” went on Lingard, without heeding him. “I went to your house to look for you and there I saw her despair. It was heart-breaking. She called for you; she entreated me to find you. She spoke wildly, poor woman, as if all this was her fault.”

Willems listened amazed. The blind old idiot! How queerly he misunderstood! But if it was true, if it was even true, the very idea of seeing her filled his soul with intense loathing. He did not break his oath, but he would not go back to her. Let hers be the sin of that separation; of the sacred bond broken. He revelled in the extreme purity of his heart, and he would not go back to her. Let her come back to him. He had the comfortable conviction that he would never see her again, and that through her own fault only. In this conviction he told himself solemnly that if she would come to him he would receive her with generous forgiveness, because such was the praiseworthy solidity of his principles. But he hesitated whether he would or would not disclose to Lingard the revolting completeness of his humiliation. Turned out of his house — and by his wife; that woman who hardly dared to breathe in his presence, yesterday. He remained perplexed and silent. No. He lacked the courage to tell the ignoble story.

As the boat of the brig appeared suddenly on the black water close to the jetty, Lingard broke the painful silence.

“I always thought,” he said, sadly, “I always thought you were somewhat heartless, Willems, and apt to cast adrift those that thought most of you. I appeal to what is best in you; do not abandon that woman.”

“I have not abandoned her,” answered Willems, quickly, with conscious truthfulness. “Why should I? As you so justly observed, she has been a good wife to me. A very good, quiet, obedient, loving wife, and I love her as much as she loves me. Every bit. But as to going back now, to that place where I . . . To walk again amongst those men who yesterday were ready to crawl before me, and then feel on my back the sting of their pitying or satisfied smiles — no! I can’t. I would rather hide from them at the bottom of the sea,” he went on, with resolute energy. “I don’t think, Captain Lingard,” he added, more quietly, “I don’t think that you realize what my position was there.”

In a wide sweep of his hand he took in the sleeping shore from north to south, as if wishing it a proud and threatening good-bye. For a short moment he forgot his downfall in the recollection of his brilliant triumphs. Amongst the men of his class and occupation who slept in those dark houses he had been indeed the first.

“It is hard,” muttered Lingard, pensively. “But whose the fault? Whose the fault?”

“Captain Lingard!” cried Willems, under the sudden impulse of a felicitous inspiration, “if you leave me here on this jetty — it’s murder. I shall never return to that place alive, wife or no wife. You may just as well cut my throat at once.”

The old seaman started.

“Don’t try to frighten me, Willems,” he said, with great severity, and paused.

Above the accents of Willems’ brazen despair he heard, with considerable uneasiness, the whisper of his own absurd conscience. He meditated for awhile with an irresolute air.

“I could tell you to go and drown yourself, and be damned to you,” he said, with an unsuccessful assumption of brutality in his manner, “but I won’t. We are responsible for one another — worse luck. I am almost ashamed of myself, but I can understand your dirty pride. I can! By . . .”

He broke off with a loud sigh and walked briskly to the steps, at the bottom of which lay his boat, rising and falling gently on the slight and invisible swell.

“Below there! Got a lamp in the boat? Well, light it and bring it up, one of you. Hurry now!”

He tore out a page of his pocketbook, moistened his pencil with great energy and waited, stamping his feet impatiently.

“I will see this thing through,” he muttered to himself. “And I will have it all square and ship-shape; see if I don’t! Are you going to bring that lamp, you son of a crippled mud-turtle? I am waiting.”

The gleam of the light on the paper placated his professional anger, and he wrote rapidly, the final dash of his signature curling the paper up in a triangular tear.

“Take that to this white Tuan’s house. I will send the boat back for you in half an hour.”

The coxswain raised his lamp deliberately to Willem’s face.

“This Tuan? Tau! I know.”

“Quick then!” said Lingard, taking the lamp from him — and the man went off at a run.

“Kassi mem! To the lady herself,” called Lingard after him.

Then, when the man disappeared, he turned to Willems.

“I have written to your wife,” he said. “If you do not return for good, you do not go back to that house only for another parting. You must come as you stand. I won’t have that poor woman tormented. I will see to it that you are not separated for long. Trust me!”

Willems shivered, then smiled in the darkness.

“No fear of that,” he muttered, enigmatically. “I trust you implicitly, Captain Lingard,” he added, in a louder tone.

Lingard led the way down the steps, swinging the lamp and speaking over his shoulder.

“It is the second time, Willems, I take you in hand. Mind it is the last. The second time; and the only difference between then and now is that you were bare-footed then and have boots now. In fourteen years. With all your smartness! A poor result that. A very poor result.”

He stood for awhile on the lowest platform of the steps, the light of the lamp falling on the upturned face of the stroke oar, who held the gunwale of the boat close alongside, ready for the captain to step in.

“You see,” he went on, argumentatively, fumbling about the top of the lamp, “you got yourself so crooked amongst those ‘longshore quill-drivers that you could not run clear in any way. That’s what comes of such talk as yours, and of such a life. A man sees so much falsehood that he begins to lie to himself. Pah!” he said, in disgust, “there’s only one place for an

honest man. The sea, my boy, the sea! But you never would; didn't think there was enough money in it; and now — look!"

He blew the light out, and, stepping into the boat, stretched quickly his hand towards Willems, with friendly care. Willems sat by him in silence, and the boat shoved off, sweeping in a wide circle towards the brig.

"Your compassion is all for my wife, Captain Lingard," said Willems, moodily. "Do you think I am so very happy?"

"No! no!" said Lingard, heartily. "Not a word more shall pass my lips. I had to speak my mind once, seeing that I knew you from a child, so to speak. And now I shall forget; but you are young yet. Life is very long," he went on, with unconscious sadness; "let this be a lesson to you."

He laid his hand affectionately on Willems' shoulder, and they both sat silent till the boat came alongside the ship's ladder.

When on board Lingard gave orders to his mate, and leading Willems on the poop, sat on the breech of one of the brass six-pounders with which his vessel was armed. The boat went off again to bring back the messenger. As soon as it was seen returning dark forms appeared on the brig's spars; then the sails fell in festoons with a swish of their heavy folds, and hung motionless under the yards in the dead calm of the clear and dewy night. From the forward end came the clink of the windlass, and soon afterwards the hail of the chief mate informing Lingard that the cable was hove short.

"Hold on everything," hailed back Lingard; "we must wait for the land-breeze before we let go our hold of the ground."

He approached Willems, who sat on the skylight, his body bent down, his head low, and his hands hanging listlessly between his knees.

"I am going to take you to Sambir," he said. "You've never heard of the place, have you? Well, it's up that river of mine about which people talk so much and know so little. I've found out the entrance for a ship of Flash's size. It isn't easy. You'll see. I will show you. You have been at sea long enough to take an interest. . . . Pity you didn't stick to it. Well, I am going there. I have my own trading post in the place. Almayer is my partner. You knew him when he was at Hudig's. Oh, he lives there as happy as a king. D'ye see, I have them all in my pocket. The rajah is an old friend of mine. My word is law — and I am the only trader. No other white man but Almayer had ever been in that settlement. You will live quietly there till I come back from my next cruise to the westward. We shall see then what can be done for you. Never fear. I have no doubt my secret will be safe with

you. Keep mum about my river when you get amongst the traders again. There's many would give their ears for the knowledge of it. I'll tell you something: that's where I get all my guttah and rattans. Simply inexhaustible, my boy."

While Lingard spoke Willems looked up quickly, but soon his head fell on his breast in the discouraging certitude that the knowledge he and Hudig had wished for so much had come to him too late. He sat in a listless attitude.

"You will help Almayer in his trading if you have a heart for it," continued Lingard, "just to kill time till I come back for you. Only six weeks or so."

Over their heads the damp sails fluttered noisily in the first faint puff of the breeze; then, as the airs freshened, the brig tended to the wind, and the silenced canvas lay quietly aback. The mate spoke with low distinctness from the shadows of the quarter-deck.

"There's the breeze. Which way do you want to cast her, Captain Lingard?"

Lingard's eyes, that had been fixed aloft, glanced down at the dejected figure of the man sitting on the skylight. He seemed to hesitate for a minute.

"To the northward, to the northward," he answered, testily, as if annoyed at his own fleeting thought, "and bear a hand there. Every puff of wind is worth money in these seas."

He remained motionless, listening to the rattle of blocks and the creaking of trusses as the head-yards were hauled round. Sail was made on the ship and the windlass manned again while he stood still, lost in thought. He only roused himself when a barefooted seacannie glided past him silently on his way to the wheel.

"Put the helm aport! Hard over!" he said, in his harsh sea-voice, to the man whose face appeared suddenly out of the darkness in the circle of light thrown upwards from the binnacle lamps.

The anchor was secured, the yards trimmed, and the brig began to move out of the roadstead. The sea woke up under the push of the sharp cutwater, and whispered softly to the gliding craft in that tender and rippling murmur in which it speaks sometimes to those it nurses and loves. Lingard stood by the taff-rail listening, with a pleased smile till the Flash began to draw close to the only other vessel in the anchorage.

“Here, Willems,” he said, calling him to his side, “d’ye see that barque here? That’s an Arab vessel. White men have mostly given up the game, but this fellow drops in my wake often, and lives in hopes of cutting me out in that settlement. Not while I live, I trust. You see, Willems, I brought prosperity to that place. I composed their quarrels, and saw them grow under my eyes. There’s peace and happiness there. I am more master there than his Dutch Excellency down in Batavia ever will be when some day a lazy man-of-war blunders at last against the river. I mean to keep the Arabs out of it, with their lies and their intrigues. I shall keep the venomous breed out, if it costs me my fortune.”

The Flash drew quietly abreast of the barque, and was beginning to drop it astern when a white figure started up on the poop of the Arab vessel, and a voice called out —

“Greeting to the Rajah Laut!”

“To you greeting!” answered Lingard, after a moment of hesitating surprise. Then he turned to Willems with a grim smile. “That’s Abdulla’s voice,” he said. “Mighty civil all of a sudden, isn’t he? I wonder what it means. Just like his impudence! No matter! His civility or his impudence are all one to me. I know that this fellow will be under way and after me like a shot. I don’t care! I have the heels of anything that floats in these seas,” he added, while his proud and loving glance ran over and rested fondly amongst the brig’s lofty and graceful spars.



## CHAPTER FIVE

“It was the writing on his forehead,” said Babalatchi, adding a couple of small sticks to the little fire by which he was squatting, and without looking at Lakamba who lay down supported on his elbow on the other side of the embers. “It was written when he was born that he should end his life in darkness, and now he is like a man walking in a black night — with his eyes open, yet seeing not. I knew him well when he had slaves, and many wives, and much merchandise, and trading praus, and praus for fighting. Hai — ya! He was a great fighter in the days before the breath of the Merciful put out the light in his eyes. He was a pilgrim, and had many virtues: he was brave, his hand was open, and he was a great robber. For many years he led the men that drank blood on the sea: first in prayer and first in fight! Have I not stood behind him when his face was turned to the West? Have I not watched by his side ships with high masts burning in a straight flame on the calm water? Have I not followed him on dark nights amongst sleeping men that woke up only to die? His sword was swifter than the fire from Heaven, and struck before it flashed. Hai! Tuan! Those were the days and that was a leader, and I myself was younger; and in those days there were not so many fireships with guns that deal fiery death from afar. Over the hill and over the forest — O! Tuan Lakamba! they dropped whistling fireballs into the creek where our praus took refuge, and where they dared not follow men who had arms in their hands.”

He shook his head with mournful regret and threw another handful of fuel on the fire. The burst of clear flame lit up his broad, dark, and pock-marked face, where the big lips, stained with betel-juice, looked like a deep and bleeding gash of a fresh wound. The reflection of the firelight gleamed brightly in his solitary eye, lending it for a moment a fierce animation that died out together with the short-lived flame. With quick touches of his bare hands he raked the embers into a heap, then, wiping the warm ash on his waistcloth — his only garment — he clasped his thin legs with his entwined fingers, and rested his chin on his drawn-up knees. Lakamba stirred slightly without changing his position or taking his eyes off the glowing coals, on which they had been fixed in dreamy immobility.

“Yes,” went on Babalatchi, in a low monotone, as if pursuing aloud a train of thought that had its beginning in the silent contemplation of the unstable nature of earthly greatness — “yes. He has been rich and strong,

and now he lives on alms: old, feeble, blind, and without companions, but for his daughter. The Rajah Patalolo gives him rice, and the pale woman — his daughter — cooks it for him, for he has no slave.”

“I saw her from afar,” muttered Lakamba, disparagingly. “A she-dog with white teeth, like a woman of the Orang-Putih.”

“Right, right,” assented Babalatchi; “but you have not seen her near. Her mother was a woman from the west; a Baghdadi woman with veiled face. Now she goes uncovered, like our women do, for she is poor and he is blind, and nobody ever comes near them unless to ask for a charm or a blessing and depart quickly for fear of his anger and of the Rajah’s hand. You have not been on that side of the river?”

“Not for a long time. If I go . . .”

“True! true!” interrupted Babalatchi, soothingly, “but I go often alone — for your good — and look — and listen. When the time comes; when we both go together towards the Rajah’s campong, it will be to enter — and to remain.”

Lakamba sat up and looked at Babalatchi gloomily.

“This is good talk, once, twice; when it is heard too often it becomes foolish, like the prattle of children.”

“Many, many times have I seen the cloudy sky and have heard the wind of the rainy seasons,” said Babalatchi, impressively.

“And where is your wisdom? It must be with the wind and the clouds of seasons past, for I do not hear it in your talk.”

“Those are the words of the ungrateful!” shouted Babalatchi, with sudden exasperation. “Verily, our only refuge is with the One, the Mighty, the Redresser of . . .”

“Peace! Peace!” growled the startled Lakamba. “It is but a friend’s talk.”

Babalatchi subsided into his former attitude, muttering to himself. After awhile he went on again in a louder voice —

“Since the Rajah Laut left another white man here in Sambir, the daughter of the blind Omar el Badavi has spoken to other ears than mine.”

“Would a white man listen to a beggar’s daughter?” said Lakamba, doubtingly.

“Hai! I have seen . . .”

“And what did you see? O one-eyed one!” exclaimed Lakamba, contemptuously.

“I have seen the strange white man walking on the narrow path before the sun could dry the drops of dew on the bushes, and I have heard the whisper of his voice when he spoke through the smoke of the morning fire to that woman with big eyes and a pale skin. Woman in body, but in heart a man! She knows no fear and no shame. I have heard her voice too.”

He nodded twice at Lakamba sagaciously and gave himself up to silent musing, his solitary eye fixed immovably upon the straight wall of forest on the opposite bank. Lakamba lay silent, staring vacantly. Under them Lingard's own river rippled softly amongst the piles supporting the bamboo platform of the little watch-house before which they were lying. Behind the house the ground rose in a gentle swell of a low hill cleared of the big timber, but thickly overgrown with the grass and bushes, now withered and burnt up in the long drought of the dry season. This old rice clearing, which had been several years lying fallow, was framed on three sides by the impenetrable and tangled growth of the untouched forest, and on the fourth came down to the muddy river bank. There was not a breath of wind on the land or river, but high above, in the transparent sky, little clouds rushed past the moon, now appearing in her diffused rays with the brilliance of silver, now obscuring her face with the blackness of ebony. Far away, in the middle of the river, a fish would leap now and then with a short splash, the very loudness of which measured the profundity of the overpowering silence that swallowed up the sharp sound suddenly.

Lakamba dozed uneasily off, but the wakeful Babalatchi sat thinking deeply, sighing from time to time, and slapping himself over his naked torso incessantly in a vain endeavour to keep off an occasional and wandering mosquito that, rising as high as the platform above the swarms of the riverside, would settle with a ping of triumph on the unexpected victim. The moon, pursuing her silent and toilsome path, attained her highest elevation, and chasing the shadow of the roof-eaves from Lakamba's face, seemed to hang arrested over their heads. Babalatchi revived the fire and woke up his companion, who sat up yawning and shivering discontentedly.

Babalatchi spoke again in a voice which was like the murmur of a brook that runs over the stones: low, monotonous, persistent; irresistible in its power to wear out and to destroy the hardest obstacles. Lakamba listened, silent but interested. They were Malay adventurers; ambitious men of that place and time; the Bohemians of their race. In the early days of the settlement, before the ruler Patalolo had shaken off his allegiance to the

Sultan of Koti, Lakamba appeared in the river with two small trading vessels. He was disappointed to find already some semblance of organization amongst the settlers of various races who recognized the unobtrusive sway of old Patalolo, and he was not politic enough to conceal his disappointment. He declared himself to be a man from the east, from those parts where no white man ruled, and to be of an oppressed race, but of a princely family. And truly enough he had all the gifts of an exiled prince. He was discontented, ungrateful, turbulent; a man full of envy and ready for intrigue, with brave words and empty promises for ever on his lips. He was obstinate, but his will was made up of short impulses that never lasted long enough to carry him to the goal of his ambition. Received coldly by the suspicious Patalolo, he persisted — permission or no permission — in clearing the ground on a good spot some fourteen miles down the river from Sambir, and built himself a house there, which he fortified by a high palisade. As he had many followers and seemed very reckless, the old Rajah did not think it prudent at the time to interfere with him by force. Once settled, he began to intrigue. The quarrel of Patalolo with the Sultan of Koti was of his fomenting, but failed to produce the result he expected because the Sultan could not back him up effectively at such a great distance. Disappointed in that scheme, he promptly organized an outbreak of the Bugis settlers, and besieged the old Rajah in his stockade with much noisy valour and a fair chance of success; but Lingard then appeared on the scene with the armed brig, and the old seaman's hairy forefinger, shaken menacingly in his face, quelled his martial ardour. No man cared to encounter the Rajah Laut, and Lakamba, with momentary resignation, subsided into a half-cultivator, half-trader, and nursed in his fortified house his wrath and his ambition, keeping it for use on a more propitious occasion. Still faithful to his character of a prince-pretender, he would not recognize the constituted authorities, answering sulkily the Rajah's messenger, who claimed the tribute for the cultivated fields, that the Rajah had better come and take it himself. By Lingard's advice he was left alone, notwithstanding his rebellious mood; and for many days he lived undisturbed amongst his wives and retainers, cherishing that persistent and causeless hope of better times, the possession of which seems to be the universal privilege of exiled greatness.

But the passing days brought no change. The hope grew faint and the hot ambition burnt itself out, leaving only a feeble and expiring spark amongst

a heap of dull and tepid ashes of indolent acquiescence with the decrees of Fate, till Babalatchi fanned it again into a bright flame. Babalatchi had blundered upon the river while in search of a safe refuge for his disreputable head.

He was a vagabond of the seas, a true Orang-Laut, living by rapine and plunder of coasts and ships in his prosperous days; earning his living by honest and irksome toil when the days of adversity were upon him. So, although at times leading the Sulu rovers, he had also served as Serang of country ships, and in that wise had visited the distant seas, beheld the glories of Bombay, the might of the Mascati Sultan; had even struggled in a pious throng for the privilege of touching with his lips the Sacred Stone of the Holy City. He gathered experience and wisdom in many lands, and after attaching himself to Omar el Badavi, he affected great piety (as became a pilgrim), although unable to read the inspired words of the Prophet. He was brave and bloodthirsty without any affection, and he hated the white men who interfered with the manly pursuits of throat-cutting, kidnapping, slave-dealing, and fire-raising, that were the only possible occupation for a true man of the sea. He found favour in the eyes of his chief, the fearless Omar el Badavi, the leader of Brunei rovers, whom he followed with unquestioning loyalty through the long years of successful depredation. And when that long career of murder, robbery and violence received its first serious check at the hands of white men, he stood faithfully by his chief, looked steadily at the bursting shells, was undismayed by the flames of the burning stronghold, by the death of his companions, by the shrieks of their women, the wailing of their children; by the sudden ruin and destruction of all that he deemed indispensable to a happy and glorious existence. The beaten ground between the houses was slippery with blood, and the dark mangroves of the muddy creeks were full of sighs of the dying men who were stricken down before they could see their enemy. They died helplessly, for into the tangled forest there was no escape, and their swift praus, in which they had so often scoured the coast and the seas, now wedged together in the narrow creek, were burning fiercely. Babalatchi, with the clear perception of the coming end, devoted all his energies to saving if it was but only one of them. He succeeded in time. When the end came in the explosion of the stored powder-barrels, he was ready to look for his chief. He found him half dead and totally blinded, with nobody near him but his daughter Aissa: — the sons had fallen earlier in the day, as became men of

their courage. Helped by the girl with the steadfast heart, Babalatchi carried Omar on board the light prau and succeeded in escaping, but with very few companions only. As they hauled their craft into the network of dark and silent creeks, they could hear the cheering of the crews of the man-of-war's boats dashing to the attack of the rover's village. Aissa, sitting on the high after-deck, her father's blackened and bleeding head in her lap, looked up with fearless eyes at Babalatchi. "They shall find only smoke, blood and dead men, and women mad with fear there, but nothing else living," she said, mournfully. Babalatchi, pressing with his right hand the deep gash on his shoulder, answered sadly: "They are very strong. When we fight with them we can only die. Yet," he added, menacingly — "some of us still live! Some of us still live!"

For a short time he dreamed of vengeance, but his dream was dispelled by the cold reception of the Sultan of Sulu, with whom they sought refuge at first and who gave them only a contemptuous and grudging hospitality. While Omar, nursed by Aissa, was recovering from his wounds, Babalatchi attended industriously before the exalted Presence that had extended to them the hand of Protection. For all that, when Babalatchi spoke into the Sultan's ear certain proposals of a great and profitable raid, that was to sweep the islands from Ternate to Acheen, the Sultan was very angry. "I know you, you men from the west," he exclaimed, angrily. "Your words are poison in a Ruler's ears. Your talk is of fire and murder and booty — but on our heads falls the vengeance of the blood you drink. Begone!"

There was nothing to be done. Times were changed. So changed that, when a Spanish frigate appeared before the island and a demand was sent to the Sultan to deliver Omar and his companions, Babalatchi was not surprised to hear that they were going to be made the victims of political expediency. But from that sane appreciation of danger to tame submission was a very long step. And then began Omar's second flight. It began arms in hand, for the little band had to fight in the night on the beach for the possession of the small canoes in which those that survived got away at last. The story of that escape lives in the hearts of brave men even to this day. They talk of Babalatchi and of the strong woman who carried her blind father through the surf under the fire of the warship from the north. The companions of that piratical and son-less Aeneas are dead now, but their ghosts wander over the waters and the islands at night — after the manner of ghosts — and haunt the fires by which sit armed men, as is meet for the

spirits of fearless warriors who died in battle. There they may hear the story of their own deeds, of their own courage, suffering and death, on the lips of living men. That story is told in many places. On the cool mats in breezy verandahs of Rajahs' houses it is alluded to disdainfully by impassive statesmen, but amongst armed men that throng the courtyards it is a tale which stills the murmur of voices and the tinkle of anklets; arrests the passage of the siri-vessel, and fixes the eyes in absorbed gaze. They talk of the fight, of the fearless woman, of the wise man; of long suffering on the thirsty sea in leaky canoes; of those who died. . . . Many died. A few survived. The chief, the woman, and another one who became great.

There was no hint of incipient greatness in Babalatchi's unostentatious arrival in Sambir. He came with Omar and Aissa in a small prau loaded with green cocoanuts, and claimed the ownership of both vessel and cargo. How it came to pass that Babalatchi, fleeing for his life in a small canoe, managed to end his hazardous journey in a vessel full of a valuable commodity, is one of those secrets of the sea that baffle the most searching inquiry. In truth nobody inquired much. There were rumours of a missing trading prau belonging to Menado, but they were vague and remained mysterious. Babalatchi told a story which — it must be said in justice to Patalolo's knowledge of the world — was not believed. When the Rajah ventured to state his doubts, Babalatchi asked him in tones of calm remonstrance whether he could reasonably suppose that two oldish men — who had only one eye amongst them — and a young woman were likely to gain possession of anything whatever by violence? Charity was a virtue recommended by the Prophet. There were charitable people, and their hand was open to the deserving. Patalolo wagged his aged head doubtingly, and Babalatchi withdrew with a shocked mien and put himself forthwith under Lakamba's protection. The two men who completed the prau's crew followed him into that magnate's campong. The blind Omar, with Aissa, remained under the care of the Rajah, and the Rajah confiscated the cargo. The prau hauled up on the mud-bank, at the junction of the two branches of the Pantai, rotted in the rain, warped in the sun, fell to pieces and gradually vanished into the smoke of household fires of the settlement. Only a forgotten plank and a rib or two, sticking neglected in the shiny ooze for a long time, served to remind Babalatchi during many months that he was a stranger in the land.

Otherwise, he felt perfectly at home in Lakamba's establishment, where his peculiar position and influence were quickly recognized and soon submitted to even by the women. He had all a true vagabond's pliability to circumstances and adaptiveness to momentary surroundings. In his readiness to learn from experience that contempt for early principles so necessary to a true statesman, he equalled the most successful politicians of any age; and he had enough persuasiveness and firmness of purpose to acquire a complete mastery over Lakamba's vacillating mind — where there was nothing stable but an all-pervading discontent. He kept the discontent alive, he rekindled the expiring ambition, he moderated the poor exile's not unnatural impatience to attain a high and lucrative position. He — the man of violence — deprecated the use of force, for he had a clear comprehension of the difficult situation. From the same cause, he — the hater of white men — would to some extent admit the eventual expediency of Dutch protection. But nothing should be done in a hurry. Whatever his master Lakamba might think, there was no use in poisoning old Patalolo, he maintained. It could be done, of course; but what then? As long as Lingard's influence was paramount — as long as Almayer, Lingard's representative, was the only great trader of the settlement, it was not worth Lakamba's while — even if it had been possible — to grasp the rule of the young state. Killing Almayer and Lingard was so difficult and so risky that it might be dismissed as impracticable. What was wanted was an alliance; somebody to set up against the white men's influence — and somebody who, while favourable to Lakamba, would at the same time be a person of a good standing with the Dutch authorities. A rich and considered trader was wanted. Such a person once firmly established in Sambir would help them to oust the old Rajah, to remove him from power or from life if there was no other way. Then it would be time to apply to the Orang Blanda for a flag; for a recognition of their meritorious services; for that protection which would make them safe for ever! The word of a rich and loyal trader would mean something with the Ruler down in Batavia. The first thing to do was to find such an ally and to induce him to settle in Sambir. A white trader would not do. A white man would not fall in with their ideas — would not be trustworthy. The man they wanted should be rich, unscrupulous, have many followers, and be a well-known personality in the islands. Such a man might be found amongst the Arab traders. Lingard's jealousy, said Babalatchi, kept all the traders out of the river. Some were afraid, and some



did not know how to get there; others ignored the very existence of Sambir; a good many did not think it worth their while to run the risk of Lingard's enmity for the doubtful advantage of trade with a comparatively unknown settlement. The great majority were undesirable or untrustworthy. And Babalatchi mentioned regretfully the men he had known in his young days: wealthy, resolute, courageous, reckless, ready for any enterprise! But why lament the past and speak about the dead? There is one man — living — great — not far off . . .

Such was Babalatchi's line of policy laid before his ambitious protector. Lakamba assented, his only objection being that it was very slow work. In his extreme desire to grasp dollars and power, the unintellectual exile was ready to throw himself into the arms of any wandering cut-throat whose help could be secured, and Babalatchi experienced great difficulty in restraining him from unconsidered violence. It would not do to let it be seen that they had any hand in introducing a new element into the social and political life of Sambir. There was always a possibility of failure, and in that case Lingard's vengeance would be swift and certain. No risk should be run. They must wait.

Meantime he pervaded the settlement, squatting in the course of each day by many household fires, testing the public temper and public opinion — and always talking about his impending departure.

At night he would often take Lakamba's smallest canoe and depart silently to pay mysterious visits to his old chief on the other side of the river. Omar lived in odour of sanctity under the wing of Patalolo. Between the bamboo fence, enclosing the houses of the Rajah, and the wild forest, there was a banana plantation, and on its further edge stood two little houses built on low piles under a few precious fruit trees that grew on the banks of a clear brook, which, bubbling up behind the house, ran in its short and rapid course down to the big river. Along the brook a narrow path led through the dense second growth of a neglected clearing to the banana plantation and to the houses in it which the Rajah had given for residence to Omar. The Rajah was greatly impressed by Omar's ostentatious piety, by his oracular wisdom, by his many misfortunes, by the solemn fortitude with which he bore his affliction. Often the old ruler of Sambir would visit informally the blind Arab and listen gravely to his talk during the hot hours of an afternoon. In the night, Babalatchi would call and interrupt Omar's repose, unrebuked. Aissa, standing silently at the door of one of the huts,

could see the two old friends as they sat very still by the fire in the middle of the beaten ground between the two houses, talking in an indistinct murmur far into the night. She could not hear their words, but she watched the two formless shadows curiously. Finally Babalatchi would rise and, taking her father by the wrist, would lead him back to the house, arrange his mats for him, and go out quietly. Instead of going away, Babalatchi, unconscious of Aissa's eyes, often sat again by the fire, in a long and deep meditation. Aissa looked with respect on that wise and brave man — she was accustomed to see at her father's side as long as she could remember — sitting alone and thoughtful in the silent night by the dying fire, his body motionless and his mind wandering in the land of memories, or — who knows? — perhaps groping for a road in the waste spaces of the uncertain future.

Babalatchi noted the arrival of Willems with alarm at this new accession to the white men's strength. Afterwards he changed his opinion. He met Willems one night on the path leading to Omar's house, and noticed later on, with only a moderate surprise, that the blind Arab did not seem to be aware of the new white man's visits to the neighbourhood of his dwelling. Once, coming unexpectedly in the daytime, Babalatchi fancied he could see the gleam of a white jacket in the bushes on the other side of the brook. That day he watched Aissa pensively as she moved about preparing the evening rice; but after awhile he went hurriedly away before sunset, refusing Omar's hospitable invitation, in the name of Allah, to share their meal. That same evening he startled Lakamba by announcing that the time had come at last to make the first move in their long-deferred game. Lakamba asked excitedly for explanation. Babalatchi shook his head and pointed to the flitting shadows of moving women and to the vague forms of men sitting by the evening fires in the courtyard. Not a word would he speak here, he declared. But when the whole household was reposing, Babalatchi and Lakamba passed silent amongst sleeping groups to the riverside, and, taking a canoe, paddled off stealthily on their way to the dilapidated guard-hut in the old rice-clearing. There they were safe from all eyes and ears, and could account, if need be, for their excursion by the wish to kill a deer, the spot being well known as the drinking-place of all kinds of game. In the seclusion of its quiet solitude Babalatchi explained his plan to the attentive Lakamba. His idea was to make use of Willems for the destruction of Lingard's influence.

“I know the white men, Tuan,” he said, in conclusion. “In many lands have I seen them; always the slaves of their desires, always ready to give up their strength and their reason into the hands of some woman. The fate of the Believers is written by the hand of the Mighty One, but they who worship many gods are thrown into the world with smooth foreheads, for any woman’s hand to mark their destruction there. Let one white man destroy another. The will of the Most High is that they should be fools. They know how to keep faith with their enemies, but towards each other they know only deception. Hai! I have seen! I have seen!”

He stretched himself full length before the fire, and closed his eye in real or simulated sleep. Lakamba, not quite convinced, sat for a long time with his gaze riveted on the dull embers. As the night advanced, a slight white mist rose from the river, and the declining moon, bowed over the tops of the forest, seemed to seek the repose of the earth, like a wayward and wandering lover who returns at last to lay his tired and silent head on his beloved’s breast.

## CHAPTER SIX

“Lend me your gun, Almayer,” said Willems, across the table on which a smoky lamp shone redly above the disorder of a finished meal. “I have a mind to go and look for a deer when the moon rises to-night.”

Almayer, sitting sidewise to the table, his elbow pushed amongst the dirty plates, his chin on his breast and his legs stretched stiffly out, kept his eyes steadily on the toes of his grass slippers and laughed abruptly.

“You might say yes or no instead of making that unpleasant noise,” remarked Willems, with calm irritation.

“If I believed one word of what you say, I would,” answered Almayer without changing his attitude and speaking slowly, with pauses, as if dropping his words on the floor. “As it is — what’s the use? You know where the gun is; you may take it or leave it. Gun. Deer. Bosh! Hunt deer! Pah! It’s a . . . gazelle you are after, my honoured guest. You want gold anklets and silk sarongs for that game — my mighty hunter. And you won’t get those for the asking, I promise you. All day amongst the natives. A fine help you are to me.”

“You shouldn’t drink so much, Almayer,” said Willems, disguising his fury under an affected drawl. “You have no head. Never had, as far as I can remember, in the old days in Macassar. You drink too much.”

“I drink my own,” retorted Almayer, lifting his head quickly and darting an angry glance at Willems.

Those two specimens of the superior race glared at each other savagely for a minute, then turned away their heads at the same moment as if by previous arrangement, and both got up. Almayer kicked off his slippers and scrambled into his hammock, which hung between two wooden columns of the verandah so as to catch every rare breeze of the dry season, and Willems, after standing irresolutely by the table for a short time, walked without a word down the steps of the house and over the courtyard towards the little wooden jetty, where several small canoes and a couple of big white whale-boats were made fast, tugging at their short painters and bumping together in the swift current of the river. He jumped into the smallest canoe, balancing himself clumsily, slipped the rattan painter, and gave an unnecessary and violent shove, which nearly sent him headlong overboard. By the time he regained his balance the canoe had drifted some fifty yards down the river. He knelt in the bottom of his little craft and fought the

current with long sweeps of the paddle. Almayer sat up in his hammock, grasping his feet and peering over the river with parted lips till he made out the shadowy form of man and canoe as they struggled past the jetty again.

“I thought you would go,” he shouted. “Won’t you take the gun? Hey?” he yelled, straining his voice. Then he fell back in his hammock and laughed to himself feebly till he fell asleep. On the river, Willems, his eyes fixed intently ahead, swept his paddle right and left, unheeding the words that reached him faintly.

It was now three months since Lingard had landed Willems in Sambir and had departed hurriedly, leaving him in Almayer’s care.

The two white men did not get on well together. Almayer, remembering the time when they both served Hudig, and when the superior Willems treated him with offensive condescension, felt a great dislike towards his guest. He was also jealous of Lingard’s favour. Almayer had married a Malay girl whom the old seaman had adopted in one of his accesses of unreasoning benevolence, and as the marriage was not a happy one from a domestic point of view, he looked to Lingard’s fortune for compensation in his matrimonial unhappiness. The appearance of that man, who seemed to have a claim of some sort upon Lingard, filled him with considerable uneasiness, the more so because the old seaman did not choose to acquaint the husband of his adopted daughter with Willems’ history, or to confide to him his intentions as to that individual’s future fate. Suspicious from the first, Almayer discouraged Willems’ attempts to help him in his trading, and then when Willems drew back, he made, with characteristic perverseness, a grievance of his unconcern. From cold civility in their relations, the two men drifted into silent hostility, then into outspoken enmity, and both wished ardently for Lingard’s return and the end of a situation that grew more intolerable from day to day. The time dragged slowly. Willems watched the succeeding sunrises wondering dismally whether before the evening some change would occur in the deadly dullness of his life. He missed the commercial activity of that existence which seemed to him far off, irreparably lost, buried out of sight under the ruins of his past success — now gone from him beyond the possibility of redemption. He mooned disconsolately about Almayer’s courtyard, watching from afar, with uninterested eyes, the up-country canoes discharging guttah or rattans, and loading rice or European goods on the little wharf of Lingard & Co. Big as was the extent of ground owned by

Almayer, Willems yet felt that there was not enough room for him inside those neat fences. The man who, during long years, became accustomed to think of himself as indispensable to others, felt a bitter and savage rage at the cruel consciousness of his superfluity, of his uselessness; at the cold hostility visible in every look of the only white man in this barbarous corner of the world. He gnashed his teeth when he thought of the wasted days, of the life thrown away in the unwilling company of that peevish and suspicious fool. He heard the reproach of his idleness in the murmurs of the river, in the unceasing whisper of the great forests. Round him everything stirred, moved, swept by in a rush; the earth under his feet and the heavens above his head. The very savages around him strove, struggled, fought, worked — if only to prolong a miserable existence; but they lived, they lived! And it was only himself that seemed to be left outside the scheme of creation in a hopeless immobility filled with tormenting anger and with ever-stinging regret.

He took to wandering about the settlement. The afterwards flourishing Sambir was born in a swamp and passed its youth in malodorous mud. The houses crowded the bank, and, as if to get away from the unhealthy shore, stepped boldly into the river, shooting over it in a close row of bamboo platforms elevated on high piles, amongst which the current below spoke in a soft and unceasing plaint of murmuring eddies. There was only one path in the whole town and it ran at the back of the houses along the succession of blackened circular patches that marked the place of the household fires. On the other side the virgin forest bordered the path, coming close to it, as if to provoke impudently any passer-by to the solution of the gloomy problem of its depths. Nobody would accept the deceptive challenge. There were only a few feeble attempts at a clearing here and there, but the ground was low and the river, retiring after its yearly floods, left on each a gradually diminishing mudhole, where the imported buffaloes of the Bugis settlers wallowed happily during the heat of the day. When Willems walked on the path, the indolent men stretched on the shady side of the houses looked at him with calm curiosity, the women busy round the cooking fires would send after him wondering and timid glances, while the children would only look once, and then run away yelling with fright at the horrible appearance of the man with a red and white face. These manifestations of childish disgust and fear stung Willems with a sense of absurd humiliation; he sought in his walks the comparative solitude of the rudimentary

clearings, but the very buffaloes snorted with alarm at his sight, scrambled lumberingly out of the cool mud and stared wildly in a compact herd at him as he tried to slink unperceived along the edge of the forest. One day, at some unguarded and sudden movement of his, the whole herd stampeded down the path, scattered the fires, sent the women flying with shrill cries, and left behind a track of smashed pots, trampled rice, overturned children, and a crowd of angry men brandishing sticks in loud-voiced pursuit. The innocent cause of that disturbance ran shamefacedly the gauntlet of black looks and unfriendly remarks, and hastily sought refuge in Almayer's campong. After that he left the settlement alone.

Later, when the enforced confinement grew irksome, Willems took one of Almayer's many canoes and crossed the main branch of the Pantai in search of some solitary spot where he could hide his discouragement and his weariness. He skirted in his little craft the wall of tangled verdure, keeping in the dead water close to the bank where the spreading nipa palms nodded their broad leaves over his head as if in contemptuous pity of the wandering outcast. Here and there he could see the beginnings of chopped-out pathways, and, with the fixed idea of getting out of sight of the busy river, he would land and follow the narrow and winding path, only to find that it led nowhere, ending abruptly in the discouragement of thorny thickets. He would go back slowly, with a bitter sense of unreasonable disappointment and sadness; oppressed by the hot smell of earth, dampness, and decay in that forest which seemed to push him mercilessly back into the glittering sunshine of the river. And he would recommence paddling with tired arms to seek another opening, to find another deception.

As he paddled up to the point where the Rajah's stockade came down to the river, the nipas were left behind rattling their leaves over the brown water, and the big trees would appear on the bank, tall, strong, indifferent in the immense solidity of their life, which endures for ages, to that short and fleeting life in the heart of the man who crept painfully amongst their shadows in search of a refuge from the unceasing reproach of his thoughts. Amongst their smooth trunks a clear brook meandered for a time in twining lacets before it made up its mind to take a leap into the hurrying river, over the edge of the steep bank. There was also a pathway there and it seemed frequented. Willems landed, and following the capricious promise of the track soon found himself in a comparatively clear space, where the confused tracery of sunlight fell through the branches and the foliage

overhead, and lay on the stream that shone in an easy curve like a bright sword-blade dropped amongst the long and feathery grass.

Further on, the path continued, narrowed again in the thick undergrowth. At the end of the first turning Willems saw a flash of white and colour, a gleam of gold like a sun-ray lost in shadow, and a vision of blackness darker than the deepest shade of the forest. He stopped, surprised, and fancied he had heard light footsteps — growing lighter — ceasing. He looked around. The grass on the bank of the stream trembled and a tremulous path of its shivering, silver-grey tops ran from the water to the beginning of the thicket. And yet there was not a breath of wind. Somebody kind passed there. He looked pensive while the tremor died out in a quick tremble under his eyes; and the grass stood high, unstirring, with drooping heads in the warm and motionless air.

He hurried on, driven by a suddenly awakened curiosity, and entered the narrow way between the bushes. At the next turn of the path he caught again the glimpse of coloured stuff and of a woman's black hair before him. He hastened his pace and came in full view of the object of his pursuit. The woman, who was carrying two bamboo vessels full of water, heard his footsteps, stopped, and putting the bamboos down half turned to look back. Willems also stood still for a minute, then walked steadily on with a firm tread, while the woman moved aside to let him pass. He kept his eyes fixed straight before him, yet almost unconsciously he took in every detail of the tall and graceful figure. As he approached her the woman tossed her head slightly back, and with a free gesture of her strong, round arm, caught up the mass of loose black hair and brought it over her shoulder and across the lower part of her face. The next moment he was passing her close, walking rigidly, like a man in a trance. He heard her rapid breathing and he felt the touch of a look darted at him from half-open eyes. It touched his brain and his heart together. It seemed to him to be something loud and stirring like a shout, silent and penetrating like an inspiration. The momentum of his motion carried him past her, but an invisible force made up of surprise and curiosity and desire spun him round as soon as he had passed.

She had taken up her burden already, with the intention of pursuing her path. His sudden movement arrested her at the first step, and again she stood straight, slim, expectant, with a readiness to dart away suggested in the light immobility of her pose. High above, the branches of the trees met in a transparent shimmer of waving green mist, through which the rain of



yellow rays descended upon her head, streamed in glints down her black tresses, shone with the changing glow of liquid metal on her face, and lost itself in vanishing sparks in the sombre depths of her eyes that, wide open now, with enlarged pupils, looked steadily at the man in her path. And Willems stared at her, charmed with a charm that carries with it a sense of irreparable loss, tingling with that feeling which begins like a caress and ends in a blow, in that sudden hurt of a new emotion making its way into a human heart, with the brusque stirring of sleeping sensations awakening suddenly to the rush of new hopes, new fears, new desires — and to the flight of one's old self.

She moved a step forward and again halted. A breath of wind that came through the trees, but in Willems' fancy seemed to be driven by her moving figure, rippled in a hot wave round his body and scorched his face in a burning touch. He drew it in with a long breath, the last long breath of a soldier before the rush of battle, of a lover before he takes in his arms the adored woman; the breath that gives courage to confront the menace of death or the storm of passion.

Who was she? Where did she come from? Wonderingly he took his eyes off her face to look round at the serried trees of the forest that stood big and still and straight, as if watching him and her breathlessly. He had been baffled, repelled, almost frightened by the intensity of that tropical life which wants the sunshine but works in gloom; which seems to be all grace of colour and form, all brilliance, all smiles, but is only the blossoming of the dead; whose mystery holds the promise of joy and beauty, yet contains nothing but poison and decay. He had been frightened by the vague perception of danger before, but now, as he looked at that life again, his eyes seemed able to pierce the fantastic veil of creepers and leaves, to look past the solid trunks, to see through the forbidding gloom — and the mystery was disclosed — enchanting, subduing, beautiful. He looked at the woman. Through the checkered light between them she appeared to him with the impalpable distinctness of a dream. The very spirit of that land of mysterious forests, standing before him like an apparition behind a transparent veil — a veil woven of sunbeams and shadows.

She had approached him still nearer. He felt a strange impatience within him at her advance. Confused thoughts rushed through his head, disordered, shapeless, stunning. Then he heard his own voice asking —

“Who are you?”

“I am the daughter of the blind Omar,” she answered, in a low but steady tone. “And you,” she went on, a little louder, “you are the white trader — the great man of this place.”

“Yes,” said Willems, holding her eyes with his in a sense of extreme effort, “Yes, I am white.” Then he added, feeling as if he spoke about some other man, “But I am the outcast of my people.”

She listened to him gravely. Through the mesh of scattered hair her face looked like the face of a golden statue with living eyes. The heavy eyelids dropped slightly, and from between the long eyelashes she sent out a sidelong look: hard, keen, and narrow, like the gleam of sharp steel. Her lips were firm and composed in a graceful curve, but the distended nostrils, the upward poise of the half-averted head, gave to her whole person the expression of a wild and resentful defiance.

A shadow passed over Willems’ face. He put his hand over his lips as if to keep back the words that wanted to come out in a surge of impulsive necessity, the outcome of dominant thought that rushes from the heart to the brain and must be spoken in the face of doubt, of danger, of fear, of destruction itself.

“You are beautiful,” he whispered.

She looked at him again with a glance that running in one quick flash of her eyes over his sunburnt features, his broad shoulders, his straight, tall, motionless figure, rested at last on the ground at his feet. Then she smiled. In the sombre beauty of her face that smile was like the first ray of light on a stormy daybreak that darts evanescent and pale through the gloomy clouds: the forerunner of sunrise and of thunder.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

There are in our lives short periods which hold no place in memory but only as the recollection of a feeling. There is no remembrance of gesture, of action, of any outward manifestation of life; those are lost in the unearthly brilliance or in the unearthly gloom of such moments. We are absorbed in the contemplation of that something, within our bodies, which rejoices or suffers while the body goes on breathing, instinctively runs away or, not less instinctively, fights — perhaps dies. But death in such a moment is the privilege of the fortunate, it is a high and rare favour, a supreme grace.

Willems never remembered how and when he parted from Aissa. He caught himself drinking the muddy water out of the hollow of his hand, while his canoe was drifting in mid-stream past the last houses of Sambir. With his returning wits came the fear of something unknown that had taken possession of his heart, of something inarticulate and masterful which could not speak and would be obeyed. His first impulse was that of revolt. He would never go back there. Never! He looked round slowly at the brilliance of things in the deadly sunshine and took up his paddle! How changed everything seemed! The river was broader, the sky was higher. How fast the canoe flew under the strokes of his paddle! Since when had he acquired the strength of two men or more? He looked up and down the reach at the forests of the bank with a confused notion that with one sweep of his hand he could tumble all these trees into the stream. His face felt burning. He drank again, and shuddered with a depraved sense of pleasure at the after-taste of slime in the water.

It was late when he reached Almayer's house, but he crossed the dark and uneven courtyard, walking lightly in the radiance of some light of his own, invisible to other eyes. His host's sulky greeting jarred him like a sudden fall down a great height. He took his place at the table opposite Almayer and tried to speak cheerfully to his gloomy companion, but when the meal was ended and they sat smoking in silence he felt an abrupt discouragement, a lassitude in all his limbs, a sense of immense sadness as after some great and irreparable loss. The darkness of the night entered his heart, bringing with it doubt and hesitation and dull anger with himself and all the world. He had an impulse to shout horrible curses, to quarrel with Almayer, to do something violent. Quite without any immediate provocation he thought he would like to assault the wretched, sulky beast.

He glanced at him ferociously from under his eyebrows. The unconscious Almayer smoked thoughtfully, planning to-morrow's work probably. The man's composure seemed to Willems an unpardonable insult. Why didn't that idiot talk to-night when he wanted him to? . . . on other nights he was ready enough to chatter. And such dull nonsense too! And Willems, trying hard to repress his own senseless rage, looked fixedly through the thick tobacco-smoke at the stained tablecloth.

They retired early, as usual, but in the middle of the night Willems leaped out of his hammock with a stifled execration and ran down the steps into the courtyard. The two night watchmen, who sat by a little fire talking together in a monotonous undertone, lifted their heads to look wonderingly at the discomposed features of the white man as he crossed the circle of light thrown out by their fire. He disappeared in the darkness and then came back again, passing them close, but with no sign of consciousness of their presence on his face. Backwards and forwards he paced, muttering to himself, and the two Malays, after a short consultation in whispers left the fire quietly, not thinking it safe to remain in the vicinity of a white man who behaved in such a strange manner. They retired round the corner of the godown and watched Willems curiously through the night, till the short daybreak was followed by the sudden blaze of the rising sun, and Almayer's establishment woke up to life and work.

As soon as he could get away unnoticed in the bustle of the busy riverside, Willems crossed the river on his way to the place where he had met Aissa. He threw himself down in the grass by the side of the brook and listened for the sound of her footsteps. The brilliant light of day fell through the irregular opening in the high branches of the trees and streamed down, softened, amongst the shadows of big trunks. Here and there a narrow sunbeam touched the rugged bark of a tree with a golden splash, sparkled on the leaping water of the brook, or rested on a leaf that stood out, shimmering and distinct, on the monotonous background of sombre green tints. The clear gap of blue above his head was crossed by the quick flight of white rice-birds whose wings flashed in the sunlight, while through it the heat poured down from the sky, clung about the steaming earth, rolled among the trees, and wrapped up Willems in the soft and odorous folds of air heavy with the faint scent of blossoms and with the acrid smell of decaying life. And in that atmosphere of Nature's workshop Willems felt soothed and lulled into forgetfulness of his past, into indifference as to his

future. The recollections of his triumphs, of his wrongs and of his ambition vanished in that warmth, which seemed to melt all regrets, all hope, all anger, all strength out of his heart. And he lay there, dreamily contented, in the tepid and perfumed shelter, thinking of Aissa's eyes; recalling the sound of her voice, the quiver of her lips — her frowns and her smile.

She came, of course. To her he was something new, unknown and strange. He was bigger, stronger than any man she had seen before, and altogether different from all those she knew. He was of the victorious race. With a vivid remembrance of the great catastrophe of her life he appeared to her with all the fascination of a great and dangerous thing; of a terror vanquished, surmounted, made a plaything of. They spoke with just such a deep voice — those victorious men; they looked with just such hard blue eyes at their enemies. And she made that voice speak softly to her, those eyes look tenderly at her face! He was indeed a man. She could not understand all he told her of his life, but the fragments she understood she made up for herself into a story of a man great amongst his own people, valorous and unfortunate; an undaunted fugitive dreaming of vengeance against his enemies. He had all the attractiveness of the vague and the unknown — of the unforeseen and of the sudden; of a being strong, dangerous, alive, and human, ready to be enslaved.

She felt that he was ready. She felt it with the unerring intuition of a primitive woman confronted by a simple impulse. Day after day, when they met and she stood a little way off, listening to his words, holding him with her look, the undefined terror of the new conquest became faint and blurred like the memory of a dream, and the certitude grew distinct, and convincing, and visible to the eyes like some material thing in full sunlight. It was a deep joy, a great pride, a tangible sweetness that seemed to leave the taste of honey on her lips. He lay stretched at her feet without moving, for he knew from experience how a slight movement of his could frighten her away in those first days of their intercourse. He lay very quiet, with all the ardour of his desire ringing in his voice and shining in his eyes, whilst his body was still, like death itself. And he looked at her, standing above him, her head lost in the shadow of broad and graceful leaves that touched her cheek; while the slender spikes of pale green orchids streamed down from amongst the boughs and mingled with the black hair that framed her face, as if all those plants claimed her for their own — the animated and

brilliant flower of all that exuberant life which, born in gloom, struggles for ever towards the sunshine.

Every day she came a little nearer. He watched her slow progress — the gradual taming of that woman by the words of his love. It was the monotonous song of praise and desire that, commencing at creation, wraps up the world like an atmosphere and shall end only in the end of all things — when there are no lips to sing and no ears to hear. He told her that she was beautiful and desirable, and he repeated it again and again; for when he told her that, he had said all there was within him — he had expressed his only thought, his only feeling. And he watched the startled look of wonder and mistrust vanish from her face with the passing days, her eyes soften, the smile dwell longer and longer on her lips; a smile as of one charmed by a delightful dream; with the slight exaltation of intoxicating triumph lurking in its dawning tenderness.

And while she was near there was nothing in the whole world — for that idle man — but her look and her smile. Nothing in the past, nothing in the future; and in the present only the luminous fact of her existence. But in the sudden darkness of her going he would be left weak and helpless, as though despoiled violently of all that was himself. He who had lived all his life with no preoccupation but that of his own career, contemptuously indifferent to all feminine influence, full of scorn for men that would submit to it, if ever so little; he, so strong, so superior even in his errors, realized at last that his very individuality was snatched from within himself by the hand of a woman. Where was the assurance and pride of his cleverness; the belief in success, the anger of failure, the wish to retrieve his fortune, the certitude of his ability to accomplish it yet? Gone. All gone. All that had been a man within him was gone, and there remained only the trouble of his heart — that heart which had become a contemptible thing; which could be fluttered by a look or a smile, tormented by a word, soothed by a promise.

When the longed-for day came at last, when she sank on the grass by his side and with a quick gesture took his hand in hers, he sat up suddenly with the movement and look of a man awakened by the crash of his own falling house. All his blood, all his sensation, all his life seemed to rush into that hand leaving him without strength, in a cold shiver, in the sudden clamminess and collapse as of a deadly gun-shot wound. He flung her hand away brutally, like something burning, and sat motionless, his head fallen forward, staring on the ground and catching his breath in painful gasps. His

impulse of fear and apparent horror did not dismay her in the least. Her face was grave and her eyes looked seriously at him. Her fingers touched the hair of his temple, ran in a light caress down his cheek, twisted gently the end of his long moustache: and while he sat in the tremor of that contact she ran off with startling fleetness and disappeared in a peal of clear laughter, in the stir of grass, in the nod of young twigs growing over the path; leaving behind only a vanishing trail of motion and sound.

He scrambled to his feet slowly and painfully, like a man with a burden on his shoulders, and walked towards the riverside. He hugged to his breast the recollection of his fear and of his delight, but told himself seriously over and over again that this must be the end of that adventure. After shoving off his canoe into the stream he lifted his eyes to the bank and gazed at it long and steadily, as if taking his last look at a place of charming memories. He marched up to Almayer's house with the concentrated expression and the determined step of a man who had just taken a momentous resolution. His face was set and rigid, his gestures and movements were guarded and slow. He was keeping a tight hand on himself. A very tight hand. He had a vivid illusion — as vivid as reality almost — of being in charge of a slippery prisoner. He sat opposite Almayer during that dinner — which was their last meal together — with a perfectly calm face and within him a growing terror of escape from his own self.

Now and then he would grasp the edge of the table and set his teeth hard in a sudden wave of acute despair, like one who, falling down a smooth and rapid declivity that ends in a precipice, digs his finger nails into the yielding surface and feels himself slipping helplessly to inevitable destruction.

Then, abruptly, came a relaxation of his muscles, the giving way of his will. Something seemed to snap in his head, and that wish, that idea kept back during all those hours, darted into his brain with the heat and noise of a conflagration. He must see her! See her at once! Go now! To-night! He had the raging regret of the lost hour, of every passing moment. There was no thought of resistance now. Yet with the instinctive fear of the irrevocable, with the innate falseness of the human heart, he wanted to keep open the way of retreat. He had never absented himself during the night. What did Almayer know? What would Almayer think? Better ask him for the gun. A moonlight night. . . . Look for deer. . . . A colourable pretext. He would lie to Almayer. What did it matter! He lied to himself every minute of his life. And for what? For a woman. And such. . . .

Almayer's answer showed him that deception was useless. Everything gets to be known, even in this place. Well, he did not care. Cared for nothing but for the lost seconds. What if he should suddenly die. Die before he saw her. Before he could . . .

As, with the sound of Almayer's laughter in his ears, he urged his canoe in a slanting course across the rapid current, he tried to tell himself that he could return at any moment. He would just go and look at the place where they used to meet, at the tree under which he lay when she took his hand, at the spot where she sat by his side. Just go there and then return — nothing more; but when his little skiff touched the bank he leaped out, forgetting the painter, and the canoe hung for a moment amongst the bushes and then swung out of sight before he had time to dash into the water and secure it. He was thunderstruck at first. Now he could not go back unless he called up the Rajah's people to get a boat and rowers — and the way to Patalolo's campong led past Aissa's house!

He went up the path with the eager eyes and reluctant steps of a man pursuing a phantom, and when he found himself at a place where a narrow track branched off to the left towards Omar's clearing he stood still, with a look of strained attention on his face as if listening to a far-off voice — the voice of his fate. It was a sound inarticulate but full of meaning; and following it there came a rending and tearing within his breast. He twisted his fingers together, and the joints of his hands and arms cracked. On his forehead the perspiration stood out in small pearly drops. He looked round wildly. Above the shapeless darkness of the forest undergrowth rose the treetops with their high boughs and leaves standing out black on the pale sky — like fragments of night floating on moonbeams. Under his feet warm steam rose from the heated earth. Round him there was a great silence.

He was looking round for help. This silence, this immobility of his surroundings seemed to him a cold rebuke, a stern refusal, a cruel unconcern. There was no safety outside of himself — and in himself there was no refuge; there was only the image of that woman. He had a sudden moment of lucidity — of that cruel lucidity that comes once in life to the most benighted. He seemed to see what went on within him, and was horrified at the strange sight. He, a white man whose worst fault till then had been a little want of judgment and too much confidence in the rectitude of his kind! That woman was a complete savage, and . . . He tried to tell himself that the thing was of no consequence. It was a vain effort. The



novelty of the sensations he had never experienced before in the slightest degree, yet had despised on hearsay from his safe position of a civilized man, destroyed his courage. He was disappointed with himself. He seemed to be surrendering to a wild creature the unstained purity of his life, of his race, of his civilization. He had a notion of being lost amongst shapeless things that were dangerous and ghastly. He struggled with the sense of certain defeat — lost his footing — fell back into the darkness. With a faint cry and an upward throw of his arms he gave up as a tired swimmer gives up: because the swamped craft is gone from under his feet; because the night is dark and the shore is far — because death is better than strife.

## PART II

## CHAPTER ONE

The light and heat fell upon the settlement, the clearings, and the river as if flung down by an angry hand. The land lay silent, still, and brilliant under the avalanche of burning rays that had destroyed all sound and all motion, had buried all shadows, had choked every breath. No living thing dared to affront the serenity of this cloudless sky, dared to revolt against the oppression of this glorious and cruel sunshine. Strength and resolution, body and mind alike were helpless, and tried to hide before the rush of the fire from heaven. Only the frail butterflies, the fearless children of the sun, the capricious tyrants of the flowers, fluttered audaciously in the open, and their minute shadows hovered in swarms over the drooping blossoms, ran lightly on the withering grass, or glided on the dry and cracked earth. No voice was heard in this hot noontide but the faint murmur of the river that hurried on in swirls and eddies, its sparkling wavelets chasing each other in their joyous course to the sheltering depths, to the cool refuge of the sea.

Almayer had dismissed his workmen for the midday rest, and, his little daughter on his shoulder, ran quickly across the courtyard, making for the shade of the verandah of his house. He laid the sleepy child on the seat of the big rocking-chair, on a pillow which he took out of his own hammock, and stood for a while looking down at her with tender and pensive eyes. The child, tired and hot, moved uneasily, sighed, and looked up at him with the veiled look of sleepy fatigue. He picked up from the floor a broken palm-leaf fan, and began fanning gently the flushed little face. Her eyelids fluttered and Almayer smiled. A responsive smile brightened for a second her heavy eyes, broke with a dimple the soft outline of her cheek; then the eyelids dropped suddenly, she drew a long breath through the parted lips — and was in a deep sleep before the fleeting smile could vanish from her face.

Almayer moved lightly off, took one of the wooden armchairs, and placing it close to the balustrade of the verandah sat down with a sigh of relief. He spread his elbows on the top rail and resting his chin on his clasped hands looked absently at the river, at the dance of sunlight on the flowing water. Gradually the forest of the further bank became smaller, as if sinking below the level of the river. The outlines wavered, grew thin, dissolved in the air. Before his eyes there was now only a space of undulating blue — one big, empty sky growing dark at times. . . . Where

was the sunshine? . . . He felt soothed and happy, as if some gentle and invisible hand had removed from his soul the burden of his body. In another second he seemed to float out into a cool brightness where there was no such thing as memory or pain. Delicious. His eyes closed — opened — closed again.

“Almayer!”

With a sudden jerk of his whole body he sat up, grasping the front rail with both his hands, and blinked stupidly.

“What? What’s that?” he muttered, looking round vaguely.

“Here! Down here, Almayer.”

Half rising in his chair, Almayer looked over the rail at the foot of the verandah, and fell back with a low whistle of astonishment.

“A ghost, by heavens!” he exclaimed softly to himself.

“Will you listen to me?” went on the husky voice from the courtyard. “May I come up, Almayer?”

Almayer stood up and leaned over the rail. “Don’t you dare,” he said, in a voice subdued but distinct. “Don’t you dare! The child sleeps here. And I don’t want to hear you — or speak to you either.”

“You must listen to me! It’s something important.”

“Not to me, surely.”

“Yes! To you. Very important.”

“You were always a humbug,” said Almayer, after a short silence, in an indulgent tone. “Always! I remember the old days. Some fellows used to say there was no one like you for smartness — but you never took me in. Not quite. I never quite believed in you, Mr. Willems.”

“I admit your superior intelligence,” retorted Willems, with scornful impatience, from below. “Listening to me would be a further proof of it. You will be sorry if you don’t.”

“Oh, you funny fellow!” said Almayer, banteringly. “Well, come up. Don’t make a noise, but come up. You’ll catch a sunstroke down there and die on my doorstep perhaps. I don’t want any tragedy here. Come on!”

Before he finished speaking Willems’ head appeared above the level of the floor, then his shoulders rose gradually and he stood at last before Almayer — a masquerading spectre of the once so very confidential clerk of the richest merchant in the islands. His jacket was soiled and torn; below the waist he was clothed in a worn-out and faded sarong. He flung off his hat, uncovering his long, tangled hair that stuck in wisps on his perspiring

forehead and straggled over his eyes, which glittered deep down in the sockets like the last sparks amongst the black embers of a burnt-out fire. An unclean beard grew out of the caverns of his sunburnt cheeks. The hand he put out towards Almayer was very unsteady. The once firm mouth had the tell-tale droop of mental suffering and physical exhaustion. He was barefooted. Almayer surveyed him with leisurely composure.

“Well!” he said at last, without taking the extended hand which dropped slowly along Willems’ body.

“I am come,” began Willems.

“So I see,” interrupted Almayer. “You might have spared me this treat without making me unhappy. You have been away five weeks, if I am not mistaken. I got on very well without you — and now you are here you are not pretty to look at.”

“Let me speak, will you!” exclaimed Willems.

“Don’t shout like this. Do you think yourself in the forest with your . . . your friends? This is a civilized man’s house. A white man’s. Understand?”

“I am come,” began Willems again; “I am come for your good and mine.”

“You look as if you had come for a good feed,” chimed in the irrepressible Almayer, while Willems waved his hand in a discouraged gesture. “Don’t they give you enough to eat,” went on Almayer, in a tone of easy banter, “those — what am I to call them — those new relations of yours? That old blind scoundrel must be delighted with your company. You know, he was the greatest thief and murderer of those seas. Say! do you exchange confidences? Tell me, Willems, did you kill somebody in Macassar or did you only steal something?”

“It is not true!” exclaimed Willems, hotly. “I only borrowed. . . . They all lied! I . . .”

“Sh-sh!” hissed Almayer, warningly, with a look at the sleeping child. “So you did steal,” he went on, with repressed exultation. “I thought there was something of the kind. And now, here, you steal again.”

For the first time Willems raised his eyes to Almayer’s face.

“Oh, I don’t mean from me. I haven’t missed anything,” said Almayer, with mocking haste. “But that girl. Hey! You stole her. You did not pay the old fellow. She is no good to him now, is she?”

“Stop that. Almayer!”

Something in Willems' tone caused Almayer to pause. He looked narrowly at the man before him, and could not help being shocked at his appearance.

"Almayer," went on Willems, "listen to me. If you are a human being you will. I suffer horribly — and for your sake."

Almayer lifted his eyebrows. "Indeed! How? But you are raving," he added, negligently.

"Ah! You don't know," whispered Willems. "She is gone. Gone," he repeated, with tears in his voice, "gone two days ago."

"No!" exclaimed the surprised Almayer. "Gone! I haven't heard that news yet." He burst into a subdued laugh. "How funny! Had enough of you already? You know it's not flattering for you, my superior countryman."

Willems — as if not hearing him — leaned against one of the columns of the roof and looked over the river. "At first," he whispered, dreamily, "my life was like a vision of heaven — or hell; I didn't know which. Since she went I know what perdition means; what darkness is. I know what it is to be torn to pieces alive. That's how I feel."

"You may come and live with me again," said Almayer, coldly. "After all, Lingard — whom I call my father and respect as such — left you under my care. You pleased yourself by going away. Very good. Now you want to come back. Be it so. I am no friend of yours. I act for Captain Lingard."

"Come back?" repeated Willems, passionately. "Come back to you and abandon her? Do you think I am mad? Without her! Man! what are you made of? To think that she moves, lives, breathes out of my sight. I am jealous of the wind that fans her, of the air she breathes, of the earth that receives the caress of her foot, of the sun that looks at her now while I . . . I haven't seen her for two days — two days."

The intensity of Willems' feeling moved Almayer somewhat, but he affected to yawn elaborately, "You do bore me," he muttered. "Why don't you go after her instead of coming here?"

"Why indeed?"

"Don't you know where she is? She can't be very far. No native craft has left this river for the last fortnight."

"No! not very far — and I will tell you where she is. She is in Lakamba's campong." And Willems fixed his eyes steadily on Almayer's face.

"Phew! Patalolo never sent to let me know. Strange," said Almayer, thoughtfully. "Are you afraid of that lot?" he added, after a short pause.

“I — afraid!”

“Then is it the care of your dignity which prevents you from following her there, my high-minded friend?” asked Almayer, with mock solicitude. “How noble of you!”

There was a short silence; then Willems said, quietly, “You are a fool. I should like to kick you.”

“No fear,” answered Almayer, carelessly; “you are too weak for that. You look starved.”

“I don’t think I have eaten anything for the last two days; perhaps more — I don’t remember. It does not matter. I am full of live embers,” said Willems, gloomily. “Look!” and he bared an arm covered with fresh scars. “I have been biting myself to forget in that pain the fire that hurts me there!” He struck his breast violently with his fist, reeled under his own blow, fell into a chair that stood near and closed his eyes slowly.

“Disgusting exhibition,” said Almayer, loftily. “What could father ever see in you? You are as estimable as a heap of garbage.”

“You talk like that! You, who sold your soul for a few guilders,” muttered Willems, wearily, without opening his eyes.

“Not so few,” said Almayer, with instinctive readiness, and stopped confused for a moment. He recovered himself quickly, however, and went on: “But you — you have thrown yours away for nothing; flung it under the feet of a damned savage woman who has made you already the thing you are, and will kill you very soon, one way or another, with her love or with her hate. You spoke just now about guilders. You meant Lingard’s money, I suppose. Well, whatever I have sold, and for whatever price, I never meant you — you of all people — to spoil my bargain. I feel pretty safe though. Even father, even Captain Lingard, would not touch you now with a pair of tongs; not with a ten-foot pole. . . .”

He spoke excitedly, all in one breath, and, ceasing suddenly, glared at Willems and breathed hard through his nose in sulky resentment. Willems looked at him steadily for a moment, then got up.

“Almayer,” he said resolutely, “I want to become a trader in this place.”

Almayer shrugged his shoulders.

“Yes. And you shall set me up. I want a house and trade goods — perhaps a little money. I ask you for it.”

“Anything else you want? Perhaps this coat?” and here Almayer unbuttoned his jacket — “or my house — or my boots?”

“After all it’s natural,” went on Willems, without paying any attention to Almayer — “it’s natural that she should expect the advantages which . . . and then I could shut up that old wretch and then . . .”

He paused, his face brightened with the soft light of dreamy enthusiasm, and he turned his eyes upwards. With his gaunt figure and dilapidated appearance he looked like some ascetic dweller in a wilderness, finding the reward of a self-denying life in a vision of dazzling glory. He went on in an impassioned murmur —

“And then I would have her all to myself away from her people — all to myself — under my own influence — to fashion — to mould — to adore — to soften — to . . . Oh! Delight! And then — then go away to some distant place where, far from all she knew, I would be all the world to her! All the world to her!”

His face changed suddenly. His eyes wandered for awhile and then became steady all at once.

“I would repay every cent, of course,” he said, in a business-like tone, with something of his old assurance, of his old belief in himself, in it. “Every cent. I need not interfere with your business. I shall cut out the small native traders. I have ideas — but never mind that now. And Captain Lingard would approve, I feel sure. After all it’s a loan, and I shall be at hand. Safe thing for you.”

“Ah! Captain Lingard would approve! He would app . . .” Almayer choked. The notion of Lingard doing something for Willems enraged him. His face was purple. He spluttered insulting words. Willems looked at him coolly.

“I assure you, Almayer,” he said, gently, “that I have good grounds for my demand.”

“Your cursed impudence!”

“Believe me, Almayer, your position here is not so safe as you may think. An unscrupulous rival here would destroy your trade in a year. It would be ruin. Now Lingard’s long absence gives courage to certain individuals. You know? — I have heard much lately. They made proposals to me . . . You are very much alone here. Even Patalolo . . .”

“Damn Patalolo! I am master in this place.”

“But, Almayer, don’t you see . . .”

“Yes, I see. I see a mysterious ass,” interrupted Almayer, violently. “What is the meaning of your veiled threats? Don’t you think I know



something also? They have been intriguing for years — and nothing has happened. The Arabs have been hanging about outside this river for years — and I am still the only trader here; the master here. Do you bring me a declaration of war? Then it's from yourself only. I know all my other enemies. I ought to knock you on the head. You are not worth powder and shot though. You ought to be destroyed with a stick — like a snake."

Almayer's voice woke up the little girl, who sat up on the pillow with a sharp cry. He rushed over to the chair, caught up the child in his arms, walked back blindly, stumbled against Willems' hat which lay on the floor, and kicked it furiously down the steps.

"Clear out of this! Clear out!" he shouted.

Willems made an attempt to speak, but Almayer howled him down.

"Take yourself off! Don't you see you frighten the child — you scarecrow! No, no! dear," he went on to his little daughter, soothingly, while Willems walked down the steps slowly. "No. Don't cry. See! Bad man going away. Look! He is afraid of your papa. Nasty, bad man. Never come back again. He shall live in the woods and never come near my little girl. If he comes papa will kill him — so!" He struck his fist on the rail of the balustrade to show how he would kill Willems, and, perching the consoled child on his shoulder held her with one hand, while he pointed toward the retreating figure of his visitor.

"Look how he runs away, dearest," he said, coaxingly. "Isn't he funny. Call 'pig' after him, dearest. Call after him."

The seriousness of her face vanished into dimples. Under the long eyelashes, glistening with recent tears, her big eyes sparkled and danced with fun. She took firm hold of Almayer's hair with one hand, while she waved the other joyously and called out with all her might, in a clear note, soft and distinct like the pipe of a bird: —

"Pig! Pig! Pig!"

## CHAPTER TWO

A sigh under the flaming blue, a shiver of the sleeping sea, a cool breath as if a door had been swung upon the frozen spaces of the universe, and with a stir of leaves, with the nod of boughs, with the tremble of slender branches the sea breeze struck the coast, rushed up the river, swept round the broad reaches, and travelled on in a soft ripple of darkening water, in the whisper of branches, in the rustle of leaves of the awakened forests. It fanned in Lakamba's campong the dull red of expiring embers into a pale brilliance; and, under its touch, the slender, upright spirals of smoke that rose from every glowing heap swayed, wavered, and eddying down filled the twilight of clustered shade trees with the aromatic scent of the burning wood. The men who had been dozing in the shade during the hot hours of the afternoon woke up, and the silence of the big courtyard was broken by the hesitating murmur of yet sleepy voices, by coughs and yawns, with now and then a burst of laughter, a loud hail, a name or a joke sent out in a soft drawl. Small groups squatted round the little fires, and the monotonous undertone of talk filled the enclosure; the talk of barbarians, persistent, steady, repeating itself in the soft syllables, in musical tones of the never-ending discourses of those men of the forests and the sea, who can talk most of the day and all the night; who never exhaust a subject, never seem able to thresh a matter out; to whom that talk is poetry and painting and music, all art, all history; their only accomplishment, their only superiority, their only amusement. The talk of camp fires, which speaks of bravery and cunning, of strange events and of far countries, of the news of yesterday and the news of to-morrow. The talk about the dead and the living — about those who fought and those who loved.

Lakamba came out on the platform before his own house and sat down — perspiring, half asleep, and sulky — in a wooden armchair under the shade of the overhanging eaves. Through the darkness of the doorway he could hear the soft warbling of his womenkind, busy round the looms where they were weaving the checkered pattern of his gala sarongs. Right and left of him on the flexible bamboo floor those of his followers to whom their distinguished birth, long devotion, or faithful service had given the privilege of using the chief's house, were sleeping on mats or just sat up rubbing their eyes: while the more wakeful had mustered enough energy to draw a chessboard with red clay on a fine mat and were now meditating

silently over their moves. Above the prostrate forms of the players, who lay face downward supported on elbow, the soles of their feet waving irresolutely about, in the absorbed meditation of the game, there towered here and there the straight figure of an attentive spectator looking down with dispassionate but profound interest. On the edge of the platform a row of high-heeled leather sandals stood ranged carefully in a level line, and against the rough wooden rail leaned the slender shafts of the spears belonging to these gentlemen, the broad blades of dulled steel looking very black in the reddening light of approaching sunset.

A boy of about twelve — the personal attendant of Lakamba — squatted at his master's feet and held up towards him a silver siri box. Slowly Lakamba took the box, opened it, and tearing off a piece of green leaf deposited in it a pinch of lime, a morsel of gambier, a small bit of areca nut, and wrapped up the whole with a dexterous twist. He paused, morsel in hand, seemed to miss something, turned his head from side to side, slowly, like a man with a stiff neck, and ejaculated in an ill-humoured bass —

“Babalatchi!”

The players glanced up quickly, and looked down again directly. Those men who were standing stirred uneasily as if prodded by the sound of the chief's voice. The one nearest to Lakamba repeated the call, after a while, over the rail into the courtyard. There was a movement of upturned faces below by the fires, and the cry trailed over the enclosure in sing-song tones. The thumping of wooden pestles husking the evening rice stopped for a moment and Babalatchi's name rang afresh shrilly on women's lips in various keys. A voice far off shouted something — another, nearer, repeated it; there was a short hubbub which died out with extreme suddenness. The first crier turned to Lakamba, saying indolently —

“He is with the blind Omar.”

Lakamba's lips moved inaudibly. The man who had just spoken was again deeply absorbed in the game going on at his feet; and the chief — as if he had forgotten all about it already — sat with a stolid face amongst his silent followers, leaning back squarely in his chair, his hands on the arms of his seat, his knees apart, his big blood-shot eyes blinking solemnly, as if dazzled by the noble vacuity of his thoughts.

Babalatchi had gone to see old Omar late in the afternoon. The delicate manipulation of the ancient pirate's susceptibilities, the skilful management of Aissa's violent impulses engrossed him to the exclusion of every other

business — interfered with his regular attendance upon his chief and protector — even disturbed his sleep for the last three nights. That day when he left his own bamboo hut — which stood amongst others in Lakamba's campong — his heart was heavy with anxiety and with doubt as to the success of his intrigue. He walked slowly, with his usual air of detachment from his surroundings, as if unaware that many sleepy eyes watched from all parts of the courtyard his progress towards a small gate at its upper end. That gate gave access to a separate enclosure in which a rather large house, built of planks, had been prepared by Lakamba's orders for the reception of Omar and Aissa. It was a superior kind of habitation which Lakamba intended for the dwelling of his chief adviser — whose abilities were worth that honour, he thought. But after the consultation in the deserted clearing — when Babalatchi had disclosed his plan — they both had agreed that the new house should be used at first to shelter Omar and Aissa after they had been persuaded to leave the Rajah's place, or had been kidnapped from there — as the case might be. Babalatchi did not mind in the least the putting off of his own occupation of the house of honour, because it had many advantages for the quiet working out of his plans. It had a certain seclusion, having an enclosure of its own, and that enclosure communicated also with Lakamba's private courtyard at the back of his residence — a place set apart for the female household of the chief. The only communication with the river was through the great front courtyard always full of armed men and watchful eyes. Behind the whole group of buildings there stretched the level ground of rice-clearings, which in their turn were closed in by the wall of untouched forests with undergrowth so thick and tangled that nothing but a bullet — and that fired at pretty close range — could penetrate any distance there.

Babalatchi slipped quietly through the little gate and, closing it, tied up carefully the rattan fastenings. Before the house there was a square space of ground, beaten hard into the level smoothness of asphalt. A big buttressed tree, a giant left there on purpose during the process of clearing the land, roofed in the clear space with a high canopy of gnarled boughs and thick, sombre leaves. To the right — and some small distance away from the large house — a little hut of reeds, covered with mats, had been put up for the special convenience of Omar, who, being blind and infirm, had some difficulty in ascending the steep plankway that led to the more substantial dwelling, which was built on low posts and had an uncovered verandah.

Close by the trunk of the tree, and facing the doorway of the hut, the household fire glowed in a small handful of embers in the midst of a large circle of white ashes. An old woman — some humble relation of one of Lakamba's wives, who had been ordered to attend on Aissa — was squatting over the fire and lifted up her bleared eyes to gaze at Babalatchi in an uninterested manner, as he advanced rapidly across the courtyard.

Babalatchi took in the courtyard with a keen glance of his solitary eye, and without looking down at the old woman muttered a question. Silently, the woman stretched a tremulous and emaciated arm towards the hut. Babalatchi made a few steps towards the doorway, but stopped outside in the sunlight.

"O! Tuan Omar, Omar besar! It is I — Babalatchi!"

Within the hut there was a feeble groan, a fit of coughing and an indistinct murmur in the broken tones of a vague plaint. Encouraged evidently by those signs of dismal life within, Babalatchi entered the hut, and after some time came out leading with rigid carefulness the blind Omar, who followed with both his hands on his guide's shoulders. There was a rude seat under the tree, and there Babalatchi led his old chief, who sat down with a sigh of relief and leaned wearily against the rugged trunk. The rays of the setting sun, darting under the spreading branches, rested on the white-robed figure sitting with head thrown back in stiff dignity, on the thin hands moving uneasily, and on the stolid face with its eyelids dropped over the destroyed eyeballs; a face set into the immobility of a plaster cast yellowed by age.

"Is the sun near its setting?" asked Omar, in a dull voice.

"Very near," answered Babalatchi.

"Where am I? Why have I been taken away from the place which I knew — where I, blind, could move without fear? It is like black night to those who see. And the sun is near its setting — and I have not heard the sound of her footsteps since the morning! Twice a strange hand has given me my food to-day. Why? Why? Where is she?"

"She is near," said Babalatchi.

"And he?" went on Omar, with sudden eagerness, and a drop in his voice. "Where is he? Not here. Not here!" he repeated, turning his head from side to side as if in deliberate attempt to see.

"No! He is not here now," said Babalatchi, soothingly. Then, after a pause, he added very low, "But he shall soon return."

“Return! O crafty one! Will he return? I have cursed him three times,” exclaimed Omar, with weak violence.

“He is — no doubt — accursed,” assented Babalatchi, in a conciliating manner — “and yet he will be here before very long — I know!”

“You are crafty and faithless. I have made you great. You were dirt under my feet — less than dirt,” said Omar, with tremulous energy.

“I have fought by your side many times,” said Babalatchi, calmly.

“Why did he come?” went on Omar. “Did you send him? Why did he come to defile the air I breathe — to mock at my fate — to poison her mind and steal her body? She has grown hard of heart to me. Hard and merciless and stealthy like rocks that tear a ship’s life out under the smooth sea.” He drew a long breath, struggled with his anger, then broke down suddenly. “I have been hungry,” he continued, in a whimpering tone — “often I have been very hungry — and cold — and neglected — and nobody near me. She has often forgotten me — and my sons are dead, and that man is an infidel and a dog. Why did he come? Did you show him the way?”

“He found the way himself, O Leader of the brave,” said Babalatchi, sadly. “I only saw a way for their destruction and our own greatness. And if I saw aright, then you shall never suffer from hunger any more. There shall be peace for us, and glory and riches.”

“And I shall die to-morrow,” murmured Omar, bitterly.

“Who knows? Those things have been written since the beginning of the world,” whispered Babalatchi, thoughtfully.

“Do not let him come back,” exclaimed Omar.

“Neither can he escape his fate,” went on Babalatchi. “He shall come back, and the power of men we always hated, you and I, shall crumble into dust in our hand.” Then he added with enthusiasm, “They shall fight amongst themselves and perish both.”

“And you shall see all this, while, I . . .”

“True!” murmured Babalatchi, regretfully. “To you life is darkness.”

“No! Flame!” exclaimed the old Arab, half rising, then falling back in his seat. “The flame of that last day! I see it yet — the last thing I saw! And I hear the noise of the rent earth — when they all died. And I live to be the plaything of a crafty one,” he added, with inconsequential peevishness.

“You are my master still,” said Babalatchi, humbly. “You are very wise — and in your wisdom you shall speak to Syed Abdulla when he comes here — you shall speak to him as I advised, I, your servant, the man who

fought at your right hand for many years. I have heard by a messenger that the Syed Abdulla is coming to-night, perhaps late; for those things must be done secretly, lest the white man, the trader up the river, should know of them. But he will be here. There has been a surat delivered to Lakamba. In it, Syed Abdulla says he will leave his ship, which is anchored outside the river, at the hour of noon to-day. He will be here before daylight if Allah wills."

He spoke with his eye fixed on the ground, and did not become aware of Aissa's presence till he lifted his head when he ceased speaking. She had approached so quietly that even Omar did not hear her footsteps, and she stood now looking at them with troubled eyes and parted lips, as if she was going to speak; but at Babalatchi's entreating gesture she remained silent. Omar sat absorbed in thought.

"Ay wa! Even so!" he said at last, in a weak voice. "I am to speak your wisdom, O Babalatchi! Tell him to trust the white man! I do not understand. I am old and blind and weak. I do not understand. I am very cold," he continued, in a lower tone, moving his shoulders uneasily. He ceased, then went on rambling in a faint whisper. "They are the sons of witches, and their father is Satan the stoned. Sons of witches. Sons of witches." After a short silence he asked suddenly, in a firmer voice — "How many white men are there here, O crafty one?"

"There are two here. Two white men to fight one another," answered Babalatchi, with alacrity.

"And how many will be left then? How many? Tell me, you who are wise."

"The downfall of an enemy is the consolation of the unfortunate," said Babalatchi, sententiously. "They are on every sea; only the wisdom of the Most High knows their number — but you shall know that some of them suffer."

"Tell me, Babalatchi, will they die? Will they both die?" asked Omar, in sudden agitation.

Aissa made a movement. Babalatchi held up a warning hand.

"They shall, surely, die," he said steadily, looking at the girl with unflinching eye.

"Ay wa! But die soon! So that I can pass my hand over their faces when Allah has made them stiff."

“If such is their fate and yours,” answered Babalatchi, without hesitation. “God is great!”

A violent fit of coughing doubled Omar up, and he rocked himself to and fro, wheezing and moaning in turns, while Babalatchi and the girl looked at him in silence. Then he leaned back against the tree, exhausted.

“I am alone, I am alone,” he wailed feebly, groping vaguely about with his trembling hands. “Is there anybody near me? Is there anybody? I am afraid of this strange place.”

“I am by your side, O Leader of the brave,” said Babalatchi, touching his shoulder lightly. “Always by your side as in the days when we both were young: as in the time when we both went with arms in our hands.”

“Has there been such a time, Babalatchi?” said Omar, wildly; “I have forgotten. And now when I die there will be no man, no fearless man to speak of his father’s bravery. There was a woman! A woman! And she has forsaken me for an infidel dog. The hand of the Compassionate is heavy on my head! Oh, my calamity! Oh, my shame!”

He calmed down after a while, and asked quietly —

“Is the sun set, Babalatchi?”

“It is now as low as the highest tree I can see from here,” answered Babalatchi.

“It is the time of prayer,” said Omar, attempting to get up.

Dutifully Babalatchi helped his old chief to rise, and they walked slowly towards the hut. Omar waited outside, while Babalatchi went in and came out directly, dragging after him the old Arab’s praying carpet. Out of a brass vessel he poured the water of ablution on Omar’s outstretched hands, and eased him carefully down into a kneeling posture, for the venerable robber was far too infirm to be able to stand. Then as Omar droned out the first words and made his first bow towards the Holy City, Babalatchi stepped noiselessly towards Aissa, who did not move all the time.

Aissa looked steadily at the one-eyed sage, who was approaching her slowly and with a great show of deference. For a moment they stood facing each other in silence. Babalatchi appeared embarrassed. With a sudden and quick gesture she caught hold of his arm, and with the other hand pointed towards the sinking red disc that glowed, rayless, through the floating mists of the evening.

“The third sunset! The last! And he is not here,” she whispered; “what have you done, man without faith? What have you done?”



“Indeed I have kept my word,” murmured Babalatchi, earnestly. “This morning Bulangi went with a canoe to look for him. He is a strange man, but our friend, and shall keep close to him and watch him without ostentation. And at the third hour of the day I have sent another canoe with four rowers. Indeed, the man you long for, O daughter of Omar! may come when he likes.”

“But he is not here! I waited for him yesterday. To-day! To-morrow I shall go.”

“Not alive!” muttered Babalatchi to himself. “And do you doubt your power,” he went on in a louder tone — “you that to him are more beautiful than an houri of the seventh Heaven? He is your slave.”

“A slave does run away sometimes,” she said, gloomily, “and then the master must go and seek him out.”

“And do you want to live and die a beggar?” asked Babalatchi, impatiently.

“I care not,” she exclaimed, wringing her hands; and the black pupils of her wide-open eyes darted wildly here and there like petrels before the storm.

“Sh! Sh!” hissed Babalatchi, with a glance towards Omar. “Do you think, O girl! that he himself would live like a beggar, even with you?”

“He is great,” she said, ardently. “He despises you all! He despises you all! He is indeed a man!”

“You know that best,” muttered Babalatchi, with a fugitive smile — “but remember, woman with the strong heart, that to hold him now you must be to him like the great sea to thirsty men — a never-ceasing torment, and a madness.”

He ceased and they stood in silence, both looking on the ground, and for a time nothing was heard above the crackling of the fire but the intoning of Omar glorifying the God — his God, and the Faith — his faith. Then Babalatchi cocked his head on one side and appeared to listen intently to the hum of voices in the big courtyard. The dull noise swelled into distinct shouts, then into a great tumult of voices, dying away, recommencing, growing louder, to cease again abruptly; and in those short pauses the shrill vociferations of women rushed up, as if released, towards the quiet heaven. Aissa and Babalatchi started, but the latter gripped in his turn the girl’s arm and restrained her with a strong grasp.

“Wait,” he whispered.

The little door in the heavy stockade which separated Lakamba's private ground from Omar's enclosure swung back quickly, and the noble exile appeared with disturbed mien and a naked short sword in his hand. His turban was half unrolled, and the end trailed on the ground behind him. His jacket was open. He breathed thickly for a moment before he spoke.

"He came in Bulangi's boat," he said, "and walked quietly till he was in my presence, when the senseless fury of white men caused him to rush upon me. I have been in great danger," went on the ambitious nobleman in an aggrieved tone. "Do you hear that, Babalatchi? That eater of swine aimed a blow at my face with his unclean fist. He tried to rush amongst my household. Six men are holding him now."

A fresh outburst of yells stopped Lakamba's discourse. Angry voices shouted: "Hold him. Beat him down. Strike at his head."

Then the clamour ceased with sudden completeness, as if strangled by a mighty hand, and after a second of surprising silence the voice of Willems was heard alone, howling maledictions in Malay, in Dutch, and in English.

"Listen," said Lakamba, speaking with unsteady lips, "he blasphemes his God. His speech is like the raving of a mad dog. Can we hold him for ever? He must be killed!"

"Fool!" muttered Babalatchi, looking up at Aissa, who stood with set teeth, with gleaming eyes and distended nostrils, yet obedient to the touch of his restraining hand. "It is the third day, and I have kept my promise," he said to her, speaking very low. "Remember," he added warningly — "like the sea to the thirsty! And now," he said aloud, releasing her and stepping back, "go, fearless daughter, go!"

Like an arrow, rapid and silent she flew down the enclosure, and disappeared through the gate of the courtyard. Lakamba and Babalatchi looked after her. They heard the renewed tumult, the girl's clear voice calling out, "Let him go!" Then after a pause in the din no longer than half the human breath the name of Aissa rang in a shout loud, discordant, and piercing, which sent through them an involuntary shudder. Old Omar collapsed on his carpet and moaned feebly; Lakamba stared with gloomy contempt in the direction of the inhuman sound; but Babalatchi, forcing a smile, pushed his distinguished protector through the narrow gate in the stockade, followed him, and closed it quickly.

The old woman, who had been most of the time kneeling by the fire, now rose, glanced round fearfully and crouched hiding behind the tree. The gate

of the great courtyard flew open with a great clatter before a frantic kick, and Willems darted in carrying Aissa in his arms. He rushed up the enclosure like a tornado, pressing the girl to his breast, her arms round his neck, her head hanging back over his arm, her eyes closed and her long hair nearly touching the ground. They appeared for a second in the glare of the fire, then, with immense strides, he dashed up the planks and disappeared with his burden in the doorway of the big house.

Inside and outside the enclosure there was silence. Omar lay supporting himself on his elbow, his terrified face with its closed eyes giving him the appearance of a man tormented by a nightmare.

“What is it? Help! Help me to rise!” he called out faintly.

The old hag, still crouching in the shadow, stared with bleared eyes at the doorway of the big house, and took no notice of his call. He listened for a while, then his arm gave way, and, with a deep sigh of discouragement, he let himself fall on the carpet.

The boughs of the tree nodded and trembled in the unsteady currents of the light wind. A leaf fluttered down slowly from some high branch and rested on the ground, immobile, as if resting for ever, in the glow of the fire; but soon it stirred, then soared suddenly, and flew, spinning and turning before the breath of the perfumed breeze, driven helplessly into the dark night that had closed over the land.

## CHAPTER THREE

For upwards of forty years Abdulla had walked in the way of his Lord. Son of the rich Syed Selim bin Sali, the great Mohammedan trader of the Straits, he went forth at the age of seventeen on his first commercial expedition, as his father's representative on board a pilgrim ship chartered by the wealthy Arab to convey a crowd of pious Malays to the Holy Shrine. That was in the days when steam was not in those seas — or, at least, not so much as now. The voyage was long, and the young man's eyes were opened to the wonders of many lands. Allah had made it his fate to become a pilgrim very early in life. This was a great favour of Heaven, and it could not have been bestowed upon a man who prized it more, or who made himself more worthy of it by the unswerving piety of his heart and by the religious solemnity of his demeanour. Later on it became clear that the book of his destiny contained the programme of a wandering life. He visited Bombay and Calcutta, looked in at the Persian Gulf, beheld in due course the high and barren coasts of the Gulf of Suez, and this was the limit of his wanderings westward. He was then twenty-seven, and the writing on his forehead decreed that the time had come for him to return to the Straits and take from his dying father's hands the many threads of a business that was spread over all the Archipelago: from Sumatra to New Guinea, from Batavia to Palawan.

Very soon his ability, his will — strong to obstinacy — his wisdom beyond his years, caused him to be recognized as the head of a family whose members and connections were found in every part of those seas. An uncle here — a brother there; a father-in-law in Batavia, another in Palembang; husbands of numerous sisters; cousins innumerable scattered north, south, east, and west — in every place where there was trade: the great family lay like a network over the islands. They lent money to princes, influenced the council-rooms, faced — if need be — with peaceful intrepidity the white rulers who held the land and the sea under the edge of sharp swords; and they all paid great deference to Abdulla, listened to his advice, entered into his plans — because he was wise, pious, and fortunate.

He bore himself with the humility becoming a Believer, who never forgets, even for one moment of his waking life, that he is the servant of the Most High. He was largely charitable because the charitable man is the friend of Allah, and when he walked out of his house — built of stone, just

outside the town of Penang — on his way to his godowns in the port, he had often to snatch his hand away sharply from under the lips of men of his race and creed; and often he had to murmur deprecating words, or even to rebuke with severity those who attempted to touch his knees with their finger-tips in gratitude or supplication. He was very handsome, and carried his small head high with meek gravity. His lofty brow, straight nose, narrow, dark face with its chiselled delicacy of feature, gave him an aristocratic appearance which proclaimed his pure descent. His beard was trimmed close and to a rounded point. His large brown eyes looked out steadily with a sweetness that was belied by the expression of his thin-lipped mouth. His aspect was serene. He had a belief in his own prosperity which nothing could shake.

Restless, like all his people, he very seldom dwelt for many days together in his splendid house in Penang. Owner of ships, he was often on board one or another of them, traversing in all directions the field of his operations. In every port he had a household — his own or that of a relation — to hail his advent with demonstrative joy. In every port there were rich and influential men eager to see him, there was business to talk over, there were important letters to read: an immense correspondence, enclosed in silk envelopes — a correspondence which had nothing to do with the infidels of colonial post-offices, but came into his hands by devious, yet safe, ways. It was left for him by taciturn nakhodas of native trading craft, or was delivered with profound salaams by travel-stained and weary men who would withdraw from his presence calling upon Allah to bless the generous giver of splendid rewards. And the news was always good, and all his attempts always succeeded, and in his ears there rang always a chorus of admiration, of gratitude, of humble entreaties.

A fortunate man. And his felicity was so complete that the good genii, who ordered the stars at his birth, had not neglected — by a refinement of benevolence strange in such primitive beings — to provide him with a desire difficult to attain, and with an enemy hard to overcome. The envy of Lingard's political and commercial successes, and the wish to get the best of him in every way, became Abdulla's mania, the paramount interest of his life, the salt of his existence.

For the last few months he had been receiving mysterious messages from Sambir urging him to decisive action. He had found the river a couple of years ago, and had been anchored more than once off that estuary where

the, till then, rapid Pantai, spreading slowly over the lowlands, seems to hesitate, before it flows gently through twenty outlets; over a maze of mudflats, sandbanks and reefs, into the expectant sea. He had never attempted the entrance, however, because men of his race, although brave and adventurous travellers, lack the true seamanlike instincts, and he was afraid of getting wrecked. He could not bear the idea of the Rajah Laut being able to boast that Abdulla bin Selim, like other and lesser men, had also come to grief when trying to wrest his secret from him. Meantime he returned encouraging answers to his unknown friends in Sambir, and waited for his opportunity in the calm certitude of ultimate triumph.

Such was the man whom Lakamba and Babalatchi expected to see for the first time on the night of Willems' return to Aissa. Babalatchi, who had been tormented for three days by the fear of having over-reached himself in his little plot, now, feeling sure of his white man, felt lighthearted and happy as he superintended the preparations in the courtyard for Abdulla's reception. Half-way between Lakamba's house and the river a pile of dry wood was made ready for the torch that would set fire to it at the moment of Abdulla's landing. Between this and the house again there was, ranged in a semicircle, a set of low bamboo frames, and on those were piled all the carpets and cushions of Lakamba's household. It had been decided that the reception was to take place in the open air, and that it should be made impressive by the great number of Lakamba's retainers, who, clad in clean white, with their red sarongs gathered round their waists, chopper at side and lance in hand, were moving about the compound or, gathering into small knots, discussed eagerly the coming ceremony.

Two little fires burned brightly on the water's edge on each side of the landing place. A small heap of damar-gum torches lay by each, and between them Babalatchi strolled backwards and forwards, stopping often with his face to the river and his head on one side, listening to the sounds that came from the darkness over the water. There was no moon and the night was very clear overhead, but, after the afternoon breeze had expired in fitful puffs, the vapours hung thickening over the glancing surface of the Pantai and clung to the shore, hiding from view the middle of the stream.

A cry in the mist — then another — and, before Babalatchi could answer, two little canoes dashed up to the landing-place, and two of the principal citizens of Sambir, Daoud Sahamin and Hamet Bahassoen, who had been confidentially invited to meet Abdulla, landed quickly and after greeting

Babalatchi walked up the dark courtyard towards the house. The little stir caused by their arrival soon subsided, and another silent hour dragged its slow length while Babalatchi tramped up and down between the fires, his face growing more anxious with every passing moment.

At last there was heard a loud hail from down the river. At a call from Babalatchi men ran down to the riverside and, snatching the torches, thrust them into the fires, then waved them above their heads till they burst into a flame. The smoke ascended in thick, wispy streams, and hung in a ruddy cloud above the glare that lit up the courtyard and flashed over the water, showing three long canoes manned by many paddlers lying a little off; the men in them lifting their paddles on high and dipping them down together, in an easy stroke that kept the small flotilla motionless in the strong current, exactly abreast of the landing-place. A man stood up in the largest craft and called out —

“Syed Abdulla bin Selim is here!”

Babalatchi answered aloud in a formal tone —

“Allah gladdens our hearts! Come to the land!”

Abdulla landed first, steadying himself by the help of Babalatchi’s extended hand. In the short moment of his passing from the boat to the shore they exchanged sharp glances and a few rapid words.

“Who are you?”

“Babalatchi. The friend of Omar. The protected of Lakamba.”

“You wrote?”

“My words were written, O Giver of alms!”

And then Abdulla walked with composed face between the two lines of men holding torches, and met Lakamba in front of the big fire that was crackling itself up into a great blaze. For a moment they stood with clasped hands invoking peace upon each other’s head, then Lakamba, still holding his honoured guest by the hand, led him round the fire to the prepared seats. Babalatchi followed close behind his protector. Abdulla was accompanied by two Arabs. He, like his companions, was dressed in a white robe of starched muslin, which fell in stiff folds straight from the neck. It was buttoned from the throat halfway down with a close row of very small gold buttons; round the tight sleeves there was a narrow braid of gold lace. On his shaven head he wore a small skull-cap of plaited grass. He was shod in patent leather slippers over his naked feet. A rosary of heavy wooden beads hung by a round turn from his right wrist. He sat down slowly in the place

of honour, and, dropping his slippers, tucked up his legs under him decorously.

The improvised divan was arranged in a wide semi-circle, of which the point most distant from the fire — some ten yards — was also the nearest to Lakamba's dwelling. As soon as the principal personages were seated, the verandah of the house was filled silently by the muffled-up forms of Lakamba's female belongings. They crowded close to the rail and looked down, whispering faintly. Below, the formal exchange of compliments went on for some time between Lakamba and Abdulla, who sat side by side. Babalatchi squatted humbly at his protector's feet, with nothing but a thin mat between himself and the hard ground.

Then there was a pause. Abdulla glanced round in an expectant manner, and after a while Babalatchi, who had been sitting very still in a pensive attitude, seemed to rouse himself with an effort, and began to speak in gentle and persuasive tones. He described in flowing sentences the first beginnings of Sambir, the dispute of the present ruler, Patalolo, with the Sultan of Koti, the consequent troubles ending with the rising of Bugis settlers under the leadership of Lakamba. At different points of the narrative he would turn for confirmation to Sahamin and Bahassoen, who sat listening eagerly and assented together with a "Betul! Betul! Right! Right!" ejaculated in a fervent undertone.

Warming up with his subject as the narrative proceeded, Babalatchi went on to relate the facts connected with Lingard's action at the critical period of those internal dissensions. He spoke in a restrained voice still, but with a growing energy of indignation. What was he, that man of fierce aspect, to keep all the world away from them? Was he a government? Who made him ruler? He took possession of Patalolo's mind and made his heart hard; he put severe words into his mouth and caused his hand to strike right and left. That unbeliever kept the Faithful panting under the weight of his senseless oppression. They had to trade with him — accept such goods as he would give — such credit as he would accord. And he exacted payment every year . . .

"Very true!" exclaimed Sahamin and Bahassoen together.

Babalatchi glanced at them approvingly and turned to Abdulla.

"Listen to those men, O Protector of the oppressed!" he exclaimed. "What could we do? A man must trade. There was nobody else."



Sahamin got up, staff in hand, and spoke to Abdulla with ponderous courtesy, emphasizing his words by the solemn flourishes of his right arm.

“It is so. We are weary of paying our debts to that white man here, who is the son of the Rajah Laut. That white man — may the grave of his mother be defiled! — is not content to hold us all in his hand with a cruel grasp. He seeks to cause our very death. He trades with the Dyaks of the forest, who are no better than monkeys. He buys from them guttah and rattans — while we starve. Only two days ago I went to him and said, ‘Tuan Almayer’ — even so; we must speak politely to that friend of Satan — ‘Tuan Almayer, I have such and such goods to sell. Will you buy?’ And he spoke thus — because those white men have no understanding of any courtesy — he spoke to me as if I was a slave: ‘Daoud, you are a lucky man’ — remark, O First amongst the Believers! that by those words he could have brought misfortune on my head — ‘you are a lucky man to have anything in these hard times. Bring your goods quickly, and I shall receive them in payment of what you owe me from last year.’ And he laughed, and struck me on the shoulder with his open hand. May Jehannum be his lot!”

“We will fight him,” said young Bahassoen, crisply. “We shall fight if there is help and a leader. Tuan Abdulla, will you come among us?”

Abdulla did not answer at once. His lips moved in an inaudible whisper and the beads passed through his fingers with a dry click. All waited in respectful silence. “I shall come if my ship can enter this river,” said Abdulla at last, in a solemn tone.

“It can, Tuan,” exclaimed Babalatchi. “There is a white man here who . . .”

“I want to see Omar el Badavi and that white man you wrote about,” interrupted Abdulla.

Babalatchi got on his feet quickly, and there was a general move.

The women on the verandah hurried indoors, and from the crowd that had kept discreetly in distant parts of the courtyard a couple of men ran with armfuls of dry fuel, which they cast upon the fire. One of them, at a sign from Babalatchi, approached and, after getting his orders, went towards the little gate and entered Omar’s enclosure. While waiting for his return, Lakamba, Abdulla, and Babalatchi talked together in low tones. Sahamin sat by himself chewing betel-nut sleepily with a slight and indolent motion of his heavy jaw. Bahassoen, his hand on the hilt of his short sword, strutted backwards and forwards in the full light of the fire,

looking very warlike and reckless; the envy and admiration of Lakamba's retainers, who stood in groups or flitted about noiselessly in the shadows of the courtyard.

The messenger who had been sent to Omar came back and stood at a distance, waiting till somebody noticed him. Babalatchi beckoned him close.

"What are his words?" asked Babalatchi.

"He says that Syed Abdulla is welcome now," answered the man.

Lakamba was speaking low to Abdulla, who listened to him with deep interest.

". . . We could have eighty men if there was need," he was saying — "eighty men in fourteen canoes. The only thing we want is gunpowder . . ."

"Hai! there will be no fighting," broke in Babalatchi. "The fear of your name will be enough and the terror of your coming."

"There may be powder too," muttered Abdulla with great nonchalance, "if only the ship enters the river safely."

"If the heart is stout the ship will be safe," said Babalatchi. "We will go now and see Omar el Badavi and the white man I have here."

Lakamba's dull eyes became animated suddenly.

"Take care, Tuan Abdulla," he said, "take care. The behaviour of that unclean white madman is furious in the extreme. He offered to strike . . ."

"On my head, you are safe, O Giver of alms!" interrupted Babalatchi.

Abdulla looked from one to the other, and the faintest flicker of a passing smile disturbed for a moment his grave composure. He turned to Babalatchi, and said with decision —

"Let us go."

"This way, O Uplifter of our hearts!" rattled on Babalatchi, with fussy deference. "Only a very few paces and you shall behold Omar the brave, and a white man of great strength and cunning. This way."

He made a sign for Lakamba to remain behind, and with respectful touches on the elbow steered Abdulla towards the gate at the upper end of the court-yard. As they walked on slowly, followed by the two Arabs, he kept on talking in a rapid undertone to the great man, who never looked at him once, although appearing to listen with flattering attention. When near the gate Babalatchi moved forward and stopped, facing Abdulla, with his hand on the fastenings.

“You shall see them both,” he said. “All my words about them are true. When I saw him enslaved by the one of whom I spoke, I knew he would be soft in my hand like the mud of the river. At first he answered my talk with bad words of his own language, after the manner of white men. Afterwards, when listening to the voice he loved, he hesitated. He hesitated for many days — too many. I, knowing him well, made Omar withdraw here with his . . . household. Then this red-faced man raged for three days like a black panther that is hungry. And this evening, this very evening, he came. I have him here. He is in the grasp of one with a merciless heart. I have him here,” ended Babalatchi, exultingly tapping the upright of the gate with his hand.

“That is good,” murmured Abdulla.

“And he shall guide your ship and lead in the fight — if fight there be,” went on Babalatchi. “If there is any killing — let him be the slayer. You should give him arms — a short gun that fires many times.”

“Yes, by Allah!” assented Abdulla, with slow thoughtfulness.

“And you will have to open your hand, O First amongst the generous!” continued Babalatchi. “You will have to satisfy the rapacity of a white man, and also of one who is not a man, and therefore greedy of ornaments.”

“They shall be satisfied,” said Abdulla; “but . . .” He hesitated, looking down on the ground and stroking his beard, while Babalatchi waited, anxious, with parted lips. After a short time he spoke again jerkily in an indistinct whisper, so that Babalatchi had to turn his head to catch the words. “Yes. But Omar is the son of my father’s uncle . . . and all belonging to him are of the Faith . . . while that man is an unbeliever. It is most unseemly . . . very unseemly. He cannot live under my shadow. Not that dog. Penitence! I take refuge with my God,” he mumbled rapidly. “How can he live under my eyes with that woman, who is of the Faith? Scandal! O abomination!”

He finished with a rush and drew a long breath, then added dubiously —

“And when that man has done all we want, what is to be done with him?”

They stood close together, meditative and silent, their eyes roaming idly over the courtyard. The big bonfire burned brightly, and a wavering splash of light lay on the dark earth at their feet, while the lazy smoke wreathed itself slowly in gleaming coils amongst the black boughs of the trees. They could see Lakamba, who had returned to his place, sitting hunched up spiritlessly on the cushions, and Sahamin, who had got on his feet again and appeared to be talking to him with dignified animation. Men in twos or

threes came out of the shadows into the light, strolling slowly, and passed again into the shadows, their faces turned to each other, their arms moving in restrained gestures. Bahassoen, his head proudly thrown back, his ornaments, embroideries, and sword-hilt flashing in the light, circled steadily round the fire like a planet round the sun. A cool whiff of damp air came from the darkness of the riverside; it made Abdulla and Babalatchi shiver, and woke them up from their abstraction.

“Open the gate and go first,” said Abdulla; “there is no danger?”

“On my life, no!” answered Babalatchi, lifting the rattan ring. “He is all peace and content, like a thirsty man who has drunk water after many days.”

He swung the gate wide, made a few paces into the gloom of the enclosure, and retraced his steps suddenly.

“He may be made useful in many ways,” he whispered to Abdulla, who had stopped short, seeing him come back.

“O Sin! O Temptation!” sighed out Abdulla, faintly. “Our refuge is with the Most High. Can I feed this infidel for ever and for ever?” he added, impatiently.

“No,” breathed out Babalatchi. “No! Not for ever. Only while he serves your designs, O Dispenser of Allah’s gifts! When the time comes — and your order . . .”

He sidled close to Abdulla, and brushed with a delicate touch the hand that hung down listlessly, holding the prayer-beads.

“I am your slave and your offering,” he murmured, in a distinct and polite tone, into Abdulla’s ear. “When your wisdom speaks, there may be found a little poison that will not lie. Who knows?”

## CHAPTER FOUR

Babalatchi saw Abdulla pass through the low and narrow entrance into the darkness of Omar's hut; heard them exchange the usual greetings and the distinguished visitor's grave voice asking: "There is no misfortune — please God — but the sight?" and then, becoming aware of the disapproving looks of the two Arabs who had accompanied Abdulla, he followed their example and fell back out of earshot. He did it unwillingly, although he did not ignore that what was going to happen in there was now absolutely beyond his control. He roamed irresolutely about for awhile, and at last wandered with careless steps towards the fire, which had been moved, from under the tree, close to the hut and a little to windward of its entrance. He squatted on his heels and began playing pensively with live embers, as was his habit when engrossed in thought, withdrawing his hand sharply and shaking it above his head when he burnt his fingers in a fit of deeper abstraction. Sitting there he could hear the murmur of the talk inside the hut, and he could distinguish the voices but not the words. Abdulla spoke in deep tones, and now and then this flowing monotone was interrupted by a querulous exclamation, a weak moan or a plaintive quaver of the old man. Yes. It was annoying not to be able to make out what they were saying, thought Babalatchi, as he sat gazing fixedly at the unsteady glow of the fire. But it will be right. All will be right. Abdulla inspired him with confidence. He came up fully to his expectation. From the very first moment when he set his eye on him he felt sure that this man — whom he had known by reputation only — was very resolute. Perhaps too resolute. Perhaps he would want to grasp too much later on. A shadow flitted over Babalatchi's face. On the eve of the accomplishment of his desires he felt the bitter taste of that drop of doubt which is mixed with the sweetness of every success.

When, hearing footsteps on the verandah of the big house, he lifted his head, the shadow had passed away and on his face there was an expression of watchful alertness. Willems was coming down the plankway, into the courtyard. The light within trickled through the cracks of the badly joined walls of the house, and in the illuminated doorway appeared the moving form of Aissa. She also passed into the night outside and disappeared from view. Babalatchi wondered where she had got to, and for the moment forgot the approach of Willems. The voice of the white man speaking roughly

above his head made him jump to his feet as if impelled upwards by a powerful spring.

“Where’s Abdulla?”

Babalatchi waved his hand towards the hut and stood listening intently. The voices within had ceased, then recommenced again. He shot an oblique glance at Willems, whose indistinct form towered above the glow of dying embers.

“Make up this fire,” said Willems, abruptly. “I want to see your face.”

With obliging alacrity Babalatchi put some dry brushwood on the coals from a handy pile, keeping all the time a watchful eye on Willems. When he straightened himself up his hand wandered almost involuntarily towards his left side to feel the handle of a kriss amongst the folds of his sarong, but he tried to look unconcerned under the angry stare.

“You are in good health, please God?” he murmured.

“Yes!” answered Willems, with an unexpected loudness that caused Babalatchi to start nervously. “Yes! . . . Health! . . . You . . .”

He made a long stride and dropped both his hands on the Malay’s shoulders. In the powerful grip Babalatchi swayed to and fro limply, but his face was as peaceful as when he sat — a little while ago — dreaming by the fire. With a final vicious jerk Willems let go suddenly, and turning away on his heel stretched his hands over the fire. Babalatchi stumbled backwards, recovered himself, and wriggled his shoulders laboriously.

“Tse! Tse! Tse!” he clicked, deprecatingly. After a short silence he went on with accentuated admiration: “What a man it is! What a strong man! A man like that” — he concluded, in a tone of meditative wonder — “a man like that could upset mountains — mountains!”

He gazed hopefully for a while at Willems’ broad shoulders, and continued, addressing the inimical back, in a low and persuasive voice —

“But why be angry with me? With me who think only of your good? Did I not give her refuge, in my own house? Yes, Tuan! This is my own house. I will let you have it without any recompense because she must have a shelter. Therefore you and she shall live here. Who can know a woman’s mind? And such a woman! If she wanted to go away from that other place, who am I — to say no! I am Omar’s servant. I said: ‘Gladden my heart by taking my house.’ Did I say right?”

“I’ll tell you something,” said Willems, without changing his position; “if she takes a fancy to go away from this place it is you who shall suffer. I will

wring your neck.”

“When the heart is full of love there is no room in it for justice,” recommenced Babalatchi, with unmoved and persistent softness. “Why slay me? You know, Tuan, what she wants. A splendid destiny is her desire — as of all women. You have been wronged and cast out by your people. She knows that. But you are brave, you are strong — you are a man; and, Tuan — I am older than you — you are in her hand. Such is the fate of strong men. And she is of noble birth and cannot live like a slave. You know her — and you are in her hand. You are like a snared bird, because of your strength. And — remember I am a man that has seen much — submit, Tuan! Submit! . . . Or else . . .”

He drawled out the last words in a hesitating manner and broke off his sentence. Still stretching his hands in turns towards the blaze and without moving his head, Willems gave a short, lugubrious laugh, and asked —

“Or else what?”

“She may go away again. Who knows?” finished Babalatchi, in a gentle and insinuating tone.

This time Willems spun round sharply. Babalatchi stepped back.

“If she does it will be the worse for you,” said Willems, in a menacing voice. “It will be your doing, and I . . .”

Babalatchi spoke, from beyond the circle of light, with calm disdain.

“Hai — ya! I have heard before. If she goes — then I die. Good! Will that bring her back do you think — Tuan? If it is my doing it shall be well done, O white man! and — who knows — you will have to live without her.”

Willems gasped and started back like a confident wayfarer who, pursuing a path he thinks safe, should see just in time a bottomless chasm under his feet. Babalatchi came into the light and approached Willems sideways, with his head thrown back and a little on one side so as to bring his only eye to bear full on the countenance of the tall white man.

“You threaten me,” said Willems, indistinctly.

“I, Tuan!” exclaimed Babalatchi, with a slight suspicion of irony in the affected surprise of his tone. “I, Tuan? Who spoke of death? Was it I? No! I spoke of life only. Only of life. Of a long life for a lonely man!”

They stood with the fire between them, both silent, both aware, each in his own way, of the importance of the passing minutes. Babalatchi’s fatalism gave him only an insignificant relief in his suspense, because no

fatalism can kill the thought of the future, the desire of success, the pain of waiting for the disclosure of the immutable decrees of Heaven. Fatalism is born of the fear of failure, for we all believe that we carry success in our own hands, and we suspect that our hands are weak. Babalatchi looked at Willems and congratulated himself upon his ability to manage that white man. There was a pilot for Abdulla — a victim to appease Lingard's anger in case of any mishap. He would take good care to put him forward in everything. In any case let the white men fight it out amongst themselves. They were fools. He hated them — the strong fools — and knew that for his righteous wisdom was reserved the safe triumph.

Willems measured dismally the depth of his degradation. He — a white man, the admired of white men, was held by those miserable savages whose tool he was about to become. He felt for them all the hate of his race, of his morality, of his intelligence. He looked upon himself with dismay and pity. She had him. He had heard of such things. He had heard of women who . . . He would never believe such stories. . . . Yet they were true. But his own captivity seemed more complete, terrible, and final — without the hope of any redemption. He wondered at the wickedness of Providence that had made him what he was; that, worse still, permitted such a creature as Almayer to live. He had done his duty by going to him. Why did he not understand? All men were fools. He gave him his chance. The fellow did not see it. It was hard, very hard on himself — Willems. He wanted to take her from amongst her own people. That's why he had condescended to go to Almayer. He examined himself. With a sinking heart he thought that really he could not — somehow — live without her. It was terrible and sweet. He remembered the first days. Her appearance, her face, her smile, her eyes, her words. A savage woman! Yet he perceived that he could think of nothing else but of the three days of their separation, of the few hours since their reunion. Very well. If he could not take her away, then he would go to her. . . . He had, for a moment, a wicked pleasure in the thought that what he had done could not be undone. He had given himself up. He felt proud of it. He was ready to face anything, do anything. He cared for nothing, for nobody. He thought himself very fearless, but as a matter of fact he was only drunk; drunk with the poison of passionate memories.

He stretched his hands over the fire, looked round and called out —  
“Aissa!”



She must have been near, for she appeared at once within the light of the fire. The upper part of her body was wrapped up in the thick folds of a head covering which was pulled down over her brow, and one end of it thrown across from shoulder to shoulder hid the lower part of her face. Only her eyes were visible — sombre and gleaming like a starry night.

Willems, looking at this strange, muffled figure, felt exasperated, amazed and helpless. The ex-confidential clerk of the rich Hudig would hug to his breast settled conceptions of respectable conduct. He sought refuge within his ideas of propriety from the dismal mangroves, from the darkness of the forests and of the heathen souls of the savages that were his masters. She looked like an animated package of cheap cotton goods! It made him furious. She had disguised herself so because a man of her race was near! He told her not to do it, and she did not obey. Would his ideas ever change so as to agree with her own notions of what was becoming, proper and respectable? He was really afraid they would, in time. It seemed to him awful. She would never change! This manifestation of her sense of proprieties was another sign of their hopeless diversity; something like another step downwards for him. She was too different from him. He was so civilized! It struck him suddenly that they had nothing in common — not a thought, not a feeling; he could not make clear to her the simplest motive of any act of his . . . and he could not live without her.

The courageous man who stood facing Babalatchi gasped unexpectedly with a gasp that was half a groan. This little matter of her veiling herself against his wish acted upon him like a disclosure of some great disaster. It increased his contempt for himself as the slave of a passion he had always derided, as the man unable to assert his will. This will, all his sensations, his personality — all this seemed to be lost in the abominable desire, in the priceless promise of that woman. He was not, of course, able to discern clearly the causes of his misery; but there are none so ignorant as not to know suffering, none so simple as not to feel and suffer from the shock of warring impulses. The ignorant must feel and suffer from their complexity as well as the wisest; but to them the pain of struggle and defeat appears strange, mysterious, remediable and unjust. He stood watching her, watching himself. He tingled with rage from head to foot, as if he had been struck in the face. Suddenly he laughed; but his laugh was like a distorted echo of some insincere mirth very far away.

From the other side of the fire Babalatchi spoke hurriedly —

“Here is Tuan Abdulla.”

## CHAPTER FIVE

Directly on stepping outside Omar's hut Abdulla caught sight of Willems. He expected, of course, to see a white man, but not that white man, whom he knew so well. Everybody who traded in the islands, and who had any dealings with Hudig, knew Willems. For the last two years of his stay in Macassar the confidential clerk had been managing all the local trade of the house under a very slight supervision only on the part of the master. So everybody knew Willems, Abdulla amongst others — but he was ignorant of Willems' disgrace. As a matter of fact the thing had been kept very quiet — so quiet that a good many people in Macassar were expecting Willems' return there, supposing him to be absent on some confidential mission. Abdulla, in his surprise, hesitated on the threshold. He had prepared himself to see some seaman — some old officer of Lingard's; a common man — perhaps difficult to deal with, but still no match for him. Instead, he saw himself confronted by an individual whose reputation for sagacity in business was well known to him. How did he get here, and why? Abdulla, recovering from his surprise, advanced in a dignified manner towards the fire, keeping his eyes fixed steadily on Willems. When within two paces from Willems he stopped and lifted his right hand in grave salutation. Willems nodded slightly and spoke after a while.

"We know each other, Tuan Abdulla," he said, with an assumption of easy indifference.

"We have traded together," answered Abdulla, solemnly, "but it was far from here."

"And we may trade here also," said Willems.

"The place does not matter. It is the open mind and the true heart that are required in business."

"Very true. My heart is as open as my mind. I will tell you why I am here."

"What need is there? In leaving home one learns life. You travel. Travelling is victory! You shall return with much wisdom."

"I shall never return," interrupted Willems. "I have done with my people. I am a man without brothers. Injustice destroys fidelity."

Abdulla expressed his surprise by elevating his eyebrows. At the same time he made a vague gesture with his arm that could be taken as an equivalent of an approving and conciliating "just so!"

Till then the Arab had not taken any notice of Aissa, who stood by the fire, but now she spoke in the interval of silence following Willems' declaration. In a voice that was much deadened by her wrappings she addressed Abdulla in a few words of greeting, calling him a kinsman. Abdulla glanced at her swiftly for a second, and then, with perfect good breeding, fixed his eyes on the ground. She put out towards him her hand, covered with a corner of her face-veil, and he took it, pressed it twice, and dropping it turned towards Willems. She looked at the two men searchingly, then backed away and seemed to melt suddenly into the night.

"I know what you came for, Tuan Abdulla," said Willems; "I have been told by that man there." He nodded towards Babalatchi, then went on slowly, "It will be a difficult thing."

"Allah makes everything easy," interjected Babalatchi, piously, from a distance.

The two men turned quickly and stood looking at him thoughtfully, as if in deep consideration of the truth of that proposition. Under their sustained gaze Babalatchi experienced an unwonted feeling of shyness, and dared not approach nearer. At last Willems moved slightly, Abdulla followed readily, and they both walked down the courtyard, their voices dying away in the darkness. Soon they were heard returning, and the voices grew distinct as their forms came out of the gloom. By the fire they wheeled again, and Babalatchi caught a few words. Willems was saying —

"I have been at sea with him many years when young. I have used my knowledge to observe the way into the river when coming in, this time."

Abdulla assented in general terms.

"In the variety of knowledge there is safety," he said; and then they passed out of earshot.

Babalatchi ran to the tree and took up his position in the solid blackness under its branches, leaning against the trunk. There he was about midway between the fire and the other limit of the two men's walk. They passed him close. Abdulla slim, very straight, his head high, and his hands hanging before him and twisting mechanically the string of beads; Willems tall, broad, looking bigger and stronger in contrast to the slight white figure by the side of which he strolled carelessly, taking one step to the other's two; his big arms in constant motion as he gesticulated vehemently, bending forward to look Abdulla in the face.

They passed and repassed close to Babalatchi some half a dozen times, and, whenever they were between him and the fire, he could see them plain enough. Sometimes they would stop short, Willems speaking emphatically, Abdulla listening with rigid attention, then, when the other had ceased, bending his head slightly as if consenting to some demand, or admitting some statement. Now and then Babalatchi caught a word here and there, a fragment of a sentence, a loud exclamation. Impelled by curiosity he crept to the very edge of the black shadow under the tree. They were nearing him, and he heard Willems say —

“You will pay that money as soon as I come on board. That I must have.”

He could not catch Abdulla’s reply. When they went past again, Willems was saying —

“My life is in your hand anyway. The boat that brings me on board your ship shall take the money to Omar. You must have it ready in a sealed bag.”

Again they were out of hearing, but instead of coming back they stopped by the fire facing each other. Willems moved his arm, shook his hand on high talking all the time, then brought it down jerkily — stamped his foot. A short period of immobility ensued. Babalatchi, gazing intently, saw Abdulla’s lips move almost imperceptibly. Suddenly Willems seized the Arab’s passive hand and shook it. Babalatchi drew the long breath of relieved suspense. The conference was over. All well, apparently.

He ventured now to approach the two men, who saw him and waited in silence. Willems had retired within himself already, and wore a look of grim indifference. Abdulla moved away a step or two. Babalatchi looked at him inquisitively.

“I go now,” said Abdulla, “and shall wait for you outside the river, Tuan Willems, till the second sunset. You have only one word, I know.”

“Only one word,” repeated Willems.

Abdulla and Babalatchi walked together down the enclosure, leaving the white man alone by the fire. The two Arabs who had come with Abdulla preceded them and passed at once through the little gate into the light and the murmur of voices of the principal courtyard, but Babalatchi and Abdulla stopped on this side of it. Abdulla said —

“It is well. We have spoken of many things. He consents.”

“When?” asked Babalatchi, eagerly.

“On the second day from this. I have promised every thing. I mean to keep much.”

“Your hand is always open, O Most Generous amongst Believers! You will not forget your servant who called you here. Have I not spoken the truth? She has made roast meat of his heart.”

With a horizontal sweep of his arm Abdulla seemed to push away that last statement, and said slowly, with much meaning —

“He must be perfectly safe; do you understand? Perfectly safe — as if he was amongst his own people — till . . .”

“Till when?” whispered Babalatchi.

“Till I speak,” said Abdulla. “As to Omar.” He hesitated for a moment, then went on very low: “He is very old.”

“Hai-ya! Old and sick,” murmured Babalatchi, with sudden melancholy.

“He wanted me to kill that white man. He begged me to have him killed at once,” said Abdulla, contemptuously, moving again towards the gate.

“He is impatient, like those who feel death near them,” exclaimed Babalatchi, apologetically.

“Omar shall dwell with me,” went on Abdulla, “when . . . But no matter. Remember! The white man must be safe.”

“He lives in your shadow,” answered Babalatchi, solemnly. “It is enough!” He touched his forehead and fell back to let Abdulla go first.

And now they are back in the courtyard wherefrom, at their appearance, listlessness vanishes, and all the faces become alert and interested once more. Lakamba approaches his guest, but looks at Babalatchi, who reassures him by a confident nod. Lakamba clumsily attempts a smile, and looking, with natural and ineradicable sulkiness, from under his eyebrows at the man whom he wants to honour, asks whether he would condescend to visit the place of sitting down and take food. Or perhaps he would prefer to give himself up to repose? The house is his, and what is in it, and those many men that stand afar watching the interview are his. Syed Abdulla presses his host’s hand to his breast, and informs him in a confidential murmur that his habits are ascetic and his temperament inclines to melancholy. No rest; no food; no use whatever for those many men who are his. Syed Abdulla is impatient to be gone. Lakamba is sorrowful but polite, in his hesitating, gloomy way. Tuan Abdulla must have fresh boatmen, and many, to shorten the dark and fatiguing road. Hai-ya! There! Boats!

By the riverside indistinct forms leap into a noisy and disorderly activity. There are cries, orders, banter, abuse. Torches blaze sending out much more

smoke than light, and in their red glare Babalatchi comes up to say that the boats are ready.

Through that lurid glare Syed Abdulla, in his long white gown, seems to glide fantastically, like a dignified apparition attended by two inferior shades, and stands for a moment at the landing-place to take leave of his host and ally — whom he loves. Syed Abdulla says so distinctly before embarking, and takes his seat in the middle of the canoe under a small canopy of blue calico stretched on four sticks. Before and behind Syed Abdulla, the men squatting by the gunwales hold high the blades of their paddles in readiness for a dip, all together. Ready? Not yet. Hold on all! Syed Abdulla speaks again, while Lakamba and Babalatchi stand close on the bank to hear his words. His words are encouraging. Before the sun rises for the second time they shall meet, and Syed Abdulla's ship shall float on the waters of this river — at last! Lakamba and Babalatchi have no doubt — if Allah wills. They are in the hands of the Compassionate. No doubt. And so is Syed Abdulla, the great trader who does not know what the word failure means; and so is the white man — the smartest business man in the islands — who is lying now by Omar's fire with his head on Aissa's lap, while Syed Abdulla flies down the muddy river with current and paddles between the sombre walls of the sleeping forest; on his way to the clear and open sea where the Lord of the Isles (formerly of Greenock, but condemned, sold, and registered now as of Penang) waits for its owner, and swings erratically at anchor in the currents of the capricious tide, under the crumbling red cliffs of Tanjong Mirrah.

For some time Lakamba, Sahamin, and Bahassoen looked silently into the humid darkness which had swallowed the big canoe that carried Abdulla and his unvarying good fortune. Then the two guests broke into a talk expressive of their joyful anticipations. The venerable Sahamin, as became his advanced age, found his delight in speculation as to the activities of a rather remote future. He would buy praus, he would send expeditions up the river, he would enlarge his trade, and, backed by Abdulla's capital, he would grow rich in a very few years. Very few. Meantime it would be a good thing to interview Almayer to-morrow and, profiting by the last day of the hated man's prosperity, obtain some goods from him on credit. Sahamin thought it could be done by skilful wheedling. After all, that son of Satan was a fool, and the thing was worth doing, because the coming revolution would wipe all debts out. Sahamin did not mind imparting that idea to his

companions, with much senile chuckling, while they strolled together from the riverside towards the residence. The bull-necked Lakamba, listening with pouted lips without the sign of a smile, without a gleam in his dull, bloodshot eyes, shuffled slowly across the courtyard between his two guests. But suddenly Bahassoen broke in upon the old man's prattle with the generous enthusiasm of his youth. . . . Trading was very good. But was the change that would make them happy effected yet? The white man should be despoiled with a strong hand! . . . He grew excited, spoke very loud, and his further discourse, delivered with his hand on the hilt of his sword, dealt incoherently with the honourable topics of throat-cutting, fire-raising, and with the far-famed valour of his ancestors.

Babalatchi remained behind, alone with the greatness of his conceptions. The sagacious statesman of Sambir sent a scornful glance after his noble protector and his noble protector's friends, and then stood meditating about that future which to the others seemed so assured. Not so to Babalatchi, who paid the penalty of his wisdom by a vague sense of insecurity that kept sleep at arm's length from his tired body. When he thought at last of leaving the waterside, it was only to strike a path for himself and to creep along the fences, avoiding the middle of the courtyard where small fires glimmered and winked as though the sinister darkness there had reflected the stars of the serene heaven. He slunk past the wicket-gate of Omar's enclosure, and crept on patiently along the light bamboo palisade till he was stopped by the angle where it joined the heavy stockade of Lakamba's private ground. Standing there, he could look over the fence and see Omar's hut and the fire before its door. He could also see the shadow of two human beings sitting between him and the red glow. A man and a woman. The sight seemed to inspire the careworn sage with a frivolous desire to sing. It could hardly be called a song; it was more in the nature of a recitative without any rhythm, delivered rapidly but distinctly in a croaking and unsteady voice; and if Babalatchi considered it a song, then it was a song with a purpose and, perhaps for that reason, artistically defective. It had all the imperfections of unskilful improvisation and its subject was gruesome. It told a tale of shipwreck and of thirst, and of one brother killing another for the sake of a gourd of water. A repulsive story which might have had a purpose but possessed no moral whatever. Yet it must have pleased Babalatchi for he repeated it twice, the second time even in louder tones than at first, causing a disturbance amongst the white rice-birds and the wild fruit-pigeons which



roosted on the boughs of the big tree growing in Omar's compound. There was in the thick foliage above the singer's head a confused beating of wings, sleepy remarks in bird-language, a sharp stir of leaves. The forms by the fire moved; the shadow of the woman altered its shape, and Babalatchi's song was cut short abruptly by a fit of soft and persistent coughing. He did not try to resume his efforts after that interruption, but went away stealthily to seek — if not sleep — then, at least, repose.

## CHAPTER SIX

As soon as Abdulla and his companions had left the enclosure, Aissa approached Willems and stood by his side. He took no notice of her expectant attitude till she touched him gently, when he turned furiously upon her and, tearing off her face-veil, trampled upon it as though it had been a mortal enemy. She looked at him with the faint smile of patient curiosity, with the puzzled interest of ignorance watching the running of a complicated piece of machinery. After he had exhausted his rage, he stood again severe and unbending looking down at the fire, but the touch of her fingers at the nape of his neck effaced instantly the hard lines round his mouth; his eyes wavered uneasily; his lips trembled slightly. Starting with the unresisting rapidity of a particle of iron — which, quiescent one moment, leaps in the next to a powerful magnet — he moved forward, caught her in his arms and pressed her violently to his breast. He released her as suddenly, and she stumbled a little, stepped back, breathed quickly through her parted lips, and said in a tone of pleased reproof —

“O Fool-man! And if you had killed me in your strong arms what would you have done?”

“You want to live . . . and to run away from me again,” he said gently. “Tell me — do you?”

She moved towards him with very short steps, her head a little on one side, hands on hips, with a slight balancing of her body: an approach more tantalizing than an escape. He looked on, eager — charmed. She spoke jestingly.

“What am I to say to a man who has been away three days from me? Three!” she repeated, holding up playfully three fingers before Willems’ eyes. He snatched at the hand, but she was on her guard and whisked it behind her back.

“No!” she said. “I cannot be caught. But I will come. I am coming myself because I like. Do not move. Do not touch me with your mighty hands, O child!”

As she spoke she made a step nearer, then another. Willems did not stir. Pressing against him she stood on tiptoe to look into his eyes, and her own seemed to grow bigger, glistening and tender, appealing and promising. With that look she drew the man’s soul away from him through his immobile pupils, and from Willems’ features the spark of reason vanished

under her gaze and was replaced by an appearance of physical well-being, an ecstasy of the senses which had taken possession of his rigid body; an ecstasy that drove out regrets, hesitation and doubt, and proclaimed its terrible work by an appalling aspect of idiotic beatitude. He never stirred a limb, hardly breathed, but stood in stiff immobility, absorbing the delight of her close contact by every pore.

“Closer! Closer!” he murmured.

Slowly she raised her arms, put them over his shoulders, and clasping her hands at the back of his neck, swung off the full length of her arms. Her head fell back, the eyelids dropped slightly, and her thick hair hung straight down: a mass of ebony touched by the red gleams of the fire. He stood unyielding under the strain, as solid and motionless as one of the big trees of the surrounding forests; and his eyes looked at the modelling of her chin, at the outline of her neck, at the swelling lines of her bosom, with the famished and concentrated expression of a starving man looking at food. She drew herself up to him and rubbed her head against his cheek slowly and gently. He sighed. She, with her hands still on his shoulders, glanced up at the placid stars and said —

“The night is half gone. We shall finish it by this fire. By this fire you shall tell me all: your words and Syed Abdulla’s words; and listening to you I shall forget the three days — because I am good. Tell me — am I good?”

He said “Yes” dreamily, and she ran off towards the big house.

When she came back, balancing a roll of fine mats on her head, he had replenished the fire and was ready to help her in arranging a couch on the side of it nearest to the hut. She sank down with a quick but gracefully controlled movement, and he threw himself full length with impatient haste, as if he wished to forestall somebody. She took his head on her knees, and when he felt her hands touching his face, her fingers playing with his hair, he had an expression of being taken possession of; he experienced a sense of peace, of rest, of happiness, and of soothing delight. His hands strayed upwards about her neck, and he drew her down so as to have her face above his. Then he whispered — “I wish I could die like this — now!” She looked at him with her big sombre eyes, in which there was no responsive light. His thought was so remote from her understanding that she let the words pass by unnoticed, like the breath of the wind, like the flight of a cloud. Woman though she was, she could not comprehend, in her simplicity, the

tremendous compliment of that speech, that whisper of deadly happiness, so sincere, so spontaneous, coming so straight from the heart — like every corruption. It was the voice of madness, of a delirious peace, of happiness that is infamous, cowardly, and so exquisite that the debased mind refuses to contemplate its termination: for to the victims of such happiness the moment of its ceasing is the beginning afresh of that torture which is its price.

With her brows slightly knitted in the determined preoccupation of her own desires, she said —

“Now tell me all. All the words spoken between you and Syed Abdulla.”

Tell what? What words? Her voice recalled back the consciousness that had departed under her touch, and he became aware of the passing minutes every one of which was like a reproach; of those minutes that falling, slow, reluctant, irresistible into the past, marked his footsteps on the way to perdition. Not that he had any conviction about it, any notion of the possible ending on that painful road. It was an indistinct feeling, a threat of suffering like the confused warning of coming disease, an inarticulate monition of evil made up of fear and pleasure, of resignation and of revolt. He was ashamed of his state of mind. After all, what was he afraid of? Were those scruples? Why that hesitation to think, to speak of what he intended doing? Scruples were for imbeciles. His clear duty was to make himself happy. Did he ever take an oath of fidelity to Lingard? No. Well then — he would not let any interest of that old fool stand between Willems and Willems’ happiness. Happiness? Was he not, perchance, on a false track? Happiness meant money. Much money. At least he had always thought so till he had experienced those new sensations which . . .

Aissa’s question, repeated impatiently, interrupted his musings, and looking up at her face shining above him in the dim light of the fire he stretched his limbs luxuriously and obedient to her desire, he spoke slowly and hardly above his breath. She, with her head close to his lips, listened absorbed, interested, in attentive immobility. The many noises of the great courtyard were hushed up gradually by the sleep that stilled all voices and closed all eyes. Then somebody droned out a song with a nasal drawl at the end of every verse. He stirred. She put her hand suddenly on his lips and sat upright. There was a feeble coughing, a rustle of leaves, and then a complete silence took possession of the land; a silence cold, mournful, profound; more like death than peace; more hard to bear than the fiercest

tumult. As soon as she removed her hand he hastened to speak, so insupportable to him was that stillness perfect and absolute in which his thoughts seemed to ring with the loudness of shouts.

“Who was there making that noise?” he asked.

“I do not know. He is gone now,” she answered, hastily. “Tell me, you will not return to your people; not without me. Not with me. Do you promise?”

“I have promised already. I have no people of my own. Have I not told you, that you are everybody to me?”

“Ah, yes,” she said, slowly, “but I like to hear you say that again — every day, and every night, whenever I ask; and never to be angry because I ask. I am afraid of white women who are shameless and have fierce eyes.” She scanned his features close for a moment and added:

“Are they very beautiful? They must be.”

“I do not know,” he whispered, thoughtfully. “And if I ever did know, looking at you I have forgotten.”

“Forgotten! And for three days and two nights you have forgotten me also! Why? Why were you angry with me when I spoke at first of Tuan Abdulla, in the days when we lived beside the brook? You remembered somebody then. Somebody in the land whence you come. Your tongue is false. You are white indeed, and your heart is full of deception. I know it. And yet I cannot help believing you when you talk of your love for me. But I am afraid!”

He felt flattered and annoyed by her vehemence, and said —

“Well, I am with you now. I did come back. And it was you that went away.”

“When you have helped Abdulla against the Rajah Laut, who is the first of white men, I shall not be afraid any more,” she whispered.

“You must believe what I say when I tell you that there never was another woman; that there is nothing for me to regret, and nothing but my enemies to remember.”

“Where do you come from?” she said, impulsive and inconsequent, in a passionate whisper. “What is that land beyond the great sea from which you come? A land of lies and of evil from which nothing but misfortune ever comes to us — who are not white. Did you not at first ask me to go there with you? That is why I went away.”

“I shall never ask you again.”

“And there is no woman waiting for you there?”

“No!” said Willems, firmly.

She bent over him. Her lips hovered above his face and her long hair brushed his cheeks.

“You taught me the love of your people which is of the Devil,” she murmured, and bending still lower, she said faintly, “Like this?”

“Yes, like this!” he answered very low, in a voice that trembled slightly with eagerness; and she pressed suddenly her lips to his while he closed his eyes in an ecstasy of delight.

There was a long interval of silence. She stroked his head with gentle touches, and he lay dreamily, perfectly happy but for the annoyance of an indistinct vision of a well-known figure; a man going away from him and diminishing in a long perspective of fantastic trees, whose every leaf was an eye looking after that man, who walked away growing smaller, but never getting out of sight for all his steady progress. He felt a desire to see him vanish, a hurried impatience of his disappearance, and he watched for it with a careful and irksome effort. There was something familiar about that figure. Why! Himself! He gave a sudden start and opened his eyes, quivering with the emotion of that quick return from so far, of finding himself back by the fire with the rapidity of a flash of lightning. It had been half a dream; he had slumbered in her arms for a few seconds. Only the beginning of a dream — nothing more. But it was some time before he recovered from the shock of seeing himself go away so deliberately, so definitely, so unguardedly; and going away — where? Now, if he had not woke up in time he would never have come back again from there; from whatever place he was going to. He felt indignant. It was like an evasion, like a prisoner breaking his parole — that thing slinking off stealthily while he slept. He was very indignant, and was also astonished at the absurdity of his own emotions.

She felt him tremble, and murmuring tender words, pressed his head to her breast. Again he felt very peaceful with a peace that was as complete as the silence round them. He muttered —

“You are tired, Aissa.”

She answered so low that it was like a sigh shaped into faint words.

“I shall watch your sleep, O child!”

He lay very quiet, and listened to the beating of her heart. That sound, light, rapid, persistent, and steady; her very life beating against his cheek,

gave him a clear perception of secure ownership, strengthened his belief in his possession of that human being, was like an assurance of the vague felicity of the future. There were no regrets, no doubts, no hesitation now. Had there ever been? All that seemed far away, ages ago — as unreal and pale as the fading memory of some delirium. All the anguish, suffering, strife of the past days; the humiliation and anger of his downfall; all that was an infamous nightmare, a thing born in sleep to be forgotten and leave no trace — and true life was this: this dreamy immobility with his head against her heart that beat so steadily.

He was broad awake now, with that tingling wakefulness of the tired body which succeeds to the few refreshing seconds of irresistible sleep, and his wide-open eyes looked absently at the doorway of Omar's hut. The reed walls glistened in the light of the fire, the smoke of which, thin and blue, drifted slanting in a succession of rings and spirals across the doorway, whose empty blackness seemed to him impenetrable and enigmatical like a curtain hiding vast spaces full of unexpected surprises. This was only his fancy, but it was absorbing enough to make him accept the sudden appearance of a head, coming out of the gloom, as part of his idle fantasy or as the beginning of another short dream, of another vagary of his overtired brain. A face with drooping eyelids, old, thin, and yellow, above the scattered white of a long beard that touched the earth. A head without a body, only a foot above the ground, turning slightly from side to side on the edge of the circle of light as if to catch the radiating heat of the fire on either cheek in succession. He watched it in passive amazement, growing distinct, as if coming nearer to him, and the confused outlines of a body crawling on all fours came out, creeping inch by inch towards the fire, with a silent and all but imperceptible movement. He was astounded at the appearance of that blind head dragging that crippled body behind, without a sound, without a change in the composure of the sightless face, which was plain one second, blurred the next in the play of the light that drew it to itself steadily. A mute face with a kriss between its lips. This was no dream. Omar's face. But why? What was he after?

He was too indolent in the happy languor of the moment to answer the question. It darted through his brain and passed out, leaving him free to listen again to the beating of her heart; to that precious and delicate sound which filled the quiet immensity of the night. Glancing upwards he saw the motionless head of the woman looking down at him in a tender gleam of

liquid white between the long eyelashes, whose shadow rested on the soft curve of her cheek; and under the caress of that look, the uneasy wonder and the obscure fear of that apparition, crouching and creeping in turns towards the fire that was its guide, were lost — were drowned in the quietude of all his senses, as pain is drowned in the flood of drowsy serenity that follows upon a dose of opium.

He altered the position of his head by ever so little, and now could see easily that apparition which he had seen a minute before and had nearly forgotten already. It had moved closer, gliding and noiseless like the shadow of some nightmare, and now it was there, very near, motionless and still as if listening; one hand and one knee advanced; the neck stretched out and the head turned full towards the fire. He could see the emaciated face, the skin shiny over the prominent bones, the black shadows of the hollow temples and sunken cheeks, and the two patches of blackness over the eyes, over those eyes that were dead and could not see. What was the impulse which drove out this blind cripple into the night to creep and crawl towards that fire? He looked at him, fascinated, but the face, with its shifting lights and shadows, let out nothing, closed and impenetrable like a walled door.

Omar raised himself to a kneeling posture and sank on his heels, with his hands hanging down before him. Willems, looking out of his dreamy numbness, could see plainly the kriss between the thin lips, a bar across the face; the handle on one side where the polished wood caught a red gleam from the fire and the thin line of the blade running to a dull black point on the other. He felt an inward shock, which left his body passive in Aissa's embrace, but filled his breast with a tumult of powerless fear; and he perceived suddenly that it was his own death that was groping towards him; that it was the hate of himself and the hate of her love for him which drove this helpless wreck of a once brilliant and resolute pirate, to attempt a desperate deed that would be the glorious and supreme consolation of an unhappy old age. And while he looked, paralyzed with dread, at the father who had resumed his cautious advance — blind like fate, persistent like destiny — he listened with greedy eagerness to the heart of the daughter beating light, rapid, and steady against his head.

He was in the grip of horrible fear; of a fear whose cold hand robs its victim of all will and of all power; of all wish to escape, to resist, or to move; which destroys hope and despair alike, and holds the empty and useless carcass as if in a vise under the coming stroke. It was not the fear of



death — he had faced danger before — it was not even the fear of that particular form of death. It was not the fear of the end, for he knew that the end would not come then. A movement, a leap, a shout would save him from the feeble hand of the blind old man, from that hand that even now was, with cautious sweeps along the ground, feeling for his body in the darkness. It was the unreasoning fear of this glimpse into the unknown things, into those motives, impulses, desires he had ignored, but that had lived in the breasts of despised men, close by his side, and were revealed to him for a second, to be hidden again behind the black mists of doubt and deception. It was not death that frightened him: it was the horror of bewildered life where he could understand nothing and nobody round him; where he could guide, control, comprehend nothing and no one — not even himself.

He felt a touch on his side. That contact, lighter than the caress of a mother's hand on the cheek of a sleeping child, had for him the force of a crushing blow. Omar had crept close, and now, kneeling above him, held the kriss in one hand while the other skimmed over his jacket up towards his breast in gentle touches; but the blind face, still turned to the heat of the fire, was set and immovable in its aspect of stony indifference to things it could not hope to see. With an effort Willems took his eyes off the deathlike mask and turned them up to Aissa's head. She sat motionless as if she had been part of the sleeping earth, then suddenly he saw her big sombre eyes open out wide in a piercing stare and felt the convulsive pressure of her hands pinning his arms along his body. A second dragged itself out, slow and bitter, like a day of mourning; a second full of regret and grief for that faith in her which took its flight from the shattered ruins of his trust. She was holding him! She too! He felt her heart give a great leap, his head slipped down on her knees, he closed his eyes and there was nothing. Nothing! It was as if she had died; as though her heart had leaped out into the night, abandoning him, defenceless and alone, in an empty world.

His head struck the ground heavily as she flung him aside in her sudden rush. He lay as if stunned, face up and, daring not move, did not see the struggle, but heard the piercing shriek of mad fear, her low angry words; another shriek dying out in a moan. When he got up at last he looked at Aissa kneeling over her father, he saw her bent back in the effort of holding him down, Omar's contorted limbs, a hand thrown up above her head and her quick movement grasping the wrist. He made an impulsive step

forward, but she turned a wild face to him and called out over her shoulder —

“Keep back! Do not come near! Do not. . . .”

And he stopped short, his arms hanging lifelessly by his side, as if those words had changed him into stone. She was afraid of his possible violence, but in the unsettling of all his convictions he was struck with the frightful thought that she preferred to kill her father all by herself; and the last stage of their struggle, at which he looked as though a red fog had filled his eyes, loomed up with an unnatural ferocity, with a sinister meaning; like something monstrous and depraved, forcing its complicity upon him under the cover of that awful night. He was horrified and grateful; drawn irresistibly to her — and ready to run away. He could not move at first — then he did not want to stir. He wanted to see what would happen. He saw her lift, with a tremendous effort, the apparently lifeless body into the hut, and remained standing, after they disappeared, with the vivid image in his eyes of that head swaying on her shoulder, the lower jaw hanging down, collapsed, passive, meaningless, like the head of a corpse.

Then after a while he heard her voice speaking inside, harshly, with an agitated abruptness of tone; and in answer there were groans and broken murmurs of exhaustion. She spoke louder. He heard her saying violently — “No! No! Never!”

And again a plaintive murmur of entreaty as of some one begging for a supreme favour, with a last breath. Then she said —

“Never! I would sooner strike it into my own heart.”

She came out, stood panting for a short moment in the doorway, and then stepped into the firelight. Behind her, through the darkness came the sound of words calling the vengeance of heaven on her head, rising higher, shrill, strained, repeating the curse over and over again — till the voice cracked in a passionate shriek that died out into hoarse muttering ending with a deep and prolonged sigh. She stood facing Willems, one hand behind her back, the other raised in a gesture compelling attention, and she listened in that attitude till all was still inside the hut. Then she made another step forward and her hand dropped slowly.

“Nothing but misfortune,” she whispered, absently, to herself. “Nothing but misfortune to us who are not white.” The anger and excitement died out

of her face, and she looked straight at Willems with an intense and mournful gaze.

He recovered his senses and his power of speech with a sudden start.

“Aissa,” he exclaimed, and the words broke out through his lips with hurried nervousness. “Aissa! How can I live here? Trust me. Believe in me. Let us go away from here. Go very far away! Very far; you and I!”

He did not stop to ask himself whether he could escape, and how, and where. He was carried away by the flood of hate, disgust, and contempt of a white man for that blood which is not his blood, for that race which is not his race; for the brown skins; for the hearts false like the sea, blacker than night. This feeling of repulsion overmastered his reason in a clear conviction of the impossibility for him to live with her people. He urged her passionately to fly with him because out of all that abhorred crowd he wanted this one woman, but wanted her away from them, away from that race of slaves and cut-throats from which she sprang. He wanted her for himself — far from everybody, in some safe and dumb solitude. And as he spoke his anger and contempt rose, his hate became almost fear; and his desire of her grew immense, burning, illogical and merciless; crying to him through all his senses; louder than his hate, stronger than his fear, deeper than his contempt — irresistible and certain like death itself.

Standing at a little distance, just within the light — but on the threshold of that darkness from which she had come — she listened, one hand still behind her back, the other arm stretched out with the hand half open as if to catch the fleeting words that rang around her, passionate, menacing, imploring, but all tinged with the anguish of his suffering, all hurried by the impatience that gnawed his breast. And while she listened she felt a slowing down of her heart-beats as the meaning of his appeal grew clearer before her indignant eyes, as she saw with rage and pain the edifice of her love, her own work, crumble slowly to pieces, destroyed by that man’s fears, by that man’s falseness. Her memory recalled the days by the brook when she had listened to other words — to other thoughts — to promises and to pleadings for other things, which came from that man’s lips at the bidding of her look or her smile, at the nod of her head, at the whisper of her lips. Was there then in his heart something else than her image, other desires than the desires of her love, other fears than the fear of losing her? How could that be? Had she grown ugly or old in a moment? She was appalled, surprised and angry with the anger of unexpected humiliation; and her eyes looked

fixedly, sombre and steady, at that man born in the land of violence and of evil wherefrom nothing but misfortune comes to those who are not white. Instead of thinking of her caresses, instead of forgetting all the world in her embrace, he was thinking yet of his people; of that people that steals every land, masters every sea, that knows no mercy and no truth — knows nothing but its own strength. O man of strong arm and of false heart! Go with him to a far country, be lost in the throng of cold eyes and false hearts — lose him there! Never! He was mad — mad with fear; but he should not escape her! She would keep him here a slave and a master; here where he was alone with her; where he must live for her — or die. She had a right to his love which was of her making, to the love that was in him now, while he spoke those words without sense. She must put between him and other white men a barrier of hate. He must not only stay, but he must also keep his promise to Abdulla, the fulfilment of which would make her safe.

“Aissa, let us go! With you by my side I would attack them with my naked hands. Or no! Tomorrow we shall be outside, on board Abdulla’s ship. You shall come with me and then I could . . . If the ship went ashore by some chance, then we could steal a canoe and escape in the confusion. . . . You are not afraid of the sea . . . of the sea that would give me freedom . . .”

He was approaching her gradually with extended arms, while he pleaded ardently in incoherent words that ran over and tripped each other in the extreme eagerness of his speech. She stepped back, keeping her distance, her eyes on his face, watching on it the play of his doubts and of his hopes with a piercing gaze, that seemed to search out the innermost recesses of his thought; and it was as if she had drawn slowly the darkness round her, wrapping herself in its undulating folds that made her indistinct and vague. He followed her step by step till at last they both stopped, facing each other under the big tree of the enclosure. The solitary exile of the forests, great, motionless and solemn in his abandonment, left alone by the life of ages that had been pushed away from him by those pigmies that crept at his foot, towered high and straight above their heads. He seemed to look on, dispassionate and imposing, in his lonely greatness, spreading his branches wide in a gesture of lofty protection, as if to hide them in the sombre shelter of innumerable leaves; as if moved by the disdainful compassion of the strong, by the scornful pity of an aged giant, to screen this struggle of two human hearts from the cold scrutiny of glittering stars.

The last cry of his appeal to her mercy rose loud, vibrated under the sombre canopy, darted among the boughs startling the white birds that slept wing to wing — and died without an echo, strangled in the dense mass of unstirring leaves. He could not see her face, but he heard her sighs and the distracted murmur of indistinct words. Then, as he listened holding his breath, she exclaimed suddenly —

“Have you heard him? He has cursed me because I love you. You brought me suffering and strife — and his curse. And now you want to take me far away where I would lose you, lose my life; because your love is my life now. What else is there? Do not move,” she cried violently, as he stirred a little — ”do not speak! Take this! Sleep in peace!”

He saw a shadowy movement of her arm. Something whizzed past and struck the ground behind him, close to the fire. Instinctively he turned round to look at it. A kriss without its sheath lay by the embers; a sinuous dark object, looking like something that had been alive and was now crushed, dead and very inoffensive; a black wavy outline very distinct and still in the dull red glow. Without thinking he moved to pick it up, stooping with the sad and humble movement of a beggar gathering the alms flung into the dust of the roadside. Was this the answer to his pleading, to the hot and living words that came from his heart? Was this the answer thrown at him like an insult, that thing made of wood and iron, insignificant and venomous, fragile and deadly? He held it by the blade and looked at the handle stupidly for a moment before he let it fall again at his feet; and when he turned round he faced only the night: — the night immense, profound and quiet; a sea of darkness in which she had disappeared without leaving a trace.

He moved forward with uncertain steps, putting out both his hands before him with the anguish of a man blinded suddenly.

“Aissa!” he cried — ”come to me at once.”

He peered and listened, but saw nothing, heard nothing. After a while the solid blackness seemed to wave before his eyes like a curtain disclosing movements but hiding forms, and he heard light and hurried footsteps, then the short clatter of the gate leading to Lakamba’s private enclosure. He sprang forward and brought up against the rough timber in time to hear the words, “Quick! Quick!” and the sound of the wooden bar dropped on the other side, securing the gate. With his arms thrown up, the palms against the paling, he slid down in a heap on the ground.

“Aissa,” he said, pleadingly, pressing his lips to a chink between the stakes. “Aissa, do you hear me? Come back! I will do what you want, give you all you desire — if I have to set the whole Sambir on fire and put that fire out with blood. Only come back. Now! At once! Are you there? Do you hear me? Aissa!”

On the other side there were startled whispers of feminine voices; a frightened little laugh suddenly interrupted; some woman’s admiring murmur — “This is brave talk!” Then after a short silence Aissa cried —

“Sleep in peace — for the time of your going is near. Now I am afraid of you. Afraid of your fear. When you return with Tuan Abdulla you shall be great. You will find me here. And there will be nothing but love. Nothing else! — Always! — Till we die!”

He listened to the shuffle of footsteps going away, and staggered to his feet, mute with the excess of his passionate anger against that being so savage and so charming; loathing her, himself, everybody he had ever known; the earth, the sky, the very air he drew into his oppressed chest; loathing it because it made him live, loathing her because she made him suffer. But he could not leave that gate through which she had passed. He wandered a little way off, then swerved round, came back and fell down again by the stockade only to rise suddenly in another attempt to break away from the spell that held him, that brought him back there, dumb, obedient and furious. And under the immobilized gesture of lofty protection in the branches outspread wide above his head, under the high branches where white birds slept wing to wing in the shelter of countless leaves, he tossed like a grain of dust in a whirlwind — sinking and rising — round and round — always near that gate. All through the languid stillness of that night he fought with the impalpable; he fought with the shadows, with the darkness, with the silence. He fought without a sound, striking futile blows, dashing from side to side; obstinate, hopeless, and always beaten back; like a man bewitched within the invisible sweep of a magic circle.

## PART III

## CHAPTER ONE

“Yes! Cat, dog, anything that can scratch or bite; as long as it is harmful enough and mangy enough. A sick tiger would make you happy — of all things. A half-dead tiger that you could weep over and palm upon some poor devil in your power, to tend and nurse for you. Never mind the consequences — to the poor devil. Let him be mangled or eaten up, of course! You haven’t any pity to spare for the victims of your infernal charity. Not you! Your tender heart bleeds only for what is poisonous and deadly. I curse the day when you set your benevolent eyes on him. I curse it . . .”

“Now then! Now then!” growled Lingard in his moustache. Almayer, who had talked himself up to the choking point, drew a long breath and went on —

“Yes! It has been always so. Always. As far back as I can remember. Don’t you recollect? What about that half-starved dog you brought on board in Bangkok in your arms. In your arms by . . . ! It went mad next day and bit the serang. You don’t mean to say you have forgotten? The best serang you ever had! You said so yourself while you were helping us to lash him down to the chain-cable, just before he died in his fits. Now, didn’t you? Two wives and ever so many children the man left. That was your doing. . . . And when you went out of your way and risked your ship to rescue some Chinamen from a water-logged junk in Formosa Straits, that was also a clever piece of business. Wasn’t it? Those damned Chinamen rose on you before forty-eight hours. They were cut-throats, those poor fishermen. You knew they were cut-throats before you made up your mind to run down on a lee shore in a gale of wind to save them. A mad trick! If they hadn’t been scoundrels — hopeless scoundrels — you would not have put your ship in jeopardy for them, I know. You would not have risked the lives of your crew — that crew you loved so — and your own life. Wasn’t that foolish! And, besides, you were not honest. Suppose you had been drowned? I would have been in a pretty mess then, left alone here with that adopted daughter of yours. Your duty was to myself first. I married that girl because you promised to make my fortune. You know you did! And then three months afterwards you go and do that mad trick — for a lot of Chinamen too. Chinamen! You have no morality. I might have been ruined for the sake of those murderous scoundrels that, after all, had to be driven overboard



after killing ever so many of your crew — of your beloved crew! Do you call that honest?”

“Well, well!” muttered Lingard, chewing nervously the stump of his cheroot that had gone out and looking at Almayer — who stamped wildly about the verandah — much as a shepherd might look at a pet sheep in his obedient flock turning unexpectedly upon him in enraged revolt. He seemed disconcerted, contemptuously angry yet somewhat amused; and also a little hurt as if at some bitter jest at his own expense. Almayer stopped suddenly, and crossing his arms on his breast, bent his body forward and went on speaking.

“I might have been left then in an awkward hole — all on account of your absurd disregard for your safety — yet I bore no grudge. I knew your weaknesses. But now — when I think of it! Now we are ruined. Ruined! Ruined! My poor little Nina. Ruined!”

He slapped his thighs smartly, walked with small steps this way and that, seized a chair, planted it with a bang before Lingard, and sat down staring at the old seaman with haggard eyes. Lingard, returning his stare steadily, dived slowly into various pockets, fished out at last a box of matches and proceeded to light his cheroot carefully, rolling it round and round between his lips, without taking his gaze for a moment off the distressed Almayer. Then from behind a cloud of tobacco smoke he said calmly —

“If you had been in trouble as often as I have, my boy, you wouldn’t carry on so. I have been ruined more than once. Well, here I am.”

“Yes, here you are,” interrupted Almayer. “Much good it is to me. Had you been here a month ago it would have been of some use. But now! . . . You might as well be a thousand miles off.”

“You scold like a drunken fish-wife,” said Lingard, serenely. He got up and moved slowly to the front rail of the verandah. The floor shook and the whole house vibrated under his heavy step. For a moment he stood with his back to Almayer, looking out on the river and forest of the east bank, then turned round and gazed mildly down upon him.

“It’s very lonely this morning here. Hey?” he said.

Almayer lifted up his head.

“Ah! you notice it — don’t you? I should think it is lonely! Yes, Captain Lingard, your day is over in Sambir. Only a month ago this verandah would have been full of people coming to greet you. Fellows would be coming up

those steps grinning and salaaming — to you and to me. But our day is over. And not by my fault either. You can't say that. It's all the doing of that pet rascal of yours. Ah! He is a beauty! You should have seen him leading that hellish crowd. You would have been proud of your old favourite."

"Smart fellow that," muttered Lingard, thoughtfully. Almayer jumped up with a shriek.

"And that's all you have to say! Smart fellow! O Lord!"

"Don't make a show of yourself. Sit down. Let's talk quietly. I want to know all about it. So he led?"

"He was the soul of the whole thing. He piloted Abdulla's ship in. He ordered everything and everybody," said Almayer, who sat down again, with a resigned air.

"When did it happen — exactly?"

"On the sixteenth I heard the first rumours of Abdulla's ship being in the river; a thing I refused to believe at first. Next day I could not doubt any more. There was a great council held openly in Lakamba's place where almost everybody in Sambir attended. On the eighteenth the Lord of the Isles was anchored in Sambir reach, abreast of my house. Let's see. Six weeks to-day, exactly."

"And all that happened like this? All of a sudden. You never heard anything — no warning. Nothing. Never had an idea that something was up? Come, Almayer!"

"Heard! Yes, I used to hear something every day. Mostly lies. Is there anything else in Sambir?"

"You might not have believed them," observed Lingard. "In fact you ought not to have believed everything that was told to you, as if you had been a green hand on his first voyage."

Almayer moved in his chair uneasily.

"That scoundrel came here one day," he said. "He had been away from the house for a couple of months living with that woman. I only heard about him now and then from Patalolo's people when they came over. Well one day, about noon, he appeared in this courtyard, as if he had been jerked up from hell-where he belongs."

Lingard took his cheroot out, and, with his mouth full of white smoke that oozed out through his parted lips, listened, attentive. After a short pause Almayer went on, looking at the floor moodily —

"I must say he looked awful. Had a bad bout of the ague probably. The left shore is very unhealthy. Strange that only the breadth of the river . . ."

He dropped off into deep thoughtfulness as if he had forgotten his grievances in a bitter meditation upon the unsanitary condition of the virgin forests on the left bank. Lingard took this opportunity to expel the smoke in a mighty expiration and threw the stump of his cheroot over his shoulder.

"Go on," he said, after a while. "He came to see you . . ."

"But it wasn't unhealthy enough to finish him, worse luck!" went on Almayer, rousing himself, "and, as I said, he turned up here with his brazen impudence. He bullied me, he threatened vaguely. He wanted to scare me, to blackmail me. Me! And, by heaven — he said you would approve. You! Can you conceive such impudence? I couldn't exactly make out what he was driving at. Had I known, I would have approved him. Yes! With a bang on the head. But how could I guess that he knew enough to pilot a ship through the entrance you always said was so difficult. And, after all, that was the only danger. I could deal with anybody here — but when Abdulla came. . . . That barque of his is armed. He carries twelve brass six-pounders, and about thirty men. Desperate beggars. Sumatra men, from Deli and Acheen. Fight all day and ask for more in the evening. That kind."

"I know, I know," said Lingard, impatiently.

"Of course, then, they were cheeky as much as you please after he anchored abreast of our jetty. Willems brought her up himself in the best berth. I could see him from this verandah standing forward, together with the half-caste master. And that woman was there too. Close to him. I heard they took her on board off Lakamba's place. Willems said he would not go higher without her. Stormed and raged. Frightened them, I believe. Abdulla had to interfere. She came off alone in a canoe, and no sooner on deck than she fell at his feet before all hands, embraced his knees, wept, raved, begged his pardon. Why? I wonder. Everybody in Sambir is talking of it. They never heard tell or saw anything like it. I have all this from Ali, who goes about in the settlement and brings me the news. I had better know what is going on — hadn't I? From what I can make out, they — he and that woman — are looked upon as something mysterious — beyond comprehension. Some think them mad. They live alone with an old woman in a house outside Lakamba's campong and are greatly respected — or feared, I should say rather. At least, he is. He is very violent. She knows nobody, sees nobody, will speak to nobody but him. Never leaves him for a

moment. It's the talk of the place. There are other rumours. From what I hear I suspect that Lakamba and Abdulla are tired of him. There's also talk of him going away in the Lord of the Isles — when she leaves here for the southward — as a kind of Abdulla's agent. At any rate, he must take the ship out. The half-caste is not equal to it as yet."

Lingard, who had listened absorbed till then, began now to walk with measured steps. Almayer ceased talking and followed him with his eyes as he paced up and down with a quarter-deck swing, tormenting and twisting his long white beard, his face perplexed and thoughtful.

"So he came to you first of all, did he?" asked Lingard, without stopping.

"Yes. I told you so. He did come. Came to extort money, goods — I don't know what else. Wanted to set up as a trader — the swine! I kicked his hat into the courtyard, and he went after it, and that was the last of him till he showed up with Abdulla. How could I know that he could do harm in that way? Or in any way at that! Any local rising I could put down easy with my own men and with Patalolo's help."

"Oh! yes. Patalolo. No good. Eh? Did you try him at all?"

"Didn't I!" exclaimed Almayer. "I went to see him myself on the twelfth. That was four days before Abdulla entered the river. In fact, same day Willems tried to get at me. I did feel a little uneasy then. Patalolo assured me that there was no human being that did not love me in Sambir. Looked as wise as an owl. Told me not to listen to the lies of wicked people from down the river. He was alluding to that man Bulangi, who lives up the sea reach, and who had sent me word that a strange ship was anchored outside — which, of course, I repeated to Patalolo. He would not believe. Kept on mumbling 'No! No! No!' like an old parrot, his head all of a tremble, all beslobbered with betel-nut juice. I thought there was something queer about him. Seemed so restless, and as if in a hurry to get rid of me. Well. Next day that one-eyed malefactor who lives with Lakamba — what's his name — Babalatchi, put in an appearance here! Came about mid-day, casually like, and stood there on this verandah chatting about one thing and another. Asking when I expected you, and so on. Then, incidentally, he mentioned that they — his master and himself — were very much bothered by a ferocious white man — my friend — who was hanging about that woman — Omar's daughter. Asked my advice. Very deferential and proper. I told him the white man was not my friend, and that they had better kick him out. Whereupon he went away salaaming, and protesting his friendship and his

master's goodwill. Of course I know now the infernal nigger came to spy and to talk over some of my men. Anyway, eight were missing at the evening muster. Then I took alarm. Did not dare to leave my house unguarded. You know what my wife is, don't you? And I did not care to take the child with me — it being late — so I sent a message to Patalolo to say that we ought to consult; that there were rumours and uneasiness in the settlement. Do you know what answer I got?"

Lingard stopped short in his walk before Almayer, who went on, after an impressive pause, with growing animation.

"All brought it: 'The Rajah sends a friend's greeting, and does not understand the message.' That was all. Not a word more could Ali get out of him. I could see that Ali was pretty well scared. He hung about, arranging my hammock — one thing and another. Then just before going away he mentioned that the water-gate of the Rajah's place was heavily barred, but that he could see only very few men about the courtyard. Finally he said, 'There is darkness in our Rajah's house, but no sleep. Only darkness and fear and the wailing of women.' Cheerful, wasn't it? It made me feel cold down my back somehow. After Ali slipped away I stood here — by this table, and listened to the shouting and drumming in the settlement. Racket enough for twenty weddings. It was a little past midnight then."

Again Almayer stopped in his narrative with an abrupt shutting of lips, as if he had said all that there was to tell, and Lingard stood staring at him, pensive and silent. A big bluebottle fly flew in recklessly into the cool verandah, and darted with loud buzzing between the two men. Lingard struck at it with his hat. The fly swerved, and Almayer dodged his head out of the way. Then Lingard aimed another ineffectual blow; Almayer jumped up and waved his arms about. The fly buzzed desperately, and the vibration of minute wings sounded in the peace of the early morning like a far-off string orchestra accompanying the hollow, determined stamping of the two men, who, with heads thrown back and arms gyrating on high, or again bending low with infuriated lunges, were intent upon killing the intruder. But suddenly the buzz died out in a thin thrill away in the open space of the courtyard, leaving Lingard and Almayer standing face to face in the fresh silence of the young day, looking very puzzled and idle, their arms hanging uselessly by their sides — like men disheartened by some portentous failure.

“Look at that!” muttered Lingard. “Got away after all.”

“Nuisance,” said Almayer in the same tone. “Riverside is overrun with them. This house is badly placed . . . mosquitos . . . and these big flies . . . . last week stung Nina . . . been ill four days . . . poor child. . . . I wonder what such damned things are made for!”

## CHAPTER TWO

After a long silence, during which Almayer had moved towards the table and sat down, his head between his hands, staring straight before him, Lingard, who had recommenced walking, cleared his throat and said —

“What was it you were saying?”

“Ah! Yes! You should have seen this settlement that night. I don’t think anybody went to bed. I walked down to the point, and could see them. They had a big bonfire in the palm grove, and the talk went on there till the morning. When I came back here and sat in the dark verandah in this quiet house I felt so frightfully lonely that I stole in and took the child out of her cot and brought her here into my hammock. If it hadn’t been for her I am sure I would have gone mad; I felt so utterly alone and helpless. Remember, I hadn’t heard from you for four months. Didn’t know whether you were alive or dead. Patalolo would have nothing to do with me. My own men were deserting me like rats do a sinking hulk. That was a black night for me, Captain Lingard. A black night as I sat here not knowing what would happen next. They were so excited and rowdy that I really feared they would come and burn the house over my head. I went and brought my revolver. Laid it loaded on the table. There were such awful yells now and then. Luckily the child slept through it, and seeing her so pretty and peaceful steadied me somehow. Couldn’t believe there was any violence in this world, looking at her lying so quiet and so unconscious of what went on. But it was very hard. Everything was at an end. You must understand that on that night there was no government in Sambir. Nothing to restrain those fellows. Patalolo had collapsed. I was abandoned by my own people, and all that lot could vent their spite on me if they wanted. They know no gratitude. How many times haven’t I saved this settlement from starvation? Absolute starvation. Only three months ago I distributed again a lot of rice on credit. There was nothing to eat in this infernal place. They came begging on their knees. There isn’t a man in Sambir, big or little, who is not in debt to Lingard & Co. Not one. You ought to be satisfied. You always said that was the right policy for us. Well, I carried it out. Ah! Captain Lingard, a policy like that should be backed by loaded rifles . . .”

“You had them!” exclaimed Lingard in the midst of his promenade, that went on more rapid as Almayer talked: the headlong tramp of a man hurrying on to do something violent. The verandah was full of dust,

oppressive and choking, which rose under the old seaman's feet, and made Almayer cough again and again.

"Yes, I had! Twenty. And not a finger to pull a trigger. It's easy to talk," he spluttered, his face very red.

Lingard dropped into a chair, and leaned back with one hand stretched out at length upon the table, the other thrown over the back of his seat. The dust settled, and the sun surging above the forest flooded the verandah with a clear light. Almayer got up and busied himself in lowering the split rattan screens that hung between the columns of the verandah.

"Phew!" said Lingard, "it will be a hot day. That's right, my boy. Keep the sun out. We don't want to be roasted alive here."

Almayer came back, sat down, and spoke very calmly —

"In the morning I went across to see Patalolo. I took the child with me, of course. I found the water-gate barred, and had to walk round through the bushes. Patalolo received me lying on the floor, in the dark, all the shutters closed. I could get nothing out of him but lamentations and groans. He said you must be dead. That Lakamba was coming now with Abdulla's guns to kill everybody. Said he did not mind being killed, as he was an old man, but that the wish of his heart was to make a pilgrimage. He was tired of men's ingratitude — he had no heirs — he wanted to go to Mecca and die there. He would ask Abdulla to let him go. Then he abused Lakamba — between sobs — and you, a little. You prevented him from asking for a flag that would have been respected — he was right there — and now when his enemies were strong he was weak, and you were not there to help him. When I tried to put some heart into him, telling him he had four big guns — you know the brass six-pounders you left here last year — and that I would get powder, and that, perhaps, together we could make head against Lakamba, he simply howled at me. No matter which way he turned — he shrieked — the white men would be the death of him, while he wanted only to be a pilgrim and be at peace. My belief is," added Almayer, after a short pause, and fixing a dull stare upon Lingard, "that the old fool saw this thing coming for a long time, and was not only too frightened to do anything himself, but actually too scared to let you or me know of his suspicions. Another of your particular pets! Well! You have a lucky hand, I must say!"

Lingard struck a sudden blow on the table with his clenched hand. There was a sharp crack of splitting wood. Almayer started up violently, then fell back in his chair and looked at the table.



“There!” he said, moodily, “you don’t know your own strength. This table is completely ruined. The only table I had been able to save from my wife. By and by I will have to eat squatting on the floor like a native.”

Lingard laughed heartily. “Well then, don’t nag at me like a woman at a drunken husband!” He became very serious after awhile, and added, “If it hadn’t been for the loss of the Flash I would have been here three months ago, and all would have been well. No use crying over that. Don’t you be uneasy, Kaspar. We will have everything ship-shape here in a very short time.”

“What? You don’t mean to expel Abdulla out of here by force! I tell you, you can’t.”

“Not I!” exclaimed Lingard. “That’s all over, I am afraid. Great pity. They will suffer for it. He will squeeze them. Great pity. Damn it! I feel so sorry for them if I had the Flash here I would try force. Eh! Why not? However, the poor Flash is gone, and there is an end of it. Poor old hooker. Hey, Almayer? You made a voyage or two with me. Wasn’t she a sweet craft? Could make her do anything but talk. She was better than a wife to me. Never scolded. Hey? . . . And to think that it should come to this. That I should leave her poor old bones sticking on a reef as though I had been a damned fool of a southern-going man who must have half a mile of water under his keel to be safe! Well! well! It’s only those who do nothing that make no mistakes, I suppose. But it’s hard. Hard.”

He nodded sadly, with his eyes on the ground. Almayer looked at him with growing indignation.

“Upon my word, you are heartless,” he burst out; “perfectly heartless — and selfish. It does not seem to strike you — in all that — that in losing your ship — by your recklessness, I am sure — you ruin me — us, and my little Nina. What’s going to become of me and of her? That’s what I want to know. You brought me here, made me your partner, and now, when everything is gone to the devil — through your fault, mind you — you talk about your ship . . . ship! You can get another. But here. This trade. That’s gone now, thanks to Willems. . . . Your dear Willems!”

“Never you mind about Willems. I will look after him,” said Lingard, severely. “And as to the trade . . . I will make your fortune yet, my boy. Never fear. Have you got any cargo for the schooner that brought me here?”

“The shed is full of rattans,” answered Almayer, “and I have about eighty tons of guttah in the well. The last lot I ever will have, no doubt,” he added,

bitterly.

“So, after all, there was no robbery. You’ve lost nothing actually. Well, then, you must . . . Hallo! What’s the matter! . . . Here! . . .”

“Robbery! No!” screamed Almayer, throwing up his hands.

He fell back in the chair and his face became purple. A little white foam appeared on his lips and trickled down his chin, while he lay back, showing the whites of his upturned eyes. When he came to himself he saw Lingard standing over him, with an empty water-chatty in his hand.

“You had a fit of some kind,” said the old seaman with much concern. “What is it? You did give me a fright. So very sudden.”

Almayer, his hair all wet and stuck to his head, as if he had been diving, sat up and gasped.

“Outrage! A fiendish outrage. I . . .”

Lingard put the chatty on the table and looked at him in attentive silence. Almayer passed his hand over his forehead and went on in an unsteady tone:

“When I remember that, I lose all control,” he said. “I told you he anchored Abdulla’s ship abreast our jetty, but over to the other shore, near the Rajah’s place. The ship was surrounded with boats. From here it looked as if she had been landed on a raft. Every dugout in Sambir was there. Through my glass I could distinguish the faces of people on the poop — Abdulla, Willems, Lakamba — everybody. That old cringing scoundrel Sahamin was there. I could see quite plain. There seemed to be much talk and discussion. Finally I saw a ship’s boat lowered. Some Arab got into her, and the boat went towards Patalolo’s landing-place. It seems they had been refused admittance — so they say. I think myself that the water-gate was not unbarred quick enough to please the exalted messenger. At any rate I saw the boat come back almost directly. I was looking on, rather interested, when I saw Willems and some more go forward — very busy about something there. That woman was also amongst them. Ah, that woman . . .”

Almayer choked, and seemed on the point of having a relapse, but by a violent effort regained a comparative composure.

“All of a sudden,” he continued — “bang! They fired a shot into Patalolo’s gate, and before I had time to catch my breath — I was startled, you may believe — they sent another and burst the gate open. Whereupon, I suppose, they thought they had done enough for a while, and probably felt hungry, for a feast began aft. Abdulla sat amongst them like an idol, cross-

legged, his hands on his lap. He's too great altogether to eat when others do, but he presided, you see. Willems kept on dodging about forward, aloof from the crowd, and looking at my house through the ship's long glass. I could not resist it. I shook my fist at him."

"Just so," said Lingard, gravely. "That was the thing to do, of course. If you can't fight a man the best thing is to exasperate him."

Almayer waved his hand in a superior manner, and continued, unmoved: "You may say what you like. You can't realize my feelings. He saw me, and, with his eye still at the small end of the glass, lifted his arm as if answering a hail. I thought my turn to be shot at would come next after Patalolo, so I ran up the Union Jack to the flagstaff in the yard. I had no other protection. There were only three men besides Ali that stuck to me — three cripples, for that matter, too sick to get away. I would have fought singlehanded, I think, I was that angry, but there was the child. What to do with her? Couldn't send her up the river with the mother. You know I can't trust my wife. I decided to keep very quiet, but to let nobody land on our shore. Private property, that; under a deed from Patalolo. I was within my right — wasn't I? The morning was very quiet. After they had a feed on board the barque with Abdulla most of them went home; only the big people remained. Towards three o'clock Sahamin crossed alone in a small canoe. I went down on our wharf with my gun to speak to him, but didn't let him land. The old hypocrite said Abdulla sent greetings and wished to talk with me on business; would I come on board? I said no; I would not. Told him that Abdulla may write and I would answer, but no interview, neither on board his ship nor on shore. I also said that if anybody attempted to land within my fences I would shoot — no matter whom. On that he lifted his hands to heaven, scandalized, and then paddled away pretty smartly — to report, I suppose. An hour or so afterwards I saw Willems land a boat party at the Rajah's. It was very quiet. Not a shot was fired, and there was hardly any shouting. They tumbled those brass guns you presented to Patalolo last year down the bank into the river. It's deep there close to. The channel runs that way, you know. About five, Willems went back on board, and I saw him join Abdulla by the wheel aft. He talked a lot, swinging his arms about — seemed to explain things — pointed at my house, then down the reach. Finally, just before sunset, they hove upon the cable and dredged the ship down nearly half a mile to the junction of the two branches of the river — where she is now, as you might have seen."

Lingard nodded.

“That evening, after dark — I was informed — Abdulla landed for the first time in Sambir. He was entertained in Sahamin’s house. I sent Ali to the settlement for news. He returned about nine, and reported that Patalolo was sitting on Abdulla’s left hand before Sahamin’s fire. There was a great council. Ali seemed to think that Patalolo was a prisoner, but he was wrong there. They did the trick very neatly. Before midnight everything was arranged as I can make out. Patalolo went back to his demolished stockade, escorted by a dozen boats with torches. It appears he begged Abdulla to let him have a passage in the Lord of the Isles to Penang. From there he would go to Mecca. The firing business was alluded to as a mistake. No doubt it was in a sense. Patalolo never meant resisting. So he is going as soon as the ship is ready for sea. He went on board next day with three women and half a dozen fellows as old as himself. By Abdulla’s orders he was received with a salute of seven guns, and he has been living on board ever since — five weeks. I doubt whether he will leave the river alive. At any rate he won’t live to reach Penang. Lakamba took over all his goods, and gave him a draft on Abdulla’s house payable in Penang. He is bound to die before he gets there. Don’t you see?”

He sat silent for a while in dejected meditation, then went on:

“Of course there were several rows during the night. Various fellows took the opportunity of the unsettled state of affairs to pay off old scores and settle old grudges. I passed the night in that chair there, dozing uneasily. Now and then there would be a great tumult and yelling which would make me sit up, revolver in hand. However, nobody was killed. A few broken heads — that’s all. Early in the morning Willems caused them to make a fresh move which I must say surprised me not a little. As soon as there was daylight they busied themselves in setting up a flag-pole on the space at the other end of the settlement, where Abdulla is having his houses built now. Shortly after sunrise there was a great gathering at the flag-pole. All went there. Willems was standing leaning against the mast, one arm over that woman’s shoulders. They had brought an armchair for Patalolo, and Lakamba stood on the right hand of the old man, who made a speech. Everybody in Sambir was there: women, slaves, children — everybody! Then Patalolo spoke. He said that by the mercy of the Most High he was going on a pilgrimage. The dearest wish of his heart was to be accomplished. Then, turning to Lakamba, he begged him to rule justly

during his — Patalolo's — absence There was a bit of play-acting there. Lakamba said he was unworthy of the honourable burden, and Patalolo insisted. Poor old fool! It must have been bitter to him. They made him actually entreat that scoundrel. Fancy a man compelled to beg of a robber to despoil him! But the old Rajah was so frightened. Anyway, he did it, and Lakamba accepted at last. Then Willems made a speech to the crowd. Said that on his way to the west the Rajah — he meant Patalolo — would see the Great White Ruler in Batavia and obtain his protection for Sambir. Meantime, he went on, I, an Orang Blanda and your friend, hoist the flag under the shadow of which there is safety. With that he ran up a Dutch flag to the mast-head. It was made hurriedly, during the night, of cotton stuffs, and, being heavy, hung down the mast, while the crowd stared. Ali told me there was a great sigh of surprise, but not a word was spoken till Lakamba advanced and proclaimed in a loud voice that during all that day every one passing by the flagstaff must uncover his head and salaam before the emblem."

"But, hang it all!" exclaimed Lingard — "Abdulla is British!"

"Abdulla wasn't there at all — did not go on shore that day. Yet Ali, who has his wits about him, noticed that the space where the crowd stood was under the guns of the Lord of the Isles. They had put a coir warp ashore, and gave the barque a cant in the current, so as to bring the broadside to bear on the flagstaff. Clever! Eh? But nobody dreamt of resistance. When they recovered from the surprise there was a little quiet jeering; and Bahassoen abused Lakamba violently till one of Lakamba's men hit him on the head with a staff. Frightful crack, I am told. Then they left off jeering. Meantime Patalolo went away, and Lakamba sat in the chair at the foot of the flagstaff, while the crowd surged around, as if they could not make up their minds to go. Suddenly there was a great noise behind Lakamba's chair. It was that woman, who went for Willems. Ali says she was like a wild beast, but he twisted her wrist and made her grovel in the dust. Nobody knows exactly what it was about. Some say it was about that flag. He carried her off, flung her into a canoe, and went on board Abdulla's ship. After that Sahamin was the first to salaam to the flag. Others followed suit. Before noon everything was quiet in the settlement, and Ali came back and told me all this."

Almayer drew a long breath. Lingard stretched out his legs.

"Go on!" he said.

Almayer seemed to struggle with himself. At last he spluttered out:  
“The hardest is to tell yet. The most unheard-of thing! An outrage! A fiendish outrage!”

## CHAPTER THREE

“Well! Let’s know all about it. I can’t imagine . . .” began Lingard, after waiting for some time in silence.

“Can’t imagine! I should think you couldn’t,” interrupted Almayer. “Why! . . . You just listen. When Ali came back I felt a little easier in my mind. There was then some semblance of order in Sambir. I had the Jack up since the morning and began to feel safer. Some of my men turned up in the afternoon. I did not ask any questions; set them to work as if nothing had happened. Towards the evening — it might have been five or half-past — I was on our jetty with the child when I heard shouts at the far-off end of the settlement. At first I didn’t take much notice. By and by Ali came to me and says, ‘Master, give me the child, there is much trouble in the settlement.’ So I gave him Nina and went in, took my revolver, and passed through the house into the back courtyard. As I came down the steps I saw all the serving girls clear out from the cooking shed, and I heard a big crowd howling on the other side of the dry ditch which is the limit of our ground. Could not see them on account of the fringe of bushes along the ditch, but I knew that crowd was angry and after somebody. As I stood wondering, that Jim-Eng — you know the Chinaman who settled here a couple of years ago?”

“He was my passenger; I brought him here,” exclaimed Lingard. “A first-class Chinaman that.”

“Did you? I had forgotten. Well, that Jim-Eng, he burst through the bush and fell into my arms, so to speak. He told me, panting, that they were after him because he wouldn’t take off his hat to the flag. He was not so much scared, but he was very angry and indignant. Of course he had to run for it; there were some fifty men after him — Lakamba’s friends — but he was full of fight. Said he was an Englishman, and would not take off his hat to any flag but English. I tried to soothe him while the crowd was shouting on the other side of the ditch. I told him he must take one of my canoes and cross the river. Stop on the other side for a couple of days. He wouldn’t. Not he. He was English, and he would fight the whole lot. Says he: ‘They are only black fellows. We white men,’ meaning me and himself, ‘can fight everybody in Sambir.’ He was mad with passion. The crowd quieted a little, and I thought I could shelter Jim-Eng without much risk, when all of a sudden I heard Willems’ voice. He shouted to me in English: ‘Let four men

enter your compound to get that Chinaman!' I said nothing. Told Jim-Eng to keep quiet too. Then after a while Willems shouts again: 'Don't resist, Almayer. I give you good advice. I am keeping this crowd back. Don't resist them!' That beggar's voice enraged me; I could not help it. I cried to him: 'You are a liar!' and just then Jim-Eng, who had flung off his jacket and had tucked up his trousers ready for a fight; just then that fellow he snatches the revolver out of my hand and lets fly at them through the bush. There was a sharp cry — he must have hit somebody — and a great yell, and before I could wink twice they were over the ditch and through the bush and on top of us! Simply rolled over us! There wasn't the slightest chance to resist. I was trampled under foot, Jim-Eng got a dozen gashes about his body, and we were carried halfway up the yard in the first rush. My eyes and mouth were full of dust; I was on my back with three or four fellows sitting on me. I could hear Jim-Eng trying to shout not very far from me. Now and then they would throttle him and he would gurgle. I could hardly breathe myself with two heavy fellows on my chest. Willems came up running and ordered them to raise me up, but to keep good hold. They led me into the verandah. I looked round, but did not see either Ali or the child. Felt easier. Struggled a little. . . . Oh, my God!"

Almayer's face was distorted with a passing spasm of rage. Lingard moved in his chair slightly. Almayer went on after a short pause:

"They held me, shouting threats in my face. Willems took down my hammock and threw it to them. He pulled out the drawer of this table, and found there a palm and needle and some sail-twine. We were making awnings for your brig, as you had asked me last voyage before you left. He knew, of course, where to look for what he wanted. By his orders they laid me out on the floor, wrapped me in my hammock, and he started to stitch me in, as if I had been a corpse, beginning at the feet. While he worked he laughed wickedly. I called him all the names I could think of. He told them to put their dirty paws over my mouth and nose. I was nearly choked. Whenever I moved they punched me in the ribs. He went on taking fresh needlefuls as he wanted them, and working steadily. Sewed me up to my throat. Then he rose, saying, 'That will do; let go.' That woman had been standing by; they must have been reconciled. She clapped her hands. I lay on the floor like a bale of goods while he stared at me, and the woman shrieked with delight. Like a bale of goods! There was a grin on every face,



and the verandah was full of them. I wished myself dead — 'pon my word, Captain Lingard, I did! I do now whenever I think of it!"

Lingard's face expressed sympathetic indignation. Almayer dropped his head upon his arms on the table, and spoke in that position in an indistinct and muffled voice, without looking up.

"Finally, by his directions, they flung me into the big rocking-chair. I was sewed in so tight that I was stiff like a piece of wood. He was giving orders in a very loud voice, and that man Babalatchi saw that they were executed. They obeyed him implicitly. Meantime I lay there in the chair like a log, and that woman capered before me and made faces; snapped her fingers before my nose. Women are bad! — ain't they? I never saw her before, as far as I know. Never done anything to her. Yet she was perfectly fiendish. Can you understand it? Now and then she would leave me alone to hang round his neck for awhile, and then she would return before my chair and begin her exercises again. He looked on, indulgent. The perspiration ran down my face, got into my eyes — my arms were sewn in. I was blinded half the time; at times I could see better. She drags him before my chair. 'I am like white women,' she says, her arms round his neck. You should have seen the faces of the fellows in the verandah! They were scandalized and ashamed of themselves to see her behaviour. Suddenly she asks him, alluding to me: 'When are you going to kill him?' Imagine how I felt. I must have swooned; I don't remember exactly. I fancy there was a row; he was angry. When I got my wits again he was sitting close to me, and she was gone. I understood he sent her to my wife, who was hiding in the back room and never came out during this affair. Willems says to me — I fancy I can hear his voice, hoarse and dull — he says to me: 'Not a hair of your head shall be touched.' I made no sound. Then he goes on: 'Please remark that the flag you have hoisted — which, by the by, is not yours — has been respected. Tell Captain Lingard so when you do see him. But,' he says, 'you first fired at the crowd.' 'You are a liar, you blackguard!' I shouted. He winced, I am sure. It hurt him to see I was not frightened. 'Anyways,' he says, 'a shot had been fired out of your compound and a man was hit. Still, all your property shall be respected on account of the Union Jack. Moreover, I have no quarrel with Captain Lingard, who is the senior partner in this business. As to you,' he continued, 'you will not forget this day — not if you live to be a hundred years old — or I don't know your nature. You will keep the bitter taste of this humiliation to the last day of your life,

and so your kindness to me shall be repaid. I shall remove all the powder you have. This coast is under the protection of the Netherlands, and you have no right to have any powder. There are the Governor's Orders in Council to that effect, and you know it. Tell me where the key of the small storehouse is?' I said not a word, and he waited a little, then rose, saying: 'It's your own fault if there is any damage done.' He ordered Babalatchi to have the lock of the office-room forced, and went in — rummaged amongst my drawers — could not find the key. Then that woman Aissa asked my wife, and she gave them the key. After awhile they tumbled every barrel into the river. Eighty-three hundredweight! He superintended himself, and saw every barrel roll into the water. There were mutterings. Babalatchi was angry and tried to expostulate, but he gave him a good shaking. I must say he was perfectly fearless with those fellows. Then he came back to the verandah, sat down by me again, and says: 'We found your man Ali with your little daughter hiding in the bushes up the river. We brought them in. They are perfectly safe, of course. Let me congratulate you, Almayer, upon the cleverness of your child. She recognized me at once, and cried "pig" as naturally as you would yourself. Circumstances alter feelings. You should have seen how frightened your man Ali was. Clapped his hands over her mouth. I think you spoil her, Almayer. But I am not angry. Really, you look so ridiculous in this chair that I can't feel angry.' I made a frantic effort to burst out of my hammock to get at that scoundrel's throat, but I only fell off and upset the chair over myself. He laughed and said only: 'I leave you half of your revolver cartridges and take half myself; they will fit mine. We are both white men, and should back each other up. I may want them.' I shouted at him from under the chair: 'You are a thief,' but he never looked, and went away, one hand round that woman's waist, the other on Babalatchi's shoulder, to whom he was talking — laying down the law about something or other. In less than five minutes there was nobody inside our fences. After awhile Ali came to look for me and cut me free. I haven't seen Willems since — nor anybody else for that matter. I have been left alone. I offered sixty dollars to the man who had been wounded, which were accepted. They released Jim-Eng the next day, when the flag had been hauled down. He sent six cases of opium to me for safe keeping but has not left his house. I think he is safe enough now. Everything is very quiet."

Towards the end of his narrative Almayer lifted his head off the table, and now sat back in his chair and stared at the bamboo rafters of the roof

above him. Lingard lolled in his seat with his legs stretched out. In the peaceful gloom of the verandah, with its lowered screens, they heard faint noises from the world outside in the blazing sunshine: a hail on the river, the answer from the shore, the creak of a pulley; sounds short, interrupted, as if lost suddenly in the brilliance of noonday. Lingard got up slowly, walked to the front rail, and holding one of the screens aside, looked out in silence. Over the water and the empty courtyard came a distinct voice from a small schooner anchored abreast of the Lingard jetty.

“Serang! Take a pull at the main peak halyards. This gaff is down on the boom.”

There was a shrill pipe dying in long-drawn cadence, the song of the men swinging on the rope. The voice said sharply: “That will do!” Another voice — the serang’s probably — shouted: “Ikat!” and as Lingard dropped the blind and turned away all was silent again, as if there had been nothing on the other side of the swaying screen; nothing but the light, brilliant, crude, heavy, lying on a dead land like a pall of fire. Lingard sat down again, facing Almayer, his elbow on the table, in a thoughtful attitude.

“Nice little schooner,” muttered Almayer, wearily. “Did you buy her?”

“No,” answered Lingard. “After I lost the Flash we got to Palembang in our boats. I chartered her there, for six months. From young Ford, you know. Belongs to him. He wanted a spell ashore, so I took charge myself. Of course all Ford’s people on board. Strangers to me. I had to go to Singapore about the insurance; then I went to Macassar, of course. Had long passages. No wind. It was like a curse on me. I had lots of trouble with old Hudig. That delayed me much.”

“Ah! Hudig! Why with Hudig?” asked Almayer, in a perfunctory manner.

“Oh! about a . . . a woman,” mumbled Lingard.

Almayer looked at him with languid surprise. The old seaman had twisted his white beard into a point, and now was busy giving his moustaches a fierce curl. His little red eyes — those eyes that had smarted under the salt sprays of every sea, that had looked unwinking to windward in the gales of all latitudes — now glared at Almayer from behind the lowered eyebrows like a pair of frightened wild beasts crouching in a bush.

“Extraordinary! So like you! What can you have to do with Hudig’s women? The old sinner!” said Almayer, negligently.

“What are you talking about! Wife of a friend of . . . I mean of a man I know . . .”

“Still, I don’t see . . .” interjected Almayer carelessly.

“Of a man you know too. Well. Very well.”

“I knew so many men before you made me bury myself in this hole!” growled Almayer, unamiably. “If she had anything to do with Hudig — that wife — then she can’t be up to much. I would be sorry for the man,” added Almayer, brightening up with the recollection of the scandalous tittle-tattle of the past, when he was a young man in the second capital of the Islands — and so well informed, so well informed. He laughed. Lingard’s frown deepened.

“Don’t talk foolish! It’s Willems’ wife.”

Almayer grasped the sides of his seat, his eyes and mouth opened wide.

“What? Why!” he exclaimed, bewildered.

“Willems’ — wife,” repeated Lingard distinctly. “You ain’t deaf, are you? The wife of Willems. Just so. As to why! There was a promise. And I did not know what had happened here.”

“What is it. You’ve been giving her money, I bet,” cried Almayer.

“Well, no!” said Lingard, deliberately. “Although I suppose I shall have to . . .”

Almayer groaned.

“The fact is,” went on Lingard, speaking slowly and steadily, “the fact is that I have . . . I have brought her here. Here. To Sambir.”

“In heaven’s name! why?” shouted Almayer, jumping up. The chair tilted and fell slowly over. He raised his clasped hands above his head and brought them down jerkily, separating his fingers with an effort, as if tearing them apart. Lingard nodded, quickly, several times.

“I have. Awkward. Hey?” he said, with a puzzled look upwards.

“Upon my word,” said Almayer, tearfully. “I can’t understand you at all. What will you do next! Willems’ wife!”

“Wife and child. Small boy, you know. They are on board the schooner.”

Almayer looked at Lingard with sudden suspicion, then turning away busied himself in picking up the chair, sat down in it turning his back upon the old seaman, and tried to whistle, but gave it up directly. Lingard went on —

“Fact is, the fellow got into trouble with Hudig. Worked upon my feelings. I promised to arrange matters. I did. With much trouble. Hudig was angry with her for wishing to join her husband. Unprincipled old fellow. You know she is his daughter. Well, I said I would see her through it

all right; help Willems to a fresh start and so on. I spoke to Craig in Palembang. He is getting on in years, and wanted a manager or partner. I promised to guarantee Willems' good behaviour. We settled all that. Craig is an old crony of mine. Been shipmates in the forties. He's waiting for him now. A pretty mess! What do you think?"

Almayer shrugged his shoulders.

"That woman broke with Hudig on my assurance that all would be well," went on Lingard, with growing dismay. "She did. Proper thing, of course. Wife, husband . . . together . . . as it should be . . . Smart fellow . . . Impossible scoundrel . . . Jolly old go! Oh! damn!"

Almayer laughed spitefully.

"How delighted he will be," he said, softly. "You will make two people happy. Two at least!" He laughed again, while Lingard looked at his shaking shoulders in consternation.

"I am jammed on a lee shore this time, if ever I was," muttered Lingard.

"Send her back quick," suggested Almayer, stifling another laugh.

"What are you sniggering at?" growled Lingard, angrily. "I'll work it out all clear yet. Meantime you must receive her into this house."

"My house!" cried Almayer, turning round.

"It's mine too — a little isn't it?" said Lingard. "Don't argue," he shouted, as Almayer opened his mouth. "Obey orders and hold your tongue!"

"Oh! If you take it in that tone!" mumbled Almayer, sulkily, with a gesture of assent.

"You are so aggravating too, my boy," said the old seaman, with unexpected placidity. "You must give me time to turn round. I can't keep her on board all the time. I must tell her something. Say, for instance, that he is gone up the river. Expected back every day. That's it. D'ye hear? You must put her on that tack and dodge her along easy, while I take the kinks out of the situation. By God!" he exclaimed, mournfully, after a short pause, "life is foul! Foul like a lee forebrace on a dirty night. And yet. And yet. One must see it clear for running before going below — for good. Now you attend to what I said," he added, sharply, "if you don't want to quarrel with me, my boy."

"I don't want to quarrel with you," murmured Almayer with unwilling deference. "Only I wish I could understand you. I know you are my best

friend, Captain Lingard; only, upon my word, I can't make you out sometimes! I wish I could . . .”

Lingard burst into a loud laugh which ended shortly in a deep sigh. He closed his eyes, tilting his head over the back of his armchair; and on his face, baked by the unclouded suns of many hard years, there appeared for a moment a weariness and a look of age which startled Almayer, like an unexpected disclosure of evil.

“I am done up,” said Lingard, gently. “Perfectly done up. All night on deck getting that schooner up the river. Then talking with you. Seems to me I could go to sleep on a clothes-line. I should like to eat something though. Just see about that, Kaspar.”

Almayer clapped his hands, and receiving no response was going to call, when in the central passage of the house, behind the red curtain of the doorway opening upon the verandah, they heard a child's imperious voice speaking shrilly.

“Take me up at once. I want to be carried into the verandah. I shall be very angry. Take me up.”

A man's voice answered, subdued, in humble remonstrance. The faces of Almayer and Lingard brightened at once. The old seaman called out —

“Bring the child. Leks!”

“You will see how she has grown,” exclaimed Almayer, in a jubilant tone.

Through the curtained doorway Ali appeared with little Nina Almayer in his arms. The child had one arm round his neck, and with the other she hugged a ripe pumelo nearly as big as her own head. Her little pink, sleeveless robe had half slipped off her shoulders, but the long black hair, that framed her olive face, in which the big black eyes looked out in childish solemnity, fell in luxuriant profusion over her shoulders, all round her and over Ali's arms, like a close-meshed and delicate net of silken threads. Lingard got up to meet Ali, and as soon as she caught sight of the old seaman she dropped the fruit and put out both her hands with a cry of delight. He took her from the Malay, and she laid hold of his moustaches with an affectionate goodwill that brought unaccustomed tears into his little red eyes.

“Not so hard, little one, not so hard,” he murmured, pressing with an enormous hand, that covered it entirely, the child's head to his face.

“Pick up my pumelo, O Rajah of the sea!” she said, speaking in a high-pitched, clear voice with great volubility. “There, under the table. I want it quick! Quick! You have been away fighting with many men. Ali says so. You are a mighty fighter. Ali says so. On the great sea far away, away, away.”

She waved her hand, staring with dreamy vacancy, while Lingard looked at her, and squatting down groped under the table after the pumelo.

“Where does she get those notions?” said Lingard, getting up cautiously, to Almayer, who had been giving orders to Ali.

“She is always with the men. Many a time I’ve found her with her fingers in their rice dish, of an evening. She does not care for her mother though — I am glad to say. How pretty she is — and so sharp. My very image!”

Lingard had put the child on the table, and both men stood looking at her with radiant faces.

“A perfect little woman,” whispered Lingard. “Yes, my dear boy, we shall make her somebody. You’ll see!”

“Very little chance of that now,” remarked Almayer, sadly.

“You do not know!” exclaimed Lingard, taking up the child again, and beginning to walk up and down the verandah. “I have my plans. I have — listen.”

And he began to explain to the interested Almayer his plans for the future. He would interview Abdulla and Lakamba. There must be some understanding with those fellows now they had the upper hand. Here he interrupted himself to swear freely, while the child, who had been diligently fumbling about his neck, had found his whistle and blew a loud blast now and then close to his ear — which made him wince and laugh as he put her hands down, scolding her lovingly. Yes — that would be easily settled. He was a man to be reckoned with yet. Nobody knew that better than Almayer. Very well. Then he must patiently try and keep some little trade together. It would be all right. But the great thing — and here Lingard spoke lower, bringing himself to a sudden standstill before the entranced Almayer — the great thing would be the gold hunt up the river. He — Lingard — would devote himself to it. He had been in the interior before. There were immense deposits of alluvial gold there. Fabulous. He felt sure. Had seen places. Dangerous work? Of course! But what a reward! He would explore — and find. Not a shadow of doubt. Hang the danger! They would first get as much as they could for themselves. Keep the thing quiet. Then after a

time form a Company. In Batavia or in England. Yes, in England. Much better. Splendid! Why, of course. And that baby would be the richest woman in the world. He — Lingard — would not, perhaps, see it — although he felt good for many years yet — but Almayer would. Here was something to live for yet! Hey?

But the richest woman in the world had been for the last five minutes shouting shrilly — "Rajah Laut! Rajah Laut! Hai! Give ear!" while the old seaman had been speaking louder, unconsciously, to make his deep bass heard above the impatient clamour. He stopped now and said tenderly —

"What is it, little woman?"

"I am not a little woman. I am a white child. Anak Putih. A white child; and the white men are my brothers. Father says so. And Ali says so too. Ali knows as much as father. Everything."

Almayer almost danced with paternal delight.

"I taught her. I taught her," he repeated, laughing with tears in his eyes. "Isn't she sharp?"

"I am the slave of the white child," said Lingard, with playful solemnity. "What is the order?"

"I want a house," she warbled, with great eagerness. "I want a house, and another house on the roof, and another on the roof — high. High! Like the places where they dwell — my brothers — in the land where the sun sleeps."

"To the westward," explained Almayer, under his breath. "She remembers everything. She wants you to build a house of cards. You did, last time you were here."

Lingard sat down with the child on his knees, and Almayer pulled out violently one drawer after another, looking for the cards, as if the fate of the world depended upon his haste. He produced a dirty double pack which was only used during Lingard's visit to Sambir, when he would sometimes play — of an evening — with Almayer, a game which he called Chinese bezique. It bored Almayer, but the old seaman delighted in it, considering it a remarkable product of Chinese genius — a race for which he had an unaccountable liking and admiration.

"Now we will get on, my little pearl," he said, putting together with extreme precaution two cards that looked absurdly flimsy between his big fingers. Little Nina watched him with intense seriousness as he went on



erecting the ground floor, while he continued to speak to Almayer with his head over his shoulder so as not to endanger the structure with his breath.

"I know what I am talking about. . . . Been in California in forty-nine. . . . Not that I made much . . . then in Victoria in the early days . . . . I know all about it. Trust me. Moreover a blind man could . . . Be quiet, little sister, or you will knock this affair down. . . . My hand pretty steady yet! Hey, Kaspar? . . . Now, delight of my heart, we shall put a third house on the top of these two . . . keep very quiet. . . . As I was saying, you got only to stoop and gather handfuls of gold . . . dust . . . there. Now here we are. Three houses on top of one another. Grand!"

He leaned back in his chair, one hand on the child's head, which he smoothed mechanically, and gesticulated with the other, speaking to Almayer.

"Once on the spot, there would be only the trouble to pick up the stuff. Then we shall all go to Europe. The child must be educated. We shall be rich. Rich is no name for it. Down in Devonshire where I belong, there was a fellow who built a house near Teignmouth which had as many windows as a three-decker has ports. Made all his money somewhere out here in the good old days. People around said he had been a pirate. We boys — I was a boy in a Brixham trawler then — certainly believed that. He went about in a bath-chair in his grounds. Had a glass eye . . ."

"Higher, Higher!" called out Nina, pulling the old seaman's beard.

"You do worry me — don't you?" said Lingard, gently, giving her a tender kiss. "What? One more house on top of all these? Well! I will try."

The child watched him breathlessly. When the difficult feat was accomplished she clapped her hands, looked on steadily, and after a while gave a great sigh of content.

"Oh! Look out!" shouted Almayer.

The structure collapsed suddenly before the child's light breath. Lingard looked discomposed for a moment. Almayer laughed, but the little girl began to cry.

"Take her," said the old seaman, abruptly. Then, after Almayer went away with the crying child, he remained sitting by the table, looking gloomily at the heap of cards.

"Damn this Willems," he muttered to himself. "But I will do it yet!"

He got up, and with an angry push of his hand swept the cards off the table. Then he fell back in his chair.

“Tired as a dog,” he sighed out, closing his eyes.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Consciously or unconsciously, men are proud of their firmness, steadfastness of purpose, directness of aim. They go straight towards their desire, to the accomplishment of virtue — sometimes of crime — in an uplifting persuasion of their firmness. They walk the road of life, the road fenced in by their tastes, prejudices, disdains or enthusiasms, generally honest, invariably stupid, and are proud of never losing their way. If they do stop, it is to look for a moment over the hedges that make them safe, to look at the misty valleys, at the distant peaks, at cliffs and morasses, at the dark forests and the hazy plains where other human beings grope their days painfully away, stumbling over the bones of the wise, over the unburied remains of their predecessors who died alone, in gloom or in sunshine, halfway from anywhere. The man of purpose does not understand, and goes on, full of contempt. He never loses his way. He knows where he is going and what he wants. Travelling on, he achieves great length without any breadth, and battered, besmirched, and weary, he touches the goal at last; he grasps the reward of his perseverance, of his virtue, of his healthy optimism: an untruthful tombstone over a dark and soon forgotten grave.

Lingard had never hesitated in his life. Why should he? He had been a most successful trader, and a man lucky in his fights, skilful in navigation, undeniably first in seamanship in those seas. He knew it. Had he not heard the voice of common consent?

The voice of the world that respected him so much; the whole world to him — for to us the limits of the universe are strictly defined by those we know. There is nothing for us outside the babble of praise and blame on familiar lips, and beyond our last acquaintance there lies only a vast chaos; a chaos of laughter and tears which concerns us not; laughter and tears unpleasant, wicked, morbid, contemptible — because heard imperfectly by ears rebellious to strange sounds. To Lingard — simple himself — all things were simple. He seldom read. Books were not much in his way, and he had to work hard navigating, trading, and also, in obedience to his benevolent instincts, shaping stray lives he found here and there under his busy hand. He remembered the Sunday-school teachings of his native village and the discourses of the black-coated gentleman connected with the Mission to Fishermen and Seamen, whose yawl-rigged boat darting through rain-squalls amongst the coasters wind-bound in Falmouth Bay, was part of

those precious pictures of his youthful days that lingered in his memory. "As clever a sky-pilot as you could wish to see," he would say with conviction, "and the best man to handle a boat in any weather I ever did meet!" Such were the agencies that had roughly shaped his young soul before he went away to see the world in a southern-going ship — before he went, ignorant and happy, heavy of hand, pure in heart, profane in speech, to give himself up to the great sea that took his life and gave him his fortune. When thinking of his rise in the world — commander of ships, then shipowner, then a man of much capital, respected wherever he went, Lingard in a word, the Rajah Laut — he was amazed and awed by his fate, that seemed to his ill-informed mind the most wondrous known in the annals of men. His experience appeared to him immense and conclusive, teaching him the lesson of the simplicity of life. In life — as in seamanship — there were only two ways of doing a thing: the right way and the wrong way. Common sense and experience taught a man the way that was right. The other was for lubbers and fools, and led, in seamanship, to loss of spars and sails or shipwreck; in life, to loss of money and consideration, or to an unlucky knock on the head. He did not consider it his duty to be angry with rascals. He was only angry with things he could not understand, but for the weaknesses of humanity he could find a contemptuous tolerance. It being manifest that he was wise and lucky — otherwise how could he have been as successful in life as he had been? — he had an inclination to set right the lives of other people, just as he could hardly refrain — in defiance of nautical etiquette — from interfering with his chief officer when the crew was sending up a new topmast, or generally when busy about, what he called, "a heavy job." He was meddlesome with perfect modesty; if he knew a thing or two there was no merit in it. "Hard knocks taught me wisdom, my boy," he used to say, "and you had better take the advice of a man who has been a fool in his time. Have another." And "my boy" as a rule took the cool drink, the advice, and the consequent help which Lingard felt himself bound in honour to give, so as to back up his opinion like an honest man. Captain Tom went sailing from island to island, appearing unexpectedly in various localities, beaming, noisy, anecdotal, commendatory or comminatory, but always welcome.

It was only since his return to Sambir that the old seaman had for the first time known doubt and unhappiness, The loss of the Flash — planted firmly and for ever on a ledge of rock at the north end of Gaspar Straits in the

uncertain light of a cloudy morning — shook him considerably; and the amazing news which he heard on his arrival in Sambir were not made to soothe his feelings. A good many years ago — prompted by his love of adventure — he, with infinite trouble, had found out and surveyed — for his own benefit only — the entrances to that river, where, he had heard through native report, a new settlement of Malays was forming. No doubt he thought at the time mostly of personal gain; but, received with hearty friendliness by Patalolo, he soon came to like the ruler and the people, offered his counsel and his help, and — knowing nothing of Arcadia — he dreamed of Arcadian happiness for that little corner of the world which he loved to think all his own. His deep-seated and immovable conviction that only he — he, Lingard — knew what was good for them was characteristic of him and, after all, not so very far wrong. He would make them happy whether or no, he said, and he meant it. His trade brought prosperity to the young state, and the fear of his heavy hand secured its internal peace for many years.

He looked proudly upon his work. With every passing year he loved more the land, the people, the muddy river that, if he could help it, would carry no other craft but the Flash on its unclean and friendly surface. As he slowly warped his vessel up-stream he would scan with knowing looks the riverside clearings, and pronounce solemn judgment upon the prospects of the season's rice-crop. He knew every settler on the banks between the sea and Sambir; he knew their wives, their children; he knew every individual of the multi-coloured groups that, standing on the flimsy platforms of tiny reed dwellings built over the water, waved their hands and shouted shrilly: "O! Kapal layer! Hai!" while the Flash swept slowly through the populated reach, to enter the lonely stretches of sparkling brown water bordered by the dense and silent forest, whose big trees nodded their outspread boughs gently in the faint, warm breeze — as if in sign of tender but melancholy welcome. He loved it all: the landscape of brown golds and brilliant emeralds under the dome of hot sapphire; the whispering big trees; the loquacious nipa-palms that rattled their leaves volubly in the night breeze, as if in haste to tell him all the secrets of the great forest behind them. He loved the heavy scents of blossoms and black earth, that breath of life and of death which lingered over his brig in the damp air of tepid and peaceful nights. He loved the narrow and sombre creeks, strangers to sunshine: black, smooth, tortuous — like byways of despair. He liked even the troops

of sorrowful-faced monkeys that profaned the quiet spots with capricious gambols and insane gestures of inhuman madness. He loved everything there, animated or inanimated; the very mud of the riverside; the very alligators, enormous and stolid, basking on it with impertinent unconcern. Their size was a source of pride to him. "Immense fellows! Make two of them Palembang reptiles! I tell you, old man!" he would shout, poking some crony of his playfully in the ribs: "I tell you, big as you are, they could swallow you in one gulp, hat, boots and all! Magnificent beggars! Wouldn't you like to see them? Wouldn't you! Ha! ha! ha!" His thunderous laughter filled the verandah, rolled over the hotel garden, overflowed into the street, paralyzing for a short moment the noiseless traffic of bare brown feet; and its loud reverberations would even startle the landlord's tame bird — a shameless mynah — into a momentary propriety of behaviour under the nearest chair. In the big billiard-room perspiring men in thin cotton singlets would stop the game, listen, cue in hand, for a while through the open windows, then nod their moist faces at each other sagaciously and whisper: "The old fellow is talking about his river."

His river! The whispers of curious men, the mystery of the thing, were to Lingard a source of never-ending delight. The common talk of ignorance exaggerated the profits of his queer monopoly, and, although strictly truthful in general, he liked, on that matter, to mislead speculation still further by boasts full of cold raillery. His river! By it he was not only rich — he was interesting. This secret of his which made him different to the other traders of those seas gave intimate satisfaction to that desire for singularity which he shared with the rest of mankind, without being aware of its presence within his breast. It was the greater part of his happiness, but he only knew it after its loss, so unforeseen, so sudden and so cruel.

After his conversation with Almayer he went on board the schooner, sent Joanna on shore, and shut himself up in his cabin, feeling very unwell. He made the most of his indisposition to Almayer, who came to visit him twice a day. It was an excuse for doing nothing just yet. He wanted to think. He was very angry. Angry with himself, with Willems. Angry at what Willems had done — and also angry at what he had left undone. The scoundrel was not complete. The conception was perfect, but the execution, unaccountably, fell short. Why? He ought to have cut Almayer's throat and burnt the place to ashes — then cleared out. Got out of his way; of him, Lingard! Yet he didn't. Was it impudence, contempt — or what? He felt

hurt at the implied disrespect of his power, and the incomplete rascality of the proceeding disturbed him exceedingly. There was something short, something wanting, something that would have given him a free hand in the work of retribution. The obvious, the right thing to do, was to shoot Willems. Yet how could he? Had the fellow resisted, showed fight, or ran away; had he shown any consciousness of harm done, it would have been more possible, more natural. But no! The fellow actually had sent him a message. Wanted to see him. What for? The thing could not be explained. An unexampled, cold-blooded treachery, awful, incomprehensible. Why did he do it? Why? Why? The old seaman in the stuffy solitude of his little cabin on board the schooner groaned out many times that question, striking with an open palm his perplexed forehead.

During his four days of seclusion he had received two messages from the outer world; from that world of Sambir which had, so suddenly and so finally, slipped from his grasp. One, a few words from Willems written on a torn-out page of a small notebook; the other, a communication from Abdulla caligraphed carefully on a large sheet of flimsy paper and delivered to him in a green silk wrapper. The first he could not understand. It said: "Come and see me. I am not afraid. Are you? W." He tore it up angrily, but before the small bits of dirty paper had the time to flutter down and settle on the floor, the anger was gone and was replaced by a sentiment that induced him to go on his knees, pick up the fragments of the torn message, piece it together on the top of his chronometer box, and contemplate it long and thoughtfully, as if he had hoped to read the answer of the horrible riddle in the very form of the letters that went to make up that fresh insult. Abdulla's letter he read carefully and rammed it into his pocket, also with anger, but with anger that ended in a half-resigned, half-amused smile. He would never give in as long as there was a chance. "It's generally the safest way to stick to the ship as long as she will swim," was one of his favourite sayings: "The safest and the right way. To abandon a craft because it leaks is easy — but poor work. Poor work!" Yet he was intelligent enough to know when he was beaten, and to accept the situation like a man, without repining. When Almayer came on board that afternoon he handed him the letter without comment.

Almayer read it, returned it in silence, and leaning over the taffrail (the two men were on deck) looked down for some time at the play of the eddies round the schooner's rudder. At last he said without looking up —

“That’s a decent enough letter. Abdulla gives him up to you. I told you they were getting sick of him. What are you going to do?”

Lingard cleared his throat, shuffled his feet, opened his mouth with great determination, but said nothing for a while. At last he murmured —

“I’ll be hanged if I know — just yet.”

“I wish you would do something soon . . .”

“What’s the hurry?” interrupted Lingard. “He can’t get away. As it stands he is at my mercy, as far as I can see.”

“Yes,” said Almayer, reflectively — “and very little mercy he deserves too. Abdulla’s meaning — as I can make it out amongst all those compliments — is: ‘Get rid for me of that white man — and we shall live in peace and share the trade.’”

“You believe that?” asked Lingard, contemptuously.

“Not altogether,” answered Almayer. “No doubt we will share the trade for a time — till he can grab the lot. Well, what are you going to do?”

He looked up as he spoke and was surprised to see Lingard’s discomposed face.

“You ain’t well. Pain anywhere?” he asked, with real solicitude.

“I have been queer — you know — these last few days, but no pain.” He struck his broad chest several times, cleared his throat with a powerful “Hem!” and repeated: “No. No pain. Good for a few years yet. But I am bothered with all this, I can tell you!”

“You must take care of yourself,” said Almayer. Then after a pause he added: “You will see Abdulla. Won’t you?”

“I don’t know. Not yet. There’s plenty of time,” said Lingard, impatiently.

“I wish you would do something,” urged Almayer, moodily. “You know, that woman is a perfect nuisance to me. She and her brat! Yelps all day. And the children don’t get on together. Yesterday the little devil wanted to fight with my Nina. Scratched her face, too. A perfect savage! Like his honourable papa. Yes, really. She worries about her husband, and whimpers from morning to night. When she isn’t weeping she is furious with me. Yesterday she tormented me to tell her when he would be back and cried because he was engaged in such dangerous work. I said something about it being all right — no necessity to make a fool of herself, when she turned upon me like a wild cat. Called me a brute, selfish, heartless; raved about her beloved Peter risking his life for my benefit, while I did not care. Said I



took advantage of his generous good-nature to get him to do dangerous work — my work. That he was worth twenty of the likes of me. That she would tell you — open your eyes as to the kind of man I was, and so on. That's what I've got to put up with for your sake. You really might consider me a little. I haven't robbed anybody," went on Almayer, with an attempt at bitter irony — "or sold my best friend, but still you ought to have some pity on me. It's like living in a hot fever. She is out of her wits. You make my house a refuge for scoundrels and lunatics. It isn't fair. 'Pon my word it isn't! When she is in her tantrums she is ridiculously ugly and screeches so — it sets my teeth on edge. Thank God! my wife got a fit of the sulks and cleared out of the house. Lives in a riverside hut since that affair — you know. But this Willems' wife by herself is almost more than I can bear. And I ask myself why should I? You are exacting and no mistake. This morning I thought she was going to claw me. Only think! She wanted to go prancing about the settlement. She might have heard something there, so I told her she mustn't. It wasn't safe outside our fences, I said. Thereupon she rushes at me with her ten nails up to my eyes. 'You miserable man,' she yells, 'even this place is not safe, and you've sent him up this awful river where he may lose his head. If he dies before forgiving me, Heaven will punish you for your crime . . .' My crime! I ask myself sometimes whether I am dreaming! It will make me ill, all this. I've lost my appetite already."

He flung his hat on deck and laid hold of his hair despairingly. Lingard looked at him with concern.

"What did she mean by it?" he muttered, thoughtfully.

"Mean! She is crazy, I tell you — and I will be, very soon, if this lasts!"

"Just a little patience, Kaspar," pleaded Lingard. "A day or so more."

Relieved or tired by his violent outburst, Almayer calmed down, picked up his hat and, leaning against the bulwark, commenced to fan himself with it.

"Days do pass," he said, resignedly — "but that kind of thing makes a man old before his time. What is there to think about? — I can't imagine! Abdulla says plainly that if you undertake to pilot his ship out and instruct the half-caste, he will drop Willems like a hot potato and be your friend ever after. I believe him perfectly, as to Willems. It's so natural. As to being your friend it's a lie of course, but we need not bother about that just yet. You just say yes to Abdulla, and then whatever happens to Willems will be nobody's business."

He interrupted himself and remained silent for a while, glaring about with set teeth and dilated nostrils.

"You leave it to me. I'll see to it that something happens to him," he said at last, with calm ferocity. Lingard smiled faintly.

"The fellow isn't worth a shot. Not the trouble of it," he whispered, as if to himself. Almayer fired up suddenly.

"That's what you think," he cried. "You haven't been sewn up in your hammock to be made a laughing-stock of before a parcel of savages. Why! I daren't look anybody here in the face while that scoundrel is alive. I will . . . I will settle him."

"I don't think you will," growled Lingard.

"Do you think I am afraid of him?"

"Bless you! no!" said Lingard with alacrity. "Afraid! Not you. I know you. I don't doubt your courage. It's your head, my boy, your head that I . . ."

"That's it," said the aggrieved Almayer. "Go on. Why don't you call me a fool at once?"

"Because I don't want to," burst out Lingard, with nervous irritability. "If I wanted to call you a fool, I would do so without asking your leave." He began to walk athwart the narrow quarter-deck, kicking ropes' ends out of his way and growling to himself: "Delicate gentleman . . . what next? . . . I've done man's work before you could toddle. Understand . . . say what I like."

"Well! well!" said Almayer, with affected resignation. "There's no talking to you these last few days." He put on his hat, strolled to the gangway and stopped, one foot on the little inside ladder, as if hesitating, came back and planted himself in Lingard's way, compelling him to stand still and listen.

"Of course you will do what you like. You never take advice — I know that; but let me tell you that it wouldn't be honest to let that fellow get away from here. If you do nothing, that scoundrel will leave in Abdulla's ship for sure. Abdulla will make use of him to hurt you and others elsewhere. Willems knows too much about your affairs. He will cause you lots of trouble. You mark my words. Lots of trouble. To you — and to others perhaps. Think of that, Captain Lingard. That's all I've got to say. Now I must go back on shore. There's lots of work. We will begin loading this schooner to-morrow morning, first thing. All the bundles are ready. If you

should want me for anything, hoist some kind of flag on the mainmast. At night two shots will fetch me." Then he added, in a friendly tone, "Won't you come and dine in the house to-night? It can't be good for you to stew on board like that, day after day."

Lingard did not answer. The image evoked by Almayer; the picture of Willems ranging over the islands and disturbing the harmony of the universe by robbery, treachery, and violence, held him silent, entranced — painfully spellbound. Almayer, after waiting for a little while, moved reluctantly towards the gangway, lingered there, then sighed and got over the side, going down step by step. His head disappeared slowly below the rail. Lingard, who had been staring at him absently, started suddenly, ran to the side, and looking over, called out —

"Hey! Kaspar! Hold on a bit!"

Almayer signed to his boatmen to cease paddling, and turned his head towards the schooner. The boat drifted back slowly abreast of Lingard, nearly alongside.

"Look here," said Lingard, looking down — "I want a good canoe with four men to-day."

"Do you want it now?" asked Almayer.

"No! Catch this rope. Oh, you clumsy devil! . . . No, Kaspar," went on Lingard, after the bow-man had got hold of the end of the brace he had thrown down into the canoe — "No, Kaspar. The sun is too much for me. And it would be better to keep my affairs quiet, too. Send the canoe — four good paddlers, mind, and your canvas chair for me to sit in. Send it about sunset. D'ye hear?"

"All right, father," said Almayer, cheerfully — "I will send Ali for a steersman, and the best men I've got. Anything else?"

"No, my lad. Only don't let them be late."

"I suppose it's no use asking you where you are going," said Almayer, tentatively. "Because if it is to see Abdulla, I . . ."

"I am not going to see Abdulla. Not to-day. Now be off with you."

He watched the canoe dart away shorewards, waved his hand in response to Almayer's nod, and walked to the taffrail smoothing out Abdulla's letter, which he had pulled out of his pocket. He read it over carefully, crumpled it up slowly, smiling the while and closing his fingers firmly over the crackling paper as though he had hold there of Abdulla's throat. Halfway to his pocket he changed his mind, and flinging the ball overboard looked at it

thoughtfully as it spun round in the eddies for a moment, before the current bore it away down-stream, towards the sea.

## PART IV

## CHAPTER ONE

The night was very dark. For the first time in many months the East Coast slept unseen by the stars under a veil of motionless cloud that, driven before the first breath of the rainy monsoon, had drifted slowly from the eastward all the afternoon; pursuing the declining sun with its masses of black and grey that seemed to chase the light with wicked intent, and with an ominous and gloomy steadiness, as though conscious of the message of violence and turmoil they carried. At the sun's disappearance below the western horizon, the immense cloud, in quickened motion, grappled with the glow of retreating light, and rolling down to the clear and jagged outline of the distant mountains, hung arrested above the steaming forests; hanging low, silent and menacing over the unstirring tree-tops; withholding the blessing of rain, nursing the wrath of its thunder; undecided — as if brooding over its own power for good or for evil.

Babalatchi, coming out of the red and smoky light of his little bamboo house, glanced upwards, drew in a long breath of the warm and stagnant air, and stood for a moment with his good eye closed tightly, as if intimidated by the unwonted and deep silence of Lakamba's courtyard. When he opened his eye he had recovered his sight so far, that he could distinguish the various degrees of formless blackness which marked the places of trees, of abandoned houses, of riverside bushes, on the dark background of the night.

The careworn sage walked cautiously down the deserted courtyard to the waterside, and stood on the bank listening to the voice of the invisible river that flowed at his feet; listening to the soft whispers, to the deep murmurs, to the sudden gurgles and the short hisses of the swift current racing along the bank through the hot darkness.

He stood with his face turned to the river, and it seemed to him that he could breathe easier with the knowledge of the clear vast space before him; then, after a while he leaned heavily forward on his staff, his chin fell on his breast, and a deep sigh was his answer to the selfish discourse of the river that hurried on unceasing and fast, regardless of joy or sorrow, of suffering and of strife, of failures and triumphs that lived on its banks. The brown water was there, ready to carry friends or enemies, to nurse love or hate on its submissive and heartless bosom, to help or to hinder, to save life or give death; the great and rapid river: a deliverance, a prison, a refuge or a grave.

Perchance such thoughts as these caused Babalatchi to send another mournful sigh into the trailing mists of the unconcerned Pantai. The barbarous politician had forgotten the recent success of his plottings in the melancholy contemplation of a sorrow that made the night blacker, the clammy heat more oppressive, the still air more heavy, the dumb solitude more significant of torment than of peace. He had spent the night before by the side of the dying Omar, and now, after twenty-four hours, his memory persisted in returning to that low and sombre reed hut from which the fierce spirit of the incomparably accomplished pirate took its flight, to learn too late, in a worse world, the error of its earthly ways. The mind of the savage statesman, chastened by bereavement, felt for a moment the weight of his loneliness with keen perception worthy even of a sensibility exasperated by all the refinements of tender sentiment that a glorious civilization brings in its train, among other blessings and virtues, into this excellent world. For the space of about thirty seconds, a half-naked, betel-chewing pessimist stood upon the bank of the tropical river, on the edge of the still and immense forests; a man angry, powerless, empty-handed, with a cry of bitter discontent ready on his lips; a cry that, had it come out, would have rung through the virgin solitudes of the woods, as true, as great, as profound, as any philosophical shriek that ever came from the depths of an easy-chair to disturb the impure wilderness of chimneys and roofs.

For half a minute and no more did Babalatchi face the gods in the sublime privilege of his revolt, and then the one-eyed puller of wires became himself again, full of care and wisdom and far-reaching plans, and a victim to the tormenting superstitions of his race. The night, no matter how quiet, is never perfectly silent to attentive ears, and now Babalatchi fancied he could detect in it other noises than those caused by the ripples and eddies of the river. He turned his head sharply to the right and to the left in succession, and then spun round quickly in a startled and watchful manner, as if he had expected to see the blind ghost of his departed leader wandering in the obscurity of the empty courtyard behind his back. Nothing there. Yet he had heard a noise; a strange noise! No doubt a ghostly voice of a complaining and angry spirit. He listened. Not a sound. Reassured, Babalatchi made a few paces towards his house, when a very human noise, that of hoarse coughing, reached him from the river. He stopped, listened attentively, but now without any sign of emotion, and moving briskly back to the waterside stood expectant with parted lips, trying to pierce with his

eye the wavering curtain of mist that hung low over the water. He could see nothing, yet some people in a canoe must have been very near, for he heard words spoken in an ordinary tone.

“Do you think this is the place, Ali? I can see nothing.”

“It must be near here, Tuan,” answered another voice. “Shall we try the bank?”

“No! . . . Let drift a little. If you go poking into the bank in the dark you might stove the canoe on some log. We must be careful. . . . Let drift! Let drift! . . . This does seem to be a clearing of some sort. We may see a light by and by from some house or other. In Lakamba’s campong there are many houses? Hey?”

“A great number, Tuan . . . I do not see any light.”

“Nor I,” grumbled the first voice again, this time nearly abreast of the silent Babalatchi who looked uneasily towards his own house, the doorway of which glowed with the dim light of a torch burning within. The house stood end on to the river, and its doorway faced down-stream, so Babalatchi reasoned rapidly that the strangers on the river could not see the light from the position their boat was in at the moment. He could not make up his mind to call out to them, and while he hesitated he heard the voices again, but now some way below the landing-place where he stood.

“Nothing. This cannot be it. Let them give way, Ali! Dayong there!”

That order was followed by the splash of paddles, then a sudden cry —

“I see a light. I see it! Now I know where to land, Tuan.”

There was more splashing as the canoe was paddled sharply round and came back up-stream close to the bank.

“Call out,” said very near a deep voice, which Babalatchi felt sure must belong to a white man. “Call out — and somebody may come with a torch. I can’t see anything.”

The loud hail that succeeded these words was emitted nearly under the silent listener’s nose. Babalatchi, to preserve appearances, ran with long but noiseless strides halfway up the courtyard, and only then shouted in answer and kept on shouting as he walked slowly back again towards the river bank. He saw there an indistinct shape of a boat, not quite alongside the landing-place.

“Who speaks on the river?” asked Babalatchi, throwing a tone of surprise into his question.



“A white man,” answered Lingard from the canoe. “Is there not one torch in rich Lakamba’s campong to light a guest on his landing?”

“There are no torches and no men. I am alone here,” said Babalatchi, with some hesitation.

“Alone!” exclaimed Lingard. “Who are you?”

“Only a servant of Lakamba. But land, Tuan Putih, and see my face. Here is my hand. No! Here! . . . By your mercy. . . . Ada! . . . Now you are safe.”

“And you are alone here?” said Lingard, moving with precaution a few steps into the courtyard. “How dark it is,” he muttered to himself — “one would think the world had been painted black.”

“Yes. Alone. What more did you say, Tuan? I did not understand your talk.”

“It is nothing. I expected to find here . . . But where are they all?”

“What matters where they are?” said Babalatchi, gloomily. “Have you come to see my people? The last departed on a long journey — and I am alone. Tomorrow I go too.”

“I came to see a white man,” said Lingard, walking on slowly. “He is not gone, is he?”

“No!” answered Babalatchi, at his elbow. “A man with a red skin and hard eyes,” he went on, musingly, “whose hand is strong, and whose heart is foolish and weak. A white man indeed . . . But still a man.”

They were now at the foot of the short ladder which led to the split-bamboo platform surrounding Babalatchi’s habitation. The faint light from the doorway fell down upon the two men’s faces as they stood looking at each other curiously.

“Is he there?” asked Lingard, in a low voice, with a wave of his hand upwards.

Babalatchi, staring hard at his long-expected visitor, did not answer at once. “No, not there,” he said at last, placing his foot on the lowest rung and looking back. “Not there, Tuan — yet not very far. Will you sit down in my dwelling? There may be rice and fish and clear water — not from the river, but from a spring . . .”

“I am not hungry,” interrupted Lingard, curtly, “and I did not come here to sit in your dwelling. Lead me to the white man who expects me. I have no time to lose.”

“The night is long, Tuan,” went on Babalatchi, softly, “and there are other nights and other days. Long. Very long . . . How much time it takes

for a man to die! O Rajah Laut!”

Lingard started.

“You know me!” he exclaimed.

“Ay — wa! I have seen your face and felt your hand before — many years ago,” said Babalatchi, holding on halfway up the ladder, and bending down from above to peer into Lingard’s upturned face. “You do not remember — but I have not forgotten. There are many men like me: there is only one Rajah Laut.”

He climbed with sudden agility the last few steps, and stood on the platform waving his hand invitingly to Lingard, who followed after a short moment of indecision.

The elastic bamboo floor of the hut bent under the heavy weight of the old seaman, who, standing within the threshold, tried to look into the smoky gloom of the low dwelling. Under the torch, thrust into the cleft of a stick, fastened at a right angle to the middle stay of the ridge pole, lay a red patch of light, showing a few shabby mats and a corner of a big wooden chest the rest of which was lost in shadow. In the obscurity of the more remote parts of the house a lance-head, a brass tray hung on the wall, the long barrel of a gun leaning against the chest, caught the stray rays of the smoky illumination in trembling gleams that wavered, disappeared, reappeared, went out, came back — as if engaged in a doubtful struggle with the darkness that, lying in wait in distant corners, seemed to dart out viciously towards its feeble enemy. The vast space under the high pitch of the roof was filled with a thick cloud of smoke, whose under-side — level like a ceiling — reflected the light of the swaying dull flame, while at the top it oozed out through the imperfect thatch of dried palm leaves. An indescribable and complicated smell, made up of the exhalation of damp earth below, of the taint of dried fish and of the effluvia of rotting vegetable matter, pervaded the place and caused Lingard to sniff strongly as he strode over, sat on the chest, and, leaning his elbows on his knees, took his head between his hands and stared at the doorway thoughtfully.

Babalatchi moved about in the shadows, whispering to an indistinct form or two that flitted about at the far end of the hut. Without stirring Lingard glanced sideways, and caught sight of muffled-up human shapes that hovered for a moment near the edge of light and retreated suddenly back into the darkness. Babalatchi approached, and sat at Lingard’s feet on a rolled-up bundle of mats.

“Will you eat rice and drink sagueir?” he said. “I have waked up my household.”

“My friend,” said Lingard, without looking at him, “when I come to see Lakamba, or any of Lakamba’s servants, I am never hungry and never thirsty. Tau! Savee! Never! Do you think I am devoid of reason? That there is nothing there?”

He sat up, and, fixing abruptly his eyes on Babalatchi, tapped his own forehead significantly.

“Tse! Tse! Tse! How can you talk like that, Tuan!” exclaimed Babalatchi, in a horrified tone.

“I talk as I think. I have lived many years,” said Lingard, stretching his arm negligently to take up the gun, which he began to examine knowingly, cocking it, and easing down the hammer several times. “This is good. Mataram make. Old, too,” he went on.

“Hai!” broke in Babalatchi, eagerly. “I got it when I was young. He was an Aru trader, a man with a big stomach and a loud voice, and brave — very brave. When we came up with his prau in the grey morning, he stood aft shouting to his men and fired this gun at us once. Only once!” . . . He paused, laughed softly, and went on in a low, dreamy voice. “In the grey morning we came up: forty silent men in a swift Sulu prau; and when the sun was so high” — here he held up his hands about three feet apart — ”when the sun was only so high, Tuan, our work was done — and there was a feast ready for the fishes of the sea.”

“Aye! aye!” muttered Lingard, nodding his head slowly. “I see. You should not let it get rusty like this,” he added.

He let the gun fall between his knees, and moving back on his seat, leaned his head against the wall of the hut, crossing his arms on his breast.

“A good gun,” went on Babalatchi. “Carry far and true. Better than this — there.”

With the tips of his fingers he touched gently the butt of a revolver peeping out of the right pocket of Lingard’s white jacket.

“Take your hand off that,” said Lingard sharply, but in a good-humoured tone and without making the slightest movement.

Babalatchi smiled and hitched his seat a little further off.

For some time they sat in silence. Lingard, with his head tilted back, looked downwards with lowered eyelids at Babalatchi, who was tracing invisible lines with his finger on the mat between his feet. Outside, they

could hear Ali and the other boatmen chattering and laughing round the fire they had lighted in the big and deserted courtyard.

“Well, what about that white man?” said Lingard, quietly.

It seemed as if Babalatchi had not heard the question. He went on tracing elaborate patterns on the floor for a good while. Lingard waited motionless. At last the Malay lifted his head.

“Hai! The white man. I know!” he murmured absently. “This white man or another. . . . Tuan,” he said aloud with unexpected animation, “you are a man of the sea?”

“You know me. Why ask?” said Lingard, in a low tone.

“Yes. A man of the sea — even as we are. A true Orang Laut,” went on Babalatchi, thoughtfully, “not like the rest of the white men.”

“I am like other whites, and do not wish to speak many words when the truth is short. I came here to see the white man that helped Lakamba against Patalolo, who is my friend. Show me where that white man lives; I want him to hear my talk.”

“Talk only? Tuan! Why hurry? The night is long and death is swift — as you ought to know; you who have dealt it to so many of my people. Many years ago I have faced you, arms in hand. Do you not remember? It was in Carimata — far from here.”

“I cannot remember every vagabond that came in my way,” protested Lingard, seriously.

“Hai! Hai!” continued Babalatchi, unmoved and dreamy. “Many years ago. Then all this” — and looking up suddenly at Lingard’s beard, he flourished his fingers below his own beardless chin — “then all this was like gold in sunlight, now it is like the foam of an angry sea.”

“Maybe, maybe,” said Lingard, patiently, paying the involuntary tribute of a faint sigh to the memories of the past evoked by Babalatchi’s words.

He had been living with Malays so long and so close that the extreme deliberation and deviousness of their mental proceedings had ceased to irritate him much. To-night, perhaps, he was less prone to impatience than ever. He was disposed, if not to listen to Babalatchi, then to let him talk. It was evident to him that the man had something to say, and he hoped that from the talk a ray of light would shoot through the thick blackness of inexplicable treachery, to show him clearly — if only for a second — the man upon whom he would have to execute the verdict of justice. Justice only! Nothing was further from his thoughts than such an useless thing as

revenge. Justice only. It was his duty that justice should be done — and by his own hand. He did not like to think how. To him, as to Babalatchi, it seemed that the night would be long enough for the work he had to do. But he did not define to himself the nature of the work, and he sat very still, and willingly dilatory, under the fearsome oppression of his call. What was the good to think about it? It was inevitable, and its time was near. Yet he could not command his memories that came crowding round him in that evil-smelling hut, while Babalatchi talked on in a flowing monotone, nothing of him moving but the lips, in the artificially inanimated face. Lingard, like an anchored ship that had broken her sheer, darted about here and there on the rapid tide of his recollections. The subdued sound of soft words rang around him, but his thoughts were lost, now in the contemplation of the past sweetness and strife of Carimata days, now in the uneasy wonder at the failure of his judgment; at the fatal blindness of accident that had caused him, many years ago, to rescue a half-starved runaway from a Dutch ship in Samarang roads. How he had liked the man: his assurance, his push, his desire to get on, his conceited good-humour and his selfish eloquence. He had liked his very faults — those faults that had so many, to him, sympathetic sides.

And he had always dealt fairly by him from the very beginning; and he would deal fairly by him now — to the very end. This last thought darkened Lingard's features with a responsive and menacing frown. The doer of justice sat with compressed lips and a heavy heart, while in the calm darkness outside the silent world seemed to be waiting breathlessly for that justice he held in his hand — in his strong hand: — ready to strike — reluctant to move.

## CHAPTER TWO

Babalatchi ceased speaking. Lingard shifted his feet a little, uncrossed his arms, and shook his head slowly. The narrative of the events in Sambir, related from the point of view of the astute statesman, the sense of which had been caught here and there by his inattentive ears, had been yet like a thread to guide him out of the sombre labyrinth of his thoughts; and now he had come to the end of it, out of the tangled past into the pressing necessities of the present. With the palms of his hands on his knees, his elbows squared out, he looked down on Babalatchi who sat in a stiff attitude, inexpressive and mute as a talking doll the mechanism of which had at length run down.

“You people did all this,” said Lingard at last, “and you will be sorry for it before the dry wind begins to blow again. Abdulla’s voice will bring the Dutch rule here.”

Babalatchi waved his hand towards the dark doorway.

“There are forests there. Lakamba rules the land now. Tell me, Tuan, do you think the big trees know the name of the ruler? No. They are born, they grow, they live and they die — yet know not, feel not. It is their land.”

“Even a big tree may be killed by a small axe,” said Lingard, drily. “And, remember, my one-eyed friend, that axes are made by white hands. You will soon find that out, since you have hoisted the flag of the Dutch.”

“Ay — wa!” said Babalatchi, slowly. “It is written that the earth belongs to those who have fair skins and hard but foolish hearts. The farther away is the master, the easier it is for the slave, Tuan! You were too near. Your voice rang in our ears always. Now it is not going to be so. The great Rajah in Batavia is strong, but he may be deceived. He must speak very loud to be heard here. But if we have need to shout, then he must hear the many voices that call for protection. He is but a white man.”

“If I ever spoke to Patalolo, like an elder brother, it was for your good — for the good of all,” said Lingard with great earnestness.

“This is a white man’s talk,” exclaimed Babalatchi, with bitter exultation. “I know you. That is how you all talk while you load your guns and sharpen your swords; and when you are ready, then to those who are weak you say: ‘Obey me and be happy, or die! You are strange, you white men. You think it is only your wisdom and your virtue and your happiness that are true. You are stronger than the wild beasts, but not so wise. A black tiger knows when

he is not hungry — you do not. He knows the difference between himself and those that can speak; you do not understand the difference between yourselves and us — who are men. You are wise and great — and you shall always be fools.”

He threw up both his hands, stirring the sleeping cloud of smoke that hung above his head, and brought the open palms on the flimsy floor on each side of his outstretched legs. The whole hut shook. Lingard looked at the excited statesman curiously.

“Apa! Apa! What’s the matter?” he murmured, soothingly. “Whom did I kill here? Where are my guns? What have I done? What have I eaten up?”

Babalatchi calmed down, and spoke with studied courtesy.

“You, Tuan, are of the sea, and more like what we are. Therefore I speak to you all the words that are in my heart. . . . Only once has the sea been stronger than the Rajah of the sea.”

“You know it; do you?” said Lingard, with pained sharpness.

“Hai! We have heard about your ship — and some rejoiced. Not I. Amongst the whites, who are devils, you are a man.”

“Trima kassi! I give you thanks,” said Lingard, gravely.

Babalatchi looked down with a bashful smile, but his face became saddened directly, and when he spoke again it was in a mournful tone.

“Had you come a day sooner, Tuan, you would have seen an enemy die. You would have seen him die poor, blind, unhappy — with no son to dig his grave and speak of his wisdom and courage. Yes; you would have seen the man that fought you in Carimata many years ago, die alone — but for one friend. A great sight to you.”

“Not to me,” answered Lingard. “I did not even remember him till you spoke his name just now. You do not understand us. We fight, we vanquish — and we forget.”

“True, true,” said Babalatchi, with polite irony; “you whites are so great that you disdain to remember your enemies. No! No!” he went on, in the same tone, “you have so much mercy for us, that there is no room for any remembrance. Oh, you are great and good! But it is in my mind that amongst yourselves you know how to remember. Is it not so, Tuan?”

Lingard said nothing. His shoulders moved imperceptibly. He laid his gun across his knees and stared at the flint lock absently.

“Yes,” went on Babalatchi, falling again into a mournful mood, “yes, he died in darkness. I sat by his side and held his hand, but he could not see the

face of him who watched the faint breath on his lips. She, whom he had cursed because of the white man, was there too, and wept with covered face. The white man walked about the courtyard making many noises. Now and then he would come to the doorway and glare at us who mourned. He stared with wicked eyes, and then I was glad that he who was dying was blind. This is true talk. I was glad; for a white man's eyes are not good to see when the devil that lives within is looking out through them."

"Devil! Hey?" said Lingard, half aloud to himself, as if struck with the obviousness of some novel idea. Babalatchi went on:

"At the first hour of the morning he sat up — he so weak — and said plainly some words that were not meant for human ears. I held his hand tightly, but it was time for the leader of brave men to go amongst the Faithful who are happy. They of my household brought a white sheet, and I began to dig a grave in the hut in which he died. She mourned aloud. The white man came to the doorway and shouted. He was angry. Angry with her because she beat her breast, and tore her hair, and mourned with shrill cries as a woman should. Do you understand what I say, Tuan? That white man came inside the hut with great fury, and took her by the shoulder, and dragged her out. Yes, Tuan. I saw Omar dead, and I saw her at the feet of that white dog who has deceived me. I saw his face grey, like the cold mist of the morning; I saw his pale eyes looking down at Omar's daughter beating her head on the ground at his feet. At the feet of him who is Abdulla's slave. Yes, he lives by Abdulla's will. That is why I held my hand while I saw all this. I held my hand because we are now under the flag of the Orang Blanda, and Abdulla can speak into the ears of the great. We must not have any trouble with white men. Abdulla has spoken — and I must obey."

"That's it, is it?" growled Lingard in his moustache. Then in Malay, "It seems that you are angry, O Babalatchi!"

"No; I am not angry, Tuan," answered Babalatchi, descending from the insecure heights of his indignation into the insincere depths of safe humility. "I am not angry. What am I to be angry? I am only an Orang Laut, and I have fled before your people many times. Servant of this one — protected of another; I have given my counsel here and there for a handful of rice. What am I, to be angry with a white man? What is anger without the power to strike? But you whites have taken all: the land, the sea, and the



power to strike! And there is nothing left for us in the islands but your white men's justice; your great justice that knows not anger."

He got up and stood for a moment in the doorway, sniffing the hot air of the courtyard, then turned back and leaned against the stay of the ridge pole, facing Lingard who kept his seat on the chest. The torch, consumed nearly to the end, burned noisily. Small explosions took place in the heart of the flame, driving through its smoky blaze strings of hard, round puffs of white smoke, no bigger than peas, which rolled out of doors in the faint draught that came from invisible cracks of the bamboo walls. The pungent taint of unclean things below and about the hut grew heavier, weighing down Lingard's resolution and his thoughts in an irresistible numbness of the brain. He thought drowsily of himself and of that man who wanted to see him — who waited to see him. Who waited! Night and day. Waited. . . . A spiteful but vaporous idea floated through his brain that such waiting could not be very pleasant to the fellow. Well, let him wait. He would see him soon enough. And for how long? Five seconds — five minutes — say nothing — say something. What? No! Just give him time to take one good look, and then . . .

Suddenly Babalatchi began to speak in a soft voice. Lingard blinked, cleared his throat — sat up straight.

"You know all now, Tuan. Lakamba dwells in the stockaded house of Patalolo; Abdulla has begun to build godowns of plank and stone; and now that Omar is dead, I myself shall depart from this place and live with Lakamba and speak in his ear. I have served many. The best of them all sleeps in the ground in a white sheet, with nothing to mark his grave but the ashes of the hut in which he died. Yes, Tuan! the white man destroyed it himself. With a blazing brand in his hand he strode around, shouting to me to come out — shouting to me, who was throwing earth on the body of a great leader. Yes; swearing to me by the name of your God and ours that he would burn me and her in there if we did not make haste. . . . Hai! The white men are very masterful and wise. I dragged her out quickly!"

"Oh, damn it!" exclaimed Lingard — then went on in Malay, speaking earnestly. "Listen. That man is not like other white men. You know he is not. He is not a man at all. He is . . . I don't know."

Babalatchi lifted his hand deprecatingly. His eye twinkled, and his red-stained big lips, parted by an expressionless grin, uncovered a stumpy row of black teeth filed evenly to the gums.

“Hai! Hai! Not like you. Not like you,” he said, increasing the softness of his tones as he neared the object uppermost in his mind during that much-desired interview. “Not like you, Tuan, who are like ourselves, only wiser and stronger. Yet he, also, is full of great cunning, and speaks of you without any respect, after the manner of white men when they talk of one another.”

Lingard leaped in his seat as if he had been prodded.

“He speaks! What does he say?” he shouted.

“Nay, Tuan,” protested the composed Babalatchi; “what matters his talk if he is not a man? I am nothing before you — why should I repeat words of one white man about another? He did boast to Abdulla of having learned much from your wisdom in years past. Other words I have forgotten. Indeed, Tuan, I have . . .”

Lingard cut short Babalatchi’s protestations by a contemptuous wave of the hand and reseated himself with dignity.

“I shall go,” said Babalatchi, “and the white man will remain here, alone with the spirit of the dead and with her who has been the delight of his heart. He, being white, cannot hear the voice of those that died. . . . Tell me, Tuan,” he went on, looking at Lingard with curiosity — “tell me, Tuan, do you white people ever hear the voices of the invisible ones?”

“We do not,” answered Lingard, “because those that we cannot see do not speak.”

“Never speak! And never complain with sounds that are not words?” exclaimed Babalatchi, doubtingly. “It may be so — or your ears are dull. We Malays hear many sounds near the places where men are buried. Tonight I heard . . . Yes, even I have heard. . . . I do not want to hear any more,” he added, nervously. “Perhaps I was wrong when I . . . There are things I regret. The trouble was heavy in his heart when he died. Sometimes I think I was wrong . . . but I do not want to hear the complaint of invisible lips. Therefore I go, Tuan. Let the unquiet spirit speak to his enemy the white man who knows not fear, or love, or mercy — knows nothing but contempt and violence. I have been wrong! I have! Hai! Hai!”

He stood for awhile with his elbow in the palm of his left hand, the fingers of the other over his lips as if to stifle the expression of inconvenient remorse; then, after glancing at the torch, burnt out nearly to its end, he moved towards the wall by the chest, fumbled about there and suddenly

flung open a large shutter of attaps woven in a light framework of sticks. Lingard swung his legs quickly round the corner of his seat.

"Hallo!" he said, surprised.

The cloud of smoke stirred, and a slow wisp curled out through the new opening. The torch flickered, hissed, and went out, the glowing end falling on the mat, whence Babalatchi snatched it up and tossed it outside through the open square. It described a vanishing curve of red light, and lay below, shining feebly in the vast darkness. Babalatchi remained with his arm stretched out into the empty night.

"There," he said, "you can see the white man's courtyard, Tuan, and his house."

"I can see nothing," answered Lingard, putting his head through the shutter-hole. "It's too dark."

"Wait, Tuan," urged Babalatchi. "You have been looking long at the burning torch. You will soon see. Mind the gun, Tuan. It is loaded."

"There is no flint in it. You could not find a fire-stone for a hundred miles round this spot," said Lingard, testily. "Foolish thing to load that gun."

"I have a stone. I had it from a man wise and pious that lives in Menang Kabau. A very pious man — very good fire. He spoke words over that stone that make its sparks good. And the gun is good — carries straight and far. Would carry from here to the door of the white man's house, I believe, Tuan."

"Tida apa. Never mind your gun," muttered Lingard, peering into the formless darkness. "Is that the house — that black thing over there?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Babalatchi; "that is his house. He lives there by the will of Abdulla, and shall live there till . . . From where you stand, Tuan, you can look over the fence and across the courtyard straight at the door — at the door from which he comes out every morning, looking like a man that had seen Jehannum in his sleep."

Lingard drew his head in. Babalatchi touched his shoulder with a groping hand.

"Wait a little, Tuan. Sit still. The morning is not far off now — a morning without sun after a night without stars. But there will be light enough to see the man who said not many days ago that he alone has made you less than a child in Sambir."

He felt a slight tremor under his hand, but took it off directly and began feeling all over the lid of the chest, behind Lingard's back, for the gun.

"What are you at?" said Lingard, impatiently. "You do worry about that rotten gun. You had better get a light."

"A light! I tell you, Tuan, that the light of heaven is very near," said Babalatchi, who had now obtained possession of the object of his solicitude, and grasping it strongly by its long barrel, grounded the stock at his feet.

"Perhaps it is near," said Lingard, leaning both his elbows on the lower cross-piece of the primitive window and looking out. "It is very black outside yet," he remarked carelessly.

Babalatchi fidgeted about.

"It is not good for you to sit where you may be seen," he muttered.

"Why not?" asked Lingard.

"The white man sleeps, it is true," explained Babalatchi, softly; "yet he may come out early, and he has arms."

"Ah! he has arms?" said Lingard.

"Yes; a short gun that fires many times — like yours here. Abdulla had to give it to him."

Lingard heard Babalatchi's words, but made no movement. To the old adventurer the idea that fire arms could be dangerous in other hands than his own did not occur readily, and certainly not in connection with Willems. He was so busy with the thoughts about what he considered his own sacred duty, that he could not give any consideration to the probable actions of the man of whom he thought — as one may think of an executed criminal — with wondering indignation tempered by scornful pity. While he sat staring into the darkness, that every minute grew thinner before his pensive eyes, like a dispersing mist, Willems appeared to him as a figure belonging already wholly to the past — a figure that could come in no way into his life again. He had made up his mind, and the thing was as well as done. In his weary thoughts he had closed this fatal, inexplicable, and horrible episode in his life. The worst had happened. The coming days would see the retribution.

He had removed an enemy once or twice before, out of his path; he had paid off some very heavy scores a good many times. Captain Tom had been a good friend to many: but it was generally understood, from Honolulu round about to Diego Suarez, that Captain Tom's enmity was rather more than any man single-handed could easily manage. He would not, as he said

often, hurt a fly as long as the fly left him alone; yet a man does not live for years beyond the pale of civilized laws without evolving for himself some queer notions of justice. Nobody of those he knew had ever cared to point out to him the errors of his conceptions.

It was not worth anybody's while to run counter to Lingard's ideas of the fitness of things — that fact was acquired to the floating wisdom of the South Seas, of the Eastern Archipelago, and was nowhere better understood than in out-of-the-way nooks of the world; in those nooks which he filled, unresisted and masterful, with the echoes of his noisy presence. There is not much use in arguing with a man who boasts of never having regretted a single action of his life, whose answer to a mild criticism is a good-natured shout — "You know nothing about it. I would do it again. Yes, sir!" His associates and his acquaintances accepted him, his opinions, his actions like things preordained and unchangeable; looked upon his many-sided manifestations with passive wonder not unmixed with that admiration which is only the rightful due of a successful man. But nobody had ever seen him in the mood he was in now. Nobody had seen Lingard doubtful and giving way to doubt, unable to make up his mind and unwilling to act; Lingard timid and hesitating one minute, angry yet inactive the next; Lingard puzzled in a word, because confronted with a situation that discomposed him by its unprovoked malevolence, by its ghastly injustice, that to his rough but unsophisticated palate tasted distinctly of sulphurous fumes from the deepest hell.

The smooth darkness filling the shutter-hole grew paler and became blotchy with ill-defined shapes, as if a new universe was being evolved out of sombre chaos. Then outlines came out, defining forms without any details, indicating here a tree, there a bush; a black belt of forest far off; the straight lines of a house, the ridge of a high roof near by. Inside the hut, Babalatchi, who lately had been only a persuasive voice, became a human shape leaning its chin imprudently on the muzzle of a gun and rolling an uneasy eye over the reappearing world. The day came rapidly, dismal and oppressed by the fog of the river and by the heavy vapours of the sky — a day without colour and without sunshine: incomplete, disappointing, and sad.

Babalatchi twitched gently Lingard's sleeve, and when the old seaman had lifted up his head interrogatively, he stretched out an arm and a pointing

forefinger towards Willems' house, now plainly visible to the right and beyond the big tree of the courtyard.

"Look, Tuan!" he said. "He lives there. That is the door — his door. Through it he will appear soon, with his hair in disorder and his mouth full of curses. That is so. He is a white man, and never satisfied. It is in my mind he is angry even in his sleep. A dangerous man. As Tuan may observe," he went on, obsequiously, "his door faces this opening, where you condescend to sit, which is concealed from all eyes. Faces it — straight — and not far. Observe, Tuan, not at all far."

"Yes, yes; I can see. I shall see him when he wakes."

"No doubt, Tuan. When he wakes. . . . If you remain here he can not see you. I shall withdraw quickly and prepare my canoe myself. I am only a poor man, and must go to Sambir to greet Lakamba when he opens his eyes. I must bow before Abdulla who has strength — even more strength than you. Now if you remain here, you shall easily behold the man who boasted to Abdulla that he had been your friend, even while he prepared to fight those who called you protector. Yes, he plotted with Abdulla for that cursed flag. Lakamba was blind then, and I was deceived. But you, Tuan! Remember, he deceived you more. Of that he boasted before all men."

He leaned the gun quietly against the wall close to the window, and said softly: "Shall I go now, Tuan? Be careful of the gun. I have put the fire-stone in. The fire-stone of the wise man, which never fails."

Lingard's eyes were fastened on the distant doorway. Across his line of sight, in the grey emptiness of the courtyard, a big fruit-pigeon flapped languidly towards the forests with a loud booming cry, like the note of a deep gong: a brilliant bird looking in the gloom of threatening day as black as a crow. A serried flock of white rice birds rose above the trees with a faint scream, and hovered, swaying in a disordered mass that suddenly scattered in all directions, as if burst asunder by a silent explosion. Behind his back Lingard heard a shuffle of feet — women leaving the hut. In the other courtyard a voice was heard complaining of cold, and coming very feeble, but exceedingly distinct, out of the vast silence of the abandoned houses and clearings. Babalatchi coughed discreetly. From under the house the thumping of wooden pestles husking the rice started with unexpected abruptness. The weak but clear voice in the yard again urged, "Blow up the embers, O brother!" Another voice answered, drawling in modulated, thin sing-song, "Do it yourself, O shivering pig!" and the drawl of the last words

stopped short, as if the man had fallen into a deep hole. Babalatchi coughed again a little impatiently, and said in a confidential tone —

“Do you think it is time for me to go, Tuan? Will you take care of my gun, Tuan? I am a man that knows how to obey; even obey Abdulla, who has deceived me. Nevertheless this gun carries far and true — if you would want to know, Tuan. And I have put in a double measure of powder, and three slugs. Yes, Tuan. Now — perhaps — I go.”

When Babalatchi commenced speaking, Lingard turned slowly round and gazed upon him with the dull and unwilling look of a sick man waking to another day of suffering. As the astute statesman proceeded, Lingard’s eyebrows came close, his eyes became animated, and a big vein stood out on his forehead, accentuating a lowering frown. When speaking his last words Babalatchi faltered, then stopped, confused, before the steady gaze of the old seaman.

Lingard rose. His face cleared, and he looked down at the anxious Babalatchi with sudden benevolence.

“So! That’s what you were after,” he said, laying a heavy hand on Babalatchi’s yielding shoulder. “You thought I came here to murder him. Hey? Speak! You faithful dog of an Arab trader!”

“And what else, Tuan?” shrieked Babalatchi, exasperated into sincerity. “What else, Tuan! Remember what he has done; he poisoned our ears with his talk about you. You are a man. If you did not come to kill, Tuan, then either I am a fool or . . .”

He paused, struck his naked breast with his open palm, and finished in a discouraged whisper — “or, Tuan, you are.”

Lingard looked down at him with scornful serenity. After his long and painful gropings amongst the obscure abominations of Willems’ conduct, the logical if tortuous evolutions of Babalatchi’s diplomatic mind were to him welcome as daylight. There was something at last he could understand — the clear effect of a simple cause. He felt indulgent towards the disappointed sage.

“So you are angry with your friend, O one-eyed one!” he said slowly, nodding his fierce countenance close to Babalatchi’s discomfited face. “It seems to me that you must have had much to do with what happened in Sambir lately. Hey? You son of a burnt father.”

“May I perish under your hand, O Rajah of the sea, if my words are not true!” said Babalatchi, with reckless excitement. “You are here in the midst

of your enemies. He the greatest. Abdulla would do nothing without him, and I could do nothing without Abdulla. Strike me — so that you strike all!”

“Who are you,” exclaimed Lingard contemptuously — “who are you to dare call yourself my enemy! Dirt! Nothing! Go out first,” he went on severely. “Lakas! quick. March out!”

He pushed Babalatchi through the doorway and followed him down the short ladder into the courtyard. The boatmen squatting over the fire turned their slow eyes with apparent difficulty towards the two men; then, unconcerned, huddled close together again, stretching forlornly their hands over the embers. The women stopped in their work and with uplifted pestles flashed quick and curious glances from the gloom under the house.

“Is that the way?” asked Lingard with a nod towards the little wicket-gate of Willems’ enclosure.

“If you seek death, that is surely the way,” answered Babalatchi in a dispassionate voice, as if he had exhausted all the emotions. “He lives there: he who destroyed your friends; who hastened Omar’s death; who plotted with Abdulla first against you, then against me. I have been like a child. O shame! . . . But go, Tuan. Go there.”

“I go where I like,” said Lingard, emphatically, “and you may go to the devil; I do not want you any more. The islands of these seas shall sink before I, Rajah Laut, serve the will of any of your people. Tau? But I tell you this: I do not care what you do with him after to-day. And I say that because I am merciful.”

“Tida! I do nothing,” said Babalatchi, shaking his head with bitter apathy. “I am in Abdulla’s hand and care not, even as you do. No! no!” he added, turning away, “I have learned much wisdom this morning. There are no men anywhere. You whites are cruel to your friends and merciful to your enemies — which is the work of fools.”

He went away towards the riverside, and, without once looking back, disappeared in the low bank of mist that lay over the water and the shore. Lingard followed him with his eyes thoughtfully. After awhile he roused himself and called out to his boatmen —

“Hai — ya there! After you have eaten rice, wait for me with your paddles in your hands. You hear?”

“Ada, Tuan!” answered Ali through the smoke of the morning fire that was spreading itself, low and gentle, over the courtyard — “we hear!”



Lingard opened slowly the little wicket-gate, made a few steps into the empty enclosure, and stopped. He had felt about his head the short breath of a puff of wind that passed him, made every leaf of the big tree shiver — and died out in a hardly perceptible tremor of branches and twigs. Instinctively he glanced upwards with a seaman's impulse. Above him, under the grey motionless waste of a stormy sky, drifted low black vapours, in stretching bars, in shapeless patches, in sinuous wisps and tormented spirals. Over the courtyard and the house floated a round, sombre, and lingering cloud, dragging behind a tail of tangled and filmy streamers — like the dishevelled hair of a mourning woman.

## CHAPTER THREE

“Beware!”

The tremulous effort and the broken, inadequate tone of the faint cry, surprised Lingard more than the unexpected suddenness of the warning conveyed, he did not know by whom and to whom. Besides himself there was no one in the courtyard as far as he could see.

The cry was not renewed, and his watchful eyes, scanning warily the misty solitude of Willems’ enclosure, were met everywhere only by the stolid impassiveness of inanimate things: the big sombre-looking tree, the shut-up, sightless house, the glistening bamboo fences, the damp and drooping bushes further off — all these things, that condemned to look for ever at the incomprehensible afflictions or joys of mankind, assert in their aspect of cold unconcern the high dignity of lifeless matter that surrounds, incurious and unmoved, the restless mysteries of the ever-changing, of the never-ending life.

Lingard, stepping aside, put the trunk of the tree between himself and the house, then, moving cautiously round one of the projecting buttresses, had to tread short in order to avoid scattering a small heap of black embers upon which he came unexpectedly on the other side. A thin, wizened, little old woman, who, standing behind the tree, had been looking at the house, turned towards him with a start, gazed with faded, expressionless eyes at the intruder, then made a limping attempt to get away. She seemed, however, to realize directly the hopelessness or the difficulty of the undertaking, stopped, hesitated, tottered back slowly; then, after blinking dully, fell suddenly on her knees amongst the white ashes, and, bending over the heap of smouldering coals, distended her sunken cheeks in a steady effort to blow up the hidden sparks into a useful blaze. Lingard looked down on her, but she seemed to have made up her mind that there was not enough life left in her lean body for anything else than the discharge of the simple domestic duty, and, apparently, she begrudged him the least moment of attention.

After waiting for awhile, Lingard asked —

“Why did you call, O daughter?”

“I saw you enter,” she croaked feebly, still grovelling with her face near the ashes and without looking up, “and I called — the cry of warning. It was her order. Her order,” she repeated, with a moaning sigh.

“And did she hear?” pursued Lingard, with gentle composure.

Her projecting shoulder-blades moved uneasily under the thin stuff of the tight body jacket. She scrambled up with difficulty to her feet, and hobbled away, muttering peevishly to herself, towards a pile of dry brushwood heaped up against the fence.

Lingard, looking idly after her, heard the rattle of loose planks that led from the ground to the door of the house. He moved his head beyond the shelter of the tree and saw Aissa coming down the inclined way into the courtyard. After making a few hurried paces towards the tree, she stopped with one foot advanced in an appearance of sudden terror, and her eyes glanced wildly right and left. Her head was uncovered. A blue cloth wrapped her from her head to foot in close slanting folds, with one end thrown over her shoulder. A tress of her black hair strayed across her bosom. Her bare arms pressed down close to her body, with hands open and outstretched fingers; her slightly elevated shoulders and the backward inclination of her torso gave her the aspect of one defiant yet shrinking from a coming blow. She had closed the door of the house behind her; and as she stood solitary in the unnatural and threatening twilight of the murky day, with everything unchanged around her, she appeared to Lingard as if she had been made there, on the spot, out of the black vapours of the sky and of the sinister gleams of feeble sunshine that struggled, through the thickening clouds, into the colourless desolation of the world.

After a short but attentive glance towards the shut-up house, Lingard stepped out from behind the tree and advanced slowly towards her. The sudden fixity of her — till then — restless eyes and a slight twitch of her hands were the only signs she gave at first of having seen him. She made a long stride forward, and putting herself right in his path, stretched her arms across; her black eyes opened wide, her lips parted as if in an uncertain attempt to speak — but no sound came out to break the significant silence of their meeting. Lingard stopped and looked at her with stern curiosity. After a while he said composedly —

“Let me pass. I came here to talk to a man. Does he hide? Has he sent you?”

She made a step nearer, her arms fell by her side, then she put them straight out nearly touching Lingard’s breast.

“He knows not fear,” she said, speaking low, with a forward throw of her head, in a voice trembling but distinct. “It is my own fear that has sent me

here. He sleeps.”

“He has slept long enough,” said Lingard, in measured tones. “I am come — and now is the time of his waking. Go and tell him this — or else my own voice will call him up. A voice he knows well.”

He put her hands down firmly and again made as if to pass by her.

“Do not!” she exclaimed, and fell at his feet as if she had been cut down by a scythe. The unexpected suddenness of her movement startled Lingard, who stepped back.

“What’s this?” he exclaimed in a wondering whisper — then added in a tone of sharp command: “Stand up!”

She rose at once and stood looking at him, timorous and fearless; yet with a fire of recklessness burning in her eyes that made clear her resolve to pursue her purpose even to the death. Lingard went on in a severe voice —

“Go out of my path. You are Omar’s daughter, and you ought to know that when men meet in daylight women must be silent and abide their fate.”

“Women!” she retorted, with subdued vehemence. “Yes, I am a woman! Your eyes see that, O Rajah Laut, but can you see my life? I also have heard — O man of many fights — I also have heard the voice of fire-arms; I also have felt the rain of young twigs and of leaves cut up by bullets fall down about my head; I also know how to look in silence at angry faces and at strong hands raised high grasping sharp steel. I also saw men fall dead around me without a cry of fear and of mourning; and I have watched the sleep of weary fugitives, and looked at night shadows full of menace and death with eyes that knew nothing but watchfulness. And,” she went on, with a mournful drop in her voice, “I have faced the heartless sea, held on my lap the heads of those who died raving from thirst, and from their cold hands took the paddle and worked so that those with me did not know that one man more was dead. I did all this. What more have you done? That was my life. What has been yours?”

The matter and the manner of her speech held Lingard motionless, attentive and approving against his will. She ceased speaking, and from her staring black eyes with a narrow border of white above and below, a double ray of her very soul streamed out in a fierce desire to light up the most obscure designs of his heart. After a long silence, which served to emphasize the meaning of her words, she added in the whisper of bitter regret —

“And I have knelt at your feet! And I am afraid!”

“You,” said Lingard deliberately, and returning her look with an interested gaze, “you are a woman whose heart, I believe, is great enough to fill a man’s breast: but still you are a woman, and to you, I, Rajah Laut, have nothing to say.”

She listened bending her head in a movement of forced attention; and his voice sounded to her unexpected, far off, with the distant and unearthly ring of voices that we hear in dreams, saying faintly things startling, cruel or absurd, to which there is no possible reply. To her he had nothing to say! She wrung her hands, glanced over the courtyard with that eager and distracted look that sees nothing, then looked up at the hopeless sky of livid grey and drifting black; at the unquiet mourning of the hot and brilliant heaven that had seen the beginning of her love, that had heard his entreaties and her answers, that had seen his desire and her fear; that had seen her joy, her surrender — and his defeat. Lingard moved a little, and this slight stir near her precipitated her disordered and shapeless thoughts into hurried words.

“Wait!” she exclaimed in a stifled voice, and went on disconnectedly and rapidly — “Stay. I have heard. Men often spoke by the fires . . . men of my people. And they said of you — the first on the sea — they said that to men’s cries you were deaf in battle, but after . . . No! even while you fought, your ears were open to the voice of children and women. They said . . . that. Now I, a woman, I . . .”

She broke off suddenly and stood before him with dropped eyelids and parted lips, so still now that she seemed to have been changed into a breathless, an unhearing, an unseeing figure, without knowledge of fear or hope, of anger or despair. In the astounding repose that came on her face, nothing moved but the delicate nostrils that expanded and collapsed quickly, flutteringly, in interrupted beats, like the wings of a snared bird.

“I am white,” said Lingard, proudly, looking at her with a steady gaze where simple curiosity was giving way to a pitying annoyance, “and men you have heard, spoke only what is true over the evening fires. My ears are open to your prayer. But listen to me before you speak. For yourself you need not be afraid. You can come even now with me and you shall find refuge in the household of Syed Abdulla — who is of your own faith. And this also you must know: nothing that you may say will change my purpose towards the man who is sleeping — or hiding — in that house.”

Again she gave him the look that was like a stab, not of anger but of desire; of the intense, over-powering desire to see in, to see through, to understand everything: every thought, emotion, purpose; every impulse, every hesitation inside that man; inside that white-clad foreign being who looked at her, who spoke to her, who breathed before her like any other man, but bigger, red-faced, white-haired and mysterious. It was the future clothed in flesh; the to-morrow; the day after; all the days, all the years of her life standing there before her alive and secret, with all their good or evil shut up within the breast of that man; of that man who could be persuaded, cajoled, entreated, perhaps touched, worried; frightened — who knows? — if only first he could be understood! She had seen a long time ago whither events were tending. She had noted the contemptuous yet menacing coldness of Abdulla; she had heard — alarmed yet unbelieving — Babalatchi's gloomy hints, covert allusions and veiled suggestions to abandon the useless white man whose fate would be the price of the peace secured by the wise and good who had no need of him any more. And he — himself! She clung to him. There was nobody else. Nothing else. She would try to cling to him always — all the life! And yet he was far from her. Further every day. Every day he seemed more distant, and she followed him patiently, hopefully, blindly, but steadily, through all the devious wanderings of his mind. She followed as well as she could. Yet at times — very often lately — she had felt lost like one strayed in the thickets of tangled undergrowth of a great forest. To her the ex-clerk of old Hudig appeared as remote, as brilliant, as terrible, as necessary, as the sun that gives life to these lands: the sun of unclouded skies that dazzles and withers; the sun beneficent and wicked — the giver of light, perfume, and pestilence. She had watched him — watched him close; fascinated by love, fascinated by danger. He was alone now — but for her; and she saw — she thought she saw — that he was like a man afraid of something. Was it possible? He afraid? Of what? Was it of that old white man who was coming — who had come? Possibly. She had heard of that man ever since she could remember. The bravest were afraid of him! And now what was in the mind of this old, old man who looked so strong? What was he going to do with the light of her life? Put it out? Take it away? Take it away for ever! — for ever! — and leave her in darkness: — not in the stirring, whispering, expectant night in which the hushed world awaits the return of sunshine; but in the night without end, the night of the grave, where nothing breathes,

nothing moves, nothing thinks — the last darkness of cold and silence without hope of another sunrise.

She cried — "Your purpose! You know nothing. I must . . ."

He interrupted — unreasonably excited, as if she had, by her look, inoculated him with some of her own distress.

"I know enough."

She approached, and stood facing him at arm's length, with both her hands on his shoulders; and he, surprised by that audacity, closed and opened his eyes two or three times, aware of some emotion arising within him, from her words, her tone, her contact; an emotion unknown, singular, penetrating and sad — at the close sight of that strange woman, of that being savage and tender, strong and delicate, fearful and resolute, that had got entangled so fatally between their two lives — his own and that other white man's, the abominable scoundrel.

"How can you know?" she went on, in a persuasive tone that seemed to flow out of her very heart — "how can you know? I live with him all the days. All the nights. I look at him; I see his every breath, every glance of his eye, every movement of his lips. I see nothing else! What else is there? And even I do not understand. I do not understand him! — Him! — My life! Him who to me is so great that his presence hides the earth and the water from my sight!"

Lingard stood straight, with his hands deep in the pockets of his jacket. His eyes winked quickly, because she spoke very close to his face. She disturbed him and he had a sense of the efforts he was making to get hold of her meaning, while all the time he could not help telling himself that all this was of no use.

She added after a pause — "There has been a time when I could understand him. When I knew what was in his mind better than he knew it himself. When I felt him. When I held him. . . . And now he has escaped."

"Escaped? What? Gone away!" shouted Lingard.

"Escaped from me," she said; "left me alone. Alone. And I am ever near him. Yet alone."

Her hands slipped slowly off Lingard's shoulders and her arms fell by her side, listless, discouraged, as if to her — to her, the savage, violent, and ignorant creature — had been revealed clearly in that moment the tremendous fact of our isolation, of the loneliness impenetrable and transparent, elusive and everlasting; of the indestructible loneliness that

surrounds, envelopes, clothes every human soul from the cradle to the grave, and, perhaps, beyond.

“Aye! Very well! I understand. His face is turned away from you,” said Lingard. “Now, what do you want?”

“I want . . . I have looked — for help . . . everywhere . . . against men. . . . All men . . . I do not know. First they came, the invisible whites, and dealt death from afar . . . then he came. He came to me who was alone and sad. He came; angry with his brothers; great amongst his own people; angry with those I have not seen: with the people where men have no mercy and women have no shame. He was of them, and great amongst them. For he was great?”

Lingard shook his head slightly. She frowned at him, and went on in disordered haste —

“Listen. I saw him. I have lived by the side of brave men . . . of chiefs. When he came I was the daughter of a beggar — of a blind man without strength and hope. He spoke to me as if I had been brighter than the sunshine — more delightful than the cool water of the brook by which we met — more . . .” Her anxious eyes saw some shade of expression pass on her listener’s face that made her hold her breath for a second, and then explode into pained fury so violent that it drove Lingard back a pace, like an unexpected blast of wind. He lifted both his hands, incongruously paternal in his venerable aspect, bewildered and soothing, while she stretched her neck forward and shouted at him.

“I tell you I was all that to him. I know it! I saw it! . . . There are times when even you white men speak the truth. I saw his eyes. I felt his eyes, I tell you! I saw him tremble when I came near — when I spoke — when I touched him. Look at me! You have been young. Look at me. Look, Rajah Laut!”

She stared at Lingard with provoking fixity, then, turning her head quickly, she sent over her shoulder a glance, full of humble fear, at the house that stood high behind her back — dark, closed, rickety and silent on its crooked posts.

Lingard’s eyes followed her look, and remained gazing expectantly at the house. After a minute or so he muttered, glancing at her suspiciously —

“If he has not heard your voice now, then he must be far away — or dead.”



“He is there,” she whispered, a little calmed but still anxious — “he is there. For three days he waited. Waited for you night and day. And I waited with him. I waited, watching his face, his eyes, his lips; listening to his words. — To the words I could not understand. — To the words he spoke in daylight; to the words he spoke at night in his short sleep. I listened. He spoke to himself walking up and down here — by the river; by the bushes. And I followed. I wanted to know — and I could not! He was tormented by things that made him speak in the words of his own people. Speak to himself — not to me. Not to me! What was he saying? What was he going to do? Was he afraid of you? — Of death? What was in his heart? . . . Fear? . . . Or anger? . . . what desire? . . . what sadness? He spoke; spoke; many words. All the time! And I could not know! I wanted to speak to him. He was deaf to me. I followed him everywhere, watching for some word I could understand; but his mind was in the land of his people — away from me. When I touched him he was angry — so!”

She imitated the movement of some one shaking off roughly an importunate hand, and looked at Lingard with tearful and unsteady eyes.

After a short interval of laboured panting, as if she had been out of breath with running or fighting, she looked down and went on —

“Day after day, night after night, I lived watching him — seeing nothing. And my heart was heavy — heavy with the presence of death that dwelt amongst us. I could not believe. I thought he was afraid. Afraid of you! Then I, myself, knew fear. . . . Tell me, Rajah Laut, do you know the fear without voice — the fear of silence — the fear that comes when there is no one near — when there is no battle, no cries, no angry faces or armed hands anywhere? . . . The fear from which there is no escape!”

She paused, fastened her eyes again on the puzzled Lingard, and hurried on in a tone of despair —

“And I knew then he would not fight you! Before — many days ago — I went away twice to make him obey my desire; to make him strike at his own people so that he could be mine — mine! O calamity! His hand was false as your white hearts. It struck forward, pushed by my desire — by his desire of me. . . . It struck that strong hand, and — O shame! — it killed nobody! Its fierce and lying blow woke up hate without any fear. Round me all was lies. His strength was a lie. My own people lied to me and to him. And to meet you — you, the great! — he had no one but me? But me with

my rage, my pain, my weakness. Only me! And to me he would not even speak. The fool!"

She came up close to Lingard, with the wild and stealthy aspect of a lunatic longing to whisper out an insane secret — one of those misshapen, heart-rending, and ludicrous secrets; one of those thoughts that, like monsters — cruel, fantastic, and mournful, wander about terrible and unceasing in the night of madness. Lingard looked at her, astounded but unflinching. She spoke in his face, very low.

"He is all! Everything. He is my breath, my light, my heart. . . . Go away. . . . Forget him. . . . He has no courage and no wisdom any more . . . and I have lost my power. . . . Go away and forget. There are other enemies. . . . Leave him to me. He had been a man once. . . . You are too great. Nobody can withstand you. . . . I tried. . . . I know now . . . . I cry for mercy. Leave him to me and go away."

The fragments of her supplicating sentences were as if tossed on the crest of her sobs. Lingard, outwardly impassive, with his eyes fixed on the house, experienced that feeling of condemnation, deep-seated, persuasive, and masterful; that illogical impulse of disapproval which is half disgust, half vague fear, and that wakes up in our hearts in the presence of anything new or unusual, of anything that is not run into the mould of our own conscience; the accursed feeling made up of disdain, of anger, and of the sense of superior virtue that leaves us deaf, blind, contemptuous and stupid before anything which is not like ourselves.

He answered, not looking at her at first, but speaking towards the house that fascinated him —

"I go away! He wanted me to come — he himself did! . . . You must go away. You do not know what you are asking for. Listen. Go to your own people. Leave him. He is . . ."

He paused, looked down at her with his steady eyes; hesitated, as if seeking an adequate expression; then snapped his fingers, and said —

"Finish."

She stepped back, her eyes on the ground, and pressed her temples with both her hands, which she raised to her head in a slow and ample movement full of unconscious tragedy. The tone of her words was gentle and vibrating, like a loud meditation. She said —

“Tell the brook not to run to the river; tell the river not to run to the sea. Speak loud. Speak angrily. Maybe they will obey you. But it is in my mind that the brook will not care. The brook that springs out of the hillside and runs to the great river. He would not care for your words: he that cares not for the very mountain that gave him life; he that tears the earth from which he springs. Tears it, eats it, destroys it — to hurry faster to the river — to the river in which he is lost for ever. . . . O Rajah Laut! I do not care.”

She drew close again to Lingard, approaching slowly, reluctantly, as if pushed by an invisible hand, and added in words that seemed to be torn out of her —

“I cared not for my own father. For him that died. I would have rather . . . You do not know what I have done . . . I . . .”

“You shall have his life,” said Lingard, hastily.

They stood together, crossing their glances; she suddenly appeased, and Lingard thoughtful and uneasy under a vague sense of defeat. And yet there was no defeat. He never intended to kill the fellow — not after the first moment of anger, a long time ago. The days of bitter wonder had killed anger; had left only a bitter indignation and a bitter wish for complete justice. He felt discontented and surprised. Unexpectedly he had come upon a human being — a woman at that — who had made him disclose his will before its time. She should have his life. But she must be told, she must know, that for such men as Willems there was no favour and no grace.

“Understand,” he said slowly, “that I leave him his life not in mercy but in punishment.”

She started, watched every word on his lips, and after he finished speaking she remained still and mute in astonished immobility. A single big drop of rain, a drop enormous, pellucid and heavy — like a super-human tear coming straight and rapid from above, tearing its way through the sombre sky — struck loudly the dry ground between them in a starred splash. She wrung her hands in the bewilderment of the new and incomprehensible fear. The anguish of her whisper was more piercing than the shrillest cry.

“What punishment! Will you take him away then? Away from me? Listen to what I have done. . . . It is I who . . .”

“Ah!” exclaimed Lingard, who had been looking at the house.

“Don’t you believe her, Captain Lingard,” shouted Willems from the doorway, where he appeared with swollen eyelids and bared breast. He

stood for a while, his hands grasping the lintels on each side of the door, and writhed about, glaring wildly, as if he had been crucified there. Then he made a sudden rush head foremost down the plankway that responded with hollow, short noises to every footstep.

She heard him. A slight thrill passed on her face and the words that were on her lips fell back unspoken into her benighted heart; fell back amongst the mud, the stones — and the flowers, that are at the bottom of every heart.

## CHAPTER FOUR

When he felt the solid ground of the courtyard under his feet, Willems pulled himself up in his headlong rush and moved forward with a moderate gait. He paced stiffly, looking with extreme exactitude at Lingard's face; looking neither to the right nor to the left but at the face only, as if there was nothing in the world but those features familiar and dreaded; that white-haired, rough and severe head upon which he gazed in a fixed effort of his eyes, like a man trying to read small print at the full range of human vision. As soon as Willems' feet had left the planks, the silence which had been lifted up by the jerky rattle of his footsteps fell down again upon the courtyard; the silence of the cloudy sky and of the windless air, the sullen silence of the earth oppressed by the aspect of coming turmoil, the silence of the world collecting its faculties to withstand the storm. Through this silence Willems pushed his way, and stopped about six feet from Lingard. He stopped simply because he could go no further. He had started from the door with the reckless purpose of clapping the old fellow on the shoulder. He had no idea that the man would turn out to be so tall, so big and so unapproachable. It seemed to him that he had never, never in his life, seen Lingard.

He tried to say —

“Do not believe . . .”

A fit of coughing checked his sentence in a faint splutter. Directly afterwards he swallowed — as it were — a couple of pebbles, throwing his chin up in the act; and Lingard, who looked at him narrowly, saw a bone, sharp and triangular like the head of a snake, dart up and down twice under the skin of his throat. Then that, too, did not move. Nothing moved.

“Well,” said Lingard, and with that word he came unexpectedly to the end of his speech. His hand in his pocket closed firmly round the butt of his revolver bulging his jacket on the hip, and he thought how soon and how quickly he could terminate his quarrel with that man who had been so anxious to deliver himself into his hands — and how inadequate would be that ending! He could not bear the idea of that man escaping from him by going out of life; escaping from fear, from doubt, from remorse into the peaceful certitude of death. He held him now. And he was not going to let him go — to let him disappear for ever in the faint blue smoke of a pistol shot. His anger grew within him. He felt a touch as of a burning hand on his

heart. Not on the flesh of his breast, but a touch on his heart itself, on the palpitating and untiring particle of matter that responds to every emotion of the soul; that leaps with joy, with terror, or with anger.

He drew a long breath. He could see before him the bare chest of the man expanding and collapsing under the wide-open jacket. He glanced aside, and saw the bosom of the woman near him rise and fall in quick respirations that moved slightly up and down her hand, which was pressed to her breast with all the fingers spread out and a little curved, as if grasping something too big for its span. And nearly a minute passed. One of those minutes when the voice is silenced, while the thoughts flutter in the head, like captive birds inside a cage, in rushes desperate, exhausting and vain.

During that minute of silence Lingard's anger kept rising, immense and towering, such as a crested wave running over the troubled shallows of the sands. Its roar filled his ears; a roar so powerful and distracting that, it seemed to him, his head must burst directly with the expanding volume of that sound. He looked at that man. That infamous figure upright on its feet, still, rigid, with stony eyes, as if its rotten soul had departed that moment and the carcass hadn't had the time yet to topple over. For the fraction of a second he had the illusion and the fear of the scoundrel having died there before the enraged glance of his eyes. Willems' eyelids fluttered, and the unconscious and passing tremor in that stiffly erect body exasperated Lingard like a fresh outrage. The fellow dared to stir! Dared to wink, to breathe, to exist; here, right before his eyes! His grip on the revolver relaxed gradually. As the transport of his rage increased, so also his contempt for the instruments that pierce or stab, that interpose themselves between the hand and the object of hate. He wanted another kind of satisfaction. Naked hands, by heaven! No firearms. Hands that could take him by the throat, beat down his defence, batter his face into shapeless flesh; hands that could feel all the desperation of his resistance and overpower it in the violent delight of a contact lingering and furious, intimate and brutal.

He let go the revolver altogether, stood hesitating, then throwing his hands out, strode forward — and everything passed from his sight. He could not see the man, the woman, the earth, the sky — saw nothing, as if in that one stride he had left the visible world behind to step into a black and deserted space. He heard screams round him in that obscurity, screams like the melancholy and pitiful cries of sea-birds that dwell on the lonely

reefs of great oceans. Then suddenly a face appeared within a few inches of his own. His face. He felt something in his left hand. His throat . . . Ah! the thing like a snake's head that darts up and down . . . He squeezed hard. He was back in the world. He could see the quick beating of eyelids over a pair of eyes that were all whites, the grin of a drawn-up lip, a row of teeth gleaming through the drooping hair of a moustache . . . Strong white teeth. Knock them down his lying throat . . . He drew back his right hand, the fist up to the shoulder, knuckles out. From under his feet rose the screams of sea-birds. Thousands of them. Something held his legs . . . What the devil . . . He delivered his blow straight from the shoulder, felt the jar right up his arm, and realized suddenly that he was striking something passive and unresisting. His heart sank within him with disappointment, with rage, with mortification. He pushed with his left arm, opening the hand with haste, as if he had just perceived that he got hold by accident of something repulsive — and he watched with stupefied eyes Willems tottering backwards in groping strides, the white sleeve of his jacket across his face. He watched his distance from that man increase, while he remained motionless, without being able to account to himself for the fact that so much empty space had come in between them. It should have been the other way. They ought to have been very close, and . . . Ah! He wouldn't fight, he wouldn't resist, he wouldn't defend himself! A cur! Evidently a cur! . . . He was amazed and aggrieved — profoundly, bitterly — with the immense and blank desolation of a small child robbed of a toy. He shouted — unbelieving:

“Will you be a cheat to the end?”

He waited for some answer. He waited anxiously with an impatience that seemed to lift him off his feet. He waited for some word, some sign; for some threatening stir. Nothing! Only two unwinking eyes glittered intently at him above the white sleeve. He saw the raised arm detach itself from the face and sink along the body. A white clad arm, with a big stain on the white sleeve. A red stain. There was a cut on the cheek. It bled. The nose bled too. The blood ran down, made one moustache look like a dark rag stuck over the lip, and went on in a wet streak down the clipped beard on one side of the chin. A drop of blood hung on the end of some hairs that were glued together; it hung for a while and took a leap down on the ground. Many more followed, leaping one after another in close file. One alighted on the breast and glided down instantly with devious vivacity, like a small insect running away; it left a narrow dark track on the white skin.

He looked at it, looked at the tiny and active drops, looked at what he had done, with obscure satisfaction, with anger, with regret. This wasn't much like an act of justice. He had a desire to go up nearer to the man, to hear him speak, to hear him say something atrocious and wicked that would justify the violence of the blow. He made an attempt to move, and became aware of a close embrace round both his legs, just above the ankles. Instinctively, he kicked out with his foot, broke through the close bond and felt at once the clasp transferred to his other leg; the clasp warm, desperate and soft, of human arms. He looked down bewildered. He saw the body of the woman stretched at length, flattened on the ground like a dark blue rag. She trailed face downwards, clinging to his leg with both arms in a tenacious hug. He saw the top of her head, the long black hair streaming over his foot, all over the beaten earth, around his boot. He couldn't see his foot for it. He heard the short and repeated moaning of her breath. He imagined the invisible face close to his heel. With one kick into that face he could free himself. He dared not stir, and shouted down —

“Let go! Let go! Let go!”

The only result of his shouting was a tightening of the pressure of her arms. With a tremendous effort he tried to bring his right foot up to his left, and succeeded partly. He heard distinctly the rub of her body on the ground as he jerked her along. He tried to disengage himself by drawing up his foot. He stamped. He heard a voice saying sharply —

“Steady, Captain Lingard, steady!”

His eyes flew back to Willems at the sound of that voice, and, in the quick awakening of sleeping memories, Lingard stood suddenly still, appeased by the clear ring of familiar words. Appeased as in days of old, when they were trading together, when Willems was his trusted and helpful companion in out-of-the-way and dangerous places; when that fellow, who could keep his temper so much better than he could himself, had spared him many a difficulty, had saved him from many an act of hasty violence by the timely and good-humoured warning, whispered or shouted, “Steady, Captain Lingard, steady.” A smart fellow. He had brought him up. The smartest fellow in the islands. If he had only stayed with him, then all this . . . He called out to Willems —

“Tell her to let me go or . . .”

He heard Willems shouting something, waited for awhile, then glanced vaguely down and saw the woman still stretched out perfectly mute and



unstirring, with her head at his feet. He felt a nervous impatience that, somehow, resembled fear.

“Tell her to let go, to go away, Willems, I tell you. I’ve had enough of this,” he cried.

“All right, Captain Lingard,” answered the calm voice of Willems, “she has let go. Take your foot off her hair; she can’t get up.”

Lingard leaped aside, clean away, and spun round quickly. He saw her sit up and cover her face with both hands, then he turned slowly on his heel and looked at the man. Willems held himself very straight, but was unsteady on his feet, and moved about nearly on the same spot, like a tipsy man attempting to preserve his balance. After gazing at him for a while, Lingard called, rancorous and irritable —

“What have you got to say for yourself?”

Willems began to walk towards him. He walked slowly, reeling a little before he took each step, and Lingard saw him put his hand to his face, then look at it holding it up to his eyes, as if he had there, concealed in the hollow of the palm, some small object which he wanted to examine secretly. Suddenly he drew it, with a brusque movement, down the front of his jacket and left a long smudge.

“That’s a fine thing to do,” said Willems.

He stood in front of Lingard, one of his eyes sunk deep in the increasing swelling of his cheek, still repeating mechanically the movement of feeling his damaged face; and every time he did this he pressed the palm to some clean spot on his jacket, covering the white cotton with bloody imprints as of some deformed and monstrous hand. Lingard said nothing, looking on. At last Willems left off staunching the blood and stood, his arms hanging by his side, with his face stiff and distorted under the patches of coagulated blood; and he seemed as though he had been set up there for a warning: an incomprehensible figure marked all over with some awful and symbolic signs of deadly import. Speaking with difficulty, he repeated in a reproachful tone —

“That was a fine thing to do.”

“After all,” answered Lingard, bitterly, “I had too good an opinion of you.”

“And I of you. Don’t you see that I could have had that fool over there killed and the whole thing burnt to the ground, swept off the face of the

earth. You wouldn't have found as much as a heap of ashes had I liked. I could have done all that. And I wouldn't."

"You — could — not. You dared not. You scoundrel!" cried Lingard.

"What's the use of calling me names?"

"True," retorted Lingard — "there's no name bad enough for you."

There was a short interval of silence. At the sound of their rapidly exchanged words, Aissa had got up from the ground where she had been sitting, in a sorrowful and dejected pose, and approached the two men. She stood on one side and looked on eagerly, in a desperate effort of her brain, with the quick and distracted eyes of a person trying for her life to penetrate the meaning of sentences uttered in a foreign tongue: the meaning portentous and fateful that lurks in the sounds of mysterious words; in the sounds surprising, unknown and strange.

Willems let the last speech of Lingard pass by; seemed by a slight movement of his hand to help it on its way to join the other shadows of the past. Then he said —

"You have struck me; you have insulted me . . ."

"Insulted you!" interrupted Lingard, passionately. "Who — what can insult you . . . you . . ."

He choked, advanced a step.

"Steady! steady!" said Willems calmly. "I tell you I sha'n't fight. Is it clear enough to you that I sha'n't? I — shall — not — lift — a — finger."

As he spoke, slowly punctuating each word with a slight jerk of his head, he stared at Lingard, his right eye open and big, the left small and nearly closed by the swelling of one half of his face, that appeared all drawn out on one side like faces seen in a concave glass. And they stood exactly opposite each other: one tall, slight and disfigured; the other tall, heavy and severe.

Willems went on —

"If I had wanted to hurt you — if I had wanted to destroy you, it was easy. I stood in the doorway long enough to pull a trigger — and you know I shoot straight."

"You would have missed," said Lingard, with assurance. "There is, under heaven, such a thing as justice."

The sound of that word on his own lips made him pause, confused, like an unexpected and unanswerable rebuke. The anger of his outraged pride, the anger of his outraged heart, had gone out in the blow; and there

remained nothing but the sense of some immense infamy — of something vague, disgusting and terrible, which seemed to surround him on all sides, hover about him with shadowy and stealthy movements, like a band of assassins in the darkness of vast and unsafe places. Was there, under heaven, such a thing as justice? He looked at the man before him with such an intensity of prolonged glance that he seemed to see right through him, that at last he saw but a floating and unsteady mist in human shape. Would it blow away before the first breath of the breeze and leave nothing behind?

The sound of Willems' voice made him start violently. Willems was saying —

"I have always led a virtuous life; you know I have. You always praised me for my steadiness; you know you have. You know also I never stole — if that's what you're thinking of. I borrowed. You know how much I repaid. It was an error of judgment. But then consider my position there. I had been a little unlucky in my private affairs, and had debts. Could I let myself go under before the eyes of all those men who envied me? But that's all over. It was an error of judgment. I've paid for it. An error of judgment."

Lingard, astounded into perfect stillness, looked down. He looked down at Willems' bare feet. Then, as the other had paused, he repeated in a blank tone —

"An error of judgment . . ."

"Yes," drawled out Willems, thoughtfully, and went on with increasing animation: "As I said, I have always led a virtuous life. More so than Hudig — than you. Yes, than you. I drank a little, I played cards a little. Who doesn't? But I had principles from a boy. Yes, principles. Business is business, and I never was an ass. I never respected fools. They had to suffer for their folly when they dealt with me. The evil was in them, not in me. But as to principles, it's another matter. I kept clear of women. It's forbidden — I had no time — and I despised them. Now I hate them!"

He put his tongue out a little; a tongue whose pink and moist end ran here and there, like something independently alive, under his swollen and blackened lip; he touched with the tips of his fingers the cut on his cheek, felt all round it with precaution: and the unharmed side of his face appeared for a moment to be preoccupied and uneasy about the state of that other side which was so very sore and stiff.

He recommenced speaking, and his voice vibrated as though with repressed emotion of some kind.

“You ask my wife, when you see her in Macassar, whether I have no reason to hate her. She was nobody, and I made her Mrs. Willems. A half-caste girl! You ask her how she showed her gratitude to me. You ask . . . Never mind that. Well, you came and dumped me here like a load of rubbish; dumped me here and left me with nothing to do — nothing good to remember — and damn little to hope for. You left me here at the mercy of that fool, Almayer, who suspected me of something. Of what? Devil only knows. But he suspected and hated me from the first; I suppose because you befriended me. Oh! I could read him like a book. He isn’t very deep, your Sambir partner, Captain Lingard, but he knows how to be disagreeable. Months passed. I thought I would die of sheer weariness, of my thoughts, of my regrets And then . . .”

He made a quick step nearer to Lingard, and as if moved by the same thought, by the same instinct, by the impulse of his will, Aissa also stepped nearer to them. They stood in a close group, and the two men could feel the calm air between their faces stirred by the light breath of the anxious woman who enveloped them both in the uncomprehending, in the despairing and wondering glances of her wild and mournful eyes.

## CHAPTER FIVE

Willems turned a little from her and spoke lower.

“Look at that,” he said, with an almost imperceptible movement of his head towards the woman to whom he was presenting his shoulder. “Look at that! Don’t believe her! What has she been saying to you? What? I have been asleep. Had to sleep at last. I’ve been waiting for you three days and nights. I had to sleep some time. Hadn’t I? I told her to remain awake and watch for you, and call me at once. She did watch. You can’t believe her. You can’t believe any woman. Who can tell what’s inside their heads? No one. You can know nothing. The only thing you can know is that it isn’t anything like what comes through their lips. They live by the side of you. They seem to hate you, or they seem to love you; they caress or torment you; they throw you over or stick to you closer than your skin for some inscrutable and awful reason of their own — which you can never know! Look at her — and look at me. At me! — her infernal work. What has she been saying?”

His voice had sunk to a whisper. Lingard listened with great attention, holding his chin in his hand, which grasped a great handful of his white beard. His elbow was in the palm of his other hand, and his eyes were still fixed on the ground. He murmured, without looking up —

“She begged me for your life — if you want to know — as if the thing were worth giving or taking!”

“And for three days she begged me to take yours,” said Willems quickly. “For three days she wouldn’t give me any peace. She was never still. She planned ambushes. She has been looking for places all over here where I could hide and drop you with a safe shot as you walked up. It’s true. I give you my word.”

“Your word,” muttered Lingard, contemptuously.

Willems took no notice.

“Ah! She is a ferocious creature,” he went on. “You don’t know . . . I wanted to pass the time — to do something — to have something to think about — to forget my troubles till you came back. And . . . look at her . . . she took me as if I did not belong to myself. She did. I did not know there was something in me she could get hold of. She, a savage. I, a civilized European, and clever! She that knew no more than a wild animal! Well, she found out something in me. She found it out, and I was lost. I knew it. She

tormented me. I was ready to do anything. I resisted — but I was ready. I knew that too. That frightened me more than anything; more than my own sufferings; and that was frightful enough, I assure you.”

Lingard listened, fascinated and amazed like a child listening to a fairy tale, and, when Willems stopped for breath, he shuffled his feet a little.

“What does he say?” cried out Aissa, suddenly.

The two men looked at her quickly, and then looked at one another.

Willems began again, speaking hurriedly —

“I tried to do something. Take her away from those people. I went to Almayer; the biggest blind fool that you ever . . . Then Abdulla came — and she went away. She took away with her something of me which I had to get back. I had to do it. As far as you are concerned, the change here had to happen sooner or later; you couldn’t be master here for ever. It isn’t what I have done that torments me. It is the why. It’s the madness that drove me to it. It’s that thing that came over me. That may come again, some day.”

“It will do no harm to anybody then, I promise you,” said Lingard, significantly.

Willems looked at him for a second with a blank stare, then went on —

“I fought against her. She goaded me to violence and to murder. Nobody knows why. She pushed me to it persistently, desperately, all the time. Fortunately Abdulla had sense. I don’t know what I wouldn’t have done. She held me then. Held me like a nightmare that is terrible and sweet. By and by it was another life. I woke up. I found myself beside an animal as full of harm as a wild cat. You don’t know through what I have passed. Her father tried to kill me — and she very nearly killed him. I believe she would have stuck at nothing. I don’t know which was more terrible! She would have stuck at nothing to defend her own. And when I think that it was me — me — Willems . . . I hate her. To-morrow she may want my life. How can I know what’s in her? She may want to kill me next!”

He paused in great trepidation, then added in a scared tone —

“I don’t want to die here.”

“Don’t you?” said Lingard, thoughtfully.

Willems turned towards Aissa and pointed at her with a bony forefinger.

“Look at her! Always there. Always near. Always watching, watching . . . for something. Look at her eyes. Ain’t they big? Don’t they stare? You wouldn’t think she can shut them like human beings do. I don’t believe she ever does. I go to sleep, if I can, under their stare, and when I wake up I see

them fixed on me and moving no more than the eyes of a corpse. While I am still they are still. By God — she can't move them till I stir, and then they follow me like a pair of jailers. They watch me; when I stop they seem to wait patient and glistening till I am off my guard — for to do something. To do something horrible. Look at them! You can see nothing in them. They are big, menacing — and empty. The eyes of a savage; of a damned mongrel, half-Arab, half-Malay. They hurt me! I am white! I swear to you I can't stand this! Take me away. I am white! All white!"

He shouted towards the sombre heaven, proclaiming desperately under the frown of thickening clouds the fact of his pure and superior descent. He shouted, his head thrown up, his arms swinging about wildly; lean, ragged, disfigured; a tall madman making a great disturbance about something invisible; a being absurd, repulsive, pathetic, and droll. Lingard, who was looking down as if absorbed in deep thought, gave him a quick glance from under his eyebrows: Aissa stood with clasped hands. At the other end of the courtyard the old woman, like a vague and decrepit apparition, rose noiselessly to look, then sank down again with a stealthy movement and crouched low over the small glow of the fire. Willems' voice filled the enclosure, rising louder with every word, and then, suddenly, at its very loudest, stopped short — like water stops running from an over-turned vessel. As soon as it had ceased the thunder seemed to take up the burden in a low growl coming from the inland hills. The noise approached in confused mutterings which kept on increasing, swelling into a roar that came nearer, rushed down the river, passed close in a tearing crash — and instantly sounded faint, dying away in monotonous and dull repetitions amongst the endless sinuosities of the lower reaches. Over the great forests, over all the innumerable people of unstirring trees — over all that living people immense, motionless, and mute — the silence, that had rushed in on the track of the passing tumult, remained suspended as deep and complete as if it had never been disturbed from the beginning of remote ages. Then, through it, after a time, came to Lingard's ears the voice of the running river: a voice low, discreet, and sad, like the persistent and gentle voices that speak of the past in the silence of dreams.

He felt a great emptiness in his heart. It seemed to him that there was within his breast a great space without any light, where his thoughts wandered forlornly, unable to escape, unable to rest, unable to die, to vanish — and to relieve him from the fearful oppression of their existence. Speech,

action, anger, forgiveness, all appeared to him alike useless and vain, appeared to him unsatisfactory, not worth the effort of hand or brain that was needed to give them effect. He could not see why he should not remain standing there, without ever doing anything, to the end of time. He felt something, something like a heavy chain, that held him there. This wouldn't do. He backed away a little from Willems and Aissa, leaving them close together, then stopped and looked at both. The man and the woman appeared to him much further than they really were. He had made only about three steps backward, but he believed for a moment that another step would take him out of earshot for ever. They appeared to him slightly under life size, and with a great cleanness of outlines, like figures carved with great precision of detail and highly finished by a skilful hand. He pulled himself together. The strong consciousness of his own personality came back to him. He had a notion of surveying them from a great and inaccessible height.

He said slowly: "You have been possessed of a devil."

"Yes," answered Willems gloomily, and looking at Aissa. "Isn't it pretty?"

"I've heard this kind of talk before," said Lingard, in a scornful tone; then paused, and went on steadily after a while: "I regret nothing. I picked you up by the waterside, like a starving cat — by God. I regret nothing; nothing that I have done. Abdulla — twenty others — no doubt Hudig himself, were after me. That's business — for them. But that you should . . . Money belongs to him who picks it up and is strong enough to keep it — but this thing was different. It was part of my life. . . . I am an old fool."

He was. The breath of his words, of the very words he spoke, fanned the spark of divine folly in his breast, the spark that made him — the hard-headed, heavy-handed adventurer — stand out from the crowd, from the sordid, from the joyous, unscrupulous, and noisy crowd of men that were so much like himself.

Willems said hurriedly: "It wasn't me. The evil was not in me, Captain Lingard."

"And where else confound you! Where else?" interrupted Lingard, raising his voice. "Did you ever see me cheat and lie and steal? Tell me that. Did you? Hey? I wonder where in perdition you came from when I found you under my feet. . . . No matter. You will do no more harm."



Willems moved nearer, gazing upon him anxiously. Lingard went on with distinct deliberation —

“What did you expect when you asked me to see you? What? You know me. I am Lingard. You lived with me. You’ve heard men speak. You knew what you had done. Well! What did you expect?”

“How can I know?” groaned Willems, wringing his hands; “I was alone in that infernal savage crowd. I was delivered into their hands. After the thing was done, I felt so lost and weak that I would have called the devil himself to my aid if it had been any good — if he hadn’t put in all his work already. In the whole world there was only one man that had ever cared for me. Only one white man. You! Hate is better than being alone! Death is better! I expected . . . anything. Something to expect. Something to take me out of this. Out of her sight!”

He laughed. His laugh seemed to be torn out from him against his will, seemed to be brought violently on the surface from under his bitterness, his self-contempt, from under his despairing wonder at his own nature.

“When I think that when I first knew her it seemed to me that my whole life wouldn’t be enough to . . . And now when I look at her! She did it all. I must have been mad. I was mad. Every time I look at her I remember my madness. It frightens me. . . . And when I think that of all my life, of all my past, of all my future, of my intelligence, of my work, there is nothing left but she, the cause of my ruin, and you whom I have mortally offended . . .”

He hid his face for a moment in his hands, and when he took them away he had lost the appearance of comparative calm and gave way to a wild distress.

“Captain Lingard . . . anything . . . a deserted island . . . anywhere . . . I promise . . .”

“Shut up!” shouted Lingard, roughly.

He became dumb, suddenly, completely.

The wan light of the clouded morning retired slowly from the courtyard, from the clearings, from the river, as if it had gone unwillingly to hide in the enigmatical solitudes of the gloomy and silent forests. The clouds over their heads thickened into a low vault of uniform blackness. The air was still and inexpressibly oppressive. Lingard unbuttoned his jacket, flung it wide open and, inclining his body sideways a little, wiped his forehead with his hand, which he jerked sharply afterwards. Then he looked at Willems and said —

“No promise of yours is any good to me. I am going to take your conduct into my own hands. Pay attention to what I am going to say. You are my prisoner.”

Willems’ head moved imperceptibly; then he became rigid and still. He seemed not to breathe.

“You shall stay here,” continued Lingard, with sombre deliberation. “You are not fit to go amongst people. Who could suspect, who could guess, who could imagine what’s in you? I couldn’t! You are my mistake. I shall hide you here. If I let you out you would go amongst unsuspecting men, and lie, and steal, and cheat for a little money or for some woman. I don’t care about shooting you. It would be the safest way though. But I won’t. Do not expect me to forgive you. To forgive one must have been angry and become contemptuous, and there is nothing in me now — no anger, no contempt, no disappointment. To me you are not Willems, the man I befriended and helped through thick and thin, and thought much of . . . You are not a human being that may be destroyed or forgiven. You are a bitter thought, a something without a body and that must be hidden . . . You are my shame.”

He ceased and looked slowly round. How dark it was! It seemed to him that the light was dying prematurely out of the world and that the air was already dead.

“Of course,” he went on, “I shall see to it that you don’t starve.”

“You don’t mean to say that I must live here, Captain Lingard?” said Willems, in a kind of mechanical voice without any inflections.

“Did you ever hear me say something I did not mean?” asked Lingard. “You said you didn’t want to die here — well, you must live . . . Unless you change your mind,” he added, as if in involuntary afterthought.

He looked at Willems narrowly, then shook his head.

“You are alone,” he went on. “Nothing can help you. Nobody will. You are neither white nor brown. You have no colour as you have no heart. Your accomplices have abandoned you to me because I am still somebody to be reckoned with. You are alone but for that woman there. You say you did this for her. Well, you have her.”

Willems mumbled something, and then suddenly caught his hair with both his hands and remained standing so. Aissa, who had been looking at him, turned to Lingard.

“What did you say, Rajah Laut?” she cried.

There was a slight stir amongst the filmy threads of her disordered hair, the bushes by the river sides trembled, the big tree nodded precipitately over them with an abrupt rustle, as if waking with a start from a troubled sleep — and the breath of hot breeze passed, light, rapid, and scorching, under the clouds that whirled round, unbroken but undulating, like a restless phantom of a sombre sea.

Lingard looked at her pityingly before he said —

“I have told him that he must live here all his life . . . and with you.”

The sun seemed to have gone out at last like a flickering light away up beyond the clouds, and in the stifling gloom of the courtyard the three figures stood colourless and shadowy, as if surrounded by a black and superheated mist. Aissa looked at Willems, who remained still, as though he had been changed into stone in the very act of tearing his hair. Then she turned her head towards Lingard and shouted —

“You lie! You lie! . . . White man. Like you all do. You . . . whom Abdulla made small. You lie!”

Her words rang out shrill and venomous with her secret scorn, with her overpowering desire to wound regardless of consequences; in her woman’s reckless desire to cause suffering at any cost, to cause it by the sound of her own voice — by her own voice, that would carry the poison of her thought into the hated heart.

Willems let his hands fall, and began to mumble again. Lingard turned his ear towards him instinctively, caught something that sounded like “Very well” — then some more mumbling — then a sigh.

“As far as the rest of the world is concerned,” said Lingard, after waiting for awhile in an attentive attitude, “your life is finished. Nobody will be able to throw any of your villainies in my teeth; nobody will be able to point at you and say, ‘Here goes a scoundrel of Lingard’s up-bringing.’ You are buried here.”

“And you think that I will stay . . . that I will submit?” exclaimed Willems, as if he had suddenly recovered the power of speech.

“You needn’t stay here — on this spot,” said Lingard, drily. “There are the forests — and here is the river. You may swim. Fifteen miles up, or forty down. At one end you will meet Almayer, at the other the sea. Take your choice.”

He burst into a short, joyless laugh, then added with severe gravity —

“There is also another way.”

“If you want to drive my soul into damnation by trying to drive me to suicide you will not succeed,” said Willems in wild excitement. “I will live. I shall repent. I may escape. . . . Take that woman away — she is sin.”

A hooked dart of fire tore in two the darkness of the distant horizon and lit up the gloom of the earth with a dazzling and ghastly flame. Then the thunder was heard far away, like an incredibly enormous voice muttering menaces.

Lingard said —

“I don’t care what happens, but I may tell you that without that woman your life is not worth much — not twopence. There is a fellow here who . . . and Abdulla himself wouldn’t stand on any ceremony. Think of that! And then she won’t go.”

He began, even while he spoke, to walk slowly down towards the little gate. He didn’t look, but he felt as sure that Willems was following him as if he had been leading him by a string. Directly he had passed through the wicket-gate into the big courtyard he heard a voice, behind his back, saying —

“I think she was right. I ought to have shot you. I couldn’t have been worse off.”

“Time yet,” answered Lingard, without stopping or looking back. “But, you see, you can’t. There is not even that in you.”

“Don’t provoke me, Captain Lingard,” cried Willems.

Lingard turned round sharply. Willems and Aissa stopped. Another forked flash of lightning split up the clouds overhead, and threw upon their faces a sudden burst of light — a blaze violent, sinister and fleeting; and in the same instant they were deafened by a near, single crash of thunder, which was followed by a rushing noise, like a frightened sigh of the startled earth.

“Provoke you!” said the old adventurer, as soon as he could make himself heard. “Provoke you! Hey! What’s there in you to provoke? What do I care?”

“It is easy to speak like that when you know that in the whole world — in the whole world — I have no friend,” said Willems.

“Whose fault?” said Lingard, sharply.

Their voices, after the deep and tremendous noise, sounded to them very unsatisfactory — thin and frail, like the voices of pigmies — and they became suddenly silent, as if on that account. From up the courtyard

Lingard's boatmen came down and passed them, keeping step in a single file, their paddles on shoulder, and holding their heads straight with their eyes fixed on the river. Ali, who was walking last, stopped before Lingard, very stiff and upright. He said —

“That one-eyed Babalatchi is gone, with all his women. He took everything. All the pots and boxes. Big. Heavy. Three boxes.”

He grinned as if the thing had been amusing, then added with an appearance of anxious concern, “Rain coming.”

“We return,” said Lingard. “Make ready.”

“Aye, aye, sir!” ejaculated Ali with precision, and moved on. He had been quartermaster with Lingard before making up his mind to stay in Sambir as Almayer's head man. He strutted towards the landing-place thinking proudly that he was not like those other ignorant boatmen, and knew how to answer properly the very greatest of white captains.

“You have misunderstood me from the first, Captain Lingard,” said Willems.

“Have I? It's all right, as long as there is no mistake about my meaning,” answered Lingard, strolling slowly to the landing-place. Willems followed him, and Aissa followed Willems.

Two hands were extended to help Lingard in embarking. He stepped cautiously and heavily into the long and narrow canoe, and sat in the canvas folding-chair that had been placed in the middle. He leaned back and turned his head to the two figures that stood on the bank a little above him. Aissa's eyes were fastened on his face in a visible impatience to see him gone. Willems' look went straight above the canoe, straight at the forest on the other side of the river.

“All right, Ali,” said Lingard, in a low voice.

A slight stir animated the faces, and a faint murmur ran along the line of paddlers. The foremost man pushed with the point of his paddle, canted the fore end out of the dead water into the current; and the canoe fell rapidly off before the rush of brown water, the stern rubbing gently against the low bank.

“We shall meet again, Captain Lingard!” cried Willems, in an unsteady voice.

“Never!” said Lingard, turning half round in his chair to look at Willems. His fierce red eyes glittered remorselessly over the high back of his seat.

“Must cross the river. Water less quick over there,” said Ali.

He pushed in his turn now with all his strength, throwing his body recklessly right out over the stern. Then he recovered himself just in time into the squatting attitude of a monkey perched on a high shelf, and shouted: "Dayong!"

The paddles struck the water together. The canoe darted forward and went on steadily crossing the river with a sideways motion made up of its own speed and the downward drift of the current.

Lingard watched the shore astern. The woman shook her hand at him, and then squatted at the feet of the man who stood motionless. After a while she got up and stood beside him, reaching up to his head — and Lingard saw then that she had wetted some part of her covering and was trying to wash the dried blood off the man's immovable face, which did not seem to know anything about it. Lingard turned away and threw himself back in his chair, stretching his legs out with a sigh of fatigue. His head fell forward; and under his red face the white beard lay fan-like on his breast, the ends of fine long hairs all astir in the faint draught made by the rapid motion of the craft that carried him away from his prisoner — from the only thing in his life he wished to hide.

In its course across the river the canoe came into the line of Willems' sight and his eyes caught the image, followed it eagerly as it glided, small but distinct, on the dark background of the forest. He could see plainly the figure of the man sitting in the middle. All his life he had felt that man behind his back, a reassuring presence ready with help, with commendation, with advice; friendly in reproof, enthusiastic in approbation; a man inspiring confidence by his strength, by his fearlessness, by the very weakness of his simple heart. And now that man was going away. He must call him back.

He shouted, and his words, which he wanted to throw across the river, seemed to fall helplessly at his feet. Aissa put her hand on his arm in a restraining attempt, but he shook it off. He wanted to call back his very life that was going away from him. He shouted again — and this time he did not even hear himself. No use. He would never return. And he stood in sullen silence looking at the white figure over there, lying back in the chair in the middle of the boat; a figure that struck him suddenly as very terrible, heartless and astonishing, with its unnatural appearance of running over the water in an attitude of languid repose.

For a time nothing on earth stirred, seemingly, but the canoe, which glided up-stream with a motion so even and smooth that it did not convey any sense of movement. Overhead, the massed clouds appeared solid and steady as if held there in a powerful grip, but on their uneven surface there was a continuous and trembling glimmer, a faint reflection of the distant lightning from the thunderstorm that had broken already on the coast and was working its way up the river with low and angry growls. Willems looked on, as motionless as everything round him and above him. Only his eyes seemed to live, as they followed the canoe on its course that carried it away from him, steadily, unhesitatingly, finally, as if it were going, not up the great river into the momentous excitement of Sambir, but straight into the past, into the past crowded yet empty, like an old cemetery full of neglected graves, where lie dead hopes that never return.

From time to time he felt on his face the passing, warm touch of an immense breath coming from beyond the forest, like the short panting of an oppressed world. Then the heavy air round him was pierced by a sharp gust of wind, bringing with it the fresh, damp feel of the falling rain; and all the innumerable tree-tops of the forests swayed to the left and sprang back again in a tumultuous balancing of nodding branches and shuddering leaves. A light frown ran over the river, the clouds stirred slowly, changing their aspect but not their place, as if they had turned ponderously over; and when the sudden movement had died out in a quickened tremor of the slenderest twigs, there was a short period of formidable immobility above and below, during which the voice of the thunder was heard, speaking in a sustained, emphatic and vibrating roll, with violent louder bursts of crashing sound, like a wrathful and threatening discourse of an angry god. For a moment it died out, and then another gust of wind passed, driving before it a white mist which filled the space with a cloud of waterdust that hid suddenly from Willems the canoe, the forests, the river itself; that woke him up from his numbness in a forlorn shiver, that made him look round despairingly to see nothing but the whirling drift of rain spray before the freshening breeze, while through it the heavy big drops fell about him with sonorous and rapid beats upon the dry earth. He made a few hurried steps up the courtyard and was arrested by an immense sheet of water that fell all at once on him, fell sudden and overwhelming from the clouds, cutting his respiration, streaming over his head, clinging to him, running down his body, off his arms, off his legs. He stood gasping while the water beat him

in a vertical downpour, drove on him slanting in squalls, and he felt the drops striking him from above, from everywhere; drops thick, pressed and dashing at him as if flung from all sides by a mob of infuriated hands. From under his feet a great vapour of broken water floated up, he felt the ground become soft — melt under him — and saw the water spring out from the dry earth to meet the water that fell from the sombre heaven. An insane dread took possession of him, the dread of all that water around him, of the water that ran down the courtyard towards him, of the water that pressed him on every side, of the slanting water that drove across his face in wavering sheets which gleamed pale red with the flicker of lightning streaming through them, as if fire and water were falling together, monstrously mixed, upon the stunned earth.

He wanted to run away, but when he moved it was to slide about painfully and slowly upon that earth which had become mud so suddenly under his feet. He fought his way up the courtyard like a man pushing through a crowd, his head down, one shoulder forward, stopping often, and sometimes carried back a pace or two in the rush of water which his heart was not stout enough to face. Aissa followed him step by step, stopping when he stopped, recoiling with him, moving forward with him in his toilsome way up the slippery declivity of the courtyard, of that courtyard, from which everything seemed to have been swept away by the first rush of the mighty downpour. They could see nothing. The tree, the bushes, the house, and the fences — all had disappeared in the thickness of the falling rain. Their hair stuck, streaming, to their heads; their clothing clung to them, beaten close to their bodies; water ran off them, off their heads over their shoulders. They moved, patient, upright, slow and dark, in the gleam clear or fiery of the falling drops, under the roll of unceasing thunder, like two wandering ghosts of the drowned that, condemned to haunt the water for ever, had come up from the river to look at the world under a deluge.

On the left the tree seemed to step out to meet them, appearing vaguely, high, motionless and patient; with a rustling plaint of its innumerable leaves through which every drop of water tore its separate way with cruel haste. And then, to the right, the house surged up in the mist, very black, and clamorous with the quick patter of rain on its high-pitched roof above the steady splash of the water running off the eaves. Down the plankway leading to the door flowed a thin and pellucid stream, and when Willems began his ascent it broke over his foot as if he were going up a steep ravine



in the bed of a rapid and shallow torrent. Behind his heels two streaming smudges of mud stained for an instant the purity of the rushing water, and then he splashed his way up with a spurt and stood on the bamboo platform before the open door under the shelter of the overhanging eaves — under shelter at last!

A low moan ending in a broken and plaintive mutter arrested Willems on the threshold. He peered round in the half-light under the roof and saw the old woman crouching close to the wall in a shapeless heap, and while he looked he felt a touch of two arms on his shoulders. Aissa! He had forgotten her. He turned, and she clasped him round the neck instantly, pressing close to him as if afraid of violence or escape. He stiffened himself in repulsion, in horror, in the mysterious revolt of his heart; while she clung to him — clung to him as if he were a refuge from misery, from storm, from weariness, from fear, from despair; and it was on the part of that being an embrace terrible, enraged and mournful, in which all her strength went out to make him captive, to hold him for ever.

He said nothing. He looked into her eyes while he struggled with her fingers about the nape of his neck, and suddenly he tore her hands apart, holding her arms up in a strong grip of her wrists, and bending his swollen face close over hers, he said —

“It is all your doing. You . . .”

She did not understand him — not a word. He spoke in the language of his people — of his people that know no mercy and no shame. And he was angry. Alas! he was always angry now, and always speaking words that she could not understand. She stood in silence, looking at him through her patient eyes, while he shook her arms a little and then flung them down.

“Don’t follow me!” he shouted. “I want to be alone — I mean to be left alone!”

He went in, leaving the door open.

She did not move. What need to understand the words when they are spoken in such a voice? In that voice which did not seem to be his voice — his voice when he spoke by the brook, when he was never angry and always smiling! Her eyes were fixed upon the dark doorway, but her hands strayed mechanically upwards; she took up all her hair, and, inclining her head slightly over her shoulder, wrung out the long black tresses, twisting them persistently, while she stood, sad and absorbed, like one listening to an inward voice — the voice of bitter, of unavailing regret. The thunder had

ceased, the wind had died out, and the rain fell perpendicular and steady through a great pale clearness — the light of remote sun coming victorious from amongst the dissolving blackness of the clouds. She stood near the doorway. He was there — alone in the gloom of the dwelling. He was there. He spoke not. What was in his mind now? What fear? What desire? Not the desire of her as in the days when he used to smile . . . How could she know?

. . .

A sigh coming from the bottom of her heart, flew out into the world through her parted lips. A sigh faint, profound, and broken; a sigh full of pain and fear, like the sigh of those who are about to face the unknown: to face it in loneliness, in doubt, and without hope. She let go her hair, that fell scattered over her shoulders like a funeral veil, and she sank down suddenly by the door. Her hands clasped her ankles; she rested her head on her drawn-up knees, and remained still, very still, under the streaming mourning of her hair. She was thinking of him; of the days by the brook; she was thinking of all that had been their love — and she sat in the abandoned posture of those who sit weeping by the dead, of those who watch and mourn over a corpse.

## PART V

## CHAPTER ONE

Almayer propped, alone on the verandah of his house, with both his elbows on the table, and holding his head between his hands, stared before him, away over the stretch of sprouting young grass in his courtyard, and over the short jetty with its cluster of small canoes, amongst which his big whale-boat floated high, like a white mother of all that dark and aquatic brood. He stared on the river, past the schooner anchored in mid-stream, past the forests of the left bank; he stared through and past the illusion of the material world.

The sun was sinking. Under the sky was stretched a network of white threads, a network fine and close-meshed, where here and there were caught thicker white vapours of globular shape; and to the eastward, above the ragged barrier of the forests, surged the summits of a chain of great clouds, growing bigger slowly, in imperceptible motion, as if careful not to disturb the glowing stillness of the earth and of the sky. Abreast of the house the river was empty but for the motionless schooner. Higher up, a solitary log came out from the bend above and went on drifting slowly down the straight reach: a dead and wandering tree going out to its grave in the sea, between two ranks of trees motionless and living.

And Almayer sat, his face in his hands, looking on and hating all this: the muddy river; the faded blue of the sky; the black log passing by on its first and last voyage; the green sea of leaves — the sea that glowed shimmered, and stirred above the uniform and impenetrable gloom of the forests — the joyous sea of living green powdered with the brilliant dust of oblique sunrays.

He hated all this; he begrudged every day — every minute — of his life spent amongst all these things; he begrudged it bitterly, angrily, with enraged and immense regret, like a miser compelled to give up some of his treasure to a near relation. And yet all this was very precious to him. It was the present sign of a splendid future.

He pushed the table away impatiently, got up, made a few steps aimlessly, then stood by the balustrade and again looked at the river — at that river which would have been the instrument for the making of his fortune if . . . if . . .

“What an abominable brute!” he said.

He was alone, but he spoke aloud, as one is apt to do under the impulse of a strong, of an overmastering thought.

“What a brute!” he muttered again.

The river was dark now, and the schooner lay on it, a black, a lonely, and a graceful form, with the slender masts darting upwards from it in two frail and raking lines. The shadows of the evening crept up the trees, crept up from bough to bough, till at last the long sunbeams coursing from the western horizon skimmed lightly over the topmost branches, then flew upwards amongst the piled-up clouds, giving them a sombre and fiery aspect in the last flush of light. And suddenly the light disappeared as if lost in the immensity of the great, blue, and empty hollow overhead. The sun had set: and the forests became a straight wall of formless blackness. Above them, on the edge of lingering clouds, a single star glimmered fitfully, obscured now and then by the rapid flight of high and invisible vapours.

Almayer fought with the uneasiness within his breast. He heard Ali, who moved behind him preparing his evening meal, and he listened with strange attention to the sounds the man made — to the short, dry bang of the plate put upon the table, to the clink of glass and the metallic rattle of knife and fork. The man went away. Now he was coming back. He would speak directly; and Almayer, notwithstanding the absorbing gravity of his thoughts, listened for the sound of expected words. He heard them, spoken in English with painstaking distinctness.

“Ready, sir!”

“All right,” said Almayer, curtly. He did not move. He remained pensive, with his back to the table upon which stood the lighted lamp brought by Ali. He was thinking: “Where was Lingard now? Halfway down the river probably, in Abdulla’s ship. He would be back in about three days — perhaps less. And then? Then the schooner would have to be got out of the river, and when that craft was gone they — he and Lingard — would remain here; alone with the constant thought of that other man, that other man living near them! What an extraordinary idea to keep him there for ever. For ever! What did that mean — for ever? Perhaps a year, perhaps ten years. Preposterous! Keep him there ten years — or may be twenty! The fellow was capable of living more than twenty years. And for all that time he would have to be watched, fed, looked after. There was nobody but Lingard to have such notions. Twenty years! Why, no! In less than ten years their fortune would be made and they would leave this place, first for

Batavia — yes, Batavia — and then for Europe. England, no doubt. Lingard would want to go to England. And would they leave that man here? How would that fellow look in ten years? Very old probably. Well, devil take him. Nina would be fifteen. She would be rich and very pretty and he himself would not be so old then. . . .”

Almayer smiled into the night.

. . . Yes, rich! Why! Of course! Captain Lingard was a resourceful man, and he had plenty of money even now. They were rich already; but not enough. Decidedly not enough. Money brings money. That gold business was good. Famous! Captain Lingard was a remarkable man. He said the gold was there — and it was there. Lingard knew what he was talking about. But he had queer ideas. For instance, about Willems. Now what did he want to keep him alive for? Why?

“That scoundrel,” muttered Almayer again.

“Makan Tuan!” ejaculated Ali suddenly, very loud in a pressing tone.

Almayer walked to the table, sat down, and his anxious visage dropped from above into the light thrown down by the lamp-shade. He helped himself absently, and began to eat in great mouthfuls.

. . . Undoubtedly, Lingard was the man to stick to! The man undismayed, masterful and ready. How quickly he had planned a new future when Willems’ treachery destroyed their established position in Sambir! And the position even now was not so bad. What an immense prestige that Lingard had with all those people — Arabs, Malays and all. Ah, it was good to be able to call a man like that father. Fine! Wonder how much money really the old fellow had. People talked — they exaggerated surely, but if he had only half of what they said . . .

He drank, throwing his head up, and fell to again.

. . . Now, if that Willems had known how to play his cards well, had he stuck to the old fellow he would have been in his position, he would be now married to Lingard’s adopted daughter with his future assured — splendid .

..

“The beast!” growled Almayer, between two mouthfuls.

Ali stood rigidly straight with an uninterested face, his gaze lost in the night which pressed round the small circle of light that shone on the table, on the glass, on the bottle, and on Almayer’s head as he leaned over his plate moving his jaws.

. . . A famous man Lingard — yet you never knew what he would do next. It was notorious that he had shot a white man once for less than Willems had done. For less? . . . Why, for nothing, so to speak! It was not even his own quarrel. It was about some Malay returning from pilgrimage with wife and children. Kidnapped, or robbed, or something. A stupid story — an old story. And now he goes to see that Willems and — nothing. Comes back talking big about his prisoner; but after all he said very little. What did that Willems tell him? What passed between them? The old fellow must have had something in his mind when he let that scoundrel off. And Joanna! She would get round the old fellow. Sure. Then he would forgive perhaps. Impossible. But at any rate he would waste a lot of money on them. The old man was tenacious in his hates, but also in his affections. He had known that beast Willems from a boy. They would make it up in a year or so. Everything is possible: why did he not rush off at first and kill the brute? That would have been more like Lingard. . . .

Almayer laid down his spoon suddenly, and pushing his plate away, threw himself back in the chair.

. . . Unsafe. Decidedly unsafe. He had no mind to share Lingard's money with anybody. Lingard's money was Nina's money in a sense. And if Willems managed to become friendly with the old man it would be dangerous for him — Almayer. Such an unscrupulous scoundrel! He would oust him from his position. He would lie and slander. Everything would be lost. Lost. Poor Nina. What would become of her? Poor child. For her sake he must remove that Willems. Must. But how? Lingard wanted to be obeyed. Impossible to kill Willems. Lingard might be angry. Incredible, but so it was. He might . . .

A wave of heat passed through Almayer's body, flushed his face, and broke out of him in copious perspiration. He wriggled in his chair, and pressed his hands together under the table. What an awful prospect! He fancied he could see Lingard and Willems reconciled and going away arm-in-arm, leaving him alone in this God-forsaken hole — in Sambir — in this deadly swamp! And all his sacrifices, the sacrifice of his independence, of his best years, his surrender to Lingard's fancies and caprices, would go for nothing! Horrible! Then he thought of his little daughter — his daughter! — and the ghastliness of his supposition overpowered him. He had a deep emotion, a sudden emotion that made him feel quite faint at the idea of that

young life spoiled before it had fairly begun. His dear child's life! Lying back in his chair he covered his face with both his hands.

Ali glanced down at him and said, unconcernedly — "Master finish?"

Almayer was lost in the immensity of his commiseration for himself, for his daughter, who was — perhaps — not going to be the richest woman in the world — notwithstanding Lingard's promises. He did not understand the other's question, and muttered through his fingers in a doleful tone —

"What did you say? What? Finish what?"

"Clear up meza," explained Ali.

"Clear up!" burst out Almayer, with incomprehensible exasperation. "Devil take you and the table. Stupid! Chatterer! Chelakka! Get out!"

He leaned forward, glaring at his head man, then sank back in his seat with his arms hanging straight down on each side of the chair. And he sat motionless in a meditation so concentrated and so absorbing, with all his power of thought so deep within himself, that all expression disappeared from his face in an aspect of staring vacancy.

Ali was clearing the table. He dropped negligently the tumbler into the greasy dish, flung there the spoon and fork, then slipped in the plate with a push amongst the remnants of food. He took up the dish, tucked up the bottle under his armpit, and went off.

"My hammock!" shouted Almayer after him.

"Ada! I come soon," answered Ali from the doorway in an offended tone, looking back over his shoulder. . . . How could he clear the table and hang the hammock at the same time. Ya-wa! Those white men were all alike. Wanted everything done at once. Like children . . .

The indistinct murmur of his criticism went away, faded and died out together with the soft footfall of his bare feet in the dark passage.

For some time Almayer did not move. His thoughts were busy at work shaping a momentous resolution, and in the perfect silence of the house he believed that he could hear the noise of the operation as if the work had been done with a hammer. He certainly felt a thumping of strokes, faint, profound, and startling, somewhere low down in his breast; and he was aware of a sound of dull knocking, abrupt and rapid, in his ears. Now and then he held his breath, unconsciously, too long, and had to relieve himself by a deep expiration that whistled dully through his pursed lips. The lamp standing on the far side of the table threw a section of a lighted circle on the floor, where his out-stretched legs stuck out from under the table with feet



rigid and turned up like the feet of a corpse; and his set face with fixed eyes would have been also like the face of the dead, but for its vacant yet conscious aspect; the hard, the stupid, the stony aspect of one not dead, but only buried under the dust, ashes, and corruption of personal thoughts, of base fears, of selfish desires.

“I will do it!”

Not till he heard his own voice did he know that he had spoken. It startled him. He stood up. The knuckles of his hand, somewhat behind him, were resting on the edge of the table as he remained still with one foot advanced, his lips a little open, and thought: It would not do to fool about with Lingard. But I must risk it. It's the only way I can see. I must tell her. She has some little sense. I wish they were a thousand miles off already. A hundred thousand miles. I do. And if it fails. And she blabs out then to Lingard? She seemed a fool. No; probably they will get away. And if they did, would Lingard believe me? Yes. I never lied to him. He would believe. I don't know . . . Perhaps he won't. . . . “I must do it. Must!” he argued aloud to himself.

For a long time he stood still, looking before him with an intense gaze, a gaze rapt and immobile, that seemed to watch the minute quivering of a delicate balance, coming to a rest.

To the left of him, in the whitewashed wall of the house that formed the back of the verandah, there was a closed door. Black letters were painted on it proclaiming the fact that behind that door there was the office of Lingard & Co. The interior had been furnished by Lingard when he had built the house for his adopted daughter and her husband, and it had been furnished with reckless prodigality. There was an office desk, a revolving chair, bookshelves, a safe: all to humour the weakness of Almayer, who thought all those paraphernalia necessary to successful trading. Lingard had laughed, but had taken immense trouble to get the things. It pleased him to make his protege, his adopted son-in-law, happy. It had been the sensation of Sambir some five years ago. While the things were being landed, the whole settlement literally lived on the river bank in front of the Rajah Laut's house, to look, to wonder, to admire. . . . What a big meza, with many boxes fitted all over it and under it! What did the white man do with such a table? And look, look, O Brothers! There is a green square box, with a gold plate on it, a box so heavy that those twenty men cannot drag it up the bank. Let us go, brothers, and help pull at the ropes, and perchance we

may see what's inside. Treasure, no doubt. Gold is heavy and hard to hold, O Brothers! Let us go and earn a recompense from the fierce Rajah of the Sea who shouts over there, with a red face. See! There is a man carrying a pile of books from the boat! What a number of books. What were they for? . . . And an old invalided jurumudi, who had travelled over many seas and had heard holy men speak in far-off countries, explained to a small knot of unsophisticated citizens of Sambir that those books were books of magic — of magic that guides the white men's ships over the seas, that gives them their wicked wisdom and their strength; of magic that makes them great, powerful, and irresistible while they live, and — praise be to Allah! — the victims of Satan, the slaves of Jehannum when they die.

And when he saw the room furnished, Almayer had felt proud. In his exultation of an empty-headed quill-driver, he thought himself, by the virtue of that furniture, at the head of a serious business. He had sold himself to Lingard for these things — married the Malay girl of his adoption for the reward of these things and of the great wealth that must necessarily follow upon conscientious book-keeping. He found out very soon that trade in Sambir meant something entirely different. He could not guide Patalolo, control the irrepressible old Sahamin, or restrain the youthful vagaries of the fierce Bahassoen with pen, ink, and paper. He found no successful magic in the blank pages of his ledgers; and gradually he lost his old point of view in the saner appreciation of his situation. The room known as the office became neglected then like a temple of an exploded superstition. At first, when his wife reverted to her original savagery, Almayer, now and again, had sought refuge from her there; but after their child began to speak, to know him, he became braver, for he found courage and consolation in his unreasoning and fierce affection for his daughter — in the impenetrable mantle of selfishness he wrapped round both their lives: round himself, and that young life that was also his.

When Lingard ordered him to receive Joanna into his house, he had a truckle bed put into the office — the only room he could spare. The big office desk was pushed on one side, and Joanna came with her little shabby trunk and with her child and took possession in her dreamy, slack, half-asleep way; took possession of the dust, dirt, and squalor, where she appeared naturally at home, where she dragged a melancholy and dull existence; an existence made up of sad remorse and frightened hope,

amongst the hopeless disorder — the senseless and vain decay of all these emblems of civilized commerce. Bits of white stuff; rags yellow, pink, blue: rags limp, brilliant and soiled, trailed on the floor, lay on the desk amongst the sombre covers of books soiled, grimy, but stiff-backed, in virtue, perhaps, of their European origin. The biggest set of bookshelves was partly hidden by a petticoat, the waistband of which was caught upon the back of a slender book pulled a little out of the row so as to make an improvised clothespeg. The folding canvas bedstead stood nearly in the middle of the room, stood anyhow, parallel to no wall, as if it had been, in the process of transportation to some remote place, dropped casually there by tired bearers. And on the tumbled blankets that lay in a disordered heap on its edge, Joanna sat almost all day with her stockingless feet upon one of the bed pillows that were somehow always kicking about the floor. She sat there, vaguely tormented at times by the thought of her absent husband, but most of the time thinking tearfully of nothing at all, looking with swimming eyes at her little son — at the big-headed, pasty-faced, and sickly Louis Willems — who rolled a glass inkstand, solid with dried ink, about the floor, and tottered after it with the portentous gravity of demeanour and absolute absorption by the business in hand that characterize the pursuits of early childhood. Through the half-open shutter a ray of sunlight, a ray merciless and crude, came into the room, beat in the early morning upon the safe in the far-off corner, then, travelling against the sun, cut at midday the big desk in two with its solid and clean-edged brilliance; with its hot brilliance in which a swarm of flies hovered in dancing flight over some dirty plate forgotten there amongst yellow papers for many a day. And towards the evening the cynical ray seemed to cling to the ragged petticoat, lingered on it with wicked enjoyment of that misery it had exposed all day; lingered on the corner of the dusty bookshelf, in a red glow intense and mocking, till it was suddenly snatched by the setting sun out of the way of the coming night. And the night entered the room. The night abrupt, impenetrable and all-filling with its flood of darkness; the night cool and merciful; the blind night that saw nothing, but could hear the fretful whimpering of the child, the creak of the bedstead, Joanna's deep sighs as she turned over, sleepless, in the confused conviction of her wickedness, thinking of that man masterful, fair-headed, and strong — a man hard perhaps, but her husband; her clever and handsome husband to whom she

had acted so cruelly on the advice of bad people, if her own people; and of her poor, dear, deceived mother.

To Almayer, Joanna's presence was a constant worry, a worry unobtrusive yet intolerable; a constant, but mostly mute, warning of possible danger. In view of the absurd softness of Lingard's heart, every one in whom Lingard manifested the slightest interest was to Almayer a natural enemy. He was quite alive to that feeling, and in the intimacy of the secret intercourse with his inner self had often congratulated himself upon his own wide-awake comprehension of his position. In that way, and impelled by that motive, Almayer had hated many and various persons at various times. But he never had hated and feared anybody so much as he did hate and fear Willems. Even after Willems' treachery, which seemed to remove him beyond the pale of all human sympathy, Almayer mistrusted the situation and groaned in spirit every time he caught sight of Joanna.

He saw her very seldom in the daytime. But in the short and opal-tinted twilights, or in the azure dusk of starry evenings, he often saw, before he slept, the slender and tall figure trailing to and fro the ragged tail of its white gown over the dried mud of the riverside in front of the house. Once or twice when he sat late on the verandah, with his feet upon the deal table on a level with the lamp, reading the seven months' old copy of the North China Herald, brought by Lingard, he heard the stairs creak, and, looking round the paper, he saw her frail and meagre form rise step by step and toil across the verandah, carrying with difficulty the big, fat child, whose head, lying on the mother's bony shoulder, seemed of the same size as Joanna's own. Several times she had assailed him with tearful clamour or mad entreaties: asking about her husband, wanting to know where he was, when he would be back; and ending every such outburst with despairing and incoherent self-reproaches that were absolutely incomprehensible to Almayer. On one or two occasions she had overwhelmed her host with vituperative abuse, making him responsible for her husband's absence. Those scenes, begun without any warning, ended abruptly in a sobbing flight and a bang of the door; stirred the house with a sudden, a fierce, and an evanescent disturbance; like those inexplicable whirlwinds that rise, run, and vanish without apparent cause upon the sun-scorched dead level of arid and lamentable plains.

But to-night the house was quiet, deadly quiet, while Almayer stood still, watching that delicate balance where he was weighing all his chances:

Joanna's intelligence, Lingard's credulity, Willems' reckless audacity, desire to escape, readiness to seize an unexpected opportunity. He weighed, anxious and attentive, his fears and his desires against the tremendous risk of a quarrel with Lingard. . . . Yes. Lingard would be angry. Lingard might suspect him of some connivance in his prisoner's escape — but surely he would not quarrel with him — Almayer — about those people once they were gone — gone to the devil in their own way. And then he had hold of Lingard through the little girl. Good. What an annoyance! A prisoner! As if one could keep him in there. He was bound to get away some time or other. Of course. A situation like that can't last. Anybody could see that. Lingard's eccentricity passed all bounds. You may kill a man, but you mustn't torture him. It was almost criminal. It caused worry, trouble, and unpleasantness. . . . Almayer for a moment felt very angry with Lingard. He made him responsible for the anguish he suffered from, for the anguish of doubt and fear; for compelling him — the practical and innocent Almayer — to such painful efforts of mind in order to find out some issue for absurd situations created by the unreasonable sentimentality of Lingard's unpractical impulses.

"Now if the fellow were dead it would be all right," said Almayer to the verandah.

He stirred a little, and scratching his nose thoughtfully, revelled in a short flight of fancy, showing him his own image crouching in a big boat, that floated arrested — say fifty yards off — abreast of Willems' landing-place. In the bottom of the boat there was a gun. A loaded gun. One of the boatmen would shout, and Willems would answer — from the bushes. The rascal would be suspicious. Of course. Then the man would wave a piece of paper urging Willems to come to the landing-place and receive an important message. "From the Rajah Laut" the man would yell as the boat edged in-shore, and that would fetch Willems out. Wouldn't it? Rather! And Almayer saw himself jumping up at the right moment, taking aim, pulling the trigger — and Willems tumbling over, his head in the water — the swine!

He seemed to hear the report of the shot. It made him thrill from head to foot where he stood. . . . How simple! . . . Unfortunate . . . Lingard . . . He sighed, shook his head. Pity. Couldn't be done. And couldn't leave him there either! Suppose the Arabs were to get hold of him again — for instance to lead an expedition up the river! Goodness only knows what harm would come of it. . . .

The balance was at rest now and inclining to the side of immediate action. Almayer walked to the door, walked up very close to it, knocked loudly, and turned his head away, looking frightened for a moment at what he had done. After waiting for a while he put his ear against the panel and listened. Nothing. He composed his features into an agreeable expression while he stood listening and thinking to himself: I hear her. Crying. Eh? I believe she has lost the little wits she had and is crying night and day since I began to prepare her for the news of her husband's death — as Lingard told me. I wonder what she thinks. It's just like father to make me invent all these stories for nothing at all. Out of kindness. Kindness! Damn! . . . She isn't deaf, surely.

He knocked again, then said in a friendly tone, grinning benevolently at the closed door —

"It's me, Mrs. Willems. I want to speak to you. I have . . . have . . . important news. . . ."

"What is it?"

"News," repeated Almayer, distinctly. "News about your husband. Your husband! . . . Damn him!" he added, under his breath.

He heard a stumbling rush inside. Things were overturned. Joanna's agitated voice cried —

"News! What? What? I am coming out."

"No," shouted Almayer. "Put on some clothes, Mrs. Willems, and let me in. It's . . . very confidential. You have a candle, haven't you?"

She was knocking herself about blindly amongst the furniture in that room. The candlestick was upset. Matches were struck ineffectually. The matchbox fell. He heard her drop on her knees and grope over the floor while she kept on moaning in maddened distraction.

"Oh, my God! News! Yes . . . yes. . . . Ah! where . . . where . . . candle. Oh, my God! . . . I can't find . . . Don't go away, for the love of Heaven . . ."

"I don't want to go away," said Almayer, impatiently, through the keyhole; "but look sharp. It's con . . . it's pressing."

He stamped his foot lightly, waiting with his hand on the door-handle. He thought anxiously: The woman's a perfect idiot. Why should I go away? She will be off her head. She will never catch my meaning. She's too stupid.

She was moving now inside the room hurriedly and in silence. He waited. There was a moment of perfect stillness in there, and then she spoke

in an exhausted voice, in words that were shaped out of an expiring sigh — out of a sigh light and profound, like words breathed out by a woman before going off into a dead faint —

“Come in.”

He pushed the door. Ali, coming through the passage with an armful of pillows and blankets pressed to his breast high up under his chin, caught sight of his master before the door closed behind him. He was so astonished that he dropped his bundle and stood staring at the door for a long time. He heard the voice of his master talking. Talking to that Sirani woman! Who was she? He had never thought about that really. He speculated for a while hazily upon things in general. She was a Sirani woman — and ugly. He made a disdainful grimace, picked up the bedding, and went about his work, slinging the hammock between two uprights of the verandah. . . . Those things did not concern him. She was ugly, and brought here by the Rajah Laut, and his master spoke to her in the night. Very well. He, Ali, had his work to do. Sling the hammock — go round and see that the watchmen were awake — take a look at the moorings of the boats, at the padlock of the big storehouse — then go to sleep. To sleep! He shivered pleasantly. He leaned with both arms over his master’s hammock and fell into a light doze.

A scream, unexpected, piercing — a scream beginning at once in the highest pitch of a woman’s voice and then cut short, so short that it suggested the swift work of death — caused Ali to jump on one side away from the hammock, and the silence that succeeded seemed to him as startling as the awful shriek. He was thunderstruck with surprise. Almayer came out of the office, leaving the door ajar, passed close to his servant without taking any notice, and made straight for the water-chatty hung on a nail in a draughty place. He took it down and came back, missing the petrified Ali by an inch. He moved with long strides, yet, notwithstanding his haste, stopped short before the door, and, throwing his head back, poured a thin stream of water down his throat. While he came and went, while he stopped to drink, while he did all this, there came steadily from the dark room the sound of feeble and persistent crying, the crying of a sleepy and frightened child. After he had drunk, Almayer went in, closing the door carefully.

Ali did not budge. That Sirani woman shrieked! He felt an immense curiosity very unusual to his stolid disposition. He could not take his eyes off the door. Was she dead in there? How interesting and funny! He stood

with open mouth till he heard again the rattle of the door-handle. Master coming out. He pivoted on his heels with great rapidity and made believe to be absorbed in the contemplation of the night outside. He heard Almayer moving about behind his back. Chairs were displaced. His master sat down.

“Ali,” said Almayer.

His face was gloomy and thoughtful. He looked at his head man, who had approached the table, then he pulled out his watch. It was going. Whenever Lingard was in Sambir Almayer’s watch was going. He would set it by the cabin clock, telling himself every time that he must really keep that watch going for the future. And every time, when Lingard went away, he would let it run down and would measure his weariness by sunrises and sunsets in an apathetic indifference to mere hours; to hours only; to hours that had no importance in Sambir life, in the tired stagnation of empty days; when nothing mattered to him but the quality of guttah and the size of rattans; where there were no small hopes to be watched for; where to him there was nothing interesting, nothing supportable, nothing desirable to expect; nothing bitter but the slowness of the passing days; nothing sweet but the hope, the distant and glorious hope — the hope wearying, aching and precious, of getting away.

He looked at the watch. Half-past eight. Ali waited stolidly.

“Go to the settlement,” said Almayer, “and tell Mahmat Banjer to come and speak to me to-night.”

Ali went off muttering. He did not like his errand. Banjer and his two brothers were Bajow vagabonds who had appeared lately in Sambir and had been allowed to take possession of a tumbledown abandoned hut, on three posts, belonging to Lingard & Co., and standing just outside their fence. Ali disapproved of the favour shown to those strangers. Any kind of dwelling was valuable in Sambir at that time, and if master did not want that old rotten house he might have given it to him, Ali, who was his servant, instead of bestowing it upon those bad men. Everybody knew they were bad. It was well known that they had stolen a boat from Hinopari, who was very aged and feeble and had no sons; and that afterwards, by the truculent recklessness of their demeanour, they had frightened the poor old man into holding his tongue about it. Yet everybody knew of it. It was one of the tolerated scandals of Sambir, disapproved and accepted, a manifestation of that base acquiescence in success, of that inexpressed and cowardly



toleration of strength, that exists, infamous and irremediable, at the bottom of all hearts, in all societies; whenever men congregate; in bigger and more virtuous places than Sambir, and in Sambir also, where, as in other places, one man could steal a boat with impunity while another would have no right to look at a paddle.

Almayer, leaning back in his chair, meditated. The more he thought, the more he felt convinced that Banjer and his brothers were exactly the men he wanted. Those fellows were sea gipsies, and could disappear without attracting notice; and if they returned, nobody — and Lingard least of all — would dream of seeking information from them. Moreover, they had no personal interest of any kind in Sambir affairs — had taken no sides — would know nothing anyway.

He called in a strong voice: “Mrs. Willems!”

She came out quickly, almost startling him, so much did she appear as though she had surged up through the floor, on the other side of the table. The lamp was between them, and Almayer moved it aside, looking up at her from his chair. She was crying. She was crying gently, silently, in a ceaseless welling up of tears that did not fall in drops, but seemed to overflow in a clear sheet from under her eyelids — seemed to flow at once all over her face, her cheeks, and over her chin that glistened with moisture in the light. Her breast and her shoulders were shaken repeatedly by a convulsive and noiseless catching in her breath, and after every spasmodic sob her sorrowful little head, tied up in a red kerchief, trembled on her long neck, round which her bony hand gathered and clasped the disarranged dress.

“Compose yourself, Mrs. Willems,” said Almayer.

She emitted an inarticulate sound that seemed to be a faint, a very far off, a hardly audible cry of mortal distress. Then the tears went on flowing in profound stillness.

“You must understand that I have told you all this because I am your friend — real friend,” said Almayer, after looking at her for some time with visible dissatisfaction. “You, his wife, ought to know the danger he is in. Captain Lingard is a terrible man, you know.”

She blubbered out, sniffing and sobbing together.

“Do you . . . you . . . speak . . . the . . . the truth now?”

“Upon my word of honour. On the head of my child,” protested Almayer. “I had to deceive you till now because of Captain Lingard. But I couldn’t

bear it. Think only what a risk I run in telling you — if ever Lingard was to know! Why should I do it? Pure friendship. Dear Peter was my colleague in Macassar for years, you know.”

“What shall I do . . . what shall I do!” she exclaimed, faintly, looking around on every side as if she could not make up her mind which way to rush off.

“You must help him to clear out, now Lingard is away. He offended Lingard, and that’s no joke. Lingard said he would kill him. He will do it, too,” said Almayer, earnestly.

She wrung her hands. “Oh! the wicked man. The wicked, wicked man!” she moaned, swaying her body from side to side.

“Yes. Yes! He is terrible,” assented Almayer. “You must not lose any time. I say! Do you understand me, Mrs. Willems? Think of your husband. Of your poor husband. How happy he will be. You will bring him his life — actually his life. Think of him.”

She ceased her swaying movement, and now, with her head sunk between her shoulders, she hugged herself with both her arms; and she stared at Almayer with wild eyes, while her teeth chattered, rattling violently and uninterruptedly, with a very loud sound, in the deep peace of the house.

“Oh! Mother of God!” she wailed. “I am a miserable woman. Will he forgive me? The poor, innocent man. Will he forgive me? Oh, Mr. Almayer, he is so severe. Oh! help me. . . . I dare not. . . . You don’t know what I’ve done to him. . . . I daren’t! . . . I can’t! . . . God help me!”

The last words came in a despairing cry. Had she been flayed alive she could not have sent to heaven a more terrible, a more heartrending and anguished plaint.

“Sh! Sh!” hissed Almayer, jumping up. “You will wake up everybody with your shouting.”

She kept on sobbing then without any noise, and Almayer stared at her in boundless astonishment. The idea that, maybe, he had done wrong by confiding in her, upset him so much that for a moment he could not find a connected thought in his head.

At last he said: “I swear to you that your husband is in such a position that he would welcome the devil . . . listen well to me . . . the devil himself if the devil came to him in a canoe. Unless I am much mistaken,” he added, under his breath. Then again, loudly: “If you have any little difference to make up with him, I assure you — I swear to you — this is your time!”

The ardently persuasive tone of his words — he thought — would have carried irresistible conviction to a graven image. He noticed with satisfaction that Joanna seemed to have got some inkling of his meaning. He continued, speaking slowly —

“Look here, Mrs. Willems. I can’t do anything. Daren’t. But I will tell you what I will do. There will come here in about ten minutes a Bugis man — you know the language; you are from Macassar. He has a large canoe; he can take you there. To the new Rajah’s clearing, tell him. They are three brothers, ready for anything if you pay them . . . you have some money. Haven’t you?”

She stood — perhaps listening — but giving no sign of intelligence, and stared at the floor in sudden immobility, as if the horror of the situation, the overwhelming sense of her own wickedness and of her husband’s great danger, had stunned her brain, her heart, her will — had left her no faculty but that of breathing and of keeping on her feet. Almayer swore to himself with much mental profanity that he had never seen a more useless, a more stupid being.

“D’ye hear me?” he said, raising his voice. “Do try to understand. Have you any money? Money. Dollars. Guilders. Money! What’s the matter with you?”

Without raising her eyes she said, in a voice that sounded weak and undecided as if she had been making a desperate effort of memory —

“The house has been sold. Mr. Hudig was angry.”

Almayer gripped the edge of the table with all his strength. He resisted manfully an almost uncontrollable impulse to fly at her and box her ears.

“It was sold for money, I suppose,” he said with studied and incisive calmness. “Have you got it? Who has got it?”

She looked up at him, raising her swollen eyelids with a great effort, in a sorrowful expression of her drooping mouth, of her whole besmudged and tear-stained face. She whispered resignedly —

“Leonard had some. He wanted to get married. And uncle Antonio; he sat at the door and would not go away. And Aghostina — she is so poor . . . and so many, many children — little children. And Luiz the engineer. He never said a word against my husband. Also our cousin Maria. She came and shouted, and my head was so bad, and my heart was worse. Then cousin Salvator and old Daniel da Souza, who . . .”

Almayer had listened to her speechless with rage. He thought: I must give money now to that idiot. Must! Must get her out of the way now before Lingard is back. He made two attempts to speak before he managed to burst out —

“I don’t want to know their blasted names! Tell me, did all those infernal people leave you anything? To you! That’s what I want to know!”

“I have two hundred and fifteen dollars,” said Joanna, in a frightened tone.

Almayer breathed freely. He spoke with great friendliness —

“That will do. It isn’t much, but it will do. Now when the man comes I will be out of the way. You speak to him. Give him some money; only a little, mind! And promise more. Then when you get there you will be guided by your husband, of course. And don’t forget to tell him that Captain Lingard is at the mouth of the river — the northern entrance. You will remember. Won’t you? The northern branch. Lingard is — death.”

Joanna shivered. Almayer went on rapidly —

“I would have given you money if you had wanted it. ‘Pon my word! Tell your husband I’ve sent you to him. And tell him not to lose any time. And also say to him from me that we shall meet — some day. That I could not die happy unless I met him once more. Only once. I love him, you know. I prove it. Tremendous risk to me — this business is!”

Joanna snatched his hand and before he knew what she would be at, pressed it to her lips.

“Mrs. Willems! Don’t. What are you . . .” cried the abashed Almayer, tearing his hand away.

“Oh, you are good!” she cried, with sudden exaltation, “You are noble . . . I shall pray every day . . . to all the saints . . . I shall . . .”

“Never mind . . . never mind!” stammered out Almayer, confusedly, without knowing very well what he was saying. “Only look out for Lingard. . . . I am happy to be able . . . in your sad situation . . . believe me. . . .”

They stood with the table between them, Joanna looking down, and her face, in the half-light above the lamp, appeared like a soiled carving of old ivory — a carving, with accentuated anxious hollows, of old, very old ivory. Almayer looked at her, mistrustful, hopeful. He was saying to himself: How frail she is! I could upset her by blowing at her. She seems to have got some idea of what must be done, but will she have the strength to carry it through? I must trust to luck now!

Somewhere far in the back courtyard Ali's voice rang suddenly in angry remonstrance —

“Why did you shut the gate, O father of all mischief? You a watchman! You are only a wild man. Did I not tell you I was coming back? You . . .”

“I am off, Mrs. Willems,” exclaimed Almayer. “That man is here — with my servant. Be calm. Try to . . .”

He heard the footsteps of the two men in the passage, and without finishing his sentence ran rapidly down the steps towards the riverside.

## CHAPTER TWO

For the next half-hour Almayer, who wanted to give Joanna plenty of time, stumbled amongst the lumber in distant parts of his enclosure, sneaked along the fences; or held his breath, flattened against grass walls behind various outhouses: all this to escape Ali's inconveniently zealous search for his master. He heard him talk with the head watchman — sometimes quite close to him in the darkness — then moving off, coming back, wondering, and, as the time passed, growing uneasy.

"He did not fall into the river? — say, thou blind watcher!" Ali was growling in a bullying tone, to the other man. "He told me to fetch Mahmat, and when I came back swiftly I found him not in the house. There is that Sirani woman there, so that Mahmat cannot steal anything, but it is in my mind, the night will be half gone before I rest."

He shouted —

"Master! O master! O mast . . ."

"What are you making that noise for?" said Almayer, with severity, stepping out close to them.

The two Malays leaped away from each other in their surprise.

"You may go. I don't want you any more tonight, Ali," went on Almayer. "Is Mahmat there?"

"Unless the ill-behaved savage got tired of waiting. Those men know not politeness. They should not be spoken to by white men," said Ali, resentfully.

Almayer went towards the house, leaving his servants to wonder where he had sprung from so unexpectedly. The watchman hinted obscurely at powers of invisibility possessed by the master, who often at night . . . Ali interrupted him with great scorn. Not every white man has the power. Now, the Rajah Laut could make himself invisible. Also, he could be in two places at once, as everybody knew; except he — the useless watchman — who knew no more about white men than a wild pig! Ya-wa!

And Ali strolled towards his hut, yawning loudly.

As Almayer ascended the steps he heard the noise of a door flung to, and when he entered the verandah he saw only Mahmat there, close to the doorway of the passage. Mahmat seemed to be caught in the very act of slinking away, and Almayer noticed that with satisfaction. Seeing the white man, the Malay gave up his attempt and leaned against the wall. He was a

short, thick, broad-shouldered man with very dark skin and a wide, stained, bright-red mouth that uncovered, when he spoke, a close row of black and glistening teeth. His eyes were big, prominent, dreamy and restless. He said sulkily, looking all over the place from under his eyebrows —

“White Tuan, you are great and strong — and I a poor man. Tell me what is your will, and let me go in the name of God. It is late.”

Almayer examined the man thoughtfully. How could he find out whether . . . He had it! Lately he had employed that man and his two brothers as extra boatmen to carry stores, provisions, and new axes to a camp of rattan cutters some distance up the river. A three days’ expedition. He would test him now in that way. He said negligently —

“I want you to start at once for the camp, with surat for the Kavitan. One dollar a day.”

The man appeared plunged in dull hesitation, but Almayer, who knew his Malays, felt pretty sure from his aspect that nothing would induce the fellow to go. He urged —

“It is important — and if you are swift I shall give two dollars for the last day.”

“No, Tuan. We do not go,” said the man, in a hoarse whisper.

“Why?”

“We start on another journey.”

“Where?”

“To a place we know of,” said Mahmat, a little louder, in a stubborn manner, and looking at the floor.

Almayer experienced a feeling of immense joy. He said, with affected annoyance —

“You men live in my house and it is as if it were your own. I may want my house soon.”

Mahmat looked up.

“We are men of the sea and care not for a roof when we have a canoe that will hold three, and a paddle apiece. The sea is our house. Peace be with you, Tuan.”

He turned and went away rapidly, and Almayer heard him directly afterwards in the courtyard calling to the watchman to open the gate. Mahmat passed through the gate in silence, but before the bar had been put up behind him he had made up his mind that if the white man ever wanted to eject him from his hut, he would burn it and also as many of the white

man's other buildings as he could safely get at. And he began to call his brothers before he was inside the dilapidated dwelling.

"All's well!" muttered Almayer to himself, taking some loose Java tobacco from a drawer in the table. "Now if anything comes out I am clear. I asked the man to go up the river. I urged him. He will say so himself. Good."

He began to charge the china bowl of his pipe, a pipe with a long cherry stem and a curved mouthpiece, pressing the tobacco down with his thumb and thinking: No. I sha'n't see her again. Don't want to. I will give her a good start, then go in chase — and send an express boat after father. Yes! that's it.

He approached the door of the office and said, holding his pipe away from his lips —

"Good luck to you, Mrs. Willems. Don't lose any time. You may get along by the bushes; the fence there is out of repair. Don't lose time. Don't forget that it is a matter of . . . life and death. And don't forget that I know nothing. I trust you."

He heard inside a noise as of a chest-lid falling down. She made a few steps. Then a sigh, profound and long, and some faint words which he did not catch. He moved away from the door on tiptoe, kicked off his slippers in a corner of the verandah, then entered the passage puffing at his pipe; entered cautiously in a gentle creaking of planks and turned into a curtained entrance to the left. There was a big room. On the floor a small binnacle lamp — that had found its way to the house years ago from the lumber-room of the Flash — did duty for a night-light. It glimmered very small and dull in the great darkness. Almayer walked to it, and picking it up revived the flame by pulling the wick with his fingers, which he shook directly after with a grimace of pain. Sleeping shapes, covered — head and all — with white sheets, lay about on the mats on the floor. In the middle of the room a small cot, under a square white mosquito net, stood — the only piece of furniture between the four walls — looking like an altar of transparent marble in a gloomy temple. A woman, half-lying on the floor with her head dropped on her arms, which were crossed on the foot of the cot, woke up as Almayer strode over her outstretched legs. She sat up without a word, leaning forward, and, clasping her knees, stared down with sad eyes, full of sleep.



Almayer, the smoky light in one hand, his pipe in the other, stood before the curtained cot looking at his daughter — at his little Nina — at that part of himself, at that small and unconscious particle of humanity that seemed to him to contain all his soul. And it was as if he had been bathed in a bright and warm wave of tenderness, in a tenderness greater than the world, more precious than life; the only thing real, living, sweet, tangible, beautiful and safe amongst the elusive, the distorted and menacing shadows of existence. On his face, lit up indistinctly by the short yellow flame of the lamp, came a look of rapt attention while he looked into her future. And he could see things there! Things charming and splendid passing before him in a magic unrolling of resplendent pictures; pictures of events brilliant, happy, inexpressibly glorious, that would make up her life. He would do it! He would do it. He would! He would — for that child! And as he stood in the still night, lost in his enchanting and gorgeous dreams, while the ascending, thin thread of tobacco smoke spread into a faint bluish cloud above his head, he appeared strangely impressive and ecstatic: like a devout and mystic worshipper, adoring, transported and mute; burning incense before a shrine, a diaphanous shrine of a child-idol with closed eyes; before a pure and vaporous shrine of a small god — fragile, powerless, unconscious and sleeping.

When Ali, roused by loud and repeated shouting of his name, stumbled outside the door of his hut, he saw a narrow streak of trembling gold above the forests and a pale sky with faded stars overhead: signs of the coming day. His master stood before the door waving a piece of paper in his hand and shouting excitedly — "Quick, Ali! Quick!" When he saw his servant he rushed forward, and pressing the paper on him objurgated him, in tones which induced Ali to think that something awful had happened, to hurry up and get the whale-boat ready to go immediately — at once, at once — after Captain Lingard. Ali remonstrated, agitated also, having caught the infection of distracted haste.

"If must go quick, better canoe. Whale-boat no can catch, same as small canoe."

"No, no! Whale-boat! whale-boat! You dolt! you wretch!" howled Almayer, with all the appearance of having gone mad. "Call the men! Get along with it. Fly!"

And Ali rushed about the courtyard kicking the doors of huts open to put his head in and yell frightfully inside; and as he dashed from hovel to hovel,

men shivering and sleepy were coming out, looking after him stupidly, while they scratched their ribs with bewildered apathy. It was hard work to put them in motion. They wanted time to stretch themselves and to shiver a little. Some wanted food. One said he was sick. Nobody knew where the rudder was. Ali darted here and there, ordering, abusing, pushing one, then another, and stopping in his exertions at times to wring his hands hastily and groan, because the whale-boat was much slower than the worst canoe and his master would not listen to his protestations.

Almayer saw the boat go off at last, pulled anyhow by men that were cold, hungry, and sulky; and he remained on the jetty watching it down the reach. It was broad day then, and the sky was perfectly cloudless. Almayer went up to the house for a moment. His household was all astir and wondering at the strange disappearance of the Sirani woman, who had taken her child and had left her luggage. Almayer spoke to no one, got his revolver, and went down to the river again. He jumped into a small canoe and paddled himself towards the schooner. He worked very leisurely, but as soon as he was nearly alongside he began to hail the silent craft with the tone and appearance of a man in a tremendous hurry.

“Schooner ahoy! schooner ahoy!” he shouted.

A row of blank faces popped up above the bulwark. After a while a man with a woolly head of hair said —

“Sir!”

“The mate! the mate! Call him, steward!” said Almayer, excitedly, making a frantic grab at a rope thrown down to him by somebody.

In less than a minute the mate put his head over. He asked, surprised —

“What can I do for you, Mr. Almayer?”

“Let me have the gig at once, Mr. Swan — at once. I ask in Captain Lingard’s name. I must have it. Matter of life and death.”

The mate was impressed by Almayer’s agitation

“You shall have it, sir. . . . Man the gig there! Bear a hand, serang! . . . It’s hanging astern, Mr. Almayer,” he said, looking down again. “Get into it, sir. The men are coming down by the painter.”

By the time Almayer had clambered over into the stern sheets, four calashes were in the boat and the oars were being passed over the taffrail. The mate was looking on. Suddenly he said —

“Is it dangerous work? Do you want any help? I would come . . .”

“Yes, yes!” cried Almayer. “Come along. Don’t lose a moment. Go and get your revolver. Hurry up! hurry up!”

Yet, notwithstanding his feverish anxiety to be off, he lolled back very quiet and unconcerned till the mate got in and, passing over the thwarts, sat down by his side. Then he seemed to wake up, and called out —

“Let go — let go the painter!”

“Let go the painter — the painter!” yelled the bowman, jerking at it.

People on board also shouted “Let go!” to one another, till it occurred at last to somebody to cast off the rope; and the boat drifted rapidly away from the schooner in the sudden silencing of all voices.

Almayer steered. The mate sat by his side, pushing the cartridges into the chambers of his revolver. When the weapon was loaded he asked —

“What is it? Are you after somebody?”

“Yes,” said Almayer, curtly, with his eyes fixed ahead on the river. “We must catch a dangerous man.”

“I like a bit of a chase myself,” declared the mate, and then, discouraged by Almayer’s aspect of severe thoughtfulness, said nothing more.

Nearly an hour passed. The calashes stretched forward head first and lay back with their faces to the sky, alternately, in a regular swing that sent the boat flying through the water; and the two sitters, very upright in the stern sheets, swayed rhythmically a little at every stroke of the long oars plied vigorously.

The mate observed: “The tide is with us.”

“The current always runs down in this river,” said Almayer.

“Yes — I know,” retorted the other; “but it runs faster on the ebb. Look by the land at the way we get over the ground! A five-knot current here, I should say.”

“H’m!” growled Almayer. Then suddenly: “There is a passage between two islands that will save us four miles. But at low water the two islands, in the dry season, are like one with only a mud ditch between them. Still, it’s worth trying.”

“Ticklish job that, on a falling tide,” said the mate, coolly. “You know best whether there’s time to get through.”

“I will try,” said Almayer, watching the shore intently. “Look out now!”

He tugged hard at the starboard yoke-line.

“Lay in your oars!” shouted the mate.

The boat swept round and shot through the narrow opening of a creek that broadened out before the craft had time to lose its way.

“Out oars! . . . Just room enough,” muttered the mate.

It was a sombre creek of black water speckled with the gold of scattered sunlight falling through the boughs that met overhead in a soaring, restless arc full of gentle whispers passing, tremulous, aloft amongst the thick leaves. The creepers climbed up the trunks of serried trees that leaned over, looking insecure and undermined by floods which had eaten away the earth from under their roots. And the pungent, acrid smell of rotting leaves, of flowers, of blossoms and plants dying in that poisonous and cruel gloom, where they pined for sunshine in vain, seemed to lay heavy, to press upon the shiny and stagnant water in its tortuous windings amongst the everlasting and invincible shadows.

Almayer looked anxious. He steered badly. Several times the blades of the oars got foul of the bushes on one side or the other, checking the way of the gig. During one of those occurrences, while they were getting clear, one of the calashes said something to the others in a rapid whisper. They looked down at the water. So did the mate.

“Hallo!” he exclaimed. “Eh, Mr. Almayer! Look! The water is running out. See there! We will be caught.”

“Back! back! We must go back!” cried Almayer.

“Perhaps better go on.”

“No; back! back!”

He pulled at the steering line, and ran the nose of the boat into the bank. Time was lost again in getting clear.

“Give way, men! give way!” urged the mate, anxiously.

The men pulled with set lips and dilated nostrils, breathing hard.

“Too late,” said the mate, suddenly. “The oars touch the bottom already. We are done.”

The boat stuck. The men laid in the oars, and sat, panting, with crossed arms.

“Yes, we are caught,” said Almayer, composedly. “That is unlucky!”

The water was falling round the boat. The mate watched the patches of mud coming to the surface. Then in a moment he laughed, and pointing his finger at the creek —

“Look!” he said; “the blamed river is running away from us. Here’s the last drop of water clearing out round that bend.”

Almayer lifted his head. The water was gone, and he looked only at a curved track of mud — of mud soft and black, hiding fever, rottenness, and evil under its level and glazed surface.

“We are in for it till the evening,” he said, with cheerful resignation. “I did my best. Couldn’t help it.”

“We must sleep the day away,” said the mate. “There’s nothing to eat,” he added, gloomily.

Almayer stretched himself in the stern sheets. The Malays curled down between thwarts.

“Well, I’m jiggered!” said the mate, starting up after a long pause. “I was in a devil of a hurry to go and pass the day stuck in the mud. Here’s a holiday for you! Well! well!”

They slept or sat unmoving and patient. As the sun mounted higher the breeze died out, and perfect stillness reigned in the empty creek. A troop of long-nosed monkeys appeared, and crowding on the outer boughs, contemplated the boat and the motionless men in it with grave and sorrowful intensity, disturbed now and then by irrational outbreaks of mad gesticulation. A little bird with sapphire breast balanced a slender twig across a slanting beam of light, and flashed in it to and fro like a gem dropped from the sky. His minute round eye stared at the strange and tranquil creatures in the boat. After a while he sent out a thin twitter that sounded impertinent and funny in the solemn silence of the great wilderness; in the great silence full of struggle and death.

## CHAPTER THREE

On Lingard's departure solitude and silence closed round Willems; the cruel solitude of one abandoned by men; the reproachful silence which surrounds an outcast ejected by his kind, the silence unbroken by the slightest whisper of hope; an immense and impenetrable silence that swallows up without echo the murmur of regret and the cry of revolt. The bitter peace of the abandoned clearings entered his heart, in which nothing could live now but the memory and hate of his past. Not remorse. In the breast of a man possessed by the masterful consciousness of his individuality with its desires and its rights; by the immovable conviction of his own importance, of an importance so indisputable and final that it clothes all his wishes, endeavours, and mistakes with the dignity of unavoidable fate, there could be no place for such a feeling as that of remorse.

The days passed. They passed unnoticed, unseen, in the rapid blaze of glaring sunrises, in the short glow of tender sunsets, in the crushing oppression of high noons without a cloud. How many days? Two — three — or more? He did not know. To him, since Lingard had gone, the time seemed to roll on in profound darkness. All was night within him. All was gone from his sight. He walked about blindly in the deserted courtyards, amongst the empty houses that, perched high on their posts, looked down inimically on him, a white stranger, a man from other lands; seemed to look hostile and mute out of all the memories of native life that lingered between their decaying walls. His wandering feet stumbled against the blackened brands of extinct fires, kicking up a light black dust of cold ashes that flew in drifting clouds and settled to leeward on the fresh grass sprouting from the hard ground, between the shade trees. He moved on, and on; ceaseless, unresting, in widening circles, in zigzagging paths that led to no issue; he struggled on wearily with a set, distressed face behind which, in his tired brain, seethed his thoughts: restless, sombre, tangled, chilling, horrible and venomous, like a nestful of snakes.

From afar, the bleared eyes of the old serving woman, the sombre gaze of Aissa followed the gaunt and tottering figure in its unceasing prowling along the fences, between the houses, amongst the wild luxuriance of riverside thickets. Those three human beings abandoned by all were like shipwrecked people left on an insecure and slippery ledge by the retiring tide of an angry sea — listening to its distant roar, living anguished between the menace of

its return and the hopeless horror of their solitude — in the midst of a tempest of passion, of regret, of disgust, of despair. The breath of the storm had cast two of them there, robbed of everything — even of resignation. The third, the decrepit witness of their struggle and their torture, accepted her own dull conception of facts; of strength and youth gone; of her useless old age; of her last servitude; of being thrown away by her chief, by her nearest, to use up the last and worthless remnant of flickering life between those two incomprehensible and sombre outcasts: a shrivelled, an unmoved, a passive companion of their disaster.

To the river Willems turned his eyes like a captive that looks fixedly at the door of his cell. If there was any hope in the world it would come from the river, by the river. For hours together he would stand in sunlight while the sea breeze sweeping over the lonely reach fluttered his ragged garments; the keen salt breeze that made him shiver now and then under the flood of intense heat. He looked at the brown and sparkling solitude of the flowing water, of the water flowing ceaseless and free in a soft, cool murmur of ripples at his feet. The world seemed to end there. The forests of the other bank appeared unattainable, enigmatical, for ever beyond reach like the stars of heaven — and as indifferent. Above and below, the forests on his side of the river came down to the water in a serried multitude of tall, immense trees towering in a great spread of twisted boughs above the thick undergrowth; great, solid trees, looking sombre, severe, and malevolently stolid, like a giant crowd of pitiless enemies pressing round silently to witness his slow agony. He was alone, small, crushed. He thought of escape — of something to be done. What? A raft! He imagined himself working at it, feverishly, desperately; cutting down trees, fastening the logs together and then drifting down with the current, down to the sea into the straits. There were ships there — ships, help, white men. Men like himself. Good men who would rescue him, take him away, take him far away where there was trade, and houses, and other men that could understand him exactly, appreciate his capabilities; where there was proper food, and money; where there were beds, knives, forks, carriages, brass bands, cool drinks, churches with well-dressed people praying in them. He would pray also. The superior land of refined delights where he could sit on a chair, eat his tiffin off a white tablecloth, nod to fellows — good fellows; he would be popular; always was — where he could be virtuous, correct, do business, draw a salary, smoke cigars, buy things in shops — have boots . . . be happy, free,

become rich. O God! What was wanted? Cut down a few trees. No! One would do. They used to make canoes by burning out a tree trunk, he had heard. Yes! One would do. One tree to cut down . . . He rushed forward, and suddenly stood still as if rooted in the ground. He had a pocket-knife.

And he would throw himself down on the ground by the riverside. He was tired, exhausted; as if that raft had been made, the voyage accomplished, the fortune attained. A glaze came over his staring eyes, over his eyes that gazed hopelessly at the rising river where big logs and uprooted trees drifted in the shine of mid-stream: a long procession of black and ragged specks. He could swim out and drift away on one of these trees. Anything to escape! Anything! Any risk! He could fasten himself up between the dead branches. He was torn by desire, by fear; his heart was wrung by the faltering of his courage. He turned over, face downwards, his head on his arms. He had a terrible vision of shadowless horizons where the blue sky and the blue sea met; or a circular and blazing emptiness where a dead tree and a dead man drifted together, endlessly, up and down, upon the brilliant undulations of the straits. No ships there. Only death. And the river led to it.

He sat up with a profound groan.

Yes, death. Why should he die? No! Better solitude, better hopeless waiting, alone. Alone. No! he was not alone, he saw death looking at him from everywhere; from the bushes, from the clouds — he heard her speaking to him in the murmur of the river, filling the space, touching his heart, his brain with a cold hand. He could see and think of nothing else. He saw it — the sure death — everywhere. He saw it so close that he was always on the point of throwing out his arms to keep it off. It poisoned all he saw, all he did; the miserable food he ate, the muddy water he drank; it gave a frightful aspect to sunrises and sunsets, to the brightness of hot noon, to the cooling shadows of the evenings. He saw the horrible form among the big trees, in the network of creepers in the fantastic outlines of leaves, of the great indented leaves that seemed to be so many enormous hands with big broad palms, with stiff fingers outspread to lay hold of him; hands gently stirring, or hands arrested in a frightful immobility, with a stillness attentive and watching for the opportunity to take him, to enlace him, to strangle him, to hold him till he died; hands that would hold him dead, that would never let go, that would cling to his body for ever till it perished — disappeared in their frantic and tenacious grasp.



And yet the world was full of life. All the things, all the men he knew, existed, moved, breathed; and he saw them in a long perspective, far off, diminished, distinct, desirable, unattainable, precious . . . lost for ever. Round him, ceaselessly, there went on without a sound the mad turmoil of tropical life. After he had died all this would remain! He wanted to clasp, to embrace solid things; he had an immense craving for sensations; for touching, pressing, seeing, handling, holding on, to all these things. All this would remain — remain for years, for ages, for ever. After he had miserably died there, all this would remain, would live, would exist in joyous sunlight, would breathe in the coolness of serene nights. What for, then? He would be dead. He would be stretched upon the warm moisture of the ground, feeling nothing, seeing nothing, knowing nothing; he would lie stiff, passive, rotting slowly; while over him, under him, through him — unopposed, busy, hurried — the endless and minute throngs of insects, little shining monsters of repulsive shapes, with horns, with claws, with pincers, would swarm in streams, in rushes, in eager struggle for his body; would swarm countless, persistent, ferocious and greedy — till there would remain nothing but the white gleam of bleaching bones in the long grass; in the long grass that would shoot its feathery heads between the bare and polished ribs. There would be that only left of him; nobody would miss him; no one would remember him.

Nonsense! It could not be. There were ways out of this. Somebody would turn up. Some human beings would come. He would speak, entreat — use force to extort help from them. He felt strong; he was very strong. He would . . . The discouragement, the conviction of the futility of his hopes would return in an acute sensation of pain in his heart. He would begin again his aimless wanderings. He tramped till he was ready to drop, without being able to calm by bodily fatigue the trouble of his soul. There was no rest, no peace within the cleared grounds of his prison. There was no relief but in the black release of sleep, of sleep without memory and without dreams; in the sleep coming brutal and heavy, like the lead that kills. To forget in annihilating sleep; to tumble headlong, as if stunned, out of daylight into the night of oblivion, was for him the only, the rare respite from this existence which he lacked the courage to endure — or to end.

He lived, he struggled with the inarticulate delirium of his thoughts under the eyes of the silent Aissa. She shared his torment in the poignant wonder, in the acute longing, in the despairing inability to understand the cause of

his anger and of his repulsion; the hate of his looks; the mystery of his silence; the menace of his rare words — of those words in the speech of white people that were thrown at her with rage, with contempt, with the evident desire to hurt her; to hurt her who had given herself, her life — all she had to give — to that white man; to hurt her who had wanted to show him the way to true greatness, who had tried to help him, in her woman's dream of everlasting, enduring, unchangeable affection. From the short contact with the whites in the crashing collapse of her old life, there remained with her the imposing idea of irresistible power and of ruthless strength. She had found a man of their race — and with all their qualities. All whites are alike. But this man's heart was full of anger against his own people, full of anger existing there by the side of his desire of her. And to her it had been an intoxication of hope for great things born in the proud and tender consciousness of her influence. She had heard the passing whisper of wonder and fear in the presence of his hesitation, of his resistance, of his compromises; and yet with a woman's belief in the durable steadfastness of hearts, in the irresistible charm of her own personality, she had pushed him forward, trusting the future, blindly, hopefully; sure to attain by his side the ardent desire of her life, if she could only push him far beyond the possibility of retreat. She did not know, and could not conceive, anything of his — so exalted — ideals. She thought the man a warrior and a chief, ready for battle, violence, and treachery to his own people — for her. What more natural? Was he not a great, strong man? Those two, surrounded each by the impenetrable wall of their aspirations, were hopelessly alone, out of sight, out of earshot of each other; each the centre of dissimilar and distant horizons; standing each on a different earth, under a different sky. She remembered his words, his eyes, his trembling lips, his outstretched hands; she remembered the great, the immeasurable sweetness of her surrender, that beginning of her power which was to last until death. He remembered the quaysides and the warehouses; the excitement of a life in a whirl of silver coins; the glorious uncertainty of a money hunt; his numerous successes, the lost possibilities of wealth and consequent glory. She, a woman, was the victim of her heart, of her woman's belief that there is nothing in the world but love — the everlasting thing. He was the victim of his strange principles, of his continence, of his blind belief in himself, of his solemn veneration for the voice of his boundless ignorance.

In a moment of his idleness, of suspense, of discouragement, she had come — that creature — and by the touch of her hand had destroyed his future, his dignity of a clever and civilized man; had awakened in his breast the infamous thing which had driven him to what he had done, and to end miserably in the wilderness and be forgotten, or else remembered with hate or contempt. He dared not look at her, because now whenever he looked at her his thought seemed to touch crime, like an outstretched hand. She could only look at him — and at nothing else. What else was there? She followed him with a timorous gaze, with a gaze for ever expecting, patient, and entreating. And in her eyes there was the wonder and desolation of an animal that knows only suffering, of the incomplete soul that knows pain but knows not hope; that can find no refuge from the facts of life in the illusory conviction of its dignity, of an exalted destiny beyond; in the heavenly consolation of a belief in the momentous origin of its hate.

For the first three days after Lingard went away he would not even speak to her. She preferred his silence to the sound of hated and incomprehensible words he had been lately addressing to her with a wild violence of manner, passing at once into complete apathy. And during these three days he hardly ever left the river, as if on that muddy bank he had felt himself nearer to his freedom. He would stay late; he would stay till sunset; he would look at the glow of gold passing away amongst sombre clouds in a bright red flush, like a splash of warm blood. It seemed to him ominous and ghastly with a foreboding of violent death that beckoned him from everywhere — even from the sky.

One evening he remained by the riverside long after sunset, regardless of the night mist that had closed round him, had wrapped him up and clung to him like a wet winding-sheet. A slight shiver recalled him to his senses, and he walked up the courtyard towards his house. Aissa rose from before the fire, that glimmered red through its own smoke, which hung thickening under the boughs of the big tree. She approached him from the side as he neared the plankway of the house. He saw her stop to let him begin his ascent. In the darkness her figure was like the shadow of a woman with clasped hands put out beseechingly. He stopped — could not help glancing at her. In all the sombre gracefulness of the straight figure, her limbs, features — all was indistinct and vague but the gleam of her eyes in the faint starlight. He turned his head away and moved on. He could feel her footsteps behind him on the bending planks, but he walked up without

turning his head. He knew what she wanted. She wanted to come in there. He shuddered at the thought of what might happen in the impenetrable darkness of that house if they were to find themselves alone — even for a moment. He stopped in the doorway, and heard her say —

“Let me come in. Why this anger? Why this silence? . . . Let me watch . . . by your side. . . . Have I not watched faithfully? Did harm ever come to you when you closed your eyes while I was by? . . . I have waited . . . I have waited for your smile, for your words . . . I can wait no more. . . . Look at me . . . speak to me. Is there a bad spirit in you? A bad spirit that has eaten up your courage and your love? Let me touch you. Forget all . . . All. Forget the wicked hearts, the angry faces . . . and remember only the day I came to you . . . to you! O my heart! O my life!”

The pleading sadness of her appeal filled the space with the tremor of her low tones, that carried tenderness and tears into the great peace of the sleeping world. All around them the forests, the clearings, the river, covered by the silent veil of night, seemed to wake up and listen to her words in attentive stillness. After the sound of her voice had died out in a stifled sigh they appeared to listen yet; and nothing stirred among the shapeless shadows but the innumerable fireflies that twinkled in changing clusters, in gliding pairs, in wandering and solitary points — like the glimmering drift of scattered star-dust.

Willems turned round slowly, reluctantly, as if compelled by main force. Her face was hidden in her hands, and he looked above her bent head, into the sombre brilliance of the night. It was one of those nights that give the impression of extreme vastness, when the sky seems higher, when the passing puffs of tepid breeze seem to bring with them faint whispers from beyond the stars. The air was full of sweet scent, of the scent charming, penetrating and violent like the impulse of love. He looked into that great dark place odorous with the breath of life, with the mystery of existence, renewed, fecund, indestructible; and he felt afraid of his solitude, of the solitude of his body, of the loneliness of his soul in the presence of this unconscious and ardent struggle, of this lofty indifference, of this merciless and mysterious purpose, perpetuating strife and death through the march of ages. For the second time in his life he felt, in a sudden sense of his significance, the need to send a cry for help into the wilderness, and for the second time he realized the hopelessness of its unconcern. He could shout for help on every side — and nobody would answer. He could stretch out

his hands, he could call for aid, for support, for sympathy, for relief — and nobody would come. Nobody. There was no one there — but that woman.

His heart was moved, softened with pity at his own abandonment. His anger against her, against her who was the cause of all his misfortunes, vanished before his extreme need for some kind of consolation. Perhaps — if he must resign himself to his fate — she might help him to forget. To forget! For a moment, in an access of despair so profound that it seemed like the beginning of peace, he planned the deliberate descent from his pedestal, the throwing away of his superiority, of all his hopes, of old ambitions, of the ungrateful civilization. For a moment, forgetfulness in her arms seemed possible; and lured by that possibility the semblance of renewed desire possessed his breast in a burst of reckless contempt for everything outside himself — in a savage disdain of Earth and of Heaven. He said to himself that he would not repent. The punishment for his only sin was too heavy. There was no mercy under Heaven. He did not want any. He thought, desperately, that if he could find with her again the madness of the past, the strange delirium that had changed him, that had worked his undoing, he would be ready to pay for it with an eternity of perdition. He was intoxicated by the subtle perfumes of the night; he was carried away by the suggestive stir of the warm breeze; he was possessed by the exaltation of the solitude, of the silence, of his memories, in the presence of that figure offering herself in a submissive and patient devotion; coming to him in the name of the past, in the name of those days when he could see nothing, think of nothing, desire nothing — but her embrace.

He took her suddenly in his arms, and she clasped her hands round his neck with a low cry of joy and surprise. He took her in his arms and waited for the transport, for the madness, for the sensations remembered and lost; and while she sobbed gently on his breast he held her and felt cold, sick, tired, exasperated with his failure — and ended by cursing himself. She clung to him trembling with the intensity of her happiness and her love. He heard her whispering — her face hidden on his shoulder — of past sorrow, of coming joy that would last for ever; of her unshaken belief in his love. She had always believed. Always! Even while his face was turned away from her in the dark days while his mind was wandering in his own land, amongst his own people. But it would never wander away from her any more, now it had come back. He would forget the cold faces and the hard

hearts of the cruel people. What was there to remember? Nothing? Was it not so? . . .

He listened hopelessly to the faint murmur. He stood still and rigid, pressing her mechanically to his breast while he thought that there was nothing for him in the world. He was robbed of everything; robbed of his passion, of his liberty, of forgetfulness, of consolation. She, wild with delight, whispered on rapidly, of love, of light, of peace, of long years. . . . He looked drearily above her head down into the deeper gloom of the courtyard. And, all at once, it seemed to him that he was peering into a sombre hollow, into a deep black hole full of decay and of whitened bones; into an immense and inevitable grave full of corruption where sooner or later he must, unavoidably, fall.

In the morning he came out early, and stood for a time in the doorway, listening to the light breathing behind him — in the house. She slept. He had not closed his eyes through all that night. He stood swaying — then leaned against the lintel of the door. He was exhausted, done up; fancied himself hardly alive. He had a disgusted horror of himself that, as he looked at the level sea of mist at his feet, faded quickly into dull indifference. It was like a sudden and final decrepitude of his senses, of his body, of his thoughts. Standing on the high platform, he looked over the expanse of low night fog above which, here and there, stood out the feathery heads of tall bamboo clumps and the round tops of single trees, resembling small islets emerging black and solid from a ghostly and impalpable sea. Upon the faintly luminous background of the eastern sky, the sombre line of the great forests bounded that smooth sea of white vapours with an appearance of a fantastic and unattainable shore.

He looked without seeing anything — thinking of himself. Before his eyes the light of the rising sun burst above the forest with the suddenness of an explosion. He saw nothing. Then, after a time, he murmured with conviction — speaking half aloud to himself in the shock of the penetrating thought:

“I am a lost man.”

He shook his hand above his head in a gesture careless and tragic, then walked down into the mist that closed above him in shining undulations under the first breath of the morning breeze.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Willems moved languidly towards the river, then retraced his steps to the tree and let himself fall on the seat under its shade. On the other side of the immense trunk he could hear the old woman moving about, sighing loudly, muttering to herself, snapping dry sticks, blowing up the fire. After a while a whiff of smoke drifted round to where he sat. It made him feel hungry, and that feeling was like a new indignity added to an intolerable load of humiliations. He felt inclined to cry. He felt very weak. He held up his arm before his eyes and watched for a little while the trembling of the lean limb. Skin and bone, by God! How thin he was! . . . He had suffered from fever a good deal, and now he thought with tearful dismay that Lingard, although he had sent him food — and what food, great Lord: a little rice and dried fish; quite unfit for a white man — had not sent him any medicine. Did the old savage think that he was like the wild beasts that are never ill? He wanted quinine.

He leaned the back of his head against the tree and closed his eyes. He thought feebly that if he could get hold of Lingard he would like to flay him alive; but it was only a blurred, a short and a passing thought. His imagination, exhausted by the repeated delineations of his own fate, had not enough strength left to grip the idea of revenge. He was not indignant and rebellious. He was cowed. He was cowed by the immense cataclysm of his disaster. Like most men, he had carried solemnly within his breast the whole universe, and the approaching end of all things in the destruction of his own personality filled him with paralyzing awe. Everything was toppling over. He blinked his eyes quickly, and it seemed to him that the very sunshine of the morning disclosed in its brightness a suggestion of some hidden and sinister meaning. In his unreasoning fear he tried to hide within himself. He drew his feet up, his head sank between his shoulders, his arms hugged his sides. Under the high and enormous tree soaring superbly out of the mist in a vigorous spread of lofty boughs, with a restless and eager flutter of its innumerable leaves in the clear sunshine, he remained motionless, huddled up on his seat: terrified and still.

Willems' gaze roamed over the ground, and then he watched with idiotic fixity half a dozen black ants entering courageously a tuft of long grass which, to them, must have appeared a dark and a dangerous jungle. Suddenly he thought: There must be something dead in there. Some dead

insect. Death everywhere! He closed his eyes again in an access of trembling pain. Death everywhere — wherever one looks. He did not want to see the ants. He did not want to see anybody or anything. He sat in the darkness of his own making, reflecting bitterly that there was no peace for him. He heard voices now. . . . Illusion! Misery! Torment! Who would come? Who would speak to him? What business had he to hear voices? . . . yet he heard them faintly, from the river. Faintly, as if shouted far off over there, came the words “We come back soon.” . . . Delirium and mockery! Who would come back? Nobody ever comes back! Fever comes back. He had it on him this morning. That was it. . . . He heard unexpectedly the old woman muttering something near by. She had come round to his side of the tree. He opened his eyes and saw her bent back before him. She stood, with her hand shading her eyes, looking towards the landing-place. Then she glided away. She had seen — and now she was going back to her cooking; a woman incurious; expecting nothing; without fear and without hope.

She had gone back behind the tree, and now Willems could see a human figure on the path to the landing-place. It appeared to him to be a woman, in a red gown, holding some heavy bundle in her arms; it was an apparition unexpected, familiar and odd. He cursed through his teeth . . . It had wanted only this! See things like that in broad daylight! He was very bad — very bad. . . . He was horribly scared at this awful symptom of the desperate state of his health.

This scare lasted for the space of a flash of lightning, and in the next moment it was revealed to him that the woman was real; that she was coming towards him; that she was his wife! He put his feet down to the ground quickly, but made no other movement. His eyes opened wide. He was so amazed that for a time he absolutely forgot his own existence. The only idea in his head was: Why on earth did she come here?

Joanna was coming up the courtyard with eager, hurried steps. She carried in her arms the child, wrapped up in one of Almayer’s white blankets that she had snatched off the bed at the last moment, before leaving the house. She seemed to be dazed by the sun in her eyes; bewildered by her strange surroundings. She moved on, looking quickly right and left in impatient expectation of seeing her husband at any moment. Then, approaching the tree, she perceived suddenly a kind of a dried-up, yellow corpse, sitting very stiff on a bench in the shade and looking at her with big eyes that were alive. That was her husband.



She stopped dead short. They stared at one another in profound stillness, with astounded eyes, with eyes maddened by the memories of things far off that seemed lost in the lapse of time. Their looks crossed, passed each other, and appeared to dart at them through fantastic distances, to come straight from the incredible.

Looking at him steadily she came nearer, and deposited the blanket with the child in it on the bench. Little Louis, after howling with terror in the darkness of the river most of the night, now slept soundly and did not wake. Willems' eyes followed his wife, his head turning slowly after her. He accepted her presence there with a tired acquiescence in its fabulous improbability. Anything might happen. What did she come for? She was part of the general scheme of his misfortune. He half expected that she would rush at him, pull his hair, and scratch his face. Why not? Anything might happen! In an exaggerated sense of his great bodily weakness he felt somewhat apprehensive of possible assault. At any rate, she would scream at him. He knew her of old. She could screech. He had thought that he was rid of her for ever. She came now probably to see the end. . . .

Suddenly she turned, and embracing him slid gently to the ground.

This startled him. With her forehead on his knees she sobbed noiselessly. He looked down dismally at the top of her head. What was she up to? He had not the strength to move — to get away. He heard her whispering something, and bent over to listen. He caught the word "Forgive."

That was what she came for! All that way. Women are queer. Forgive. Not he! . . . All at once this thought darted through his brain: How did she come? In a boat. Boat! boat!

He shouted "Boat!" and jumped up, knocking her over. Before she had time to pick herself up he pounced upon her and was dragging her up by the shoulders. No sooner had she regained her feet than she clasped him tightly round the neck, covering his face, his eyes, his mouth, his nose with desperate kisses. He dodged his head about, shaking her arms, trying to keep her off, to speak, to ask her. . . . She came in a boat, boat, boat! . . . They struggled and swung round, tramping in a semicircle. He blurted out, "Leave off. Listen," while he tore at her hands. This meeting of lawful love and sincere joy resembled fight. Louis Willems slept peacefully under his blanket.

At last Willems managed to free himself, and held her off, pressing her arms down. He looked at her. He had half a suspicion that he was dreaming.

Her lips trembled; her eyes wandered unsteadily, always coming back to his face. He saw her the same as ever, in his presence. She appeared startled, tremulous, ready to cry. She did not inspire him with confidence. He shouted —

“How did you come?”

She answered in hurried words, looking at him intently —

“In a big canoe with three men. I know everything. Lingard’s away. I come to save you. I know. . . . Almayer told me.”

“Canoe! — Almayer — Lies. Told you — You!” stammered Willems in a distracted manner. “Why you? — Told what?”

Words failed him. He stared at his wife, thinking with fear that she — stupid woman — had been made a tool in some plan of treachery . . . in some deadly plot.

She began to cry —

“Don’t look at me like that, Peter. What have I done? I come to beg — to beg — forgiveness. . . . Save — Lingard — danger.”

He trembled with impatience, with hope, with fear. She looked at him and sobbed out in a fresh outburst of grief —

“Oh! Peter. What’s the matter? — Are you ill? . . . Oh! you look so ill . . .”

He shook her violently into a terrified and wondering silence.

“How dare you! — I am well — perfectly well. . . . Where’s that boat? Will you tell me where that boat is — at last? The boat, I say . . . You! . . .”

“You hurt me,” she moaned.

He let her go, and, mastering her terror, she stood quivering and looking at him with strange intensity. Then she made a movement forward, but he lifted his finger, and she restrained herself with a long sigh. He calmed down suddenly and surveyed her with cold criticism, with the same appearance as when, in the old days, he used to find fault with the household expenses. She found a kind of fearful delight in this abrupt return into the past, into her old subjection.

He stood outwardly collected now, and listened to her disconnected story. Her words seemed to fall round him with the distracting clatter of stunning hail. He caught the meaning here and there, and straightway would lose himself in a tremendous effort to shape out some intelligible theory of events. There was a boat. A boat. A big boat that could take him to sea if necessary. That much was clear. She brought it. Why did Almayer lie to her

so? Was it a plan to decoy him into some ambush? Better that than hopeless solitude. She had money. The men were ready to go anywhere . . . she said.

He interrupted her —

“Where are they now?”

“They are coming directly,” she answered, tearfully. “Directly. There are some fishing stakes near here — they said. They are coming directly.”

Again she was talking and sobbing together. She wanted to be forgiven. Forgiven? What for? Ah! the scene in Macassar. As if he had time to think of that! What did he care what she had done months ago? He seemed to struggle in the toils of complicated dreams where everything was impossible, yet a matter of course, where the past took the aspects of the future and the present lay heavy on his heart — seemed to take him by the throat like the hand of an enemy. And while she begged, entreated, kissed his hands, wept on his shoulder, adjured him in the name of God, to forgive, to forget, to speak the word for which she longed, to look at his boy, to believe in her sorrow and in her devotion — his eyes, in the fascinated immobility of shining pupils, looked far away, far beyond her, beyond the river, beyond this land, through days, weeks, months; looked into liberty, into the future, into his triumph . . . into the great possibility of a startling revenge.

He felt a sudden desire to dance and shout. He shouted —

“After all, we shall meet again, Captain Lingard.”

“Oh, no! No!” she cried, joining her hands.

He looked at her with surprise. He had forgotten she was there till the break of her cry in the monotonous tones of her prayer recalled him into that courtyard from the glorious turmoil of his dreams. It was very strange to see her there — near him. He felt almost affectionate towards her. After all, she came just in time. Then he thought: That other one. I must get away without a scene. Who knows; she may be dangerous! . . . And all at once he felt he hated Aissa with an immense hatred that seemed to choke him. He said to his wife —

“Wait a moment.”

She, obedient, seemed to gulp down some words which wanted to come out. He muttered: “Stay here,” and disappeared round the tree.

The water in the iron pan on the cooking fire boiled furiously, belching out volumes of white steam that mixed with the thin black thread of smoke.

The old woman appeared to him through this as if in a fog, squatting on her heels, impassive and weird.

Willems came up near and asked, "Where is she?"

The woman did not even lift her head, but answered at once, readily, as though she had expected the question for a long time.

"While you were asleep under the tree, before the strange canoe came, she went out of the house. I saw her look at you and pass on with a great light in her eyes. A great light. And she went towards the place where our master Lakamba had his fruit trees. When we were many here. Many, many. Men with arms by their side. Many . . . men. And talk . . . and songs . . ."

She went on like that, raving gently to herself for a long time after Willems had left her.

Willems went back to his wife. He came up close to her and found he had nothing to say. Now all his faculties were concentrated upon his wish to avoid Aissa. She might stay all the morning in that grove. Why did those rascally boatmen go? He had a physical repugnance to set eyes on her. And somewhere, at the very bottom of his heart, there was a fear of her. Why? What could she do? Nothing on earth could stop him now. He felt strong, reckless, pitiless, and superior to everything. He wanted to preserve before his wife the lofty purity of his character. He thought: She does not know. Almayer held his tongue about Aissa. But if she finds out, I am lost. If it hadn't been for the boy I would . . . free of both of them. . . . The idea darted through his head. Not he! Married. . . . Swore solemnly. No . . . sacred tie. . . . Looking on his wife, he felt for the first time in his life something approaching remorse. Remorse, arising from his conception of the awful nature of an oath before the altar. . . . She mustn't find out. . . . Oh, for that boat! He must run in and get his revolver. Couldn't think of trusting himself unarmed with those Bajow fellows. Get it now while she is away. Oh, for that boat! . . . He dared not go to the river and hail. He thought: She might hear me. . . . I'll go and get . . . cartridges . . . then will be all ready . . . nothing else. No.

And while he stood meditating profoundly before he could make up his mind to run to the house, Joanna pleaded, holding to his arm — pleaded despairingly, broken-hearted, hopeless whenever she glanced up at his face, which to her seemed to wear the aspect of unforgiving rectitude, of virtuous severity, of merciless justice. And she pleaded humbly — abashed before him, before the unmoved appearance of the man she had wronged in

defiance of human and divine laws. He heard not a word of what she said till she raised her voice in a final appeal —

“. . . Don't you see I loved you always? They told me horrible things about you. . . . My own mother! They told me — you have been — you have been unfaithful to me, and I . . .”

“It's a damned lie!” shouted Willems, waking up for a moment into righteous indignation.

“I know! I know — Be generous. — Think of my misery since you went away — Oh! I could have torn my tongue out. . . . I will never believe anybody — Look at the boy — Be merciful — I could never rest till I found you. . . . Say — a word — one word. . .”

“What the devil do you want?” exclaimed Willems, looking towards the river. “Where's that damned boat? Why did you let them go away? You stupid!”

“Oh, Peter! — I know that in your heart you have forgiven me — You are so generous — I want to hear you say so. . . . Tell me — do you?”

“Yes! yes!” said Willems, impatiently. “I forgive you. Don't be a fool.”

“Don't go away. Don't leave me alone here. Where is the danger? I am so frightened. . . . Are you alone here? Sure? . . . Let us go away!”

“That's sense,” said Willems, still looking anxiously towards the river.

She sobbed gently, leaning on his arm.

“Let me go,” he said.

He had seen above the steep bank the heads of three men glide along smoothly. Then, where the shore shelved down to the landing-place, appeared a big canoe which came slowly to land.

“Here they are,” he went on, briskly. “I must get my revolver.”

He made a few hurried paces towards the house, but seemed to catch sight of something, turned short round and came back to his wife. She stared at him, alarmed by the sudden change in his face. He appeared much discomposed. He stammered a little as he began to speak.

“Take the child. Walk down to the boat and tell them to drop it out of sight, quick, behind the bushes. Do you hear? Quick! I will come to you there directly. Hurry up!”

“Peter! What is it? I won't leave you. There is some danger in this horrible place.”

“Will you do what I tell you?” said Willems, in an irritable whisper.

“No! no! no! I won’t leave you. I will not lose you again. Tell me, what is it?”

From beyond the house came a faint voice singing. Willems shook his wife by the shoulder.

“Do what I tell you! Run at once!”

She gripped his arm and clung to him desperately. He looked up to heaven as if taking it to witness of that woman’s infernal folly.

The song grew louder, then ceased suddenly, and Aissa appeared in sight, walking slowly, her hands full of flowers.

She had turned the corner of the house, coming out into the full sunshine, and the light seemed to leap upon her in a stream brilliant, tender, and caressing, as if attracted by the radiant happiness of her face. She had dressed herself for a festive day, for the memorable day of his return to her, of his return to an affection that would last for ever. The rays of the morning sun were caught by the oval clasp of the embroidered belt that held the silk sarong round her waist. The dazzling white stuff of her body jacket was crossed by a bar of yellow and silver of her scarf, and in the black hair twisted high on her small head shone the round balls of gold pins amongst crimson blossoms and white star-shaped flowers, with which she had crowned herself to charm his eyes; those eyes that were henceforth to see nothing in the world but her own resplendent image. And she moved slowly, bending her face over the mass of pure white champakas and jasmine pressed to her breast, in a dreamy intoxication of sweet scents and of sweeter hopes.

She did not seem to see anything, stopped for a moment at the foot of the plankway leading to the house, then, leaving her high-heeled wooden sandals there, ascended the planks in a light run; straight, graceful, flexible, and noiseless, as if she had soared up to the door on invisible wings. Willems pushed his wife roughly behind the tree, and made up his mind quickly for a rush to the house, to grab his revolver and . . . Thoughts, doubts, expedients seemed to boil in his brain. He had a flashing vision of delivering a stunning blow, of tying up that flower bedecked woman in the dark house — a vision of things done swiftly with enraged haste — to save his prestige, his superiority — something of immense importance. . . . He had not made two steps when Joanna bounded after him, caught the back of his ragged jacket, tore out a big piece, and instantly hooked herself with both hands to the collar, nearly dragging him down on his back. Although

taken by surprise, he managed to keep his feet. From behind she panted into his ear —

“That woman! Who’s that woman? Ah! that’s what those boatmen were talking about. I heard them . . . heard them . . . heard . . . in the night. They spoke about some woman. I dared not understand. I would not ask . . . listen . . . believe! How could I? Then it’s true. No. Say no. . . . Who’s that woman?”

He swayed, tugging forward. She jerked at him till the button gave way, and then he slipped half out of his jacket and, turning round, remained strangely motionless. His heart seemed to beat in his throat. He choked — tried to speak — could not find any words. He thought with fury: I will kill both of them.

For a second nothing moved about the courtyard in the great vivid clearness of the day. Only down by the landing-place a waringan-tree, all in a blaze of clustering red berries, seemed alive with the stir of little birds that filled with the feverish flutter of their feathers the tangle of overloaded branches. Suddenly the variegated flock rose spinning in a soft whirr and dispersed, slashing the sunlit haze with the sharp outlines of stiffened wings. Mahmat and one of his brothers appeared coming up from the landing-place, their lances in their hands, to look for their passengers.

Aissa coming now empty-handed out of the house, caught sight of the two armed men. In her surprise she emitted a faint cry, vanished back and in a flash reappeared in the doorway with Willems’ revolver in her hand. To her the presence of any man there could only have an ominous meaning. There was nothing in the outer world but enemies. She and the man she loved were alone, with nothing round them but menacing dangers. She did not mind that, for if death came, no matter from what hand, they would die together.

Her resolute eyes took in the courtyard in a circular glance. She noticed that the two strangers had ceased to advance and now were standing close together leaning on the polished shafts of their weapons. The next moment she saw Willems, with his back towards her, apparently struggling under the tree with some one. She saw nothing distinctly, and, unhesitating, flew down the plankway calling out: “I come!”

He heard her cry, and with an unexpected rush drove his wife backwards to the seat. She fell on it; he jerked himself altogether out of his jacket, and

she covered her face with the soiled rags. He put his lips close to her, asking —

“For the last time, will you take the child and go?”

She groaned behind the unclean ruins of his upper garment. She mumbled something. He bent lower to hear. She was saying —

“I won’t. Order that woman away. I can’t look at her!”

“You fool!”

He seemed to spit the words at her, then, making up his mind, spun round to face Aissa. She was coming towards them slowly now, with a look of unbounded amazement on her face. Then she stopped and stared at him — who stood there, stripped to the waist, bare-headed and sombre.

Some way off, Mahmat and his brother exchanged rapid words in calm undertones. . . . This was the strong daughter of the holy man who had died. The white man is very tall. There would be three women and the child to take in the boat, besides that white man who had the money . . . . The brother went away back to the boat, and Mahmat remained looking on. He stood like a sentinel, the leaf-shaped blade of his lance glinting above his head.

Willems spoke suddenly.

“Give me this,” he said, stretching his hand towards the revolver.

Aissa stepped back. Her lips trembled. She said very low: “Your people?”

He nodded slightly. She shook her head thoughtfully, and a few delicate petals of the flowers dying in her hair fell like big drops of crimson and white at her feet.

“Did you know?” she whispered.

“No!” said Willems. “They sent for me.”

“Tell them to depart. They are accursed. What is there between them and you — and you who carry my life in your heart!”

Willems said nothing. He stood before her looking down on the ground and repeating to himself: I must get that revolver away from her, at once, at once. I can’t think of trusting myself with those men without firearms. I must have it.

She asked, after gazing in silence at Joanna, who was sobbing gently —

“Who is she?”

“My wife,” answered Willems, without looking up. “My wife according to our white law, which comes from God!”

“Your law! Your God!” murmured Aissa, contemptuously.



“Give me this revolver,” said Willems, in a peremptory tone. He felt an unwillingness to close with her, to get it by force.

She took no notice and went on —

“Your law . . . or your lies? What am I to believe? I came — I ran to defend you when I saw the strange men. You lied to me with your lips, with your eyes. You crooked heart! . . . Ah!” she added, after an abrupt pause. “She is the first! Am I then to be a slave?”

“You may be what you like,” said Willems, brutally. “I am going.”

Her gaze was fastened on the blanket under which she had detected a slight movement. She made a long stride towards it. Willems turned half round. His legs seemed to him to be made of lead. He felt faint and so weak that, for a moment, the fear of dying there where he stood, before he could escape from sin and disaster, passed through his mind in a wave of despair.

She lifted up one corner of the blanket, and when she saw the sleeping child a sudden quick shudder shook her as though she had seen something inexpressibly horrible. She looked at Louis Willems with eyes fixed in an unbelieving and terrified stare. Then her fingers opened slowly, and a shadow seemed to settle on her face as if something obscure and fatal had come between her and the sunshine. She stood looking down, absorbed, as though she had watched at the bottom of a gloomy abyss the mournful procession of her thoughts.

Willems did not move. All his faculties were concentrated upon the idea of his release. And it was only then that the assurance of it came to him with such force that he seemed to hear a loud voice shouting in the heavens that all was over, that in another five, ten minutes, he would step into another existence; that all this, the woman, the madness, the sin, the regrets, all would go, rush into the past, disappear, become as dust, as smoke, as drifting clouds — as nothing! Yes! All would vanish in the unappeasable past which would swallow up all — even the very memory of his temptation and of his downfall. Nothing mattered. He cared for nothing. He had forgotten Aissa, his wife, Lingard, Hudig — everybody, in the rapid vision of his hopeful future.

After a while he heard Aissa saying —

“A child! A child! What have I done to be made to devour this sorrow and this grief? And while your man-child and the mother lived you told me there was nothing for you to remember in the land from which you came! And I thought you could be mine. I thought that I would . . .”

Her voice ceased in a broken murmur, and with it, in her heart, seemed to die the greater and most precious hope of her new life.

She had hoped that in the future the frail arms of a child would bind their two lives together in a bond which nothing on earth could break, a bond of affection, of gratitude, of tender respect. She the first — the only one! But in the instant she saw the son of that other woman she felt herself removed into the cold, the darkness, the silence of a solitude impenetrable and immense — very far from him, beyond the possibility of any hope, into an infinity of wrongs without any redress.

She strode nearer to Joanna. She felt towards that woman anger, envy, jealousy. Before her she felt humiliated and enraged. She seized the hanging sleeve of the jacket in which Joanna was hiding her face and tore it out of her hands, exclaiming loudly —

“Let me see the face of her before whom I am only a servant and a slave. Ya-wa! I see you!”

Her unexpected shout seemed to fill the sunlit space of cleared grounds, rise high and run on far into the land over the unstirring tree-tops of the forests. She stood in sudden stillness, looking at Joanna with surprised contempt.

“A Sirani woman!” she said, slowly, in a tone of wonder.

Joanna rushed at Willems — clung to him, shrieking: “Defend me, Peter! Defend me from that woman!”

“Be quiet. There is no danger,” muttered Willems, thickly.

Aissa looked at them with scorn. “God is great! I sit in the dust at your feet,” she exclaimed jeeringly, joining her hands above her head in a gesture of mock humility. “Before you I am as nothing.” She turned to Willems fiercely, opening her arms wide. “What have you made of me?” she cried, “you lying child of an accursed mother! What have you made of me? The slave of a slave. Don’t speak! Your words are worse than the poison of snakes. A Sirani woman. A woman of a people despised by all.”

She pointed her finger at Joanna, stepped back, and began to laugh.

“Make her stop, Peter!” screamed Joanna. “That heathen woman. Heathen! Heathen! Beat her, Peter.”

Willems caught sight of the revolver which Aissa had laid on the seat near the child. He spoke in Dutch to his wife, without moving his head.

“Snatch the boy — and my revolver there. See. Run to the boat. I will keep her back. Now’s the time.”

Aissa came nearer. She stared at Joanna, while between the short gusts of broken laughter she raved, fumbling distractedly at the buckle of her belt.

“To her! To her — the mother of him who will speak of your wisdom, of your courage. All to her. I have nothing. Nothing. Take, take.”

She tore the belt off and threw it at Joanna’s feet. She flung down with haste the armlets, the gold pins, the flowers; and the long hair, released, fell scattered over her shoulders, framing in its blackness the wild exaltation of her face.

“Drive her off, Peter. Drive off the heathen savage,” persisted Joanna. She seemed to have lost her head altogether. She stamped, clinging to Willems’ arm with both her hands.

“Look,” cried Aissa. “Look at the mother of your son! She is afraid. Why does she not go from before my face? Look at her. She is ugly.”

Joanna seemed to understand the scornful tone of the words. As Aissa stepped back again nearer to the tree she let go her husband’s arm, rushed at her madly, slapped her face, then, swerving round, darted at the child who, unnoticed, had been wailing for some time, and, snatching him up, flew down to the waterside, sending shriek after shriek in an access of insane terror.

Willems made for the revolver. Aissa passed swiftly, giving him an unexpected push that sent him staggering away from the tree. She caught up the weapon, put it behind her back, and cried —

“You shall not have it. Go after her. Go to meet danger. . . . Go to meet death. . . . Go unarmed. . . . Go with empty hands and sweet words . . . as you came to me. . . . Go helpless and lie to the forests, to the sea . . . to the death that waits for you. . . .”

She ceased as if strangled. She saw in the horror of the passing seconds the half-naked, wild-looking man before her; she heard the faint shrillness of Joanna’s insane shrieks for help somewhere down by the riverside. The sunlight streamed on her, on him, on the mute land, on the murmuring river — the gentle brilliance of a serene morning that, to her, seemed traversed by ghastly flashes of uncertain darkness. Hate filled the world, filled the space between them — the hate of race, the hate of hopeless diversity, the hate of blood; the hate against the man born in the land of lies and of evil from which nothing but misfortune comes to those who are not white. And as she stood, maddened, she heard a whisper near her, the whisper of the dead Omar’s voice saying in her ear: “Kill! Kill!”

She cried, seeing him move —

“Do not come near me . . . or you die now! Go while I remember yet . . . remember. . . .”

Willems pulled himself together for a struggle. He dared not go unarmed. He made a long stride, and saw her raise the revolver. He noticed that she had not cocked it, and said to himself that, even if she did fire, she would surely miss. Go too high; it was a stiff trigger. He made a step nearer — saw the long barrel moving unsteadily at the end of her extended arm. He thought: This is my time . . . He bent his knees slightly, throwing his body forward, and took off with a long bound for a tearing rush.

He saw a burst of red flame before his eyes, and was deafened by a report that seemed to him louder than a clap of thunder. Something stopped him short, and he stood aspiring in his nostrils the acrid smell of the blue smoke that drifted from before his eyes like an immense cloud. . . . Missed, by Heaven! . . . Thought so! . . . And he saw her very far off, throwing her arms up, while the revolver, very small, lay on the ground between them. . . . Missed! . . . He would go and pick it up now. Never before did he understand, as in that second, the joy, the triumphant delight of sunshine and of life. His mouth was full of something salt and warm. He tried to cough; spat out. . . . Who shrieks: In the name of God, he dies! — he dies! — Who dies? — Must pick up — Night! — What? . . . Night already. . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

Many years afterwards Almayer was telling the story of the great revolution in Sambir to a chance visitor from Europe. He was a Roumanian, half naturalist, half orchid-hunter for commercial purposes, who used to declare to everybody, in the first five minutes of acquaintance, his intention of writing a scientific book about tropical countries. On his way to the interior he had quartered himself upon Almayer. He was a man of some education, but he drank his gin neat, or only, at most, would squeeze the juice of half a small lime into the raw spirit. He said it was good for his health, and, with that medicine before him, he would describe to the surprised Almayer the wonders of European capitals; while Almayer, in exchange, bored him by expounding, with gusto, his unfavourable opinions of Sambir's social and political life. They talked far into the night, across the deal table on the verandah, while, between them, clear-winged, small,

and flabby insects, dissatisfied with moonlight, streamed in and perished in thousands round the smoky light of the evil-smelling lamp.

Almayer, his face flushed, was saying —

“Of course, I did not see that. I told you I was stuck in the creek on account of father’s — Captain Lingard’s — susceptible temper. I am sure I did it all for the best in trying to facilitate the fellow’s escape; but Captain Lingard was that kind of man — you know — one couldn’t argue with. Just before sunset the water was high enough, and we got out of the creek. We got to Lakamba’s clearing about dark. All very quiet; I thought they were gone, of course, and felt very glad. We walked up the courtyard — saw a big heap of something lying in the middle. Out of that she rose and rushed at us. By God. . . . You know those stories of faithful dogs watching their masters’ corpses . . . don’t let anybody approach . . . got to beat them off — and all that. . . . Well, ‘pon my word we had to beat her off. Had to! She was like a fury. Wouldn’t let us touch him. Dead — of course. Should think so. Shot through the lung, on the left side, rather high up, and at pretty close quarters too, for the two holes were small. Bullet came out through the shoulder-blade. After we had overpowered her — you can’t imagine how strong that woman was; it took three of us — we got the body into the boat and shoved off. We thought she had fainted then, but she got up and rushed into the water after us. Well, I let her clamber in. What could I do? The river’s full of alligators. I will never forget that pull up-stream in the night as long as I live. She sat in the bottom of the boat, holding his head in her lap, and now and again wiping his face with her hair. There was a lot of blood dried about his mouth and chin. And for all the six hours of that journey she kept on whispering tenderly to that corpse! . . . I had the mate of the schooner with me. The man said afterwards that he wouldn’t go through it again — not for a handful of diamonds. And I believed him — I did. It makes me shiver. Do you think he heard? No! I mean somebody — something — heard? . . .”

“I am a materialist,” declared the man of science, tilting the bottle shakily over the emptied glass.

Almayer shook his head and went on —

“Nobody saw how it really happened but that man Mahmat. He always said that he was no further off from them than two lengths of his lance. It appears the two women rowed each other while that Willems stood between them. Then Mahmat says that when Joanna struck her and ran off, the other

two seemed to become suddenly mad together. They rushed here and there. Mahmat says — those were his very words: ‘I saw her standing holding the pistol that fires many times and pointing it all over the campong. I was afraid — lest she might shoot me, and jumped on one side. Then I saw the white man coming at her swiftly. He came like our master the tiger when he rushes out of the jungle at the spears held by men. She did not take aim. The barrel of her weapon went like this — from side to side, but in her eyes I could see suddenly a great fear. There was only one shot. She shrieked while the white man stood blinking his eyes and very straight, till you could count slowly one, two, three; then he coughed and fell on his face. The daughter of Omar shrieked without drawing breath, till he fell. I went away then and left silence behind me. These things did not concern me, and in my boat there was that other woman who had promised me money. We left directly, paying no attention to her cries. We are only poor men — and had but a small reward for our trouble!’ That’s what Mahmat said. Never varied. You ask him yourself. He’s the man you hired the boats from, for your journey up the river.”

“The most rapacious thief I ever met!” exclaimed the traveller, thickly.

“Ah! He is a respectable man. His two brothers got themselves speared — served them right. They went in for robbing Dyak graves. Gold ornaments in them you know. Serve them right. But he kept respectable and got on. Aye! Everybody got on — but I. And all through that scoundrel who brought the Arabs here.”

“De mortuis nil ni . . . num,” muttered Almayer’s guest.

“I wish you would speak English instead of jabbering in your own language, which no one can understand,” said Almayer, sulkily.

“Don’t be angry,” hiccoughed the other. “It’s Latin, and it’s wisdom. It means: Don’t waste your breath in abusing shadows. No offence there. I like you. You have a quarrel with Providence — so have I. I was meant to be a professor, while — look.”

His head nodded. He sat grasping the glass. Almayer walked up and down, then stopped suddenly.

“Yes, they all got on but I. Why? I am better than any of them. Lakamba calls himself a Sultan, and when I go to see him on business sends that one-eyed fiend of his — Babalatchi — to tell me that the ruler is asleep; and shall sleep for a long time. And that Babalatchi! He is the Shahbandar of the State — if you please. Oh Lord! Shahbandar! The pig! A vagabond I

wouldn't let come up these steps when he first came here. . . . Look at Abdulla now. He lives here because — he says — here he is away from white men. But he has hundreds of thousands. Has a house in Penang. Ships. What did he not have when he stole my trade from me! He knocked everything here into a cocked hat, drove father to gold-hunting — then to Europe, where he disappeared. Fancy a man like Captain Lingard disappearing as though he had been a common coolie. Friends of mine wrote to London asking about him. Nobody ever heard of him there! Fancy! Never heard of Captain Lingard!"

The learned gatherer of orchids lifted his head.

"He was a sen — sentimen — tal old buc — buccaneer," he stammered out, "I like him. I'm sent — tal myself."

He winked slowly at Almayer, who laughed.

"Yes! I told you about that gravestone. Yes! Another hundred and twenty dollars thrown away. Wish I had them now. He would do it. And the inscription. Ha! ha! ha! 'Peter Willems, Delivered by the Mercy of God from his Enemy.' What enemy — unless Captain Lingard himself? And then it has no sense. He was a great man — father was — but strange in many ways. . . . You haven't seen the grave? On the top of that hill, there, on the other side of the river. I must show you. We will go there."

"Not I!" said the other. "No interest — in the sun — too tiring. . . . Unless you carry me there."

As a matter of fact he was carried there a few months afterwards, and his was the second white man's grave in Sambir; but at present he was alive if rather drunk. He asked abruptly —

"And the woman?"

"Oh! Lingard, of course, kept her and her ugly brat in Macassar. Sinful waste of money — that! Devil only knows what became of them since father went home. I had my daughter to look after. I shall give you a word to Mrs. Vinck in Singapore when you go back. You shall see my Nina there. Lucky man. She is beautiful, and I hear so accomplished, so . . ."

"I have heard already twenty . . . a hundred times about your daughter. What ab — about — that — that other one, Ai — ssa?"

"She! Oh! we kept her here. She was mad for a long time in a quiet sort of way. Father thought a lot of her. He gave her a house to live in, in my campong. She wandered about, speaking to nobody unless she caught sight of Abdulla, when she would have a fit of fury, and shriek and curse like

anything. Very often she would disappear — and then we all had to turn out and hunt for her, because father would worry till she was brought back. Found her in all kinds of places. Once in the abandoned campong of Lakamba. Sometimes simply wandering in the bush. She had one favourite spot we always made for at first. It was ten to one on finding her there — a kind of a grassy glade on the banks of a small brook. Why she preferred that place, I can't imagine! And such a job to get her away from there. Had to drag her away by main force. Then, as the time passed, she became quieter and more settled, like. Still, all my people feared her greatly. It was my Nina that tamed her. You see the child was naturally fearless and used to have her own way, so she would go to her and pull at her sarong, and order her about, as she did everybody. Finally she, I verily believe, came to love the child. Nothing could resist that little one — you know. She made a capital nurse. Once when the little devil ran away from me and fell into the river off the end of the jetty, she jumped in and pulled her out in no time. I very nearly died of fright. Now of course she lives with my serving girls, but does what she likes. As long as I have a handful of rice or a piece of cotton in the store she sha'n't want for anything. You have seen her. She brought in the dinner with Ali."

"What! That doubled-up crone?"

"Ah!" said Almayer. "They age quickly here. And long foggy nights spent in the bush will soon break the strongest backs — as you will find out yourself soon."

"Dis . . . disgusting," growled the traveller.

He dozed off. Almayer stood by the balustrade looking out at the bluish sheen of the moonlit night. The forests, unchanged and sombre, seemed to hang over the water, listening to the unceasing whisper of the great river; and above their dark wall the hill on which Lingard had buried the body of his late prisoner rose in a black, rounded mass, upon the silver paleness of the sky. Almayer looked for a long time at the clean-cut outline of the summit, as if trying to make out through darkness and distance the shape of that expensive tombstone. When he turned round at last he saw his guest sleeping, his arms on the table, his head on his arms.

"Now, look here!" he shouted, slapping the table with the palm of his hand.

The naturalist woke up, and sat all in a heap, staring owlishly.



“Here!” went on Almayer, speaking very loud and thumping the table, “I want to know. You, who say you have read all the books, just tell me . . . why such infernal things are ever allowed. Here I am! Done harm to nobody, lived an honest life . . . and a scoundrel like that is born in Rotterdam or some such place at the other end of the world somewhere, travels out here, robs his employer, runs away from his wife, and ruins me and my Nina — he ruined me, I tell you — and gets himself shot at last by a poor miserable savage, that knows nothing at all about him really. Where’s the sense of all this? Where’s your Providence? Where’s the good for anybody in all this? The world’s a swindle! A swindle! Why should I suffer? What have I done to be treated so?”

He howled out his string of questions, and suddenly became silent. The man who ought to have been a professor made a tremendous effort to articulate distinctly —

“My dear fellow, don’t — don’t you see that the ba-bare fac — the fact of your existence is off — offensive. . . . I — I like you — like . . .”

He fell forward on the table, and ended his remarks by an unexpected and prolonged snore.

Almayer shrugged his shoulders and walked back to the balustrade.

He drank his own trade gin very seldom, but when he did, a ridiculously small quantity of the stuff could induce him to assume a rebellious attitude towards the scheme of the universe. And now, throwing his body over the rail, he shouted impudently into the night, turning his face towards that far-off and invisible slab of imported granite upon which Lingard had thought fit to record God’s mercy and Willems’ escape.

“Father was wrong — wrong!” he yelled. “I want you to smart for it. You must smart for it! Where are you, Willems? Hey? . . . Hey? . . . Where there is no mercy for you — I hope!”

“Hope,” repeated in a whispering echo the startled forests, the river and the hills; and Almayer, who stood waiting, with a smile of tipsy attention on his lips, heard no other answer.

# ***THE NIGGER OF THE NARCISSUS***



## **A TALE OF THE FORECASTLE**

This early novella is well-known for its quality compared to other works, and many critics believe it marks the start of Conrad's major period.



*Conrad prior to his first voyage*

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TO  
EDWARD GARNETT  
THIS TALE  
ABOUT MY FRIENDS  
OF THE SEA

TO MY READERS IN AMERICA

From that evening when James Wait joined the ship — late for the muster of the crew — to the moment when he left us in the open sea, shrouded in sailcloth, through the open port, I had much to do with him. He was in my watch. A negro in a British forecastle is a lonely being. He has no chums. Yet James Wait, afraid of death and making her his accomplice was an impostor of some character — mastering our compassion, scornful of our sentimentalism, triumphing over our suspicions.

But in the book he is nothing; he is merely the centre of the ship's collective psychology and the pivot of the action. Yet he, who in the family circle and amongst my friends is familiarly referred to as the Nigger, remains very precious to me. For the book written round him is not the sort of thing that can be attempted more than once in a life-time. It is the book by which, not as a novelist perhaps, but as an artist striving for the utmost sincerity of expression, I am willing to stand or fall. Its pages are the tribute of my unalterable and profound affection for the ships, the seamen, the winds and the great sea — the moulders of my youth, the companions of the best years of my life.

After writing the last words of that book, in the revulsion of feeling before the accomplished task, I understood that I had done with the sea, and that henceforth I had to be a writer. And almost without laying down the pen I wrote a preface, trying to express the spirit in which I was entering on the task of my new life. That preface on advice (which I now think was wrong) was never published with the book. But the late W. E. Henley, who had the courage at that time (1897) to serialize my "Nigger" in the New Review judged it worthy to be printed as an afterword at the end of the last instalment of the tale.

I am glad that this book which means so much to me is coming out again, under its proper title of "The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'" and under the auspices of my good, friends and publishers Messrs. Doubleday, Page & Co. into the light of publicity.

Half the span of a generation has passed since W. E. Henley, after reading two chapters, sent me a verbal message: "Tell Conrad that if the rest is up to the sample it shall certainly come out in the New Review." The most gratifying recollection of my writer's life!

And here is the Suppressed Preface.

1914.

JOSEPH CONRAD.

## PREFACE

A work that aspires, however humbly, to the condition of art should carry its justification in every line. And art itself may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect. It is an attempt to find in its forms, in its colours, in its light, in its shadows, in the aspects of matter and in the facts of life what of each is fundamental, what is enduring and essential — their one illuminating and convincing quality — the very truth of their existence. The artist, then, like the thinker or the scientist, seeks the truth and makes his appeal. Impressed by the aspect of the world the thinker plunges into ideas, the scientist into facts — whence, presently, emerging they make their appeal to those qualities of our being that fit us best for the hazardous enterprise of living. They speak authoritatively to our common-sense, to our intelligence, to our desire of peace or to our desire of unrest; not seldom to our prejudices, sometimes to our fears, often to our egoism — but always to our credulity. And their words are heard with reverence, for their concern is with weighty matters: with the cultivation of our minds and the proper care of our bodies, with the attainment of our ambitions, with the perfection of the means and the glorification of our precious aims.

It is otherwise with the artist.

Confronted by the same enigmatical spectacle the artist descends within himself, and in that lonely region of stress and strife, if he be deserving and fortunate, he finds the terms of his appeal. His appeal is made to our less obvious capacities: to that part of our nature which, because of the warlike conditions of existence, is necessarily kept out of sight within the more resisting and hard qualities — like the vulnerable body within a steel armour. His appeal is less loud, more profound, less distinct, more stirring — and sooner forgotten. Yet its effect endures forever. The changing wisdom of successive generations discards ideas, questions facts, demolishes theories. But the artist appeals to that part of our being which is not dependent on wisdom; to that in us which is a gift and not an acquisition — and, therefore, more permanently enduring. He speaks to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our

sense of pity, and beauty, and pain; to the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation — and to the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts, to the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hope, in fear, which binds men to each other, which binds together all humanity — the dead to the living and the living to the unborn.

It is only some such train of thought, or rather of feeling, that can in a measure explain the aim of the attempt, made in the tale which follows, to present an unrestful episode in the obscure lives of a few individuals out of all the disregarded multitude of the bewildered, the simple and the voiceless. For, if any part of truth dwells in the belief confessed above, it becomes evident that there is not a place of splendour or a dark corner of the earth that does not deserve, if only a passing glance of wonder and pity. The motive then, may be held to justify the matter of the work; but this preface, which is simply an avowal of endeavour, cannot end here — for the avowal is not yet complete. Fiction — if it at all aspires to be art — appeals to temperament. And in truth it must be, like painting, like music, like all art, the appeal of one temperament to all the other innumerable temperaments whose subtle and resistless power endows passing events with their true meaning, and creates the moral, the emotional atmosphere of the place and time. Such an appeal to be effective must be an impression conveyed through the senses; and, in fact, it cannot be made in any other way, because temperament, whether individual or collective, is not amenable to persuasion. All art, therefore, appeals primarily to the senses, and the artistic aim when expressing itself in written words must also make its appeal through the senses, if its highest desire is to reach the secret spring of responsive emotions. It must strenuously aspire to the plasticity of sculpture, to the colour of painting, and to the magic suggestiveness of music — which is the art of arts. And it is only through complete, unswerving devotion to the perfect blending of form and substance; it is only through an unremitting never-discouraged care for the shape and ring of sentences that an approach can be made to plasticity, to colour, and that the light of magic suggestiveness may be brought to play for an evanescent instant over the commonplace surface of words: of the old, old words, worn thin, defaced by ages of careless usage.

The sincere endeavour to accomplish that creative task, to go as far on that road as his strength will carry him, to go undeterred by faltering,



weariness or reproach, is the only valid justification for the worker in prose. And if his conscience is clear, his answer to those who in the fulness of a wisdom which looks for immediate profit, demand specifically to be edified, consoled, amused; who demand to be promptly improved, or encouraged, or frightened, or shocked, or charmed, must run thus: — My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel — it is, before all, to make you see. That — and no more, and it is everything. If I succeed, you shall find there according to your deserts: encouragement, consolation, fear, charm — all you demand — and, perhaps, also that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask. To snatch in a moment of courage, from the remorseless rush of time, a passing phase of life, is only the beginning of the task. The task approached in tenderness and faith is to hold up unquestioningly, without choice and without fear, the rescued fragment before all eyes in the light of a sincere mood. It is to show its vibration, its colour, its form; and through its movement, its form, and its colour, reveal the substance of its truth — disclose its inspiring secret: the stress and passion within the core of each convincing moment. In a single-minded attempt of that kind, if one be deserving and fortunate, one may perchance attain to such clearness of sincerity that at last the presented vision of regret or pity, of terror or mirth, shall awaken in the hearts of the beholders that feeling of unavoidable solidarity; of the solidarity in mysterious origin, in toil, in joy, in hope, in uncertain fate, which binds men to each other and all mankind to the visible world. It is evident that he who, rightly or wrongly, holds by the convictions expressed above cannot be faithful to any one of the temporary formulas of his craft. The enduring part of them — the truth which each only imperfectly veils — should abide with him as the most precious of his possessions, but they all: Realism, Romanticism, Naturalism, even the unofficial sentimentalism (which like the poor, is exceedingly difficult to get rid of,) all these gods must, after a short period of fellowship, abandon him — even on the very threshold of the temple — to the stammerings of his conscience and to the outspoken consciousness of the difficulties of his work. In that uneasy solitude the supreme cry of Art for Art itself, loses the exciting ring of its apparent immorality. It sounds far off. It has ceased to be a cry, and is heard only as a whisper, often incomprehensible, but at times and faintly encouraging.

Sometimes, stretched at ease in the shade of a roadside tree, we watch the motions of a labourer in a distant field, and after a time, begin to wonder languidly as to what the fellow may be at. We watch the movements of his body, the waving of his arms, we see him bend down, stand up, hesitate, begin again. It may add to the charm of an idle hour to be told the purpose of his exertions. If we know he is trying to lift a stone, to dig a ditch, to uproot a stump, we look with a more real interest at his efforts; we are disposed to condone the jar of his agitation upon the restfulness of the landscape; and even, if in a brotherly frame of mind, we may bring ourselves to forgive his failure. We understood his object, and, after all, the fellow has tried, and perhaps he had not the strength — and perhaps he had not the knowledge. We forgive, go on our way — and forget.

And so it is with the workman of art. Art is long and life is short, and success is very far off. And thus, doubtful of strength to travel so far, we talk a little about the aim — the aim of art, which, like life itself, is inspiring, difficult — obscured by mists; it is not in the clear logic of a triumphant conclusion; it is not in the unveiling of one of those heartless secrets which are called the Laws of Nature. It is not less great, but only more difficult.

To arrest, for the space of a breath, the hands busy about the work of the earth, and compel men entranced by the sight of distant goals to glance for a moment at the surrounding vision of form and colour, of sunshine and shadows; to make them pause for a look, for a sigh, for a smile — such is the aim, difficult and evanescent, and reserved only for a very few to achieve. But sometimes, by the deserving and the fortunate, even that task is accomplished. And when it is accomplished — behold! — all the truth of life is there: a moment of vision, a sigh, a smile — and the return to an eternal rest.

1897. J. C.

## **THE NIGGER OF THE “NARCISSUS”**

## CHAPTER ONE

Mr. Baker, chief mate of the ship *Narcissus*, stepped in one stride out of his lighted cabin into the darkness of the quarter-deck. Above his head, on the break of the poop, the night-watchman rang a double stroke. It was nine o'clock. Mr. Baker, speaking up to the man above him, asked: — "Are all the hands aboard, Knowles?"

The man limped down the ladder, then said reflectively: —

"I think so, sir. All our old chaps are there, and a lot of new men has come.... They must be all there."

"Tell the boatswain to send all hands aft," went on Mr. Baker; "and tell one of the youngsters to bring a good lamp here. I want to muster our crowd."

The main deck was dark aft, but halfway from forward, through the open doors of the forecabin, two streaks of brilliant light cut the shadow of the quiet night that lay upon the ship. A hum of voices was heard there, while port and starboard, in the illuminated doorways, silhouettes of moving men appeared for a moment, very black, without relief, like figures cut out of sheet tin. The ship was ready for sea. The carpenter had driven in the last wedge of the mainhatch battens, and, throwing down his maul, had wiped his face with great deliberation, just on the stroke of five. The decks had been swept, the windlass oiled and made ready to heave up the anchor; the big tow-rope lay in long bights along one side of the main deck, with one end carried up and hung over the bows, in readiness for the tug that would come paddling and hissing noisily, hot and smoky, in the limpid, cool quietness of the early morning. The captain was ashore, where he had been engaging some new hands to make up his full crew; and, the work of the day over, the ship's officers had kept out of the way, glad of a little breathing-time. Soon after dark the few liberty-men and the new hands began to arrive in shore-boats rowed by white-clad Asiatics, who clamoured fiercely for payment before coming alongside the gangway-ladder. The feverish and shrill babble of Eastern language struggled against the masterful tones of tipsy seamen, who argued against brazen claims and dishonest hopes by profane shouts. The resplendent and bestarred peace of the East was torn into squalid tatters by howls of rage and shrieks of lament raised over sums ranging from five annas to half a rupee; and every soul

afloat in Bombay Harbour became aware that the new hands were joining the Narcissus.

Gradually the distracting noise had subsided. The boats came no longer in splashing clusters of three or four together, but dropped alongside singly, in a subdued buzz of expostulation cut short by a "Not a pace more! You go to the devil!" from some man staggering up the accommodation-ladder — a dark figure, with a long bag poised on the shoulder. In the forecastle the newcomers, upright and swaying amongst corded boxes and bundles of bedding, made friends with the old hands, who sat one above another in the two tiers of bunks, gazing at their future shipmates with glances critical but friendly. The two forecastle lamps were turned up high, and shed an intense hard glare; shore-going round hats were pushed far on the backs of heads, or rolled about on the deck amongst the chain-cables; white collars, undone, stuck out on each side of red faces; big arms in white sleeves gesticulated; the growling voices hummed steady amongst bursts of laughter and hoarse calls. "Here, sonny, take that bunk!... Don't you do it!... What's your last ship?... I know her.... Three years ago, in Puget Sound.... This here berth leaks, I tell you!... Come on; give us a chance to swing that chest!... Did you bring a bottle, any of you shore toffs?... Give us a bit of 'baccy.... I know her; her skipper drank himself to death.... He was a dandy boy!... Liked his lotion inside, he did!... No!... Hold your row, you chaps!... I tell you, you came on board a hooker, where they get their money's worth out of poor Jack, by — !..."

A little fellow, called Craik and nicknamed Belfast, abused the ship violently, romancing on principle, just to give the new hands something to think over. Archie, sitting aslant on his sea-chest, kept his knees out of the way, and pushed the needle steadily through a white patch in a pair of blue trousers. Men in black jackets and stand-up collars, mixed with men bare-footed, bare-armed, with coloured shirts open on hairy chests, pushed against one another in the middle of the forecastle. The group swayed, reeled, turning upon itself with the motion of a scrimmage, in a haze of tobacco smoke. All were speaking together, swearing at every second word. A Russian Finn, wearing a yellow shirt with pink stripes, stared upwards, dreamy-eyed, from under a mop of tumbled hair. Two young giants with smooth, baby faces — two Scandinavians — helped each other to spread their bedding, silent, and smiling placidly at the tempest of good-humoured and meaningless curses. Old Singleton, the oldest able seaman in the ship,

set apart on the deck right under the lamps, stripped to the waist, tattooed like a cannibal chief all over his powerful chest and enormous biceps. Between the blue and red patterns his white skin gleamed like satin; his bare back was propped against the heel of the bowsprit, and he held a book at arm's length before his big, sunburnt face. With his spectacles and a venerable white beard, he resembled a learned and savage patriarch, the incarnation of barbarian wisdom serene in the blasphemous turmoil of the world. He was intensely absorbed, and as he turned the pages an expression of grave surprise would pass over his rugged features. He was reading "Pelham." The popularity of Bulwer Lytton in the forecastles of Southern-going ships is a wonderful and bizarre phenomenon. What ideas do his polished and so curiously insincere sentences awaken in the simple minds of the big children who people those dark and wandering places of the earth? What meaning can their rough, inexperienced souls find in the elegant verbiage of his pages? What excitement? — what forgetfulness? — what appeasement? Mystery! Is it the fascination of the incomprehensible? — is it the charm of the impossible? Or are those beings who exist beyond the pale of life stirred by his tales as by an enigmatical disclosure of a resplendent world that exists within the frontier of infamy and filth, within that border of dirt and hunger, of misery and dissipation, that comes down on all sides to the water's edge of the incorruptible ocean, and is the only thing they know of life, the only thing they see of surrounding land — those life-long prisoners of the sea? Mystery! Singleton, who had sailed to the southward since the age of twelve, who in the last forty-five years had lived (as we had calculated from his papers) no more than forty months ashore — old Singleton, who boasted, with the mild composure of long years well spent, that generally from the day he was paid off from one ship till the day he shipped in another he seldom was in a condition to distinguish daylight — old Singleton sat unmoved in the clash of voices and cries, spelling through "Pelham" with slow labour, and lost in an absorption profound enough to resemble a trance. He breathed regularly. Every time he turned the book in his enormous and blackened hands the muscles of his big white arms rolled slightly under the smooth skin. Hidden by the white moustache, his lips, stained with tobacco-juice that trickled down the long beard, moved in inward whisper. His bleared eyes gazed fixedly from behind the glitter of black-rimmed glasses. Opposite to him, and on a level with his face, the ship's cat sat on the barrel of the windlass in the pose of a

crouching chimera, blinking its green eyes at its old friend. It seemed to meditate a leap on to the old man's lap over the bent back of the ordinary seaman who sat at Singleton's feet. Young Charley was lean and long-necked. The ridge of his backbone made a chain of small hills under the old shirt. His face of a street-boy — a face precocious, sagacious, and ironic, with deep downward folds on each side of the thin, wide mouth — hung low over his bony knees. He was learning to make a lanyard knot with a bit of an old rope. Small drops of perspiration stood out on his bulging forehead; he sniffed strongly from time to time, glancing out of the corners of his restless eyes at the old seaman, who took no notice of the puzzled youngster muttering at his work.

The noise increased. Little Belfast seemed, in the heavy heat of the forecastle, to boil with facetious fury. His eyes danced; in the crimson of his face, comical as a mask, the mouth yawned black, with strange grimaces. Facing him, a half-undressed man held his sides, and, throwing his head back, laughed with wet eyelashes. Others stared with amazed eyes. Men sitting doubled up in the upper bunks smoked short pipes, swinging bare brown feet above the heads of those who, sprawling below on sea-chests, listened, smiling stupidly or scornfully. Over the white rims of berths stuck out heads with blinking eyes; but the bodies were lost in the gloom of those places, that resembled narrow niches for coffins in a whitewashed and lighted mortuary. Voices buzzed louder. Archie, with compressed lips, drew himself in, seemed to shrink into a smaller space, and sewed steadily, industrious and dumb. Belfast shrieked like an inspired Dervish: — "... So I seez to him, boys, seez I, 'Beggin' yer pardon, sorr,' seez I to that second mate of that steamer — 'beggin' your-r-r pardon, sorr, the Board of Trade must 'ave been drunk when they granted you your certificate!' 'What do you say, you — — — !' seez he, comin' at me like a mad bull... all in his white clothes; and I up with my tar-pot and capsizes it all over his blamed lovely face and his lovely jacket.... 'Take that!' seez I. 'I am a sailor, anyhow, you nosing, skipper-licking, useless, sooperfloos bridge-stanchion, you! That's the kind of man I am!' shouts I.... You should have seed him skip, boys! Drowned, blind with tar, he was! So..."

"Don't 'ee believe him! He never upset no tar; I was there!" shouted somebody. The two Norwegians sat on a chest side by side, alike and placid, resembling a pair of love-birds on a perch, and with round eyes stared innocently; but the Russian Finn, in the racket of explosive shouts

and rolling laughter, remained motionless, limp and dull, like a deaf man without a backbone. Near him Archie smiled at his needle. A broad-chested, slow-eyed newcomer spoke deliberately to Belfast during an exhausted lull in the noise: — "I wonder any of the mates here are alive yet with such a chap as you on board! I conclooode they ain't that bad now, if you had the taming of them, sonny."

"Not bad! Not bad!" screamed Belfast. "If it wasn't for us sticking together... Not bad! They ain't never bad when they ain't got a chawnce, blast their black 'arts...."

He foamed, whirling his arms, then suddenly grinned and, taking a tablet of black tobacco out of his pocket, bit a piece off with a funny show of ferocity. Another new hand — a man with shifty eyes and a yellow hatchet face, who had been listening open-mouthed in the shadow of the midship locker — observed in a squeaky voice: — "Well, it's a 'omeward trip, anyhow. Bad or good, I can do it on my 'ed — s'long as I get 'ome. And I can look after my rights! I will show 'em!" All the heads turned towards him. Only the ordinary seaman and the cat took no notice. He stood with arms akimbo, a little fellow with white eyelashes. He looked as if he had known all the degradations and all the furies. He looked as if he had been cuffed, kicked, rolled in the mud; he looked as if he had been scratched, spat upon, pelted with unmentionable filth... and he smiled with a sense of security at the faces around. His ears were bending down under the weight of his battered felt hat. The torn tails of his black coat flapped in fringes about the calves of his legs. He unbuttoned the only two buttons that remained and every one saw that he had no shirt under it. It was his deserved misfortune that those rags which nobody could possibly be supposed to own looked on him as if they had been stolen. His neck was long and thin; his eyelids were red; rare hairs hung about his jaws; his shoulders were peaked and drooped like the broken wings of a bird; all his left side was caked with mud which showed that he had lately slept in a wet ditch. He had saved his inefficient carcass from violent destruction by running away from an American ship where, in a moment of forgetful folly, he had dared to engage himself; and he had knocked about for a fortnight ashore in the native quarter, cadging for drinks, starving, sleeping on rubbish-heaps, wandering in sunshine: a startling visitor from a world of nightmares. He stood repulsive and smiling in the sudden silence. This clean white forecastle was his refuge; the place where he could be lazy;



where he could wallow, and lie and eat — and curse the food he ate; where he could display his talents for shirking work, for cheating, for cadging; where he could find surely some one to wheedle and some one to bully — and where he would be paid for doing all this. They all knew him. Is there a spot on earth where such a man is unknown, an ominous survival testifying to the eternal fitness of lies and impudence? A taciturn long-armed shellback, with hooked fingers, who had been lying on his back smoking, turned in his bed to examine him dispassionately, then, over his head, sent a long jet of clear saliva towards the door. They all knew him! He was the man that cannot steer, that cannot splice, that dodges the work on dark nights; that, aloft, holds on frantically with both arms and legs, and swears at the wind, the sleet, the darkness; the man who curses the sea while others work. The man who is the last out and the first in when all hands are called. The man who can't do most things and won't do the rest. The pet of philanthropists and self-seeking landlubbers. The sympathetic and deserving creature that knows all about his rights, but knows nothing of courage, of endurance, and of the unexpressed faith, of the unspoken loyalty that knits together a ship's company. The independent offspring of the ignoble freedom of the slums full of disdain and hate for the austere servitude of the sea.

Some one cried at him: "What's your name?" — "Donkin," he said, looking round with cheerful effrontery. — "What are you?" asked another voice. — "Why, a sailor like you, old man," he replied, in a tone that meant to be hearty but was impudent. — "Blamme if you don't look a blamed sight worse than a broken-down fireman," was the comment in a convinced mutter. Charley lifted his head and piped in a cheeky voice: "He is a man and a sailor" — then wiping his nose with the back of his hand bent down industriously over his bit of rope. A few laughed. Others stared doubtfully. The ragged newcomer was indignant — "That's a fine way to welcome a chap into a fo'c'sle," he snarled. "Are you men or a lot of 'artless cannibals?" — "Don't take your shirt off for a word, shipmate," called out Belfast, jumping up in front, fiery, menacing, and friendly at the same time. — "Is that 'ere bloke blind?" asked the indomitable scarecrow, looking right and left with affected surprise. "Can't 'ee see I 'aven't got no shirt?"

He held both his arms out crosswise and shook the rags that hung over his bones with dramatic effect.

“‘Cos why?” he continued very loud. “The bloody Yankees been tryin’ to jump my guts out ‘cos I stood up for my rights like a good ‘un. I am an Englishman, I am. They set upon me an’ I ‘ad to run. That’s why. A’n’t yer never seed a man ‘ard up? Yah! What kind of blamed ship is this? I’m dead broke. I ‘aven’t got nothink. No bag, no bed, no blanket, no shirt — not a bloomin’ rag but what I stand in. But I ‘ad the ‘art to stand up agin’ them Yankees. ‘As any of you ‘art enough to spare a pair of old pants for a chum?”

He knew how to conquer the naïve instincts of that crowd. In a moment they gave him their compassion, jocularly, contemptuously, or surlily; and at first it took the shape of a blanket thrown at him as he stood there with the white skin of his limbs showing his human kinship through the black fantasy of his rags. Then a pair of old shoes fell at his muddy feet. With a cry: — “From under,” a rolled-up pair of canvas trousers, heavy with tar stains, struck him on the shoulder. The gust of their benevolence sent a wave of sentimental pity through their doubting hearts. They were touched by their own readiness to alleviate a shipmate’s misery. Voices cried: — “We will fit you out, old man.” Murmurs: “Never seed seech a hard case.... Poor beggar.... I’ve got an old singlet.... Will that be of any use to you?... Take it, matey....” Those friendly murmurs filled the forecastle. He pawed around with his naked foot, gathering the things in a heap and looked about for more. Unemotional Archie perfunctorily contributed to the pile an old cloth cap with the peak torn off. Old Singleton, lost in the serene regions of fiction, read on unheeding. Charley, pitiless with the wisdom of youth, squeaked: — “If you want brass buttons for your new unyforms I’ve got two for you.” The filthy object of universal charity shook his fist at the youngster. — “I’ll make you keep this ‘ere fo’c’sle clean, young feller,” he snarled viciously. “Never you fear. I will learn you to be civil to an able seaman, you ignerant ass.” He glared harmfully, but saw Singleton shut his book, and his little beady eyes began to roam from berth to berth. — “Take that bunk by the door there — it’s pretty fair,” suggested Belfast. So advised, he gathered the gifts at his feet, pressed them in a bundle against his breast, then looked cautiously at the Russian Finn, who stood on one side with an unconscious gaze, contemplating, perhaps, one of those weird visions that haunt the men of his race. — “Get out of my road, Dutchy,” said the victim of Yankee brutality. The Finn did not move — did not hear. “Get out, blast ye,” shouted the other, shoving him aside with his elbow.

“Get out, you blanked deaf and dumb fool. Get out.” The man staggered, recovered himself, and gazed at the speaker in silence. — “Those damned furriners should be kept under,” opined the amiable Donkin to the forecastle. “If you don’t teach ‘em their place they put on you like anythink.” He flung all his worldly possessions into the empty bed-place, gauged with another shrewd look the risks of the proceeding, then leaped up to the Finn, who stood pensive and dull. — “I’ll teach you to swell around,” he yelled. “I’ll plug your eyes for you, you blooming square-head.” Most of the men were now in their bunks and the two had the forecastle clear to themselves. The development of the destitute Donkin aroused interest. He danced all in tatters before the amazed Finn, squaring from a distance at the heavy, unmoved face. One or two men cried encouragingly: “Go it, Whitechapel!” settling themselves luxuriously in their beds to survey the fight. Others shouted: “Shut yer row!... Go an’ put yer ‘ed in a bag!...” The hubbub was recommencing. Suddenly many heavy blows struck with a handspike on the deck above boomed like discharges of small cannon through the forecastle. Then the boatswain’s voice rose outside the door with an authoritative note in its drawl: — “D’ye hear, below there? Lay aft! Lay aft to muster all hands!”

There was a moment of surprised stillness. Then the forecastle floor disappeared under men whose bare feet flopped on the planks as they sprang clear out of their berths. Caps were rooted for amongst tumbled blankets. Some, yawning, buttoned waistbands. Half-smoked pipes were knocked hurriedly against woodwork and stuffed under pillows. Voices growled: — “What’s up?... Is there no rest for us?” Donkin yelled: — “If that’s the way of this ship, we’ll ‘ave to change all that.... You leave me alone.... I will soon....” None of the crowd noticed him. They were lurching in twos and threes through the doors, after the manner of merchant Jacks who cannot go out of a door fairly, like mere landmen. The votary of change followed them. Singleton, struggling into his jacket, came last, tall and fatherly, bearing high his head of a weather-beaten sage on the body of an old athlete. Only Charley remained alone in the white glare of the empty place, sitting between the two rows of iron links that stretched into the narrow gloom forward. He pulled hard at the strands in a hurried endeavour to finish his knot. Suddenly he started up, flung the rope at the cat, and skipped after the black tom which went off leaping sedately over chain compressors, with its tail carried stiff and upright, like a small flag pole.

Outside the glare of the steaming forecastle the serene purity of the night enveloped the seamen with its soothing breath, with its tepid breath flowing under the stars that hung countless above the mastheads in a thin cloud of luminous dust. On the town side the blackness of the water was streaked with trails of light which undulated gently on slight ripples, similar to filaments that float rooted to the shore. Rows of other lights stood away in straight lines as if drawn up on parade between towering buildings; but on the other side of the harbour sombre hills arched high their black spines, on which, here and there, the point of a star resembled a spark fallen from the sky. Far off, Byculla way, the electric lamps at the dock gates shone on the end of lofty standards with a glow blinding and frigid like captive ghosts of some evil moons. Scattered all over the dark polish of the roadstead, the ships at anchor floated in perfect stillness under the feeble gleam of their riding-lights, looming up, opaque and bulky, like strange and monumental structures abandoned by men to an everlasting repose.

Before the cabin door Mr. Baker was mustering the crew. As they stumbled and lurched along past the mainmast, they could see aft his round, broad face with a white paper before it, and beside his shoulder the sleepy head, with dropped eyelids, of the boy, who held, suspended at the end of his raised arm, the luminous globe of a lamp. Even before the shuffle of naked soles had ceased along the decks, the mate began to call over the names. He called distinctly in a serious tone befitting this roll-call to unquiet loneliness, to inglorious and obscure struggle, or to the more trying endurance of small privations and wearisome duties. As the chief mate read out a name, one of the men would answer: "Yes, sir!" or "Here!" and, detaching himself from the shadowy mob of heads visible above the blackness of starboard bulwarks, would step bare-footed into the circle of light, and in two noiseless strides pass into the shadows on the port side of the quarterdeck. They answered in divers tones: in thick mutters, in clear, ringing voices; and some, as if the whole thing had been an outrage on their feelings, used an injured intonation: for discipline is not ceremonious in merchant ships, where the sense of hierarchy is weak, and where all feel themselves equal before the unconcerned immensity of the sea and the exacting appeal of the work. Mr. Baker read on steadily: — "Hansen — Campbell — Smith — Wamibo. Now, then, Wamibo. Why don't you answer? Always got to call your name twice." The Finn emitted at last an uncouth grunt, and, stepping out, passed through the patch of light, weird

and gaudy, with the face of a man marching through a dream. The mate went on faster: — "Craik — Singleton — Donkin.... O Lord!" he involuntarily ejaculated as the incredibly dilapidated figure appeared in the light. It stopped; it uncovered pale gums and long, upper teeth in a malevolent grin. — "Is there any-think wrong with me, Mister Mate?" it asked, with a flavour of insolence in the forced simplicity of its tone. On both sides of the deck subdued titters were heard. — "That'll do. Go over," growled Mr. Baker, fixing the new hand with steady blue eyes. And Donkin vanished suddenly out of the light into the dark group of mustered men, to be slapped on the back and to hear flattering whispers: — "He ain't afeard, he'll give sport to 'em, see if he don't.... Reg'lar Punch and Judy show.... Did ye see the mate start at him?... Well! Damme, if I ever!..." The last man had gone over, and there was a moment of silence while the mate peered at his list. — "Sixteen, seventeen," he muttered. "I am one hand short, bo'sen," he said aloud. The big west-countryman at his elbow, swarthy and bearded like a gigantic Spaniard, said in a rumbling bass: — "There's no one left forward, sir. I had a look round. He ain't aboard, but he may, turn up before daylight." — "Ay. He may or he may not," commented the mate, "can't make out that last name. It's all a smudge.... That will do, men. Go below."

The distinct and motionless group stirred, broke up, began to move forward.

"Wait!" cried a deep, ringing voice.

All stood still. Mr. Baker, who had turned away yawning, spun round open-mouthed. At last, furious, he blurted out: — "What's this? Who said 'Wait'? What...."

But he saw a tall figure standing on the rail. It came down and pushed through the crowd, marching with a heavy tread towards the light on the quarterdeck. Then again the sonorous voice said with insistence: — "Wait!" The lamplight lit up the man's body. He was tall. His head was away up in the shadows of lifeboats that stood on skids above the deck. The whites of his eyes and his teeth gleamed distinctly, but the face was indistinguishable. His hands were big and seemed gloved.

Mr. Baker advanced intrepidly. "Who are you? How dare you..." he began.

The boy, amazed like the rest, raised the light to the man's face. It was black. A surprised hum — a faint hum that sounded like the suppressed

mutter of the word “Nigger” — ran along the deck and escaped out into the night. The nigger seemed not to hear. He balanced himself where he stood in a swagger that marked time. After a moment he said calmly: — “My name is Wait — James Wait.”

“Oh!” said Mr. Baker. Then, after a few seconds of smouldering silence, his temper blazed out. “Ah! Your name is Wait. What of that? What do you want? What do you mean, coming shouting here?”

The nigger was calm, cool, towering, superb. The men had approached and stood behind him in a body. He overtopped the tallest by half a head. He said: “I belong to the ship.” He enunciated distinctly, with soft precision. The deep, rolling tones of his voice filled the deck without effort. He was naturally scornful, unaffectedly condescending, as if from his height of six foot three he had surveyed all the vastness of human folly and had made up his mind not to be too hard on it. He went on: — “The captain shipped me this morning. I couldn’t get aboard sooner. I saw you all aft as I came up the ladder, and could see directly you were mustering the crew. Naturally I called out my name. I thought you had it on your list, and would understand. You misapprehended.” He stopped short. The folly around him was confounded. He was right as ever, and as ever ready to forgive. The disdainful tones had ceased, and, breathing heavily, he stood still, surrounded by all these white men. He held his head up in the glare of the lamp — a head vigorously modelled into deep shadows and shining lights — a head powerful and misshapen with a tormented and flattened face — a face pathetic and brutal: the tragic, the mysterious, the repulsive mask of a nigger’s soul.

Mr. Baker, recovering his composure, looked at the paper close. “Oh, yes; that’s so. All right, Wait. Take your gear forward,” he said.

Suddenly the nigger’s eyes rolled wildly, became all whites. He put his hand to his side and coughed twice, a cough metallic, hollow, and tremendously loud; it resounded like two explosions in a vault; the dome of the sky rang to it, and the iron plates of the ship’s bulwarks seemed to vibrate in unison, then he marched off forward with the others. The officers lingering by the cabin door could hear him say: “Won’t some of you chaps lend a hand with my dunnage? I’ve got a chest and a bag.” The words, spoken sonorously, with an even intonation, were heard all over the ship, and the question was put in a manner that made refusal impossible. The short, quick shuffle of men carrying something heavy went away forward,

but the tall figure of the nigger lingered by the main hatch in a knot of smaller shapes. Again he was heard asking: "Is your cook a coloured gentleman?" Then a disappointed and disapproving "Ah! h'm!" was his comment upon the information that the cook happened to be a mere white man. Yet, as they went all together towards the forecastle, he condescended to put his head through the galley door and boom out inside a magnificent "Good evening, doctor!" that made all the saucepans ring. In the dim light the cook dozed on the coal locker in front of the captain's supper. He jumped up as if he had been cut with a whip, and dashed wildly on deck to see the backs of several men going away laughing. Afterwards, when talking about that voyage, he used to say: — "The poor fellow had scared me. I thought I had seen the devil." The cook had been seven years in the ship with the same captain. He was a serious-minded man with a wife and three children, whose society he enjoyed on an average one month out of twelve. When on shore he took his family to church twice every Sunday. At sea he went to sleep every evening with his lamp turned up full, a pipe in his mouth, and an open Bible in his hand. Some one had always to go during the night to put out the light, take the book from his hand, and the pipe from between his teeth. "For" — Belfast used to say, irritated and complaining — "some night, you stupid cookie, you'll swallow your ould clay, and we will have no cook." — "Ah! sonny, I am ready for my Maker's call... wish you all were," the other would answer with a benign serenity that was altogether imbecile and touching. Belfast outside the galley door danced with vexation. "You holy fool! I don't want you to die," he howled, looking up with furious, quivering face and tender eyes. "What's the hurry? You blessed wooden-headed ould heretic, the divvle will have you soon enough. Think of Us... of Us... of Us!" And he would go away, stamping, spitting aside, disgusted and worried; while the other, stepping out, saucepan in hand, hot, begrimed and placid, watched with a superior, cock-sure smile the back of his "queer little man" reeling in a rage. They were great friends.

Mr. Baker, lounging over the after-hatch, sniffed the humid night in the company of the second mate. — "Those West India niggers run fine and large — some of them... Ough!... Don't they? A fine, big man that, Mr. Creighton. Feel him on a rope. Hey? Ough! I will take him into my watch, I think." The second mate, a fair, gentlemanly young fellow, with a resolute face and a splendid physique, observed quietly that it was just about what

he expected. There could be felt in his tone some slight bitterness which Mr. Baker very kindly set himself to argue away. "Come, come, young man," he said, grunting between the words. "Come! Don't be too greedy. You had that big Finn in your watch all the voyage. I will do what's fair. You may have those two young Scandinavians and I... Ough!... I get the nigger, and will take that.... Ough! that cheeky costermonger chap in a black frock-coat. I'll make him.... Ough!... make him toe the mark, or my.... Ough!.... name isn't Baker. Ough! Ough! Ough!"

He grunted thrice — ferociously. He had that trick of grunting so between his words and at the end of sentences. It was a fine, effective grunt that went well with his menacing utterance, with his heavy, bull-necked frame, his jerky, rolling gait; with his big, seamed face, his steady eyes, and sardonic mouth. But its effect had been long ago discounted by the men. They liked him; Belfast — who was a favourite, and knew it — mimicked him, not quite behind his back. Charley — but with greater caution — imitated his rolling gait. Some of his sayings became established, daily quotations in the fore-castle. Popularity can go no farther! Besides, all hands were ready to admit that on a fitting occasion the mate could "jump down a fellow's throat in a reg'lar Western Ocean style."

Now he was giving his last orders. "Ough! You, Knowles! Call all hands at four. I want... Ough!... to heave short before the tug comes. Look out for the captain. I am going to lie down in my clothes.... Ough!... Call me when you see the boat coming. Ough! Ough!. The old man is sure to have something to say when he gets aboard," he remarked to Creighton. "Well, good-night.... Ough! A long day before us to-morrow.... Ough!... Better turn in now. Ough! Ough!"

Upon the dark deck a band of light flashed, then a door slammed, and Mr. Baker was gone into his neat cabin. Young Creighton stood leaning over the rail, and looked dreamily into the night of the East. And he saw in it a long country lane, a lane of waving leaves and dancing sunshine. He saw stirring boughs of old trees outspread, and framing in their arch the tender, the caressing blueness of an English sky. And through the arch a girl in a light dress, smiling under a sunshade, seemed to be stepping out of the tender sky.

At the other end of the ship the fore-castle, with only one lamp burning now, was going to sleep in a dim emptiness traversed by loud breathings, by sudden short sighs. The double row of berths yawned black, like graves



tenanted by uneasy corpses. Here and there a curtain of gaudy chintz, half drawn, marked the resting-place of a sybarite. A leg hung over the edge very white and lifeless. An arm stuck straight out with a dark palm turned up, and thick fingers half closed. Two light snores, that did not synchronise, quarrelled in funny dialogue. Singleton stripped again — the old man suffered much from prickly heat — stood cooling his back in the doorway, with his arms crossed on his bare and adorned chest. His head touched the beam of the deck above. The nigger, half undressed, was busy casting adrift the lashing of his box, and spreading his bedding in an upper berth. He moved about in his socks, tall and noiseless, with a pair of braces beating about his calves. Amongst the shadows of stanchions and bowsprit, Donkin munched a piece of hard ship's bread, sitting on the deck with upturned feet and restless eyes; he held the biscuit up before his mouth in the whole fist and snapped his jaws at it with a raging face. Crumbs fell between his outspread legs. Then he got up.

"Where's our water-cask?" he asked in a contained voice.

Singleton, without a word, pointed with a big hand that held a short smouldering pipe. Donkin bent over the cask, drank out of the tin, splashing the water, turned round and noticed the nigger looking at him over the shoulder with calm loftiness. He moved up sideways.

"There's a blooming supper for a man," he whispered bitterly. "My dorg at 'ome wouldn't 'ave it. It's fit enouf for you an' me. 'Ere's a big ship's fo'c'sle!... Not a blooming scrap of meat in the kids. I've looked in all the lockers...."

The nigger stared like a man addressed unexpectedly in a foreign language. Donkin changed his tone: — "Giv' us a bit of 'baccy, mate," he breathed out confidentially, "I 'aven't 'ad smoke or chew for the last month. I am rampin' mad for it. Come on, old man!"

"Don't be familiar," said the nigger. Donkin started and sat down on a chest near by, out of sheer surprise. "We haven't kept pigs together," continued James Wait in a deep undertone. "Here's your tobacco." Then, after a pause, he inquired: — "What ship?" — "Golden State," muttered Donkin indistinctly, biting the tobacco. The nigger whistled low. — "Ran?" he said curtly. Donkin nodded: one of his cheeks bulged out. "In course I ran," he mumbled. "They booted the life hout of one Dago chap on the passage 'ere, then started on me. I cleared hout 'ere. — " "Left your dunnage behind?" — "Yes, dunnage and money," answered Donkin, raising

his voice a little; "I got nothink. No clothes, no bed. A bandy-legged little Hirish chap 'ere 'as give me a blanket. Think I'll go an' sleep in the fore topmast staysail to-night."

He went on deck trailing behind his back a corner of the blanket. Singleton, without a glance, moved slightly aside to let him pass. The nigger put away his shore togs and sat in clean working clothes on his box, one arm stretched over his knees. After staring at Singleton for some time he asked without emphasis: — "What kind of ship is this? Pretty fair? Eh?"

Singleton didn't stir. A long while after he said, with unmoved face: — "Ship!... Ships are all right. It is the men in them!"

He went on smoking in the profound silence. The wisdom of half a century spent in listening to the thunder of the waves had spoken unconsciously through his old lips. The cat purred on the windlass. Then James Wait had a fit of roaring, rattling cough, that shook him, tossed him like a hurricane, and flung him panting with staring eyes headlong on his sea-chest. Several men woke up. One said sleepily out of his bunk: "'Struth! what a blamed row!" — "I have a cold on my chest," gasped Wait. — "Cold! you call it," grumbled the man; "should think 'twas something more...." — "Oh! you think so," said the nigger upright and loftily scornful again. He climbed into his berth and began coughing persistently while he put his head out to glare all round the fore-castle. There was no further protest. He fell back on the pillow, and could be heard there wheezing regularly like a man oppressed in his sleep.

Singleton stood at the door with his face to the light and his back to the darkness. And alone in the dim emptiness of the sleeping fore-castle he appeared bigger, colossal, very old; old as Father Time himself, who should have come there into this place as quiet as a sepulchre to contemplate with patient eyes the short victory of sleep, the consoler. Yet he was only a child of time, a lonely relic of a devoured and forgotten generation. He stood, still strong, as ever unthinking; a ready man with a vast empty past and with no future, with his childlike impulses and his man's passions already dead within his tattooed breast. The men who could understand his silence were gone — those men who knew how to exist beyond the pale of life and within sight of eternity. They had been strong, as those are strong who know neither doubts nor hopes. They had been impatient and enduring, turbulent and devoted, unruly and faithful. Well-meaning people had tried to represent those men as whining over every mouthful of their food; as

going about their work in fear of their lives. But in truth they had been men who knew toil, privation, violence, debauchery — but knew not fear, and had no desire of spite in their hearts. Men hard to manage, but easy to inspire; voiceless men — but men enough to scorn in their hearts the sentimental voices that bewailed the hardness of their fate. It was a fate unique and their own; the capacity to bear it appeared to them the privilege of the chosen! Their generation lived inarticulate and, indispensable, without knowing the sweetness of affections or the refuge of a home — and died free from the dark menace of a narrow grave. They were the everlasting children of the mysterious sea. Their successors are the grown-up children of a discontented earth. They are less naughty, but less innocent; less profane, but perhaps also less believing; and if they have learned how to speak they have also learned how to whine. But the others were strong and mute; they were effaced, bowed and enduring, like stone caryatides that hold up in the night the lighted halls of a resplendent and glorious edifice. They are gone now — and it does not matter. The sea and the earth are unfaithful to their children: a truth, a faith, a generation of men goes — and is forgotten, and it does not matter! Except, perhaps, to the few of those who believed the truth, confessed the faith — or loved the men.

A breeze was coming. The ship that had been lying tide-rode swung to a heavier puff; and suddenly the slack of the chain cable between the windlass and the hawse-pipe clinked, slipped forward an inch, and rose gently off the deck with a startling suggestion as of unsuspected life that had been lurking stealthily in the iron. In the hawse-pipe the grinding links sent through the ship a sound like a low groan of a man sighing under a burden. The strain came on the windlass, the chain tautened like a string, vibrated — and the handle of the screw-brake moved in slight jerks. Singleton stepped forward.

Till then he had been standing meditative and unthinking, reposeful and hopeless, with a face grim and blank — a sixty-year-old child of the mysterious sea. The thoughts of all his lifetime could have been expressed in six words, but the stir of those things that were as much part of his existence as his beating heart called up a gleam of alert understanding upon the sternness of his aged face. The flame of the lamp swayed, and the old man, with knitted and bushy eyebrows, stood over the brake, watchful and motionless in the wild saraband of dancing shadows. Then the ship, obedient to the call of her anchor, forged ahead slightly and eased the strain.

The cable relieved, hung down, and after swaying imperceptibly to and fro dropped with a loud tap on the hard wood planks. Singleton seized the high lever, and, by a violent throw forward of his body, wrung out another half-turn from the brake. He recovered himself, breathed largely, and remained for a while glaring down at the powerful and compact engine that squatted on the deck at his feet like some quiet monster — a creature amazing and tame.

“You... hold!” he growled at it masterfully in the incult tangle of his white beard.

## CHAPTER TWO

Next morning, at daylight, the *Narcissus* went to sea.

A slight haze blurred the horizon. Outside the harbour the measureless expanse of smooth water lay sparkling like a floor of jewels, and as empty as the sky. The short black tug gave a pluck to windward, in the usual way, then let go the rope, and hovered for a moment on the quarter with her engines stopped; while the slim, long hull of the ship moved ahead slowly under lower topsails. The loose upper canvas blew out in the breeze with soft round contours, resembling small white clouds snared in the maze of ropes. Then the sheets were hauled home, the yards hoisted, and the ship became a high and lonely pyramid, gliding, all shining and white, through the sunlit mist. The tug turned short round and went away towards the land. Twenty-six pairs of eyes watched her low broad stern crawling languidly over the smooth swell between the two paddle-wheels that turned fast, beating the water with fierce hurry. She resembled an enormous and aquatic black beetle, surprised by the light, overwhelmed by the sunshine, trying to escape with ineffectual effort into the distant gloom of the land. She left a lingering smudge of smoke on the sky, and two vanishing trails of foam on the water. On the place where she had stopped a round black patch of soot remained, undulating on the swell — an unclean mark of the creature's rest.

The *Narcissus* left alone, heading south, seemed to stand resplendent and still upon the restless sea, under the moving sun. Flakes of foam swept past her sides; the water struck her with flashing blows; the land glided away slowly fading; a few birds screamed on motionless wings over the swaying mastheads. But soon the land disappeared, the birds went away; and to the west the pointed sail of an Arab dhow running for Bombay, rose triangular and upright above the sharp edge of the horizon, lingered and vanished like an illusion. Then the ship's wake, long and straight, stretched itself out through a day of immense solitude. The setting sun, burning on the level of the water, flamed crimson below the blackness of heavy rain clouds. The sunset squall, coming up from behind, dissolved itself into the short deluge of a hissing shower. It left the ship glistening from trucks to water-line, and with darkened sails. She ran easily before a fair monsoon, with her decks cleared for the night; and, moving along with her, was heard the sustained and monotonous swishing of the waves, mingled with the low whispers of

men mustered aft for the setting of watches; the short plaint of some block aloft; or, now and then, a loud sigh of wind.

Mr. Baker, coming out of his cabin, called out the first name sharply before closing the door behind him. He was going to take charge of the deck. On the homeward trip, according to an old custom of the sea, the chief officer takes the first night-watch — from eight till midnight. So Mr. Baker, after he had heard the last “Yes, sir!” said moodily, “Relieve the wheel and look-out”; and climbed with heavy feet the poop ladder to windward. Soon after Mr. Creighton came down, whistling softly, and went into the cabin. On the doorstep the steward lounged, in slippers, meditative, and with his shirt-sleeves rolled up to the armpits.

On the main deck the cook, locking up the galley doors, had an altercation with young Charley about a pair of socks. He could be heard saying impressively, in the darkness amidships: “You don’t deserve a kindness. I’ve been drying them for you, and now you complain about the holes — and you swear, too! Right in front of me! If I hadn’t been a Christian — which you ain’t, you young ruffian — I would give you a clout on the head.... Go away!” Men in couples or threes stood pensive or moved silently along the bulwarks in the waist. The first busy day of a homeward passage was sinking into the dull peace of resumed routine. Aft, on the high poop, Mr. Baker walked shuffling and grunted to himself in the pauses of his thoughts. Forward, the look-out man, erect between the flukes of the two anchors, hummed an endless tune, keeping his eyes fixed dutifully ahead in a vacant stare. A multitude of stars coming out into the clear night peopled the emptiness of the sky. They glittered, as if alive above the sea; they surrounded the running ship on all sides; more intense than the eyes of a staring crowd, and as inscrutable as the souls of men.

The passage had begun, and the ship, a fragment detached from the earth, went on lonely and swift like a small planet. Round her the abysses of sky and sea met in an unattainable frontier. A great circular solitude moved with her, ever changing and ever the same, always monotonous and always imposing. Now and then another wandering white speck, burdened with life, appeared far off — disappeared; intent on its own destiny. The sun looked upon her all day, and every morning rose with a burning, round stare of undying curiosity. She had her own future; she was alive with the lives of those beings who trod her decks; like that earth which had given her up to the sea, she had an intolerable load of regrets and hopes. On her lived timid

truth and audacious lies; and, like the earth, she was unconscious, fair to see — and condemned by men to an ignoble fate. The august loneliness of her path lent dignity to the sordid inspiration of her pilgrimage. She drove foaming to the southward, as if guided by the courage of a high endeavour. The smiling greatness of the sea dwarfed the extent of time. The days raced after one another, brilliant and quick like the flashes of a lighthouse, and the nights, eventful and short, resembled fleeting dreams.

The men had shaken into their places, and the half-hourly voice of the bells ruled their life of unceasing care. Night and day the head and shoulders of a seaman could be seen aft by the wheel, outlined high against sunshine or starlight, very steady above the stir of revolving spokes. The faces changed, passing in rotation. Youthful faces, bearded faces, dark faces: faces serene, or faces moody, but all akin with the brotherhood of the sea; all with the same attentive expression of eyes, carefully watching the compass or the sails. Captain Allistoun, serious, and with an old red muffler round his throat, all day long pervaded the poop. At night, many times he rose out of the darkness of the companion, such as a phantom above a grave, and stood watchful and mute under the stars, his night-shirt fluttering like a flag — then, without a sound, sank down again. He was born on the shores of the Pentland Firth. In his youth he attained the rank of harpooner in Peterhead whalers. When he spoke of that time his restless grey eyes became still and cold, like the loom of ice. Afterwards he went into the East Indian trade for the sake of change. He had commanded the *Narcissus* since she was built. He loved his ship, and drove her unmercifully; for his secret ambition was to make her accomplish some day a brilliantly quick passage which would be mentioned in nautical papers. He pronounced his owner's name with a sardonic smile, spoke but seldom to his officers, and reproved errors in a gentle voice, with words that cut to the quick. His hair was iron-grey, his face hard and of the colour of pump-leather. He shaved every morning of his life — at six — but once (being caught in a fierce hurricane eighty miles southwest of Mauritius) he had missed three consecutive days. He feared naught but an unforgiving God, and wished to end his days in a little house, with a plot of ground attached — far in the country — out of sight of the sea.

He, the ruler of that minute world, seldom descended from the Olympian heights of his poop. Below him — at his feet, so to speak — common mortals led their busy and insignificant lives. Along the main deck, Mr.

Baker grunted in a manner bloodthirsty and innocuous; and kept all our noses to the grindstone, being — as he once remarked — paid for doing that very thing. The men working about the deck were healthy and contented — as most seamen are, when once well out to sea. The true peace of God begins at any spot a thousand miles from the nearest land; and when He sends there the messengers of His might it is not in terrible wrath against crime, presumption, and folly, but paternally, to chasten simple hearts — ignorant hearts that know nothing of life, and beat undisturbed by envy or greed.

In the evening the cleared decks had a reposeful aspect, resembling the autumn of the earth. The sun was sinking to rest, wrapped in a mantle of warm clouds. Forward, on the end of the spare spars, the boatswain and the carpenter sat together with crossed arms; two men friendly, powerful, and deep-chested. Beside them the short, dumpy sailmaker — who had been in the Navy — related, between the whiffs of his pipe, impossible stories about Admirals. Couples tramped backwards and forwards, keeping step and balance without effort, in a confined space. Pigs grunted in the big pigstye. Belfast, leaning thoughtfully on his elbow, above the bars, communed with them through the silence of his meditation. Fellows with shirts open wide on sunburnt breasts sat upon the mooring bits, and all up the steps of the forecastle ladders. By the foremast a few discussed in a circle the characteristics of a gentleman. One said: — "It's money as does it." Another maintained: — "No, it's the way they speak." Lame Knowles stumped up with an unwashed face (he had the distinction of being the dirty man of the forecastle), and showing a few yellow fangs in a shrewd smile, explained craftily that he "had seen some of their pants." The backsides of them — he had observed — were thinner than paper from constant sitting down in offices, yet otherwise they looked first-rate and would last for years. It was all appearance. "It was," he said, "bloomin' easy to be a gentleman when you had a clean job for life." They disputed endlessly, obstinate and childish; they repeated in shouts and with inflamed faces their amazing arguments; while the soft breeze, eddying down the enormous cavity of the foresail, distended above their bare heads, stirred the tumbled hair with a touch passing and light like an indulgent caress.

They were forgetting their toil, they were forgetting themselves. The cook approached to hear, and stood by, beaming with the inward consciousness of his faith, like a conceited saint unable to forget his



glorious reward; Donkin, solitary and brooding over his wrongs on the forecastle-head, moved closer to catch the drift of the discussion below him; he turned his sallow face to the sea, and his thin nostrils moved, sniffing the breeze, as he lounged negligently by the rail. In the glow of sunset faces shone with interest, teeth flashed, eyes sparkled. The walking couples stood still suddenly, with broad grins; a man, bending over a wash-tub, sat up, entranced, with the soapsuds flecking his wet arms. Even the three petty officers listened leaning back, comfortably propped, and with superior smiles. Belfast left off scratching the ear of his favourite pig, and, open mouthed, tried with eager eyes to have his say. He lifted his arms, grimacing and baffled. From a distance Charley screamed at the ring: — "I know about gentlemen more'n any of you. I've been intermit with 'em.... I've blacked their boots." The cook, craning his neck to hear better, was scandalised. "Keep your mouth shut when your elders speak, you impudent young heathen — you." "All right, old Hallelujah, I'm done," answered Charley, soothingly. At some opinion of dirty Knowles, delivered with an air of supernatural cunning, a ripple of laughter ran along, rose like a wave, burst with a startling roar. They stamped with both feet; they turned their shouting faces to the sky; many, spluttering, slapped their thighs; while one or two, bent double, gasped, hugging themselves with both arms like men in pain. The carpenter and the boatswain, without changing their attitude, shook with laughter where they sat; the sailmaker, charged with an anecdote about a Commodore, looked sulky; the cook was wiping his eyes with a greasy rag; and lame Knowles, astonished at his own success, stood in their midst showing a slow smile.

Suddenly the face of Donkin leaning high-shouldered over the after-rail became grave. Something like a weak rattle was heard through the forecastle door. It became a murmur; it ended in a sighing groan. The washerman plunged both his arms into the tub abruptly; the cook became more crestfallen than an exposed backslider; the boatswain moved his shoulders uneasily; the carpenter got up with a spring and walked away — while the sailmaker seemed mentally to give his story up, and began to puff at his pipe with sombre determination. In the blackness of the doorway a pair of eyes glimmered white, and big, and staring. Then James Wait's head protruding, became visible, as if suspended between the two hands that grasped a doorpost on each side of the face. The tassel of his blue woollen nightcap, cocked forward, danced gaily over his left eyelid. He stepped out

in a tottering stride. He looked powerful as ever, but showed a strange and affected unsteadiness in his gait; his face was perhaps a trifle thinner, and his eyes appeared rather startlingly prominent. He seemed to hasten the retreat of departing light by his very presence; the setting sun dipped sharply, as though fleeing before our nigger; a black mist emanated from him; a subtle and dismal influence; a something cold and gloomy that floated out and settled on all the faces like a mourning veil. The circle broke up. The joy of laughter died on stiffened lips. There was not a smile left among all the ship's company. Not a word was spoken. Many turned their backs, trying to look unconcerned; others, with averted heads, sent half-reluctant glances out of the corners of their eyes. They resembled criminals conscious of misdeeds more than honest men distracted by doubt; only two or three stared frankly, but stupidly, with lips slightly open. All expected James Wait to say something, and, at the same time, had the air of knowing beforehand what he would say. He leaned his back against the doorpost, and with heavy eyes swept over them a glance domineering and pained, like a sick tyrant overawing a crowd of abject but untrustworthy slaves.

No one went away. They waited in fascinated dread. He said ironically, with gasps between the words: —

“Thank you... chaps. You... are nice... and... quiet... you are! Yelling so... before... the door...”

He made a longer pause, during which he worked his ribs in an exaggerated labour of breathing. It was intolerable. Feet were shuffled. Belfast let out a groan; but Donkin above blinked his red eyelids with invisible eyelashes, and smiled bitterly over the nigger's head.

The nigger went on again with surprising ease. He gasped no more, and his voice rang, hollow and loud, as though he had been talking in an empty cavern. He was contemptuously angry.

“I tried to get a wink of sleep. You know I can't sleep o' nights. And you come jabbering near the door here like a blooming lot of old women.... You think yourselves good shipmates. Do you?... Much you care for a dying man!”

Belfast spun away from the pigstye. “Jimmy,” he cried tremulously, “if you hadn't been sick I would — — — ”

He stopped. The nigger waited awhile, then said, in a gloomy tone: — “You would.... What? Go an' fight another such one as yourself. Leave me alone. It won't be for long. I'll soon die.... It's coming right enough!”

Men stood around very still and with exasperated eyes. It was just what they had expected, and hated to hear, that idea of a stalking death, thrust at them many times a day like a boast and like a menace by this obnoxious nigger. He seemed to take a pride in that death which, so far, had attended only upon the ease of his life; he was overbearing about it, as if no one else in the world had ever been intimate with such a companion; he paraded it unceasingly before us with an affectionate persistence that made its presence indubitable, and at the same time incredible. No man could be suspected of such monstrous friendship! Was he a reality — or was he a sham — this ever-expected visitor of Jimmy's? We hesitated between pity and mistrust, while, on the slightest provocation, he shook before our eyes the bones of his bothersome and infamous skeleton. He was for ever trotting him out. He would talk of that coming death as though it had been already there, as if it had been walking the deck outside, as if it would presently come in to sleep in the only empty bunk; as if it had sat by his side at every meal. It interfered daily with our occupations, with our leisure, with our amusements. We had no songs and no music in the evening, because Jimmy (we all lovingly called him Jimmy, to conceal our hate of his accomplice) had managed, with that prospective decease of his, to disturb even Archie's mental balance. Archie was the owner of the concertina; but after a couple of stinging lectures from Jimmy he refused to play any more. He said: — "Yon's an uncanny joker. I dinna ken what's wrang wi' him, but there's something verra wrang, verra wrang. It's nae manner of use asking me. I won't play." Our singers became mute because Jimmy was a dying man. For the same reason no chap — as Knowles remarked — could "drive in a nail to hang his few poor rags upon," without being made aware of the enormity he committed in disturbing Jimmy's interminable last moments. At night, instead of the cheerful yell, "One bell! Turn out! Do you hear there? Hey! hey! hey! Show leg!" the watches were called man by man, in whispers, so as not to interfere with Jimmy's, possibly, last slumber on earth. True, he was always awake, and managed, as we sneaked out on deck, to plant in our backs some cutting remark that, for the moment, made us feel as if we had been brutes, and afterwards made us suspect ourselves of being fools. We spoke in low tones within that fo'c'sle as though it had been a church. We ate our meals in silence and dread, for Jimmy was capricious with his food, and railed bitterly at the salt meat, at the biscuits, at the tea, as at articles unfit for human consumption — "let alone for a

dying man!" He would say: — "Can't you find a better slice of meat for a sick man who's trying to get home to be cured — or buried? But there! If I had a chance, you fellows would do away with it. You would poison me. Look at what you have given me!" We served him in his bed with rage and humility, as though we had been the base courtiers of a hated prince; and he rewarded us by his unconciliating criticism. He had found the secret of keeping for ever on the run the fundamental imbecility of mankind; he had the secret of life, that confounded dying man, and he made himself master of every moment of our existence. We grew desperate, and remained submissive. Emotional little Belfast was for ever on the verge of assault or on the verge of tears. One evening he confided to Archie: — "For a ha'penny I would knock his ugly black head off — the skulking dodger!" And the straightforward Archie pretended to be shocked! Such was the infernal spell which that casual St. Kitt's nigger had cast upon our guileless manhood! But the same night Belfast stole from the galley the officers' Sunday fruit pie, to tempt the fastidious appetite of Jimmy. He endangered not only his long friendship with the cook but also — as it appeared — his eternal welfare. The cook was overwhelmed with grief; he did not know the culprit but he knew that wickedness flourished; he knew that Satan was abroad amongst those men, whom he looked upon as in some way under his spiritual care. Whenever he saw three or four of us standing together he would leave his stove, to run out and preach. We fled from him; and only Charley (who knew the thief) affronted the cook with a candid gaze which irritated the good man. "It's you, I believe," he groaned, sorrowful and with a patch of soot on his chin. "It's you. You are a brand for the burning! No more of your socks in my galley." Soon, unofficially, the information was spread about that, should there be another case of stealing, our marmalade (an extra allowance: half a pound per man) would be stopped. Mr. Baker ceased to heap jocular abuse upon his favourites, and grunted suspiciously at all. The captain's cold eyes, high up on the poop, glittered mistrustful, as he surveyed us trooping in a small mob from halyards to braces for the usual evening pull at all the ropes. Such stealing in a merchant ship is difficult to check, and may be taken as a declaration by men of their dislike for their officers. It is a bad symptom. It may end in God knows what trouble. The Narcissus was still a peaceful ship, but mutual confidence was shaken. Donkin did not conceal his delight. We were dismayed.

Then illogical Belfast reproached our nigger with great fury. James Wait, with his elbow on the pillow, choked, gasped out: — "Did I ask you to bone the dratted thing? Blow your blamed pie. It has made me worse — you little Irish lunatic, you!" Belfast, with scarlet face and trembling lips, made a dash at him. Every man in the forecastle rose with a shout. There was a moment of wild tumult. Some one shrieked piercingly: — "Easy, Belfast! Easy!..." We expected Belfast to strangle Wait without more ado. Dust flew. We heard through it the nigger's cough, metallic and explosive like a gong. Next moment we saw Belfast hanging over him. He was saying plaintively: — "Don't! Don't, Jimmy! Don't be like that. An angel couldn't put up with ye — sick as ye are." He looked round at us from Jimmy's bedside, his comical mouth twitching, and through tearful eyes; then he tried to put straight the disarranged blankets. The unceasing whisper of the sea filled the forecastle. Was James Wait frightened, or touched, or repentant? He lay on his back with a hand to his side, and as motionless as if his expected visitor had come at last. Belfast fumbled about his feet, repeating with emotion: — "Yes. We know. Ye are bad, but.... Just say what ye want done, and.... We all know ye are bad — very bad...." No! Decidedly James Wait was not touched or repentant. Truth to say, he seemed rather startled. He sat up with incredible suddenness and ease. "Ah! You think I am bad, do you?" he said gloomily, in his clearest baritone voice (to hear him speak sometimes you would never think there was anything wrong with that man). "Do you?... Well, act according! Some of you haven't sense enough to put a blanket shipshape over a sick man. There! Leave it alone! I can die anyhow!" Belfast turned away limply with a gesture of discouragement. In the silence of the forecastle, full of interested men, Donkin pronounced distinctly: — "Well, I'm blowed!" and sniggered. Wait looked at him. He looked at him in a quite friendly manner. Nobody could tell what would please our incomprehensible invalid: but for us the scorn of that snigger was hard to bear.

Donkin's position in the forecastle was distinguished but unsafe. He stood on the bad eminence of a general dislike. He was left alone; and in his isolation he could do nothing but think of the gales of the Cape of Good Hope and envy us the possession of warm clothing and waterproofs. Our sea-boots, our oilskin coats, our well-filled sea-chests, were to him so many causes for bitter meditation: he had none of those things, and he felt instinctively that no man, when the need arose, would offer to share them

with him. He was impudently cringing to us and systematically insolent to the officers. He anticipated the best results, for himself, from such a line of conduct — and was mistaken. Such natures forget that under extreme provocation men will be just — whether they want to be so or not. Donkin's insolence to long-suffering Mr. Baker became at last intolerable to us, and we rejoiced when the mate, one dark night, tamed him for good.

It was done neatly, with great decency and decorum, and with little noise. We had been called — just before midnight — to trim the yards, and Donkin — as usual — made insulting remarks. We stood sleepily in a row with the forebrace in our hands waiting for the next order, and heard in the darkness a scuffly trampling of feet, an exclamation of surprise, sounds of cuffs and slaps, suppressed, hissing whispers: — "Ah! Will you!"... "Don't!... Don't!"... "Then behave."... "Oh! Oh!..." Afterwards there were soft thuds mixed with the rattle of iron things as if a man's body had been tumbling helplessly amongst the main-pump rods. Before we could realise the situation, Mr. Baker's voice was heard very near and a little impatient: — "Haul away, men! Lay back on that rope!" And we did lay back on the rope with great alacrity. As if nothing had happened, the chief mate went on trimming the yards with his usual and exasperating fastidiousness. We didn't at the time see anything of Donkin, and did not care. Had the chief officer thrown him overboard, no man would have said as much as "Hallo! he's gone!" But, in truth, no great harm was done — even if Donkin did lose one of his front teeth. We perceived this in the morning, and preserved a ceremonious silence: the etiquette of the forecastle commanded us to be blind and dumb in such a case, and we cherished the decencies of our life more than ordinary landsmen respect theirs. Charley, with unpardonable want of savoir vivre, yelled out: — "'Ave you been to your dentyst?... Hurt ye, didn't it?" He got a box on the ear from one of his best friends. The boy was surprised, and remained plunged in grief for at least three hours. We were sorry for him, but youth requires even more discipline than age. Donkin grinned venomously. From that day he became pitiless; told Jimmy that he was a "black fraud"; hinted to us that we were an imbecile lot, daily taken in by a vulgar nigger. And Jimmy seemed to like the fellow!

Singleton lived untouched by human emotions. Taciturn and unsmiling, he breathed amongst us — in that alone resembling the rest of the crowd. We were trying to be decent chaps, and found it jolly difficult; we oscillated between the desire of virtue and the fear of ridicule; we wished to save

ourselves from the pain of remorse, but did not want to be made the contemptible dupes of our sentiment. Jimmy's hateful accomplice seemed to have blown with his impure breath undreamt of subtleties into our hearts. We were disturbed and cowardly. That we knew. Singleton seemed to know nothing, understand nothing. We had thought him till then as wise as he looked, but now we dared, at times, suspect him of being stupid — from old age. One day, however, at dinner, as we sat on our boxes round a tin dish that stood on the deck within the circle of our feet, Jimmy expressed his general disgust with men and things in words that were particularly disgusting. Singleton lifted his head. We became mute. The old man, addressing Jimmy, asked: — "Are you dying?" Thus interrogated, James Wait appeared horribly startled and confused. We all were startled. Mouths remained open; hearts thumped, eyes blinked; a dropped tin fork rattled in the dish; a man rose as if to go out, and stood still. In less than a minute Jimmy pulled himself together: — "Why? Can't you see I am?" he answered shakily. Singleton lifted a piece of soaked biscuit ("his teeth" — he declared — "had no edge on them now") to his lips. — "Well, get on with your dying," he said with venerable mildness; "don't raise a blamed fuss with us over that job. We can't help you." Jimmy fell back in his bunk, and for a long time lay very still wiping the perspiration off his chin. The dinner-tins were put away quickly. On deck we discussed the incident in whispers. Some showed a chuckling exultation. Many looked grave. Wamibo, after long periods of staring dreaminess, attempted abortive smiles; and one of the young Scandinavians, much tormented by doubt, ventured in the second dog-watch to approach Singleton (the old man did not encourage us much to speak to him) and ask sheepishly: — "You think he will die?" Singleton looked up. — "Why, of course he will die," he said deliberately. This seemed decisive. It was promptly imparted to every one by him who had consulted the oracle. Shy and eager, he would step up and with averted gaze recite his formula: — "Old Singleton says he will die." It was a relief! At last we knew that our compassion would not be misplaced, and we could again smile without misgivings — but we reckoned without Donkin. Donkin "didn't want to 'ave no truck with 'em dirty furriners." When Nilsen came to him with the news: "Singleton says he will die," he answered him by a spiteful "And so will you — you fat-headed Dutchman. Wish you Dutchmen were all dead — 'stead comin' takin' our money inter your starvin' country." We were appalled. We perceived that after all

Singleton's answer meant nothing. We began to hate him for making fun of us. All our certitudes were going; we were on doubtful terms with our officers; the cook had given us up for lost; we had overheard the boatswain's opinion that "we were a crowd of softies." We suspected Jimmy, one another, and even our very selves. We did not know what to do. At every insignificant turn of our humble life we met Jimmy overbearing and blocking the way, arm-in-arm with his awful and veiled familiar. It was a weird servitude.

It began a week after leaving Bombay and came on us stealthily like any other great misfortune. Every one had remarked that Jimmy from the first was very slack at his work; but we thought it simply the outcome of his philosophy of life. Donkin said: — "You put no more weight on a rope than a bloody sparrer." He disdained him. Belfast, ready for a fight, exclaimed provokingly: — "You don't kill yourself, old man!" — "Would you?" he retorted with extreme, scorn — and Belfast retired. One morning, as we were washing decks, Mr. Baker called to him: — "Bring your broom over here, Wait." He strolled languidly.

"Move yourself! Ough!" grunted Mr. Baker; "what's the matter with your hind legs?" He stopped dead short. He gazed slowly with eyes that bulged out with an expression audacious and sad. — "It isn't my legs," he said, "it's my lungs." Everybody listened. — "What's... Ough!... What's wrong with them?" inquired Mr. Baker. All the watch stood around on the wet deck, grinning, and with brooms or buckets in their hands. He said mournfully: — "Going — or gone. Can't you see I'm a dying man? I know it!" Mr. Baker was disgusted. — "Then why the devil did you ship aboard here?" — "I must live till I die — mustn't I?" he replied. The grins became audible. — "Go off my deck — get out of my sight," said Mr. Baker. He was nonplussed. It was a unique experience. James Wait, obedient, dropped his broom, and walked slowly forward. A burst of laughter followed him. It was too funny. All hands laughed.... They laughed!... Alas!

He became the tormentor of all our moments; he "was worse than a nightmare. You couldn't see that there was anything wrong with him: a nigger does not show. He was not very fat — certainly — but then he was no leaner than other niggers we had known. He coughed often, but the most prejudiced person could perceive that, mostly, he coughed when it suited his purpose. He wouldn't, or couldn't, do his work — and he wouldn't lie-up. One day he would skip aloft with the best of them, and next time we would



be obliged to risk our lives to get his limp body down. He was reported, he was examined; he was remonstrated with, threatened, cajoled, lectured. He was called into the cabin to interview the captain. There were wild rumours. It was said he had cheeked the old man; it was said he had frightened him. Charley maintained that the “skipper, weepin,’ ‘as giv’ ‘im ‘is blessin’ an’ a pot of jam.” Knowles had it from the steward that the unspeakable Jimmy had been reeling against the cabin furniture; that he had groaned; that he had complained of general brutality and disbelief; and had ended by coughing all over the old man’s meteorological journals which were then spread on the table. At any rate, Wait returned forward supported by the steward, who, in a pained and shocked voice, entreated us: — ”Here! Catch hold of him, one of you. He is to lie-up.” Jimmy drank a tin mugful of coffee, and, after bullying first one and then another, went to bed. He remained there most of the time, but when it suited him would come on deck and appear amongst us. He was scornful and brooding; he looked ahead upon the sea, and no one could tell what was the meaning of that black man sitting apart in a meditative attitude and as motionless as a carving.

He refused steadily all medicine; he threw sago and cornflour overboard till the steward got tired of bringing it to him. He asked for paregoric. They sent him a big bottle; enough to poison a wilderness of babies. He kept it between his mattress and the deal lining of the ship’s side; and nobody ever saw him take a dose. Donkin abused him to his face, jeered at him while he gasped; and the same day Wait would lend him a warm jersey. Once Donkin reviled him for half an hour; reproached him with the extra work his malingering gave to the watch; and ended by calling him “a black-faced swine.” Under the spell of our accursed perversity we were horror-struck. But Jimmy positively seemed to revel in that abuse. It made him look cheerful — and Donkin had a pair of old sea boots thrown at him. “Here, you East-end trash,” boomed Wait, “you may have that.”

At last Mr. Baker had to tell the captain that James Wait was disturbing the peace of the ship. “Knock discipline on the head — he will, Ough,” grunted Mr. Baker. As a matter of fact, the starboard watch came as near as possible to refusing duty, when ordered one morning by the boatswain to wash out their fore-castle. It appears Jimmy objected to a wet floor — and that morning we were in a compassionate mood. We thought the boatswain a brute, and, practically, told him so. Only Mr. Baker’s delicate tact

prevented an all-fired row: he refused to take us seriously. He came bustling forward, and called us many unpolite names but in such a hearty and seamanlike manner that we began to feel ashamed of ourselves. In truth, we thought him much too good a sailor to annoy him willingly: and after all Jimmy might have been a fraud — probably was! The forecastle got a clean up that morning; but in the afternoon a sick-bay was fitted up in the deck-house. It was a nice little cabin opening on deck, and with two berths. Jimmy's belongings were transported there, and then — notwithstanding his protests — Jimmy himself. He said he couldn't walk. Four men carried him on a blanket. He complained that he would have to die there alone, like a dog. We grieved for him, and were delighted to have him removed from the forecastle. We attended him as before. The galley was next door, and the cook looked in many times a day. Wait became a little more cheerful. Knowles affirmed having heard him laugh to himself in peals one day. Others had seen him walking about on deck at night. His little place, with the door ajar on a long hook, was always full of tobacco smoke. We spoke through the crack cheerfully, sometimes abusively, as we passed by, intent on our work. He fascinated us. He would never let doubt die. He overshadowed the ship. Invulnerable in his promise of speedy corruption he trampled on our self-respect, he demonstrated to us daily our want of moral courage; he tainted our lives. Had we been a miserable gang of wretched immortals, unhallowed alike by hope and fear, he could not have lorded it over us with a more pitiless assertion of his sublime privilege.

## CHAPTER THREE

Meantime the *Narcissus*, with square yards, ran out of the fair monsoon. She drifted slowly, swinging round and round the compass, through a few days of baffling light airs. Under the patter of short warm showers, grumbling men whirled the heavy yards from side to side; they caught hold of the soaked ropes with groans and sighs, while their officers, sulky and dripping with rain water, unceasingly ordered them about in wearied voices. During the short respites they looked with disgust into the smarting palms of their stiff hands, and asked one another bitterly: — "Who would be a sailor if he could be a farmer?" All the tempers were spoilt, and no man cared what he said. One black night, when the watch, panting in the heat and half-drowned with the rain, had been through four mortal hours hunted from brace to brace, Belfast declared that he would "chuck the sea for ever and go in a steamer." This was excessive, no doubt. Captain Allistoun, with great self-control, would mutter sadly to Mr. Baker: — "It is not so bad — not so bad," when he had managed to shove, and dodge, and manoeuvre his smart ship through sixty miles in twenty-four hours. From the doorstep of the little cabin, Jimmy, chin in hand, watched our distasteful labours with insolent and melancholy eyes. We spoke to him gently — and out of his sight exchanged sour smiles.

Then, again, with a fair wind and under a clear sky, the ship went on piling up the South Latitude. She passed outside Madagascar and Mauritius without a glimpse of the land. Extra lashings were put on the spare spars. Hatches were looked to. The steward in his leisure moments and with a worried air tried to fit washboards to the cabin doors. Stout canvas was bent with care. Anxious eyes looked to the westward, towards the cape of storms. The ship began to dip into a southwest swell, and the softly luminous sky of low latitudes took on a harder sheen from day to day above our heads: it arched high above the ship vibrating and pale, like an immense dome of steel, resonant with the deep voice of freshening gales. The sunshine gleamed cold on the white curls of black waves. Before the strong breath of westerly squalls the ship, with reduced sail, lay slowly over, obstinate and yielding. She drove to and fro in the unceasing endeavour to fight her way through the invisible violence of the winds: she pitched headlong into dark smooth hollows; she struggled upwards over the snowy ridges of great running seas; she rolled, restless, from side to side, like a

thing in pain. Enduring and valiant, she answered to the call of men; and her slim spars waving for ever in abrupt semicircles, seemed to beckon in vain for help towards the stormy sky.

It was a bad winter off the Cape that year. The relieved helmsmen came off flapping their arms, or ran stamping hard and blowing into swollen, red fingers. The watch on deck dodged the sting of cold sprays or, crouching in sheltered corners, watched dismally the high and merciless seas boarding the ship time after time in unappeasable fury. Water tumbled in cataracts over the fore-castle doors. You had to dash through a waterfall to get into your damp bed. The men turned in wet and turned out stiff to face the redeeming and ruthless exactions of their glorious and obscure fate. Far aft, and peering watchfully to windward, the officers could be seen through the mist of squalls. They stood by the weather-rail, holding on grimly, straight and glistening in their long coats; and in the disordered plunges of the hard-driven ship, they appeared high up, attentive, tossing violently above the grey line of a clouded horizon in motionless attitudes.

They watched the weather and the ship as men on shore watch the momentous chances of fortune. Captain Allistoun never left the deck, as though he had been part of the ship's fittings. Now and then the steward, shivering, but always in shirt sleeves, would struggle towards him with some hot coffee, half of which the gale blew out of the cup before it reached the master's lips. He drank what was left gravely in one long gulp, while heavy sprays pattered loudly on his oilskin coat, the seas swishing broke about his high boots; and he never took his eyes off the ship. He kept his gaze riveted upon her as a loving man watches the unselfish toil of a delicate woman upon the slender thread of whose existence is hung the whole meaning and joy of the world. We all watched her. She was beautiful and had a weakness. We loved her no less for that. We admired her qualities aloud, we boasted of them to one another, as though they had been our own, and the consciousness of her only fault we kept buried in the silence of our profound affection. She was born in the thundering peal of hammers beating upon iron, in black eddies of smoke, under a grey sky, on the banks of the Clyde. The clamorous and sombre stream gives birth to things of beauty that float away into the sunshine of the world to be loved by men. The Narcissus was one of that perfect brood. Less perfect than many perhaps, but she was ours, and, consequently, incomparable. We were proud of her. In Bombay, ignorant landlubbers alluded to her as that "pretty grey ship."

Pretty! A scurvy meed of commendation! We knew she was the most magnificent sea-boat ever launched. We tried to forget that, like many good sea-boats, she was at times rather crank. She was exacting. She wanted care in loading and handling, and no one knew exactly how much care would be enough. Such are the imperfections of mere men! The ship knew, and sometimes would correct the presumptuous human ignorance by the wholesome discipline of fear. We had heard ominous stories about past voyages. The cook (technically a seaman, but in reality no sailor) — the cook, when unstrung by some misfortune, such as the rolling over of a saucepan, would mutter gloomily while he wiped the floor: — "There! Look at what she has done! Some voy'ge she will drown all hands! You'll see if she won't." To which the steward, snatching in the galley a moment to draw breath in the hurry of his worried life, would remark philosophically: — "Those that see won't tell, anyhow. I don't want to see it." We derided those fears. Our hearts went out to the old man when he pressed her hard so as to make her hold her own, hold to every inch gained to windward; when he made her, under reefed sails, leap obliquely at enormous waves. The men, knitted together aft into a ready group by the first sharp order of an officer coming to take charge of the deck in bad weather: — "Keep handy the watch," stood admiring her valiance. Their eyes blinked in the wind; their dark faces were wet with drops of water more salt and bitter than human tears; beards and moustaches, soaked, hung straight and dripping like fine seaweed. They were fantastically misshapen; in high boots, in hats like helmets, and swaying clumsily, stiff and bulky in glistening oilskins, they resembled men strangely equipped for some fabulous adventure. Whenever she rose easily to a towering green sea, elbows dug ribs, faces brightened, lips murmured: — "Didn't she do it cleverly," and all the heads turning like one watched with sardonic grins the foiled wave go roaring to leeward, white with the foam of a monstrous rage. But when she had not been quick enough and, struck heavily, lay over trembling under the blow, we clutched at ropes, and looking up at the narrow bands of drenched and strained sails waving desperately aloft, we thought in our hearts: — "No wonder. Poor thing!"

The thirty-second day out of Bombay began inauspiciously. In the morning a sea smashed one of the galley doors. We dashed in through lots of steam and found the cook very wet and indignant with the ship: — "She's getting worse every day. She's trying to drown me in front of my

own stove!" He was very angry. We pacified him, and the carpenter, though washed away twice from there, managed to repair the door. Through that accident our dinner was not ready till late, but it didn't matter in the end because Knowles, who went to fetch it, got knocked down by a sea and the dinner went over the side. Captain Allistoun, looking more hard and thin-lipped than ever, hung on to full topsails and foresail, and would not notice that the ship, asked to do too much, appeared to lose heart altogether for the first time since we knew her. She refused to rise, and bored her way sullenly through the seas. Twice running, as though she had been blind or weary of life, she put her nose deliberately into a big wave and swept the decks from end to end. As the boatswain observed with marked annoyance, while we were splashing about in a body to try and save a worthless wash-tub: — "Every blooming thing in the ship is going overboard this afternoon." Venerable Singleton broke his habitual silence and said with a glance aloft: — "The old man's in a temper with the weather, but it's no good bein' angry with the winds of heaven." Jimmy had shut his door, of course. We knew he was dry and comfortable within his little cabin, and in our absurd way were pleased one moment, exasperated the next, by that certitude. Donkin skulked shamelessly, uneasy and miserable. He grumbled: — "I'm perishin' with cold outside in bloomin' wet rags, an' that 'ere black sojer sits dry on a blamed chest full of bloomin' clothes; blank his black soul!" We took no notice of him; we hardly gave a thought to Jimmy and his bosom friend. There was no leisure for idle probing of hearts. Sails blew adrift. Things broke loose. Cold and wet, we were washed about the deck while trying to repair damages. The ship tossed about, shaken furiously, like a toy in the hand of a lunatic. Just at sunset there was a rush to shorten sail before the menace of a sombre hail cloud. The hard gust of wind came brutal like the blow of a fist. The ship relieved of her canvas in time received it pluckily: she yielded reluctantly to the violent onset; then coming up with a stately and irresistible motion, brought her spars to windward in the teeth of the screeching squall. Out of the abysmal darkness of the black cloud overhead white hail streamed on her, rattled on the rigging, leaped in handfuls off the yards, rebounded on the deck — round and gleaming in the murky turmoil like a shower of pearls. It passed away. For a moment a livid sun shot horizontally the last rays of sinister light between the hills of steep, rolling waves. Then a wild night rushed in — stamped out in a great howl that dismal remnant of a stormy day.

There was no sleep on board that night. Most seamen remember in their life one or two such nights of a culminating gale. Nothing seems left of the whole universe but darkness, clamour, fury — and the ship. And like the last vestige of a shattered creation she drifts, bearing an anguished remnant of sinful mankind, through the distress, tumult, and pain of an avenging terror. No one slept in the fore-castle. The tin oil-lamp suspended on a long string, smoking, described wide circles; wet clothing made dark heaps on the glistening floor; a thin layer of water rushed to and fro. In the bed-places men lay booted, resting on elbows and with open eyes. Hung-up suits of oilskin swung out and in, lively and disquieting like reckless ghosts of decapitated seamen dancing in a tempest. No one spoke and all listened. Outside the night moaned and sobbed to the accompaniment of a continuous loud tremor as of innumerable drums beating far off. Shrieks passed through the air. Tremendous dull blows made the ship tremble while she rolled under the weight of the seas toppling on her deck. At times she soared up swiftly as if to leave this earth for ever, then during interminable moments fell through a void with all the hearts on board of her standing still, till a frightful shock, expected and sudden, started them off again with a big thump. After every dislocating jerk of the ship, Wamibo, stretched full length, his face on the pillow, groaned slightly with the pain of his tormented universe. Now and then, for the fraction of an intolerable second, the ship, in the fiercer burst of a terrible uproar, remained on her side, vibrating and still, with a stillness more appalling than the wildest motion. Then upon all those prone bodies a stir would pass, a shiver of suspense. A man would protrude his anxious head and a pair of eyes glistened in the sway of light glaring wildly. Some moved their legs a little as if making ready to jump out. But several, motionless on their backs and with one hand gripping hard the edge of the bunk, smoked nervously with quick puffs, staring upwards; immobilised in a great craving for peace.

At midnight, orders were given to furl the fore and mizen topsails. With immense efforts men crawled aloft through a merciless buffeting, saved the canvas and crawled down almost exhausted, to bear in panting silence the cruel battering of the seas. Perhaps for the first time in the history of the merchant service the watch, told to go below, did not leave the deck, as if compelled to remain there by the fascination of a venomous violence. At every heavy gust men, huddled together, whispered to one another, "It can blow no harder," and presently the gale would give them the lie with a

piercing shriek, and drive their breath back into their throats. A fierce squall seemed to burst asunder the thick mass of sooty vapours; and above the wrack of torn clouds glimpses could be caught of the high moon rushing backwards with frightful speed over the sky, right into the wind's eye. Many hung their heads, muttering that it "turned their inwards out" to look at it. Soon the clouds closed up and the world again became a raging, blind darkness that howled, flinging at the lonely ship salt sprays and sleet.

About half-past seven the pitchy obscurity round us turned a ghastly grey, and we knew that the sun had risen. This unnatural and threatening daylight, in which we could see one another's wild eyes and drawn faces, was only an added tax on our endurance. The horizon seemed to have come on all sides within arm's length of the ship. Into that narrowed circle furious seas leaped in, struck, and leaped out. A rain of salt, heavy drops flew aslant like mist. The main-topsail had to be goose-winged, and with stolid resignation every one prepared to go aloft once more; but the officers yelled, pushed back, and at last we understood that no more men would be allowed to go on the yard than were absolutely necessary for the work. As at any moment the masts were likely to be jumped out or blown overboard, we concluded that the captain didn't want to see all his crowd go over the side at once. That was reasonable. The watch then on duty, led by Mr. Creighton, began to struggle up the rigging. The wind flattened them against the ratlines; then, easing a little, would let them ascend a couple of steps; and again, with a sudden gust, pin all up the shrouds the whole crawling line in attitudes of crucifixion. The other watch plunged down on the main deck to haul up the sail. Men's heads bobbed up as the water flung them irresistibly from side to side. Mr. Baker grunted encouragingly in our midst, spluttering and blowing amongst the tangled ropes like an energetic porpoise. Favoured by an ominous and untrustworthy lull, the work was done without any one being lost either off the deck or from the yard. For the moment the gale seemed to take off, and the ship, as if grateful for our efforts, plucked up heart and made better weather of it.

At eight the men off duty, watching their chance, ran forward over the flooded deck to get some rest. The other half of the crew remained aft for their turn of "seeing her through her trouble," as they expressed it. The two mates urged the master to go below. Mr. Baker grunted in his ear: — "Ough! surely now... Ough!... confidence in us... nothing more to do... she must lay it out or go.



“Ough! Ough!” Tall young Mr. Creighton smiled down at him cheerfully: — “...She’s as right as a trivet! Take a spell, sir.” He looked at them stonily with bloodshot, sleepless eyes. The rims of his eyelids were scarlet, and he moved his jaws unceasingly with a slow effort, as though he had been masticating a lump of india-rubber. He shook his head. He repeated: — “Never mind me. I must see it out — I must see it out,” but he consented to sit down for a moment on the skylight, with his hard face turned unflinchingly to windward. The sea spat at it — and stoical, it streamed with water as though he had been weeping. On the weather side of the poop the watch, hanging on to the mizen rigging and to one another, tried to exchange encouraging words. Singleton, at the wheel, yelled out: — “Look out for yourselves!” His voice reached them in a warning whisper. They were startled.

A big, foaming sea came out of the mist; it made for the ship, roaring wildly, and in its rush it looked as mischievous and discomposing as a madman with an axe. One or two, shouting, scrambled up the rigging; most, with a convulsive catch of the breath, held on where they stood. Singleton dug his knees under the wheel-box, and carefully eased the helm to the headlong pitch of the ship, but without taking his eyes off the coming wave. It towered close-to and high, like a wall of green glass topped with snow. The ship rose to it as though she had soared on wings, and for a moment rested poised upon the foaming crest as if she had been a great sea-bird. Before we could draw breath a heavy gust struck her, another roller took her unfairly under the weather bow, she gave a toppling lurch, and filled her decks. Captain Allistoun leaped up, and fell; Archie rolled over him, screaming: — “She will rise!”

She gave another lurch to leeward; the lower deadeyes dipped heavily; the men’s feet flew from under them, and they hung kicking above the slanting poop. They could see the ship putting her side in the water, and shouted all together: — “She’s going!” Forward the forecastle doors flew open, and the watch below were seen leaping out one after another, throwing their arms up; and, falling on hands and knees, scrambled aft on all fours along the high side of the deck, sloping more than the roof of a house. From leeward the seas rose, pursuing them; they looked wretched in a hopeless struggle, like vermin fleeing before a flood; they fought up the weather ladder of the poop one after another, half naked and staring wildly; and as soon as they got up they shot to leeward in clusters, with closed eyes,

till they brought up heavily with their ribs against the iron stanchions of the rail; then, groaning, they rolled in a confused mass. The immense volume of water thrown forward by the last scend of the ship had burst the lee door of the forecastle. They could see their chests, pillows, blankets, clothing, come out floating upon the sea. While they struggled back to windward they looked in dismay. The straw beds swam high, the blankets, spread out, undulated; while the chests, waterlogged and with a heavy list, pitched heavily like dismantled hulks, before they sank; Archie's big coat passed with outspread arms, resembling a drowned seaman floating with his head under water. Men were slipping down while trying to dig their fingers into the planks; others, jammed in corners, rolled enormous eyes. They all yelled unceasingly: — "The masts! Cut! Cut!..." A black squall howled low over the ship, that lay on her side with the weather yard-arms pointing to the clouds; while the tall masts, inclined nearly to the horizon, seemed to be of an immeasurable length. The carpenter let go his hold, rolled against the skylight, and began to crawl to the cabin entrance, where a big axe was kept ready for just such an emergency. At that moment the topsail sheet parted, the end of the heavy chain racketed aloft, and sparks of red fire streamed down through the flying sprays. The sail flapped once with a jerk that seemed to tear our hearts out through our teeth, and instantly changed into a bunch of fluttering narrow ribbons that tied themselves into knots and became quiet along the yard. Captain Allistoun struggled, managed to stand up with his face near the deck, upon which men swung on the ends of ropes, like nest robbers upon a cliff. One of his feet was on somebody's chest; his face was purple; his lips moved. He yelled also; he yelled, bending down: — "No! No!" Mr. Baker, one leg over the binnacle-stand, roared out: — "Did you say no? Not cut?" He shook his head madly. "No! No!" Between his legs the crawling carpenter heard, collapsed at once, and lay full length in the angle of the skylight. Voices took up the shout — "No! No!" Then all became still. They waited for the ship to turn over altogether, and shake them out into the sea; and upon the terrific noise of wind and sea not a murmur of remonstrance came out from those men, who each would have given ever so many years of life to see "them damned sticks go overboard!" They all believed it their only chance; but a little hard-faced man shook his grey head and shouted "No!" without giving them as much as a glance. They were silent, and gasped. They gripped rails, they had wound ropes'-ends under their arms; they clutched ringbolts, they crawled in heaps where

there was foothold; they held on with both arms, hooked themselves to anything to windward with elbows, with chins, almost with their teeth: and some, unable to crawl away from where they had been flung, felt the sea leap up, striking against their backs as they struggled upwards. Singleton had stuck to the wheel. His hair flew out in the wind; the gale seemed to take its life-long adversary by the beard and shake his old head. He wouldn't let go, and, with his knees forced between the spokes, flew up and down like a man on a bough. As Death appeared unready, they began to look about. Donkin, caught by one foot in a loop of some rope, hung, head down, below us, and yelled, with his face to the deck: — "Cut! Cut!" Two men lowered themselves cautiously to him; others hauled on the rope. They caught him up, shoved him into a safer place, held him. He shouted curses at the master, shook his fist at him with horrible blasphemies, called upon us in filthy words to "Cut! Don't mind that murdering fool! Cut, some of you!" One of his rescuers struck him a back-handed blow over the mouth; his head banged on the deck, and he became suddenly very quiet, with a white face, breathing hard, and with a few drops of blood trickling from his cut lip. On the lee side another man could be seen stretched out as if stunned; only the washboard prevented him from going over the side. It was the steward. We had to sling him up like a bale, for he was paralysed with fright. He had rushed up out of the pantry when he felt the ship go over, and had rolled down helplessly, clutching a china mug. It was not broken. With difficulty we tore it away from him, and when he saw it in our hands he was amazed. "Where did you get that thing?" he kept on asking us in a trembling voice. His shirt was blown to shreds; the ripped sleeves flapped like wings. Two men made him fast, and, doubled over the rope that held him, he resembled a bundle of wet rags. Mr. Baker crawled along the line of men, asking: — "Are you all there?" and looking them over. Some blinked vacantly, others shook convulsively; Wamibo's head hung over his breast; and in painful attitudes, cut by lashings, exhausted with clutching, screwed up in corners, they breathed heavily. Their lips twitched, and at every sickening heave of the overturned ship they opened them wide as if to shout. The cook, embracing a wooden stanchion, unconsciously repeated a prayer. In every short interval of the fiendish noises around he could be heard there, without cap or slippers, imploring in that storm the Master of our lives not to lead him into temptation. Soon he also became silent. In all that crowd of cold and hungry men, waiting wearily for a violent death, not

a voice was heard; they were mute, and in sombre thoughtfulness listened to the horrible imprecations of the gale.

Hours passed. They were sheltered by the heavy inclination of the ship from the wind that rushed in one long unbroken moan above their heads, but cold rain showers fell at times into the uneasy calm of their refuge. Under the torment of that new infliction a pair of shoulders would writhe a little. Teeth chattered. The sky was clearing, and bright sunshine gleamed over the ship. After every burst of battering seas, vivid and fleeting rainbows arched over the drifting hull in the flick of sprays. The gale was ending in a clear blow, which gleamed and cut like a knife. Between two bearded shellbacks Charley, fastened with somebody's long muffler to a deck ring-bolt, wept quietly, with rare tears wrung out by bewilderment, cold, hunger, and general misery. One of his neighbours punched him in the ribs asking roughly: — "What's the matter with your cheek? In fine weather there's no holding you, youngster." Turning about with prudence he worked himself out of his coat and threw it over the boy. The other man closed up, muttering: — "'Twill make a bloomin' man of you, sonny." They flung their arms over and pressed against him. Charley drew his feet up and his eyelids dropped. Sighs were heard, as men, perceiving that they were not to be "drowned in a hurry," tried easier positions. Mr. Creighton, who had hurt his leg, lay amongst us with compressed lips. Some fellows belonging to his watch set about securing him better. Without a word or a glance he lifted his arms one after another to facilitate the operation, and not a muscle moved in his stern, young face. They asked him with solicitude: — "Easier now, sir?" He answered with a curt: — "That'll do." He was a hard young officer, but many of his watch used to say they liked him well enough because he had "such a gentlemanly way of damning us up and down the deck." Others unable to discern such fine shades of refinement, respected him for his smartness. For the first time since the ship had gone on her beam ends Captain Allistoun gave a short glance down at his men. He was almost upright — one foot against the side of the skylight, one knee on the deck; and with the end of the vang round his waist swung back and forth with his gaze fixed ahead, watchful, like a man looking out for a sign. Before his eyes the ship, with half her deck below water, rose and fell on heavy seas that rushed from under her flashing in the cold sunshine. We began to think she was wonderfully buoyant — considering. Confident voices were heard shouting: — "She'll do, boys!" Belfast exclaimed with fervour: — "I would

giv' a month's pay for a draw at a pipe!" One or two, passing dry tongues on their salt lips, muttered something about a "drink of water." The cook, as if inspired, scrambled up with his breast against the poop water-cask and looked in. There was a little at the bottom. He yelled, waving his arms, and two men began to crawl backwards and forwards with the mug. We had a good mouthful all round. The master shook his head impatiently, refusing. When it came to Charley one of his neighbours shouted: — "That bloom-in' boy's asleep." He slept as though he had been dosed with narcotics. They let him be. Singleton held to the wheel with one hand while he drank, bending down to shelter his lips from the wind. Wamibo had to be poked and yelled at before he saw the mug held before his eyes. Knowles said sagaciously: — "It's better'n a tot o' rum." Mr. Baker grunted: — "Thank ye." Mr. Creighton drank and nodded. Donkin gulped greedily, glaring over the rim. Belfast made us laugh when with grimacing mouth he shouted: — "Pass it this way. We're all taytottlers here." The master, presented with the mug again by a crouching man, who screamed up at him: — "We all had a drink, captain," groped for it without ceasing to look ahead, and handed it back stiffly as though he could not spare half a glance away from the ship. Faces brightened. We shouted to the cook: — "Well done, doctor!" He sat to leeward, propped by the water-cask and yelled back abundantly, but the seas were breaking in thunder just then, and we only caught snatches that sounded like: "Providence" and "born again." He was at his old game of preaching. We made friendly but derisive gestures at him, and from below he lifted one arm, holding on with the other, moved his lips; he beamed up to us, straining his voice — earnest, and ducking his head before the sprays.

Suddenly some one cried: — "Where's Jimmy?" and we were appalled once more. On the end of the row the boatswain shouted hoarsely: — "Has any one seed him come out?" Voices exclaimed dismally: — "Drowned — is he?... No! In his cabin!... Good Lord!... Caught like a bloomin' rat in a trap.... Couldn't open his door... Aye! She went over too quick and the water jammed it... Poor beggar!... No help for 'im.... Let's go and see..." "Damn him, who could go?" screamed Donkin. — "Nobody expects you to," growled the man next to him: "you're only a thing." — "Is there half a chance to get at 'im?" inquired two or three men together. Belfast untied himself with blind impetuosity, and all at once shot down to leeward quicker than a flash of lightning. We shouted all together with dismay; but with his legs overboard he held and yelled for a rope. In our extremity

nothing could be terrible; so we judged him funny kicking there, and with his scared face. Some one began to laugh, and, as if hysterically infected with screaming merriment, all those haggard men went off laughing, wild-eyed, like a lot of maniacs tied up on a wall. Mr. Baker swung off the binnacle-stand and tendered him one leg. He scrambled up rather scared, and consigning us with abominable words to the “divvle.” “You are.... Ough! You’re a foul-mouthed beggar, Craik,” grunted Mr. Baker. He answered, stuttering with indignation: — ”Look at ‘em, sorr. The bloomin dirty images! laughing at a chum going overboard. Call themselves men, too.” But from the break of the poop the boatswain called out: — ”Come along,” and Belfast crawled away in a hurry to join him. The five men, poised and gazing over the edge of the poop, looked for the best way to get forward. They seemed to hesitate. The others, twisting in their lashings, turning painfull, stared with open lips. Captain Allistoun saw nothing; he seemed with his eyes to hold the ship up in a superhuman concentration of effort. The wind screamed loud in sunshine; columns of spray rose straight up; and in the glitter of rainbows bursting over the trembling hull the men went over cautiously, disappearing from sight with deliberate movements.

They went swinging from belaying pin to cleat above the seas that beat the half-submerged deck. Their toes scraped the planks. Lumps of green cold water toppled over the bulwark and on their heads. They hung for a moment on strained arms, with the breath knocked out of them, and with closed eyes — then, letting go with one hand, balanced with lolling heads, trying to grab some rope or stanchion further forward. The long-armed and athletic boatswain swung quickly, gripping things with a fist hard as iron, and remembering suddenly snatches of the last letter from his “old woman.” Little Belfast scrambled in a rage spluttering “cursed nigger.” Wamibo’s tongue hung out with excitement; and Archie, intrepid and calm, watched his chance to move with intelligent coolness.

When above the side of the house, they let go one after another, and falling heavily, sprawled, pressing their palms to the smooth teak wood. Round them the backwash of waves seethed white and hissing. All the doors had become trap-doors, of course. The first was the galley door. The galley extended from side to side, and they could hear the sea splashing with hollow noises in there. The next door was that of the carpenter’s shop. They lifted it, and looked down. The room seemed to have been devastated by an earthquake. Everything in it had tumbled on the bulkhead facing the

door, and on the other side of that bulkhead there was Jimmy dead or alive. The bench, a half-finished meat-safe, saws, chisels, wire rods, axes, crowbars, lay in a heap besprinkled with loose nails. A sharp adze stuck up with a shining edge that gleamed dangerously down there like a wicked smile. The men clung to one another, peering. A sickening, sly lurch of the ship nearly sent them overboard in a body. Belfast howled "Here goes!" and leaped down. Archie followed cannily, catching at shelves that gave way with him, and eased himself in a great crash of ripped wood. There was hardly room for three men to move. And in the sunshiny blue square of the door, the boatswain's face, bearded and dark, Wamibo's face, wild and pale, hung over — watching.

Together they shouted: "Jimmy! Jim!" From above the boatswain contributed a deep growl: "You. Wait!" In a pause, Belfast entreated: "Jimmy, darlin', are ye aloive?" The boatswain said: "Again! All together, boys!" All yelled excitedly. Wamibo made noises resembling loud barks. Belfast drummed on the side of the bulkhead with a piece of iron. All ceased suddenly. The sound of screaming and hammering went on thin and distinct — like a solo after a chorus. He was alive. He was screaming and knocking below us with the hurry of a man prematurely shut up in a coffin. We went to work. We attacked with desperation the abominable heap of things heavy, of things sharp, of things clumsy to handle. The boatswain crawled away to find somewhere a flying end of a rope; and Wamibo, held back by shouts: — "Don't jump!... Don't come in here, muddle-head!" — remained glaring above us — all shining eyes, gleaming fangs, tumbled hair; resembling an amazed and half-witted fiend gloating over the extraordinary agitation of the damned. The boatswain adjured us to "bear a hand," and a rope descended. We made things fast to it and they went up spinning, never to be seen by man again. A rage to fling things overboard possessed us. We worked fiercely, cutting our hands and speaking brutally to one another. Jimmy kept up a distracting row; he screamed piercingly, without drawing breath, like a tortured woman; he banged with hands and feet. The agony of his fear wrung our hearts so terribly that we longed to abandon him, to get out of that place deep as a well and swaying like a tree, to get out of his hearing, back on the poop where we could wait passively for death in incomparable repose. We shouted to him to "shut up, for God's sake." He redoubled his cries. He must have fancied we could not hear him. Probably he heard his own clamour but faintly. We could picture him

crouching on the edge of the upper berth, letting out with both fists at the wood, in the dark, and with his mouth wide open for that unceasing cry. Those were loathsome moments. A cloud driving across the sun would darken the doorway menacingly. Every movement of the ship was pain. We scrambled about with no room to breathe, and felt frightfully sick. The boatswain yelled down at us: — "Bear a hand! Bear a hand! We two will be washed away from here directly if you ain't quick!" Three times a sea leaped over the high side and flung bucketfuls of water on our heads. Then Jimmy, startled by the shock, would stop his noise for a moment — waiting for the ship to sink, perhaps — and began again, distressingly loud, as if invigorated by the gust of fear. At the bottom the nails lay in a layer several inches thick. It was ghastly. Every nail in the world, not driven in firmly somewhere, seemed to have found its way into that carpenter's shop. There they were, of all kinds, the remnants of stores from seven voyages. Tin-tacks, copper tacks (sharp as needles); pump nails with big heads, like tiny iron mushrooms; nails without any heads (horrible); French nails polished and slim. They lay in a solid mass more inabordable than a hedgehog. We hesitated, yearning for a shovel, while Jimmy below us yelled as though he had been flayed. Groaning, we dug our fingers in, and very much hurt, shook our hands, scattering nails and drops of blood. We passed up our hats full of assorted nails to the boatswain, who, as if performing a mysterious and appeasing rite, cast them wide upon a raging sea.

We got to the bulkhead at last. Those were stout planks. She was a ship, well finished in every detail — the *Narcissus* was. They were the stoutest planks ever put into a ship's bulkhead — we thought — and then we perceived that, in our hurry, we had sent all the tools overboard. Absurd little Belfast wanted to break it down with his own weight, and with both feet leaped straight up like a springbok, cursing the Clyde shipwrights for not scamping their work. Incidentally he reviled all North Britain, the rest of the earth, the sea — and all his companions. He swore, as he alighted heavily on his heels, that he would never, never any more associate with any fool that "hadn't savee enough to know his knee from his elbow." He managed by his thumping to scare the last remnant of wits out of Jimmy. We could hear the object of our exasperated solicitude darting to and fro under the planks. He had cracked his voice at last, and could only squeak miserably. His back or else his head rubbed the planks, now here, now there, in a puzzling manner. He squeaked as he dodged the invisible blows.



It was more heartrending even than his yells. Suddenly Archie produced a crowbar. He had kept it back; also a small hatchet. We howled with satisfaction. He struck a mighty blow and small chips flew at our eyes. The boatswain above shouted: — "Look out! Look out there. Don't kill the man. Easy does it!" Wamibo, maddened with excitement, hung head down and insanely urged us: — "Hoo! Strook'im! Hoo! Hoo!" We were afraid he would fall in and kill one of us and, hurriedly, we entreated the boatswain to "shove the blamed Finn overboard." Then, all together, we yelled down at the planks: — "Stand from under! Get forward," and listened. We only heard the deep hum and moan of the wind above us, the mingled roar and hiss of the seas. The ship, as if overcome with despair, wallowed lifelessly, and our heads swam with that unnatural motion. Belfast clamoured: — "For the love of God, Jimmy, where are ye?... Knock! Jimmy darlint!... Knock! You bloody black beast! Knock!" He was as quiet as a dead man inside a grave; and, like men standing above a grave, we were on the verge of tears — but with vexation, the strain, the fatigue; with the great longing to be done with it, to get away, and lie down to rest somewhere where we could see our danger and breathe. Archie shouted: — "Gi'e me room!" We crouched behind him, guarding our heads, and he struck time after time in the joint of planks. They cracked. Suddenly the crowbar went halfway in through a splintered oblong hole. It must have missed Jimmy's head by less than an inch. Archie withdrew it quickly, and that infamous nigger rushed at the hole, put his lips to it, and whispered "Help" in an almost extinct voice; he pressed his head to it, trying madly to get out through that opening one inch wide and three inches long. In our disturbed state we were absolutely paralysed by his incredible action. It seemed impossible to drive him away. Even Archie at last lost his composure. "If ye don't clear oot I'll drive the crowbar thro' your head," he shouted in a determined voice. He meant what he said, and his earnestness seemed to make an impression on Jimmy. He disappeared suddenly, and we set to prising and tearing at the planks with the eagerness of men trying to get at a mortal enemy, and spurred by the desire to tear him limb from limb. The wood split, cracked, gave way. Belfast plunged in head and shoulders and groped viciously. "I've got 'im! Got 'im," he shouted. "Oh! There!... He's gone; I've got 'im!... Pull at my legs!... Pull!" Wamibo hooted unceasingly. The boatswain shouted directions: — "Catch hold of his hair, Belfast; pull straight up, you two!... Pull fair!" We pulled fair. We pulled Belfast out with a jerk, and dropped

him with disgust. In a sitting posture, purple-faced, he sobbed despairingly: — "How can I hold on to 'is blooming short wool?" Suddenly Jimmy's head and shoulders appeared. He stuck halfway, and with rolling eyes foamed at our feet. We flew at him with brutal impatience, we tore the shirt off his back, we tugged at his ears, we panted over him; and all at once he came away in our hands as though somebody had let go his legs. With the same movement, without a pause, we swung him up. His breath whistled, he kicked our upturned faces, he grasped two pairs of arms above his head, and he squirmed up with such precipitation that he seemed positively to escape from our hands like a bladder full of gas. Streaming with perspiration, we swarmed up the rope, and, coming into the blast of cold wind, gasped like men plunged into icy water. With burning faces we shivered to the very marrow of our bones. Never before had the gale seemed to us more furious, the sea more mad, the sunshine more merciless and mocking, and the position of the ship more hopeless and appalling. Every movement of her was ominous of the end of her agony and of the beginning of ours. We staggered away from the door, and, alarmed by a sudden roll, fell down in a bunch. It appeared to us that the side of the house was more smooth than glass and more slippery than ice. There was nothing to hang on to but a long brass hook used sometimes to keep back an open door. Wamibo held on to it and we held on to Wamibo, clutching our Jimmy. He had completely collapsed now. He did not seem to have the strength to close his hand. We stuck to him blindly in our fear. We were not afraid of Wamibo letting go (we remembered that the brute was stronger than any three men in the ship), but we were afraid of the hook giving way, and we also believed that the ship had made up her mind to turn over at last. But she didn't. A sea swept over us. The boatswain spluttered: — "Up and away. There's a lull. Away aft with you, or we will all go to the devil here." We stood up surrounding Jimmy. We begged him to hold up, to hold on, at least. He glared with his bulging eyes, mute as a fish, and with all the stiffening knocked out of him. He wouldn't stand; he wouldn't even as much as clutch at our necks; he was only a cold black skin loosely stuffed with soft cotton wool; his arms and legs swung jointless and pliable; his head rolled about; the lower lip hung down, enormous and heavy. We pressed round him, bothered and dismayed; sheltering him we swung here and there in a body; and on the very brink of eternity we tottered all

together with concealing and absurd gestures, like a lot of drunken men embarrassed with a stolen corpse.

Something had to be done. We had to get him aft. A rope was tied slack under his armpits, and, reaching up at the risk of our lives, we hung him on the fore-sheet cleet. He emitted no sound; he looked as ridiculously lamentable as a doll that had lost half its sawdust, and we started on our perilous journey over the main deck, dragging along with care that pitiful, that limp, that hateful burden. He was not very heavy, but had he weighed a ton he could not have been more awkward to handle. We literally passed him from hand to hand. Now and then we had to hang him up on a handy belaying-pin, to draw a breath and reform the line. Had the pin broken he would have irretrievably gone into the Southern Ocean, but he had to take his chance of that; and after a little while, becoming apparently aware of it, he groaned slightly, and with a great effort whispered a few words. We listened eagerly. He was reproaching us with our carelessness in letting him run such risks: "Now, after I got myself out from there," he breathed out weakly. "There" was his cabin. And he got himself out. We had nothing to do with it apparently!... No matter.... We went on and let him take his chances, simply because we could not help it; for though at that time we hated him more than ever — more than anything under heaven — we did not want to lose him. We had so far saved him; and it had become a personal matter between us and the sea. We meant to stick to him. Had we (by an incredible hypothesis) undergone similar toil and trouble for an empty cask, that cask would have become as precious to us as Jimmy was. More precious, in fact, because we would have had no reason to hate the cask. And we hated James Wait. We could not get rid of the monstrous suspicion that this astounding black-man was shamming sick, had been malingering heartlessly in the face of our toil, of our scorn, of our patience — and now was malingering in the face of our devotion — in the face of death. Our vague and imperfect morality rose with disgust at his unmanly lie. But he stuck to it manfully — amazingly. No! It couldn't be. He was at all extremity. His cantankerous temper was only the result of the provoking invincible-ness of that death he felt by his side. Any man may be angry with such a masterful chum. But, then, what kind of men were we — with our thoughts! Indignation and doubt grappled within us in a scuffle that trampled upon the finest of our feelings. And we hated him because of the suspicion; we detested him because of the doubt. We could not scorn him

safely — neither could we pity him without risk to our dignity. So we hated him and passed him carefully from hand to hand. We cried, “Got him?” — “Yes. All right. Let go.”

And he swung from one enemy to another, showing about as much life as an old bolster would do. His eyes made two narrow white slits in the black face. The air escaped through his lips with a noise like the sound of bellows. We reached the poop ladder at last, and it being a comparatively safe place, we lay for a moment in an exhausted heap to rest a little. He began to mutter. We were always incurably anxious to hear what he had to say. This time he mumbled peevishly, “It took you some time to come! I began to think the whole smart lot of you had been washed overboard. What kept you back? Hey? Funk?” We said nothing. With sighs we started again to drag him up. The secret and ardent desire of our hearts was the desire to beat him viciously with our fists about the head; and we handled him as tenderly as though he had been made of glass....

The return on the poop was like the return of wanderers after many years amongst people marked by the desolation of time. Eyes were turned slowly in their sockets, glancing at us. Faint murmurs were heard, “Have you got ‘im after all?” The well-known faces looked strange and familiar; they seemed faded and grimy; they had a mingled expression of fatigue and eagerness. They seemed to have become much thinner during our absence, as if all these men had been starving for a long time in their abandoned attitudes. The captain, with a round turn of a rope on his wrist, and kneeling on one knee, swung with a face cold and stiff; but with living eyes he was still holding the ship up, heeding no one, as if lost in the unearthly effort of that endeavour. We fastened up James Wait in a safe place. Mr. Baker scrambled along to lend a hand. Mr. Creighton, on his back, and very pale, muttered, “Well done,” and gave us, Jimmy and the sky, a scornful glance, then closed his eyes slowly. Here and there a man stirred a little, but most of them remained apathetic, in cramped positions, muttering between shivers. The sun was setting. A sun enormous, unclouded and red, declining low as if bending down to look into their faces. The wind whistled across long sunbeams that, resplendent and cold, struck full on the dilated pupils of staring eyes without making them wink. The wisps of hair and the tangled beards were grey with the salt of the sea. The faces were earthy, and the dark patches under the eyes extended to the ears, smudged into the hollows of sunken cheeks. The lips were livid and thin, and when they moved it was

with difficulty, as though they had been glued to the teeth. Some grinned sadly in the sunlight, shaking with cold. Others were sad and still. Charley, subdued by the sudden disclosure of the insignificance of his youth, darted fearful glances. The two smooth-faced Norwegians resembled decrepit children, staring stupidly. To leeward, on the edge of the horizon, black seas leaped up towards the glowing sun. It sank slowly, round and blazing, and the crests of waves splashed on the edge of the luminous circle. One of the Norwegians appeared to catch sight of it, and, after giving a violent start, began to speak. His voice, startling the others, made them stir. They moved their heads stiffly, or turning with difficulty, looked at him with surprise, with fear, or in grave silence. He chattered at the setting sun, nodding his head, while the big seas began to roll across the crimson disc; and over miles of turbulent waters the shadows of high waves swept with a running darkness the faces of men. A crested roller broke with a loud hissing roar, and the sun, as if put out, disappeared. The chattering voice faltered, went out together with the light. There were sighs. In the sudden lull that follows the crash of a broken sea a man said wearily, "Here's that blooming Dutchman gone off his chump." A seaman, lashed by the middle, tapped the deck with his open hand with unceasing quick flaps. In the gathering greyness of twilight a bulky form was seen rising aft, and began marching on all fours with the movements of some big cautious beast. It was Mr. Baker passing along the line of men. He grunted encouragingly over every one, felt their fastenings. Some, with half-open eyes, puffed like men oppressed by heat; others mechanically and in dreamy voices answered him, "Aye! aye! sir!" He went from one to another grunting, "Ough!... See her through it yet;" and unexpectedly, with loud angry outbursts, blew up Knowles for cutting off a long piece from the fall of the relieving tackle. "Ough! — — — Ashamed of yourself — — — Relieving tackle — — — Don't you know better! — — — Ough! — — — Able seaman! Ough!" The lame man was crushed. He muttered, "Get som'think for a lashing for myself, sir." — "Ough! Lashing — — — yourself. Are you a tinker or a sailor — — — What? Ough! — — — May want that tackle directly — — — Ough! — — — More use to the ship than your lame carcass. Ough! — — — Keep it! — — — Keep it, now you've done it."

He crawled away slowly, muttering to himself about some men being "worse than children." It had been a comforting row. Low exclamations were heard: "Hallo... Hallo..." Those who had been painfully dozing asked

with convulsive starts, "What's up?... What is it?" The answers came with unexpected cheerfulness: "The mate is going bald-headed for lame Jack about something or other." "No!".... "What 'as he done?" Some one even chuckled. It was like a whiff of hope, like a reminder of safe days. Donkin, who had been stupefied with fear, revived suddenly and began to shout: — "'Ear 'im; that's the way they tawlk to us. Vy donch 'ee 'it 'im — one ov yer? 'It 'im. 'It 'im! Comin' the mate over us. We are as good men as 'ee! We're all goin' to 'ell now. We 'ave been starved in this rotten ship, an' now we're goin' to be drowned for them black 'earted bullies! 'It 'im!" He shrieked in the deepening gloom, he blubbered and sobbed, screaming: — "'It 'im! 'It 'im!" The rage and fear of his disregarded right to live tried the steadfastness of hearts more than the menacing shadows of the night that advanced through the unceasing clamour of the gale. From aft Mr. Baker was heard: — "Is one of you men going to stop him — must I come along?" "Shut up!"... "Keep quiet!" cried various voices, exasperated, trembling with cold. — "You'll get one across the mug from me directly," said an invisible seaman, in a weary tone, "I won't let the mate have the trouble." He ceased and lay still with the silence of despair. On the black sky the stars, coming out, gleamed over an inky sea that, speckled with foam, flashed back at them the evanescent and pale light of a dazzling whiteness born from the black turmoil of the waves. Remote in the eternal calm they glittered hard and cold above the uproar of the earth; they surrounded the vanquished and tormented ship on all sides: more pitiless than the eyes of a triumphant mob, and as unapproachable as the hearts of men.

The icy south wind howled exultingly under the sombre splendour of the sky. The cold shook the men with a resistless violence as though it had tried to shake them to pieces. Short moans were swept unheard off the stiff lips. Some complained in mutters of "not feeling themselves below the waist;" while those who had closed their eyes, imagined they had a block of ice on their chests. Others, alarmed at not feeling any pain in their fingers, beat the deck feebly with their hands — obstinate and exhausted. Wamibo stared vacant and dreamy. The Scandinavians kept on a meaningless mutter through chattering teeth. The spare Scotchmen, with determined efforts, kept their lower jaws still. The West-country men lay big and stolid in an invulnerable surliness. A man yawned and swore in turns. Another breathed with a rattle in his throat. Two elderly hard-weather shellbacks, fast side by

side, whispered dismally to one another about the landlady of a boarding-house in Sunderland, whom they both knew. They extolled her motherliness and her liberality; they tried to talk about the joint of beef and the big fire in the downstairs kitchen. The words dying faintly on their lips, ended in light sighs. A sudden voice cried into the cold night, "O Lord!" No one changed his position or took any notice of the cry. One or two passed, with a repeated and vague gesture, their hand over their faces, but most of them kept very still. In the benumbed immobility of their bodies they were excessively wearied by their thoughts, which rushed with the rapidity and vividness of dreams. Now and then, by an abrupt and startling exclamation, they answered the weird hail of some illusion; then, again, in silence contemplated the vision of known faces and familiar things. They recalled the aspect of forgotten shipmates and heard the voice of dead and gone skippers. They remembered the noise of gaslit streets, the steamy heat of tap-rooms or the scorching sunshine of calm days at sea.

Mr. Baker left his insecure place, and crawled, with stoppages, along the poop. In the dark and on all fours he resembled some carnivorous animal prowling amongst corpses. At the break, propped to windward of a stanchion, he looked down on the main deck. It seemed to him that the ship had a tendency to stand up a little more. The wind had eased a little, he thought, but the sea ran as high as ever. The waves foamed viciously, and the lee side of the deck disappeared under a hissing whiteness as of boiling milk, while the rigging sang steadily with a deep vibrating note, and, at every upward swing of the ship, the wind rushed with a long-drawn clamour amongst the spars. Mr. Baker watched very still. A man near him began to make a blabbing noise with his lips, all at once and very loud, as though the cold had broken brutally through him. He went on: — "Ba — ba — ba — brrr — brr — ba — ba." — "Stop that!" cried Mr. Baker, groping in the dark. "Stop it!" He went on shaking the leg he found under his hand. — "What is it, sir?" called out Belfast, in the tone of a man awakened suddenly; "we are looking after that 'ere Jimmy." — "Are you? Ough! Don't make that row then. Who's that near you?" — "It's me — the boatswain, sir," growled the West-country man; "we are trying to keep life in that poor devil." — "Aye, aye!" said Mr. Baker. "Do it quietly, can't you?" — "He wants us to hold him up above the rail," went on the boatswain, with irritation, "says he can't breathe here under our jackets." — "If we lift 'im, we drop 'im overboard," said another voice, "we can't feel

our hands with cold." — "I don't care. I am choking!" exclaimed James Wait in a clear tone. — "Oh, no, my son," said the boatswain, desperately, "you don't go till we all go on this fine night." — "You will see yet many a worse," said Mr. Baker, cheerfully. — "It's no child's play, sir!" answered the boatswain. "Some of us further aft, here, are in a pretty bad way." — "If the blamed sticks had been cut out of her she would be running along on her bottom now like any decent ship, an' giv' us all a chance," said some one, with a sigh. — "The old man wouldn't have it... much he cares for us," whispered another. — "Care for you!" exclaimed Mr. Baker, angrily. "Why should he care for you? Are you a lot of women passengers to be taken care of? We are here to take care of the ship — and some of you ain't up to that. Ough!... What have you done so very smart to be taken care of? Ough!... Some of you can't stand a bit of a breeze without crying over it." — "Come, sorr. We ain't so bad," protested Belfast, in a voice shaken by shivers; "we ain't... brr..." — "Again," shouted the mate, grabbing at the shadowy form; "again!... Why, you're in your shirt! What have you done?" — "I've put my oilskin and jacket over that half-dead nayggur — and he says he chokes," said Belfast, complainingly. — "You wouldn't call me nigger if I wasn't half dead, you Irish beggar!" boomed James Wait, vigorously. — "You... brrr... You wouldn't be white if you were ever so well... I will fight you... brrrr... in fine weather... brrr ... with one hand tied behind my back... brrrrrr..." — "I don't want your rags — I want air," gasped out the other faintly, as if suddenly exhausted.

The sprays swept over whistling and pattering. Men disturbed in their peaceful torpor by the pain of quarrelsome shouts, moaned, muttering curses. Mr. Baker crawled off a little way to leeward where a water-cask loomed up big, with something white against it. "Is it you, Podmore?" asked Mr. Baker. He had to repeat the question twice before the cook turned, coughing feebly. — "Yes, sir. I've been praying in my mind for a quick deliverance; for I am prepared for any call.... I — — —" — "Look here, cook," interrupted Mr. Baker, "the men are perishing with cold." — "Cold!" said the cook, mournfully; "they will be warm enough before long." — "What?" asked Mr. Baker, looking along the deck into the faint sheen of frothing water. — "They are a wicked lot," continued the cook solemnly, but in an unsteady voice, "about as wicked as any ship's company in this sinful world! Now, I" — he trembled so that he could hardly speak; his was an exposed place, and in a cotton shirt, a thin pair of trousers, and



with his knees under his nose, he received, quaking, the flicks of stinging, salt drops; his voice sounded exhausted — "now. I — any time ... My eldest youngster, Mr. Baker.. a clever boy... last Sunday on shore before this voyage he wouldn't go to church, sir. Says I, 'You go and clean yourself, or I'll know the reason why!' What does he do?... Pond, Mr. Baker — fell into the pond in his best rig, sir!... Accident?... 'Nothing will save you, fine scholar though you are!' says I.... Accident!... I whopped him, sir, till I couldn't lift my arm...." His voice faltered. "I whopped 'im!" he repeated, rattling his teeth; then, after a while, let out a mournful sound that was half a groan, half a snore. Mr. Baker shook him by the shoulders. "Hey! Cook! Hold up, Podmore! Tell me — is there any fresh water in the galley tank? The ship is lying along less, I think; I would try to get forward. A little water would do them good. Hallo! Look out! Look out!" The cook struggled. — "Not you, sir — not you!" He began to scramble to windward. "Galley!... my business!" he shouted. — "Cook's going crazy now," said several voices. He yelled: — "Crazy, am I? I am more ready to die than any of you, officers incloosive — there! As long as she swims I will cook! I will get you coffee." — "Cook, ye are a gentleman!" cried Belfast. But the cook was already going over the weather-ladder. He stopped for a moment to shout back on the poop: — "As long as she swims I will cook!" and disappeared as though he had gone overboard. The men who had heard sent after him a cheer that sounded like a wail of sick children. An hour or more afterwards some one said distinctly: "He's gone for good." — "Very likely," assented the boatswain; "even in fine weather he was as smart about the deck as a milch-cow on her first voyage. We ought to go and see." Nobody moved. As the hours dragged slowly through the darkness Mr. Baker crawled back and forth along the poop several times. Some men fancied they had heard him exchange murmurs with the master, but at that time the memories were incomparably more vivid than anything actual, and they were not certain whether the murmurs were heard now or many years ago. They did not try to find out. A mutter more or less did not matter. It was too cold for curiosity, and almost for hope. They could not spare a moment or a thought from the great mental occupation of wishing to live. And the desire of life kept them alive, apathetic and enduring, under the cruel persistence of wind and cold; while the bestarred black dome of the sky revolved slowly above the ship, that drifted, bearing their patience and their suffering, through the stormy solitude of the sea.

Huddled close to one another, they fancied themselves utterly alone. They heard sustained loud noises, and again bore the pain of existence through long hours of profound silence. In the night they saw sunshine, felt warmth, and suddenly, with a start, thought that the sun would never rise upon a freezing world. Some heard laughter, listened to songs; others, near the end of the poop, could hear loud human shrieks, and opening their eyes, were surprised to hear them still, though very faint, and far away. The boatswain said: — "Why, it's the cook, hailing from forward, I think." He hardly believed his own words or recognised his own voice. It was a long time before the man next to him gave a sign of life. He punched hard his other neighbour and said: — "The cook's shouting!" Many did not understand, others did not care; the majority further aft did not believe. But the boatswain and another man had the pluck to crawl away forward to see. They seemed to have been gone for hours, and were very soon forgotten. Then suddenly men who had been plunged in a hopeless resignation became as if possessed with a desire to hurt. They belaboured one another with fists. In the darkness they struck persistently anything soft they could feel near, and, with a greater effort than for a shout, whispered excitedly: — "They've got some hot coffee.... Boss'en got it...." "No!... Where?".... "It's coming! Cook made it." James Wait moaned. Donkin scrambled viciously, caring not where he kicked, and anxious that the officers should have none of it. It came in a pot, and they drank in turns. It was hot, and while it blistered the greedy palates, it seemed incredible. The men sighed out parting with the mug: — "How 'as he done it?" Some cried weakly: — "Bully for you, doctor!"

He had done it somehow. Afterwards Archie declared that the thing was "meeraculous." For many days we wondered, and it was the one ever-interesting subject of conversation to the end of the voyage. We asked the cook, in fine weather, how he felt when he saw his stove "reared up on end." We inquired, in the north-east trade and on serene evenings, whether he had to stand on his head to put things right somewhat. We suggested he had used his bread-board for a raft, and from there comfortably had stoked his grate; and we did our best to conceal our admiration under the wit of fine irony. He affirmed not to know anything about it, rebuked our levity, declared himself, with solemn animation, to have been the object of a special mercy for the saving of our unholy lives. Fundamentally he was right, no doubt; but he need not have been so offensively positive about it

— he need not have hinted so often that it would have gone hard with us had he not been there, meritorious and pure, to receive the inspiration and the strength for the work of grace. Had we been saved by his recklessness or his agility, we could have at length become reconciled to the fact; but to admit our obligation to anybody's virtue and holiness alone was as difficult for us as for any other handful of mankind. Like many benefactors of humanity, the cook took himself too seriously, and reaped the reward of irreverence. We were not un-ungrateful, however. He remained heroic. His saying — the saying of his life — became proverbial in the mouth of men as are the sayings of conquerors or sages. Later, whenever one of us was puzzled by a task and advised to relinquish it, he would express his determination to persevere and to succeed by the words: — "As long as she swims I will cook!"

The hot drink helped us through the bleak hours that precede the dawn. The sky low by the horizon took on the delicate tints of pink and yellow like the inside of a rare shell. And higher, where it glowed with a pearly sheen, a small black cloud appeared, like a forgotten fragment of the night set in a border of dazzling gold. The beams of light skipped on the crests of waves. The eyes of men turned to the eastward. The sunlight flooded their weary faces. They were giving themselves up to fatigue as though they had done for ever with their work. On Singleton's black oilskin coat the dried salt glistened like hoar frost. He hung on by the wheel, with open and lifeless eyes. Captain Allistoun, unblinking, faced the rising sun. His lips stirred, opened for the first time in twenty-four hours, and with a fresh firm voice he cried, "Wear ship!"

The commanding sharp tones made all these torpid men start like a sudden flick of a whip. Then again, motionless where they lay, the force of habit made some of them repeat the order in hardly audible murmurs. Captain Allistoun glanced down at his crew, and several, with fumbling fingers and hopeless movements, tried to cast themselves adrift. He repeated impatiently, "Wear ship. Now then, Mr. Baker, get the men along. What's the matter with them?" — "Wear ship. Do you hear there? — Wear ship!" thundered out the boatswain suddenly. His voice seemed to break through a deadly spell. Men began to stir and crawl. — "I want the fore-top-mast staysail run up smartly," said the master, very loudly; "if you can't manage it standing up you must do it lying down — that's all. Bear a hand!" — "Come along! Let's give the old girl a chance," urged the

boatswain. — "Aye! aye! Wear ship!" exclaimed quavering voices. The forecastle men, with reluctant faces, prepared to go forward. Mr. Baker pushed ahead, grunting, on all fours to show the way, and they followed him over the break. The others lay still with a vile hope in their hearts of not being required to move till they got saved or drowned in peace.

After some time they could be seen forward appearing on the forecastle head, one by one in unsafe attitudes; hanging on to the rails, clambering over the anchors; embracing the cross-head of the windlass or hugging the fore-capstan. They were restless with strange exertions, waved their arms, knelt, lay flat down, staggered up, seemed to strive their hardest to go overboard. Suddenly a small white piece of canvas fluttered amongst them, grew larger, beating. Its narrow head rose in jerks — and at last it stood distended and triangular in the sunshine. — "They have done it!" cried the voices aft. Captain Allistoun let go the rope he had round his wrist and rolled to leeward headlong. He could be seen casting the lee main braces off the pins while the backwash of waves splashed over him. — "Square the main yard!" he shouted up to us — who stared at him in wonder. We hesitated to stir. "The main brace, men. Haul! haul anyhow! Lay on your backs and haul!" he screeched, half drowned down there. We did not believe we could move the main yard, but the strongest and the less discouraged tried to execute the order. Others assisted half-heartedly. Singleton's eyes blazed suddenly as he took a fresh grip of the spokes. Captain Allistoun fought his way up to windward. — "Haul, men! Try to move it! Haul, and help the ship." His hard face worked suffused and furious. "Is she going off, Singleton?" he cried. — "Not a move yet, sir," croaked the old seaman in a horribly hoarse voice. — "Watch the helm, Singleton," spluttered the master. "Haul, men! Have you no more strength than rats? Haul, and earn your salt." Mr. Creighton, on his back, with a swollen leg and a face as white as a piece of paper, blinked his eyes; his bluish lips twitched. In the wild scramble men grabbed at him, crawled over his hurt leg, knelt on his chest. He kept perfectly still, setting his teeth without a moan, without a sigh. The master's ardour, the cries of that silent man inspired us. We hauled and hung in bunches on the rope. We heard him say with violence to Donkin, who sprawled abjectly on his stomach, — "I will brain you with this belaying pin if you don't catch hold of the brace," and that victim of men's injustice, cowardly and cheeky, whimpered: — "Are you goin' to murder us now?" while with sudden desperation he

gripped the rope. Men sighed, shouted, hissed meaningless words, groaned. The yards moved, came slowly square against the wind, that hummed loudly on the yard-arms. — "Going off, sir," shouted Singleton, "she's just started." — "Catch a turn with that brace. Catch a turn!" clamoured the master. Mr. Creighton, nearly suffocated and unable to move, made a mighty effort, and with his left hand managed to nip the rope.

— "All fast!" cried some one. He closed his eyes as if going off into a swoon, while huddled together about the brace we watched with scared looks what the ship would do now.

She went off slowly as though she had been weary and disheartened like the men she carried. She paid off very gradually, making us hold our breath till we choked, and as soon as she had brought the wind abaft the beam she started to move, and fluttered our hearts. It was awful to see her, nearly overturned, begin to gather way and drag her submerged side through the water. The dead-eyes of the rigging churned the breaking seas. The lower half of the deck was full of mad whirlpools and eddies; and the long line of the lee rail could be seen showing black now and then in the swirls of a field of foam as dazzling and white as a field of snow. The wind sang shrilly amongst the spars; and at every slight lurch we expected her to slip to the bottom sideways from under our backs. When dead before it she made the first distinct attempt to stand up, and we encouraged her with a feeble and discordant howl. A great sea came running up aft and hung for a moment over us with a curling top; then crashed down under the counter and spread out on both sides into a great sheet of bursting froth. Above its fierce hiss we heard Singleton's croak: — "She is steering!" He had both his feet now planted firmly on the grating, and the wheel spun fast as he eased the helm. — "Bring the wind on the port quarter and steady her!" called out the master, staggering to his feet, the first man up from amongst our prostrate heap. One or two screamed with excitement: — "She rises!" Far away forward, Mr. Baker and three others were seen erect and black on the clear sky, lifting their arms, and with open mouths as though they had been shouting all together. The ship trembled, trying to lift her side, lurched back, seemed to give up with a nerveless dip, and suddenly with an unexpected jerk swung violently to windward, as though she had torn herself out from a deadly grasp. The whole immense volume of water, lifted by her deck, was thrown bodily across to starboard. Loud cracks were heard. Iron ports breaking open thundered with ringing blows. The water

topped over the starboard rail with the rush of a river falling over a dam. The sea on deck, and the seas on every side of her, mingled together in a deafening roar. She rolled violently. We got up and were helplessly run or flung about from side to side. Men, rolling over and over, yelled, — "The house will go!" — "She clears herself!" Lifted by a towering sea she ran along with it for a moment, spouting thick streams of water through every opening of her wounded sides. The lee braces having been carried away or washed off the pins, all the ponderous yards on the fore swung from side to side and with appalling rapidity at every roll. The men forward were seen crouching here and there with fearful glances upwards at the enormous spars that whirled about over their heads. The torn canvas and the ends of broken gear streamed in the wind like wisps of hair. Through the clear sunshine, over the flashing turmoil and uproar of the seas, the ship ran blindly, dishevelled and headlong, as if fleeing for her life; and on the poop we spun, we tottered about, distracted and noisy. We all spoke at once in a thin babble; we had the aspect of invalids and the gestures of maniacs. Eyes shone, large and haggard, in smiling, meagre faces that seemed to have been dusted over with powdered chalk. We stamped, clapped our hands, feeling ready to jump and do anything; but in reality hardly able to keep on our feet.

Captain Allistoun, hard and slim, gesticulated madly from the poop at Mr. Baker: "Steady these fore-yards! Steady them the best you can!" On the main deck, men excited by his cries, splashed, dashing aimlessly, here and there with the foam swirling up to their waists. Apart, far aft, and alone by the helm, old Singleton had deliberately tucked his white beard under the top button of his glistening coat. Swaying upon the din and tumult of the seas, with the whole battered length of the ship launched forward in a rolling rush before his steady old eyes, he stood rigidly still, forgotten by all, and with an attentive face. In front of his erect figure only the two arms moved crosswise with a swift and sudden readiness, to check or urge again the rapid stir of circling spokes. He steered with care.

## CHAPTER FOUR

On men reprieved by its disdainful mercy, the immortal sea confers in its justice the full privilege of desired unrest. Through the perfect wisdom of its grace they are not permitted to meditate at ease upon the complicated and acrid savour of existence. They must without pause justify their life to the eternal pity that commands toil to be hard and unceasing, from sunrise to sunset, from sunset to sunrise; till the weary succession of nights and days tainted by the obstinate clamour of sages, demanding bliss and an empty heaven, is redeemed at last by the vast silence of pain and labour, by the dumb fear and the dumb courage of men obscure, forgetful, and enduring.

The master and Mr. Baker coming face to face stared for a moment, with the intense and amazed looks of men meeting unexpectedly after years of trouble. Their voices were gone, and they whispered desperately at one another. — "Any one missing?" asked Captain Allistoun. — "No. All there." — "Anybody hurt?" — "Only the second mate." — "I will look after him directly. We're lucky." — "Very," articulated Mr. Baker, faintly. He gripped the rail and rolled bloodshot eyes. The little grey man made an effort to raise his voice above a dull mutter, and fixed his chief mate with a cold gaze, piercing like a dart. — "Get sail on the ship," he said, speaking authoritatively and with an inflexible snap of his thin lips. "Get sail on her as soon as you can. This is a fair wind. At once, sir — Don't give the men time to feel themselves. They will get done up and stiff, and we will never... We must get her along now"... He reeled to a long heavy roll; the rail dipped into the glancing, hissing water. He caught a shroud, swung helplessly against the mate... "now we have a fair wind at last — — — Make — — — sail." His head rolled from shoulder to shoulder. His eyelids began to beat rapidly. "And the pumps — — — pumps, Mr. Baker." He peered as though the face within a foot of his eyes had been half a mile off. "Keep the men on the move to — — — to get her along," he mumbled in a drowsy tone, like a man going off into a doze. He pulled himself together suddenly. "Mustn't stand. Won't do," he said with a painful attempt at a smile. He let go his hold, and, propelled by the dip of the ship, ran aft unwillingly, with small steps, till he brought up against the binnacle stand. Hanging on there he looked up in an aimless manner at Singleton, who, unheeding him, watched anxiously the end of the jib-boom —

"Steering gear works all right?" he asked. There was a noise in the old seaman's throat, as though the words had been rattling together before they could come out. — "Steers... like a little boat," he said, at last, with hoarse tenderness, without giving the master as much as half a glance — then, watchfully, spun the wheel down, steadied, flung it back again. Captain Allistoun tore himself away from the delight of leaning against the binnacle, and began to walk the poop, swaying and reeling to preserve his balance....

The pump-rods, clanking, stamped in short jumps while the fly-wheels turned smoothly, with great speed, at the foot of the mainmast, flinging back and forth with a regular impetuosity two limp clusters of men clinging to the handles. They abandoned themselves, swaying from the hip with twitching faces and stony eyes. The carpenter, sounding from time to time, exclaimed mechanically: "Shake her up! Keep her going!" Mr. Baker could not speak, but found his voice to shout; and under the goad of his objurgations, men looked to the lashings, dragged out new sails; and thinking themselves unable to move, carried heavy blocks aloft — overhauled the gear. They went up the rigging with faltering and desperate efforts. Their heads swam as they shifted their hold, stepped blindly on the yards like men in the dark; or trusted themselves to the first rope at hand with the negligence of exhausted strength. The narrow escapes from falls did not disturb the languid beat of their hearts; the roar of the seas seething far below them sounded continuous and faint like an indistinct noise from another world: the wind filled their eyes with tears, and with heavy gusts tried to push them off from where they swayed in insecure positions. With streaming faces and blowing hair they flew up and down between sky and water, bestriding the ends of yard-arms, crouching on foot-ropes, embracing lifts to have their hands free, or standing up against chain ties. Their thoughts floated vaguely between the desire of rest and the desire of life, while their stiffened fingers cast off head-earrings, fumbled for knives, or held with tenacious grip against the violent shocks of beating canvas. They glared savagely at one another, made frantic signs with one hand while they held their life in the other, looked down on the narrow strip of flooded deck, shouted along to leeward: "Light-to!"... "Haul out!"... "Make fast!" Their lips moved, their eyes started, furious and eager with the desire to be understood, but the wind tossed their words unheard upon the disturbed sea. In an unendurable and unending strain they worked like men driven by a



merciless dream to toil in an atmosphere of ice or flame. They burnt and shivered in turns. Their eyeballs smarted as if in the smoke of a conflagration; their heads were ready to burst with every shout. Hard fingers seemed to grip their throats. At every roll they thought: Now I must let go. It will shake us all off — and thrown about aloft they cried wildly: “Look out there — catch the end.”... “Reeve clear”... “Turn this block....” They nodded desperately; shook infuriated faces, “No! No! From down up.” They seemed to hate one another with a deadly hate, The longing to be done with it all gnawed their breasts, and the wish to do things well was a burning pain. They cursed their fate, contemned their life, and wasted their breath in deadly imprecations upon one another.’ The sailmaker, with his bald head bared, worked feverishly, forgetting his intimacy with so many admirals. The boatswain, climbing up with marlinspikes and bunches of spunyarn rovings, or kneeling on the yard and ready to take a turn with the midship-stop, had acute and fleeting visions of his old woman and the youngsters in a moorland village. Mr. Baker, feeling very weak, tottered here and there, grunting and inflexible, like a man of iron. He waylaid those who, coming from aloft, stood gasping for breath. He ordered, encouraged, scolded. “Now then — to the main topsail now! Tally on to that gantline. Don’t stand about there!” — “Is there no rest for us?” muttered voices. He spun round fiercely, with a sinking heart. — “No! No rest till the work is done. Work till you drop. That’s what you’re here for.” A bowed seaman at his elbow gave a short laugh. — “Do or die,” he croaked bitterly, then spat into his broad palms, swung up his long arms, and grasping the rope high above his head sent out a mournful, wailing cry for a pull all together. A sea boarded the quarter-deck and sent the whole lot sprawling to leeward. Caps, handspikes floated. Clenched hands, kicking legs, with here and there a spluttering face, stuck out of the white hiss of foaming water. Mr. Baker, knocked down with the rest, screamed — “Don’t let go that rope! Hold on to it! Hold!” And sorely bruised by the brutal fling, they held on to it, as though it had been the fortune of their life. The ship ran, rolling heavily, and the topping crests glanced past port and starboard flashing their white heads. Pumps were freed. Braces were rove. The three topsails and foresail were set. She spurted faster over the water, outpacing the swift rush of waves. The menacing thunder of distanced seas rose behind her — filled the air with the tremendous vibrations of its voice. And devastated, battered,

and wounded she drove foaming to the northward, as though inspired by the courage of a high endeavour....

The forecastle was a place of damp desolation. They looked at their dwelling with dismay. It was slimy, dripping; it hummed hollow with the wind, and was strewn with shapeless wreckage like a half-tide cavern in a rocky and exposed coast. Many had lost all they had in the world, but most of the starboard watch had preserved their chests; thin streams of water trickled out of them, however. The beds were soaked; the blankets spread out and saved by some nail squashed under foot. They dragged wet rags from evil-smelling corners, and wringing the water out, recognised their property. Some smiled stiffly. Others looked round blank and mute. There were cries of joy over old waistcoats, and groans of sorrow over shapeless things found among the splinters of smashed bed boards. One lamp was discovered jammed under the bowsprit. Charley whimpered a little. Knowles stumped here and there, sniffing, examining dark places for salvage. He poured dirty water out of a boot, and was concerned to find the owner. Those who, overwhelmed by their losses, sat on the forepeak hatch, remained elbows on knees, and, with a fist against each cheek, disdained to look up. He pushed it under their noses. "Here's a good boot. Yours?" They snarled, "No — get out." One snapped at him, "Take it to hell out of this." He seemed surprised. "Why? It's a good boot," but remembering suddenly that he had lost every stitch of his clothing, he dropped his find and began to swear. In the dim light cursing voices clashed. A man came in and, dropping his arms, stood still, repeating from the doorstep, "Here's a bloomin' old go! Here's a bloomin' old go!" A few rooted anxiously in flooded chests for tobacco. They breathed hard, clamoured with heads down. "Look at that Jack!"... "Here! Sam! Here's my shore-going rig spoilt for ever." One blasphemed tearfully, holding up a pair of dripping trousers. No one looked at him. The cat came out from somewhere. He had an ovation. They snatched him from hand to hand, caressed him in a murmur of pet names. They wondered where he had "weathered it out;" disputed about it. A squabbling argument began. Two men brought in a bucket of fresh water, and all crowded round it; but Tom, lean and mewing, came up with every hair astir and had the first drink. A couple of hands went aft for oil and biscuits.

Then in the yellow light and in the intervals of mopping the deck they crunched hard bread, arranging to "worry through somehow." Men

chummed as to beds. Turns were settled for wearing boots and having the use of oilskin coats. They called one another “old man” and “sonny” in cheery voices. Friendly slaps resounded. Jokes were shouted. One or two stretched on the wet deck, slept with heads pillowed on their bent arms, and several, sitting on the hatch, smoked. Their weary faces appeared through a thin blue haze, pacified and with sparkling eyes. The boatswain put his head through the door. “Relieve the wheel, one of you” — he shouted inside — “it’s six. Blamme if that old Singleton hasn’t been there more’n thirty hours. You are a fine lot.” He slammed the door again. “Mate’s watch on deck,” said some one. “Hey, Donkin, it’s your relief!” shouted three or four together. He had crawled into an empty bunk and on wet planks lay still. “Donkin, your wheel.” He made no sound. “Donkin’s dead,” guffawed some one, “Sell ‘is bloomin’ clothes,” shouted another. “Donkin, if ye don’t go to the bloomin’ wheel they will sell your clothes — d’ye hear?” jeered a third. He groaned from his dark hole. He complained about pains in all his bones, he whimpered pitifully. “He won’t go,” exclaimed a contemptuous voice, “your turn, Davis.” The young seaman rose painfully, squaring his shoulders. Donkin stuck his head out, and it appeared in the yellow light, fragile and ghastly. “I will giv’ yer a pound of tobaccer,” he whined in a conciliating voice, “so soon as I draw it from aft. I will — s’elp me...” Davis swung his arm backhanded and the head vanished. “I’ll go,” he said, “but you will pay for it.” He walked unsteady but resolute to the door. “So I will,” yelped Donkin, popping out behind him. “So I will — s’elp me... a pound... three bob they chawрге.” Davis flung the door open. “You will pay my price... in fine weather,” he shouted over his shoulder. One of the men unbuttoned his wet coat rapidly, threw it at his head. “Here, Taffy — take that, you thief!” “Thank you!” he cried from the darkness above the swish of rolling water. He could be heard splashing; a sea came on board with a thump. “He’s got his bath already,” remarked a grim shellback. “Aye, aye!” grunted others. Then, after a long silence, Wamibo made strange noises. “Hallo, what’s up with you?” said some one grumpily. “He says he would have gone for Davy,” explained Archie, who was the Finn’s interpreter generally. “I believe him!” cried voices.... “Never mind, Dutchy... You’ll do, muddle-head.... Your turn will come soon enough... You don’t know when ye’re well off.” They ceased, and all together turned their faces to the door. Singleton stepped in, advanced two paces, and stood swaying slightly. The sea hissed, flowed roaring past the bows, and the forecastle trembled,

full of deep murmurs; the lamp flared, swinging like a pendulum. He looked with a dreamy and puzzled stare, as though he could not distinguish the still men from their restless shadows. There were awestruck exclamations: — "Hallo, hallo"... "How does it look outside now, Singleton?" Those who sat on the hatch lifted their eyes in silence, and the next oldest seaman in the ship (those two understood one another, though they hardly exchanged three words in a day) gazed up at his friend attentively for a moment, then taking a short clay pipe out of his mouth, offered it without a word. Singleton put out his arm towards it, missed, staggered, and suddenly fell forward, crashing down, stiff and headlong like an uprooted tree. There was a swift rush. Men pushed, crying: — "He's done!"... "Turn him over!"... "Stand clear there!" Under a crowd of startled faces bending over him he lay on his back, staring upwards in a continuous and intolerable manner. In the breathless silence of a general consternation, he said in a grating murmur: — "I am all right," and clutched with his hands. They helped him up. He mumbled despondently: — "I am getting old... old." — "Not you," cried Belfast, with ready tact. Supported on all sides, he hung his head. — "Are you better?" they asked. He glared at them from under his eyebrows with large black eyes, spreading over his chest the bushy whiteness of a beard long and thick. — "Old! old!" he repeated sternly. Helped along, he reached his bunk. There was in it a slimy soft heap of something that smelt, as does at dead low water a muddy foreshore. It was his soaked straw bed. With a convulsive effort he pitched himself on it, and in the darkness of the narrow place could be heard growling angrily, like an irritated and savage animal uneasy in its den: — "Bit of breeze... small thing... can't stand up... old!" He slept at last, high-booted, sou'wester on head, and his oilskin clothes rustled, when with a deep sighing groan he turned over. Men conversed about him in quiet, concerned whispers. "This will break'im up"... "Strong as a horse"... "Aye. But he ain't what he used to be." In sad murmurs they gave him up. Yet at midnight he turned out to duty as if nothing had been the matter, and answered to his name with a mournful "Here!" He brooded alone more than ever, in an impenetrable silence and with a saddened face. For many years he had heard himself called "Old Singleton," and had serenely accepted the qualification, taking it as a tribute of respect due to a man who through half a century had measured his strength against the favours and the rages of the sea. He had never given a thought to his mortal self. He lived unscathed, as though he

had been indestructible, surrendering to all the temptations, weathering many gales. He had panted in sunshine, shivered in the cold; suffered hunger, thirst, debauch; passed through many trials — known all the furies. Old! It seemed to him he was broken at last. And like a man bound treacherously while he sleeps, he woke up fettered by the long chain of disregarded years. He had to take up at once the burden of all his existence, and found it almost too heavy for his strength. Old! He moved his arms, shook his head, felt his limbs. Getting old... and then? He looked upon the immortal sea with the awakened and groping perception of its heartless might; he saw it unchanged, black and foaming under the eternal scrutiny of the stars; he heard its impatient voice calling for him out of a pitiless vastness full of unrest, of turmoil, and of terror. He looked afar upon it, and he saw an immensity tormented and blind, moaning and furious, that claimed all the days of his tenacious life, and, when life was over, would claim the worn-out body of its slave....

This was the last of the breeze. It veered quickly, changed to a black south-easter, and blew itself out, giving the ship a famous shove to the northward into the joyous sunshine of the trade. Rapid and white she ran homewards in a straight path, under a blue sky and upon the plain of a blue sea. She carried Singleton's completed wisdom, Donkin's delicate susceptibilities, and the conceited folly of us all. The hours of ineffective turmoil were forgotten; the fear and anguish of these dark moments were never mentioned in the glowing peace of fine days. Yet from that time our life seemed to start afresh as though we had died and had been resuscitated. All the first part of the voyage, the Indian Ocean on the other side of the Cape, all that was lost in a haze, like an ineradicable suspicion of some previous existence. It had ended — then there were blank hours: a livid blurr — and again we lived! Singleton was possessed of sinister truth; Mr. Creighton of a damaged leg; the cook of fame — and shamefully abused the opportunities of his distinction. Donkin had an added grievance. He went about repeating with insistence: — "'E said 'e would brain me — did yer 'ear? They are goin' to murder us now for the least little thing." We began at last to think it was rather awful. And we were conceited! We boasted of our pluck, of our capacity for work, of our energy. We remembered honourable episodes: our devotion, our indomitable perseverance — and were proud of them as though they had been the outcome of our unaided impulses. We remembered our danger, our toil — and conveniently forgot

our horrible scare. We decried our officers — who had done nothing — and listened to the fascinating Donkin. His care for our rights, his disinterested concern for our dignity, were not discouraged by the invariable contumely of our words, by the disdain of our looks. Our contempt for him was unbounded — and we could not but listen with interest to that consummate artist. He told us we were good men — a “bloomin’ condemned lot of good men.” Who thanked us? Who took any notice of our wrongs? Didn’t we lead a “dorg’s loife for two poun’ ten a month?” Did we think that miserable pay enough to compensate us for the risk to our lives and for the loss of our clothes? “We’ve lost every rag!” he cried. He made us forget that he, at any rate, had lost nothing of his own. The younger men listened, thinking — this ‘ere Donkin’s a long-headed chap, though no kind of man, anyhow. The Scandinavians were frightened at his audacities; Wamibo did not understand; and the older seamen thoughtfully nodded their heads making the thin gold earrings glitter in the fleshy lobes of hairy ears. Severe, sunburnt faces were propped meditatively on tattooed forearms. Veined, brown fists held in their knotted grip the dirty white clay of smouldering pipes. They listened, impenetrable, broad-backed, with bent shoulders, and in grim silence. He talked with ardour, despised and irrefutable. His picturesque and filthy loquacity flowed like a troubled stream from a poisoned source. His beady little eyes danced, glancing right and left, ever on the watch for the approach of an officer. Sometimes Mr. Baker going forward to take a look at the head sheets would roll with his uncouth gait through the sudden stillness of the men; or Mr. Creighton limped along, smooth-faced, youthful, and more stern than ever, piercing our short silence with a keen glance of his clear eyes. Behind his back Donkin would begin again darting stealthy, sidelong looks. — ”‘Ere’s one of ‘em. Some of yer ‘as made ‘im fast that day. Much thanks yer got for it. Ain’t ‘ee a-drivin’ yer wusse’n ever?... Let ‘im slip overboard.... Vy not? It would ‘ave been less trouble. Vy not?” He advanced confidentially, backed away with great effect; he whispered, he screamed, waved his miserable arms no thicker than pipe-stems — stretched his lean neck — spluttered squinted. In the pauses of his impassioned orations the wind sighed quietly aloft, the calm sea unheeded murmured in a warning whisper along the ship’s side. We abominated the creature and could not deny the luminous truth of his contentions. It was all so obvious. We were indubitably good men; our deserts were great and our pay small. Through our exertions we

had saved the ship and the skipper would get the credit of it. What had he done? we wanted to know. Donkin asked: — "What 'ee could do without hus?" and we could not answer. We were oppressed by the injustice of the world, surprised to perceive how long we had lived under its burden without realising our unfortunate state, annoyed by the uneasy suspicion of our undiscerning stupidity. Donkin assured us it was all our "good 'eartedness," but we would not be consoled by such shallow sophistry. We were men enough to courageously admit to ourselves our intellectual shortcomings; though from that time we refrained from kicking him, tweaking his nose, or from accidentally knocking him about, which last, after we had weathered the Cape, had been rather a popular amusement. Davis ceased to talk at him provokingly about black eyes and flattened noses. Charley, much subdued since the gale, did not jeer at him. Knowles deferentially and with a crafty air propounded questions such as: — "Could we all have the same grub as the mates? Could we all stop ashore till we got it? What would be the next thing to try for if we got that?" He answered readily with contemptuous certitude; he strutted with assurance in clothes that were much too big for him as though he had tried to disguise himself. These were Jimmy's clothes mostly — though he would accept anything from anybody; but nobody, except Jimmy, had anything to spare. His devotion to Jimmy was unbounded. He was for ever dodging in the little cabin, ministering to Jimmy's wants, humouring his whims, submitting to his exacting peevishness, often laughing with him. Nothing could keep him away from the pious work of visiting the sick, especially when there was some heavy hauling to be done on deck. Mr. Baker had on two occasions jerked him out from there by the scruff of the neck to our inexpressible scandal. Was a sick chap to be left without attendance? Were we to be ill-used for attending a shipmate? — "What?" growled Mr. Baker, turning menacingly at the mutter, and the whole half-circle like one man stepped back a pace. "Set the topmast stunsail. Away aloft, Donkin, overhaul the gear," ordered the mate inflexibly. "Fetch the sail along; bend the down-haul clear. Bear a hand." Then, the sail set, he would go slowly aft and stand looking at the compass for a long time, careworn, pensive, and breathing hard as if stifled by the taint of unaccountable ill-will that pervaded the ship. "What's up amongst them?" he thought. "Can't make out this hanging back and growling. A good crowd, too, as they go nowadays." On deck the men exchanged bitter words, suggested by a silly exasperation

against something unjust and irremediable that would not be denied, and would whisper into their ears long after Donkin had ceased speaking. Our little world went on its curved and unswerving path carrying a discontented and aspiring population. They found comfort of a gloomy kind in an interminable and conscientious analysis of their unappreciated worth; and inspired by Donkin's hopeful doctrines they dreamed enthusiastically of the time when every lonely ship would travel over a serene sea, manned by a wealthy and well-fed crew of satisfied skippers.

It looked-as if it would be a long passage. The south-east trades, light and unsteady, were left behind; and then, on the equator and under a low grey sky, the ship, in close heat, floated upon a smooth sea that resembled a sheet of ground glass. Thunder squalls hung on the horizon, circled round the ship, far off and growling angrily, like a troop of wild beasts afraid to charge home. The invisible sun, sweeping above the upright masts, made on the clouds a blurred stain of rayless light, and a similar patch of faded radiance kept pace with it from east to west over the unglittering level of the waters. At night, through the impenetrable darkness of earth and, heaven, broad sheets of flame waved noiselessly; and for half a second the becalmed craft stood out with its masts and rigging, with every sail and every rope distinct and black in the centre of a fiery outburst, like a charred ship enclosed in a globe of fire. And, again, for long hours she remained lost in a vast universe of night and silence where gentle sighs wandering here and there like forlorn souls, made the still sails flutter as in sudden fear, and the ripple of a beshrouded ocean whisper its compassion afar — in a voice mournful, immense, and faint....

When the lamp was put out, and through the door thrown wide open, Jimmy, turning on his pillow, could see vanishing beyond the straight line of top-gallant rail, the quick, repeated visions of a fabulous world made up of leaping fire and sleeping water. The lightning gleamed in his big sad eyes that seemed in a red flicker to burn themselves out in his black face, and then he would lie blinded and invisible in the midst of an intense darkness. He could hear on the quiet deck soft footfalls, the breathing of some man lounging on the doorstep; the low creak of swaying masts; or the calm voice of the watch-officer reverberating aloft, hard and loud, amongst the unstirring sails. He listened with avidity, taking a rest in the attentive perception of the slightest sound from the fatiguing wanderings of his sleeplessness. He was cheered by the rattling of blocks, reassured by the stir



and murmur of the watch, soothed by the slow yawn of some sleepy and weary seaman settling himself deliberately for a snooze on the planks. Life seemed an indestructible thing. It went on in darkness, in sunshine, in sleep; tireless, it hovered affectionately round the imposture of his ready death. It was bright, like the twisted flare of lightning, and more full of surprises than the dark night. It made him safe, and the calm of its overpowering darkness was as precious as its restless and dangerous light.

But in the evening, in the dog-watches, and even far into the first night-watch, a knot of men could always be seen congregated before Jimmy's cabin. They leaned on each side of the door peacefully interested and with crossed legs; they stood astride the doorstep discoursing, or sat in silent couples on his sea-chest; while against the bulwark along the spare topmast, three or four in a row stared meditatively; with their simple faces lit up by the projected glare of Jimmy's lamp. The little place, repainted white, had, in the night, the brilliance of a silver shrine where a black idol, reclining stiffly under a blanket, blinked its weary eyes and received our homage. Donkin officiated. He had the air of a demonstrator showing a phenomenon, a manifestation bizarre, simple, and meritorious that, to the beholders, should be a profound and an everlasting lesson. "Just look at 'im, 'ee knows what's what — never fear!" he exclaimed now and then, flourishing a hand hard and fleshless like the claw of a snipe. Jimmy, on his back, smiled with reserve and without moving a limb. He affected the languor of extreme weakness, so as to make it manifest to us that our delay in hauling him out from his horrible confinement, and then that night spent on the poop among our selfish neglect of his needs, had "done for him." He rather liked to talk about it, and of course we were always interested. He spoke spasmodically, in fast rushes with long pauses between, as a tipsy man walks.... "Cook had just given me a pannikin of hot coffee.... Slapped it down there, on my chest — banged the door to.... I felt a heavy roll coming; tried to save my coffee, burnt my fingers... and fell out of my bunk.... She went over so quick.... Water came in through the ventilator.... I couldn't move the door... dark as a grave... tried to scramble up into the upper berth.... Rats... a rat bit my finger as I got up.... I could hear him swimming below me.... I thought you would never come... I thought you were all gone overboard... of course... Could hear nothing but the wind.... Then you came... to look for the corpse, I suppose. A little more and..."

“Man! But ye made a rare lot of noise in here,” observed Archie, thoughtfully.

“You chaps kicked up such a confounded row above.... Enough to scare any one.... I didn’t know what you were up to.... Bash in the blamed planks... my head.... Just what a silly, scary gang of fools would do.... Not much good to me anyhow.... Just as well... drown.... Pah.”

He groaned, snapped his big white teeth, and gazed with scorn. Belfast lifted a pair of dolorous eyes, with a broken-hearted smile, clenched his fists stealthily; blue-eyed Archie caressed his red whiskers with a hesitating hand; the boatswain at the door stared a moment, and brusquely went away with a loud guffaw. Wamibo dreamed.... Donkin felt all over his sterile chin for the few rare hairs, and said, triumphantly, with a sidelong glance at Jimmy: — ”Look at ‘im! Wish I was ‘arf has ‘ealthy as ‘ee is — I do.” He jerked a short thumb over his shoulder towards the after end of the ship. “That’s the blooming way to do ‘em!” he yelped, with forced heartiness. Jimmy said: — ”Don’t be a dam’ fool,” in a pleasant voice. Knowles, rubbing his shoulder against the doorpost, remarked shrewdly: — ”We can’t all go an’ be took sick — it would be mutiny.” — ”Mutiny — gawn!” jeered Donkin, “there’s no bloomin’ law against bein’ sick.” — ”There’s six weeks’ hard for refoosing dooty,” argued Knowles, “I mind I once seed in Cardiff the crew of an overloaded ship — leastways she weren’t overloaded, only a fatherly old gentleman with a white beard and an umbreller came along the quay and talked to the hands. Said as how it was crool hard to be drowned in winter just for the sake of a few pounds more for the owner — he said. Nearly cried over them — he did; and he had a square mainsail coat, and a gaff-topsail hat too — all proper. So they chaps they said they wouldn’t go to be drowned in winter — depending upon that ‘ere Plimsoll man to see ‘em through the court. They thought to have a bloomin’ lark and two or three days’ spree. And the beak giv’ ‘em six weeks — coss the ship warn’t overloaded. Anyways they made it out in court that she wasn’t. There wasn’t one overloaded ship in Penarth Dock at all. ‘Pears that old coon he was only on pay and allowance from some kind people, under orders to look for overloaded ships, and he couldn’t see no further than the length of his umbreller. Some of us in the boarding-house, where I live when I’m looking for a ship in Cardiff, stood by to duck that old weeping spunger in the dock. We kept a good look-out, too — but he

topped his boom directly he was outside the court.... Yes. They got six weeks' hard...."

They listened, full of curiosity, nodding in the pauses their rough pensive faces. Donkin opened his mouth once or twice, but restrained himself. Jimmy lay still with open eyes and not at all interested. A seaman emitted the opinion that after a verdict of atrocious partiality "the bloomin' beaks go an' drink at the skipper's expense." Others assented. It was clear, of course. Donkin said: — "Well, six weeks ain't much trouble. You sleep all night in, reg'lar, in chokey. Do it on my 'ead." "You are used to it ainch'ee, Donkin?" asked somebody. Jimmy condescended to laugh. It cheered up every one wonderfully. Knowles, with surprising mental agility, shifted his ground. "If we all went sick what would become of the ship? eh?" He posed the problem and grinned all round. — "Let 'er go to 'ell," sneered Donkin. "Damn 'er. She ain't yourn." — "What? Just let her drift?" insisted Knowles in a tone of unbelief. — "Aye! Drift, an' be blowed," affirmed Donkin with fine recklessness. The other did not see it — meditated. — "The stores would run out," he muttered, "and... never get anywhere... and what about payday?" he added with greater assurance. — "Jack likes a good pay-day," exclaimed a listener on the doorstep. "Aye, because then the girls put one arm round his neck an' t'other in his pocket, and call him ducky. Don't they, Jack?" — "Jack, you're a terror with the gals." — "He takes three of 'em in tow to once, like one of 'em Watkinses two-funnel tugs waddling away with three schooners behind." — "Jack, you're a lame scamp." — "Jack, tell us about that one with a blue eye and a black eye. Do." — "There's plenty of girls with one black eye along the Highway by..."

— "No, that's a speshul one — come, Jack." Donkin looked severe and disgusted; Jimmy very bored; a grey-haired sea-dog shook his head slightly, smiling at the bowl of his pipe, discreetly amused. Knowles turned about bewildered; stammered first at one, then at another. — "No!... I never!... can't talk sensible sense midst you.... Always on the kid." He retired bashfully — muttering and pleased. They laughed, hooting in the crude light, around Jimmy's bed, where on a white pillow his hollowed black face moved to and fro restlessly. A puff of wind came, made the flame of the lamp leap, and outside, high up, the sails fluttered, while near by the block of the foresheet struck a ringing blow on the iron bulwark. A voice far off cried, "Helm up!" another, more faint, answered, "Hard-up, sir!" They

became silent — waited expectantly. The grey-haired seaman knocked his pipe on the doorstep and stood up.' The ship leaned over gently and the sea seemed to wake up, murmuring drowsily. "Here's a little wind comin'," said some one very low. Jimmy turned over slowly to face the breeze. The voice in the night cried loud and commanding: — "Haul the spanker out." The group before the door vanished out of the light. They could be heard tramping aft while they repeated with varied intonations: — "Spanker out!"... "Out spanker, sir!" Donkin remained alone with Jimmy. There was a silence. Jimmy opened and shut his lips several times as if swallowing draughts of fresher air; Donkin moved the toes of his bare feet and looked at them thoughtfully.

"Ain't you going to give them a hand with the sail?" asked Jimmy.

"No. If six ov 'em ain't 'nough beef to set that blamed, rotten spanker, they ain't fit to live," answered Donkin in a bored, far-away voice, as though he had been talking from the bottom of a hole. Jimmy considered the conical, fowl-like profile with a queer kind of interest; he was leaning out of his bunk with the calculating, uncertain expression of a man who reflects how best to lay hold of some strange creature that looks as though it could sting or bite. But he said only: — "The mate will miss you — and there will be ructions."

Donkin got up to go. "I will do for 'im some dark night; see if I don't," he said over his shoulder.

Jimmy went on quickly: — "You're like a poll-parrot, like a screechin' poll-parrot." Donkin stopped and cocked his head attentively on one side. His big ears stood out, transparent and veined, resembling the thin wings of a bat.

"Yuss?" he said, with his back towards Jimmy.

"Yes! Chatter out all you know — like... like a dirty white cockatoo."

Donkin waited. He could hear the other's breathing, long and slow; the breathing of a man with a hundredweight or so on the breastbone. Then he asked calmly: — "What do I know?"

"What?... What I tell you... not much. What do you want... to talk about my health so..."

"It's a blooming imposyshun. A bloomin', stinkin', first-class imposyshun — but it don't tyke me in. Not it."

Jimmy kept still. Donkin put his hands in his pockets, and in one slouching stride came up to the bunk.

"I talk — what's the odds. They ain't men 'ere — sheep they are. A driven lot of sheep. I 'old you up... Vy not? You're well orf."

"I am... I don't say anything about that...."

"Well. Let 'em see it. Let 'em larn what a man can do. I am a man, I know all about yer...." Jimmy threw himself further away on the pillow; the other stretched out his skinny neck, jerked his bird face down at him as though pecking at the eyes. "I am a man. I've seen the inside of every chokey in the Colonies rather'n give up my rights...."

"You are a jail-prop," said Jimmy, weakly.

"I am... an' proud of it, too. You! You 'aven't the bloomin' nerve — so you inventyd this 'ere dodge...." He paused; then with marked afterthought accentuated slowly: — "Yer ain't sick — are yer?"

"No," said Jimmy, firmly. "Been out of sorts now and again this year," he mumbled with a sudden drop in his voice.

Donkin closed one eye, amicable and confidential. He whispered: — "Ye 'ave done this afore'aven'tchee?" Jimmy smiled — then as if unable to hold back he let himself go: — "Last ship — yes. I was out of sorts on the passage. See? It was easy. They paid me off in Calcutta, and the skipper made no bones about it either.... I got my money all right. Laid up fifty-eight days! The fools! O Lord! The fools! Paid right off." He laughed spasmodically. Donkin chimed in giggling. Then Jimmy coughed violently. "I am as well as ever," he said, as soon as he could draw breath.

Donkin made a derisive gesture. "In course," he said, profoundly, "any one can see that." — "They don't," said Jimmy, gasping like a fish. — "They would swallow any yarn," affirmed Donkin. — "Don't you let on too much," admonished Jimmy in an exhausted voice. — "Your little gyme? Eh?" commented Donkin, jovially. Then with sudden disgust: "Yer all for yerself, s'long as ye're right..."

So charged with egoism James Wait pulled the blanket up to his chin and lay still for a while. His heavy lips protruded in an everlasting black pout. "Why are you so hot on making trouble?" he asked without much interest.

"'Cos it's a bloomin' shayme. We are put upon... bad food, bad pay... I want us to kick up a bloomin' row; a blamed 'owling row that would make 'em remember! Knocking people about... brain us indeed! Ain't we men?" His altruistic indignation blazed. Then he said calmly: — "I've been airing yer clothes." — "All right," said Jimmy, languidly, "bring them in." — "Giv' us the key of your chest, I'll put 'em away for yer," said Donkin with

friendly eagerness. — "Bring 'em in, I will put them away myself," answered James Wait with severity. Donkin looked down, muttering.... "What d'you say? What d'you say?" inquired Wait anxiously. — "Nothink. The night's dry, let 'em 'ang out till the morning," said Donkin, in a strangely trembling voice, as though restraining laughter or rage. Jimmy seemed satisfied. — "Give me a little water for the night in my mug — there," he said. Donkin took a stride over the doorstep. — "Git it yerself," he replied in a surly tone. "You can do it, unless you are sick." — "Of course I can do it," said Wait, "only... " — "Well, then, do it," said Donkin, viciously, "if yer can look after yer clothes, yer can look after yerself." He went on deck without a look back.

Jimmy reached out for the mug. Not a drop. He put it back gently with a faint sigh — and closed his eyes. He thought: — That lunatic Belfast will bring me some water if I ask. Fool. I am very thirsty.... It was very hot in the cabin, and it seemed to turn slowly round, detach itself from the ship, and swing out smoothly into a luminous, arid space where a black sun shone, spinning very fast. A place without any water! No water! A policeman with the face of Donkin drank a glass of beer by the side of an empty well, and flew away flapping vigorously. A ship whose mastheads protruded through the sky and could not be seen, was discharging grain, and the wind whirled the dry husks in spirals along the quay of a dock with no water in it. He whirled along with the husks — very tired and light. All his inside was gone. He felt lighter than the husks — and more dry. He expanded his hollow chest. The air streamed in, carrying away in its rush a lot of strange things that resembled houses, trees, people, lamp-posts.... No more! There was no more air — and he had not finished drawing his long breath. But he was in jail! They were locking him up. A door slammed. They turned the key twice, flung a bucket of water over him — Phoo! What for?

He opened his eyes, thinking the fall had been very heavy for an empty man — empty — empty. He was in his cabin. Ah! All right! His face was streaming with perspiration, his arms heavier than lead. He saw the cook standing in the doorway, a brass key in one hand and a bright tin hook-pot in the other.

"I have locked up the galley for the night," said the cook, beaming benevolently. "Eight bells just gone. I brought you a pot of cold tea for your

night's drinking, Jimmy. I sweetened it with some white cabin sugar, too. Well — it won't break the ship."

He came in, hung the pot on the edge of the bunk, asked perfunctorily, "How goes it?" and sat down on the box. — "H'm," grunted Wait, inhospitably. The cook wiped his face with a dirty cotton rag, which, afterwards, he tied round his neck. — "That's how them firemen do in steamboats," he said, serenely, and much pleased with himself. "My work is as heavy as theirs — I'm thinking — and longer hours. Did you ever see them down the stokehold? Like fiends they look — firing — firing — firing — down there."

He pointed his forefinger at the deck. Some gloomy thought darkened his shining face, fleeting, like the shadow of a travelling cloud over the light of a peaceful sea. The relieved watch tramped noisily forward, passing in a body across the sheen of the doorway. Some one cried, "Good-night!" Belfast stopped for a moment and looked at Jimmy, quivering and speechless with repressed emotion. He gave the cook a glance charged with dismal foreboding, and vanished. The cook cleared his throat. Jimmy stared upwards and kept as still as a man in hiding.

The night was clear, with a gentle breeze. Above the mastheads the resplendent curve of the Milky Way spanned the sky like a triumphal arch of eternal light, thrown over the dark pathway of the earth. On the forecastle head a man whistled with loud precision a lively jig, while another could be heard faintly, shuffling and stamping in time. There came from forward a confused murmur of voices, laughter — snatches of song. The cook shook his head, glanced obliquely at Jimmy, and began to mutter. "Aye. Dance and sing. That's all they think of. I am surprised that Providence don't get tired.... They forget the day that's sure to come... but you...."

Jimmy drank a gulp of tea, hurriedly, as though he had stolen it, and shrank under his blanket, edging away towards the bulkhead. The cook got up, closed the door, then sat down again and said distinctly: —

"Whenever I poke my galley fire I think of you chaps — swearing, stealing, lying, and worse — as if there was no such thing as another world.... Not bad fellows, either, in a way," he conceded, slowly; then, after a pause of regretful musing, he went on in a resigned tone: — "Well, well. They will have a hot time of it. Hot! Did I say? The furnaces of one of them White Star boats ain't nothing to it."

He kept very quiet for a while. There was a great stir in his brain; an addled vision of bright outlines; an exciting row of rousing songs and groans of pain. He suffered, enjoyed, admired, approved. He was delighted, frightened, exalted — as on that evening (the only time in his life — twenty-seven years ago; he loved to recall the number of years) when as a young man he had — through keeping bad company — become intoxicated in an East-end music-hall. A tide of sudden feeling swept him clean out of his body. He soared. He contemplated the secret of the hereafter. It commended itself to him. It was excellent; he loved it, himself, all hands, and Jimmy. His heart overflowed with tenderness, with comprehension, with the desire to meddle, with anxiety for the soul of that black man, with the pride of possessed eternity, with the feeling of might. Snatch him up in his arms and pitch him right into the middle of salvation... The black soul — blacker — body — rot — Devil. No! Talk-strength — Samson.... There was a great din as of cymbals in his ears; he flashed through an ecstatic jumble of shining faces, lilies, prayer-books, unearthly joy, white skirts, gold harps, black coats, wings. He saw flowing garments, clean shaved faces, a sea of light — a lake of pitch. There were sweet scent, a smell of sulphur — red tongues of flame licking a white mist. An awesome voice thundered!... It lasted three seconds.

“Jimmy!” he cried in an inspired tone. Then he hesitated. A spark of human pity glimmered yet through the infernal fog of his supreme conceit.

“What?” said James Wait, unwillingly. There was a silence. He turned his head just the least bit, and stole a cautious glance. The cook’s lips moved without a sound; his face was rapt, his eyes turned up. He seemed to be mentally imploring deck beams, the brass hook of the lamp, two cockroaches.

“Look here,” said Wait, “I want to go to sleep. I think I could.”

“This is no time for sleep!” exclaimed the cook, very loud. He had prayerfully divested himself of the last vestige of his humanity. He was a voice — a fleshless and sublime thing, as on that memorable night — the night when he went walking over the sea to make coffee for perishing sinners. “This is no time for sleeping,” he repeated with exaltation. “I can’t sleep.”

“Don’t care damn,” said Wait, with factitious energy. “I can. Go an’ turn in.”



“Swear... in the very jaws!... In the very jaws! Don’t you see the everlasting fire... don’t you feel it? Blind, chockfull of sin! Repent, repent! I can’t bear to think of you. I hear the call to save you. Night and day. Jimmy, let me save you!” The words of entreaty and menace broke out of him in a roaring torrent. The cockroaches ran away. Jimmy perspired, wriggling stealthily under his blanket. The cook yelled.... “Your days are numbered!... — ”Get out of this,” boomed Wait, courageously. — ”Pray with me!... “ — ”I won’t!...” The little cabin was as hot as an oven. It contained an immensity of fear and pain; an atmosphere of shrieks and moans; prayers vociferated like blasphemies and whispered curses. Outside, the men called by Charley, who informed them in tones of delight that there was a holy row going on in Jimmy’s place, crowded before the closed door, too startled to open it. All hands were there. The watch below had jumped out on deck in their shirts, as after a collision. Men running up, asked: — ”What is it?” Others said: — ”Listen!” The muffled screaming went on: — ”On your knees! On your knees!” — ”Shut up!” — ”Never! You are delivered into my hands.... Your life has been saved.... Purpose.... Mercy.... Repent.” — ”You are a crazy fool!...” — ”Account of you... you... Never sleep in this world, if I...” — ”Leave off.” — ”No!... stokehold... only think!...” Then an impassioned screeching babble where words pattered like hail. — ”No!” shouted Wait. — ”Yes. You are!... No help.... Everybody says so.” — ”You lie!” — ”I see you dying this minnyt... before my eyes... as good as dead already.” — ”Help!” shouted Jimmy, piercingly. — ”Not in this valley.... look upwards,” howled the other. — ”Go away! Murder! Help!” clamoured Jimmy. His voice broke. There were moanings, low mutters, a few sobs.

“What’s the matter now?” said a seldom-heard voice. — ”Fall back, men! Fall back, there!” repeated Mr. Creighton, sternly, pushing through. — ”Here’s the old man,” whispered some. — ”The cook’s in there, sir,” exclaimed several, backing away. The door clattered open; a broad stream of light darted out on wondering faces; a warm whiff of vitiated air passed. The two mates towered head and shoulders above the spare, grey-haired man who stood revealed between them, in shabby clothes, stiff and angular, like a small carved figure, and with a thin, composed face. The cook got up from his knees. Jimmy sat high in the bunk, claspings his drawn-up legs. The tassel of the blue night-cap almost imperceptibly trembled over his knees. They gazed astonished at his long, curved back, while the white corner of one eye gleamed blindly at them. He was afraid to turn his head, he shrank

within himself; and there was an aspect astounding and animal-like in the perfection of his expectant immobility. A thing of instinct — the unthinking stillness of a scared brute. “What are you doing here?” asked Mr. Baker, sharply. — “My duty,” said the cook, with ardour. — “Your... what?” began the mate. Captain Allistoun touched his arm lightly. — “I know his caper,” he said, in a low voice. “Come out of that, Podmore,” he ordered, aloud.

The cook wrung his hands, shook his fists above his head, and his arms dropped as if too heavy. For a moment he stood distracted and speechless. — “Never,” he stammered, “I... he I.” —

“What — do — you — say?” pronounced Captain Allistoun. “Come out at once — or...” — “I am going,” said the cook, with a hasty and sombre resignation. He strode over the doorstep firmly — hesitated — made a few steps. They looked at him in silence. — “I make you responsible!” he cried, desperately, turning half round. “That man is dying. I make you.. “ — “You there yet?” called the master in a threatening tone. — “No, sir,” he exclaimed, hurriedly, in a startled voice. The boatswain led him away by the arm; some one laughed; Jimmy lifted his head for a stealthy glance, and in one unexpected leap sprang out of his bunk; Mr. Baker made a clever catch and felt him very limp in his arms; the group at the door grunted with surprise. — “He lies,” gasped Wait, “he talked about black devils — he is a devil — a white devil — I am all right.” He stiffened himself, and Mr. Baker, experimentally, let him go. He staggered a pace or two; Captain Allistoun watched him with a quiet and penetrating gaze; Belfast ran to his support. He did not appear to be aware of any one near him; he stood silent for a moment, battling single-handed with a legion of nameless terrors, amidst the eager looks of excited men who watched him far off, utterly alone in the impenetrable solitude of his fear. The sea gurgled through the scuppers as the ship heeled over to a short puff of wind.

“Keep him away from me,” said James Wait at last in his fine baritone voice, and leaning with all his weight on Belfast’s neck. “I’ve been better this last week:... I am well... I was going back to duty... to-morrow — now if you like — Captain.” Belfast hitched his shoulders to keep him upright.

“No,” said the master, looking at him, fixedly. Under Jimmy’s armpit Belfast’s red face moved uneasily. A row of eyes gleaming stared on the edge of light. They pushed one another with elbows, turned their heads, whispered. Wait let his chin fall on his breast and, with lowered eyelids, looked round in a suspicious manner.

"Why not?" cried a voice from the shadows, "the man's all right, sir."

"I am all right," said Wait, with eagerness. "Been sick... better... turn-to now." He sighed. — "Howly Mother!" exclaimed Belfast with a heave of the shoulders, "stand up, Jimmy." — "Keep away from me then," said Wait, giving Belfast a petulant push, and reeling fetched against the doorpost. His cheekbones glistened as though they had been varnished. He snatched off his night-cap, wiped his perspiring face with it, flung it on the deck. "I am coming out," he declared without stirring.

"No. You don't," said the master, curtly. Bare feet shuffled, disapproving voices murmured all round; he went on as if he had not heard: — "You have been skulking nearly all the passage and now you want to come out. You think you are near enough to the pay-table now. Smell the shore, hey?"

"I've been sick... now — better," mumbled Wait, glaring in the light. — "You have been shamming sick," retorted Captain Allistoun with severity; "Why..." he hesitated for less than half a second. "Why, anybody can see that. There's nothing the matter with you, but you choose to lie-up to please yourself — and now you shall lie-up to please me. Mr. Baker, my orders are that this man is not to be allowed on deck to the end of the passage."

There were exclamations of surprise, triumph, indignation. The dark group of men swung across the light. "What for?" "Told you so..." "Bloomin' shame..." — "We've got to say somethink about that," screeched Donkin from the rear. — "Never mind, Jim — we will see you righted," cried several together. An elderly seaman stepped to the front. "D'ye mean to say, sir," he asked, ominously, "that a sick chap ain't allowed to get well in this 'ere hooker?" Behind him Donkin whispered excitedly amongst a staring crowd where no one spared him a glance, but Captain Allistoun shook a forefinger at the angry bronzed face of the speaker. — "You — you hold your tongue," he said, warningly. — "This isn't the way," clamoured two or three younger men. — "Are we bloomin' masheens?" inquired Donkin in a piercing tone, and dived under the elbows of the front rank. — "Soon show 'im we ain't boys..." — "The man's a man if he is black." — "We ain't goin' to work this bloomin' ship shorthanded if Snowball's all right..." — "He says he is." — "Well then, strike, boys, strike!" — "That's the bloomin' ticket." Captain Allistoun said sharply to the second mate: "Keep quiet, Mr. Creighton," and stood composed in the tumult, listening with profound attention to mixed growls and screeches, to every exclamation and every curse of the sudden outbreak. Somebody slammed

the cabin door to with a kick; the darkness full of menacing mutters leaped with a short clatter over the streak of light, and the men became gesticulating shadows that growled, hissed, laughed excitedly. Mr. Baker whispered: — "Get away from them, sir." The big shape of Mr. Creighton hovered silently about the slight figure of the master. — "We have been hymposed upon all this voyage," said a gruff voice, "but this 'ere fancy takes the cake." — "That man is a shipmate." — "Are we bloomin' kids?" — "The port watch will refuse duty." Charley carried away by his feeling whistled shrilly, then yelped: — "Giv' us our Jimmy!" This seemed to cause a variation in the disturbance. There was a fresh burst of squabbling uproar. A lot of quarrels were set going at once. — "Yes." — "No." — "Never been sick." — "Go for them to once." — "Shut yer mouth, youngster — -this is men's work." — "Is it?" muttered Captain Allistoun, bitterly. Mr. Baker grunted: "Ough! They're gone silly. They've been simmering for the last month." — "I did notice," said the master. — "They have started a row amongst themselves now," said Mr. Creighton with disdain, "better get aft, sir. We will soothe them. — "Keep your temper, Creighton," said the master. And the three men began to move slowly towards the cabin door.

In the shadows of the fore rigging a dark mass stamped, eddied, advanced, retreated. There were words of reproach, encouragement, unbelief, execration. The elder seamen, bewildered and angry, growled their determination to go through with something or other; but the younger school of advanced thought exposed their and Jimmy's wrongs with confused shouts, arguing amongst themselves. They clustered round that moribund carcass, the fit emblem of their aspirations, and encouraging one another they swayed, they tramped on one spot, shouting that they would not be "put upon." Inside the cabin, Belfast, helping Jimmy into his bunk, twitched all over in his desire not to miss all the row, and with difficulty restrained the tears of his facile emotion. James Wait, flat on his back under the blanket, gasped complaints. — "We will back you up, never fear," assured Belfast, busy about his feet. —

"I'll come out to-morrow morning — — — take my chance — — — you fellows must — — —" mumbled Wait, "I come out to-morrow — — — skipper or no skipper." He lifted one arm with great difficulty, passed the hand over his face; "Don't you let that cook..." he breathed out. — "No, no," said Belfast, turning his back on the bunk, "I will put a head on him if

he comes near you.” — “I will smash his mug!” exclaimed faintly Wait, enraged and weak; “I don’t want to kill a man, but...” He panted fast like a dog after a run in sunshine. Some one just outside the door shouted, “He’s as fit as any ov us!” Belfast put his hand on the door-handle. — “Here!” called James Wait, hurriedly, and in such a clear voice that the other spun round with a start. James Wait, stretched out black and deathlike in the dazzling light, turned his head on the pillow. His eyes stared at Belfast, appealing and impudent. “I am rather weak from lying-up so long,” he said, distinctly. Belfast nodded. “Getting quite well now,” insisted Wait. — “Yes. I noticed you getting better this... last month,” said Belfast, looking down. “Hallo! What’s this?” he shouted and ran out.

He was flattened directly against the side of the house by two men who lurched against him. A lot of disputes seemed to be going on all round. He got clear and saw three indistinct figures standing along in the fainter darkness under the arched foot of the mainsail, that rose above their heads like a convex wall of a high edifice. Donkin hissed: — “Go for them... it’s dark!” The crowd took a short run aft in a body — then there was a check. Donkin, agile and thin, flitted past with his right arm going like a windmill — and then stood still suddenly with his arm pointing rigidly above his head. The hurtling flight of some heavy object was heard; it passed between the heads of the two mates, bounded heavily along the deck, struck the after hatch with a ponderous and deadened blow. The bulky shape of Mr. Baker grew distinct. “Come to your senses, men!” he cried, advancing at the arrested crowd. “Come back, Mr. Baker!” called the master’s quiet voice. He obeyed unwillingly. There was a minute of silence, then a deafening hubbub arose. Above it Archie was heard energetically: — “If ye do oot ageen I wull tell!” There were shouts. “Don’t!” “Drop it!” — “We ain’t that kind!” The black cluster of human forms reeled against the bulwark, back again towards the house. Ringbolts rang under stumbling feet. — “Drop it!” “Let me!” — “No!” — “Curse you... hah!” Then sounds as of some one’s face being slapped; a piece of iron fell on the deck; a short scuffle, and some one’s shadowy body scuttled rapidly across the main hatch before the shadow of a kick. A raging voice sobbed out a torrent of filthy language... — “Throwing things — good God!” grunted Mr. Baker in dismay. — “That was meant for me,” said the master, quietly; “I felt the wind of that thing; what was it — an iron belaying-pin?” — “By Jove!” muttered Mr. Creighton. The confused voices of men talking amidships mingled with the

wash of the sea, ascended between the silent and distended sails-seemed to flow away into the night, further than the horizon, higher than the sky. The stars burned steadily over the inclined mastheads. Trails of light lay on the water, broke before the advancing hull, and, after she had passed, trembled for a long time as if in awe of the murmuring sea.

Meantime the helmsman, anxious to know what the row was about, had let go the wheel, and, bent double, ran with long, stealthy footsteps to the break of the poop. The *Narcissus*, left to herself, came up gently in to the wind without any one being aware of it. She gave a slight roll, and the sleeping sails woke suddenly, coming all together with a mighty flap against the masts, then filled again one after another in a quick succession of loud reports that ran down the lofty spars, till the collapsed mainsail flew out last with a violent jerk. The ship trembled from trucks to keel; the sails kept on rattling like a discharge of musketry; the chain sheets and loose shackles jingled aloft in a thin peal; the gin blocks groaned. It was as if an invisible hand had given the ship an angry shake to recall the men that peopled her decks to the sense of reality, vigilance, and duty. — "Helm up!" cried the master, sharply. "Run aft, Mr. Creighton, and see what that fool there is up to." — "Flatten in the head sheets. Stand by the weather fore-braces," growled Mr. Baker. Startled men ran swiftly repeating the orders. The watch below, abandoned all at once by the watch on deck, drifted towards the forecastle in twos and threes, arguing noisily as they went — "We shall see to-morrow!" cried a loud voice, as if to cover with a menacing hint an inglorious retreat. And then only orders were heard, the falling of heavy coils of rope, the rattling of blocks. Singleton's white head flitted here and there in the night, high above the deck, like the ghost of a bird. — "Going off, sir!" shouted Mr. Creighton from aft. — "Full again." — "All right..." — "Ease off the head sheets. That will do the braces. Coil the ropes up," grunted Mr. Baker, bustling about.

Gradually the tramping noises, the confused sound of voices, died out, and the officers, coming together on the poop, discussed the events. Mr. Baker was bewildered and grunted; Mr. Creighton was calmly furious; but Captain Allistoun was composed and thoughtful. He listened to Mr. Baker's growling argumentation, to Creighton's interjected and severe remarks, while looking down on the deck he weighed in his hand the iron belayingpin — that a moment ago had just missed his head — as if it had been the only tangible fact of the whole transaction. He was one of those

commanders who speak little, seem to hear nothing, look at no one — and know everything, hear every whisper, see every fleeting shadow of their ship's life. His two big officers towered above his lean, short figure; they talked over his head; they were dismayed, surprised, and angry, while between them the little quiet man seemed to have found his taciturn serenity in the profound depths of a larger experience. Lights were burning in the forecabin; now and then a loud gust of babbling chatter came from forward, swept over the decks, and became faint, as if the unconscious ship, gliding gently through the great peace of the sea, had left behind and for ever the foolish noise of turbulent mankind. But it was renewed again and again. Gesticulating arms, profiles of heads with open mouths appeared for a moment in the illuminated squares of doorways; black fists darted — withdrew... "Yes. It was most damnable to have such an unprovoked row sprung on one," assented the master. ... A tumult of yells rose in the light, abruptly ceased.... He didn't think there would be any further trouble just then.... A bell was struck aft, another, forward, answered in a deeper tone, and the clamour of ringing metal spread round the ship in a circle of wide vibrations that ebbed away into the immeasurable night of an empty sea.... Didn't he know them! Didn't he! In past years. Better men, too. Real men to stand by one in a tight place. Worse than devils too sometimes — downright, horned devils. Pah! This — . nothing. A miss as good as a mile.... The wheel was being relieved in the usual way. — "Full and by," said, very loud, the man going off. — "Full and by," repeated the other, catching hold of the spokes. — "This head wind is my trouble," exclaimed the master, stamping his foot in sudden anger; "head wind! all the rest is nothing." He was calm again in a moment. "Keep them on the move to-night, gentlemen; just to let them feel we've got hold all the time — quietly, you know. Mind you keep your hands off them, Creighton. To-morrow I will talk to them like a Dutch Uncle. A crazy crowd of tinkers! Yes, tinkers! I could count the real sailors amongst them on the fingers of one hand. Nothing will do but a row — if — you — please." He paused. "Did you think I had gone wrong there, Mr. Baker?" He tapped his forehead, laughed short. "When I saw him standing there, three parts dead and so scared — black amongst that gaping lot — no grit to face what's coming to us all — the notion came to me all at once, before I could think. Sorry for him — like you would be for a sick brute. If ever creature was in a mortal funk to die! ... I thought I would let him go out in his own way. Kind of impulse. It

never came into my head, those fools.... H'm! Stand to it now — of course." He stuck the belaying-pin in his pocket, seemed ashamed of himself, then sharply: — "If you see Podmore at his tricks again tell him I will have him put under the pump. Had to do it once before. The fellow breaks out like that now and then. Good cook tho'." He walked away quickly, came back to the companion. The two mates followed him through the starlight with amazed eyes. He went down three steps, and changing his tone, spoke with his head near the deck: — "I shan't turn in to-night, in case of anything; just call out if... Did you see the eyes of that sick nigger, Mr. Baker? I fancied he begged me for something. What? Past all help. One lone black beggar amongst the lot of us, and he seemed to look through me into the very hell. Fancy, this wretched Podmore! Well, let him die in peace. I am master here after all. Let him be. He might have been half a man once... Keep a good look-out." He disappeared down below, leaving his mates facing one another, and more impressed than if they had seen a stone image shed a miraculous tear of compassion over the incertitudes of life and death....

In the blue mist spreading from twisted threads that stood upright in the bowls of pipes, the forecastle appeared as vast as a hall. Between the beams a heavy cloud stagnated; and the lamps surrounded by halos burned each at the core of a purple glow in two lifeless flames without rays. Wreaths drifted in denser wisps. Men sprawled about on the deck, sat in negligent poses, or, bending a knee, drooped with one shoulder against a bulkhead. Lips moved, eyes flashed, waving arms made sudden eddies in the smoke. The murmur of voices seemed to pile itself higher and higher as if unable to run out quick enough through the narrow doors. The watch below in their shirts, and striding on long white legs, resembled raving somnambulists; while now and then one of the watch on deck would rush in, looking strangely over-dressed, listen a moment, fling a rapid sentence into the noise and run out again; but a few remained near the door, fascinated, and with one ear turned to the deck. "Stick together, boys," roared Davis. Belfast tried to make himself heard. Knowles grinned in a slow, dazed way. A short fellow with a thick clipped beard kept on yelling periodically: — "Who's afeard? Who's afeard?" Another one jumped up, excited, with blazing eyes, sent out a string of unattached curses and sat down quietly. Two men discussed familiarly, striking one another's breast in turn, to clinch arguments. Three others, with their heads in a bunch, spoke all



together with a confidential air, and at the top of their voices. It was a stormy chaos of speech where intelligible fragments tossing, struck the ear. One could hear: — "In the last ship" — "Who cares? Try it on any one of us if — — —."

"Knock under" — "Not a hand's turn" — "He says he is all right" — "I always thought" — "Never mind..." Donkin, crouching all in a heap against the bowsprit, hunched his shoulderblades as high as his ears, and hanging a peaked nose, resembled a sick vulture with ruffled plumes. Belfast, straddling his legs, had a face red with yelling, and with arms thrown up, figured a Maltese cross. The two Scandinavians, in a corner, had the dumbfounded and distracted aspect of men gazing at a cataclysm. And, beyond the light, Singleton stood in the smoke, monumental, indistinct, with his head touching the beam; like a statue of heroic size in the gloom of a crypt.

He stepped forward, impassive and big. The noise subsided like a broken wave: but Belfast cried once more with uplifted arms: — "The man is dying I tell ye!" then sat down suddenly on the hatch and took his head between his hands. All looked at Singleton, gazing upwards from the deck, staring out of dark corners, or turning their heads with curious glances. They were expectant and appeased as if that old man, who looked at no one, had possessed the secret of their uneasy indignations and desires, a sharper vision, a clearer knowledge. And indeed standing there amongst them, he had the uninterested appearance of one who had seen multitudes of ships, had listened many times to voices such as theirs, had already seen all that could happen on the wide seas. They heard his voice rumble in his broad chest as though the words had been rolling towards them out of a rugged past. "What do you want to do?" he asked. No one answered. Only Knowles muttered — "Aye, aye," and somebody said low: — "It's a bloomin' shame." He waited, made a contemptuous gesture. — "I have seen rows aboard ship before some of you were born," he said, slowly, "for something or nothing; but never for such a thing." — "The man is dying, I tell ye," repeated Belfast, woefully, sitting at Singleton's feet. — "And a black fellow, too," went on the old seaman, "I have seen them die like flies." He stopped, thoughtful, as if trying to recollect gruesome things, details of horrors, hecatombs of niggers. They looked at him fascinated. He was old enough to remember slavers, bloody mutinies, pirates perhaps; who could tell through what violences and terrors he had lived! What would he

say? He said: — "You can't help him; die he must." He made another pause. His moustache and beard stirred. He chewed words, mumbled behind tangled white hairs; incomprehensible and exciting, like an oracle behind a veil.... — "Stop ashore — — — sick. — — — -Instead — — — bringing all this head wind. Afraid. The sea will have her own. — — — Die in sight of land. Always so. They know it — — — long passage — — — more days, more dollars. — — — You — — —"

He seemed to wake up from a dream. "You can't help yourselves," he said, austere, "Skipper's no fool. He has something in his mind. Look out — say! I know 'em!" With eyes fixed in front he turned his head from right to left, from left to right, as if inspecting a long row of astute skippers. — "'Ee said 'ee would brain me!" cried Donkin in a heartrending tone. Singleton peered downwards with puzzled attention, as though he couldn't find him. — "Damn you!" he said, vaguely, giving it up. He radiated unspeakable wisdom, hard unconcern, the chilling air of resignation. Round him all the listeners felt themselves somehow completely enlightened by their disappointment, and mute, they lolled about with the careless ease of men who can discern perfectly the irremediable aspect of their existence. He, profound and unconscious, waved his arm once, and strode out on deck without another word.

Belfast was lost in a round-eyed meditation. One or two vaulted heavily into upper berths, and, once there, sighed; others dived head first inside lower bunks — swift, and turning round instantly upon themselves, like animals going into lairs. The grating of a knife scraping burnt clay was heard. Knowles grinned no more. Davis said, in a tone of ardent conviction: "Then our skipper's looney." Archie muttered: "My faith! we haven't heard the last of it yet!" Four bells were struck. — "Half our watch below gone!" cried Knowles in alarm, then reflected. "Well, two hours' sleep is something towards a rest," he observed, consolingly. Some already pretended to slumber; and Charley, sound asleep, suddenly said a few slurred words in an arbitrary, blank voice. — "This blamed boy has worrums!" commented Knowles from under a blanket, in a learned manner. Belfast got up and approached Archie's berth. — "We pulled him out," he whispered, sadly. — "What?" said the other, with sleepy discontent. — "And now we will have to chuck him overboard," went on Belfast, whose lower lip trembled. — "Chuck what?" asked Archie. — "Poor Jimmy," breathed out Belfast. — "He be blowed!" said Archie with untruthful

brutality, and sat up in his bunk; "It's all through him. If it hadn't been for me, there would have been murder on board this ship!" — "'Tain't his fault, is it?" argued Belfast, in a murmur; "I've put him to bed... an' he ain't no heavier than an empty beef-cask," he added, with tears in his eyes. Archie looked at him steadily, then turned his nose to the ship's side with determination. Belfast wandered about as though he had lost his way in the dim forecaskle, and nearly fell over Donkin. He contemplated him from on high for a while. "Ain't ye going to turn in?" he asked. Donkin looked up hopelessly. — "That black'earted Scotch son of a thief kicked me!" he whispered from the floor, in a tone of utter desolation. — "And a good job, too!" said Belfast, still very depressed; "You were as near hanging as damn-it to-night, sonny. Don't you play any of your murthering games around my Jimmy! You haven't pulled him out. You just mind! 'Cos if I start to kick you" — he brightened up a bit — "if I start to kick you, it will be Yankee fashion — to break something!" He tapped lightly with his knuckles the top of the bowed head. "You moind that, my bhoy!" he concluded, cheerily. Donkin let it pass. — "Will they split on me?" he asked, with pained anxiety. — "Who — split?" hissed Belfast, coming back a step. "I would split your nose this minyt if I hadn't Jimmy to look after! Who d'ye think we are?" Donkin rose and watched Belfast's back lurch through the doorway. On all sides invisible men slept, breathing calmly. He seemed to draw courage and fury from the peace around him. Venomous and thin-faced, he glared from the ample misfit of borrowed clothes as if looking for something he could smash. His heart leaped wildly in his narrow chest. They slept! He wanted to wring necks, gouge eyes, spit on faces. He shook a dirty pair of meagre fists at the smoking lights. "Ye're no men!" he cried, in a deadened tone. No one moved. "Yer 'aven't the pluck of a mouse!" His voice rose to a husky screech. Wamibo darted out a dishevelled head, and looked at him wildly. "Ye're sweepings ov ships! I 'ope you will all rot before you die!" Wamibo blinked, uncomprehending but interested. Donkin sat down heavily; he blew with force through quivering nostrils, he ground and snapped his teeth, and, with the chin pressed hard against the breast, he seemed busy gnawing his way through it, as if to get at the heart within....

In the morning the ship, beginning another day of her wandering life, had an aspect of sumptuous freshness, like the spring-time of the earth. The washed decks glistened in a long clear stretch; the oblique sunlight struck the yellow brasses in dazzling splashes, darted over the polished rods in

lines of gold, and the single drops of salt water forgotten here and there along the rail were as limpid as drops of dew, and sparkled more than scattered diamonds. The sails slept, hushed by a gentle breeze. The sun, rising lonely and splendid in the blue sky, saw a solitary ship gliding close-hauled on the blue sea.

The men pressed three deep abreast of the mainmast and opposite the cabin-door. They shuffled, pushed, had an irresolute mien and stolid faces. At every slight movement Knowles lurched heavily on his short leg. Donkin glided behind backs, restless and anxious, like a man looking for an ambush. Captain Allistoun came out on the quarter-deck suddenly. He walked to and fro before the front. He was grey, slight, alert, shabby in the sunshine, and as hard as adamant. He had his right hand in the side-pocket of his jacket, and also something heavy in there that made folds all down that side. One of the seamen cleared his throat ominously. — "I haven't till now found fault with you men," said the master, stopping short. He faced them with his worn, steely gaze, that by a universal illusion looked straight into every individual pair of the twenty pairs of eyes before his face. At his back Mr. Baker, gloomy and bull-necked, grunted low; Mr. Creighton, fresh as paint, had rosy cheeks and a ready, resolute bearing. "And I don't now," continued the master; "but I am here to drive this ship and keep every man-jack aboard of her up to the mark. If you knew your work as well as I do mine, there would be no trouble. You've been braying in the dark about 'See to-morrow morning!' Well, you see me now. What do you want?" He waited, stepping quickly to and fro, giving them searching glances. What did they want? They shifted from foot to foot, they balanced their bodies; some, pushing back their caps, scratched their heads. What did they want? Jimmy was forgotten; no one thought of him, alone forward in his cabin, fighting great shadows, clinging to brazen lies, chuckling painfully over his transparent deceptions. No, not Jimmy; he was more forgotten than if he had been dead. They wanted great things. And suddenly all the simple words they knew seemed to be lost for ever in the immensity of their vague and burning desire. They knew what they wanted, but they could not find anything worth saying. They stirred on one spot, swinging, at the end of muscular arms, big tarry hands with crooked fingers. A murmur died out. — "What is it — food?" asked the master, "you know the stores have been spoiled off the Cape." — "We know that, sir," said a bearded shell-back in the front rank. — "Work too hard — eh? Too much for your strength?" he

asked again. There was an offended silence. — "We don't want to go shorthanded, sir," began at last Davis in a wavering voice, "and this 'ere black...." — "Enough!" cried the master. He stood scanning them for a moment, then walking a few steps this way and that began to storm at them coldly, in gusts violent and cutting like the gales of those icy seas that had known his youth. — "Tell you what's the matter? Too big for your boots. Think yourselves damn good men. Know half your work. Do half your duty. Think it too much. If you did ten times as much it wouldn't be enough." — "We did our best by her, sir," cried some one with shaky exasperation. — "Your best," stormed on the master; "You hear a lot on shore, don't you? They don't tell you there your best isn't much to boast of. I tell you — your best is no better than bad."

"You can do no more? No, I know, and say nothing. But you stop your caper or I will stop it for you. I am ready for you! Stop it!" He shook a finger at the crowd. "As to that man," he raised his voice very much; "as to that man, if he puts his nose out on deck without my leave I will clap him in irons. There!" The cook heard him forward, ran out of the galley lifting his arms, horrified, unbelieving, amazed, and ran in again. There was a moment of profound silence during which a bow-legged seaman, stepping aside, expectorated decorously into the scupper. "There is another thing," said the master, calmly. He made a quick stride and with a swing took an iron belaying-pin out of his pocket. "This!" His movement was so unexpected and sudden that the crowd stepped back. He gazed fixedly at their faces, and some at once put on a surprised air as though they had never seen a belaying-pin before. He held it up. "This is my affair. I don't ask you any questions, but you all know it; it has got to go where it came from." His eyes became angry. The crowd stirred uneasily. They looked away from the piece of iron, they appeared shy, they were embarrassed and shocked as though it had been something horrid, scandalous, or indelicate, that in common decency should not have been flourished like this in broad daylight. The master watched them attentively. "Donkin," he called out in a short, sharp tone.

Donkin dodged behind one, then behind another, but they looked over their shoulders and moved aside. The ranks kept on opening before him, closing behind, till at last he appeared alone before the master as though he had come up through the deck. Captain Allistoun moved close to him. They were much of a size, and at short range the master exchanged a deadly

glance with the beady eyes. They wavered. — "You know this?" asked the master. — "No, I don't," answered the other, with cheeky trepidation. — "You are a cur. Take it," ordered the master. Donkin's arms seemed glued to his thighs; he stood, eyes front, as if drawn on parade. "Take it," repeated the master, and stepped closer; they breathed on one another. "Take it," said Captain Allistoun again, making a menacing gesture. Donkin tore away one arm from his side. — "Vy are yer down on me?" he mumbled with effort and as if his mouth had been full of dough. — "If you don't..." began the master. Donkin snatched at the pin as though his intention had been to run away with it, and remained stock still holding it like a candle. "Put it back where you took it from," said Captain Allistoun, looking at him fiercely. Donkin stepped back opening wide eyes. "Go, you blackguard, or I will make you," cried the master, driving him slowly backwards by a menacing advance. He dodged, and with the dangerous iron tried to guard his head from a threatening fist. Mr. Baker ceased grunting for a moment. — "Good! By Jove," murmured appreciatively Mr. Creighton in the tone of a connoisseur. — "Don't tech me," snarled Donkin, backing away. — "Then go. Go faster." — "Don't yer 'it me.... I will pull yer up afore the magistrty.... I'll show yer up." Captain Allistoun made a long stride, and Donkin, turning his back fairly, ran off a little, then stopped and over his shoulder showed yellow teeth. — "Further on, fore-rigging," urged the master, pointing with his arm. — "Are yer goin' to stand by and see me bullied?" screamed Donkin at the silent crowd that watched him. Captain Allistoun walked at him smartly. He started off again with a leap, dashed at the fore-rigging, rammed the pin into its hole violently. "I'll be even with yer yet," he screamed at the ship at large and vanished beyond the foremast. Captain Allistoun spun round and walked back aft with a composed face, as though he had already forgotten the scene. Men moved out of his way. He looked at no one. — "That will do, Mr. Baker. Send the watch below," he said, quietly. "And you men try to walk straight for the future," he added in a calm voice. He looked pensively for a while at the backs of the impressed and retreating crowd. "Breakfast, steward," he called in a tone of relief through the cabin door. — "I didn't like to see you — Ough! — give that pin to that chap, sir," observed Mr. Baker; "he could have bust — Ough! — bust your head like an eggshell with it." — "O! he!" muttered the master, absently. "Queer lot," he went on in a low voice. "I suppose it's all right now. Can never tell tho' nowadays, with such a... Years ago; I was a young

master then — one China voyage I had a mutiny; real mutiny, Baker. Different men tho'. I knew what they wanted: they wanted to broach the cargo and get at the liquor. Very simple.... We knocked them about for two days, and when they had enough — gentle as lambs. Good crew. And a smart trip I made." He glanced aloft at the yards braced sharp up. "Head wind day after day," he exclaimed, bitterly. "Shall we never get a decent slant this passage?" — "Ready, sir," said the steward, appearing before them as if by magic and with a stained napkin in his hand. — "Ah! All right. Come along, Mr. Baker — it's late — with all this nonsense."

## CHAPTER FIVE

A heavy atmosphere of oppressive quietude pervaded the ship. In the afternoon men went about washing clothes and hanging them out to dry in the unprosperous breeze with the meditative languor of disenchanted philosophers. Very little was said. The problem of life seemed too voluminous for the narrow limits of human speech, and by common consent it was abandoned to the great sea that had from the beginning enfolded it in its immense grip; to the sea that knew all, and would in time infallibly unveil to each the wisdom hidden in all the errors, the certitude that lurks in doubts, the realm of safety and peace beyond the frontiers of sorrow and fear. And in the confused current of impotent thoughts that set unceasingly this way and that through bodies of men, Jimmy bobbed up upon the surface, compelling attention, like a black buoy chained to the bottom of a muddy stream. Falsehood triumphed. It triumphed through doubt, through stupidity, through pity, through sentimentalism. We set ourselves to bolster it up from compassion, from recklessness, from a sense of fun. Jimmy's steadfastness to his untruthful attitude in the face of the inevitable truth had the proportions of a colossal enigma — of a manifestation grand and incomprehensible that at times inspired a wondering awe; and there was also, to many, something exquisitely droll in fooling him thus to the top of his bent. The latent egoism of tenderness to suffering appeared in the developing anxiety not to see him die. His obstinate non-recognition of the only certitude whose approach we could watch from day to day was as disquieting as the failure of some law of nature. He was so utterly wrong about himself that one could not but suspect him of having access to some source of supernatural knowledge. He was absurd to the point of inspiration. He was unique, and as fascinating as only something inhuman could be; he seemed to shout his denials already from beyond the awful border. He was becoming immaterial like an apparition; his cheekbones rose, the forehead slanted more; the face was all hollows, patches of shade; and the fleshless head resembled a disinterred black skull, fitted with two restless globes of silver in the sockets of eyes. He was demoralising. Through him we were becoming highly humanised, tender, complex, excessively decadent: we understood the subtlety of his fear, sympathised with all his repulsions, shrinkings, evasions, delusions — as though we had been over-civilised, and rotten, and without any knowledge of the meaning



of life. We had the air of being initiated in some infamous mysteries; we had the profound grimaces of conspirators, exchanged meaning glances, significant short words. We were inexpressibly vile and very much pleased with ourselves. We lied to him with gravity, with emotion, with unction, as if performing some moral trick with a view to an eternal reward. We made a chorus of affirmation to his wildest assertions, as though he had been a millionaire, a politician, or a reformer — and we a crowd of ambitious lubbers. When we ventured to question his statements we did it after the manner of obsequious sycophants, to the end that his glory should be augmented by the flattery of our dissent. He influenced the moral tone of our world as though he had it in his power to distribute honours, treasures, or pain; and he could give us nothing but his contempt. It was immense; it seemed to grow gradually larger, as his body day by day shrank a little more, while we looked. It was the only thing about him — of him — that gave the impression of durability and vigour. It lived within him with an unquenchable life. It spoke through the eternal pout of his black lips; it looked at us through the impertinent mournfulness of his languid and enormous stare. We watched him intently. He seemed unwilling to move, as if distrustful of his own solidity. The slightest gesture must have disclosed to him (it could not surely be otherwise) his bodily weakness, and caused a pang of mental suffering. He was chary of movements. He lay stretched out, chin on blanket, in a kind of sly, cautious immobility. Only his eyes roamed over faces: his eyes disdainful, penetrating and sad.

It was at that time that Belfast's devotion — and also his pugnacity — secured universal respect. He spent every moment of his spare time in Jimmy's cabin. He tended him, talked to him; was as gentle as a woman, as tenderly gay as an old philanthropist, as sentimentally careful of his nigger as a model slave-owner. But outside he was irritable, explosive as gunpowder, sombre, suspicious, and never more brutal than when most sorrowful. With him it was a tear and a blow: a tear for Jimmy, a blow for any one who did not seem to take a scrupulously orthodox view of Jimmy's case. We talked about nothing else. The two Scandinavians, even, discussed the situation — but it was impossible to know in what spirit, because they quarrelled in their own language. Belfast suspected one of them of irreverence, and in this incertitude thought that there was no option but to fight them both. They became very much terrified by his truculence, and henceforth lived amongst us, dejected, like a pair of mutes. Wamibo never

spoke intelligibly, but he was as smileless as an animal — seemed to know much less about it all than the cat — and consequently was safe. Moreover, he had belonged to the chosen band of Jimmy's rescuers, and was above suspicion. Archie was silent generally, but often spent an hour or so talking to Jimmy quietly with an air of proprietorship. At any time of the day and often through the night some man could be seen sitting on Jimmy's box. In the evening, between six and eight, the cabin was crowded, and there was an interested group at the door. Every one stared at the nigger.

He basked in the warmth of our interest. His eye gleamed ironically, and in a weak voice he reproached us with our cowardice. He would say, "If you fellows had stuck out for me I would be now on deck." We hung our heads. "Yes, but if you think I am going; to let them put me in irons just to show you sport.... Well, no.... It ruins my health, this lying-up, it does. You don't care." We were as abashed as if it had been true. His superb impudence carried all before it. We would not have dared to revolt. We didn't want to, really. We wanted to keep him alive till home — to the end of the voyage.

Singleton as usual held aloof, appearing to scorn the insignificant events of an ended life. Once only he came along, and unexpectedly stopped in the doorway. He peered at Jimmy in profound silence, as if desirous to add that black image to the crowd of Shades that peopled his old memory. We kept very quiet, and for a long time Singleton stood there as though he had come by appointment to call for some one, or to see some important event. James Wait lay perfectly still, and apparently not aware of the gaze scrutinising him with a steadiness full of expectation. There was a sense of a contest in the air. We felt the inward strain of men watching a wrestling bout. At last Jimmy with perceptible apprehension turned his head on the pillow. — "Good evening," he said in a conciliating tone. — "H'm," answered the old seaman, grumpily. For a moment longer he looked at Jimmy with severe fixity, then suddenly went away. It was a long time before any one spoke in the little cabin, though we all breathed more freely as men do after an escape from some dangerous situation. We all knew the old man's ideas about Jimmy, and nobody dared to combat them. They were unsettling, they caused pain; and, what was worse, they might have been true for all we knew. Only once did he condescend to explain them fully, but the impression was lasting. He said that Jimmy was the cause of head winds. Mortally sick men — he maintained — linger till the first sight of land, and then die; and Jimmy knew that the very first land would draw his life from

him. It is so in every ship. Didn't we know it? He asked us with austere contempt: what did we know? What would we doubt next? Jimmy's desire encouraged by us and aided by Wamibo's (he was a Finn — wasn't he? Very well!) by Wamibo's spells delayed the ship in the open sea. Only lubberly fools couldn't see it. Whoever heard of such a run of calms and head winds? It wasn't natural.... We could not deny that it was strange. We felt uneasy. The common saying, "More days, more dollars," did not give the usual comfort because the stores were running short. Much had been spoiled off the Cape, and we were on half allowance of biscuit. Peas, sugar and tea had been finished long ago. Salt meat was giving out. We had plenty of coffee but very little water to make it with. We took up another hole in our belts and went on scraping, polishing, painting the ship from morning to night. And soon she looked as though she had come out of a band-box; but hunger lived on board of her. Not dead starvation, but steady, living hunger that stalked about the decks, slept in the forecastle; the tormentor of waking moments, the disturber of dreams. We looked to windward for signs of change. Every few hours of night and day we put her round with the hope that she would come up on that tack at last! She didn't. She seemed to have forgotten the way home; she rushed to and fro, heading northwest, heading east; she ran backwards and forwards, distracted, like a timid creature at the foot of a wall. Sometimes, as if tired to death, she would wallow languidly for a day in the smooth swell of an unruffled sea. All up the swinging masts the sails thrashed furiously through the hot stillness of the calm. We were weary, hungry, thirsty; we commenced to believe Singleton, but with unshaken fidelity dissembled to Jimmy. We spoke to him with jocose allusiveness, like cheerful accomplices in a clever plot; but we looked to the westward over the rail with longing eyes for a sign of hope, for a sign of fair wind; even if its first breath should bring death to our reluctant Jimmy. In vain! The universe conspired with James Wait. Light airs from the northward sprang up again; the sky remained clear; and round our weariness the glittering sea, touched by the breeze, basked voluptuously in the great sunshine, as though it had forgotten our life and trouble.

Donkin looked out for a fair wind along with the rest. No one knew the venom of his thoughts now. He was silent, and appeared thinner, as if consumed slowly by an inward rage at the injustice of men and of fate. He was ignored by all and spoke to no one, but his hate for every man dwelt in his furtive eyes. He talked with the cook only, having somehow persuaded

the good man that he — Donkin — was a much calumniated and persecuted person. Together they bewailed the immorality of the ship's company. There could be no greater criminals than we, who by our lies conspired to send the unprepared soul of a poor ignorant black man to everlasting perdition. Podmore cooked what there was to cook, remorsefully, and felt all the time that by preparing the food of such sinners he imperilled his own salvation. As to the Captain — he had sailed with him for seven years, now, he said, and would not have believed it possible that such a man... “Well. Well... There it was... Can't get out of it. Judgment capsized all in a minute... Struck in all his pride... More like a sudden visitation than anything else.” Donkin, perched sullenly on the coal-locker, swung his legs and concurred. He paid in the coin of spurious assent for the privilege to sit in the galley; he was disheartened and scandalised; he agreed with the cook; could find no words severe enough to criticise our conduct; and when in the heat of reprobation he swore at us, Podmore, who would have liked to swear also if it hadn't been for his principles, pretended not to hear. So Donkin, unrebuked, cursed enough for two, cadged for matches, borrowed tobacco, and loafed for hours, very much at home, before the stove. From there he could hear us on the other side of the bulkhead, talking to Jimmy. The cook knocked the saucepans about, slammed the oven door, muttered prophecies of damnation for all the ship's company; and Donkin, who did not admit of any hereafter (except for purposes of blasphemy) listened, concentrated and angry, gloating fiercely over a called-up image of infinite torment — as men gloat over the accursed images of cruelty and revenge, of greed, and of power....

On clear evenings the silent ship, under the cold sheen of the dead moon, took on a false aspect of passionless repose resembling the winter of the earth. Under her a long band of gold barred the black disc of the sea. Footsteps echoed on her quiet decks. The moonlight clung to her like a frosted mist, and the white sails stood out in dazzling cones as of stainless snow. In the magnificence of the phantom rays the ship appeared pure like a vision of ideal beauty, illusive like a tender dream of serene peace. And nothing in her was real, nothing was distinct and solid but the heavy shadows that filled her decks with their unceasing and noiseless stir: the shadows darker than the night and more restless than the thoughts of men.

Donkin prowled spiteful and alone amongst the shadows, thinking that Jimmy too long delayed to die. That evening land had been reported from

aloft, and the master, while adjusting the tubes of the long glass, had observed with quiet bitterness to Mr. Baker that, after fighting our way inch by inch to the Western Islands, there was nothing to expect now but a spell of calm. The sky was clear and the barometer high. The light breeze dropped with the sun, and an enormous stillness, forerunner of a night without wind, descended upon the heated waters of the ocean. As long as daylight lasted, the hands collected on the forecastle-head watched on the eastern sky the island of Flores, that rose above the level expanse of the sea with irregular and broken outlines like a sombre ruin upon a vast and deserted plain. It was the first land seen for nearly four months. Charley was excited, and in the midst of general indulgence took liberties with his betters. Men strangely elated without knowing why, talked in groups, and pointed with bared arms. For the first time that voyage Jimmy's sham existence seemed for a moment forgotten in the face of a solid reality. We had got so far anyhow. Belfast discoursed, quoting imaginary examples of short homeward runs from the Islands. "Them smart fruit schooners do it in five days," he affirmed. "What do you want? — only a good little breeze." Archie maintained that seven days was the record passage, and they disputed amicably with insulting words. Knowles declared he could already smell home from there, and with a heavy list on his short leg laughed fit to split his sides. A group of grizzled sea-dogs looked out for a time in silence and with grim absorbed faces. One said suddenly — "'Tain't far to London now." — "My first night ashore, blamme if I haven't steak and onions for supper... and a pint of bitter," said another. — "A barrel ye mean," shouted someone. — "Ham an' eggs three times a day. That's the way I live!" cried an excited voice. There was a stir, appreciative murmurs; eyes began to shine; jaws champed; short, nervous laughs were heard. Archie smiled with reserve all to himself. Singleton came up, gave a careless glance, and went down again without saying a word, indifferent, like a man who had seen Flores an incalculable number of times. The night travelling from the East blotted out of the limpid sky the purple stain of the high land. "Dead calm," said somebody quietly. The murmur of lively talk suddenly wavered, died out; the clusters broke up; men began to drift away one by one, descending the ladders slowly and with serious faces as if sobered by that reminder of their dependence upon the invisible. And when the big yellow moon ascended gently above the sharp rim of the clear horizon it found the ship

wrapped up in a breathless silence; a fearless ship that seemed to sleep profoundly, dreamlessly on the bosom of the sleeping and terrible sea.

Donkin chafed at the peace — at the ship — at the sea that stretching away on all sides merged into the illimitable silence of all creation. He felt himself pulled up sharp by unrecognised grievances. He had been physically cowed, but his injured dignity remained indomitable, and nothing could heal his lacerated feelings. Here was land already — home very soon — a bad pay-day — no clothes — more hard work. How offensive all this was. Land. The land that draws away life from sick sailors. That nigger there had money — clothes — easy times; and would not die. Land draws life away.... He felt tempted to go and see whether it did. Perhaps already.. It would be a bit of luck. There was money in the beggar's chest. He stepped briskly out of the shadows into the moonlight, and, instantly, his craving, hungry face from sallow became livid. He opened the door of the cabin and had a shock. Sure enough, Jimmy was dead! He moved no more than a recumbent figure with clasped hands, carved on the lid of a stone coffin. Donkin glared with avidity. Then Jimmy, without stirring, blinked his eyelids, and Donkin had another shock. Those eyes were rather startling. He shut the door behind his back with gentle care, looking intently the while at James Wait as though he had come in there at a great risk to tell some secret of startling importance. Jimmy did not move but glanced languidly out of the corners of his eyes. — "Calm?" he asked. — "Yuss," said Donkin, very disappointed, and sat down on the box.

Jimmy was used to such visits at all times of night or day. Men succeeded one another. They spoke in clear voices, pronounced cheerful words, repeated old jokes, listened to him; and each, going out, seemed to leave behind a little of his own vitality, surrender some of his own strength, renew the assurance of life — the indestructible thing! He did not like to be alone in his cabin, because, when he was alone, it seemed to him as if he hadn't been there at all. There was nothing. No pain. Not now. Perfectly right — but he couldn't enjoy his healthful repose unless some one was by to see it. This man would do as well as anybody. Donkin watched him stealthily: — "Soon home now," observed Wait. — "Vy d'yer whisper?" asked Donkin with interest, "can't yer speak up?" Jimmy looked annoyed and said nothing for a while; then in a lifeless, unringing voice: — "Why should I shout? You ain't deaf that I know." — "Oh! I can 'ear right enough," answered Donkin in a low tone, and looked down. He was thinking sadly of going out

when Jimmy spoke again. — "Time we did get home... to get something decent to eat... I am always hungry." Donkin felt angry all of a sudden. — "What about me," he hissed, "I am 'ungry too an' got ter work. You, 'ungry!" — "Your work won't kill you," commented Wait, feebly; "there's a couple of biscuits in the lower bunk there — you may have one. I can't eat them." Donkin dived in, groped in the corner and when he came up again his mouth was full. He munched with ardour. Jimmy seemed to doze with open eyes. Donkin finished his hard bread and got up. — "You're not going?" asked Jimmy, staring at the ceiling. — "No," said Donkin, impulsively, and instead of going out leaned his back against the closed door. He looked at James Wait, and saw him long, lean, dried up, as though all his flesh had shrivelled on his bones in the heat of a white furnace; the meagre fingers of one hand moved lightly upon the edge of the bunk playing an endless tune. To look at him was irritating and fatiguing; he could last like this for days; he was outrageous — belonging wholly neither to death nor life, and perfectly invulnerable in his apparent ignorance of both. Donkin felt tempted to enlighten him. — "What are yer thinkin' of?" he asked, surlily. James Wait had a grimacing smile that passed over the deathlike impassiveness of his bony face, incredible and frightful as would, in a dream, have been the sudden smile of a corpse.

"There is a girl," whispered Wait.... "Canton Street girl. — — — She chucked a third engineer of a Rennie boat — — — for me. Cooks oysters just as I like... She says — — — she would chuck — — — any toff — — — louder."

Donkin could hardly believe his ears. He was scandalised — "Would she? Yer wouldn't be any good to 'er," he said with unrestrained disgust. Wait was not there to hear him. He was swaggering up the East India Dock Road; saying kindly, "Come along for a treat," pushing glass swing-doors, posing with superb assurance in the gaslight above a mahogany counter. — "D'yer think yer will ever get ashore?" asked Donkin, angrily. Wait came back with a start. — "Ten days," he said, promptly, and returned at once to the regions of memory that know nothing of time. He felt untired, calm, and safely withdrawn within himself beyond the reach of every grave incertitude. There was something of the immutable quality of eternity in the slow moments of his complete restfulness. He was very quiet and easy amongst his vivid reminiscences which he mistook joyfully for images of an undoubted future. He cared for no one. Donkin felt this vaguely like a

blind man feeling in his darkness the fatal antagonism of all the surrounding existences, that to him shall for ever remain unrealisable, unseen and enviable. He had a desire to assert his importance, to break, to crush; to be even with everybody for everything; to tear the veil, unmask, expose, leave no refuge — a perfidious desire of truthfulness! He laughed in a mocking splutter and said:

“Ten days. Strike me blind if ever!... You will be dead by this time tomorrow p’r’aps. Ten days!” He waited for a while. “D’ye ‘ear me? Blamme if yer don’t look dead already.”

Wait must have been collecting his strength, for he said almost aloud — “You’re a stinking, cadging liar. Every one knows you.” And sitting up, against all probability, startled his visitor horribly. But very soon Donkin recovered himself. He blustered, “What? What? Who’s a liar? You are — the crowd are — the skipper — everybody. I ain’t! Putting on airs! Who’s yer?” He nearly choked himself with indignation. “Who’s yer to put on airs,” he repeated, trembling. “‘Ave one — ’ave one, says ‘ee — an’ cawn’t eat ‘em ‘isself. Now I’ll ‘ave both. By Gawd — I will! Yer nobody!”

He plunged into the lower bunk, rooted in there and brought to light another dusty biscuit. He held it up before Jimmy — then took a bite defiantly.

“What now?” he asked with feverish impudence. “Yer may take one — says yer. Why not giv’ me both? No. I’m a mangy dorg. One fur a mangy dorg. I’ll tyke both. Can yer stop me? Try. Come on. Try.”

Jimmy was clasping his legs and hiding his face on the knees. His shirt clung to him. Every rib was visible. His emaciated back was shaken in repeated jerks by the panting catches of his breath.

“Yer won’t? Yer can’t! What did I say?” went on Donkin, fiercely. He swallowed another dry mouthful with a hasty effort. The other’s silent helplessness, his weakness, his shrinking attitude exasperated him. “Ye’re done!” he cried. “Who’s yer to be lied to; to be waited on ‘and an’ foot like a bloomin’ ymperor. Yer nobody. Yer no one at all!” he spluttered with such a strength of unerring conviction that it shook him from head to foot in coming out, and left him vibrating like a released string.

James Wait rallied again. He lifted his head and turned bravely at Donkin, who saw a strange face, an unknown face, a fantastic and grimacing mask of despair and fury. Its lips moved rapidly; and hollow, moaning, whistling sounds filled the cabin with a vague mutter full of



menace, complaint and desolation, like the far-off murmur of a rising wind. Wait shook his head; rolled his eyes; he denied, cursed, threatened — and not a word had the strength to pass beyond the sorrowful pout of those black lips. It was incomprehensible and disturbing; a gibberish of emotions, a frantic dumb show of speech pleading for impossible things, promising a shadowy vengeance. It sobered Donkin into a scrutinising watchfulness.

“Yer can’t oller. See? What did I tell yer?” he said, slowly, after a moment of attentive examination. The other kept on headlong and unheard, nodding passionately, grinning with grotesque and appalling flashes of big white teeth. Donkin, as if fascinated by the dumb eloquence and anger of that black phantom, approached, stretching his neck out with distrustful curiosity; and it seemed to him suddenly that he was looking only at the shadow of a man crouching high in the bunk on the level with his eyes. — “What? What?” he said. He seemed to catch the shape of some words in the continuous panting hiss. “Yer will tell Belfast! Will yer? Are yer a bloomin’ kid?” He trembled with alarm and rage, “Tell yer gran’mother! Yer afeard! Who’s yer ter be afeard more’n any one?” His passionate sense of his own importance ran away with a last remnant of caution. “Tell an’ be damned! Tell, if yer can!” he cried. “I’ve been treated worser’n a dorg by your blooming back-lickers. They ‘as set me on, only to turn against me. I am the only man ‘ere. They clouted me, kicked me — an’ yer laffed — yer black, rotten incumbrance, you! You will pay fur it. They giv’ yer their grub, their water — yer will pay fur it to me, by Gawd! Who axed me ter ‘ave a drink of water? They put their bloomin’ rags on yer that night, an’ what did they giv’ ter me — a clout on the bloomin’ mouth — blast their... S’elp me!... Yer will pay fur it with yer money. I’m goin’ ter ‘ave it in a minyte; as soon has ye’re dead, yer bloomin’ useless fraud. That’s the man I am. An’ ye’re a thing — a bloody thing. Yah — you corpse!” He flung at Jimmy’s head the biscuit he had been all the time clutching hard, but it only grazed, and striking with a loud crack the bulkhead beyond burst like a hand-grenade into flying pieces. James Wait, as if wounded mortally, fell back on the pillow. His lips ceased to move and the rolling eyes became quiet and stared upwards with an intense and steady persistence. Donkin was surprised; he sat suddenly on the chest, and looked down, exhausted and gloomy. After a moment, he began to mutter to himself, “Die, you beggar — die. Somebody’ll come in... I wish I was drunk... Ten days... oysters...” He looked up and spoke louder. “No... No more for yer... no more bloomin’

gals that cook oysters... Who's yer? It's my turn now... I wish I was drunk; I would soon giv' you a leg up. That's where yer bound to go. Feet fust, through a port... Splash! Never see yer any more. Overboard! Good 'nuff fur yer." Jimmy's head moved slightly and he turned his eyes to Donkin's face; a gaze unbelieving, desolated and appealing, of a child frightened by the menace of being shut up alone in the dark. Donkin observed him from the chest with hopeful eyes; then, without rising, tried the lid. Locked. "I wish I was drunk," he muttered and getting up listened anxiously to the distant sound of footsteps on the deck. They approached — ceased. Some one yawned interminably just outside the door, and the footsteps went away shuffling lazily. Donkin's fluttering heart eased its pace, and when he looked towards the bunk again Jimmy was staring as before at the white beam. — "'Ow d'yer feel now?" he asked. — "Bad," breathed out Jimmy.

Donkin sat down patient and purposeful. Every half-hour the bells spoke to one another ringing along the whole length of the ship. Jimmy's respiration was so rapid that it couldn't be counted, so faint that it couldn't be heard. His eyes were terrified as though he had been looking at unspeakable horrors; and by his face one could see that he was thinking of abominable things. Suddenly with an incredibly strong and heartbreaking voice he sobbed out:

"Overboard!... I!... My God!" Donkin writhed a little on the box. He looked unwillingly. James Wait was mute. His two long bony hands smoothed the blanket upwards, as though he had wished to gather it all up under his chin. A tear, a big solitary tear, escaped from the corner of his eye and, without touching the hollow cheek, fell on the pillow. His throat rattled faintly.

And Donkin, watching the end of that hateful nigger, felt the anguishing grasp of a great sorrow on his heart at the thought that he himself, some day, would have to go through it all — just like this — perhaps! His eyes became moist. "Poor beggar," he murmured. The night seemed to go by in a flash; it seemed to him he could hear the irremediable rush of precious minutes. How long would this blooming affair last? Too long surely. No luck. He could not restrain himself. He got up and approached the bunk. Wait did not stir. Only his eyes appeared alive and his hands continued their smoothing movement with a horrible and tireless industry. Donkin bent over.

“Jimmy,” he called low. There was no answer, but the rattle stopped. “D’yer see me?” he asked, trembling. Jimmy’s chest heaved. Donkin, looking away, bent his ear to Jimmy’s lips, and heard a sound like the rustle of a single dry leaf driven along the smooth sand of a beach. It shaped itself.

“Light... the lamp... and... go,” breathed out Wait.

Donkin, instinctively, glanced over his shoulder at the brilliant flame; then, still looking away, felt under the pillow for a key. He got it at once and for the next few minutes remained on his knees shakily but swiftly busy inside the box. When he got up, his face — for the first time in his life — had a pink flush — perhaps of triumph.

He slipped the key under the pillow again, avoiding to glance at Jimmy, who had not moved. He turned his back squarely from the bunk, and started to the door as though he were going to walk a mile. At his second stride he had his nose against it. He clutched the handle cautiously, but at that moment he received the irresistible impression of something happening behind his back. He spun round as though he had been tapped on the shoulder. He was just in time to see Wait’s eyes blaze up and go out at once, like two lamps overturned together by a sweeping blow. Something resembling a scarlet thread hung down his chin out of the corner of his lips — and he had ceased to breathe.

Donkin closed the door behind him gently but firmly. Sleeping men, huddled under jackets, made on the lighted deck shapeless dark mounds that had the appearance of neglected graves. Nothing had been done all through the night and he hadn’t been missed. He stood motionless and perfectly astounded to find the world outside as he had left it; there was the sea, the ship — sleeping men; and he wondered absurdly at it, as though he had expected to find the men dead, familiar things gone for ever: as though, like a wanderer returning after many years, he had expected to see bewildering changes. He shuddered a little in the penetrating freshness of the air, and hugged himself forlornly. The declining moon drooped sadly in the western board as if withered by the cold touch of a pale dawn. The ship slept. And the immortal sea stretched away immense and hazy, like the image of life, with a glittering surface and lightless depths. Donkin gave it a defiant glance and slunk off noiselessly as if judged and cast out by the august silence of its might.

Jimmy’s death, after all, came as a tremendous surprise. We did not know till then how much faith we had put in his delusions. We had taken his

chances of life so much at his own valuation that his death, like the death of an old belief, shook the foundations of our society. A common bond was gone; the strong, effective and respectable bond of a sentimental lie. All that day we mooned at our work, with suspicious looks and a disabused air. In our hearts we thought that in the matter of his departure Jimmy had acted in a perverse and unfriendly manner. He didn't back us up, as a shipmate should. In going he took away with himself the gloomy and solemn shadow in which our folly had posed, with humane satisfaction, as a tender arbiter of fate. And now we saw it was no such thing. It was just common foolishness; a silly and ineffectual meddling with issues of majestic import — that is, if Podmore was right. Perhaps he was? Doubt survived Jimmy; and, like a community of banded criminals disintegrated by a touch of grace, we were profoundly scandalised with each other. Men spoke unkindly to their best chums. Others refused to speak at all. Singleton only was not surprised. "Dead — is he? Of course," he said, pointing at the island right abeam: for the calm still held the ship spell-bound within sight of Flores. Dead — of course. He wasn't surprised. Here was the land, and there, on the fore-hatch and waiting for the sailmaker — there was that corpse. Cause and effect. And for the first time that voyage, the old seaman became quite cheery and garrulous, explaining and illustrating from the stores of experience how, in sickness, the sight of an island (even a very small one) is generally more fatal than the view of a continent. But he couldn't explain why.

Jimmy was to be buried at five, and it was a long day till then — a day of mental disquiet and even of physical disturbance. We took no interest in our work and, very properly, were rebuked for it. This, in our constant state of hungry irritation, was exasperating. Donkin worked with his brow bound in a dirty rag, and looked so ghastly that Mr. Baker was touched with compassion at the sight of this plucky suffering. — "Ough! You, Donkin! Put down your work and go lay-up this watch. You look ill." — "I am bad, sir — in my 'ead," he said in a subdued voice, and vanished speedily. This annoyed many, and they thought the mate "bloomin' soft to-day." Captain Allistoun could be seen on the poop watching the sky to the southwest, and it soon got to be known about the decks that the barometer had begun to fall in the night, and that a breeze might be expected before long. This, by a subtle association of ideas, led to violent quarrelling as to the exact moment of Jimmy's death. Was it before or after "that 'ere glass started down?" It

was impossible to know, and it caused much contemptuous growling at one another. All of a sudden there was a great tumult forward. Pacific Knowles and good-tempered Davis had come to blows over it. The watch below interfered with spirit, and for ten minutes there was a noisy scrimmage round the hatch, where, in the balancing shade of the sails, Jimmy's body, wrapped up in a white blanket, was watched over by the sorrowful Belfast, who, in his desolation, disdained the fray. When the noise had ceased, and the passions had calmed into surly silence, he stood up at the head of the swathed body, lifting both arms on high, cried with pained indignation: — "You ought to be ashamed of yourselves!..." We were.

Belfast took his bereavement very hard. He gave proofs of unextinguishable devotion. It was he, and no other man, who would help the sailmaker to prepare what was left of Jimmy for a solemn surrender to the insatiable sea. He arranged the weights carefully at the feet: two holystones, an old anchor-shackle without its pin, some broken links of a worn-out stream cable. He arranged them this way, then that. "Bless my soul! you aren't afraid he will chafe his heel?" said the sailmaker, who hated the job. He pushed the needle, purring furiously, with his head in a cloud of tobacco smoke; he turned the flaps over, pulled at the stitches, stretched at the canvas. — "Lift his shoulders.... Pull to you a bit.... So — o — o. Steady." Belfast obeyed, pulled, lifted, overcome with sorrow, dropping tears on the tarred twine. — . "Don't you drag the canvas too taut over his poor face, Sails," he entreated, tearfully. — "What are you fashing yourself for? He will be comfortable enough," assured the sailmaker, cutting the thread after the last stitch, which came about the middle of Jimmy's forehead. He rolled up the remaining canvas, put away the needles. "What makes you take on so?" he asked. Belfast looked down at the long package of grey sailcloth. — "I pulled him out," he whispered, "and he did not want to go. If I had sat up with him last night he would have kept alive for me... but something made me tired." The sailmaker took vigorous draws at his pipe and mumbled: — "When I... West India Station... In the Blanche frigate... Yellow Jack... sewed in twenty men a week... Portsmouth-Devonport men — townies — knew their fathers, mothers, sisters — the whole boiling of 'em. Thought nothing of it. And these niggers like this one — you don't know where it comes from. Got nobody. No use to nobody. Who will miss him?" — "I do — I pulled him out," mourned Belfast dismally.

On two planks nailed together and apparently resigned and still under the folds of the Union Jack with a white border, James Wait, carried aft by four men, was deposited slowly, with his feet pointing at an open port. A swell had set in from the westward, and following on the roll of the ship, the red ensign, at half-mast, darted out and collapsed again on the grey sky, like a tongue of flickering fire; Charley tolled the bell; and at every swing to starboard the whole vast semi-circle of steely waters visible on that side seemed to come up with a rush to the edge of the port, as if impatient to get at our Jimmy. Every one was there but Donkin, who was too ill to come; the Captain and Mr. Creighton stood bareheaded on the break of the poop; Mr. Baker, directed by the master, who had said to him gravely: — "You know more about the prayer book than I do," came out of the cabin door quickly and a little embarrassed. All the caps went off. He began to read in a low tone, and with his usual harmlessly menacing utterance, as though he had been for the last time reproving confidentially that dead seaman at his feet. The men listened in scattered groups; they leaned on the fife rail, gazing on the deck; they held their chins in their hands thoughtfully, or, with crossed arms and one knee slightly bent, hung their heads in an attitude of upright meditation. Wamibo dreamed. Mr. Baker read on, grunting reverently at the turn of every page. The words, missing the unsteady hearts of men, rolled out to wander without a home upon the heartless sea; and James Wait, silenced for ever, lay uncritical and passive under the hoarse murmur of despair and hopes.

Two men made ready and waited for those words that send so many of our brothers to their last plunge. Mr. Baker began the passage. "Stand by," muttered the boatswain. Mr. Baker read out: "To the deep," and paused. The men lifted the inboard end of the planks, the boatswain snatched off the Union Jack, and James Wait did not move. — "Higher," muttered the boatswain angrily. All the heads were raised; every man stirred uneasily, but James Wait gave no sign of going. In death and swathed up for all eternity, he yet seemed to cling to the ship with the grip of an undying fear. "Higher! Lift!" whispered the boatswain, fiercely. — "He won't go," stammered one of the men, shakily, and both appeared ready to drop everything. Mr. Baker waited, burying his face in the book, and shuffling his feet nervously. All the men looked profoundly disturbed; from their midst a faint humming noise spread out — growing louder.... "Jimmy!" cried Belfast in a wailing tone, and there was a second of shuddering dismay.

“Jimmy, be a man!” he shrieked, passionately. Every mouth was wide open, not an eyelid winked. He stared wildly, twitching all over; he bent his body forward like a man peering at an horror. “Go!” he shouted, and sprang out of the crowd with his arm extended. “Go, Jimmy! — Jimmy, go! Go!” His fingers touched the head of the body, and the grey package started reluctantly to whizz off the lifted planks all at once, with the suddenness of a flash of lightning. The crowd stepped forward like one man; a deep Ah — h — h! came out vibrating from the broad chests. The ship rolled as if relieved of an unfair burden; the sails flapped. Belfast, supported by Archie, gasped hysterically; and Charley, who anxious to see Jimmy’s last dive, leaped headlong on the rail, was too late to see anything but the faint circle of a vanishing ripple.

Mr. Baker, perspiring abundantly, read out the last prayer in a deep rumour of excited men and fluttering sails. “Amen!” he said in an unsteady growl, and closed the book.

“Square the yards!” thundered a voice above his head. All hands gave a jump; one or two dropped their caps; Mr. Baker looked up surprised. The master, standing on the break of the poop, pointed to the westward. “Breeze coming,” he said, “Man the weather braces.” Mr. Baker crammed the book hurriedly into his pocket. “Forward, there — let go the foretack!” he hailed joyfully, bareheaded and brisk; “Square the foreyard, you port-watch!” — “Fair wind — fair wind,” muttered the men going to the braces. — “What did I tell you?” mumbled old Singleton, flinging down coil after coil with hasty energy; “I knowed it — he’s gone, and here it comes.”

It came with the sound of a lofty and powerful sigh. The sails filled, the ship gathered way, and the waking sea began to murmur sleepily of home to the ears of men.

That night, while the ship rushed foaming to the Northward before a freshening gale, the boatswain unbosomed himself to the petty officers’ berth: — “The chap was nothing but trouble,” he said, “from the moment he came aboard — d’ye remember — that night in Bombay? Been bullying all that softy crowd — cheeked the old man — we had to go fooling all over a half-drowned ship to save him. Dam’ nigh a mutiny all for him — and now the mate abused me like a pickpocket for forgetting to dab a lump of grease on them planks. So I did, but you ought to have known better, too, than to leave a nail sticking up — hey, Chips?”

“And you ought to have known better than to chuck all my tools overboard for ‘im, like a skeary greenhorn,” retorted the morose carpenter. “Well — he’s gone after ‘em now,” he added in an unforgiving tone. — ”On the China Station, I remember once, the Admiral he says to me...” began the sailmaker.

A week afterwards the Narcissus entered the chops of the Channel.

Under white wings she skimmed low over the blue sea like a great tired bird speeding to its nest. The clouds raced with her mastheads; they rose astern enormous and white, soared to the zenith, flew past, and falling down the wide curve of the sky, seemed to dash headlong into the sea — the clouds swifter than the ship, more free, but without a home. The coast to welcome her stepped out of space into the sunshine. The lofty headlands trod masterfully into the sea; the wide bays smiled in the light; the shadows of homeless clouds ran along the sunny plains, leaped over valleys, without a check darted up the hills, rolled down the slopes; and the sunshine pursued them with patches of running brightness. On the brows of dark cliffs white lighthouses shone in pillars of light. The Channel glittered like a blue mantle shot with gold and starred by the silver of the capping seas. The Narcissus rushed past the headlands and the bays. Outward-bound vessels crossed her track, lying over, and with their masts stripped for a slogging fight with the hard sou’wester. And, inshore, a string of smoking steamboats waddled, hugging the coast, like migrating and amphibious monsters, distrustful of the restless waves.

At night the headlands retreated, the bays advanced into one unbroken line of gloom. The lights of the earth mingled with the lights of heaven; and above the tossing lanterns of a trawling fleet a great lighthouse shone steadily, like an enormous riding light burning above a vessel of fabulous dimensions. Below its steady glow, the coast, stretching away straight and black, resembled the high side of an indestructible craft riding motionless upon the immortal and unresting sea. The dark land lay alone in the midst of waters, like a mighty ship bestarred with vigilant lights — a ship carrying the burden of millions of lives — a ship freighted with dross and with jewels, with gold and with steel. She towered up immense and strong, guarding priceless traditions and untold suffering, sheltering glorious memories and base forgetfulness, ignoble virtues and splendid transgressions. A great ship! For ages had the ocean battered in vain her enduring sides; she was there when the world was vaster and darker, when



the sea was great and mysterious, and ready to surrender the prize of fame to audacious men. A ship mother of fleets and nations! The great flagship of the race; stronger than the storms! and anchored in the open sea.

The *Narcissus*, heeling over to off-shore gusts, rounded the South Foreland, passed through the Downs, and, in tow, entered the river. Shorn of the glory of her white wings, she wound obediently after the tug through the maze of invisible channels. As she passed them the red-painted light-vessels, swung at their moorings, seemed for an instant to sail with great speed in the rush of tide, and the next moment were left hopelessly behind. The big buoys on the tails of banks slipped past her sides very low, and, dropping in her wake, tugged at their chains like fierce watchdogs. The reach narrowed; from both sides the land approached the ship. She went steadily up the river. On the riverside slopes the houses appeared in groups — seemed to stream down the declivities at a run to see her pass, and, checked by the mud of the foreshore, crowded on the banks. Further on, the tall factory chimneys appeared in insolent bands and watched her go by, like a straggling crowd of slim giants, swaggering and upright under the black plummets of smoke, cavalierly aslant. She swept round the bends; an impure breeze shrieked a welcome between her stripped spars; and the land, closing in, stepped between the ship and the sea.

A low cloud hung before her — a great opalescent and tremulous cloud, that seemed to rise from the steaming brows of millions of men. Long drifts of smoky vapours soiled it with livid trails; it throbbed to the beat of millions of hearts, and from it came an immense and lamentable murmur — the murmur of millions of lips praying, cursing, sighing, jeering — the undying murmur of folly, regret, and hope exhaled by the crowds of the anxious earth. The *Narcissus* entered the cloud; the shadows deepened; on all sides there was the clang of iron, the sound of mighty blows, shrieks, yells. Black barges drifted stealthily on the murky stream. A mad jumble of begrimed walls loomed up vaguely in the smoke, bewildering and mournful, like a vision of disaster. The tugs backed and filled in the stream, to hold the ship steady at the dock-gates; from her bows two lines went through the air whistling, and struck at the land viciously, like a pair of snakes. A bridge broke in two before her, as if by enchantment; big hydraulic capstans began to turn all by themselves, as though animated by a mysterious and unholy spell. She moved through a narrow lane of water between two low walls of granite, and men with check-ropes in their hands

kept pace with her, walking on the broad flagstones. A group waited impatiently on each side of the vanished bridge: rough heavy men in caps; sallow-faced men in high hats; two bareheaded women; ragged children, fascinated, and with wide eyes. A cart coming at a jerky trot pulled up sharply. One of the women screamed at the silent ship — "Hallo, Jack!" without looking at any one in particular, and all hands looked at her from the forecastle head. — "Stand clear! Stand clear of that rope!" cried the dockmen, bending over stone posts. The crowd murmured, stamped where they stood. — "Let go your quarter-checks! Let go!" sang out a ruddy-faced old man on the quay. The ropes splashed heavily falling in the water, and the *Narcissus* entered the dock.

The stony shores ran away right and left in straight lines, enclosing a sombre and rectangular pool. Brick walls rose high above the water! — soulless walls, staring through hundreds of windows as troubled and dull as the eyes of over-fed brutes. At their base monstrous iron cranes crouched, with chains hanging from their long necks, balancing cruel-looking hooks over the decks of lifeless ships. A noise of wheels rolling over stones, the thump of heavy things falling, the racket of feverish winches, the grinding of strained chains, floated on the air. Between high buildings the dust of all the continents soared in short flights; and a penetrating smell of perfumes and dirt, of spices and hides, of things costly and of things filthy, pervaded the space, made for it an atmosphere precious and disgusting. The *Narcissus* came gently into her berth; the shadows of soulless walls fell upon her, the dust of all the continents leaped upon her deck, and a swarm of strange men, clambering up her sides, took possession of her in the name of the sordid earth. She had ceased to live.

A toff in a black coat and high hat scrambled with agility, came up to the second mate, shook hands, and said: — "Hallo, Herbert." It was his brother. A lady appeared suddenly. A real lady, in a black dress and with a parasol. She looked extremely elegant in the midst of us, and as strange as if she had fallen there from the sky. Mr. Baker touched his cap to her. It was the master's wife. And very soon the Captain, dressed very smartly and in a white shirt, went with her over the side. We didn't recognise him at all till, turning on the quay, he called to Mr. Baker: — "Don't forget to wind up the chronometers to-morrow morning." An underhand lot of seedy-looking chaps with shifty eyes wandered in and out of the forecastle looking for a job — they said. — "More likely for something to steal," commented

Knowles, cheerfully. Poor beggars. Who cared? Weren't we home! But Mr. Baker went for one of them who had given him some cheek, and we were delighted. Everything was delightful. — "I've finished aft, sir," called out Mr. Creighton. — "No water in the well, sir," reported for the last time the carpenter, sounding-rod in hand. Mr. Baker glanced along the decks at the expectant group of sailors, glanced aloft at the yards. — "Ough! That will do, men," he grunted. The group broke up. The voyage was ended.

Rolled-up beds went flying over the rail; lashed chests went sliding down the gangway — mighty few of both at that. "The rest is having a cruise off the Cape," explained Knowles enigmatically to a dock-loafer with whom he had struck a sudden friendship. Men ran, calling to one another, hailing utter strangers to "lend a hand with the dunnage," then with sudden decorum approached the mate to shake hands before going ashore. — "Good-bye, sir," they repeated in various tones. Mr. Baker grasped hard palms, grunted in a friendly manner at every one, his eyes twinkled. — "Take care of your money, Knowles. Ough! Soon get a nice wife if you do." The lame man was delighted. — "Good-bye, sir," said Belfast, with emotion, wringing the mate's hand, and looked up with swimming eyes. "I thought I would take 'im ashore with me," he went on, plaintively. Mr. Baker did not understand, but said kindly: — "Take care of yourself, Craik," and the bereaved Belfast went over the rail mourning and alone.

Mr. Baker, in the sudden peace of the ship, moved about solitary and grunting, trying door-handles, peering into dark places, never done — a model chief mate! No one waited for him ashore. Mother dead; father and two brothers, Yarmouth fishermen, drowned together on the Dogger Bank; sister married and unfriendly. Quite a lady. Married to the leading tailor of a little town, and its leading politician, who did not think his sailor brother-in-law quite respectable enough for him. Quite a lady, quite a lady, he thought, sitting down for a moment's rest on the quarter-hatch. Time enough to go ashore and get a bite and sup, and a bed somewhere. He didn't like to part with a ship. No one to think about then. The darkness of a misty evening fell, cold and damp, upon the deserted deck; and Mr. Baker sat smoking, thinking of all the successive ships to whom through many long years he had given the best of a seaman's care. And never a command in sight. Not once! — "I haven't somehow the cut of a skipper about me," he meditated, placidly, while the shipkeeper (who had taken possession of the galley), a wizened old man with bleared eyes, cursed him in whispers for "hanging

about so.” — “Now, Creighton,” he pursued the unenvious train of thought, “quite a gentleman... swell friends... will get on. Fine young fellow... a little more experience.” He got up and shook himself. “I’ll be back first thing tomorrow morning for the hatches. Don’t you let them touch anything before I come, shipkeeper,” he called out. Then, at last, he also went ashore — a model chief mate!

The men scattered by the dissolving contact of the land came together once more in the shipping office. — “The *Narcissus* pays off,” shouted outside a glazed door a brass-bound old fellow with a crown and the capitals B. T. on his cap. A lot trooped in at once but many were late. The room was large, white-washed, and bare; a counter surmounted by a brass-wire grating fenced off a third of the dusty space, and behind the grating a pasty-faced clerk, with his hair parted in the middle, had the quick, glittering eyes and the vivacious, jerky movements of a caged bird. Poor Captain Allistoun also in there, and sitting before a little table with piles of gold and notes on it, appeared subdued by his captivity. Another Board of Trade bird was perching on a high stool near the door: an old bird that did not mind the chaff of elated sailors. The crew of the *Narcissus*, broken up into knots, pushed in the corners. They had new shore togs, smart jackets that looked as if they had been shaped with an axe, glossy trousers that seemed made of crumpled sheet-iron, collarless flannel shirts, shiny new boots. They tapped on shoulders, button-holed one another, asked: — “Where did you sleep last night?” whispered gaily, slapped their thighs with bursts of subdued laughter. Most had clean, radiant faces; only one or two turned up dishevelled and sad; the two-young Norwegians looked tidy, meek, and altogether of a promising material for the kind ladies who patronise the Scandinavian Home. Wamibo, still in his working clothes, dreamed, upright and burly in the middle of the room, and, when Archie came in, woke up for a smile. But the wide-awake clerk called out a name, and the paying-off business began.

One by one they came up to the pay-table to get the wages of their glorious and obscure toil. They swept the money with care into broad palms, rammed it trustfully into trousers’ pockets, or, turning their backs on the table, reckoned with difficulty in the hollow of their stiff hands. — “Money right? Sign the release. There — there,” repeated the clerk, impatiently. “How stupid those sailors are!” he thought. Singleton came up, venerable — and uncertain as to daylight; brown drops of tobacco juice

hung in his white beard; his hands, that never hesitated in the great light of the open sea, could hardly find the small pile of gold in the profound darkness of the shore. "Can't write?" said the clerk, shocked. "Make a mark, then." Singleton painfully sketched in a heavy cross, blotted the page. "What a disgusting old brute," muttered the clerk. Somebody opened the door for him, and the patriarchal seaman passed through unsteadily, without as much as a glance at any of us.

Archie displayed a pocket-book. He was chaffed. Belfast, who looked wild, as though he had already luffed up through a public-house or two, gave signs of emotion and wanted to speak to the Captain privately. The master was surprised. They spoke through the wires, and we could hear the Captain saying: — "I've given it up to the Board of Trade." "I should 've liked to get something of his," mumbled Belfast. "But you can't, my man. It's given up, locked and sealed, to the Marine Office," expostulated the master; and Belfast stood back, with drooping mouth and troubled eyes. In a pause of the business we heard the master and the clerk talking. We caught: "James Wait — deceased — found no papers of any kind — no relations — no trace — the Office must hold his wages then." Donkin entered. He seemed out of breath, was grave, full of business. He went straight to the desk, talked with animation to the clerk, who thought him an intelligent man. They discussed the account, dropping h's against one another as if for a wager — very friendly. Captain Allistoun paid. "I give you a bad discharge," he said, quietly. Donkin raised his voice: — "I don't want your bloomin' discharge — keep it. I'm goin' ter 'ave a job ashore." He turned to us. "No more bloomin' sea fur me," he said, aloud. All looked at him. He had better clothes, had an easy air, appeared more at home than any of us; he stared with assurance, enjoying the effect of his declaration. "Yuss. I 'ave friends well off. That's more'n you got. But I am a man. Yer shipmates for all that. Who's comin fur a drink?"

No one moved. There was a silence; a silence of blank faces and stony looks. He waited a moment, smiled bitterly, and went to the door. There he faced round once more. "You won't? You bloomin' lot of yrpocrits. No? What 'ave I done to yer? Did I bully yer? Did I 'urt yer? Did I?... You won't drink?... No!... Then may ye die of thirst, every mother's son of yer! Not one of yer 'as the sperrit of a bug. Ye're the scum of the world. Work and starve!"

He went out, and slammed the door with such violence that the old Board of Trade bird nearly fell off his perch.

"He's mad," declared Archie. "No! No! He's drunk," insisted Belfast, lurching about, and in a maudlin tone. Captain Allistoun sat smiling thoughtfully at the cleared pay-table.

Outside, on Tower Hill, they blinked, hesitated clumsily, as if blinded by the strange quality of the hazy light, as if discomposed by the view of so many men; and they who could hear one another in the howl of gales seemed deafened and distracted by the dull roar of the busy earth. — "To the Black Horse! To the Black Horse!" cried some. "Let us have a drink together before we part." They crossed the road, clinging to one another. Only Charley and Belfast wandered off alone. As I came up I saw a red-faced, blowsy woman, in a grey shawl, and with dusty, fluffy hair, fall on Charley's neck. It was his mother. She slobbered over him: — "O, my boy! My boy!" — "Leggo of me," said Charley, "Leggo, mother!" I was passing him at the time, and over the untidy head of the blubbering woman he gave me a humorous smile and a glance ironic, courageous, and profound, that seemed to put all my knowledge of life to shame. I nodded and passed on, but heard him say again, good-naturedly: — "If you leggo of me this minyt — ye shall 'ave a bob for a drink out of my pay." In the next few steps I came upon Belfast. He caught my arm with tremulous enthusiasm. — "I couldn't go wi' 'em," he stammered, indicating by a nod our noisy crowd, that drifted slowly along the other sidewalk. "When I think of Jimmy... Poor Jim! When I think of him I have no heart for drink. You were his chum, too... but I pulled him out... didn't I? Short wool he had.... Yes. And I stole the blooming pie.... He wouldn't go.... He wouldn't go for nobody." He burst into tears. "I never touched him — never — never!" he sobbed. "He went for me like... like ... a lamb."

I disengaged myself gently. Belfast's crying fits generally ended in a fight with some one, and I wasn't anxious to stand the brunt of his inconsolable sorrow. Moreover, two bulky policemen stood near by, looking at us with a disapproving and incorruptible gaze. — "So long!" I said, and went on my way.

But at the corner I stopped to take my last look at the crew of the Narcissus. They were swaying irresolute and noisy on the broad flagstones before the Mint. They were bound for the Black Horse, where men, in fur caps with brutal faces and in shirt sleeves, dispense out of varnished barrels

the illusions of strength, mirth, happiness; the illusion of splendour and poetry of life, to the paid-off crews of southern-going ships. From afar I saw them discoursing, with jovial eyes and clumsy gestures, while the sea of life thundered into their ears ceaseless and unheeded. And swaying about there on the white stones, surrounded by the hurry and clamour of men, they appeared to be creatures of another kind — lost, alone, forgetful, and doomed; they were like castaways, like reckless and joyous castaways, like mad castaways making merry in the storm and upon an insecure ledge of a treacherous rock. The roar of the town resembled the roar of topping breakers, merciless and strong, with a loud voice and cruel purpose; but overhead the clouds broke; a flood of sunshine streamed down the walls of grimy houses. The dark knot of seamen drifted in sunshine. To the left of them the trees in Tower Gardens sighed, the stones of the Tower gleaming, seemed to stir in the play of light, as if remembering suddenly all the great joys and sorrows of the past, the fighting prototypes of these men; press-gangs; mutinous cries; the wailing of women by the riverside, and the shouts of men welcoming victories. The sunshine of heaven fell like a gift of grace on the mud of the earth, on the remembering and mute stones, on greed, selfishness; on the anxious faces of forgetful men. And to the right of the dark group the stained front of the Mint, cleansed by the flood of light, stood out for a moment dazzling and white like a marble palace in a fairy tale. The crew of the *Narcissus* drifted out of sight.

I never saw them again. The sea took some, the steamers took others, the graveyards of the earth will account for the rest. Singleton has no doubt taken with him the long record of his faithful work into the peaceful depths of an hospitable sea. And Donkin, who never did a decent day's work in his life, no doubt earns his living by discoursing with filthy eloquence upon the right of labour to live. So be it! Let the earth and the sea each have its own.

A gone shipmate, like any other man, is gone for ever; and I never met one of them again. But at times the spring-flood of memory sets with force up the dark River of the Nine Bends. Then on the waters of the forlorn stream drifts a ship — a shadowy ship manned by a crew of Shades. They pass and make a sign, in a shadowy hail. Haven't we, together and upon the immortal sea, wrung out a meaning from our sinful lives? Good-bye, brothers! You were a good crowd. As good a crowd as ever fisted with wild cries the beating canvas of a heavy foresail; or tossing aloft, invisible in the night, gave back yell for yell to a westerly gale.

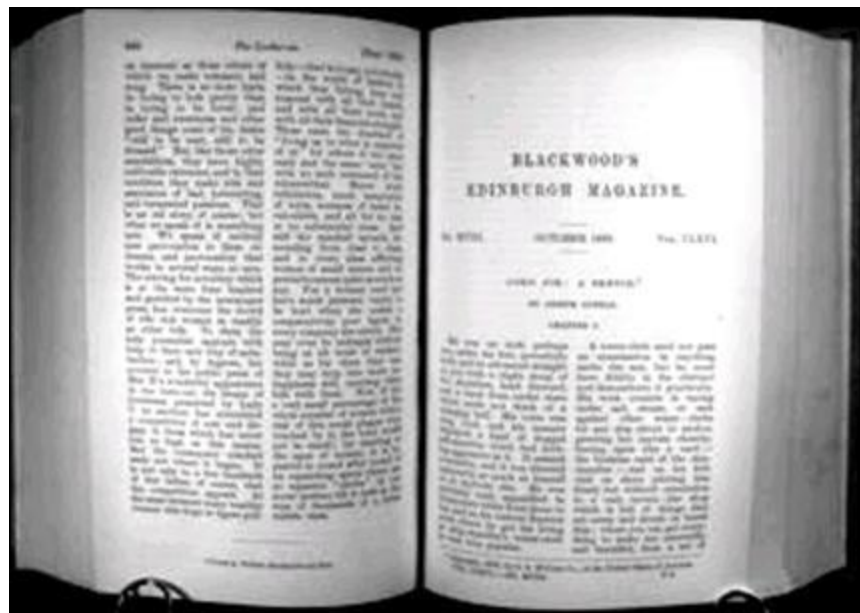
**THE END**



## ***LORD JIM***



*Lord Jim* was originally published as a serial in Blackwood's Magazine from October 1899 to November 1900. It tells the story of Jim's abandonment of a ship in distress on which he is serving as a mate and his later attempts at coming to terms with his actions. The novel is now widely regarded as one of the best pieces of fiction of the 20th century.



A serial part of Blackwood's Magazine



*Conrad, close to the time of publication*

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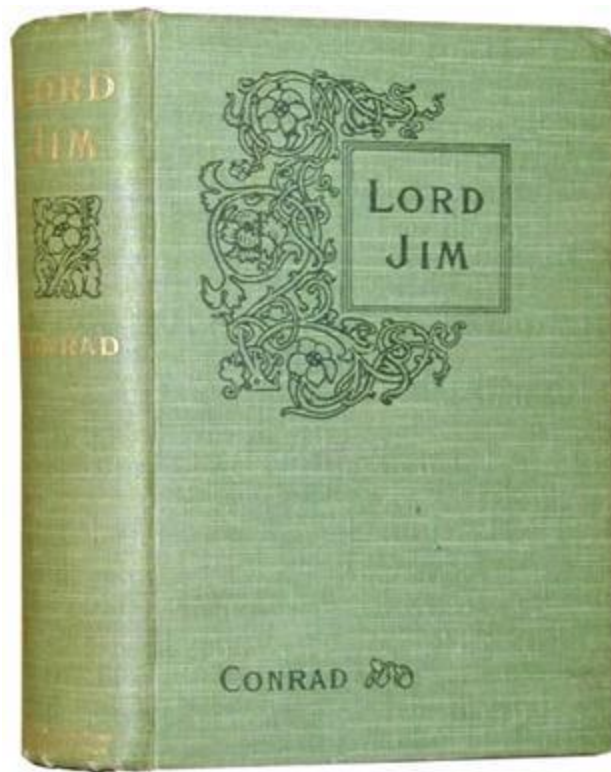
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*The first edition*

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

When this novel first appeared in book form a notion got about that I had been bolted away with. Some reviewers maintained that the work starting as a short story had got beyond the writer's control. One or two discovered internal evidence of the fact, which seemed to amuse them. They pointed out the limitations of the narrative form. They argued that no man could have been expected to talk all that time, and other men to listen so long. It was not, they said, very credible.

After thinking it over for something like sixteen years, I am not so sure about that. Men have been known, both in the tropics and in the temperate zone, to sit up half the night 'swapping yarns'. This, however, is but one yarn, yet with interruptions affording some measure of relief; and in regard to the listeners' endurance, the postulate must be accepted that the story was interesting. It is the necessary preliminary assumption. If I hadn't believed that it was interesting I could never have begun to write it. As to the mere physical possibility we all know that some speeches in Parliament have taken nearer six than three hours in delivery; whereas all that part of the book which is Marlow's narrative can be read through aloud, I should say, in less than three hours. Besides — though I have kept strictly all such insignificant details out of the tale — we may presume that there must have been refreshments on that night, a glass of mineral water of some sort to help the narrator on.

But, seriously, the truth of the matter is, that my first thought was of a short story, concerned only with the pilgrim ship episode; nothing more. And that was a legitimate conception. After writing a few pages, however, I became for some reason discontented and I laid them aside for a time. I didn't take them out of the drawer till the late Mr. William Blackwood suggested I should give something again to his magazine.

It was only then that I perceived that the pilgrim ship episode was a good starting-point for a free and wandering tale; that it was an event, too, which could conceivably colour the whole 'sentiment of existence' in a simple and sensitive character. But all these preliminary moods and stirrings of spirit were rather obscure at the time, and they do not appear clearer to me now after the lapse of so many years.

The few pages I had laid aside were not without their weight in the choice of subject. But the whole was re-written deliberately. When I sat down to it I knew it would be a long book, though I didn't foresee that it would spread itself over thirteen numbers of *Maga*.

I have been asked at times whether this was not the book of mine I liked best. I am a great foe to favouritism in public life, in private life, and even in the delicate relationship of an author to his works. As a matter of principle I will have no favourites; but I don't go so far as to feel grieved and annoyed by the preference some people give to my *Lord Jim*. I won't even say that I 'fail to understand . . .' No! But once I had occasion to be puzzled and surprised.

A friend of mine returning from Italy had talked with a lady there who did not like the book. I regretted that, of course, but what surprised me was the ground of her dislike. 'You know,' she said, 'it is all so morbid.'

The pronouncement gave me food for an hour's anxious thought. Finally I arrived at the conclusion that, making due allowances for the subject itself being rather foreign to women's normal sensibilities, the lady could not have been an Italian. I wonder whether she was European at all? In any case, no Latin temperament would have perceived anything morbid in the acute consciousness of lost honour. Such a consciousness may be wrong, or it may be right, or it may be condemned as artificial; and, perhaps, my *Jim* is not a type of wide commonness. But I can safely assure my readers that he is not the product of coldly perverted thinking. He's not a figure of Northern Mists either. One sunny morning, in the commonplace surroundings of an Eastern roadstead, I saw his form pass by — appealing — significant — under a cloud — perfectly silent. Which is as it should be. It was for me, with all the sympathy of which I was capable, to seek fit words for his meaning. He was 'one of us'.

J.C.

1917.



# **LORD JIM**

## **CHAPTER 1**

He was an inch, perhaps two, under six feet, powerfully built, and he advanced straight at you with a slight stoop of the shoulders, head forward, and a fixed from-under stare which made you think of a charging bull. His voice was deep, loud, and his manner displayed a kind of dogged self-assertion which had nothing aggressive in it. It seemed a necessity, and it was directed apparently as much at himself as at anybody else. He was spotlessly neat, apparelled in immaculate white from shoes to hat, and in the various Eastern ports where he got his living as ship-chandler's water-clerk he was very popular.

A water-clerk need not pass an examination in anything under the sun, but he must have Ability in the abstract and demonstrate it practically. His work consists in racing under sail, steam, or oars against other water-clerks for any ship about to anchor, greeting her captain cheerily, forcing upon him a card — the business card of the ship-chandler — and on his first visit on shore piloting him firmly but without ostentation to a vast, cavern-like shop which is full of things that are eaten and drunk on board ship; where you can get everything to make her seaworthy and beautiful, from a set of chain-hooks for her cable to a book of gold-leaf for the carvings of her stern; and where her commander is received like a brother by a ship-chandler he has never seen before. There is a cool parlour, easy-chairs, bottles, cigars, writing implements, a copy of harbour regulations, and a warmth of welcome that melts the salt of a three months' passage out of a seaman's heart. The connection thus begun is kept up, as long as the ship remains in harbour, by the daily visits of the water-clerk. To the captain he is faithful like a friend and attentive like a son, with the patience of Job, the unselfish devotion of a woman, and the jollity of a boon companion. Later on the bill is sent in. It is a beautiful and humane occupation. Therefore good water-clerks are scarce. When a water-clerk who possesses Ability in the abstract has also the advantage of having been brought up to the sea, he is worth to his employer a lot of money and some humouring. Jim had always good wages and as much humouring as would have bought the fidelity of a fiend. Nevertheless, with black ingratitude he would throw up

the job suddenly and depart. To his employers the reasons he gave were obviously inadequate. They said 'Confounded fool!' as soon as his back was turned. This was their criticism on his exquisite sensibility.

To the white men in the waterside business and to the captains of ships he was just Jim — nothing more. He had, of course, another name, but he was anxious that it should not be pronounced. His incognito, which had as many holes as a sieve, was not meant to hide a personality but a fact. When the fact broke through the incognito he would leave suddenly the seaport where he happened to be at the time and go to another — generally farther east. He kept to seaports because he was a seaman in exile from the sea, and had Ability in the abstract, which is good for no other work but that of a water-clerk. He retreated in good order towards the rising sun, and the fact followed him casually but inevitably. Thus in the course of years he was known successively in Bombay, in Calcutta, in Rangoon, in Penang, in Batavia — and in each of these halting-places was just Jim the water-clerk. Afterwards, when his keen perception of the Intolerable drove him away for good from seaports and white men, even into the virgin forest, the Malays of the jungle village, where he had elected to conceal his deplorable faculty, added a word to the monosyllable of his incognito. They called him Tuan Jim: as one might say — Lord Jim.

Originally he came from a parsonage. Many commanders of fine merchant-ships come from these abodes of piety and peace. Jim's father possessed such certain knowledge of the Unknowable as made for the righteousness of people in cottages without disturbing the ease of mind of those whom an unerring Providence enables to live in mansions. The little church on a hill had the mossy greyness of a rock seen through a ragged screen of leaves. It had stood there for centuries, but the trees around probably remembered the laying of the first stone. Below, the red front of the rectory gleamed with a warm tint in the midst of grass-plots, flower-beds, and fir-trees, with an orchard at the back, a paved stable-yard to the left, and the sloping glass of greenhouses tacked along a wall of bricks. The living had belonged to the family for generations; but Jim was one of five sons, and when after a course of light holiday literature his vocation for the sea had declared itself, he was sent at once to a 'training-ship for officers of the mercantile marine.'

He learned there a little trigonometry and how to cross top-gallant yards. He was generally liked. He had the third place in navigation and pulled

stroke in the first cutter. Having a steady head with an excellent physique, he was very smart aloft. His station was in the fore-top, and often from there he looked down, with the contempt of a man destined to shine in the midst of dangers, at the peaceful multitude of roofs cut in two by the brown tide of the stream, while scattered on the outskirts of the surrounding plain the factory chimneys rose perpendicular against a grimy sky, each slender like a pencil, and belching out smoke like a volcano. He could see the big ships departing, the broad-beamed ferries constantly on the move, the little boats floating far below his feet, with the hazy splendour of the sea in the distance, and the hope of a stirring life in the world of adventure.

On the lower deck in the babel of two hundred voices he would forget himself, and beforehand live in his mind the sea-life of light literature. He saw himself saving people from sinking ships, cutting away masts in a hurricane, swimming through a surf with a line; or as a lonely castaway, barefooted and half naked, walking on uncovered reefs in search of shellfish to stave off starvation. He confronted savages on tropical shores, quelled mutinies on the high seas, and in a small boat upon the ocean kept up the hearts of despairing men — always an example of devotion to duty, and as unflinching as a hero in a book.

‘Something’s up. Come along.’

He leaped to his feet. The boys were streaming up the ladders. Above could be heard a great scurrying about and shouting, and when he got through the hatchway he stood still — as if confounded.

It was the dusk of a winter’s day. The gale had freshened since noon, stopping the traffic on the river, and now blew with the strength of a hurricane in fitful bursts that boomed like salvoes of great guns firing over the ocean. The rain slanted in sheets that flicked and subsided, and between whiles Jim had threatening glimpses of the tumbling tide, the small craft jumbled and tossing along the shore, the motionless buildings in the driving mist, the broad ferry-boats pitching ponderously at anchor, the vast landing-stages heaving up and down and smothered in sprays. The next gust seemed to blow all this away. The air was full of flying water. There was a fierce purpose in the gale, a furious earnestness in the screech of the wind, in the brutal tumult of earth and sky, that seemed directed at him, and made him hold his breath in awe. He stood still. It seemed to him he was whirled around.

He was jostled. 'Man the cutter!' Boys rushed past him. A coaster running in for shelter had crashed through a schooner at anchor, and one of the ship's instructors had seen the accident. A mob of boys clambered on the rails, clustered round the davits. 'Collision. Just ahead of us. Mr. Symons saw it.' A push made him stagger against the mizzen-mast, and he caught hold of a rope. The old training-ship chained to her moorings quivered all over, bowing gently head to wind, and with her scanty rigging humming in a deep bass the breathless song of her youth at sea. 'Lower away!' He saw the boat, manned, drop swiftly below the rail, and rushed after her. He heard a splash. 'Let go; clear the falls!' He leaned over. The river alongside seethed in frothy streaks. The cutter could be seen in the falling darkness under the spell of tide and wind, that for a moment held her bound, and tossing abreast of the ship. A yelling voice in her reached him faintly: 'Keep stroke, you young whelps, if you want to save anybody! Keep stroke!' And suddenly she lifted high her bow, and, leaping with raised oars over a wave, broke the spell cast upon her by the wind and tide.

Jim felt his shoulder gripped firmly. 'Too late, youngster.' The captain of the ship laid a restraining hand on that boy, who seemed on the point of leaping overboard, and Jim looked up with the pain of conscious defeat in his eyes. The captain smiled sympathetically. 'Better luck next time. This will teach you to be smart.'

A shrill cheer greeted the cutter. She came dancing back half full of water, and with two exhausted men washing about on her bottom boards. The tumult and the menace of wind and sea now appeared very contemptible to Jim, increasing the regret of his awe at their inefficient menace. Now he knew what to think of it. It seemed to him he cared nothing for the gale. He could affront greater perils. He would do so — better than anybody. Not a particle of fear was left. Nevertheless he brooded apart that evening while the bowman of the cutter — a boy with a face like a girl's and big grey eyes — was the hero of the lower deck. Eager questioners crowded round him. He narrated: 'I just saw his head bobbing, and I dashed my boat-hook in the water. It caught in his breeches and I nearly went overboard, as I thought I would, only old Symons let go the tiller and grabbed my legs — the boat nearly swamped. Old Symons is a fine old chap. I don't mind a bit him being grumpy with us. He swore at me all the time he held my leg, but that was only his way of telling me to stick to the boat-hook. Old Symons is awfully excitable — isn't he? No — not

the little fair chap — the other, the big one with a beard. When we pulled him in he groaned, “Oh, my leg! oh, my leg!” and turned up his eyes. Fancy such a big chap fainting like a girl. Would any of you fellows faint for a jab with a boat-hook? — I wouldn’t. It went into his leg so far.’ He showed the boat-hook, which he had carried below for the purpose, and produced a sensation. ‘No, silly! It was not his flesh that held him — his breeches did. Lots of blood, of course.’

Jim thought it a pitiful display of vanity. The gale had ministered to a heroism as spurious as its own pretence of terror. He felt angry with the brutal tumult of earth and sky for taking him unawares and checking unfairly a generous readiness for narrow escapes. Otherwise he was rather glad he had not gone into the cutter, since a lower achievement had served the turn. He had enlarged his knowledge more than those who had done the work. When all men flinched, then — he felt sure — he alone would know how to deal with the spurious menace of wind and seas. He knew what to think of it. Seen dispassionately, it seemed contemptible. He could detect no trace of emotion in himself, and the final effect of a staggering event was that, unnoticed and apart from the noisy crowd of boys, he exulted with fresh certitude in his avidity for adventure, and in a sense of many-sided courage.

## CHAPTER 2

After two years of training he went to sea, and entering the regions so well known to his imagination, found them strangely barren of adventure. He made many voyages. He knew the magic monotony of existence between sky and water: he had to bear the criticism of men, the exactions of the sea, and the prosaic severity of the daily task that gives bread — but whose only reward is in the perfect love of the work. This reward eluded him. Yet he could not go back, because there is nothing more enticing, disenchanting, and enslaving than the life at sea. Besides, his prospects were good. He was gentlemanly, steady, tractable, with a thorough knowledge of his duties; and in time, when yet very young, he became chief mate of a fine ship, without ever having been tested by those events of the sea that show in the light of day the inner worth of a man, the edge of his temper, and the fibre of his stuff; that reveal the quality of his resistance and the secret truth of his pretences, not only to others but also to himself.

Only once in all that time he had again a glimpse of the earnestness in the anger of the sea. That truth is not so often made apparent as people might think. There are many shades in the danger of adventures and gales, and it is only now and then that there appears on the face of facts a sinister violence of intention — that indefinable something which forces it upon the mind and the heart of a man, that this complication of accidents or these elemental furies are coming at him with a purpose of malice, with a strength beyond control, with an unbridled cruelty that means to tear out of him his hope and his fear, the pain of his fatigue and his longing for rest: which means to smash, to destroy, to annihilate all he has seen, known, loved, enjoyed, or hated; all that is priceless and necessary — the sunshine, the memories, the future; which means to sweep the whole precious world utterly away from his sight by the simple and appalling act of taking his life.

Jim, disabled by a falling spar at the beginning of a week of which his Scottish captain used to say afterwards, ‘Man! it’s a pairfect meeracle to me how she lived through it!’ spent many days stretched on his back, dazed, battered, hopeless, and tormented as if at the bottom of an abyss of unrest. He did not care what the end would be, and in his lucid moments overvalued his indifference. The danger, when not seen, has the imperfect vagueness of human thought. The fear grows shadowy; and Imagination,

the enemy of men, the father of all terrors, unstimulated, sinks to rest in the dullness of exhausted emotion. Jim saw nothing but the disorder of his tossed cabin. He lay there batted down in the midst of a small devastation, and felt secretly glad he had not to go on deck. But now and again an uncontrollable rush of anguish would grip him bodily, make him gasp and writhe under the blankets, and then the unintelligent brutality of an existence liable to the agony of such sensations filled him with a despairing desire to escape at any cost. Then fine weather returned, and he thought no more about It.

His lameness, however, persisted, and when the ship arrived at an Eastern port he had to go to the hospital. His recovery was slow, and he was left behind.

There were only two other patients in the white men's ward: the purser of a gunboat, who had broken his leg falling down a hatchway; and a kind of railway contractor from a neighbouring province, afflicted by some mysterious tropical disease, who held the doctor for an ass, and indulged in secret debaucheries of patent medicine which his Tamil servant used to smuggle in with unwearied devotion. They told each other the story of their lives, played cards a little, or, yawning and in pyjamas, lounged through the day in easy-chairs without saying a word. The hospital stood on a hill, and a gentle breeze entering through the windows, always flung wide open, brought into the bare room the softness of the sky, the languor of the earth, the bewitching breath of the Eastern waters. There were perfumes in it, suggestions of infinite repose, the gift of endless dreams. Jim looked every day over the thickets of gardens, beyond the roofs of the town, over the fronds of palms growing on the shore, at that roadstead which is a thoroughfare to the East, — at the roadstead dotted by garlanded islets, lighted by festal sunshine, its ships like toys, its brilliant activity resembling a holiday pageant, with the eternal serenity of the Eastern sky overhead and the smiling peace of the Eastern seas possessing the space as far as the horizon.

Directly he could walk without a stick, he descended into the town to look for some opportunity to get home. Nothing offered just then, and, while waiting, he associated naturally with the men of his calling in the port. These were of two kinds. Some, very few and seen there but seldom, led mysterious lives, had preserved an undefaced energy with the temper of buccaneers and the eyes of dreamers. They appeared to live in a crazy maze

of plans, hopes, dangers, enterprises, ahead of civilisation, in the dark places of the sea; and their death was the only event of their fantastic existence that seemed to have a reasonable certitude of achievement. The majority were men who, like himself, thrown there by some accident, had remained as officers of country ships. They had now a horror of the home service, with its harder conditions, severer view of duty, and the hazard of stormy oceans. They were attuned to the eternal peace of Eastern sky and sea. They loved short passages, good deck-chairs, large native crews, and the distinction of being white. They shuddered at the thought of hard work, and led precariously easy lives, always on the verge of dismissal, always on the verge of engagement, serving Chinamen, Arabs, half-castes — would have served the devil himself had he made it easy enough. They talked everlastingly of turns of luck: how So-and-so got charge of a boat on the coast of China — a soft thing; how this one had an easy billet in Japan somewhere, and that one was doing well in the Siamese navy; and in all they said — in their actions, in their looks, in their persons — could be detected the soft spot, the place of decay, the determination to lounge safely through existence.

To Jim that gossiping crowd, viewed as seamen, seemed at first more unsubstantial than so many shadows. But at length he found a fascination in the sight of those men, in their appearance of doing so well on such a small allowance of danger and toil. In time, beside the original disdain there grew up slowly another sentiment; and suddenly, giving up the idea of going home, he took a berth as chief mate of the *Patna*.

The *Patna* was a local steamer as old as the hills, lean like a greyhound, and eaten up with rust worse than a condemned water-tank. She was owned by a Chinaman, chartered by an Arab, and commanded by a sort of renegade New South Wales German, very anxious to curse publicly his native country, but who, apparently on the strength of Bismarck's victorious policy, brutalised all those he was not afraid of, and wore a 'blood-and-iron' air, combined with a purple nose and a red moustache. After she had been painted outside and whitewashed inside, eight hundred pilgrims (more or less) were driven on board of her as she lay with steam up alongside a wooden jetty.

They streamed aboard over three gangways, they streamed in urged by faith and the hope of paradise, they streamed in with a continuous tramp and shuffle of bare feet, without a word, a murmur, or a look back; and



when clear of confining rails spread on all sides over the deck, flowed forward and aft, overflowed down the yawning hatchways, filled the inner recesses of the ship — like water filling a cistern, like water flowing into crevices and crannies, like water rising silently even with the rim. Eight hundred men and women with faith and hopes, with affections and memories, they had collected there, coming from north and south and from the outskirts of the East, after treading the jungle paths, descending the rivers, coasting in praus along the shallows, crossing in small canoes from island to island, passing through suffering, meeting strange sights, beset by strange fears, upheld by one desire. They came from solitary huts in the wilderness, from populous campongs, from villages by the sea. At the call of an idea they had left their forests, their clearings, the protection of their rulers, their prosperity, their poverty, the surroundings of their youth and the graves of their fathers. They came covered with dust, with sweat, with grime, with rags — the strong men at the head of family parties, the lean old men pressing forward without hope of return; young boys with fearless eyes glancing curiously, shy little girls with tumbled long hair; the timid women muffled up and clasping to their breasts, wrapped in loose ends of soiled head-cloths, their sleeping babies, the unconscious pilgrims of an exacting belief.

‘Look at dese cattle,’ said the German skipper to his new chief mate.

An Arab, the leader of that pious voyage, came last. He walked slowly aboard, handsome and grave in his white gown and large turban. A string of servants followed, loaded with his luggage; the Patna cast off and backed away from the wharf.

She was headed between two small islets, crossed obliquely the anchoring-ground of sailing-ships, swung through half a circle in the shadow of a hill, then ranged close to a ledge of foaming reefs. The Arab, standing up aft, recited aloud the prayer of travellers by sea. He invoked the favour of the Most High upon that journey, implored His blessing on men’s toil and on the secret purposes of their hearts; the steamer pounded in the dusk the calm water of the Strait; and far astern of the pilgrim ship a screw-pile lighthouse, planted by unbelievers on a treacherous shoal, seemed to wink at her its eye of flame, as if in derision of her errand of faith.

She cleared the Strait, crossed the bay, continued on her way through the ‘One-degree’ passage. She held on straight for the Red Sea under a serene sky, under a sky scorching and unclouded, enveloped in a fulgor of

sunshine that killed all thought, oppressed the heart, withered all impulses of strength and energy. And under the sinister splendour of that sky the sea, blue and profound, remained still, without a stir, without a ripple, without a wrinkle — viscous, stagnant, dead. The Patna, with a slight hiss, passed over that plain, luminous and smooth, unrolled a black ribbon of smoke across the sky, left behind her on the water a white ribbon of foam that vanished at once, like the phantom of a track drawn upon a lifeless sea by the phantom of a steamer.

Every morning the sun, as if keeping pace in his revolutions with the progress of the pilgrimage, emerged with a silent burst of light exactly at the same distance astern of the ship, caught up with her at noon, pouring the concentrated fire of his rays on the pious purposes of the men, glided past on his descent, and sank mysteriously into the sea evening after evening, preserving the same distance ahead of her advancing bows. The five whites on board lived amidships, isolated from the human cargo. The awnings covered the deck with a white roof from stem to stern, and a faint hum, a low murmur of sad voices, alone revealed the presence of a crowd of people upon the great blaze of the ocean. Such were the days, still, hot, heavy, disappearing one by one into the past, as if falling into an abyss for ever open in the wake of the ship; and the ship, lonely under a wisp of smoke, held on her steadfast way black and smouldering in a luminous immensity, as if scorched by a flame flicked at her from a heaven without pity.

The nights descended on her like a benediction.

## CHAPTER 3

A marvellous stillness pervaded the world, and the stars, together with the serenity of their rays, seemed to shed upon the earth the assurance of everlasting security. The young moon recurved, and shining low in the west, was like a slender shaving thrown up from a bar of gold, and the Arabian Sea, smooth and cool to the eye like a sheet of ice, extended its perfect level to the perfect circle of a dark horizon. The propeller turned without a check, as though its beat had been part of the scheme of a safe universe; and on each side of the Patna two deep folds of water, permanent and sombre on the unwrinkled shimmer, enclosed within their straight and diverging ridges a few white swirls of foam bursting in a low hiss, a few wavelets, a few ripples, a few undulations that, left behind, agitated the surface of the sea for an instant after the passage of the ship, subsided splashing gently, calmed down at last into the circular stillness of water and sky with the black speck of the moving hull remaining everlastingly in its centre.

Jim on the bridge was penetrated by the great certitude of unbounded safety and peace that could be read on the silent aspect of nature like the certitude of fostering love upon the placid tenderness of a mother's face. Below the roof of awnings, surrendered to the wisdom of white men and to their courage, trusting the power of their unbelief and the iron shell of their fire-ship, the pilgrims of an exacting faith slept on mats, on blankets, on bare planks, on every deck, in all the dark corners, wrapped in dyed cloths, muffled in soiled rags, with their heads resting on small bundles, with their faces pressed to bent forearms: the men, the women, the children; the old with the young, the decrepit with the lusty — all equal before sleep, death's brother.

A draught of air, fanned from forward by the speed of the ship, passed steadily through the long gloom between the high bulwarks, swept over the rows of prone bodies; a few dim flames in globe-lamps were hung short here and there under the ridge-poles, and in the blurred circles of light thrown down and trembling slightly to the unceasing vibration of the ship appeared a chin upturned, two closed eyelids, a dark hand with silver rings, a meagre limb draped in a torn covering, a head bent back, a naked foot, a throat bared and stretched as if offering itself to the knife. The well-to-do had made for their families shelters with heavy boxes and dusty mats; the

poor reposed side by side with all they had on earth tied up in a rag under their heads; the lone old men slept, with drawn-up legs, upon their prayer-carpet, with their hands over their ears and one elbow on each side of the face; a father, his shoulders up and his knees under his forehead, dozed dejectedly by a boy who slept on his back with tousled hair and one arm commandingly extended; a woman covered from head to foot, like a corpse, with a piece of white sheeting, had a naked child in the hollow of each arm; the Arab's belongings, piled right aft, made a heavy mound of broken outlines, with a cargo-lamp swung above, and a great confusion of vague forms behind: gleams of paunchy brass pots, the foot-rest of a deck-chair, blades of spears, the straight scabbard of an old sword leaning against a heap of pillows, the spout of a tin coffee-pot. The patent log on the taffrail periodically rang a single tinkling stroke for every mile traversed on an errand of faith. Above the mass of sleepers a faint and patient sigh at times floated, the exhalation of a troubled dream; and short metallic clangs bursting out suddenly in the depths of the ship, the harsh scrape of a shovel, the violent slam of a furnace-door, exploded brutally, as if the men handling the mysterious things below had their breasts full of fierce anger: while the slim high hull of the steamer went on evenly ahead, without a sway of her bare masts, cleaving continuously the great calm of the waters under the inaccessible serenity of the sky.

Jim paced athwart, and his footsteps in the vast silence were loud to his own ears, as if echoed by the watchful stars: his eyes, roaming about the line of the horizon, seemed to gaze hungrily into the unattainable, and did not see the shadow of the coming event. The only shadow on the sea was the shadow of the black smoke pouring heavily from the funnel its immense streamer, whose end was constantly dissolving in the air. Two Malays, silent and almost motionless, steered, one on each side of the wheel, whose brass rim shone fragmentarily in the oval of light thrown out by the binnacle. Now and then a hand, with black fingers alternately letting go and catching hold of revolving spokes, appeared in the illumined part; the links of wheel-chains ground heavily in the grooves of the barrel. Jim would glance at the compass, would glance around the unattainable horizon, would stretch himself till his joints cracked, with a leisurely twist of the body, in the very excess of well-being; and, as if made audacious by the invincible aspect of the peace, he felt he cared for nothing that could happen to him to the end of his days. From time to time he glanced idly at a

chart pegged out with four drawing-pins on a low three-legged table abaft the steering-gear case. The sheet of paper portraying the depths of the sea presented a shiny surface under the light of a bull's-eye lamp lashed to a stanchion, a surface as level and smooth as the glimmering surface of the waters. Parallel rulers with a pair of dividers reposed on it; the ship's position at last noon was marked with a small black cross, and the straight pencil-line drawn firmly as far as Perim figured the course of the ship — the path of souls towards the holy place, the promise of salvation, the reward of eternal life — while the pencil with its sharp end touching the Somali coast lay round and still like a naked ship's spar floating in the pool of a sheltered dock. 'How steady she goes,' thought Jim with wonder, with something like gratitude for this high peace of sea and sky. At such times his thoughts would be full of valorous deeds: he loved these dreams and the success of his imaginary achievements. They were the best parts of life, its secret truth, its hidden reality. They had a gorgeous virility, the charm of vagueness, they passed before him with an heroic tread; they carried his soul away with them and made it drunk with the divine philtre of an unbounded confidence in itself. There was nothing he could not face. He was so pleased with the idea that he smiled, keeping perfunctorily his eyes ahead; and when he happened to glance back he saw the white streak of the wake drawn as straight by the ship's keel upon the sea as the black line drawn by the pencil upon the chart.

The ash-buckets racketed, clanking up and down the stoke-hold ventilators, and this tin-pot clatter warned him the end of his watch was near. He sighed with content, with regret as well at having to part from that serenity which fostered the adventurous freedom of his thoughts. He was a little sleepy too, and felt a pleasurable languor running through every limb as though all the blood in his body had turned to warm milk. His skipper had come up noiselessly, in pyjamas and with his sleeping-jacket flung wide open. Red of face, only half awake, the left eye partly closed, the right staring stupid and glassy, he hung his big head over the chart and scratched his ribs sleepily. There was something obscene in the sight of his naked flesh. His bared breast glistened soft and greasy as though he had sweated out his fat in his sleep. He pronounced a professional remark in a voice harsh and dead, resembling the rasping sound of a wood-file on the edge of a plank; the fold of his double chin hung like a bag triced up close under the hinge of his jaw. Jim started, and his answer was full of deference; but the

odious and fleshy figure, as though seen for the first time in a revealing moment, fixed itself in his memory for ever as the incarnation of everything vile and base that lurks in the world we love: in our own hearts we trust for our salvation, in the men that surround us, in the sights that fill our eyes, in the sounds that fill our ears, and in the air that fills our lungs.

The thin gold shaving of the moon floating slowly downwards had lost itself on the darkened surface of the waters, and the eternity beyond the sky seemed to come down nearer to the earth, with the augmented glitter of the stars, with the more profound sombreness in the lustre of the half-transparent dome covering the flat disc of an opaque sea. The ship moved so smoothly that her onward motion was imperceptible to the senses of men, as though she had been a crowded planet speeding through the dark spaces of ether behind the swarm of suns, in the appalling and calm solitudes awaiting the breath of future creations. 'Hot is no name for it down below,' said a voice.

Jim smiled without looking round. The skipper presented an unmoved breadth of back: it was the renegade's trick to appear pointedly unaware of your existence unless it suited his purpose to turn at you with a devouring glare before he let loose a torrent of foamy, abusive jargon that came like a gush from a sewer. Now he emitted only a sulky grunt; the second engineer at the head of the bridge-ladder, kneading with damp palms a dirty sweat-rag, unabashed, continued the tale of his complaints. The sailors had a good time of it up here, and what was the use of them in the world he would be blowed if he could see. The poor devils of engineers had to get the ship along anyhow, and they could very well do the rest too; by gosh they — 'Shut up!' growled the German stolidly. 'Oh yes! Shut up — and when anything goes wrong you fly to us, don't you?' went on the other. He was more than half cooked, he expected; but anyway, now, he did not mind how much he sinned, because these last three days he had passed through a fine course of training for the place where the bad boys go when they die — b'gosh, he had — besides being made jolly well deaf by the blasted racket below. The durned, compound, surface-condensing, rotten scrap-heap rattled and banged down there like an old deck-winch, only more so; and what made him risk his life every night and day that God made amongst the refuse of a breaking-up yard flying round at fifty-seven revolutions, was more than he could tell. He must have been born reckless, b'gosh. He . . . 'Where did you get drink?' inquired the German, very savage; but

motionless in the light of the binnacle, like a clumsy effigy of a man cut out of a block of fat. Jim went on smiling at the retreating horizon; his heart was full of generous impulses, and his thought was contemplating his own superiority. 'Drink!' repeated the engineer with amiable scorn: he was hanging on with both hands to the rail, a shadowy figure with flexible legs. 'Not from you, captain. You're far too mean, b'gosh. You would let a good man die sooner than give him a drop of schnapps. That's what you Germans call economy. Penny wise, pound foolish.' He became sentimental. The chief had given him a four-finger nip about ten o'clock — 'only one, s'elp me!' — good old chief; but as to getting the old fraud out of his bunk — a five-ton crane couldn't do it. Not it. Not to-night anyhow. He was sleeping sweetly like a little child, with a bottle of prime brandy under his pillow. From the thick throat of the commander of the Patna came a low rumble, on which the sound of the word schwein fluttered high and low like a capricious feather in a faint stir of air. He and the chief engineer had been cronies for a good few years — serving the same jovial, crafty, old Chinaman, with horn-rimmed goggles and strings of red silk plaited into the venerable grey hairs of his pigtail. The quay-side opinion in the Patna's home-port was that these two in the way of brazen peculation 'had done together pretty well everything you can think of.' Outwardly they were badly matched: one dull-eyed, malevolent, and of soft fleshy curves; the other lean, all hollows, with a head long and bony like the head of an old horse, with sunken cheeks, with sunken temples, with an indifferent glazed glance of sunken eyes. He had been stranded out East somewhere — in Canton, in Shanghai, or perhaps in Yokohama; he probably did not care to remember himself the exact locality, nor yet the cause of his shipwreck. He had been, in mercy to his youth, kicked quietly out of his ship twenty years ago or more, and it might have been so much worse for him that the memory of the episode had in it hardly a trace of misfortune. Then, steam navigation expanding in these seas and men of his craft being scarce at first, he had 'got on' after a sort. He was eager to let strangers know in a dismal mumble that he was 'an old stager out here.' When he moved, a skeleton seemed to sway loose in his clothes; his walk was mere wandering, and he was given to wander thus around the engine-room skylight, smoking, without relish, doctored tobacco in a brass bowl at the end of a cherrywood stem four feet long, with the imbecile gravity of a thinker evolving a system of philosophy from the hazy glimpse of a truth. He was usually anything

but free with his private store of liquor; but on that night he had departed from his principles, so that his second, a weak-headed child of Wapping, what with the unexpectedness of the treat and the strength of the stuff, had become very happy, cheeky, and talkative. The fury of the New South Wales German was extreme; he puffed like an exhaust-pipe, and Jim, faintly amused by the scene, was impatient for the time when he could get below: the last ten minutes of the watch were irritating like a gun that hangs fire; those men did not belong to the world of heroic adventure; they weren't bad chaps though. Even the skipper himself . . . His gorge rose at the mass of panting flesh from which issued gurgling mutters, a cloudy trickle of filthy expressions; but he was too pleurably languid to dislike actively this or any other thing. The quality of these men did not matter; he rubbed shoulders with them, but they could not touch him; he shared the air they breathed, but he was different. . . . Would the skipper go for the engineer? . . . The life was easy and he was too sure of himself — too sure of himself to . . . The line dividing his meditation from a surreptitious doze on his feet was thinner than a thread in a spider's web.

The second engineer was coming by easy transitions to the consideration of his finances and of his courage.

'Who's drunk? I? No, no, captain! That won't do. You ought to know by this time the chief ain't free-hearted enough to make a sparrow drunk, b'gosh. I've never been the worse for liquor in my life; the stuff ain't made yet that would make me drunk. I could drink liquid fire against your whisky peg for peg, b'gosh, and keep as cool as a cucumber. If I thought I was drunk I would jump overboard — do away with myself, b'gosh. I would! Straight! And I won't go off the bridge. Where do you expect me to take the air on a night like this, eh? On deck amongst that vermin down there? Likely — ain't it! And I am not afraid of anything you can do.'

The German lifted two heavy fists to heaven and shook them a little without a word.

'I don't know what fear is,' pursued the engineer, with the enthusiasm of sincere conviction. 'I am not afraid of doing all the bloomin' work in this rotten hooker, b'gosh! And a jolly good thing for you that there are some of us about the world that aren't afraid of their lives, or where would you be — you and this old thing here with her plates like brown paper — brown paper, s'elp me? It's all very fine for you — you get a power of pieces out of her one way and another; but what about me — what do I get? A measly



hundred and fifty dollars a month and find yourself. I wish to ask you respectfully — respectfully, mind — who wouldn't chuck a dratted job like this? 'Tain't safe, s'elp me, it ain't! Only I am one of them fearless fellows . . .'

He let go the rail and made ample gestures as if demonstrating in the air the shape and extent of his valour; his thin voice darted in prolonged squeaks upon the sea, he tiptoed back and forth for the better emphasis of utterance, and suddenly pitched down head-first as though he had been clubbed from behind. He said 'Damn!' as he tumbled; an instant of silence followed upon his screeching: Jim and the skipper staggered forward by common accord, and catching themselves up, stood very stiff and still gazing, amazed, at the undisturbed level of the sea. Then they looked upwards at the stars.

What had happened? The wheezy thump of the engines went on. Had the earth been checked in her course? They could not understand; and suddenly the calm sea, the sky without a cloud, appeared formidably insecure in their immobility, as if poised on the brow of yawning destruction. The engineer rebounded vertically full length and collapsed again into a vague heap. This heap said 'What's that?' in the muffled accents of profound grief. A faint noise as of thunder, of thunder infinitely remote, less than a sound, hardly more than a vibration, passed slowly, and the ship quivered in response, as if the thunder had growled deep down in the water. The eyes of the two Malays at the wheel glittered towards the white men, but their dark hands remained closed on the spokes. The sharp hull driving on its way seemed to rise a few inches in succession through its whole length, as though it had become pliable, and settled down again rigidly to its work of cleaving the smooth surface of the sea. Its quivering stopped, and the faint noise of thunder ceased all at once, as though the ship had steamed across a narrow belt of vibrating water and of humming air.

## CHAPTER 4

A month or so afterwards, when Jim, in answer to pointed questions, tried to tell honestly the truth of this experience, he said, speaking of the ship: 'She went over whatever it was as easy as a snake crawling over a stick.' The illustration was good: the questions were aiming at facts, and the official Inquiry was being held in the police court of an Eastern port. He stood elevated in the witness-box, with burning cheeks in a cool lofty room: the big framework of punkahs moved gently to and fro high above his head, and from below many eyes were looking at him out of dark faces, out of white faces, out of red faces, out of faces attentive, spellbound, as if all these people sitting in orderly rows upon narrow benches had been enslaved by the fascination of his voice. It was very loud, it rang startling in his own ears, it was the only sound audible in the world, for the terribly distinct questions that extorted his answers seemed to shape themselves in anguish and pain within his breast, — came to him poignant and silent like the terrible questioning of one's conscience. Outside the court the sun blazed — within was the wind of great punkahs that made you shiver, the shame that made you burn, the attentive eyes whose glance stabbed. The face of the presiding magistrate, clean shaved and impassible, looked at him deadly pale between the red faces of the two nautical assessors. The light of a broad window under the ceiling fell from above on the heads and shoulders of the three men, and they were fiercely distinct in the half-light of the big court-room where the audience seemed composed of staring shadows. They wanted facts. Facts! They demanded facts from him, as if facts could explain anything!

'After you had concluded you had collided with something floating awash, say a water-logged wreck, you were ordered by your captain to go forward and ascertain if there was any damage done. Did you think it likely from the force of the blow?' asked the assessor sitting to the left. He had a thin horseshoe beard, salient cheek-bones, and with both elbows on the desk clasped his rugged hands before his face, looking at Jim with thoughtful blue eyes; the other, a heavy, scornful man, thrown back in his seat, his left arm extended full length, drummed delicately with his finger-tips on a blotting-pad: in the middle the magistrate upright in the roomy arm-chair, his head inclined slightly on the shoulder, had his arms crossed on his breast and a few flowers in a glass vase by the side of his inkstand.

‘I did not,’ said Jim. ‘I was told to call no one and to make no noise for fear of creating a panic. I thought the precaution reasonable. I took one of the lamps that were hung under the awnings and went forward. After opening the forepeak hatch I heard splashing in there. I lowered then the lamp the whole drift of its lanyard, and saw that the forepeak was more than half full of water already. I knew then there must be a big hole below the water-line.’ He paused.

‘Yes,’ said the big assessor, with a dreamy smile at the blotting-pad; his fingers played incessantly, touching the paper without noise.

‘I did not think of danger just then. I might have been a little startled: all this happened in such a quiet way and so very suddenly. I knew there was no other bulkhead in the ship but the collision bulkhead separating the forepeak from the forehold. I went back to tell the captain. I came upon the second engineer getting up at the foot of the bridge-ladder: he seemed dazed, and told me he thought his left arm was broken; he had slipped on the top step when getting down while I was forward. He exclaimed, “My God! That rotten bulkhead’ll give way in a minute, and the damned thing will go down under us like a lump of lead.” He pushed me away with his right arm and ran before me up the ladder, shouting as he climbed. His left arm hung by his side. I followed up in time to see the captain rush at him and knock him down flat on his back. He did not strike him again: he stood bending over him and speaking angrily but quite low. I fancy he was asking him why the devil he didn’t go and stop the engines, instead of making a row about it on deck. I heard him say, “Get up! Run! fly!” He swore also. The engineer slid down the starboard ladder and bolted round the skylight to the engine-room companion which was on the port side. He moaned as he ran. . . .’

He spoke slowly; he remembered swiftly and with extreme vividness; he could have reproduced like an echo the moaning of the engineer for the better information of these men who wanted facts. After his first feeling of revolt he had come round to the view that only a meticulous precision of statement would bring out the true horror behind the appalling face of things. The facts those men were so eager to know had been visible, tangible, open to the senses, occupying their place in space and time, requiring for their existence a fourteen-hundred-ton steamer and twenty-seven minutes by the watch; they made a whole that had features, shades of expression, a complicated aspect that could be remembered by the eye, and

something else besides, something invisible, a directing spirit of perdition that dwelt within, like a malevolent soul in a detestable body. He was anxious to make this clear. This had not been a common affair, everything in it had been of the utmost importance, and fortunately he remembered everything. He wanted to go on talking for truth's sake, perhaps for his own sake also; and while his utterance was deliberate, his mind positively flew round and round the serried circle of facts that had surged up all about him to cut him off from the rest of his kind: it was like a creature that, finding itself imprisoned within an enclosure of high stakes, dashes round and round, distracted in the night, trying to find a weak spot, a crevice, a place to scale, some opening through which it may squeeze itself and escape. This awful activity of mind made him hesitate at times in his speech. . . .

‘The captain kept on moving here and there on the bridge; he seemed calm enough, only he stumbled several times; and once as I stood speaking to him he walked right into me as though he had been stone-blind. He made no definite answer to what I had to tell. He mumbled to himself; all I heard of it were a few words that sounded like “confounded steam!” and “infernal steam!” — something about steam. I thought . . .’

He was becoming irrelevant; a question to the point cut short his speech, like a pang of pain, and he felt extremely discouraged and weary. He was coming to that, he was coming to that — and now, checked brutally, he had to answer by yes or no. He answered truthfully by a curt ‘Yes, I did’; and fair of face, big of frame, with young, gloomy eyes, he held his shoulders upright above the box while his soul writhed within him. He was made to answer another question so much to the point and so useless, then waited again. His mouth was tastelessly dry, as though he had been eating dust, then salt and bitter as after a drink of sea-water. He wiped his damp forehead, passed his tongue over parched lips, felt a shiver run down his back. The big assessor had dropped his eyelids, and drummed on without a sound, careless and mournful; the eyes of the other above the sunburnt, clasped fingers seemed to glow with kindliness; the magistrate had swayed forward; his pale face hovered near the flowers, and then dropping sideways over the arm of his chair, he rested his temple in the palm of his hand. The wind of the punkahs eddied down on the heads, on the dark-faced natives wound about in voluminous draperies, on the Europeans sitting together very hot and in drill suits that seemed to fit them as close as their skins, and holding their round pith hats on their knees; while gliding along

the walls the court peons, buttoned tight in long white coats, flitted rapidly to and fro, running on bare toes, red-sashed, red turban on head, as noiseless as ghosts, and on the alert like so many retrievers.

Jim's eyes, wandering in the intervals of his answers, rested upon a white man who sat apart from the others, with his face worn and clouded, but with quiet eyes that glanced straight, interested and clear. Jim answered another question and was tempted to cry out, 'What's the good of this! what's the good!' He tapped with his foot slightly, bit his lip, and looked away over the heads. He met the eyes of the white man. The glance directed at him was not the fascinated stare of the others. It was an act of intelligent volition. Jim between two questions forgot himself so far as to find leisure for a thought. This fellow — ran the thought — looks at me as though he could see somebody or something past my shoulder. He had come across that man before — in the street perhaps. He was positive he had never spoken to him. For days, for many days, he had spoken to no one, but had held silent, incoherent, and endless converse with himself, like a prisoner alone in his cell or like a wayfarer lost in a wilderness. At present he was answering questions that did not matter though they had a purpose, but he doubted whether he would ever again speak out as long as he lived. The sound of his own truthful statements confirmed his deliberate opinion that speech was of no use to him any longer. That man there seemed to be aware of his hopeless difficulty. Jim looked at him, then turned away resolutely, as after a final parting.

And later on, many times, in distant parts of the world, Marlow showed himself willing to remember Jim, to remember him at length, in detail and audibly.

Perhaps it would be after dinner, on a verandah draped in motionless foliage and crowned with flowers, in the deep dusk speckled by fiery cigar-ends. The elongated bulk of each cane-chair harboured a silent listener. Now and then a small red glow would move abruptly, and expanding light up the fingers of a languid hand, part of a face in profound repose, or flash a crimson gleam into a pair of pensive eyes overshadowed by a fragment of an unruffled forehead; and with the very first word uttered Marlow's body, extended at rest in the seat, would become very still, as though his spirit had winged its way back into the lapse of time and were speaking through his lips from the past.

## CHAPTER 5

‘Oh yes. I attended the inquiry,’ he would say, ‘and to this day I haven’t left off wondering why I went. I am willing to believe each of us has a guardian angel, if you fellows will concede to me that each of us has a familiar devil as well. I want you to own up, because I don’t like to feel exceptional in any way, and I know I have him — the devil, I mean. I haven’t seen him, of course, but I go upon circumstantial evidence. He is there right enough, and, being malicious, he lets me in for that kind of thing. What kind of thing, you ask? Why, the inquiry thing, the yellow-dog thing — you wouldn’t think a mangy, native tyke would be allowed to trip up people in the verandah of a magistrate’s court, would you? — the kind of thing that by devious, unexpected, truly diabolical ways causes me to run up against men with soft spots, with hard spots, with hidden plague spots, by Jove! and loosens their tongues at the sight of me for their infernal confidences; as though, forsooth, I had no confidences to make to myself, as though — God help me! — I didn’t have enough confidential information about myself to harrow my own soul till the end of my appointed time. And what I have done to be thus favoured I want to know. I declare I am as full of my own concerns as the next man, and I have as much memory as the average pilgrim in this valley, so you see I am not particularly fit to be a receptacle of confessions. Then why? Can’t tell — unless it be to make time pass away after dinner. Charley, my dear chap, your dinner was extremely good, and in consequence these men here look upon a quiet rubber as a tumultuous occupation. They wallow in your good chairs and think to themselves, “Hang exertion. Let that Marlow talk.”

‘Talk? So be it. And it’s easy enough to talk of Master Jim, after a good spread, two hundred feet above the sea-level, with a box of decent cigars handy, on a blessed evening of freshness and starlight that would make the best of us forget we are only on sufferance here and got to pick our way in cross lights, watching every precious minute and every irremediable step, trusting we shall manage yet to go out decently in the end — but not so sure of it after all — and with dashed little help to expect from those we touch elbows with right and left. Of course there are men here and there to whom the whole of life is like an after-dinner hour with a cigar; easy, pleasant, empty, perhaps enlivened by some fable of strife to be forgotten before the

end is told — before the end is told — even if there happens to be any end to it.

‘My eyes met his for the first time at that inquiry. You must know that everybody connected in any way with the sea was there, because the affair had been notorious for days, ever since that mysterious cable message came from Aden to start us all cackling. I say mysterious, because it was so in a sense though it contained a naked fact, about as naked and ugly as a fact can well be. The whole waterside talked of nothing else. First thing in the morning as I was dressing in my state-room, I would hear through the bulkhead my Parsee Dubash jabbering about the Patna with the steward, while he drank a cup of tea, by favour, in the pantry. No sooner on shore I would meet some acquaintance, and the first remark would be, “Did you ever hear of anything to beat this?” and according to his kind the man would smile cynically, or look sad, or let out a swear or two. Complete strangers would accost each other familiarly, just for the sake of easing their minds on the subject: every confounded loafer in the town came in for a harvest of drinks over this affair: you heard of it in the harbour office, at every ship-broker’s, at your agent’s, from whites, from natives, from half-castes, from the very boatmen squatting half naked on the stone steps as you went up — by Jove! There was some indignation, not a few jokes, and no end of discussions as to what had become of them, you know. This went on for a couple of weeks or more, and the opinion that whatever was mysterious in this affair would turn out to be tragic as well, began to prevail, when one fine morning, as I was standing in the shade by the steps of the harbour office, I perceived four men walking towards me along the quay. I wondered for a while where that queer lot had sprung from, and suddenly, I may say, I shouted to myself, “Here they are!”

‘There they were, sure enough, three of them as large as life, and one much larger of girth than any living man has a right to be, just landed with a good breakfast inside of them from an outward-bound Dale Line steamer that had come in about an hour after sunrise. There could be no mistake; I spotted the jolly skipper of the Patna at the first glance: the fattest man in the whole blessed tropical belt clear round that good old earth of ours. Moreover, nine months or so before, I had come across him in Samarang. His steamer was loading in the Roads, and he was abusing the tyrannical institutions of the German empire, and soaking himself in beer all day long and day after day in De Jongh’s back-shop, till De Jongh, who charged a

guilder for every bottle without as much as the quiver of an eyelid, would beckon me aside, and, with his little leathery face all puckered up, declare confidentially, "Business is business, but this man, captain, he make me very sick. Tfui!"

'I was looking at him from the shade. He was hurrying on a little in advance, and the sunlight beating on him brought out his bulk in a startling way. He made me think of a trained baby elephant walking on hind-legs. He was extravagantly gorgeous too — got up in a soiled sleeping-suit, bright green and deep orange vertical stripes, with a pair of ragged straw slippers on his bare feet, and somebody's cast-off pith hat, very dirty and two sizes too small for him, tied up with a manilla rope-yarn on the top of his big head. You understand a man like that hasn't the ghost of a chance when it comes to borrowing clothes. Very well. On he came in hot haste, without a look right or left, passed within three feet of me, and in the innocence of his heart went on pelting upstairs into the harbour office to make his deposition, or report, or whatever you like to call it.

'It appears he addressed himself in the first instance to the principal shipping-master. Archie Ruthvel had just come in, and, as his story goes, was about to begin his arduous day by giving a dressing-down to his chief clerk. Some of you might have known him — an obliging little Portuguese half-caste with a miserably skinny neck, and always on the hop to get something from the shipmasters in the way of eatables — a piece of salt pork, a bag of biscuits, a few potatoes, or what not. One voyage, I recollect, I tipped him a live sheep out of the remnant of my sea-stock: not that I wanted him to do anything for me — he couldn't, you know — but because his childlike belief in the sacred right to perquisites quite touched my heart. It was so strong as to be almost beautiful. The race — the two races rather — and the climate . . . However, never mind. I know where I have a friend for life.

'Well, Ruthvel says he was giving him a severe lecture — on official morality, I suppose — when he heard a kind of subdued commotion at his back, and turning his head he saw, in his own words, something round and enormous, resembling a sixteen-hundred-weight sugar-hogshead wrapped in striped flannelette, up-ended in the middle of the large floor space in the office. He declares he was so taken aback that for quite an appreciable time he did not realise the thing was alive, and sat still wondering for what purpose and by what means that object had been transported in front of his



desk. The archway from the ante-room was crowded with punkah-pullers, sweepers, police peons, the coxswain and crew of the harbour steam-launch, all craning their necks and almost climbing on each other's backs. Quite a riot. By that time the fellow had managed to tug and jerk his hat clear of his head, and advanced with slight bows at Ruthvel, who told me the sight was so discomposing that for some time he listened, quite unable to make out what that apparition wanted. It spoke in a voice harsh and lugubrious but intrepid, and little by little it dawned upon Archie that this was a development of the Patna case. He says that as soon as he understood who it was before him he felt quite unwell — Archie is so sympathetic and easily upset — but pulled himself together and shouted "Stop! I can't listen to you. You must go to the Master Attendant. I can't possibly listen to you. Captain Elliot is the man you want to see. This way, this way." He jumped up, ran round that long counter, pulled, shoved: the other let him, surprised but obedient at first, and only at the door of the private office some sort of animal instinct made him hang back and snort like a frightened bullock. "Look here! what's up? Let go! Look here!" Archie flung open the door without knocking. "The master of the Patna, sir," he shouts. "Go in, captain." He saw the old man lift his head from some writing so sharp that his nose-nippers fell off, banged the door to, and fled to his desk, where he had some papers waiting for his signature: but he says the row that burst out in there was so awful that he couldn't collect his senses sufficiently to remember the spelling of his own name. Archie's the most sensitive shipping-master in the two hemispheres. He declares he felt as though he had thrown a man to a hungry lion. No doubt the noise was great. I heard it down below, and I have every reason to believe it was heard clear across the Esplanade as far as the band-stand. Old father Elliot had a great stock of words and could shout — and didn't mind who he shouted at either. He would have shouted at the Viceroy himself. As he used to tell me: "I am as high as I can get; my pension is safe. I've a few pounds laid by, and if they don't like my notions of duty I would just as soon go home as not. I am an old man, and I have always spoken my mind. All I care for now is to see my girls married before I die." He was a little crazy on that point. His three daughters were awfully nice, though they resembled him amazingly, and on the mornings he woke up with a gloomy view of their matrimonial prospects the office would read it in his eye and tremble, because, they said, he was sure to have somebody for breakfast. However, that morning he did

not eat the renegade, but, if I may be allowed to carry on the metaphor, chewed him up very small, so to speak, and — ah! ejected him again.

‘Thus in a very few moments I saw his monstrous bulk descend in haste and stand still on the outer steps. He had stopped close to me for the purpose of profound meditation: his large purple cheeks quivered. He was biting his thumb, and after a while noticed me with a sidelong vexed look. The other three chaps that had landed with him made a little group waiting at some distance. There was a sallow-faced, mean little chap with his arm in a sling, and a long individual in a blue flannel coat, as dry as a chip and no stouter than a broomstick, with drooping grey moustaches, who looked about him with an air of jaunty imbecility. The third was an upstanding, broad-shouldered youth, with his hands in his pockets, turning his back on the other two who appeared to be talking together earnestly. He stared across the empty Esplanade. A ramshackle gharry, all dust and venetian blinds, pulled up short opposite the group, and the driver, throwing up his right foot over his knee, gave himself up to the critical examination of his toes. The young chap, making no movement, not even stirring his head, just stared into the sunshine. This was my first view of Jim. He looked as unconcerned and unapproachable as only the young can look. There he stood, clean-limbed, clean-faced, firm on his feet, as promising a boy as the sun ever shone on; and, looking at him, knowing all he knew and a little more too, I was as angry as though I had detected him trying to get something out of me by false pretences. He had no business to look so sound. I thought to myself — well, if this sort can go wrong like that . . . and I felt as though I could fling down my hat and dance on it from sheer mortification, as I once saw the skipper of an Italian barque do because his duffer of a mate got into a mess with his anchors when making a flying moor in a roadstead full of ships. I asked myself, seeing him there apparently so much at ease — is he silly? is he callous? He seemed ready to start whistling a tune. And note, I did not care a rap about the behaviour of the other two. Their persons somehow fitted the tale that was public property, and was going to be the subject of an official inquiry. “That old mad rogue upstairs called me a hound,” said the captain of the Patna. I can’t tell whether he recognised me — I rather think he did; but at any rate our glances met. He glared — I smiled; hound was the very mildest epithet that had reached me through the open window. “Did he?” I said from some strange inability to hold my tongue. He nodded, bit his thumb again, swore

under his breath: then lifting his head and looking at me with sullen and passionate impudence — "Bah! the Pacific is big, my friendt. You damned Englishmen can do your worst; I know where there's plenty room for a man like me: I am well aguaindt in Apia, in Honolulu, in . . ." He paused reflectively, while without effort I could depict to myself the sort of people he was "aguaindt" with in those places. I won't make a secret of it that I had been "aguaindt" with not a few of that sort myself. There are times when a man must act as though life were equally sweet in any company. I've known such a time, and, what's more, I shan't now pretend to pull a long face over my necessity, because a good many of that bad company from want of moral — moral — what shall I say? — posture, or from some other equally profound cause, were twice as instructive and twenty times more amusing than the usual respectable thief of commerce you fellows ask to sit at your table without any real necessity — from habit, from cowardice, from good-nature, from a hundred sneaking and inadequate reasons.

"You Englishmen are all rogues," went on my patriotic Flensburg or Stettin Australian. I really don't recollect now what decent little port on the shores of the Baltic was defiled by being the nest of that precious bird. "What are you to shout? Eh? You tell me? You no better than other people, and that old rogue he make Gottam fuss with me." His thick carcass trembled on its legs that were like a pair of pillars; it trembled from head to foot. "That's what you English always make — make a tam' fuss — for any little thing, because I was not born in your tam' country. Take away my certificate. Take it. I don't want the certificate. A man like me don't want your verfluchte certificate. I shpit on it." He spat. "I vill an Amerigan citizen begome," he cried, fretting and fuming and shuffling his feet as if to free his ankles from some invisible and mysterious grasp that would not let him get away from that spot. He made himself so warm that the top of his bullet head positively smoked. Nothing mysterious prevented me from going away: curiosity is the most obvious of sentiments, and it held me there to see the effect of a full information upon that young fellow who, hands in pockets, and turning his back upon the sidewalk, gazed across the grass-plots of the Esplanade at the yellow portico of the Malabar Hotel with the air of a man about to go for a walk as soon as his friend is ready. That's how he looked, and it was odious. I waited to see him overwhelmed, confounded, pierced through and through, squirming like an impaled beetle — and I was half afraid to see it too — if you understand what I mean.

Nothing more awful than to watch a man who has been found out, not in a crime but in a more than criminal weakness. The commonest sort of fortitude prevents us from becoming criminals in a legal sense; it is from weakness unknown, but perhaps suspected, as in some parts of the world you suspect a deadly snake in every bush — from weakness that may lie hidden, watched or unwatched, prayed against or manfully scorned, repressed or maybe ignored more than half a lifetime, not one of us is safe. We are snared into doing things for which we get called names, and things for which we get hanged, and yet the spirit may well survive — survive the condemnation, survive the halter, by Jove! And there are things — they look small enough sometimes too — by which some of us are totally and completely undone. I watched the youngster there. I liked his appearance; I knew his appearance; he came from the right place; he was one of us. He stood there for all the parentage of his kind, for men and women by no means clever or amusing, but whose very existence is based upon honest faith, and upon the instinct of courage. I don't mean military courage, or civil courage, or any special kind of courage. I mean just that inborn ability to look temptations straight in the face — a readiness unintellectual enough, goodness knows, but without pose — a power of resistance, don't you see, ungracious if you like, but priceless — an unthinking and blessed stiffness before the outward and inward terrors, before the might of nature and the seductive corruption of men — backed by a faith invulnerable to the strength of facts, to the contagion of example, to the solicitation of ideas. Hang ideas! They are tramps, vagabonds, knocking at the back-door of your mind, each taking a little of your substance, each carrying away some crumb of that belief in a few simple notions you must cling to if you want to live decently and would like to die easy!

‘This has nothing to do with Jim, directly; only he was outwardly so typical of that good, stupid kind we like to feel marching right and left of us in life, of the kind that is not disturbed by the vagaries of intelligence and the perversions of — of nerves, let us say. He was the kind of fellow you would, on the strength of his looks, leave in charge of the deck — figuratively and professionally speaking. I say I would, and I ought to know. Haven't I turned out youngsters enough in my time, for the service of the Red Rag, to the craft of the sea, to the craft whose whole secret could be expressed in one short sentence, and yet must be driven afresh every day into young heads till it becomes the component part of every waking

thought — till it is present in every dream of their young sleep! The sea has been good to me, but when I remember all these boys that passed through my hands, some grown up now and some drowned by this time, but all good stuff for the sea, I don't think I have done badly by it either. Were I to go home to-morrow, I bet that before two days passed over my head some sunburnt young chief mate would overtake me at some dock gateway or other, and a fresh deep voice speaking above my hat would ask: "Don't you remember me, sir? Why! little So-and-so. Such and such a ship. It was my first voyage." And I would remember a bewildered little shaver, no higher than the back of this chair, with a mother and perhaps a big sister on the quay, very quiet but too upset to wave their handkerchiefs at the ship that glides out gently between the pier-heads; or perhaps some decent middle-aged father who had come early with his boy to see him off, and stays all the morning, because he is interested in the windlass apparently, and stays too long, and has got to scramble ashore at last with no time at all to say good-bye. The mud pilot on the poop sings out to me in a drawl, "Hold her with the check line for a moment, Mister Mate. There's a gentleman wants to get ashore. . . . Up with you, sir. Nearly got carried off to Talcahuano, didn't you? Now's your time; easy does it. . . . All right. Slack away again forward there." The tugs, smoking like the pit of perdition, get hold and churn the old river into fury; the gentleman ashore is dusting his knees — the benevolent steward has shied his umbrella after him. All very proper. He has offered his bit of sacrifice to the sea, and now he may go home pretending he thinks nothing of it; and the little willing victim shall be very sea-sick before next morning. By-and-by, when he has learned all the little mysteries and the one great secret of the craft, he shall be fit to live or die as the sea may decree; and the man who had taken a hand in this fool game, in which the sea wins every toss, will be pleased to have his back slapped by a heavy young hand, and to hear a cheery sea-puppy voice: "Do you remember me, sir? The little So-and-so."

'I tell you this is good; it tells you that once in your life at least you had gone the right way to work. I have been thus slapped, and I have winced, for the slap was heavy, and I have glowed all day long and gone to bed feeling less lonely in the world by virtue of that hearty thump. Don't I remember the little So-and-so's! I tell you I ought to know the right kind of looks. I would have trusted the deck to that youngster on the strength of a single glance, and gone to sleep with both eyes — and, by Jove! it wouldn't

have been safe. There are depths of horror in that thought. He looked as genuine as a new sovereign, but there was some infernal alloy in his metal. How much? The least thing — the least drop of something rare and accursed; the least drop! — but he made you — standing there with his don't-care-hang air — he made you wonder whether perchance he were nothing more rare than brass.

‘I couldn’t believe it. I tell you I wanted to see him squirm for the honour of the craft. The other two no-account chaps spotted their captain, and began to move slowly towards us. They chatted together as they strolled, and I did not care any more than if they had not been visible to the naked eye. They grinned at each other — might have been exchanging jokes, for all I know. I saw that with one of them it was a case of a broken arm; and as to the long individual with grey moustaches he was the chief engineer, and in various ways a pretty notorious personality. They were nobodies. They approached. The skipper gazed in an inanimate way between his feet: he seemed to be swollen to an unnatural size by some awful disease, by the mysterious action of an unknown poison. He lifted his head, saw the two before him waiting, opened his mouth with an extraordinary, sneering contortion of his puffed face — to speak to them, I suppose — and then a thought seemed to strike him. His thick, purplish lips came together without a sound, he went off in a resolute waddle to the gharry and began to jerk at the door-handle with such a blind brutality of impatience that I expected to see the whole concern overturned on its side, pony and all. The driver, shaken out of his meditation over the sole of his foot, displayed at once all the signs of intense terror, and held with both hands, looking round from his box at this vast carcass forcing its way into his conveyance. The little machine shook and rocked tumultuously, and the crimson nape of that lowered neck, the size of those straining thighs, the immense heaving of that dingy, striped green-and-orange back, the whole burrowing effort of that gaudy and sordid mass, troubled one’s sense of probability with a droll and fearsome effect, like one of those grotesque and distinct visions that scare and fascinate one in a fever. He disappeared. I half expected the roof to split in two, the little box on wheels to burst open in the manner of a ripe cotton-pod — but it only sank with a click of flattened springs, and suddenly one venetian blind rattled down. His shoulders reappeared, jammed in the small opening; his head hung out, distended and tossing like a captive balloon, perspiring, furious, spluttering. He reached for the

gharry-wallah with vicious flourishes of a fist as dumpy and red as a lump of raw meat. He roared at him to be off, to go on. Where? Into the Pacific, perhaps. The driver lashed; the pony snorted, reared once, and darted off at a gallop. Where? To Apia? To Honolulu? He had 6000 miles of tropical belt to disport himself in, and I did not hear the precise address. A snorting pony snatched him into "Ewigkeit" in the twinkling of an eye, and I never saw him again; and, what's more, I don't know of anybody that ever had a glimpse of him after he departed from my knowledge sitting inside a ramshackle little gharry that fled round the corner in a white smother of dust. He departed, disappeared, vanished, absconded; and absurdly enough it looked as though he had taken that gharry with him, for never again did I come across a sorrel pony with a slit ear and a lackadaisical Tamil driver afflicted by a sore foot. The Pacific is indeed big; but whether he found a place for a display of his talents in it or not, the fact remains he had flown into space like a witch on a broomstick. The little chap with his arm in a sling started to run after the carriage, bleating, "Captain! I say, Captain! I sa-a-ay!" — but after a few steps stopped short, hung his head, and walked back slowly. At the sharp rattle of the wheels the young fellow spun round where he stood. He made no other movement, no gesture, no sign, and remained facing in the new direction after the gharry had swung out of sight.

'All this happened in much less time than it takes to tell, since I am trying to interpret for you into slow speech the instantaneous effect of visual impressions. Next moment the half-caste clerk, sent by Archie to look a little after the poor castaways of the Patna, came upon the scene. He ran out eager and bareheaded, looking right and left, and very full of his mission. It was doomed to be a failure as far as the principal person was concerned, but he approached the others with fussy importance, and, almost immediately, found himself involved in a violent altercation with the chap that carried his arm in a sling, and who turned out to be extremely anxious for a row. He wasn't going to be ordered about — "not he, b'gosh." He wouldn't be terrified with a pack of lies by a cocky half-bred little quill-driver. He was not going to be bullied by "no object of that sort," if the story were true "ever so"! He bawled his wish, his desire, his determination to go to bed. "If you weren't a God-forsaken Portuguese," I heard him yell, "you would know that the hospital is the right place for me." He pushed the fist of his sound arm under the other's nose; a crowd began to collect; the half-caste,

flustered, but doing his best to appear dignified, tried to explain his intentions. I went away without waiting to see the end.

‘But it so happened that I had a man in the hospital at the time, and going there to see about him the day before the opening of the Inquiry, I saw in the white men’s ward that little chap tossing on his back, with his arm in splints, and quite light-headed. To my great surprise the other one, the long individual with drooping white moustache, had also found his way there. I remembered I had seen him slinking away during the quarrel, in a half prance, half shuffle, and trying very hard not to look scared. He was no stranger to the port, it seems, and in his distress was able to make tracks straight for Mariani’s billiard-room and grog-shop near the bazaar. That unspeakable vagabond, Mariani, who had known the man and had ministered to his vices in one or two other places, kissed the ground, in a manner of speaking, before him, and shut him up with a supply of bottles in an upstairs room of his infamous hovel. It appears he was under some hazy apprehension as to his personal safety, and wished to be concealed. However, Mariani told me a long time after (when he came on board one day to dun my steward for the price of some cigars) that he would have done more for him without asking any questions, from gratitude for some unholy favour received very many years ago — as far as I could make out. He thumped twice his brawny chest, rolled enormous black-and-white eyes glistening with tears: “Antonio never forget — Antonio never forget!” What was the precise nature of the immoral obligation I never learned, but be it what it may, he had every facility given him to remain under lock and key, with a chair, a table, a mattress in a corner, and a litter of fallen plaster on the floor, in an irrational state of funk, and keeping up his pecker with such tonics as Mariani dispensed. This lasted till the evening of the third day, when, after letting out a few horrible screams, he found himself compelled to seek safety in flight from a legion of centipedes. He burst the door open, made one leap for dear life down the crazy little stairway, landed bodily on Mariani’s stomach, picked himself up, and bolted like a rabbit into the streets. The police plucked him off a garbage-heap in the early morning. At first he had a notion they were carrying him off to be hanged, and fought for liberty like a hero, but when I sat down by his bed he had been very quiet for two days. His lean bronzed head, with white moustaches, looked fine and calm on the pillow, like the head of a war-worn soldier with a child-like soul, had it not been for a hint of spectral alarm that lurked in the blank



glitter of his glance, resembling a nondescript form of a terror crouching silently behind a pane of glass. He was so extremely calm, that I began to indulge in the eccentric hope of hearing something explanatory of the famous affair from his point of view. Why I longed to go grubbing into the deplorable details of an occurrence which, after all, concerned me no more than as a member of an obscure body of men held together by a community of inglorious toil and by fidelity to a certain standard of conduct, I can't explain. You may call it an unhealthy curiosity if you like; but I have a distinct notion I wished to find something. Perhaps, unconsciously, I hoped I would find that something, some profound and redeeming cause, some merciful explanation, some convincing shadow of an excuse. I see well enough now that I hoped for the impossible — for the laying of what is the most obstinate ghost of man's creation, of the uneasy doubt uprising like a mist, secret and gnawing like a worm, and more chilling than the certitude of death — the doubt of the sovereign power enthroned in a fixed standard of conduct. It is the hardest thing to stumble against; it is the thing that breeds yelling panics and good little quiet villainies; it's the true shadow of calamity. Did I believe in a miracle? and why did I desire it so ardently? Was it for my own sake that I wished to find some shadow of an excuse for that young fellow whom I had never seen before, but whose appearance alone added a touch of personal concern to the thoughts suggested by the knowledge of his weakness — made it a thing of mystery and terror — like a hint of a destructive fate ready for us all whose youth — in its day — had resembled his youth? I fear that such was the secret motive of my prying. I was, and no mistake, looking for a miracle. The only thing that at this distance of time strikes me as miraculous is the extent of my imbecility. I positively hoped to obtain from that battered and shady invalid some exorcism against the ghost of doubt. I must have been pretty desperate too, for, without loss of time, after a few indifferent and friendly sentences which he answered with languid readiness, just as any decent sick man would do, I produced the word Patna wrapped up in a delicate question as in a wisp of floss silk. I was delicate selfishly; I did not want to startle him; I had no solicitude for him; I was not furious with him and sorry for him: his experience was of no importance, his redemption would have had no point for me. He had grown old in minor iniquities, and could no longer inspire aversion or pity. He repeated Patna? interrogatively, seemed to make a short effort of memory, and said: "Quite right. I am an old stager out here.

I saw her go down.” I made ready to vent my indignation at such a stupid lie, when he added smoothly, “She was full of reptiles.”

‘This made me pause. What did he mean? The unsteady phantom of terror behind his glassy eyes seemed to stand still and look into mine wistfully. “They turned me out of my bunk in the middle watch to look at her sinking,” he pursued in a reflective tone. His voice sounded alarmingly strong all at once. I was sorry for my folly. There was no snowy-winged coif of a nursing sister to be seen flitting in the perspective of the ward; but away in the middle of a long row of empty iron bedsteads an accident case from some ship in the Roads sat up brown and gaunt with a white bandage set rakishly on the forehead. Suddenly my interesting invalid shot out an arm thin like a tentacle and clawed my shoulder. “Only my eyes were good enough to see. I am famous for my eyesight. That’s why they called me, I expect. None of them was quick enough to see her go, but they saw that she was gone right enough, and sang out together — like this.” . . . A wolfish howl searched the very recesses of my soul. “Oh! make ‘im dry up,” whined the accident case irritably. “You don’t believe me, I suppose,” went on the other, with an air of ineffable conceit. “I tell you there are no such eyes as mine this side of the Persian Gulf. Look under the bed.”

‘Of course I stooped instantly. I defy anybody not to have done so. “What can you see?” he asked. “Nothing,” I said, feeling awfully ashamed of myself. He scrutinised my face with wild and withering contempt. “Just so,” he said, “but if I were to look I could see — there’s no eyes like mine, I tell you.” Again he clawed, pulling at me downwards in his eagerness to relieve himself by a confidential communication. “Millions of pink toads. There’s no eyes like mine. Millions of pink toads. It’s worse than seeing a ship sink. I could look at sinking ships and smoke my pipe all day long. Why don’t they give me back my pipe? I would get a smoke while I watched these toads. The ship was full of them. They’ve got to be watched, you know.” He winked facetiously. The perspiration dripped on him off my head, my drill coat clung to my wet back: the afternoon breeze swept impetuously over the row of bedsteads, the stiff folds of curtains stirred perpendicularly, rattling on brass rods, the covers of empty beds blew about noiselessly near the bare floor all along the line, and I shivered to the very marrow. The soft wind of the tropics played in that naked ward as bleak as a winter’s gale in an old barn at home. “Don’t you let him start his hollering, mister,” hailed from afar the accident case in a distressed angry shout that

came ringing between the walls like a quavering call down a tunnel. The clawing hand hauled at my shoulder; he leered at me knowingly. "The ship was full of them, you know, and we had to clear out on the strict Q.T.," he whispered with extreme rapidity. "All pink. All pink — as big as mastiffs, with an eye on the top of the head and claws all round their ugly mouths. Ough! Ough!" Quick jerks as of galvanic shocks disclosed under the flat coverlet the outlines of meagre and agitated legs; he let go my shoulder and reached after something in the air; his body trembled tensely like a released harp-string; and while I looked down, the spectral horror in him broke through his glassy gaze. Instantly his face of an old soldier, with its noble and calm outlines, became decomposed before my eyes by the corruption of stealthy cunning, of an abominable caution and of desperate fear. He restrained a cry — "Ssh! what are they doing now down there?" he asked, pointing to the floor with fantastic precautions of voice and gesture, whose meaning, borne upon my mind in a lurid flash, made me very sick of my cleverness. "They are all asleep," I answered, watching him narrowly. That was it. That's what he wanted to hear; these were the exact words that could calm him. He drew a long breath. "Ssh! Quiet, steady. I am an old stager out here. I know them brutes. Bash in the head of the first that stirs. There's too many of them, and she won't swim more than ten minutes." He panted again. "Hurry up," he yelled suddenly, and went on in a steady scream: "They are all awake — millions of them. They are trampling on me! Wait! Oh, wait! I'll smash them in heaps like flies. Wait for me! Help! H-e-elp!" An interminable and sustained howl completed my discomfiture. I saw in the distance the accident case raise deplorably both his hands to his bandaged head; a dresser, aproned to the chin showed himself in the vista of the ward, as if seen in the small end of a telescope. I confessed myself fairly routed, and without more ado, stepping out through one of the long windows, escaped into the outside gallery. The howl pursued me like a vengeance. I turned into a deserted landing, and suddenly all became very still and quiet around me, and I descended the bare and shiny staircase in a silence that enabled me to compose my distracted thoughts. Down below I met one of the resident surgeons who was crossing the courtyard and stopped me. "Been to see your man, Captain? I think we may let him go tomorrow. These fools have no notion of taking care of themselves, though. I say, we've got the chief engineer of that pilgrim ship here. A curious case. D.T.'s of the worst kind. He has been drinking hard in that Greek's or

Italian's grog-shop for three days. What can you expect? Four bottles of that kind of brandy a day, I am told. Wonderful, if true. Sheeted with boiler-iron inside I should think. The head, ah! the head, of course, gone, but the curious part is there's some sort of method in his raving. I am trying to find out. Most unusual — that thread of logic in such a delirium. Traditionally he ought to see snakes, but he doesn't. Good old tradition's at a discount nowadays. Eh! His — er — visions are batrachian. Ha! ha! No, seriously, I never remember being so interested in a case of jim-jams before. He ought to be dead, don't you know, after such a festive experiment. Oh! he is a tough object. Four-and-twenty years of the tropics too. You ought really to take a peep at him. Noble-looking old boozier. Most extraordinary man I ever met — medically, of course. Won't you?"

'I have been all along exhibiting the usual polite signs of interest, but now assuming an air of regret I murmured of want of time, and shook hands in a hurry. "I say," he cried after me; "he can't attend that inquiry. Is his evidence material, you think?"

"Not in the least," I called back from the gateway.'

## CHAPTER 6

‘The authorities were evidently of the same opinion. The inquiry was not adjourned. It was held on the appointed day to satisfy the law, and it was well attended because of its human interest, no doubt. There was no incertitude as to facts — as to the one material fact, I mean. How the Patna came by her hurt it was impossible to find out; the court did not expect to find out; and in the whole audience there was not a man who cared. Yet, as I’ve told you, all the sailors in the port attended, and the waterside business was fully represented. Whether they knew it or not, the interest that drew them here was purely psychological — the expectation of some essential disclosure as to the strength, the power, the horror, of human emotions. Naturally nothing of the kind could be disclosed. The examination of the only man able and willing to face it was beating futilely round the well-known fact, and the play of questions upon it was as instructive as the tapping with a hammer on an iron box, were the object to find out what’s inside. However, an official inquiry could not be any other thing. Its object was not the fundamental why, but the superficial how, of this affair.

‘The young chap could have told them, and, though that very thing was the thing that interested the audience, the questions put to him necessarily led him away from what to me, for instance, would have been the only truth worth knowing. You can’t expect the constituted authorities to inquire into the state of a man’s soul — or is it only of his liver? Their business was to come down upon the consequences, and frankly, a casual police magistrate and two nautical assessors are not much good for anything else. I don’t mean to imply these fellows were stupid. The magistrate was very patient. One of the assessors was a sailing-ship skipper with a reddish beard, and of a pious disposition. Brierly was the other. Big Brierly. Some of you must have heard of Big Brierly — the captain of the crack ship of the Blue Star line. That’s the man.

‘He seemed consumedly bored by the honour thrust upon him. He had never in his life made a mistake, never had an accident, never a mishap, never a check in his steady rise, and he seemed to be one of those lucky fellows who know nothing of indecision, much less of self-mistrust. At thirty-two he had one of the best commands going in the Eastern trade — and, what’s more, he thought a lot of what he had. There was nothing like it in the world, and I suppose if you had asked him point-blank he would have

confessed that in his opinion there was not such another commander. The choice had fallen upon the right man. The rest of mankind that did not command the sixteen-knot steel steamer Ossa were rather poor creatures. He had saved lives at sea, had rescued ships in distress, had a gold chronometer presented to him by the underwriters, and a pair of binoculars with a suitable inscription from some foreign Government, in commemoration of these services. He was acutely aware of his merits and of his rewards. I liked him well enough, though some I know — meek, friendly men at that — couldn't stand him at any price. I haven't the slightest doubt he considered himself vastly my superior — indeed, had you been Emperor of East and West, you could not have ignored your inferiority in his presence — but I couldn't get up any real sentiment of offence. He did not despise me for anything I could help, for anything I was — don't you know? I was a negligible quantity simply because I was not the fortunate man of the earth, not Montague Brierly in command of the Ossa, not the owner of an inscribed gold chronometer and of silver-mounted binoculars testifying to the excellence of my seamanship and to my indomitable pluck; not possessed of an acute sense of my merits and of my rewards, besides the love and worship of a black retriever, the most wonderful of its kind — for never was such a man loved thus by such a dog. No doubt, to have all this forced upon you was exasperating enough; but when I reflected that I was associated in these fatal disadvantages with twelve hundred millions of other more or less human beings, I found I could bear my share of his good-natured and contemptuous pity for the sake of something indefinite and attractive in the man. I have never defined to myself this attraction, but there were moments when I envied him. The sting of life could do no more to his complacent soul than the scratch of a pin to the smooth face of a rock. This was enviable. As I looked at him, flanking on one side the unassuming pale-faced magistrate who presided at the inquiry, his self-satisfaction presented to me and to the world a surface as hard as granite. He committed suicide very soon after.

'No wonder Jim's case bored him, and while I thought with something akin to fear of the immensity of his contempt for the young man under examination, he was probably holding silent inquiry into his own case. The verdict must have been of unmitigated guilt, and he took the secret of the evidence with him in that leap into the sea. If I understand anything of men, the matter was no doubt of the gravest import, one of those trifles that

awaken ideas — start into life some thought with which a man unused to such a companionship finds it impossible to live. I am in a position to know that it wasn't money, and it wasn't drink, and it wasn't woman. He jumped overboard at sea barely a week after the end of the inquiry, and less than three days after leaving port on his outward passage; as though on that exact spot in the midst of waters he had suddenly perceived the gates of the other world flung open wide for his reception.

'Yet it was not a sudden impulse. His grey-headed mate, a first-rate sailor and a nice old chap with strangers, but in his relations with his commander the surliest chief officer I've ever seen, would tell the story with tears in his eyes. It appears that when he came on deck in the morning Brierly had been writing in the chart-room. "It was ten minutes to four," he said, "and the middle watch was not relieved yet of course. He heard my voice on the bridge speaking to the second mate, and called me in. I was loth to go, and that's the truth, Captain Marlow — I couldn't stand poor Captain Brierly, I tell you with shame; we never know what a man is made of. He had been promoted over too many heads, not counting my own, and he had a damnable trick of making you feel small, nothing but by the way he said 'Good morning.' I never addressed him, sir, but on matters of duty, and then it was as much as I could do to keep a civil tongue in my head." (He flattered himself there. I often wondered how Brierly could put up with his manners for more than half a voyage.) "I've a wife and children," he went on, "and I had been ten years in the Company, always expecting the next command — more fool I. Says he, just like this: 'Come in here, Mr. Jones,' in that swagger voice of his — 'Come in here, Mr. Jones.' In I went. 'We'll lay down her position,' says he, stooping over the chart, a pair of dividers in hand. By the standing orders, the officer going off duty would have done that at the end of his watch. However, I said nothing, and looked on while he marked off the ship's position with a tiny cross and wrote the date and the time. I can see him this moment writing his neat figures: seventeen, eight, four A.M. The year would be written in red ink at the top of the chart. He never used his charts more than a year, Captain Brierly didn't. I've the chart now. When he had done he stands looking down at the mark he had made and smiling to himself, then looks up at me. 'Thirty-two miles more as she goes,' says he, 'and then we shall be clear, and you may alter the course twenty degrees to the southward.'

“We were passing to the north of the Hector Bank that voyage. I said, ‘All right, sir,’ wondering what he was fussing about, since I had to call him before altering the course anyhow. Just then eight bells were struck: we came out on the bridge, and the second mate before going off mentions in the usual way — ‘Seventy-one on the log.’ Captain Brierly looks at the compass and then all round. It was dark and clear, and all the stars were out as plain as on a frosty night in high latitudes. Suddenly he says with a sort of a little sigh: ‘I am going aft, and shall set the log at zero for you myself, so that there can be no mistake. Thirty-two miles more on this course and then you are safe. Let’s see — the correction on the log is six per cent. additive; say, then, thirty by the dial to run, and you may come twenty degrees to starboard at once. No use losing any distance — is there?’ I had never heard him talk so much at a stretch, and to no purpose as it seemed to me. I said nothing. He went down the ladder, and the dog, that was always at his heels whenever he moved, night or day, followed, sliding nose first, after him. I heard his boot-heels tap, tap on the after-deck, then he stopped and spoke to the dog — ‘Go back, Rover. On the bridge, boy! Go on — get.’ Then he calls out to me from the dark, ‘Shut that dog up in the chart-room, Mr. Jones — will you?’

“This was the last time I heard his voice, Captain Marlow. These are the last words he spoke in the hearing of any living human being, sir.” At this point the old chap’s voice got quite unsteady. “He was afraid the poor brute would jump after him, don’t you see?” he pursued with a quaver. “Yes, Captain Marlow. He set the log for me; he — would you believe it? — he put a drop of oil in it too. There was the oil-feeder where he left it near by. The boat-swain’s mate got the hose along aft to wash down at half-past five; by-and-by he knocks off and runs up on the bridge — ‘Will you please come aft, Mr. Jones,’ he says. ‘There’s a funny thing. I don’t like to touch it.’ It was Captain Brierly’s gold chronometer watch carefully hung under the rail by its chain.

“As soon as my eyes fell on it something struck me, and I knew, sir. My legs got soft under me. It was as if I had seen him go over; and I could tell how far behind he was left too. The taffrail-log marked eighteen miles and three-quarters, and four iron belaying-pins were missing round the mainmast. Put them in his pockets to help him down, I suppose; but, Lord! what’s four iron pins to a powerful man like Captain Brierly. Maybe his confidence in himself was just shook a bit at the last. That’s the only sign of



fluster he gave in his whole life, I should think; but I am ready to answer for him, that once over he did not try to swim a stroke, the same as he would have had pluck enough to keep up all day long on the bare chance had he fallen overboard accidentally. Yes, sir. He was second to none — if he said so himself, as I heard him once. He had written two letters in the middle watch, one to the Company and the other to me. He gave me a lot of instructions as to the passage — I had been in the trade before he was out of his time — and no end of hints as to my conduct with our people in Shanghai, so that I should keep the command of the Ossa. He wrote like a father would to a favourite son, Captain Marlow, and I was five-and-twenty years his senior and had tasted salt water before he was fairly breeched. In his letter to the owners — it was left open for me to see — he said that he had always done his duty by them — up to that moment — and even now he was not betraying their confidence, since he was leaving the ship to as competent a seaman as could be found — meaning me, sir, meaning me! He told them that if the last act of his life didn't take away all his credit with them, they would give weight to my faithful service and to his warm recommendation, when about to fill the vacancy made by his death. And much more like this, sir. I couldn't believe my eyes. It made me feel queer all over," went on the old chap, in great perturbation, and squashing something in the corner of his eye with the end of a thumb as broad as a spatula. "You would think, sir, he had jumped overboard only to give an unlucky man a last show to get on. What with the shock of him going in this awful rash way, and thinking myself a made man by that chance, I was nearly off my chump for a week. But no fear. The captain of the Pelion was shifted into the Ossa — came aboard in Shanghai — a little popinjay, sir, in a grey check suit, with his hair parted in the middle. 'Aw — I am — aw — your new captain, Mister — Mister — aw — Jones.' He was drowned in scent — fairly stunk with it, Captain Marlow. I dare say it was the look I gave him that made him stammer. He mumbled something about my natural disappointment — I had better know at once that his chief officer got the promotion to the Pelion — he had nothing to do with it, of course — supposed the office knew best — sorry. . . . Says I, 'Don't you mind old Jones, sir; dam' his soul, he's used to it.' I could see directly I had shocked his delicate ear, and while we sat at our first tiffin together he began to find fault in a nasty manner with this and that in the ship. I never heard such a voice out of a Punch and Judy show. I set my teeth hard, and glued my eyes

to my plate, and held my peace as long as I could; but at last I had to say something. Up he jumps tiptoeing, ruffling all his pretty plumes, like a little fighting-cock. 'You'll find you have a different person to deal with than the late Captain Brierly.' 'I've found it,' says I, very glum, but pretending to be mighty busy with my steak. 'You are an old ruffian, Mister — aw — Jones; and what's more, you are known for an old ruffian in the employ,' he squeaks at me. The damned bottle-washers stood about listening with their mouths stretched from ear to ear. 'I may be a hard case,' answers I, 'but I ain't so far gone as to put up with the sight of you sitting in Captain Brierly's chair.' With that I lay down my knife and fork. 'You would like to sit in it yourself — that's where the shoe pinches,' he sneers. I left the saloon, got my rags together, and was on the quay with all my dunnage about my feet before the stevedores had turned to again. Yes. Adrift — on shore — after ten years' service — and with a poor woman and four children six thousand miles off depending on my half-pay for every mouthful they ate. Yes, sir! I chucked it rather than hear Captain Brierly abused. He left me his night-glasses — here they are; and he wished me to take care of the dog — here he is. Hallo, Rover, poor boy. Where's the captain, Rover?" The dog looked up at us with mournful yellow eyes, gave one desolate bark, and crept under the table.

'All this was taking place, more than two years afterwards, on board that nautical ruin the Fire-Queen this Jones had got charge of — quite by a funny accident, too — from Matherson — mad Matherson they generally called him — the same who used to hang out in Hai-phong, you know, before the occupation days. The old chap snuffled on —

"Ay, sir, Captain Brierly will be remembered here, if there's no other place on earth. I wrote fully to his father and did not get a word in reply — neither Thank you, nor Go to the devil! — nothing! Perhaps they did not want to know."

'The sight of that watery-eyed old Jones mopping his bald head with a red cotton handkerchief, the sorrowing yelp of the dog, the squalor of that fly-blown cuddy which was the only shrine of his memory, threw a veil of inexpressibly mean pathos over Brierly's remembered figure, the posthumous revenge of fate for that belief in his own splendour which had almost cheated his life of its legitimate terrors. Almost! Perhaps wholly. Who can tell what flattering view he had induced himself to take of his own suicide?

“Why did he commit the rash act, Captain Marlow — can you think?” asked Jones, pressing his palms together. “Why? It beats me! Why?” He slapped his low and wrinkled forehead. “If he had been poor and old and in debt — and never a show — or else mad. But he wasn’t of the kind that goes mad, not he. You trust me. What a mate don’t know about his skipper isn’t worth knowing. Young, healthy, well off, no cares. . . . I sit here sometimes thinking, thinking, till my head fairly begins to buzz. There was some reason.”

“You may depend on it, Captain Jones,” said I, “it wasn’t anything that would have disturbed much either of us two,” I said; and then, as if a light had been flashed into the muddle of his brain, poor old Jones found a last word of amazing profundity. He blew his nose, nodding at me dolefully: “Ay, ay! neither you nor I, sir, had ever thought so much of ourselves.”

Of course the recollection of my last conversation with Brierly is tinged with the knowledge of his end that followed so close upon it. I spoke with him for the last time during the progress of the inquiry. It was after the first adjournment, and he came up with me in the street. He was in a state of irritation, which I noticed with surprise, his usual behaviour when he condescended to converse being perfectly cool, with a trace of amused tolerance, as if the existence of his interlocutor had been a rather good joke. “They caught me for that inquiry, you see,” he began, and for a while enlarged complainingly upon the inconveniences of daily attendance in court. “And goodness knows how long it will last. Three days, I suppose.” I heard him out in silence; in my then opinion it was a way as good as another of putting on side. “What’s the use of it? It is the stupidest set-out you can imagine,” he pursued hotly. I remarked that there was no option. He interrupted me with a sort of pent-up violence. “I feel like a fool all the time.” I looked up at him. This was going very far — for Brierly — when talking of Brierly. He stopped short, and seizing the lapel of my coat, gave it a slight tug. “Why are we tormenting that young chap?” he asked. This question chimed in so well to the tolling of a certain thought of mine that, with the image of the absconding renegade in my eye, I answered at once, “Hanged if I know, unless it be that he lets you.” I was astonished to see him fall into line, so to speak, with that utterance, which ought to have been tolerably cryptic. He said angrily, “Why, yes. Can’t he see that wretched skipper of his has cleared out? What does he expect to happen? Nothing can save him. He’s done for.” We walked on in silence a few steps. “Why eat all

that dirt?" he exclaimed, with an oriental energy of expression — about the only sort of energy you can find a trace of east of the fiftieth meridian. I wondered greatly at the direction of his thoughts, but now I strongly suspect it was strictly in character: at bottom poor Brierly must have been thinking of himself. I pointed out to him that the skipper of the Patna was known to have feathered his nest pretty well, and could procure almost anywhere the means of getting away. With Jim it was otherwise: the Government was keeping him in the Sailors' Home for the time being, and probably he hadn't a penny in his pocket to bless himself with. It costs some money to run away. "Does it? Not always," he said, with a bitter laugh, and to some further remark of mine — "Well, then, let him creep twenty feet underground and stay there! By heavens! I would." I don't know why his tone provoked me, and I said, "There is a kind of courage in facing it out as he does, knowing very well that if he went away nobody would trouble to run after him." "Courage be hanged!" growled Brierly. "That sort of courage is of no use to keep a man straight, and I don't care a snap for such courage. If you were to say it was a kind of cowardice now — of softness. I tell you what, I will put up two hundred rupees if you put up another hundred and undertake to make the beggar clear out early to-morrow morning. The fellow's a gentleman if he ain't fit to be touched — he will understand. He must! This infernal publicity is too shocking: there he sits while all these confounded natives, serangs, lascars, quartermasters, are giving evidence that's enough to burn a man to ashes with shame. This is abominable. Why, Marlow, don't you think, don't you feel, that this is abominable; don't you now — come — as a seaman? If he went away all this would stop at once." Brierly said these words with a most unusual animation, and made as if to reach after his pocket-book. I restrained him, and declared coldly that the cowardice of these four men did not seem to me a matter of such great importance. "And you call yourself a seaman, I suppose," he pronounced angrily. I said that's what I called myself, and I hoped I was too. He heard me out, and made a gesture with his big arm that seemed to deprive me of my individuality, to push me away into the crowd. "The worst of it," he said, "is that all you fellows have no sense of dignity; you don't think enough of what you are supposed to be."

'We had been walking slowly meantime, and now stopped opposite the harbour office, in sight of the very spot from which the immense captain of the Patna had vanished as utterly as a tiny feather blown away in a

hurricane. I smiled. Brierly went on: "This is a disgrace. We've got all kinds amongst us — some anointed scoundrels in the lot; but, hang it, we must preserve professional decency or we become no better than so many tinkers going about loose. We are trusted. Do you understand? — trusted! Frankly, I don't care a snap for all the pilgrims that ever came out of Asia, but a decent man would not have behaved like this to a full cargo of old rags in bales. We aren't an organised body of men, and the only thing that holds us together is just the name for that kind of decency. Such an affair destroys one's confidence. A man may go pretty near through his whole sea-life without any call to show a stiff upper lip. But when the call comes . . . Aha! . . . If I . . ."

'He broke off, and in a changed tone, "I'll give you two hundred rupees now, Marlow, and you just talk to that chap. Confound him! I wish he had never come out here. Fact is, I rather think some of my people know his. The old man's a parson, and I remember now I met him once when staying with my cousin in Essex last year. If I am not mistaken, the old chap seemed rather to fancy his sailor son. Horrible. I can't do it myself — but you . . ."

'Thus, apropos of Jim, I had a glimpse of the real Brierly a few days before he committed his reality and his sham together to the keeping of the sea. Of course I declined to meddle. The tone of this last "but you" (poor Brierly couldn't help it), that seemed to imply I was no more noticeable than an insect, caused me to look at the proposal with indignation, and on account of that provocation, or for some other reason, I became positive in my mind that the inquiry was a severe punishment to that Jim, and that his facing it — practically of his own free will — was a redeeming feature in his abominable case. I hadn't been so sure of it before. Brierly went off in a huff. At the time his state of mind was more of a mystery to me than it is now.

'Next day, coming into court late, I sat by myself. Of course I could not forget the conversation I had with Brierly, and now I had them both under my eyes. The demeanour of one suggested gloomy impudence and of the other a contemptuous boredom; yet one attitude might not have been truer than the other, and I was aware that one was not true. Brierly was not bored — he was exasperated; and if so, then Jim might not have been impudent. According to my theory he was not. I imagined he was hopeless. Then it was that our glances met. They met, and the look he gave me was

discouraging of any intention I might have had to speak to him. Upon either hypothesis — insolence or despair — I felt I could be of no use to him. This was the second day of the proceedings. Very soon after that exchange of glances the inquiry was adjourned again to the next day. The white men began to troop out at once. Jim had been told to stand down some time before, and was able to leave amongst the first. I saw his broad shoulders and his head outlined in the light of the door, and while I made my way slowly out talking with some one — some stranger who had addressed me casually — I could see him from within the court-room resting both elbows on the balustrade of the verandah and turning his back on the small stream of people trickling down the few steps. There was a murmur of voices and a shuffle of boots.

‘The next case was that of assault and battery committed upon a money-lender, I believe; and the defendant — a venerable villager with a straight white beard — sat on a mat just outside the door with his sons, daughters, sons-in-law, their wives, and, I should think, half the population of his village besides, squatting or standing around him. A slim dark woman, with part of her back and one black shoulder bared, and with a thin gold ring in her nose, suddenly began to talk in a high-pitched, shrewish tone. The man with me instinctively looked up at her. We were then just through the door, passing behind Jim’s burly back.

‘Whether those villagers had brought the yellow dog with them, I don’t know. Anyhow, a dog was there, weaving himself in and out amongst people’s legs in that mute stealthy way native dogs have, and my companion stumbled over him. The dog leaped away without a sound; the man, raising his voice a little, said with a slow laugh, “Look at that wretched cur,” and directly afterwards we became separated by a lot of people pushing in. I stood back for a moment against the wall while the stranger managed to get down the steps and disappeared. I saw Jim spin round. He made a step forward and barred my way. We were alone; he glared at me with an air of stubborn resolution. I became aware I was being held up, so to speak, as if in a wood. The verandah was empty by then, the noise and movement in court had ceased: a great silence fell upon the building, in which, somewhere far within, an oriental voice began to whine abjectly. The dog, in the very act of trying to sneak in at the door, sat down hurriedly to hunt for fleas.

“Did you speak to me?” asked Jim very low, and bending forward, not so much towards me but at me, if you know what I mean. I said “No” at once. Something in the sound of that quiet tone of his warned me to be on my defence. I watched him. It was very much like a meeting in a wood, only more uncertain in its issue, since he could possibly want neither my money nor my life — nothing that I could simply give up or defend with a clear conscience. “You say you didn’t,” he said, very sombre. “But I heard.” “Some mistake,” I protested, utterly at a loss, and never taking my eyes off him. To watch his face was like watching a darkening sky before a clap of thunder, shade upon shade imperceptibly coming on, the doom growing mysteriously intense in the calm of maturing violence.

“As far as I know, I haven’t opened my lips in your hearing,” I affirmed with perfect truth. I was getting a little angry, too, at the absurdity of this encounter. It strikes me now I have never in my life been so near a beating — I mean it literally; a beating with fists. I suppose I had some hazy prescience of that eventuality being in the air. Not that he was actively threatening me. On the contrary, he was strangely passive — don’t you know? but he was lowering, and, though not exceptionally big, he looked generally fit to demolish a wall. The most reassuring symptom I noticed was a kind of slow and ponderous hesitation, which I took as a tribute to the evident sincerity of my manner and of my tone. We faced each other. In the court the assault case was proceeding. I caught the words: “Well — buffalo — stick — in the greatness of my fear. . . .”

“What did you mean by staring at me all the morning?” said Jim at last. He looked up and looked down again. “Did you expect us all to sit with downcast eyes out of regard for your susceptibilities?” I retorted sharply. I was not going to submit meekly to any of his nonsense. He raised his eyes again, and this time continued to look me straight in the face. “No. That’s all right,” he pronounced with an air of deliberating with himself upon the truth of this statement — “that’s all right. I am going through with that. Only” — and there he spoke a little faster — “I won’t let any man call me names outside this court. There was a fellow with you. You spoke to him — oh yes — I know; ‘tis all very fine. You spoke to him, but you meant me to hear. . . .”

‘I assured him he was under some extraordinary delusion. I had no conception how it came about. “You thought I would be afraid to resent this,” he said, with just a faint tinge of bitterness. I was interested enough to

discern the slightest shades of expression, but I was not in the least enlightened; yet I don't know what in these words, or perhaps just the intonation of that phrase, induced me suddenly to make all possible allowances for him. I ceased to be annoyed at my unexpected predicament. It was some mistake on his part; he was blundering, and I had an intuition that the blunder was of an odious, of an unfortunate nature. I was anxious to end this scene on grounds of decency, just as one is anxious to cut short some unprovoked and abominable confidence. The funniest part was, that in the midst of all these considerations of the higher order I was conscious of a certain trepidation as to the possibility — nay, likelihood — of this encounter ending in some disreputable brawl which could not possibly be explained, and would make me ridiculous. I did not hanker after a three days' celebrity as the man who got a black eye or something of the sort from the mate of the Patna. He, in all probability, did not care what he did, or at any rate would be fully justified in his own eyes. It took no magician to see he was amazingly angry about something, for all his quiet and even torpid demeanour. I don't deny I was extremely desirous to pacify him at all costs, had I only known what to do. But I didn't know, as you may well imagine. It was a blackness without a single gleam. We confronted each other in silence. He hung fire for about fifteen seconds, then made a step nearer, and I made ready to ward off a blow, though I don't think I moved a muscle. "If you were as big as two men and as strong as six," he said very softly, "I would tell you what I think of you. You . . ." "Stop!" I exclaimed. This checked him for a second. "Before you tell me what you think of me," I went on quickly, "will you kindly tell me what it is I've said or done?" During the pause that ensued he surveyed me with indignation, while I made supernatural efforts of memory, in which I was hindered by the oriental voice within the court-room expostulating with impassioned volubility against a charge of falsehood. Then we spoke almost together. "I will soon show you I am not," he said, in a tone suggestive of a crisis. "I declare I don't know," I protested earnestly at the same time. He tried to crush me by the scorn of his glance. "Now that you see I am not afraid you try to crawl out of it," he said. "Who's a cur now — hey?" Then, at last, I understood.

'He had been scanning my features as though looking for a place where he would plant his fist. "I will allow no man," . . . he mumbled threateningly. It was, indeed, a hideous mistake; he had given himself away



utterly. I can't give you an idea how shocked I was. I suppose he saw some reflection of my feelings in my face, because his expression changed just a little. "Good God!" I stammered, "you don't think I . . ." "But I am sure I've heard," he persisted, raising his voice for the first time since the beginning of this deplorable scene. Then with a shade of disdain he added, "It wasn't you, then? Very well; I'll find the other." "Don't be a fool," I cried in exasperation; "it wasn't that at all." "I've heard," he said again with an unshaken and sombre perseverance.

'There may be those who could have laughed at his pertinacity; I didn't. Oh, I didn't! There had never been a man so mercilessly shown up by his own natural impulse. A single word had stripped him of his discretion — of that discretion which is more necessary to the decencies of our inner being than clothing is to the decorum of our body. "Don't be a fool," I repeated. "But the other man said it, you don't deny that?" he pronounced distinctly, and looking in my face without flinching. "No, I don't deny," said I, returning his gaze. At last his eyes followed downwards the direction of my pointing finger. He appeared at first uncomprehending, then confounded, and at last amazed and scared as though a dog had been a monster and he had never seen a dog before. "Nobody dreamt of insulting you," I said.

'He contemplated the wretched animal, that moved no more than an effigy: it sat with ears pricked and its sharp muzzle pointed into the doorway, and suddenly snapped at a fly like a piece of mechanism.

'I looked at him. The red of his fair sunburnt complexion deepened suddenly under the down of his cheeks, invaded his forehead, spread to the roots of his curly hair. His ears became intensely crimson, and even the clear blue of his eyes was darkened many shades by the rush of blood to his head. His lips pouted a little, trembling as though he had been on the point of bursting into tears. I perceived he was incapable of pronouncing a word from the excess of his humiliation. From disappointment too — who knows? Perhaps he looked forward to that hammering he was going to give me for rehabilitation, for appeasement? Who can tell what relief he expected from this chance of a row? He was naive enough to expect anything; but he had given himself away for nothing in this case. He had been frank with himself — let alone with me — in the wild hope of arriving in that way at some effective refutation, and the stars had been ironically unpropitious. He made an inarticulate noise in his throat like a man imperfectly stunned by a blow on the head. It was pitiful.

‘I didn’t catch up again with him till well outside the gate. I had even to trot a bit at the last, but when, out of breath at his elbow, I taxed him with running away, he said, “Never!” and at once turned at bay. I explained I never meant to say he was running away from me. “From no man — from not a single man on earth,” he affirmed with a stubborn mien. I forbore to point out the one obvious exception which would hold good for the bravest of us; I thought he would find out by himself very soon. He looked at me patiently while I was thinking of something to say, but I could find nothing on the spur of the moment, and he began to walk on. I kept up, and anxious not to lose him, I said hurriedly that I couldn’t think of leaving him under a false impression of my — of my — I stammered. The stupidity of the phrase appalled me while I was trying to finish it, but the power of sentences has nothing to do with their sense or the logic of their construction. My idiotic mumble seemed to please him. He cut it short by saying, with courteous placidity that argued an immense power of self-control or else a wonderful elasticity of spirits — ”Altogether my mistake.” I marvelled greatly at this expression: he might have been alluding to some trifling occurrence. Hadn’t he understood its deplorable meaning? “You may well forgive me,” he continued, and went on a little moodily, “All these staring people in court seemed such fools that — that it might have been as I supposed.”

‘This opened suddenly a new view of him to my wonder. I looked at him curiously and met his unabashed and impenetrable eyes. “I can’t put up with this kind of thing,” he said, very simply, “and I don’t mean to. In court it’s different; I’ve got to stand that — and I can do it too.”

‘I don’t pretend I understood him. The views he let me have of himself were like those glimpses through the shifting rents in a thick fog — bits of vivid and vanishing detail, giving no connected idea of the general aspect of a country. They fed one’s curiosity without satisfying it; they were no good for purposes of orientation. Upon the whole he was misleading. That’s how I summed him up to myself after he left me late in the evening. I had been staying at the Malabar House for a few days, and on my pressing invitation he dined with me there.’

## CHAPTER 7

‘An outward-bound mail-boat had come in that afternoon, and the big dining-room of the hotel was more than half full of people with a-hundred-pounds-round-the-world tickets in their pockets. There were married couples looking domesticated and bored with each other in the midst of their travels; there were small parties and large parties, and lone individuals dining solemnly or feasting boisterously, but all thinking, conversing, joking, or scowling as was their wont at home; and just as intelligently receptive of new impressions as their trunks upstairs. Henceforth they would be labelled as having passed through this and that place, and so would be their luggage. They would cherish this distinction of their persons, and preserve the gummed tickets on their portmanteaus as documentary evidence, as the only permanent trace of their improving enterprise. The dark-faced servants tripped without noise over the vast and polished floor; now and then a girl’s laugh would be heard, as innocent and empty as her mind, or, in a sudden hush of crockery, a few words in an affected drawl from some wit embroidering for the benefit of a grinning tableful the last funny story of shipboard scandal. Two nomadic old maids, dressed up to kill, worked acrimoniously through the bill of fare, whispering to each other with faded lips, wooden-faced and bizarre, like two sumptuous scarecrows. A little wine opened Jim’s heart and loosened his tongue. His appetite was good, too, I noticed. He seemed to have buried somewhere the opening episode of our acquaintance. It was like a thing of which there would be no more question in this world. And all the time I had before me these blue, boyish eyes looking straight into mine, this young face, these capable shoulders, the open bronzed forehead with a white line under the roots of clustering fair hair, this appearance appealing at sight to all my sympathies: this frank aspect, the artless smile, the youthful seriousness. He was of the right sort; he was one of us. He talked soberly, with a sort of composed unreserve, and with a quiet bearing that might have been the outcome of manly self-control, of impudence, of callousness, of a colossal unconsciousness, of a gigantic deception. Who can tell! From our tone we might have been discussing a third person, a football match, last year’s weather. My mind floated in a sea of conjectures till the turn of the conversation enabled me, without being offensive, to remark that, upon the whole, this inquiry must have been pretty trying to him. He darted his arm

across the tablecloth, and clutching my hand by the side of my plate, glared fixedly. I was startled. "It must be awfully hard," I stammered, confused by this display of speechless feeling. "It is — hell," he burst out in a muffled voice.

'This movement and these words caused two well-groomed male globe-trotters at a neighbouring table to look up in alarm from their iced pudding. I rose, and we passed into the front gallery for coffee and cigars.

'On little octagon tables candles burned in glass globes; clumps of stiff-leaved plants separated sets of cosy wicker chairs; and between the pairs of columns, whose reddish shafts caught in a long row the sheen from the tall windows, the night, glittering and sombre, seemed to hang like a splendid drapery. The riding lights of ships winked afar like setting stars, and the hills across the roadstead resembled rounded black masses of arrested thunder-clouds.

"I couldn't clear out," Jim began. "The skipper did — that's all very well for him. I couldn't, and I wouldn't. They all got out of it in one way or another, but it wouldn't do for me."

'I listened with concentrated attention, not daring to stir in my chair; I wanted to know — and to this day I don't know, I can only guess. He would be confident and depressed all in the same breath, as if some conviction of innate blamelessness had checked the truth writhing within him at every turn. He began by saying, in the tone in which a man would admit his inability to jump a twenty-foot wall, that he could never go home now; and this declaration recalled to my mind what Brierly had said, "that the old parson in Essex seemed to fancy his sailor son not a little."

'I can't tell you whether Jim knew he was especially "fancied," but the tone of his references to "my Dad" was calculated to give me a notion that the good old rural dean was about the finest man that ever had been worried by the cares of a large family since the beginning of the world. This, though never stated, was implied with an anxiety that there should be no mistake about it, which was really very true and charming, but added a poignant sense of lives far off to the other elements of the story. "He has seen it all in the home papers by this time," said Jim. "I can never face the poor old chap." I did not dare to lift my eyes at this till I heard him add, "I could never explain. He wouldn't understand." Then I looked up. He was smoking reflectively, and after a moment, rousing himself, began to talk again. He discovered at once a desire that I should not confound him with his partners

in — in crime, let us call it. He was not one of them; he was altogether of another sort. I gave no sign of dissent. I had no intention, for the sake of barren truth, to rob him of the smallest particle of any saving grace that would come in his way. I didn't know how much of it he believed himself. I didn't know what he was playing up to — if he was playing up to anything at all — and I suspect he did not know either; for it is my belief no man ever understands quite his own artful dodges to escape from the grim shadow of self-knowledge. I made no sound all the time he was wondering what he had better do after "that stupid inquiry was over."

'Apparently he shared Brierly's contemptuous opinion of these proceedings ordained by law. He would not know where to turn, he confessed, clearly thinking aloud rather than talking to me. Certificate gone, career broken, no money to get away, no work that he could obtain as far as he could see. At home he could perhaps get something; but it meant going to his people for help, and that he would not do. He saw nothing for it but ship before the mast — could get perhaps a quartermaster's billet in some steamer. Would do for a quartermaster. . . . "Do you think you would?" I asked pitilessly. He jumped up, and going to the stone balustrade looked out into the night. In a moment he was back, towering above my chair with his youthful face clouded yet by the pain of a conquered emotion. He had understood very well I did not doubt his ability to steer a ship. In a voice that quavered a bit he asked me why did I say that? I had been "no end kind" to him. I had not even laughed at him when — here he began to mumble — "that mistake, you know — made a confounded ass of myself." I broke in by saying rather warmly that for me such a mistake was not a matter to laugh at. He sat down and drank deliberately some coffee, emptying the small cup to the last drop. "That does not mean I admit for a moment the cap fitted," he declared distinctly. "No?" I said. "No," he affirmed with quiet decision. "Do you know what you would have done? Do you? And you don't think yourself" . . . he gulped something . . . "you don't think yourself a — a — cur?"

'And with this — upon my honour! — he looked up at me inquisitively. It was a question it appears — a bona fide question! However, he didn't wait for an answer. Before I could recover he went on, with his eyes straight before him, as if reading off something written on the body of the night. "It is all in being ready. I wasn't; not — not then. I don't want to excuse

myself; but I would like to explain — I would like somebody to understand — somebody — one person at least! You! Why not you?”

‘It was solemn, and a little ridiculous too, as they always are, those struggles of an individual trying to save from the fire his idea of what his moral identity should be, this precious notion of a convention, only one of the rules of the game, nothing more, but all the same so terribly effective by its assumption of unlimited power over natural instincts, by the awful penalties of its failure. He began his story quietly enough. On board that Dale Line steamer that had picked up these four floating in a boat upon the discreet sunset glow of the sea, they had been after the first day looked askance upon. The fat skipper told some story, the others had been silent, and at first it had been accepted. You don’t cross-examine poor castaways you had the good luck to save, if not from cruel death, then at least from cruel suffering. Afterwards, with time to think it over, it might have struck the officers of the Avondale that there was “something fishy” in the affair; but of course they would keep their doubts to themselves. They had picked up the captain, the mate, and two engineers of the steamer Patna sunk at sea, and that, very properly, was enough for them. I did not ask Jim about the nature of his feelings during the ten days he spent on board. From the way he narrated that part I was at liberty to infer he was partly stunned by the discovery he had made — the discovery about himself — and no doubt was at work trying to explain it away to the only man who was capable of appreciating all its tremendous magnitude. You must understand he did not try to minimise its importance. Of that I am sure; and therein lies his distinction. As to what sensations he experienced when he got ashore and heard the unforeseen conclusion of the tale in which he had taken such a pitiful part, he told me nothing of them, and it is difficult to imagine.

‘I wonder whether he felt the ground cut from under his feet? I wonder? But no doubt he managed to get a fresh foothold very soon. He was ashore a whole fortnight waiting in the Sailors’ Home, and as there were six or seven men staying there at the time, I had heard of him a little. Their languid opinion seemed to be that, in addition to his other shortcomings, he was a sulky brute. He had passed these days on the verandah, buried in a long chair, and coming out of his place of sepulture only at meal-times or late at night, when he wandered on the quays all by himself, detached from his surroundings, irresolute and silent, like a ghost without a home to haunt. “I don’t think I’ve spoken three words to a living soul in all that time,” he

said, making me very sorry for him; and directly he added, "One of these fellows would have been sure to blurt out something I had made up my mind not to put up with, and I didn't want a row. No! Not then. I was too — too . . . I had no heart for it." "So that bulkhead held out after all," I remarked cheerfully. "Yes," he murmured, "it held. And yet I swear to you I felt it bulge under my hand." "It's extraordinary what strains old iron will stand sometimes," I said. Thrown back in his seat, his legs stiffly out and arms hanging down, he nodded slightly several times. You could not conceive a sadder spectacle. Suddenly he lifted his head; he sat up; he slapped his thigh. "Ah! what a chance missed! My God! what a chance missed!" he blazed out, but the ring of the last "missed" resembled a cry wrung out by pain.

'He was silent again with a still, far-away look of fierce yearning after that missed distinction, with his nostrils for an instant dilated, sniffing the intoxicating breath of that wasted opportunity. If you think I was either surprised or shocked you do me an injustice in more ways than one! Ah, he was an imaginative beggar! He would give himself away; he would give himself up. I could see in his glance darted into the night all his inner being carried on, projected headlong into the fanciful realm of recklessly heroic aspirations. He had no leisure to regret what he had lost, he was so wholly and naturally concerned for what he had failed to obtain. He was very far away from me who watched him across three feet of space. With every instant he was penetrating deeper into the impossible world of romantic achievements. He got to the heart of it at last! A strange look of beatitude overspread his features, his eyes sparkled in the light of the candle burning between us; he positively smiled! He had penetrated to the very heart — to the very heart. It was an ecstatic smile that your faces — or mine either — will never wear, my dear boys. I whisked him back by saying, "If you had stuck to the ship, you mean!"

'He turned upon me, his eyes suddenly amazed and full of pain, with a bewildered, startled, suffering face, as though he had tumbled down from a star. Neither you nor I will ever look like this on any man. He shuddered profoundly, as if a cold finger-tip had touched his heart. Last of all he sighed.

'I was not in a merciful mood. He provoked one by his contradictory indiscretions. "It is unfortunate you didn't know beforehand!" I said with every unkind intention; but the perfidious shaft fell harmless — dropped at

his feet like a spent arrow, as it were, and he did not think of picking it up. Perhaps he had not even seen it. Presently, lolling at ease, he said, "Dash it all! I tell you it bulged. I was holding up my lamp along the angle-iron in the lower deck when a flake of rust as big as the palm of my hand fell off the plate, all of itself." He passed his hand over his forehead. "The thing stirred and jumped off like something alive while I was looking at it." "That made you feel pretty bad," I observed casually. "Do you suppose," he said, "that I was thinking of myself, with a hundred and sixty people at my back, all fast asleep in that fore-'tween-deck alone — and more of them aft; more on the deck — sleeping — knowing nothing about it — three times as many as there were boats for, even if there had been time? I expected to see the iron open out as I stood there and the rush of water going over them as they lay. . . . What could I do — what?"

'I can easily picture him to myself in the peopled gloom of the cavernous place, with the light of the globe-lamp falling on a small portion of the bulkhead that had the weight of the ocean on the other side, and the breathing of unconscious sleepers in his ears. I can see him glaring at the iron, startled by the falling rust, overburdened by the knowledge of an imminent death. This, I gathered, was the second time he had been sent forward by that skipper of his, who, I rather think, wanted to keep him away from the bridge. He told me that his first impulse was to shout and straightway make all those people leap out of sleep into terror; but such an overwhelming sense of his helplessness came over him that he was not able to produce a sound. This is, I suppose, what people mean by the tongue cleaving to the roof of the mouth. "Too dry," was the concise expression he used in reference to this state. Without a sound, then, he scrambled out on deck through the number one hatch. A windsail rigged down there swung against him accidentally, and he remembered that the light touch of the canvas on his face nearly knocked him off the hatchway ladder.

'He confessed that his knees wobbled a good deal as he stood on the foredeck looking at another sleeping crowd. The engines having been stopped by that time, the steam was blowing off. Its deep rumble made the whole night vibrate like a bass string. The ship trembled to it.

'He saw here and there a head lifted off a mat, a vague form uprise in sitting posture, listen sleepily for a moment, sink down again into the billowy confusion of boxes, steam-winches, ventilators. He was aware all these people did not know enough to take intelligent notice of that strange



noise. The ship of iron, the men with white faces, all the sights, all the sounds, everything on board to that ignorant and pious multitude was strange alike, and as trustworthy as it would for ever remain incomprehensible. It occurred to him that the fact was fortunate. The idea of it was simply terrible.

‘You must remember he believed, as any other man would have done in his place, that the ship would go down at any moment; the bulging, rust-eaten plates that kept back the ocean, fatally must give way, all at once like an undermined dam, and let in a sudden and overwhelming flood. He stood still looking at these recumbent bodies, a doomed man aware of his fate, surveying the silent company of the dead. They were dead! Nothing could save them! There were boats enough for half of them perhaps, but there was no time. No time! No time! It did not seem worth while to open his lips, to stir hand or foot. Before he could shout three words, or make three steps, he would be floundering in a sea whitened awfully by the desperate struggles of human beings, clamorous with the distress of cries for help. There was no help. He imagined what would happen perfectly; he went through it all motionless by the hatchway with the lamp in his hand — he went through it to the very last harrowing detail. I think he went through it again while he was telling me these things he could not tell the court.

“‘I saw as clearly as I see you now that there was nothing I could do. It seemed to take all life out of my limbs. I thought I might just as well stand where I was and wait. I did not think I had many seconds. . . .” Suddenly the steam ceased blowing off. The noise, he remarked, had been distracting, but the silence at once became intolerably oppressive.

“‘I thought I would choke before I got drowned,” he said.

‘He protested he did not think of saving himself. The only distinct thought formed, vanishing, and re-forming in his brain, was: eight hundred people and seven boats; eight hundred people and seven boats.

“‘Somebody was speaking aloud inside my head,” he said a little wildly. “Eight hundred people and seven boats — and no time! Just think of it.” He leaned towards me across the little table, and I tried to avoid his stare. “Do you think I was afraid of death?” he asked in a voice very fierce and low. He brought down his open hand with a bang that made the coffee-cups dance. “I am ready to swear I was not — I was not. . . . By God — no!” He hitched himself upright and crossed his arms; his chin fell on his breast.

‘The soft clashes of crockery reached us faintly through the high windows. There was a burst of voices, and several men came out in high good-humour into the gallery. They were exchanging jocular reminiscences of the donkeys in Cairo. A pale anxious youth stepping softly on long legs was being chaffed by a strutting and rubicund globe-trotter about his purchases in the bazaar. “No, really — do you think I’ve been done to that extent?” he inquired very earnest and deliberate. The band moved away, dropping into chairs as they went; matches flared, illuminating for a second faces without the ghost of an expression and the flat glaze of white shirt-fronts; the hum of many conversations animated with the ardour of feasting sounded to me absurd and infinitely remote.

“Some of the crew were sleeping on the number one hatch within reach of my arm,” began Jim again.

‘You must know they kept Kalashee watch in that ship, all hands sleeping through the night, and only the reliefs of quartermasters and look-out men being called. He was tempted to grip and shake the shoulder of the nearest lascar, but he didn’t. Something held his arms down along his sides. He was not afraid — oh no! only he just couldn’t — that’s all. He was not afraid of death perhaps, but I’ll tell you what, he was afraid of the emergency. His confounded imagination had evoked for him all the horrors of panic, the trampling rush, the pitiful screams, boats swamped — all the appalling incidents of a disaster at sea he had ever heard of. He might have been resigned to die but I suspect he wanted to die without added terrors, quietly, in a sort of peaceful trance. A certain readiness to perish is not so very rare, but it is seldom that you meet men whose souls, steeled in the impenetrable armour of resolution, are ready to fight a losing battle to the last; the desire of peace waxes stronger as hope declines, till at last it conquers the very desire of life. Which of us here has not observed this, or maybe experienced something of that feeling in his own person — this extreme weariness of emotions, the vanity of effort, the yearning for rest? Those striving with unreasonable forces know it well, — the shipwrecked castaways in boats, wanderers lost in a desert, men battling against the unthinking might of nature, or the stupid brutality of crowds.’

## CHAPTER 8

‘How long he stood stock-still by the hatch expecting every moment to feel the ship dip under his feet and the rush of water take him at the back and toss him like a chip, I cannot say. Not very long — two minutes perhaps. A couple of men he could not make out began to converse drowsily, and also, he could not tell where, he detected a curious noise of shuffling feet. Above these faint sounds there was that awful stillness preceding a catastrophe, that trying silence of the moment before the crash; then it came into his head that perhaps he would have time to rush along and cut all the lanyards of the gribes, so that the boats would float as the ship went down.

‘The Patna had a long bridge, and all the boats were up there, four on one side and three on the other — the smallest of them on the port-side and nearly abreast of the steering gear. He assured me, with evident anxiety to be believed, that he had been most careful to keep them ready for instant service. He knew his duty. I dare say he was a good enough mate as far as that went. “I always believed in being prepared for the worst,” he commented, staring anxiously in my face. I nodded my approval of the sound principle, averting my eyes before the subtle unsoundness of the man.

‘He started unsteadily to run. He had to step over legs, avoid stumbling against the heads. Suddenly some one caught hold of his coat from below, and a distressed voice spoke under his elbow. The light of the lamp he carried in his right hand fell upon an upturned dark face whose eyes entreated him together with the voice. He had picked up enough of the language to understand the word water, repeated several times in a tone of insistence, of prayer, almost of despair. He gave a jerk to get away, and felt an arm embrace his leg.

“‘The beggar clung to me like a drowning man,” he said impressively. “Water, water! What water did he mean? What did he know? As calmly as I could I ordered him to let go. He was stopping me, time was pressing, other men began to stir; I wanted time — time to cut the boats adrift. He got hold of my hand now, and I felt that he would begin to shout. It flashed upon me it was enough to start a panic, and I hauled off with my free arm and slung the lamp in his face. The glass jingled, the light went out, but the blow made him let go, and I ran off — I wanted to get at the boats; I wanted to get at the boats. He leaped after me from behind. I turned on him. He would

not keep quiet; he tried to shout; I had half throttled him before I made out what he wanted. He wanted some water — water to drink; they were on strict allowance, you know, and he had with him a young boy I had noticed several times. His child was sick — and thirsty. He had caught sight of me as I passed by, and was begging for a little water. That's all. We were under the bridge, in the dark. He kept on snatching at my wrists; there was no getting rid of him. I dashed into my berth, grabbed my water-bottle, and thrust it into his hands. He vanished. I didn't find out till then how much I was in want of a drink myself." He leaned on one elbow with a hand over his eyes.

'I felt a creepy sensation all down my backbone; there was something peculiar in all this. The fingers of the hand that shaded his brow trembled slightly. He broke the short silence.

"These things happen only once to a man and . . . Ah! well! When I got on the bridge at last the beggars were getting one of the boats off the chocks. A boat! I was running up the ladder when a heavy blow fell on my shoulder, just missing my head. It didn't stop me, and the chief engineer — they had got him out of his bunk by then — raised the boat-stretcher again. Somehow I had no mind to be surprised at anything. All this seemed natural — and awful — and awful. I dodged that miserable maniac, lifted him off the deck as though he had been a little child, and he started whispering in my arms: 'Don't! don't! I thought you were one of them niggers.' I flung him away, he skidded along the bridge and knocked the legs from under the little chap — the second. The skipper, busy about the boat, looked round and came at me head down, growling like a wild beast. I flinched no more than a stone. I was as solid standing there as this," he tapped lightly with his knuckles the wall beside his chair. "It was as though I had heard it all, seen it all, gone through it all twenty times already. I wasn't afraid of them. I drew back my fist and he stopped short, muttering —

"'Ah! it's you. Lend a hand quick.'

"That's what he said. Quick! As if anybody could be quick enough. 'Aren't you going to do something?' I asked. 'Yes. Clear out,' he snarled over his shoulder.

"I don't think I understood then what he meant. The other two had picked themselves up by that time, and they rushed together to the boat. They tramped, they wheezed, they shoved, they cursed the boat, the ship, each other — cursed me. All in mutters. I didn't move, I didn't speak. I

watched the slant of the ship. She was as still as if landed on the blocks in a dry dock — only she was like this,” He held up his hand, palm under, the tips of the fingers inclined downwards. “Like this,” he repeated. “I could see the line of the horizon before me, as clear as a bell, above her stem-head; I could see the water far off there black and sparkling, and still — still as a-pond, deadly still, more still than ever sea was before — more still than I could bear to look at. Have you watched a ship floating head down, checked in sinking by a sheet of old iron too rotten to stand being shored up? Have you? Oh yes, shored up? I thought of that — I thought of every mortal thing; but can you shore up a bulkhead in five minutes — or in fifty for that matter? Where was I going to get men that would go down below? And the timber — the timber! Would you have had the courage to swing the maul for the first blow if you had seen that bulkhead? Don’t say you would: you had not seen it; nobody would. Hang it — to do a thing like that you must believe there is a chance, one in a thousand, at least, some ghost of a chance; and you would not have believed. Nobody would have believed. You think me a cur for standing there, but what would you have done? What! You can’t tell — nobody can tell. One must have time to turn round. What would you have me do? Where was the kindness in making crazy with fright all those people I could not save single-handed — that nothing could save? Look here! As true as I sit on this chair before you . . .”

‘He drew quick breaths at every few words and shot quick glances at my face, as though in his anguish he were watchful of the effect. He was not speaking to me, he was only speaking before me, in a dispute with an invisible personality, an antagonistic and inseparable partner of his existence — another possessor of his soul. These were issues beyond the competency of a court of inquiry: it was a subtle and momentous quarrel as to the true essence of life, and did not want a judge. He wanted an ally, a helper, an accomplice. I felt the risk I ran of being circumvented, blinded, decoyed, bullied, perhaps, into taking a definite part in a dispute impossible of decision if one had to be fair to all the phantoms in possession — to the reputable that had its claims and to the disreputable that had its exigencies. I can’t explain to you who haven’t seen him and who hear his words only at second hand the mixed nature of my feelings. It seemed to me I was being made to comprehend the Inconceivable — and I know of nothing to compare with the discomfort of such a sensation. I was made to look at the convention that lurks in all truth and on the essential sincerity of falsehood.

He appealed to all sides at once — to the side turned perpetually to the light of day, and to that side of us which, like the other hemisphere of the moon, exists stealthily in perpetual darkness, with only a fearful ashy light falling at times on the edge. He swayed me. I own to it, I own up. The occasion was obscure, insignificant — what you will: a lost youngster, one in a million — but then he was one of us; an incident as completely devoid of importance as the flooding of an ant-heap, and yet the mystery of his attitude got hold of me as though he had been an individual in the forefront of his kind, as if the obscure truth involved were momentous enough to affect mankind's conception of itself. . . .'

Marlow paused to put new life into his expiring cheroot, seemed to forget all about the story, and abruptly began again.

'My fault of course. One has no business really to get interested. It's a weakness of mine. His was of another kind. My weakness consists in not having a discriminating eye for the incidental — for the externals — no eye for the hod of the rag-picker or the fine linen of the next man. Next man — that's it. I have met so many men,' he pursued, with momentary sadness — 'met them too with a certain — certain — impact, let us say; like this fellow, for instance — and in each case all I could see was merely the human being. A confounded democratic quality of vision which may be better than total blindness, but has been of no advantage to me, I can assure you. Men expect one to take into account their fine linen. But I never could get up any enthusiasm about these things. Oh! it's a failing; it's a failing; and then comes a soft evening; a lot of men too indolent for whist — and a story. . . .'

He paused again to wait for an encouraging remark, perhaps, but nobody spoke; only the host, as if reluctantly performing a duty, murmured —

'You are so subtle, Marlow.'

'Who? I?' said Marlow in a low voice. 'Oh no! But he was; and try as I may for the success of this yarn, I am missing innumerable shades — they were so fine, so difficult to render in colourless words. Because he complicated matters by being so simple, too — the simplest poor devil! . . . By Jove! he was amazing. There he sat telling me that just as I saw him before my eyes he wouldn't be afraid to face anything — and believing in it too. I tell you it was fabulously innocent and it was enormous, enormous! I watched him covertly, just as though I had suspected him of an intention to take a jolly good rise out of me. He was confident that, on the square, "on

the square, mind!" there was nothing he couldn't meet. Ever since he had been "so high" — "quite a little chap," he had been preparing himself for all the difficulties that can beset one on land and water. He confessed proudly to this kind of foresight. He had been elaborating dangers and defences, expecting the worst, rehearsing his best. He must have led a most exalted existence. Can you fancy it? A succession of adventures, so much glory, such a victorious progress! and the deep sense of his sagacity crowning every day of his inner life. He forgot himself; his eyes shone; and with every word my heart, searched by the light of his absurdity, was growing heavier in my breast. I had no mind to laugh, and lest I should smile I made for myself a stolid face. He gave signs of irritation.

"It is always the unexpected that happens," I said in a propitiatory tone. My obtuseness provoked him into a contemptuous "Pshaw!" I suppose he meant that the unexpected couldn't touch him; nothing less than the unconceivable itself could get over his perfect state of preparation. He had been taken unawares — and he whispered to himself a malediction upon the waters and the firmament, upon the ship, upon the men. Everything had betrayed him! He had been tricked into that sort of high-minded resignation which prevented him lifting as much as his little finger, while these others who had a very clear perception of the actual necessity were tumbling against each other and sweating desperately over that boat business. Something had gone wrong there at the last moment. It appears that in their flurry they had contrived in some mysterious way to get the sliding bolt of the foremost boat-chock jammed tight, and forthwith had gone out of the remnants of their minds over the deadly nature of that accident. It must have been a pretty sight, the fierce industry of these beggars toiling on a motionless ship that floated quietly in the silence of a world asleep, fighting against time for the freeing of that boat, grovelling on all-fours, standing up in despair, tugging, pushing, snarling at each other venomously, ready to kill, ready to weep, and only kept from flying at each other's throats by the fear of death that stood silent behind them like an inflexible and cold-eyed taskmaster. Oh yes! It must have been a pretty sight. He saw it all, he could talk about it with scorn and bitterness; he had a minute knowledge of it by means of some sixth sense, I conclude, because he swore to me he had remained apart without a glance at them and at the boat — without one single glance. And I believe him. I should think he was too busy watching the threatening slant of the ship, the suspended menace discovered in the

midst of the most perfect security — fascinated by the sword hanging by a hair over his imaginative head.

‘Nothing in the world moved before his eyes, and he could depict to himself without hindrance the sudden swing upwards of the dark sky-line, the sudden tilt up of the vast plain of the sea, the swift still rise, the brutal fling, the grasp of the abyss, the struggle without hope, the starlight closing over his head for ever like the vault of a tomb — the revolt of his young life — the black end. He could! By Jove! who couldn’t? And you must remember he was a finished artist in that peculiar way, he was a gifted poor devil with the faculty of swift and forestalling vision. The sights it showed him had turned him into cold stone from the soles of his feet to the nape of his neck; but there was a hot dance of thoughts in his head, a dance of lame, blind, mute thoughts — a whirl of awful cripples. Didn’t I tell you he confessed himself before me as though I had the power to bind and to loose? He burrowed deep, deep, in the hope of my absolution, which would have been of no good to him. This was one of those cases which no solemn deception can palliate, where no man can help; where his very Maker seems to abandon a sinner to his own devices.

‘He stood on the starboard side of the bridge, as far as he could get from the struggle for the boat, which went on with the agitation of madness and the stealthiness of a conspiracy. The two Malays had meantime remained holding to the wheel. Just picture to yourselves the actors in that, thank God! unique, episode of the sea, four beside themselves with fierce and secret exertions, and three looking on in complete immobility, above the awnings covering the profound ignorance of hundreds of human beings, with their weariness, with their dreams, with their hopes, arrested, held by an invisible hand on the brink of annihilation. For that they were so, makes no doubt to me: given the state of the ship, this was the deadliest possible description of accident that could happen. These beggars by the boat had every reason to go distracted with funk. Frankly, had I been there, I would not have given as much as a counterfeit farthing for the ship’s chance to keep above water to the end of each successive second. And still she floated! These sleeping pilgrims were destined to accomplish their whole pilgrimage to the bitterness of some other end. It was as if the Omnipotence whose mercy they confessed had needed their humble testimony on earth for a while longer, and had looked down to make a sign, “Thou shalt not!” to the ocean. Their escape would trouble me as a prodigiously inexplicable



event, did I not know how tough old iron can be — as tough sometimes as the spirit of some men we meet now and then, worn to a shadow and breasting the weight of life. Not the least wonder of these twenty minutes, to my mind, is the behaviour of the two helmsmen. They were amongst the native batch of all sorts brought over from Aden to give evidence at the inquiry. One of them, labouring under intense bashfulness, was very young, and with his smooth, yellow, cheery countenance looked even younger than he was. I remember perfectly Brierly asking him, through the interpreter, what he thought of it at the time, and the interpreter, after a short colloquy, turning to the court with an important air —

“He says he thought nothing.”

‘The other, with patient blinking eyes, a blue cotton handkerchief, faded with much washing, bound with a smart twist over a lot of grey wisps, his face shrunk into grim hollows, his brown skin made darker by a mesh of wrinkles, explained that he had a knowledge of some evil thing befalling the ship, but there had been no order; he could not remember an order; why should he leave the helm? To some further questions he jerked back his spare shoulders, and declared it never came into his mind then that the white men were about to leave the ship through fear of death. He did not believe it now. There might have been secret reasons. He wagged his old chin knowingly. Aha! secret reasons. He was a man of great experience, and he wanted that white Tuan to know — he turned towards Brierly, who didn’t raise his head — that he had acquired a knowledge of many things by serving white men on the sea for a great number of years — and, suddenly, with shaky excitement he poured upon our spellbound attention a lot of queer-sounding names, names of dead-and-gone skippers, names of forgotten country ships, names of familiar and distorted sound, as if the hand of dumb time had been at work on them for ages. They stopped him at last. A silence fell upon the court, — a silence that remained unbroken for at least a minute, and passed gently into a deep murmur. This episode was the sensation of the second day’s proceedings — affecting all the audience, affecting everybody except Jim, who was sitting moodily at the end of the first bench, and never looked up at this extraordinary and damning witness that seemed possessed of some mysterious theory of defence.

‘So these two lascars stuck to the helm of that ship without steerage-way, where death would have found them if such had been their destiny. The whites did not give them half a glance, had probably forgotten their

existence. Assuredly Jim did not remember it. He remembered he could do nothing; he could do nothing, now he was alone. There was nothing to do but to sink with the ship. No use making a disturbance about it. Was there? He waited upstanding, without a sound, stiffened in the idea of some sort of heroic discretion. The first engineer ran cautiously across the bridge to tug at his sleeve.

“Come and help! For God’s sake, come and help!”

‘He ran back to the boat on the points of his toes, and returned directly to worry at his sleeve, begging and cursing at the same time.

“I believe he would have kissed my hands,” said Jim savagely, “and, next moment, he starts foaming and whispering in my face, ‘If I had the time I would like to crack your skull for you.’ I pushed him away. Suddenly he caught hold of me round the neck. Damn him! I hit him. I hit out without looking. ‘Won’t you save your own life — you infernal coward?’ he sobs. Coward! He called me an infernal coward! Ha! ha! ha! ha! He called me — ha! ha! ha! . . .”

‘He had thrown himself back and was shaking with laughter. I had never in my life heard anything so bitter as that noise. It fell like a blight on all the merriment about donkeys, pyramids, bazaars, or what not. Along the whole dim length of the gallery the voices dropped, the pale blotches of faces turned our way with one accord, and the silence became so profound that the clear tinkle of a teaspoon falling on the tessellated floor of the verandah rang out like a tiny and silvery scream.

“You mustn’t laugh like this, with all these people about,” I remonstrated. “It isn’t nice for them, you know.”

‘He gave no sign of having heard at first, but after a while, with a stare that, missing me altogether, seemed to probe the heart of some awful vision, he muttered carelessly — “Oh! they’ll think I am drunk.”

‘And after that you would have thought from his appearance he would never make a sound again. But — no fear! He could no more stop telling now than he could have stopped living by the mere exertion of his will.’

## CHAPTER 9

“I was saying to myself, ‘Sink — curse you! Sink!’” These were the words with which he began again. He wanted it over. He was severely left alone, and he formulated in his head this address to the ship in a tone of imprecation, while at the same time he enjoyed the privilege of witnessing scenes — as far as I can judge — of low comedy. They were still at that bolt. The skipper was ordering, “Get under and try to lift”; and the others naturally shirked. You understand that to be squeezed flat under the keel of a boat wasn’t a desirable position to be caught in if the ship went down suddenly. “Why don’t you — you the strongest?” whined the little engineer. “Gott-for-dam! I am too thick,” spluttered the skipper in despair. It was funny enough to make angels weep. They stood idle for a moment, and suddenly the chief engineer rushed again at Jim.

“Come and help, man! Are you mad to throw your only chance away? Come and help, man! Man! Look there — look!”

‘And at last Jim looked astern where the other pointed with maniacal insistence. He saw a silent black squall which had eaten up already one-third of the sky. You know how these squalls come up there about that time of the year. First you see a darkening of the horizon — no more; then a cloud rises opaque like a wall. A straight edge of vapour lined with sickly whitish gleams flies up from the southwest, swallowing the stars in whole constellations; its shadow flies over the waters, and confounds sea and sky into one abyss of obscurity. And all is still. No thunder, no wind, no sound; not a flicker of lightning. Then in the tenebrous immensity a livid arch appears; a swell or two like undulations of the very darkness run past, and suddenly, wind and rain strike together with a peculiar impetuosity as if they had burst through something solid. Such a cloud had come up while they weren’t looking. They had just noticed it, and were perfectly justified in surmising that if in absolute stillness there was some chance for the ship to keep afloat a few minutes longer, the least disturbance of the sea would make an end of her instantly. Her first nod to the swell that precedes the burst of such a squall would be also her last, would become a plunge, would, so to speak, be prolonged into a long dive, down, down to the bottom. Hence these new capers of their fright, these new antics in which they displayed their extreme aversion to die.

“It was black, black,” pursued Jim with moody steadiness. “It had sneaked upon us from behind. The infernal thing! I suppose there had been at the back of my head some hope yet. I don’t know. But that was all over anyhow. It maddened me to see myself caught like this. I was angry, as though I had been trapped. I was trapped! The night was hot, too, I remember. Not a breath of air.”

‘He remembered so well that, gasping in the chair, he seemed to sweat and choke before my eyes. No doubt it maddened him; it knocked him over afresh — in a manner of speaking — but it made him also remember that important purpose which had sent him rushing on that bridge only to slip clean out of his mind. He had intended to cut the lifeboats clear of the ship. He whipped out his knife and went to work slashing as though he had seen nothing, had heard nothing, had known of no one on board. They thought him hopelessly wrong-headed and crazy, but dared not protest noisily against this useless loss of time. When he had done he returned to the very same spot from which he had started. The chief was there, ready with a clutch at him to whisper close to his head, scathingly, as though he wanted to bite his ear —

““You silly fool! do you think you’ll get the ghost of a show when all that lot of brutes is in the water? Why, they will batter your head for you from these boats.”

‘He wrung his hands, ignored, at Jim’s elbow. The skipper kept up a nervous shuffle in one place and mumbled, “Hammer! hammer! Mein Gott! Get a hammer.”

‘The little engineer whimpered like a child, but, broken arm and all, he turned out the least craven of the lot as it seems, and, actually, mustered enough pluck to run an errand to the engine-room. No trifle, it must be owned in fairness to him. Jim told me he darted desperate looks like a cornered man, gave one low wail, and dashed off. He was back instantly clambering, hammer in hand, and without a pause flung himself at the bolt. The others gave up Jim at once and ran off to assist. He heard the tap, tap of the hammer, the sound of the released chock falling over. The boat was clear. Only then he turned to look — only then. But he kept his distance — he kept his distance. He wanted me to know he had kept his distance; that there was nothing in common between him and these men — who had the hammer. Nothing whatever. It is more than probable he thought himself cut off from them by a space that could not be traversed, by an obstacle that

could not be overcome, by a chasm without bottom. He was as far as he could get from them — the whole breadth of the ship.

‘His feet were glued to that remote spot and his eyes to their indistinct group bowed together and swaying strangely in the common torment of fear. A hand-lamp lashed to a stanchion above a little table rigged up on the bridge — the Patna had no chart-room amidships — threw a light on their labouring shoulders, on their arched and bobbing backs. They pushed at the bow of the boat; they pushed out into the night; they pushed, and would no more look back at him. They had given him up as if indeed he had been too far, too hopelessly separated from themselves, to be worth an appealing word, a glance, or a sign. They had no leisure to look back upon his passive heroism, to feel the sting of his abstention. The boat was heavy; they pushed at the bow with no breath to spare for an encouraging word: but the turmoil of terror that had scattered their self-command like chaff before the wind, converted their desperate exertions into a bit of fooling, upon my word, fit for knockabout clowns in a farce. They pushed with their hands, with their heads, they pushed for dear life with all the weight of their bodies, they pushed with all the might of their souls — only no sooner had they succeeded in canting the stem clear of the davit than they would leave off like one man and start a wild scramble into her. As a natural consequence the boat would swing in abruptly, driving them back, helpless and jostling against each other. They would stand nonplussed for a while, exchanging in fierce whispers all the infamous names they could call to mind, and go at it again. Three times this occurred. He described it to me with morose thoughtfulness. He hadn’t lost a single movement of that comic business. “I loathed them. I hated them. I had to look at all that,” he said without emphasis, turning upon me a sombrely watchful glance. “Was ever there any one so shamefully tried?”

‘He took his head in his hands for a moment, like a man driven to distraction by some unspeakable outrage. These were things he could not explain to the court — and not even to me; but I would have been little fitted for the reception of his confidences had I not been able at times to understand the pauses between the words. In this assault upon his fortitude there was the jeering intention of a spiteful and vile vengeance; there was an element of burlesque in his ordeal — a degradation of funny grimaces in the approach of death or dishonour.

‘He related facts which I have not forgotten, but at this distance of time I couldn’t recall his very words: I only remember that he managed wonderfully to convey the brooding rancour of his mind into the bare recital of events. Twice, he told me, he shut his eyes in the certitude that the end was upon him already, and twice he had to open them again. Each time he noted the darkening of the great stillness. The shadow of the silent cloud had fallen upon the ship from the zenith, and seemed to have extinguished every sound of her teeming life. He could no longer hear the voices under the awnings. He told me that each time he closed his eyes a flash of thought showed him that crowd of bodies, laid out for death, as plain as daylight. When he opened them, it was to see the dim struggle of four men fighting like mad with a stubborn boat. “They would fall back before it time after time, stand swearing at each other, and suddenly make another rush in a bunch. . . . Enough to make you die laughing,” he commented with downcast eyes; then raising them for a moment to my face with a dismal smile, “I ought to have a merry life of it, by God! for I shall see that funny sight a good many times yet before I die.” His eyes fell again. “See and hear. . . . See and hear,” he repeated twice, at long intervals, filled by vacant staring.

‘He roused himself.

“‘I made up my mind to keep my eyes shut,” he said, “and I couldn’t. I couldn’t, and I don’t care who knows it. Let them go through that kind of thing before they talk. Just let them — and do better — that’s all. The second time my eyelids flew open and my mouth too. I had felt the ship move. She just dipped her bows — and lifted them gently — and slow! everlastingly slow; and ever so little. She hadn’t done that much for days. The cloud had raced ahead, and this first swell seemed to travel upon a sea of lead. There was no life in that stir. It managed, though, to knock over something in my head. What would you have done? You are sure of yourself — aren’t you? What would you do if you felt now — this minute — the house here move, just move a little under your chair. Leap! By heavens! you would take one spring from where you sit and land in that clump of bushes yonder.”

‘He flung his arm out at the night beyond the stone balustrade. I held my peace. He looked at me very steadily, very severe. There could be no mistake: I was being bullied now, and it behoved me to make no sign lest by a gesture or a word I should be drawn into a fatal admission about

myself which would have had some bearing on the case. I was not disposed to take any risk of that sort. Don't forget I had him before me, and really he was too much like one of us not to be dangerous. But if you want to know I don't mind telling you that I did, with a rapid glance, estimate the distance to the mass of denser blackness in the middle of the grass-plot before the verandah. He exaggerated. I would have landed short by several feet — and that's the only thing of which I am fairly certain.

'The last moment had come, as he thought, and he did not move. His feet remained glued to the planks if his thoughts were knocking about loose in his head. It was at this moment too that he saw one of the men around the boat step backwards suddenly, clutch at the air with raised arms, totter and collapse. He didn't exactly fall, he only slid gently into a sitting posture, all hunched up, and with his shoulders propped against the side of the engine-room skylight. "That was the donkey-man. A haggard, white-faced chap with a ragged moustache. Acted third engineer," he explained.

"Dead," I said. We had heard something of that in court.

"So they say," he pronounced with sombre indifference. "Of course I never knew. Weak heart. The man had been complaining of being out of sorts for some time before. Excitement. Over-exertion. Devil only knows. Ha! ha! ha! It was easy to see he did not want to die either. Droll, isn't it? May I be shot if he hadn't been fooled into killing himself! Fooled — neither more nor less. Fooled into it, by heavens! just as I . . . Ah! If he had only kept still; if he had only told them to go to the devil when they came to rush him out of his bunk because the ship was sinking! If he had only stood by with his hands in his pockets and called them names!"

'He got up, shook his fist, glared at me, and sat down.

"A chance missed, eh?" I murmured.

"Why don't you laugh?" he said. "A joke hatched in hell. Weak heart! . . . I wish sometimes mine had been."

'This irritated me. "Do you?" I exclaimed with deep-rooted irony. "Yes! Can't you understand?" he cried. "I don't know what more you could wish for," I said angrily. He gave me an utterly uncomprehending glance. This shaft had also gone wide of the mark, and he was not the man to bother about stray arrows. Upon my word, he was too unsuspecting; he was not fair game. I was glad that my missile had been thrown away, — that he had not even heard the twang of the bow.

‘Of course he could not know at the time the man was dead. The next minute — his last on board — was crowded with a tumult of events and sensations which beat about him like the sea upon a rock. I use the simile advisedly, because from his relation I am forced to believe he had preserved through it all a strange illusion of passiveness, as though he had not acted but had suffered himself to be handled by the infernal powers who had selected him for the victim of their practical joke. The first thing that came to him was the grinding surge of the heavy davits swinging out at last — a jar which seemed to enter his body from the deck through the soles of his feet, and travel up his spine to the crown of his head. Then, the squall being very near now, another and a heavier swell lifted the passive hull in a threatening heave that checked his breath, while his brain and his heart together were pierced as with daggers by panic-stricken screams. “Let go! For God’s sake, let go! Let go! She’s going.” Following upon that the boat-falls ripped through the blocks, and a lot of men began to talk in startled tones under the awnings. “When these beggars did break out, their yelps were enough to wake the dead,” he said. Next, after the splashing shock of the boat literally dropped in the water, came the hollow noises of stamping and tumbling in her, mingled with confused shouts: “Unhook! Unhook! Shove! Unhook! Shove for your life! Here’s the squall down on us. . . .” He heard, high above his head, the faint muttering of the wind; he heard below his feet a cry of pain. A lost voice alongside started cursing a swivel hook. The ship began to buzz fore and aft like a disturbed hive, and, as quietly as he was telling me of all this — because just then he was very quiet in attitude, in face, in voice — he went on to say without the slightest warning as it were, “I stumbled over his legs.”

‘This was the first I heard of his having moved at all. I could not restrain a grunt of surprise. Something had started him off at last, but of the exact moment, of the cause that tore him out of his immobility, he knew no more than the uprooted tree knows of the wind that laid it low. All this had come to him: the sounds, the sights, the legs of the dead man — by Jove! The infernal joke was being crammed devilishly down his throat, but — look you — he was not going to admit of any sort of swallowing motion in his gullet. It’s extraordinary how he could cast upon you the spirit of his illusion. I listened as if to a tale of black magic at work upon a corpse.

““He went over sideways, very gently, and this is the last thing I remember seeing on board,” he continued. “I did not care what he did. It



looked as though he were picking himself up: I thought he was picking himself up, of course: I expected him to bolt past me over the rail and drop into the boat after the others. I could hear them knocking about down there, and a voice as if crying up a shaft called out 'George!' Then three voices together raised a yell. They came to me separately: one bleated, another screamed, one howled. Ough!"

'He shivered a little, and I beheld him rise slowly as if a steady hand from above had been pulling him out of the chair by his hair. Up, slowly — to his full height, and when his knees had locked stiff the hand let him go, and he swayed a little on his feet. There was a suggestion of awful stillness in his face, in his movements, in his very voice when he said "They shouted" — and involuntarily I pricked up my ears for the ghost of that shout that would be heard directly through the false effect of silence. "There were eight hundred people in that ship," he said, impaling me to the back of my seat with an awful blank stare. "Eight hundred living people, and they were yelling after the one dead man to come down and be saved. 'Jump, George! Jump! Oh, jump!' I stood by with my hand on the davit. I was very quiet. It had come over pitch dark. You could see neither sky nor sea. I heard the boat alongside go bump, bump, and not another sound down there for a while, but the ship under me was full of talking noises. Suddenly the skipper howled 'Mein Gott! The squall! The squall! Shove off!' With the first hiss of rain, and the first gust of wind, they screamed, 'Jump, George! We'll catch you! Jump!' The ship began a slow plunge; the rain swept over her like a broken sea; my cap flew off my head; my breath was driven back into my throat. I heard as if I had been on the top of a tower another wild screech, 'Geo-o-o-orge! Oh, jump!' She was going down, down, head first under me. . . ."

'He raised his hand deliberately to his face, and made picking motions with his fingers as though he had been bothered with cobwebs, and afterwards he looked into the open palm for quite half a second before he blurted out —

"“I had jumped . . .” He checked himself, averted his gaze. . . . “It seems,” he added.

'His clear blue eyes turned to me with a piteous stare, and looking at him standing before me, dumfounded and hurt, I was oppressed by a sad sense of resigned wisdom, mingled with the amused and profound pity of an old man helpless before a childish disaster.

““Looks like it,” I muttered.

““I knew nothing about it till I looked up,” he explained hastily. And that’s possible, too. You had to listen to him as you would to a small boy in trouble. He didn’t know. It had happened somehow. It would never happen again. He had landed partly on somebody and fallen across a thwart. He felt as though all his ribs on his left side must be broken; then he rolled over, and saw vaguely the ship he had deserted uprising above him, with the red side-light glowing large in the rain like a fire on the brow of a hill seen through a mist. “She seemed higher than a wall; she loomed like a cliff over the boat . . . I wished I could die,” he cried. “There was no going back. It was as if I had jumped into a well — into an everlasting deep hole. . . .”“

## CHAPTER 10

‘He locked his fingers together and tore them apart. Nothing could be more true: he had indeed jumped into an everlasting deep hole. He had tumbled from a height he could never scale again. By that time the boat had gone driving forward past the bows. It was too dark just then for them to see each other, and, moreover, they were blinded and half drowned with rain. He told me it was like being swept by a flood through a cavern. They turned their backs to the squall; the skipper, it seems, got an oar over the stern to keep the boat before it, and for two or three minutes the end of the world had come through a deluge in a pitchy blackness. The sea hissed “like twenty thousand kettles.” That’s his simile, not mine. I fancy there was not much wind after the first gust; and he himself had admitted at the inquiry that the sea never got up that night to any extent. He crouched down in the bows and stole a furtive glance back. He saw just one yellow gleam of the mast-head light high up and blurred like a last star ready to dissolve. “It terrified me to see it still there,” he said. That’s what he said. What terrified him was the thought that the drowning was not over yet. No doubt he wanted to be done with that abomination as quickly as possible. Nobody in the boat made a sound. In the dark she seemed to fly, but of course she could not have had much way. Then the shower swept ahead, and the great, distracting, hissing noise followed the rain into distance and died out. There was nothing to be heard then but the slight wash about the boat’s sides. Somebody’s teeth were chattering violently. A hand touched his back. A faint voice said, “You there?” Another cried out shakily, “She’s gone!” and they all stood up together to look astern. They saw no lights. All was black. A thin cold drizzle was driving into their faces. The boat lurched slightly. The teeth chattered faster, stopped, and began again twice before the man could master his shiver sufficiently to say, “Ju-ju-st in ti-ti-me. . . . Brrrr.” He recognised the voice of the chief engineer saying surlily, “I saw her go down. I happened to turn my head.” The wind had dropped almost completely.

‘They watched in the dark with their heads half turned to windward as if expecting to hear cries. At first he was thankful the night had covered up the scene before his eyes, and then to know of it and yet to have seen and heard nothing appeared somehow the culminating point of an awful

misfortune. "Strange, isn't it?" he murmured, interrupting himself in his disjointed narrative.

'It did not seem so strange to me. He must have had an unconscious conviction that the reality could not be half as bad, not half as anguishing, appalling, and vengeful as the created terror of his imagination. I believe that, in this first moment, his heart was wrung with all the suffering, that his soul knew the accumulated savour of all the fear, all the horror, all the despair of eight hundred human beings pounced upon in the night by a sudden and violent death, else why should he have said, "It seemed to me that I must jump out of that accursed boat and swim back to see — half a mile — more — any distance — to the very spot . . ."? Why this impulse? Do you see the significance? Why back to the very spot? Why not drown alongside — if he meant drowning? Why back to the very spot, to see — as if his imagination had to be soothed by the assurance that all was over before death could bring relief? I defy any one of you to offer another explanation. It was one of those bizarre and exciting glimpses through the fog. It was an extraordinary disclosure. He let it out as the most natural thing one could say. He fought down that impulse and then he became conscious of the silence. He mentioned this to me. A silence of the sea, of the sky, merged into one indefinite immensity still as death around these saved, palpitating lives. "You might have heard a pin drop in the boat," he said with a queer contraction of his lips, like a man trying to master his sensibilities while relating some extremely moving fact. A silence! God alone, who had willed him as he was, knows what he made of it in his heart. "I didn't think any spot on earth could be so still," he said. "You couldn't distinguish the sea from the sky; there was nothing to see and nothing to hear. Not a glimmer, not a shape, not a sound. You could have believed that every bit of dry land had gone to the bottom; that every man on earth but I and these beggars in the boat had got drowned." He leaned over the table with his knuckles propped amongst coffee-cups, liqueur-glasses, cigar-ends. "I seemed to believe it. Everything was gone and — all was over . . ." he fetched a deep sigh . . . "with me."

Marlow sat up abruptly and flung away his cheroot with force. It made a darting red trail like a toy rocket fired through the drapery of creepers. Nobody stirred.

'Hey, what do you think of it?' he cried with sudden animation. 'Wasn't he true to himself, wasn't he? His saved life was over for want of ground

under his feet, for want of sights for his eyes, for want of voices in his ears. Annihilation — hey! And all the time it was only a clouded sky, a sea that did not break, the air that did not stir. Only a night; only a silence.

‘It lasted for a while, and then they were suddenly and unanimously moved to make a noise over their escape. “I knew from the first she would go.” “Not a minute too soon.” “A narrow squeak, b’gosh!” He said nothing, but the breeze that had dropped came back, a gentle draught freshened steadily, and the sea joined its murmuring voice to this talkative reaction succeeding the dumb moments of awe. She was gone! She was gone! Not a doubt of it. Nobody could have helped. They repeated the same words over and over again as though they couldn’t stop themselves. Never doubted she would go. The lights were gone. No mistake. The lights were gone. Couldn’t expect anything else. She had to go. . . . He noticed that they talked as though they had left behind them nothing but an empty ship. They concluded she would not have been long when she once started. It seemed to cause them some sort of satisfaction. They assured each other that she couldn’t have been long about it — “Just shot down like a flat-iron.” The chief engineer declared that the mast-head light at the moment of sinking seemed to drop “like a lighted match you throw down.” At this the second laughed hysterically. “I am g-g-glad, I am gla-a-a-d.” His teeth went on “like an electric rattle,” said Jim, “and all at once he began to cry. He wept and blubbered like a child, catching his breath and sobbing ‘Oh dear! oh dear! oh dear!’ He would be quiet for a while and start suddenly, ‘Oh, my poor arm! oh, my poor a-a-a-arm!’ I felt I could knock him down. Some of them sat in the stern-sheets. I could just make out their shapes. Voices came to me, mumble, mumble, grunt, grunt. All this seemed very hard to bear. I was cold too. And I could do nothing. I thought that if I moved I would have to go over the side and . . .”

‘His hand groped stealthily, came in contact with a liqueur-glass, and was withdrawn suddenly as if it had touched a red-hot coal. I pushed the bottle slightly. “Won’t you have some more?” I asked. He looked at me angrily. “Don’t you think I can tell you what there is to tell without screwing myself up?” he asked. The squad of globe-trotters had gone to bed. We were alone but for a vague white form erect in the shadow, that, being looked at, cringed forward, hesitated, backed away silently. It was getting late, but I did not hurry my guest.

‘In the midst of his forlorn state he heard his companions begin to abuse some one. “What kept you from jumping, you lunatic?” said a scolding voice. The chief engineer left the stern-sheets, and could be heard clambering forward as if with hostile intentions against “the greatest idiot that ever was.” The skipper shouted with rasping effort offensive epithets from where he sat at the oar. He lifted his head at that uproar, and heard the name “George,” while a hand in the dark struck him on the breast. “What have you got to say for yourself, you fool?” queried somebody, with a sort of virtuous fury. “They were after me,” he said. “They were abusing me — abusing me . . . by the name of George.”

‘He paused to stare, tried to smile, turned his eyes away and went on. “That little second puts his head right under my nose, ‘Why, it’s that blasted mate!’ ‘What!’ howls the skipper from the other end of the boat. ‘No!’ shrieks the chief. And he too stooped to look at my face.”

‘The wind had left the boat suddenly. The rain began to fall again, and the soft, uninterrupted, a little mysterious sound with which the sea receives a shower arose on all sides in the night. “They were too taken aback to say anything more at first,” he narrated steadily, “and what could I have to say to them?” He faltered for a moment, and made an effort to go on. “They called me horrible names.” His voice, sinking to a whisper, now and then would leap up suddenly, hardened by the passion of scorn, as though he had been talking of secret abominations. “Never mind what they called me,” he said grimly. “I could hear hate in their voices. A good thing too. They could not forgive me for being in that boat. They hated it. It made them mad. . . .” He laughed short. . . . “But it kept me from — Look! I was sitting with my arms crossed, on the gunwale! . . .” He perched himself smartly on the edge of the table and crossed his arms. . . . “Like this — see? One little tilt backwards and I would have been gone — after the others. One little tilt — the least bit — the least bit.” He frowned, and tapping his forehead with the tip of his middle finger, “It was there all the time,” he said impressively. “All the time — that notion. And the rain — cold, thick, cold as melted snow — colder — on my thin cotton clothes — I’ll never be so cold again in my life, I know. And the sky was black too — all black. Not a star, not a light anywhere. Nothing outside that confounded boat and those two yapping before me like a couple of mean mongrels at a tree’d thief. Yap! yap! ‘What you doing here? You’re a fine sort! Too much of a bloomin’ gentleman to put your hand to it. Come out of your trance, did you? To

sneak in? Did you?’ Yap! yap! ‘You ain’t fit to live!’ Yap! yap! Two of them together trying to out-bark each other. The other would bay from the stern through the rain — couldn’t see him — couldn’t make it out — some of his filthy jargon. Yap! yap! Bow-ow-ow-ow-ow! Yap! yap! It was sweet to hear them; it kept me alive, I tell you. It saved my life. At it they went, as if trying to drive me overboard with the noise! . . . ‘I wonder you had pluck enough to jump. You ain’t wanted here. If I had known who it was, I would have tipped you over — you skunk! What have you done with the other? Where did you get the pluck to jump — you coward? What’s to prevent us three from firing you overboard?’ . . . They were out of breath; the shower passed away upon the sea. Then nothing. There was nothing round the boat, not even a sound. Wanted to see me overboard, did they? Upon my soul! I think they would have had their wish if they had only kept quiet. Fire me overboard! Would they? ‘Try,’ I said. ‘I would for twopence.’ ‘Too good for you,’ they screeched together. It was so dark that it was only when one or the other of them moved that I was quite sure of seeing him. By heavens! I only wish they had tried.”

‘I couldn’t help exclaiming, “What an extraordinary affair!”

““Not bad — eh?” he said, as if in some sort astounded. “They pretended to think I had done away with that donkey-man for some reason or other. Why should I? And how the devil was I to know? Didn’t I get somehow into that boat? into that boat — I . . .” The muscles round his lips contracted into an unconscious grimace that tore through the mask of his usual expression — something violent, short-lived and illuminating like a twist of lightning that admits the eye for an instant into the secret convolutions of a cloud. “I did. I was plainly there with them — wasn’t I? Isn’t it awful a man should be driven to do a thing like that — and be responsible? What did I know about their George they were howling after? I remembered I had seen him curled up on the deck. ‘Murdering coward!’ the chief kept on calling me. He didn’t seem able to remember any other two words. I didn’t care, only his noise began to worry me. ‘Shut up,’ I said. At that he collected himself for a confounded screech. ‘You killed him! You killed him!’ ‘No,’ I shouted, ‘but I will kill you directly.’ I jumped up, and he fell backwards over a thwart with an awful loud thump. I don’t know why. Too dark. Tried to step back I suppose. I stood still facing aft, and the wretched little second began to whine, ‘You ain’t going to hit a chap with a broken arm — and you call yourself a gentleman, too.’ I heard a heavy tramp — one — two —

and wheezy grunting. The other beast was coming at me, clattering his oar over the stern. I saw him moving, big, big — as you see a man in a mist, in a dream. ‘Come on,’ I cried. I would have tumbled him over like a bale of shakings. He stopped, muttered to himself, and went back. Perhaps he had heard the wind. I didn’t. It was the last heavy gust we had. He went back to his oar. I was sorry. I would have tried to — to . . .”

‘He opened and closed his curved fingers, and his hands had an eager and cruel flutter. “Steady, steady,” I murmured.

“‘Eh? What? I am not excited,” he remonstrated, awfully hurt, and with a convulsive jerk of his elbow knocked over the cognac bottle. I started forward, scraping my chair. He bounced off the table as if a mine had been exploded behind his back, and half turned before he alighted, crouching on his feet to show me a startled pair of eyes and a face white about the nostrils. A look of intense annoyance succeeded. “Awfully sorry. How clumsy of me!” he mumbled, very vexed, while the pungent odour of spilt alcohol enveloped us suddenly with an atmosphere of a low drinking-bout in the cool, pure darkness of the night. The lights had been put out in the dining-hall; our candle glimmered solitary in the long gallery, and the columns had turned black from pediment to capital. On the vivid stars the high corner of the Harbour Office stood out distinct across the Esplanade, as though the sombre pile had glided nearer to see and hear.

‘He assumed an air of indifference.

“‘I dare say I am less calm now than I was then. I was ready for anything. These were trifles. . . .”

“‘You had a lively time of it in that boat,” I remarked

“‘I was ready,” he repeated. “After the ship’s lights had gone, anything might have happened in that boat — anything in the world — and the world no wiser. I felt this, and I was pleased. It was just dark enough too. We were like men walled up quick in a roomy grave. No concern with anything on earth. Nobody to pass an opinion. Nothing mattered.” For the third time during this conversation he laughed harshly, but there was no one about to suspect him of being only drunk. “No fear, no law, no sounds, no eyes — not even our own, till — till sunrise at least.”

‘I was struck by the suggestive truth of his words. There is something peculiar in a small boat upon the wide sea. Over the lives borne from under the shadow of death there seems to fall the shadow of madness. When your ship fails you, your whole world seems to fail you; the world that made



you, restrained you, took care of you. It is as if the souls of men floating on an abyss and in touch with immensity had been set free for any excess of heroism, absurdity, or abomination. Of course, as with belief, thought, love, hate, conviction, or even the visual aspect of material things, there are as many shipwrecks as there are men, and in this one there was something abject which made the isolation more complete — there was a villainy of circumstances that cut these men off more completely from the rest of mankind, whose ideal of conduct had never undergone the trial of a fiendish and appalling joke. They were exasperated with him for being a half-hearted shirker: he focussed on them his hatred of the whole thing; he would have liked to take a signal revenge for the abhorrent opportunity they had put in his way. Trust a boat on the high seas to bring out the Irrational that lurks at the bottom of every thought, sentiment, sensation, emotion. It was part of the burlesque meanness pervading that particular disaster at sea that they did not come to blows. It was all threats, all a terribly effective feint, a sham from beginning to end, planned by the tremendous disdain of the Dark Powers whose real terrors, always on the verge of triumph, are perpetually foiled by the steadfastness of men. I asked, after waiting for a while, “Well, what happened?” A futile question. I knew too much already to hope for the grace of a single uplifting touch, for the favour of hinted madness, of shadowed horror. “Nothing,” he said. “I meant business, but they meant noise only. Nothing happened.”

‘And the rising sun found him just as he had jumped up first in the bows of the boat. What a persistence of readiness! He had been holding the tiller in his hand, too, all the night. They had dropped the rudder overboard while attempting to ship it, and I suppose the tiller got kicked forward somehow while they were rushing up and down that boat trying to do all sorts of things at once so as to get clear of the side. It was a long heavy piece of hard wood, and apparently he had been clutching it for six hours or so. If you don’t call that being ready! Can you imagine him, silent and on his feet half the night, his face to the gusts of rain, staring at sombre forms watchful of vague movements, straining his ears to catch rare low murmurs in the stern-sheets! Firmness of courage or effort of fear? What do you think? And the endurance is undeniable too. Six hours more or less on the defensive; six hours of alert immobility while the boat drove slowly or floated arrested, according to the caprice of the wind; while the sea, calmed, slept at last; while the clouds passed above his head; while the sky from an

immensity lustreless and black, diminished to a sombre and lustrous vault, scintillated with a greater brilliance, faded to the east, paled at the zenith; while the dark shapes blotting the low stars astern got outlines, relief became shoulders, heads, faces, features, — confronted him with dreary stares, had dishevelled hair, torn clothes, blinked red eyelids at the white dawn. “They looked as though they had been knocking about drunk in gutters for a week,” he described graphically; and then he muttered something about the sunrise being of a kind that foretells a calm day. You know that sailor habit of referring to the weather in every connection. And on my side his few mumbled words were enough to make me see the lower limb of the sun clearing the line of the horizon, the tremble of a vast ripple running over all the visible expanse of the sea, as if the waters had shuddered, giving birth to the globe of light, while the last puff of the breeze would stir the air in a sigh of relief.

“They sat in the stern shoulder to shoulder, with the skipper in the middle, like three dirty owls, and stared at me,” I heard him say with an intention of hate that distilled a corrosive virtue into the commonplace words like a drop of powerful poison falling into a glass of water; but my thoughts dwelt upon that sunrise. I could imagine under the pellucid emptiness of the sky these four men imprisoned in the solitude of the sea, the lonely sun, regardless of the speck of life, ascending the clear curve of the heaven as if to gaze ardently from a greater height at his own splendour reflected in the still ocean. “They called out to me from aft,” said Jim, “as though we had been chums together. I heard them. They were begging me to be sensible and drop that ‘blooming piece of wood.’ Why would I carry on so? They hadn’t done me any harm — had they? There had been no harm. . . . No harm!”

‘His face crimsoned as though he could not get rid of the air in his lungs.

“No harm!” he burst out. “I leave it to you. You can understand. Can’t you? You see it — don’t you? No harm! Good God! What more could they have done? Oh yes, I know very well — I jumped. Certainly. I jumped! I told you I jumped; but I tell you they were too much for any man. It was their doing as plainly as if they had reached up with a boat-hook and pulled me over. Can’t you see it? You must see it. Come. Speak — straight out.”

‘His uneasy eyes fastened upon mine, questioned, begged, challenged, entreated. For the life of me I couldn’t help murmuring, “You’ve been tried.” “More than is fair,” he caught up swiftly. “I wasn’t given half a

chance — with a gang like that. And now they were friendly — oh, so damnably friendly! Chums, shipmates. All in the same boat. Make the best of it. They hadn't meant anything. They didn't care a hang for George. George had gone back to his berth for something at the last moment and got caught. The man was a manifest fool. Very sad, of course. . . . Their eyes looked at me; their lips moved; they wagged their heads at the other end of the boat — three of them; they beckoned — to me. Why not? Hadn't I jumped? I said nothing. There are no words for the sort of things I wanted to say. If I had opened my lips just then I would have simply howled like an animal. I was asking myself when I would wake up. They urged me aloud to come aft and hear quietly what the skipper had to say. We were sure to be picked up before the evening — right in the track of all the Canal traffic; there was smoke to the north-west now.

“It gave me an awful shock to see this faint, faint blur, this low trail of brown mist through which you could see the boundary of sea and sky. I called out to them that I could hear very well where I was. The skipper started swearing, as hoarse as a crow. He wasn't going to talk at the top of his voice for my accommodation. ‘Are you afraid they will hear you on shore?’ I asked. He glared as if he would have liked to claw me to pieces. The chief engineer advised him to humour me. He said I wasn't right in my head yet. The other rose astern, like a thick pillar of flesh — and talked — talked. . . .”

‘Jim remained thoughtful. “Well?” I said. “What did I care what story they agreed to make up?” he cried recklessly. “They could tell what they jolly well liked. It was their business. I knew the story. Nothing they could make people believe could alter it for me. I let him talk, argue — talk, argue. He went on and on and on. Suddenly I felt my legs give way under me. I was sick, tired — tired to death. I let fall the tiller, turned my back on them, and sat down on the foremost thwart. I had enough. They called to me to know if I understood — wasn't it true, every word of it? It was true, by God! after their fashion. I did not turn my head. I heard them palavering together. ‘The silly ass won't say anything.’ ‘Oh, he understands well enough.’ ‘Let him be; he will be all right.’ ‘What can he do?’ What could I do? Weren't we all in the same boat? I tried to be deaf. The smoke had disappeared to the northward. It was a dead calm. They had a drink from the water-breaker, and I drank too. Afterwards they made a great business of spreading the boat-sail over the gunwales. Would I keep a look-out?

They crept under, out of my sight, thank God! I felt weary, weary, done up, as if I hadn't had one hour's sleep since the day I was born. I couldn't see the water for the glitter of the sunshine. From time to time one of them would creep out, stand up to take a look all round, and get under again. I could hear spells of snoring below the sail. Some of them could sleep. One of them at least. I couldn't! All was light, light, and the boat seemed to be falling through it. Now and then I would feel quite surprised to find myself sitting on a thwart. . . ."

'He began to walk with measured steps to and fro before my chair, one hand in his trousers-pocket, his head bent thoughtfully, and his right arm at long intervals raised for a gesture that seemed to put out of his way an invisible intruder.

"I suppose you think I was going mad," he began in a changed tone. "And well you may, if you remember I had lost my cap. The sun crept all the way from east to west over my bare head, but that day I could not come to any harm, I suppose. The sun could not make me mad. . . ." His right arm put aside the idea of madness. . . . "Neither could it kill me. . . ." Again his arm repulsed a shadow. . . . "That rested with me."

"Did it?" I said, inexpressibly amazed at this new turn, and I looked at him with the same sort of feeling I might be fairly conceived to experience had he, after spinning round on his heel, presented an altogether new face.

"I didn't get brain fever, I did not drop dead either," he went on. "I didn't bother myself at all about the sun over my head. I was thinking as coolly as any man that ever sat thinking in the shade. That greasy beast of a skipper poked his big cropped head from under the canvas and screwed his fishy eyes up at me. 'Donnerwetter! you will die,' he growled, and drew in like a turtle. I had seen him. I had heard him. He didn't interrupt me. I was thinking just then that I wouldn't."

'He tried to sound my thought with an attentive glance dropped on me in passing. "Do you mean to say you had been deliberating with yourself whether you would die?" I asked in as impenetrable a tone as I could command. He nodded without stopping. "Yes, it had come to that as I sat there alone," he said. He passed on a few steps to the imaginary end of his beat, and when he flung round to come back both his hands were thrust deep into his pockets. He stopped short in front of my chair and looked down. "Don't you believe it?" he inquired with tense curiosity. I was moved

to make a solemn declaration of my readiness to believe implicitly anything he thought fit to tell me.'

## CHAPTER 11

‘He heard me out with his head on one side, and I had another glimpse through a rent in the mist in which he moved and had his being. The dim candle spluttered within the ball of glass, and that was all I had to see him by; at his back was the dark night with the clear stars, whose distant glitter disposed in retreating planes lured the eye into the depths of a greater darkness; and yet a mysterious light seemed to show me his boyish head, as if in that moment the youth within him had, for a moment, glowed and expired. “You are an awful good sort to listen like this,” he said. “It does me good. You don’t know what it is to me. You don’t” . . . words seemed to fail him. It was a distinct glimpse. He was a youngster of the sort you like to see about you; of the sort you like to imagine yourself to have been; of the sort whose appearance claims the fellowship of these illusions you had thought gone out, extinct, cold, and which, as if rekindled at the approach of another flame, give a flutter deep, deep down somewhere, give a flutter of light . . . of heat! . . . Yes; I had a glimpse of him then . . . and it was not the last of that kind. . . . “You don’t know what it is for a fellow in my position to be believed — make a clean breast of it to an elder man. It is so difficult — so awfully unfair — so hard to understand.”

‘The mists were closing again. I don’t know how old I appeared to him — and how much wise. Not half as old as I felt just then; not half as uselessly wise as I knew myself to be. Surely in no other craft as in that of the sea do the hearts of those already launched to sink or swim go out so much to the youth on the brink, looking with shining eyes upon that glitter of the vast surface which is only a reflection of his own glances full of fire. There is such magnificent vagueness in the expectations that had driven each of us to sea, such a glorious indefiniteness, such a beautiful greed of adventures that are their own and only reward. What we get — well, we won’t talk of that; but can one of us restrain a smile? In no other kind of life is the illusion more wide of reality — in no other is the beginning all illusion — the disenchantment more swift — the subjugation more complete. Hadn’t we all commenced with the same desire, ended with the same knowledge, carried the memory of the same cherished glamour through the sordid days of imprecation? What wonder that when some heavy prod gets home the bond is found to be close; that besides the fellowship of the craft there is felt the strength of a wider feeling — the

feeling that binds a man to a child. He was there before me, believing that age and wisdom can find a remedy against the pain of truth, giving me a glimpse of himself as a young fellow in a scrape that is the very devil of a scrape, the sort of scrape greybeards wag at solemnly while they hide a smile. And he had been deliberating upon death — confound him! He had found that to meditate about because he thought he had saved his life, while all its glamour had gone with the ship in the night. What more natural! It was tragic enough and funny enough in all conscience to call aloud for compassion, and in what was I better than the rest of us to refuse him my pity? And even as I looked at him the mists rolled into the rent, and his voice spoke —

“I was so lost, you know. It was the sort of thing one does not expect to happen to one. It was not like a fight, for instance.”

“It was not,” I admitted. He appeared changed, as if he had suddenly matured.

“One couldn’t be sure,” he muttered.

“Ah! You were not sure,” I said, and was placated by the sound of a faint sigh that passed between us like the flight of a bird in the night.

“Well, I wasn’t,” he said courageously. “It was something like that wretched story they made up. It was not a lie — but it wasn’t truth all the same. It was something. . . . One knows a downright lie. There was not the thickness of a sheet of paper between the right and the wrong of this affair.”

“How much more did you want?” I asked; but I think I spoke so low that he did not catch what I said. He had advanced his argument as though life had been a network of paths separated by chasms. His voice sounded reasonable.

“Suppose I had not — I mean to say, suppose I had stuck to the ship? Well. How much longer? Say a minute — half a minute. Come. In thirty seconds, as it seemed certain then, I would have been overboard; and do you think I would not have laid hold of the first thing that came in my way — oar, life-buoy, grating — anything? Wouldn’t you?”

“And be saved,” I interjected.

“I would have meant to be,” he retorted. “And that’s more than I meant when I” . . . he shivered as if about to swallow some nauseous drug . . . “jumped,” he pronounced with a convulsive effort, whose stress, as if propagated by the waves of the air, made my body stir a little in the chair. He fixed me with lowering eyes. “Don’t you believe me?” he cried. “I

swear! . . . Confound it! You got me here to talk, and . . . You must! . . . You said you would believe.” “Of course I do,” I protested, in a matter-of-fact tone which produced a calming effect. “Forgive me,” he said. “Of course I wouldn’t have talked to you about all this if you had not been a gentleman. I ought to have known . . . I am — I am — a gentleman too . . .” “Yes, yes,” I said hastily. He was looking me squarely in the face, and withdrew his gaze slowly. “Now you understand why I didn’t after all . . . didn’t go out in that way. I wasn’t going to be frightened at what I had done. And, anyhow, if I had stuck to the ship I would have done my best to be saved. Men have been known to float for hours — in the open sea — and be picked up not much the worse for it. I might have lasted it out better than many others. There’s nothing the matter with my heart.” He withdrew his right fist from his pocket, and the blow he struck on his chest resounded like a muffled detonation in the night.

“No,” I said. He meditated, with his legs slightly apart and his chin sunk. “A hair’s-breadth,” he muttered. “Not the breadth of a hair between this and that. And at the time . . .”

“It is difficult to see a hair at midnight,” I put in, a little viciously I fear. Don’t you see what I mean by the solidarity of the craft? I was aggrieved against him, as though he had cheated me — me! — of a splendid opportunity to keep up the illusion of my beginnings, as though he had robbed our common life of the last spark of its glamour. “And so you cleared out — at once.”

“Jumped,” he corrected me incisively. “Jumped — mind!” he repeated, and I wondered at the evident but obscure intention. “Well, yes! Perhaps I could not see then. But I had plenty of time and any amount of light in that boat. And I could think, too. Nobody would know, of course, but this did not make it any easier for me. You’ve got to believe that, too. I did not want all this talk. . . . No . . . Yes . . . I won’t lie . . . I wanted it: it is the very thing I wanted — there. Do you think you or anybody could have made me if I . . . I am — I am not afraid to tell. And I wasn’t afraid to think either. I looked it in the face. I wasn’t going to run away. At first — at night, if it hadn’t been for those fellows I might have . . . No! by heavens! I was not going to give them that satisfaction. They had done enough. They made up a story, and believed it for all I know. But I knew the truth, and I would live it down — alone, with myself. I wasn’t going to give in to such a beastly unfair thing. What did it prove after all? I was confoundedly cut up. Sick of



life — to tell you the truth; but what would have been the good to shirk it — in — in — that way? That was not the way. I believe — I believe it would have — it would have ended — nothing.”

‘He had been walking up and down, but with the last word he turned short at me.

““What do you believe?” he asked with violence. A pause ensued, and suddenly I felt myself overcome by a profound and hopeless fatigue, as though his voice had startled me out of a dream of wandering through empty spaces whose immensity had harassed my soul and exhausted my body.

““. . . Would have ended nothing,” he muttered over me obstinately, after a little while. “No! the proper thing was to face it out — alone for myself — wait for another chance — find out . . .”“

## CHAPTER 12

‘All around everything was still as far as the ear could reach. The mist of his feelings shifted between us, as if disturbed by his struggles, and in the rifts of the immaterial veil he would appear to my staring eyes distinct of form and pregnant with vague appeal like a symbolic figure in a picture. The chill air of the night seemed to lie on my limbs as heavy as a slab of marble.

“‘I see,” I murmured, more to prove to myself that I could break my state of numbness than for any other reason.

“‘The Avondale picked us up just before sunset,” he remarked moodily. “‘Steamed right straight for us. We had only to sit and wait.”

‘After a long interval, he said, “They told their story.” And again there was that oppressive silence. “Then only I knew what it was I had made up my mind to,” he added.

“‘You said nothing,” I whispered.

“‘What could I say?” he asked, in the same low tone. . . . “Shock slight. Stopped the ship. Ascertained the damage. Took measures to get the boats out without creating a panic. As the first boat was lowered ship went down in a squall. Sank like lead. . . . What could be more clear” . . . he hung his head . . . “and more awful?” His lips quivered while he looked straight into my eyes. “I had jumped — hadn’t I?” he asked, dismayed. “That’s what I had to live down. The story didn’t matter.” . . . He clasped his hands for an instant, glanced right and left into the gloom: “It was like cheating the dead,” he stammered.

“‘And there were no dead,” I said.

‘He went away from me at this. That is the only way I can describe it. In a moment I saw his back close to the balustrade. He stood there for some time, as if admiring the purity and the peace of the night. Some flowering-shrub in the garden below spread its powerful scent through the damp air. He returned to me with hasty steps.

“‘And that did not matter,” he said, as stubbornly as you please.

“‘Perhaps not,” I admitted. I began to have a notion he was too much for me. After all, what did I know?

“‘Dead or not dead, I could not get clear,” he said. “I had to live; hadn’t I?”

“‘Well, yes — if you take it in that way,” I mumbled.

“I was glad, of course,” he threw out carelessly, with his mind fixed on something else. “The exposure,” he pronounced slowly, and lifted his head. “Do you know what was my first thought when I heard? I was relieved. I was relieved to learn that those shouts — did I tell you I had heard shouts? No? Well, I did. Shouts for help . . . blown along with the drizzle. Imagination, I suppose. And yet I can hardly . . . How stupid. . . . The others did not. I asked them afterwards. They all said No. No? And I was hearing them even then! I might have known — but I didn’t think — I only listened. Very faint screams — day after day. Then that little half-caste chap here came up and spoke to me. ‘The Patna . . . French gunboat . . . towed successfully to Aden . . . Investigation . . . Marine Office . . . Sailors’ Home . . . arrangements made for your board and lodging!’ I walked along with him, and I enjoyed the silence. So there had been no shouting. Imagination. I had to believe him. I could hear nothing any more. I wonder how long I could have stood it. It was getting worse, too . . . I mean — louder.” ‘He fell into thought.

“And I had heard nothing! Well — so be it. But the lights! The lights did go! We did not see them. They were not there. If they had been, I would have swam back — I would have gone back and shouted alongside — I would have begged them to take me on board. . . . I would have had my chance. . . . You doubt me? . . . How do you know how I felt? . . . What right have you to doubt? . . . I very nearly did it as it was — do you understand?” His voice fell. “There was not a glimmer — not a glimmer,” he protested mournfully. “Don’t you understand that if there had been, you would not have seen me here? You see me — and you doubt.”

‘I shook my head negatively. This question of the lights being lost sight of when the boat could not have been more than a quarter of a mile from the ship was a matter for much discussion. Jim stuck to it that there was nothing to be seen after the first shower had cleared away; and the others had affirmed the same thing to the officers of the Avondale. Of course people shook their heads and smiled. One old skipper who sat near me in court tickled my ear with his white beard to murmur, “Of course they would lie.” As a matter of fact nobody lied; not even the chief engineer with his story of the mast-head light dropping like a match you throw down. Not consciously, at least. A man with his liver in such a state might very well have seen a floating spark in the corner of his eye when stealing a hurried glance over his shoulder. They had seen no light of any sort though they

were well within range, and they could only explain this in one way: the ship had gone down. It was obvious and comforting. The foreseen fact coming so swiftly had justified their haste. No wonder they did not cast about for any other explanation. Yet the true one was very simple, and as soon as Brierly suggested it the court ceased to bother about the question. If you remember, the ship had been stopped, and was lying with her head on the course steered through the night, with her stern canted high and her bows brought low down in the water through the filling of the fore-compartment. Being thus out of trim, when the squall struck her a little on the quarter, she swung head to wind as sharply as though she had been at anchor. By this change in her position all her lights were in a very few moments shut off from the boat to leeward. It may very well be that, had they been seen, they would have had the effect of a mute appeal — that their glimmer lost in the darkness of the cloud would have had the mysterious power of the human glance that can awaken the feelings of remorse and pity. It would have said, “I am here — still here” . . . and what more can the eye of the most forsaken of human beings say? But she turned her back on them as if in disdain of their fate: she had swung round, burdened, to glare stubbornly at the new danger of the open sea which she so strangely survived to end her days in a breaking-up yard, as if it had been her recorded fate to die obscurely under the blows of many hammers. What were the various ends their destiny provided for the pilgrims I am unable to say; but the immediate future brought, at about nine o’clock next morning, a French gunboat homeward bound from Reunion. The report of her commander was public property. He had swept a little out of his course to ascertain what was the matter with that steamer floating dangerously by the head upon a still and hazy sea. There was an ensign, union down, flying at her main gaff (the serang had the sense to make a signal of distress at daylight); but the cooks were preparing the food in the cooking-boxes forward as usual. The decks were packed as close as a sheep-pen: there were people perched all along the rails, jammed on the bridge in a solid mass; hundreds of eyes stared, and not a sound was heard when the gunboat ranged abreast, as if all that multitude of lips had been sealed by a spell.

‘The Frenchman hailed, could get no intelligible reply, and after ascertaining through his binoculars that the crowd on deck did not look plague-stricken, decided to send a boat. Two officers came on board, listened to the serang, tried to talk with the Arab, couldn’t make head or tail

of it: but of course the nature of the emergency was obvious enough. They were also very much struck by discovering a white man, dead and curled up peacefully on the bridge. “Fort intrigues par ce cadavre,” as I was informed a long time after by an elderly French lieutenant whom I came across one afternoon in Sydney, by the merest chance, in a sort of cafe, and who remembered the affair perfectly. Indeed this affair, I may notice in passing, had an extraordinary power of defying the shortness of memories and the length of time: it seemed to live, with a sort of uncanny vitality, in the minds of men, on the tips of their tongues. I’ve had the questionable pleasure of meeting it often, years afterwards, thousands of miles away, emerging from the remotest possible talk, coming to the surface of the most distant allusions. Has it not turned up to-night between us? And I am the only seaman here. I am the only one to whom it is a memory. And yet it has made its way out! But if two men who, unknown to each other, knew of this affair met accidentally on any spot of this earth, the thing would pop up between them as sure as fate, before they parted. I had never seen that Frenchman before, and at the end of an hour we had done with each other for life: he did not seem particularly talkative either; he was a quiet, massive chap in a creased uniform, sitting drowsily over a tumbler half full of some dark liquid. His shoulder-straps were a bit tarnished, his clean-shaved cheeks were large and sallow; he looked like a man who would be given to taking snuff — don’t you know? I won’t say he did; but the habit would have fitted that kind of man. It all began by his handing me a number of Home News, which I didn’t want, across the marble table. I said “Merci.” We exchanged a few apparently innocent remarks, and suddenly, before I knew how it had come about, we were in the midst of it, and he was telling me how much they had been “intrigued by that corpse.” It turned out he had been one of the boarding officers.

‘In the establishment where we sat one could get a variety of foreign drinks which were kept for the visiting naval officers, and he took a sip of the dark medical-looking stuff, which probably was nothing more nasty than cassis a l’eau, and glancing with one eye into the tumbler, shook his head slightly. “Impossible de comprendre — vous concevez,” he said, with a curious mixture of unconcern and thoughtfulness. I could very easily conceive how impossible it had been for them to understand. Nobody in the gunboat knew enough English to get hold of the story as told by the serang. There was a good deal of noise, too, round the two officers. “They crowded

upon us. There was a circle round that dead man (autour de ce mort),” he described. “One had to attend to the most pressing. These people were beginning to agitate themselves — Parbleu! A mob like that — don’t you see?” he interjected with philosophic indulgence. As to the bulkhead, he had advised his commander that the safest thing was to leave it alone, it was so villainous to look at. They got two hawsers on board promptly (en toute hale) and took the Patna in tow — stern foremost at that — which, under the circumstances, was not so foolish, since the rudder was too much out of the water to be of any great use for steering, and this manoeuvre eased the strain on the bulkhead, whose state, he expounded with stolid glibness, demanded the greatest care (exigeait les plus grands menagements). I could not help thinking that my new acquaintance must have had a voice in most of these arrangements: he looked a reliable officer, no longer very active, and he was seamanlike too, in a way, though as he sat there, with his thick fingers clasped lightly on his stomach, he reminded you of one of those snuffy, quiet village priests, into whose ears are poured the sins, the sufferings, the remorse of peasant generations, on whose faces the placid and simple expression is like a veil thrown over the mystery of pain and distress. He ought to have had a threadbare black soutane buttoned smoothly up to his ample chin, instead of a frock-coat with shoulder-straps and brass buttons. His broad bosom heaved regularly while he went on telling me that it had been the very devil of a job, as doubtless (sans doute) I could figure to myself in my quality of a seaman (en votre qualite de marin). At the end of the period he inclined his body slightly towards me, and, pursing his shaved lips, allowed the air to escape with a gentle hiss. “Luckily,” he continued, “the sea was level like this table, and there was no more wind than there is here.” . . . The place struck me as indeed intolerably stuffy, and very hot; my face burned as though I had been young enough to be embarrassed and blushing. They had directed their course, he pursued, to the nearest English port “naturellement,” where their responsibility ceased, “Dieu merci.” . . . He blew out his flat cheeks a little. . . . “Because, mind you (notez bien), all the time of towing we had two quartermasters stationed with axes by the hawsers, to cut us clear of our tow in case she . . .” He fluttered downwards his heavy eyelids, making his meaning as plain as possible. . . . “What would you! One does what one can (on fait ce qu’on peut),” and for a moment he managed to invest his ponderous immobility with an air of resignation. “Two quartermasters — thirty hours — always

there. Two!" he repeated, lifting up his right hand a little, and exhibiting two fingers. This was absolutely the first gesture I saw him make. It gave me the opportunity to "note" a starred scar on the back of his hand — effect of a gunshot clearly; and, as if my sight had been made more acute by this discovery, I perceived also the seam of an old wound, beginning a little below the temple and going out of sight under the short grey hair at the side of his head — the graze of a spear or the cut of a sabre. He clasped his hands on his stomach again. "I remained on board that — that — my memory is going (s'en va). Ah! Patt-na. C'est bien ca. Patt-na. Merci. It is droll how one forgets. I stayed on that ship thirty hours. . . ."

"You did!" I exclaimed. Still gazing at his hands, he pursed his lips a little, but this time made no hissing sound. "It was judged proper," he said, lifting his eyebrows dispassionately, "that one of the officers should remain to keep an eye open (pour ouvrir l'oeil)" . . . he sighed idly . . . "and for communicating by signals with the towing ship — do you see? — and so on. For the rest, it was my opinion too. We made our boats ready to drop over — and I also on that ship took measures. . . . Enfin! One has done one's possible. It was a delicate position. Thirty hours! They prepared me some food. As for the wine — go and whistle for it — not a drop." In some extraordinary way, without any marked change in his inert attitude and in the placid expression of his face, he managed to convey the idea of profound disgust. "I — you know — when it comes to eating without my glass of wine — I am nowhere."

'I was afraid he would enlarge upon the grievance, for though he didn't stir a limb or twitch a feature, he made one aware how much he was irritated by the recollection. But he seemed to forget all about it. They delivered their charge to the "port authorities," as he expressed it. He was struck by the calmness with which it had been received. "One might have thought they had such a droll find (drole de trouvaille) brought them every day. You are extraordinary — you others," he commented, with his back propped against the wall, and looking himself as incapable of an emotional display as a sack of meal. There happened to be a man-of-war and an Indian Marine steamer in the harbour at the time, and he did not conceal his admiration of the efficient manner in which the boats of these two ships cleared the Patna of her passengers. Indeed his torpid demeanour concealed nothing: it had that mysterious, almost miraculous, power of producing striking effects by means impossible of detection which is the last word of

the highest art. “Twenty-five minutes — watch in hand — twenty-five, no more.” . . . He unclasped and clasped again his fingers without removing his hands from his stomach, and made it infinitely more effective than if he had thrown up his arms to heaven in amazement. . . . “All that lot (tout ce monde) on shore — with their little affairs — nobody left but a guard of seamen (marins de l’Etat) and that interesting corpse (cet interessant cadavre). Twenty-five minutes.” . . . With downcast eyes and his head tilted slightly on one side he seemed to roll knowingly on his tongue the savour of a smart bit of work. He persuaded one without any further demonstration that his approval was eminently worth having, and resuming his hardly interrupted immobility, he went on to inform me that, being under orders to make the best of their way to Toulon, they left in two hours’ time, “so that (de sorte que) there are many things in this incident of my life (dans cet episode de ma vie) which have remained obscure.”“



## CHAPTER 13

‘After these words, and without a change of attitude, he, so to speak, submitted himself passively to a state of silence. I kept him company; and suddenly, but not abruptly, as if the appointed time had arrived for his moderate and husky voice to come out of his immobility, he pronounced, “Mon Dieu! how the time passes!” Nothing could have been more commonplace than this remark; but its utterance coincided for me with a moment of vision. It’s extraordinary how we go through life with eyes half shut, with dull ears, with dormant thoughts. Perhaps it’s just as well; and it may be that it is this very dullness that makes life to the incalculable majority so supportable and so welcome. Nevertheless, there can be but few of us who had never known one of these rare moments of awakening when we see, hear, understand ever so much — everything — in a flash — before we fall back again into our agreeable somnolence. I raised my eyes when he spoke, and I saw him as though I had never seen him before. I saw his chin sunk on his breast, the clumsy folds of his coat, his clasped hands, his motionless pose, so curiously suggestive of his having been simply left there. Time had passed indeed: it had overtaken him and gone ahead. It had left him hopelessly behind with a few poor gifts: the iron-grey hair, the heavy fatigue of the tanned face, two scars, a pair of tarnished shoulder-straps; one of those steady, reliable men who are the raw material of great reputations, one of those uncouth lives that are buried without drums and trumpets under the foundations of monumental successes. “I am now third lieutenant of the *Victorieuse*” (she was the flagship of the French Pacific squadron at the time), he said, detaching his shoulders from the wall a couple of inches to introduce himself. I bowed slightly on my side of the table, and told him I commanded a merchant vessel at present anchored in Rushcutters’ Bay. He had “remarked” her, — a pretty little craft. He was very civil about it in his impassive way. I even fancy he went the length of tilting his head in compliment as he repeated, breathing visibly the while, “Ah, yes. A little craft painted black — very pretty — very pretty (*tres coquet*).” After a time he twisted his body slowly to face the glass door on our right. “A dull town (*triste ville*),” he observed, staring into the street. It was a brilliant day; a southerly buster was raging, and we could see the passers-by, men and women, buffeted by the wind on the sidewalks, the sunlit fronts of the houses across the road blurred by the tall whirls of dust.

“I descended on shore,” he said, “to stretch my legs a little, but . . .” He didn’t finish, and sank into the depths of his repose. “Pray — tell me,” he began, coming up ponderously, “what was there at the bottom of this affair — precisely (au juste)? It is curious. That dead man, for instance — and so on.”

““There were living men too,” I said; “much more curious.”

““No doubt, no doubt,” he agreed half audibly, then, as if after mature consideration, murmured, “Evidently.” I made no difficulty in communicating to him what had interested me most in this affair. It seemed as though he had a right to know: hadn’t he spent thirty hours on board the Palna — had he not taken the succession, so to speak, had he not done “his possible”? He listened to me, looking more priest-like than ever, and with what — probably on account of his downcast eyes — had the appearance of devout concentration. Once or twice he elevated his eyebrows (but without raising his eyelids), as one would say “The devil!” Once he calmly exclaimed, “Ah, bah!” under his breath, and when I had finished he pursed his lips in a deliberate way and emitted a sort of sorrowful whistle.

‘In any one else it might have been an evidence of boredom, a sign of indifference; but he, in his occult way, managed to make his immobility appear profoundly responsive, and as full of valuable thoughts as an egg is of meat. What he said at last was nothing more than a “Very interesting,” pronounced politely, and not much above a whisper. Before I got over my disappointment he added, but as if speaking to himself, “That’s it. That is it.” His chin seemed to sink lower on his breast, his body to weigh heavier on his seat. I was about to ask him what he meant, when a sort of preparatory tremor passed over his whole person, as a faint ripple may be seen upon stagnant water even before the wind is felt. “And so that poor young man ran away along with the others,” he said, with grave tranquillity.

‘I don’t know what made me smile: it is the only genuine smile of mine I can remember in connection with Jim’s affair. But somehow this simple statement of the matter sounded funny in French. . . . “S’est enfui avec les autres,” had said the lieutenant. And suddenly I began to admire the discrimination of the man. He had made out the point at once: he did get hold of the only thing I cared about. I felt as though I were taking professional opinion on the case. His imperturbable and mature calmness was that of an expert in possession of the facts, and to whom one’s perplexities are mere child’s-play. “Ah! The young, the young,” he said

indulgently. "And after all, one does not die of it." "Die of what?" I asked swiftly. "Of being afraid." He elucidated his meaning and sipped his drink.

"I perceived that the three last fingers of his wounded hand were stiff and could not move independently of each other, so that he took up his tumbler with an ungainly clutch. "One is always afraid. One may talk, but . . ." He put down the glass awkwardly. . . . "The fear, the fear — look you — it is always there." . . . He touched his breast near a brass button, on the very spot where Jim had given a thump to his own when protesting that there was nothing the matter with his heart. I suppose I made some sign of dissent, because he insisted, "Yes! yes! One talks, one talks; this is all very fine; but at the end of the reckoning one is no cleverer than the next man — and no more brave. Brave! This is always to be seen. I have rolled my hump (*roule ma bosse*)," he said, using the slang expression with imperturbable seriousness, "in all parts of the world; I have known brave men — famous ones! *Allez!*" . . . He drank carelessly. . . . "Brave — you conceive — in the Service — one has got to be — the trade demands it (*le metier veut ça*). Is it not so?" he appealed to me reasonably. "Eh bien! Each of them — I say each of them, if he were an honest man — *bien entendu* — would confess that there is a point — there is a point — for the best of us — there is somewhere a point when you let go everything (*vous lachez tout*). And you have got to live with that truth — do you see? Given a certain combination of circumstances, fear is sure to come. Abominable funk (*un trac epouvantable*). And even for those who do not believe this truth there is fear all the same — the fear of themselves. Absolutely so. Trust me. Yes. Yes. . . . At my age one knows what one is talking about — *que diable!*" . . . He had delivered himself of all this as immovably as though he had been the mouthpiece of abstract wisdom, but at this point he heightened the effect of detachment by beginning to twirl his thumbs slowly. "It's evident — *parbleu!*" he continued; "for, make up your mind as much as you like, even a simple headache or a fit of indigestion (*un derangement d'estomac*) is enough to . . . Take me, for instance — I have made my proofs. Eh bien! I, who am speaking to you, once . . ."

"He drained his glass and returned to his twirling. "No, no; one does not die of it," he pronounced finally, and when I found he did not mean to proceed with the personal anecdote, I was extremely disappointed; the more so as it was not the sort of story, you know, one could very well press him for. I sat silent, and he too, as if nothing could please him better. Even his

thumbs were still now. Suddenly his lips began to move. "That is so," he resumed placidly. "Man is born a coward (*L'homme est ne poltron*). It is a difficulty — *parbleu!* It would be too easy other wise. But habit — habit — necessity — do you see? — the eye of others — *voila*. One puts up with it. And then the example of others who are no better than yourself, and yet make good countenance. . . ."

'His voice ceased.

"That young man — you will observe — had none of these inducements — at least at the moment," I remarked.

'He raised his eyebrows forgivingly: "I don't say; I don't say. The young man in question might have had the best dispositions — the best dispositions," he repeated, wheezing a little.

"I am glad to see you taking a lenient view," I said. "His own feeling in the matter was — ah! — hopeful, and . . ."

'The shuffle of his feet under the table interrupted me. He drew up his heavy eyelids. Drew up, I say — no other expression can describe the steady deliberation of the act — and at last was disclosed completely to me. I was confronted by two narrow grey circlets, like two tiny steel rings around the profound blackness of the pupils. The sharp glance, coming from that massive body, gave a notion of extreme efficiency, like a razor-edge on a battle-axe. "Pardon," he said punctiliously. His right hand went up, and he swayed forward. "Allow me . . . I contended that one may get on knowing very well that one's courage does not come of itself (*ne vient pas tout seul*). There's nothing much in that to get upset about. One truth the more ought not to make life impossible. . . . But the honour — the honour, *monsieur!* . . . The honour . . . that is real — that is! And what life may be worth when" . . . he got on his feet with a ponderous impetuosity, as a startled ox might scramble up from the grass . . . "when the honour is gone — ah *ca!* *par exemple* — I can offer no opinion. I can offer no opinion — because — *monsieur* — I know nothing of it."

'I had risen too, and, trying to throw infinite politeness into our attitudes, we faced each other mutely, like two china dogs on a mantelpiece. Hang the fellow! he had pricked the bubble. The blight of futility that lies in wait for men's speeches had fallen upon our conversation, and made it a thing of empty sounds. "Very well," I said, with a disconcerted smile; "but couldn't it reduce itself to not being found out?" He made as if to retort readily, but when he spoke he had changed his mind. "This, *monsieur*, is too fine for me

— much above me — I don't think about it." He bowed heavily over his cap, which he held before him by the peak, between the thumb and the forefinger of his wounded hand. I bowed too. We bowed together: we scraped our feet at each other with much ceremony, while a dirty specimen of a waiter looked on critically, as though he had paid for the performance. "Serviteur," said the Frenchman. Another scrape. "Monsieur" . . . "Monsieur." . . . The glass door swung behind his burly back. I saw the southerly buster get hold of him and drive him down wind with his hand to his head, his shoulders braced, and the tails of his coat blown hard against his legs.

'I sat down again alone and discouraged — discouraged about Jim's case. If you wonder that after more than three years it had preserved its actuality, you must know that I had seen him only very lately. I had come straight from Samarang, where I had loaded a cargo for Sydney: an utterly uninteresting bit of business, — what Charley here would call one of my rational transactions, — and in Samarang I had seen something of Jim. He was then working for De Jongh, on my recommendation. Water-clerk. "My representative afloat," as De Jongh called him. You can't imagine a mode of life more barren of consolation, less capable of being invested with a spark of glamour — unless it be the business of an insurance canvasser. Little Bob Stanton — Charley here knew him well — had gone through that experience. The same who got drowned afterwards trying to save a lady's-maid in the Sephora disaster. A case of collision on a hazy morning off the Spanish coast — you may remember. All the passengers had been packed tidily into the boats and shoved clear of the ship, when Bob sheered alongside again and scrambled back on deck to fetch that girl. How she had been left behind I can't make out; anyhow, she had gone completely crazy — wouldn't leave the ship — held to the rail like grim death. The wrestling-match could be seen plainly from the boats; but poor Bob was the shortest chief mate in the merchant service, and the woman stood five feet ten in her shoes and was as strong as a horse, I've been told. So it went on, pull devil, pull baker, the wretched girl screaming all the time, and Bob letting out a yell now and then to warn his boat to keep well clear of the ship. One of the hands told me, hiding a smile at the recollection, "It was for all the world, sir, like a naughty youngster fighting with his mother." The same old chap said that "At the last we could see that Mr. Stanton had given up hauling at the gal, and just stood by looking at her, watchful like.

We thought afterwards he must've been reckoning that, maybe, the rush of water would tear her away from the rail by-and-by and give him a show to save her. We daren't come alongside for our life; and after a bit the old ship went down all on a sudden with a lurch to starboard — plop. The suck in was something awful. We never saw anything alive or dead come up." Poor Bob's spell of shore-life had been one of the complications of a love affair, I believe. He fondly hoped he had done with the sea for ever, and made sure he had got hold of all the bliss on earth, but it came to canvassing in the end. Some cousin of his in Liverpool put up to it. He used to tell us his experiences in that line. He made us laugh till we cried, and, not altogether displeased at the effect, undersized and bearded to the waist like a gnome, he would tiptoe amongst us and say, "It's all very well for you beggars to laugh, but my immortal soul was shrivelled down to the size of a parched pea after a week of that work." I don't know how Jim's soul accommodated itself to the new conditions of his life — I was kept too busy in getting him something to do that would keep body and soul together — but I am pretty certain his adventurous fancy was suffering all the pangs of starvation. It had certainly nothing to feed upon in this new calling. It was distressing to see him at it, though he tackled it with a stubborn serenity for which I must give him full credit. I kept my eye on his shabby plodding with a sort of notion that it was a punishment for the heroics of his fancy — an expiation for his craving after more glamour than he could carry. He had loved too well to imagine himself a glorious racehorse, and now he was condemned to toil without honour like a costermonger's donkey. He did it very well. He shut himself in, put his head down, said never a word. Very well; very well indeed — except for certain fantastic and violent outbreaks, on the deplorable occasions when the irrepressible Patna case cropped up. Unfortunately that scandal of the Eastern seas would not die out. And this is the reason why I could never feel I had done with Jim for good.

'I sat thinking of him after the French lieutenant had left, not, however, in connection with De Jongh's cool and gloomy backshop, where we had hurriedly shaken hands not very long ago, but as I had seen him years before in the last flickers of the candle, alone with me in the long gallery of the Malabar House, with the chill and the darkness of the night at his back. The respectable sword of his country's law was suspended over his head. To-morrow — or was it to-day? (midnight had slipped by long before we parted) — the marble-faced police magistrate, after distributing fines and

terms of imprisonment in the assault-and-battery case, would take up the awful weapon and smite his bowed neck. Our communion in the night was uncommonly like a last vigil with a condemned man. He was guilty too. He was guilty — as I had told myself repeatedly, guilty and done for; nevertheless, I wished to spare him the mere detail of a formal execution. I don't pretend to explain the reasons of my desire — I don't think I could; but if you haven't got a sort of notion by this time, then I must have been very obscure in my narrative, or you too sleepy to seize upon the sense of my words. I don't defend my morality. There was no morality in the impulse which induced me to lay before him Brierly's plan of evasion — I may call it — in all its primitive simplicity. There were the rupees — absolutely ready in my pocket and very much at his service. Oh! a loan; a loan of course — and if an introduction to a man (in Rangoon) who could put some work in his way . . . Why! with the greatest pleasure. I had pen, ink, and paper in my room on the first floor And even while I was speaking I was impatient to begin the letter — day, month, year, 2.30 A.M. . . . for the sake of our old friendship I ask you to put some work in the way of Mr. James So-and-so, in whom, &c., &c. . . . I was even ready to write in that strain about him. If he had not enlisted my sympathies he had done better for himself — he had gone to the very fount and origin of that sentiment he had reached the secret sensibility of my egoism. I am concealing nothing from you, because were I to do so my action would appear more unintelligible than any man's action has the right to be, and — in the second place — to-morrow you will forget my sincerity along with the other lessons of the past. In this transaction, to speak grossly and precisely, I was the irreproachable man; but the subtle intentions of my immorality were defeated by the moral simplicity of the criminal. No doubt he was selfish too, but his selfishness had a higher origin, a more lofty aim. I discovered that, say what I would, he was eager to go through the ceremony of execution, and I didn't say much, for I felt that in argument his youth would tell against me heavily: he believed where I had already ceased to doubt. There was something fine in the wildness of his unexpressed, hardly formulated hope. "Clear out! Couldn't think of it," he said, with a shake of the head. "I make you an offer for which I neither demand nor expect any sort of gratitude," I said; "you shall repay the money when convenient, and . . ." "Awfully good of you," he muttered without looking up. I watched him narrowly: the future must have appeared horribly uncertain to him; but he

did not falter, as though indeed there had been nothing wrong with his heart. I felt angry — not for the first time that night. “The whole wretched business,” I said, “is bitter enough, I should think, for a man of your kind . . .” “It is, it is,” he whispered twice, with his eyes fixed on the floor. It was heartrending. He towered above the light, and I could see the down on his cheek, the colour mantling warm under the smooth skin of his face. Believe me or not, I say it was outrageously heartrending. It provoked me to brutality. “Yes,” I said; “and allow me to confess that I am totally unable to imagine what advantage you can expect from this licking of the dregs.” “Advantage!” he murmured out of his stillness. “I am dashed if I do,” I said, enraged. “I’ve been trying to tell you all there is in it,” he went on slowly, as if meditating something unanswerable. “But after all, it is my trouble.” I opened my mouth to retort, and discovered suddenly that I’d lost all confidence in myself; and it was as if he too had given me up, for he mumbled like a man thinking half aloud. “Went away . . . went into hospitals. . . . Not one of them would face it. . . . They! . . .” He moved his hand slightly to imply disdain. “But I’ve got to get over this thing, and I mustn’t shirk any of it or . . . I won’t shirk any of it.” He was silent. He gazed as though he had been haunted. His unconscious face reflected the passing expressions of scorn, of despair, of resolution — reflected them in turn, as a magic mirror would reflect the gliding passage of unearthly shapes. He lived surrounded by deceitful ghosts, by austere shades. “Oh! nonsense, my dear fellow,” I began. He had a movement of impatience. “You don’t seem to understand,” he said incisively; then looking at me without a wink, “I may have jumped, but I don’t run away.” “I meant no offence,” I said; and added stupidly, “Better men than you have found it expedient to run, at times.” He coloured all over, while in my confusion I half-choked myself with my own tongue. “Perhaps so,” he said at last, “I am not good enough; I can’t afford it. I am bound to fight this thing down — I am fighting it now.” I got out of my chair and felt stiff all over. The silence was embarrassing, and to put an end to it I imagined nothing better but to remark, “I had no idea it was so late,” in an airy tone. . . . “I dare say you have had enough of this,” he said brusquely: “and to tell you the truth” — he began to look round for his hat — “so have I.”

‘Well! he had refused this unique offer. He had struck aside my helping hand; he was ready to go now, and beyond the balustrade the night seemed to wait for him very still, as though he had been marked down for its prey. I



heard his voice. "Ah! here it is." He had found his hat. For a few seconds we hung in the wind. "What will you do after — after . . ." I asked very low. "Go to the dogs as likely as not," he answered in a gruff mutter. I had recovered my wits in a measure, and judged best to take it lightly. "Pray remember," I said, "that I should like very much to see you again before you go." "I don't know what's to prevent you. The damned thing won't make me invisible," he said with intense bitterness, — "no such luck." And then at the moment of taking leave he treated me to a ghastly muddle of dubious stammers and movements, to an awful display of hesitations. God forgive him — me! He had taken it into his fanciful head that I was likely to make some difficulty as to shaking hands. It was too awful for words. I believe I shouted suddenly at him as you would bellow to a man you saw about to walk over a cliff; I remember our voices being raised, the appearance of a miserable grin on his face, a crushing clutch on my hand, a nervous laugh. The candle spluttered out, and the thing was over at last, with a groan that floated up to me in the dark. He got himself away somehow. The night swallowed his form. He was a horrible bungler. Horrible. I heard the quick crunch-crunch of the gravel under his boots. He was running. Absolutely running, with nowhere to go to. And he was not yet four-and-twenty.'

## CHAPTER 14

‘I slept little, hurried over my breakfast, and after a slight hesitation gave up my early morning visit to my ship. It was really very wrong of me, because, though my chief mate was an excellent man all round, he was the victim of such black imaginings that if he did not get a letter from his wife at the expected time he would go quite distracted with rage and jealousy, lose all grip on the work, quarrel with all hands, and either weep in his cabin or develop such a ferocity of temper as all but drove the crew to the verge of mutiny. The thing had always seemed inexplicable to me: they had been married thirteen years; I had a glimpse of her once, and, honestly, I couldn’t conceive a man abandoned enough to plunge into sin for the sake of such an unattractive person. I don’t know whether I have not done wrong by refraining from putting that view before poor Selvin: the man made a little hell on earth for himself, and I also suffered indirectly, but some sort of, no doubt, false delicacy prevented me. The marital relations of seamen would make an interesting subject, and I could tell you instances. . . . However, this is not the place, nor the time, and we are concerned with Jim — who was unmarried. If his imaginative conscience or his pride; if all the extravagant ghosts and austere shades that were the disastrous familiars of his youth would not let him run away from the block, I, who of course can’t be suspected of such familiars, was irresistibly impelled to go and see his head roll off. I wended my way towards the court. I didn’t hope to be very much impressed or edified, or interested or even frightened — though, as long as there is any life before one, a jolly good fright now and then is a salutary discipline. But neither did I expect to be so awfully depressed. The bitterness of his punishment was in its chill and mean atmosphere. The real significance of crime is in its being a breach of faith with the community of mankind, and from that point of view he was no mean traitor, but his execution was a hole-and-corner affair. There was no high scaffolding, no scarlet cloth (did they have scarlet cloth on Tower Hill? They should have had), no awe-stricken multitude to be horrified at his guilt and be moved to tears at his fate — no air of sombre retribution. There was, as I walked along, the clear sunshine, a brilliance too passionate to be consoling, the streets full of jumbled bits of colour like a damaged kaleidoscope: yellow, green, blue, dazzling white, the brown nudity of an undraped shoulder, a bullock-cart with a red canopy, a company of native infantry in a drab body

with dark heads marching in dusty laced boots, a native policeman in a sombre uniform of scanty cut and belted in patent leather, who looked up at me with orientally pitiful eyes as though his migrating spirit were suffering exceedingly from that unforeseen — what d'ye call 'em? — avatar — incarnation. Under the shade of a lonely tree in the courtyard, the villagers connected with the assault case sat in a picturesque group, looking like a chromo-lithograph of a camp in a book of Eastern travel. One missed the obligatory thread of smoke in the foreground and the pack-animals grazing. A blank yellow wall rose behind overtopping the tree, reflecting the glare. The court-room was sombre, seemed more vast. High up in the dim space the punkahs were swaying short to and fro, to and fro. Here and there a draped figure, dwarfed by the bare walls, remained without stirring amongst the rows of empty benches, as if absorbed in pious meditation. The plaintiff, who had been beaten, — an obese chocolate-coloured man with shaved head, one fat breast bare and a bright yellow caste-mark above the bridge of his nose, — sat in pompous immobility: only his eyes glittered, rolling in the gloom, and the nostrils dilated and collapsed violently as he breathed. Brierly dropped into his seat looking done up, as though he had spent the night in sprinting on a cinder-track. The pious sailing-ship skipper appeared excited and made uneasy movements, as if restraining with difficulty an impulse to stand up and exhort us earnestly to prayer and repentance. The head of the magistrate, delicately pale under the neatly arranged hair, resembled the head of a hopeless invalid after he had been washed and brushed and propped up in bed. He moved aside the vase of flowers — a bunch of purple with a few pink blossoms on long stalks — and seizing in both hands a long sheet of bluish paper, ran his eye over it, propped his forearms on the edge of the desk, and began to read aloud in an even, distinct, and careless voice.

‘By Jove! For all my foolishness about scaffolds and heads rolling off — I assure you it was infinitely worse than a beheading. A heavy sense of finality brooded over all this, unrelieved by the hope of rest and safety following the fall of the axe. These proceedings had all the cold vengefulness of a death-sentence, and the cruelty of a sentence of exile. This is how I looked at it that morning — and even now I seem to see an undeniable vestige of truth in that exaggerated view of a common occurrence. You may imagine how strongly I felt this at the time. Perhaps it is for that reason that I could not bring myself to admit the finality. The

thing was always with me, I was always eager to take opinion on it, as though it had not been practically settled: individual opinion — international opinion — by Jove! That Frenchman's, for instance. His own country's pronouncement was uttered in the passionless and definite phraseology a machine would use, if machines could speak. The head of the magistrate was half hidden by the paper, his brow was like alabaster.

'There were several questions before the court. The first as to whether the ship was in every respect fit and seaworthy for the voyage. The court found she was not. The next point, I remember, was, whether up to the time of the accident the ship had been navigated with proper and seamanlike care. They said Yes to that, goodness knows why, and then they declared that there was no evidence to show the exact cause of the accident. A floating derelict probably. I myself remember that a Norwegian barque bound out with a cargo of pitch-pine had been given up as missing about that time, and it was just the sort of craft that would capsize in a squall and float bottom up for months — a kind of maritime ghoul on the prowl to kill ships in the dark. Such wandering corpses are common enough in the North Atlantic, which is haunted by all the terrors of the sea, — fogs, icebergs, dead ships bent upon mischief, and long sinister gales that fasten upon one like a vampire till all the strength and the spirit and even hope are gone, and one feels like the empty shell of a man. But there — in those seas — the incident was rare enough to resemble a special arrangement of a malevolent providence, which, unless it had for its object the killing of a donkeyman and the bringing of worse than death upon Jim, appeared an utterly aimless piece of devilry. This view occurring to me took off my attention. For a time I was aware of the magistrate's voice as a sound merely; but in a moment it shaped itself into distinct words . . . "in utter disregard of their plain duty," it said. The next sentence escaped me somehow, and then . . . "abandoning in the moment of danger the lives and property confided to their charge" . . . went on the voice evenly, and stopped. A pair of eyes under the white forehead shot darkly a glance above the edge of the paper. I looked for Jim hurriedly, as though I had expected him to disappear. He was very still — but he was there. He sat pink and fair and extremely attentive. "Therefore, . . ." began the voice emphatically. He stared with parted lips, hanging upon the words of the man behind the desk. These came out into the stillness wafted on the wind made by the punkahs, and I, watching for their effect upon him, caught only the fragments of official language. . . . "The Court . .

. Gustav So-and-so . . . master . . . native of Germany . . . James So-and-so . . . mate . . . certificates cancelled.” A silence fell. The magistrate had dropped the paper, and, leaning sideways on the arm of his chair, began to talk with Brierly easily. People started to move out; others were pushing in, and I also made for the door. Outside I stood still, and when Jim passed me on his way to the gate, I caught at his arm and detained him. The look he gave discomposed me, as though I had been responsible for his state he looked at me as if I had been the embodied evil of life. “It’s all over,” I stammered. “Yes,” he said thickly. “And now let no man . . .” He jerked his arm out of my grasp. I watched his back as he went away. It was a long street, and he remained in sight for some time. He walked rather slow, and straddling his legs a little, as if he had found it difficult to keep a straight line. Just before I lost him I fancied he staggered a bit.

““Man overboard,” said a deep voice behind me. Turning round, I saw a fellow I knew slightly, a West Australian; Chester was his name. He, too, had been looking after Jim. He was a man with an immense girth of chest, a rugged, clean-shaved face of mahogany colour, and two blunt tufts of iron-grey, thick, wiry hairs on his upper lip. He had been pearler, wrecker, trader, whaler too, I believe; in his own words — anything and everything a man may be at sea, but a pirate. The Pacific, north and south, was his proper hunting-ground; but he had wandered so far afield looking for a cheap steamer to buy. Lately he had discovered — so he said — a guano island somewhere, but its approaches were dangerous, and the anchorage, such as it was, could not be considered safe, to say the least of it. “As good as a gold-mine,” he would exclaim. “Right bang in the middle of the Walpole Reefs, and if it’s true enough that you can get no holding-ground anywhere in less than forty fathom, then what of that? There are the hurricanes, too. But it’s a first-rate thing. As good as a gold-mine — better! Yet there’s not a fool of them that will see it. I can’t get a skipper or a shipowner to go near the place. So I made up my mind to cart the blessed stuff myself.” . . . This was what he required a steamer for, and I knew he was just then negotiating enthusiastically with a Parsee firm for an old, brig-rigged, sea-anachronism of ninety horse-power. We had met and spoken together several times. He looked knowingly after Jim. “Takes it to heart?” he asked scornfully. “Very much,” I said. “Then he’s no good,” he opined. “What’s all the to-do about? A bit of ass’s skin. That never yet made a man. You must see things exactly as they are — if you don’t, you may just as well give in at once. You will

never do anything in this world. Look at me. I made it a practice never to take anything to heart." "Yes," I said, "you see things as they are." "I wish I could see my partner coming along, that's what I wish to see," he said. "Know my partner? Old Robinson. Yes; the Robinson. Don't you know? The notorious Robinson. The man who smuggled more opium and bagged more seals in his time than any loose Johnny now alive. They say he used to board the sealing-schooners up Alaska way when the fog was so thick that the Lord God, He alone, could tell one man from another. Holy-Terror Robinson. That's the man. He is with me in that guano thing. The best chance he ever came across in his life." He put his lips to my ear. "Cannibal? — well, they used to give him the name years and years ago. You remember the story? A shipwreck on the west side of Stewart Island; that's right; seven of them got ashore, and it seems they did not get on very well together. Some men are too cantankerous for anything — don't know how to make the best of a bad job — don't see things as they are — as they are, my boy! And then what's the consequence? Obvious! Trouble, trouble; as likely as not a knock on the head; and serve 'em right too. That sort is the most useful when it's dead. The story goes that a boat of Her Majesty's ship Wolverine found him kneeling on the kelp, naked as the day he was born, and chanting some psalm-tune or other; light snow was falling at the time. He waited till the boat was an oar's length from the shore, and then up and away. They chased him for an hour up and down the boulders, till a marihe flung a stone that took him behind the ear providentially and knocked him senseless. Alone? Of course. But that's like that tale of sealing-schooners; the Lord God knows the right and the wrong of that story. The cutter did not investigate much. They wrapped him in a boat-cloak and took him off as quick as they could, with a dark night coming on, the weather threatening, and the ship firing recall guns every five minutes. Three weeks afterwards he was as well as ever. He didn't allow any fuss that was made on shore to upset him; he just shut his lips tight, and let people screech. It was bad enough to have lost his ship, and all he was worth besides, without paying attention to the hard names they called him. That's the man for me." He lifted his arm for a signal to some one down the street. "He's got a little money, so I had to let him into my thing. Had to! It would have been sinful to throw away such a find, and I was cleaned out myself. It cut me to the quick, but I could see the matter just as it was, and if I must share — thinks I — with any man, then give me Robinson. I left him at breakfast in the

hotel to come to court, because I've an idea. . . . Ah! Good morning, Captain Robinson. . . . Friend of mine, Captain Robinson."

'An emaciated patriarch in a suit of white drill, a solah topi with a green-lined rim on a head trembling with age, joined us after crossing the street in a trotting shuffle, and stood propped with both hands on the handle of an umbrella. A white beard with amber streaks hung lumpily down to his waist. He blinked his creased eyelids at me in a bewildered way. "How do you do? how do you do?" he piped amiably, and tottered. "A little deaf," said Chester aside. "Did you drag him over six thousand miles to get a cheap steamer?" I asked. "I would have taken him twice round the world as soon as look at him," said Chester with immense energy. "The steamer will be the making of us, my lad. Is it my fault that every skipper and shipowner in the whole of blessed Australasia turns out a blamed fool? Once I talked for three hours to a man in Auckland. 'Send a ship,' I said, 'send a ship. I'll give you half of the first cargo for yourself, free gratis for nothing — just to make a good start.' Says he, 'I wouldn't do it if there was no other place on earth to send a ship to.' Perfect ass, of course. Rocks, currents, no anchorage, sheer cliff to lay to, no insurance company would take the risk, didn't see how he could get loaded under three years. Ass! I nearly went on my knees to him. 'But look at the thing as it is,' says I. 'Damn rocks and hurricanes. Look at it as it is. There's guano there Queensland sugar-planters would fight for — fight for on the quay, I tell you.' . . . What can you do with a fool? . . . 'That's one of your little jokes, Chester,' he says. . . . Joke! I could have wept. Ask Captain Robinson here. . . . And there was another shipowning fellow — a fat chap in a white waistcoat in Wellington, who seemed to think I was up to some swindle or other. 'I don't know what sort of fool you're looking for,' he says, 'but I am busy just now. Good morning.' I longed to take him in my two hands and smash him through the window of his own office. But I didn't. I was as mild as a curate. 'Think of it,' says I. 'Do think it over. I'll call to-morrow.' He grunted something about being 'out all day.' On the stairs I felt ready to beat my head against the wall from vexation. Captain Robinson here can tell you. It was awful to think of all that lovely stuff lying waste under the sun — stuff that would send the sugar-cane shooting sky-high. The making of Queensland! The making of Queensland! And in Brisbane, where I went to have a last try, they gave me the name of a lunatic. Idiots! The only sensible man I came across was the cabman who drove me about. A broken-down swell he was,

I fancy. Hey! Captain Robinson? You remember I told you about my cabby in Brisbane — don't you? The chap had a wonderful eye for things. He saw it all in a jiffy. It was a real pleasure to talk with him. One evening after a devil of a day amongst shipowners I felt so bad that, says I, 'I must get drunk. Come along; I must get drunk, or I'll go mad.' 'I am your man,' he says; 'go ahead.' I don't know what I would have done without him. Hey! Captain Robinson."

'He poked the ribs of his partner. "He! he! he!" laughed the Ancient, looked aimlessly down the street, then peered at me doubtfully with sad, dim pupils. . . . "He! he! he!" . . . He leaned heavier on the umbrella, and dropped his gaze on the ground. I needn't tell you I had tried to get away several times, but Chester had foiled every attempt by simply catching hold of my coat. "One minute. I've a notion." "What's your infernal notion?" I exploded at last. "If you think I am going in with you . . ." "No, no, my boy. Too late, if you wanted ever so much. We've got a steamer." "You've got the ghost of a steamer," I said. "Good enough for a start — there's no superior nonsense about us. Is there, Captain Robinson?" "No! no! no!" croaked the old man without lifting his eyes, and the senile tremble of his head became almost fierce with determination. "I understand you know that young chap," said Chester, with a nod at the street from which Jim had disappeared long ago. "He's been having grub with you in the Malabar last night — so I was told."

'I said that was true, and after remarking that he too liked to live well and in style, only that, for the present, he had to be saving of every penny — "none too many for the business! Isn't that so, Captain Robinson?" — he squared his shoulders and stroked his dumpy moustache, while the notorious Robinson, coughing at his side, clung more than ever to the handle of the umbrella, and seemed ready to subside passively into a heap of old bones. "You see, the old chap has all the money," whispered Chester confidentially. "I've been cleaned out trying to engineer the dratted thing. But wait a bit, wait a bit. The good time is coming." . . . He seemed suddenly astonished at the signs of impatience I gave. "Oh, crakee!" he cried; "I am telling you of the biggest thing that ever was, and you . . ." "I have an appointment," I pleaded mildly. "What of that?" he asked with genuine surprise; "let it wait." "That's exactly what I am doing now," I remarked; "hadn't you better tell me what it is you want?" "Buy twenty hotels like that," he growled to himself; "and every joker boarding in them



too — twenty times over.” He lifted his head smartly “I want that young chap.” “I don’t understand,” I said. “He’s no good, is he?” said Chester crisply. “I know nothing about it,” I protested. “Why, you told me yourself he was taking it to heart,” argued Chester. “Well, in my opinion a chap who . . . Anyhow, he can’t be much good; but then you see I am on the look-out for somebody, and I’ve just got a thing that will suit him. I’ll give him a job on my island.” He nodded significantly. “I’m going to dump forty coolies there — if I’ve to steal ‘em. Somebody must work the stuff. Oh! I mean to act square: wooden shed, corrugated-iron roof — I know a man in Hobart who will take my bill at six months for the materials. I do. Honour bright. Then there’s the water-supply. I’ll have to fly round and get somebody to trust me for half-a-dozen second-hand iron tanks. Catch rain-water, hey? Let him take charge. Make him supreme boss over the coolies. Good idea, isn’t it? What do you say?” “There are whole years when not a drop of rain falls on Walpole,” I said, too amazed to laugh. He bit his lip and seemed bothered. “Oh, well, I will fix up something for them — or land a supply. Hang it all! That’s not the question.”

‘I said nothing. I had a rapid vision of Jim perched on a shadowless rock, up to his knees in guano, with the screams of sea-birds in his ears, the incandescent ball of the sun above his head; the empty sky and the empty ocean all a-quiver, simmering together in the heat as far as the eye could reach. “I wouldn’t advise my worst enemy . . .” I began. “What’s the matter with you?” cried Chester; “I mean to give him a good screw — that is, as soon as the thing is set going, of course. It’s as easy as falling off a log. Simply nothing to do; two six-shooters in his belt . . . Surely he wouldn’t be afraid of anything forty coolies could do — with two six-shooters and he the only armed man too! It’s much better than it looks. I want you to help me to talk him over.” “No!” I shouted. Old Robinson lifted his bleared eyes dismally for a moment, Chester looked at me with infinite contempt. “So you wouldn’t advise him?” he uttered slowly. “Certainly not,” I answered, as indignant as though he had requested me to help murder somebody; “moreover, I am sure he wouldn’t. He is badly cut up, but he isn’t mad as far as I know.” “He is no earthly good for anything,” Chester mused aloud. “He would just have done for me. If you only could see a thing as it is, you would see it’s the very thing for him. And besides . . . Why! it’s the most splendid, sure chance . . .” He got angry suddenly. “I must have a man. There! . . .” He stamped his foot and smiled unpleasantly. “Anyhow, I could

guarantee the island wouldn't sink under him — and I believe he is a bit particular on that point." "Good morning," I said curtly. He looked at me as though I had been an incomprehensible fool. . . . "Must be moving, Captain Robinson," he yelled suddenly into the old man's ear. "These Parsee Johnnies are waiting for us to clinch the bargain." He took his partner under the arm with a firm grip, swung him round, and, unexpectedly, leered at me over his shoulder. "I was trying to do him a kindness," he asserted, with an air and tone that made my blood boil. "Thank you for nothing — in his name," I rejoined. "Oh! you are devilish smart," he sneered; "but you are like the rest of them. Too much in the clouds. See what you will do with him." "I don't know that I want to do anything with him." "Don't you?" he spluttered; his grey moustache bristled with anger, and by his side the notorious Robinson, propped on the umbrella, stood with his back to me, as patient and still as a worn-out cab-horse. "I haven't found a guano island," I said. "It's my belief you wouldn't know one if you were led right up to it by the hand," he riposted quickly; "and in this world you've got to see a thing first, before you can make use of it. Got to see it through and through at that, neither more nor less." "And get others to see it, too," I insinuated, with a glance at the bowed back by his side. Chester snorted at me. "His eyes are right enough — don't you worry. He ain't a puppy." "Oh, dear, no!" I said. "Come along, Captain Robinson," he shouted, with a sort of bullying deference under the rim of the old man's hat; the Holy Terror gave a submissive little jump. The ghost of a steamer was waiting for them, Fortune on that fair isle! They made a curious pair of Argonauts. Chester strode on leisurely, well set up, portly, and of conquering mien; the other, long, wasted, drooping, and hooked to his arm, shuffled his withered shanks with desperate haste.'

## CHAPTER 15

‘I did not start in search of Jim at once, only because I had really an appointment which I could not neglect. Then, as ill-luck would have it, in my agent’s office I was fastened upon by a fellow fresh from Madagascar with a little scheme for a wonderful piece of business. It had something to do with cattle and cartridges and a Prince Ravonalo something; but the pivot of the whole affair was the stupidity of some admiral — Admiral Pierre, I think. Everything turned on that, and the chap couldn’t find words strong enough to express his confidence. He had globular eyes starting out of his head with a fishy glitter, bumps on his forehead, and wore his long hair brushed back without a parting. He had a favourite phrase which he kept on repeating triumphantly, “The minimum of risk with the maximum of profit is my motto. What?” He made my head ache, spoiled my tiffin, but got his own out of me all right; and as soon as I had shaken him off, I made straight for the water-side. I caught sight of Jim leaning over the parapet of the quay. Three native boatmen quarrelling over five annas were making an awful row at his elbow. He didn’t hear me come up, but spun round as if the slight contact of my finger had released a catch. “I was looking,” he stammered. I don’t remember what I said, not much anyhow, but he made no difficulty in following me to the hotel.

‘He followed me as manageable as a little child, with an obedient air, with no sort of manifestation, rather as though he had been waiting for me there to come along and carry him off. I need not have been so surprised as I was at his tractability. On all the round earth, which to some seems so big and that others affect to consider as rather smaller than a mustard-seed, he had no place where he could — what shall I say? — where he could withdraw. That’s it! Withdraw — be alone with his loneliness. He walked by my side very calm, glancing here and there, and once turned his head to look after a Sidiboy fireman in a cutaway coat and yellowish trousers, whose black face had silky gleams like a lump of anthracite coal. I doubt, however, whether he saw anything, or even remained all the time aware of my companionship, because if I had not edged him to the left here, or pulled him to the right there, I believe he would have gone straight before him in any direction till stopped by a wall or some other obstacle. I steered him into my bedroom, and sat down at once to write letters. This was the only place in the world (unless, perhaps, the Walpole Reef — but that was

not so handy) where he could have it out with himself without being bothered by the rest of the universe. The damned thing — as he had expressed it — had not made him invisible, but I behaved exactly as though he were. No sooner in my chair I bent over my writing-desk like a medieval scribe, and, but for the movement of the hand holding the pen, remained anxiously quiet. I can't say I was frightened; but I certainly kept as still as if there had been something dangerous in the room, that at the first hint of a movement on my part would be provoked to pounce upon me. There was not much in the room — you know how these bedrooms are — a sort of four-poster bedstead under a mosquito-net, two or three chairs, the table I was writing at, a bare floor. A glass door opened on an upstairs verandah, and he stood with his face to it, having a hard time with all possible privacy. Dusk fell; I lit a candle with the greatest economy of movement and as much prudence as though it were an illegal proceeding. There is no doubt that he had a very hard time of it, and so had I, even to the point, I must own, of wishing him to the devil, or on Walpole Reef at least. It occurred to me once or twice that, after all, Chester was, perhaps, the man to deal effectively with such a disaster. That strange idealist had found a practical use for it at once — unerringly, as it were. It was enough to make one suspect that, maybe, he really could see the true aspect of things that appeared mysterious or utterly hopeless to less imaginative persons. I wrote and wrote; I liquidated all the arrears of my correspondence, and then went on writing to people who had no reason whatever to expect from me a gossiping letter about nothing at all. At times I stole a sidelong glance. He was rooted to the spot, but convulsive shudders ran down his back; his shoulders would heave suddenly. He was fighting, he was fighting — mostly for his breath, as it seemed. The massive shadows, cast all one way from the straight flame of the candle, seemed possessed of gloomy consciousness; the immobility of the furniture had to my furtive eye an air of attention. I was becoming fanciful in the midst of my industrious scribbling; and though, when the scratching of my pen stopped for a moment, there was complete silence and stillness in the room, I suffered from that profound disturbance and confusion of thought which is caused by a violent and menacing uproar — of a heavy gale at sea, for instance. Some of you may know what I mean: that mingled anxiety, distress, and irritation with a sort of craven feeling creeping in — not pleasant to acknowledge, but which gives a quite special merit to one's endurance. I

don't claim any merit for standing the stress of Jim's emotions; I could take refuge in the letters; I could have written to strangers if necessary. Suddenly, as I was taking up a fresh sheet of notepaper, I heard a low sound, the first sound that, since we had been shut up together, had come to my ears in the dim stillness of the room. I remained with my head down, with my hand arrested. Those who have kept vigil by a sick-bed have heard such faint sounds in the stillness of the night watches, sounds wrung from a racked body, from a weary soul. He pushed the glass door with such force that all the panes rang: he stepped out, and I held my breath, straining my ears without knowing what else I expected to hear. He was really taking too much to heart an empty formality which to Chester's rigorous criticism seemed unworthy the notice of a man who could see things as they were. An empty formality; a piece of parchment. Well, well. As to an inaccessible guano deposit, that was another story altogether. One could intelligibly break one's heart over that. A feeble burst of many voices mingled with the tinkle of silver and glass floated up from the dining-room below; through the open door the outer edge of the light from my candle fell on his back faintly; beyond all was black; he stood on the brink of a vast obscurity, like a lonely figure by the shore of a sombre and hopeless ocean. There was the Walpole Reef in it — to be sure — a speck in the dark void, a straw for the drowning man. My compassion for him took the shape of the thought that I wouldn't have liked his people to see him at that moment. I found it trying myself. His back was no longer shaken by his gasps; he stood straight as an arrow, faintly visible and still; and the meaning of this stillness sank to the bottom of my soul like lead into the water, and made it so heavy that for a second I wished heartily that the only course left open for me was to pay for his funeral. Even the law had done with him. To bury him would have been such an easy kindness! It would have been so much in accordance with the wisdom of life, which consists in putting out of sight all the reminders of our folly, of our weakness, of our mortality; all that makes against our efficiency — the memory of our failures, the hints of our undying fears, the bodies of our dead friends. Perhaps he did take it too much to heart. And if so then — Chester's offer. . . . At this point I took up a fresh sheet and began to write resolutely. There was nothing but myself between him and the dark ocean. I had a sense of responsibility. If I spoke, would that motionless and suffering youth leap into the obscurity — clutch at the straw? I found out how difficult it may be sometimes to make a sound.

There is a weird power in a spoken word. And why the devil not? I was asking myself persistently while I drove on with my writing. All at once, on the blank page, under the very point of the pen, the two figures of Chester and his antique partner, very distinct and complete, would dodge into view with stride and gestures, as if reproduced in the field of some optical toy. I would watch them for a while. No! They were too phantasmal and extravagant to enter into any one's fate. And a word carries far — very far — deals destruction through time as the bullets go flying through space. I said nothing; and he, out there with his back to the light, as if bound and gagged by all the invisible foes of man, made no stir and made no sound.'

## CHAPTER 16

‘The time was coming when I should see him loved, trusted, admired, with a legend of strength and prowess forming round his name as though he had been the stuff of a hero. It’s true — I assure you; as true as I’m sitting here talking about him in vain. He, on his side, had that faculty of beholding at a hint the face of his desire and the shape of his dream, without which the earth would know no lover and no adventurer. He captured much honour and an Arcadian happiness (I won’t say anything about innocence) in the bush, and it was as good to him as the honour and the Arcadian happiness of the streets to another man. Felicity, felicity — how shall I say it? — is quaffed out of a golden cup in every latitude: the flavour is with you — with you alone, and you can make it as intoxicating as you please. He was of the sort that would drink deep, as you may guess from what went before. I found him, if not exactly intoxicated, then at least flushed with the elixir at his lips. He had not obtained it at once. There had been, as you know, a period of probation amongst infernal ship-chandlers, during which he had suffered and I had worried about — about — my trust — you may call it. I don’t know that I am completely reassured now, after beholding him in all his brilliance. That was my last view of him — in a strong light, dominating, and yet in complete accord with his surroundings — with the life of the forests and with the life of men. I own that I was impressed, but I must admit to myself that after all this is not the lasting impression. He was protected by his isolation, alone of his own superior kind, in close touch with Nature, that keeps faith on such easy terms with her lovers. But I cannot fix before my eye the image of his safety. I shall always remember him as seen through the open door of my room, taking, perhaps, too much to heart the mere consequences of his failure. I am pleased, of course, that some good — and even some splendour — came out of my endeavours; but at times it seems to me it would have been better for my peace of mind if I had not stood between him and Chester’s confoundedly generous offer. I wonder what his exuberant imagination would have made of Walpole islet — that most hopelessly forsaken crumb of dry land on the face of the waters. It is not likely I would ever have heard, for I must tell you that Chester, after calling at some Australian port to patch up his brig-rigged sea-anachronism, steamed out into the Pacific with a crew of twenty-two hands all told, and the only news having a possible bearing upon the

mystery of his fate was the news of a hurricane which is supposed to have swept in its course over the Walpole shoals, a month or so afterwards. Not a vestige of the Argonauts ever turned up; not a sound came out of the waste. Finis! The Pacific is the most discreet of live, hot-tempered oceans: the chilly Antarctic can keep a secret too, but more in the manner of a grave.

‘And there is a sense of blessed finality in such discretion, which is what we all more or less sincerely are ready to admit — for what else is it that makes the idea of death supportable? End! Finis! the potent word that exorcises from the house of life the haunting shadow of fate. This is what — notwithstanding the testimony of my eyes and his own earnest assurances — I miss when I look back upon Jim’s success. While there’s life there is hope, truly; but there is fear too. I don’t mean to say that I regret my action, nor will I pretend that I can’t sleep o’ nights in consequence; still, the idea obtrudes itself that he made so much of his disgrace while it is the guilt alone that matters. He was not — if I may say so — clear to me. He was not clear. And there is a suspicion he was not clear to himself either. There were his fine sensibilities, his fine feelings, his fine longings — a sort of sublimated, idealised selfishness. He was — if you allow me to say so — very fine; very fine — and very unfortunate. A little coarser nature would not have borne the strain; it would have had to come to terms with itself — with a sigh, with a grunt, or even with a guffaw; a still coarser one would have remained invulnerably ignorant and completely uninteresting.

‘But he was too interesting or too unfortunate to be thrown to the dogs, or even to Chester. I felt this while I sat with my face over the paper and he fought and gasped, struggling for his breath in that terribly stealthy way, in my room; I felt it when he rushed out on the verandah as if to fling himself over — and didn’t; I felt it more and more all the time he remained outside, faintly lighted on the background of night, as if standing on the shore of a sombre and hopeless sea.

‘An abrupt heavy rumble made me lift my head. The noise seemed to roll away, and suddenly a searching and violent glare fell on the blind face of the night. The sustained and dazzling flickers seemed to last for an unconscionable time. The growl of the thunder increased steadily while I looked at him, distinct and black, planted solidly upon the shores of a sea of light. At the moment of greatest brilliance the darkness leaped back with a culminating crash, and he vanished before my dazzled eyes as utterly as though he had been blown to atoms. A blustering sigh passed; furious hands



seemed to tear at the shrubs, shake the tops of the trees below, slam doors, break window-panes, all along the front of the building. He stepped in, closing the door behind him, and found me bending over the table: my sudden anxiety as to what he would say was very great, and akin to a fright. "May I have a cigarette?" he asked. I gave a push to the box without raising my head. "I want — want — tobacco," he muttered. I became extremely buoyant. "Just a moment." I grunted pleasantly. He took a few steps here and there. "That's over," I heard him say. A single distant clap of thunder came from the sea like a gun of distress. "The monsoon breaks up early this year," he remarked conversationally, somewhere behind me. This encouraged me to turn round, which I did as soon as I had finished addressing the last envelope. He was smoking greedily in the middle of the room, and though he heard the stir I made, he remained with his back to me for a time.

"Come — I carried it off pretty well," he said, wheeling suddenly. "Something's paid off — not much. I wonder what's to come." His face did not show any emotion, only it appeared a little darkened and swollen, as though he had been holding his breath. He smiled reluctantly as it were, and went on while I gazed up at him mutely. . . . "Thank you, though — your room — jolly convenient — for a chap — badly hipped." . . . The rain pattered and swished in the garden; a water-pipe (it must have had a hole in it) performed just outside the window a parody of blubbering woe with funny sobs and gurgling lamentations, interrupted by jerky spasms of silence. . . . "A bit of shelter," he mumbled and ceased.

'A flash of faded lightning darted in through the black framework of the windows and ebbed out without any noise. I was thinking how I had best approach him (I did not want to be flung off again) when he gave a little laugh. "No better than a vagabond now" . . . the end of the cigarette smouldered between his fingers . . . "without a single — single," he pronounced slowly; "and yet . . ." He paused; the rain fell with redoubled violence. "Some day one's bound to come upon some sort of chance to get it all back again. Must!" he whispered distinctly, glaring at my boots.

'I did not even know what it was he wished so much to regain, what it was he had so terribly missed. It might have been so much that it was impossible to say. A piece of ass's skin, according to Chester. . . . He looked up at me inquisitively. "Perhaps. If life's long enough," I muttered through my teeth with unreasonable animosity. "Don't reckon too much on it."

“Jove! I feel as if nothing could ever touch me,” he said in a tone of sombre conviction. “If this business couldn’t knock me over, then there’s no fear of there being not enough time to — climb out, and . . .” He looked upwards.

‘It struck me that it is from such as he that the great army of waifs and strays is recruited, the army that marches down, down into all the gutters of the earth. As soon as he left my room, that “bit of shelter,” he would take his place in the ranks, and begin the journey towards the bottomless pit. I at least had no illusions; but it was I, too, who a moment ago had been so sure of the power of words, and now was afraid to speak, in the same way one dares not move for fear of losing a slippery hold. It is when we try to grapple with another man’s intimate need that we perceive how incomprehensible, wavering, and misty are the beings that share with us the sight of the stars and the warmth of the sun. It is as if loneliness were a hard and absolute condition of existence; the envelope of flesh and blood on which our eyes are fixed melts before the outstretched hand, and there remains only the capricious, unconsolable, and elusive spirit that no eye can follow, no hand can grasp. It was the fear of losing him that kept me silent, for it was borne upon me suddenly and with unaccountable force that should I let him slip away into the darkness I would never forgive myself.

“Well. Thanks — once more. You’ve been — er — uncommonly — really there’s no word to . . . Uncommonly! I don’t know why, I am sure. I am afraid I don’t feel as grateful as I would if the whole thing hadn’t been so brutally sprung on me. Because at bottom . . . you, yourself . . .” He stuttered.

“Possibly,” I struck in. He frowned.

“All the same, one is responsible.” He watched me like a hawk.

“And that’s true, too,” I said.

“Well. I’ve gone with it to the end, and I don’t intend to let any man cast it in my teeth without — without — resenting it.” He clenched his fist.

“There’s yourself,” I said with a smile — mirthless enough, God knows — but he looked at me menacingly. “That’s my business,” he said. An air of indomitable resolution came and went upon his face like a vain and passing shadow. Next moment he looked a dear good boy in trouble, as before. He flung away the cigarette. “Good-bye,” he said, with the sudden haste of a man who had lingered too long in view of a pressing bit of work waiting for him; and then for a second or so he made not the slightest movement. The

downpour fell with the heavy uninterrupted rush of a sweeping flood, with a sound of unchecked overwhelming fury that called to one's mind the images of collapsing bridges, of uprooted trees, of undermined mountains. No man could breast the colossal and headlong stream that seemed to break and swirl against the dim stillness in which we were precariously sheltered as if on an island. The perforated pipe gurgled, choked, spat, and splashed in odious ridicule of a swimmer fighting for his life. "It is raining," I remonstrated, "and I . . ." "Rain or shine," he began brusquely, checked himself, and walked to the window. "Perfect deluge," he muttered after a while: he leaned his forehead on the glass. "It's dark, too."

"Yes, it is very dark," I said.

'He pivoted on his heels, crossed the room, and had actually opened the door leading into the corridor before I leaped up from my chair. "Wait," I cried, "I want you to . . ." "I can't dine with you again to-night," he flung at me, with one leg out of the room already. "I haven't the slightest intention to ask you," I shouted. At this he drew back his foot, but remained mistrustfully in the very doorway. I lost no time in entreating him earnestly not to be absurd; to come in and shut the door.'

## CHAPTER 17

'He came in at last; but I believe it was mostly the rain that did it; it was falling just then with a devastating violence which quieted down gradually while we talked. His manner was very sober and set; his bearing was that of a naturally taciturn man possessed by an idea. My talk was of the material aspect of his position; it had the sole aim of saving him from the degradation, ruin, and despair that out there close so swiftly upon a friendless, homeless man; I pleaded with him to accept my help; I argued reasonably: and every time I looked up at that absorbed smooth face, so grave and youthful, I had a disturbing sense of being no help but rather an obstacle to some mysterious, inexplicable, impalpable striving of his wounded spirit.

"I suppose you intend to eat and drink and to sleep under shelter in the usual way," I remember saying with irritation. "You say you won't touch the money that is due to you." . . . He came as near as his sort can to making a gesture of horror. (There were three weeks and five days' pay owing him as mate of the Patna.) "Well, that's too little to matter anyhow; but what will you do to-morrow? Where will you turn? You must live . . ." "That isn't the thing," was the comment that escaped him under his breath. I ignored it, and went on combating what I assumed to be the scruples of an exaggerated delicacy. "On every conceivable ground," I concluded, "you must let me help you." "You can't," he said very simply and gently, and holding fast to some deep idea which I could detect shimmering like a pool of water in the dark, but which I despaired of ever approaching near enough to fathom. I surveyed his well-proportioned bulk. "At any rate," I said, "I am able to help what I can see of you. I don't pretend to do more." He shook his head sceptically without looking at me. I got very warm. "But I can," I insisted. "I can do even more. I am doing more. I am trusting you . . ." "The money . . ." he began. "Upon my word you deserve being told to go to the devil," I cried, forcing the note of indignation. He was startled, smiled, and I pressed my attack home. "It isn't a question of money at all. You are too superficial," I said (and at the same time I was thinking to myself: Well, here goes! And perhaps he is, after all). "Look at the letter I want you to take. I am writing to a man of whom I've never asked a favour, and I am writing about you in terms that one only ventures to use when speaking of an intimate friend. I make myself unreservedly responsible for you. That's

what I am doing. And really if you will only reflect a little what that means . . .”

‘He lifted his head. The rain had passed away; only the water-pipe went on shedding tears with an absurd drip, drip outside the window. It was very quiet in the room, whose shadows huddled together in corners, away from the still flame of the candle flaring upright in the shape of a dagger; his face after a while seemed suffused by a reflection of a soft light as if the dawn had broken already.

“‘Jove!’ he gasped out. “It is noble of you!”

‘Had he suddenly put out his tongue at me in derision, I could not have felt more humiliated. I thought to myself — Serve me right for a sneaking humbug. . . . His eyes shone straight into my face, but I perceived it was not a mocking brightness. All at once he sprang into jerky agitation, like one of those flat wooden figures that are worked by a string. His arms went up, then came down with a slap. He became another man altogether. “And I had never seen,” he shouted; then suddenly bit his lip and frowned. “What a bally ass I’ve been,” he said very slow in an awed tone. . . . “You are a brick!” he cried next in a muffled voice. He snatched my hand as though he had just then seen it for the first time, and dropped it at once. “Why! this is what I — you — I . . .” he stammered, and then with a return of his old stolid, I may say mulish, manner he began heavily, “I would be a brute now if I . . .” and then his voice seemed to break. “That’s all right,” I said. I was almost alarmed by this display of feeling, through which pierced a strange elation. I had pulled the string accidentally, as it were; I did not fully understand the working of the toy. “I must go now,” he said. “Jove! You have helped me. Can’t sit still. The very thing . . .” He looked at me with puzzled admiration. “The very thing . . .”

‘Of course it was the thing. It was ten to one that I had saved him from starvation — of that peculiar sort that is almost invariably associated with drink. This was all. I had not a single illusion on that score, but looking at him, I allowed myself to wonder at the nature of the one he had, within the last three minutes, so evidently taken into his bosom. I had forced into his hand the means to carry on decently the serious business of life, to get food, drink, and shelter of the customary kind while his wounded spirit, like a bird with a broken wing, might hop and flutter into some hole to die quietly of inanition there. This is what I had thrust upon him: a definitely small thing; and — behold! — by the manner of its reception it loomed in the dim

light of the candle like a big, indistinct, perhaps a dangerous shadow. "You don't mind me not saying anything appropriate," he burst out. "There isn't anything one could say. Last night already you had done me no end of good. Listening to me — you know. I give you my word I've thought more than once the top of my head would fly off. . ." He darted — positively darted — here and there, rammed his hands into his pockets, jerked them out again, flung his cap on his head. I had no idea it was in him to be so airily brisk. I thought of a dry leaf imprisoned in an eddy of wind, while a mysterious apprehension, a load of indefinite doubt, weighed me down in my chair. He stood stock-still, as if struck motionless by a discovery. "You have given me confidence," he declared, soberly. "Oh! for God's sake, my dear fellow — don't!" I entreated, as though he had hurt me. "All right. I'll shut up now and henceforth. Can't prevent me thinking though. . . . Never mind! . . . I'll show yet . . ." He went to the door in a hurry, paused with his head down, and came back, stepping deliberately. "I always thought that if a fellow could begin with a clean slate . . . And now you . . . in a measure . . . yes . . . clean slate." I waved my hand, and he marched out without looking back; the sound of his footfalls died out gradually behind the closed door — the unhesitating tread of a man walking in broad daylight.

'But as to me, left alone with the solitary candle, I remained strangely unenlightened. I was no longer young enough to behold at every turn the magnificence that besets our insignificant footsteps in good and in evil. I smiled to think that, after all, it was yet he, of us two, who had the light. And I felt sad. A clean slate, did he say? As if the initial word of each our destiny were not graven in imperishable characters upon the face of a rock.'

## CHAPTER 18

‘Six months afterwards my friend (he was a cynical, more than middle-aged bachelor, with a reputation for eccentricity, and owned a rice-mill) wrote to me, and judging, from the warmth of my recommendation, that I would like to hear, enlarged a little upon Jim’s perfections. These were apparently of a quiet and effective sort. “Not having been able so far to find more in my heart than a resigned toleration for any individual of my kind, I have lived till now alone in a house that even in this steaming climate could be considered as too big for one man. I have had him to live with me for some time past. It seems I haven’t made a mistake.” It seemed to me on reading this letter that my friend had found in his heart more than tolerance for Jim — that there were the beginnings of active liking. Of course he stated his grounds in a characteristic way. For one thing, Jim kept his freshness in the climate. Had he been a girl — my friend wrote — one could have said he was blooming — blooming modestly — like a violet, not like some of these blatant tropical flowers. He had been in the house for six weeks, and had not as yet attempted to slap him on the back, or address him as “old boy,” or try to make him feel a superannuated fossil. He had nothing of the exasperating young man’s chatter. He was good-tempered, had not much to say for himself, was not clever by any means, thank goodness — wrote my friend. It appeared, however, that Jim was clever enough to be quietly appreciative of his wit, while, on the other hand, he amused him by his naiveness. “The dew is yet on him, and since I had the bright idea of giving him a room in the house and having him at meals I feel less withered myself. The other day he took it into his head to cross the room with no other purpose but to open a door for me; and I felt more in touch with mankind than I had been for years. Ridiculous, isn’t it? Of course I guess there is something — some awful little scrape — which you know all about — but if I am sure that it is terribly heinous, I fancy one could manage to forgive it. For my part, I declare I am unable to imagine him guilty of anything much worse than robbing an orchard. Is it much worse? Perhaps you ought to have told me; but it is such a long time since we both turned saints that you may have forgotten we, too, had sinned in our time? It may be that some day I shall have to ask you, and then I shall expect to be told. I don’t care to question him myself till I have some idea what it is. Moreover, it’s too soon as yet. Let him open the door a few times more for me. . . .”

Thus my friend. I was trebly pleased — at Jim's shaping so well, at the tone of the letter, at my own cleverness. Evidently I had known what I was doing. I had read characters aright, and so on. And what if something unexpected and wonderful were to come of it? That evening, reposing in a deck-chair under the shade of my own poop awning (it was in Hong-Kong harbour), I laid on Jim's behalf the first stone of a castle in Spain.

'I made a trip to the northward, and when I returned I found another letter from my friend waiting for me. It was the first envelope I tore open. "There are no spoons missing, as far as I know," ran the first line; "I haven't been interested enough to inquire. He is gone, leaving on the breakfast-table a formal little note of apology, which is either silly or heartless. Probably both — and it's all one to me. Allow me to say, lest you should have some more mysterious young men in reserve, that I have shut up shop, definitely and for ever. This is the last eccentricity I shall be guilty of. Do not imagine for a moment that I care a hang; but he is very much regretted at tennis-parties, and for my own sake I've told a plausible lie at the club. . . ." I flung the letter aside and started looking through the batch on my table, till I came upon Jim's handwriting. Would you believe it? One chance in a hundred! But it is always that hundredth chance! That little second engineer of the Patna had turned up in a more or less destitute state, and got a temporary job of looking after the machinery of the mill. "I couldn't stand the familiarity of the little beast," Jim wrote from a seaport seven hundred miles south of the place where he should have been in clover. "I am now for the time with Egstrom & Blake, ship-chandlers, as their — well — runner, to call the thing by its right name. For reference I gave them your name, which they know of course, and if you could write a word in my favour it would be a permanent employment." I was utterly crushed under the ruins of my castle, but of course I wrote as desired. Before the end of the year my new charter took me that way, and I had an opportunity of seeing him.

'He was still with Egstrom & Blake, and we met in what they called "our parlour" opening out of the store. He had that moment come in from boarding a ship, and confronted me head down, ready for a tussle. "What have you got to say for yourself?" I began as soon as we had shaken hands. "What I wrote you — nothing more," he said stubbornly. "Did the fellow blab — or what?" I asked. He looked up at me with a troubled smile. "Oh, no! He didn't. He made it a kind of confidential business between us. He was most damnably mysterious whenever I came over to the mill; he would



wink at me in a respectful manner — as much as to say ‘We know what we know.’ Infernally fawning and familiar — and that sort of thing . . .” He threw himself into a chair and stared down his legs. “One day we happened to be alone and the fellow had the cheek to say, ‘Well, Mr. James’ — I was called Mr. James there as if I had been the son — ’here we are together once more. This is better than the old ship — ain’t it?’ . . . Wasn’t it appalling, eh? I looked at him, and he put on a knowing air. ‘Don’t you be uneasy, sir,’ he says. ‘I know a gentleman when I see one, and I know how a gentleman feels. I hope, though, you will be keeping me on this job. I had a hard time of it too, along of that rotten old Patna racket.’ Jove! It was awful. I don’t know what I should have said or done if I had not just then heard Mr. Denver calling me in the passage. It was tiffin-time, and we walked together across the yard and through the garden to the bungalow. He began to chaff me in his kindly way . . . I believe he liked me . . .”

‘Jim was silent for a while.

“‘I know he liked me. That’s what made it so hard. Such a splendid man! . . . That morning he slipped his hand under my arm. . . . He, too, was familiar with me.” He burst into a short laugh, and dropped his chin on his breast. “Pah! When I remembered how that mean little beast had been talking to me,” he began suddenly in a vibrating voice, “I couldn’t bear to think of myself . . . I suppose you know . . .” I nodded. . . . “More like a father,” he cried; his voice sank. “I would have had to tell him. I couldn’t let it go on — could I?” “Well?” I murmured, after waiting a while. “I preferred to go,” he said slowly; “this thing must be buried.”

‘We could hear in the shop Blake upbraiding Egstrom in an abusive, strained voice. They had been associated for many years, and every day from the moment the doors were opened to the last minute before closing, Blake, a little man with sleek, jetty hair and unhappy, beady eyes, could be heard rowing his partner incessantly with a sort of scathing and plaintive fury. The sound of that everlasting scolding was part of the place like the other fixtures; even strangers would very soon come to disregard it completely unless it be perhaps to mutter “Nuisance,” or to get up suddenly and shut the door of the “parlour.” Egstrom himself, a raw-boned, heavy Scandinavian, with a busy manner and immense blonde whiskers, went on directing his people, checking parcels, making out bills or writing letters at a stand-up desk in the shop, and comported himself in that clatter exactly as though he had been stone-deaf. Now and again he would emit a bothered

perfunctory “Sssh,” which neither produced nor was expected to produce the slightest effect. “They are very decent to me here,” said Jim. “Blake’s a little cad, but Egstrom’s all right.” He stood up quickly, and walking with measured steps to a tripod telescope standing in the window and pointed at the roadstead, he applied his eye to it. “There’s that ship which has been becalmed outside all the morning has got a breeze now and is coming in,” he remarked patiently; “I must go and board.” We shook hands in silence, and he turned to go. “Jim!” I cried. He looked round with his hand on the lock. “You — you have thrown away something like a fortune.” He came back to me all the way from the door. “Such a splendid old chap,” he said. “How could I? How could I?” His lips twitched. “Here it does not matter.” “Oh! you — you — ” I began, and had to cast about for a suitable word, but before I became aware that there was no name that would just do, he was gone. I heard outside Egstrom’s deep gentle voice saying cheerily, “That’s the Sarah W. Granger, Jimmy. You must manage to be first aboard”; and directly Blake struck in, screaming after the manner of an outraged cockatoo, “Tell the captain we’ve got some of his mail here. That’ll fetch him. D’ye hear, Mister What’s-your-name?” And there was Jim answering Egstrom with something boyish in his tone. “All right. I’ll make a race of it.” He seemed to take refuge in the boat-sailing part of that sorry business.

‘I did not see him again that trip, but on my next (I had a six months’ charter) I went up to the store. Ten yards away from the door Blake’s scolding met my ears, and when I came in he gave me a glance of utter wretchedness; Egstrom, all smiles, advanced, extending a large bony hand. “Glad to see you, captain. . . . Sssh. . . . Been thinking you were about due back here. What did you say, sir? . . . Sssh. . . . Oh! him! He has left us. Come into the parlour.” . . . After the slam of the door Blake’s strained voice became faint, as the voice of one scolding desperately in a wilderness. . . . “Put us to a great inconvenience, too. Used us badly — I must say . . .” “Where’s he gone to? Do you know?” I asked. “No. It’s no use asking either,” said Egstrom, standing bewhiskered and obliging before me with his arms hanging down his sides clumsily, and a thin silver watch-chain looped very low on a rucked-up blue serge waistcoat. “A man like that don’t go anywhere in particular.” I was too concerned at the news to ask for the explanation of that pronouncement, and he went on. “He left — let’s see — the very day a steamer with returning pilgrims from the Red Sea put in here with two blades of her propeller gone. Three weeks ago now.” “Wasn’t

there something said about the Patna case?" I asked, fearing the worst. He gave a start, and looked at me as if I had been a sorcerer. "Why, yes! How do you know? Some of them were talking about it here. There was a captain or two, the manager of Vanlo's engineering shop at the harbour, two or three others, and myself. Jim was in here too, having a sandwich and a glass of beer; when we are busy — you see, captain — there's no time for a proper tiffin. He was standing by this table eating sandwiches, and the rest of us were round the telescope watching that steamer come in; and by-and-by Vanlo's manager began to talk about the chief of the Patna; he had done some repairs for him once, and from that he went on to tell us what an old ruin she was, and the money that had been made out of her. He came to mention her last voyage, and then we all struck in. Some said one thing and some another — not much — what you or any other man might say; and there was some laughing. Captain O'Brien of the Sarah W. Granger, a large, noisy old man with a stick — he was sitting listening to us in this arm-chair here — he let drive suddenly with his stick at the floor, and roars out, 'Skunks!' . . . Made us all jump. Vanlo's manager winks at us and asks, 'What's the matter, Captain O'Brien?' 'Matter! matter!' the old man began to shout; 'what are you Injuns laughing at? It's no laughing matter. It's a disgrace to human natur' — that's what it is. I would despise being seen in the same room with one of those men. Yes, sir!' He seemed to catch my eye like, and I had to speak out of civility. 'Skunks!' says I, 'of course, Captain O'Brien, and I wouldn't care to have them here myself, so you're quite safe in this room, Captain O'Brien. Have a little something cool to drink.' 'Dam' your drink, Egstrom,' says he, with a twinkle in his eye; 'when I want a drink I will shout for it. I am going to quit. It stinks here now.' At this all the others burst out laughing, and out they go after the old man. And then, sir, that blasted Jim he puts down the sandwich he had in his hand and walks round the table to me; there was his glass of beer poured out quite full. 'I am off,' he says — just like this. 'It isn't half-past one yet,' says I; 'you might snatch a smoke first.' I thought he meant it was time for him to go down to his work. When I understood what he was up to, my arms fell — so! Can't get a man like that every day, you know, sir; a regular devil for sailing a boat; ready to go out miles to sea to meet ships in any sort of weather. More than once a captain would come in here full of it, and the first thing he would say would be, 'That's a reckless sort of a lunatic you've got for water-clerk, Egstrom. I was feeling my way in at daylight under

short canvas when there comes flying out of the mist right under my forefoot a boat half under water, sprays going over the mast-head, two frightened niggers on the bottom boards, a yelling fiend at the tiller. Hey! hey! Ship ahoy! ahoy! Captain! Hey! hey! Egstrom & Blake's man first to speak to you! Hey! hey! Egstrom & Blake! Hallo! hey! whoop! Kick the niggers — out reefs — a squall on at the time — shoots ahead whooping and yelling to me to make sail and he would give me a lead in — more like a demon than a man. Never saw a boat handled like that in all my life. Couldn't have been drunk — was he? Such a quiet, soft-spoken chap too — blush like a girl when he came on board. . . . I tell you, Captain Marlow, nobody had a chance against us with a strange ship when Jim was out. The other ship-chandlers just kept their old customers, and . . .”

‘Egstrom appeared overcome with emotion.

“‘Why, sir — it seemed as though he wouldn't mind going a hundred miles out to sea in an old shoe to nab a ship for the firm. If the business had been his own and all to make yet, he couldn't have done more in that way. And now . . . all at once . . . like this! Thinks I to myself: ‘Oho! a rise in the screw — that's the trouble — is it?’ ‘All right,’ says I, ‘no need of all that fuss with me, Jimmy. Just mention your figure. Anything in reason.’ He looks at me as if he wanted to swallow something that stuck in his throat. ‘I can't stop with you.’ ‘What's that blooming joke?’ I asks. He shakes his head, and I could see in his eye he was as good as gone already, sir. So I turned to him and slanged him till all was blue. ‘What is it you're running away from?’ I asks. ‘Who has been getting at you? What scared you? You haven't as much sense as a rat; they don't clear out from a good ship. Where do you expect to get a better berth? — you this and you that.’ I made him look sick, I can tell you. ‘This business ain't going to sink,’ says I. He gave a big jump. ‘Good-bye,’ he says, nodding at me like a lord; ‘you ain't half a bad chap, Egstrom. I give you my word that if you knew my reasons you wouldn't care to keep me.’ ‘That's the biggest lie you ever told in your life,’ says I; ‘I know my own mind.’ He made me so mad that I had to laugh. ‘Can't you really stop long enough to drink this glass of beer here, you funny beggar, you?’ I don't know what came over him; he didn't seem able to find the door; something comical, I can tell you, captain. I drank the beer myself. ‘Well, if you're in such a hurry, here's luck to you in your own drink,’ says I; ‘only, you mark my words, if you keep up this game you'll very soon find that the earth ain't big enough to hold you — that's all.’ He

gave me one black look, and out he rushed with a face fit to scare little children.”

‘Egstrom snorted bitterly, and combed one auburn whisker with knotty fingers. “Haven’t been able to get a man that was any good since. It’s nothing but worry, worry, worry in business. And where might you have come across him, captain, if it’s fair to ask?”

““He was the mate of the Patna that voyage,” I said, feeling that I owed some explanation. For a time Egstrom remained very still, with his fingers plunged in the hair at the side of his face, and then exploded. “And who the devil cares about that?” “I daresay no one,” I began . . . “And what the devil is he — anyhow — for to go on like this?” He stuffed suddenly his left whisker into his mouth and stood amazed. “Jee!” he exclaimed, “I told him the earth wouldn’t be big enough to hold his caper.”“

## CHAPTER 19

‘I have told you these two episodes at length to show his manner of dealing with himself under the new conditions of his life. There were many others of the sort, more than I could count on the fingers of my two hands. They were all equally tinged by a high-minded absurdity of intention which made their futility profound and touching. To fling away your daily bread so as to get your hands free for a grapple with a ghost may be an act of prosaic heroism. Men had done it before (though we who have lived know full well that it is not the haunted soul but the hungry body that makes an outcast), and men who had eaten and meant to eat every day had applauded the creditable folly. He was indeed unfortunate, for all his recklessness could not carry him out from under the shadow. There was always a doubt of his courage. The truth seems to be that it is impossible to lay the ghost of a fact. You can face it or shirk it — and I have come across a man or two who could wink at their familiar shades. Obviously Jim was not of the winking sort; but what I could never make up my mind about was whether his line of conduct amounted to shirking his ghost or to facing him out.

‘I strained my mental eyesight only to discover that, as with the complexion of all our actions, the shade of difference was so delicate that it was impossible to say. It might have been flight and it might have been a mode of combat. To the common mind he became known as a rolling stone, because this was the funniest part: he did after a time become perfectly known, and even notorious, within the circle of his wanderings (which had a diameter of, say, three thousand miles), in the same way as an eccentric character is known to a whole countryside. For instance, in Bangkok, where he found employment with Yucker Brothers, charterers and teak merchants, it was almost pathetic to see him go about in sunshine hugging his secret, which was known to the very up-country logs on the river. Schomberg, the keeper of the hotel where he boarded, a hirsute Alsatian of manly bearing and an irrepressible retailer of all the scandalous gossip of the place, would, with both elbows on the table, impart an adorned version of the story to any guest who cared to imbibe knowledge along with the more costly liquors. “And, mind you, the nicest fellow you could meet,” would be his generous conclusion; “quite superior.” It says a lot for the casual crowd that frequented Schomberg’s establishment that Jim managed to hang out in Bangkok for a whole six months. I remarked that people, perfect strangers,

took to him as one takes to a nice child. His manner was reserved, but it was as though his personal appearance, his hair, his eyes, his smile, made friends for him wherever he went. And, of course, he was no fool. I heard Siegmund Yucker (native of Switzerland), a gentle creature ravaged by a cruel dyspepsia, and so frightfully lame that his head swung through a quarter of a circle at every step he took, declare appreciatively that for one so young he was “of great gabasidy,” as though it had been a mere question of cubic contents. “Why not send him up country?” I suggested anxiously. (Yucker Brothers had concessions and teak forests in the interior.) “If he has capacity, as you say, he will soon get hold of the work. And physically he is very fit. His health is always excellent.” “Ach! It’s a great ting in dis goundry to be vree vrom tispep-shia,” sighed poor Yucker enviously, casting a stealthy glance at the pit of his ruined stomach. I left him drumming pensively on his desk and muttering, “Es ist ein’ Idee. Es ist ein’ Idee.” Unfortunately, that very evening an unpleasant affair took place in the hotel.

‘I don’t know that I blame Jim very much, but it was a truly regrettable incident. It belonged to the lamentable species of bar-room scuffles, and the other party to it was a cross-eyed Dane of sorts whose visiting-card recited, under his misbegotten name: first lieutenant in the Royal Siamese Navy. The fellow, of course, was utterly hopeless at billiards, but did not like to be beaten, I suppose. He had had enough to drink to turn nasty after the sixth game, and make some scornful remark at Jim’s expense. Most of the people there didn’t hear what was said, and those who had heard seemed to have had all precise recollection scared out of them by the appalling nature of the consequences that immediately ensued. It was very lucky for the Dane that he could swim, because the room opened on a verandah and the Menam flowed below very wide and black. A boat-load of Chinamen, bound, as likely as not, on some thieving expedition, fished out the officer of the King of Siam, and Jim turned up at about midnight on board my ship without a hat. “Everybody in the room seemed to know,” he said, gasping yet from the contest, as it were. He was rather sorry, on general principles, for what had happened, though in this case there had been, he said, “no option.” But what dismayed him was to find the nature of his burden as well known to everybody as though he had gone about all that time carrying it on his shoulders. Naturally after this he couldn’t remain in the place. He was universally condemned for the brutal violence, so unbecoming a man in his

delicate position; some maintained he had been disgracefully drunk at the time; others criticised his want of tact. Even Schomberg was very much annoyed. "He is a very nice young man," he said argumentatively to me, "but the lieutenant is a first-rate fellow too. He dines every night at my table d'hôte, you know. And there's a billiard-cue broken. I can't allow that. First thing this morning I went over with my apologies to the lieutenant, and I think I've made it all right for myself; but only think, captain, if everybody started such games! Why, the man might have been drowned! And here I can't run out into the next street and buy a new cue. I've got to write to Europe for them. No, no! A temper like that won't do!" . . . He was extremely sore on the subject.

'This was the worst incident of all in his — his retreat. Nobody could deplore it more than myself; for if, as somebody said hearing him mentioned, "Oh yes! I know. He has knocked about a good deal out here," yet he had somehow avoided being battered and chipped in the process. This last affair, however, made me seriously uneasy, because if his exquisite sensibilities were to go the length of involving him in pot-house shindies, he would lose his name of an inoffensive, if aggravating, fool, and acquire that of a common loafer. For all my confidence in him I could not help reflecting that in such cases from the name to the thing itself is but a step. I suppose you will understand that by that time I could not think of washing my hands of him. I took him away from Bangkok in my ship, and we had a longish passage. It was pitiful to see how he shrank within himself. A seaman, even if a mere passenger, takes an interest in a ship, and looks at the sea-life around him with the critical enjoyment of a painter, for instance, looking at another man's work. In every sense of the expression he is "on deck"; but my Jim, for the most part, skulked down below as though he had been a stowaway. He infected me so that I avoided speaking on professional matters, such as would suggest themselves naturally to two sailors during a passage. For whole days we did not exchange a word; I felt extremely unwilling to give orders to my officers in his presence. Often, when alone with him on deck or in the cabin, we didn't know what to do with our eyes.

'I placed him with De Jongh, as you know, glad enough to dispose of him in any way, yet persuaded that his position was now growing intolerable. He had lost some of that elasticity which had enabled him to rebound back into his uncompromising position after every overthrow. One day, coming ashore, I saw him standing on the quay; the water of the roadstead and the



sea in the offing made one smooth ascending plane, and the outermost ships at anchor seemed to ride motionless in the sky. He was waiting for his boat, which was being loaded at our feet with packages of small stores for some vessel ready to leave. After exchanging greetings, we remained silent — side by side. “Jove!” he said suddenly, “this is killing work.”

‘He smiled at me; I must say he generally could manage a smile. I made no reply. I knew very well he was not alluding to his duties; he had an easy time of it with De Jongh. Nevertheless, as soon as he had spoken I became completely convinced that the work was killing. I did not even look at him. “Would you like,” said I, “to leave this part of the world altogether; try California or the West Coast? I’ll see what I can do . . .” He interrupted me a little scornfully. “What difference would it make?” . . . I felt at once convinced that he was right. It would make no difference; it was not relief he wanted; I seemed to perceive dimly that what he wanted, what he was, as it were, waiting for, was something not easy to define — something in the nature of an opportunity. I had given him many opportunities, but they had been merely opportunities to earn his bread. Yet what more could any man do? The position struck me as hopeless, and poor Brierly’s saying recurred to me, “Let him creep twenty feet underground and stay there.” Better that, I thought, than this waiting above ground for the impossible. Yet one could not be sure even of that. There and then, before his boat was three oars’ lengths away from the quay, I had made up my mind to go and consult Stein in the evening.

‘This Stein was a wealthy and respected merchant. His “house” (because it was a house, Stein & Co., and there was some sort of partner who, as Stein said, “looked after the Moluccas”) had a large inter-island business, with a lot of trading posts established in the most out-of-the-way places for collecting the produce. His wealth and his respectability were not exactly the reasons why I was anxious to seek his advice. I desired to confide my difficulty to him because he was one of the most trustworthy men I had ever known. The gentle light of a simple, unwearied, as it were, and intelligent good-nature illumined his long hairless face. It had deep downward folds, and was pale as of a man who had always led a sedentary life — which was indeed very far from being the case. His hair was thin, and brushed back from a massive and lofty forehead. One fancied that at twenty he must have looked very much like what he was now at threescore. It was a student’s face; only the eyebrows nearly all white, thick and bushy, together with the

resolute searching glance that came from under them, were not in accord with his, I may say, learned appearance. He was tall and loose-jointed; his slight stoop, together with an innocent smile, made him appear benevolently ready to lend you his ear; his long arms with pale big hands had rare deliberate gestures of a pointing out, demonstrating kind. I speak of him at length, because under this exterior, and in conjunction with an upright and indulgent nature, this man possessed an intrepidity of spirit and a physical courage that could have been called reckless had it not been like a natural function of the body — say good digestion, for instance — completely unconscious of itself. It is sometimes said of a man that he carries his life in his hand. Such a saying would have been inadequate if applied to him; during the early part of his existence in the East he had been playing ball with it. All this was in the past, but I knew the story of his life and the origin of his fortune. He was also a naturalist of some distinction, or perhaps I should say a learned collector. Entomology was his special study. His collection of Buprestidae and Longicorns — beetles all — horrible miniature monsters, looking malevolent in death and immobility, and his cabinet of butterflies, beautiful and hovering under the glass of cases on lifeless wings, had spread his fame far over the earth. The name of this merchant, adventurer, sometime adviser of a Malay sultan (to whom he never alluded otherwise than as “my poor Mohammed Bonso”), had, on account of a few bushels of dead insects, become known to learned persons in Europe, who could have had no conception, and certainly would not have cared to know anything, of his life or character. I, who knew, considered him an eminently suitable person to receive my confidences about Jim’s difficulties as well as my own.’

## CHAPTER 20

‘Late in the evening I entered his study, after traversing an imposing but empty dining-room very dimly lit. The house was silent. I was preceded by an elderly grim Javanese servant in a sort of livery of white jacket and yellow sarong, who, after throwing the door open, exclaimed low, “O master!” and stepping aside, vanished in a mysterious way as though he had been a ghost only momentarily embodied for that particular service. Stein turned round with the chair, and in the same movement his spectacles seemed to get pushed up on his forehead. He welcomed me in his quiet and humorous voice. Only one corner of the vast room, the corner in which stood his writing-desk, was strongly lighted by a shaded reading-lamp, and the rest of the spacious apartment melted into shapeless gloom like a cavern. Narrow shelves filled with dark boxes of uniform shape and colour ran round the walls, not from floor to ceiling, but in a sombre belt about four feet broad. Catacombs of beetles. Wooden tablets were hung above at irregular intervals. The light reached one of them, and the word *Coleoptera* written in gold letters glittered mysteriously upon a vast dimness. The glass cases containing the collection of butterflies were ranged in three long rows upon slender-legged little tables. One of these cases had been removed from its place and stood on the desk, which was bestrewn with oblong slips of paper blackened with minute handwriting.

“So you see me — so,” he said. His hand hovered over the case where a butterfly in solitary grandeur spread out dark bronze wings, seven inches or more across, with exquisite white veinings and a gorgeous border of yellow spots. “Only one specimen like this they have in your London, and then — no more. To my small native town this my collection I shall bequeath. Something of me. The best.”

‘He bent forward in the chair and gazed intently, his chin over the front of the case. I stood at his back. “Marvellous,” he whispered, and seemed to forget my presence. His history was curious. He had been born in Bavaria, and when a youth of twenty-two had taken an active part in the revolutionary movement of 1848. Heavily compromised, he managed to make his escape, and at first found a refuge with a poor republican watchmaker in Trieste. From there he made his way to Tripoli with a stock of cheap watches to hawk about, — not a very great opening truly, but it turned out lucky enough, because it was there he came upon a Dutch

traveller — a rather famous man, I believe, but I don't remember his name. It was that naturalist who, engaging him as a sort of assistant, took him to the East. They travelled in the Archipelago together and separately, collecting insects and birds, for four years or more. Then the naturalist went home, and Stein, having no home to go to, remained with an old trader he had come across in his journeys in the interior of Celebes — if Celebes may be said to have an interior. This old Scotsman, the only white man allowed to reside in the country at the time, was a privileged friend of the chief ruler of Wajo States, who was a woman. I often heard Stein relate how that chap, who was slightly paralysed on one side, had introduced him to the native court a short time before another stroke carried him off. He was a heavy man with a patriarchal white beard, and of imposing stature. He came into the council-hall where all the rajahs, pangerans, and headmen were assembled, with the queen, a fat wrinkled woman (very free in her speech, Stein said), reclining on a high couch under a canopy. He dragged his leg, thumping with his stick, and grasped Stein's arm, leading him right up to the couch. "Look, queen, and you rajahs, this is my son," he proclaimed in a stentorian voice. "I have traded with your fathers, and when I die he shall trade with you and your sons."

'By means of this simple formality Stein inherited the Scotsman's privileged position and all his stock-in-trade, together with a fortified house on the banks of the only navigable river in the country. Shortly afterwards the old queen, who was so free in her speech, died, and the country became disturbed by various pretenders to the throne. Stein joined the party of a younger son, the one of whom thirty years later he never spoke otherwise but as "my poor Mohammed Bonso." They both became the heroes of innumerable exploits; they had wonderful adventures, and once stood a siege in the Scotsman's house for a month, with only a score of followers against a whole army. I believe the natives talk of that war to this day. Meantime, it seems, Stein never failed to annex on his own account every butterfly or beetle he could lay hands on. After some eight years of war, negotiations, false truces, sudden outbreaks, reconciliation, treachery, and so on, and just as peace seemed at last permanently established, his "poor Mohammed Bonso" was assassinated at the gate of his own royal residence while dismounting in the highest spirits on his return from a successful deer-hunt. This event rendered Stein's position extremely insecure, but he would have stayed perhaps had it not been that a short time afterwards he

lost Mohammed's sister ("my dear wife the princess," he used to say solemnly), by whom he had had a daughter — mother and child both dying within three days of each other from some infectious fever. He left the country, which this cruel loss had made unbearable to him. Thus ended the first and adventurous part of his existence. What followed was so different that, but for the reality of sorrow which remained with him, this strange part must have resembled a dream. He had a little money; he started life afresh, and in the course of years acquired a considerable fortune. At first he had travelled a good deal amongst the islands, but age had stolen upon him, and of late he seldom left his spacious house three miles out of town, with an extensive garden, and surrounded by stables, offices, and bamboo cottages for his servants and dependants, of whom he had many. He drove in his buggy every morning to town, where he had an office with white and Chinese clerks. He owned a small fleet of schooners and native craft, and dealt in island produce on a large scale. For the rest he lived solitary, but not misanthropic, with his books and his collection, classing and arranging specimens, corresponding with entomologists in Europe, writing up a descriptive catalogue of his treasures. Such was the history of the man whom I had come to consult upon Jim's case without any definite hope. Simply to hear what he would have to say would have been a relief. I was very anxious, but I respected the intense, almost passionate, absorption with which he looked at a butterfly, as though on the bronze sheen of these frail wings, in the white tracings, in the gorgeous markings, he could see other things, an image of something as perishable and defying destruction as these delicate and lifeless tissues displaying a splendour unmarred by death.

"Marvellous!" he repeated, looking up at me. "Look! The beauty — but that is nothing — look at the accuracy, the harmony. And so fragile! And so strong! And so exact! This is Nature — the balance of colossal forces. Every star is so — and every blade of grass stands so — and the mighty Kosmos in perfect equilibrium produces — this. This wonder; this masterpiece of Nature — the great artist."

"Never heard an entomologist go on like this," I observed cheerfully. "Masterpiece! And what of man?"

"Man is amazing, but he is not a masterpiece," he said, keeping his eyes fixed on the glass case. "Perhaps the artist was a little mad. Eh? What do you think? Sometimes it seems to me that man is come where he is not wanted, where there is no place for him; for if not, why should he want all

the place? Why should he run about here and there making a great noise about himself, talking about the stars, disturbing the blades of grass? . . .”

“Catching butterflies,” I chimed in.

‘He smiled, threw himself back in his chair, and stretched his legs. “Sit down,” he said. “I captured this rare specimen myself one very fine morning. And I had a very big emotion. You don’t know what it is for a collector to capture such a rare specimen. You can’t know.”

‘I smiled at my ease in a rocking-chair. His eyes seemed to look far beyond the wall at which they stared; and he narrated how, one night, a messenger arrived from his “poor Mohammed,” requiring his presence at the “residenz” — as he called it — which was distant some nine or ten miles by a bridle-path over a cultivated plain, with patches of forest here and there. Early in the morning he started from his fortified house, after embracing his little Emma, and leaving the “princess,” his wife, in command. He described how she came with him as far as the gate, walking with one hand on the neck of his horse; she had on a white jacket, gold pins in her hair, and a brown leather belt over her left shoulder with a revolver in it. “She talked as women will talk,” he said, “telling me to be careful, and to try to get back before dark, and what a great wickedness it was for me to go alone. We were at war, and the country was not safe; my men were putting up bullet-proof shutters to the house and loading their rifles, and she begged me to have no fear for her. She could defend the house against anybody till I returned. And I laughed with pleasure a little. I liked to see her so brave and young and strong. I too was young then. At the gate she caught hold of my hand and gave it one squeeze and fell back. I made my horse stand still outside till I heard the bars of the gate put up behind me. There was a great enemy of mine, a great noble — and a great rascal too — roaming with a band in the neighbourhood. I cantered for four or five miles; there had been rain in the night, but the musts had gone up, up — and the face of the earth was clean; it lay smiling to me, so fresh and innocent — like a little child. Suddenly somebody fires a volley — twenty shots at least it seemed to me. I hear bullets sing in my ear, and my hat jumps to the back of my head. It was a little intrigue, you understand. They got my poor Mohammed to send for me and then laid that ambush. I see it all in a minute, and I think — This wants a little management. My pony snort, jump, and stand, and I fall slowly forward with my head on his mane. He begins to walk, and with one eye I could see over his neck a faint cloud of smoke hanging in front of a

clump of bamboos to my left. I think — Aha! my friends, why you not wait long enough before you shoot? This is not yet gelungen. Oh no! I get hold of my revolver with my right hand — quiet — quiet. After all, there were only seven of these rascals. They get up from the grass and start running with their sarongs tucked up, waving spears above their heads, and yelling to each other to look out and catch the horse, because I was dead. I let them come as close as the door here, and then bang, bang, bang — take aim each time too. One more shot I fire at a man's back, but I miss. Too far already. And then I sit alone on my horse with the clean earth smiling at me, and there are the bodies of three men lying on the ground. One was curled up like a dog, another on his back had an arm over his eyes as if to keep off the sun, and the third man he draws up his leg very slowly and makes it with one kick straight again. I watch him very carefully from my horse, but there is no more — bleibt ganz ruhig — keep still, so. And as I looked at his face for some sign of life I observed something like a faint shadow pass over his forehead. It was the shadow of this butterfly. Look at the form of the wing. This species fly high with a strong flight. I raised my eyes and I saw him fluttering away. I think — Can it be possible? And then I lost him. I dismounted and went on very slow, leading my horse and holding my revolver with one hand and my eyes darting up and down and right and left, everywhere! At last I saw him sitting on a small heap of dirt ten feet away. At once my heart began to beat quick. I let go my horse, keep my revolver in one hand, and with the other snatch my soft felt hat off my head. One step. Steady. Another step. Flop! I got him! When I got up I shook like a leaf with excitement, and when I opened these beautiful wings and made sure what a rare and so extraordinary perfect specimen I had, my head went round and my legs became so weak with emotion that I had to sit on the ground. I had greatly desired to possess myself of a specimen of that species when collecting for the professor. I took long journeys and underwent great privations; I had dreamed of him in my sleep, and here suddenly I had him in my fingers — for myself! In the words of the poet” (he pronounced it “boet”) —

““So halt’ ich’s endlich denn in meinen Händen,  
Und nenn’ es in gewissem Sinne mein.”“

He gave to the last word the emphasis of a suddenly lowered voice, and withdrew his eyes slowly from my face. He began to charge a long-

stemmed pipe busily and in silence, then, pausing with his thumb on the orifice of the bowl, looked again at me significantly.

“Yes, my good friend. On that day I had nothing to desire; I had greatly annoyed my principal enemy; I was young, strong; I had friendship; I had the love” (he said “lof”) “of woman, a child I had, to make my heart very full — and even what I had once dreamed in my sleep had come into my hand too!”

‘He struck a match, which flared violently. His thoughtful placid face twitched once.

“Friend, wife, child,” he said slowly, gazing at the small flame — ”phoo!” The match was blown out. He sighed and turned again to the glass case. The frail and beautiful wings quivered faintly, as if his breath had for an instant called back to life that gorgeous object of his dreams.

“The work,” he began suddenly, pointing to the scattered slips, and in his usual gentle and cheery tone, “is making great progress. I have been this rare specimen describing. . . . Na! And what is your good news?”

“To tell you the truth, Stein,” I said with an effort that surprised me, “I came here to describe a specimen. . . .”

“Butterfly?” he asked, with an unbelieving and humorous eagerness.

“Nothing so perfect,” I answered, feeling suddenly dispirited with all sorts of doubts. “A man!”

“Ach so!” he murmured, and his smiling countenance, turned to me, became grave. Then after looking at me for a while he said slowly, “Well — I am a man too.”

‘Here you have him as he was; he knew how to be so generously encouraging as to make a scrupulous man hesitate on the brink of confidence; but if I did hesitate it was not for long.

‘He heard me out, sitting with crossed legs. Sometimes his head would disappear completely in a great eruption of smoke, and a sympathetic growl would come out from the cloud. When I finished he uncrossed his legs, laid down his pipe, leaned forward towards me earnestly with his elbows on the arms of his chair, the tips of his fingers together.

“I understand very well. He is romantic.”

‘He had diagnosed the case for me, and at first I was quite startled to find how simple it was; and indeed our conference resembled so much a medical consultation — Stein, of learned aspect, sitting in an arm-chair before his



desk; I, anxious, in another, facing him, but a little to one side — that it seemed natural to ask —

““What’s good for it?”

‘He lifted up a long forefinger.

““There is only one remedy! One thing alone can us from being ourselves cure!” The finger came down on the desk with a smart rap. The case which he had made to look so simple before became if possible still simpler — and altogether hopeless. There was a pause. “Yes,” said I, “strictly speaking, the question is not how to get cured, but how to live.”

‘He approved with his head, a little sadly as it seemed. “Ja! ja! In general, adapting the words of your great poet: That is the question. . . .” He went on nodding sympathetically. . . . “How to be! Ach! How to be.”

‘He stood up with the tips of his fingers resting on the desk.

““We want in so many different ways to be,” he began again. “This magnificent butterfly finds a little heap of dirt and sits still on it; but man he will never on his heap of mud keep still. He want to be so, and again he want to be so. . . .” He moved his hand up, then down. . . . “He wants to be a saint, and he wants to be a devil — and every time he shuts his eyes he sees himself as a very fine fellow — so fine as he can never be. . . . In a dream. . . .”

‘He lowered the glass lid, the automatic lock clicked sharply, and taking up the case in both hands he bore it religiously away to its place, passing out of the bright circle of the lamp into the ring of fainter light — into shapeless dusk at last. It had an odd effect — as if these few steps had carried him out of this concrete and perplexed world. His tall form, as though robbed of its substance, hovered noiselessly over invisible things with stooping and indefinite movements; his voice, heard in that remoteness where he could be glimpsed mysteriously busy with immaterial cares, was no longer incisive, seemed to roll voluminous and grave — mellowed by distance.

““And because you not always can keep your eyes shut there comes the real trouble — the heart pain — the world pain. I tell you, my friend, it is not good for you to find you cannot make your dream come true, for the reason that you not strong enough are, or not clever enough. . . . Ja! . . . And all the time you are such a fine fellow too! Wie? Was? Gott im Himmel! How can that be? Ha! ha! ha!”

‘The shadow prowling amongst the graves of butterflies laughed boisterously.

“‘Yes! Very funny this terrible thing is. A man that is born falls into a dream like a man who falls into the sea. If he tries to climb out into the air as inexperienced people endeavour to do, he drowns — nicht wahr? . . . No! I tell you! The way is to the destructive element submit yourself, and with the exertions of your hands and feet in the water make the deep, deep sea keep you up. So if you ask me — how to be?”

‘His voice leaped up extraordinarily strong, as though away there in the dusk he had been inspired by some whisper of knowledge. “I will tell you! For that too there is only one way.”

‘With a hasty swish-swish of his slippers he loomed up in the ring of faint light, and suddenly appeared in the bright circle of the lamp. His extended hand aimed at my breast like a pistol; his deepset eyes seemed to pierce through me, but his twitching lips uttered no word, and the austere exaltation of a certitude seen in the dusk vanished from his face. The hand that had been pointing at my breast fell, and by-and-by, coming a step nearer, he laid it gently on my shoulder. There were things, he said mournfully, that perhaps could never be told, only he had lived so much alone that sometimes he forgot — he forgot. The light had destroyed the assurance which had inspired him in the distant shadows. He sat down and, with both elbows on the desk, rubbed his forehead. “And yet it is true — it is true. In the destructive element immerse.” . . . He spoke in a subdued tone, without looking at me, one hand on each side of his face. “That was the way. To follow the dream, and again to follow the dream — and so — ewig — usque ad finem. . . .” The whisper of his conviction seemed to open before me a vast and uncertain expanse, as of a crepuscular horizon on a plain at dawn — or was it, perchance, at the coming of the night? One had not the courage to decide; but it was a charming and deceptive light, throwing the impalpable poesy of its dimness over pitfalls — over graves. His life had begun in sacrifice, in enthusiasm for generous ideas; he had travelled very far, on various ways, on strange paths, and whatever he followed it had been without faltering, and therefore without shame and without regret. In so far he was right. That was the way, no doubt. Yet for all that, the great plain on which men wander amongst graves and pitfalls remained very desolate under the impalpable poesy of its crepuscular light, overshadowed in the centre, circled with a bright edge as if surrounded by

an abyss full of flames. When at last I broke the silence it was to express the opinion that no one could be more romantic than himself.

‘He shook his head slowly, and afterwards looked at me with a patient and inquiring glance. It was a shame, he said. There we were sitting and talking like two boys, instead of putting our heads together to find something practical — a practical remedy — for the evil — for the great evil — he repeated, with a humorous and indulgent smile. For all that, our talk did not grow more practical. We avoided pronouncing Jim’s name as though we had tried to keep flesh and blood out of our discussion, or he were nothing but an erring spirit, a suffering and nameless shade. “Na!” said Stein, rising. “To-night you sleep here, and in the morning we shall do something practical — practical. . . .” He lit a two-branched candlestick and led the way. We passed through empty dark rooms, escorted by gleams from the lights Stein carried. They glided along the waxed floors, sweeping here and there over the polished surface of a table, leaped upon a fragmentary curve of a piece of furniture, or flashed perpendicularly in and out of distant mirrors, while the forms of two men and the flicker of two flames could be seen for a moment stealing silently across the depths of a crystalline void. He walked slowly a pace in advance with stooping courtesy; there was a profound, as it were a listening, quietude on his face; the long flaxen locks mixed with white threads were scattered thinly upon his slightly bowed neck.

“‘He is romantic — romantic,” he repeated. “And that is very bad — very bad. . . . Very good, too,” he added. “But is he?” I queried.

“‘Gewiss,” he said, and stood still holding up the candelabrum, but without looking at me. “Evident! What is it that by inward pain makes him know himself? What is it that for you and me makes him — exist?”

‘At that moment it was difficult to believe in Jim’s existence — starting from a country parsonage, blurred by crowds of men as by clouds of dust, silenced by the clashing claims of life and death in a material world — but his imperishable reality came to me with a convincing, with an irresistible force! I saw it vividly, as though in our progress through the lofty silent rooms amongst fleeting gleams of light and the sudden revelations of human figures stealing with flickering flames within unfathomable and pellucid depths, we had approached nearer to absolute Truth, which, like Beauty itself, floats elusive, obscure, half submerged, in the silent still waters of mystery. “Perhaps he is,” I admitted with a slight laugh, whose

unexpectedly loud reverberation made me lower my voice directly; “but I am sure you are.” With his head dropping on his breast and the light held high he began to walk again. “Well — I exist, too,” he said.

‘He preceded me. My eyes followed his movements, but what I did see was not the head of the firm, the welcome guest at afternoon receptions, the correspondent of learned societies, the entertainer of stray naturalists; I saw only the reality of his destiny, which he had known how to follow with unfaltering footsteps, that life begun in humble surroundings, rich in generous enthusiasms, in friendship, love, war — in all the exalted elements of romance. At the door of my room he faced me. “Yes,” I said, as though carrying on a discussion, “and amongst other things you dreamed foolishly of a certain butterfly; but when one fine morning your dream came in your way you did not let the splendid opportunity escape. Did you? Whereas he . . .” Stein lifted his hand. “And do you know how many opportunities I let escape; how many dreams I had lost that had come in my way?” He shook his head regretfully. “It seems to me that some would have been very fine — if I had made them come true. Do you know how many? Perhaps I myself don’t know.” “Whether his were fine or not,” I said, “he knows of one which he certainly did not catch.” “Everybody knows of one or two like that,” said Stein; “and that is the trouble — the great trouble. . . .”

‘He shook hands on the threshold, peered into my room under his raised arm. “Sleep well. And to-morrow we must do something practical — practical. . . .”

‘Though his own room was beyond mine I saw him return the way he came. He was going back to his butterflies.’

## CHAPTER 21

‘I don’t suppose any of you have ever heard of Patusan?’ Marlow resumed, after a silence occupied in the careful lighting of a cigar. ‘It does not matter; there’s many a heavenly body in the lot crowding upon us of a night that mankind had never heard of, it being outside the sphere of its activities and of no earthly importance to anybody but to the astronomers who are paid to talk learnedly about its composition, weight, path — the irregularities of its conduct, the aberrations of its light — a sort of scientific scandal-mongering. Thus with Patusan. It was referred to knowingly in the inner government circles in Batavia, especially as to its irregularities and aberrations, and it was known by name to some few, very few, in the mercantile world. Nobody, however, had been there, and I suspect no one desired to go there in person, just as an astronomer, I should fancy, would strongly object to being transported into a distant heavenly body, where, parted from his earthly emoluments, he would be bewildered by the view of an unfamiliar heavens. However, neither heavenly bodies nor astronomers have anything to do with Patusan. It was Jim who went there. I only meant you to understand that had Stein arranged to send him into a star of the fifth magnitude the change could not have been greater. He left his earthly failings behind him and what sort of reputation he had, and there was a totally new set of conditions for his imaginative faculty to work upon. Entirely new, entirely remarkable. And he got hold of them in a remarkable way.

‘Stein was the man who knew more about Patusan than anybody else. More than was known in the government circles I suspect. I have no doubt he had been there, either in his butterfly-hunting days or later on, when he tried in his incorrigible way to season with a pinch of romance the fattening dishes of his commercial kitchen. There were very few places in the Archipelago he had not seen in the original dusk of their being, before light (and even electric light) had been carried into them for the sake of better morality and — and — well — the greater profit, too. It was at breakfast of the morning following our talk about Jim that he mentioned the place, after I had quoted poor Brierly’s remark: “Let him creep twenty feet underground and stay there.” He looked up at me with interested attention, as though I had been a rare insect. “This could be done, too,” he remarked, sipping his coffee. “Bury him in some sort,” I explained. “One doesn’t like to do it of

course, but it would be the best thing, seeing what he is.” “Yes; he is young,” Stein mused. “The youngest human being now in existence,” I affirmed. “Schon. There’s Patusan,” he went on in the same tone. . . . “And the woman is dead now,” he added incomprehensibly.

‘Of course I don’t know that story; I can only guess that once before Patusan had been used as a grave for some sin, transgression, or misfortune. It is impossible to suspect Stein. The only woman that had ever existed for him was the Malay girl he called “My wife the princess,” or, more rarely, in moments of expansion, “the mother of my Emma.” Who was the woman he had mentioned in connection with Patusan I can’t say; but from his allusions I understand she had been an educated and very good-looking Dutch-Malay girl, with a tragic or perhaps only a pitiful history, whose most painful part no doubt was her marriage with a Malacca Portuguese who had been clerk in some commercial house in the Dutch colonies. I gathered from Stein that this man was an unsatisfactory person in more ways than one, all being more or less indefinite and offensive. It was solely for his wife’s sake that Stein had appointed him manager of Stein & Co.’s trading post in Patusan; but commercially the arrangement was not a success, at any rate for the firm, and now the woman had died, Stein was disposed to try another agent there. The Portuguese, whose name was Cornelius, considered himself a very deserving but ill-used person, entitled by his abilities to a better position. This man Jim would have to relieve. “But I don’t think he will go away from the place,” remarked Stein. “That has nothing to do with me. It was only for the sake of the woman that I . . . But as I think there is a daughter left, I shall let him, if he likes to stay, keep the old house.”

‘Patusan is a remote district of a native-ruled state, and the chief settlement bears the same name. At a point on the river about forty miles from the sea, where the first houses come into view, there can be seen rising above the level of the forests the summits of two steep hills very close together, and separated by what looks like a deep fissure, the cleavage of some mighty stroke. As a matter of fact, the valley between is nothing but a narrow ravine; the appearance from the settlement is of one irregularly conical hill split in two, and with the two halves leaning slightly apart. On the third day after the full, the moon, as seen from the open space in front of Jim’s house (he had a very fine house in the native style when I visited him), rose exactly behind these hills, its diffused light at first throwing the

two masses into intensely black relief, and then the nearly perfect disc, glowing ruddily, appeared, gliding upwards between the sides of the chasm, till it floated away above the summits, as if escaping from a yawning grave in gentle triumph. "Wonderful effect," said Jim by my side. "Worth seeing. Is it not?"

'And this question was put with a note of personal pride that made me smile, as though he had had a hand in regulating that unique spectacle. He had regulated so many things in Patusan — things that would have appeared as much beyond his control as the motions of the moon and the stars.

'It was inconceivable. That was the distinctive quality of the part into which Stein and I had tumbled him unwittingly, with no other notion than to get him out of the way; out of his own way, be it understood. That was our main purpose, though, I own, I might have had another motive which had influenced me a little. I was about to go home for a time; and it may be I desired, more than I was aware of myself, to dispose of him — to dispose of him, you understand — before I left. I was going home, and he had come to me from there, with his miserable trouble and his shadowy claim, like a man panting under a burden in a mist. I cannot say I had ever seen him distinctly — not even to this day, after I had my last view of him; but it seemed to me that the less I understood the more I was bound to him in the name of that doubt which is the inseparable part of our knowledge. I did not know so much more about myself. And then, I repeat, I was going home — to that home distant enough for all its hearthstones to be like one hearthstone, by which the humblest of us has the right to sit. We wander in our thousands over the face of the earth, the illustrious and the obscure, earning beyond the seas our fame, our money, or only a crust of bread; but it seems to me that for each of us going home must be like going to render an account. We return to face our superiors, our kindred, our friends — those whom we obey, and those whom we love; but even they who have neither, the most free, lonely, irresponsible and bereft of ties, — even those for whom home holds no dear face, no familiar voice, — even they have to meet the spirit that dwells within the land, under its sky, in its air, in its valleys, and on its rises, in its fields, in its waters and its trees — a mute friend, judge, and inspirer. Say what you like, to get its joy, to breathe its peace, to face its truth, one must return with a clear conscience. All this may seem to you sheer sentimentalism; and indeed very few of us have the

will or the capacity to look consciously under the surface of familiar emotions. There are the girls we love, the men we look up to, the tenderness, the friendships, the opportunities, the pleasures! But the fact remains that you must touch your reward with clean hands, lest it turn to dead leaves, to thorns, in your grasp. I think it is the lonely, without a fireside or an affection they may call their own, those who return not to a dwelling but to the land itself, to meet its disembodied, eternal, and unchangeable spirit — it is those who understand best its severity, its saving power, the grace of its secular right to our fidelity, to our obedience. Yes! few of us understand, but we all feel it though, and I say all without exception, because those who do not feel do not count. Each blade of grass has its spot on earth whence it draws its life, its strength; and so is man rooted to the land from which he draws his faith together with his life. I don't know how much Jim understood; but I know he felt, he felt confusedly but powerfully, the demand of some such truth or some such illusion — I don't care how you call it, there is so little difference, and the difference means so little. The thing is that in virtue of his feeling he mattered. He would never go home now. Not he. Never. Had he been capable of picturesque manifestations he would have shuddered at the thought and made you shudder too. But he was not of that sort, though he was expressive enough in his way. Before the idea of going home he would grow desperately stiff and immovable, with lowered chin and pouted lips, and with those candid blue eyes of his glowering darkly under a frown, as if before something unbearable, as if before something revolting. There was imagination in that hard skull of his, over which the thick clustering hair fitted like a cap. As to me, I have no imagination (I would be more certain about him today, if I had), and I do not mean to imply that I figured to myself the spirit of the land uprising above the white cliffs of Dover, to ask me what I — returning with no bones broken, so to speak — had done with my very young brother. I could not make such a mistake. I knew very well he was of those about whom there is no inquiry; I had seen better men go out, disappear, vanish utterly, without provoking a sound of curiosity or sorrow. The spirit of the land, as becomes the ruler of great enterprises, is careless of innumerable lives. Woe to the stragglers! We exist only in so far as we hang together. He had straggled in a way; he had not hung on; but he was aware of it with an intensity that made him touching, just as a man's more intense life makes his death more touching than the death of a tree. I



happened to be handy, and I happened to be touched. That's all there is to it. I was concerned as to the way he would go out. It would have hurt me if, for instance, he had taken to drink. The earth is so small that I was afraid of, some day, being waylaid by a blear-eyed, swollen-faced, besmirched loafer, with no soles to his canvas shoes, and with a flutter of rags about the elbows, who, on the strength of old acquaintance, would ask for a loan of five dollars. You know the awful jaunty bearing of these scarecrows coming to you from a decent past, the rasping careless voice, the half-averted impudent glances — those meetings more trying to a man who believes in the solidarity of our lives than the sight of an impenitent death-bed to a priest. That, to tell you the truth, was the only danger I could see for him and for me; but I also mistrusted my want of imagination. It might even come to something worse, in some way it was beyond my powers of fancy to foresee. He wouldn't let me forget how imaginative he was, and your imaginative people swing farther in any direction, as if given a longer scope of cable in the uneasy anchorage of life. They do. They take to drink too. It may be I was belittling him by such a fear. How could I tell? Even Stein could say no more than that he was romantic. I only knew he was one of us. And what business had he to be romantic? I am telling you so much about my own instinctive feelings and bemused reflections because there remains so little to be told of him. He existed for me, and after all it is only through me that he exists for you. I've led him out by the hand; I have paraded him before you. Were my commonplace fears unjust? I won't say — not even now. You may be able to tell better, since the proverb has it that the onlookers see most of the game. At any rate, they were superfluous. He did not go out, not at all; on the contrary, he came on wonderfully, came on straight as a die and in excellent form, which showed that he could stay as well as spurt. I ought to be delighted, for it is a victory in which I had taken my part; but I am not so pleased as I would have expected to be. I ask myself whether his rush had really carried him out of that mist in which he loomed interesting if not very big, with floating outlines — a straggler yearning inconsolably for his humble place in the ranks. And besides, the last word is not said, — probably shall never be said. Are not our lives too short for that full utterance which through all our stammerings is of course our only and abiding intention? I have given up expecting those last words, whose ring, if they could only be pronounced, would shake both heaven and earth. There is never time to say our last word — the last word of our love,

of our desire, faith, remorse, submissions, revolt. The heaven and the earth must not be shaken, I suppose — at least, not by us who know so many truths about either. My last words about Jim shall be few. I affirm he had achieved greatness; but the thing would be dwarfed in the telling, or rather in the hearing. Frankly, it is not my words that I mistrust but your minds. I could be eloquent were I not afraid you fellows had starved your imaginations to feed your bodies. I do not mean to be offensive; it is respectable to have no illusions — and safe — and profitable — and dull. Yet you, too, in your time must have known the intensity of life, that light of glamour created in the shock of trifles, as amazing as the glow of sparks struck from a cold stone — and as short-lived, alas!’

## CHAPTER 22

‘The conquest of love, honour, men’s confidence — the pride of it, the power of it, are fit materials for a heroic tale; only our minds are struck by the externals of such a success, and to Jim’s successes there were no externals. Thirty miles of forest shut it off from the sight of an indifferent world, and the noise of the white surf along the coast overpowered the voice of fame. The stream of civilisation, as if divided on a headland a hundred miles north of Patusan, branches east and south-east, leaving its plains and valleys, its old trees and its old mankind, neglected and isolated, such as an insignificant and crumbling islet between the two branches of a mighty, devouring stream. You find the name of the country pretty often in collections of old voyages. The seventeenth-century traders went there for pepper, because the passion for pepper seemed to burn like a flame of love in the breast of Dutch and English adventurers about the time of James the First. Where wouldn’t they go for pepper! For a bag of pepper they would cut each other’s throats without hesitation, and would forswear their souls, of which they were so careful otherwise: the bizarre obstinacy of that desire made them defy death in a thousand shapes — the unknown seas, the loathsome and strange diseases; wounds, captivity, hunger, pestilence, and despair. It made them great! By heavens! it made them heroic; and it made them pathetic too in their craving for trade with the inflexible death levying its toll on young and old. It seems impossible to believe that mere greed could hold men to such a steadfastness of purpose, to such a blind persistence in endeavour and sacrifice. And indeed those who adventured their persons and lives risked all they had for a slender reward. They left their bones to lie bleaching on distant shores, so that wealth might flow to the living at home. To us, their less tried successors, they appear magnified, not as agents of trade but as instruments of a recorded destiny, pushing out into the unknown in obedience to an inward voice, to an impulse beating in the blood, to a dream of the future. They were wonderful; and it must be owned they were ready for the wonderful. They recorded it complacently in their sufferings, in the aspect of the seas, in the customs of strange nations, in the glory of splendid rulers.

‘In Patusan they had found lots of pepper, and had been impressed by the magnificence and the wisdom of the Sultan; but somehow, after a century of chequered intercourse, the country seems to drop gradually out of the trade.

Perhaps the pepper had given out. Be it as it may, nobody cares for it now; the glory has departed, the Sultan is an imbecile youth with two thumbs on his left hand and an uncertain and beggarly revenue extorted from a miserable population and stolen from him by his many uncles.

‘This of course I have from Stein. He gave me their names and a short sketch of the life and character of each. He was as full of information about native states as an official report, but infinitely more amusing. He had to know. He traded in so many, and in some districts — as in Patusan, for instance — his firm was the only one to have an agency by special permit from the Dutch authorities. The Government trusted his discretion, and it was understood that he took all the risks. The men he employed understood that too, but he made it worth their while apparently. He was perfectly frank with me over the breakfast-table in the morning. As far as he was aware (the last news was thirteen months old, he stated precisely), utter insecurity for life and property was the normal condition. There were in Patusan antagonistic forces, and one of them was Rajah Allang, the worst of the Sultan’s uncles, the governor of the river, who did the extorting and the stealing, and ground down to the point of extinction the country-born Malays, who, utterly defenceless, had not even the resource of emigrating — “For indeed,” as Stein remarked, “where could they go, and how could they get away?” No doubt they did not even desire to get away. The world (which is circumscribed by lofty impassable mountains) has been given into the hand of the high-born, and this Rajah they knew: he was of their own royal house. I had the pleasure of meeting the gentleman later on. He was a dirty, little, used-up old man with evil eyes and a weak mouth, who swallowed an opium pill every two hours, and in defiance of common decency wore his hair uncovered and falling in wild stringy locks about his wizened grimy face. When giving audience he would clamber upon a sort of narrow stage erected in a hall like a ruinous barn with a rotten bamboo floor, through the cracks of which you could see, twelve or fifteen feet below, the heaps of refuse and garbage of all kinds lying under the house. That is where and how he received us when, accompanied by Jim, I paid him a visit of ceremony. There were about forty people in the room, and perhaps three times as many in the great courtyard below. There was constant movement, coming and going, pushing and murmuring, at our backs. A few youths in gay silks glared from the distance; the majority, slaves and humble dependants, were half naked, in ragged sarongs, dirty

with ashes and mud-stains. I had never seen Jim look so grave, so self-possessed, in an impenetrable, impressive way. In the midst of these dark-faced men, his stalwart figure in white apparel, the gleaming clusters of his fair hair, seemed to catch all the sunshine that trickled through the cracks in the closed shutters of that dim hall, with its walls of mats and a roof of thatch. He appeared like a creature not only of another kind but of another essence. Had they not seen him come up in a canoe they might have thought he had descended upon them from the clouds. He did, however, come in a crazy dug-out, sitting (very still and with his knees together, for fear of overturning the thing) — sitting on a tin box — which I had lent him — nursing on his lap a revolver of the Navy pattern — presented by me on parting — which, through an interposition of Providence, or through some wrong-headed notion, that was just like him, or else from sheer instinctive sagacity, he had decided to carry unloaded. That's how he ascended the Patusan river. Nothing could have been more prosaic and more unsafe, more extravagantly casual, more lonely. Strange, this fatality that would cast the complexion of a flight upon all his acts, of impulsive unreflecting desertion of a jump into the unknown.

‘It is precisely the casualness of it that strikes me most. Neither Stein nor I had a clear conception of what might be on the other side when we, metaphorically speaking, took him up and hove him over the wall with scant ceremony. At the moment I merely wished to achieve his disappearance; Stein characteristically enough had a sentimental motive. He had a notion of paying off (in kind, I suppose) the old debt he had never forgotten. Indeed he had been all his life especially friendly to anybody from the British Isles. His late benefactor, it is true, was a Scot — even to the length of being called Alexander McNeil — and Jim came from a long way south of the Tweed; but at the distance of six or seven thousand miles Great Britain, though never diminished, looks foreshortened enough even to its own children to rob such details of their importance. Stein was excusable, and his hinted intentions were so generous that I begged him most earnestly to keep them secret for a time. I felt that no consideration of personal advantage should be allowed to influence Jim; that not even the risk of such influence should be run. We had to deal with another sort of reality. He wanted a refuge, and a refuge at the cost of danger should be offered him — nothing more.

‘Upon every other point I was perfectly frank with him, and I even (as I believed at the time) exaggerated the danger of the undertaking. As a matter of fact I did not do it justice; his first day in Patusan was nearly his last — would have been his last if he had not been so reckless or so hard on himself and had condescended to load that revolver. I remember, as I unfolded our precious scheme for his retreat, how his stubborn but weary resignation was gradually replaced by surprise, interest, wonder, and by boyish eagerness. This was a chance he had been dreaming of. He couldn’t think how he merited that I . . . He would be shot if he could see to what he owed . . . And it was Stein, Stein the merchant, who . . . but of course it was me he had to . . . I cut him short. He was not articulate, and his gratitude caused me inexplicable pain. I told him that if he owed this chance to any one especially, it was to an old Scot of whom he had never heard, who had died many years ago, of whom little was remembered besides a roaring voice and a rough sort of honesty. There was really no one to receive his thanks. Stein was passing on to a young man the help he had received in his own young days, and I had done no more than to mention his name. Upon this he coloured, and, twisting a bit of paper in his fingers, he remarked bashfully that I had always trusted him.

‘I admitted that such was the case, and added after a pause that I wished he had been able to follow my example. “You think I don’t?” he asked uneasily, and remarked in a mutter that one had to get some sort of show first; then brightening up, and in a loud voice he protested he would give me no occasion to regret my confidence, which — which . . .

““Do not misapprehend,” I interrupted. “It is not in your power to make me regret anything.” There would be no regrets; but if there were, it would be altogether my own affair: on the other hand, I wished him to understand clearly that this arrangement, this — this — experiment, was his own doing; he was responsible for it and no one else. “Why? Why,” he stammered, “this is the very thing that I . . .” I begged him not to be dense, and he looked more puzzled than ever. He was in a fair way to make life intolerable to himself . . . “Do you think so?” he asked, disturbed; but in a moment added confidently, “I was going on though. Was I not?” It was impossible to be angry with him: I could not help a smile, and told him that in the old days people who went on like this were on the way of becoming hermits in a wilderness. “Hermits be hanged!” he commented with engaging impulsiveness. Of course he didn’t mind a wilderness. . . . “I was

glad of it," I said. That was where he would be going to. He would find it lively enough, I ventured to promise. "Yes, yes," he said, keenly. He had shown a desire, I continued inflexibly, to go out and shut the door after him. . . . "Did I?" he interrupted in a strange access of gloom that seemed to envelop him from head to foot like the shadow of a passing cloud. He was wonderfully expressive after all. Wonderfully! "Did I?" he repeated bitterly. "You can't say I made much noise about it. And I can keep it up, too — only, confound it! you show me a door." . . . "Very well. Pass on," I struck in. I could make him a solemn promise that it would be shut behind him with a vengeance. His fate, whatever it was, would be ignored, because the country, for all its rotten state, was not judged ripe for interference. Once he got in, it would be for the outside world as though he had never existed. He would have nothing but the soles of his two feet to stand upon, and he would have first to find his ground at that. "Never existed — that's it, by Jove," he murmured to himself. His eyes, fastened upon my lips, sparkled. If he had thoroughly understood the conditions, I concluded, he had better jump into the first gharri he could see and drive on to Stein's house for his final instructions. He flung out of the room before I had fairly finished speaking.'

## CHAPTER 23

‘He did not return till next morning. He had been kept to dinner and for the night. There never had been such a wonderful man as Mr. Stein. He had in his pocket a letter for Cornelius (“the Johnnie who’s going to get the sack,” he explained, with a momentary drop in his elation), and he exhibited with glee a silver ring, such as natives use, worn down very thin and showing faint traces of chasing.

‘This was his introduction to an old chap called Doramin — one of the principal men out there — a big pot — who had been Mr. Stein’s friend in that country where he had all these adventures. Mr. Stein called him “war-comrade.” War-comrade was good. Wasn’t it? And didn’t Mr. Stein speak English wonderfully well? Said he had learned it in Celebes — of all places! That was awfully funny. Was it not? He did speak with an accent — a twang — did I notice? That chap Doramin had given him the ring. They had exchanged presents when they parted for the last time. Sort of promising eternal friendship. He called it fine — did I not? They had to make a dash for dear life out of the country when that Mohammed — Mohammed — What’s-his-name had been killed. I knew the story, of course. Seemed a beastly shame, didn’t it? . . .

‘He ran on like this, forgetting his plate, with a knife and fork in hand (he had found me at tiffin), slightly flushed, and with his eyes darkened many shades, which was with him a sign of excitement. The ring was a sort of credential — (“It’s like something you read of in books,” he threw in appreciatively) — and Doramin would do his best for him. Mr. Stein had been the means of saving that chap’s life on some occasion; purely by accident, Mr. Stein had said, but he — Jim — had his own opinion about that. Mr. Stein was just the man to look out for such accidents. No matter. Accident or purpose, this would serve his turn immensely. Hoped to goodness the jolly old beggar had not gone off the hooks meantime. Mr. Stein could not tell. There had been no news for more than a year; they were kicking up no end of an all-fired row amongst themselves, and the river was closed. Jolly awkward, this; but, no fear; he would manage to find a crack to get in.

‘He impressed, almost frightened, me with his elated rattle. He was voluble like a youngster on the eve of a long holiday with a prospect of delightful scrapes, and such an attitude of mind in a grown man and in this



connection had in it something phenomenal, a little mad, dangerous, unsafe. I was on the point of entreating him to take things seriously when he dropped his knife and fork (he had begun eating, or rather swallowing food, as it were, unconsciously), and began a search all round his plate. The ring! The ring! Where the devil . . . Ah! Here it was . . . He closed his big hand on it, and tried all his pockets one after another. Jove! wouldn't do to lose the thing. He meditated gravely over his fist. Had it? Would hang the bally affair round his neck! And he proceeded to do this immediately, producing a string (which looked like a bit of a cotton shoe-lace) for the purpose. There! That would do the trick! It would be the deuce if . . . He seemed to catch sight of my face for the first time, and it steadied him a little. I probably didn't realise, he said with a naive gravity, how much importance he attached to that token. It meant a friend; and it is a good thing to have a friend. He knew something about that. He nodded at me expressively, but before my disclaiming gesture he leaned his head on his hand and for a while sat silent, playing thoughtfully with the bread-crumbs on the cloth . . . "Slam the door — that was jolly well put," he cried, and jumping up, began to pace the room, reminding me by the set of the shoulders, the turn of his head, the headlong and uneven stride, of that night when he had paced thus, confessing, explaining — what you will — but, in the last instance, living — living before me, under his own little cloud, with all his unconscious subtlety which could draw consolation from the very source of sorrow. It was the same mood, the same and different, like a fickle companion that to-day guiding you on the true path, with the same eyes, the same step, the same impulse, to-morrow will lead you hopelessly astray. His tread was assured, his straying, darkened eyes seemed to search the room for something. One of his footfalls somehow sounded louder than the other — the fault of his boots probably — and gave a curious impression of an invisible halt in his gait. One of his hands was rammed deep into his trousers' pocket, the other waved suddenly above his head. "Slam the door!" he shouted. "I've been waiting for that. I'll show yet . . . I'll . . . I'm ready for any confounded thing . . . I've been dreaming of it . . . Jove! Get out of this. Jove! This is luck at last . . . You wait. I'll . . ."

'He tossed his head fearlessly, and I confess that for the first and last time in our acquaintance I perceived myself unexpectedly to be thoroughly sick of him. Why these vapourings? He was stumping about the room flourishing his arm absurdly, and now and then feeling on his breast for the

ring under his clothes. Where was the sense of such exaltation in a man appointed to be a trading-clerk, and in a place where there was no trade — at that? Why hurl defiance at the universe? This was not a proper frame of mind to approach any undertaking; an improper frame of mind not only for him, I said, but for any man. He stood still over me. Did I think so? he asked, by no means subdued, and with a smile in which I seemed to detect suddenly something insolent. But then I am twenty years his senior. Youth is insolent; it is its right — its necessity; it has got to assert itself, and all assertion in this world of doubts is a defiance, is an insolence. He went off into a far corner, and coming back, he, figuratively speaking, turned to rend me. I spoke like that because I — even I, who had been no end kind to him — even I remembered — remembered — against him — what — what had happened. And what about others — the — the — world? Where's the wonder he wanted to get out, meant to get out, meant to stay out — by heavens! And I talked about proper frames of mind!

“It is not I or the world who remember,” I shouted. “It is you — you, who remember.”

‘He did not flinch, and went on with heat, “Forget everything, everybody, everybody.” . . . His voice fell. . . “But you,” he added.

“Yes — me too — if it would help,” I said, also in a low tone. After this we remained silent and languid for a time as if exhausted. Then he began again, composedly, and told me that Mr. Stein had instructed him to wait for a month or so, to see whether it was possible for him to remain, before he began building a new house for himself, so as to avoid “vain expense.” He did make use of funny expressions — Stein did. “Vain expense” was good. . . . Remain? Why! of course. He would hang on. Let him only get in — that's all; he would answer for it he would remain. Never get out. It was easy enough to remain.

“Don't be foolhardy,” I said, rendered uneasy by his threatening tone. “If you only live long enough you will want to come back.”

“Come back to what?” he asked absently, with his eyes fixed upon the face of a clock on the wall.

‘I was silent for a while. “Is it to be never, then?” I said. “Never,” he repeated dreamily without looking at me, and then flew into sudden activity. “Jove! Two o'clock, and I sail at four!”

‘It was true. A brigantine of Stein's was leaving for the westward that afternoon, and he had been instructed to take his passage in her, only no

orders to delay the sailing had been given. I suppose Stein forgot. He made a rush to get his things while I went aboard my ship, where he promised to call on his way to the outer roadstead. He turned up accordingly in a great hurry and with a small leather valise in his hand. This wouldn't do, and I offered him an old tin trunk of mine supposed to be water-tight, or at least damp-tight. He effected the transfer by the simple process of shooting out the contents of his valise as you would empty a sack of wheat. I saw three books in the tumble; two small, in dark covers, and a thick green-and-gold volume — a half-crown complete Shakespeare. "You read this?" I asked. "Yes. Best thing to cheer up a fellow," he said hastily. I was struck by this appreciation, but there was no time for Shakespearian talk. A heavy revolver and two small boxes of cartridges were lying on the cuddy-table. "Pray take this," I said. "It may help you to remain." No sooner were these words out of my mouth than I perceived what grim meaning they could bear. "May help you to get in," I corrected myself remorsefully. He however was not troubled by obscure meanings; he thanked me effusively and bolted out, calling Good-bye over his shoulder. I heard his voice through the ship's side urging his boatmen to give way, and looking out of the stern-port I saw the boat rounding under the counter. He sat in her leaning forward, exciting his men with voice and gestures; and as he had kept the revolver in his hand and seemed to be presenting it at their heads, I shall never forget the scared faces of the four Javanese, and the frantic swing of their stroke which snatched that vision from under my eyes. Then turning away, the first thing I saw were the two boxes of cartridges on the cuddy-table. He had forgotten to take them.

'I ordered my gig manned at once; but Jim's rowers, under the impression that their lives hung on a thread while they had that madman in the boat, made such excellent time that before I had traversed half the distance between the two vessels I caught sight of him clambering over the rail, and of his box being passed up. All the brigantine's canvas was loose, her mainsail was set, and the windlass was just beginning to clink as I stepped upon her deck: her master, a dapper little half-caste of forty or so, in a blue flannel suit, with lively eyes, his round face the colour of lemon-peel, and with a thin little black moustache drooping on each side of his thick, dark lips, came forward smirking. He turned out, notwithstanding his self-satisfied and cheery exterior, to be of a careworn temperament. In answer to a remark of mine (while Jim had gone below for a moment) he

said, "Oh yes. Patusan." He was going to carry the gentleman to the mouth of the river, but would "never ascend." His flowing English seemed to be derived from a dictionary compiled by a lunatic. Had Mr. Stein desired him to "ascend," he would have "reverentially" — (I think he wanted to say respectfully — but devil only knows) — "reverentially made objects for the safety of properties." If disregarded, he would have presented "resignation to quit." Twelve months ago he had made his last voyage there, and though Mr. Cornelius "propitiated many offertories" to Mr. Rajah Allang and the "principal populations," on conditions which made the trade "a snare and ashes in the mouth," yet his ship had been fired upon from the woods by "irresponsive parties" all the way down the river; which causing his crew "from exposure to limb to remain silent in hidings," the brigantine was nearly stranded on a sandbank at the bar, where she "would have been perishable beyond the act of man." The angry disgust at the recollection, the pride of his fluency, to which he turned an attentive ear, struggled for the possession of his broad simple face. He scowled and beamed at me, and watched with satisfaction the undeniable effect of his phraseology. Dark frowns ran swiftly over the placid sea, and the brigantine, with her fore-topsail to the mast and her main-boom amidships, seemed bewildered amongst the cat's-paws. He told me further, gnashing his teeth, that the Rajah was a "laughable hyaena" (can't imagine how he got hold of hyaenas); while somebody else was many times falser than the "weapons of a crocodile." Keeping one eye on the movements of his crew forward, he let loose his volubility — comparing the place to a "cage of beasts made ravenous by long impenitence." I fancy he meant impunity. He had no intention, he cried, to "exhibit himself to be made attached purposefully to robbery." The long-drawn wails, giving the time for the pull of the men catting the anchor, came to an end, and he lowered his voice. "Plenty too much enough of Patusan," he concluded, with energy.

'I heard afterwards he had been so indiscreet as to get himself tied up by the neck with a rattan halter to a post planted in the middle of a mud-hole before the Rajah's house. He spent the best part of a day and a whole night in that unwholesome situation, but there is every reason to believe the thing had been meant as a sort of joke. He brooded for a while over that horrid memory, I suppose, and then addressed in a quarrelsome tone the man coming aft to the helm. When he turned to me again it was to speak judicially, without passion. He would take the gentleman to the mouth of

the river at Batu Kring (Patusan town “being situated internally,” he remarked, “thirty miles”). But in his eyes, he continued — a tone of bored, weary conviction replacing his previous voluble delivery — the gentleman was already “in the similitude of a corpse.” “What? What do you say?” I asked. He assumed a startlingly ferocious demeanour, and imitated to perfection the act of stabbing from behind. “Already like the body of one deported,” he explained, with the insufferably conceited air of his kind after what they imagine a display of cleverness. Behind him I perceived Jim smiling silently at me, and with a raised hand checking the exclamation on my lips.

‘Then, while the half-caste, bursting with importance, shouted his orders, while the yards swung creaking and the heavy boom came surging over, Jim and I, alone as it were, to leeward of the mainsail, clasped each other’s hands and exchanged the last hurried words. My heart was freed from that dull resentment which had existed side by side with interest in his fate. The absurd chatter of the half-caste had given more reality to the miserable dangers of his path than Stein’s careful statements. On that occasion the sort of formality that had been always present in our intercourse vanished from our speech; I believe I called him “dear boy,” and he tacked on the words “old man” to some half-uttered expression of gratitude, as though his risk set off against my years had made us more equal in age and in feeling. There was a moment of real and profound intimacy, unexpected and short-lived like a glimpse of some everlasting, of some saving truth. He exerted himself to soothe me as though he had been the more mature of the two. “All right, all right,” he said, rapidly, and with feeling. “I promise to take care of myself. Yes; I won’t take any risks. Not a single blessed risk. Of course not. I mean to hang out. Don’t you worry. Jove! I feel as if nothing could touch me. Why! this is luck from the word Go. I wouldn’t spoil such a magnificent chance!” . . . A magnificent chance! Well, it was magnificent, but chances are what men make them, and how was I to know? As he had said, even I — even I remembered — his — his misfortune against him. It was true. And the best thing for him was to go.

‘My gig had dropped in the wake of the brigantine, and I saw him aft detached upon the light of the westering sun, raising his cap high above his head. I heard an indistinct shout, “You — shall — hear — of — me.” Of me, or from me, I don’t know which. I think it must have been of me. My eyes were too dazzled by the glitter of the sea below his feet to see him

clearly; I am fated never to see him clearly; but I can assure you no man could have appeared less “in the similitude of a corpse,” as that half-caste croaker had put it. I could see the little wretch’s face, the shape and colour of a ripe pumpkin, poked out somewhere under Jim’s elbow. He, too, raised his arm as if for a downward thrust. Absit omen!’

## CHAPTER 24

‘The coast of Patusan (I saw it nearly two years afterwards) is straight and sombre, and faces a misty ocean. Red trails are seen like cataracts of rust streaming under the dark-green foliage of bushes and creepers clothing the low cliffs. Swampy plains open out at the mouth of rivers, with a view of jagged blue peaks beyond the vast forests. In the offing a chain of islands, dark, crumbling shapes, stand out in the everlasting sunlit haze like the remnants of a wall breached by the sea.

‘There is a village of fisher-folk at the mouth of the Batu Kring branch of the estuary. The river, which had been closed so long, was open then, and Stein’s little schooner, in which I had my passage, worked her way up in three tides without being exposed to a fusillade from “irresponsive parties.” Such a state of affairs belonged already to ancient history, if I could believe the elderly headman of the fishing village, who came on board to act as a sort of pilot. He talked to me (the second white man he had ever seen) with confidence, and most of his talk was about the first white man he had ever seen. He called him Tuan Jim, and the tone of his references was made remarkable by a strange mixture of familiarity and awe. They, in the village, were under that lord’s special protection, which showed that Jim bore no grudge. If he had warned me that I would hear of him it was perfectly true. I was hearing of him. There was already a story that the tide had turned two hours before its time to help him on his journey up the river. The talkative old man himself had steered the canoe and had marvelled at the phenomenon. Moreover, all the glory was in his family. His son and his son-in-law had paddled; but they were only youths without experience, who did not notice the speed of the canoe till he pointed out to them the amazing fact.

‘Jim’s coming to that fishing village was a blessing; but to them, as to many of us, the blessing came heralded by terrors. So many generations had been released since the last white man had visited the river that the very tradition had been lost. The appearance of the being that descended upon them and demanded inflexibly to be taken up to Patusan was discomposing; his insistence was alarming; his generosity more than suspicious. It was an unheard-of request. There was no precedent. What would the Rajah say to this? What would he do to them? The best part of the night was spent in consultation; but the immediate risk from the anger of that strange man

seemed so great that at last a cranky dug-out was got ready. The women shrieked with grief as it put off. A fearless old hag cursed the stranger.

‘He sat in it, as I’ve told you, on his tin box, nursing the unloaded revolver on his lap. He sat with precaution — than which there is nothing more fatiguing — and thus entered the land he was destined to fill with the fame of his virtues, from the blue peaks inland to the white ribbon of surf on the coast. At the first bend he lost sight of the sea with its labouring waves for ever rising, sinking, and vanishing to rise again — the very image of struggling mankind — and faced the immovable forests rooted deep in the soil, soaring towards the sunshine, everlasting in the shadowy might of their tradition, like life itself. And his opportunity sat veiled by his side like an Eastern bride waiting to be uncovered by the hand of the master. He too was the heir of a shadowy and mighty tradition! He told me, however, that he had never in his life felt so depressed and tired as in that canoe. All the movement he dared to allow himself was to reach, as it were by stealth, after the shell of half a cocoa-nut floating between his shoes, and bale some of the water out with a carefully restrained action. He discovered how hard the lid of a block-tin case was to sit upon. He had heroic health; but several times during that journey he experienced fits of giddiness, and between whiles he speculated hazily as to the size of the blister the sun was raising on his back. For amusement he tried by looking ahead to decide whether the muddy object he saw lying on the water’s edge was a log of wood or an alligator. Only very soon he had to give that up. No fun in it. Always alligator. One of them flopped into the river and all but capsized the canoe. But this excitement was over directly. Then in a long empty reach he was very grateful to a troop of monkeys who came right down on the bank and made an insulting hullabaloo on his passage. Such was the way in which he was approaching greatness as genuine as any man ever achieved. Principally, he longed for sunset; and meantime his three paddlers were preparing to put into execution their plan of delivering him up to the Rajah.

“I suppose I must have been stupid with fatigue, or perhaps I did doze off for a time,” he said. The first thing he knew was his canoe coming to the bank. He became instantaneously aware of the forest having been left behind, of the first houses being visible higher up, of a stockade on his left, and of his boatmen leaping out together upon a low point of land and taking to their heels. Instinctively he leaped out after them. At first he thought himself deserted for some inconceivable reason, but he heard excited



shouts, a gate swung open, and a lot of people poured out, making towards him. At the same time a boat full of armed men appeared on the river and came alongside his empty canoe, thus shutting off his retreat.

“I was too startled to be quite cool — don’t you know? and if that revolver had been loaded I would have shot somebody — perhaps two, three bodies, and that would have been the end of me. But it wasn’t. . . .” “Why not?” I asked. “Well, I couldn’t fight the whole population, and I wasn’t coming to them as if I were afraid of my life,” he said, with just a faint hint of his stubborn sulkiness in the glance he gave me. I refrained from pointing out to him that they could not have known the chambers were actually empty. He had to satisfy himself in his own way. . . . “Anyhow it wasn’t,” he repeated good-humouredly, “and so I just stood still and asked them what was the matter. That seemed to strike them dumb. I saw some of these thieves going off with my box. That long-legged old scoundrel Kassim (I’ll show him to you to-morrow) ran out fussing to me about the Rajah wanting to see me. I said, ‘All right.’ I too wanted to see the Rajah, and I simply walked in through the gate and — and — here I am.” He laughed, and then with unexpected emphasis, “And do you know what’s the best in it?” he asked. “I’ll tell you. It’s the knowledge that had I been wiped out it is this place that would have been the loser.”

‘He spoke thus to me before his house on that evening I’ve mentioned — after we had watched the moon float away above the chasm between the hills like an ascending spirit out of a grave; its sheen descended, cold and pale, like the ghost of dead sunlight. There is something haunting in the light of the moon; it has all the dispassionateness of a disembodied soul, and something of its inconceivable mystery. It is to our sunshine, which — say what you like — is all we have to live by, what the echo is to the sound: misleading and confusing whether the note be mocking or sad. It robs all forms of matter — which, after all, is our domain — of their substance, and gives a sinister reality to shadows alone. And the shadows were very real around us, but Jim by my side looked very stalwart, as though nothing — not even the occult power of moonlight — could rob him of his reality in my eyes. Perhaps, indeed, nothing could touch him since he had survived the assault of the dark powers. All was silent, all was still; even on the river the moonbeams slept as on a pool. It was the moment of high water, a moment of immobility that accentuated the utter isolation of this lost corner of the earth. The houses crowding along the wide shining sweep without

ripple or glitter, stepping into the water in a line of jostling, vague, grey, silvery forms mingled with black masses of shadow, were like a spectral herd of shapeless creatures pressing forward to drink in a spectral and lifeless stream. Here and there a red gleam twinkled within the bamboo walls, warm, like a living spark, significant of human affections, of shelter, of repose.

‘He confessed to me that he often watched these tiny warm gleams go out one by one, that he loved to see people go to sleep under his eyes, confident in the security of to-morrow. “Peaceful here, eh?” he asked. He was not eloquent, but there was a deep meaning in the words that followed. “Look at these houses; there’s not one where I am not trusted. Jove! I told you I would hang on. Ask any man, woman, or child . . .” He paused. “Well, I am all right anyhow.”

‘I observed quickly that he had found that out in the end. I had been sure of it, I added. He shook his head. “Were you?” He pressed my arm lightly above the elbow. “Well, then — you were right.”

‘There was elation and pride, there was awe almost, in that low exclamation. “Jove!” he cried, “only think what it is to me.” Again he pressed my arm. “And you asked me whether I thought of leaving. Good God! I! want to leave! Especially now after what you told me of Mr. Stein’s . . . Leave! Why! That’s what I was afraid of. It would have been — it would have been harder than dying. No — on my word. Don’t laugh. I must feel — every day, every time I open my eyes — that I am trusted — that nobody has a right — don’t you know? Leave! For where? What for? To get what?”

‘I had told him (indeed it was the main object of my visit) that it was Stein’s intention to present him at once with the house and the stock of trading goods, on certain easy conditions which would make the transaction perfectly regular and valid. He began to snort and plunge at first. “Confound your delicacy!” I shouted. “It isn’t Stein at all. It’s giving you what you had made for yourself. And in any case keep your remarks for McNeil — when you meet him in the other world. I hope it won’t happen soon. . . .” He had to give in to my arguments, because all his conquests, the trust, the fame, the friendships, the love — all these things that made him master had made him a captive, too. He looked with an owner’s eye at the peace of the evening, at the river, at the houses, at the everlasting life of the forests, at the life of the old mankind, at the secrets of the land, at the pride

of his own heart; but it was they that possessed him and made him their own to the innermost thought, to the slightest stir of blood, to his last breath.

‘It was something to be proud of. I, too, was proud — for him, if not so certain of the fabulous value of the bargain. It was wonderful. It was not so much of his fearlessness that I thought. It is strange how little account I took of it: as if it had been something too conventional to be at the root of the matter. No. I was more struck by the other gifts he had displayed. He had proved his grasp of the unfamiliar situation, his intellectual alertness in that field of thought. There was his readiness, too! Amazing. And all this had come to him in a manner like keen scent to a well-bred hound. He was not eloquent, but there was a dignity in this constitutional reticence, there was a high seriousness in his stammerings. He had still his old trick of stubborn blushing. Now and then, though, a word, a sentence, would escape him that showed how deeply, how solemnly, he felt about that work which had given him the certitude of rehabilitation. That is why he seemed to love the land and the people with a sort of fierce egoism, with a contemptuous tenderness.’

## CHAPTER 25

““This is where I was prisoner for three days,” he murmured to me (it was on the occasion of our visit to the Rajah), while we were making our way slowly through a kind of awestruck riot of dependants across Tunku Allang’s courtyard. “Filthy place, isn’t it? And I couldn’t get anything to eat either, unless I made a row about it, and then it was only a small plate of rice and a fried fish not much bigger than a stickleback — confound them! Jove! I’ve been hungry prowling inside this stinking enclosure with some of these vagabonds shoving their mugs right under my nose. I had given up that famous revolver of yours at the first demand. Glad to get rid of the bally thing. Look like a fool walking about with an empty shooting-iron in my hand.” At that moment we came into the presence, and he became unflinchingly grave and complimentary with his late captor. Oh! magnificent! I want to laugh when I think of it. But I was impressed, too. The old disreputable Tunku Allang could not help showing his fear (he was no hero, for all the tales of his hot youth he was fond of telling); and at the same time there was a wistful confidence in his manner towards his late prisoner. Note! Even where he would be most hated he was still trusted. Jim — as far as I could follow the conversation — was improving the occasion by the delivery of a lecture. Some poor villagers had been waylaid and robbed while on their way to Doramin’s house with a few pieces of gum or beeswax which they wished to exchange for rice. “It was Doramin who was a thief,” burst out the Rajah. A shaking fury seemed to enter that old frail body. He writhed weirdly on his mat, gesticulating with his hands and feet, tossing the tangled strings of his mop — an impotent incarnation of rage. There were staring eyes and dropping jaws all around us. Jim began to speak. Resolutely, coolly, and for some time he enlarged upon the text that no man should be prevented from getting his food and his children’s food honestly. The other sat like a tailor at his board, one palm on each knee, his head low, and fixing Jim through the grey hair that fell over his very eyes. When Jim had done there was a great stillness. Nobody seemed to breathe even; no one made a sound till the old Rajah sighed faintly, and looking up, with a toss of his head, said quickly, “You hear, my people! No more of these little games.” This decree was received in profound silence. A rather heavy man, evidently in a position of confidence, with intelligent eyes, a bony, broad, very dark face, and a cheerily of officious manner (I learned

later on he was the executioner), presented to us two cups of coffee on a brass tray, which he took from the hands of an inferior attendant. "You needn't drink," muttered Jim very rapidly. I didn't perceive the meaning at first, and only looked at him. He took a good sip and sat composedly, holding the saucer in his left hand. In a moment I felt excessively annoyed. "Why the devil," I whispered, smiling at him amiably, "do you expose me to such a stupid risk?" I drank, of course, there was nothing for it, while he gave no sign, and almost immediately afterwards we took our leave. While we were going down the courtyard to our boat, escorted by the intelligent and cheery executioner, Jim said he was very sorry. It was the barest chance, of course. Personally he thought nothing of poison. The remotest chance. He was — he assured me — considered to be infinitely more useful than dangerous, and so . . . "But the Rajah is afraid of you abominably. Anybody can see that," I argued with, I own, a certain peevishness, and all the time watching anxiously for the first twist of some sort of ghastly colic. I was awfully disgusted. "If I am to do any good here and preserve my position," he said, taking his seat by my side in the boat, "I must stand the risk: I take it once every month, at least. Many people trust me to do that — for them. Afraid of me! That's just it. Most likely he is afraid of me because I am not afraid of his coffee." Then showing me a place on the north front of the stockade where the pointed tops of several stakes were broken, "This is where I leaped over on my third day in Patusan. They haven't put new stakes there yet. Good leap, eh?" A moment later we passed the mouth of a muddy creek. "This is my second leap. I had a bit of a run and took this one flying, but fell short. Thought I would leave my skin there. Lost my shoes struggling. And all the time I was thinking to myself how beastly it would be to get a jab with a bally long spear while sticking in the mud like this. I remember how sick I felt wriggling in that slime. I mean really sick — as if I had bitten something rotten."

'That's how it was — and the opportunity ran by his side, leaped over the gap, floundered in the mud . . . still veiled. The unexpectedness of his coming was the only thing, you understand, that saved him from being at once dispatched with krisses and flung into the river. They had him, but it was like getting hold of an apparition, a wraith, a portent. What did it mean? What to do with it? Was it too late to conciliate him? Hadn't he better be killed without more delay? But what would happen then? Wretched old Allang went nearly mad with apprehension and through the

difficulty of making up his mind. Several times the council was broken up, and the advisers made a break helter-skelter for the door and out on to the verandah. One — it is said — even jumped down to the ground — fifteen feet, I should judge — and broke his leg. The royal governor of Patusan had bizarre mannerisms, and one of them was to introduce boastful rhapsodies into every arduous discussion, when, getting gradually excited, he would end by flying off his perch with a kriss in his hand. But, barring such interruptions, the deliberations upon Jim's fate went on night and day.

‘Meanwhile he wandered about the courtyard, shunned by some, glared at by others, but watched by all, and practically at the mercy of the first casual ragamuffin with a chopper, in there. He took possession of a small tumble-down shed to sleep in; the effluvia of filth and rotten matter incommoded him greatly: it seems he had not lost his appetite though, because — he told me — he had been hungry all the blessed time. Now and again “some fussy ass” deputed from the council-room would come out running to him, and in honeyed tones would administer amazing interrogatories: “Were the Dutch coming to take the country? Would the white man like to go back down the river? What was the object of coming to such a miserable country? The Rajah wanted to know whether the white man could repair a watch?” They did actually bring out to him a nickel clock of New England make, and out of sheer unbearable boredom he busied himself in trying to get the alarum to work. It was apparently when thus occupied in his shed that the true perception of his extreme peril dawned upon him. He dropped the thing — he says — “like a hot potato,” and walked out hastily, without the slightest idea of what he would, or indeed could, do. He only knew that the position was intolerable. He strolled aimlessly beyond a sort of ramshackle little granary on posts, and his eyes fell on the broken stakes of the palisade; and then — he says — at once, without any mental process as it were, without any stir of emotion, he set about his escape as if executing a plan matured for a month. He walked off carelessly to give himself a good run, and when he faced about there was some dignitary, with two spearmen in attendance, close at his elbow ready with a question. He started off “from under his very nose,” went over “like a bird,” and landed on the other side with a fall that jarred all his bones and seemed to split his head. He picked himself up instantly. He never thought of anything at the time; all he could remember — he said — was a great yell; the first houses of Patusan were before him four hundred

yards away; he saw the creek, and as it were mechanically put on more pace. The earth seemed fairly to fly backwards under his feet. He took off from the last dry spot, felt himself flying through the air, felt himself, without any shock, planted upright in an extremely soft and sticky mudbank. It was only when he tried to move his legs and found he couldn't that, in his own words, "he came to himself." He began to think of the "bally long spears." As a matter of fact, considering that the people inside the stockade had to run to the gate, then get down to the landing-place, get into boats, and pull round a point of land, he had more advance than he imagined. Besides, it being low water, the creek was without water — you couldn't call it dry — and practically he was safe for a time from everything but a very long shot perhaps. The higher firm ground was about six feet in front of him. "I thought I would have to die there all the same," he said. He reached and grabbed desperately with his hands, and only succeeded in gathering a horrible cold shiny heap of slime against his breast — up to his very chin. It seemed to him he was burying himself alive, and then he struck out madly, scattering the mud with his fists. It fell on his head, on his face, over his eyes, into his mouth. He told me that he remembered suddenly the courtyard, as you remember a place where you had been very happy years ago. He longed — so he said — to be back there again, mending the clock. Mending the clock — that was the idea. He made efforts, tremendous sobbing, gasping efforts, efforts that seemed to burst his eyeballs in their sockets and make him blind, and culminating into one mighty supreme effort in the darkness to crack the earth asunder, to throw it off his limbs — and he felt himself creeping feebly up the bank. He lay full length on the firm ground and saw the light, the sky. Then as a sort of happy thought the notion came to him that he would go to sleep. He will have it that he did actually go to sleep; that he slept — perhaps for a minute, perhaps for twenty seconds, or only for one second, but he recollects distinctly the violent convulsive start of awakening. He remained lying still for a while, and then he arose muddy from head to foot and stood there, thinking he was alone of his kind for hundreds of miles, alone, with no help, no sympathy, no pity to expect from any one, like a hunted animal. The first houses were not more than twenty yards from him; and it was the desperate screaming of a frightened woman trying to carry off a child that started him again. He pelted straight on in his socks, beplastered with filth out of all semblance to a human being. He traversed more than half the length of the

settlement. The nimbler women fled right and left, the slower men just dropped whatever they had in their hands, and remained petrified with dropping jaws. He was a flying terror. He says he noticed the little children trying to run for life, falling on their little stomachs and kicking. He swerved between two houses up a slope, clambered in desperation over a barricade of felled trees (there wasn't a week without some fight in Patusan at that time), burst through a fence into a maize-patch, where a scared boy flung a stick at him, blundered upon a path, and ran all at once into the arms of several startled men. He just had breath enough to gasp out, "Doramin! Doramin!" He remembers being half-carried, half-rushed to the top of the slope, and in a vast enclosure with palms and fruit trees being run up to a large man sitting massively in a chair in the midst of the greatest possible commotion and excitement. He fumbled in mud and clothes to produce the ring, and, finding himself suddenly on his back, wondered who had knocked him down. They had simply let him go — don't you know? — but he couldn't stand. At the foot of the slope random shots were fired, and above the roofs of the settlement there rose a dull roar of amazement. But he was safe. Doramin's people were barricading the gate and pouring water down his throat; Doramin's old wife, full of business and commiseration, was issuing shrill orders to her girls. "The old woman," he said softly, "made a to-do over me as if I had been her own son. They put me into an immense bed — her state bed — and she ran in and out wiping her eyes to give me pats on the back. I must have been a pitiful object. I just lay there like a log for I don't know how long."

'He seemed to have a great liking for Doramin's old wife. She on her side had taken a motherly fancy to him. She had a round, nut-brown, soft face, all fine wrinkles, large, bright red lips (she chewed betel assiduously), and screwed up, winking, benevolent eyes. She was constantly in movement, scolding busily and ordering unceasingly a troop of young women with clear brown faces and big grave eyes, her daughters, her servants, her slave-girls. You know how it is in these households: it's generally impossible to tell the difference. She was very spare, and even her ample outer garment, fastened in front with jewelled clasps, had somehow a skimpy effect. Her dark bare feet were thrust into yellow straw slippers of Chinese make. I have seen her myself flitting about with her extremely thick, long, grey hair falling about her shoulders. She uttered homely shrewd sayings, was of noble birth, and was eccentric and arbitrary. In the afternoon she would sit



in a very roomy arm-chair, opposite her husband, gazing steadily through a wide opening in the wall which gave an extensive view of the settlement and the river.

‘She invariably tucked up her feet under her, but old Doramin sat squarely, sat imposingly as a mountain sits on a plain. He was only of the nakhoda or merchant class, but the respect shown to him and the dignity of his bearing were very striking. He was the chief of the second power in Patusan. The immigrants from Celebes (about sixty families that, with dependants and so on, could muster some two hundred men “wearing the kriss”) had elected him years ago for their head. The men of that race are intelligent, enterprising, revengeful, but with a more frank courage than the other Malays, and restless under oppression. They formed the party opposed to the Rajah. Of course the quarrels were for trade. This was the primary cause of faction fights, of the sudden outbreaks that would fill this or that part of the settlement with smoke, flame, the noise of shots and shrieks. Villages were burnt, men were dragged into the Rajah’s stockade to be killed or tortured for the crime of trading with anybody else but himself. Only a day or two before Jim’s arrival several heads of households in the very fishing village that was afterwards taken under his especial protection had been driven over the cliffs by a party of the Rajah’s spearmen, on suspicion of having been collecting edible birds’ nests for a Celebes trader. Rajah Allang pretended to be the only trader in his country, and the penalty for the breach of the monopoly was death; but his idea of trading was indistinguishable from the commonest forms of robbery. His cruelty and rapacity had no other bounds than his cowardice, and he was afraid of the organised power of the Celebes men, only — till Jim came — he was not afraid enough to keep quiet. He struck at them through his subjects, and thought himself pathetically in the right. The situation was complicated by a wandering stranger, an Arab half-breed, who, I believe, on purely religious grounds, had incited the tribes in the interior (the bush-folk, as Jim himself called them) to rise, and had established himself in a fortified camp on the summit of one of the twin hills. He hung over the town of Patusan like a hawk over a poultry-yard, but he devastated the open country. Whole villages, deserted, rotted on their blackened posts over the banks of clear streams, dropping piecemeal into the water the grass of their walls, the leaves of their roofs, with a curious effect of natural decay as if they had been a form of vegetation stricken by a blight at its very root. The two

parties in Patusan were not sure which one this partisan most desired to plunder. The Rajah intrigued with him feebly. Some of the Bugis settlers, weary with endless insecurity, were half inclined to call him in. The younger spirits amongst them, chaffing, advised to “get Sherif Ali with his wild men and drive the Rajah Allang out of the country.” Doramin restrained them with difficulty. He was growing old, and, though his influence had not diminished, the situation was getting beyond him. This was the state of affairs when Jim, bolting from the Rajah’s stockade, appeared before the chief of the Bugis, produced the ring, and was received, in a manner of speaking, into the heart of the community.’

## CHAPTER 26

‘Doramin was one of the most remarkable men of his race I had ever seen. His bulk for a Malay was immense, but he did not look merely fat; he looked imposing, monumental. This motionless body, clad in rich stuffs, coloured silks, gold embroideries; this huge head, enfolded in a red-and-gold headkerchief; the flat, big, round face, wrinkled, furrowed, with two semicircular heavy folds starting on each side of wide, fierce nostrils, and enclosing a thick-lipped mouth; the throat like a bull; the vast corrugated brow overhanging the staring proud eyes — made a whole that, once seen, can never be forgotten. His impassive repose (he seldom stirred a limb when once he sat down) was like a display of dignity. He was never known to raise his voice. It was a hoarse and powerful murmur, slightly veiled as if heard from a distance. When he walked, two short, sturdy young fellows, naked to the waist, in white sarongs and with black skull-caps on the backs of their heads, sustained his elbows; they would ease him down and stand behind his chair till he wanted to rise, when he would turn his head slowly, as if with difficulty, to the right and to the left, and then they would catch him under his armpits and help him up. For all that, there was nothing of a cripple about him: on the contrary, all his ponderous movements were like manifestations of a mighty deliberate force. It was generally believed he consulted his wife as to public affairs; but nobody, as far as I know, had ever heard them exchange a single word. When they sat in state by the wide opening it was in silence. They could see below them in the declining light the vast expanse of the forest country, a dark sleeping sea of sombre green undulating as far as the violet and purple range of mountains; the shining sinuosity of the river like an immense letter S of beaten silver; the brown ribbon of houses following the sweep of both banks, overtopped by the twin hills uprising above the nearer tree-tops. They were wonderfully contrasted: she, light, delicate, spare, quick, a little witch-like, with a touch of motherly fussiness in her repose; he, facing her, immense and heavy, like a figure of a man roughly fashioned of stone, with something magnanimous and ruthless in his immobility. The son of these old people was a most distinguished youth.

‘They had him late in life. Perhaps he was not really so young as he looked. Four- or five-and-twenty is not so young when a man is already father of a family at eighteen. When he entered the large room, lined and

carpeted with fine mats, and with a high ceiling of white sheeting, where the couple sat in state surrounded by a most deferential retinue, he would make his way straight to Doramin, to kiss his hand — which the other abandoned to him, majestically — and then would step across to stand by his mother's chair. I suppose I may say they idolised him, but I never caught them giving him an overt glance. Those, it is true, were public functions. The room was generally thronged. The solemn formality of greetings and leave-takings, the profound respect expressed in gestures, on the faces, in the low whispers, is simply indescribable. "It's well worth seeing," Jim had assured me while we were crossing the river, on our way back. "They are like people in a book, aren't they?" he said triumphantly. "And Dain Waris — their son — is the best friend (barring you) I ever had. What Mr. Stein would call a good 'war-comrade.' I was in luck. Jove! I was in luck when I tumbled amongst them at my last gasp." He meditated with bowed head, then rousing himself he added — "'Of course I didn't go to sleep over it, but . . ." He paused again. "It seemed to come to me," he murmured. "All at once I saw what I had to do . . ."

"There was no doubt that it had come to him; and it had come through war, too, as is natural, since this power that came to him was the power to make peace. It is in this sense alone that might so often is right. You must not think he had seen his way at once. When he arrived the Bugis community was in a most critical position. "They were all afraid," he said to me — "each man afraid for himself; while I could see as plain as possible that they must do something at once, if they did not want to go under one after another, what between the Rajah and that vagabond Sherif." But to see that was nothing. When he got his idea he had to drive it into reluctant minds, through the bulwarks of fear, of selfishness. He drove it in at last. And that was nothing. He had to devise the means. He devised them — an audacious plan; and his task was only half done. He had to inspire with his own confidence a lot of people who had hidden and absurd reasons to hang back; he had to conciliate imbecile jealousies, and argue away all sorts of senseless mistrusts. Without the weight of Doramin's authority, and his son's fiery enthusiasm, he would have failed. Dain Waris, the distinguished youth, was the first to believe in him; theirs was one of those strange, profound, rare friendships between brown and white, in which the very difference of race seems to draw two human beings closer by some mystic element of sympathy. Of Dain Waris, his own people said with pride that he

knew how to fight like a white man. This was true; he had that sort of courage — the courage in the open, I may say — but he had also a European mind. You meet them sometimes like that, and are surprised to discover unexpectedly a familiar turn of thought, an unobscured vision, a tenacity of purpose, a touch of altruism. Of small stature, but admirably well proportioned, Dain Waris had a proud carriage, a polished, easy bearing, a temperament like a clear flame. His dusky face, with big black eyes, was in action expressive, and in repose thoughtful. He was of a silent disposition; a firm glance, an ironic smile, a courteous deliberation of manner seemed to hint at great reserves of intelligence and power. Such beings open to the Western eye, so often concerned with mere surfaces, the hidden possibilities of races and lands over which hangs the mystery of unrecorded ages. He not only trusted Jim, he understood him, I firmly believe. I speak of him because he had captivated me. His — if I may say so — his caustic placidity, and, at the same time, his intelligent sympathy with Jim's aspirations, appealed to me. I seemed to behold the very origin of friendship. If Jim took the lead, the other had captivated his leader. In fact, Jim the leader was a captive in every sense. The land, the people, the friendship, the love, were like the jealous guardians of his body. Every day added a link to the fetters of that strange freedom. I felt convinced of it, as from day to day I learned more of the story.

‘The story! Haven't I heard the story? I've heard it on the march, in camp (he made me scour the country after invisible game); I've listened to a good part of it on one of the twin summits, after climbing the last hundred feet or so on my hands and knees. Our escort (we had volunteer followers from village to village) had camped meantime on a bit of level ground half-way up the slope, and in the still breathless evening the smell of wood-smoke reached our nostrils from below with the penetrating delicacy of some choice scent. Voices also ascended, wonderful in their distinct and immaterial clearness. Jim sat on the trunk of a felled tree, and pulling out his pipe began to smoke. A new growth of grass and bushes was springing up; there were traces of an earthwork under a mass of thorny twigs. “It all started from here,” he said, after a long and meditative silence. On the other hill, two hundred yards across a sombre precipice, I saw a line of high blackened stakes, showing here and there ruinously — the remnants of Sherif Ali's impregnable camp.

‘But it had been taken, though. That had been his idea. He had mounted Doramin’s old ordnance on the top of that hill; two rusty iron 7-pounders, a lot of small brass cannon — currency cannon. But if the brass guns represent wealth, they can also, when crammed recklessly to the muzzle, send a solid shot to some little distance. The thing was to get them up there. He showed me where he had fastened the cables, explained how he had improvised a rude capstan out of a hollowed log turning upon a pointed stake, indicated with the bowl of his pipe the outline of the earthwork. The last hundred feet of the ascent had been the most difficult. He had made himself responsible for success on his own head. He had induced the war party to work hard all night. Big fires lighted at intervals blazed all down the slope, “but up here,” he explained, “the hoisting gang had to fly around in the dark.” From the top he saw men moving on the hillside like ants at work. He himself on that night had kept on rushing down and climbing up like a squirrel, directing, encouraging, watching all along the line. Old Doramin had himself carried up the hill in his arm-chair. They put him down on the level place upon the slope, and he sat there in the light of one of the big fires — ”amazing old chap — real old chieftain,” said Jim, “with his little fierce eyes — a pair of immense flintlock pistols on his knees. Magnificent things, ebony, silver-mounted, with beautiful locks and a calibre like an old blunderbuss. A present from Stein, it seems — in exchange for that ring, you know. Used to belong to good old McNeil. God only knows how he came by them. There he sat, moving neither hand nor foot, a flame of dry brushwood behind him, and lots of people rushing about, shouting and pulling round him — the most solemn, imposing old chap you can imagine. He wouldn’t have had much chance if Sherif Ali had let his infernal crew loose at us and stampeded my lot. Eh? Anyhow, he had come up there to die if anything went wrong. No mistake! Jove! It thrilled me to see him there — like a rock. But the Sherif must have thought us mad, and never troubled to come and see how we got on. Nobody believed it could be done. Why! I think the very chaps who pulled and shoved and sweated over it did not believe it could be done! Upon my word I don’t think they did. . . .”

‘He stood erect, the smouldering brier-wood in his clutch, with a smile on his lips and a sparkle in his boyish eyes. I sat on the stump of a tree at his feet, and below us stretched the land, the great expanse of the forests, sombre under the sunshine, rolling like a sea, with glints of winding rivers,

the grey spots of villages, and here and there a clearing, like an islet of light amongst the dark waves of continuous tree-tops. A brooding gloom lay over this vast and monotonous landscape; the light fell on it as if into an abyss. The land devoured the sunshine; only far off, along the coast, the empty ocean, smooth and polished within the faint haze, seemed to rise up to the sky in a wall of steel.

‘And there I was with him, high in the sunshine on the top of that historic hill of his. He dominated the forest, the secular gloom, the old mankind. He was like a figure set up on a pedestal, to represent in his persistent youth the power, and perhaps the virtues, of races that never grow old, that have emerged from the gloom. I don’t know why he should always have appeared to me symbolic. Perhaps this is the real cause of my interest in his fate. I don’t know whether it was exactly fair to him to remember the incident which had given a new direction to his life, but at that very moment I remembered very distinctly. It was like a shadow in the light.’

## CHAPTER 27

‘Already the legend had gifted him with supernatural powers. Yes, it was said, there had been many ropes cunningly disposed, and a strange contrivance that turned by the efforts of many men, and each gun went up tearing slowly through the bushes, like a wild pig rooting its way in the undergrowth, but . . . and the wisest shook their heads. There was something occult in all this, no doubt; for what is the strength of ropes and of men’s arms? There is a rebellious soul in things which must be overcome by powerful charms and incantations. Thus old Sura — a very respectable householder of Patusan — with whom I had a quiet chat one evening. However, Sura was a professional sorcerer also, who attended all the rice sowings and reapings for miles around for the purpose of subduing the stubborn souls of things. This occupation he seemed to think a most arduous one, and perhaps the souls of things are more stubborn than the souls of men. As to the simple folk of outlying villages, they believed and said (as the most natural thing in the world) that Jim had carried the guns up the hill on his back — two at a time.

‘This would make Jim stamp his foot in vexation and exclaim with an exasperated little laugh, “What can you do with such silly beggars? They will sit up half the night talking bally rot, and the greater the lie the more they seem to like it.” You could trace the subtle influence of his surroundings in this irritation. It was part of his captivity. The earnestness of his denials was amusing, and at last I said, “My dear fellow, you don’t suppose I believe this.” He looked at me quite startled. “Well, no! I suppose not,” he said, and burst into a Homeric peal of laughter. “Well, anyhow the guns were there, and went off all together at sunrise. Jove! You should have seen the splinters fly,” he cried. By his side Dain Waris, listening with a quiet smile, dropped his eyelids and shuffled his feet a little. It appears that the success in mounting the guns had given Jim’s people such a feeling of confidence that he ventured to leave the battery under charge of two elderly Bugis who had seen some fighting in their day, and went to join Dain Waris and the storming party who were concealed in the ravine. In the small hours they began creeping up, and when two-thirds of the way up, lay in the wet grass waiting for the appearance of the sun, which was the agreed signal. He told me with what impatient anguishing emotion he watched the swift coming of the dawn; how, heated with the work and the climbing, he felt



the cold dew chilling his very bones; how afraid he was he would begin to shiver and shake like a leaf before the time came for the advance. "It was the slowest half-hour in my life," he declared. Gradually the silent stockade came out on the sky above him. Men scattered all down the slope were crouching amongst the dark stones and dripping bushes. Dain Waris was lying flattened by his side. "We looked at each other," Jim said, resting a gentle hand on his friend's shoulder. "He smiled at me as cheery as you please, and I dared not stir my lips for fear I would break out into a shivering fit. 'Pon my word, it's true! I had been streaming with perspiration when we took cover — so you may imagine . . ." He declared, and I believe him, that he had no fears as to the result. He was only anxious as to his ability to repress these shivers. He didn't bother about the result. He was bound to get to the top of that hill and stay there, whatever might happen. There could be no going back for him. Those people had trusted him implicitly. Him alone! His bare word. . . .

'I remember how, at this point, he paused with his eyes fixed upon me. "As far as he knew, they never had an occasion to regret it yet," he said. "Never. He hoped to God they never would. Meantime — worse luck! — they had got into the habit of taking his word for anything and everything. I could have no idea! Why, only the other day an old fool he had never seen in his life came from some village miles away to find out if he should divorce his wife. Fact. Solemn word. That's the sort of thing. . . He wouldn't have believed it. Would I? Squatted on the verandah chewing betel-nut, sighing and spitting all over the place for more than an hour, and as glum as an undertaker before he came out with that dashed conundrum. That's the kind of thing that isn't so funny as it looks. What was a fellow to say? — Good wife? — Yes. Good wife — old though. Started a confounded long story about some brass pots. Been living together for fifteen years — twenty years — could not tell. A long, long time. Good wife. Beat her a little — not much — just a little, when she was young. Had to — for the sake of his honour. Suddenly in her old age she goes and lends three brass pots to her sister's son's wife, and begins to abuse him every day in a loud voice. His enemies jeered at him; his face was utterly blackened. Pots totally lost. Awfully cut up about it. Impossible to fathom a story like that; told him to go home, and promised to come along myself and settle it all. It's all very well to grin, but it was the dashedest nuisance! A day's journey through the forest, another day lost in coaxing a lot of silly villagers to get

at the rights of the affair. There was the making of a sanguinary shindy in the thing. Every bally idiot took sides with one family or the other, and one half of the village was ready to go for the other half with anything that came handy. Honour bright! No joke! . . . Instead of attending to their bally crops. Got him the infernal pots back of course — and pacified all hands. No trouble to settle it. Of course not. Could settle the deadliest quarrel in the country by crooking his little finger. The trouble was to get at the truth of anything. Was not sure to this day whether he had been fair to all parties. It worried him. And the talk! Jove! There didn't seem to be any head or tail to it. Rather storm a twenty-foot-high old stockade any day. Much! Child's play to that other job. Wouldn't take so long either. Well, yes; a funny set out, upon the whole — the fool looked old enough to be his grandfather. But from another point of view it was no joke. His word decided everything — ever since the smashing of Sherif Ali. An awful responsibility," he repeated. "No, really — joking apart, had it been three lives instead of three rotten brass pots it would have been the same. . . ."

'Thus he illustrated the moral effect of his victory in war. It was in truth immense. It had led him from strife to peace, and through death into the innermost life of the people; but the gloom of the land spread out under the sunshine preserved its appearance of inscrutable, of secular repose. The sound of his fresh young voice — it's extraordinary how very few signs of wear he showed — floated lightly, and passed away over the unchanged face of the forests like the sound of the big guns on that cold dewy morning when he had no other concern on earth but the proper control of the chills in his body. With the first slant of sun-rays along these immovable tree-tops the summit of one hill wreathed itself, with heavy reports, in white clouds of smoke, and the other burst into an amazing noise of yells, war-cries, shouts of anger, of surprise, of dismay. Jim and Dain Waris were the first to lay their hands on the stakes. The popular story has it that Jim with a touch of one finger had thrown down the gate. He was, of course, anxious to disclaim this achievement. The whole stockade — he would insist on explaining to you — was a poor affair (Sherif Ali trusted mainly to the inaccessible position); and, anyway, the thing had been already knocked to pieces and only hung together by a miracle. He put his shoulder to it like a little fool and went in head over heels. Jove! If it hadn't been for Dain Waris, a pock-marked tattooed vagabond would have pinned him with his spear to a baulk of timber like one of Stein's beetles. The third man in, it

seems, had been Tamb' Itam, Jim's own servant. This was a Malay from the north, a stranger who had wandered into Patusan, and had been forcibly detained by Rajah Allang as paddler of one of the state boats. He had made a bolt of it at the first opportunity, and finding a precarious refuge (but very little to eat) amongst the Bugis settlers, had attached himself to Jim's person. His complexion was very dark, his face flat, his eyes prominent and injected with bile. There was something excessive, almost fanatical, in his devotion to his "white lord." He was inseparable from Jim like a morose shadow. On state occasions he would tread on his master's heels, one hand on the haft of his kriss, keeping the common people at a distance by his truculent brooding glances. Jim had made him the headman of his establishment, and all Patusan respected and courted him as a person of much influence. At the taking of the stockade he had distinguished himself greatly by the methodical ferocity of his fighting. The storming party had come on so quick — Jim said — that notwithstanding the panic of the garrison, there was a "hot five minutes hand-to-hand inside that stockade, till some bally ass set fire to the shelters of boughs and dry grass, and we all had to clear out for dear life."

"The rout, it seems, had been complete. Doramin, waiting immovably in his chair on the hillside, with the smoke of the guns spreading slowly above his big head, received the news with a deep grunt. When informed that his son was safe and leading the pursuit, he, without another sound, made a mighty effort to rise; his attendants hurried to his help, and, held up reverently, he shuffled with great dignity into a bit of shade, where he laid himself down to sleep, covered entirely with a piece of white sheeting. In Patusan the excitement was intense. Jim told me that from the hill, turning his back on the stockade with its embers, black ashes, and half-consumed corpses, he could see time after time the open spaces between the houses on both sides of the stream fill suddenly with a seething rush of people and get empty in a moment. His ears caught feebly from below the tremendous din of gongs and drums; the wild shouts of the crowd reached him in bursts of faint roaring. A lot of streamers made a flutter as of little white, red, yellow birds amongst the brown ridges of roofs. "You must have enjoyed it," I murmured, feeling the stir of sympathetic emotion.

"It was . . . it was immense! Immense!" he cried aloud, flinging his arms open. The sudden movement startled me as though I had seen him bare the secrets of his breast to the sunshine, to the brooding forests, to the steely

sea. Below us the town reposed in easy curves upon the banks of a stream whose current seemed to sleep. “Immense!” he repeated for a third time, speaking in a whisper, for himself alone.

‘Immense! No doubt it was immense; the seal of success upon his words, the conquered ground for the soles of his feet, the blind trust of men, the belief in himself snatched from the fire, the solitude of his achievement. All this, as I’ve warned you, gets dwarfed in the telling. I can’t with mere words convey to you the impression of his total and utter isolation. I know, of course, he was in every sense alone of his kind there, but the unsuspected qualities of his nature had brought him in such close touch with his surroundings that this isolation seemed only the effect of his power. His loneliness added to his stature. There was nothing within sight to compare him with, as though he had been one of those exceptional men who can be only measured by the greatness of their fame; and his fame, remember, was the greatest thing around for many a day’s journey. You would have to paddle, pole, or track a long weary way through the jungle before you passed beyond the reach of its voice. Its voice was not the trumpeting of the disreputable goddess we all know — not blatant — not brazen. It took its tone from the stillness and gloom of the land without a past, where his word was the one truth of every passing day. It shared something of the nature of that silence through which it accompanied you into unexplored depths, heard continuously by your side, penetrating, far-reaching — tinged with wonder and mystery on the lips of whispering men.’

## CHAPTER 28

‘The defeated Sherif Ali fled the country without making another stand, and when the miserable hunted villagers began to crawl out of the jungle back to their rotting houses, it was Jim who, in consultation with Dain Waris, appointed the headmen. Thus he became the virtual ruler of the land. As to old Tunku Allang, his fears at first had known no bounds. It is said that at the intelligence of the successful storming of the hill he flung himself, face down, on the bamboo floor of his audience-hall, and lay motionless for a whole night and a whole day, uttering stifled sounds of such an appalling nature that no man dared approach his prostrate form nearer than a spear’s length. Already he could see himself driven ignominiously out of Patusan, wandering abandoned, stripped, without opium, without his women, without followers, a fair game for the first comer to kill. After Sherif Ali his turn would come, and who could resist an attack led by such a devil? And indeed he owed his life and such authority as he still possessed at the time of my visit to Jim’s idea of what was fair alone. The Bugis had been extremely anxious to pay off old scores, and the impassive old Doramin cherished the hope of yet seeing his son ruler of Patusan. During one of our interviews he deliberately allowed me to get a glimpse of this secret ambition. Nothing could be finer in its way than the dignified wariness of his approaches. He himself — he began by declaring — had used his strength in his young days, but now he had grown old and tired. . . . With his imposing bulk and haughty little eyes darting sagacious, inquisitive glances, he reminded one irresistibly of a cunning old elephant; the slow rise and fall of his vast breast went on powerful and regular, like the heave of a calm sea. He too, as he protested, had an unbounded confidence in Tuan Jim’s wisdom. If he could only obtain a promise! One word would be enough! . . . His breathing silences, the low rumblings of his voice, recalled the last efforts of a spent thunderstorm.

‘I tried to put the subject aside. It was difficult, for there could be no question that Jim had the power; in his new sphere there did not seem to be anything that was not his to hold or to give. But that, I repeat, was nothing in comparison with the notion, which occurred to me, while I listened with a show of attention, that he seemed to have come very near at last to mastering his fate. Doramin was anxious about the future of the country, and I was struck by the turn he gave to the argument. The land remains

where God had put it; but white men — he said — they come to us and in a little while they go. They go away. Those they leave behind do not know when to look for their return. They go to their own land, to their people, and so this white man too would. . . . I don't know what induced me to commit myself at this point by a vigorous "No, no." The whole extent of this indiscretion became apparent when Doramin, turning full upon me his face, whose expression, fixed in rugged deep folds, remained unalterable, like a huge brown mask, said that this was good news indeed, reflectively; and then wanted to know why.

'His little, motherly witch of a wife sat on my other hand, with her head covered and her feet tucked up, gazing through the great shutter-hole. I could only see a straying lock of grey hair, a high cheek-bone, the slight masticating motion of the sharp chin. Without removing her eyes from the vast prospect of forests stretching as far as the hills, she asked me in a pitying voice why was it that he so young had wandered from his home, coming so far, through so many dangers? Had he no household there, no kinsmen in his own country? Had he no old mother, who would always remember his face? . . .

'I was completely unprepared for this. I could only mutter and shake my head vaguely. Afterwards I am perfectly aware I cut a very poor figure trying to extricate myself out of this difficulty. From that moment, however, the old nakhoda became taciturn. He was not very pleased, I fear, and evidently I had given him food for thought. Strangely enough, on the evening of that very day (which was my last in Patusan) I was once more confronted with the same question, with the unanswerable why of Jim's fate. And this brings me to the story of his love.

'I suppose you think it is a story that you can imagine for yourselves. We have heard so many such stories, and the majority of us don't believe them to be stories of love at all. For the most part we look upon them as stories of opportunities: episodes of passion at best, or perhaps only of youth and temptation, doomed to forgetfulness in the end, even if they pass through the reality of tenderness and regret. This view mostly is right, and perhaps in this case too. . . . Yet I don't know. To tell this story is by no means so easy as it should be — were the ordinary standpoint adequate. Apparently it is a story very much like the others: for me, however, there is visible in its background the melancholy figure of a woman, the shadow of a cruel wisdom buried in a lonely grave, looking on wistfully, helplessly, with

sealed lips. The grave itself, as I came upon it during an early morning stroll, was a rather shapeless brown mound, with an inlaid neat border of white lumps of coral at the base, and enclosed within a circular fence made of split saplings, with the bark left on. A garland of leaves and flowers was woven about the heads of the slender posts — and the flowers were fresh.

‘Thus, whether the shadow is of my imagination or not, I can at all events point out the significant fact of an unforgotten grave. When I tell you besides that Jim with his own hands had worked at the rustic fence, you will perceive directly the difference, the individual side of the story. There is in his espousal of memory and affection belonging to another human being something characteristic of his seriousness. He had a conscience, and it was a romantic conscience. Through her whole life the wife of the unspeakable Cornelius had no other companion, confidant, and friend but her daughter. How the poor woman had come to marry the awful little Malacca Portuguese — after the separation from the father of her girl — and how that separation had been brought about, whether by death, which can be sometimes merciful, or by the merciless pressure of conventions, is a mystery to me. From the little which Stein (who knew so many stories) had let drop in my hearing, I am convinced that she was no ordinary woman. Her own father had been a white; a high official; one of the brilliantly endowed men who are not dull enough to nurse a success, and whose careers so often end under a cloud. I suppose she too must have lacked the saving dullness — and her career ended in Patusan. Our common fate . . . for where is the man — I mean a real sentient man — who does not remember vaguely having been deserted in the fullness of possession by some one or something more precious than life? . . . our common fate fastens upon the women with a peculiar cruelty. It does not punish like a master, but inflicts lingering torment, as if to gratify a secret, unappeasable spite. One would think that, appointed to rule on earth, it seeks to revenge itself upon the beings that come nearest to rising above the trammels of earthly caution; for it is only women who manage to put at times into their love an element just palpable enough to give one a fright — an extra-terrestrial touch. I ask myself with wonder — how the world can look to them — whether it has the shape and substance we know, the air we breathe! Sometimes I fancy it must be a region of unreasonable sublimities seething with the excitement of their adventurous souls, lighted by the glory of all possible risks and renunciations. However, I suspect there are very

few women in the world, though of course I am aware of the multitudes of mankind and of the equality of sexes — in point of numbers, that is. But I am sure that the mother was as much of a woman as the daughter seemed to be. I cannot help picturing to myself these two, at first the young woman and the child, then the old woman and the young girl, the awful sameness and the swift passage of time, the barrier of forest, the solitude and the turmoil round these two lonely lives, and every word spoken between them penetrated with sad meaning. There must have been confidences, not so much of fact, I suppose, as of innermost feelings — regrets — fears — warnings, no doubt: warnings that the younger did not fully understand till the elder was dead — and Jim came along. Then I am sure she understood much — not everything — the fear mostly, it seems. Jim called her by a word that means precious, in the sense of a precious gem — jewel. Pretty, isn't it? But he was capable of anything. He was equal to his fortune, as he — after all — must have been equal to his misfortune. Jewel he called her; and he would say this as he might have said “Jane,” don't you know — with a marital, homelike, peaceful effect. I heard the name for the first time ten minutes after I had landed in his courtyard, when, after nearly shaking my arm off, he darted up the steps and began to make a joyous, boyish disturbance at the door under the heavy eaves. “Jewel! O Jewel! Quick! Here's a friend come,” . . . and suddenly peering at me in the dim verandah, he mumbled earnestly, “You know — this — no confounded nonsense about it — can't tell you how much I owe to her — and so — you understand — I — exactly as if . . .” His hurried, anxious whispers were cut short by the flitting of a white form within the house, a faint exclamation, and a child-like but energetic little face with delicate features and a profound, attentive glance peeped out of the inner gloom, like a bird out of the recess of a nest. I was struck by the name, of course; but it was not till later on that I connected it with an astonishing rumour that had met me on my journey, at a little place on the coast about 230 miles south of Patusan River. Stein's schooner, in which I had my passage, put in there, to collect some produce, and, going ashore, I found to my great surprise that the wretched locality could boast of a third-class deputy-assistant resident, a big, fat, greasy, blinking fellow of mixed descent, with turned-out, shiny lips. I found him lying extended on his back in a cane chair, odiously unbuttoned, with a large green leaf of some sort on the top of his steaming head, and another in his hand which he used lazily as a fan . . . Going to



Patusan? Oh yes. Stein's Trading Company. He knew. Had a permission? No business of his. It was not so bad there now, he remarked negligently, and, he went on drawling, "There's some sort of white vagabond has got in there, I hear. . . . Eh? What you say? Friend of yours? So! . . . Then it was true there was one of these verdammte — What was he up to? Found his way in, the rascal. Eh? I had not been sure. Patusan — they cut throats there — no business of ours." He interrupted himself to groan. "Phoo! Almighty! The heat! The heat! Well, then, there might be something in the story too, after all, and . . ." He shut one of his beastly glassy eyes (the eyelid went on quivering) while he leered at me atrociously with the other. "Look here," says he mysteriously, "if — do you understand? — if he has really got hold of something fairly good — none of your bits of green glass — understand? — I am a Government official — you tell the rascal . . . Eh? What? Friend of yours?" . . . He continued wallowing calmly in the chair . . . "You said so; that's just it; and I am pleased to give you the hint. I suppose you too would like to get something out of it? Don't interrupt. You just tell him I've heard the tale, but to my Government I have made no report. Not yet. See? Why make a report? Eh? Tell him to come to me if they let him get alive out of the country. He had better look out for himself. Eh? I promise to ask no questions. On the quiet — you understand? You too — you shall get something from me. Small commission for the trouble. Don't interrupt. I am a Government official, and make no report. That's business. Understand? I know some good people that will buy anything worth having, and can give him more money than the scoundrel ever saw in his life. I know his sort." He fixed me steadfastly with both his eyes open, while I stood over him utterly amazed, and asking myself whether he was mad or drunk. He perspired, puffed, moaning feebly, and scratching himself with such horrible composure that I could not bear the sight long enough to find out. Next day, talking casually with the people of the little native court of the place, I discovered that a story was travelling slowly down the coast about a mysterious white man in Patusan who had got hold of an extraordinary gem — namely, an emerald of an enormous size, and altogether priceless. The emerald seems to appeal more to the Eastern imagination than any other precious stone. The white man had obtained it, I was told, partly by the exercise of his wonderful strength and partly by cunning, from the ruler of a distant country, whence he had fled instantly, arriving in Patusan in utmost distress, but frightening the people by his extreme ferocity, which nothing

seemed able to subdue. Most of my informants were of the opinion that the stone was probably unlucky, — like the famous stone of the Sultan of Succadana, which in the old times had brought wars and untold calamities upon that country. Perhaps it was the same stone — one couldn't say. Indeed the story of a fabulously large emerald is as old as the arrival of the first white men in the Archipelago; and the belief in it is so persistent that less than forty years ago there had been an official Dutch inquiry into the truth of it. Such a jewel — it was explained to me by the old fellow from whom I heard most of this amazing Jim-myth — a sort of scribe to the wretched little Rajah of the place; — such a jewel, he said, cocking his poor purblind eyes up at me (he was sitting on the cabin floor out of respect), is best preserved by being concealed about the person of a woman. Yet it is not every woman that would do. She must be young — he sighed deeply — and insensible to the seductions of love. He shook his head sceptically. But such a woman seemed to be actually in existence. He had been told of a tall girl, whom the white man treated with great respect and care, and who never went forth from the house unattended. People said the white man could be seen with her almost any day; they walked side by side, openly, he holding her arm under his — pressed to his side — thus — in a most extraordinary way. This might be a lie, he conceded, for it was indeed a strange thing for any one to do: on the other hand, there could be no doubt she wore the white man's jewel concealed upon her bosom.'

## CHAPTER 29

‘This was the theory of Jim’s marital evening walks. I made a third on more than one occasion, unpleasantly aware every time of Cornelius, who nursed the aggrieved sense of his legal paternity, slinking in the neighbourhood with that peculiar twist of his mouth as if he were perpetually on the point of gnashing his teeth. But do you notice how, three hundred miles beyond the end of telegraph cables and mail-boat lines, the haggard utilitarian lies of our civilisation wither and die, to be replaced by pure exercises of imagination, that have the futility, often the charm, and sometimes the deep hidden truthfulness, of works of art? Romance had singled Jim for its own — and that was the true part of the story, which otherwise was all wrong. He did not hide his jewel. In fact, he was extremely proud of it.

‘It comes to me now that I had, on the whole, seen very little of her. What I remember best is the even, olive pallor of her complexion, and the intense blue-black gleams of her hair, flowing abundantly from under a small crimson cap she wore far back on her shapely head. Her movements were free, assured, and she blushed a dusky red. While Jim and I were talking, she would come and go with rapid glances at us, leaving on her passage an impression of grace and charm and a distinct suggestion of watchfulness. Her manner presented a curious combination of shyness and audacity. Every pretty smile was succeeded swiftly by a look of silent, repressed anxiety, as if put to flight by the recollection of some abiding danger. At times she would sit down with us and, with her soft cheek dimpled by the knuckles of her little hand, she would listen to our talk; her big clear eyes would remain fastened on our lips, as though each pronounced word had a visible shape. Her mother had taught her to read and write; she had learned a good bit of English from Jim, and she spoke it most amusingly, with his own clipping, boyish intonation. Her tenderness hovered over him like a flutter of wings. She lived so completely in his contemplation that she had acquired something of his outward aspect, something that recalled him in her movements, in the way she stretched her arm, turned her head, directed her glances. Her vigilant affection had an intensity that made it almost perceptible to the senses; it seemed actually to exist in the ambient matter of space, to envelop him like a peculiar fragrance, to dwell in the sunshine like a tremulous, subdued, and impassioned note. I suppose you think that I too am romantic, but it is a mistake. I am relating to you the sober impressions

of a bit of youth, of a strange uneasy romance that had come in my way. I observed with interest the work of his — well — good fortune. He was jealously loved, but why she should be jealous, and of what, I could not tell. The land, the people, the forests were her accomplices, guarding him with vigilant accord, with an air of seclusion, of mystery, of invincible possession. There was no appeal, as it were; he was imprisoned within the very freedom of his power, and she, though ready to make a footstool of her head for his feet, guarded her conquest inflexibly — as though he were hard to keep. The very Tamb' Itam, marching on our journeys upon the heels of his white lord, with his head thrown back, truculent and be-weaponed like a janissary, with kriss, chopper, and lance (besides carrying Jim's gun); even Tamb' Itam allowed himself to put on the airs of uncompromising guardianship, like a surly devoted jailer ready to lay down his life for his captive. On the evenings when we sat up late, his silent, indistinct form would pass and repass under the verandah, with noiseless footsteps, or lifting my head I would unexpectedly make him out standing rigidly erect in the shadow. As a general rule he would vanish after a time, without a sound; but when we rose he would spring up close to us as if from the ground, ready for any orders Jim might wish to give. The girl too, I believe, never went to sleep till we had separated for the night. More than once I saw her and Jim through the window of my room come out together quietly and lean on the rough balustrade — two white forms very close, his arm about her waist, her head on his shoulder. Their soft murmurs reached me, penetrating, tender, with a calm sad note in the stillness of the night, like a self-communion of one being carried on in two tones. Later on, tossing on my bed under the mosquito-net, I was sure to hear slight creakings, faint breathing, a throat cleared cautiously — and I would know that Tamb' Itam was still on the prowl. Though he had (by the favour of the white lord) a house in the compound, had "taken wife," and had lately been blessed with a child, I believe that, during my stay at all events, he slept on the verandah every night. It was very difficult to make this faithful and grim retainer talk. Even Jim himself was answered in jerky short sentences, under protest as it were. Talking, he seemed to imply, was no business of his. The longest speech I heard him volunteer was one morning when, suddenly extending his hand towards the courtyard, he pointed at Cornelius and said, "Here comes the Nazarene." I don't think he was addressing me, though I stood at his side; his object seemed rather to awaken the indignant attention of the

universe. Some muttered allusions, which followed, to dogs and the smell of roast-meat, struck me as singularly felicitous. The courtyard, a large square space, was one torrid blaze of sunshine, and, bathed in intense light, Cornelius was creeping across in full view with an inexpressible effect of stealthiness, of dark and secret slinking. He reminded one of everything that is unsavoury. His slow laborious walk resembled the creeping of a repulsive beetle, the legs alone moving with horrid industry while the body glided evenly. I suppose he made straight enough for the place where he wanted to get to, but his progress with one shoulder carried forward seemed oblique. He was often seen circling slowly amongst the sheds, as if following a scent; passing before the verandah with upward stealthy glances; disappearing without haste round the corner of some hut. That he seemed free of the place demonstrated Jim's absurd carelessness or else his infinite disdain, for Cornelius had played a very dubious part (to say the least of it) in a certain episode which might have ended fatally for Jim. As a matter of fact, it had redounded to his glory. But everything redounded to his glory; and it was the irony of his good fortune that he, who had been too careful of it once, seemed to bear a charmed life.

'You must know he had left Doramin's place very soon after his arrival — much too soon, in fact, for his safety, and of course a long time before the war. In this he was actuated by a sense of duty; he had to look after Stein's business, he said. Hadn't he? To that end, with an utter disregard of his personal safety, he crossed the river and took up his quarters with Cornelius. How the latter had managed to exist through the troubled times I can't say. As Stein's agent, after all, he must have had Doramin's protection in a measure; and in one way or another he had managed to wriggle through all the deadly complications, while I have no doubt that his conduct, whatever line he was forced to take, was marked by that abjectness which was like the stamp of the man. That was his characteristic; he was fundamentally and outwardly abject, as other men are markedly of a generous, distinguished, or venerable appearance. It was the element of his nature which permeated all his acts and passions and emotions; he raged abjectly, smiled abjectly, was abjectly sad; his civilities and his indignations were alike abject. I am sure his love would have been the most abject of sentiments — but can one imagine a loathsome insect in love? And his loathsomeness, too, was abject, so that a simply disgusting person would have appeared noble by his side. He has his place neither in the background

nor in the foreground of the story; he is simply seen skulking on its outskirts, enigmatical and unclean, tainting the fragrance of its youth and of its naiveness.

‘His position in any case could not have been other than extremely miserable, yet it may very well be that he found some advantages in it. Jim told me he had been received at first with an abject display of the most amicable sentiments. “The fellow apparently couldn’t contain himself for joy,” said Jim with disgust. “He flew at me every morning to shake both my hands — confound him! — but I could never tell whether there would be any breakfast. If I got three meals in two days I considered myself jolly lucky, and he made me sign a chit for ten dollars every week. Said he was sure Mr. Stein did not mean him to keep me for nothing. Well — he kept me on nothing as near as possible. Put it down to the unsettled state of the country, and made as if to tear his hair out, begging my pardon twenty times a day, so that I had at last to entreat him not to worry. It made me sick. Half the roof of his house had fallen in, and the whole place had a mangy look, with wisps of dry grass sticking out and the corners of broken mats flapping on every wall. He did his best to make out that Mr. Stein owed him money on the last three years’ trading, but his books were all torn, and some were missing. He tried to hint it was his late wife’s fault. Disgusting scoundrel! At last I had to forbid him to mention his late wife at all. It made Jewel cry. I couldn’t discover what became of all the trade-goods; there was nothing in the store but rats, having a high old time amongst a litter of brown paper and old sacking. I was assured on every hand that he had a lot of money buried somewhere, but of course could get nothing out of him. It was the most miserable existence I led there in that wretched house. I tried to do my duty by Stein, but I had also other matters to think of. When I escaped to Doramin old Tunku Allang got frightened and returned all my things. It was done in a roundabout way, and with no end of mystery, through a Chinaman who keeps a small shop here; but as soon as I left the Bugis quarter and went to live with Cornelius it began to be said openly that the Rajah had made up his mind to have me killed before long. Pleasant, wasn’t it? And I couldn’t see what there was to prevent him if he really had made up his mind. The worst of it was, I couldn’t help feeling I wasn’t doing any good either for Stein or for myself. Oh! it was beastly — the whole six weeks of it.”‘

## CHAPTER 30

‘He told me further that he didn’t know what made him hang on — but of course we may guess. He sympathised deeply with the defenceless girl, at the mercy of that “mean, cowardly scoundrel.” It appears Cornelius led her an awful life, stopping only short of actual ill-usage, for which he had not the pluck, I suppose. He insisted upon her calling him father — ”and with respect, too — with respect,” he would scream, shaking a little yellow fist in her face. “I am a respectable man, and what are you? Tell me — what are you? You think I am going to bring up somebody else’s child and not be treated with respect? You ought to be glad I let you. Come — say Yes, father. . . . No? . . . You wait a bit.” Thereupon he would begin to abuse the dead woman, till the girl would run off with her hands to her head. He pursued her, dashing in and out and round the house and amongst the sheds, would drive her into some corner, where she would fall on her knees stopping her ears, and then he would stand at a distance and declaim filthy denunciations at her back for half an hour at a stretch. “Your mother was a devil, a deceitful devil — and you too are a devil,” he would shriek in a final outburst, pick up a bit of dry earth or a handful of mud (there was plenty of mud around the house), and fling it into her hair. Sometimes, though, she would hold out full of scorn, confronting him in silence, her face sombre and contracted, and only now and then uttering a word or two that would make the other jump and writhe with the sting. Jim told me these scenes were terrible. It was indeed a strange thing to come upon in a wilderness. The endlessness of such a subtly cruel situation was appalling — if you think of it. The respectable Cornelius (Inchi ‘Nelyus the Malays called him, with a grimace that meant many things) was a much-disappointed man. I don’t know what he had expected would be done for him in consideration of his marriage; but evidently the liberty to steal, and embezzle, and appropriate to himself for many years and in any way that suited him best, the goods of Stein’s Trading Company (Stein kept the supply up unfalteringly as long as he could get his skippers to take it there) did not seem to him a fair equivalent for the sacrifice of his honourable name. Jim would have enjoyed exceedingly thrashing Cornelius within an inch of his life; on the other hand, the scenes were of so painful a character, so abominable, that his impulse would be to get out of earshot, in order to spare the girl’s feelings. They left her agitated, speechless, clutching her

bosom now and then with a stony, desperate face, and then Jim would lounge up and say unhappily, "Now — come — really — what's the use — you must try to eat a bit," or give some such mark of sympathy. Cornelius would keep on slinking through the doorways, across the verandah and back again, as mute as a fish, and with malevolent, mistrustful, underhand glances. "I can stop his game," Jim said to her once. "Just say the word." And do you know what she answered? She said — Jim told me impressively — that if she had not been sure he was intensely wretched himself, she would have found the courage to kill him with her own hands. "Just fancy that! The poor devil of a girl, almost a child, being driven to talk like that," he exclaimed in horror. It seemed impossible to save her not only from that mean rascal but even from herself! It wasn't that he pitied her so much, he affirmed; it was more than pity; it was as if he had something on his conscience, while that life went on. To leave the house would have appeared a base desertion. He had understood at last that there was nothing to expect from a longer stay, neither accounts nor money, nor truth of any sort, but he stayed on, exasperating Cornelius to the verge, I won't say of insanity, but almost of courage. Meantime he felt all sorts of dangers gathering obscurely about him. Doramin had sent over twice a trusty servant to tell him seriously that he could do nothing for his safety unless he would recross the river again and live amongst the Bugis as at first. People of every condition used to call, often in the dead of night, in order to disclose to him plots for his assassination. He was to be poisoned. He was to be stabbed in the bath-house. Arrangements were being made to have him shot from a boat on the river. Each of these informants professed himself to be his very good friend. It was enough — he told me — to spoil a fellow's rest for ever. Something of the kind was extremely possible — nay, probable — but the lying warnings gave him only the sense of deadly scheming going on all around him, on all sides, in the dark. Nothing more calculated to shake the best of nerve. Finally, one night, Cornelius himself, with a great apparatus of alarm and secrecy, unfolded in solemn wheedling tones a little plan wherein for one hundred dollars — or even for eighty; let's say eighty — he, Cornelius, would procure a trustworthy man to smuggle Jim out of the river, all safe. There was nothing else for it now — if Jim cared a pin for his life. What's eighty dollars? A trifle. An insignificant sum. While he, Cornelius, who had to remain behind, was absolutely courting death by this proof of devotion to Mr. Stein's young



friend. The sight of his abject grimacing was — Jim told me — very hard to bear: he clutched at his hair, beat his breast, rocked himself to and fro with his hands pressed to his stomach, and actually pretended to shed tears. “Your blood be on your own head,” he squeaked at last, and rushed out. It is a curious question how far Cornelius was sincere in that performance. Jim confessed to me that he did not sleep a wink after the fellow had gone. He lay on his back on a thin mat spread over the bamboo flooring, trying idly to make out the bare rafters, and listening to the rustlings in the torn thatch. A star suddenly twinkled through a hole in the roof. His brain was in a whirl; but, nevertheless, it was on that very night that he matured his plan for overcoming Sherif Ali. It had been the thought of all the moments he could spare from the hopeless investigation into Stein’s affairs, but the notion — he says — came to him then all at once. He could see, as it were, the guns mounted on the top of the hill. He got very hot and excited lying there; sleep was out of the question more than ever. He jumped up, and went out barefooted on the verandah. Walking silently, he came upon the girl, motionless against the wall, as if on the watch. In his then state of mind it did not surprise him to see her up, nor yet to hear her ask in an anxious whisper where Cornelius could be. He simply said he did not know. She moaned a little, and peered into the campong. Everything was very quiet. He was possessed by his new idea, and so full of it that he could not help telling the girl all about it at once. She listened, clapped her hands lightly, whispered softly her admiration, but was evidently on the alert all the time. It seems he had been used to make a confidant of her all along — and that she on her part could and did give him a lot of useful hints as to Patusan affairs there is no doubt. He assured me more than once that he had never found himself the worse for her advice. At any rate, he was proceeding to explain his plan fully to her there and then, when she pressed his arm once, and vanished from his side. Then Cornelius appeared from somewhere, and, perceiving Jim, ducked sideways, as though he had been shot at, and afterwards stood very still in the dusk. At last he came forward prudently, like a suspicious cat. “There were some fishermen there — with fish,” he said in a shaky voice. “To sell fish — you understand.” . . . It must have been then two o’clock in the morning — a likely time for anybody to hawk fish about!

‘Jim, however, let the statement pass, and did not give it a single thought. Other matters occupied his mind, and besides he had neither seen nor heard

anything. He contented himself by saying, "Oh!" absently, got a drink of water out of a pitcher standing there, and leaving Cornelius a prey to some inexplicable emotion — that made him embrace with both arms the worm-eaten rail of the verandah as if his legs had failed — went in again and lay down on his mat to think. By-and-by he heard stealthy footsteps. They stopped. A voice whispered tremulously through the wall, "Are you asleep?" "No! What is it?" he answered briskly, and there was an abrupt movement outside, and then all was still, as if the whisperer had been startled. Extremely annoyed at this, Jim came out impetuously, and Cornelius with a faint shriek fled along the verandah as far as the steps, where he hung on to the broken banister. Very puzzled, Jim called out to him from the distance to know what the devil he meant. "Have you given your consideration to what I spoke to you about?" asked Cornelius, pronouncing the words with difficulty, like a man in the cold fit of a fever. "No!" shouted Jim in a passion. "I have not, and I don't intend to. I am going to live here, in Patusan." "You shall d-d-die h-h-here," answered Cornelius, still shaking violently, and in a sort of expiring voice. The whole performance was so absurd and provoking that Jim didn't know whether he ought to be amused or angry. "Not till I have seen you tucked away, you bet," he called out, exasperated yet ready to laugh. Half seriously (being excited with his own thoughts, you know) he went on shouting, "Nothing can touch me! You can do your damndest." Somehow the shadowy Cornelius far off there seemed to be the hateful embodiment of all the annoyances and difficulties he had found in his path. He let himself go — his nerves had been over-wrought for days — and called him many pretty names, — swindler, liar, sorry rascal: in fact, carried on in an extraordinary way. He admits he passed all bounds, that he was quite beside himself — defied all Patusan to scare him away — declared he would make them all dance to his own tune yet, and so on, in a menacing, boasting strain. Perfectly bombastic and ridiculous, he said. His ears burned at the bare recollection. Must have been off his chump in some way. . . . The girl, who was sitting with us, nodded her little head at me quickly, frowned faintly, and said, "I heard him," with child-like solemnity. He laughed and blushed. What stopped him at last, he said, was the silence, the complete deathlike silence, of the indistinct figure far over there, that seemed to hang collapsed, doubled over the rail in a weird immobility. He came to his senses, and ceasing suddenly, wondered greatly at himself. He watched for

a while. Not a stir, not a sound. “Exactly as if the chap had died while I had been making all that noise,” he said. He was so ashamed of himself that he went indoors in a hurry without another word, and flung himself down again. The row seemed to have done him good though, because he went to sleep for the rest of the night like a baby. Hadn’t slept like that for weeks. “But I didn’t sleep,” struck in the girl, one elbow on the table and nursing her cheek. “I watched.” Her big eyes flashed, rolling a little, and then she fixed them on my face intently.’

## CHAPTER 31

‘You may imagine with what interest I listened. All these details were perceived to have some significance twenty-four hours later. In the morning Cornelius made no allusion to the events of the night. “I suppose you will come back to my poor house,” he muttered, surlily, slinking up just as Jim was entering the canoe to go over to Doramin’s campong. Jim only nodded, without looking at him. “You find it good fun, no doubt,” muttered the other in a sour tone. Jim spent the day with the old nakhoda, preaching the necessity of vigorous action to the principal men of the Bugis community, who had been summoned for a big talk. He remembered with pleasure how very eloquent and persuasive he had been. “I managed to put some backbone into them that time, and no mistake,” he said. Sherif Ali’s last raid had swept the outskirts of the settlement, and some women belonging to the town had been carried off to the stockade. Sherif Ali’s emissaries had been seen in the market-place the day before, strutting about haughtily in white cloaks, and boasting of the Rajah’s friendship for their master. One of them stood forward in the shade of a tree, and, leaning on the long barrel of a rifle, exhorted the people to prayer and repentance, advising them to kill all the strangers in their midst, some of whom, he said, were infidels and others even worse — children of Satan in the guise of Moslems. It was reported that several of the Rajah’s people amongst the listeners had loudly expressed their approbation. The terror amongst the common people was intense. Jim, immensely pleased with his day’s work, crossed the river again before sunset.

‘As he had got the Bugis irretrievably committed to action and had made himself responsible for success on his own head, he was so elated that in the lightness of his heart he absolutely tried to be civil with Cornelius. But Cornelius became wildly jovial in response, and it was almost more than he could stand, he says, to hear his little squeaks of false laughter, to see him wriggle and blink, and suddenly catch hold of his chin and crouch low over the table with a distracted stare. The girl did not show herself, and Jim retired early. When he rose to say good-night, Cornelius jumped up, knocking his chair over, and ducked out of sight as if to pick up something he had dropped. His good-night came huskily from under the table. Jim was amazed to see him emerge with a dropping jaw, and staring, stupidly frightened eyes. He clutched the edge of the table. “What’s the matter? Are

you unwell?" asked Jim. "Yes, yes, yes. A great colic in my stomach," says the other; and it is Jim's opinion that it was perfectly true. If so, it was, in view of his contemplated action, an abject sign of a still imperfect callousness for which he must be given all due credit.

'Be it as it may, Jim's slumbers were disturbed by a dream of heavens like brass resounding with a great voice, which called upon him to Awake! Awake! so loud that, notwithstanding his desperate determination to sleep on, he did wake up in reality. The glare of a red spluttering conflagration going on in mid-air fell on his eyes. Coils of black thick smoke curved round the head of some apparition, some unearthly being, all in white, with a severe, drawn, anxious face. After a second or so he recognised the girl. She was holding a dammar torch at arm's-length aloft, and in a persistent, urgent monotone she was repeating, "Get up! Get up! Get up!"

'Suddenly he leaped to his feet; at once she put into his hand a revolver, his own revolver, which had been hanging on a nail, but loaded this time. He gripped it in silence, bewildered, blinking in the light. He wondered what he could do for her.

'She asked rapidly and very low, "Can you face four men with this?" He laughed while narrating this part at the recollection of his polite alacrity. It seems he made a great display of it. "Certainly — of course — certainly — command me." He was not properly awake, and had a notion of being very civil in these extraordinary circumstances, of showing his unquestioning, devoted readiness. She left the room, and he followed her; in the passage they disturbed an old hag who did the casual cooking of the household, though she was so decrepit as to be hardly able to understand human speech. She got up and hobbled behind them, mumbling toothlessly. On the verandah a hammock of sail-cloth, belonging to Cornelius, swayed lightly to the touch of Jim's elbow. It was empty.

'The Patusan establishment, like all the posts of Stein's Trading Company, had originally consisted of four buildings. Two of them were represented by two heaps of sticks, broken bamboos, rotten thatch, over which the four corner-posts of hardwood leaned sadly at different angles: the principal storeroom, however, stood yet, facing the agent's house. It was an oblong hut, built of mud and clay; it had at one end a wide door of stout planking, which so far had not come off the hinges, and in one of the side walls there was a square aperture, a sort of window, with three wooden bars. Before descending the few steps the girl turned her face over her

shoulder and said quickly, "You were to be set upon while you slept." Jim tells me he experienced a sense of deception. It was the old story. He was weary of these attempts upon his life. He had had his fill of these alarms. He was sick of them. He assured me he was angry with the girl for deceiving him. He had followed her under the impression that it was she who wanted his help, and now he had half a mind to turn on his heel and go back in disgust. "Do you know," he commented profoundly, "I rather think I was not quite myself for whole weeks on end about that time." "Oh yes. You were though," I couldn't help contradicting.

'But she moved on swiftly, and he followed her into the courtyard. All its fences had fallen in a long time ago; the neighbours' buffaloes would pace in the morning across the open space, snorting profoundly, without haste; the very jungle was invading it already. Jim and the girl stopped in the rank grass. The light in which they stood made a dense blackness all round, and only above their heads there was an opulent glitter of stars. He told me it was a beautiful night — quite cool, with a little stir of breeze from the river. It seems he noticed its friendly beauty. Remember this is a love story I am telling you now. A lovely night seemed to breathe on them a soft caress. The flame of the torch streamed now and then with a fluttering noise like a flag, and for a time this was the only sound. "They are in the storeroom waiting," whispered the girl; "they are waiting for the signal." "Who's to give it?" he asked. She shook the torch, which blazed up after a shower of sparks. "Only you have been sleeping so restlessly," she continued in a murmur; "I watched your sleep, too." "You!" he exclaimed, craning his neck to look about him. "You think I watched on this night only!" she said, with a sort of despairing indignation.

'He says it was as if he had received a blow on the chest. He gasped. He thought he had been an awful brute somehow, and he felt remorseful, touched, happy, elated. This, let me remind you again, is a love story; you can see it by the imbecility, not a repulsive imbecility, the exalted imbecility of these proceedings, this station in torchlight, as if they had come there on purpose to have it out for the edification of concealed murderers. If Sherif Ali's emissaries had been possessed — as Jim remarked — of a pennyworth of spunk, this was the time to make a rush. His heart was thumping — not with fear — but he seemed to hear the grass rustle, and he stepped smartly out of the light. Something dark, imperfectly seen, flitted rapidly out of sight. He called out in a strong voice, "Cornelius! O Cornelius!" A

profound silence succeeded: his voice did not seem to have carried twenty feet. Again the girl was by his side. "Fly!" she said. The old woman was coming up; her broken figure hovered in crippled little jumps on the edge of the light; they heard her mumbling, and a light, moaning sigh. "Fly!" repeated the girl excitedly. "They are frightened now — this light — the voices. They know you are awake now — they know you are big, strong, fearless . . ." "If I am all that," he began; but she interrupted him: "Yes — to-night! But what of to-morrow night? Of the next night? Of the night after — of all the many, many nights? Can I be always watching?" A sobbing catch of her breath affected him beyond the power of words.

'He told me that he had never felt so small, so powerless — and as to courage, what was the good of it? he thought. He was so helpless that even flight seemed of no use; and though she kept on whispering, "Go to Doramin, go to Doramin," with feverish insistence, he realised that for him there was no refuge from that loneliness which centupled all his dangers except — in her. "I thought," he said to me, "that if I went away from her it would be the end of everything somehow." Only as they couldn't stop there for ever in the middle of that courtyard, he made up his mind to go and look into the storehouse. He let her follow him without thinking of any protest, as if they had been indissolubly united. "I am fearless — am I?" he muttered through his teeth. She restrained his arm. "Wait till you hear my voice," she said, and, torch in hand, ran lightly round the corner. He remained alone in the darkness, his face to the door: not a sound, not a breath came from the other side. The old hag let out a dreary groan somewhere behind his back. He heard a high-pitched almost screaming call from the girl. "Now! Push!" He pushed violently; the door swung with a creak and a clatter, disclosing to his intense astonishment the low dungeon-like interior illuminated by a lurid, wavering glare. A turmoil of smoke eddied down upon an empty wooden crate in the middle of the floor, a litter of rags and straw tried to soar, but only stirred feebly in the draught. She had thrust the light through the bars of the window. He saw her bare round arm extended and rigid, holding up the torch with the steadiness of an iron bracket. A conical ragged heap of old mats cumbered a distant corner almost to the ceiling, and that was all.

'He explained to me that he was bitterly disappointed at this. His fortitude had been tried by so many warnings, he had been for weeks surrounded by so many hints of danger, that he wanted the relief of some

reality, of something tangible that he could meet. "It would have cleared the air for a couple of hours at least, if you know what I mean," he said to me. "Jove! I had been living for days with a stone on my chest." Now at last he had thought he would get hold of something, and — nothing! Not a trace, not a sign of anybody. He had raised his weapon as the door flew open, but now his arm fell. "Fire! Defend yourself," the girl outside cried in an agonising voice. She, being in the dark and with her arm thrust in to the shoulder through the small hole, couldn't see what was going on, and she dared not withdraw the torch now to run round. "There's nobody here!" yelled Jim contemptuously, but his impulse to burst into a resentful exasperated laugh died without a sound: he had perceived in the very act of turning away that he was exchanging glances with a pair of eyes in the heap of mats. He saw a shifting gleam of whites. "Come out!" he cried in a fury, a little doubtful, and a dark-faced head, a head without a body, shaped itself in the rubbish, a strangely detached head, that looked at him with a steady scowl. Next moment the whole mound stirred, and with a low grunt a man emerged swiftly, and bounded towards Jim. Behind him the mats as it were jumped and flew, his right arm was raised with a crooked elbow, and the dull blade of a kriss protruded from his fist held off, a little above his head. A cloth wound tight round his loins seemed dazzlingly white on his bronze skin; his naked body glistened as if wet.

'Jim noted all this. He told me he was experiencing a feeling of unutterable relief, of vengeful elation. He held his shot, he says, deliberately. He held it for the tenth part of a second, for three strides of the man — an unconscionable time. He held it for the pleasure of saying to himself, That's a dead man! He was absolutely positive and certain. He let him come on because it did not matter. A dead man, anyhow. He noticed the dilated nostrils, the wide eyes, the intent, eager stillness of the face, and then he fired.

'The explosion in that confined space was stunning. He stepped back a pace. He saw the man jerk his head up, fling his arms forward, and drop the kriss. He ascertained afterwards that he had shot him through the mouth, a little upwards, the bullet coming out high at the back of the skull. With the impetus of his rush the man drove straight on, his face suddenly gaping disfigured, with his hands open before him gropingly, as though blinded, and landed with terrific violence on his forehead, just short of Jim's bare toes. Jim says he didn't lose the smallest detail of all this. He found himself



calm, appeased, without rancour, without uneasiness, as if the death of that man had atoned for everything. The place was getting very full of sooty smoke from the torch, in which the unswaying flame burned blood-red without a flicker. He walked in resolutely, striding over the dead body, and covered with his revolver another naked figure outlined vaguely at the other end. As he was about to pull the trigger, the man threw away with force a short heavy spear, and squatted submissively on his hams, his back to the wall and his clasped hands between his legs. "You want your life?" Jim said. The other made no sound. "How many more of you?" asked Jim again. "Two more, Tuan," said the man very softly, looking with big fascinated eyes into the muzzle of the revolver. Accordingly two more crawled from under the mats, holding out ostentatiously their empty hands.'

## CHAPTER 32

‘Jim took up an advantageous position and shepherded them out in a bunch through the doorway: all that time the torch had remained vertical in the grip of a little hand, without so much as a tremble. The three men obeyed him, perfectly mute, moving automatically. He ranged them in a row. “Link arms!” he ordered. They did so. “The first who withdraws his arm or turns his head is a dead man,” he said. “March!” They stepped out together, rigidly; he followed, and at the side the girl, in a trailing white gown, her black hair falling as low as her waist, bore the light. Erect and swaying, she seemed to glide without touching the earth; the only sound was the silky swish and rustle of the long grass. “Stop!” cried Jim.

‘The river-bank was steep; a great freshness ascended, the light fell on the edge of smooth dark water frothing without a ripple; right and left the shapes of the houses ran together below the sharp outlines of the roofs. “Take my greetings to Sherif Ali — till I come myself,” said Jim. Not one head of the three budged. “Jump!” he thundered. The three splashes made one splash, a shower flew up, black heads bobbed convulsively, and disappeared; but a great blowing and spluttering went on, growing faint, for they were diving industriously in great fear of a parting shot. Jim turned to the girl, who had been a silent and attentive observer. His heart seemed suddenly to grow too big for his breast and choke him in the hollow of his throat. This probably made him speechless for so long, and after returning his gaze she flung the burning torch with a wide sweep of the arm into the river. The ruddy fiery glare, taking a long flight through the night, sank with a vicious hiss, and the calm soft starlight descended upon them, unchecked.

‘He did not tell me what it was he said when at last he recovered his voice. I don’t suppose he could be very eloquent. The world was still, the night breathed on them, one of those nights that seem created for the sheltering of tenderness, and there are moments when our souls, as if freed from their dark envelope, glow with an exquisite sensibility that makes certain silences more lucid than speeches. As to the girl, he told me, “She broke down a bit. Excitement — don’t you know. Reaction. Deucedly tired she must have been — and all that kind of thing. And — and — hang it all — she was fond of me, don’t you see. . . . I too . . . didn’t know, of course . . . never entered my head . . .”

‘Then he got up and began to walk about in some agitation. “I — I love her dearly. More than I can tell. Of course one cannot tell. You take a different view of your actions when you come to understand, when you are made to understand every day that your existence is necessary — you see, absolutely necessary — to another person. I am made to feel that. Wonderful! But only try to think what her life has been. It is too extravagantly awful! Isn’t it? And me finding her here like this — as you may go out for a stroll and come suddenly upon somebody drowning in a lonely dark place. Jove! No time to lose. Well, it is a trust too . . . I believe I am equal to it . . .”

‘I must tell you the girl had left us to ourselves some time before. He slapped his chest. “Yes! I feel that, but I believe I am equal to all my luck!” He had the gift of finding a special meaning in everything that happened to him. This was the view he took of his love affair; it was idyllic, a little solemn, and also true, since his belief had all the unshakable seriousness of youth. Some time after, on another occasion, he said to me, “I’ve been only two years here, and now, upon my word, I can’t conceive being able to live anywhere else. The very thought of the world outside is enough to give me a fright; because, don’t you see,” he continued, with downcast eyes watching the action of his boot busied in squashing thoroughly a tiny bit of dried mud (we were strolling on the river-bank) — ”because I have not forgotten why I came here. Not yet!”

‘I refrained from looking at him, but I think I heard a short sigh; we took a turn or two in silence. “Upon my soul and conscience,” he began again, “if such a thing can be forgotten, then I think I have a right to dismiss it from my mind. Ask any man here” . . . his voice changed. “Is it not strange,” he went on in a gentle, almost yearning tone, “that all these people, all these people who would do anything for me, can never be made to understand? Never! If you disbelieved me I could not call them up. It seems hard, somehow. I am stupid, am I not? What more can I want? If you ask them who is brave — who is true — who is just — who is it they would trust with their lives? — they would say, Tuan Jim. And yet they can never know the real, real truth . . .”

‘That’s what he said to me on my last day with him. I did not let a murmur escape me: I felt he was going to say more, and come no nearer to the root of the matter. The sun, whose concentrated glare dwarfs the earth into a restless mote of dust, had sunk behind the forest, and the diffused

light from an opal sky seemed to cast upon a world without shadows and without brilliance the illusion of a calm and pensive greatness. I don't know why, listening to him, I should have noted so distinctly the gradual darkening of the river, of the air; the irresistible slow work of the night settling silently on all the visible forms, effacing the outlines, burying the shapes deeper and deeper, like a steady fall of impalpable black dust.

"Jove!" he began abruptly, "there are days when a fellow is too absurd for anything; only I know I can tell you what I like. I talk about being done with it — with the bally thing at the back of my head . . . Forgetting . . . Hang me if I know! I can think of it quietly. After all, what has it proved? Nothing. I suppose you don't think so . . ."

'I made a protesting murmur.

"No matter," he said. "I am satisfied . . . nearly. I've got to look only at the face of the first man that comes along, to regain my confidence. They can't be made to understand what is going on in me. What of that? Come! I haven't done so badly."

"Not so badly," I said.

"But all the same, you wouldn't like to have me aboard your own ship hey?"

"Confound you!" I cried. "Stop this."

"Aha! You see," he said, crowing, as it were, over me placidly. "Only," he went on, "you just try to tell this to any of them here. They would think you a fool, a liar, or worse. And so I can stand it. I've done a thing or two for them, but this is what they have done for me."

"My dear chap," I cried, "you shall always remain for them an insoluble mystery." Thereupon we were silent.

"Mystery," he repeated, before looking up. "Well, then let me always remain here."

'After the sun had set, the darkness seemed to drive upon us, borne in every faint puff of the breeze. In the middle of a hedged path I saw the arrested, gaunt, watchful, and apparently one-legged silhouette of Tamb' Itam; and across the dusky space my eye detected something white moving to and fro behind the supports of the roof. As soon as Jim, with Tamb' Itam at his heels, had started upon his evening rounds, I went up to the house alone, and, unexpectedly, found myself waylaid by the girl, who had been clearly waiting for this opportunity.

‘It is hard to tell you what it was precisely she wanted to wrest from me. Obviously it would be something very simple — the simplest impossibility in the world; as, for instance, the exact description of the form of a cloud. She wanted an assurance, a statement, a promise, an explanation — I don’t know how to call it: the thing has no name. It was dark under the projecting roof, and all I could see were the flowing lines of her gown, the pale small oval of her face, with the white flash of her teeth, and, turned towards me, the big sombre orbits of her eyes, where there seemed to be a faint stir, such as you may fancy you can detect when you plunge your gaze to the bottom of an immensely deep well. What is it that moves there? you ask yourself. Is it a blind monster or only a lost gleam from the universe? It occurred to me — don’t laugh — that all things being dissimilar, she was more inscrutable in her childish ignorance than the Sphinx propounding childish riddles to wayfarers. She had been carried off to Patusan before her eyes were open. She had grown up there; she had seen nothing, she had known nothing, she had no conception of anything. I ask myself whether she were sure that anything else existed. What notions she may have formed of the outside world is to me inconceivable: all that she knew of its inhabitants were a betrayed woman and a sinister pantaloon. Her lover also came to her from there, gifted with irresistible seductions; but what would become of her if he should return to these inconceivable regions that seemed always to claim back their own? Her mother had warned her of this with tears, before she died . . .

‘She had caught hold of my arm firmly, and as soon as I had stopped she had withdrawn her hand in haste. She was audacious and shrinking. She feared nothing, but she was checked by the profound incertitude and the extreme strangeness — a brave person groping in the dark. I belonged to this Unknown that might claim Jim for its own at any moment. I was, as it were, in the secret of its nature and of its intentions — the confidant of a threatening mystery — armed with its power perhaps! I believe she supposed I could with a word whisk Jim away out of her very arms; it is my sober conviction she went through agonies of apprehension during my long talks with Jim; through a real and intolerable anguish that might have conceivably driven her into plotting my murder, had the fierceness of her soul been equal to the tremendous situation it had created. This is my impression, and it is all I can give you: the whole thing dawned gradually upon me, and as it got clearer and clearer I was overwhelmed by a slow

incredulous amazement. She made me believe her, but there is no word that on my lips could render the effect of the headlong and vehement whisper, of the soft, passionate tones, of the sudden breathless pause and the appealing movement of the white arms extended swiftly. They fell; the ghostly figure swayed like a slender tree in the wind, the pale oval of the face drooped; it was impossible to distinguish her features, the darkness of the eyes was unfathomable; two wide sleeves uprose in the dark like unfolding wings, and she stood silent, holding her head in her hands.'

## CHAPTER 33

'I was immensely touched: her youth, her ignorance, her pretty beauty, which had the simple charm and the delicate vigour of a wild-flower, her pathetic pleading, her helplessness, appealed to me with almost the strength of her own unreasonable and natural fear. She feared the unknown as we all do, and her ignorance made the unknown infinitely vast. I stood for it, for myself, for you fellows, for all the world that neither cared for Jim nor needed him in the least. I would have been ready enough to answer for the indifference of the teeming earth but for the reflection that he too belonged to this mysterious unknown of her fears, and that, however much I stood for, I did not stand for him. This made me hesitate. A murmur of hopeless pain unsealed my lips. I began by protesting that I at least had come with no intention to take Jim away.

'Why did I come, then? After a slight movement she was as still as a marble statue in the night. I tried to explain briefly: friendship, business; if I had any wish in the matter it was rather to see him stay. . . . "They always leave us," she murmured. The breath of sad wisdom from the grave which her piety wreathed with flowers seemed to pass in a faint sigh. . . . Nothing, I said, could separate Jim from her.

'It is my firm conviction now; it was my conviction at the time; it was the only possible conclusion from the facts of the case. It was not made more certain by her whispering in a tone in which one speaks to oneself, "He swore this to me." "Did you ask him?" I said.

'She made a step nearer. "No. Never!" She had asked him only to go away. It was that night on the river-bank, after he had killed the man — after she had flung the torch in the water because he was looking at her so. There was too much light, and the danger was over then — for a little time — for a little time. He said then he would not abandon her to Cornelius. She had insisted. She wanted him to leave her. He said that he could not — that it was impossible. He trembled while he said this. She had felt him tremble. . . . One does not require much imagination to see the scene, almost to hear their whispers. She was afraid for him too. I believe that then she saw in him only a predestined victim of dangers which she understood better than himself. Though by nothing but his mere presence he had mastered her heart, had filled all her thoughts, and had possessed himself of all her affections, she underestimated his chances of success. It is obvious that at

about that time everybody was inclined to underestimate his chances. Strictly speaking he didn't seem to have any. I know this was Cornelius's view. He confessed that much to me in extenuation of the shady part he had played in Sherif Ali's plot to do away with the infidel. Even Sherif Ali himself, as it seems certain now, had nothing but contempt for the white man. Jim was to be murdered mainly on religious grounds, I believe. A simple act of piety (and so far infinitely meritorious), but otherwise without much importance. In the last part of this opinion Cornelius concurred. "Honourable sir," he argued abjectly on the only occasion he managed to have me to himself — "honourable sir, how was I to know? Who was he? What could he do to make people believe him? What did Mr. Stein mean sending a boy like that to talk big to an old servant? I was ready to save him for eighty dollars. Only eighty dollars. Why didn't the fool go? Was I to get stabbed myself for the sake of a stranger?" He grovelled in spirit before me, with his body doubled up insinuatingly and his hands hovering about my knees, as though he were ready to embrace my legs. "What's eighty dollars? An insignificant sum to give to a defenceless old man ruined for life by a deceased she-devil." Here he wept. But I anticipate. I didn't that night chance upon Cornelius till I had had it out with the girl.

'She was unselfish when she urged Jim to leave her, and even to leave the country. It was his danger that was foremost in her thoughts — even if she wanted to save herself too — perhaps unconsciously: but then look at the warning she had, look at the lesson that could be drawn from every moment of the recently ended life in which all her memories were centred. She fell at his feet — she told me so — there by the river, in the discreet light of stars which showed nothing except great masses of silent shadows, indefinite open spaces, and trembling faintly upon the broad stream made it appear as wide as the sea. He had lifted her up. He lifted her up, and then she would struggle no more. Of course not. Strong arms, a tender voice, a stalwart shoulder to rest her poor lonely little head upon. The need — the infinite need — of all this for the aching heart, for the bewildered mind; — the promptings of youth — the necessity of the moment. What would you have? One understands — unless one is incapable of understanding anything under the sun. And so she was content to be lifted up — and held. "You know — Jove! this is serious — no nonsense in it!" as Jim had whispered hurriedly with a troubled concerned face on the threshold of his house. I don't know so much about nonsense, but there was nothing light-



hearted in their romance: they came together under the shadow of a life's disaster, like knight and maiden meeting to exchange vows amongst haunted ruins. The starlight was good enough for that story, a light so faint and remote that it cannot resolve shadows into shapes, and show the other shore of a stream. I did look upon the stream that night and from the very place; it rolled silent and as black as Styx: the next day I went away, but I am not likely to forget what it was she wanted to be saved from when she entreated him to leave her while there was time. She told me what it was, calmed — she was now too passionately interested for mere excitement — in a voice as quiet in the obscurity as her white half-lost figure. She told me, "I didn't want to die weeping." I thought I had not heard aright.

"You did not want to die weeping?" I repeated after her. "Like my mother," she added readily. The outlines of her white shape did not stir in the least. "My mother had wept bitterly before she died," she explained. An inconceivable calmness seemed to have risen from the ground around us, imperceptibly, like the still rise of a flood in the night, obliterating the familiar landmarks of emotions. There came upon me, as though I had felt myself losing my footing in the midst of waters, a sudden dread, the dread of the unknown depths. She went on explaining that, during the last moments, being alone with her mother, she had to leave the side of the couch to go and set her back against the door, in order to keep Cornelius out. He desired to get in, and kept on drumming with both fists, only desisting now and again to shout huskily, "Let me in! Let me in! Let me in!" In a far corner upon a few mats the moribund woman, already speechless and unable to lift her arm, rolled her head over, and with a feeble movement of her hand seemed to command — "No! No!" and the obedient daughter, setting her shoulders with all her strength against the door, was looking on. "The tears fell from her eyes — and then she died," concluded the girl in an imperturbable monotone, which more than anything else, more than the white statuesque immobility of her person, more than mere words could do, troubled my mind profoundly with the passive, irremediable horror of the scene. It had the power to drive me out of my conception of existence, out of that shelter each of us makes for himself to creep under in moments of danger, as a tortoise withdraws within its shell. For a moment I had a view of a world that seemed to wear a vast and dismal aspect of disorder, while, in truth, thanks to our unwearied efforts, it is as sunny an arrangement of small conveniences as the mind of man can conceive. But

still — it was only a moment: I went back into my shell directly. One must — don't you know? — though I seemed to have lost all my words in the chaos of dark thoughts I had contemplated for a second or two beyond the pale. These came back, too, very soon, for words also belong to the sheltering conception of light and order which is our refuge. I had them ready at my disposal before she whispered softly, "He swore he would never leave me, when we stood there alone! He swore to me!" . . . "And it is possible that you — you! do not believe him?" I asked, sincerely reproachful, genuinely shocked. Why couldn't she believe? Wherefore this craving for incertitude, this clinging to fear, as if incertitude and fear had been the safeguards of her love. It was monstrous. She should have made for herself a shelter of inexpugnable peace out of that honest affection. She had not the knowledge — not the skill perhaps. The night had come on apace; it had grown pitch-dark where we were, so that without stirring she had faded like the intangible form of a wistful and perverse spirit. And suddenly I heard her quiet whisper again, "Other men had sworn the same thing." It was like a meditative comment on some thoughts full of sadness, of awe. And she added, still lower if possible, "My father did." She paused the time to draw an inaudible breath. "Her father too." . . . These were the things she knew! At once I said, "Ah! but he is not like that." This, it seemed, she did not intend to dispute; but after a time the strange still whisper wandering dreamily in the air stole into my ears. "Why is he different? Is he better? Is he . . ." "Upon my word of honour," I broke in, "I believe he is." We subdued our tones to a mysterious pitch. Amongst the huts of Jim's workmen (they were mostly liberated slaves from the Sheriff's stockade) somebody started a shrill, drawling song. Across the river a big fire (at Doramin's, I think) made a glowing ball, completely isolated in the night. "Is he more true?" she murmured. "Yes," I said. "More true than any other man," she repeated in lingering accents. "Nobody here," I said, "would dream of doubting his word — nobody would dare — except you."

'I think she made a movement at this. "More brave," she went on in a changed tone. "Fear will never drive him away from you," I said a little nervously. The song stopped short on a shrill note, and was succeeded by several voices talking in the distance. Jim's voice too. I was struck by her silence. "What has he been telling you? He has been telling you something?" I asked. There was no answer. "What is it he told you?" I insisted.

“Do you think I can tell you? How am I to know? How am I to understand?” she cried at last. There was a stir. I believe she was wringing her hands. “There is something he can never forget.”

“So much the better for you,” I said gloomily.

“What is it? What is it?” She put an extraordinary force of appeal into her supplicating tone. “He says he had been afraid. How can I believe this? Am I a mad woman to believe this? You all remember something! You all go back to it. What is it? You tell me! What is this thing? Is it alive? — is it dead? I hate it. It is cruel. Has it got a face and a voice — this calamity? Will he see it — will he hear it? In his sleep perhaps when he cannot see me — and then arise and go. Ah! I shall never forgive him. My mother had forgiven — but I, never! Will it be a sign — a call?”

‘It was a wonderful experience. She mistrusted his very slumbers — and she seemed to think I could tell her why! Thus a poor mortal seduced by the charm of an apparition might have tried to wring from another ghost the tremendous secret of the claim the other world holds over a disembodied soul astray amongst the passions of this earth. The very ground on which I stood seemed to melt under my feet. And it was so simple too; but if the spirits evoked by our fears and our unrest have ever to vouch for each other’s constancy before the forlorn magicians that we are, then I — I alone of us dwellers in the flesh — have shuddered in the hopeless chill of such a task. A sign, a call! How telling in its expression was her ignorance. A few words! How she came to know them, how she came to pronounce them, I can’t imagine. Women find their inspiration in the stress of moments that for us are merely awful, absurd, or futile. To discover that she had a voice at all was enough to strike awe into the heart. Had a spurned stone cried out in pain it could not have appeared a greater and more pitiful miracle. These few sounds wandering in the dark had made their two benighted lives tragic to my mind. It was impossible to make her understand. I chafed silently at my impotence. And Jim, too — poor devil! Who would need him? Who would remember him? He had what he wanted. His very existence probably had been forgotten by this time. They had mastered their fates. They were tragic.

‘Her immobility before me was clearly expectant, and my part was to speak for my brother from the realm of forgetful shade. I was deeply moved at my responsibility and at her distress. I would have given anything for the power to soothe her frail soul, tormenting itself in its invincible ignorance

like a small bird beating about the cruel wires of a cage. Nothing easier than to say, Have no fear! Nothing more difficult. How does one kill fear, I wonder? How do you shoot a spectre through the heart, slash off its spectral head, take it by its spectral throat? It is an enterprise you rush into while you dream, and are glad to make your escape with wet hair and every limb shaking. The bullet is not run, the blade not forged, the man not born; even the winged words of truth drop at your feet like lumps of lead. You require for such a desperate encounter an enchanted and poisoned shaft dipped in a lie too subtle to be found on earth. An enterprise for a dream, my masters!

‘I began my exorcism with a heavy heart, with a sort of sullen anger in it too. Jim’s voice, suddenly raised with a stern intonation, carried across the courtyard, reproving the carelessness of some dumb sinner by the river-side. Nothing — I said, speaking in a distinct murmur — there could be nothing, in that unknown world she fancied so eager to rob her of her happiness, there was nothing, neither living nor dead, there was no face, no voice, no power, that could tear Jim from her side. I drew breath and she whispered softly, “He told me so.” “He told you the truth,” I said. “Nothing,” she sighed out, and abruptly turned upon me with a barely audible intensity of tone: “Why did you come to us from out there? He speaks of you too often. You make me afraid. Do you — do you want him?” A sort of stealthy fierceness had crept into our hurried mutters. “I shall never come again,” I said bitterly. “And I don’t want him. No one wants him.” “No one,” she repeated in a tone of doubt. “No one,” I affirmed, feeling myself swayed by some strange excitement. “You think him strong, wise, courageous, great — why not believe him to be true too? I shall go to-morrow — and that is the end. You shall never be troubled by a voice from there again. This world you don’t know is too big to miss him. You understand? Too big. You’ve got his heart in your hand. You must feel that. You must know that.” “Yes, I know that,” she breathed out, hard and still, as a statue might whisper.

‘I felt I had done nothing. And what is it that I had wished to do? I am not sure now. At the time I was animated by an inexplicable ardour, as if before some great and necessary task — the influence of the moment upon my mental and emotional state. There are in all our lives such moments, such influences, coming from the outside, as it were, irresistible, incomprehensible — as if brought about by the mysterious conjunctions of the planets. She owned, as I had put it to her, his heart. She had that and everything else — if she could only believe it. What I had to tell her was

that in the whole world there was no one who ever would need his heart, his mind, his hand. It was a common fate, and yet it seemed an awful thing to say of any man. She listened without a word, and her stillness now was like the protest of an invincible unbelief. What need she care for the world beyond the forests? I asked. From all the multitudes that peopled the vastness of that unknown there would come, I assured her, as long as he lived, neither a call nor a sign for him. Never. I was carried away. Never! Never! I remember with wonder the sort of dogged fierceness I displayed. I had the illusion of having got the spectre by the throat at last. Indeed the whole real thing has left behind the detailed and amazing impression of a dream. Why should she fear? She knew him to be strong, true, wise, brave. He was all that. Certainly. He was more. He was great — invincible — and the world did not want him, it had forgotten him, it would not even know him.

‘I stopped; the silence over Patusan was profound, and the feeble dry sound of a paddle striking the side of a canoe somewhere in the middle of the river seemed to make it infinite. “Why?” she murmured. I felt that sort of rage one feels during a hard tussle. The spectre was trying to slip out of my grasp. “Why?” she repeated louder; “tell me!” And as I remained confounded, she stamped with her foot like a spoilt child. “Why? Speak.” “You want to know?” I asked in a fury. “Yes!” she cried. “Because he is not good enough,” I said brutally. During the moment’s pause I noticed the fire on the other shore blaze up, dilating the circle of its glow like an amazed stare, and contract suddenly to a red pin-point. I only knew how close to me she had been when I felt the clutch of her fingers on my forearm. Without raising her voice, she threw into it an infinity of scathing contempt, bitterness, and despair.

““This is the very thing he said. . . . You lie!”

‘The last two words she cried at me in the native dialect. “Hear me out!” I entreated; she caught her breath tremulously, flung my arm away. “Nobody, nobody is good enough,” I began with the greatest earnestness. I could hear the sobbing labour of her breath frightfully quickened. I hung my head. What was the use? Footsteps were approaching; I slipped away without another word. . . .’

## CHAPTER 34

Marlow swung his legs out, got up quickly, and staggered a little, as though he had been set down after a rush through space. He leaned his back against the balustrade and faced a disordered array of long cane chairs. The bodies prone in them seemed startled out of their torpor by his movement. One or two sat up as if alarmed; here and there a cigar glowed yet; Marlow looked at them all with the eyes of a man returning from the excessive remoteness of a dream. A throat was cleared; a calm voice encouraged negligently, 'Well.'

'Nothing,' said Marlow with a slight start. 'He had told her — that's all. She did not believe him — nothing more. As to myself, I do not know whether it be just, proper, decent for me to rejoice or to be sorry. For my part, I cannot say what I believed — indeed I don't know to this day, and never shall probably. But what did the poor devil believe himself? Truth shall prevail — don't you know *Magna est veritas* el . . . Yes, when it gets a chance. There is a law, no doubt — and likewise a law regulates your luck in the throwing of dice. It is not Justice the servant of men, but accident, hazard, Fortune — the ally of patient Time — that holds an even and scrupulous balance. Both of us had said the very same thing. Did we both speak the truth — or one of us did — or neither? . . .'

Marlow paused, crossed his arms on his breast, and in a changed tone —

'She said we lied. Poor soul! Well — let's leave it to Chance, whose ally is Time, that cannot be hurried, and whose enemy is Death, that will not wait. I had retreated — a little cowed, I must own. I had tried a fall with fear itself and got thrown — of course. I had only succeeded in adding to her anguish the hint of some mysterious collusion, of an inexplicable and incomprehensible conspiracy to keep her for ever in the dark. And it had come easily, naturally, unavoidably, by his act, by her own act! It was as though I had been shown the working of the implacable destiny of which we are the victims — and the tools. It was appalling to think of the girl whom I had left standing there motionless; Jim's footsteps had a fateful sound as he tramped by, without seeing me, in his heavy laced boots. "What? No lights!" he said in a loud, surprised voice. "What are you doing in the dark — you two?" Next moment he caught sight of her, I suppose. "Hallo, girl!" he cried cheerily. "Hallo, boy!" she answered at once, with amazing pluck.

‘This was their usual greeting to each other, and the bit of swagger she would put into her rather high but sweet voice was very droll, pretty, and childlike. It delighted Jim greatly. This was the last occasion on which I heard them exchange this familiar hail, and it struck a chill into my heart. There was the high sweet voice, the pretty effort, the swagger; but it all seemed to die out prematurely, and the playful call sounded like a moan. It was too confoundedly awful. “What have you done with Marlow?” Jim was asking; and then, “Gone down — has he? Funny I didn’t meet him. . . . You there, Marlow?”

‘I didn’t answer. I wasn’t going in — not yet at any rate. I really couldn’t. While he was calling me I was engaged in making my escape through a little gate leading out upon a stretch of newly cleared ground. No; I couldn’t face them yet. I walked hastily with lowered head along a trodden path. The ground rose gently, the few big trees had been felled, the undergrowth had been cut down and the grass fired. He had a mind to try a coffee-plantation there. The big hill, rearing its double summit coal-black in the clear yellow glow of the rising moon, seemed to cast its shadow upon the ground prepared for that experiment. He was going to try ever so many experiments; I had admired his energy, his enterprise, and his shrewdness. Nothing on earth seemed less real now than his plans, his energy, and his enthusiasm; and raising my eyes, I saw part of the moon glittering through the bushes at the bottom of the chasm. For a moment it looked as though the smooth disc, falling from its place in the sky upon the earth, had rolled to the bottom of that precipice: its ascending movement was like a leisurely rebound; it disengaged itself from the tangle of twigs; the bare contorted limb of some tree, growing on the slope, made a black crack right across its face. It threw its level rays afar as if from a cavern, and in this mournful eclipse-like light the stumps of felled trees uprose very dark, the heavy shadows fell at my feet on all sides, my own moving shadow, and across my path the shadow of the solitary grave perpetually garlanded with flowers. In the darkened moonlight the interlaced blossoms took on shapes foreign to one’s memory and colours indefinable to the eye, as though they had been special flowers gathered by no man, grown not in this world, and destined for the use of the dead alone. Their powerful scent hung in the warm air, making it thick and heavy like the fumes of incense. The lumps of white coral shone round the dark mound like a chaplet of bleached skulls,

and everything around was so quiet that when I stood still all sound and all movement in the world seemed to come to an end.

‘It was a great peace, as if the earth had been one grave, and for a time I stood there thinking mostly of the living who, buried in remote places out of the knowledge of mankind, still are fated to share in its tragic or grotesque miseries. In its noble struggles too — who knows? The human heart is vast enough to contain all the world. It is valiant enough to bear the burden, but where is the courage that would cast it off?

‘I suppose I must have fallen into a sentimental mood; I only know that I stood there long enough for the sense of utter solitude to get hold of me so completely that all I had lately seen, all I had heard, and the very human speech itself, seemed to have passed away out of existence, living only for a while longer in my memory, as though I had been the last of mankind. It was a strange and melancholy illusion, evolved half-consciously like all our illusions, which I suspect only to be visions of remote unattainable truth, seen dimly. This was, indeed, one of the lost, forgotten, unknown places of the earth; I had looked under its obscure surface; and I felt that when tomorrow I had left it for ever, it would slip out of existence, to live only in my memory till I myself passed into oblivion. I have that feeling about me now; perhaps it is that feeling which has incited me to tell you the story, to try to hand over to you, as it were, its very existence, its reality — the truth disclosed in a moment of illusion.

‘Cornelius broke upon it. He bolted out, vermin-like, from the long grass growing in a depression of the ground. I believe his house was rotting somewhere near by, though I’ve never seen it, not having been far enough in that direction. He ran towards me upon the path; his feet, shod in dirty white shoes, twinkled on the dark earth; he pulled himself up, and began to whine and cringe under a tall stove-pipe hat. His dried-up little carcass was swallowed up, totally lost, in a suit of black broadcloth. That was his costume for holidays and ceremonies, and it reminded me that this was the fourth Sunday I had spent in Patusan. All the time of my stay I had been vaguely aware of his desire to confide in me, if he only could get me all to himself. He hung about with an eager craving look on his sour yellow little face; but his timidity had kept him back as much as my natural reluctance to have anything to do with such an unsavoury creature. He would have succeeded, nevertheless, had he not been so ready to slink off as soon as you looked at him. He would slink off before Jim’s severe gaze, before my



own, which I tried to make indifferent, even before Tamb' Itam's surly, superior glance. He was perpetually slinking away; whenever seen he was seen moving off deviously, his face over his shoulder, with either a mistrustful snarl or a woe-begone, piteous, mute aspect; but no assumed expression could conceal this innate irremediable abjectness of his nature, any more than an arrangement of clothing can conceal some monstrous deformity of the body.

'I don't know whether it was the demoralisation of my utter defeat in my encounter with a spectre of fear less than an hour ago, but I let him capture me without even a show of resistance. I was doomed to be the recipient of confidences, and to be confronted with unanswerable questions. It was trying; but the contempt, the unreasoned contempt, the man's appearance provoked, made it easier to bear. He couldn't possibly matter. Nothing mattered, since I had made up my mind that Jim, for whom alone I cared, had at last mastered his fate. He had told me he was satisfied . . . nearly. This is going further than most of us dare. I — who have the right to think myself good enough — dare not. Neither does any of you here, I suppose? . . .'

Marlow paused, as if expecting an answer. Nobody spoke.

'Quite right,' he began again. 'Let no soul know, since the truth can be wrung out of us only by some cruel, little, awful catastrophe. But he is one of us, and he could say he was satisfied . . . nearly. Just fancy this! Nearly satisfied. One could almost envy him his catastrophe. Nearly satisfied. After this nothing could matter. It did not matter who suspected him, who trusted him, who loved him, who hated him — especially as it was Cornelius who hated him.

'Yet after all this was a kind of recognition. You shall judge of a man by his foes as well as by his friends, and this enemy of Jim was such as no decent man would be ashamed to own, without, however, making too much of him. This was the view Jim took, and in which I shared; but Jim disregarded him on general grounds. "My dear Marlow," he said, "I feel that if I go straight nothing can touch me. Indeed I do. Now you have been long enough here to have a good look round — and, frankly, don't you think I am pretty safe? It all depends upon me, and, by Jove! I have lots of confidence in myself. The worst thing he could do would be to kill me, I suppose. I don't think for a moment he would. He couldn't, you know — not if I were myself to hand him a loaded rifle for the purpose, and then turn

my back on him. That's the sort of thing he is. And suppose he would — suppose he could? Well — what of that? I didn't come here flying for my life — did I? I came here to set my back against the wall, and I am going to stay here . . .”

“‘Till you are quite satisfied,” I struck in.

‘We were sitting at the time under the roof in the stern of his boat; twenty paddles flashed like one, ten on a side, striking the water with a single splash, while behind our backs Tamb’ Itam dipped silently right and left, and stared right down the river, attentive to keep the long canoe in the greatest strength of the current. Jim bowed his head, and our last talk seemed to flicker out for good. He was seeing me off as far as the mouth of the river. The schooner had left the day before, working down and drifting on the ebb, while I had prolonged my stay overnight. And now he was seeing me off.

‘Jim had been a little angry with me for mentioning Cornelius at all. I had not, in truth, said much. The man was too insignificant to be dangerous, though he was as full of hate as he could hold. He had called me “honourable sir” at every second sentence, and had whined at my elbow as he followed me from the grave of his “late wife” to the gate of Jim’s compound. He declared himself the most unhappy of men, a victim, crushed like a worm; he entreated me to look at him. I wouldn’t turn my head to do so; but I could see out of the corner of my eye his obsequious shadow gliding after mine, while the moon, suspended on our right hand, seemed to gloat serenely upon the spectacle. He tried to explain — as I’ve told you — his share in the events of the memorable night. It was a matter of expediency. How could he know who was going to get the upper hand? “I would have saved him, honourable sir! I would have saved him for eighty dollars,” he protested in dulcet tones, keeping a pace behind me. “He has saved himself,” I said, “and he has forgiven you.” I heard a sort of tittering, and turned upon him; at once he appeared ready to take to his heels. “What are you laughing at?” I asked, standing still. “Don’t be deceived, honourable sir!” he shrieked, seemingly losing all control over his feelings. “He save himself! He knows nothing, honourable sir — nothing whatever. Who is he? What does he want here — the big thief? What does he want here? He throws dust into everybody’s eyes; he throws dust into your eyes, honourable sir; but he can’t throw dust into my eyes. He is a big fool, honourable sir.” I laughed contemptuously, and, turning on my heel,

began to walk on again. He ran up to my elbow and whispered forcibly, "He's no more than a little child here — like a little child — a little child." Of course I didn't take the slightest notice, and seeing the time pressed, because we were approaching the bamboo fence that glittered over the blackened ground of the clearing, he came to the point. He commenced by being abjectly lachrymose. His great misfortunes had affected his head. He hoped I would kindly forget what nothing but his troubles made him say. He didn't mean anything by it; only the honourable sir did not know what it was to be ruined, broken down, trampled upon. After this introduction he approached the matter near his heart, but in such a rambling, ejaculatory, craven fashion, that for a long time I couldn't make out what he was driving at. He wanted me to intercede with Jim in his favour. It seemed, too, to be some sort of money affair. I heard time and again the words, "Moderate provision — suitable present." He seemed to be claiming value for something, and he even went the length of saying with some warmth that life was not worth having if a man were to be robbed of everything. I did not breathe a word, of course, but neither did I stop my ears. The gist of the affair, which became clear to me gradually, was in this, that he regarded himself as entitled to some money in exchange for the girl. He had brought her up. Somebody else's child. Great trouble and pains — old man now — suitable present. If the honourable sir would say a word. . . . I stood still to look at him with curiosity, and fearful lest I should think him extortionate, I suppose, he hastily brought himself to make a concession. In consideration of a "suitable present" given at once, he would, he declared, be willing to undertake the charge of the girl, "without any other provision — when the time came for the gentleman to go home." His little yellow face, all crumpled as though it had been squeezed together, expressed the most anxious, eager avarice. His voice whined coaxingly, "No more trouble — natural guardian — a sum of money . . ."

'I stood there and marvelled. That kind of thing, with him, was evidently a vocation. I discovered suddenly in his cringing attitude a sort of assurance, as though he had been all his life dealing in certitudes. He must have thought I was dispassionately considering his proposal, because he became as sweet as honey. "Every gentleman made a provision when the time came to go home," he began insinuatingly. I slammed the little gate. "In this case, Mr. Cornelius," I said, "the time will never come." He took a few seconds to gather this in. "What!" he fairly squealed. "Why," I

continued from my side of the gate, “haven’t you heard him say so himself? He will never go home.” “Oh! this is too much,” he shouted. He would not address me as “honoured sir” any more. He was very still for a time, and then without a trace of humility began very low: “Never go — ah! He — he — he comes here devil knows from where — comes here — devil knows why — to trample on me till I die — ah — trample” (he stamped softly with both feet), “trample like this — nobody knows why — till I die. . . .” His voice became quite extinct; he was bothered by a little cough; he came up close to the fence and told me, dropping into a confidential and piteous tone, that he would not be trampled upon. “Patience — patience,” he muttered, striking his breast. I had done laughing at him, but unexpectedly he treated me to a wild cracked burst of it. “Ha! ha! ha! We shall see! We shall see! What! Steal from me! Steal from me everything! Everything! Everything!” His head drooped on one shoulder, his hands were hanging before him lightly clasped. One would have thought he had cherished the girl with surpassing love, that his spirit had been crushed and his heart broken by the most cruel of spoliations. Suddenly he lifted his head and shot out an infamous word. “Like her mother — she is like her deceitful mother. Exactly. In her face, too. In her face. The devil!” He leaned his forehead against the fence, and in that position uttered threats and horrible blasphemies in Portuguese in very weak ejaculations, mingled with miserable complaints and groans, coming out with a heave of the shoulders as though he had been overtaken by a deadly fit of sickness. It was an inexpressibly grotesque and vile performance, and I hastened away. He tried to shout something after me. Some disparagement of Jim, I believe — not too loud though, we were too near the house. All I heard distinctly was, “No more than a little child — a little child.”“

## CHAPTER 35

‘But next morning, at the first bend of the river shutting off the houses of Patusan, all this dropped out of my sight bodily, with its colour, its design, and its meaning, like a picture created by fancy on a canvas, upon which, after long contemplation, you turn your back for the last time. It remains in the memory motionless, unfaded, with its life arrested, in an unchanging light. There are the ambitions, the fears, the hate, the hopes, and they remain in my mind just as I had seen them — intense and as if for ever suspended in their expression. I had turned away from the picture and was going back to the world where events move, men change, light flickers, life flows in a clear stream, no matter whether over mud or over stones. I wasn’t going to dive into it; I would have enough to do to keep my head above the surface. But as to what I was leaving behind, I cannot imagine any alteration. The immense and magnanimous Doramin and his little motherly witch of a wife, gazing together upon the land and nursing secretly their dreams of parental ambition; Tunku Allang, wizened and greatly perplexed; Dain Waris, intelligent and brave, with his faith in Jim, with his firm glance and his ironic friendliness; the girl, absorbed in her frightened, suspicious adoration; Tamb’ Itam, surly and faithful; Cornelius, leaning his forehead against the fence under the moonlight — I am certain of them. They exist as if under an enchanter’s wand. But the figure round which all these are grouped — that one lives, and I am not certain of him. No magician’s wand can immobilise him under my eyes. He is one of us.

‘Jim, as I’ve told you, accompanied me on the first stage of my journey back to the world he had renounced, and the way at times seemed to lead through the very heart of untouched wilderness. The empty reaches sparkled under the high sun; between the high walls of vegetation the heat drowsed upon the water, and the boat, impelled vigorously, cut her way through the air that seemed to have settled dense and warm under the shelter of lofty trees.

‘The shadow of the impending separation had already put an immense space between us, and when we spoke it was with an effort, as if to force our low voices across a vast and increasing distance. The boat fairly flew; we sweltered side by side in the stagnant superheated air; the smell of mud, of mush, the primeval smell of fecund earth, seemed to sting our faces; till suddenly at a bend it was as if a great hand far away had lifted a heavy

curtain, had flung open un immense portal. The light itself seemed to stir, the sky above our heads widened, a far-off murmur reached our ears, a freshness enveloped us, filled our lungs, quickened our thoughts, our blood, our regrets — and, straight ahead, the forests sank down against the dark-blue ridge of the sea.

‘I breathed deeply, I revelled in the vastness of the opened horizon, in the different atmosphere that seemed to vibrate with the toil of life, with the energy of an impeccable world. This sky and this sea were open to me. The girl was right — there was a sign, a call in them — something to which I responded with every fibre of my being. I let my eyes roam through space, like a man released from bonds who stretches his cramped limbs, runs, leaps, responds to the inspiring elation of freedom. “This is glorious!” I cried, and then I looked at the sinner by my side. He sat with his head sunk on his breast and said “Yes,” without raising his eyes, as if afraid to see writ large on the clear sky of the offing the reproach of his romantic conscience.

‘I remember the smallest details of that afternoon. We landed on a bit of white beach. It was backed by a low cliff wooded on the brow, draped in creepers to the very foot. Below us the plain of the sea, of a serene and intense blue, stretched with a slight upward tilt to the thread-like horizon drawn at the height of our eyes. Great waves of glitter blew lightly along the pitted dark surface, as swift as feathers chased by the breeze. A chain of islands sat broken and massive facing the wide estuary, displayed in a sheet of pale glassy water reflecting faithfully the contour of the shore. High in the colourless sunshine a solitary bird, all black, hovered, dropping and soaring above the same spot with a slight rocking motion of the wings. A ragged, sooty bunch of flimsy mat hovels was perched over its own inverted image upon a crooked multitude of high piles the colour of ebony. A tiny black canoe put off from amongst them with two tiny men, all black, who toiled exceedingly, striking down at the pale water: and the canoe seemed to slide painfully on a mirror. This bunch of miserable hovels was the fishing village that boasted of the white lord’s especial protection, and the two men crossing over were the old headman and his son-in-law. They landed and walked up to us on the white sand, lean, dark-brown as if dried in smoke, with ashy patches on the skin of their naked shoulders and breasts. Their heads were bound in dirty but carefully folded headkerchiefs, and the old man began at once to state a complaint, voluble, stretching a lank arm, screwing up at Jim his old bleared eyes confidently. The Rajah’s people

would not leave them alone; there had been some trouble about a lot of turtles' eggs his people had collected on the islets there — and leaning at arm's-length upon his paddle, he pointed with a brown skinny hand over the sea. Jim listened for a time without looking up, and at last told him gently to wait. He would hear him by-and-by. They withdrew obediently to some little distance, and sat on their heels, with their paddles lying before them on the sand; the silvery gleams in their eyes followed our movements patiently; and the immensity of the outspread sea, the stillness of the coast, passing north and south beyond the limits of my vision, made up one colossal Presence watching us four dwarfs isolated on a strip of glistening sand.

“The trouble is,” remarked Jim moodily, “that for generations these beggars of fishermen in that village there had been considered as the Rajah's personal slaves — and the old rip can't get it into his head that . . .”

‘He paused. “That you have changed all that,” I said.

“Yes I've changed all that,” he muttered in a gloomy voice.

“You have had your opportunity,” I pursued.

“Have I?” he said. “Well, yes. I suppose so. Yes. I have got back my confidence in myself — a good name — yet sometimes I wish . . . No! I shall hold what I've got. Can't expect anything more.” He flung his arm out towards the sea. “Not out there anyhow.” He stamped his foot upon the sand. “This is my limit, because nothing less will do.”

‘We continued pacing the beach. “Yes, I've changed all that,” he went on, with a sidelong glance at the two patient squatting fishermen; “but only try to think what it would be if I went away. Jove! can't you see it? Hell loose. No! To-morrow I shall go and take my chance of drinking that silly old Tunku Allang's coffee, and I shall make no end of fuss over these rotten turtles' eggs. No. I can't say — enough. Never. I must go on, go on for ever holding up my end, to feel sure that nothing can touch me. I must stick to their belief in me to feel safe and to — to” . . . He cast about for a word, seemed to look for it on the sea . . . “to keep in touch with” . . . His voice sank suddenly to a murmur . . . “with those whom, perhaps, I shall never see any more. With — with — you, for instance.”

‘I was profoundly humbled by his words. “For God's sake,” I said, “don't set me up, my dear fellow; just look to yourself.” I felt a gratitude, an affection, for that straggler whose eyes had singled me out, keeping my place in the ranks of an insignificant multitude. How little that was to boast

of, after all! I turned my burning face away; under the low sun, glowing, darkened and crimson, like an ember snatched from the fire, the sea lay outspread, offering all its immense stillness to the approach of the fiery orb. Twice he was going to speak, but checked himself; at last, as if he had found a formula —

“I shall be faithful,” he said quietly. “I shall be faithful,” he repeated, without looking at me, but for the first time letting his eyes wander upon the waters, whose blueness had changed to a gloomy purple under the fires of sunset. Ah! he was romantic, romantic. I recalled some words of Stein’s. . . . “In the destructive element immerse! . . . To follow the dream, and again to follow the dream — and so — always — usque ad finem . . .” He was romantic, but none the less true. Who could tell what forms, what visions, what faces, what forgiveness he could see in the glow of the west! . . . A small boat, leaving the schooner, moved slowly, with a regular beat of two oars, towards the sandbank to take me off. “And then there’s Jewel,” he said, out of the great silence of earth, sky, and sea, which had mastered my very thoughts so that his voice made me start. “There’s Jewel.” “Yes,” I murmured. “I need not tell you what she is to me,” he pursued. “You’ve seen. In time she will come to understand . . .” “I hope so,” I interrupted. “She trusts me, too,” he mused, and then changed his tone. “When shall we meet next, I wonder?” he said.

“Never — unless you come out,” I answered, avoiding his glance. He didn’t seem to be surprised; he kept very quiet for a while.

“Good-bye, then,” he said, after a pause. “Perhaps it’s just as well.”

‘We shook hands, and I walked to the boat, which waited with her nose on the beach. The schooner, her mainsail set and jib-sheet to windward, curveted on the purple sea; there was a rosy tinge on her sails. “Will you be going home again soon?” asked Jim, just as I swung my leg over the gunwale. “In a year or so if I live,” I said. The forefoot grated on the sand, the boat floated, the wet oars flashed and dipped once, twice. Jim, at the water’s edge, raised his voice. “Tell them . . .” he began. I signed to the men to cease rowing, and waited in wonder. Tell who? The half-submerged sun faced him; I could see its red gleam in his eyes that looked dumbly at me. . . . “No — nothing,” he said, and with a slight wave of his hand motioned the boat away. I did not look again at the shore till I had clambered on board the schooner.



‘By that time the sun had set. The twilight lay over the east, and the coast, turned black, extended infinitely its sombre wall that seemed the very stronghold of the night; the western horizon was one great blaze of gold and crimson in which a big detached cloud floated dark and still, casting a slaty shadow on the water beneath, and I saw Jim on the beach watching the schooner fall off and gather headway.

‘The two half-naked fishermen had arisen as soon as I had gone; they were no doubt pouring the plaint of their trifling, miserable, oppressed lives into the ears of the white lord, and no doubt he was listening to it, making it his own, for was it not a part of his luck — the luck “from the word Go” — the luck to which he had assured me he was so completely equal? They, too, I should think, were in luck, and I was sure their pertinacity would be equal to it. Their dark-skinned bodies vanished on the dark background long before I had lost sight of their protector. He was white from head to foot, and remained persistently visible with the stronghold of the night at his back, the sea at his feet, the opportunity by his side — still veiled. What do you say? Was it still veiled? I don’t know. For me that white figure in the stillness of coast and sea seemed to stand at the heart of a vast enigma. The twilight was ebbing fast from the sky above his head, the strip of sand had sunk already under his feet, he himself appeared no bigger than a child — then only a speck, a tiny white speck, that seemed to catch all the light left in a darkened world. . . . And, suddenly, I lost him. . . .

## CHAPTER 36

With these words Marlow had ended his narrative, and his audience had broken up forthwith, under his abstract, pensive gaze. Men drifted off the verandah in pairs or alone without loss of time, without offering a remark, as if the last image of that incomplete story, its incompleteness itself, and the very tone of the speaker, had made discussion in vain and comment impossible. Each of them seemed to carry away his own impression, to carry it away with him like a secret; but there was only one man of all these listeners who was ever to hear the last word of the story. It came to him at home, more than two years later, and it came contained in a thick packet addressed in Marlow's upright and angular handwriting.

The privileged man opened the packet, looked in, then, laying it down, went to the window. His rooms were in the highest flat of a lofty building, and his glance could travel afar beyond the clear panes of glass, as though he were looking out of the lantern of a lighthouse. The slopes of the roofs glistened, the dark broken ridges succeeded each other without end like sombre, uncrested waves, and from the depths of the town under his feet ascended a confused and unceasing mutter. The spires of churches, numerous, scattered haphazard, uprose like beacons on a maze of shoals without a channel; the driving rain mingled with the falling dusk of a winter's evening; and the booming of a big clock on a tower, striking the hour, rolled past in voluminous, austere bursts of sound, with a shrill vibrating cry at the core. He drew the heavy curtains.

The light of his shaded reading-lamp slept like a sheltered pool, his footfalls made no sound on the carpet, his wandering days were over. No more horizons as boundless as hope, no more twilights within the forests as solemn as temples, in the hot quest for the Ever-undiscovered Country over the hill, across the stream, beyond the wave. The hour was striking! No more! No more! — but the opened packet under the lamp brought back the sounds, the visions, the very savour of the past — a multitude of fading faces, a tumult of low voices, dying away upon the shores of distant seas under a passionate and unconsoling sunshine. He sighed and sat down to read.

At first he saw three distinct enclosures. A good many pages closely blackened and pinned together; a loose square sheet of greyish paper with a few words traced in a handwriting he had never seen before, and an

explanatory letter from Marlow. From this last fell another letter, yellowed by time and frayed on the folds. He picked it up and, laying it aside, turned to Marlow's message, ran swiftly over the opening lines, and, checking himself, thereafter read on deliberately, like one approaching with slow feet and alert eyes the glimpse of an undiscovered country.

‘. . . I don't suppose you've forgotten,’ went on the letter. ‘You alone have showed an interest in him that survived the telling of his story, though I remember well you would not admit he had mastered his fate. You prophesied for him the disaster of weariness and of disgust with acquired honour, with the self-appointed task, with the love sprung from pity and youth. You had said you knew so well “that kind of thing,” its illusory satisfaction, its unavoidable deception. You said also — I call to mind — that “giving your life up to them” (them meaning all of mankind with skins brown, yellow, or black in colour) “was like selling your soul to a brute.” You contended that “that kind of thing” was only endurable and enduring when based on a firm conviction in the truth of ideas racially our own, in whose name are established the order, the morality of an ethical progress. “We want its strength at our backs,” you had said. “We want a belief in its necessity and its justice, to make a worthy and conscious sacrifice of our lives. Without it the sacrifice is only forgetfulness, the way of offering is no better than the way to perdition.” In other words, you maintained that we must fight in the ranks or our lives don't count. Possibly! You ought to know — be it said without malice — you who have rushed into one or two places single-handed and came out cleverly, without singeing your wings. The point, however, is that of all mankind Jim had no dealings but with himself, and the question is whether at the last he had not confessed to a faith mightier than the laws of order and progress.

‘I affirm nothing. Perhaps you may pronounce — after you've read. There is much truth — after all — in the common expression “under a cloud.” It is impossible to see him clearly — especially as it is through the eyes of others that we take our last look at him. I have no hesitation in imparting to you all I know of the last episode that, as he used to say, had “come to him.” One wonders whether this was perhaps that supreme opportunity, that last and satisfying test for which I had always suspected him to be waiting, before he could frame a message to the impeccable world. You remember that when I was leaving him for the last time he had asked whether I would be going home soon, and suddenly cried after me,

“Tell them . . .” I had waited — curious I’ll own, and hopeful too — only to hear him shout, “No — nothing.” That was all then — and there will be nothing more; there will be no message, unless such as each of us can interpret for himself from the language of facts, that are so often more enigmatic than the craftiest arrangement of words. He made, it is true, one more attempt to deliver himself; but that too failed, as you may perceive if you look at the sheet of greyish foolscap enclosed here. He had tried to write; do you notice the commonplace hand? It is headed “The Fort, Patusan.” I suppose he had carried out his intention of making out of his house a place of defence. It was an excellent plan: a deep ditch, an earth wall topped by a palisade, and at the angles guns mounted on platforms to sweep each side of the square. Doramin had agreed to furnish him the guns; and so each man of his party would know there was a place of safety, upon which every faithful partisan could rally in case of some sudden danger. All this showed his judicious foresight, his faith in the future. What he called “my own people” — the liberated captives of the Sherif — were to make a distinct quarter of Patusan, with their huts and little plots of ground under the walls of the stronghold. Within he would be an invincible host in himself “The Fort, Patusan.” No date, as you observe. What is a number and a name to a day of days? It is also impossible to say whom he had in his mind when he seized the pen: Stein — myself — the world at large — or was this only the aimless startled cry of a solitary man confronted by his fate? “An awful thing has happened,” he wrote before he flung the pen down for the first time; look at the ink blot resembling the head of an arrow under these words. After a while he had tried again, scrawling heavily, as if with a hand of lead, another line. “I must now at once . . .” The pen had spluttered, and that time he gave it up. There’s nothing more; he had seen a broad gulf that neither eye nor voice could span. I can understand this. He was overwhelmed by the inexplicable; he was overwhelmed by his own personality — the gift of that destiny which he had done his best to master.

‘I send you also an old letter — a very old letter. It was found carefully preserved in his writing-case. It is from his father, and by the date you can see he must have received it a few days before he joined the Patna. Thus it must be the last letter he ever had from home. He had treasured it all these years. The good old parson fancied his sailor son. I’ve looked in at a sentence here and there. There is nothing in it except just affection. He tells his “dear James” that the last long letter from him was very “honest and

entertaining.” He would not have him “judge men harshly or hastily.” There are four pages of it, easy morality and family news. Tom had “taken orders.” Carrie’s husband had “money losses.” The old chap goes on equably trusting Providence and the established order of the universe, but alive to its small dangers and its small mercies. One can almost see him, grey-haired and serene in the inviolable shelter of his book-lined, faded, and comfortable study, where for forty years he had conscientiously gone over and over again the round of his little thoughts about faith and virtue, about the conduct of life and the only proper manner of dying; where he had written so many sermons, where he sits talking to his boy, over there, on the other side of the earth. But what of the distance? Virtue is one all over the world, and there is only one faith, one conceivable conduct of life, one manner of dying. He hopes his “dear James” will never forget that “who once gives way to temptation, in the very instant hazards his total depravity and everlasting ruin. Therefore resolve fixedly never, through any possible motives, to do anything which you believe to be wrong.” There is also some news of a favourite dog; and a pony, “which all you boys used to ride,” had gone blind from old age and had to be shot. The old chap invokes Heaven’s blessing; the mother and all the girls then at home send their love. . . . No, there is nothing much in that yellow frayed letter fluttering out of his cherishing grasp after so many years. It was never answered, but who can say what converse he may have held with all these placid, colourless forms of men and women peopling that quiet corner of the world as free of danger or strife as a tomb, and breathing equably the air of undisturbed rectitude. It seems amazing that he should belong to it, he to whom so many things “had come.” Nothing ever came to them; they would never be taken unawares, and never be called upon to grapple with fate. Here they all are, evoked by the mild gossip of the father, all these brothers and sisters, bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, gazing with clear unconscious eyes, while I seem to see him, returned at last, no longer a mere white speck at the heart of an immense mystery, but of full stature, standing disregarded amongst their untroubled shapes, with a stern and romantic aspect, but always mute, dark — under a cloud.

“The story of the last events you will find in the few pages enclosed here. You must admit that it is romantic beyond the wildest dreams of his boyhood, and yet there is to my mind a sort of profound and terrifying logic in it, as if it were our imagination alone that could set loose upon us the

might of an overwhelming destiny. The imprudence of our thoughts recoils upon our heads; who toys with the sword shall perish by the sword. This astounding adventure, of which the most astounding part is that it is true, comes on as an unavoidable consequence. Something of the sort had to happen. You repeat this to yourself while you marvel that such a thing could happen in the year of grace before last. But it has happened — and there is no disputing its logic.

‘I put it down here for you as though I had been an eyewitness. My information was fragmentary, but I’ve fitted the pieces together, and there is enough of them to make an intelligible picture. I wonder how he would have related it himself. He has confided so much in me that at times it seems as though he must come in presently and tell the story in his own words, in his careless yet feeling voice, with his offhand manner, a little puzzled, a little bothered, a little hurt, but now and then by a word or a phrase giving one of these glimpses of his very own self that were never any good for purposes of orientation. It’s difficult to believe he will never come. I shall never hear his voice again, nor shall I see his smooth tan-and-pink face with a white line on the forehead, and the youthful eyes darkened by excitement to a profound, unfathomable blue.’

## CHAPTER 37

'It all begins with a remarkable exploit of a man called Brown, who stole with complete success a Spanish schooner out of a small bay near Zamboanga. Till I discovered the fellow my information was incomplete, but most unexpectedly I did come upon him a few hours before he gave up his arrogant ghost. Fortunately he was willing and able to talk between the choking fits of asthma, and his racked body writhed with malicious exultation at the bare thought of Jim. He exulted thus at the idea that he had "paid out the stuck-up beggar after all." He gloated over his action. I had to bear the sunken glare of his fierce crow-footed eyes if I wanted to know; and so I bore it, reflecting how much certain forms of evil are akin to madness, derived from intense egoism, inflamed by resistance, tearing the soul to pieces, and giving factitious vigour to the body. The story also reveals unsuspected depths of cunning in the wretched Cornelius, whose abject and intense hate acts like a subtle inspiration, pointing out an unerring way towards revenge.

"I could see directly I set my eyes on him what sort of a fool he was," gasped the dying Brown. "He a man! Hell! He was a hollow sham. As if he couldn't have said straight out, 'Hands off my plunder!' blast him! That would have been like a man! Rot his superior soul! He had me there — but he hadn't devil enough in him to make an end of me. Not he! A thing like that letting me off as if I wasn't worth a kick! . . ." Brown struggled desperately for breath. . . . "Fraud. . . . Letting me off. . . . And so I did make an end of him after all. . . ." He choked again. . . . "I expect this thing'll kill me, but I shall die easy now. You . . . you here . . . I don't know your name — I would give you a five-pound note if — if I had it — for the news — or my name's not Brown. . . ." He grinned horribly. . . . "Gentleman Brown."

'He said all these things in profound gasps, staring at me with his yellow eyes out of a long, ravaged, brown face; he jerked his left arm; a pepper-and-salt matted beard hung almost into his lap; a dirty ragged blanket covered his legs. I had found him out in Bangkok through that busybody Schomberg, the hotel-keeper, who had, confidentially, directed me where to look. It appears that a sort of loafing, fuddled vagabond — a white man living amongst the natives with a Siamese woman — had considered it a great privilege to give a shelter to the last days of the famous Gentleman

Brown. While he was talking to me in the wretched hovel, and, as it were, fighting for every minute of his life, the Siamese woman, with big bare legs and a stupid coarse face, sat in a dark corner chewing betel stolidly. Now and then she would get up for the purpose of shooing a chicken away from the door. The whole hut shook when she walked. An ugly yellow child, naked and pot-bellied like a little heathen god, stood at the foot of the couch, finger in mouth, lost in a profound and calm contemplation of the dying man.

‘He talked feverishly; but in the middle of a word, perhaps, an invisible hand would take him by the throat, and he would look at me dumbly with an expression of doubt and anguish. He seemed to fear that I would get tired of waiting and go away, leaving him with his tale untold, with his exultation unexpressed. He died during the night, I believe, but by that time I had nothing more to learn.

‘So much as to Brown, for the present.

‘Eight months before this, coming into Samarang, I went as usual to see Stein. On the garden side of the house a Malay on the verandah greeted me shyly, and I remembered that I had seen him in Patusan, in Jim’s house, amongst other Bugis men who used to come in the evening to talk interminably over their war reminiscences and to discuss State affairs. Jim had pointed him out to me once as a respectable petty trader owning a small seagoing native craft, who had showed himself “one of the best at the taking of the stockade.” I was not very surprised to see him, since any Patusan trader venturing as far as Samarang would naturally find his way to Stein’s house. I returned his greeting and passed on. At the door of Stein’s room I came upon another Malay in whom I recognised Tamb’ Itam.

‘I asked him at once what he was doing there; it occurred to me that Jim might have come on a visit. I own I was pleased and excited at the thought. Tamb’ Itam looked as if he did not know what to say. “Is Tuan Jim inside?” I asked impatiently. “No,” he mumbled, hanging his head for a moment, and then with sudden earnestness, “He would not fight. He would not fight,” he repeated twice. As he seemed unable to say anything else, I pushed him aside and went in.

‘Stein, tall and stooping, stood alone in the middle of the room between the rows of butterfly cases. “Ach! is it you, my friend?” he said sadly, peering through his glasses. A drab sack-coat of alpaca hung, unbuttoned, down to his knees. He had a Panama hat on his head, and there were deep



furrows on his pale cheeks. "What's the matter now?" I asked nervously. "There's Tamb' Itam there. . . ." "Come and see the girl. Come and see the girl. She is here," he said, with a half-hearted show of activity. I tried to detain him, but with gentle obstinacy he would take no notice of my eager questions. "She is here, she is here," he repeated, in great perturbation. "They came here two days ago. An old man like me, a stranger — sehen Sie — cannot do much. . . . Come this way. . . . Young hearts are unforgiving. . . ." I could see he was in utmost distress. . . . "The strength of life in them, the cruel strength of life. . . ." He mumbled, leading me round the house; I followed him, lost in dismal and angry conjectures. At the door of the drawing-room he barred my way. "He loved her very much," he said interrogatively, and I only nodded, feeling so bitterly disappointed that I would not trust myself to speak. "Very frightful," he murmured. "She can't understand me. I am only a strange old man. Perhaps you . . . she knows you. Talk to her. We can't leave it like this. Tell her to forgive him. It was very frightful." "No doubt," I said, exasperated at being in the dark; "but have you forgiven him?" He looked at me queerly. "You shall hear," he said, and opening the door, absolutely pushed me in.

'You know Stein's big house and the two immense reception-rooms, uninhabited and uninhabitable, clean, full of solitude and of shining things that look as if never beheld by the eye of man? They are cool on the hottest days, and you enter them as you would a scrubbed cave underground. I passed through one, and in the other I saw the girl sitting at the end of a big mahogany table, on which she rested her head, the face hidden in her arms. The waxed floor reflected her dimly as though it had been a sheet of frozen water. The rattan screens were down, and through the strange greenish gloom made by the foliage of the trees outside a strong wind blew in gusts, swaying the long draperies of windows and doorways. Her white figure seemed shaped in snow; the pendent crystals of a great chandelier clicked above her head like glittering icicles. She looked up and watched my approach. I was chilled as if these vast apartments had been the cold abode of despair.

'She recognised me at once, and as soon as I had stopped, looking down at her: "He has left me," she said quietly; "you always leave us — for your own ends." Her face was set. All the heat of life seemed withdrawn within some inaccessible spot in her breast. "It would have been easy to die with him," she went on, and made a slight weary gesture as if giving up the

incomprehensible. “He would not! It was like a blindness — and yet it was I who was speaking to him; it was I who stood before his eyes; it was at me that he looked all the time! Ah! you are hard, treacherous, without truth, without compassion. What makes you so wicked? Or is it that you are all mad?”

‘I took her hand; it did not respond, and when I dropped it, it hung down to the floor. That indifference, more awful than tears, cries, and reproaches, seemed to defy time and consolation. You felt that nothing you could say would reach the seat of the still and benumbing pain.

‘Stein had said, “You shall hear.” I did hear. I heard it all, listening with amazement, with awe, to the tones of her inflexible weariness. She could not grasp the real sense of what she was telling me, and her resentment filled me with pity for her — for him too. I stood rooted to the spot after she had finished. Leaning on her arm, she stared with hard eyes, and the wind passed in gusts, the crystals kept on clicking in the greenish gloom. She went on whispering to herself: “And yet he was looking at me! He could see my face, hear my voice, hear my grief! When I used to sit at his feet, with my cheek against his knee and his hand on my head, the curse of cruelty and madness was already within him, waiting for the day. The day came! . . . and before the sun had set he could not see me any more — he was made blind and deaf and without pity, as you all are. He shall have no tears from me. Never, never. Not one tear. I will not! He went away from me as if I had been worse than death. He fled as if driven by some accursed thing he had heard or seen in his sleep. . . .”

‘Her steady eyes seemed to strain after the shape of a man torn out of her arms by the strength of a dream. She made no sign to my silent bow. I was glad to escape.

‘I saw her once again, the same afternoon. On leaving her I had gone in search of Stein, whom I could not find indoors; and I wandered out, pursued by distressful thoughts, into the gardens, those famous gardens of Stein, in which you can find every plant and tree of tropical lowlands. I followed the course of the canalised stream, and sat for a long time on a shaded bench near the ornamental pond, where some waterfowl with clipped wings were diving and splashing noisily. The branches of casuarina trees behind me swayed lightly, incessantly, reminding me of the sighing of fir trees at home.

‘This mournful and restless sound was a fit accompaniment to my meditations. She had said he had been driven away from her by a dream, — and there was no answer one could make her — there seemed to be no forgiveness for such a transgression. And yet is not mankind itself, pushing on its blind way, driven by a dream of its greatness and its power upon the dark paths of excessive cruelty and of excessive devotion? And what is the pursuit of truth, after all?

‘When I rose to get back to the house I caught sight of Stein’s drab coat through a gap in the foliage, and very soon at a turn of the path I came upon him walking with the girl. Her little hand rested on his forearm, and under the broad, flat rim of his Panama hat he bent over her, grey-haired, paternal, with compassionate and chivalrous deference. I stood aside, but they stopped, facing me. His gaze was bent on the ground at his feet; the girl, erect and slight on his arm, stared sombrely beyond my shoulder with black, clear, motionless eyes. “Schrecklich,” he murmured. “Terrible! Terrible! What can one do?” He seemed to be appealing to me, but her youth, the length of the days suspended over her head, appealed to me more; and suddenly, even as I realised that nothing could be said, I found myself pleading his cause for her sake. “You must forgive him,” I concluded, and my own voice seemed to me muffled, lost in unresponsive deaf immensity. “We all want to be forgiven,” I added after a while.

“‘What have I done?’” she asked with her lips only.

“‘You always mistrusted him,’” I said.

“‘He was like the others,’” she pronounced slowly.

“‘Not like the others,’” I protested, but she continued evenly, without any feeling —

“‘He was false.’” And suddenly Stein broke in. “No! no! no! My poor child! . . .” He patted her hand lying passively on his sleeve. “No! no! Not false! True! True! True!” He tried to look into her stony face. “You don’t understand. Ach! Why you do not understand? . . . Terrible,” he said to me. “Some day she shall understand.”

“‘Will you explain?’” I asked, looking hard at him. They moved on.

‘I watched them. Her gown trailed on the path, her black hair fell loose. She walked upright and light by the side of the tall man, whose long shapeless coat hung in perpendicular folds from the stooping shoulders, whose feet moved slowly. They disappeared beyond that spinney (you may remember) where sixteen different kinds of bamboo grow together, all

distinguishable to the learned eye. For my part, I was fascinated by the exquisite grace and beauty of that fluted grove, crowned with pointed leaves and feathery heads, the lightness, the vigour, the charm as distinct as a voice of that unperplexed luxuriating life. I remember staying to look at it for a long time, as one would linger within reach of a consoling whisper. The sky was pearly grey. It was one of those overcast days so rare in the tropics, in which memories crowd upon one, memories of other shores, of other faces.

‘I drove back to town the same afternoon, taking with me Tamb’ Itam and the other Malay, in whose seagoing craft they had escaped in the bewilderment, fear, and gloom of the disaster. The shock of it seemed to have changed their natures. It had turned her passion into stone, and it made the surly taciturn Tamb’ Itam almost loquacious. His surliness, too, was subdued into puzzled humility, as though he had seen the failure of a potent charm in a supreme moment. The Bugis trader, a shy hesitating man, was very clear in the little he had to say. Both were evidently over-awed by a sense of deep inexpressible wonder, by the touch of an inscrutable mystery.’

There with Marlow’s signature the letter proper ended. The privileged reader screwed up his lamp, and solitary above the billowy roofs of the town, like a lighthouse-keeper above the sea, he turned to the pages of the story.

## CHAPTER 38

‘It all begins, as I’ve told you, with the man called Brown,’ ran the opening sentence of Marlow’s narrative. ‘You who have knocked about the Western Pacific must have heard of him. He was the show ruffian on the Australian coast — not that he was often to be seen there, but because he was always trotted out in the stories of lawless life a visitor from home is treated to; and the mildest of these stories which were told about him from Cape York to Eden Bay was more than enough to hang a man if told in the right place. They never failed to let you know, too, that he was supposed to be the son of a baronet. Be it as it may, it is certain he had deserted from a home ship in the early gold-digging days, and in a few years became talked about as the terror of this or that group of islands in Polynesia. He would kidnap natives, he would strip some lonely white trader to the very pyjamas he stood in, and after he had robbed the poor devil, he would as likely as not invite him to fight a duel with shot-guns on the beach — which would have been fair enough as these things go, if the other man hadn’t been by that time already half-dead with fright. Brown was a latter-day buccaneer, sorry enough, like his more celebrated prototypes; but what distinguished him from his contemporary brother ruffians, like Bully Hayes or the mellifluous Pease, or that perfumed, Dundreary-whiskered, dandified scoundrel known as Dirty Dick, was the arrogant temper of his misdeeds and a vehement scorn for mankind at large and for his victims in particular. The others were merely vulgar and greedy brutes, but he seemed moved by some complex intention. He would rob a man as if only to demonstrate his poor opinion of the creature, and he would bring to the shooting or maiming of some quiet, unoffending stranger a savage and vengeful earnestness fit to terrify the most reckless of desperadoes. In the days of his greatest glory he owned an armed barque, manned by a mixed crew of Kanakas and runaway whalers, and boasted, I don’t know with what truth, of being financed on the quiet by a most respectable firm of copra merchants. Later on he ran off — it was reported — with the wife of a missionary, a very young girl from Clapham way, who had married the mild, flat-footed fellow in a moment of enthusiasm, and, suddenly transplanted to Melanesia, lost her bearings somehow. It was a dark story. She was ill at the time he carried her off, and died on board his ship. It is said — as the most wonderful put of the tale — that over her body he gave way to an outburst of sombre and violent grief.

His luck left him, too, very soon after. He lost his ship on some rocks off Malaita, and disappeared for a time as though he had gone down with her. He is heard of next at Nuka-Hiva, where he bought an old French schooner out of Government service. What creditable enterprise he might have had in view when he made that purchase I can't say, but it is evident that what with High Commissioners, consuls, men-of-war, and international control, the South Seas were getting too hot to hold gentlemen of his kidney. Clearly he must have shifted the scene of his operations farther west, because a year later he plays an incredibly audacious, but not a very profitable part, in a serio-comic business in Manila Bay, in which a peculating governor and an absconding treasurer are the principal figures; thereafter he seems to have hung around the Philippines in his rotten schooner battling with unadverse fortune, till at last, running his appointed course, he sails into Jim's history, a blind accomplice of the Dark Powers.

His tale goes that when a Spanish patrol cutter captured him he was simply trying to run a few guns for the insurgents. If so, then I can't understand what he was doing off the south coast of Mindanao. My belief, however, is that he was blackmailing the native villages along the coast. The principal thing is that the cutter, throwing a guard on board, made him sail in company towards Zamboanga. On the way, for some reason or other, both vessels had to call at one of these new Spanish settlements — which never came to anything in the end — where there was not only a civil official in charge on shore, but a good stout coasting schooner lying at anchor in the little bay; and this craft, in every way much better than his own, Brown made up his mind to steal.

He was down on his luck — as he told me himself. The world he had bullied for twenty years with fierce, aggressive disdain, had yielded him nothing in the way of material advantage except a small bag of silver dollars, which was concealed in his cabin so that “the devil himself couldn't smell it out.” And that was all — absolutely all. He was tired of his life, and not afraid of death. But this man, who would stake his existence on a whim with a bitter and jeering recklessness, stood in mortal fear of imprisonment. He had an unreasoning cold-sweat, nerve-shaking, blood-to-water-turning sort of horror at the bare possibility of being locked up — the sort of terror a superstitious man would feel at the thought of being embraced by a spectre. Therefore the civil official who came on board to make a preliminary investigation into the capture, investigated arduously all day

long, and only went ashore after dark, muffled up in a cloak, and taking great care not to let Brown's little all clink in its bag. Afterwards, being a man of his word, he contrived (the very next evening, I believe) to send off the Government cutter on some urgent bit of special service. As her commander could not spare a prize crew, he contented himself by taking away before he left all the sails of Brown's schooner to the very last rag, and took good care to tow his two boats on to the beach a couple of miles off.

'But in Brown's crew there was a Solomon Islander, kidnapped in his youth and devoted to Brown, who was the best man of the whole gang. That fellow swam off to the coaster — five hundred yards or so — with the end of a warp made up of all the running gear unrove for the purpose. The water was smooth, and the bay dark, "like the inside of a cow," as Brown described it. The Solomon Islander clambered over the bulwarks with the end of the rope in his teeth. The crew of the coaster — all Tagals — were ashore having a jollification in the native village. The two shipkeepers left on board woke up suddenly and saw the devil. It had glittering eyes and leaped quick as lightning about the deck. They fell on their knees, paralysed with fear, crossing themselves and mumbling prayers. With a long knife he found in the caboose the Solomon Islander, without interrupting their orisons, stabbed first one, then the other; with the same knife he set to sawing patiently at the coir cable till suddenly it parted under the blade with a splash. Then in the silence of the bay he let out a cautious shout, and Brown's gang, who meantime had been peering and straining their hopeful ears in the darkness, began to pull gently at their end of the warp. In less than five minutes the two schooners came together with a slight shock and a creak of spars.

'Brown's crowd transferred themselves without losing an instant, taking with them their firearms and a large supply of ammunition. They were sixteen in all: two runaway blue-jackets, a lanky deserter from a Yankee man-of-war, a couple of simple, blond Scandinavians, a mulatto of sorts, one bland Chinaman who cooked — and the rest of the nondescript spawn of the South Seas. None of them cared; Brown bent them to his will, and Brown, indifferent to gallows, was running away from the spectre of a Spanish prison. He didn't give them the time to trans-ship enough provisions; the weather was calm, the air was charged with dew, and when they cast off the ropes and set sail to a faint off-shore draught there was no

flutter in the damp canvas; their old schooner seemed to detach itself gently from the stolen craft and slip away silently, together with the black mass of the coast, into the night.

‘They got clear away. Brown related to me in detail their passage down the Straits of Macassar. It is a harrowing and desperate story. They were short of food and water; they boarded several native craft and got a little from each. With a stolen ship Brown did not dare to put into any port, of course. He had no money to buy anything, no papers to show, and no lie plausible enough to get him out again. An Arab barque, under the Dutch flag, surprised one night at anchor off Poulo Laut, yielded a little dirty rice, a bunch of bananas, and a cask of water; three days of squally, misty weather from the north-east shot the schooner across the Java Sea. The yellow muddy waves drenched that collection of hungry ruffians. They sighted mail-boats moving on their appointed routes; passed well-found home ships with rusty iron sides anchored in the shallow sea waiting for a change of weather or the turn of the tide; an English gunboat, white and trim, with two slim masts, crossed their bows one day in the distance; and on another occasion a Dutch corvette, black and heavily sparred, loomed up on their quarter, steaming dead slow in the mist. They slipped through unseen or disregarded, a wan, sallow-faced band of utter outcasts, enraged with hunger and hunted by fear. Brown’s idea was to make for Madagascar, where he expected, on grounds not altogether illusory, to sell the schooner in Tamatave, and no questions asked, or perhaps obtain some more or less forged papers for her. Yet before he could face the long passage across the Indian Ocean food was wanted — water too.

‘Perhaps he had heard of Patusan — or perhaps he just only happened to see the name written in small letters on the chart — probably that of a largish village up a river in a native state, perfectly defenceless, far from the beaten tracks of the sea and from the ends of submarine cables. He had done that kind of thing before — in the way of business; and this now was an absolute necessity, a question of life and death — or rather of liberty. Of liberty! He was sure to get provisions — bullocks — rice — sweet-potatoes. The sorry gang licked their chops. A cargo of produce for the schooner perhaps could be extorted — and, who knows? — some real ringing coined money! Some of these chiefs and village headmen can be made to part freely. He told me he would have roasted their toes rather than



be baulked. I believe him. His men believed him too. They didn't cheer aloud, being a dumb pack, but made ready wolfishly.

'Luck served him as to weather. A few days of calm would have brought unmentionable horrors on board that schooner, but with the help of land and sea breezes, in less than a week after clearing the Sunda Straits, he anchored off the Batu Kring mouth within a pistol-shot of the fishing village.

'Fourteen of them packed into the schooner's long-boat (which was big, having been used for cargo-work) and started up the river, while two remained in charge of the schooner with food enough to keep starvation off for ten days. The tide and wind helped, and early one afternoon the big white boat under a ragged sail shouldered its way before the sea breeze into Patusan Reach, manned by fourteen assorted scarecrows glaring hungrily ahead, and fingering the breech-blocks of cheap rifles. Brown calculated upon the terrifying surprise of his appearance. They sailed in with the last of the flood; the Rajah's stockade gave no sign; the first houses on both sides of the stream seemed deserted. A few canoes were seen up the reach in full flight. Brown was astonished at the size of the place. A profound silence reigned. The wind dropped between the houses; two oars were got out and the boat held on up-stream, the idea being to effect a lodgment in the centre of the town before the inhabitants could think of resistance.

'It seems, however, that the headman of the fishing village at Batu Kring had managed to send off a timely warning. When the long-boat came abreast of the mosque (which Doramin had built: a structure with gables and roof finials of carved coral) the open space before it was full of people. A shout went up, and was followed by a clash of gongs all up the river. From a point above two little brass 6-pounders were discharged, and the round-shot came skipping down the empty reach, spurting glittering jets of water in the sunshine. In front of the mosque a shouting lot of men began firing in volleys that whipped athwart the current of the river; an irregular, rolling fusillade was opened on the boat from both banks, and Brown's men replied with a wild, rapid fire. The oars had been got in.

'The turn of the tide at high water comes on very quickly in that river, and the boat in mid-stream, nearly hidden in smoke, began to drift back stern foremost. Along both shores the smoke thickened also, lying below the roofs in a level streak as you may see a long cloud cutting the slope of a mountain. A tumult of war-cries, the vibrating clang of gongs, the deep snoring of drums, yells of rage, crashes of volley-firing, made an awful din,

in which Brown sat confounded but steady at the tiller, working himself into a fury of hate and rage against those people who dared to defend themselves. Two of his men had been wounded, and he saw his retreat cut off below the town by some boats that had put off from Tunku Allang's stockade. There were six of them, full of men. While he was thus beset he perceived the entrance of the narrow creek (the same which Jim had jumped at low water). It was then brim full. Steering the long-boat in, they landed, and, to make a long story short, they established themselves on a little knoll about 900 yards from the stockade, which, in fact, they commanded from that position. The slopes of the knoll were bare, but there were a few trees on the summit. They went to work cutting these down for a breastwork, and were fairly intrenched before dark; meantime the Rajah's boats remained in the river with curious neutrality. When the sun set the glare of many brushwood blazes lighted on the river-front, and between the double line of houses on the land side threw into black relief the roofs, the groups of slender palms, the heavy clumps of fruit trees. Brown ordered the grass round his position to be fired; a low ring of thin flames under the slow ascending smoke wriggled rapidly down the slopes of the knoll; here and there a dry bush caught with a tall, vicious roar. The conflagration made a clear zone of fire for the rifles of the small party, and expired smouldering on the edge of the forests and along the muddy bank of the creek. A strip of jungle luxuriating in a damp hollow between the knoll and the Rajah's stockade stopped it on that side with a great crackling and detonations of bursting bamboo stems. The sky was sombre, velvety, and swarming with stars. The blackened ground smoked quietly with low creeping wisps, till a little breeze came on and blew everything away. Brown expected an attack to be delivered as soon as the tide had flowed enough again to enable the war-boats which had cut off his retreat to enter the creek. At any rate he was sure there would be an attempt to carry off his long-boat, which lay below the hill, a dark high lump on the feeble sheen of a wet mud-flat. But no move of any sort was made by the boats in the river. Over the stockade and the Rajah's buildings Brown saw their lights on the water. They seemed to be anchored across the stream. Other lights afloat were moving in the reach, crossing and recrossing from side to side. There were also lights twinkling motionless upon the long walls of houses up the reach, as far as the bend, and more still beyond, others isolated inland. The loom of the big fires disclosed buildings, roofs, black piles as far as he could see. It was an

immense place. The fourteen desperate invaders lying flat behind the felled trees raised their chins to look over at the stir of that town that seemed to extend up-river for miles and swarm with thousands of angry men. They did not speak to each other. Now and then they would hear a loud yell, or a single shot rang out, fired very far somewhere. But round their position everything was still, dark, silent. They seemed to be forgotten, as if the excitement keeping awake all the population had nothing to do with them, as if they had been dead already.'

## CHAPTER 39

‘All the events of that night have a great importance, since they brought about a situation which remained unchanged till Jim’s return. Jim had been away in the interior for more than a week, and it was Dain Waris who had directed the first repulse. That brave and intelligent youth (“who knew how to fight after the manner of white men”) wished to settle the business off-hand, but his people were too much for him. He had not Jim’s racial prestige and the reputation of invincible, supernatural power. He was not the visible, tangible incarnation of unfailing truth and of unfailing victory. Beloved, trusted, and admired as he was, he was still one of them, while Jim was one of us. Moreover, the white man, a tower of strength in himself, was invulnerable, while Dain Waris could be killed. Those unexpressed thoughts guided the opinions of the chief men of the town, who elected to assemble in Jim’s fort for deliberation upon the emergency, as if expecting to find wisdom and courage in the dwelling of the absent white man. The shooting of Brown’s ruffians was so far good, or lucky, that there had been half-a-dozen casualties amongst the defenders. The wounded were lying on the verandah tended by their women-folk. The women and children from the lower part of the town had been sent into the fort at the first alarm. There Jewel was in command, very efficient and high-spirited, obeyed by Jim’s “own people,” who, quitting in a body their little settlement under the stockade, had gone in to form the garrison. The refugees crowded round her; and through the whole affair, to the very disastrous last, she showed an extraordinary martial ardour. It was to her that Dain Waris had gone at once at the first intelligence of danger, for you must know that Jim was the only one in Patusan who possessed a store of gunpowder. Stein, with whom he had kept up intimate relations by letters, had obtained from the Dutch Government a special authorisation to export five hundred kegs of it to Patusan. The powder-magazine was a small hut of rough logs covered entirely with earth, and in Jim’s absence the girl had the key. In the council, held at eleven o’clock in the evening in Jim’s dining-room, she backed up Waris’s advice for immediate and vigorous action. I am told that she stood up by the side of Jim’s empty chair at the head of the long table and made a warlike impassioned speech, which for the moment extorted murmurs of approbation from the assembled headmen. Old Doramin, who had not showed himself outside his own gate for more than a year, had been brought

across with great difficulty. He was, of course, the chief man there. The temper of the council was very unforgiving, and the old man's word would have been decisive; but it is my opinion that, well aware of his son's fiery courage, he dared not pronounce the word. More dilatory counsels prevailed. A certain Haji Saman pointed out at great length that "these tyrannical and ferocious men had delivered themselves to a certain death in any case. They would stand fast on their hill and starve, or they would try to regain their boat and be shot from ambushes across the creek, or they would break and fly into the forest and perish singly there." He argued that by the use of proper stratagems these evil-minded strangers could be destroyed without the risk of a battle, and his words had a great weight, especially with the Patusan men proper. What unsettled the minds of the townsfolk was the failure of the Rajah's boats to act at the decisive moment. It was the diplomatic Kassim who represented the Rajah at the council. He spoke very little, listened smilingly, very friendly and impenetrable. During the sitting messengers kept arriving every few minutes almost, with reports of the invaders' proceedings. Wild and exaggerated rumours were flying: there was a large ship at the mouth of the river with big guns and many more men — some white, others with black skins and of bloodthirsty appearance. They were coming with many more boats to exterminate every living thing. A sense of near, incomprehensible danger affected the common people. At one moment there was a panic in the courtyard amongst the women; shrieking; a rush; children crying — Haji Sunan went out to quiet them. Then a fort sentry fired at something moving on the river, and nearly killed a villager bringing in his women-folk in a canoe together with the best of his domestic utensils and a dozen fowls. This caused more confusion. Meantime the palaver inside Jim's house went on in the presence of the girl. Doramin sat fierce-faced, heavy, looking at the speakers in turn, and breathing slow like a bull. He didn't speak till the last, after Kassim had declared that the Rajah's boats would be called in because the men were required to defend his master's stockade. Dain Waris in his father's presence would offer no opinion, though the girl entreated him in Jim's name to speak out. She offered him Jim's own men in her anxiety to have these intruders driven out at once. He only shook his head, after a glance or two at Doramin. Finally, when the council broke up it had been decided that the houses nearest the creek should be strongly occupied to obtain the command of the enemy's boat. The boat itself was not to be interfered with

openly, so that the robbers on the hill should be tempted to embark, when a well-directed fire would kill most of them, no doubt. To cut off the escape of those who might survive, and to prevent more of them coming up, Dain Waris was ordered by Doramin to take an armed party of Bugis down the river to a certain spot ten miles below Patusan, and there form a camp on the shore and blockade the stream with the canoes. I don't believe for a moment that Doramin feared the arrival of fresh forces. My opinion is that his conduct was guided solely by his wish to keep his son out of harm's way. To prevent a rush being made into the town the construction of a stockade was to be commenced at daylight at the end of the street on the left bank. The old nakhoda declared his intention to command there himself. A distribution of powder, bullets, and percussion-caps was made immediately under the girl's supervision. Several messengers were to be dispatched in different directions after Jim, whose exact whereabouts were unknown. These men started at dawn, but before that time Kassim had managed to open communications with the besieged Brown.

'That accomplished diplomatist and confidant of the Rajah, on leaving the fort to go back to his master, took into his boat Cornelius, whom he found slinking mutely amongst the people in the courtyard. Kassim had a little plan of his own and wanted him for an interpreter. Thus it came about that towards morning Brown, reflecting upon the desperate nature of his position, heard from the marshy overgrown hollow an amicable, quavering, strained voice crying — in English — for permission to come up, under a promise of personal safety and on a very important errand. He was overjoyed. If he was spoken to he was no longer a hunted wild beast. These friendly sounds took off at once the awful stress of vigilant watchfulness as of so many blind men not knowing whence the deathblow might come. He pretended a great reluctance. The voice declared itself "a white man — a poor, ruined, old man who had been living here for years." A mist, wet and chilly, lay on the slopes of the hill, and after some more shouting from one to the other, Brown called out, "Come on, then, but alone, mind!" As a matter of fact — he told me, writhing with rage at the recollection of his helplessness — it made no difference. They couldn't see more than a few yards before them, and no treachery could make their position worse. By-and-by Cornelius, in his week-day attire of a ragged dirty shirt and pants, barefooted, with a broken-rimmed pith hat on his head, was made out vaguely, sidling up to the defences, hesitating, stopping to listen in a

peering posture. "Come along! You are safe," yelled Brown, while his men stared. All their hopes of life became suddenly centered in that dilapidated, mean newcomer, who in profound silence clambered clumsily over a felled tree-trunk, and shivering, with his sour, mistrustful face, looked about at the knot of bearded, anxious, sleepless desperadoes.

'Half an hour's confidential talk with Cornelius opened Brown's eyes as to the home affairs of Patusan. He was on the alert at once. There were possibilities, immense possibilities; but before he would talk over Cornelius's proposals he demanded that some food should be sent up as a guarantee of good faith. Cornelius went off, creeping sluggishly down the hill on the side of the Rajah's palace, and after some delay a few of Tunku Allang's men came up, bringing a scanty supply of rice, chillies, and dried fish. This was immeasurably better than nothing. Later on Cornelius returned accompanying Kassim, who stepped out with an air of perfect good-humoured trustfulness, in sandals, and muffled up from neck to ankles in dark-blue sheeting. He shook hands with Brown discreetly, and the three drew aside for a conference. Brown's men, recovering their confidence, were slapping each other on the back, and cast knowing glances at their captain while they busied themselves with preparations for cooking.

'Kassim disliked Doramin and his Bugis very much, but he hated the new order of things still more. It had occurred to him that these whites, together with the Rajah's followers, could attack and defeat the Bugis before Jim's return. Then, he reasoned, general defection of the townsfolk was sure to follow, and the reign of the white man who protected poor people would be over. Afterwards the new allies could be dealt with. They would have no friends. The fellow was perfectly able to perceive the difference of character, and had seen enough of white men to know that these newcomers were outcasts, men without country. Brown preserved a stern and inscrutable demeanour. When he first heard Cornelius's voice demanding admittance, it brought merely the hope of a loophole for escape. In less than an hour other thoughts were seething in his head. Urged by an extreme necessity, he had come there to steal food, a few tons of rubber or gum may be, perhaps a handful of dollars, and had found himself enmeshed by deadly dangers. Now in consequence of these overtures from Kassim he began to think of stealing the whole country. Some confounded fellow had apparently accomplished something of the kind — single-handed at that. Couldn't have done it very well though. Perhaps they could work together

— squeeze everything dry and then go out quietly. In the course of his negotiations with Kassim he became aware that he was supposed to have a big ship with plenty of men outside. Kassim begged him earnestly to have this big ship with his many guns and men brought up the river without delay for the Rajah's service. Brown professed himself willing, and on this basis the negotiation was carried on with mutual distrust. Three times in the course of the morning the courteous and active Kassim went down to consult the Rajah and came up busily with his long stride. Brown, while bargaining, had a sort of grim enjoyment in thinking of his wretched schooner, with nothing but a heap of dirt in her hold, that stood for an armed ship, and a Chinaman and a lame ex-beachcomber of Levuka on board, who represented all his many men. In the afternoon he obtained further doles of food, a promise of some money, and a supply of mats for his men to make shelters for themselves. They lay down and snored, protected from the burning sunshine; but Brown, sitting fully exposed on one of the felled trees, feasted his eyes upon the view of the town and the river. There was much loot there. Cornelius, who had made himself at home in the camp, talked at his elbow, pointing out the localities, imparting advice, giving his own version of Jim's character, and commenting in his own fashion upon the events of the last three years. Brown, who, apparently indifferent and gazing away, listened with attention to every word, could not make out clearly what sort of man this Jim could be. "What's his name? Jim! Jim! That's not enough for a man's name." "They call him," said Cornelius scornfully, "Tuan Jim here. As you may say Lord Jim." "What is he? Where does he come from?" inquired Brown. "What sort of man is he? Is he an Englishman?" "Yes, yes, he's an Englishman. I am an Englishman too. From Malacca. He is a fool. All you have to do is to kill him and then you are king here. Everything belongs to him," explained Cornelius. "It strikes me he may be made to share with somebody before very long," commented Brown half aloud. "No, no. The proper way is to kill him the first chance you get, and then you can do what you like," Cornelius would insist earnestly. "I have lived for many years here, and I am giving you a friend's advice."

'In such converse and in gloating over the view of Patusan, which he had determined in his mind should become his prey, Brown whiled away most of the afternoon, his men, meantime, resting. On that day Dain Waris's fleet of canoes stole one by one under the shore farthest from the creek, and went



down to close the river against his retreat. Of this Brown was not aware, and Kassim, who came up the knoll an hour before sunset, took good care not to enlighten him. He wanted the white man's ship to come up the river, and this news, he feared, would be discouraging. He was very pressing with Brown to send the "order," offering at the same time a trusty messenger, who for greater secrecy (as he explained) would make his way by land to the mouth of the river and deliver the "order" on board. After some reflection Brown judged it expedient to tear a page out of his pocket-book, on which he simply wrote, "We are getting on. Big job. Detain the man." The stolid youth selected by Kassim for that service performed it faithfully, and was rewarded by being suddenly tipped, head first, into the schooner's empty hold by the ex-beachcomber and the Chinaman, who thereupon hastened to put on the hatches. What became of him afterwards Brown did not say.'

## CHAPTER 40

‘Brown’s object was to gain time by fooling with Kassim’s diplomacy. For doing a real stroke of business he could not help thinking the white man was the person to work with. He could not imagine such a chap (who must be confoundedly clever after all to get hold of the natives like that) refusing a help that would do away with the necessity for slow, cautious, risky cheating, that imposed itself as the only possible line of conduct for a single-handed man. He, Brown, would offer him the power. No man could hesitate. Everything was in coming to a clear understanding. Of course they would share. The idea of there being a fort — all ready to his hand — a real fort, with artillery (he knew this from Cornelius), excited him. Let him only once get in and . . . He would impose modest conditions. Not too low, though. The man was no fool, it seemed. They would work like brothers till . . . till the time came for a quarrel and a shot that would settle all accounts. With grim impatience of plunder he wished himself to be talking with the man now. The land already seemed to be his to tear to pieces, squeeze, and throw away. Meantime Kassim had to be fooled for the sake of food first — and for a second string. But the principal thing was to get something to eat from day to day. Besides, he was not averse to begin fighting on that Rajah’s account, and teach a lesson to those people who had received him with shots. The lust of battle was upon him.

‘I am sorry that I can’t give you this part of the story, which of course I have mainly from Brown, in Brown’s own words. There was in the broken, violent speech of that man, unveiling before me his thoughts with the very hand of Death upon his throat, an undisguised ruthlessness of purpose, a strange vengeful attitude towards his own past, and a blind belief in the righteousness of his will against all mankind, something of that feeling which could induce the leader of a horde of wandering cut-throats to call himself proudly the Scourge of God. No doubt the natural senseless ferocity which is the basis of such a character was exasperated by failure, ill-luck, and the recent privations, as well as by the desperate position in which he found himself; but what was most remarkable of all was this, that while he planned treacherous alliances, had already settled in his own mind the fate of the white man, and intrigued in an overbearing, offhand manner with Kassim, one could perceive that what he had really desired, almost in spite of himself, was to play havoc with that jungle town which had defied him,

to see it strewn over with corpses and enveloped in flames. Listening to his pitiless, panting voice, I could imagine how he must have looked at it from the hillock, peopling it with images of murder and rapine. The part nearest to the creek wore an abandoned aspect, though as a matter of fact every house concealed a few armed men on the alert. Suddenly beyond the stretch of waste ground, interspersed with small patches of low dense bush, excavations, heaps of rubbish, with trodden paths between, a man, solitary and looking very small, strolled out into the deserted opening of the street between the shut-up, dark, lifeless buildings at the end. Perhaps one of the inhabitants, who had fled to the other bank of the river, coming back for some object of domestic use. Evidently he supposed himself quite safe at that distance from the hill on the other side of the creek. A light stockade, set up hastily, was just round the turn of the street, full of his friends. He moved leisurely. Brown saw him, and instantly called to his side the Yankee deserter, who acted as a sort of second in command. This lanky, loose-jointed fellow came forward, wooden-faced, trailing his rifle lazily. When he understood what was wanted from him a homicidal and conceited smile uncovered his teeth, making two deep folds down his sallow, leathery cheeks. He prided himself on being a dead shot. He dropped on one knee, and taking aim from a steady rest through the unlopped branches of a felled tree, fired, and at once stood up to look. The man, far away, turned his head to the report, made another step forward, seemed to hesitate, and abruptly got down on his hands and knees. In the silence that fell upon the sharp crack of the rifle, the dead shot, keeping his eyes fixed upon the quarry, guessed that "this there coon's health would never be a source of anxiety to his friends any more." The man's limbs were seen to move rapidly under his body in an endeavour to run on all-fours. In that empty space arose a multitudinous shout of dismay and surprise. The man sank flat, face down, and moved no more. "That showed them what we could do," said Brown to me. "Struck the fear of sudden death into them. That was what we wanted. They were two hundred to one, and this gave them something to think over for the night. Not one of them had an idea of such a long shot before. That beggar belonging to the Rajah scooted down-hill with his eyes hanging out of his head."

'As he was telling me this he tried with a shaking hand to wipe the thin foam on his blue lips. "Two hundred to one. Two hundred to one . . . strike terror, . . . terror, terror, I tell you. . . ." His own eyes were starting out of

their sockets. He fell back, clawing the air with skinny fingers, sat up again, bowed and hairy, glared at me sideways like some man-beast of folk-lore, with open mouth in his miserable and awful agony before he got his speech back after that fit. There are sights one never forgets.

‘Furthermore, to draw the enemy’s fire and locate such parties as might have been hiding in the bushes along the creek, Brown ordered the Solomon Islander to go down to the boat and bring an oar, as you send a spaniel after a stick into the water. This failed, and the fellow came back without a single shot having been fired at him from anywhere. “There’s nobody,” opined some of the men. It is “onnatural,” remarked the Yankee. Kassim had gone, by that time, very much impressed, pleased too, and also uneasy. Pursuing his tortuous policy, he had dispatched a message to Dain Waris warning him to look out for the white men’s ship, which, he had had information, was about to come up the river. He minimised its strength and exhorted him to oppose its passage. This double-dealing answered his purpose, which was to keep the Bugis forces divided and to weaken them by fighting. On the other hand, he had in the course of that day sent word to the assembled Bugis chiefs in town, assuring them that he was trying to induce the invaders to retire; his messages to the fort asked earnestly for powder for the Rajah’s men. It was a long time since Tunku Allang had had ammunition for the score or so of old muskets rusting in their arm-racks in the audience-hall. The open intercourse between the hill and the palace unsettled all the minds. It was already time for men to take sides, it began to be said. There would soon be much bloodshed, and thereafter great trouble for many people. The social fabric of orderly, peaceful life, when every man was sure of to-morrow, the edifice raised by Jim’s hands, seemed on that evening ready to collapse into a ruin reeking with blood. The poorer folk were already taking to the bush or flying up the river. A good many of the upper class judged it necessary to go and pay their court to the Rajah. The Rajah’s youths jostled them rudely. Old Tunku Allang, almost out of his mind with fear and indecision, either kept a sullen silence or abused them violently for daring to come with empty hands: they departed very much frightened; only old Doramin kept his countrymen together and pursued his tactics inflexibly. Enthroned in a big chair behind the improvised stockade, he issued his orders in a deep veiled rumble, unmoved, like a deaf man, in the flying rumours.

‘Dusk fell, hiding first the body of the dead man, which had been left lying with arms outstretched as if nailed to the ground, and then the revolving sphere of the night rolled smoothly over Patusan and came to a rest, showering the glitter of countless worlds upon the earth. Again, in the exposed part of the town big fires blazed along the only street, revealing from distance to distance upon their glares the falling straight lines of roofs, the fragments of wattled walls jumbled in confusion, here and there a whole hut elevated in the glow upon the vertical black stripes of a group of high piles and all this line of dwellings, revealed in patches by the swaying flames, seemed to flicker tortuously away up-river into the gloom at the heart of the land. A great silence, in which the looms of successive fires played without noise, extended into the darkness at the foot of the hill; but the other bank of the river, all dark save for a solitary bonfire at the river-front before the fort, sent out into the air an increasing tremor that might have been the stamping of a multitude of feet, the hum of many voices, or the fall of an immensely distant waterfall. It was then, Brown confessed to me, while, turning his back on his men, he sat looking at it all, that notwithstanding his disdain, his ruthless faith in himself, a feeling came over him that at last he had run his head against a stone wall. Had his boat been afloat at the time, he believed he would have tried to steal away, taking his chances of a long chase down the river and of starvation at sea. It is very doubtful whether he would have succeeded in getting away. However, he didn’t try this. For another moment he had a passing thought of trying to rush the town, but he perceived very well that in the end he would find himself in the lighted street, where they would be shot down like dogs from the houses. They were two hundred to one — he thought, while his men, huddling round two heaps of smouldering embers, munched the last of the bananas and roasted the few yams they owed to Kassim’s diplomacy. Cornelius sat amongst them dozing sulkily.

‘Then one of the whites remembered that some tobacco had been left in the boat, and, encouraged by the impunity of the Solomon Islander, said he would go to fetch it. At this all the others shook off their despondency. Brown applied to, said, “Go, and be d — d to you,” scornfully. He didn’t think there was any danger in going to the creek in the dark. The man threw a leg over the tree-trunk and disappeared. A moment later he was heard clambering into the boat and then clambering out. “I’ve got it,” he cried. A flash and a report at the very foot of the hill followed. “I am hit,” yelled the

man. "Look out, look out — I am hit," and instantly all the rifles went off. The hill squirted fire and noise into the night like a little volcano, and when Brown and the Yankee with curses and cuffs stopped the panic-stricken firing, a profound, weary groan floated up from the creek, succeeded by a plaint whose heartrending sadness was like some poison turning the blood cold in the veins. Then a strong voice pronounced several distinct incomprehensible words somewhere beyond the creek. "Let no one fire," shouted Brown. "What does it mean?" . . . "Do you hear on the hill? Do you hear? Do you hear?" repeated the voice three times. Cornelius translated, and then prompted the answer. "Speak," cried Brown, "we hear." Then the voice, declaiming in the sonorous inflated tone of a herald, and shifting continually on the edge of the vague waste-land, proclaimed that between the men of the Bugis nation living in Patusan and the white men on the hill and those with them, there would be no faith, no compassion, no speech, no peace. A bush rustled; a haphazard volley rang out. "Dam' foolishness," muttered the Yankee, vexedly grounding the butt. Cornelius translated. The wounded man below the hill, after crying out twice, "Take me up! take me up!" went on complaining in moans. While he had kept on the blackened earth of the slope, and afterwards crouching in the boat, he had been safe enough. It seems that in his joy at finding the tobacco he forgot himself and jumped out on her off-side, as it were. The white boat, lying high and dry, showed him up; the creek was no more than seven yards wide in that place, and there happened to be a man crouching in the bush on the other bank.

'He was a Bugis of Tondano only lately come to Patusan, and a relation of the man shot in the afternoon. That famous long shot had indeed appalled the beholders. The man in utter security had been struck down, in full view of his friends, dropping with a joke on his lips, and they seemed to see in the act an atrocity which had stirred a bitter rage. That relation of his, Si-Lapa by name, was then with Doramin in the stockade only a few feet away. You who know these chaps must admit that the fellow showed an unusual pluck by volunteering to carry the message, alone, in the dark. Creeping across the open ground, he had deviated to the left and found himself opposite the boat. He was startled when Brown's man shouted. He came to a sitting position with his gun to his shoulder, and when the other jumped out, exposing himself, he pulled the trigger and lodged three jagged slugs point-blank into the poor wretch's stomach. Then, lying flat on his face, he gave himself up for dead, while a thin hail of lead chopped and swished the

bushes close on his right hand; afterwards he delivered his speech shouting, bent double, dodging all the time in cover. With the last word he leaped sideways, lay close for a while, and afterwards got back to the houses unharmed, having achieved on that night such a renown as his children will not willingly allow to die.

‘And on the hill the forlorn band let the two little heaps of embers go out under their bowed heads. They sat dejected on the ground with compressed lips and downcast eyes, listening to their comrade below. He was a strong man and died hard, with moans now loud, now sinking to a strange confidential note of pain. Sometimes he shrieked, and again, after a period of silence, he could be heard muttering deliriously a long and unintelligible complaint. Never for a moment did he cease.

“‘What’s the good?” Brown had said unmoved once, seeing the Yankee, who had been swearing under his breath, prepare to go down. “That’s so,” assented the deserter, reluctantly desisting. “There’s no encouragement for wounded men here. Only his noise is calculated to make all the others think too much of the hereafter, cap’n.” “Water!” cried the wounded man in an extraordinarily clear vigorous voice, and then went off moaning feebly. “Ay, water. Water will do it,” muttered the other to himself, resignedly. “Plenty by-and-by. The tide is flowing.”

‘At last the tide flowed, silencing the plaint and the cries of pain, and the dawn was near when Brown, sitting with his chin in the palm of his hand before Patusan, as one might stare at the unscalable side of a mountain, heard the brief ringing bark of a brass 6-pounder far away in town somewhere. “What’s this?” he asked of Cornelius, who hung about him. Cornelius listened. A muffled roaring shout rolled down-river over the town; a big drum began to throb, and others responded, pulsating and droning. Tiny scattered lights began to twinkle in the dark half of the town, while the part lighted by the loom of fires hummed with a deep and prolonged murmur. “He has come,” said Cornelius. “What? Already? Are you sure?” Brown asked. “Yes! yes! Sure. Listen to the noise.” “What are they making that row about?” pursued Brown. “For joy,” snorted Cornelius; “he is a very great man, but all the same, he knows no more than a child, and so they make a great noise to please him, because they know no better.” “Look here,” said Brown, “how is one to get at him?” “He shall come to talk to you,” Cornelius declared. “What do you mean? Come down here strolling as it were?” Cornelius nodded vigorously in the dark. “Yes. He

will come straight here and talk to you. He is just like a fool. You shall see what a fool he is." Brown was incredulous. "You shall see; you shall see," repeated Cornelius. "He is not afraid — not afraid of anything. He will come and order you to leave his people alone. Everybody must leave his people alone. He is like a little child. He will come to you straight." Alas! he knew Jim well — that "mean little skunk," as Brown called him to me. "Yes, certainly," he pursued with ardour, "and then, captain, you tell that tall man with a gun to shoot him. Just you kill him, and you will frighten everybody so much that you can do anything you like with them afterwards — get what you like — go away when you like. Ha! ha! ha! Fine . . ." He almost danced with impatience and eagerness; and Brown, looking over his shoulder at him, could see, shown up by the pitiless dawn, his men drenched with dew, sitting amongst the cold ashes and the litter of the camp, haggard, cowed, and in rags.'



## CHAPTER 41

‘To the very last moment, till the full day came upon them with a spring, the fires on the west bank blazed bright and clear; and then Brown saw in a knot of coloured figures motionless between the advanced houses a man in European clothes, in a helmet, all white. “That’s him; look! look!” Cornelius said excitedly. All Brown’s men had sprung up and crowded at his back with lustreless eyes. The group of vivid colours and dark faces with the white figure in their midst were observing the knoll. Brown could see naked arms being raised to shade the eyes and other brown arms pointing. What should he do? He looked around, and the forests that faced him on all sides walled the cock-pit of an unequal contest. He looked once more at his men. A contempt, a weariness, the desire of life, the wish to try for one more chance — for some other grave — struggled in his breast. From the outline the figure presented it seemed to him that the white man there, backed up by all the power of the land, was examining his position through binoculars. Brown jumped up on the log, throwing his arms up, the palms outwards. The coloured group closed round the white man, and fell back twice before he got clear of them, walking slowly alone. Brown remained standing on the log till Jim, appearing and disappearing between the patches of thorny scrub, had nearly reached the creek; then Brown jumped off and went down to meet him on his side.

‘They met, I should think, not very far from the place, perhaps on the very spot, where Jim took the second desperate leap of his life — the leap that landed him into the life of Patusan, into the trust, the love, the confidence of the people. They faced each other across the creek, and with steady eyes tried to understand each other before they opened their lips. Their antagonism must have been expressed in their glances; I know that Brown hated Jim at first sight. Whatever hopes he might have had vanished at once. This was not the man he had expected to see. He hated him for this — and in a checked flannel shirt with sleeves cut off at the elbows, grey bearded, with a sunken, sun-blackened face — he cursed in his heart the other’s youth and assurance, his clear eyes and his untroubled bearing. That fellow had got in a long way before him! He did not look like a man who would be willing to give anything for assistance. He had all the advantages on his side — possession, security, power; he was on the side of an overwhelming force! He was not hungry and desperate, and he did not seem

in the least afraid. And there was something in the very neatness of Jim's clothes, from the white helmet to the canvas leggings and the pipeclayed shoes, which in Brown's sombre irritated eyes seemed to belong to things he had in the very shaping of his life condemned and flouted.

"Who are you?" asked Jim at last, speaking in his usual voice. "My name's Brown," answered the other loudly; "Captain Brown. What's yours?" and Jim after a little pause went on quietly, as if he had not heard: "What made you come here?" "You want to know," said Brown bitterly. "It's easy to tell. Hunger. And what made you?"

"The fellow started at this," said Brown, relating to me the opening of this strange conversation between those two men, separated only by the muddy bed of a creek, but standing on the opposite poles of that conception of life which includes all mankind — "The fellow started at this and got very red in the face. Too big to be questioned, I suppose. I told him that if he looked upon me as a dead man with whom you may take liberties, he himself was not a whit better off really. I had a fellow up there who had a bead drawn on him all the time, and only waited for a sign from me. There was nothing to be shocked at in this. He had come down of his own free will. 'Let us agree,' said I, 'that we are both dead men, and let us talk on that basis, as equals. We are all equal before death,' I said. I admitted I was there like a rat in a trap, but we had been driven to it, and even a trapped rat can give a bite. He caught me up in a moment. 'Not if you don't go near the trap till the rat is dead.' I told him that sort of game was good enough for these native friends of his, but I would have thought him too white to serve even a rat so. Yes, I had wanted to talk with him. Not to beg for my life, though. My fellows were — well — what they were — men like himself, anyhow. All we wanted from him was to come on in the devil's name and have it out. 'God d — n it,' said I, while he stood there as still as a wooden post, 'you don't want to come out here every day with your glasses to count how many of us are left on our feet. Come. Either bring your infernal crowd along or let us go out and starve in the open sea, by God! You have been white once, for all your tall talk of this being your own people and you being one with them. Are you? And what the devil do you get for it; what is it you've found here that is so d — d precious? Hey? You don't want us to come down here perhaps — do you? You are two hundred to one. You don't want us to come down into the open. Ah! I promise you we shall give you some sport before you've done. You talk about me making a cowardly set

upon unoffending people. What's that to me that they are unoffending, when I am starving for next to no offence? But I am not a coward. Don't you be one. Bring them along or, by all the fiends, we shall yet manage to send half your unoffending town to heaven with us in smoke!"

'He was terrible — relating this to me — this tortured skeleton of a man drawn up together with his face over his knees, upon a miserable bed in that wretched hovel, and lifting his head to look at me with malignant triumph.

"That's what I told him — I knew what to say," he began again, feebly at first, but working himself up with incredible speed into a fiery utterance of his scorn. "We aren't going into the forest to wander like a string of living skeletons dropping one after another for ants to go to work upon us before we are fairly dead. Oh no! . . . 'You don't deserve a better fate,' he said. 'And what do you deserve,' I shouted at him, 'you that I find skulking here with your mouth full of your responsibility, of innocent lives, of your infernal duty? What do you know more of me than I know of you? I came here for food. D'ye hear? — food to fill our bellies. And what did you come for? What did you ask for when you came here? We don't ask you for anything but to give us a fight or a clear road to go back whence we came. . . .' 'I would fight with you now,' says he, pulling at his little moustache. 'And I would let you shoot me, and welcome,' I said. 'This is as good a jumping-off place for me as another. I am sick of my infernal luck. But it would be too easy. There are my men in the same boat — and, by God, I am not the sort to jump out of trouble and leave them in a d — d lurch,' I said. He stood thinking for a while and then wanted to know what I had done ('out there' he says, tossing his head down-stream) to be hazed about so. 'Have we met to tell each other the story of our lives?' I asked him. 'Suppose you begin. No? Well, I am sure I don't want to hear. Keep it to yourself. I know it is no better than mine. I've lived — and so did you, though you talk as if you were one of those people that should have wings so as to go about without touching the dirty earth. Well — it is dirty. I haven't got any wings. I am here because I was afraid once in my life. Want to know what of? Of a prison. That scares me, and you may know it — if it's any good to you. I won't ask you what scared you into this infernal hole, where you seem to have found pretty pickings. That's your luck and this is mine — the privilege to beg for the favour of being shot quickly, or else kicked out to go free and starve in my own way.' . . ."

‘His debilitated body shook with an exultation so vehement, so assured, and so malicious that it seemed to have driven off the death waiting for him in that hut. The corpse of his mad self-love uprose from rags and destitution as from the dark horrors of a tomb. It is impossible to say how much he lied to Jim then, how much he lied to me now — and to himself always. Vanity plays lurid tricks with our memory, and the truth of every passion wants some pretence to make it live. Standing at the gate of the other world in the guise of a beggar, he had slapped this world’s face, he had spat on it, he had thrown upon it an immensity of scorn and revolt at the bottom of his misdeeds. He had overcome them all — men, women, savages, traders, ruffians, missionaries — and Jim — ”that beefy-faced beggar.” I did not begrudge him this triumph in articulo mortis, this almost posthumous illusion of having trampled all the earth under his feet. While he was boasting to me, in his sordid and repulsive agony, I couldn’t help thinking of the chuckling talk relating to the time of his greatest splendour when, during a year or more, Gentleman Brown’s ship was to be seen, for many days on end, hovering off an islet befringed with green upon azure, with the dark dot of the mission-house on a white beach; while Gentleman Brown, ashore, was casting his spells over a romantic girl for whom Melanesia had been too much, and giving hopes of a remarkable conversion to her husband. The poor man, some time or other, had been heard to express the intention of winning “Captain Brown to a better way of life.” . . . “Bag Gentleman Brown for Glory” — as a leery-eyed loafer expressed it once — ”just to let them see up above what a Western Pacific trading skipper looks like.” And this was the man, too, who had run off with a dying woman, and had shed tears over her body. “Carried on like a big baby,” his then mate was never tired of telling, “and where the fun came in may I be kicked to death by diseased Kanakas if I know. Why, gents! she was too far gone when he brought her aboard to know him; she just lay there on her back in his bunk staring at the beam with awful shining eyes — and then she died. Dam’ bad sort of fever, I guess. . . .” I remembered all these stories while, wiping his matted lump of a beard with a livid hand, he was telling me from his noisome couch how he got round, got in, got home, on that confounded, immaculate, don’t-you-touch-me sort of fellow. He admitted that he couldn’t be scared, but there was a way, “as broad as a turnpike, to get in and shake his twopenny soul around and inside out and upside down — by God!”“



## CHAPTER 42

‘I don’t think he could do more than perhaps look upon that straight path. He seemed to have been puzzled by what he saw, for he interrupted himself in his narrative more than once to exclaim, “He nearly slipped from me there. I could not make him out. Who was he?” And after glaring at me wildly he would go on, jubilating and sneering. To me the conversation of these two across the creek appears now as the deadliest kind of duel on which Fate looked on with her cold-eyed knowledge of the end. No, he didn’t turn Jim’s soul inside out, but I am much mistaken if the spirit so utterly out of his reach had not been made to taste to the full the bitterness of that contest. These were the emissaries with whom the world he had renounced was pursuing him in his retreat — white men from “out there” where he did not think himself good enough to live. This was all that came to him — a menace, a shock, a danger to his work. I suppose it is this sad, half-resentful, half-resigned feeling, piercing through the few words Jim said now and then, that puzzled Brown so much in the reading of his character. Some great men owe most of their greatness to the ability of detecting in those they destine for their tools the exact quality of strength that matters for their work; and Brown, as though he had been really great, had a satanic gift of finding out the best and the weakest spot in his victims. He admitted to me that Jim wasn’t of the sort that can be got over by truckling, and accordingly he took care to show himself as a man confronting without dismay ill-luck, censure, and disaster. The smuggling of a few guns was no great crime, he pointed out. As to coming to Patusan, who had the right to say he hadn’t come to beg? The infernal people here let loose at him from both banks without staying to ask questions. He made the point brazenly, for, in truth, Dain Waris’s energetic action had prevented the greatest calamities; because Brown told me distinctly that, perceiving the size of the place, he had resolved instantly in his mind that as soon as he had gained a footing he would set fire right and left, and begin by shooting down everything living in sight, in order to cow and terrify the population. The disproportion of forces was so great that this was the only way giving him the slightest chance of attaining his ends — he argued in a fit of coughing. But he didn’t tell Jim this. As to the hardships and starvation they had gone through, these had been very real; it was enough to look at his band. He made, at the sound of a shrill whistle, all his men appear standing

in a row on the logs in full view, so that Jim could see them. For the killing of the man, it had been done — well, it had — but was not this war, bloody war — in a corner? and the fellow had been killed cleanly, shot through the chest, not like that poor devil of his lying now in the creek. They had to listen to him dying for six hours, with his entrails torn with slugs. At any rate this was a life for a life. . . . And all this was said with the weariness, with the recklessness of a man spurred on and on by ill-luck till he cares not where he runs. When he asked Jim, with a sort of brusque despairing frankness, whether he himself — straight now — didn't understand that when "it came to saving one's life in the dark, one didn't care who else went — three, thirty, three hundred people" — it was as if a demon had been whispering advice in his ear. "I made him wince," boasted Brown to me. "He very soon left off coming the righteous over me. He just stood there with nothing to say, and looking as black as thunder — not at me — on the ground." He asked Jim whether he had nothing fishy in his life to remember that he was so damnedly hard upon a man trying to get out of a deadly hole by the first means that came to hand — and so on, and so on. And there ran through the rough talk a vein of subtle reference to their common blood, an assumption of common experience; a sickening suggestion of common guilt, of secret knowledge that was like a bond of their minds and of their hearts.

'At last Brown threw himself down full length and watched Jim out of the corners of his eyes. Jim on his side of the creek stood thinking and switching his leg. The houses in view were silent, as if a pestilence had swept them clean of every breath of life; but many invisible eyes were turned, from within, upon the two men with the creek between them, a stranded white boat, and the body of the third man half sunk in the mud. On the river canoes were moving again, for Patusan was recovering its belief in the stability of earthly institutions since the return of the white lord. The right bank, the platforms of the houses, the rafts moored along the shores, even the roofs of bathing-huts, were covered with people that, far away out of earshot and almost out of sight, were straining their eyes towards the knoll beyond the Rajah's stockade. Within the wide irregular ring of forests, broken in two places by the sheen of the river, there was a silence. "Will you promise to leave the coast?" Jim asked. Brown lifted and let fall his hand, giving everything up as it were — accepting the inevitable. "And surrender your arms?" Jim went on. Brown sat up and glared across.

“Surrender our arms! Not till you come to take them out of our stiff hands. You think I am gone crazy with funk? Oh no! That and the rags I stand in is all I have got in the world, besides a few more breechloaders on board; and I expect to sell the lot in Madagascar, if I ever get so far — begging my way from ship to ship.”

‘Jim said nothing to this. At last, throwing away the switch he held in his hand, he said, as if speaking to himself, “I don’t know whether I have the power.” . . . “You don’t know! And you wanted me just now to give up my arms! That’s good, too,” cried Brown; “Suppose they say one thing to you, and do the other thing to me.” He calmed down markedly. “I dare say you have the power, or what’s the meaning of all this talk?” he continued. “What did you come down here for? To pass the time of day?”

““Very well,” said Jim, lifting his head suddenly after a long silence. “You shall have a clear road or else a clear fight.” He turned on his heel and walked away.

‘Brown got up at once, but he did not go up the hill till he had seen Jim disappear between the first houses. He never set his eyes on him again. On his way back he met Cornelius slouching down with his head between his shoulders. He stopped before Brown. “Why didn’t you kill him?” he demanded in a sour, discontented voice. “Because I could do better than that,” Brown said with an amused smile. “Never! never!” protested Cornelius with energy. “Couldn’t. I have lived here for many years.” Brown looked up at him curiously. There were many sides to the life of that place in arms against him; things he would never find out. Cornelius slunk past dejectedly in the direction of the river. He was now leaving his new friends; he accepted the disappointing course of events with a sulky obstinacy which seemed to draw more together his little yellow old face; and as he went down he glanced askant here and there, never giving up his fixed idea.

‘Henceforth events move fast without a check, flowing from the very hearts of men like a stream from a dark source, and we see Jim amongst them, mostly through Tamb’ Itam’s eyes. The girl’s eyes had watched him too, but her life is too much entwined with his: there is her passion, her wonder, her anger, and, above all, her fear and her unforgiving love. Of the faithful servant, uncomprehending as the rest of them, it is the fidelity alone that comes into play; a fidelity and a belief in his lord so strong that even amazement is subdued to a sort of saddened acceptance of a mysterious



failure. He has eyes only for one figure, and through all the mazes of bewilderment he preserves his air of guardianship, of obedience, of care.

‘His master came back from his talk with the white men, walking slowly towards the stockade in the street. Everybody was rejoiced to see him return, for while he was away every man had been afraid not only of him being killed, but also of what would come after. Jim went into one of the houses, where old Doramin had retired, and remained alone for a long time with the head of the Bugis settlers. No doubt he discussed the course to follow with him then, but no man was present at the conversation. Only Tamb’ Itam, keeping as close to the door as he could, heard his master say, “Yes. I shall let all the people know that such is my wish; but I spoke to you, O Doramin, before all the others, and alone; for you know my heart as well as I know yours and its greatest desire. And you know well also that I have no thought but for the people’s good.” Then his master, lifting the sheeting in the doorway, went out, and he, Tamb’ Itam, had a glimpse of old Doramin within, sitting in the chair with his hands on his knees, and looking between his feet. Afterwards he followed his master to the fort, where all the principal Bugis and Patusan inhabitants had been summoned for a talk. Tamb’ Itam himself hoped there would be some fighting. “What was it but the taking of another hill?” he exclaimed regretfully. However, in the town many hoped that the rapacious strangers would be induced, by the sight of so many brave men making ready to fight, to go away. It would be a good thing if they went away. Since Jim’s arrival had been made known before daylight by the gun fired from the fort and the beating of the big drum there, the fear that had hung over Patusan had broken and subsided like a wave on a rock, leaving the seething foam of excitement, curiosity, and endless speculation. Half of the population had been ousted out of their homes for purposes of defence, and were living in the street on the left side of the river, crowding round the fort, and in momentary expectation of seeing their abandoned dwellings on the threatened bank burst into flames. The general anxiety was to see the matter settled quickly. Food, through Jewel’s care, had been served out to the refugees. Nobody knew what their white man would do. Some remarked that it was worse than in Sherif Ali’s war. Then many people did not care; now everybody had something to lose. The movements of canoes passing to and fro between the two parts of the town were watched with interest. A couple of Bugis war-boats lay anchored in the middle of the stream to protect the river, and a thread of smoke stood

at the bow of each; the men in them were cooking their midday rice when Jim, after his interviews with Brown and Doramin, crossed the river and entered by the water-gate of his fort. The people inside crowded round him, so that he could hardly make his way to the house. They had not seen him before, because on his arrival during the night he had only exchanged a few words with the girl, who had come down to the landing-stage for the purpose, and had then gone on at once to join the chiefs and the fighting men on the other bank. People shouted greetings after him. One old woman raised a laugh by pushing her way to the front madly and enjoining him in a scolding voice to see to it that her two sons, who were with Doramin, did not come to harm at the hands of the robbers. Several of the bystanders tried to pull her away, but she struggled and cried, "Let me go. What is this, O Muslims? This laughter is unseemly. Are they not cruel, bloodthirsty robbers bent on killing?" "Let her be," said Jim, and as a silence fell suddenly, he said slowly, "Everybody shall be safe." He entered the house before the great sigh, and the loud murmurs of satisfaction, had died out.

'There's no doubt his mind was made up that Brown should have his way clear back to the sea. His fate, revolted, was forcing his hand. He had for the first time to affirm his will in the face of outspoken opposition. "There was much talk, and at first my master was silent," Tamb' Itam said. "Darkness came, and then I lit the candles on the long table. The chiefs sat on each side, and the lady remained by my master's right hand."

'When he began to speak, the unaccustomed difficulty seemed only to fix his resolve more immovably. The white men were now waiting for his answer on the hill. Their chief had spoken to him in the language of his own people, making clear many things difficult to explain in any other speech. They were erring men whom suffering had made blind to right and wrong. It is true that lives had been lost already, but why lose more? He declared to his hearers, the assembled heads of the people, that their welfare was his welfare, their losses his losses, their mourning his mourning. He looked round at the grave listening faces and told them to remember that they had fought and worked side by side. They knew his courage . . . Here a murmur interrupted him . . . And that he had never deceived them. For many years they had dwelt together. He loved the land and the people living in it with a very great love. He was ready to answer with his life for any harm that should come to them if the white men with beards were allowed to retire. They were evil-doers, but their destiny had been evil, too. Had he ever

advised them ill? Had his words ever brought suffering to the people? he asked. He believed that it would be best to let these whites and their followers go with their lives. It would be a small gift. "I whom you have tried and found always true ask you to let them go." He turned to Doramin. The old nakhoda made no movement. "Then," said Jim, "call in Dain Waris, your son, my friend, for in this business I shall not lead.""

## CHAPTER 43

'Tamb' Itam behind his chair was thunderstruck. The declaration produced an immense sensation. "Let them go because this is best in my knowledge which has never deceived you," Jim insisted. There was a silence. In the darkness of the courtyard could be heard the subdued whispering, shuffling noise of many people. Doramin raised his heavy head and said that there was no more reading of hearts than touching the sky with the hand, but — he consented. The others gave their opinion in turn. "It is best," "Let them go," and so on. But most of them simply said that they "believed Tuan Jim."

'In this simple form of assent to his will lies the whole gist of the situation; their creed, his truth; and the testimony to that faithfulness which made him in his own eyes the equal of the impeccable men who never fall out of the ranks. Stein's words, "Romantic! — Romantic!" seem to ring over those distances that will never give him up now to a world indifferent to his failings and his virtues, and to that ardent and clinging affection that refuses him the dole of tears in the bewilderment of a great grief and of eternal separation. From the moment the sheer truthfulness of his last three years of life carries the day against the ignorance, the fear, and the anger of men, he appears no longer to me as I saw him last — a white speck catching all the dim light left upon a sombre coast and the darkened sea — but greater and more pitiful in the loneliness of his soul, that remains even for her who loved him best a cruel and insoluble mystery.

'It is evident that he did not mistrust Brown; there was no reason to doubt the story, whose truth seemed warranted by the rough frankness, by a sort of virile sincerity in accepting the morality and the consequences of his acts. But Jim did not know the almost inconceivable egotism of the man which made him, when resisted and foiled in his will, mad with the indignant and revengeful rage of a thwarted autocrat. But if Jim did not mistrust Brown, he was evidently anxious that some misunderstanding should not occur, ending perhaps in collision and bloodshed. It was for this reason that directly the Malay chiefs had gone he asked Jewel to get him something to eat, as he was going out of the fort to take command in the town. On her remonstrating against this on the score of his fatigue, he said that something might happen for which he would never forgive himself. "I am responsible for every life in the land," he said. He was moody at first; she served him

with her own hands, taking the plates and dishes (of the dinner-service presented him by Stein) from Tamb' Itam. He brightened up after a while; told her she would be again in command of the fort for another night. "There's no sleep for us, old girl," he said, "while our people are in danger." Later on he said jokingly that she was the best man of them all. "If you and Dain Waris had done what you wanted, not one of these poor devils would be alive to-day." "Are they very bad?" she asked, leaning over his chair. "Men act badly sometimes without being much worse than others," he said after some hesitation.

'Tamb' Itam followed his master to the landing-stage outside the fort. The night was clear but without a moon, and the middle of the river was dark, while the water under each bank reflected the light of many fires "as on a night of Ramadan," Tamb' Itam said. War-boats drifted silently in the dark lane or, anchored, floated motionless with a loud ripple. That night there was much paddling in a canoe and walking at his master's heels for Tamb' Itam: up and down the street they tramped, where the fires were burning, inland on the outskirts of the town where small parties of men kept guard in the fields. Tuan Jim gave his orders and was obeyed. Last of all they went to the Rajah's stockade, which a detachment of Jim's people manned on that night. The old Rajah had fled early in the morning with most of his women to a small house he had near a jungle village on a tributary stream. Kassim, left behind, had attended the council with his air of diligent activity to explain away the diplomacy of the day before. He was considerably cold-shouldered, but managed to preserve his smiling, quiet alertness, and professed himself highly delighted when Jim told him sternly that he proposed to occupy the stockade on that night with his own men. After the council broke up he was heard outside accosting this and that deputing chief, and speaking in a loud, gratified tone of the Rajah's property being protected in the Rajah's absence.

'About ten or so Jim's men marched in. The stockade commanded the mouth of the creek, and Jim meant to remain there till Brown had passed below. A small fire was lit on the flat, grassy point outside the wall of stakes, and Tamb' Itam placed a little folding-stool for his master. Jim told him to try and sleep. Tamb' Itam got a mat and lay down a little way off; but he could not sleep, though he knew he had to go on an important journey before the night was out. His master walked to and fro before the fire with bowed head and with his hands behind his back. His face was sad.

Whenever his master approached him Tamb' Itam pretended to sleep, not wishing his master to know he had been watched. At last his master stood still, looking down on him as he lay, and said softly, "It is time."

'Tamb' Itam arose directly and made his preparations. His mission was to go down the river, preceding Brown's boat by an hour or more, to tell Dain Waris finally and formally that the whites were to be allowed to pass out unmolested. Jim would not trust anybody else with that service. Before starting, Tamb' Itam, more as a matter of form (since his position about Jim made him perfectly known), asked for a token. "Because, Tuan," he said, "the message is important, and these are thy very words I carry." His master first put his hand into one pocket, then into another, and finally took off his forefinger Stein's silver ring, which he habitually wore, and gave it to Tamb' Itam. When Tamb' Itam left on his mission, Brown's camp on the knoll was dark but for a single small glow shining through the branches of one of the trees the white men had cut down.

'Early in the evening Brown had received from Jim a folded piece of paper on which was written, "You get the clear road. Start as soon as your boat floats on the morning tide. Let your men be careful. The bushes on both sides of the creek and the stockade at the mouth are full of well-armed men. You would have no chance, but I don't believe you want bloodshed." Brown read it, tore the paper into small pieces, and, turning to Cornelius, who had brought it, said jeeringly, "Good-bye, my excellent friend." Cornelius had been in the fort, and had been sneaking around Jim's house during the afternoon. Jim chose him to carry the note because he could speak English, was known to Brown, and was not likely to be shot by some nervous mistake of one of the men as a Malay, approaching in the dusk, perhaps might have been.

'Cornelius didn't go away after delivering the paper. Brown was sitting up over a tiny fire; all the others were lying down. "I could tell you something you would like to know," Cornelius mumbled crossly. Brown paid no attention. "You did not kill him," went on the other, "and what do you get for it? You might have had money from the Rajah, besides the loot of all the Bugis houses, and now you get nothing." "You had better clear out from here," growled Brown, without even looking at him. But Cornelius let himself drop by his side and began to whisper very fast, touching his elbow from time to time. What he had to say made Brown sit up at first, with a curse. He had simply informed him of Dain Waris's armed party down the

river. At first Brown saw himself completely sold and betrayed, but a moment's reflection convinced him that there could be no treachery intended. He said nothing, and after a while Cornelius remarked, in a tone of complete indifference, that there was another way out of the river which he knew very well. "A good thing to know, too," said Brown, pricking up his ears; and Cornelius began to talk of what went on in town and repeated all that had been said in council, gossiping in an even undertone at Brown's ear as you talk amongst sleeping men you do not wish to wake. "He thinks he has made me harmless, does he?" mumbled Brown very low. . . . "Yes. He is a fool. A little child. He came here and robbed me," droned on Cornelius, "and he made all the people believe him. But if something happened that they did not believe him any more, where would he be? And the Bugis Dain who is waiting for you down the river there, captain, is the very man who chased you up here when you first came." Brown observed nonchalantly that it would be just as well to avoid him, and with the same detached, musing air Cornelius declared himself acquainted with a backwater broad enough to take Brown's boat past Waris's camp. "You will have to be quiet," he said as an afterthought, "for in one place we pass close behind his camp. Very close. They are camped ashore with their boats hauled up." "Oh, we know how to be as quiet as mice; never fear," said Brown. Cornelius stipulated that in case he were to pilot Brown out, his canoe should be towed. "I'll have to get back quick," he explained.

'It was two hours before the dawn when word was passed to the stockade from outlying watchers that the white robbers were coming down to their boat. In a very short time every armed man from one end of Patusan to the other was on the alert, yet the banks of the river remained so silent that but for the fires burning with sudden blurred flares the town might have been asleep as if in peace-time. A heavy mist lay very low on the water, making a sort of illusive grey light that showed nothing. When Brown's long-boat glided out of the creek into the river, Jim was standing on the low point of land before the Rajah's stockade — on the very spot where for the first time he put his foot on Patusan shore. A shadow loomed up, moving in the greyness, solitary, very bulky, and yet constantly eluding the eye. A murmur of low talking came out of it. Brown at the tiller heard Jim speak calmly: "A clear road. You had better trust to the current while the fog lasts; but this will lift presently." "Yes, presently we shall see clear," replied Brown.

‘The thirty or forty men standing with muskets at ready outside the stockade held their breath. The Bugis owner of the prau, whom I saw on Stein’s verandah, and who was amongst them, told me that the boat, shaving the low point close, seemed for a moment to grow big and hang over it like a mountain. “If you think it worth your while to wait a day outside,” called out Jim, “I’ll try to send you down something — a bullock, some yams — what I can.” The shadow went on moving. “Yes. Do,” said a voice, blank and muffled out of the fog. Not one of the many attentive listeners understood what the words meant; and then Brown and his men in their boat floated away, fading spectrally without the slightest sound.

‘Thus Brown, invisible in the mist, goes out of Patusan elbow to elbow with Cornelius in the stern-sheets of the long-boat. “Perhaps you shall get a small bullock,” said Cornelius. “Oh yes. Bullock. Yam. You’ll get it if he said so. He always speaks the truth. He stole everything I had. I suppose you like a small bullock better than the loot of many houses.” “I would advise you to hold your tongue, or somebody here may fling you overboard into this damned fog,” said Brown. The boat seemed to be standing still; nothing could be seen, not even the river alongside, only the water-dust flew and trickled, condensed, down their beards and faces. It was weird, Brown told me. Every individual man of them felt as though he were adrift alone in a boat, haunted by an almost imperceptible suspicion of sighing, muttering ghosts. “Throw me out, would you? But I would know where I was,” mumbled Cornelius surlily. “I’ve lived many years here.” “Not long enough to see through a fog like this,” Brown said, lolling back with his arm swinging to and fro on the useless tiller. “Yes. Long enough for that,” snarled Cornelius. “That’s very useful,” commented Brown. “Am I to believe you could find that backway you spoke of blindfold, like this?” Cornelius grunted. “Are you too tired to row?” he asked after a silence. “No, by God!” shouted Brown suddenly. “Out with your oars there.” There was a great knocking in the fog, which after a while settled into a regular grind of invisible sweeps against invisible thole-pins. Otherwise nothing was changed, and but for the slight splash of a dipped blade it was like rowing a balloon car in a cloud, said Brown. Thereafter Cornelius did not open his lips except to ask querulously for somebody to bale out his canoe, which was towing behind the long-boat. Gradually the fog whitened and became luminous ahead. To the left Brown saw a darkness as though he had been looking at the back of the departing night. All at once a big bough



covered with leaves appeared above his head, and ends of twigs, dripping and still, curved slenderly close alongside. Cornelius, without a word, took the tiller from his hand.'

## CHAPTER 44

'I don't think they spoke together again. The boat entered a narrow by-channel, where it was pushed by the oar-blades set into crumbling banks, and there was a gloom as if enormous black wings had been outspread above the mist that filled its depth to the summits of the trees. The branches overhead showered big drops through the gloomy fog. At a mutter from Cornelius, Brown ordered his men to load. "I'll give you a chance to get even with them before we're done, you dismal cripples, you," he said to his gang. "Mind you don't throw it away — you hounds." Low growls answered that speech. Cornelius showed much fussy concern for the safety of his canoe.

'Meantime Tamb' Itam had reached the end of his journey. The fog had delayed him a little, but he had paddled steadily, keeping in touch with the south bank. By-and-by daylight came like a glow in a ground glass globe. The shores made on each side of the river a dark smudge, in which one could detect hints of columnar forms and shadows of twisted branches high up. The mist was still thick on the water, but a good watch was being kept, for as Iamb' Itam approached the camp the figures of two men emerged out of the white vapour, and voices spoke to him boisterously. He answered, and presently a canoe lay alongside, and he exchanged news with the paddlers. All was well. The trouble was over. Then the men in the canoe let go their grip on the side of his dug-out and incontinently fell out of sight. He pursued his way till he heard voices coming to him quietly over the water, and saw, under the now lifting, swirling mist, the glow of many little fires burning on a sandy stretch, backed by lofty thin timber and bushes. There again a look-out was kept, for he was challenged. He shouted his name as the two last sweeps of his paddle ran his canoe up on the strand. It was a big camp. Men crouched in many little knots under a subdued murmur of early morning talk. Many thin threads of smoke curled slowly on the white mist. Little shelters, elevated above the ground, had been built for the chiefs. Muskets were stacked in small pyramids, and long spears were stuck singly into the sand near the fires.

'Tamb' Itam, assuming an air of importance, demanded to be led to Dain Waris. He found the friend of his white lord lying on a raised couch made of bamboo, and sheltered by a sort of shed of sticks covered with mats. Dain Waris was awake, and a bright fire was burning before his sleeping-place,

which resembled a rude shrine. The only son of nakhoda Doramin answered his greeting kindly. Tamb' Itam began by handing him the ring which vouched for the truth of the messenger's words. Dain Waris, reclining on his elbow, bade him speak and tell all the news. Beginning with the consecrated formula, "The news is good," Tamb' Itam delivered Jim's own words. The white men, deputing with the consent of all the chiefs, were to be allowed to pass down the river. In answer to a question or two Tamb' Itam then reported the proceedings of the last council. Dain Waris listened attentively to the end, toying with the ring which ultimately he slipped on the forefinger of his right hand. After hearing all he had to say he dismissed Tamb' Itam to have food and rest. Orders for the return in the afternoon were given immediately. Afterwards Dain Waris lay down again, open-eyed, while his personal attendants were preparing his food at the fire, by which Tamb' Itam also sat talking to the men who lounged up to hear the latest intelligence from the town. The sun was eating up the mist. A good watch was kept upon the reach of the main stream where the boat of the whites was expected to appear every moment.

'It was then that Brown took his revenge upon the world which, after twenty years of contemptuous and reckless bullying, refused him the tribute of a common robber's success. It was an act of cold-blooded ferocity, and it consoled him on his deathbed like a memory of an indomitable defiance. Stealthily he landed his men on the other side of the island opposite to the Bugis camp, and led them across. After a short but quite silent scuffle, Cornelius, who had tried to slink away at the moment of landing, resigned himself to show the way where the undergrowth was most sparse. Brown held both his skinny hands together behind his back in the grip of one vast fist, and now and then impelled him forward with a fierce push. Cornelius remained as mute as a fish, abject but faithful to his purpose, whose accomplishment loomed before him dimly. At the edge of the patch of forest Brown's men spread themselves out in cover and waited. The camp was plain from end to end before their eyes, and no one looked their way. Nobody even dreamed that the white men could have any knowledge of the narrow channel at the back of the island. When he judged the moment come, Brown yelled, "Let them have it," and fourteen shots rang out like one.

'Tamb' Itam told me the surprise was so great that, except for those who fell dead or wounded, not a soul of them moved for quite an appreciable

time after the first discharge. Then a man screamed, and after that scream a great yell of amazement and fear went up from all the throats. A blind panic drove these men in a surging swaying mob to and fro along the shore like a herd of cattle afraid of the water. Some few jumped into the river then, but most of them did so only after the last discharge. Three times Brown's men fired into the ruck, Brown, the only one in view, cursing and yelling, "Aim low! aim low!"

'Tamb' Itam says that, as for him, he understood at the first volley what had happened. Though untouched he fell down and lay as if dead, but with his eyes open. At the sound of the first shots Dain Waris, reclining on the couch, jumped up and ran out upon the open shore, just in time to receive a bullet in his forehead at the second discharge. Tamb' Itam saw him fling his arms wide open before he fell. Then, he says, a great fear came upon him — not before. The white men retired as they had come — unseen.

'Thus Brown balanced his account with the evil fortune. Notice that even in this awful outbreak there is a superiority as of a man who carries right — the abstract thing — within the envelope of his common desires. It was not a vulgar and treacherous massacre; it was a lesson, a retribution — a demonstration of some obscure and awful attribute of our nature which, I am afraid, is not so very far under the surface as we like to think.

'Afterwards the whites depart unseen by Tamb' Itam, and seem to vanish from before men's eyes altogether; and the schooner, too, vanishes after the manner of stolen goods. But a story is told of a white long-boat picked up a month later in the Indian Ocean by a cargo steamer. Two parched, yellow, glassy-eyed, whispering skeletons in her recognised the authority of a third, who declared that his name was Brown. His schooner, he reported, bound south with a cargo of Java sugar, had sprung a bad leak and sank under his feet. He and his companions were the survivors of a crew of six. The two died on board the steamer which rescued them. Brown lived to be seen by me, and I can testify that he had played his part to the last.

'It seems, however, that in going away they had neglected to cast off Cornelius's canoe. Cornelius himself Brown had let go at the beginning of the shooting, with a kick for a parting benediction. Tamb' Itam, after arising from amongst the dead, saw the Nazarene running up and down the shore amongst the corpses and the expiring fires. He uttered little cries. Suddenly he rushed to the water, and made frantic efforts to get one of the Bugis boats into the water. "Afterwards, till he had seen me," related Tamb' Itam,

“he stood looking at the heavy canoe and scratching his head.” “What became of him?” I asked. Tamb’ Itam, staring hard at me, made an expressive gesture with his right arm. “Twice I struck, Tuan,” he said. “When he beheld me approaching he cast himself violently on the ground and made a great outcry, kicking. He screeched like a frightened hen till he felt the point; then he was still, and lay staring at me while his life went out of his eyes.”

‘This done, Tamb’ Itam did not tarry. He understood the importance of being the first with the awful news at the fort. There were, of course, many survivors of Dain Waris’s party; but in the extremity of panic some had swum across the river, others had bolted into the bush. The fact is that they did not know really who struck that blow — whether more white robbers were not coming, whether they had not already got hold of the whole land. They imagined themselves to be the victims of a vast treachery, and utterly doomed to destruction. It is said that some small parties did not come in till three days afterwards. However, a few tried to make their way back to Patusan at once, and one of the canoes that were patrolling the river that morning was in sight of the camp at the very moment of the attack. It is true that at first the men in her leaped overboard and swam to the opposite bank, but afterwards they returned to their boat and started fearfully up-stream. Of these Tamb’ Itam had an hour’s advance.’

## CHAPTER 45

'When Tamb' Itam, paddling madly, came into the town-reach, the women, thronging the platforms before the houses, were looking out for the return of Dain Waris's little fleet of boats. The town had a festive air; here and there men, still with spears or guns in their hands, could be seen moving or standing on the shore in groups. Chinamen's shops had been opened early; but the market-place was empty, and a sentry, still posted at the corner of the fort, made out Tamb' Itam, and shouted to those within. The gate was wide open. Tamb' Itam jumped ashore and ran in headlong. The first person he met was the girl coming down from the house.

'Tamb' Itam, disordered, panting, with trembling lips and wild eyes, stood for a time before her as if a sudden spell had been laid on him. Then he broke out very quickly: "They have killed Dain Waris and many more." She clapped her hands, and her first words were, "Shut the gates." Most of the fortmen had gone back to their houses, but Tamb' Itam hurried on the few who remained for their turn of duty within. The girl stood in the middle of the courtyard while the others ran about. "Doramin," she cried despairingly, as Tamb' Itam passed her. Next time he went by he answered her thought rapidly, "Yes. But we have all the powder in Patusan." She caught him by the arm, and, pointing at the house, "Call him out," she whispered, trembling.

'Tamb' Itam ran up the steps. His master was sleeping. "It is I, Tamb' Itam," he cried at the door, "with tidings that cannot wait." He saw Jim turn over on the pillow and open his eyes, and he burst out at once. "This, Tuan, is a day of evil, an accursed day." His master raised himself on his elbow to listen — just as Dain Waris had done. And then Tamb' Itam began his tale, trying to relate the story in order, calling Dain Waris Panglima, and saying: "The Panglima then called out to the chief of his own boatmen, 'Give Tamb' Itam something to eat'" — when his master put his feet to the ground and looked at him with such a discomposed face that the words remained in his throat.

"Speak out," said Jim. "Is he dead?" "May you live long," cried Tamb' Itam. "It was a most cruel treachery. He ran out at the first shots and fell." . . . His master walked to the window and with his fist struck at the shutter. The room was made light; and then in a steady voice, but speaking fast, he began to give him orders to assemble a fleet of boats for immediate pursuit,

go to this man, to the other — send messengers; and as he talked he sat down on the bed, stooping to lace his boots hurriedly, and suddenly looked up. “Why do you stand here?” he asked very red-faced. “Waste no time.” Tamb’ Itam did not move. “Forgive me, Tuan, but . . . but,” he began to stammer. “What?” cried his master aloud, looking terrible, leaning forward with his hands gripping the edge of the bed. “It is not safe for thy servant to go out amongst the people,” said Tamb’ Itam, after hesitating a moment.

‘Then Jim understood. He had retreated from one world, for a small matter of an impulsive jump, and now the other, the work of his own hands, had fallen in ruins upon his head. It was not safe for his servant to go out amongst his own people! I believe that in that very moment he had decided to defy the disaster in the only way it occurred to him such a disaster could be defied; but all I know is that, without a word, he came out of his room and sat before the long table, at the head of which he was accustomed to regulate the affairs of his world, proclaiming daily the truth that surely lived in his heart. The dark powers should not rob him twice of his peace. He sat like a stone figure. Tamb’ Itam, deferential, hinted at preparations for defence. The girl he loved came in and spoke to him, but he made a sign with his hand, and she was awed by the dumb appeal for silence in it. She went out on the verandah and sat on the threshold, as if to guard him with her body from dangers outside.

‘What thoughts passed through his head — what memories? Who can tell? Everything was gone, and he who had been once unfaithful to his trust had lost again all men’s confidence. It was then, I believe, he tried to write — to somebody — and gave it up. Loneliness was closing on him. People had trusted him with their lives — only for that; and yet they could never, as he had said, never be made to understand him. Those without did not hear him make a sound. Later, towards the evening, he came to the door and called for Tamb’ Itam. “Well?” he asked. “There is much weeping. Much anger too,” said Tamb’ Itam. Jim looked up at him. “You know,” he murmured. “Yes, Tuan,” said Tamb’ Itam. “Thy servant does know, and the gates are closed. We shall have to fight.” “Fight! What for?” he asked. “For our lives.” “I have no life,” he said. Tamb’ Itam heard a cry from the girl at the door. “Who knows?” said Tamb’ Itam. “By audacity and cunning we may even escape. There is much fear in men’s hearts too.” He went out, thinking vaguely of boats and of open sea, leaving Jim and the girl together.

‘I haven’t the heart to set down here such glimpses as she had given me of the hour or more she passed in there wrestling with him for the possession of her happiness. Whether he had any hope — what he expected, what he imagined — it is impossible to say. He was inflexible, and with the growing loneliness of his obstinacy his spirit seemed to rise above the ruins of his existence. She cried “Fight!” into his ear. She could not understand. There was nothing to fight for. He was going to prove his power in another way and conquer the fatal destiny itself. He came out into the courtyard, and behind him, with streaming hair, wild of face, breathless, she staggered out and leaned on the side of the doorway. “Open the gates,” he ordered. Afterwards, turning to those of his men who were inside, he gave them leave to depart to their homes. “For how long, Tuan?” asked one of them timidly. “For all life,” he said, in a sombre tone.

‘A hush had fallen upon the town after the outburst of wailing and lamentation that had swept over the river, like a gust of wind from the opened abode of sorrow. But rumours flew in whispers, filling the hearts with consternation and horrible doubts. The robbers were coming back, bringing many others with them, in a great ship, and there would be no refuge in the land for any one. A sense of utter insecurity as during an earthquake pervaded the minds of men, who whispered their suspicions, looking at each other as if in the presence of some awful portent.

‘The sun was sinking towards the forests when Dain Waris’s body was brought into Doramin’s campong. Four men carried it in, covered decently with a white sheet which the old mother had sent out down to the gate to meet her son on his return. They laid him at Doramin’s feet, and the old man sat still for a long time, one hand on each knee, looking down. The fronds of palms swayed gently, and the foliage of fruit trees stirred above his head. Every single man of his people was there, fully armed, when the old nakhoda at last raised his eyes. He moved them slowly over the crowd, as if seeking for a missing face. Again his chin sank on his breast. The whispers of many men mingled with the slight rustling of the leaves.

‘The Malay who had brought Tamb’ Itam and the girl to Samarang was there too. “Not so angry as many,” he said to me, but struck with a great awe and wonder at the “suddenness of men’s fate, which hangs over their heads like a cloud charged with thunder.” He told me that when Dain Waris’s body was uncovered at a sign of Doramin’s, he whom they often called the white lord’s friend was disclosed lying unchanged with his



eyelids a little open as if about to wake. Doramin leaned forward a little more, like one looking for something fallen on the ground. His eyes searched the body from its feet to its head, for the wound maybe. It was in the forehead and small; and there was no word spoken while one of the bystanders, stooping, took off the silver ring from the cold stiff hand. In silence he held it up before Doramin. A murmur of dismay and horror ran through the crowd at the sight of that familiar token. The old nakhoda stared at it, and suddenly let out one great fierce cry, deep from the chest, a roar of pain and fury, as mighty as the bellow of a wounded bull, bringing great fear into men's hearts, by the magnitude of his anger and his sorrow that could be plainly discerned without words. There was a great stillness afterwards for a space, while the body was being borne aside by four men. They laid it down under a tree, and on the instant, with one long shriek, all the women of the household began to wail together; they mourned with shrill cries; the sun was setting, and in the intervals of screamed lamentations the high sing-song voices of two old men intoning the Koran chanted alone.

'About this time Jim, leaning on a gun-carriage, looked at the river, and turned his back on the house; and the girl, in the doorway, panting as if she had run herself to a standstill, was looking at him across the yard. Tamb' Itam stood not far from his master, waiting patiently for what might happen. All at once Jim, who seemed to be lost in quiet thought, turned to him and said, "Time to finish this."

"Tuan?" said Tamb' Itam, advancing with alacrity. He did not know what his master meant, but as soon as Jim made a movement the girl started too and walked down into the open space. It seems that no one else of the people of the house was in sight. She tottered slightly, and about half-way down called out to Jim, who had apparently resumed his peaceful contemplation of the river. He turned round, setting his back against the gun. "Will you fight?" she cried. "There is nothing to fight for," he said; "nothing is lost." Saying this he made a step towards her. "Will you fly?" she cried again. "There is no escape," he said, stopping short, and she stood still also, silent, devouring him with her eyes. "And you shall go?" she said slowly. He bent his head. "Ah!" she exclaimed, peering at him as it were, "you are mad or false. Do you remember the night I prayed you to leave me, and you said that you could not? That it was impossible! Impossible! Do you remember you said you would never leave me? Why? I asked you

for no promise. You promised unasked — remember.” “Enough, poor girl,” he said. “I should not be worth having.”

‘Tamb’ Itam said that while they were talking she would laugh loud and senselessly like one under the visitation of God. His master put his hands to his head. He was fully dressed as for every day, but without a hat. She stopped laughing suddenly. “For the last time,” she cried menacingly, “will you defend yourself?” “Nothing can touch me,” he said in a last flicker of superb egoism. Tamb’ Itam saw her lean forward where she stood, open her arms, and run at him swiftly. She flung herself upon his breast and clasped him round the neck.

“Ah! but I shall hold thee thus,” she cried. . . . “Thou art mine!”

‘She sobbed on his shoulder. The sky over Patusan was blood-red, immense, streaming like an open vein. An enormous sun nestled crimson amongst the tree-tops, and the forest below had a black and forbidding face.

‘Tamb’ Itam tells me that on that evening the aspect of the heavens was angry and frightful. I may well believe it, for I know that on that very day a cyclone passed within sixty miles of the coast, though there was hardly more than a languid stir of air in the place.

‘Suddenly Tamb’ Itam saw Jim catch her arms, trying to unclasp her hands. She hung on them with her head fallen back; her hair touched the ground. “Come here!” his master called, and Tamb’ Itam helped to ease her down. It was difficult to separate her fingers. Jim, bending over her, looked earnestly upon her face, and all at once ran to the landing-stage. Tamb’ Itam followed him, but turning his head, he saw that she had struggled up to her feet. She ran after them a few steps, then fell down heavily on her knees. “Tuan! Tuan!” called Tamb’ Itam, “look back;” but Jim was already in a canoe, standing up paddle in hand. He did not look back. Tamb’ Itam had just time to scramble in after him when the canoe floated clear. The girl was then on her knees, with clasped hands, at the water-gate. She remained thus for a time in a supplicating attitude before she sprang up. “You are false!” she screamed out after Jim. “Forgive me,” he cried. “Never! Never!” she called back.

‘Tamb’ Itam took the paddle from Jim’s hands, it being unseemly that he should sit while his lord paddled. When they reached the other shore his master forbade him to come any farther; but Tamb’ Itam did follow him at a distance, walking up the slope to Doramin’s campong.

‘It was beginning to grow dark. Torches twinkled here and there. Those they met seemed awestruck, and stood aside hastily to let Jim pass. The wailing of women came from above. The courtyard was full of armed Bugis with their followers, and of Patusan people.

‘I do not know what this gathering really meant. Were these preparations for war, or for vengeance, or to repulse a threatened invasion? Many days elapsed before the people had ceased to look out, quaking, for the return of the white men with long beards and in rags, whose exact relation to their own white man they could never understand. Even for those simple minds poor Jim remains under a cloud.

‘Doramin, alone! immense and desolate, sat in his arm-chair with the pair of flintlock pistols on his knees, faced by a armed throng. When Jim appeared, at somebody’s exclamation, all the heads turned round together, and then the mass opened right and left, and he walked up a lane of averted glances. Whispers followed him; murmurs: “He has worked all the evil.” “He hath a charm.” . . . He heard them — perhaps!

‘When he came up into the light of torches the wailing of the women ceased suddenly. Doramin did not lift his head, and Jim stood silent before him for a time. Then he looked to the left, and moved in that direction with measured steps. Dain Waris’s mother crouched at the head of the body, and the grey dishevelled hair concealed her face. Jim came up slowly, looked at his dead friend, lifting the sheet, than dropped it without a word. Slowly he walked back.

““He came! He came!” was running from lip to lip, making a murmur to which he moved. “He hath taken it upon his own head,” a voice said aloud. He heard this and turned to the crowd. “Yes. Upon my head.” A few people recoiled. Jim waited awhile before Doramin, and then said gently, “I am come in sorrow.” He waited again. “I am come ready and unarmed,” he repeated.

‘The unwieldy old man, lowering his big forehead like an ox under a yoke, made an effort to rise, clutching at the flintlock pistols on his knees. From his throat came gurgling, choking, inhuman sounds, and his two attendants helped him from behind. People remarked that the ring which he had dropped on his lap fell and rolled against the foot of the white man, and that poor Jim glanced down at the talisman that had opened for him the door of fame, love, and success within the wall of forests fringed with white foam, within the coast that under the western sun looks like the very

stronghold of the night. Doramin, struggling to keep his feet, made with his two supporters a swaying, tottering group; his little eyes stared with an expression of mad pain, of rage, with a ferocious glitter, which the bystanders noticed; and then, while Jim stood stiffened and with bared head in the light of torches, looking him straight in the face, he clung heavily with his left arm round the neck of a bowed youth, and lifting deliberately his right, shot his son's friend through the chest.

'The crowd, which had fallen apart behind Jim as soon as Doramin had raised his hand, rushed tumultuously forward after the shot. They say that the white man sent right and left at all those faces a proud and unflinching glance. Then with his hand over his lips he fell forward, dead.

'And that's the end. He passes away under a cloud, inscrutable at heart, forgotten, unforgiven, and excessively romantic. Not in the wildest days of his boyish visions could he have seen the alluring shape of such an extraordinary success! For it may very well be that in the short moment of his last proud and unflinching glance, he had beheld the face of that opportunity which, like an Eastern bride, had come veiled to his side.

'But we can see him, an obscure conqueror of fame, tearing himself out of the arms of a jealous love at the sign, at the call of his exalted egoism. He goes away from a living woman to celebrate his pitiless wedding with a shadowy ideal of conduct. Is he satisfied — quite, now, I wonder? We ought to know. He is one of us — and have I not stood up once, like an evoked ghost, to answer for his eternal constancy? Was I so very wrong after all? Now he is no more, there are days when the reality of his existence comes to me with an immense, with an overwhelming force; and yet upon my honour there are moments, too when he passes from my eyes like a disembodied spirit astray amongst the passions of this earth, ready to surrender himself faithfully to the claim of his own world of shades.

'Who knows? He is gone, inscrutable at heart, and the poor girl is leading a sort of soundless, inert life in Stein's house. Stein has aged greatly of late. He feels it himself, and says often that he is "preparing to leave all this; preparing to leave . . ." while he waves his hand sadly at his butterflies.'

September 1899 — July 1900.

# ***THE INHERITORS***

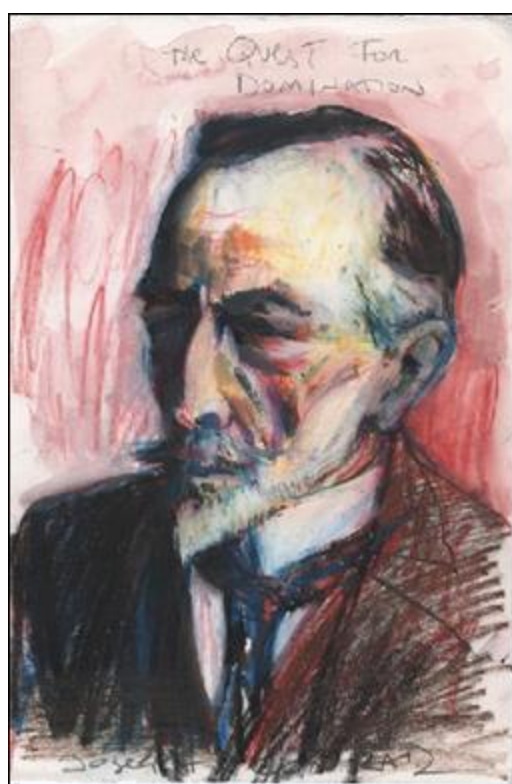


An Extravagant Story

By

JOSEPH CONRAD & FORD M. HUEFFER

“Sardanapalus builded seven cities in a day. Let us eat, drink and sleep, for to-morrow we die.”



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## CHAPTER ONE

"Ideas," she said. "Oh, as for ideas — "

"Well?" I hazarded, "as for ideas — ?"

We went through the old gateway and I cast a glance over my shoulder. The noon sun was shining over the masonry, over the little saints' effigies, over the little fretted canopies, the grime and the white streaks of bird-dropping.

"There," I said, pointing toward it, "doesn't that suggest something to you?"

She made a motion with her head — half negative, half contemptuous.

"But," I stuttered, "the associations — the ideas — the historical ideas — "

She said nothing.

"You Americans," I began, but her smile stopped me. It was as if she were amused at the utterances of an old lady shocked by the habits of the daughters of the day. It was the smile of a person who is confident of superseding one fatally.

In conversations of any length one of the parties assumes the superiority — superiority of rank, intellectual or social. In this conversation she, if she did not attain to tacitly acknowledged temperamental superiority, seemed at least to claim it, to have no doubt as to its ultimate according. I was unused to this. I was a talker, proud of my conversational powers.

I had looked at her before; now I cast a sideways, critical glance at her. I came out of my moodiness to wonder what type this was. She had good hair, good eyes, and some charm. Yes. And something besides — a something — a something that was not an attribute of her beauty. The modelling of her face was so perfect and so delicate as to produce an effect of transparency, yet there was no suggestion of frailness; her glance had an extraordinary strength of life. Her hair was fair and gleaming, her cheeks coloured as if a warm light had fallen on them from somewhere. She was familiar till it occurred to you that she was strange.

"Which way are you going?" she asked.

"I am going to walk to Dover," I answered.

"And I may come with you?"

I looked at her — intent on divining her in that one glance. It was of course impossible. "There will be time for analysis," I thought.



“The roads are free to all,” I said. “You are not an American?”

She shook her head. No. She was not an Australian either, she came from none of the British colonies.

“You are not English,” I affirmed. “You speak too well.” I was piqued. She did not answer. She smiled again and I grew angry. In the cathedral she had smiled at the verger’s commendation of particularly abominable restorations, and that smile had drawn me toward her, had emboldened me to offer deferential and condemnatory remarks as to the plaster-of-Paris mouldings. You know how one addresses a young lady who is obviously capable of taking care of herself. That was how I had come across her. She had smiled at the gabble of the cathedral guide as he showed the obsessed troop, of which we had formed units, the place of martyrdom of Blessed Thomas, and her smile had had just that quality of superseder’s contempt. It had pleased me then; but, now that she smiled thus past me — it was not quite at me — in the crooked highways of the town, I was irritated. After all, I was somebody; I was not a cathedral verger. I had a fancy for myself in those days — a fancy that solitude and brooding had crystallised into a habit of mind. I was a writer with high — with the highest — ideals. I had withdrawn myself from the world, lived isolated, hidden in the countryside, lived as hermits do, on the hope of one day doing something — of putting greatness on paper. She suddenly fathomed my thoughts: “You write,” she affirmed. I asked how she knew, wondered what she had read of mine — there was so little.

“Are you a popular author?” she asked.

“Alas, no!” I answered. “You must know that.”

“You would like to be?”

“We should all of us like,” I answered; “though it is true some of us protest that we aim for higher things.”

“I see,” she said, musingly. As far as I could tell she was coming to some decision. With an instinctive dislike to any such proceeding as regarded myself, I tried to cut across her unknown thoughts.

“But, really — ” I said, “I am quite a commonplace topic. Let us talk about yourself. Where do you come from?”

It occurred to me again that I was intensely unacquainted with her type.

Here was the same smile — as far as I could see, exactly the same smile.

There are fine shades in smiles as in laughs, as in tones of voice. I seemed unable to hold my tongue.

“Where do you come from?” I asked. “You must belong to one of the new nations. You are a foreigner, I’ll swear, because you have such a fine contempt for us. You irritate me so that you might almost be a Prussian. But it is obvious that you are of a new nation that is beginning to find itself.”

“Oh, we are to inherit the earth, if that is what you mean,” she said.

“The phrase is comprehensive,” I said. I was determined not to give myself away. “Where in the world do you come from?” I repeated. The question, I was quite conscious, would have sufficed, but in the hope, I suppose, of establishing my intellectual superiority, I continued:

“You know, fair play’s a jewel. Now I’m quite willing to give you information as to myself. I have already told you the essentials — you ought to tell me something. It would only be fair play.”

“Why should there be any fair play?” she asked.

“What have you to say against that?” I said. “Do you not number it among your national characteristics?”

“You really wish to know where I come from?”

I expressed light-hearted acquiescence.

“Listen,” she said, and uttered some sounds. I felt a kind of unholy emotion. It had come like a sudden, suddenly hushed, intense gust of wind through a breathless day. “What — what!” I cried.

“I said I inhabit the Fourth Dimension.”

I recovered my equanimity with the thought that I had been visited by some stroke of an obscure and unimportant physical kind.

“I think we must have been climbing the hill too fast for me,” I said, “I have not been very well. I missed what you said.” I was certainly out of breath.

“I said I inhabit the Fourth Dimension,” she repeated with admirable gravity.

“Oh, come,” I expostulated, “this is playing it rather low down. You walk a convalescent out of breath and then propound riddles to him.”

I was recovering my breath, and, with it, my inclination to expand. Instead, I looked at her. I was beginning to understand. It was obvious enough that she was a foreigner in a strange land, in a land that brought out her national characteristics. She must be of some race, perhaps Semitic, perhaps Slav — of some incomprehensible race. I had never seen a Circassian, and there used to be a tradition that Circassian women were beautiful, were fair-skinned, and so on. What was repelling in her was

accounted for by this difference in national point of view. One is, after all, not so very remote from the horse. What one does not understand one shies at — finds sinister, in fact. And she struck me as sinister.

“You won’t tell me who you are?” I said.

“I have done so,” she answered.

“If you expect me to believe that you inhabit a mathematical monstrosity, you are mistaken. You are, really.”

She turned round and pointed at the city.

“Look!” she said.

We had climbed the western hill. Below our feet, beneath a sky that the wind had swept clean of clouds, was the valley; a broad bowl, shallow, filled with the purple of smoke-wreaths. And above the mass of red roofs there soared the golden stonework of the cathedral tower. It was a vision, the last word of a great art. I looked at her. I was moved, and I knew that the glory of it must have moved her.

She was smiling. “Look!” she repeated. I looked.

There was the purple and the red, and the golden tower, the vision, the last word. She said something — uttered some sound.

What had happened? I don’t know. It all looked contemptible. One seemed to see something beyond, something vaster — vaster than cathedrals, vaster than the conception of the gods to whom cathedrals were raised. The tower reeled out of the perpendicular. One saw beyond it, not roofs, or smoke, or hills, but an unrealised, an unrealisable infinity of space.

It was merely momentary. The tower filled its place again and I looked at her.

“What the devil,” I said, hysterically — “what the devil do you play these tricks upon me for?”

“You see,” she answered, “the rudiments of the sense are there.”

“You must excuse me if I fail to understand,” I said, grasping after fragments of dropped dignity. “I am subject to fits of giddiness.” I felt a need for covering a species of nakedness. “Pardon my swearing,” I added; a proof of recovered equanimity.

We resumed the road in silence. I was physically and mentally shaken; and I tried to deceive myself as to the cause. After some time I said:

“You insist then in preserving your — your incognito.”

“Oh, I make no mystery of myself,” she answered.

“You have told me that you come from the Fourth Dimension,” I remarked, ironically.

“I come from the Fourth Dimension,” she said, patiently. She had the air of one in a position of difficulty; of one aware of it and ready to brave it. She had the listlessness of an enlightened person who has to explain, over and over again, to stupid children some rudimentary point of the multiplication table.

She seemed to divine my thoughts, to be aware of their very wording. She even said “yes” at the opening of her next speech.

“Yes,” she said. “It is as if I were to try to explain the new ideas of any age to a person of the age that has gone before.” She paused, seeking a concrete illustration that would touch me. “As if I were explaining to Dr. Johnson the methods and the ultimate vogue of the cockney school of poetry.”

“I understand,” I said, “that you wish me to consider myself as relatively a Choctaw. But what I do not understand is; what bearing that has upon — upon the Fourth Dimension, I think you said?”

“I will explain,” she replied.

“But you must explain as if you were explaining to a Choctaw,” I said, pleasantly, “you must be concise and convincing.”

She answered: “I will.”

She made a long speech of it; I condense. I can’t remember her exact words — there were so many; but she spoke like a book. There was something exquisitely piquant in her choice of words, in her expressionless voice. I seemed to be listening to a phonograph reciting a technical work. There was a touch of the incongruous, of the mad, that appealed to me — the commonplace rolling-down landscape, the straight, white, undulating road that, from the tops of rises, one saw running for miles and miles, straight, straight, and so white. Filtering down through the great blue of the sky came the thrilling of innumerable skylarks. And I was listening to a parody of a scientific work recited by a phonograph.

I heard the nature of the Fourth Dimension — heard that it was an inhabited plane — invisible to our eyes, but omnipresent; heard that I had seen it when Bell Harry had reeled before my eyes. I heard the Dimensionists described: a race clear-sighted, eminently practical, incredible; with no ideals, prejudices, or remorse; with no feeling for art and no reverence for life; free from any ethical tradition; callous to pain,

weakness, suffering and death, as if they had been invulnerable and immortal. She did not say that they were immortal, however. "You would — you will — hate us," she concluded. And I seemed only then to come to myself. The power of her imagination was so great that I fancied myself face to face with the truth. I supposed she had been amusing herself; that she should have tried to frighten me was inadmissible. I don't pretend that I was completely at my ease, but I said, amiably: "You certainly have succeeded in making these beings hateful."

"I have made nothing," she said with a faint smile, and went on amusing herself. She would explain origins, now.

"Your" — she used the word as signifying, I suppose, the inhabitants of the country, or the populations of the earth — "your ancestors were mine, but long ago you were crowded out of the Dimension as we are to-day, you overran the earth as we shall do to-morrow. But you contracted diseases, as we shall contract them, — beliefs, traditions; fears; ideas of pity ... of love. You grew luxurious in the worship of your ideals, and sorrowful; you solaced yourselves with creeds, with arts — you have forgotten!"

She spoke with calm conviction; with an overwhelming and dispassionate assurance. She was stating facts; not professing a faith. We approached a little roadside inn. On a bench before the door a dun-clad country fellow was asleep, his head on the table.

"Put your fingers in your ears," my companion commanded.

I humoured her.

I saw her lips move. The countryman started, shuddered, and by a clumsy, convulsive motion of his arms, upset his quart. He rubbed his eyes. Before he had voiced his emotions we had passed on.

"I have seen a horse-coper do as much for a stallion," I commented. "I know there are words that have certain effects. But you shouldn't play pranks like the low-comedy devil in Faustus."

"It isn't good form, I suppose?" she sneered.

"It's a matter of feeling," I said, hotly, "the poor fellow has lost his beer."

"What's that to me?" she commented, with the air of one affording a concrete illustration.

"It's a good deal to him," I answered.

"But what to me?"

I said nothing. She ceased her exposition immediately afterward, growing silent as suddenly as she had become discursive. It was rather as if she had

learnt a speech by heart and had come to the end of it. I was quite at a loss as to what she was driving at. There was a newness, a strangeness about her; sometimes she struck me as mad, sometimes as frightfully sane. We had a meal somewhere — a meal that broke the current of her speech — and then, in the late afternoon, took a by-road and wandered in secluded valleys. I had been ill; trouble of the nerves, brooding, the monotony of life in the shadow of unsucccess. I had an errand in this part of the world and had been approaching it deviously, seeking the normal in its quiet hollows, trying to get back to my old self. I did not wish to think of how I should get through the year — of the thousand little things that matter. So I talked and she — she listened very well.

But topics exhaust themselves and, at the last, I myself brought the talk round to the Fourth Dimension. We were sauntering along the forgotten valley that lies between Hardves and Stelling Minnis; we had been silent for several minutes. For me, at least, the silence was pregnant with the undefinable emotions that, at times, run in currents between man and woman. The sun was getting low and it was shadowy in those shrouded hollows. I laughed at some thought, I forget what, and then began to badger her with questions. I tried to exhaust the possibilities of the Dimensionist idea, made grotesque suggestions. I said: “And when a great many of you have been crowded out of the Dimension and invaded the earth you will do so and so — ” something preposterous and ironical. She coldly dissented, and at once the irony appeared as gross as the jocularity of a commercial traveller. Sometimes she signified: “Yes, that is what we shall do;” signified it without speaking — by some gesture perhaps, I hardly know what. There was something impressive — something almost regal — in this manner of hers; it was rather frightening in those lonely places, which were so forgotten, so gray, so closed in. There was something of the past world about the hanging woods, the little veils of unmoving mist — as if time did not exist in those furrows of the great world; and one was so absolutely alone; anything might have happened. I grew weary of the sound of my tongue. But when I wanted to cease, I found she had on me the effect of some incredible stimulant.

We came to the end of the valley where the road begins to climb the southern hill, out into the open air. I managed to maintain an uneasy silence. From her grimly dispassionate reiterations I had attained to a clear idea, even to a visualisation, of her fantastic conception — allegory, madness, or

whatever it was. She certainly forced it home. The Dimensionists were to come in swarms, to materialise, to devour like locusts, to be all the more irresistible because indistinguishable. They were to come like snow in the night: in the morning one would look out and find the world white; they were to come as the gray hairs come, to sap the strength of us as the years sap the strength of the muscles. As to methods, we should be treated as we ourselves treat the inferior races. There would be no fighting, no killing; we — our whole social system — would break as a beam snaps, because we were worm-eaten with altruism and ethics. We, at our worst, had a certain limit, a certain stage where we exclaimed: “No, this is playing it too low down,” because we had scruples that acted like handicapping weights. She uttered, I think, only two sentences of connected words: “We shall race with you and we shall not be weighted,” and, “We shall merely sink you lower by our weight.” All the rest went like this:

“But then,” I would say ... “we shall not be able to trust anyone. Anyone may be one of you...” She would answer: “Anyone.” She prophesied a reign of terror for us. As one passed one’s neighbour in the street one would cast sudden, piercing glances at him.

I was silent. The birds were singing the sun down. It was very dark among the branches, and from minute to minute the colours of the world deepened and grew sombre.

“But — ” I said. A feeling of unrest was creeping over me. “But why do you tell me all this?” I asked. “Do you think I will enlist with you?”

“You will have to in the end,” she said, “and I do not wish to waste my strength. If you had to work unwittingly you would resist and resist and resist. I should have to waste my power on you. As it is, you will resist only at first, then you will begin to understand. You will see how we will bring a man down — a man, you understand, with a great name, standing for probity and honour. You will see the nets drawing closer and closer, and you will begin to understand. Then you will cease resisting, that is all.”

I was silent. A June nightingale began to sing, a trifle hoarsely. We seemed to be waiting for some signal. The things of the night came and went, rustled through the grass, rustled through the leafage. At last I could not even see the white gleam of her face....

I stretched out my hand and it touched hers. I seized it without an instant of hesitation. “How could I resist you?” I said, and heard my own whisper with a kind of amazement at its emotion. I raised her hand. It was very cold

and she seemed to have no thought of resistance; but before it touched my lips something like a panic of prudence had overcome me. I did not know what it would lead to — and I remembered that I did not even know who she was. From the beginning she had struck me as sinister and now, in the obscurity, her silence and her coldness seemed to be a passive threatening of unknown entanglement. I let her hand fall.

“We must be getting on,” I said.

The road was shrouded and overhung by branches. There was a kind of translucent light, enough to see her face, but I kept my eyes on the ground. I was vexed. Now that it was past the episode appeared to be a lost opportunity. We were to part in a moment, and her rare mental gifts and her unfamiliar, but very vivid, beauty made the idea of parting intensely disagreeable. She had filled me with a curiosity that she had done nothing whatever to satisfy, and with a fascination that was very nearly a fear. We mounted the hill and came out on a stretch of soft common sward. Then the sound of our footsteps ceased and the world grew more silent than ever. There were little enclosed fields all round us. The moon threw a wan light, and gleaming mist hung in the ragged hedges. Broad, soft roads ran away into space on every side.

“And now ...” I asked, at last, “shall we ever meet again?” My voice came huskily, as if I had not spoken for years and years.

“Oh, very often,” she answered.

“Very often?” I repeated. I hardly knew whether I was pleased or dismayed. Through the gate-gap in a hedge, I caught a glimmer of a white house front. It seemed to belong to another world; to another order of things.

“Ah ... here is Callan’s,” I said. “This is where I was going....”

“I know,” she answered; “we part here.”

“To meet again?” I asked.

“Oh ... to meet again; why, yes, to meet again.”



## CHAPTER TWO

Her figure faded into the darkness, as pale things waver down into deep water, and as soon as she disappeared my sense of humour returned. The episode appeared more clearly, as a flirtation with an enigmatic, but decidedly charming, chance travelling companion. The girl was a riddle, and a riddle once guessed is a very trivial thing. She, too, would be a very trivial thing when I had found a solution. It occurred to me that she wished me to regard her as a symbol, perhaps, of the future — as a type of those who are to inherit the earth, in fact. She had been playing the fool with me, in her insolent modernity. She had wished me to understand that I was old-fashioned; that the frame of mind of which I and my fellows were the inheritors was over and done with. We were to be compulsorily retired; to stand aside superannuated. It was obvious that she was better equipped for the swiftness of life. She had a something — not only quickness of wit, not only ruthless determination, but a something quite different and quite indefinably more impressive. Perhaps it was only the confidence of the superseder, the essential quality that makes for the empire of the Occidental. But I was not a negro — not even relatively a Hindoo. I was somebody, confound it, I was somebody.

As an author, I had been so uniformly unsuccessful, so absolutely unrecognised, that I had got into the way of regarding myself as ahead of my time, as a worker for posterity. It was a habit of mind — the only revenge that I could take upon spiteful Fate. This girl came to confound me with the common herd — she declared herself to be that very posterity for which I worked.

She was probably a member of some clique that called themselves Fourth Dimensionists — just as there had been pre-Raphaelites. It was a matter of cant allegory. I began to wonder how it was that I had never heard of them. And how on earth had they come to hear of me!

“She must have read something of mine,” I found myself musing: “the Jenkins story perhaps. It must have been the Jenkins story; they gave it a good place in their rotten magazine. She must have seen that it was the real thing, and....” When one is an author one looks at things in that way, you know.

By that time I was ready to knock at the door of the great Callan. I seemed to be jerked into the commonplace medium of a great, great — oh,

an infinitely great — novelist's home life. I was led into a well-lit drawing-room, welcomed by the great man's wife, gently propelled into a bedroom, made myself tidy, descended and was introduced into the sanctum, before my eyes had grown accustomed to the lamp-light. Callan was seated upon his sofa surrounded by an admiring crowd of very local personages. I forget what they looked like. I think there was a man whose reddish beard did not become him and another whose face might have been improved by the addition of a reddish beard; there was also an extremely moody dark man and I vaguely recollect a person who lisped.

They did not talk much; indeed there was very little conversation. What there was Callan supplied. He — spoke — very — slowly — and — very — authoritatively, like a great actor whose aim is to hold the stage as long as possible. The raising of his heavy eyelids at the opening door conveyed the impression of a dark, mental weariness; and seemed somehow to give additional length to his white nose. His short, brown beard was getting very grey, I thought. With his lofty forehead and with his superior, yet propitiatory smile, I was of course familiar. Indeed one saw them on posters in the street. The notables did not want to talk. They wanted to be spell-bound — and they were. Callan sat there in an appropriate attitude — the one in which he was always photographed. One hand supported his head, the other toyed with his watch-chain. His face was uniformly solemn, but his eyes were disconcertingly furtive. He cross-questioned me as to my walk from Canterbury; remarked that the cathedral was a — magnificent — Gothic — Monument and set me right as to the lie of the roads. He seemed pleased to find that I remembered very little of what I ought to have noticed on the way. It gave him an opportunity for the display of his local erudition.

“A — remarkable woman — used — to — live — in — the — cottage — next — the — mill — at — Stelling,” he said; “she was the original of Kate Wingfield.”

“In your ‘Boldero?’” the chorus chorussed.

Remembrance of the common at Stelling — of the glimmering white faces of the shadowy cottages — was like a cold waft of mist to me. I forgot to say “Indeed!”

“She was — a very — remarkable — woman — She — — ”

I found myself wondering which was real; the common with its misty hedges and the blurred moon; or this room with its ranks of uniformly

bound books and its bust of the great man that threw a portentous shadow upward from its pedestal behind the lamp.

Before I had entirely recovered myself, the notables were departing to catch the last train. I was left alone with Callan.

He did not trouble to resume his attitude for me, and when he did speak, spoke faster.

“Interesting man, Mr. Jinks?” he said; “you recognised him?”

“No,” I said; “I don’t think I ever met him.”

Callan looked annoyed.

“I thought I’d got him pretty well. He’s Hector Steele. In my ‘Blanfield,’” he added.

“Indeed!” I said. I had never been able to read “Blanfield.” “Indeed, ah, yes — of course.”

There was an awkward pause.

“The whiskey will be here in a minute,” he said, suddenly. “I don’t have it in when Whatnot’s here. He’s the Rector, you know; a great temperance man. When we’ve had a — a modest quencher — we’ll get to business.”

“Oh,” I said, “your letters really meant — ”

“Of course,” he answered. “Oh, here’s the whiskey. Well now, Fox was down here the other night. You know Fox, of course?”

“Didn’t he start the rag called — ?”

“Yes, yes,” Callan answered, hastily, “he’s been very successful in launching papers. Now he’s trying his hand with a new one. He’s any amount of backers — big names, you know. He’s to run my next as a feuilleton. This — this venture is to be rather more serious in tone than any that he’s done hitherto. You understand?”

“Why, yes,” I said; “but I don’t see where I come in.”

Callan took a meditative sip of whiskey, added a little more water, a little more whiskey, and then found the mixture to his liking.

“You see,” he said, “Fox got a letter here to say that Wilkinson had died suddenly — some affection of the heart. Wilkinson was to have written a series of personal articles on prominent people. Well, Fox was nonplussed and I put in a word for you.”

“I’m sure I’m much — ” I began.

“Not at all, not at all,” Callan interrupted, blandly. “I’ve known you and you’ve known me for a number of years.”

A sudden picture danced before my eyes — the portrait of the Callan of the old days — the fawning, shady individual, with the seedy clothes, the furtive eyes and the obliging manners.

“Why, yes,” I said; “but I don’t see that that gives me any claim.”

Callan cleared his throat.

“The lapse of time,” he said in his grand manner, “rivets what we may call the bands of association.”

He paused to inscribe this sentence on the tablets of his memory. It would be dragged in — to form a purple patch — in his new serial.

“You see,” he went on, “I’ve written a good deal of autobiographical matter and it would verge upon self-advertisement to do more. You know how much I dislike that. So I showed Fox your sketch in the Kensington.”

“The Jenkins story?” I said. “How did you come to see it?”

“Then send me the Kensington,” he answered. There was a touch of sourness in his tone, and I remembered that the Kensington I had seen had been ballasted with seven goodly pages by Callan himself — seven unreadable packed pages of a serial.

“As I was saying,” Callan began again, “you ought to know me very well, and I suppose you are acquainted with my books. As for the rest, I will give you what material you want.”

“But, my dear Callan,” I said, “I’ve never tried my hand at that sort of thing.”

Callan silenced me with a wave of his hand.

“It struck both Fox and myself that your — your ‘Jenkins’ was just what was wanted,” he said; “of course, that was a study of a kind of broken-down painter. But it was well done.”

I bowed my head. Praise from Callan was best acknowledged in silence.

“You see, what we want, or rather what Fox wants,” he explained, “is a kind of series of studies of celebrities chez eux. Of course, they are not broken down. But if you can treat them as you treated Jenkins — get them in their studies, surrounded by what in their case stands for the broken lay figures and the faded serge curtains — it will be exactly the thing. It will be a new line, or rather — what is a great deal better, mind you — an old line treated in a slightly, very slightly different way. That’s what the public wants.”

“Ah, yes,” I said, “that’s what the public wants. But all the same, it’s been done time out of mind before. Why, I’ve seen photographs of you and

your arm-chair and your pen-wiper and so on, half a score of times in the sixpenny magazines.”

Callan again indicated bland superiority with a wave of his hand.

“You undervalue yourself,” he said.

I murmured — ”Thanks.”

“This is to be — not a mere pandering to curiosity — but an attempt to get at the inside of things — to get the atmosphere, so to speak; not merely to catalogue furniture.”

He was quoting from the prospectus of the new paper, and then cleared his throat for the utterance of a tremendous truth.

“Photography — is not — Art,” he remarked.

The fantastic side of our colloquy began to strike me.

“After all,” I thought to myself, “why shouldn’t that girl have played at being a denizen of another sphere? She did it ever so much better than Callan. She did it too well, I suppose.”

“The price is very decent,” Callan chimed in. “I don’t know how much per thousand, ...but....”

I found myself reckoning, against my will as it were.

“You’ll do it, I suppose?” he said.

I thought of my debts ... “Why, yes, I suppose so,” I answered. “But who are the others that I am to provide with atmospheres?”

Callan shrugged his shoulders.

“Oh, all sorts of prominent people — soldiers, statesmen, Mr. Churchill, the Foreign Minister, artists, preachers — all sorts of people.”

“All sorts of glory,” occurred to me.

“The paper will stand expenses up to a reasonable figure,” Callan reassured me.

“It’ll be a good joke for a time,” I said. “I’m infinitely obliged to you.”

He warded off my thanks with both hands.

“I’ll just send a wire to Fox to say that you accept,” he said, rising. He seated himself at his desk in the appropriate attitude. He had an appropriate attitude for every vicissitude of his life. These he had struck before so many people that even in the small hours of the morning he was ready for the kodak wielder. Beside him he had every form of labour-saver; every kind of literary knick-knack. There were book-holders that swung into positions suitable to appropriate attitudes; there were piles of little green boxes with red capital letters of the alphabet upon them, and big red boxes with black

small letters. There was a writing-lamp that cast an æsthetic glow upon another appropriate attitude — and there was one typewriter with note-paper upon it, and another with MS. paper already in position.

“My God!” I thought — ”to these heights the Muse soars.”

As I looked at the gleaming pillars of the typewriters, the image of my own desk appeared to me; chipped, ink-stained, gloriously dusty. I thought that when again I lit my battered old tin lamp I should see ashes and match-ends; a tobacco-jar, an old gnawed penny penholder, bits of pink blotting-paper, match-boxes, old letters, and dust everywhere. And I knew that my attitude — when I sat at it — would be inappropriate.

Callan was ticking off the telegram upon his machine. “It will go in the morning at eight,” he said.

## CHAPTER THREE

To encourage me, I suppose, Callan gave me the proof-sheets of his next to read in bed. The thing was so bad that it nearly sickened me of him and his jobs. I tried to read the stuff; to read it conscientiously, to read myself to sleep with it. I was under obligations to old Cal and I wanted to do him justice, but the thing was impossible. I fathomed a sort of a plot. It dealt in fratricide with a touch of adultery; a Great Moral Purpose loomed in the background. It would have been a dully readable novel but for that; as it was, it was intolerable. It was amazing that Cal himself could put out such stuff; that he should have the impudence. He was not a fool, not by any means a fool. It revolted me more than a little.

I came to it out of a different plane of thought. I may not have been able to write then — or I may; but I did know enough to recognise the flagrantly, the indecently bad, and, upon my soul, the idea that I, too, must cynically offer this sort of stuff if I was ever to sell my tens of thousands very nearly sent me back to my solitude. Callan had begun very much as I was beginning now; he had even, I believe, had ideals in his youth and had starved a little. It was rather trying to think that perhaps I was really no more than another Callan, that, when at last I came to review my life, I should have much such a record to look back upon. It disgusted me a little, and when I put out the light the horrors settled down upon me.

I woke in a shivering frame of mind, ashamed to meet Callan's eye. It was as if he must be aware of my over-night thoughts, as if he must think me a fool who quarrelled with my victuals. He gave no signs of any such knowledge — was dignified, cordial; discussed his breakfast with gusto, opened his letters, and so on. An anæmic amanuensis was taking notes for appropriate replies. How could I tell him that I would not do the work, that I was too proud and all the rest of it? He would have thought me a fool, would have stiffened into hostility, I should have lost my last chance. And, in the broad light of day, I was loath to do that.

He began to talk about indifferent things; we glided out on to a current of mediocre conversation. The psychical moment, if there were any such, disappeared.

Someone bearing my name had written to express an intention of offering personal worship that afternoon. The prospect seemed to please the great Cal. He was used to such things; he found them pay, I suppose. We began

desultorily to discuss the possibility of the writer's being a relation of mine; I doubted. I had no relations that I knew of; there was a phenomenal old aunt who had inherited the acres and respectability of the Etchingham Grangers, but she was not the kind of person to worship a novelist. I, the poor last of the family, was without the pale, simply because I, too, was a novelist. I explained these things to Callan and he commented on them, found it strange how small or how large, I forget which, the world was. Since his own apotheosis shoals of Callans had claimed relationship.

I ate my breakfast. Afterward, we set about the hatching of that article — the thought of it sickens me even now. You will find it in the volume along with the others; you may see how I lugged in Callan's surroundings, his writing-room, his dining-room, the romantic arbour in which he found it easy to write love-scenes, the clipped trees like peacocks and the trees clipped like bears, and all the rest of the background for appropriate attitudes. He was satisfied with any arrangements of words that suggested a gentle awe on the part of the writer.

"Yes, yes," he said once or twice, "that's just the touch, just the touch — very nice. But don't you think...." We lunched after some time.

I was so happy. Quite pathetically happy. It had come so easy to me. I had doubted my ability to do the sort of thing; but it had written itself, as money spends itself, and I was going to earn money like that. The whole of my past seemed a mistake — a childishness. I had kept out of this sort of thing because I had thought it below me; I had kept out of it and had starved my body and warped my mind. Perhaps I had even damaged my work by this isolation. To understand life one must live — and I had only brooded. But, by Jove, I would try to live now.

Callan had retired for his accustomed siesta and I was smoking pipe after pipe over a confoundedly bad French novel that I had found in the bookshelves. I must have been dozing. A voice from behind my back announced:

"Miss Etchingham Granger!" and added — "Mr. Callan will be down directly." I laid down my pipe, wondered whether I ought to have been smoking when Cal expected visitors, and rose to my feet.

"You!" I said, sharply. She answered, "You see." She was smiling. She had been so much in my thoughts that I was hardly surprised — the thing had even an air of pleasant inevitability about it.

"You must be a cousin of mine," I said, "the name — "



“Oh, call it sister,” she answered.

I was feeling inclined for farce, if blessed chance would throw it in my way. You see, I was going to live at last, and life for me meant irresponsibility.

“Ah!” I said, ironically, “you are going to be a sister to me, as they say.” She might have come the bogy over me last night in the moonlight, but now ... There was a spice of danger about it, too, just a touch lurking somewhere. Besides, she was good-looking and well set up, and I couldn’t see what could touch me. Even if it did, even if I got into a mess, I had no relatives, not even a friend, to be worried about me. I stood quite alone, and I half relished the idea of getting into a mess — it would be part of life, too. I was going to have a little money, and she excited my curiosity. I was tingling to know what she was really at.

“And one might ask,” I said, “what you are doing in this — in this....” I was at a loss for a word to describe the room — the smugness parading as professional Bohemianism.

“Oh, I am about my own business,” she said, “I told you last night — have you forgotten?”

“Last night you were to inherit the earth,” I reminded her, “and one doesn’t start in a place like this. Now I should have gone — well — I should have gone to some politician’s house — a cabinet minister’s — say to Gurnard’s. He’s the coming man, isn’t he?”

“Why, yes,” she answered, “he’s the coming man.”

You will remember that, in those days, Gurnard was only the dark horse of the ministry. I knew little enough of these things, despised politics generally; they simply didn’t interest me. Gurnard I disliked platonically; perhaps because his face was a little enigmatic — a little repulsive. The country, then, was in the position of having no Opposition and a Cabinet with two distinct strains in it — the Churchill and the Gurnard — and Gurnard was the dark horse.

“Oh, you should join your flats,” I said, pleasantly. “If he’s the coming man, where do you come in?... Unless he, too, is a Dimensionist.”

“Oh, both — both,” she answered. I admired the tranquillity with which she converted my points into her own. And I was very happy — it struck me as a pleasant sort of fooling....

“I suppose you will let me know some day who you are?” I said.

“I have told you several times,” she answered.

“Oh, you won’t frighten me to-day,” I asserted, “not here, you know, and anyhow, why should you want to?”

“I have told you,” she said again.

“You’ve told me you were my sister,” I said; “but my sister died years and years ago. Still, if it suits you, if you want to be somebody’s sister ...”

“It suits me,” she answered — “I want to be placed, you see.”

I knew that my name was good enough to place anyone. We had been the Grangers of Etchingham since — oh, since the flood. And if the girl wanted to be my sister and a Granger, why the devil shouldn’t she, so long as she would let me continue on this footing? I hadn’t talked to a woman — not to a well set-up one — for ages and ages. It was as if I had come back from one of the places to which younger sons exile themselves, and for all I knew it might be the correct thing for girls to elect brothers nowadays in one set or another.

“Oh, tell me some more,” I said, “one likes to know about one’s sister. You and the Right Honourable Charles Gurnard are Dimensionists, and who are the others of your set?”

“There is only one,” she answered. And would you believe it! — it seems he was Fox, the editor of my new paper.

“You select your characters with charming indiscriminateness,” I said.

“Fox is only a sort of toad, you know — he won’t get far.”

“Oh, he’ll go far,” she answered, “but he won’t get there. Fox is fighting against us.”

“Oh, so you don’t dwell in amity?” I said. “You fight for your own hands.”

“We fight for our own hands,” she answered, “I shall throw Gurnard over when he’s pulled the chestnuts out of the fire.”

I was beginning to get a little tired of this. You see, for me, the scene was a veiled flirtation and I wanted to get on. But I had to listen to her fantastic scheme of things. It was really a duel between Fox, the Journal-founder, and Gurnard, the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Fox, with Churchill, the Foreign Minister, and his supporters, for pieces, played what he called “the Old Morality business” against Gurnard, who passed for a cynically immoral politician.

I grew more impatient. I wanted to get out of this stage into something more personal. I thought she invented this sort of stuff to keep me from getting at her errand at Callan’s. But I didn’t want to know her errand; I

wanted to make love to her. As for Fox and Gurnard and Churchill, the Foreign Minister, who really was a sympathetic character and did stand for political probity, she might be uttering allegorical truths, but I was not interested in them. I wanted to start some topic that would lead away from this Dimensionist farce.

“My dear sister,” I began.... Callan always moved about like a confounded eavesdropper, wore carpet slippers, and stepped round the corners of screens. I expect he got copy like that.

“So, she’s your sister?” he said suddenly, from behind me. “Strange that you shouldn’t recognise the handwriting....”

“Oh, we don’t correspond,” I said light-heartedly, “we are so different.” I wanted to take a rise out of the creeping animal that he was. He confronted her blandly.

“You must be the little girl that I remember,” he said. He had known my parents ages ago. That, indeed, was how I came to know him; I wouldn’t have chosen him for a friend. “I thought Granger said you were dead ... but one gets confused....”

“Oh, we see very little of each other,” she answered. “Arthur might have said I was dead — he’s capable of anything, you know.” She spoke with an assumption of sisterly indifference that was absolutely striking. I began to think she must be an actress of genius, she did it so well. She was the sister who had remained within the pale; I, the rascal of a brother whose vagaries were trying to his relations. That was the note she struck, and she maintained it. I didn’t know what the deuce she was driving at, and I didn’t care. These scenes with a touch of madness appealed to me. I was going to live, and here, apparently, was a woman ready to my hand. Besides, she was making a fool of Callan, and that pleased me. His patronising manners had irritated me.

I assisted rather silently. They began to talk of mutual acquaintances — as one talks. They both seemed to know everyone in this world. She gave herself the airs of being quite in the inner ring; alleged familiarity with quite impossible persons, with my portentous aunt, with Cabinet Ministers — that sort of people. They talked about them — she, as if she lived among them; he, as if he tried very hard to live up to them.

She affected reverence for his person, plied him with compliments that he swallowed raw — horribly raw. It made me shudder a little; it was tragic to see the little great man confronted with that woman. It shocked me to think

that, really, I must appear much like him — must have looked like that yesterday. He was a little uneasy, I thought, made little confidences as if in spite of himself; little confidences about the Hour, the new paper for which I was engaged. It seemed to be run by a small gang with quite a number of assorted axes to grind. There was some foreign financier — a person of position whom she knew (a noble man in the best sense, Callan said); there was some politician (she knew him too, and he was equally excellent, so Callan said), Mr. Churchill himself, an artist or so, an actor or so — and Callan. They all wanted a little backing, so it seemed. Callan, of course, put it in another way. The Great — Moral — Purpose turned up, I don't know why. He could not think he was taking me in and she obviously knew more about the people concerned than he did. But there it was, looming large, and quite as farcical as all the rest of it. The foreign financier — they called him the Duc de Mersch — was by way of being a philanthropist on megalomaniac lines. For some international reason he had been allowed to possess himself of the pleasant land of Greenland. There was gold in it and train-oil in it and other things that paid — but the Duc de Mersch was not thinking of that. He was first and foremost a State Founder, or at least he was that after being titular ruler of some little spot of a Teutonic grand-duchy. No one of the great powers would let any other of the great powers possess the country, so it had been handed over to the Duc de Mersch, who had at heart, said Cal, the glorious vision of founding a model state — the model state, in which washed and broadclothed Esquimaux would live, side by side, regenerated lives, enfranchised equals of choicely selected younger sons of whatever occidental race. It was that sort of thing. I was even a little overpowered, in spite of the fact that Callan was its trumpeter; there was something fine about the conception and Churchill's acquiescence seemed to guarantee an honesty in its execution.

The Duc de Mersch wanted money, and he wanted to run a railway across Greenland. His idea was that the British public should supply the money and the British Government back the railway, as they did in the case of a less philanthropic Suez Canal. In return he offered an eligible harbour and a strip of coast at one end of the line; the British public was to be repaid in casks of train-oil and gold and with the consciousness of having aided in letting the light in upon a dark spot of the earth. So the Duc de Mersch started the Hour. The Hour was to extol the Duc de Mersch's moral purpose; to pat the Government's back; influence public opinion; and

generally advance the cause of the System for the Regeneration of the Arctic Regions.

I tell the story rather flippantly, because I heard it from Callan, and because it was impossible to take him seriously. Besides, I was not very much interested in the thing itself. But it did interest me to see how deftly she pumped him — squeezed him dry.

I was even a little alarmed for poor old Cal. After all, the man had done me a service; had got me a job. As for her, she struck me as a potentially dangerous person. One couldn't tell, she might be some adventuress, or if not that, a speculator who would damage Cal's little schemes. I put it to her plainly afterward; and quarrelled with her as well as I could. I drove her down to the station. Callan must have been distinctly impressed or he would never have had out his trap for her.

"You know," I said to her, "I won't have you play tricks with Callan — not while you're using my name. It's very much at your service as far as I'm concerned — but, confound it, if you're going to injure him I shall have to show you up — to tell him."

"You couldn't, you know," she said, perfectly calmly, "you've let yourself in for it. He wouldn't feel pleased with you for letting it go as far as it has. You'd lose your job, and you're going to live, you know — you're going to live...."

I was taken aback by this veiled threat in the midst of the pleasantries. It wasn't fair play — not at all fair play. I recovered some of my old alarm, remembered that she really was a dangerous person; that ...

"But I sha'n't hurt Callan," she said, suddenly, "you may make your mind easy."

"You really won't?" I asked.

"Really not," she answered. It relieved me to believe her. I did not want to quarrel with her. You see, she fascinated me, she seemed to act as a stimulant, to set me tingling somehow — and to baffle me.... And there was truth in what she said. I had let myself in for it, and I didn't want to lose Callan's job by telling him I had made a fool of him.

"I don't care about anything else," I said. She smiled.

## CHAPTER FOUR

I went up to town bearing the Callan article, and a letter of warm commendation from Callan to Fox. I had been very docile; had accepted emendations; had lavished praise, had been unctuous and yet had contrived to retain the dignified savour of the editorial “we.” Callan himself asked no more.

I was directed to seek Fox out — to find him immediately. The matter was growing urgent. Fox was not at the office — the brand new office that I afterward saw pass through the succeeding stages of business-like comfort and dusty neglect. I was directed to ask for him at the stage door of the Buckingham.

I waited in the doorkeeper’s glass box at the Buckingham. I was eyed by the suspicious commissionaire with the contempt reserved for resting actors. Resting actors are hungry suppliants as a rule. Call-boys sought Mr. Fox. “Anybody seen Mr. Fox? He’s gone to lunch.”

“Mr. Fox is out,” said the commissionaire.

I explained that the matter was urgent. More call-boys disappeared through the folding doors. Unenticing personages passed the glass box, casting hostile glances askance at me on my high stool. A message came back.

“If it’s Mr. Etchingham Granger, he’s to follow Mr. Fox to Mrs. Hartly’s at once.”

I followed Mr. Fox to Mrs. Hartly’s — to a little flat in a neighbourhood that I need not specify. The eminent journalist was lunching with the eminent actress. A husband was in attendance — a nonentity with a heavy yellow moustache, who hummed and hawed over his watch.

Mr. Fox was full-faced, with a persuasive, peremptory manner. Mrs. Hartly was — well, she was just Mrs. Hartly. You remember how we all fell in love with her figure and her manner, and her voice, and the way she used her hands. She broke her bread with those very hands; spoke to her husband with that very voice, and rose from table with that same graceful management of her limp skirts. She made eyes at me; at her husband; at little Fox, at the man who handed the asparagus — great round grey eyes. She was just the same. The curtain never fell on that eternal dress rehearsal. I don’t wonder the husband was forever looking at his watch.

Mr. Fox was a friend of the house. He dispensed with ceremony, read my manuscript over his Roquefort, and seemed to find it add to the savour.

"You are going to do me for Mr. Fox," Mrs. Hartly said, turning her large grey eyes upon me. They were very soft. They seemed to send out waves of intense sympatheticism. I thought of those others that had shot out a razor-edged ray.

"Why," I answered, "there was some talk of my doing somebody for the Hour."

Fox put my manuscript under his empty tumbler.

"Yes," he said, sharply. "He will do, I think. H'm, yes. Why, yes."

"You're a friend of Mr. Callan's, aren't you?" Mrs. Hartly asked, "What a dear, nice man he is! You should see him at rehearsals. You know I'm doing his 'Boldero'; he's given me a perfectly lovely part — perfectly lovely. And the trouble he takes. He tries every chair on the stage."

"H'm; yes," Fox interjected, "he likes to have his own way."

"We all like that," the great actress said. She was quoting from her first great part. I thought — but, perhaps, I was mistaken — that all her utterances were quotations from her first great part. Her husband looked at his watch.

"Are you coming to this confounded flower show?" he asked.

"Yes," she said, turning her mysterious eyes upon him, "I'll go and get ready."

She disappeared through an inner door. I expected to hear the pistol-shot and the heavy fall from the next room. I forgot that it was not the end of the fifth act.

Fox put my manuscript into his breast pocket.

"Come along, Granger," he said to me, "I want to speak to you. You'll have plenty of opportunity for seeing Mrs. Hartly, I expect. She's tenth on your list. Good-day, Hartly."

Hartly's hand was wavering between his moustache and his watch pocket.

"Good-day," he said sulkily.

"You must come and see me again, Mr. Granger," Mrs. Hartly said from the door. "Come to the Buckingham and see how we're getting on with your friend's play. We must have a good long talk if you're to get my local colour, as Mr. Fox calls it."

"To gild refined gold; to paint the lily,

To throw a perfume on the violet — ”

I quoted banally.

“That’s it,” she said, with a tender smile. She was fastening a button in her glove. I doubt her recognition of the quotation.

When we were in our hansom, Fox began:

“I’m relieved by what I’ve seen of your copy. One didn’t expect this sort of thing from you. You think it a bit below you, don’t you? Oh, I know, I know. You literary people are usually so impracticable; you know what I mean. Callan said you were the man. Callan has his uses; but one has something else to do with one’s paper. I’ve got interests of my own. But you’ll do; it’s all right. You don’t mind my being candid, do you, now?” I muttered that I rather liked it.

“Well then,” he went on, “now I see my way.”

“I’m glad you do,” I murmured. “I wish I did.”

“Oh, that will be all right,” Fox comforted. “I dare say Callan has rather sickened you of the job; particularly if you ain’t used to it. But you won’t find the others as trying. There’s Churchill now, he’s your next. You’ll have to mind him. You’ll find him a decent chap. Not a bit of side on him.”

“What Churchill?” I asked.

“The Foreign Minister.”

“The devil,” I said.

“Oh, you’ll find him all right,” Fox reassured; “you’re to go down to his place to-morrow. It’s all arranged. Here we are. Hop out.” He suited his own action to his words and ran nimbly up the new terra-cotta steps of the Hour’s home. He left me to pay the cabman.

When I rejoined him he was giving directions to an invisible somebody through folding doors.

“Come along,” he said, breathlessly. “Can’t see him,” he added to a little boy, who held a card in his hands. “Tell him to go to Mr. Evans. One’s life isn’t one’s own here,” he went on, when he had reached his own room.

It was a palatial apartment furnished in white and gold — Louis Quinze, or something of the sort — with very new decorations after Watteau covering the walls. The process of disfiguration, however, had already begun. A roll desk of the least possible Louis Quinze order stood in one of the tall windows; the carpet was marked by muddy footprints, and a matchboard screen had been run across one end of the room.



“Hullo, Evans,” Fox shouted across it, “just see that man from Grant’s, will you? Heard from the Central News yet?”

He was looking through the papers on the desk.

“Not yet, I’ve just rung them up for the fifth time,” the answer came.

“Keep on at it,” Fox exhorted.

“Here’s Churchill’s letter,” he said to me. “Have an arm-chair; those blasted things are too uncomfortable for anything. Make yourself comfortable. I’ll be back in a minute.”

I took an arm-chair and addressed myself to the Foreign Minister’s letter. It expressed bored tolerance of a potential interviewer, but it seemed to please Fox. He ran into the room, snatched up a paper from his desk, and ran out again.

“Read Churchill’s letter?” he asked, in passing. “I’ll tell you all about it in a minute.” I don’t know what he expected me to do with it — kiss the postage stamp, perhaps.

At the same time, it was pleasant to sit there idle in the midst of the hurry, the breathlessness. I seemed to be at last in contact with real life, with the life that matters. I was somebody, too. Fox treated me with a kind of deference — as if I were a great unknown. His “you literary men” was pleasing. It was the homage that the pretender pays to the legitimate prince; the recognition due to the real thing from the machine-made imitation; the homage of the builder to the architect.

“Ah, yes,” it seemed to say, “we jobbing men run up our rows and rows of houses; build whole towns and fill the papers for years. But when we want something special — something monumental — we have to come to you.”

Fox came in again.

“Very sorry, my dear fellow, find I can’t possibly get a moment for a chat with you. Look here, come and dine with me at the Paragraph round the corner — to-night at six sharp. You’ll go to Churchill’s to-morrow.”

The Paragraph Club, where I was to meet Fox, was one of those sporadic establishments that spring up in the neighbourhood of the Strand. It is one of their qualities that they are always just round the corner; another, that their stewards are too familiar; another, that they — in the opinion of the other members — are run too much for the convenience of one in particular.

In this case it was Fox who kept the dinner waiting. I sat in the little smoking-room and, from behind a belated morning paper, listened to the

conversation of the three or four journalists who represented the members. I felt as a new boy in a new school feels on his first introduction to his fellows.

There was a fossil dramatic critic sleeping in an arm-chair before the fire. At dinner-time he woke up, remarked:

“You should have seen Fanny Ellsler,” and went to sleep again.

Sprawling on a red velvet couch was a beau jeune homme, with the necktie of a Parisian-American student. On a chair beside him sat a personage whom, perhaps because of his plentiful lack of h’s, I took for a distinguished foreigner.

They were talking about a splendid subject for a music-hall dramatic sketch of some sort — afforded by a bus driver, I fancy.

I heard afterward that my Frenchman had been a costermonger and was now half journalist, half financier, and that my art student was an employee of one of the older magazines.

“Dinner’s on the table, gents,” the steward said from the door. He went toward the sleeper by the fire. “I expect Mr. Cunningham will wear that arm-chair out before he’s done,” he said over his shoulder.

“Poor old chap; he’s got nowhere else to go to,” the magazine employee said.

“Why doesn’t he go to the work’ouse,” the journalist financier retorted. “Make a good sketch that, eh?” he continued, reverting to his bus-driver.

“Jolly!” the magazine employee said, indifferently.

“Now, then, Mr. Cunningham,” the steward said, touching the sleeper on the shoulder, “dinner’s on the table.”

“God bless my soul,” the dramatic critic said, with a start. The steward left the room. The dramatic critic furtively took a set of false teeth out of his waistcoat pocket; wiped them with a bandanna handkerchief, and inserted them in his mouth.

He tottered out of the room.

I got up and began to inspect the pen-and-ink sketches on the walls.

The faded paltry caricatures of faded paltry lesser lights that confronted me from fly-blown frames on the purple walls almost made me shiver.

“There you are, Granger,” said a cheerful voice behind me. “Come and have some dinner.”

I went and had some dinner. It was seasoned by small jokes and little personalities. A Teutonic journalist, a musical critic, I suppose, inquired as

to the origin of the meagre pheasant. Fox replied that it had been preserved in the back-yard. The dramatic critic mumbled unheard that some piece or other was off the bills of the Adelphi. I grinned vacantly. Afterward, under his breath, Fox put me up to a thing or two regarding the inner meaning of the new daily. Put by him, without any glamour of a moral purpose, the case seemed rather mean. The dingy smoking-room depressed me and the whole thing was, what I had, for so many years, striven to keep out of. Fox hung over my ear, whispering. There were shades of intonation in his sibillating. Some of those “in it,” the voice implied, were not above-board; others were, and the tone became deferential, implied that I was to take my tone from itself.

“Of course, a man like the Right Honourable C. does it on the straight, ... quite on the straight, ... has to have some sort of semi-official backer.... In this case, it’s me, ... the Hour. They’re a bit splitty, the Ministry, I mean.... They say Gurnard isn’t playing square ... they say so.” His broad, red face glowed as he bent down to my ear, his little sea-blue eyes twinkled with moisture. He enlightened me cautiously, circumspectly. There was something unpleasant in the business — not exactly in Fox himself, but the kind of thing. I wish he would cease his explanations — I didn’t want to hear them. I have never wanted to know how things are worked; preferring to take the world at its face value. Callan’s revelations had been bearable, because of the farcical pompousness of his manner. But this was different, it had the stamp of truth, perhaps because it was a little dirty. I didn’t want to hear that the Foreign Minister was ever so remotely mixed up in this business. He was only a symbol to me, but he stood for the stability of statesmanship and for the decencies that it is troublesome to have touched.

“Of course,” he was proceeding, “the Churchill gang would like to go on playing the stand-off to us. But it won’t do, they’ve got to come in or see themselves left. Gurnard has pretty well nobbled their old party press, so they’ve got to begin all over again.”

That was it — that was precisely it. Churchill ought to have played the stand-off to people like us — to have gone on playing it at whatever cost. That was what I demanded of the world as I conceived it. It was so much less troublesome in that way. On the other hand, this was life — I was living now and the cost of living is disillusionment; it was the price I had to pay. Obviously, a Foreign Minister had to have a semi-official organ, or I supposed so.... “Mind you,” Fox whispered on, “I think myself, that it’s a

pity he is supporting the Greenland business. The thing's not altogether straight. But it's going to be made to pay like hell, and there's the national interest to be considered. If this Government didn't take it up, some other would — and that would give Gurnard and a lot of others a peg against Churchill and his. We can't afford to lose any more coaling stations in Greenland or anywhere else. And, mind you, Mr. C. can look after the interests of the niggers a good deal better if he's a hand in the pie. You see the position, eh?"

I wasn't actually listening to him, but I nodded at proper intervals. I knew that he wanted me to take that line in confidential conversations with fellows seeking copy. I was quite resigned to that. Incidentally, I was overcome by the conviction — perhaps it was no more than a sensation — that that girl was mixed up in this thing, that her shadow was somewhere among the others flickering upon the sheet. I wanted to ask Fox if he knew her. But, then, in that absurd business, I did not even know her name, and the whole story would have sounded a little mad. Just now, it suited me that Fox should have a moderate idea of my sanity. Besides, the thing was out of tone, I idealised her then. One wouldn't talk about her in a smoking-room full of men telling stories, and one wouldn't talk about her at all to Fox.

The musical critic had been prowling about the room with Fox's eyes upon him. He edged suddenly nearer, pushed a chair aside, and came toward us.

"Hullo," he said, in an ostentatiously genial, after-dinner voice, "what are you two chaps a-talking about?"

"Private matters," Fox answered, without moving a hair.

"Then I suppose I'm in the way?" the other muttered. Fox did not answer.

"Wants a job," he said, watching the discomfited Teuton's retreat, "but, as I was saying — oh, it pays both ways." He paused and fixed his eyes on me. He had been explaining the financial details of the matter, in which the Duc de Mersch and Callan and Mrs. Hartly and all these people clubbed together and started a paper which they hired Fox to run, which was to bring their money back again, which was to scratch their backs, which.... It was like the house that Jack built; I wondered who Jack was. That was it, who was Jack? It all hinged upon that.

"Why, yes," I said. "It seems rather neat."

"Of course," Fox wandered on, "you are wondering why the deuce I tell you all this. Fact is, you'd hear it all if I didn't, and a good deal more that

isn't true besides. But I believe you're the sort of chap to respect a confidence."

I didn't rise to the sentiment. I knew as well as he did that he was bamboozling me, that he was, as he said, only telling me — not the truth, but just what I should hear everywhere. I did not bear him any ill-will; it was part of the game, that. But the question was, who was Jack? It might be Fox himself.... There might, after all, be some meaning in the farrago of nonsense that that fantastic girl had let off upon me. Fox really and in a figure of speech such as she allowed herself, might be running a team consisting of the Duc de Mersch and Mr. Churchill.

He might really be backing a foreign, philanthropic ruler and State-founder, and a British Foreign Minister, against the rather sinister Chancellor of the Exchequer that Mr. Gurnard undoubtedly was. It might suit him; perhaps he had shares in something or other that depended on the success of the Duc de Mersch's Greenland Protectorate. I knew well enough, you must remember, that Fox was a big man — one of those big men that remain permanently behind the curtain, perhaps because they have a certain lack of comeliness of one sort or another and don't look well on the stage itself. And I understood now that if he had abandoned — as he had done — half a dozen enterprises of his own for the sake of the Hour, it must be because it was very well worth his while. It was not merely a question of the editorship of a paper; there was something very much bigger in the background. My Dimensionist young lady, again, might have other shares that depended on the Chancellor of the Exchequer's blocking the way. In that way she might very well talk allegorically of herself as in alliance with Gurnard against Fox and Churchill. I was at sea in that sort of thing — but I understood vaguely that something of the sort was remotely possible.

I didn't feel called upon to back out of it on that account, yet I very decidedly wished that the thing could have been otherwise. For myself, I came into the matter with clean hands — and I was going to keep my hands clean; otherwise, I was at Fox's disposal.

"I understand," I said, the speech marking my decision, "I shall have dealings with a good many of the proprietors — I am the scratcher, in fact, and you don't want me to make a fool of myself."

"Well," he answered, gauging me with his blue, gimlet eyes, "it's just as well to know."

“It’s just as well to know,” I echoed. It was just as well to know.

## CHAPTER FIVE

I had gone out into the blackness of the night with a firmer step, with a new assurance. I had had my interview, the thing was definitely settled; the first thing in my life that had ever been definitely settled; and I felt I must tell Lea before I slept. Lea had helped me a good deal in the old days — he had helped everybody, for that matter. You would probably find traces of Lea's influence in the beginnings of every writer of about my decade; of everybody who ever did anything decent, and of some who never got beyond the stage of burgeoning decently. He had given me the material help that a publisher's reader could give, until his professional reputation was endangered, and he had given me the more valuable help that so few can give. I had grown ashamed of this one-sided friendship. It was, indeed, partly because of that that I had taken to the wilds — to a hut near a wood, and all the rest of what now seemed youthful foolishness. I had desired to live alone, not to be helped any more, until I could make some return. As a natural result I had lost nearly all my friends and found myself standing there as naked as on the day I was born.

All around me stretched an immense town — an immense blackness. People — thousands of people hurried past me, had errands, had aims, had others to talk to, to trifle with. But I had nobody. This immense city, this immense blackness, had no interiors for me. There were house fronts, staring windows, closed doors, but nothing within; no rooms, no hollow places. The houses meant nothing to me, nothing more than the solid earth. Lea remained the only one the thought of whom was not like the reconsideration of an ancient, a musty pair of gloves.

He lived just anywhere. Being a publisher's reader, he had to report upon the probable commercial value of the manuscripts that unknown authors sent to his employer, and I suppose he had a settled plan of life, of the sort that brought him within the radius of a given spot at apparently irregular, but probably ordered, intervals. It seemed to be no more than a piece of good luck that let me find him that night in a little room in one of the by-ways of Bloomsbury. He was sprawling angularly on a cane lounge, surrounded by whole rubbish heaps of manuscript, a grey scrawl in a foam of soiled paper. He peered up at me as I stood in the doorway.

"Hullo!" he said, "what's brought you here? Have a manuscript?" He waved an abstracted hand round him. "You'll find a chair somewhere." A

claret bottle stood on the floor beside him. He took it by the neck and passed it to me.

He bent his head again and continued his reading. I displaced three bulky folio sheaves of typewritten matter from a chair and seated myself behind him. He continued to read.

"I hadn't seen these rooms before," I said, for want of something to say.

The room was not so much scantily as arbitrarily furnished. It contained a big mahogany sideboard; a common deal table, an extraordinary kind of folding wash-hand-stand; a deal bookshelf, the cane lounge, and three unrelated chairs. There were three framed Dutch prints on the marble mantel-shelf; striped curtains before the windows. A square, cheap looking-glass, with a razor above it, hung between them. And on the floor, on the chairs, on the sideboard, on the unmade bed, the profusion of manuscripts.

He scribbled something on a blue paper and began to roll a cigarette. He took off his glasses, rubbed them, and closed his eyes tightly.

"Well, and how's Sussex?" he asked.

I felt a sudden attack of what, essentially, was nostalgia. The fact that I was really leaving an old course of life, was actually and finally breaking with it, became vividly apparent. Lea, you see, stood for what was best in the mode of thought that I was casting aside. He stood for the aspiration. The brooding, the moodiness; all the childish qualities, were my own importations. I was a little ashamed to tell him, that — that I was going to live, in fact. Some of the glory of it had gone, as if one of two candles I had been reading by had flickered out. But I told him, after a fashion, that I had got a job at last.

"Oh, I congratulate you," he said.

"You see," I began to combat the objections he had not had time to utter, "even for my work it will be a good thing — I wasn't seeing enough of life to be able to...."

"Oh, of course not," he answered — "it'll be a good thing. You must have been having a pretty bad time."

It struck me as abominably unfair. I hadn't taken up with the Hour because I was tired of having a bad time, but for other reasons: because I had felt my soul being crushed within me.

"You're mistaken," I said. And I explained. He answered, "Yes, yes," but I fancied that he was adding to himself — "They all say that." I grew more angry. Lea's opinion formed, to some extent, the background of my life. For



many years I had been writing quite as much to satisfy him as to satisfy myself, and his coldness chilled me. He thought that my heart was not in my work, and I did not want Lea to think that of me. I tried to explain as much to him — but it was difficult, and he gave me no help.

I knew there had been others that he had fostered, only to see them, in the end, drift into the back-wash. And now he thought I was going too....

“Here,” he said, suddenly breaking away from the subject, “look at that.”

He threw a heavy, ribbon-bound mass of matter into my lap, and recommenced writing his report upon its saleability as a book. He was of opinion that it was too delicately good to attract his employer’s class of readers. I began to read it to get rid of my thoughts. The heavy black handwriting of the manuscript sticks in my mind’s eye. It must have been good, but probably not so good as I then thought it — I have entirely forgotten all about it; otherwise, I remember that we argued afterward: I for its publication; he against. I was thinking of the wretched author whose fate hung in the balance. He became a pathetic possibility, hidden in the heart of the white paper that bore pen-markings of a kind too good to be marketable. There was something appalling in Lea’s careless — “Oh, it’s too good!” He was used to it, but as for me, in arguing that man’s case I suddenly became aware that I was pleading my own — pleading the case of my better work. Everything that Lea said of this work, of this man, applied to my work; and to myself. “There’s no market for that sort of thing, no public; this book’s been all round the trade. I’ve had it before. The man will never come to the front. He’ll take to inn-keeping, and that will finish him off.” That’s what he said, and he seemed to be speaking of me. Some one was knocking at the door of the room — tentative knocks of rather flabby knuckles. It was one of those sounds that one does not notice immediately. The man might have been knocking for ten minutes. It happened to be Lea’s employer, the publisher of my first book. He opened the door at last, and came in rather peremptorily. He had the air of having worked himself into a temper — of being intellectually rather afraid of Lea, but of being, for this occasion, determined to assert himself.

The introduction to myself — I had never met him — which took place after he had hastily brought out half a sentence or so, had the effect of putting him out of his stride, but, after having remotely acknowledged the possibility of my existence, he began again.

The matter was one of some delicacy. I myself should have hesitated to broach it before a third party, even one so negligible as myself. But Mr. Polehampton apparently did not. He had to catch the last post.

Lea, it appeared, had advised him to publish a manuscript by a man called Howden — a moderately known writer....

“But I am disturbed to find, Mr. Lea, that is, my daughter tells me that the manuscript is not ... is not at all the thing.... In fact, it’s quite — and — eh ... I suppose it’s too late to draw back?”

“Oh, it’s altogether too late for that” Lea said, nonchalantly.

“Besides, Howden’s theories always sell.”

“Oh, yes, of course, of course,” Mr. Polehampton interjected, hastily, “but don’t you think now ... I mean, taking into consideration the damage it may do our reputation ... that we ought to ask Mr. Howden to accept, say fifty pounds less than....”

“I should think it’s an excellent idea,” Lea said. Mr. Polehampton glanced at him suspiciously, then turned to me.

“You see,” he began to explain, “one has to be so careful about these things.”

“Oh, I can quite understand,” I answered. There was something so naïve in the man’s point of view that I had felt my heart go out to him. And he had taught me at last how it is that the godly grow fat at the expense of the unrighteous. Mr. Polehampton, however, was not fat. He was even rather thin, and his peaked grey hair, though it was actually well brushed, looked as if it ought not to have been. He had even an anxious expression. People said he speculated in some stock or other, and I should say they were right.

“I ... eh ... believe I published your first book ... I lost money by it, but I can assure you that I bear no grudge — almost a hundred pounds. I bear no grudge....”

The man was an original. He had no idea that I might feel insulted; indeed, he really wanted to be pleasant, and condescending, and forgiving. I didn’t feel insulted. He was too big for his clothes, gave that impression at least, and he wore black kid gloves. Moreover, his eyes never left the cornice of the room. I saw him rather often after that night, but never without his gloves and never with his eyes lowered.

“And ... eh ...” he asked, “what are you doing now, Mr. Granger?”

Lea told him Fox had taken me up; that I was going to go. I suddenly remembered it was said of Fox that everyone he took up did “go.” The fact

was obviously patent to Mr. Polehampton. He unbent with remarkable suddenness; it reminded me of the abrupt closing of a stiff umbrella. He became distinctly and crudely cordial — hoped that we should work together again; once more reminded me that he had published my first book (the words had a different savour now), and was enchanted to discover that we were neighbours in Sussex. My cottage was within four miles of his villa, and we were members of the same golf club.

“We must have a game — several games,” he said. He struck me as the sort of man to find a difficulty in getting anyone to play with him.

After that he went away. As I had said, I did not dislike him — he was pathetic; but his tone of mind, his sudden change of front, unnerved me. It proved so absolutely that I was “going to go,” and I did not want to go — in that sense. The thing is a little difficult to explain, I wanted to take the job because I wanted to have money — for a little time, for a year or so, but if I once began to go, the temptation would be strong to keep on going, and I was by no means sure that I should be able to resist the temptation. So many others had failed. What if I wrote to Fox, and resigned?... Lea was deep in a manuscript once more.

“Shall I throw it up?” I asked suddenly. I wanted the thing settled.

“Oh, go on with it, by all means go on with it,” Lea answered.

“And ...?” I postulated.

“Take your chance of the rest,” he supplied; “you’ve had a pretty bad time.”

“I suppose,” I reflected, “if I haven’t got the strength of mind to get out of it in time, I’m not up to much.”

“There’s that, too,” he commented, “the game may not be worth the candle.” I was silent. “You must take your chance when you get it,” he added.

He had resumed his reading, but he looked up again when I gave way, as I did after a moment’s thought.

“Of course,” he said, “it will probably be all right. You do your best.

It’s a good thing ... might even do you good.”

In that way the thing went through. As I was leaving the room, the idea occurred to me, “By the way, you don’t know anything of a clique: the Dimensionists — Fourth Dimensionists?”

“Never heard of them,” he negatived. “What’s their specialty?”

“They’re going to inherit the earth,” I answered.

“Oh, I wish them joy,” he closed.

“You don’t happen to be one yourself? I believe it’s a sort of secret society.” He wasn’t listening. I went out quietly.

The night effects of that particular neighbourhood have always affected me dismally. That night they upset me, upset me in much the same way, acting on much the same nerves as the valley in which I had walked with that puzzling girl. I remembered that she had said she stood for the future, that she was a symbol of my own decay — the whole silly farrago, in fact. I reasoned with myself — that I was tired, out of trim, and so on, that I was in a fit state to be at the mercy of any nightmare. I plunged into Southampton Row. There was safety in the contact with the crowd, in jostling, in being jostled.

## CHAPTER SIX

It was Saturday and, as was his custom during the session, the Foreign Secretary had gone for privacy and rest till Monday to a small country house he had within easy reach of town. I went down with a letter from Fox in my pocket, and early in the afternoon found myself talking without any kind of inward disturbance to the Minister's aunt, a lean, elderly lady, with a keen eye, and credited with a profound knowledge of European politics. She had a rather abrupt manner and a business-like, brown scheme of coloration. She looked people very straight in the face, bringing to bear all the penetration which, as rumour said, enabled her to take a hidden, but very real part in the shaping of our foreign policy. She seemed to catalogue me, label me, and lay me on the shelf, before I had given my first answer to her first question.

"You ought to know this part of the country well," she said. I think she was considering me as a possible canvasser — an infinitesimal thing, but of a kind possibly worth remembrance at the next General Election.

"No," I said, "I've never been here before."

"Etchingham is only three miles away."

It was new to me to be looked upon as worth consideration for my place-name. I realised that Miss Churchill accorded me toleration on its account, that I was regarded as one of the Grangers of Etchingham, who had taken to literature.

"I met your aunt yesterday," Miss Churchill continued. She had met everybody yesterday.

"Yes," I said, non-committally. I wondered what had happened at that meeting. My aunt and I had never been upon terms. She was a great personage in her part of the world, a great dowager land-owner, as poor as a mouse, and as respectable as a hen. She was, moreover, a keen politician on the side of Miss Churchill. I, who am neither land-owner, nor respectable, nor politician, had never been acknowledged — but I knew that, for the sake of the race, she would have refrained from enlarging on my shortcomings.

"Has she found a companion to suit her yet?" I said, absent-mindedly. I was thinking of an old legend of my mother's. Miss Churchill looked me in between the eyes again. She was preparing to relabel me, I think. I had

become a spiteful humourist. Possibly I might be useful for platform malice.

“Why, yes,” she said, the faintest of twinkles in her eyes, “she has adopted a niece.”

The legend went that, at a hotly contested election in which my aunt had played a prominent part, a rainbow poster had beset the walls. “Who starved her governess?” it had inquired.

My accidental reference to such electioneering details placed me upon an excellent footing with Miss Churchill. I seemed quite unawares to have asserted myself a social equal, a person not to be treated as a casual journalist. I became, in fact, not the representative of the Hour — but an Etchingham Granger that competitive forces had compelled to accept a journalistic plum. I began to see the line I was to take throughout my interviewing campaign. On the one hand, I was “one of us,” who had temporarily strayed beyond the pale; on the other, I was to be a sort of great author’s bottle-holder.

A side door, behind Miss Churchill, opened gently. There was something very characteristic in the tentative manner of its coming ajar. It seemed to say: “Why any noisy vigour?” It seemed to be propelled by a contemplative person with many things on his mind. A tall, grey man in the doorway leaned the greater part of his weight on the arm that was stretched down to the handle. He was looking thoughtfully at a letter that he held in his other hand. A face familiar enough in caricatures suddenly grew real to me — more real than the face of one’s nearest friends, yet older than one had any wish to expect. It was as if I had gazed more intently than usual at the face of a man I saw daily, and had found him older and greyer than he had ever seemed before — as if I had begun to realise that the world had moved on.

He said, languidly — almost protestingly, “What am I to do about the Duc de Mersch?”

Miss Churchill turned swiftly, almost apprehensively, toward him. She uttered my name and he gave the slightest of starts of annoyance — a start that meant, “Why wasn’t I warned before?” This irritated me; I knew well enough what were his relations with de Mersch, and the man took me for a little eavesdropper, I suppose. His attitudes were rather grotesque, of the sort that would pass in a person of his eminence. He stuck his eye-glasses on the end of his nose, looked at me short-sightedly, took them off and

looked again. He had the air of looking down from an immense height — of needing a telescope.

“Oh, ah ... Mrs. Granger’s son, I presume.... I wasn’t aware....” The hesitation of his manner made me feel as if we never should get anywhere — not for years and years.

“No,” I said, rather brusquely, “I’m only from the Hour.”

He thought me one of Fox’s messengers then, said that Fox might have written: “Have saved you the trouble, I mean ... or....”

He had the air of wishing to be amiable, of wishing, even, to please me by proving that he was aware of my identity.

“Oh,” I said, a little loftily, “I haven’t any message, I’ve only come to interview you.” An expression of dismay sharpened the lines of his face.

“To....” he began, “but I’ve never allowed — ” He recovered himself sharply, and set the glasses vigorously on his nose; at last he had found the right track. “Oh, I remember now,” he said, “I hadn’t looked at it in that way.”

The whole thing grated on my self-love and I became, in a contained way, furiously angry. I was impressed with the idea that the man was only a puppet in the hands of Fox and de Mersch, and that lot. And he gave himself these airs of enormous distance. I, at any rate, was clean-handed in the matter; I hadn’t any axe to grind.

“Ah, yes,” he said, hastily, “you are to draw my portrait — as Fox put it. He sent me your Jenkins sketch. I read it — it struck a very nice note. And so — .” He sat himself down on a preposterously low chair, his knees on a level with his chin. I muttered that I feared he would find the process a bore.

“Not more for me than for you,” he answered, seriously — “one has to do these things.”

“Why, yes,” I echoed, “one has to do these things.” It struck me that he regretted it — regretted it intensely; that he attached a bitter meaning to the words.

“And ... what is the procedure?” he asked, after a pause. “I am new to the sort of thing.” He had the air, I thought, of talking to some respectable tradesman that one calls in only when one is in extremis — to a distinguished pawnbroker, a man quite at the top of a tree of inferior timber.

“Oh, for the matter of that, so am I,” I answered. “I’m supposed to get your atmosphere, as Callan put it.”

“Indeed,” he answered, absently, and then, after a pause, “You know Callan?” I was afraid I should fall in his estimation.

“One has to do these things,” I said; “I’ve just been getting his atmosphere.”

He looked again at the letter in his hand, smoothed his necktie and was silent. I realised that I was in the way, but I was still so disturbed that I forgot how to phrase an excuse for a momentary absence.

“Perhaps, ...” I began.

He looked at me attentively.

“I mean, I think I’m in the way,” I blurted out.

“Well,” he answered, “it’s quite a small matter. But, if you are to get my atmosphere, we may as well begin out of doors.” He hesitated, pleased with his witticism; “Unless you’re tired,” he added.

“I will go and get ready,” I said, as if I were a lady with bonnet-strings to tie. I was conducted to my room, where I kicked my heels for a decent interval. When I descended, Mr. Churchill was lounging about the room with his hands in his trouser-pockets and his head hanging limply over his chest. He said, “Ah!” on seeing me, as if he had forgotten my existence. He paused for a long moment, looked meditatively at himself in the glass over the fireplace, and then grew brisk. “Come along,” he said.

We took a longish walk through a lush home-country meadow land. We talked about a number of things, he opening the ball with that infernal Jenkins sketch. I was in the stage at which one is sick of the thing, tired of the bare idea of it — and Mr. Churchill’s laboriously kind phrases made the matter no better.

“You know who Jenkins stands for?” I asked. I wanted to get away on the side issues.

“Oh, I guessed it was — — ” he answered. They said that Mr. Churchill was an enthusiast for the school of painting of which Jenkins was the last exponent. He began to ask questions about him. Did he still paint? Was he even alive?

“I once saw several of his pictures,” he reflected. “His work certainly appealed to me ... yes, it appealed to me. I meant at the time ... but one forgets; there are so many things.” It seemed to me that the man wished by these detached sentences to convey that he had the weight of a kingdom — of several kingdoms — on his mind; that he could spare no more than a fragment of his thoughts for everyday use.



“You must take me to see him,” he said, suddenly. “I ought to have something.” I thought of poor white-haired Jenkins, and of his long struggle with adversity. It seemed a little cruel that Churchill should talk in that way without meaning a word of it — as if the words were a polite formality.

“Nothing would delight me more,” I answered, and added, “nothing in the world.”

He asked me if I had seen such and such a picture, talked of artists, and praised this and that man very fittingly, but with a certain timidity — a timidity that lured me back to my normally overbearing frame of mind. In such matters I was used to hearing my own voice. I could talk a man down, and, with a feeling of the unfitness of things, I talked Churchill down. The position, even then, struck me as gently humorous. It was as if some infinitely small animal were bullying some colossus among the beasts. I was of no account in the world, he had his say among the Olympians. And I talked recklessly, like any little school-master, and he swallowed it.

We reached the broad market-place of a little, red and grey, home county town; a place of but one street dominated by a great inn-signboard a-top of an enormous white post. The effigy of So-and-So of gracious memory swung lazily, creaking, overhead.

“This is Etchingham,” Churchill said.

It was a pleasant commentary on the course of time, this entry into the home of my ancestors. I had been without the pale for so long, that I had never seen the haunt of ancient peace. They had done very little, the Grangers of Etchingham — never anything but live at Etchingham and quarrel at Etchingham and die at Etchingham and be the monstrous important Grangers of Etchingham. My father had had the undesirable touch, not of the genius, but of the Bohemian. The Grangers of Etchingham had cut him adrift and he had swum to sink in other seas. Now I was the last of the Grangers and, as things went, was quite the best known of all of them. They had grown poor in their generation; they bade fair to sink, even as, it seemed, I bade fair to rise, and I had come back to the old places on the arm of one of the great ones of the earth. I wondered what the portentous old woman who ruled alone in Etchingham thought of these times — the portentous old woman who ruled, so they said, the place with a rod of iron; who made herself unbearable to her companions and had to fall back upon an unfortunate niece. I wondered idly who the niece could be; certainly not a Granger of Etchingham, for I was the only one of the breed.

One of her own nieces, most probably. Churchill had gone into the post-office, leaving me standing at the foot of the sign-post. It was a pleasant summer day, the air very clear, the place very slumbrous. I looked up the street at a pair of great stone gate-posts, august, in their way, standing distinctly aloof from the common houses, a little weather-stained, staidly lichened. At the top of each column sat a sculptured wolf — as far as I knew, my own crest. It struck me pleasantly that this must be the entrance of the Manor house.

The tall iron gates swung inward, and I saw a girl on a bicycle curve out, at the top of the sunny street. She glided, very clear, small, and defined, against the glowing wall, leaned aslant for the turn, and came shining down toward me. My heart leapt; she brought the whole thing into composition — the whole of that slumbrous, sunny street. The bright sky fell back into place, the red roofs, the blue shadows, the red and blue of the sign-board, the blue of the pigeons walking round my feet, the bright red of a postman's cart. She was gliding toward me, growing and growing into the central figure. She descended and stood close to me.

"You?" I said. "What blessed chance brought you here?"

"Oh, I am your aunt's companion," she answered, "her niece, you know."

"Then you must be a cousin," I said.

"No; sister," she corrected, "I assure you it's sister. Ask anyone — ask your aunt." I was braced into a state of puzzled buoyancy.

"But really, you know," I said. She was smiling, standing up squarely to me, leaning a little back, swaying her machine with the motion of her body.

"It's a little ridiculous, isn't it?" she said.

"Very," I answered, "but even at that, I don't see — . And I'm not phenomenally dense."

"Not phenomenally," she answered.

"Considering that I'm not a — not a Dimensionist," I bantered. "But you have really palmed yourself off on my aunt?"

"Really," she answered, "she doesn't know any better. She believes in me immensely. I am such a real Granger, there never was a more typical one. And we shake our heads together over you." My bewilderment was infinite, but it stopped short of being unpleasant.

"Might I call on my aunt?" I asked. "It wouldn't interfere — "

"Oh, it wouldn't interfere," she said, "but we leave for Paris to-morrow. We are very busy. We — that is, my aunt; I am too young and too, too

discreet — have a little salon where we hatch plots against half the régimes in Europe. You have no idea how Legitimate we are.”

“I don’t understand in the least,” I said; “not in the least.”

“Oh, you must take me literally if you want to understand,” she answered, “and you won’t do that. I tell you plainly that I find my account in unsettled states, and that I am unsettling them. Everywhere. You will see.”

She spoke with her monstrous dispassionateness, and I felt a shiver pass down my spine, very distinctly. I was thinking what she might do if ever she became in earnest, and if ever I chanced to stand in her way — as her husband, for example.

“I wish you would talk sense — for one blessed minute,” I said; “I want to get things a little settled in my mind.”

“Oh, I’ll talk sense,” she said, “by the hour, but you won’t listen. Take your friend, Churchill, now. He’s the man that we’re going to bring down. I mentioned it to you, and so....”

“But this is sheer madness,” I answered.

“Oh, no, it’s a bald statement of fact,” she went on.

“I don’t see how,” I said, involuntarily.

“Your article in the Hour will help. Every trifle will help,” she said. “Things that you understand and others that you cannot.... He is identifying himself with the Duc de Mersch. That looks nothing, but it’s fatal. There will be friendships ... and desertions.”

“Ah!” I said. I had had an inkling of this, and it made me respect her insight into home politics. She must have been alluding to Gurnard, whom everybody — perhaps from fear — pretended to trust. She looked at me and smiled again. It was still the same smile; she was not radiant to-day and pensive to-morrow. “Do you know I don’t like to hear that?” I began.

“Oh, there’s irony in it, and pathos, and that sort of thing,” she said, with the remotest chill of mockery in her intonation. “He goes into it clean-handed enough and he only half likes it. But he sees that it’s his last chance. It’s not that he’s worn out — but he feels that his time has come — unless he does something. And so he’s going to do something. You understand?”

“Not in the least,” I said, light-heartedly.

“Oh, it’s the System for the Regeneration of the Arctic Regions — the Greenland affair of my friend de Mersch. Churchill is going to make a grand coup with that — to keep himself from slipping down hill, and, of

course, it would add immensely to your national prestige. And he only half sees what de Mersch is or isn't."

"This is all Greek to me," I muttered rebelliously.

"Oh, I know, I know," she said. "But one has to do these things, and I want you to understand. So Churchill doesn't like the whole business. But he's under the shadow. He's been thinking a good deal lately that his day is over — I'll prove it to you in a minute — and so — oh, he's going to make a desperate effort to get in touch with the spirit of the times that he doesn't like and doesn't understand. So he lets you get his atmosphere. That's all."

"Oh, that's all," I said, ironically.

"Of course he'd have liked to go on playing the stand-off to chaps like you and me," she mimicked the tone and words of Fox himself.

"This is witchcraft," I said. "How in the world do you know what Fox said to me?"

"Oh, I know," she said. It seemed to me that she was playing me with all this nonsense — as if she must have known that I had a tenderness for her and were fooling me to the top of her bent. I tried to get my hook in.

"Now look here," I said, "we must get things settled. You ..."

She carried the speech off from under my nose.

"Oh, you won't denounce me," she said, "not any more than you did before; there are so many reasons. There would be a scene, and you're afraid of scenes — and our aunt would back me up. She'd have to. My money has been reviving the glories of the Grangers. You can see, they've been regilding the gate."

I looked almost involuntarily at the tall iron gates through which she had passed into my view. It was true enough — some of the scroll work was radiant with new gold.

"Well," I said, "I will give you credit for not wishing to — to prey upon my aunt. But still ..." I was trying to make the thing out. It struck me that she was an American of the kind that subsidizes households like that of Etchingham Manor. Perhaps my aunt had even forced her to take the family name, to save appearances. The old woman was capable of anything, even of providing an obscure nephew with a brilliant sister. And I should not be thanked if I interfered. This skeleton of swift reasoning passed between word and word ... "You are no sister of mine!" I was continuing my sentence quite amiably.

Her face brightened to greet someone approaching behind me.

“Did you hear him?” she said. “Did you hear him, Mr. Churchill. He casts off — he disowns me. Isn’t he a stern brother? And the quarrel is about nothing.” The impudence — or the presence of mind of it — overwhelmed me.

Churchill smiled pleasantly.

“Oh — one always quarrels about nothing,” Churchill answered. He spoke a few words to her; about my aunt; about the way her machine ran — that sort of thing. He behaved toward her as if she were an indulged child, impertinent with licence and welcome enough. He himself looked rather like the short-sighted, but indulgent and very meagre lion that peers at the unicorn across a plum-cake.

“So you are going back to Paris,” he said. “Miss Churchill will be sorry. And you are going to continue to — to break up the universe?”

“Oh, yes,” she answered, “we are going on with that, my aunt would never give it up. She couldn’t, you know.”

“You’ll get into trouble,” Churchill said, as if he were talking to a child intent on stealing apples. “And when is our turn coming? You’re going to restore the Stuarts, aren’t you?” It was his idea of badinage, amiable without consequence.

“Oh, not quite that,” she answered, “not quite that.” It was curious to watch her talking to another man — to a man, not a bagman like Callan. She put aside the face she always showed me and became at once what Churchill took her for — a spoiled child. At times she suggested a certain kind of American, and had that indefinable air of glib acquaintance with the names, and none of the spirit of tradition. One half expected her to utter rhapsodies about donjon-keeps.

“Oh, you know,” she said, with a fine affectation of aloofness, “we shall have to be rather hard upon you; we shall crumple you up like — ” Churchill had been moving his stick absent-mindedly in the dust of the road, he had produced a big “C H U.” She had erased it with the point of her foot — “like that,” she concluded.

He laid his head back and laughed almost heartily.

“Dear me,” he said, “I had no idea that I was so much in the way of — of yourself and Mrs. Granger.”

“Oh, it’s not only that,” she said, with a little smile and a cast of the eye to me. “But you’ve got to make way for the future.”

Churchill's face changed suddenly. He looked rather old, and grey, and wintry, even a little frail. I understood what she was proving to me, and I rather disliked her for it. It seemed wantonly cruel to remind a man of what he was trying to forget.

"Ah, yes," he said, with the gentle sadness of quite an old man, "I dare say there is more in that than you think. Even you will have to learn."

"But not for a long time," she interrupted audaciously.

"I hope not," he answered, "I hope not." She nodded and glided away.

We resumed the road in silence. Mr. Churchill smiled at his own thoughts once or twice.

"A most amusing ..." he said at last. "She does me a great deal of good, a great deal."

I think he meant that she distracted his thoughts.

"Does she always talk like that?" I asked. He had hardly spoken to me, and I felt as if I were interrupting a reverie — but I wanted to know.

"I should say she did," he answered; "I should say so. But Miss Churchill says that she has a real genius for organization. She used to see a good deal of them, before they went to Paris, you know."

"What are they doing there?" It was as if I were extracting secrets from a sleep-walker.

"Oh, they have a kind of a meeting place, for all kinds of Legitimist pretenders — French and Spanish, and that sort of thing. I believe Mrs. Granger takes it very seriously." He looked at me suddenly. "But you ought to know more about it than I do," he said.

"Oh, we see very little of each other," I answered, "you could hardly call us brother and sister."

"Oh, I see," he answered. I don't know what he saw. For myself, I saw nothing.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

I succeeded in giving Fox what his journal wanted; I got the atmosphere of Churchill and his house, in a way that satisfied the people for whom it was meant. His house was a pleasant enough place, of the sort where they do you well, but not nauseously well. It stood in a tranquil countryside, and stood there modestly. Architecturally speaking, it was gently commonplace; one got used to it and liked it. And Churchill himself, when one had become accustomed to his manner, one liked very well — very well indeed. He had a dainty, dilettante mind, delicately balanced, with strong limitations, a fantastic temperament for a person in his walk of life — but sane, mind you, persistent. After a time, I amused myself with a theory that his heart was not in his work, that circumstance had driven him into the career of politics and ironical fate set him at its head. For myself, I had an intense contempt for the political mind, and it struck me that he had some of the same feeling. He had little personal quaintnesses, too, a deference, a modesty, an open-mindedness.

I was with him for the greater part of his weekend holiday; hung, perforce, about him whenever he had any leisure. I suppose he found me tiresome — but one has to do these things. He talked, and I talked; heavens, how we talked! He was almost always deferential, I almost always dogmatic; perhaps because the conversation kept on my own ground. Politics we never touched. I seemed to feel that if I broached them, I should be checked — politely, but very definitely. Perhaps he actually contrived to convey as much to me; perhaps I evolved the idea that if I were to say:

“What do you think about the ‘Greenland System’” — he would answer:

“I try not to think about it,” or whatever gently closing phrase his mind conceived. But I never did so; there were so many other topics.

He was then writing his *Life of Cromwell* and his mind was very full of his subject. Once he opened his heart, after delicately sounding me for signs of boredom. It happened, by the merest chance — one of those blind chances that inevitably lead in the future — that I, too, was obsessed at that moment by the Lord Oliver. A great many years before, when I was a yearling of tremendous plans, I had set about one of those glorious novels that one plans — a splendid thing with Old Noll as the hero or the heavy father. I had haunted the bookstalls in search of local colour and had wonderfully well invested my half-crowns. Thus a company of seventeenth

century tracts, dog-eared, coverless, but very glorious under their dust, accompany me through life. One parts last with those relics of a golden age, and during my late convalescence I had reread many of them, the arbitrary half-remembered phrases suggesting all sorts of scenes — lamplight in squalid streets, trays full of weather-beaten books. So, even then, my mind was full of *Mercurius Rusticus*. Mr. Churchill on Cromwell amused me immensely and even excited me. It was life, this attending at a self-revelation of an impossible temperament. It did me good, as he had said of my pseudo-sister. It was fantastic — as fantastic as herself — and it came out more in his conversation than in the book itself. I had something to do with that, of course. But imagine the treatment accorded to Cromwell by this delicate, negative, obstinately judicial personality. It was the sort of thing one wants to get into a novel. It was a lesson to me — in temperament, in point of view; I went with his mood, tried even to outdo him, in the hope of spurring him to outdo himself. I only mention it because I did it so well that it led to extraordinary consequences.

We were walking up and down his lawn, in the twilight, after his Sunday supper. The pale light shone along the gleaming laurels and dwelt upon the soft clouds of orchard blossoms that shimmered above them. It dwelt, too, upon the silver streaks in his dark hair and made his face seem more pallid, and more old. It affected me like some intense piece of irony. It was like hearing a dying man talk of the year after next. I had the sense of the unreality of things strong upon me. Why should nightingale upon nightingale pour out volley upon volley of song for the delight of a politician whose heart was not in his task of keeping back the waters of the deluge, but who grew animated at the idea of damning one of the titans who had let loose the deluge?

About a week after — or it may have been a fortnight — Churchill wrote to me and asked me to take him to see the Jenkins of my Jenkins story. It was one of those ordeals that one goes through when one has tried to advance one's friends. Jenkins took the matter amiss, thought it was a display of insulting patronage on the part of officialism. He was reluctant to show his best work, the forgotten masterpieces, the things that had never sold, that hung about on the faded walls and rotted in cellars. He would not be his genial self; he would not talk. Churchill behaved very well — I think he understood.



Jenkins thawed before his gentle appreciations. I could see the change operating within him. He began to realise that this incredible visit from a man who ought to be hand and glove with Academicians was something other than a spy's encroachment. He was old, you must remember, and entirely unsuccessful. He had fought a hard fight and had been worsted. He took his revenge in these suspicions.

We younger men adored him. He had the ruddy face and the archaic silver hair of the King of Hearts; and a wonderful elaborate politeness that he had inherited from his youth — from the days of Brummell. And, whilst all his belongings were rotting into dust, he retained an extraordinarily youthful and ingenuous habit of mind. It was that, or a little of it, that gave the charm to my Jenkins story.

It was a disagreeable experience. I wished so much that the perennial hopefulness of the man should at last escape deferring and I was afraid that Churchill would chill before Jenkins had time to thaw. But, as I have said, I think Churchill understood. He smiled his kindly, short-sighted smile over canvas after canvas, praised the right thing in each, remembered having seen this and that in such and such a year, and Jenkins thawed.

He happened to leave the room — to fetch some studies, to hurry up the tea or for some such reason. Bereft of his presence the place suddenly grew ghostly. It was as if the sun had died in the sky and left us in that nether world where dead, buried pasts live in a grey, shadowless light. Jenkins' palette glowed from above a medley of stained rags on his open colour table. The rush-bottom of his chair resembled a wind-torn thatch.

"One can draw morals from a life like that," I said suddenly. I was thinking rather of Jenkins than of the man I was talking to.

"Why, yes," he said, absently, "I suppose there are men who haven't the knack of getting on."

"It's more than a knack," I said, with unnecessary bitterness. "It's a temperament."

"I think it's a habit, too. It may be acquired, mayn't it?"

"No, no," I fulminated, "it's precisely because it can't be acquired that the best men — the men like ..." I stopped suddenly, impressed by the idea that the thing was out of tone. I had to assert myself more than I liked in talking to Churchill. Otherwise I should have disappeared. A word from him had the weight of three kingdoms and several colonies behind it, and I was forced to get that out of my head by making conversation a mere matter

of temperament. In that I was the stronger. If I wanted to say a thing, I said it; but he was hampered by a judicial mind. It seemed, too, that he liked a dictatorial interlocutor, else he would hardly have brought himself into contact with me again. Perhaps it was new to him. My eye fell upon a couple of masks, hanging one on each side of the fireplace. The room was full of a profusion of little casts, thick with dust upon the shoulders, the hair, the eyelids, on every part that projected outward.

“By-the-bye,” I said, “that’s a death-mask of Cromwell.”

“Ah!” he answered, “I knew there was....”

He moved very slowly toward it, rather as if he did not wish to bring it within his field of view. He stopped before reaching it and pivotted slowly to face me.

“About my book,” he opened suddenly, “I have so little time.” His briskness dropped into a half complaint, like a faintly suggested avowal of impotence. “I have been at it four years now. It struck me — you seemed to coincide so singularly with my ideas.”

His speech came wavering to a close, but he recommenced it apologetically — as if he wished me to help him out.

“I went to see Smithson the publisher about it, and he said he had no objection....”

He looked appealingly at me. I kept silence.

“Of course, it’s not your sort of work. But you might try.... You see....” He came to a sustained halt.

“I don’t understand,” I said, rather coldly, when the silence became embarrassing. “You want me to ‘ghost’ for you?”

“‘Ghost,’ good gracious no,” he said, energetically; “dear me, no!”

“Then I really don’t understand,” I said.

“I thought you might see your ... I wanted you to collaborate with me. Quite publicly, of course, as far as the epithet applies.”

“To collaborate,” I said slowly. “You....”

I was looking at a miniature of the Farnese Hercules — I wondered what it meant, what club had struck the wheel of my fortune and whirled it into this astounding attitude.

“Of course you must think about it,” he said.

“I don’t know,” I muttered; “the idea is so new. It’s so little in my line. I don’t know what I should make of it.”

I talked at random. There were so many thoughts jostling in my head. It seemed to carry me so much farther from the kind of work I wanted to do. I did not really doubt my ability — one does not. I rather regarded it as work upon a lower plane. And it was a tremendous — an incredibly tremendous — opportunity.

“You know pretty well how much I’ve done,” he continued. “I’ve got a good deal of material together and a good deal of the actual writing is done. But there is ever so much still to do. It’s getting beyond me, as I said just now.”

I looked at him again, rather incredulously. He stood before me, a thin parallelogram of black with a mosaic of white about the throat. The slight grotesqueness of the man made him almost impossibly real in his abstracted earnestness. He so much meant what he said that he ignored what his hands were doing, or his body or his head. He had taken a very small, very dusty book out of a little shelf beside him, and was absently turning over the rusty leaves, while he talked with his head bent over it. What was I to him, or he to me?

“I could give my Saturday afternoons to it,” he was saying, “whenever you could come down.”

“It’s immensely kind of you,” I began.

“Not at all, not at all,” he waived. “I’ve set my heart on doing it and, unless you help me, I don’t suppose I ever shall get it done.”

“But there are hundreds of others,” I said.

“There may be,” he said, “there may be. But I have not come across them.”

I was beset by a sudden emotion of blind candour.

“Oh, nonsense, nonsense,” I said. “Don’t you see that you are offering me the chance of a lifetime?”

Churchill laughed.

“After all, one cannot refuse to take what offers,” he said. “Besides, your right man to do the work might not suit me as a collaborator.”

“It’s very tempting,” I said.

“Why, then, succumb,” he smiled.

I could not find arguments against him, and I succumbed as Jenkins re-entered the room.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

After that I began to live, as one lives; and for forty-nine weeks. I know it was forty-nine, because I got fifty-two atmospheres in all; Callan's and Churchill's, and those forty-nine and the last one that finished the job and the year of it. It was amusing work in its way; people mostly preferred to have their atmospheres taken at their country houses — it showed that they had them, I suppose. Thus I spent a couple of days out of every week in agreeable resorts, and people were very nice to me — it was part of the game.

So I had a pretty good time for a year and enjoyed it, probably because I had had a pretty bad one for several years. I filled in the rest of my weeks by helping Fox and collaborating with Mr. Churchill and adoring Mrs. Hartly at odd moments. I used to hang about the office of the Hour on the chance of snapping up a blank three lines fit for a subtle puff of her. Sometimes they were too hurried to be subtle, and then Mrs. Hartly was really pleased.

I never understood her in the least, and I very much doubt whether she ever understood a word I said. I imagine that I must have talked to her about her art or her mission — things obviously as strange to her as to the excellent Hartly himself. I suppose she hadn't any art; I am certain she hadn't any mission, except to be adored. She walked about the stage and one adored her, just as she sat about her flat and was adored, and there the matter ended.

As for Fox, I seemed to suit him — I don't in the least know why. No doubt he knew me better than I knew myself. He used to get hold of me whilst I was hanging about the office on the chance of engaging space for Mrs. Hartly, and he used to utilise me for the ignoblest things. I saw men for him, scribbled notes for him, abused people through the telephone, and wrote articles. Of course, there were the pickings.

I never understood Fox — not in the least, not more than I understood Mrs. Hartly. He had the mannerisms of the most incredible vulgarian and had, apparently, the point of view of a pig. But there was something else that obscured all that, that forced one to call him a wonderful man. Everyone called him that. He used to say that he knew what he wanted and that he got it, and that was true, too. I didn't in the least want to do his odd jobs, even for the ensuing pickings, and I didn't want to be hail-fellow with

him. But I did them and I was, without even realising that it was distasteful to me. It was probably the same with everybody else.

I used to have an idea that I was going to reform him; that one day I should make him convert the Hour into an asylum for writers of merit. He used to let me have my own way sometimes — just often enough to keep my conscience from inconveniencing me. He let me present Lea with an occasional column and a half; and once he promised me that one day he would allow me to get the atmosphere of Arthur Edwards, the novelist.

Then there was Churchill and the Life of Cromwell that progressed slowly. The experiment succeeded well enough, as I grew less domineering and he less embarrassed. Toward the end I seemed to have become a familiar inmate of his house. I used to go down with him on Saturday afternoons and we talked things over in the train. It was, to an idler like myself, wonderful the way that essential idler's days were cut out and fitted in like the squares of a child's puzzle; little passages of work of one kind fitting into quite unrelated passages of something else. He did it well, too, without the remotest semblance of hurry.

I suppose that actually the motive power was his aunt. People used to say so, but it did not appear on the surface to anyone in close contact with the man; or it appeared only in very small things. We used to work in a tall, dark, pleasant room, book-lined, and giving on to a lawn that was always an asylum for furtive thrushes. Miss Churchill, as a rule, sat half forgotten near the window, with the light falling over her shoulder. She was always very absorbed in papers; seemed to be spending laborious days in answering letters, in evolving reports. Occasionally she addressed a question to her nephew, occasionally received guests that came informally but could not be refused admittance. Once it was a semi-royal personage, once the Duc de Mersch, my reputed employer.

The latter, I remember, was announced when Churchill and I were finally finishing our account of the tremendous passing of the Protector. In that silent room I had a vivid sense of the vast noise of the storm in that twilight of the crowning mercy. I seemed to see the candles a-flicker in the eddies of air forced into the gloomy room; the great bed and the portentous uncouth form that struggled in the shadows of the hangings. Miss Churchill looked up from the card that had been placed in her hands.

“Edward,” she said, “the Duc de Mersch.”

Churchill rose irritably from his low seat. "Confound him," he said, "I won't see him."

"You can't help it, I think," his aunt said, reflectively; "you will have to settle it sooner or later."

I know pretty well what it was they had to settle — the Greenland affair that had hung in the air so long. I knew it from hearsay, from Fox, vaguely enough. Mr. Gurnard was said to recommend it for financial reasons, the Duc to be eager, Churchill to hang back unaccountably. I never had much head for details of this sort, but people used to explain them to me — to explain the reasons for de Mersch's eagerness. They were rather shabby, rather incredible reasons, that sounded too reasonable to be true. He wanted the money for his railways — wanted it very badly. He was vastly in want of money, he was this, that, and the other in certain international-philanthropic concerns, and had a finger in this, that, and the other pie. There was an "All Round the World Cable Company" that united hearts and hands, and a "Pan-European Railway, Exploration, and Civilisation Company" that let in light in dark places, and an "International Housing of the Poor Company," as well as a number of others. Somewhere at the bottom of these seemingly bottomless concerns, the Duc de Mersch was said to be moving, and the Hour certainly contained periodically complimentary allusions to their higher philanthropy and dividend-earning prospects. But that was as much as I knew. The same people — people one met in smoking-rooms — said that the Trans-Greenland Railway was the last card of de Mersch. British investors wouldn't trust the Duc without some sort of guarantee from the British Government, and no other investor would trust him on any terms. England was to guarantee something or other — the interest for a number of years, I suppose. I didn't believe them, of course — one makes it a practice to believe nothing of the sort. But I recognised that the evening was momentous to somebody — that Mr. Gurnard and the Duc de Mersch and Churchill were to discuss something and that I was remotely interested because the Hour employed me.

Churchill continued to pace up and down.

"Gurnard dines here to-night," his aunt said.

"Oh, I see." His hands played with some coins in his trouser-pockets. "I see," he said again, "they've ..."

The occasion impressed me. I remember very well the manner of both nephew and aunt. They seemed to be suddenly called to come to a decision

that was no easy one, that they had wished to relegate to an indefinite future.

She left Churchill pacing nervously up and down.

"I could go on with something else, if you like," I said.

"But I don't like," he said, energetically; "I'd much rather not see the man. You know the sort of person he is."

"Why, no," I answered, "I never studied the Almanac de Gotha."

"Oh, I forgot," he said. He seemed vexed with himself.

Churchill's dinners were frequently rather trying to me. Personages of enormous importance used to drop in — and reveal themselves as rather asinine. At the best of times they sat dimly opposite to me, discomposed me, and disappeared. Sometimes they stared me down. That night there were two of them.

Gurnard I had heard of. One can't help hearing of a Chancellor of the Exchequer. The books of reference said that he was the son of one William Gurnard, Esq., of Grimsby; but I remember that once in my club a man who professed to know everything, assured me that W. Gurnard, Esq. (whom he had described as a fish salesman), was only an adoptive father. His rapid rise seemed to me inexplicable till the same man accounted for it with a shrug: "When a man of such ability believes in nothing, and sticks at nothing, there's no saying how far he may go. He has kicked away every ladder. He doesn't mean to come down."

This, no doubt, explained much; but not everything in his fabulous career. His adherents called him an inspired statesman; his enemies set him down a mere politician. He was a man of forty-five, thin, slightly bald, and with an icy assurance of manner. He was indifferent to attacks upon his character, but crushed mercilessly every one who menaced his position. He stood alone, and a little mysterious; his own party was afraid of him.

Gurnard was quite hidden from me by table ornaments; the Duc de Mersch glowed with light and talked voluminously, as if he had for years and years been starved of human society. He glowed all over, it seemed to me. He had a glorious beard, that let one see very little of his florid face and took the edge away from an almost non-existent forehead and depressingly wrinkled eyelids. He spoke excellent English, rather slowly, as if he were forever replying to toasts to his health. It struck me that he seemed to treat Churchill in nuances as an inferior, whilst for the invisible Gurnard, he reserved an attitude of nervous self-assertion. He had apparently come to

dilate on the *Système Groënlandais*, and he dilated. Some mistaken persons had insinuated that the *Système* was neither more nor less than a corporate exploitation of unhappy Esquimaux. De Mersch emphatically declared that those mistaken people were mistaken, declared it with official finality. The Esquimaux were not unhappy. I paid attention to my dinner, and let the discourse on the affairs of the Hyperborean Protectorate lapse into an unheeded murmur. I tried to be the simple amanuensis at the feast.

Suddenly, however, it struck me that de Mersch was talking at me; that he had by the merest shade raised his intonation. He was dilating upon the immense international value of the proposed Trans-Greenland Railway. Its importance to British trade was indisputable; even the opposition had no serious arguments to offer. It was the obvious duty of the British Government to give the financial guarantee. He would not insist upon the moral aspect of the work — it was unnecessary. Progress, improvement, civilisation, a little less evil in the world — more light! It was our duty not to count the cost of humanising a lower race. Besides, the thing would pay like another Suez Canal. Its terminus and the British coaling station would be on the west coast of the island.... I knew the man was talking at me — I wondered why.

Suddenly he turned his glowing countenance full upon me.

"I think I must have met a member of your family," he said. The solution occurred to me. I was a journalist, he a person interested in a railway that he wished the Government to back in some way or another. His attempts to capture my suffrage no longer astonished me. I murmured:

"Indeed!"

"In Paris — Mrs. Etchingham Granger," he said.

I said, "Oh, yes."

Miss Churchill came to the rescue.

"The Duc de Mersch means our friend, your aunt," she explained. I had an unpleasant sensation. Through fronds of asparagus fern I caught the eyes of Gurnard fixed upon me as though something had drawn his attention. I returned his glance, tried to make his face out. It had nothing distinctive in its half-hidden pallid oval; nothing that one could seize upon. But it gave the impression of never having seen the light of day, of never having had the sun upon it. But the conviction that I had aroused his attention disturbed me. What could the man know about me? I seemed to feel his glance bore through the irises of my eyes into the back of my skull. The feeling was



almost physical; it was as if some incredibly concentrant reflector had been turned upon me. Then the eyelids dropped over the metallic rings beneath them. Miss Churchill continued to explain.

“She has started a sort of Salon des Causes Perdues in the Faubourg Saint Germain.” She was recording the vagaries of my aunt. The Duc laughed.

“Ah, yes,” he said, “what a menagerie — Carlists, and Orleanists, and Papal Blacks. I wonder she has not held a bazaar in favour of your White Rose League.”

“Ah, yes,” I echoed, “I have heard that she was mad about the divine right of kings.”

Miss Churchill rose, as ladies rise at the end of a dinner. I followed her out of the room, in obedience to some minute signal.

We were on the best of terms — we two. She mothered me, as she mothered everybody not beneath contempt or above a certain age. I liked her immensely — the masterful, absorbed, brown lady. As she walked up the stairs, she said, in half apology for withdrawing me.

“They’ve got things to talk about.”

“Why, yes,” I answered; “I suppose the railway matter has to be settled.” She looked at me fixedly.

“You — you mustn’t talk,” she warned.

“Oh,” I answered, “I’m not indiscreet — not essentially.”

The other three were somewhat tardy in making their drawing-room appearance. I had a sense of them, leaning their heads together over the edges of the table. In the interim a rather fierce political dowager convoyed two well-controlled, blond daughters into the room. There was a continual coming and going of such people in the house; they did with Miss Churchill social business of some kind, arranged electoral rarée-shows, and what not; troubled me very little. On this occasion the blond daughters were types of the sixties’ survivals — the type that unemotionally inspected albums. I was convoying them through a volume of views of Switzerland, the dowager was saying to Miss Churchill:

“You think, then, it will be enough if we have...” When the door opened behind my back. I looked round negligently and hastily returned to the consideration of a shining photograph of the Dent du Midi. A very gracious figure of a girl was embracing the grim Miss Churchill, as a gracious girl should virginally salute a grim veteran.

“Ah, my dear Miss Churchill!” a fluting voice filled the large room, “we were very nearly going back to Paris without once coming to see you. We are only over for two days — for the Tenants’ Ball, and so my aunt ... but surely that is Arthur....”

I turned eagerly. It was the Dimensionist girl. She continued talking to Miss Churchill. “We meet so seldom, and we are never upon terms,” she said lightly. “I assure you we are like cat and dog.” She came toward me and the blond maidens disappeared, everybody, everything disappeared. I had not seen her for nearly a year. I had vaguely gathered from Miss Churchill that she was regarded as a sister of mine, that she had, with wealth inherited from a semi-fabulous Australian uncle, revived the glories of my aunt’s house. I had never denied it, because I did not want to interfere with my aunt’s attempts to regain some of the family’s prosperity. It even had my sympathy to a small extent, for, after all, the family was my family too.

As a memory my pseudo-sister had been something bright and clear-cut and rather small; seen now, she was something that one could not look at for glow. She moved toward me, smiling and radiant, as a ship moves beneath towers of shining canvas. I was simply overwhelmed. I don’t know what she said, what I said, what she did or I. I have an idea that we conversed for some minutes. I remember that she said, at some point,

“Go away now; I want to talk to Mr. Gurnard.”

As a matter of fact, Gurnard was making toward her — a deliberate, slow progress. She greeted him with nonchalance, as, beneath eyes, a woman greets a man she knows intimately. I found myself hating him, thinking that he was not the sort of man she ought to know.

“It’s settled?” she asked him, as he came within range. He looked at me inquiringly — insolently. She said, “My brother,” and he answered:

“Oh, yes,” as I moved away. I hated the man and I could not keep my eyes off him and her. I went and stood against the mantel-piece. The Duc de Mersch bore down upon them, and I welcomed his interruption until I saw that he, too, was intimate with her, intimate with a pomposity of flourishes as irritating as Gurnard’s nonchalance.

I stood there and glowered at them. I noted her excessive beauty; her almost perilous self-possession while she stood talking to those two men. Of me there was nothing left but the eyes. I had no mind, no thoughts. I saw the three figures go through the attitudes of conversation — she very

animated, de Mersch grotesquely empressé, Gurnard undisguisedly saturnine. He repelled me exactly as grossly vulgar men had the power of doing, but he, himself, was not that — there was something ... something. I could not quite make out his face, I never could. I never did, any more than I could ever quite visualise hers. I wondered vaguely how Churchill could work in harness with such a man, how he could bring himself to be closeted, as he had just been, with him and with a fool like de Mersch — I should have been afraid.

As for de Mersch, standing between those two, he seemed like a country lout between confederate sharpers. It struck me that she let me see, made me see, that she and Gurnard had an understanding, made manifest to me by glances that passed when the Duc had his unobservant eyes turned elsewhere.

I saw Churchill, in turn, move desultorily toward them, drawn in, like a straw toward a little whirlpool. I turned my back in a fury of jealousy.

## CHAPTER NINE

I had a pretty bad night after that, and was not much in the mood for Fox on the morrow. The sight of her had dwarfed everything; the thought of her disgusted me with everything, made me out of conceit with the world — with that part of the world that had become my world. I wanted to get up into hers — and I could not see any way. The room in which Fox sat seemed to be hopelessly off the road — to be hopelessly off any road to any place; to be the end of a blind alley. One day I might hope to occupy such a room — in my shirt-sleeves, like Fox. But that was not the end of my career — not the end that I desired. She had upset me.

“You’ve just missed Polehampton,” Fox said; “wanted to get hold of your ‘Atmospheres.’”

“Oh, damn Polehampton,” I said, “and particularly damn the ‘Atmospheres.’”

“Willingly,” Fox said, “but I told Mr. P. that you were willing if....”

“I don’t want to know,” I repeated. “I tell you I’m sick of the things.”

“What a change,” he asserted, sympathetically, “I thought you would.”

It struck me as disgusting that a person like Fox should think about me at all. “Oh, I’ll see it through,” I said. “Who’s the next?”

“We’ve got to have the Duc de Mersch now,” he answered, “De Mersch as State Founder — written as large as you can — all across the page. The moment’s come and we’ve got to rope it in, that’s all. I’ve been middling good to you.... You understand....”

He began to explain in his dark sentences. The time had come for an energetically engineered boom in de Mersch — a boom all along the line. And I was to commence the campaign. Fox had been good to me and I was to repay him. I listened in a sort of apathetic indifference.

“Oh, very well,” I said. I was subconsciously aware that, as far as I was concerned, the determining factor of the situation was the announcement that de Mersch was to be in Paris. If he had been in his own particular grand duchy I wouldn’t have gone after him. For a moment I thought of the interview as taking place in London. But Fox — ostensibly, at least — wasn’t even aware of de Mersch’s visit; spoke of him as being in Paris — in a flat in which he was accustomed to interview the continental financiers who took up so much of his time.

I realised that I wanted to go to Paris because she was there. She had said that she was going to Paris on the morrow of yesterday. The name was pleasant to me, and it turned the scale.

Fox's eyes remained upon my face.

"Do you good, eh?" he dimly interpreted my thoughts. "A run over. I thought you'd like it and, look here, Polehampton's taken over the Bi-Monthly; wants to get new blood into it, see? He'd take something. I've been talking to him — a short series.... 'Aspects.' That sort of thing." I tried to work myself into some sort of enthusiasm of gratitude. I knew that Fox had spoken well of me to Polehampton — as a sort of set off.

"You go and see Mr. P.," he confirmed; "it's really all arranged. And then get off to Paris as fast as you can and have a good time."

"Have I been unusually cranky lately?" I asked.

"Oh, you've been a little off the hooks, I thought, for the last week or so."

He took up a large bottle of white mucilage, and I accepted it as a sign of dismissal. I was touched by his solicitude for my health. It always did touch me, and I found myself unusually broad-minded in thought as I went down the terra-cotta front steps into the streets. For all his frank vulgarity, for all his shirt-sleeves — I somehow regarded that habit of his as the final mark of the Beast — and the Louis Quinze accessories, I felt a warm good-feeling for the little man.

I made haste to see Polehampton, to beard him in a sort of den that contained a number of shelves of books selected for their glittering back decoration. They gave the impression that Mr. Polehampton wished to suggest to his visitors the fitness and propriety of clothing their walls with the same gilt cloth. They gave that idea, but I think that, actually, Mr. Polehampton took an aesthetic delight in the gilding. He was not a publisher by nature. He had drifted into the trade and success, but beneath a polish of acquaintance retained a fine awe for a book as such. In early life he had had such shining things on a shiny table in a parlour. He had a similar awe for his daughter, who had been born after his entry into the trade, and who had the literary flavour — a flavour so pronounced that he dragged her by the heels into any conversation with us who hewed his raw material, expecting, I suppose, to cow us. For the greater good of this young lady he had bought the Bi-Monthly — one of the portentous political organs. He had, they said, ideas of forcing a seat out of the party as a recompense.

It didn't matter much what was the nature of my series of articles. I was to get the atmosphere of cities as I had got those of the various individuals. I seemed to pay on those lines, and Miss Polehampton commended me.

"My daughter likes ... eh ... your touch, you know, and...." His terms were decent — for the man, and were offered with a flourish that indicated special benevolence and a reference to the hundred pounds. I was at a loss to account for his manner until he began to stammer out an indication. Its lines were that I knew Fox, and I knew Churchill and the Duc de Mersch, and the Hour. "And those financial articles ... in the Hour ... were they now?... Were they ... was the Trans -Greenland railway actually ... did I think it would be worth one's while ... in fact...." and so on.

I never was any good in a situation of that sort, never any good at all. I ought to have assumed blank ignorance, but the man's eyes pleaded; it seemed a tremendous matter to him. I tried to be non-committal, and said: "Of course I haven't any right." But I had a vague, stupid sense that loyalty to Churchill demanded that I should back up a man he was backing. As a matter of fact, nothing so direct was a-gate, it couldn't have been. It was something about shares in one of de Mersch's other enterprises. Polehampton was going to pick them up for nothing, and they were going to rise when the boom in de Mersch's began — something of the sort. And the boom would begin as soon as the news of the agreement about the railway got abroad.

I let him get it out of me in a way that makes the thought of that bare place with its gilt book-backs and its three uncomfortable office-chairs and the ground-glass windows through which one read the inversion of the legend "Polehampton," all its gloom and its rigid lines and its pallid light, a memory of confusion. And Polehampton was properly grateful, and invited me to dine with him and his phantasmal daughter — who wanted to make my acquaintance. It was like a command to a state banquet given by a palace official, and Lea would be invited to meet me. Miss Polehampton did not like Lea, but he had to be asked once a year — to encourage good feeling, I suppose. The interview dribbled out on those lines. I asked if it was one of Lea's days at the office. It was not. I tried to put in a good word for Lea, but it was not very effective. Polehampton was too subject to his assistant's thorns to be responsive to praise of him.

So I hurried out of the place. I wanted to be out of this medium in which my ineffectiveness threatened to proclaim itself to me. It was not a very

difficult matter. I had, in those days, rooms in one of the political journalists' clubs — a vast mausoleum of white tiles. But a man used to pack my portmanteau very efficiently and at short notice. At the station one of those coincidences that are not coincidences made me run against the great Callan. He was rather unhappy — found it impossible to make an already distracted porter listen to the end of one of his sentences with two-second waits between each word. For that reason he brightened to see me — was delighted to find a through-journey companion who would take him on terms of greatness. In the railway carriage, divested of troublesome bags that imparted anxiety to his small face and a stagger to his walk, he swelled to his normal dimensions.

"So you're — going to — Paris," he meditated, "for the Hour."

"I'm going to Paris for the Hour," I agreed.

"Ah!" he went on, "you're going to interview the Elective Grand Duke...."

"We call him the Duc de Mersch," I interrupted, flippantly. It was a matter of nuances. The Elective Grand Duke was a philanthropist and a State Founder, the Duc de Mersch was the hero as financier.

"Of Holstein-Launewitz," Callan ignored. The titles slipped over his tongue like the last drops of some inestimable oily vintage.

"I might have saved you the trouble. I'm going to see him myself."

"You," I italicised. It struck me as phenomenal and rather absurd that everybody that I came across should, in some way or other, be mixed up with this portentous philanthropist. It was as if a fisherman were drawing in a ground line baited with hundreds of hooks. He had a little offended air.

"He, or, I should say, a number of people interested in a philanthropic society, have asked me to go to Greenland."

"Do they want to get rid of you?" I asked, flippantly. I was made to know my place.

"My dear fellow," Callan said, in his most deliberate, most Olympian tone. "I believe you're entirely mistaken, I believe ... I've been informed that the *Système Groënlandais* is one of the healthiest places in the Polar regions. There are interested persons who...."

"So I've heard," I interrupted, "but I can assure you I've heard nothing but good of the *Système* and the ... and its philanthropists. I meant nothing against them. I was only astonished that you should go to such a place."

“I have been asked to go upon a mission,” he explained, seriously, “to ascertain what the truth about the *Système* really is. It is a new country with, I am assured, a great future in store. A great deal of English money has been invested in its securities, and naturally great interest is taken in its affairs.”

“So it seems,” I said, “I seem to run upon it at every hour of the day and night.”

“Ah, yes,” Callan rhapsodised, “it has a great future in store, a great future. The Duke is a true philanthropist. He has taken infinite pains — infinite pains. He wished to build up a model state, the model protectorate of the world, a place where perfect equality shall obtain for all races, all creeds, and all colours. You would scarcely believe how he has worked to ensure the happiness of the native races. He founded the great society to protect the Esquimaux, the Society for the Regeneration of the Arctic Regions — the S.R.A.R. — as you called it, and now he is only waiting to accomplish his greatest project — the Trans-Greenland railway. When that is done, he will hand over the *Système* to his own people. That is the act of a great man.”

“Ah, yes,” I said.

“Well,” Callan began again, but suddenly paused. “By-the-bye, this must go no farther,” he said, anxiously, “I will let you have full particulars when the time is ripe.”

“My dear Callan,” I said, touchily, “I can hold my tongue.”

He went off at tangent.

“I don’t want you to take my word — I haven’t seen it yet. But I feel assured about it myself. The most distinguished people have spoken to me in its favour. The celebrated traveller, Aston, spoke of it with tears in his eyes. He was the first governor-general, you know. Of course I should not take any interest in it, if I were not satisfied as to that. It is precisely because I feel that the thing is one of the finest monuments of a grand century that I am going to lend it the weight of my pen.”

“I quite understand,” I assured him; then, solicitously, “I hope they don’t expect you to do it for nothing.”

“Oh, dear, no,” Callan answered.

“Ah, well, I wish you luck,” I said. “They couldn’t have got a better man to win over the National conscience. I suppose it comes to that.”

Callan nodded.



“I fancy I have the ear of the public,” he said. He seemed to get satisfaction from the thought.

The train entered Folkestone Harbour. The smell of the sea and the easy send of the boat put a little heart into me, but my spirits were on the down grade. Callan was a trying companion. The sight of him stirred uneasy emotions, the sound of his voice jarred.

“Are you coming to the Grand?” he said, as we passed St. Denis.

“My God, no,” I answered, hotly, “I’m going across the river.”

“Ah,” he murmured, “the Quartier Latin. I wish I could come with you. But I’ve my reputation to think of. You’d be surprised how people get to hear of my movements. Besides, I’m a family man.”

I was agitatedly silent. The train steamed into the glare of the electric lights, and, getting into a fiacre, I breathed again. I seemed to be at the entrance of a new life, a better sort of paradise, during that drive across the night city. In London one is always a passenger, in Paris one has reached a goal. The crowds on the pavements, under the plane-trees, in the black shadows, in the white glare of the open spaces, are at leisure — they go nowhere, seek nothing beyond.

We crossed the river, the unwinking towers of Notre Dame towering pallidly against the dark sky behind us; rattled into the new light of the resuming boulevard; turned up a dark street, and came to a halt before a half-familiar shut door. You know how one wakes the sleepy concierge, how one takes one’s candle, climbs up hundreds and hundreds of smooth stairs, following the slipshod footfalls of a half-awakened guide upward through Rembrandt’s own shadows, and how one’s final sleep is sweetened by the little inconveniences of a strange bare room and of a strange hard bed.

## CHAPTER TEN

Before noon of the next day I was ascending the stairs of the new house in which the Duc had his hermitage. There was an air of secrecy in the broad publicity of the carpeted stairs that led to his flat; a hush in the atmosphere; in the street itself, a glorified cul de sac that ran into the bustling life of the Italiens. It had the sudden sluggishness of a back-water. One seemed to have grown suddenly deaf in the midst of the rattle.

There was an incredible suggestion of silence — the silence of a private detective — in the mien of the servant who ushered me into a room. He was the English servant of the theatre — the English servant that foreigners affect. The room had a splendour of its own, not a cheaply vulgar splendour, but the vulgarity of the most lavish plush and purple kind. The air was heavy, killed by the scent of exotic flowers, darkened by curtains that suggested the voluminous velvet backgrounds of certain old portraits. The Duc de Mersch had carried with him into this place of retirement the taste of the New Palace, that show-place of his that was the stupefaction of swarms of honest tourists.

I remembered soon enough that the man was a philanthropist, that he might be an excellent man of heart and indifferent of taste. He must be. But I was prone to be influenced by things of this sort, and felt depressed at the thought that so much of royal excellence should weigh so heavily in the wrong scale of the balance of the applied arts. I turned my back on the room and gazed at the blazing white decorations of the opposite house-fronts.

A door behind me must have opened, for I heard the sounds of a concluding tirade in a high-pitched voice.

“Et quant à un duc de farce, je ne m’en fiche pas mal, moi,” it said in an accent curiously compounded of the foreign and the coulisse. A muttered male remonstrance ensued, and then, with disconcerting clearness:

“Gr-r-rangeur — Eschingan — eh bien — il entend. Et moi, j’entends, moi aussi. Tu veux me jouer contre elle. La Grangeur — pah! Consoles-toi avec elle, mon vieux. Je ne veux plus de toi. Tu m’as donné de tes sales rentes Groenlandoises, et je n’ai pas pu les vendre. Ah, vieux farceur, tu vas voir ce que j’en vais faire.”

A glorious creature — a really glorious creature — came out of an adjoining room. She was as frail, as swaying as a garden lily. Her great blue eyes turned irefully upon me, her bowed lips parted, her nostrils quivered.

“Et quant à vous, M. Grangeur Eschingan,” she began, “je vais vous donner mon idée à moi ...”

I did not understand the situation in the least, but I appreciated the awkwardness of it. The world seemed to be standing on its head. I was overcome; but I felt for the person in the next room. I did not know what to do. Suddenly I found myself saying:

“I am extremely sorry, madam, but I don’t understand French.” An expression of more intense vexation passed into her face — her beautiful face. I fancy she wished — wished intensely — to give me the benefit of her “idée à elle.” She made a quick, violent gesture of disgusted contempt, and turned toward the half-open door from which she had come. She began again to dilate upon the little weaknesses of the person behind, when silently and swiftly it closed. We heard the lock click. With extraordinary quickness she had her mouth at the keyhole: “Peeg, peeg,” she enunciated. Then she stood to her full height, her face became calm, her manner stately. She glided half way across the room, paused, looked at me, and pointed toward the unmoving door.

“Peeg, peeg,” she explained, mysteriously. I think she was warning me against the wiles of the person behind the door. I gazed into her great eyes. “I understand,” I said, gravely. She glided from the room. For me the incident supplied a welcome touch of comedy. I had leisure for thought. The door remained closed. It made the Duc a more real person for me. I had regarded him as a rather tiresome person in whom a pompous philanthropism took the place of human feelings. It amused me to be called Le Grangeur. It amused me, and I stood in need of amusement. Without it I might never have written the article on the Duc. I had started out that morning in a state of nervous irritation. I had wanted more than ever to have done with the thing, with the Hour, with journalism, with everything. But this little new experience buoyed me up, set my mind working in less morbid lines. I began to wonder whether de Mersch would funk, or whether he would take my non-comprehension of the woman’s tirades as a thing assured.

The door at which I had entered, by which she had left, opened.

He must have impressed me in some way or other that evening at the Churchills. He seemed a very stereotyped image in my memory. He spoke just as he had spoken, moved his hands just as I expected him to move them. He called for no modification of my views of his person. As a rule

one classes a man so-and-so at first meeting, modifies the classification at each subsequent one, and so on. He seemed to be all affability, of an adipose turn. He had the air of the man of the world among men of the world; but none of the unconscious reserve of manner that one expects to find in the temporarily great. He had in its place a kind of sub-sulkiness, as if he regretted the pedestal from which he had descended.

In his slow commercial English he apologised for having kept me waiting; he had been taking the air of this fine morning, he said. He mumbled the words with his eyes on my waistcoat, with an air that accorded rather ill with the semblance of portentous probity that his beard conferred on him. But he set an eye-glass in his left eye immediately afterward, and looked straight at me as if in challenge. With a smiling "Don't mention," I tried to demonstrate that I met him half way.

"You want to interview me," he said, blandly. "I am only too pleased. I suppose it is about my Arctic schemes that you wish to know. I will do what I can to inform you. You perhaps remember what I said when I had the pleasure of meeting you at the house of the Right Honourable Mr. Churchill. It has been the dream of my life to leave behind me a happy and contented State — as much as laws and organisation can make one. This is what I should most like the English to know of me." He was a dull talker. I supposed that philanthropists and state founders kept their best faculties for their higher pursuits. I imagined the low, receding forehead and the pink-nailed, fleshy hands to belong to a new Solon, a latter-day Æneas. I tried to work myself into the properly enthusiastic frame of mind. After all, it was a great work that he had undertaken. I was too much given to dwell upon intellectual gifts. These the Duc seemed to lack. I credited him with having let them be merged in his one noble idea.

He furnished me with statistics. They had laid down so many miles of railways, used so many engines of British construction. They had taught the natives to use and to value sewing-machines and European costumes. So many hundred of English younger sons had gone to make their fortunes and, incidentally, to enlighten the Esquimaux — so many hundreds of French, of Germans, Greeks, Russians. All these lived and moved in harmony, employed, happy, free labourers, protected by the most rigid laws. Man-eating, fetich-worship, slavery had been abolished, stamped out. The great international society for the preservation of Polar freedom watched over all, suggested new laws, modified the old. The country was unhealthy,

but not to men of clean lives — *hominibus bonæ voluntatis*. It asked for no others.

“I have had to endure much misrepresentation. I have been called names,” the Duc said.

The figure of the lady danced before my eyes, lithe, supple — a statue endued with the motion of a serpent. I seemed to see her sculptured white hand pointing to the closed door.

“Ah, yes,” I said, “but one knows the people that call you names.”

“Well, then,” he answered, “it is your task to make them know the truth.

Your nation has so much power. If it will only realise.”

“I will do my best,” I said.

I saw the apotheosis of the Press — a Press that makes a State Founder suppliant to a man like myself. For he had the tone of a deprecating petitioner. I stood between himself and a people, the arbiter of the peoples, of the kings of the future. I was nothing, nobody; yet here I stood in communion with one of those who change the face of continents. He had need of me, of the power that was behind me. It was strange to be alone in that room with that man — to be there just as I might be in my own little room alone with any other man.

I was not unduly elated, you must understand. It was nothing to me. I was just a person elected by some suffrage of accidents. Even in my own eyes I was merely a symbol — the sign visible of incomprehensible power.

“I will do my best,” I said.

“Ah, yes, do,” he said, “Mr. Churchill told me how nicely you can do such things.”

I said that it was very kind of Mr. Churchill. The tension of the conversation was relaxed. The Duc asked if I had yet seen my aunt.

“I had forgotten her,” I said.

“Oh, you must see her,” he said; “she is a most remarkable lady. She is one of my relaxations. All Paris talks about her, I can assure you.”

“I had no idea,” I said.

“Oh, cultivate her,” he said; “you will be amused.”

“I will,” I said, as I took my leave.

I went straight home to my little room above the roofs. I began at once to write my article, working at high pressure, almost hysterically. I remember that place and that time so well. In moments of emotion one gazes fixedly at things, hardly conscious of them. Afterward one remembers.

I can still see the narrow room, the bare, brown, discoloured walls, the incongruous marble clock on the mantel-piece, the single rickety chair that swayed beneath me. I could almost draw the tortuous pattern of the faded cloth that hid the round table at which I sat. The ink was thick, pale, and sticky; the pen spluttered. I wrote furiously, anxious to be done with it. Once I went and leaned over the balcony, trying to hit on a word that would not come. Miles down below, little people crawled over the cobbled street, little carts rattled, little workmen let down casks into a cellar. It was all very grey, small, and clear.

Through the open window of an opposite garret I could see a sculptor working at a colossal clay model. In his white blouse he seemed big, out of all proportion to the rest of the world. Level with my eyes there were flat lead roofs and chimneys. On one of these was scrawled, in big, irregular, blue-painted letters: "A bas Coignet."

Great clouds began to loom into view over the house-tops, rounded, toppling masses of grey, lit up with sullen orange against the pale limpid blue of the sky. I stood and looked at all these objects. I had come out here to think — thoughts had deserted me. I could only look.

The clouds moved imperceptibly, fatefully onward, a streak of lightning tore them apart. They whirled like tortured smoke and grew suddenly black. Large spots of rain with jagged edges began to fall on the lead floor of my balcony.

I turned into the twilight of my room and began to write. I can still feel the tearing of my pen-point on the coarse paper. It was a hindrance to thought, but my flow of words ignored it, gained impetus from it, as a stream does at the breaking of a dam.

I was writing a pæan to a great coloniser. That sort of thing was in the air then. I was drawn into it, carried away by my subject. Perhaps I let it do so because it was so little familiar to my lines of thought. It was fresh ground and I revelled in it. I committed myself to that kind of emotional, lyrical outburst that one dislikes so much on re-reading. I was half conscious of the fact, but I ignored it.

The thunderstorm was over, and there was a moist sparkling freshness in the air when I hurried with my copy to the Hour office in the Avenue de l'Opéra. I wished to be rid of it, to render impossible all chance of revision on the morrow.

I wanted, too, to feel elated; I expected it. It was a right. At the office I found the foreign correspondent, a little cosmopolitan Jew whose eyebrows began their growth on the bridge of his nose. He was effusive and familiar, as the rest of his kind.

“Hullo, Granger,” was his greeting. I was used to regarding myself as fallen from a high estate, but I was not yet so humble in spirit as to relish being called Granger by a stranger of his stamp. I tried to freeze him politely.

“Read your stuff in the Hour,” was his rejoinder; “jolly good I call it. Been doing old Red-Beard? Let’s have a look. Yes, yes. That’s the way — that’s the real thing — I call it. Must have bored you to death ... old de Mersch I mean. I ought to have had the job, you know. My business, interviewing people in Paris. But I don’t mind. Much rather you did it than I. You do it a heap better.”

I murmured thanks. There was a pathos about the sleek little man — a pathos that is always present in the type. He seemed to be trying to assume a deprecating equality.

“Where are you going to-night?” he asked, with sudden effusiveness. I was taken aback. One is not used to being asked these questions after five minutes’ acquaintance. I said that I had no plans.

“Look here,” he said, brightening up, “come and have dinner with me at Breguet’s, and look in at the Opera afterward. We’ll have a real nice chat.”

I was too tired to frame an adequate excuse. Besides, the little man was as eager as a child for a new toy. We went to Breguet’s and had a really excellent dinner.

“Always come here,” he said; “one meets a lot of swells. It runs away with a deal of money — but I don’t care to do things on the cheap, not for the Hour, you know. You can always be certain when I say that I have a thing from a senator that he is a senator, and not an old woman in a paper kiosque. Most of them do that sort of thing, you know.”

“I always wondered,” I said, mildly.

“That’s de Sourdam I nodded to as we came in, and that old chap there is Pluyvis — the Affaire man, you know. I must have a word with him in a minute, if you’ll excuse me.”

He began to ask affectionately after the health of the excellent Fox, asked if I saw him often, and so on and so on. I divined with amusement that was pleasurable that the little man had his own little axe to grind, and thought I

might take a turn at the grindstone if he managed me well. So he nodded to de Sourdam of the Austrian embassy and had his word with Pluyvis, and rejoiced to have impressed me — I could see him bubble with happiness and purr. He proposed that we should stroll as far as the paper kiosk that he patronised habitually — it was kept by a fellow-Israelite — a snuffy little old woman.

I understood that in the joy of his heart he was for expanding, for wasting a few minutes on a stroll.

“Haven’t stretched my legs for months,” he explained.

We strolled there through the summer twilight. It was so pleasant to saunter through the young summer night. There were so many little things to catch the eyes, so many of the little things down near the earth; expressions on faces of the passers, the set of a collar, the quaint foreign tightness of waist of a good bourgeoisie who walked arm in arm with her perspiring spouse. The gilding on the statue of Joan of Arc had a pleasant littleness of Philistinism, the arcades of the Rue de Rivoli broke up the grey light pleasantly too. I remembered a little shop — a little Greek affair with a windowful of pinch-beck — where I had been given a false five-franc piece years and years ago. The same villainous old Levantine stood in the doorway, perhaps the fez that he wore was the same fez. The little old woman that we strolled to was bent nearly double. Her nose touched her wares as often as not, her mittened hands sought quiveringly the papers that the correspondent asked for. I liked him the better for his solicitude for this forlorn piece of flotsam of his own race.

“Always come here,” he exclaimed; “one gets into habits. Very honest woman, too, you can be certain of getting your change. If you’re a stranger you can’t be sure that they won’t give you Italian silver, you know.”

“Oh, I know,” I answered. I knew, too, that he wished me to purchase something. I followed the course of her groping hands, caught sight of the Revue Rouge, and remembered that it contained something about Greenland. I helped myself to it, paid for it, and received my just change. I felt that I had satisfied the little man, and felt satisfied with myself.

“I want to see Radet’s article on Greenland,” I said.

“Oh, yes,” he explained, once more exhibiting himself in the capacity of the man who knows, “Radet gives it to them. Rather a lark, I call it, though you mustn’t let old de Mersch know you read him. Radet got sick of Cochon, and tried Greenland. He’s getting touched by the Whites you know.



They say that the priests don't like the way the *Système's* playing into the hands of the Protestants and the English Government. So they set Radet on to write it down. He's going in for mysticism and all that sort of thing — just like all these French jokers are doing. Got deuced thick with that lot in the F. St. Germain — some relation of yours, ain't they? Rather a lark that lot, quite the thing just now, everyone goes there; old de Mersch too. Have frightful rows sometimes, such a mixed lot, you see." The good little man rattled amiably along beside me.

"Seems quite funny to be buying books," he said. "I haven't read a thing I've bought, not for years."

We reached the Opera in time for the end of the first act — it was *Aïda*, I think. My little friend had a free pass all over the house. I had not been in it for years. In the old days I had always seen the stage from a great height, craning over people's heads in a sultry twilight; now I saw it on a level, seated at my ease. I had only the power of the Press to thank for the change.

"Come here as often as I can," my companion said; "can't do without music when it's to be had." Indeed he had the love of his race for it. It seemed to soften him, to change his nature, as he sat silent by my side.

But the closing notes of each scene found him out in the cool of the corridors, talking, and being talked to by anyone that would vouchsafe him a word.

"Pick up a lot here," he explained.

After the finale we leaned over one of the side balconies to watch the crowd streaming down the marble staircases. It is a scene that I never tire of. There is something so fantastically tawdry in the coloured marble of the architecture. It is for all the world like a triumph of ornamental soap work; one expects to smell the odours. And the torrent of humanity pouring liquidly aslant through the mirror-like light, and the spaciousness.... Yes, it is fantastic, somehow; ironical, too.

I was watching the devious passage of a rather drunken, gigantic, florid Englishman, wondering, I think, how he would reach his bed.

"That must be a relation of yours," the correspondent said, pointing. My glance followed the line indicated by his pale finger. I made out the glorious beard of the Duc de Mersch, on his arm was an old lady to whom he seemed to pay deferential attention. His head was bent on one side; he was smiling frankly. A little behind them, on the stairway, there was a space. Perhaps I was mistaken; perhaps there was no space — I don't know. I was

only conscious of a figure, an indescribably clear-cut woman's figure, gliding down the way. It had a coldness, a self-possession, a motion of its own. In that clear, transparent, shimmering light, every little fold of the dress, every little shadow of the white arms, the white shoulders, came up to me. The face turned up to meet mine. I remember so well the light shining down on the face, not a shadow anywhere, not a shadow beneath the eyebrows, the nostrils, the waves of hair. It was a vision of light, threatening, sinister.

She smiled, her lips parted.

"You come to me to-morrow," she said. Did I hear the words, did her lips merely form them? She was far, far down below me; the air was alive with the rustling of feet, of garments, of laughter, full of sounds that made themselves heard, full of sounds that would not be caught.

"You come to me ... to-morrow."

The old lady on the Duc de Mersch's arm was obviously my aunt. I did not see why I should not go to them to-morrow. It struck me suddenly and rather pleasantly that this was, after all, my family. This old lady actually was a connection more close than anyone else in the world. As for the girl, to all intents and, in everyone else's eyes, she was my sister. I cannot say I disliked having her for my sister, either. I stood looking down upon them and felt less alone than I had done for many years.

A minute scuffle of the shortest duration was taking place beside me. There were a couple of men at my elbow. I don't in the least know what they were — perhaps marquises, perhaps railway employees — one never can tell over there. One of them was tall and blond, with a heavy, bow-shaped red moustache — Irish in type; the other of no particular height, excellently groomed, dark, and exemplary. I knew he was exemplary from some detail of costume that I can't remember — his gloves or a strip of silk down the sides of his trousers — something of the sort. The blond was saying something that I did not catch. I heard the words "de Mersch" and "Anglaise," and saw the dark man turn his attention to the little group below. Then I caught my own name mispronounced and somewhat of a stumbling-block to a high-pitched contemptuous intonation. The little correspondent, who was on my other arm, started visibly and moved swiftly behind my back.

"Messieurs," he said in an urgent whisper, and drew them to a little distance. I saw him say something, saw them pivot to look at me, shrug

their shoulders and walk away. I didn't in the least grasp the significance of the scene — not then.

“What's the matter?” I asked my returning friend; “were they talking about me?” He answered nervously.

“Oh, it was about your aunt's Salon, you know. They might have been going to say something awkward ... one never knows.”

“They really do talk about it then?” I said. “I've a good mind to attend one of their exhibitions.”

“Why, of course,” he said, “you ought. I really think you ought.”

“I'll go to-morrow,” I answered.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

I couldn't get to sleep that night, but lay and tossed, lit my candle and read, and so on, for ever and ever — for an eternity. I was confoundedly excited; there were a hundred things to be thought about; clamouring to be thought about; out-clamouring the re-curent chimes of some near clock. I began to read the article by Radet in the *Revue Rouge* — the one I had bought of the old woman in the kiosque. It upset me a good deal — that article. It gave away the whole Greenland show so completely that the ecstatic bosh I had just despatched to the *Hour* seemed impossible. I suppose the good Radet had his axe to grind — just as I had had to grind the State Founder's, but Radet's axe didn't show. I was reading about an inland valley, a broad, shadowy, grey thing; immensely broad, immensely shadowy, winding away between immense, half-invisible mountains into the silence of an unknown country. A little band of men, microscopic figures in that immensity, in those mists, crept slowly up it. A man among them was speaking; I seemed to hear his voice, low, monotonous, overpowered by the wan light and the silence and the vastness.

And how well it was done — how the man could write; how skilfully he made his points. There was no slosh about it, no sentiment. The touch was light, in places even gay. He saw so well the romance of that dun band that had cast remorse behind; that had no return, no future, that spread desolation desolately. This was merely a review article — a thing that in England would have been unreadable; the narrative of a nomad of some genius. I could never have written like that — I should have spoilt it somehow. It set me tingling with desire, with the desire that transcends the sexual; the desire for the fine phrase, for the right word — for all the other intangibles. And I had been wasting all this time; had been writing my inanities. I must go away; must get back, right back to the old road, must work. There was so little time. It was unpleasant, too, to have been mixed up in this affair, to have been trepanned into doing my best to help it on its foul way. God knows I had little of the humanitarian in me. If people must murder in the by-ways of an immense world they must do murder and pay the price. But that I should have been mixed up in such was not what I had wanted. I must have dine with it all; with all this sort of thing, must get back to my old self, must get back. I seemed to hear the slow words of the Duc de Mersch.

“We have increased exports by so much; the imports by so much. We have protected the natives, have kept their higher interests ever present in our minds. And through it all we have never forgotten the mission entrusted to us by Europe — to remove the evil of darkness from the earth — to root out barbarism with its nameless horrors, whose existence has been a blot on our consciences. Men of good-will and self-sacrifice are doing it now — are laying down their priceless lives to root out ... to root out....”

Of course they were rooting them out.

It didn't matter to me. One supposes that that sort of native exists for that sort of thing — to be rooted out by men of good-will, with careers to make. The point was that that was what they were really doing out there — rooting out the barbarians as well as the barbarism, and proving themselves worthy of their hire. And I had been writing them up and was no better than the farcical governor of a department who would write on the morrow to protest that that was what they did not do. You see I had a sort of personal pride in those days; and preferred to think of myself as a decent person. I knew that people would say the same sort of thing about me that they said about all the rest of them. I couldn't very well protest. I had been scratching the backs of all sorts of creatures; out of friendship, out of love — for all sorts of reasons. This was only a sort of last straw — or perhaps it was the sight of her that had been the last straw. It seemed naïvely futile to have been wasting my time over Mrs. Hartly and those she stood for, when there was something so different in the world — something so like a current of east wind.

That vein of thought kept me awake, and a worse came to keep it company. The men from the next room came home — students, I suppose. They talked gaily enough, their remarks interspersed by the thuds of falling boots and the other incomprehensible noises of the night. Through the flimsy partition I caught half sentences in that sort of French intonation that is so impossible to attain. It reminded me of the voices of the two men at the Opera. I began to wonder what they had been saying — what they could have been saying that concerned me and affected the little correspondent to interfere. Suddenly the thing dawned upon me with the startling clearness of a figure in a complicated pattern — a clearness from which one cannot take one's eyes.

It threw everything — the whole world — into more unpleasant relations with me than even the Greenland affair. They had not been talking about my

aunt and her Salon, but about my ... my sister. She was De Mersch's "Anglaise." I did not believe it, but probably all Paris — the whole world — said she was. And to the whole world I was her brother! Those two men who had looked at me over their shoulders had shrugged and said, "Oh, he's ..." And the whole world wherever I went would whisper in asides, "Don't you know Granger? He's the brother. De Mersch employs him."

I began to understand everything; the woman in de Mersch's room with her "Eschingan-Grangeur-r-r"; the deference of the little Jew — the man who knew. He knew that I — that I, who patronised him, was a person to stand well with because of my — my sister's hold over de Mersch. I wasn't, of course, but you can't understand how the whole thing maddened me all the same. I hated the world — this world of people who whispered and were whispered to, of men who knew and men who wanted to know — the shadowy world of people who didn't matter, but whose eyes and voices were all round one and did somehow matter. I knew well enough how it had come about. It was de Mersch — the State Founder, with his shamed face and his pallid hands. She had been attracted by his air of greatness, by his elective grand-dukedom, by his protestations. Women are like that. She had been attracted and didn't know what she was doing, didn't know what the world was over here — how people talked. She had been excited by the whirl and flutter of it, and perhaps she didn't care. The thing must come to an end, however. She had said that I should go to her on the morrow. Well, I would go, and I would put a stop to this. I had suddenly discovered how very much I was a Granger of Etchingham, after all I had family traditions and graves behind me. And for the sake of all these people whose one achievement had been the making of a good name I had to intervene now. After all — "Bon sang ne" — does not get itself talked about in that way.

The early afternoon of the morrow found me in a great room — a faded, sombre salon of the house my aunt had taken in the Faubourg Saint Germain. Numbers of strong-featured people were talking in groups among the tables and chairs of a time before the Revolution. I rather forget how I had got there, and what had gone before. I must have arisen late and passed the intervening hours in a state of trepidation. I was going to see her, and I was like a cub in love, with a man's place to fill. It was a preposterous state of things that set the solid world in a whirl. Once there, my eyes suddenly took in things.

I had a sense of her standing by my side. She had just introduced me to my aunt — a heavy-featured, tired-eyed village tyrant. She was so obviously worn out, so obviously “not what she had been,” that her face would have been pitiful but for its immovable expression of class pride. The Grangers of Etchingam, you see, were so absolutely at the top of their own particular kind of tree that it was impossible for them to meet anyone who was not an inferior. A man might be a cabinet minister, might even be a prince, but he couldn’t be a Granger of Etchingam, couldn’t have such an assortment of graves, each containing a Granger, behind his back. The expression didn’t even lift for me who had. It couldn’t, it was fixed there. One wondered what she was doing in this galère. It seemed impossible that she should interest herself in the restoration of the Bourbons — they were all very well, but they weren’t even English, let alone a county family. I figured it out that she must have set her own village so much in order that there remained nothing but the setting in order of the rest of the world. Her bored eyes wandered sleepily over the assemblage. They seemed to have no preferences for any of them. They rested on the vacuously Bonaparte prince, on the moribund German Jesuit to whom he was listening, on the darkly supple young Spanish priest, on the rosy-gilled English Passionist, on Radet, the writer of that article in the *Revue Rouge*, who was talking to a compatriot in one of the tall windows. She seemed to accept the saturnine-looking men, the political women, who all spoke a language not their own, with an accent and a fluency, and a dangerous far-away smile and a display of questionable teeth all their own. She seemed to class the political with the pious, the obvious adventurer with the seeming fanatic. It was amazing to me to see her there, standing with her county family self-possession in the midst of so much that was questionable. She offered me no explanation; I had to find one for myself.

We stood and talked in the centre of the room. It did not seem a place in which one could sit.

“Why have you never been to see me?” she asked languidly. “I might never have known of your existence if it had not been for your sister.” My sister was standing at my side, you must remember. I don’t suppose that I started, but I made my aunt no answer.

“Indeed,” she went on, “I should never have known that you had a sister. Your father was so very peculiar. From the day he married, my husband never heard a word from him.”

“They were so very different,” I said, listlessly.

“Ah, yes,” she answered, “brothers so often are.” She sighed, apropos of nothing. She continued to utter disjointed sentences from which I gathered a skeleton history of my soi distant sister’s introduction of herself and of her pretensions. She had, it seemed, casually introduced herself at some garden-party or function of the sort, had represented herself as a sister of my own to whom a maternal uncle had left a fabulous fortune. She herself had suggested her being sheltered under my aunt’s roof as a singularly welcome “paying guest.” She herself, too, had suggested the visit to Paris and had hired the house from a degenerate Duc de Luynes who preferred the delights of an appartement in the less lugubrious Avenue Marceau.

“We have tastes so much in common,” my aunt explained, as she moved away to welcome a new arrival. I was left alone with the woman who called herself my sister.

We stood a little apart. Each little group of talkers in the vast room seemed to stand just without earshot of the next. I had my back to the door, my face to her.

“And so you have come,” she said, maliciously it seemed to me.

It was impossible to speak in such a position; in such a place; impossible to hold a discussion on family affairs when a diminutive Irishwoman with too mobile eyebrows, and a couple of gigantic, raw-boned, lugubrious Spaniards, were in a position to hear anything that one uttered above a whisper. One might want to raise one’s voice. Besides, she was so — so terrible; there was no knowing what she might not say. She so obviously did not care what the Irish or the Spaniards or the Jesuits heard or thought, that I was forced to the mortifying conclusion that I did.

“Oh, I’ve come,” I answered. I felt as outrageously out of it as one does at a suburban hop where one does not know one animal of the menagerie. I did not know what to do or what to say, or what to do with my hands. I was pervaded by the unpleasant idea that all those furtive eyes were upon me; gauging me because I was the brother of a personality. I was concerned about the fit of my coat and my boots, and all the while I was in a furious temper; my errand was important.

She stood looking at me, a sinuous, brilliant thing, with a light in the eyes half challenging, half openly victorious.

“You have come,” she said, “and ...”



I became singularly afraid of her; and wanted to stop her mouth. She might be going to say anything. She overpowered me so that I actually dwindled — into the gawkiness of extreme youth. I became a goggle-eyed, splay-footed boy again and made a boy's desperate effort after a recovery at one stroke of an ideal standard of dignity.

"I must have a word with you," I said, remembering. She made a little gesture with her hands, signifying "I am here." "But in private," I added.

"Oh, everything's in private here," she said. I was silent.

"I must," I added after a time.

"I can't retire with you," she said; "'it would look odd,' you'd say, wouldn't you?" I shrugged my shoulders in intense irritation. I didn't want to be burlesqued. A flood of fresh people came into the room. I heard a throaty "ahem" behind me. The Duc de Mersch was introducing himself to notice. It was as I had thought — the man was an habitue, with his well-cut clothes, his air of protestation, and his tremendous golden poll. He was the only sunlight that the gloomy place rejoiced in. He bowed low over my oppressor's hand, smiled upon me, and began to utter platitudes in English.

"Oh, you may speak French," she said carelessly.

"But your brother...." he answered.

"I understand French very well," I said. I was in no mood to spare him embarrassments; wanted to show him that I had a hold over him, and knew he wasn't the proper person to talk to a young lady. He glared at me haughtily.

"But yesterday ..." he began in a tone that burlesqued august displeasure. I was wondering what he had looked like on the other side of the door — whilst that lady had been explaining his nature to me.

"Yesterday I wished to avoid embarrassments," I said; "I was to represent your views about Greenland. I might have misunderstood you in some important matter."

"I see, I see," he said conciliatorily. "Yesterday we spoke English for the benefit of the British public. When we speak French we are not in public, I hope." He had a semi-supplicating manner.

"Everything's rather too much in public here," I answered. My part as I imagined it was that of a British brother defending his sister from questionable attentions — the person who "tries to show the man he isn't wanted." But de Mersch didn't see the matter in that light at all. He could not, of course. He was as much used to being purred to as my aunt to

looking down on non-county persons. He seemed to think I was making an incomprehensible insular joke, and laughed non-committally. It wouldn't have been possible to let him know he wasn't wanted.

"Oh, you needn't be afraid of my brother," she said suddenly. "He is quite harmless. He is even going to give up writing for the papers except when we want him."

The Duc turned from me to her, smiled and bowed. His smile was inane, but he bowed very well; he had been groomed into that sort of thing or had it in the blood.

"We work together still?" he asked.

"Why not?" she answered.

A hubbub of angry voices raised itself behind my back. It was one of the contretemps that made the Salon Grangeur famous throughout the city.

"You forced yourself upon me. Did I say anywhere that you were responsible? If it resembles your particular hell upon earth, what is that to me? You do worse things; you, yourself, monsieur. Haven't I seen ... haven't I seen it?"

The Duc de Mersch looked swiftly over his shoulder toward the window.

"They seem to be angry there," he said nervously. "Had not something better be done, Miss Granger?"

Miss Granger followed the direction of his eyes.

"Why," she said, "we're used to these differences of opinion. Besides, it's only Monsieur Radet; he's forever at war with someone or other."

"He ought to be shown the door," the Duc grumbled.

"Oh, as for that," she answered, "we couldn't. My aunt would be desolated by such a necessity. He is very influential in certain quarters. My aunt wants to catch him for the — He's going to write an article."

"He writes too many articles," the Duc said, with heavy displeasure.

"Oh, he has written one too many," she answered, "but that can be traversed...."

"But no one believes," the Duc objected ... Radet's voice intermittently broke in upon his sotto-voce, coming to our ears in gusts.

"Haven't I seen you ... and then ... and you offer me the cross ... to bribe me to silence ... me...."

In the general turning of faces toward the window in which stood Radet and the other, mine turned too. Radet was a cadaverous, weatherworn, passion-worn individual, badger-grey, and worked up into a grotesquely

attitudinised fury of injured self-esteem. The other was a denationalised, shifty-eyed, sallow, grey-bearded governor of one of the provinces of the *Système Groënlandais*; had a closely barbered head, a bull neck, and a great belly. He cast furtive glances round him, uncertain whether to escape or to wait for his say. He looked at the ring that encircled the window at a little distance, and his face, which had betrayed a half-apparent shame, hardened at sight of the cynical masks of the cosmopolitan conspirators. They were amused by the scene. The Holsteiner gained confidence, shrugged his shoulders.

“You have had the fever very badly since you came back,” he said, showing a level row of white teeth. “You did not talk like that out there.”

“No — *pas si bête* — you would have hanged me, perhaps, as you did that poor devil of a Swiss. What was his name? Now you offer me the cross. Because I had the fever, *hein?*”

I had been watching the Duc’s face; a first red flush had come creeping from under the roots of his beard, and had spread over the low forehead and the sides of the neck. The eye-glass fell from the eye, a signal for the colour to retreat. The full lips grew pallid, and began to mutter unspoken words. His eyes wandered appealingly from the woman beside him to me. I didn’t want to look him in the face. The man was a trafficker in human blood, an evil liver, and I hated him. He had to pay his price; would have to pay — but I didn’t want to see him pay it. There was a limit.

I began to excuse myself, and slid out between the groups of excellent plotters. As I was going, she said to me:

“You may come to me to-morrow in the morning.”

## CHAPTER TWELVE

I was at the Hôtel de Luynes — or Granger — early on the following morning. The mists were still hanging about the dismal upper windows of the inscrutable Faubourg; the toilet of the city was being completed; the little hoses on wheels were clattering about the quiet larger streets. I had not much courage thus early in the day. I had started impulsively; stepping with the impulse of immediate action from the doorstep of the dairy where I had breakfasted. But I made detours; it was too early, and my pace slackened into a saunter as I passed the row of porters' lodges in that dead, inscrutable street. I wanted to fly; had that impulse very strongly; but I burnt my boats with my inquiry of the incredibly ancient, one-eyed porteress. I made my way across the damp court-yard, under the enormous portico, and into the chilly stone hall that no amount of human coming and going sufficed to bring back to a semblance of life. Mademoiselle was expecting me. One went up a great flight of stone steps into one of the immensely high, narrow, impossibly rectangular ante-rooms that one sees in the frontispieces of old plays. The furniture looked no more than knee-high until one discovered that one's self had no appreciable stature. The sad light slanted in ruled lines from the great height of the windows; an army of motes moved slowly in and out of the shadows. I went after awhile and looked disconsolately out into the court-yard. The porteress was making her way across the gravelled space, her arms, her hands, the pockets of her black apron full of letters of all sizes. I remembered that the facteur had followed me down the street. A noise of voices came confusedly to my ears from between half-opened folding-doors; the thing reminded me of my waiting in de Mersch's rooms. It did not last so long. The voices gathered tone, as they do at the end of a colloquy, succeeded each other at longer intervals, and at last came to a sustained halt. The tall doors moved ajar and she entered, followed by a man whom I recognized as the governor of a province of the day before. In that hostile light he looked old and weazened and worried; seemed to have lost much of his rotundity. As for her, she shone with a light of her own.

He greeted me dejectedly, and did not brighten when she let him know that we had a mutual friend in Callan. The Governor, it seemed, in his capacity of Supervisor of the Système, was to conduct that distinguished person through the wilds of Greenland; was to smooth his way and to point out to him excellences of administration.

I wished him a good journey; he sighed and began to fumble with his hat.

“Alors, c’est entendu,” she said; giving him leave to depart. He looked at her in an odd sort of way, took her hand and applied it to his lips.

“C’est entendu,” he said with a heavy sigh, drops of moisture spattering from beneath his white moustache, “mais ...”

He ogled again with infinitesimal eyes and went out of the room. He had the air of wishing to wipe the perspiration from his brows and to exclaim, “Quelle femme!” But if he had any such wish he mastered it until the door hid him from sight.

“Why the ...” I began before it had well closed, “do you allow that thing to make love to you?” I wanted to take up my position before she could have a chance to make me ridiculous. I wanted to make a long speech — about duty to the name of Granger. But the next word hung, and, before it came, she had answered:

“He? — Oh, I’m making use of him.”

“To inherit the earth?” I asked ironically, and she answered gravely:

“To inherit the earth.”

She was leaning against the window, playing with the strings of the blinds, and silhouetted against the leaden light. She seemed to be, physically, a little tired; and the lines of her figure to interlace almost tenderly — to “compose” well, after the ideas of a certain school. I knew so little of her — only just enough to be in love with her — that this struck me as the herald of a new phase, not so much in her attitude to me as in mine to her; she had even then a sort of gravity, the gravity of a person on whom things were beginning to weigh.

“But,” I said, irresolutely. I could not speak to her; to this new conception of her, in the way I had planned; in the way one would talk to a brilliant, limpid — oh, to a woman of sorts. But I had to take something of my old line. “How would flirting with that man help you?”

“It’s quite simple,” she answered, “he’s to show Callan all Greenland, and Callan is to write ... Callan has immense influence over a great class, and he will have some of the prestige of — of a Commissioner.”

“Oh, I know about Callan,” I said.

“And,” she went on, “this man had orders to hide things from Callan; you know what it is they have to hide. But he won’t now; that is what I was arranging. It’s partly by bribery and partly because he has a belief in his beaux yeux — so Callan will be upset and will write an ... exposure; the

sort of thing Callan would write if he were well upset. And he will be, by what this man will let him see. You know what a little man like Callan will feel ... he will be made ill. He would faint at the sight of a drop of blood, you know, and he will see — oh, the very worst, worse than what Radet saw. And he will write a frightful article, and it will be a thunderclap for de Mersch.... And de Mersch will be getting very shaky by then. And your friend Churchill will try to carry de Mersch's railway bill through in the face of the scandal. Churchill's motives will be excellent, but everyone will say ... You know what people say ... That is what I and Gurnard want. We want people to talk; we want them to believe...."

I don't know whether there really was a hesitation in her voice, or whether I read that into it. She stood there, playing with the knots of the window-cords and speaking in a low monotone. The whole thing, the sad twilight of the place, her tone of voice, seemed tinged with unavailing regret. I had almost forgotten the Dimensionist story, and I had never believed in it. But now, for the first time I began to have my doubts. I was certain that she had been plotting something with one of the Duc de Mersch's lieutenants. The man's manner vouched for that; he had not been able to look me in the face. But, more than anything, his voice and manner made me feel that we had passed out of a realm of farcical allegory. I knew enough to see that she might be speaking the truth. And, if she were, her calm avowal of such treachery proved that she was what she had said the Dimensionists were; cold, with no scruples, clear-sighted and admirably courageous, and indubitably enemies of society.

"I don't understand," I said. "But de Mersch then?"

She made a little gesture; one of those movements that I best remember of her; the smallest, the least noticeable. It reduced de Mersch to nothing; he no longer even counted.

"Oh, as for him," she said, "he is only a detail." I had still the idea that she spoke with a pitying intonation — as if she were speaking to a dog in pain. "He doesn't really count; not really. He will crumble up and disappear, very soon. You won't even remember him."

"But," I said, "you go about with him, as if you.... You are getting yourself talked about.... Everyone thinks — " ... The accusation that I had come to make seemed impossible, now I was facing her. "I believe," I added, with the suddenness of inspiration. "I'm certain even, that he thinks that you ..."

“Well, they think that sort of thing. But it is only part of the game. Oh, I assure you it is no more than that.”

I was silent. I felt that, for one reason or another, she wished me to believe.

“Yes,” she said, “I want you to believe. It will save you a good deal of pain.”

“If you wanted to save me pain,” I maintained, “you would have done with de Mersch ... for good.” I had an idea that the solution was beyond me. It was as if the controlling powers were flitting, invisible, just above my head, just beyond my grasp. There was obviously something vibrating; some cord, somewhere, stretched very taut and quivering. But I could think of no better solution than: “You must have done with him.” It seemed obvious, too, that that was impossible, was outside the range of things that could be done — but I had to do my best. “It’s a — it’s vile,” I added, “vile.”

“Oh, I know, I know,” she said, “for you.... And I’m even sorry. But it has to be gone on with. De Mersch has to go under in just this way. It can’t be any other.”

“Why not?” I asked, because she had paused. I hadn’t any desire for enlightenment.

“It isn’t even only Churchill,” she said, “not even only that de Mersch will bring down Churchill with him. It is that he must bring down everything that Churchill stands for. You know what that is — the sort of probity, all the old order of things. And the more vile the means used to destroy de Mersch the more vile the whole affair will seem. People — the sort of people — have an idea that a decent man cannot be touched by tortuous intrigues. And the whole thing will be — oh, malodorous. You understand.”

“I don’t,” I answered, “I don’t understand at all.”

“Ah, yes, you do,” she said, “you understand....” She paused for a long while, and I was silent. I understood vaguely what she meant; that if Churchill fell amid the clouds of dust of such a collapse, there would be an end of belief in probity ... or nearly an end. But I could not see what it all led up to; where it left us.

“You see,” she began again, “I want to make it as little painful to you as I can; as little painful as explanations can make it. I can’t feel as you feel, but

I can see, rather dimly, what it is that hurts you. And so ... I want to; I really want to."

"But you won't do the one thing," I returned hopelessly to the charge.

"I cannot," she answered, "it must be like that; there isn't any way. You are so tied down to these little things. Don't you see that de Mersch, and — and all these people — don't really count? They aren't anything at all in the scheme of things. I think that, even for you, they aren't worth bothering about. They're only accidents; the accidents that — "

"That what?" I asked, although I began to see dimly what she meant.

"That lead in the inevitable," she answered. "Don't you see? Don't you understand? We are the inevitable ... and you can't keep us back. We have to come and you, you will only hurt yourself, by resisting." A sense that this was the truth, the only truth, beset me. It was for the moment impossible to think of anything else — of anything else in the world. "You must accept us and all that we mean, you must stand back; sooner or later. Look even all round you, and you will understand better. You are in the house of a type — a type that became impossible. Oh, centuries ago. And that type too, tried very hard to keep back the inevitable; not only because itself went under, but because everything that it stood for went under. And it had to suffer — heartache ... that sort of suffering. Isn't it so?"

I did not answer; the illustration was too abominably just. It was just that. There were even now all these people — these Legitimists — sneering ineffectually; shutting themselves away from the light in their mournful houses and suffering horribly because everything that they stood for had gone under.

"But even if I believe you," I said, "the thing is too horrible, and your tools are too mean; that man who has just gone out and — and Callan — are they the weapons of the inevitable? After all, the Revolution ..." I was striving to get back to tangible ideas — ideas that one could name and date and label ... "the Revolution was noble in essence and made for good. But all this of yours is too vile and too petty. You are bribing, or something worse, that man to betray his master. And that you call helping on the inevitable...."

"They used to say just that of the Revolution. That wasn't nice of its tools. Don't you see? They were the people that went under.... They couldn't see the good...."

"And I — I am to take it on trust," I said, bitterly.



“You couldn’t see the good,” she answered, “it isn’t possible, and there is no way of explaining. Our languages are different, and there’s no bridge — no bridge at all. We can’t meet....”

It was that revolted me. If there was no bridge and we could not meet, we must even fight; that is, if I believed her version of herself. If I did not, I was being played the fool with. I preferred to think that. If she were only fooling me she remained attainable. If it was as she said, there was no hope at all — not any.

“I don’t believe you,” I said, suddenly. I didn’t want to believe her. The thing was too abominable — too abominable for words, and incredible. I struggled against it as one struggles against inevitable madness, against the thought of it. It hung over me, stupefying, deadening. One could only fight it with violence, crudely, in jerks, as one struggles against the numbness of frost. It was like a pall, like descending clouds of smoke, seemed to be actually present in the absurdly lofty room — this belief in what she stood for, in what she said she stood for.

“I don’t believe you,” I proclaimed, “I won’t.... You are playing the fool with me ... trying to get round me ... to make me let you go on with these — with these — It is abominable. Think of what it means for me, what people are saying of me, and I am a decent man — You shall not. Do you understand, you shall not. It is unbearable ... and you ... you try to fool me ... in order to keep me quiet ...”

“Oh, no,” she said. “Oh, no.”

She had an accent that touched grief, as nearly as she could touch it. I remember it now, as one remembers these things. But then I passed it over. I was too much moved myself to notice it more than subconsciously, as one notices things past which one is whirled. And I was whirled past these things, in an ungovernable fury at the remembrance of what I had suffered, of what I had still to suffer. I was speaking with intense rage, jerking out words, ideas, as floodwater jerks through a sluice the débris of once ordered fields.

“You are,” I said, “you are — you — you — dragging an ancient name through the dust — you ...”

I forget what I said. But I remember, “dragging an ancient name.” It struck me, at the time, by its forlornness, as part of an appeal to her. It was so pathetically tiny a motive, so out of tone, that it stuck in my mind. I only remember the upshot of my speech; that, unless she swore — oh, yes, swore

— to have done with de Mersch, I would denounce her to my aunt at that very moment and in that very house.

And she said that it was impossible.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

I had a sense of walking very fast — almost of taking flight — down a long dim corridor, and of a door that opened into an immense room. All that I remember of it, as I saw it then, was a number of pastel portraits of weak, vacuous individuals, in dulled, gilt, oval frames. The heads stood out from the panelling and stared at me from between ringlets, from under powdered hair, simpering, or contemptuous with the expression that must have prevailed in the monde of the time before the Revolution. At a great distance, bent over account — books and pink cheques on the flap of an *escritoire*, sat my aunt, very small, very grey, very intent on her work.

The people who built these rooms must have had some property of the presence to make them bulk large — if they ever really did so — in the eyes of dependents, of lackeys. Perhaps it was their sense of ownership that gave them the necessary prestige. My aunt, who was only a temporary occupant, certainly had none of it. Bent intently over her accounts, peering through her spectacles at columns of figures, she was nothing but a little old woman alone in an immense room. It seemed impossible that she could really have any family pride, any pride of any sort. She looked round at me over her spectacles, across her shoulder.

“Ah ... Etchingham,” she said. She seemed to be trying to carry herself back to England, to the England of her land-agent and her select visiting list. Here she was no more superior than if we had been on a desert island. I wanted to enlighten her as to the woman she was sheltering — wanted to very badly; but a necessity for introducing the matter seemed to arise as she gradually stiffened into assertiveness.

“My dear aunt,” I said, “the woman....” The alien nature of the theme grew suddenly formidable. She looked at me arousedly.

“You got my note then,” she said. “But I don’t think a woman can have brought it. I have given such strict orders. They have such strange ideas here, though. And Madame — the *portière* — is an old retainer of M. de Luynes, I haven’t much influence over her. It is absurd, but....” It seems that the old lady in the lodge made a point of carrying letters that went by hand. She had an eye for gratuities — and the police, I should say, were concerned. They make a good deal of use of that sort of person in that neighbourhood of infinitesimal and unceasing plotting.

“I didn’t mean that,” I said, “but the woman who calls herself my sister....”

“My dear nephew,” she interrupted, with tranquil force, as if she were taking an arranged line, “I cannot — I absolutely cannot be worried with your quarrels with your sister. As I said to you in my note of this morning, when you are in this town you must consider this house your home. It is almost insulting of you to go to an inn. I am told it is even ... quite an unfit place that you are stopping at — for a member of our family.”

I maintained for a few seconds a silence of astonishment.

“But,” I returned to the charge, “the matter is one of importance. You must understand that she....”

My aunt stiffened and froze. It was as if I had committed some flagrant sin against etiquette.

“If I am satisfied as to her behaviour,” she said, “I think that you might be.” She paused as if she were satisfied that she had set me hopelessly in the wrong.

“I don’t withdraw my invitation,” she said. “You must understand I wish you to come here. But your quarrels you and she must settle. On those terms....”

She had the air of conferring an immense favour, as if she believed that I had, all my life through, been waiting for her invitation to come within the pale. As for me, I felt a certain relief at having the carrying out of my duty made impossible for me. I did not want to tell my aunt and thus to break things off definitely and for good. Something would have happened; the air might have cleared as it clears after a storm; I should have learnt where I stood. But I was afraid of the knowledge. Light in these dark places might reveal an abyss at my feet. I wanted to let things slide.

My aunt had returned to her accounts, the accounts which were the cog-wheels that kept running the smooth course of the Etchingham estates. She seemed to wish to indicate that I counted for not very much in the scheme of things as she saw it.

“I should like to make your better acquaintance,” she said, with her head still averted, “there are reasons....” It came suddenly into my head that she had an idea of testamentary dispositions, that she felt she was breaking up, that I had my rights. I didn’t much care for the thing, but the idea of being the heir of Etchingham was — well, was an idea. It would make me more possible to my pseudo-sister. It would be, as it were, a starting-point, would

make me potentially a somebody of her sort of ideal. Moreover, I should be under the same roof, near her, with her sometimes. One asks so little more than that, that it seemed almost half the battle. I began to consider phrases of thanks and acceptance and then uttered them.

I never quite understood the bearings of that scene; never quite whether my aunt really knew that my sister was not my sister. She was a wonderfully clever woman of the unscrupulous order, with a sang-froid and self-possession well calculated to let her cut short any inconvenient revelations. It was as if she had had long practice in the art, though I cannot say what occasion she can have had for its practice — perhaps for the confounding of wavering avowers of Dissent at home.

I used to think that she knew, if not all, at least a portion; that the weight that undoubtedly was upon her mind was nothing else but that. She broke up, was breaking up from day to day, and I can think of no other reason. She had the air of being disintegrated, like a mineral under an immense weight — quartz in a crushing mill; of being dulled and numbed as if she were under the influence of narcotics.

There is little enough wonder, if she actually carried that imponderable secret about with her. I used to look at her sometimes, and wonder if she, too, saw the oncoming of the inevitable. She was limited enough in her ideas, but not too stupid to take that in if it presented itself. Indeed they have that sort of idea rather grimly before them all the time — that class.

It must have been that that was daily, and little by little, pressing down her eyelids and deepening the quivering lines of her impenetrable face. She had a certain solitary grandeur, the pathos attaching to the last of a race, of a type; the air of waiting for the deluge, of listening for an inevitable sound — the sound of oncoming waters.

It was weird, the time that I spent in that house — more than weird — deadening. It had an extraordinary effect on me — an effect that my “sister,” perhaps, had carefully calculated. She made pretensions of that sort later on; said that she had been breaking me in to perform my allotted task in the bringing on of the inevitable.

I have nowhere come across such an intense solitude as there was there, a solitude that threw one so absolutely upon one’s self and into one’s self. I used to sit working in one of those tall, panelled rooms, very high up in the air. I was writing at the series of articles for the Bi-Monthly, for Polehampton. I was to get the atmosphere of Paris, you remember. It was

rather extraordinary, that process. Up there I seemed to be as much isolated from Paris as if I had been in — well, in Hampton Court. It was almost impossible to write; I had things to think about: preoccupations, jealousies. It was true I had a living to make, but that seemed to have lost its engrossingness as a pursuit, or at least to have suspended it.

The panels of the room seemed to act as a sounding-board, the belly of an immense 'cello. There were never any noises in the house, only whispers coming from an immense distance — as when one drops stones down an unfathomable well and hears ages afterward the faint sound of disturbed waters. When I look back at that time I figure myself as forever sitting with uplifted pen, waiting for a word that would not come, and that I did not much care about getting. The panels of the room would creak sympathetically to the opening of the entrance-door of the house, the faintest of creaks; people would cross the immense hall to the room in which they plotted; would cross leisurely, with laughter and rustling of garments that after a long time reached my ears in whispers. Then I should have an access of mad jealousy. I wanted to be part of her life, but I could not stand that Salon of suspicious conspirators. What could I do there? Stand and look at them, conscious that they all dropped their voices instinctively when I came near them?

That was the general tone of that space of time, but, of course, it was not always that. I used to emerge now and then to breakfast sympathetically with my aunt, sometimes to sit through a meal with the two of them. I danced attendance on them singly; paid depressing calls with my aunt; calls on the people in the Faubourg; people without any individuality other than a kind of desiccation, the shrivelled appearance and point of view of a dried pippin. In revenge, they had names that startled one, names that recalled the generals and flaneurs of an impossibly distant time; names that could hardly have had any existence outside the memoirs of Madame de Sévigné, the names of people that could hardly have been fitted to do anything more vigorous than be reflected in the mirrors of the Salle des Glaces. I was so absolutely depressed, so absolutely in a state of suspended animation, that I seemed to conform exactly to my aunt's ideas of what was desirable in me as an attendant on her at these functions. I used to stand behind chairs and talk, like a good young man, to the assorted Pères and Abbés who were generally present.

And then I used to go home and get the atmospheres of these people. I must have done it abominably badly, for the notes that brought Polehampton's cheques were accompanied by the bravos of that gentleman and the assurances that Miss Polehampton liked my work — liked it very much.

I suppose I exhibited myself in the capacity of the man who knew — who could let you into a thing or two. After all, anyone could write about students' balls and the lakes in the Bois, but it took someone to write "with knowledge" of the interiors of the barred houses in the Rue de l'Université.

Then, too, I attended the more showy entertainments with my sister. I had by now become so used to hearing her styled "your sister" that the epithet had the quality of a name. She was "mademoiselle votre soeur," as she might have been Mlle. Patience or Hope, without having anything of the named quality. What she did at the entertainments, the charitable bazaars, the dismal dances, the impossibly bad concerts, I have no idea. She must have had some purpose, for she did nothing without. I myself descended into fulfilling the functions of a rudimentarily developed chaperon — functions similar in importance to those performed by the eyes of a mole. I had the maddest of accesses of jealousy if she talked to a man — and such men — or danced with one. And then I was forever screwing my courage up and feeling it die away. We used to drive about in a coupe, a thing that shut us inexorably together, but which quite as inexorably destroyed all opportunities for what one calls making love. In smooth streets its motion was too glib, on the pavé it rattled too abominably. I wanted to make love to her — oh, immensely, but I was never in the mood, or the opportunity was never forthcoming. I used to have the wildest fits of irritation; not of madness or of depression, but of simple wildness at the continual recurrence of small obstacles. I couldn't read, couldn't bring myself to it. I used to sit and look dazedly at the English newspapers — at any newspaper but the Hour. De Mersch had, for the moment, disappeared. There were troubles in his elective grand duchy — he had, indeed, contrived to make himself unpopular with the electors, excessively unpopular. I used to read piquant articles about his embroglio in an American paper that devoted itself to matters of the sort. All sorts of international difficulties were to arise if de Mersch were ejected. There was some other obscure prince of a rival house, Prussian or Russian, who had desires for the degree of royalty that sat so heavily on de Mersch. Indeed, I think there were two rival

princes, each waiting with portmanteaux packed and manifestos in their breast pockets, ready to pass de Mersch's frontiers.

The grievances of his subjects — so the *Paris-American Gazette* said — were intimately connected with matters of finance, and de Mersch's personal finances and his grand ducal were inextricably mixed up with the wild-cat schemes with which he was seeking to make a fortune large enough to enable him to laugh at half a dozen elective grand duchies. Indeed, de Mersch's own portmanteau was reported to be packed against the day when British support of his Greenland schemes would let him afford to laugh at his cantankerous Diet.

The thing interested me so little that I never quite mastered the details of it. I wished the man no good, but so long as he kept out of my way I was not going to hate him actively. Finally the affairs of Holstein-Launewitz ceased to occupy the papers — the thing was arranged and the Russian and Prussian princes unpacked their portmanteaux, and, I suppose, consigned their manifestos to the flames, or adapted them to the needs of other principalities. De Mersch's affairs ceded their space in the public prints to the topic of the dearness of money. Somebody, somewhere, was said to be up to something. I used to try to read the articles, to master the details, because I disliked finding a whole field of thought of which I knew absolutely nothing. I used to read about the great discount houses and other things that conveyed absolutely nothing to my mind. I only gathered that the said great houses were having a very bad time, and that everybody else was having a very much worse.

One day, indeed, the matter was brought home to me by the receipt from Polehampton of bills instead of my usual cheques. I had a good deal of trouble in cashing the things; indeed, people seemed to look askance at them. I consulted my aunt on the subject, at breakfast. It was the sort of thing that interested the woman of business in her, and we were always short of topics of conversation.

We breakfasted in rather a small room, as rooms went there; my aunt sitting at the head of the table, with an early morning air of being *en famille* that she wore at no other time of day. It was not a matter of garments, for she was not the woman to wear a peignoir; but lay, I supposed, in her manner, which did not begin to assume frigidity until several watches of the day had passed.



I handed her Polehampton's bills and explained that I was at a loss to turn them to account; that I even had only the very haziest of ideas as to their meaning. Holding the forlorn papers in her hand, she began to lecture me on the duty of acquiring the rudiments of what she called "business habits."

"Of course you do not require to master details to any considerable extent," she said, "but I always have held that it is one of the duties of a..."

She interrupted herself as my sister came into the room; looked at her, and then held out the papers in her hand. The things quivered a little; the hand must have quivered too.

"You are going to Halderschrodt's?" she said, interrogatively. "You could get him to negotiate these for Etchingham?"

Miss Granger looked at the papers negligently.

"I am going this afternoon," she answered. "Etchingham can come...." She suddenly turned to me: "So your friend is getting shaky," she said.

"It means that?" I asked. "But I've heard that he has done the same sort of thing before."

"He must have been shaky before," she said, "but I daresay Halderschrodt...."

"Oh, it's hardly worth while bothering that personage about such a sum," I interrupted. Halderschrodt, in those days, was a name that suggested no dealings in any sum less than a million.

"My dear Etchingham," my aunt interrupted in a shocked tone, "it is quite worth his while to oblige us...."

"I didn't know," I said.

That afternoon we drove to Halderschrodt's private office, a sumptuous — that is the *mot juste* — suite of rooms on the first floor of the house next to the Duc de Mersch's *Sans Souci*. I sat on a plush-bottomed gilded chair, whilst my pseudo-sister transacted her business in an adjoining room — a room exactly corresponding with that within which de Mersch had lurked whilst the lady was warning me against him. A clerk came after awhile, carried me off into an enclosure, where my bill was discounted by another, and then reconducted me to my plush chair. I did not occupy it, as it happened. A meagre, very tall Alsatian was holding the door open for the exit of my sister. He said nothing at all, but stood slightly inclined as she passed him. I caught a glimpse of a red, long face, very tired eyes, and hair of almost startling whiteness — the white hair of a comparatively young man, without any lustre of any sort — a dead white, like that of snow. I

remember that white hair with a feeling of horror, whilst I have almost forgotten the features of the great Baron de Halderschrodt.

I had still some of the feeling of having been in contact with a personality of the most colossal significance as we went down the red carpet of the broad white marble stairs. With one foot on the lowest step, the figure of a perfectly clothed, perfectly groomed man was standing looking upward at our descent. I had thought so little of him that the sight of the Duc de Mersch's face hardly suggested any train of emotions. It lit up with an expression of pleasure.

"You," he said.

She stood looking down upon him from the altitude of two steps, looking with intolerable passivity.

"So you use the common stairs," she said, "one had the idea that you communicated with these people through a private door." He laughed uneasily, looking askance at me.

"Oh, I ...," he said.

She moved a little to one side to pass him in her descent.

"So things have arranged themselves — *là bas*," she said, referring, I supposed, to the elective grand duchy.

"Oh, it was like a miracle," he answered, "and I owed a great deal — a great deal — to your hints...."

"You must tell me all about it to-night," she said.

De Mersch's face had an extraordinary quality that I seemed to notice in all the faces around me — a quality of the flesh that seemed to lose all luminosity, of the eyes that seemed forever to have a tendency to seek the ground, to avoid the sight of the world. When he brightened to answer her it was as if with effort. It seemed as if a weight were on the mind of the whole world — a preoccupation that I shared without understanding. She herself, a certain absent-mindedness apart, seemed the only one that was entirely unaffected.

As we sat side by side in the little carriage, she said suddenly:

"They are coming to the end of their tether, you see." I shrank away from her a little — but I did not see and did not want to see. I said so. It even seemed to me that de Mersch having got over the troubles *là bas*, was taking a new lease of life.

"I did think," I said, "a little time ago that ..."

The wheels of the coupe suddenly began to rattle abominably over the cobbles of a narrow street. It was impossible to talk, and I was thrown back upon myself. I found that I was in a temper — in an abominable temper. The sudden sight of that man, her method of greeting him, the intimacy that the scene revealed ... the whole thing had upset me. Of late, for want of any alarms, in spite of groundlessness I had had the impression that I was the integral part of her life. It was not a logical idea, but strictly a habit of mind that had grown up in the desolation of my solitude.

We passed into one of the larger boulevards, and the thing ran silently.

“That de Mersch was crumbling up,” she suddenly completed my unfinished sentence; “oh, that was only a grumble — premonitory. But it won’t take long now. I have been putting on the screw. Halderschrodt will ... I suppose he will commit suicide, in a day or two. And then the — the fun will begin.”

I didn’t answer. The thing made no impression — no mental impression at all.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

That afternoon we had a scene, and late that night another. The memory of the former is a little blotted out. Things began to move so quickly that, try as I will to arrange their sequence in my mind, I cannot. I cannot even very distinctly remember what she told me at that first explanation. I must have attacked her fiercely — on the score of de Mersch, in the old vein; must have told her that I would not in the interest of the name allow her to see the man again. She told me things, too, rather abominable things, about the way in which she had got Halderschrodt into her power and was pressing him down. Halderschrodt was de Mersch's banker-in-chief; his fall would mean de Mersch's, and so on. The "so on" in this case meant a great deal more. Halderschrodt, apparently, was the "somebody who was up to something" of the American paper — that is to say the allied firms that Halderschrodt represented. I can't remember the details. They were too huge and too unfamiliar, and I was too agitated by my own share in the humanity of it. But, in sum, it seemed that the fall of Halderschrodt would mean a sort of incredibly vast Black Monday — a frightful thing in the existing state of public confidence, but one which did not mean much to me. I forget how she said she had been able to put the screw on him. Halderschrodt, as you must remember, was the third of his colossal name, a man without much genius and conscious of the lack, obsessed with the idea of operating some enormous coup, like the founder of his dynasty, something in which foresight in international occurrence played a chief part. That idea was his weakness, the defect of his mind, and she had played on that weakness. I forget, I say, the details, if I ever heard them; they concerned themselves with a dynastic revolution somewhere, a revolution that was to cause a slump all over the world, and that had been engineered in our Salon. And she had burked the revolution — betrayed it, I suppose — and the consequences did not ensue, and Halderschrodt and all the rest of them were left high and dry.

The whole thing was a matter of under-currents that never came to the surface, a matter of shifting sands from which only those with the clearest heads could come forth.

"And we ... we have clear heads," she said. It was impossible to listen to her without shuddering. For me, if he stood for anything, Halderschrodt stood for stability; there was the tremendous name, and there was the

person I had just seen, the person on whom a habit of mind approaching almost to the royal had conferred a presence that had some of the divinity that hedges a king. It seemed frightful merely to imagine his ignominious collapse; as frightful as if she had pointed out a splendid-limbed man and said: "That man will be dead in five minutes." That, indeed, was what she said of Halderschrodt.... The man had saluted her, going to his death; the austere inclination that I had seen had been the salutation of such a man.

I was so moved by one thing and another that I hardly noticed that Gurnard had come into the room. I had not seen him since the night when he had dined with the Duc de Mersch at Churchill's, but he seemed so part of the emotion, of the frame of mind, that he slid noiselessly into the scene and hardly surprised me. I was called out of the room — someone desired to see me, and I passed, without any transition of feeling, into the presence of an entire stranger — a man who remains a voice to me. He began to talk to me about the state of my aunt's health. He said she was breaking up; that he begged respectfully to urge that I would use my influence to take her back to London to consult Sir James — I, perhaps, living in the house and not having known my aunt for very long, might not see; but he ... He was my aunt's solicitor. He was quite right; my aunt was breaking up, she had declined visibly in the few hours that I had been away from her. She had been doing business with this man, had altered her will, had seen Mr. Gurnard; and, in some way had received a shock that seemed to have deprived her of all volition. She sat with her head leaning back, her eyes closed, the lines of her face all seeming to run downward.

"It is obvious to me that arrangements ought to be made for your return to England," the lawyer said, "whatever engagements Miss Granger or Mr. Etchingham Granger or even Mr. Gurnard may have made."

I wondered vaguely what the devil Mr. Gurnard could have to say in the matter, and then Miss Granger herself came into the room.

"They want me," my aunt said in a low voice, "they have been persuading me ... to go back ... to Etchingham, I think you said, Meredith."

I became conscious that I wanted to return to England, wanted it very much, wanted to be out of this; to get somewhere where there was stability and things that one could understand. Everything here seemed to be in a mist, with the ground trembling underfoot.

"Why ..." Miss Granger's verdict came, "we can go when you like. To-morrow."

Things immediately began to shape themselves on these unexpected lines, a sort of bustle of departure to be in the air. I was employed to conduct the lawyer as far as the porter's lodge, a longish traverse. He beguiled the way by excusing himself for hurrying back to London.

"I might have been of use; in these hurried departures there are generally things. But, you will understand, Mr. — Mr. Etchingham; at a time like this I could hardly spare the hours that it cost me to come over. You would be astonished what a deal of extra work it gives and how far-spreading the evil is. People seem to have gone mad. Even I have been astonished."

"I had no idea," I said.

"Of course not, of course not — no one had. But, unless I am much mistaken — much — there will have to be an enquiry, and people will be very lucky who have had nothing to do with it ..."

I gathered that things were in a bad way, over there as over here; that there were scandals and a tremendous outcry for purification in the highest places. I saw the man get into his fiacre and took my way back across the court-yard rather slowly, pondering over the part I was to fill in the emigration, wondering how far events had conferred on me a partnership in the family affairs.

I found that my tacitly acknowledged function was that of supervising nurse-tender, the sort of thing that made for personal tenderness in the aridity of profuse hired help. I was expected to arrange a rug just a little more comfortably than the lady's maid who would travel in the compartment — to give the finishing touches.

It was astonishing how well the thing was engineered; the removal, I mean. It gave me an even better idea of the woman my aunt had been than even the panic of her solicitor. The thing went as smoothly as the disappearance of a caravan of gypsies, camped for the night on a heath beside gorse bushes. We went to the ball that night as if from a household that had its roots deep in the solid rock, and in the morning we had disappeared.

The ball itself was a finishing touch — the finishing touch of my sister's affairs and the end of my patience. I spent an interminable night, one of those nights that never end and that remain quivering and raw in the memory. I seemed to be in a blaze of light, watching, through a shifting screen of shimmering dresses — her and the Duc de Mersch. I don't know whether the thing was really noticeable, but it seemed that everyone was —

that everyone must be — remarking it. I thought I caught women making smile-punctuated remarks behind fans, men answering inaudibly with eyes discreetly on the ground. It was a mixed assembly, somebody's liquidation of social obligations, and there was a sprinkling of the kind of people who do make remarks. It was not the noticeability for its own sake that I hated, but the fact that their relations by their noticeability made me impossible, whilst the notice itself confirmed my own fears. I hung, glowering in corners, noticeable enough myself, I suppose.

The thing reached a crisis late in the evening. There was a kind of winter-garden that one strolled in, a place of giant palms stretching up into a darkness of intense shadow. I was prowling about in the shadows of great metallic leaves, cursing under my breath, in a fury of nervous irritation; quivering like a horse martyred by a stupidly merciless driver. I happened to stand back for a moment in the narrowest of paths, with the touch of spiky leaves on my hand and on my face. In front of me was the glaring perspective of one of the longer alleys, and, stepping into it, a great band of blue ribbon cutting across his chest, came de Mersch with her upon his arm. De Mersch himself hardly counted. He had a way of glowing, but he paled ineffectual fires beside her mænadic glow. There was something overpowering in the sight of her, in the fire of her eyes, in the glow of her coils of hair, in the poise of her head. She wore some kind of early nineteenth-century dress, sweeping low from the waist with a tenderness of fold that affected one with delicate pathos, that had a virgin quality of almost poignant intensity. And beneath it she stepped with the buoyancy — the long steps — of a triumphing Diana.

It was more than terrible for me to stand there longing with a black, baffled longing, with some of the base quality of an eavesdropper and all the baseness of the unsuccessful.

Then Gurnard loomed in the distance, moving insensibly down the long, glaring corridor, a sinister figure, suggesting in the silence of his oncoming the motionless flight of a vulture. Well within my field of sight he overtook them and, with a lack of preliminary greeting that suggested supreme intimacy, walked beside them. I stood for some moments — for some minutes, and then hastened after them. I was going to do something. After a time I found de Mersch and Gurnard standing facing each other in one of the doorways of the place — Gurnard, a small, dark, impassive column; de Mersch, bulky, overwhelming, florid, standing with his legs well apart and

speaking vociferously with a good deal of gesture. I approached them from the side, standing rather insistently at his elbow.

"I want," I said, "I would be extremely glad if you would give me a minute, monsieur." I was conscious that I spoke with a tremour of the voice, a sort of throaty eagerness. I was unaware of what course I was to pursue, but I was confident of calmness, of self-control — I was equal to that. They had a pause of surprised silence. Gurnard wheeled and fixed me critically with his eye-glass. I took de Mersch a little apart, into a solitude of palm branches, and began to speak before he had asked me my errand.

"You must understand that I would not interfere without a good deal of provocation," I was saying, when he cut me short, speaking in a thick, jovial voice.

"Oh, we will understand that, my good Granger, and then ..."

"It is about my sister," I said — "you — you go too far. I must ask you, as a gentleman, to cease persecuting her."

He answered "The devil!" and then: "If I do not — — ?"

It was evident in his voice, in his manner, that the man was a little — well, gris. "If you do not," I said, "I shall forbid her to see you and I shall ..."

"Oh, oh!" he interjected with the intonation of a reveller at a farce. "We are at that — we are the excellent brother." He paused, and then added: "Well, go to the devil, you and your forbidding." He spoke with the greatest good humour.

"I am in earnest," I said; "very much in earnest. The thing has gone too far, and even for your own sake, you had better ..."

He said "Ah, ah!" in the tone of his "Oh, oh!"

"She is no friend to you," I struggled on, "she is playing with you for her own purposes; you will ..."

He swayed a little on his feet and said: "Bravo ... bravissimo. If we can't forbid him, we will frighten him. Go on, my good fellow ..." and then, "Come, go on ..."

I looked at his great bulk of a body. It came into my head dimly that I wanted him to strike me, to give me an excuse — anything to end the scene violently, with a crash and exclamations of fury.

"You absolutely refuse to pay any attention?" I said.

"Oh, absolutely," he answered.



“You know that I can do something, that I can expose you.” I had a vague idea that I could, that the number of small things that I knew to his discredit and the mass of my hatred could be welded into a damning whole. He laughed a high-pitched, hysterical laugh. The dawn was beginning to spread pallidly above us, gleaming mournfully through the glass of the palm-house. People began to pass, muffled up, on their way out of the place.

“You may go ...” he was beginning. But the expression of his face altered. Miss Granger, muffled up like all the rest of the world, was coming out of the inner door. “We have been having a charming ...” he began to her. She touched me gently on the arm.

“Come, Arthur,” she said, and then to him, “You have heard the news?”

He looked at her rather muzzily.

“Baron Halderschrodt has committed suicide,” she said. “Come, Arthur.”

We passed on slowly, but de Mersch followed.

“You — you aren’t in earnest?” he said, catching at her arm so that we swung round and faced him. There was a sort of mad entreaty in his eyes, as if he hoped that by unsaying she could remedy an irremediable disaster, and there was nothing left of him but those panic-stricken, beseeching eyes.

“Monsieur de Sabran told me,” she answered; “he had just come from making the constation. Besides, you can hear ...”

Half-sentences came to our ears from groups that passed us. A very old man with a nose that almost touched his thick lips, was saying to another of the same type:

“Shot himself ... through the left temple ... Mon Dieu!”

De Mersch walked slowly down the long corridor away from us. There was an extraordinary stiffness in his gait, as if he were trying to emulate the goose step of his days in the Prussian Guard. My companion looked after him as though she wished to gauge the extent of his despair.

“You would say ‘Habet,’ wouldn’t you?” she asked me.

I thought we had seen the last of him, but as in the twilight of the dawn we waited for the lodge gates to open, a furious clatter of hoofs came down the long street, and a carriage drew level with ours. A moment after, de Mersch was knocking at our window.

“You will ... you will ...” he stuttered, “speak ... to Mr. Gurnard. That is our only chance ... now.” His voice came in mingled with the cold air of the morning. I shivered. “You have so much power ... with him and....”

“Oh, I ...” she answered.

“The thing must go through,” he said again, “or else ...” He paused. The great gates in front of us swung noiselessly open, one saw into the courtyard. The light was growing stronger. She did not answer.

“I tell you,” he asseverated insistently, “if the British Government abandons my railway all our plans ...”

“Oh, the Government won’t abandon it,” she said, with a little emphasis on the verb. He stepped back out of range of the wheels, and we turned in and left him standing there.

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In the great room which was usually given up to the political plotters stood a table covered with eatables and lit by a pair of candles in tall silver sticks. I was conscious of a raging hunger and of a fierce excitement that made the thought of sleep part of a past of phantoms. I began to eat unconsciously, pacing up and down the while. She was standing beside the table in the glow of the transparent light. Pallid blue lines showed in the long windows. It was very cold and hideously late; away in those endless small hours when the pulse drags, when the clock-beat drags, when time is effaced.

“You see?” she said suddenly.

“Oh, I see,” I answered — “and ... and now?”

“Now we are almost done with each other,” she answered.

I felt a sudden mental falling away. I had never looked at things in that way, had never really looked things in the face. I had grown so used to the idea that she was to parcel out the remainder of my life, had grown so used to the feeling that I was the integral portion of her life ... “But I — ” I said, “What is to become of me?”

She stood looking down at the ground ... for a long time. At last she said in a low monotone:

“Oh, you must try to forget.”

A new idea struck me — luminously, overwhelming. I grew reckless. “You — you are growing considerate,” I taunted. “You are not so sure, not so cold. I notice a change in you. Upon my soul ...”

Her eyes dilated suddenly, and as suddenly closed again. She said nothing. I grew conscious of unbearable pain, the pain of returning life. She was going away. I should be alone. The future began to exist again, looming

up like a vessel through thick mist, silent, phantasmal, overwhelming — a hideous future of irremediable remorse, of solitude, of craving.

“You are going back to work with Churchill,” she said suddenly.

“How did you know?” I asked breathlessly. My despair of a sort found vent in violent interjecting of an immaterial query.

“You leave your letters about,” she said, “and.... It will be best for you.”

“It will not,” I said bitterly. “It could never be the same. I don’t want to see Churchill. I want....”

“You want?” she asked, in a low monotone.

“You,” I answered.

She spoke at last, very slowly:

“Oh, as for me, I am going to marry Gurnard.”

I don’t know just what I said then, but I remember that I found myself repeating over and over again, the phrases running metrically up and down my mind: “You couldn’t marry Gurnard; you don’t know what he is. You couldn’t marry Gurnard; you don’t know what he is.” I don’t suppose that I knew anything to the discredit of Gurnard — but he struck me in that way at that moment; struck me convincingly — more than any array of facts could have done.

“Oh — as for what he is — ” she said, and paused. “I know....” and then suddenly she began to speak very fast.

“Don’t you see? — can’t you see? — that I don’t marry Gurnard for what he is in that sense, but for what he is in the other. It isn’t a marriage in your sense at all. And ... and it doesn’t affect you ... don’t you see? We have to have done with one another, because ... because....”

I had an inspiration.

“I believe,” I said, very slowly, “I believe ... you do care....”

She said nothing.

“You care,” I repeated.

She spoke then with an energy that had something of a threat in it. “Do you think I would? Do you think I could?... or dare? Don’t you understand?” She faltered — “but then....” she added, and was silent for a long minute. I felt the throb of a thousand pulses in my head, on my temples. “Oh, yes, I care,” she said slowly, “but that — that makes it all the worse. Why, yes, I care — yes, yes. It hurts me to see you. I might.... It would draw me away. I have my allotted course. And you — Don’t you see, you would influence me; you would be — you are — a disease — for me.”

“But,” I said, “I could — I would — do anything.”

I had only the faintest of ideas of what I would do — for her sake.

“Ah, no,” she said, “you must not say that. You don’t understand.... Even that would mean misery for you — and I — I could not bear. Don’t you see? Even now, before you have done your allotted part, I am wanting — oh, wanting — to let you go.... But I must not; I must not. You must go on ... and bear it for a little while more — and then....”

There was a tension somewhere, a string somewhere that was stretched tight and vibrating. I was tremulous with an excitement that overmastered my powers of speech, that surpassed my understanding.

“Don’t you see ...” she asked again, “you are the past — the passing. We could never meet. You are ... for me ... only the portrait of a man — of a man who has been dead — oh, a long time; and I, for you, only a possibility ... a conception.... You work to bring me on — to make me possible.”

“But — ” I said. The idea was so difficult to grasp. “I will — there must be a way — ”

“No,” she answered, “there is no way — you must go back; must try. There will be Churchill and what he stands for — He won’t die, he won’t even care much for losing this game ... not much.... And you will have to forget me. There is no other way — no bridge. We can’t meet, you and I....”

The words goaded me to fury. I began to pace furiously up and down. I wanted to tell her that I would throw away everything for her, would crush myself out, would be a lifeless tool, would do anything. But I could tear no words out of the stone that seemed to surround me.

“You may even tell him, if you like, what I and Gurnard are going to do. It will make no difference; he will fall. But you would like him to — to make a good fight for it, wouldn’t you? That is all I can do ... for your sake.”

I began to speak — as if I had not spoken for years. The house seemed to be coming to life; there were noises of opening doors, of voices outside.

“I believe you care enough,” I said “to give it all up for me. I believe you do, and I want you.” I continued to pace up and down. The noises of returning day grew loud; frightfully loud. It was as if I must hasten, must get said what I had to say, as if I must raise my voice to make it heard amid the clamour of a world awakening to life.

“I believe you do ... I believe you do....” I said again and again, “and I want you.” My voice rose higher and higher. She stood motionless, an inscrutable white figure, like some silent Greek statue, a harmony of falling folds of heavy drapery perfectly motionless.

“I want you,” I said — ”I want you, I want you, I want you.” It was unbearable to myself.

“Oh, be quiet,” she said at last. “Be quiet! If you had wanted me I have been here. It is too late. All these days; all these — ”

“But ...” I said.

From without someone opened the great shutters of the windows, and the light from the outside world burst in upon us.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

We parted in London next day, I hardly know where. She seemed so part of my being, was for me so little more than an intellectual force, so little of a physical personality, that I cannot remember where my eyes lost sight of her.

I had desolately made the crossing from country to country, had convoyed my aunt to her big house in one of the gloomy squares in a certain district, and then we had parted. Even afterward it was as if she were still beside me, as if I had only to look round to find her eyes upon me. She remained the propelling force, I a boat thrust out upon a mill-pond, moving more and more slowly. I had been for so long in the shadow of that great house, shut in among the gloom, that all this light, this blazing world — it was a June day in London — seemed impossible, and hateful. Over there, there had been nothing but very slow, fading minutes; now there was a past, a future. It was as if I stood between them in a cleft of unscalable rocks.

I went about mechanically, made arrangements for my housing, moved in and out of rooms in the enormous mausoleum of a club that was all the home I had, in a sort of stupor. Suddenly I remembered that I had been thinking of something; that she had been talking of Churchill. I had had a letter from him on the morning of the day before. When I read it, Churchill and his “Cromwell” had risen in my mind like preposterous phantoms; the one as unreal as the other — as alien. I seemed to have passed an infinity of æons beyond them. The one and the other belonged as absolutely to the past as a past year belongs. The thought of them did not bring with it the tremulously unpleasant sensations that, as a rule, come with the thoughts of a too recent temps jadis, but rather as a vein of rose across a gray evening. I had passed his letter over; had dropped it half-read among the litter of the others. Then there had seemed to be a haven into whose mouth I was drifting.

Now I should have to pick the letters up again, all of them; set to work desolately to pick up the threads of the past; and work it back into life as one does half-drowned things. I set about it listlessly. There remained of that time an errand for my aunt, an errand that would take me to Etchingham; something connected with her land steward. I think the old lady had ideas of inducting me into a position that it had grown tacitly acknowledged I was to fill. I was to go down there; to see about some

alterations that were in progress; and to make arrangements for my aunt's return. I was so tired, so dog tired, and the day still had so many weary hours to run, that I recognised instinctively that if I were to come through it sane I must tire myself more, must keep on going — until I sank. I drifted down to Etchingham that evening, I sent a messenger over to Churchill's cottage, waited for an answer that told me that Churchill was there, and then slept, and slept.

I woke back in the world again, in a world that contained the land steward and the manor house. I had a sense of recovered power from the sight of them, of the sunlight on the stretches of turf, of the mellow, golden stonework of the long range of buildings, from the sound of a chime of bells that came wonderfully sweetly over the soft swelling of the close turf. The feeling came not from any sense of prospective ownership, but from the acute consciousness of what these things stood for. I did not recognise it then, but later I understood; for the present it was enough to have again the power to set my foot on the ground, heel first. In the streets of the little town there was a sensation of holiday, not pronounced enough to call for flags, but enough to convey the idea of waiting for an event.

The land steward, at the end of a tour amongst cottages, explained there was to be a celebration in the neighbourhood — a “cock-and-hen show with a political annex”; the latter under the auspices of Miss Churchill. Churchill himself was to speak; there was a possibility of a pronouncement. I found London reporters at my inn, men I half knew. They expressed mitigated delight at the view of me, and over a lunch-table let me know what “one said” — what one said of the outside of events I knew too well internally. They most of them had the air of my aunt's solicitor when he had said, “Even I did not realise....” their positions saving them the necessity of concealing surprise. “One can't know everything.” They fumbled amusingly about the causes, differed with one another, but were surprisingly unanimous as to effects, as to the panic and the call for purification. It was rather extraordinary, too, how large de Mersch loomed on the horizon over here. It was as if the whole world centred in him, as if he represented the modern spirit that must be purified away by burning before things could return to their normal state. I knew what he represented ... but there it was.

It was part of my programme, the attendance at the poultry show; I was to go back to the cottage with Churchill, after he had made his speech. It

was rather extraordinary, the sensations of that function. I went in rather late, with the reporter of the Hour, who was anxious to do me the favour of introducing me without payment — it was his way of making himself pleasant, and I had the reputation of knowing celebrities. It was rather extraordinary to be back again in the midst of this sort of thing, to be walking over a crowded, green paddock, hedged in with tall trees and dotted here and there with the gaily striped species of tent that is called marquee. And the type of face, and the style of the costume! They would have seemed impossible the day before yesterday.

There were all Miss Churchill's gang of great dames, muslin, rustling, marriageable daughters, a continual twitter of voices, and a sprinkling of the peasantry, dun-coloured and struck speechless.

One of the great ladies surveyed me as I stood in the centre of an open space, surveyed me through tortoise-shell glasses on the end of a long handle, and beckoned me to her side.

"You are unattached?" she asked. She had pretensions to voice the county, just as my aunt undoubtedly set the tone of its doings, decided who was visitable, and just as Miss Churchill gave the political tone. "You may wait upon me, then," she said; "my daughter is with her young man. That is the correct phrase, is it not?"

She was a great lady, who stood nearly six foot high, and whom one would have styled buxom, had one dared. "I have a grievance," she went on; "I must talk to someone. Come this way. There!" She pointed with the handle of her glasses to a pen of glossy blackbirds. "You see!... Not even commended! — and I assure you the trouble I have taken over them, with the idea of setting an example to the tenantry, is incredible. They give a prize to one of our own tenants ... which is as much as telling the man that he is an example to me. Then they wonder that the country is going to the dogs. I assure you that after breakfast I have had the scraps collected from the plates — that was the course recommended by the poultry manuals — and have taken them out with my own hands."

The sort of thing passed for humour in the county, and, being delivered with an air and a half Irish ruefulness, passed well enough.

"And that reminds me," she went on, " — I mean the fact that the country is going to the dogs, as my husband [You haven't seen him anywhere, have you? He is one of the judges, and I want to have a word with him about my Orpingtons] says every morning after he has looked at his paper — that ...



oh, that you have been in Paris, haven't you? with your aunt. Then, of course, you have seen this famous Duc de Mersch?"

She looked at me humourously through her glasses. "I'm going to pump you, you know," she said, "it is the duty that is expected of me. I have to talk for a countyful of women without a tongue in their heads. So tell me about him. Is it true that he is at the bottom of all this mischief? Is it through him that this man committed suicide? They say so. He was mixed up in that Royalist plot, wasn't he? — and the people that have been failing all over the place are mixed up with him, aren't they?"

"I ... I really don't know," I said; "if you say so...."

"Oh, I assure you I'm sound enough," she answered, "the Churchills — I know you're a friend of his — haven't a stauncher ally than I am, and I should only be too glad to be able to contradict. But it's so difficult. I assure you I go out of my way; talk to the most outrageous people, deny the very possibility of Mr. Churchill's being in any way implicated. One knows that it's impossible, but what can one do? I have said again and again — to people like grocers' wives; even to the grocers, for that matter — that Mr. Churchill is a statesman, and that if he insists that this odious man's railway must go through, it is in the interests of the country that it should. I tell them...."

She paused for a minute to take breath and then went on: "I was speaking to a man of that class only this morning, rather an intelligent man and quite nice — I was saying, 'Don't you see, my dear Mr. Tull, that it is a question of international politics. If the grand duke does not get the money for his railway, the grand duke will be turned out of his — what is it — principality? And that would be most dangerous — in the present condition of affairs over there, and besides....' The man listened very respectfully, but I could see that he was not convinced. I buckled to again...."

"'And besides,' I said, 'there is the question of Greenland itself. We English must have Greenland ... sooner or later. It touches you, even. You have a son who's above — who doesn't care for life in a country town, and you want to send him abroad — with a little capital. Well, Greenland is just the place for him.' The man looked at me, and almost shook his head in my face."

"'If you'll excuse me, my lady,' he said, 'it won't do. Mr. Churchill is a man above hocus-pocus. Well I know it that have had dealings with him. But ... well, the long and the short of it is, my lady, that you can't touch

pitch and not be defiled; or, leastwise, people'll think you've been defiled — those that don't know you. The foreign nations are all very well, and the grand duchy — and the getting hold of Greenland, but what touches me is this — My neighbour Slingsby had a little money, and he gets a prospectus. It looked very well — very well — and he brings it in to me. I did not have anything to do with it, but Slingsby did. Well, now there's Slingsby on the rates and his wife a lady born, almost. I might have been taken in the same way but for — for the grace of God, I'm minded to say. Well, Slingsby's a good man, and used to be a hard-working man — all his life, and now it turns out that that prospectus came about by the man de Mersch's manoeuvres — "wild-cat schemes," they call them in the paper that I read. And there's any number of them started by de Mersch or his agents. Just for what? That de Mersch may be the richest man in the world and a philanthropist. Well, then, where's Slingsby, if that's philanthropy? So Mr. Churchill comes along and says, in a manner of speaking, "That's all very well, but this same Mr. Mersch is the grand duke of somewhere or other, and we must bolster him up in his kingdom, or else there will be trouble with the powers." Powers — what's powers to me? — or Greenland? when there's Slingsby, a man I've smoked a pipe with every market evening of my life, in the workhouse? And there's hundreds of Slingsbys all over the country.'"

"The man was working himself — Slingsby was a good sort of man. It shocked even me. One knows what goes on in one's own village, of course. And it's only too true that there's hundreds of Slingsbys — I'm not boring you, am I?"

I did not answer for a moment. "I — I had no idea," I said; "I have been so long out of it and over there one did not realise the ... the feeling."

"You've been well out of it," she answered; "one has had to suffer, I assure you." I believed that she had had to suffer; it must have taken a good deal to make that lady complain. Her large, ruddy features followed the droop of her eyes down to the fringe of the parasol that she was touching the turf with. We were sitting on garden seats in the dappled shade of enormous elms.

There was in the air a touch of the sounds discoursed by a yeomanry band at the other end of the grounds. One could see the red of their uniforms through moving rifts in the crowd of white dresses.

“That wasn’t even the worst,” she said suddenly, lifting her eyes and looking away between the trunks of the trees. “The man has been reading the papers and he gave me the benefit of his reflections. ‘Someone’s got to be punished for this;’ he said, ‘we’ve got to show them that you can’t be hand-and-glove with that sort of blackguard, without paying for it. I don’t say, mind you, that Mr. Churchill is or ever has been. I know him, and I trust him. But there’s more than me in the world, and they can’t all know him. Well, here’s the papers saying — or they don’t say it, but they hint, which is worse in a way — that he must be, or he wouldn’t stick up for the man. They say the man’s a blackguard out and out — in Greenland too; has the blacks murdered. Churchill says the blacks are to be safe-guarded, that’s the word. Well, they may be — but so ought Slingsby to have been, yet it didn’t help him. No, my lady, we’ve got to put our own house in order and that first, before thinking of the powers or places like Greenland. What’s the good of the saner policy that Mr. Churchill talks about, if you can’t trust anyone with your money, and have to live on the capital? If you can’t sleep at night for thinking that you may be in the workhouse to-morrow — like Slingsby? The first duty of men in Mr. Churchill’s position — as I see it — is to see that we’re able to be confident of honest dealing. That’s what we want, not Greenlands. That’s how we all feel, and you know it, too, or else you, a great lady, wouldn’t stop to talk to a man like me. And, mind you, I’m true blue, always have been and always shall be, and, if it was a matter of votes, I’d give mine to Mr. Churchill to-morrow. But there’s a many that wouldn’t, and there’s a many that believe the hintings.’”

My lady stopped and sighed from a broad bosom. “What could I say?” she went on again. “I know Mr. Churchill and I like him — and everyone that knows him likes him. I’m one of the stalwarts, mind you; I’m not for giving in to popular clamour; I’m for the ‘saner policy,’ like Churchill. But, as the man said: ‘There’s a many that believe the hintings.’ And I almost wish Churchill.... However, you understand what I meant when I said that one had had to suffer.”

“Oh, I understand,” I said. I was beginning to. “And Churchill?” I asked later, “he gives no sign of relenting?”

“Would you have him?” she asked sharply; “would you make him if you could?” She had an air of challenging. “I’m for the ‘saner policy!’ cost what it may. He owes it to himself to sacrifice himself, if it comes to that.”

"I'm with you too," I answered, "over boot and spur." Her enthusiasm was contagious, and unnecessary.

"Oh, he'll stick," she began again after consultation with the parasol fringe. "You'll hear him after a minute. It's a field day to-day. You'll miss the other heavy guns if you stop with me. I do it ostentatiously — wait until they've done. They're all trembling; all of them. My husband will be on the platform — trembling too. He is a type of them. All day long and at odd moments at night I talk to him — out-talk him and silence him. What's the state of popular feeling to him? He's for the country, not the town — this sort of thing has nothing to do with him. It's a matter to be settled by Jews in the City. Well, he sees it at night, and then in the morning the papers undo all my work. He begins to talk about his seat — which I got for him. I've been the 'voice of the county' for years now. Well, it'll soon be a voice without a county.... What is it? 'The old order changeth.' So, I've arranged it that I shall wait until the trembling big-wigs have stuttered their speeches out, and then I'm going to sail down the centre aisle and listen to Churchill with visible signs of approval. It won't do much to-day, but there was a time when it would have changed the course of an election.... Ah, there's Effie's young man. It's time."

She rose and marched, with the air of going to a last sacrifice, across the deserted sward toward a young man who was passing under the calico flag of the gateway.

"It's all right, Willoughby," she said, as we drew level, "I've found someone else to face the music with me; you can go back to Effie." A bronzed and grateful young man murmured thanks to me.

"It's an awful relief, Granger," he said; "can't think how you can do it. I'm hooked, but you...."

"He's the better man," his mother-in-law-elect said, over her shoulder. She sailed slowly up the aisle beside me, an almost heroic figure of a matron. "Splendidly timed, you see," she said, "do you observe my husband's embarrassment?"

It was splendid to see Churchill again, standing there negligently, with the diffidence of a boy amid the bustle of applause. I understood suddenly why I loved him so, this tall, gray man with the delicate, almost grotesque, mannerisms. He appealed to me by sheer force of picturesqueness, appealed as some forgotten mediaeval city might. I was concerned for him as for some such dying place, standing above the level plains; I was jealous lest it

should lose one jot of its glory, of its renown. He advocated his saner policy before all those people; stood up there and spoke gently, persuasively, without any stress of emotion, without more movement than an occasional flutter of the glasses he held in his hand. One would never have recognised that the thing was a fighting speech but for the occasional shiver of his audience. They were thinking of their Slingsbys; he affecting, insouciantly, to treat them as rational people.

It was extraordinary to sit there shut in by that wall of people all of one type, of one idea; the idea of getting back; all conscious that a force of which they knew nothing was dragging them forward over the edge of a glacier, into a crevasse. They wanted to get back, were struggling, panting even — as a nation pants — to get back by their own way that they understood and saw; were hauling, and hauling desperately, at the weighted rope that was dragging them forward. Churchill stood up there and repeated: “Mine is the only way — the saner policy,” and his words would fly all over the country to fall upon the deaf ears of the panic-stricken, who could not understand the use of calmness, of trifling even, in the face of danger, who suspected the calmness as one suspects the thing one has not. At the end of it I received his summons to a small door at the back of the building. The speech seemed to have passed out of his mind far more than out of mine.

“So you have come,” he said; “that’s good, and so.... Let us walk a little way ... out of this. My aunt will pick us up on the road.” He linked his arm into mine and propelled me swiftly down the bright, broad street. “I’m sorry you came in for that, but — one has to do these things.”

There was a sort of resisted numbness in his voice, a lack of any resiliency. My heart sank a little. It was as if I were beside an invalid who did not — must not — know his condition; as if I were pledged not to notice anything. In the open the change struck home as a hammer strikes; in the pitiless searching of the unrestrained light, his grayness, his tremulousness, his aloofness from the things about him, came home to me like a pang.

“You look a bit fagged,” I said, “perhaps we ought not to talk about work.” His thoughts seemed to come back from a great distance, oh, from an infinite distance beyond the horizon, the soft hills of that fat country. “You want rest,” I added.

“I — oh, no,” he answered, “I can’t have it ... till the end of the session. I’m used to it too.”

He began talking briskly about the “Cromwell;” proofs had emerged from the infinite and wanted attention. There were innumerable little matters, things to be copied for the appendix and revisions. It was impossible for me to keep my mind upon them.

It had come suddenly home to me that this was the world that I belonged to; that I had come back to it as if from an under world; that to this I owed allegiance. She herself had recognised that; she herself had bidden me tell him what was a-gate against him. It was a duty too; he was my friend. But, face to face with him, it became almost an impossibility. It was impossible even to put it into words. The mere ideas seemed to be untranslatable, to savour of madness. I found myself in the very position that she had occupied at the commencement of our relations: that of having to explain — say, to a Persian — the working principles of the telegraph. And I was not equal to the task. At the same time I had to do something. I had to. It would be abominable to have to go through life forever, alone with the consciousness of that sort of treachery of silence. But how could I tell him even the comprehensibles? What kind of sentence was I to open with? With pluckings of an apologetic string, without prelude at all — or how? I grew conscious that there was need for haste; he was looking behind him down the long white road for the carriage that was to pick us up.

“My dear fellow....” I began. He must have noted a change in my tone, and looked at me with suddenly lifted eyebrows. “You know my sister is going to marry Mr. Gurnard.”

“Why, no,” he answered — “that is ... I’ve heard....” he began to offer good wishes.

“No, no,” I interrupted him hurriedly, “not that. But I happen to know that Gurnard is meditating ... is going to separate from you in public matters.” An expression of dismay spread over his face.

“My dear fellow,” he began.

“Oh, I’m not drunk,” I said bitterly, “but I’ve been behind the scenes — for a long time. And I could not ... couldn’t let the thing go on without a word.”

He stopped in the road and looked at me.

“Yes, yes,” he said, “I daresay.... But what does it lead to?... Even if I could listen to you — I can’t go behind the scenes. Mr. Gurnard may differ

from me in points, but don't you see?..." He had walked on slowly, but he came to a halt again. "We had better put these matters out of our minds. Of course you are not drunk; but one is tied down in these matters...."

He spoke very gently, as if he did not wish to offend me by this closing of the door. He seemed suddenly to grow very old and very gray. There was a stile in the dusty hedge-row, and he walked toward it, meditating. In a moment he looked back at me. "I had forgotten," he said; "I meant to suggest that we should wait here — I am a little tired." He perched himself on the top bar and became lost in the inspection of the cord of his glasses. I went toward him.

"I knew," I said, "that you could not listen to ... to the sort of thing. But there were reasons. I felt forced. You will forgive me." He looked up at me, starting as if he had forgotten my presence.

"Yes, yes," he said, "I have a certain — I can't think of the right word — say respect — for your judgment and — and motives ... But you see, there are, for instance, my colleagues. I couldn't go to them ..." He lost the thread of his idea.

"To tell the truth," I said, with a sudden impulse for candour, "it isn't the political aspect of the matter, but the personal. I spoke because it was just possible that I might be of service to you — personally — and because I would like you ... to make a good fight for it." I had borrowed her own words.

He looked up at me and smiled. "Thank you," he said. "I believe you think it's a losing game," he added, with a touch of gray humour that was like a genial hour of sunlight on a wintry day. I did not answer. A little way down the road Miss Churchill's carriage whirled into sight, sparkling in the sunlight, and sending up an attendant cloud of dust that melted like smoke through the dog-roses of the leeward hedge.

"So you don't think much of me as a politician," Churchill suddenly deduced smilingly. "You had better not tell that to my aunt."

I went up to town with Churchill that evening. There was nothing waiting for me there, but I did not want to think. I wanted to be among men, among crowds of men, to be dazed, to be stupefied, to hear nothing for the din of life, to be blinded by the blaze of lights.

There were plenty of people in Churchill's carriage; a military member and a local member happened to be in my immediate neighbourhood. Their minds were full of the financial scandals, and they dinned their alternating

opinions into me. I assured them that I knew nothing about the matter, and they grew more solicitous for my enlightenment.

“It all comes from having too many eggs in one basket,” the local member summed up. “The old-fashioned small enterprises had their disadvantages, but — mind you — these gigantic trusts.... Isn’t that so, General?”

“Oh, I quite agree with you,” the general barked; “at the same time....” Their voices sounded on, intermingling, indistinguishable, soothing even. I seemed to be listening to the hum of a threshing-machine — a passage of sound booming on one note, a passage, a half-tone higher, and so on, and so on. Visible things grew hazy, fused into one another.



## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

We reached London somewhat late in the evening — in the twilight of a summer day. There was the hurry and bustle of arrival, a hurry and bustle that changed the tenor of my thoughts and broke their train. As I stood reflecting before the door of the carriage, I felt a friendly pressure of a hand on my shoulder.

“You’ll see to that,” Churchill’s voice said in my ear. “You’ll set the copyists to work.”

“I’ll go to the Museum to-morrow,” I said. There were certain extracts to be made for the “Life of Cromwell” — extracts from pamphlets that we had not conveniently at disposal. He nodded, walked swiftly toward his brougham, opened the door and entered.

I remember so well that last sight of him — of his long, slim figure bending down for the entrance, woefully solitary, woefully weighted; remember so well the gleam of the carriage panels reflecting the murky light of the bare London terminus, the attitude of the coachman stiffly reining back the horse; the thin hand that reached out, a gleam of white, to turn the gleaming handle. There was something intimately suggestive of the man in the motion of that hand, in its tentative outstretching, its gentle, half-persuasive — almost theoretic — grasp of the handle. The pleasure of its friendly pressure on my shoulder carried me over some minutes of solitude; its weight on my body removing another from my mind. I had feared that my ineffective disclosure had chilled what of regard he had for me. He had said nothing, his manner had said nothing, but I had feared. In the railway carriage he had sat remote from me, buried in papers. But that touch on my shoulder was enough to set me well with myself again, if not to afford scope for pleasant improvisation. It at least showed me that he bore me no ill-will, otherwise he would hardly have touched me. Perhaps, even, he was grateful to me, not for service, but for ineffectual good-will. Whatever I read into it, that was the last time he spoke to me, and the last time he touched me. And I loved him very well. Things went so quickly after that.

In a moderately cheerful frame of mind I strolled the few yards that separated me from my club — intent on dining. In my averseness to solitude I sat down at a table where sat already a little, bald-headed, false-toothed Anglo-Indian, a man who bored me into fits of nervous excitement. He was by way of being an incredibly distant uncle of my own. As a rule I

avoided him, to-night I dined with him. He was a person of interminable and incredibly inaccurate reminiscences. His long residence in an indigo-producing swamp had affected his memory, which was supported by only very occasional visits to England.

He told me tales of my poor father and of my poor, dear mother, and of Mr. Bromptons and Mrs. Kenwards who had figured on their visiting lists away back in the musty sixties.

“Your poor, dear father was precious badly off then,” he said; “he had a hard struggle for it. I had a bad time of it too; worm had got at all my plantations, so I couldn’t help him, poor chap. I think, mind you, Kenny Granger treated him very badly. He might have done something for him — he had influence, Kenny had.”

Kenny was my uncle, the head of the family, the husband of my aunt.

“They weren’t on terms,” I said.

“Oh, I know, I know,” the old man mumbled, “but still, for one’s only brother ... However, you contrive to do yourselves pretty well. You’re making your pile, aren’t you? Someone said to me the other day — can’t remember who it was — that you were quite one of the rising men — quite one of the men.”

“Very kind of someone,” I said.

“And now I see,” he went on, lifting up a copy of a morning paper, over which I had found him munching his salmon cutlet, “now I see your sister is going to marry a cabinet minister. Ah!” he shook his poor, muddled, baked head, “I remember you both as tiny little dots.”

“Why,” I said, “she can hardly have been born then.”

“Oh, yes,” he affirmed, “that was when I came over in ‘78. She remembered, too, that I brought her over an ivory doll — she remembered.”

“You have seen her?” I asked.

“Oh, I called two or three weeks — no, months — ago. She’s the image of your poor, dear mother,” he added, “at that age; I remarked upon it to your aunt, but, of course, she could not remember. They were not married until after the quarrel.”

A sudden restlessness made me bolt the rest of my tepid dinner. With my return to the upper world, and the return to me of a will, despair of a sort had come back. I had before me the problem — the necessity — of winning her. Once I was out of contact with her she grew smaller, less of an idea, more of a person — that one could win. And there were two ways. I must

either woo her as one woos a person barred; must compel her to take flight, to abandon, to cast away everything; or I must go to her as an eligible suitor with the Etchingham acres and possibilities of a future on that basis. This fantastic old man with his mumbled reminiscences spoilt me for the last. One remembers sooner or later that a county-man may not marry his reputed sister without scandal. And I craved her intensely.

She had upon me the effect of an incredible stimulant; away from her I was like a drunkard cut off from his liquor; an opium-taker from his drug. I hardly existed; I hardly thought.

I had an errand at my aunt's house; had a message to deliver, sympathetic enquiries to make — and I wanted to see her, to gain some sort of information from her; to spy out the land; to ask her for terms. There was a change in the appearance of the house, an adventitious brightness that indicated the rise in the fortunes of the family. For me the house was empty and the great door closed hollowly behind me. My sister was not at home. It seemed abominable to me that she should be out; that she could be talking to anyone, or could exist without me. I went sullenly across the road to the palings of the square. As I turned the corner I found my head pivoting on my neck. I was looking over my shoulder at the face of the house, was wondering which was her window.

“Like a love-sick boy — like a damn love-sick boy,” I growled at myself. My sense of humour was returning to me. There began a pilgrimage in search of companionship.

London was a desert more solitary than was believable. On those brilliant summer evenings the streets were crowded, were alive, bustled with the chitter-chatter of footsteps, with the chitter-chatter of voices, of laughter.

It was impossible to walk, impossible to do more than tread on one's own toes; one was almost blinded by the constant passing of faces. It was like being in a wheat-field with one's eyes on a level with the indistinguishable ears. One was alone in one's intense contempt for all these faces, all these contented faces; one towered intellectually above them; one towered into regions of rarefaction. And down below they enjoyed themselves. One understood life better; they better how to live. That struck me then — in Oxford Street. There was the intense good-humour, the absolute disregard of the minor inconveniences, of the inconveniences of a crowd, of the ignominy of being one of a crowd. There was the intense poetry of the soft

light, the poetry of the summer-night coolness, and they understood how to enjoy it. I turned up an ancient court near Bedford Row.

“In the name of God,” I said, “I will enjoy ...” and I did. The poetry of those old deserted quarters came suddenly home to me — all the little commonplace thoughts; all the commonplace associations of Georgian London. For the time I was done with the meanings of things.

I was seeking Lea — he was not at home. The quarter was honeycombed with the homes of people one knows; of people one used to know, excellent young men who wrote for the papers, who sub-edited papers, who designed posters, who were always just the same. One forgot them for a year or two, one came across them again and found them just the same — still writing for the same papers, still sub-editing the same papers, designing the same posters. I was in the mood to rediscover them in the privacies of their hearths, with the same excellent wives making fair copies of the same manuscripts, with the same gaiety of the same indifferent whiskey, brown or pale or suspicious-looking, in heavy, square, cut-glass stoppered decanters, and with the same indifferent Virginian tobacco at the same level in the same jars.

I was in the mood for this stability, for the excellent household article that was their view of life and literature. I wanted to see it again, to hear again how it was filling the unvarying, allotted columns of the daily, the weekly, or the monthly journals. I wanted to breathe again this mild atmosphere where there are no longer hopes or fears. But, alas!...

I rang bell after bell of that gloomy central London district. You know what happens. One pulls the knob under the name of the person one seeks — pulls it three, or, it may be, four times in vain. One rings the housekeeper’s bell; it reverberates, growing fainter and fainter, gradually stifled by a cavernous subterranean atmosphere. After an age a head peeps round the opening door, the head of a hopeless anachronism, the head of a widow of early Victorian merit, or of an orphan of incredible age. One asks for So-and-so — he’s out; for Williams — he’s expecting an increase of family, and has gone into the country with madame. And Waring? Oh, he’s gone no one knows where, and Johnson who used to live at Number 44 only comes up to town on Tuesdays now. I exhausted the possibilities of that part of Bloomsbury, the possibilities of variety in the types of housekeepers. The rest of London divided itself into bands — into zones. Between here and Kensington the people that I knew could not be called on after dinner, those

who lived at Chiswick and beyond were hyperborean — one was bound by the exigencies of time. It was ten o'clock as I stood reflecting on a doorstep — on Johnson's doorstep. I must see somebody, must talk to somebody, before I went to bed in the cheerless room at the club. It was true I might find a political stalwart in the smoking-room — but that was a last resort, a desperate and ignominious pis aller.

There was Fox, I should find him at the office. But it needed a change of tone before I could contemplate with equanimity the meeting of that individual. I had been preparing myself to confront all the ethically excellent young men and Fox was, ethically speaking, far from excellent, middle-aged, rubicund, leery — a free lance of genius. I made the necessary change in my tone of mind and ran him to earth.

The Watteau room was further enlivened by the introduction of a scarlet plush couch of sumptuous design. By its side stood a couple of electric lights. The virulent green of their shades made the colours of the beshepherded wall-panels appear almost unearthly, and threw impossible shadows on the deal partition. Round the couch stood chairs with piles of papers neatly arranged on them; round it, on the floor, were more papers lying like the leaves of autumn that one sings of. On it lay Fox, enveloped in a Shetland shawl — a good shawl that was the only honest piece of workmanship in the torn-tawdry place. Fox was as rubicund as ever, but his features were noticeably peaked and there were heavy lines under his eyes — lines cast into deep shadow by the light by which he was reading. I entered unannounced, and was greeted by an indifferent upward glance that changed into one of something like pleasure as he made out my features in the dim light.

"Hullo, you old country hawbuck," he said, with spasmodic jocularly; "I'm uncommon glad to see you." He came to a jerky close, with an indrawing of his breath. "I'm about done," he went on. "Same old thing — sciatica. Took me just after I got here this afternoon; sent out one of the messengers to buy me a sofa, and here I've been ever since. Well, and what's brought you up — don't answer, I know all about it. I've got to keep on talking until this particular spasm's over, or else I shall scream and disturb the flow of Soane's leader. Well, and now you've come, you'll stop and help me to put the Hour to bed, won't you? And then you can come and put me to bed."

He went on talking at high pressure, exaggerating his expressions, heightening his humorous touches with punctuations of rather wild laughter. At last he came to a stop with a half suppressed “Ah!” and a long indrawing of the breath.

“That’s over,” he said. “Give me a drop of brandy — there’s a good fellow.” I gave him his nip. Then I explained to him that I couldn’t work for the Hour; that I wasn’t on terms with de Mersch.

“Been dropping money over him?” he asked, cheerfully. I explained a little more — that there was a lady.

“Oh, it’s that,” Fox said. “The man is a fool ... But anyhow Mersch don’t count for much in this particular show. He’s no money in it even, so you may put your pride in your pocket, or wherever you keep it. It’s all right. Straight. He’s only the small change.”

“But,” I said, “everyone says; you said yourself....”

“To be sure,” he answered. “But you don’t think that I play second fiddle to a bounder of that calibre. Not really?”

He looked at me with a certain seriousness. I remembered, as I had remembered once before, that Fox was a personality — a power. I had never realised till then how entirely — fundamentally — different he was from any other man that I knew. He was surprising enough to have belonged to another race. He looked at me, not as if he cared whether I gave him his due or no, but as if he were astonished at my want of perception of the fact. He let his towzled head fall back upon the plush cushions. “You might kick him from here to Greenland for me,” he said; “I wouldn’t weep. It suits me to hold him up, and a kicking might restore his equilibrium. I’m sick of him — I’ve told him so. I knew there was a woman. But don’t you worry; I’m the man here.”

“If that’s the case ...” I said.

“Oh, that’s it,” he answered.

I helped him to put the paper to bed; took some of the work off his hands. It was all part of the getting back to life; of the resuming of rusty armour; and I wanted to pass the night. I was not unused to it, as it happened. Fox had had several of these fits during my year, and during most of them I had helped him through the night; once or twice for three on end. Once I had had entire control for a matter of five nights. But they gave me a new idea of Fox, those two or three weird hours that night. It was as if I had never seen him before. The attacks grew more virulent as the night advanced. He

groaned and raved, and said things — oh, the most astounding things in gibberish that upset one's nerves and everything else. At the height he sang hymns, and then, as the fits passed, relapsed into incredible clear-headedness. It gave me, I say, a new idea of Fox. It was as if, for all the time I had known him, he had been playing a part, and that only now, in the delirium of his pain, in the madness into which he drank himself, were fragments of the real man thrown to the surface. I grew, at last, almost afraid to be alone with him in the dead small hours of the morning, and longed for the time when I could go to bed among the uninspiring, marble-topped furniture of my club.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

At noon of the next day I gave Fox his look in at his own flat. He was stretched upon a sofa — it was evident that I was to take such of his duties as were takeable. He greeted me with words to that effect.

“Don’t go filling the paper with your unbreeched geniuses,” he said, genially, “and don’t overwork yourself. There’s really nothing to do, but you’re being there will keep that little beast Evans from getting too cock-a-hoop. He’d like to jerk me out altogether; thinks they’d get on just as well without me.”

I expressed in my manner general contempt for Evans, and was taking my leave.

“Oh, and — ” Fox called after me. I turned back. “The Greenland mail ought to be in to-day. If Callan’s contrived to get his flood-gates open, run his stuff in, there’s a good chap. It’s a feature and all that, you know.”

“I suppose Soane’s to have a look at it,” I asked.

“Oh, yes,” he answered; “but tell him to keep strictly to old Cal’s lines — rub that into him. If he were to get drunk and run in some of his own tips it’d be awkward. People are expecting Cal’s stuff. Tell you what: you take him out to lunch, eh? Keep an eye on the supplies, and ram it into him that he’s got to stick to Cal’s line of argument.”

“Soane’s as bad as ever, then?” I asked.

“Oh,” Fox answered, “he’ll be all right for the stuff if you get that one idea into him.” A prolonged and acute fit of pain seized him. I fetched his man and left him to his rest.

At the office of the Hour I was greeted by the handing to me of a proof of Callan’s manuscript. Evans, the man across the screen, was the immediate agent.

“I suppose it’s got to go in, so I had it set up,” he said.

“Oh, of course it’s got to go in,” I answered. “It’s to go to Soane first, though.”

“Soane’s not here yet,” he answered. I noted the tone of sub-acid pleasure in his voice. Evans would have enjoyed a fiasco.

“Oh, well,” I answered, nonchalantly, “there’s plenty of time. You allow space on those lines. I’ll send round to hunt Soane up.”

I felt called to be upon my mettle. I didn’t much care about the paper, but I had a definite antipathy to being done by Evans — by a mad Welshman in



a stubborn fit. I knew what was going to happen; knew that Evans would feign inconceivable stupidity, the sort of black stupidity that is at command of individuals of his primitive race. I was in for a day of petty worries. In the circumstances it was a thing to be thankful for; it dragged my mind away from larger issues. One has no time for brooding when one is driving a horse in a jibbing fit.

Evans was grimly conscious that I was moderately ignorant of technical details; he kept them well before my eyes all day long.

At odd moments I tried to read Callan's article. It was impossible. It opened with a description of the squalor of the Greenlander's life, and contained tawdry passages of local colour.

I knew what was coming. This was the view of the Greenlanders of pre-Merschian Greenland, elaborated, after the manner of Callan — the Special Commissioner — so as to bring out the glory and virtue of the work of regeneration. Then in a gush of superlatives the work itself would be described. I knew quite well what was coming, and was temperamentally unable to read more than the first ten lines.

Everything was going wrong. The printers developed one of their sudden crazes for asking idiotic questions. Their messengers came to Evans, Evans sent them round the pitch-pine screen to me. "Mr. Jackson wants to know — —"

The fourth of the messengers that I had despatched to Soane returned with the news that Soane would arrive at half-past nine. I sent out in search of the strongest coffee that the city afforded. Soane arrived. He had been ill, he said, very ill. He desired to be fortified with champagne. I produced the coffee.

Soane was the son of an Irish peer. He had magnificent features — a little blurred nowadays — and a remainder of the grand manner. His nose was a marvel of classic workmanship, but the floods of time had reddened and speckled it — not offensively, but ironically; his hair was turning grey, his eyes were bloodshot, his heavy moustache rather ragged. He inspired one with the respect that one feels for a man who has lived and does not care a curse. He had a weird intermittent genius that made it worth Fox's while to put up with his lapses and his brutal snubs.

I produced the coffee and pointed to the sofa of the night before.

"Damn it," he said, "I'm ill, I tell you; I want ..."

“Exactly!” I cut in. “You want a rest, old fellow. Here’s Cal’s article. We want something special about it. If you don’t feel up to it I’ll send round to Jenkins.”

“Damn Jenkins,” he said; “I’m up to it.”

“You understand,” I said, “you’re to write strictly on Callan’s lines. Don’t insert any information from extraneous sources. And make it as slashing as you like — on those lines.”

He grunted in acquiescence. I left him lying on the sofa, drinking the coffee. I had tenderly arranged the lights for him as Fox had arranged them the night before. As I went out to get my dinner I was comfortably aware of him, holding the slips close to his muddled eyes and philosophically damning the nature of things.

When I returned, Soane, from his sofa, said something that I did not catch — something about Callan and his article.

“Oh, for God’s sake,” I answered, “don’t worry me. Have some more coffee and stick to Cal’s line of argument. That’s what Fox said. I’m not responsible.”

“Deuced queer,” Soane muttered. He began to scribble with a pencil. From the tone of his voice I knew that he had reached the precise stage at which something brilliant — the real thing of its kind — might be expected.

Very late Soane finished his leader. He looked up as he wrote the last word.

“I’ve got it written,” he said. “But ... I say, what the deuce is up?

It’s like being a tall clock with the mainspring breaking, this.”

I rang the bell for someone to take the copy down.

“Your metaphor’s too much for me, Soane,” I said.

“It’s appropriate all the way along,” he maintained, “if you call me a mainspring. I’ve been wound up and wound up to write old de Mersch and his Greenland up — and it’s been a tight wind, these days, I tell you. Then all of a sudden ...”

A boy appeared and carried off the copy.

“All of a sudden,” Soane resumed, “something gives — I suppose something’s given — and there’s a whirr-rr-rr and the hands fly backwards and old de Mersch and Greenland bump to the bottom, like the weights.”

The boom of the great presses was rattling the window frames. Soane got up and walked toward one of the cupboards.

“Dry work,” he said; “but the simile’s just, isn’t it?”

I gave one swift step toward the bell-button beside the desk. The proof of Callan's article, from which Soane had been writing, lay a crumpled white streamer on the brown wood of Fox's desk. I made toward it. As I stretched out my hand the solution slipped into my mind, coming with no more noise than that of a bullet; impinging with all the shock and remaining with all the pain. I had remembered the morning, over there in Paris, when she had told me that she had invited one of de Mersch's lieutenants to betray him by not concealing from Callan the real horrors of the Systeme Groënlandais — flogged, butchered, miserable natives, the famines, the vices, diseases, and the crimes. There came suddenly before my eyes the tall narrow room in my aunt's house, the opening of the door and her entry, followed by that of the woebegone governor of a province — the man who was to show Callan things — with his grating "C'est entendu ..."

I remembered the scene distinctly; her words; her looks; my utter unbelief. I remembered, too, that it had not saved me from a momentary sense of revolt against that inflexible intention of a treachery which was to be another step toward the inheritance of the earth. I had rejected the very idea, and here it had come; it was confronting me with all its meaning and consequences. Callan had been shown things he had not been meant to see, and had written the truth as he had seen it. His article was a small thing in itself, but he had been sent out there with tremendous flourishes of de Mersch's trumpets. He was the man who could be believed. De Mersch's supporters had practically said: "If he condemns us we are indeed damned." And now that the condemnation had come, it meant ruin, as it seemed to me, for everybody I had known, worked for, seen, or heard of, during the last year of my life. It was ruin for Fox, for Churchill, for the ministers, and for the men who talk in railway carriages, for shopkeepers and for the government; it was a menace to the institutions which hold us to the past, that are our guarantees for the future. The safety of everything one respected and believed in was involved in the disclosure of an atrocious fraud, and the disclosure was in my hands. For that night I had the power of the press in my keeping. People were waiting for this pronouncement. De Mersch's last card was his philanthropy; his model state and his happy natives.

The drone of the presses made the floor under my feet quiver, and the whole building vibrated as if the earth itself had trembled. I was alone with

my knowledge. Did she know; had she put the power in my hand? But I was alone, and I was free.

I took up the proof and began to read, slanting the page to the fall of the light. It was a phrenetic indictment, but under the paltry rhetoric of the man there was genuine indignation and pain. There were revolting details of cruelty to the miserable, helpless, and defenceless; there were greed, and self-seeking, stripped naked; but more revolting to see without a mask was that falsehood which had been hiding under the words that for ages had spurred men to noble deeds, to self-sacrifice, to heroism. What was appalling was the sudden perception that all the traditional ideals of honour, glory, conscience, had been committed to the upholding of a gigantic and atrocious fraud. The falsehood had spread stealthily, had eaten into the very heart of creeds and convictions that we lean upon on our passage between the past and the future. The old order of things had to live or perish with a lie. I saw all this with the intensity and clearness of a revelation; I saw it as though I had been asleep through a year of work and dreams, and had awakened to the truth. I saw it all; I saw her intention. What was I to do?

Without my marking its approach emotion was upon me. The fingers that held up the extended slips tattooed one on another through its negligible thickness.

“Pretty thick that,” Soane said. He was looking back at me from the cupboard he had opened. “I’ve rubbed it in, too ... there’ll be hats on the green to-morrow.” He had his head inside the cupboard, and his voice came to me hollowly. He extracted a large bottle with a gilt-foiled neck.

“Won’t it upset the apple cart to-morrow,” he said, very loudly; “won’t it?”

His voice acted on me as the slight shake upon a phial full of waiting chemicals; crystallised them suddenly with a little click. Everything suddenly grew very clear to me. I suddenly understood that all the tortuous intrigue hinged upon what I did in the next few minutes. It rested with me now to stretch out my hand to that button in the wall or to let the whole world — “the ... the probity ... that sort of thing,” she had said — fall to pieces. The drone of the presses continued to make itself felt like the quiver of a suppressed emotion. I might stop them or I might not. It rested with me.

Everybody was in my hands; they were quite small. If I let the thing go on, they would be done for utterly, and the new era would begin.

Soane had got hold of a couple of long-stalked glasses. They clinked together whilst he searched the cupboard for something.

“Eh, what?” he said. “It is pretty strong, isn’t it? Ought to shake out some of the supporters, eh? Bill comes on to-morrow ... do for that, I should think.” He wanted a corkscrew very badly.

But that was precisely it — it would “shake out some of the supporters,” and give Gurnard his patent excuse. Churchill, I knew, would stick to his line, the saner policy. But so many of the men who had stuck to Churchill would fall away now, and Gurnard, of course, would lead them to his own triumph.

It was a criminal verdict. Callan had gone out as a commissioner — with a good deal of drum-beating. And this was his report, this shriek. If it sounded across the house-tops — if I let it — good-by to the saner policy and to Churchill. It did not make any difference that Churchill’s was the saner policy, because there was no one in the nation sane enough to see it. They wanted purity in high places, and here was a definite, criminal indictment against de Mersch. And de Mersch would — in a manner of speaking, have to be lynched, policy or no policy.

She wanted this, and in all the earth she was the only desirable thing.

If I thwarted her — she would ... what would she do now? I looked at Soane.

“What would happen if I stopped the presses?” I asked. Soane was twisting his corkscrew in the wire of the champagne bottle.

It was fatal; I could see nothing on earth but her. What else was there in the world. Wine? The light of the sun? The wind on the heath? Honour!

My God, what was honour to me if I could see nothing but her on earth?

Would honour or wine or sun or wind ever give me what she could give?

Let them go.

“What would happen if what?” Soane grumbled, “D — n this wire.”

“Oh, I was thinking about something,” I answered. The wire gave with a little snap and he began to ease the cork. Was I to let the light pass me by for the sake of ... of Fox, for instance, who trusted me? Well, let Fox go. And Churchill and what Churchill stood for; the probity; the greatness and the spirit of the past from which had sprung my conscience and the consciences of the sleeping millions around me — the woman at the poultry show with her farmers and shopkeepers. Let them go too.

Soane put into my hand one of his charged glasses. He seemed to rise out of the infinite, a forgotten shape. I sat down at the desk opposite him.

“Deuced good idea,” he said, suddenly, “to stop the confounded presses and spoof old Fox. He’s up to some devilry. And, by Jove, I’d like to get my knife in him; Jove, I would. And then chuck up everything and leave for the Sandwich Islands. I’m sick of this life, this dog’s life.... One might have made a pile though, if one’d known this smash was coming. But one can’t get at the innards of things. — No such luck — no such luck, eh?” I looked at him stupidly; took in his blood-shot eyes and his ruffled grizzling hair. I wondered who he was. “Il s’agissait de...?” I seemed to be back in Paris, I couldn’t think of what I had been thinking of. I drank his glass of wine and he filled me another. I drank that too.

Ah yes — even then the thing wasn’t settled, even now that I had recognized that Fox and the others were of no account ... What remained was to prove to her that I wasn’t a mere chattel, a piece in the game. I was at the very heart of the thing. After all, it was chance that had put me there, the blind chance of all the little things that lead in the inevitable, the future. If, now, I thwarted her, she would ... what would she do? She would have to begin all over again. She wouldn’t want to be revenged; she wasn’t revengeful. But how if she would never look upon me again?

The thing had reduced itself to a mere matter of policy. Or was it passion?

A clatter of the wheels of heavy carts and of the hoofs of heavy horses on granite struck like hammer blows on my ears, coming from the well of the court-yard below. Soane had finished his bottle and was walking to the cupboard. He paused at the window and stood looking down.

“Strong beggars, those porters,” he said; “I couldn’t carry that weight of paper — not with my rot on it, let alone Callan’s. You’d think it would break down the carts.”

I understood that they were loading the carts for the newspaper mails. There was still time to stop them. I got up and went toward the window, very swiftly. I was going to call to them to stop loading. I threw the casement open.

\* \* \* \* \*

Of course, I did not stop them. The solution flashed on me with the breath of the raw air. It was ridiculously simple. If I thwarted her, well, she

would respect me. But her business in life was the inheritance of the earth, and, however much she might respect me — or by so much the more — she would recognise that I was a force to deflect her from the right line — "a disease for me," she had said.

"What I have to do," I said, "is to show her that ... that I had her in my hands and that I co-operated loyally."

The thing was so simple that I triumphed; triumphed with the full glow of wine, triumphed looking down into that murky court-yard where the lanterns danced about in the rays of a great arc lamp. The gilt letters scattered all over the windows blazed forth the names of Fox's innumerable ventures. Well, he ... he had been a power, but I triumphed. I had co-operated loyally with the powers of the future, though I wanted no share in the inheritance of the earth. Only, I was going to push into the future. One of the great carts got into motion amidst a shower of sounds that whirled upward round and round the well. The black hood swayed like the shoulders of an elephant as it passed beneath my feet under the arch. It disappeared — it was co-operating too; in a few hours people at the other end of the country — of the world — would be raising their hands. Oh, yes, it was co-operating loyally.

I closed the window. Soane was holding a champagne bottle in one hand. In the other he had a paper knife of Fox's — a metal thing, a Japanese dagger or a Deccan knife. He sliced the neck off the bottle.

"Thought you were going to throw yourself out," he said; "I wouldn't stop you. I'm sick of it ... sick."

"Look at this ... to-night ... this infernal trick of Fox's.... And I helped too.... Why?... I must eat." He paused "... and drink," he added. "But there is starvation for no end of fools in this little move. A few will be losing their good names too.... I don't care, I'm off.... By-the-bye: What is he doing it for? Money? Funk? — You ought to know. You must be in it too. It's not hunger with you. Wonderful what people will do to keep their pet vice going.... Eh?" He swayed a little. "You don't drink — what's your pet vice?"

He looked at me very defiantly, clutching the neck of the empty bottle. His drunken and overbearing glare seemed to force upon me a complicity in his squalid bargain with life, rewarded by a squalid freedom. He was pitiful and odious to my eyes; and somehow in a moment he appeared menacing.

“You can’t frighten me,” I said, in response to the strange fear he had inspired. “No one can frighten me now.” A sense of my inaccessibility was the first taste of an achieved triumph. I had done with fear. The poor devil before me appeared infinitely remote. He was lost; but he was only one of the lost; one of those that I could see already overwhelmed by the rush from the flood-gates opened at my touch. He would be destroyed in good company; swept out of my sight together with the past they had known and with the future they had waited for. But he was odious. “I am done with you,” I said.

“Eh; what?... Who wants to frighten?... I wanted to know what’s your pet vice.... Won’t tell? You might safely — I’m off.... No.... Want to tell me mine?... No time.... I’m off.... Ask the policeman ... crossing sweeper will do.... I’m going.”

“You will have to,” I said.

“What.... Dismiss me?... Throw the indispensable Soane overboard like a squeezed lemon?... Would you?... What would Fox say?... Eh? But you can’t, my boy — not you. Tell you ... tell you ... can’t.... Beforehand with you ... sick of it.... I’m off ... to the Islands — the Islands of the Blest.... I’m going to be an ... no, not an angel like Fox ... an ... oh, a beachcomber. Lie on white sand, in the sun ... blue sky and palm-trees — eh?... S.S. Waikato. I’m off.... Come too ... lark ... dismiss yourself out of all this. Warm sand, warm, mind you ... you won’t?” He had an injured expression. “Well, I’m off. See me into the cab, old chap, you’re a decent fellow after all ... not one of these beggars who would sell their best friend ... for a little money ... or some woman. Will see the last of me....”

I didn’t believe he would reach the South Seas, but I went downstairs and watched him march up the street with a slight stagger under the pallid dawn. I suppose it was the lingering chill of the night that made me shiver. I felt unbounded confidence in the future, there was nothing now between her and me. The echo of my footsteps on the flagstones accompanied me, filling the empty earth with the sound of my progress.



## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

I walked along, got to my club and upstairs into my room peaceably. A feeling of entire tranquillity had come over me. I rested after a strife which had issued in a victory whose meaning was too great to comprehend and enjoy at once. I only knew that it was great because there seemed nothing more left to do. Everything reposed within me — even conscience, even memory, reposed as in death. I had risen above them, and my thoughts moved serenely as in a new light, as men move in sunshine above the graves of the forgotten dead. I felt like a man at the beginning of a long holiday — an indefinite space of idleness with some great felicity — a felicity too great for words, too great for joy — at the end. Everything was delicious and vague; there were no shapes, no persons. Names flitted through my mind — Fox, Churchill, my aunt; but they were living people seen from above, flitting in the dusk, without individuality; things that moved below me in a valley from which I had emerged. I must have been dreaming of them.

I know I dreamed of her. She alone was distinct among these shapes. She appeared dazzling; resplendent with a splendid calmness, and I braced myself to the shock of love, the love I had known, that all men had known; but greater, transcendental, almost terrible, a fit reward for the sacrifice of a whole past. Suddenly she spoke. I heard a sound like the rustling of a wind through trees, and I felt the shock of an unknown emotion made up of fear and of enthusiasm, as though she had been not a woman but only a voice crying strange, unknown words in inspiring tones, promising and cruel, without any passion of love or hate. I listened. It was like the wind in the trees of a little wood. No hate ... no love. No love. There was a crash as of a falling temple. I was borne to the earth, overwhelmed, crushed by an immensity of ruin and of sorrow. I opened my eyes and saw the sun shining through the window-blinds.

I seem to remember I was surprised at it. I don't know why. Perhaps the lingering effect of the ruin in the dream, which had involved sunshine itself. I liked it though, and lay for a time enjoying the — what shall I say? — usualness of it. The sunshine of yesterday — of to-morrow. It occurred to me that the morning must be far advanced, and I got up briskly, as a man rises to his work. But as soon as I got on my legs I felt as if I had already over-worked myself. In reality there was nothing to do. All my muscles

twitched with fatigue. I had experienced the same sensations once after an hour's desperate swimming to save myself from being carried out to sea by the tide.

No. There was nothing to do. I descended the staircase, and an utter sense of aimlessness drove me out through the big doors, which swung behind me without noise. I turned toward the river, and on the broad embankment the sunshine enveloped me, friendly, familiar, and warm like the care of an old friend. A black dumb barge drifted, clumsy and empty, and the solitary man in it wrestled with the heavy sweep, straining his arms, throwing his face up to the sky at every effort. He knew what he was doing, though it was the river that did his work for him.

His exertions impressed me with the idea that I too had something to do. Certainly I had. One always has. Somehow I could not remember. It was intolerable, and even alarming, this blank, this emptiness of the many hours before night came again, till suddenly, it dawned upon me I had to make some extracts in the British Museum for our "Cromwell." Our Cromwell. There was no Cromwell; he had lived, had worked for the future — and now he had ceased to exist. His future — our past, had come to an end. The barge with the man still straining at the oar had gone out of sight under the arch of the bridge, as through a gate into another world. A bizarre sense of solitude stole upon me, and I turned my back upon the river as empty as my day. Hansoms, broughams, streamed with a continuous muffled roll of wheels and a beat of hoofs. A big dray put in a note of thunder and a clank of chains. I found myself curiously unable to understand what possible purpose remained to keep them in motion. The past that had made them had come to an end, and their future had been devoured by a new conception. And what of Churchill? He, too, had worked for the future; he would live on, but he had already ceased to exist. I had evoked him in this poignant thought and he came not alone. He came with a train of all the vanquished in this stealthy, unseen contest for an immense stake in which I was one of the victors. They crowded upon me. I saw Fox, Polehampton, de Mersch himself, crowds of figures without a name, women with whom I had fancied myself in love, men I had shaken by the hand, Lea's reproachful, ironical face. They were near; near enough to touch; nearer. I did not only see them, I absolutely felt them all. Their tumultuous and silent stir seemed to raise a tumult in my breast.

I sprang suddenly to my feet — a sensation that I had had before, that was not new to me, a remembered fear, had me fast; a remembered voice seemed to speak clearly incomprehensible words that had moved me before. The sheer faces of the enormous buildings near at hand seemed to topple forwards like cliffs in an earthquake, and for an instant I saw beyond them into unknown depths that I had seen into before. It was as if the shadow of annihilation had passed over them beneath the sunshine. Then they returned to rest; motionless, but with a changed aspect.

“This is too absurd,” I said to myself. “I am not well.” I was certainly unfit for any sort of work. “But I must get through the day somehow.” Tomorrow ... to-morrow.... I had a pale vision of her face as it had appeared to me at sunset on the first day I had met her.

I went back to my club — to lunch, of course. I had no appetite, but I was tormented by the idea of an interminable afternoon before me. I sat idly for a long time. Behind my back two men were talking.

“Churchill ... oh, no better than the rest. He only wants to be found out. If I’ve any nose for that sort of thing, there’s something in the air. It’s absurd to be told that he knew nothing about it.... You’ve seen the Hour?” I got up to go away, but suddenly found myself standing by their table.

“You are unjust,” I said. They looked up at me together with an immense surprise. I didn’t know them and I passed on. But I heard one of them ask:

“Who’s that fellow?” ...

“Oh — Etchingham Granger....”

“Is he queer?” the other postulated.

I went slowly down the great staircase. A knot of men was huddled round the tape machine; others came, half trotting, half walking, to peer over heads, under arm-pits.

“What’s the matter with that thing?” I asked of one of them.

“Oh, Grogram’s up,” he said, and passed me. Someone from a point of vantage read out:

“The Leader of the House (Sir C. Grogram, Devonport) said that....” The words came haltingly to my ears as the man’s voice followed the jerks of the little instrument “... the Government obviously could not ... alter its policy at ... eleventh hour ... at dictates of ... quite irresponsible person in one of ... the daily ... papers.”

I was wondering whether it was Soane or Callan who was poor old Grogram’s “quite irresponsible person,” when I caught the sound of

Gurnard's name. I turned irritably away. I didn't want to hear that fool read out the words of that.... It was like the warning croak of a raven in an old ballad.

I began desultorily to descend to the smoking-room. In the Cimmerian gloom of the stairway the voice of a pursuer hailed me.

"I say, Granger! I say, Granger!"

I looked back. The man was one of the rats of the lower journalism, large-boned, rubicund, asthmatic; a mass of flesh that might, to the advantage of his country and himself, have served as a cavalry trooper. He puffed stertorously down towards me.

"I say, I say," his breath came rattling and wheezing. "What's up at the Hour?"

"I'm sure I don't know," I answered curtly.

"They said you took it yesterday. You've been playing the very devil, haven't you? But I suppose it was not off your own bat?"

"Oh, I never play off my own bat," I answered.

"Of course I don't want to intrude," he said again. In the gloom I was beginning to discern the workings of the tortured apoplectic face. "But, I say, what's de Mersch's little game?"

"You'd better ask him," I answered. It was incredibly hateful, this satyr's mask in the dim light.

"He's not in London," it answered, with a wink of the creased eyelids, "but, I suppose, now, Fox and de Mersch haven't had a row, now, have they?"

I did not answer. The thing was wearily hateful, and this was only the beginning. Hundreds more would be asking the same question in a few minutes.

The head wagged on the mountainous shoulders.

"Looks fishy," he said. I recognised that, to force words from me, he was threatening a kind of blackmail. Another voice began to call from the top of the stairs —

"I say, Granger! I say, Granger...."

I pushed the folding-doors apart and went slowly down the gloomy room. I heard the doors swing again, and footsteps patter on the matting behind me. I did not turn; the man came round me and looked at my face. It was Polehampton. There were tears in his eyes.

"I say," he said, "I say, what does it mean; what does it mean?" It was very difficult for me to look at him. "I tell you...." he began again. He had the dictatorial air of a very small, quite hopeless man, a man mystified by a blow of unknown provenance. "I tell you...." he began again.

"But what has it to do with me?" I said roughly.

"Oh, but you ... you advised me to buy." He had become supplicatory. "Didn't you, now?... Didn't you.... You said, you remember ... that...." I didn't answer the man. What had I got to say? He remained looking intently at me, as if it were of the greatest moment to him that I should make the acknowledgment and share the blame — as if it would take an immense load from his shoulders. I couldn't do it; I hated him.

"Didn't you," he began categorically; "didn't you advise me to buy those debentures of de Mersch's?" I did not answer.

"What does it all mean?" he said again. "If this bill doesn't get through, I tell you I shall be ruined. And they say that Mr. Gurnard is going to smash it. They are all saying it, up there; and that you — you on the Hour ... are ... are responsible." He took out a handkerchief and began to blow his nose. I didn't say a single word.

"But what's to be done?" he started again; "what's to be done.... I tell you.... My daughter, you know, she's very brave, she said to me this morning she could work; but she couldn't, you know; she's not been brought up to that sort of thing ... not even typewriting ... and so ... we're all ruined ... everyone of us. And I've more than fifty hands, counting Mr. Lea, and they'll all have to go. It's horrible.... I trusted you, Granger, you know; I trusted you, and they say up there that you...." I turned away from him. I couldn't bear to see the bewildered fear in his eyes. "So many of us," he began again, "everyone I know.... I told them to buy and ... But you might have let us know, Granger, you might have. Think of my poor daughter."

I wanted to say something to the man, wanted to horribly; but there wasn't anything to say — not a word. I was sorry. I took up a paper that sprawled on one of the purple ottomans. I stood with my back to this haggard man and pretended to read.

I noticed incredulously that I was swaying on my legs. I looked round me. Two old men were asleep in armchairs under the gloomy windows. One had his head thrown back, the other was crumpled forward into himself; his

frail, white hand just touched the floor. A little further off two young men were talking; they had the air of conspirators over their empty coffee cups.

I was conscious that Polehampton had left me, that he had gone from behind me; but I don't think I was conscious of the passage of time. God knows how long I stood there. Now and then I saw Polehampton's face before my eyes, with the panic-stricken eyes, the ruffled hair, the lines of tears seaming the cheeks, seeming to look out at me from the crumple of the paper that I held. I knew too, that there were faces like that everywhere; everywhere, faces of panic-stricken little people of no more account than the dead in graveyards, just the material to make graveyards, nothing more; little people of absolutely no use but just to suffer horribly from this blow coming upon them from nowhere. It had never occurred to me at the time that their inheritance had passed to me ... to us. And yet, I began to wonder stupidly, what was the difference between me to-day and me yesterday. There wasn't any, not any at all. Only to-day I had nothing more to do.

The doors at the end of the room flew open, as if burst by a great outcry penetrating from without, and a man appeared running up the room — one of those men who bear news eternally, who catch the distant clamour and carry it into quiet streets. Why did he disturb me? Did I want to hear his news? I wanted to think of Churchill; to think of how to explain.... The man was running up the room.

"I say ... I say, you beggars...."

I was beginning to wonder how it was that I felt such an absolute conviction of being alone, and it was then, I believe, that in this solitude that had descended upon my soul I seemed to see the shape of an approaching Nemesis. It is permitted to no man to break with his past, with the past of his kind, and to throw away the treasure of his future. I began to suspect I had gained nothing; I began to understand that even such a catastrophe was possible. I sat down in the nearest chair. Then my fear passed away. The room was filling; it hummed with excited voices. "Churchill! No better than the others," I heard somebody saying. Two men had stopped talking. They were middle-aged, a little gray, and ruddy. The face of one was angry, and of the other sad. "He wanted only to be found out. What a fall in the mud." "No matter," said the other, "one is made a little sad. He stood for everything I had been pinning my faith to." They passed on. A brazen voice bellowed in the distance. "The greatest fall of any minister that ever was." A tall, heavy journalist in a white waistcoat

was the centre of a group that turned slowly upon itself, gathering bulk. “Done for — stood up to the last. I saw him get into his brougham. The police had a job.... There’s quite a riot down there.... Pale as a ghost. Gurnard? Gurnard magnificent. Very cool and in his best form. Threw them over without as much as a wink. Outraged conscience speech. Magnificent. Why it’s the chance of his life.” ... And then for a time the voices and the faces seemed to pass away and die out. I had dropped my paper, and as I stooped to pick it up the voices returned.

— ”Granger ... Etchingham Granger.... Sister is going to marry Gurnard.”

I got on to my hands and knees to pick up the paper, of course. What I did not understand was where the water came from. Otherwise it was pretty clear. Somebody seemed to be in a fit. No, he wasn’t drunk; look at his teeth. What did they want to look at his teeth for; was he a horse?

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It must have been I that was in the fit. There were a lot of men round me, the front row on their knees — holding me, some of them. A man in a red coat and plush breeches — a waiter — was holding a glass of water; another had a small bottle. They were talking about me under their breaths. At one end of the horseshoe someone said:

“He’s the man who....” Then he caught my eye. He lowered his voice, and the abominable whisper ran round among the heads. It was easy to guess: “the man who was got at.” I was to be that for the rest of my life. I was to be famous at last. There came the desire to be out of it.

I struggled to my feet.

Someone said: “Feel better now?” I answered: “I — oh, I’ve got to go and see....”

It was rather difficult to speak distinctly; my tongue got in the way. But I strove to impress the fool with the idea that I had affairs that must be attended to — that I had private affairs.

“You aren’t fit. Let me....”

I pushed him roughly aside — what business was it of his? I slunk hastily out of the room. The others remained. I knew what they were going to do — to talk things over, to gabble about “the man who....”

It was treacherous walking, that tessellated pavement in the hall.

Someone said: “Hullo, Granger,” as I passed. I took no notice.

Where did I wish to go to? There was no one who could minister to me; the whole world had resolved itself into a vast solitary city of closed doors. I had no friend — no one. But I must go somewhere, must hide somewhere, must speak to someone. I mumbled the address of Fox to a cabman. Some idea of expiation must have been in my mind; some idea of seeing the thing through, mingled with that necessity for talking to someone — anyone.

I was afraid too; not of Fox's rage; not even of anything that he could do — but of the sight of his despair. He had become a tragic figure.

I reached his flat and I had said: "It is I," and again, "It is I," and he had not stirred. He was lying on the sofa under a rug, motionless as a corpse. I had paced up and down the room. I remember that the pile of the carpet was so long that it was impossible to walk upon it easily. Everything else in the room was conceived in an exuberance of luxury that now had something of the macabre in it. It was that now — before, it had been unclean. There was a great bed whose lines suggested sinking softness, a glaring yellow satin coverlet, vast, like a sea. The walls were covered with yellow satin, the windows draped with lace worth a king's ransom, the light was softened, the air dead, the sounds hung slumbrously. And, in the centre of it, that motionless body. It stirred, pivoted on some central axis beneath the rug, and faced me sitting. There was no look of inquiry in the bloodshot eyes — they turned dully upon me, topaz-coloured in a blood-red setting. There was no expression in the suffused face.

"You want?" he said, in a voice that was august by dint of hopelessness.

"I want to explain," I said. I had no idea that this was what I had come for.

He answered only: "You!" He had the air of one speaking to something infinitely unimportant. It was as if I had no inkling of the real issue.

With a bravery of desperation I began to explain that I hadn't stumbled into the thing; that I had acted open-eyed; for my own ends ... "My own ends." I repeated it several times. I wanted him to understand, and I did explain. I kept nothing from him; neither her coming, nor her words, nor my feelings. I had gone in with my eyes open.

For the first time Fox looked at me as if I were a sentient being. "Oh, you know that much," he said listlessly.

"It's no disgrace to have gone under to her," I said; "we had to." His despair seemed to link him into one "we" with myself. I wanted to put heart into him. I don't know why.



He didn't look at me again.

"Oh, that," he said dully, "I — I understand who you mean.... If I had known before I might have done something. But she came of a higher plane." He seemed to be talking to himself. The half-forgotten horror grew large; I remembered that she had said that Fox, like herself, was one of a race apart, that was to supersede us — Dimensionists. And, when I looked at him now, it was plain to me that he was of a race different to my own, just as he had always seemed different from any other man. He had had a different tone in triumph; he was different now, in his despair. He went on: "I might have managed Gurnard alone, but I never thought of her coming. You see one does one's best, but, somehow, here one grows rather blind. I ought to have stuck to Gurnard, of course; never to have broken with him. We ought all to have kept together. — But I kept my end up as long as he was alone."

He went on talking in an expressionless monotone, perhaps to himself, perhaps to me. I listened as one listens to unmeaning sounds — to that of a distant train at night. He was looking at the floor, his mouth moving mechanically. He sat perfectly square, one hand on either knee, his back bowed out, his head drooping forward. It was as if there were no more muscular force in the whole man — as if he were one of those ancient things one sees sunning themselves on benches by the walls of workhouses.

"But," I said angrily, "it's not all over, you can make a fight for it still."

"You don't seem to understand," he answered, "it is all over — the whole thing. I ran Churchill and his conscious rectitude gang for all they were worth.... Well, I liked them, I was a fool to give way to pity. — But I did. — One grows weak among people like you. Of course I knew that their day was over.... And it's all over," he said again after a long pause.

"And what will you do?" I asked, half hysterically.

"I don't just know," he answered; "we've none of us gone under before.

There haven't been enough really to clash until she came."

The dead tranquillity of his manner was overwhelming; there was nothing to be said. I was in the presence of a man who was not as I was, whose standard of values, absolute to himself, was not to be measured by any of mine.

"I suppose I shall cut my throat," he began again.

I noticed with impersonal astonishment that the length of my right side was covered with the dust of a floor. In my restless motions I came opposite

the fireplace. Above it hung a number of tiny, jewelled frames, containing daubs of an astonishing lewdness. The riddle grew painful. What kind of a being could conceive this impossibly barbaric room, could enshrine those impossibly crude designs, and then fold his hands? I turned fiercely upon him. "But you are rich enough to enjoy life," I said.

"What's that?" he asked wearily.

"In the name of God," I shouted, "what do you work for — what have you been plotting and plotting for, if not to enjoy your life at the last?" He made a small indefinite motion of ignorance, as if I had propounded to him a problem that he could not solve, that he did not think worth the solving.

It came to me as the confirmation of a suspicion — that motion. They had no joy, these people who were to supersede us; their clear-sightedness did nothing more for them than just that enabling them to spread desolation among us and take our places. It had been in her manner all along, she was like Fate; like the abominable Fate that desolates the whole length of our lives; that leaves of our hopes, of our plans, nothing but a hideous jumble of fragments like those of statues, smashed by hammers; the senseless, inscrutable, joyless Fate that we hate, and that debases us forever and ever. She had been all that to me ... and to how many more?

"I used to be a decent personality," I vociferated at him. "Do you hear — decent. I could look a man in the face. And you cannot even enjoy. What do you come for? What do you live for? What is at the end of it all?"

"Ah, if I knew ..." he answered, negligently.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

I wanted to see her, to finish it one way or another, and, at my aunt's house, I found her standing in an immense white room; waiting for me. There was a profusion of light. It left her absolutely shadowless, like a white statue in a gallery; inscrutable.

"I have come," I said. I had it in my mind to say: "Because there is nothing for me to do on earth." But I did not, I looked at her instead.

"You have come," she repeated. She had no expression in her voice, in her eyes. It was as if I were nothing to her; as if I were the picture of a man. Well, that was it; I was a picture, she a statue. "I did it," I said at last.

"And you want?" she asked.

"You know," I answered, "I want my...." I could not think of the word. It was either a reward or a just due. She looked at me, quite suddenly. It made an effect as if the Venus of Milo had turned its head toward me. She began to speak, as if the statue were speaking, as if a passing bell were speaking; recording a passing passionlessly.

"You have done nothing at all," she said. "Nothing."

"And yet," I said, "I was at the heart of it all."

"Nothing at all," she repeated. "You were at the heart, yes; but at the heart of a machine." Her words carried a sort of strong conviction. I seemed suddenly to see an immense machine — unconcerned, soulless, but all its parts made up of bodies of men: a great mill grinding out the dust of centuries; a great wine-press. She was continuing her speech.

"As for you — you are only a detail, like all the others; you were set in a place because you would act as you did. It was in your character. We inherit the earth and you, your day is over.... You remember that day, when I found you — the first day?"

I remembered that day. It was on the downland, under the immense sky, amid the sound of larks. She had explained the nature of things. She had talked expressionlessly in pregnant words; she was talking now. I knew no more of her to-day, after all these days, after I had given up to her my past and my future.

"You remember that day. I was looking for such a man, and I found you."

"And you ..." I said, "you have done this thing! Think of it!... I have nobody — nothing — nowhere in the world. I cannot look a man in the

face, not even Churchill. I can never go to him again." I paused, expecting a sign of softening. None came. "I have parted with my past and you tell me there is no future."

"None," she echoed. Then, coldly, as a swan takes the water, she began to speak:

"Well, yes! I've hurt you. You have suffered and in your pain you think me vile, but remember that for ages the virtue of to-morrow has been the vileness of to-day. That which outstrips one, one calls vile. My virtue lies in gaining my end. Pity for you would have been a crime for me. You have suffered. And then? What are you to me? As I came among you I am to-day; that is where I am triumphant and virtuous. I have succeeded. When I came here I came into a world of — of shadows of men. What were their passions, their joys, their fears, their despair, their outcry, to me? If I had ears, my virtue was to close them to the cries. There was no other way. There was one of us — your friend Fox, I mean. He came into the world, but had not the virtue to hold himself aloof. He has told you, 'One goes blind down here.' He began to feel a little like the people round him. He contracted likings and dislikings. He liked you ... and you betrayed him. So he went under. He grew blind down here. I have not grown blind. I see as I saw. I move as I did in a world of ... of the pictures of men. They despair. I hear groans ... well, they are the groans of the dead to me. This to you, down near it, is a mass of tortuous intrigue; vile in its pettiest detail. But come further off; stand beside me, and what does it look like? It is a mighty engine of disintegration. It has crushed out a whole fabric, a whole plane of society. It has done that. I guided it. I had to have my eyes on every little strand of it; to be forever on the watch."

"And now I stand alone. Yesterday that fabric was everything to you; it seemed solid enough. And where is it to-day? What is it to you more than to me? There stood Virtue ... and Probity ... and all the things that all those people stood for. Well, to-day they are gone; the very belief in them is gone. Who will believe in them, now that it is proved that their tools were people ... like de Mersch? And it was I that did it. That, too, is to be accounted to me for virtue."

"Well, I have inherited the earth. I am the worm at the very heart of the rose of it. You are thinking that all that I have gained is the hand of Gurnard. But it is more than that. It is a matter of a chess-board; and Gurnard is the only piece that remains. And I am the hand that moves him.

As for a marriage; well, it is a marriage of minds, a union for a common purpose. But mine is the master mind. As for you. Well, you have parted with your past ... and there is no future for you. That is true. You have nowhere to go to; have nothing left, nothing in the world. That is true too. But what is that to me? A set of facts — that you have parted with your past and have no future. You had to do the work; I had to make you do it. I chose you because you would do it. That is all.... I knew you; knew your secret places, your weaknesses. That is my power. I stand for the Inevitable, for the future that goes on its way; you for the past that lies by the roadside. If for your sake I had swerved one jot from my allotted course, I should have been untrue. There was a danger, once, for a minute.... But I stood out against it. What would you have had me do? Go under as Fox went under? Speak like him, look as he looks now.... Me? Well, I did not.”

“I was in the hands of the future; I never swerved; I went on my way. I had to judge men as I judged you; to corrupt, as I corrupted you. I cajoled; I bribed; I held out hopes; and with every one, as with you, I succeeded. It is in that power that the secret of the greatness which is virtue, lies. I had to set about a work of art, of an art strange to you; as strange, as alien as the arts of dead peoples. You are the dead now, mine the art of an ensuing day. All that remains to you is to fold your hands and wonder, as you wondered before the gates of Nineveh. I had to sound the knell of the old order; of your virtues, of your honours, of your faiths, of ... of altruism, if you like. Well, it is sounded. I was forever on the watch; I foresaw; I forestalled; I have never rested. And you....”

“And I ...” I said, “I only loved you.”

There was a silence. I seemed for a moment to see myself a tenuous, bodiless thing, like a ghost in a bottomless cleft between the past and the to come. And I was to be that forever.

“You only loved me,” she repeated. “Yes, you loved me. But what claim upon me does that give you? You loved me.... Well, if I had loved you it would have given you a claim.... All your misery; your heartache comes from ... from love; your love for me, your love for the things of the past, for what was doomed.... You loved the others too ... in a way, and you betrayed them and you are wretched. If you had not loved them you would not be wretched now; if you had not loved me you would not have betrayed your — your very self. At the first you stood alone; as much alone as I. All these people were nothing to you. I was nothing to you. But you must needs

love them and me. You should have let them remain nothing to the end. But you did not. What were they to you? — Shapes, shadows on a sheet. They looked real. But were they — any one of them? You will never see them again; you will never see me again; we shall be all parts of a past of shadows. If you had been as I am, you could have looked back upon them unmoved or could have forgotten.... But you ... ‘you only loved’ and you will have no more ease. And, even now, it is only yourself that matters. It is because you broke; because you were false to your standards at a supreme moment; because you have discovered that your honour will not help you to stand a strain. It is not the thought of the harm you have done the others.... What are they — what is Churchill who has fallen or Fox who is dead — to you now? It is yourself that you bemoan. That is your tragedy, that you can never go again to Churchill with the old look in your eyes, that you can never go to anyone for fear of contempt.... Oh, I know you, I know you.”

She knew me. It was true, what she said.

I had had my eyes on the ground all this while; now I looked at her, trying to realise that I should never see her again. It was impossible. There was that intense beauty, that shadowlessness that was like translucence. And there was her voice. It was impossible to understand that I was never to see her again, never to hear her voice, after this.

She was silent for a long time and I said nothing — nothing at all. It was the thought of her making Fox’s end; of her sitting as Fox had sat, hopelessly, lifelessly, like a man waiting at the end of the world. At last she said: “There is no hope. We have to go our ways; you yours, I mine. And then if you will — if you cannot forget — you may remember that I cared; that, for a moment, in between two breaths, I thought of ... of failing. That is all I can do ... for your sake.”

That silenced me. Even if I could have spoken to any purpose, I would have held my tongue now.

I had not looked at her; but stood with my eyes averted, very conscious of her standing before me; of her great beauty, of her great glory.

\* \* \* \* \*

After a long time I went away. I never saw her again. I never saw any one of them all again. Fox was dead and Churchill I have never had the heart to face. That was the end of all that part of my life. It passed away and left me only a consciousness of weakness and ... and regrets. She remains. One

recognises her hand in the trend of events. Well, it is not a very gay world. Gurnard, they say, is the type of the age — of its spirit. And they say that I, the Granger of Etchingham, am not on terms with my brother-in-law.

## ***TYPHOON***



This short novel was serialised in *Pall Mall Magazine* from January to March 1902. It is a classic sea yarn concerning how Captain MacWhirr sails the Siamese steamer Nan-Shan into a typhoon. Other characters include the young Jukes and Solomon, the head engineer. The novel classically evokes the sea-faring life at the turn of the century. While Macwhirr is emotionally estranged from his family and crew, and though he refuses to consider an alternate course to skirt the typhoon, his indomitable will in the face of a superior natural force elicits grudging admiration.



Far as the mariner on highest mast  
Can see all around upon the calmed vast,  
    So wide was Neptune's hall . . . — KEATS



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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

The main characteristic of this volume consists in this, that all the stories composing it belong not only to the same period but have been written one after another in the order in which they appear in the book.

The period is that which follows on my connection with Blackwood's Magazine. I had just finished writing "The End of the Tether" and was casting about for some subject which could be developed in a shorter form than the tales in the volume of "Youth" when the instance of a steamship full of returning coolies from Singapore to some port in northern China occurred to my recollection. Years before I had heard it being talked about in the East as a recent occurrence. It was for us merely one subject of conversation amongst many others of the kind. Men earning their bread in any very specialized occupation will talk shop, not only because it is the most vital interest of their lives but also because they have not much knowledge of other subjects. They have never had the time to get acquainted with them. Life, for most of us, is not so much a hard as an exacting taskmaster.

I never met anybody personally concerned in this affair, the interest of which for us was, of course, not the bad weather but the extraordinary complication brought into the ship's life at a moment of exceptional stress by the human element below her deck. Neither was the story itself ever enlarged upon in my hearing. In that company each of us could imagine easily what the whole thing was like. The financial difficulty of it, presenting also a human problem, was solved by a mind much too simple to be perplexed by anything in the world except men's idle talk for which it was not adapted.

From the first the mere anecdote, the mere statement I might say, that such a thing had happened on the high seas, appeared to me a sufficient subject for meditation. Yet it was but a bit of a sea yarn after all. I felt that to bring out its deeper significance which was quite apparent to me, something other, something more was required; a leading motive that would harmonize all these violent noises, and a point of view that would put all that elemental fury into its proper place.

What was needed of course was Captain MacWhirr. Directly I perceived him I could see that he was the man for the situation. I don't mean to say that I ever saw Captain MacWhirr in the flesh, or had ever come in contact with his literal mind and his dauntless temperament. MacWhirr is not an acquaintance of a few hours, or a few weeks, or a few months. He is the product of twenty years of life. My own life. Conscious invention had little to do with him. If it is true that Captain MacWhirr never walked and breathed on this earth (which I find for my part extremely difficult to believe) I can also assure my readers that he is perfectly authentic. I may venture to assert the same of every aspect of the story, while I confess that the particular typhoon of the tale was not a typhoon of my actual experience.

At its first appearance "Typhoon," the story, was classed by some critics as a deliberately intended storm-piece. Others picked out MacWhirr, in whom they perceived a definite symbolic intention. Neither was exclusively my intention. Both the typhoon and Captain MacWhirr presented themselves to me as the necessities of the deep conviction with which I approached the subject of the story. It was their opportunity. It was also my opportunity; and it would be vain to discourse about what I made of it in a handful of pages, since the pages themselves are here, between the covers of this volume, to speak for themselves.

This is a belated reflection. If it had occurred to me before it would have perhaps done away with the existence of this Author's Note; for, indeed, the same remark applies to every story in this volume. None of them are stories of experience in the absolute sense of the word. Experience in them is but the canvas of the attempted picture. Each of them has its more than one intention. With each the question is what the writer has done with his opportunity; and each answers the question for itself in words which, if I may say so without undue solemnity, were written with a conscientious regard for the truth of my own sensations. And each of those stories, to mean something, must justify itself in its own way to the conscience of each successive reader.

"Falk" — the second story in the volume — offended the delicacy of one critic at least by certain peculiarities of its subject. But what is the subject of "Falk"? I personally do not feel so very certain about it. He who reads must find out for himself. My intention in writing "Falk" was not to shock anybody. As in most of my writings I insist not on the events but on their

effect upon the persons in the tale. But in everything I have written there is always one invariable intention, and that is to capture the reader's attention, by securing his interest and enlisting his sympathies for the matter in hand, whatever it may be, within the limits of the visible world and within the boundaries of human emotions.

I may safely say that Falk is absolutely true to my experience of certain straightforward characters combining a perfectly natural ruthlessness with a certain amount of moral delicacy. Falk obeys the law of self-preservation without the slightest misgivings as to his right, but at a crucial turn of that ruthlessly preserved life he will not condescend to dodge the truth. As he is presented as sensitive enough to be affected permanently by a certain unusual experience, that experience had to be set by me before the reader vividly; but it is not the subject of the tale. If we go by mere facts then the subject is Falk's attempt to get married; in which the narrator of the tale finds himself unexpectedly involved both on its ruthless and its delicate side.

"Falk" shares with one other of my stories ("The Return" in the "Tales of Unrest" volume) the distinction of never having been serialized. I think the copy was shown to the editor of some magazine who rejected it indignantly on the sole ground that "the girl never says anything." This is perfectly true. From first to last Hermann's niece utters no word in the tale — and it is not because she is dumb, but for the simple reason that whenever she happens to come under the observation of the narrator she has either no occasion or is too profoundly moved to speak. The editor, who obviously had read the story, might have perceived that for himself. Apparently he did not, and I refrained from pointing out the impossibility to him because, since he did not venture to say that "the girl" did not live, I felt no concern at his indignation.

All the other stories were serialized. The "Typhoon" appeared in the early numbers of the Pall Mall Magazine, then under the direction of the late Mr. Halkett. It was on that occasion, too, that I saw for the first time my conceptions rendered by an artist in another medium. Mr. Maurice Grieffenhagen knew how to combine in his illustrations the effect of his own most distinguished personal vision with an absolute fidelity to the inspiration of the writer. "Amy Foster" was published in The Illustrated London News with a fine drawing of Amy on her day out giving tea to the children at her home, in a hat with a big feather. "To-morrow" appeared

first in the Pall Mall Magazine. Of that story I will only say that it struck many people by its adaptability to the stage and that I was induced to dramatize it under the title of "One Day More"; up to the present my only effort in that direction. I may also add that each of the four stories on their appearance in book form was picked out on various grounds as the "best of the lot" by different critics, who reviewed the volume with a warmth of appreciation and understanding, a sympathetic insight and a friendliness of expression for which I cannot be sufficiently grateful.

1919. J. C.

# TYPHOON

## I

Captain MacWhirr, of the steamer Nan-Shan, had a physiognomy that, in the order of material appearances, was the exact counterpart of his mind: it presented no marked characteristics of firmness or stupidity; it had no pronounced characteristics whatever; it was simply ordinary, irresponsive, and unruffled.

The only thing his aspect might have been said to suggest, at times, was bashfulness; because he would sit, in business offices ashore, sunburnt and smiling faintly, with downcast eyes. When he raised them, they were perceived to be direct in their glance and of blue colour. His hair was fair and extremely fine, clasping from temple to temple the bald dome of his skull in a clamp as of fluffy silk. The hair of his face, on the contrary, carrotty and flaming, resembled a growth of copper wire clipped short to the line of the lip; while, no matter how close he shaved, fiery metallic gleams passed, when he moved his head, over the surface of his cheeks. He was rather below the medium height, a bit round-shouldered, and so sturdy of limb that his clothes always looked a shade too tight for his arms and legs. As if unable to grasp what is due to the difference of latitudes, he wore a brown bowler hat, a complete suit of a brownish hue, and clumsy black boots. These harbour togs gave to his thick figure an air of stiff and uncouth smartness. A thin silver watch chain looped his waistcoat, and he never left his ship for the shore without clutching in his powerful, hairy fist an elegant umbrella of the very best quality, but generally unrolled. Young Jukes, the chief mate, attending his commander to the gangway, would sometimes venture to say, with the greatest gentleness, "Allow me, sir" — and possessing himself of the umbrella deferentially, would elevate the ferule, shake the folds, twirl a neat furl in a jiffy, and hand it back; going through the performance with a face of such portentous gravity, that Mr. Solomon Rout, the chief engineer, smoking his morning cigar over the skylight, would turn away his head in order to hide a smile. "Oh! aye! The blessed



gamp. . . . Thank 'ee, Jukes, thank 'ee," would mutter Captain MacWhirr, heartily, without looking up.

Having just enough imagination to carry him through each successive day, and no more, he was tranquilly sure of himself; and from the very same cause he was not in the least conceited. It is your imaginative superior who is touchy, overbearing, and difficult to please; but every ship Captain MacWhirr commanded was the floating abode of harmony and peace. It was, in truth, as impossible for him to take a flight of fancy as it would be for a watchmaker to put together a chronometer with nothing except a two-pound hammer and a whip-saw in the way of tools. Yet the uninteresting lives of men so entirely given to the actuality of the bare existence have their mysterious side. It was impossible in Captain MacWhirr's case, for instance, to understand what under heaven could have induced that perfectly satisfactory son of a petty grocer in Belfast to run away to sea. And yet he had done that very thing at the age of fifteen. It was enough, when you thought it over, to give you the idea of an immense, potent, and invisible hand thrust into the ant-heap of the earth, laying hold of shoulders, knocking heads together, and setting the unconscious faces of the multitude towards inconceivable goals and in undreamt-of directions.

His father never really forgave him for this undutiful stupidity. "We could have got on without him," he used to say later on, "but there's the business. And he an only son, too!" His mother wept very much after his disappearance. As it had never occurred to him to leave word behind, he was mourned over for dead till, after eight months, his first letter arrived from Talcahuano. It was short, and contained the statement: "We had very fine weather on our passage out." But evidently, in the writer's mind, the only important intelligence was to the effect that his captain had, on the very day of writing, entered him regularly on the ship's articles as Ordinary Seaman. "Because I can do the work," he explained. The mother again wept copiously, while the remark, "Tom's an ass," expressed the emotions of the father. He was a corpulent man, with a gift for sly chaffing, which to the end of his life he exercised in his intercourse with his son, a little pityingly, as if upon a half-witted person.

MacWhirr's visits to his home were necessarily rare, and in the course of years he despatched other letters to his parents, informing them of his successive promotions and of his movements upon the vast earth. In these missives could be found sentences like this: "The heat here is very great."

Or: "On Christmas day at 4 P. M. we fell in with some icebergs." The old people ultimately became acquainted with a good many names of ships, and with the names of the skippers who commanded them — with the names of Scots and English shipowners — with the names of seas, oceans, straits, promontories — with outlandish names of lumber-ports, of rice-ports, of cotton-ports — with the names of islands — with the name of their son's young woman. She was called Lucy. It did not suggest itself to him to mention whether he thought the name pretty. And then they died.

The great day of MacWhirr's marriage came in due course, following shortly upon the great day when he got his first command.

All these events had taken place many years before the morning when, in the chart-room of the steamer Nan-Shan, he stood confronted by the fall of a barometer he had no reason to distrust. The fall — taking into account the excellence of the instrument, the time of the year, and the ship's position on the terrestrial globe — was of a nature ominously prophetic; but the red face of the man betrayed no sort of inward disturbance. Omens were as nothing to him, and he was unable to discover the message of a prophecy till the fulfilment had brought it home to his very door. "That's a fall, and no mistake," he thought. "There must be some uncommonly dirty weather knocking about."

The Nan-Shan was on her way from the southward to the treaty port of Fu-chau, with some cargo in her lower holds, and two hundred Chinese coolies returning to their village homes in the province of Fo-kien, after a few years of work in various tropical colonies. The morning was fine, the oily sea heaved without a sparkle, and there was a queer white misty patch in the sky like a halo of the sun. The fore-deck, packed with Chinamen, was full of sombre clothing, yellow faces, and pigtails, sprinkled over with a good many naked shoulders, for there was no wind, and the heat was close. The coolies lounged, talked, smoked, or stared over the rail; some, drawing water over the side, sluiced each other; a few slept on hatches, while several small parties of six sat on their heels surrounding iron trays with plates of rice and tiny teacups; and every single Celestial of them was carrying with him all he had in the world — a wooden chest with a ringing lock and brass on the corners, containing the savings of his labours: some clothes of ceremony, sticks of incense, a little opium maybe, bits of nameless rubbish of conventional value, and a small hoard of silver dollars, toiled for in coal lighters, won in gambling-houses or in petty trading, grubbed out of earth,

sweated out in mines, on railway lines, in deadly jungle, under heavy burdens — amassed patiently, guarded with care, cherished fiercely.

A cross swell had set in from the direction of Formosa Channel about ten o'clock, without disturbing these passengers much, because the Nan-Shan, with her flat bottom, rolling chocks on bilges, and great breadth of beam, had the reputation of an exceptionally steady ship in a sea-way. Mr. Jukes, in moments of expansion on shore, would proclaim loudly that the "old girl was as good as she was pretty." It would never have occurred to Captain MacWhirr to express his favourable opinion so loud or in terms so fanciful.

She was a good ship, undoubtedly, and not old either. She had been built in Dumbarton less than three years before, to the order of a firm of merchants in Siam — Messrs. Sigg and Son. When she lay afloat, finished in every detail and ready to take up the work of her life, the builders contemplated her with pride.

"Sigg has asked us for a reliable skipper to take her out," remarked one of the partners; and the other, after reflecting for a while, said: "I think MacWhirr is ashore just at present." "Is he? Then wire him at once. He's the very man," declared the senior, without a moment's hesitation.

Next morning MacWhirr stood before them unperturbed, having travelled from London by the midnight express after a sudden but undemonstrative parting with his wife. She was the daughter of a superior couple who had seen better days.

"We had better be going together over the ship, Captain," said the senior partner; and the three men started to view the perfections of the Nan-Shan from stem to stern, and from her keelson to the trucks of her two stumpy pole-masts.

Captain MacWhirr had begun by taking off his coat, which he hung on the end of a steam windless embodying all the latest improvements.

"My uncle wrote of you favourably by yesterday's mail to our good friends — Messrs. Sigg, you know — and doubtless they'll continue you out there in command," said the junior partner. "You'll be able to boast of being in charge of the handiest boat of her size on the coast of China, Captain," he added.

"Have you? Thank 'ee," mumbled vaguely MacWhirr, to whom the view of a distant eventuality could appeal no more than the beauty of a wide landscape to a purblind tourist; and his eyes happening at the moment to be at rest upon the lock of the cabin door, he walked up to it, full of purpose,

and began to rattle the handle vigorously, while he observed, in his low, earnest voice, "You can't trust the workmen nowadays. A brand-new lock, and it won't act at all. Stuck fast. See? See?"

As soon as they found themselves alone in their office across the yard: "You praised that fellow up to Sigg. What is it you see in him?" asked the nephew, with faint contempt.

"I admit he has nothing of your fancy skipper about him, if that's what you mean," said the elder man, curtly. "Is the foreman of the joiners on the Nan-Shan outside? . . . Come in, Bates. How is it that you let Tait's people put us off with a defective lock on the cabin door? The Captain could see directly he set eye on it. Have it replaced at once. The little straws, Bates . . . the little straws. . . ."

The lock was replaced accordingly, and a few days afterwards the Nan-Shan steamed out to the East, without MacWhirr having offered any further remark as to her fittings, or having been heard to utter a single word hinting at pride in his ship, gratitude for his appointment, or satisfaction at his prospects.

With a temperament neither loquacious nor taciturn he found very little occasion to talk. There were matters of duty, of course — directions, orders, and so on; but the past being to his mind done with, and the future not there yet, the more general actualities of the day required no comment — because facts can speak for themselves with overwhelming precision.

Old Mr. Sigg liked a man of few words, and one that "you could be sure would not try to improve upon his instructions." MacWhirr satisfying these requirements, was continued in command of the Nan-Shan, and applied himself to the careful navigation of his ship in the China seas. She had come out on a British register, but after some time Messrs. Sigg judged it expedient to transfer her to the Siamese flag.

At the news of the contemplated transfer Jukes grew restless, as if under a sense of personal affront. He went about grumbling to himself, and uttering short scornful laughs. "Fancy having a ridiculous Noah's Ark elephant in the ensign of one's ship," he said once at the engine-room door. "Dash me if I can stand it: I'll throw up the billet. Don't it make you sick, Mr. Rout?" The chief engineer only cleared his throat with the air of a man who knows the value of a good billet.

The first morning the new flag floated over the stern of the Nan-Shan Jukes stood looking at it bitterly from the bridge. He struggled with his

feelings for a while, and then remarked, "Queer flag for a man to sail under, sir."

"What's the matter with the flag?" inquired Captain MacWhirr. "Seems all right to me." And he walked across to the end of the bridge to have a good look.

"Well, it looks queer to me," burst out Jukes, greatly exasperated, and flung off the bridge.

Captain MacWhirr was amazed at these manners. After a while he stepped quietly into the chart-room, and opened his International Signal Code-book at the plate where the flags of all the nations are correctly figured in gaudy rows. He ran his finger over them, and when he came to Siam he contemplated with great attention the red field and the white elephant. Nothing could be more simple; but to make sure he brought the book out on the bridge for the purpose of comparing the coloured drawing with the real thing at the flagstaff astern. When next Jukes, who was carrying on the duty that day with a sort of suppressed fierceness, happened on the bridge, his commander observed:

"There's nothing amiss with that flag."

"Isn't there?" mumbled Jukes, falling on his knees before a deck-locker and jerking therefrom viciously a spare lead-line.

"No. I looked up the book. Length twice the breadth and the elephant exactly in the middle. I thought the people ashore would know how to make the local flag. Stands to reason. You were wrong, Jukes. . . ."

"Well, sir," began Jukes, getting up excitedly, "all I can say — " He fumbled for the end of the coil of line with trembling hands.

"That's all right." Captain MacWhirr soothed him, sitting heavily on a little canvas folding-stool he greatly affected. "All you have to do is to take care they don't hoist the elephant upside-down before they get quite used to it."

Jukes flung the new lead-line over on the fore-deck with a loud "Here you are, bo'ss'en — don't forget to wet it thoroughly," and turned with immense resolution towards his commander; but Captain MacWhirr spread his elbows on the bridge-rail comfortably.

"Because it would be, I suppose, understood as a signal of distress," he went on. "What do you think? That elephant there, I take it, stands for something in the nature of the Union Jack in the flag. . . ."

“Does it!” yelled Jukes, so that every head on the Nan-Shan’s decks looked towards the bridge. Then he sighed, and with sudden resignation: “It would certainly be a dam’ distressful sight,” he said, meekly.

Later in the day he accosted the chief engineer with a confidential, “Here, let me tell you the old man’s latest.”

Mr. Solomon Rout (frequently alluded to as Long Sol, Old Sol, or Father Rout), from finding himself almost invariably the tallest man on board every ship he joined, had acquired the habit of a stooping, leisurely condescension. His hair was scant and sandy, his flat cheeks were pale, his bony wrists and long scholarly hands were pale, too, as though he had lived all his life in the shade.

He smiled from on high at Jukes, and went on smoking and glancing about quietly, in the manner of a kind uncle lending an ear to the tale of an excited schoolboy. Then, greatly amused but impassive, he asked:

“And did you throw up the billet?”

“No,” cried Jukes, raising a weary, discouraged voice above the harsh buzz of the Nan-Shan’s friction winches. All of them were hard at work, snatching slings of cargo, high up, to the end of long derricks, only, as it seemed, to let them rip down recklessly by the run. The cargo chains groaned in the gins, clinked on coamings, rattled over the side; and the whole ship quivered, with her long gray flanks smoking in wreaths of steam. “No,” cried Jukes, “I didn’t. What’s the good? I might just as well fling my resignation at this bulkhead. I don’t believe you can make a man like that understand anything. He simply knocks me over.”

At that moment Captain MacWhirr, back from the shore, crossed the deck, umbrella in hand, escorted by a mournful, self-possessed Chinaman, walking behind in paper-soled silk shoes, and who also carried an umbrella.

The master of the Nan-Shan, speaking just audibly and gazing at his boots as his manner was, remarked that it would be necessary to call at Fuchau this trip, and desired Mr. Rout to have steam up to-morrow afternoon at one o’clock sharp. He pushed back his hat to wipe his forehead, observing at the same time that he hated going ashore anyhow; while overtopping him Mr. Rout, without deigning a word, smoked austere, nursing his right elbow in the palm of his left hand. Then Jukes was directed in the same subdued voice to keep the forward ‘tween-deck clear of cargo. Two hundred coolies were going to be put down there. The Bun Hin Company were sending that lot home. Twenty-five bags of rice would

be coming off in a sampan directly, for stores. All seven-years'-men they were, said Captain MacWhirr, with a camphor-wood chest to every man. The carpenter should be set to work nailing three-inch battens along the deck below, fore and aft, to keep these boxes from shifting in a sea-way. Jukes had better look to it at once. "D'ye hear, Jukes?" This chinaman here was coming with the ship as far as Fu-chau — a sort of interpreter he would be. Bun Hin's clerk he was, and wanted to have a look at the space. Jukes had better take him forward. "D'ye hear, Jukes?"

Jukes took care to punctuate these instructions in proper places with the obligatory "Yes, sir," ejaculated without enthusiasm. His brusque "Come along, John; make look see" set the Chinaman in motion at his heels.

"Wanchee look see, all same look see can do," said Jukes, who having no talent for foreign languages mangled the very pidgin-English cruelly. He pointed at the open hatch. "Catchee number one piecie place to sleep in. Eh?"

He was gruff, as became his racial superiority, but not unfriendly. The Chinaman, gazing sad and speechless into the darkness of the hatchway, seemed to stand at the head of a yawning grave.

"No catchee rain down there — savee?" pointed out Jukes. "Suppose all'ee same fine weather, one piecie coolie-man come topside," he pursued, warming up imaginatively. "Make so — Phooooo!" He expanded his chest and blew out his cheeks. "Savee, John? Breathe — fresh air. Good. Eh? Washee him piecie pants, chow-chow top-side — see, John?"

With his mouth and hands he made exuberant motions of eating rice and washing clothes; and the Chinaman, who concealed his distrust of this pantomime under a collected demeanour tinged by a gentle and refined melancholy, glanced out of his almond eyes from Jukes to the hatch and back again. "Velly good," he murmured, in a disconsolate undertone, and hastened smoothly along the decks, dodging obstacles in his course. He disappeared, ducking low under a sling of ten dirty gunny-bags full of some costly merchandise and exhaling a repulsive smell.

Captain MacWhirr meantime had gone on the bridge, and into the chart-room, where a letter, commenced two days before, awaited termination. These long letters began with the words, "My darling wife," and the steward, between the scrubbing of the floors and the dusting of chronometer-boxes, snatched at every opportunity to read them. They interested him much more than they possibly could the woman for whose

eye they were intended; and this for the reason that they related in minute detail each successive trip of the Nan-Shan.

Her master, faithful to facts, which alone his consciousness reflected, would set them down with painstaking care upon many pages. The house in a northern suburb to which these pages were addressed had a bit of garden before the bow-windows, a deep porch of good appearance, coloured glass with imitation lead frame in the front door. He paid five-and-forty pounds a year for it, and did not think the rent too high, because Mrs. MacWhirr (a pretentious person with a scraggy neck and a disdainful manner) was admittedly ladylike, and in the neighbourhood considered as “quite superior.” The only secret of her life was her abject terror of the time when her husband would come home to stay for good. Under the same roof there dwelt also a daughter called Lydia and a son, Tom. These two were but slightly acquainted with their father. Mainly, they knew him as a rare but privileged visitor, who of an evening smoked his pipe in the dining-room and slept in the house. The lanky girl, upon the whole, was rather ashamed of him; the boy was frankly and utterly indifferent in a straightforward, delightful, unaffected way manly boys have.

And Captain MacWhirr wrote home from the coast of China twelve times every year, desiring quaintly to be “remembered to the children,” and subscribing himself “your loving husband,” as calmly as if the words so long used by so many men were, apart from their shape, worn-out things, and of a faded meaning.

The China seas north and south are narrow seas. They are seas full of every-day, eloquent facts, such as islands, sand-banks, reefs, swift and changeable currents — tangled facts that nevertheless speak to a seaman in clear and definite language. Their speech appealed to Captain MacWhirr’s sense of realities so forcibly that he had given up his state-room below and practically lived all his days on the bridge of his ship, often having his meals sent up, and sleeping at night in the chart-room. And he indited there his home letters. Each of them, without exception, contained the phrase, “The weather has been very fine this trip,” or some other form of a statement to that effect. And this statement, too, in its wonderful persistence, was of the same perfect accuracy as all the others they contained.

Mr. Rout likewise wrote letters; only no one on board knew how chatty he could be pen in hand, because the chief engineer had enough imagination



to keep his desk locked. His wife relished his style greatly. They were a childless couple, and Mrs. Rout, a big, high-bosomed, jolly woman of forty, shared with Mr. Rout's toothless and venerable mother a little cottage near Teddington. She would run over her correspondence, at breakfast, with lively eyes, and scream out interesting passages in a joyous voice at the deaf old lady, prefacing each extract by the warning shout, "Solomon says!" She had the trick of firing off Solomon's utterances also upon strangers, astonishing them easily by the unfamiliar text and the unexpectedly jocular vein of these quotations. On the day the new curate called for the first time at the cottage, she found occasion to remark, "As Solomon says: 'the engineers that go down to the sea in ships behold the wonders of sailor nature';" when a change in the visitor's countenance made her stop and stare.

"Solomon. . . . Oh! . . . Mrs. Rout," stuttered the young man, very red in the face, "I must say . . . I don't. . . ."

"He's my husband," she announced in a great shout, throwing herself back in the chair. Perceiving the joke, she laughed immoderately with a handkerchief to her eyes, while he sat wearing a forced smile, and, from his inexperience of jolly women, fully persuaded that she must be deplorably insane. They were excellent friends afterwards; for, absolving her from irreverent intention, he came to think she was a very worthy person indeed; and he learned in time to receive without flinching other scraps of Solomon's wisdom.

"For my part," Solomon was reported by his wife to have said once, "give me the dullest ass for a skipper before a rogue. There is a way to take a fool; but a rogue is smart and slippery." This was an airy generalization drawn from the particular case of Captain MacWhirr's honesty, which, in itself, had the heavy obviousness of a lump of clay. On the other hand, Mr. Jukes, unable to generalize, unmarried, and unengaged, was in the habit of opening his heart after another fashion to an old chum and former shipmate, actually serving as second officer on board an Atlantic liner.

First of all he would insist upon the advantages of the Eastern trade, hinting at its superiority to the Western ocean service. He extolled the sky, the seas, the ships, and the easy life of the Far East. The Nan-Shan, he affirmed, was second to none as a sea-boat.

"We have no brass-bound uniforms, but then we are like brothers here," he wrote. "We all mess together and live like fighting-cocks. . . . All the

chaps of the black-squad are as decent as they make that kind, and old Sol, the Chief, is a dry stick. We are good friends. As to our old man, you could not find a quieter skipper. Sometimes you would think he hadn't sense enough to see anything wrong. And yet it isn't that. Can't be. He has been in command for a good few years now. He doesn't do anything actually foolish, and gets his ship along all right without worrying anybody. I believe he hasn't brains enough to enjoy kicking up a row. I don't take advantage of him. I would scorn it. Outside the routine of duty he doesn't seem to understand more than half of what you tell him. We get a laugh out of this at times; but it is dull, too, to be with a man like this — in the long-run. Old Sol says he hasn't much conversation. Conversation! O Lord! He never talks. The other day I had been yarning under the bridge with one of the engineers, and he must have heard us. When I came up to take my watch, he steps out of the chart-room and has a good look all round, peeps over at the sidelights, glances at the compass, squints upward at the stars. That's his regular performance. By-and-by he says: 'Was that you talking just now in the port alleyway?' 'Yes, sir.' 'With the third engineer?' 'Yes, sir.' He walks off to starboard, and sits under the dodger on a little campstool of his, and for half an hour perhaps he makes no sound, except that I heard him sneeze once. Then after a while I hear him getting up over there, and he strolls across to port, where I was. 'I can't understand what you can find to talk about,' says he. 'Two solid hours. I am not blaming you. I see people ashore at it all day long, and then in the evening they sit down and keep at it over the drinks. Must be saying the same things over and over again. I can't understand.'

"Did you ever hear anything like that? And he was so patient about it. It made me quite sorry for him. But he is exasperating, too, sometimes. Of course one would not do anything to vex him even if it were worth while. But it isn't. He's so jolly innocent that if you were to put your thumb to your nose and wave your fingers at him he would only wonder gravely to himself what got into you. He told me once quite simply that he found it very difficult to make out what made people always act so queerly. He's too dense to trouble about, and that's the truth."

Thus wrote Mr. Jukes to his chum in the Western ocean trade, out of the fulness of his heart and the liveliness of his fancy.

He had expressed his honest opinion. It was not worthwhile trying to impress a man of that sort. If the world had been full of such men, life

would have probably appeared to Jukes an unentertaining and unprofitable business. He was not alone in his opinion. The sea itself, as if sharing Mr. Jukes' good-natured forbearance, had never put itself out to startle the silent man, who seldom looked up, and wandered innocently over the waters with the only visible purpose of getting food, raiment, and house-room for three people ashore. Dirty weather he had known, of course. He had been made wet, uncomfortable, tired in the usual way, felt at the time and presently forgotten. So that upon the whole he had been justified in reporting fine weather at home. But he had never been given a glimpse of immeasurable strength and of immoderate wrath, the wrath that passes exhausted but never appeased — the wrath and fury of the passionate sea. He knew it existed, as we know that crime and abominations exist; he had heard of it as a peaceable citizen in a town hears of battles, famines, and floods, and yet knows nothing of what these things mean — though, indeed, he may have been mixed up in a street row, have gone without his dinner once, or been soaked to the skin in a shower. Captain MacWhirr had sailed over the surface of the oceans as some men go skimming over the years of existence to sink gently into a placid grave, ignorant of life to the last, without ever having been made to see all it may contain of perfidy, of violence, and of terror. There are on sea and land such men thus fortunate — or thus disdained by destiny or by the sea.

## II

Observing the steady fall of the barometer, Captain MacWhirr thought, "There's some dirty weather knocking about." This is precisely what he thought. He had had an experience of moderately dirty weather — the term dirty as applied to the weather implying only moderate discomfort to the seaman. Had he been informed by an indisputable authority that the end of the world was to be finally accomplished by a catastrophic disturbance of the atmosphere, he would have assimilated the information under the simple idea of dirty weather, and no other, because he had no experience of cataclysms, and belief does not necessarily imply comprehension. The wisdom of his country had pronounced by means of an Act of Parliament that before he could be considered as fit to take charge of a ship he should be able to answer certain simple questions on the subject of circular storms such as hurricanes, cyclones, typhoons; and apparently he had answered them, since he was now in command of the Nan-Shan in the China seas during the season of typhoons. But if he had answered he remembered nothing of it. He was, however, conscious of being made uncomfortable by the clammy heat. He came out on the bridge, and found no relief to this oppression. The air seemed thick. He gasped like a fish, and began to believe himself greatly out of sorts.

The Nan-Shan was ploughing a vanishing furrow upon the circle of the sea that had the surface and the shimmer of an undulating piece of gray silk. The sun, pale and without rays, poured down leaden heat in a strangely indecisive light, and the Chinamen were lying prostrate about the decks. Their bloodless, pinched, yellow faces were like the faces of bilious invalids. Captain MacWhirr noticed two of them especially, stretched out on their backs below the bridge. As soon as they had closed their eyes they seemed dead. Three others, however, were quarrelling barbarously away forward; and one big fellow, half naked, with herculean shoulders, was hanging limply over a winch; another, sitting on the deck, his knees up and his head drooping sideways in a girlish attitude, was plaiting his pigtail with infinite languor depicted in his whole person and in the very movement of his fingers. The smoke struggled with difficulty out of the funnel, and instead of streaming away spread itself out like an infernal sort of cloud, smelling of sulphur and raining soot all over the decks.

“What the devil are you doing there, Mr. Jukes?” asked Captain MacWhirr.

This unusual form of address, though mumbled rather than spoken, caused the body of Mr. Jukes to start as though it had been prodded under the fifth rib. He had had a low bench brought on the bridge, and sitting on it, with a length of rope curled about his feet and a piece of canvas stretched over his knees, was pushing a sail-needle vigorously. He looked up, and his surprise gave to his eyes an expression of innocence and candour.

“I am only roping some of that new set of bags we made last trip for whipping up coals,” he remonstrated, gently. “We shall want them for the next coaling, sir.”

“What became of the others?”

“Why, worn out of course, sir.”

Captain MacWhirr, after glaring down irresolutely at his chief mate, disclosed the gloomy and cynical conviction that more than half of them had been lost overboard, “if only the truth was known,” and retired to the other end of the bridge. Jukes, exasperated by this unprovoked attack, broke the needle at the second stitch, and dropping his work got up and cursed the heat in a violent undertone.

The propeller thumped, the three Chinamen forward had given up squabbling very suddenly, and the one who had been plaiting his tail clasped his legs and stared dejectedly over his knees. The lurid sunshine cast faint and sickly shadows. The swell ran higher and swifter every moment, and the ship lurched heavily in the smooth, deep hollows of the sea.

“I wonder where that beastly swell comes from,” said Jukes aloud, recovering himself after a stagger.

“North-east,” grunted the literal MacWhirr, from his side of the bridge. “There’s some dirty weather knocking about. Go and look at the glass.”

When Jukes came out of the chart-room, the cast of his countenance had changed to thoughtfulness and concern. He caught hold of the bridge-rail and stared ahead.

The temperature in the engine-room had gone up to a hundred and seventeen degrees. Irritated voices were ascending through the skylight and through the fiddle of the stokehold in a harsh and resonant uproar, mingled with angry clangs and scrapes of metal, as if men with limbs of iron and throats of bronze had been quarrelling down there. The second engineer

was falling foul of the stokers for letting the steam go down. He was a man with arms like a blacksmith, and generally feared; but that afternoon the stokers were answering him back recklessly, and slammed the furnace doors with the fury of despair. Then the noise ceased suddenly, and the second engineer appeared, emerging out of the stokehold streaked with grime and soaking wet like a chimney-sweep coming out of a well. As soon as his head was clear of the fiddle he began to scold Jukes for not trimming properly the stokehold ventilators; and in answer Jukes made with his hands deprecatory soothing signs meaning: "No wind — can't be helped — you can see for yourself." But the other wouldn't hear reason. His teeth flashed angrily in his dirty face. He didn't mind, he said, the trouble of punching their blanked heads down there, blank his soul, but did the condemned sailors think you could keep steam up in the God-forsaken boilers simply by knocking the blanked stokers about? No, by George! You had to get some draught, too — may he be everlastingly blanked for a swab-headed deck-hand if you didn't! And the chief, too, rampaging before the steam-gauge and carrying on like a lunatic up and down the engine-room ever since noon. What did Jukes think he was stuck up there for, if he couldn't get one of his decayed, good-for-nothing deck-cripples to turn the ventilators to the wind?

The relations of the "engine-room" and the "deck" of the Nan-Shan were, as is known, of a brotherly nature; therefore Jukes leaned over and begged the other in a restrained tone not to make a disgusting ass of himself; the skipper was on the other side of the bridge. But the second declared mutinously that he didn't care a rap who was on the other side of the bridge, and Jukes, passing in a flash from lofty disapproval into a state of exaltation, invited him in unflattering terms to come up and twist the beastly things to please himself, and catch such wind as a donkey of his sort could find. The second rushed up to the fray. He flung himself at the port ventilator as though he meant to tear it out bodily and toss it overboard. All he did was to move the cowl round a few inches, with an enormous expenditure of force, and seemed spent in the effort. He leaned against the back of the wheelhouse, and Jukes walked up to him.

"Oh, Heavens!" ejaculated the engineer in a feeble voice. He lifted his eyes to the sky, and then let his glassy stare descend to meet the horizon that, tilting up to an angle of forty degrees, seemed to hang on a slant for a while and settled down slowly. "Heavens! Phew! What's up, anyhow?"

Jukes, straddling his long legs like a pair of compasses, put on an air of superiority. “We’re going to catch it this time,” he said. “The barometer is tumbling down like anything, Harry. And you trying to kick up that silly row. . . .”

The word “barometer” seemed to revive the second engineer’s mad animosity. Collecting afresh all his energies, he directed Jukes in a low and brutal tone to shove the unmentionable instrument down his gory throat. Who cared for his crimson barometer? It was the steam — the steam — that was going down; and what between the firemen going faint and the chief going silly, it was worse than a dog’s life for him; he didn’t care a tinker’s curse how soon the whole show was blown out of the water. He seemed on the point of having a cry, but after regaining his breath he muttered darkly, “I’ll faint them,” and dashed off. He stopped upon the fiddle long enough to shake his fist at the unnatural daylight, and dropped into the dark hole with a whoop.

When Jukes turned, his eyes fell upon the rounded back and the big red ears of Captain MacWhirr, who had come across. He did not look at his chief officer, but said at once, “That’s a very violent man, that second engineer.”

“Jolly good second, anyhow,” grunted Jukes. “They can’t keep up steam,” he added, rapidly, and made a grab at the rail against the coming lurch.

Captain MacWhirr, unprepared, took a run and brought himself up with a jerk by an awning stanchion.

“A profane man,” he said, obstinately. “If this goes on, I’ll have to get rid of him the first chance.”

“It’s the heat,” said Jukes. “The weather’s awful. It would make a saint swear. Even up here I feel exactly as if I had my head tied up in a woollen blanket.”

Captain MacWhirr looked up. “D’ye mean to say, Mr. Jukes, you ever had your head tied up in a blanket? What was that for?”

“It’s a manner of speaking, sir,” said Jukes, stolidly.

“Some of you fellows do go on! What’s that about saints swearing? I wish you wouldn’t talk so wild. What sort of saint would that be that would swear? No more saint than yourself, I expect. And what’s a blanket got to do with it — or the weather either. . . . The heat does not make me swear —

does it? It's filthy bad temper. That's what it is. And what's the good of your talking like this?"

Thus Captain MacWhirr expostulated against the use of images in speech, and at the end electrified Jukes by a contemptuous snort, followed by words of passion and resentment: "Damme! I'll fire him out of the ship if he don't look out."

And Jukes, incorrigible, thought: "Goodness me! Somebody's put a new inside to my old man. Here's temper, if you like. Of course it's the weather; what else? It would make an angel quarrelsome — let alone a saint."

All the Chinamen on deck appeared at their last gasp.

At its setting the sun had a diminished diameter and an expiring brown, rayless glow, as if millions of centuries elapsing since the morning had brought it near its end. A dense bank of cloud became visible to the northward; it had a sinister dark olive tint, and lay low and motionless upon the sea, resembling a solid obstacle in the path of the ship. She went floundering towards it like an exhausted creature driven to its death. The coppery twilight retired slowly, and the darkness brought out overhead a swarm of unsteady, big stars, that, as if blown upon, flickered exceedingly and seemed to hang very near the earth. At eight o'clock Jukes went into the chart-room to write up the ship's log.

He copies neatly out of the rough-book the number of miles, the course of the ship, and in the column for "wind" scrawled the word "calm" from top to bottom of the eight hours since noon. He was exasperated by the continuous, monotonous rolling of the ship. The heavy inkstand would slide away in a manner that suggested perverse intelligence in dodging the pen. Having written in the large space under the head of "Remarks" "Heat very oppressive," he stuck the end of the penholder in his teeth, pipe fashion, and mopped his face carefully.

"Ship rolling heavily in a high cross swell," he began again, and commented to himself, "Heavily is no word for it." Then he wrote: "Sunset threatening, with a low bank of clouds to N. and E. Sky clear overhead."

Sprawling over the table with arrested pen, he glanced out of the door, and in that frame of his vision he saw all the stars flying upwards between the teakwood jambs on a black sky. The whole lot took flight together and disappeared, leaving only a blackness flecked with white flashes, for the sea was as black as the sky and speckled with foam afar. The stars that had flown to the roll came back on the return swing of the ship, rushing



downwards in their glittering multitude, not of fiery points, but enlarged to tiny discs brilliant with a clear wet sheen.

Jukes watched the flying big stars for a moment, and then wrote: "8 P.M. Swell increasing. Ship labouring and taking water on her decks. Battered down the coolies for the night. Barometer still falling." He paused, and thought to himself, "Perhaps nothing whatever'll come of it." And then he closed resolutely his entries: "Every appearance of a typhoon coming on."

On going out he had to stand aside, and Captain MacWhirr strode over the doorstep without saying a word or making a sign.

"Shut the door, Mr. Jukes, will you?" he cried from within.

Jukes turned back to do so, muttering ironically: "Afraid to catch cold, I suppose." It was his watch below, but he yearned for communion with his kind; and he remarked cheerily to the second mate: "Doesn't look so bad, after all — does it?"

The second mate was marching to and fro on the bridge, tripping down with small steps one moment, and the next climbing with difficulty the shifting slope of the deck. At the sound of Jukes' voice he stood still, facing forward, but made no reply.

"Hallo! That's a heavy one," said Jukes, swaying to meet the long roll till his lowered hand touched the planks. This time the second mate made in his throat a noise of an unfriendly nature.

He was an oldish, shabby little fellow, with bad teeth and no hair on his face. He had been shipped in a hurry in Shanghai, that trip when the second officer brought from home had delayed the ship three hours in port by contriving (in some manner Captain MacWhirr could never understand) to fall overboard into an empty coal-lighter lying alongside, and had to be sent ashore to the hospital with concussion of the brain and a broken limb or two.

Jukes was not discouraged by the unsympathetic sound. "The Chinamen must be having a lovely time of it down there," he said. "It's lucky for them the old girl has the easiest roll of any ship I've ever been in. There now! This one wasn't so bad."

"You wait," snarled the second mate.

With his sharp nose, red at the tip, and his thin pinched lips, he always looked as though he were raging inwardly; and he was concise in his speech to the point of rudeness. All his time off duty he spent in his cabin with the door shut, keeping so still in there that he was supposed to fall asleep as

soon as he had disappeared; but the man who came in to wake him for his watch on deck would invariably find him with his eyes wide open, flat on his back in the bunk, and glaring irritably from a soiled pillow. He never wrote any letters, did not seem to hope for news from anywhere; and though he had been heard once to mention West Hartlepool, it was with extreme bitterness, and only in connection with the extortionate charges of a boarding-house. He was one of those men who are picked up at need in the ports of the world. They are competent enough, appear hopelessly hard up, show no evidence of any sort of vice, and carry about them all the signs of manifest failure. They come aboard on an emergency, care for no ship afloat, live in their own atmosphere of casual connection amongst their shipmates who know nothing of them, and make up their minds to leave at inconvenient times. They clear out with no words of leavetaking in some God-forsaken port other men would fear to be stranded in, and go ashore in company of a shabby sea-chest, corded like a treasure-box, and with an air of shaking the ship's dust off their feet.

"You wait," he repeated, balanced in great swings with his back to Jukes, motionless and implacable.

"Do you mean to say we are going to catch it hot?" asked Jukes with boyish interest.

"Say? . . . I say nothing. You don't catch me," snapped the little second mate, with a mixture of pride, scorn, and cunning, as if Jukes' question had been a trap cleverly detected. "Oh, no! None of you here shall make a fool of me if I know it," he mumbled to himself.

Jukes reflected rapidly that this second mate was a mean little beast, and in his heart he wished poor Jack Allen had never smashed himself up in the coal-lighter. The far-off blackness ahead of the ship was like another night seen through the starry night of the earth — the starless night of the immensities beyond the created universe, revealed in its appalling stillness through a low fissure in the glittering sphere of which the earth is the kernel.

"Whatever there might be about," said Jukes, "we are steaming straight into it."

"You've said it," caught up the second mate, always with his back to Jukes. "You've said it, mind — not I."

"Oh, go to Jericho!" said Jukes, frankly; and the other emitted a triumphant little chuckle.

“You’ve said it,” he repeated.

“And what of that?”

“I’ve known some real good men get into trouble with their skippers for saying a dam’ sight less,” answered the second mate feverishly. “Oh, no! You don’t catch me.”

“You seem deucedly anxious not to give yourself away,” said Jukes, completely soured by such absurdity. “I wouldn’t be afraid to say what I think.”

“Aye, to me! That’s no great trick. I am nobody, and well I know it.”

The ship, after a pause of comparative steadiness, started upon a series of rolls, one worse than the other, and for a time Jukes, preserving his equilibrium, was too busy to open his mouth. As soon as the violent swinging had quieted down somewhat, he said: “This is a bit too much of a good thing. Whether anything is coming or not I think she ought to be put head on to that swell. The old man is just gone in to lie down. Hang me if I don’t speak to him.”

But when he opened the door of the chart-room he saw his captain reading a book. Captain MacWhirr was not lying down: he was standing up with one hand grasping the edge of the bookshelf and the other holding open before his face a thick volume. The lamp wriggled in the gimbals, the loosened books toppled from side to side on the shelf, the long barometer swung in jerky circles, the table altered its slant every moment. In the midst of all this stir and movement Captain MacWhirr, holding on, showed his eyes above the upper edge, and asked, “What’s the matter?”

“Swell getting worse, sir.”

“Noticed that in here,” muttered Captain MacWhirr. “Anything wrong?”

Jukes, inwardly disconcerted by the seriousness of the eyes looking at him over the top of the book, produced an embarrassed grin.

“Rolling like old boots,” he said, sheepishly.

“Aye! Very heavy — very heavy. What do you want?”

At this Jukes lost his footing and began to flounder. “I was thinking of our passengers,” he said, in the manner of a man clutching at a straw.

“Passengers?” wondered the Captain, gravely. “What passengers?”

“Why, the Chinamen, sir,” explained Jukes, very sick of this conversation.

“The Chinamen! Why don’t you speak plainly? Couldn’t tell what you meant. Never heard a lot of coolies spoken of as passengers before.

Passengers, indeed! What's come to you?"

Captain MacWhirr, closing the book on his forefinger, lowered his arm and looked completely mystified. "Why are you thinking of the Chinamen, Mr. Jukes?" he inquired.

Jukes took a plunge, like a man driven to it. "She's rolling her decks full of water, sir. Thought you might put her head on perhaps — for a while. Till this goes down a bit — very soon, I dare say. Head to the eastward. I never knew a ship roll like this."

He held on in the doorway, and Captain MacWhirr, feeling his grip on the shelf inadequate, made up his mind to let go in a hurry, and fell heavily on the couch.

"Head to the eastward?" he said, struggling to sit up. "That's more than four points off her course."

"Yes, sir. Fifty degrees. . . . Would just bring her head far enough round to meet this. . . ."

Captain MacWhirr was now sitting up. He had not dropped the book, and he had not lost his place.

"To the eastward?" he repeated, with dawning astonishment. "To the . . . Where do you think we are bound to? You want me to haul a full-powered steamship four points off her course to make the Chinamen comfortable! Now, I've heard more than enough of mad things done in the world — but this. . . . If I didn't know you, Jukes, I would think you were in liquor. Steer four points off. . . . And what afterwards? Steer four points over the other way, I suppose, to make the course good. What put it into your head that I would start to tack a steamer as if she were a sailing-ship?"

"Jolly good thing she isn't," threw in Jukes, with bitter readiness. "She would have rolled every blessed stick out of her this afternoon."

"Aye! And you just would have had to stand and see them go," said Captain MacWhirr, showing a certain animation. "It's a dead calm, isn't it?"

"It is, sir. But there's something out of the common coming, for sure."

"Maybe. I suppose you have a notion I should be getting out of the way of that dirt," said Captain MacWhirr, speaking with the utmost simplicity of manner and tone, and fixing the oilcloth on the floor with a heavy stare. Thus he noticed neither Jukes' discomfiture nor the mixture of vexation and astonished respect on his face.

"Now, here's this book," he continued with deliberation, slapping his thigh with the closed volume. "I've been reading the chapter on the storms

there.”

This was true. He had been reading the chapter on the storms. When he had entered the chart-room, it was with no intention of taking the book down. Some influence in the air — the same influence, probably, that caused the steward to bring without orders the Captain’s sea-boots and oilskin coat up to the chart-room — had as it were guided his hand to the shelf; and without taking the time to sit down he had waded with a conscious effort into the terminology of the subject. He lost himself amongst advancing semi-circles, left- and right-hand quadrants, the curves of the tracks, the probable bearing of the centre, the shifts of wind and the readings of barometer. He tried to bring all these things into a definite relation to himself, and ended by becoming contemptuously angry with such a lot of words, and with so much advice, all head-work and supposition, without a glimmer of certitude.

“It’s the damnedest thing, Jukes,” he said. “If a fellow was to believe all that’s in there, he would be running most of his time all over the sea trying to get behind the weather.”

Again he slapped his leg with the book; and Jukes opened his mouth, but said nothing.

“Running to get behind the weather! Do you understand that, Mr. Jukes? It’s the maddest thing!” ejaculated Captain MacWhirr, with pauses, gazing at the floor profoundly. “You would think an old woman had been writing this. It passes me. If that thing means anything useful, then it means that I should at once alter the course away, away to the devil somewhere, and come booming down on Fu-chau from the northward at the tail of this dirty weather that’s supposed to be knocking about in our way. From the north! Do you understand, Mr. Jukes? Three hundred extra miles to the distance, and a pretty coal bill to show. I couldn’t bring myself to do that if every word in there was gospel truth, Mr. Jukes. Don’t you expect me. . . .”

And Jukes, silent, marvelled at this display of feeling and loquacity.

“But the truth is that you don’t know if the fellow is right, anyhow. How can you tell what a gale is made of till you get it? He isn’t aboard here, is he? Very well. Here he says that the centre of them things bears eight points off the wind; but we haven’t got any wind, for all the barometer falling. Where’s his centre now?”

“We will get the wind presently,” mumbled Jukes.

“Let it come, then,” said Captain MacWhirr, with dignified indignation. “It’s only to let you see, Mr. Jukes, that you don’t find everything in books. All these rules for dodging breezes and circumventing the winds of heaven, Mr. Jukes, seem to me the maddest thing, when you come to look at it sensibly.”

He raised his eyes, saw Jukes gazing at him dubiously, and tried to illustrate his meaning.

“About as queer as your extraordinary notion of dodging the ship head to sea, for I don’t know how long, to make the Chinamen comfortable; whereas all we’ve got to do is to take them to Fu-chau, being timed to get there before noon on Friday. If the weather delays me — very well. There’s your log-book to talk straight about the weather. But suppose I went swinging off my course and came in two days late, and they asked me: ‘Where have you been all that time, Captain?’ What could I say to that? ‘Went around to dodge the bad weather,’ I would say. ‘It must’ve been dam’ bad,’ they would say. ‘Don’t know,’ I would have to say; ‘I’ve dodged clear of it.’ See that, Jukes? I have been thinking it all out this afternoon.”

He looked up again in his unseeing, unimaginative way. No one had ever heard him say so much at one time. Jukes, with his arms open in the doorway, was like a man invited to behold a miracle. Unbounded wonder was the intellectual meaning of his eye, while incredulity was seated in his whole countenance.

“A gale is a gale, Mr. Jukes,” resumed the Captain, “and a full-powered steam-ship has got to face it. There’s just so much dirty weather knocking about the world, and the proper thing is to go through it with none of what old Captain Wilson of the *Melita* calls ‘storm strategy.’ The other day ashore I heard him hold forth about it to a lot of shipmasters who came in and sat at a table next to mine. It seemed to me the greatest nonsense. He was telling them how he outmanoeuvred, I think he said, a terrific gale, so that it never came nearer than fifty miles to him. A neat piece of head-work he called it. How he knew there was a terrific gale fifty miles off beats me altogether. It was like listening to a crazy man. I would have thought Captain Wilson was old enough to know better.”

Captain MacWhirr ceased for a moment, then said, “It’s your watch below, Mr. Jukes?”

Jukes came to himself with a start. “Yes, sir.”

“Leave orders to call me at the slightest change,” said the Captain. He reached up to put the book away, and tucked his legs upon the couch. “Shut the door so that it don’t fly open, will you? I can’t stand a door banging. They’ve put a lot of rubbishy locks into this ship, I must say.”

Captain MacWhirr closed his eyes.

He did so to rest himself. He was tired, and he experienced that state of mental vacuity which comes at the end of an exhaustive discussion that has liberated some belief matured in the course of meditative years. He had indeed been making his confession of faith, had he only known it; and its effect was to make Jukes, on the other side of the door, stand scratching his head for a good while.

Captain MacWhirr opened his eyes.

He thought he must have been asleep. What was that loud noise? Wind? Why had he not been called? The lamp wriggled in its gimbals, the barometer swung in circles, the table altered its slant every moment; a pair of limp sea-boots with collapsed tops went sliding past the couch. He put out his hand instantly, and captured one.

Jukes’ face appeared in a crack of the door: only his face, very red, with staring eyes. The flame of the lamp leaped, a piece of paper flew up, a rush of air enveloped Captain MacWhirr. Beginning to draw on the boot, he directed an expectant gaze at Jukes’ swollen, excited features.

“Came on like this,” shouted Jukes, “five minutes ago . . . all of a sudden.”

The head disappeared with a bang, and a heavy splash and patter of drops swept past the closed door as if a pailful of melted lead had been flung against the house. A whistling could be heard now upon the deep vibrating noise outside. The stuffy chart-room seemed as full of draughts as a shed. Captain MacWhirr collared the other sea-boot on its violent passage along the floor. He was not flustered, but he could not find at once the opening for inserting his foot. The shoes he had flung off were scurrying from end to end of the cabin, gambolling playfully over each other like puppies. As soon as he stood up he kicked at them viciously, but without effect.

He threw himself into the attitude of a lunging fencer, to reach after his oilskin coat; and afterwards he staggered all over the confined space while he jerked himself into it. Very grave, straddling his legs far apart, and stretching his neck, he started to tie deliberately the strings of his sou’-wester under his chin, with thick fingers that trembled slightly. He went

through all the movements of a woman putting on her bonnet before a glass, with a strained, listening attention, as though he had expected every moment to hear the shout of his name in the confused clamour that had suddenly beset his ship. Its increase filled his ears while he was getting ready to go out and confront whatever it might mean. It was tumultuous and very loud — made up of the rush of the wind, the crashes of the sea, with that prolonged deep vibration of the air, like the roll of an immense and remote drum beating the charge of the gale.

He stood for a moment in the light of the lamp, thick, clumsy, shapeless in his panoply of combat, vigilant and red-faced.

“There’s a lot of weight in this,” he muttered.

As soon as he attempted to open the door the wind caught it. Clinging to the handle, he was dragged out over the doorstep, and at once found himself engaged with the wind in a sort of personal scuffle whose object was the shutting of that door. At the last moment a tongue of air scurried in and licked out the flame of the lamp.

Ahead of the ship he perceived a great darkness lying upon a multitude of white flashes; on the starboard beam a few amazing stars drooped, dim and fitful, above an immense waste of broken seas, as if seen through a mad drift of smoke.

On the bridge a knot of men, indistinct and toiling, were making great efforts in the light of the wheelhouse windows that shone mistily on their heads and backs. Suddenly darkness closed upon one pane, then on another. The voices of the lost group reached him after the manner of men’s voices in a gale, in shreds and fragments of forlorn shouting snatched past the ear. All at once Jukes appeared at his side, yelling, with his head down.

“Watch — put in — wheelhouse shutters — glass — afraid — blow in.”

Jukes heard his commander upbraiding.

“This — come — anything — warning — call me.”

He tried to explain, with the uproar pressing on his lips.

“Light air — remained — bridge — sudden — north-east — could turn — thought — you — sure — hear.”

They had gained the shelter of the weather-cloth, and could converse with raised voices, as people quarrel.

“I got the hands along to cover up all the ventilators. Good job I had remained on deck. I didn’t think you would be asleep, and so . . . What did you say, sir? What?”



“Nothing,” cried Captain MacWhirr. “I said — all right.”

“By all the powers! We’ve got it this time,” observed Jukes in a howl.

“You haven’t altered her course?” inquired Captain MacWhirr, straining his voice.

“No, sir. Certainly not. Wind came out right ahead. And here comes the head sea.”

A plunge of the ship ended in a shock as if she had landed her forefoot upon something solid. After a moment of stillness a lofty flight of sprays drove hard with the wind upon their faces.

“Keep her at it as long as we can,” shouted Captain MacWhirr.

Before Jukes had squeezed the salt water out of his eyes all the stars had disappeared.

### III

Jukes was as ready a man as any half-dozen young mates that may be caught by casting a net upon the waters; and though he had been somewhat taken aback by the startling viciousness of the first squall, he had pulled himself together on the instant, had called out the hands and had rushed them along to secure such openings about the deck as had not been already battened down earlier in the evening. Shouting in his fresh, stentorian voice, "Jump, boys, and bear a hand!" he led in the work, telling himself the while that he had "just expected this."

But at the same time he was growing aware that this was rather more than he had expected. From the first stir of the air felt on his cheek the gale seemed to take upon itself the accumulated impetus of an avalanche. Heavy sprays enveloped the Nan-Shan from stem to stern, and instantly in the midst of her regular rolling she began to jerk and plunge as though she had gone mad with fright.

Jukes thought, "This is no joke." While he was exchanging explanatory yells with his captain, a sudden lowering of the darkness came upon the night, falling before their vision like something palpable. It was as if the masked lights of the world had been turned down. Jukes was uncritically glad to have his captain at hand. It relieved him as though that man had, by simply coming on deck, taken most of the gale's weight upon his shoulders. Such is the prestige, the privilege, and the burden of command.

Captain MacWhirr could expect no relief of that sort from any one on earth. Such is the loneliness of command. He was trying to see, with that watchful manner of a seaman who stares into the wind's eye as if into the eye of an adversary, to penetrate the hidden intention and guess the aim and force of the thrust. The strong wind swept at him out of a vast obscurity; he felt under his feet the uneasiness of his ship, and he could not even discern the shadow of her shape. He wished it were not so; and very still he waited, feeling stricken by a blind man's helplessness.

To be silent was natural to him, dark or shine. Jukes, at his elbow, made himself heard yelling cheerily in the gusts, "We must have got the worst of it at once, sir." A faint burst of lightning quivered all round, as if flashed into a cavern — into a black and secret chamber of the sea, with a floor of foaming crests.

It unveiled for a sinister, fluttering moment a ragged mass of clouds hanging low, the lurch of the long outlines of the ship, the black figures of men caught on the bridge, heads forward, as if petrified in the act of butting. The darkness palpitated down upon all this, and then the real thing came at last.

It was something formidable and swift, like the sudden smashing of a vial of wrath. It seemed to explode all round the ship with an overpowering concussion and a rush of great waters, as if an immense dam had been blown up to windward. In an instant the men lost touch of each other. This is the disintegrating power of a great wind: it isolates one from one's kind. An earthquake, a landslip, an avalanche, overtake a man incidentally, as it were — without passion. A furious gale attacks him like a personal enemy, tries to grasp his limbs, fastens upon his mind, seeks to rout his very spirit out of him.

Jukes was driven away from his commander. He fancied himself whirled a great distance through the air. Everything disappeared — even, for a moment, his power of thinking; but his hand had found one of the rail-stanchions. His distress was by no means alleviated by an inclination to disbelieve the reality of this experience. Though young, he had seen some bad weather, and had never doubted his ability to imagine the worst; but this was so much beyond his powers of fancy that it appeared incompatible with the existence of any ship whatever. He would have been incredulous about himself in the same way, perhaps, had he not been so harassed by the necessity of exerting a wrestling effort against a force trying to tear him away from his hold. Moreover, the conviction of not being utterly destroyed returned to him through the sensations of being half-drowned, bestially shaken, and partly choked.

It seemed to him he remained there precariously alone with the stanchion for a long, long time. The rain poured on him, flowed, drove in sheets. He breathed in gasps; and sometimes the water he swallowed was fresh and sometimes it was salt. For the most part he kept his eyes shut tight, as if suspecting his sight might be destroyed in the immense flurry of the elements. When he ventured to blink hastily, he derived some moral support from the green gleam of the starboard light shining feebly upon the flight of rain and sprays. He was actually looking at it when its ray fell upon the uprearing sea which put it out. He saw the head of the wave topple over, adding the mite of its crash to the tremendous uproar raging around him,

and almost at the same instant the stanchion was wrenched away from his embracing arms. After a crushing thump on his back he found himself suddenly afloat and borne upwards. His first irresistible notion was that the whole China Sea had climbed on the bridge. Then, more sanely, he concluded himself gone overboard. All the time he was being tossed, flung, and rolled in great volumes of water, he kept on repeating mentally, with the utmost precipitation, the words: "My God! My God! My God! My God!"

All at once, in a revolt of misery and despair, he formed the crazy resolution to get out of that. And he began to thresh about with his arms and legs. But as soon as he commenced his wretched struggles he discovered that he had become somehow mixed up with a face, an oilskin coat, somebody's boots. He clawed ferociously all these things in turn, lost them, found them again, lost them once more, and finally was himself caught in the firm clasp of a pair of stout arms. He returned the embrace closely round a thick solid body. He had found his captain.

They tumbled over and over, tightening their hug. Suddenly the water let them down with a brutal bang; and, stranded against the side of the wheelhouse, out of breath and bruised, they were left to stagger up in the wind and hold on where they could.

Jukes came out of it rather horrified, as though he had escaped some unparalleled outrage directed at his feelings. It weakened his faith in himself. He started shouting aimlessly to the man he could feel near him in that fiendish blackness, "Is it you, sir? Is it you, sir?" till his temples seemed ready to burst. And he heard in answer a voice, as if crying far away, as if screaming to him fretfully from a very great distance, the one word "Yes!" Other seas swept again over the bridge. He received them defencelessly right over his bare head, with both his hands engaged in holding.

The motion of the ship was extravagant. Her lurches had an appalling helplessness: she pitched as if taking a header into a void, and seemed to find a wall to hit every time. When she rolled she fell on her side headlong, and she would be righted back by such a demolishing blow that Jukes felt her reeling as a clubbed man reels before he collapses. The gale howled and scuffled about gigantically in the darkness, as though the entire world were one black gully. At certain moments the air streamed against the ship as if sucked through a tunnel with a concentrated solid force of impact that seemed to lift her clean out of the water and keep her up for an instant with

only a quiver running through her from end to end. And then she would begin her tumbling again as if dropped back into a boiling cauldron. Jukes tried hard to compose his mind and judge things coolly.

The sea, flattened down in the heavier gusts, would uprise and overwhelm both ends of the Nan-Shan in snowy rushes of foam, expanding wide, beyond both rails, into the night. And on this dazzling sheet, spread under the blackness of the clouds and emitting a bluish glow, Captain MacWhirr could catch a desolate glimpse of a few tiny specks black as ebony, the tops of the hatches, the battened companions, the heads of the covered winches, the foot of a mast. This was all he could see of his ship. Her middle structure, covered by the bridge which bore him, his mate, the closed wheelhouse where a man was steering shut up with the fear of being swept overboard together with the whole thing in one great crash — her middle structure was like a half-tide rock awash upon a coast. It was like an outlying rock with the water boiling up, streaming over, pouring off, beating round — like a rock in the surf to which shipwrecked people cling before they let go — only it rose, it sank, it rolled continuously, without respite and rest, like a rock that should have miraculously struck adrift from a coast and gone wallowing upon the sea.

The Nan-Shan was being looted by the storm with a senseless, destructive fury: trysails torn out of the extra gaskets, double-lashed awnings blown away, bridge swept clean, weather-cloths burst, rails twisted, light-screens smashed — and two of the boats had gone already. They had gone unheard and unseen, melting, as it were, in the shock and smother of the wave. It was only later, when upon the white flash of another high sea hurling itself amidships, Jukes had a vision of two pairs of davits leaping black and empty out of the solid blackness, with one overhauled fall flying and an iron-bound block capering in the air, that he became aware of what had happened within about three yards of his back.

He poked his head forward, groping for the ear of his commander. His lips touched it — big, fleshy, very wet. He cried in an agitated tone, “Our boats are going now, sir.”

And again he heard that voice, forced and ringing feebly, but with a penetrating effect of quietness in the enormous discord of noises, as if sent out from some remote spot of peace beyond the black wastes of the gale; again he heard a man’s voice — the frail and indomitable sound that can be made to carry an infinity of thought, resolution and purpose, that shall be

pronouncing confident words on the last day, when heavens fall, and justice is done — again he heard it, and it was crying to him, as if from very, very far — "All right."

He thought he had not managed to make himself understood. "Our boats — I say boats — the boats, sir! Two gone!"

The same voice, within a foot of him and yet so remote, yelled sensibly, "Can't be helped."

Captain MacWhirr had never turned his face, but Jukes caught some more words on the wind.

"What can — expect — when hammering through — such — Bound to leave — something behind — stands to reason."

Watchfully Jukes listened for more. No more came. This was all Captain MacWhirr had to say; and Jukes could picture to himself rather than see the broad squat back before him. An impenetrable obscurity pressed down upon the ghostly glimmers of the sea. A dull conviction seized upon Jukes that there was nothing to be done.

If the steering-gear did not give way, if the immense volumes of water did not burst the deck in or smash one of the hatches, if the engines did not give up, if way could be kept on the ship against this terrific wind, and she did not bury herself in one of these awful seas, of whose white crests alone, topping high above her bows, he could now and then get a sickening glimpse — then there was a chance of her coming out of it. Something within him seemed to turn over, bringing uppermost the feeling that the Nan-Shan was lost.

"She's done for," he said to himself, with a surprising mental agitation, as though he had discovered an unexpected meaning in this thought. One of these things was bound to happen. Nothing could be prevented now, and nothing could be remedied. The men on board did not count, and the ship could not last. This weather was too impossible.

Jukes felt an arm thrown heavily over his shoulders; and to this overture he responded with great intelligence by catching hold of his captain round the waist.

They stood clasped thus in the blind night, bracing each other against the wind, cheek to cheek and lip to ear, in the manner of two hulks lashed stem to stern together.

And Jukes heard the voice of his commander hardly any louder than before, but nearer, as though, starting to march athwart the prodigious rush

of the hurricane, it had approached him, bearing that strange effect of quietness like the serene glow of a halo.

“D’ye know where the hands got to?” it asked, vigorous and evanescent at the same time, overcoming the strength of the wind, and swept away from Jukes instantly.

Jukes didn’t know. They were all on the bridge when the real force of the hurricane struck the ship. He had no idea where they had crawled to. Under the circumstances they were nowhere, for all the use that could be made of them. Somehow the Captain’s wish to know distressed Jukes.

“Want the hands, sir?” he cried, apprehensively.

“Ought to know,” asserted Captain MacWhirr. “Hold hard.”

They held hard. An outburst of unchained fury, a vicious rush of the wind absolutely steadied the ship; she rocked only, quick and light like a child’s cradle, for a terrific moment of suspense, while the whole atmosphere, as it seemed, streamed furiously past her, roaring away from the tenebrous earth.

It suffocated them, and with eyes shut they tightened their grasp. What from the magnitude of the shock might have been a column of water running upright in the dark, butted against the ship, broke short, and fell on her bridge, crushingly, from on high, with a dead burying weight.

A flying fragment of that collapse, a mere splash, enveloped them in one swirl from their feet over their heads, filling violently their ears, mouths and nostrils with salt water. It knocked out their legs, wrenched in haste at their arms, seethed away swiftly under their chins; and opening their eyes, they saw the piled-up masses of foam dashing to and fro amongst what looked like the fragments of a ship. She had given way as if driven straight in. Their panting hearts yielded, too, before the tremendous blow; and all at once she sprang up again to her desperate plunging, as if trying to scramble out from under the ruins.

The seas in the dark seemed to rush from all sides to keep her back where she might perish. There was hate in the way she was handled, and a ferocity in the blows that fell. She was like a living creature thrown to the rage of a mob: hustled terribly, struck at, borne up, flung down, leaped upon. Captain MacWhirr and Jukes kept hold of each other, deafened by the noise, gagged by the wind; and the great physical tumult beating about their bodies, brought, like an unbridled display of passion, a profound trouble to their souls. One of those wild and appalling shrieks that are heard at times

passing mysteriously overhead in the steady roar of a hurricane, swooped, as if borne on wings, upon the ship, and Jukes tried to outscreech it.

“Will she live through this?”

The cry was wrenched out of his breast. It was as unintentional as the birth of a thought in the head, and he heard nothing of it himself. It all became extinct at once — thought, intention, effort — and of his cry the inaudible vibration added to the tempest waves of the air.

He expected nothing from it. Nothing at all. For indeed what answer could be made? But after a while he heard with amazement the frail and resisting voice in his ear, the dwarf sound, unconquered in the giant tumult.

“She may!”

It was a dull yell, more difficult to seize than a whisper. And presently the voice returned again, half submerged in the vast crashes, like a ship battling against the waves of an ocean.

“Let’s hope so!” it cried — small, lonely and unmoved, a stranger to the visions of hope or fear; and it flickered into disconnected words: “Ship. . . . This. . . . Never — Anyhow . . . for the best.” Jukes gave it up.

Then, as if it had come suddenly upon the one thing fit to withstand the power of a storm, it seemed to gain force and firmness for the last broken shouts:

“Keep on hammering . . . builders . . . good men. . . . And chance it . . . engines. . . . Rout . . . good man.”

Captain MacWhirr removed his arm from Jukes’ shoulders, and thereby ceased to exist for his mate, so dark it was; Jukes, after a tense stiffening of every muscle, would let himself go limp all over. The gnawing of profound discomfort existed side by side with an incredible disposition to somnolence, as though he had been buffeted and worried into drowsiness. The wind would get hold of his head and try to shake it off his shoulders; his clothes, full of water, were as heavy as lead, cold and dripping like an armour of melting ice: he shivered — it lasted a long time; and with his hands closed hard on his hold, he was letting himself sink slowly into the depths of bodily misery. His mind became concentrated upon himself in an aimless, idle way, and when something pushed lightly at the back of his knees he nearly, as the saying is, jumped out of his skin.

In the start forward he bumped the back of Captain MacWhirr, who didn’t move; and then a hand gripped his thigh. A lull had come, a menacing lull of the wind, the holding of a stormy breath — and he felt



himself pawed all over. It was the boatswain. Jukes recognized these hands, so thick and enormous that they seemed to belong to some new species of man.

The boatswain had arrived on the bridge, crawling on all fours against the wind, and had found the chief mate's legs with the top of his head. Immediately he crouched and began to explore Jukes' person upwards with prudent, apologetic touches, as became an inferior.

He was an ill-favoured, undersized, gruff sailor of fifty, coarsely hairy, short-legged, long-armed, resembling an elderly ape. His strength was immense; and in his great lumpy paws, bulging like brown boxing-gloves on the end of furry forearms, the heaviest objects were handled like playthings. Apart from the grizzled pelt on his chest, the menacing demeanour and the hoarse voice, he had none of the classical attributes of his rating. His good nature almost amounted to imbecility: the men did what they liked with him, and he had not an ounce of initiative in his character, which was easy-going and talkative. For these reasons Jukes disliked him; but Captain MacWhirr, to Jukes' scornful disgust, seemed to regard him as a first-rate petty officer.

He pulled himself up by Jukes' coat, taking that liberty with the greatest moderation, and only so far as it was forced upon him by the hurricane.

"What is it, boss'n, what is it?" yelled Jukes, impatiently. What could that fraud of a boss'n want on the bridge? The typhoon had got on Jukes' nerves. The husky bellowings of the other, though unintelligible, seemed to suggest a state of lively satisfaction.

There could be no mistake. The old fool was pleased with something.

The boatswain's other hand had found some other body, for in a changed tone he began to inquire: "Is it you, sir? Is it you, sir?" The wind strangled his howls.

"Yes!" cried Captain MacWhirr.

## IV

All that the boatswain, out of a superabundance of yells, could make clear to Captain MacWhirr was the bizarre intelligence that "All them Chinamen in the fore 'tween deck have fetched away, sir."

Jukes to leeward could hear these two shouting within six inches of his face, as you may hear on a still night half a mile away two men conversing across a field. He heard Captain MacWhirr's exasperated "What? What?" and the strained pitch of the other's hoarseness. "In a lump . . . seen them myself. . . . Awful sight, sir . . . thought . . . tell you."

Jukes remained indifferent, as if rendered irresponsible by the force of the hurricane, which made the very thought of action utterly vain. Besides, being very young, he had found the occupation of keeping his heart completely steeled against the worst so engrossing that he had come to feel an overpowering dislike towards any other form of activity whatever. He was not scared; he knew this because, firmly believing he would never see another sunrise, he remained calm in that belief.

These are the moments of do-nothing heroics to which even good men surrender at times. Many officers of ships can no doubt recall a case in their experience when just such a trance of confounded stoicism would come all at once over a whole ship's company. Jukes, however, had no wide experience of men or storms. He conceived himself to be calm — inexorably calm; but as a matter of fact he was daunted; not abjectly, but only so far as a decent man may, without becoming loathsome to himself.

It was rather like a forced-on numbness of spirit. The long, long stress of a gale does it; the suspense of the interminably culminating catastrophe; and there is a bodily fatigue in the mere holding on to existence within the excessive tumult; a searching and insidious fatigue that penetrates deep into a man's breast to cast down and sadden his heart, which is incorrigible, and of all the gifts of the earth — even before life itself — aspires to peace.

Jukes was benumbed much more than he supposed. He held on — very wet, very cold, stiff in every limb; and in a momentary hallucination of swift visions (it is said that a drowning man thus reviews all his life) he beheld all sorts of memories altogether unconnected with his present situation. He remembered his father, for instance: a worthy business man, who at an unfortunate crisis in his affairs went quietly to bed and died

forthwith in a state of resignation. Jukes did not recall these circumstances, of course, but remaining otherwise unconcerned he seemed to see distinctly the poor man's face; a certain game of nap played when quite a boy in Table Bay on board a ship, since lost with all hands; the thick eyebrows of his first skipper; and without any emotion, as he might years ago have walked listlessly into her room and found her sitting there with a book, he remembered his mother — dead, too, now — the resolute woman, left badly off, who had been very firm in his bringing up.

It could not have lasted more than a second, perhaps not so much. A heavy arm had fallen about his shoulders; Captain MacWhirr's voice was speaking his name into his ear.

"Jukes! Jukes!"

He detected the tone of deep concern. The wind had thrown its weight on the ship, trying to pin her down amongst the seas. They made a clean breach over her, as over a deep-swimming log; and the gathered weight of crashes menaced monstrosly from afar. The breakers flung out of the night with a ghostly light on their crests — the light of sea-foam that in a ferocious, boiling-up pale flash showed upon the slender body of the ship the toppling rush, the downfall, and the seething mad scurry of each wave. Never for a moment could she shake herself clear of the water; Jukes, rigid, perceived in her motion the ominous sign of haphazard floundering. She was no longer struggling intelligently. It was the beginning of the end; and the note of busy concern in Captain MacWhirr's voice sickened him like an exhibition of blind and pernicious folly.

The spell of the storm had fallen upon Jukes. He was penetrated by it, absorbed by it; he was rooted in it with a rigour of dumb attention. Captain MacWhirr persisted in his cries, but the wind got between them like a solid wedge. He hung round Jukes' neck as heavy as a millstone, and suddenly the sides of their heads knocked together.

"Jukes! Mr. Jukes, I say!"

He had to answer that voice that would not be silenced. He answered in the customary manner: ". . . Yes, sir."

And directly, his heart, corrupted by the storm that breeds a craving for peace, rebelled against the tyranny of training and command.

Captain MacWhirr had his mate's head fixed firm in the crook of his elbow, and pressed it to his yelling lips mysteriously. Sometimes Jukes would break in, admonishing hastily: "Look out, sir!" or Captain MacWhirr

would bawl an earnest exhortation to "Hold hard, there!" and the whole black universe seemed to reel together with the ship. They paused. She floated yet. And Captain MacWhirr would resume, his shouts. ". . . . Says . . . whole lot . . . fetched away. . . . Ought to see . . . what's the matter."

Directly the full force of the hurricane had struck the ship, every part of her deck became untenable; and the sailors, dazed and dismayed, took shelter in the port alleyway under the bridge. It had a door aft, which they shut; it was very black, cold, and dismal. At each heavy fling of the ship they would groan all together in the dark, and tons of water could be heard scuttling about as if trying to get at them from above. The boatswain had been keeping up a gruff talk, but a more unreasonable lot of men, he said afterwards, he had never been with. They were snug enough there, out of harm's way, and not wanted to do anything, either; and yet they did nothing but grumble and complain peevishly like so many sick kids. Finally, one of them said that if there had been at least some light to see each other's noses by, it wouldn't be so bad. It was making him crazy, he declared, to lie there in the dark waiting for the blamed hooker to sink.

"Why don't you step outside, then, and be done with it at once?" the boatswain turned on him.

This called up a shout of execration. The boatswain found himself overwhelmed with reproaches of all sorts. They seemed to take it ill that a lamp was not instantly created for them out of nothing. They would whine after a light to get drowned by — anyhow! And though the unreason of their revilings was patent — since no one could hope to reach the lamp-room, which was forward — he became greatly distressed. He did not think it was decent of them to be nagging at him like this. He told them so, and was met by general contumely. He sought refuge, therefore, in an embittered silence. At the same time their grumbling and sighing and muttering worried him greatly, but by-and-by it occurred to him that there were six globe lamps hung in the 'tween-deck, and that there could be no harm in depriving the coolies of one of them.

The Nan-Shan had an athwartship coal-bunker, which, being at times used as cargo space, communicated by an iron door with the fore 'tween-deck. It was empty then, and its manhole was the foremost one in the alleyway. The boatswain could get in, therefore, without coming out on deck at all; but to his great surprise he found he could induce no one to help

him in taking off the manhole cover. He groped for it all the same, but one of the crew lying in his way refused to budge.

“Why, I only want to get you that blamed light you are crying for,” he expostulated, almost pitifully.

Somebody told him to go and put his head in a bag. He regretted he could not recognize the voice, and that it was too dark to see, otherwise, as he said, he would have put a head on that son of a sea-cook, anyway, sink or swim. Nevertheless, he had made up his mind to show them he could get a light, if he were to die for it.

Through the violence of the ship’s rolling, every movement was dangerous. To be lying down seemed labour enough. He nearly broke his neck dropping into the bunker. He fell on his back, and was sent shooting helplessly from side to side in the dangerous company of a heavy iron bar — a coal-trimmer’s slice probably — left down there by somebody. This thing made him as nervous as though it had been a wild beast. He could not see it, the inside of the bunker coated with coal-dust being perfectly and impenetrably black; but he heard it sliding and clattering, and striking here and there, always in the neighbourhood of his head. It seemed to make an extraordinary noise, too — to give heavy thumps as though it had been as big as a bridge girder. This was remarkable enough for him to notice while he was flung from port to starboard and back again, and clawing desperately the smooth sides of the bunker in the endeavour to stop himself. The door into the ‘tween-deck not fitting quite true, he saw a thread of dim light at the bottom.

Being a sailor, and a still active man, he did not want much of a chance to regain his feet; and as luck would have it, in scrambling up he put his hand on the iron slice, picking it up as he rose. Otherwise he would have been afraid of the thing breaking his legs, or at least knocking him down again. At first he stood still. He felt unsafe in this darkness that seemed to make the ship’s motion unfamiliar, unforeseen, and difficult to counteract. He felt so much shaken for a moment that he dared not move for fear of “taking charge again.” He had no mind to get battered to pieces in that bunker.

He had struck his head twice; he was dazed a little. He seemed to hear yet so plainly the clatter and bangs of the iron slice flying about his ears that he tightened his grip to prove to himself he had it there safely in his hand. He was vaguely amazed at the plainness with which down there he could hear the gale raging. Its howls and shrieks seemed to take on, in the

emptiness of the bunker, something of the human character, of human rage and pain — being not vast but infinitely poignant. And there were, with every roll, thumps, too — profound, ponderous thumps, as if a bulky object of five-ton weight or so had got play in the hold. But there was no such thing in the cargo. Something on deck? Impossible. Or alongside? Couldn't be.

He thought all this quickly, clearly, competently, like a seaman, and in the end remained puzzled. This noise, though, came deadened from outside, together with the washing and pouring of water on deck above his head. Was it the wind? Must be. It made down there a row like the shouting of a big lot of crazed men. And he discovered in himself a desire for a light, too — if only to get drowned by — and a nervous anxiety to get out of that bunker as quickly as possible.

He pulled back the bolt: the heavy iron plate turned on its hinges; and it was as though he had opened the door to the sounds of the tempest. A gust of hoarse yelling met him: the air was still; and the rushing of water overhead was covered by a tumult of strangled, throaty shrieks that produced an effect of desperate confusion. He straddled his legs the whole width of the doorway and stretched his neck. And at first he perceived only what he had come to seek: six small yellow flames swinging violently on the great body of the dusk.

It was stayed like the gallery of a mine, with a row of stanchions in the middle, and cross-beams overhead, penetrating into the gloom ahead — indefinitely. And to port there loomed, like the caving in of one of the sides, a bulky mass with a slanting outline. The whole place, with the shadows and the shapes, moved all the time. The boatswain glared: the ship lurched to starboard, and a great howl came from that mass that had the slant of fallen earth.

Pieces of wood whizzed past. Planks, he thought, inexpressibly startled, and flinging back his head. At his feet a man went sliding over, open-eyed, on his back, straining with uplifted arms for nothing: and another came bounding like a detached stone with his head between his legs and his hands clenched. His pigtail whipped in the air; he made a grab at the boatswain's legs, and from his opened hand a bright white disc rolled against the boatswain's foot. He recognized a silver dollar, and yelled at it with astonishment. With a precipitated sound of trampling and shuffling of bare feet, and with guttural cries, the mound of writhing bodies piled up to port

detached itself from the ship's side and sliding, inert and struggling, shifted to starboard, with a dull, brutal thump. The cries ceased. The boatswain heard a long moan through the roar and whistling of the wind; he saw an inextricable confusion of heads and shoulders, naked soles kicking upwards, fists raised, tumbling backs, legs, pigtails, faces.

"Good Lord!" he cried, horrified, and banged to the iron door upon this vision.

This was what he had come on the bridge to tell. He could not keep it to himself; and on board ship there is only one man to whom it is worth while to unburden yourself. On his passage back the hands in the alleyway swore at him for a fool. Why didn't he bring that lamp? What the devil did the coolies matter to anybody? And when he came out, the extremity of the ship made what went on inside of her appear of little moment.

At first he thought he had left the alleyway in the very moment of her sinking. The bridge ladders had been washed away, but an enormous sea filling the after-deck floated him up. After that he had to lie on his stomach for some time, holding to a ring-bolt, getting his breath now and then, and swallowing salt water. He struggled farther on his hands and knees, too frightened and distracted to turn back. In this way he reached the after-part of the wheelhouse. In that comparatively sheltered spot he found the second mate.

The boatswain was pleasantly surprised — his impression being that everybody on deck must have been washed away a long time ago. He asked eagerly where the Captain was.

The second mate was lying low, like a malignant little animal under a hedge.

"Captain? Gone overboard, after getting us into this mess." The mate, too, for all he knew or cared. Another fool. Didn't matter. Everybody was going by-and-by.

The boatswain crawled out again into the strength of the wind; not because he much expected to find anybody, he said, but just to get away from "that man." He crawled out as outcasts go to face an inclement world. Hence his great joy at finding Jukes and the Captain. But what was going on in the 'tween-deck was to him a minor matter by that time. Besides, it was difficult to make yourself heard. But he managed to convey the idea that the Chinaman had broken adrift together with their boxes, and that he had come up on purpose to report this. As to the hands, they were all right.

Then, appeased, he subsided on the deck in a sitting posture, hugging with his arms and legs the stand of the engine-room telegraph — an iron casting as thick as a post. When that went, why, he expected he would go, too. He gave no more thought to the coolies.

Captain MacWhirr had made Jukes understand that he wanted him to go down below — to see.

“What am I to do then, sir?” And the trembling of his whole wet body caused Jukes’ voice to sound like bleating.

“See first . . . Boss’n . . . says . . . adrift.”

“That boss’n is a confounded fool,” howled Jukes, shakily.

The absurdity of the demand made upon him revolted Jukes. He was as unwilling to go as if the moment he had left the deck the ship were sure to sink.

“I must know . . . can’t leave. . . .”

“They’ll settle, sir.”

“Fight . . . boss’n says they fight. . . . Why? Can’t have . . . fighting . . . board ship. . . . Much rather keep you here . . . case . . . I should . . . washed overboard myself. . . . Stop it . . . some way. You see and tell me . . . through engine-room tube. Don’t want you . . . come up here . . . too often. Dangerous . . . moving about . . . deck.”

Jukes, held with his head in chancery, had to listen to what seemed horrible suggestions.

“Don’t want . . . you get lost . . . so long . . . ship isn’t. . . . Rout . . . Good man . . . Ship . . . may . . . through this . . . all right yet.”

All at once Jukes understood he would have to go.

“Do you think she may?” he screamed.

But the wind devoured the reply, out of which Jukes heard only the one word, pronounced with great energy “. . . Always. . . .”

Captain MacWhirr released Jukes, and bending over the boatswain, yelled, “Get back with the mate.” Jukes only knew that the arm was gone off his shoulders. He was dismissed with his orders — to do what? He was exasperated into letting go his hold carelessly, and on the instant was blown away. It seemed to him that nothing could stop him from being blown right over the stern. He flung himself down hastily, and the boatswain, who was following, fell on him.

“Don’t you get up yet, sir,” cried the boatswain. “No hurry!”



A sea swept over. Jukes understood the boatswain to splutter that the bridge ladders were gone. "I'll lower you down, sir, by your hands," he screamed. He shouted also something about the smoke-stack being as likely to go overboard as not. Jukes thought it very possible, and imagined the fires out, the ship helpless. . . . The boatswain by his side kept on yelling. "What? What is it?" Jukes cried distressfully; and the other repeated, "What would my old woman say if she saw me now?"

In the alleyway, where a lot of water had got in and splashed in the dark, the men were still as death, till Jukes stumbled against one of them and cursed him savagely for being in the way. Two or three voices then asked, eager and weak, "Any chance for us, sir?"

"What's the matter with you fools?" he said brutally. He felt as though he could throw himself down amongst them and never move any more. But they seemed cheered; and in the midst of obsequious warnings, "Look out! Mind that manhole lid, sir," they lowered him into the bunker. The boatswain tumbled down after him, and as soon as he had picked himself up he remarked, "She would say, 'Serve you right, you old fool, for going to sea.'"

The boatswain had some means, and made a point of alluding to them frequently. His wife — a fat woman — and two grown-up daughters kept a greengrocer's shop in the East-end of London.

In the dark, Jukes, unsteady on his legs, listened to a faint thunderous patter. A deadened screaming went on steadily at his elbow, as it were; and from above the louder tumult of the storm descended upon these near sounds. His head swam. To him, too, in that bunker, the motion of the ship seemed novel and menacing, sapping his resolution as though he had never been afloat before.

He had half a mind to scramble out again; but the remembrance of Captain MacWhirr's voice made this impossible. His orders were to go and see. What was the good of it, he wanted to know. Enraged, he told himself he would see — of course. But the boatswain, staggering clumsily, warned him to be careful how he opened that door; there was a blamed fight going on. And Jukes, as if in great bodily pain, desired irritably to know what the devil they were fighting for.

"Dollars! Dollars, sir. All their rotten chests got burst open. Blamed money skipping all over the place, and they are tumbling after it head over heels — tearing and biting like anything. A regular little hell in there."

Jukes convulsively opened the door. The short boatswain peered under his arm.

One of the lamps had gone out, broken perhaps. Rancorous, guttural cries burst out loudly on their ears, and a strange panting sound, the working of all these straining breasts. A hard blow hit the side of the ship: water fell above with a stunning shock, and in the forefront of the gloom, where the air was reddish and thick, Jukes saw a head bang the deck violently, two thick calves waving on high, muscular arms twined round a naked body, a yellow-face, open-mouthed and with a set wild stare, look up and slide away. An empty chest clattered turning over; a man fell head first with a jump, as if lifted by a kick; and farther off, indistinct, others streamed like a mass of rolling stones down a bank, thumping the deck with their feet and flourishing their arms wildly. The hatchway ladder was loaded with coolies swarming on it like bees on a branch. They hung on the steps in a crawling, stirring cluster, beating madly with their fists the underside of the battened hatch, and the headlong rush of the water above was heard in the intervals of their yelling. The ship heeled over more, and they began to drop off: first one, then two, then all the rest went away together, falling straight off with a great cry.

Jukes was confounded. The boatswain, with gruff anxiety, begged him, "Don't you go in there, sir."

The whole place seemed to twist upon itself, jumping incessantly the while; and when the ship rose to a sea Jukes fancied that all these men would be shot upon him in a body. He backed out, swung the door to, and with trembling hands pushed at the bolt. . . .

As soon as his mate had gone Captain MacWhirr, left alone on the bridge, sidled and staggered as far as the wheelhouse. Its door being hinged forward, he had to fight the gale for admittance, and when at last he managed to enter, it was with an instantaneous clatter and a bang, as though he had been fired through the wood. He stood within, holding on to the handle.

The steering-gear leaked steam, and in the confined space the glass of the binnacle made a shiny oval of light in a thin white fog. The wind howled, hummed, whistled, with sudden booming gusts that rattled the doors and shutters in the vicious patter of sprays. Two coils of lead-line and a small canvas bag hung on a long lanyard, swung wide off, and came back clinging to the bulkheads. The gratings underfoot were nearly afloat; with

every sweeping blow of a sea, water squirted violently through the cracks all round the door, and the man at the helm had flung down his cap, his coat, and stood propped against the gear-casing in a striped cotton shirt open on his breast. The little brass wheel in his hands had the appearance of a bright and fragile toy. The cords of his neck stood hard and lean, a dark patch lay in the hollow of his throat, and his face was still and sunken as in death.

Captain MacWhirr wiped his eyes. The sea that had nearly taken him overboard had, to his great annoyance, washed his sou'-wester hat off his bald head. The fluffy, fair hair, soaked and darkened, resembled a mean skein of cotton threads festooned round his bare skull. His face, glistening with sea-water, had been made crimson with the wind, with the sting of sprays. He looked as though he had come off sweating from before a furnace.

"You here?" he muttered, heavily.

The second mate had found his way into the wheelhouse some time before. He had fixed himself in a corner with his knees up, a fist pressed against each temple; and this attitude suggested rage, sorrow, resignation, surrender, with a sort of concentrated unforgiveness. He said mournfully and defiantly, "Well, it's my watch below now: ain't it?"

The steam gear clattered, stopped, clattered again; and the helmsman's eyeballs seemed to project out of a hungry face as if the compass card behind the binnacle glass had been meat. God knows how long he had been left there to steer, as if forgotten by all his shipmates. The bells had not been struck; there had been no reliefs; the ship's routine had gone down wind; but he was trying to keep her head north-north-east. The rudder might have been gone for all he knew, the fires out, the engines broken down, the ship ready to roll over like a corpse. He was anxious not to get muddled and lose control of her head, because the compass-card swung far both ways, wriggling on the pivot, and sometimes seemed to whirl right round. He suffered from mental stress. He was horribly afraid, also, of the wheelhouse going. Mountains of water kept on tumbling against it. When the ship took one of her desperate dives the corners of his lips twitched.

Captain MacWhirr looked up at the wheelhouse clock. Screwed to the bulk-head, it had a white face on which the black hands appeared to stand quite still. It was half-past one in the morning.

"Another day," he muttered to himself.

The second mate heard him, and lifting his head as one grieving amongst ruins, "You won't see it break," he exclaimed. His wrists and his knees could be seen to shake violently. "No, by God! You won't. . . ."

He took his face again between his fists.

The body of the helmsman had moved slightly, but his head didn't budge on his neck, — like a stone head fixed to look one way from a column. During a roll that all but took his booted legs from under him, and in the very stagger to save himself, Captain MacWhirr said austere, "Don't you pay any attention to what that man says." And then, with an indefinable change of tone, very grave, he added, "He isn't on duty."

The sailor said nothing.

The hurricane boomed, shaking the little place, which seemed air-tight; and the light of the binnacle flickered all the time.

"You haven't been relieved," Captain MacWhirr went on, looking down. "I want you to stick to the helm, though, as long as you can. You've got the hang of her. Another man coming here might make a mess of it. Wouldn't do. No child's play. And the hands are probably busy with a job down below. . . . Think you can?"

The steering-gear leaped into an abrupt short clatter, stopped smouldering like an ember; and the still man, with a motionless gaze, burst out, as if all the passion in him had gone into his lips: "By Heavens, sir! I can steer for ever if nobody talks to me."

"Oh! aye! All right. . . ." The Captain lifted his eyes for the first time to the man, ". . . Hackett."

And he seemed to dismiss this matter from his mind. He stooped to the engine-room speaking-tube, blew in, and bent his head. Mr. Rout below answered, and at once Captain MacWhirr put his lips to the mouthpiece.

With the uproar of the gale around him he applied alternately his lips and his ear, and the engineer's voice mounted to him, harsh and as if out of the heat of an engagement. One of the stokers was disabled, the others had given in, the second engineer and the donkey-man were firing-up. The third engineer was standing by the steam-valve. The engines were being tended by hand. How was it above?

"Bad enough. It mostly rests with you," said Captain MacWhirr. Was the mate down there yet? No? Well, he would be presently. Would Mr. Rout let him talk through the speaking-tube? — through the deck speaking-tube, because he — the Captain — was going out again on the bridge directly.

There was some trouble amongst the Chinamen. They were fighting, it seemed. Couldn't allow fighting anyhow. . . .

Mr. Rout had gone away, and Captain MacWhirr could feel against his ear the pulsation of the engines, like the beat of the ship's heart. Mr. Rout's voice down there shouted something distantly. The ship pitched headlong, the pulsation leaped with a hissing tumult, and stopped dead. Captain MacWhirr's face was impassive, and his eyes were fixed aimlessly on the crouching shape of the second mate. Again Mr. Rout's voice cried out in the depths, and the pulsating beats recommenced, with slow strokes — growing swifter.

Mr. Rout had returned to the tube. "It don't matter much what they do," he said, hastily; and then, with irritation, "She takes these dives as if she never meant to come up again."

"Awful sea," said the Captain's voice from above.

"Don't let me drive her under," barked Solomon Rout up the pipe.

"Dark and rain. Can't see what's coming," uttered the voice. "Must — keep — her — moving — enough to steer — and chance it," it went on to state distinctly.

"I am doing as much as I dare."

"We are — getting — smashed up — a good deal up here," proceeded the voice mildly. "Doing — fairly well — though. Of course, if the wheelhouse should go. . . ."

Mr. Rout, bending an attentive ear, muttered peevishly something under his breath.

But the deliberate voice up there became animated to ask: "Jukes turned up yet?" Then, after a short wait, "I wish he would bear a hand. I want him to be done and come up here in case of anything. To look after the ship. I am all alone. The second mate's lost. . . ."

"What?" shouted Mr. Rout into the engine-room, taking his head away. Then up the tube he cried, "Gone overboard?" and clapped his ear to.

"Lost his nerve," the voice from above continued in a matter-of-fact tone. "Damned awkward circumstance."

Mr. Rout, listening with bowed neck, opened his eyes wide at this. However, he heard something like the sounds of a scuffle and broken exclamations coming down to him. He strained his hearing; and all the time Beale, the third engineer, with his arms uplifted, held between the palms of

his hands the rim of a little black wheel projecting at the side of a big copper pipe.

He seemed to be poising it above his head, as though it were a correct attitude in some sort of game.

To steady himself, he pressed his shoulder against the white bulkhead, one knee bent, and a sweat-rag tucked in his belt hanging on his hip. His smooth cheek was begrimed and flushed, and the coal dust on his eyelids, like the black pencilling of a make-up, enhanced the liquid brilliance of the whites, giving to his youthful face something of a feminine, exotic and fascinating aspect. When the ship pitched he would with hasty movements of his hands screw hard at the little wheel.

“Gone crazy,” began the Captain’s voice suddenly in the tube. “Rushed at me. . . . Just now. Had to knock him down. . . . This minute. You heard, Mr. Rout?”

“The devil!” muttered Mr. Rout. “Look out, Beale!”

His shout rang out like the blast of a warning trumpet, between the iron walls of the engine-room. Painted white, they rose high into the dusk of the skylight, sloping like a roof; and the whole lofty space resembled the interior of a monument, divided by floors of iron grating, with lights flickering at different levels, and a mass of gloom lingering in the middle, within the columnar stir of machinery under the motionless swelling of the cylinders. A loud and wild resonance, made up of all the noises of the hurricane, dwelt in the still warmth of the air. There was in it the smell of hot metal, of oil, and a slight mist of steam. The blows of the sea seemed to traverse it in an unringing, stunning shock, from side to side.

Gleams, like pale long flames, trembled upon the polish of metal; from the flooring below the enormous crank-heads emerged in their turns with a flash of brass and steel — going over; while the connecting-rods, big-jointed, like skeleton limbs, seemed to thrust them down and pull them up again with an irresistible precision. And deep in the half-light other rods dodged deliberately to and fro, crossheads nodded, discs of metal rubbed smoothly against each other, slow and gentle, in a commingling of shadows and gleams.

Sometimes all those powerful and unerring movements would slow down simultaneously, as if they had been the functions of a living organism, stricken suddenly by the blight of languor; and Mr. Rout’s eyes would blaze darker in his long sallow face. He was fighting this fight in a pair of carpet

slippers. A short shiny jacket barely covered his loins, and his white wrists protruded far out of the tight sleeves, as though the emergency had added to his stature, had lengthened his limbs, augmented his pallor, hollowed his eyes.

He moved, climbing high up, disappearing low down, with a restless, purposeful industry, and when he stood still, holding the guard-rail in front of the starting-gear, he would keep glancing to the right at the steam-gauge, at the water-gauge, fixed upon the white wall in the light of a swaying lamp. The mouths of two speaking-tubes gaped stupidly at his elbow, and the dial of the engine-room telegraph resembled a clock of large diameter, bearing on its face curt words instead of figures. The grouped letters stood out heavily black, around the pivot-head of the indicator, emphatically symbolic of loud exclamations: AHEAD, ASTERN, SLOW, Half, STAND BY; and the fat black hand pointed downwards to the word FULL, which, thus singled out, captured the eye as a sharp cry secures attention.

The wood-encased bulk of the low-pressure cylinder, frowning portly from above, emitted a faint wheeze at every thrust, and except for that low hiss the engines worked their steel limbs headlong or slow with a silent, determined smoothness. And all this, the white walls, the moving steel, the floor plates under Solomon Rout's feet, the floors of iron grating above his head, the dusk and the gleams, uprose and sank continuously, with one accord, upon the harsh wash of the waves against the ship's side. The whole loftiness of the place, booming hollow to the great voice of the wind, swayed at the top like a tree, would go over bodily, as if borne down this way and that by the tremendous blasts.

"You've got to hurry up," shouted Mr. Rout, as soon as he saw Jukes appear in the stokehold doorway.

Jukes' glance was wandering and tipsy; his red face was puffy, as though he had overslept himself. He had had an arduous road, and had travelled over it with immense vivacity, the agitation of his mind corresponding to the exertions of his body. He had rushed up out of the bunker, stumbling in the dark alleyway amongst a lot of bewildered men who, trod upon, asked "What's up, sir?" in awed mutters all round him; — down the stokehold ladder, missing many iron rungs in his hurry, down into a place deep as a well, black as Tophet, tipping over back and forth like a see-saw. The water in the bilges thundered at each roll, and lumps of coal skipped to and fro, from end to end, rattling like an avalanche of pebbles on a slope of iron.

Somebody in there moaned with pain, and somebody else could be seen crouching over what seemed the prone body of a dead man; a lusty voice blasphemed; and the glow under each fire-door was like a pool of flaming blood radiating quietly in a velvety blackness.

A gust of wind struck upon the nape of Jukes' neck and next moment he felt it streaming about his wet ankles. The stokehold ventilators hummed: in front of the six fire-doors two wild figures, stripped to the waist, staggered and stooped, wrestling with two shovels.

"Hallo! Plenty of draught now," yelled the second engineer at once, as though he had been all the time looking out for Jukes. The donkeyman, a dapper little chap with a dazzling fair skin and a tiny, gingery moustache, worked in a sort of mute transport. They were keeping a full head of steam, and a profound rumbling, as of an empty furniture van trotting over a bridge, made a sustained bass to all the other noises of the place.

"Blowing off all the time," went on yelling the second. With a sound as of a hundred scoured saucepans, the orifice of a ventilator spat upon his shoulder a sudden gush of salt water, and he volleyed a stream of curses upon all things on earth including his own soul, ripping and raving, and all the time attending to his business. With a sharp clash of metal the ardent pale glare of the fire opened upon his bullet head, showing his spluttering lips, his insolent face, and with another clang closed like the white-hot wink of an iron eye.

"Where's the blooming ship? Can you tell me? blast my eyes! Under water — or what? It's coming down here in tons. Are the condemned crows gone to Hades? Hey? Don't you know anything — you jolly sailor-man you . . . ?"

Jukes, after a bewildered moment, had been helped by a roll to dart through; and as soon as his eyes took in the comparative vastness, peace and brilliance of the engine-room, the ship, setting her stern heavily in the water, sent him charging head down upon Mr. Rout.

The chief's arm, long like a tentacle, and straightening as if worked by a spring, went out to meet him, and deflected his rush into a spin towards the speaking-tubes. At the same time Mr. Rout repeated earnestly:

"You've got to hurry up, whatever it is."

Jukes yelled "Are you there, sir?" and listened. Nothing. Suddenly the roar of the wind fell straight into his ear, but presently a small voice shoved aside the shouting hurricane quietly.



“You, Jukes? — Well?”

Jukes was ready to talk: it was only time that seemed to be wanting. It was easy enough to account for everything. He could perfectly imagine the coolies batted down in the reeking ‘tween-deck, lying sick and scared between the rows of chests. Then one of these chests — or perhaps several at once — breaking loose in a roll, knocking out others, sides splitting, lids flying open, and all these clumsy Chinamen rising up in a body to save their property. Afterwards every fling of the ship would hurl that tramping, yelling mob here and there, from side to side, in a whirl of smashed wood, torn clothing, rolling dollars. A struggle once started, they would be unable to stop themselves. Nothing could stop them now except main force. It was a disaster. He had seen it, and that was all he could say. Some of them must be dead, he believed. The rest would go on fighting. . . .

He sent up his words, tripping over each other, crowding the narrow tube. They mounted as if into a silence of an enlightened comprehension dwelling alone up there with a storm. And Jukes wanted to be dismissed from the face of that odious trouble intruding on the great need of the ship.

## V

He waited. Before his eyes the engines turned with slow labour, that in the moment of going off into a mad fling would stop dead at Mr. Rout's shout, "Look out, Beale!" They paused in an intelligent immobility, stilled in mid-stroke, a heavy crank arrested on the cant, as if conscious of danger and the passage of time. Then, with a "Now, then!" from the chief, and the sound of a breath expelled through clenched teeth, they would accomplish the interrupted revolution and begin another.

There was the prudent sagacity of wisdom and the deliberation of enormous strength in their movements. This was their work — this patient coaxing of a distracted ship over the fury of the waves and into the very eye of the wind. At times Mr. Rout's chin would sink on his breast, and he watched them with knitted eyebrows as if lost in thought.

The voice that kept the hurricane out of Jukes' ear began: "Take the hands with you . . .," and left off unexpectedly.

"What could I do with them, sir?"

A harsh, abrupt, imperious clang exploded suddenly. The three pairs of eyes flew up to the telegraph dial to see the hand jump from FULL to STOP, as if snatched by a devil. And then these three men in the engineroom had the intimate sensation of a check upon the ship, of a strange shrinking, as if she had gathered herself for a desperate leap.

"Stop her!" bellowed Mr. Rout.

Nobody — not even Captain MacWhirr, who alone on deck had caught sight of a white line of foam coming on at such a height that he couldn't believe his eyes — nobody was to know the steepness of that sea and the awful depth of the hollow the hurricane had scooped out behind the running wall of water.

It raced to meet the ship, and, with a pause, as of girding the loins, the Nan-Shan lifted her bows and leaped. The flames in all the lamps sank, darkening the engine-room. One went out. With a tearing crash and a swirling, raving tumult, tons of water fell upon the deck, as though the ship had darted under the foot of a cataract.

Down there they looked at each other, stunned.

"Swept from end to end, by God!" bawled Jukes.

She dipped into the hollow straight down, as if going over the edge of the world. The engine-room toppled forward menacingly, like the inside of a tower nodding in an earthquake. An awful racket, of iron things falling, came from the stokehold. She hung on this appalling slant long enough for Beale to drop on his hands and knees and begin to crawl as if he meant to fly on all fours out of the engine-room, and for Mr. Rout to turn his head slowly, rigid, cavernous, with the lower jaw dropping. Jukes had shut his eyes, and his face in a moment became hopelessly blank and gentle, like the face of a blind man.

At last she rose slowly, staggering, as if she had to lift a mountain with her bows.

Mr. Rout shut his mouth; Jukes blinked; and little Beale stood up hastily.

“Another one like this, and that’s the last of her,” cried the chief.

He and Jukes looked at each other, and the same thought came into their heads. The Captain! Everything must have been swept away. Steering-gear gone — ship like a log. All over directly.

“Rush!” ejaculated Mr. Rout thickly, glaring with enlarged, doubtful eyes at Jukes, who answered him by an irresolute glance.

The clang of the telegraph gong soothed them instantly. The black hand dropped in a flash from STOP to FULL.

“Now then, Beale!” cried Mr. Rout.

The steam hissed low. The piston-rods slid in and out. Jukes put his ear to the tube. The voice was ready for him. It said: “Pick up all the money. Bear a hand now. I’ll want you up here.” And that was all.

“Sir?” called up Jukes. There was no answer.

He staggered away like a defeated man from the field of battle. He had got, in some way or other, a cut above his left eyebrow — a cut to the bone. He was not aware of it in the least: quantities of the China Sea, large enough to break his neck for him, had gone over his head, had cleaned, washed, and salted that wound. It did not bleed, but only gaped red; and this gash over the eye, his dishevelled hair, the disorder of his clothes, gave him the aspect of a man worsted in a fight with fists.

“Got to pick up the dollars.” He appealed to Mr. Rout, smiling pitifully at random.

“What’s that?” asked Mr. Rout, wildly. “Pick up . . . ? I don’t care. . . .” Then, quivering in every muscle, but with an exaggeration of paternal tone, “Go away now, for God’s sake. You deck people’ll drive me silly. There’s

that second mate been going for the old man. Don't you know? You fellows are going wrong for want of something to do. . . ."

At these words Jukes discovered in himself the beginnings of anger. Want of something to do — indeed. . . . Full of hot scorn against the chief, he turned to go the way he had come. In the stokehold the plump donkeyman toiled with his shovel mutely, as if his tongue had been cut out; but the second was carrying on like a noisy, undaunted maniac, who had preserved his skill in the art of stoking under a marine boiler.

"Hallo, you wandering officer! Hey! Can't you get some of your slush-slingers to wind up a few of them ashes? I am getting choked with them here. Curse it! Hallo! Hey! Remember the articles: Sailors and firemen to assist each other. Hey! D'ye hear?"

Jukes was climbing out frantically, and the other, lifting up his face after him, howled, "Can't you speak? What are you poking about here for? What's your game, anyhow?"

A frenzy possessed Jukes. By the time he was back amongst the men in the darkness of the alleyway, he felt ready to wring all their necks at the slightest sign of hanging back. The very thought of it exasperated him. He couldn't hang back. They shouldn't.

The impetuosity with which he came amongst them carried them along. They had already been excited and startled at all his comings and goings — by the fierceness and rapidity of his movements; and more felt than seen in his rushes, he appeared formidable — busied with matters of life and death that brooked no delay. At his first word he heard them drop into the bunker one after another obediently, with heavy thumps.

They were not clear as to what would have to be done. "What is it? What is it?" they were asking each other. The boatswain tried to explain; the sounds of a great scuffle surprised them: and the mighty shocks, reverberating awfully in the black bunker, kept them in mind of their danger. When the boatswain threw open the door it seemed that an eddy of the hurricane, stealing through the iron sides of the ship, had set all these bodies whirling like dust: there came to them a confused uproar, a tempestuous tumult, a fierce mutter, gusts of screams dying away, and the tramping of feet mingling with the blows of the sea.

For a moment they glared amazed, blocking the doorway. Jukes pushed through them brutally. He said nothing, and simply darted in. Another lot of

coolies on the ladder, struggling suicidally to break through the battened hatch to a swamped deck, fell off as before, and he disappeared under them like a man overtaken by a landslide.

The boatswain yelled excitedly: "Come along. Get the mate out. He'll be trampled to death. Come on."

They charged in, stamping on breasts, on fingers, on faces, catching their feet in heaps of clothing, kicking broken wood; but before they could get hold of him Jukes emerged waist deep in a multitude of clawing hands. In the instant he had been lost to view, all the buttons of his jacket had gone, its back had got split up to the collar, his waistcoat had been torn open. The central struggling mass of Chinamen went over to the roll, dark, indistinct, helpless, with a wild gleam of many eyes in the dim light of the lamps.

"Leave me alone — damn you. I am all right," screeched Jukes. "Drive them forward. Watch your chance when she pitches. Forward with 'em. Drive them against the bulkhead. Jam 'em up."

The rush of the sailors into the seething 'tween-deck was like a splash of cold water into a boiling cauldron. The commotion sank for a moment.

The bulk of Chinamen were locked in such a compact scrimmage that, linking their arms and aided by an appalling dive of the ship, the seamen sent it forward in one great shove, like a solid block. Behind their backs small clusters and loose bodies tumbled from side to side.

The boatswain performed prodigious feats of strength. With his long arms open, and each great paw clutching at a stanchion, he stopped the rush of seven entwined Chinamen rolling like a boulder. His joints cracked; he said, "Ha!" and they flew apart. But the carpenter showed the greater intelligence. Without saying a word to anybody he went back into the alleyway, to fetch several coils of cargo gear he had seen there — chain and rope. With these life-lines were rigged.

There was really no resistance. The struggle, however it began, had turned into a scramble of blind panic. If the coolies had started up after their scattered dollars they were by that time fighting only for their footing. They took each other by the throat merely to save themselves from being hurled about. Whoever got a hold anywhere would kick at the others who caught at his legs and hung on, till a roll sent them flying together across the deck.

The coming of the white devils was a terror. Had they come to kill? The individuals torn out of the ruck became very limp in the seamen's hands: some, dragged aside by the heels, were passive, like dead bodies, with open,

fixed eyes. Here and there a coolie would fall on his knees as if begging for mercy; several, whom the excess of fear made unruly, were hit with hard fists between the eyes, and cowered; while those who were hurt submitted to rough handling, blinking rapidly without a plaint. Faces streamed with blood; there were raw places on the shaven heads, scratches, bruises, torn wounds, gashes. The broken porcelain out of the chests was mostly responsible for the latter. Here and there a Chinaman, wild-eyed, with his tail unplaited, nursed a bleeding sole.

They had been ranged closely, after having been shaken into submission, cuffed a little to allay excitement, addressed in gruff words of encouragement that sounded like promises of evil. They sat on the deck in ghastly, drooping rows, and at the end the carpenter, with two hands to help him, moved busily from place to place, setting taut and hitching the life-lines. The boatswain, with one leg and one arm embracing a stanchion, struggled with a lamp pressed to his breast, trying to get a light, and growling all the time like an industrious gorilla. The figures of seamen stooped repeatedly, with the movements of gleaners, and everything was being flung into the bunker: clothing, smashed wood, broken china, and the dollars, too, gathered up in men's jackets. Now and then a sailor would stagger towards the doorway with his arms full of rubbish; and dolorous, slanting eyes followed his movements.

With every roll of the ship the long rows of sitting Celestials would sway forward brokenly, and her headlong dives knocked together the line of shaven polls from end to end. When the wash of water rolling on the deck died away for a moment, it seemed to Jukes, yet quivering from his exertions, that in his mad struggle down there he had overcome the wind somehow: that a silence had fallen upon the ship, a silence in which the sea struck thunderously at her sides.

Everything had been cleared out of the 'tween-deck — all the wreckage, as the men said. They stood erect and tottering above the level of heads and drooping shoulders. Here and there a coolie sobbed for his breath. Where the high light fell, Jukes could see the salient ribs of one, the yellow, wistful face of another; bowed necks; or would meet a dull stare directed at his face. He was amazed that there had been no corpses; but the lot of them seemed at their last gasp, and they appeared to him more pitiful than if they had been all dead.

Suddenly one of the coolies began to speak. The light came and went on his lean, straining face; he threw his head up like a baying hound. From the bunker came the sounds of knocking and the tinkle of some dollars rolling loose; he stretched out his arm, his mouth yawned black, and the incomprehensible guttural hooting sounds, that did not seem to belong to a human language, penetrated Jukes with a strange emotion as if a brute had tried to be eloquent.

Two more started mouthing what seemed to Jukes fierce denunciations; the others stirred with grunts and growls. Jukes ordered the hands out of the 'tweendecks hurriedly. He left last himself, backing through the door, while the grunts rose to a loud murmur and hands were extended after him as after a malefactor. The boatswain shot the bolt, and remarked uneasily, "Seems as if the wind had dropped, sir."

The seamen were glad to get back into the alleyway. Secretly each of them thought that at the last moment he could rush out on deck — and that was a comfort. There is something horribly repugnant in the idea of being drowned under a deck. Now they had done with the Chinamen, they again became conscious of the ship's position.

Jukes on coming out of the alleyway found himself up to the neck in the noisy water. He gained the bridge, and discovered he could detect obscure shapes as if his sight had become preternaturally acute. He saw faint outlines. They recalled not the familiar aspect of the Nan-Shan, but something remembered — an old dismantled steamer he had seen years ago rotting on a mudbank. She recalled that wreck.

There was no wind, not a breath, except the faint currents created by the lurches of the ship. The smoke tossed out of the funnel was settling down upon her deck. He breathed it as he passed forward. He felt the deliberate throb of the engines, and heard small sounds that seemed to have survived the great uproar: the knocking of broken fittings, the rapid tumbling of some piece of wreckage on the bridge. He perceived dimly the squat shape of his captain holding on to a twisted bridge-rail, motionless and swaying as if rooted to the planks. The unexpected stillness of the air oppressed Jukes.

"We have done it, sir," he gasped.

"Thought you would," said Captain MacWhirr.

"Did you?" murmured Jukes to himself.

"Wind fell all at once," went on the Captain.

Jukes burst out: "If you think it was an easy job — "

But his captain, clinging to the rail, paid no attention. "According to the books the worst is not over yet."

"If most of them hadn't been half dead with seasickness and fright, not one of us would have come out of that 'tween-deck alive," said Jukes.

"Had to do what's fair by them," mumbled MacWhirr, stolidly. "You don't find everything in books."

"Why, I believe they would have risen on us if I hadn't ordered the hands out of that pretty quick," continued Jukes with warmth.

After the whisper of their shouts, their ordinary tones, so distinct, rang out very loud to their ears in the amazing stillness of the air. It seemed to them they were talking in a dark and echoing vault.

Through a jagged aperture in the dome of clouds the light of a few stars fell upon the black sea, rising and falling confusedly. Sometimes the head of a watery cone would topple on board and mingle with the rolling flurry of foam on the swamped deck; and the Nan-Shan wallowed heavily at the bottom of a circular cistern of clouds. This ring of dense vapours, gyrating madly round the calm of the centre, encompassed the ship like a motionless and unbroken wall of an aspect inconceivably sinister. Within, the sea, as if agitated by an internal commotion, leaped in peaked mounds that jostled each other, slapping heavily against her sides; and a low moaning sound, the infinite plaint of the storm's fury, came from beyond the limits of the menacing calm. Captain MacWhirr remained silent, and Jukes' ready ear caught suddenly the faint, long-drawn roar of some immense wave rushing unseen under that thick blackness, which made the appalling boundary of his vision.

"Of course," he started resentfully, "they thought we had caught at the chance to plunder them. Of course! You said — pick up the money. Easier said than done. They couldn't tell what was in our heads. We came in, smash — right into the middle of them. Had to do it by a rush."

"As long as it's done . . .," mumbled the Captain, without attempting to look at Jukes. "Had to do what's fair."

"We shall find yet there's the devil to pay when this is over," said Jukes, feeling very sore. "Let them only recover a bit, and you'll see. They will fly at our throats, sir. Don't forget, sir, she isn't a British ship now. These brutes know it well, too. The damned Siamese flag."

"We are on board, all the same," remarked Captain MacWhirr.



“The trouble’s not over yet,” insisted Jukes, prophetically, reeling and catching on. “She’s a wreck,” he added, faintly.

“The trouble’s not over yet,” assented Captain MacWhirr, half aloud . . . .  
“Look out for her a minute.”

“Are you going off the deck, sir?” asked Jukes, hurriedly, as if the storm were sure to pounce upon him as soon as he had been left alone with the ship.

He watched her, battered and solitary, labouring heavily in a wild scene of mountainous black waters lit by the gleams of distant worlds. She moved slowly, breathing into the still core of the hurricane the excess of her strength in a white cloud of steam — and the deep-toned vibration of the escape was like the defiant trumpeting of a living creature of the sea impatient for the renewal of the contest. It ceased suddenly. The still air moaned. Above Jukes’ head a few stars shone into a pit of black vapours. The inky edge of the cloud-disc frowned upon the ship under the patch of glittering sky. The stars, too, seemed to look at her intently, as if for the last time, and the cluster of their splendour sat like a diadem on a lowering brow.

Captain MacWhirr had gone into the chart-room. There was no light there; but he could feel the disorder of that place where he used to live tidily. His armchair was upset. The books had tumbled out on the floor: he scrunched a piece of glass under his boot. He groped for the matches, and found a box on a shelf with a deep ledge. He struck one, and puckering the corners of his eyes, held out the little flame towards the barometer whose glittering top of glass and metals nodded at him continuously.

It stood very low — incredibly low, so low that Captain MacWhirr grunted. The match went out, and hurriedly he extracted another, with thick, stiff fingers.

Again a little flame flared up before the nodding glass and metal of the top. His eyes looked at it, narrowed with attention, as if expecting an imperceptible sign. With his grave face he resembled a booted and misshapen pagan burning incense before the oracle of a Joss. There was no mistake. It was the lowest reading he had ever seen in his life.

Captain MacWhirr emitted a low whistle. He forgot himself till the flame diminished to a blue spark, burnt his fingers and vanished. Perhaps something had gone wrong with the thing!

There was an aneroid glass screwed above the couch. He turned that way, struck another match, and discovered the white face of the other instrument looking at him from the bulkhead, meaningly, not to be gainsaid, as though the wisdom of men were made unerring by the indifference of matter. There was no room for doubt now. Captain MacWhirr pshawed at it, and threw the match down.

The worst was to come, then — and if the books were right this worst would be very bad. The experience of the last six hours had enlarged his conception of what heavy weather could be like. “It’ll be terrific,” he pronounced, mentally. He had not consciously looked at anything by the light of the matches except at the barometer; and yet somehow he had seen that his water-bottle and the two tumblers had been flung out of their stand. It seemed to give him a more intimate knowledge of the tossing the ship had gone through. “I wouldn’t have believed it,” he thought. And his table had been cleared, too; his rulers, his pencils, the inkstand — all the things that had their safe appointed places — they were gone, as if a mischievous hand had plucked them out one by one and flung them on the wet floor. The hurricane had broken in upon the orderly arrangements of his privacy. This had never happened before, and the feeling of dismay reached the very seat of his composure. And the worst was to come yet! He was glad the trouble in the ‘tween-deck had been discovered in time. If the ship had to go after all, then, at least, she wouldn’t be going to the bottom with a lot of people in her fighting teeth and claw. That would have been odious. And in that feeling there was a humane intention and a vague sense of the fitness of things.

These instantaneous thoughts were yet in their essence heavy and slow, partaking of the nature of the man. He extended his hand to put back the matchbox in its corner of the shelf. There were always matches there — by his order. The steward had his instructions impressed upon him long before. “A box . . . just there, see? Not so very full . . . where I can put my hand on it, steward. Might want a light in a hurry. Can’t tell on board ship what you might want in a hurry. Mind, now.”

And of course on his side he would be careful to put it back in its place scrupulously. He did so now, but before he removed his hand it occurred to him that perhaps he would never have occasion to use that box any more. The vividness of the thought checked him and for an infinitesimal fraction of a second his fingers closed again on the small object as though it had

been the symbol of all these little habits that chain us to the weary round of life. He released it at last, and letting himself fall on the settee, listened for the first sounds of returning wind.

Not yet. He heard only the wash of water, the heavy splashes, the dull shocks of the confused seas boarding his ship from all sides. She would never have a chance to clear her decks.

But the quietude of the air was startlingly tense and unsafe, like a slender hair holding a sword suspended over his head. By this awful pause the storm penetrated the defences of the man and unsealed his lips. He spoke out in the solitude and the pitch darkness of the cabin, as if addressing another being awakened within his breast.

“I shouldn’t like to lose her,” he said half aloud.

He sat unseen, apart from the sea, from his ship, isolated, as if withdrawn from the very current of his own existence, where such freaks as talking to himself surely had no place. His palms reposed on his knees, he bowed his short neck and puffed heavily, surrendering to a strange sensation of weariness he was not enlightened enough to recognize for the fatigue of mental stress.

From where he sat he could reach the door of a washstand locker. There should have been a towel there. There was. Good. . . . He took it out, wiped his face, and afterwards went on rubbing his wet head. He towelled himself with energy in the dark, and then remained motionless with the towel on his knees. A moment passed, of a stillness so profound that no one could have guessed there was a man sitting in that cabin. Then a murmur arose.

“She may come out of it yet.”

When Captain MacWhirr came out on deck, which he did brusquely, as though he had suddenly become conscious of having stayed away too long, the calm had lasted already more than fifteen minutes — long enough to make itself intolerable even to his imagination. Jukes, motionless on the forepart of the bridge, began to speak at once. His voice, blank and forced as though he were talking through hard-set teeth, seemed to flow away on all sides into the darkness, deepening again upon the sea.

“I had the wheel relieved. Hackett began to sing out that he was done. He’s lying in there alongside the steering-gear with a face like death. At first I couldn’t get anybody to crawl out and relieve the poor devil. That boss’n’s worse than no good, I always said. Thought I would have had to go myself and haul out one of them by the neck.”

“Ah, well,” muttered the Captain. He stood watchful by Jukes’ side.

“The second mate’s in there, too, holding his head. Is he hurt, sir?”

“No — crazy,” said Captain MacWhirr, curtly.

“Looks as if he had a tumble, though.”

“I had to give him a push,” explained the Captain.

Jukes gave an impatient sigh.

“It will come very sudden,” said Captain MacWhirr, “and from over there, I fancy. God only knows though. These books are only good to muddle your head and make you jumpy. It will be bad, and there’s an end. If we only can steam her round in time to meet it. . . .”

A minute passed. Some of the stars winked rapidly and vanished.

“You left them pretty safe?” began the Captain abruptly, as though the silence were unbearable.

“Are you thinking of the coolies, sir? I rigged lifelines all ways across that ‘tween-deck.”

“Did you? Good idea, Mr. Jukes.”

“I didn’t . . . think you cared to . . . know,” said Jukes — the lurching of the ship cut his speech as though somebody had been jerking him around while he talked — ”how I got on with . . . that infernal job. We did it. And it may not matter in the end.”

“Had to do what’s fair, for all — they are only Chinamen. Give them the same chance with ourselves — hang it all. She isn’t lost yet. Bad enough to be shut up below in a gale — ”

“That’s what I thought when you gave me the job, sir,” interjected Jukes, moodily.

“ — without being battered to pieces,” pursued Captain MacWhirr with rising vehemence. “Couldn’t let that go on in my ship, if I knew she hadn’t five minutes to live. Couldn’t bear it, Mr. Jukes.”

A hollow echoing noise, like that of a shout rolling in a rocky chasm, approached the ship and went away again. The last star, blurred, enlarged, as if returning to the fiery mist of its beginning, struggled with the colossal depth of blackness hanging over the ship — and went out.

“Now for it!” muttered Captain MacWhirr. “Mr. Jukes.”

“Here, sir.”

The two men were growing indistinct to each other.

“We must trust her to go through it and come out on the other side. That’s plain and straight. There’s no room for Captain Wilson’s storm-strategy

here.”

“No, sir.”

“She will be smothered and swept again for hours,” mumbled the Captain. “There’s not much left by this time above deck for the sea to take away — unless you or me.”

“Both, sir,” whispered Jukes, breathlessly.

“You are always meeting trouble half way, Jukes,” Captain MacWhirr remonstrated quaintly. “Though it’s a fact that the second mate is no good. D’ye hear, Mr. Jukes? You would be left alone if. . . .”

Captain MacWhirr interrupted himself, and Jukes, glancing on all sides, remained silent.

“Don’t you be put out by anything,” the Captain continued, mumbling rather fast. “Keep her facing it. They may say what they like, but the heaviest seas run with the wind. Facing it — always facing it — that’s the way to get through. You are a young sailor. Face it. That’s enough for any man. Keep a cool head.”

“Yes, sir,” said Jukes, with a flutter of the heart.

In the next few seconds the Captain spoke to the engine-room and got an answer.

For some reason Jukes experienced an access of confidence, a sensation that came from outside like a warm breath, and made him feel equal to every demand. The distant muttering of the darkness stole into his ears. He noted it unmoved, out of that sudden belief in himself, as a man safe in a shirt of mail would watch a point.

The ship laboured without intermission amongst the black hills of water, paying with this hard tumbling the price of her life. She rumbled in her depths, shaking a white plummet of steam into the night, and Jukes’ thought skimmed like a bird through the engine-room, where Mr. Rout — good man — was ready. When the rumbling ceased it seemed to him that there was a pause of every sound, a dead pause in which Captain MacWhirr’s voice rang out startlingly.

“What’s that? A puff of wind?” — it spoke much louder than Jukes had ever heard it before — “On the bow. That’s right. She may come out of it yet.”

The mutter of the winds drew near apace. In the forefront could be distinguished a drowsy waking plaint passing on, and far off the growth of a multiple clamour, marching and expanding. There was the throb as of many

drums in it, a vicious rushing note, and like the chant of a tramping multitude.

Jukes could no longer see his captain distinctly. The darkness was absolutely piling itself upon the ship. At most he made out movements, a hint of elbows spread out, of a head thrown up.

Captain MacWhirr was trying to do up the top button of his oilskin coat with unwonted haste. The hurricane, with its power to madden the seas, to sink ships, to uproot trees, to overturn strong walls and dash the very birds of the air to the ground, had found this taciturn man in its path, and, doing its utmost, had managed to wring out a few words. Before the renewed wrath of winds swooped on his ship, Captain MacWhirr was moved to declare, in a tone of vexation, as it were: "I wouldn't like to lose her."

He was spared that annoyance.

## VI

On A bright sunshiny day, with the breeze chasing her smoke far ahead, the Nan-Shan came into Fu-chau. Her arrival was at once noticed on shore, and the seamen in harbour said: "Look! Look at that steamer. What's that? Siamese — isn't she? Just look at her!"

She seemed, indeed, to have been used as a running target for the secondary batteries of a cruiser. A hail of minor shells could not have given her upper works a more broken, torn, and devastated aspect: and she had about her the worn, weary air of ships coming from the far ends of the world — and indeed with truth, for in her short passage she had been very far; sighting, verily, even the coast of the Great Beyond, whence no ship ever returns to give up her crew to the dust of the earth. She was incrustated and gray with salt to the trucks of her masts and to the top of her funnel; as though (as some facetious seaman said) "the crowd on board had fished her out somewhere from the bottom of the sea and brought her in here for salvage." And further, excited by the felicity of his own wit, he offered to give five pounds for her — "as she stands."

Before she had been quite an hour at rest, a meagre little man, with a red-tipped nose and a face cast in an angry mould, landed from a sampan on the quay of the Foreign Concession, and incontinently turned to shake his fist at her.

A tall individual, with legs much too thin for a rotund stomach, and with watery eyes, strolled up and remarked, "Just left her — eh? Quick work."

He wore a soiled suit of blue flannel with a pair of dirty cricketing shoes; a dingy gray moustache drooped from his lip, and daylight could be seen in two places between the rim and the crown of his hat.

"Hallo! what are you doing here?" asked the ex-second-mate of the Nan-Shan, shaking hands hurriedly.

"Standing by for a job — chance worth taking — got a quiet hint," explained the man with the broken hat, in jerky, apathetic wheezes.

The second shook his fist again at the Nan-Shan. "There's a fellow there that ain't fit to have the command of a scow," he declared, quivering with passion, while the other looked about listlessly.

"Is there?"

But he caught sight on the quay of a heavy seaman's chest, painted brown under a fringed sailcloth cover, and lashed with new manila line. He eyed it with awakened interest.

"I would talk and raise trouble if it wasn't for that damned Siamese flag. Nobody to go to — or I would make it hot for him. The fraud! Told his chief engineer — that's another fraud for you — I had lost my nerve. The greatest lot of ignorant fools that ever sailed the seas. No! You can't think . . ."

"Got your money all right?" inquired his seedy acquaintance suddenly.

"Yes. Paid me off on board," raged the second mate. "'Get your breakfast on shore,' says he."

"Mean skunk!" commented the tall man, vaguely, and passed his tongue on his lips. "What about having a drink of some sort?"

"He struck me," hissed the second mate.

"No! Struck! You don't say?" The man in blue began to bustle about sympathetically. "Can't possibly talk here. I want to know all about it. Struck — eh? Let's get a fellow to carry your chest. I know a quiet place where they have some bottled beer. . . ."

Mr. Jukes, who had been scanning the shore through a pair of glasses, informed the chief engineer afterwards that "our late second mate hasn't been long in finding a friend. A chap looking uncommonly like a bummer. I saw them walk away together from the quay."

The hammering and banging of the needful repairs did not disturb Captain MacWhirr. The steward found in the letter he wrote, in a tidy chart-room, passages of such absorbing interest that twice he was nearly caught in the act. But Mrs. MacWhirr, in the drawing-room of the forty-pound house, stifled a yawn — perhaps out of self-respect — for she was alone.

She reclined in a plush-bottomed and gilt hammock-chair near a tiled fireplace, with Japanese fans on the mantel and a glow of coals in the grate. Lifting her hands, she glanced wearily here and there into the many pages. It was not her fault they were so prosy, so completely uninteresting — from "My darling wife" at the beginning, to "Your loving husband" at the end. She couldn't be really expected to understand all these ship affairs. She was glad, of course, to hear from him, but she had never asked herself why, precisely.

". . . They are called typhoons . . . The mate did not seem to like it . . . Not in books . . . Couldn't think of letting it go on. . . ."



The paper rustled sharply. “. . . A calm that lasted more than twenty minutes,” she read perfunctorily; and the next words her thoughtless eyes caught, on the top of another page, were: “see you and the children again. . . .” She had a movement of impatience. He was always thinking of coming home. He had never had such a good salary before. What was the matter now?

It did not occur to her to turn back overleaf to look. She would have found it recorded there that between 4 and 6 A. M. on December 25th, Captain MacWhirr did actually think that his ship could not possibly live another hour in such a sea, and that he would never see his wife and children again. Nobody was to know this (his letters got mislaid so quickly) — nobody whatever but the steward, who had been greatly impressed by that disclosure. So much so, that he tried to give the cook some idea of the “narrow squeak we all had” by saying solemnly, “The old man himself had a dam’ poor opinion of our chance.”

“How do you know?” asked, contemptuously, the cook, an old soldier. “He hasn’t told you, maybe?”

“Well, he did give me a hint to that effect,” the steward brazened it out.

“Get along with you! He will be coming to tell me next,” jeered the old cook, over his shoulder.

Mrs. MacWhirr glanced farther, on the alert. “. . . Do what’s fair. . . Miserable objects . . . . Only three, with a broken leg each, and one . . . Thought had better keep the matter quiet . . . hope to have done the fair thing. . . .”

She let fall her hands. No: there was nothing more about coming home. Must have been merely expressing a pious wish. Mrs. MacWhirr’s mind was set at ease, and a black marble clock, priced by the local jeweller at 3L. 18s. 6d., had a discreet stealthy tick.

The door flew open, and a girl in the long-legged, short-frocked period of existence, flung into the room.

A lot of colourless, rather lanky hair was scattered over her shoulders. Seeing her mother, she stood still, and directed her pale prying eyes upon the letter.

“From father,” murmured Mrs. MacWhirr. “What have you done with your ribbon?”

The girl put her hands up to her head and pouted.

“He’s well,” continued Mrs. MacWhirr languidly. “At least I think so. He never says.” She had a little laugh. The girl’s face expressed a wandering indifference, and Mrs. MacWhirr surveyed her with fond pride.

“Go and get your hat,” she said after a while. “I am going out to do some shopping. There is a sale at Linom’s.”

“Oh, how jolly!” uttered the child, impressively, in unexpectedly grave vibrating tones, and bounded out of the room.

It was a fine afternoon, with a gray sky and dry sidewalks. Outside the draper’s Mrs. MacWhirr smiled upon a woman in a black mantle of generous proportions armoured in jet and crowned with flowers blooming falsely above a bilious matronly countenance. They broke into a swift little babble of greetings and exclamations both together, very hurried, as if the street were ready to yawn open and swallow all that pleasure before it could be expressed.

Behind them the high glass doors were kept on the swing. People couldn’t pass, men stood aside waiting patiently, and Lydia was absorbed in poking the end of her parasol between the stone flags. Mrs. MacWhirr talked rapidly.

“Thank you very much. He’s not coming home yet. Of course it’s very sad to have him away, but it’s such a comfort to know he keeps so well.” Mrs. MacWhirr drew breath. “The climate there agrees with him,” she added, beamingly, as if poor MacWhirr had been away touring in China for the sake of his health.

Neither was the chief engineer coming home yet. Mr. Rout knew too well the value of a good billet.

“Solomon says wonders will never cease,” cried Mrs. Rout joyously at the old lady in her armchair by the fire. Mr. Rout’s mother moved slightly, her withered hands lying in black half-mittens on her lap.

The eyes of the engineer’s wife fairly danced on the paper. “That captain of the ship he is in — a rather simple man, you remember, mother? — has done something rather clever, Solomon says.”

“Yes, my dear,” said the old woman meekly, sitting with bowed silvery head, and that air of inward stillness characteristic of very old people who seem lost in watching the last flickers of life. “I think I remember.”

Solomon Rout, Old Sol, Father Sol, the Chief, “Rout, good man” — Mr. Rout, the condescending and paternal friend of youth, had been the baby of her many children — all dead by this time. And she remembered him best

as a boy of ten — long before he went away to serve his apprenticeship in some great engineering works in the North. She had seen so little of him since, she had gone through so many years, that she had now to retrace her steps very far back to recognize him plainly in the mist of time. Sometimes it seemed that her daughter-in-law was talking of some strange man.

Mrs. Rout junior was disappointed. “H’m. H’m.” She turned the page. “How provoking! He doesn’t say what it is. Says I couldn’t understand how much there was in it. Fancy! What could it be so very clever? What a wretched man not to tell us!”

She read on without further remark soberly, and at last sat looking into the fire. The chief wrote just a word or two of the typhoon; but something had moved him to express an increased longing for the companionship of the jolly woman. “If it hadn’t been that mother must be looked after, I would send you your passage-money to-day. You could set up a small house out here. I would have a chance to see you sometimes then. We are not growing younger. . . .”

“He’s well, mother,” sighed Mrs. Rout, rousing herself.

“He always was a strong healthy boy,” said the old woman, placidly.

But Mr. Jukes’ account was really animated and very full. His friend in the Western Ocean trade imparted it freely to the other officers of his liner. “A chap I know writes to me about an extraordinary affair that happened on board his ship in that typhoon — you know — that we read of in the papers two months ago. It’s the funniest thing! Just see for yourself what he says. I’ll show you his letter.”

There were phrases in it calculated to give the impression of light-hearted, indomitable resolution. Jukes had written them in good faith, for he felt thus when he wrote. He described with lurid effect the scenes in the ‘tween-deck. “. . . It struck me in a flash that those confounded Chinamen couldn’t tell we weren’t a desperate kind of robbers. ‘Tisn’t good to part the Chinaman from his money if he is the stronger party. We need have been desperate indeed to go thieving in such weather, but what could these beggars know of us? So, without thinking of it twice, I got the hands away in a jiffy. Our work was done — that the old man had set his heart on. We cleared out without staying to inquire how they felt. I am convinced that if they had not been so unmercifully shaken, and afraid — each individual one of them — to stand up, we would have been torn to pieces. Oh! It was

pretty complete, I can tell you; and you may run to and fro across the Pond to the end of time before you find yourself with such a job on your hands.”

After this he alluded professionally to the damage done to the ship, and went on thus:

“It was when the weather quieted down that the situation became confoundedly delicate. It wasn’t made any better by us having been lately transferred to the Siamese flag; though the skipper can’t see that it makes any difference — ‘as long as we are on board’ — he says. There are feelings that this man simply hasn’t got — and there’s an end of it. You might just as well try to make a bedpost understand. But apart from this it is an infernally lonely state for a ship to be going about the China seas with no proper consuls, not even a gunboat of her own anywhere, nor a body to go to in case of some trouble.

“My notion was to keep these Johnnies under hatches for another fifteen hours or so; as we weren’t much farther than that from Fu-chau. We would find there, most likely, some sort of a man-of-war, and once under her guns we were safe enough; for surely any skipper of a man-of-war — English, French or Dutch — would see white men through as far as row on board goes. We could get rid of them and their money afterwards by delivering them to their Mandarin or Taotai, or whatever they call these chaps in goggles you see being carried about in sedan-chairs through their stinking streets.

“The old man wouldn’t see it somehow. He wanted to keep the matter quiet. He got that notion into his head, and a steam windlass couldn’t drag it out of him. He wanted as little fuss made as possible, for the sake of the ship’s name and for the sake of the owners — ‘for the sake of all concerned,’ says he, looking at me very hard.

“It made me angry hot. Of course you couldn’t keep a thing like that quiet; but the chests had been secured in the usual manner and were safe enough for any earthly gale, while this had been an altogether fiendish business I couldn’t give you even an idea of.

“Meantime, I could hardly keep on my feet. None of us had a spell of any sort for nearly thirty hours, and there the old man sat rubbing his chin, rubbing the top of his head, and so bothered he didn’t even think of pulling his long boots off.

“‘I hope, sir,’ says I, ‘you won’t be letting them out on deck before we make ready for them in some shape or other.’ Not, mind you, that I felt very

sanguine about controlling these beggars if they meant to take charge. A trouble with a cargo of Chinamen is no child's play. I was dam' tired, too. 'I wish,' said I, 'you would let us throw the whole lot of these dollars down to them and leave them to fight it out amongst themselves, while we get a rest.'

"'Now you talk wild, Jukes,' says he, looking up in his slow way that makes you ache all over, somehow. 'We must plan out something that would be fair to all parties.'

"I had no end of work on hand, as you may imagine, so I set the hands going, and then I thought I would turn in a bit. I hadn't been asleep in my bunk ten minutes when in rushes the steward and begins to pull at my leg.

"'For God's sake, Mr. Jukes, come out! Come on deck quick, sir. Oh, do come out!'

"The fellow scared all the sense out of me. I didn't know what had happened: another hurricane — or what. Could hear no wind.

"'The Captain's letting them out. Oh, he is letting them out! Jump on deck, sir, and save us. The chief engineer has just run below for his revolver.'

"That's what I understood the fool to say. However, Father Rout swears he went in there only to get a clean pocket-handkerchief. Anyhow, I made one jump into my trousers and flew on deck aft. There was certainly a good deal of noise going on forward of the bridge. Four of the hands with the boss'n were at work abaft. I passed up to them some of the rifles all the ships on the China coast carry in the cabin, and led them on the bridge. On the way I ran against Old Sol, looking startled and sucking at an unlighted cigar.

"'Come along,' I shouted to him.

"We charged, the seven of us, up to the chart-room. All was over. There stood the old man with his sea-boots still drawn up to the hips and in shirt-sleeves — got warm thinking it out, I suppose. Bun Hin's dandy clerk at his elbow, as dirty as a sweep, was still green in the face. I could see directly I was in for something.

"'What the devil are these monkey tricks, Mr. Jukes?' asks the old man, as angry as ever he could be. I tell you frankly it made me lose my tongue. 'For God's sake, Mr. Jukes,' says he, 'do take away these rifles from the men. Somebody's sure to get hurt before long if you don't. Damme, if this ship isn't worse than Bedlam! Look sharp now. I want you up here to help

me and Bun Hin's Chinaman to count that money. You wouldn't mind lending a hand, too, Mr. Rout, now you are here. The more of us the better.'

"He had settled it all in his mind while I was having a snooze. Had we been an English ship, or only going to land our cargo of coolies in an English port, like Hong-Kong, for instance, there would have been no end of inquiries and bother, claims for damages and so on. But these Chinamen know their officials better than we do.

"The hatches had been taken off already, and they were all on deck after a night and a day down below. It made you feel queer to see so many gaunt, wild faces together. The beggars stared about at the sky, at the sea, at the ship, as though they had expected the whole thing to have been blown to pieces. And no wonder! They had had a doing that would have shaken the soul out of a white man. But then they say a Chinaman has no soul. He has, though, something about him that is deuced tough. There was a fellow (amongst others of the badly hurt) who had had his eye all but knocked out. It stood out of his head the size of half a hen's egg. This would have laid out a white man on his back for a month: and yet there was that chap elbowing here and there in the crowd and talking to the others as if nothing had been the matter. They made a great hubbub amongst themselves, and whenever the old man showed his bald head on the foreshore of the bridge, they would all leave off jawing and look at him from below.

"It seems that after he had done his thinking he made that Bun Hin's fellow go down and explain to them the only way they could get their money back. He told me afterwards that, all the coolies having worked in the same place and for the same length of time, he reckoned he would be doing the fair thing by them as near as possible if he shared all the cash we had picked up equally among the lot. You couldn't tell one man's dollars from another's, he said, and if you asked each man how much money he brought on board he was afraid they would lie, and he would find himself a long way short. I think he was right there. As to giving up the money to any Chinese official he could scare up in Fu-chau, he said he might just as well put the lot in his own pocket at once for all the good it would be to them. I suppose they thought so, too.

"We finished the distribution before dark. It was rather a sight: the sea running high, the ship a wreck to look at, these Chinamen staggering up on the bridge one by one for their share, and the old man still booted, and in his shirt-sleeves, busy paying out at the chartroom door, perspiring like

anything, and now and then coming down sharp on myself or Father Rout about one thing or another not quite to his mind. He took the share of those who were disabled himself to them on the No. 2 hatch. There were three dollars left over, and these went to the three most damaged coolies, one to each. We turned-to afterwards, and shovelled out on deck heaps of wet rags, all sorts of fragments of things without shape, and that you couldn't give a name to, and let them settle the ownership themselves.

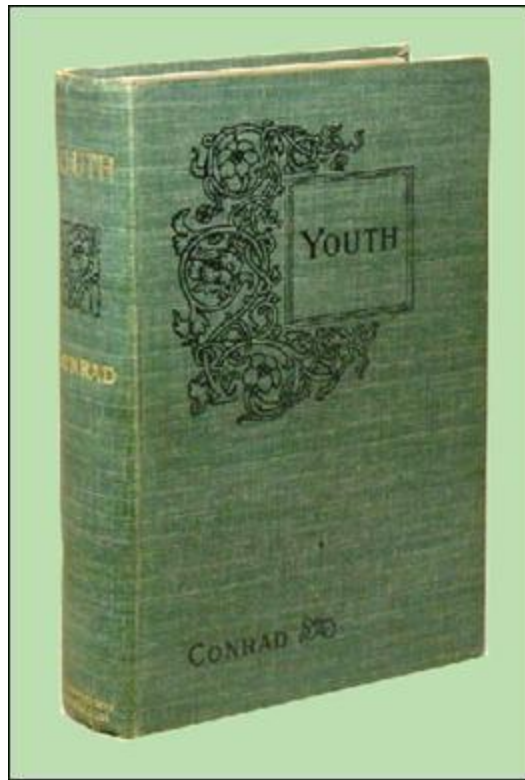
“This certainly is coming as near as can be to keeping the thing quiet for the benefit of all concerned. What's your opinion, you pampered mail-boat swell? The old chief says that this was plainly the only thing that could be done. The skipper remarked to me the other day, ‘There are things you find nothing about in books.’ I think that he got out of it very well for such a stupid man.”

## ***HEART OF DARKNESS***



This novella was first published in 1902, but appeared as a three-part series in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1899. It is widely regarded as a significant work of English literature and has inspired writers and filmmakers across the world. The story concerns Charles Marlow, an Englishman who took a foreign assignment from a Belgian trading company as a ferry-boat captain in Africa. *Heart of Darkness* exposes the dark side of European colonization, exploring the three levels of darkness that the protagonist, Marlow, encounters: the darkness of the Congo wilderness, the darkness of the Europeans' cruel treatment of the natives, and the profound darkness within every human being for committing heinous acts of evil.

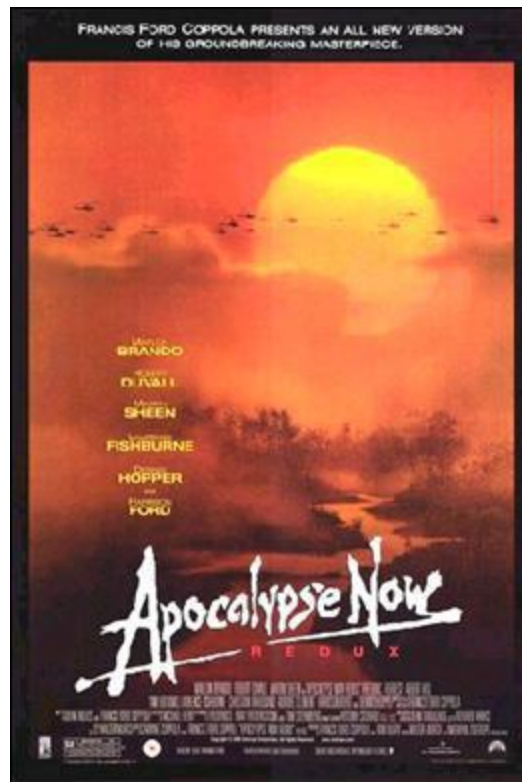




*The 1902 first edition*

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*The famous Viet Nam war movie inspired by Conrad's novella*

more than justice! I rang the bell  
before he did, on the first floor and  
while I waited he seemed to stare  
at me out of the polished panel, stare  
with that wide and unmerciful  
entranced <sup>entranced</sup> gaze at the universe - I seemed  
to hear the whispered cry "Oh! the horror!"

The dusk was falling. I waited had  
to wait in a lofty drawing room with  
windows from floor to ceiling that  
were like three luminous ~~columns~~ and  
he draped columns. The bent ~~back~~ gift  
legs and backs of the furniture ~~seemed~~  
distinctly. The tall white marble  
mantel ~~piece~~ ~~was~~ fire place had  
a cold and heavy ~~whiteness~~ - A  
grand piano stood ~~heavily~~ in a  
corner ~~like~~ ~~as if~~ ~~it~~ ~~was~~ ~~like~~ ~~a~~  
sombre and polished sarcophagus. A  
door high door opened - closed. I rose.

He came forward in the dusk  
all in black with a pale head, floating  
in the dusk. She was in mourning. It  
was more than a year since his death.

# I

The Nellie, a cruising yawl, swung to her anchor without a flutter of the sails, and was at rest. The flood had made, the wind was nearly calm, and being bound down the river, the only thing for it was to come to and wait for the turn of the tide.

The sea-reach of the Thames stretched before us like the beginning of an interminable waterway. In the offing the sea and the sky were welded together without a joint, and in the luminous space the tanned sails of the barges drifting up with the tide seemed to stand still in red clusters of canvas sharply peaked, with gleams of varnished sprits. A haze rested on the low shores that ran out to sea in vanishing flatness. The air was dark above Gravesend, and farther back still seemed condensed into a mournful gloom, brooding motionless over the biggest, and the greatest, town on earth.

The Director of Companies was our captain and our host. We four affectionately watched his back as he stood in the bows looking to seaward. On the whole river there was nothing that looked half so nautical. He resembled a pilot, which to a seaman is trustworthiness personified. It was difficult to realize his work was not out there in the luminous estuary, but behind him, within the brooding gloom.

Between us there was, as I have already said somewhere, the bond of the sea. Besides holding our hearts together through long periods of separation, it had the effect of making us tolerant of each other's yarns — and even convictions. The Lawyer — the best of old fellows — had, because of his many years and many virtues, the only cushion on deck, and was lying on the only rug. The Accountant had brought out already a box of dominoes, and was toying architecturally with the bones. Marlow sat cross-legged right aft, leaning against the mizzen-mast. He had sunken cheeks, a yellow complexion, a straight back, an ascetic aspect, and, with his arms dropped, the palms of hands outwards, resembled an idol. The Director, satisfied the anchor had good hold, made his way aft and sat down amongst us. We exchanged a few words lazily. Afterwards there was silence on board the yacht. For some reason or other we did not begin that game of dominoes. We felt meditative, and fit for nothing but placid staring. The day was ending in a serenity of still and exquisite brilliance. The water shone

pacifically; the sky, without a speck, was a benign immensity of unstained light; the very mist on the Essex marshes was like a gauzy and radiant fabric, hung from the wooded rises inland, and draping the low shores in diaphanous folds. Only the gloom to the west, brooding over the upper reaches, became more somber every minute, as if angered by the approach of the sun.

And at last, in its curved and imperceptible fall, the sun sank low, and from glowing white changed to a dull red without rays and without heat, as if about to go out suddenly, stricken to death by the touch of that gloom brooding over a crowd of men.

Forthwith a change came over the waters, and the serenity became less brilliant but more profound. The old river in its broad reach rested unruffled at the decline of day, after ages of good service done to the race that peopled its banks, spread out in the tranquil dignity of a waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth. We looked at the venerable stream not in the vivid flush of a short day that comes and departs for ever, but in the august light of abiding memories. And indeed nothing is easier for a man who has, as the phrase goes, “followed the sea” with reverence and affection, than to evoke the great spirit of the past upon the lower reaches of the Thames. The tidal current runs to and fro in its unceasing service, crowded with memories of men and ships it had borne to the rest of home or to the battles of the sea. It had known and served all the men of whom the nation is proud, from Sir Francis Drake to Sir John Franklin, knights all, titled and untitled — the great knights-errant of the sea. It had borne all the ships whose names are like jewels flashing in the night of time, from the Golden Hind returning with her round flanks full of treasure, to be visited by the Queen’s Highness and thus pass out of the gigantic tale, to the Erebus and Terror, bound on other conquests — and that never returned. It had known the ships and the men. They had sailed from Deptford, from Greenwich, from Erith — the adventurers and the settlers; kings’ ships and the ships of men on ‘Change; captains, admirals, the dark “interlopers” of the Eastern trade, and the commissioned “generals” of East India fleets. Hunters for gold or pursuers of fame, they all had gone out on that stream, bearing the sword, and often the torch, messengers of the might within the land, bearers of a spark from the sacred fire. What greatness had not floated on the ebb of that river into the mystery of an unknown earth! . . . The dreams of men, the seed of commonwealths, the germs of empires.

The sun set; the dusk fell on the stream, and lights began to appear along the shore. The Chapman lighthouse, a three-legged thing erect on a mud-flat, shone strongly. Lights of ships moved in the fairway — a great stir of lights going up and going down. And farther west on the upper reaches the place of the monstrous town was still marked ominously on the sky, a brooding gloom in sunshine, a lurid glare under the stars.

“And this also,” said Marlow suddenly, “has been one of the dark places of the earth.”

He was the only man of us who still “followed the sea.” The worst that could be said of him was that he did not represent his class. He was a seaman, but he was a wanderer, too, while most seamen lead, if one may so express it, a sedentary life. Their minds are of the stay-at-home order, and their home is always with them — the ship; and so is their country — the sea. One ship is very much like another, and the sea is always the same. In the immutability of their surroundings the foreign shores, the foreign faces, the changing immensity of life, glide past, veiled not by a sense of mystery but by a slightly disdainful ignorance; for there is nothing mysterious to a seaman unless it be the sea itself, which is the mistress of his existence and as inscrutable as Destiny. For the rest, after his hours of work, a casual stroll or a casual spree on shore suffices to unfold for him the secret of a whole continent, and generally he finds the secret not worth knowing. The yarns of seamen have a direct simplicity, the whole meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut. But Marlow was not typical (if his propensity to spin yarns be excepted), and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine.

His remark did not seem at all surprising. It was just like Marlow. It was accepted in silence. No one took the trouble to grunt even; and presently he said, very slow —

“I was thinking of very old times, when the Romans first came here, nineteen hundred years ago — the other day. . . . Light came out of this river since — you say Knights? Yes; but it is like a running blaze on a plain, like a flash of lightning in the clouds. We live in the flicker — may it last as long as the old earth keeps rolling! But darkness was here yesterday. Imagine the feelings of a commander of a fine — what d’ye call ‘em? — trireme in the Mediterranean, ordered suddenly to the north; run overland

across the Gauls in a hurry; put in charge of one of these craft the legionaries, — a wonderful lot of handy men they must have been too — used to build, apparently by the hundred, in a month or two, if we may believe what we read. Imagine him here — the very end of the world, a sea the color of lead, a sky the color of smoke, a kind of ship about as rigid as a concertina — and going up this river with stores, or orders, or what you like. Sandbanks, marshes, forests, savages, — precious little to eat fit for a civilized man, nothing but Thames water to drink. No Falernian wine here, no going ashore. Here and there a military camp lost in a wilderness, like a needle in a bundle of hay — cold, fog, tempests, disease, exile, and death, — death skulking in the air, in the water, in the bush. They must have been dying like flies here. Oh yes — he did it. Did it very well, too, no doubt, and without thinking much about it either, except afterwards to brag of what he had gone through in his time, perhaps. They were men enough to face the darkness. And perhaps he was cheered by keeping his eye on a chance of promotion to the fleet at Ravenna by-and-by, if he had good friends in Rome and survived the awful climate. Or think of a decent young citizen in a toga — perhaps too much dice, you know — coming out here in the train of some prefect, or tax-gatherer, or trader even, to mend his fortunes. Land in a swamp, march through the woods, and in some inland post feel the savagery, the utter savagery, had closed round him, — all that mysterious life of the wilderness that stirs in the forest, in the jungles, in the hearts of wild men. There's no initiation either into such mysteries. He has to live in the midst of the incomprehensible, which is also detestable. And it has a fascination, too, that goes to work upon him. The fascination of the abomination — you know. Imagine the growing regrets, the longing to escape, the powerless disgust, the surrender, the hate.”

He paused.

“Mind,” he began again, lifting one arm from the elbow, the palm of the hand outwards, so that, with his legs folded before him, he had the pose of a Buddha preaching in European clothes and without a lotus-flower — “Mind, none of us would feel exactly like this. What saves us is efficiency — the devotion to efficiency. But these chaps were not much account, really. They were no colonists; their administration was merely a squeeze, and nothing more, I suspect. They were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force — nothing to boast of, when you have it, since your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others. They



grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got. It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind — as is very proper for those who tackle a darkness. The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretense but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea — something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to. . . .”

He broke off. Flames glided in the river, small green flames, red flames, white flames, pursuing, overtaking, joining, crossing each other — then separating slowly or hastily. The traffic of the great city went on in the deepening night upon the sleepless river. We looked on, waiting patiently — there was nothing else to do till the end of the flood; but it was only after a long silence, when he said, in a hesitating voice, “I suppose you fellows remember I did once turn fresh-water sailor for a bit,” that we knew we were fated, before the ebb began to run, to hear about one of Marlow’s inconclusive experiences.

“I don’t want to bother you much with what happened to me personally,” he began, showing in this remark the weakness of many tellers of tales who seem so often unaware of what their audience would best like to hear; “yet to understand the effect of it on me you ought to know how I got out there, what I saw, how I went up that river to the place where I first met the poor chap. It was the farthest point of navigation and the culminating point of my experience. It seemed somehow to throw a kind of light on everything about me — and into my thoughts. It was somber enough too — and pitiful — not extraordinary in any way — not very clear either. No, not very clear. And yet it seemed to throw a kind of light.

“I had then, as you remember, just returned to London after a lot of Indian Ocean, Pacific, China Seas — a regular dose of the East — six years or so, and I was loafing about, hindering you fellows in your work and invading your homes, just as though I had got a heavenly mission to civilize you. It was very fine for a time, but after a bit I did get tired of resting. Then I began to look for a ship — I should think the hardest work on earth. But the ships wouldn’t even look at me. And I got tired of that game too.

“Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the

glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all look that) I would put my finger on it and say, 'When I grow up I will go there.' The North Pole was one of these places, I remember. Well, I haven't been there yet, and shall not try now. The glamour's off. Other places were scattered about the Equator, and in every sort of latitude all over the two hemispheres. I have been in some of them, and . . . well, we won't talk about that. But there was one yet — the biggest, the most blank, so to speak — that I had a hankering after.

"True, by this time it was not a blank space any more. It had got filled since my boyhood with rivers and lakes and names. It had ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery — a white patch for a boy to dream gloriously over. It had become a place of darkness. But there was in it one river especially, a mighty big river, that you could see on the map, resembling an immense snake uncoiled, with its head in the sea, its body at rest curving afar over a vast country, and its tail lost in the depths of the land. And as I looked at the map of it in a shop-window, it fascinated me as a snake would a bird — a silly little bird. Then I remembered there was a big concern, a Company for trade on that river. Dash it all! I thought to myself, they can't trade without using some kind of craft on that lot of fresh water — steamboats! Why shouldn't I try to get charge of one? I went on along Fleet Street, but could not shake off the idea. The snake had charmed me.

"You understand it was a Continental concern, that Trading society; but I have a lot of relations living on the Continent, because it's cheap and not so nasty as it looks, they say.

"I am sorry to own I began to worry them. This was already a fresh departure for me. I was not used to get things that way, you know. I always went my own road and on my own legs where I had a mind to go. I wouldn't have believed it of myself; but, then — you see — I felt somehow I must get there by hook or by crook. So I worried them. The men said 'My dear fellow,' and did nothing. Then — would you believe it? — I tried the women. I, Charlie Marlow, set the women to work — to get a job. Heavens! Well, you see, the notion drove me. I had an aunt, a dear enthusiastic soul. She wrote: 'It will be delightful. I am ready to do anything, anything for you. It is a glorious idea. I know the wife of a very high personage in the Administration, and also a man who has lots of influence with,' &c., &c.

She was determined to make no end of fuss to get me appointed skipper of a river steamboat, if such was my fancy.

“I got my appointment — of course; and I got it very quick. It appears the Company had received news that one of their captains had been killed in a scuffle with the natives. This was my chance, and it made me the more anxious to go. It was only months and months afterwards, when I made the attempt to recover what was left of the body, that I heard the original quarrel arose from a misunderstanding about some hens. Yes, two black hens. Fresleven — that was the fellow’s name, a Dane — thought himself wronged somehow in the bargain, so he went ashore and started to hammer the chief of the village with a stick. Oh, it didn’t surprise me in the least to hear this, and at the same time to be told that Fresleven was the gentlest, quietest creature that ever walked on two legs. No doubt he was; but he had been a couple of years already out there engaged in the noble cause, you know, and he probably felt the need at last of asserting his self-respect in some way. Therefore he whacked the old nigger mercilessly, while a big crowd of his people watched him, thunderstruck, till some man, — I was told the chief’s son, — in desperation at hearing the old chap yell, made a tentative jab with a spear at the white man — and of course it went quite easy between the shoulder-blades. Then the whole population cleared into the forest, expecting all kinds of calamities to happen, while, on the other hand, the steamer Fresleven commanded left also in a bad panic, in charge of the engineer, I believe. Afterwards nobody seemed to trouble much about Fresleven’s remains, till I got out and stepped into his shoes. I couldn’t let it rest, though; but when an opportunity offered at last to meet my predecessor, the grass growing through his ribs was tall enough to hide his bones. They were all there. The supernatural being had not been touched after he fell. And the village was deserted, the huts gaped black, rotting, all askew within the fallen enclosures. A calamity had come to it, sure enough. The people had vanished. Mad terror had scattered them, men, women, and children, through the bush, and they had never returned. What became of the hens I don’t know either. I should think the cause of progress got them, anyhow. However, through this glorious affair I got my appointment, before I had fairly begun to hope for it.

“I flew around like mad to get ready, and before forty-eight hours I was crossing the Channel to show myself to my employers, and sign the contract. In a very few hours I arrived in a city that always makes me think

of a whited sepulcher. Prejudice no doubt. I had no difficulty in finding the Company's offices. It was the biggest thing in the town, and everybody I met was full of it. They were going to run an over-sea empire, and make no end of coin by trade.

"A narrow and deserted street in deep shadow, high houses, innumerable windows with venetian blinds, a dead silence, grass sprouting between the stones, imposing carriage archways right and left, immense double doors standing ponderously ajar. I slipped through one of these cracks, went up a swept and ungarnished staircase, as arid as a desert, and opened the first door I came to. Two women, one fat and the other slim, sat on straw-bottomed chairs, knitting black wool. The slim one got up and walked straight at me — still knitting with downcast eyes — and only just as I began to think of getting out of her way, as you would for a somnambulist, stood still, and looked up. Her dress was as plain as an umbrella-cover, and she turned round without a word and preceded me into a waiting-room. I gave my name, and looked about. Deal table in the middle, plain chairs all round the walls, on one end a large shining map, marked with all the colors of a rainbow. There was a vast amount of red — good to see at any time, because one knows that some real work is done in there, a deuce of a lot of blue, a little green, smears of orange, and, on the East Coast, a purple patch, to show where the jolly pioneers of progress drink the jolly lager-beer. However, I wasn't going into any of these. I was going into the yellow. Dead in the center. And the river was there — fascinating — deadly — like a snake. Ough! A door opened, a white-haired secretarial head, but wearing a compassionate expression, appeared, and a skinny forefinger beckoned me into the sanctuary. Its light was dim, and a heavy writing-desk squatted in the middle. From behind that structure came out an impression of pale plumpness in a frock-coat. The great man himself. He was five feet six, I should judge, and had his grip on the handle-end of ever so many millions. He shook hands, I fancy, murmured vaguely, was satisfied with my French. Bon voyage.

"In about forty-five seconds I found myself again in the waiting-room with the compassionate secretary, who, full of desolation and sympathy, made me sign some document. I believe I undertook amongst other things not to disclose any trade secrets. Well, I am not going to.

"I began to feel slightly uneasy. You know I am not used to such ceremonies, and there was something ominous in the atmosphere. It was

just as though I had been let into some conspiracy — I don't know — something not quite right; and I was glad to get out. In the outer room the two women knitted black wool feverishly. People were arriving, and the younger one was walking back and forth introducing them. The old one sat on her chair. Her flat cloth slippers were propped up on a foot-warmer, and a cat reposed on her lap. She wore a starched white affair on her head, had a wart on one cheek, and silver-rimmed spectacles hung on the tip of her nose. She glanced at me above the glasses. The swift and indifferent placidity of that look troubled me. Two youths with foolish and cheery countenances were being piloted over, and she threw at them the same quick glance of unconcerned wisdom. She seemed to know all about them and about me too. An eerie feeling came over me. She seemed uncanny and fateful. Often far away there I thought of these two, guarding the door of Darkness, knitting black wool as for a warm pall, one introducing, introducing continuously to the unknown, the other scrutinizing the cheery and foolish faces with unconcerned old eyes. Ave! Old knitter of black wool. Morituri te salutant. Not many of those she looked at ever saw her again — not half, by a long way.

“There was yet a visit to the doctor. ‘A simple formality,’ assured me the secretary, with an air of taking an immense part in all my sorrows. Accordingly a young chap wearing his hat over the left eyebrow, some clerk I suppose, — there must have been clerks in the business, though the house was as still as a house in a city of the dead, — came from somewhere upstairs, and led me forth. He was shabby and careless, with ink-stains on the sleeves of his jacket, and his cravat was large and billowy, under a chin shaped like the toe of an old boot. It was a little too early for the doctor, so I proposed a drink, and thereupon he developed a vein of joviality. As we sat over our vermouths he glorified the Company's business, and by-and-by I expressed casually my surprise at him not going out there. He became very cool and collected all at once. ‘I am not such a fool as I look, quoth Plato to his disciples,’ he said sententiously, emptied his glass with great resolution, and we rose.

“The old doctor felt my pulse, evidently thinking of something else the while. ‘Good, good for there,’ he mumbled, and then with a certain eagerness asked me whether I would let him measure my head. Rather surprised, I said Yes, when he produced a thing like calipers and got the dimensions back and front and every way, taking notes carefully. He was an

unshaven little man in a threadbare coat like a gaberdine, with his feet in slippers, and I thought him a harmless fool. 'I always ask leave, in the interests of science, to measure the crania of those going out there,' he said. 'And when they come back, too?' I asked. 'Oh, I never see them,' he remarked; 'and, moreover, the changes take place inside, you know.' He smiled, as if at some quiet joke. 'So you are going out there. Famous. Interesting too.' He gave me a searching glance, and made another note. 'Ever any madness in your family?' he asked, in a matter-of-fact tone. I felt very annoyed. 'Is that question in the interests of science too?' 'It would be,' he said, without taking notice of my irritation, 'interesting for science to watch the mental changes of individuals, on the spot, but . . . ' 'Are you an alienist?' I interrupted. 'Every doctor should be — a little,' answered that original, imperturbably. 'I have a little theory which you Messieurs who go out there must help me to prove. This is my share in the advantages my country shall reap from the possession of such a magnificent dependency. The mere wealth I leave to others. Pardon my questions, but you are the first Englishman coming under my observation. . . . ' I hastened to assure him I was not in the least typical. 'If I were,' said I, 'I wouldn't be talking like this with you.' 'What you say is rather profound, and probably erroneous,' he said, with a laugh. 'Avoid irritation more than exposure to the sun. Adieu. How do you English say, eh? Good-by. Ah! Good-by. Adieu. In the tropics one must before everything keep calm.' . . . He lifted a warning forefinger. . . . 'Du calme, du calme. Adieu.'



The Belgian riverboat Conrad commanded on the upper Congo, 1889

“One thing more remained to do — say good-by to my excellent aunt. I found her triumphant. I had a cup of tea — the last decent cup of tea for many days — and in a room that most soothingly looked just as you would expect a lady’s drawing-room to look, we had a long quiet chat by the fireside. In the course of these confidences it became quite plain to me I had been represented to the wife of the high dignitary, and goodness knows to how many more people besides, as an exceptional and gifted creature — a piece of good fortune for the Company — a man you don’t get hold of every day. Good heavens! and I was going to take charge of a two-penny-halfpenny river-steamboat with a penny whistle attached! It appeared, however, I was also one of the Workers, with a capital — you know. Something like an emissary of light, something like a lower sort of apostle. There had been a lot of such rot let loose in print and talk just about that time, and the excellent woman, living right in the rush of all that humbug, got carried off her feet. She talked about ‘weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways,’ till, upon my word, she made me quite uncomfortable. I ventured to hint that the Company was run for profit.

“‘You forget, dear Charlie, that the laborer is worthy of his hire,’ she said, brightly. It’s queer how out of touch with truth women are. They live in a world of their own, and there had never been anything like it, and never can be. It is too beautiful altogether, and if they were to set it up it would go to pieces before the first sunset. Some confounded fact we men have been living contentedly with ever since the day of creation would start up and knock the whole thing over.

“After this I got embraced, told to wear flannel, be sure to write often, and so on — and I left. In the street — I don’t know why — a queer feeling came to me that I was an impostor. Odd thing that I, who used to clear out for any part of the world at twenty-four hours’ notice, with less thought than most men give to the crossing of a street, had a moment — I won’t say of hesitation, but of startled pause, before this commonplace affair. The best way I can explain it to you is by saying that, for a second or two, I felt as though, instead of going to the center of a continent, I were about to set off for the center of the earth.

“I left in a French steamer, and she called in every blamed port they have out there, for, as far as I could see, the sole purpose of landing soldiers and custom-house officers. I watched the coast. Watching a coast as it slips by the ship is like thinking about an enigma. There it is before you — smiling,



frowning, inviting, grand, mean, insipid, or savage, and always mute with an air of whispering, 'Come and find out.' This one was almost featureless, as if still in the making, with an aspect of monotonous grimness. The edge of a colossal jungle, so dark-green as to be almost black, fringed with white surf, ran straight, like a ruled line, far, far away along a blue sea whose glitter was blurred by a creeping mist. The sun was fierce, the land seemed to glisten and drip with steam. Here and there grayish-whitish specks showed up, clustered inside the white surf, with a flag flying above them perhaps. Settlements some centuries old, and still no bigger than pin-heads on the untouched expanse of their background. We pounded along, stopped, landed soldiers; went on, landed custom-house clerks to levy toll in what looked like a God-forsaken wilderness, with a tin shed and a flag-pole lost in it; landed more soldiers — to take care of the custom-house clerks, presumably. Some, I heard, got drowned in the surf; but whether they did or not, nobody seemed particularly to care. They were just flung out there, and on we went. Every day the coast looked the same, as though we had not moved; but we passed various places — trading places — with names like Gran' Bassam Little Popo, names that seemed to belong to some sordid farce acted in front of a sinister backcloth. The idleness of a passenger, my isolation amongst all these men with whom I had no point of contact, the oily and languid sea, the uniform somberness of the coast, seemed to keep me away from the truth of things, within the toil of a mournful and senseless delusion. The voice of the surf heard now and then was a positive pleasure, like the speech of a brother. It was something natural, that had its reason, that had a meaning. Now and then a boat from the shore gave one a momentary contact with reality. It was paddled by black fellows. You could see from afar the white of their eyeballs glistening. They shouted, sang; their bodies streamed with perspiration; they had faces like grotesque masks — these chaps; but they had bone, muscle, a wild vitality, an intense energy of movement, that was as natural and true as the surf along their coast. They wanted no excuse for being there. They were a great comfort to look at. For a time I would feel I belonged still to a world of straightforward facts; but the feeling would not last long. Something would turn up to scare it away. Once, I remember, we came upon a man-of-war anchored off the coast. There wasn't even a shed there, and she was shelling the bush. It appears the French had one of their wars going on thereabouts. Her ensign dropped limp like a rag; the muzzles of the long eight-inch guns stuck out all over

the low hull; the greasy, slimy swell swung her up lazily and let her down, swaying her thin masts. In the empty immensity of earth, sky, and water, there she was, incomprehensible, firing into a continent. Pop, would go one of the eight-inch guns; a small flame would dart and vanish, a little white smoke would disappear, a tiny projectile would give a feeble screech — and nothing happened. Nothing could happen. There was a touch of insanity in the proceeding, a sense of lugubrious drollery in the sight; and it was not dissipated by somebody on board assuring me earnestly there was a camp of natives — he called them enemies! — hidden out of sight somewhere.

“We gave her her letters (I heard the men in that lonely ship were dying of fever at the rate of three a day) and went on. We called at some more places with farcical names, where the merry dance of death and trade goes on in a still and earthy atmosphere as of an overheated catacomb; all along the formless coast bordered by dangerous surf, as if Nature herself had tried to ward off intruders; in and out of rivers, streams of death in life, whose banks were rotting into mud, whose waters, thickened into slime, invaded the contorted mangroves, that seemed to writhe at us in the extremity of an impotent despair. Nowhere did we stop long enough to get a particularized impression, but the general sense of vague and oppressive wonder grew upon me. It was like a weary pilgrimage amongst hints for nightmares.

“It was upward of thirty days before I saw the mouth of the big river. We anchored off the seat of the government. But my work would not begin till some two hundred miles farther on. So as soon as I could I made a start for a place thirty miles higher up.

“I had my passage on a little sea-going steamer. Her captain was a Swede, and knowing me for a seaman, invited me on the bridge. He was a young man, lean, fair, and morose, with lanky hair and a shuffling gait. As we left the miserable little wharf, he tossed his head contemptuously at the shore. ‘Been living there?’ he asked. I said, ‘Yes.’ ‘Fine lot these government chaps — are they not?’ he went on, speaking English with great precision and considerable bitterness. ‘It is funny what some people will do for a few francs a month. I wonder what becomes of that kind when it goes up country?’ I said to him I expected to see that soon. ‘So-o-o!’ he exclaimed. He shuffled athwart, keeping one eye ahead vigilantly. ‘Don’t be too sure,’ he continued. ‘The other day I took up a man who hanged himself on the road. He was a Swede, too.’ ‘Hanged himself! Why, in God’s name?’

I cried. He kept on looking out watchfully. 'Who knows? The sun too much for him, or the country perhaps.'

"At last we opened a reach. A rocky cliff appeared, mounds of turned-up earth by the shore, houses on a hill, others, with iron roofs, amongst a waste of excavations, or hanging to the declivity. A continuous noise of the rapids above hovered over this scene of inhabited devastation. A lot of people, mostly black and naked, moved about like ants. A jetty projected into the river. A blinding sunlight drowned all this at times in a sudden recrudescence of glare. 'There's your Company's station,' said the Swede, pointing to three wooden barrack-like structures on the rocky slope. 'I will send your things up. Four boxes did you say? So. Farewell.'

"I came upon a boiler wallowing in the grass, then found a path leading up the hill. It turned aside for the bowlders, and also for an undersized railway-truck lying there on its back with its wheels in the air. One was off. The thing looked as dead as the carcass of some animal. I came upon more pieces of decaying machinery, a stack of rusty rails. To the left a clump of trees made a shady spot, where dark things seemed to stir feebly. I blinked, the path was steep. A horn tooted to the right, and I saw the black people run. A heavy and dull detonation shook the ground, a puff of smoke came out of the cliff, and that was all. No change appeared on the face of the rock. They were building a railway. The cliff was not in the way or anything; but this objectless blasting was all the work going on.

"A slight clinking behind me made me turn my head. Six black men advanced in a file, toiling up the path. They walked erect and slow, balancing small baskets full of earth on their heads, and the clink kept time with their footsteps. Black rags were wound round their loins, and the short ends behind wagged to and fro like tails. I could see every rib, the joints of their limbs were like knots in a rope; each had an iron collar on his neck, and all were connected together with a chain whose bights swung between them, rhythmically clinking. Another report from the cliff made me think suddenly of that ship of war I had seen firing into a continent. It was the same kind of ominous voice; but these men could by no stretch of imagination be called enemies. They were called criminals, and the outraged law, like the bursting shells, had come to them, an insoluble mystery from over the sea. All their meager breasts panted together, the violently dilated nostrils quivered, the eyes stared stonily uphill. They passed me within six inches, without a glance, with that complete, deathlike

indifference of unhappy savages. Behind this raw matter one of the reclaimed, the product of the new forces at work, strolled despondently, carrying a rifle by its middle. He had a uniform jacket with one button off, and seeing a white man on the path, hoisted his weapon to his shoulder with alacrity. This was simple prudence, white men being so much alike at a distance that he could not tell who I might be. He was speedily reassured, and with a large, white, rascally grin, and a glance at his charge, seemed to take me into partnership in his exalted trust. After all, I also was a part of the great cause of these high and just proceedings.

“Instead of going up, I turned and descended to the left. My idea was to let that chain-gang get out of sight before I climbed the hill. You know I am not particularly tender; I’ve had to strike and to fend off. I’ve had to resist and to attack sometimes — that’s only one way of resisting — without counting the exact cost, according to the demands of such sort of life as I had blundered into. I’ve seen the devil of violence, and the devil of greed, and the devil of hot desire; but, by all the stars! these were strong, lusty, red-eyed devils, that swayed and drove men — men, I tell you. But as I stood on this hillside, I foresaw that in the blinding sunshine of that land I would become acquainted with a flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly. How insidious he could be, too, I was only to find out several months later and a thousand miles farther. For a moment I stood appalled, as though by a warning. Finally I descended the hill, obliquely, towards the trees I had seen.

“I avoided a vast artificial hole somebody had been digging on the slope, the purpose of which I found it impossible to divine. It wasn’t a quarry or a sandpit, anyhow. It was just a hole. It might have been connected with the philanthropic desire of giving the criminals something to do. I don’t know. Then I nearly fell into a very narrow ravine, almost no more than a scar in the hillside. I discovered that a lot of imported drainage-pipes for the settlement had been tumbled in there. There wasn’t one that was not broken. It was a wanton smash-up. At last I got under the trees. My purpose was to stroll into the shade for a moment; but no sooner within than it seemed to me I had stepped into a gloomy circle of some Inferno. The rapids were near, and an uninterrupted, uniform, headlong, rushing noise filled the mournful stillness of the grove, where not a breath stirred, not a leaf moved, with a mysterious sound — as though the tearing pace of the launched earth had suddenly become audible.

“Black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees, leaning against the trunks, clinging to the earth, half coming out, half effaced within the dim light, in all the attitudes of pain, abandonment, and despair. Another mine on the cliff went off, followed by a slight shudder of the soil under my feet. The work was going on. The work! And this was the place where some of the helpers had withdrawn to die.

“They were dying slowly — it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now, — nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom. Brought from all the recesses of the coast in all the legality of time contracts, lost in uncongenial surroundings, fed on unfamiliar food, they sickened, became inefficient, and were then allowed to crawl away and rest. These moribund shapes were free as air — and nearly as thin. I began to distinguish the gleam of eyes under the trees. Then, glancing down, I saw a face near my hand. The black bones reclined at full length with one shoulder against the tree, and slowly the eyelids rose and the sunken eyes looked up at me, enormous and vacant, a kind of blind, white flicker in the depths of the orbs, which died out slowly. The man seemed young — almost a boy — but you know with them it’s hard to tell. I found nothing else to do but to offer him one of my good Swede’s ship’s biscuits I had in my pocket. The fingers closed slowly on it and held — there was no other movement and no other glance. He had tied a bit of white worsted round his neck — Why? Where did he get it? Was it a badge — an ornament — a charm — a propitiatory act? Was there any idea at all connected with it? It looked startling round his black neck, this bit of white thread from beyond the seas.

“Near the same tree two more bundles of acute angles sat with their legs drawn up. One, with his chin propped on his knees, stared at nothing, in an intolerable and appalling manner: his brother phantom rested its forehead, as if overcome with a great weariness; and all about others were scattered in every pose of contorted collapse, as in some picture of a massacre or a pestilence. While I stood horror-struck, one of these creatures rose to his hands and knees, and went off on all-fours towards the river to drink. He lapped out of his hand, then sat up in the sunlight, crossing his shins in front of him, and after a time let his woolly head fall on his breastbone.

“I didn’t want any more loitering in the shade, and I made haste towards the station. When near the buildings I met a white man, in such an

unexpected elegance of get-up that in the first moment I took him for a sort of vision. I saw a high starched collar, white cuffs, a light alpaca jacket, snowy trousers, a clear necktie, and varnished boots. No hat. Hair parted, brushed, oiled, under a green-lined parasol held in a big white hand. He was amazing, and had a penholder behind his ear.

“I shook hands with this miracle, and I learned he was the Company’s chief accountant, and that all the bookkeeping was done at this station. He had come out for a moment, he said, ‘to get a breath of fresh air.’ The expression sounded wonderfully odd, with its suggestion of sedentary desk-life. I wouldn’t have mentioned the fellow to you at all, only it was from his lips that I first heard the name of the man who is so indissolubly connected with the memories of that time. Moreover, I respected the fellow. Yes; I respected his collars, his vast cuffs, his brushed hair. His appearance was certainly that of a hairdresser’s dummy; but in the great demoralization of the land he kept up his appearance. That’s backbone. His starched collars and got-up shirt-fronts were achievements of character. He had been out nearly three years; and, later on, I could not help asking him how he managed to sport such linen. He had just the faintest blush, and said modestly, ‘I’ve been teaching one of the native women about the station. It was difficult. She had a distaste for the work.’ This man had verily accomplished something. And he was devoted to his books, which were in apple-pie order.

“Everything else in the station was in a muddle, — heads, things, buildings. Strings of dusty niggers with splay feet arrived and departed; a stream of manufactured goods, rubbishy cottons, beads, and brass-wire set into the depths of darkness, and in return came a precious trickle of ivory.

“I had to wait in the station for ten days — an eternity. I lived in a hut in the yard, but to be out of the chaos I would sometimes get into the accountant’s office. It was built of horizontal planks, and so badly put together that, as he bent over his high desk, he was barred from neck to heels with narrow strips of sunlight. There was no need to open the big shutter to see. It was hot there too; big flies buzzed fiendishly, and did not sting, but stabbed. I sat generally on the floor, while, of faultless appearance (and even slightly scented), perching on a high stool, he wrote, he wrote. Sometimes he stood up for exercise. When a truckle-bed with a sick man (some invalided agent from up-country) was put in there, he exhibited a gentle annoyance. ‘The groans of this sick person,’ he said, distract my

attention. And without that it is extremely difficult to guard against clerical errors in this climate.'

"One day he remarked, without lifting his head, 'In the interior you will no doubt meet Mr. Kurtz.' On my asking who Mr. Kurtz was, he said he was a first-class agent; and seeing my disappointment at this information, he added slowly, laying down his pen, 'He is a very remarkable person.' Further questions elicited from him that Mr. Kurtz was at present in charge of a trading post, a very important one, in the true ivory-country, at 'the very bottom of there. Sends in as much ivory as all the others put together. . . .' He began to write again. The sick man was too ill to groan. The flies buzzed in a great peace.

"Suddenly there was a growing murmur of voices and a great tramping of feet. A caravan had come in. A violent babble of uncouth sounds burst out on the other side of the planks. All the carriers were speaking together, and in the midst of the uproar the lamentable voice of the chief agent was heard 'giving it up' tearfully for the twentieth time that day. . . . He rose slowly. 'What a frightful row,' he said. He crossed the room gently to look at the sick man, and returning, said to me, 'He does not hear.' 'What! Dead?' I asked, startled. 'No, not yet,' he answered, with great composure. Then, alluding with a toss of the head to the tumult in the station-yard, 'When one has got to make correct entries, one comes to hate those savages — hate them to the death.' He remained thoughtful for a moment. 'When you see Mr. Kurtz,' he went on, 'tell him from me that everything here' — he glanced at the desk — 'is very satisfactory. I don't like to write to him — with those messengers of ours you never know who may get hold of your letter — at that Central Station.' He stared at me for a moment with his mild, bulging eyes. 'Oh, he will go far, very far,' he began again. 'He will be a somebody in the Administration before long. They, above — the Council in Europe, you know — mean him to be.'

"He turned to his work. The noise outside had ceased, and presently in going out I stopped at the door. In the steady buzz of flies the homeward-bound agent was lying flushed and insensible; the other, bent over his books, was making correct entries of perfectly correct transactions; and fifty feet below the doorstep I could see the still tree-tops of the grove of death.

"Next day I left that station at last, with a caravan of sixty men, for a two-hundred-mile tramp.

“No use telling you much about that. Paths, paths, everywhere; a stamped-in network of paths spreading over the empty land, through long grass, through burnt grass, through thickets, down and up chilly ravines, up and down stony hills ablaze with heat; and a solitude, a solitude, nobody, not a hut. The population had cleared out a long time ago. Well, if a lot of mysterious niggers armed with all kinds of fearful weapons suddenly took to traveling on the road between Deal and Gravesend, catching the yokels right and left to carry heavy loads for them, I fancy every farm and cottage thereabouts would get empty very soon. Only here the dwellings were gone too. Still I passed through several abandoned villages. There’s something pathetically childish in the ruins of grass walls. Day after day, with the stamp and shuffle of sixty pair of bare feet behind me, each pair under a 60-lb. load. Camp, cook, sleep, strike camp, march. Now and then a carrier dead in harness, at rest in the long grass near the path, with an empty water-gourd and his long staff lying by his side. A great silence around and above. Perhaps on some quiet night the tremor of far-off drums, sinking, swelling, a tremor vast, faint; a sound weird, appealing, suggestive, and wild — and perhaps with as profound a meaning as the sound of bells in a Christian country. Once a white man in an unbuttoned uniform, camping on the path with an armed escort of lank Zanzibaris, very hospitable and festive — not to say drunk. Was looking after the upkeep of the road, he declared. Can’t say I saw any road or any upkeep, unless the body of a middle-aged negro, with a bullet-hole in the forehead, upon which I absolutely stumbled three miles farther on, may be considered as a permanent improvement. I had a white companion too, not a bad chap, but rather too fleshy and with the exasperating habit of fainting on the hot hillsides, miles away from the least bit of shade and water. Annoying, you know, to hold your own coat like a parasol over a man’s head while he is coming-to. I couldn’t help asking him once what he meant by coming there at all. ‘To make money, of course. What do you think?’ he said, scornfully. Then he got fever, and had to be carried in a hammock slung under a pole. As he weighed sixteen stone I had no end of rows with the carriers. They jibbed, ran away, sneaked off with their loads in the night — quite a mutiny. So, one evening, I made a speech in English with gestures, not one of which was lost to the sixty pairs of eyes before me, and the next morning I started the hammock off in front all right. An hour afterwards I came upon the whole concern wrecked in a bush — man, hammock, groans, blankets, horrors. The heavy pole had skinned his



poor nose. He was very anxious for me to kill somebody, but there wasn't the shadow of a carrier near. I remembered the old doctor, — 'It would be interesting for science to watch the mental changes of individuals, on the spot.' I felt I was becoming scientifically interesting. However, all that is to no purpose. On the fifteenth day I came in sight of the big river again, and hobbled into the Central Station. It was on a back water surrounded by scrub and forest, with a pretty border of smelly mud on one side, and on the three others inclosed by a crazy fence of rushes. A neglected gap was all the gate it had, and the first glance at the place was enough to let you see the flabby devil was running that show. White men with long staves in their hands appeared languidly from amongst the buildings, strolling up to take a look at me, and then retired out of sight somewhere. One of them, a stout, excitable chap with black mustaches, informed me with great volubility and many digressions, as soon as I told him who I was, that my steamer was at the bottom of the river. I was thunderstruck. What, how, why? Oh, it was 'all right.' The 'manager himself' was there. All quite correct. 'Everybody had behaved splendidly! splendidly!' — 'you must,' he said in agitation, 'go and see the general manager at once. He is waiting!'

"I did not see the real significance of that wreck at once. I fancy I see it now, but I am not sure — not at all. Certainly the affair was too stupid — when I think of it — to be altogether natural. Still. . . . But at the moment it presented itself simply as a confounded nuisance. The steamer was sunk. They had started two days before in a sudden hurry up the river with the manager on board, in charge of some volunteer skipper, and before they had been out three hours they tore the bottom out of her on stones, and she sank near the south bank. I asked myself what I was to do there, now my boat was lost. As a matter of fact, I had plenty to do in fishing my command out of the river. I had to set about it the very next day. That, and the repairs when I brought the pieces to the station, took some months.

"My first interview with the manager was curious. He did not ask me to sit down after my twenty-mile walk that morning. He was commonplace in complexion, in features, in manners, and in voice. He was of middle size and of ordinary build. His eyes, of the usual blue, were perhaps remarkably cold, and he certainly could make his glance fall on one as trenchant and heavy as an ax. But even at these times the rest of his person seemed to disclaim the intention. Otherwise there was only an indefinable, faint expression of his lips, something stealthy — a smile — not a smile — I

remember it, but I can't explain. It was unconscious, this smile was, though just after he had said something it got intensified for an instant. It came at the end of his speeches like a seal applied on the words to make the meaning of the commonest phrase appear absolutely inscrutable. He was a common trader, from his youth up employed in these parts — nothing more. He was obeyed, yet he inspired neither love nor fear, nor even respect. He inspired uneasiness. That was it! Uneasiness. Not a definite mistrust — just uneasiness — nothing more. You have no idea how effective such a . . . a . . . faculty can be. He had no genius for organizing, for initiative, or for order even. That was evident in such things as the deplorable state of the station. He had no learning, and no intelligence. His position had come to him — why? Perhaps because he was never ill . . . He had served three terms of three years out there . . . Because triumphant health in the general rout of constitutions is a kind of power in itself. When he went home on leave he rioted on a large scale — pompously. Jack ashore — with a difference — in externals only. This one could gather from his casual talk. He originated nothing, he could keep the routine going — that's all. But he was great. He was great by this little thing that it was impossible to tell what could control such a man. He never gave that secret away. Perhaps there was nothing within him. Such a suspicion made one pause — for out there there were no external checks. Once when various tropical diseases had laid low almost every 'agent' in the station, he was heard to say, 'Men who come out here should have no entrails.' He sealed the utterance with that smile of his, as though it had been a door opening into a darkness he had in his keeping. You fancied you had seen things — but the seal was on. When annoyed at meal-times by the constant quarrels of the white men about precedence, he ordered an immense round table to be made, for which a special house had to be built. This was the station's mess-room. Where he sat was the first place — the rest were nowhere. One felt this to be his unalterable conviction. He was neither civil nor uncivil. He was quiet. He allowed his 'boy' — an overfed young negro from the coast — to treat the white men, under his very eyes, with provoking insolence.

"He began to speak as soon as he saw me. I had been very long on the road. He could not wait. Had to start without me. The up-river stations had to be relieved. There had been so many delays already that he did not know who was dead and who was alive, and how they got on — and so on, and so on. He paid no attention to my explanations, and, playing with a stick of

sealing-wax, repeated several times that the situation was 'very grave, very grave.' There were rumors that a very important station was in jeopardy, and its chief, Mr. Kurtz, was ill. Hoped it was not true. Mr. Kurtz was . . . I felt weary and irritable. Hang Kurtz, I thought. I interrupted him by saying I had heard of Mr. Kurtz on the coast. 'Ah! So they talk of him down there,' he murmured to himself. Then he began again, assuring me Mr. Kurtz was the best agent he had, an exceptional man, of the greatest importance to the Company; therefore I could understand his anxiety. He was, he said, 'very, very uneasy.' Certainly he fidgeted on his chair a good deal, exclaimed, 'Ah, Mr. Kurtz!' broke the stick of sealing-wax and seemed dumbfounded by the accident. Next thing he wanted to know 'how long it would take to' . . . I interrupted him again. Being hungry, you know, and kept on my feet too, I was getting savage. 'How could I tell,' I said. 'I hadn't even seen the wreck yet — some months, no doubt.' All this talk seemed to me so futile. 'Some months,' he said. 'Well, let us say three months before we can make a start. Yes. That ought to do the affair.' I flung out of his hut (he lived all alone in a clay hut with a sort of veranda) muttering to myself my opinion of him. He was a chattering idiot. Afterwards I took it back when it was borne in upon me startlingly with what extreme nicety he had estimated the time requisite for the 'affair.'

"I went to work the next day, turning, so to speak, my back on that station. In that way only it seemed to me I could keep my hold on the redeeming facts of life. Still, one must look about sometimes; and then I saw this station, these men strolling aimlessly about in the sunshine of the yard. I asked myself sometimes what it all meant. They wandered here and there with their absurd long staves in their hands, like a lot of faithless pilgrims bewitched inside a rotten fence. The word 'ivory' rang in the air, was whispered, was sighed. You would think they were praying to it. A taint of imbecile rapacity blew through it all, like a whiff from some corpse. By Jove! I've never seen anything so unreal in my life. And outside, the silent wilderness surrounding this cleared speck on the earth struck me as something great and invincible, like evil or truth, waiting patiently for the passing away of this fantastic invasion.

"Oh, these months! Well, never mind. Various things happened. One evening a grass shed full of calico, cotton prints, beads, and I don't know what else, burst into a blaze so suddenly that you would have thought the earth had opened to let an avenging fire consume all that trash. I was

smoking my pipe quietly by my dismantled steamer, and saw them all cutting capers in the light, with their arms lifted high, when the stout man with mustaches came tearing down to the river, a tin pail in his hand, assured me that everybody was 'behaving splendidly, splendidly,' dipped about a quart of water and tore back again. I noticed there was a hole in the bottom of his pail.

"I strolled up. There was no hurry. You see the thing had gone off like a box of matches. It had been hopeless from the very first. The flame had leaped high, driven everybody back, lighted up everything — and collapsed. The shed was already a heap of embers glowing fiercely. A nigger was being beaten near by. They said he had caused the fire in some way; be that as it may, he was screeching most horribly. I saw him, later on, for several days, sitting in a bit of shade looking very sick and trying to recover himself: afterwards he arose and went out — and the wilderness without a sound took him into its bosom again. As I approached the glow from the dark I found myself at the back of two men, talking. I heard the name of Kurtz pronounced, then the words, 'take advantage of this unfortunate accident.' One of the men was the manager. I wished him a good evening. 'Did you ever see anything like it — eh? it is incredible,' he said, and walked off. The other man remained. He was a first-class agent, young, gentlemanly, a bit reserved, with a forked little beard and a hooked nose. He was stand-offish with the other agents, and they on their side said he was the manager's spy upon them. As to me, I had hardly ever spoken to him before. We got into talk, and by-and-by we strolled away from the hissing ruins. Then he asked me to his room, which was in the main building of the station. He struck a match, and I perceived that this young aristocrat had not only a silver-mounted dressing-case but also a whole candle all to himself. Just at that time the manager was the only man supposed to have any right to candles. Native mats covered the clay walls; a collection of spears, assegais, shields, knives was hung up in trophies. The business intrusted to this fellow was the making of bricks — so I had been informed; but there wasn't a fragment of a brick anywhere in the station, and he had been there more than a year — waiting. It seems he could not make bricks without something, I don't know what — straw maybe. Anyways, it could not be found there, and as it was not likely to be sent from Europe, it did not appear clear to me what he was waiting for. An act of special creation perhaps. However, they were all waiting — all the

sixteen or twenty pilgrims of them — for something; and upon my word it did not seem an uncongenial occupation, from the way they took it, though the only thing that ever came to them was disease — as far as I could see. They beguiled the time by backbiting and intriguing against each other in a foolish kind of way. There was an air of plotting about that station, but nothing came of it, of course. It was as unreal as everything else — as the philanthropic pretense of the whole concern, as their talk, as their government, as their show of work. The only real feeling was a desire to get appointed to a trading-post where ivory was to be had, so that they could earn percentages. They intrigued and slandered and hated each other only on that account, — but as to effectually lifting a little finger — oh, no. By heavens! there is something after all in the world allowing one man to steal a horse while another must not look at a halter. Steal a horse straight out. Very well. He has done it. Perhaps he can ride. But there is a way of looking at a halter that would provoke the most charitable of saints into a kick.

“I had no idea why he wanted to be sociable, but as we chatted in there it suddenly occurred to me the fellow was trying to get at something — in fact, pumping me. He alluded constantly to Europe, to the people I was supposed to know there — putting leading questions as to my acquaintances in the sepulchral city, and so on. His little eyes glittered like mica discs — with curiosity, — though he tried to keep up a bit of superciliousness. At first I was astonished, but very soon I became awfully curious to see what he would find out from me. I couldn’t possibly imagine what I had in me to make it worth his while. It was very pretty to see how he baffled himself, for in truth my body was full of chills, and my head had nothing in it but that wretched steamboat business. It was evident he took me for a perfectly shameless prevaricator. At last he got angry, and to conceal a movement of furious annoyance, he yawned. I rose. Then I noticed a small sketch in oils, on a panel, representing a woman, draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch. The background was somber — almost black. The movement of the woman was stately, and the effect of the torchlight on the face was sinister.

“It arrested me, and he stood by civilly, holding a half-pint champagne bottle (medical comforts) with the candle stuck in it. To my question he said Mr. Kurtz had painted this — in this very station more than a year ago — while waiting for means to go to his trading-post. ‘Tell me, pray,’ said I, ‘who is this Mr. Kurtz?’

“‘The chief of the Inner Station,’ he answered in a short tone, looking away. ‘Much obliged,’ I said, laughing. ‘And you are the brickmaker of the Central Station. Everyone knows that.’ He was silent for a while. ‘He is a prodigy,’ he said at last. ‘He is an emissary of pity, and science, and progress, and devil knows what else. We want,’ he began to declaim suddenly, ‘for the guidance of the cause intrusted to us by Europe, so to speak, higher intelligence, wide sympathies, a singleness of purpose.’ ‘Who says that?’ I asked. ‘Lots of them,’ he replied. ‘Some even write that; and so he comes here, a special being, as you ought to know.’ ‘Why ought I to know?’ I interrupted, really surprised. He paid no attention. ‘Yes. To-day he is chief of the best station, next year he will be assistant-manager, two years more and . . . but I dare say you know what he will be in two years’ time. You are of the new gang — the gang of virtue. The same people who sent him specially also recommended you. Oh, don’t say no. I’ve my own eyes to trust.’ Light dawned upon me. My dear aunt’s influential acquaintances were producing an unexpected effect upon that young man. I nearly burst into a laugh. ‘Do you read the Company’s confidential correspondence?’ I asked. He hadn’t a word to say. It was great fun. ‘When Mr. Kurtz,’ I continued severely, ‘is General Manager, you won’t have the opportunity.’

“He blew the candle out suddenly, and we went outside. The moon had risen. Black figures strolled about listlessly, pouring water on the glow, whence proceeded a sound of hissing; steam ascended in the moonlight, the beaten nigger groaned somewhere. ‘What a row the brute makes!’ said the indefatigable man with the mustaches, appearing near us. ‘Serve him right. Transgression — punishment — bang! Pitiless, pitiless. That’s the only way. This will prevent all conflagrations for the future. I was just telling the manager . . .’ He noticed my companion, and became crestfallen all at once. ‘Not in bed yet,’ he said, with a kind of servile heartiness; ‘it’s so natural. Ha! Danger — agitation.’ He vanished. I went on to the river-side, and the other followed me. I heard a scathing murmur at my ear, ‘Heap of muffs — go to.’ The pilgrims could be seen in knots gesticulating, discussing. Several had still their staves in their hands. I verily believe they took these sticks to bed with them. Beyond the fence the forest stood up spectrally in the moonlight, and through the dim stir, through the faint sounds of that lamentable courtyard, the silence of the land went home to one’s very heart, — its mystery, its greatness, the amazing reality of its concealed life. The hurt nigger moaned feebly somewhere near by, and then fetched a deep sigh

that made me mend my pace away from there. I felt a hand introducing itself under my arm. 'My dear sir,' said the fellow, 'I don't want to be misunderstood, and especially by you, who will see Mr. Kurtz long before I can have that pleasure. I wouldn't like him to get a false idea of my disposition. . . .'

"I let him run on, this papier-mache Mephistopheles, and it seemed to me that if I tried I could poke my forefinger through him, and would find nothing inside but a little loose dirt, maybe. He, don't you see, had been planning to be assistant-manager by-and-by under the present man, and I could see that the coming of that Kurtz had upset them both not a little. He talked precipitately, and I did not try to stop him. I had my shoulders against the wreck of my steamer, hauled up on the slope like a carcass of some big river animal. The smell of mud, of primeval mud, by Jove! was in my nostrils, the high stillness of primeval forest was before my eyes; there were shiny patches on the black creek. The moon had spread over everything a thin layer of silver — over the rank grass, over the mud, upon the wall of matted vegetation standing higher than the wall of a temple, over the great river I could see through a somber gap glittering, glittering, as it flowed broadly by without a murmur. All this was great, expectant, mute, while the man jabbered about himself. I wondered whether the stillness on the face of the immensity looking at us two were meant as an appeal or as a menace. What were we who had strayed in here? Could we handle that dumb thing, or would it handle us? I felt how big, how confoundedly big, was that thing that couldn't talk, and perhaps was deaf as well. What was in there? I could see a little ivory coming out from there, and I had heard Mr. Kurtz was in there. I had heard enough about it too — God knows! Yet somehow it didn't bring any image with it — no more than if I had been told an angel or a fiend was in there. I believed it in the same way one of you might believe there are inhabitants in the planet Mars. I knew once a Scotch sailmaker who was certain, dead sure, there were people in Mars. If you asked him for some idea how they looked and behaved, he would get shy and mutter something about 'walking on all-fours.' If you as much as smiled, he would — though a man of sixty — offer to fight you. I would not have gone so far as to fight for Kurtz, but I went for him near enough to a lie. You know I hate, detest, and can't bear a lie, not because I am straighter than the rest of us, but simply because it appalls me. There is a taint of death, a flavor of mortality in lies, — which

is exactly what I hate and detest in the world — what I want to forget. It makes me miserable and sick, like biting something rotten would do. Temperament, I suppose. Well, I went near enough to it by letting the young fool there believe anything he liked to imagine as to my influence in Europe. I became in an instant as much of a pretense as the rest of the bewitched pilgrims. This simply because I had a notion it somehow would be of help to that Kurtz whom at the time I did not see — you understand. He was just a word for me. I did not see the man in the name any more than you do. Do you see him? Do you see the story? Do you see anything? It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream — making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation, that commingling of absurdity, surprise, and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt, that notion of being captured by the incredible which is of the very essence of dreams. . . .”

He was silent for a while.

“. . . No, it is impossible; it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one’s existence, — that which makes its truth, its meaning — its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we dream — alone. . . .”

He paused again as if reflecting, then added — ”Of course in this you fellows see more than I could then. You see me, whom you know. . . .”

It had become so pitch dark that we listeners could hardly see one another. For a long time already he, sitting apart, had been no more to us than a voice. There was not a word from anybody. The others might have been asleep, but I was awake. I listened, I listened on the watch for the sentence, for the word, that would give me the clew to the faint uneasiness inspired by this narrative that seemed to shape itself without human lips in the heavy night-air of the river.

“. . . Yes — I let him run on,” Marlow began again, “and think what he pleased about the powers that were behind me. I did! And there was nothing behind me! There was nothing but that wretched, old, mangled steamboat I was leaning against, while he talked fluently about ‘the necessity for every man to get on.’ ‘And when one comes out here, you conceive, it is not to gaze at the moon.’ Mr. Kurtz was a ‘universal genius,’ but even a genius would find it easier to work with ‘adequate tools — intelligent men.’ He did not make bricks — why, there was a physical impossibility in the way — as I was well aware; and if he did secretarial work for the manager, it was



because ‘no sensible man rejects wantonly the confidence of his superiors.’ Did I see it? I saw it. What more did I want? What I really wanted was rivets, by heaven! Rivets. To get on with the work — to stop the hole. Rivets I wanted. There were cases of them down at the coast — cases — piled up — burst — split! You kicked a loose rivet at every second step in that station yard on the hillside. Rivets had rolled into the grove of death. You could fill your pockets with rivets for the trouble of stooping down — and there wasn’t one rivet to be found where it was wanted. We had plates that would do, but nothing to fasten them with. And every week the messenger, a lone negro, letter-bag on shoulder and staff in hand, left our station for the coast. And several times a week a coast caravan came in with trade goods, — ghastly glazed calico that made you shudder only to look at it, glass beads value about a penny a quart, confounded spotted cotton handkerchiefs. And no rivets. Three carriers could have brought all that was wanted to set that steamboat afloat.

“He was becoming confidential now, but I fancy my unresponsive attitude must have exasperated him at last, for he judged it necessary to inform me he feared neither God nor devil, let alone any mere man. I said I could see that very well, but what I wanted was a certain quantity of rivets — and rivets were what really Mr. Kurtz wanted, if he had only known it. Now letters went to the coast every week. . . . ‘My dear sir,’ he cried, ‘I write from dictation.’ I demanded rivets. There was a way — for an intelligent man. He changed his manner; became very cold, and suddenly began to talk about a hippopotamus; wondered whether sleeping on board the steamer (I stuck to my salvage night and day) I wasn’t disturbed. There was an old hippo that had the bad habit of getting out on the bank and roaming at night over the station grounds. The pilgrims used to turn out in a body and empty every rifle they could lay hands on at him. Some even had sat up o’ nights for him. All this energy was wasted, though. ‘That animal has a charmed life,’ he said; ‘but you can say this only of brutes in this country. No man — you apprehend me? — no man here bears a charmed life.’ He stood there for a moment in the moonlight with his delicate hooked nose set a little askew, and his mica eyes glittering without a wink, then, with a curt Good night, he strode off. I could see he was disturbed and considerably puzzled, which made me feel more hopeful than I had been for days. It was a great comfort to turn from that chap to my influential friend, the battered, twisted, ruined, tin-pot steamboat. I clambered on board. She

rang under my feet like an empty Huntley & Palmer biscuit-tin kicked along a gutter; she was nothing so solid in make, and rather less pretty in shape, but I had expended enough hard work on her to make me love her. No influential friend would have served me better. She had given me a chance to come out a bit — to find out what I could do. No, I don't like work. I had rather laze about and think of all the fine things that can be done. I don't like work — no man does — but I like what is in the work, — the chance to find yourself. Your own reality — for yourself, not for others — what no other man can ever know. They can only see the mere show, and never can tell what it really means.

“I was not surprised to see somebody sitting aft, on the deck, with his legs dangling over the mud. You see I rather chummed with the few mechanics there were in that station, whom the other pilgrims naturally despised — on account of their imperfect manners, I suppose. This was the foreman — a boiler-maker by trade — a good worker. He was a lank, bony, yellow-faced man, with big intense eyes. His aspect was worried, and his head was as bald as the palm of my hand; but his hair in falling seemed to have stuck to his chin, and had prospered in the new locality, for his beard hung down to his waist. He was a widower with six young children (he had left them in charge of a sister of his to come out there), and the passion of his life was pigeon-flying. He was an enthusiast and a connoisseur. He would rave about pigeons. After work hours he used sometimes to come over from his hut for a talk about his children and his pigeons; at work, when he had to crawl in the mud under the bottom of the steamboat, he would tie up that beard of his in a kind of white serviette he brought for the purpose. It had loops to go over his ears. In the evening he could be seen squatted on the bank rinsing that wrapper in the creek with great care, then spreading it solemnly on a bush to dry.

“I slapped him on the back and shouted, ‘We shall have rivets!’ He scrambled to his feet exclaiming ‘No! Rivets!’ as though he couldn't believe his ears. Then in a low voice, ‘You . . . eh?’ I don't know why we behaved like lunatics. I put my finger to the side of my nose and nodded mysteriously. ‘Good for you!’ he cried, snapped his fingers above his head, lifting one foot. I tried a jig. We capered on the iron deck. A frightful clatter came out of that hulk, and the virgin forest on the other bank of the creek sent it back in a thundering roll upon the sleeping station. It must have made some of the pilgrims sit up in their hovels. A dark figure obscured the

lighted doorway of the manager's hut, vanished, then, a second or so after, the doorway itself vanished too. We stopped, and the silence driven away by the stamping of our feet flowed back again from the recesses of the land. The great wall of vegetation, an exuberant and entangled mass of trunks, branches, leaves, boughs, festoons, motionless in the moonlight, was like a rioting invasion of soundless life, a rolling wave of plants, piled up, crested, ready to topple over the creek, to sweep every little man of us out of his little existence. And it moved not. A deadened burst of mighty splashes and snorts reached us from afar, as though an ichthyosaurus had been taking a bath of glitter in the great river. 'After all,' said the boiler-maker in a reasonable tone, 'why shouldn't we get the rivets?' Why not, indeed! I did not know of any reason why we shouldn't. 'They'll come in three weeks,' I said confidently.

"But they didn't. Instead of rivets there came an invasion, an infliction, a visitation. It came in sections during the next three weeks, each section headed by a donkey carrying a white man in new clothes and tan shoes, bowing from that elevation right and left to the impressed pilgrims. A quarrelsome band of footsore sulky niggers trod on the heels of the donkeys; a lot of tents, camp-stools, tin boxes, white cases, brown bales would be shot down in the courtyard, and the air of mystery would deepen a little over the muddle of the station. Five such installments came, with their absurd air of disorderly flight with the loot of innumerable outfit shops and provision stores, that, one would think, they were lugging, after a raid, into the wilderness for equitable division. It was an inextricable mess of things decent in themselves but that human folly made look like the spoils of thieving.

"This devoted band called itself the Eldorado Exploring Expedition, and I believe they were sworn to secrecy. Their talk, however, was the talk of sordid buccaneers: it was reckless without hardihood, greedy without audacity, and cruel without courage; there was not an atom of foresight or of serious intention in the whole batch of them, and they did not seem aware these things are wanted for the work of the world. To tear treasure out of the bowels of the land was their desire, with no more moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe. Who paid the expenses of the noble enterprise I don't know; but the uncle of our manager was leader of that lot.

“In exterior he resembled a butcher in a poor neighborhood, and his eyes had a look of sleepy cunning. He carried his fat paunch with ostentation on his short legs, and during the time his gang infested the station spoke to no one but his nephew. You could see these two roaming about all day long with their heads close together in an everlasting confab.

“I had given up worrying myself about the rivets. One’s capacity for that kind of folly is more limited than you would suppose. I said Hang! — and let things slide. I had plenty of time for meditation, and now and then I would give some thought to Kurtz. I wasn’t very interested in him. No. Still, I was curious to see whether this man, who had come out equipped with moral ideas of some sort, would climb to the top after all, and how he would set about his work when there.”

## II

“One evening as I was lying flat on the deck of my steamboat, I heard voices approaching — and there were the nephew and the uncle strolling along the bank. I laid my head on my arm again, and had nearly lost myself in a doze, when somebody said in my ear, as it were: ‘I am as harmless as a little child, but I don’t like to be dictated to. Am I the manager — or am I not? I was ordered to send him there. It’s incredible.’ . . . I became aware that the two were standing on the shore alongside the forepart of the steamboat, just below my head. I did not move; it did not occur to me to move: I was sleepy. ‘It is unpleasant,’ grunted the uncle. ‘He has asked the Administration to be sent there,’ said the other, ‘with the idea of showing what he could do; and I was instructed accordingly. Look at the influence that man must have. Is it not frightful?’ They both agreed it was frightful, then made several bizarre remarks: ‘Make rain and fine weather — one man — the Council — by the nose’ — bits of absurd sentences that got the better of my drowsiness, so that I had pretty near the whole of my wits about me when the uncle said, ‘The climate may do away with this difficulty for you. Is he alone there?’ ‘Yes,’ answered the manager; ‘he sent his assistant down the river with a note to me in these terms: “Clear this poor devil out of the country, and don’t bother sending more of that sort. I had rather be alone than have the kind of men you can dispose of with me.” It was more than a year ago. Can you imagine such impudence!’ ‘Anything since then?’ asked the other, hoarsely. ‘Ivory,’ jerked the nephew; ‘lots of it — prime sort — lots — most annoying, from him.’ ‘And with that?’ questioned the heavy rumble. ‘Invoice,’ was the reply fired out, so to speak. Then silence. They had been talking about Kurtz.

“I was broad awake by this time, but, lying perfectly at ease, remained still, having no inducement to change my position. ‘How did that ivory come all this way?’ growled the elder man, who seemed very vexed. The other explained that it had come with a fleet of canoes in charge of an English half-caste clerk Kurtz had with him; that Kurtz had apparently intended to return himself, the station being by that time bare of goods and stores, but after coming three hundred miles, had suddenly decided to go back, which he started to do alone in a small dug-out with four paddlers, leaving the half-caste to continue down the river with the ivory. The two

fellows there seemed astounded at anybody attempting such a thing. They were at a loss for an adequate motive. As to me, I seemed to see Kurtz for the first time. It was a distinct glimpse: the dug-out, four paddling savages, and the lone white man turning his back suddenly on the headquarters, on relief, on thoughts of home — perhaps; setting his face towards the depths of the wilderness, towards his empty and desolate station. I did not know the motive. Perhaps he was just simply a fine fellow who stuck to his work for its own sake. His name, you understand, had not been pronounced once. He was ‘that man.’ The half-caste, who, as far as I could see, had conducted a difficult trip with great prudence and pluck, was invariably alluded to as ‘that scoundrel.’ The ‘scoundrel’ had reported that the ‘man’ had been very ill — had recovered imperfectly. . . . The two below me moved away then a few paces, and strolled back and forth at some little distance. I heard: ‘Military post — doctor — two hundred miles — quite alone now — unavoidable delays — nine months — no news — strange rumors.’ They approached again, just as the manager was saying, ‘No one, as far as I know, unless a species of wandering trader — a pestilential fellow, snapping ivory from the natives.’ Who was it they were talking about now? I gathered in snatches that this was some man supposed to be in Kurtz’s district, and of whom the manager did not approve. ‘We will not be free from unfair competition till one of these fellows is hanged for an example,’ he said. ‘Certainly,’ grunted the other; ‘get him hanged! Why not? Anything — anything can be done in this country. That’s what I say; nobody here, you understand, here, can endanger your position. And why? You stand the climate — you outlast them all. The danger is in Europe; but there before I left I took care to — ’ They moved off and whispered, then their voices rose again. ‘The extraordinary series of delays is not my fault. I did my possible.’ The fat man sighed, ‘Very sad.’ ‘And the pestiferous absurdity of his talk,’ continued the other; ‘he bothered me enough when he was here. “Each station should be like a beacon on the road towards better things, a center for trade of course, but also for humanizing, improving, instructing.” Conceive you — that ass! And he wants to be manager! No, it’s — ’ Here he got choked by excessive indignation, and I lifted my head the least bit. I was surprised to see how near they were — right under me. I could have spat upon their hats. They were looking on the ground, absorbed in thought. The manager was switching his leg with a slender twig: his sagacious relative lifted his head. ‘You have been well since you came out this time?’

he asked. The other gave a start. 'Who? I? Oh! Like a charm — like a charm. But the rest — oh, my goodness! All sick. They die so quick, too, that I haven't the time to send them out of the country — it's incredible!' 'H'm. Just so,' grunted the uncle. 'Ah! my boy, trust to this — I say, trust to this.' I saw him extend his short flipper of an arm for a gesture that took in the forest, the creek, the mud, the river, — seemed to beckon with a dishonoring flourish before the sunlit face of the land a treacherous appeal to the lurking death, to the hidden evil, to the profound darkness of its heart. It was so startling that I leaped to my feet and looked back at the edge of the forest, as though I had expected an answer of some sort to that black display of confidence. You know the foolish notions that come to one sometimes. The high stillness confronted these two figures with its ominous patience, waiting for the passing away of a fantastic invasion.

"They swore aloud together — out of sheer fright, I believe — then pretending not to know anything of my existence, turned back to the station. The sun was low; and leaning forward side by side, they seemed to be tugging painfully uphill their two ridiculous shadows of unequal length, that trailed behind them slowly over the tall grass without bending a single blade.

"In a few days the Eldorado Expedition went into the patient wilderness, that closed upon it as the sea closes over a diver. Long afterwards the news came that all the donkeys were dead. I know nothing as to the fate of the less valuable animals. They, no doubt, like the rest of us, found what they deserved. I did not inquire. I was then rather excited at the prospect of meeting Kurtz very soon. When I say very soon I mean it comparatively. It was just two months from the day we left the creek when we came to the bank below Kurtz's station.

"Going up that river was like traveling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest. The air was warm, thick, heavy, sluggish. There was no joy in the brilliance of sunshine. The long stretches of the waterway ran on, deserted, into the gloom of overshadowed distances. On silvery sandbanks hippos and alligators sunned themselves side by side. The broadening waters flowed through a mob of wooded islands; you lost your way on that river as you would in a desert, and butted all day long against shoals, trying to find the channel, till you thought yourself bewitched and cut off for ever from everything you had

known once — somewhere — far away — in another existence perhaps. There were moments when one's past came back to one, as it will sometimes when you have not a moment to spare to yourself; but it came in the shape of an unrestful and noisy dream, remembered with wonder amongst the overwhelming realities of this strange world of plants, and water, and silence. And this stillness of life did not in the least resemble a peace. It was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention. It looked at you with a vengeful aspect. I got used to it afterwards; I did not see it any more; I had no time. I had to keep guessing at the channel; I had to discern, mostly by inspiration, the signs of hidden banks; I watched for sunken stones; I was learning to clap my teeth smartly before my heart flew out, when I shaved by a fluke some infernal sly old snag that would have ripped the life out of the tin-pot steamboat and drowned all the pilgrims; I had to keep a look-out for the signs of dead wood we could cut up in the night for next day's steaming. When you have to attend to things of that sort, to the mere incidents of the surface, the reality — the reality, I tell you — fades. The inner truth is hidden — luckily, luckily. But I felt it all the same; I felt often its mysterious stillness watching me at my monkey tricks, just as it watches you fellows performing on your respective tight-ropes for — what is it? half-a-crown a tumble — ”

“Try to be civil, Marlow,” growled a voice, and I knew there was at least one listener awake besides myself.

“I beg your pardon. I forgot the heartache which makes up the rest of the price. And indeed what does the price matter, if the trick be well done? You do your tricks very well. And I didn't do badly either, since I managed not to sink that steamboat on my first trip. It's a wonder to me yet. Imagine a blindfolded man set to drive a van over a bad road. I sweated and shivered over that business considerably, I can tell you. After all, for a seaman, to scrape the bottom of the thing that's supposed to float all the time under his care is the unpardonable sin. No one may know of it, but you never forget the thump — eh? A blow on the very heart. You remember it, you dream of it, you wake up at night and think of it — years after — and go hot and cold all over. I don't pretend to say that steamboat floated all the time. More than once she had to wade for a bit, with twenty cannibals splashing around and pushing. We had enlisted some of these chaps on the way for a crew. Fine fellows — cannibals — in their place. They were men one could work with,



and I am grateful to them. And, after all, they did not eat each other before my face: they had brought along a provision of hippo-meat which went rotten, and made the mystery of the wilderness stink in my nostrils. Phoo! I can sniff it now. I had the manager on board and three or four pilgrims with their staves — all complete. Sometimes we came upon a station close by the bank, clinging to the skirts of the unknown, and the white men rushing out of a tumble-down hovel, with great gestures of joy and surprise and welcome, seemed very strange, — had the appearance of being held there captive by a spell. The word ivory would ring in the air for a while — and on we went again into the silence, along empty reaches, round the still bends, between the high walls of our winding way, reverberating in hollow claps the ponderous beat of the stern-wheel. Trees, trees, millions of trees, massive, immense, running up high; and at their foot, hugging the bank against the stream, crept the little begrimed steamboat, like a sluggish beetle crawling on the floor of a lofty portico. It made you feel very small, very lost, and yet it was not altogether depressing, that feeling. After all, if you were small, the grimy beetle crawled on — which was just what you wanted it to do. Where the pilgrims imagined it crawled to I don't know. To some place where they expected to get something, I bet! For me it crawled toward Kurtz — exclusively; but when the steam-pipes started leaking we crawled very slow. The reaches opened before us and closed behind, as if the forest had stepped leisurely across the water to bar the way for our return. We penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness. It was very quiet there. At night sometimes the roll of drums behind the curtain of trees would run up the river and remain sustained faintly, as if hovering in the air high over our heads, till the first break of day. Whether it meant war, peace, or prayer we could not tell. The dawns were heralded by the descent of a chill stillness; the woodcutters slept, their fires burned low; the snapping of a twig would make you start. We were wanderers on a prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet. We could have fancied ourselves the first of men taking possession of an accursed inheritance, to be subdued at the cost of profound anguish and of excessive toil. But suddenly, as we struggled round a bend, there would be a glimpse of rush walls, of peaked grass-roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling, under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage. The steamer toiled along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible

frenzy. The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us — who could tell? We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings; we glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse. We could not understand, because we were too far and could not remember, because we were traveling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign — and no memories.

“The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there — there you could look at a thing monstrous and free. It was unearthly, and the men were — No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it — this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled, and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity — like yours — the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough; but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you — you so remote from the night of first ages — could comprehend. And why not? The mind of man is capable of anything — because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future. What was there after all? Joy, fear, sorrow, devotion, valor, rage — who can tell? — but truth — truth stripped of its cloak of time. Let the fool gape and shudder — the man knows, and can look on without a wink. But he must at least be as much of a man as these on the shore. He must meet that truth with his own true stuff — with his own inborn strength. Principles? Principles won’t do. Acquisitions, clothes, pretty rags — rags that would fly off at the first good shake. No; you want a deliberate belief. An appeal to me in this fiendish row — is there? Very well; I hear; I admit, but I have a voice too, and for good or evil mine is the speech that cannot be silenced. Of course, a fool, what with sheer fright and fine sentiments, is always safe. Who’s that grunting? You wonder I didn’t go ashore for a howl and a dance? Well, no — I didn’t. Fine sentiments, you say? Fine sentiments, be hanged! I had no time. I had to mess about with white-lead and strips of woolen blanket helping to put bandages on those leaky steam-pipes — I tell you. I had to watch the steering, and circumvent those snags, and get the tin-pot along by hook or by crook. There was surface-truth enough in these things to save a wiser man. And between

whiles I had to look after the savage who was fireman. He was an improved specimen; he could fire up a vertical boiler. He was there below me, and, upon my word, to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat, walking on his hind-legs. A few months of training had done for that really fine chap. He squinted at the steam-gauge and at the water-gauge with an evident effort of intrepidity — and he had filed teeth too, the poor devil, and the wool of his pate shaved into queer patterns, and three ornamental scars on each of his cheeks. He ought to have been clapping his hands and stamping his feet on the bank, instead of which he was hard at work, a thrall to strange witchcraft, full of improving knowledge. He was useful because he had been instructed; and what he knew was this — that should the water in that transparent thing disappear, the evil spirit inside the boiler would get angry through the greatness of his thirst, and take a terrible vengeance. So he sweated and fired up and watched the glass fearfully (with an impromptu charm, made of rags, tied to his arm, and a piece of polished bone, as big as a watch, stuck flatways through his lower lip), while the wooded banks slipped past us slowly, the short noise was left behind, the interminable miles of silence — and we crept on, towards Kurtz. But the snags were thick, the water was treacherous and shallow, the boiler seemed indeed to have a sulky devil in it, and thus neither that fireman nor I had any time to peer into our creepy thoughts.

“Some fifty miles below the Inner Station we came upon a hut of reeds, an inclined and melancholy pole, with the unrecognizable tatters of what had been a flag of some sort flying from it, and a neatly stacked woodpile. This was unexpected. We came to the bank, and on the stack of firewood found a flat piece of board with some faded pencil-writing on it. When deciphered it said: ‘Wood for you. Hurry up. Approach cautiously.’ There was a signature, but it was illegible — not Kurtz — a much longer word. ‘Hurry up.’ Where? Up the river? ‘Approach cautiously.’ We had not done so. But the warning could not have been meant for the place where it could be only found after approach. Something was wrong above. But what — and how much? That was the question. We commented adversely upon the imbecility of that telegraphic style. The bush around said nothing, and would not let us look very far, either. A torn curtain of red twill hung in the doorway of the hut, and flapped sadly in our faces. The dwelling was dismantled; but we could see a white man had lived there not very long ago.

There remained a rude table — a plank on two posts; a heap of rubbish reposed in a dark corner, and by the door I picked up a book. It had lost its covers, and the pages had been thumbed into a state of extremely dirty softness; but the back had been lovingly stitched afresh with white cotton thread, which looked clean yet. It was an extraordinary find. Its title was, ‘An Inquiry into some Points of Seamanship,’ by a man Tower, Towson — some such name — Master in his Majesty’s Navy. The matter looked dreary reading enough, with illustrative diagrams and repulsive tables of figures, and the copy was sixty years old. I handled this amazing antiquity with the greatest possible tenderness, lest it should dissolve in my hands. Within, Towson or Towser was inquiring earnestly into the breaking strain of ships’ chains and tackle, and other such matters. Not a very enthralling book; but at the first glance you could see there a singleness of intention, an honest concern for the right way of going to work, which made these humble pages, thought out so many years ago, luminous with another than a professional light. The simple old sailor, with his talk of chains and purchases, made me forget the jungle and the pilgrims in a delicious sensation of having come upon something unmistakably real. Such a book being there was wonderful enough; but still more astounding were the notes penciled in the margin, and plainly referring to the text. I couldn’t believe my eyes! They were in cipher! Yes, it looked like cipher. Fancy a man lugging with him a book of that description into this nowhere and studying it — and making notes — in cipher at that! It was an extravagant mystery.

“I had been dimly aware for some time of a worrying noise, and when I lifted my eyes I saw the wood-pile was gone, and the manager, aided by all the pilgrims, was shouting at me from the river-side. I slipped the book into my pocket. I assure you to leave off reading was like tearing myself away from the shelter of an old and solid friendship.

“I started the lame engine ahead. ‘It must be this miserable trader — this intruder,’ exclaimed the manager, looking back malevolently at the place we had left. ‘He must be English,’ I said. ‘It will not save him from getting into trouble if he is not careful,’ muttered the manager darkly. I observed with assumed innocence that no man was safe from trouble in this world.

“The current was more rapid now, the steamer seemed at her last gasp, the stern-wheel flopped languidly, and I caught myself listening on tiptoe for the next beat of the boat, for in sober truth I expected the wretched thing to give up every moment. It was like watching the last flickers of a life. But

still we crawled. Sometimes I would pick out a tree a little way ahead to measure our progress towards Kurtz by, but I lost it invariably before we got abreast. To keep the eyes so long on one thing was too much for human patience. The manager displayed a beautiful resignation. I fretted and fumed and took to arguing with myself whether or no I would talk openly with Kurtz; but before I could come to any conclusion it occurred to me that my speech or my silence, indeed any action of mine, would be a mere futility. What did it matter what anyone knew or ignored? What did it matter who was manager? One gets sometimes such a flash of insight. The essentials of this affair lay deep under the surface, beyond my reach, and beyond my power of meddling.

“Towards the evening of the second day we judged ourselves about eight miles from Kurtz’s station. I wanted to push on; but the manager looked grave, and told me the navigation up there was so dangerous that it would be advisable, the sun being very low already, to wait where we were till next morning. Moreover, he pointed out that if the warning to approach cautiously were to be followed, we must approach in daylight — not at dusk, or in the dark. This was sensible enough. Eight miles meant nearly three hours’ steaming for us, and I could also see suspicious ripples at the upper end of the reach. Nevertheless, I was annoyed beyond expression at the delay, and most unreasonably too, since one night more could not matter much after so many months. As we had plenty of wood, and caution was the word, I brought up in the middle of the stream. The reach was narrow, straight, with high sides like a railway cutting. The dusk came gliding into it long before the sun had set. The current ran smooth and swift, but a dumb immobility sat on the banks. The living trees, lashed together by the creepers and every living bush of the undergrowth, might have been changed into stone, even to the slenderest twig, to the lightest leaf. It was not sleep — it seemed unnatural, like a state of trance. Not the faintest sound of any kind could be heard. You looked on amazed, and began to suspect yourself of being deaf — then the night came suddenly, and struck you blind as well. About three in the morning some large fish leaped, and the loud splash made me jump as though a gun had been fired. When the sun rose there was a white fog, very warm and clammy, and more blinding than the night. It did not shift or drive; it was just there, standing all round you like something solid. At eight or nine, perhaps, it lifted as a shutter lifts. We had a glimpse of the towering multitude of trees, of the immense matted

jungle, with the blazing little ball of the sun hanging over it — all perfectly still — and then the white shutter came down again, smoothly, as if sliding in greased grooves. I ordered the chain, which we had begun to heave in, to be paid out again. Before it stopped running with a muffled rattle, a cry, a very loud cry, as of infinite desolation, soared slowly in the opaque air. It ceased. A complaining clamor, modulated in savage discords, filled our ears. The sheer unexpectedness of it made my hair stir under my cap. I don't know how it struck the others: to me it seemed as though the mist itself had screamed, so suddenly, and apparently from all sides at once, did this tumultuous and mournful uproar arise. It culminated in a hurried outbreak of almost intolerably excessive shrieking, which stopped short, leaving us stiffened in a variety of silly attitudes, and obstinately listening to the nearly as appalling and excessive silence. 'Good God! What is the meaning — ?' stammered at my elbow one of the pilgrims, — a little fat man, with sandy hair and red whiskers, who wore side-spring boots, and pink pyjamas tucked into his socks. Two others remained open-mouthed a whole minute, then dashed into the little cabin, to rush out incontinently and stand darting scared glances, with Winchesters at 'ready' in their hands. What we could see was just the steamer we were on, her outlines blurred as though she had been on the point of dissolving, and a misty strip of water, perhaps two feet broad, around her — and that was all. The rest of the world was nowhere, as far as our eyes and ears were concerned. Just nowhere. Gone, disappeared; swept off without leaving a whisper or a shadow behind.

"I went forward, and ordered the chain to be hauled in short, so as to be ready to trip the anchor and move the steamboat at once if necessary. 'Will they attack?' whispered an awed voice. 'We will all be butchered in this fog,' murmured another. The faces twitched with the strain, the hands trembled slightly, the eyes forgot to wink. It was very curious to see the contrast of expressions of the white men and of the black fellows of our crew, who were as much strangers to that part of the river as we, though their homes were only eight hundred miles away. The whites, of course greatly discomposed, had besides a curious look of being painfully shocked by such an outrageous row. The others had an alert, naturally interested expression; but their faces were essentially quiet, even those of the one or two who grinned as they hauled at the chain. Several exchanged short, grunting phrases, which seemed to settle the matter to their satisfaction.

Their headman, a young, broad-chested black, severely draped in dark-blue fringed cloths, with fierce nostrils and his hair all done up artfully in oily ringlets, stood near me. 'Aha!' I said, just for good fellowship's sake. 'Catch 'im,' he snapped, with a bloodshot widening of his eyes and a flash of sharp teeth — 'catch 'im. Give 'im to us.' 'To you, eh?' I asked; 'what would you do with them?' 'Eat 'im!' he said curtly, and, leaning his elbow on the rail, looked out into the fog in a dignified and profoundly pensive attitude. I would no doubt have been properly horrified, had it not occurred to me that he and his chaps must be very hungry: that they must have been growing increasingly hungry for at least this month past. They had been engaged for six months (I don't think a single one of them had any clear idea of time, as we at the end of countless ages have. They still belonged to the beginnings of time — had no inherited experience to teach them as it were), and of course, as long as there was a piece of paper written over in accordance with some farcical law or other made down the river, it didn't enter anybody's head to trouble how they would live. Certainly they had brought with them some rotten hippo-meat, which couldn't have lasted very long, anyway, even if the pilgrims hadn't, in the midst of a shocking hullabaloo, thrown a considerable quantity of it overboard. It looked like a high-handed proceeding; but it was really a case of legitimate self-defense. You can't breathe dead hippo waking, sleeping, and eating, and at the same time keep your precarious grip on existence. Besides that, they had given them every week three pieces of brass wire, each about nine inches long; and the theory was they were to buy their provisions with that currency in river-side villages. You can see how that worked. There were either no villages, or the people were hostile, or the director, who like the rest of us fed out of tins, with an occasional old he-goat thrown in, didn't want to stop the steamer for some more or less recondite reason. So, unless they swallowed the wire itself, or made loops of it to snare the fishes with, I don't see what good their extravagant salary could be to them. I must say it was paid with a regularity worthy of a large and honorable trading company. For the rest, the only thing to eat — though it didn't look eatable in the least — I saw in their possession was a few lumps of some stuff like half-cooked dough, of a dirty lavender color, they kept wrapped in leaves, and now and then swallowed a piece of, but so small that it seemed done more for the looks of the thing than for any serious purpose of sustenance. Why in the name of all the gnawing devils of hunger they didn't go for us

— they were thirty to five — and have a good tuck in for once, amazes me now when I think of it. They were big powerful men, with not much capacity to weigh the consequences, with courage, with strength, even yet, though their skins were no longer glossy and their muscles no longer hard. And I saw that something restraining, one of those human secrets that baffle probability, had come into play there. I looked at them with a swift quickening of interest — not because it occurred to me I might be eaten by them before very long, though I own to you that just then I perceived — in a new light, as it were — how unwholesome the pilgrims looked, and I hoped, yes, I positively hoped, that my aspect was not so — what shall I say? — so — unappetizing: a touch of fantastic vanity which fitted well with the dream-sensation that pervaded all my days at that time. Perhaps I had a little fever too. One can't live with one's finger everlastingly on one's pulse. I had often 'a little fever,' or a little touch of other things — the playful paw-strokes of the wilderness, the preliminary trifling before the more serious onslaught which came in due course. Yes; I looked at them as you would on any human being, with a curiosity of their impulses, motives, capacities, weaknesses, when brought to the test of an inexorable physical necessity. Restraint! What possible restraint? Was it superstition, disgust, patience, fear — or some kind of primitive honor? No fear can stand up to hunger, no patience can wear it out, disgust simply does not exist where hunger is; and as to superstition, beliefs, and what you may call principles, they are less than chaff in a breeze. Don't you know the devilry of lingering starvation, its exasperating torment, its black thoughts, its somber and brooding ferocity? Well, I do. It takes a man all his inborn strength to fight hunger properly. It's really easier to face bereavement, dishonor, and the perdition of one's soul — than this kind of prolonged hunger. Sad, but true. And these chaps too had no earthly reason for any kind of scruple. Restraint! I would just as soon have expected restraint from a hyena prowling amongst the corpses of a battlefield. But there was the fact facing me — the fact dazzling, to be seen, like the foam on the depths of the sea, like a ripple on an unfathomable enigma, a mystery greater — when I thought of it — than the curious, inexplicable note of desperate grief in this savage clamor that had swept by us on the river-bank, behind the blind whiteness of the fog.

“Two pilgrims were quarreling in hurried whispers as to which bank. ‘Left.’ ‘No, no; how can you? Right, right, of course.’ ‘It is very serious,’



said the manager's voice behind me; 'I would be desolated if anything should happen to Mr. Kurtz before we came up.' I looked at him, and had not the slightest doubt he was sincere. He was just the kind of man who would wish to preserve appearances. That was his restraint. But when he muttered something about going on at once, I did not even take the trouble to answer him. I knew, and he knew, that it was impossible. Were we to let go our hold of the bottom, we would be absolutely in the air — in space. We wouldn't be able to tell where we were going to — whether up or down stream, or across — till we fetched against one bank or the other, — and then we wouldn't know at first which it was. Of course I made no move. I had no mind for a smash-up. You couldn't imagine a more deadly place for a shipwreck. Whether drowned at once or not, we were sure to perish speedily in one way or another. 'I authorize you to take all the risks,' he said, after a short silence. 'I refuse to take any,' I said shortly; which was just the answer he expected, though its tone might have surprised him. 'Well, I must defer to your judgment. You are captain,' he said, with marked civility. I turned my shoulder to him in sign of my appreciation, and looked into the fog. How long would it last? It was the most hopeless look-out. The approach to this Kurtz grubbing for ivory in the wretched bush was beset by as many dangers as though he had been an enchanted princess sleeping in a fabulous castle. 'Will they attack, do you think?' asked the manager, in a confidential tone.

"I did not think they would attack, for several obvious reasons. The thick fog was one. If they left the bank in their canoes they would get lost in it, as we would be if we attempted to move. Still, I had also judged the jungle of both banks quite impenetrable — and yet eyes were in it, eyes that had seen us. The river-side bushes were certainly very thick; but the undergrowth behind was evidently penetrable. However, during the short lift I had seen no canoes anywhere in the reach — certainly not abreast of the steamer. But what made the idea of attack inconceivable to me was the nature of the noise — of the cries we had heard. They had not the fierce character boding of immediate hostile intention. Unexpected, wild, and violent as they had been, they had given me an irresistible impression of sorrow. The glimpse of the steamboat had for some reason filled those savages with unrestrained grief. The danger, if any, I expounded, was from our proximity to a great human passion let loose. Even extreme grief may ultimately vent itself in violence — but more generally takes the form of apathy. . . .

“You should have seen the pilgrims stare! They had no heart to grin, or even to revile me; but I believe they thought me gone mad — with fright, maybe. I delivered a regular lecture. My dear boys, it was no good bothering. Keep a look-out? Well, you may guess I watched the fog for the signs of lifting as a cat watches a mouse; but for anything else our eyes were of no more use to us than if we had been buried miles deep in a heap of cotton-wool. It felt like it too — choking, warm, stifling. Besides, all I said, though it sounded extravagant, was absolutely true to fact. What we afterwards alluded to as an attack was really an attempt at repulse. The action was very far from being aggressive — it was not even defensive, in the usual sense: it was undertaken under the stress of desperation, and in its essence was purely protective.

“It developed itself, I should say, two hours after the fog lifted, and its commencement was at a spot, roughly speaking, about a mile and a half below Kurtz’s station. We had just floundered and flopped round a bend, when I saw an islet, a mere grassy hummock of bright green, in the middle of the stream. It was the only thing of the kind; but as we opened the reach more, I perceived it was the head of a long sandbank, or rather of a chain of shallow patches stretching down the middle of the river. They were discolored, just awash, and the whole lot was seen just under the water, exactly as a man’s backbone is seen running down the middle of his back under the skin. Now, as far as I did see, I could go to the right or to the left of this. I didn’t know either channel, of course. The banks looked pretty well alike, the depth appeared the same; but as I had been informed the station was on the west side, I naturally headed for the western passage.

“No sooner had we fairly entered it than I became aware it was much narrower than I had supposed. To the left of us there was the long uninterrupted shoal, and to the right a high, steep bank heavily overgrown with bushes. Above the bush the trees stood in serried ranks. The twigs overhung the current thickly, and from distance to distance a large limb of some tree projected rigidly over the stream. It was then well on in the afternoon, the face of the forest was gloomy, and a broad strip of shadow had already fallen on the water. In this shadow we steamed up — very slowly, as you may imagine. I sheered her well inshore — the water being deepest near the bank, as the sounding-pole informed me.

“One of my hungry and forbearing friends was sounding in the bows just below me. This steamboat was exactly like a decked scow. On the deck

there were two little teak-wood houses, with doors and windows. The boiler was in the fore-end, and the machinery right astern. Over the whole there was a light roof, supported on stanchions. The funnel projected through that roof, and in front of the funnel a small cabin built of light planks served for a pilot-house. It contained a couch, two camp-stools, a loaded Martini-Henry leaning in one corner, a tiny table, and the steering-wheel. It had a wide door in front and a broad shutter at each side. All these were always thrown open, of course. I spent my days perched up there on the extreme fore-end of that roof, before the door. At night I slept, or tried to, on the couch. An athletic black belonging to some coast tribe, and educated by my poor predecessor, was the helmsman. He sported a pair of brass earrings, wore a blue cloth wrapper from the waist to the ankles, and thought all the world of himself. He was the most unstable kind of fool I had ever seen. He steered with no end of a swagger while you were by; but if he lost sight of you, he became instantly the prey of an abject funk, and would let that cripple of a steamboat get the upper hand of him in a minute.

“I was looking down at the sounding-pole, and feeling much annoyed to see at each try a little more of it stick out of that river, when I saw my poleman give up the business suddenly, and stretch himself flat on the deck, without even taking the trouble to haul his pole in. He kept hold on it though, and it trailed in the water. At the same time the fireman, whom I could also see below me, sat down abruptly before his furnace and ducked his head. I was amazed. Then I had to look at the river mighty quick, because there was a snag in the fairway. Sticks, little sticks, were flying about — thick: they were whizzing before my nose, dropping below me, striking behind me against my pilot-house. All this time the river, the shore, the woods, were very quiet — perfectly quiet. I could only hear the heavy splashing thump of the stern-wheel and the patter of these things. We cleared the snag clumsily. Arrows, by Jove! We were being shot at! I stepped in quickly to close the shutter on the land side. That fool-helmsman, his hands on the spokes, was lifting his knees high, stamping his feet, champing his mouth, like a reined-in horse. Confound him! And we were staggering within ten feet of the bank. I had to lean right out to swing the heavy shutter, and I saw a face amongst the leaves on the level with my own, looking at me very fierce and steady; and then suddenly, as though a veil had been removed from my eyes, I made out, deep in the tangled gloom, naked breasts, arms, legs, glaring eyes, — the bush was swarming

with human limbs in movement, glistening, of bronze color. The twigs shook, swayed, and rustled, the arrows flew out of them, and then the shutter came to. 'Steer her straight,' I said to the helmsman. He held his head rigid, face forward; but his eyes rolled, he kept on lifting and setting down his feet gently, his mouth foamed a little. 'Keep quiet!' I said in a fury. I might just as well have ordered a tree not to sway in the wind. I darted out. Below me there was a great scuffle of feet on the iron deck; confused exclamations; a voice screamed, 'Can you turn back?' I caught shape of a V-shaped ripple on the water ahead. What? Another snag! A fusillade burst out under my feet. The pilgrims had opened with their Winchesters, and were simply squirting lead into that bush. A deuce of a lot of smoke came up and drove slowly forward. I swore at it. Now I couldn't see the ripple or the snag either. I stood in the doorway, peering, and the arrows came in swarms. They might have been poisoned, but they looked as though they wouldn't kill a cat. The bush began to howl. Our wood-cutters raised a warlike whoop; the report of a rifle just at my back deafened me. I glanced over my shoulder, and the pilot-house was yet full of noise and smoke when I made a dash at the wheel. The fool-nigger had dropped everything, to throw the shutter open and let off that Martini-Henry. He stood before the wide opening, glaring, and I yelled at him to come back, while I straightened the sudden twist out of that steamboat. There was no room to turn even if I had wanted to, the snag was somewhere very near ahead in that confounded smoke, there was no time to lose, so I just crowded her into the bank — right into the bank, where I knew the water was deep.

"We tore slowly along the overhanging bushes in a whirl of broken twigs and flying leaves. The fusillade below stopped short, as I had foreseen it would when the squirts got empty. I threw my head back to a glinting whizz that traversed the pilot-house, in at one shutter-hole and out at the other. Looking past that mad helmsman, who was shaking the empty rifle and yelling at the shore, I saw vague forms of men running bent double, leaping, gliding, distinct, incomplete, evanescent. Something big appeared in the air before the shutter, the rifle went overboard, and the man stepped back swiftly, looked at me over his shoulder in an extraordinary, profound, familiar manner, and fell upon my feet. The side of his head hit the wheel twice, and the end of what appeared a long cane clattered round and knocked over a little camp-stool. It looked as though after wrenching that

thing from somebody ashore he had lost his balance in the effort. The thin smoke had blown away, we were clear of the snag, and looking ahead I could see that in another hundred yards or so I would be free to sheer off, away from the bank; but my feet felt so very warm and wet that I had to look down. The man had rolled on his back and stared straight up at me; both his hands clutched that cane. It was the shaft of a spear that, either thrown or lunged through the opening, had caught him in the side just below the ribs; the blade had gone in out of sight, after making a frightful gash; my shoes were full; a pool of blood lay very still, gleaming dark-red under the wheel; his eyes shone with an amazing luster. The fusillade burst out again. He looked at me anxiously, gripping the spear like something precious, with an air of being afraid I would try to take it away from him. I had to make an effort to free my eyes from his gaze and attend to the steering. With one hand I felt above my head for the line of the steam-whistle, and jerked out screech after screech hurriedly. The tumult of angry and warlike yells was checked instantly, and then from the depths of the woods went out such a tremulous and prolonged wail of mournful fear and utter despair as may be imagined to follow the flight of the last hope from the earth. There was a great commotion in the bush; the shower of arrows stopped, a few dropping shots rang out sharply — then silence, in which the languid beat of the stern-wheel came plainly to my ears. I put the helm hard a-starboard at the moment when the pilgrim in pink pyjamas, very hot and agitated, appeared in the doorway. ‘The manager sends me — ’ he began in an official tone, and stopped short. ‘Good God!’ he said, glaring at the wounded man.

“We two whites stood over him, and his lustrous and inquiring glance enveloped us both. I declare it looked as though he would presently put to us some question in an understandable language; but he died without uttering a sound, without moving a limb, without twitching a muscle. Only in the very last moment, as though in response to some sign we could not see, to some whisper we could not hear, he frowned heavily, and that frown gave to his black death-mask an inconceivably somber, brooding, and menacing expression. The luster of inquiring glance faded swiftly into vacant glassiness. ‘Can you steer?’ I asked the agent eagerly. He looked very dubious; but I made a grab at his arm, and he understood at once I meant him to steer whether or no. To tell you the truth, I was morbidly anxious to change my shoes and socks. ‘He is dead,’ murmured the fellow,

immensely impressed. ‘No doubt about it,’ said I, tugging like mad at the shoe-laces. ‘And, by the way, I suppose Mr. Kurtz is dead as well by this time.’

“For the moment that was the dominant thought. There was a sense of extreme disappointment, as though I had found out I had been striving after something altogether without a substance. I couldn’t have been more disgusted if I had traveled all this way for the sole purpose of talking with Mr. Kurtz. Talking with. . . . I flung one shoe overboard, and became aware that that was exactly what I had been looking forward to — a talk with Kurtz. I made the strange discovery that I had never imagined him as doing, you know, but as discoursing. I didn’t say to myself, ‘Now I will never see him,’ or ‘Now I will never shake him by the hand,’ but, ‘Now I will never hear him.’ The man presented himself as a voice. Not of course that I did not connect him with some sort of action. Hadn’t I been told in all the tones of jealousy and admiration that he had collected, bartered, swindled, or stolen more ivory than all the other agents together? That was not the point. The point was in his being a gifted creature, and that of all his gifts the one that stood out pre-eminently, that carried with it a sense of real presence, was his ability to talk, his words — the gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness.

“The other shoe went flying unto the devil-god of that river. I thought, ‘By Jove! it’s all over. We are too late; he has vanished — the gift has vanished, by means of some spear, arrow, or club. I will never hear that chap speak after all,’ — and my sorrow had a startling extravagance of emotion, even such as I had noticed in the howling sorrow of these savages in the bush. I couldn’t have felt more of lonely desolation somehow, had I been robbed of a belief or had missed my destiny in life. . . . Why do you sigh in this beastly way, somebody? Absurd? Well, absurd. Good Lord! mustn’t a man ever — Here, give me some tobacco.” . . .

There was a pause of profound stillness, then a match flared, and Marlow’s lean face appeared, worn, hollow, with downward folds and dropped eyelids, with an aspect of concentrated attention; and as he took vigorous draws at his pipe, it seemed to retreat and advance out of the night in the regular flicker of the tiny flame. The match went out.

“Absurd!” he cried. “This is the worst of trying to tell. . . . Here you all are, each moored with two good addresses, like a hulk with two anchors, a butcher round one corner, a policeman round another, excellent appetites, and temperature normal — you hear — normal from year’s end to year’s end. And you say, Absurd! Absurd be — exploded! Absurd! My dear boys, what can you expect from a man who out of sheer nervousness had just flung overboard a pair of new shoes. Now I think of it, it is amazing I did not shed tears. I am, upon the whole, proud of my fortitude. I was cut to the quick at the idea of having lost the inestimable privilege of listening to the gifted Kurtz. Of course I was wrong. The privilege was waiting for me. Oh yes, I heard more than enough. And I was right, too. A voice. He was very little more than a voice. And I heard — him — it — this voice — other voices — all of them were so little more than voices — and the memory of that time itself lingers around me, impalpable, like a dying vibration of one immense jabber, silly, atrocious, sordid, savage, or simply mean, without any kind of sense. Voices, voices — even the girl herself — now — ”

He was silent for a long time.

“I laid the ghost of his gifts at last with a lie,” he began suddenly. “Girl! What? Did I mention a girl? Oh, she is out of it — completely. They — the women, I mean — are out of it — should be out of it. We must help them to stay in that beautiful world of their own, lest ours gets worse. Oh, she had to be out of it. You should have heard the disinterred body of Mr. Kurtz saying, ‘My Intended.’ You would have perceived directly then how completely she was out of it. And the lofty frontal bone of Mr. Kurtz! They say the hair goes on growing sometimes, but this — ah specimen, was impressively bald. The wilderness had patted him on the head, and, behold, it was like a ball — an ivory ball; it had caressed him, and — lo! — he had withered; it had taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to its own by the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation. He was its spoiled and pampered favorite. Ivory? I should think so. Heaps of it, stacks of it. The old mud shanty was bursting with it. You would think there was not a single tusk left either above or below the ground in the whole country. ‘Mostly fossil,’ the manager had remarked disparagingly. It was no more fossil than I am; but they call it fossil when it is dug up. It appears these niggers do bury the tusks sometimes — but evidently they couldn’t bury this parcel deep enough to save the gifted Mr. Kurtz from his fate. We filled the steamboat

with it, and had to pile a lot on the deck. Thus he could see and enjoy as long as he could see, because the appreciation of this favor had remained with him to the last. You should have heard him say, 'My ivory.' Oh yes, I heard him. 'My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my — ' everything belonged to him. It made me hold my breath in expectation of hearing the wilderness burst into a prodigious peal of laughter that would shake the fixed stars in their places. Everything belonged to him — but that was a trifle. The thing was to know what he belonged to, how many powers of darkness claimed him for their own. That was the reflection that made you creepy all over. It was impossible — it was not good for one either — trying to imagine. He had taken a high seat amongst the devils of the land — I mean literally. You can't understand. How could you? — with solid pavement under your feet, surrounded by kind neighbors ready to cheer you or to fall on you, stepping delicately between the butcher and the policeman, in the holy terror of scandal and gallows and lunatic asylums — how can you imagine what particular region of the first ages a man's untrammelled feet may take him into by the way of solitude — utter solitude without a policeman — by the way of silence, utter silence, where no warning voice of a kind neighbor can be heard whispering of public opinion? These little things make all the great difference. When they are gone you must fall back upon your own innate strength, upon your own capacity for faithfulness. Of course you may be too much of a fool to go wrong — too dull even to know you are being assaulted by the powers of darkness. I take it, no fool ever made a bargain for his soul with the devil: the fool is too much of a fool, or the devil too much of a devil — I don't know which. Or you may be such a thunderingly exalted creature as to be altogether deaf and blind to anything but heavenly sights and sounds. Then the earth for you is only a standing place — and whether to be like this is your loss or your gain I won't pretend to say. But most of us are neither one nor the other. The earth for us is a place to live in, where we must put up with sights, with sounds, with smells too, by Jove! — breathe dead hippo, so to speak, and not be contaminated. And there, don't you see? Your strength comes in, the faith in your ability for the digging of unostentatious holes to bury the stuff in — your power of devotion, not to yourself, but to an obscure, back-breaking business. And that's difficult enough. Mind, I am not trying to excuse or even explain — I am trying to account to myself for — for — Mr. Kurtz — for the shade of Mr. Kurtz. This initiated wraith



from the back of Nowhere honored me with its amazing confidence before it vanished altogether. This was because it could speak English to me. The original Kurtz had been educated partly in England, and — as he was good enough to say himself — his sympathies were in the right place. His mother was half-English, his father was half-French. All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz; and by-and-by I learned that, most appropriately, the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs had intrusted him with the making of a report, for its future guidance. And he had written it too. I've seen it. I've read it. It was eloquent, vibrating with eloquence, but too high-strung, I think. Seventeen pages of close writing he had found time for! But this must have been before his — let us say — nerves, went wrong, and caused him to preside at certain midnight dances ending with unspeakable rites, which — as far as I reluctantly gathered from what I heard at various times — were offered up to him — do you understand? — to Mr. Kurtz himself. But it was a beautiful piece of writing. The opening paragraph, however, in the light of later information, strikes me now as ominous. He began with the argument that we whites, from the point of development we had arrived at, 'must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings — we approach them with the might as of a deity,' and so on, and so on. 'By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded,' &c., &c. From that point he soared and took me with him. The peroration was magnificent, though difficult to remember, you know. It gave me the notion of an exotic Immensity ruled by an august Benevolence. It made me tingle with enthusiasm. This was the unbounded power of eloquence — of words — of burning noble words. There were no practical hints to interrupt the magic current of phrases, unless a kind of note at the foot of the last page, scrawled evidently much later, in an unsteady hand, may be regarded as the exposition of a method. It was very simple, and at the end of that moving appeal to every altruistic sentiment it blazed at you, luminous and terrifying, like a flash of lightning in a serene sky: 'Exterminate all the brutes!' The curious part was that he had apparently forgotten all about that valuable postscriptum, because, later on, when he in a sense came to himself, he repeatedly entreated me to take good care of 'my pamphlet' (he called it), as it was sure to have in the future a good influence upon his career. I had full information about all these things, and, besides, as it turned out, I was to have the care of his memory. I've done enough for it to

give me the indisputable right to lay it, if I choose, for an everlasting rest in the dust-bin of progress, amongst all the sweepings and, figuratively speaking, all the dead cats of civilization. But then, you see, I can't choose. He won't be forgotten. Whatever he was, he was not common. He had the power to charm or frighten rudimentary souls into an aggravated witch-dance in his honor; he could also fill the small souls of the pilgrims with bitter misgivings: he had one devoted friend at least, and he had conquered one soul in the world that was neither rudimentary nor tainted with self-seeking. No; I can't forget him, though I am not prepared to affirm the fellow was exactly worth the life we lost in getting to him. I missed my late helmsman awfully, — I missed him even while his body was still lying in the pilot-house. Perhaps you will think it passing strange this regret for a savage who was no more account than a grain of sand in a black Sahara. Well, don't you see, he had done something, he had steered; for months I had him at my back — a help — an instrument. It was a kind of partnership. He steered for me — I had to look after him, I worried about his deficiencies, and thus a subtle bond had been created, of which I only became aware when it was suddenly broken. And the intimate profundity of that look he gave me when he received his hurt remains to this day in my memory — like a claim of distant kinship affirmed in a supreme moment.

“Poor fool! If he had only left that shutter alone. He had no restraint, no restraint — just like Kurtz — a tree swayed by the wind. As soon as I had put on a dry pair of slippers, I dragged him out, after first jerking the spear out of his side, which operation I confess I performed with my eyes shut tight. His heels leaped together over the little door-step; his shoulders were pressed to my breast; I hugged him from behind desperately. Oh! he was heavy, heavy; heavier than any man on earth, I should imagine. Then without more ado I tipped him overboard. The current snatched him as though he had been a wisp of grass, and I saw the body roll over twice before I lost sight of it for ever. All the pilgrims and the manager were then congregated on the awning-deck about the pilot-house, chattering at each other like a flock of excited magpies, and there was a scandalized murmur at my heartless promptitude. What they wanted to keep that body hanging about for I can't guess. Embalm it, maybe. But I had also heard another, and a very ominous, murmur on the deck below. My friends the wood-cutters were likewise scandalized, and with a better show of reason — though I admit that the reason itself was quite inadmissible. Oh, quite! I had made up

my mind that if my late helmsman was to be eaten, the fishes alone should have him. He had been a very second-rate helmsman while alive, but now he was dead he might have become a first-class temptation, and possibly cause some startling trouble. Besides, I was anxious to take the wheel, the man in pink pyjamas showing himself a hopeless duffer at the business.

“This I did directly the simple funeral was over. We were going half-speed, keeping right in the middle of the stream, and I listened to the talk about me. They had given up Kurtz, they had given up the station; Kurtz was dead, and the station had been burnt — and so on — and so on. The red-haired pilgrim was beside himself with the thought that at least this poor Kurtz had been properly revenged. ‘Say! We must have made a glorious slaughter of them in the bush. Eh? What do you think? Say?’ He positively danced, the bloodthirsty little gingery beggar. And he had nearly fainted when he saw the wounded man! I could not help saying, ‘You made a glorious lot of smoke, anyhow.’ I had seen, from the way the tops of the bushes rustled and flew, that almost all the shots had gone too high. You can’t hit anything unless you take aim and fire from the shoulder; but these chaps fired from the hip with their eyes shut. The retreat, I maintained — and I was right — was caused by the screeching of the steam-whistle. Upon this they forgot Kurtz, and began to howl at me with indignant protests.

“The manager stood by the wheel murmuring confidentially about the necessity of getting well away down the river before dark at all events, when I saw in the distance a clearing on the river-side and the outlines of some sort of building. ‘What’s this?’ I asked. He clapped his hands in wonder. ‘The station!’ he cried. I edged in at once, still going half-speed.

“Through my glasses I saw the slope of a hill interspersed with rare trees and perfectly free from undergrowth. A long decaying building on the summit was half buried in the high grass; the large holes in the peaked roof gaped black from afar; the jungle and the woods made a background. There was no inclosure or fence of any kind; but there had been one apparently, for near the house half-a-dozen slim posts remained in a row, roughly trimmed, and with their upper ends ornamented with round carved balls. The rails, or whatever there had been between, had disappeared. Of course the forest surrounded all that. The river-bank was clear, and on the water-side I saw a white man under a hat like a cart-wheel beckoning persistently with his whole arm. Examining the edge of the forest above and below, I was almost certain I could see movements — human forms gliding here and

there. I steamed past prudently, then stopped the engines and let her drift down. The man on the shore began to shout, urging us to land. 'We have been attacked,' screamed the manager. 'I know — I know. It's all right,' yelled back the other, as cheerful as you please. 'Come along. It's all right. I am glad.'

"His aspect reminded me of something I had seen — something funny I had seen somewhere. As I maneuvered to get alongside, I was asking myself, 'What does this fellow look like?' Suddenly I got it. He looked like a harlequin. His clothes had been made of some stuff that was brown holland probably, but it was covered with patches all over, with bright patches, blue, red, and yellow, — patches on the back, patches on front, patches on elbows, on knees; colored binding round his jacket, scarlet edging at the bottom of his trousers; and the sunshine made him look extremely gay and wonderfully neat withal, because you could see how beautifully all this patching had been done. A beardless, boyish face, very fair, no features to speak of, nose peeling, little blue eyes, smiles and frowns chasing each other over that open countenance like sunshine and shadow on a windswept plain. 'Look out, captain!' he cried; 'there's a snag lodged in here last night.' What! Another snag? I confess I swore shamefully. I had nearly holed my cripple, to finish off that charming trip. The harlequin on the bank turned his little pug nose up to me. 'You English?' he asked, all smiles. 'Are you?' I shouted from the wheel. The smiles vanished, and he shook his head as if sorry for my disappointment. Then he brightened up. 'Never mind!' he cried encouragingly. 'Are we in time?' I asked. 'He is up there,' he replied, with a toss of the head up the hill, and becoming gloomy all of a sudden. His face was like the autumn sky, overcast one moment and bright the next.

"When the manager, escorted by the pilgrims, all of them armed to the teeth, had gone to the house, this chap came on board. 'I say, I don't like this. These natives are in the bush,' I said. He assured me earnestly it was all right. 'They are simple people,' he added; 'well, I am glad you came. It took me all my time to keep them off.' 'But you said it was all right,' I cried. 'Oh, they meant no harm,' he said; and as I stared he corrected himself, 'Not exactly.' Then vivaciously, 'My faith, your pilot-house wants a clean up!' In the next breath he advised me to keep enough steam on the boiler to blow the whistle in case of any trouble. 'One good screech will do more for you than all your rifles. They are simple people,' he repeated. He

rattled away at such a rate he quite overwhelmed me. He seemed to be trying to make up for lots of silence, and actually hinted, laughing, that such was the case. 'Don't you talk with Mr. Kurtz?' I said. 'You don't talk with that man — you listen to him,' he exclaimed with severe exaltation. 'But now — ' He waved his arm, and in the twinkling of an eye was in the uttermost depths of despondency. In a moment he came up again with a jump, possessed himself of both my hands, shook them continuously, while he gabbled: 'Brother sailor . . . honor . . . pleasure . . . delight . . . introduce myself . . . Russian . . . son of an arch-priest . . . Government of Tambov . . . What? Tobacco! English tobacco; the excellent English tobacco! Now, that's brotherly. Smoke? Where's a sailor that does not smoke?'

"The pipe soothed him, and gradually I made out he had run away from school, had gone to sea in a Russian ship; ran away again; served some time in English ships; was now reconciled with the arch-priest. He made a point of that. 'But when one is young one must see things, gather experience, ideas; enlarge the mind.' 'Here!' I interrupted. 'You can never tell! Here I have met Mr. Kurtz,' he said, youthfully solemn and reproachful. I held my tongue after that. It appears he had persuaded a Dutch trading-house on the coast to fit him out with stores and goods, and had started for the interior with a light heart, and no more idea of what would happen to him than a baby. He had been wandering about that river for nearly two years alone, cut off from everybody and everything. 'I am not so young as I look. I am twenty-five,' he said. 'At first old Van Shuyten would tell me to go to the devil,' he narrated with keen enjoyment; 'but I stuck to him, and talked and talked, till at last he got afraid I would talk the hind-leg off his favorite dog, so he gave me some cheap things and a few guns, and told me he hoped he would never see my face again. Good old Dutchman, Van Shuyten. I've sent him one small lot of ivory a year ago, so that he can't call me a little thief when I get back. I hope he got it. And for the rest I don't care. I had some wood stacked for you. That was my old house. Did you see?'

"I gave him Towson's book. He made as though he would kiss me, but restrained himself. 'The only book I had left, and I thought I had lost it,' he said, looking at it ecstatically. 'So many accidents happen to a man going about alone, you know. Canoes get upset sometimes — and sometimes you've got to clear out so quick when the people get angry.' He thumbed the pages. 'You made notes in Russian?' I asked. He nodded. 'I thought they were written in cipher,' I said. He laughed, then became serious. 'I had

lots of trouble to keep these people off,' he said. 'Did they want to kill you?' I asked. 'Oh no!' he cried, and checked himself. 'Why did they attack us?' I pursued. He hesitated, then said shamefacedly, 'They don't want him to go.' 'Don't they?' I said, curiously. He nodded a nod full of mystery and wisdom. 'I tell you,' he cried, 'this man has enlarged my mind.' He opened his arms wide, staring at me with his little blue eyes that were perfectly round."

### III

“I looked at him, lost in astonishment. There he was before me, in motley, as though he had absconded from a troupe of mimes, enthusiastic, fabulous. His very existence was improbable, inexplicable, and altogether bewildering. He was an insoluble problem. It was inconceivable how he had existed, how he had succeeded in getting so far, how he had managed to remain — why he did not instantly disappear. ‘I went a little farther,’ he said, ‘then still a little farther — till I had gone so far that I don’t know how I’ll ever get back. Never mind. Plenty time. I can manage. You take Kurtz away quick — quick — I tell you.’ The glamour of youth enveloped his particolored rags, his destitution, his loneliness, the essential desolation of his futile wanderings. For months — for years — his life hadn’t been worth a day’s purchase; and there he was gallantly, thoughtlessly alive, to all appearance indestructible solely by the virtue of his few years and of his unreflecting audacity. I was seduced into something like admiration — like envy. Glamour urged him on, glamour kept him unscathed. He surely wanted nothing from the wilderness but space to breathe in and to push on through. His need was to exist, and to move onwards at the greatest possible risk, and with a maximum of privation. If the absolutely pure, uncalculating, unpractical spirit of adventure had ever ruled a human being, it ruled this be-patched youth. I almost envied him the possession of this modest and clear flame. It seemed to have consumed all thought of self so completely, that, even while he was talking to you, you forgot that it was he — the man before your eyes — who had gone through these things. I did not envy him his devotion to Kurtz, though. He had not meditated over it. It came to him, and he accepted it with a sort of eager fatalism. I must say that to me it appeared about the most dangerous thing in every way he had come upon so far.

“They had come together unavoidably, like two ships becalmed near each other, and lay rubbing sides at last. I suppose Kurtz wanted an audience, because on a certain occasion, when encamped in the forest, they had talked all night, or more probably Kurtz had talked. ‘We talked of everything,’ he said, quite transported at the recollection. ‘I forgot there was such a thing as sleep. The night did not seem to last an hour. Everything! Everything! . . . Of love too.’ ‘Ah, he talked to you of love!’ I said, much amused. ‘It isn’t

what you think,' he cried, almost passionately. 'It was in general. He made me see things — things.'

"He threw his arms up. We were on deck at the time, and the headman of my wood-cutters, lounging near by, turned upon him his heavy and glittering eyes. I looked around, and I don't know why, but I assure you that never, never before, did this land, this river, this jungle, the very arch of this blazing sky, appear to me so hopeless and so dark, so impenetrable to human thought, so pitiless to human weakness. 'And, ever since, you have been with him, of course?' I said.

"On the contrary. It appears their intercourse had been very much broken by various causes. He had, as he informed me proudly, managed to nurse Kurtz through two illnesses (he alluded to it as you would to some risky feat), but as a rule Kurtz wandered alone, far in the depths of the forest. 'Very often coming to this station, I had to wait days and days before he would turn up,' he said. 'Ah, it was worth waiting for! — sometimes.' 'What was he doing? exploring or what?' I asked. 'Oh yes, of course;' he had discovered lots of villages, a lake too — he did not know exactly in what direction; it was dangerous to inquire too much — but mostly his expeditions had been for ivory. 'But he had no goods to trade with by that time,' I objected. 'There's a good lot of cartridges left even yet,' he answered, looking away. 'To speak plainly, he raided the country,' I said. He nodded. 'Not alone, surely!' He muttered something about the villages round that lake. 'Kurtz got the tribe to follow him, did he?' I suggested. He fidgeted a little. 'They adored him,' he said. The tone of these words was so extraordinary that I looked at him searchingly. It was curious to see his mingled eagerness and reluctance to speak of Kurtz. The man filled his life, occupied his thoughts, swayed his emotions. 'What can you expect?' he burst out; 'he came to them with thunder and lightning, you know — and they had never seen anything like it — and very terrible. He could be very terrible. You can't judge Mr. Kurtz as you would an ordinary man. No, no, no! Now — just to give you an idea — I don't mind telling you, he wanted to shoot me too one day — but I don't judge him.' 'Shoot you!' I cried. 'What for?' 'Well, I had a small lot of ivory the chief of that village near my house gave me. You see I used to shoot game for them. Well, he wanted it, and wouldn't hear reason. He declared he would shoot me unless I gave him the ivory and then cleared out of the country, because he could do so, and had a fancy for it, and there was nothing on earth to prevent him killing



whom he jolly well pleased. And it was true too. I gave him the ivory. What did I care! But I didn't clear out. No, no. I couldn't leave him. I had to be careful, of course, till we got friendly again for a time. He had his second illness then. Afterwards I had to keep out of the way; but I didn't mind. He was living for the most part in those villages on the lake. When he came down to the river, sometimes he would take to me, and sometimes it was better for me to be careful. This man suffered too much. He hated all this, and somehow he couldn't get away. When I had a chance I begged him to try and leave while there was time; I offered to go back with him. And he would say yes, and then he would remain; go off on another ivory hunt; disappear for weeks; forget himself amongst these people — forget himself — you know.' 'Why! he's mad,' I said. He protested indignantly. Mr. Kurtz couldn't be mad. If I had heard him talk, only two days ago, I wouldn't dare hint at such a thing. . . . I had taken up my binoculars while we talked and was looking at the shore, sweeping the limit of the forest at each side and at the back of the house. The consciousness of there being people in that bush, so silent, so quiet — as silent and quiet as the ruined house on the hill — made me uneasy. There was no sign on the face of nature of this amazing tale that was not so much told as suggested to me in desolate exclamations, completed by shrugs, in interrupted phrases, in hints ending in deep sighs. The woods were unmoved, like a mask — heavy, like the closed door of a prison — they looked with their air of hidden knowledge, of patient expectation, of unapproachable silence. The Russian was explaining to me that it was only lately that Mr. Kurtz had come down to the river, bringing along with him all the fighting men of that lake tribe. He had been absent for several months — getting himself adored, I suppose — and had come down unexpectedly, with the intention to all appearance of making a raid either across the river or down stream. Evidently the appetite for more ivory had got the better of the — what shall I say? — less material aspirations. However he had got much worse suddenly. 'I heard he was lying helpless, and so I came up — took my chance,' said the Russian. 'Oh, he is bad, very bad.' I directed my glass to the house. There were no signs of life, but there was the ruined roof, the long mud wall peeping above the grass, with three little square window-holes, no two of the same size; all this brought within reach of my hand, as it were. And then I made a brusque movement, and one of the remaining posts of that vanished fence leaped up in the field of my glass. You remember I told you I had been struck at the distance by

certain attempts at ornamentation, rather remarkable in the ruinous aspect of the place. Now I had suddenly a nearer view, and its first result was to make me throw my head back as if before a blow. Then I went carefully from post to post with my glass, and I saw my mistake. These round knobs were not ornamental but symbolic; they were expressive and puzzling, striking and disturbing — food for thought and also for the vultures if there had been any looking down from the sky; but at all events for such ants as were industrious enough to ascend the pole. They would have been even more impressive, those heads on the stakes, if their faces had not been turned to the house. Only one, the first I had made out, was facing my way. I was not so shocked as you may think. The start back I had given was really nothing but a movement of surprise. I had expected to see a knob of wood there, you know. I returned deliberately to the first I had seen — and there it was, black, dried, sunken, with closed eyelids, — a head that seemed to sleep at the top of that pole, and, with the shrunken dry lips showing a narrow white line of the teeth, was smiling too, smiling continuously at some endless and jocose dream of that eternal slumber.

“I am not disclosing any trade secrets. In fact the manager said afterwards that Mr. Kurtz’s methods had ruined the district. I have no opinion on that point, but I want you clearly to understand that there was nothing exactly profitable in these heads being there. They only showed that Mr. Kurtz lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts, that there was something wanting in him — some small matter which, when the pressing need arose, could not be found under his magnificent eloquence. Whether he knew of this deficiency himself I can’t say. I think the knowledge came to him at last — only at the very last. But the wilderness had found him out early, and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion. I think it had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude — and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating. It echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core. . . . I put down the glass, and the head that had appeared near enough to be spoken to seemed at once to have leaped away from me into inaccessible distance.

“The admirer of Mr. Kurtz was a bit crestfallen. In a hurried, indistinct voice he began to assure me he had not dared to take these — say, symbols — down. He was not afraid of the natives; they would not stir till Mr. Kurtz

gave the word. His ascendancy was extraordinary. The camps of these people surrounded the place, and the chiefs came every day to see him. They would crawl. . . . 'I don't want to know anything of the ceremonies used when approaching Mr. Kurtz,' I shouted. Curious, this feeling that came over me that such details would be more intolerable than those heads drying on the stakes under Mr. Kurtz's windows. After all, that was only a savage sight, while I seemed at one bound to have been transported into some lightless region of subtle horrors, where pure, uncomplicated savagery was a positive relief, being something that had a right to exist — obviously — in the sunshine. The young man looked at me with surprise. I suppose it did not occur to him Mr. Kurtz was no idol of mine. He forgot I hadn't heard any of these splendid monologues on, what was it? on love, justice, conduct of life — or what not. If it had come to crawling before Mr. Kurtz, he crawled as much as the veriest savage of them all. I had no idea of the conditions, he said: these heads were the heads of rebels. I shocked him excessively by laughing. Rebels! What would be the next definition I was to hear? There had been enemies, criminals, workers — and these were rebels. Those rebellious heads looked very subdued to me on their sticks. 'You don't know how such a life tries a man like Kurtz,' cried Kurtz's last disciple. 'Well, and you?' I said. 'I! I! I am a simple man. I have no great thoughts. I want nothing from anybody. How can you compare me to . . . ?' His feelings were too much for speech, and suddenly he broke down. 'I don't understand,' he groaned. 'I've been doing my best to keep him alive, and that's enough. I had no hand in all this. I have no abilities. There hasn't been a drop of medicine or a mouthful of invalid food for months here. He was shamefully abandoned. A man like this, with such ideas. Shamefully! Shamefully! I — I — haven't slept for the last ten nights. . . .'

"His voice lost itself in the calm of the evening. The long shadows of the forest had slipped down hill while we talked, had gone far beyond the ruined hovel, beyond the symbolic row of stakes. All this was in the gloom, while we down there were yet in the sunshine, and the stretch of the river abreast of the clearing glittered in a still and dazzling splendor, with a murky and over-shadowed bend above and below. Not a living soul was seen on the shore. The bushes did not rustle.

"Suddenly round the corner of the house a group of men appeared, as though they had come up from the ground. They waded waist-deep in the grass, in a compact body, bearing an improvised stretcher in their midst.

Instantly, in the emptiness of the landscape, a cry arose whose shrillness pierced the still air like a sharp arrow flying straight to the very heart of the land; and, as if by enchantment, streams of human beings — of naked human beings — with spears in their hands, with bows, with shields, with wild glances and savage movements, were poured into the clearing by the dark-faced and pensive forest. The bushes shook, the grass swayed for a time, and then everything stood still in attentive immobility.

“‘Now, if he does not say the right thing to them we are all done for,’ said the Russian at my elbow. The knot of men with the stretcher had stopped too, half-way to the steamer, as if petrified. I saw the man on the stretcher sit up, lank and with an uplifted arm, above the shoulders of the bearers. ‘Let us hope that the man who can talk so well of love in general will find some particular reason to spare us this time,’ I said. I resented bitterly the absurd danger of our situation, as if to be at the mercy of that atrocious phantom had been a dishonoring necessity. I could not hear a sound, but through my glasses I saw the thin arm extended commandingly, the lower jaw moving, the eyes of that apparition shining darkly far in its bony head that nodded with grotesque jerks. Kurtz — Kurtz — that means short in German — don’t it? Well, the name was as true as everything else in his life — and death. He looked at least seven feet long. His covering had fallen off, and his body emerged from it pitiful and appalling as from a winding-sheet. I could see the cage of his ribs all astir, the bones of his arm waving. It was as though an animated image of death carved out of old ivory had been shaking its hand with menaces at a motionless crowd of men made of dark and glittering bronze. I saw him open his mouth wide — it gave him a weirdly voracious aspect, as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him. A deep voice reached me faintly. He must have been shouting. He fell back suddenly. The stretcher shook as the bearers staggered forward again, and almost at the same time I noticed that the crowd of savages was vanishing without any perceptible movement of retreat, as if the forest that had ejected these beings so suddenly had drawn them in again as the breath is drawn in a long aspiration.

“Some of the pilgrims behind the stretcher carried his arms — two shot-guns, a heavy rifle, and a light revolver-carbine — the thunderbolts of that pitiful Jupiter. The manager bent over him murmuring as he walked beside his head. They laid him down in one of the little cabins — just a room for a bed-place and a camp-stool or two, you know. We had brought his belated

correspondence, and a lot of torn envelopes and open letters littered his bed. His hand roamed feebly amongst these papers. I was struck by the fire of his eyes and the composed languor of his expression. It was not so much the exhaustion of disease. He did not seem in pain. This shadow looked satiated and calm, as though for the moment it had had its fill of all the emotions.

“He rustled one of the letters, and looking straight in my face said, ‘I am glad.’ Somebody had been writing to him about me. These special recommendations were turning up again. The volume of tone he emitted without effort, almost without the trouble of moving his lips, amazed me. A voice! a voice! It was grave, profound, vibrating, while the man did not seem capable of a whisper. However, he had enough strength in him — factitious no doubt — to very nearly make an end of us, as you shall hear directly.

“The manager appeared silently in the doorway; I stepped out at once and he drew the curtain after me. The Russian, eyed curiously by the pilgrims, was staring at the shore. I followed the direction of his glance.

“Dark human shapes could be made out in the distance, flitting indistinctly against the gloomy border of the forest, and near the river two bronze figures, leaning on tall spears, stood in the sunlight under fantastic headdresses of spotted skins, warlike and still in statuesque repose. And from right to left along the lighted shore moved a wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman.

“She walked with measured steps, draped in striped and fringed cloths, treading the earth proudly, with a slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments. She carried her head high; her hair was done in the shape of a helmet; she had brass leggings to the knee, brass wire gauntlets to the elbow, a crimson spot on her tawny cheek, innumerable necklaces of glass beads on her neck; bizarre things, charms, gifts of witch-men, that hung about her, glittered and trembled at every step. She must have had the value of several elephant tusks upon her. She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent; there was something ominous and stately in her deliberate progress. And in the hush that had fallen suddenly upon the whole sorrowful land, the immense wilderness, the colossal body of the fecund and mysterious life seemed to look at her, pensive, as though it had been looking at the image of its own tenebrous and passionate soul.

“She came abreast of the steamer, stood still, and faced us. Her long shadow fell to the water’s edge. Her face had a tragic and fierce aspect of

wild sorrow and of dumb pain mingled with the fear of some struggling, half-shaped resolve. She stood looking at us without a stir and like the wilderness itself, with an air of brooding over an inscrutable purpose. A whole minute passed, and then she made a step forward. There was a low jingle, a glint of yellow metal, a sway of fringed draperies, and she stopped as if her heart had failed her. The young fellow by my side growled. The pilgrims murmured at my back. She looked at us all as if her life had depended upon the unswerving steadiness of her glance. Suddenly she opened her bared arms and threw them up rigid above her head, as though in an uncontrollable desire to touch the sky, and at the same time the swift shadows darted out on the earth, swept around on the river, gathering the steamer into a shadowy embrace. A formidable silence hung over the scene.

“She turned away slowly, walked on, following the bank, and passed into the bushes to the left. Once only her eyes gleamed back at us in the dusk of the thickets before she disappeared.

“‘If she had offered to come aboard I really think I would have tried to shoot her,’ said the man of patches, nervously. ‘I had been risking my life every day for the last fortnight to keep her out of the house. She got in one day and kicked up a row about those miserable rags I picked up in the storeroom to mend my clothes with. I wasn’t decent. At least it must have been that, for she talked like a fury to Kurtz for an hour, pointing at me now and then. I don’t understand the dialect of this tribe. Luckily for me, I fancy Kurtz felt too ill that day to care, or there would have been mischief. I don’t understand. . . . No — it’s too much for me. Ah, well, it’s all over now.’

“At this moment I heard Kurtz’s deep voice behind the curtain, ‘Save me! — save the ivory, you mean. Don’t tell me. Save me! Why, I’ve had to save you. You are interrupting my plans now. Sick! Sick! Not so sick as you would like to believe. Never mind. I’ll carry my ideas out yet — I will return. I’ll show you what can be done. You with your little peddling notions — you are interfering with me. I will return. I . . .’

“The manager came out. He did me the honor to take me under the arm and lead me aside. ‘He is very low, very low,’ he said. He considered it necessary to sigh, but neglected to be consistently sorrowful. ‘We have done all we could for him — haven’t we? But there is no disguising the fact, Mr. Kurtz has done more harm than good to the Company. He did not see the time was not ripe for vigorous action. Cautiously, cautiously — that’s my principle. We must be cautious yet. The district is closed to us for

a time. Deplorable! Upon the whole, the trade will suffer. I don't deny there is a remarkable quantity of ivory — mostly fossil. We must save it, at all events — but look how precarious the position is — and why? Because the method is unsound.' 'Do you,' said I, looking at the shore, 'call it "unsound method"?' 'Without doubt,' he exclaimed, hotly. 'Don't you?' . . . 'No method at all,' I murmured after a while. 'Exactly,' he exulted. 'I anticipated this. Shows a complete want of judgment. It is my duty to point it out in the proper quarter.' 'Oh,' said I, 'that fellow — what's his name? — the brickmaker, will make a readable report for you.' He appeared confounded for a moment. It seemed to me I had never breathed an atmosphere so vile, and I turned mentally to Kurtz for relief — positively for relief. 'Nevertheless I think Mr. Kurtz is a remarkable man,' I said with emphasis. He started, dropped on me a cold heavy glance, said very quietly, 'He was,' and turned his back on me. My hour of favor was over; I found myself lumped along with Kurtz as a partisan of methods for which the time was not ripe: I was unsound! Ah! but it was something to have at least a choice of nightmares.

"I had turned to the wilderness really, not to Mr. Kurtz, who, I was ready to admit, was as good as buried. And for a moment it seemed to me as if I also were buried in a vast grave full of unspeakable secrets. I felt an intolerable weight oppressing my breast, the smell of the damp earth, the unseen presence of victorious corruption, the darkness of an impenetrable night. . . . The Russian tapped me on the shoulder. I heard him mumbling and stammering something about 'brother seaman — couldn't conceal — knowledge of matters that would affect Mr. Kurtz's reputation.' I waited. For him evidently Mr. Kurtz was not in his grave; I suspect that for him Mr. Kurtz was one of the immortals. 'Well!' said I at last, 'speak out. As it happens, I am Mr. Kurtz's friend — in a way.'

"He stated with a good deal of formality that had we not been 'of the same profession,' he would have kept the matter to himself without regard to consequences. 'He suspected there was an active ill-will towards him on the part of these white men that — ' 'You are right,' I said, remembering a certain conversation I had overheard. 'The manager thinks you ought to be hanged.' He showed a concern at this intelligence which amused me at first. 'I had better get out of the way quietly,' he said, earnestly. 'I can do no more for Kurtz now, and they would soon find some excuse. What's to stop them? There's a military post three hundred miles from here.' 'Well, upon

my word,' said I, 'perhaps you had better go if you have any friends amongst the savages near by.' 'Plenty,' he said. 'They are simple people — and I want nothing, you know.' He stood biting his lips, then: 'I don't want any harm to happen to these whites here, but of course I was thinking of Mr. Kurtz's reputation — but you are a brother seaman and — ' 'All right,' said I, after a time. 'Mr. Kurtz's reputation is safe with me.' I did not know how truly I spoke.

"He informed me, lowering his voice, that it was Kurtz who had ordered the attack to be made on the steamer. 'He hated sometimes the idea of being taken away — and then again. . . . But I don't understand these matters. I am a simple man. He thought it would scare you away — that you would give it up, thinking him dead. I could not stop him. Oh, I had an awful time of it this last month.' 'Very well,' I said. 'He is all right now.' 'Ye-e-es,' he muttered, not very convinced apparently. 'Thanks,' said I; 'I shall keep my eyes open.' 'But quiet — eh?' he urged, anxiously. 'It would be awful for his reputation if anybody here — ' I promised a complete discretion with great gravity. 'I have a canoe and three black fellows waiting not very far. I am off. Could you give me a few Martini-Henry cartridges?' I could, and did, with proper secrecy. He helped himself, with a wink at me, to a handful of my tobacco. 'Between sailors — you know — good English tobacco.' At the door of the pilot-house he turned round — 'I say, haven't you a pair of shoes you could spare?' He raised one leg. 'Look.' The soles were tied with knotted strings sandal-wise under his bare feet. I rooted out an old pair, at which he looked with admiration before tucking it under his left arm. One of his pockets (bright red) was bulging with cartridges, from the other (dark blue) peeped 'Towson's Inquiry,' &c., &c. He seemed to think himself excellently well equipped for a renewed encounter with the wilderness. 'Ah! I'll never, never meet such a man again. You ought to have heard him recite poetry — his own too it was, he told me. Poetry!' He rolled his eyes at the recollection of these delights. 'Oh, he enlarged my mind!' 'Goodby,' said I. He shook hands and vanished in the night. Sometimes I ask myself whether I had ever really seen him — whether it was possible to meet such a phenomenon! . . .

"When I woke up shortly after midnight his warning came to my mind with its hint of danger that seemed, in the starred darkness, real enough to make me get up for the purpose of having a look round. On the hill a big fire burned, illuminating fitfully a crooked corner of the station-house. One



of the agents with a picket of a few of our blacks, armed for the purpose, was keeping guard over the ivory; but deep within the forest, red gleams that wavered, that seemed to sink and rise from the ground amongst confused columnar shapes of intense blackness, showed the exact position of the camp where Mr. Kurtz's adorers were keeping their uneasy vigil. The monotonous beating of a big drum filled the air with muffled shocks and a lingering vibration. A steady droning sound of many men chanting each to himself some weird incantation came out from the black, flat wall of the woods as the humming of bees comes out of a hive, and had a strange narcotic effect upon my half-awake senses. I believe I dozed off leaning over the rail, till an abrupt burst of yells, an overwhelming outbreak of a pent-up and mysterious frenzy, woke me up in a bewildered wonder. It was cut short all at once, and the low droning went on with an effect of audible and soothing silence. I glanced casually into the little cabin. A light was burning within, but Mr. Kurtz was not there.

"I think I would have raised an outcry if I had believed my eyes. But I didn't believe them at first — the thing seemed so impossible. The fact is I was completely unnerved by a sheer blank fright, pure abstract terror, unconnected with any distinct shape of physical danger. What made this emotion so overpowering was — how shall I define it? — the moral shock I received, as if something altogether monstrous, intolerable to thought and odious to the soul, had been thrust upon me unexpectedly. This lasted of course the merest fraction of a second, and then the usual sense of commonplace, deadly danger, the possibility of a sudden onslaught and massacre, or something of the kind, which I saw impending, was positively welcome and composing. It pacified me, in fact, so much, that I did not raise an alarm.

"There was an agent buttoned up inside an ulster and sleeping on a chair on deck within three feet of me. The yells had not awakened him; he snored very slightly; I left him to his slumbers and leaped ashore. I did not betray Mr. Kurtz — it was ordered I should never betray him — it was written I should be loyal to the nightmare of my choice. I was anxious to deal with this shadow by myself alone, — and to this day I don't know why I was so jealous of sharing with anyone the peculiar blackness of that experience.

"As soon as I got on the bank I saw a trail — a broad trail through the grass. I remember the exultation with which I said to myself, 'He can't walk — he is crawling on all-fours — I've got him.' The grass was wet with dew.

I strode rapidly with clenched fists. I fancy I had some vague notion of falling upon him and giving him a drubbing. I don't know. I had some imbecile thoughts. The knitting old woman with the cat obtruded herself upon my memory as a most improper person to be sitting at the other end of such an affair. I saw a row of pilgrims squirting lead in the air out of Winchesters held to the hip. I thought I would never get back to the steamer, and imagined myself living alone and unarmed in the woods to an advanced age. Such silly things — you know. And I remember I confounded the beat of the drum with the beating of my heart, and was pleased at its calm regularity.

“I kept to the track though — then stopped to listen. The night was very clear: a dark blue space, sparkling with dew and starlight, in which black things stood very still. I thought I could see a kind of motion ahead of me. I was strangely cocksure of everything that night. I actually left the track and ran in a wide semicircle (I verily believe chuckling to myself) so as to get in front of that stir, of that motion I had seen — if indeed I had seen anything. I was circumventing Kurtz as though it had been a boyish game.

“I came upon him, and, if he had not heard me coming, I would have fallen over him too, but he got up in time. He rose, unsteady, long, pale, indistinct, like a vapor exhaled by the earth, and swayed slightly, misty and silent before me; while at my back the fires loomed between the trees, and the murmur of many voices issued from the forest. I had cut him off cleverly; but when actually confronting him I seemed to come to my senses, I saw the danger in its right proportion. It was by no means over yet. Suppose he began to shout? Though he could hardly stand, there was still plenty of vigor in his voice. ‘Go away — hide yourself,’ he said, in that profound tone. It was very awful. I glanced back. We were within thirty yards from the nearest fire. A black figure stood up, strode on long black legs, waving long black arms, across the glow. It had horns — antelope horns, I think — on its head. Some sorcerer, some witch-man, no doubt: it looked fiend-like enough. ‘Do you know what you are doing?’ I whispered. ‘Perfectly,’ he answered, raising his voice for that single word: it sounded to me far off and yet loud, like a hail through a speaking-trumpet. ‘If he makes a row we are lost,’ I thought to myself. This clearly was not a case for fisticuffs, even apart from the very natural aversion I had to beat that Shadow — this wandering and tormented thing. ‘You will be lost,’ I said — ‘utterly lost.’ One gets sometimes such a flash of inspiration, you know. I

did say the right thing, though indeed he could not have been more irretrievably lost than he was at this very moment, when the foundations of our intimacy were being laid — to endure — to endure — even to the end — even beyond.

“‘I had immense plans,’ he muttered irresolutely. ‘Yes,’ said I; ‘but if you try to shout I’ll smash your head with — ’ There was not a stick or a stone near. ‘I will throttle you for good,’ I corrected myself. ‘I was on the threshold of great things,’ he pleaded, in a voice of longing, with a wistfulness of tone that made my blood run cold. ‘And now for this stupid scoundrel — ’ ‘Your success in Europe is assured in any case,’ I affirmed, steadily. I did not want to have the throttling of him, you understand — and indeed it would have been very little use for any practical purpose. I tried to break the spell — the heavy, mute spell of the wilderness — that seemed to draw him to its pitiless breast by the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts, by the memory of gratified and monstrous passions. This alone, I was convinced, had driven him out to the edge of the forest, to the bush, towards the gleam of fires, the throb of drums, the drone of weird incantations; this alone had beguiled his unlawful soul beyond the bounds of permitted aspirations. And, don’t you see, the terror of the position was not in being knocked on the head — though I had a very lively sense of that danger too — but in this, that I had to deal with a being to whom I could not appeal in the name of anything high or low. I had, even like the niggers, to invoke him — himself his own exalted and incredible degradation. There was nothing either above or below him, and I knew it. He had kicked himself loose of the earth. Confound the man! he had kicked the very earth to pieces. He was alone, and I before him did not know whether I stood on the ground or floated in the air. I’ve been telling you what we said — repeating the phrases we pronounced, — but what’s the good? They were common everyday words, — the familiar, vague sounds exchanged on every waking day of life. But what of that? They had behind them, to my mind, the terrific suggestiveness of words heard in dreams, of phrases spoken in nightmares. Soul! If anybody had ever struggled with a soul, I am the man. And I wasn’t arguing with a lunatic either. Believe me or not, his intelligence was perfectly clear — concentrated, it is true, upon himself with horrible intensity, yet clear; and therein was my only chance — barring, of course, the killing him there and then, which wasn’t so good, on account of unavoidable noise. But his soul was mad. Being alone in the

wilderness, it had looked within itself, and, by heavens! I tell you, it had gone mad. I had — for my sins, I suppose — to go through the ordeal of looking into it myself. No eloquence could have been so withering to one's belief in mankind as his final burst of sincerity. He struggled with himself, too. I saw it, — I heard it. I saw the inconceivable mystery of a soul that knew no restraint, no faith, and no fear, yet struggling blindly with itself. I kept my head pretty well; but when I had him at last stretched on the couch, I wiped my forehead, while my legs shook under me as though I had carried half a ton on my back down that hill. And yet I had only supported him, his bony arm clasped round my neck — and he was not much heavier than a child.

“When next day we left at noon, the crowd, of whose presence behind the curtain of trees I had been acutely conscious all the time, flowed out of the woods again, filled the clearing, covered the slope with a mass of naked, breathing, quivering, bronze bodies. I steamed up a bit, then swung downstream, and two thousand eyes followed the evolutions of the splashing, thumping, fierce river-demon beating the water with its terrible tail and breathing black smoke into the air. In front of the first rank, along the river, three men, plastered with bright red earth from head to foot, strutted to and fro restlessly. When we came abreast again, they faced the river, stamped their feet, nodded their horned heads, swayed their scarlet bodies; they shook towards the fierce river-demon a bunch of black feathers, a mangy skin with a pendent tail — something that looked like a dried gourd; they shouted periodically together strings of amazing words that resembled no sounds of human language; and the deep murmurs of the crowd, interrupted suddenly, were like the response of some satanic litany.

“We had carried Kurtz into the pilot-house: there was more air there. Lying on the couch, he stared through the open shutter. There was an eddy in the mass of human bodies, and the woman with helmeted head and tawny cheeks rushed out to the very brink of the stream. She put out her hands, shouted something, and all that wild mob took up the shout in a roaring chorus of articulated, rapid, breathless utterance.

““Do you understand this?” I asked.

“He kept on looking out past me with fiery, longing eyes, with a mingled expression of wistfulness and hate. He made no answer, but I saw a smile, a smile of indefinable meaning, appear on his colorless lips that a moment

after twitched convulsively. ‘Do I not?’ he said slowly, gasping, as if the words had been torn out of him by a supernatural power.

“I pulled the string of the whistle, and I did this because I saw the pilgrims on deck getting out their rifles with an air of anticipating a jolly lark. At the sudden screech there was a movement of abject terror through that wedged mass of bodies. ‘Don’t! Don’t you frighten them away,’ cried someone on deck disconsolately. I pulled the string time after time. They broke and ran, they leaped, they crouched, they swerved, they dodged the flying terror of the sound. The three red chaps had fallen flat, face down on the shore, as though they had been shot dead. Only the barbarous and superb woman did not so much as flinch, and stretched tragically her bare arms after us over the somber and glittering river.

“And then that imbecile crowd down on the deck started their little fun, and I could see nothing more for smoke.

“The brown current ran swiftly out of the heart of darkness, bearing us down towards the sea with twice the speed of our upward progress; and Kurtz’s life was running swiftly too, ebbing, ebbing out of his heart into the sea of inexorable time. The manager was very placid, he had no vital anxieties now, he took us both in with a comprehensive and satisfied glance: the ‘affair’ had come off as well as could be wished. I saw the time approaching when I would be left alone of the party of ‘unsound method.’ The pilgrims looked upon me with disfavor. I was, so to speak, numbered with the dead. It is strange how I accepted this unforeseen partnership, this choice of nightmares forced upon me in the tenebrous land invaded by these mean and greedy phantoms.

“Kurtz discoursed. A voice! a voice! It rang deep to the very last. It survived his strength to hide in the magnificent folds of eloquence the barren darkness of his heart. Oh, he struggled! he struggled! The wastes of his weary brain were haunted by shadowy images now — images of wealth and fame revolving obsequiously round his unextinguishable gift of noble and lofty expression. My Intended, my station, my career, my ideas — these were the subjects for the occasional utterances of elevated sentiments. The shade of the original Kurtz frequented the bedside of the hollow sham, whose fate it was to be buried presently in the mold of primeval earth. But both the diabolic love and the unearthly hate of the mysteries it had penetrated fought for the possession of that soul satiated with primitive

emotions, avid of lying fame, of sham distinction, of all the appearances of success and power.

“Sometimes he was contemptibly childish. He desired to have kings meet him at railway-stations on his return from some ghastly Nowhere, where he intended to accomplish great things. ‘You show them you have in you something that is really profitable, and then there will be no limits to the recognition of your ability,’ he would say. ‘Of course you must take care of the motives — right motives — always.’ The long reaches that were like one and the same reach, monotonous bends that were exactly alike, slipped past the steamer with their multitude of secular trees looking patiently after this grimy fragment of another world, the forerunner of change, of conquest, of trade, of massacres, of blessings. I looked ahead — piloting. ‘Close the shutter,’ said Kurtz suddenly one day; ‘I can’t bear to look at this.’ I did so. There was a silence. ‘Oh, but I will wring your heart yet!’ he cried at the invisible wilderness.

“We broke down — as I had expected — and had to lie up for repairs at the head of an island. This delay was the first thing that shook Kurtz’s confidence. One morning he gave me a packet of papers and a photograph, — the lot tied together with a shoe-string. ‘Keep this for me,’ he said. ‘This noxious fool’ (meaning the manager) ‘is capable of prying into my boxes when I am not looking.’ In the afternoon I saw him. He was lying on his back with closed eyes, and I withdrew quietly, but I heard him mutter, ‘Live rightly, die, die . . .’ I listened. There was nothing more. Was he rehearsing some speech in his sleep, or was it a fragment of a phrase from some newspaper article? He had been writing for the papers and meant to do so again, ‘for the furthering of my ideas. It’s a duty.’

“His was an impenetrable darkness. I looked at him as you peer down at a man who is lying at the bottom of a precipice where the sun never shines. But I had not much time to give him, because I was helping the engine-driver to take to pieces the leaky cylinders, to straighten a bent connecting-rod, and in other such matters. I lived in an infernal mess of rust, filings, nuts, bolts, spanners, hammers, ratchet-drills — things I abominate, because I don’t get on with them. I tended the little forge we fortunately had aboard; I toiled wearily in a wretched scrap-heap — unless I had the shakes too bad to stand.

“One evening coming in with a candle I was startled to hear him say a little tremulously, ‘I am lying here in the dark waiting for death.’ The light

was within a foot of his eyes. I forced myself to murmur, 'Oh, nonsense!' and stood over him as if transfixed.

"Anything approaching the change that came over his features I have never seen before, and hope never to see again. Oh, I wasn't touched. I was fascinated. It was as though a veil had been rent. I saw on that ivory face the expression of somber pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror — of an intense and hopeless despair. Did he live his life again in every detail of desire, temptation, and surrender during that supreme moment of complete knowledge? He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision, — he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath —

"The horror! The horror!"

"I blew the candle out and left the cabin. The pilgrims were dining in the mess-room, and I took my place opposite the manager, who lifted his eyes to give me a questioning glance, which I successfully ignored. He leaned back, serene, with that peculiar smile of his sealing the unexpressed depths of his meanness. A continuous shower of small flies streamed upon the lamp, upon the cloth, upon our hands and faces. Suddenly the manager's boy put his insolent black head in the doorway, and said in a tone of scathing contempt —

"Mistah Kurtz — he dead."

"All the pilgrims rushed out to see. I remained, and went on with my dinner. I believe I was considered brutally callous. However, I did not eat much. There was a lamp in there — light, don't you know — and outside it was so beastly, beastly dark. I went no more near the remarkable man who had pronounced a judgment upon the adventures of his soul on this earth. The voice was gone. What else had been there? But I am of course aware that next day the pilgrims buried something in a muddy hole.

"And then they very nearly buried me.

"However, as you see, I did not go to join Kurtz there and then. I did not. I remained to dream the nightmare out to the end, and to show my loyalty to Kurtz once more. Destiny. My destiny! Droll thing life is — that mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose. The most you can hope from it is some knowledge of yourself — that comes too late — a crop of unextinguishable regrets. I have wrestled with death. It is the most unexciting contest you can imagine. It takes place in an impalpable grayness, with nothing underfoot, with nothing around, without spectators, without clamor, without glory, without the great desire of victory, without

the great fear of defeat, in a sickly atmosphere of tepid skepticism, without much belief in your own right, and still less in that of your adversary. If such is the form of ultimate wisdom, then life is a greater riddle than some of us think it to be. I was within a hair's-breadth of the last opportunity for pronouncement, and I found with humiliation that probably I would have nothing to say. This is the reason why I affirm that Kurtz was a remarkable man. He had something to say. He said it. Since I had peeped over the edge myself, I understand better the meaning of his stare, that could not see the flame of the candle, but was wide enough to embrace the whole universe, piercing enough to penetrate all the hearts that beat in the darkness. He had summed up — he had judged. 'The horror!' He was a remarkable man. After all, this was the expression of some sort of belief; it had candor, it had conviction, it had a vibrating note of revolt in its whisper, it had the appalling face of a glimpsed truth — the strange commingling of desire and hate. And it is not my own extremity I remember best — a vision of grayness without form filled with physical pain, and a careless contempt for the evanescence of all things — even of this pain itself. No! It is his extremity that I seem to have lived through. True, he had made that last stride, he had stepped over the edge, while I had been permitted to draw back my hesitating foot. And perhaps in this is the whole difference; perhaps all the wisdom, and all truth, and all sincerity, are just compressed into that inappreciable moment of time in which we step over the threshold of the invisible. Perhaps! I like to think my summing-up would not have been a word of careless contempt. Better his cry — much better. It was an affirmation, a moral victory paid for by innumerable defeats, by abominable terrors, by abominable satisfactions. But it was a victory! That is why I have remained loyal to Kurtz to the last, and even beyond, when a long time after I heard once more, not his own voice, but the echo of his magnificent eloquence thrown to me from a soul as translucently pure as a cliff of crystal.

"No, they did not bury me, though there is a period of time which I remember mistily, with a shuddering wonder, like a passage through some inconceivable world that had no hope in it and no desire. I found myself back in the sepulchral city resenting the sight of people hurrying through the streets to filch a little money from each other, to devour their infamous cookery, to gulp their unwholesome beer, to dream their insignificant and silly dreams. They trespassed upon my thoughts. They were intruders



whose knowledge of life was to me an irritating pretense, because I felt so sure they could not possibly know the things I knew. Their bearing, which was simply the bearing of commonplace individuals going about their business in the assurance of perfect safety, was offensive to me like the outrageous flauntings of folly in the face of a danger it is unable to comprehend. I had no particular desire to enlighten them, but I had some difficulty in restraining myself from laughing in their faces, so full of stupid importance. I dare say I was not very well at that time. I tottered about the streets — there were various affairs to settle — grinning bitterly at perfectly respectable persons. I admit my behavior was inexcusable, but then my temperature was seldom normal in these days. My dear aunt's endeavors to 'nurse up my strength' seemed altogether beside the mark. It was not my strength that wanted nursing, it was my imagination that wanted soothing. I kept the bundle of papers given me by Kurtz, not knowing exactly what to do with it. His mother had died lately, watched over, as I was told, by his Intended. A clean-shaved man, with an official manner and wearing gold-rimmed spectacles, called on me one day and made inquiries, at first circuitous, afterwards suavely pressing, about what he was pleased to denominate certain 'documents.' I was not surprised, because I had had two rows with the manager on the subject out there. I had refused to give up the smallest scrap out of that package, and I took the same attitude with the spectacled man. He became darkly menacing at last, and with much heat argued that the Company had the right to every bit of information about its 'territories.' And, said he, 'Mr. Kurtz's knowledge of unexplored regions must have been necessarily extensive and peculiar — owing to his great abilities and to the deplorable circumstances in which he had been placed: therefore' — I assured him Mr. Kurtz's knowledge, however extensive, did not bear upon the problems of commerce or administration. He invoked then the name of science. 'It would be an incalculable loss if,' &c., &c. I offered him the report on the 'Suppression of Savage Customs,' with the postscriptum torn off. He took it up eagerly, but ended by sniffing at it with an air of contempt. 'This is not what we had a right to expect,' he remarked. 'Expect nothing else,' I said. 'There are only private letters.' He withdrew upon some threat of legal proceedings, and I saw him no more; but another fellow, calling himself Kurtz's cousin, appeared two days later, and was anxious to hear all the details about his dear relative's last moments. Incidentally he gave me to understand that Kurtz had been essentially a

great musician. 'There was the making of an immense success,' said the man, who was an organist, I believe, with lank gray hair flowing over a greasy coat-collar. I had no reason to doubt his statement; and to this day I am unable to say what was Kurtz's profession, whether he ever had any — which was the greatest of his talents. I had taken him for a painter who wrote for the papers, or else for a journalist who could paint — but even the cousin (who took snuff during the interview) could not tell me what he had been — exactly. He was a universal genius — on that point I agreed with the old chap, who thereupon blew his nose noisily into a large cotton handkerchief and withdrew in senile agitation, bearing off some family letters and memoranda without importance. Ultimately a journalist anxious to know something of the fate of his 'dear colleague' turned up. This visitor informed me Kurtz's proper sphere ought to have been politics 'on the popular side.' He had furry straight eyebrows, bristly hair cropped short, an eye-glass on a broad ribbon, and, becoming expansive, confessed his opinion that Kurtz really couldn't write a bit — 'but heavens! how that man could talk! He electrified large meetings. He had faith — don't you see? — he had the faith. He could get himself to believe anything — anything. He would have been a splendid leader of an extreme party.' 'What party?' I asked. 'Any party,' answered the other. 'He was an — an — extremist.' Did I not think so? I assented. Did I know, he asked, with a sudden flash of curiosity, 'what it was that had induced him to go out there?' 'Yes,' said I, and forthwith handed him the famous Report for publication, if he thought fit. He glanced through it hurriedly, mumbling all the time, judged 'it would do,' and took himself off with this plunder.

"Thus I was left at last with a slim packet of letters and the girl's portrait. She struck me as beautiful — I mean she had a beautiful expression. I know that the sunlight can be made to lie too, yet one felt that no manipulation of light and pose could have conveyed the delicate shade of truthfulness upon those features. She seemed ready to listen without mental reservation, without suspicion, without a thought for herself. I concluded I would go and give her back her portrait and those letters myself. Curiosity? Yes; and also some other feeling perhaps. All that had been Kurtz's had passed out of my hands: his soul, his body, his station, his plans, his ivory, his career. There remained only his memory and his Intended — and I wanted to give that up too to the past, in a way, — to surrender personally all that remained of him with me to that oblivion which is the last word of our common fate. I don't

defend myself. I had no clear perception of what it was I really wanted. Perhaps it was an impulse of unconscious loyalty, or the fulfillment of one of these ironic necessities that lurk in the facts of human existence. I don't know. I can't tell. But I went.

"I thought his memory was like the other memories of the dead that accumulate in every man's life, — a vague impress on the brain of shadows that had fallen on it in their swift and final passage; but before the high and ponderous door, between the tall houses of a street as still and decorous as a well-kept alley in a cemetery, I had a vision of him on the stretcher, opening his mouth voraciously, as if to devour all the earth with all its mankind. He lived then before me; he lived as much as he had ever lived — a shadow insatiable of splendid appearances, of frightful realities; a shadow darker than the shadow of the night, and draped nobly in the folds of a gorgeous eloquence. The vision seemed to enter the house with me — the stretcher, the phantom-bearers, the wild crowd of obedient worshipers, the gloom of the forests, the glitter of the reach between the murky bends, the beat of the drum, regular and muffled like the beating of a heart — the heart of a conquering darkness. It was a moment of triumph for the wilderness, an invading and vengeful rush which, it seemed to me, I would have to keep back alone for the salvation of another soul. And the memory of what I had heard him say afar there, with the horned shapes stirring at my back, in the glow of fires, within the patient woods, those broken phrases came back to me, were heard again in their ominous and terrifying simplicity. I remembered his abject pleading, his abject threats, the colossal scale of his vile desires, the meanness, the torment, the tempestuous anguish of his soul. And later on I seemed to see his collected languid manner, when he said one day, 'This lot of ivory now is really mine. The Company did not pay for it. I collected it myself at a very great personal risk. I am afraid they will try to claim it as theirs though. H'm. It is a difficult case. What do you think I ought to do — resist? Eh? I want no more than justice.' . . . He wanted no more than justice — no more than justice. I rang the bell before a mahogany door on the first floor, and while I waited he seemed to stare at me out of the glassy panel — stare with that wide and immense stare embracing, condemning, loathing all the universe. I seemed to hear the whispered cry, 'The horror! The horror!'

"The dusk was falling. I had to wait in a lofty drawing-room with three long windows from floor to ceiling that were like three luminous and

bedraped columns. The bent gilt legs and backs of the furniture shone in indistinct curves. The tall marble fireplace had a cold and monumental whiteness. A grand piano stood massively in a corner, with dark gleams on the flat surfaces like a somber and polished sarcophagus. A high door opened — closed. I rose.

“She came forward, all in black, with a pale head, floating towards me in the dusk. She was in mourning. It was more than a year since his death, more than a year since the news came; she seemed as though she would remember and mourn for ever. She took both my hands in hers and murmured, ‘I had heard you were coming.’ I noticed she was not very young — I mean not girlish. She had a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering. The room seemed to have grown darker, as if all the sad light of the cloudy evening had taken refuge on her forehead. This fair hair, this pale visage, this pure brow, seemed surrounded by an ashy halo from which the dark eyes looked out at me. Their glance was guileless, profound, confident, and trustful. She carried her sorrowful head as though she were proud of that sorrow, as though she would say, ‘I — I alone know how to mourn for him as he deserves. But while we were still shaking hands, such a look of awful desolation came upon her face that I perceived she was one of those creatures that are not the playthings of Time. For her he had died only yesterday. And, by Jove! the impression was so powerful that for me too he seemed to have died only yesterday — nay, this very minute. I saw her and him in the same instant of time — his death and her sorrow — I saw her sorrow in the very moment of his death. Do you understand? I saw them together — I heard them together. She had said, with a deep catch of the breath, ‘I have survived;’ while my strained ears seemed to hear distinctly, mingled with her tone of despairing regret, the summing-up whisper of his eternal condemnation. I asked myself what I was doing there, with a sensation of panic in my heart as though I had blundered into a place of cruel and absurd mysteries not fit for a human being to behold. She motioned me to a chair. We sat down. I laid the packet gently on the little table, and she put her hand over it. . . . ‘You knew him well,’ she murmured, after a moment of mourning silence.

“‘Intimacy grows quick out there,’ I said. ‘I knew him as well as it is possible for one man to know another.’

“‘And you admired him,’ she said. ‘It was impossible to know him and not to admire him. Was it?’

“‘He was a remarkable man,’ I said, unsteadily. Then before the appealing fixity of her gaze, that seemed to watch for more words on my lips, I went on, ‘It was impossible not to — ’

“‘Love him,’ she finished eagerly, silencing me into an appalled dumbness. ‘How true! how true! But when you think that no one knew him so well as I! I had all his noble confidence. I knew him best.’

“‘You knew him best,’ I repeated. And perhaps she did. But with every word spoken the room was growing darker, and only her forehead, smooth and white, remained illumined by the unextinguishable light of belief and love.

“‘You were his friend,’ she went on. ‘His friend,’ she repeated, a little louder. ‘You must have been, if he had given you this, and sent you to me. I feel I can speak to you — and oh! I must speak. I want you — you who have heard his last words — to know I have been worthy of him. . . . It is not pride. . . . Yes! I am proud to know I understood him better than anyone on earth — he told me so himself. And since his mother died I have had no one — no one — to — to — ’

“I listened. The darkness deepened. I was not even sure whether he had given me the right bundle. I rather suspect he wanted me to take care of another batch of his papers which, after his death, I saw the manager examining under the lamp. And the girl talked, easing her pain in the certitude of my sympathy; she talked as thirsty men drink. I had heard that her engagement with Kurtz had been disapproved by her people. He wasn’t rich enough or something. And indeed I don’t know whether he had not been a pauper all his life. He had given me some reason to infer that it was his impatience of comparative poverty that drove him out there.

“‘. . . Who was not his friend who had heard him speak once?’ she was saying. ‘He drew men towards him by what was best in them.’ She looked at me with intensity. ‘It is the gift of the great,’ she went on, and the sound of her low voice seemed to have the accompaniment of all the other sounds, full of mystery, desolation, and sorrow, I had ever heard — the ripple of the river, the sighing of the trees swayed by the wind, the murmurs of wild crowds, the faint ring of incomprehensible words cried from afar, the whisper of a voice speaking from beyond the threshold of an eternal darkness. ‘But you have heard him! You know!’ she cried.

“‘Yes, I know,’ I said with something like despair in my heart, but bowing my head before the faith that was in her, before that great and

saving illusion that shone with an unearthly glow in the darkness, in the triumphant darkness from which I could not have defended her — from which I could not even defend myself.

“‘What a loss to me — to us!’ — she corrected herself with beautiful generosity; then added in a murmur, ‘To the world.’ By the last gleams of twilight I could see the glitter of her eyes, full of tears — of tears that would not fall.

“‘I have been very happy — very fortunate — very proud,’ she went on. ‘Too fortunate. Too happy for a little while. And now I am unhappy for — for life.’

“She stood up; her fair hair seemed to catch all the remaining light in a glimmer of gold. I rose too.

“‘And of all this,’ she went on, mournfully, ‘of all his promise, and of all his greatness, of his generous mind, of his noble heart, nothing remains — nothing but a memory. You and I — ’

“‘We shall always remember him,’ I said, hastily.

“‘No!’ she cried. ‘It is impossible that all this should be lost — that such a life should be sacrificed to leave nothing — but sorrow. You know what vast plans he had. I knew of them too — I could not perhaps understand, — but others knew of them. Something must remain. His words, at least, have not died.’

“‘His words will remain,’ I said.

“‘And his example,’ she whispered to herself. ‘Men looked up to him, — his goodness shone in every act. His example — ’

“‘True,’ I said; ‘his example too. Yes, his example. I forgot that.’

“‘But I do not. I cannot — I cannot believe — not yet. I cannot believe that I shall never see him again, that nobody will see him again, never, never, never.’

“She put out her arms as if after a retreating figure, stretching them black and with clasped pale hands across the fading and narrow sheen of the window. Never see him! I saw him clearly enough then. I shall see this eloquent phantom as long as I live, and I shall see her too, a tragic and familiar Shade, resembling in this gesture another one, tragic also, and bedecked with powerless charms, stretching bare brown arms over the glitter of the infernal stream, the stream of darkness. She said suddenly very low, ‘He died as he lived.’

“‘His end,’ said I, with dull anger stirring in me, ‘was in every way worthy of his life.’

“‘And I was not with him,’ she murmured. My anger subsided before a feeling of infinite pity.

“‘Everything that could be done — ’ I mumbled.

“‘Ah, but I believed in him more than anyone on earth — more than his own mother, more than — himself. He needed me! Me! I would have treasured every sigh, every word, every sign, every glance.’

“‘I felt like a chill grip on my chest. ‘Don’t,’ I said, in a muffled voice.

“‘Forgive me. I — I — have mourned so long in silence — in silence. . . . You were with him — to the last? I think of his loneliness. Nobody near to understand him as I would have understood. Perhaps no one to hear. . . .’

“‘To the very end,’ I said, shakily. ‘I heard his very last words. . . .’

I stopped in a fright.

“‘Repeat them,’ she said in a heart-broken tone. ‘I want — I want — something — something — to — to live with.’

“‘I was on the point of crying at her, ‘Don’t you hear them?’ The dusk was repeating them in a persistent whisper all around us, in a whisper that seemed to swell menacingly like the first whisper of a rising wind. ‘The horror! The horror!’

“‘His last word — to live with,’ she murmured. ‘Don’t you understand I loved him — I loved him — I loved him!’

“‘I pulled myself together and spoke slowly.

“‘The last word he pronounced was — your name.’

“‘I heard a light sigh, and then my heart stood still, stopped dead short by an exulting and terrible cry, by the cry of inconceivable triumph and of unspeakable pain. ‘I knew it — I was sure!’ . . . She knew. She was sure. I heard her weeping; she had hidden her face in her hands. It seemed to me that the house would collapse before I could escape, that the heavens would fall upon my head. But nothing happened. The heavens do not fall for such a trifle. Would they have fallen, I wonder, if I had rendered Kurtz that justice which was his due? Hadn’t he said he wanted only justice? But I couldn’t. I could not tell her. It would have been too dark — too dark altogether. . . .’

Marlow ceased, and sat apart, indistinct and silent, in the pose of a meditating Buddha. Nobody moved for a time. “We have lost the first of the ebb,” said the Director, suddenly. I raised my head. The offing was barred

by a black bank of clouds, and the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed somber under an overcast sky — seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness.





# *ROMANCE*



By Joseph Conrad and F. M. Hueffer



*Conrad with his wife at their Ashford home*

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TO  
ELSIE AND JESSIE

“C’est toi qui dors dans Vombre, O sacré Souvenir.”

If we could have remembrance now

And see, as in the days to come

We shall, what’s venturous in these hours:

The swift, intangible romance of fields at home,

The gleams of sun, the showers,

Our workaday contentments, or our powers

To fare still forward through the uncharted haze

Of present days. . . .

For, looking back when years shall flow

Upon this olden day that’s now,

We’ll see, romantic in dimm’d hours,

These memories of ours.

## PART FIRST — THE QUARRY AND THE BEACH

### ROMANCE

#### CHAPTER ONE

To yesterday and to to-day I say my polite “vaya usted con Dios.” What are these days to me? But that far-off day of my romance, when from between the blue and white bales in Don Ramon’s darkened storeroom, at Kingston, I saw the door open before the figure of an old man with the tired, long, white face, that day I am not likely to forget. I remember the chilly smell of the typical West Indian store, the indescribable smell of damp gloom, of locos, of pimento, of olive oil, of new sugar, of new rum; the glassy double sheen of Ramon’s great spectacles, the piercing eyes in the mahogany face, while the tap, tap, tap of a cane on the flags went on behind the inner door; the click of the latch; the stream of light. The door, petulantly thrust inwards, struck against some barrels. I remember the rattling of the bolts on that door, and the tall figure that appeared there, snuffbox in hand. In that land of white clothes, that precise, ancient, Castilian in black was something to remember. The black cane that had made the tap, tap, tap dangled by a silken cord from the hand whose delicate blue-veined, wrinkled wrist ran back into a foam of lawn ruffles. The other hand paused in the act of conveying a pinch of snuff to the nostrils of the hooked nose that had, on the skin stretched tight over the bridge, the polish of old ivory; the elbow pressing the black cocked-hat against the side; the legs, one bent, the other bowing a little back — this was the attitude of Seraphina’s father.

Having imperiously thrust the door of the inner room open, he remained immovable, with no intention of entering, and called in a harsh, aged voice: “Señor Ramon! Señor Ramon!” and then twice: “Sera-phina — Seraphina!” turning his head back.

Then for the first time I saw Seraphina, looking over her father’s shoulder. I remember her face on that day; her eyes were gray — the gray of black, not of blue. For a moment they looked me straight in the face, reflectively, unconcerned, and then travelled to the spectacles of old Ramon.

This glance — remember I was young on that day — had been enough to set me wondering what they were thinking of me; what they could have seen of me.

“But there he is — your Señor Ramon,” she said to her father, as if she were chiding him for a petulance in calling; “your sight is not very good, my poor little father — there he is, your Ramon.”

The warm reflection of the light behind her, gilding the curve of her face from ear to chin, lost itself in the shadows of black lace falling from dark hair that was not quite black. She spoke as if the words clung to her lips; as if she had to put them forth delicately for fear of damaging the frail things. She raised her long hand to a white flower that clung above her ear like the pen of a clerk, and disappeared. Ramon hurried with a stiffness of immense respect towards the ancient grandee. The door swung to.

I remained alone. The blue bales and the white, and the great red oil jars loomed in the dim light filtering through the jalousies out of the blinding sunlight of Jamaica. A moment after, the door opened once more and a young man came out to me; tall, slim, with very bright, very large black eyes aglow in an absolute pallor of face. That was Carlos Riego.

Well, that is my yesterday of romance, for the many things that have passed between those times and now have become dim or have gone out of my mind. And my day before yesterday was the day on which I, at twenty-two, stood looking at myself in the tall glass, the day on which I left my home in Kent and went, as chance willed it, out to sea with Carlos Riego.

That day my cousin Rooksby had become engaged to my sister Veronica, and I had a fit of jealous misery. I was rawboned, with fair hair, I had a good skin, tanned by the weather, good teeth, and brown eyes. I had not had a very happy life, and I had lived shut in on myself, thinking of the wide world beyond my reach, that seemed to hold out infinite possibilities of romance, of adventure, of love, perhaps, and stores of gold. In the family my mother counted; my father did not. She was the daughter of a Scottish earl who had ruined himself again and again. He had been an inventor, a projector, and my mother had been a poor beauty, brought up on the farm we still lived on — the last rag of land that had remained to her father. Then she had married a good man in his way; a good enough catch; moderately well off, very amiable, easily influenced, a dilettante, and a bit of a dreamer, too. He had taken her into the swim of the Regency, and his purse had not held out. So my mother, asserting herself, had insisted upon a return to our

farm, which had been her dowry. The alternative would have been a shabby, ignominious life at Calais, in the shadow of Brummel and such.

My father used to sit all day by the fire, inscribing “ideas” every now and then in a pocket-book. I think he was writing an epic poem, and I think he was happy in an ineffectual way. He had thin red hair, untidy for want of a valet, a shining, delicate, hooked nose, narrow-lidded blue eyes, and a face with the colour and texture of a white-heart cherry. He used to spend his days in a hooded chair. My mother managed everything, leading an out-of-door life which gave her face the colour of a wrinkled pippin. It was the face of a Roman mother, tight-lipped, brown-eyed, and fierce. You may understand the kind of woman she was from the hands she employed on the farm. They were smugglers and night-malefactors to a man — and she liked that. The decent, slow-witted, gently devious type of rustic could not live under her. The neighbours round declared that the Lady Mary Kemp’s farm was a hotbed of disorder. I expect it was, too; three of our men were hung up at Canterbury on one day — for horse-stealing and arson.... Anyhow, that was my mother. As for me, I was under her, and, since I had my aspirations, I had a rather bitter childhood. And I had others to contrast myself with. First there was Rooksby: a pleasant, well-spoken, amiable young squire of the immediate neighbourhood; young Sir Ralph, a man popular with all sorts, and in love with my sister Veronica from early days. Veronica was very beautiful, and very gentle, and very kind; tall, slim, with sloping white shoulders and long white arms, hair the colour of amber, and startled blue eyes — a good mate for Rooksby. Rooksby had foreign relations, too. The uncle from whom he inherited the Priory had married a Riego, a Castilian, during the Peninsular war. He had been a prisoner at the time — he had died in Spain, I think. When Ralph made the grand tour, he had made the acquaintance of his Spanish relations; he used to talk about them, the Riegos, and Veronica used to talk of what he said of them until they came to stand for Romance, the romance of the outer world, to me. One day, a little before Ralph and Veronica became engaged, these Spaniards descended out of the blue. It was Romance suddenly dangled right before my eyes. It was Romance; you have no idea what it meant to me to talk to Carlos Riego.

Rooksby was kind enough. He had me over to the Priory, where I made the acquaintance of the two maiden ladies, his second cousins, who kept house for him. Yes, Ralph was kind; but I rather hated him for it, and was a



little glad when he, too, had to suffer some of the pangs of jealousy — jealousy of Carlos Riego.

Carlos was dark, and of a grace to set Ralph as much in the shade as Ralph himself set me; and Carlos had seen a deal more of the world than Ralph. He had a foreign sense of humour that made him forever ready to sacrifice his personal dignity. It made Veronica laugh, and even drew a grim smile from my mother; but it gave Ralph bad moments. How he came into these parts was a little of a mystery. When Ralph was displeased with this Spanish connection he used to swear that Carlos had cut a throat or taken a purse. At other times he used to say that it was a political matter. In fine, Carlos had the hospitality of the Priory, and the title of Count when he chose to use it. He brought with him a short, pursy, bearded companion, half friend, half servant, who said he had served in Napoleon's Spanish contingent, and had a way of striking his breast with a wooden hand (his arm had suffered in a cavalry charge), and exclaiming, "I, Tomas Castro! . . ." He was an Andalusian.

For myself, the first shock of his strangeness over-come, I adored Carlos, and Veronica liked him, and laughed at him, till one day he said good-by and rode off along the London road, followed by his Tomas Castro. I had an intense longing to go with him out into the great world that brooded all round our foothills.

You are to remember that I knew nothing whatever of that great world. I had never been further away from our farm than just to Canterbury school, to Hythe market, to Romney market. Our farm nestled down under the steep, brown downs, just beside the Roman road to Canterbury; Stone Street — the Street — we called it. Ralph's land was just on the other side of the Street, and the shepherds on the downs used to see of nights a dead-and-gone Rooksby, Sir Peter that was, ride upon it past the quarry with his head under his arm. I don't think I believed in him, but I believed in the smugglers who shared the highway with that horrible ghost. It is impossible for any one nowadays-to conceive the effect these smugglers had upon life thereabouts and then. They were the power to which everything else deferred. They used to overrun the country in great bands, and brooked no interference with their business. Not long before they had defeated regular troops in a pitched battle on the Marsh, and on the very day I went away I remember we couldn't do our carting because the smugglers had given us notice they would need our horses in the evening. They were a power in the

land where there was violence enough without them, God knows! Our position on that Street put us in the midst of it all. At dusk we shut our doors, pulled down our blinds, sat round the fire, and knew pretty well what was going on outside. There would be long whistles in the dark, and when we found men lurking in our barns we feigned not to see them — it was safer so. The smugglers — the Free Traders, they called themselves — were as well organized for helping malefactors out of the country as for running goods in; so it came about that we used to have comers and forgers, murderers and French spies — all sorts of malefactors — hiding in our straw throughout the day, wait-for the whistle to blow from the Street at dusk. I, born with my century, was familiar with these things; but my mother forbade my meddling with them. I expect she knew enough herself — all the resident gentry did. But Ralph — though he was to some extent of the new school, and used to boast that, if applied to, he “would grant a warrant against any Free Trader” — never did, as a matter of fact, or not for many years.

Carlos, then, Rooksby’s Spanish kinsman, had come and gone, and I envied him his going, with his air of mystery, to some far-off lawless adventures — perhaps over there in Spain, where there were war and rebellion. Shortly afterwards Rooksby proposed for the hand of Veronica and was accepted — by my mother. Veronica went about looking happy. That upset me, too. It seemed unjust that she should go out into the great world — to Bath, to Brighton, should see the Prince Regent and the great fights on Hounslow Heath — whilst I was to remain forever a farmer’s boy. That afternoon I was upstairs, looking at the reflection of myself in the tall glass, wondering miserably why I seemed to be such an oaf.

The voice of Rooksby hailed me suddenly from downstairs. “Hey, John — John Kemp; come down, I say!”

I started away from the glass as if I had been taken in an act of folly. Rooksby was flicking his leg with his switch in the doorway, at the bottom of the narrow flight of stairs.

He wanted to talk to me, he said, and I followed him out through the yard on to the soft road that climbs the hill to westward. The evening was falling slowly and mournfully; it was dark already in the folds of the sombre downs.

We passed the corner of the orchard. “I know what you’ve got to tell me,” I said. “You’re going to marry Veronica. Well, you’ve no need of my

blessing. Some people have all the luck. Here am I . . . look at me!”

Ralph walked with his head bent down.

“Confound it,” I said, “I shall run away to sea! I tell you, I’m rotting, rotting! There! I say, Ralph, give me Carlos’ direction....” I caught hold of his arm. “I’ll go after him. He’d show me a little life. He said he would.”

Ralph remained lost in a kind of gloomy abstraction, while I went on worrying him for Carlos’ address.

“Carlos is the only soul I know outside five miles from here. Besides, he’s friends in the Indies. That’s where I want to go, and he could give me a cast. You remember what Tomas Castro said. . . .”

Rooksby came to a sudden halt, and began furiously to switch his corded legs.

“Curse Carlos, and his Castro, too. They’ll have me in jail betwixt them. They’re both in my red barn, if you want their direction. . . .”

He hurried on suddenly up the hill, leaving me gazing upwards at him. When I caught him up he was swearing — as one did in those days — and stamping his foot in the middle of the road.

“I tell you,” he said violently, “it’s the most accursed business! That Castro, with his Cuba, is nothing but a blasted buccaneer... and Carlos is no better. They go to Liverpool for a passage to Jamaica, and see what comes of it!”

It seems that on Liverpool docks, in the owl-light, they fell in with an elderly hunk just returned from West Indies, who asks the time at the door of a shipping agent. Castro pulls out a watch, and the old fellow jumps on it, vows it’s his own, taken from him years before by some picaroons on his outward voyage. Out from the agent’s comes another, and swears that Castro is one of the self-same crew. He himself purported to be the master of the very ship. Afterwards — in the solitary dusk among the ropes and bales — there had evidently been some play with knives, and it ended with a flight to London, and then down to Rooksby’s red barn, with the runners in full cry after them.

“Think of it,” Rooksby said, “and me a justice, and... oh, it drives me wild, this hole-and-corner work! There’s a filthy muddle with the Free Traders — a whistle to blow after dark at the quarry. To-night of all nights, and me a justice... and as good as a married man!”

I looked at him wonderingly in the dusk; his high coat collar almost hid his face, and his hat was pressed down over his eyes. The thing seemed

incredible to me. Here was an adventure, and I was shocked to see that Rooksby was in a pitiable state about it.

“But, Ralph,” I said, “I would help Carlos.”

“Oh, you,” he said fretfully. “You want to run your head into a noose; that’s what it comes to. Why, I may have to flee the country. There’s the red-breasts poking their noses into every cottage on the Ashford road.” He strode on again. A wisp of mist came stealing down the hill. “I can’t give my cousin up. He could be smuggled out, right enough. But then I should have to get across salt water, too, for at least a year. Why — — ”

He seemed ready to tear his hair, and then I put in my say. He needed a little persuasion, though, in spite of Veronica.

I should have to meet Carlos Riego and Castro in a little fir-wood above the quarry, in half an hour’s time. All I had to do was to whistle three bars of “Lillibulero,” as a signal. A connection had been already arranged with the Free Traders on the road beside the quarry, and they were coming down that night, as we knew well enough, both of us. They were coming in force from Canterbury way down to the Marsh. It had cost Ralph a pretty penny; but, once in the hands of the smugglers, his cousin and Castro would be safe enough from the runners; it would have needed a troop of horse to take them. The difficulty was that of late the smugglers themselves had become demoralized. There were ugly rumours of it; and there was a danger that Castro and Carlos, if not looked after, might end their days in some marsh-dyke. It was desirable that someone well known in our parts should see them to the seashore. A boat, there, was to take them out into the bay, where an outward-bound West Indiaman would pick them up. But for Ralph’s fear for his neck, which had increased in value since its devotion to Veronica, he would have squired his cousin. As it was, he fluttered round the idea of letting me take his place. Finally he settled it; and I embarked on a long adventure.

## CHAPTER TWO

Between moonrise and sunset I was stumbling through the bracken of the little copse that was like a tuft of hair on the brow of the great white quarry. It was quite dark, in among the trees. I made the circuit of the copse, whistling softly my three bars of “Lillibulero.” Then I plunged into it. The bracken underfoot rustled and rustled. I came to a halt. A little bar of light lay on the horizon in front of me, almost colourless. It was crossed again and again by the small fir-trunks that were little more than wands. A woodpigeon rose with a sudden crash of sound, flapping away against the branches. My pulse was dancing with delight — my heart, too. It was like a game of hide-and-seek, and yet it was life at last. Everything grew silent again and I began to think I had missed my time. Down below in the plain, a great way off, a dog was barking continuously. I moved forward a few paces and whistled. The glow of adventure began to die away. There was nothing at all — a little mystery of light on the tree-trunks.

I moved forward again, getting back towards the road. Against the glimmer of dead light I thought I caught the outlines of a man’s hat down among the tossing lines of the bracken. I whispered loudly:

“Carlos! Carlos!”

There was a moment of hoarse whispering; a sudden gruff sound. A shaft of blazing yellow light darted from the level of the ground into my dazed eyes. A man sprang at me and thrust something cold and knobby into my neckcloth. The light continued to blaze into my eyes; it moved upwards and shone on a red waistcoat dashed with gilt buttons. I was being arrested.... “In the King’s name....” It was a most sudden catastrophe. A hand was clutching my windpipe.

“Don’t you so much as squeak, Mr. Castro,” a voice whispered in my ear.

The lanthorn light suddenly died out, and I heard whispers.

“Get him out on to the road.... I’ll tackle the other . . . Darbies. . . . Mind his knife.”

I was like a confounded rabbit in their hands. One of them had his fist on my collar and jerked me out upon the hard road. We rolled down the embankment, but he was on the top. It seemed an abominable episode, a piece of bad faith on the part of fate. I ought to have been exempt from these sordid haps, but the man’s hot leathery hand on my throat was like a foretaste of the other collar. And I was horribly afraid — horribly — of the

sort of mysterious potency of the laws that these men represented, and I could think of nothing to do.

We stood in a little slanting cutting in the shadow. A watery light before the moon's rising slanted downwards from the hilltop along the opposite bank. We stood in utter silence.

"If you stir a hair," my captor said coolly, "I'll squeeze the blood out of your throat, like a rotten orange."

He had the calmness of one dealing with an everyday incident; yet the incident was — it should have been — tremendous. We stood waiting silently for an eternity, as one waits for a hare to break covert before the beaters. From down the long hill came a small sound of horses' hoofs — a sound like the beating of the heart, intermittent — a muffled thud on turf, and a faint clink of iron. It seemed to die away unheard by the runner beside me. Presently there was a crackling of the short pine branches, a rustle, and a hoarse whisper said from above:

"Other's cleared, Thorns. Got that one safe?"

"All serene."

The man from above dropped down into the road, a clumsy, cloaked figure. He turned his lanthorn upon me, in a painful yellow glare.

"What! 'Tis the young 'un," he grunted, after a moment. "Read the warrant, Thorns."

My captor began to fumble in his pocket, pulled out a paper, and bent down into the light. Suddenly he paused and looked up at me.

"This ain't — — — Mr. Lilly white, I don't believe this ain't a Jack Spaniard."

The clinks of bits and stirrup-irons came down in a waft again.

"That be hanged for a tale, Thorns," the man with the lanthorn said sharply. "If this here ain't Riego — or the other — I'll . . ."

I began to come out of my stupor.

"My name's John Kemp," I said.

The other grunted. "Hurry up, Thorns."

"But, Mr. Lillywhite," Thorns reasoned, "he don't speak like a Dago. Split me if he do! And we ain't in a friendly country either, you know that. We can't afford to rile the gentry!"

I plucked up courage.

"You'll get your heads broke," I said, "if you wait much longer. Hark to that!"

The approaching horses had turned off the turf on to the hard road; the steps of first one and then another sounded out down the silent hill. I knew it was the Free Traders from that; for except between banks they kept to the soft roadsides as if it were an article of faith. The noise of hoofs became that of an army.

The runners began to consult. The shadow called Thorns was for bolting across country; but Lilly white was not built for speed. Besides he did not know the lie of the land, and believed the Free Traders were mere bogeys.

"They'll never touch us," Lillywhite grumbled. "We've a warrant... King's name...." He was flashing his lanthorn aimlessly up the hill.

"Besides," he began again, "we've got this gallus bird. If he's not a Spaniard, he knows all about them. I heard him. Kemp he may be, but he spoke Spanish up there... and we've got something for our trouble. He'll swing, I'll lay you a — — —"

From far above us came a shout, then a confused noise of voices. The moon began to get up; above the cutting the clouds had a fringe of sudden silver. A horseman, cloaked and muffled to the ears, trotted warily towards us.

"What's up?" he hailed from a matter of ten yards. "What are you showing that glim for? Anything wrong below?"

The runners kept silence; we heard the click of a pistol lock.

"In the King's name," Lillywhite shouted, "get off that nag and lend a hand! We've a prisoner."

The horseman gave an incredulous whistle, and then began to shout, his voice winding mournfully uphill, "Hallo! Hallo — o — o." An echo stole back, "Hallo! Hallo — o — o"; then a number of voices. The horse stood, drooping its head, and the man turned in his saddle. "Runners," he shouted, "Bow Street runners! Come along, come along, boys! We'll roast 'em.... Runners! Runners!"

The sound of heavy horses at a jolting trot came to our ears.

"We're in for it," Lillywhite grunted. "D — — — n this county of Kent."

Thorns never loosed his hold of my collar. At the steep of the hill the men and horses came into sight against the white sky, a confused crowd of ominous things.

"Turn that lanthorn off'n me," the horseman said. "Don't you see you frighten my horse? Now, boys, get round them. . . ."

The great horses formed an irregular half-circle round us; men descended clumsily, like sacks of corn. The lantern was seized and flashed upon us; there was a confused hubbub. I caught my own name.

“Yes, I’m Kemp... John Kemp,” I called. “I’m true blue.”

“Blue be hanged!” a voice shouted back. “What be you a-doing with runners?”

The riot went on — forty or fifty voices. The runners were seized; several hands caught at me. It was impossible to make myself heard; a fist struck me on the cheek.

“Gibbet ‘em,” somebody shrieked; “they hung my nephew! Gibbet ‘em all the three. Young Kemp’s mother’s a bad ‘un. An informer he is. Up with ‘em!”

I was pulled down on my knees, then thrust forward, and then left to myself while they rushed to bonnet Lillywhite. I stumbled against a great, quiet farm horse.

A continuous scuffling went on; an imperious voice cried: “Hold your tongues, you fools! Hold your tongues!...” Someone else called: “Hear to Jack Rangley. Hear to him!”

There was a silence. I saw a hand light a torch at the lantern, and the crowd of faces, the muddle of limbs, the horses’ heads, and the quiet trees above, flickered into sight.

“Don’t let them hang me, Jack Rangley,” I sobbed. “You know I’m no spy. Don’t let ‘em hang me, Jack.”

He rode his horse up to me, and caught me by the collar.

“Hold your tongue,” he said roughly. He began to make a set speech, anathematizing runners. He moved to tie our feet, and hang us by our finger-nails over the quarry edge.

A hubbub of assent and dissent went up; then the crowd became unanimous. Rangley slipped from his horse.

“Blindfold ‘em, lads,” he cried, and turned me sharply round.

“Don’t struggle,” he whispered in my ear; his silk handkerchief came cool across my eyelids. I felt hands fumbling with a knot at the back of my head. “You’re all right,” he said again. The hubbub of voices ceased suddenly. “Now, lads, bring ‘em along.”

A voice I knew said their watchword, “Snuff and enough,” loudly, and then, “What’s agate?”

Someone else answered, “It’s Rooksby, it’s Sir Ralph.”



The voice interrupted sharply, “No names, now. I don’t want hanging.” The hand left my arm; there was a pause in the motion of the procession. I caught a moment’s sound of whispering. Then a new voice cried, “Strip the runners to the shirt. Strip ‘em. That’s it.” I heard some groans and a cry, “You won’t murder us.” Then a nasal drawl, “We will sure — ly.” Someone else, Rangley, I think, called, “Bring ‘em along — this way now.”

After a period of turmoil we seemed to come out of the crowd upon a very rough, descending path; Rangley had called out, “Now, then, the rest of you be off; we’ve got enough here”; and the hoofs of heavy horses sounded again. Then we came to a halt, and Rangley called sharply from close to me:

“Now, you runners — and you, John Kemp — here you be on the brink of eternity, above the old quarry. There’s a sheer drop of a hundred feet. We’ll tie your legs and hang you by your fingers. If you hang long enough, you’ll have time to say your prayers. Look alive, lads!”

The voice of one of the runners began to shout, “You’ll swing for this — you — — —”

As for me I was in a dream. “Jack,” I said, “Jack, you won’t — — —”

“Oh, that’s all right,” the voice said in a whisper. “Mum, now! It’s all right.”

It withdrew itself a little from my ear and called, “Now then, ready with them. When I say three....”

I heard groans and curses, and began to shout for help. My voice came back in an echo, despairingly. Suddenly I was dragged backward, and the bandage pulled from my eyes,

“Come along,” Rangley said, leading me gently enough to the road, which was five steps behind. “It’s all a joke,” he snarled. “A pretty bad one for those catchpolls. Hear ‘em groan. The drop’s not two feet.”

We made a few paces down the road; the pitiful voices of the runners crying for help came plainly to my ears.

“You — they — aren’t murdering them?” I asked.

“No, no,” he answered. “Can’t afford to. Wish we could; but they’d make it too hot for us.”

We began to descend the hill. From the quarry a voice shrieked:

“Help — help — for the love of God — I can’t. . . .”

There was a grunt and the sound of a fall; then a precisely similar sequence of sounds.

“That’ll teach ‘em,” Rangley said ferociously. “Come along — they’ve only rolled down a bank. They weren’t over the quarry. It’s all right. I swear it is.”

And, as a matter of fact, that was the smugglers’ ferocious idea of humour. They would hang any undesirable man, like these runners, whom it would make too great a stir to murder outright, over the edge of a low bank, and swear to him that he was clawing the brink of Shakespeare’s Cliff or any other hundred-foot drop. The wretched creatures suffered all the tortures of death before they let go, and, as a rule, they never returned to our parts.

## CHAPTER THREE

The spirit of the age has changed; everything has changed so utterly that one can hardly believe in the existence of one's earlier self. But I can still remember how, at that moment, I made the acquaintance of my heart — a thing that bounded and leapt within my chest, a little sickeningly. The other details I forget.

Jack Rangley was a tall, big-boned, thin man, with something sinister in the lines of his horseman's cloak, and something reckless in the way he set his spurred heel on the ground. He was the son of an old Marsh squire. Old Rangley had been head of the last of the Owlers — the aristocracy of export smugglers — and Jack had sunk a little in becoming the head of the Old Bourne Tap importers. But he was hard enough, tyrannical enough, and had nerve enough to keep Free-trading alive in our parts until long after it had become an anachronism. He ended his days on the gallows, of course, but that was long afterwards.

"I'd give a dollar to know what's going on in those runners' heads," Rangley said, pointing back with his crop. He laughed gayly. The great white face of the quarry rose up pale in the moonlight; the dusky red fires of the limekilns glowed at the base, sending up a blood-red dust of sullen smoke. "I'll swear they think they've dropped straight into hell.

"You'll have to cut the country, John," he added suddenly, "they'll have got your name uncommon pat. I did my best for you." He had had me tied up like that before the runners' eyes in order to take their suspicions off me. He had made a pretence to murder me with the same idea. But he didn't believe they were taken in. "There'll be warrants out before morning, if they ain't too shaken. But what were you doing in the business? The two Spaniards were lying in the fern looking on when you come blundering your clumsy nose in. If it hadn't been for Rooksby you might have — — — Hullo, there!" he broke off.

An answer came from the black shadow of a clump of roadside elms. I made out the forms of three or four horses standing with their heads together.

"Come along," Rangley said; "up with you. We'll talk as we go."

Someone helped me into a saddle; my legs trembled in the stirrups as if I had ridden a thousand miles on end already. I imagine I must have fallen into a stupor; for I have only a vague impression of somebody's exculpating

himself to me. As a matter of fact, Ralph, after having egged me on, in the intention of staying at home, had had qualms of conscience, and had come to the quarry. It was he who had cried the watchword, "Snuff and enough," and who had held the whispered consultation. Carlos and Castro had waited in their hiding-place, having been spectators of the arrival of the runners and of my capture. I gathered this long afterwards. At that moment I was conscious only of the motion of the horse beneath me, of intense weariness, and of the voice of Ralph, who was lamenting his own cowardice.

"If it had come at any other time!" he kept on repeating. "But now, with Veronica to think of! — — — You take me, Johnny, don't you?"

My companions rode silently. After we had passed the houses of a little village a heavy mist fell upon us, white, damp, and clogging. Ralph reined his horse beside mine.

"I'm sorry," he began again, "I'm miserably sorry I got you into this scrape. I swear I wouldn't have had it happen, not for a thousand pounds — not for ten."

"It doesn't matter," I said cheerfully.

"Ah, but," Rooksby said, "you'll have to leave the country for a time. Until I can arrange. I will. You can trust me."

"Oh, he'll have to leave the country, for sure," Rangsley said jovially, "if he wants to live it down. There's five-and-forty warrants out against me — but they dursent serve 'em. But he's not me."

"It's a miserable business," Ralph said. He had an air of the profoundest dejection. In the misty light he looked like a man mortally wounded, riding from a battle-field.

"Let him come with us," the musical voice of Carlos came through the mist in front of us. "He shall see the world a little."

"For God's sake hold your tongue!" Ralph answered him. "There's mischief enough. He shall go to France."

"Oh, let the young blade rip about the world for a year or two, squire," Rangsley's voice said from behind us.

In the end Ralph let me go with Carlos — actually across the sea, and to the West Indies. I begged and implored him; it seemed that now there was a chance for me to find my world of romance. And Ralph, who, though one of the most law-respecting of men, was not for the moment one of the most valorous, was wild to wash his hands of the whole business. He did his best for me; he borrowed a goodly number of guineas from Rangsley, who

travelled with a bag of them at his saddle-bow, ready to pay his men their seven shillings a head for the run.

Ralph remembered, too — or I remembered for him — that he had estates and an agent in Jamaica, and he turned into the big inn at the junction of the London road to write a letter to his agent bidding him house me and employ me as an improver. For fear of compromising him we waited in the shadow of trees a furlong or two down the road. He came at a trot, gave me the letter, drew me aside, and began upbraiding himself again. The others rode onwards.

“Oh, it’s all right,” I said. “It’s fine — it’s fine. I’d have given fifty guineas for this chance this morning — and, Ralph, I say, you may tell Veronica why I’m going, but keep a shut mouth to my mother. Let her think I’ve run away — eh? Don’t spoil your chance.”

He was in such a state of repentance and flutter that he could not let me take a decent farewell. The sound of the others’ horses had long died away down the hill when he began to tell me what he ought to have done.

“I knew it at once after I’d let you go. I ought to have kept you out of it. You came near being murdered. And to think of it — you, her brother — to be — — —”

“Oh, it’s all right,” I said gayly, “it’s all right. You’ve to stand by Veronica. I’ve no one to my back. Good-night, good-by.”

I pulled my horse’s head round and galloped down the hill. The main body had halted before setting out over the shingle to the shore. Rangley was waiting to conduct us into the town, where we should find a man to take us three fugitives out to the expected ship. We rode clattering aggressively through the silence of the long, narrow main street. Every now and then Carlos Riego coughed lamentably, but Tomas Castro rode in gloomy silence. There was a light here and there in a window, but not a soul stirring abroad. On the blind of an inn the shadow of a bearded man held the shadow of a rummer to its mouth.

“That’ll be my uncle,” Rangley said. “He’ll be the man to do your errand.” He called to one of the men behind. “Here, Joe Pilcher, do you go into the White Hart and drag my Uncle Tom out. Bring ‘un up to me — to the nest.”

Three doors further on we came to a halt, and got down from our horses.

Rangley knocked on a shutter-panel, two hard knocks with the crop and three with the naked fist. Then a lock clicked, heavy bars rumbled, and a

chain rattled. Rangsley pushed me through the doorway. A side door opened, and I saw into a lighted room filled with wreaths of smoke. A paunchy man in a bob wig, with a blue coat and Windsor buttons, holding a churchwarden pipe in his right hand and a pewter quart in his left, came towards us.

“Hullo, captain,” he said, “you’ll be too late with the lights, won’t you?” He had a deprecatory air.

“Your watch is fast, Mr. Mayor,” Rangsley answered surlily; “the tide won’t serve for half an hour yet.”

“Cht, cht,” the other wheezed. “No offence. We respect you. But still, when one has a stake, one likes to know.”

“My stake’s all I have, and my neck,” Rangsley said impatiently; “what’s yours? A matter of fifty pun ten?... Why don’t you make them bring they lanterns?”

A couple of dark lanterns were passed to Rangsley, who half-uncovered one, and lit the way up steep wooden stairs. We climbed up to a tiny cock-loft, of which the side towards the sea was all glazed.

“Now you sit there, on the floor,” Rangsley commanded; “can’t leave you below; the runners will be coming to the mayor for new warrants tomorrow, and he’d not like to have spent the night in your company.”

He threw a casement open. The moon was hidden from us by clouds, but, a long way off, over the distant sea, there was an irregular patch of silver light, against which the chimneys of the opposite houses were silhouetted. The church clock began muffledly to chime the quarters behind us; then the hour struck — ten strokes.

Rangsley set one of his lanterns on the window and twisted the top. He sent beams of yellow light shooting out to seawards. His hands quivered, and he was mumbling to himself under the influence of ungovernable excitement. His stakes were very large, and all depended on the flicker of those lanterns out towards the men on the luggers that were hidden in the black expanse of the sea. Then he waited, and against the light of the window I could see him mopping his forehead with the sleeve of his coat; my heart began to beat softly and insistently — out of sympathy.

Suddenly, from the deep shadow of the cloud above the sea, a yellow light flashed silently cut — very small, very distant, very short-lived. Rangsley heaved a deep sigh and slapped me heavily on the shoulder.

“All serene, my buck,” he said; “now let’s see after you. I’ve half an hour. What’s the ship?”

I was at a loss, but Carlos said out of the darkness, “The ship the Thames. My friend Señor Ortiz, of the Minorities, said you would know.”

“Oh, I know, I know,” Rangsley said softly; and, indeed, he did know all that was to be known about smuggling out of the southern counties of people who could no longer inhabit them. The trade was a survival of the days of Jacobite plots. “And it’s a hanging job, too. But it’s no affair of mine.” He stopped and reflected for an instant.

I could feel Carlos’ eyes upon us, looking out of the thick darkness. A slight rustling came from the corner that hid Castro.

“She passes down channel to-night, then?” Rangsley said. “With this wind you’ll want to be well out in the Bay at a quarter after eleven.”

An abnormal scuffling, intermingled with snatches of jovial remonstrance, made itself heard from the bottom of the ladder. A voice called up through the hatch, “Here’s your uncle, Squahre Jack,” and a husky murmur corroborated.

“Be you drunk again, you old sinner?” Rangsley asked. “Listen to me.... Here’s three men to be set aboard the Thames at a quarter after eleven.”

A grunt came in reply.

Rangsley repeated slowly.

The grunt answered again.

“Here’s three men to be set aboard the Thames at a quarter after eleven. . .” Rangsley said again.

“Here’s... a-cop... three men to be set aboard Thames at quarter after eleven,” a voice hiccupped back to us.

“Well, see you do it,” Rangsley said. “He’s as drunk as a king,” he commented to us; “but when you’ve said a thing three times, he remembers — hark to him.”

The drunken voice from below kept up a constant babble of, “Three men to be set aboard Thames... three men to be set . . .”

“He’ll not stop saying that till he has you safe aboard,” Rangsley said. He showed a glimmer of light down the ladder — Carlos and Castro descended. I caught sight below me of the silver head and the deep red ears of the drunken uncle of Rangsley. He had been one of the most redoubtable of the family, a man of immense strength and cunning, but a confirmed habit of consuming a pint and a half of gin a night had made him

disinclined for the more arduous tasks of the trade. He limited his energies to working the underground passage, to the success of which his fox-like cunning, and intimate knowledge of the passing shipping, were indispensable. I was preparing to follow the others down the ladder when Rangley touched my arm.

“I don’t like your company,” he said close behind my ear. “I know who they are. There were bills out for them this morning. I’d blow them, and take the reward, but for you and Squahre Rooksby. They’re handy with their knives, too, I fancy. You mind me, and look to yourself with them. There’s something unnatural.”

His words had a certain effect upon me, and his manner perhaps more. A thing that was “unnatural” to Jack Rangley — the man of darkness, who lived forever as if in the shadow of the gallows — was a thing to be avoided. He was for me nearly as romantic a figure as Carlos himself, but for his forbidding darkness, and he was a person of immense power. The silent flittings of lights that I had just seen, the answering signals from the luggers far out to sea, the enforced sleep of the towns and countryside whilst his plans were working out at night, had impressed me with a sense of awe. And his words sank into my spirit, and made me afraid for my future.

We followed the others downwards into a ground-floor room that was fitted up as a barber’s shop. A rushlight was burning on a table. Rangley took hold of a piece of wainscotting, part of the frame of a panel; he pulled it towards him, and, at the same moment, a glazed show-case full of razors and brushes swung noiselessly forward with an effect of the supernatural. A small opening, just big enough to take a man’s body, revealed itself. We passed through it and up a sort of tunnel. The door at the other end, which was formed of panels, had a manger and straw crib attached to it on the outside, and let us into a horse’s stall. We found ourselves in the stable of the inn.

“We don’t use this passage for ourselves,” Rangley said. “Only the most looked up to need to — the justices and such like. But gallus birds like you and your company, it’s best for us not to be seen in company with. Follow my uncle now. Good-night.”

We went into the yard, under the pillars of the town hall, across the silent street, through a narrow passage, and down to the sea. Old Rangley reeled ahead of us swiftly, muttering, “Three men to be set aboard the Thames...



quarter past eleven. Three men to be set aboard..." and in a few minutes we stood upon the shingle beside the idle sea, that was nearly at the full.

## CHAPTER FOUR

It was, I suppose, what I demanded of Fate — to be gently wafted into the position of a hero of romance, without rough hands at my throat. It is what we all ask, I suppose; and we get it sometimes in ten-minute snatches. I didn't know where I was going. It was enough for me to sail in and out of the patches of shadow that fell from the moon right above our heads.

We embarked, and, as we drew further out, the land turned to a shadow, spotted here and there with little lights. Behind us a cock crowed. The shingle crashed at intervals beneath the feet of a large body of men. I remembered the smugglers; but it was as if I had remembered them only to forget them forever. Old Rangsley, who steered with the sheet in his hand, kept up an unintelligible babble. Carlos and Castro talked under their breaths. Along the gunwale there was a constant ripple and gurgle. Suddenly old Rangsley began to sing; his voice was hoarse and drunken.

“When Harol’ war in va — a — ded,  
An’ fallin’, lost his crownd,  
An’ Normun Willium wa — a — ded.”

The water murmured without a pause, as if it had a million tiny facts to communicate in very little time. And then old Rangsley hove to, to wait for the ship, and sat half asleep, lurching over the tiller. He was a very, unreliable scoundrel. The boat leaked like a sieve. The wind freshened, and we three began to ask ourselves how it was going to end. There were no lights upon the sea.

At last, well out, a blue gleam caught our eyes; but by this time old Rangsley was helpless, and it fell to me to manage the boat. Carlos was of no use — he knew it, and, without saying a word, busied himself in bailing the water out. But Castro, I was surprised to notice, knew more than I did about a boat, and, maimed as he was, made himself useful.

“To me it looks as if we should drown,” Carlos said at one point, very quietly. “I am sorry for you, Juan.”

“And for yourself, too,” I answered, feeling very hopeless, and with a dogged grimness.

“Just now, my young cousin, I feel as if I should not mind dying under the water,” he remarked with a sigh, but without ceasing to bail for a moment.

“Ah, you are sorry to be leaving home, and your friends, and Spain, and your fine adventures,” I answered.

The blue flare showed a very little nearer. There was nothing to be done but talk and wait.

“No; England,” he answered in a tone full of meaning — “things in England — people there. One person at least.”

To me his words and his smile seemed to imply a bitter irony; but they were said very earnestly.

Castro had hauled the helpless form of old Rangley forward. I caught him muttering savagely:

“I could kill that old man!”

He did not want to be drowned; neither assuredly did I. But it was not fear so much as a feeling of dreariness and disappointment that had come over me, the sudden feeling that I was going not to adventure, but to death; that here was not romance, but an end — a disenchanting surprise that it should soon be all over.

We kept a grim silence. Further out in the bay, we were caught in a heavy squall. Sitting by the tiller, I got as much out of her as I knew how. We would go as far as we could before the run was over. Carlos bailed unceasingly, and without a word of complaint, sticking to his self-appointed task as if in very truth he were careless of life. A feeling came over me that this, indeed, was the elevated and the romantic. Perhaps he was tired of his life; perhaps he really regretted what he left behind him in England, or somewhere else — some association, some woman. But he, at least, if we went down together, would go gallantly, and without complaint, at the end of a life with associations, movements, having lived and regretted. I should disappear in-gloriously on the very threshold.

Castro, standing up unsteadily, growled, “We may do it yet! See, señor!”

The blue gleam was much larger — it flared smokily up towards the sky. I made out ghastly parallelograms of a ship’s sails high above us, and at last many faces peering unseeingly over the rail in our direction. We all shouted together.

I may say that it was thanks to me that we reached the ship. Our boat went down under us whilst I was tying a rope under Carlos’ arms. He was standing up with the baler still in his hand. On board, the women passengers were screaming, and as I clung desperately to the rope that was thrown me, it struck me oddly that I had never before heard so many women’s voices at

the same time. Afterwards, when I stood on the deck, they began laughing at old Rangley, who held forth in a thunderous voice, punctuated by hiccoughs:

“They carried I aboard — a cop — theer lugger and sinks I in the cold, co — old sea.”

It mortified me excessively that I should be tacked to his tail and exhibited to a number of people, and I had a sudden conviction of my small importance. I had expected something altogether different — an audience sympathetically interested in my desire for a passage to the West Indies; instead of which people laughed while I spoke in panting jerks, and the water dripped out of my clothes. After I had made it clear that I wanted to go with Carlos, and could pay for my passage, I was handed down into the steerage, where a tallow candle burnt in a thick, blue atmosphere. I was stripped and filled with some fiery liquid, and fell asleep. Old Rangley was sent ashore with the pilot.

It was a new and strange life to me, opening there suddenly enough. The Thames was one of the usual West Indiamen; but to me even the very ropes and spars, the sea, and the unbroken dome of the sky, had a rich strangeness. Time passed lazily and gliding. I made more fully the acquaintance of my companions, but seemed to know them no better. I lived with Carlos in the cabin — Castro in the half-deck; but we were all three pretty constantly together, and they being the only Spaniards on board, we were more or less isolated from the other passengers.

Looking at my companions at times, I had vague misgivings. It was as if these two had fascinated me to the verge of some danger. Sometimes Castro, looking up, uttered vague ejaculations. Carlos pushed his hat back and sighed. They had preoccupations, cares, interests in which they let me have no part.

Castro struck me as absolutely ruffianly. His head was knotted in a red, white-spotted handkerchief; his grizzled beard was tangled; he wore a black and rusty cloak, ragged at the edges, and his feet were often bare; at his side would lie his wooden right hand. As a rule, the place of his forearm was taken by a long, thin, steel blade, that he was forever sharpening.

Carlos talked with me, telling me about his former life and his adventures. The other passengers he discountenanced by a certain coldness of manner that made me ashamed of talking to them. I respected him so; he was so wonderful to me then. Castro I detested; but I accepted their

relationship without in the least understanding how Carlos, with his fine grain, his high soul — I gave him credit for a high soul — could put up with the squalid ferocity with which I credited Castro. It seemed to hang in the air round the grotesque ragged-ness of the saturnine brown man.

Carlos had made Spain too hot to hold him in those tortuous intrigues of the Army of the Faith and Bourbon troops and Italian legions. From what I could understand, he must have played fast and loose in an insolent manner. And there was some woman offended. There was a gayness and gallantry in that part of it. He had known the very spirit of romance, and now he was sailing gallantly out to take up his inheritance from an uncle who was a great noble, owning the greater part of one of the Intendencias of Cuba.

“He is a very old man, I hear,” Carlos said — “a little doting, and having need of me.”

There were all the elements of romance about Carlos’ story — except the actual discomforts of the ship in which we were sailing. He himself had never been in Cuba or seen his uncle; but he had, as I have indicated, ruined himself in one way or another in Spain, and it had come as a God-send to him when his uncle had sent Tomas Castro to bring him to Cuba, to the town of Rio Medio.

“The town belongs to my uncle. He is very rich; a Grand d’Espagne . . . everything; but he is now very old, and has left Havana to die in his palace in his own town. He has an only daughter, a Dona Seraphina, and I suppose that if I find favour in his eyes I shall marry her, and inherit my uncle’s great riches; I am the only one that is left of the family to inherit.” He waved his hand and smiled a little. “Vaya; a little of that great wealth would be welcome. If I had had a few pence more there would have been none of this worry, and I should not have been on this dirty ship in these rags.” He looked down good-humouredly at his clothes.

“But,” I said, “how do you come to be in a scrape at all?”

He laughed a little proudly.

“In a scrape?” he said. “I... I am in none. It is Tomas Castro there.” He laughed affectionately. “He is as faithful as he is ugly,” he said; “but I fear he has been a villain, too.... What do I know? Over there in my uncle’s town, there are some villains — you know what I mean, one must not speak too loudly on this ship. There is a man called O’Brien, who mismanages my uncle’s affairs. What do I know? The good Tomas has been in some villainy that is no affair of mine. He is a good friend and a faithful dependent of my

family's. He certainly had that man's watch — the man we met by evil chance at Liverpool, a man who came from Jamaica. He had bought it — of a bad man, perhaps, I do not ask. It was Castro your police wished to take. But I, bon Dieu, do you think I would take watches?"

I certainly did not think he had taken a watch; but I did not relinquish the idea that he, in a glamorous, romantic way, had been a pirate. Rooksby had certainly hinted as much in his irritation.

He lost none of his romantic charm in my eyes. The fact that he was sailing in uncomfortable circumstances detracted little; nor did his clothes, which, at the worst, were better than any I had ever had. And he wore them with an air and a grace. He had probably been in worse circumstances when campaigning with the Army of the Faith in Spain. And there was certainly the uncle with the romantic title and the great inheritance, and the cousin — the Miss Seraphina, whom he would probably marry. I imagined him an aristocratic scapegrace, a corsair — it was the Byronic period then — sailing out to marry a sort of shimmering princess with hair like Veronica's, bright golden, and a face like that of a certain keeper's daughter. Carlos, however, knew nothing about his cousin; he cared little more, as far as I could tell. "What can she be to me since I have seen your...?" he said once, and then stopped, looking at me with a certain tender irony. He insisted, though, that his aged uncle was in need of him. As for Castro — he and his rags came out of a life of sturt and strife, and I hoped he might die by treachery. He had undoubtedly been sent by the uncle across the seas to find Carlos and bring him out of Europe; there was something romantic in that mission. He was now a dependent of the Riego family, but there were unfathomable depths in that tubby little man's past. That he had gone to Russia at the tail of the Grande Armée, one could not help believing. He had been most likely in the grand army of sutlers and camp-followers. He could talk convincingly of the cold, and of the snows and his escape. And from his allusions one could get glimpses of what he had been before and afterwards — apparently everything that was questionable in a secularly disturbed Europe; no doubt somewhat of a bandit; a guerrillero in the sixes and sevens; with the Army of the Faith near the French border, later on.

There had been room and to spare for that sort of pike, in the muddy waters, during the first years of the century. But the waters were clearing, and now the good Castro had been dodging the gallows in the Antilles or in Mexico. In his heroic moods he would swear that his arm had been cut off

at Somo Sierra; swear it with a great deal of asseveration, making one see the Polish lancers charging the gunners, being cut down, and his own sword arm falling suddenly.

Carlos, however, used to declare with affectionate cynicism that the arm had been broken by the cudgel of a Polish peasant while Castro was trying to filch a pig from a stable.... "I cut his throat out, though," Castro would grumble darkly; "so, like that, and it matters very little — it is even an improvement. See, I put on my blade. See, I transfix you that fly there.... See how astonished he was. He did never expect that." He had actually impaled a crawling cockroach. He spent his days cooking extraordinary messes, crouching for hours over a little charcoal brazier that he lit surreptitiously in the back of his bunk, making substitutes for eternal gaspachos.

All these things, if they deepened the romance of Carlos' career, enhanced, also, the mystery. I asked him one day, "But why do you go to Jamaica at all if you are bound for Cuba?"

He looked at me, smiling a little mournfully.

"Ah, Juan mio," he said, "Spain is not like your England, unchanging and stable. The party who reign to-day do not love me, and they are masters in Cuba as in Spain. But in his province my uncle rules alone. There I shall be safe." He was condescending to roll some cigarettes for Tomas, whose wooden hand incommoded him, and he tossed a fragment of tobacco to the wind with a laugh. "In Jamaica there is a merchant, a Señor Ramon; I have letters to him, and he shall find me a conveyance to Rio Medio, my uncle's town. He is an quliado."

He laughed again. "It is not easy to enter that place, Juanino."

There was certainly some mystery about that town of his uncle's. One night I overheard him say to Castro:

"Tell me, O my Tomas, would it be safe to take this caballero, my cousin, to Rio Medio?"

Castro paused, and then murmured gruffly:

"Señor, unless that Irishman is consulted beforehand, or the English lord would undertake to join with the picaroons, it is very assuredly not safe."

Carlos made a little exclamation of mild astonishment.

"Pero? Is it so bad as that in my uncle's own town?"

Tomas muttered something that I did not catch, and then:

“If the English caballero committed indiscretions, or quarrelled — and all these people quarrel, why, God knows — that Irish devil could hang many persons, even myself, or take vengeance on your worship.”

Carlos was silent as if in a reverie. At last he said:

“But if affairs are like this, it would be well to have one more with us. The caballero, my cousin, is very strong and of great courage.”

Castro grunted, “Oh, of a courage! But as the proverb says, ‘If you set an Englishman by a hornets’ nest they shall not remain long within.’”:

After that I avoided any allusion to Cuba, because the thing, think as I would about it, would not grow clear. It was plain that something illegal was going on there, or how could “that Irish devil,” whoever he was, have power to hang Tomas and be revenged on Carlos? It did not affect my love for Carlos, though, in the weariness of this mystery, the passage seemed to drag a little. And it was obvious enough that Carlos was unwilling or unable to tell anything about what pre-, occupied him.

I had noticed an intimacy spring up between the ship’s second mate and Tomas, who was, it seemed to me, forever engaged in long confabulations in the man’s cabin, and, as much to make talk as for any other reason, I asked Carlos if he had noticed his dependent’s familiarity. It was noticeable because Castro held aloof from every other soul on board. Carlos answered me with one of his nervous and angry smiles.

“Ah, Juan mine, do not ask too many questions! I wish you could come with me all the way, but I cannot tell you all I know. I do not even myself know all. It seems that the man is going to leave the ship in Jamaica, and has letters for that Señor Ramon, the merchant, even as I have. Vaya; more I cannot tell you.”

This struck me as curious, and a little of the whole mystery seemed from that time to attach to the second mate, who before had been no more to me than a long, sallow Nova Scotian, with a disagreeable intonation and rather offensive manners. I began to watch him, desultorily, and was rather startled by something more than a suspicion that he himself was watching me. On one occasion in particular I seemed to observe this. The second mate was lankily stalking the deck, his hands in his pockets. As he paused in his walk to spit into the sea beside me, Carlos said:

“And you, my Juan, what will you do in this Jamaica?”

The sense that we were approaching land was already all over the ship. The second mate leered at me enigmatically, and moved slowly away. I said



that I was going to the Horton Estates, Rooksby's, to learn planting under a Mr. Macdonald, the agent. Carlos shrugged his shoulders. I suppose I had spoken with some animation.

"Ah," he said, with his air of great wisdom and varied experience, of disillusionment, "it will be much the same as it has been at your home — after the first days. Hard work and a great sameness." He began to cough violently.

I said bitterly enough, "Yes. It will be always the same with me. I shall never see life. You've seen all that there is to see, so I suppose you do not mind settling down with an old uncle in a palace."

He answered suddenly, with a certain darkness of manner, "That is as God wills. Who knows? Perhaps life, even in my uncle's palace, will not be so safe."

The second mate was bearing down on us again.

I said jocularly, "Why, when I get very tired of life at Horton Pen, I shall come to see you in your uncle's town."

Carlos had another of his fits of coughing.

"After all, we are kinsmen. I dare say you would give me a bed," I went on.

The second mate was quite close to us then.

Carlos looked at me with an expression of affection that a little shamed my lightness of tone:

"I love you much more than a kinsman, Juan," he said. "I wish you could come with me. I try to arrange it. Later, perhaps, I may be dead. I am very ill."

He was undoubtedly ill. Campaigning in Spain, exposure in England in a rainy time, and then the ducking when we came on board, had done him no good. He looked moodily at the sea.

"I wish you could come. I will try — — —"

The mate had paused, and was listening quite unaffectedly, behind Carlos' back.

A moment after Carlos half turned and regarded him with a haughty stare.

He whistled and walked away.

Carlos muttered something that I did not catch about "spies of that pestilent Irishman." Then:

“I will not selfishly take you into any more dangers,” he said. “But life on a sugar plantation is not fit for you.”

I felt glad and flattered that a personage so romantic should deem me a fit companion for himself. He went forward as if with some purpose.

Some days afterwards the second mate sent for me to his cabin. He had been on the sick list, and he was lying in his bunk, stripped to the waist, one arm and one leg touching the floor. He raised himself slowly when I came in, and spat. He had in a pronounced degree the Nova Scotian peculiarities and accent, and after he had shaved, his face shone like polished leather.

“Hallo!” he said. “See heeyur, young Kemp, does your neck just itch to be stretched?”

I looked at him with mouth and eyes agape.

He spat again, and waved a claw towards the forward bulkhead.

“They’ll do it for yeh,” he said. “You’re such a green goose, it makes me sick a bit. You hev’n’t reckoned out the chances, not quite. It’s a kind of dead reckoning yeh hev’n’t had call to make. Eh?”

“What do you mean?” I asked, bewildered.

He looked at me, grinning, half naked, with amused contempt, for quite a long time, and at last offered sardonically to open my eyes for me.

I said nothing.

“Do you know what will happen to you,” he asked, “ef yeh don’t get quit of that Carlos of yours?”

I was surprised into muttering that I didn’t know.

“I can tell yeh,” he continued. “Yeh will get hanged.”

By that time I was too amazed to get angry. I simply suspected the Blue Nose of being drunk. But he glared at me so soberly that next moment I felt frightened.

“Hanged by the neck,” he repeated; and then added, “Young fellow, you scoot. Take a fool’s advice, and scoot. That Castro is a blame fool, anyhow. Yeh want men for that job. Men, I tell you.” He slapped his bony breast.

I had no idea that he could look so ferocious. His eyes fascinated me, and he opened his cavernous mouth as if to swallow me. His lantern jaws snapped without a sound. He seemed to change his mind.

“I am done with yeh,” he said, with a sort of sinister restraint. He rose to his feet, and, turning his back to me, began to shave, squinting into a broken looking-glass.

I had not the slightest inkling of his meaning. I only knew that going out of his berth was like escaping from the dark lair of a beast into a sunlit world. There is no denying that his words, and still more his manner, had awakened in me a sense of insecurity that had no precise object, for it was manifestly absurd and impossible to suspect my friend Carlos. Moreover, hanging was a danger so recondite, and an eventuality so extravagant, as to make the whole thing ridiculous. And yet I remembered how unhappy I felt, how inexplicably unhappy. Presently the reason was made clear. I was homesick. I gave no further thought to the second mate. I looked at the harbour we were entering, and thought of the home I had left so eagerly. After all, I was no more than a boy, and even younger in mind than in body.

Queer-looking boats crawled between the shores like tiny water beetles. One headed out towards us, then another. I did not want them to reach us. It was as if I did not wish my solitude to be disturbed, and I was not pleased with the idea of going ashore. A great ship, floating high on the water, black and girt with the two broad yellow streaks of her double tier of guns, glided out slowly from beyond a cluster of shipping in the bay. She passed without a hail, going out under her topsails with a flag at the fore. Her lofty spars overtopped our masts immensely, and I saw the men in her rigging looking down on our decks. The only sounds that came out of her were the piping of boatswain's calls and the tramping of feet. Imagining her to be going home, I felt a great desire to be on board. Ultimately, as it turned out, I went home in that very ship, but then it was too late. I was another man by that time, with much queer knowledge and other desires. Whilst I was looking and longing I heard Carlos' voice behind me asking one of our sailors what ship it was.

"Don't you know a flagship when you see it?" a voice grumbled surlily. "Admiral Rowley's," it continued. Then it rumbled out some remarks about "pirates, vermin, coast of Cuba."

Carlos came to the side, and looked after the man-of-war in the distance.

"You could help us," I heard him mutter.

## CHAPTER FIVE

There was a lad called Barnes, a steerage passenger of about my own age, a raw, red-headed Northumbrian yokel, going out as a recruit to one of the West Indian regiments. He was a serious, strenuous youth, and I had talked a little with him at odd moments. In my great loneliness I went to say good-bye to him after I had definitely parted with Carlos.

I had been in our cabin. A great bustle of shore-going, of leave-taking had sprung up all over the ship. Carlos and Castro had entered with a tall, immobile, gold-spectacled Spaniard, dressed all in white, and with a certain air of noticing and attentive deference, bowing a little as he entered the cabin in earnest conference with Tomas Castro. Carlos had preceded them with a certain nonchalance, and the Spaniard — it was the Señor Ramon, the merchant I had heard of — regarded him as if with interested curiosity. With Tomas he seemed already familiar. He stood in the doorway, against the strong light, bowing a little.

With a certain courtesy, touched with indifference, Carlos made him acquainted with me. Ramon turned his searching, quietly analytic gaze upon me.

“But is the caballero going over, too?” he asked.

Carlos said, “No. I think not, now.”

And at that moment the second mate, shouldering his way through a white-clothed crowd of shore people, made up behind Señor Ramon. He held a letter in his hand.

“I am going over,” he said, in his high nasal voice, and with a certain ferocity.

Ramon looked round apprehensively.

Carlos said, “The señor, my cousin, wishes for a Mr. Macdonald. You know him, señor?”

Ramon made a dry gesture of perfect acquaintance. “I think I have seen him just now,” he said. “I will make inquiries.”

All three of them had followed him, and became lost in the crowd. It was then, not knowing whether I should ever see Carlos again, and with a desperate, unhappy feeling of loneliness, that I had sought out Barnes in the dim immensity of the steerage.

In the square of wan light that came down the scuttle he was cording his hair-trunk — unemotional and very matter-of-fact. He began to talk in an

everyday voice about his plans. An uncle was going to meet him, and to house him for a day or two before he went to the barracks.

“Mebbe we’ll meet again,” he said. “I’ll be here many years, I think.”

He shouldered his trunk and climbed unromantically up the ladder. He said he would look for Macdonald for me.

It was absurd to suppose that the strange ravings of the second mate had had an effect on me. “Hanged! Pirates!” Was Carlos really a pirate, or Castro, his humble friend? It was vile of me to suspect Carlos. A couple of men, meeting by the scuttle, began to talk loudly, every word coming plainly to my ears in the stillness of my misery, and the large deserted steerage. One of them, new from home, was asking questions. Another answered:

“Oh, I lost half a seroon the last voyage — the old thing.”

“Haven’t they routed out the scoundrels yet?” the other asked.

The first man lowered his voice. I caught only that “the admiral was an old fool — no good for this job. He’s found out the name of the place the pirates come from — Rio Medio. That’s the place, only he can’t get in at it with his three-deckers. You saw his flagship?”

Rio Medio was the name of the town to which Carlos was going — which his uncle owned. They moved away from above.

What was I to believe? What could this mean? But the second mate’s, “Scoot, young man,” seemed to come to my ears like the blast of a trumpet. I became suddenly intensely anxious to find Macdonald — to see no more of Carlos.

From above came suddenly a gruff voice in Spanish. “Señor, it would be a great folly.”

Tomas Castro was descending the ladder gingerly. He was coming to fetch his bundle. I went hastily into the distance of the vast, dim cavern of spare room that served for the steerage.

“I want him very much,” Carlos said. “I like him. He would be of help to us.”

“It’s as your worship wills,” Castro said gruffly. They were both at the bottom of the ladder. “But an Englishman there would work great mischief. And this youth — — ”

“I will take him, Tomas,” Carlos said, laying a hand on his arm.

“Those others will think he is a spy. I know them,” Castro muttered. “They will hang him, or work some devil’s mischief. You do not know that

Irish judge — the canaille, the friend of priests.”

“He is very brave. He will not fear,” Carlos said.

I came suddenly forward. “I will not go with you,” I said, before I had reached them even.

Castro started back as if he had been stung, and caught at the wooden hand that sheathed his steel blade.

“Ah, it is you, Señor,” he said, with an air of relief and dislike. Carlos, softly and very affectionately, began inviting me to go to his uncle’s town. His uncle, he was sure, would welcome me. Jamaica and a planter’s life were not fit for me.

I had not then spoken very loudly, or had not made my meaning very clear. I felt a great desire to find Macdonald, and a simple life that I could understand.

“I am not going with you,” I said, very loudly this time.

He stopped at once. Through the scuttle of the half-deck we heard a hubbub of voices, of people exchanging greetings, of Christian names called out joyously. A tumultuous shuffling of feet went on continuously over our heads. The ship was crowded with people from the shore. Perhaps Macdonald was amongst them, even looking for me.

“Ah, amigo mio, but you must now,” said Carlos gently — “you must — —” And, looking me straight in the face with a still, penetrating glance of his big, romantic eyes, “It is a good life,” he whispered seductively, “and I like you, John Kemp. You are young-very young yet. But I love you very much for your own sake, and for the sake of one I shall never see again.”

He fascinated me. He was all eyes in the dusk, standing in a languid pose just clear of the shaft of light that fell through the scuttle in a square patch.

I lowered my voice, too. “What life?” I asked.

“Life in my uncle’s palace,” he said, so sweetly and persuasively that the suggestiveness of it caused a thrill in me.

His uncle could nominate me to posts of honour fit for a caballero.

I seemed to wake up. “Your uncle the pirate!” I cried, and was amazed at my own words.

Tomas Castro sprang up, and placed his rough, hot hand over my lips.

“Be quiet, John Kemp, you fool!” he hissed with sudden energy.

He had spruced himself, but I seemed to see the rags still nutter about him. He had combed out his beard, but I could not forget the knots that had been in it.

“I told your worship how foolish and wrong-headed these English are,” he said sardonically to Carlos. And then to me, “If the senor speaks loudly again, I shall kill him.”

He was evidently very frightened of something.

Carlos, silent as an apparition at the foot of the ladder, put a finger to his lips and glanced upwards.

Castro writhed his whole body, and I stepped backwards. “I know what Rio Medio is,” I said, not very loudly. “It is a nest of pirates.”

Castro crept towards me again on the points of his toes. “Señor Don Juan Kemp, child of the devil,” he hissed, looking very much frightened, “you must die!”

I smiled. He was trembling all over. I could hear the talking and laughing that went on under the break of the poop. Two women were kissing, with little cries, near the hatchway. I could hear them distinctly.

Tomas Castro dropped his ragged cloak with a grandiose gesture.

“By my hand!” he added with difficulty.

He was really very much alarmed. Carlos was gazing up the hatch. I was ready to laugh at the idea of dying by Tomas Castro’s hand while, within five feet of me, people were laughing and kissing. I should have laughed had I not suddenly felt his hand on my throat. I kicked his shins hard, and fell backwards over a chest. He went back a step or two, flourished his arm, beat his chest, and turned furiously upon Carlos.

“He will get us murdered,” he said. “Do you think we are safe here? If these people here heard that name they wouldn’t wait to ask who your worship is. They would tear us to pieces in an instant. I tell you — moi, Tomas Castro — he will ruin us, this white fool — — — -”

Carlos began to cough, shaken speechless as if by an invisible devil. Castro’s eyes ran furtively all round him, then he looked at me. He made an extraordinary swift motion with his right hand, and I saw that he was facing me with a long steel blade displayed. Carlos continued to cough. The thing seemed odd, laughable still. Castro began to parade round me: it was as if he were a cock performing its saltatory rites before attacking. There was the same tenseness of muscle. He stepped with extraordinary care on the points of his toes, and came to a stop about four feet from me. I began to wonder what Rooksby would have thought of this sort of thing, to wonder why Castro himself found it necessary to crouch for such a long time. Up above, the hum of many people, still laughing, still talking, faded a little out of

mind. I understood, horribly, how possible it would be to die within those few feet of them. Castro's eyes were dusky yellow, the pupils a great deal inflated, the lines of his mouth very hard and drawn immensely tight. It seemed extraordinary that he should put so much emotion into such a very easy killing. I had my back against the bulkhead, it felt very hard against my shoulder-blades. I had no dread, only a sort of shrinking from the actual contact of the point, as one shrinks from being tickled. I opened my mouth. I was going to shriek a last, despairing call, to the light and laughter of meetings above when Carlos, still shaken, with one white hand pressed very hard upon his chest, started forward and gripped his hand round Castro's steel. He began to whisper in the other's hairy ear. I caught:

"You are a fool. He will not make us to be molested, he is my kinsman."

Castro made a reluctant gesture towards Barnes' chest that lay between us.

"We could cram him into that," he said.

"Oh, bloodthirsty fool," Carlos answered, recovering his breath; "is it always necessary to wash your hands in blood? Are we not in enough danger? Up — up! Go see if the boat is yet there. We must go quickly; up — up — — —" He waved his hand towards the scuttle.

"But still," Castro said. He was reluctantly fitting his wooden hand upon the blue steel. He sent a baleful yellow glare into my eyes, and stooped to pick up his ragged cloak.

"Up — mount!" Carlos commanded.

Castro muttered, "Vamos," and began clumsily to climb the ladder, like a bale of rags being hauled from above. Carlos placed his foot on the steps, preparing to follow him. He turned his head round towards me, his hand extended, a smile upon his lips.

"Juan," he said, "let us not quarrel. You are very young; you cannot understand these things; you cannot weigh them; you have a foolish idea in your head. I wished you to come with us because I love you, Juan. Do you think I wish you evil? You are true and brave, and our families are united." He sighed suddenly.

"I do not want to quarrel!" I said. "I don't."

I did not want to quarrel; I wanted more to cry. I was very lonely, and he was going away. Romance was going out of my life.

He added musically, "You even do not understand. There is someone else who speaks for you to me, always — someone else. But one day you will. I



shall come back for you — one day.” He looked at me and smiled. It stirred unknown depths of emotion in me. I would have gone with him, then, had he asked me. “One day,” he repeated, with an extraordinary cadence of tone.

His hand was grasping mine; it thrilled me like a woman’s; he stood shaking it very gently.

“One day,” he said, “I shall repay what I owe you. I wished you with me, because I go into some danger. I wanted you. Good-by. Hasta mas ver.”

He leaned over and kissed me lightly on the cheek, then climbed away. I felt that the light of Romance was going out of my life. As we reached the top of the ladder, somebody began to call harshly, startlingly. I heard my own name and the words, “mahn ye were speerin’ after.”

The light was obscured, the voice began clamouring insistently.

“John Kemp, Johnnie Kemp, noo. Here’s the mahn ye were speerin’ after. Here’s Macdonald.”

It was the voice of Barnes, and the voice of the every day. I discovered that I had been tremendously upset. The pulses in my temples were throbbing, and I wanted to shut my eyes — to sleep! I was tired; Romance had departed. Barnes and the Macdonald he had found for me represented all the laborious insects of the world; all the ants who are forever hauling immensely heavy and immenlsely unimportant burdens up weary hillocks, down steep places, getting nowhere and doing nothing.

Nevertheless I hurried up, stumbling at the hatchway against a man who was looking down. He said nothing at all, and I was dazed by the light. Barnes remarked hurriedly, “This ‘ll be your Mr. Macdonald”; and, turning his back on me, forgot my existence. I felt more alone than ever. The man in front of me held his head low, as if he wished to butt me.

I began breathlessly to tell him I had a letter from “my — my — Rooksby — brother-in-law — Ralph Rooks-by” — I was panting as if I had run a long way. He said nothing at all. I fumbled for the letter in an inner pocket of my waistcoat, and felt very shy. Macdonald maintained a portentous silence; his enormous body was enveloped rather than clothed in a great volume of ill-fitting white stuff; he held in his hand a great umbrella with a vivid green lining. His face was very pale, and had the leaden transparency of a boiled artichoke; it was fringed by a red beard streaked with gray, as brown flood-water is with foam. I noticed at last that the reason for his presenting his forehead to me was an incredible squint — a

squint that gave the idea that he was performing some tortuous and defiant feat with the muscles of his neck.

He maintained an air of distrustful inscrutability. The hand which took my letter was very large, very white, and looked as if it would feel horribly flabby. With the other he put on his nose a pair of enormous mother-of-pearl-framed spectacles — things exactly like those of a cobra's — and began to read. He had said precisely nothing at all. It was for him and what he represented that I had thrown over Carlos and what he represented. I felt that I deserved to be received with acclamation. I was not. He read the letter very deliberately, swaying, umbrella and all, with the slow movement of a dozing elephant. Once he crossed his eyes at me, meditatively, above the mother-of-pearl rims. He was so slow, so deliberate, that I own I began to wonder whether Carlos and Castro were still on board. It seemed to be at least half an hour before Macdonald cleared his throat, with a sound resembling the coughing of a defective pump, and a mere trickle of a voice asked:

“Hwhat evidence have ye of identitee?”

I hadn't any at all, and began to finger my buttonholes as shamefaced as a pauper before a Board. The certitude dawned upon me suddenly that Carlos, even if he would consent to swear to me, would prejudice my chances.

I cannot help thinking that I came very near to being cast adrift upon the streets of Kingston. To my asseverations Macdonald returned nothing but a series of minute “humphs.” I don't know what overcame his scruples; he had shown no signs of yielding, but suddenly turning on his heel made a motion with one of his flabby white hands. I understood it to mean that I was to follow him aft.

The decks were covered with a jabbering turmoil of negroes with muscular arms and brawny shoulders. All their shining black faces seem to be momentarily gashed open to show rows of white teeth, and were spotted with inlaid eyeballs. The sounds coming from them were a bewildering noise. They were hauling baggage about aimlessly. A large soft bundle of bedding nearly took me off my legs. There wasn't room for emotion. Macdonald laid about him with the handle of the umbrella a few inches from the deck; but the passage that he made for himself closed behind him.

Suddenly, in the pushing and hurrying, I came upon a little clear space beside a pile of boxes. Stooping over them was the angular figure of

Nichols, the second mate. He looked up at me, screwing his yellow eyes together.

“Going ashore,” he asked, “long of that Puffing Billy?”

“What business is it of yours?” I mumbled sulkily.

Sudden and intense threatening came into his yellow eyes:

“Don’t you ever come to you know where,” he said; “I don’t want no spies on what I do. There’s a man there’ll crack your little backbone if he catches you. Don’t yeh come now. Never.”

## **PART SECOND — THE GIRL WITH THE LIZARD**

## CHAPTER ONE

“Rio Medio?” Señor Ramon said to me nearly two years afterwards. “The caballero is pleased to give me credit for a very great knowledge. What should I know of that town? There are doubtless good men there and very wicked, as in other towns. Who knows? Your worship must ask the boats’ crews that the admiral has sent to burn the town. They will be back very soon now.”

He looked at me, inscrutably and attentively, through his gold spectacles.

It was on the arcade before his store in Spanish Town. Long sunblinds flapped slightly. Before the next door a large sign proclaimed “Office of the Buchatoro Journal” It was, as I have said, after two years — years which, as Carlos had predicted, I had found to be of hard work, and long, hot sameness. I had come down from Horton Pen to Spanish Town, expecting a letter from Veronica, and, the stage not being in, had dropped in to chat with Ramon over a consignment of Yankee notions, which he was prepared to sell at an extravagantly cheap price. It was just at the time when Admiral Rowley was understood to be going to make an energetic attempt upon the pirates who still infested the Gulf of Mexico and nearly ruined the Jamaica trade of those days. Naturally enough, we had talked of the mysterious town in which the pirates were supposed to have their headquarters.

“I know no more than others,” Ramon said, “save, señor, that I lose much more because my dealings are much greater. But I do not even know whether those who take my goods are pirates, as you English say, or Mexican privateers, as the Havana authorities say. I do not very much care. Basta, what I know is that every week some ship with a letter of marque steals one of my consignments, and I lose many hundreds of dollars.”

Ramon was, indeed, one of the most frequented merchants in Jamaica; he had stores in both Kingston and Spanish Town; his cargoes came from all the seas. All the planters and all the official class in the island had dealings with him.

“It was most natural that the hidalgo, your respected cousin, should consult me if he wished to go to any town in Cuba. Whom else should he go to? You yourself, señor, or the excellent Mr. Topnambo, if you desired to know what ships in a month’s time are likely to be sailing for Havana, for New Orleans, or any Gulf port, you would ask me. What more natural? It is my business, my trade, to know these things. In that way I make my bread.

But as for Rio Medio, I do not know the place.” He had a touch of irony in his composed voice. “But it is very certain,” he went on, “that if your Government had not recognized the belligerent rights of the rebellious colony of Mexico, there would be now no letters of marque, no accursed Mexican privateers, and I and everyone else in the island should not now be losing thousands of dollars every year.”

That was the eternal grievance of every Spaniard in the island — and of not a few of the English and Scotch planters. Spain was still in the throes of losing the Mexican colonies when Great Britain had acknowledged the existence of a state of war and a Mexican Government. Mexican letters of marque had immediately filled the Gulf. No kind of shipping was safe from them, and Spain was quite honestly powerless to prevent their swarming on the coast of Cuba — the Ever Faithful Island, itself.

“What can Spain do,” said Ramon bitterly, “when even your Admiral Rowley, with his great ships, cannot rid the sea of them?” He lowered his voice. “I tell you, young señor, that England will lose this Island of Jamaica over this business. You yourself are a Separationist, are you not?... No? You live with Separationists. How could I tell? Many people say you are.”

His words gave me a distinctly disagreeable sensation. I hadn’t any idea of being a Separationist; I was loyal enough. But I understood suddenly, and for the first time, how very much like one I might look.

“I myself am nothing,” Ramon went on impassively; “I am content that the island should remain English. It will never again be Spanish, nor do I wish that it should. But our little, waspish friend there” — he lifted one thin, brown hand to the sign of the Buckatoro Journal — “his paper is doing much mischief. I think the admiral or the governor will commit him to jail. He is going to run away and take his paper to Kingston; I myself have bought his office furniture.”

I looked at him and wondered, for all his impassivity, what he knew — what, in the depths of his inscrutable Spanish brain, his dark eyes concealed.

He bowed to me a little. “There will come a very great trouble,” he said.

Jamaica was in those days — and remained for many years after — in the throes of a question. The question was, of course, that of the abolition of slavery. The planters as a rule were immensely rich and overbearing. They said, “If the Home Government tries to abolish our slavery system, we will abolish the Home Government, and go to the United States for protection.”

That was treason, of course; but there was so much of it that the governor, the Duke of Manchester, had to close his ears and pretend not to hear. The planters had another grievance — the pirates in the Gulf of Mexico. There was one in particular, a certain El Demonio or Diablero, who practically sealed the Florida passage; it was hardly possible to get a cargo underwritten, and the planters' pockets felt it a good deal. Practically, El Demonio had, during the last two years, gutted a ship once a week, as if he wanted to help the Kingston Separationist papers. The planters said, "If the Home Government wishes to meddle with our internal affairs, our slaves, let it first clear our seas.... Let it hang El Demonio. . . ."

The Government had sent out one of Nelson's old captains, Admiral Rowley, a good fighting man; but when it came to clearing the Gulf of Mexico, he was about as useless as a prize-fighter trying to clear a stable of rats. I don't suppose El Demonio really did more than a tithe of the mischief attributed to him, but in the peculiar circumstances he found himself elevated to the rank of an important factor in colonial politics. The Ministerialist papers used to kill him once a month; the Separationists made him capture one of old Rowley's sloops five times a year. They both lied, of course. But obviously Rowley and his frigates weren't much use against a pirate whom they could not catch at sea, and who lived at the bottom of a bottle-necked creek with tooth rocks all over the entrance — that was the sort of place Rio Medio was reported to be. . . .

I didn't much care about either party — I was looking out for romance — but I inclined a little to the Separationists, because Macdonald, with whom I lived for two years at Horton Pen, was himself a Separationist, in a cool Scotch sort of way. He was an Argyleshire man, who had come out to the island as a lad in 1786, and had worked his way up to the position of agent to the Rooksby estate at Horton Pen. He had a little estate of his own, too, at the mouth of the River Minho, where he grew rice very profitably. He had been the first man to plant it on the island.

Horton Pen nestled down at the foot of the tall white scars that end the Vale of St. Thomas and are not much unlike Dover Cliffs, hanging over a sea of squares of the green cane, alternating with masses of pimento foliage. Macdonald's wife was an immensely stout, raven-haired, sloe-eyed, talkative body, the most motherly woman I have ever known — I suppose because she was childless.

What was anomalous in my position had passed away with the next outward mail. Veronica wrote to me; Ralph to his attorney and the Macdonalds. But by that time Mrs. Mac. had darned my socks ten times.

The surrounding gentry, the large resident landowners, of whom there remained a sprinkling in the Vale, were at first inclined to make much of me. There was Mrs. Topnambo, a withered, very dried-up personage, who affected pink trimmings; she gave the ton to the countryside as far as ton could be given to a society that rioted with hospitality. She made efforts to draw me out of the Macdonald environment, to make me differentiate myself, because I was the grandson of an earl. But the Topnambos were the great Loyalists of the place, and the Macdonalds the principal Separationists, and I stuck to the Macdonalds. I was searching for romance, you see, and could find none in Mrs. Topnambo's white figure, with its dryish, gray skin, and pink patches round the neck, that lay forever in dark or darkened rooms, and talked querulously of "Your uncle, the earl," whom I had never seen. I didn't get on with the men any better. They were either very dried up and querulous, too, or else very liquorish or boisterous in an incomprehensible way. Their evenings seemed to be a constant succession of shouts of laughter, merging into undignified staggers of white trousers through blue nights — round the corners of ragged huts. I never understood the hidden sources of their humour, and I had not money enough to mix well with their lavishness. I was too proud to be indebted to them, too. They didn't even acknowledge me on the road at last; they called me poor-spirited, a thin-blooded nobleman's cub — a Separationist traitor — and left me to superintend niggers and save money. Mrs. Mac, good Separationist though she was, as became the wife of her husband, had the word "home" forever on her lips. She had once visited the Rooksbys at Horton; she had treasured up a host of tiny things, parts of my forgotten boyhood, and she talked of them and talked of them until that past seemed a wholly desirable time, and the present a dull thing!

Journeying in search of romance — and that, after all, is our business in this world — is much like trying to eaten the horizon. It lies a little distance before us, and a little distance behind — about as far as the eye can carry. One, discovers that one has passed through it just as one passed what is to-day our horizon — One looks back and says. "Why there it is." One looks forward and says the same. It lies either in the old days when we used to, or in the new days when we shall. I look back upon those days of mine, and



little things remain, come back to me, assume an atmosphere, take significance, go to the making of a temps jadis. Probably, when I look back upon what is the dull, arid waste of to-day, it will be much the same.

I could almost wish to take again one of the long, uninteresting night rides from the Vale to Spanish Town, or to listen once more to one of old Macdonald's interminable harangues on the folly of Mr. Canning's policy, or the virtues of Scotch thrift. "Jack, lad," he used to bellow in his curious squeak of a voice, "a gentleman you may be of guid Scots blood. But ye're a puir body's son for a' that." He was set on my making money and turning honest pennies. I think he really liked me.

It was with that idea that he introduced me to Ramon, "an esteemed Spanish merchant of Kingston and Spanish Town." Ramon had seemed mysterious when I had seen him in company with Carlos and Castro but re-introduced in the homely atmosphere of the Macdonalds, he had become merely a saturnine, tall, dusky-featured, gold-spectacled Spaniard, and very good company. I learnt nearly all my Spanish from him. The only mystery about him was the extravagantly cheap rate at which he sold his things under the flagstaff in front of Admiral Rowley's house, the King's House, as it was called. The admiral himself was said to have extensive dealings with Ramon; he had at least the reputation of desiring to turn an honest penny, like myself. At any rate, everyone, from the proudest planters to the editor of the Buckatoro Journal next door, was glad of a chat with Ramon, whose knowledge of an immense variety of things was as deep as a draw-well — and as placid.

I used to buy island produce through him, ship it to New Orleans, have it sold, and re-import parcels of "notions," making a double profit. He was always ready to help me, and as ready to talk, saying that he had an immense respect for my relations, the Riegos.

That was how, at the end of my second year in the island, I had come to talking to him. The stage should have brought a letter from Veronica, who was to have presented Rooksby with a son and heir, but it was unaccountably late. I had been twice to the coach office, and was making my way desultorily back to Ramon's. He was talking to the editor of the Buckatoro Journal — the man from next door — and to another who had, whilst I walked lazily across the blazing square, ridden furiously up to the steps of the arcade. The rider was talking to both of them with exaggerated gestures of his arms. He had ridden off, spurring, and the editor, a little,

gleaming-eyed hunchback, had remained in the sunshine, talking excitedly to Ramon.

I knew him well, an amusing, queer, warped, Satanic member of society, who was a sort of nephew to the Macdonalds, and hand in glove with all the Scotch Separationists of the island. He had started an extraordinary, scandalous paper that, to avoid sequestration, changed its name and offices every few issues, and was said by Loyalists, like the Topnambos, to have an extremely bad influence.

He subsisted a good deal on the charity of people like the Macdonalds, and I used sometimes to catch sight of him at evenfall listening to Mrs. Macdonald; he would be sitting beside her hammock on the veranda, his head very much down on his breast, very much on one side, and his great hump portending over his little white face, and ruffling up his ragged black hair. Mrs. Macdonald clacked all the scandal of the Vale, and the Buckatoro Journal got the benefit of it all, with adornments.

For the last month or so the Journal had been more than usually effective, and it was only because Rowley was preparing to confound his traducers by the boat attack on Rio Medio, that a warrant had not come against David. When I saw him talking to Ramon, I imagined that the rider must have brought news of a warrant, and that David was preparing for flight. He hopped nimbly from Ramon's steps into the obscurity of his own door. Ramon turned his spectacles softly upon me.

"There you have it," he said. "The folly; the folly! To send only little boats to attack such a nest of villains. It is inconceivable."

The horseman had brought news that the boats of Rowley's squadron had been beaten off with great loss, in their attack on Rio Medio.

Ramon went on with an air of immense superiority, "And all the while we merchants are losing thousands."

His dark eyes searched my face, and it came disagreeably into my head that he was playing some part; that his talk was delusive, his anger feigned; that, perhaps, he still suspected me of being a Separationist. He went on talking about the failure of the boat attack. All Jamaica had been talking of it, speculating about it, congratulating itself on it. British valour was going to tell; four boats' crews would do the trick. And now the boats had been beaten off, the crews captured, half the men killed! Already there was panic on the island. I could see men coming together in little knots, talking eagerly. I didn't like to listen to Ramon, to a Spaniard talking in that way

about the defeat of my countrymen by his. I walked across the King's Square, and the stage driving up just then, I went to the office, and got my correspondence.

Veronica's letter came like a faint echo, like the sound of very distant surf, heard at night; it seemed impossible that any one could be as interested as she in the things that were happening over there. She had had a son; one of Ralph's aunts was its godmother. She and Ralph had been to Bath last spring; the country wanted water very badly. Ralph had used his influence, had explained matters to a very great personage, had spent a little money on the injured runners. In the meanwhile I had nearly forgotten the whole matter; it seemed to be extraordinary that they should still be interested in it.

I was to come back; as soon as it was safe I was to come back; that was the main tenor of the letter.

I read it in a little house of call, in a whitewashed room that contained a cardboard cat labelled "The Best," for sole ornament. Four swarthy fellows, Mexican patriots, were talking noisily about their War of Independence, and the exploits of a General Trapelascis, who had been defeating the Spanish troops over there. It was almost impossible to connect them with a world that included Veronica's delicate handwriting with the pencil lines erased at the base of each line of ink. They seemed to be infinitely more real. Even Veronica's interest in me seemed a little strange; her desire for my return irritated me. It was as if she had asked me to return to a state of bondage, after having found myself. Thinking of it made me suddenly aware that I had become a man, with a man's aims, and a disillusionized view of life. It suddenly appeared very wonderful that I could sit calmly there, surveying, for instance, those four sinister fellows with daggers, as if they were nothing at all. When I had been at home the matter would have caused me extraordinary emotions, as many as if I had seen an elephant in a travelling show. As for going back to my old life, it didn't seem to be possible.

## CHAPTER TWO

One night I was riding alone towards Horton Pen. A large moon hung itself up above me like an enormous white plate. Finally the sloping roof of the Ferry Inn, with one dishevelled palm tree drooping over it, rose into the disk. The window lights were reflected like shaken torches in the river. A mass of objects, picked out with white globes, loomed in the high shadow of the inn, standing motionless. They resolved themselves into a barouche, with four horses steaming a great deal, and an army of negresses with bandboxes on their heads. A great lady was on the road; her querulous voice was calling to someone within the open door that let down a soft yellow light from the top of the precipitous steps. A nondescript object, with apparently two horns and a wheel, rested inert at the foot of the sign-post; two negroes were wiping their foreheads beside it. That resolved itself into a man slumbering in a wheelbarrow, his white face turned up to the moon. A sort of buzz of voices came from above; then a man in European clothes was silhouetted against the light in the doorway. He held a full glass very carefully and started to descend. Suddenly he stopped emotionally. Then he turned half-right and called back, "Sir Charles! Sir Charles! Here's the very man! I protest, the very man!" There was an interrogative roar from within. It was like being outside a lion's cage.

People appeared and disappeared in front of the lighted door; windows stood open, with heads craning out all along the inn face. I was hurrying off the back of my horse when the admiral came out on to the steps. Someone lit a torch, and the admiral became a dark, solid figure, with the flash of the gold lace on his coat. He stood very high in the leg; had small white whiskers, and a large nose that threw a vast shadow on to his forehead in the upward light; his high collar was open, and a mass of white appeared under his chin; his head was uncovered. A third male face, very white, bobbed up and down beside his shining left shoulder. He kept on saying:

"What? what? what? Hey, what?... That man?" He appeared to be halfway between supreme content and violent anger. At last he delivered himself. "Let's duck him... hey?... Let's duck him!" He spoke with a sort of benevolent chuckle, then raised his voice and called, "Tinsley! Tinsley! Where the deuce is Tinsley?"

A high nasal sound came from the carriage window. "Sir Charles! Sir Charles! Let there be no scene in my presence, I beg."

I suddenly saw, halfway up, laboriously ascending the steps, a black figure, indistinguishable at first on account of deformities. It was David Macdonald. Since his last, really terrible comments on the failure of the boat-attack, he had been lying hidden somewhere. It came upon me in a flash that he was making his way from one hiding place to another. In making his escape from Spanish Town, either to Kingston or the Vale, he had run against the admiral and his party returning from the Topnambos' ball. It was hardly a coincidence: everyone on the road met at the Ferry Inn. But that hardly made the thing more pleasant.

Sir Charles continued to clamour for Tinsley, his flag lieutenant, who, as a matter of fact, was the man drunk in the wheelbarrow. When this was explained by the shouts of the negroes, he grunted, "Umph!" turned on the man at his side, and said, "Here, Oldham; you lend a hand to duck the little toad." It was the sort of thing that the thirsty climate of Jamaica rendered frequent enough. Oldham dropped his glass and protested. Macdonald continued silently and enigmatically to climb the steps; now he was in for it he showed plenty of pluck. No doubt he recognized that, if the admiral made a fool of himself, he would be afraid to issue warrants in soberness. I could not stand by and see them bully the wretched little creature. At the same time I didn't, most decidedly, want to identify myself with him.

I called out impulsively, "Sir Charles, surely you would not use violence to a cripple."

Then, very suddenly, they all got to action, David Macdonald reaching the top of the steps. Shrieks came from the interior of the carriage, and from the waiting *négresses*. I saw three men were falling upon a little thing like a damaged cat. I couldn't stand that, come what might of it.

I ran hastily up the steps, hoping to be able to make them recover their senses, a force of purely conventional emotion impelling me. It was no business of mine; I didn't want to interfere, and I felt like a man hastening to separate half a dozen fighting dogs too large to be pleasant.

When I reached the top, there was a sort of undignified scuffle, and in the end I found myself standing above a ghastly white gentleman who, from a sitting posture, was gasping out, "I'll commit you!... I swear I'll commit you!..." I helped him to his feet rather apologetically, while the admiral behind me was asking insistently who the deuce I was. The man I had picked up retreated a little, and then turned back to look at me. The light was shining on my face, and he began to call out, "I know him. I know him

perfectly well. He's John Kemp. I'll commit him at once. The papers are in the barouche." After that he seemed to take it into his head that I was going to assault him again. He bolted out of sight, and I was left facing the admiral. He stared at me contemptuously. I was streaming with perspiration and upbraiding him for assaulting a cripple.

The admiral said, "Oh, that's what you think? I will settle with you presently. This is rank mutiny." I looked at Oldham, who was the admiral's secretary. He was extremely dishevelled about his neck, much as if a monkey had been clawing him thereabouts. Half of his roll collar flapped on his heaving chest; his stock hung down behind like a cue. I had seen him kneeling on the ground with his head pinned down by the hunchback. I said loftily:

"What did you set him on a little beggar like that for? You were three to one. What did you expect?"

The admiral swore. Oldham began to mop with a lace handkerchief at a damaged upper lip from which a stream of blood was running; he even seemed to be weeping a little. Finally, he vanished in at the door, very much bent together. The undaunted David hopped in after him coolly.

The admiral said, "I know your kind. You're a treasonous dog, sir. This is mutiny. You shall be made an example of."

All the same he must have been ashamed of himself, for presently he and the two others went down the steps without even looking at me, and their carriage rolled away.

Inside the inn I found a couple of merchant captains, one asleep with his head on the table and little rings shining in his great red ears; the other very spick and span — of what they called the new school then. His name was Williams — Captain Williams of the *Lion*, which he part owned; a man of some note for the dinners he gave on board his ship. His eyes sparkled blue and very round in a round rosy face, and he clawed effusively at my arm.

"Well done!" he bubbled over. "You gave it them; strike me, you did! It did me good to see and hear. I wasn't going to poke my nose in, not I. But I admire you, my boy."

He was a quite guileless man with a strong dislike for the admiral's blundering — a dislike that all the seamen shared — and for people of the Topnambo kidney who affected to be above his dinners. He assured me that I had burst upon those gentry roaring... "like the Bull of Bashan. You should have seen!" and he drank my health in a glass of punch.

David Macdonald joined us, looming through wreaths of tobacco smoke. He was always very nice in his dress, and had washed himself into a state of enviable coolness.

“They won’t touch me now,” he said. “I wanted that assault and battery....” He suddenly turned vivid, sarcastic black eyes upon me. “But you,” he said — “my dear Kemp! You’re in a devil of a scrape! They’ll have a warrant out against you under the Black Act. I know the gentry.”

“Oh, he won’t mind,” Williams struck in, “I know him; he’s a trump. Afraid of nothing.”

David Macdonald made a movement of his head that did duty for an ominous shake:

“It’s a devil of a mess,” he said. “But I’ll touch them up. Why did you hit Topnambo? He’s the spitefullest beast in the island. They’ll make it out high treason. They are capable of sending you home on this charge.”

“Oh, never say die.” Williams turned to me, “Come and dine with me on board at Kingston to-morrow night. If there’s any fuss I’ll see what I can do. Or you can take a trip with me to Havana till it blows over. My old woman’s on board.” His face fell. “But there, you’ll get round her. I’ll see you through.”

They drank some sangaree and became noisy. I wasn’t very happy; there was much truth in what David Macdonald had said. Topnambo would certainly do his best to have me in jail — to make an example of me as a Separationist to please the admiral and the Duke of Manchester. Under the spell of his liquor Williams became more and more pressing with his offers of help.

“It’s the devil that my missus should be on board, just this trip. But hang it! come and dine with me. I’ll get some of the Kingston men — the regular hot men — to stand up for you. They will when they hear the tale.”

There was a certain amount of sense in what he said. If warrants were out against me, he or some of the Kingston merchants whom he knew, and who had no cause to love the admiral, might help me a good deal.

Accordingly, I did go down to Kingston. It happened to be the day when the seven pirates were hanged at Port Royal Point. I had never seen a hanging, and a man who hadn’t was rare in those days. I wanted to keep out of the way, but it was impossible to get a boatman to row me off to the Lion. They were all dying to see the show, and, half curious, half reluctant, I let myself drift with the crowd.

The gallows themselves stood high enough to be seen — a long very stout beam supported by posts at each end. There was a blazing sun, and the crowd pushed and shouted and craned its thousands of heads every time one heard the cry of “Here they come,” for an hour or so. There was a very limpid sky, a very limpid sea, a scattering of shipping gliding up and down, and the very silent hills a long way away. There was a large flavour of Spaniards among the crowd. I got into the middle of a knot of them, jammed against the wheels of one of the carriages, standing, hands down, on tiptoe, staring at the long scaffold. There were a great many false alarms, sudden outcries, hushing again rather slowly. In between I could hear someone behind me talk Spanish to the occupants of the carriage. I thought the voice was Ramon’s, but I could not turn, and the people in the carriage answered in French, I thought. A man was shouting “Cool Drinks” on the other side of them.

Finally, there was a roar, an irresistible swaying, a rattle of musket ramrods, a rhythm of marching feet, and the grating of heavy iron-bound wheels. Seven men appeared in sight above the heads, clinging to each other for support, and being drawn slowly along. The little worsted balls on the infantry shakos bobbed all round their feet. They were a sorry-looking group, those pirates; very wild-eyed, very ragged, dust-stained, weather-beaten, begrimed till they had the colour of unpolished mahogany. Clinging still to each other as they stood beneath the dangling ropes of the long beam, they had the appearance of a group of statuary to forlorn misery. Festoons of chains completed the “composition.”

One was a very old man with long yellow-white hair, one a negro whose skin had no lustre at all. The rest were very dark-skinned, peak-bearded, and had long hair falling round their necks. A soldier with a hammer and a small anvil climbed into the cart, and bent down out of sight. There was a ring of iron on iron, and the man next the very old man raised his arms and began to speak very slowly, very distinctly, and very mournfully. It was quite easy to understand him; he declared his perfect innocence. No one listened to him; his name was Pedro Nones. He ceased speaking, and someone on a horse, the High Sheriff, I think, galloped impatiently past the cart and shouted. Two men got into the cart, one pulled the rope, the other caught the pirate by the elbows. He jerked himself loose, and began to cry out; he seemed to be lost in amazement, and shrieked:



“Adonde está el padre?... Adonde está el padre?” No one answered; there wasn’t a priest of any denomination; I don’t know whether the omission was purposed. The man’s face grew convulsed with agony, his eyeballs stared out very white and vivid, as he struggled with the two men. He began to curse us epileptically for compassing his damnation. A hoarse patter of Spanish imprecations came from the crowd immediately round me. The man with the voice like Ramon’s groaned in a lamentable way; someone else said, “What infamy . . . what infamy!”

An aged voice said tremulously in the carriage, “This shall be a matter of official remonstrance.” Another said, “Ah, these English heretics!”

There was a forward rush of the crowd, which carried me away. Someone in front began to shout orders, and the crowd swayed back again. The infantry muskets rattled. The commotion lasted some time. When it ceased, I saw that the man about to die had been kissing the very old man; tears were streaming down the gray, parchment-coloured cheeks. Pedro Nones had the rope round his neck; it curved upwards loosely towards the beam, growing taut as the cart jolted away. He shouted:

“Adiô, viejo, para siempre adi — — — ”

My whole body seemed to go dead all over. I happened to look downwards at my hands; they were extraordinarily white, with the veins standing out all over them. They felt as if they had been sodden in water, and it was quite a long time before they recovered their natural colour. The rest of the men were hung after that, the cart jolting a little way backwards and forwards and growing less crowded after every journey. One man, who was very large framed and stout, had to go through it twice because the rope broke. He made a good deal of fuss. My head ached, and after the involuntary straining and craning to miss no details was over, I felt sick and dazed. The people talked a great deal as they streamed back, loosening over the broader stretch of pebbles; they seemed to wish to remind each other of details. I have an idea that one or two, in the sheer largeness of heart that seizes one after occasions of popular emotions, asked me in exulting voices if I had seen the nigger’s tongue sticking out.

Others thought that there wasn’t very much to be exultant over. We had not really captured the pirates; they had been handed over to the admiral by the Havana authorities — as an international courtesy I suppose, or else because they were pirates of no account and short in funds, or because the admiral had been making a fuss in front of the Morro. It was even asserted

by the anti-admiral faction that the seven weren't pirates at all, but merely Cuban mauvais sujets, hawkers of derogatory coplas, and known freethinkers. In any case, excited people cheered the High Sheriff and the returning infantry, because it was pleasant to hang any kind of Spaniard. I got nearly knocked down by the kettle-drummers, who came through the scattering crowd at a swinging quick-step. As I cannoned off the drums, a hand caught at my arm, and someone else began to speak to me. It was old Ramon, who was telling me that he had a special kind of Manchester goods at his store. He explained that they had arrived very lately, and that he had come from Spanish Town solely on their account. One made the eighth of a penny a yard more on them than on any other kind. If I would deign to have some of it offered to my inspection, he had his little curricule just off the road. He was drawing me gently towards it all the time, and I had not any idea of resisting. He had been behind in the crowd, he said, beside the carriage of the commissioner and the judge of the Marine Court sent by the Havana authorities to deliver the pirates.

It was after that, that in Ramon's dusky store, I had my first sight of Seraphina and of her father, and then came my meeting with Carlos. I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw him come out with extended hand. It was an extraordinary sensation, that of talking to Carlos again. He seemed to have worn badly. His face had lost its moist bloom, its hardly distinguishable subcutaneous flush. It had grown very, very pale. Dark blue circles took away from the blackness and sparkle of his eyes. And he coughed, and coughed.

He put his arm affectionately round my shoulders and said, "How splendid to see you again, my Juan." His eyes had affection in them, there was no doubt about that, but I felt vaguely suspicious of him. I remembered how we had parted on board the Thames. "We can talk here," he added; "it is very pleasant. You shall see my uncle, that great man, the star of Cuban law, and my cousin Seraphina, your kinsfolk. They love you; I have spoken well of you." He smiled gayly, and went on, "This is not a place befitting his greatness, nor my cousin's, nor, indeed, my own." He smiled again. "But I shall be very soon dead, and to me it matters little." He frowned a little, and then laughed. "But you should have seen the faces of your officers when my uncle refused to go to their governor's palace; there was to have been a fiesta, a 'reception'; is it not the word? It will cause a great scandal."

He smiled with a good deal of fine malice, and looked as if he expected me to be pleased. I said that I did not quite understand what had offended his uncle.

“Oh, it was because there was no priest,” Carlos answered, “when those poor devils were hung. They were canaille. Yes; but one gives that much even to such. And my uncle was there in his official capacity as a plenipotentiary. He was very much distressed: we were all. You heard, my uncle himself had advised their being surrendered to your English. And when there was no priest he repented very bitterly. Why, after all, it was an infamy.”

He paused again, and leant back against the counter. When his eyes were upon the ground and his face not animated by talking, there became lamentably insistent his pallor, the deep shadows under his eyes, and infinite sadness in the droop of his features, as if he were preoccupied by an all-pervading and hopeless grief. When he looked at me, he smiled, however.

“Well, at worst it is over, and my uncle is here in this dirty place instead of at your palace. We sail back to Cuba this very evening.” He looked round him at Ramon’s calicos and sugar tubs in the dim light, as if he accepted almost incredulously the fact that they could be in such a place, and the manner of his voice indicated that he thought our governor’s palace would have been hardly less barbarous. “But I am sorry,” he said suddenly, “because I wanted you — you and all your countrymen — to make a good impression on him. You must do it yourself alone. And you will. You are not like these others. You are our kinsman, and I have praised you very much. You saved my life.”

I began to say that I had done nothing at all, but he waved his hand with a little smile.

“You are very brave,” he said, as if to silence me. “I am not ungrateful.”

He began again to ask for news from home — from my home. I told him that Veronica had a baby, and he sighed.

“She married the excellent Rooksby?” he asked. “Ah, what a waste.” He relapsed into silence again. “There was no woman in your land like her. She might have — — — And to marry that — that excellent personage, my good cousin. It is a tragedy.”

“It was a very good match,” I answered.

He sighed again. "My uncle is asleep in there, now," he said, after a pause, pointing at the inner door. "We must not wake him; he is a very old man. You do not mind talking to me? You will wait to see them? Dona Seraphina is here, too."

"You have not married your cousin?" I asked.

I wanted very much to see the young girl who had looked at me for a moment, and I certainly should have been distressed if Carlos had said she was married.

He answered, "What would you have?" and shrugged his shoulders gently. A smile came into his face. "She is very willful. I did not please her, I do not know why. Perhaps she has seen too many men like me."

He told me that, when he reached Cuba, after parting with me on the Thames, his uncle, "in spite of certain influences," had received him quite naturally as his heir, and the future head of the family. But Seraphina, whom by the laws of convenience he ought to have married, had quite calmly refused him.

"I did not impress her; she is romantic. She wanted a very bold man, a Cid, something that it is not easy to have."

He paused again, and looked at me with some sort of challenge in his eyes.

"She could have met no one better than you," I said.

He waved his hand a little. "Oh, for that — — —" he said deprecatingly. "Besides, I am dying. I have never been well since I went into your cold sea, over there, after we left your sister. You remember how I coughed on board that miserable ship."

I did remember it very well.

He went to the inner door, looked in, and then came back to me.

"Seraphina needs a guide — a controller — someone very strong and gentle, and kind and brave. My uncle will never ask her to marry against her wish; he is too old and has too little will. And for any man who would marry her — except one — there would be great dangers, for her and for him. It would need a cool man, and a brave man, and a good one, too, to hazard, perhaps even life, for her sake. She will be very rich. All our lands, all our towns, all our gold." There was a suggestion of fabulousness in his dreamy voice. "They shall never be mine," he added. "Vaya."

He looked at me with his piercing eyes set to an expression that might have been gentle mockery. At any rate, it also contained intense scrutiny,

and, perhaps, a little of appeal. I sighed myself.

"There is a man called O'Brien in there," he said. "He does us the honour to pretend to my cousin's hand."

I felt singularly angry. "Well, he's not a Spaniard," I said.

Carlos answered mockingly, "Oh, for Spaniard, no. He is a descendant of the Irish kings."

"He's an adventurer," I said. "You ought to be on your guard. You don't know these bog-trotting fortune-hunters. They're the laughter of Europe, kings and all."

Carlos smiled again. "He's a very dangerous man for all that," he said. "I should not advise any one to come to Rio Medio, my uncle's town, without making a friend of the Señor O'Brien."

He went once more to the inner door, and, after a moment's whispering with someone within, returned to me.

"My uncle still sleeps," he said. "I must keep you a little longer. Ah, yes, the Señor O'Brien. He shall marry my cousin, I think, when I am dead."

"You don't know these fellows," I said.

"Oh, I know them very well," Carlos smiled, "there are many of them at Havana. They came there after what they call the '98, when there was great rebellion in Ireland, and many good Catholics were killed and ruined."

"Then he's a rebel, and ought to be hung," I said.

Carlos laughed as of old. "It may be, but, my good Juan, we Christians do not see eye to eye with you. This man rebelled against your government, but, also, he suffered for the true faith. He is a good Catholic; he has suffered for it; and in the Ever Faithful Island, that is a passport. He has climbed very high; he is a judge of the Marine Court at Havana. That is why he is here to-day, attending my uncle in this affair of delivering up the pirates. My uncle loves him very much. O'Brien was at first my uncle's clerk, and my uncle made him a juez, and he is also the intendant of my uncle's estates, and he has a great influence in my uncle's town of Rio Medio. I tell you, if you come to visit us, it will be as well to be on good terms with the Señor Juez O'Brien. My uncle is a very old man, and if I die before him, this O'Brien, I think, will end by marrying my cousin, because my poor uncle is very much in his hands. There are other pretenders, but they have little chance, because it is so very dangerous to come to my uncle's town of Rio Medio, on account of this man's intrigues and of his power with the populace."

I looked at Carlos intently. The name of the town had seemed to be familiar to me. Now I suddenly remembered that it was where Nicolas el Demonio, the pirate who was so famous as to be almost mythical, had beaten off Admiral Rowley's boats.

"Come, you had better see this Irish hidalgo who wants to do us so much honour," — he gave an inscrutable glance at me, — "but do not talk loudly till my uncle wakes."

He threw the door open. I followed him into the room, where the vision of the ancient Don and the charming apparition of the young girl had retreated only a few moments before.

## CHAPTER THREE

The room was very lofty and coldly dim; there were great bars in front of the begrimed windows. It was very bare, containing only a long black table, some packing cases, and half a dozen rocking chairs. Of these, five were very new and one very old, black and heavy, with a green leather seat and a coat of arms worked on its back cushions. There were little heaps of mahogany sawdust here and there on the dirty tiled floor, and a pile of sacking in one corner. Beneath a window the flap of an open trap-door half hid a large green damp-stain; a deep recess in the wall yawned like a cavern, and had two or three tubs in the right corner; a man with a blond head, slightly bald as if he had been tonsured, was rocking gently in one of the new chairs.

Opposite him, with his aged face towards us, sat the old Don asleep in the high chair. His delicate white hands lay along the arms, one of them holding a gold vinaigrette; his black, silver-headed cane was between his silk-stockinged legs. The diamond buckles of his shoes shot out little vivid rays, even in that gloomy place. The young girl was sitting with her hands to her temples and her elbows on the long table, minutely examining the motionlessness of a baby lizard, a tiny thing with golden eyes, whom fear seemed to have turned into stone.

We entered quietly, and after a moment she looked up candidly into my eyes, and placed her finger on her lips, motioning her head towards her father. She placed her hand in mine, and whispered very clearly:

“Be welcome, my English cousin,” and then dropped her eyes again to the lizard.

She knew all about me from Carlos. The man of whom I had seen only the top of his head, turned his chair suddenly and glinted at me with little blue eyes. He was rather small and round, with very firm flesh, and very white, plump hands. He was dressed in the black clothes of a Spanish judge. On his round face there was always a smile like that which hangs around the jaws of a pike — only more humorous. He bowed a little exaggeratedly to me and said:

“Ah, ye are that famous Mr. Kemp.”

I said that I imagined him the more famous Señor Juez O’Brien.

“It’s little use saying ye arren’t famous,” he said. His voice had the faint, infinitely sweet twang of certain Irishry; a thing as delicate and intangible

as the scent of lime flowers. "Our noble friend" — he indicated Carlos with a little flutter of one white hand — "has told me what make of a dare-devil gallant ye are; breaking the skulls of half the Bow Street runners for the sake of a friend in distress. Well, I honour ye for it; I've done as much myself." He added, "In the old days," and sighed.

"You mean in the '98," I said, a little insolently.

O'Brien's eyes twinkled. He had, as a matter of fact, nearly lost his neck in the Irish fiasco, either in Clonmel or Sligo, bolting violently from the English dragoons, in the mist, to a French man-of-war's boats in the bay. To him, even though he was now a judge in Cuba, it was an episode of heroism of youth — of romance, in fact. So that, probably, he did not resent my mention of it. I certainly wanted to resent something that was slighting in his voice, and patronizing in his manner.

The old Don slumbered placidly, his face turned up to the distant begrimed ceiling.

"Now, I'll make you a fair offer," O'Brien said suddenly, after an intent study of the insolent glance that I gave him. I disliked him because I knew nothing about the sort of man he was. He was, as a matter of fact, more alien to me than Carlos. And he gave me the impression that, if perhaps he were not absolutely the better man, he could still make a fool of me, or at least make me look like a fool.

"I'm told you are a Separationist," he said. "Well, it's like me. I am an Irishman; there has been a price on my head in another island. And there are warrants out against you here for assaulting the admiral. We can work together, and there's nothing low in what I have in mind for you."

He had heard frequently from Carlos that I was a desperate and aristocratically lawless young man, who had lived in a district entirely given up to desperate and murderous smugglers. But this was the first I had heard definitely of warrants against me in Jamaica. That, no doubt, he had heard from Ramon, who knew everything. In all this little sardonic Irishman said to me, it seemed the only thing worth attention. It stuck in my mind while, in persuasive tones, and with airy fluency, he discoursed of the profits that could be made, nowadays, in arming privateers under the Mexican flag. He told me I needn't be surprised at their being fitted out in a Spanish colony. "There's more than one aspect to disloyalty like this," said he dispassionately, but with a quick wink contrasting with his tone.



Spain resented our recognition of their rebellious colonies. And with the same cool persuasiveness, relieved by humorous smiles, he explained that the loyal Spaniards of the Ever Faithful Island thought there was no sin in doing harm to the English, even under the Mexican flag, whose legal existence they did not recognize.

“Mind ye, it’s an organized thing, I have something to say in it. It hurts Mr. Canning’s Government at home, the curse of Cromwell on him and them. They will be dropping some of their own colonies directly. And as you are a Separationist, small blame to you, and I am an Irishman, we shan’t cry our eyes out over it. Come, Mr. Kemp, ‘tis all for the good of the Cause.... And there’s nothing low. You are a gentleman, and I wouldn’t propose anything that was. The very best people in Havana are interested in the matter. Our schooners lie in Rio Medio, but I can’t be there all the time myself.”

Surprise deprived me of speech. I glanced at Carlos. He was watching us inscrutably. The young girl touched the lizard gently, but it was too frightened to move. O’Brien, with shrewd glances, rocked his chair.... What did I want? he inquired. To see life? What he proposed was the life for a fine young fellow like me. Moreover, I was half Scotch. Had I forgotten the wrongs of my own country? Had I forgotten the ‘45?

“You’ll have heard tell of a Scotch Chief Justice whose son spent in Amsterdam the money his father earned on the justice seat in Edinb’ro’ — money paid for rum and run silks . . .”

Of course I had heard of it; everybody had; but it had been some years before.

“We’re backwards hereabouts,” O’Brien jeered. “But over there they winked and chuckled at the judge, and they do the same in Havana at us.”

Suddenly from behind us the voice of the young girl said, “Of what do you discourse, my English cousin?”

O’Brien interposed deferentially. “Señorita, I ask him to come to Rio,” he said.

She turned her large dark eyes scrutinizingly upon me, then dropped them again. She was arranging some melon seeds in a rayed circle round the lizard that looked motionlessly at her.

“Do not speak very loudly, lest you awaken my father,” she warned us.

The old Don’s face was still turned to the ceiling. Carlos, standing behind his chair, opened his mouth a little in a half smile. I was really angry with

O'Brien by that time, with his air of omniscience, superiority, and self-content, as if he were talking to a child or someone very credulous and weak-minded.

"What right have you to speak for me, Señor Juez?" I said in the best Spanish I could.

The young girl looked at me once more, and then again looked down.

"Oh, I can speak for you," he answered in English, "because I know. Your position's this." He sat down in his rocking chair, crossed his legs, and looked at me as if he expected me to show signs of astonishment at his knowing so much. "You're in a hole. You must leave this island of Jamaica — surely it's as distressful as my own dear land — and you can't go home, because the runners would be after you. You're 'wanted' here as well as there, and you've nowhere to go."

I looked at him, quite startled by this view of my case. He extended one plump hand towards me, and still further lowered his voice.

"Now, I offer you a good berth, a snug berth. And 'tis a pretty spot." He got a sort of languorous honey into his voice, and drawled out, "The — the Señorita's." He took an air of businesslike candour. "You can help us, and we you; we could do without you better than you without us. Our undertaking — there's big names in it, just as in the Free Trading you know so well, don't be saying you don't — is worked from Havana. What we need is a man we can trust. We had one — Nichols. You remember the mate of the ship you came over in. He was Nicola el Demonio; he won't be any longer — I can't tell you why, it's too long a story."

I did remember very vividly that cadaverous Nova Scotian mate of the Thames, who had warned me with truculent menaces against showing my face in Rio Medio. I remembered his sallow, shiny cheeks, and the exaggerated gestures of his claw-like hands.

O'Brien smiled. "Nichols is alive right enough, but no more good than if he were dead. And that's the truth. He pretends his nerve's gone; he was a devil among tailors for a time, but he's taken to crying now. It was when your blundering old admiral's boats had to be beaten off that his zeal cooled. He thinks the British Government will rise in its strength." There was a bitter contempt in his voice, but he regained his calm business tone. "It will do nothing of the sort. I've given them those seven poor devils that had to die to-day without absolution. So Nichols is done for, as far as we are concerned. I've got him put away to keep him from blabbing. You can

have his place — and better than his place. He was only a sailor, which you are not. However, you know enough of ships, and what we want is a man with courage, of course, but also a man we can trust. Any of the Creoles would bolt into the bush the moment they'd five dollars in hand. We'll pay you well; a large share of all you take."

I laughed outright. "You're quite mistaken in your man," I said. "You are, really."

He shook his head gently, and brushed an invisible speck from his plump black knees.

"You must go somewhere," he said. "Why not go with us?"

I looked at him, puzzled by his tenacity and assurance.

"Ramon here has told us you battered the admiral last night; and there's a warrant out already against you for attempted murder. You're hand and glove with the best of the Separationists in this island, I know, but they won't save you from being committed — for rebellion, perhaps. You know it as well as I do. You were down here to take a passage to-day, weren't you, now?"

I remembered that the Island Loyalists said that the pirates and Separationists worked together to bother the admiral and raise discontent. Living in the centre of Separationist discontent with the Macdonalds, I knew it was not true. But nothing was too bad to say against the planters who clamoured for union with the United States.

O'Brien leaned forward. His voice had a note of disdain, and then took one of deeper earnestness; it sank into his chest. He extended his hand; his eyebrows twitched. He looked — he was — a conspirator.

"I tell you I do it for the sake of Ireland," he said passionately. "Every ship we take, every clamour they raise here, is a stroke and is disgrace for them over there that have murdered us and ruined my own dear land." His face worked convulsively; I was in the presence of one of the primeval passions. But he grew calm immediately after. "You want Separation for reasons of your own. I don't ask what they are. No doubt you and your crony Macdonald and the rest of them will feather your own nests; I don't ask. But help me to be a thorn in their sides — just a little — just a little longer. What do I put in your way? Just what you want. Have your Jamaica joined to the United States. You'll be able to come back with your pockets full, and I'll be joyful — for the sake of my own dear land."

I said suddenly and recklessly — if I had to face one race-passion, he had to look at another; we were cat and dog — Celt and Saxon, as it was in the beginning: “I am not a traitor to my country.” Then I realized with sudden concern that I had probably awakened the old Don. He stirred uneasily in his chair, and lifted one hand.

“The moment I go out from here I’ll denounce you,” I said very low; “I swear I will. You’re here; you can’t get away; you’ll swing.”

O’Brien started. His eyes blazed at me. Then he frowned. “I’ve been misled,” he muttered, with a dark glance at Carlos. And recovering his jocular serenity, “Ye mean it?” he asked; “it’s not British heroics?”

The old Don stirred again and sighed. The young girl glided swiftly to his side. “Señor O’Brien,” she said, “you have so irritated my English cousin that he has awakened my father.”

O’Brien grinned gently. “‘Tis ever the way,” he said sardonically. “The English fools do the harm and the Irish fool gets the kicking.” He rose to his feet, quite collected, a spick-and-span little man. “I suppose I’ve said too much. Well, well! You are going to denounce the senior judge of the Marine Court of Havana as a pirate. I wonder who will believe you!” He went behind the old Don’s chair with the gliding motion of a Spanish lawyer, and slipped down the open trap-hatch near the window.

It was the disappearance of a shadow. I heard some guttural mutterings come up through the hatch, a rustling, then silence. If he was afraid of me at all he carried it off very well. I apologized to the young girl for having awakened her father. Her colour was very high, and her eyes sparkled. If she had not been so very beautiful I should have gone away at once. She said angrily:

“He is odious to me, the Señor Juez. Too long my father has suffered his insolence.” She was very small, but she had an extraordinary dignity of command. “I could see, Señor, that he was annoying you. Why should you consider such a creature?” Her head drooped. “But my father is very old.”

I turned upon Carlos, who stood all black in the light of the window.

“Why did you make me meet him? He may be a judge of your Marine Court, but he’s nothing but a scoundrelly bog-trotter.”

Carlos said a little haughtily, “You must not denounce him. You should not leave this place if I feared you would try thus to bring dishonour on this gray head, and involve this young girl in a public scandal.” His manner

became soft. "For the honour of the house you shall say nothing. And you shall come with us. I need you."

I was full of mistrust now. If he did countenance this unlawful enterprise, whose headquarters were in Rio Medio, he was not the man for me. Though it was big enough to be made, by the papers at home, of political importance, it was, after all, neither more nor less than piracy. The idea of my turning a sort of Irish traitor was so extravagantly outrageous that now I could smile at the imbecility of that fellow O'Brien. As to turning into a sea-thief for lucre — my blood boiled.

No. There was something else there. Something deep; something dangerous; some intrigue, that I could not conceive even the first notion of. But that Carlos wanted anxiously to make use of me for some purpose was clear. I was mystified to the point of forgetting how heavily I was compromised even in Jamaica, though it was worth remembering, because at that time an indictment for rebellion — under the Black Act — was no joking matter. I might be sent home under arrest; and even then, there was my affair with the runners.

"It is coming to pay a visit," he was saying persuasively, "while your affair here blows over, my Juan — and — and — making my last hours easy, perhaps."

I looked at him; he was worn to a shadow — a shadow with dark wistful eyes. "I don't understand you," I faltered.

The old man stirred, opened his lids, and put a gold vinaigrette to his nostrils.

"Of course I shall not denounce O'Brien," I said. "I, too, respect the honour of your house."

"You are even better than I thought you. And if I entreat you, for the love of your mother — of your sister? Juan, it is not for myself, it is — — —"

The young girl was pouring some drops from a green phial into a silver goblet; she passed close to us, and handed it to her father, who had leant a little forward in his chair. Every movement of hers affected me with an intimate joy; it was as if I had been waiting to see just that carriage of the neck, just that proud glance from the eyes, just that droop of eyelashes upon the cheeks, for years and years.

"No, I shall hold my tongue, and that's enough," I said.

At that moment the old Don sat up and cleared his throat. Carlos sprang towards him with an infinite grace of tender obsequiousness. He mentioned

my name and the relationship, then rehearsed the innumerable titles of his uncle, ending “and patron of the Bishopric of Pinar del Rio.”

I stood stiffly in front of the old man. He bowed his head at intervals, holding the silver cup carefully whilst his chair rocked a little. When Carlos’ mellow voice had finished the rehearsing of the sonorous styles, I mumbled something about “transcendent honour.”

He stopped me with a little, deferentially peremptory gesture of one hand, and began to speak, smiling with a contraction of the lips and a trembling of the head. His voice was very low, and quavered slightly, but every syllable was enunciated with the same beauty of clearness that there was in his features, in his hands, in his ancient gestures.

“The honour is to me,” he said, “and the pleasure. I behold my kinsman, who, with great heroism, I am told, rescued my dearly loved nephew from great dangers; it is an honour to me to be able to give him thanks. My beloved and lamented sister contracted a union with an English hidalgo, through whose house your own very honourable family is allied to my own; it is a pleasure to me to meet after many years with one who has seen the places where her later life was passed.”

He paused, and breathed with some difficulty, as if the speech had exhausted him. Afterwards he began to ask me questions about Rooksby’s aunt — the lamented sister of his speech. He had loved her greatly, he said. I knew next to nothing about her, and his fine smile and courtly, aged, deferential manners made me very nervous. I felt as if I had been taken to pay a ceremonial visit to a supreme pontiff in his dotage. He spoke about Horton Priory with some animation for a little while, and then faltered, and forgot what he was speaking of. Suddenly he said:

“But where is O’Brien? Did he write to the Governor here? I should like you to know the Señor O’Brien. He is a spiritual man.”

I forbore to say that I had already seen O’Brien, and the old man sank into complete silence. It was beginning to grow dark, and the noise of suppressed voices came from the open trap-door. Nobody said anything.

I felt a sort of uneasiness; I could by no means understand the connection between the old Don and what had gone before, and I did not, in a purely conventional sense, know how long I ought to stop. The sky through the barred windows had grown pallid.

The old Don said suddenly, “You must visit my poor town of Rio Medio,” but he gave no specific invitation and said nothing more.

Afterwards he asked, rather querulously, "But where is O'Brien? He must write those letters for me."

The young girl said, "He has preceded us to the ship; he will write there."

She had gone back to her seat. Don Balthasar shrugged his shoulders to his ears, and moved his hands from his knees.

"Without doubt, he knows best," he said, "but he should ask me."

It grew darker still; the old Don seemed to have fallen asleep again. Save for the gleam of the silver buckle of his hat, he had disappeared into the gloom of the place. I remembered my engagement to dine with Williams on board the Lion, and I rose to my feet. There did not seem to be any chance of my talking to the young girl. She was once more leaning nonchalantly over the lizard, and her hair drooped right across her face like clusters of grapes. There was a gleam on a little piece of white forehead, and all around and about her there were shadows deepening. Carlos came concernedly towards me as I looked at the door.

"But you must not go yet," he said a little suavely; "I have many things to say. Tell me — —"

His manner heightened my uneasiness to a fear. The expression of his eyes changed, and they became fixed over my shoulder, while on his lips the words "You must come, you must come," trembled, hardly audible. I could only shake my head. At once he stepped back as if resigning. He was giving me up — and it occurred to me that if the danger of his seduction was over, there remained the danger of arrest just outside the door.

Some one behind me said peremptorily, "It is time," and there was a flickering diminution of the light. I had a faint instantaneous view of the old Don dozing, with his head back — of the tall windows, cut up into squares by the black bars. Something hairily coarse ran harshly down my face; I grew blind; my mouth, my eyes, my nostrils were filled with dust; my breath shut in upon me became a flood of warm air. I had no time to resist. I kicked my legs convulsively; my elbows were drawn tight against my sides. Someone grunted under my weight; then I was carried — down, along, up, down again; my feet were knocking along a wall, and the top of my head rubbed occasionally against what must have been the roof of a low stone passage, issuing from under the back room of Ramon's store. Finally, I was dropped upon something that felt like a heap of wood-shavings. My surprise, rage, and horror had been so great that, after the first stifled cry, I had made no sound. I heard the footsteps of several men going away.





## CHAPTER FOUR

I remained lying there, bound hand and foot, for a long time; for quite long enough to allow me to collect my senses and see that I had been a fool to threaten O'Brien. I had been nobly indignant, and behold! I had a sack thrown over my head for my pains, and was put away safely somewhere or other. It seemed to be a cellar.

I was in search of romance, and here were all the elements; Spaniards, a conspirator, and a kidnapping; but I couldn't feel a fool and romantic as well. True romance, I suppose, needs a whirl of emotions to extinguish all the senses except that of sight, which it dims. Except for sight, which I hadn't at all, I had the use of them all, and all reported unpleasant things.

I ached and smarted with my head in a sack, with my mouth full of flour that had gone mouldy and offended my nostrils; I had a sense of ignominy, and I was extremely angry; I could see that the old Don was in his dotage — but Carlos I was bitter against.

I was not really afraid; I could not suppose that the Riegos would allow me to be murdered or seriously maltreated. But I was incensed against Fate or Chance or whatever it is — on account of the ignominious details, the coarse sack, the mouldy flour, the stones of the tunnel that had barked my shins, the tightness of the ropes that bound my ankles together, and seemed to cut into my wrists behind my back.

I waited, and my fury grew in a dead silence. How would it end — with what outrage? I would show my contempt and preserve my dignity by submitting without a struggle — I despised this odious plot. At last there were voices, footsteps; I found it very hard to carry out my resolution and refrain from stifled cries and kicks. I was lifted up and carried, like a corpse, with many stumbles, by men who sometimes growled as they hastened along. From time to time somebody murmured, "Take care." Then I was deposited into a boat. The world seemed to be swaying, splashing, jarring — and it became obvious to me that I was being taken to some ship. The Spanish ship, of course. Suddenly I broke into cold perspiration at the thought that, after all, their purpose might be to drop me quickly overboard. "Carlos!" I cried. I felt the point of a knife on my breast. "Silence, Señor!" said a gruff voice.

This fear vanished when we came alongside a ship evidently already under way; but I was handled so roughly and clumsily that I was thoroughly

exhausted and out of breath, by the time I was got on board. All was still around me; I was left alone on a settee in the main cabin, as I imagined. For a long time I made no movement; then a door opened and shut. There was a murmured conversation between two voices. This went on in animated whispers for a time. At last I felt as if someone were trying, rather ineffectually, to remove the sack itself. Finally, that actually did rub its way over my head, and something soft and silken began to wipe my eyes with a surprising care, and even tenderness. "This was stupidly done," came a discontented remark; "you do not handle a caballero like this."

"And how else was it to be done, to that kind of caballero?" was the curt retort.

By that time I had blinked my eyes into a condition for remaining open for minute stretches. Two men were bending over me — Carlos and O'Brien himself. The latter said:

"Believe me, your mistake made this necessary. This young gentleman was about to become singularly inconvenient, and he is in no way harmed."

He spoke in a velvety voice, and walked away gently through the darkness. Carlos followed with the lanthorn dangling at arm's length; strangely enough he had not even looked at me. I suppose he was ashamed, and I was too proud to speak to him, with my hands and feet tied fast. The door closed, and I remained sitting in the darkness. Long small windows grew into light at one end of the place, curved into an outline that suggested a deep recess. The figure of a crowned woman, that moved rigidly up and down, was silhouetted over my body. Groaning creaks of wood and the faint swish of water made themselves heard continuously.

I turned my head to a click, I saw a door open a little way, and the small blue flame of a taper floated into the room. Then the door closed with a definite sound of shutting in. The light shone redly through protecting fingers, and upwards on to a small face. It came to a halt, and I made out the figure of a girl leaning across a table and looking upwards. There was a click of glass, and then a great blaze of light created a host of shining things; a glitter of gilded carvings, red velvet couches, a shining table, a low ceiling, painted white, on carved rafters. A large silver lamp she had lighted kept on swinging to the gentle motion of the ship.

She stood just in front of me; the girl that I had seen through the door; the girl I had seen play with the melon seeds. She was breathing fast — it

agitated me to be alone with her — and she had a little shining dagger in her hand.

She cut the rope round my ankles, and motioned me imperiously to turn round. “Your hands — your hands!”

I turned my back awkwardly to her, and felt the grip of small, cool, very firm fingers upon my wrists. My arms fell apart, numb and perfectly useless; I was half aware of pain in them, but it passed unnoticed among a cloud of other emotions. I didn’t feel my finger-tips because I had the agitation, the flutter, the tantalization of looking at her.

I was all the while conscious of the — say, the irregularity of my position, but I felt very little fear. There were the old Don, an ineffectual, silver-haired old gentleman, who obviously was not a pirate; the sleek O’Brien, and Carlos, who seemed to cough on the edge of a grave — and this young girl. There was not any future that I could conceive, and the past seemed to be cut off from me by a narrow, very dark tunnel through which I could see nothing at all.

The young girl was, for the moment, what counted most on the whole, the only thing the eye could rest on. She affected me as an apparition familiar, yet absolutely new in her charm. I had seen her gray eyes; I had seen her red lips; her dark hair, her lithe gestures; the carriage of her head; her throat, her hands. I knew her; I seemed to have known her for years. A rush of strange, sweet feeling made me dumb. She was looking at me, her lips set, her eyes wide and still; and suddenly she said:

“Ask nothing. The land is not far yet. You can escape, Carlos thought.... But no! You would only perish for nothing. Go with God.” She pointed imperiously towards the square stern-ports of the cabin.

Following the direction of her hand, my eyes fell upon the image of a Madonna; rather large — perhaps a third life-size; with a gilt crown, a pink serious face bent a little forward over a pink naked child that perched on her left arm and raised one hand. It stood on a bracket, against the rudder casing, with fat cherubs’ heads carved on the supports. The young girl crossed herself with a swift motion of the hand. The stern-ports, glazed in small panes, were black, and gleaming in a white frame-work.

“Go — go — go with God,” the girl whispered urgently. “There is a boat — — —”

I made a motion to rise; I wanted to go. The idea of having my liberty, of its being again a possibility, made her seem of less importance; other things

began to have their share. But I could not stand, though the blood was returning, warm and tingling, in my legs and hands. She looked at me with a sharp frown puckering her brows a little; beat a hasty tattoo with one of her feet, and cast a startled glance towards the forward door that led on deck. Then she walked to the other side of the table, and sat looking at me in the glow of the lamp.

“Your life hangs on a thread,” she murmured.

I answered, “You have given it to me. Shall I never — — — -?” I was acutely conscious of the imperfection of my language.

She looked at me sharply; then lowered her lids. Afterwards she raised them again. “Think of yourself. Every moment is — — — -”

“I will be as quick as I can,” I said.

I was chafing my ankles and looking up at her. I wanted, very badly, to thank her for taking an interest in me, only I found it very difficult to speak to her. Suddenly she sprang to her feet:

“That man thinks he can destroy you. I hate him — I detest him! You have seen how he treats my father.”

It struck me, like a blow, that she was merely avenging O’Brien’s insolence to her father. I had been kidnapped against Don Balthasar Riego’s will. It gave me very well the measure of the old man’s powerlessness in face of his intendant — who was obviously confident of afterwards soothing the resentment.

I was glad I had not thanked her for taking an interest in me. I was distressed, too, because once more I had missed Romance by an inch.

Someone kicked at the locked door. A voice cried — I could not help thinking — warningly, “Seraphina, Seraphina,” and another voice said with excessive softness, “Senorita! Voyons! quelle folie.”

She sprang at me. Her hand hurt my wrist as she dragged me aft. I scrambled clumsily into the recess of the counter, and put my head out. The night air was very chilly and full of brine; a little boat towing by a long painter was sheering about in the phosphorescent wake of the ship. The sea itself was pallid in the light of the moon, invisible to me. A little astern of us, on our port quarter, a vessel under a press of canvas seemed to stand still; looming up like an immense pale ghost. She might have been coming up with us, or else we had just passed her — I couldn’t tell. I had no time to find out, and I didn’t care. The great thing was to get hold of the painter. The whispers of the girl urged me, but the thing was not easy; the rope,

fastened higher up, streamed away out of reach of my hand. At last, by watching the moment when it slacked, and throwing myself half out of the stern window, I managed to hook it with my finger-tips. Next moment it was nearly jerked away from me, but I didn't lose it, and the boat taking a run just then under the counter, I got a good hold. The sound of another kick at the door made me swing myself out, head first, without reflection. I got soused to the waist before I had reached the bows of the boat. With a frantic effort I clambered up and rolled in. When I got on my legs, the jerky motion of tossing had ceased, the boat was floating still, and the light of the stern windows was far away already. The girl had managed to cut the painter.

The other vessel was heading straight for me, rather high on the water, broad-beamed, squat, and making her way quietly, like a shadow. The land might have been four or five miles away — I had no means of knowing exactly. It looked like a high black cloud, and purple-gray mists here and there among the peaks hung like scarves.

I got an oar over the stern to scull, but I was not fit for much exertion. I stared at the ship I had left. Her stern windows glimmered with a slight up-and-down motion; her sails seemed to fall into black confusion against the blaze of the moon; faint cries came to me out of her, and by the alteration of her shape I understood that she was being brought to, preparatory to lowering a boat. She might have been half a mile distant when the gleam of her stern windows swung slowly round and went out. I had no mind to be recaptured, and began to scull frantically towards the other vessel. By that time she was quite near — near enough for me to hear the lazy sound of the water at her bows, and the occasional flutter of a sail. The land breeze was dying away, and in the wake of the moon I perceived the boat of my pursuers coming over, black and distinct; but the other vessel was nearly upon me. I sheered under her starboard bow and yelled, "Ship ahoy! Ship ahoy!"

There was a lot of noise on board, and no one seemed to hear my shouts. Several voices yelled. "That cursed Spanish ship ahead is heaving-to athwart our hawse." The crew and the officers seemed all to be forward shouting abuse at the "lubberly Dago," and it looked as though I were abandoned to my fate. The ship forged ahead in the light air; I failed in my grab at her fore chains, and my boat slipped astern, bumping against the side. I missed the main chain, too, and yelled all the time with desperation,

“For God’s sake! Ship ahoy! For God’s sake throw me a rope, some-, body, before it’s too late!”

I was giving up all hope when a heavy coil — of a brace, I suppose — fell upon my head, nearly knocking me over. Half stunned as I was, desperation lent me strength to scramble up her side hand over hand, while the boat floated away from under my feet. I was done up when I got on the poop. A yell came from forward, “Hard aport.” Then the same voice addressed itself to abusing the Spanish ship very close to us now. “What do you mean by coming-to right across my bows like this?” it yelled in a fury.

I stood still in the shadows on the poop. We were drawing slowly past the stern of the Spaniard, and O’Brien’s voice answered in English:

“We are picking up a boat of ours that’s gone adrift with a man. Have you seen anything of her?” “No — confound you and your boat.” Of course those forward knew nothing of my being on board. The man who had thrown me the rope — a passenger, a certain Major Cowper, going home with his wife and child — had walked away proudly, without deigning as much as to look at me twice, as if to see a man clamber on board a ship ten miles from the land was the most usual occurrence. He was, I found afterwards, an absurd, pompous person, as stiff as a ramrod, and so full of his own importance that he imagined he had almost demeaned himself by his condescension in throwing down the rope in answer to my despairing cries. On the other hand, the helmsman, the only other person aft, was so astounded as to become quite speechless. I could see, in the light of the binnacle thrown upon his face, his staring eyes and his open mouth.

The voice forward had subsided by then, and as the stern of the Spanish ship came abreast of the poop, I stepped out of the shadow of the sails, and going close to the rail I said, not very loud — there was no need to shout — but very distinctly:

“I am out of your clutches, Mr. O’Brien, after all. I promise you that you shall hear of me yet.”

Meanwhile, another man had come up from forward on the poop, growling like a bear, a short, rotund little man, the captain of the ship. The Spanish vessel was dropping astern, silent, with her sails all black, hiding the low moon. Suddenly a hurried hail came out of her.

“What ship is this?”

“What’s that to you, blank your eyes? The Breeze, if you want to know. What are you going to do about it?” the little skipper shouted fiercely. In the

light wind the ships were separating slowly.

“Where are you bound to?” hailed O’Brien’s voice again.

The little skipper laughed with exasperation. “Dash your blanked impudence. To Havana, and be hanged to you. Anything more you want to know? And my name’s Lumsden, and I am sixty years old, and if I had you here, I would put a head on you for getting in my way, you — — —”

He stopped, out of breath. Then, addressing himself to his passenger:

“That’s the Spanish chartered ship that brought these sanguinary pirates that were hanged this morning, major. She’s taking the Spanish commissioner back. I suppose they had no man-of-war handy for the service in Cuba. Did you ever — — —”

He had caught sight of me for the first time, and positively jumped a foot high with astonishment.

“Who on earth’s that there?”

His astonishment was comprehensible. The major, Without deigning to enlighten him, walked proudly away. He was too dignified a person to explain.

It was left to me. Frequenting, as I had been doing, Ramon’s store, which was a great gossiping centre of the maritime world in Kingston, I knew the faces and the names of most of the merchant captains who used to gather there to drink and swap yarns. I was not myself quite unknown to little Lumsden. I told him all my story, and all the time he kept on scratching his bald head, full of incredulous perplexity. Old Señor Ramon! Such a respectable man. And I had been kidnapped? From his store!

“If I didn’t see you here in my cuddy before my eyes, I wouldn’t believe a word you say,” he declared absurdly.

But he was ready enough to take me to Havana. However, he insisted upon calling down his mate, a gingery fellow, short, too, but wizened, and as stupid as himself.

“Here’s that Kemp, you know. The young fellow that Macdonald of the Horton Pen picked up somewhere two years ago. The Spaniards in that ship kidnapped him — so he says. He says they are pirates. But that’s a government chartered ship, and all the pirates that have ever been in her were hanged this morning in Kingston. But here he is, anyhow. And he says that at home he had throttled a Bow Street runner before he went off with the smugglers. Did you ever hear the likes of it, Mercer? I shouldn’t think he was telling us a parcel of lies; hey, Mercer?”

And the two grotesque little chaps stood nodding their heads at me sagaciously.

“He’s a desperate character, then,” said Mercer at last, cautiously. “This morning, the very last thing I heard ashore, as I went to fetch the fresh beef off, is that he had been assaulting a justice of the peace on the highroad, and had been trying to knock down the admiral, who was coming down to town in a chaise with Mr. Topnambo. There’s a warrant out against him under the Black Act, sir.”

Then he brightened up considerably. “So he must have been kidnapped or something after all, sir, or he would be in chokey now.”

It was true, after all. Romance reserved me for another fate, for another sort of captivity, for more than one sort. And my imagination had been captured, enslaved already by the image of that young girl who had called me her English cousin, the girl with the lizard, the girl with the dagger! And with every word she uttered romance itself, if I had only known it, the romance of persecuted lovers, spoke to me through her lips.

That night the Spanish ship had the advantage of us in a freshening wind, and overtook the Breeze. Before morning dawned she passed us, and before the close of the next day she was gone out of sight ahead, steering, apparently, the same course with ourselves.

Her superior sailing had an enormous influence upon my fortunes; and I was more adrift in the world than ever before, more in the dark as to what awaited me than when I was lugged along with my head in a sack. I gave her but little thought. A sort of numbness had come over me. I could think of the girl who had cut me free, and for all my resentment at the indignity of my treatment, I had hardly a thought to spare for the man who had me bound. I was pleased to remember that she hated him; that she had said so herself. For the rest, I had a vague notion of going to the English Consul in Havana. After all, I was not a complete nobody. I was John Kemp, a gentleman, well connected; I could prove it. The Bow Street runner had not been dead as I had thought. The last letter from Veronica informed me that the man had given up thief-catching, and was keeping, now, a little inn in the neighbourhood. Ralph, my brother-in-law, had helped him to it, no doubt. I could come home safely now.

And I had discovered I was no longer anxious to return home.



## CHAPTER FIVE

There wasn't any weirdness about the ship when I woke in the sunlight. She was old and slow and rather small. She carried Lumsden (master), Mercer (mate), a crew that seemed no better and no worse than any other crew, and the old gentleman who had thrown me the rope the night before, and who seemed to think that he had derogated from his dignity in doing it. He was a Major Cowper, retiring from a West Indian regiment, and had with him his wife and a disagreeable little girl, with a yellow pigtail and a bony little chest and arms.

On the whole, they weren't the sort of people that one would have chosen for companions on a pleasure-trip. Major Cowper's wife lay all day in a deck chair, alternately drawing to her and repulsing the whining little girl. The major talked to me about the scandals with which the world was filled, and kept a suspicious eye upon his wife. He spent the morning in shaving what part of his face his white whiskers did not cover, the afternoon in enumerating to me the subjects on which he intended to write to the Horse Guards. He had grown entirely amiable, perhaps for the reason that his wife ignored my existence.

Meantime I let the days slip by idly, only wondering how I could manage to remain in Havana and breathe the air of the same island with the girl who had delivered me. Perhaps some day we might meet — who knows? I was not afraid of that Irishman.

It never occurred to me to bother about the course we were taking, till one day we sighted the Cuban coast, and I heard Lumsden and Mercer pronounce the name of Rio Medio. The two ridiculous old chaps talked of Mexican privateers, which seemed to rendezvous off that place. They pointed out to me the headland near the bay. There was no sign of privateer or pirate, as far as the eye could reach. In the course of beating up to windward we closed in with the coast, and then the wind fell.

I remained motionless against the rail for half the night, looking at the land. Not a single light was visible. A wistful, dreamy longing, a quiet longing pervaded me, as though I had been drugged. I dreamed, as young men dream, of a girl's face. She was sleeping there within this dim vision of land. Perhaps this was as near as I should ever be able to approach her. I felt a sorrow without much suffering. A great stillness reigned around the ship, over the whole earth. At last I went below and fell asleep.

I was awakened by the idea that I had heard an extraordinary row — shouting and stamping. But there was a dead silence, to which I was listening with all my ears. Suddenly there was a little pop, as if someone had spat rather vigorously; then a succession of shouts, then another little pop, and more shouts, and the stamping overhead. A woman began to shriek on the other side of the bulkhead, then another woman somewhere else, then the little girl. I hurried on deck, but it was some minutes before I could make things fit together. I saw Major Cowper on the poop; he was brandishing a little pistol and apostrophizing Lumsden, who was waving ineffectual arms towards the sky; and there was a great deal of shouting, forward and overhead. Cowper rushed at me, and explained that something was an abominable scandal, and that there were women on board. He waved his pistol towards the side; I noticed that the butt was inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Lumsden rushed at him and clawed at his clothes, imploring him not to be rash.

We were so close in with the coast that the surf along the shore gleamed and sparkled in full view.

Someone shouted aloft, “Look out! They are firing again.”

Then only I noticed, a quarter of a mile astern and between the land and us, a little schooner, rather low in the water, curtseying under a cloud of white canvas — a wonderful thing to look at. It was as if I had never seen anything so instinct with life and the joy of it. A snowy streak spattered away from her bows at each plunge. She came at a great speed, and a row of faces looking our way became plain, like a beady decoration above her bulwarks. She swerved a little out of her course, and a sort of mushroom of smoke grew out of her side; there was a little gleam of smouldering light hidden in its heart. The spitting bang followed again, and something skipped along the wave-tops beside us, raising little pillars of spray that drifted away on the wind. The schooner came back on her course, heading straight for us; a shout like groaned applause went up from on board us. Lumsden hid his face in his hands.

I could hear little Mercer shrieking out orders forwards. We were shortening sail. The schooner, luffing a little, ranged abreast. A hail like a metal blare came out of her.

“If you donn’d heef-to we seenk you! We seenk you! By God!”

Major Cowper was using abominable language beside me. Suddenly he began to call out to someone:

“Go down... go down, I say.”

A woman’s face disappeared into the hood of the companion like a rabbit’s tail into its burrow. There was a great volley of cracks from the loose sails, and the ship came to. At the same time the schooner, now on our beam and stripped of her light kites, put in stays and remained on the other tack, with her foresheet to windward.

Major Cowper said it was a scandal. The country was going to the dogs because merchantmen were not compelled by law to carry guns. He spluttered into my ears that there wasn’t so much as a twopenny signal mortar on board, and no more powder than enough to load one of his duelling pistols. He was going to write to the Horse Guards.

A blue-and-white ensign fluttered up to the main gaff of the schooner; a boat dropped into the water. It all went breathlessly — I hadn’t time to think. I saw old Cowper run to the side and aim his pistol overboard; there was an ineffectual click; he made a gesture of disgust, and tossed it on deck. His head hung dejectedly down upon his chest.

Lumsden said, “Thank God, oh, thank God!” and the old man turned on him like a snarling dog.

“You infernal coward,” he said. “Haven’t you got a spark of courage?”

A moment after, our decks were invaded by men, brown and ragged, leaping down from the bulwarks one after the other.

They had come out at break of day (we must have been observed the evening before), a big schooner — full of as ill-favoured, ragged rascals as the most vivid imagination could conceive. Of course, there had been no resistance on our part. We were outsailed, and at the first ferocious hail the halyards had been let go by the run, and all our crew had bolted aloft. A few bronzed bandits posted abreast of each mast kept them there by the menace of bell-mouthed blunderbusses pointed upwards. Lumsden and Mercer had been each tied flat down to a spare spar. They presented an appearance too ridiculous to awaken genuine compassion. Major Cowper was made to sit on a hen-coop, and a bearded pirate, with a red handkerchief tied round his head and a cutlass in his hand, stood guard over him. The major looked angry and crestfallen. The rest of that infamous crew, without losing a moment, rushed into the cuddy to loot the cabins for wearing apparel,

jewellery, and money. They squabbled amongst themselves, throwing the things on deck into a great heap of booty.

The schooner flying the Mexican flag remained hove to abeam. But in the man in command of the boarding party I recognized Tomas Castro!

He was a pirate. My surmises were correct. He looked the part to the life, in a plumed hat, cloaked to the chin, and standing apart in a saturnine dignity.

“Are you going to have us all murdered, Castro?” I asked, with indignation. To my surprise he did not seem to recognize me; indeed, he pretended not to see me at all. I might have been thin air for any sign he gave of being aware of my presence; but, turning his back on me, he addressed himself to the ignobly captive Lumsden, telling him that he, Castro, was the commander of that Mexican schooner, and menacing him with dreadful threats of vengeance for what he called the resistance we had offered to a privateer of the Republic. I suppose he was pleased to qualify with the name of armed resistance the miserable little pop of the major’s pocket pistol. To punish that audacity he announced that no private property would be respected.

“You shall have to give up all the money on board,” he yelled at the wretched man lying there like a sheep ready for slaughter. The other could only gasp and blink. Castro’s ferocity was so remarkable that for a moment it struck me as put on. There was no necessity for it. We were meek and silent enough, only poor Major Cowper muttered:

“My wife and child. . . .”

The ragged brown men were pouring on deck from below; their arms full of bundles. Half a dozen of them started to pull off the main hatch tarpaulin. Up aloft the crew looked down with scared eyes. I began to say excitedly, in my indignation, almost into his very ear:

“I know you, Tomas Castro — I know you — Tomas Castro.”

Even then he seemed not to hear; but at last he looked into my face balefully, as if he wished to convey the plague to me.

“Hold your tongue,” he said very quickly in Spanish. “This is folly!” His little hawk’s beak of a nose nestled in his moustache. He waved his arm and declared forcibly, “I don’t know you. I am Nicola el Demonio, the Mexican.”

Poor old Cowper groaned. The reputation of Nicola el Demonio, if rumours were to be trusted, was a horrible thing for a man with women

depending on him.

Five or six of these bandits were standing about Lumsden, the major, and myself, fingering the locks of their guns. Poor old Cowper, breaking away from his guard, was raging up and down the poop; and the big pirate kept him off the companion truculently. The major wanted to get below; the little girl was screaming in the cuddy, and we could hear her very plainly. It was rather horrible. Castro had gone forward into the crowd of scoundrels round the hatchway. It was only then that I realized that Major Cowper was in a state of delirious apprehension and fury; I seemed to remember at last that for a long time he had been groaning somewhere near me. He kept on saying:

“Oh, for God’s sake — for God’s sake — my poor wife.”

I understood that he must have been asking me to do something.

It came as a shock to me. I had a vague sensation of his fears. Up till then I hadn’t realized that any one could be much interested in Mrs. Cowper.

He caught hold of my arm, as if he wanted support, and stuttered:

“Couldn’t you — couldn’t you speak to — — — ” He nodded in the direction of Tomas Castro, who was bent and shouting down the hatch. “Try to — — — -” the old man gasped. “Didn’t you hear the child scream?” His face was pallid and wrinkled, like a piece of crumpled paper; his mouth was drawn on one side, and his lips quivered one against the other.

I went to Castro and caught him by the arm. He spun round and smiled discreetly.

“We shall be using force upon you directly. Pray resist, Señor; but not too much. What? His wife? Tell that stupid Inglez with whispers that she is safe.” He whispered with an air of profound intelligence, “We shall be ready to go as soon as these foul swine have finished their stealing. I cannot stop them,” he added.

I could not pause to think what he might mean. The child’s shrieks resounding louder and louder, I ran below. There were a couple of men in the cabin with the women. Mrs. Cowper was lying back upon a sofa, her face very white and drawn, her eyes wide open. Her useless hands twitched at her dress; otherwise she was absolutely motionless, like a frozen woman. The black nurse was panting convulsively in a corner — a palpitating bundle of orange and purple and white clothes. The child was rushing round and round, shrieking. The two men did nothing at all. One of them kept saying in Spanish:

“But — we only want your rings. But — we only want your rings.”

The other made feeble efforts to catch the child as it rushed past him. He wanted its earrings — they were contraband of war, I suppose.

Mrs. Cowper was petrified with terror. Explaining the desires of the two men was like shouting things into the ear of a very deaf woman. She kept on saying:

“Will they go away then? Will they go away then?” All the while she was drawing the rings off her thin fingers, and handing them to me. I gave them to the ruffians whose presence seemed to terrify her out of her senses. I had no option. I could do nothing else. Then I asked her whether she wished me to remain with her and the child. She said:

“Yes. No. Go away. Yes. No — let me think.”

Finally it came into my head that in the captain’s cabin she would be able to talk to her husband through the deck ventilator, and, after a time, the idea filtered through to her brain. She could hardly walk at all. The child and the nurse ran in front of us, and, practically, I carried her there in my arms. Once in the stateroom she struggled loose from me, and, rushing in, slammed the door violently in my face. She seemed to hate me.

## CHAPTER SIX

I went on deck again. On the poop about twenty men had surrounded Major Cowper; his white head was being jerked backwards and forwards above their bending backs; they had got his old uniform coat off, and were fighting for the buttons. I had just time to shout to him, "Your wife's down there, she's all right!" when very suddenly I became aware that Tomas Castro was swearing horribly at these thieves. He drove them away, and we were left quite alone on the poop, I holding the major's coat over my arm. Major Cowper stooped down to call through the skylight. I could hear faint answers coming up to him.

Meantime, some of the rascals left on board the schooner had filled on her in a light wind, and, sailing round our stern, had brought their vessel alongside. Ropes were thrown on board and we lay close together, but the schooner with her dirty decks looked to me, now, very sinister and very sordid.

Then I remembered Castro's extraordinary words; they suggested infinite possibilities of a disastrous nature, I could not tell just what. The explanation seemed to be struggling to bring itself to light, like a name that one has had for hours on the tip of a tongue without being able to formulate it. Major Cowper rose stiffly, and limped to my side. He looked at me askance, then shifted his eyes away. Afterwards, he took his coat from my arm. I tried to help him, but he refused my aid, and jerked himself painfully into it. It was too tight for him. Suddenly, he said:

"You seem to be deuced intimate with that man — deuced intimate."

His tone caused me more misgiving than I should have thought possible. He took a turn on the deserted deck; went to the skylight; called down, "All well, still?" waited, listening with his head on one side, and then came back to me.

"You drop into the ship," he said, "out of the clouds. Out of the clouds, I say. You tell us some sort of cock-and-bull story. I say it looks deuced suspicious." He took another turn and came back. "My wife says that you took her rings and — and — gave them to — — —"

He had an ashamed air. It came into my head that that hateful woman had been egging him on to this through the skylight, instead of saying her prayers.

“Your wife!” I said. “Why, she might have been murdered — if I hadn’t made her give them up. I believe I saved her life.”

He said suddenly, “Tut, tut!” and shrugged his shoulders. He hung his head for a minute, then he added, “Mind, I don’t say — I don’t say that it mayn’t be as you say. You’re a very nice young fellow.... But what I say is — I am a public man — you ought to clear yourself.” He was beginning to recover his military bearing.

“Oh! don’t be absurd,” I said.

One of the Spaniards came up to me and whispered, “You must come now. We are going to cast off.” At the same time Tomas Castro prowled to the other side of the ship, within five yards of us. I called out, “Tomas Castro! Tomas Castro! I will not go with you.” The man beside me said, “Come, señor! Vamos!”

Suddenly Castro, stretching his arm out at me, cried, “Come, hombres. This is the caballero; seize him.” And to me in his broken English he shouted, “You may resist, if you like.”

This was what I meant to do with all my might. The ragged crowd surrounded me; they chattered like monkeys. One man irritated me beyond conception. He looked like an inn-keeper in knee-breeches, had a broken nose that pointed to the left, and a double chin. More of them came running up every minute. I made a sort of blind rush at the fellow with the broken nose; my elbow caught him on the soft folds of flesh and he skipped backwards; the rest scattered in all directions, and then stood at a distance, chattering and waving their hands. And beyond them I saw old Cowper gesticulating approval. The man with the double chin drew a knife from his sleeve, crouched instantly, and sprang at me. I hadn’t fought anybody since I had been at school; raising my fists was like trying a dubious experiment in an emergency. I caught him rather hard on the end of his broken nose; I felt the contact on my right, and a small pain in my left hand. His arms went up to the sky; his face, too. But I had started forward to meet him, and half a dozen of them flung their arms round me from behind.

I seemed to have an exaggerated clearness of vision; I saw each brown dirty paw reach out to clutch some part of me. I was not angry any more; it wasn’t any good being angry, but I made a fight for it. There were dozens of them; they clutched my wrists, my elbows, and in between my wrists and my elbows, and my shoulders. One pair of arms was round my neck, another round my waist, and they kept on trying to catch my legs with



ropes. We seemed to stagger all over the deck; I expect they got in each other's way; they would have made a better job of it if they hadn't been such a multitude. I must then have got a crack on the head, for everything grew dark; the night seemed to fall on us, as we fought.

Afterwards I found myself lying gasping on my back on the deck of the schooner; four or five men were holding me down. Castro was putting a pistol into his belt. He stamped his foot violently, and then went and shouted in Spanish:

"Come you all on board. You have done mischief enough, fools of Lugarenos. Now we go."

I saw, as in a dream of stress and violence, some men making ready to cast off the schooner, and then, in a supreme effort, an effort of lusty youth and strength, which I remember to this day, I scattered men like chaff, and stood free.

For the fraction of a second I stood, ready to fall myself, and looking at prostrate men. It was a flash of vision, and then I made a bolt for the rail. I clambered furiously; I saw the deck of the old barque; I had just one exulting sight of it, and then Major Cowper uprose before my eyes and knocked me back on board the schooner, tumbling after me himself.

Twenty men flung themselves upon my body. I made no movement. The end had come. I hadn't the strength to shake off a fly, my heart was bursting my ribs. I lay on my back and managed to say, "Give me air." I thought I should die.

Castro, draped in his cloak, stood over me, but Major Cowper fell on his knees near my head, almost sobbing: "My papers! My papers! I tell you I shall starve. Make them give me back my papers. They ain't any use to them — my pension — mortgages — not worth a penny piece to you."

He crouched over my face, and the Spaniards stood around, wondering. He begged me to intercede, to save him those papers of the greatest importance.

Castro preserved his attitude of a conspirator. I was touched by the major's distress, and at last I condescended to address Castro on his behalf, though it cost me an effort, for I was angry, indignant, and humiliated.

"Whart — whart? What do I know of his papers? Let him find them." He waved his hand loftily.

The deck was hillocked with heaps of clothing, of bedding, casks of rum, old hats, and tarpaulins. Cowper ran in and out among the plunder, like a

pointer in a turnip field. He was groaning.

Beside one of the pumps was a small pile of shiny cases; ship's instruments, a chronometer in its case, a medicine chest.

Cowper tottered at a black dispatch-box. "There, there!" he said; "I tell you I shall starve if I don't have it. Ask him — ask him — — —" He was clutching me like a drowning man.

Castro raised the inevitable arm towards heaven, letting his round black cloak fall into folds like those of an umbrella. Cowper gathered that he might take his japanned dispatch-box; he seized the brass handles and rushed towards the side, but at the last moment he had the good impulse to return to me, holding out his hand, and spluttering distractedly, "God bless you, God bless you." After a time he remembered that I had rescued his wife and child, and he asked God to bless me for that too. "If it is ever necessary," he said, "on my honour, if you escape, I will come a thousand miles to testify. On my honour — remember." He said he was going to live in Clapham. That is as much as I remember. I was held pinned down to the deck, and he disappeared from my sight. Before the ships had separated, I was carried below in the cabin of the schooner.

They left me alone there, and I sat with my head on my arms for a long time, I did not think of anything at all; I was too utterly done up with my struggles, and there was nothing to be thought about. I had grown to accept the meanness of things as if I had aged a great deal. I had seen men scratch each other's faces over coat buttons, old shoes — over Mercer's trousers. My own future did not interest me at this stage. I sat up and looked round me.

I was in a small, bare cabin, roughly wainscotted and exceedingly filthy. There were the grease-marks from the backs of heads all along a bulkhead above a wooden bench; the rough table, on which my arms rested, was covered with layers of tallow spots. Bright light shone through a porthole. Two or three ill-assorted muskets slanted about round the foot of the mast — a long old piece, of the time of Pizarro, all red velvet and silver' chasing, on a swivelled stand, three English fowling-pieces, and a coachman's blunderbuss. A man was rising from a mattress stretched on the floor; he placed a mandolin, decorated with red favours, on the greasy table. He was shockingly thin, and so tall that his head disturbed the candle-soot on the ceiling. He said: "Ah, I was waiting for the cavalier to awake."

He stalked round the end of the table, slid between it and the side, and grasped my arm with wrapt earnestness as he settled himself slowly beside me. He wore a red shirt that had become rather black where his long brown ringlets fell on his shoulders; it had tarnished gilt buttons ciphered "G. R.," stolen, I suppose, from some English ship.

"I beg the Señor Caballero to listen to what I have to record," he said, with intense gravity. "I cannot bear this much longer — no, I cannot bear my sufferings much longer."

His face was of a large, classical type; a close-featured, rather long face, with an immense nose that from the front resembled the section of a bell; eyebrows like horseshoes, and very large-pupilled eyes that had the purplish-brown lustre of a horse's. His air was mournful in the extreme, and he began to speak resonantly as if his chest were a sounding-board. He used immensely long sentences, of which I only understood one-half.

"What, then, is the difference between me, Manuel-del-Popolo Isturiz, and this Tomas Castro? The Señor Caballero can tell at once. Look at me. I am the finer man. I would have you ask the ladies of Rio Medio, and leave the verdict to them. This Castro is an Andalou — a foreigner. And we, the braves of Rio Medio, will suffer no foreigner to make headway with our ladies. Yet this Andalusian is preferred because he is a humble friend of the great Don, and because he is for a few days given the command. I ask you, Señor, what is the radical difference between me, the sailing captain of this vessel, and him, the fighting captain for a few days? Is it not I that am, as it were, the brains of it, and he only its knife? I ask the Señor Caballero."

I didn't in the least know what to answer. His great eyes wistfully explored my face. I expect I looked bewildered.

"I lay my case at your feet," he continued. "You are to be our chief leader, and, on account of your illustrious birth and renowned intelligence, will occupy a superior position in the council of the notables. Is it not so? Has not the Señor Juez O'Brien so ordained? You will give ear to me, you will alleviate my indignant sufferings?" He implored me with his eyes for a long time.

Manuel-del-Popolo, as he called himself, pushed the hair back from his forehead. I had noticed that the love-locks were plaited with black braid, and that he wore large dirty silk ruffles.

"The caballero" he continued, marking his words with a long, white finger a-tap on the table, "will represent my views to the notables. My

position at present, as I have had the honour to observe, is become unbearable. Consider, too, how your worship and I would work together. What lightness for you and me. You will find this Castro unbearably gross. But I — I assure you I am a man of taste — an improvisador — an artist. My songs are celebrated. And yet!...”

He folded his arms again, and waited; then he said, employing his most impressive voice:

“I have influence with the men of Rio. I could raise a riot. We Cubans are a jealous people; we do not love that foreigners should take our best from us. We do not love it; we will not suffer it. Let this Castro bethink himself and go in peace, leaving us and our ladies. As the proverb says, ‘It is well to build a bridge for a departing enemy.’”

He began to peer at me more wistfully, and his eyes grew more luminous than ever. This man, in spite of his grotesqueness, was quite in earnest, there was no doubting that.

“I have a gentle spirit,” he began again, “a gentle spirit. I am submissive to the legitimate authorities. What the Señor Juez O’Brien asks me to do, I do. I would put a knife into any one who inconvenienced the Señor Juez O’Brien, who is a good Catholic; we would all do that, as is right and fitting. But this Castro — this Andalou, who is nearly as bad as a heretic! When my day comes, I will have his arms flayed and the soles of his feet, and I will rub red pepper into them; and all the men of Rio who do not love foreigners will applaud. And I will stick little thorns under his tongue, and I will cut off his eyelids with little scissors, and set him facing the sun. Caballero, you would love me; I have a gentle spirit. I am a pleasant companion.” He rose and squeezed round the table. “Listen” — his eyes lit up with rapture — “you shall hear me. It is divine — ah, it is very pleasant, you will say.”

He seized his mandolin, slung it round his neck, and leant against the bulkhead. The bright light from the port-hole gilded the outlines of his body, as he swayed about and moved his long fingers across the strings; they tinkled metallically. He sang in a nasal voice:

“‘Listen!’ the young girls say as they hasten to the barred window.

‘Listen! Ah, surely that is the guitar of Man — u — el — del-Popolo,  
As he glides along the wall in the twilight.’”

It was a very long song. He gesticulated freely with his hand in between the scratching of the strings, which seemed to be a matter of luck. His eyes

gazed distantly at the wall above my head. The performance bewildered and impressed me; I wondered if this was what they had carried me off for. It was like being mad. He made a decrescendo tinkling, and his lofty features lapsed into their normal mournfulness.

At that moment Castro put his face round the door, then entered altogether. He sighed in a satisfied manner, and had an air of having finished a laborious undertaking.

“We have arranged the confusion up above,” he said to Manuel-del-Popolo; “you may go and see to the sailing. . . . Hurry; it is growing late.”

Manuel blazed silently, and stalked out of the door as if he had an electric cloud round his head. Tomas Castro turned towards me.

“You are better?” he asked benevolently. “You exerted yourself too much. . . . But still, if you liked — — —” He picked up the mandolin, and began negligently scratching the strings. I noticed an alteration in him; he had grown softer in the flesh in the past years; there were little threads of gray in the knotted curls of his beard. It was as if he had lived well, on the whole. He bent his head over the strings, plucked one, tightened a peg, plucked it again, then set the instrument on the table, and dropped on to the mattress. “Will you have some rum?” he said. “You have grown broad and strong, like a bull.... You made those men fly, *sacré nom d’une pipe*.... One would have thought you were in earnest.... Ah, well!” He stretched himself at length on the mattress, and closed his eyes.

I looked at him to discover traces of irony. There weren’t any. He was talking quietly; he even reproved me for having carried the pretence of resistance beyond a joke.

“You fought too much; you struck many men — and hard. You will have made enemies. The picaros of this dirty little town are as conceited as pigs. You must take care, or you will have a knife in your back.”

He lay with his hands crossed on his stomach, which was round like a pudding. After a time he opened his eyes, and looked at the dancing white reflection of the water on the grimy ceiling.

“To think of seeing you again, after all these years,” he said. “I did not believe my ears when Don Carlos asked me to fetch you like this. Who would have believed it? But, as they say,” he added philosophically, “‘The water flows to the sea, and the little stones find their places.’” He paused to listen to the sounds that came from above. “That Manuel is a fool,” he said without rancour; “he is mad with jealousy because for this day I have

command here. But, all the same, they are dangerous pigs, these slaves of the Señor O'Brien. I wish the town were rid of them. One day there will be a riot — a function — with their jealousies and madness."

I sat and said nothing, and things fitted themselves together, little patches of information going in here and there like the pieces of a puzzle map. O'Brien had gone on to Havana in the ship from which I had escaped, to render an account of the pirates that had been hung at Kingston; the Riegos had been landed in boats at Rio Medio, of course.

"That poor Don Carlos!" Castro moaned lamentably. "They had the barbarity to take him out in the night, in that raw fog. He coughed and coughed; it made me faint to hear him. He could not even speak to me — his Tomas; it was pitiful. He could not speak when we got to the Casa."

I could not really understand why I had been a second time kidnapped. Castro said that O'Brien had not been unwilling that I should reach Havana. It was Carlos that had ordered Tomas to take me out of the Breeze. He had come down in the raw morning, before the schooner had put out from behind the point, to impress very elaborate directions upon Tomas Castro; indeed, it was whilst talking to Tomas that he had burst a blood-vessel.

"He said to me: 'Have a care now. Listen. He is my dear friend, that Señor Juan. I love him as if he were my only brother. Be very careful, Tomas Castro. Make it appear that he comes to us much against his will. Let him be dragged on board by many men. You are to understand, Tomas, that he is a youth of noble family, and that you are to be as careful of compromising him as you are of the honour of Our Lady.'"

Tomas Castro looked across at me. "You will be able to report well of me," he said; "I did my best. If you are compromised, it was you who did it by talking to me as if you knew me."

I remembered, then, that Tomas certainly had resented my seeming to recognize him before Cowper and Lumsden. He closed his eyes again. After a time he added:

"Vaya! After all, it is foolishness to fear being compromised. You would never believe that his Excellency Don Balthasar had led a riotous life — to look at him with his silver head. It is said he had three friars killed once in Seville, a very, very long time ago. It was dangerous in those days to come against our Mother, the Church." He paused, and undid his shirt, laying bare an incredibly hairy chest; then slowly kicked off his shoes. "One stifles here," he said. "Ah! in the old days — — —"

Suddenly he turned to me and said, with an air of indescribable interest, as if he were gloating over an obscene idea:

“So they would hang a gentleman like you, if they caught you? What savages you English people are! — what savages! Like cannibals! You did well to make that comedy of resisting. Quel pays!... What a people... I dream of them still.... The eyes; the teeth! Ah, well! in an hour we shall be in Rio. I must sleep....”

## CHAPTER SEVEN

By two of the afternoon we were running into the inlet of Rio Medio. I had come on deck when Tomas Castro had started out of his doze. I wanted to see. We went round violently as I emerged, and, clinging to the side, I saw, in a whirl, tall, baked, brown hills dropping sheer down to a strip of flat land and a belt of dark-green scrub at the water's edge; little pink squares of house-walls dropped here and there, mounting the hillside among palms, like men standing in tall grass, running back, hiding in a steep valley; silver-gray huts with ragged dun roofs, like dishevelled shocks of hair; a great pink church-face, very tall and narrow, pyramidal towards the top, and pierced for seven bells, but having only three. It looked as if it had been hidden for centuries in the folds of an ancient land, as it lay there asleep in the blighting sunlight.

When we anchored, Tomas, beside me in saturnine silence, grunted and spat into the water.

"Look here," I said. "What is the meaning of it all? What is it? What is at the bottom?"

He shrugged his shoulders gloomily. "If your worship does not know, who should?" he said. "It is not for me to say why people should wish to come here."

"Then take me to Carlos," I said. "I must get this settled."

Castro looked at me suspiciously. "You will not excite him?" he said. "I have known people die right out when they were like that."

"Oh, I won't excite him," I said.

As we were rowed ashore, he began to point out the houses of the notables. Rio Medio had been one of the principal ports of the Antilles in the seventeenth century, but it had failed before the rivalry of Havana because its harbour would not take the large vessels of modern draft. Now it had no trade, no life, no anything except a bishop and a great monastery, a few retired officials from Havana. A large settlement of ragged thatched huts and clay hovels lay to the west of the cathedral. The Casa Riego was an enormous palace, with windows like loopholes, facing the shore. Don Balthasar practically owned the whole town and all the surrounding country, and, except for his age and feebleness, might have been an absolute monarch.



He had lived in Havana with great splendour, but now, in his failing years, had retired to his palace, from which he had since only twice set foot. This had only been when official ceremonies of extreme importance, such as the international execution of pirates that I had witnessed, demanded the presence of someone of his eminence and lustre. Otherwise he had lived shut up in his palace. There was nowhere in Rio Medio for him to go to.

He was said to regard his intendente O'Brien as the apple of his eye, and had used his influence to get him made one of the judges of the Marine Court. The old Don himself probably knew nothing about the pirates. The inlet had been used by buccaneers ever since the days of Columbus; but they were below his serious consideration, even if he had ever seen them, which Tomas Castro doubted.

There was no doubting the sincerity of his tone.

"Oh, you thought I was a pirate!" he muttered. "For a day — yes — to oblige a Riego, my friend — yes! Moreover, I hate that familiar of the priests, that soft-spoken Juez, intendente, intriguer — that O'Brien. A sufferer for the faith! Que picardia! Have I, too, not suffered for the faith? I am the trusted humble friend of the Riegos. But, perhaps, you think Don Balthasar is himself a pirate! He who has in his veins the blood of the Cid Campeador; whose ancestors have owned half this island since the days of Christopher himself. . . ."

"Has he nothing whatever to do with it?" I asked. "After all, it goes on in his own town."

"Oh, you English," he muttered; "you are all mad! Would one of your great nobles be a pirate? Perhaps they would — God knows. Alas, alas!" he suddenly broke off, "when I think that my Carlos shall leave his bones in this ungodly place. . . ."

I gave up questioning Tomas Castro; he was too much for me.

We entered the grim palace by the shore through an imposing archway, and mounted a broad staircase. In a lofty room, giving off the upper gallery round the central court of the Casa Riego, Carlos lay in a great bed. I stood before him, having pushed aside Tomas Castro, who had been cautiously scratching the great brilliant mahogany panels with a dirty finger-nail.

"Damnation, Carlos!" I said. "This is the third of your treacheries. What do you want with me?"

You might well have imagined he was a descendant of the Cid Campeador, only to look at him lying there without a quiver of a feature, his

face stainlessly white, a little bluish in extreme lack of blood, with all the nobility of death upon it, like an alabaster effigy of an old knight in a cathedral. On the red-velvet hangings of the bed was an immense coat-of-arms, worked in silk and surrounded by a collar, with the golden sheep hanging from the ring. The shield was patched in with an immense number of quarterings — lions rampant, leopards courant, fleurs de lis, castles, eagles, hands, and arms. His eyes opened slowly, and his face assumed an easy, languorous smile of immense pleasure.

“Ah, Juan,” he said, “se bienvenido, be welcome, be welcome.”

Castro caught me roughly by the shoulder, and gazed at me with blazing, yellow eyes.

“You should not speak roughly to him,” he said. “English beast! He is dying.”

“No, I won’t speak roughly to him,” I answered. “I see.”

I did see. At first I had been suspicious; it might have been put on to mollify me. But one could not put on that blueness of tinge, that extra — nearly final — touch of the chisel to the lines round the nose, that air of restfulness that nothing any more could very much disturb. There was no doubt that Carlos was dying.

“Treacheries — no. You had to come,” he said suddenly. “I need you. I am glad, dear Juan.” He waved a thin long hand a little towards mine. “You shall not long be angry. It had to be done — you must forgive the means.”

His air was so gay, so uncomplaining, that it was hard to believe it came from him.

“You could not have acted worse if you had owed me a grudge, Carlos,” I said. “I want an explanation. But I don’t want to kill you. . . .”

“Oh, no, oh, no,” he said; “in a minute I will tell.”

He dropped a gold ball into a silver basin that was by the bedside, and it sounded like a great bell. A nun in a sort of coif that took the lines of a buffalo’s horns glided to him with a gold cup, from which he drank, raising himself a little. Then the religious went out with Tomas Castro, who gave me a last ferocious glower from his yellow eyes. Carlos smiled.

“They try to make my going easy,” he said. “Vamos! The pillow is smooth for him who is well loved.” He shut his eyes. Suddenly he said, “Why do you, alone, hate me, John Kemp? What have I done?”

“God knows I don’t hate you, Carlos,” I answered.

“You have always mistrusted me,” he said. “And yet I am, perhaps, nearer to you than many of your countrymen, and I have always wished you well, and you have always hated and mistrusted me. From the very first you mistrusted me. Why?”

It was useless denying it; he had the extraordinary incredulity of his kind. I remembered how I had idolized him as a boy at home.

“Your brother-in-law, my cousin Rooksby, was the very first to believe that I was a pirate. I, a vulgar pirate! I, Carlos Riego! Did he not believe it — and you?” He glanced a little ironically, and lifted a thin white finger towards the great coat-of-arms. “That sort of thing,” he said, “amigo mio, does not allow one to pick pockets.” He suddenly turned a little to one side, and fixed me with his clear eyes. “My friend,” he said, “if I told you that Rooksby and your greatest Kent earls carried smugglers’ tubs, you would say I was an ignorant fool. Yet they, too, are magistrates. The only use I have ever made of these ruffians was to-day, to bring you here. It was a necessity. That O’Brien had gone on to take you when you arrived. You would never have come alive out of Havana. I was saving your life. Once there, you could never have escaped from that man.”

I saw suddenly that this might be the truth. There had been something friendly in Tomas Castro’s desire not to compromise me before the people on board the ship. Obviously he had been acting a part, with a visible contempt for the pilfering that he could not prevent. He had been sent merely to bring me to Rio Medio.

“I never disliked you,” I protested. “I do not understand what you mean. All I know is, that you have used me ill — outrageously ill. You have saved my life now, you say. That may be true; but why did you ever make me meet with that man O’Brien?”

“And even for that you should not hate me,” he said, shaking his head on the silk pillows. “I never wished you anything but well, Juan, because you were honest and young, of noble blood, good to look upon; you had done me and my friend good service, to your own peril, when my own cousin had deserted me. And I loved you for the sake of another. I loved your sister. We have a proverb: ‘A man is always good to the eyes in which the sister hath found favour.’”

I looked at him in amazement. “You loved Veronica!” I said. “But Veronica is nothing at all. There was the Señorita.”

He smiled wearily. "Ah, the Señorita; she is very well; a man could love her, too. But we do not command love, my friend."

I interrupted him. "I want to know why you brought me here. Why did you ask me to come here when we were on board the Thames?"

He answered sadly, "Ah, then! Because I loved your sister, and you reminded me always of her. But that is all over now — done with for good.... I have to address myself to dying as it becomes one of my race to die." He smiled at me. "One must die in peace to die like a Christian. Life has treated me rather scurvily, only the gentleman must not repine like a poor man of low birth. I would like to do a good turn to the friend who is the brother of his sister, to the girl-cousin whom I do not love with love, but whom I understand with affection — to the great inheritance that is not for my wasted hands."

I looked out of the open door of the room. There was the absolutely quiet inner court of the palace, a colonnade of tall square pillars, in the centre the little thread of a fountain. Round the fountain were tangled bushes of flowers — enormous geraniums, enormous hollyhocks, a riot of orange marigolds.

"How like our flowers at home!" I said mechanically.

"I brought the seeds from there — from your sister's garden," he said.

I felt horribly hipped. "But all these things tell me nothing," I said, with an attempt towards briskness.

"I have to husband my voice." He closed his eyes.

There is no saying that I did not believe him; I did, every word. I had simply been influenced by Rooksby's suspicions. I had made an ass of myself over that business on board the Thames. The passage of Carlos and his faithful Tomas had been arranged for by some agent of O'Brien in London, who was in communication with Ramon and Rio Medio. The same man had engaged Nichols, that Nova Scotian mate, an unscrupulous sailor, for O'Brien's service. He was to leave the ship in Kingston, and report himself to Ramon, who furnished him with the means to go to Cuba. That man, seeing me intimate with two persons going to Rio Medio, had got it into his head that I was going there, too. And, very naturally, he did not want an Englishman for a witness of his doings.

But Rooksby's behaviour, his veiled accusations, his innuendoes against Carlos, had influenced me more than anything else. I remembered a hundred little things now that I knew that Carlos loved Veronica. I

understood Rooksby's jealous impatience, Veronica's friendly glances at Carlos, the fact that Rooksby had proposed to Veronica on the very day that Carlos had come again into the neighbourhood with the runners after him. I saw very well that there was no more connection between the Casa Riego and the rascality of Rio Medio than there was between Ralph himself and old drunken Rangsley on Hythe beach. There was less, perhaps.

"Ah, you have had a sad life, my Carlos," I said, after a long time.

He opened his eyes, and smiled his brave smile. "Ah, as to that," he said, "one kept on. One has to husband one's voice, though, and not waste it over lamentations. I have to tell you — ah, yes...." He paused and fixed his eyes upon me. "Figure to yourself that this house, this town, an immense part of this island, much even yet in Castile itself, much gold, many slaves, a great name — a very great name — are what I shall leave behind me. Now think that there is a very noble old man, one who has been very great in the world, who shall die very soon; then all these things shall go to a young girl. That old man is very old, is a little foolish with age; that young girl knows very little of the world, and is very passionate, very proud, very helpless.

"Add, now, to that a great menace — a very dangerous, crafty, subtle personage, who has the ear of that old man; whose aim it is to become the possessor of that young girl and of that vast wealth. The old man is much subject to the other. Old men are like that, especially the very great. They have many things to think of; it is necessary that they rely on somebody. I am, in fact, speaking of my uncle and the man called O'Brien. You have seen him." Carlos spoke in a voice hardly above a whisper, but he stuck to his task with indomitable courage. "If I die and leave him here, he will have my uncle to himself. He is a terrible man. Where would all that great fortune go? For the re-establishing of the true faith in Ireland? Quien sabe? Into the hands of O'Brien, at any rate. And the daughter, too — a young girl — she would be in the hands of O'Brien, too. If I could expect to live, it might be different. That is the greatest distress of all." He swallowed painfully, and put his frail hand on to the white ruffle at his neck. "I was in great trouble to find how to thwart this O'Brien. My uncle went to Kingston because he was persuaded it was his place to see that the execution of those unhappy men was conducted with due humanity. O'Brien came with us as his secretary. I was in the greatest horror of mind. I prayed for guidance. Then my eyes fell upon you, who were pressed against our very carriage

wheels. It was like an answer to my prayers.” Carlos suddenly reached out and caught my hand.

I thought he was wandering, and I was immensely sorry for him. He looked at me so wistfully with his immense eyes. He continued to press my hand.

“But when I saw you,” he went on, after a time, “it had come into my head, ‘That is the man who is sent in answer to my prayers.’ I knew it, I say. If you could have my cousin and my lands, I thought, it would be like my having your sister — not quite, but good enough for a man who is to die in a short while, and leave no trace but a marble tomb. Ah, one desires very much to leave a mark under God’s blessed sun, and to be able to know a little how things will go after one is dead.... I arranged the matter very quickly in my mind. There was the difficulty of O’Brien. If I had said, ‘Here is the man who is to marry my cousin,’ he would have had you or me murdered; he would stop at nothing. So I said to him very quietly, ‘Look here, Señor Secretary, that is the man you have need of to replace your Nichols — a devil to fight; but I think he will not consent without a little persuasion. Decoy him, then, to Ramon’s, and do your persuading.’ O’Brien was very glad, because he thought that at last I was coming to take an interest in his schemes, and because it was bringing humiliation to an Englishman. And Sera-phina was glad, because I had often spoken of you with enthusiasm, as very fearless and very honourable. Then I made that man Ramon decoy you, thinking that the matter would be left to me.”

That was what Carlos had expected. But O’Brien, talking with Ramon, had heard me described as an extreme Separationist so positively that he had thought it safe to open himself fully. He must have counted, also, on my youth, my stupidity, or my want of principle. Finding out his mistake, he very soon made up his mind how to act; and Carlos, fearing that worse might befall me, had let him.

But when the young girl had helped me to escape, Carlos, who understood fully the very great risks I ran in going to Havana in the ship that picked me up, had made use of O’Brien’s own picaroons to save me from him. That was the story.

Towards the end his breath came fast and short; there was a flush on his face; his eyes gazed imploringly at me.

“You will stay here, now, till I die, and then — I want you to protect. — — — ” He fell back on the pillows.



## **PART THIRD — CASA RIEGO**



## CHAPTER ONE

All this is in my mind now, softened by distance, by the tenderness of things remembered — the wonderful dawn of life, with all the mystery and promise of the young day breaking amongst heavy thunder-clouds. At the time I was overwhelmed — I can't express it otherwise. I felt like a man thrown out to sink or swim, trying to keep his head above water. Of course, I did not suspect Carlos now; I was ashamed of ever having done so. I had long ago forgiven him his methods. "In a great need, you must," he had said, looking at me anxiously, "recur to desperate remedies." And he was going to die. I had made no answer, and only hung my head — not in resentment, but in doubt of my strength to bear the burden of the great trust that this man whom I loved for his gayety, his recklessness and romance, was going to leave in my inexperienced hands.

He had talked till, at last exhausted, he sank back gently on the pillows of the enormous bed emblazoned like a monument. I went out, following a gray-headed negro, and the nun glided in, and stood at the foot with her white hands folded patiently.

"Señor!" I heard her mutter reproachfully to the invalid.

"Do not scold a poor sinner, Dona Maria," he addressed her feebly, with valiant jocularity. "The days are not many now."

The strangeness and tremendousness of what was happening came over me very strongly whilst, in a large chamber with barred loopholes, I was throwing off the rags in which I had entered this house. The night had come already, and I was putting on some of Carlos' clothes by the many flames of candles burning in a tall bronze candelabrum, whose three legs figured the paws of a lion. And never, since I had gone on the road to wait for the smugglers, and been choked by the Bow Street runners, had I remembered so well the house in which I was born. It was as if, till then, I had never felt the need to look back. But now, like something romantic and glamorous, there came before me Veronica's sweet, dim face, my mother's severe and resolute countenance. I had need of all her resoluteness now. And I remembered the figure of my father in the big chair by the ingle, powerless and lost in his search for rhymes. He might have understood the romance of my situation.

It grew upon me as I thought. Don Balthasar, I understood, was apprised of my arrival. As in a dream, I followed the old negro, who had returned to

the door of my room. It grew upon me in the silence of this colonnaded court. We walked along the upper gallery; his cane tapped before me on the tessellated pavement; below, the water splashed in the marble basins; glass lanterns hung glimmering between the pillars and, in wrought silver frames, lighted the broad white staircase. Under the inner curve of the vaulted gateway a black-faced man on guard, with a bell-mouthed gun, rose from a stool at our passing. I thought I saw Castro's peaked hat and large cloak flit in the gloom into which fell the light from the small doorway of a sort of guardroom near the closed gate. We continued along the arcaded walk; a double curtain was drawn to right and left before me, while my guide stepped aside.

In a vast white apartment three black figures stood about a central glitter of crystal and silver. At once the aged, slightly mechanical voice of Don Balthasar rose thinly, putting himself and his house at my disposition.

The formality of movements, of voices, governed and checked the unbounded emotions of my wonder. The two ladies sank, with a rustle of starch and stiff silks, in answer to my profound bow. I had just enough control over myself to accomplish that, but mentally I was out of breath; and when I felt the slight, trembling touch of Don Balthasar's hand resting on my inclined head, it was as if I had suddenly become aware for a moment of the earth's motion. The hand was gone; his face was averted, and a corpulent priest, all straight and black below his rosy round face, had stepped forward to say a Latin grace in solemn tones that wheezed a little. As soon as he had done he withdrew with a circular bow to the ladies, to Don Balthasar, who inclined his silvery head. His lifeless voice propounded:

"Our excellent Father Antonio, in his devotion, dines by the bedside of our beloved Carlos." He sighed. The heavy carvings of his chair rose upright at his back; he sat with his head leaning forward over his silver plate. A heavy silence fell. Death hovered over that table — and also, as it were, the breath of past ages. The multitude of lights, the polished floor of costly wood, the bare whiteness of walls wainscotted with marble, the vastness of the room, the imposing forms of furniture, carved heavily in ebony, impressed me with a sense of secular and austere magnificence. For centuries there had always been a Riego living in this fortress-like palace, ruling this portion of the New World with the whole majesty of his race. And I thought of the long, loop-holed, buttressed walls that this abode of

noble adventurers presented foursquare to the night outside, standing there by the seashore like a tomb of warlike glories. They built their houses thus, centuries ago, when the bands of buccaneers, indomitable and atrocious, had haunted their conquest with a reminder of mortality and weakness.

It was a tremendous thing for me, this dinner. The portly duenna on my left had a round eye and an irritated, parrot-like profile, crowned by a high comb, a head shaded by black lace. I dared hardly lift my eyes to the dark and radiant presence facing me across a table furniture that was like a display of treasure.

But I did look. She was the girl of the lizard, the girl of the dagger, and, in the solemnity of the silence, she was like a fabulous apparition from a half-forgotten tale. I watched covertly the youthful grace of her features. The curve of her cheek filled me with delight. From time to time she shook the heavy clusters of her curls, and I was amazed, as though I had never before seen a woman's hair. Each parting of her lips was a distinct anticipation of a great felicity; when she said a few words to me, I felt an inward trembling. They were indifferent words.

Had she forgotten she was the girl with the dagger? And the old Don? What did that old man know? What did he think? What did he mean by that touch of a blessing on my head? Did he know how I had come to his house? But every turn of her head troubled my thoughts. The movements of her hands made me forget myself. The gravity of her eyes above the smile of her lips suggested ideas of adoration.

We were served noiselessly. A battalion of young lusty negroes, in blue jackets laced with silver, walked about barefooted under the command of the old major-domo. He, alone, had white silk stockings, and shoes with silver buckles; his wide-skirted maroon velvet coat, with gold on the collar and cuffs, hung low about his thin shanks; and, with a long ebony staff in his hand, he directed the service from behind Don Balthasar's chair. At times he bent towards his master's ear. Don Balthasar answered with a murmur: and those two faces brought close together, one like a noble ivory carving, the other black with the mute pathos of the African faces, seemed to commune in a fellowship of age, of things far off, remembered, lived through together. There was something mysterious and touching in this violent contrast, toned down by the near approach to the tomb — the brotherhood of master and slave.

At a given moment an enormous iron key was brought in on a silver salver, and, bending over the chair, the gray-headed negro laid it by Don Balthasar's plate.

"Don Carlos' orders," he muttered.

The old Don seemed to wake up; a little colour mounted to his cheeks.

"There was a time, young caballero, when the gates of Casa Riego stood open night and day to the griefs and poverty of the people, like the doors of a church — and as respected. But now it seems . . ."

He mumbled a little peevishly, but seemed to recollect himself. "The safety of his guest is like the breath of life to a Castilian," he ended, with a benignant but attentive look at me.

He rose, and we passed out through the double lines of the servants ranged from table to door. By the splash of the fountain, on a little round table between two chairs, stood a many-branched candlestick. The duenna sat down opposite Don Balthasar. A multitude of stars was suspended over the breathless peace of the court.

"Señorita," I began, mustering all my courage, and all my Spanish, "I do not know — — —"

She was walking by my side with upright carriage and a nonchalant step, and shut her fan smartly.

"Don Carlos himself had given me the dagger," she said rapidly.

The fan flew open; a touch of the wind fanning her person came faintly upon my cheek with a suggestion of delicate perfume.

She noticed my confusion, and said, "Let us walk to the end, Señor."

The old man and the duenna had cards in their hands now. The intimate tone of her words ravished me into the seventh heaven.

"Ah," she said, when we were out of ear-shot, "I have the spirit of my house; but I am only a weak girl. We have taken this resolution because of your hidal-guidad, because you are our kinsman, because you are English. Ay de mi! Would I had been a man. My father needs a son in his great, great age. Poor father! Poor Don Carlos!"

There was the catch of a sob in the shadow of the end gallery. We turned back, and the undulation of her walk seemed to throw me into a state of exaltation.

"On the word of an Englishman — — —" I began.

The fan touched my arm. The eyes of the duenna glittered over the cards.

“This woman belongs to that man, too,” muttered Seraphina. “And yet she used to be faithful — almost a mother. Misericordia! Señor, there is no one in this unhappy place that he has not bought, corrupted, frightened, or bent to his will — to his madness of hate against England. Of our poor he has made a rabble. The bishop himself is afraid.”

Such was the beginning of our first conversation in this court suggesting the cloistered peace of a convent. We strolled to and fro; she dropped her eyelids, and the agitation of her mind, pictured in the almost fierce swiftness of her utterance, made a wonderful contrast to the leisurely rhythm of her movements, marked by the slow beating of the fan. The retirement of her father from the world after her mother’s death had made a great solitude round his declining years. Yes, that sorrow, and the base intrigues of that man — a fugitive, a hanger-on of her mother’s family — recommended to Don Balthasar’s grace by her mother’s favour. Yes! He had, before she died, thrown his baneful influence even upon that saintly spirit, by the piety of his practices and these sufferings for his faith he always paraded. His faith! Oh, hypocrite, hypocrite, hypocrite! His only faith was hate — the hate of England. He would sacrifice everything to it. He would despoil and ruin his greatest benefactors, this fatal man!

“Señor, my cousin,” she said picturesquely, “he would, if he could, drop poison into every spring of clear water in your country. . . . Smile, Don Juan.”

Her repressed vehemence had held me spellbound, and the silvery little burst of laughter ending her fierce tirade had the bewildering effect of a crash on my mind. The other two looked up from their cards.

“I pretend to laugh to deceive that woman,” she explained quickly. “I used to love her.”

She had no one now about her she could trust or love. It was as if the whole world were blind to the nefarious nature of that man. He had possessed himself of her little father’s mind. I glanced towards the old Don, who at that moment was brokenly taking a pinch of snuff out of a gold snuff-box, while the duenna, very sallow and upright, waited, frowning loftily at her cards.

“It seemed as if nothing could restrain that man,” Seraphina’s voice went on by my side, “neither fear nor gratitude.” He seemed to cast a spell upon people. He was the plenipotentiary of a powerful religious order — no matter. Don Carlos knew these things better than she did. He had the ear of

the Captain-General through that. "Sh! But the intrigues, the intrigues!" I saw her little hand clenched on the closed fan. There were no bounds to his audacity. He wasted their wealth. "The audacity!" He had overawed her father's mind; he claimed descent from his Irish kings, he who — — — "Señor, my English cousin, he even dares aspire to my person."

The game of cards was over.

"Death rather," she let fall in a whisper of calm resolution.

She dropped me a deep curtsey. Servants were ranging themselves in a row, holding upright before their black faces wax lights in tall silver candlesticks inherited from the second Viceroy of Mexico. I bowed profoundly, with indignation on her behalf and horror in my breast; and, turning away from me, she sank low, bending her head to receive her father's blessing. The major-domo preceded the cortège. The two women moved away with an ample rustling of silk, and with lights carried on each side of their black, stiff figures. Before they had disappeared up the wide staircase, Don Balthasar, who had stood perfectly motionless with his old face over his snuff-box, seemed to wake up, and made in the air a hasty sign of the cross after his daughter.

They appeared again in the upper gallery between the columns. I saw her head, draped in lace, carried proudly, with the white flower in her hair. I raised my eyes. All my being seemed to strive upwards in that glance. Had she turned her face my way just a little? Illusion! And the double door above closed with an echoing sound along the empty galleries. She had disappeared.

Don Balthasar took three turns in the courtyard, no more. It was evidently a daily custom. When he withdrew his hand from my arm to tap his snuff-box, we stood still till he was ready to slip it in again. This was the strangest part of it, the most touching, the most startling — that he should lean like this on me, as if he had done it for years. Before me there must have been somebody else. Carlos? Carlos, no doubt. And in this placing me in that position there was apparent the work of death, the work of life, of time, the pathetic realization of an inevitable destiny. He talked a little disjointedly, with the uncertain swaying of a shadow on his thoughts, as if the light of his mind had flickered like an expiring lamp. I remember that once he asked me, in a sort of senile worry, whether I had ever heard of an Irish king called Brian Boru; but he did not seem to attach any importance

to my reply, and spoke no more till he said good-night at the door of my chamber.

He went on to his apartment, surrounded by lights and preceded by his major-domo, who walked as bowed with age as himself; but the African had a firmer step.

I watched him go; there was about his progress in state something ghostlike and royal, an old-time, decayed majesty. It was as if he had arisen before me after a hundred years' sleep in his retreat — that man who, in his wild and passionate youth, had endangered the wealth of the Riegos, had been the idol of the Madrid populace, and a source of dismay to his family. He had carried away, *vi et armis*, a nun from a convent, incurring the enmity of the Church and the displeasure of his sovereign. He had sacrificed all his fortune in Europe to the service of his king, had fought against the French, had a price put upon his head by a special proclamation. He had known passion, power, war, exile, and love. He had been thanked by his returned king, honoured for his wisdom, and crushed with sorrow by the death of his young wife — Seraphina's mother.

What a life! And what was my arm — my arm on which he had leaned in his decay? I looked at it with a sort of surprise, dubiously. What was expected of it? I asked myself. Would it have the strength? Ah, let her only lean on it!

It seemed to me that I would have the power to shake down heavy pillars of stone, like Samson, in her service; to reach up and take the stars, one by one, to lay at her feet. I heard a sigh. A shadow appeared in the gallery.

The door of my room was open. Leaning my back against the balustrade, I saw the black figure of the Father Antonio, muttering over his breviary, enter the space of the light.

He crossed himself, and stopped with a friendly, "You are taking the air, my son. The night is warm." He was rubicund, and his little eyes looked me over with priestly mansuetude.

I said it was warm indeed. I liked him instinctively.

He lifted his eyes to the starry sky. "The orbs are shining excessively," he said; then added, "To the greater glory of God. One is never tired of contemplating this sublime spectacle."

"How is Don Carlos, your reverence?" I asked.

"My beloved penitent sleeps," he answered, peering at me benevolently; "he reposes. Do you know, young caballero, that I have been a prisoner of

war in your country, and am acquainted with Londres? I was chaplain of the ship San José at the battle of Trafalgar. On my soul, it is, indeed, a blessed, fertile country, full of beauty and of well-disposed hearts. I have never failed since to say every day an especial prayer for its return to our holy mother, the Church. Because I love it.”

I said nothing to this, only bowing; and he laid a short, thick hand on my shoulder.

“May your coming amongst us, my son, bring calmness to a Christian soul too much troubled with the affairs of this world.” He sighed, nodded to me with a friendly, sad smile, and began to mutter his prayers as he went.



## CHAPTER TWO

Don Balthasar accepted my presence without a question. Perhaps he fancied he had invited me; of my manner of coming he was ignorant, of course. O'Brien, who had gone on to Havana in the ship which had landed the Riegos in Rio Medio, gave no sign of life. And yet, on the arrival of the Breeze, he must have found out I was no longer on board. I forgot the danger suspended over my head. For a fortnight I lived as if in a dream.

"What is the action you want me to take, Carlos?"

I asked one day.

Propped up with pillows, he looked at me with the big eyes of his emaciation.

"I would like best to see you marry my cousin. Once before a woman of our race had married an Englishman. She had been happy. English things last forever — English peace, English power, English fidelity. It is a country of much serenity, of order, of stable affection. . . ."

His voice was very weak and full of faith. I remained silent, overwhelmed at this secret of my innermost heart, voiced by his bloodless lips — as if a dream had come to pass, as if a miracle had taken place. He added, with an indefinable smile of an almost unearthly wistfulness:

"I would have married your sister, my Juan."

He had on him the glamour of things English — of English power emerging from the dust of wars and revolution; of England stable and undismayed, like a strong man who had kept his feet in the tottering of secular edifices shaken to their foundations by an earthquake. It was as if for him that were something fine, something romantic, just as for me romance had always seemed to be embodied in his features, in his glance, and to live in the air he breathed. On the other side of the bed the old Don, lost in a high-backed armchair, remained plunged in that meditation of the old which resembles sleep, as sleep resembles death. The priest, lighted up by the narrow, bright streak of the window, was reading his breviary through a pair of enormous spectacles. The white coif of the nun hovered in distant corners of the room.

We were constantly talking of O'Brien. He was the only subject of all our conversations; and when Carlos inveighed against the Intendente, the old Don nodded sadly in his chair. He was dishonouring the name of the Riegos, Carlos would exclaim feebly, turning his head towards his uncle.

His uncle's own province, the name of his own town, stood for a refuge of the scum of the Antilles. It was a shameful sanctuary. Every ruffian, rascal, murderer, and thief of the West Indies had come to think of this ancient and honourable town as a safe haven.

I myself could very well remember the Jamaica household expression, "The Rio Medio piracies," and all these paragraphs in the home papers that reached us a month old headed, "The Activity of the So-called Mexican Privateers," and urging upon our Government the necessity of energetic remonstrances in Madrid. "The fact, incredible as it may appear," said the writers, "seeming to be that the nest of these Picaroons is actually within the loyal dominions of the Spanish Crown." If Spain, our press said, resented our recognition of South American independence, let it do so openly, not by countenancing criminals. It was unworthy of a great nation. "Our West Indian trade is being stabbed in the back," declaimed the Bristol Mirror. "Where is our fleet?" it asked. "If the Cuban authorities are unable or unwilling, let us take the matter in our own hands."

There was a great deal of mystery about this peculiar outbreak of lawlessness that seemed to be directed so pointedly against the British trade. The town of Rio Medio was alluded to as one of the unapproachable towns of the earth — closed, like the capital of Prester John to the travellers, or Mecca to the infidels. Nobody I ever met in Jamaica had set eyes on the place. The impression prevailed that no stranger could come out of it alive. Incredible stories were told of it in the island, and indignation at its existence grew at home and in the colonies.

Admiral Rowley, an old fighter, grown a bit lazy, no diplomatist (the stories of his being venal, I take it, were simply abominable calumnies), unable to get anything out of the Cuban authorities but promises and lofty protestations, had made up his mind, under direct pressure from home, to take matters into his own hands. His boat attack had been a half-and-half affair, for all that. He intended, he had said, to go to the bottom of the thing, and find out what there was in the place; but he could not believe that anybody would dare offer resistance to the boats of an English squadron. They were sent in as if for an exploration rather than for an armed landing.

It ended in a disaster, and a sense of wonder had been added to the mystery of the fabulous Rio Medio organization. The Cuban authorities protested against the warlike operations attempted in a friendly country; at

the same time, they had delivered the seven pirates — the men whom I saw hanged in Kingston. And Rowley was recalled home in disgrace.

It was my extraordinary fate to penetrate into this holy city of the last organized piracy the world would ever know. I beheld it with my eyes; I had stood on the point behind the very battery of guns which had swept Rowley's boats out of existence.

The narrow entrance faced, across the water, the great portal of the cathedral. Rio Medio had been a place of some splendour in its time. The ruinous heavy buildings clung to the hillsides, and my eyes plunged into a broad vista of an empty and magnificent street. Behind many of the imposing and escutcheoned frontages there was nothing but heaps of rubble; the footsteps of rare passers-by woke lonely echoes, and strips of grass outlined in parallelograms the flagstones of the roadway. The Casa Riego raised its buttressed and loop-holed bulk near the shore, resembling a defensive outwork; on my other hand the shallow bay, vast, placid, and shining, extended itself behind the strip of coast like an enormous lagoon. The fronds of palm-clusters dotted the beach over the glassy shimmer of the far distance. The dark and wooded slopes of the hills closed the view inland on every side.

Under the palms the green masses of vegetation concealed the hovels of the rabble. There were three so-called 'villages' at the bottom of the bay; and that good Catholic and terrible man, Señor Juez O'Brien, could with a simple nod send every man in them to the gallows.

The respectable population of Rio Medio, leading a cloistered existence in the ruins of old splendour, used to call that thievish rabble *Lugarenos* — villagers. They were sea-thieves, but they were dangerous. At night, from these clusters of hovels surrounded by the banana plantations, there issued a villainous noise, the humming of hived scoundrels. Lights twinkled. One could hear the thin twanging of guitars, uproarious songs, all the sounds of their drinking, singing, gambling, quarrelling, love-making, squalor. Sometimes the long shriek of a woman rent the air, or shouting tumults rose and subsided; while, on the other side of the cathedral, the houses of the past, the houses without life, showed no light and made no sound.

There would be no strollers on the beach in the daytime; the masts of the two schooners (bought in the United States by O'Brien to make war with on the British Empire) appeared like slender sticks far away up the empty stretch of water; and that gathering of ruffians, thieves, murderers, and

runaway slaves slept in their noisome dens. Their habits were obscene and nocturnal. Cruel without hardihood, and greedy without courage, they were no skull-and-crossbones pirates of the old kind, that, under the black flag, neither gave nor expected quarter. Their usual practice was to hang in rowboats round some unfortunate ship becalmed in sight of their coast, like a troop of vultures hopping about the carcass of a dead buffalo on a plain. When they judged the thing was fairly safe, they would attack with a great noise and show of ferocity; do some hasty looting amongst the cargo; break into the cabins for watches, wearing apparel, and so on; perpetrate at times some atrocity, such as singeing the soles of some poor devil of a ship-master, when they had positive information (from such affiliated helpers as Ramon, the storekeeper in Jamaica) that there was coined money concealed on board; and take themselves off to their sordid revels on shore, and to hold auctions of looted property on the beach. These Were attended by people from the interior of the province, and now and then even the Havana dealers would come on the quiet to secure a few pieces of silk or a cask or two of French wine. Tomas Castro could not mention them without spitting in sign of contempt. And it was with that base crew that O'Brien imagined himself to be making war on the British Empire!

In the time of Nichols it did look as if they were really becoming enterprising. They had actually chased and boarded ships sixty miles out at sea. It seems he had inspired them with audacity by means of kicks, blows, and threats of instant death, after the manner of Bluenose sailors. His long limbs, the cadaverous and menacing aspect, the strange nasal ferocity of tone, something mocking and desperate in his aspect, had persuaded them that this unique sort of heretic was literally in league with the devil. He had been the most efficient of the successive leaders O'Brien had imported to give some sort of effect to his warlike operations. I laugh and wonder as I write these words; but the man did look upon it as a war and nothing else. What he had had the audacity to propose to me had been treason, not thieving. It had a glamour for him which, he supposed, a Separationist (as I had the reputation of being) could not fail to see. He was thinking of enlarging his activity, of getting really in touch with the Mexican Junta of rebels. As he had said, he needed a gentleman now. These were Carlos' surmises.

Before Nichols there had been a rather bloodthirsty Frenchman, but he got himself stabbed in an aguardiente shop for blaspheming the Virgin.

Nichols, as far as I could understand, had really grown scared at O'Brien's success in repulsing Rowley's boats; he had mysteriously disappeared, and neither of the two schooners had been out till the day of my kidnapping, when Castro, by order of Carlos, had taken the command. The freebooters of Rio Medio had returned to their cautious and petty pilfering in boats, from such unlucky ships as the chance of the weather had delivered into their hands. I heard, also, during my walks with Castro (he attended me wrapped in his cloak, and with two pistols in his belt), that there were great jealousies and bickerings amongst that base populace. They were divided into two parties. For instance, the rascals living in the easternmost village accepted tacitly the leadership of a certain Domingo, a mulatto, keeper of a vile grogshop, who was skilled in the art of throwing a knife to a great distance. Man-uel-del-Popolo, the extraordinary improvisador with the guitar, was an aspirant for power with a certain following of his own. Words could not express Castro's scorn for these fellows. Ladrones! vermin of the earth, scum of the sea, he called them.

His position, of course, was exceptional. A dependent of the Riegos, a familiar of the Casa, he was infinitely removed from a Domingo or a Manuel. He lived soberly, like a Spaniard, in some hut in the nearest of the villages, with an old woman who swept the earth floor and cooked his food at an outside fire — his puchero and tortillas — and rolled for him his provision of cigarettes for the day. Every morning he marched up to the Casa, like a courtier, to attend on his king. I never saw him eat or drink anything there. He leaned a shoulder against the wall, or sat on the floor of the gallery with his short legs stretched out near the big mahogany door of Carlos' room, with many cigarettes stuck behind his ears and in the band of his hat. When these were gone he grubbed for more in the depths of his clothing, somewhere near his skin. Puffs of smoke issued from his pursed lips; and the desolation of his pose, the sorrow of his round, wrinkled face, was so great that it seemed were he to cease smoking, he would die of grief.

The general effect of the place was of vitality exhausted, of a body calcined, of romance turned into stone. The still air, the hot sunshine, the white beach curving around the deserted sheet of water, the sombre green of the hills, had the motionlessness of things petrified, the vividness of things painted, the sadness of things abandoned, desecrated. And, as if alone intrusted with the guardianship of life's sacred fire, I was moving amongst them, nursing my love for Sera-phina. The words of Carlos were like oil

upon a flame; it enveloped me from head to foot with a leap. I had the physical sensation of breathing it, of seeing it, of being at the same time driven on and restrained. One moment I strode blindly over the sand, the next I stood still; and Castro, coming up panting, would remark from behind that, on such a hot day as this, it was a shame to disturb even a dog sleeping in the shade. I had the feeling of absolute absorption into one idea. I was ravaged by a thought. It was as if I had never before imagined, heard spoken of, or seen a woman.

It was true. She was a revelation to my eye and my ear, as much as to my heart and mind. Indeed, I seemed never before to have seen a woman. Whom had I seen? Veronica? We had been too poor, and my mother too proud, to keep up a social intercourse with our neighbours; the village girls had been devoid of even the most rustic kind of charm; the people were too poor to be handsome. I had never been tempted to look at a woman's face; and the manner of my going from home is known. In Jamaica, sharing with an exaggerated loyalty the unpopularity of the Mac-donalds, I had led a lonely life; for I had no taste for their friends' society, and the others, after a time, would have nothing to do with me. I had made a sort of hermitage for myself out of a house in a distant plantation, and sometimes I would see no white face for whole weeks together. She was the first woman to me — a strange new being, a marvel as great as Eve herself to Adam's wondering awakening.

It may be that a close intimacy stands in the way of love springing up between two young people, but in our case it was different. My passion seemed to spring from our understanding, because the understanding was in the face of danger. We were like two people in a slowly sinking ship; the feeling of the abyss under our feet was our bond, not the real comprehension of each other. Apart from that, she remained to me always unattainable and romantic? — unique, with all the unexpressed promises of love such as no world had ever known. And naturally, because for me, hitherto, the world had held no woman. She was an apparition of dreams — the girl with the lizard, the girl with the dagger, a wonder to stretch out my hands to from afar; and yet I was permitted to whisper intimately to this my dream, to this vision. We had to put our heads close together, talking of the enemy and of the shadow over the house; while under our eyes Carlos waited for death, made cruel by his anxieties, and the old Don walked in the darkness of his accumulated years.

As to me, what was I to her?

Carlos, in a weak voice, and holding her hand with a feeble and tenacious grasp, had told her repeatedly that the English cousin was ready to offer up his life to her happiness in this world. Many a time she would turn her glance upon me — not a grateful glance, but, as it were, searching and pensive — a glance of penetrating candour, a young girl's glance, that, by its very trustfulness, seems to look one through and through.

And then the sense of my unworthiness made me long for her love as a sinner, in his weakness, longs for the saving grace.

“Our English cousin is worthy of his great nation. He is very brave, and very chivalrous to a poor girl,” she would say softly.

One day, I remember, going out of Carlos' room, she had just paused on the threshold for an almost imperceptible moment, the time to murmur, with feeling, “May Heaven reward you, Don Juan.” This sound, faint and enchanting, like a breath of sweet wind, staggered me. Castro, sitting outside as usual, had scrambled to his feet and stood by, hat in hand, his head bent slightly with saturnine deference. She smiled at him. I think she felt kindly towards the tubby little bandit of a fellow. After all, there was something touching and pathetic in his mournful vigil at the door of our radiant Carlos. I could have embraced that figure of grotesque and truculent devotion. Had she not smiled upon him?

The rest of that memorable day I spent in a state of delightful distraction, as if I had been ravished into the seventh heaven, and feared to be cast out again presently, as my unworthiness deserved. What if it were possible, after all? — this, what Carlos wished, what he had said. The heavens shook; the constellations above the court of Casa Riego trembled at the thought.

Carlos fought valiantly. There were days when his courage seemed to drive the grim presence out of the chamber, where Father Antonio with his breviary, and the white coif of the nun, seemed the only reminders of illness and mortality. Sometimes his voice was very strong, and a sort of hopefulness lighted his wasted features. Don Balthasar paid many visits to his nephew in the course of each day. He sat apparently attentive, and nodding at the name of O'Brien. Then Carlos would talk against O'Brien from amongst his pillows as if inspired, till the old man, striking the floor with his gold-headed cane, would exclaim, in a quavering voice, that he, alone, had made him, had raised him up from the dust, and could abase him to the dust again. He would instantly go to Havana; orders would be given

to Cesar for the journey this very moment. He would then take a pinch of snuff with shaky energy, and lean back in the armchair. Carlos would whisper to me, "He will never leave the Casa again," and an air of solemn, brooding helplessness would fall upon the funereal magnificence of the room. Presently we would hear the old Don muttering dotingly to himself the name of Seraphina's mother, the young wife of his old days, so saintly, and snatched away from him in punishment of his early sinfulness. It was impossible that she should have been deceived in Don Patricio (O'Brien's Christian name was Patrick). The intendente was a man of great intelligence, and full of reverence for her memory. Don Balthasar admitted that he himself was growing old; and, besides, there was that sorrow of his life. . . . He had been fortunate in his affliction to have a man of his worth by his side. There might have been slight irregularities, faults of youth (O'Brien was five-and-forty if a day). The archbishop himself was edified by the life of the upright judge — all Havana, all the island. The intendente's great zeal for the House might have led him into an indiscretion or two. So many years now, so many years. A noble himself. Had we heard of an Irish king? A king . . . king... he could not recall the name at present. It might be well to hear what a man of such abilities had to say for himself.

Carlos and I looked at each other silently. "And his life hangs on a thread," whispered the dying man with something like despair.

The crisis of all these years of plotting would come the moment the old Don closed his eyes. Meantime, why was it that O'Brien did not show himself in Rio Medio? What was it that kept him in Havana?

"Already I do not count, my Juan," Carlos would say. "And he prepares all things for the day of my uncle's death."

The dark ways of that man were inscrutable. He must have known, of course, that I was in Rio Medio. His presence was to be feared, and his absence itself was growing formidable.

"But what do you think he will do? How do you think he will act?" I would ask, a little bewildered by my responsibility.

Carlos could not tell precisely. It was not till some time after his arrival from Europe that he became clearly aware of all the extent of that man's ambition. At the same time, he had realized all his power. That man aimed at nothing less than the whole Riego fortune, and, of course, through Seraphina. I would feel a rage at this — a sort of rage that made my head



spin as if the ground had reeled. "He would have found means of getting rid of me if he had not seen I was not long for this world," Carlos would say. He had gained an unlimited ascendancy over his uncle's mind; he had made a solitude round this solemn dotage in which ended so much power, a great reputation, a stormy life of romance and passion — so picturesque and excessive even in his old man's love, whose after-effect, as though the work of a Nemesis resenting so much brilliance, was casting a shadow upon the fate of his daughter.

Small, fair, plump, concealing his Irish vivacity of intelligence under the taciturn gravity of a Spanish lawyer, and backed by the influence of two noble houses, O'Brien had attained to a remarkable reputation of sagacity and unstained honesty. Hand in glove with the clergy, one of the judges of the Marine Court, procurator to the cathedral chapter, he had known how to make himself so necessary to the highest in the land that everybody but the very highest looked upon him with fear. His occult influence was altogether out of proportion to his official position. His plans were carried out with an unswerving tenacity of purpose. Carlos believed him capable of anything but a vulgar speculation. He had been reduced to observe his action quietly, hampered by the weakness of ill-health. As an instance of O'Brien's methods, he related to me the manner in which, faithful to his purpose of making a solitude about the Riegos, he had contrived to prevent overtures for an alliance from the Salazar family. The young man Don Vincente himself was impossible, an evil liver, Carlos said, of dissolute habits. Still, to have even that shadow of a rival out of the way, O'Brien took advantage of a sanguinary affray between that man and one of his boon companions about some famous guitar-player girl. The encounter having taken place under the wall of a convent, O'Brien had contrived to keep Don Vincente in prison ever since — not on a charge of murder (which for a young man of that quality would have been a comparatively venial offence), but of sacrilege. The Salazars were a powerful family, but he was strong enough to risk their enmity. "Imagine that, Juan!" Carlos would exclaim, closing his eyes. What had caused him the greatest uneasiness was the knowledge that Don Balthasar had been induced lately to write some letter to the archbishop in Havana. Carlos was afraid it was simply an expression of affection and unbounded trust in his intendente, practically dictated to the old man by O'Brien. "Do you not see, Juan, how such a letter would strengthen his case, should he ask the guardians for Seraphina's hand?" And

perhaps he was appointed one of the guardians himself. It was impossible to know what, were the testamentary dispositions; Father Antonio, who had learned many things in the confessional, could tell us nothing, but, when the matter was mentioned, only rolled his eyes up to heaven in an alarming manner. It was startling to think of all the unholy forces awakened by the temptation of Seraphina's helplessness and her immense fortune. Incorruptible himself, that man knew how to corrupt others. There might have been combined in one dark intrigue the covetousness of religious orders, the avarice of high officials — God knows what conspiracy — to help O'Brien's ambition, his passions. He could make himself necessary; he could bribe; he could frighten; he was able to make use of the highest in the land and of the lowest, from the present Captain-General to the Lugarenos. In Havana he had for him the reigning powers; in Rio Medio the lowest outcasts of the island.

This last was the most dangerous aspect of his power for us, and also his weakest point. This was the touch of something fanciful and imaginative; a certain grim childishness in the idea of making war on the British Empire; a certain disregard of risk; a bizarre illusion of his hate for the abhorred Saxon. That he risked his position by his connection with such a nest of scoundrels, there could be no doubt. It was he who had given them such organization as they had, and he stood between them and the law. But whatever might have been suspected of him, he was cautious enough not to go too far. He never appeared personally; his agents directed the action — men who came from Havana rather mysteriously. They were of all sorts; some of them were friars. But the rabble, who knew him really only as the intendente of the great man, stood in the greatest dread of him. Who was it procured the release of some of them who had got into trouble in Havana? The intendente. Who was it who caused six of their comrades, who had been taken up on a matter of street-brawling in the capital, to be delivered to the English as pirates? Again, the intendente, the terrible man, the Juez, who apparently had the power to pardon and condemn.

In this way he was most dangerous to us in Rio Medio. He had that rabble at his beck and call. He could produce a rising of cut-throats by lifting his little finger. He was not very likely to do that, however. He was intriguing in Havana — but how could we unmask him there? "He has cut us off from the world," Carlos would say. "It is so, my Juan, that, if I tried to write, no letter of mine would reach its destination; it would fall into his

hands. And if I did manage to make my voice heard, he would appeal to my uncle himself in his defence.”

Besides, to whom could he write? — who would believe him? O’Brien would deny everything, and go on his way. He had been accepted too long, had served too many people and known so many secrets. It was terrible. And if I went myself to Havana, no one would believe me. But I should disappear; they would never see me again. It was impossible to unmask that man unless by a long and careful action. And for this he — Carlos — had no time; and I — I had no standing, no relations, no skill even....

“But what is my line of conduct, Carlos?” I insisted; while Father Antonio, from whom Carlos had, of course, no secrets, stood by the bed, his round, jolly face almost comical in its expression of compassionate concern.

Carlos passed his thin, wasted hand over a white brow pearly with the sweat of real anguish.

Carlos thought that while Don Balthasar lived, O’Brien would do nothing to compromise his influence over him. Neither could I take any action; I must wait and watch. O’Brien would, no doubt, try to remove me; but as long as I kept within the Casa, he thought I should be safe. He recommended me to try to please his cousin, and even found strength to smile at my transports. Don Balthasar liked me for the sake of his sister, who had been so happy in England. I was his kinsman and his guest. From first to last, England, the idea of my country, of my home, played a great part in my life then; it seemed to rest upon all our thoughts. To me it was but my boyhood, the farm at the foot of the downs — Rooksby’s Manor — all within a small nook between the quarry by the side of the Canterbury road and the shingle beach, whose regular crashing under the feet of a smuggling band was the last sound of my country I had heard. For Carlos it was the concrete image of stability, with the romantic feeling of its peace and of Veronica’s beauty; the unchangeable land where he had loved. To O’Brien’s hate it loomed up immense and odious, like the form of a colossal enemy. Father Antonio, in the naïve benevolence of his heart, prayed each night for its conversion, as if it were a loved sinner. He believed this event to be not very far off accomplishment, and told me once, with an amazing simplicity of certitude, that “there will be a great joy amongst the host of heaven on that day.” It is marvellous how that distant land, from which I had escaped as if from a prison to go in search of

romance, appeared romantic and perfect in these days — all things to all men! With Seraphina I talked of it and its denizens as of a fabulous country. I wonder what idea she had formed of my father, of my mother, my sister — "Señora Dona Veronica Rooksby," she called her — of the landscape, of the life, of the sky. Her eyes turned to me seriously. Once, stooping, she plucked an orange marigold for her hair; and at last we came to talk of our farm as the only perfect refuge for her.

## CHAPTER THREE

One evening Carlos, after a silence of distress, had said, "There's nothing else for it. When the crisis comes, you must carry her off from this unhappiness and misery that hangs over her head. You must take her out of Cuba; there is no safety for her here."

This took my breath away. "But where are we to go, Carlos?" I asked, bending over him.

"To — to England," he whispered.

He was utterly worn out that evening by all the perplexities of his death-bed. He made a great effort and murmured a few words more — about the Spanish ambassador in London being a near relation of the Riegos; then he gave it up and lay still under my amazed eyes. The nun was approaching, alarmed, from the shadows. Father Antonio, gazing sadly upon his beloved penitent, signed me to withdraw.

Castro had not gone away yet; he greeted me in low tones outside the big door.

"Señor," he went on, "I make my report usually to his Señoria Don Carlos; only I have not been admitted to-day into his rooms at all. But what I have to say is for your ear, also. There has arrived a friar from a Havana convent amongst the Lugarenos of the bay. I have known him come like this before."

I remembered that in the morning, while dressing, I had glanced out of the narrow outside window of my room, and had seen a brown, mounted figure passing on the sands. Its sandalled feet dangled against the flanks of a powerful mule.

Castro shook his head. "Malediction on his green eyes! He baptizes the offspring of this vermin sometimes, and sits for hours in the shade before the door of Domingo's posada telling his beads as piously as a devil that had turned monk for the greater undoing of us Christians. These women crowd there to kiss his oily paw. What else they — — — Basta! Only I wanted to tell you, Señor, that this evening (I just come from taking a pasear that way) there is much talk in the villages of an evil-intentioned heretic that has introduced himself into this our town; of an Inglez hungry for men to hang — of you, in short."

The moon, far advanced in its first quarter, threw an ashen, bluish light upon one-half of the courtyard; and the straight shadow upon the other

seemed to lie at the foot of the columns, black as a broad stroke of Indian ink.

“And what do you think of it, Castro?” I asked.

“I think that Domingo has his orders. Manuel has made a song already. And do you know its burden, Señor? Killing is its burden. I would the devil had all these Improvisadores. They gape round him while he twangs and screeches, the wind-bag! And he knows what words to sing to them, too. He has talent. Maladetta!”

“Well, and what do you advise?”

“I advise the senor to keep, now, within the Casa. No songs can give that vermin the audacity to seek the senor here. The gate remains barred; the firearms are always loaded; and Cesar is a sagacious African. But methinks this moon would fall out of the heaven first before they would dare.... Keep to the Casa, I say — I, Tomas Castro.”

He flung the corner of his cloak over his left shoulder, and preceded me to the door of my room; then, after a “God guard you, Señor,” continued along the colonnade. Before I had shut my door it occurred to me that he was going on towards the part of the gallery on which Seraphina’s apartments opened. Why? What could he want there?

I am not so much ashamed of my sudden suspicion of him — one did not know whom to trust — but I am a little ashamed to confess that, kicking off my shoes, I crept out instantly to spy upon him.

This part of the house was dark in the inky flood of shadow; and before I had come to a recess in the wall, I heard the discreet scratching of a fingernail on a door. A streak of light darted and disappeared, like a signal for the murmurs of two voices.

I recognized the woman’s at once. It belonged to one of Seraphina’s maids, a pretty little quadroon — a favourite of hers — called La Chica. She had slipped out, and her twitter-like whispering reached me in the still solemnity of the quadrangle. She addressed Castro as “His Worship” at every second word, for the saturnine little man, in his unbrushed cloak and battered hat, was immensely respected by the household. Had he not been sent to Europe to fetch Don Carlos? He was in the confidence of the masters — their humble friend. The little tire-woman twittered of her mistress. The senorita had been most anxious all day — ever since she had heard the friar had come. Castro muttered:

“Tell the Excellency that her orders have been obeyed. The English caballero has been warned. I have been sleepless in my watchfulness over the guest of the house, as the senorita has desired — for the honour of the Riegos. Let her set her mind at ease.”

The girl then whispered to him with great animation. Did not his worship think that it was the senorita’s heart which was not at ease?

Then the quadrangle became dumb in its immobility, half sheen, half night, with its arcades, the soothing splash of water, with its expiring lights, in a suggestion of Castilian severity, enveloped by the exotic softness of the air.

“What folly!” uttered Castro’s sombre voice. “You women do not mind how many corpses come into your imaginings of love. The mere whisper of such a thing — — —”

She murmured swiftly. He interrupted her.

“Thine eyes, La Chica — thine eyes see only the silliness of thine own heart. Think of thine own lovers, nina. Por Dios!” — he changed to a tone of severe appreciation — ”thy foolish face looks well by moonlight.”

I believe he was chucking her gravely under the chin. I heard her soft, gratified cooing in answer to the compliment; the streak of light flashed on the polished shaft of a pillar; and Castro went on, going round to the staircase, evidently so as not to pass again before my open door.

I forgot to shut it. I did not stop until I was in the middle of my room; and then I stood still for a long time in a self-forgetful ecstasy, while the many wax candles of the high candelabrum burned without a flicker in a rich cluster of flames, as if lighted to throw the splendour of a celebration upon the pageant of my thoughts.

For the honour of the Riegos!

I came to myself. Well, it was sweet to be the object of her anxiety and care, even on these terms — on any terms. And I felt a sort of profound, inexpressible, grateful emotion, as though no one, never, on no day, on no occasion, had taken thought of me before.

I should not be able to sleep. I went to the window, and leaned my forehead on the iron bar. There was no glass; the heavy shutter was thrown open; and, under the faint crescent of the moon I saw a small part of the beach, very white, the long streak of light lying mistily on the bay, and two black shapes, cloaked, moving and stopping all of a piece like pillars, their immensely long shadows running away from their feet, with the points of

the hats touching the wall of the Casa Riego. Another, a shorter, thicker shape, appeared, walking with dignity. It was Castro. The other two had a movement of recoil, then took off their hats.

“Buenas noches, caballeros,” his voice said, with grim politeness. “You are out late.”

“So is your worship. Vaya, Señor, con Dios. We are taking the air.”

They walked away, while Castro remained looking after them. But I, from my elevation, noticed that they had suddenly crouched behind some scrubby bushes growing on the edge of the sand. Then Castro, too, passed out of my sight in the opposite direction, muttering angrily.

I forgot them all. Everything on earth was still, and I seemed to be looking through a casement out of an enchanted castle standing in the dreamland of romance. I breathed out the name of Seraphina into the moonlight in an increasing transport. “Seraphina! Seraphina! Seraphina!” The repeated beauty of the sound intoxicated me. “Seraphina!” I cried aloud, and stopped, astounded at myself. And the moonlight of romance seemed to whisper spitefully from below:

“Death to the traitor! Vengeance for our brothers dead on the English gallows!” “Come away, Manuel.”

“No. I am an artist. It is necessary for my soul...”

“Be quiet!”

Their hissing ascended along the wall from under the window. The two Lugarenos had stolen in unnoticed by me. There was a stifled metallic ringing, as of a guitar carried under a cloak.

“Vengeance on the heretic Inglez!”

“Come away! They may suddenly open the gate and fall upon us with sticks.”

“My gentle spirit is roused to the accomplishment of great things. I feel in me a valiance, an inspiration. I am no vulgar seller of aguardiente, like Domingo. I was born to be the capataz of the Lugarenos.”

“We shall be set upon and beaten, oh, thou Manuel. Come away!”

There were no footsteps, only a noiseless flitting of two shadows, and a distant voice crying:

“Woe, woe, woe to the traitor!”

I had not needed Castro’s warning to understand the meaning of this. O’Brien was setting his power to work, only this Manuel’s restless vanity had taught me exactly how the thing was to be done. The friar had been



exciting the minds of this rabble against me; awakening their suspicions, their hatred, their fears.

I remained at the casement, lost in rather sombre reflections. I was now a prisoner within the walls of the Casa. After all, it mattered little. I did not want to go away unless I could carry off Seraphina with me. What a dream! What an impossible dream! Alone, without friends, with no place to go to, without means of going; without, by Heaven, the right of even as much as speaking of it to her. Carlos — Carlos dreamed — a dream of his dying hours. England was so far, the enemy so near; and — Providence itself seemed to have forgotten me.

A sound of panting made me turn my head. Father Antonio was mopping his brow in the doorway. Though a heavy man, he was noiseless of foot. A wheezing would be heard along the dark galleries some time before his black bulk approached you with a gliding motion. He had the outward placidity of corpulent people, a natural artlessness of demeanour which was amusing and attractive, and there was something shrewd in his simplicity. Indeed, he must have displayed much tact and shrewdness to have defeated all O'Brien's efforts to oust him from his position of confessor to the household. What had helped him to hold his ground was that, as he said to me once, "I, too, my son, am a legacy of that truly pious and noble lady, the wife of Don Riego. I was made her spiritual director soon after her marriage, and I may say that she showed more discretion in the choice of her confessor than in that of her man of affairs. But what would you have? The best of us, except for Divine grace, is liable to err; and, poor woman, let us hope that, in her blessed state, she is spared the knowledge of the iniquities going on here below in the Casa."

He used to talk to me in that strain, coming in almost every evening on his way from the sick room. He, too, had his own perplexities, which made him wipe his forehead repeatedly; afterwards he used to spread his red bandanna handkerchief over his knees.

He sympathized with Carlos, his beloved penitent, with Seraphina, his dear daughter, whom he had baptized and instructed in the mysteries of "our holy religion," and he allowed himself often to drop the remark that his "illustrious spiritual son," Don Balthasar, after a stormy life of which men knew only too much, had attained to a state of truly childlike and God-fearing innocence — a sign, no doubt, of Heaven's forgiveness for those

excesses. He ended, always, by sighing heartily, to sit with his gaze on the floor.

That night he came in silently, and after shutting the door with care, took his habitual seat, a broad wooden armchair.

“How did your reverence leave Don Carlos?” I asked.

“Very low,” he said. “The disease is making terrible ravages, and my ministrations — — — I ought to be used to the sight of human misery, but — — —” He raised his hands; a genuine emotion overpowered him; then, uncovering his face to stare at me, “He is lost, Don Juan,” he exclaimed.

“Indeed, I fear we are about to lose him, your reverence,” I said, surprised at this display. It seemed inconceivable that he should have been in doubt up to this very moment.

He rolled his eyes painfully. I was forgetting the infinite might of God. Still, nothing short of a miracle — — — But what had we done to deserve miracles?

“Where is the ancient piety of our forefathers which made Spain so great?” he apostrophized the empty air, a little wildly, as if in distraction. “No, Don Juan; even I, a true servant of our faith, am conscious of not having had enough grace for my humble ministrations to poor sailors and soldiers — men naturally inclined to sin, but simple. And now — there are two great nobles, the fortune of a great house....”

I looked at him and wondered, for he was, in a manner, wringing his hands, as if in immense distress.

“We are all thinking of that poor child — mas que, Don Juan, imagine all that wealth devoted to the iniquitous purposes of that man. Her happiness sacrificed.”

“I cannot imagine this — I will not,” I interrupted, so violently that he hushed me with both hands uplifted.

“To these wild enterprises against your own country,” he went on vehemently, disregarding my exasperated and contemptuous laugh. “And she herself, the niña I have baptized her; I have instructed her; and a more noble disposition, more naturally inclined to the virtues and proprieties of her sex — — — But, Don Juan, she has pride, which doubtless is a gift of God, too, but it is made a snare of by Satan, the roaring lion, the thief of souls. And what if her feminine rashness — women are rash, my son,” he interjected with unction — ”and her pride were to lead her into — I am

horrified at the thought — into an act of mortal sin for which there is no repentance?”

“Enough!” I shouted at him.

“No repentance,” he repeated, rising to his feet excitedly, and I stood before him, my arms down my sides, with my fists clenched.

Why did the stupid priest come to talk like this to me, as if I had not enough of my own unbearable thoughts?

He sat down and began to flourish his handkerchief. There was depicted on his broad face — depicted simply and even touchingly — the inward conflict of his benevolence and of his doubts.

“I observe your emotion, my son,” he said. I must have been as pale as death. And, after a pause, he meditated aloud, “And, after all, you English are a reverent nation. You, a scion of the nobility, have been brought up in deplorable rebellion against the authority of God on this earth; but you are not a scoffer — not a scoffer. I, a humble priest — — — But, after all, the Holy Father himself, in his inspired wisdom — — — I have prayed to be enlightened....”

He spread the square of his damp handkerchief on his knees, and bowed his head. I had regained command over myself, but I did not understand in the least. I had passed from my exasperation into a careworn fatigue of mind that was like utter darkness.

“After all,” he said, looking up naively, “the business of us priests is to save souls. It is a solemn time when death approaches. The affairs of this world should be cast aside. And yet God surely does not mean us to abandon the living to the mercy of the wicked.”

A sadness came upon his face, his eyes; all the world seemed asleep. He made an effort. “My son,” he said with decision, “I call you to follow me to the bedside of Don Carlos at this very hour of night. I, a humble priest, the unworthy instrument of God’s grace, call upon you to bring him a peace which my ministrations cannot give. His time is near.”

I rose up, startled by his solemnity, by the hint of hidden significance in these words.

“Is he dying now?” I cried.

“He ought to detach his thoughts from this earth; and if there is no other way — — —”

“What way? What am I expected to do?”

“My son, I had observed your emotion. We, the appointed confidants of men’s frailties, are quick to discern the signs of their innermost feelings. Let me tell you that my cherished daughter in God, Señorita Dona Seraphina Riego, is with Don Carlos, the virtual head of the family, since his Excellency Don Balthasar is in a state of, I may say, infantile innocence.”

“What do you mean, father?” I faltered.

“She is waiting for you with him,” he pronounced, looking up. And as his solemnity seemed to have deprived me of my power to move, he added, with his ordinary simplicity, “Why, my son, she is, I may say, not wholly indifferent to your person.”

I could not have dropped more suddenly into the chair had the good padre discharged a pistol into my breast. He went away; and when I leapt up, I saw a young man in black velvet and white ruffles staring at me out of the large mirror set frameless into the wall, like the apparition of a Spanish ghost with my own English face.

When I ran out, the moon had sunk below the ridge of the roof; the whole quadrangle of the Casa had turned black under the stars, with only a yellow glimmer of light falling into the well of the court from the lamp under the vaulted gateway. The form of the priest had gone out of sight, and a far-away knocking, mingling with my footfalls, seemed to be part of the tumult within my heart. Below, a voice at the gate challenged, “Who goes there?” I ran on. Two tiny flames burned before Carlos’ door at the end of the long vista, and two of Seraphina’s maids shrank away from the great mahogany panels at my approach. The candlesticks trembled askew in their hands; the wax guttered down, and the taller of the two girls, with an uncovered long neck, gazed at me out of big sleepy eyes in a sort of dumb wonder. The teeth of the plump little one — La Chica — rattled violently like castanets. She moved aside with a hysterical little laugh, and glanced upwards at me.

I stopped, as if I had intruded; of all the persons in the sick-room, not one turned a head. The stillness of the lights, of things, of the air, seemed to have passed into Seraphina’s face. She stood with a stiff carriage under the heavy hangings of the bed, looking very Spanish and romantic in her short black skirt, a black lace shawl enveloping her head, her shoulders, her arms, as low as the waist. Her bare feet, thrust into high-heeled slippers, lent to her presence an air of flight, as if she had run into that room in distress or fear. Carlos, sitting up amongst the snowy pillows of eider-down at his back, was not speaking to her. He had done; and the flush on his cheek, the

eager lustre of his eyes, gave him an appearance of animation, almost of joy, a sort of consuming, flame-like brilliance. They were waiting for me. With all his eagerness and air of life, all he could do was to lift his white hand an inch or two off the silk coverlet that spread over his limbs smoothly, like a vast crimson pall. There was something joyous and cruel in the shimmer of this piece of colour, contrasted with the dead white of the linen, the duskiness of the wasted face, the dark head with no visible body, symbolically motionless. The confused shadows and the tarnished splendour of emblazoned draperies, looped up high under the ceiling, fell in heavy and unstirring folds right down to the polished floor, that reflected the lights like a sheet of water, or rather like ice.

I felt it slippery under my feet. I, alone, had to move, in this great chamber, with its festive patches of colour amongst the funereal shadows, with the expectant, still figures of priest and nun, servants of passionless eternity, as if immobilized and made mute by hostile wonder before the perishable triumph of life and love. And only the impatient tapping of the sick man's hand on the stiff silk of the coverlet was heard.

It called to me. Seraphina's unstirring head was lighted strongly by a two-branched scone on the wall; and when I stood by her side, not even the shadow of the eyelashes on her cheek trembled. Carlos' lips moved; his voice was almost extinct; but for all his emaciation, the profundity of his eyes, the sunken cheeks, the hollow temples, he remained attractive, with the charm of his gallant and romantic temper worn away to an almost unearthly fineness.

He was going to have his desire because, on the threshold of his spiritual inheritance, he refused, or was unable, to turn his gaze away from this world. Father Antonio's business was to save this soul; and with a sort of simple and sacerdotal shrewdness, in which there was much love for his most noble penitent, he would try to appease its trouble by a romantic satisfaction. His voice, very grave and profound, addressed me:

"Approach, my son — nearer. We trust the natural feelings of pity which are implanted in every human breast, the nobility of your extraction, the honour of your hidalguidad, and that inextinguishable courage which, as by the unwearied mercy of God, distinguishes the sons of your fortunate and unhappy nation." His bass voice, deepened in solemn utterance, vibrated huskily. There was a rustic dignity in his uncouth form, in his broad face, in the gesture of the raised hand. "You shall promise to respect the dictates of

our conscience, guided by the authority of our faith; to defer to our scruples, and to the procedure of our Church in matters which we believe touch the welfare of our souls.... You promise?"

He waited. Carlos' eyes burned darkly on my face. What were they asking of me? This was nothing. Of course I would respect her scruples — her scruples — if my heart should break. I felt her living intensely by my side; she could be brought no nearer to me by anything they could do, or I could promise. She had already all the devotion of my love and youth, the unreasoning and potent devotion, without a thought or hope of reward. I was almost ashamed to pronounce the two words they expected. "I promise."

And suddenly the meaning pervading this scene, something that was in my mind already, and that I had hardly dared to look at till now, became clear to me in its awful futility against the dangers, in all its remote consequences. It was a betrothal. The priest — Carlos, too — must have known that it had no binding power. To Carlos it was symbolic of his wishes. Father Antonio was thinking of the papal dispensation. I was a heretic. What if it were refused? But what was that risk to me, who had never dared to hope? Moreover, they had brought her there, had persuaded her; she had been influenced by her fears, impressed by Carlos. What could she care for me? And I repeated:

"I promise. I promise, even at the cost of suffering and unhappiness, never to demand anything from her against her conscience."

Carlos' voice sounded weak. "I answer for him, good father." Then he seemed to wander in a whisper, which we two caught faintly, "He resembles his sister, O Divine — — —"

And on this ghostly sigh, on this breath, with the feeble click of beads in the nun's hands, a silence fell upon the room, vast as the stillness of a world of unknown faiths, loves, beliefs, of silent illusions, of unexpressed passions and secret motives that live in our unfathomable hearts.

Seraphina had given me a quick glance — the first glance — which I had rather felt than seen. Carlos made an effort, and, raising himself, put her hand in mine.

Father Antonio, trying to pronounce a short allocution, broke down, naïve in his emotion, as he had been in his dignity. I could at first catch only the words, "Beloved child — Holy Father — poor priest...." He had taken this upon himself; and he would attest the purity of our intentions, the

necessity of the case, the assent of the head of the family, my excellent disposition. All the Englishmen had excellent dispositions. He would, personally, go to the foot of the Holy See — on his knees, if necessary. Meantime, a document — he should at once prepare a justificative document. The archbishop, it is true, did not like him on account of the calumnies of that man O'Brien. But there was, beyond the seas, the supreme authority of the Church, unerring and inaccessible to calumnies.

All that time Seraphina's hand was lying passive in my palm — warm, soft, living; all the life, all the world, all the happiness, the only desire — and I dared not close my grasp, afraid of the vanity of my hopes, shrinking from the intense felicity in the audacious act. Father Antonio — I must say the word — blubbered. He was now only a tender-hearted, simple old man, nothing more.

"Before God now, Don Juan.... I am only a poor priest, but invested with a sacred office, an enormous power. Tremble, Señor, it is a young girl... I have loved her like my own; for, indeed, I have in baptism given her the spiritual life. You owe her protection; it is for that, before God, Señor — — —"

It was as if Carlos had swooned; his eyes were closed, his face like a carving. But gradually the suggestion of a tender and ironic smile appeared on his lips. With a slow effort he raised his arm and his eyelids, in an appeal of all his weariness for my ear. I made a movement to stoop over him, and the floor, the great bed, the whole room, seemed to heave and sway. I felt a slight, a fleeting pressure of Seraphina's hand before it slipped out of mine; I thought, in the beating rush of blood to my temples, that I was going mad.

He had thrown his arm over my neck; there was the calming austerity of death on his lips, that just touched my ear and departed, together with the far-away sound of the words, losing themselves in the remoteness of another world:

"Like an Englishman, Juan."

"On my honour, Carlos."

His arm, releasing my neck, fell stretched out on the coverlet. Father Antonio had mastered his emotion; with the trail of undried tears on his face, he had become a priest again, exalted above the reach of his earthly sorrow by the august concern of his sacerdotal duty.

"Don Carlos, my son, is your mind at ease, now?"

Carlos closed his eyes slowly.

“Then turn all your thoughts to heaven.” Father Antonio’s bass voice rose, aloud, with an extraordinary authority. “You have done with the earth.”

The arm of the nun touched the cords of the curtains» and the massive folds shook and fell expanded, hiding from us the priest and the penitent.



## CHAPTER FOUR

Seraphina and I moved towards the door sadly, as if under the oppression of a memory, as people go back from the side of a grave to the cares of life. No exultation possessed me. Nothing had happened. It had been a sick man's whim.

"Señorita," I said low, with my hand on the wrought bronze of the door-handle, "Don Carlos might have died in full trust of my devotion to you — without this."

"I know it," she answered, hanging her head.

"It was his wish," I said. "And I deferred."

"It was his wish," she repeated.

"Remember he had asked you for no promise."

"Yes, it is you only he has asked. You have remembered it very well, Señor. And you — you ask for nothing."

"No," I said; "neither from your heart nor from your conscience — nor from your gratitude. Gratitude from you! As if it were not I that owe you gratitude for having condescended to stand with your hand in mine — if only for a moment — if only to bring peace to a dying man; for giving me the felicity, the illusion of this wonderful instant, that, all my life, I shall remember as those who are suddenly stricken blind remember the great glory of the sun. I shall live with it, I shall cherish it in my heart to my dying day; and I promise never to mention it to you again."

Her lips were slightly parted, her eyes remained downcast, her head drooped as if in extreme attention.

"I asked for no promise," she murmured coldly.

My heart was heavy. "Thank you for that proof of your confidence," I said. "I am yours without any promises. Wholly yours. But what can I offer? What help? What refuge? What protection? What can I do? I can only die for you. Ah, but this was cruel of Carlos, when he knew that I had nothing else but my poor life to give."

"I accept that," she said unexpectedly. "Señorita, it is generous of you to accept so worthless a gift — a life I value not at all save for one unique memory which I owe to you."

I knew she was looking at me while I swung open the door with a low bow. I did not trust myself to look at her. An unreasonable disenchantment, like the awakening from a happy dream, oppressed me. I felt an almost

angry desire to seize her in my arms — to go back to my dream. If I had looked at her then, I believed I could not have controlled myself.

She passed out; and when I looked up there was O'Brien booted and spurred, but otherwise in his lawyer's black, inclining his dapper figure profoundly before her in the dim gallery. She had stopped short. The two maids, huddled together behind her, stared with terrified eyes. The flames of their candles vacillated very much.

I closed the door quietly. Carlos was done with the earth. This had become my affair; and the necessity of coming to an immediate decision almost deprived me of my power of thinking. The necessity had arisen too swiftly; the arrival of that man acted like the sudden apparition of a phantom. It had been expected, however; only, from the moment we had turned away from Carlos' bedside, we had thought of nothing but ourselves; we had dwelt alone in our emotions, as if there had been no inhabitant of flesh and blood on the earth but we two. Our danger had been present, no doubt, in our minds, because we drew it in with every breath. It was the indispensable condition of our contact, of our words, of our thoughts; it was the atmosphere of our feelings; a something as all-pervading and impalpable as the air we drew into our lungs. And suddenly this danger, this breath of our life, had taken this material form. It was material and expected, and yet it had the effect of an evil spectre, inasmuch as one did not know where and how it was vulnerable, what precisely it would do, how one should defend one's self.

His bow was courtly; his gravity was all in his bearing, which was quiet and confident: the manner of a capable man, the sort of man the great of this earth find invaluable and are inclined to trust. His full-shaven face had a good-natured, almost a good-humored expression, which I have come to think must have depended on the cast of his features, on the setting of his eyes — on some peculiarity not under his control, or else he could not have preserved it so well. On certain occasions, as this one, for instance, it affected me as a refinement of cynicism; and, generally, it was startling, like the assumption of a mask inappropriate to the action and the speeches of the part.

He had journeyed in his customary manner overland from Havana, arriving unexpectedly at night, as he had often done before; only this time he had found the little door, cut out in one of the sides of the big gate, bolted fast. It was his knocking I had heard, as I hurried after the priest. The

major-domo, who had been called up to let him in, told me afterwards that the senior intendente had put no question whatever to him as to this, and had gone on, as usual, towards his own room. Nobody knew what was going on in Carlos' chamber, but, of course, he came upon the two girls at the door. He said nothing to them either, only just stopped there and waited, leaning with one elbow on the balustrade with his good-tempered, gray eyes fixed on the door. He had fully expected to see Seraphina come out presently, but I think he did not count on seeing me as well. When he straightened himself up after the bow, we two were standing side by side.

I had stepped quickly towards her, asking myself what he would do. He did not seem to be armed; neither had I any weapon about me. Would he fly at my throat? I was the bigger, and the younger man. I wished he would. But he found a way of making me feel all his other advantages. He did not recognize my existence. He appeared not to see me at all. He seemed not to be aware of Seraphina's startled immobility, of my firm attitude; but turning his good-humoured face towards the two girls, who appeared ready to sink through the floor before his gaze, he shook his fore-finger at them slightly.

This was all. He was not menacing; he was almost playful; and this gesture, marvellous in its economy of effort, disclosed all the might and insolence of his power. It had the unerring efficacy of an act of instinct. It was instinct. He could not know how he dismayed us by that shake of the finger. The tall girl dropped her candlestick with a clatter, and fled along the gallery like a shadow. La Chica cowered under the wall. The light of her candle just touched dimly the form of a negro boy, waiting passively in the background with O'Brien's saddle-bags over his shoulder.

"You see," said Seraphina to me, in a swift, desolate murmur. "They are all like this — all, all."

Without a change of countenance, without emphasis, he said to her in French:

"Votre père dort sans doute, Señorita."

And she intrepidly replied, "You know very well, Señor Intendente, that nothing can make him open his eyes."

"So it seems," he muttered between his teeth, stooping to pick up the dropped candlestick. It was lying at my feet. I could have taken him at a disadvantage, then; I could have felled him with one blow, thrown myself upon his back. Thus may an athletic prisoner set upon a jailer coming into his cell, if there were not the prison, the locks, the bars, the heavy gates! the

walls, all the apparatus of captivity, and the superior weight of the idea chaining down the will, if not the courage.

It might have been his knowledge of this, or his absolute disdain of me. The unconcerned manner in which he busied himself — his head within striking distance of my fist — in lighting the extinguished candle from the trembling Chica's humiliated me beyond expression. He had some difficulty with that, till he said to her just audibly, "Calm thyself, niña," and she became rigid in her appearance of excessive terror.

He turned then towards Seraphina, candlestick in hand, courteously saying in Spanish:

"May I be allowed to help light you to your door, since that silly Juanita — I think it was Juanita — has taken leave of her senses? She is not fit to remain in your service — any more than this one here."

With a gasp of desolation, La Chica began to sob limply against the wall. I made one step forward; and, holding the candle well up, as though for the purpose of examining my face carefully, he never looked my way, while he and Seraphina were exchanging a few phrases in French which I did not understand well enough to follow.

He was politely interrogatory, it seemed to me. The natural, good-humoured expression never left his face, as though he had a fund of inexhaustible patience for dealing with the unaccountable trifles of a woman's conduct. Seraphina's shawl had slipped off her head. La Chica sidled towards her, sobbing a deep sob now and then, without any sign of tears; and with their scattered hair, their bare arms, the disorder of their attire, they looked like two women discovered in a secret flight for life. Only the mistress stood her ground firmly; her voice was decided; there was resolution in the way one little white hand clutched the black lace on her bosom. Only once she seemed to hesitate in her replies. Then, after a pause he gave her for reflection, he appeared to repeat his question. She glanced at me apprehensively, as I thought, before she confirmed the previous answer by a slow inclination of her head.

Had he allowed himself to make a provoking movement, a dubious gesture of any sort, I would have flung myself upon him at once; but the nonchalant manner in which he looked away, while he extended to me his hand with the candlestick, amazed me. I simply took it from him. He stepped back, with a ceremonious bow for Seraphina. La Chica ran up close to her elbow. I heard her voice saying sadly, "You need fear nothing for

yourself, child”; and they moved away slowly. I remained facing O’Brien, with a vague notion of protecting their retreat.

This time it was I who was holding the light before his face. It was calm and colourless; his eyes were fixed on the ground reflectively, with the appearance of profound and quiet absorption. But suddenly I perceived the convulsive clutch of his hand on the skirt of his coat. It was as if accidentally I had looked inside the man — upon the strength of his illusions, on his desire, on his passion. Now he will fly at me, I thought, with a tremendously convincing certitude. Now — — — All my muscles, stiffening, answered the appeal of that thought of battle.

He said, “Won’t you give me that light?”

And I understood he demanded a surrender.

“I would see you die first where you stand,” was my answer.

This object in my hand had become endowed with moral meaning — significant, like a symbol — only to be torn from me with my life.

He lifted his head; the light twinkled in his eyes. “Oh, I won’t die,” he said, with that bizarre suggestion of humour in his face, in his subdued voice. “But it is a small thing; and you are young; it may be yet worth your while to try and please me — this time.”

Before I could answer, Seraphina, from some little distance, called out hurriedly:

“Don Juan, your arm.”

Her voice, sounding a little unsteady, made me forget O’Brien, and, turning my back on him, I ran up to her. She needed my support; and before us La Chica tottered and stumbled along with the lights, moaning:

“Madré de Dios! What will become of us now! Oh, what will become of us now!”

“You know what he had asked me to let him do,” Seraphina talked rapidly. “I made answer, ‘No; give the light to my cousin.’ Then he said, ‘Do you really wish it, Señorita? I am the older friend.’ I repeated, ‘Give the light to my cousin, Señor.’ He, then, cruelly, ‘For the young man’s own sake, reflect, Señorita.’ And he waited before he asked me again, ‘Shall I surrender it to him?’ I felt death upon my heart, and all my fear for you — there.” She touched her beautiful throat with a swift movement of a hand that disappeared at once under the lace. “And because I could not speak, I — — — Don Juan, you have just offered me your life — I — — —

Misericordia! What else was possible? I made with my head the sign 'Yes.'"

In the stress, hurry, and rapture encompassing my immense gratitude, I pressed her hand to my side familiarly, as if we had been two lovers walking in a lane on a serene evening.

"If you had not made that sign, it would have been worse than death — in my heart," I said. "He had allied me, too, to renounce my trust, my light."

We walked on slowly, accompanied in our sudden silence by the plash of the fountain at the bottom of the great square of darkness on our left, and by the piteous moans of La Chica.

"That is what he meant," said the enchanting voice by my side. "And you refused. That is your valour."

"From no selfish motives," I said, troubled, as if all the great incertitude of my mind had been awakened by the sound that brought so much delight to my heart. "My valour is nothing."

"It has given me a new courage," she said.

"You did not want more," I said earnestly.

"Ah! I was very much alone. It is difficult to — — —"

She hesitated.

"To live alone," I finished.

"More so to die," she whispered, with a new note of timidity. "It is frightful. Be cautious, Don Juan, for the love of God, because I could not — — —"

We stopped. La Chica, silent, as if exhausted, drooped lamentably, with her shoulder against the wall, by Seraphina's door; and the pure crystalline sound of the fountain below, enveloping the parting pause, seemed to wind its coldness round my heart.

"Poor Don Carlos!" she said. "I had a great affection for him. I was afraid they would want me to marry him. He loved your sister."

"He never told her," I murmured. "I wonder if she ever guessed."

"He was poor, homeless, ill already, in a foreign land."

"We all loved him at home," I said.

"He never asked her," she breathed out. "And, perhaps — but he never asked her."

"I have no more force," sighed La Chica, suddenly, and sank down at the foot of the wall, putting the candlesticks on the floor.

“You have been very good to him,” I said; “only he need not have demanded this from you. Of course, I understood perfectly.... I hope you understand, too, that I — — — ”

“Señor, my cousin,” she flashed out suddenly, “do you think that I would have consented only from my affection for him?”

“Señorita,” I cried, “I am poor, homeless, in a foreign land. How can I believe? How can I dare to dream? — unless your own voice — — — ”

“Then you are permitted to ask. Ask, Don Juan.”

I dropped on one knee, and, suddenly extending her arm, she pressed her hand to my lips. Lighted up from below, the picturesque aspect of her figure took on something of a transcendental grace; the unusual upward shadows invested her beauty with a new mystery of fascination. A minute passed. I could hear her rapid breathing above, and I stood up before her, holding both her hands.

“How very few days have we been together,” she whispered. “Juan, I am ashamed.”

“I did not count the days. I have known you always. I have dreamed of you since I can remember — for days, for months, a year, all my life.”

The crash of a heavy door flung to, exploded, filling the galleries all round the patio with the sonorous reminder of our peril.

“Ah! We had forgotten.”

I heard her voice, and felt her form in my arms. Her lips at my ear pronounced:

“Remember, Juan. Two lives, but one death only.”

And she was gone so quickly that it was as though she had passed through the wood of the massive panels.

La Chica crouched on her knees. The lights on the floor burned before her empty stare, and with her bare shoulders the tone of old ivory emerging from the white linen, with wisps of raven hair hanging down her cheeks, the abandonment of her whole person embodied every outward mark and line of desolation.

“What do you fear from him?” I asked.

She looked up; moved nearer to me on her knees. “I have a lover outside.”

She seized her hair wildly, drew it across her face, tried to stuff handfuls of it into her mouth, as if to stop herself from shrieking.

“He shook his finger at me,” she moaned.

Her terror, as incomprehensible as the emotion of an animal, was gaining upon me. I said sternly:

“What can he do, then?”

“I don’t know.”

She did not know. She was like me. She feared for her love. Like myself! Was there anything in the way of our undoing which it was not in his power to achieve?

“Try to be faithful to your mistress,” I said, “and all may be well yet.”

She made no answer, but staggered to her feet, and went away blindly through the door, which opened just wide enough to let her through. There were clouds on the sky. The patio, in its blackness, was like the rectangular mouth of a bottomless pit. I picked up the candlesticks, and lighted myself to my room, walking upon air, upon tempestuous air, in a feeling of insecurity and exultation.

The lights of my candelabrum had gone out. I stood the two candlesticks on a table, and the shadows of the room, uplifted above the two flames as high as the ceiling, filled the corners heavily like gathered draperies, descended to the foot of the four walls in the shape of a military tent, in which warlike objects vaguely gleamed: a trophy of ancient arquebuses and conquering swords, arranged with bows, spears, the stick and stone weapons of an extinct race, a war collar of shells or pebbles, a round wicker-work shield in a halo of arrows, with a matchlock piece on each side — of the sort that had to be served by two men.

I had left the door of my room open on purpose, so that he should know I was back there, and ready for him. I took down a long straight blade, like a rapier, with a basket hilt. It was a cumbrous weapon, and with a blunt edge; still, it had a point, and I was ready to thrust and parry against the world. I called upon my foes. No enemy appeared, and by the light of two candles, with a sword in my hand, I lost myself in the foreshadowings of the future.

It was positive and uncertain. I wandered in it like a soul outside the gates of paradise, with an anticipation of bliss, and the pain of my exclusion. There was only one man in the way. I was certain he had been watching us across the blackness of the patio. He must have seen the dimly-lit dumb show of our parting at Sera-phina’s door. I hoped he had understood, and that my shadow, bearing the two lights, had struck him as triumphant and undismayed, walking upon air. I strained my ears. I had heard....



Somebody was coming towards me along the silent galleries. It was he; I knew it. He was coming nearer and nearer. In the profound, tomb-like stillness of the great house, I had heard the sound of his footsteps on the tessellated pavement from afar. Now he had turned the corner, and the calm, strolling pace of his approach was enough to strike awe into an adversary's heart. It never hesitated, not once; never hurried; never slowed till it stopped. He stood in the doorway.

I suppose, in that big room, by the light of two candles, I must have presented an impressive picture of a menacing youth all in black, with a tense face, and holding a naked, long rapier in his hand. At any rate, he stood still, eyeing me from the doorway, the picture of a dapper Spanish lawyer in a lofty frame; all in black, also, with a fair head and a well-turned leg advanced in a black silk stocking. He had taken off his riding boots. For the rest, I had never seen him dressed otherwise. There was no weapon in his hand, or at his side.

I lowered the point, and, seeing he remained on the doorstep, as if not willing to trust himself within, I said disdainfully:

“You don't suppose I would murder a defenceless man.”

“Am I defenceless?” He had a slight lift of the eyebrows. “That is news, indeed. It is you who are supposing. I have been a very certain man for this many a year.”

“How can you know how an English gentleman would feel and act? I am neither a murderer nor yet an intriguer.”

He walked right in rapidly, and, getting round to the other side of the table, drew a small pistol out of his breeches pocket.

“You see — I am not trusting too much to your English generosity.”

He laid the pistol negligently on the table. I had turned about on my heels. As we stood, by lunging between the two candlesticks, I should have been able to run him through the body before he could cry out.

I laid the sword on the table.

“Would you trust a damned Irish rebel?” he asked.

“You are wrong in your surmise. I would have nothing to do with a rebel, even in my thoughts and suppositions. I think that the Intendente of Don Balthasar Riego would look twice before murdering in a bedroom the guest of the house — a relation, a friend of the family.”

“That's sensible,” he said, with that unalterable air of good nature, which sometimes was like the most cruel mockery of humour. “And do you think

that even a relation of the Riegos would escape the scaffold for killing Don Patricio O'Brien, one of the Royal Judges of the Marine Court, member of the Council, Procurator to the Chapter...."

"Intendente of the Casa," I threw in.

"That's my gratitude," he said gravely. "So you see...."

"Supreme chief of thieves and picaroons," I suggested again.

He answered this by a gesture of disdainful superiority.

"I wonder if you — -if any of you English — would have the courage to risk your all — ambition, pride, position, wealth, peace of mind, your dearest hope, your self-respect — like this. For an idea."

His tone, that revealed something exalted and sad behind everything that was sordid and base in the acts of that man's villainous tools, struck me with astonishment. I beheld, as an inseparable whole, the contemptible result, the childishness of his imagination, the danger of his recklessness, and something like loftiness in his pitiful illusion.

"Nothing's too hot, too dirty, too heavy. Any way to get at you English; any means. To strike! That's the thing. I would die happy if I knew I had helped to detach from you one island — one little island of all the earth you have filched away, stolen, taken by force, got by lying.... Don't taunt me with your taunts of thieves. What weapons better worthy of you could I use? Oh, I am modest. I am modest. This is a little thing, this Jamaica. What do I care for the Separationist blatherskite more than for the loyal fools? You are all English to me. If I had my way, your Empire would die of pin-pricks all over its big, overgrown body. Let only one bit drop off. If robbing your ships may help it, then, as you see me standing here, I am ready to go myself in a leaky boat. I tell you Jamaica's gone. And that may be the beginning of the end."

He lifted his arm not at me, but at England, if I may judge from his burning stare. It was not to me he was speaking. There we were, Irish and English, face to face, as it had been ever since we had met in the narrow way of the world that had never been big enough for the tribes, the nations, the races of man.

"Now, Mr. O'Brien, I don't know what you may do to me, but I won't listen to any of this," I said, very red in the face.

"Who wants you to listen?" he muttered absently, and went away from the table to look out of the loophole, leaving me there with the sword and the pistol.

Whatever he might have said of the scaffold, this was very imprudent of him. It was characteristic of the man — of that impulsiveness which existed in him side by side with his sagacity, with his coolness in intrigue, with his unmerciful and revengeful temper. By my own feelings I understood what an imprudence it was. But he was turning his back on me, and how could I?... His imprudence was so complete that it made for security. He did not, I am sure, remember my existence. I would just as soon have jumped with a dagger upon a man in the dark.

He was really stirred to his depths — to the depths of his hate, and of his love — by seeing me, an insignificant youth (I was no more), surge up suddenly in his path. He turned where he stood at last, and contemplated me with a sort of thoughtful surprise, as though he had tried to account to himself for my existence.

“No,” he said, to himself really, “I wonder when I look at you. How did you manage to get that pretty reputation over there? Ramon’s a fool. He shall know it to his cost. But the craftiness of that Carlos! Or is it only my confounded willingness to believe?”

He was putting his finger nearly on the very spot. I said nothing.

“Why,” he exclaimed, “when it’s all boiled down, you are only an English beggar boy.”

“I’ve come to a man’s estate since we met last,” I said meaningly.

He seemed to meditate over this. His face never changed, except, perhaps, to an even more amused benignity of expression.

“You have lived very fast by that account,” he remarked artlessly. “Is it possible now? Well, life, as you know, can’t last forever; and, indeed, taking a better look at you in this poor light, you do seem to be very near death.”

I did not flinch; and, with a very dry mouth, I uttered defiantly:

“Such talk means nothing.”

“Bravely said. But this is not talk. You’ve gone too fast. I am giving you a chance to turn back.”

“Not an inch,” I said fiercely. “Neither in thought, in deed; not even in semblance.”

He seemed as though he wanted to swallow a bone in his throat.

“Believe me, there is more in life than you think. There is at your age, more than...” he had a strange contortion of the body, as though in a sudden access of internal pain; that humorous smile, that abode in the form of his

lips, changed into a ghastly, forced grin... "than one love in a life — more than one woman."

I believe he tried to leer at me, because his voice was absolutely dying in his throat. My indignation was boundless. I cried out with the fire of deathless conviction:

"It is not true. You know it is not true."

He was speechless for a time; then, shaking and stammering with that inward rage that seemed to heave like molten lava in his breast, without ever coming to the surface of his face:

"What! Is it I, then, who have to go back? For — for you — -a boy — come from devil knows where — an English, beggarly.... For a girl's whim.... I — a man."

He calmed down. "No; you are mad. You are dreaming. You don't know. You can't — you! You don't know what a man is; you with your calf-love a day old. How dare you look at me who have breathed for years in the very air? You fool — you little, wretched fool! For years sleeping, and waking, and working...."

"And intriguing," I broke in, "and plotting, and deceiving — for years."

This calmed him altogether. "I am a man; you are but a boy; or else I would not have to tell you that your love" — he choked at the word — "is to mine like — like —"

His eyes fell on a cut-glass water-ewer, and, with a convulsive sweep of his arm, he sent it flying far away from the table. It fell heavily, shattering itself with the unringing thud of a piece of ice. "Like this." He remained for some time with his eyes fixed on the table, and when he looked up at me it was with a sort of amused incredulity. His tone was not resentful. He spoke in a business-like manner, a little contemptuously. I had only Don Carlos to thank for the position in which I found myself. What the "poor devil over there" expected from me, he, O'Brien, would not inquire. It was a ridiculous boy-and-girl affair. If those two — meaning Carlos and Seraphina — had not been so mighty clever, I should have been safe now in Jamaica jail, on a charge of treasonable practices. He seemed to find the idea funny. Well, anyhow, he had meant no worse by me than my own dear countrymen. When he, O'Brien, had found how absurdly he had been hoodwinked by Don Carlos — the poor devil — and misled by Ramon — he would make him smart for it, yet — all he had intended to do was to lodge me in Havana jail. On his word of honour...

“Me in jail!” I cried angrily. “You — you would dare! On what charge? You could not....”

“You don’t know what Pat O’Brien can do in Cuba.”

The little country solicitor came out in a flash from under the Spanish lawyer. Then he frowned slightly at me. “You being an Englishman, I would have had you taken up on a charge of stealing.”

Blood rushed to my face. I lost control over myself. “Mr. O’Brien,” I said, “I dare say you could have trumped up anything against me. You are a very great scoundrel.”

“Why? Because I don’t lie about my motives, as you all do? I would wish you to know that I would scorn to lie either to myself or to you.”

I touched the haft of the sword on the table. It was lying with the point his way.

“I had been thinking,” said I, in great heat, “to propose to you that we should fight it out between us two, man to man, rebel and traitor as you have been.”

“The devil you have!” he muttered.

“But really you are too much of a Picaroon. I think the gallows should be your end.”

I gave rein to my exasperation, because I felt myself hopelessly in his power. What he was driving at, I could not tell. I had an intolerable sense of being as much at his mercy as though I had been lying bound hand and foot on the floor. It gave me pleasure to tell him what I thought. And, perhaps, I was not quite candid, either. Suppose I provoked him enough to fire his pistol at me. He had been fingering the butt, absently, as we talked. He might have missed me, and then.... Or he might have shot me dead. But surely there was some justice in Cuba. It was clear enough that he did not wish to kill me himself. Well, this was a desperate strait; to force him to do something he did not wish to do, even at the cost of my own life, was the only step left open to me to thwart his purpose; the only thing I could do just then for the furtherance of my mission to save Seraphina from his intrigues. I was oppressed by the misery of it all. As to killing him as he stood — if I could do it by being very quick with the old rapier — my bringing up, my ideas, my very being, recoiled from it. I had never taken a life. I was very young. I was not used to scenes of violence; and to begin like this in cold blood! Not only my conscience, but my very courage faltered. Truth to tell, I was afraid; not for myself — I had the courage to

die; but I was afraid of the act. It was the unknown for me — for my nerve — for my conscience. And then the Spanish gallows! That, too, revolted me. To kill him, and then kill myself.... No, I must live. “Two lives, one death,” she had said.... For a second or two my brain reeled with horror; I was certainly losing my self-possession. His voice broke upon that nightmare.

“It may be your lot, yet,” it said. I burst into a nervous laugh. For a moment I could not stop myself.

“I won’t murder you,” I cried.

To this he said astonishingly, “Will you go to Mexico?”

It sounded like a joke. He was very serious. “I shall send one of the schooners there on a little affair of mine. I can make use of you. I give you this chance.” It was as though he had thrown a bucketful of water over me. I had an inward shiver, and became quite cool. It was his turn now to let himself go.

It was a matter of delivering certain papers to the Spanish commandant in Tamaulipas. There would be some employment found for me with the Royal troops. I was a relation of the Riegos. And there came upon his voice a strange ardour; a swiftness into his utterance. He walked away from the table; came back, and gazed into my face in a marked, expectant manner. He was not prompted by any love for me, he said, and gave an uncertain laugh.

My wits had returned to me wholly; and as he repeated “No love for you — no love for you,” I had the intuition that what influenced him was his love for Seraphina. I saw it. I read it in the workings of his face. His eyes retained his good-humoured twinkle. He did not attach any importance to a boy-and-girl affair; not at all — pah! The lady, naturally young, warmhearted, full of kindness. I mustn’t think.... Ha, ha! A man of his age, of course, understood.... No importance at all.

He walked away from the table trying to snap his fingers, and, suddenly, he reeled; he reeled, as though he had been overcome by the poison of his jealousy — as though a thought had stabbed him to the heart. There was an instant when the sight of that man moved me more than anything I had seen of passionate suffering before (and that was nothing), or since. He longed to kill me — I felt it in the very air of the room; and he loved her too much to dare. He laughed at me across the table. I had ridiculously misunderstood a

very proper and natural kindness of a girl with not much worldly experience. He had known her from the earliest childhood.

“Take my word for it,” he stammered.

It seemed to me that there were tears in his eyes. A stiff smile was parting his lips. He took up the pistol, and evidently not knowing anything about it, looked with an air of curiosity into the barrel.

It was time to think of making my career. That’s what I ought to be thinking of at my age. “At your age — at your age,” he repeated aimlessly. I was an Englishman. He hated me — and it was easy to believe this, though he neither glared nor grimaced. He smiled.

He smiled continuously and rather pitifully. But his devotion to a — a — person who.... His devotion was great enough to overcome even that, even that. Did I understand? I owed it to the lady’s regard, which, for the rest, I had misunderstood — stupidly misunderstood.

“Well, at your age it’s excusable!” he mumbled. “A career that...”

“I see,” I said slowly. Young as I was, it was impossible to mistake his motives. Only a man of mature years, and really possessed by a great passion — by a passion that had grown slowly, till it was exactly as big as his soul — could have acted like this — with that profound simplicity, with such resignation, with such horrible moderation — But I wanted to find out more. “And when would you want me to go?” I asked, with a dissimulation of which I would not have suspected myself capable a moment before. I was maturing in the fire of love, of danger; in the lurid light of life piercing through my youthful innocence.

“Ah,” he said, banging the pistol on to the table hurriedly. “At once. Tonight. Now.”

“Without seeing anybody?”

“Without seeing... Oh, of course. In your own interest.”

He was very quiet now. “I thought you looked intelligent enough,” he said, appearing suddenly very tired. “I am glad you see your position. You shall go far in the Royal service, on the faith of Pat O’Brien, English as you are. I will make it my own business for the sake of — the Riego family. There is only one little condition.”

He pulled out of his pocket a piece of paper, a pen, a travelling inkstand. He looked the lawyer to the life; the Spanish family lawyer grafted on an Irish attorney.

“You can’t see anybody. But you ought to write. Dona Seraphina naturally would be interested. A cousin and... I shall explain to Don Balthasar, of course.... I will dictate: ‘Out of regard for your future, and the desire for active life, of your own will, you accept eagerly Señor O’Brien’s proposition.’ She’ll understand.”

“Oh, yes, she’ll understand,” I said.

“Yes. And that you will write of your safe arrival in Tamaulipas. You must promise to write. Your word...”

“By heavens, Señor O’Brien!” I burst out with inexpressible scorn, “I thought you meant your villains to cut my throat on the passage. I should have deserved no better fate.”

He started. I shook with rage. A change had come upon both of us as sudden as if we had been awakened by a violent noise. For a time we did not speak a word. One look at me was enough for him. He passed his hand over his forehead.

“What devil’s in you, boy?” he said. “I seem to make nothing but mistakes.”

He went to the loophole window, and, advancing his head, cried out:

“The schooner does not sail to-night.”

He had some of his cut-throats posted under the window. I could not make out the reply he got; but after a while he said distinctly, so as to be heard below:

“I give up that spy to you.” Then he came back, put the pistol in his pocket, and said to me, “Fool! I’ll make you long for death yet.”

“You’ve given yourself away pretty well,” I said. “Some day I shall unmask you. It will be my revenge on you for daring to propose to me....”

“What?” he interrupted, over his shoulder. “You? Not you — and I’ll tell you why. It’s because dead men tell no tales.”

He passed through the door — a back view of a dapper Spanish lawyer, all in black, in a lofty frame. The calm, strolling footsteps went away along the gallery. He turned the corner. The tapping of his heels echoed in the patio, into whose blackness filtered the first suggestion of the dawn.



## CHAPTER FIVE

I remember walking about the room, and thinking to myself, "This is bad, this is very bad; what shall I do now?" A sort of mad meditation that in this meaningless way became so tense as positively to frighten me. Then it occurred to me that I could do nothing whatever at present, and I was soothed by this sense of powerless-ness, which, one would think, ought to have driven me to distraction. I went to sleep ultimately, just as a man sentenced to death goes to sleep, lulled in a sort of ghastly way by the finality of his doom. Even when I awoke it kept me steady, in a way. I washed, dressed, walked, ate, said "Good-morning, Cesar," to the old major-domo I met in the gallery; exchanged grins with the negro boys under the gateway, and watched the mules being ridden out barebacked by other nearly naked negro boys into the sea, with great splashing of water and a noise of voices. A small knot of men, unmistakably *Lugareños*, stood on the beach, also, watching the mules, and exchanging loud jocular shouts with the blacks. Rio Medio, the dead, forsaken, and desecrated city, was lying, as bare as a skeleton, on the sands. They were yellow; the bay was very blue, the wooded hills very green.

After the mules had been ridden uproariously back to the stables, wet and capering, and shaking their long ears, all the life of the land seemed to take refuge in this vivid colouring. As I looked at it from the outer balcony above the great gate, the small group of *Lugareños* turned about to look at the Casa Riego.

They recognized me, no doubt, and one of them flourished, threateningly, an arm from under his cloak. I retreated indoors.

This was the only menacing sign, absolutely the only sign that marked this day. It was a day of pause. Seraphina did not leave her apartments; Don Balthasar did not show himself; Father Antonio, hurrying towards the sick room, greeted me with only a wave of the hand. I was not admitted to see Carlos; the nun came to the door, shook her head at me, and closed it gently in my face. Castro, sitting on the floor not very far away, seemed unaware of me in so marked a manner that it inspired me with the idea of not taking the slightest notice of him. Now and then the figure of a maid in white linen and bright petticoat flitted in the upper gallery, and once I fancied I saw the black, rigid carriage of the duenna disappearing behind a pillar.

Señor O'Brien, old Cesar whispered, without looking at me, was extremely occupied in the Cancillería. His midday meal was served him there. I had mine all alone, and then the sunny, heat-laden stillness of siesta-time fell upon the Castilian dignity of the house.

I sank into a kind of reposeful belief in the work of accident. Something would happen. I did not know how soon and how atrociously my belief was to be justified. I exercised my ingenuity in the most approved lover-fashion — in devising means how to get secret speech with Seraphina. The confounded silly maids fled from my most distant appearance, as though I had the pest. I was wondering whether I should not go simply and audaciously and knock at her door, when I fancied I heard a scratching at mine. It was a very stealthy sound, quite capable of awakening my dormant emotions.

I went to the door and listened. Then, opening it the merest crack, I saw the inexplicable emptiness of the gallery. Castro, on his hands and knees, startled me by whispering at my feet:

“Stand aside, Señor.”

He entered my room on all-fours, and waited till I got the door closed before he stood up.

“Even he may sleep sometimes,” he said. “And the balustrade has hidden me.”

To see this little saturnine bandit, who generally stalked about haughtily, as if the whole Casa belonged to him by right of fidelity, crawl into my room like this was inexpressibly startling. He shook the folds of his cloak, and dropped his hat on the floor.

“Still, it is better so. The very women of the house are not safe,” he said. “Señor, I have no mind to be delivered to the English for hanging. But I have not been admitted to see Don Carlos, and, therefore, I must make my report to you. These are Don Carlos’ orders. ‘Serve him, Castro, when I am dead, as if my soul had passed into his body.’”

He nodded sadly. “Si! But Don Carlos is a friend to me and you — you.” He shook his head, and drew me away from the door. “Two *Lugareños*,” he said, “Manuel and another one, did go last night, as directed by the friar” — he supposed — “to meet the Juez in the bush outside Rio Medio.”

I had guessed that much, and told him of Manuel’s behaviour under my window. How did they know my chamber?

“Bad, bad,” muttered Castro. “La Chica told her lover, no doubt.” He hissed, and stamped his foot.

She was pretty, but flighty. The lover was a silly boy of decent, Christian parents, who was always hanging about in the low villages. No matter.

What he could not understand was why some boats should have been held in readiness till nearly the morning to tow a schooner outside. Manuel came along at dawn, and dismissed the crews. They had separated, making a great noise on the beach, and yelling, “Death to the Inglez!”

I cleared up that point for him. He told me that O’Brien had the duenna called to his room that morning. Nothing had been heard outside, but the woman came out staggering, with her hand on the wall. He had terrified her. God knows what he had said to her. The widow — as Castro called her — had a son, an escrivano in one of the Courts of Justice. No doubt it was that.

“There it is, Señor,” murmured Castro, scowling all round, as if every wall of the room was an enemy. “He holds all the people in his hand in some way. Even I must be cautious, though I am a humble, trusted friend of the Casa!”

“What harm could he do you?” I asked.

“He is civil to me. Amigo Castro here, and Amigo Castro there. Bah! The devil, alone, is his friend! He could deliver me to justice, and get my life sworn away. He could — — — Quien sabe? What need he care what he does — a man that can get absolution from the archbishop himself if he likes.”

He meditated. “No! there is only one remedy for him.” He tiptoed to my ear. “The knife!”

He made a pass in the air with his blade, and I remembered vividly the cockroach he had impaled with such accuracy on board the Thames. His baneful glance reminded me of his murderous capering in the steerage, when he had thought that the only remedy for me was the knife.

He went to the loop-hole, and passed the steel thoughtfully on the stone edge. I had not moved.

“The knife; but what would you have? Before, when I talked of this to Don Carlos, he only laughed at me. That was his way in matters of importance. Now they will not let me come in to him. He is too near God — and the Señorita — why, she is too near the saints for all the great nobility of her spirit. But, que dia-bleria, when I — in my devotion — opened my mouth to her I saw some of that spirit in her eyes....”

There was a slight irony in his voice. "No! Me — Castro! to be told that an English Señora would have dismissed me forever from her presence for such a hint. 'Your Excellency,' I said, 'deign, then, to find it good that I should avoid giving offence to that man. It is not my desire to run my neck into the iron collar.'"

He looked at me fixedly, as if expecting me to make a sign, then shrugged his shoulders.

"Bueno. You see this? Then look to it yourself, Señor. You are to me even as Don Carlos — all except for the love. No English body is big enough to receive his soul. No friend will be left that would risk his very honour of a noble for a man like Tomas Castro. Let me warn you not to leave the Casa, even if a shining angel stood outside the gate and called you by name. The gate is barred, now, night and day. I have dropped a hint to Cesar, and that old African knows more than the Señor would suppose. I cannot tell how soon I may have the opportunity to talk to you again."

He peeped through the crack of the door, then slipped out, suddenly falling at once on his hands and knees, so as to be hidden by the stone balustrade from anybody in the patio. He, too, did not think himself safe.

Early in the evening I descended into the court, and Father Antonio, walking up and down the patio with his eyes on his breviary, muttered to me:

"Sit on this chair," and went on without stopping.

I took a chair near the marble rim of the basin with its border of English flowers, its splashing thread of water. The goldfishes that had been lying motionless, with their heads pointing different ways, glided into a bunch to the fall of my shadow, waiting for crumbs of bread.

Father Antonio, his head down, and the open breviary under his nose, brushed my foot with the skirt of his cassock.

"Have you any plan?"

When he came back, walking very slowly, I said, "None."

At this next turn I pronounced rapidly, "I should like to see Carlos."

He frowned over the edge of the book. I understood that he refused to let me in. And, after all, why should I disturb that dying man? The news about him was that he felt stronger that day. But he was preparing for eternity. Father Antonio's business was to save souls. I felt horribly crushed and alone. The priest asked, hardly moving his lips: "What do you trust to?"

I had the time to meditate my reply. "Tell Carlos I think of escape by sea."

He made a little sign of assent, turned off towards the staircase, and went back to the sick room.

"The folly of it," I thought. How could I think of it? Escape where? I dared not even show myself outside the Casa. My safety within depended on old Cesar more than on anybody else. He had the key of the gate, and the gate was practically the only thing between me and a miserable death at the hands of the first ruffian I met outside. And with the thought I seemed to stifle in that patio open to the sky.

That gate seemed to cut off the breath of life from me. I was there, as if in a trap. Should I — I asked myself — try to enlighten Don Balthasar? Why not? He would understand me. I would tell him that in his own town, as he always called Rio Medio, there lurked assassination for his guest. That would move him if anything could.

He was then walking with O'Brien after dinner, as he had walked with me on the day of my arrival. Only Seraphina had not appeared, and we three men had sat out the silent meal alone.

They stopped as I approached, and Don Balthasar listened to me benignantly. "Ah, yes, yes! Times have changed." But there was no reason for alarm. There were some undesirable persons. Had they not arrived lately? He turned to O'Brien, who stood by, in readiness to resume the walk, and answered, "Yes, quite lately. Very undesirable," in a matter-of-fact tone. The excellent Don Patricio would take measures to have them removed, the old man soothed me. But it was not really dangerous for any one to go out. Again he addressed O'Brien, who only smiled gently, as much as to say, "What an absurdity!" I must not forget, continued the old man, the veneration for the very name of Riego that still, thank Heaven, survived in these godless and revolutionary times in the Riegos' own town. He straightened his back a little, looking at me with dignity, and then glanced at the other, who inclined his head affirmatively. The utter and complete hopelessness of the position appalled me for a moment. The old man had not put foot outside his door for years, not even to go to church. Father Antonio said Mass for him every day in the little chapel next the dining room. When O'Brien — for his own purposes, and the better to conceal his own connection with the Rio Medio piracies — had persuaded him to go to Jamaica officially, he had been rowed in state to the ship

waiting outside. For many years now it had been impossible to enlighten him as to the true condition of affairs. He listened to people's talk as though it had been children's prattle. I have related how he received Carlos' denunciations. If one insisted, he would draw himself up in displeasure. But in his decay he had preserved a great dignity, a grave firmness that intimidated me a little.

I did not, of course, insist that evening, and, after giving me my dismissal in a gesture of blessing, he resumed his engrossing conversation with O'Brien. It related to the services commemorating his wife's death, those services that, once every twelve months, draped in black all the churches in Havana. A hundred masses, no less, had to be said that day; a distribution of alms had to be made. O'Brien was charged with all the arrangements, and I caught, as they crept past me up and down the patio, snatches of phrases relating to this mournful function, when all the capital was invited to pray for the soul of the illustrious lady. The priest of the church of San Antonio had said this and that; the grand vicar of the diocese had made difficulties about something; however, by the archbishop's special grace, no less than three altars would be draped in the cathedral.

I saw Don Balthasar smile with an ineffable satisfaction; he thanked O'Brien for his zeal, and seemed to lean more familiarly on his arm. His voice trembled with eagerness. "And now, my excellent Don Patricio, as to the number of candles...."

I stood for a while as if rooted to the spot, overwhelmed by my insignificance. O'Brien never once looked my way. Then, hanging my head, I went slowly up the white staircase towards my room.

Cesar, going his rounds along the gallery, shuffled his silk-clad shanks smartly between two young negroes balancing lanthorns suspended on the shafts of their halberds. That little group had a mediaeval and outlandish aspect. Cesar carried a bunch of keys in one hand, his staff of office in the other. He stood aside, in his maroon velvet and gold lace, holding the three-cornered hat under his arm, bowing his gray, woolly head — the most venerable and deferential of majordomos. His attendants, backing against the wall, grounded their halberds heavily at my approach.

He stepped out to intercept me, and, with great discretion, "Señor, a word," he said in his subdued voice. "A moment ago I have been called within the door of our senorita's apartments. She has given me this for your

worship, together with many compliments. It is a seal. The Señor will understand.”

I took it; it was a tiny seal with her monogram on it. “Yes,” I said.

“And Señorita Dona Seraphina has charged me to repeat” — he made a stealthy sign, as if to counteract an evil influence — “the words, ‘Two lives — one death.’ The Señor will understand.”

“Yes,” I said, looking away with a pang at my heart. He touched my elbow. “And to trust Cesar. Señor, I dandled her when she was quite little. Let me most earnestly urge upon your worship not to go near the windows, especially if there is light in your worship’s room. Evil men are gazing upon the house, and I have seen myself the glint of a musket at the end of the street. The moon grows fast, too. The senorita begs you to trust Cesar.”

“Are there many men?” I asked.

“Not many in sight; I have seen only one. But by signs, open to a man of my experience, I suspect many more to be about.” Then, as I looked down on the ground, he added parenthetically, “They are poor shots, one and all, lacking the very firmness of manhood necessary to discharge a piece with a good aim. Still, Señor, I am ordered to entreat you to be cautious. Strange it is that to-night, from the great revelry at the Aldea Bajo, one might think they had just visited an English ship outside.”

A ship! a ship! of any sort. But how to get out of the Casa? Murder forbade me even as much as to look out of the windows. Was there a ship outside? Cesar was positive there was not — not since I had arrived. Besides, the empty sea itself was unattainable, it seemed. I pressed the seal to my lips. “Tell the senorita how I received her gift,” I said; and the old negro inclined his head lower still. “Tell her that as the letters of her name are graved on this, so are all the words she has spoken graven on my heart.”

They went away busily, the lanthorns swinging about the ax-heads of the halberds, Cesar’s staff tapping the stones.

I shut my door, and buried my face in the pillows of the state bed. My mental anguish was excessive; action, alone, could relieve it. I had been battling with my thoughts like a man fighting with shadows. I could see no issue to such a struggle, and I prayed for something tangible to encounter — something that one could overcome or go under to. I must have fallen suddenly asleep, because there was a lion in front of me. It lashed its tail, and beyond the indistinct agitation of the brute I saw Seraphina. I tried to shout to her; no voice came out of my throat. And the lion produced a

strange noise; he opened his jaws like a door. I sat up. It was like a change of dream. A glare filled my eyes. In the wide doorway of my room, in a group of attendants, I saw a figure in a short black cloak standing, hat on head, and an arm outstretched. It was Don Balthasar. He held himself more erect than I had ever seen him before. Stifled sounds of weeping, a vast, confused rumour of lamentations, running feet and flammings doors, came from behind him; his aged, dry voice, much firmer and very distinct, was speaking to me.

“You are summoned to attend the bedside of Don Carlos Riego at the hour of death, to help his soul struggling on the threshold of eternity, with your prayers — as a kinsman and a friend.”

A great draught swayed the lights about that black and courtly figure. All the windows and doors of the palace had been flung open for the departure of the struggling soul. Don Balthasar turned; the group of attendants was gone in a moment, with a tramp of feet and jostling of lights in the long gallery.

I ran out after them. A wavering glare came from under the arch, and, through the open gate, I saw the bulky shape of the bishop’s coach waiting outside in the moonlight. A strip of cloth fell from step to step down the middle of the broad white stairs. The staircase was brilliantly lighted, and quite empty. The household was crowding the upper galleries; the sobbing murmurs of their voices fell into the deserted patio. The strip of crimson cloth laid for the bishop ran across it from the arch of the stairway to the entrance.

The door of Carlos’ room stood wide open; I saw the many candles on a table covered with white linen, the side of the big bed, surpliced figures moving within the room. There was the ringing of small bells, and sighing groans from the kneeling forms in the gallery through which I was making my way slowly.

Castro appeared at my side suddenly. “Señor,” he began, with saturnine stoicism, “he is dead. I have seen battlefields — — —” His voice broke.

I saw, through the large portal of the death-chamber, Don Balthasar and Seraphina standing at the foot of the bed; the bowed heads of two priests; the bishop, a tiny old man, in his vestments; and Father Antonio, burly and motionless, with his chin in his hand, as if left behind after leading that soul to the very gate of Eternity. All about me, women and men were crossing



themselves; and Castro, who for a moment had covered his eyes with his hand, touched my elbow.

“And you live,” he said, with sombre emphasis; then, warningly, “You are in great danger now.”

I looked around, as if expecting to see an uplifted knife. I saw only a lot of people — household negroes and the women — rising from their knees. Below, the patio was empty.

“The house is defenceless,” Castro continued. We heard tumultuous voices under the gate. O’Brien appeared in the doorway of Carlos’ room with an attentive and dismayed expression on his face. I do not really think he had anything to do with what then took place. He meant to have me killed outside; but the rabble, excited by Manuel’s inflammatory speeches, had that night started from the villages below with the intention of clamouring for my life. Many of their women were with them. Some of the *Lugareños* carried torches, others had pikes; most of them, however, had nothing but their long knives. They came in a disorderly, shouting mob along the beach, intending this not for an attack, but as a simple demonstration.

The sight of the open gate struck them with wonder. The bishop’s coach blocked the entrance, and for a time they hesitated, awed by the mystery of the house and by the rites going on in there. Then two or three bolder spirits stole closer. The bishop’s people, of course, did not think of offering any resistance. The very defencelessness of the house restrained the mob for a while. A few more men from outside ran in. Several women began to clamour scoldingly to them to bring the Ingles out. Then the men, encouraging each other in their audacity, advanced further under the arch.

A solitary black, the only guard left at the gate, shouted at them, “Arria! Go back!” It had no effect. More of them crowded in, though, of course, the greater part of that mob remained outside. The black rolled big eyes. He could not stop them; he did not like to leave his post; he dared not fire. “Go back! Go back!” he repeated.

“Not without the Ingles,” they answered.

The tumult we had heard arose when the *Lugareños* suddenly fell upon the sentry, and wrenched his musket from him.

This man, when disarmed, ran away. I saw him running across the patio, on the crimson pathway, to the foot of the staircase. His shouting, “The *Lugareños* have risen!” broke upon the hush of mourning. Father Antonio

made a brusque movement, and Seraphina sent a startled glance in my direction.

The cloistered court, with its marble basin and a jet of water in the centre, remained empty for a moment after the negro had run across; a growing clamour penetrated into it. In the midst of it I heard O'Brien's voice saying, "Why don't they shut the gate?" Immediately afterwards a woman in the gallery cried out in surprise, and I saw the Lugareños pour into the patio.

For a time that motley group of bandits stood in the light, as if intimidated by the great dignity of the house, by the mysterious prestige of the Casa whose interior, probably, none of them had ever seen before. They gazed about silently, as if surprised to find themselves there.

It looked as if they would have retired if they had not caught sight of me. A murmur of "the Inglez" arose at once. By that time the household negroes had occupied the staircase with what weapons they could find upstairs.

Father Antonio pushed past O'Brien out of the room, and shook his arms over the balustrade.

"Impious men," he cried, "begone from this house of death." His eyes flashed at the ruffians, who stared stupidly from below.

"Give us the Inglez," they growled. Seraphina, from within, cried, "Juan." I was then near the door, but not within the room.

"The Inglez! The heretic! The traitor!" came in sullen, subdued mutter. A hoarse, reckless voice shouted, "Give him to us, and we shall go!"

"You are putting in danger all the lives in this house!" O'Brien hissed at me. "Señorita, pray do not." He stood in the way of Seraphina, who wished to come out.

"It is you!" she cried. "It is you! It is your voice, it is your hand, it is your iniquity!"

He was confounded by her vehemence.

"Who brought him here?" he stammered. "Am I to find one of that accursed brood forever in my way? I take him to witness that for your sake — — —"

A formidable roar, "Throw us down the Inglez!" filled the patio. They were gaining assurance down there; and the ferocious clamouring of the mob outside came faintly upon our ears.

O'Brien barred the way. Don Balthasar leaned on his daughter's arm — she very straight, with tears still on her face and indignation in her eye, he bowed, and with his immovable fine features set in the calmness of age.

Behind that group there were two priests, one with a scared, white face, another, black-browed, with an exalted and fanatical aspect. The light of the candles from the improvised altar fell on the bishop's small, bald head, emerging with a patient droop from the wide spread of his cope, as though he had been inclosed in a portable gold shrine. He was ready to go.

Don Balthasar, who seemed to have heard nothing, as if suddenly waking up to his duty, left his daughter, and muttering to O'Brien, "Let me precede the bishop," came out, bare-headed, into the gallery. Father Antonio had turned away, and his heavy hand fell on O'Brien's shoulder.

"Have you no heart, no reverence, no decency?" he said. "In the name of everything you respect, I call upon you to stop this sacrilegious outbreak."

O'Brien shook off the priestly hand, and fixed his eyes upon Seraphina. It happened to be looking at his face; he seemed to be ready to go out of his mind. His jealousy, the awful torment of soul and body, made him motionless and speechless.

Seeing Don Balthasar appear by the balustrade, the ruffians below had become silent for a while. His aged, mechanical voice was heard asking distinctly:

"What do these people want?"

Seraphina, from within the room, said aloud, "They are clamouring for the life of our guest." She looked at O'Brien contemptuously, "They are doing this to please you."

"Before God, I have nothing to do with this."

It was true enough, he had nothing to do with this outbreak; and I believe he would have interfered, but, in his dismay at having lost himself in the eyes of Seraphina, in his rage against myself, he did not know how to act. No doubt he had been deceiving himself as to his position with Seraphina. He was a man who in his wishes. His desire of revenge on me, the downfall of his hopes (he could no longer deceive himself), a desperate striving of thought for their regaining, his impulse towards the impossible — all these emotions paralyzed his will.

Don Balthasar beckoned to me.

"Don't go near him," said O'Brien, in a thick, mumbling voice. "I shall — — — I must — — —"

I put him aside. Don Balthasar took my arm. "Misguided populace," he whispered. "They have been a source of sorrow to me lately. But this

wicked folly is incredible. I shall call upon them to come to their senses. My voice — — — ”

The court below was strongly lighted, so that I saw the bearded, bronzed, wild faces of the Lugareños looking up. We, also, were strongly shown by the light of the doorway behind us, and by the torches burning in the gallery.

That morning, in my helplessness, I had come to put my trust in accident — in some accident — I hardly knew of what nature — my own death, perhaps — that would find a solution for my responsibilities, put an end to my tormenting thoughts. And now the accident came with a terrible swiftness, at which I shudder to this day.

We were looking down into the patio. Don Balthasar had just said, “You are nowhere as safe as by my side,” when I noticed a Lugareño withdrawing himself from the throng about the basin. His face came to me familiarly. He was the pirate with the broken nose, who had had a taste of my fist. He had the sentry’s musket on his shoulder, and was slinking away towards the gate.

Don Balthasar extended his hand over the balustrade, and there was a general movement of recoil below. I wondered why the slaves on the stairs did not charge and clear the patio; but I suppose with such a mob outside there was a natural hesitation in bringing the position to an issue. The Lugareños were muttering, “Look at the Inglez!” then cried out together, “Excellency, give up this Inglez!”

Don Balthasar seemed ten years younger suddenly. I had never seen him so imposingly erect.

“Insensate!” he began, without any anger.

“He is going to fire!” yelled Castro’s voice somewhere in the gallery.

I saw a red dart in the shadow of the gate. The broken-nosed pirate had fired at me. The report, deadened in the vault, hardly reached my ears. Don Balthazar’s arm seemed to swing me back. Then I felt him lean heavily on my shoulder. I did not know what had happened till I heard him say:

“Pray for me, gentlemen.”

Father Antonio received him in his arms.

For a second after the shot, the most dead silence prevailed in the court. It was broken by an affrighted howl below: and Seraphina’s voice cried piercingly:

“Father!”

The priest, dropping on one knee, sustained the silvery head, with its thin features already calm in death. Don Balthasar had saved my life; and his daughter flung herself upon the body. O'Brien pressed his hands to his temples, and remained motionless.

I saw the bishop, in his stiff cope, creep up to the group with the motion of a tortoise. And, for a moment, his quavering voice pronouncing the absolution was the only sound in the house.

Then a most fiendish noise broke out below. The negroes had charged, and the Lugareños, struck with terror at the unforeseen catastrophe, were rushing helter-skelter through the gate. The screaming of the maids was frightful. They ran up and down the galleries with their hair streaming. O'Brien passed me by swiftly, muttering like a madman.

I, also, got down into the courtyard in time to strike some heavy blows under the gateway; but I don't know who it was that thrust into my hands the musket which I used as a club. The sudden burst of shrieks, the cries of terror under the vault of the gate, yells of rage and consternation, silenced the mob outside. The Lugareños, appalled at what had happened, shouted most pitifully. They squeaked like the vermin they were. I brought down the clubbed musket; two went down. Of two I am sure. The rush of flying feet swept through between the walls, bearing me along. For a time a black stream of men eddied in the moonlight round the bishop's coach, like a torrent breaking round a boulder. The great heavy machine rocked, mules plunged, torches swayed.

The archway had been cleared. Outside, the slaves were forming in the open space before the Casa, while Cesar, with a few others, laboured to swing the heavy gates to. Hats, torn cloaks, knives strewed the flagstones, and the dim light of the lamps, fastened high up on the walls, fell on the faces of three men stretched out on their backs. Another, lying huddled up in a heap, got up suddenly and rushed out.

The thought of Seraphina clinging to the lifeless body of her father upstairs came to me; it came over me in horror, and I let the musket fall out of my hand. A silence like the silence of despair reigned in the house. She would hate me now. I felt as if I could walk out and give myself up, had it not been for the sight of O'Brien.

He was leaning his shoulders against the wall in the posture of a man suddenly overcome by a deadly disease. No one was looking at us. It came to me that he could not have many illusions left to him now. He looked up

wearily, saw me, and, waking up at once, thrust his hands into the pockets of his breeches. I thought of his pistol. No wild hope of love would prevent him, now, from killing me outright. The fatal shot that had put an end to Don Balthasar's life must have brought to him an awakening worse than death. I made one stride, caught him by both arms swiftly, and pinned him to the wall with all my strength. We struggled in silence.

I found him much more vigorous than I had expected; but, at the same time, I felt at once that I was more than a match for him. We did not say a word. We made no noise. But, in our struggle, we got away from the wall into the middle of the gateway I dared not let go of his arms to take him by the throat. He only tried to jerk and wrench himself away. Had he succeeded, it would have been death for me. We never moved our feet from the spot, fairly in the middle of the archway but nearer to the gate than to the patio. The slaves, formed outside, guarded the bishop's coach, and I do not know that there was anybody else actually with us under the vault of the entrance. We glared into each other's faces, and the world seemed very still around us. I felt in me a passion — not of hate, but of determination to be done with him; and from his face it was impossible to guess his suffering, his despair, or his rage.

In the midst of our straining I heard a sibilant sound. I detached my eyes from his; his struggles redoubled, and, behind him, stealing in towards us from the court, black on the strip of crimson cloth, I saw Tomas Castro. He flung his cloak back. The light of the lanthorn under the keystone of the arch glimmered feebly on the blade of his maimed arm. He made a discreet and bloodcurdling gesture to me with the other.

How could I hold a man so that he should be stabbed from behind in my arms? Castro was running up swiftly, his cloak opening like a pair of sable wings. Collecting all my strength, I forced O'Brien round, and we swung about in a flash. Now he had his back to the gate. My effort seemed to have uprooted him. I felt him give way all over.

As soon as our position had changed, Castro checked himself, and stepped aside into the shadow of the guardroom doorway. I don't think O'Brien had been aware of what had been going on. His strength was overborne by mine. I drove him backwards. His eyes blinked wildly. He bared his teeth. He resisted, as though I had been forcing him over the brink of perdition. His feet clung to the flagstones. I shook him till his head rolled.

“Viper brood!” he spluttered.

“Out you go!” I hissed.

I had found nothing heroic, nothing romantic to say — nothing that would express my desperate resolve to rid the world of his presence. All I could do was to fling him out. The Casa Riego was all my world — a World full of great pain, great mourning, and love. I saw him pitch headlong under the wheels of the bishop’s enormous carriage. The black coachman who had sat aloft, unmoved through all the tumult, in his white stockings and three-cornered hat, glanced down from his high box. And the two parts of the gate came together with a clang of ironwork and a heavy crash that seemed as loud as thunder under that vault.

## CHAPTER SIX

Not even in memory am I willing to live over again those three days when Father Antonio, the old major-domo, and myself would meet each other in the galleries, in the patio, in the empty rooms, moving in the stillness of the house with heavy hearts and desolate eyes, which seemed to demand, "What is there to do?"

Of course, precautions were taken against the Lugareños. They were besieging the Casa from afar. They had established a sort of camp at the end of the street, and they prowled about amongst the old, barricaded houses in their pointed hats, in their rags and finery; women, with food, passed constantly between the villages and the panic-stricken town; there were groups on the beach; and one of the schooners had been towed down the bay, and was lying, now, moored stem and stern opposite the great gate. They did nothing whatever active against us. They lay around and watched, as if in pursuance of a plan traced by a superior authority. They were watching for me. But when, by some mischance, they burnt the roof off the outbuildings that were at some distance from the Casa, their chiefs sent up a deputation of three, with apologies. Those men came unarmed, and, as it were, under Castro's protection, and absolutely whimpered with regrets before Father Antonio. "Would his reverence kindly intercede with the most noble senorita?..."

"Silence! Dare not pronounce her name!" thundered the good priest, snatching away his hand, which they attempted to grab and kiss.

I, in the background, noted their black looks at me even as they cringed. The man who had fired the shot, they said, had expired of his wounds after great torments. Their other dead had been thrust out of the gate before. A long fellow, with slanting eyebrows and a scar on his cheek, called El Rechado, tried to inform Cesar, confidentially, that Manuel, his friend, had been opposed to any encroachment of the Casa's offices, only: "That Domingo — — —"

As soon as we discovered what was their object (their apparent object, at any rate), they were pushed out of the gate unceremoniously, — still protesting their love and respect — by the Riego negroes. Castro followed them out again, after exchanging a meaning look with Father Antonio. To live in the two camps, as it were, was a triumph of Castro's diplomacy, of his saturnine mysteriousness. He kept us in touch with the outer world,



coming in under all sorts of pretences, mostly with messages from the bishop, or escorting the priests that came in relays to pray by the bodies of the two last Riegos lying in state, side by side, rigid in black velvet and white lace ruffles, on the great bed dragged out into the middle of the room.

Two enormous wax torches in iron stands flamed and guttered at the door; a black cloth draped the emblazoned shields; and the wind from the sea, blowing through the open casement, inclined all together the flames of a hundred candles, pale in the sunlight, extremely ardent in the night. The murmur of prayers for these souls went on incessantly; I have it in my ears now. There would be always some figure of the household kneeling in prayer at the door; or the old major-domo would come in to stand at the foot, motionless for a time; or, through the open door, I would see the cassock of Father Antonio, flung on his knees, with his forehead resting on the edge of the bed, his hands clasped above his tonsure.

Apart from what was necessary for defence, all the life of the house seemed stopped. Not a woman appeared; all the doors were closed; and the numbing desolation of a great bereavement was symbolized by Don Balthasar's chair in the patio, which had remained lying overturned in full view of every part of the house, till I could bear the sight no longer, and asked Cesar to have it put away. "Si, Señor," he said deferentially, and a few tears ran suddenly down his withered cheeks. The English flowers had been trampled down; an unclean hat floated on the basin, now here, now there, frightening the goldfish from one side to the other.

And Seraphina. It seems not fitting that I should write of her in these days. I hardly dared let my thoughts approach her, but I had to think of her all the time. Her sorrow was the very soul of the house.

Shortly after I had thrown O'Brien out the bishop had left, and then I learned from Father Antonio that Seraphina had been carried away to her own apartments in a fainting condition. The excellent man was almost incoherent with distress and trouble of mind, and walked up and down, his big head drooping on his capacious chest, the joints of his entwined fingers cracking. I had met him in the gallery, as I was making my way back to Carlos' room in anxiety and fear, and we had stepped aside into a large saloon, seldom used, above the gateway. I shall never forget the restless, swift pacing of that burly figure, while, feeling utterly crushed, now the excitement was over, I leaned against a console. Three long bands of

moonlight fell, chilly bluish, into the vast room, with its French Empire furniture stiffly arranged about the white walls.

“And that man?” he asked me at last.

“I could have killed him with my own hands,” I said. “I was the stronger. He had his pistols on him, I am certain, only I could not be a party to an assassination....”

“Oh, my son, it would have been no sin to have exerted the strength which God had blessed you with,” he interrupted. “We are allowed to kill venomous snakes, wild beasts; we are given our strength for that, our intelligence....” And all the time he walked about, wringing his hands.

“Yes, your reverence,” I said, feeling the most miserable and helpless of lovers on earth; “but there was no time. If I had not thrown him out, Castro would have stabbed him in the back in my very hands. And that would have been — — —” Words failed me.

I had been obliged not only to desist myself, but to save his life from Castro. I had been obliged! There had been no option. Murderous enemy as he was, it seemed to me I should never have slept a wink all the rest of my life.

“Yes, it is just, it is just. What else? Alas!” Father Antonio repeated disconnectedly. “Those feelings implanted in your breast — — I have served my king, as you know, in my sacred calling, but in the midst of war, which is the outcome of the wickedness natural to our fallen state. I understand; I understand. It may be that God, in his mercy, did not wish the death of that evil man — not yet, perhaps. Let us submit. He may repent.” He snuffled aloud. “I think of that poor child,” he said through his handkerchief. Then, pressing my arm with his vigorous fingers, he murmured, “I fear for her reason.”

It may be imagined in what state I spent the rest of that sleepless night. At times, the thought that I was the cause of her bereavement nearly drove me mad.

And there was the danger, too.

But what else could I have done? My whole soul had recoiled from the horrible help Castro was bringing us at the point of his blade. No love could demand from me such a sacrifice.

Next day Father Antonio was calmer. To my trembling inquiries he said something consolatory as to the blessed relief of tears. When not praying fervently in the mortuary chamber, he could be seen pacing the gallery in a

severe aloofness of meditation. In the evening he took me by the arm, and, without a word, led me up a narrow and winding staircase. He pushed a small door, and we stepped out on a flat part of the roof, flooded in moonlight.

The points of land dark with the shadows of trees and broken ground clasped the waters of the bay, with a body of shining white mists in the centre; and, beyond, the vast level of the open sea, touched with glitter, appeared infinitely sombre under the luminous sky.

We stood back from the parapet, and Father Antonio threw out a thick arm at the splendid trail of the moon upon the dark water.

“This is the only way,” he said.

He had a warm heart under his black robe, a simple and courageous comprehension of life, this priest who was very much of a man; a certain grandeur of resolution when it was a matter of what he regarded as his principal office.

“This is the way,” he repeated.

Never before had I been struck so much by the gloom, the vastness, the emptiness of the open sea, as on that moonlight night. And Father Antonio’s deep voice went on:

“My son, since God has made use of the nobility of your heart to save that sinner from an unshriven death — — — ”

He paused to mutter, “Inscrutable! inscrutable!” to himself, sighed, and then:

“Let us rejoice,” he continued, with a completely unconcealed resignation, “that you have been the chosen instrument to afford him an opportunity to repent.”

His tone changed suddenly.

“He will never repent,” he said with great force. “He has sold his soul and body to the devil, like those magicians of old of whom we have records.”

He clicked his tongue with compunction, and regretted his want of charity. It was proper for me, however, as a man having to deal with a world of wickedness and error, to act as though I did not believe in his repentance.

“The hardness of the human heart is incredible; I have seen the most appalling examples.” And the priest meditated. “He is not a common criminal, however,” he added profoundly.

It was true. He was a man of illusions, ministering to passions that uplifted him above the fear of consequences, Young as I was, I understood that, too. There was no safety for us in Cuba while he lived. Father Antonio nodded dismally.

“Where to go?” I asked. “Where to turn? Whom can we trust? In whom can we repose the slightest confidence? Where can we look for hope?”

Again the padre pointed to the sea. The hopeless aspect of its moonlit and darkling calm struck me so forcibly that I did not even ask how he proposed to get us out there. I only made a gesture of discouragement. Outside the Casa, my life was not worth ten minutes’ purchase. And how could I risk her there? How could I propose to her to follow me to an almost certain death? What could be the issue of such an adventure? How could we hope to devise such secret means of getting away as would prevent the Lugareños pursuing us? I should perish, then, and she...

Father Antonio seemed to lose his self-control suddenly.

“Yes,” he cried. “The sea is a perfidious element, but what is it to the blind malevolence of men?” He gripped my shoulder. “The risk to her life,” he cried; “the risk of drowning, of hunger, of thirst — that is all the sea can do. I do not think of that. I love her too much. She is my very own spiritual child; and I tell you, Señor, that the unholy intrigue of that man endangers not her happiness, not her fortune alone — it endangers her innocent soul itself.”

A profound silence ensued. I remembered that his business was to save souls. This old man loved that young girl whom he had watched growing up, defenceless in her own home; he loved her with a great strength of paternal instinct that no vow of celibacy can extinguish, and with a heroic sense of his priestly duty. And I was not to say him nay. The sea — so be it. It was easier to think of her dead than to think of her immured; it was better that she should be the victim of the sea than of evil men; that she should be lost with me than to me.

Father Antonio, with that naïve sense of the poetry of the sky he possessed, apostrophized the moon, the “gentle orb,” as he called it, which ought to be weary of looking at the miseries of the earth. His immense shadow on the leads seemed to fling two vast fists over the parapet, as if to strike at the enemies below, and without discussing any specific plan we descended. It was understood that Seraphina and I should try to escape — I

won't say by sea, but to the sea. At best, to ask the charitable help of some passing ship, at worst to go out of the world together.

I had her confidence. I will not tell of my interview with her; but I shall never forget my sensations of awe, as if entering a temple, the melancholy and soothing intimacy of our meeting, the dimly lit loftiness of the room, the vague form of La Chica in the background, and the frail, girlish figure in black with a very pale, delicate face. Father Antonio was the only other person present, and chided her for giving way to grief. "It is like rebellion — like rebellion," he denounced, turning away his head to wipe a tear hastily; and I wondered and thanked God that I should be a comfort to that tender young girl, whose lot on earth had been difficult, whose sorrow was great but could not overwhelm her indomitable spirit, which held a promise of sweetness and love.

Her courage was manifest to me in the gentle and sad tones of her voice. I made her sit in a vast armchair of tapestry, in which she looked lost like a little child, and I took a stool at her feet. This is an unforgettable hour in my life in which not a word of love was spoken, which is not to be written of. The burly shadow of the priest lay motionless from the window right across the room; the flickering flame of a silver lamp made an unsteady white circle of light on the lofty ceiling above her head. A clock was beating gravely somewhere in the distant gloom, like the unperturbed heart of that silence, in which our understanding of each other was growing, even into a strength fit to withstand every tempest.

"Escape by the sea," I said aloud. "It would be, at least, like two lovers leaping hand in hand off a high rock, and nothing else."

Father Antonio's bass voice spoke behind us.

"It is better to jeopardize the sinful body that returns to the dust of which it is made than the redeemed soul, whose awful lot is eternity. Reflect."

Seraphina hung her head, but her hand did not tremble in mine.

"My daughter," the old man continued, "you have to confide your fate to a noble youth of elevated sentiments, and of a truly chivalrous heart...."

"I trust him," said Seraphina.

And, as I heard her say this, it seemed really to me as if, in very truth, my sentiments were noble and my heart chivalrous. Such is the power of a girl's voice. The door closed on us, and I felt very humble.

But in the gallery Father Antonio leaned heavily on my shoulder.

“I shall be a lonely old man,” he whispered faintly. “After all these years! Two great nobles; the end of a great house — a child I had seen grow up.... But I am less afraid for her now.”

I shall not relate all the plans we made and rejected. Everything seemed impossible. We knew from Castro that O’Brien had gone to Havana, either to take the news of Don Balthasar’s death himself, or else to prevent the news spreading there too soon. Whatever his motive for leaving Rio Medio, he had left orders that the house should be respected under the most awful penalties, and that it should be watched so that no one left it. The Englishman was to be killed at sight. Not a hair on anybody else’s head was to be touched.

To escape seemed impossible; then on the third day the thing came to pass. The way was found. Castro, who served me as if Carlos’ soul had passed into my body, but looked at me with a saturnine disdain, had arranged it all with Father Antonio.

It was the day of the burial of Carlos and Don Balthasar. That same day Castro had heard that a ship had been seen becalmed a long way out to sea. It was a great opportunity; and the funeral procession would give the occasion for my escape. There was in Rio Medio, as in all Spanish towns amongst the respectable part of the population, a confraternity for burying the dead, “The Brothers of Pity,” who, clothed in black robes and cowls, with only two holes for the eyes, carried the dead to their resting-place, unrecognizable and unrecognized in that pious work. A “Brother of Pity” dress would be brought for me into Father Antonio’s room. Castro was confident as to his ability of getting a boat. It would be a very small and dangerous one, but what would I have, if I neither killed my enemy, nor let any one else kill him for me, he commented with sombre sarcasm.

A truce of God had been called, and the burial was to take place in the evening when the mortal remains of the last of the Riegos would be laid in the vault of the cathedral of what had been known as their own province, and had, in fact, been so for a time under a grant from Charles V.

Early in the day I had a short interview with Seraphina. She was resolute. Then, long before dark, I slipped into Father Antonio’s room, where I was to stay until the moment to come out and mingle with the throng of other Brothers of Pity. Once with the bodies in the crypt of the cathedral, I was to await Seraphina there, and, together, we should slip through a side door on to the shore. Cesar, to throw any observer off the scent (three Lugareños

were to be admitted to see the bodies put in their coffins), posted two of the Riego negroes with loaded muskets on guard before the door of my empty room, as if to protect me.

Then, just as dusk fell, Father Antonio, who had been praying silently in a corner, got up, blew his nose, sighed, and suddenly enfolded me in his powerful arms for an instant.

"I am an old man — a poor priest," he whispered jerkily into my ear, "and the sea is very perfidious. And yet it favours the sons of your nation. But, remember — the child has no one but you. Spare her."

He went off; stopped. "Inscrutable! inscrutable!" he murmured, lifting upwards his eyes. He raised his hand with a solemn slowness. "An old man's blessing can do no harm," he said humbly. I bowed my head. My heart was too full for speech, and the door closed. I never saw him again, except later on in his surplice for a moment at the gate, his great bass voice distinct in the chanting of the priests conducting the bodies.

The Lugareños would respect the truce arranged by the bishop.

No man of them but the three had entered the Casa. Already, early in the night, their black-haired women, with coarse faces and melancholy eyes, were kneeling in rows under the black mantillas on the stone floor of the cathedral, praying for the repose of the soul of Seraphina's father, of that old man who had lived among them, unapproachable, almost invisible, and as if infinitely removed. They had venerated him, and many of them had never set eyes on his person.

It strikes me, now, as strange and significant of a mysterious human need, the need to look upwards towards a superiority inexpressibly remote, the need of something to idealize in life. They had only that and, maybe, a sort of love as idealized and as personal for the mother of God, whom, also, they had never seen, to whom they trusted to save them from a devil as real. And they had, moreover, a fear even more real of O'Brien.

And, when one comes to think of it, in putting on the long spectacled robe of a Brother of Pity, in walking before the staggering bearers of the great coffin with a tall crucifix in my hand, in thus taking advantage of their truce of God, I was, also, taking advantage of what was undoubtedly their honour — a thing that handicapped them quite as much as had mine when I found myself unable to strike down O'Brien. At that time, I was a great deal too excited to consider this, however. I had many things to think of, and the immense necessity of keeping a cool head.

It was, after all, Tomas Castro to whom all the credit of the thing belonged. Just after it had fallen very dark, he brought me the black robes, a pair of heavy pistols to gird on under them, and the heavy staff topped by a crucifix. He had an air of sarcastic protest in the dim light of my room, and he explained with exaggeratedly plain words precisely what I was to do — which, as a matter of fact, was neither more nor less than merely following in his own footsteps.

“And, oh, Señor,” he said sardonically, “if you desire again to pillow your head upon the breast of your mother; if you would again see your sister, who, alas! by bewitching my Carlos, is at the heart of all our troubles; if you desire again to see that dismal land of yours, which politeness forbids me to curse, I would beg of you not to let the mad fury of your nation break loose in the midst of these thieves and scoundrels.”

He peered intently into the spectacled eyeholes of my cowl, and laid his hand on his sword-hilt. His small figure, tightly clothed in black velvet from chin to knee, swayed gently backwards and forwards in the light of the dim candle, and his grotesque shadow flitted over the ghostly walls of the great room. He stood gazing silently for a minute, then turned smartly on his heels, and, with a gesture of sardonic respect, threw open the door for me.

“Pray, Señor,” he said, “that the moon may not rise too soon.”

We went swiftly down the colonnades for the last time, in the pitch darkness and into the blackness of the vast archway. The clumping staff of my heavy crucifix drew hollow echoes from the flagstones. In the deep sort of cave behind us, lit by a dim lanthorn, the negroes waited to unbar the doors. Castro himself began to mutter over his beads. Suddenly he said:

“It is the last time I shall stand here. Now, there is not any more a place for me on the earth.”

Great flashes of light began to make suddenly visible the tall pillars of the immense mournful palace, and after a long time, absolutely without a sound, save the sputter of enormous torches, an incredibly ghostly body of figures, black-robed from head to foot, with large eyeholes peering fantastically, swayed into the great arch of the hall. Above them was the enormous black coffin. It was a sight so appalling and unexpected that I stood gazing at them without any power to move, until I remembered that I, too, was such a figure. And then, with an ejaculation of impatience, Tomas Castro caught at my hand, and whirled me round.



The great doors had swung noiselessly open, and the black night, bespangled with little flames, was framed in front of me. He suddenly unsheathed his portentous sword, and, hanging his great hat upon his maimed arm, stalked, a pathetic and sinister figure of grief, down the great steps. I followed him in the vivid and extraordinary compulsion of the sinister body that, like one fabulous and enormous monster, swayed impenetrably after me.

My heart beat till my head was in a tumultuous whirl, when thus, at last, I stepped out of that house — but I suppose my grim robes cloaked my emotions — though, seeing very clearly through the eyeholes, it was almost incredible to me that I was not myself seen. But these Brothers of Pity were a secret society, known to no man except their spiritual head, who chose them in turn, and not knowing even each other. Their good deeds of charity were, in that way, done by pure stealth. And it happened that their spiritual director was the Father Antonio himself. At that foot of the palace steps, drawn back out of our way, stood the great glass coach of state, containing, even then, the woman who was all the world to me, invisible to me, unattainable to me, not to be comforted by me, even as her great griefs were to me invisible and unassuageable. And there between us, in the great coffin, held on high by the grim, shadowy beings, was all that she loved, invisible, unattainable, too, and beyond all human comfort. Standing there, in the midst of the whispering, bare-headed, kneeling, and villainous crowd, I had a vivid vision of her pale, dim, pitiful face. Ah, poor thing! she was going away for good from all that state, from all that seclusion, from all that peace, mutely, and with a noble pride of quietness, into a world of dangers, with no head but mine to think for her, no arm but mine to ward off all the great terrors, the immense and dangerous weight of a new world.

In the twinkle of innumerable candles, the priceless harness of the white mules, waiting to draw the great coach after us, shone like streaks of ore in an infinitely rich silver mine. A double line of tapers kept the road to the cathedral, and a crowd of our negroes, the bell muzzles of their guns suggested in the twinkling light, massed themselves round the coach. Outside the lines were the crowd of rascallions in red jackets, their women and children — all the population of the Aldea Bajo, groaning. The whole crowd got into motion round us, the white mules plunging frantically, the coach swaying. Ahead of me inarched the sardonic, gallantly grotesque figure of true Tomas, his sword point up, his motions always jaunty. Ahead

of him, again, were the white robes of many priests, a cluster of tall candles, a great jewelled cross, and a tall saint's figure swaying, more than shoulder high, and disappearing up above into the darkness. For me, under my cowl, it was suffocatingly hot; but I seemed to move forward, following, swept along without any volition of my own. It appeared an immensely long journey; and then, as we went at last up the cathedral steps, a voice cried harshly, "Death to the heretic!" My heart stood still. I clutched frantically at the handle of a pistol that I could not disengage from folds of black cloth. But, as a matter of fact, the cry was purely a general one; I was supposed to be shut up in the palace still.

The sudden glow, the hush, the warm breath of incense, and the blaze of light turned me suddenly faint; my ears buzzed, and I heard strange sounds.

The cathedral was a mass of heads. Everyone in Rio Medio was present, or came trooping in behind us. The better class was clustered near the blaze of gilding, mottled marble, wax flowers, and black and purple drapery that vaulted over the two black coffins in the choir. Down in the unlit body of the church the riff-raff of O'Brien kept the doors.

I followed the silent figure of Tomas Castro to the bishop's own stall, right up in the choir, and we became hidden from the rest by the forest of candles round the catafalque. Up the centre of the great church, and high over the heads of the kneeling people, came the great coffin, swaying, its bearers robbed of half their grimness by the blaze of lights. Tomas Castro suddenly caught at my sleeve whilst they were letting the coffin down on to the bier. He drew me unnoticed into the shadow behind the bishop's stall. In the swift transit, I had a momentary glance of a small, black figure, infinitely tiny in that quiet place, and infinitely solitary, veiled in black from head to foot, coming alone up the centre of the nave.

I stood hidden there beside the bishop's stall for a long time, and then suddenly I saw the black figure alone in the gallery, looking down upon me — from the loggia of the Riegos. I felt suddenly an immense calm; she was looking at me with unseeing eyes, but I knew and felt that she would follow me now to the end of the world. I had no more any doubts as to the issue of our enterprise; it was open to no unsucccess with a figure so steadfast engaged in it; it was impossible that blind fate should be insensible to her charm, impossible that any man could strike at or thwart her.

Monks began to sing; a great brass instrument grunted lamentably; in the body of the building there was silence. The bishop and his supporters

moved about, as if aimlessly, in front of the altar; the chains of the gold censers clicked ceaselessly. Seraphina's head had sunk forward out of my sight. All the heads of the cathedral bowed down, and suddenly, from round the side of the stall, a hand touched mine, and a voice said, "It is time." Very softly, as if it were part of the rite, I was drawn round the stall through a door in the side of the screen. As we went out, in his turnings, the old bishop gave us the benediction. Then the door closed on the glory of his robes, and in a minute, in the darkness we were rustling down a circular narrow staircase into the dimness of a crypt, lit by the little blue flame of an oil lamp. From above came sounds like thunder, immense, vibrating; we were immediately under the choir. Through the cracks round a large stone showed a parallelogram of light.

In the dimness I had a glimpse of the face of my conductor — a thin, wonderfully hollow-cheeked lay brother. He began, with great gentleness, to assist me out of my black robes, and then he said:

"The senorita will be here very soon with the Señor Tomas," and then added, with an infinitely sad and tender, dim smile:

"Will not the Señor Caballero, if it is not repugnant, say a prayer for the repose of..." He pointed gently upwards to the great flagstone above which was the coffin of Don Balthasar and Carlos. The priest himself was one of those very holy, very touching — -perhaps, very stupid — men that one finds in such places. With his dim, wistful face he is very present in my memory. He added: "And that the good God of us all may keep it in the Señor Caballero's heart to care well for the soul of the dear senorita."

"I am a very old man," he whispered, after a pause. He was indeed an old man, quite worn out, quite without hope on earth. "I have loved the senorita since she was a child. The Señor Caballero takes her from us. I would have him pray — to be made worthy."

Whilst I was doing it, the place began to be alive with whispers of garments, of hushed footsteps, a small exclamation in a gruff voice. Then the stone above moved out of its place, and a blaze of light fell down from the choir above.

I saw beside me Seraphina's face, brilliantly lit, looking upwards. Tomas Castro said:

"Come quickly... come quickly... the prayers are ending; there will be people in the street." And from above an enormous voice intoned:

“Tu.. u.. ba mi.. i.. i..rum...” And the serpent groaned discordantly. The end of a great box covered with black velvet glided forward above our heads; ropes were fastened round it. The priest had opened a door in the shadowy distance, beside a white marble tablet in the thick walls. The coffin up above moved forward a little again; the ropes were readjusted with a rattling, wooden sound. A dry, formal voice intoned from above:

“Èrit... Justus Ab auditione...”

From the open door the priest rattled his keys, and said, “Come, come,” impatiently.

I was horribly afraid that Seraphina would shriek or faint, or refuse to move. There was very little time. The pirates might stream out of the front of the cathedral as we came from the back; the bishop had promised to accentuate the length of the service. But Seraphina glided towards the open door; a breath of fresh air reached us. She looked back once. The coffin was swinging right over the hole, shutting out the light. Tomas Castro took her hand and said, “Come... come,” with infinite tenderness.

He had been sobbing convulsedly. We went up some steps, and the door shut behind us with a sound like a sigh of relief.

We walked fast, in perfect blackness and solitude, on the deserted beach between the old town and the village. Every soul was near the cathedral. A boat lay half afloat. To the left in the distance the light of the schooner opposite the Casa Riego wavered on the still water.

Suddenly Tomas Castro said:

“The senorita never before set foot to the open ground.”

At once I lifted her into the boat. “Shove off, Tomas,” I said, with a beating heart.

## **PART FOURTH — BLADE AND GUITAR**

## CHAPTER ONE

There was a slight, almost imperceptible jar, a faint grating noise, a whispering sound of sand — and the boat, without a splash, floated.

The earth, slipping as it were away from under the keel, left us borne upon the waters of the bay, which were as still as the windless night itself. The pushing off of that boat was like a launching into space, as a bird opens its wings on the brow of a cliff, and remains poised in the air. A sense of freedom came to me, the unreasonable feeling of exultation — as if I had been really a bird essaying its flight for the first time. Everything, sudden and evil and most fortunate, had been arranged for me, as though I had been a lay figure on which Romance had been wreaking its bewildering unexpectedness; but with the floating clear of the boat, I felt somehow that this escape I had to manage myself.

It was dark. Dipping cautiously the blade of the oar, I gave another push against the shelving shore. Seraphina sat, cloaked and motionless, and Tomas Castro, in the bows, made no sound. I didn't even hear him breathe. Everything was left to me. The boat, impelled afresh, made a slight ripple, and my elation was replaced in a moment by all the torments of the most acute anxiety.

I gave another push, and then lost the bottom. Success depended upon my resource, readiness, and courage. And what was this success? Immediately, it meant getting out of the bay, and into the open sea in a twelve-foot dinghy looted from some ship years ago by the Rio Medio pirates, if that miserable population of sordid and ragged outcasts of the Antilles deserved such a romantic name. They were sea-thieves.

Already the wooded shoulder of a mountain was thrown out intensely black by the glow in the sky behind. The moon was about to rise. A great anguish took my heart as if in a vice. The stillness of the dark shore struck me as unnatural. I imagined the yell of the discovery breaking it, and the fancy caused me a greater emotion than the thing itself, I flatter myself, could possibly have done. The unusual silence in which, through the open portals, the altar of the cathedral alone blazed with many flames upon the bay, seemed to enter my very heart violently, like a sudden access of anguish. The two in the boat with me were silent, too. I could not bear it.

“Seraphina,” I murmured, and heard a stifled sob.

“It is time to take the oars, Señor,” whispered Castro suddenly, as though he had fallen asleep as soon as he had scrambled into the bows, and only had awaked that instant. “The mists in the middle of the bay will hide us when the moon rises.”

It was time — if we were to escape. Escape where? Into the open sea? With that silent, sorrowing girl by my side! In this miserable cockleshell, and without any refuge open to us? It was not really a hesitation; she could not be left at the mercy of O’Brien. It was as though I had for the first time perceived how vast the world was; how dangerous; how unsafe. And there was no alternative. There could be no going back.

Perhaps, if I had known what was before us, my heart would have failed me utterly out of sheer pity. Suddenly my eyes caught sight of the moon making like the glow of a bush fire on the black slope of the mountain. In a moment it would flood the bay with light, and the schooner anchored off the beach before the Casa Riego was not eighty yards away. I dipped my oar without a splash. Castro pulled with his one hand.

The mists rising on the lowlands never filled the bay, and I could see them lying in moonlight across the outlet like a silvery white ghost of a wall. We penetrated it, and instantly became lost to view from the shore.

Castro, pulling quickly, turned his head, and grunted at a red blur very low in the mist. A fire was burning on the low point of land where Nichols — the Nova Scotian — had planted the battery which had worked such havoc with Admiral Rowley’s boats. It was a mere earthwork and some of the guns had been removed. The fire, however, warned us that there were some people on the point. We ceased rowing for a moment, and Castro explained to me that a fire was always lit when any of these thieves’ boats were stirring. There would be three or four men to keep it up. On this very night Manuel-del-Popolo was outside with a good many rowboats, waiting on the Indiaman. The ship had been seen nearing the shore since noon. She was becalmed now. Perhaps they were looting her already.

This fact had so far favoured our escape. There had been no strollers on the beach that night. Since the investment of the Casa Riego, Castro had lived amongst the besiegers on his prestige of a superior person, of a caballero skilled in war and diplomacy. No one knew how much the tubby, saturnine little man was in the confidence of the Juez O’Brien; and there was no doubt that he was a good Catholic. He was a very grave, a very silent caballero. In reality his heart had been broken by the death of Carlos,

and he did not care what happened to him. His action was actuated by his scorn and hate of the Rio Medio population, rather than by any friendly feeling towards myself.

On that night Domingo's partisans were watching the Casa Riego, while Manuel (who was more of a seaman) had taken most of his personal friends, and all the larger boats that would float, to do a bit of "outside work," as they called it, upon the becalmed West Indiaman.

This had facilitated Castro's plan, and it also accounted for the smallness of the boat, which was the only one of the refuse lot left on the beach that did not gape at every seam. She was not tight by any means, though. I could hear the water washing above the bottom-boards, and I remember how concern about keeping Seraphina's feet dry mingled with the grave apprehensions of our enterprise.

We had been paddling an easy stroke. The red blurr of the fire on the point was growing larger, while the diminished blaze of lights on the high altar of the cathedral pierced the mist with an orange ray.

"The boat should be baled out," I remarked in a whisper.

Castro laid his oar in and made his way to the thwart. It shows how well we were prepared for our flight, that there was not even a half-cocoanut shell in the boat. A gallon earthenware jar, stoppered with a bunch of grass, contained all our provision of fresh water. Castro displaced it, and, bending low, tried to bale with his big, soft hat. I should imagine that he found it impracticable, because, suddenly, he tore off one of his square-toed shoes with a steel buckle. He used it as a scoop, blaspheming at the necessity, but in a very low mutter, out of respect for Seraphina.

Standing up in the stern-sheets by her side, I kept on sculling gently. Once before I had gone desperately to sea — escaping the gallows, perhaps — in a very small boat, with the drunken song of Rangsley's uncle heralding the fascination of the unknown to a very callow youth. That night had been as dark, but the danger had been less great. The boat, it is true, had actually sunk under us, but then it was only the sea that might have swallowed me who knew nothing of life, and was as much a stranger to fate as the animals on our farm. But now the world of men stood ready to devour us, and the Gulf of Mexico was of no more account than a puddle on a road infested by robbers. What were the dangers of the sea to the passions amongst which I was launched — with my high fortunes in my hand, and, like all those who live and love, with a sword suspended above my head?



The danger had been less great on that old night, when I had heard behind me the soft crash of the smugglers' feet on the shingle. It had been less great, and, if it had had a touch of the sordid, it had led me to this second and more desperate escape — in a cockleshell, carrying off a silent and cloaked figure, which quickened my heart-beats at each look. I was carrying her off from the evil spells of the Casa Riego, as a knight a princess from an enchanted castle. But she was more to me than any princess to any knight.

There was never anything like that in the world. Lovers might have gone, in their passion, to a certain death; but never, it seemed to me, in the history of youth, had they gone in such an atmosphere of cautious stillness upon such a reckless adventure. Everything depended upon slipping out through the gullet of the bay without a sound. The men on the point had no means of pursuit, but, if they heard or saw anything, they could shout a warning to the boats outside. These were the real dangers — my first concern. Afterwards... I did not want to think of afterwards. There were only the open sea and the perilous coast. Perhaps, if I thought of them, I should give up.

I thought only of gaining each successive moment and concentrated all my faculties into an effort of stealthiness. I handled the boat with a deliberation full of tense prudence, as if the oar had been a stalk of straw, as if the water of the bay had been the film of a glass bubble an unguarded movement could have shivered to atoms. I hardly breathed, for the feeling that a deeper breath would have blown away the mist that was our sole protection now.

It was not blown away. On the contrary, it clung closer to us, with the enveloping chill of a cloud wreathing a mountain crag. The vague shadows and dim outlines that had hung around us began, at last, to vanish utterly in an impenetrable and luminous whiteness. And through the jumble of my thoughts darted the sudden knowledge that there was a sea-fog outside — a thing quite different from the nightly mists of the bay. It was rolling into the passage inexplicably, for no stir of air reached us. It was possible to watch its endless drift by the glow of the fire on the point, now much nearer us. Its edges seemed to melt away in the flight of the water-dust. It was a sea-fog coming in. Was it disastrous to us, or favourable? It, at least, answered our immediate need for concealment, and this was enough for me, when all our future hung upon every passing minute.

The Rio picaroons, when engaged in thieving from some ship becalmed on the coast, began by towing one of their schooners as far as the entrance. They left her there as a rallying point for the boats, and to receive the booty.

One of these schooners, as I knew, was moored opposite the Casa Riego. The other might be lying at anchor somewhere right in the fairway ahead, within a few yards. I strained my ears for some revealing sound from her, if she were there — a cough, a voice, the creak of a block, or the fall of something on her deck. Nothing came. I began to fear lest I should run stem on into her side without a moment's warning. I could see no further than the length of our twelve-foot boat.

To make certain of avoiding that danger, I decided to shave close the spit of sand that tipped the narrow strip of lowland to the south. I set my teeth, and sheered in resolutely.

Castro remained on the after-thwart, with his elbows on his knees. His head nearly touched my leg. I could distinguish the woeful, bent back, the broken swaying of the plume in his hat. Seraphina's perfect immobility gave me the measure of her courage, and the silence was so profoundly pellucid that the flutter of the flames that we were nearing began to come loud out of the blur of the glow. Then I heard the very crackling of the wood, like a fusillade from a great distance. Even then Castro did not deign to turn his head.

Such as he was — a born vagabond, contrabandista, spy in armed camps, sutler at the tail of the Grande Armée (escaped, God only knows how, from the snows of Russia), beggar, guerrillero, bandit, sceptically murderous, draping his rags in saturnine dignity — he had ended by becoming the sinister and grotesque squire of our quixotic Carlos. There was something romantically sombre in his devotion. He disdained to turn round at the danger, because he had left his heart on the coffin as a lesser affection would have laid a wreath. I looked down at Seraphina. She too, had left a heart in the vaults of the cathedral. The edge of the heavy cloak drawn over her head concealed her face from me, and, with her face, her ignorance, her great doubts, her great fears.

I heard, above the crackling of dry wood, a husky exclamation of surprise, and then a startled voice exclaiming:

“Look! Santissima Madre! What is this?”

Sheer instinct altered at once the motion of my hand so as to incline the bows of the dinghy away from the shore; but a sort of stupefying

amazement seized upon my soul. We had been seen. It was all over. Was it possible? All over, already?

In my anxiety to keep clear of the schooner which, for all I know to this day, may not have been there at all, I had come too close to the sand, so close that I heard soft, rapid footfalls stop short in the fog. A voice seemed to be asking me in a whisper:

“Where, oh, where?”

Another cried out irresistibly, “I see it.”

It was a subdued cry, as if hushed in sudden awe.

My arm swung to and fro; the turn of my wrist went on imparting the propelling motion of the oar. All the rest of my body was gripped helplessly in the dead expectation of the end, as if in the benumbing seconds of a fall from a towering height. And it was swift, too. I felt a draught at the back of my neck — a breath of wind. And instantly, as if a battering-ram had been let swing past me at many layers of stretched gauze, I beheld, through a tattered deep hole in the fog, a roaring vision of flames, borne down and springing up again; a dance of purple gleams on the strip of unveiled water, and three coal-black figures in the light.

One of them stood high on lank black legs, with long black arms thrown up stiffly above the black shape of a hat. The two others crouched low on the very edge of the water, peering as if from an ambush.

The clearness of this vision was contained by a thick and fiery atmosphere, into which a soft white rush and swirl of fog fell like a sudden whirl of snow. It closed down and overwhelmed at once the tall flutter of the flames, the black figures, the purple gleams playing round my oar. The hot glare had struck my eyeballs once, and had melted away again into the old, fiery stain on the mended fabric of the fog. But the attitudes of the crouching men left no room for doubt that we had been seen. I expected a sudden uplifting of voices on the shore, answered by cries from the sea, and I screamed excitedly at Castro to lay hold of his oar.

He did not stir, and after my shout, which must have fallen on the scared ears with a weird and unearthly note, a profound silence attended us — the silence of a superstitious fear. And, instead of howls, I heard, before the boat had travelled its own short length, a voice that seemed to be the voice of fear itself asking, “Did you hear that?” and a trembling mutter of an invocation to all the saints. Then a strangled throat trying to pronounce firmly, “The souls of the dead Inglez. Crying from pain.”

Admiral Rowley's seamen, so miserably thrown away in the ill-conceived attack on the bay, were making a ghostly escort for our escape. Those dead boats'-crews were supposed to haunt the fatal spot, after the manner of spectres that linger in remorse, regret, or revenge, about the gates of departure. I had blundered; the fog, breaking apart, had betrayed us. But my obscure and vanquished countrymen held possession of the outlet by the memory of their courage. In this critical moment it was they, I may say, who stood by us.

We, on our part, must have been disclosed, dark, indistinct, utterly inexplicable; completely unexpected; an apparition of stealthy shades. The painful voice in the fog said:

"Let them be. Answer not. They shall pass on, for none of them died on the shore — all in the water. Yes, all in the water."

I suppose the man was trying to reassure himself and his companions. His meaning, no doubt, was that, being on shore, they were safe from the ghosts of those Ingles who had never achieved a landing. From the enlarging and sudden deepening of the glow, I knew that they were throwing more brushwood on the fire.

I kept on sculling, and gradually the sharp fusillade of dry twigs grew more distant, more muffled in the fog. At last it ceased altogether. Then a weakness came over me, and, hauling my oar in, I sat down by Sera-phina's side. I longed for the sound of her voice, for some tender word, for the caress of a murmur upon my perplexed soul. I was sure of her, as of a conquered and rare treasure, whose possession simplifies life into a sort of adoring guardianship — and I felt so much at her mercy that an overwhelming sense of guilt made me afraid to speak to her. The slight heave of the open sea swung the boat up and down.

Suddenly Castro let out a sort of lugubrious chuckle, and, in low tones, I began to upbraid him with his apathy. Even with his one arm he should have obeyed my call to the oar. It was incomprehensible to me that we had not been fired at. Castro enlightened me, in a few moody and scornful words. The Rio Medio people, he commented upon the incident, were fools, of bestial nature, afraid of they knew not what.

"Castro, the valour of these dead countrymen of mine was not wasted; they have stood by us like true friends," I whispered in the excitement of our escape.

"These insensate English," he grumbled....

“A dead enemy would have served the turn better. If the caballero had none other than dead friends....”

His harsh, bitter mumble stopped. Then Sera-phina’s voice said softly:

“It is you who are the friend, Tomas Castro. To you shall come a friend’s reward.”

“Alas, Señorita!” he sighed. “What remains for me in this world — for me who have given for two masses for the souls of that illustrious man, and of your cousin Don Carlos, my last piece of silver?”

“We shall make you very rich, Tomas Castro,” she said with decision, as if there had been bags of gold in the boat.

He returned a high-flown phrase of thanks in a bitter, absent whisper. I knew well enough that the help he had given me was not for money, not for love — not even for loyalty to the Riegos. It was obedience to the last recommendation of Carlos. He ran risks for my safety, but gave me none of his allegiance.

He was still the same tubby, murderous little man, with a steel blade screwed to the wooden stump of his forearm, as when, swelling his breast, he had stepped on his toes before me like a bloodthirsty pigeon, in the steerage of the ship that had brought us from home. I heard him mumble, with almost incredible, sardonic contempt, that, indeed, the senor would soon have none but dead friends if he refrained from striking at his enemies. Had the senor taken the very excellent opportunity afforded by Providence, and that any sane Christian man would have taken — to let him stab the Juez O’Brien — we should not then be wandering in a little boat. What folly! What folly! One little thrust of a knife, and we should all have been now safe in our beds....

His tone was one of weary superiority, and I remained appalled by that truth, stripped of all chivalrous pretence. It was clear, in sparing that defenceless life, I had been guilty of cruelty for the sake of my conscience. There was Seraphina by my side; it was she who had to suffer. I had let her enemy go free, because he had happened to be near me, disarmed. Had I acted like an Englishman and a gentleman, or only like a fool satisfying his sentiment at other people’s expense? Innocent people, too, like the Riego servants, Castro himself; like Seraphina, on whom my high-minded forbearance had brought all these dangers, these hardships, and this uncertain fate.

She gave no sign of having heard Castro's words. The silence of women is very impenetrable, and it was as if my hold upon the world — since she was the whole world for me — had been weakened by that shade of decency of feeling which makes a distinction between killing and murder. But suddenly I felt, without her cloaked figure having stirred, her small hand slip into mine. Its soft warmth seemed to go straight to my heart soothing, invigorating — as it she had slipped into my palm a weapon of extraordinary and inspiring potency.

"Ah, you are generous," I whispered close to the edge of the cloak overshadowing her face.

"You must now think of yourself, Juan," she said.

"Of myself," I echoed sadly. "I have only you to think of, and you are so far away — out of my reach. There are your dead — all your loss, between you and me."

She touched my arm.

"It is I who must think of my dead," she whispered. "But you, you must think of yourself, because I have nothing of mine in this world now."

Her words affected me like the whisper of remorse. It was true. There were her wealth, her lands, her palaces; but her only refuge was that little boat. Her father's long aloofness from life had created such an isolation round his closing years that his daughter had no one but me to turn to for protection against the plots of her own Intendente. And, at the thought of our desperate plight, of the suffering awaiting us in that small boat, with the possibility of a lingering death for an end, I wavered for a moment. Was it not my duty to return to the bay and give myself up? In that case, as Castro expressed it, our throats would be cut for love of the Juez.

But Seraphina, the rabble would carry to the Casa on the palms of their hands — out of veneration for the family, and for fear of O'Brien.

"So, Señor," he mumbled, "if to you to-morrow's sun is as little as to me let us pull the boat's head, round."

"Let us set our hands to the side and overturn it, rather," Seraphina said, with an indignation of high command.

I said no more. If I could have taken O'Brien with me into the other world, I would have died to save her the pain of so much as a pinprick. But because I could not, she must even go with me; must suffer because I clung to her as men cling to their hope of highest good — with an exalted and selfish devotion.

Castro had moved forward, as if to show his readiness to pull round. Meantime I heard a click. A feeble gleam fell on his misty hands under the black halo of the hat rim. Again the flint and blade clicked, and a large red spark winked rapidly in the bows. He had lighted a cigarette.

## CHAPTER TWO

Silence, stillness, breathless caution were the absolute conditions of our existence. But I hadn't the heart to remonstrate with him for the danger he caused Seraphina and myself. The fog was so thick now that I could not make out his outline, but I could smell the tobacco very plainly.

The acrid odour of picadura seemed to knit the events of three years into one uninterrupted adventure. I remembered the shingle beach; the deck of the old Thames. It brought to my mind my first vision of Seraphina, and the emblazoned magnificence of Carlos' sick bed. It all came and went in a whiff of smoke; for of all the power and charm that had made Carlos so seductive there remained no such deep trace in the world as in the heart of the little grizzled bandit who, like a philosopher, or a desperado, puffed his cigarette in the face of the very spirit of murder hovering round us, under the mask and cloak of the fog. And by the serene heaven of my life's evening, the spirit of murder became actually audible to us in hasty and rhythmical knocks, accompanied by a cheerful tinkling.

These sounds, growing swiftly louder, at last induced Castro to throw away his cigarette. Seraphina clutched my arm. The noise of oars rowing fast, to the precipitated jingling of a guitar, swooped down upon us with a gallant ferocity.

"Caramba," Castro muttered; "it is the fool Manuel himself!"

I said, then: "We have eight shots between us two, Tomas."

He thrust his brace of pistols upon my knees.

"Dispose of them as your worship pleases," he muttered.

"You mustn't give up, yet," I whispered.

"What is it that I give up?" he mumbled wearily. "Besides, there grows from my forearm a blade. If I shall find myself indisposed to quit this world alone.... Listen to the singing of that imbecile."

A carolling falsetto seemed to hang muffled in upper space, above the fog that settled low on the water, like a dense and milky sediment of the air. The moonlight fell into it strangely. We seemed to breathe at the bottom of a shallow sea, white as snow, shining like silver, and impenetrably opaque everywhere, except overhead, where the yellow disc of the moon glittered through a thin cloud of steam. The gay truculence of the hollow knocking, the metallic jingle, the shrill trolling, went on crescendo to a burst of babbling voices, a mad speed of tinkling, a thundering shout, "Altro,



Amigos!” followed by a great clatter of oars flung in. The sudden silence pulsed with the ponderous strokes of my heart.

To escape now seemed impossible. At least it seemed impossible while they talked. A dark spot in the shining expanse of fog swam into view. It shifted its place after I had first made it out, and then remained motionless, astern of the dinghy. It was the shadow of a big boat full of men, but when they were silent, I was not sure that I saw anything at all. I made no doubt, had they been aware of our nearness, there were amongst them eyes that could have detected us in the same elusive way. But how could they even dream of anything of the kind? They talked noisily, and there must have been a round dozen of them, at the least.

Sometimes they would fall a-shouting all together, and then keep quiet as if listening. By-and-by I began to hear answering yells, that seemed to converge upon us from all directions.

We were in the thick of it. It was Manuel’s boat, as Castro had guessed, and the other boats were rallying upon it gropingly, keeping up a succession of yells:

“Ohe! Ohe! Where, where?”

And the people in Manuel’s boat howled back at them, “Ohe! Ohe...e! This way; here!”

Suddenly he struck the guitar a mighty blow, and chanted in an inspired and grandiose strain:

“Steer — for — the — song.”

His fingers ran riot among the strings, and above the jingling his voice, forced to the highest pitch, declaimed, as in the midst of a tempest:

“I adore the saints in the glory of heaven

And, on the dust of the earth,

The print of her footsteps.”

He was improvising. Sometimes he gasped; the rill of softened tinkle ran on, and, glaring watchfully, I fancied I could detect his shape in the white vapour, like a shadow thrown from afar by a tallow dip upon a snowy sheet — the lank droop of his posturing, the greasy locks, the attentive poise of his head, the sentimental rolling of his lustrous and enormous eyes.

I had not forgotten his astonishing display in the cabin of the schooner when, after the confiding of his woes and his ambitions, he had favoured me with a sample of his art. As at that time, when he had been nursing his truculent conceit, he sang, and the unsteady twanging of his guitar lurched

and staggered far behind his voice, like a drunken slave in the footsteps of a raving master. Tinkle, tinkle, twang! A headlong rush of muddled fingering; a sudden bang, like a heavy stumble.

“She is the proud daughter of the old Castile! Olà! Olà!” he chanted mysteriously at the beginning of every stanza in a rapturous and soft ecstasy, and then would shriek, as though he had been suddenly cast up on the rock. The poet of Rio Medio was rallying his crew of thieves to a rhapsody of secret and unrequited passion. Twang, ping, tinkle tinkle. He was the Capataz of the valiant Lugareños! The true Capataz! The only Capataz. Olà! Olà! Twang, twang. But he was the slave of her charms, the captive of her eyes, of her lips, of her hair, of her eyebrows, which, he proclaimed in a soaring shriek, were like rainbows arched over stars.

It was a love-song, a mournful parody, the odious grimacing of an ape to the true sorrow of the human face. I could have fled from it, as from an intolerable humiliation. And it would have been easy to pull away unheard while he sang, but I had a plan, the beginning of a plan, something like the beginning of a hope. And for that I should have to use the fog for the purpose of remaining within earshot.

Would the fog last long enough to serve my turn? That was the only question, and I believed it would, for it settled lower; it settled down denser, almost too heavy to be stirred by the fitful efforts of the breeze. It was a true night fog of the tropics, that, born after sunset, tries to creep back into the warm bosom of the sea before sunrise. Once in Rio Medio, taking a walk in the early morning along the sand-dunes, I had stood watching below me the heads of some people, fishing from a boat, emerge strangely in the dawn out of such a fog. It concealed their very shoulders more completely than water could have done. I trusted it would not come so soon to our heads, emerging, though it seemed to me that already, by merely clambering on Castro’s shoulders, I could attain to clear moonlight; see the highlands of the coast, the masts of the English ship. She could not be very far off if only one could tell the direction. But an unsteady little dinghy was not the platform for acrobatic exercises, and Castro not exactly the man.

The slightest noise would have betrayed us, and moreover, the thing was no good, for even supposing I had got a hurried sight of the ship’s spars, I should have to get down into the fog to pull, and there would be nothing visible to keep us from going astray, unless at every dozen strokes I

clambered on Castro's shoulders again to rectify the direction — an obviously impracticable and absurd proceeding.

"She is the proud daughter of old Castile, Olà, Olà," Manuel sang confidentially with a subdued and gallant lilt... Obviously impracticable. But I had another idea.

"Tinkle tinkle pinnng... Brrroum. Brrroum.

My soul yearns for the alms of a smile.

For a forgiving glance yearns my lofty soul..."

he sang. Ah, if one could have added another four feet to one's stature. Four or five feet only. There seemed to be nothing but a thin veil between me and the moon. No more than a thin haze. But at the level of my eyes everything was hidden. From behind the white veil came the crying of the strings, a screeching, lugubrious and fierce in its artificial transport, as if it were mocking my sad and ardent conviction of un-worthiness, the crowning torment, and the inward pride of pure love. In the breathless pauses I could hear the hollow bumping of gunwales knocking against each other; faint splashings of oars; the distant hail of some laggards groping their way on the shrouded sea.

The note of cruel passion that runs in the blood held these cut-throats profoundly silent in their boats, as at home I could imagine a party of smugglers (they would not stick at a murder or two, either) listening, with pensive faces, to a sentimental ditty of some "sweet Nancy," howled dismally within the walls of a wayside taproom in the smoke of pipes. I seemed to understand profoundly the difference of races that brings with it the feeling of romance or awakens hate. My gorge rose at Manuel's song. I hated his lamentations. "Alas, alas; in vain, in vain." He strummed with vertiginous speed, with fury, and the distracted clamour of his voice, wrestling madly with the ringing madness of the strings, ended in a piercing and supreme shriek.

"Finished. It is finished." A low and applauding murmur flowed to my ears, the austere acclamations of connoisseurs. "Viva, viva, Manuele!" — a squeak of fervid admiration. "Ah, our Manuelito..." But a gruff voice discoursed jovially, "Care not, Manuel. What of Paquita with the broken tooth? Is she not left to thee? And por Dios, hombres, in the dark all women are alike."

"I will cram thy unclean mouth with live coals," Manuel drawled spitefully.

They roared with laughter at this sally. I depicted to myself their shapes, their fierce gesticulations, their earrings, bound heads, rags, and weapons, the vile scowls on their swarthy, grimacing faces. My anxiety beheld them as plainly as anything seen with the eyes of the body. And, with my sharpened hearing catching every word with preternatural distinctness, I felt as if, the ring of Gyges on my finger, I had sat invisible at the council of my enemies.

It was noisy, animated, with an issue of supreme interest for us. The ship, seen at midday standing inshore with a light wind, had not approached the bay near enough to be conveniently attacked till just after dusk. They had waited for her all the afternoon, sleeping and gambling on the spit of sand. But something heavy in her appearance had excited their craven suspicions, and checked their ardour. She appeared to them dangerous. What if she were an English man-of-war disguised? Some even pretended to recognize in her positively one of the lighter frigates of Rowley's squadron. Night had fallen whilst they squabbled, and their flotilla hung under the land, the men in a conflict of rapacity and fear, arguing among themselves as to the ship's character, but all unanimously goading Manuel — since he would call himself their only Capataz — to go boldly and find out.

It seems he had just been doing this with the help of a few choicer spirits, and under cover of the fog. They had managed to steal near enough to hear Englishmen conversing on board, orders given, and the yo-hoing of invisible sailors, trimming the yards of the ship to the fitful airs. This last, of course, was decisive. Such sounds are not heard on a man-of-war. She was a merchant ship: she would be an easy prey. And Manuel, in a state of exaltation at his venturesome bravery, had pulled back inshore, to rally all the boats round his own, and lead them to certain plunder. They would soon find out, he declaimed, what it was to have at their head their own valiant Manuel, instead of that vagabond, that stranger, that Andalusian starveling; that traitor, that infidel, that Castro. Hidden away, he seemed to spout all this for our ears alone, as though he could see us in our boat.... Patience; patience! Some day he would cut off that interloper's eyelids, and lay him on his back under a nice clear sun. Castro made a brusque movement; a little shudder of disgust escaped Seraphina.... Meantime, Manuel declared, by his audacity, that ship was as good as theirs already. "Viva el Capataz!" they cheered.

The cloud-like vapours resting on the sea muffled the short roar; we heard grim laughter, excited cries. He began to make a set speech, and his voice, haranguing with vehement inflections in the shining whiteness of a cloud, had an amazing and uncorporeal character; the quality of abstract surprise; of phenomenal emotion shouted into empty space. And for me it had, also, the fascination of a revealed depth.

It was like the oration of an ambitious leader in a farce; he held his hearers with his eloquence, as much as he had done with the song of his grotesque and desecrating love. He vaunted his sagacity and his valour, and overwhelmed with invective all sorts of names — my own and Castro's among them. He revealed the unholy ideals of all that band of scoundrels — ideals that he said should find fruition under his captaincy. He boasted of secret conferences with O'Brien. There were murmurs of satisfaction.

I don't wonder at Seraphina's shudder of horror, of disgust, of dismay, and indignation. Robbed of the inexpugnable shelter of the Casa Riego, she, too, was made to look into the depths; upon the animalism, the lusts, and the reveries of that sordid, vermin-haunted crowd. I felt for her a profound and shamed sorrow. It was like a profaning touch on the sacredness of her mourning for the dead, and on her clear and passionate vision of life.

"Hombres de Rio Medio! Amigos! Valientes!..." Manuel was beginning his peroration. He would lead them, now, against the English ship. The terrified heretics would surrender. There was always gold in English ships. He stopped his speech, and then called loudly, "Let the boats keep touch with each other, and not stray in that fog."

"The dog," grunted Castro. We heard a resolute bustle of preparation; oars were being shipped.

"Make ready, Tomas," I whispered.

"Ready for what?" he grumbled. "Where shall your worship run from these swine?"

"We must follow them," I answered.

"The madness of the senor's countrymen descends upon him," he whispered with sardonic politeness. "Wherefore follow?"

"To find the English ship," I answered swiftly.

This, from the moment we had heard Manuel's guitar, had been my idea. Since the fog that concealed us from their sight made us, too, hopelessly blind, those wretches must guide us themselves out of their own clutches, as it were. I don't put this forward as an inspired conception. It was a most

risky and almost hopeless expedient; but the position was so critical that there was no other alternative to sitting still and waiting with folded hands for discovery. Castro seemed more inclined for the latter.

Fortunately, the bandits wasted some time in blasphemous bickerings as to the order of the boats in the procession of attack. I urged my views upon Castro in hurried whispers. His assent was of importance, since he could use an oar very well, and, if left to myself, I could not hope to scull fast enough to keep within hearing of the flotilla.

"Of what use to us would be a ship in Manuel's power?" he argued morosely. On the other hand, if we waited near her till she had been plundered and released, neither the fog nor the night would last forever.

"My countrymen will beat them off," I affirmed confidently. "At any rate, let us be on the spot. We may take a hand. And remember, Tomas, they are not led by you, this time."

"True," he said, mollified. "But one thing more deserves the consideration of your worship... If we follow this plan, we take the senorita among flying bullets. And lead, alas! unlike steel, is blind, or that illustrious man would not now be dead. If we wait here, the senorita, at least, shall take no harm from these ruffians, as I have said."

"Are you afraid of the bullets?" I asked Seraphina.

Before she had answered, Castro hissed at me:

"Oh, you unspeakable English. Would you sacrifice the daughter, too, only because she is brave?"

His sinister allusion made my blood boil with rage, and suddenly run cold in my veins. Swathed in the brilliant cloud, we heard the sounds of quarrelling and scrambling die away; cries of "Ready! ready!" an unexpected and brutal laugh. Seraphina leaned forward.

"Tomas, I wish this thing. I command it," she whispered imperiously. "We shall help these English on the ship. We must; I command it. For these are now my people."

I heard him mutter to himself, "h, dear shade of my Carlos. Her people. Where are now mine?" But he shipped his oar, and sat waiting.

In the moment before the picaroons actually started, I became the prey of the most intense anxiety. I knew we were to seaward of the cluster. But of our position relatively to the boats, and to the English ship they would make for, I was profoundly ignorant. The dinghy might be lying right in the way. Before I could master the sort of disorder I was thrown into by that thought

— which, strange to say, had not occurred to me till then — with a shrill whistle Manuel led off.

We are always incited to trust, our eyes rather than our ears; and such is the conventional temper in which we receive the impression of our senses that I had no idea they were so near us. The destruction of my illusory feeling of distance was the most startling thing in the world. Instantly, it seemed, with the second swing and splash of the oars, the boats were right upon us. They went clear. It was like being grazed by a fall of rocks. I seemed to feel the wind of the rush.

The rapid clatter of rowing, the excited hum of voices, the violent commotion of the water, passed by us with an impetuosity that took my breath away. They had started in a bunch. There must have been amongst them at least one crew of negroes, because somebody was beating a tambourine smartly, and the rowers chorused in a quick, panting undertone, “Ho, ho, talibambo.... Ho, ho, talibambo.” One of the boats silhouetted herself for an instant, a row of heads swaying back and forth, towered over astern by a full-length figure as straight as an arrow. A retreating voice thundered, “Silence!” The sounds and the forms faded together in the fog with amazing swiftness.

Seraphina, her cloak off, her head bare, stared forward after the fleeting murmurs and shadows we were pursuing. Sometimes she warned us, “More to the left”; or, “Faster!” We had to put forth our best, for Manuel, as if in the very wantonness of confidence, had set a tremendous pace.

I suppose he took his first direction by the light on the point. I cannot tell what guided him after that feeble sheen had become buried in the fog; but there was no check in the speed, no sign of hesitation. We followed in the track of the sound, and, for the most part, kept in sight of the elusive shadow of the sternmost boat. Often, in a denser belt of fog, the sounds of rowing became muffled almost to extinction; or we seemed to hear them all round and, startled, checked our speed. Dark apparitions of boats would surge up on all sides in a most inexplicable way; to the right; to the left; even coming from behind. They appeared real, unmistakable, and, before we had time to dodge them, vanished utterly. Then we had to spurt desperately after the grind of the oars, caught, just in time, in an unexpected direction.

And then we lost them. We pulled frantically. Seraphina had been urging us, “Faster! faster!” From time to time I would ask her, “Can you see

them?" "Not yet," she answered curtly. The perspiration poured down my face. Castro's panting was like the wheezing of bellows at my back. Suddenly, in a despairing tone, she said:

"Stop! I can neither see nor hear anything now."

We feathered our oars at once, and fell to listening with lowered heads. The ripple of the boat's way expired slowly. A great white stillness hung slumbrously over the sea.

It was inconceivable. We pulled once or twice with extreme energy for a few minutes after imaginary whistles or shouts. Once I heard them passing our bows. But it was useless; we stopped, and the moon, from within the mistiness of an immense halo, looked dreamily upon our heads.

Castro grunted, "Here is an end of your plan, Señor Don Juan."

The peculiar and ghastly hopelessness of our position could not be better illustrated than by this fresh difficulty. We had lost touch — with a murderous gang that had every inducement not to spare our lives. And positively it was a misfortune; an abandonment. I refused to admit to myself its finality, as if it had reflected upon the devotion of tried friends. I repeated to Castro that we should become aware of them directly — probably even nearer than we wished. And, at any rate, we were certain of a mighty loud noise when the attack on the ship began. She, at least, could not be very far now. "Unless, indeed," I admitted with exasperation, "we are to suppose that your imbecile Lugareños have missed their prey and got themselves as utterly lost as we ourselves."

I was irritated — by his nodding plume; by his cold, perfunctory, as if sleepy mutters, "Possibly, possibly, puede ser." He retorted: "Your English generosity could wish your countrymen no better luck than that my Lugareños, as your worship pleases to call them, should miss their way. They are hungry for loot — with much fasting. And it is hunger that makes your wolf fly straight at the throat."

All the time Seraphina breathed no word. But when I raised my voice, she put out a hushing hand to my arm. And, from her intent pose, from the turn of her shadowy head, I knew that she was peering and listening loyally.

Minutes passed — very few, I dare say — and brought no sound. The restlessness of waiting made us dip our oars in a haphazard stroke, without aim, without the means of judging whether we pulled to seaward, inshore, north, or south, or only in a circle. Once we went excitedly in chase of some



splashing that must have been a leaping fish. I was hanging my head over my idle oar when Seraphina touched me.

"I see!" she said, pointing over the bows.

Both Castro and I, peering horizontally over the water, did not see anything. Not a shadow. Moreover, if they were so near, we ought to have heard something.

"I believe it is land!" she murmured. "You are looking too low, Juan."

As soon as I looked up I saw it, too, dark and beetling, like the overhang of a low cliff. Where on earth had we blundered to? For a moment I was confounded. Fiery reflections from a light played faintly above that shape. Then I recognized what I was looking at. We had found the ship.

The fog was so shallow that up there the upper bulk of a heavy, square stern, the very rails and stanchions crowning it like a balustrade, jutted out in the misty sheen like the balcony of an invisible edifice, for the lines of her run, the sides of her hull, were plunged in the dense white layer below. And, throwing back my head, I traced even her becalmed sails, pearly gray pinnacles of shadow uprising, tall and motionless, towards the moon.

A redness wavered over her, as from a blaze on her deck. Could she be on fire? And she was silent as a tomb. Could she be abandoned? I had promised myself to dash alongside, but there was a weirdness in that fragment of a dumb ship hanging out of a fog. We pulled only a stroke or two nearer to the stern, and stopped. I remembered Castro's warning — the blindness of flying lead; but it was the profound stillness that checked me. It seemed to portend something inconceivable. I hailed, tentatively, as if I had not expected to be answered, "Ship, ahoy!"

Neither was I answered by the instantaneous, "Hallo," of usual watchfulness, though she was not abandoned. Indeed, my hail made a good many men jump, to judge by the sounds and the words that came to me from above. "What? What? A hail?" "Boat near?" "In English, sir."

"Dive for the captain, one of you," an authoritative voice directed. "He's just run below for a minute. Don't frighten the missus. Call him out quietly."

Talking, in confidential undertones, followed.

"See him?" "Can't, sir." "What's the dodge, I wonder." "Astern, I think, sir." "D — — — n this fog, it lies as thick as pea-soup on the water."

I waited, and after a perplexed sort of pause, heard a stern "Keep off."

## CHAPTER THREE

They did not suspect how close I was to them. And their temper struck me at once as unsafe. They seemed very much on the alert, and, as I imagined, disposed to precipitate action. I called out, deadening my voice warily:

“I am an Englishman, escaping from the pirates here. We want your help.”

To this no answer was made, but by that time the captain had come on deck. The dinghy must have drifted in a little closer, for I made out behind the shadowy rail one, two, three figures in a row, looming bulkily above my head, as men appear enlarged in mist.

“‘Englishman,’ he says.” “That’s very likely,” pronounced a new voice. They held a hurried consultation up there, of which I caught only detached sentences, and the general tone of concern. “It’s perfectly well known that there is an Englishman here.... Aye, a runaway second mate.... Killed a man in a Bristol ship.... What was his name, now?”

“Won’t you answer me?” I called out.

“Aye, we will answer you as soon as we see you.... Keep your eyes skinned fore and aft on deck there.... Ready, boys?”

“All ready, sir”; voices came from further off.

“Listen to me,” I entreated.

Someone called out briskly, “This is a bad place for pretty tales of Englishmen in distress. We know very well where we are.”

“You are off Rio Medio,” I began anxiously; “and I — — —”

“Speaks the truth like a Briton, anyhow,” commented a lazy drawl.

“I would send another man to the pump,” a reflective voice suggested. “To make sure of the force, Mr. Sebright, you know.”

“Certainly, sir.... Another hand to the brakes, bo’sun.”

“I have been held captive on shore,” I said. “I escaped this evening, three hours ago.”

“And found this ship in the fog? You made a good shot at it, didn’t you?”

“It’s no time for trifling, I swear to you,” I continued. “They are out looking for you, in force. I’ve heard them. I was with them when they started.”

“I believe you.”

“They seem to have missed the ship.”

“So you came to have a friendly chat meantime. That’s kind. Beastly weather, aint it?”

“I want to come aboard,” I shouted. “You must be crazy not to believe me.”

“But we do believe every single word you say,” bantered the Sebright voice with serenity.

Suddenly another struck in, “Nichols, I call to mind, sir.”

“Of course, of course. This is the man.”

“My name’s not Nichols,” I protested.

“Now, now. You mustn’t begin to lie,” remonstrated Sebright. Somebody laughed discreetly.

“You are mistaken, on my honour,” I said. “Nichols left Rio Medio some time ago.”

“About three hours, eh?” came the drawl of insufferable folly in these precious minutes.

It was clear that Manuel had gone astray, but I feared not for long. They would spread out in search. And now I had found this hopeless ship, it seemed impossible that anybody else could miss her.

“You may be boarded any moment by more than a dozen boats. I warn you solemnly. Will you let me come?”

A low whistle was heard on board. They were impressed, “Why should he tell us this?” an undertone inquired.

“Why the devil shouldn’t he? It’s no great news, is it? Some scoundrelly trick. This man’s up to any dodge. Why, the ‘Jane’ was taken in broad day by two boats that pretended they were going to sell vegetables.”

“Look out, or by heavens you’ll be taken by surprise. There’s a lot of them,” I said as impressively as I could.

“Look out, look out. There’s a lot of them,” someone yelled in a sort of panic.

“Oh, that’s your game,” Sebright’s voice said to me. “Frighten us, eh? Never you mind what this skunk says, men. Stand fast. We shall take a lot of killing.” He was answered by a sort of pugnacious uproar, a clash of cutlasses and laughter, as if at some joke.

“That’s right, boys; mind and send them away with clean faces, you gunners. Jack, you keep a good lookout for that poor distressed Englishman. What’s that? a noise in the fog? Stand by. Now then, cook!...”

“All ready to dish up, sir,” a voice answered him.

It was like a sort of madness. Were they thinking of eating? Even at that the English talk made my heart expand — the homeliness of it. I seemed to know all their voices, as if I had talked to each man before. It brought back memories, like the voices of friends.

But there was the strange irrelevancy, levity, the enmity — the irrational, baffling nature of the anguishing conversation, as if with the unapproachable men we meet in nightmares.

We in the dinghy, as well as those on board, were listening anxiously. A profound silence reigned for a time.

“I don’t care for myself,” I tried once more, speaking distinctly. “But a lady in the boat here is in great danger, too. Won’t you do something for a woman?”

I perceived, from the sort of stir on board, that this caused some sensation.

“Or is the whole ship’s company afraid to let one little boat come alongside?” I added, after waiting for an answer.

A throat was cleared on board mildly, “Hem... you see, we don’t know who you are.”

“I’ve told you who I am. The lady is Spanish.”

“Just so. But there are Englishmen and Englishmen in these days. Some of them keep very bad company ashore, and others afloat. I couldn’t think of taking you on board, unless I know something more of you.”

I seemed to detect an intention of malice in the mild voice. The more so that I overheard a rapid interchange of mutterings up there. “See him yet?” “Not a thing, sir.” “Wait, I say.”

Nothing could overcome the fixed idea of these men, who seemed to enjoy so much the cleverness of their suspicions. It was the most dangerous of tempers to deal with. It made them as untrustworthy as so many lunatics. They were capable of anything, of decoying us alongside, and stoving the bottom out of the boat, and drowning us before they discovered their mistake, if they ever did. Even as it was, there was danger; and yet I was extremely loath to give her up. It was impossible to give her up. But what were we to do? What to say? How to act?

“Castro, this is horrible,” I said blankly. That he was beginning to chafe, to fret, and shuffle his feet only added to my dismay. He might begin at any moment to swear in Spanish, and that was sure to bring a shower of lead,

blind, fired blindly. "We have nothing to expect from the people of that ship. We cannot even get on board."

"Not without Manuel's help, it seems," he said bitterly. "Strange, is it not, Señor? Your countrymen — your excellent and virtuous countrymen. Generous and courageous and perspicacious."

Seraphina said suddenly, "They have reason. It is well for them to be suspicious of us in this place." She had a tone of calm reproof, and of faith.

"They shall be of more use when they are dead," Castro muttered. "The senor's other dead countrymen served us well."

"I shall give you great, very great sums of money," Seraphina suddenly cried towards the ship. "I am the Señorita Seraphina Riego."

"There is a woman — that's a woman's voice, I'll swear," I heard them exclaim on board, and I cried again:

"Yes, yes. There is a woman."

"I dare say. But where do you come in? You are a distressed Englishman, aren't you?" a voice came back.

"You shall let us come up on your ship," Seraphina said. "I shall come myself, alone — Seraphina Riego."

"Eh, what?" the voice asked.

I felt a little wind on the back of my head. There was desperate hurry.

"We are escaping to get married," I called out. They were beginning to shout orders on the ship. "Oh, you've come to the wrong shop. A church is what you want for that trouble," the voice called back brutally, through the other cries of orders to square the yards.

I shouted again, but my voice must have been drowned in the creaking of blocks and yards. They were alert enough for every chance of getting away — for every flaw of wind. Already the ship was less distinct, as if my eyes had grown dim. By the time a voice on board her cried, "Belay," faintly, she had gone from my sight. Then the puff of wind passed away, too, and left us more alone than ever, with only the small disk of the moon poised vertically above the mists.

"Listen," said Tomas Castro, after what seemed an eternity of crestfallen silence.

He need not have spoken; there could be no doubt that Manuel had lost himself, and my belief is that the ship had sailed right into the midst of the flotilla. There was an unmistakable character of surprise in the distant

tumult that arose suddenly, and as suddenly ceased for a space of a breath or two. "Now, Castro," I shouted. "Ha! bueno!"

We gave way with a vigour that seemed to lift the dinghy out of the water. The uproar gathered volume and fierceness.

From the first it was a hand-to-hand contest, engaged in suddenly, as if the assailants had at once managed to board in a body, and, as it were, in one unanimous spring. No shots had been fired. Too far to hear the blows, and seeing nothing as yet of the ship, we seemed to be hastening towards a deadly struggle of voices, of shadows with leathern throats; every cry heard in battle was there — rage, encouragement, fury, hate, and pain. And those of pain were amazingly distinct. They were yells; they were howls. And suddenly, as we approached the ship, but before we could make out any sign of her, we came upon a boat. We had to swerve to clear her. She seemed to have dropped out of the fight in utter disarray; she lay with no oars out, and full of men who writhed and tumbled over each other, shrieking as if they had been flayed. Above the writhing figures in the middle of the boat, a tall man, upright in the stern-sheets, raved awful imprecations and shook his fists above his head.

The blunt dinghy foamed past that vision within an oar's length, no more, making straight for the clamour of the fight. The last puff of wind must have thinned the fog in the ship's track; for, standing up, face forward to pull stroke, I saw her come out, stern-on to us, from truck to water-line, mistily tall and motionless, but resounding with the most fierce and desperate noises. A cluster of empty boats clung low to her port side, raft-like and vague on the water.

We heard now, mingled with the fury and hate of shouts reverberating from the placid sails, mighty thuds and crashes, as though it had been a combat with clubs and battle-axes.

Evidently, in the surprise and haste of the unexpected coming together, they had been obliged to board all on the same side. As I headed for the other a big boat, full of men, with many oars, shot across our bows, and vanished round the ship's counter in the twinkling of an eye. The defenders, engaged on the port side, were going to be taken in the rear. We were then so close to the counter that the cries of "Death, death," rang over our heads. A voice on the poop said furiously in English, "Stand fast, men." Next moment, we, too, rounded the quarter only twenty feet behind the big boat, but with a slightly wider sweep.

I said, "Have the pistols ready, Seraphina." And she answered quite steadily:

"They are ready, Juan."

I could not have believed that any handiwork of man afloat could have got so much way through the water. To this very day I am not rid of the absurd impression that, at that particular moment, the dinghy was travelling with us as fast as a cannon-ball. No sooner round than we were upon them. We were upon them so fast that I had barely the time to fling away my oar, and close my grip on the butt of the pistols Seraphina pressed into my hand from behind. Castro, too, had dropped his oar, and, turning as swift as a cat, crouched in the bows. I saw his good arm darting out towards their boat.

They had cast a grapnel cleverly, and, swung abreast of the main chains, were grimly busied in boarding the undefended side in silence. One had already his leg over the ship's rail, and below him three more were clambering resolutely, one above the other. The rest of them, standing up in a body with their faces to the ship, were so oblivious of everything in their purpose, that they staggered all together to the shock of the dinghy, heavily, as if the earth had reeled under them.

Castro knew what he was doing. I saw his only hand hop along the gunwale, dragging our cockle-shell forward very swiftly. The tottering Spaniards turned their heads, and for a moment we looked at each other in silence.

I was too excited to shout; the surprise seemed to have deprived them of their senses, and they all had the same grin of teeth closed upon the naked blades of their knives, the same stupid stare fastened upon my eyes. I pulled the trigger in the nearest face, and the terrific din of the fight going on above us was overpowered by the report of the pistol, as if by a clap of thunder. The man's gaping mouth dropped the knife, and he stood stiffly long enough for the thought, "I've missed him," to flash through my mind before he tumbled clean out of the boat without touching anything, like a wooden dummy tipped by the heels. His headlong fall sent the water flying high over the stern of the dinghy. With the second barrel I took a long shot at the man sitting amazed, astride of the rail above. I saw him double up suddenly, and fall inboard sideways, but the fellow following him made a convulsive effort, and leapt out of sight on to the deck of the ship. I dropped the discharged weapon, and fired the first barrel of the other at the upper of the two men clinging halfway up the ship's side. To that one shot they both

vanished as if by enchantment, the fellow I had hit knocking off his friend below. The crash of their fall was followed by a great yell.

These had been all nearly point-blank shots, and, anyhow, I had had a good deal of pistol practice. Macdonald had a little gallery at Horton Pen. The Lugareños, huddled together in the boat, were only able to moan with terror. They made soft, pitiful, complaining noises. Two or three took headers overboard, like so many frogs, and then one began to squeak exactly like a rat.

By that time, Castro, with his fixed blade, had cut their grapnel rope close to the ring. As the ship kept forging ahead all the time, the boat of the pirate bumped away lightly from between the vessel and our dinghy, and we remained alongside, holding to the end of the severed line. I sent my fourth shot after them and got in exchange a scream and a howl of "Mercy! mercy! we surrender!" She swung clear of the quarter, all hushed, and faded into the mist and moonlight, with the head and arms of a motionless man hanging grotesquely over the bows.

Leaving Seraphina with Castro, and sticking the remaining pair of pistols in my belt, I swarmed up the rope. The moon, the lights of several lanterns, the glare from the open doors, mingled violently in the steamy fog between the high bulwarks of the ship. But the character of the contest was changing, even as I paused on the rail to get my bearings. The fellow who had leapt on board to escape my shot had bolted across the deck to his friends on the other side, yelling:

"Fly, fly! The heretics are coming, shooting from the sea. All is lost. Fly, oh fly!"

He had jumped straight overboard, but the infection of his panic was already visible. The cries of "Muerte, muerte! Death, death!" had ceased, and the Englishmen were cheering ferociously. In a moment, under my eyes, the seamen, who had been holding their own with difficulty in a shower of defensive blows, began to dart forward, striking out with their fists, catching with their hands. I jumped upon the main hatch, and found myself in the skirt of the final rush.

A tall Lugareño had possessed himself of one of the ship's capstan bars, and, less craven than the others, was flourishing it on high, aiming at the head of a sailor engaged in throttling a negro whom he held at the full length of his immense arms. I fired, and the Lugareño tumbled down with



all the appearance of having knocked himself over with the bar he had that moment uplifted. It rested across his neck as he lay stretched at my feet.

I was not able to effect anything more after this, because the sailor, after rushing his limp antagonist overboard with terrific force, turned raging for more, caught sight of me — an evident stranger — and flew at my throat. He was English, but as he squeezed my windpipe so hard that I couldn't utter a word I brought the butt of my pistol upon his thick skull without the slightest compunction, for, indeed, I had to deal with a powerful man, well able to strangle me with his bare hands, and very determined to achieve the feat. He grunted under the blow, reeled away a few steps, then, charging back at once, gripped me round the body, and tried to lift me off my feet. We fell together into a warm puddle.

I had no idea spilt blood kept its warmth so much. And the quantity of it was appalling; the deck seemed to swim with gore, and we simply weltered in it. We rolled rapidly along the reeking scuppers, amongst the feet of a lot of men who were hopping about us in the greatest excitement, the hearty thuds of blows, aimed with all sorts of weapons, just missing my head. The pistol was kicked out of my hand.

The horror of my position was very great. Must I kill the man? must I die myself in this miserable and senseless manner? I tried to shout, "Drag this maniac off me."

He was pinning my arms to my body. I saw the furious faces bending over me, the many hands murderously uplifted. They, of course, couldn't tell that I wasn't one of the men who had boarded them, and my life had never been in such jeopardy. I felt all the fury of rage and mortification. Was I to die like this, villainously trodden underfoot, on the threshold of safety, of liberty, of love? And, in those moments of violent struggle I saw, as one sees in moments of wisdom and meditation, my soul — all life, lying under the shadow of a perfidious destiny. And Seraphina was there in the boat, waiting for me. The sea! The boat! They were in another land, and I, I should no more.... never any more.... A sharp voice called, "Back there, men. Steady. Take him alive." They dragged me up.

I needn't relate by what steps, from being terribly handled as a captive, I was promoted to having my arms shaken off in the character of a saviour. But I got any amount of praise at last, though I was terribly out of breath — at the very last gasp, as you might say. A man, smooth-faced, well-knit, very elated and buoyant, began talking to me endlessly. He was mighty

happy, and anyhow he could talk to me, because I was past doing anything but taking a moment's rest. He said I had come in the nick of time, and was quite the best of fellows.

"If you had a fancy to be called the Archbishop of Canterbury, we'd 'your Grace' you. I am the mate, Sebright. The captain's gone in to show himself to the missus; she wouldn't like to have him too much chipped.... Wonderful is the love of woman. She sat up a bit later to-night with her fancy-sewing to see what might turn up. I told her at tea-time she had better go in early and shut her stateroom door, because if any of the Dagos chanced to come aboard, I couldn't be responsible for the language of my crowd. We are supposed to keep clear of profanity this trip, she being a niece of Mr. Perkins of Bristol, our owner, and a Methodist. But, hang it all, there's reason in all things. You can't have a ship like a chapel — though she would. Oh, bless you, she would, even when we're beating off these picaroons."

I was sitting on the afterhatch, and leaning my head on my arms.

"Feel bad? Do you? Handled you like a bag of shavings. Well, the boys got their monkey up, hammering the Dagos. Here you, Mike, go look along the deck, for a double-barrelled pistol. Move yourself a bit. Feel along under the spars."

There was something authoritative and knowing in his personality; boyishly elated and full of business.

"We must put the ship to rights. You don't think they'd come back for another taste? The blessed old deck's afloat. That's my little dodge, boiling water for these Dagos, if they come. So I got the cook to fire up, and we put the suction-hose of the fire pump into the boiler, and we filled the coppers and the kettles. Not a bad notion, eh? But ten times as much wouldn't have been enough, and the hose burst at the third stroke, so that only one boat got anything to speak of. But Lord, she dropped out of the ruck as if she'd been swept with langridge. Squealed like a litter of pigs, didn't they?"

What I had taken for blood had been the water from the burst hose. I must say I was relieved. My new friend babbled any amount of joyous information into me before I quite got my wind back. He rubbed his hands and clapped me on the shoulder. But his heart was kind, and he became concerned at my collapsed state.

"I say, you don't think my chaps broke some of your ribs, do you? Let me feel."

And then I managed to tell him something of Seraphina that he would listen to.

“What, what?” he said. “Oh, heavens and earth! there’s your girl. Of course.... Hey, bo’sun, rig a whip and chair on the yardarm to take a lady on board. Bear a hand. A lady! yes, a lady. Confound it, don’t lose your wits, man. Look over the starboard rail, and you will see a lady alongside with a Dago in a small boat. Let the Dago come on board, too; the gentleman here says he’s a good sort. Now, do you understand?”

He talked to me a good deal more; told me that they had made a prisoner — “a tall, comical chap; wears his hair like an old aunt of mine, a bunch of curls flapping on each side of his face” — and then said that he must go and report to Captain Williams, who had gone into his wife’s stateroom. The name struck me. I said:

“Is this ship the Lion?”

“Aye, aye. That’s her. She is,” several seamen answered together, casting curious glances from their work.

“Tell your captain my name is Kemp,” I shouted after Sebright with what strength of lung I had.

What luck! Williams was the jolly little ship’s captain I was to have dined with on the day of execution on Kingston Point — the day I had been kidnapped. It seemed ages ago. I wanted to get to the side to look after Seraphina, but I simply couldn’t remember how to stand. I sat on the hatch, looking at the seamen.

They were clearing the ropes, collecting the lamps, picking up knives, handspikes, crowbars, swabbing the decks with squashy flaps. A bare-footed, bare-armed fellow, holding a bundle of brass-hilted cutlasses under his arm, had lost himself in the contemplation of my person.

“Where are you bound to?” I inquired at large, and everybody showed a friendly alacrity in answer.

“Havana.” “Havana, sir.” “Havana’s our next port. Aye, Havana.”

The deck rang with modulations of the name.

I heard a loud, “Alas,” sighed out behind me. A distracted, stricken voice repeated twice in Spanish, “Oh, my greatness; oh, my greatness.” Then, shiveringly, in a tone of profound self-communion, “I have a greatly parched throat,” it said. Harshly jovial voices answered:

“Stow your lingo and come before the captain. Step along.”

A prisoner, conducted aft, stalked reluctantly into the light between two short, bustling sailors. Dishevelled black hair like a damaged peruke, mournful, yellow face, enormous stag's eyes straining down on me. I recognized Manuel-del-Popolo. At the same moment he sprang back, shrieking, "This is a miracle of the devil — of the devil."

The sailors fell to tugging at his arms savagely, asking, "What's come to you?" and, after a short struggle that shook his tatters and his raven locks tempestuously like a gust of wind, he submitted to be walked up repeating:

"Is it you, Señor? Is it you? Is it you?"

One of his shoulders was bare from neck to elbow; at every step one of his knees and part of a lean thigh protruded their nakedness through a large rent; a strip of grimy, blood-stained linen, torn right down to the waist, dangled solemnly in front of his legs. There was a horrible raw patch amongst the roots of his hair just above his temple; there was blood in his nostrils, the stamp of excessive anguish on his features, a sort of guarded despair in his eye. His voice sank while he said again, twice:

"Is it you? Is it you?" And then, for the last time, "Is it you?" he repeated in a whisper.

The seamen formed a wide ring, and, looking at me, he talked to himself confidentially.

"Escaped — the Inglez! Then thou art doomed, Domingo. Domingo, thou art doomed. Dom... Señor!"

The change of tone, his effort to extend his hands towards me, surprised us all. I looked away.

"Hold hard! Hold him, mate!"

"Señor, condescend to behold my downfall. I am led here to the slaughter, Señor! To the slaughter, Señor! Pity! Grace! Mercy! And only a short while ago — behold. Slaughter... I... Manuel. Señor, I am universally admired — with a parched throat, Señor. I could compose a song that would make a priest weep.... A greatly parched throat, Señor," he added piteously.

I could not help turning my head. I had not been used half as hard as he. It was enough to look at him to believe in the dryness of his throat. Under the matted mass of his hair, he was grinning in amiable agony, and his globular eyes yearned upon me with a motionless and glassy lustre.

"You have not forgotten me, Señor? Forget Manuel! Impossible! Manuel, Señor. For the love of God. Manuel. Manuel-del-Popolo. I did sing, deign to remember. I offered you my fidelity, Señor. As you are a caballero, I charge

you to remember. Save me, Señor. Speak to those men.... For the sake of your honour, Señor.”

His voice was extraordinarily harsh — not his own. Apparently, he believed that he was going to be cut to pieces there and then by the sailors. He seemed to read it in their faces, shuddering and shrinking whenever he raised his eyes. But all these faces gaped with good-natured wonder, except the faces of his two guardians, and these expressed a state of conscientious worry. They were ridiculously anxious to suppress his sudden contortions, as one would some gross indecency. In the scuffle they hissed and swore under their breath. They were scandalized and made unhappy by his behaviour.

“Are you ready down there?” roared the bo’sun in the waist.

“Olla raight! Olla raight! Waita a leetle,” I heard Castro’s voice coming, as if from under the ship. I said coldly a few words about the certain punishment awaiting a pirate in Havana, and got on to my feet stiffly. But Manuel was too terrified to understand what I meant. He attempted to snatch at me with his imprisoned hands, and got for his pains a severe jerking, which made his head roll about his shoulders weirdly.

“Pity, Señor!” he screamed. And then, with low fervour, “Don’t go away. Listen! I am profound. Perhaps the Señor did not know that? Mercy! I am a man of intrigue. A politico. You have escaped, and I rejoice at it.”... He bared his fangs, and frothed like a mad dog.... “Señor, I am made happy because of the love I bore you from the first — and Domingo, who let you slip out of the Casa, is doomed. He is doomed. Thou art doomed, Domingo! But the excessive affection for your noble person inspires my intellect with a salutary combination. Wait, Señor! A moment! An instant!... A combination!...”

He gasped as though his heart had burst. The seamen, open-mouthed, were slowly narrowing their circle.

“Can’t he gabble!” remarked someone patiently.

His eyes were starting out of his head. He spoke with fearful rapidity.

“... There’s no refuge from the anger of the Juez but the grave — the grave — the grave!... Ha! ha! Go into thy grave, Domingo. But you, Señor — listen to my supplications — where will you go? To Havana. The Juez is there, and I call the malediction of the priests on my head if you, too, are not doomed. Life! Liberty! Señor, let me go, and I shall run — I shall ride, Señor — I shall throw myself at the feet of the Juez, and say... I shall say I

killed you. I am greatly trusted by the reason of my superior intelligence. I shall say, 'Domingo let him go — but he is dead. Think of him no more — of that Inglez who escaped — from Domingo. Do not look for him. I, your own Manuel, have killed him.' Give me my life for yours, Señor. I shall swear I had killed you with this right hand! Ah!"

He hung on my lips breathless, with a face so distorted that, though it might have been death alone he hated, he looked, indeed, as if impatient to set to and tear me to pieces with his long teeth. Men clutching at straws must have faces thus convulsed by an eager and despairing hope. His silence removed the spell — the spell of his incredible loquacity. I heard the boatswain's hoarse tones:

"Hold on well, ma'am. Right! Walk away steady with that whip!"

I ran limping forward.

"High enough," he rumbled; and I received Seraphina into my arms.

## CHAPTER FOUR

I said, "This is home, at last. It is all over"; and she stood by me on the deck. She pushed the heavy black cloak from over her head, and her white face appeared above the dim black shadow of her mourning. She looked silently round her on the mist, the groups of rough men, the splatterings of light that were like violence, too. She said nothing, but rested her hand on my arm.

She had her immense griefs, and this was the home I offered her. She looked back at the side. I thought she would have liked to be in the boat again. I said:

"The people in this ship are my old friends. You can trust them — and me."

Tomas Castro, clambering leisurely over the side, followed. As soon as his feet touched the deck, he threw the corner of his cloak across his left shoulder, bent down half the rim of his hat, and assumed the appearance of a short, dark conspirator, overtopped by the stalwart sailors, who had abandoned Manuel to crowd, bare-armed, bare-chested, pushing, and craning their necks, round us.

She said, "I can trust you; it is my duty to trust you, and this is now my home."

It was like a definite pronouncement of faith — and of a line of policy. She seemed, for that moment, quite apart from my love, a thing very much above me and mine; closed up in an immense grief, but quite whole-souledly determined to go unflinchingly into a new life, breaking quietly with all her past for the sake of the traditions of all that past.

The sailors fell back to make way for us. It was only by the touch of her hand on my arm that I had any hope that she trusted me, me personally, and apart from the commands of the dead Carlos; the dead father, and the great weight of her dead traditions that could be never anything any more for her — except a memory. Ah, she stood it very well; her head was erect and proud. The cabin door opened, and a rigid female figure with dry outlines, and a smooth head, stood out with severe simplicity against the light of the cabin door. The light falling on Seraphina seemed to show her for the first time. A lamentable voice bellowed:

"Señorita!... Señorita!" and then, in an insinuating, heart-breaking tone, "Señorita!..."

She walked quietly past the figure of the woman, and disappeared in the brilliant light of the cabin. The door closed. I remained standing there. Manuel, at her disappearance, raised his voice to a tremendous, incessant yell of despair, as if he expected to make her hear.

“Señorita... proteccion del oprimido; oh, hija de piedad... Señorita.”

His lamentable noise brought half the ship round us; the sailors fell back before the mate, Sebright, walking at the elbow of a stout man in loose trousers and jacket. They stopped.

“An unexpected meeting, Captain Williams,” was all I found to say to him. He had a constrained air, and shook hands in awkward silence.

“How do you do?” he said hurriedly. After a moment he added, with a sort of confused, as if official air, “I hope, Kemp, you’ll be able to explain satisfactorily...”

I said, rather off-handedly, “Why, the two men I killed ought to be credentials enough for all immediate purposes!”

“That isn’t what I meant,” he said. He spoke rather with a mumble, and apologetically. It was difficult to see in him any trace of the roystering Williams who had roared toasts to my health in Jamaica, after the episode at the Ferry Inn with the admiral. It was as if, now, he had a weight on his mind. I was tired. I said:

“Two dead men is more than you or any of your crew can show. And, as far as I can judge, you did no more than hold your own till I came.”

He positively stuttered, “Yes, yes. But...”

I got angry with what seemed stupid obstinacy.

“You’d be having a rope twisted tight round your head, or red-hot irons at the soles of your feet, at this very moment, if it had not been for us,” I said indignantly.

He wiped his forehead perplexedly. “Phew, how you do talk!” he remonstrated. “What I mean is that my wife...” He stopped again, then went on. “She took it into her head to come with me this voyage. For the first time.... And you two coming alone in an open boat like this! It’s what she isn’t used to.”

I simply couldn’t get at what he meant; I couldn’t even hear him very well, because Manuel-del-Popolo was still calling out to Seraphina in the cabin. Williams and I looked at each other — he embarrassed, and I utterly confounded.



“Mrs. Williams thinks it’s irregular,” Sebright broke in, “you and your young lady being alone — in an open boat at night, and that sort of thing. It isn’t what they approve of at Bristol.”

Manuel suddenly bellowed out, “Señorita — save me from their barbarity. I am a victim. Behold their bloody knives ready — and their eyes which gloat.”

He shrank convulsively from the fellow with the bundle of cutlasses under his arm, who innocently pushed his way close to him; he threw himself forward, the two sailors hung back on his arms, nearly sitting on the deck, and he strained dog-like in his intense fear of immediate death. Williams, however, really seemed to want an answer to his absurdity that I could not take very seriously. I said:

“What do you expect us to do? Go back to our boat, or what?”

It seemed to affect him a good deal. “Wait till you are caught by a good woman yourself,” he mumbled wretchedly.

Was this the roystering Williams? The jolly good fellow? I wanted to laugh, a little hysterically, because of the worry after great fatigue. Was his wife such a terrifying virago? “A good woman,” Williams insisted. I turned my eyes to Sebright, who looked on amusedly.

“It’s all right,” he answered my questioning look. “She’s a good soul, but she doesn’t see fellows like us in the congregation she worships with at home.” Then he whispered in my ear, “Owner’s niece. Older than the skipper. Married him for love. Suspects every woman — every man, too, by George, except me, perhaps. She’s learned life in some back chapel in Bristol. What can you expect? You go straight into the cabin,” he added.

At that moment the cabin door opened again, and the figure of the woman I had seen before reappeared against the light.

“I was allowed to stand under the gate of the Casa, Excellency, I was in very truth. Oh, turn not the light of your face from me.” Manuel, who had been silent for a minute, immediately recommenced his clamour in the hope, I suppose, that it would reach Seraphina’s ears, now the door was opened.

“What is to be done, Owen?” the woman asked, with a serenity I thought very merciless.

She had precisely the air of having someone “in the house,” someone rather questionable that you want, at home, to get rid of, as soon as a very small charity permitted.

“Madam,” I said rather coldly, “I appeal to your woman’s compassion....”

“Even thus the arch-enemy sets his snares,” she retorted on me a little tremulously.

“Señorita, I have seen you grow,” Manuel called again. “Your father, who is with the saints, gave me alms when I was a boy. Will you let them kill a man to whom your father...”

“Snares. All snares. Can she be blessed in going away from her natural guardians at night, alone, with a young man? How can we, consistently with our duty...”

Her voice was cold and gentle. Even in the imperfect light her appearance suggested something cold and monachal. The thought of what she might have been saying, or, in the subtle way of women, making Seraphina feel, in there, made me violently angry, but lucid, too.

“She comes straight from the fresh grave of her father,” I said. “I am her only guardian.”

Manuel rose to the height of his appeal. “Señorita, I worshipped your childhood, I threw my hat in the air many times before your coach, when you drove out all in white, smiling, an angel from paradise. Excellency, help me. Excel...”

A hand was clapped on his mouth then, and we heard only a great scuffle going on behind us. The way to the cozy cabin remained barred. My heart was kindled by resentment, but by the power of love my soul was made tranquil, for come what absurdity might, I had Sera-phina safe for the time. The woman in the doorway guarded the respectable ship’s cuddy from the un-wedded vagabondage of romance.

“What’s to be done, Owen?” she asked again, but this time a little irresolutely, I thought. “You know something of this — but I....”

“My dear, what an idea,” began Williams; and I heard his helpless mutters, “Like a hero — one evening — admiral — old Topnambo — nothing of her — on my soul — Lord’s son...”

Sebright spoke up from the side. “We could drive them overboard together, certainly, Mrs. Williams, but that wouldn’t be quite proper, perhaps. Put them each in a bag, separately, and drown them one on each side of the ship, decently....”

“You will not put me off with your ungodly levity, Mr. Sebright.”

“But I am perfectly serious, Mrs. Williams. It may raise a mutiny amongst these horrid, profane sailors, but I really don’t see how we are to

get rid of them else. The bo'sun has cut adrift their ramshackle, old sieve of a boat, and she's now a quarter of a mile astern, half-full of water. And we can't give them one of the ship's boats to go and get their throats cut ashore. J. Perkins, Esquire, wouldn't like it. He would swear something awful, if the boat got lost. Now, don't say no, Mrs. Williams. I've heard him myself swear a pound's worth of oaths for a matter of tenpence. You know very well what your uncle is. A perfect Turk in that way."

"Don't be scandalous, Mr. Sebright."

"But I didn't begin, Mrs. Williams. It's you who are raising all this trouble for nothing; because, as a matter of fact, they did not come alone. They had a man with them. An elderly, most respectable man. There he stands yonder, with a feather in his hat. Hey! You! Señor caballero, hidalgo, Pedro — Miguel — José — what's your particular saint? Step this way a bit..."

Manuel managed to jerk a half-choked "Excellency," and Castro, muffled up to the eyes, began to walk slowly aft, pausing after each solemn stride. The dark woman in the doorway was as effectual as an angel with a flaming sword. She paralyzed me completely.

Sebright dropped his voice a little. "I don't see that's much worse than going off at six o'clock in the morning to get married on the quiet; all alone with a man in a hackney coach — you know you did — and being given away by a perfect stranger."

"Mr. Sebright! Be quiet! How dare you?... Owen!"

Williams made a vague, growling noise, but Sebright, after muttering hurriedly, "It's all right, sir," proceeded with the utmost coolness:

"Why, all Bristol knows it! There are those who said that you got out of the scullery window into the back street. I am only telling you..."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself to believe such tales," she cried in great agitation. "I walked out at the gate!"

"Yes. And the gardener's wife said you must have sneaked the key off the nail by the side of the cradle — coming to the lodge the evening before, to see her poor, ailing baby. You ought to know what love brings the best of us to. And your uncle isn't a bloody-handed pirate either. He's only a good-hearted, hard-swearing old heathen. And you, too, are good-hearted. Come, Mrs. Williams. I know you're just longing to tuck this young lady up in bed — poor thing. Think what she has gone through! You ought to be fussing with sherry and biscuits and what not — making that good-for-nothing

steward fly round. The beggar is hiding in the lazarette, I bet. Now then — allow me.”

I got hold of the matter there again. I said — because I felt that the matter only needed making clear:

“This young lady is the daughter of a great Spanish noble. Her father was killed by these pirates. I am myself of noble family, and I am her appointed guardian, and am trying to save her from a very horrible fate.”

She looked at me apprehensively.

“You would be committing a wicked act to try to interfere with this,” I said.

I suppose I carried conviction.

“I must believe what you say,” she said. She added suddenly, with a sort of tremulous, warm feeling, “There, there. I don’t mean to be unkind. I knew nothing, and a married woman can’t be too careful. For all I could have told, you might have been a — a libertine; one of the poor lost souls that Satan...”

Manuel, as if struggling with the waves, managed to free his lips.

“Excellency, help!” he spluttered, like a drowning man.

“I will give the young lady every care,” Mrs. Williams said, “until light shall be vouchsafed.”

She shut the door.

“You will go too far, Sebright,” Williams remonstrated; “and I’ll have to give you the sack.”

“It’s all right, captain. I can turn her round my little finger,” said the young man cheerily. “Somebody has to do it if you won’t — or can’t. What shall we do with that yelping Dago? He’s a distressful beast to have about the decks.”

“Put him in the coal-hole, I suppose, as far as Havana. I won’t rest till I see him on his way to the gallows. The Captain-General shall be made sick of this business, or my name isn’t Williams. I’ll make a breeze over it at home. You shall help in that, Kemp. You ain’t afraid of big-wigs. Not you. You ain’t afraid of anything....”

“He’s a devil of a fellow, and a dead shot,” threw in Sebright. “And jolly lucky for us, too, sir. It’s simply marvellous that you should turn up like this, Mr. Kemp. We hadn’t a grain of powder that wasn’t caked solid in the canisters. Nothing’ll take it out of my head that somebody had got at the magazine while we lay in Kingston....”

It did not occur to Williams to ask whether I was wounded, or tired, or hungry. And yet all through the West Indies the dinners you got on board the *Lion* were famous in shipping circles. But festive men of his stamp are often like that. They do it more for the glory and romance of the hospitality, and he could not, perhaps, under the circumstances, expect me to intone “for he is a jolly good fellow” over the wine. He was by no means a bad or unfeeling man; only he was not hungry himself, and another’s mere necessity of that sort failed to excite his imagination. I know he was no worse than other men, and I have reason to remember him with gratitude; but, at the time, I was surprised and indignant at the extraordinary way he took my presence for granted, as if I had come off casually in a shore boat to idle away an hour or two on board. Since his wife appeared satisfied, he did not seem to desire any explanation. I felt as if I had for him no independent existence. When I had ceased to be a source of domestic difficulty, I became a precious sort of convenience, a most welcome person (“an English gentleman to back me up,” he repeated several times), who would help him to make “these old women at the Admiralty sit up!” A burning shame, this! It had gone on long enough, God knows, but if they were to tackle an old trader, like the “*Lion*”, now, it was time the whole country should hear of it. His owner, J. Perkins, his wife’s uncle, wasn’t the man to go to sleep over the job. Parliament should hear of it. Most fortunate I was there to be produced — eye-witness — nobleman’s son. He knew I could speak up in a good cause.

“And by the way, Kemp,” he said, with sudden annoyance, recollecting himself, as it were, “you never turned up for that dinner — sent no word, nor anything...”

Williams had been talking to me, but it was with Sebright that I felt myself growing intimate. The young mate of the “*Lion*” stood by, very quiet, listening with a capable smile. Now he said, in a tone of dry comment:

“Jolly sight more useful turning up here.”

“I was kidnapped away from Ramon’s back shop, if that’s a sufficient apology. It’s rather a long story.”

“Well, you can’t tell it on deck, that’s very clear,” Sebright had to shout to me. “Not while this infernal noise — what the deuce’s up? It sounds more like a dog-fight than anything else.”

As we ran towards the main hatch I recognized the aptness of the comparison. It was that sort of vicious, snarling, yelping clamour which arises all at once and suddenly dies.

“Castro! Thou Castro!”

“Malediction... My eyelids...”

“Thou! Englishman’s dog!”

“Ha! Porco.”

The voices ceased. Castro ran tiptoeing lightly, mantled in ample folds. He assumed his hat with a brave tap, crouched swiftly inside his cloak. It touched the deck all round in a black cone surmounted by a peering, quivering head. Quick as thought he hopped and sank low again. Everybody watched with wonder this play, as of some large and diabolic toy. For my part, knowing the deadly purpose of these preliminaries, I was struck with horror. Had he chosen to run on him at once, nothing could have saved Manuel. The poor wretch, vigorously held in front of Castro, was far too terrified to make a sound. With an immovable sailor on each side, he scuffled violently, and cowered by starts as if tied up between two stone posts. His dumb, rapid panting was in our ears. I shouted:

“Stop, Castro! Stop!... Stop him, some of you! He means to kill the fellow!”

Nobody heeded my shouting. Castro flung his cloak on the deck, jumped on it, kicked it aside, all in the same moment as it seemed, dodged to the right, to the left, drew himself up, and stepped high, paunchy in his tight smalls and short jacket, making all the time a low, sibilant sound, which was perfectly blood-curdling.

“He has a blade on his forearm!” I yelled. “He’s armed, I tell you!”

No one could comprehend my distress. A sailor, raising a lamp, had a broad smile. Somebody laughed outright. Castro planted himself before Manuel, nodded menacingly, and stooped ready for a spring. I was too late in my grab at his collar, but Manuel’s guardians, acting with precision, put out one arm each to meet his rush, and he came flying backwards upon me, as though he had rebounded from a wall.

He had almost knocked me down, and while I staggered to keep my feet the air resounded with urgent calls to shoot, to fire, to bring him down!... “Kill him, Señor!” came in an entreating yell from Castro. And I became aware that Manuel had taken this opportunity to wrench himself free. I heard the hard thud of his leap. Straight from the hatch (as I was told later

by the marvelling sailors) he had alighted with both feet on the rail. I only saw him already there, sitting on his heels, jabbering and nodding at us like an enormous baboon. "Shoot, sir! Shoot!" "Kill! Kill, Señor! As you love your life — kill!"

Unwittingly, without volition, as if compelled by the suggestion of the bloodthirsty cries, my hand drew the remaining pistol out of my belt. I raised it, and found myself covering the strange antics of an infuriated ape. He tore at his flanks with both hands in the idea, I suppose, of stripping for a swim. Rags flew from him in all directions; an astounding eruption of rags round a huddled-up figure crouching, wildly active, in front of the muzzle. I had him. I was sure of my shot. He was only an ape. A dead ape. But why? Wherefore? To what end? What could it matter whether he lived or died. He sickened me, and I pitied him, as I should have pitied an ape.

I lowered my arm an almost imperceptible fraction of a second before he sprang up and vanished. The sound of the heavy plunge was followed by a regretful clamour all over the decks, and a general rush to the side. There was nothing to be seen; he had gone through the layer of fog covering the water. No one heard him blow or splutter. It was as if a lump of lead had fallen overboard.

Williams wouldn't have had this happen for a five-pound note. Sebright expressed the hope that he wouldn't cheat the gallows by drowning. The two men who had held him slunk away abashed. To lower a boat for the purpose of catching him in the water would have been useless and imprudent.

"His friends can't be far off yet in the boats," growled the bo'sun; "and if they don't pick him up, they would be more than likely to pick up our chaps."

Somebody expectorated in so marked a manner that I looked behind me. Castro had resumed his cloak, and was draping himself with deliberate dignity. When this undertaking had been accomplished, he came up very close to me, and without a word looked up balefully from the heavy folds thrown across his mouth and chin under the very tip of his hooked nose.

"I could not do it," I said. "I could not. It would have been useless. Too much like murder, Tomas."

"Oh! the inconstancy, the fancifulness of these English," he generalized, with suppressed passion, right into my face. "I don't know what's worse, their fury or their pity. The childishness of it! The childishness.... Do you

imagine, Señor, that Manuel or the Juez O'Brien shall some day spare you in their turn? If I didn't know the courage of your nation..."

"I despise the Juez and Manuel alike," I interrupted angrily. I despised Castro, too, at that moment, and he paid me back with interest. There was no mistaking his scathing tone.

"I know you well. You scorn your friends, as well as your foes. I have seen so many of you. The blessed saints guard us from the calamity of your friendship...."

"No friendship could make an assassin of me, Mr. Castro...."

"... Which is only a very little less calamitous than your enmity," he continued, in a cold rage. "A very little less. You let Manuel go.... Manuel!... Because of your mercy.... Mercy! Bah! It is all your pride — your mad pride. You shall rue it, Señor. Heaven is just. You shall rue it, Señor."

He denounced me prophetically, wrapped up with an air of midnight secrecy; but, after all, he had been a friend in the act, if not in the spirit, and I contented myself by asking, with some pity for his imbecile craving after murder:

"Why? What can Manuel do to me? He at least is completely helpless."

"Did the Señor Don Juan ever ask himself what Manuel could do to me — Tomas Castro? To me, who am poor and a vagabond, and a friend of Don Carlos, may his soul rest with God. Are all you English like princes that you should never think of anybody but yourselves?"

He revolted and provoked me, as if his opinion of the English could matter, or his point of view signify anything against the authority of my conscience. And it is our conscience that illumines the romantic side of our life. His point of view was as benighted and primitive as the point of view of hunger; but, in his fidelity to the dead architect of my fortunes, he reflected dimly the light of Carlos' romance, and I had taken advantage of it, not so much for the saving of my life as for the guarding of my love. I had reached that point when love displaces one's personality, when it becomes the only ground under our feet, the only sky over our head, the only light of vision, the first condition of thought — when we are ready to strive for it, as we fight for the breath of our body. Brusquely I turned my back on him, and heard the repeated clicking of flint against his blade. He lighted a cigarette, and crossed the deck to lean cloaked against the bulwark, smoking moodily under his slouched hat.





## CHAPTER FIVE

Manuel's escape was the last event of that memorable night. Nothing more happened, and nothing more could be done; but there remained much talk and wonderment to get through. I did all the talking, of course, under the cuddly lamps. Williams, red and stout, sat staring at me across the table. His round eyes were perfectly motionless with astonishment — the story of what had happened in the Casa Riego was not what he had expected of the small, badly reputed Cuban town.

Sebright, who had all the duties of the soiled ship and chipped men to attend to, came in from the deck several times, and would stand listening for minutes with his fingers playing thoughtfully about his slight moustache. The dawn was not very far when he led me into his own cabin. I was half dead with fatigue, and troubled by an inward restlessness.

"Turn in into my berth," said Sebright.

I protested with a stiff tongue, but he gave me a friendly push, and I tumbled like a log on to the bedclothes. As soon as my head felt the pillow the fresh colouring of his face appeared blurred, and an arm, mistily large, was extended to put out the light of the lamp screwed to the bulkhead.

"I suppose you know there are warrants out in Jamaica against you — for that row with the admiral," he said.

An irresistible and unexpected drowsiness had relaxed all my limbs.

"Hang Jamaica!" I said, with difficult animation. "We are going home."

"Hang Jamaica!" he agreed. Then, in the dark, as if coming after me across the obscure threshold of sleep, his voice meditated, "I am sorry, though, we are bound for Havana. Pity. Great pity! Has it occurred to you, Mr. Kemp, that..."

It is very possible that he did not finish his sentence; no more penetrated, at least, into my drowsy ear. I awoke slowly from a trance-like sleep, with a confused notion of having to pick up the thread of a dropped hint. I went up on deck.

The sun shone, a faint breeze blew, the sea sparkled freshly, and the wet decks glistened. I stood still, touched by the new glory of light falling on me; it was a new world — new and familiar, yet disturbingly beautiful. I seemed to discover all sorts of secret charms that I had never seen in things I had seen a hundred times. The watch on deck were busy with brooms and

buckets; a sailor, coiling a rope over a pin, paused in his work to point over the port-quarter, with a massive fore-arm like a billet of red mahogany.

I looked about, rubbing my eyes. The “Lion”, close hauled, was heading straight away from the coast, which stood out, not very far yet, outlined heavily and flooded with light. Astern, and to leeward of us, against a headland of black and indigo, a dazzling white speck resembled a snowflake fallen upon the blue of the sea.

“That’s a schooner,” said the seaman.

They were the first words I heard that morning, and their friendly hoarseness brushed away whatever of doubt might seem to mar the inexplicability of my new glow of my happiness. It was because we were safe — she and I — and because my undisturbed love let my heart open to the beauty of the young day and the joyousness of a splendid sea. I took deep breaths, and my eyes went all over the ship, embracing, like an affectionate contact, her elongated shape, the flashing brasses, the tall masts, the gentle curves of her sails soothed into perfect stillness by the wind. I felt that she was a shrine, for was not Seraphina sleeping in her, as safe as a child in its cradle? And presently the beauty, the serenity, the purity, and the splendour of the world would be reflected in her clear eyes, and made over to me by her glance.

There are times when an austere and just Providence, in its march along the inscrutable way, brings our hearts to the test of their own unreason. Which of us has not been tried by irrational awe, fear, pride, abasement, exultation? And such moments remain marked by indelible physical impressions, standing out of the ghostly level of memory like rocks out of the sea, like towers on a plain. I had many of these unforgettable emotions — the profound horror of Don Balthasar’s death; the first floating of the boat, like the opening of wings in space; the first fluttering of the flames in the fog — many others afterwards, more cruel, more terrible, with a terror worse than death, in which the very suffering was lost; and also this — this moment of elation in the clear morning, as if the universe had shed its glory upon my feelings as the sunshine glorifies the sea. I laughed in very lightness of heart, in a profound sense of success; I laughed, irresponsible and oblivious, as one laughs in the thrilling delight of a dream.

“Do I look so confoundedly silly?” asked Sebright, speaking as though he had a heavy cold. “I am stupid — tired. I’ve been on my feet this twenty-

four hours — about the liveliest in my life, too. You haven't slept very long either — none of us have. I'm sure I hope your young lady has rested."

He put his hands in his pockets. He might have been very tired, but I had never seen a boy fresh out of bed with a rosier face. The black pin-points of his pupils seemed to bore through distance, exploring the horizon beyond my shoulder. The man called Mike, the one I had had the tussle with overnight, came up behind the indefatigable mate, and shyly offered me my pistol. His head was bound over the top, and under the chin, as if for toothache, and his bronzed, rough-hewn face looked out astonishingly through the snowy whiteness of the linen. Only a few hours before, we had been doing our best to kill each other. In my cordial glow, I bantered him light-heartedly about his ferocity and his strength.

He stood before me, patiently rubbing the brown instep of one thick foot with the horny sole of the other.

"You paid me off for that bit, sir," he said bashfully. "It was in the way of duty."

"I'm uncommon glad you didn't squeeze the ghost out of me," I said; "a morning like this is enough to make you glad you can breathe."

To this day I remember the beauty of that rugged, grizzled, hairy seaman's eyelashes. They were long and thick, shadowing the eyes softly like the lashes of a young girl.

"I'm sure, sir, we wish you luck — to you and the young lady — all of us," he said shamefacedly; and his bass, half-concealed mutter was quite as sweet to my ears as a celestial melody; it was, after all, the sanction of simple earnestness to my desires and hopes — a witness that he and his like were on my side in the world of romance.

"Well, go forward now, Mike," Sebright said, as I took the pistol.

"It's a blessing to talk to one's own people," I said, expansively, to him. "He's a fine fellow." I stuck the pistol in my belt. "I trust I shall never need to use barrel or butt again, as long as I live."

"A very sensible wish," Sebright answered, with a sort of reserve of meaning in his tone; "especially as on board here we couldn't find you a single pinch of powder for a priming. Do you notice the consort we have this morning?"

"What do I want with powder?" I asked. "Do you mean that?" I pointed to the white sail of the schooner. Sebright, looking hard at me, nodded several times.

“We sighted her as soon as day broke. D’you know what she means?”

I said I supposed she was a coaster.

“It means, most likely, that the fellow with the curls that made me think of my maiden aunt, has managed to keep his horse-face above water.” He meant Manuel-del-Popolo. “What mischief he may do yet before he runs his head into a noose, it’s hard to say. The old Spaniard you brought with you thinks he has already been busy — for no good, you may be sure.”

“You mean that’s one of the Rio schooners?” I asked quickly.

That, with all its consequent troubles forme, was what he did mean. He said I might take his word for it that, with the winds we had had, no craft working along the coast could be just there now unless she came out of Rio Medio. There was a calm almost up to sunrise, and it looked as if they had towed her out with boats before daylight.... “Seems a rather unlikely bit of exertion for the lazy brutes; but if they are as much afraid of that confounded Irishman as you say they are, that would account for their energy.”

They would steal and do murder simply for the love of God, but it would take the fear of a devil to make them do a bit of honest work — and pulling an oar was honest work, no matter why it was done. This was the combined wisdom of Sebright and of Tomas Castro, with whom he had been in consultation. As to the fear of the devil, O’Brien was very much like a devil, an efficient substitute. And there was certainly somebody or something to make them bestir themselves like this....

Before my mind arose a scene: Manuel, the night before, pulled out of the water into a boat — raging, half-drowned, eloquent, inspired. The contemptible beast was inspired, as a politician is, a demagogue. He could sway his fellows, as I had heard enough to know. And I felt a slight chill on the warmth of my hope, because that bright sail, brilliantly and furtively dodging along in our wake, must be the product of Manuel’s inspiration, urged to perseverance by the fear of O’Brien. The mate continued, staring knowingly at it:

“You know I am putting two and two together, like the old maids that come to see my aunt when they want to take away a woman’s character. The Dagos are out and no mistake. The question is, Why? You must know whether those schooners can sail anything; but don’t forget the old Lion is pretty smart. Is it likely they’ll attempt the ship again?”

I negatived that at once. I explained to Sebright that the store of ammunition in Rio Medio would not run to it; that the Lugareños were cowardly, divided by faction, incapable, by themselves, of combining for any length of time, and still less of following a plan requiring perseverance and hardihood.

“They can’t mean anything in the nature of open attack,” I affirmed. “They may have attempted something of the sort in Nichols’ time, but it isn’t in their nature.”

Sebright said that was practically Castro’s opinion, too — except that Castro had emphasized his remarks by spitting all the time, “like an old tomcat. He seems a very spiteful man, with no great love for you, Mr. Kemp. Do you think it safe to have him about you? What are all these grievances of his?”

Castro seemed to have spouted his bile like a volcano, and had rather confused Sebright. He had said much about being a friend of the Spanish lord — Carlos; and that now he had no place on earth to hide his head.

“As far as I could make out, he’s wanted in England,” said Sebright, “for some matter of a stolen watch, years ago in Liverpool, I think. And your cousin, the grandee, was mixed up in that, too. That sounds funny; you didn’t tell us about that. Damme if he didn’t seem to imply that you, too... But you have never been in Liverpool. Of course not....”

But that had not been precisely Castro’s point. He had affirmed he had enemies in Spain; he shuddered at the idea of going to France, and now my English fancifulness had made it impossible for him to live in Rio Medio, where he had had the care of a good pad-rona.

“I suppose he means a landlady,” Sebright chuckled. “Old but good, he says. He expected to die there in peace, a good Christian. And what’s that about the priests getting hold of his very last bit of silver? I must say that sounded truest of all his rigmarole. For the salvation of his soul, I suppose?”

“No, my cousin’s soul,” I said gloomily.

“Humbugs. I only understood one word in three.”

Just then Tomas himself stalked into sight among the men forward. Coming round the corner of the deck-house, he stopped at the galley door like a crow outside a hut, waiting. We watched him getting a light for his cigarette at the galley door with much dignified pantomime. The negro cook of the Lion, holding out to him in the doorway a live coal in a pair of tongs, turned his Ethiopian face and white ivories towards a group of sailors

lost in the contemplation of the proceedings.' And, when Castro had passed them, spurting jets of smoke, they swung about to look after his short figure, upon whose draped blackness the sunlight brought out reddish streaks as if bucketfuls of rusty water had been thrown over him from hat to toe. The end of his broken plume hung forward aggressively.

"Look how the fellow struts! Night and thunder! Hey, Don Tenebroso! Would your worship hasten hither...." Sebright hailed jocularly.

Castro, without altering his pace, came up to us.

"What do you think of her now?" asked Sebright, pointing to the strange sail. "She's grown a bit plainer, now she is out of the glare."

Castro, wrapping his chin, stood still, face to the sea. After a long while:

"Malediction," he pronounced slowly, and without moving his head shot a sidelong glance at me.

"It's clear enough how he feels about our friends over there. Malediction. Just so. Very proper. But it seems as though he had a bone to pick with all the world," drawled Sebright, a little sleepily. Then, resuming his briskness, he bantered, "So you don't want to go to England, Mr. Castro? No friends there? Sus. per col., and that sort of thing?"

Castro, contemptuous, staring straight away, nodded impatiently.

"But this gentleman you are so devoted to is going to England — to his friends."

Castro's arms shook under the mantle falling all round him straight from the neck. His whole body seemed convulsed. From his puckered dark lips issued a fiendish and derisive squeal.

"Let his friends beware, then. Por Dios! Let them beware. Let them pray and fast, and beg the intercession of the saints. Ha! ha! ha!..."

Nothing could have been more unlike his saturnine self-centred truculence of restraint. He impressed me; and even Sebright's steady, cool eyes grew perceptibly larger before this sarcastic fury. Castro choked; the rusty, black folds encircling him shook and heaved. Unexpectedly he thrust out in front of the cloak one yellow, dirty little hand, side by side with the bright end of his fixed blade.

"What do I hear? To England! Going to England! Ha! Then let him hasten there straight! Let him go straight there, I say — I, Tomas Castro!"

He lowered his tone to impress us more, and the point of the knife, as it were an emphatic forefinger, tapped the open palm forcibly. Did we think that a man was not already riding along the coast to Havana on a fast mule?

— the very best mule from the stables of Don Balthasar himself — that murdered saint. The Captain-General had no such mules. His late excellency owned a sugar estate halfway between Rio Medio and Havana, and a relay of riding mules was kept there for quickness when His Excellency of holy memory found occasion to write his commands to the capital. The news of our escape would reach the Juez next day at the latest. Manuel would take care of that — unless he were drowned. But he could swim like a fish. Malediction!

“I cried out to you to kill!” he addressed me directly; “with all my soul I cried. And why? Because he had seen you and the senorita, too, alas! He should have been made dumb — made dumb with your pistol, Señor, since those two stupid English mariners were too much for an old man like me. Manuel should have been made dumb — dumb forever, I say. What mattered he — that gutter-born offspring of an evil Gitana, whom I have seen, Señor! I, myself, have seen her in the days of my adversity in Madrid, Señor — a red flower behind the ear, clad in rags that did not cover all her naked skin, looking on while they fought for her with knives in a wine-shop full of beggars and thieves. Si, senior. That’s his mother. Improvisador — politico — capataz. Ha.... Dirt!”

He made a gesture of immense contempt.

“What mattered he? The coach would have returned from the cathedral, and the Casa Riego could have been held for days — and who could have known you were not inside. I had conversed earnestly with Cesar the majordomo — an African, it is true, but a man of much character and excellent sagacity. Ah, Manuel! Manuel! If I — — — But the devil himself fathers the children of such mothers. I am no longer in possession of my first vigour, and you, Señor, have all the folly of your nation....”

He bared his grizzled head to me loftily.

“... And the courage! Doubtless, that is certain. It is well. You may want it all before long, Señor... And the courage!”

The broken plume swept the deck. For a time he blinked his creased, brown eyelids in the sun, then pulled his hat low down over his brows, and, wrapping himself up closely, turned away from me to look at the sail to leeward.

“What an old, old, wrinkled, little, puffy beggar he is!” observed Sebright, in an undertone...



“Well, and what is your worship’s opinion as to the purpose of that schooner?”

Castro shrugged his shoulders. “Who knows?”... He released the gathered folds of his cloak, and moved off without a look at either of us.

“There he struts, with his wings drooping like a turkey-cock gone into deep mourning,” said Sebright. “Who knows? Ah, well, there’s no hurry to know for a day or two. I don’t think that craft could overhaul the Lion, if they tried ever so. They may manage to keep us in sight perhaps.”

He yawned, and left me standing motionless, thinking of Seraphina. I longed to see her — to make sure, as if my belief in the possession of her had been inexplicably weakened. I was going to look at the door of her cabin. But when I got as far as the companion I had to stand aside for Mrs. Williams, who was coming up the winding stairs.

From above I saw the gray woollen shawl thrown over her narrow shoulders. Her parting made a broad line on her brown head. She mounted busily, holding up a little the front of her black, plain skirt. Her glance met mine with a pale, searching candour from below.

Overnight she had heard all my story. She had come out to the saloon whilst I had been giving it to Williams, and after saying reassuringly, “The young lady, I am thankful, is asleep,” she had sat with her eyes fixed upon my lips. I had been aware of her anxious face, and of the slight, nervous movements of her hands at certain portions of my narrative under the blazing lamps. We met now, for the first time, in the daylight.

Hastily, as if barring my road to Seraphina’s cabin, “Miss Riego, I would have you know,” she said, “is in good bodily health. I have this moment looked upon her again. The poor, superstitious young lady is on her knees, crossing herself.”

Mrs. Williams shuddered slightly. It was plain that the sight of that popish practice had given her a shock — almost a scare, as if she had seen a secret and nefarious rite. I explained that Seraphina, being a Catholic, worshipped as her lights enjoined, as we did after ours. Mrs. Williams only sighed at this, and, making an effort, proposed that I should walk with her a little. We began to pace the poop, she gliding with short steps at my side, and drawing close the skimpy shawl about her. The smooth bands of her hair put a shadow into the slight hollows of her temples. No nun, in the chilly meekness of the habit, had ever given me such a strong impression of poverty and renunciation.

But there was in that faded woman a warmth of sentiment. She flushed delicately whenever caught (and one could not help catching her continually) following her husband with eyes that had an expression of maternal uneasiness and the captivated attention of a bride. And after she had got over the idea that I, as a member of the male British aristocracy, was dissolute — it was an article of faith with her — that warmth of sentiment would bring a faint, sympathetic rosiness to her sunken cheeks.

She said suddenly and trembling, “Oh, young sir, reflect upon these things before it is too late. You young men, in your luxurious, worldly, ungoverned lives...”

I shall never forget that first talk with her on the poop — her hurried, nervous voice (for she was a timid woman, speaking from a sense of duty), and the extravagant forms her ignorance took. With the emotions of the past night still throbbing in my brain and heart, with the sight of the sea and the coast, with the *Rio Medio* schooner hanging on our quarter, I listened to her, and had a hard task to believe my ears. She was so convinced that I was “dissolute,” because of my class — as an earl’s grandson.

It is difficult to imagine how she arrived at the conviction; it must have been from pulpit denunciations of the small Bethel on the outskirt of Bristol. Her uncle, J. Perkins, was a great ruffian, certainly, and Williams was dissolute enough, if one wished to call his festive imbecilities by a hard name. But these two could, by no means, be said to belong to the upper classes. And these two, apart from her favourite preacher, were the only two men of whom she could be said to have more than a visual knowledge.

She had spent her best years in domestic slavery to her bachelor uncle, an old shipowner of savage selfishness; she had been the deplorable mistress of his big, half-furnished house, standing in a damp garden full of trees. The outrageous Perkins had been a sailor in his time — mate of a privateer in the great French war, afterwards master of a slaver, developing at last into the owner of a small fleet of West Indiamen. Williams was his favourite captain, whom he would bring home in the evening to drink rum and water, and smoke churchwarden pipes with him. The niece had to sit up, too, at these dismal revels. Old Perkins would keep her out of bed to mix the grogs, till he was ready to climb the bare stone staircase, echoing from top to bottom with his stumbles. However, it seems he dozed a good deal in snatches during the evening, and this, I suppose, gave their opportunity to the pale, spiritual-looking spinster with the patient eyes, and to the thick,

staring Williams, florid with good living, and utterly unused to the company of women of that sort. But in what way these two unsimilar beings had looked upon each other, what she saw in him, what he imagined her to be like, why, how, wherefore, an understanding arose between them, remains inexplicable. It was her romance — and it is even possible that he was moved by an unselfish sentiment. Sebright accounted for the matter by saying that, as to the woman, it was no wonder. Anything to get away from a bullying old ruffian, that would use bad language in cold blood just to horrify her — and then burst into a laugh and jeer; but as to Captain Williams (Sebright had been with him from a boy), he ought to have known he was quite incapable of keeping straight after all these free-and-easy years.

He used to talk a lot, about that time, of good women, of settling down to a respectable home, of leading a better life; but, of course, he couldn't. Simply couldn't, what with old friends in Kingston and Havana — and his habits formed — and his weakness for women who, as Sebright put it, could not be called good. Certainly there did not seem to have been any sordid calculation in the marriage. Williams fully expected to lose his command; but, as it turned out, the old beast, Perkins, was quite daunted by the loss of his niece. He found them out in their lodgings, came to them crying — absolutely whimpering about his white hairs, talking touchingly of his will, and promising amendment. In the end it was arranged that Williams should keep his command; and Mrs. Williams went back to her uncle. That was the best of it. Actually went back to look after that lonely old rip, out of pure pity and goodness of heart. Of course old Perkins was afraid to treat her as badly as before, and everything was going on fairly well, till some kind friend sent her an anonymous letter about Williams' goings on in Jamaica. Sebright strongly suspected the master of another regular trading ship, with whom Williams had a difference in Kingston the voyage before last — Sebright said — about a small matter, with long hair — not worth talking about. She said nothing at first, and nearly worried herself into a brain-fever. Then she confessed she had a letter — didn't believe it — but wanted a change, and would like to come for one voyage. Nothing could be said to that.

The worst was, the captain was so knocked over at the idea of his little sins coming to light, that he — Sebright — had the greatest difficulty in preventing him from giving himself away.

“If I hadn’t been really fond of her,” Sebright concluded, “I would have let everything go by the board. It’s too difficult. And mind, the whole of Kingston was on the broad grin all the time we were there — but it’s no joke. She’s a good woman, and she’s jealous. She wants to keep her own. Never had much of her own in this world, poor thing. She can’t help herself any more than the skipper can. Luckily, she knows no more of life than a baby. But it’s a most cruel set out.”

Sebright had exposed the domestic situation on board the *Lion* with a force of insight and sympathy hardly to be expected from his years. No doubt his attachment to the disparate couple counted for not a little. He seemed to feel for them both a sort of exasperated affection; but I have no doubt that in his way he was a remarkable young man with his contrasted bringing up first at the hands of an old maiden lady; afterwards on board ship with Williams, to whom he was indentured at the age of fifteen, when as he casually mentioned — “a scoundrelly attorney in Exeter had run off with most of the old girl’s money.” Indeed, looking back, they all appear to me uncommon; even to the round-eyed Williams, cowed simply out of respect and regard for his wife, and as if dazed with fright at the conventional catastrophe of being found out before he could get her safely back to Bristol. As to Mrs. Williams, I must confess that the poor woman’s ridiculous and genuine misery, inducing her to undertake the voyage, presented itself to me simply as a blessing, there on the poop. She had been practically good to Seraphina, and her talking to me mattered very little, set against that.... And such talk!

It was like listening to an earnest, impassioned, tremulous impertinence. She seemed to start from the assumption that I was capable of every villainy, and devoid of honour and conscience; only one perceived that she used the words from the force of unworldly conviction, and without any real knowledge of their meaning, as a precocious child uses terms borrowed from its pastors and masters.

I was greatly disconcerted at first, but I was never angry. What of it, if, with a sort of sweet absurdity, she talked in great agitation of the depravity of hearts, of the sin of light-mindedness, of the self-deception which leads men astray — a confused but purposeful jumble, in which occasional allusions to the errors of Rome, and to the want of seriousness in the upper classes, put in a last touch of extravagance?

What of it? The time was coming when I should remember the frail, homely, as if starved, woman, and thank heaven for her generous heart, which was gained for us from that moment. Far from being offended, I was drawn to her. There is a beauty in the absolute conscience of the simple; and besides, her distrust was for me, alone. I saw that she erected\* herself not into a judge, but into a guardian, against the dangers of our youth and our romance. She was disturbed by its origin.

There was so much of the unusual, of the unheard of in its beginning, that she was afraid of the end. I was so inexperienced, she said, and so was the young lady — poor motherless thing — wilful, no doubt — so very taking — like a little child, rather. Had I comprehended all my responsibility? (And here one of the hurried side-allusions to the errors of Rome came in with a reminder, touching the charge of another immortal soul beside my own.) Had I reflected?...

It seems to me that this moment was the last of my boyishness. It was as if the contact with her earnestness had matured me with a power greater than the power of dangers, of fear, of tragic events. She wanted to know insistently whether I were sure of myself, whether I had examined my feelings, and had measured my strength, and had asked for guidance. I had done nothing of this. Not till brought face to face with her unanswerable simplicity did I descend within myself. It seemed I had descended so deeply that, for a time, I lost the sound of her voice. And again I heard her.

“There’s time yet,” she was saying. “Think, young sir (she had addressed me throughout as ‘young sir.’) My husband and I have been talking it over most anxiously. Think well before you commit the young lady for life. You are both so young. It looks as if we had been sent providentially....”

What was she driving at? Did she doubt my love? It was rather horrible; but it was too startling and too extravagant to be met with anger. We looked at each other, and I discovered that she had been, in reality, tremendously excited by this adventure. This was the secret of her audacity. And I was also possessed by excitement. We stood there like two persons meeting in a great wind. Without moving her hands, she clasped and unclasped her fingers, looking up at me with soliciting eyes; and her lips, firmly closed, twitched.

“I am looking for the means of explaining to you how much I love her,” I burst out. “And if I found a way, you could not understand. What do you know? — what can you know?...”

I said this not in scorn, but in sheer helplessness. I was at a loss before the august magnitude of my feeling, which I saw confronting me like an enormous presence arising from that blue sea. It was no longer a boy-and-girl affair; no longer an adventure; it was an immense and serious happiness, to be paid for by an infinity of sacrifice.

“I am a woman,” she said, with a fluttering dignity. “And it is because I know how women suffer from what men say....”

Her face flushed. It flushed to the very bands of her hair. She was rosy all over the eyes and forehead. Rosy and ascetic, with something outraged and inexpressibly sweet in her expression. My great emotion was between us like a mist, through which I beheld strange appearances. It was as if an immaterial spirit had blushed before me. And suddenly I saw tears — tears that glittered exceedingly, falling hard and round, like pellets of glass, out of her faded eyes.

“Mrs. Williams,” I cried, “you can’t know how I love her. No one in the world can know. When I think of her — and I think of her always — it seems to me that one life is not enough to show my devotion. I love her like something unchangeable and unique — altogether out of the world; because I see the world through her. I would still love her if she had made me miserable and unhappy.”

She exclaimed a low “Ah!” and turned her head away for a moment.

“But one cannot express these things,” I continued. “There are no words. Words are not meant for that. I love her so that, were I to die this moment, I verily believe my soul, refusing to leave this earth, would remain hovering near her....”

She interrupted me with a sort of indulgent horror. “Sh! sh!” I mustn’t talk like that. I really must not — and inconsequently she declared she was quite willing to believe me. Her husband and herself had not slept a wink for thinking of us. The notion of the fat, sleepy Williams, sitting up all night to consider, owlishly, the durability of my love, cooled my excitement. She thought they had been providentially thrown into our way to give us an opportunity of reconsidering our decision. There were still so many difficulties in the way.

I did not see any; her utter incomprehension began to weary me, while she still twined her fingers, wiped her eyes by stealth, as it were, and talked unflinchingly. She could not have made herself clearly understood by Seraphina. Moreover, women were so helpless — so very helpless in such

matters. That is why she was speaking to me. She did not doubt my sincerity at the present time — but there was, humanly speaking, a long life before us — and what of afterwards? Was I sure of myself — later on — when all was well?

I cut her short. Seizing both her hands:

“I accept the omen, Mrs. Williams!” I cried. “That’s it! When all is well! And all must be well in a very short time, with you and your husband’s help, which shall not fail me, I know. I feel as if the worst of our troubles were over already....”

But at that moment I saw Seraphina coming out on deck. She emerged from the companion, bare-headed, and looked about at her new surroundings with that air of imperious and childlike beauty which made her charm. The wind stirred slightly her delicate hair, and I looked at her; I looked at her stilled, as one watches the dawn or listens to a sweet strain of music caught from afar. Suddenly dropping Mrs. Williams’ hand, I ran to her....

When I turned round, Williams had joined his wife, and she had slipped her arm under his. Her hand, thin and white, looked like the hand of an invalid on the brawny forearm of that man bursting with health and good condition. By the side of his lustiness, she was almost ethereal — and yet I seemed to see in them something they had in common — something subtle, like the expression of eyes. It was the expression of their eyes. They looked at us with commiseration; one of them sweetly, the other with his owlish fixity. As we two, Seraphina and I, approached them together, I heard Williams’ thick, sleepy voice asking, “And so he says he won’t?” To which his wife, raising her tone with a shade of indignation, answered, “Of course not.” No, I was not mistaken. In their dissimilar persons, eyes, faces, there was expressed a common trouble, doubt, and commiseration. This expression seemed to go out to meet us sadly, like a bearer of ill-news. And, as if at the sight of a downcast messenger, I experienced the clear presentiment of some fatal intelligence.

It was conveyed to me late in the afternoon of that ‘same day out of Williams’ own thick lips, that seemed as heavy and inert as his voice.

“As far as we can see,” he said, “you can’t stay in the ship, Kemp. It would do no one any good — not the slightest good. Ask Sebright here.”

It was a sort of council of war, to which we had been summoned in the saloon. Mrs. Williams had some sewing in her lap. She listened, her hands motionless, her eyes full of desolation. Seraphina's attitude, leaning her cheek on her hand, reminded me of the time when I had seen her absorbed in watching the green-and-gold lizard in the back room of Ramon's store, with her hair falling about her face like a veil. Castro was not called in till later on. But Sebright was there, leaning his back negligently against the bulkhead behind Williams, and looking down on us seated on both sides of the long table. And there was present, too, in all our minds, the image of the Rio Medio schooner, hull down on our quarter. In all the trials of sailing, we had not been able to shake her off that day.

"I don't want to hide from you, Mr. Kemp," Sebright began, "that it was I who pointed out to the captain that you would be only getting the ship in trouble for nothing. She's an old trader and favourite with shippers; and if we once get to loggerheads with the powers, there's an end of her trading. As to missing Havana this trip, even if you, Mr. Kemp, could give a pot of money, the captain could never show his nose in there again after breaking his charter-party to help steal a young lady. And it isn't as if she were nobody. She's the richest heiress in the island. The biggest people in Spain would have their say in this matter. I suppose they could put the captain in prison or something. Anyway, good-by to the Havana business for good. Why, old Perkins would have a fit. He got over one runaway match.... All right, Mrs. Williams, not another word.... What I meant to say is that this is nothing else but a love story, and to knock on the head a valuable old-established connection for it..Don't bite your lip, Mr. Kemp. I mean no disrespect to your feelings. Perkins would start up to break things — let alone his heart. I am sure the captain and Mrs. Williams think so, too."

The festive and subdued captain of the Lion was staring straight before him, as if stuffed. Mrs. Williams moved her fingers, compressed her lips, and looked helplessly at all of us in turn. "Besides altering his will," Sebright breathed confidentially at the back of my head. I perceived that this old Perkins, whom I had never seen, and was never to see in the body, whose body no one was ever to see any more (he died suddenly on the echoing staircase, with a flat candlestick in his hand; was already dead at the time, so that Mrs. Williams was actually sitting in the cabin of her very own ship) — I perceived that old Perkins was present at this discussion with all the power of a malignant, bad-tempered spirit. Those two were afraid of



him. They had defied him once, it is true — but even that had been done out of fear, as it were.

Dismayed, I spoke quickly to Seraphina. With her head resting on her hand, and her eyes following the aimless tracings of her finger on the table, she said:

“It shall be as God wills it, Juan.”

“For Heaven’s sake, don’t!” said Sebright, coughing behind me. He understood Spanish fairly well. “What I’ve said is perfectly true. Nevertheless the captain was ready to risk it.”

“Yes,” ejaculated Williams profoundly, out of almost still lips, and otherwise so motionless all over that the deep sound seemed to have been produced by some person under the table. Mrs. Williams’ fingers were clasped on her lap, and her eyes seemed to beg for belief all round our faces.

“But the point is that it would have been no earthly good for you two,” continued Sebright. “That’s the point I made. If O’Brien knows anything, he knows you are on board this ship. He reckons on it as a dead certainty. Now, it is very evident that we could refuse to give you up, Mr. Kemp, and that the admiral (if the flagship’s off Havana, as I think she must be by now) would have to back us up. How you would get on afterwards with old Groggy Rowley, I don’t know. It isn’t likely he has forgotten you tried to wipe the floor with him, if I am to take the captain’s yarn as correct.”

“A regular hero,” Williams testified suddenly, in his concealed, from-under-the-table tone. “He’s not afraid of any of them; not he. Ha! ha! Old Topnambo must have....” He glanced at his wife, and bit his tongue — perhaps at the recollection of his unsafe conjugal position — ending in disjointed words, “In his chaise — warrant — separationist — rebel,” and all this without moving a limb or a muscle of his face, till, with a low, throaty chuckle, he fluttered a stony sort of wink to my address.

Sebright had paused only long enough for this ebullition to be over. The cool logic of his surmise appalled me. He didn’t see why O’Brien or anybody in Havana should want to interfere with me personally. But if I wanted to keep my young lady, it was obvious she must not arrive in Havana on board a ship where they would be sure to look for her the very first thing. It was even worse than it looked, he declared. His firm conviction was that if the Lion did not turn up in Havana pretty soon, there would be a Spanish man-of-war sent out to look for her — or else Mr.

O'Brien was not the man we took him for. There was lying in harbour a corvette called the Tornado, a very likely looking craft. I didn't expect them to fight a corvette. No doubt there would be a fuss made about stopping a British ship on the high seas; but that would be a cold comfort after the lady had been taken away from me. She was a person of so much importance that even our own admiral could be induced — say, by the Captain-General's remonstrances — to sanction such an action. There was no saying what Rowley would do if they only promised to present him with half a dozen pirates to take home for a hanging. Why! that was the very identical thing the flagship was kept dodging off Havana for! And O'Brien knew where to lay his hands on a gross of such birds, for that matter.

"No," concluded Sebright, overwhelming me from behind, as I sat looking, not at the uncertainties of the future, but at the paralyzing hopelessness of the bare to-morrow. "The Lion is no place for you, whether she goes into Havana or not. Moreover, into Havana she must go now. There's no help for it. It's the deuce of a situation."

"Very well," I gasped. I tried to be resolute. I felt, suddenly, as if all the air in the cabin had gone up the open skylight. I couldn't remain below another moment; and, muttering something about coming back directly, I jumped up and ran out without looking at any one lest I should give myself away. I ran out on deck for air, but the great blue emptiness of the open staggered me like a blow over the heart. I walked slowly to the side, and, planting both my elbows on the rail, stared abroad defiantly and without a single clear thought in my head. I had a vague feeling that the descent of the sun towards the waters, going on before my eyes with changes of light and cloud, was like some gorgeous and empty ceremonial of immersion belonging to a vast barren faith remote from consolation and hope. And I noticed, also, small things without importance — the hirsute aspect of a sailor; the end of a rope trailing overboard; and Castro, so different from everybody else on board that his appearance seemed to create a profound solitude round him, lounging before the cabin door as if engaged in a deep conspiracy all by himself. I heard voices talking loudly behind me, too.

I noted them distinctly, but with perfect indifference. A long time after, with the same indifference, I looked over my shoulder. Castro had vanished from the quarter-deck. And I turned my face to the sea again as a man, feeling himself beaten in a fight with death, might turn his face to the wall.

I had fought a harder battle with a more cruel foe than death, with the doubt of myself; an endless contest, in which there is no peace of victory or of defeat. The open sea was like a blank and unscalable wall imprisoning the eternal question of conduct. Right or wrong? Generosity or folly? Conscience or only weak fear before remorse? The magnificent ritual of sunset went on palpitating with an inaudible rhythm, with slow and unerring observance, went on to the end, leaving its funeral fires on the sky and a great shadow upon the sea. Twice I had honourably stayed my hand. Twice... to this end.

In a moment, I went through all the agonies of suicide, which left me alive, alas, to burn with the shame of the treasonable thought, and terrified by the revolt of my soul refusing to leave the world in which a young girl lived! The vast twilight seemed to take the impress of her image like wax. What did Seraphina think of me? I knew nothing of her but her features, and it was enough. Strange, this power of a woman's face upon a man's heart — this mastery, potent as witchcraft and mysterious like a miracle. I should have to go and tell her. I did not suppose she could have understood all of Sebright's argumentation. Therefore, it was for me to explain to what a pretty pass I had brought our love.

I was so greatly disinclined to stir that I let Sebright's voice go on calling my name half a dozen times from the cabin door. At last I faced about.

"Mr. Kemp! I say, Kemp! Aren't you coming in yet?"

"To say good-by," I said, approaching him.

It had fallen dark already.

"Good-by? No. The carpenter must have a day at least."

Carpenter! What had a carpenter to do in this? However, nothing mattered — as though I had managed to spoil the whole scheme of creation.

"You didn't think of making a start to-night, did you?" Sebright wondered. "Where would be the sense of it?"

"Sense," I answered contemptuously. "There is no sense in anything. There is necessity. Necessity."

He remained silent for a time, peering at me.

"Necessity, to be sure," he said slowly. "And I don't see why you should be angry at it."

I was thinking that it was easy enough for him to keep cool — the necessity being mine. He continued to philosophize with what seemed to me a shocking freedom of mind.

“Must try to put some sense into it. That’s what we are here for, I guess. Anyhow, there’s some room for sense in arranging the way a thing is to be done, be it as hard as it may. And I don’t see any sense, either, in exposing a woman to more hardship than is absolutely necessary. We have talked it out now, and I can do no more. Do go inside for a bit. Mrs. Williams is worrying the Señorita, rather, I’m afraid.”

I paused a moment to try and regain the command of my faculties. But it was as if a bombshell had exploded inside my skull, scattering all my wits to the four winds of heaven. Only the conviction of failure remained, attended by a profound distress.

I fancy, though, I presented a fairly bold front. The lamp was lit, and small changes had occurred during my absence. Williams had turned his bulk sideways to the table. Mrs. Williams had risen from her place, and was now sitting upright close to Seraphina, holding one little hand inclosed caressingly between her frail palms, as if she had there something alive that needed cherishing. And in that position she looked up at me with a strange air of worn-out youth, cast by a rosy flush over her forehead and face. Seraphina still leaned her head on her other hand, and I noted, through the soft shadow of falling hair, the heightened colour on her cheek and the augmented brilliance of her eye.

“How I wish she had been an English girl,” Mrs. Williams sighed regretfully, and leaned forward to look into Seraphina’s half-averted face.

“My dear, did you quite, quite understand what I have been saying to you?”

She waited.

“Si Señora,” said Seraphina. None of us moved. Then, after a time, turning to me with sudden animation, “This woman asked me if I believed in your love,” she cried. “She is old. Oh, Juan, can the years change the heart? your heart?” Her voice dropped. “How am I to know that?” she went on piteously. “I am young — and we may not live so long. I believe in mine....”

The corners of her delicate lips drooped; but she mastered her desire to cry, and steadied her voice which, always rich and full of womanly charm, took on, when she was deeply moved, an imposing gravity of timbre.

“But I am a Spaniard, and I believe in my lover’s honour; in your — your English honour, Juan.”

With the dignity of a supreme confidence she extended her hand. It was one of the culminating moments of our love. For love is like a journey in mountainous country, up through the clouds, and down into the shadows to an unknown destination. It was a moment rapt and full of feeling, in which we seemed to dwell together high up and alone — till she withdrew her hand from my lips, and I found myself back in the cabin, as if precipitated from a lofty place.

Nobody was looking at us. Mrs. Williams sat with downcast eyelids, with her hands reposing on her lap: her husband gazed discreetly at a gold moulding on the deck-beam; and the upward cast of his eyes invested his red face with an air of singularly imbecile ecstasy. And there was Castro, too, whom I had not seen till then, though I must have brushed against him on entering. He had stood by the door a mute, and, as it were, a voluntarily unmasked conspirator with the black round of the hat lying in front of his feet. He, alone, looked at us. He looked from Seraphina to me — from me to Seraphina. He looked unutterable things, rolling his crow-footed eyes in pious horror and glowering in turns. When Seraphina addressed him, he hastened to incline his head with his usual deference for the daughter of the Riegos.

She said, "There are things that concern this caballero, and that you can never understand. Your fidelity is proved. It has sunk deep here.... It shall give you a contented old age — on the word of Seraphina Riego."

He looked down at his feet with gloomy submission.

"There is a proverb about an enamoured woman," he muttered to himself, loud enough for me to overhear. Then, stooping deliberately to pick up his hat, he flourished it with a great sweep lower than his knees. His dumpy black back flitted out of the cabin; and almost directly we heard the sharp click of his flint and blade outside the door.

## CHAPTER SIX

How often the activity of our life is the least real part of it! Life, looked upon as a whole, presents itself to my fancy as a pursuit with open arms of a winged and magnificent dream, hovering just over our heads and casting its glory upon our hopes. It is in this simple vision, which is one and enduring, and not in the changing facts, that we must look for meaning and for truth. The three quiet days we spent together on board the *Lion* remain to me memorable and full of import, eventless and containing the very quintessence of existence. We shared the sunshine, always together, very close, turning hand in hand to the sea, whose unstained blueness continued under our feet the blue above our heads, as though we had been snatched up into the sky. The insignificant words we exchanged seemed informed by a sustaining certitude and an admirable gravity, as though there had been some quality of unerring wisdom in the blind love of man and woman. From the inexhaustible treasure of her feelings she drew words, glances, gestures that appeased every uneasiness of my heart. In some brief moment of illumination whose advent my man's eyes had utterly missed, she had learned all at once everything there was to know. She knew. She no longer needed to survey my actions, my words, my thoughts; but she accorded me the sincere flattery of spell-bound attention, and it was made intoxicating by her smile. In those short days of a pause, when, like a swimmer turning on his back, we lived in the trustful confidence of the sustaining depths, instead of struggling with the agitation of the surface — in these days we had the time to look at each other profoundly; and I saw her smile come back again a little changed, more meaning and a little less mirthful, as if her lips had been made stiff by sorrow. But she was young; and youth, the time of softness, of tenderness, of enthusiasm, and of pity, presents a surface as hard as marble to the finality of death.

Breathing side by side, drinking in the sunshine, and talking of ourselves not at all, but casting the sense of our love like a magnificent garment over the wide significance of a world already conquered, we could not help being made aware of the currents of excitement and sympathy that converged upon our essential isolation from the life of the ship. It was the excitement of the adventure brewing for our drinking according to Sebright's recipe. People approached us — spoke to us. We attended to them as if called down from an elevation; we were aware of the kind tone;

and, remaining indistinct, they retreated, leaving us free to regain the heights of the lovers' paradise — a region of tender whispers and intense silences. Suddenly there would be a short, throaty laugh behind our backs, and Williams would begin, "I say, Kemp; do you call to mind so-and-so?" Invariably some planter or merchant in Jamaica. I never could.

Williams would grunt, "No? I wonder how you passed your time away these two years or more. The place isn't that big." His purpose was to cheer me up by some gossip, if only he could find a common acquaintance to talk over. I believe he thought me a queer fish. He told me once that everybody he knew in Jamaica had that precise opinion of me. Then with a chuckle and muttering, "Warrants — assault — Top — nambo — ha, ha!" he would leave us to ourselves, and continue his waddle up and down the poop. He wore loose silk trousers, and the round legs inside moved like a contrivance made out of two gate-posts.

He was absurd. They all were that before our sweet reasonableness. But this atmosphere, full of interest and good will, was good to breathe. The very steward — the same who had been hiding in the lazarette during the fight — a hunted creature, displaying the most insignificant anatomy ever inhabited by a quailing spirit, devoted himself to the manufacture of strange cakes, which at tea-time he would deposit smoking hot in front of Seraphina's place. After each such exploit, he appeared amazed at his audacity in taking so much upon himself. The carpenter took more than a day, tinkering at an old ship's boat. He was a Shetlander — a sort of shaggy hyperborean giant with a forbidding face, an appraising, contemplative manner, and many nails in his mouth. At last the time came when he, too, approached our oblivion from behind, with a large hammer in his hand; but instead of braining us with one sweep of his mighty arm, he remarked simply in uncouth accents, "There now; I am thinking she will do well for what ye want her. I can do no more for ye."

We turned round, arm-in-arm, to look at the boat. There she was, lying careened on the deck, with patched sides, in a belt of chips, shavings, and sawdust; a few pensive sailors stood about, gazing down at her with serious eyes. Sebright, bent double, circled slowly on a prow of minute inspection. Suddenly straightening himself up, he pronounced a curt "She'll do"; and, without looking at us at all, went off busily with his rapid stride.

A light sigh floated down upon our heads. Williams and his wife appeared on the poop above us like an allegorical couple of repletion and

starvation, conceived in a fantastic vein on a balcony. A cigar smouldered in his stumpy red fingers. She had slipped a hand under his arm, as she would always do the moment they came near each other. She never looked more wasted and old-maidish than when thus affirming her wifely rights. But her eyes were motherly.

“Ah, my dears!” (She usually addressed Seraphina as “miss,” and myself as “young sir.”) “Ah, my dears! It seems so heartless to be sending you off in such a small boat, even for your own good.”

“Never fear, Mary. Repaired. Carry six comfortably,” reassured Williams in a tremendous mutter, like a bull.

“But why can’t you give them one of the others, Owen? That big one there?”

“Nonsense, Mary. Never see boat again. Wouldn’t grudge it. Only Sebright is quite right. Didn’t you hear what Sebright said? Very sensible. Ask Sebright. He will explain to you again.”

It was Sebright, with his asperity and his tact, with fits of brusqueness subdued by an almost affectionate contempt, who conducted all their affairs, as I have seen a trustworthy and experienced old nurse rule the infinite perplexities of a room full of children. His clear-sightedness and mental grip seemed independent of age and experience, like the ability of genius. He had an imaginative eye for detail, and, starting from a mere hint, would go scheming onwards with astonishing precision. His plan, to which we were committed — committed helplessly and without resistance — was based upon the necessity of our leaving the ship.

He had developed it to me that evening, in the cabin, directly Castro had gone out. He had already got Williams and his wife to share his view of our situation. He began by laying it down that in every desperate position there was a loophole for escape. Like other great men, he was conscious of his ability, and was inclined to theorize at large for a while. You had to accept the situation, go with it in a measure, and as you had walked into trouble with your eyes shut, you had only to continue with your eyes open. Time was the only thing that could defeat one. If you had no time, he admitted, you were at a dead wall. In this case he judged there would be time, because O’Brien, warned already, would sit tight for a few days, being sure to get hold of us directly the Lion came into port. It was only if the Lion failed to turn up within a reasonable term in Havana, that he would take fright, and



take measures to hunt her up at sea. But I might rest assured that the Lion was going to Havana as fast as the winds would allow her.

What was, then, the situation? he continued, looking at me piercingly above Williams' cropped head. I had run away for dear life from Cuba (taking with me what was best in it, to be sure, he interjected, with a faint smile towards Seraphina). I had no money, no friends (except my friends in this cabin, he was good enough to say); warrants out against me in Jamaica; no means to get to England; no safety in the ship. It was no use shirking that little fact. We must leave the Lion. This was a hopeless enough position. But it was hopeless only because it was not looked upon in the right way. We assumed that we had to leave her forever, while the whole secret of the trick was in this, that we need only leave her for a time. After O'Brien's myrmidons had gone through her, and had been hooted away empty-handed, she became again, if not absolutely safe, then at least possible — the only possible refuge for us — the only decent means of reaching England together, where, he understood, our trouble would cease. Williams nodded approval heavily.

"The friends of Miss Riego would be glad to know she had made the passage under the care of a respectable married lady," Sebright explained, in that imperturbable manner of his, which reflected faintly all his inner moods — whether of recklessness, of jocularly or anxiety — and often his underlying scorn. His gravity grew perfectly portentous. "Mrs. Williams," he continued, "was, of course, very anxious to do her part creditably. As it happened, the Lion was chartered for London this voyage; and notwithstanding her natural desire to rejoin, as soon as possible, her home and her aged uncle in Bristol, she intended to go with the young lady in a hackney coach to the very door."

I had previously told them that the lately appointed Spanish ambassador in London was a relation of the Riegos, and personally acquainted with Seraphina, who, nearly two years before, had been on a short visit to Spain, and had lived for some months with his family in Madrid, I believe. No trouble or difficulty was to be apprehended as to proper recognition, or in the matter of rights and inheritance, and so on. The ambassador would make that his own affair. And for the rest I trusted the decision of her character and the strength of her affection. I was not afraid she would let any one talk her out of an engagement, the dying wish of her nearest kinsman, sealed, as it were, with the blood of her father. This matter of temporary absence from

the Lion, however, seemed to present an insuperable difficulty. We could not, obviously, be left for days floating in an open boat outside Havana harbour, waiting till the ship came out to pick us up. Sebright himself admitted that at first he did not see how it could be contrived. He didn't see at all. He thought and thought. It was enough to sicken one of every sort of thinking. Then, suddenly, the few words Castro had let drop about the sugar estate and the relay of mules came into his head — providentially, as Mrs. Williams would say. He fancied that the primitive and grandiose manner for a gentleman to keep a relay of mules — any amount of mules — in case he should want to send a letter or two, caused the circumstance to stick in his mind. At once he had “our little hidalgo” in, and put him through an examination.

“He turned fairly sulky, and tried constantly to break out against you, till Dona Seraphina here gave him a good talking to,” Sebright said.

Otherwise it was most satisfactory. The place was accessible from the sea through a narrow inlet, opening into a small, perfectly sheltered basin at the back of the sand-dunes. The little river watering the estate emptied itself into that basin. One could land from a boat there, he understood, as if in a dock — and it was the very devil if I and Miss Riego could not lie hidden for a few days on her own property, the more so that, as it came out in the course of the discussion, while I had “rushed out to look at the sunset,” that the manager, or whatever they called him — the fellow in charge — was the husband of Dona Seraphina's old nurse-woman. Of course, it behoved us to make as little fuss as possible — try to reach the house along by-paths early in the morning, when all the slaves would be out at work in the fields. Castro, who professed to know the locality very well indeed, would be of use. Meantime, the Lion would make her way to Havana, as if nothing was the matter. No doubt all sorts of confounded alguazils and custom-house hounds would be ready to swarm on board in full cry. They would be made very welcome. Any strangers on board? Certainly not. Why should there be?... Rio Medio? What about Rio Medio? Hadn't been within miles and miles of Rio Medio; tried this trip to beat up well clear of the coast. Search the ship? With pleasure — every nook and cranny. He didn't suppose they would have the cheek to talk of the pirates; but if they did venture — what then? Pirates? That's very serious and dishonourable to the power of Spain. Personally, had seen nothing of pirates. Thought they had all been captured and hanged quite lately. Rumours of the Lion having been attacked

obviously untrue. Some other ship, perhaps.... That was the line to take. If it didn't convince them, it would puzzle them altogether. Of course, Captain Williams, in his great regard for me, had abandoned the intention of making an affair of state of the outrage committed on his ship. He would not lodge any complaint in Havana — nothing at all. The old women of the Admiralty wouldn't be made to sit up this time. No report would be sent to the admiral either. Only, if the ship were interfered with, and bothered under any pretence whatever, once they had been given every facility to have one good look everywhere, the admiral would be asked to stop it. And the Spanish authorities would have not a leg to stand on either, for this simple reason, that they could not very well own to the sources of their information. Meantime, all hands on board the Lion had to be taken into confidence; that could not be avoided. He, Sebright, answered for their discretion while sober, anyhow; and he promised me that no leave or money would be given in Havana, for fear they should get on a spree, and let out something in the grogshops on shore. We all knew what a sailor-man was after a glass or two. So that was settled. Now, as to our rejoining the Lion. This, of necessity, must be left to me. Counting from the time we parted from her to land on the coast, the Lion would remain in Havana sixteen days; and if we did not turn up in that time, and the cargo was all on board by then, Captain Williams would try to remain in harbour on one pretence or another a few days longer. But sixteen days should be ample, and it was even better not to hurry up too much. To arrive on the fifteenth day would be the safest proceeding in a way, but for the cutting of the thing too fine, perhaps. With all these mules at our disposal, Sebright didn't see why we should not make our way by land, pass through the town at night, or in the earliest morning, and go straight on board the Lion — perhaps use some sort of disguise. He couldn't say. He was out of it there. Blackened faces or something. Anyway, we would be looked out for on board night and day.

Later on, however, we had learned from Castro that the estate possessed a sailing craft of about twenty tons, which made frequent trips to Havana. These sugar droghers belonging to the plantations (every estate on the coast had one or more) went in and out of the harbour without being taken much notice of. Sometimes the battery at the water's edge on the north side or a custom-house guard would hail them, but not often — and even then only to ask the name, where from, and for the number of sugar-hogsheads on board. "By heavens! That's the very thing!" rejoiced Sebright. And it was

agreed that this would be our best way. We should time our arrival for early morning, or else at dusk. The craft that brought us in should be made, by a piece of unskillful management, to fall aboard the Lion, and remain alongside long enough to give us time to sneak in through an open deck-port.

The whole occurrence must be so contrived as to wear the appearance of a pure accident to the onlookers, should there be any. Shouting and an exchange of abuse on both parts should sound very true. Then the drogher, getting herself clear, would proceed innocently to the custom-house steps, where all such coasters had to report themselves on arrival. "Never fear. We shall put in some loud and scandalous cursing," Sebright assured me. "The boys will greatly enjoy that part, I dare say."

Remained to consider the purpose of the schooner that had come out of Rio Medio to hang on our skirts. It was doubtful whether it was in our power to shake her off. Sebright was full of admiration for her sailing qualities, coupled with infinite contempt for the "lubberly gang on board."

"If I had the handling of her, now," he said, "I would take my position as near as I liked, and stick there. It seems almost as if she would do it of herself, if those imbeciles would only let her have her own way. I never yet saw a Spaniard, good or bad, that was anything of a sailor. As it is, we may maintain a distance that would make it difficult for them to see what we are about. And if not, then — why, you must take your leave of us at night."

He didn't know that, but for the dismalness of such a departure, it were not just as well. Who could tell what eyes might be watching on shore?

"You know I never pretended my plan was quite safe. But have you got another?"

I made no answer, because I had no other, and could not think of one. Incredible as it may appear, not only my heart, but my mind, also, in the awakened comprehension of my love, refused to grapple with difficulties. My thoughts raced ahead of ships and pursuing men, into a dream of cloudless felicity without end. And I don't think Sebright expected any suggestion from me. This took place during one of our busy talks — only he and I — alone in his cabin. He had been washing his hands, making ready for tea.

"Do you know," he said, turning full on me, and wiping his fingers carefully with a coarse towel — "do you know, I shouldn't wonder if that schooner were not keeping watch on us, in suspicion of just some such

move on our part. 'Tis extraordinary how clever the greatest fool may show himself sometimes. Only, with their lubberly Spanish seamanship, they would expect us, probably, to make a whole ceremony of your landing: ship hove to for hours close in shore, a boat going off to land and returning, and all such pother. 'We are sure to see their little show,' they think to themselves. Eh? What? Whereas we shall keep well clear of the land when the time comes, and drop you in the dark without as much check on our way as there is in the wink of an eye. Hey?... Mind, Mr. Kemp, you take the boat out of sight up that little river, in case they should have a fancy, as they go along after us, to peep into that inlet. As I have said it wouldn't do to trust too much in any fool's folly."

And now the time was approaching; the time to awake and step forth out of the temple of sunshine and love — of whispers and silences. It had come. The night before both Williams and Sebright had been on deck, working the ship with an anxious care to take the utmost advantage of every favouring flaw in the contrary breeze. In the morning I was told there was a norther brewing. A norther is a tempestuous gale. I saw no signs of it. The realm of the sun, like the vanished one of the stars, appeared to my senses to be profoundly asleep, and breathing as gently as a child upon the ship. The Lion, too, seemed to lie wrapped in an enchanted slumber from the water-line to the tops of her upright masts. And yet she moved with the breath of the world, but so imperceptibly that it was the coast that seemed to be nearing her like a line of low vapour blown along the water. Between Williams and Sebright Castro pointed with his one arm, and a splutter of guttural syllables fell like hail out of his lips. The other two seemed incredulous. He stamped with both his feet angrily. Finally they went below together, to look at the chart, I suppose. They came up again very fast, one after another, and stood in a row, looking on as before. Three more dissimilar human beings it would have been difficult to imagine.

Dazzling white patches, about the size of a man's hand, came out between sky and water. They grew in width, and ran together with a hummocky outline into a continuous undulation of sand-dunes. Here and there this rampart had a gap like a breach made by guns. Mrs. Williams, behind me, blew her nose faintly; her eyes were red, but she did not look at us. No eye was turned our way, and the spell of the coast was on her, too. A low, dark headland broke out to view through the dunes, and stood there

conspicuous amongst the heaps of dazzling sand, like a small man frowning. A voice on deck pronounced:

“That’s right. Here’s his landmark. The fellow knew very well what he was talking about.”

It was Sebright’s voice, and Castro, strolling away triumphantly, affected to turn his back on the land. He had recognized the formation of the coast about the inlet long before anybody else could distinguish the details. His word had been doubted. He was offended, and passed us by, wrapping himself up closely. One of Seraphina’s locks blew against my cheek, and this last effort of the breeze remained snared in the silken meshes of her hair.

“There’s not enough wind to fill the sail of a toy boat,” grumbled Sebright; “and you can’t pull this heavy gig ashore with only that one-armed man at the other oar.” He was sorry he could not send us off with four good rowers. The norther might be coming on before they could return to the ship, and — apart from the presence of four English sailors on the coast being sure to get talked about — there was the difficulty in getting them back on board in Havana. We could, no doubt, smuggle ourselves in; but six people would make too much of a show. On the other hand, the absence of four men out of the ship’s company could not be accounted for very well to the authorities. “We can’t say they all died, and we threw them overboard. It would be too startling. No; you must go alone, and leave us at the first breath of wind; and that, I fear, ‘ll be the first of the norther, too.”

He threw his head back, and hailed, “Do you see anything of that schooner from aloft there?”

“Nothing of her, sir,” answered a man perched, with dangling feet, astride the very end of the topsail yard-arm. He paused, scanned the space from under the flat of his hand, and added, shouting with deliberation, “There’s — a — haze — to seaward, sir.” The ship, with her decks sprinkled over with men in twos and threes, sent up to his ears a murmur of satisfaction.

If we could not see her, she could not see us. This was a favourable circumstance. To the infinite gratification of everyone on board, it had been discovered at daylight that the schooner had lost touch with us during the hours of darkness — either through unskillful handling, or from some accidental disadvantage of the variable wind. I had been informed of it, directly I showed myself on deck in the morning, by several men who had radiant grins, as if some great piece of luck had befallen them, one and all.

They shared their unflagging attention between the land and the sea-horizon, pointing out to each other, with their tattooed arms, the features of the coast, nodding knowingly towards the open. At midday most of them brought out their dinners on deck, and could be seen forward, each with a tin plate in the left hand, gesticulating amicably with clasp knives. A small white handkerchief hung from Mrs. Williams' fingers, and now and then she touched her eyes lightly, one after the other. Her husband and Sebright, with a grave mien, stamped busily around the binnacle aft, changing places, making way for each other, stooping in turns to glance carefully along the compass card at the low bluff, like two gunners laying a piece of heavy ordnance for an important shot. The steward, emerging out of the companion, rang a handbell violently, and remained scared at the failure of that appeal. After waiting for a moment, he produced a further feeble tinkle, and sank down out of sight, with resignation.

A white sun, as if blazing with the pallor of fury, swung past the zenith in a profound and universal stillness. There was not a wrinkle on the sea; it presented a lustrous and glittering level, like the polished facet of a gem. In the cabin we sat down to the meal, not even pretending a desire to eat, exchanging vague phrases, hanging our heads over the empty plates. But the regular footsteps of the boatswain left in charge hesitated, stopped near the skylight. He said in an imperfectly assured voice, "Seems as if there was a steadier draught coming now." At this we rose from the table impetuously, as though he had shouted an alarm of fire, and Mrs. Williams, with a little cry, ran round to Seraphina. Leaving the two women locked in a silent embrace, the captain, Sebright and myself hurried out on deck.

Every man in the ship had done the same. Even the shiny black cook had come out of his galley, and was already comfortably seated on the rail, baring his white teeth to the sunshine.

"Just about enough to blow out a farthing dip," said Sebright, in a disappointed mutter.

He thought, however, we had better not wait for more. There would be too much presently. Some sailors hauled the boat alongside, the rest lined the rail as for a naval spectacle, and Williams stared blankly. We were waiting for Seraphina, who appeared, attended by Mrs. Williams, looking more kind, bloodless, and ascetic than ever. But my girl's cheeks glowed; her eyes sparkled audaciously. She had done up her hair in some way that made it fit her head like a cap. It became her exceedingly, and the decision

of her movements, the white serenity of her brow, dazzled me as if I had never seen her before. She seemed less childlike, older, ripe for this adventure in a new development of strength and courage. She inclined her head slowly at the gaping sailors, who had taken their caps off.

As soon as she appeared, Castro, who had been leaning against the bulwark, started up, and with a muttered “Adios, Señores,” went down the overside ladder and ensconced himself in the bow of the boat. The leave-taking was hurried over. Williams gave no sign of feeling, except, perhaps, for the greater intensity of his stare, which passed beyond our shoulders in the very act of handshaking. Sebright helped Seraphina down into the boat, and ran up again nimbly. Mrs. Williams, with her slim hand held in both mine, uttered a few incoherent words — about men’s promises and the happiness of women, as I thought; but, truth to say, my own suppressed excitement was too considerable for close attention. I only knew that I had given her my confidence, that complete and utter confidence which neither wisdom nor power alone, can command. And, suddenly, it occurred to me that the heiress of a splendid name and fortune, down in the boat there, had no better friend in the world than this woman, who had come to us out of the waste of the sea, opening her simple heart to our need, like a pious and naive hermit in a wilderness throwing open the door of his cell to strange wayfarers.

“Mrs. Williams,” I stammered. “If we — if I — there’s no saying what may happen to any of us. If she ever comes to you — if she ever is in want of help....”

“Yes, yes. Always, always — like my own daughter.”

And the good woman broke down, as if, indeed, I were taking her own daughter away.

“Nonsense, Mary!” Williams advanced, muttering tremendously. “They are not going round the world. Dare say get ashore in time for supper.”

He stared through her without expression, as if she had been thin air, but she seized his arm, of course, and he gave me, then, an amazingly rapid wink which, I suppose, meant that I should go....

“All right there?” asked Sebright from above, as soon as I had taken my seat in the stern sheets by the side of Seraphina. He was standing on the poop deck ready with a sign for letting go the end of our painter on deck; but before I could answer in the affirmative, Castro, ensconced forward under his hat, drew his ready blade across the rope, as it were a throat.



At once a narrow strip of water opened between the boat and the ship, and our long-prepared departure, hastened thus by half a second, seemed to strike everybody dumb with surprise, as if we had taken wings to ourselves to fly away. Hastily I grasped the tiller to give the boat a sheer, and heard a sort of loud gasp in the air above. A row of heads, posed on chins all along the rail, stared after us with unanimous fixity. Mrs. Williams averted her face on her husband's shoulder. Behind the couple, Sebright raised his cap gravely.

Our little sail filled to a breeze which was much too feeble to produce a perceptible effect on the ship, and we left behind us her towering form, as one recedes from a tall white spire on a plain. I laid the boat's head straight for the dwarf headland, marking the mouth of the inlet on the interminable range of sand-dunes. We drove on with a smart ripple, but before we felt sufficiently settled to exchange a few words the animated sound languished suddenly, paused altogether, and, with a renewed murmur under our feet seemed to lose itself below the glassy waters.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

The calm had returned. The sea, changing from the warm glitter of a gem, and attuned to the grays and blacks of space, resembled a monstrous cinder under a sky of ashes.

The sun had disappeared, smothered in these clouds that had formed themselves all at once and everywhere, like some swift corruption of the upper air. For the best part of the afternoon the ship and the boat remained lying at right angles, within half a mile of each other. What light was left in the world, cut off from the source of life, seemed to sicken with a strange decay. The long stretch of sands and the sails of the motionless vessel stood out lividly pale in universal gloom. And yet the state of the atmosphere was such that we could see clear-cut the very folds in the steep face of the dunes, and the figures of the people moving on the poop of the Lion. There was always somebody there that had the aspect of watching us. Then, with some excitement, we saw them on board haul up the mainsail and lower the gig.

The four oars beat the sombre water, rising and falling apparently in the same place. She was an interminable time coming on, but as she neared us I was surprised at her dashing speed. Sebright, who steered, laid her alongside smartly, and two of his men, clambering over without a word, lowered our lug at once.

“We came to reef your sail for you. You couldn’t manage that very well with a one-armed crew,” said the young mate quietly in the enormous stillness. In his opinion, we couldn’t expect now any wind till the first squall came down. This flurry, as he called it, would send us in smoking, and he was sure it would help the ship, as well, into Havana, in about twenty-four hours. He didn’t think that it would come very heavy at first; and, once landed, we need not care how hard it blew.

He tendered me over the gunwale a pocket-flask covered with leather, and with a screwed silver stopper in the shape of a cup. It was from the captain; full of prime rum. We were pretty sure to get wet. He thrust, also, into my hands a gray woollen shawl. Mrs. Williams thought my young lady might be glad of it at night. “The dear old woman has shut herself up inside their stateroom, and is praying for you now,” he concluded. “Look alive, boys.”

His men did not answer him, but at some words he addressed to Castro, the latter, in the bows and looking at the coast, growled with a surly impatience. He was perfectly sure of the entrance. Had been in and out several times. Yes. At night, too. Sebright then turned to me. After all, it was not so difficult. The inlet bore due south from us, and the wind would come true from the north. Always did in these bursts. I had only to keep dead before it. "The clouds will light you in at the last," he added meaningly, glancing upwards.

The two sailors, having finished reefing, hoisted, lowered, and hoisted again the yard to see that the gear ran clear, and without one look at us, stepped back into the gig, and sat down in their places. For a moment longer we lay together, touching sides. Sebright extended his hand from boat to boat.

"You are in God's care now, Kemp," he said, looking up at me, and with an unexpected depth of feeling in his tone. "Take no turn with the sheet on any account, and if you feel it coming too heavy, let fly and chance it. Did I tell you we have sighted the schooner from aloft? No? We can just make her out from the main-yard away astern under the land. That don't matter now.... Señorita, I kiss your hands." He liked to air his Spanish.... "Keep cool whatever happens. Dead before it — mind. And count on sixteen days from to-morrow. Well. No more. Give way, boys."

He never looked back. We watched the boat being hoisted and secured. Shortly afterwards, as we were observing the Lion shortening sail, the first of the rain descended between her and us like a lowered veil. For a time she remained mistily visible, dark and gaunt with her bared spars. The downpour redoubled; she disappeared; and our hearts were stirred to a faster beat.

The shower fell on us, around us, descending perpendicularly, with a steady force; and the thunder rolled far off, as if coming from under the sea. Sometimes the muffled rumbling stopped, and let us hear plainly the gentle hiss and the patter of the drops falling upon a vast expanse. Suddenly, mingled with a loud detonation right over our heads, a burst of light outlined under the bellying strip of our sail the pointed crown of Castro's hat, reposing on a heap of black clothing huddled in the bows. The darkness swallowed it all. I swung Seraphina in front of me, and made her sit low on the stern sheets beneath my feet. A lot of foam boiled up around the boat, and we had the sensation of having been sent flying from a catapult.

Everything was black — perfectly black. At intervals, headlong gusts of rain swept over our heads. I suppose I did keep sufficiently cool, but in every flash of lightning the wind, the sea, the clouds, the rain, and the boat appeared to rush together thundering upon the coast. The line of sands, bordered with a belt of foam, zigzagged dazzlingly upon an earth as black as the clouds; only the headland, with every vision, remained sombre and unmoved. At last it rose up right before the boat. Blue lightning streamed on a lane of tumbling waters at its foot. Was this the entrance? With the vague notion of shortening sail, I let the sheet go from my hand. There was a jerk, the crack of snapped wood, and the next flash showed me Castro emerging from the ruins of mast and sail. He uprose, hurling the wreck from him overboard, then flickered out of sight with his arm waving to the left, and I bore accordingly on the tiller. In a moment I saw him again, erect forward, with the arm pointing to the right, and I obeyed his signal. The clouds, straining with water and fire, were, indeed, lighting us on our way. A wave swelled astern, chasing us in; rocking frightfully, we glanced past a stationary mass of foam — a sandbar — breakers.... It was terrible.... Suddenly, the motion of the boat changed, and the flickers of lightning fell into a small, land-locked basin. The wind tore deep furrows in it, howling and scuffling behind the dunes. Spray flew from the whole surface, the entire pool of a bay seemed to heave bodily upwards, and I saw Castro again, with his face to me this time. His black cloak was blowing straight out from his throat, his mouth yawned wide; he shouted directions, but in an instant darkness sealed my eyes with its impenetrable impress. It was impossible to steer now; the boat swung and reeled where she listed; a violent shock threw me sideways off my seat. I felt her turning over, and, gathering Seraphina in my arms, I leaped out before she capsized. I leaped clear out into shallow water.

I should never in my life have thought myself capable of such a feat, and yet I did it with assurance, with no effort that I can remember. More than that — I managed, after the leap, to keep my feet in the clinging, staggering clutch of water charged with sand, which swirled heavily about my knees. It kept on hurling itself at my legs from behind, while I waded across the narrow strip of sand with an inspired firmness of step defying all the power of the elements. I felt the harder ground at last, but not before I had caught a momentary glimpse of a black and bulky object tumbling over and over in the advancing and withdrawing liquid flurry of the beach.

“Sit still here on the ground,” I shouted to Seraphina, though flights of spray enveloped us completely. “I am going back for Castro.”

I faced about, putting my head down. He had been undoubtedly knocked over; and an old man, with only one hand to help himself with, ran a very serious risk of being buffeted into insensibility, and thus coming to his death in some four feet of water. The violent glare disclosed a body, entangled in a cloak, rolling about helplessly between land and water, as it were. I dashed on in the dark; a wave went over my head as I stooped, nearly waist-deep, groping. His rotary motion, in that smother, made it extremely difficult to obtain any sort of hold. A little more, and he would have knocked my legs from under me, but it was as if my grim determination were by itself of a saving nature. He submitted to being hauled up the beach, passively, like a sack. It was a heavy drag on the sand; I felt him bump behind me on the edge of the harder ground, and a deluge fell uninterruptedly from above. He lay prone on his face, like a corpse, between Seraphina and myself. We could not remain there, however.

But where to go? What to do? In what direction to look for a refuge? Was there any shelter near by? How were we to reach it? How were we to move at all? No doubt he had expired; and the earth, swept, deluged, glimmering fiercely and devastated with an awful uproar, appeared no longer habitable. A thunder-clap seemed to crash new life into him; the world flared all round, as if turning to a spark, and he was seen sitting up dazedly, like one called up from the dead. Through it all he had preserved his hat.

It was fixed firmly down under his chin with a handkerchief, the side rims over his ears like flaps, and, for the rest, presenting the appearance of a coal-scuttle bonnet behind, as well as in front. We followed its peculiar aspect. Driving on under this indestructible headgear, he flickered in and out of the world, while, with entwined arms and leaning back against the wind with all our might, Seraphina and myself were borne along in his train. He knew of a shelter; and this knowledge, perhaps, and also his evident familiarity with the topography of the country, made him appear indomitably confident in the storm.

A small plain of coarse grass was bounded by the steep spur of a rise. To the left a little river would burst, all at once, in all its windings into a bluish sulphurous glow; and between the crashes of thunder there was heard the long-drawn, whistling swish of the rushes and cane-brakes springing on the boggy ground. We skirted the rise. The rain beat against it; the lightning

showed its streaming and furrowed surface. We stumbled in the gusts. We felt under our feet, mud, sand, rocky inequalities of the ground, and the moving stones in the bed of a torrent, which broke headlong against our ankles. The entrance of a deep ravine opened.

Its lower sides palpitated with the ceaseless tossing of dwarf trees and bushes; and, motionless above the sombre tumult of the slopes, the monumental stretch of bare rock rose on high, level at the top, and emitting a ghastly yellow sheen in the flashes. The thunderclaps rolled ponderously between the narrowing walls of that chasm, that was all aflame one moment, and all black the next. A torrent springing at its head, and dashing with inaudible fury along the bottom, seemed to gleam placidly amongst the rounded forms of inky bushes and pale boulders below our path. Enormous eddies of wind from above made us stop short and totter breathless, clinging to each other.

Castro sustained Seraphina on the other side; but frequently he had to leave us and move ahead, looking for the way. There was, in fact, a half-obliterated path winding along the less steep of the two sides; and we struggled after our guide with the unthinking fortitude of despair. He was being disclosed to us so suddenly, extinguished so swiftly, that he appeared, always, as if motionless and posturing in a variety of climbing attitudes. The rise of the bottom was very steep, and the last hundred yards really stiff. We did them practically on our hands and knees. The dislodged stones bounded away from under our feet, unheard, like puff-balls.

At the top I tried to make of my body a shelter for Seraphina. The wind howled and roared over us. "Up! Vamos! The worst is yet before us," shrieked Castro in my ear.

What could he mean by this? The play of lightning opened to view only a vast and rolling upland. Fire flowed in sheets undulating with the expanses of long grass amongst the trees, here and there, in coal-black clumps, and flashed violently against a low edge of forests very dark and far away.

"Let us go!" he cried. "Courage, Señorita!"

Courage! The populace said of her that she had never needed to put her foot to the ground. If courage consists, for a being so tender, in toiling and enduring without faltering and plaint, — even to the very limit of physical power, — then she was the most courageous woman in the world, as she was the most charming, most faithful, most generous, and the most worthy of love. I tried not to think of her racked limbs, for the very pain and pity of

it. We retraced our steps, but now following the edge of that precipice out of which we had emerged. I had peremptorily insisted on carrying her. She put her arms round my neck and, to my uplifted heart, she weighed no heavier than a feather. Castro, grasping my arm, guided my steps and gave me support against the wind.

There was a distinct lull. Even the thunder had rolled away, dwindling to a deep mutter. Castro fell on his knees in front of me.

"It is here," I heard him scream.

I set Seraphina down. A hooked dart of fire tore in two the thick canopy of clouds. I started back from the edge.

"What! Here?" I yelled.

"Señor — Si! There is a cavern below...."

I had seen a ledge clinging to the face of the rock.

It was a cornice inclining downwards upon the wall of the precipice, as you see, sometimes, a flight of stairs built against the outside wall of a house. And it resembled a stair roughly, with long, sloping steps, wet with rain.

"Por Dios, Señor, do not let us stay to think here, or we shall perish in this tempest."

He howled, gesticulated, shrieked with all the strength of his lungs. He knew these tornadoes. Brute beasts would be found lying dead in the fields in the morning. This was the beginning only. The lightning showed his kneeling form, the eager upturned face, and a finger pointing urgently into the abyss. The wind was nothing! Nothing to what would come after. As he shrieked these words I was feeling the crust of the earth vibrate, absolutely vibrate, under the soles of my feet, with the sound of thunder.

He unfastened his cloak, and was seen to struggle above his head with the hovering and flapping cloth, as though he had captured a black and pugnacious bird. We mastered at last a corner each, and then we started to twist the whole, as if to wring the water out. We produced, thus, a sort of short rope, the thickness of a cable, and the descent began.

"Do not look behind you. Do not look," Castro screeched.

The first downward steps were terrible, but as soon as our heads had sunk below the level of the plain it was better, for we had turned about to the rock, moving sideways, cautiously, one step at a time, as if inspecting its fractured roughness for traces of a mysterious inscription. Castro, with one end of the twisted cloak in his hand, went first; I held the other; and

between us, Seraphina, the rope at her back, imitated our movements, with her loosened hair flying high in the wind, and her pale, rigid head as if deaf to the crashes. I saw the drawn stillness of her face, her dilated eyes staring within three inches of the strata. The strain on our prudence was tremendous. The knowledge of the precipice behind must have affected me. Explain it as you will, several times during that descent I felt my brain slip away from my control, and suggest a desire to fling myself over backwards. The twigs of the bushes, growing a little below the outer edge of the path, swished at my calves. Castro stopped. The cornice ended as a broken stairway hangs upon nothing. A tall, narrow arch stood back in the rock, with a sill three feet high at least. Castro clambered over; his head and torso, when he turned about, were lighted up blindingly between the inner walls at every flash. Seeing me lay hold of Seraphina, he yelled:

“Señor, mind! It’s death if you stagger back.”

I lifted her up, and put her over like a child; and, no sooner in myself, felt my strength leave all my limbs as water runs out of an overturned vessel. I could not have lifted up a child’s doll then. Directly, with a wild little laugh, she said to me:

“Juan — I shall never dare come out.”

I hugged her silently to my breast.

Castro went ahead. It was a narrow passage; our elbows touched the sides all the way. He struck at his flint regularly, sparks streamed down from his hand; we felt a freshness, a sense of space, as though we had come into another world. His voice directed us to turn to the left, then cried in the dark, “Stand still.” A blue gleam darted after us, and retired without having done anything against the tenebrous body of gloom, and the thunder rolled far in, unobstructed, in leisurely, organ-like peals, as if through an amazingly vast emptiness of a temple. But where was Castro? We heard snappings, rustlings, mutters; sparks streamed, now here, now there. We dared not move. There might have been steep ridges — deep holes in that cavern. And suddenly we discovered him on all-fours, puffing out his cheeks above a small flame kindled in a heap of dry sticks and leaves.

It was an abode of darkness, enormous, without sonority. Feeble currents of air, passing on our faces, gave us a feeling of being in the open air on a night more black than any known night had been before. One’s voice lost itself in there without resonance, as if on a plain; the smoke of our blaze drove aslant, scintillating with red sparks, and went trailing afar, as if under



the clouds of a starless sky. Ultimately, it must have escaped through some imperceptible crevices in the roof of rock. In one place, only, the light of the fire illuminated a small part of the rugged wall, where the shadows of our bodies would surge up, repeating our movements, and suddenly be gone from our sight. Everywhere else, pressing upon the reflection of the flames, the blind darkness of the vault might have extended away for miles and miles.

Castro thought it probable. He made me observe the incline of the floor. It sloped down deep and far. For miles, no doubt. Nobody could tell; no one had seen the end of it. This cavern had been known of old. This brushwood, these dead leaves, that would make a couch for her Excellency, had been stored for years — perhaps by men who had died long ago. Look at the dry rot. These large piles of branches were found stacked up when he first beheld this place. Caramba! What toil! What fatigue! Let us thank the saints, however.

Nevertheless, he shook his head at the strangeness of it. His cloak, spread out wide, was drying in the light, while he busied himself with his hat, turning it before the blaze in both hands, tenderly; and his tight little figure, lit up in front from head to foot, steamed from every limb. His round, plump shoulders and gray-shock head smoked quietly at the top. Suddenly, the fine mesh of wrinkles on his face ran together, shrinking like a torn cobweb; a spasmodic sound, quite new to me, was heard. He had laughed.

The warmth of the fire had penetrated our chilled bodies with a feeling of comfort and repose. Williams' flask was empty; and this was a new Castro, mellowed, discursive, almost genial. It was obvious to me that, had it not been for him, we two, lost and wandering in the storm, should have died from exposure and exhaustion — from some accident, perhaps. On the other hand I had indubitably saved his life, and he had already thanked me in high-flown language; very grave, but exaggerating the horrors of his danger, as a woman might have done for the better expression of gratitude. He had been greatly shocked. Spaniards, as a race, have never, for all their conquests, been on intimate terms with the sea. As individuals I have often observed in them, especially in the lower classes, a sort of dread, a dislike of salt water, mingled with contempt and fear.

Castro, lifting up his right arm, protested that I had given a proof of very noble devotion in rushing back for an old man into that black water. Ough! He shuddered. He had given himself up — *por Dios!* He hinted that, at his

age, he could not have cared much for life; but then, drowning in the sea was a death abhorrent to an old Christian. You died brutally — without absolution, and unable, even, to think of your sins. He had had his mouth filled with horrid, bitter sand, too. Tfui! He gave me a thousand thanks. But these English were wonderful in their way.... Ah! Caramba! They were....

A large protuberance of the rocky floor had been roughly chipped into the semblance of a seat, God only knows by what hands and in what forgotten age. Seraphina's inclined pose, her torn dress, the wet tresses lying over her shoulders, her homeless aspect, made me think of a beautiful and miserable gipsy girl drying her hair before a fire. A little foot advanced, gleamed white on the instep in front of the ruddy glare; her clasped fingers nursed one raised knee; and, shivering no longer, her head drooping in still profile, she listened to us, frowning thoughtfully upon the flames.

In the guise of a beggar-maid, and fair, like a fugitive princess of romance, she sat concealed in the very heart of her dominions. This cavern belonged to her, as Castro remarked, and the bay of the sea, and the earth above our heads, the rolling upland, herds of cattle, fields of sugar-cane — even as far as the forest away there; the forest itself, too. And there were on that estate, alone, over two hundred Africans, he was able to tell us. He boasted of the wealth of the Riegos. Her Excellency, probably, did not know such details. Two hundred — certainly. The estate of Don Vincente Salazar was on the other side of the river. Don Vincente was at present suffering the indignity of a prison for a small matter of a quarrel with another caballero — who had died lately — and all, he understood, through the intrigues of the prior of a certain convent; the uncle, they said, of the dead caballero. Bah! There was something to get. These fat friars were like the lean wolves of Russia — hungry for everything they could see. Never enough, Cuerpo de Dios! Never enough! Like their good friend who helped them in their iniquities, the Juez O'Brien, who had been getting rich for years on the sublime generosity of her Excellency's blessed father. In the greatness of his nobility, Don Balthasar of holy memory had every right to be obstinate.... Basta! He would speak no more; only there is a saying in Castile that fools and obstinate people make lawyers rich....

"Vuestra Señoria," he cried, checking himself, slapping his breast penitently, "deign to forgive me. I have been greatly exalted by the familiarity of the two last men of your house — allowed to speak freely because of my fidelity.... Alas! Alas!"

Seraphina, on the other side of the fire, made a vague gesture, and took her chin in her hand without looking at him.

“Patience,” he mumbled to himself very audibly. “He is rich, this picaro, O’Brien. But there is, also, a proverb — that no riches shall avail in the day of vengeance.”

Noticing that we had begun to whisper together, he threw himself before the fire, and was silent.

“Promise me one thing, Juan,” murmured Seraphina.

I was kneeling by the side of her seat.

“By all that’s holy,” I cried, “I shall force him to come out and fight fair — and kill him as an English gentleman may.”

“Not that! Not that!” she interrupted me. She did not mean me to do that. It was what she feared. It would be delivering myself into that man’s hands. Did I think what that meant? It would be delivering her, too, into that man’s power. She would not survive it. And if I desired her to live on, I must keep out of O’Brien’s clutches.

“In my thoughts I have bound my life to yours, Juan, so fast that the stroke which cuts yours, cuts mine, too. No death can separate us.”

“No,” I said.

And she took my head in her hands, and looked into my eyes.

“No more mourning,” she whispered rapidly. “No more. I am too young to have a lover’s grave in my life — and too proud to submit....”

“Never,” I protested ardently. “That couldn’t be.”

“Therefore look to it, Juan, that you do not sacrifice your life which is mine, either to your love — or — or — to revenge.” She bowed her head; the falling hair concealed her face. “For it would be in vain.”

“The cloak is perfectly dry now, Señorita,” said Castro, reclining on his elbow on the edge of the darkness.

We two stepped out towards the entrance, leaving her on her knees, in silent prayer, with her hands clasped on her forehead, and leaning against the rugged wall of rock. Outside, the earth, enveloped in fire and uproar, seemed to have been given over to the fury of a devil.

Yes. She was right. O’Brien was a formidable and deadly enemy. I wished ourselves on board the *Lion* chaperoned by Mrs. Williams, and in the middle of the Atlantic. Nothing could make us really safe from his hatred but the vastness of the ocean. Meantime we had a shelter, for that

night, at least, in this cavern that seemed big enough to contain, in its black gloom of a burial vault, all the dust and passions and hates of a nation....

Afterwards Castro and I sat murmuring by the diminished fire. He had much to say about the history of this cave. There was a tradition that the ancient buccaneers had held their revels in it. The stone on which the senorita had been sitting was supposed to have been the throne of their chief. A ferocious band they were, without the fear of God or devil — mostly English. The Rio Medio picaroons had used this cavern, occasionally, up to a year or so ago. But there were always ugly affairs with the people on the estate — the vaqueros. In his younger days Don Balthasar, having whole leagues of grass land here, had introduced a herd of cattle; then, as the Africans are useless for that work, he had ordered some peons from Mexico to be brought over with their families — ignorant men, who hardly knew how to make the sign of the cross. The quarrels had been about the cattle, which the Lugareños killed for meat. The peons rode over them, and there were many wounds on both sides. Then, the last time a Rio Medio schooner was lying here (after looting a ship outside), there was some gambling going on (they played round this very stone), and Manuel — (Si, Señor, this same Manuel the singer — Bestia!) — in a dispute over the stakes, killed a peon, striking him unexpectedly with a knife in the throat. No vengeance was taken for this, because the Lugareños sailed away at once; but the widow made a great noise, and some rumours came to the ears of Don Balthasar himself — for he, Castro, had been honoured with a mission to visit the estate. That was even the first occasion of Manuel's hate for him — Castro. And, as usual, the Intendente after all settled the matter as he liked, and nothing was done to Manuel. Don Balthasar was old, and, besides, too great a noble to be troubled with the doings of such vermin.... And Castro began to yawn.

At daybreak — he explained — he would start for the hacienda early, and return with mules for Seraphina and myself. The buildings of the estate were nearly three leagues away. All this tract of the country on the side of the sea was very deserted, the sugar-cane fields worked by the slaves lying inland, beyond the habitations. Here, near the coast, there were only the herds of cattle ranging the savannas and the peons looking after them, but even they sometimes did not come in sight of the sea for weeks together. He had no fear of being seen by anybody on his journey; we, also, could start without fear in daylight, as soon as he brought the mules. For the rest, he

would make proper arrangements for secrecy with the husband of Seraphina's nurse — Enrico, he called him: a silent Galician; a graybeard worthy of confidence.

One of his first cares had been to grub out of his soaked clothes a handful of tobacco, and now he turned over the little drying heap critically. He hunted up a fragment of maize leaf somewhere upon his bosom. His face brightened. "Bueno," he muttered, very pleased.

"Señor — good-night," he said, more humanized than I had supposed possible; or was it only that I was getting to know him better? "And thanks. There's that in life which even an old tired man.... Here I, Castro... old and sad, Señor. Yes, Señor — nothing of mine in all the world — and yet.... But what a death! Ouch! the brute water... Caramba! Altogether improper for a man who has escaped from a great many battles and the winter of Russia.... The snow, Señor...."

He drowsed, garrulous, with the blackened end of his cigarette hanging from his lower lip, swayed sideways — and let himself go over gently, pillowing his head on the stump of his arm. The thin, viperish blade, stuck upwards from under his temple, gleamed red before the sinking fire.

I raised a handful of flaring twigs to look at Sera-phina. A terrible night raged over the land; the inner arch of the opening growled, winking bluishly time after time, and, like an enchanted princess enveloped in a beggar's cloak, she was lying profoundly asleep in the heart of her dominions.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

The first thing I noted, on opening my eyes, was that Castro had gone already; I was annoyed. He might have called me. However, we had arranged everything the evening before. The broad day, penetrating through the passage, diffused a semicircle of twilight over the flooring. It extended as far as the emplacement of the fire, black and cold now with a gray heap of ashes in the middle. Farther away in the darkness, beyond the reach of light, Seraphina on her bed of leaves did not stir. But what was that hat doing there? Castro's hat. It asserted its existence more than it ever did on the head of its master; black and rusty, like a battered cone of iron, reposing on a wide flange near the ashes. Then he was not gone. He would not start to walk three leagues, bare-headed. He would appear presently; and I waited, vexed at the loss of time. But he did not appear. "Castro," I cried in an undertone. The leaves rustled; Seraphina sat up.

We were pleased to be with each other in an inexpugnable retreat, to hear our voices untinged by anxiety; and, going to the outer end of the short passage, we breathed with joy the pure air. The tops of the bushes below glittered with drops of rain, the sky was clear, and the sun, to us invisible, struck full upon the face of the rock on the other side of the ravine. A great bird soared, all was light and silence, and we forgot Castro for a time. I threw my legs over the sill, and sitting on the stone surveyed the cornice. The bright day robbed the ravine of half its horrors. The path was rather broad, though there was a frightful sheer drop of ninety feet at least. Two men could have walked abreast on that ledge, and with a hand-rail one would have thought nothing of it. The most dangerous part yet was at the entrance, where it ended in a rounded projection not quite so wide as the rest. I bantered Seraphina as to going out. She said she was ready. She would shut her eyes, and take hold of my hand. Englishmen, she had heard, were good at climbing. Their heads were steady. Then we became silent. There were no signs of Castro. Where could he have gone? What could he be doing? It was unimaginable.

I grew nervous with anxiety at last, and begged Seraphina to go in. She obeyed without a word, and I remained just within the entrance, watching. I had no means to tell the time, but it seemed to me that an hour or two passed. Hadn't we better, I thought, start at once on foot for the hacienda? I did not know the way, but by descending the ravine again to the sea, and

walking along the bank of the little river, I was sure to reach it. The objection to this was that we should miss Castro. Hang Castro! And yet there was something mysterious and threatening in his absence. Could he — could he have stepped out for some reason in the dark, perhaps, and tumbled off the cornice? I had seen no traces of a slip — there would be none on the rock; the twigs of the growth below the edge would spring back, of course. But why should he fall? The footing was good — however, a sudden attack of vertigo.... I tried to look at it from every side. He was not a somnambulist, as far as I knew. And there was nothing to eat — I felt hungry already — or drink. The want of water would drive us out very soon to the spring bubbling out at the head of the ravine, a mile in the open. Then why not go at once, drink, and return to our lair as quickly as possible?

But I did not like to think of her going up and down the cornice. I remembered that we had a flask, and went in hastily to look for it. First, I looked near the hat; then, Seraphina and I, bent double with our eyes on the ground examined every square inch of twilight; we even wandered a long way into the darkness, feeling about with our hands. It was useless! I called out to her, and then we desisted, and coming together, wondered what might have become of the thing. He had taken it — that was clear.

But if, as one might suppose, he had taken it away to get some water for us, he ought to have been back long before. I was beginning to feel rather alarmed, and I tried to consider what we had better do. It was necessary to learn, first, what had become of him. Staring out of the opening, in my perplexity, I saw, on the other side of the ravine, the lower part of a man from his waist to his feet.

By crouching down at once, I brought his head into view. This was not Castro. He wore a black sombrero, and on his shoulder carried a gun. He turned his back on the ravine, and began to walk straight away, sinking from my sight till only his hat and shoulders remained visible. He lifted his arm then — straight up — evidently as a signal, and waited. Presently another head and shoulders joined him, and they glided across my line of sight together. But I had recognized their bandit-like aspect with infinite consternation. Lu-garenos!

I caught Seraphina's hand. My first thought was that we should have to steal out of the cavern with the first coming of darkness. Castro must be lying low in hiding somewhere above. The thing was plain. We must try to make our way to the hacienda under the cover of the night, unseen by those

two men. Evidently they were emissaries sent from Rio Medio to watch this part of the coast against our possible landing. I was to be hunted down, it seems: and I reproached myself bitterly with the hardships I was bringing upon her continually. Thinking of the fatigues she had undergone — (I did not think of dangers — that was another thing — the romance of dying together like all the lovers in the tradition of the world) — I shook with rage and exasperation. The firm pressure of her hands calmed me. She was content. But what if they took it into their heads to come into the cavern?

The emptiness of the blue sky above the sheer yellow rock opposite was frightful. It was a mere strip, stretched like a luminous bandage over our eyes. They were, perhaps, even now on their way round the head of the ravine. I had no weapon except the butt of my pistol. The charges had been spoilt by the salt water, of course, and I had been tempted to fling it out of my belt, but for the thought of obtaining some powder somewhere. And those men I had seen were armed. At once we abandoned the neighbourhood of the entrance, plunging straight away into the profound obscurity of the cave. The rocky ground under our feet had a gentle slope, then dipped so sharply as to surprise us; and the entrance, diminishing at our backs, shone at last no larger than the entrance of a mouse-hole. We made a few steps more, gropingly. The bead of light disappeared altogether when we sat down, and we remained there hand-in-hand and silent, like two frightened children placed at the centre of the earth. There was not a sound, not a gleam. Sera-phina bore the crushing strain of this perfect and black stillness in an almost heroic immobility; but, as to me, it seemed to lie upon my limbs, to embarrass my breathing like a numbness full of dread; and to shake that feeling off I jumped up repeatedly to look at that luminous bead, that point of light no bigger than a pearl in the infinity of darkness. And once, just as I was looking, it shut and opened at me slowly, like the deliberate drooping and rising of the lid upon a white eyeball.

Somebody had come in.

We watched side by side. Only one. Would he go out? The point of light, like a white star setting in a coal-black firmament, remained uneclipsed. Whoever had entered was in no haste to leave. Moreover, we had no means of telling what another obscuring of the light might mean; a departure or another arrival. There were two men about, as we knew; and it was even possible that they had entered together in one wink of the light, treading close upon each other's heels. We both felt the sudden great desire to know



for certain. But, especially, we needed to find out if perchance this was not Castro who had returned. We could not afford to lose his assistance. And should he conclude, we were out — should he risk himself outside again, in order to find us and be discovered himself, and thus lost to us when we felt him so necessary? And the doubt came. If this man was Castro, why didn't he penetrate further, and shout our names? He ought to have been intelligent enough to guess.... And it was this doubt that, making suspense intolerable, put us in motion.

We circled widely in that subterranean darkness, which, unlike the darkest night on the surface of the earth, had no suggestion of shape, no horizon, and seemed to have no more limit than the darkness of infinite space. On this floor of solid rock we moved with noiseless steps, like a pair of timid phantoms. The spot of light grew in size, developed a shape — stretching from a pearly bead to a silvery thread; and, approaching from the side, we scanned from afar the circumscribed region of twilight about the opening. There was a man in it. We contemplated for a time his rounded back, his drooping head. It was gray. The man was Castro. He sat rocking himself sorrowfully over the ashes. He was mourning for us. We were touched by this silent faithfulness of grief.

He started when I put my hand on his shoulder, looked up, then, instead of giving any signs of joy, dropped his head again.

"You managed to avoid them, Castro?" I said.

"Señor, behold. Here I am. I, Castro."

His tone was gloomy, and after sitting still for a while under our gaze, he slapped his forehead violently. He was in his tantrums, I judged, and, as usual, angry with me — the cause of every misfortune. He was upset and annoyed beyond reason, as I thought, by this new difficulty. It meant delay — a certain measure of that sort of danger of which we had thought ourselves free for a time — night travelling for Seraphina. But I had an idea to save her this. We did not all want to go. Castro could start, alone, for the hacienda after dark, and bring, besides the mules, half a dozen peons with him for an escort. There was nothing really to get so upset about. The danger would have been if he had let himself be caught. But he had not. As to his temper, I knew my man; he had been amiable too long. But by this time we were so sure of his truculent devotion that Seraphina spoke gently to him, saying how anxious we had been — how glad we were to see him safe with us.... He would not be conciliated easily, it seemed, and let out

only a blood-curdling dismal groan. Without looking at her, he tried hastily to make a cigarette. He was very clever at it generally, rolling it with one hand on his knee somehow; but this time all his limbs seemed to shake, he lost several pinches of tobacco, dropped the piece of maize leaf. Seraphina, stooping over his shoulder, took it up, twisted the thing swiftly. "Take, amigo," she said.

He was looking up at her, as if struck dumb, roiling his eye wildly. He jumped up.

"You — Señorita! For a miserable old man! You break my heart."

And with long strides he disappeared in the darkness, leaving us wondering.

We sat side by side on the couch of leaves. With Castro there I felt we were quite equal to dealing with the two Lugareños if they had the unlucky idea of intruding upon us. Indeed, a vigilant man, posted on one side of the end of the passage, could have disputed the entrance against ten, twenty, almost any number, as long as he kept his strength and had something heavy enough to knock them over. Faint sounds reached me, as if at a great distance Castro had been shouting to himself. I called to him. He did not answer, but unexpectedly his short person showed itself in the brightest part of the light.

"Señor!" he called out with a strange intonation. I got up and went to him. He seemed to be listening intently with his ear turned to the opening. Then suddenly:

"Look at me, Señor. Am I Castro — the same Castro? old and friendless?"

He stood biting his forefinger and looking up at me from under his knitted eyebrows. I didn't know what to say. What was this nonsense?

He ejaculated a sort of incomprehensible babble, and, passing by me, rushed towards Seraphina; she sat up, startled, on her couch of leaves. Falling before her on his plump knees, he seized her hand, pressed it against his ragged moustache.

"Excellency, forgive me! No — no forgiveness! Ha! old man! Ha — thou old man...."

He bowed before her shadowy figure, that sustained the pale oval of the face, till his forehead struck the rock. Plunging his hand into the ashes, he poured a fistful with inarticulate low cries over his gray hairs; and the agitation of that obese little body on its knees had a lamentable and

grotesque inconsequence, as inexplicable in itself as the sorrow of a madman. Full of wonder before his abject collapse, she murmured:

“What have you done?”

He tried to fling himself upon her feet, but my hand was in his collar, and after an unmerciful shaking, I sat him down by main force. He gulped, blinked the whites of his eyes, then, in a whisper full of rage:

“Horror, shame, misery, and malediction; I have betrayed you.”

At once she said soothingly, “Tomasr I do not believe this”; while I thought to myself: How? Why? For what reason? In what manner betrayed? How was it possible? And, if so, why did he come back to us? But, as things stood, he would never dare approach a Lugareño. If he had, they would never have let him go again.

“You told them we were here?” I asked, so perfectly incredulous that I was not at all surprised to hear him protest, by all the saints, that he never did — never would do. Never. Never... But why should he? Was he the prey of some strange hallucination? Rocking himself, he struck his breast with his clenched hand, then suddenly caught at his hair and remained perfectly motionless. Minutes passed; this despairing stillness inspired in me a feeling of awe at last — the awe of something inconceivable. My head buzzed so with the effort to think that I had the illusions of faint murmurs in the cave, the very shadows of murmurs. And all at once a real voice — his voice — burst out fearfully rapid and voluble.

He had really gone out to get a provision of water. Waking up early, he saw us sleeping, and felt a great pity for the senorita. As to the caballero — his saviour from drowning, alas! — the senorita would need every ounce of his strength. He would let us sleep till his return from the spring; and, there being a blessed freshness in the air, he caught up the flask and started bare-headed. The sun had just risen. Would to God he had never seen it! After plunging his face in the running water, he remained on his knees and busied himself in rinsing and filling the flask. The torrent, gushing with force, made a loud noise, and after he had done screwing the top on, he was about to rise, when, glancing about carelessly, he saw two men leaning on their escopetas and looking at him in perfect silence. They were standing right over him; he knew them well; one they called El Rubio; the other, the little one, was José — squinting José. They said nothing; nothing at all. With a sudden and mighty effort he preserved his self-command, affected unconcern and, instead of getting up, only shifted his pose to a sitting

position, took off his shoes and stockings, and proceeded to bathe his feet. But it was as if a blazing fire had been kindled in his breast, and a tornado had been blowing in his head.

He could not tell whence these two had come, with what object, or how much they knew. They might have been only messengers from Rio Medio to Havana. They generally went in couples. If Manuel had escaped alive out of the sea, everything was known in Rio Medio. From where he sat he beheld the empty, open sea over the dunes, but the edge of the upland, cleft by many ravines (of which the one we had ascended was the deepest), concealed from him the little basin and the inlet. He was certain these men had not come up that way. They had approached him over the plain. But there was more than one way by which the upland could be reached from below. The thoughts rushed round and round his head. He remembered that our boat must be floating or lying stranded in the little bay, and resolved, in case of necessity, to say that we two were dead, that we had been drowned.

It was El Rubio who put the very question to him, in an insolent tone, and sitting on the ground out of his reach, with his gun across his knees. His long knife ready in his hand, squinting José remained standing over Castro. Those two men nodded to each other significantly at the intelligence. He perceived that they were more than half disposed to credit his story. They had nearly been drowned themselves pursuing that accursed heretic of an Englishman. When, from their remarks, he learned that the schooner was in the bay, he began putting on his shoes, though the hope of making a sudden dash for his life down the ravine abandoned him.

The schooner had been run in at night during the gale, and in such distress that they let her take the ground. She was not injured, however, and some of them were preparing to haul her off. Our boat, as I conceived, after bumping along the beach, had drifted within the influence of the current created by the little river, or else by the water forced into the basin by the tempest, seeking to escape, and had been carried out towards the inlet. She was seen at daylight, knocking about amongst the breakers, bottom up, and in such shallow water that three or four men wading out knee-deep managed to turn her over. They had found Mrs. Williams' woollen shawl and my cap floating underneath. At the same time the broken mast and sail were made out, tossing upon the waves, not very far off to seaward. That the boat had been in the bay at all did not seem to have occurred to them. It had been concluded that she had capsized outside the entrance. It was very

possible that we had been drowned under her. Castro hastened to confirm the idea by relating how he had been clinging to the bottom of the boat for a long time. Thus he had saved himself, he declared.

“Manuel will be glad,” observed El Rubio then, with an evil laugh. And for a long time nobody said a word.

El Rubio, cross-legged, was observing him with the eyes of a basilisk, but Castro swore a great oath that, as to himself, he showed no signs of fear. He looked at the water gushing from the rock, bubbling up, sparkling, running away in a succession of tiny leaps and falls. Why should he fear? Was he not old, and tired, and without any hope of peace on earth? What was death? Nothing. It was absolutely nothing. It comes to all. It was rest after much vain trouble — and he trusted that, through his devotion to the Mother of God, his sins would be forgiven after a short time in purgatory. But, as he had made up his mind not to fall into Manuel’s hands, he resolved that presently he would stab himself to the heart, where he sat — over this running water. For it would not be like a suicide. He was doomed, and surely God did not want his body to be tormented by such a devil as Manuel before death.

He would lean far over before he struck his faithful blade into his breast, so as to fall with his face in the water. It looked deliciously cool, and the sun was heavy on his bare head. Suddenly, El Rubio sprang to his feet, saying:

“Now, José.”

It is clear that these ruffians stood in awe of his blade. In their cowardly hearts they did not think it quite safe (being only two to one) to try and disarm that old man. They backed away a step or two, and, levelling their pieces, suddenly ordered him to get up and walk before. He threw at them an obscene word. He thought to himself, “Bueno! They will blow my head off my shoulders.” No emotion stirred in him, as if his blood had already ceased to run in his veins. They remained, all three, in a state of suspended animation, but at last El Rubio hissed through his teeth with vexation, and grunted:

“Attention, José. Take aim. We will break his legs and take away the sting of this old scorpion.”

Castro’s blood felt chilly in his limbs, but instead of planting his knife in his breast, he spoke up to ask them where, supposing he consented, they wished to conduct him.

“To Manuel — our captain. He would like to embrace you before you die,” said El Rubio, advancing a stride nearer, his gun to his shoulder. “Get up! March!”

And Castro found himself on his feet, looking straight into the black holes of the barrels.

“Walk!” they exclaimed together, stepping upon him.

The time had come to die.

“Ha! Canalla!” he said.

They made a menacing clamour, “Walk viejo, traitor; walk.”

“Señorita — I walked.” The heartrending effort of the voice, the trembling of this gray head, the sobs under the words, oppressed our breast with dismay and dread. Ardently he would have us believe that at this juncture he was thinking of us only — of us wondering, alone, ignorant of danger, and hidden blindly under the earth. His purpose was to provoke the two Luga-reños to shoot, so that we should be warned by the reports. Besides, an opportunity for escape might yet present itself in some most unlikely way, perhaps at the very last moment. Had he not his own life in his own hands? He cared not for it. It was in his power to end it at any time. And there would be dense thickets on the way; long grass where one could plunge suddenly — who knows! And overgrown ravines where one could hide — creep under the bushes — escape — and return with help.... But when he faced the plains its greatness crushed his poor strength. The uncovered vastness imprisoned him as effectually as a wall. He knew himself for what he was: an old man, short of breath, heavy of foot; nevertheless he walked on hastily, his eyes on the ground. The footsteps of his captors sounded behind him, and he tried to edge towards the ravine. When nearly above the opening of the cavern he would, he thought, swerve inland, and dash off as fast as he was able. Then they would have to fire at him; we would be sure to hear the shots, the warning would be clear... and suddenly, looking up, he saw that a small band of Lugareños, having just ascended the brow of the upland, were coming to meet him. Now was the time to get shot; he turned sharply, and began to run over that great plain towards a distant clump of trees.

Nobody fired at him. He heard only the mingled jeers and shouts of the two men behind, “Quicker, Castro; quicker!” They followed him, holding their sides. Those ahead had already spread themselves out over the plain, yelling to each other, and were converging upon him. That was the time to

stop, and with one blow fall dead at their feet. He doubled round in front of Manuel, who stood waving his arms and screeching orders, and ran back towards the ravine. The plain rang with furious shouts. They rushed at him from every side. He would throw himself over. It was a race for the precipice. He won it.

I suppose he found it not so easy to die, to part with the warmth of sunshine, the taste of food; to break that material servitude to life, contemptible as a vice, that binds us about like a chain on the limbs of hopeless slaves. He showered blows upon his chest, sitting before us, he battered with his fist at the side of his head till I caught his arm. We could always sell our lives dearly, I said. He would have to defend the entrance with me. We two could hold it till it was blocked with their corpses.

He jumped up with a derisive shriek; a cloud of ashes flew from under his stumble, and he vanished in the darkness with mad gesticulations.

“Their corpses — their corpses — their... Ha! ha! ha!”

The snarling sound died away; and I understood, then, what meant this illusion of ghostly murmurs that once or twice had seemed to tremble in the narrow region of gray light around the arch. The sunshine of the earth, and the voices of men, expired on the threshold of the eternal obscurity and stillness in which we were imprisoned, as if in a grave with inexorable death standing between us and the free spaces of the world.

## CHAPTER NINE

For it meant that. Imprisoned! Castro's derisive shriek meant that. And I had known it before. He emerged back out of the black depths, with livid, swollen features, and foam about his mouth, to splutter:

"Their corpses, you say.... Ha! Our corpses," and retreated again, where I could only hear incoherent mutters.

Seraphina clutched my arm. "Juan — together — no separation."

I had known it, even as I spoke of selling our lives dearly. They could only be surrendered. Surrendered miserably to these wretches, or to the everlasting darkness in which Castro muttered his despair. I needed not to hear this ominous and sinister sound — nor yet Seraphina's cry. She understood, too. They would never come down unless to look upon us when we were dead. I need not have gone to the entrance of the cave to understand all the horror of our fate. The Lugareños had already lighted a fire. Very near the brink, too.

It was burning some thirty feet above my head; and the sheer wall on the other side caught up and sent across into my face the crackling of dry branches, the loud excited talking, the arguments, the oaths, the laughter; now and then a very shriek of joy. Manuel was giving orders. Some advanced the opinion that the cursed Inglez, the spy who came from Jamaica to see whom he could get for a hanging without a priest, was down there, too. So that was it! O'Brien knew how to stir their hate. I should get a short shrift. "He was a fiend, the Inglez: look how many of us he has killed!" they cried; and Manuel would have loved to cut my flesh, in small pieces, off my bones — only, alas! I was now beyond his vengeance, he feared. However, somebody was left.

He must have thrown himself flat, with his head over the brink, for his yell of "Castro!" exploded, and rolled heavily between the rocks.

"Castro! Castro! Castro!" he shouted twenty times, till he set the whole ravine in an uproar. He waited, and when the clamour had quieted down amongst the bushes below, called out softly, "Do you hear me, Castro, my victim? Thou art my victim, Castro."

Castro had crept into the passage after me. He pushed his head beyond my shoulder.

"I defy thee, Manuel," he screamed.

A hubbub arose. "He's there! He is there!"



“Bravo, Castro,” Manuel shouted from above. “I love thee because thou art my victim. I shall sing a song for thee. Come up. Hey! Castro! Castro! Come up.... No? Then the dead to their grave, and the living to their feast.”

Sometimes a little earth, detached from the layer of soil covering the rock, would fall streaming from above. The men told off to guard the cornice walked to and fro near the edge, and the confused murmur of voices hung subdued in the air of the cleft, like a modulated tremor. Castro, moaning gently, stumbled back into the cave.

Seraphina had remained sitting on the stone seat. The twilight rested on her knees, on her face, on the heap of cold ashes at her feet. But Castro, who had stood stock-still, with a hand to his forehead, turned to me excitedly:

“The peons, for Dios!” Had I ever thought of the peons belonging to the estancia?

Well, that was a hope. I did not know exactly how matters stood between them and the Lugareños. There was no love lost. A fight was likely; but, even if no actual collision took place, they would be sure to visit the camp above in no very friendly spirit; a chance might offer to make our position known to these men, who had no reason to hate either me or Castro — and would not be afraid of thwarting the miserable band of ghouls sitting above our grave. How our presence could be made known I was not sure. Perhaps simply by shouting with all our might from the mouth of the cave. We could offer rewards — say who we were, summon them for the service of their own Señorita. But, probably, they had never heard of her. No matter. The news would soon reach the hacienda, and Enrico had two hundred slaves at his back. One of us must always remain at the mouth of the cave listening to what went on above. There would be the trampling of horses’ hoofs — quarrelling, no doubt — anyway, much talk — new voices — something to inform us. Only, how soon would they come? They were not likely to be riding where there were no cattle. Had Castro seen any signs of a herd on the uplands near by?

His face fell. He had not. There were many savannas within the belt of forests, and the herds might be miles away, stampeded inland by the storm. Sitting down suddenly, as if overcome, he averted his eyes and began to scratch the rock between his legs with the point of his blade.

We were all silent. How long could we wait? How long could people live?... I looked at Seraphina. How long could she live?... The thought

seared my heart like a hot iron. I wrung my hands stealthily.

“Ha! my blade!” muttered Castro. “My sting.... Old scorpion! They did not take my sting away.... Only — bah!”

He, a man, had not risen to the fortitude of a venomous creature. He was defeated. He groaned profoundly. Life was too much. It clung to one. A scorpion — an insect — within a ring of flames, would lift its sting and stab venom into its own head. And he — Castro — a man — a man, por Dios — had less firmness than a creeping thing. Why — why, did he not stab this dishonoured old heart?

“Señorita,” he cried agonizingly, “I swear I did shout to them to fire — so — in to my breast — and then...”

Seraphina leaned over him pityingly.

“Enough, Castro. One lives because of hope. And grieve not. Thy death would have done no good.”

Her face had a splendid pallor, the radiant whiteness and majesty of marble; it had never before appeared to me more beautiful: and her hair unrolling its dark undulations, as if tinged deep with the funereal gloom of the background, covered her magnificently right down to her elbows. Her eyes were incredibly profound. Her person had taken on an indefinable beauty, a new beauty, that, like the comeliness that comes from joy, love, or success, seemed to rise from the depths of her being, as if an unsuspected and sombre quality of her soul had responded to the horror of our situation. The fierce trials had gradually developed her, as burning sunshine opens the bud of a flower; and I beheld her now in the plenitude of her nature. From time to time Castro would raise up to her his blinking old eyes, full of timidity and distress.

He had not been young enough to throw himself over — he had worn the chain for too many years, had lived well and softly too long, was too old a slave. And yet — if he had had the courage of the act! Who knows? I rejected the thought far from me. It returned, and I caught myself looking at him with irritated eyes. But this first day passed not intolerably. We ignored our sufferings. Indeed, I felt none for my part. We had kept our thoughts bound to the slow blank minutes. And if we exchanged a few words now and then, it was to speak of patience, of resolution to endure and to hope.

At night, from the hot ravine full of shadows, came the cool fretting of the stream. The big blaze they kept up above crackled distinctly, throwing a fiery, restless stain on the face of the rock in front of the cave, high up under

the darkness and the stars of the sky — and a pair of feet would appear stamping, the shadow of a pair of ankles and feet, fantastic, sustaining no gigantic body, but enormous, tramping slowly, resembling two coffins leaping to a slow measure. I see them in my dreams now, sometimes. They disappeared.

Manuel would sing; far in the night the monotonous staccato of the guitar went on, accompanying plaintive murmurs, outbursts of anger and cries of pain, the tremulous moans of sorrow. My nerves vibrated, I broke my nails on the rock, and seemed to hear once more the parody of all the transports and of every anguish, even to death — a tragic and ignoble rendering of life. He was a true artist, powerful and scorned, admired with derision, obeyed with jeers. It was a song of mourning; he sat on the brink with his feet dangling over the precipice that sent him back his inspired tones with a confused noise of sobs and desolation.... His idol had been snatched from the humility of his adoring silence, like a falling star from the sight of the worm that crawls.... He stormed on the strings; and his voice emerged like the crying of a castaway in the tumult of the gale. He apostrophized his instrument.... Woe! Woe! No more songs. He would break it. Its work was done. He would dash it against the rock.... His palm slapped the hollow wood furiously.... So that it should lie shattered and mute like his own heart!

A frenzied explosion of yells, jests, and applause covered the finale.

A complete silence would follow, as if in the acclamations they had exhausted at once every bestial sound. Somebody would cough pitifully for a long time — and when he had done spluttering and cursing, the world outside appeared lost in an even more profound stillness. The red stain of the fire wavered across to play under the dark brow of the rock. The irritated murmur of the torrent, tearing along below, returned timidly at first, expanded, filled the ravine, ran through my ears in an angry babble. The deadened footfalls on the brink sometimes dislodged a pebble: it would start with a feeble rattle and be heard no more.

In the daytime, too, there were silences up there, perfect, profound. No prowling of feet disturbed them; the sun blazed between the rocks, and even the hum of insects could be heard. It seemed impossible not to believe that they had all died by a miracle, or else had been driven away by a silent panic. But two or more were always on the watch, directly above, with their heads over the edge; and suddenly they would begin to talk together in

drowsy tones. It was as if some barbarous somnambulists had mumbled in the daytime the bizarre atrocity of their thoughts.

They discussed Williams' flask, which had been picked up. Was the cup made of silver, they wondered. Manuel had appropriated it for his own use, it seems. Well — he was the capataz. The Inglez, should he appear by an impossible chance, was to be shot down at once; but Castro must be allowed to give himself up. And they would snigger ferociously. Sometimes quarrels arose, very noisy, a great hubbub of bickerings touching their jealousies, their fears, their unspeakable hopes of murder and rapine. They did not feel very safe where they were. Some would maintain that Castro could not have saved himself, alone. The Inglez was there, and even the senorita herself... Manuel scouted the idea with contempt. He advanced the violence of the storm, the fury of the waves, the broken mast, the position of the boat. How could they expect a woman!.... No. It was as his song had it. And he defended his point of view angrily, as though he could not bear being robbed of that source of poetical inspiration. He emitted profound sighs and superb declamations.

Castro and I listened to them at the mouth of the cave. Our tongues were dry and swollen in our mouths, there was the pressure of an iron clutch on our windpipes, fire in our throats, and the pangs of hunger that tore at us like iron pincers. But we could hear that the bandits above were anxious to be gone; they had but very few charges for their guns, and it was apparent that they were afraid of a collision with the peons of the hacienda. Glaring at each other with bloodshot, uncertain eyes, Castro and I imagined longingly a vision of men in ponchos spurring madly out of the woods, bent low, and swinging riatas over the necks of their horses — with the thunder of the galloping hoofs in the cave. Seraphina had withdrawn further into the darkness. And, with a shrinking fear, I would join her, to eat my heart out by the side of her tense and mute contemplation.

Sometimes Manuel would begin again, "Castro! Castro! Castro!" till he seemed to stagger the rocks and disturb the placid sunshine with an immense wave of sound. He called upon his victim to drink once more before he died. Long shrieks of derision rent the air, as if torn out of his breast by far greater torments than any his fancy delighted to invent. There was something terrible and weird in the abundance of words screeched continuously, without end, as if in desperation. No wonder Castro fled from the passage. And Seraphina and I, within, would be startled out of our half-

delirious state by the sudden appearance of that old man, disordered, sordid, with a white beard sprouting, who wandered, weeping aloud in the twilight.

More than once I would stagger off far away into the depths of the cavern in an access of rage, fling myself on the floor, bite my arms, beat my head on the rock. I would give myself up. She must be saved from this tortured death. She had said she would throw herself over if I left her. But would she have the strength? It was impossible to know. For days it seemed she had been lying perfectly still, on her side, one hand under her wan cheek, and only answering "Juan" when I pronounced her name. There was something awful in our dry whispers. They were lifeless, like the tones of the dead, if the dead ever speak to each other across the earth separating the graves. The moral suffering, joined to the physical torture of hunger and thirst, annihilated my will in a measure, but also kindled a vague, gnawing feeling of hostility against her. She asked too much of me. It was too much. And I would drag myself back to sit for hours, and with an aching heart look towards her couch from a distance.

My eyes, accustomed to obscurity, traced an indistinct and recumbent form. Her forehead was white; her hair merged into the darkness which was gathering slowly upon her eyes, her cheeks, her throat. She was perfectly still. It was cruel, it was odious, it was intolerable to be so still. This must end. I would carry her out by main force. She said no word, but there was in the embrace of those arms instantly thrown around my neck, in the feel of those dry lips pressed upon mine, in the emaciated face, in the big shining eyes of that being as light as a feather, a passionate mournfulness of seduction, a tenacious clinging to the appointed fate, that suddenly overawed my movement of rage. I laid her down again, and covered my face with my hands. She called out to Castro. He reeled, as if drunk, and waited at the head of her couch, with his chin dropped on his breast. "Vuestra, Señoria," he muttered.

"Listen well, Castro." Her voice was very faint, and each word came alone, as if shrunk and parched. "Can my gold — the promise of much gold — you know these men — save the lives...?"

He uttered a choked cry, and began to tremble, groping for her hand.

"Si, Señorita. Excellency, si. It would. Mercy. Save me. I am too old to bear this. Gold, yes; much gold. Manuel...."

"Listen, Castro.... And Don Juan?" His head fell again. "Speak the truth, Castro."

He struggled with himself; then, rattling in his throat, shrieked “No!” with a terrible effort. “No. Nothing can save thy English lover.” “Why?” she breathed feebly. He raged at her in his weakness. Why? Because the order had gone forth; because they dared not disobey. Because she had only gold in the palm of her hand, while Señor O’Brien held all their lives in his. The accursed Juez was for them like death itself that walks amongst men, taking this one, leaving another.

He was their life, and their law, and their safety, and their death — and the caballero had not killed him....

His voice seemed to wither and dry up gradually in his throat. He crawled away, and we heard him chuckling horribly somewhere, like a madman. Seraphina stretched out her hand.

“Then, Juan — why not together — like this?”

If she had the courage of this death, I must have even more. It was a point of honour. I had no wish, and no right, to seek for some easier way out of life. But she had a woman’s capacity for passive endurance, a serenity of mind in this martyrdom confessing to something sinister in the power of love that, like faith, can move mountains and order cruel sacrifices. She could have walked out in perfect safety — and it was that thought that maddened me. And there was no sleep; there were only intervals in which I could fall into a delirious reverie of still lakes, of vast sheets of water. I waded into them up to my lips. Never further. They were smooth and cold as ice; I stood in them shivering and straining for a draught, burning within with the fire of thirst, while a phantom all pale, and with its hair streaming, called to me “Courage!” from the brink in Seraphina’s voice. As to Castro, he was going mad. He was simply going mad, as people go mad for want of food and drink. And yet he seemed to keep his strength. He was never still. It was a factitious strength, the restlessness of incipient insanity. Once, while I was trying to talk with him about our only hope — the peons — he gave me a look of such sombre distraction that I left off, intimidated, to wonder vaguely at this glimpse of something hidden and excessive springing from torments which surely could be no greater than mine.

He had the strength, and sometimes he could find the voice, to hurl abuse, curses, and imprecations from the mouth of the cave. Great shouts of laughter exploded above, and they seemed to hold their breath to hear more; or Manuel, hanging over, would praise in mocking, mellifluous accents the energy of his denunciations. I tried to pull him away from there, but he

turned upon me fiercely; and from prudence — for all hope was not dead in me yet — I left him alone.

That night I heard him make an extraordinary sound chewing; at the same time he was sobbing and cursing stealthily. He had found something to eat, then! I could not believe my ears, but I began to creep towards the sound, and suddenly there was a short, mad scuffle in the darkness, during which I nearly spitted myself on his blade. At last, trembling in every limb, with my blood beating furiously in my ears, I scrambled to my feet, holding a small piece of meat in my hands. Instantly, without hesitating, without thinking, I plunged my teeth into it only to fling it far away from me with a frantic execration. This was the first sound uttered since we had grappled. Lying prone near me, Castro, with a rattle in his throat, tried to laugh.

This was a supreme touch of Manuel's art; they were pressed for time, and he had hit upon that deep and politic invention to hasten the surrender of his beloved victim. I nearly cried with the fiery pain on my cracked lips. That piece of half-putrid flesh was salt — horribly salt — salt like salt itself. Whenever they heard him rave and mutter at the mouth of the cave, they would throw down these prepared scraps. It was as if I had put a live coal into my mouth.

"Ha!" he croaked feebly. "Have you thrown it away? I, too; the first piece. No matter. I can no more swallow anything, now."

His voice was like the rustling of parchment at my feet.

"Do not look for it, Don Juan. The sinners in hell.... Ha! Fiend. I could not resist."

I sank down by his side. He seemed to be writhing on the floor muttering, "Thirst — thirst — thirst." His blade clicked on the rock; then all was still. Was he dead? Suddenly he began with an amazingly animated utterance.

"Señor! For this they had to kill cattle."

This thought had kept him up. Probably, they had been firing shots. But there was a way of hamstringing a stalked cow silently; and the plains were vast, the grass on them was long; the carcasses would lie hidden out of sight; the herds were rounded up only twice every year. His despairing voice died out in a mournful fall, and again he was as still as death.

"No! I can bear this no longer," he uttered with force. He refused to bear it. He suffered too much. There was no hope. He would overwhelm them with maledictions, and then leap down from the ledge. "Adios, Señor."

I stretched out my arm and caught him by the leg. It seemed to me I could not part with him. It would have been disloyal, an admission that all was over, the beginning of the end. We were exhausting ourselves by this sort of imbecile wrestling. Meantime, I kept on entreating him to be a man; and at last I managed to clamber upon his chest. "A man!" he sighed. I released him. For a space, unheard in the darkness, he seemed to be collecting all his remaining strength.

"Oh, those strange Ingles! Why should I not leap? and whom do you love best or hate more, me or the senorita? Be thou a man, also, and pray God to give thee reason to understand men for once in thy life. Ha! Enamoured woman — he is a fool! But I, Castro...."

His whispering became appallingly unintelligible, then ceased, passing into a moan. My will to restrain him abandoned me. He had brought this on us. And if he really wished to give up the struggle....

"Señor," he mumbled brokenly, "a thousand thanks. Br-r-r! Oh, the ugly water — water — water — water — salt water — salt! You saved me. Why? Let God be the Judge. I would have preferred a malignant demon for a friend. I forgive you. Adios! And — -Her Excellency — poor Castro.... Ha! Thou old scorpion, encircled by fire — by fire and thirst. No. No scorpion, alas! Only a man — not like you — therefore — a Mass — or two — perhaps...."

The freshness of the night penetrated through the arch, as far as the faint twilight of the day. I heard his tearful muttering creep away from my side. "Thirst — thirst — thirst." I did not stir; and an incredulity, a weariness, the sense of our common fate, mingled with an unconfessed desire — the desire of seeing what would come of it — a desire that stirred my blood like a glimmer of hope, and prevented me from making a movement or uttering a whisper. If his sufferings were so great, who was I to... Mine, too. I almost envied him. He was free.

As if an inward obscurity had parted in two I looked to the very bottom of my thoughts. And his action appeared like a sacrifice. It could liberate us two from this cave before it was too late. He, he alone, was the prey they had trapped. They would be satisfied, probably. Nay! There could be no doubt. Directly he was dead they would depart. Ah! he wanted to leap. He must not be allowed. Now that I understood perfectly what this meant, I had to prevent him. There was no choice. I must stop him at any cost.



The awakening of my conscience sent me to my feet; but before I had stumbled halfway through the passage I heard his shout in the open air, "Behold me!"

A man outside cried excitedly, "He is out!"

An exulting tumult fell into the arch, the clash of twenty voices yelling in different keys, "He is out — the traitor! He is out!" I was too late, but I made three more hesitating steps and stood blinded. The flaming branches they were holding over the precipice showered a multitude of sparks, that fell disappearing continuously in the lurid light, shutting out the night from the mouth of the cave. And in this light Castro could be seen kneeling on the other side of the sill.

With his fingers clutching the edge of the slab, he hung outwards, his head falling back, his spine arched tensely, like a bow; and the red sparks coming from above with the dancing whirl of snowflakes, vanished in the air before they could settle on his face.

"Manuel! Manuel!"

They answered with a deep, confused growl, jostling and crowding on the edge to look down into his eyes. Meantime I stared at the convulsive heaving of his breast, at his upturned chin, his swelling throat. He defied Manuel. He would leap. Behold! he was going to leap — to his own death — in his own time. He challenged them to come down on the ledge; and the blade of the maimed arm waved to and fro stiffly, point up, like a red-hot weapon in the light. He devoted them to pestilence, to English gallows, to the infernal powers: while all the time commenting murmurs passed over his head, as though he had extorted their sinister appreciation.

"Canalla! dogs, thieves, prey of death, vermin of hell — I spit on you — like this!"

He had not the force, nor the saliva, and remained straining mutely upwards while they laughed at him all together, with something sombre, and as if doomed in their derision.... "He will jump! No, he will not!" "Yes! Leap, Castro! Spit, Castro!" "He will run back into the cave! Maladetta!"... Manuel's voiced cooed lovingly on the brink:

"Come to us and drink, Castro."

I waited for his leap with doubt, with disbelief, in the helpless agitation of the weak. Gradually he seemed to relax all over.

"Drink deep; drink, and drink, and drink, Castro. Water. Clear water, cool water. Taste, Castro!"

He called on him in tones that were almost tender in their urgency, to come and drink before he died. His voice seemed to cast a spell, like an incantation, upon the tubby little figure, with something yearning in the upward turn of the listening face.

“Drink!” Manuel repeated the word several times; then, suddenly he called, “Taste, Castro, taste,” and a descending brightness, as of a crystal rod hurled from above, shivered to nothing on the upturned face. The light disappearing from before the cave seemed scared away by the inhuman discord of his shriek; and I flung myself forward to lick the splash of moisture on the sill. I did not think of Castro, I had forgotten him. I raged at the deception of my thirst, exploring with my tongue the rough surface of the stone till I tasted my own blood. Only then, raising my head to gasp, and clench my fists with a baffled and exasperated desire, I noticed how profound was the silence, in which the words, “Take away his sting,” seemed to pronounce themselves over the ravine in the impersonal austerity of the rock, and with the tone of a tremendous decree.

## CHAPTER TEN

He had surrendered to his thirst. What weakness! He had not thrown himself over, then. What folly! One splash of water on his face had been enough. He was contemptible; and lying collapsed, in a sort of tormented apathy, at the mouth of the cave, I despised and envied his good fortune. It could not save him from death, but at least he drank. I understood this when I heard his voice, a voice altogether altered — a firm, greedy voice saying, “More,” breathlessly. And then he drank again. He was drinking. He was drinking up there in the light of the fire, in a circle of mortal enemies, under Manuel’s gloating eyes. Drinking! O happiness! O delight! What a miserable wretch! I clawed the stone convulsively; I think I would have rushed out for my share if I had not heard Manuel’s cruel and caressing voice:

“How now? You do not want to throw yourself over, my Castro?”

“I have drunk,” he said gloomily.

I think they must have given him something to eat then. In my mind there are many blanks in the vision of that scene, a vision built upon a few words reaching me, suddenly, with great intervals of silence between, as though I had been coming to myself out of a dead faint now and then. A ferocious hum of many voices would rise sometimes impatiently, the scrambling of feet near the edge; or, in a sinister and expectant stillness, Manuel the artist would be speaking to his “beloved victim Castro” in a gentle and insinuating voice that seemed to tremble slightly with eagerness. Had he eaten and drunk enough? They had kept their promises, he said. They would keep them all. The water had been cool — and presently he, Manuel-del-Popolo, would accompany with his guitar and his voice the last moments of his victim. Bursts of laughter punctuated his banter. Ah! that Manuel, that Manuel! Some actually swore in admiration. But was Castro really at his ease? Was it not good to eat and drink? Had he quite returned to life? But, Caramba, amigos, what neglect! The caballero who has honoured us must smoke. They shouted in high glee: “Yes. Smoke, Castro. Let him smoke.” I suppose he did; and Manuel expounded to him how pleasant life was in which one could eat, and drink, and smoke. His words tortured me. Castro remained mute — from disdain, from despair, perhaps. Afterwards they carried him along clear of the cornice, and I understood they formed a half-circle round him, drawing their knives. Manuel, screeching in a high

falsetto, ordered the bonds of his feet to be cut. I advanced my head out as far as I dared; their voices reached me deadened; I could only see the profound shadow of the ravine, a patch of dark clear sky opulent with stars, and the play of the firelight on the opposite side. The shadow of a pair of monumental feet, and the lower edge of a cloak, spread amply like a skirt, stood out in it, intensely black and motionless, right in front of the cave. Now and then, elbowed in the surge round Castro, the guitar emitted a deep and hollow resonance. He was tumultuously ordered to stand up and, I imagine, he was being pricked with the points of their knives till he did get on his feet. “Jump!” they roared all together — and Manuel began to finger the strings, lifting up his voice between the gusts of savage hilarity, mingled with cries of death. He exhorted his followers to close on the traitor inch by inch, presenting their knives.

“He runs here and there, the blood trickling from his limbs — but in vain, this is the appointed time for the leap...”

It was an improvisation; they stamped their feet to the slow measure; they shouted in chorus the one word “Leap!” raising a ferocious roar; and between whiles the song of voice and strings came to me from a distance, softened and lingering in a voluptuous and pitiless cadence that wrung my heart, and seemed to eat up the remnants of my strength. But what could I have done, even if I had had the strength of a giant, and a most fearless resolution? I should have been shot dead before I had crawled halfway up the ledge. A piercing shriek covered the guitar, the song, and the wild merriment.

Then everything seemed to stop — even my own painful breathing. Again Castro shrieked like a madman:

“Señorita — your gold. Señorita! Hear me! Help!”

Then all was still.

“Hear the dead calling to the dead,” sneered Manuel.

An awestruck sort of hum proceeded from the Spaniards. Was the señorita alive? In the cave? Or where?

“Her nod would have saved thee, Castro,” said Manuel slowly. I got up. I heard Castro stammer wildly:

“She shall fill both your hands with gold. Do you hear, hombres? I, Castro, tell you — each man — both hands — — — ”

He had done it. The last hope was gone now. And all that there remained for me to do was to leap over or give myself up, and end this horrible

business.

“She was a creature born to command the moon and the stars,” Manuel mused aloud in a vibrating tone, and suddenly smote the strings with emphatic violence. She could even stay his vengeance. But was it possible! No, no. It could not be — and yet....

“Thou art alive yet, Castro,” he cried. “Thou hast eaten and drunk; life is good — is it not, old man? — and the leap is high.”

He thundered “Silence!” to still the excited murmurs of his band. If she lived Castro should live, too — he, Manuel, said so; but he threatened him with horrible tortures, with two days of slow dying, if he dared to deceive. Let him, then, speak the truth quickly.

“Speak, ‘viejo’. Where is she?”

And at the opening, fifty yards away, I was tempted to call out, as though I had loved Castro well enough to save him from the shame and remorse of a plain betrayal. That the moment of it had come I could have no doubt. And it was I myself, perhaps, who could not face the certitude of his downfall. If my throat had not been so compressed, so dry with thirst and choked with emotion, I believe I should have cried out and brought them away from that miserable man with a rush. Since we were lost, he at least should be saved from this. I suffered from his spasmodic, agonized laugh away there, with twenty knives aimed at his breast and the eighty-foot drop of the precipice at his back. Why did he hesitate?

I was to learn, then, that the ultimate value of life to all of us is based on the means of self-deception. Morally he had his back against the wall, he could not hope to deceive himself; and after Manuel had cried again at him, “Where are they?” in a really terrible tone, I heard his answer:

“At the bottom of the sea.”

He had his own courage after all — if only the courage not to believe in Manuel’s promises. And he must have been weary of his life — weary enough not to pay that price. And yet he had gone to the very verge, calling upon Seraphina as if she could hear him. Madness of fear, no doubt — succeeded by an awakening, a heroic reaction. And yet sometimes it seems to me as if the whole scene, with his wild cries for help, had been the outcome of a supreme exercise of cunning. For, indeed, he could not have invented anything better to bring the conviction of our death to the most sceptical of those ruffians. All I heard after his words had been a great shout, followed by a sudden and unbroken silence. It seemed to last a very

long time. He had thrown himself over! It is like the blank space of a swoon to me, and yet it must have been real enough, because, huddled up just inside the sill, with my head reposing wearily on the stone, I watched three moving flames of lighted branches carried by men follow each other closely in a swaying descent along the path on the other side of the ravine. They passed on downwards, flickering out of view. Then, after a time, a voice below, to the left of the cave, ascended with a hooting and mournful effect from the depths.

“Manuel! Manuel! We have found him!... Es muerte!”

And from above Manuel’s shout rolled, augmented, between the rocks.

“Bueno! Turn his face up — for the birds!”

They continued calling to each other for a good while. The men below declared their intention of going on to the sea shore; and Manuel shouted to them not to forget to send him up a good rope early in the morning. Apparently, the schooner had been refloated some time before; many of the Lugareños were to sleep on board. They purposed to set sail early next day.

This revived me, and I spent the night between Seraphina’s couch and the mouth of the cave, keeping tight hold of my reason that seemed to lose itself in this hope, in this darkness, in this torment. I touched her cheek, it was hot — while her forehead felt to my fingers as cold as ice. I had no more voice, but I tried to force out some harsh whispers through my throat. They sounded horrible to my own ears, and she endeavoured to soothe me by murmuring my name feebly. I believe she thought me delirious. I tried to pray for my strength to last till I could carry her out of that cave to the side of the brook — then let death come. “Live, live,” I whispered into her ear, and would hear a sigh so faint, so feeble, that it swayed all my soul with pity and fear, “Yes, Juan.”... And I would go away to watch for the dawn from the mouth of the cave, and curse the stars that would not fade.

Manuel’s voice always steadied me. A languor had come over them above, as if their passion had been exhausted; as if their hearts had been saddened by an unbridled debauch. There was, however, their everlasting quarrelling. Several of them, I understood, left the camp for the schooner, but avoiding the road by the ravine as if Castro’s dead body down there had made it impassable. And the talk went on late into the night. There was some superstitious fear attached to the cave — a legend of men who had gone in and had never come back any more. All they knew of it was the region of twilight; formerly, when they used the shelter of the cavern, no

one, it seems, ever ventured outside the circle of the fire. Manuel disdained their fears. Had he not been such a profound politico, a man of stratagems, there would have been a necessity to go down and see.... They all protested.

Who was going down? Not they.... Their craven cowardice was amazing.

He begged them to keep themselves quiet. They had him for Capataz now. A man of intelligence. Had he not enticed Castro out? He had never believed there was any one else in there. He sighed. Otherwise Castro would have tried to save his life by confessing. There had been nothing to confess. But he had the means of making sure. A voice suggested that the Ingles might have withdrawn himself into the depths. These English were not afraid of demons, being devils themselves; and this one was fiendishly reckless. But Manuel observed, contemptuously, that a man trapped like this would remain near the opening. Hope would keep him there till he died — unless he rushed out like Castro—Manuel laughed, but in a mournful tone: and, listening to the craven talk of their doubts and fears, it seemed to me that if I could appear at one bound amongst them, they would scatter like chaff before my glance. It seemed intolerable to wait; more than human strength could bear. Would the day never come? A drowsiness stole upon their voices.

Manuel kept watch. He fed the fire, and his incomplete shadow, projected across the chasm, would pass and return, obscuring the glow that fell on the rock. His footsteps seemed to measure the interminable duration of the night. Sometimes he would stop short and talk to himself in low, exalted mutters. A big bright star rested on the brow of the rock opposite, shining straight into my eyes. It sank, as if it had plunged into the stone. At last. Another came to look into the cavern. I watched the gradual coming of a gray sheen from the side of Seraphina's couch. This was the day, the last day of pain, or else of life. Its ghostly edge invaded slowly the darkness of the cave towards its appointed limit, creeping slowly, as colourless as spilt water on the floor. I pressed my lips silently upon her cheek. Her eyes were open. It seemed to me she had a smile fainter than her sighs. She was very brave, but her smile did not go beyond her lips. Not a feature of her face moved. I could have opened my veins for her without hesitation, if it had not been a forbidden sacrifice.

Would they go? I asked myself. Through Castro's heroism or through his weakness, perhaps through both the heroism and the weakness of that man, they must be satisfied. They must be. I could not doubt it; I could not

believe it. Everything seemed improbable; everything seemed possible. If they descended I would, I thought, have the strength to carry her off, away into the darkness. If there was any truth in what I had overheard them saying, that the depths of the cavern concealed an abyss, we would cast ourselves into it.

The feeble, consenting pressure of her hand horrified me. They would not come down. They were afraid of that place, I whispered to her — and I thought to myself that such cowardice was incredible. Our fate was sealed. And yet from what I had heard....

We watched the daylight growing in the opening; at any moment it might have been obscured by their figures. The tormenting incertitudes of that hour were cruel enough to overcome, almost, the sensations of thirst, of hunger, to engender a restlessness that had the effect of renewed vigour. They were like a nightmare; but that nightmare seemed to clear my mind of its feverish hallucinations. I was more collected, then, than I had been for the last forty-eight hours of our imprisonment. But I could not remain there, waiting. It was absolutely necessary that I should watch at the entrance for the moment of their departure.

The morning was serenely cool and, in its stillness, their talk filled with clear-cut words the calm air of the ravine. A party — I could not tell how many — had already come up from the schooner in a great state of excitement. They feared that their presence had, in some way, become known to the peons of the hacienda. There was much abuse of a man called Carneiro, who, the day before, had fired an incautious shot at a fat cow on one of the inland savannas. They cursed him. Last night, before the moon rose, those on board the schooner had heard the whinnying of a horse. Somebody had ridden down to the water's edge in the darkness and, after waiting a while, had galloped back the way he came. The prints of hoofs on the beach showed that.

They feared these horsemen greatly. A vengeance was owing for the man Manuel had killed; and I could guess they talked with their faces over their shoulders. "And what about finding out whether the Inglez was there, dead or alive?" asked some.

I was sure, now, that they would not come down in a body. It would expose them to the danger of being caught in the cavern by the peons. There was no time for a thorough search, they argued.

For the first time that morning I heard Manuel's voice, "Stand aside."



He came down to the very brink.

“If the Inglez is down there, and if he is alive, he is listening to us now.”

He was as certain as though he had been able to see me. He added:

“But there’s no one.”

“Go and look, Manuel,” they cried.

He said something in a tone of contempt. The Voices above my head sank into busy murmurs.

“Give me the rope here,” he said aloud.

I had a feeling of some inconceivable danger nearing me; and in my state of weakness I began to tremble, backing away from the orifice. I had no strength in my limbs. I had no weapons. How could I fight? I would use my teeth. With a light knocking against the rock above the arch, Williams’ flask, tied by its green cord to the end of a thick rope, descended slowly, and hung motionless before the entrance.

It had been freshly filled with water; it was dripping wet outside, and the silver top, struck by the sunbeams, dazzled my eyes.

This was the danger — this bait. And it seems to me that if I had had the slightest inkling of what was coming, I should have rushed at it instantly. But it took me some time to understand — to take in the idea that this was water, there, within reach of my hand. With a great effort I resisted the madness that incited me to hurl myself upon the flask. I hung back with all my power. A convulsive spasm contracted my throat. I turned about and fled out of the passage.

I ran to Seraphina. “Put out your hand to me,” I panted in the darkness. “I need your help.”

I felt it resting lightly on my bowed head. She did not even ask me what I meant; as if the greatness of her soul was omniscient. There was, in that silence, a supreme unselfishness, the unquestioning devotion of a woman.

“Patience, patience,” I kept on muttering. I was losing confidence in myself. If only I had been free to dash my head against the rock. I had the courage for that, yet. But this was a situation from which there was no issue in death.

“We are saved,” I murmured distractedly.

“Patience,” she breathed out. Her hand slipped languidly off my head.

And I began to creep away from her side. I am here to tell the truth. I began to creep away towards the flask. I did not confess this to myself; but I know now. There was a devilish power in it. I have learned the nature of

feelings in a man whom Satan beguiles into selling his soul — the horror of an irresistible and fatal longing for a supreme felicity. And in a drink of water for me, then, there was a greater promise than in universal knowledge, in unbounded power, in unlimited wealth, in imperishable youth. What could have been these seductions to a drink? No soul had thirsted after things unlawful as my parched throat thirsted for water. No devil had ever tempted a man with such a bribe of perdition.

I suffered from the lucidity of my feelings. I saw, with indignation, my own wretched self being angled for like a fish. And with all that, in my forlorn state, I remained prudent. I did not rush out blindly. No. I approached the inner end of the passage, as though I had been stalking a wild creature, slowly, from the side. I crept along the wall of the cavern, and protruded my head far enough to look at the fiendish temptation.

There it was, a small dark object suspended in the light, with the yellow rock across the ravine for a background. The silver top shivered the sunbeams brilliantly. I had half hopes they had taken it away by this time. When I drew my head back I lost sight of it, but all my being went out to it with an almost pitiful longing. I remembered Castro for the first time in many hours. Was I nothing better than Castro? He had been angled for with salted meat. I shuddered. A darkness fell into the passage. I put down my uplifted foot without advancing. The unexpectedness of that shadow saved me, I believe. Manuel had descended the cornice.

He was alone. Standing before the outer opening, he darkened the passage, through which his talk to the people above came loudly into my ears. They could see now if he were not a worthy Capataz. If the Inglez was in there he was a corpse. And yet, of these living hearts above, of these valientes of Rio Medio, there was not one who would go alone to look upon a dead body. He had contrived an infallible test, and yet they would not believe him. Well, his valiance should prove it; his valiance, afraid neither of light nor of darkness.

I could not hear the answers he got from up there; but the vague sounds that reached me carried the usual commingling of derision and applause, the resentment of their jeers at the admiration he knew how to extort by the display of his talents.

They must kill the cattle, these caballeros. He scolded ironically. Of course. They must feed on meat like lions; but their souls were like the

souls of hens born on dunghills. And behold! there was he, Manuel, not afraid of shadows.

He was coming in, there could be no doubt. Out there in the full light, he could not possibly have detected that rapid appearance of my head darted forward and withdrawn at once; but I had a view of his arm putting aside the swinging flask, of his leg raised to step over the high sill. I saw him, and I ran noiselessly away from the opening.

I had the time to charge Seraphina not to move, on our lives — on the wretched remnant of our lives — when his black shape stood in the frame of the opening, edged with a thread of light following the contour of his hat, of his shoulders, of his whole body down to his feet — whence a long shadow fell upon the pool of twilight on the floor.

What had made him come down? Vanity? The exacting demands of his leadership? Fear of O'Brien? The Juez would expect to hear something definite, and his band pretended not to believe in the stratagem of the bottle. I think that, for his part, from his knowledge of human nature, he never doubted its efficacy. He could not guess how very little, only, he was wrong. How very little! And yet he seemed rooted in incertitude on the threshold. His head turned from side to side. I could not make out his face as he stood, but the slightest of his movements did not escape me. He stepped aside, letting in all the fullness of the light.

Would he have the courage to explore at least the immediate neighbourhood of the opening? Who could tell his complex motives? Who could tell his purpose or his fears? He had killed a man in there once. But, then, he had not been alone. If he were only showing off before his unruly band, he need not stir a step further. He did not advance. He leaned his shoulders against the rock just clear of the opening. One half of him was lighted plainly; his long profile, part of his raven locks, one listless hand, his crossed legs, the buckle of one shoe.

"Nobody," he pronounced slowly, in a dead whisper.

While I looked at him, the profound politico, the artist, the everlastingly questioned Capataz, the man of talent and ability, he thought himself alone, and allowed his head to drop on his breast, as if saddened by the vanity of human ambition. Then, lifting it with a jerk, he listened with one ear turned to the passage; afterwards he peered into the cavern. Two long strides, over the cold heap of ashes, brought him to the stone seat.

It was very plain to me from his starting movements and attitudes, that he shared his uneasy attention between the inside and the outside of the cave. He sat down, but seemed ready to jump up; and I saw him turn his eyes upwards to the dark vault, as if on the alert for a noise from above. I am inclined to think he was expecting to hear the galloping hoofs of the peons' horses every moment. I think he did. The words "I am safer here than they above," were perfectly audible to me in the mumbling he kept up nervously. He wished to hear the sound of his own voice, as a timid person whistles and talks on a lonely road at night. Only the year before he had killed a man in that cavern, under circumstances that were, I believe, revolting even to the honour of these bandits. He sat there between the shadow of his murder and the reality of the vengeance. I asked myself what could be the outcome of a struggle with him. He was armed; he was not weakened by hunger; but he stood between us and the water. My thirst would give me strength; the desire to end Seraphina's sufferings would make me invincible. On the other hand, it was dangerous to interfere. I could not tell whether they would not try to find out what became of him. It was safest to let him go. It was extremely improbable that they would sail without him.

I am not conscious of having stirred a limb; neither had Seraphina moved, I am ready to swear; but plainly something, some sort of sound, startled him. He bounded out of his seated immobility, and in one leap had his shoulders against the rock standing at bay before the darkness, with his knife in his hand. I wonder he did not surprise me into an exclamation. I was as startled as himself. His teeth and the whites of his eyes gleamed straight at me from afar; he hissed with fear; for an instant I was firmly convinced he had seen me. All this took place so quickly that I had no time to make one movement towards receiving his attack, when I saw him make a great sign of the cross in the air with the point of his dagger.

He sheathed it slowly, and sidled along the few feet to the entrance, his shoulders rubbing the wall. He blocked out the light, and in a moment had backed out of sight.

Before he got to the further end I was already, at the inner, creeping after him. I had started at once, as if his disappearance had removed a spell, as though he had drawn me after him by an invisible bond. Raising myself on my forearms I saw him, from his knees up, standing outside the sill, with his back to the precipice and his face turned up.

"There is nobody in there," he shouted.

I sank down and wriggled forward on my stomach, raising myself on my elbows, now and then, to look. Manuel was looking upwards conversing with the people above, and holding Williams' flask in both his hands. He never once glanced into the passage; he seemed to be trying to undo the cord knotted to the end of the thick rope, which hung in a long bight before him. The flask captured my eyes, my thought, my energy. I would tear it away from him directly. There was in me, then, neither fear nor intelligence; only the desire of possessing myself of the thing; but an instinctive caution prevented my rushing out violently. I proceeded with an animal-like stealthiness, with which cool reason had nothing to do.

He had some difficulty with the knot, and evidently did not wish to cut the green silk cord. How well I remember his fumbling fingers. He sat down sideways on the sill, with his legs outside, of course, his face and hands turned to the light, very absorbed in his endeavour. They shouted to him from above.

"I come at once," he cried to them, without lifting his head.

I had crept up almost near enough to grab the flask. It never occurred to me that by flinging myself on him, I could have pushed him off the sill. My only idea was to get hold. He did not exist for me. The leather-covered bottle was the only real thing in the world. I was completely insane. I heard a faint detonation, and Manuel got up quickly from the sill. The flask was out of my reach.

There were more popping sounds of shots fired, away on the plain. The peons were attacking an outpost of the Lugareños. A deep voice cried, "They are driving them in." Then several together yelled:

"Come away, Manuel. Come away. Por Dios...."

Stretched at full length in the passage, and sustaining myself on my trembling arms, I gazed up at him. He stood very rigid, holding the flask in both hands. Several muskets were discharged together just above, and in the noise of the reports I remember a voice crying urgently over the edge, "Manuel! Manuel!" The shadow of irresolution passed over his features. He hesitated whether to run up the ledge or bolt into the cave. He shouted something. He was not answered, but the yelling and the firing ceased suddenly, as if the Lugareños had given up and taken to their heels. I became aware of a sort of increasing throbbing sound that seemed to come from behind me, out of the cave; then, as Manuel lifted his foot hastily to

step over the sill, I jumped up deliriously, and with outstretched hands lurched forward at the flask in his fingers.

I believe I laughed at him in an imbecile manner.

Somebody laughed; and I remember the superior smile on his face passing into a ghastly grin, that disappeared slowly, while his astonished eyes, glaring at that gaunt and dishevelled apparition rising before him in the dusk of the passage, seemed to grow to an enormous size. He drew back his foot, as though it had been burnt; and in a panic-stricken impulse, he flung the flask straight into my face, and staggered away from the sill.

I made a catch at it with a scream of triumph, whose unearthly sound brought me back to my senses.

“In the name of God, retire,” he cried, as though I had been an apparition from another world.

What took place afterwards happened with an inconceivable rapidity, in less time than it takes to draw breath. He never recognized me. I saw his glare of incredulous awe change, suddenly, to horror and despair. He had felt himself losing his balance.

He had stepped too far back. He tried to recover himself, but it was too late. He hung for a moment in his backward fall; his arms beat the air, his body curled upon itself with an awful striving. All at once he went limp all over, and, with the sunlight full upon his upturned face, vanished downwards from my sight.

But at the last moment he managed to clutch the bight of the hanging rope. The end of it must have been lying quite loose on the ground above, for I saw its whole length go whizzing after him, in the twinkling of an eye. I pressed the flask fiercely to my breast, raging with the thought that he could yet tear it out of my hands; but by the time the strain came, his falling body had acquired such a velocity that I didn't feel the slightest jerk when the green cord snapped — no more than if it had been the thread of a cobweb.

I confess that tears, tears of gratitude, were running down my face. My limbs trembled. But I was sane enough not to think of myself any more.

“Drink! Drink,” I stammered, raising Seraphina's head on my shoulder, while the galloping horses of the peons in hot pursuit passed with a thundering rumble above us. Then all was still.

Our getting out of the cave was a matter of unremitting toil, through what might have been a year of time; the recollection is of an arduous

undertaking, accomplished without the usual incentives of men's activity. Necessity, alone, remained; the iron necessity without the glamour of freedom of choice, of pride.

Our unsteady feet crushed, at last, the black embers of the fires scattered by the hoofs of horses; and the plain appeared immense to our weakness, swept of shadows by the high sun, lonely and desolate as the sea. We looked at the litter of the Lugareños' camp, rags on the trodden grass, a couple of abandoned blankets, a musket thrown away in the panic, a dirty red sash lying on a heap of sticks, a wooden bucket from the schooner, smashed water-gourds. One of them remained miraculously poised on its round bottom and full to the brim, while everything else seemed to have been overturned, torn, scattered haphazard by a furious gust of wind. A scaffolding of poles, for drying strips of meat, had been knocked over; I found nothing there except bits of hairy hide; but lumps of scorched flesh adhered to the white bones scattered amongst the ashes of the camp — and I thanked God for them.

We averted our eyes from our faces in very love, and we did not speak from pity for each other. There was no joy in our escape, no relief, no sense of freedom. The Lugareños and the peons, the pursued and the pursuers, had disappeared from the upland without leaving as much as a corpse in view. There were no moving things on the earth, no bird soared in the pellucid air, not even a moving cloud on the sky. The sun declined, and the rolling expanse of the plain frightened us, as if space had been something alive and hostile.

We walked away from that spot, as if our feet had been shod in lead; and we hugged the edge of the cruel ravine, as one keeps by the side of a friend. We must have been grotesque, pathetic, and lonely; like two people newly arisen from a tomb, shrinking before the strangeness of the half-forgotten face of the world. And at the head of the ravine we stopped.

The sensation of light, vastness, and solitude, rolled upon our souls emerging from the darkness, overwhelmingly, like a wave of the sea. We might have been an only couple sent back from the underworld to begin another cycle of pain on a depopulated earth. It had not for us even the fitful caress of a breeze; and the only sound of greeting was the angry babble of the brook dashing down the stony slope at our feet.

We knelt over it to drink deeply and bathe our faces. Then looking about helplessly, I discovered afar the belt of the sea inclosed between the

undulating lines of the dunes and the straight edge of the horizon. I pointed my arm at the white sails of the schooner creeping from under the land, and Seraphina, resting her head on my shoulder, shuddered.

“Let us go away from here.”

Our necessity pointed down the slope. We could not think of another way, and the extent of the plain with its boundary of forests filled us with the dread of things unknown. But, by getting down to the inlet of the sea, and following the bank of the little river, we were sure to reach the hacienda, if only a hope could buoy our sinking hearts long enough.

From our first step downwards the hard, rattling noise of the stones accompanied our descent, growing in volume, bewildering our minds. We had missed the indistinct beginning of the trail on the side of the ravine, and had to follow the course of the stream. A growth of wiry bushes sprang thickly between the large fragments of fallen rocks. On our right the shadows were beginning to steal into the chasm. Towering on our left the great stratified wall caught at the top of the glow of the low sun in a rich, tawny tint, right under the dark blue strip of sky, that seemed to reflect the gloom of the ravine, the sepulchral arid gloom of deep shadows and gray rocks, through which the shallow torrent dashed violently with glassy gleams between the sombre masses of vegetation.

We pushed on through the bunches of tough twigs; the massive boulders closed the view on every side; and Seraphina followed me with her hands on my shoulders. This was the best way in which I could help her descent till the declivity became less steep; and then I went ahead, forcing a path for her. Often we had to walk into the bed of the stream. It was icy cold. Some strange beast, perhaps a bird, invisible somewhere, emitted from time to time a faint and lamentable shriek. It was a wild scene, and the orifice of the cave appeared as an inaccessible black hole some ninety feet above our heads.

Then, as I stepped round a large fragment of rock, my eyes fell on Manuel's body.

Seraphina was behind me. With a wave of my hand I arrested her. It had not occurred to me before that, following the bottom of the ravine, we must come upon the two bodies. Castro's was lower down, of course. I would have spared her the sight, but there was no retracing our steps. We had no strength and no time. Manuel was lying on his back with his hands under him, and his feet nearly in the brook.



The lower portion of the rope made a heap of cordage on the ground near him, but a great length of it hung perpendicularly above his head. The loose end he had snatched over the edge of his fall had whipped itself tight round the stem of a dwarf tree growing in a crevice high up the rock; and as he fell below, the jerk must have checked his descent, and had prevented him from alighting on his head. There was not a sign of blood anywhere upon him or on the stones. His eyes were shut. He might have lain down to sleep there, in our way; only from the slightly unnatural twist in the position of his arms and legs, I saw, at a glance, that all his limbs were broken.

On the other side of the boulder Seraphina called to me, and I could not answer her, so great was the shock I received in seeing the flutter of his slowly opening eyelids.

He still lived, then! He looked at me! It was an awful discovery to make, and the contrast of his anxious and feverish stare with the collapsed posture of his body was full of intolerable suggestions of fate blundering unlawfully, of death itself being conquered by pain. I looked away only to perceive something pitiless, belittling, and cruel in the precipitous immobility of the sheer walls, in the dark funereal green of the foliage, in the falling shadows, in the remoteness of the sky.

The unconsciousness of matter hinted at a weird and mysterious antagonism. All the inanimate things seemed to have conspired to throw in our way this man just enough alive to feel pain. The faint and lamentable sounds we had heard must have come from him. He was looking at me. It was impossible to say whether he saw anything at all. He barred our road with his remnant of life; but, when suddenly he spoke, my heart stood still for a moment in my motionless body.

“You, too!” he droned awfully. “Behold! I have been precipitated, alive, into this hell by another ghost. Nothing else could have overcome the greatness of my spirit.”

His red shirt was torn open at the throat. His bared breast began to heave. He cried out with pain. Ready to fly from him myself, I shouted to Seraphina to keep away.

But it was too late. Imagining I had seen some new danger in our path, she had advanced to stand by my side.

“He is dying,” I muttered in distraction. “We can do nothing.”

But could we pass him by before he died? “This is terrible,” said Seraphina.

My real hope had been that, after driving the Lugareños away, the peons would off-saddle near the little river to rest themselves and their horses. This is why I had almost pitilessly hurried Seraphina, after we had left the cave, down the steep but short descent of the ravine. I had kept to myself my despairing conviction that we could never reach the hacienda unaided, even if we had known the way. I had pretended confidence in ourselves, but all my trust was in the assistance I expected to get from these men. I understood so well the slenderness of that hope that I had not dared to mention it to her and to propose she should wait for me on the upland, while I went down by myself on that quest. I could not bear the fear of returning unsuccessful only to find her dead. That is, if I had the strength to return after such a disappointment.

And the idea of her, waiting for me in vain, then wandering off, perhaps to fall under a bush and die alone, was too appalling to contemplate. That we must keep together, at all costs, was like a point of honour, like an article of faith with us — confirmed by what we had gone through already. It was like a law of existence, like a creed, like a defence which, once broken, would let despair upon our heads. I am sure she would not have consented to even a temporary separation. She had a sort of superstitious feeling that, should we be forced apart, even to the manifest saving of our lives, we would lay ourselves open to some calamity worse than mere death could be.

I loved her enough to share that feeling, but with the addition of a man's half-unconscious selfishness. I needed her indomitable frailness to prop my grosser strength. I needed that something not wholly of this world, which women's more exalted nature infuses into their passions, into their sorrows, into their joys; as if their adventurous souls had the power to range beyond the orbit of the earth for the gathering of their love, their hate — and their charity.

"He calls for death," she said, shrinking with horror and pity before the mutters of the miserable man at our feet. Every moment of daylight was of the utmost importance, if we were to save our freedom, our happiness, our very lives; and we remained rooted to the spot. For it seemed as though, at last, he had attained the end of his enterprise. He had captured us, as if by a very cruel stratagem.

A drowsiness would come at times over those big open eyes, like a film through which a blazing glance would break out now and then. He had

recognized us perfectly; but, for the most part, we seemed to him to be the haunting ghosts of his inferno.

“You came from heaven,” he raved feebly, rolling his straining eyes towards Seraphina. His internal injuries must have been frightful. Perhaps he dared not shift his head — the only movement that was in his power. “I reached up to the very angels in the inspiration of my song,” he droned, “and would be called a demon on earth. Manuel el Demonio. And now precipitated alive.... Nothing less. There is a greatness in me. Let some dew fall upon my lips.”

He moaned from the very bottom of his heart. His teeth chattered.

“The blessed may not know anything of the cold and thirst of this place. A drop of dew — as on earth you used to throw alms to the poor from your coach — for the love of God.”

She sank on the stones nearer to him than I would willingly have done, brave as a woman, only, can be before the atrocious depths of human misery. I leaned my shoulders against the boulder and crossed my arms on my breast, as if giving up an unequal struggle. Her hair was loose, her dress stained with ashes, torn by brambles; the darkness of the cavern seemed to linger in her hollow cheeks, in her sunken temples.

“He is thirsty,” she murmured to me.

“Yes,” I said.

She tore off a strip of her dress, dipped it in the running water at her side, and approached it, all dripping, to his lips which closed upon it with avidity. The walls of the rock looked on implacably, but the rushing stream seemed to hurry away, as if from an accursed spot.

“Dew from heaven,” he sighed out.

“You are on earth, Manuel,” she said. “You are given time to repent. This is earth.”

“Impossible,” he muttered with difficulty.

He had forced his human fellowship upon us, this man whose ambition it had been to be called demon on the earth. He held us by the humanity of his broken frame, by his human glance, by his human voice. I wonder if, had I been alone, I would have passed on as reason dictated, or have had the courage of pity and finished him off, as he demanded. Whenever he became aware of our presence, he addressed me as “Thou, English ghost,” and directed me, in a commanding voice, to take a stone and crush his head, before I went back to my own torments. I withdrew, at last, where he could

not see me; but Seraphina never flinched in her task of moistening his lips with the strip of cloth she dipped in the brook, time after time, with a sublime perseverance of compassion.

It made me silent. Could I have stood there and recited the sinister detail of that man's crimes, in the hope that she would recoil from him to pursue the road of safety? It was not his evil, but his suffering that confronted us now. The sense of our kinship emerged out of it like a fresh horror after we had escaped the sea, the tempest; after we had resisted untold fatigues, hunger, thirst, despair. We were vanquished by what was in us, not in him. I could say nothing. The light ebbed out of the ravine. The sky, like a thin blue veil stretched between the earth and the spaces of the universe, filtered the gloom of the darkness beyond.

I thought of the invisible sun ready to set into the sea, of the peons riding away, and of our helpless, hopeless state.

"For the love of God," he mumbled.

"Yes, for the love of God," I heard her expressionless voice repeat. And then there was only the greedy sound of his lips sucking at the cloth, and the impatient ripple of the stream.

"Come, death," he sighed.

Yes, come, I thought, to release him and to set us free. All my prayer, now, was that we should be granted the strength to struggle from under the malignant frown of these crags, to close our eyes forever in the open.

And the truth is that, had we gone on, we should have found no one by the sea. The routed Lugareños had been able to embark under cover of a fusillade from those on board the schooner. All that would have met our despair, at the end of our toilsome march, would have been three dead pirates lying on the sand. The main body of the peons had gone, already, up the valley of the river with their few wounded. There would have been nothing for us to do but to stumble on and on upon their track, till we lay down never to rise again. They did not draw rein once, between the sea and the hacienda, sixteen miles away.

About the time when we began our descent into the ravine, two of the peons, detached from the main body for the purpose of observing the schooner from the upland, had topped the edge of the plain. We had then penetrated into Manuel's inferno, too deep to be seen by them. These men spent some time lying on the grass, and watching over the dunes the course of the schooner on the open sea. Their horses were grazing near them. The

wind was light; they waited to see the vessel far enough down the coast to make any intention of return improbable.

It was Manuel who saved our lives, defeating his own aim to the bitter end. Had not his vanity, policy, or the necessity of his artistic soul, induced him to enter the cave; had not his cowardice prevented him joining the Lugareños above, at the moment of the attack; had he not recoiled violently in a superstitious fear before my apparition at the mouth of the cave — we should have been released from our entombment, only to look once more at the sun. He paid the price of our ransom, to the uttermost farthing, in his lingering death. Had he killed himself on the spot, he would have taken our only slender chance with him into that nether world where he imagined himself to have been “precipitated alive.” Finding him dead, we should have gone on. Less than ten minutes, no more than another ten paces beyond the spot, we should have been hidden from sight in the thickets of denser growth in the lower part of the ravine. I doubt whether we should have been able to get through; but, even so, we should have been going away from the only help within our reach. We should have been lost.

The two vaqueros, after seeing the schooner hull down under the low, fiery sun of the west, mounted and rode home over the plain, making for the head of the ravine, as their way lay. And, as they cantered along the side opposite to the cave, one of them caught sight of the length of rope dangling down the precipice. They pulled up at once.

The first I knew of their nearness was the snorting of a horse forced towards the edge of the chasm. I saw the animal’s forelegs planted tensely on the very brink, and the body of the rider leaning over his neck to look down. And, when I wished to shout, I found I could not produce the slightest sound.

The man, rising in his stirrups, the reins in one hand and turning up the brim of his sombrero with the other, peered down at us over the pricked ears of his horse. I pointed over my head at the mouth of the cave, then down at Seraphina, lifting my hands to show that I was unarmed. I opened my lips wide. Surprise, agitation, weakness, had robbed me of every vestige of my voice. I beckoned downwards with a desperate energy, Horse and rider remained perfectly still, like an equestrian statue set up on the edge of a precipice. Sera-phina had never raised her head.

The man’s intent scrutiny could not have mistaken me for a Lugareño. I think he gazed so long because he was amazed to discover down there a

woman on her knees, stooping over a prostrate body, and a bareheaded man in a ragged white shirt and black breeches, reeling between the bushes and gesticulating violently, like an excited mute. But how a rope came to hang down from a tree, growing in a position so inaccessible that only a bird could have attached it there struck him as the most mysterious thing of all. He pointed his finger at it interrogatively, and I answered this inquiring sign by indicating the stony slope of the ravine. It seemed as if he could not speak for wonder. After a while he sat back in his saddle, gave me an encouraging wave of the hand, and wheeled his horse away from the brink.

It was as if we had been casting a spell of extinction on each other's voices. No sooner had he disappeared than I found mine. I do not suppose it was very loud but, at my aimless screech, Seraphina looked upwards on every side, saw no one anywhere, and remained on her knees with her eyes, full of apprehension, fixed upon me.

"No! I am not mad, dearest," I said. "There was a man. He has seen us."

"Oh, Juan!" she faltered out, "pray with me that God may have mercy on this poor wretch and let him die."

I said nothing. My thin, quavering scream after the peon had awakened Manuel from his delirious dream of an inferno. The voice that issued from his shattered body was awfully measured, hollow, and profound.

"You live!" he uttered slowly, turning his eyes full upon my face, and, as if perceiving for the first time in me the appearance of a living man. "Ha! You English walk the earth unscathed."

A feeling of pity came to me — a pity distinct from the harrowing sensations of his miserable end. He had been evil in the obscurity of his life, as there are plants growing harmful and deadly in the shade, drawing poison from the dank soil on which they flourish. He was as unconscious of his evil as they — but he had a man's right to my pity.

"I am b — roken," he stammered out.

Seraphina kept on moistening his lips.

"Repent, Manuel," she entreated fervently. "We have forgiven thee the evil done to us. Repent of thy crimes — poor man."

"Your voice, Señorita. What? You! You yourself bringing this blessing to my lips! In your childhood I cried 'viva' many times before your coach. And now you deign — in your voice — with your hand. Ha! I could improvise — The star stoops to the crushed worm...."

A rising clatter of rolling stones mingled from afar with the broken moanings of his voice. Looking over my shoulder, I saw one peon beginning the descent of the slope, and, higher up, motionless between the heads of two horses, the head of another man — with the purple tint of an enlarged sky beyond, reflecting the glow of an invisible sun setting into the sea.

Manuel cried out piercingly, and we shuddered. Seraphina shrank close to my side, hiding her head on my breast. The peon staggered awkwardly down the slope, descending sideways in small steps, embarrassed by the enormous rowels of his spurs. He had a striped serape over his shoulder, and grasped a broad-bladed machete in his right hand. His stumbling, cautious feet sent into the ravine a crashing sound, as though we were to be buried under a stream of stones.

“Vuestra Señoría” gasped Manuel. “I shall be silent. Pity me! Do not — do not withdraw your hand from my extreme pain.”

I felt she had to summon all her courage to look at him again. She disengaged herself, resolutely, from my enfolding arms.

“No, no; unfortunate man,” she said, in a benumbed voice. “Think of thy end.”

“A crushed worm, senorita,” he mumbled.

The peon, having reached the bottom of the slope, became lost to view amongst the bushes and the great fragments of rocks below. Every sound in the ravine was hushed; and the darkening sky seemed to cast the shadow of an everlasting night into the eyes of the dying man.

Then the peon came out, pushing through, in a great swish of parted bushes. His spurs jingled at every step, his footfalls crunched heavily on the pebbles. He stopped, as if transfixed, muttering his astonishment to himself, but asking no questions. He was a young man with a thin black moustache twisted gallantly to two little points. He looked up at the sheer wall of the precipice; he looked down at the group we formed at his feet. Suddenly, as if returning from an abyss of pain, Manuel declared distinctly:

“I feel in me a greatness, an inspiration....”

These were his last words. The heavy dark lashes descended slowly upon the faint gleam of the eyeballs, like a lowered curtain. The deep folds of the ravine gathered the falling dusk into great pools of absolute blackness, at the foot of the crags.

Rising high above our littleness, that watched, fascinated, the struggle of lights and shadows over the soul entangled in the wreck of a man's body, the rocks had a monumental indifference. And between their great, stony faces, turning pale in the gloom, with the amazed peon as if standing guard, machete in hand, Manuel's greatness and his inspiration passed away without as much as an exhaled sigh. I did not even know that he had ceased to breathe, till Seraphina rose from her knees with a low cry, and flung far away from her, nervously, the strip of cloth upon which his parted lips had refused to close.

My arms were ready to receive her. "Ah! At last!" she cried. There was something resentful and fierce in that cry, as though the pity of her woman's heart had been put to too cruel a test.

I, too, had been humane to that man. I had had his life on the end of my pistol, and had spared him from an impulse that had done nothing but withhold from him the mercy of a speedy death. This had been my pity.

But it was Seraphina's cry — this "At last," showing the stress and pain of the ordeal — that shook my faith in my conduct. It had brought upon our heads a retribution of mental and bodily anguish, like a criminal weakness. I was young, and my belief in the justice of life had received a shock. If it were impossible to foretell the consequences of our acts, if there were no safety in the motives within ourselves, what remained for our guidance?

And the inscrutable immobility of towering forms, steeped in the shadows of the chasm, appeared pregnant with a dreadful wisdom. It seemed to me that I would never have the courage to lift my hand, open my lips, make a step, obey a thought. A long sun-ray shot to the zenith from the beclouded west, crossing obliquely in a faint red bar the purple band of sky above the ravine.

The young vaquero had taken off his hat before the might of death, and made a perfunctory sign of the cross. He looked up and down the lofty wall, as if it could give him the word of that riddle. Twice his spurs clashed softly, and, with one hand grasping the rope, he stooped low in the twilight over the body.

"We looked for this Lugareño," he said, replacing his hat on his head carelessly. "He was a mad singer, and I saw him once kill one of us very swiftly. They used to call him in jest, El Demonio. Ah! But you... But you...."



His wonder overcame him. His bewildered eyes glimmered, staring at us in the deepening dusk.

“Speak, hombre,” he cried. “Who are you and who is she? Whence came you? Where are you going with this woman?...”

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

Not a soul stirred in the one long street of the negro village. The yellow crescent of the diminished moon swam low in the pearly light of the dawn; and the bamboo walls of huts, thatched with palm leaves, glistened here and there through the great leaves of bananas. All that night we had been moving on and on, slowly crossing clear savannas, in which nothing stirred beside ourselves but the escort of our own shadows, or plunging through dense patches of forest of an obscurity so impenetrable that the very forms of our rescuers became lost to us, though we heard their low voices and felt their hands steadying us in our saddles. Then our horses paced softly on the dust of a road, while athwart an avenue of orange trees whose foliage seemed as black as coal, the blind walls of the hacienda shone dead white like a vision of mists. A Brazilian aloe flowered by the side of the gate; we drooped in our saddles; and the heavy knocks against the wooden portal seemed to go on without cause, and stop without reason, like a sound heard in a dream. We entered Seraphina's hacienda. The high walls inclosed a square court deep as the yard of a prison, with flat-roofed buildings all around. It rang with many voices suddenly. Every moment the daylight increased; young négresses in loose gowns ran here and there, cackling like chased hens, and a fat woman waddled out from under the shadow of a veranda.

She was Seraphina's old nurse. She was scolding volubly, and suddenly she shrieked, as though she had been stabbed. Then all was still for a long time. Sitting high on the back of my patient mount, with my fingers twisted in the mane, I saw in a throng of woolly heads and bright garments Seraphina's pale face. An increasing murmur of sobs and endearing names mounted up to me. Her hair hung down, her eyes seemed immense; these people were carrying her off — and a man with a careworn, bilious face and a straight, gray beard, neatly clipped on the edges, stood at the head of my horse, blinking with astonishment.

The fat woman reappeared, rolling painfully along the veranda.

"Enrico! It is her lover! Oh! my treasure, my lamb, my precious child. Do you hear, Enrico? Her lover! Oh! the poor darling of my heart."

She appeared to be giggling and weeping at the same time. The sky above the yard brightened all at once, as if the sun had emerged with a leap from the distant waters of the Atlantic. She waved her short arms at me over

the railing, then plunged her dark fingers in the shock of iron-gray hair gathered on the top of her head. She turned away abruptly, a yellow headkerchief dodged in her way, a slap resounded, a cry of pain, and a negro girl bolted into the court, nursing her cheek in the palms of her hands. Doors slammed; other negro girls ran out of the veranda dismayed, and took cover in various directions.

I swayed to and fro in the saddle, but faithful to the plan of our escape, I tried to make clear my desire that these peons should be sworn to secrecy immediately. Meantime, somebody was trying to disengage my feet from the stirrups.

“Certainly. It is as your worship wishes.”

The careworn man at the head of my horse was utterly in the dark.

“Attention!” he shouted. “Catch hold, hombres. Carry the caballero.”

What caballero? A rosy flush tinged a boundless expanse above my face, and then came a sudden contraction of space and dusk. There were big earthenware jars ranged in a row on the floor, and the two vaqueros stood bareheaded, stretching their arms over me towards a black crucifix on a wall, taking their oaths, while I rested on my back. A white beard hovered about my face, a voice said, “It is done,” then called anxiously twice, “Señor! Señor!” and when I had escaped from the dream of a cavern, I found myself with my head pillowed on a fat woman’s breast, and drinking chicken broth out of a basin held to my lips. Her large cheeks quivered, she had black twinkling eyes and slight moustaches at the corners of her lips. But where was her white beard? And why did she talk of an angel, as if she were Manuel?

“Seraphina!” I cried, but Castro’s cloak swooped on my head like a sable wing. It was death. I struggled. Then I died. It was delicious to die. I followed the floating shape of my love beyond the worlds of the universe. We soared together above pain, strife, cruelty, and pity. We had left death behind us and everything of life but our love, which threw a radiant halo around two flames which were ourselves — and immortality inclosed us in a great and soothing darkness.

Nothing stirred in it. We drifted no longer. We hung in it quite still — and the empty husk of my body watched our two flames side by side, mingling their light in an infinite loneliness. There were two candles burning low on a little black table near my head. Enrico, with his white beard and zealous

eyes, was bending over my couch, while a chair, on high runners, rocked empty behind him. I stared.

“Señor, the night is far advanced,” he said soothingly, “and Dolores, my wife, watches over Dona Seraphina’s slumbers, on the other side of this wall.”

I had been dead to the world for nearly twenty hours, and the awakening resembled a new birth, for I felt as weak and helpless as an infant.

It is extraordinary how quickly we regained so much of our strength; but I suppose people recover sooner from the effects of privation than from the weakness of disease. Keeping pace with the return of our bodily vigour, the anxieties of mind returned, augmented tenfold by all the weight of our sinister experience. And yet, what worse could happen to us in the future? What other terror could it hold? We had come back from the very confines of destruction. But Seraphina, reclining back in an armchair, very still, with her eyes fixed on the high white wall facing the veranda across the court, would murmur the word “Separation!”

The possibility of our lives being forced apart was terrible to her affection, and intolerable to her pride. She had made her choice, and the feeling she had surrendered herself to so openly must have had a supreme potency. She had disregarded for it all the traditions of silence and reserve. She had looked at me fondly through the very tears of her grief; she had followed me — leaving her dead unburied and her prayers unsaid. What more could she have done to proclaim her love to the world? Could she, after that, allow anything short of death to thwart her fidelity? Never! And if she were to discover that I could, after all, find it in my heart to support an existence in which she had no share, then, indeed, it would be more than enough to make her die of shame.

“Ah, dearest!” I said, “you shall never die of shame.”

We were different, but we had read each other’s natures by a fierce light. I understood the point of honour in her constancy, and she never doubted the scruples of my true devotion, which had brought so many dangers on her head. We were flying not to save our lives, but to preserve inviolate our truth to each other and to ourselves. And if our sentiments appear exaggerated, violent, and overstrained, I must point back to their origin. Our love had not grown like a delicate flower, cherished in tempered sunshine. It had never known the atmosphere of tenderness; our souls had not been awakened to each other by a gentle whisper, but as if by the blast of a

trumpet. It had called us to a life whose enemy was not death, but separation.

The enemy sat at the gate of our shelter, as death sits at the gate of life. These high walls could not protect us, nor the tearful mumble of the old woman's prayers, nor yet the careworn fidelity of Enrico. The couple hung about us, quivering with emotion. They peeped round the corners of the veranda, and only rarely ventured to come out openly. The silent Galician stroked his clipped beard; the obese woman kept on crossing herself with loud, resigned sighs. She would waddle up, wiping her eyes, to stroke Seraphina's head and murmur endearing names. They waited on us hand and foot, and would stand close together, ready for the slightest sign, in a rapt contemplation. Now and then she would nudge her husband's ribs with her thick elbow and murmur, "Her lover."

She was happy when Seraphina let her sit at her feet, and hold her hand. She would pat it with gentle taps, squatting shapelessly on a low stool.

"Why go so far from thy old nurse, darling of my heart? Ah! love is love, and we have only one life to live, but this England is very far — very far away."

She nodded her big iron-gray head slowly; and to our longing England appeared very distant, too, a fortunate isle across the seas, an abode of peace, a sanctuary of love.

There was no plan open to us but the one laid down by Sebright. The secrecy of our sojourn at the hacienda had, in a measure, failed, though there was no reason to suppose the two peons had broken their oath. Our arrival at dawn had been unobserved, as far as we knew, and the domestic slaves, mostly girls, had been kept from all communication with the field hands outside. All these square leagues of the estate were very much out of the world, and this isolation had not been broken upon by any of O'Brien's agents coming out to spy. It seemed to be the only part of Seraphina's great possessions that remained absolutely her own.

Not a whisper of any sort of news reached us in our hiding-place till the fourth evening, when one of the vaqueros reported to Enrico that, riding on the inland boundary, he had fallen in with a company of infantry encamped on the edge of a little wood. Troops were being moved upon Rio Medio. He brought a note from the officer in command of that party. It contained nothing but a requisition for twenty head of cattle. The same night we left the hacienda.

It was a starry darkness. Behind us the soft wailing of the old woman at the gate died out:

“So far! So very far!”

We left the long street of the slave village on the left, and walked down the gentle slope of the open glade towards the little river. Seraphina’s hair was concealed in the crown of a wide sombrero and, wrapped up in a serape, she looked so much like a cloaked vaquero that one missed the jingle of spurs out of her walk. Enrico had fitted me out in his own clothes from top to toe. He carried a lanthorn, and we followed the circle of light that swayed and trembled upon the short grass. There was no one else with us, the crew of the drogher being already on board to await our coming.

Her mast appeared above the roof of some low sheds grouped about a short wooden jetty. Enrico raised the lamp high to light us, as we stepped on board.

Not a word was spoken; the five negroes of the crew (Enrico answered for their fidelity) moved about noiselessly, almost invisible. Blocks rattled feebly aloft.

“Enrico,” said Seraphina, “do not forget to put a stone cross over poor Castro’s grave.”

“No, Señorita. May you know years of felicity. We would all have laid down our lives for you. Remember that, and do not forget the living. Your childhood has been the consolation of the poor woman there for the loss of our little one, your foster brother, who died. We have given to you much of our affection for him who was denied to our old age.”

He stepped back from the rail. “Go with God,” he said.

The faint air filled the sail, and the outlines of wharf and roof fell back into the sombre background of the land, but the lanthorn in Enrico’s hand glimmered motionless at the end of the jetty, till a bend of the stream hid it from our sight.

We glided smoothly between the banks. Now and then a stretch of osiers and cane brakes rustled alongside in the darkness. All was strange; the contours of the land melted before our advance. The earth was made of shifting shadows, and only the stars remained in unchanged groups of glitter on the black sky. We floated across the land-locked basin, and under the low headland we had steered for from the sea in the storm. All this, seen only once under streams of lightning, was unrecognizable to us, and seemed plunged in deep slumber. But the fresh feel of the sea air, and the freedom

of earth and sky wedded on the sea horizon, returned to us like old friends, the companions of that time when we communed in words and silences on board the *Lion*, that fragment of England found in a mist, boarded in battle, with its absurd and warmhearted protection. On our other hand, the rampart of white dunes intruded the line of a ghostly shore between the depth of the sea and the profundity of the sky; and when the faint breeze failed for a moment, the negro crew troubled the silence with the heavy splashes of their sweeps falling in slow and solemn cadence. The rudder creaked gently; the black in command was old and of spare build, resembling Cesar, the major-domo, without the splendour of maroon velvet and gold lace. He was a very good sailor, I believe, taciturn and intelligent. He had seen the *Lion* frequently on his trips to Havana, and would recognize her, he assured me, amongst a whole host of shipping. When I had explained what was expected of him, according to Sebright's programme, a bizarre grimace of a smile disturbed the bony, mournful cast of his African face.

"Fall on board by accident, Señor. Si! Now, by St. Jago of Compostella, the patron of our hacienda, you shall see this old Pedro — who has been set to sail the craft ever since she was built — as overcome by an accident as a little rascal of a boy that has stolen a boat."

After this wordy declaration he never spoke to us again. He gave his short orders in low undertones, and the others, four stalwart blacks, in the prime of life, executed them in silence. Another night brought the unchanging stars to look at us in their multitudes, till the dawn put them out just as we opened the entrance of the harbour. The daylight discovered the arid colouring of the coast, a castle on a sandy hill, and a few small boats with ragged sails making for the land. A brigantine, that seemed to have carried the breeze with her right in, threw up the Stars and Stripes radiantly to the rising sun, before rounding the point. The sound of bells came out to sea, and met us while we crept slowly on, abreast of the battery at the water's edge.

"A feast-day in the city," said the old negro at the helm. "And here is an English ship of war."

The sun-rays struck from afar full at her belted side; the water was like glass along the shore. She swam into the very shade of the hill, before she wore round, with great deliberation, in an ample sweep of her headgear through a complete half-circle. She came to the wind on the other tack

under her short canvas; her lower deck ports were closed, the hammock cloths like a ridge of unmelted snow lying along her rail.

It was evident she was kept standing off and on outside the harbour, as an armed man may pace to and fro before a gate. With the hum of six hundred wakeful lives in her flanks, the tap-tapping of a drum, and the shrill modulations of the boatswain's calls piping some order along her decks, she floated majestically across our path. But the only living being we saw was the red-coated marine on sentry by the lifebuoys, looking down at us over the taffrail. We passed so close to her that I could distinguish the whites of his eyes, and the tompions in the muzzles of her stern-chasers protruding out of the ports belonging to the admiral's quarters.

I knew her. She was Rowley's flagship. She had thrown the shadow of her sails upon the end of my first sea journey. She was the man-of-war going out for a cruise on that day when Carlos, Tomas, and myself arrived in Jamaica in the old Thames. And there she was meeting me again, after two years, before Havana — the might of the fortunate isle to which we turned our eyes, part and parcel of my inheritance, formidable with the courage of my countrymen, humming with my native speech — and as foreign to my purposes as if I had forfeited forever my birthright in her protection. I had drifted into a sort of outlaw. You may not break the king's peace and be made welcome on board a king's ship. You may not hope to make use of a king's ship for the purposes of an elopement. There was no room on board that seventy-four for our romance.

As it was, I very nearly hailed her. What would become of us if the Lion had already left Havana? I thought. But no. To hail her meant separation — the only forbidden thing to those who, in the strength of youth and love, are permitted to defy the world together.

I did not hail; and the marine dwindled to a red speck upon the noble hull forging away from us on the offshore tack. The brazen clangour of bells seemed to struggle with the sharp puff of the breeze that sent us in.

The shipping in harbour was covered with bunting in honour of the feast-day; for the same reason, there was not a sign of the usual crowd of small boats that give animation to the waters of a port; the middle of the harbour was strangely empty. A solitary bumboat canoe, with a yellow bunch of bananas in the bow, and an old negro woman dipping a languid paddle at the stern, were all that met my eye. Presently, however, a six-oared custom-house galley darted out from the tier of ships, pulling for the American



brigantine. I noticed in her, beside the ordinary port officials, several soldiers, and a person astonishingly like the alguazil of the illustrations to Spanish romances. One of the uniformed sitters waved his hand at us, recognizing an estate drogher, and shouted some directions, of which we only caught the words:

“Steps — examination — to-morrow.”

Our steersman took off his old hat humbly, to hail back, “Muy bien, Señor.”

I breathed freely, for they gave us no more of their attention. Soldiers, alguazil, and custom-house officers were swarming aboard the American, as if bent on ransacking her from stem to stern in the shortest possible time, so as not to be late for the procession.

The absence of movement in the harbour, the festive and idle appearance of the ships, with the flutter of innumerable flags on the forest of masts, and the great uproar of church bells in the air, made an impressive greeting for our eyes and ears. And the deserted aspect of the harbour front of the city was very striking, too. The feast had swept the quays of people so completely that the tiny pair of sentries at the foot of a tall yellow building caught the eye from afar. Sera-phina crouched on a coil of rope under the bulwark; old Pedro, at the tiller, peered about from under his hand, and I, trying to expose myself to view as little as possible, helped him to look for the Lion. There she is. Yes! No! There she was. A crushing load fell off my chest. We had made her out together, old Pedro and I.

And then the last part of Sebright’s plan had to be carried out at once. The foresheet of the drogher appeared to part, our mainsail shook, and before I could gasp twice, we had drifted stern foremost into the Lion’s mizzen chains with a crash that brought a genuine expression of concern to the old negro’s face. He had managed the whole thing with a most convincing skill, and without even once glancing at the ship. We had done our part, but the people of the Lion seemed to fail in theirs unaccountably. Of all the faces that crowded her rail at the shock, not one appeared with a glimmer of intelligence. All the cargo ports were down. Their surprise and their swearing appeared to me alarmingly unaffected; with a most imbecile alacrity they exerted themselves, with small spars and boathooks, to push the drogher off. Nobody seemed to recognize me; Seraphina might have been a peon sitting on deck, cloaked from neck to heels and under a

sombrero. I dared not shout to them in English, for fear of being heard on board the other ships around. At last Sebright himself appeared on the poop.

He gave one look over the side.

“What the devil...” he began. Was he blind, too?

Suddenly I saw him throw up his arms above his head. He vanished. A port came open with a jerk at the last moment. I lifted Seraphina up: two hands caught hold of her, and, in my great hurry to scramble up after her, I barked my shins cruelly. The port fell; the drogher went on bumping alongside, completely disregarded. Seraphina dropped the cloak at her feet and flung off her hat.

“Good-morning, amigos,” she said gravely.

A hissed “Damn you fools — keep quiet!” from Sebright, stifled the cheer in all those bronzed throats. Only a thin little poor “hooray” quavered along the deck. The timid steward had not been able to overcome his enthusiasm. He slapped his head in despair, and rushed away to bury himself in his pantry.

“Turned up, by heavens!... Go in.... Good God!... Bucketfuls of tears....” stammered Sebright, pushing us into the cuddy. “Go in! Go in at once!”

Mrs. Williams rose from behind the table wide-eyed, clasping her hands, and stumbled twice as she ran to us.

“What have you done to that child, Mr. Kemp!” she cried insanely at me. “Oh, my dear, my dear! You look like your own ghost.”

Sebright, burning with impatience, pulled me away. The cabin door fell upon the two women, locked in a hug, and, stepping into his stateroom, we could do nothing at first but slap each other on the back and ejaculate the most unmeaning exclamations, like a couple of jocular idiots. But when, in the expansion of my heart, I tried to banter him about not keeping his word to look out for us, he bent double in trying to restrain his hilarity, slapped his thighs, and grew red in the face.

The excellent joke was that, for the past six days, we had been supposed to be dead — drowned; at least Dona Seraphina had been provided with that sort of death in her own name; I was drowned, too, but in the disguise of a piratical young English nobleman.

“There’s nothing too bad for them to believe of us,” he commented, and guffawed in his joy at seeing me unscathed. “Dead! Drowned! Ha! Ha! Good, wasn’t it?”

Mrs. Williams — he said — had been weeping her eyes out over our desolate end; and even the skipper had sulked with his food for a day or two.

“Ha! Ha! Drowned! Excellent!” He shook me by the shoulders, looking me straight in the eyes — and the bizarre, nervous hilarity of my reception, so unlike his scornful attitude, proved that he, too, had believed the rumour. Indeed, nothing could have been more natural, considering my inexperience in handling boats and the fury of the norther. It had sent the *Lion* staggering into Havana in less than twenty hours after we had parted from her on the coast.

Suddenly a change came over him. He pushed me on to the settee.

“Speak! Talk! What has happened? Where have you been all this time? Man, you look ten years older.”

“Ten years. Is that all?” I said.

And after he had heard the whole story of our passages he appeared greatly sobered.

“Wonderful! Wonderful!” he muttered, lost in deep thought, till I reminded him it was his turn, now, to speak.

“You are the talk of the town,” he said, recovering his elasticity of spirit as he went on. The death of Don Balthasar had been the first great sensation of Havana, but it seemed that O’Brien had kept that news to himself, till he heard by an overland messenger that Sera-phina and I had escaped from Casa Riego.

Then he gave it to the world; he let it be inferred that he had the news of both events together. The story, as sworn to by various suborned rascals, and put out by his creatures, ran that an English desperado, arriving in Rio Medio with some Mexicans in a schooner, had incited the rabble of the place to attack the Casa Riego. Don Balthasar had been shot while defending his house at the head of his negroes; and Don Balthasar’s daughter had been carried off by the English pirate.

The amazement and sensation were extreme. Several of the first families went into mourning. A service for the repose of Don Balthasar’s soul was sung in the Cathedral. Captain Williams went there out of curiosity, and returned full of the magnificence of the sight; nave draped in black, an enormous catafalque, with silver angels, more than life-size, kneeling at the four corners with joined hands, an amazing multitude of lights. A demonstration of unbounded grief from the Judge of the Marine Court had

startled the distinguished congregation. In his place amongst the body of higher magistrature, Don Patricio O'Brien burst into an uncontrollable paroxysm of sobs, and had to be assisted out of the church.

It was almost incredible, but I could well believe it. With the thunderous strains of *Dies Irae* rolling over his bowed head, amongst all these symbols and trappings of woe, he must have seen, in the black anguish of his baffled passion, the true image of death itself, and tasted all the profound deception of life. Who could tell how much secret rage, jealousy, regret, and despair had gone to that outburst of grief, whose truth had fluttered a distinguished company of mourners, and had nearly interrupted their official supplications for the repose of that old man, who had been dead to the world for so many years? I believe that, on that very day, just as he was going to the service, O'Brien had received the news of our supposed death by drowning. The music, the voices, the lights of the grave, the pomp of mourning, awe, and supplication crying for mercy upon the dead, had been too much for him. He had presumed too much upon his fortitude. He wept aloud for his love lost, for his vengeance defeated, for the dreams gone out of his life, for the inaccessible consummation of his desire.

"And, you know, with all these affairs, he feels himself wobbling in his socket," Sebright began again, after musing for a while. Indeed, the last events in Rio Medio were endangering his position. He could no more present his reports upon the state of the province with incidental reflections upon the bad faith of the English Government (who encouraged the rebels against the Catholic king), the arrogance of the English admiral, and concluding with the loyalty and honesty of the Rio Medio population, "who themselves suffered many acts of molestation from the Mexican pirates." The most famous of these papers, printed at that time in the official Gazette, had recommended that the loyal town should be given a battery of thirty-six pounders for purposes of self-defence. They had been given them just in time to be turned on Rowley's boats; it is known with what deadly effect. O'Brien's report after that event had made it clear that that virtuous population of the bay, exasperated by the intrusions of the Mexicanos upon their peaceful state, and abhorring in their souls the rebellion trying to lift its envenomed head, etc., etc.,... heroically manned the battery to defend their town from the boats which they took to be these very pirates the British admiral was in search of. He pleaded for them the uncertain light of the early morning, the ardour of citizens, valorous, but naturally

inexperienced in matters of war, and the impossibility to suppose that the admiral of a friendly power would dispatch an armed force to land on these shores. I have read these things with my own eyes; there were old files of the Gazette on board, and Sebright, who had been reading up his O'Brien, pointed them out to me with his finger, muttering:

“Here — look there. Pretty, ain’t it?”

But that was all over. The bubble had burst. It was reported in town that the private audience the Juez had lately from the Captain-General was of a most stormy description. They say old Marshal What-d’ye-call-’um ended by flinging his last report in his face, and asking him how dared he work his lawyer’s tricks upon an old soldier. Good old fighting cock. But stupid. All these old soldiers were stupid, Sebright declared. Old admirals, too. However, the land troops had arrived in Rio Medio by this time; the Tornado frigate, too, no doubt, having sailed four days ago, with orders to burn the villages to the ground; and the good Lugareños must be catching colds trying to hide from the carabineers in the deep, damp woods.

Our admiral was awaiting the issue of that expedition. Returning home under a cloud, Rowley wanted to take with him the assurance of the pirate nest being destroyed at last, as a sort of diplomatic feather in his cap.

“He may think,” Sebright commented, “that it’s his sailorly bluff that has done it, but, as far as I can see, nobody but you yourself, Kemp, had anything to do with bringing it about. Funny, is it not? Old Rowley keeps his ship dodging outside because it’s cooler at sea than stewing in this harbour, but he sends in a boat for news every morning. What he is most anxious for is to get the notorious Nichols into his hands; take him home for a hanging. It seems clear to me that they are humbugging him ashore. Nichols! Where’s Nichols? There are people here who say that Nichols has had free board and lodging in Havana jail for the last six months. Others swear that it is Nichols who has killed the old gentleman, run off with Dona Seraphina, and got drowned. Nichols! Who’s Nichols? On that showing you are Nichols. Anybody may be Nichols. Who has ever seen him outside Rio Medio? I used to believe in him at one time, but, upon my word I begin to doubt whether there ever was such a man.”

“But the man existed, at any rate,” I said. “I knew him — I’ve talked with him. He came out second mate in the same ship with me — in the old Thames. Ramon took charge of him in Kingston, and that’s the last positive thing I can swear to, of him. But that he was in Rio Medio for two years,

and vanished from there almost directly after that unlucky boat affair, I am absolutely certain.”

“Well, I suppose O’Brien knows where to lay his hand on him. But no matter where the fellow is, in jail or out of it, the admiral will never get hold of him. If they had him they could not think of giving him up. He knows too much of the game; and remember that O’Brien, if he wobbles in the socket, is by no means down yet. A man like that doesn’t get knocked over like a ninepin. You may be sure he has twenty skeletons put away in good places, that he will haul out one by one, rather than let himself be squashed. He’s not going to give in. A few days ago, a priest — your priest, you know — turned up here on foot from Rio Medio, and went about wringing his hands, declaring that he knew all the truth, and meant to make a noise about it, too. O’Brien made short work of him, though; got the archbishop to send him into retreat, as they call it, to a Franciscan convent a hundred miles from here. These things are whispered about all along the gutters of this place.”

I imagined the poor Father Antonio, with his simple resignation, mourning for us in his forced retreat, brokenhearted, and murmuring, “Inscrutable, inscrutable.” I should have liked to see the old man.

“I tell you the town is fairly buzzing with the atrocities of this business,” Sebright went on. “It’s the thing for fashionable people to go and see what I may call the relics of the crime. They are on show in the waiting-hall of the Palace of Justice. Why, I went there myself. You go through a swing door into a big place that, for cheerfulness, is no better than a monster coal cellar, and there you behold, laid out on a little black table, Mrs. Williams’ woollen shawl, your Señorita’s tortoise-shell comb, that had got entangled in it somehow, and my old cap that I lent you — you remember. I assure you, it gave me the horrors to see the confounded things spread out there in that dim religious light. Dash me, if I didn’t go queer all over. And all the time swell carriages stopping before the portico, dressed-up women walking up in pairs and threes, sighing before the missus’ shawl, turning up their eyes, ‘Ah! Pobrecita! Pobrecita! But what a strange wrap for her to have. It is very coarse. Perished in the flower of her youth. Incredible! Oh, the savage, cruel Englishman.’ The funniest thing in the world.”

But if this was so, Manuel’s Lugareños were now in Havana. Sebright pointed out that, as things stood, it was the safest place for them, under the wing of their patron. Sebright had recognized the schooner at once. She

came in very early one morning, and hauled herself unostentatiously out of sight amongst a ruck of small craft moored in the lower part of the harbour. He took the first opportunity to ask one of the guards on the quay what was that pretty vessel over there, just to hear what the man would say. He was assured that she was a Porto Rico trader of no consequence, well known in the port.

“Never mind the scoundrels; they can do nothing more to you.”

Sebright dismissed the Lugareños out of my life. The unfavourable circumstance for us was that the captain had gone ashore. The ship was ready for sea; absolutely cleared; papers on board; could go in an hour if it came to that; but, at any rate, next morning at daylight, before O’Brien could get wind of the Riego drogher arriving. Every movement in port was reported to the Juez; but this was a feast, and he would not hear of it probably till next day. Even fiestas had their uses sometimes. In his anxiety to discover Seraphina, O’Brien had played such pranks amongst the foreign shipping (after the Lion had been drawn blank) that the whole consular body had addressed a joint protest to the Governor, and the Juez had been told to moderate his efforts. No ship was to be visited more than once. Still I had seen, myself, soldiers going in a boat to board the American brigantine: a garlic-eating crew, poisoning the cabins with their breath, and poking their noses everywhere. Of course, since our supposed drowning, there had been a lull; but the least thing might start him off again. He was reputed to be almost out of his mind with sorrow, arising from his great attachment for the family. He walked about as if distracted, suffered from insomnia, and had not been fit to preside in his court for over a week, now.

“But don’t you expect Williams back on board directly?”

He shook his head.

“No. Not even to-night. He told the missus he was going to spend the day out of town with his consignee, but he tipped me the wink. This evening he will send a note that the consignee detains him for the night, because the letters are not ready, and I’ll have to go to her and lie, the best I am able, that it’s quite the usual thing. Damn!”

I was appalled. This was too bad. And, as I raged against the dissolute habits of the man, Sebright entreated me to moderate my voice so as not to be heard in the cabin. Did I expect the man to change his skin? He had been doing the gay bachelor about here all his life; had never suspected he was doing anything particularly scandalous either.

“He married the old girl out of chivalry, — the romantic fat beggar, — and never realized what it meant till she came out with him,” Sebright went on whispering to me. “He loves and honours her more than you may think. That is so, for all your shrugs, Mr. Kemp. It is not so easy to break the old connection as you imagine. Why, the other evening, two of his dissolute habits (as you call them) came off, with mantillas over their heads, in a boat, in company with a male scallawag of sorts, pinching a mandolin, and serenaded the ship for him. We were all in the cabin after supper, and poor Mrs. Williams, with her eyes still red from weeping over you people, says to us, ‘How sweet and melancholy that sounds,’ says she. You should have seen the skipper rolling his eyes at me. The perspiration of fright was simply pouring down his face. I rushed on deck, and it took me all my Spanish to stop them from coming aboard. I had to swear by all the saints, and the honour of a caballero, that there was a wife. They went away laughing at last. They did not want to make trouble. They simply had not believed the tale before. Thought it was some dodge of his. I could hear their peals of laughter all the way up the harbour. These are the difficulties we have. The old girl must be protected from that sort of eye-opener, if I’ve to forswear my soul. I’ve been keeping guard over her ever since we arrived here — besides looking out for you people, as long as there was any hope.”

I was greatly cast down. Perhaps Williams was justified in making concessions to the associates of his former jolly existence to save some outrage to the feelings of his consort. I did not want to criticise his motives — but what about getting him back on board at once?

Sebright was biting his lip. The necessity was pressing, he admitted.

He had an idea where to find him. But for himself he could not go — that was evident. Neither would I wish him to leave the ship, even for a moment, now Seraphina was on board. An unexpected visit from some zealous police understrapper, a momentary want of presence of mind on the part of the timid steward; there was enough to bring about our undoing. Moreover, as he had said, he must remain on guard over the missus. But whom to send? There was not a single boatman about. The harbour was a desert of water and dressed ships; but even the crews of most of them were ashore — “on a regular spree of praying,” as he expressed it vexedly. As to our own crew, not one of them knew anything more of Spanish than a few terms of abuse, perhaps. Their hearts were in the right place, but as to their wits, he wouldn’t trust a single one of them by himself — no, not an inch



away from the ship. How could he send one of them ashore with the wineshops yawning wide on all sides, and not enough lingo to ask for the way. Sure to get drunk, to get lost, to get into trouble in some way, and in the end get picked up by the police. The slightest hitch of that sort would call attention upon the ship — and with O'Brien to draw inferences.... He rubbed his head.

"I suppose I'll have to go," he grunted. "But I am known; I may be followed. They may wonder why I rush to fetch my skipper. And yet I feel this is the time. The very time. Between now and four o'clock to-morrow morning we have an almost absolute certitude of getting away with you two. This is our chance and your chance."

He was lost in perplexity. Then, as if inspired, I cried:

"I will go!"

"The devil!" he said, amazed. "Would you?"

I rushed at him with arguments. No one would know me. My clothes were all right and clean enough for a feast-day. I could slip through the crowds un-perceived. The principal thing was to get Seraphina out of O'Brien's reach. At the worst, I could always find means to get away from Cuba by myself. There was Mrs. Williams to look after her, and if I missed Williams by some mischance, and failed to make my way back to the ship in time, I charged them solemnly not to wait, but sail away at the earliest possible moment.

I said much more than this. I was eloquent. I became as if suddenly intoxicated by the nearness of freedom and safety. The thought of being at sea with her in a few hours away from all trouble of mind or heart, made my head swim. It seemed to me I should go mad if I was not allowed to go. My limbs tingled with eagerness. I stuttered with excitement.

"Well — after all!" Sebright mumbled.

"I must go in and tell her," I said.

"No. Don't do that," said that wise young man. "Have you made up your mind?"

"Yes, I have," I answered. "But she's reasonable."

"Still," he argued, "the old girl is sure to say that nothing of the kind is necessary. The captain told her that he was coming back for tea. What could we say to that? We can't explain the true state of the case, and if you persist in going, it will look like pig-headed folly on your part."

He threw his writing-desk open for me.

“Write to her. Write down your arguments — what you have been telling me. It’s a fact that the door stands open for a few hours. As to the rest,” he pursued, with a weary sigh, “I’ll do the lying to pass it off with Mrs. Williams.”

Thus it came about that, with only two flimsy bulkheads between us, I wrote my first letter to Seraphina, while Sebright went on deck to make arrangements to send me ashore. He was some time away; long enough for me to pour out on paper the exultation of my thought, the confidence of my hope, my desire to have her safe at last with me upon the blue sea. One must seize a propitious moment lest it should slip away and never return, I wrote. I begged her to believe I was acting for the best, and only from my great love, that could not support the thought of her being so near O’Brien, the arch-enemy of our union. There was no separation on the sea.

Sebright came in brusquely.

“Come along.”

The American brigantine was berthed by then, close astern of the Lion, and Sebright had the idea of asking her mate to let his boat (it was in the water) put ashore a visitor he had on board. His own were hoisted, he explained, and there were no boatmen plying for hire.

His request was granted. I was pulled ashore by two American sailors, who never said a word to each other, and evidently took me for a Spaniard.

It was an excellent idea. By borrowing the Yankee’s boat, the track of my connection with the Lion was covered. The silent seamen landed me, as asked by Sebright, near the battery on the sand, quite clear of the city.

I thanked them in Spanish, and, traversing a piece of open ground, made a wide circle to enter the town from the land side, to still further cover my tracks. I passed through a sort of squalid suburb of huts, hovels, and negro shanties. I met very few people, and these mostly old women, looking after the swarms of children of all colours and sizes, playing in the dust. Many curs sunned themselves among heaps of rubbish, and took not the trouble to growl at me. Then I came out upon a highroad, and turned my face towards the city lying under a crude sunshine, and in a ring of metallic vibrations.

Better houses with plastered fronts washed yellow or blue, and even pinky red, alternated with tumble-down wooden structures. A crenellated squat gateway faced me with a carved shield of stone above the open gloom. A young smooth-faced mulatto, in some sort of dirty uniform, but wearing new straw slippers with blue silk rosettes over his naked feet,

l lounged cross-legged at the door of a kind of guardroom. He held a big cigar tilted up between his teeth, and ogled me, like a woman, out of the corners of his languishing eyes. He said not a word.

Fortunately my face had tanned to a dark hue. Enrico's clothes would not attract attention to me, of course. The light colour of my hair was concealed by the handkerchief bound under my hat; my footsteps echoed loudly under the vault, and I penetrated into the heart of the city.

And directly, it seemed to me, I had stepped back three hundred years. I had never seen anything so old; this was the abandoned inheritance of an adventurous race, that seemed to have thrown all its might, all its vigour, and all its enthusiasm into one supreme effort of valour and greed. I had read the history of the Spanish Conquest; and, looking at these great walls of stone, I felt my heart moved by the same wonder, and by the same sadness. With what a fury of heroism and faith had this whole people flung itself upon the opulent mystery of the New World. Never had a nation clasped closer to its heart its dream of greatness, of glory, and of romance. There had been a moment in its destiny, when it could believe that Heaven itself smiled upon its massacres. I walked slowly, awed by the solitude. They had conquered and were no more, and these wrought stones remained to testify gloomily to the death of their success. Heavy houses, immense walls, pointed arches of the doorways, cages of iron bars projecting balcony wise around each square window. And not a soul in sight, not a head looking out from these dwellings, these houses of men, these ancient abodes of hate, of base rivalries, of avarice, of ambitions — these old nests of love, these witnesses of a great romance now past and gone below the horizon. They seemed to return mournfully my wondering glances; they seemed to look at me and say, "What do you here? We have seen other men, heard other footsteps!" The peace of the cloister brooded over these aged blocks of masonry, stained with the green trails of mosses, infiltrated with shadows.

At times the belfry of a church would volley a tremendous crash of bronze into the narrow streets; and between whiles I could hear the faint echoes of far-off chanting, the brassy distant gasps of trombones. A woman in black whisked round a corner, hurrying towards the route of the procession. I took the same direction. From a wine-shop, yawning like a dirty cavern in the basement of a palatial old building, issued suddenly a brawny ruffian in rags, wiping his thick beard with the back of a hairy paw.

He lurched a little, and began to walk before me hastily. I noticed the glitter of a gold earring in the lobe of his huge ear. His cloak was frayed at the bottom into a perfect fringe and, as he flung it about, he showed a good deal of naked skin under it. His calves were bandaged crosswise; his peaked hat seemed to have been trodden upon in filth before he had put it on his head. Suddenly I stopped short. A Lugareño!

We were then in the empty part of a narrow street, whose lower end was packed, close with a crowd viewing the procession which was filing slowly past, along the wide thoroughfare. It was too late for me to go back. Moreover, the ruffian paid no attention to me. It was best to go on. The people, packed between the houses with their backs to us, blocked our way. I had to wait.

He took his position near me in the rear of the last rank of the crowd. He must have been inclined to repentance in his cups, because he began to mumble and beat his breast. Other people in the crowd were also beating their breasts. In front of me I had the façade of a building which, according to the little plan of my route Sebright drew for me, was the Palace of Justice. It had a peristyle of ugly columns at the top of a flight of steps. A cordon of infantry kept the roadway clear. The singing went on without interruption; and I saw tall saints of wood, gilt and painted red and blue, pass, borne shoulder-high, swaying and pitching above the heads of the crowd like the masts of boats in a seaway. Crucifixes were carried, flashing in the sun; an enormous Madonna, which must have weighed half a ton, tottered across my line of sight, dressed up in gold brocade and with a wreath of paper roses on her head. A military band sent a hurricane blast of brasses as it went by. Then all was still at once, except the silvery tinkling of hand-bells. The people before me fell on their knees together and left me standing up alone.

As a matter of fact I had been caught gaping at the ceremony quite new to me, and had not expected a move of that sort. The ruffian kneeling within a foot of me thumped and bellowed in an ecstasy of piety. As to me, I own I stood there looking with impatience at a passing canopy that seemed all gold, with three priests in gorgeous capes walking slowly under it, and I absolutely forgot to take off my hat. The bearded ruffian looked up from the midst of his penitential exercises, and before I realized I was outraging his or anybody else's feelings, leaped up with a yell, "Thou sacrilegious infidel," and sent my hat flying off my head.

Just then the band crashed again, the bells pealed out, and no one heard his shout. With one blow of my fist I sent him staggering backwards. The procession had passed; people were rising from their knees and pouring out of the narrow street. Swearing, he fumbled under his cloak; I watched him narrowly; but in a moment he sprang away and lost himself amongst the moving crowd. I picked up my hat.

For a time I stood very uneasy, and then retreated under a doorway. Nothing happened, and I was anxious to get on. It was possible to cross the wide street now. That Lugareño did not know me. He was a Lugareño, though. No doubt about it. I would make a dash now; but first I stole a hasty glance at the plan of my route which I kept in the hollow of my palm.

“Señor,” said a voice. I lifted my head.

An elderly man in black, with a white moustache and imperial, stood before me. The ruffian was stalking up to his side, and four soldiers with an officer were coming behind. I took in the whole disaster at a glance.

“The Señor is no doubt a foreigner — perhaps an Englishman,” said the official in black. He had a lace collar, a chain on his neck, velvet breeches, a well-turned leg in black stockings. His voice was soft.

I was so disconcerted that I nodded at him.

“The Señor is young and inconsiderate. Religious feelings ought to be respected.” The official in black was addressing me in sad and measured tones. “This good Catholic,” he continued, eying the bearded ruffian dubiously, “has made a formal statement to me of your impious demonstration.”

What a fatal accident, I thought, appalled; but I tried to explain the matter. I expressed regret. The other gazed at me benevolently.

“Nevertheless, Señor, pray follow me. Even for your own safety. You must give some account of yourself.”

This I was firmly resolved not to give. But the Lugareño had been going through a pantomime of scrutinizing my person. He crouched up, stepped back, then to one side.

“This worthy man,” began the official in black, “complains of your violence, too....”

“This worthy man,” I shouted stupidly, “is a pirate. He is a Rio Medio Lugareño. He is a criminal.”

The official seemed astounded, and I saw my idiotic mistake at once — too late!

“Strange,” he murmured, and, at the same time, the ruffianly wretch began to shout:

“It is he! The traitor! The heretic! I recognize him!”

“Peace, peace!” said the man in black.

“I demand to be taken before the Juez Don Patricio for a deposition,” shrieked the Lugareño. A crowd was beginning to collect.

The official and the officer exchanged consulting glances. At a word from the latter, the soldiers closed upon me.

I felt utterly overcome, as if the earth had crumbled under my feet, and the heavens had been rent in twain.

I walked between my captors across the street amongst hooting knots of people, and up the steps of the portico, as if in a frightful dream.

In the gloomy, chilly hall they made me wait. A soldier stood on each side of me, and there, absolutely before my eyes on a little table, reposed Mrs. Williams’ shawl and Sebright’s cap. This was the very hall of the Palace of Justice of which Sebright had spoken. It was more than ever like an absurd dream, now. But I had the leisure to collect my wits. I could not claim the Consul’s protection simply because I should have to give him a truthful account of myself, and that would mean giving up Seraphina. The Consul could not protect her. But the Lion would sail on the morrow. Sebright would understand it if Williams did not. I trusted Sebright’s sagacity. Yes, she would sail tomorrow evening. A day and a half. If I could only keep the knowledge of Seraphina from O’Brien till then — she was safe, and I should be safe, too, for my lips would be unsealed. I could claim the protection of my Consul and proclaim the villainy of the Juez.

“Go in there now, Señor, to be confronted with your accuser,” said the official in black, appearing before me. He pointed at a small door to the left. My heart was beating steadily. I felt a sort of intrepid resignation.

## **PART FIFTH — THE LOT OF MAN**

## CHAPTER ONE

“Why have I been brought here, your worships?” I asked, with a great deal of firmness.

There were two figures in black, the one beside, the other behind a large black table. I was placed in front of them, between two soldiers, in the centre of a large, gaunt room, with bare, dirty walls, and the arms of Spain above the judge’s seat.

“You are before the Juez de la Primera Instancia,” said the man in black beside the table. He wore a large and shadowy tricorn. “Be silent, and respect the procedure.”

It was, without doubt, excellent advice. He whispered some words in the ear of the Judge of the First Instance. It was plain enough to me that the judge was a quite inferior official, who merely decided whether there were any case against the accused; he had, even to his clerk, an air of timidity, of doubt.

I said, “But I insist on knowing....”

The clerk said, “In good time....” And then, in the same tone of disinterested official routine, he spoke to the Lugareño, who, from beside the door, rolled very frightened eyes from the judges and the clerk to myself and the soldiers — “Advance.”

The judge, in a hurried, perfunctory voice, put questions to the Lugareño; the clerk scratched with a large quill on a sheet of paper.

“Where do you come from?”

“The town of Rio Medio, Excellency.”

“Of what occupation?”

“Excellency — a few goats....”

“Why are you here?”

“My daughter, Excellency, married Pepe of the posada in the Calle....”

The judge said, “Yes, yes,” with an unsanguine impatience. The Lugareño’s dirty hands jumped nervously on the large rim of his limp hat.

“You lodge a complaint against the senor there.”

The clerk pointed the end of his quill towards me.

“I? God forbid, Excellency,” the Lugareño bleated. “The Alguazil of the Criminal Court instructed me to be watchful.

“You lodge an information, then?” the juez said.



“Maybe it is an information, Excellency,” the Lugareño answered, “as regards the senor there.”

The Alguazil of the Criminal Court had told him, and many other men of Rio Medio, to be on the watch for me, “undoubtedly touching what had happened, as all the world knew, in Rio Medio.”

He looked me full in the face with stupid insolence, and said:

“At first I much doubted, for all the world said this man was dead — though others said worse things. Perhaps, who knows?”

He had seen me, he said, many times in Rio Medio, outside the Casa; on the balcony of the Casa, too. And he was sure that I was a heretic and an evil person.

It suddenly struck me that this man — I was undoubtedly familiar with his face — must be the lieutenant of Manuel-del-Popolo, his boon companion. Without doubt, he had seen me on the balcony of the Casa.

He had gained a lot of assurance from the conciliatory manner of the Juez, and said suddenly, in a tentative way:

“An evil person; a heretic? Who knows? Perhaps it was he who incited some people there to murder his señoria, the illustrious Don.”

I said almost contemptuously, “Surely the charge against me is most absurd? Everyone knows who I am.”

The old judge made a gentle, tired motion with his hand.

“Señor,” he said, “there is no charge against you — except that no one knows who you are. You were in a place where very lamentable and inexplicable things happened; you are now in Havana: you have no passport. I beg of you to remain calm. These things are all in order.”

I hadn’t any doubt that, as far as he knew, he was speaking the truth. He was a man, very evidently, of a weary and naïve simplicity. Perhaps it was really true — that I should only have to explain; perhaps it was all over.

O’Brien came into the room with the casual step of an official from an office entering another’s room.

It was as if seeing me were a thing that he very much disliked — that he came because he wanted to satisfy himself of my existence, of my identity, and my being alone. The slow stare that he gave me did not mitigate the leisureliness of his entry. He walked behind the table; the judge rose with immense deference; with his eternal smile, and no word spoken, he motioned the judge to resume the examination; he stood looking at the clerk’s notes meditatively, the smile still round lips that had a nervous

tremble, and eyes that had dark marks beneath them. He seemed as if he were still smiling just after having been violently shaken.

The judge went on examining the Lugareño.

“Do you know whence the señor came?”

“Excellency, Excellency....” The man stuttered, his eyes on O’Brien’s face.

“Nor how long he was in the town of Rio Medio?” the judge went on.

O’Brien suddenly drooped towards his ear. “All those things are known, señor, my colleague,” he said, and began to whisper.

The old judge showed signs of very naïve astonishment and joy.

“Is it possible?” he exclaimed. “This man? He is very young to have committed such crimes.”

The clerk hurriedly left the room. He returned with many papers. O’Brien, leaning over the judge’s shoulder, emphasized words with one finger. What new villainies could O’Brien be meditating? It wasn’t possibly the Lugareño’s suggestion that I had lured men to murder Don Balthasar? Was it merely that I had infringed some law in carrying off Seraphina?

The old judge said, “How lucky, Don Patricio! We may now satisfy the English admiral. What good fortune!”

He suddenly sat straight in his chair; O’Brien behind him scrutinized my face — to see how I should bear what was coming.

“What is your name?” the judge asked peremptorily.

I said, “Juan — John Kemp. I am of noble English family; I am well enough known. Ask the Señor O’Brien.”

On O’Brien’s shaken face the smile hardened.

“I heard that in Rio Medio the señor was called... was called...” He paused and appealed to the Lugareño.

“What was he called — the capataz the man who led the picaroons?”

The Lugareño stammered, “Nikola... Nikola el Escoces, Señor Don Patricio.”

“You hear?” O’Brien asked the judge. “This villager identifies the man.”

“Undoubtedly — undoubtedly,” the Juez said. “We need no more evidence.... You, Señor, have seen this villain in Rio Medio, this villager identifies him by name.”

I said, “This is absurd. A hundred witnesses can say that I am John Kemp....”

“That may be true,” the Juez said dryly, and then to his clerk:

“Write here, ‘John Kemp, of noble British family, called, on the scene of his crimes, Nikola el Escoces, otherwise El Demonio.’“

I shrugged my shoulders. I did not, at the moment, realize to what this all tended.

The judge said to the clerk, “Read the Act of Accusation. Read here....” He was pointing to a paragraph of the papers the clerk had brought in. They were the Act of Accusation, prepared long before, against the man Nichols.

This particular villainy suddenly became grotesquely and portentously plain. The clerk read an appalling catalogue of sordid crimes, working into each other like kneaded dough — the testimony of witnesses who had signed the record. Nikola had looted fourteen ships, and had apparently murdered twenty-two people with his own hand — two of them women — and there was the affair of Rowley’s boats. “The pinnacle,” the clerk read, “of the British came within ten yards. The said Nikola then exclaimed, ‘Curse the bloodthirsty hounds,’ and fired the grapeshot into the boat. Seven were killed by that discharge. This I saw with my own eyes.... Signed, Isidoro Alemanno.” And another swore, “The said Nikola was below, but he came running up, and with one blow of his knife severed the throat of the man who was kneeling on the deck....”

There was no doubt that Nikola had committed these crimes; that the witnesses had sworn to them and signed the deposition.... The old judge had evidently never seen him, and now O’Brien and the Lugareño had sworn that I was Nikola el Escoces, alias El Demonio.

My first impulse was to shout with rage; but I checked it because I knew I should be silenced. I said:

“I am not Nikola el Escoces. That I can easily prove.”

The Judge of the First Instance shrugged his shoulders and looked, with implicit trust, up into O’Brien’s face.

“That man,” I pointed at the Lugareño, “is a pirate. And, what is more, he is in the pay of the Señor Juez O’Brien. He was the lieutenant of a man called Manuel-del-Popolo, who commanded the Lugareños after Nikola left Rio Medio.”

“You know very much about the pirates,” the Juez said, with the sardonic air of a very stupid man. “Without doubt you were intimate with them. I sign now your order for committal to the carcel of the Marine Court.”

I said, “But I tell you I am not Nikola....”

The Juez said impassively, "You pass out of my hands into those of the Marine Court. I am satisfied that you are a person deserving of a trial. That is the limit of my responsibility."

I shouted then, "But I tell you this O'Brien is my personal enemy."

The old man smiled acidly.

"The señor need fear nothing of our courts. He will be handed over to his own countrymen. Without doubt of them he will obtain justice." He signed to the Lugareño to go, and rose, gathering up his papers; he bowed to O'Brien. "I leave the criminal at the disposal of your worship," he said, and went out with his clerk.

O'Brien sent out the two soldiers after him, and stood there alone. He had never been so near his death. But for sheer curiosity, for my sheer desire to know what he could say, I would have smashed in his brains with the clerk's stool. I was going to do it; I made one step towards the stool. Then I saw that he was crying.

"The curse — the curse of Cromwell on you," he sobbed suddenly. "You send me back to hell again." He writhed his whole body. "Sorrow!" he said, "I know it. But what's this? What's this?"

The many reasons he had for sorrow flashed on me like a procession of sombre images.

"Dead and done with a man can bear," he muttered. "But this — Not to know — perhaps alive — perhaps hidden — She may be dead...." With a change like a flash he was commanding me.

"Tell me how you escaped."

I had a vague inspiration of the truth.

"You aren't fit for a decent man's speaking to," I said.

"You let her drown."

It gave me suddenly the measure of his ignorance; he did not know anything — nothing. His hell was uncertainty. Well, let him stay there.

"Where is she?" he said. "Where is she?"

"Where she's no need to fear you," I answered.

He had a sudden convulsive gesture, as if searching for a weapon.

"If you'll tell me she's alive..." he began.

"Oh, I'm not dead," I answered.

"Never a drowned puppy was more," he said, with a flash of vivacity. "You hang here — for murder — or in England for piracy."

"Then I've little to want to live for," I sneered at him.

“You let her drown,” he said. “You took her from that house, a young girl, in a little boat. And you can hold up your head.”

“I was trying to save her from you,” I answered.

“By God,” he said. “These English — I’ve seen them, spit the child on the mother’s breast. I’ve seen them set fire to the thatch of the widow and childless. But this.... But this.... I can save you, I tell you.”

“You can’t make me go through worse than I’ve borne,” I answered. Sorrow and all he might wish on my head, my life was too precious to him till I spoke. I wasn’t going to speak.

“I’ll search every ship in the harbour,” he said passionately.

“Do,” I said. “Bring your Lugareños to the task.”

Upon the whole, I wasn’t much afraid. Unless he got definite evidence he couldn’t — in the face of the consul’s protests, and the presence of the admiral — touch the Lion again. He fixed his eyes intently upon me.

“You came in the American brigantine,” he said. “It’s known you landed in her boat.”

I didn’t answer him; it was plain enough that the drogher’s arrival had either not been reported to him, or it had been searched in vain.

“In her boat,” he repeated. “I tell you I know she is not dead; even you, an Englishman, must have a different face if she were.”

“I don’t at least ask you for life,” I said, “to enjoy with her.”

“She’s alive,” he said. “Alive! As for where, it matters little. I’ll search every inch of the island, every road, every hacienda. You don’t realize my power.”

“Then search the bottom of the sea,” I shouted.

“Let’s look at the matter in the right light.”

He had mastered his grief, his incertitude. He was himself again, and the smile had returned — as if at the moment he forced his features to their natural lines.

“Send one of your friars to heaven — you’ll never go there yourself to meet her.”

“If you will tell me she’s alive, I’ll save you.”

I made a mute, obstinate gesture.

“If she’s alive, and you don’t tell me, I can’t but find her. And I’ll make you know the agonies of suspense — a long way from here.”

I was silent.

“If she’s dead, and you’ll tell me, I’ll save you some trouble. If she’s dead and you don’t, you’ll have your own remorse and the rest, too.”

I said, “You’re too Irish mysterious for me to understand. But you’ve a choice of four evils for me — choose yourself.”

He continued with a quivering, taut good-humour: “Prove to me she’s dead, and I’ll let you die sharply and mercifully.”

“You won’t believe!” I said; but he took no notice.

“I tell you plainly,” he smiled. “If we find... if we find her dear body — and I can’t help; but I’ve men on the watch all along the shores — I’ll give you up to your admiral for a pirate. You’ll have a long slow agony of a trial; I know what English justice is. And a disgraceful felon’s death.”

I was thinking that, in any case, a day or so might be gained, the Lion would be gone; they could not touch her while the flagship remained outside. I certainly didn’t want to be given up to the admiral; I might explain the mistaken identity. But there was the charge of treason in Jamaica. I said:

“I only ask to be given up; but you daren’t do it for your own credit. I can show you up.”

He said, “Make no mistake! If he gets you, he’ll hang you. He’s going home in disgrace. Your whole blundering Government will work to hang you.”

“They know pretty well,” I answered, “that there are queer doings in Havana. I promise you, I’ll clear things up. I know too much....”

He said, with a sudden, intense note of passion, “Only tell me where her grave is, I’ll let you go free. You couldn’t, you dare not, dastard that you are, go away from where she died — without... without making sure.”

“Then search all the new graves in the island,” I said, “I’ll tell you nothing.... Nothing!”

He came at me again and again, but I never spoke after that. He made all the issues clearer and clearer — his own side involuntarily and all the griefs I had to expect. As for him, he dared not kill me — and he dared not give me up to the admiral. In his suspense, since, for him, I was the only person in the world who knew Seraphina’s fate, he dared not let me out of his grip. And all the while he had me he must keep the admiral there, waiting for the surrender either of myself or of some other poor devil whom he might palm off as Nikola el Escoces. While the admiral was there the Lion was pretty safe from molestation, and she would sail pretty soon.

At the same time, except for the momentary sheer joy of tormenting a man whom I couldn't help regarding as a devil, I had more than enough to fear. I had suffered too much; I wanted rest, woman's love, slackening off. And here was another endless coil — endless. If it didn't end in a knife in the back, he might keep me for ages in Havana; or he might get me sent to England, where it would take months, an endless time, to prove merely that I wasn't Nikola el Escoces. I should prove it; but, in the meantime, what would become of Sera-phina? Would she follow me to England? Would she even know that I had gone there? Or would she think me dead and die herself? O'Brien knew nothing; his spies might report a hundred uncertainties. He was standing rigidly still now, as if afraid to move for fear of breaking down. He said suddenly:

"You came in some ship; you can't deceive me, I shall have them all searched again."

I said desperately, "Search and be damned — whatever ships you like."

"You cold, pitiless, English scoundrel," he shrieked suddenly. The breaking down of his restraint had let him go right into madness. "You have murdered her. You cared nothing; you came from nowhere. A beggarly fool, too stupid to be even an adventurer. A miserable blunderer, coming in blind; coming out blind; and leaving ruin and worse than hell. What good have you done yourself? What could you? What did you see? What did you hope?... Sorrow? Ruin? Death? I am acquainted with them. It is in the blood; 'tis in the tone; in the entrails of us, in our mother's milk. Your accursed land has brought always that on our own dear and sorrowful country.... You waste, you ruin, you spoil. What for?... Tell me what for? Tell me? Tell me? What did you gain? What will you ever gain? An unending curse!... But, ah, ye've no souls."

He called very loudly, as if with a passionate relief, his voice giving life to an unsuspected, misgiving echo:

"Guards! Soldiers!... You shall be shot, now!"

He was going to cut the knot that way. Two soldiers pushed the door noisily open, their muskets advanced. He took no notice of them; and they retained an attitude of military stupidity, their eyes upon him. He whispered:

"No, no! Not yet!"

Then he looked at me searchingly, as if he still hoped to get some certainty from my face, some inkling, perhaps some inspiration of what

would persuade me to speak. Then he shook his wrists violently, as if in fear of himself.

“Take him away,” he said. “Away! Out of reach of my hands. Out of reach of my hands.”

I was trembling a good deal; when the soldiers entered I thought I had got to my last minute. But, as it was, he had not learnt a thing from me. Not a thing. And I did not see where else he could go for information.



## CHAPTER TWO

The entrance to the common prison of Havana was a sort of lofty tunnel, finished by great, iron-rusted, wooden gates. A civil guard was exhibiting the judge's warrant for my committal to a white-haired man, with a red face and blue eyes, that seemed to look through tumbled bushes of silver eyebrows — the alcaide of the prison. He bowed, and rattled two farcically large keys. A practicable postern was ajar on the yellow wood of the studded gates. It was as if it afforded a glimpse of the other side of the world. The venerable turnkey, a gnome in a steeple-crowned hat, protruded a blood-red hand backwards in the direction of the postern.

"Señor Caballero," he croaked, "I pray you to consider this house your own. My servants are yours."

Within was a gravel yard, shut in by portentous lead-white house-sides with black window holes. Under each row of windows was a vast vaulted tunnel, caged with iron bars, for all the world like beasts' dens. It being day, the beasts were out and lounging about the patio. They had an effect of infinite tranquillity, as if they were ladies and gentlemen parading in a Sunday avenue. Perhaps twenty of them, in snowy white shirts and black velvet knee-breeches, strutted like pigeons in a knot, some with one woman on the arm, some with two. Bundles of variegated rags lay against the walls, as if they were sweepings. Well, they were the sweepings of Havana jail. The men in white and black were the great thieves... and there were children, too — the place was the city orphanage. For the fifth part of a second my advent made no difference. Then, at the far end, one of the men in black and white separated himself, and came swiftly to me across the sunny patio. The others followed slowly, with pea-fowl steps, their women hanging to them and whispering. The bundles of rags rose up towards me; others slunk furtively out of the barred dens. The man who was approaching had the head of a Julius Cæsar of fifty, for all the world as if he had stolen a bust and endowed it with yellow skin and stubby gray and silver hair. He saluted me with intense gravity and an imperial glance of yellow eyes along a hooked nose. His linen was the most spotless brodered and embossed stuff; from the crimson scarf round his waist protruded the shagreen and silver handle of a long dagger. He said:

"Señor, I have the honour to salute you. I am Crisostomo Garcia. I ask the courtesy of your trousers."

I did not answer him. I did not see what he wanted with my trousers, which weren't anyway as valuable as his own. The others were closing in on me like a solid wall. I leant back against the gate; I was not frightened, but I was mightily excited. The man like Cæsar looked fiercely at me, swayed a long way back on his haunches, and imperiously motioned the crowd to recede.

"Señor Inglesito," he said, "the gift I have the honour to ask of you is the price of my protection. Without it these, my brothers, will tear you limb from limb, there will nothing of you remain."

His brothers set up a stealthy, sinister growl, that went round among the heads like the mutter of an obscene echo among the mountain-tops. I wondered whether this, perhaps, was the man who, O'Brien said, would put a knife in my back. I hadn't any knife; I might knock the fellow's teeth down his throat, though.

The alcayde thrust his immense hat, blood-red face, and long, ragged, silver locks out of the little door. His features were convulsed with indignation. He had been whispering with the Civil Guard.

"Are you mad, gentlemen?" he said. "Do you wish to visit hell before your times? Do you know who the senor is? Did you ever hear of Carlos el Demonio? This is the Inglesito of Rio Medio!"

It was plain that my deeds, such as they were, reported by O'Brien spies, by the Lugareños, by all sorts of credulous gossipers, had got me the devil of a reputation in the patio of the jail. Men detached themselves from the crowd, and went running about to announce my arrival. The alcayde drew his long body into the patio, and turned to lock the little door with an immense key. In the crowd all sorts of little movements happened. Women crossed themselves, and furtively thrust pairs of crooked, skinny, brown, black-nailed fingers in my direction. The man like Cæsar said:

"I ask your pardon, Señor Caballero. I did not know. How could I tell? You are free of all the patios in this land."

The tall alcayde finished grinding the immense key in the lock, and touched me on the arm.

"If the senor will follow me," he said. "I will do the honours of this humble mansion, and indicate a choice of rooms where he may be free from the visits of these gentry."

We went up steps, and through long, shadowy corridors, with here and there a dark, lounging figure, like a stag seen in the dim aisles of a wood.

The alcayde threw open a door.

The room was like a blazing oblong-box, filled with light, but without window or chimney. Two men were fencing in the illumination of some twenty candles stuck all round the mildewed white walls on lumps of clay. There was a blaze of silver things, like an altar of a wealthy church, from a black, carved table in the far corner. The two men, in shirts and breeches, revolved round each other, their rapiers clinking, their left arms scarved, holding buttoned daggers. The alcayde proclaimed:

“Don Vincente Salazar, I have the honour to announce an English senor.”

The man with his face to me tossed his rapier impatiently into a corner. He was a plump, dark Cuban, with a brooding truculence. The other faced round quickly. His cheeks shone in the candle-light like polished yellow leather, his eyes were narrow slits, his face lugubrious. He scrutinized me intently, then drawled:

“My! You?... Hang me if I didn’t think it would be you!”

He had the air of surveying a monstrosity, and pulled the neck of his dirty print shirt open, panting. He slouched out into the corridor, and began whispering eagerly to the alcayde. The little Cuban glowered at me; I said I had the honour to salute him.

He muttered something contemptuous between his teeth. Well, if he didn’t want to talk to me, I didn’t want to talk to him. It had struck me that the tall, sallow man was undoubtedly the second mate of the Thames. Nicholas, the real Nikola el Escoces! The Cuban grumbled suddenly:

“You, Señor, are without doubt one of the spies of that friend of the priests, that O’Brien. Tell him to beware — that I bid him beware. I, Don Vincente Salazar de Valdepeñas y Forli y...”

I remembered the name; he was once the suitor of Seraphina — the man O’Brien had put out of the way. He continued with a grotesque frown of portentous significance:

“To-morrow I leave this place. And your compatriot is very much afraid, Señor. Let him fear! Let him fear! But a thousand spies should not save him.”

The tall alcayde came hurriedly back and stood bowing between us. He apologized abjectly to the Cuban for intruding me upon him. But the room was the best in the place at the disposal of the prisoners of the Juez O’Brien. And I was a noted caballero. Heaven knows what I had not done in Rio Medio. Burnt, slain, ravished.... The Señor Juez was understood to be

much incensed against me. The gloomy Cuban at once rushed upon me, as if he would have taken me into his arms.

“The Inglesito of Rio Medio!” he said. “Ha, ha! Much have I heard of you. Much of the señor’s valiance! Many tales! That foul eater of the carrion of the priests wishes your life! Ah, but let him beware! I shall save you, Señor — I, Don Vincente Salazar.”

He presented me with the room — a remarkably bare place but for his properties: silver branch candlesticks, a silver chafing-dish as large as a basin. They might have been chased by Cellini — one used to find things like that in Cuba in those days, and Salazar was the person to have them. Afterwards, at the time of the first insurrection, his eight-mule harness was sold for four thousand pounds in Paris — by reason of the gold and pearls upon it. The atmosphere, he explained, was fetid, but his man was coming to burn sandal-wood and beat the air with fans.

“And to-morrow!” he said, his eyes rolling. Suddenly he stopped. “Señor,” he said, “is it true that my venerated friend, my more than father, has been murdered — at the instigation of that fiend? Is it true that the senorita has disappeared? These tales are told.”

I said it was very true.

“They shall be avenged,” he declared, “to-morrow! I shall seek out the senorita. I shall find her. I shall find her! For me she was destined by my venerable friend.”

He snatched a black velvet jacket from the table and put it on.

“Afterwards, Señor, you shall relate. Have no fear. I shall save you. I shall save all men oppressed by this scourge of the land. For the moment afford me the opportunity to meditate.” He crossed his arms, and dropped his round head. “Alas, yes!” he meditated.

Suddenly he waved towards the door. “Señor,” he said swiftly, “I must have air; I stifle. Come with me to the corridor...”

He went towards the window giving on to the patio; he stood in the shadow, his arms folded, his head hanging dejectedly. At the moment it grew suddenly dark, as if a veil had been thrown over a lamp. The sun had set outside the walls. A drum began to beat. Down below in the obscurity the crowd separated into three strings and moved slowly towards the barren tunnels. Under our feet the white shirts disappeared; the ragged crowd gravitated to the left; the small children strung into the square cage-door. The drum beat again and the crowd hurried. Then there was a clang of

closing grilles and lights began to show behind the bars from deep recesses. In a little time there was a repulsive hash of heads and limbs to be seen under the arches vanishing a long way within, and a little light washed across the gravel of the patio from within.

“Señor,” the Cuban said suddenly, “I will pronounce his panegyric. He was a man of a great gentleness, of an inevitable nobility, of an invariable courtesy. Where, in this degenerate age, shall we find the like!” He stopped to breathe a sound of intense exasperation.

“When I think of these Irish,...” he said. “Of that O’Brien....” A servant was arranging the shining room that we had left. Salazar interrupted himself to give some orders about a banquet, then returned to me. “I tell you I am here for introducing my knife to the spine of some sort of Madrid embustero, a man who was insolent to my amiga Clara. Do you believe that for that this O’Brien, by the influence of the priests whose soles he licks with his tongue, has had me inclosed for many months? Because he feared me! Aha! I was about to expose him to the noble don who is now dead! I was about to wed the Señorita who has disappeared. But to-morrow... I shall expose his intrigue to the Captain-General. You, Señor, shall be my witness! I extend my protection to you....” He crossed his arms and spoke with much deliberation. “Señor, this Irishman incommodes me, Don Vincente Salazar de Valdepeñas y Forli....” He nodded his head expressively. “Señor, we offered these Irish the shelter of our robe for that your Government was making martyrs of them who were good Christians, and it behoves us to act in despite of your Government, who are heretics and not to be tolerated upon God’s Christian earth. But, Señor, if they incommoded your Government as they do us, I do not wonder that there was a desire to remove them. Señor, the life of that man is not worth the price of eight mules, which is the price I have paid for my release. I might walk free at this moment, but it is not fitting that I should slink away under cover of darkness. I shall go out in the daylight with my carriage. And I will have an offering to show my friends who, like me, are incommoded by this....” The man was a monomaniac; but it struck me that, if I had been O’Brien, I should have felt uncomfortable.

In the dark of the corridor a long shape appeared, lounging. The Cuban beside me started hospitably forward.

“Vamos,” he said briskly; “to the banquet....” He waved his hand towards the shining door and stood aside. We entered.

The other man was undoubtedly the Nova Scotian mate of the Thames, the man who had dissuaded me from following Carlos on the day we sailed into Kingston Harbour. He was chewing a toothpick, and at the ruminant motion of his knife-jaws I seemed to see him, sitting naked to the waist in his bunk, instead of upright there in red trousers and a blue shirt — an immense lank-length of each. I pieced his history together in a sort of flash. He was the true Nikola el Escoces; his name was Nichols, and he came from Nova Scotia. He had been the chief of O'Brien's Lugareños. He surveyed me now with a twinkle in his eyes, his yellow jaws as shiny-shaven as of old; his arms as much like a semaphore. He said mockingly:

"So you went there, after all?"

But the Cuban was pressing us towards his banquet; there was gaspacho in silver plates, and a man in livery holding something in a napkin. It worried me. We surveyed each other in silence. I wondered what Nichols knew; what it would be safe to tell him; how much he could help me? One or other of these men undoubtedly might. The Cuban was an imbecile; but he might have some influence — and if he really were going out on the morrow, and really did go to the Captain-General, he certainly could further his own revenge on O'Brien by helping me.... But as for Nichols....

Salazar began to tell a long, exaggerated story about his cook, whom he had imported from Paris.

"Think," he said; "I bring the fool two thousand miles — and then — not even able to begin on a land-crab. A fool!"

The Nova Scotian cast an uninterested side glance at him, and said in English, which Salazar did not understand:

"So you went there, after all? And now he's got you." I did not answer him. "I know all about you," he added.

"It's more than I do about you," I said.

He rose and suddenly jerked the door open, peered on each side of the corridor, and then sat down again.

"I'm not afraid to tell," he said defiantly. "I'm not afraid of anything. I'm safe."

The Cuban said to me in Spanish: "This senor is my friend. Everyone who hates that devil is my friend."

"I'm safe," Nichols repeated. "I know too much about our friend the raparee." He lowered his voice. "They say you're to be given up for piracy,

eh?” His eyes had an extraordinarily anxious leer. “You are now, eh? For how much? Can’t you tell a man? We’re in the same boat! I kin help you!”

Salazar accidentally knocked a silver goblet off the table and, at the sound, Nichols sprang half off his chair. He glared in a wild stare around him then grasped at a flagon of aguardiente and drank.

“I’m not afraid of any damn thing” he said. “I’ve got a hold on that man. He dursen’t give me up. I kin see! He’s going to give you up and say you’re responsible for it all.”

“I don’t know what he’s going to do,” I answered.

“Will you not, Señor,” Salazar said suddenly, “relate, if you can without distress, the heroic death of that venerated man?”

I glanced involuntarily at Nichols. “The distress,” I said, “would be very great. I was Don Balthasar’s kinsman. The Señor O’Brien had a great fear of my influence in the Casa. It was in trying to take me away that Don Balthasar, who defended me, was slain by the Lugareños of O’Brien.”

Salazar said, “Aha! Aha! We are kindred spirits. Hated and loved by the same souls. This fiend, Señor. And then....”

“I escaped by sea — in an open boat, in the confusion. When I reached Havana, the Juez had me arrested.”

Salazar raised both hands; his gestures, made for large, grave men, were comic in him. They reduced Spanish manners to absurdity. He said:

“That man dies. That man dies. To-morrow I go to the Captain-General. He shall hear this story of yours, Señor. He shall know of these machinations which bring honest men to this place. We are a band of brothers....”

“That’s what I say.” Nichols leered at me. “We’re all in the same boat.”

I expect he noticed that I wasn’t moved by his declaration. He said, still in English:

“Let us be open. Let’s have a council of war. This O’Brien hates me because I wouldn’t fire on my own countrymen.” He glanced furtively at me. “I wouldn’t,” he asserted; “he wanted me to fire into their boats; but I wouldn’t. Don’t you believe the tales they tell about me! They tell worse about you. Who says I would fire on my countrymen? Where’s the man who says it?” He had been drinking more brandy and glared ferociously at me. “None of your tricks, my hearty,” he said. “None of your getting out and spreading tales. O’Brien’s my friend; he’ll never give me up. He dursen’t. I know too much. You’re a pirate! No doubt it was you who fired

into them boats. By God I'll be witness against you if they give me up. I'll show you up."

All the while the little Cuban talked swiftly and with a saturnine enthusiasm. He passed the wine rapidly.

"My own countrymen!" Nichols shouted. "Never! I shot a Yankee lieutenant — Allen he was — with my own hand. That's another thing. I'm not a man to trifle with. No, sir. Don't you try it.... Why, I've papers that would hang O'Brien. I sent them home to Halifax. I know a trick worth his. By God, let him try it! Let him only try it. He dursen't give me up...."

The man in livery came in to snuff the candles. Nichols sprang from his seat in a panic and drew his knife with frantic haste. He continued, glaring at me from the wall, the knife in his hand:

"Don't you dream of tricks. I've cut more throats than you've kissed gals in your little life."

Salazar himself drew an immense pointed knife with a shagreen hilt. He kissed it rapturously.

"Aha!... Aha!" he said, "bear this kiss into his ribs at the back." His eyes glistened with this mania. "I swear it; when I next see this dog; this friend of the priests." He threw the knife on the table. "Look," he said, "was ever steel truer or more thirsty?"

"Don't you make no mistake," Nichols continued to me. "Don't you think to presume. O'Brien's my friend. I'm here snug and out of the way of the old fool of an admiral. That's why he's kept waiting off the Morro. When he goes, I walk out free. Don't you try to frighten me. I'm not a man to be frightened."

Salazar bubbled: "Ah, but now the wine flows and is red. We are a band of brothers, each loving the other. Brothers, let us drink."

The air of close confinement, the blaze, the feel of the jail, pressed upon me, and I felt sore, suddenly, at having eaten and drunk with those two. The idea of Seraphina, asleep perhaps, crying perhaps, something pure and distant and very blissful, came in upon me irresistibly.

The little Cuban said, "We have had a very delightful conversation. It is very plain this O'Brien must die."

I rose to my feet. "Gentlemen," I said in Spanish, "I am very weary; I will go and sleep in the corridor."

The Cuban sprang towards me with an immense anxiety of hospitableness. I was to sleep on his couch, the couch of cloth of gold. It



was impossible, it was insulting, that I should think of sleeping in the corridor. He thrust me gently down upon it, making with his plump hands the motions of smoothing it to receive me. I lay down and turned my face to the wall.

It wasn't possible to sleep, even though the little Cuban, with a tender solicitude, went round the walls blowing out the candles. He might be useful to me, might really explain matters to the Captain-General, or might even, as a last resource, take a letter from me to the British Consul. But I should have to be alone with him. Nichols was an abominable scoundrel; bloodthirsty to the defenceless; a liar; craven before the ghost of a threat. No doubt O'Brien did not want to give him up. Perhaps he had papers. And no doubt, once he could find a trace of Seraphina's whereabouts, O'Brien would give me up. All I could do was to hope for a gain of time. And yet, if I gained time, it could only mean that I should in the end be given up to the admiral.

And Seraphina's whereabouts. It came over me lamentably that I myself did not know. The Lion might have sailed. It was possible. She might be at sea. Then, perhaps, my only chance of ever seeing her again lay in my being given up to the admiral, to stand in England a trial, perhaps for piracy, perhaps for treason. I might meet her only in England, after many years of imprisonment. It wasn't possible. I would not believe in the possibility. How I loved her! How wildly, how irrationally — this woman of another race, of another world, bound to me by sufferings together, by joys together. Irrationally! Looking at the matter now, the reason is plain enough. Before then I had not lived. I had only waited — for her and for what she stood for. It was in my blood, in my race, in my tradition, in my training. We, all of us for generations, had made for efficiency, for drill, for restraint. Our Romance was just this very Spanish contrast, this obliquity of vision, this slight tilt of the convex mirror that shaped the same world so differently to onlookers at different points of its circle.

I could feel a little of it even then, when there was only the merest chance of my going back to England and getting back towards our old position on the rim of the mirror. The deviousness, the wayward passion, even the sempiternal abuses of the land were already beginning to take the aspect of something like quaint impotence. It was charm that, now I was on the road away, was becoming apparent. The inconveniences of life, the physical discomforts, the smells of streets, the heat, dropped into the background. I

felt that I did not want to go away, irrevocably from a land sanctioned by her presence, her young life. I turned uneasily to the other side. At the heavy black table, in the light of a single candle, the Cuban and the Nova Scotian were discussing, their heads close together.

"I tell you no," Nichols was saying in a fluent, abominable, literal translation into Spanish. "Take the knife so... thumb upwards. Stab down in the soft between the neck and the shoulder-blade. You get right into the lungs with the point. I've tried it: ten times. Never stick the back. The chances are he moves, and you hit a bone. There are no bones there. It's the way they kill pigs in New Jersey."

The Cuban bent his brows as if he were reflecting over a chessboard. "Ma..." he pondered. His knife was lying on the table. He unsheathed it, then got up, and moved behind the seated Nova Scotian.

"You say... there?" he asked, pressing his little finger at the base of Nichols' skinny column of a neck. "And then..." He measured the length of the knife on Nichols's back twice with elaborate care, breathing through his nostrils. Then he said with a convinced, musing air, "It is true. It would go down into the lungs."

"And there are arteries and things," Nichols said.

"Yes, yes," the Cuban answered, sheathing the knife and thrusting it into his belt.

"With a knife that length it's perfect." Nichols waved his shadowy hand towards Salazar's scarf. Salazar moved off a little.

"I see the advantages," he said. "No crying out, because of the blood in the lungs. I thank you Señor Escoces."

Nichols rose, lurching to his full height, and looked in my direction. I closed my eyes. I did not wish him to talk to me. I heard him say:

"Well, hasta mas ver. I shall get away from here. Good-night."

He swayed an immense shadow through the door. Salazar took the candle and followed him into the corridor.

Yes, that was it, why she was so great a part, a whole wall, a whole beam of my life's house. I saw her suddenly in the blackness, her full red lips, her quivering nostrils, the curve of her breasts, her lithe movements from the hips, the way she set her feet down, the white flower waxen in the darkness of her hair, and the robin-wing flutter of her lids over her gray eyes when she smiled. I moved convulsively in my intense desire. I would have given my soul, my share of eternity, my honour, only to see that flutter of the lids

over the shining gray eyes. I never felt I was beneath the imponderable pressure of a prison's wall till then. She was infinite miles away; I could not even imagine what inanimate things surrounded her. She must be talking to someone else; fluttering her lids like that. I recognized with a physical agony that was more than jealousy how slight was my hold upon her. It was not in her race, in her blood as in mine, to love me and my type. She had lived all her life in the middle of Romance, and the very fire and passion of her South must make me dim prose to her. I remember the flicker of Salazar's returning candle, cast in lines like an advancing scythe across the two walls from the corridor. I slept.

I had the feeling of appalled horror suddenly invading my sleep; a vast voice seemed to be exclaiming:

"Tell me where she is!"

I looked at the glowing horn of a lantern. It was O'Brien who held it. He stood over me, very sombre.

"Tell me where she is," he said, the moment my eyes opened.

I said, "She's... she's — — — I don't know."

It appalls me even now to think how narrow was my escape. It was only because I had gone to sleep in the thought that I did not know, that I answered that I did not know. Ah — he was a cunning devil! To suddenly wake one; to get one's thoughts before one had had time to think! I lay looking at him, shivering. I couldn't even see much of his face.

"Where is she?" he said again. "Where? Dead? Dead? God have mercy on your soul if the child is dead!"

I was still trembling. If I had told him! — I could hardly believe I had not. He continued bending over me with an attitude that hideously mocked solicitude.

"Where is she?" he asked again.

"Ransack the island," I said. He glared at me, lifting the lamp. "The whole earth, if you like."

He ground his teeth, bending very low over me; then stood up, raising his head into the shadow above the lamp.

"What do I care for all the admirals?" he was speaking to himself. "No ship shall leave Havana till...." He groaned. I heard him slap his forehead, and say distractedly, "But perhaps she is not in a ship."

There was a silence in which I heard him breathe heavily, and then he amazed me by saying:

“Have pity.”

I laughed, lying on my back. “On you!”

He bent down. “Fool! on yourself.”

A vast and towering shadow ran along the wall.

There wasn't a sound. The face of Salazar appeared behind him, and an uplifted hand grasping a knife. O'Brien saw the horror in my eyes. I gasped to him: “Look...” and before he could move the knife went softly home between neck and shoulder. Salazar glided to the door and turned to wave his hand at me. O'Brien's lips were pressed tightly together, the handle of the knife was against his ear, the lanthorn hung at the end of his rigid arm for a moment. As he lowered it, the blood spurted from his shoulder as if from a burst stand-pipe, only black and warm. It fell over my face, over my hands, everywhere. For a minute of eternity his agonized eyes searched my features, as if to discern whether I had connived, whether I condoned.

I had started up, my face coming right against his. I felt an immense horror. What did it mean? What had he done? He had been such a power for so long, so inevitably, over my whole life that I could not even begin to understand that this was not some new subtle villainy of his. He shook his head slowly, his ear disturbing the knife.

Then he turned jerkily on his heel, the lanthorn swinging round and leaving me in his shadow. There were ten paces to reach the door. It was like the finish of a race whether he would cover the remaining seven after the first three steps. The dangling lanthorn shed small patches of light through the holes in the metal top, like sunlight through leaves, upon the gloom of the remote ceiling. At the fifth step he pressed his hand spasmodically to his mouth; at the sixth he wavered to one side. I made a sudden motion as if to save him from falling. He was dying! He was dying! I hardly realized what it meant. This immense weight was being removed from me. I had no need to fear him any more. I couldn't understand, I could only look. This was his passing. This....

He sank, knelt down, placing the lanthorn on the floor. He covered his face with his hands and began to cough incessantly, like a man dying of consumption. The glowing top of the lanthorn hissed and sputtered out in little sharp blows, like hammer strokes... Carlos had coughed like that. Carlos was dead. Now O'Brien! He was going. I should escape. It was all over. Was it all over? He bowed stiffly forward, placing his hands on the

stones, then lay over on his side with his face to the light, his eyes glaring at it. I sat motionless, watching him. The lanthorn lit the carved leg of the black table and a dusty circle of the flags. The spurts of blood from his shoulder grew less long in answer to the pulsing of his heart; his fists unclenched, he drew his legs up to his body, then sank down. His eyes looked suddenly at mine and, as the features slowly relaxed, the smile seemed to come back, enigmatic, round his mouth.

He was dead; he was gone; I was free! He would never know where she was; never! He had gone, with the question on his lips; with the agony of uncertainty in his eyes. From the door came an immense, grotesque, and horrible chuckle.

“Aha!-Aha! I have saved you, Señor, I have protected you. We are as brothers.”

Against the tenuous blue light of the dawn Salazar was gesticulating in the doorway. I felt a sudden repulsion; a feeling of intense disgust. O’Brien lying there, I almost wished alive again — I wanted to have him again, rather than that I should have been relieved of him by that atrocious murder. I sat looking at both of them.

Saved! By that lunatic? I suddenly appreciated the agony of mind that alone could have brought O’Brien, the cautious, the all-seeing, into this place — . to ask me a question that for him was answered now. Answered for him more than for me.

Where was Seraphina? Where? How should I come to her? O’Brien was dead. And I.... Could I walk out of this place and go to her? O’Brien was dead. But I...

I suddenly realized that now I was the pirate Nikola el Escoces — that now he was no more there, nothing could save me from being handed over to the admiral. Nothing.

Salazar outside the door began to call boastfully towards the sound of approaching footsteps.’

“Aha! Aha! Come all of you! See what I have done! Come, Señor Alcayde! Come, brave soldiers...”

In that way died this man whose passion had for so long hung over my life like a shadow. Looking at the matter now, I am, perhaps, glad that he fell neither by my hand nor in my quarrel. I assuredly had injured him the first; I had come upon his ground; I had thwarted him; I had been a heavy

weight at a time when his fortunes had been failing. Failing they undoubtedly were. He had run his course too far.

And, if his death removed him out of my path, the legacy of his intrigue caused me suffering enough. Had he lived, there is no knowing what he might have done. He was bound to deliver someone to the British — either myself or Nichols. Perhaps, at the last moment, he would have kept me in Havana. There is no saying.

Undoubtedly he had not wished to deliver Nichols; either because he really knew too much or because he had scruples. Nichols had certainly been faithful to him. And, with his fine irony, it was delightful to him to think that I should die a felon's death in England. For those reasons he had identified me with Nikola el Escoces, intending to give up whichever suited him at the last moment.

Now that was settled for him and for me. The delivery was to take place at dawn, and O'Brien not to be found, the old Judge of the First Instance had been sent to identify the prisoner. He selected me, whom, of course, he recognized. There was no question of Nichols, who had been imprisoned on a charge of theft trumped up by O'Brien.

Salazar, whether he would have gone to the Captain-General or not, was now entirely useless. He was retained to answer the charge of murder. And to any protestations I could make, the old Juez was entirely deaf.

"The senor must make representations to his own authorities," he said. "I have warrant for what I have done."

It was impossible to expose O'Brien to him. The soldiers of the escort, in the dawn before the prison gates, simply laughed at me.

They marched me down through the gray mists, to the water's edge. Two soldiers held my arms; O'Brien's blood was drying on my face and on my clothes. I was, even to myself, a miserable object. Among the *négresses* on the slimy boat-steps a thick, short man was asking questions. He opened amazed eyes at the sight of me. It was Williams — the Lion was not yet gone then. If he spoke to me, or gave token of connection with Seraphina, the Spaniards would understand. They would take her from him certainly; perhaps immure her in a convent. And now that I was bound irrevocably for England, she must go, too. He was shouldering his way towards my guards.

"Silence!" I shouted, without looking at him. "Go away, make sail.... Tell Sebright...."

My guards seemed to think I had gone mad; they laid hands upon me. I didn't struggle, and we passed down towards the landing steps, brushing Williams aside. He stood perturbedly gazing after me; then I saw him asking questions of a civil guard. A man-of-war's boat, the ensign trailing in the glassy water, the glazed hats of the seamen bobbing like clockwork, was flying towards us. Here was England! Here was home! I should have to clear myself of felony, to strain every nerve and cheat the gallows. If only Williams understood, if only he did not make a fool of himself. I couldn't see him any more; a jabbering crowd all round us was being kept at a distance by the muskets of the soldiers. My only chance was Sebright's intelligence. He might prevent Williams making a fool of himself. The commander of the guard said to the lieutenant from the flagship, who had landed, attended by the master-at-arms:

"I have the honour to deliver to your worship's custody the prisoner promised to his excellency the English admiral. Here are the papers disclosing his crimes to the justice. I beg for a receipt."

A shabby escrivano from the prison advanced bowing, with an inkhorn, shaking a wet goose-quill. A guardia civil offered his back. The lieutenant signed a paper hastily, then looking hard at me, gave the order:

"Master-at-arms, handcuff one of the prisoner's hands to your own wrist. He is a desperate character."

## CHAPTER THREE

The first decent word I had spoken to me after that for months came from my turnkey at Newgate. It was when he welcomed me back from my examination before the Thames Court magistrate. The magistrate, a bad-tempered man, snuffy, with red eyes, and the air of being a piece of worn and dirty furniture of his court, had snapped at me when I tried to speak:

“Keep your lies for the Admiralty Session. I’ve only time to commit you. Damn your Spaniards; why can’t they translate their own papers;” had signed something with a squeaky quill, tossed it to his clerk, and grunted, “Next case.”

I had gone back to Newgate.

The turnkey, a man with the air of an innkeeper, bandy-legged, with a bulbous, purple-veined nose and watering eyes, slipped out of the gatehouse door, whilst the great, hollow-sounding gate still shook behind me. He said:

“If you hurries up you’ll see a bit of life.... Do you good. Condemned sermon. Being preached in the chapel now; sheriffs and all. They swing tomorrow — three of them. Quick with the stumps.”

He hurried me over the desolate mossy-green cobbles of the great solitary yard into a square, tall, bare, whitewashed place. Already from the outside one caught a droning voice. There might have been three hundred people there, boxed off in pews, with turnkeys at each end. A vast king’s arms, a splash of red and blue gilt, sprawled above a two-tiered pulpit that was like the trunk of a large broken tree. The turnkey pulled my hat off, and nudged me into a box beside the door.

“Kneel down,” he whispered hoarsely.

I knelt. A man with a new wig was droning out words, waving his hands now and then from the top of the tall pulpit. Beneath him a smaller man in an old wig was dozing, his head bent forward. The place was dirty, and ill-lighted by the tall, grimy windows, heavily barred. A pair of candles flickered beside the preacher’s right arm....

“They that go down to the sea in ships, my poor brethren,” he droned, “lying under the shadow...”

He directed his hands towards a tall deal box painted black, isolated in the centre of the lower floor. A man with a red head sat in it, his arms folded; another had his arms covering his head, which leant abjectly forward on the rail in front. There were large rusty gyves upon his wrists.



“But observe, my poor friends,” the chaplain droned on, “the psalmist saith, ‘At the last He shall bring them unto the desired haven.’ Now...”

The turnkey whispered suddenly into my ear: “Them’s the condemned he’s preaching at, them in the black pew. See Roguey Cullen wink at the woman prisoners up there in the gallery.... Him with the red hair.... All swings to-morrow.”

“After they have staggered and reeled to and fro, and been amazed... observe. After they have been tempted; even after they have fallen....”

The sheriffs had their eyes decorously closed. The clerk reached up from below the preacher, and snuffed one of the candles. The preacher paused to rearrange his shining wig. Little clouds of powder flew out where he touched it. He struck his purple velvet cushion, and continued:

“At the last, I say, He shall bring them to the haven they had desired.”

A jarring shriek rose out of the black pew, and an insensate jangling of irons rattled against the hollow wood. The ironed man, whose head had been hidden, was writhing in an epileptic fit. The governor began signalling to the jailers, and the whole dismal assembly rose to its feet, and craned to get a sight. The jailers began hurrying them out of the building. The redheaded man was crouching in the far corner of the black box.

The turnkey caught the end of my sleeve, and hurried me out of the door.

“Come away,” he said. “Come out of it.... Damn my good nature.”

We went swiftly through the tall, gloomy, echoing stone passages. All the time there was the noise of the prisoners being marshalled somewhere into their distant yards and cells. We went across the bottom of a well, where the weeping December light struck ghastly down on to the stones, into a sort of rabbit-warren of black passages and descending staircases, a horror of cold, solitude, and night. Iron door after iron door clanged to behind us in the stony blackness. After an interminable traversing, the turnkey, still with his hand on my sleeve, jerked me into my familiar cell. I hadn’t thought to be glad to get back to that dim, frozen, damp-chilled little hole; with its hateful stone walls, stone ceiling, stone floor, stone bed-slab, and stone table; its rope mat, foul stable-blanket, its horrible sense of eternal burial, out of sound, out of sight under a mined mountain of black stones. It was so tiny that the turnkey, entering after me, seemed to be pressed close up to my chest, and so dark that I could not see the colour of the dirty hair that fell matted from the bald patch on the top of his skull; so familiar that I knew

the feel of every little worming of rust on the iron candlestick. He wiped his face with a brown rag of handkerchief, and said:

“Curse me if ever I go into that place again.” After a time he added: “Unless ‘tis a matter of duty.”

I didn’t say anything; my nerves were still jangling to that shrieking, and to the clang of the iron doors that had closed behind me. I had an irresistible impulse to get hold of the iron candlestick and smash it home through the skull of the turnkey — as I had done to the men who had killed Seraphina’s father... to kill this man, then to creep along the black passages and murder man after man beside those iron doors until I got to the open air.

He began again. “You’d think we’d get used to it — you’d think we would — but ‘tis a strain for us. You never knows what the prisoners will do at a scene like that there. It drives ‘em mad. Look at this scar. Machell the forger done that for me, ‘fore he was condemned, after a sermon like that — a quiet, gentlemanly man, much like you. Lord, yes, ‘tis a strain....” He paused, still wiping his face, then went on: “And I swear that when I sees them men sit there in that black pew, an’ hev heard the hammers going clack, clack on the scaffolding outside, and knew that they hadn’t no more chance than you have to get out of there...” He pointed his short thumb towards the handkerchief of an opening, where the little blurr of blue light wavered through the two iron frames crossed in the nine feet of well. “Lord, you never gets used to it. You wants them to escape; ‘tis in the air through the whole prison, even the debtors. I tells myself again and again, ‘You’re a fool for your pains.’ But it’s the same with the others — my mates. You can’t get it out of your mind. That little kid now. I’ve seen children swing; but that little kid — as sure to swing as what... as what you are....”

“You think I am going to swing?” I asked.

I didn’t want to kill him any more; I wanted too much to hear him talk. I hadn’t heard anything for months and months of solitude, of darkness — on board the admiral’s ship, stranded in the guardship at Plymouth, bumping round the coast, and now here in Newgate. And it had been darkness all the time. Jove! That Cuban time, with its movements, its pettiness, its intrigue, its warmth, even its villainies showed plainly enough in the chill of that blackness. It had been romance, that life.

Little, and far away, and irrevocably done with, it showed all golden. There wasn’t any romance where I lay then; and there had been irons on my wrists; gruff hatred, the darkness, and always despair.

On board the flagship coming home I had been chained down in the cable-tier — a place where I could feel every straining of the great ship. Once these had risen to a pandemonium, a frightful tumult. There was a great gale outside. A sailor came down with a lanthorn, and tossed my biscuit to me.

“You d — — — d pirate,” he said, “maybe it’s you saving us from drowning.”

“Is the gale very bad?” I had called.

He muttered — and the fact that he spoke to me at all showed how great the strain of the weather must have been to wring any words out of him:

“Bad — there’s a large Indiaman gone. We saw her one minute and then...” He went away, muttering.

And suddenly the thought had come to me. What if the Indiaman were the Lion — the Lion with Seraphina on board? The man would not speak to me when he came again. No one would speak to me; I was a pirate who had fired on his own countrymen. And the thought had pursued me right into Newgate — if she were dead; if I had taken her from that security, from that peace, to end there.... And to end myself.

“Swing!” the turnkey said; “you’ll swing right enough.” He slapped the great key on his flabby hand. “You can tell that by the signs. You, being an Admiralty case, ought to have been in the Marshalsea. And you’re ordered solitary cell, and I’m tipped the straight wink against your speaking a blessed word to a blessed soul. Why don’t they let you see an attorney? Why? Because they mean you to swing.”

I said, “Never mind that. Have you heard of a ship called the Lion? Can you find out about her?”

He shook his head cunningly, and did not answer. If the Lion had been here, I must have heard. They couldn’t have left me here.

I said, “For God’s sake find out. Get me a shipping gazette.”

He affected not to hear.

“There’s money in plenty,” I said.

He winked ponderously and began again. “Oh, you’ll swing all right. A man with nothing against him has a chance; with the rhino he has it, even if he’s guilty. But you’ll swing. Charlie, who brought you back just now, had a chat with the ‘Torney-General’s devil’s clerk’s clerk, while old Nog o’ Bow Street was trying to read their Spanish. He says it’s a Gov’nment matter. They wants to hang you bad, they do, so’s to go to the Jacky Spaniards and

say, 'He were a nob, a nobby nob.' (So you are, aren't you? One uncle an earl and t'other a dean, if so be what they say's true.) 'He were a nobby nob and we swung 'im. Go you'n do likewise.' They want a striking example t' keep the West India trade quiet..." He wiped his forehead and moved my water jug of red earth on the dirty deal table under the window, for all the world like a host in front of a guest. "They means you to swing," he said. "They've silenced the Thames Court reporters. Not a noospaper will publish a correct report t'morrer. And you haven't see nobody, nor you won't, not if I can help it."

He broke off and looked at me with an expression of candour.

"Mind you," he said, "I'm not uffish. To 'n ornery gentleman — of the road or what you will — I'm not, if so be he's the necessary. I'd take a letter like another. But for you, no — fear. Not that I've my knife into you. What I can do to make you comfor'ble I will do, both now an' hereafter. But when I gets the wink, I looks after my skin. So'd any man. You don't see nobody, nor you won't; nor your nobby relations won't have the word. Till the Hadmir'lty trile. Charlie says it's unconstitutional, you ought to see your 'torney, if you've one, or your father's got one. But Lor', I says, 'Charlie, if they wants it they gets it. This ain't no habeas carpis, give-the-man-a-chance case. It's the Hadmir'lty. And not a man tried for piracy this thirty year. See what a show it gives them, what bloody Radicle knows or keeres what the perceedin's should be? Who's a-goin' t' make a question out of it? Go away,' says I to Charlie. And that's it straight."

He went towards the door, then turned.

"You should be in the Marshalsea common yard; even I knows that. But they've the wink there. 'Too full,' says they. Too full be d — — d. I've know'd the time — after the Vansdell smash it were — when they found room for three hundred more improvident debtors over and above what they're chartered for. Too full! Their common yard! They don't want you to speak to a soul, an' you won't till this day week, when the Hadmir'lty Session is in full swing." He went out and locked the door, snorting, "Too full at the Marshalsea!... Go away!"

"Find out about the Lion," I called, as the door closed.

It cleared the air for me, that speech. I understood that they wanted to hang me, and I wanted not to be hung, desperately, from that moment. I had not much cared before; I had — call it, moped. I had not really believed, really sensed it out. It isn't easy to conceive that one is going to be hanged,

I doubt if one does even with the rope round one's neck. I hadn't much wanted to live, but now I wanted to fight — one good fight before I went under for good and all, condemned or acquitted. There wasn't anything left for me to live for, Seraphina could not be alive. The Lion must have been lost.

But I was going to make a fight for it; curse it, I was going to give them trouble. My "them" was not so much the Government that meant to hang me as the unseen powers that suffered such a state of things, that allowed a number of little meannesses, accidents, fatalities, to hang me. I began to worry the turnkey. He gave me no help, only shreds of information that let me see more plainly than ever how set "they" were on sacrificing me to their exigencies.

The whole West Indian trade in London was in an uproar over the Pirate Question and over the Slave Question. Jamaica was still squealing for Separation before the premonitory grumbles of Abolition. Horton Pen, over there, came back with astonishing clearness before me. I seemed to hear old, wall-eyed, sandy-headed Macdonald, agitating his immense bulk of ill-fitting white clothes in front of his newspaper, and bellowing in his ox-voice:

"Abolition, they give us Abolition... or ram it down our throats. They who haven't even the spunk to rid us o' the d — — — d pirates, not the spunk to catch and hang one.... Jock, me lahd, we's abolush them before they sail touch our neegurs.... Let them clear oor seas, let them hang one pirate, and then talk."

I was the one they were going to hang, to consolidate the bond with the old island. The cement wanted a little blood in the mixing. Damn them! I was going to make a fight; they had torn me from Seraphina, to fulfill their own accursed ends. I felt myself grow harsh and strong, as a tree feels itself grow gnarled by winter storms. I said to the turnkey again and again:

"Man, I will promise you a thousand pounds or a pension for life, if you will get a letter through to my mother or Squire Rooksby of Horton."

He said he daren't do it; enough was known of him to hang him if he gave offence. His flabby fingers trembled, and his eyes grew large with successive shocks of cupidity. He became afraid of coming near me; of the strain of the temptation. On the next day he did not speak a word, nor the next, nor the next. I began to grow horribly afraid of being hung. The day before the trial arrived. Towards noon he flung the door open.

“Here’s paper, here’s pens,” he said. “You can prepare your defence. You may write letters. Oh, hell! why did not they let it come sooner, I’d have had your thousand pounds. I’ll run a letter down to your people fast as the devil could take it. I know a man, a gentleman of the road. For twenty pun promised, split between us, he’ll travel faster’n Turpin did to York.” He was waving a large sheet of newspaper agitatedly.

“What does it mean?” I asked. My head was whirling.

“Radical papers got a-holt of it,” he said. “Trust them for nosing out. And the Government’s answering them. They say you’re going to suffer for your crimes. Hark to this... um, um... ‘The wretched felon now in Newgate will incur the just penalty...’ Then they slaps the West Indies in the face. ‘When the planters threaten to recur to some other power for protection, they, of course, believe that the loss of the colonies would be severely felt. But...’”

“The Lion’s home,” I said.

It burst upon me that she was — that she must be. Williams — or Sebright — he was the man, had been speaking up for me. Or Seraphina had been to the Spanish ambassador.

She was back; I should see her. I started up.

“The Lion’s home,” I repeated.

The turnkey snarled, “She was posted as overdue three days ago.”

I couldn’t believe it was true.

“I saw it in the papers,” he grumbled on. “I dursn’t tell you.” He continued violently, “Blow my dickey. It would make a cat sick.”

My sudden exaltation, my sudden despair, gave way to indifference.

“Oh, coming, coming!” he shouted, in answer to an immense bellowing cry that loomed down the passage without.

I heard him grumble, “Of course, of course. I shan’t make a penny.” Then he caught hold of my arm. “Here, come along, someone to see you in the press-yard.”

He pulled me along the noisome, black warren of passages, slamming the inner door viciously behind him.

The press-yard — the exercising ground for the condemned — was empty; the last batch had gone out, my batch would be the next to come in, the turnkey said suddenly. It was a well of a place, high black walls going up into the desolate, weeping sky, and quite tiny. At one end was a sort of slit in the wall, closed with tall, immense windows. From there a faint sort

of rabbit's squeak was going up through the immense roll and rumble of traffic on the other side of the wall. The turnkey pushed me towards it.

"Go on," he said. "I'll not listen; I ought to. But, curse me, I'm not a bad sort," he added gloomily; "I dare say you'll make it worth my while."

I went and peered through the bars at a faint object pressed against other bars in just another slit across a black passage.

"What, Jackie, boy; what, Jackie?" Blinking his eyes, as if the dim light were too strong for them, a thin, bent man stood there in a brilliant new court coat. His face was meagre in the extreme, the nose and cheekbones polished and transparent like a bigaroon cherry. A thin tuft of reddish hair was brushed back from his high, shining forehead. It was my father. He exclaimed:

"What, Jackie, boy! How old you look!" then waved his arm towards me. "In trouble?" he said. "You in trouble?"

He rubbed his thin hands together, and looked round the place with a cultured man's air of disgust. I said, "Father!" and he suddenly began to talk very fast and agitatedly of what he had been doing for me. My mother, he said, was crippled with rheumatism, and Rooksby and Veronica on the preceding Thursday had set sail for Jamaica. He had read to my mother, beside her bed, the newspaper containing an account of my case; and she had given him money, and he had started with violent haste for London. The haste and the rush were still dazing him. He had lived down there in the farmhouse beneath the downs, with the stackyards under his eyes, with his books of verse and his few prints on the wall — — — My God, how it all came back to me.

In his disjointed speeches, I could see how exactly the same it all remained. The same old surly man with a squint had driven him along the muddy roads in the same ancient gig, past the bare elms, to meet the coach. And my father had never been in London since he had walked the streets with the Prince Regent's friends.

Whilst he talked to me there, lines of verse kept coming to his lips; and, after the habitual pleasure of the apt quotation, he felt acutely shocked at the inappropriateness of the place, the press-yard, with the dim light weeping downwards between immensely high walls, and the desultory snowflakes that dropped between us. And he had tried so hard, in his emergency, to be practical. When he had reached London, before even attempting to see me, he had run from minister to minister trying to

influence them in my favour — and he reached me in Newgate with nothing at all effected.

I seemed to know him then, so intimately, so much better than anything else in the world.

He began, “I had my idea in the up-coach last night. I thought, ‘A very great personage was indebted to me in the old days (more indebted than you are aware of, Johnnie). I will intercede with him.’ That was why my first step was to my old tailor’s in Conduit Street. Because... what is fit for a farm for a palace were low.” He stopped, reflected, then said, “What is fit for the farm for the palace were low.”

He felt across his coat for his breast pocket. It was what he had done years and years ago, and all these years between, inscribe ideas for lines of verse in his pocket-book. I said:

“You have seen the king?”

His face lengthened a little. “Not seen him. But I found one of the duke’s secretaries, a pleasant young fellow... not such as we used to be. But the duke was kind enough to interest himself. Perhaps my name has lived in the land. I was called Curricule Kemp, as I may have told you, because I drove a vermilion one with green and gilt wheels....”

His face, peering at me through the bars, had, for a moment, a flush of pride. Then he suddenly remembered, and, as if to propitiate his own reproof, he went on:

“I saw the Secretary of State, and he assured me, very civilly, that not even the highest personage in the land...” He dropped his voice, “Jackie, boy,” he said, his narrow-lidded eyes peering miserably across at me, “there’s not even hope of a reprieve afterwards.”

I leaned my face wearily against the iron bars. What, after all, was the use of fighting if the Lion were not back?

Then, suddenly, as the sound of his words echoed down the bare, black corridors, he seemed to realize the horror of it. His face grew absolutely white, he held his head erect, as if listening to a distant sound. And then he began to cry — horribly, and for a long time.

It was I that had to comfort him. His head had bowed at the conviction of his hopeless uselessness; all through his own life he had been made ineffectual by his indulgence in perfectly innocent, perfectly trivial enjoyments, and now, in this extremity of his only son, he was rendered almost fantastically of no avail.



“No, no, sir! You have done all that any one could; you couldn’t break these walls down. Nothing else would help.”

Small, hopeless sobs shook him continually. His thin, delicate white fingers gripped the black grille, with the convulsive grasp of a very weak man. It was more distressing to me than anything I had ever seen or felt. The mere desire, the intense desire to comfort him, made me get a grip upon myself again. And I remembered that, now that I could communicate with the outer air, it was absolutely easy; he would save my life. I said:

“You have only to go to Clapham, sir.”

And the moment I was in a state to command him, to direct him, to give him something to do, he became a changed man. He looked up and listened. I told him to go to Major Cowper’s. It would be easy enough to find him at Clapham. Cowper, I remembered, could testify to my having been seized by Tomas Castro. He had seen me fight on the decks. And what was more, he would certainly know the addresses of Kingston planters, if any were in London. They could testify that I had been in Jamaica all the while Nikola el Escoces was in Rio Medio. I knew there were some. My father was fidgeting to be gone. He had his name marked for him, and a will directing his own. He was not the same man. But I particularly told him to send me a lawyer first of all.

“Yes, yes!” he said, fidgeting to go, “to Major Cowper’s. Let me write his address.”

“And a solicitor,” I said. “Send him to me on your way there.”

“Yes, yes,” he said, “I shall be able to be of use to the solicitor. As a rule, they are men of no great perspicacity.”

And he went hurriedly away.

The real torture, the agony of suspense began then. I steadied my nerves by trying to draw up notes for my speech to the jury on the morrow. That was the turnkey’s idea.

He said, “Slap your chest, ‘peal to the honour of a British gent, and pitch it in strong.”

It was not much good; I could not keep to any logical sequence of thought, my mind was forever wandering to what my father was doing. I pictured him in his new blue coat, running agitatedly through crowded streets, his coat-tails flying behind his thin legs. The hours dragged on, and it was a matter of minutes. I had to hold upon the table edge to keep myself from raging about the cell. I tried to bury myself again in the scheme for my

defence. I wondered whom my father would have found. There was a man called Cary who had gone home from Kingston. He had a bald head and blue eyes; he must remember me. If he would corroborate! And the lawyer, when he came, might take another line of defence. It began to fall dusk slowly, through the small barred windows.

The entire night passed without a word from my father. I paced up and down the whole time, composing speeches to the jury. And then the day broke. I calmed myself with a sort of frantic energy.

Early the jailer came in, and began fussing about my cell.

“Case comes on about one,” he said. “Grand jury at half after twelve. No fear they won’t return a true bill. Grand jury, five West India merchants. They means to have you. ‘Torney-General, S’lic’tor-General. S’r Robert Mead, and five juniors agin you... You take my tip. Throw yourself on the mercy of the court, and make a rousing speech with a young ‘ooman in it. Not that you’ll get much mercy from them. They Admir’lty jedges is all hangers. ‘S we say, ‘Oncet the anchor goes up in the Old Bailey, there ain’t no hope. We begins to clean out the c’ndemned cell, here. Sticks the anchor up over their heads, when it is Hadmir’lty case,’” he commented.

I listened to him with strained attention. I made up my mind to miss not a word uttered that day. It was my only chance.

“You don’t know any one from Jamaica?” I asked.

He shook his bullet head, and tapped his purple nose. “Can’t be done,” he said. “You’d get a ornery hallybi fer a guinea a head, but they’d keep out of this case. They’ve necks like you and me.”

Whilst he was speaking, the whole of the outer world, as far as it affected me, came suddenly in upon me — that was what I meant to the great city that lay all round, the world, in the centre of which was my cell. To the great mass, I was matter for a sensation; to them I might prove myself beneficial in this business. Perhaps there were others who were thinking I might be useful in one way or another. There were the ministers of the Crown, who did not care much whether Jamaica separated or not. But they wanted to hang me because they would be able to say disdainfully to the planters, “Separate if you like; we’ve done our duty, we’ve hanged a man.”

All those people had their eyes on me, and they were about the only ones who knew of my existence. That was the end of my Romance! Romance! The broadsheet sellers would see to it afterwards with a “Dying confession.”



## CHAPTER FOUR

I never saw my father again until I was in the prisoner's anteroom at the Old Bailey. It was full of lounging men, whose fleshy limbs bulged out against the tight, loud checks of their coats and trousers. These were jailers waiting to bring in their prisoners. On the other side of one black door the Grand Jury was deliberating on my case, behind another the court was in waiting to try me. I was in a sort of tired lull. All night I had been pacing up and down, trying to bring my brain to think of points — points in my defence. It was very difficult. I knew that I must keep cool, be calm, be lucid, be convincing; and my brain had reeled at times, even in the darkness of the cell. I knew it had reeled, because I remembered that once I had fallen against the stone of one of the walls, and once against the door. Here, in the light, with only a door between myself and the last scene, I regained my hold. I was going to fight every inch from start to finish. I was going to let no chink of their armour go untried. I was going to make a good fight. My teeth chattered like castanets, jarring in my jaws until it was painful. But that was only with the cold.

A hubbub of expostulation was going on at the third door. My turnkey called suddenly:

"Let the genman in, Charlie. Pal o' ourn," and my father ran huntedly into the room. He began an endless tale of a hackney coachman who had stood in front of the door of his coach to prevent his number being taken; of a crowd of caddee-smashers, who had hustled him and filched his purse. "Of course, I made a fight for it," he said, "a damn good fight, considering. It's in the blood. But the watch came, and, in short — on such an occasion as this there is no time for words — I passed the night in the watch-house. Many and many a night I passed there when I and Lord — — — But I am losing time."

"You ain't fit to walk the streets of London alone, sir," the turnkey said.

My father gave him a corner of his narrow-lidded eyes. "My man," he said, "I walked the streets with the highest in the land before your mother bore you in Bridewell, or whatever jail it was."

"Oh, no offence," the turnkey muttered.

I said, "Did you find Cowper, sir? Will he give evidence?"

"Jackie," he said agitatedly, as if he were afraid of offending me, "he said you had filched his wife's rings."

That, in fact, was what Major Cowper had said — that I had dropped into their ship near Port Royal Heads, and had afterwards gone away with the pirates who had filched his wife's rings. My father, in his indignation, had not even deigned to ask him for the address of Jamaica planters in London; and on his way back to find a solicitor he had come into contact with those street rowdies and the watch. He had only just come from before the magistrates.

A man with one eye poked his head suddenly from behind the Grand Jury door. He jerked his head in my direction.

"True bill against that 'ere," he said, then drew his head in again.

"Jackie, boy," my father said, putting a thin hand on my wrist, and gazing imploringly into my eyes, "I'm... I'm ... I can't tell you how...."

I said, "It doesn't matter, father." I felt a foretaste of how my past would rise up to crush me. Cowper had let that wife of his coerce him into swearing my life away. I remembered vividly his blubbing protestations of friendship when I persuaded Tomas Castro to return him his black deed-box with the brass handle, on that deck littered with rubbish.... "Oh, God bless you, God bless you. You have saved me from starvation...." There had been tears in his old blue eyes. "If you need it I will go anywhere... do anything to help you. On the honour of a gentleman and a soldier." I had, of course, recommended his wife to give up her rings when the pirates were threatening her in the cabin. The other door opened, another man said:

"Now, then, in with that carrion. D'you want to keep the judges waiting?"

I stepped through the door straight down into the dock; there was a row of spikes in the front of it. I wasn't afraid; three men in enormous wigs and ermine robes faced me; four in short wigs had their heads together like parrots on a branch. A fat man, bareheaded, with a gilt chain round his neck, slipped from behind into a seat beside the highest placed judge. He was wiping his mouth and munching with his jaws. On each side of the judges, beyond the short-wigged assessors, were chairs full of ladies and gentlemen. They all had their eyes upon me. I saw it all very plainly. I was going to see everything, to keep my eyes open, not to let any chance escape. I wondered why a young girl with blue eyes and pink cheeks tittered and shrugged her shoulders. I did not know what was amusing. What astonished me was the smallness, the dirt, the want of dignity of the room itself. I thought they must be trying a case of my importance there by mistake.

Presently I noticed a great gilt anchor above the judges' heads. I wondered why it was there, until I remembered it was an Admiralty Court. I thought suddenly, "Ah! if I had thought to tell my father to go and see if the Lion had come in in the night!"

A man was bawling out a number of names.... "Peter Plimley, gent., any challenge.... Lazarus Cohen, merchant, any challenge...."

The turnkey beside me leant with his back against the spikes. He was talking to the man who had called us in.

"Lazarus Cohen, West Indian merchant.... Lord, well, I'd challenge...."

The other man said, "S — sh."

"His old dad give me five shiners to put him up to a thing if I could," the turnkey said again.

I didn't catch his meaning until an old man with a very ragged gown was handing up a book to a row of others in a box so near that I could almost have touched them. Then I realized that the turnkey had been winking to me to challenge the jury. I called out at the highest of the judges:

"I protest against that jury. It is packed. Half of them, at least, are West Indian merchants."

There was a stir all over the court. I realized then that what had seemed only a mass of stuffs of some sort were human beings all looking at me. The judge I had called to opened a pair of dim eyes upon me, clasped and unclasped his hands, very dry, ancient, wrinkled. The judge on his right called angrily:

"Nonsense, it is too late.... They are being sworn. You should have spoken when the names were read." Underneath his wig was an immensely broad face with glaring yellow eyes.

I said, "It is scandalous. You want to murder me, How should I know what you do in your courts? I say the jury is packed."

The very old judge closed his eyes, opened them again, then gasped out:

"Silence. We are here to try you. This is a court of law."

The turnkey pulled my sleeve under cover of the planking. "Treat him civil," he whispered, "Lord Justice Stowell of the Hadmir'lty. 'Tother's Baron Garrow of the Common Law; a beast; him as hanged that kid. You can sass him; it doesn't matter."

Lord Stowell waved his hand to the clerk with the ragged gown; the book passed from hand to hand along the faces of the jury, the clerk gabbling all

the while. The old judge said suddenly, in an astonishingly deep, majestic voice:

“Prisoner at the bar, you must understand that we are here to give you an impartial trial according to the laws of this land. If you desire advice as to the procedure of this court you can have it.”

I said, “I still protest against that Jury. I am an innocent man, and — — —”

He answered querulously, “Yes, yes, afterwards.” And then creaked, “Now the indictment....”

Someone hidden from me by three barristers began to read in a loud voice not very easy to follow. I caught:

“For that the said John Kemp, alias Nichols, alias Nikola el Escoces, alias el Demonio, alias el Diablotto, on the twelfth of May last, did feloniously and upon the high seas piratically seize a certain ship called the Victoria... um... um, the properties of Hyman Cohen and others... and did steal and take therefrom six hundred and thirty barrels of coffee of the value of... um... um... um... one hundred and one barrels of coffee of the value of... ninety-four half kegs... and divers others...”

I gave an immense sigh.... That was it, then. I had heard of the Victoria; it was when I was at Horton that the news of her loss reached us. Old Macdonald had sworn; it was the day a negro called Apollo had taken to the bush. I ought to be able to prove that. Afterwards, one of the judges asked me if I pleaded guilty or not guilty. I began a long wrangle about being John Kemp but not Nikola el Escoces. I was going to fight every inch of the way. They said:

“You will have your say afterwards. At present, guilty or not guilty?”

I refused to plead at all; I was not the man. The third judge woke up, and said hurriedly:

“That is a plea of not guilty, enter it as such.” Then he went to sleep again. The young girl on the bench beside him laughed joyously, and Mr. Baron Garrow nodded round at her, then snapped viciously at me:

“You don’t make your case any better by this sort of foolery.” His eyes glared at me like an awakened owl’s.

I said, “I’m fighting for my neck... and you’ll have to fight, too, to get it.”

The old judge said angrily, “Silence, or you will have to be removed.”

I said, “I am fighting for my life.”

There was a sort of buzz all round the court.

Lord Stowell said, "Yes, yes;" and then, "Now, Mr. King's Advocate, I suppose Mr. Alfonso Jervis opens for you."

A dusty wig swam up from just below my left hand, almost to a level with the dock.

The old judge shut his eyes, with an air of a man who is going a long journey in a post-chaise. Mr. Baron Garrow dipped his pen into an invisible ink-pot, and scratched it on his desk. A long story began to drone from under the wig, an interminable farrago of dull nonsense, in a hypochondriacal voice; a long tale about piracy in general; piracy in the times of the Greeks, piracy in the times of William the Conqueror... pirata nequissima Eustachio, and thanking God that a case of the sort had not been heard in that court for an immense lapse of years. Below me was an array of wigs, on each side a compressed mass of humanity, squeezed so tight that all the eyeballs seemed to be starting out of the heads towards me. From the wig below, a translation of the florid phrases of the Spanish papers was coming:

"His very Catholic Majesty, out of his great love for his ancient friend and ally, his Britannic Majesty, did surrender the body of the notorious El Demonio, called also..."

I began to wonder who had composed that precious document, whether it was the Juez de la Primera Instancia, bending his yellow face and sloe-black eyes above the paper, over there in Havana — or whether it was O'Brien, who was dead since the writing.

All the while the barrister was droning on. I did not listen because I had heard all that before — in the room of the Judge of the First Instance at Havana. Suddenly appearing behind the backs of the row of gentlefolk on the bench was the pale, thin face of my father. I wondered which of his great friends had got him his seat. He was nodding to me and smiling faintly. I nodded, too, and smiled back. I was going to show them that I was not cowed. The voice of the barrister said:

"M'luds and gentlemen of the jury, that finishes the Spanish evidence, which was taken on commission on the island of Cuba. We shall produce the officer of H. M. S. Elephant, to whom he was surrendered by the Spanish authorities at Havana, thus proving the prisoner to be the pirate Nikola, and no other. We come, now, to the specific instance, m'luds and gentlemen, an instance as vile..."



It was some little time before I had grasped how absolutely the Spanish evidence damned me. It was as if, once I fell into the hands of the English officer on Havana quays, the identity of Nikola could by no manner of means be shaken from round my neck. The barrister came to the facts.

A Kingston ship had been boarded... and there was the old story over again. I seemed to see the Rio Medio schooner rushing towards where I and old Cowper and old Lumsden looked back from the poop to see her come alongside; the strings of brown pirates pour in empty-handed, and out laden. Only in the case of the Victoria there were added the ferocities of “the prisoner at the bar, m'luds and gentlemen of the jury, a fiend in human shape, as we shall prove with the aid of the most respectable witnesses....”

The man in the wig sat down, and, before I understood what was happening, a fat, rosy man — the Attorney-General — whose cheerful gills gave him a grotesque resemblance to a sucking pig, was calling “Edward Sadler,” and the name blared like sudden fire leaping up all over the court. The Attorney-General wagged his gown into a kind of bunch behind his hips, and a man, young, fair, with a reddish beard and a shiny suit of clothes, sprang into a little box facing the jury. He bowed nervously in several directions, and laughed gently; then he looked at me and scowled. The Attorney-General cleared his throat pleasantly...

“Mr. Edward Sadler, you were, on May 25th, chief mate of the good ship Victoria....”

The fair man with the beard told his story, the old story of the ship with its cargo of coffee and dye-wood; its good passage past the Gran Caymanos; the becalming off the Cuban shore in latitude so and so, and the boarding of a black schooner, calling itself a Mexican privateer. I could see all that.

“The prisoner at the bar came alongside in a boat, with seventeen Spaniards,” he said, in a clear, expressionless voice, looking me full in the face.

I called out to the old judge, “My Lord... I protest. This is perjury. I was not the man. It Was Nichols, a Nova Scotian.”

Mr. Baron Garrow roared, “Silence,” his face suffused with blood.

Old Lord Stowell quavered, “You must respect the procedure....”

“Am I to hear my life sworn away without a word?” I asked.

He drew himself frostily into his robes. “God forbid,” he said; “but at the proper time you can cross-examine, if you think fit.”

The Attorney-General smiled at the jury-box and addressed himself to Sadler, with an air of patience very much tried:

“You swear the prisoner is the man?”

The fair man turned his sharp eyes upon me. I called, “For God’s sake, don’t perjure yourself. You are a decent man.”

“No, I won’t swear,” he said slowly. “I think he was. He had his face blacked then, of course. When I had sight of him at the Thames Court I thought he was; and seeing the Spanish evidence, I don’t see where’s the room....”

“The Spanish evidence is part of the plot,” I said.

The Attorney-General snickered. “Go on, Mr. Sadler,” he said. “Let’s have the rest of the plot unfolded.”

A juryman laughed suddenly, and resumed an abashed sudden silence. Sadler went on to tell the old story.... I saw it all as he spoke; only gaunt, shiny-faced, yellow Nichols was chewing and hitching his trousers in place of my Tomas, with his sanguine oaths and jerked gestures. And there was Nichol’s wanton, aimless ferocity.

“He had two pistols, which he fired twice each, while we were hoisting the studding-sails by his order, to keep up with the schooner. He fired twice into the crew. One of the men hit died afterwards....”

Later, another vessel, an American, had appeared in the offing, and the pirates had gone in chase of her. He finished, and Lord Stowell moved one of his ancient hands. It was as if a gray lizard had moved on his desk, a little toward me.

“Now, prisoner,” he said.

I drew a deep breath. I thought for a minute that, after all, there was a little fair play in the game — that I had a decent, fair, blue-eyed man in front of me. He looked hard at me; I hard at him; it was as if we were going to wrestle for a belt. The young girl on the bench had her lips parted and leant forward, her head a little on one side.

I said, “You won’t swear I was the man... Nikola el Escoces?”

He looked meditatively into my eyes; it was a duel between us.

“I won’t swear,” he said. “You had your face blacked, and didn’t wear a beard.”

A soft growth of hair had come out over my cheeks whilst I lay in prison. I rubbed my hand against it, and thought that he had drawn first blood.

“You must not say ‘you,’” I said. “I swear I was not the man. Did he talk like me?”

“Can’t say that he did,” Sadler answered, moving from one foot to the other.

“Had he got eyes like me, or a nose, or a mouth?”

“Can’t say,” he answered again. “His face was blacked.”

“Didn’t he talk Blue Nose — in the Nova Scotian way?”

“Well, he did,” Sadler assented slowly. “But any one could for a disguise. It’s as easy as...”

Beside me, the turnkey whispered suddenly, “Pull him up; stop his mouth.”

I said, “Wasn’t he an older man? Didn’t he look between forty and fifty?”

“What do you look like?” the chief mate asked.

“I’m twenty-four,” I answered; “I can prove it.”

“Well, you look forty and older,” he answered negligently. “So did he.”

His cool, disinterested manner overwhelmed me like the blow of an immense wave; it proved so absolutely that I had parted with all semblance of youth. It was something added to the immense waste of waters between myself and Seraphina; an immense waste of years. I did not ask much of the next witness; Sadler had made me afraid. Septimus Hearn, the master of the *Victoria*, was a man with eyes as blue and as cold as bits of round blue pebble; a little goat’s beard, iron-gray; apple-coloured cheeks, and small gold earrings in his ears. He had an extraordinarily mournful voice, and a retrospective melancholy of manner. He was just such another master of a trader as Captain Lumsden had been, and it was the same story over again, with little different touches, the hard blue eyes gazing far over the top of my head; the gnarled hands moving restlessly on the rim of his hat.

“Afterwards the prisoner ordered the steward to give us a drink of brandy. A glass was offered me, but I refused to drink it, and he said, ‘Who is it that refuses to drink a glass of brandy?’ He asked me what countryman I was, and if I was an American.”

There were two others from the unfortunate *Victoria* — a Thomas Davis, boatswain, who had had one of Nikola’s pistol-balls in his hip; and a sort of steward — I have forgotten his name — who had a scar of a cutlass wound on his forehead.

It was horrible enough; but what distressed me more was that I could not see what sort of impression I was making. Once the judge who was

generally asleep woke up and began to scratch furiously with his quill; once three of the assessors — the men in short wigs — began an animated conversation; one man with a thin, dark face laughed noiselessly, showing teeth like a white waterfall. A man in the body of the court on my left had an enormous swelling, blood-red, and looking as if a touch must burst it, under his chin; at one time he winked his eyes furiously for a long time on end. It seemed to me that something in the evidence must be affecting all these people. The turnkey beside me said to his mate, “Twig old Justice Best making notes in his stud-calendar,” and suddenly the conviction forced itself upon me that the whole thing, the long weary trial, the evidence, the parade of fairness, was being gone through in a spirit of mockery, as a mere formality; that the judges and the assessors, and the man with the goitre took no interest whatever in my case. It was a foregone conclusion.

A tiny, fair man, with pale hair oiled and rather long for those days, and with green and red signet rings on fingers that he was forever running through that hair, came mincingly into the witness-box. He held for a long time what seemed to be an amiable conversation with Sir Robert Gifford, a tall, portentous-looking man, who had black beetling brows, like tufts of black horsehair sticking in the crannies of a cliff. The conversation went like this:

“You are the Hon. Thomas Oldham?”

“Yes, yes.”

“You know Kingston, Jamaica, very well?”

“I was there four years — two as the secretary to the cabinet of his Grace the Duke of Manchester, two as civil secretary to the admiral on the station.”

“You saw the prisoner?”

“Yes, three times.”

I drew an immense breath; I thought for a moment that they had delivered themselves into my hands. The thing must prove of itself that I had been in Jamaica, not in Rio Medio, through those two years. My heart began to thump like a great solemn drum, like Paul’s bell when the king died — solemn, insistent, dominating everything. The little man was giving an account of the “bawminable” state of confusion into which the island’s trade was thrown by the misdeeds of a pirate called Nikola el Demonio.

“I assure you, my luds,” he squeaked, turning suddenly to the judges, “the island was wrought up into a pitch of... ah... almost disloyalty. The...

ah... planters were clamouring for... ah... separation. And, to be sure, I trust you'll hang the prisoner, for if you don't..."

Lord Stowell shivered, and said suddenly with haste, "Mr. Oldham, address yourself to Sir Robert."

I was almost happy; the cloven hoof had peeped so damningly out. The little man bowed briskly to the old judge, asked for a chair, sat himself down, and arranged his coat-tails.

"As I was saying," he prattled on, "the trouble and the worry that this man caused to His Grace, myself, and Admiral Rowley were inconceivable. You have no idea, you... ah... can't conceive. And no wonder, for, as it turned out, the island was simply honeycombed by his spies and agents. You have no idea; people who seemed most respectable, people we ourselves had dealings with..."

He rattled on at immense length, the barrister taking huge pinches of yellow snuff, and smiling genially with the air of a horse-trainer watching a pony go faultlessly through difficult tricks. Every now and then he flicked his whip.

"Mr. Oldham, you saw the prisoner three times. If it does not overtax your memory pray tell us." And the little creature pranced off in a new direction.

"Tax my memory! Gad, I like that. You remember a man who has had your blood as near as could be, don't you?"

I had been looking at him eagerly, but my interest faded away now. It was going to be the old confusing of my identity with Nikola's. And yet I seemed to know the little beggar's falsetto; it was a voice one does not forget.

"Remember!" he squeaked. "Gad, gentlemen of the jury, he came as near as possible — — — You have no idea what a ferocious devil it is."

I was wondering why on earth Nichols should have wanted to kill such a little thing. Because it was obvious that it must have been Nichols.

"As near as possible murdered myself and Admiral Rowley and a Mr. Topnambo, a most enlightened and loyal... ah... inhabitant of the island, on the steps of a public inn."

I had it then. It was the little man David Mac-donald had rolled down the steps with, that night at the Ferry Inn on the Spanish Town road.

"He was lying in wait for us with a gang of assassins. I was stabbed on the upper lip. I lost so much blood... had to be invalided... cannot think of

horrible episode without shuddering.”

He had seen me then, and when Ramon (“a Spaniard who was afterwards proved to be a spy of El Demonio’s — of the prisoner’s. He was hung since”) had driven me from the place of execution after the hanging of the seven pirates; and he had come into Ramon’s store at the moment when Carlos (“a piratical devil if ever there was one,” the little man protested) had drawn me into the back room, where Don Balthasar and O’Brien and Seraphina sat waiting. The men who were employed to watch Ramon’s had never seen me leave again, and afterwards a secret tunnel was discovered leading down to the quay.

“This, apparently, was the way by which the prisoner used to arrive and quit the island secretly,” he finished his evidence in chief, and the beetle-browed, portly barrister sat down. I was not so stupid but what I could see a little, even then, how the most innocent events of my past were going to rise up and crush me; but I was certain I could twist him into admitting the goodness of my tale which hadn’t yet been told. He knew I had been in Jamaica, and, put what construction he liked on it, he would have to admit it. I called out:

“Thank God, my turn’s come at last!”

The faces of the Attorney-General, the King’s Advocate, Sir Robert Gifford, Mr. Lawes, Mr. Jervis, of all the seven counsel that were arrayed to crush me, lengthened into simultaneous grins, varying at the jury-box. But I didn’t care; I grinned, too. I was going to show them.

It was as if I flew at the throat of that little man. It seemed to me that I must be able to crush a creature whose malice was as obvious and as nugatory as the green and red rings that he exhibited in his hair every few minutes. He wanted to show the jury that he had rings; that he was a mincing swell; that I hadn’t and that I was a bloody pirate. I said:

“You know that during the whole two years Nichols was at Rio I was an improver at Horton Pen with the Macdonalds, the agents of my brother-in-law, Sir Ralph Rooksby. You must know these things. You were one of the Duke of Manchester’s spies.”

We used to call the Duke’s privy council that. “I certainly know nothing of the sort,” he said, folding his hands along the edge of the witness-box, as if he had just thought of exhibiting his rings in that manner. He was abominably cool. I said:

“You must have heard of me. The Topnambos knew me.”

“The Topnambos used to talk of a blackguard with a name like Kemp who kept himself mighty out of the way in the Vale.”

“You knew I was on the island,” I pinned him down.

“You used to come to the island,” he corrected. “I’ve just explained how. But you were not there much, or we should have been able to lay hands on you. We wanted to. There was a warrant out after you tried to murder us. But you had been smuggled away by Ramon.”

I tried again:

“You have heard of my brother-in-law, Sir Ralph Rooksby?”

I wanted to show that, if I hadn’t rings, I had relations.

“Nevah heard of the man in my life,” he said.

“He was the largest land proprietor on the island,” I said.

“Dessay,” he said; “I knew forty of the largest. Mostly sharpers in the boosing-kens.” He yawned.

I said viciously:

“It was your place to know the island. You knew Horton Pen — the Macdonalds?”

The face of jolly old Mrs. Mac. came to my mind — the impeccable, Scotch, sober respectability.

“Oh, I knew the Macdonalds,” he said — ”of them. The uncle was a damn rebellious, canting, planting Scotchman. Horton Pen was the centre of the Separation Movement. We could have hung him if we’d wanted to. The nephew was the writer of an odious blackmailing print. He calumniated all the decent, loyal inhabitants. He was an agent of you pirates, too. We arrested him — got his papers; know all about your relations with him.”

I said, “That’s all nonsense. Let us hear” — the Attorney-General had always said that — ”what you know of myself.”

“What I know of you,” he sniffed, “if it’s a pleasuah, was something like this. You came to the island in a mysterious way, gave out that you were an earl’s son, and tried to get into the very excellent society of... ah... people like my friends, the Topnambos. But they would not have you, and after that you kept yourself mighty close; no one ever saw you but once or twice, and then it was riding about at night with that humpbacked scoundrel of a blackmailer.

“You, in fact, weren’t on the island at all, except when you came to spy for the pirates. You used to have long confabulations with that scoundrel Ramon, who kept you posted about the shipping. As for the blackmailer,

with the humpback, David Macdonald, you kept him, you... ah... subsidized his filthy print to foment mutiny and murder among the black fellows, and preach separation. You wanted to tie our hands, and prevent our... ah... prosecuting the preventive measures against you. When you found that it was no good you tried to murder the admiral and myself, and that very excellent man Topnambo, coming from a ball. After that you were seen encouraging seven of your... ah... pirate fellows whom we were hanging, and you drove off in haste with your agent, Ramon, before we could lay hands on you, and vanished from the island.”

I didn’t lose my grip; I went at him again, blindly, as if I were boxing with my eyes full of blood, but my teeth set tight. I said:

“You used to buy things yourself of old Ramon; bought them for the admiral to load his frigates with; things he sold at Key West.”

“That was one of the lies your scoundrel David Macdonald circulated against us.”

“You bought things... even whilst you were having his store watched.”

“Upon my soul!” he said.

“You used to buy things....” I pinned him. He looked suddenly at the King’s Advocate, then dropped his eyes.

“Nevah bought a thing in my life,” he said.

I knew the man had; Ramon had told me of his buying for the admiral more than three hundred barrels of damaged coffee for thirty pounds. I was in a mad temper. I smashed my hand upon the spikes of the rail in front of me, and although I saw hands move impulsively towards me all over the court, I did not know that my arm was impaled and the blood running down.

“Perjurer,” I shouted, “Ramon himself told me.”

“Ah, you were mighty thick with Ramon...” he said.

I let him stand down. I was done. Someone below said harshly, “That closes our case, m’luds,” and the court rustled all over. Old Lord Stowell in front of me shivered a little, looked at the window, and then said:

“Prisoner at the bar, our procedure has it that if you wish to say anything, you may now address the jury. Afterwards, if you had a counsel, he could call and examine your witnesses, if you have any.”

It was growing very dark in the court. I began to tell my story; it was so plain, so evident, it shimmered there before me... and yet I knew it was so useless.



I remembered that in my cell I had reasoned out that I must be very constrained; very lucid about the opening. "On such and such a day I landed at Kingston, to become an improver on the estate of my brother-in-law. He is Sir Ralph Rooksby of Horton Priory in Kent." I did keep cool; I was lucid; I spoke like that. I had my eyes fixed on the face of the young girl upon the bench. I remember it so well. Her eyes were fixed, fascinated, upon my hand. I tried to move it, and found that it was stuck upon the spike on which I had jammed it. I moved it carelessly away, and only felt a little pain, as if from a pin-prick; but the blood was dripping on to the floor, pat, pat. Later on, a man lit the candles on the judge's desk, and the court looked different. There were deep shadows everywhere; and the illuminated face of Lord Stowell looked grimmer, less kind, more ancient, more impossible to bring a ray of sympathy to. Down below, the barristers of the prosecution leaned back with their arms all folded, and the air of men resting in an interval of cutting down a large tree. The barristers who were, merely listeners looked at me from time to time. I heard one say, "That man ought to have his hand bound up." I was telling the story of my life, that was all I could do.

"As for Ramon, how could I know he was in the pay of the pirates, even if he were? I swear I did not know. Everyone on the island had dealings with him, the admiral himself. That is not calumny. On my honour, the admiral did have dealings. Some of you have had dealings with forgers, but that does not make you forgers."

I warmed to it; I found words. I was telling the story for that young girl. Suddenly I saw the white face of my father peep at me between the head of an old man with an enormous nose, and a stout lady in a brown cloak that had a number of little watchmen's capes. He smiled suddenly, and nodded again and again, opened his eyes, shut them; furtively waved a hand. It distracted me, threw me off my balance, my coolness was gone. It was as if something had snapped. After that I remembered very little; I think I may have quoted "The Prisoner of Chillon," because he put it into my head.

I seemed to be back again in Cuba. Down below me the barristers were talking. The King's Advocate pulled out a puce-coloured bandanna, and waved it abroad preparatorily to blowing his nose. A cloud of the perfume of a West Indian bean went up from it, sweet and warm. I had smelt it last at Rio, the sensation was so strong that I could not tell where I was.

The candles made a yellow glow on the judge's desk; but it seemed to be the blaze of light in the cell where Nichols and the Cuban had fenced. I thought I was back in Cuba again. The people in the court disappeared in the deepening shadows. At times I could not speak. Then I would begin again.

If there were to be any possibility of saving my life, I had to tell what I had been through — and to tell it vividly — I had to narrate the story of my life; and my whole life came into my mind. It was Seraphina who was the essence of my life; who spoke with the voice of all Cuba, of all Spain, of all Romance. I began to talk about old Don Balthasar Riego. I began to talk about Manuel-del-Popolo, of his red shirt, his black eyes, his mandolin; I saw again the light of his fires flicker on the other side of the ravine in front of the cave.

And I rammed all that into my story, the story I was telling to that young girl. I knew very well that I was carrying my audience with me; I knew how to do it, I had it in the blood. The old pale, faded, narrow-lidded father who was blinking and nodding at me had been one of the best raconteurs that ever was. I knew how. In the black shadows of the wall of the court I could feel the eyes upon me; I could see the parted lips of the young girl as she leaned further towards me. I knew it because, when one of the barristers below raised his voice, someone hissed “S — sh” from the shadows. And suddenly it came into my head, that even if I did save my life by talking about these things, it would be absolutely useless. I could never go back again; never be the boy again; never hear the true voice of the Ever Faithful Island. What did it matter even if I escaped; even if I could go back? The sea would be there, the sky, the silent dim hills, the listless surge; but I should never be there, I should be altered for good and all. I should never see the breathless dawn in the pondwater of Havana harbour, never be there with Seraphina close beside me in the little drogher. All that remained was to see this fight through, and then have done with fighting. I remember the intense bitterness of that feeling and the oddity of it all; of the one “I” that felt like that, of the other that was raving in front of a lot of open-eyed idiots, three old judges, and a young girl. And, in a queer way, the thoughts of the one “I” floated through into the words of the other, that seemed to be waving its hands in its final struggle, a little way in front of me.

“Look at me... look at what they have made of me, one and the other of them. I was an innocent boy. What am I now? They have taken my life from

me, let them finish it how they will, what does it matter to me, what do I care?"

There was a rustle of motion all round the court. On board Rowley's flagship the heavy irons had sawed open my wrists. I hadn't been ironed in Newgate, but the things had healed up very little. I happened to look down at my claws of hands with the grime of blood that the dock spikes had caused.

"What sort of a premium is it that you set on sticking to the right? Is this how you are going to encourage the others like me? What do I care about your death? What's life to me? Let them get their scaffold ready. I have suffered enough to be put out of my misery. God, I have suffered enough with one and another. Look at my hands, I say. Look at my wrists, and say if I care any more." I held my ghastly paws high, and the candle light shone upon them.

Out of the black shadows came shrieks of women and curses. I saw my young girl put her hands over her face and slip slowly, very slowly, from her chair, down out of sight. People were staggering in different directions. I had had more to say, but I forgot in my concern for the young girl. The turnkey pulled my sleeve and said:

"I say, that ain't true, is it, it ain't true?" Because he seemed not to want it to have been true, I glowed for a moment with the immense pride of my achievement. I had made them see things.

A minute after, I understood how futile it was. I was not a fool even in my then half-mad condition. The real feeling of the place came back upon me, the "Court of Law" of it. The King's Advocate was whispering to the Attorney-General, he motioned with his hand, first in my direction, then towards the jury; then they both laughed and nodded. They knew the ropes too well for me, and there were seven West India merchants up there who would remember their pockets in a minute. But I didn't care. I had made them see things.

## CHAPTER FIVE

I had shot my bolt and I was going to die; I could see it in the way the King's Advocate tossed his head back, fluttered his bands, looked at the jury-box, and began to play with the seals on his fob. The court had resumed its stillness. A man in some sort of livery passed a square paper to the Lord Mayor, the Lord Mayor passed it to Lord Stowell, who opened it with a jerking motion of an ancient fashion that impressed me immensely. It was as if I, there at the end of my life, were looking at a man opening a letter of the reign of Queen Anne. The shadows of his ancient, wrinkled face changed as he read, raising his eyebrows and puckering his mouth. He handed the unfolded paper to Mr. Baron Garrow, then with one wrinkled finger beckoned the Attorney-General to him. The third judge was still asleep.

"What the devil's this?" the turnkey beside me said to his companion.

I was in a good deal of pain, and felt sickly that every pulse of my heart throbbed in my mangled hand. The other spat straight in front of him.

"Damme if I know," he said. "This cursed business ought to have been over and done with an hour ago. I told Jinks to have my rarebit and noggin down by the gate-house fire at half-past five, and it's six now."

They began an interminable argument under their breaths.

"It's that wager of Lord March's... run a mile, walk a mile, eat five pounds of mutton, drink five pints of claret. No, it ain't.. Medmenham coach ain't in yet... roads too heavy.... It is. What else would stop the Court at this time of night? It isn't, or Justice Best 'd be awake and hedging his bets."

In a dizzy way I noted the Attorney-General making his way carefully back between the benches to his knot of barristers, and their wigs went all together in a bunch like ears of corn drawn suddenly into a sheaf. The heads of the other barristers were like unreaped ears. A man with a face like a weasel's called to a man with a face like a devil's — he was leaving the court — something about an ambassador. The other stopped, turned, and deposited his bag again. I heard the deep voice of Sir Robert Gifford say: "What!... Never!... too infamous..." and then the interest and the light seemed to flicker out together. I could hardly see. Voices called out to each other, harsh, dry, as if their owners had breathed nothing but dust for years and years.

One loud one barked, "You can't hear him, m'luds; in Rex v. Marsupenstein...."

A lot began calling all together, "Ah, but that was different, Mr. Attorney. You couldn't subpoena him, he being in the position of extra lege commune. But if he offers a statement...."

The candles seemed to be waving deliberately like elm-tops in a high wind.

Someone called, "Clerk, fetch me volume xiii.... I think we shall find there.... You recollect the case of Hildeshein v. Roe.... Wasn't it Hildegaulen and another, m'lud?"... "I tried the case myself. The Prussian Plenipotentiary...."

I wanted to call out to them that it was not worth while to try their dry throats any more; that having shot my bolt, I gave in. But I could not think of any words, I was so tired. "I didn't sleep at all last night," I found myself saying to myself.

The sleeping judge woke up suddenly and snarled, "Why in Heaven's name don't we get on? We shall be all night. Let him call the second name on the list. We can take the Spanish ambassador when you have settled. For my part I think we ought to hear him...."

Lord Stowell said suddenly, "Prisoner at the bar, some gentlemen have volunteered statements on your behalf. If you wish it, they can be called."

I didn't answer; I did not understand; I wanted to tell him I did not care, because the Lion was posted as overdue and Seraphina was drowned. The Court seemed to be moving slowly up and down in front of me like the deck of a ship. I thought I was bound again, and on the sofa in the gorgeous cabin of the Madre-de-Dios. Someone seemed to be calling, "Prisoner at the bar... Prisoner at the bar...." It was as if the candles had been lit in front of the Madonna with the pink child, only she had a gilt anchor instead of the spiky gilt glory above her head. Somebody was saying, "Hello there.... Hold up!... Here, bring a chair,..." and there were arms around me. Afterwards I sat down. A very old judge's voice said something rather kindly, I thought. I knew it was the very old judge, because he was called the star of Cuban law. Someone would be bending over me soon, with a lanthorn, and I should be wiping the flour out of my eyes and blinking at the red velvet and gilding of the cabin ceiling. In a minute Carlos and Castro would come... or was it O'Brien who would come? No, O'Brien was dead; stabbed, with a knife in his neck; the blood was still sticky between my first and second

fingers. I could feel it. I ought to have been allowed to wash my hands before I was tried; or was it before I spoke to the admiral? One would not speak to a man with hands like that.

A loud, high-pitched voice called from up in the air, "I will give any of you gentlemen of the robe down there fifty pounds to conduct the remainder of the case for him. I am the prisoner's father."

My father's voice broke the spell. I was in the court; the candles were still burning; all the faces, lit up or in the shadow, were bunched together in little groups; hands waved. The barrister whose face was like the devil's under his wig held in his hands the paper that had been handed to Lord Stowell; my father was talking to him from the bench. The barrister, tall, his robes old and ragged, silhouetted against the light, glanced down the paper, fluttered it in his hand, nodded to my father, and began a grotesque, nasal drawl:

"M'luds, I will conduct the case for the prisoner, if your lordships will bear with me a little. He obviously can't call his own witnesses. If he has been treated as he says, it has been one of the most abominable..."

Old Lord Stowell said, "Ch't, ch't, Mr. Walker; you know you must not make a speech for the prisoner. Call your witness. It is all that is needed."

I wondered what he meant by that. The barrister was calling a man of the name of Williams. I seemed to know the name. I seemed to know the man, too.

"Owen Williams, Master of the ship Lion.... Coffee and dye-wood.... Just come in under a jury-rig. Had been dismasted and afterwards becalmed. Heard of this trial from the pilot in Graves-end. Had taken post-chaises..."

I only heard snatches of his answers.

"On the twenty-fifth of August last I was close in with the Cuban coast.... The mate, Sebright, got boiling water for them.... Afterwards a heavy fog. They boarded us in many boats...." He was giving all the old evidence over again, fastening another stone around my neck. But suddenly he said: "This gentleman came alongside in a leaky dinghy. A dead shot. He saved all our lives."

His bullet-head, the stare of his round blue eyes seemed to draw me out of a delirium. I called out:

"Williams, for God's sake, Williams, where is Seraphina? Did she come with you?" There was an immense roaring in my head, and the ushers were shouting, "Silence! Silence!" I called out again.

Williams was smiling idiotically; then he shook his head and put his finger to his mouth to warn me to keep silence. I only noted the shake of the head. Sera-phina had not come. The Havana people must have taken her. It was all over with me. The roaring noise made me think that I was on a beach by the sea, with the smugglers, perhaps, at night down in Kent. The silence that fell upon the court was like the silence of a grave. Then someone began to speak in measured, portentous Spanish, that seemed a memory of the past.

“I, the ambassador of his Catholic Majesty, being here upon my honour and on my oath, demand the re-surrender of this gentleman, whose courage equals his innocence. Documents which have just reached my hands establish clearly the mistake of which he is the victim. The functionary who is called Alcayde of the carcel at Havana confused the men. Nikola el Escoces escaped, having murdered the judge whose place it was to identify. I demand that the prisoner be set at liberty...”

A long time after a harsh voice said:

“Your Excellency, we retire, of course, from the prosecution.”

A different one directed:

“Gentlemen of the jury, you will return a verdict of ‘Not Guilty’...”

Down below they were cheering uproariously because my life was saved. But it was I that had to face my saved life. I sat there, my head bowed into my hands. The old judge was speaking to me in a tone of lofty compassion:

“You have suffered much, as it seems, but suffering is the lot of us men. Rejoice now that your character is cleared; that here in this public place you have received the verdict of your countrymen that restores you to the liberties of our country and the affection of your kindred. I rejoice with you who am a very old man, at the end of my life....”

It was rather tremendous, his deep voice, his weighted words. Suffering is the lot of us men!... The formidable legal array, the great powers of a nation, had stood up to teach me that, and they had taught me that — suffering is the lot of us men!

It takes long enough to realize that someone is dead at a distance. I had done that. But how long, how long it needs to know that the life of your heart has come back from the dead. For years afterwards I could not bear to have her out of my sight.

Of our first meeting in London all I remember is a speechlessness that was like the awed hesitation of our overtried souls before the greatness of a

change from the verge of despair to the opening of a supreme joy.

The whole world, the whole of life, with her return, had changed all around me; it enveloped me, it enfolded me so lightly as not to be felt, so suddenly as not to be believed in, so completely that that whole meeting was an embrace, so softly that at last it lapsed into a sense of rest that was like the fall of a beneficent and welcome death.

For suffering is the lot of man, but not inevitable failure or worthless despair which is without end — suffering, the mark of manhood, which bears within its pain a hope of felicity like a jewel set in iron....

Her first words were:

“You broke our compact. You went away from me whilst I was sleeping.” Only the deepness of her reproach revealed the depth of her love, and the suffering she too had endured to reach a union that was to be without end — and to forgive.

And, looking back, we see Romance — that subtle thing that is mirage — that is life. It is the goodness of the years we have lived through, of the old time when we did this or that, when we dwelt here or there. Looking back, it seems a wonderful enough thing that I who am this, and she who is that, commencing so far away a life that, after such sufferings borne together and apart, ended so tranquilly there in a world so stable — that she and I should have passed through so much, good chance and evil chance, sad hours and joyful, all lived down and swept away into the little heap of dust that is life. That, too, is Romance!

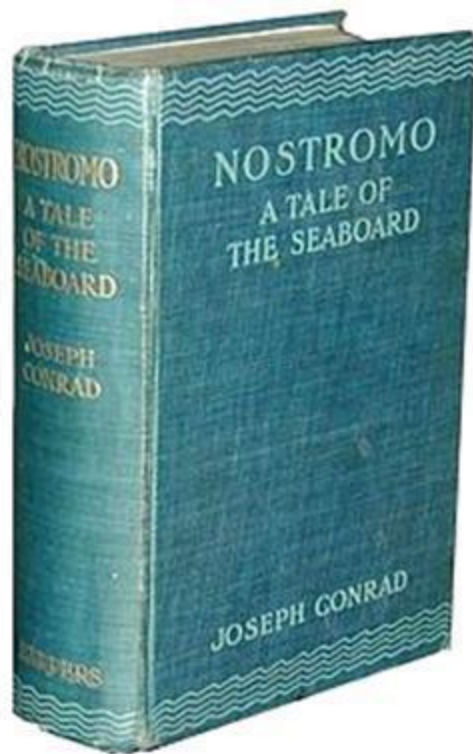


# ***NOSTROMO***



## **A TALE OF THE SEABOARD**

This 1904 novel is set in the fictitious South American republic of “Costaguana.” and was originally published serially in two volumes of *T.P.’s Weekly*. Nostromo is believed by some to be the best novel of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



*The first edition*

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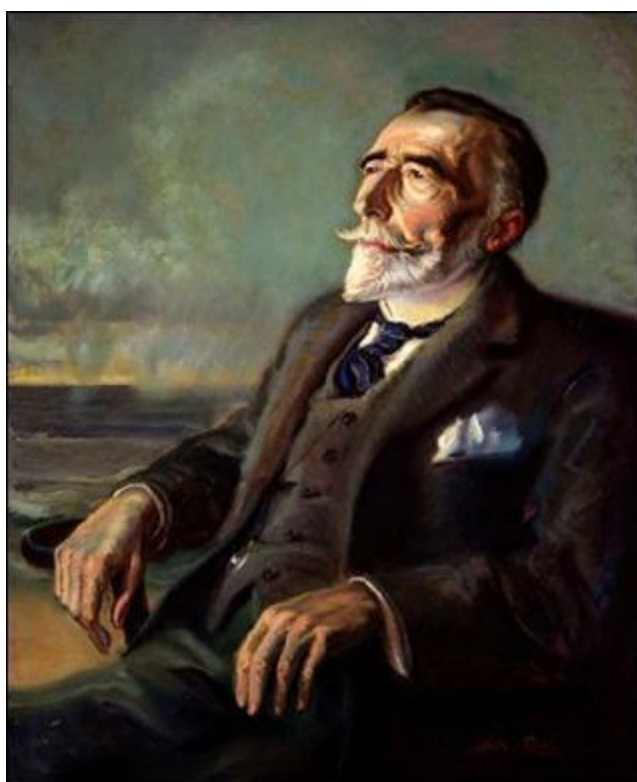
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## TO JOHN GALSWORTHY

“So foul a sky clears not without a storm.” — SHAKESPEARE

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

“Nostromo” is the most anxiously meditated of the longer novels which belong to the period following upon the publication of the “Typhoon” volume of short stories.

I don't mean to say that I became then conscious of any impending change in my mentality and in my attitude towards the tasks of my writing life. And perhaps there was never any change, except in that mysterious, extraneous thing which has nothing to do with the theories of art; a subtle change in the nature of the inspiration; a phenomenon for which I can not in any way be held responsible. What, however, did cause me some concern was that after finishing the last story of the “Typhoon” volume it seemed somehow that there was nothing more in the world to write about.

This so strangely negative but disturbing mood lasted some little time; and then, as with many of my longer stories, the first hint for “Nostromo” came to me in the shape of a vagrant anecdote completely destitute of valuable details.

As a matter of fact in 1875 or '6, when very young, in the West Indies or rather in the Gulf of Mexico, for my contacts with land were short, few, and fleeting, I heard the story of some man who was supposed to have stolen single-handed a whole lighter-full of silver, somewhere on the Tierra Firme seaboard during the troubles of a revolution.

On the face of it this was something of a feat. But I heard no details, and having no particular interest in crime qua crime I was not likely to keep that one in my mind. And I forgot it till twenty-six or seven years afterwards I came upon the very thing in a shabby volume picked up outside a second-hand book-shop. It was the life story of an American seaman written by himself with the assistance of a journalist. In the course of his wanderings that American sailor worked for some months on board a schooner, the master and owner of which was the thief of whom I had heard in my very young days. I have no doubt of that because there could hardly have been two exploits of that peculiar kind in the same part of the world and both connected with a South American revolution.

The fellow had actually managed to steal a lighter with silver, and this, it seems, only because he was implicitly trusted by his employers, who must

have been singularly poor judges of character. In the sailor's story he is represented as an unmitigated rascal, a small cheat, stupidly ferocious, morose, of mean appearance, and altogether unworthy of the greatness this opportunity had thrust upon him. What was interesting was that he would boast of it openly.

He used to say: "People think I make a lot of money in this schooner of mine. But that is nothing. I don't care for that. Now and then I go away quietly and lift a bar of silver. I must get rich slowly — you understand."

There was also another curious point about the man. Once in the course of some quarrel the sailor threatened him: "What's to prevent me reporting ashore what you have told me about that silver?"

The cynical ruffian was not alarmed in the least. He actually laughed. "You fool, if you dare talk like that on shore about me you will get a knife stuck in your back. Every man, woman, and child in that port is my friend. And who's to prove the lighter wasn't sunk? I didn't show you where the silver is hidden. Did I? So you know nothing. And suppose I lied? Eh?"

Ultimately the sailor, disgusted with the sordid meanness of that impenitent thief, deserted from the schooner. The whole episode takes about three pages of his autobiography. Nothing to speak of; but as I looked them over, the curious confirmation of the few casual words heard in my early youth evoked the memories of that distant time when everything was so fresh, so surprising, so venturesome, so interesting; bits of strange coasts under the stars, shadows of hills in the sunshine, men's passions in the dusk, gossip half-forgotten, faces grown dim. . . . Perhaps, perhaps, there still was in the world something to write about. Yet I did not see anything at first in the mere story. A rascal steals a large parcel of a valuable commodity — so people say. It's either true or untrue; and in any case it has no value in itself. To invent a circumstantial account of the robbery did not appeal to me, because my talents not running that way I did not think that the game was worth the candle. It was only when it dawned upon me that the purloiner of the treasure need not necessarily be a confirmed rogue, that he could be even a man of character, an actor and possibly a victim in the changing scenes of a revolution, it was only then that I had the first vision of a twilight country which was to become the province of Sulaco, with its high shadowy Sierra and its misty Campo for mute witnesses of events flowing from the passions of men short-sighted in good and evil.

Such are in very truth the obscure origins of “Nostromo” — the book. From that moment, I suppose, it had to be. Yet even then I hesitated, as if warned by the instinct of self-preservation from venturing on a distant and toilsome journey into a land full of intrigues and revolutions. But it had to be done.

It took the best part of the years 1903-4 to do; with many intervals of renewed hesitation, lest I should lose myself in the ever-enlarging vistas opening before me as I progressed deeper in my knowledge of the country. Often, also, when I had thought myself to a standstill over the tangled-up affairs of the Republic, I would, figuratively speaking, pack my bag, rush away from Sulaco for a change of air and write a few pages of the “Mirror of the Sea.” But generally, as I’ve said before, my sojourn on the Continent of Latin America, famed for its hospitality, lasted for about two years. On my return I found (speaking somewhat in the style of Captain Gulliver) my family all well, my wife heartily glad to learn that the fuss was all over, and our small boy considerably grown during my absence.

My principal authority for the history of Costaguana is, of course, my venerated friend, the late Don Jose Avellanosa, Minister to the Courts of England and Spain, etc., etc., in his impartial and eloquent “History of Fifty Years of Misrule.” That work was never published — the reader will discover why — and I am in fact the only person in the world possessed of its contents. I have mastered them in not a few hours of earnest meditation, and I hope that my accuracy will be trusted. In justice to myself, and to allay the fears of prospective readers, I beg to point out that the few historical allusions are never dragged in for the sake of parading my unique erudition, but that each of them is closely related to actuality; either throwing a light on the nature of current events or affecting directly the fortunes of the people of whom I speak.

As to their own histories I have tried to set them down, Aristocracy and People, men and women, Latin and Anglo-Saxon, bandit and politician, with as cool a hand as was possible in the heat and clash of my own conflicting emotions. And after all this is also the story of their conflicts. It is for the reader to say how far they are deserving of interest in their actions and in the secret purposes of their hearts revealed in the bitter necessities of the time. I confess that, for me, that time is the time of firm friendships and unforgotten hospitalities. And in my gratitude I must mention here Mrs. Gould, “the first lady of Sulaco,” whom we may safely leave to the secret



devotion of Dr. Monygham, and Charles Gould, the Idealist-creator of Material Interests whom we must leave to his Mine — from which there is no escape in this world.

About Nostromo, the second of the two racially and socially contrasted men, both captured by the silver of the San Tome Mine, I feel bound to say something more.

I did not hesitate to make that central figure an Italian. First of all the thing is perfectly credible: Italians were swarming into the Occidental Province at the time, as anybody who will read further can see; and secondly, there was no one who could stand so well by the side of Giorgio Viola the Garibaldino, the Idealist of the old, humanitarian revolutions. For myself I needed there a Man of the People as free as possible from his class-conventions and all settled modes of thinking. This is not a side snarl at conventions. My reasons were not moral but artistic. Had he been an Anglo-Saxon he would have tried to get into local politics. But Nostromo does not aspire to be a leader in a personal game. He does not want to raise himself above the mass. He is content to feel himself a power — within the People.

But mainly Nostromo is what he is because I received the inspiration for him in my early days from a Mediterranean sailor. Those who have read certain pages of mine will see at once what I mean when I say that Dominic, the padrone of the Tremolino, might under given circumstances have been a Nostromo. At any rate Dominic would have understood the younger man perfectly — if scornfully. He and I were engaged together in a rather absurd adventure, but the absurdity does not matter. It is a real satisfaction to think that in my very young days there must, after all, have been something in me worthy to command that man's half-bitter fidelity, his half-ironic devotion. Many of Nostromo's speeches I have heard first in Dominic's voice. His hand on the tiller and his fearless eyes roaming the horizon from within the monkish hood shadowing his face, he would utter the usual exordium of his remorseless wisdom: "Vous autres gentilhommes!" in a caustic tone that hangs on my ear yet. Like Nostromo! "You hombres finos!" Very much like Nostromo. But Dominic the Corsican nursed a certain pride of ancestry from which my Nostromo is free; for Nostromo's lineage had to be more ancient still. He is a man with the weight of countless generations behind him and no parentage to boast of. . . . Like the People.

In his firm grip on the earth he inherits, in his improvidence and generosity, in his lavishness with his gifts, in his manly vanity, in the obscure sense of his greatness and in his faithful devotion with something despairing as well as desperate in its impulses, he is a Man of the People, their very own unenvious force, disdaining to lead but ruling from within. Years afterwards, grown older as the famous Captain Fidanza, with a stake in the country, going about his many affairs followed by respectful glances in the modernized streets of Sulaco, calling on the widow of the cargador, attending the Lodge, listening in unmoved silence to anarchist speeches at the meeting, the enigmatical patron of the new revolutionary agitation, the trusted, the wealthy comrade Fidanza with the knowledge of his moral ruin locked up in his breast, he remains essentially a Man of the People. In his mingled love and scorn of life and in the bewildered conviction of having been betrayed, of dying betrayed he hardly knows by what or by whom, he is still of the People, their undoubted Great Man — with a private history of his own.

One more figure of those stirring times I would like to mention: and that is Antonia Avellanos — the “beautiful Antonia.” Whether she is a possible variation of Latin-American girlhood I wouldn’t dare to affirm. But, for me, she is. Always a little in the background by the side of her father (my venerated friend) I hope she has yet relief enough to make intelligible what I am going to say. Of all the people who had seen with me the birth of the Occidental Republic, she is the only one who has kept in my memory the aspect of continued life. Antonia the Aristocrat and Nostromo the Man of the People are the artisans of the New Era, the true creators of the New State; he by his legendary and daring feat, she, like a woman, simply by the force of what she is: the only being capable of inspiring a sincere passion in the heart of a trifler.

If anything could induce me to revisit Sulaco (I should hate to see all these changes) it would be Antonia. And the true reason for that — why not be frank about it? — the true reason is that I have modelled her on my first love. How we, a band of tallish schoolboys, the chums of her two brothers, how we used to look up to that girl just out of the schoolroom herself, as the standard-bearer of a faith to which we all were born but which she alone knew how to hold aloft with an unflinching hope! She had perhaps more glow and less serenity in her soul than Antonia, but she was an uncompromising Puritan of patriotism with no taint of the slightest

worldliness in her thoughts. I was not the only one in love with her; but it was I who had to hear oftenest her scathing criticism of my levities — very much like poor Decoud — or stand the brunt of her austere, unanswerable invective. She did not quite understand — but never mind. That afternoon when I came in, a shrinking yet defiant sinner, to say the final good-bye I received a hand-squeeze that made my heart leap and saw a tear that took my breath away. She was softened at the last as though she had suddenly perceived (we were such children still!) that I was really going away for good, going very far away — even as far as Sulaco, lying unknown, hidden from our eyes in the darkness of the Placid Gulf.

That's why I long sometimes for another glimpse of the "beautiful Antonia" (or can it be the Other?) moving in the dimness of the great cathedral, saying a short prayer at the tomb of the first and last Cardinal-Archbishop of Sulaco, standing absorbed in filial devotion before the monument of Don Jose Avellanos, and, with a lingering, tender, faithful glance at the medallion-memorial to Martin Decoud, going out serenely into the sunshine of the Plaza with her upright carriage and her white head; a relic of the past disregarded by men awaiting impatiently the Dawns of other New Eras, the coming of more Revolutions.

But this is the idlest of dreams; for I did understand perfectly well at the time that the moment the breath left the body of the Magnificent Capataz, the Man of the People, freed at last from the toils of love and wealth, there was nothing more for me to do in Sulaco.

J. C.

October, 1917.

# NOSTROMO

# **PART FIRST THE SILVER OF THE MINE**

## CHAPTER ONE

In the time of Spanish rule, and for many years afterwards, the town of Sulaco — the luxuriant beauty of the orange gardens bears witness to its antiquity — had never been commercially anything more important than a coasting port with a fairly large local trade in ox-hides and indigo. The clumsy deep-sea galleons of the conquerors that, needing a brisk gale to move at all, would lie becalmed, where your modern ship built on clipper lines forges ahead by the mere flapping of her sails, had been barred out of Sulaco by the prevailing calms of its vast gulf. Some harbours of the earth are made difficult of access by the treachery of sunken rocks and the tempests of their shores. Sulaco had found an inviolable sanctuary from the temptations of a trading world in the solemn hush of the deep Golfo Placido as if within an enormous semi-circular and unroofed temple open to the ocean, with its walls of lofty mountains hung with the mourning draperies of cloud.

On one side of this broad curve in the straight seaboard of the Republic of Costaguana, the last spur of the coast range forms an insignificant cape whose name is Punta Mala. From the middle of the gulf the point of the land itself is not visible at all; but the shoulder of a steep hill at the back can be made out faintly like a shadow on the sky.

On the other side, what seems to be an isolated patch of blue mist floats lightly on the glare of the horizon. This is the peninsula of Azuera, a wild chaos of sharp rocks and stony levels cut about by vertical ravines. It lies far out to sea like a rough head of stone stretched from a green-clad coast at the end of a slender neck of sand covered with thickets of thorny scrub. Utterly waterless, for the rainfall runs off at once on all sides into the sea, it has not soil enough — it is said — to grow a single blade of grass, as if it were blighted by a curse. The poor, associating by an obscure instinct of consolation the ideas of evil and wealth, will tell you that it is deadly because of its forbidden treasures. The common folk of the neighbourhood, peons of the estancias, vaqueros of the seaboard plains, tame Indians coming miles to market with a bundle of sugar-cane or a basket of maize worth about threepence, are well aware that heaps of shining gold lie in the gloom of the deep precipices cleaving the stony levels of Azuera. Tradition has it that many adventurers of olden time had perished in the search. The story goes also that within men's memory two wandering sailors —

Americanos, perhaps, but gringos of some sort for certain — talked over a gambling, good-for-nothing mozo, and the three stole a donkey to carry for them a bundle of dry sticks, a water-skin, and provisions enough to last a few days. Thus accompanied, and with revolvers at their belts, they had started to chop their way with machetes through the thorny scrub on the neck of the peninsula.

On the second evening an upright spiral of smoke (it could only have been from their camp-fire) was seen for the first time within memory of man standing up faintly upon the sky above a razor-backed ridge on the stony head. The crew of a coasting schooner, lying becalmed three miles off the shore, stared at it with amazement till dark. A negro fisherman, living in a lonely hut in a little bay near by, had seen the start and was on the lookout for some sign. He called to his wife just as the sun was about to set. They had watched the strange portent with envy, incredulity, and awe.

The impious adventurers gave no other sign. The sailors, the Indian, and the stolen burro were never seen again. As to the mozo, a Sulaco man — his wife paid for some masses, and the poor four-footed beast, being without sin, had been probably permitted to die; but the two gringos, spectral and alive, are believed to be dwelling to this day amongst the rocks, under the fatal spell of their success. Their souls cannot tear themselves away from their bodies mounting guard over the discovered treasure. They are now rich and hungry and thirsty — a strange theory of tenacious gringo ghosts suffering in their starved and parched flesh of defiant heretics, where a Christian would have renounced and been released.

These, then, are the legendary inhabitants of Azuera guarding its forbidden wealth; and the shadow on the sky on one side with the round patch of blue haze blurring the bright skirt of the horizon on the other, mark the two outermost points of the bend which bears the name of Golfo Placido, because never a strong wind had been known to blow upon its waters.

On crossing the imaginary line drawn from Punta Mala to Azuera the ships from Europe bound to Sulaco lose at once the strong breezes of the ocean. They become the prey of capricious airs that play with them for thirty hours at a stretch sometimes. Before them the head of the calm gulf is filled on most days of the year by a great body of motionless and opaque clouds. On the rare clear mornings another shadow is cast upon the sweep of the gulf. The dawn breaks high behind the towering and serrated wall of

the Cordillera, a clear-cut vision of dark peaks rearing their steep slopes on a lofty pedestal of forest rising from the very edge of the shore. Amongst them the white head of Higuerota rises majestically upon the blue. Bare clusters of enormous rocks sprinkle with tiny black dots the smooth dome of snow.

Then, as the midday sun withdraws from the gulf the shadow of the mountains, the clouds begin to roll out of the lower valleys. They swathe in sombre tatters the naked crags of precipices above the wooded slopes, hide the peaks, smoke in stormy trails across the snows of Higuerota. The Cordillera is gone from you as if it had dissolved itself into great piles of grey and black vapours that travel out slowly to seaward and vanish into thin air all along the front before the blazing heat of the day. The wasting edge of the cloud-bank always strives for, but seldom wins, the middle of the gulf. The sun — as the sailors say — is eating it up. Unless perchance a sombre thunder-head breaks away from the main body to career all over the gulf till it escapes into the offing beyond Azuera, where it bursts suddenly into flame and crashes like a sinister pirate-ship of the air, hove-to above the horizon, engaging the sea.

At night the body of clouds advancing higher up the sky smothers the whole quiet gulf below with an impenetrable darkness, in which the sound of the falling showers can be heard beginning and ceasing abruptly — now here, now there. Indeed, these cloudy nights are proverbial with the seamen along the whole west coast of a great continent. Sky, land, and sea disappear together out of the world when the Placido — as the saying is — goes to sleep under its black poncho. The few stars left below the seaward frown of the vault shine feebly as into the mouth of a black cavern. In its vastness your ship floats unseen under your feet, her sails flutter invisible above your head. The eye of God Himself — they add with grim profanity — could not find out what work a man's hand is doing in there; and you would be free to call the devil to your aid with impunity if even his malice were not defeated by such a blind darkness.

The shores on the gulf are steep to all round; three uninhabited islets basking in the sunshine just outside the cloud veil, and opposite the entrance to the harbour of Sulaco, bear the name of "The Isabels."

There is the Great Isabel; the Little Isabel, which is round; and Hermosa, which is the smallest.



That last is no more than a foot high, and about seven paces across, a mere flat top of a grey rock which smokes like a hot cinder after a shower, and where no man would care to venture a naked sole before sunset. On the Little Isabel an old ragged palm, with a thick bulging trunk rough with spines, a very witch amongst palm trees, rustles a dismal bunch of dead leaves above the coarse sand. The Great Isabel has a spring of fresh water issuing from the overgrown side of a ravine. Resembling an emerald green wedge of land a mile long, and laid flat upon the sea, it bears two forest trees standing close together, with a wide spread of shade at the foot of their smooth trunks. A ravine extending the whole length of the island is full of bushes; and presenting a deep tangled cleft on the high side spreads itself out on the other into a shallow depression abutting on a small strip of sandy shore.

From that low end of the Great Isabel the eye plunges through an opening two miles away, as abrupt as if chopped with an axe out of the regular sweep of the coast, right into the harbour of Sulaco. It is an oblong, lake-like piece of water. On one side the short wooded spurs and valleys of the Cordillera come down at right angles to the very strand; on the other the open view of the great Sulaco plain passes into the opal mystery of great distances overhung by dry haze. The town of Sulaco itself — tops of walls, a great cupola, gleams of white miradors in a vast grove of orange trees — lies between the mountains and the plain, at some little distance from its harbour and out of the direct line of sight from the sea.

## CHAPTER TWO

The only sign of commercial activity within the harbour, visible from the beach of the Great Isabel, is the square blunt end of the wooden jetty which the Oceanic Steam Navigation Company (the O.S.N. of familiar speech) had thrown over the shallow part of the bay soon after they had resolved to make of Sulaco one of their ports of call for the Republic of Costaguana. The State possesses several harbours on its long seaboard, but except Cayta, an important place, all are either small and inconvenient inlets in an iron-bound coast — like Esmeralda, for instance, sixty miles to the south — or else mere open roadsteads exposed to the winds and fretted by the surf.

Perhaps the very atmospheric conditions which had kept away the merchant fleets of bygone ages induced the O.S.N. Company to violate the sanctuary of peace sheltering the calm existence of Sulaco. The variable airs sporting lightly with the vast semicircle of waters within the head of Azuera could not baffle the steam power of their excellent fleet. Year after year the black hulls of their ships had gone up and down the coast, in and out, past Azuera, past the Isabels, past Punta Mala — disregarding everything but the tyranny of time. Their names, the names of all mythology, became the household words of a coast that had never been ruled by the gods of Olympus. The Juno was known only for her comfortable cabins amidships, the Saturn for the geniality of her captain and the painted and gilt luxuriousness of her saloon, whereas the Ganymede was fitted out mainly for cattle transport, and to be avoided by coastwise passengers. The humblest Indian in the obscurest village on the coast was familiar with the Cerberus, a little black puffer without charm or living accommodation to speak of, whose mission was to creep inshore along the wooded beaches close to mighty ugly rocks, stopping obligingly before every cluster of huts to collect produce, down to three-pound parcels of indiarubber bound in a wrapper of dry grass.

And as they seldom failed to account for the smallest package, rarely lost a bullock, and had never drowned a single passenger, the name of the O.S.N. stood very high for trustworthiness. People declared that under the Company's care their lives and property were safer on the water than in their own houses on shore.

The O.S.N.'s superintendent in Sulaco for the whole Costaguana section of the service was very proud of his Company's standing. He resumed it in

a saying which was very often on his lips, "We never make mistakes." To the Company's officers it took the form of a severe injunction, "We must make no mistakes. I'll have no mistakes here, no matter what Smith may do at his end."

Smith, on whom he had never set eyes in his life, was the other superintendent of the service, quartered some fifteen hundred miles away from Sulaco. "Don't talk to me of your Smith."

Then, calming down suddenly, he would dismiss the subject with studied negligence.

"Smith knows no more of this continent than a baby."

"Our excellent Senor Mitchell" for the business and official world of Sulaco; "Fussy Joe" for the commanders of the Company's ships, Captain Joseph Mitchell prided himself on his profound knowledge of men and things in the country — cosas de Costaguana. Amongst these last he accounted as most unfavourable to the orderly working of his Company the frequent changes of government brought about by revolutions of the military type.

The political atmosphere of the Republic was generally stormy in these days. The fugitive patriots of the defeated party had the knack of turning up again on the coast with half a steamer's load of small arms and ammunition. Such resourcefulness Captain Mitchell considered as perfectly wonderful in view of their utter destitution at the time of flight. He had observed that "they never seemed to have enough change about them to pay for their passage ticket out of the country." And he could speak with knowledge; for on a memorable occasion he had been called upon to save the life of a dictator, together with the lives of a few Sulaco officials — the political chief, the director of the customs, and the head of police — belonging to an overturned government. Poor Senor Ribiera (such was the dictator's name) had come pelting eighty miles over mountain tracks after the lost battle of Socorro, in the hope of out-distancing the fatal news — which, of course, he could not manage to do on a lame mule. The animal, moreover, expired under him at the end of the Alameda, where the military band plays sometimes in the evenings between the revolutions. "Sir," Captain Mitchell would pursue with portentous gravity, "the ill-timed end of that mule attracted attention to the unfortunate rider. His features were recognized by several deserters from the Dictatorial army amongst the rascally mob already engaged in smashing the windows of the Intendencia."

Early on the morning of that day the local authorities of Sulaco had fled for refuge to the O.S.N. Company's offices, a strong building near the shore end of the jetty, leaving the town to the mercies of a revolutionary rabble; and as the Dictator was execrated by the populace on account of the severe recruitment law his necessities had compelled him to enforce during the struggle, he stood a good chance of being torn to pieces. Providentially, Nostromo — invaluable fellow — with some Italian workmen, imported to work upon the National Central Railway, was at hand, and managed to snatch him away — for the time at least. Ultimately, Captain Mitchell succeeded in taking everybody off in his own gig to one of the Company's steamers — it was the *Minerva* — just then, as luck would have it, entering the harbour.

He had to lower these gentlemen at the end of a rope out of a hole in the wall at the back, while the mob which, pouring out of the town, had spread itself all along the shore, howled and foamed at the foot of the building in front. He had to hurry them then the whole length of the jetty; it had been a desperate dash, neck or nothing — and again it was Nostromo, a fellow in a thousand, who, at the head, this time, of the Company's body of lightermen, held the jetty against the rushes of the rabble, thus giving the fugitives time to reach the gig lying ready for them at the other end with the Company's flag at the stern. Sticks, stones, shots flew; knives, too, were thrown. Captain Mitchell exhibited willingly the long cicatrice of a cut over his left ear and temple, made by a razor-blade fastened to a stick — a weapon, he explained, very much in favour with the “worst kind of nigger out here.”

Captain Mitchell was a thick, elderly man, wearing high, pointed collars and short side-whiskers, partial to white waistcoats, and really very communicative under his air of pompous reserve.

“These gentlemen,” he would say, staring with great solemnity, “had to run like rabbits, sir. I ran like a rabbit myself. Certain forms of death are — er — distasteful to a — a — er — respectable man. They would have pounded me to death, too. A crazy mob, sir, does not discriminate. Under providence we owed our preservation to my *Capataz de Cargadores*, as they called him in the town, a man who, when I discovered his value, sir, was just the bos'n of an Italian ship, a big Genoese ship, one of the few European ships that ever came to Sulaco with a general cargo before the building of the National Central. He left her on account of some very respectable friends he made here, his own countrymen, but also, I suppose,

to better himself. Sir, I am a pretty good judge of character. I engaged him to be the foreman of our lightermen, and caretaker of our jetty. That's all that he was. But without him Senor Ribiera would have been a dead man. This Nostromo, sir, a man absolutely above reproach, became the terror of all the thieves in the town. We were infested, infested, overrun, sir, here at that time by ladrones and matreros, thieves and murderers from the whole province. On this occasion they had been flocking into Sulaco for a week past. They had scented the end, sir. Fifty per cent. of that murdering mob were professional bandits from the Campo, sir, but there wasn't one that hadn't heard of Nostromo. As to the town leperos, sir, the sight of his black whiskers and white teeth was enough for them. They quailed before him, sir. That's what the force of character will do for you."

It could very well be said that it was Nostromo alone who saved the lives of these gentlemen. Captain Mitchell, on his part, never left them till he had seen them collapse, panting, terrified, and exasperated, but safe, on the luxuriant velvet sofas in the first-class saloon of the Minerva. To the very last he had been careful to address the ex-Dictator as "Your Excellency."

"Sir, I could do no other. The man was down — ghastly, livid, one mass of scratches."

The Minerva never let go her anchor that call. The superintendent ordered her out of the harbour at once. No cargo could be landed, of course, and the passengers for Sulaco naturally refused to go ashore. They could hear the firing and see plainly the fight going on at the edge of the water. The repulsed mob devoted its energies to an attack upon the Custom House, a dreary, unfinished-looking structure with many windows two hundred yards away from the O.S.N. Offices, and the only other building near the harbour. Captain Mitchell, after directing the commander of the Minerva to land "these gentlemen" in the first port of call outside Costaguana, went back in his gig to see what could be done for the protection of the Company's property. That and the property of the railway were preserved by the European residents; that is, by Captain Mitchell himself and the staff of engineers building the road, aided by the Italian and Basque workmen who rallied faithfully round their English chiefs. The Company's lightermen, too, natives of the Republic, behaved very well under their Capataz. An outcast lot of very mixed blood, mainly negroes, everlastingly at feud with the other customers of low grog shops in the town, they embraced with delight this opportunity to settle their personal scores under

such favourable auspices. There was not one of them that had not, at some time or other, looked with terror at Nostromo's revolver poked very close at his face, or been otherwise daunted by Nostromo's resolution. He was "much of a man," their Capataz was, they said, too scornful in his temper ever to utter abuse, a tireless taskmaster, and the more to be feared because of his aloofness. And behold! there he was that day, at their head, condescending to make jocular remarks to this man or the other.

Such leadership was inspiriting, and in truth all the harm the mob managed to achieve was to set fire to one — only one — stack of railway-sleepers, which, being creosoted, burned well. The main attack on the railway yards, on the O.S.N. Offices, and especially on the Custom House, whose strong room, it was well known, contained a large treasure in silver ingots, failed completely. Even the little hotel kept by old Giorgio, standing alone halfway between the harbour and the town, escaped looting and destruction, not by a miracle, but because with the safes in view they had neglected it at first, and afterwards found no leisure to stop. Nostromo, with his Cargadores, was pressing them too hard then.

## CHAPTER THREE

It might have been said that there he was only protecting his own. From the first he had been admitted to live in the intimacy of the family of the hotel-keeper who was a countryman of his. Old Giorgio Viola, a Genoese with a shaggy white leonine head — often called simply “the Garibaldino” (as Mohammedans are called after their prophet) — was, to use Captain Mitchell’s own words, the “respectable married friend” by whose advice Nostromo had left his ship to try for a run of shore luck in Costaguana.

The old man, full of scorn for the populace, as your austere republican so often is, had disregarded the preliminary sounds of trouble. He went on that day as usual pottering about the “casa” in his slippers, muttering angrily to himself his contempt of the non-political nature of the riot, and shrugging his shoulders. In the end he was taken unawares by the out-rush of the rabble. It was too late then to remove his family, and, indeed, where could he have run to with the portly Signora Teresa and two little girls on that great plain? So, barricading every opening, the old man sat down sternly in the middle of the darkened cafe with an old shot-gun on his knees. His wife sat on another chair by his side, muttering pious invocations to all the saints of the calendar.

The old republican did not believe in saints, or in prayers, or in what he called “priest’s religion.” Liberty and Garibaldi were his divinities; but he tolerated “superstition” in women, preserving in these matters a lofty and silent attitude.

His two girls, the eldest fourteen, and the other two years younger, crouched on the sanded floor, on each side of the Signora Teresa, with their heads on their mother’s lap, both scared, but each in her own way, the dark-haired Linda indignant and angry, the fair Giselle, the younger, bewildered and resigned. The Patrona removed her arms, which embraced her daughters, for a moment to cross herself and wring her hands hurriedly. She moaned a little louder.

“Oh! Gian’ Battista, why art thou not here? Oh! why art thou not here?”

She was not then invoking the saint himself, but calling upon Nostromo, whose patron he was. And Giorgio, motionless on the chair by her side, would be provoked by these reproachful and distracted appeals.

“Peace, woman! Where’s the sense of it? There’s his duty,” he murmured in the dark; and she would retort, panting —

“Eh! I have no patience. Duty! What of the woman who has been like a mother to him? I bent my knee to him this morning; don’t you go out, Gian’ Battista — stop in the house, Battistino — look at those two little innocent children!”

Mrs. Viola was an Italian, too, a native of Spezzia, and though considerably younger than her husband, already middle-aged. She had a handsome face, whose complexion had turned yellow because the climate of Sulaco did not suit her at all. Her voice was a rich contralto. When, with her arms folded tight under her ample bosom, she scolded the squat, thick-legged China girls handling linen, plucking fowls, pounding corn in wooden mortars amongst the mud outbuildings at the back of the house, she could bring out such an impassioned, vibrating, sepulchral note that the chained watch-dog bolted into his kennel with a great rattle. Luis, a cinnamon-coloured mulatto with a sprouting moustache and thick, dark lips, would stop sweeping the cafe with a broom of palm-leaves to let a gentle shudder run down his spine. His languishing almond eyes would remain closed for a long time.

This was the staff of the Casa Viola, but all these people had fled early that morning at the first sounds of the riot, preferring to hide on the plain rather than trust themselves in the house; a preference for which they were in no way to blame, since, whether true or not, it was generally believed in the town that the Garibaldino had some money buried under the clay floor of the kitchen. The dog, an irritable, shaggy brute, barked violently and whined plaintively in turns at the back, running in and out of his kennel as rage or fear prompted him.

Bursts of great shouting rose and died away, like wild gusts of wind on the plain round the barricaded house; the fitful popping of shots grew louder above the yelling. Sometimes there were intervals of unaccountable stillness outside, and nothing could have been more gaily peaceful than the narrow bright lines of sunlight from the cracks in the shutters, ruled straight across the cafe over the disarranged chairs and tables to the wall opposite. Old Giorgio had chosen that bare, whitewashed room for a retreat. It had only one window, and its only door swung out upon the track of thick dust fenced by aloe hedges between the harbour and the town, where clumsy carts used to creak along behind slow yokes of oxen guided by boys on horseback.



In a pause of stillness Giorgio cocked his gun. The ominous sound wrung a low moan from the rigid figure of the woman sitting by his side. A sudden outbreak of defiant yelling quite near the house sank all at once to a confused murmur of growls. Somebody ran along; the loud catching of his breath was heard for an instant passing the door; there were hoarse mutters and footsteps near the wall; a shoulder rubbed against the shutter, effacing the bright lines of sunshine pencilled across the whole breadth of the room. Signora Teresa's arms thrown about the kneeling forms of her daughters embraced them closer with a convulsive pressure.

The mob, driven away from the Custom House, had broken up into several bands, retreating across the plain in the direction of the town. The subdued crash of irregular volleys fired in the distance was answered by faint yells far away. In the intervals the single shots rang feebly, and the low, long, white building blinded in every window seemed to be the centre of a turmoil widening in a great circle about its closed-up silence. But the cautious movements and whispers of a routed party seeking a momentary shelter behind the wall made the darkness of the room, striped by threads of quiet sunlight, alight with evil, stealthy sounds. The Violas had them in their ears as though invisible ghosts hovering about their chairs had consulted in mutters as to the advisability of setting fire to this foreigner's casa.

It was trying to the nerves. Old Viola had risen slowly, gun in hand, irresolute, for he did not see how he could prevent them. Already voices could be heard talking at the back. Signora Teresa was beside herself with terror.

"Ah! the traitor! the traitor!" she mumbled, almost inaudibly. "Now we are going to be burnt; and I bent my knee to him. No! he must run at the heels of his English."

She seemed to think that Nostromo's mere presence in the house would have made it perfectly safe. So far, she, too, was under the spell of that reputation the Capataz de Cargadores had made for himself by the waterside, along the railway line, with the English and with the populace of Sulaco. To his face, and even against her husband, she invariably affected to laugh it to scorn, sometimes good-naturedly, more often with a curious bitterness. But then women are unreasonable in their opinions, as Giorgio used to remark calmly on fitting occasions. On this occasion, with his gun held at ready before him, he stooped down to his wife's head, and, keeping

his eyes steadfastly on the barricaded door, he breathed out into her ear that Nostromo would have been powerless to help. What could two men shut up in a house do against twenty or more bent upon setting fire to the roof? Gian' Battista was thinking of the casa all the time, he was sure.

"He think of the casa! He!" gasped Signora Viola, crazily. She struck her breast with her open hands. "I know him. He thinks of nobody but himself."

A discharge of firearms near by made her throw her head back and close her eyes. Old Giorgio set his teeth hard under his white moustache, and his eyes began to roll fiercely. Several bullets struck the end of the wall together; pieces of plaster could be heard falling outside; a voice screamed "Here they come!" and after a moment of uneasy silence there was a rush of running feet along the front.

Then the tension of old Giorgio's attitude relaxed, and a smile of contemptuous relief came upon his lips of an old fighter with a leonine face. These were not a people striving for justice, but thieves. Even to defend his life against them was a sort of degradation for a man who had been one of Garibaldi's immortal thousand in the conquest of Sicily. He had an immense scorn for this outbreak of scoundrels and leperos, who did not know the meaning of the word "liberty."

He grounded his old gun, and, turning his head, glanced at the coloured lithograph of Garibaldi in a black frame on the white wall; a thread of strong sunshine cut it perpendicularly. His eyes, accustomed to the luminous twilight, made out the high colouring of the face, the red of the shirt, the outlines of the square shoulders, the black patch of the Bersagliere hat with cock's feathers curling over the crown. An immortal hero! This was your liberty; it gave you not only life, but immortality as well!

For that one man his fanaticism had suffered no diminution. In the moment of relief from the apprehension of the greatest danger, perhaps, his family had been exposed to in all their wanderings, he had turned to the picture of his old chief, first and only, then laid his hand on his wife's shoulder.

The children kneeling on the floor had not moved. Signora Teresa opened her eyes a little, as though he had awakened her from a very deep and dreamless slumber. Before he had time in his deliberate way to say a reassuring word she jumped up, with the children clinging to her, one on each side, gasped for breath, and let out a hoarse shriek.

It was simultaneous with the bang of a violent blow struck on the outside of the shutter. They could hear suddenly the snorting of a horse, the restive tramping of hoofs on the narrow, hard path in front of the house; the toe of a boot struck at the shutter again; a spur jingled at every blow, and an excited voice shouted, “Hola! hola, in there!”

## CHAPTER FOUR

All the morning Nostromo had kept his eye from afar on the Casa Viola, even in the thick of the hottest scrimmage near the Custom House. "If I see smoke rising over there," he thought to himself, "they are lost." Directly the mob had broken he pressed with a small band of Italian workmen in that direction, which, indeed, was the shortest line towards the town. That part of the rabble he was pursuing seemed to think of making a stand under the house; a volley fired by his followers from behind an aloe hedge made the rascals fly. In a gap chopped out for the rails of the harbour branch line Nostromo appeared, mounted on his silver-grey mare. He shouted, sent after them one shot from his revolver, and galloped up to the cafe window. He had an idea that old Giorgio would choose that part of the house for a refuge.

His voice had penetrated to them, sounding breathlessly hurried: "Hola! Vecchio! O, Vecchio! Is it all well with you in there?"

"You see — " murmured old Viola to his wife. Signora Teresa was silent now. Outside Nostromo laughed.

"I can hear the padrona is not dead."

"You have done your best to kill me with fear," cried Signora Teresa. She wanted to say something more, but her voice failed her.

Linda raised her eyes to her face for a moment, but old Giorgio shouted apologetically —

"She is a little upset."

Outside Nostromo shouted back with another laugh —

"She cannot upset me."

Signora Teresa found her voice.

"It is what I say. You have no heart — and you have no conscience, Gian' Battista — "

They heard him wheel his horse away from the shutters. The party he led were babbling excitedly in Italian and Spanish, inciting each other to the pursuit. He put himself at their head, crying, "Avanti!"

"He has not stopped very long with us. There is no praise from strangers to be got here," Signora Teresa said tragically. "Avanti! Yes! That is all he cares for. To be first somewhere — somehow — to be first with these English. They will be showing him to everybody. 'This is our Nostromo!'"

She laughed ominously. "What a name! What is that? Nostromo? He would take a name that is properly no word from them."

Meantime Giorgio, with tranquil movements, had been unfastening the door; the flood of light fell on Signora Teresa, with her two girls gathered to her side, a picturesque woman in a pose of maternal exaltation. Behind her the wall was dazzlingly white, and the crude colours of the Garibaldi lithograph paled in the sunshine.

Old Viola, at the door, moved his arm upwards as if referring all his quick, fleeting thoughts to the picture of his old chief on the wall. Even when he was cooking for the "Signori Inglesi" — the engineers (he was a famous cook, though the kitchen was a dark place) — he was, as it were, under the eye of the great man who had led him in a glorious struggle where, under the walls of Gaeta, tyranny would have expired for ever had it not been for that accursed Piedmontese race of kings and ministers. When sometimes a frying-pan caught fire during a delicate operation with some shredded onions, and the old man was seen backing out of the doorway, swearing and coughing violently in an acrid cloud of smoke, the name of Cavour — the arch intriguer sold to kings and tyrants — could be heard involved in imprecations against the China girls, cooking in general, and the brute of a country where he was reduced to live for the love of liberty that traitor had strangled.

Then Signora Teresa, all in black, issuing from another door, advanced, portly and anxious, inclining her fine, black-browed head, opening her arms, and crying in a profound tone —

"Giorgio! thou passionate man! Misericordia Divina! In the sun like this! He will make himself ill."

At her feet the hens made off in all directions, with immense strides; if there were any engineers from up the line staying in Sulaco, a young English face or two would appear at the billiard-room occupying one end of the house; but at the other end, in the cafe, Luis, the mulatto, took good care not to show himself. The Indian girls, with hair like flowing black manes, and dressed only in a shift and short petticoat, stared dully from under the square-cut fringes on their foreheads; the noisy frizzling of fat had stopped, the fumes floated upwards in sunshine, a strong smell of burnt onions hung in the drowsy heat, enveloping the house; and the eye lost itself in a vast flat expanse of grass to the west, as if the plain between the Sierra

overtopping Sulaco and the coast range away there towards Esmeralda had been as big as half the world.

Signora Teresa, after an impressive pause, remonstrated —

“Eh, Giorgio! Leave Cavour alone and take care of yourself now we are lost in this country all alone with the two children, because you cannot live under a king.”

And while she looked at him she would sometimes put her hand hastily to her side with a short twitch of her fine lips and a knitting of her black, straight eyebrows like a flicker of angry pain or an angry thought on her handsome, regular features.

It was pain; she suppressed the twinge. It had come to her first a few years after they had left Italy to emigrate to America and settle at last in Sulaco after wandering from town to town, trying shopkeeping in a small way here and there; and once an organized enterprise of fishing — in Maldonado — for Giorgio, like the great Garibaldi, had been a sailor in his time.

Sometimes she had no patience with pain. For years its gnawing had been part of the landscape embracing the glitter of the harbour under the wooded spurs of the range; and the sunshine itself was heavy and dull — heavy with pain — not like the sunshine of her girlhood, in which middle-aged Giorgio had wooed her gravely and passionately on the shores of the gulf of Spezia.

“You go in at once, Giorgio,” she directed. “One would think you do not wish to have any pity on me — with four Signori Inglesi staying in the house.” “Va bene, va bene,” Giorgio would mutter. He obeyed. The Signori Inglesi would require their midday meal presently. He had been one of the immortal and invincible band of liberators who had made the mercenaries of tyranny fly like chaff before a hurricane, “un uragano terribile.” But that was before he was married and had children; and before tyranny had reared its head again amongst the traitors who had imprisoned Garibaldi, his hero.

There were three doors in the front of the house, and each afternoon the Garibaldino could be seen at one or another of them with his big bush of white hair, his arms folded, his legs crossed, leaning back his leonine head against the side, and looking up the wooded slopes of the foothills at the snowy dome of Higuerota. The front of his house threw off a black long rectangle of shade, broadening slowly over the soft ox-cart track. Through the gaps, chopped out in the oleander hedges, the harbour branch railway,

laid out temporarily on the level of the plain, curved away its shining parallel ribbons on a belt of scorched and withered grass within sixty yards of the end of the house. In the evening the empty material trains of flat cars circled round the dark green grove of Sulaco, and ran, undulating slightly with white jets of steam, over the plain towards the Casa Viola, on their way to the railway yards by the harbour. The Italian drivers saluted him from the foot-plate with raised hand, while the negro brakesmen sat carelessly on the brakes, looking straight forward, with the rims of their big hats flapping in the wind. In return Giorgio would give a slight sideways jerk of the head, without unfolding his arms.

On this memorable day of the riot his arms were not folded on his chest. His hand grasped the barrel of the gun grounded on the threshold; he did not look up once at the white dome of Higuerota, whose cool purity seemed to hold itself aloof from a hot earth. His eyes examined the plain curiously. Tall trails of dust subsided here and there. In a speckless sky the sun hung clear and blinding. Knots of men ran headlong; others made a stand; and the irregular rattle of firearms came rippling to his ears in the fiery, still air. Single figures on foot raced desperately. Horsemen galloped towards each other, wheeled round together, separated at speed. Giorgio saw one fall, rider and horse disappearing as if they had galloped into a chasm, and the movements of the animated scene were like the passages of a violent game played upon the plain by dwarfs mounted and on foot, yelling with tiny throats, under the mountain that seemed a colossal embodiment of silence. Never before had Giorgio seen this bit of plain so full of active life; his gaze could not take in all its details at once; he shaded his eyes with his hand, till suddenly the thundering of many hoofs near by startled him.

A troop of horses had broken out of the fenced paddock of the Railway Company. They came on like a whirlwind, and dashed over the line snorting, kicking, squealing in a compact, piebald, tossing mob of bay, brown, grey backs, eyes staring, necks extended, nostrils red, long tails streaming. As soon as they had leaped upon the road the thick dust flew upwards from under their hoofs, and within six yards of Giorgio only a brown cloud with vague forms of necks and cruppers rolled by, making the soil tremble on its passage.

Viola coughed, turning his face away from the dust, and shaking his head slightly.

“There will be some horse-catching to be done before to-night,” he muttered.

In the square of sunlight falling through the door Signora Teresa, kneeling before the chair, had bowed her head, heavy with a twisted mass of ebony hair streaked with silver, into the palm of her hands. The black lace shawl she used to drape about her face had dropped to the ground by her side. The two girls had got up, hand-in-hand, in short skirts, their loose hair falling in disorder. The younger had thrown her arm across her eyes, as if afraid to face the light. Linda, with her hand on the other’s shoulder, stared fearlessly. Viola looked at his children. The sun brought out the deep lines on his face, and, energetic in expression, it had the immobility of a carving. It was impossible to discover what he thought. Bushy grey eyebrows shaded his dark glance.

“Well! And do you not pray like your mother?”

Linda pouted, advancing her red lips, which were almost too red; but she had admirable eyes, brown, with a sparkle of gold in the irises, full of intelligence and meaning, and so clear that they seemed to throw a glow upon her thin, colourless face. There were bronze glints in the sombre clusters of her hair, and the eyelashes, long and coal black, made her complexion appear still more pale.

“Mother is going to offer up a lot of candles in the church. She always does when Nostromo has been away fighting. I shall have some to carry up to the Chapel of the Madonna in the Cathedral.”

She said all this quickly, with great assurance, in an animated, penetrating voice. Then, giving her sister’s shoulder a slight shake, she added —

“And she will be made to carry one, too!”

“Why made?” inquired Giorgio, gravely. “Does she not want to?”

“She is timid,” said Linda, with a little burst of laughter. “People notice her fair hair as she goes along with us. They call out after her, ‘Look at the Rubia! Look at the Rubiacita!’ They call out in the streets. She is timid.”

“And you? You are not timid — eh?” the father pronounced, slowly.

She tossed back all her dark hair.

“Nobody calls out after me.”

Old Giorgio contemplated his children thoughtfully. There was two years difference between them. They had been born to him late, years after the boy had died. Had he lived he would have been nearly as old as Gian’



Battista — he whom the English called Nostromo; but as to his daughters, the severity of his temper, his advancing age, his absorption in his memories, had prevented his taking much notice of them. He loved his children, but girls belong more to the mother, and much of his affection had been expended in the worship and service of liberty.

When quite a youth he had deserted from a ship trading to La Plata, to enlist in the navy of Montevideo, then under the command of Garibaldi. Afterwards, in the Italian legion of the Republic struggling against the encroaching tyranny of Rosas, he had taken part, on great plains, on the banks of immense rivers, in the fiercest fighting perhaps the world had ever known. He had lived amongst men who had declaimed about liberty, suffered for liberty, died for liberty, with a desperate exaltation, and with their eyes turned towards an oppressed Italy. His own enthusiasm had been fed on scenes of carnage, on the examples of lofty devotion, on the din of armed struggle, on the inflamed language of proclamations. He had never parted from the chief of his choice — the fiery apostle of independence — keeping by his side in America and in Italy till after the fatal day of Aspromonte, when the treachery of kings, emperors, and ministers had been revealed to the world in the wounding and imprisonment of his hero — a catastrophe that had instilled into him a gloomy doubt of ever being able to understand the ways of Divine justice.

He did not deny it, however. It required patience, he would say. Though he disliked priests, and would not put his foot inside a church for anything, he believed in God. Were not the proclamations against tyrants addressed to the peoples in the name of God and liberty? “God for men — religions for women,” he muttered sometimes. In Sicily, an Englishman who had turned up in Palermo after its evacuation by the army of the king, had given him a Bible in Italian — the publication of the British and Foreign Bible Society, bound in a dark leather cover. In periods of political adversity, in the pauses of silence when the revolutionists issued no proclamations, Giorgio earned his living with the first work that came to hand — as sailor, as dock labourer on the quays of Genoa, once as a hand on a farm in the hills above Spezzia — and in his spare time he studied the thick volume. He carried it with him into battles. Now it was his only reading, and in order not to be deprived of it (the print was small) he had consented to accept the present of a pair of silver-mounted spectacles from Senora Emilia Gould, the wife

of the Englishman who managed the silver mine in the mountains three leagues from the town. She was the only Englishwoman in Sulaco.

Giorgio Viola had a great consideration for the English. This feeling, born on the battlefields of Uruguay, was forty years old at the very least. Several of them had poured their blood for the cause of freedom in America, and the first he had ever known he remembered by the name of Samuel; he commanded a negro company under Garibaldi, during the famous siege of Montevideo, and died heroically with his negroes at the fording of the Boyana. He, Giorgio, had reached the rank of ensign-alferez-and cooked for the general. Later, in Italy, he, with the rank of lieutenant, rode with the staff and still cooked for the general. He had cooked for him in Lombardy through the whole campaign; on the march to Rome he had lassoed his beef in the Campagna after the American manner; he had been wounded in the defence of the Roman Republic; he was one of the four fugitives who, with the general, carried out of the woods the inanimate body of the general's wife into the farmhouse where she died, exhausted by the hardships of that terrible retreat. He had survived that disastrous time to attend his general in Palermo when the Neapolitan shells from the castle crashed upon the town. He had cooked for him on the field of Volturmo after fighting all day. And everywhere he had seen Englishmen in the front rank of the army of freedom. He respected their nation because they loved Garibaldi. Their very countesses and princesses had kissed the general's hands in London, it was said. He could well believe it; for the nation was noble, and the man was a saint. It was enough to look once at his face to see the divine force of faith in him and his great pity for all that was poor, suffering, and oppressed in this world.

The spirit of self-forgetfulness, the simple devotion to a vast humanitarian idea which inspired the thought and stress of that revolutionary time, had left its mark upon Giorgio in a sort of austere contempt for all personal advantage. This man, whom the lowest class in Sulaco suspected of having a buried hoard in his kitchen, had all his life despised money. The leaders of his youth had lived poor, had died poor. It had been a habit of his mind to disregard to-morrow. It was engendered partly by an existence of excitement, adventure, and wild warfare. But mostly it was a matter of principle. It did not resemble the carelessness of a condottiere, it was a puritanism of conduct, born of stern enthusiasm like the puritanism of religion.

This stern devotion to a cause had cast a gloom upon Giorgio's old age. It cast a gloom because the cause seemed lost. Too many kings and emperors flourished yet in the world which God had meant for the people. He was sad because of his simplicity. Though always ready to help his countrymen, and greatly respected by the Italian emigrants wherever he lived (in his exile he called it), he could not conceal from himself that they cared nothing for the wrongs of down-trodden nations. They listened to his tales of war readily, but seemed to ask themselves what he had got out of it after all. There was nothing that they could see. "We wanted nothing, we suffered for the love of all humanity!" he cried out furiously sometimes, and the powerful voice, the blazing eyes, the shaking of the white mane, the brown, sinewy hand pointing upwards as if to call heaven to witness, impressed his hearers. After the old man had broken off abruptly with a jerk of the head and a movement of the arm, meaning clearly, "But what's the good of talking to you?" they nudged each other. There was in old Giorgio an energy of feeling, a personal quality of conviction, something they called "terribilita" — "an old lion," they used to say of him. Some slight incident, a chance word would set him off talking on the beach to the Italian fishermen of Maldonado, in the little shop he kept afterwards (in Valparaiso) to his countrymen customers; of an evening, suddenly, in the cafe at one end of the Casa Viola (the other was reserved for the English engineers) to the select clientele of engine-drivers and foremen of the railway shops.

With their handsome, bronzed, lean faces, shiny black ringlets, glistening eyes, broad-chested, bearded, sometimes a tiny gold ring in the lobe of the ear, the aristocracy of the railway works listened to him, turning away from their cards or dominoes. Here and there a fair-haired Basque studied his hand meantime, waiting without protest. No native of Costaguana intruded there. This was the Italian stronghold. Even the Sulaco policemen on a night patrol let their horses pace softly by, bending low in the saddle to glance through the window at the heads in a fog of smoke; and the drone of old Giorgio's declamatory narrative seemed to sink behind them into the plain. Only now and then the assistant of the chief of police, some broad-faced, brown little gentleman, with a great deal of Indian in him, would put in an appearance. Leaving his man outside with the horses he advanced with a confident, sly smile, and without a word up to the long trestle table. He pointed to one of the bottles on the shelf; Giorgio, thrusting his pipe into his mouth abruptly, served him in person. Nothing would be heard but the

slight jingle of the spurs. His glass emptied, he would take a leisurely, scrutinizing look all round the room, go out, and ride away slowly, circling towards the town.

## CHAPTER FIVE

In this way only was the power of the local authorities vindicated amongst the great body of strong-limbed foreigners who dug the earth, blasted the rocks, drove the engines for the “progressive and patriotic undertaking.” In these very words eighteen months before the Excellentissimo Senor don Vincente Ribiera, the Dictator of Costaguana, had described the National Central Railway in his great speech at the turning of the first sod.

He had come on purpose to Sulaco, and there was a one-o’clock dinner-party, a convite offered by the O.S.N. Company on board the Juno after the function on shore. Captain Mitchell had himself steered the cargo lighter, all draped with flags, which, in tow of the Juno’s steam launch, took the Excellentissimo from the jetty to the ship. Everybody of note in Sulaco had been invited — the one or two foreign merchants, all the representatives of the old Spanish families then in town, the great owners of estates on the plain, grave, courteous, simple men, caballeros of pure descent, with small hands and feet, conservative, hospitable, and kind. The Occidental Province was their stronghold; their Blanco party had triumphed now; it was their President-Dictator, a Blanco of the Blancos, who sat smiling urbanely between the representatives of two friendly foreign powers. They had come with him from Sta. Marta to countenance by their presence the enterprise in which the capital of their countries was engaged. The only lady of that company was Mrs. Gould, the wife of Don Carlos, the administrator of the San Tome silver mine. The ladies of Sulaco were not advanced enough to take part in the public life to that extent. They had come out strongly at the great ball at the Intendencia the evening before, but Mrs. Gould alone had appeared, a bright spot in the group of black coats behind the President-Dictator, on the crimson cloth-covered stage erected under a shady tree on the shore of the harbour, where the ceremony of turning the first sod had taken place. She had come off in the cargo lighter, full of notabilities, sitting under the flutter of gay flags, in the place of honour by the side of Captain Mitchell, who steered, and her clear dress gave the only truly festive note to the sombre gathering in the long, gorgeous saloon of the Juno.

The head of the chairman of the railway board (from London), handsome and pale in a silvery mist of white hair and clipped beard, hovered near her shoulder attentive, smiling, and fatigued. The journey from London to Sta. Marta in mail boats and the special carriages of the Sta. Marta coast-line

(the only railway so far) had been tolerable — even pleasant — quite tolerable. But the trip over the mountains to Sulaco was another sort of experience, in an old diligencia over impassable roads skirting awful precipices.

“We have been upset twice in one day on the brink of very deep ravines,” he was telling Mrs. Gould in an undertone. “And when we arrived here at last I don’t know what we should have done without your hospitality. What an out-of-the-way place Sulaco is! — and for a harbour, too! Astonishing!”

“Ah, but we are very proud of it. It used to be historically important. The highest ecclesiastical court for two viceroyalties, sat here in the olden time,” she instructed him with animation.

“I am impressed. I didn’t mean to be disparaging. You seem very patriotic.”

“The place is lovable, if only by its situation. Perhaps you don’t know what an old resident I am.”

“How old, I wonder,” he murmured, looking at her with a slight smile. Mrs. Gould’s appearance was made youthful by the mobile intelligence of her face. “We can’t give you your ecclesiastical court back again; but you shall have more steamers, a railway, a telegraph-cable — a future in the great world which is worth infinitely more than any amount of ecclesiastical past. You shall be brought in touch with something greater than two viceroyalties. But I had no notion that a place on a sea-coast could remain so isolated from the world. If it had been a thousand miles inland now — most remarkable! Has anything ever happened here for a hundred years before to-day?”

While he talked in a slow, humorous tone, she kept her little smile. Agreeing ironically, she assured him that certainly not — nothing ever happened in Sulaco. Even the revolutions, of which there had been two in her time, had respected the repose of the place. Their course ran in the more populous southern parts of the Republic, and the great valley of Sta. Marta, which was like one great battlefield of the parties, with the possession of the capital for a prize and an outlet to another ocean. They were more advanced over there. Here in Sulaco they heard only the echoes of these great questions, and, of course, their official world changed each time, coming to them over their rampart of mountains which he himself had traversed in an old diligencia, with such a risk to life and limb.

The chairman of the railway had been enjoying her hospitality for several days, and he was really grateful for it. It was only since he had left Sta. Marta that he had utterly lost touch with the feeling of European life on the background of his exotic surroundings. In the capital he had been the guest of the Legation, and had been kept busy negotiating with the members of Don Vincente's Government — cultured men, men to whom the conditions of civilized business were not unknown.

What concerned him most at the time was the acquisition of land for the railway. In the Sta. Marta Valley, where there was already one line in existence, the people were tractable, and it was only a matter of price. A commission had been nominated to fix the values, and the difficulty resolved itself into the judicious influencing of the Commissioners. But in Sulaco — the Occidental Province for whose very development the railway was intended — there had been trouble. It had been lying for ages ensconced behind its natural barriers, repelling modern enterprise by the precipices of its mountain range, by its shallow harbour opening into the everlasting calms of a gulf full of clouds, by the benighted state of mind of the owners of its fertile territory — all these aristocratic old Spanish families, all those Don Ambrosios this and Don Fernandos that, who seemed actually to dislike and distrust the coming of the railway over their lands. It had happened that some of the surveying parties scattered all over the province had been warned off with threats of violence. In other cases outrageous pretensions as to price had been raised. But the man of railways prided himself on being equal to every emergency. Since he was met by the inimical sentiment of blind conservatism in Sulaco he would meet it by sentiment, too, before taking his stand on his right alone. The Government was bound to carry out its part of the contract with the board of the new railway company, even if it had to use force for the purpose. But he desired nothing less than an armed disturbance in the smooth working of his plans. They were much too vast and far-reaching, and too promising to leave a stone unturned; and so he imagined to get the President-Dictator over there on a tour of ceremonies and speeches, culminating in a great function at the turning of the first sod by the harbour shore. After all he was their own creature — that Don Vincente. He was the embodied triumph of the best elements in the State. These were facts, and, unless facts meant nothing, Sir John argued to himself, such a man's influence must be real, and his personal action would produce the conciliatory effect he required. He had

succeeded in arranging the trip with the help of a very clever advocate, who was known in Sta. Marta as the agent of the Gould silver mine, the biggest thing in Sulaco, and even in the whole Republic. It was indeed a fabulously rich mine. Its so-called agent, evidently a man of culture and ability, seemed, without official position, to possess an extraordinary influence in the highest Government spheres. He was able to assure Sir John that the President-Dictator would make the journey. He regretted, however, in the course of the same conversation, that General Montero insisted upon going, too.

General Montero, whom the beginning of the struggle had found an obscure army captain employed on the wild eastern frontier of the State, had thrown in his lot with the Ribiera party at a moment when special circumstances had given that small adhesion a fortuitous importance. The fortunes of war served him marvellously, and the victory of Rio Seco (after a day of desperate fighting) put a seal to his success. At the end he emerged General, Minister of War, and the military head of the Blanco party, although there was nothing aristocratic in his descent. Indeed, it was said that he and his brother, orphans, had been brought up by the munificence of a famous European traveller, in whose service their father had lost his life. Another story was that their father had been nothing but a charcoal burner in the woods, and their mother a baptised Indian woman from the far interior.

However that might be, the Costaguana Press was in the habit of styling Montero's forest march from his commandancia to join the Blanco forces at the beginning of the troubles, the "most heroic military exploit of modern times." About the same time, too, his brother had turned up from Europe, where he had gone apparently as secretary to a consul. Having, however, collected a small band of outlaws, he showed some talent as guerilla chief and had been rewarded at the pacification by the post of Military Commandant of the capital.

The Minister of War, then, accompanied the Dictator. The board of the O.S.N. Company, working hand-in-hand with the railway people for the good of the Republic, had on this important occasion instructed Captain Mitchell to put the mail-boat Juno at the disposal of the distinguished party. Don Vincente, journeying south from Sta. Marta, had embarked at Cayta, the principal port of Costaguana, and came to Sulaco by sea. But the chairman of the railway company had courageously crossed the mountains



in a ramshackle diligencia, mainly for the purpose of meeting his engineer-in-chief engaged in the final survey of the road.

For all the indifference of a man of affairs to nature, whose hostility can always be overcome by the resources of finance, he could not help being impressed by his surroundings during his halt at the surveying camp established at the highest point his railway was to reach. He spent the night there, arriving just too late to see the last dying glow of sunlight upon the snowy flank of Higuerota. Pillared masses of black basalt framed like an open portal a portion of the white field lying aslant against the west. In the transparent air of the high altitudes everything seemed very near, steeped in a clear stillness as in an imponderable liquid; and with his ear ready to catch the first sound of the expected diligencia the engineer-in-chief, at the door of a hut of rough stones, had contemplated the changing hues on the enormous side of the mountain, thinking that in this sight, as in a piece of inspired music, there could be found together the utmost delicacy of shaded expression and a stupendous magnificence of effect.

Sir John arrived too late to hear the magnificent and inaudible strain sung by the sunset amongst the high peaks of the Sierra. It had sung itself out into the breathless pause of deep dusk before, climbing down the fore wheel of the diligencia with stiff limbs, he shook hands with the engineer.

They gave him his dinner in a stone hut like a cubical boulder, with no door or windows in its two openings; a bright fire of sticks (brought on muleback from the first valley below) burning outside, sent in a wavering glare; and two candles in tin candlesticks — lighted, it was explained to him, in his honour — stood on a sort of rough camp table, at which he sat on the right hand of the chief. He knew how to be amiable; and the young men of the engineering staff, for whom the surveying of the railway track had the glamour of the first steps on the path of life, sat there, too, listening modestly, with their smooth faces tanned by the weather, and very pleased to witness so much affability in so great a man.

Afterwards, late at night, pacing to and fro outside, he had a long talk with his chief engineer. He knew him well of old. This was not the first undertaking in which their gifts, as elementally different as fire and water, had worked in conjunction. From the contact of these two personalities, who had not the same vision of the world, there was generated a power for the world's service — a subtle force that could set in motion mighty machines, men's muscles, and awaken also in human breasts an unbounded

devotion to the task. Of the young fellows at the table, to whom the survey of the track was like the tracing of the path of life, more than one would be called to meet death before the work was done. But the work would be done: the force would be almost as strong as a faith. Not quite, however. In the silence of the sleeping camp upon the moonlit plateau forming the top of the pass like the floor of a vast arena surrounded by the basalt walls of precipices, two strolling figures in thick ulsters stood still, and the voice of the engineer pronounced distinctly the words —

“We can’t move mountains!”

Sir John, raising his head to follow the pointing gesture, felt the full force of the words. The white Higuerota soared out of the shadows of rock and earth like a frozen bubble under the moon. All was still, till near by, behind the wall of a corral for the camp animals, built roughly of loose stones in the form of a circle, a pack mule stamped his forefoot and blew heavily twice.

The engineer-in-chief had used the phrase in answer to the chairman’s tentative suggestion that the tracing of the line could, perhaps, be altered in deference to the prejudices of the Sulaco landowners. The chief engineer believed that the obstinacy of men was the lesser obstacle. Moreover, to combat that they had the great influence of Charles Gould, whereas tunnelling under Higuerota would have been a colossal undertaking.

“Ah, yes! Gould. What sort of a man is he?”

Sir John had heard much of Charles Gould in Sta. Marta, and wanted to know more. The engineer-in-chief assured him that the administrator of the San Tome silver mine had an immense influence over all these Spanish Dons. He had also one of the best houses in Sulaco, and the Gould hospitality was beyond all praise.

“They received me as if they had known me for years,” he said. “The little lady is kindness personified. I stayed with them for a month. He helped me to organize the surveying parties. His practical ownership of the San Tome silver mine gives him a special position. He seems to have the ear of every provincial authority apparently, and, as I said, he can wind all the hidalgos of the province round his little finger. If you follow his advice the difficulties will fall away, because he wants the railway. Of course, you must be careful in what you say. He’s English, and besides he must be immensely wealthy. The Holroyd house is in with him in that mine, so you may imagine — ”

He interrupted himself as, from before one of the little fires burning outside the low wall of the corral, arose the figure of a man wrapped in a poncho up to the neck. The saddle which he had been using for a pillow made a dark patch on the ground against the red glow of embers.

"I shall see Holroyd himself on my way back through the States," said Sir John. "I've ascertained that he, too, wants the railway."

The man who, perhaps disturbed by the proximity of the voices, had arisen from the ground, struck a match to light a cigarette. The flame showed a bronzed, black-whiskered face, a pair of eyes gazing straight; then, rearranging his wrappings, he sank full length and laid his head again on the saddle.

"That's our camp-master, whom I must send back to Sulaco now we are going to carry our survey into the Sta. Marta Valley," said the engineer. "A most useful fellow, lent me by Captain Mitchell of the O.S.N. Company. It was very good of Mitchell. Charles Gould told me I couldn't do better than take advantage of the offer. He seems to know how to rule all these muleteers and peons. We had not the slightest trouble with our people. He shall escort your diligencia right into Sulaco with some of our railway peons. The road is bad. To have him at hand may save you an upset or two. He promised me to take care of your person all the way down as if you were his father."

This camp-master was the Italian sailor whom all the Europeans in Sulaco, following Captain Mitchell's mispronunciation, were in the habit of calling Nostromo. And indeed, taciturn and ready, he did take excellent care of his charge at the bad parts of the road, as Sir John himself acknowledged to Mrs. Gould afterwards.

## CHAPTER SIX

At that time Nostromo had been already long enough in the country to raise to the highest pitch Captain Mitchell's opinion of the extraordinary value of his discovery. Clearly he was one of those invaluable subordinates whom to possess is a legitimate cause of boasting. Captain Mitchell plumed himself upon his eye for men — but he was not selfish — and in the innocence of his pride was already developing that mania for “lending you my Capataz de Cargadores” which was to bring Nostromo into personal contact, sooner or later, with every European in Sulaco, as a sort of universal factotum — a prodigy of efficiency in his own sphere of life.

“The fellow is devoted to me, body and soul!” Captain Mitchell was given to affirm; and though nobody, perhaps, could have explained why it should be so, it was impossible on a survey of their relation to throw doubt on that statement, unless, indeed, one were a bitter, eccentric character like Dr. Monygham — for instance — whose short, hopeless laugh expressed somehow an immense mistrust of mankind. Not that Dr. Monygham was a prodigal either of laughter or of words. He was bitterly taciturn when at his best. At his worst people feared the open scornfulness of his tongue. Only Mrs. Gould could keep his unbelief in men's motives within due bounds; but even to her (on an occasion not connected with Nostromo, and in a tone which for him was gentle), even to her, he had said once, “Really, it is most unreasonable to demand that a man should think of other people so much better than he is able to think of himself.”

And Mrs. Gould had hastened to drop the subject. There were strange rumours of the English doctor. Years ago, in the time of Guzman Bento, he had been mixed up, it was whispered, in a conspiracy which was betrayed and, as people expressed it, drowned in blood. His hair had turned grey, his hairless, seamed face was of a brick-dust colour; the large check pattern of his flannel shirt and his old stained Panama hat were an established defiance to the conventionalities of Sulaco. Had it not been for the immaculate cleanliness of his apparel he might have been taken for one of those shiftless Europeans that are a moral eyesore to the respectability of a foreign colony in almost every exotic part of the world. The young ladies of Sulaco, adorning with clusters of pretty faces the balconies along the Street of the Constitution, when they saw him pass, with his limping gait and bowed head, a short linen jacket drawn on carelessly over the flannel check

shirt, would remark to each other, "Here is the Senor doctor going to call on Dona Emilia. He has got his little coat on." The inference was true. Its deeper meaning was hidden from their simple intelligence. Moreover, they expended no store of thought on the doctor. He was old, ugly, learned — and a little "loco" — mad, if not a bit of a sorcerer, as the common people suspected him of being. The little white jacket was in reality a concession to Mrs. Gould's humanizing influence. The doctor, with his habit of sceptical, bitter speech, had no other means of showing his profound respect for the character of the woman who was known in the country as the English Senora. He presented this tribute very seriously indeed; it was no trifle for a man of his habits. Mrs. Gould felt that, too, perfectly. She would never have thought of imposing upon him this marked show of deference.

She kept her old Spanish house (one of the finest specimens in Sulaco) open for the dispensation of the small graces of existence. She dispensed them with simplicity and charm because she was guided by an alert perception of values. She was highly gifted in the art of human intercourse which consists in delicate shades of self-forgetfulness and in the suggestion of universal comprehension. Charles Gould (the Gould family, established in Costaguana for three generations, always went to England for their education and for their wives) imagined that he had fallen in love with a girl's sound common sense like any other man, but these were not exactly the reasons why, for instance, the whole surveying camp, from the youngest of the young men to their mature chief, should have found occasion to allude to Mrs. Gould's house so frequently amongst the high peaks of the Sierra. She would have protested that she had done nothing for them, with a low laugh and a surprised widening of her grey eyes, had anybody told her how convincingly she was remembered on the edge of the snow-line above Sulaco. But directly, with a little capable air of setting her wits to work, she would have found an explanation. "Of course, it was such a surprise for these boys to find any sort of welcome here. And I suppose they are homesick. I suppose everybody must be always just a little homesick."

She was always sorry for homesick people.

Born in the country, as his father before him, spare and tall, with a flaming moustache, a neat chin, clear blue eyes, auburn hair, and a thin, fresh, red face, Charles Gould looked like a new arrival from over the sea. His grandfather had fought in the cause of independence under Bolivar, in that famous English legion which on the battlefield of Carabobo had been

saluted by the great Liberator as Saviours of his country. One of Charles Gould's uncles had been the elected President of that very province of Sulaco (then called a State) in the days of Federation, and afterwards had been put up against the wall of a church and shot by the order of the barbarous Unionist general, Guzman Bento. It was the same Guzman Bento who, becoming later Perpetual President, famed for his ruthless and cruel tyranny, readied his apotheosis in the popular legend of a sanguinary land-haunting spectre whose body had been carried off by the devil in person from the brick mausoleum in the nave of the Church of Assumption in Sta. Marta. Thus, at least, the priests explained its disappearance to the barefooted multitude that streamed in, awestruck, to gaze at the hole in the side of the ugly box of bricks before the great altar.

Guzman Bento of cruel memory had put to death great numbers of people besides Charles Gould's uncle; but with a relative martyred in the cause of aristocracy, the Sulaco Oligarchs (this was the phraseology of Guzman Bento's time; now they were called Blancos, and had given up the federal idea), which meant the families of pure Spanish descent, considered Charles as one of themselves. With such a family record, no one could be more of a Costaguanero than Don Carlos Gould; but his aspect was so characteristic that in the talk of common people he was just the Ingles — the Englishman of Sulaco. He looked more English than a casual tourist, a sort of heretic pilgrim, however, quite unknown in Sulaco. He looked more English than the last arrived batch of young railway engineers, than anybody out of the hunting-field pictures in the numbers of Punch reaching his wife's drawing-room two months or so after date. It astonished you to hear him talk Spanish (Castillan, as the natives say) or the Indian dialect of the country-people so naturally. His accent had never been English; but there was something so indelible in all these ancestral Goulds — liberators, explorers, coffee planters, merchants, revolutionists — of Costaguana, that he, the only representative of the third generation in a continent possessing its own style of horsemanship, went on looking thoroughly English even on horseback. This is not said of him in the mocking spirit of the Llaneros — men of the great plains — who think that no one in the world knows how to sit a horse but themselves. Charles Gould, to use the suitably lofty phrase, rode like a centaur. Riding for him was not a special form of exercise; it was a natural faculty, as walking straight is to all men sound of mind and limb; but, all the same, when cantering beside the ratty ox-cart track to the

mine he looked in his English clothes and with his imported saddlery as though he had come this moment to Costaguana at his easy swift pasotrote, straight out of some green meadow at the other side of the world.

His way would lie along the old Spanish road — the Camino Real of popular speech — the only remaining vestige of a fact and name left by that royalty old Giorgio Viola hated, and whose very shadow had departed from the land; for the big equestrian statue of Charles IV. at the entrance of the Alameda, towering white against the trees, was only known to the folk from the country and to the beggars of the town that slept on the steps around the pedestal, as the Horse of Stone. The other Carlos, turning off to the left with a rapid clatter of hoofs on the disjointed pavement — Don Carlos Gould, in his English clothes, looked as incongruous, but much more at home than the kingly cavalier reining in his steed on the pedestal above the sleeping leperos, with his marble arm raised towards the marble rim of a plumed hat.

The weather-stained effigy of the mounted king, with its vague suggestion of a saluting gesture, seemed to present an inscrutable breast to the political changes which had robbed it of its very name; but neither did the other horseman, well known to the people, keen and alive on his well-shaped, slate-coloured beast with a white eye, wear his heart on the sleeve of his English coat. His mind preserved its steady poise as if sheltered in the passionless stability of private and public decencies at home in Europe. He accepted with a like calm the shocking manner in which the Sulaco ladies smothered their faces with pearl powder till they looked like white plaster casts with beautiful living eyes, the peculiar gossip of the town, and the continuous political changes, the constant “saving of the country,” which to his wife seemed a puerile and bloodthirsty game of murder and rapine played with terrible earnestness by depraved children. In the early days of her Costaguana life, the little lady used to clench her hands with exasperation at not being able to take the public affairs of the country as seriously as the incidental atrocity of methods deserved. She saw in them a comedy of naive pretences, but hardly anything genuine except her own appalled indignation. Charles, very quiet and twisting his long moustaches, would decline to discuss them at all. Once, however, he observed to her gently —

“My dear, you seem to forget that I was born here.” These few words made her pause as if they had been a sudden revelation. Perhaps the mere fact of being born in the country did make a difference. She had a great

confidence in her husband; it had always been very great. He had struck her imagination from the first by his unsentimentalism, by that very quietude of mind which she had erected in her thought for a sign of perfect competency in the business of living. Don Jose Avellanos, their neighbour across the street, a statesman, a poet, a man of culture, who had represented his country at several European Courts (and had suffered untold indignities as a state prisoner in the time of the tyrant Guzman Bento), used to declare in Dona Emilia's drawing-room that Carlos had all the English qualities of character with a truly patriotic heart.

Mrs. Gould, raising her eyes to her husband's thin, red and tan face, could not detect the slightest quiver of a feature at what he must have heard said of his patriotism. Perhaps he had just dismounted on his return from the mine; he was English enough to disregard the hottest hours of the day. Basilio, in a livery of white linen and a red sash, had squatted for a moment behind his heels to unstrap the heavy, blunt spurs in the patio; and then the Senor Administrator would go up the staircase into the gallery. Rows of plants in pots, ranged on the balustrade between the pilasters of the arches, screened the corredor with their leaves and flowers from the quadrangle below, whose paved space is the true hearthstone of a South American house, where the quiet hours of domestic life are marked by the shifting of light and shadow on the flagstones.

Senor Avellanos was in the habit of crossing the patio at five o'clock almost every day. Don Jose chose to come over at tea-time because the English rite at Dona Emilia's house reminded him of the time he lived in London as Minister Plenipotentiary to the Court of St. James. He did not like tea; and, usually, rocking his American chair, his neat little shiny boots crossed on the foot-rest, he would talk on and on with a sort of complacent virtuosity wonderful in a man of his age, while he held the cup in his hands for a long time. His close-cropped head was perfectly white; his eyes coalblack.

On seeing Charles Gould step into the sala he would nod provisionally and go on to the end of the oratorial period. Only then he would say —

"Carlos, my friend, you have ridden from San Tome in the heat of the day. Always the true English activity. No? What?"

He drank up all the tea at once in one draught. This performance was invariably followed by a slight shudder and a low, involuntary "br-r-r-r," which was not covered by the hasty exclamation, "Excellent!"



Then giving up the empty cup into his young friend's hand, extended with a smile, he continued to expatiate upon the patriotic nature of the San Tome mine for the simple pleasure of talking fluently, it seemed, while his reclining body jerked backwards and forwards in a rocking-chair of the sort exported from the United States. The ceiling of the largest drawing-room of the Casa Gould extended its white level far above his head. The loftiness dwarfed the mixture of heavy, straight-backed Spanish chairs of brown wood with leathern seats, and European furniture, low, and cushioned all over, like squat little monsters gorged to bursting with steel springs and horsehair. There were knick-knacks on little tables, mirrors let into the wall above marble consoles, square spaces of carpet under the two groups of armchairs, each presided over by a deep sofa; smaller rugs scattered all over the floor of red tiles; three windows from the ceiling down to the ground, opening on a balcony, and flanked by the perpendicular folds of the dark hangings. The stateliness of ancient days lingered between the four high, smooth walls, tinted a delicate primrose-colour; and Mrs. Gould, with her little head and shining coils of hair, sitting in a cloud of muslin and lace before a slender mahogany table, resembled a fairy posed lightly before dainty philtres dispensed out of vessels of silver and porcelain.

Mrs. Gould knew the history of the San Tome mine. Worked in the early days mostly by means of lashes on the backs of slaves, its yield had been paid for in its own weight of human bones. Whole tribes of Indians had perished in the exploitation; and then the mine was abandoned, since with this primitive method it had ceased to make a profitable return, no matter how many corpses were thrown into its maw. Then it became forgotten. It was rediscovered after the War of Independence. An English company obtained the right to work it, and found so rich a vein that neither the exactions of successive governments, nor the periodical raids of recruiting officers upon the population of paid miners they had created, could discourage their perseverance. But in the end, during the long turmoil of pronunciamientos that followed the death of the famous Guzman Bento, the native miners, incited to revolt by the emissaries sent out from the capital, had risen upon their English chiefs and murdered them to a man. The decree of confiscation which appeared immediately afterwards in the *Diario Oficial*, published in Sta. Marta, began with the words: "Justly incensed at the grinding oppression of foreigners, actuated by sordid motives of gain rather than by love for a country where they come impoverished to seek

their fortunes, the mining population of San Tome, etc. . . .” and ended with the declaration: “The chief of the State has resolved to exercise to the full his power of clemency. The mine, which by every law, international, human, and divine, reverts now to the Government as national property, shall remain closed till the sword drawn for the sacred defence of liberal principles has accomplished its mission of securing the happiness of our beloved country.”

And for many years this was the last of the San Tome mine. What advantage that Government had expected from the spoliation, it is impossible to tell now. Costaguana was made with difficulty to pay a beggarly money compensation to the families of the victims, and then the matter dropped out of diplomatic despatches. But afterwards another Government bethought itself of that valuable asset. It was an ordinary Costaguana Government — the fourth in six years — but it judged of its opportunities sanely. It remembered the San Tome mine with a secret conviction of its worthlessness in their own hands, but with an ingenious insight into the various uses a silver mine can be put to, apart from the sordid process of extracting the metal from under the ground. The father of Charles Gould, for a long time one of the most wealthy merchants of Costaguana, had already lost a considerable part of his fortune in forced loans to the successive Governments. He was a man of calm judgment, who never dreamed of pressing his claims; and when, suddenly, the perpetual concession of the San Tome mine was offered to him in full settlement, his alarm became extreme. He was versed in the ways of Governments. Indeed, the intention of this affair, though no doubt deeply meditated in the closet, lay open on the surface of the document presented urgently for his signature. The third and most important clause stipulated that the concession-holder should pay at once to the Government five years’ royalties on the estimated output of the mine.

Mr. Gould, senior, defended himself from this fatal favour with many arguments and entreaties, but without success. He knew nothing of mining; he had no means to put his concession on the European market; the mine as a working concern did not exist. The buildings had been burnt down, the mining plant had been destroyed, the mining population had disappeared from the neighbourhood years and years ago; the very road had vanished under a flood of tropical vegetation as effectually as if swallowed by the sea; and the main gallery had fallen in within a hundred yards from the

entrance. It was no longer an abandoned mine; it was a wild, inaccessible, and rocky gorge of the Sierra, where vestiges of charred timber, some heaps of smashed bricks, and a few shapeless pieces of rusty iron could have been found under the matted mass of thorny creepers covering the ground. Mr. Gould, senior, did not desire the perpetual possession of that desolate locality; in fact, the mere vision of it arising before his mind in the still watches of the night had the power to exasperate him into hours of hot and agitated insomnia.

It so happened, however, that the Finance Minister of the time was a man to whom, in years gone by, Mr. Gould had, unfortunately, declined to grant some small pecuniary assistance, basing his refusal on the ground that the applicant was a notorious gambler and cheat, besides being more than half suspected of a robbery with violence on a wealthy ranchero in a remote country district, where he was actually exercising the function of a judge. Now, after reaching his exalted position, that politician had proclaimed his intention to repay evil with good to Senor Gould — the poor man. He affirmed and reaffirmed this resolution in the drawing-rooms of Sta. Marta, in a soft and implacable voice, and with such malicious glances that Mr. Gould's best friends advised him earnestly to attempt no bribery to get the matter dropped. It would have been useless. Indeed, it would not have been a very safe proceeding. Such was also the opinion of a stout, loud-voiced lady of French extraction, the daughter, she said, of an officer of high rank (*officier superieur de l'armee*), who was accommodated with lodgings within the walls of a secularized convent next door to the Ministry of Finance. That florid person, when approached on behalf of Mr. Gould in a proper manner, and with a suitable present, shook her head despondently. She was good-natured, and her despondency was genuine. She imagined she could not take money in consideration of something she could not accomplish. The friend of Mr. Gould, charged with the delicate mission, used to say afterwards that she was the only honest person closely or remotely connected with the Government he had ever met. "No go," she had said with a cavalier, husky intonation which was natural to her, and using turns of expression more suitable to a child of parents unknown than to the orphaned daughter of a general officer. "No; it's no go. Pas moyen, mon garçon. C'est dommage, tout de meme. Ah! zut! Je ne vole pas mon monde. Je ne suis pas ministre — moi! Vous pouvez emporter votre petit sac."

For a moment, biting her carmine lip, she deplored inwardly the tyranny of the rigid principles governing the sale of her influence in high places. Then, significantly, and with a touch of impatience, "Allez," she added, "et dites bien a votre bonhomme — entendez-vous? — qu'il faut avaler la pilule."

After such a warning there was nothing for it but to sign and pay. Mr. Gould had swallowed the pill, and it was as though it had been compounded of some subtle poison that acted directly on his brain. He became at once mine-ridden, and as he was well read in light literature it took to his mind the form of the Old Man of the Sea fastened upon his shoulders. He also began to dream of vampires. Mr. Gould exaggerated to himself the disadvantages of his new position, because he viewed it emotionally. His position in Costaguana was no worse than before. But man is a desperately conservative creature, and the extravagant novelty of this outrage upon his purse distressed his sensibilities. Everybody around him was being robbed by the grotesque and murderous bands that played their game of governments and revolutions after the death of Guzman Bento. His experience had taught him that, however short the plunder might fall of their legitimate expectations, no gang in possession of the Presidential Palace would be so incompetent as to suffer itself to be baffled by the want of a pretext. The first casual colonel of the barefooted army of scarecrows that came along was able to expose with force and precision to any mere civilian his titles to a sum of 10,000 dollars; the while his hope would be immutably fixed upon a gratuity, at any rate, of no less than a thousand. Mr. Gould knew that very well, and, armed with resignation, had waited for better times. But to be robbed under the forms of legality and business was intolerable to his imagination. Mr. Gould, the father, had one fault in his sagacious and honourable character: he attached too much importance to form. It is a failing common to mankind, whose views are tinged by prejudices. There was for him in that affair a malignancy of perverted justice which, by means of a moral shock, attacked his vigorous physique. "It will end by killing me," he used to affirm many times a day. And, in fact, since that time he began to suffer from fever, from liver pains, and mostly from a worrying inability to think of anything else. The Finance Minister could have formed no conception of the profound subtlety of his revenge. Even Mr. Gould's letters to his fourteen-year-old boy Charles, then away in England for his education, came at last to talk of practically

nothing but the mine. He groaned over the injustice, the persecution, the outrage of that mine; he occupied whole pages in the exposition of the fatal consequences attaching to the possession of that mine from every point of view, with every dismal inference, with words of horror at the apparently eternal character of that curse. For the Concession had been granted to him and his descendants for ever. He implored his son never to return to Costaguana, never to claim any part of his inheritance there, because it was tainted by the infamous Concession; never to touch it, never to approach it, to forget that America existed, and pursue a mercantile career in Europe. And each letter ended with bitter self-reproaches for having stayed too long in that cavern of thieves, intriguers, and brigands.

To be told repeatedly that one's future is blighted because of the possession of a silver mine is not, at the age of fourteen, a matter of prime importance as to its main statement; but in its form it is calculated to excite a certain amount of wonder and attention. In course of time the boy, at first only puzzled by the angry jeremiads, but rather sorry for his dad, began to turn the matter over in his mind in such moments as he could spare from play and study. In about a year he had evolved from the lecture of the letters a definite conviction that there was a silver mine in the Sulaco province of the Republic of Costaguana, where poor Uncle Harry had been shot by soldiers a great many years before. There was also connected closely with that mine a thing called the "iniquitous Gould Concession," apparently written on a paper which his father desired ardently to "tear and fling into the faces" of presidents, members of judicature, and ministers of State. And this desire persisted, though the names of these people, he noticed, seldom remained the same for a whole year together. This desire (since the thing was iniquitous) seemed quite natural to the boy, though why the affair was iniquitous he did not know. Afterwards, with advancing wisdom, he managed to clear the plain truth of the business from the fantastic intrusions of the Old Man of the Sea, vampires, and ghouls, which had lent to his father's correspondence the flavour of a gruesome Arabian Nights tale. In the end, the growing youth attained to as close an intimacy with the San Tome mine as the old man who wrote these plaintive and enraged letters on the other side of the sea. He had been made several times already to pay heavy fines for neglecting to work the mine, he reported, besides other sums extracted from him on account of future royalties, on the ground that a man with such a valuable concession in his pocket could not refuse his

financial assistance to the Government of the Republic. The last of his fortune was passing away from him against worthless receipts, he wrote, in a rage, whilst he was being pointed out as an individual who had known how to secure enormous advantages from the necessities of his country. And the young man in Europe grew more and more interested in that thing which could provoke such a tumult of words and passion.

He thought of it every day; but he thought of it without bitterness. It might have been an unfortunate affair for his poor dad, and the whole story threw a queer light upon the social and political life of Costaguana. The view he took of it was sympathetic to his father, yet calm and reflective. His personal feelings had not been outraged, and it is difficult to resent with proper and durable indignation the physical or mental anguish of another organism, even if that other organism is one's own father. By the time he was twenty Charles Gould had, in his turn, fallen under the spell of the San Tome mine. But it was another form of enchantment, more suitable to his youth, into whose magic formula there entered hope, vigour, and self-confidence, instead of weary indignation and despair. Left after he was twenty to his own guidance (except for the severe injunction not to return to Costaguana), he had pursued his studies in Belgium and France with the idea of qualifying for a mining engineer. But this scientific aspect of his labours remained vague and imperfect in his mind. Mines had acquired for him a dramatic interest. He studied their peculiarities from a personal point of view, too, as one would study the varied characters of men. He visited them as one goes with curiosity to call upon remarkable persons. He visited mines in Germany, in Spain, in Cornwall. Abandoned workings had for him strong fascination. Their desolation appealed to him like the sight of human misery, whose causes are varied and profound. They might have been worthless, but also they might have been misunderstood. His future wife was the first, and perhaps the only person to detect this secret mood which governed the profoundly sensible, almost voiceless attitude of this man towards the world of material things. And at once her delight in him, lingering with half-open wings like those birds that cannot rise easily from a flat level, found a pinnacle from which to soar up into the skies.

They had become acquainted in Italy, where the future Mrs. Gould was staying with an old and pale aunt who, years before, had married a middle-aged, impoverished Italian marquis. She now mourned that man, who had known how to give up his life to the independence and unity of his country,

who had known how to be as enthusiastic in his generosity as the youngest of those who fell for that very cause of which old Giorgio Viola was a drifting relic, as a broken spar is suffered to float away disregarded after a naval victory. The Marchesa led a still, whispering existence, nun-like in her black robes and a white band over the forehead, in a corner of the first floor of an ancient and ruinous palace, whose big, empty halls downstairs sheltered under their painted ceilings the harvests, the fowls, and even the cattle, together with the whole family of the tenant farmer.

The two young people had met in Lucca. After that meeting Charles Gould visited no mines, though they went together in a carriage, once, to see some marble quarries, where the work resembled mining in so far that it also was the tearing of the raw material of treasure from the earth. Charles Gould did not open his heart to her in any set speeches. He simply went on acting and thinking in her sight. This is the true method of sincerity. One of his frequent remarks was, "I think sometimes that poor father takes a wrong view of that San Tome business." And they discussed that opinion long and earnestly, as if they could influence a mind across half the globe; but in reality they discussed it because the sentiment of love can enter into any subject and live ardently in remote phrases. For this natural reason these discussions were precious to Mrs. Gould in her engaged state. Charles feared that Mr. Gould, senior, was wasting his strength and making himself ill by his efforts to get rid of the Concession. "I fancy that this is not the kind of handling it requires," he mused aloud, as if to himself. And when she wondered frankly that a man of character should devote his energies to plotting and intrigues, Charles would remark, with a gentle concern that understood her wonder, "You must not forget that he was born there."

She would set her quick mind to work upon that, and then make the inconsequent retort, which he accepted as perfectly sagacious, because, in fact, it was so —

"Well, and you? You were born there, too."

He knew his answer.

"That's different. I've been away ten years. Dad never had such a long spell; and it was more than thirty years ago."

She was the first person to whom he opened his lips after receiving the news of his father's death.

"It has killed him!" he said.

He had walked straight out of town with the news, straight out before him in the noonday sun on the white road, and his feet had brought him face to face with her in the hall of the ruined palazzo, a room magnificent and naked, with here and there a long strip of damask, black with damp and age, hanging down on a bare panel of the wall. It was furnished with exactly one gilt armchair, with a broken back, and an octagon columnar stand bearing a heavy marble vase ornamented with sculptured masks and garlands of flowers, and cracked from top to bottom. Charles Gould was dusty with the white dust of the road lying on his boots, on his shoulders, on his cap with two peaks. Water dripped from under it all over his face, and he grasped a thick oaken cudgel in his bare right hand.

She went very pale under the roses of her big straw hat, gloved, swinging a clear sunshade, caught just as she was going out to meet him at the bottom of the hill, where three poplars stand near the wall of a vineyard.

“It has killed him!” he repeated. “He ought to have had many years yet. We are a long-lived family.”

She was too startled to say anything; he was contemplating with a penetrating and motionless stare the cracked marble urn as though he had resolved to fix its shape for ever in his memory. It was only when, turning suddenly to her, he blurted out twice, “I’ve come to you — I’ve come straight to you — ,” without being able to finish his phrase, that the great pitifulness of that lonely and tormented death in Costaguana came to her with the full force of its misery. He caught hold of her hand, raised it to his lips, and at that she dropped her parasol to pat him on the cheek, murmured “Poor boy,” and began to dry her eyes under the downward curve of her hat-brim, very small in her simple, white frock, almost like a lost child crying in the degraded grandeur of the noble hall, while he stood by her, again perfectly motionless in the contemplation of the marble urn.

Afterwards they went out for a long walk, which was silent till he exclaimed suddenly —

“Yes. But if he had only grappled with it in a proper way!”

And then they stopped. Everywhere there were long shadows lying on the hills, on the roads, on the enclosed fields of olive trees; the shadows of poplars, of wide chestnuts, of farm buildings, of stone walls; and in mid-air the sound of a bell, thin and alert, was like the throbbing pulse of the sunset glow. Her lips were slightly parted as though in surprise that he should not be looking at her with his usual expression. His usual expression was



unconditionally approving and attentive. He was in his talks with her the most anxious and deferential of dictators, an attitude that pleased her immensely. It affirmed her power without detracting from his dignity. That slight girl, with her little feet, little hands, little face attractively overweighted by great coils of hair; with a rather large mouth, whose mere parting seemed to breathe upon you the fragrance of frankness and generosity, had the fastidious soul of an experienced woman. She was, before all things and all flatteries, careful of her pride in the object of her choice. But now he was actually not looking at her at all; and his expression was tense and irrational, as is natural in a man who elects to stare at nothing past a young girl's head.

"Well, yes. It was iniquitous. They corrupted him thoroughly, the poor old boy. Oh! why wouldn't he let me go back to him? But now I shall know how to grapple with this."

After pronouncing these words with immense assurance, he glanced down at her, and at once fell a prey to distress, incertitude, and fear.

The only thing he wanted to know now, he said, was whether she did love him enough — whether she would have the courage to go with him so far away? He put these questions to her in a voice that trembled with anxiety — for he was a determined man.

She did. She would. And immediately the future hostess of all the Europeans in Sulaco had the physical experience of the earth falling away from under her. It vanished completely, even to the very sound of the bell. When her feet touched the ground again, the bell was still ringing in the valley; she put her hands up to her hair, breathing quickly, and glanced up and down the stony lane. It was reassuringly empty. Meantime, Charles, stepping with one foot into a dry and dusty ditch, picked up the open parasol, which had bounded away from them with a martial sound of drum taps. He handed it to her soberly, a little crestfallen.

They turned back, and after she had slipped her hand on his arm, the first words he pronounced were —

"It's lucky that we shall be able to settle in a coast town. You've heard its name. It is Sulaco. I am so glad poor father did get that house. He bought a big house there years ago, in order that there should always be a Casa Gould in the principal town of what used to be called the Occidental Province. I lived there once, as a small boy, with my dear mother, for a

whole year, while poor father was away in the United States on business. You shall be the new mistress of the Casa Gould."

And later, in the inhabited corner of the Palazzo above the vineyards, the marble hills, the pines and olives of Lucca, he also said —

"The name of Gould has been always highly respected in Sulaco. My uncle Harry was chief of the State for some time, and has left a great name amongst the first families. By this I mean the pure Creole families, who take no part in the miserable farce of governments. Uncle Harry was no adventurer. In Costaguana we Goulds are no adventurers. He was of the country, and he loved it, but he remained essentially an Englishman in his ideas. He made use of the political cry of his time. It was Federation. But he was no politician. He simply stood up for social order out of pure love for rational liberty and from his hate of oppression. There was no nonsense about him. He went to work in his own way because it seemed right, just as I feel I must lay hold of that mine."

In such words he talked to her because his memory was very full of the country of his childhood, his heart of his life with that girl, and his mind of the San Tome Concession. He added that he would have to leave her for a few days to find an American, a man from San Francisco, who was still somewhere in Europe. A few months before he had made his acquaintance in an old historic German town, situated in a mining district. The American had his womankind with him, but seemed lonely while they were sketching all day long the old doorways and the turreted corners of the mediaeval houses. Charles Gould had with him the inseparable companionship of the mine. The other man was interested in mining enterprises, knew something of Costaguana, and was no stranger to the name of Gould. They had talked together with some intimacy which was made possible by the difference of their ages. Charles wanted now to find that capitalist of shrewd mind and accessible character. His father's fortune in Costaguana, which he had supposed to be still considerable, seemed to have melted in the rascally crucible of revolutions. Apart from some ten thousand pounds deposited in England, there appeared to be nothing left except the house in Sulaco, a vague right of forest exploitation in a remote and savage district, and the San Tome Concession, which had attended his poor father to the very brink of the grave.

He explained those things. It was late when they parted. She had never before given him such a fascinating vision of herself. All the eagerness of

youth for a strange life, for great distances, for a future in which there was an air of adventure, of combat — a subtle thought of redress and conquest, had filled her with an intense excitement, which she returned to the giver with a more open and exquisite display of tenderness.

He left her to walk down the hill, and directly he found himself alone he became sober. That irreparable change a death makes in the course of our daily thoughts can be felt in a vague and poignant discomfort of mind. It hurt Charles Gould to feel that never more, by no effort of will, would he be able to think of his father in the same way he used to think of him when the poor man was alive. His breathing image was no longer in his power. This consideration, closely affecting his own identity, filled his breast with a mournful and angry desire for action. In this his instinct was unerring. Action is consolatory. It is the enemy of thought and the friend of flattering illusions. Only in the conduct of our action can we find the sense of mastery over the Fates. For his action, the mine was obviously the only field. It was imperative sometimes to know how to disobey the solemn wishes of the dead. He resolved firmly to make his disobedience as thorough (by way of atonement) as it well could be. The mine had been the cause of an absurd moral disaster; its working must be made a serious and moral success. He owed it to the dead man's memory. Such were the — properly speaking — emotions of Charles Gould. His thoughts ran upon the means of raising a large amount of capital in San Francisco or elsewhere; and incidentally there occurred to him also the general reflection that the counsel of the departed must be an unsound guide. Not one of them could be aware beforehand what enormous changes the death of any given individual may produce in the very aspect of the world.

The latest phase in the history of the mine Mrs. Gould knew from personal experience. It was in essence the history of her married life. The mantle of the Goulds' hereditary position in Sulaco had descended amply upon her little person; but she would not allow the peculiarities of the strange garment to weigh down the vivacity of her character, which was the sign of no mere mechanical sprightliness, but of an eager intelligence. It must not be supposed that Mrs. Gould's mind was masculine. A woman with a masculine mind is not a being of superior efficiency; she is simply a phenomenon of imperfect differentiation — interestingly barren and without importance. Dona Emilia's intelligence being feminine led her to achieve the conquest of Sulaco, simply by lighting the way for her

unselfishness and sympathy. She could converse charmingly, but she was not talkative. The wisdom of the heart having no concern with the erection or demolition of theories any more than with the defence of prejudices, has no random words at its command. The words it pronounces have the value of acts of integrity, tolerance, and compassion. A woman's true tenderness, like the true virility of man, is expressed in action of a conquering kind. The ladies of Sulaco adored Mrs. Gould. "They still look upon me as something of a monster," Mrs. Gould had said pleasantly to one of the three gentlemen from San Francisco she had to entertain in her new Sulaco house just about a year after her marriage.

They were her first visitors from abroad, and they had come to look at the San Tome mine. She jested most agreeably, they thought; and Charles Gould, besides knowing thoroughly what he was about, had shown himself a real hustler. These facts caused them to be well disposed towards his wife. An unmistakable enthusiasm, pointed by a slight flavour of irony, made her talk of the mine absolutely fascinating to her visitors, and provoked them to grave and indulgent smiles in which there was a good deal of deference. Perhaps had they known how much she was inspired by an idealistic view of success they would have been amazed at the state of her mind as the Spanish-American ladies had been amazed at the tireless activity of her body. She would — in her own words — have been for them "something of a monster." However, the Goulds were in essentials a reticent couple, and their guests departed without the suspicion of any other purpose but simple profit in the working of a silver mine. Mrs. Gould had out her own carriage, with two white mules, to drive them down to the harbour, whence the Ceres was to carry them off into the Olympus of plutocrats. Captain Mitchell had snatched at the occasion of leave-taking to remark to Mrs. Gould, in a low, confidential mutter, "This marks an epoch."

Mrs. Gould loved the patio of her Spanish house. A broad flight of stone steps was overlooked silently from a niche in the wall by a Madonna in blue robes with the crowned child sitting on her arm. Subdued voices ascended in the early mornings from the paved well of the quadrangle, with the stamping of horses and mules led out in pairs to drink at the cistern. A tangle of slender bamboo stems drooped its narrow, blade-like leaves over the square pool of water, and the fat coachman sat muffled up on the edge, holding lazily the ends of halters in his hand. Barefooted servants passed to and fro, issuing from dark, low doorways below; two laundry girls with

baskets of washed linen; the baker with the tray of bread made for the day; Leonarda — her own camerista — bearing high up, swung from her hand raised above her raven black head, a bunch of starched under-skirts dazzlingly white in the slant of sunshine. Then the old porter would hobble in, sweeping the flagstones, and the house was ready for the day. All the lofty rooms on three sides of the quadrangle opened into each other and into the corredor, with its wrought-iron railings and a border of flowers, whence, like the lady of the mediaeval castle, she could witness from above all the departures and arrivals of the Casa, to which the sonorous arched gateway lent an air of stately importance.

She had watched her carriage roll away with the three guests from the north. She smiled. Their three arms went up simultaneously to their three hats. Captain Mitchell, the fourth, in attendance, had already begun a pompous discourse. Then she lingered. She lingered, approaching her face to the clusters of flowers here and there as if to give time to her thoughts to catch up with her slow footsteps along the straight vista of the corredor.

A fringed Indian hammock from Aroa, gay with coloured featherwork, had been swung judiciously in a corner that caught the early sun; for the mornings are cool in Sulaco. The cluster of flor de noche buena blazed in great masses before the open glass doors of the reception rooms. A big green parrot, brilliant like an emerald in a cage that flashed like gold, screamed out ferociously, "Viva Costaguana!" then called twice mellifluously, "Leonarda! Leonarda!" in imitation of Mrs. Gould's voice, and suddenly took refuge in immobility and silence. Mrs. Gould reached the end of the gallery and put her head through the door of her husband's room.

Charles Gould, with one foot on a low wooden stool, was already strapping his spurs. He wanted to hurry back to the mine. Mrs. Gould, without coming in, glanced about the room. One tall, broad bookcase, with glass doors, was full of books; but in the other, without shelves, and lined with red baize, were arranged firearms: Winchester carbines, revolvers, a couple of shot-guns, and even two pairs of double-barrelled holster pistols. Between them, by itself, upon a strip of scarlet velvet, hung an old cavalry sabre, once the property of Don Enrique Gould, the hero of the Occidental Province, presented by Don Jose Avellanos, the hereditary friend of the family.

Otherwise, the plastered white walls were completely bare, except for a water-colour sketch of the San Tome mountain — the work of Dona Emilia

herself. In the middle of the red-tiled floor stood two long tables littered with plans and papers, a few chairs, and a glass show-case containing specimens of ore from the mine. Mrs. Gould, looking at all these things in turn, wondered aloud why the talk of these wealthy and enterprising men discussing the prospects, the working, and the safety of the mine rendered her so impatient and uneasy, whereas she could talk of the mine by the hour with her husband with unwearied interest and satisfaction. And dropping her eyelids expressively, she added —

“What do you feel about it, Charley?”

Then, surprised at her husband’s silence, she raised her eyes, opened wide, as pretty as pale flowers. He had done with the spurs, and, twisting his moustache with both hands, horizontally, he contemplated her from the height of his long legs with a visible appreciation of her appearance. The consciousness of being thus contemplated pleased Mrs. Gould.

“They are considerable men,” he said.

“I know. But have you listened to their conversation? They don’t seem to have understood anything they have seen here.”

“They have seen the mine. They have understood that to some purpose,” Charles Gould interjected, in defence of the visitors; and then his wife mentioned the name of the most considerable of the three. He was considerable in finance and in industry. His name was familiar to many millions of people. He was so considerable that he would never have travelled so far away from the centre of his activity if the doctors had not insisted, with veiled menaces, on his taking a long holiday.

“Mr. Holroyd’s sense of religion,” Mrs. Gould pursued, “was shocked and disgusted at the tawdriness of the dressed-up saints in the cathedral — the worship, he called it, of wood and tinsel. But it seemed to me that he looked upon his own God as a sort of influential partner, who gets his share of profits in the endowment of churches. That’s a sort of idolatry. He told me he endowed churches every year, Charley.”

“No end of them,” said Mr. Gould, marvelling inwardly at the mobility of her physiognomy. “All over the country. He’s famous for that sort of munificence.” “Oh, he didn’t boast,” Mrs. Gould declared, scrupulously. “I believe he’s really a good man, but so stupid! A poor Chulo who offers a little silver arm or leg to thank his god for a cure is as rational and more touching.”

“He’s at the head of immense silver and iron interests,” Charles Gould observed.

“Ah, yes! The religion of silver and iron. He’s a very civil man, though he looked awfully solemn when he first saw the Madonna on the staircase, who’s only wood and paint; but he said nothing to me. My dear Charley, I heard those men talk among themselves. Can it be that they really wish to become, for an immense consideration, drawers of water and hewers of wood to all the countries and nations of the earth?”

“A man must work to some end,” Charles Gould said, vaguely.

Mrs. Gould, frowning, surveyed him from head to foot. With his riding breeches, leather leggings (an article of apparel never before seen in Costaguana), a Norfolk coat of grey flannel, and those great flaming moustaches, he suggested an officer of cavalry turned gentleman farmer. This combination was gratifying to Mrs. Gould’s tastes. “How thin the poor boy is!” she thought. “He overworks himself.” But there was no denying that his fine-drawn, keen red face, and his whole, long-limbed, lank person had an air of breeding and distinction. And Mrs. Gould relented.

“I only wondered what you felt,” she murmured, gently.

During the last few days, as it happened, Charles Gould had been kept too busy thinking twice before he spoke to have paid much attention to the state of his feelings. But theirs was a successful match, and he had no difficulty in finding his answer.

“The best of my feelings are in your keeping, my dear,” he said, lightly; and there was so much truth in that obscure phrase that he experienced towards her at the moment a great increase of gratitude and tenderness.

Mrs. Gould, however, did not seem to find this answer in the least obscure. She brightened up delicately; already he had changed his tone.

“But there are facts. The worth of the mine — as a mine — is beyond doubt. It shall make us very wealthy. The mere working of it is a matter of technical knowledge, which I have — which ten thousand other men in the world have. But its safety, its continued existence as an enterprise, giving a return to men — to strangers, comparative strangers — who invest money in it, is left altogether in my hands. I have inspired confidence in a man of wealth and position. You seem to think this perfectly natural — do you? Well, I don’t know. I don’t know why I have; but it is a fact. This fact makes everything possible, because without it I would never have thought of disregarding my father’s wishes. I would never have disposed of the

Concession as a speculator disposes of a valuable right to a company — for cash and shares, to grow rich eventually if possible, but at any rate to put some money at once in his pocket. No. Even if it had been feasible — which I doubt — I would not have done so. Poor father did not understand. He was afraid I would hang on to the ruinous thing, waiting for just some such chance, and waste my life miserably. That was the true sense of his prohibition, which we have deliberately set aside.”

They were walking up and down the corridor. Her head just reached to his shoulder. His arm, extended downwards, was about her waist. His spurs jingled slightly.

“He had not seen me for ten years. He did not know me. He parted from me for my sake, and he would never let me come back. He was always talking in his letters of leaving Costaguana, of abandoning everything and making his escape. But he was too valuable a prey. They would have thrown him into one of their prisons at the first suspicion.”

His spurred feet clinked slowly. He was bending over his wife as they walked. The big parrot, turning its head askew, followed their pacing figures with a round, unblinking eye.

“He was a lonely man. Ever since I was ten years old he used to talk to me as if I had been grown up. When I was in Europe he wrote to me every month. Ten, twelve pages every month of my life for ten years. And, after all, he did not know me! Just think of it — ten whole years away; the years I was growing up into a man. He could not know me. Do you think he could?”

Mrs. Gould shook her head negatively; which was just what her husband had expected from the strength of the argument. But she shook her head negatively only because she thought that no one could know her Charles — really know him for what he was but herself. The thing was obvious. It could be felt. It required no argument. And poor Mr. Gould, senior, who had died too soon to ever hear of their engagement, remained too shadowy a figure for her to be credited with knowledge of any sort whatever.

“No, he did not understand. In my view this mine could never have been a thing to sell. Never! After all his misery I simply could not have touched it for money alone,” Charles Gould pursued: and she pressed her head to his shoulder approvingly.

These two young people remembered the life which had ended wretchedly just when their own lives had come together in that splendour of



hopeful love, which to the most sensible minds appears like a triumph of good over all the evils of the earth. A vague idea of rehabilitation had entered the plan of their life. That it was so vague as to elude the support of argument made it only the stronger. It had presented itself to them at the instant when the woman's instinct of devotion and the man's instinct of activity receive from the strongest of illusions their most powerful impulse. The very prohibition imposed the necessity of success. It was as if they had been morally bound to make good their vigorous view of life against the unnatural error of weariness and despair. If the idea of wealth was present to them it was only in so far as it was bound with that other success. Mrs. Gould, an orphan from early childhood and without fortune, brought up in an atmosphere of intellectual interests, had never considered the aspects of great wealth. They were too remote, and she had not learned that they were desirable. On the other hand, she had not known anything of absolute want. Even the very poverty of her aunt, the Marchesa, had nothing intolerable to a refined mind; it seemed in accord with a great grief: it had the austerity of a sacrifice offered to a noble ideal. Thus even the most legitimate touch of materialism was wanting in Mrs. Gould's character. The dead man of whom she thought with tenderness (because he was Charley's father) and with some impatience (because he had been weak), must be put completely in the wrong. Nothing else would do to keep their prosperity without a stain on its only real, on its immaterial side!

Charles Gould, on his part, had been obliged to keep the idea of wealth well to the fore; but he brought it forward as a means, not as an end. Unless the mine was good business it could not be touched. He had to insist on that aspect of the enterprise. It was his lever to move men who had capital. And Charles Gould believed in the mine. He knew everything that could be known of it. His faith in the mine was contagious, though it was not served by a great eloquence; but business men are frequently as sanguine and imaginative as lovers. They are affected by a personality much oftener than people would suppose; and Charles Gould, in his unshaken assurance, was absolutely convincing. Besides, it was a matter of common knowledge to the men to whom he addressed himself that mining in Costaguana was a game that could be made considerably more than worth the candle. The men of affairs knew that very well. The real difficulty in touching it was elsewhere. Against that there was an implication of calm and implacable resolution in Charles Gould's very voice. Men of affairs venture sometimes

on acts that the common judgment of the world would pronounce absurd; they make their decisions on apparently impulsive and human grounds. "Very well," had said the considerable personage to whom Charles Gould on his way out through San Francisco had lucidly exposed his point of view. "Let us suppose that the mining affairs of Sulaco are taken in hand. There would then be in it: first, the house of Holroyd, which is all right; then, Mr. Charles Gould, a citizen of Costaguana, who is also all right; and, lastly, the Government of the Republic. So far this resembles the first start of the Atacama nitrate fields, where there was a financing house, a gentleman of the name of Edwards, and — a Government; or, rather, two Governments — two South American Governments. And you know what came of it. War came of it; devastating and prolonged war came of it, Mr. Gould. However, here we possess the advantage of having only one South American Government hanging around for plunder out of the deal. It is an advantage; but then there are degrees of badness, and that Government is the Costaguana Government."

Thus spoke the considerable personage, the millionaire endower of churches on a scale befitting the greatness of his native land — the same to whom the doctors used the language of horrid and veiled menaces. He was a big-limbed, deliberate man, whose quiet burliness lent to an ample silk-faced frock-coat a superfine dignity. His hair was iron grey, his eyebrows were still black, and his massive profile was the profile of a Caesar's head on an old Roman coin. But his parentage was German and Scotch and English, with remote strains of Danish and French blood, giving him the temperament of a Puritan and an insatiable imagination of conquest. He was completely unbending to his visitor, because of the warm introduction the visitor had brought from Europe, and because of an irrational liking for earnestness and determination wherever met, to whatever end directed.

"The Costaguana Government shall play its hand for all it's worth — and don't you forget it, Mr. Gould. Now, what is Costaguana? It is the bottomless pit of 10 per cent. loans and other fool investments. European capital has been flung into it with both hands for years. Not ours, though. We in this country know just about enough to keep indoors when it rains. We can sit and watch. Of course, some day we shall step in. We are bound to. But there's no hurry. Time itself has got to wait on the greatest country in the whole of God's Universe. We shall be giving the word for everything: industry, trade, law, journalism, art, politics, and religion, from Cape Horn

clear over to Smith's Sound, and beyond, too, if anything worth taking hold of turns up at the North Pole. And then we shall have the leisure to take in hand the outlying islands and continents of the earth. We shall run the world's business whether the world likes it or not. The world can't help it — and neither can we, I guess."

By this he meant to express his faith in destiny in words suitable to his intelligence, which was unskilled in the presentation of general ideas. His intelligence was nourished on facts; and Charles Gould, whose imagination had been permanently affected by the one great fact of a silver mine, had no objection to this theory of the world's future. If it had seemed distasteful for a moment it was because the sudden statement of such vast eventualities dwarfed almost to nothingness the actual matter in hand. He and his plans and all the mineral wealth of the Occidental Province appeared suddenly robbed of every vestige of magnitude. The sensation was disagreeable; but Charles Gould was not dull. Already he felt that he was producing a favourable impression; the consciousness of that flattering fact helped him to a vague smile, which his big interlocutor took for a smile of discreet and admiring assent. He smiled quietly, too; and immediately Charles Gould, with that mental agility mankind will display in defence of a cherished hope, reflected that the very apparent insignificance of his aim would help him to success. His personality and his mine would be taken up because it was a matter of no great consequence, one way or another, to a man who referred his action to such a prodigious destiny. And Charles Gould was not humiliated by this consideration, because the thing remained as big as ever for him. Nobody else's vast conceptions of destiny could diminish the aspect of his desire for the redemption of the San Tome mine. In comparison to the correctness of his aim, definite in space and absolutely attainable within a limited time, the other man appeared for an instant as a dreamy idealist of no importance.

The great man, massive and benignant, had been looking at him thoughtfully; when he broke the short silence it was to remark that concessions flew about thick in the air of Costaguana. Any simple soul that just yearned to be taken in could bring down a concession at the first shot.

"Our consuls get their mouths stopped with them," he continued, with a twinkle of genial scorn in his eyes. But in a moment he became grave. "A conscientious, upright man, that cares nothing for boodle, and keeps clear of their intrigues, conspiracies, and factions, soon gets his passports. See

that, Mr. Gould? *Persona non grata*. That's the reason our Government is never properly informed. On the other hand, Europe must be kept out of this continent, and for proper interference on our part the time is not yet ripe, I dare say. But we here — we are not this country's Government, neither are we simple souls. Your affair is all right. The main question for us is whether the second partner, and that's you, is the right sort to hold his own against the third and unwelcome partner, which is one or another of the high and mighty robber gangs that run the Costaguana Government. What do you think, Mr. Gould, eh?"

He bent forward to look steadily into the unflinching eyes of Charles Gould, who, remembering the large box full of his father's letters, put the accumulated scorn and bitterness of many years into the tone of his answer —

"As far as the knowledge of these men and their methods and their politics is concerned, I can answer for myself. I have been fed on that sort of knowledge since I was a boy. I am not likely to fall into mistakes from excess of optimism."

"Not likely, eh? That's all right. Tact and a stiff upper lip is what you'll want; and you could bluff a little on the strength of your backing. Not too much, though. We will go with you as long as the thing runs straight. But we won't be drawn into any large trouble. This is the experiment which I am willing to make. There is some risk, and we will take it; but if you can't keep up your end, we will stand our loss, of course, and then — we'll let the thing go. This mine can wait; it has been shut up before, as you know. You must understand that under no circumstances will we consent to throw good money after bad."

Thus the great personage had spoken then, in his own private office, in a great city where other men (very considerable in the eyes of a vain populace) waited with alacrity upon a wave of his hand. And rather more than a year later, during his unexpected appearance in Sulaco, he had emphasized his uncompromising attitude with a freedom of sincerity permitted to his wealth and influence. He did this with the less reserve, perhaps, because the inspection of what had been done, and more still the way in which successive steps had been taken, had impressed him with the conviction that Charles Gould was perfectly capable of keeping up his end.

"This young fellow," he thought to himself, "may yet become a power in the land."

This thought flattered him, for hitherto the only account of this young man he could give to his intimates was —

“My brother-in-law met him in one of these one-horse old German towns, near some mines, and sent him on to me with a letter. He’s one of the Costaguana Goulds, pure-bred Englishmen, but all born in the country. His uncle went into politics, was the last Provincial President of Sulaco, and got shot after a battle. His father was a prominent business man in Sta. Marta, tried to keep clear of their politics, and died ruined after a lot of revolutions. And that’s your Costaguana in a nutshell.”

Of course, he was too great a man to be questioned as to his motives, even by his intimates. The outside world was at liberty to wonder respectfully at the hidden meaning of his actions. He was so great a man that his lavish patronage of the “purer forms of Christianity” (which in its naive form of church-building amused Mrs. Gould) was looked upon by his fellow-citizens as the manifestation of a pious and humble spirit. But in his own circles of the financial world the taking up of such a thing as the San Tome mine was regarded with respect, indeed, but rather as a subject for discreet jocularly. It was a great man’s caprice. In the great Holroyd building (an enormous pile of iron, glass, and blocks of stone at the corner of two streets, cobwebbed aloft by the radiation of telegraph wires) the heads of principal departments exchanged humorous glances, which meant that they were not let into the secrets of the San Tome business. The Costaguana mail (it was never large — one fairly heavy envelope) was taken unopened straight into the great man’s room, and no instructions dealing with it had ever been issued thence. The office whispered that he answered personally — and not by dictation either, but actually writing in his own hand, with pen and ink, and, it was to be supposed, taking a copy in his own private press copy-book, inaccessible to profane eyes. Some scornful young men, insignificant pieces of minor machinery in that eleven-storey-high workshop of great affairs, expressed frankly their private opinion that the great chief had done at last something silly, and was ashamed of his folly; others, elderly and insignificant, but full of romantic reverence for the business that had devoured their best years, used to mutter darkly and knowingly that this was a portentous sign; that the Holroyd connection meant by-and-by to get hold of the whole Republic of Costaguana, lock, stock, and barrel. But, in fact, the hobby theory was the right one. It interested the great man to attend personally to the San Tome

mine; it interested him so much that he allowed this hobby to give a direction to the first complete holiday he had taken for quite a startling number of years. He was not running a great enterprise there; no mere railway board or industrial corporation. He was running a man! A success would have pleased him very much on refreshingly novel grounds; but, on the other side of the same feeling, it was incumbent upon him to cast it off utterly at the first sign of failure. A man may be thrown off. The papers had unfortunately trumpeted all over the land his journey to Costaguana. If he was pleased at the way Charles Gould was going on, he infused an added grimness into his assurances of support. Even at the very last interview, half an hour or so before he rolled out of the patio, hat in hand, behind Mrs. Gould's white mules, he had said in Charles's room —

"You go ahead in your own way, and I shall know how to help you as long as you hold your own. But you may rest assured that in a given case we shall know how to drop you in time."

To this Charles Gould's only answer had been: "You may begin sending out the machinery as soon as you like."

And the great man had liked this imperturbable assurance. The secret of it was that to Charles Gould's mind these uncompromising terms were agreeable. Like this the mine preserved its identity, with which he had endowed it as a boy; and it remained dependent on himself alone. It was a serious affair, and he, too, took it grimly.

"Of course," he said to his wife, alluding to this last conversation with the departed guest, while they walked slowly up and down the corridor, followed by the irritated eye of the parrot — "of course, a man of that sort can take up a thing or drop it when he likes. He will suffer from no sense of defeat. He may have to give in, or he may have to die to-morrow, but the great silver and iron interests will survive, and some day will get hold of Costaguana along with the rest of the world."

They had stopped near the cage. The parrot, catching the sound of a word belonging to his vocabulary, was moved to interfere. Parrots are very human.

"Viva Costaguana!" he shrieked, with intense self-assertion, and, instantly ruffling up his feathers, assumed an air of puffed-up somnolence behind the glittering wires.

"And do you believe that, Charley?" Mrs. Gould asked. "This seems to me most awful materialism, and — "

“My dear, it’s nothing to me,” interrupted her husband, in a reasonable tone. “I make use of what I see. What’s it to me whether his talk is the voice of destiny or simply a bit of clap-trap eloquence? There’s a good deal of eloquence of one sort or another produced in both Americas. The air of the New World seems favourable to the art of declamation. Have you forgotten how dear Avellanos can hold forth for hours here — ?”

“Oh, but that’s different,” protested Mrs. Gould, almost shocked. The allusion was not to the point. Don Jose was a dear good man, who talked very well, and was enthusiastic about the greatness of the San Tome mine. “How can you compare them, Charles?” she exclaimed, reproachfully. “He has suffered — and yet he hopes.”

The working competence of men — which she never questioned — was very surprising to Mrs. Gould, because upon so many obvious issues they showed themselves strangely muddle-headed.

Charles Gould, with a careworn calmness which secured for him at once his wife’s anxious sympathy, assured her that he was not comparing. He was an American himself, after all, and perhaps he could understand both kinds of eloquence — “if it were worth while to try,” he added, grimly. But he had breathed the air of England longer than any of his people had done for three generations, and really he begged to be excused. His poor father could be eloquent, too. And he asked his wife whether she remembered a passage in one of his father’s last letters where Mr. Gould had expressed the conviction that “God looked wrathfully at these countries, or else He would let some ray of hope fall through a rift in the appalling darkness of intrigue, bloodshed, and crime that hung over the Queen of Continents.”

Mrs. Gould had not forgotten. “You read it to me, Charley,” she murmured. “It was a striking pronouncement. How deeply your father must have felt its terrible sadness!”

“He did not like to be robbed. It exasperated him,” said Charles Gould. “But the image will serve well enough. What is wanted here is law, good faith, order, security. Any one can declaim about these things, but I pin my faith to material interests. Only let the material interests once get a firm footing, and they are bound to impose the conditions on which alone they can continue to exist. That’s how your money-making is justified here in the face of lawlessness and disorder. It is justified because the security which it demands must be shared with an oppressed people. A better justice will come afterwards. That’s your ray of hope.” His arm pressed her slight form

closer to his side for a moment. "And who knows whether in that sense even the San Tome mine may not become that little rift in the darkness which poor father despaired of ever seeing?"

She glanced up at him with admiration. He was competent; he had given a vast shape to the vagueness of her unselfish ambitions.

"Charley," she said, "you are splendidly disobedient."

He left her suddenly in the corridor to go and get his hat, a soft, grey sombrero, an article of national costume which combined unexpectedly well with his English get-up. He came back, a riding-whip under his arm, buttoning up a dogskin glove; his face reflected the resolute nature of his thoughts. His wife had waited for him at the head of the stairs, and before he gave her the parting kiss he finished the conversation —

"What should be perfectly clear to us," he said, "is the fact that there is no going back. Where could we begin life afresh? We are in now for all that there is in us."

He bent over her upturned face very tenderly and a little remorsefully. Charles Gould was competent because he had no illusions. The Gould Concession had to fight for life with such weapons as could be found at once in the mire of a corruption that was so universal as almost to lose its significance. He was prepared to stoop for his weapons. For a moment he felt as if the silver mine, which had killed his father, had decoyed him further than he meant to go; and with the roundabout logic of emotions, he felt that the worthiness of his life was bound up with success. There was no going back.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

Mrs. Gould was too intelligently sympathetic not to share that feeling. It made life exciting, and she was too much of a woman not to like excitement. But it frightened her, too, a little; and when Don Jose Avellanos, rocking in the American chair, would go so far as to say, "Even, my dear Carlos, if you had failed; even if some untoward event were yet to destroy your work — which God forbid! — you would have deserved well of your country," Mrs. Gould would look up from the tea-table profoundly at her unmoved husband stirring the spoon in the cup as though he had not heard a word.

Not that Don Jose anticipated anything of the sort. He could not praise enough dear Carlos's tact and courage. His English, rock-like quality of character was his best safeguard, Don Jose affirmed; and, turning to Mrs. Gould, "As to you, Emilia, my soul" — he would address her with the familiarity of his age and old friendship — "you are as true a patriot as though you had been born in our midst."

This might have been less or more than the truth. Mrs. Gould, accompanying her husband all over the province in the search for labour, had seen the land with a deeper glance than a trueborn Costaguanera could have done. In her travel-worn riding habit, her face powdered white like a plaster cast, with a further protection of a small silk mask during the heat of the day, she rode on a well-shaped, light-footed pony in the centre of a little cavalcade. Two *mozos de campo*, picturesque in great hats, with spurred bare heels, in white embroidered *calzoneras*, leather jackets and striped ponchos, rode ahead with carbines across their shoulders, swaying in unison to the pace of the horses. A *tropilla* of pack mules brought up the rear in charge of a thin brown muleteer, sitting his long-eared beast very near the tail, legs thrust far forward, the wide brim of his hat set far back, making a sort of halo for his head. An old Costaguana officer, a retired senior major of humble origin, but patronized by the first families on account of his Blanco opinions, had been recommended by Don Jose for commissary and organizer of that expedition. The points of his grey moustache hung far below his chin, and, riding on Mrs. Gould's left hand, he looked about with kindly eyes, pointing out the features of the country, telling the names of the little *pueblos* and of the estates, of the smooth-walled *haciendas* like long fortresses crowning the knolls above the level of the Sulaco Valley. It

unrolled itself, with green young crops, plains, woodland, and gleams of water, park-like, from the blue vapour of the distant sierra to an immense quivering horizon of grass and sky, where big white clouds seemed to fall slowly into the darkness of their own shadows.

Men ploughed with wooden ploughs and yoked oxen, small on a boundless expanse, as if attacking immensity itself. The mounted figures of vaqueros galloped in the distance, and the great herds fed with all their horned heads one way, in one single wavering line as far as eye could reach across the broad potreros. A spreading cotton-wool tree shaded a thatched ranche by the road; the trudging files of burdened Indians taking off their hats, would lift sad, mute eyes to the cavalcade raising the dust of the crumbling camino real made by the hands of their enslaved forefathers. And Mrs. Gould, with each day's journey, seemed to come nearer to the soul of the land in the tremendous disclosure of this interior unaffected by the slight European veneer of the coast towns, a great land of plain and mountain and people, suffering and mute, waiting for the future in a pathetic immobility of patience.

She knew its sights and its hospitality, dispensed with a sort of slumbrous dignity in those great houses presenting long, blind walls and heavy portals to the wind-swept pastures. She was given the head of the tables, where masters and dependants sat in a simple and patriarchal state. The ladies of the house would talk softly in the moonlight under the orange trees of the courtyards, impressing upon her the sweetness of their voices and the something mysterious in the quietude of their lives. In the morning the gentlemen, well mounted in braided sombreros and embroidered riding suits, with much silver on the trappings of their horses, would ride forth to escort the departing guests before committing them, with grave good-byes, to the care of God at the boundary pillars of their estates. In all these households she could hear stories of political outrage; friends, relatives, ruined, imprisoned, killed in the battles of senseless civil wars, barbarously executed in ferocious proscriptions, as though the government of the country had been a struggle of lust between bands of absurd devils let loose upon the land with sabres and uniforms and grandiloquent phrases. And on all the lips she found a weary desire for peace, the dread of officialdom with its nightmarish parody of administration without law, without security, and without justice.

She bore a whole two months of wandering very well; she had that power of resistance to fatigue which one discovers here and there in some quite frail-looking women with surprise — like a state of possession by a remarkably stubborn spirit. Don Pepe — the old Costaguana major — after much display of solicitude for the delicate lady, had ended by conferring upon her the name of the “Never-tired Senora.” Mrs. Gould was indeed becoming a Costaguanera. Having acquired in Southern Europe a knowledge of true peasantry, she was able to appreciate the great worth of the people. She saw the man under the silent, sad-eyed beast of burden. She saw them on the road carrying loads, lonely figures upon the plain, toiling under great straw hats, with their white clothing flapping about their limbs in the wind; she remembered the villages by some group of Indian women at the fountain impressed upon her memory, by the face of some young Indian girl with a melancholy and sensual profile, raising an earthenware vessel of cool water at the door of a dark hut with a wooden porch cumbered with great brown jars. The solid wooden wheels of an ox-cart, halted with its shafts in the dust, showed the strokes of the axe; and a party of charcoal carriers, with each man’s load resting above his head on the top of the low mud wall, slept stretched in a row within the strip of shade.

The heavy stonework of bridges and churches left by the conquerors proclaimed the disregard of human labour, the tribute-labour of vanished nations. The power of king and church was gone, but at the sight of some heavy ruinous pile overtopping from a knoll the low mud walls of a village, Don Pepe would interrupt the tale of his campaigns to exclaim —

“Poor Costaguana! Before, it was everything for the Padres, nothing for the people; and now it is everything for those great politicians in Sta. Marta, for negroes and thieves.”

Charles talked with the alcaldes, with the fiscales, with the principal people in towns, and with the caballeros on the estates. The commandantes of the districts offered him escorts — for he could show an authorization from the Sulaco political chief of the day. How much the document had cost him in gold twenty-dollar pieces was a secret between himself, a great man in the United States (who condescended to answer the Sulaco mail with his own hand), and a great man of another sort, with a dark olive complexion and shifty eyes, inhabiting then the Palace of the Intendencia in Sulaco, and who piqued himself on his culture and Europeanism generally in a rather French style because he had lived in Europe for some years — in exile, he

said. However, it was pretty well known that just before this exile he had incautiously gambled away all the cash in the Custom House of a small port where a friend in power had procured for him the post of subcollector. That youthful indiscretion had, amongst other inconveniences, obliged him to earn his living for a time as a cafe waiter in Madrid; but his talents must have been great, after all, since they had enabled him to retrieve his political fortunes so splendidly. Charles Gould, exposing his business with an imperturbable steadiness, called him Excellency.

The provincial Excellency assumed a weary superiority, tilting his chair far back near an open window in the true Costaguana manner. The military band happened to be braying operatic selections on the plaza just then, and twice he raised his hand imperatively for silence in order to listen to a favourite passage.

“Exquisite, delicious!” he murmured; while Charles Gould waited, standing by with inscrutable patience. “Lucia, Lucia di Lammermoor! I am passionate for music. It transports me. Ha! the divine — ha! — Mozart. Si! divine . . . What is it you were saying?”

Of course, rumours had reached him already of the newcomer’s intentions. Besides, he had received an official warning from Sta. Marta. His manner was intended simply to conceal his curiosity and impress his visitor. But after he had locked up something valuable in the drawer of a large writing-desk in a distant part of the room, he became very affable, and walked back to his chair smartly.

“If you intend to build villages and assemble a population near the mine, you shall require a decree of the Minister of the Interior for that,” he suggested in a business-like manner.

“I have already sent a memorial,” said Charles Gould, steadily, “and I reckon now confidently upon your Excellency’s favourable conclusions.”

The Excellency was a man of many moods. With the receipt of the money a great mellowness had descended upon his simple soul. Unexpectedly he fetched a deep sigh.

“Ah, Don Carlos! What we want is advanced men like you in the province. The lethargy — the lethargy of these aristocrats! The want of public spirit! The absence of all enterprise! I, with my profound studies in Europe, you understand — ”

With one hand thrust into his swelling bosom, he rose and fell on his toes, and for ten minutes, almost without drawing breath, went on hurling

himself intellectually to the assault of Charles Gould's polite silence; and when, stopping abruptly, he fell back into his chair, it was as though he had been beaten off from a fortress. To save his dignity he hastened to dismiss this silent man with a solemn inclination of the head and the words, pronounced with moody, fatigued condescension —

“You may depend upon my enlightened goodwill as long as your conduct as a good citizen deserves it.”

He took up a paper fan and began to cool himself with a consequential air, while Charles Gould bowed and withdrew. Then he dropped the fan at once, and stared with an appearance of wonder and perplexity at the closed door for quite a long time. At last he shrugged his shoulders as if to assure himself of his disdain. Cold, dull. No intellectuality. Red hair. A true Englishman. He despised him.

His face darkened. What meant this unimpressed and frigid behaviour? He was the first of the successive politicians sent out from the capital to rule the Occidental Province whom the manner of Charles Gould in official intercourse was to strike as offensively independent.

Charles Gould assumed that if the appearance of listening to deplorable balderdash must form part of the price he had to pay for being left unmolested, the obligation of uttering balderdash personally was by no means included in the bargain. He drew the line there. To these provincial autocrats, before whom the peaceable population of all classes had been accustomed to tremble, the reserve of that English-looking engineer caused an uneasiness which swung to and fro between cringing and truculence. Gradually all of them discovered that, no matter what party was in power, that man remained in most effective touch with the higher authorities in Sta. Marta.

This was a fact, and it accounted perfectly for the Goulds being by no means so wealthy as the engineer-in-chief on the new railway could legitimately suppose. Following the advice of Don Jose Avellanos, who was a man of good counsel (though rendered timid by his horrible experiences of Guzman Bento's time), Charles Gould had kept clear of the capital; but in the current gossip of the foreign residents there he was known (with a good deal of seriousness underlying the irony) by the nickname of “King of Sulaco.” An advocate of the Costaguana Bar, a man of reputed ability and good character, member of the distinguished Moraga family possessing extensive estates in the Sulaco Valley, was pointed out to strangers, with a

shade of mystery and respect, as the agent of the San Tome mine — "political, you know." He was tall, black-whiskered, and discreet. It was known that he had easy access to ministers, and that the numerous Costaguana generals were always anxious to dine at his house. Presidents granted him audience with facility. He corresponded actively with his maternal uncle, Don Jose Avellanos; but his letters — unless those expressing formally his dutiful affection — were seldom entrusted to the Costaguana Post Office. There the envelopes are opened, indiscriminately, with the frankness of a brazen and childish impudence characteristic of some Spanish-American Governments. But it must be noted that at about the time of the re-opening of the San Tome mine the muleteer who had been employed by Charles Gould in his preliminary travels on the Campo added his small train of animals to the thin stream of traffic carried over the mountain passes between the Sta. Marta upland and the Valley of Sulaco. There are no travellers by that arduous and unsafe route unless under very exceptional circumstances, and the state of inland trade did not visibly require additional transport facilities; but the man seemed to find his account in it. A few packages were always found for him whenever he took the road. Very brown and wooden, in goatskin breeches with the hair outside, he sat near the tail of his own smart mule, his great hat turned against the sun, an expression of blissful vacancy on his long face, humming day after day a love-song in a plaintive key, or, without a change of expression, letting out a yell at his small tropilla in front. A round little guitar hung high up on his back; and there was a place scooped out artistically in the wood of one of his pack-saddles where a tightly rolled piece of paper could be slipped in, the wooden plug replaced, and the coarse canvas nailed on again. When in Sulaco it was his practice to smoke and doze all day long (as though he had no care in the world) on a stone bench outside the doorway of the Casa Gould and facing the windows of the Avellanos house. Years and years ago his mother had been chief laundry-woman in that family — very accomplished in the matter of clear-starching. He himself had been born on one of their haciendas. His name was Bonifacio, and Don Jose, crossing the street about five o'clock to call on Dona Emilia, always acknowledged his humble salute by some movement of hand or head. The porters of both houses conversed lazily with him in tones of grave intimacy. His evenings he devoted to gambling and to calls

in a spirit of generous festivity upon the peyne d'oro girls in the more remote side-streets of the town. But he, too, was a discreet man.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

Those of us whom business or curiosity took to Sulaco in these years before the first advent of the railway can remember the steadying effect of the San Tome mine upon the life of that remote province. The outward appearances had not changed then as they have changed since, as I am told, with cable cars running along the streets of the Constitution, and carriage roads far into the country, to Rincon and other villages, where the foreign merchants and the Ricos generally have their modern villas, and a vast railway goods yard by the harbour, which has a quay-side, a long range of warehouses, and quite serious, organized labour troubles of its own.

Nobody had ever heard of labour troubles then. The Cargadores of the port formed, indeed, an unruly brotherhood of all sorts of scum, with a patron saint of their own. They went on strike regularly (every bull-fight day), a form of trouble that even Nostromo at the height of his prestige could never cope with efficiently; but the morning after each fiesta, before the Indian market-women had opened their mat parasols on the plaza, when the snows of Higuerota gleamed pale over the town on a yet black sky, the appearance of a phantom-like horseman mounted on a silver-grey mare solved the problem of labour without fail. His steed paced the lanes of the slums and the weed-grown enclosures within the old ramparts, between the black, lightless cluster of huts, like cow-byres, like dog-kennels. The horseman hammered with the butt of a heavy revolver at the doors of low pulperias, of obscene lean-to sheds sloping against the tumble-down piece of a noble wall, at the wooden sides of dwellings so flimsy that the sound of snores and sleepy mutters within could be heard in the pauses of the thundering clatter of his blows. He called out men's names menacingly from the saddle, once, twice. The drowsy answers — grumpy, conciliating, savage, jocular, or deprecating — came out into the silent darkness in which the horseman sat still, and presently a dark figure would flit out coughing in the still air. Sometimes a low-toned woman cried through the window-hole softly, "He's coming directly, senor," and the horseman waited silent on a motionless horse. But if perchance he had to dismount, then, after a while, from the door of that hovel or of that pulperia, with a ferocious scuffle and stifled imprecations, a cargador would fly out head first and hands abroad, to sprawl under the forelegs of the silver-grey mare, who only pricked forward her sharp little ears. She was used to that work; and the man,



picking himself up, would walk away hastily from Nostromo's revolver, reeling a little along the street and snarling low curses. At sunrise Captain Mitchell, coming out anxiously in his night attire on to the wooden balcony running the whole length of the O.S.N. Company's lonely building by the shore, would see the lighters already under way, figures moving busily about the cargo cranes, perhaps hear the invaluable Nostromo, now dismounted and in the checked shirt and red sash of a Mediterranean sailor, bawling orders from the end of the jetty in a stentorian voice. A fellow in a thousand!

The material apparatus of perfected civilization which obliterates the individuality of old towns under the stereotyped conveniences of modern life had not intruded as yet; but over the worn-out antiquity of Sulaco, so characteristic with its stuccoed houses and barred windows, with the great yellowy-white walls of abandoned convents behind the rows of sombre green cypresses, that fact — very modern in its spirit — the San Tome mine had already thrown its subtle influence. It had altered, too, the outward character of the crowds on feast days on the plaza before the open portal of the cathedral, by the number of white ponchos with a green stripe affected as holiday wear by the San Tome miners. They had also adopted white hats with green cord and braid — articles of good quality, which could be obtained in the storehouse of the administration for very little money. A peaceable Cholo wearing these colours (unusual in Costaguana) was somehow very seldom beaten to within an inch of his life on a charge of disrespect to the town police; neither ran he much risk of being suddenly lassoed on the road by a recruiting party of lanceros — a method of voluntary enlistment looked upon as almost legal in the Republic. Whole villages were known to have volunteered for the army in that way; but, as Don Pepe would say with a hopeless shrug to Mrs. Gould, "What would you! Poor people! Pobrecitos! Pobrecitos! But the State must have its soldiers."

Thus professionally spoke Don Pepe, the fighter, with pendent moustaches, a nut-brown, lean face, and a clean run of a cast-iron jaw, suggesting the type of a cattle-herd horseman from the great Llanos of the South. "If you will listen to an old officer of Paez, senores," was the exordium of all his speeches in the Aristocratic Club of Sulaco, where he was admitted on account of his past services to the extinct cause of Federation. The club, dating from the days of the proclamation of

Costaguana's independence, boasted many names of liberators amongst its first founders. Suppressed arbitrarily innumerable times by various Governments, with memories of proscriptions and of at least one wholesale massacre of its members, sadly assembled for a banquet by the order of a zealous military commandante (their bodies were afterwards stripped naked and flung into the plaza out of the windows by the lowest scum of the populace), it was again flourishing, at that period, peacefully. It extended to strangers the large hospitality of the cool, big rooms of its historic quarters in the front part of a house, once the residence of a high official of the Holy Office. The two wings, shut up, crumbled behind the nailed doors, and what may be described as a grove of young orange trees grown in the unpaved patio concealed the utter ruin of the back part facing the gate. You turned in from the street, as if entering a secluded orchard, where you came upon the foot of a disjointed staircase, guarded by a moss-stained effigy of some saintly bishop, mitred and staffed, and bearing the indignity of a broken nose meekly, with his fine stone hands crossed on his breast. The chocolate-coloured faces of servants with mops of black hair peeped at you from above; the click of billiard balls came to your ears, and ascending the steps, you would perhaps see in the first sala, very stiff upon a straight-backed chair, in a good light, Don Pepe moving his long moustaches as he spelt his way, at arm's length, through an old Sta. Marta newspaper. His horse — a stony-hearted but persevering black brute with a hammer head — you would have seen in the street dozing motionless under an immense saddle, with its nose almost touching the curbstone of the sidewalk.

Don Pepe, when "down from the mountain," as the phrase, often heard in Sulaco, went, could also be seen in the drawing-room of the Casa Gould. He sat with modest assurance at some distance from the tea-table. With his knees close together, and a kindly twinkle of drollery in his deep-set eyes, he would throw his small and ironic pleasantries into the current of conversation. There was in that man a sort of sane, humorous shrewdness, and a vein of genuine humanity so often found in simple old soldiers of proved courage who have seen much desperate service. Of course he knew nothing whatever of mining, but his employment was of a special kind. He was in charge of the whole population in the territory of the mine, which extended from the head of the gorge to where the cart track from the foot of the mountain enters the plain, crossing a stream over a little wooden bridge

painted green — green, the colour of hope, being also the colour of the mine.

It was reported in Sulaco that up there “at the mountain” Don Pepe walked about precipitous paths, girt with a great sword and in a shabby uniform with tarnished bullion epaulettes of a senior major. Most miners being Indians, with big wild eyes, addressed him as Taita (father), as these barefooted people of Costaguana will address anybody who wears shoes; but it was Basilio, Mr. Gould’s own mozo and the head servant of the Casa, who, in all good faith and from a sense of propriety, announced him once in the solemn words, “El Senor Gobernador has arrived.”

Don Jose Avellanos, then in the drawing-room, was delighted beyond measure at the aptness of the title, with which he greeted the old major banteringly as soon as the latter’s soldierly figure appeared in the doorway. Don Pepe only smiled in his long moustaches, as much as to say, “You might have found a worse name for an old soldier.”

And El Senor Gobernador he had remained, with his small jokes upon his function and upon his domain, where he affirmed with humorous exaggeration to Mrs. Gould —

“No two stones could come together anywhere without the Gobernador hearing the click, senora.”

And he would tap his ear with the tip of his forefinger knowingly. Even when the number of the miners alone rose to over six hundred he seemed to know each of them individually, all the innumerable Joses, Manuels, Ignacios, from the villages primero — segundo — or tercero (there were three mining villages) under his government. He could distinguish them not only by their flat, joyless faces, which to Mrs. Gould looked all alike, as if run into the same ancestral mould of suffering and patience, but apparently also by the infinitely graduated shades of reddish-brown, of blackish-brown, of coppery-brown backs, as the two shifts, stripped to linen drawers and leather skull-caps, mingled together with a confusion of naked limbs, of shouldered picks, swinging lamps, in a great shuffle of sandalled feet on the open plateau before the entrance of the main tunnel. It was a time of pause. The Indian boys leaned idly against the long line of little cradle wagons standing empty; the screeners and ore-breakers squatted on their heels smoking long cigars; the great wooden shoots slanting over the edge of the tunnel plateau were silent; and only the ceaseless, violent rush of water in the open flumes could be heard, murmuring fiercely, with the splash and

rumble of revolving turbine-wheels, and the thudding march of the stamps pounding to powder the treasure rock on the plateau below. The heads of gangs, distinguished by brass medals hanging on their bare breasts, marshalled their squads; and at last the mountain would swallow one-half of the silent crowd, while the other half would move off in long files down the zigzag paths leading to the bottom of the gorge. It was deep; and, far below, a thread of vegetation winding between the blazing rock faces resembled a slender green cord, in which three lumpy knots of banana patches, palm-leaf roots, and shady trees marked the Village One, Village Two, Village Three, housing the miners of the Gould Concession.

Whole families had been moving from the first towards the spot in the Higuerota range, whence the rumour of work and safety had spread over the pastoral Campo, forcing its way also, even as the waters of a high flood, into the nooks and crannies of the distant blue walls of the Sierras. Father first, in a pointed straw hat, then the mother with the bigger children, generally also a diminutive donkey, all under burdens, except the leader himself, or perhaps some grown girl, the pride of the family, stepping barefooted and straight as an arrow, with braids of raven hair, a thick, haughty profile, and no load to carry but the small guitar of the country and a pair of soft leather sandals tied together on her back. At the sight of such parties strung out on the cross trails between the pastures, or camped by the side of the royal road, travellers on horseback would remark to each other —

“More people going to the San Tome mine. We shall see others tomorrow.”

And spurring on in the dusk they would discuss the great news of the province, the news of the San Tome mine. A rich Englishman was going to work it — and perhaps not an Englishman, *Quien sabe!* A foreigner with much money. Oh, yes, it had begun. A party of men who had been to Sulaco with a herd of black bulls for the next corrida had reported that from the porch of the posada in Rincon, only a short league from the town, the lights on the mountain were visible, twinkling above the trees. And there was a woman seen riding a horse sideways, not in the chair seat, but upon a sort of saddle, and a man’s hat on her head. She walked about, too, on foot up the mountain paths. A woman engineer, it seemed she was.

“What an absurdity! Impossible, *senor!*”

“*Si! Si! Una Americana del Norte.*”

“Ah, well! if your worship is informed. Una Americana; it need be something of that sort.”

And they would laugh a little with astonishment and scorn, keeping a wary eye on the shadows of the road, for one is liable to meet bad men when travelling late on the Campo.

And it was not only the men that Don Pepe knew so well, but he seemed able, with one attentive, thoughtful glance, to classify each woman, girl, or growing youth of his domain. It was only the small fry that puzzled him sometimes. He and the padre could be seen frequently side by side, meditative and gazing across the street of a village at a lot of sedate brown children, trying to sort them out, as it were, in low, consulting tones, or else they would together put searching questions as to the parentage of some small, staid urchin met wandering, naked and grave, along the road with a cigar in his baby mouth, and perhaps his mother's rosary, purloined for purposes of ornamentation, hanging in a loop of beads low down on his rotund little stomach. The spiritual and temporal pastors of the mine flock were very good friends. With Dr. Monygham, the medical pastor, who had accepted the charge from Mrs. Gould, and lived in the hospital building, they were on not so intimate terms. But no one could be on intimate terms with El Senor Doctor, who, with his twisted shoulders, drooping head, sardonic mouth, and side-long bitter glance, was mysterious and uncanny. The other two authorities worked in harmony. Father Roman, dried-up, small, alert, wrinkled, with big round eyes, a sharp chin, and a great snuff-taker, was an old campaigner, too; he had shriven many simple souls on the battlefields of the Republic, kneeling by the dying on hillsides, in the long grass, in the gloom of the forests, to hear the last confession with the smell of gunpowder smoke in his nostrils, the rattle of muskets, the hum and spatter of bullets in his ears. And where was the harm if, at the presbytery, they had a game with a pack of greasy cards in the early evening, before Don Pepe went his last rounds to see that all the watchmen of the mine — a body organized by himself — were at their posts? For that last duty before he slept Don Pepe did actually gird his old sword on the verandah of an unmistakable American white frame house, which Father Roman called the presbytery. Near by, a long, low, dark building, steeple-roofed, like a vast barn with a wooden cross over the gable, was the miners' chapel. There Father Roman said Mass every day before a sombre altar-piece representing the Resurrection, the grey slab of the tombstone balanced on one corner, a

figure soaring upwards, long-limbed and livid, in an oval of pallid light, and a helmeted brown legionary smitten down, right across the bituminous foreground. "This picture, my children, muy linda e maravillosa," Father Roman would say to some of his flock, "which you behold here through the munificence of the wife of our Senor Administrador, has been painted in Europe, a country of saints and miracles, and much greater than our Costaguana." And he would take a pinch of snuff with unction. But when once an inquisitive spirit desired to know in what direction this Europe was situated, whether up or down the coast, Father Roman, to conceal his perplexity, became very reserved and severe. "No doubt it is extremely far away. But ignorant sinners like you of the San Tome mine should think earnestly of everlasting punishment instead of inquiring into the magnitude of the earth, with its countries and populations altogether beyond your understanding."

With a "Good-night, Padre," "Good-night, Don Pepe," the Gobernador would go off, holding up his sabre against his side, his body bent forward, with a long, plodding stride in the dark. The jocularly proper to an innocent card game for a few cigars or a bundle of yerba was replaced at once by the stern duty mood of an officer setting out to visit the outposts of an encamped army. One loud blast of the whistle that hung from his neck provoked instantly a great shrilling of responding whistles, mingled with the barking of dogs, that would calm down slowly at last, away up at the head of the gorge; and in the stillness two serenos, on guard by the bridge, would appear walking noiselessly towards him. On one side of the road a long frame building — the store — would be closed and barricaded from end to end; facing it another white frame house, still longer, and with a verandah — the hospital — would have lights in the two windows of Dr. Monygham's quarters. Even the delicate foliage of a clump of pepper trees did not stir, so breathless would be the darkness warmed by the radiation of the over-heated rocks. Don Pepe would stand still for a moment with the two motionless serenos before him, and, abruptly, high up on the sheer face of the mountain, dotted with single torches, like drops of fire fallen from the two great blazing clusters of lights above, the ore shoots would begin to rattle. The great clattering, shuffling noise, gathering speed and weight, would be caught up by the walls of the gorge, and sent upon the plain in a growl of thunder. The pasadero in Rincon swore that on calm nights, by

listening intently, he could catch the sound in his doorway as of a storm in the mountains.

To Charles Gould's fancy it seemed that the sound must reach the uttermost limits of the province. Riding at night towards the mine, it would meet him at the edge of a little wood just beyond Rincon. There was no mistaking the growling mutter of the mountain pouring its stream of treasure under the stamps; and it came to his heart with the peculiar force of a proclamation thundered forth over the land and the marvellousness of an accomplished fact fulfilling an audacious desire. He had heard this very sound in his imagination on that far-off evening when his wife and himself, after a tortuous ride through a strip of forest, had reined in their horses near the stream, and had gazed for the first time upon the jungle-grown solitude of the gorge. The head of a palm rose here and there. In a high ravine round the corner of the San Tome mountain (which is square like a blockhouse) the thread of a slender waterfall flashed bright and glassy through the dark green of the heavy fronds of tree-ferns. Don Pepe, in attendance, rode up, and, stretching his arm up the gorge, had declared with mock solemnity, "Behold the very paradise of snakes, senora."

And then they had wheeled their horses and ridden back to sleep that night at Rincon. The alcalde — an old, skinny Moreno, a sergeant of Guzman Bento's time — had cleared respectfully out of his house with his three pretty daughters, to make room for the foreign senora and their worships the Caballeros. All he asked Charles Gould (whom he took for a mysterious and official person) to do for him was to remind the supreme Government — El Gobierno supreme — of a pension (amounting to about a dollar a month) to which he believed himself entitled. It had been promised to him, he affirmed, straightening his bent back martially, "many years ago, for my valour in the wars with the wild Indios when a young man, senior."

The waterfall existed no longer. The tree-ferns that had luxuriated in its spray had died around the dried-up pool, and the high ravine was only a big trench half filled up with the refuse of excavations and tailings. The torrent, dammed up above, sent its water rushing along the open flumes of scooped tree trunks striding on trestle-legs to the turbines working the stamps on the lower plateau — the mesa grande of the San Tome mountain. Only the memory of the waterfall, with its amazing fernery, like a hanging garden above the rocks of the gorge, was preserved in Mrs. Gould's water-colour sketch; she had made it hastily one day from a cleared patch in the bushes,

sitting in the shade of a roof of straw erected for her on three rough poles under Don Pepe's direction.

Mrs. Gould had seen it all from the beginning: the clearing of the wilderness, the making of the road, the cutting of new paths up the cliff face of San Tome. For weeks together she had lived on the spot with her husband; and she was so little in Sulaco during that year that the appearance of the Gould carriage on the Alameda would cause a social excitement. From the heavy family coaches full of stately senoras and black-eyed senoritas rolling solemnly in the shaded alley white hands were waved towards her with animation in a flutter of greetings. Dona Emilia was "down from the mountain."

But not for long. Dona Emilia would be gone "up to the mountain" in a day or two, and her sleek carriage mules would have an easy time of it for another long spell. She had watched the erection of the first frame-house put up on the lower mesa for an office and Don Pepe's quarters; she heard with a thrill of thankful emotion the first wagon load of ore rattle down the then only shoot; she had stood by her husband's side perfectly silent, and gone cold all over with excitement at the instant when the first battery of only fifteen stamps was put in motion for the first time. On the occasion when the fires under the first set of retorts in their shed had glowed far into the night she did not retire to rest on the rough cadre set up for her in the as yet bare frame-house till she had seen the first spongy lump of silver yielded to the hazards of the world by the dark depths of the Gould Concession; she had laid her unmercenary hands, with an eagerness that made them tremble, upon the first silver ingot turned out still warm from the mould; and by her imaginative estimate of its power she endowed that lump of metal with a justificative conception, as though it were not a mere fact, but something far-reaching and impalpable, like the true expression of an emotion or the emergence of a principle.

Don Pepe, extremely interested, too, looked over her shoulder with a smile that, making longitudinal folds on his face, caused it to resemble a leathern mask with a benignantly diabolic expression.

"Would not the muchachos of Hernandez like to get hold of this insignificant object, that looks, por Dios, very much like a piece of tin?" he remarked, jocularly.

Hernandez, the robber, had been an inoffensive, small ranchero, kidnapped with circumstances of peculiar atrocity from his home during



one of the civil wars, and forced to serve in the army. There his conduct as soldier was exemplary, till, watching his chance, he killed his colonel, and managed to get clear away. With a band of deserters, who chose him for their chief, he had taken refuge beyond the wild and waterless Bolson de Tonoro. The haciendas paid him blackmail in cattle and horses; extraordinary stories were told of his powers and of his wonderful escapes from capture. He used to ride, single-handed, into the villages and the little towns on the Campo, driving a pack mule before him, with two revolvers in his belt, go straight to the shop or store, select what he wanted, and ride away unopposed because of the terror his exploits and his audacity inspired. Poor country people he usually left alone; the upper class were often stopped on the roads and robbed; but any unlucky official that fell into his hands was sure to get a severe flogging. The army officers did not like his name to be mentioned in their presence. His followers, mounted on stolen horses, laughed at the pursuit of the regular cavalry sent to hunt them down, and whom they took pleasure to ambush most scientifically in the broken ground of their own fastness. Expeditions had been fitted out; a price had been put upon his head; even attempts had been made, treacherously of course, to open negotiations with him, without in the slightest way affecting the even tenor of his career. At last, in true Costaguana fashion, the Fiscal of Tonoro, who was ambitious of the glory of having reduced the famous Hernandez, offered him a sum of money and a safe conduct out of the country for the betrayal of his band. But Hernandez evidently was not of the stuff of which the distinguished military politicians and conspirators of Costaguana are made. This clever but common device (which frequently works like a charm in putting down revolutions) failed with the chief of vulgar Salteadores. It promised well for the Fiscal at first, but ended very badly for the squadron of lanceros posted (by the Fiscal's directions) in a fold of the ground into which Hernandez had promised to lead his unsuspecting followers. They came, indeed, at the appointed time, but creeping on their hands and knees through the bush, and only let their presence be known by a general discharge of firearms, which emptied many saddles. The troopers who escaped came riding very hard into Tonoro. It is said that their commanding officer (who, being better mounted, rode far ahead of the rest) afterwards got into a state of despairing intoxication and beat the ambitious Fiscal severely with the flat of his sabre in the presence of his wife and daughters, for bringing this disgrace upon the National

Army. The highest civil official of Tonoro, falling to the ground in a swoon, was further kicked all over the body and rowelled with sharp spurs about the neck and face because of the great sensitiveness of his military colleague. This gossip of the inland Campo, so characteristic of the rulers of the country with its story of oppression, inefficiency, fatuous methods, treachery, and savage brutality, was perfectly known to Mrs. Gould. That it should be accepted with no indignant comment by people of intelligence, refinement, and character as something inherent in the nature of things was one of the symptoms of degradation that had the power to exasperate her almost to the verge of despair. Still looking at the ingot of silver, she shook her head at Don Pepe's remark —

"If it had not been for the lawless tyranny of your Government, Don Pepe, many an outlaw now with Hernandez would be living peaceably and happy by the honest work of his hands."

"Senora," cried Don Pepe, with enthusiasm, "it is true! It is as if God had given you the power to look into the very breasts of people. You have seen them working round you, Dona Emilia — meek as lambs, patient like their own burros, brave like lions. I have led them to the very muzzles of guns — I, who stand here before you, senora — in the time of Paez, who was full of generosity, and in courage only approached by the uncle of Don Carlos here, as far as I know. No wonder there are bandits in the Campo when there are none but thieves, swindlers, and sanguinary macaques to rule us in Sta. Marta. However, all the same, a bandit is a bandit, and we shall have a dozen good straight Winchesters to ride with the silver down to Sulaco."

Mrs. Gould's ride with the first silver escort to Sulaco was the closing episode of what she called "my camp life" before she had settled in her town-house permanently, as was proper and even necessary for the wife of the administrator of such an important institution as the San Tome mine. For the San Tome mine was to become an institution, a rallying point for everything in the province that needed order and stability to live. Security seemed to flow upon this land from the mountain-gorge. The authorities of Sulaco had learned that the San Tome mine could make it worth their while to leave things and people alone. This was the nearest approach to the rule of common-sense and justice Charles Gould felt it possible to secure at first. In fact, the mine, with its organization, its population growing fiercely attached to their position of privileged safety, with its armoury, with its Don Pepe, with its armed body of serenos (where, it was said, many an outlaw

and deserter — and even some members of Hernandez's band — had found a place), the mine was a power in the land. As a certain prominent man in Sta. Marta had exclaimed with a hollow laugh, once, when discussing the line of action taken by the Sulaco authorities at a time of political crisis —

“You call these men Government officials? They? Never! They are officials of the mine — officials of the Concession — I tell you.”

The prominent man (who was then a person in power, with a lemon-coloured face and a very short and curly, not to say woolly, head of hair) went so far in his temporary discontent as to shake his yellow fist under the nose of his interlocutor, and shriek —

“Yes! All! Silence! All! I tell you! The political Gefe, the chief of the police, the chief of the customs, the general, all, all, are the officials of that Gould.”

Thereupon an intrepid but low and argumentative murmur would flow on for a space in the ministerial cabinet, and the prominent man's passion would end in a cynical shrug of the shoulders. After all, he seemed to say, what did it matter as long as the minister himself was not forgotten during his brief day of authority? But all the same, the unofficial agent of the San Tome mine, working for a good cause, had his moments of anxiety, which were reflected in his letters to Don Jose Avellanos, his maternal uncle.

“No sanguinary macaque from Sta. Marta shall set foot on that part of Costaguana which lies beyond the San Tome bridge,” Don Pepe used to assure Mrs. Gould. “Except, of course, as an honoured guest — for our Senor Administrador is a deep politico.” But to Charles Gould, in his own room, the old Major would remark with a grim and soldierly cheeriness, “We are all playing our heads at this game.”

Don Jose Avellanos would mutter “*Imperium in imperio*, Emilia, my soul,” with an air of profound self-satisfaction which, somehow, in a curious way, seemed to contain a queer admixture of bodily discomfort. But that, perhaps, could only be visible to the initiated. And for the initiated it was a wonderful place, this drawing-room of the Casa Gould, with its momentary glimpses of the master — El Senor Administrador — older, harder, mysteriously silent, with the lines deepened on his English, ruddy, out-of-doors complexion; flitting on his thin cavalryman's legs across the doorways, either just “back from the mountain” or with jingling spurs and riding-whip under his arm, on the point of starting “for the mountain.” Then Don Pepe, modestly martial in his chair, the llanero who seemed somehow

to have found his martial jocularly, his knowledge of the world, and his manner perfect for his station, in the midst of savage armed contests with his kind; Avellanos, polished and familiar, the diplomatist with his loquacity covering much caution and wisdom in delicate advice, with his manuscript of a historical work on Costaguana, entitled "Fifty Years of Misrule," which, at present, he thought it was not prudent (even if it were possible) "to give to the world"; these three, and also Dona Emilia amongst them, gracious, small, and fairy-like, before the glittering tea-set, with one common master-thought in their heads, with one common feeling of a tense situation, with one ever-present aim to preserve the inviolable character of the mine at every cost. And there was also to be seen Captain Mitchell, a little apart, near one of the long windows, with an air of old-fashioned neat old bachelorhood about him, slightly pompous, in a white waistcoat, a little disregarded and unconscious of it; utterly in the dark, and imagining himself to be in the thick of things. The good man, having spent a clear thirty years of his life on the high seas before getting what he called a "shore billet," was astonished at the importance of transactions (other than relating to shipping) which take place on dry land. Almost every event out of the usual daily course "marked an epoch" for him or else was "history"; unless with his pomposity struggling with a discomfited droop of his rubicund, rather handsome face, set off by snow-white close hair and short whiskers, he would mutter —

"Ah, that! That, sir, was a mistake."

The reception of the first consignment of San Tome silver for shipment to San Francisco in one of the O.S.N. Co.'s mail-boats had, of course, "marked an epoch" for Captain Mitchell. The ingots packed in boxes of stiff ox-hide with plaited handles, small enough to be carried easily by two men, were brought down by the serenos of the mine walking in careful couples along the half-mile or so of steep, zigzag paths to the foot of the mountain. There they would be loaded into a string of two-wheeled carts, resembling roomy coffers with a door at the back, and harnessed tandem with two mules each, waiting under the guard of armed and mounted serenos. Don Pepe padlocked each door in succession, and at the signal of his whistle the string of carts would move off, closely surrounded by the clank of spur and carbine, with jolts and cracking of whips, with a sudden deep rumble over the boundary bridge ("into the land of thieves and sanguinary macaques," Don Pepe defined that crossing); hats bobbing in the first light of the dawn,

on the heads of cloaked figures; Winchesters on hip; bridle hands protruding lean and brown from under the falling folds of the ponchos. The convoy skirting a little wood, along the mine trail, between the mud huts and low walls of Rincon, increased its pace on the camino real, mules urged to speed, escort galloping, Don Carlos riding alone ahead of a dust storm affording a vague vision of long ears of mules, of fluttering little green and white flags stuck upon each cart; of raised arms in a mob of sombreros with the white gleam of ranging eyes; and Don Pepe, hardly visible in the rear of that rattling dust trail, with a stiff seat and impassive face, rising and falling rhythmically on an ewe-necked silver-bitted black brute with a hammer head.

The sleepy people in the little clusters of huts, in the small ranches near the road, recognized by the headlong sound the charge of the San Tome silver escort towards the crumbling wall of the city on the Campo side. They came to the doors to see it dash by over ruts and stones, with a clatter and clank and cracking of whips, with the reckless rush and precise driving of a field battery hurrying into action, and the solitary English figure of the Senor Administrador riding far ahead in the lead.

In the fenced roadside paddocks loose horses galloped wildly for a while; the heavy cattle stood up breast deep in the grass, lowing mutteringly at the flying noise; a meek Indian villager would glance back once and hasten to shove his loaded little donkey bodily against a wall, out of the way of the San Tome silver escort going to the sea; a small knot of chilly leperos under the Stone Horse of the Alameda would mutter: "Caramba!" on seeing it take a wide curve at a gallop and dart into the empty Street of the Constitution; for it was considered the correct thing, the only proper style by the mule-drivers of the San Tome mine to go through the waking town from end to end without a check in the speed as if chased by a devil.

The early sunshine glowed on the delicate primrose, pale pink, pale blue fronts of the big houses with all their gates shut yet, and no face behind the iron bars of the windows. In the whole sunlit range of empty balconies along the street only one white figure would be visible high up above the clear pavement — the wife of the Senor Administrador — leaning over to see the escort go by to the harbour, a mass of heavy, fair hair twisted up negligently on her little head, and a lot of lace about the neck of her muslin wrapper. With a smile to her husband's single, quick, upward glance, she would watch the whole thing stream past below her feet with an orderly

uproar, till she answered by a friendly sign the salute of the galloping Don Pepe, the stiff, deferential inclination with a sweep of the hat below the knee.

The string of padlocked carts lengthened, the size of the escort grew bigger as the years went on. Every three months an increasing stream of treasure swept through the streets of Sulaco on its way to the strong room in the O.S.N. Co.'s building by the harbour, there to await shipment for the North. Increasing in volume, and of immense value also; for, as Charles Gould told his wife once with some exultation, there had never been seen anything in the world to approach the vein of the Gould Concession. For them both, each passing of the escort under the balconies of the Casa Gould was like another victory gained in the conquest of peace for Sulaco.

No doubt the initial action of Charles Gould had been helped at the beginning by a period of comparative peace which occurred just about that time; and also by the general softening of manners as compared with the epoch of civil wars whence had emerged the iron tyranny of Guzman Bento of fearful memory. In the contests that broke out at the end of his rule (which had kept peace in the country for a whole fifteen years) there was more fatuous imbecility, plenty of cruelty and suffering still, but much less of the old-time fierce and blindly ferocious political fanaticism. It was all more vile, more base, more contemptible, and infinitely more manageable in the very outspoken cynicism of motives. It was more clearly a brazen-faced scramble for a constantly diminishing quantity of booty; since all enterprise had been stupidly killed in the land. Thus it came to pass that the province of Sulaco, once the field of cruel party vengeance, had become in a way one of the considerable prizes of political career. The great of the earth (in Sta. Marta) reserved the posts in the old Occidental State to those nearest and dearest to them: nephews, brothers, husbands of favourite sisters, bosom friends, trusty supporters — or prominent supporters of whom perhaps they were afraid. It was the blessed province of great opportunities and of largest salaries; for the San Tome mine had its own unofficial pay list, whose items and amounts, fixed in consultation by Charles Gould and Senor Avellanos, were known to a prominent business man in the United States, who for twenty minutes or so in every month gave his undivided attention to Sulaco affairs. At the same time the material interests of all sorts, backed up by the influence of the San Tome mine, were quietly gathering substance in that part of the Republic. If, for

instance, the Sulaco Collectorship was generally understood, in the political world of the capital, to open the way to the Ministry of Finance, and so on for every official post, then, on the other hand, the despondent business circles of the Republic had come to consider the Occidental Province as the promised land of safety, especially if a man managed to get on good terms with the administration of the mine. "Charles Gould; excellent fellow! Absolutely necessary to make sure of him before taking a single step. Get an introduction to him from Moraga if you can — the agent of the King of Sulaco, don't you know."

No wonder, then, that Sir John, coming from Europe to smooth the path for his railway, had been meeting the name (and even the nickname) of Charles Gould at every turn in Costaguana. The agent of the San Tome Administration in Sta. Marta (a polished, well-informed gentleman, Sir John thought him) had certainly helped so greatly in bringing about the presidential tour that he began to think that there was something in the faint whispers hinting at the immense occult influence of the Gould Concession. What was currently whispered was this — that the San Tome Administration had, in part, at least, financed the last revolution, which had brought into a five-year dictatorship Don Vincente Ribiera, a man of culture and of unblemished character, invested with a mandate of reform by the best elements of the State. Serious, well-informed men seemed to believe the fact, to hope for better things, for the establishment of legality, of good faith and order in public life. So much the better, then, thought Sir John. He worked always on a great scale; there was a loan to the State, and a project for systematic colonization of the Occidental Province, involved in one vast scheme with the construction of the National Central Railway. Good faith, order, honesty, peace, were badly wanted for this great development of material interests. Anybody on the side of these things, and especially if able to help, had an importance in Sir John's eyes. He had not been disappointed in the "King of Sulaco." The local difficulties had fallen away, as the engineer-in-chief had foretold they would, before Charles Gould's mediation. Sir John had been extremely feted in Sulaco, next to the President-Dictator, a fact which might have accounted for the evident ill-humour General Montero displayed at lunch given on board the Juno just before she was to sail, taking away from Sulaco the President-Dictator and the distinguished foreign guests in his train.

The Excellentissimo ("the hope of honest men," as Don Jose had addressed him in a public speech delivered in the name of the Provincial Assembly of Sulaco) sat at the head of the long table; Captain Mitchell, positively stony-eyed and purple in the face with the solemnity of this "historical event," occupied the foot as the representative of the O.S.N. Company in Sulaco, the hosts of that informal function, with the captain of the ship and some minor officials from the shore around him. Those cheery, swarthy little gentlemen cast jovial side-glances at the bottles of champagne beginning to pop behind the guests' backs in the hands of the ship's stewards. The amber wine creamed up to the rims of the glasses.

Charles Gould had his place next to a foreign envoy, who, in a listless undertone, had been talking to him fitfully of hunting and shooting. The well-nourished, pale face, with an eyeglass and drooping yellow moustache, made the Senor Administrador appear by contrast twice as sunbaked, more flaming red, a hundred times more intensely and silently alive. Don Jose Avellanos touched elbows with the other foreign diplomat, a dark man with a quiet, watchful, self-confident demeanour, and a touch of reserve. All etiquette being laid aside on the occasion, General Montero was the only one there in full uniform, so stiff with embroideries in front that his broad chest seemed protected by a cuirass of gold. Sir John at the beginning had got away from high places for the sake of sitting near Mrs. Gould.

The great financier was trying to express to her his grateful sense of her hospitality and of his obligation to her husband's "enormous influence in this part of the country," when she interrupted him by a low "Hush!" The President was going to make an informal pronouncement.

The Excellentissimo was on his legs. He said only a few words, evidently deeply felt, and meant perhaps mostly for Avellanos — his old friend — as to the necessity of unremitting effort to secure the lasting welfare of the country emerging after this last struggle, he hoped, into a period of peace and material prosperity.

Mrs. Gould, listening to the mellow, slightly mournful voice, looking at this rotund, dark, spectacled face, at the short body, obese to the point of infirmity, thought that this man of delicate and melancholy mind, physically almost a cripple, coming out of his retirement into a dangerous strife at the call of his fellows, had the right to speak with the authority of his self-sacrifice. And yet she was made uneasy. He was more pathetic than promising, this first civilian Chief of the State Costaguana had ever known,



pronouncing, glass in hand, his simple watchwords of honesty, peace, respect for law, political good faith abroad and at home — the safeguards of national honour.

He sat down. During the respectful, appreciative buzz of voices that followed the speech, General Montero raised a pair of heavy, drooping eyelids and rolled his eyes with a sort of uneasy dullness from face to face. The military backwoods hero of the party, though secretly impressed by the sudden novelties and splendours of his position (he had never been on board a ship before, and had hardly ever seen the sea except from a distance), understood by a sort of instinct the advantage his surly, unpolished attitude of a savage fighter gave him amongst all these refined Blanco aristocrats. But why was it that nobody was looking at him? he wondered to himself angrily. He was able to spell out the print of newspapers, and knew that he had performed the “greatest military exploit of modern times.”

“My husband wanted the railway,” Mrs. Gould said to Sir John in the general murmur of resumed conversations. “All this brings nearer the sort of future we desire for the country, which has waited for it in sorrow long enough, God knows. But I will confess that the other day, during my afternoon drive when I suddenly saw an Indian boy ride out of a wood with the red flag of a surveying party in his hand, I felt something of a shock. The future means change — an utter change. And yet even here there are simple and picturesque things that one would like to preserve.”

Sir John listened, smiling. But it was his turn now to hush Mrs. Gould.

“General Montero is going to speak,” he whispered, and almost immediately added, in comic alarm, “Heavens! he’s going to propose my own health, I believe.”

General Montero had risen with a jingle of steel scabbard and a ripple of glitter on his gold-embroidered breast; a heavy sword-hilt appeared at his side above the edge of the table. In this gorgeous uniform, with his bull neck, his hooked nose flattened on the tip upon a blue-black, dyed moustache, he looked like a disguised and sinister vaquero. The drone of his voice had a strangely rasping, soulless ring. He floundered, lowering, through a few vague sentences; then suddenly raising his big head and his voice together, burst out harshly —

“The honour of the country is in the hands of the army. I assure you I shall be faithful to it.” He hesitated till his roaming eyes met Sir John’s face

upon which he fixed a lurid, sleepy glance; and the figure of the lately negotiated loan came into his mind. He lifted his glass. "I drink to the health of the man who brings us a million and a half of pounds."

He tossed off his champagne, and sat down heavily with a half-surprised, half-bullying look all round the faces in the profound, as if appalled, silence which succeeded the felicitous toast. Sir John did not move.

"I don't think I am called upon to rise," he murmured to Mrs. Gould. "That sort of thing speaks for itself." But Don Jose Avellanos came to the rescue with a short oration, in which he alluded pointedly to England's goodwill towards Costaguana — "a goodwill," he continued, significantly, "of which I, having been in my time accredited to the Court of St. James, am able to speak with some knowledge."

Only then Sir John thought fit to respond, which he did gracefully in bad French, punctuated by bursts of applause and the "Hear! Hears!" of Captain Mitchell, who was able to understand a word now and then. Directly he had done, the financier of railways turned to Mrs. Gould —

"You were good enough to say that you intended to ask me for something," he reminded her, gallantly. "What is it? Be assured that any request from you would be considered in the light of a favour to myself."

She thanked him by a gracious smile. Everybody was rising from the table.

"Let us go on deck," she proposed, "where I'll be able to point out to you the very object of my request."

An enormous national flag of Costaguana, diagonal red and yellow, with two green palm trees in the middle, floated lazily at the mainmast head of the Juno. A multitude of fireworks being let off in their thousands at the water's edge in honour of the President kept up a mysterious crepitating noise half round the harbour. Now and then a lot of rockets, swishing upwards invisibly, detonated overhead with only a puff of smoke in the bright sky. Crowds of people could be seen between the town gate and the harbour, under the bunches of multicoloured flags fluttering on tall poles. Faint bursts of military music would be heard suddenly, and the remote sound of shouting. A knot of ragged negroes at the end of the wharf kept on loading and firing a small iron cannon time after time. A greyish haze of dust hung thin and motionless against the sun.

Don Vincente Ribiera made a few steps under the deck-awning, leaning on the arm of Senor Avellanos; a wide circle was formed round him, where

the mirthless smile of his dark lips and the sightless glitter of his spectacles could be seen turning amiably from side to side. The informal function arranged on purpose on board the Juno to give the President-Dictator an opportunity to meet intimately some of his most notable adherents in Sulaco was drawing to an end. On one side, General Montero, his bald head covered now by a plumed cocked hat, remained motionless on a skylight seat, a pair of big gauntleted hands folded on the hilt of the sabre standing upright between his legs. The white plume, the coppery tint of his broad face, the blue-black of the moustaches under the curved beak, the mass of gold on sleeves and breast, the high shining boots with enormous spurs, the working nostrils, the imbecile and domineering stare of the glorious victor of Rio Seco had in them something ominous and incredible; the exaggeration of a cruel caricature, the fatuity of solemn masquerading, the atrocious grotesqueness of some military idol of Aztec conception and European bedecking, awaiting the homage of worshippers. Don Jose approached diplomatically this weird and inscrutable portent, and Mrs. Gould turned her fascinated eyes away at last.

Charles, coming up to take leave of Sir John, heard him say, as he bent over his wife's hand, "Certainly. Of course, my dear Mrs. Gould, for a protege of yours! Not the slightest difficulty. Consider it done."

Going ashore in the same boat with the Goulds, Don Jose Avellanos was very silent. Even in the Gould carriage he did not open his lips for a long time. The mules trotted slowly away from the wharf between the extended hands of the beggars, who for that day seemed to have abandoned in a body the portals of churches. Charles Gould sat on the back seat and looked away upon the plain. A multitude of booths made of green boughs, of rushes, of odd pieces of plank eked out with bits of canvas had been erected all over it for the sale of cana, of dulces, of fruit, of cigars. Over little heaps of glowing charcoal Indian women, squatting on mats, cooked food in black earthen pots, and boiled the water for the mate gourds, which they offered in soft, caressing voices to the country people. A racecourse had been staked out for the vaqueros; and away to the left, from where the crowd was massed thickly about a huge temporary erection, like a circus tent of wood with a conical grass roof, came the resonant twanging of harp strings, the sharp ping of guitars, with the grave drumming throb of an Indian gombo pulsating steadily through the shrill choruses of the dancers.

Charles Gould said presently —

“All this piece of land belongs now to the Railway Company. There will be no more popular feasts held here.”

Mrs. Gould was rather sorry to think so. She took this opportunity to mention how she had just obtained from Sir John the promise that the house occupied by Giorgio Viola should not be interfered with. She declared she could never understand why the survey engineers ever talked of demolishing that old building. It was not in the way of the projected harbour branch of the line in the least.

She stopped the carriage before the door to reassure at once the old Genoese, who came out bare-headed and stood by the carriage step. She talked to him in Italian, of course, and he thanked her with calm dignity. An old Garibaldino was grateful to her from the bottom of his heart for keeping the roof over the heads of his wife and children. He was too old to wander any more.

“And is it for ever, signora?” he asked.

“For as long as you like.”

“Bene. Then the place must be named, It was not worth while before.”

He smiled ruggedly, with a running together of wrinkles at the corners of his eyes. “I shall set about the painting of the name to-morrow.”

“And what is it going to be, Giorgio?”

“Albergo d’Italia Una,” said the old Garibaldino, looking away for a moment. “More in memory of those who have died,” he added, “than for the country stolen from us soldiers of liberty by the craft of that accursed Piedmontese race of kings and ministers.”

Mrs. Gould smiled slightly, and, bending over a little, began to inquire about his wife and children. He had sent them into town on that day. The padrona was better in health; many thanks to the signora for inquiring.

People were passing in twos and threes, in whole parties of men and women attended by trotting children. A horseman mounted on a silver-grey mare drew rein quietly in the shade of the house after taking off his hat to the party in the carriage, who returned smiles and familiar nods. Old Viola, evidently very pleased with the news he had just heard, interrupted himself for a moment to tell him rapidly that the house was secured, by the kindness of the English signora, for as long as he liked to keep it. The other listened attentively, but made no response.

When the carriage moved on he took off his hat again, a grey sombrero with a silver cord and tassels. The bright colours of a Mexican serape

twisted on the cantle, the enormous silver buttons on the embroidered leather jacket, the row of tiny silver buttons down the seam of the trousers, the snowy linen, a silk sash with embroidered ends, the silver plates on headstall and saddle, proclaimed the unapproachable style of the famous Capataz de Cargadores — a Mediterranean sailor — got up with more finished splendour than any well-to-do young ranchero of the Campo had ever displayed on a high holiday.

“It is a great thing for me,” murmured old Giorgio, still thinking of the house, for now he had grown weary of change. “The signora just said a word to the Englishman.”

“The old Englishman who has enough money to pay for a railway? He is going off in an hour,” remarked Nostromo, carelessly. “Buon viaggio, then. I’ve guarded his bones all the way from the Entrada pass down to the plain and into Sulaco, as though he had been my own father.”

Old Giorgio only moved his head sideways absently. Nostromo pointed after the Goulds’ carriage, nearing the grass-grown gate in the old town wall that was like a wall of matted jungle.

“And I have sat alone at night with my revolver in the Company’s warehouse time and again by the side of that other Englishman’s heap of silver, guarding it as though it had been my own.”

Viola seemed lost in thought. “It is a great thing for me,” he repeated again, as if to himself.

“It is,” agreed the magnificent Capataz de Cargadores, calmly. “Listen, Vecchio — go in and bring me, out a cigar, but don’t look for it in my room. There’s nothing there.”

Viola stepped into the cafe and came out directly, still absorbed in his idea, and tendered him a cigar, mumbling thoughtfully in his moustache, “Children growing up — and girls, too! Girls!” He sighed and fell silent.

“What, only one?” remarked Nostromo, looking down with a sort of comic inquisitiveness at the unconscious old man. “No matter,” he added, with lofty negligence; “one is enough till another is wanted.”

He lit it and let the match drop from his passive fingers. Giorgio Viola looked up, and said abruptly —

“My son would have been just such a fine young man as you, Gian’ Battista, if he had lived.”

“What? Your son? But you are right, padrone. If he had been like me he would have been a man.”

He turned his horse slowly, and paced on between the booths, checking the mare almost to a standstill now and then for children, for the groups of people from the distant Campo, who stared after him with admiration. The Company's lightermen saluted him from afar; and the greatly envied Capataz de Cargadores advanced, amongst murmurs of recognition and obsequious greetings, towards the huge circus-like erection. The throng thickened; the guitars tinkled louder; other horsemen sat motionless, smoking calmly above the heads of the crowd; it eddied and pushed before the doors of the high-roofed building, whence issued a shuffle and thumping of feet in time to the dance music vibrating and shrieking with a racking rhythm, overhung by the tremendous, sustained, hollow roar of the gombo. The barbarous and imposing noise of the big drum, that can madden a crowd, and that even Europeans cannot hear without a strange emotion, seemed to draw Nostromo on to its source, while a man, wrapped up in a faded, torn poncho, walked by his stirrup, and, buffeted right and left, begged "his worship" insistently for employment on the wharf. He whined, offering the Senor Capataz half his daily pay for the privilege of being admitted to the swaggering fraternity of Cargadores; the other half would be enough for him, he protested. But Captain Mitchell's right-hand man — "invaluable for our work — a perfectly incorruptible fellow" — after looking down critically at the ragged mozo, shook his head without a word in the uproar going on around.

The man fell back; and a little further on Nostromo had to pull up. From the doors of the dance hall men and women emerged tottering, streaming with sweat, trembling in every limb, to lean, panting, with staring eyes and parted lips, against the wall of the structure, where the harps and guitars played on with mad speed in an incessant roll of thunder. Hundreds of hands clapped in there; voices shrieked, and then all at once would sink low, chanting in unison the refrain of a love song, with a dying fall. A red flower, flung with a good aim from somewhere in the crowd, struck the resplendent Capataz on the cheek.

He caught it as it fell, neatly, but for some time did not turn his head. When at last he condescended to look round, the throng near him had parted to make way for a pretty Morenita, her hair held up by a small golden comb, who was walking towards him in the open space.

Her arms and neck emerged plump and bare from a snowy chemisette; the blue woollen skirt, with all the fullness gathered in front, scanty on the

hips and tight across the back, disclosed the provoking action of her walk. She came straight on and laid her hand on the mare's neck with a timid, coquettish look upwards out of the corner of her eyes.

"Querido," she murmured, caressingly, "why do you pretend not to see me when I pass?"

"Because I don't love thee any more," said Nostromo, deliberately, after a moment of reflective silence.

The hand on the mare's neck trembled suddenly. She dropped her head before all the eyes in the wide circle formed round the generous, the terrible, the inconstant Capataz de Cargadores, and his Morenita.

Nostromo, looking down, saw tears beginning to fall down her face.

"Has it come, then, ever beloved of my heart?" she whispered. "Is it true?"

"No," said Nostromo, looking away carelessly. "It was a lie. I love thee as much as ever."

"Is that true?" she cooed, joyously, her cheeks still wet with tears.

"It is true."

"True on the life?"

"As true as that; but thou must not ask me to swear it on the Madonna that stands in thy room." And the Capataz laughed a little in response to the grins of the crowd.

She pouted — very pretty — a little uneasy.

"No, I will not ask for that. I can see love in your eyes." She laid her hand on his knee. "Why are you trembling like this? From love?" she continued, while the cavernous thundering of the gombo went on without a pause. "But if you love her as much as that, you must give your Paquita a gold-mounted rosary of beads for the neck of her Madonna."

"No," said Nostromo, looking into her uplifted, begging eyes, which suddenly turned stony with surprise.

"No? Then what else will your worship give me on the day of the fiesta?" she asked, angrily; "so as not to shame me before all these people."

"There is no shame for thee in getting nothing from thy lover for once."

"True! The shame is your worship's — my poor lover's," she flared up, sarcastically.

Laughs were heard at her anger, at her retort. What an audacious spitfire she was! The people aware of this scene were calling out urgently to others in the crowd. The circle round the silver-grey mare narrowed slowly.

The girl went off a pace or two, confronting the mocking curiosity of the eyes, then flung back to the stirrup, tiptoeing, her enraged face turned up to Nostromo with a pair of blazing eyes. He bent low to her in the saddle.

“Juan,” she hissed, “I could stab thee to the heart!”

The dreaded Capataz de Cargadores, magnificent and carelessly public in his amours, flung his arm round her neck and kissed her spluttering lips. A murmur went round.

“A knife!” he demanded at large, holding her firmly by the shoulder.

Twenty blades flashed out together in the circle. A young man in holiday attire, bounding in, thrust one in Nostromo’s hand and bounded back into the ranks, very proud of himself. Nostromo had not even looked at him.

“Stand on my foot,” he commanded the girl, who, suddenly subdued, rose lightly, and when he had her up, encircling her waist, her face near to his, he pressed the knife into her little hand.

“No, Morenita! You shall not put me to shame,” he said. “You shall have your present; and so that everyone should know who is your lover to-day, you may cut all the silver buttons off my coat.”

There were shouts of laughter and applause at this witty freak, while the girl passed the keen blade, and the impassive rider jingled in his palm the increasing hoard of silver buttons. He eased her to the ground with both her hands full. After whispering for a while with a very strenuous face, she walked away, staring haughtily, and vanished into the crowd.

The circle had broken up, and the lordly Capataz de Cargadores, the indispensable man, the tried and trusty Nostromo, the Mediterranean sailor come ashore casually to try his luck in Costaguana, rode slowly towards the harbour. The Juno was just then swinging round; and even as Nostromo reined up again to look on, a flag ran up on the improvised flagstaff erected in an ancient and dismantled little fort at the harbour entrance. Half a battery of field guns had been hurried over there from the Sulaco barracks for the purpose of firing the regulation salutes for the President-Dictator and the War Minister. As the mail-boat headed through the pass, the badly timed reports announced the end of Don Vincente Ribiera’s first official visit to Sulaco, and for Captain Mitchell the end of another “historic occasion.” Next time when the “Hope of honest men” was to come that way, a year and a half later, it was unofficially, over the mountain tracks, fleeing after a defeat on a lame mule, to be only just saved by Nostromo from an



ignominious death at the hands of a mob. It was a very different event, of which Captain Mitchell used to say —

“It was history — history, sir! And that fellow of mine, Nostromo, you know, was right in it. Absolutely making history, sir.”

But this event, creditable to Nostromo, was to lead immediately to another, which could not be classed either as “history” or as “a mistake” in Captain Mitchell’s phraseology. He had another word for it.

“Sir” he used to say afterwards, “that was no mistake. It was a fatality. A misfortune, pure and simple, sir. And that poor fellow of mine was right in it — right in the middle of it! A fatality, if ever there was one — and to my mind he has never been the same man since.”

## **PART SECOND THE ISABELS**

## CHAPTER ONE

Through good and evil report in the varying fortune of that struggle which Don Jose had characterized in the phrase, "the fate of national honesty trembles in the balance," the Gould Concession, "Imperium in Imperio," had gone on working; the square mountain had gone on pouring its treasure down the wooden shoots to the unresting batteries of stamps; the lights of San Tome had twinkled night after night upon the great, limitless shadow of the Campo; every three months the silver escort had gone down to the sea as if neither the war nor its consequences could ever affect the ancient Occidental State secluded beyond its high barrier of the Cordillera. All the fighting took place on the other side of that mighty wall of serrated peaks lorded over by the white dome of Higuerota and as yet unbreached by the railway, of which only the first part, the easy Campo part from Sulaco to the Ivie Valley at the foot of the pass, had been laid. Neither did the telegraph line cross the mountains yet; its poles, like slender beacons on the plain, penetrated into the forest fringe of the foot-hills cut by the deep avenue of the track; and its wire ended abruptly in the construction camp at a white deal table supporting a Morse apparatus, in a long hut of planks with a corrugated iron roof overshadowed by gigantic cedar trees — the quarters of the engineer in charge of the advance section.

The harbour was busy, too, with the traffic in railway material, and with the movements of troops along the coast. The O.S.N. Company found much occupation for its fleet. Costaguana had no navy, and, apart from a few coastguard cutters, there were no national ships except a couple of old merchant steamers used as transports.

Captain Mitchell, feeling more and more in the thick of history, found time for an hour or so during an afternoon in the drawing-room of the Casa Gould, where, with a strange ignorance of the real forces at work around him, he professed himself delighted to get away from the strain of affairs. He did not know what he would have done without his invaluable Nostromo, he declared. Those confounded Costaguana politics gave him more work — he confided to Mrs. Gould — than he had bargained for.

Don Jose Avellanos had displayed in the service of the endangered Ribiera Government an organizing activity and an eloquence of which the echoes reached even Europe. For, after the new loan to the Ribiera Government, Europe had become interested in Costaguana. The Sala of the

Provincial Assembly (in the Municipal Buildings of Sulaco), with its portraits of the Liberators on the walls and an old flag of Cortez preserved in a glass case above the President's chair, had heard all these speeches — the early one containing the impassioned declaration "Militarism is the enemy," the famous one of the "trembling balance" delivered on the occasion of the vote for the raising of a second Sulaco regiment in the defence of the reforming Government; and when the provinces again displayed their old flags (proscribed in Guzman Bento's time) there was another of those great orations, when Don Jose greeted these old emblems of the war of Independence, brought out again in the name of new Ideals. The old idea of Federalism had disappeared. For his part he did not wish to revive old political doctrines. They were perishable. They died. But the doctrine of political rectitude was immortal. The second Sulaco regiment, to whom he was presenting this flag, was going to show its valour in a contest for order, peace, progress; for the establishment of national self-respect without which — he declared with energy — "we are a reproach and a byword amongst the powers of the world."

Don Jose Avellanos loved his country. He had served it lavishly with his fortune during his diplomatic career, and the later story of his captivity and barbarous ill-usage under Guzman Bento was well known to his listeners. It was a wonder that he had not been a victim of the ferocious and summary executions which marked the course of that tyranny; for Guzman had ruled the country with the sombre imbecility of political fanaticism. The power of Supreme Government had become in his dull mind an object of strange worship, as if it were some sort of cruel deity. It was incarnated in himself, and his adversaries, the Federalists, were the supreme sinners, objects of hate, abhorrence, and fear, as heretics would be to a convinced Inquisitor. For years he had carried about at the tail of the Army of Pacification, all over the country, a captive band of such atrocious criminals, who considered themselves most unfortunate at not having been summarily executed. It was a diminishing company of nearly naked skeletons, loaded with irons, covered with dirt, with vermin, with raw wounds, all men of position, of education, of wealth, who had learned to fight amongst themselves for scraps of rotten beef thrown to them by soldiers, or to beg a negro cook for a drink of muddy water in pitiful accents. Don Jose Avellanos, clanking his chains amongst the others, seemed only to exist in order to prove how much hunger, pain, degradation, and cruel torture a

human body can stand without parting with the last spark of life. Sometimes interrogatories, backed by some primitive method of torture, were administered to them by a commission of officers hastily assembled in a hut of sticks and branches, and made pitiless by the fear for their own lives. A lucky one or two of that spectral company of prisoners would perhaps be led tottering behind a bush to be shot by a file of soldiers. Always an army chaplain — some unshaven, dirty man, girt with a sword and with a tiny cross embroidered in white cotton on the left breast of a lieutenant's uniform — would follow, cigarette in the corner of the mouth, wooden stool in hand, to hear the confession and give absolution; for the Citizen Saviour of the Country (Guzman Bento was called thus officially in petitions) was not averse from the exercise of rational clemency. The irregular report of the firing squad would be heard, followed sometimes by a single finishing shot; a little bluish cloud of smoke would float up above the green bushes, and the Army of Pacification would move on over the savannas, through the forests, crossing rivers, invading rural pueblos, devastating the haciendas of the horrid aristocrats, occupying the inland towns in the fulfilment of its patriotic mission, and leaving behind a united land wherein the evil taint of Federalism could no longer be detected in the smoke of burning houses and the smell of spilt blood. Don Jose Avellanos had survived that time. Perhaps, when contemptuously signifying to him his release, the Citizen Saviour of the Country might have thought this benighted aristocrat too broken in health and spirit and fortune to be any longer dangerous. Or, perhaps, it may have been a simple caprice. Guzman Bento, usually full of fanciful fears and brooding suspicions, had sudden accesses of unreasonable self-confidence when he perceived himself elevated on a pinnacle of power and safety beyond the reach of mere mortal plotters. At such times he would impulsively command the celebration of a solemn Mass of thanksgiving, which would be sung in great pomp in the cathedral of Sta. Marta by the trembling, subservient Archbishop of his creation. He heard it sitting in a gilt armchair placed before the high altar, surrounded by the civil and military heads of his Government. The unofficial world of Sta. Marta would crowd into the cathedral, for it was not quite safe for anybody of mark to stay away from these manifestations of presidential piety. Having thus acknowledged the only power he was at all disposed to recognize as above himself, he would scatter acts of political grace in a sardonic wantonness of clemency. There was no other way left now to

enjoy his power but by seeing his crushed adversaries crawl impotently into the light of day out of the dark, noisome cells of the Collegio. Their harmlessness fed his insatiable vanity, and they could always be got hold of again. It was the rule for all the women of their families to present thanks afterwards in a special audience. The incarnation of that strange god, El Gobierno Supremo, received them standing, cocked hat on head, and exhorted them in a menacing mutter to show their gratitude by bringing up their children in fidelity to the democratic form of government, "which I have established for the happiness of our country." His front teeth having been knocked out in some accident of his former herdsman's life, his utterance was spluttering and indistinct. He had been working for Costaguana alone in the midst of treachery and opposition. Let it cease now lest he should become weary of forgiving!

Don Jose Avellanos had known this forgiveness.

He was broken in health and fortune deplorably enough to present a truly gratifying spectacle to the supreme chief of democratic institutions. He retired to Sulaco. His wife had an estate in that province, and she nursed him back to life out of the house of death and captivity. When she died, their daughter, an only child, was old enough to devote herself to "poor papa."

Miss Avellanos, born in Europe and educated partly in England, was a tall, grave girl, with a self-possessed manner, a wide, white forehead, a wealth of rich brown hair, and blue eyes.

The other young ladies of Sulaco stood in awe of her character and accomplishments. She was reputed to be terribly learned and serious. As to pride, it was well known that all the Corbelans were proud, and her mother was a Corbelan. Don Jose Avellanos depended very much upon the devotion of his beloved Antonia. He accepted it in the benighted way of men, who, though made in God's image, are like stone idols without sense before the smoke of certain burnt offerings. He was ruined in every way, but a man possessed of passion is not a bankrupt in life. Don Jose Avellanos desired passionately for his country: peace, prosperity, and (as the end of the preface to "Fifty Years of Misrule" has it) "an honourable place in the comity of civilized nations." In this last phrase the Minister Plenipotentiary, cruelly humiliated by the bad faith of his Government towards the foreign bondholders, stands disclosed in the patriot.

The fatuous turmoil of greedy factions succeeding the tyranny of Guzman Bento seemed to bring his desire to the very door of opportunity. He was too old to descend personally into the centre of the arena at Sta. Marta. But the men who acted there sought his advice at every step. He himself thought that he could be most useful at a distance, in Sulaco. His name, his connections, his former position, his experience commanded the respect of his class. The discovery that this man, living in dignified poverty in the Corbelan town residence (opposite the Casa Gould), could dispose of material means towards the support of the cause increased his influence. It was his open letter of appeal that decided the candidature of Don Vincente Ribiera for the Presidency. Another of these informal State papers drawn up by Don Jose (this time in the shape of an address from the Province) induced that scrupulous constitutionalist to accept the extraordinary powers conferred upon him for five years by an overwhelming vote of congress in Sta. Marta. It was a specific mandate to establish the prosperity of the people on the basis of firm peace at home, and to redeem the national credit by the satisfaction of all just claims abroad.

On the afternoon the news of that vote had reached Sulaco by the usual roundabout postal way through Cayta, and up the coast by steamer. Don Jose, who had been waiting for the mail in the Goulds' drawing-room, got out of the rocking-chair, letting his hat fall off his knees. He rubbed his silvery, short hair with both hands, speechless with the excess of joy.

"Emilia, my soul," he had burst out, "let me embrace you! Let me — "

Captain Mitchell, had he been there, would no doubt have made an apt remark about the dawn of a new era; but if Don Jose thought something of the kind, his eloquence failed him on this occasion. The inspirer of that revival of the Blanco party tottered where he stood. Mrs. Gould moved forward quickly and, as she offered her cheek with a smile to her old friend, managed very cleverly to give him the support of her arm he really needed.

Don Jose had recovered himself at once, but for a time he could do no more than murmur, "Oh, you two patriots! Oh, you two patriots!" — looking from one to the other. Vague plans of another historical work, wherein all the devotions to the regeneration of the country he loved would be enshrined for the reverent worship of posterity, flitted through his mind. The historian who had enough elevation of soul to write of Guzman Bento: "Yet this monster, imbrued in the blood of his countrymen, must not be held unreservedly to the execration of future years. It appears to be true that he,

too, loved his country. He had given it twelve years of peace; and, absolute master of lives and fortunes as he was, he died poor. His worst fault, perhaps, was not his ferocity, but his ignorance;" the man who could write thus of a cruel persecutor (the passage occurs in his "History of Misrule") felt at the foreshadowing of success an almost boundless affection for his two helpers, for these two young people from over the sea.

Just as years ago, calmly, from the conviction of practical necessity, stronger than any abstract political doctrine, Henry Gould had drawn the sword, so now, the times being changed, Charles Gould had flung the silver of the San Tome into the fray. The Inglez of Sulaco, the "Costaguana Englishman" of the third generation, was as far from being a political intriguer as his uncle from a revolutionary swashbuckler. Springing from the instinctive uprightness of their natures their action was reasoned. They saw an opportunity and used the weapon to hand.

Charles Gould's position — a commanding position in the background of that attempt to retrieve the peace and the credit of the Republic — was very clear. At the beginning he had had to accommodate himself to existing circumstances of corruption so naively brazen as to disarm the hate of a man courageous enough not to be afraid of its irresponsible potency to ruin everything it touched. It seemed to him too contemptible for hot anger even. He made use of it with a cold, fearless scorn, manifested rather than concealed by the forms of stony courtesy which did away with much of the ignominy of the situation. At bottom, perhaps, he suffered from it, for he was not a man of cowardly illusions, but he refused to discuss the ethical view with his wife. He trusted that, though a little disenchanted, she would be intelligent enough to understand that his character safeguarded the enterprise of their lives as much or more than his policy. The extraordinary development of the mine had put a great power into his hands. To feel that prosperity always at the mercy of unintelligent greed had grown irksome to him. To Mrs. Gould it was humiliating. At any rate, it was dangerous. In the confidential communications passing between Charles Gould, the King of Sulaco, and the head of the silver and steel interests far away in California, the conviction was growing that any attempt made by men of education and integrity ought to be discreetly supported. "You may tell your friend Avellanos that I think so," Mr. Holroyd had written at the proper moment from his inviolable sanctuary within the eleven-storey high factory of great affairs. And shortly afterwards, with a credit opened by the Third Southern



Bank (located next door but one to the Holroyd Building), the Ribierist party in Costaguana took a practical shape under the eye of the administrator of the San Tome mine. And Don Jose, the hereditary friend of the Gould family, could say: "Perhaps, my dear Carlos, I shall not have believed in vain."

## CHAPTER TWO

After another armed struggle, decided by Montero's victory of Rio Seco, had been added to the tale of civil wars, the "honest men," as Don Jose called them, could breathe freely for the first time in half a century. The Five-Year-Mandate law became the basis of that regeneration, the passionate desire and hope for which had been like the elixir of everlasting youth for Don Jose Avellanos.

And when it was suddenly — and not quite unexpectedly — endangered by that "brute Montero," it was a passionate indignation that gave him a new lease of life, as it were. Already, at the time of the President-Dictator's visit to Sulaco, Moraga had sounded a note of warning from Sta. Marta about the War Minister. Montero and his brother made the subject of an earnest talk between the Dictator-President and the Nestor-inspirer of the party. But Don Vincente, a doctor of philosophy from the Cordova University, seemed to have an exaggerated respect for military ability, whose mysteriousness — since it appeared to be altogether independent of intellect — imposed upon his imagination. The victor of Rio Seco was a popular hero. His services were so recent that the President-Dictator quailed before the obvious charge of political ingratitude. Great regenerating transactions were being initiated — the fresh loan, a new railway line, a vast colonization scheme. Anything that could unsettle the public opinion in the capital was to be avoided. Don Jose bowed to these arguments and tried to dismiss from his mind the gold-laced portent in boots, and with a sabre, made meaningless now at last, he hoped, in the new order of things.

Less than six months after the President-Dictator's visit, Sulaco learned with stupefaction of the military revolt in the name of national honour. The Minister of War, in a barrack-square allocution to the officers of the artillery regiment he had been inspecting, had declared the national honour sold to foreigners. The Dictator, by his weak compliance with the demands of the European powers — for the settlement of long outstanding money claims — had showed himself unfit to rule. A letter from Moraga explained afterwards that the initiative, and even the very text, of the incendiary allocution came, in reality, from the other Montero, the ex-guerillero, the Commandante de Plaza. The energetic treatment of Dr. Monygham, sent for in haste "to the mountain," who came galloping three leagues in the dark, saved Don Jose from a dangerous attack of jaundice.

After getting over the shock, Don Jose refused to let himself be prostrated. Indeed, better news succeeded at first. The revolt in the capital had been suppressed after a night of fighting in the streets. Unfortunately, both the Monteros had been able to make their escape south, to their native province of Entre-Montes. The hero of the forest march, the victor of Rio Seco, had been received with frenzied acclamations in Nicoya, the provincial capital. The troops in garrison there had gone to him in a body. The brothers were organizing an army, gathering malcontents, sending emissaries primed with patriotic lies to the people, and with promises of plunder to the wild llaneros. Even a Monterist press had come into existence, speaking oracularly of the secret promises of support given by “our great sister Republic of the North” against the sinister land-grabbing designs of European powers, cursing in every issue the “miserable Ribiera,” who had plotted to deliver his country, bound hand and foot, for a prey to foreign speculators.

Sulaco, pastoral and sleepy, with its opulent Campo and the rich silver mine, heard the din of arms fitfully in its fortunate isolation. It was nevertheless in the very forefront of the defence with men and money; but the very rumours reached it circuitously — from abroad even, so much was it cut off from the rest of the Republic, not only by natural obstacles, but also by the vicissitudes of the war. The Monteristos were besieging Cayta, an important postal link. The overland couriers ceased to come across the mountains, and no muleteer would consent to risk the journey at last; even Bonifacio on one occasion failed to return from Sta. Marta, either not daring to start, or perhaps captured by the parties of the enemy raiding the country between the Cordillera and the capital. Monterist publications, however, found their way into the province, mysteriously enough; and also Monterist emissaries preaching death to aristocrats in the villages and towns of the Campo. Very early, at the beginning of the trouble, Hernandez, the bandit, had proposed (through the agency of an old priest of a village in the wilds) to deliver two of them to the Ribierist authorities in Tonoro. They had come to offer him a free pardon and the rank of colonel from General Montero in consideration of joining the rebel army with his mounted band. No notice was taken at the time of the proposal. It was joined, as an evidence of good faith, to a petition praying the Sulaco Assembly for permission to enlist, with all his followers, in the forces being then raised in Sulaco for the defence of the Five-Year Mandate of regeneration. The

petition, like everything else, had found its way into Don Jose's hands. He had showed to Mrs. Gould these pages of dirty-greyish rough paper (perhaps looted in some village store), covered with the crabbed, illiterate handwriting of the old padre, carried off from his hut by the side of a mud-walled church to be the secretary of the dreaded Salteador. They had both bent in the lamplight of the Gould drawing-room over the document containing the fierce and yet humble appeal of the man against the blind and stupid barbarity turning an honest ranchero into a bandit. A postscript of the priest stated that, but for being deprived of his liberty for ten days, he had been treated with humanity and the respect due to his sacred calling. He had been, it appears, confessing and absolving the chief and most of the band, and he guaranteed the sincerity of their good disposition. He had distributed heavy penances, no doubt in the way of litanies and fasts; but he argued shrewdly that it would be difficult for them to make their peace with God durably till they had made peace with men.

Never before, perhaps, had Hernandez's head been in less jeopardy than when he petitioned humbly for permission to buy a pardon for himself and his gang of deserters by armed service. He could range afar from the waste lands protecting his fastness, unchecked, because there were no troops left in the whole province. The usual garrison of Sulaco had gone south to the war, with its brass band playing the Bolivar march on the bridge of one of the O.S.N. Company's steamers. The great family coaches drawn up along the shore of the harbour were made to rock on the high leathern springs by the enthusiasm of the senoras and the senoritas standing up to wave their lace handkerchiefs, as lighter after lighter packed full of troops left the end of the jetty.

Nostromo directed the embarkation, under the superintendence of Captain Mitchell, red-faced in the sun, conspicuous in a white waistcoat, representing the allied and anxious goodwill of all the material interests of civilization. General Barrios, who commanded the troops, assured Don Jose on parting that in three weeks he would have Montero in a wooden cage drawn by three pair of oxen ready for a tour through all the towns of the Republic.

"And then, senora," he continued, baring his curly iron-grey head to Mrs. Gould in her landau — "and then, senora, we shall convert our swords into plough-shares and grow rich. Even I, myself, as soon as this little business is settled, shall open a fundacion on some land I have on the llanos and try

to make a little money in peace and quietness. Senora, you know, all Costaguana knows — what do I say? — this whole South American continent knows, that Pablo Barrios has had his fill of military glory.”

Charles Gould was not present at the anxious and patriotic send-off. It was not his part to see the soldiers embark. It was neither his part, nor his inclination, nor his policy. His part, his inclination, and his policy were united in one endeavour to keep unchecked the flow of treasure he had started single-handed from the re-opened scar in the flank of the mountain. As the mine developed he had trained for himself some native help. There were foremen, artificers and clerks, with Don Pepe for the gobernador of the mining population. For the rest his shoulders alone sustained the whole weight of the “Imperium in Imperio,” the great Gould Concession whose mere shadow had been enough to crush the life out of his father.

Mrs. Gould had no silver mine to look after. In the general life of the Gould Concession she was represented by her two lieutenants, the doctor and the priest, but she fed her woman’s love of excitement on events whose significance was purified to her by the fire of her imaginative purpose. On that day she had brought the Avellanos, father and daughter, down to the harbour with her.

Amongst his other activities of that stirring time, Don Jose had become the chairman of a Patriotic Committee which had armed a great proportion of troops in the Sulaco command with an improved model of a military rifle. It had been just discarded for something still more deadly by one of the great European powers. How much of the market-price for second-hand weapons was covered by the voluntary contributions of the principal families, and how much came from those funds Don Jose was understood to command abroad, remained a secret which he alone could have disclosed; but the Ricos, as the populace called them, had contributed under the pressure of their Nestor’s eloquence. Some of the more enthusiastic ladies had been moved to bring offerings of jewels into the hands of the man who was the life and soul of the party.

There were moments when both his life and his soul seemed overtaxed by so many years of undiscouraged belief in regeneration. He appeared almost inanimate, sitting rigidly by the side of Mrs. Gould in the landau, with his fine, old, clean-shaven face of a uniform tint as if modelled in yellow wax, shaded by a soft felt hat, the dark eyes looking out fixedly. Antonia, the beautiful Antonia, as Miss Avellanos was called in Sulaco,

leaned back, facing them; and her full figure, the grave oval of her face with full red lips, made her look more mature than Mrs. Gould, with her mobile expression and small, erect person under a slightly swaying sunshade.

Whenever possible Antonia attended her father; her recognized devotion weakened the shocking effect of her scorn for the rigid conventions regulating the life of Spanish-American girlhood. And, in truth, she was no longer girlish. It was said that she often wrote State papers from her father's dictation, and was allowed to read all the books in his library. At the receptions — where the situation was saved by the presence of a very decrepit old lady (a relation of the Corbelans), quite deaf and motionless in an armchair — Antonia could hold her own in a discussion with two or three men at a time. Obviously she was not the girl to be content with peeping through a barred window at a cloaked figure of a lover ensconced in a doorway opposite — which is the correct form of Costaguana courtship. It was generally believed that with her foreign upbringing and foreign ideas the learned and proud Antonia would never marry — unless, indeed, she married a foreigner from Europe or North America, now that Sulaco seemed on the point of being invaded by all the world.

## CHAPTER THREE

When General Barrios stopped to address Mrs. Gould, Antonia raised negligently her hand holding an open fan, as if to shade from the sun her head, wrapped in a light lace shawl. The clear gleam of her blue eyes gliding behind the black fringe of eyelashes paused for a moment upon her father, then travelled further to the figure of a young man of thirty at most, of medium height, rather thick-set, wearing a light overcoat. Bearing down with the open palm of his hand upon the knob of a flexible cane, he had been looking on from a distance; but directly he saw himself noticed, he approached quietly and put his elbow over the door of the landau.

The shirt collar, cut low in the neck, the big bow of his cravat, the style of his clothing, from the round hat to the varnished shoes, suggested an idea of French elegance; but otherwise he was the very type of a fair Spanish creole. The fluffy moustache and the short, curly, golden beard did not conceal his lips, rosy, fresh, almost pouting in expression. His full, round face was of that warm, healthy creole white which is never tanned by its native sunshine. Martin Decoud was seldom exposed to the Costaguana sun under which he was born. His people had been long settled in Paris, where he had studied law, had dabbled in literature, had hoped now and then in moments of exaltation to become a poet like that other foreigner of Spanish blood, Jose Maria Heredia. In other moments he had, to pass the time, condescended to write articles on European affairs for the *Semenario*, the principal newspaper in Sta. Marta, which printed them under the heading "From our special correspondent," though the authorship was an open secret. Everybody in Costaguana, where the tale of compatriots in Europe is jealously kept, knew that it was "the son Decoud," a talented young man, supposed to be moving in the higher spheres of Society. As a matter of fact, he was an idle boulevardier, in touch with some smart journalists, made free of a few newspaper offices, and welcomed in the pleasure haunts of pressmen. This life, whose dreary superficiality is covered by the glitter of universal blague, like the stupid clowning of a harlequin by the spangles of a motley costume, induced in him a Frenchified — but most un-French — cosmopolitanism, in reality a mere barren indifferentism posing as intellectual superiority. Of his own country he used to say to his French associates: "Imagine an atmosphere of opera-bouffe in which all the comic business of stage statesmen, brigands, etc., etc., all their farcical stealing,

intriguing, and stabbing is done in dead earnest. It is screamingly funny, the blood flows all the time, and the actors believe themselves to be influencing the fate of the universe. Of course, government in general, any government anywhere, is a thing of exquisite comicality to a discerning mind; but really we Spanish-Americans do overstep the bounds. No man of ordinary intelligence can take part in the intrigues of *une farce macabre*. However, these Ribierists, of whom we hear so much just now, are really trying in their own comical way to make the country habitable, and even to pay some of its debts. My friends, you had better write up Senor Ribiera all you can in kindness to your own bondholders. Really, if what I am told in my letters is true, there is some chance for them at last."

And he would explain with railing verve what Don Vincente Ribiera stood for — a mournful little man oppressed by his own good intentions, the significance of battles won, who Montero was (*un grotesque vaniteux et feroce*), and the manner of the new loan connected with railway development, and the colonization of vast tracts of land in one great financial scheme.

And his French friends would remark that evidently this little fellow Decoud *connaissait la question a fond*. An important Parisian review asked him for an article on the situation. It was composed in a serious tone and in a spirit of levity. Afterwards he asked one of his intimates —

"Have you read my thing about the regeneration of Costaguana — *une bonne blague, hein?*"

He imagined himself Parisian to the tips of his fingers. But far from being that he was in danger of remaining a sort of nondescript dilettante all his life. He had pushed the habit of universal raillery to a point where it blinded him to the genuine impulses of his own nature. To be suddenly selected for the executive member of the patriotic small-arms committee of Sulaco seemed to him the height of the unexpected, one of those fantastic moves of which only his "dear countrymen" were capable.

"It's like a tile falling on my head. I — I — executive member! It's the first I hear of it! What do I know of military rifles? *C'est funambulesque!*" he had exclaimed to his favourite sister; for the Decoud family — except the old father and mother — used the French language amongst themselves. "And you should see the explanatory and confidential letter! Eight pages of it — no less!"



This letter, in Antonia's handwriting, was signed by Don Jose, who appealed to the "young and gifted Costaguanero" on public grounds, and privately opened his heart to his talented god-son, a man of wealth and leisure, with wide relations, and by his parentage and bringing-up worthy of all confidence.

"Which means," Martin commented, cynically, to his sister, "that I am not likely to misappropriate the funds, or go blabbing to our Charge d'Affaires here."

The whole thing was being carried out behind the back of the War Minister, Montero, a mistrusted member of the Ribiera Government, but difficult to get rid of at once. He was not to know anything of it till the troops under Barrios's command had the new rifle in their hands. The President-Dictator, whose position was very difficult, was alone in the secret.

"How funny!" commented Martin's sister and confidante; to which the brother, with an air of best Parisian blague, had retorted:

"It's immense! The idea of that Chief of the State engaged, with the help of private citizens, in digging a mine under his own indispensable War Minister. No! We are unapproachable!" And he laughed immoderately.

Afterwards his sister was surprised at the earnestness and ability he displayed in carrying out his mission, which circumstances made delicate, and his want of special knowledge rendered difficult. She had never seen Martin take so much trouble about anything in his whole life.

"It amuses me," he had explained, briefly. "I am beset by a lot of swindlers trying to sell all sorts of gaspipe weapons. They are charming; they invite me to expensive luncheons; I keep up their hopes; it's extremely entertaining. Meanwhile, the real affair is being carried through in quite another quarter."

When the business was concluded he declared suddenly his intention of seeing the precious consignment delivered safely in Sulaco. The whole burlesque business, he thought, was worth following up to the end. He mumbled his excuses, tugging at his golden beard, before the acute young lady who (after the first wide stare of astonishment) looked at him with narrowed eyes, and pronounced slowly —

"I believe you want to see Antonia."

"What Antonia?" asked the Costaguana boulevardier, in a vexed and disdainful tone. He shrugged his shoulders, and spun round on his heel. His

sister called out after him joyously —

“The Antonia you used to know when she wore her hair in two plaits down her back.”

He had known her some eight years since, shortly before the Avellanos had left Europe for good, as a tall girl of sixteen, youthfully austere, and of a character already so formed that she ventured to treat slightly his pose of disabused wisdom. On one occasion, as though she had lost all patience, she flew out at him about the aimlessness of his life and the levity of his opinions. He was twenty then, an only son, spoiled by his adoring family. This attack disconcerted him so greatly that he had faltered in his affectation of amused superiority before that insignificant chit of a school-girl. But the impression left was so strong that ever since all the girl friends of his sisters recalled to him Antonia Avellanos by some faint resemblance, or by the great force of contrast. It was, he told himself, like a ridiculous fatality. And, of course, in the news the Decouds received regularly from Costaguana, the name of their friends, the Avellanos, cropped up frequently — the arrest and the abominable treatment of the ex-Minister, the dangers and hardships endured by the family, its withdrawal in poverty to Sulaco, the death of the mother.

The Monterist pronunciamento had taken place before Martin Decoud reached Costaguana. He came out in a roundabout way, through Magellan's Straits by the main line and the West Coast Service of the O.S.N. Company. His precious consignment arrived just in time to convert the first feelings of consternation into a mood of hope and resolution. Publicly he was made much of by the familias principales. Privately Don Jose, still shaken and weak, embraced him with tears in his eyes.

“You have come out yourself! No less could be expected from a Decoud. Alas! our worst fears have been realized,” he moaned, affectionately. And again he hugged his god-son. This was indeed the time for men of intellect and conscience to rally round the endangered cause.

It was then that Martin Decoud, the adopted child of Western Europe, felt the absolute change of atmosphere. He submitted to being embraced and talked to without a word. He was moved in spite of himself by that note of passion and sorrow unknown on the more refined stage of European politics. But when the tall Antonia, advancing with her light step in the dimness of the big bare Sala of the Avellanos house, offered him her hand (in her emancipated way), and murmured, “I am glad to see you here, Don

Martin,” he felt how impossible it would be to tell these two people that he had intended to go away by the next month’s packet. Don Jose, meantime, continued his praises. Every accession added to public confidence, and, besides, what an example to the young men at home from the brilliant defender of the country’s regeneration, the worthy expounder of the party’s political faith before the world! Everybody had read the magnificent article in the famous Parisian Review. The world was now informed: and the author’s appearance at this moment was like a public act of faith. Young Decoud felt overcome by a feeling of impatient confusion. His plan had been to return by way of the United States through California, visit Yellowstone Park, see Chicago, Niagara, have a look at Canada, perhaps make a short stay in New York, a longer one in Newport, use his letters of introduction. The pressure of Antonia’s hand was so frank, the tone of her voice was so unexpectedly unchanged in its approving warmth, that all he found to say after his low bow was —

“I am inexpressibly grateful for your welcome; but why need a man be thanked for returning to his native country? I am sure Dona Antonia does not think so.”

“Certainly not, senor,” she said, with that perfectly calm openness of manner which characterized all her utterances. “But when he returns, as you return, one may be glad — for the sake of both.”

Martin Decoud said nothing of his plans. He not only never breathed a word of them to any one, but only a fortnight later asked the mistress of the Casa Gould (where he had of course obtained admission at once), leaning forward in his chair with an air of well-bred familiarity, whether she could not detect in him that day a marked change — an air, he explained, of more excellent gravity. At this Mrs. Gould turned her face full towards him with the silent inquiry of slightly widened eyes and the merest ghost of a smile, an habitual movement with her, which was very fascinating to men by something subtly devoted, finely self-forgetful in its lively readiness of attention. Because, Decoud continued imperturbably, he felt no longer an idle cumberer of the earth. She was, he assured her, actually beholding at that moment the Journalist of Sulaco. At once Mrs. Gould glanced towards Antonia, posed upright in the corner of a high, straight-backed Spanish sofa, a large black fan waving slowly against the curves of her fine figure, the tips of crossed feet peeping from under the hem of the black skirt. Decoud’s eyes also remained fixed there, while in an undertone he added

that Miss Avellanos was quite aware of his new and unexpected vocation, which in Costaguana was generally the speciality of half-educated negroes and wholly penniless lawyers. Then, confronting with a sort of urbane effrontery Mrs. Gould's gaze, now turned sympathetically upon himself, he breathed out the words, "Pro Patria!"

What had happened was that he had all at once yielded to Don Jose's pressing entreaties to take the direction of a newspaper that would "voice the aspirations of the province." It had been Don Jose's old and cherished idea. The necessary plant (on a modest scale) and a large consignment of paper had been received from America some time before; the right man alone was wanted. Even Senor Moraga in Sta. Marta had not been able to find one, and the matter was now becoming pressing; some organ was absolutely needed to counteract the effect of the lies disseminated by the Monterist press: the atrocious calumnies, the appeals to the people calling upon them to rise with their knives in their hands and put an end once for all to the Blancos, to these Gothic remnants, to these sinister mummies, these impotent paraliticos, who plotted with foreigners for the surrender of the lands and the slavery of the people.

The clamour of this Negro Liberalism frightened Senor Avellanos. A newspaper was the only remedy. And now that the right man had been found in Decoud, great black letters appeared painted between the windows above the arcaded ground floor of a house on the Plaza. It was next to Anzani's great emporium of boots, silks, ironware, muslins, wooden toys, tiny silver arms, legs, heads, hearts (for ex-voto offerings), rosaries, champagne, women's hats, patent medicines, even a few dusty books in paper covers and mostly in the French language. The big black letters formed the words, "Offices of the Porvenir." From these offices a single folded sheet of Martin's journalism issued three times a week; and the sleek yellow Anzani prowling in a suit of ample black and carpet slippers, before the many doors of his establishment, greeted by a deep, side-long inclination of his body the Journalist of Sulaco going to and fro on the business of his august calling.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Perhaps it was in the exercise of his calling that he had come to see the troops depart. The *Porvenir* of the day after next would no doubt relate the event, but its editor, leaning his side against the landau, seemed to look at nothing. The front rank of the company of infantry drawn up three deep across the shore end of the jetty when pressed too close would bring their bayonets to the charge ferociously, with an awful rattle; and then the crowd of spectators swayed back bodily, even under the noses of the big white mules. Notwithstanding the great multitude there was only a low, muttering noise; the dust hung in a brown haze, in which the horsemen, wedged in the throng here and there, towered from the hips upwards, gazing all one way over the heads. Almost every one of them had mounted a friend, who steadied himself with both hands grasping his shoulders from behind; and the rims of their hats touching, made like one disc sustaining the cones of two pointed crowns with a double face underneath. A hoarse mozo would bawl out something to an acquaintance in the ranks, or a woman would shriek suddenly the word *Adios!* followed by the Christian name of a man.

General Barrios, in a shabby blue tunic and white peg-top trousers falling upon strange red boots, kept his head uncovered and stooped slightly, propping himself up with a thick stick. No! He had earned enough military glory to satiate any man, he insisted to Mrs. Gould, trying at the same time to put an air of gallantry into his attitude. A few jetty hairs hung sparsely from his upper lip, he had a salient nose, a thin, long jaw, and a black silk patch over one eye. His other eye, small and deep-set, twinkled erratically in all directions, aimlessly affable. The few European spectators, all men, who had naturally drifted into the neighbourhood of the Gould carriage, betrayed by the solemnity of their faces their impression that the general must have had too much punch (Swedish punch, imported in bottles by Anzani) at the Amarilla Club before he had started with his Staff on a furious ride to the harbour. But Mrs. Gould bent forward, self-possessed, and declared her conviction that still more glory awaited the general in the near future.

“Senora!” he remonstrated, with great feeling, “in the name of God, reflect! How can there be any glory for a man like me in overcoming that bald-headed embustero with the dyed moustaches?”

Pablo Ignacio Barrios, son of a village alcalde, general of division, commanding in chief the Occidental Military district, did not frequent the higher society of the town. He preferred the unceremonious gatherings of men where he could tell jaguar-hunt stories, boast of his powers with the lasso, with which he could perform extremely difficult feats of the sort "no married man should attempt," as the saying goes amongst the llaneros; relate tales of extraordinary night rides, encounters with wild bulls, struggles with crocodiles, adventures in the great forests, crossings of swollen rivers. And it was not mere boastfulness that prompted the general's reminiscences, but a genuine love of that wild life which he had led in his young days before he turned his back for ever on the thatched roof of the parental *tolderia* in the woods. Wandering away as far as Mexico he had fought against the French by the side (as he said) of Juarez, and was the only military man of Costaguana who had ever encountered European troops in the field. That fact shed a great lustre upon his name till it became eclipsed by the rising star of Montero. All his life he had been an inveterate gambler. He alluded himself quite openly to the current story how once, during some campaign (when in command of a brigade), he had gambled away his horses, pistols, and accoutrements, to the very epaulettes, playing monte with his colonels the night before the battle. Finally, he had sent under escort his sword (a presentation sword, with a gold hilt) to the town in the rear of his position to be immediately pledged for five hundred pesetas with a sleepy and frightened shop-keeper. By daybreak he had lost the last of that money, too, when his only remark, as he rose calmly, was, "Now let us go and fight to the death." From that time he had become aware that a general could lead his troops into battle very well with a simple stick in his hand. "It has been my custom ever since," he would say.

He was always overwhelmed with debts; even during the periods of splendour in his varied fortunes of a Costaguana general, when he held high military commands, his gold-laced uniforms were almost always in pawn with some tradesman. And at last, to avoid the incessant difficulties of costume caused by the anxious lenders, he had assumed a disdain of military trappings, an eccentric fashion of shabby old tunics, which had become like a second nature. But the faction Barrios joined needed to fear no political betrayal. He was too much of a real soldier for the ignoble traffic of buying and selling victories. A member of the foreign diplomatic body in Sta. Marta had once passed a judgment upon him: "Barrios is a man

of perfect honesty and even of some talent for war, mais il manque de tenue." After the triumph of the Ribierists he had obtained the reputedly lucrative Occidental command, mainly through the exertions of his creditors (the Sta. Marta shopkeepers, all great politicians), who moved heaven and earth in his interest publicly, and privately besieged Senor Moraga, the influential agent of the San Tome mine, with the exaggerated lamentations that if the general were passed over, "We shall all be ruined." An incidental but favourable mention of his name in Mr. Gould senior's long correspondence with his son had something to do with his appointment, too; but most of all undoubtedly his established political honesty. No one questioned the personal bravery of the Tiger-killer, as the populace called him. He was, however, said to be unlucky in the field — but this was to be the beginning of an era of peace. The soldiers liked him for his humane temper, which was like a strange and precious flower unexpectedly blooming on the hotbed of corrupt revolutions; and when he rode slowly through the streets during some military display, the contemptuous good humour of his solitary eye roaming over the crowds extorted the acclamations of the populace. The women of that class especially seemed positively fascinated by the long drooping nose, the peaked chin, the heavy lower lip, the black silk eyepatch and band slanting rakishly over the forehead. His high rank always procured an audience of Caballeros for his sporting stories, which he detailed very well with a simple, grave enjoyment. As to the society of ladies, it was irksome by the restraints it imposed without any equivalent, as far as he could see. He had not, perhaps, spoken three times on the whole to Mrs. Gould since he had taken up his high command; but he had observed her frequently riding with the Senor Administrador, and had pronounced that there was more sense in her little bridle-hand than in all the female heads in Sulaco. His impulse had been to be very civil on parting to a woman who did not wobble in the saddle, and happened to be the wife of a personality very important to a man always short of money. He even pushed his attentions so far as to desire the aide-de-camp at his side (a thick-set, short captain with a Tartar physiognomy) to bring along a corporal with a file of men in front of the carriage, lest the crowd in its backward surges should "incommode the mules of the senora." Then, turning to the small knot of silent Europeans looking on within earshot, he raised his voice protectingly —

“Senores, have no apprehension. Go on quietly making your Ferro Carril — your railways, your telegraphs. Your — There’s enough wealth in Costaguana to pay for everything — or else you would not be here. Ha! ha! Don’t mind this little picardia of my friend Montero. In a little while you shall behold his dyed moustaches through the bars of a strong wooden cage. Si, senores! Fear nothing, develop the country, work, work!”

The little group of engineers received this exhortation without a word, and after waving his hand at them loftily, he addressed himself again to Mrs. Gould —

“That is what Don Jose says we must do. Be enterprising! Work! Grow rich! To put Montero in a cage is my work; and when that insignificant piece of business is done, then, as Don Jose wishes us, we shall grow rich, one and all, like so many Englishmen, because it is money that saves a country, and — ”

But a young officer in a very new uniform, hurrying up from the direction of the jetty, interrupted his interpretation of Senor Avellanos’s ideals. The general made a movement of impatience; the other went on talking to him insistently, with an air of respect. The horses of the Staff had been embarked, the steamer’s gig was awaiting the general at the boat steps; and Barrios, after a fierce stare of his one eye, began to take leave. Don Jose roused himself for an appropriate phrase pronounced mechanically. The terrible strain of hope and fear was telling on him, and he seemed to husband the last sparks of his fire for those oratorical efforts of which even the distant Europe was to hear. Antonia, her red lips firmly closed, averted her head behind the raised fan; and young Decoud, though he felt the girl’s eyes upon him, gazed away persistently, hooked on his elbow, with a scornful and complete detachment. Mrs. Gould heroically concealed her dismay at the appearance of men and events so remote from her racial conventions, dismay too deep to be uttered in words even to her husband. She understood his voiceless reserve better now. Their confidential intercourse fell, not in moments of privacy, but precisely in public, when the quick meeting of their glances would comment upon some fresh turn of events. She had gone to his school of uncompromising silence, the only one possible, since so much that seemed shocking, weird, and grotesque in the working out of their purposes had to be accepted as normal in this country. Decidedly, the stately Antonia looked more mature and infinitely calm; but



she would never have known how to reconcile the sudden sinkings of her heart with an amiable mobility of expression.

Mrs. Gould smiled a good-bye at Barrios, nodded round to the Europeans (who raised their hats simultaneously) with an engaging invitation, "I hope to see you all presently, at home"; then said nervously to Decoud, "Get in, Don Martin," and heard him mutter to himself in French, as he opened the carriage door, "*Le sort en est jete.*" She heard him with a sort of exasperation. Nobody ought to have known better than himself that the first cast of dice had been already thrown long ago in a most desperate game. Distant acclamations, words of command yelled out, and a roll of drums on the jetty greeted the departing general. Something like a slight faintness came over her, and she looked blankly at Antonia's still face, wondering what would happen to Charley if that absurd man failed. "*A la casa, Ignacio,*" she cried at the motionless broad back of the coachman, who gathered the reins without haste, mumbling to himself under his breath, "*Si, la casa. Si, si nina.*"

The carriage rolled noiselessly on the soft track, the shadows fell long on the dusty little plain interspersed with dark bushes, mounds of turned-up earth, low wooden buildings with iron roofs of the Railway Company; the sparse row of telegraph poles strode obliquely clear of the town, bearing a single, almost invisible wire far into the great campo — like a slender, vibrating feeler of that progress waiting outside for a moment of peace to enter and twine itself about the weary heart of the land.

The cafe window of the Albergo d'Italia Una was full of sunburnt, whiskered faces of railway men. But at the other end of the house, the end of the Signori Inglesi, old Giorgio, at the door with one of his girls on each side, bared his bushy head, as white as the snows of Higuerota. Mrs. Gould stopped the carriage. She seldom failed to speak to her protegee; moreover, the excitement, the heat, and the dust had made her thirsty. She asked for a glass of water. Giorgio sent the children indoors for it, and approached with pleasure expressed in his whole rugged countenance. It was not often that he had occasion to see his benefactress, who was also an Englishwoman — another title to his regard. He offered some excuses for his wife. It was a bad day with her; her oppressions — he tapped his own broad chest. She could not move from her chair that day.

Decoud, ensconced in the corner of his seat, observed gloomily Mrs. Gould's old revolutionist, then, offhand —

“Well, and what do you think of it all, Garibaldino?”

Old Giorgio, looking at him with some curiosity, said civilly that the troops had marched very well. One-eyed Barrios and his officers had done wonders with the recruits in a short time. Those Indios, only caught the other day, had gone swinging past in double quick time, like bersaglieri; they looked well fed, too, and had whole uniforms. “Uniforms!” he repeated with a half-smile of pity. A look of grim retrospect stole over his piercing, steady eyes. It had been otherwise in his time when men fought against tyranny, in the forests of Brazil, or on the plains of Uruguay, starving on half-raw beef without salt, half naked, with often only a knife tied to a stick for a weapon. “And yet we used to prevail against the oppressor,” he concluded, proudly.

His animation fell; the slight gesture of his hand expressed discouragement; but he added that he had asked one of the sergeants to show him the new rifle. There was no such weapon in his fighting days; and if Barrios could not —

“Yes, yes,” broke in Don Jose, almost trembling with eagerness. “We are safe. The good Senor Viola is a man of experience. Extremely deadly — is it not so? You have accomplished your mission admirably, my dear Martin.”

Decoud, lolling back moodily, contemplated old Viola.

“Ah! Yes. A man of experience. But who are you for, really, in your heart?”

Mrs. Gould leaned over to the children. Linda had brought out a glass of water on a tray, with extreme care; Giselle presented her with a bunch of flowers gathered hastily.

“For the people,” declared old Viola, sternly.

“We are all for the people — in the end.”

“Yes,” muttered old Viola, savagely. “And meantime they fight for you. Blind. Esclavos!”

At that moment young Scarfe of the railway staff emerged from the door of the part reserved for the Signori Inglesi. He had come down to headquarters from somewhere up the line on a light engine, and had had just time to get a bath and change his clothes. He was a nice boy, and Mrs. Gould welcomed him.

“It’s a delightful surprise to see you, Mrs. Gould. I’ve just come down. Usual luck. Missed everything, of course. This show is just over, and I hear there has been a great dance at Don Juste Lopez’s last night. Is it true?”

"The young patricians," Decoud began suddenly in his precise English, "have indeed been dancing before they started off to the war with the Great Pompey."

Young Scarfe stared, astounded. "You haven't met before," Mrs. Gould intervened. "Mr. Decoud — Mr. Scarfe."

"Ah! But we are not going to Pharsalia," protested Don Jose, with nervous haste, also in English. "You should not jest like this, Martin."

Antonia's breast rose and fell with a deeper breath. The young engineer was utterly in the dark. "Great what?" he muttered, vaguely.

"Luckily, Montero is not a Caesar," Decoud continued. "Not the two Monteros put together would make a decent parody of a Caesar." He crossed his arms on his breast, looking at Senor Avellanos, who had returned to his immobility. "It is only you, Don Jose, who are a genuine old Roman — *vir Romanus* — eloquent and inflexible."

Since he had heard the name of Montero pronounced, young Scarfe had been eager to express his simple feelings. In a loud and youthful tone he hoped that this Montero was going to be licked once for all and done with. There was no saying what would happen to the railway if the revolution got the upper hand. Perhaps it would have to be abandoned. It would not be the first railway gone to pot in Costaguana. "You know, it's one of their so-called national things," he ran on, wrinkling up his nose as if the word had a suspicious flavour to his profound experience of South American affairs. And, of course, he chatted with animation, it had been such an immense piece of luck for him at his age to get appointed on the staff "of a big thing like that — don't you know." It would give him the pull over a lot of chaps all through life, he asserted. "Therefore — down with Montero! Mrs. Gould." His artless grin disappeared slowly before the unanimous gravity of the faces turned upon him from the carriage; only that "old chap," Don Jose, presenting a motionless, waxy profile, stared straight on as if deaf. Scarfe did not know the Avellanos very well. They did not give balls, and Antonia never appeared at a ground-floor window, as some other young ladies used to do attended by elder women, to chat with the caballeros on horseback in the Calle. The stares of these creoles did not matter much; but what on earth had come to Mrs. Gould? She said, "Go on, Ignacio," and gave him a slow inclination of the head. He heard a short laugh from that round-faced, Frenchified fellow. He coloured up to the eyes, and stared at Giorgio Viola, who had fallen back with the children, hat in hand.

"I shall want a horse presently," he said with some asperity to the old man.

"Si, senior. There are plenty of horses," murmured the Garibaldino, smoothing absently, with his brown hands, the two heads, one dark with bronze glints, the other fair with a coppery ripple, of the two girls by his side. The returning stream of sightseers raised a great dust on the road. Horsemen noticed the group. "Go to your mother," he said. "They are growing up as I am growing older, and there is nobody —"

He looked at the young engineer and stopped, as if awakened from a dream; then, folding his arms on his breast, took up his usual position, leaning back in the doorway with an upward glance fastened on the white shoulder of Higuerota far away.

In the carriage Martin Decoud, shifting his position as though he could not make himself comfortable, muttered as he swayed towards Antonia, "I suppose you hate me." Then in a loud voice he began to congratulate Don Jose upon all the engineers being convinced Ribierists. The interest of all those foreigners was gratifying. "You have heard this one. He is an enlightened well-wisher. It is pleasant to think that the prosperity of Costaguana is of some use to the world."

"He is very young," Mrs. Gould remarked, quietly.

"And so very wise for his age," retorted Decoud. "But here we have the naked truth from the mouth of that child. You are right, Don Jose. The natural treasures of Costaguana are of importance to the progressive Europe represented by this youth, just as three hundred years ago the wealth of our Spanish fathers was a serious object to the rest of Europe — as represented by the bold buccaneers. There is a curse of futility upon our character: Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, chivalry and materialism, high-sounding sentiments and a supine morality, violent efforts for an idea and a sullen acquiescence in every form of corruption. We convulsed a continent for our independence only to become the passive prey of a democratic parody, the helpless victims of scoundrels and cut-throats, our institutions a mockery, our laws a farce — a Guzman Bento our master! And we have sunk so low that when a man like you has awakened our conscience, a stupid barbarian of a Montero — Great Heavens! a Montero! — becomes a deadly danger, and an ignorant, boastful Indio, like Barrios, is our defender."

But Don Jose, disregarding the general indictment as though he had not heard a word of it, took up the defence of Barrios. The man was competent

enough for his special task in the plan of campaign. It consisted in an offensive movement, with Cayta as base, upon the flank of the Revolutionist forces advancing from the south against Sta. Marta, which was covered by another army with the President-Dictator in its midst. Don Jose became quite animated with a great flow of speech, bending forward anxiously under the steady eyes of his daughter. Decoud, as if silenced by so much ardour, did not make a sound. The bells of the city were striking the hour of Oracion when the carriage rolled under the old gateway facing the harbour like a shapeless monument of leaves and stones. The rumble of wheels under the sonorous arch was traversed by a strange, piercing shriek, and Decoud, from his back seat, had a view of the people behind the carriage trudging along the road outside, all turning their heads, in sombreros and rebozos, to look at a locomotive which rolled quickly out of sight behind Giorgio Viola's house, under a white trail of steam that seemed to vanish in the breathless, hysterically prolonged scream of warlike triumph. And it was all like a fleeting vision, the shrieking ghost of a railway engine fleeing across the frame of the archway, behind the startled movement of the people streaming back from a military spectacle with silent footsteps on the dust of the road. It was a material train returning from the Campo to the palisaded yards. The empty cars rolled lightly on the single track; there was no rumble of wheels, no tremor of the ground. The engine-driver, running past the Casa Viola with the salute of an uplifted arm, checked his speed smartly before entering the yard; and when the ear-splitting screech of the steam-whistle for the brakes had stopped, a series of hard, battering shocks, mingled with the clanking of chain-couplings, made a tumult of blows and shaken fetters under the vault of the gate.

## CHAPTER FIVE

The Gould carriage was the first to return from the harbour to the empty town. On the ancient pavement, laid out in patterns, sunk into ruts and holes, the portly Ignacio, mindful of the springs of the Parisian-built landau, had pulled up to a walk, and Decoud in his corner contemplated moodily the inner aspect of the gate. The squat turreted sides held up between them a mass of masonry with bunches of grass growing at the top, and a grey, heavily scrolled, armorial shield of stone above the apex of the arch with the arms of Spain nearly smoothed out as if in readiness for some new device typical of the impending progress.

The explosive noise of the railway trucks seemed to augment Decoud's irritation. He muttered something to himself, then began to talk aloud in curt, angry phrases thrown at the silence of the two women. They did not look at him at all; while Don Jose, with his semi-translucent, waxy complexion, overshadowed by the soft grey hat, swayed a little to the jolts of the carriage by the side of Mrs. Gould.

"This sound puts a new edge on a very old truth."

Decoud spoke in French, perhaps because of Ignacio on the box above him; the old coachman, with his broad back filling a short, silver-braided jacket, had a big pair of ears, whose thick rims stood well away from his cropped head.

"Yes, the noise outside the city wall is new, but the principle is old."

He ruminated his discontent for a while, then began afresh with a sidelong glance at Antonia —

"No, but just imagine our forefathers in morions and corselets drawn up outside this gate, and a band of adventurers just landed from their ships in the harbour there. Thieves, of course. Speculators, too. Their expeditions, each one, were the speculations of grave and reverend persons in England. That is history, as that absurd sailor Mitchell is always saying."

"Mitchell's arrangements for the embarkation of the troops were excellent!" exclaimed Don Jose.

"That! — that! oh, that's really the work of that Genoese seaman! But to return to my noises; there used to be in the old days the sound of trumpets outside that gate. War trumpets! I'm sure they were trumpets. I have read somewhere that Drake, who was the greatest of these men, used to dine alone in his cabin on board ship to the sound of trumpets. In those days this

town was full of wealth. Those men came to take it. Now the whole land is like a treasure-house, and all these people are breaking into it, whilst we are cutting each other's throats. The only thing that keeps them out is mutual jealousy. But they'll come to an agreement some day — and by the time we've settled our quarrels and become decent and honourable, there'll be nothing left for us. It has always been the same. We are a wonderful people, but it has always been our fate to be" — he did not say "robbed," but added, after a pause — "exploited!"

Mrs. Gould said, "Oh, this is unjust!" And Antonia interjected, "Don't answer him, Emilia. He is attacking me."

"You surely do not think I was attacking Don Carlos!" Decoud answered.

And then the carriage stopped before the door of the Casa Gould. The young man offered his hand to the ladies. They went in first together; Don Jose walked by the side of Decoud, and the gouty old porter tottered after them with some light wraps on his arm.

Don Jose slipped his hand under the arm of the journalist of Sulaco.

"The Porvenir must have a long and confident article upon Barrios and the irresistibleness of his army of Cayta! The moral effect should be kept up in the country. We must cable encouraging extracts to Europe and the United States to maintain a favourable impression abroad."

Decoud muttered, "Oh, yes, we must comfort our friends, the speculators."

The long open gallery was in shadow, with its screen of plants in vases along the balustrade, holding out motionless blossoms, and all the glass doors of the reception-rooms thrown open. A jingle of spurs died out at the further end.

Basilio, standing aside against the wall, said in a soft tone to the passing ladies, "The Senor Administrador is just back from the mountain."

In the great sala, with its groups of ancient Spanish and modern European furniture making as if different centres under the high white spread of the ceiling, the silver and porcelain of the tea-service gleamed among a cluster of dwarf chairs, like a bit of a lady's boudoir, putting in a note of feminine and intimate delicacy.

Don Jose in his rocking-chair placed his hat on his lap, and Decoud walked up and down the whole length of the room, passing between tables loaded with knick-knacks and almost disappearing behind the high backs of leathern sofas. He was thinking of the angry face of Antonia; he was

confident that he would make his peace with her. He had not stayed in Sulaco to quarrel with Antonia.

Martin Decoud was angry with himself. All he saw and heard going on around him exasperated the preconceived views of his European civilization. To contemplate revolutions from the distance of the Parisian Boulevards was quite another matter. Here on the spot it was not possible to dismiss their tragic comedy with the expression, "Quelle farce!"

The reality of the political action, such as it was, seemed closer, and acquired poignancy by Antonia's belief in the cause. Its crudeness hurt his feelings. He was surprised at his own sensitiveness.

"I suppose I am more of a Costaguanero than I would have believed possible," he thought to himself.

His disdain grew like a reaction of his scepticism against the action into which he was forced by his infatuation for Antonia. He soothed himself by saying he was not a patriot, but a lover.

The ladies came in bareheaded, and Mrs. Gould sank low before the little tea-table. Antonia took up her usual place at the reception hour — the corner of a leathern couch, with a rigid grace in her pose and a fan in her hand. Decoud, swerving from the straight line of his march, came to lean over the high back of her seat.

For a long time he talked into her ear from behind, softly, with a half smile and an air of apologetic familiarity. Her fan lay half grasped on her knees. She never looked at him. His rapid utterance grew more and more insistent and caressing. At last he ventured a slight laugh.

"No, really. You must forgive me. One must be serious sometimes." He paused. She turned her head a little; her blue eyes glided slowly towards him, slightly upwards, mollified and questioning.

"You can't think I am serious when I call Montero a gran' bestia every second day in the Porvenir? That is not a serious occupation. No occupation is serious, not even when a bullet through the heart is the penalty of failure!"

Her hand closed firmly on her fan.

"Some reason, you understand, I mean some sense, may creep into thinking; some glimpse of truth. I mean some effective truth, for which there is no room in politics or journalism. I happen to have said what I thought. And you are angry! If you do me the kindness to think a little you will see that I spoke like a patriot."



She opened her red lips for the first time, not unkindly.

“Yes, but you never see the aim. Men must be used as they are. I suppose nobody is really disinterested, unless, perhaps, you, Don Martin.”

“God forbid! It’s the last thing I should like you to believe of me.” He spoke lightly, and paused.

She began to fan herself with a slow movement without raising her hand. After a time he whispered passionately —

“Antonia!”

She smiled, and extended her hand after the English manner towards Charles Gould, who was bowing before her; while Decoud, with his elbows spread on the back of the sofa, dropped his eyes and murmured, “Bonjour.”

The Senor Administrador of the San Tome mine bent over his wife for a moment. They exchanged a few words, of which only the phrase, “The greatest enthusiasm,” pronounced by Mrs. Gould, could be heard.

“Yes,” Decoud began in a murmur. “Even he!”

“This is sheer calumny,” said Antonia, not very severely.

“You just ask him to throw his mine into the melting-pot for the great cause,” Decoud whispered.

Don Jose had raised his voice. He rubbed his hands cheerily. The excellent aspect of the troops and the great quantity of new deadly rifles on the shoulders of those brave men seemed to fill him with an ecstatic confidence.

Charles Gould, very tall and thin before his chair, listened, but nothing could be discovered in his face except a kind and deferential attention.

Meantime, Antonia had risen, and, crossing the room, stood looking out of one of the three long windows giving on the street. Decoud followed her. The window was thrown open, and he leaned against the thickness of the wall. The long folds of the damask curtain, falling straight from the broad brass cornice, hid him partly from the room. He folded his arms on his breast, and looked steadily at Antonia’s profile.

The people returning from the harbour filled the pavements; the shuffle of sandals and a low murmur of voices ascended to the window. Now and then a coach rolled slowly along the disjointed roadway of the Calle de la Constitucion. There were not many private carriages in Sulaco; at the most crowded hour on the Alameda they could be counted with one glance of the eye. The great family arks swayed on high leathern springs, full of pretty powdered faces in which the eyes looked intensely alive and black. And

first Don Juste Lopez, the President of the Provincial Assembly, passed with his three lovely daughters, solemn in a black frock-coat and stiff white tie, as when directing a debate from a high tribune. Though they all raised their eyes, Antonia did not make the usual greeting gesture of a fluttered hand, and they affected not to see the two young people, Costaguaneros with European manners, whose eccentricities were discussed behind the barred windows of the first families in Sulaco. And then the widowed Senora Gavilaso de Valdes rolled by, handsome and dignified, in a great machine in which she used to travel to and from her country house, surrounded by an armed retinue in leather suits and big sombreros, with carbines at the bows of their saddles. She was a woman of most distinguished family, proud, rich, and kind-hearted. Her second son, Jaime, had just gone off on the Staff of Barrios. The eldest, a worthless fellow of a moody disposition, filled Sulaco with the noise of his dissipations, and gambled heavily at the club. The two youngest boys, with yellow Ribierist cockades in their caps, sat on the front seat. She, too, affected not to see the Senor Decoud talking publicly with Antonia in defiance of every convention. And he not even her novio as far as the world knew! Though, even in that case, it would have been scandal enough. But the dignified old lady, respected and admired by the first families, would have been still more shocked if she could have heard the words they were exchanging.

“Did you say I lost sight of the aim? I have only one aim in the world.”

She made an almost imperceptible negative movement of her head, still staring across the street at the Avellanos’s house, grey, marked with decay, and with iron bars like a prison.

“And it would be so easy of attainment,” he continued, “this aim which, whether knowingly or not, I have always had in my heart — ever since the day when you snubbed me so horribly once in Paris, you remember.”

A slight smile seemed to move the corner of the lip that was on his side.

“You know you were a very terrible person, a sort of Charlotte Corday in a schoolgirl’s dress; a ferocious patriot. I suppose you would have stuck a knife into Guzman Bento?”

She interrupted him. “You do me too much honour.”

“At any rate,” he said, changing suddenly to a tone of bitter levity, “you would have sent me to stab him without compunction.”

“Ah, par exemple!” she murmured in a shocked tone.

“Well,” he argued, mockingly, “you do keep me here writing deadly nonsense. Deadly to me! It has already killed my self-respect. And you may imagine,” he continued, his tone passing into light banter, “that Montero, should he be successful, would get even with me in the only way such a brute can get even with a man of intelligence who condescends to call him a gran’ bestia three times a week. It’s a sort of intellectual death; but there is the other one in the background for a journalist of my ability.”

“If he is successful!” said Antonia, thoughtfully.

“You seem satisfied to see my life hang on a thread,” Decoud replied, with a broad smile. “And the other Montero, the ‘my trusted brother’ of the proclamations, the guerrillero — haven’t I written that he was taking the guests’ overcoats and changing plates in Paris at our Legation in the intervals of spying on our refugees there, in the time of Rojas? He will wash out that sacred truth in blood. In my blood! Why do you look annoyed? This is simply a bit of the biography of one of our great men. What do you think he will do to me? There is a certain convent wall round the corner of the Plaza, opposite the door of the Bull Ring. You know? Opposite the door with the inscription, *Intrada de la Sombra.*’ Appropriate, perhaps! That’s where the uncle of our host gave up his Anglo-South-American soul. And, note, he might have run away. A man who has fought with weapons may run away. You might have let me go with Barrios if you had cared for me. I would have carried one of those rifles, in which Don Jose believes, with the greatest satisfaction, in the ranks of poor peons and Indios, that know nothing either of reason or politics. The most forlorn hope in the most forlorn army on earth would have been safer than that for which you made me stay here. When you make war you may retreat, but not when you spend your time in inciting poor ignorant fools to kill and to die.”

His tone remained light, and as if unaware of his presence she stood motionless, her hands clasped lightly, the fan hanging down from her interlaced fingers. He waited for a while, and then —

“I shall go to the wall,” he said, with a sort of jocular desperation.

Even that declaration did not make her look at him. Her head remained still, her eyes fixed upon the house of the Avellanos, whose chipped pilasters, broken cornices, the whole degradation of dignity was hidden now by the gathering dusk of the street. In her whole figure her lips alone moved, forming the words —

“Martin, you will make me cry.”

He remained silent for a minute, startled, as if overwhelmed by a sort of awed happiness, with the lines of the mocking smile still stiffened about his mouth, and incredulous surprise in his eyes. The value of a sentence is in the personality which utters it, for nothing new can be said by man or woman; and those were the last words, it seemed to him, that could ever have been spoken by Antonia. He had never made it up with her so completely in all their intercourse of small encounters; but even before she had time to turn towards him, which she did slowly with a rigid grace, he had begun to plead —

“My sister is only waiting to embrace you. My father is transported with joy. I won’t say anything of my mother! Our mothers were like sisters. There is the mail-boat for the south next week — let us go. That Moraga is a fool! A man like Montero is bribed. It’s the practice of the country. It’s tradition — it’s politics. Read ‘Fifty Years of Misrule.’”

“Leave poor papa alone, Don Martin. He believes — ”

“I have the greatest tenderness for your father,” he began, hurriedly. “But I love you, Antonia! And Moraga has miserably mismanaged this business. Perhaps your father did, too; I don’t know. Montero was bribeable. Why, I suppose he only wanted his share of this famous loan for national development. Why didn’t the stupid Sta. Marta people give him a mission to Europe, or something? He would have taken five years’ salary in advance, and gone on loafing in Paris, this stupid, ferocious Indio!”

“The man,” she said, thoughtfully, and very calm before this outburst, “was intoxicated with vanity. We had all the information, not from Moraga only; from others, too. There was his brother intriguing, too.”

“Oh, yes!” he said. “Of course you know. You know everything. You read all the correspondence, you write all the papers — all those State papers that are inspired here, in this room, in blind deference to a theory of political purity. Hadn’t you Charles Gould before your eyes? Rey de Sulaco! He and his mine are the practical demonstration of what could have been done. Do you think he succeeded by his fidelity to a theory of virtue? And all those railway people, with their honest work! Of course, their work is honest! But what if you cannot work honestly till the thieves are satisfied? Could he not, a gentleman, have told this Sir John what’s-his-name that Montero had to be bought off — he and all his Negro Liberals hanging on to his gold-laced sleeve? He ought to have been bought off with

his own stupid weight of gold — his weight of gold, I tell you, boots, sabre, spurs, cocked hat, and all.”

She shook her head slightly. “It was impossible,” she murmured.

“He wanted the whole lot? What?”

She was facing him now in the deep recess of the window, very close and motionless. Her lips moved rapidly. Decoud, leaning his back against the wall, listened with crossed arms and lowered eyelids. He drank the tones of her even voice, and watched the agitated life of her throat, as if waves of emotion had run from her heart to pass out into the air in her reasonable words. He also had his aspirations, he aspired to carry her away out of these deadly futilities of pronunciamientos and reforms. All this was wrong — utterly wrong; but she fascinated him, and sometimes the sheer sagacity of a phrase would break the charm, replace the fascination by a sudden unwilling thrill of interest. Some women hovered, as it were, on the threshold of genius, he reflected. They did not want to know, or think, or understand. Passion stood for all that, and he was ready to believe that some startlingly profound remark, some appreciation of character, or a judgment upon an event, bordered on the miraculous. In the mature Antonia he could see with an extraordinary vividness the austere schoolgirl of the earlier days. She seduced his attention; sometimes he could not restrain a murmur of assent; now and then he advanced an objection quite seriously. Gradually they began to argue; the curtain half hid them from the people in the sala.

Outside it had grown dark. From the deep trench of shadow between the houses, lit up vaguely by the glimmer of street lamps, ascended the evening silence of Sulaco; the silence of a town with few carriages, of unshod horses, and a softly sandalled population. The windows of the Casa Gould flung their shining parallelograms upon the house of the Avellanos. Now and then a shuffle of feet passed below with the pulsating red glow of a cigarette at the foot of the walls; and the night air, as if cooled by the snows of Higuerota, refreshed their faces.

“We Occidentals,” said Martin Decoud, using the usual term the provincials of Sulaco applied to themselves, “have been always distinct and separated. As long as we hold Cayta nothing can reach us. In all our troubles no army has marched over those mountains. A revolution in the central provinces isolates us at once. Look how complete it is now! The news of Barrios’ movement will be cabled to the United States, and only in that way will it reach Sta. Marta by the cable from the other seaboard. We

have the greatest riches, the greatest fertility, the purest blood in our great families, the most laborious population. The Occidental Province should stand alone. The early Federalism was not bad for us. Then came this union which Don Henrique Gould resisted. It opened the road to tyranny; and, ever since, the rest of Costaguana hangs like a millstone round our necks. The Occidental territory is large enough to make any man's country. Look at the mountains! Nature itself seems to cry to us, 'Separate!'"

She made an energetic gesture of negation. A silence fell.

"Oh, yes, I know it's contrary to the doctrine laid down in the 'History of Fifty Years' Misrule.' I am only trying to be sensible. But my sense seems always to give you cause for offence. Have I startled you very much with this perfectly reasonable aspiration?"

She shook her head. No, she was not startled, but the idea shocked her early convictions. Her patriotism was larger. She had never considered that possibility.

"It may yet be the means of saving some of your convictions," he said, prophetically.

She did not answer. She seemed tired. They leaned side by side on the rail of the little balcony, very friendly, having exhausted politics, giving themselves up to the silent feeling of their nearness, in one of those profound pauses that fall upon the rhythm of passion. Towards the plaza end of the street the glowing coals in the brazeros of the market women cooking their evening meal gleamed red along the edge of the pavement. A man appeared without a sound in the light of a street lamp, showing the coloured inverted triangle of his bordered poncho, square on his shoulders, hanging to a point below his knees. From the harbour end of the Calle a horseman walked his soft-stepping mount, gleaming silver-grey abreast each lamp under the dark shape of the rider.

"Behold the illustrious Capataz de Cargadores," said Decoud, gently, "coming in all his splendour after his work is done. The next great man of Sulaco after Don Carlos Gould. But he is good-natured, and let me make friends with him."

"Ah, indeed!" said Antonia. "How did you make friends?"

"A journalist ought to have his finger on the popular pulse, and this man is one of the leaders of the populace. A journalist ought to know remarkable men — and this man is remarkable in his way."

“Ah, yes!” said Antonia, thoughtfully. “It is known that this Italian has a great influence.”

The horseman had passed below them, with a gleam of dim light on the shining broad quarters of the grey mare, on a bright heavy stirrup, on a long silver spur; but the short flick of yellowish flame in the dusk was powerless against the muffled-up mysteriousness of the dark figure with an invisible face concealed by a great sombrero.

Decoud and Antonia remained leaning over the balcony, side by side, touching elbows, with their heads overhanging the darkness of the street, and the brilliantly lighted sala at their backs. This was a *tete-a-tete* of extreme impropriety; something of which in the whole extent of the Republic only the extraordinary Antonia could be capable — the poor, motherless girl, never accompanied, with a careless father, who had thought only of making her learned. Even Decoud himself seemed to feel that this was as much as he could expect of having her to himself till — till the revolution was over and he could carry her off to Europe, away from the endlessness of civil strife, whose folly seemed even harder to bear than its ignominy. After one Montero there would be another, the lawlessness of a populace of all colours and races, barbarism, irremediable tyranny. As the great Liberator Bolivar had said in the bitterness of his spirit, “America is ungovernable. Those who worked for her independence have ploughed the sea.” He did not care, he declared boldly; he seized every opportunity to tell her that though she had managed to make a Blanco journalist of him, he was no patriot. First of all, the word had no sense for cultured minds, to whom the narrowness of every belief is odious; and secondly, in connection with the everlasting troubles of this unhappy country it was hopelessly besmirched; it had been the cry of dark barbarism, the cloak of lawlessness, of crimes, of rapacity, of simple thieving.

He was surprised at the warmth of his own utterance. He had no need to drop his voice; it had been low all the time, a mere murmur in the silence of dark houses with their shutters closed early against the night air, as is the custom of Sulaco. Only the sala of the Casa Gould flung out defiantly the blaze of its four windows, the bright appeal of light in the whole dumb obscurity of the street. And the murmur on the little balcony went on after a short pause.

“But we are labouring to change all that,” Antonia protested. “It is exactly what we desire. It is our object. It is the great cause. And the word

you despise has stood also for sacrifice, for courage, for constancy, for suffering. Papa, who — ”

“Ploughing the sea,” interrupted Decoud, looking down.

There was below the sound of hasty and ponderous footsteps.

“Your uncle, the grand-vicar of the cathedral, has just turned under the gate,” observed Decoud. “He said Mass for the troops in the Plaza this morning. They had built for him an altar of drums, you know. And they brought outside all the painted blocks to take the air. All the wooden saints stood militarily in a row at the top of the great flight of steps. They looked like a gorgeous escort attending the Vicar-General. I saw the great function from the windows of the Porvenir. He is amazing, your uncle, the last of the Corbelans. He glittered exceedingly in his vestments with a great crimson velvet cross down his back. And all the time our saviour Barrios sat in the Amarilla Club drinking punch at an open window. Esprit fort — our Barrios. I expected every moment your uncle to launch an excommunication there and then at the black eye-patch in the window across the Plaza. But not at all. Ultimately the troops marched off. Later Barrios came down with some of the officers, and stood with his uniform all unbuttoned, discoursing at the edge of the pavement. Suddenly your uncle appeared, no longer glittering, but all black, at the cathedral door with that threatening aspect he has — you know, like a sort of avenging spirit. He gives one look, strides over straight at the group of uniforms, and leads away the general by the elbow. He walked him for a quarter of an hour in the shade of a wall. Never let go his elbow for a moment, talking all the time with exaltation, and gesticulating with a long black arm. It was a curious scene. The officers seemed struck with astonishment. Remarkable man, your missionary uncle. He hates an infidel much less than a heretic, and prefers a heathen many times to an infidel. He condescends graciously to call me a heathen, sometimes, you know.”

Antonia listened with her hands over the balustrade, opening and shutting the fan gently; and Decoud talked a little nervously, as if afraid that she would leave him at the first pause. Their comparative isolation, the precious sense of intimacy, the slight contact of their arms, affected him softly; for now and then a tender inflection crept into the flow of his ironic murmurs.

“Any slight sign of favour from a relative of yours is welcome, Antonia. And perhaps he understands me, after all! But I know him, too, our Padre Corbelan. The idea of political honour, justice, and honesty for him consists



in the restitution of the confiscated Church property. Nothing else could have drawn that fierce converter of savage Indians out of the wilds to work for the Ribierist cause! Nothing else but that wild hope! He would make a pronunciamiento himself for such an object against any Government if he could only get followers! What does Don Carlos Gould think of that? But, of course, with his English impenetrability, nobody can tell what he thinks. Probably he thinks of nothing apart from his mine; of his 'Imperium in Imperio.' As to Mrs. Gould, she thinks of her schools, of her hospitals, of the mothers with the young babies, of every sick old man in the three villages. If you were to turn your head now you would see her extracting a report from that sinister doctor in a check shirt — what's his name? Monygham — or else catechising Don Pepe or perhaps listening to Padre Roman. They are all down here to-day — all her ministers of state. Well, she is a sensible woman, and perhaps Don Carlos is a sensible man. It's a part of solid English sense not to think too much; to see only what may be of practical use at the moment. These people are not like ourselves. We have no political reason; we have political passions — sometimes. What is a conviction? A particular view of our personal advantage either practical or emotional. No one is a patriot for nothing. The word serves us well. But I am clear-sighted, and I shall not use that word to you, Antonia! I have no patriotic illusions. I have only the supreme illusion of a lover."

He paused, then muttered almost inaudibly, "That can lead one very far, though."

Behind their backs the political tide that once in every twenty-four hours set with a strong flood through the Gould drawing-room could be heard, rising higher in a hum of voices. Men had been dropping in singly, or in twos and threes: the higher officials of the province, engineers of the railway, sunburnt and in tweeds, with the frosted head of their chief smiling with slow, humorous indulgence amongst the young eager faces. Scarfe, the lover of fandangos, had already slipped out in search of some dance, no matter where, on the outskirts of the town. Don Juste Lopez, after taking his daughters home, had entered solemnly, in a black creased coat buttoned up under his spreading brown beard. The few members of the Provincial Assembly present clustered at once around their President to discuss the news of the war and the last proclamation of the rebel Montero, the miserable Montero, calling in the name of "a justly incensed democracy" upon all the Provincial Assemblies of the Republic to suspend their sittings

till his sword had made peace and the will of the people could be consulted. It was practically an invitation to dissolve: an unheard-of audacity of that evil madman.

The indignation ran high in the knot of deputies behind Jose Avellanos. Don Jose, lifting up his voice, cried out to them over the high back of his chair, "Sulaco has answered by sending to-day an army upon his flank. If all the other provinces show only half as much patriotism as we Occidentals —

”

A great outburst of acclamations covered the vibrating treble of the life and soul of the party. Yes! Yes! This was true! A great truth! Sulaco was in the forefront, as ever! It was a boastful tumult, the hopefulness inspired by the event of the day breaking out amongst those caballeros of the Campo thinking of their herds, of their lands, of the safety of their families. Everything was at stake. . . . No! It was impossible that Montero should succeed! This criminal, this shameless Indio! The clamour continued for some time, everybody else in the room looking towards the group where Don Juste had put on his air of impartial solemnity as if presiding at a sitting of the Provincial Assembly. Decoud had turned round at the noise, and, leaning his back on the balustrade, shouted into the room with all the strength of his lungs, "Gran' bestia!"

This unexpected cry had the effect of stilling the noise. All the eyes were directed to the window with an approving expectation; but Decoud had already turned his back upon the room, and was again leaning out over the quiet street.

"This is the quintessence of my journalism; that is the supreme argument," he said to Antonia. "I have invented this definition, this last word on a great question. But I am no patriot. I am no more of a patriot than the Capataz of the Sulaco Cargadores, this Genoese who has done such great things for this harbour — this active usher-in of the material implements for our progress. You have heard Captain Mitchell confess over and over again that till he got this man he could never tell how long it would take to unload a ship. That is bad for progress. You have seen him pass by after his labours on his famous horse to dazzle the girls in some ballroom with an earthen floor. He is a fortunate fellow! His work is an exercise of personal powers; his leisure is spent in receiving the marks of extraordinary adulation. And he likes it, too. Can anybody be more fortunate? To be feared and admired is — ”

“And are these your highest aspirations, Don Martin?” interrupted Antonia.

“I was speaking of a man of that sort,” said Decoud, curtly. “The heroes of the world have been feared and admired. What more could he want?”

Decoud had often felt his familiar habit of ironic thought fall shattered against Antonia’s gravity. She irritated him as if she, too, had suffered from that inexplicable feminine obtuseness which stands so often between a man and a woman of the more ordinary sort. But he overcame his vexation at once. He was very far from thinking Antonia ordinary, whatever verdict his scepticism might have pronounced upon himself. With a touch of penetrating tenderness in his voice he assured her that his only aspiration was to a felicity so high that it seemed almost unrealizable on this earth.

She coloured invisibly, with a warmth against which the breeze from the sierra seemed to have lost its cooling power in the sudden melting of the snows. His whisper could not have carried so far, though there was enough ardour in his tone to melt a heart of ice. Antonia turned away abruptly, as if to carry his whispered assurance into the room behind, full of light, noisy with voices.

The tide of political speculation was beating high within the four walls of the great sala, as if driven beyond the marks by a great gust of hope. Don Juste’s fan-shaped beard was still the centre of loud and animated discussions. There was a self-confident ring in all the voices. Even the few Europeans around Charles Gould — a Dane, a couple of Frenchmen, a discreet fat German, smiling, with down-cast eyes, the representatives of those material interests that had got a footing in Sulaco under the protecting might of the San Tome mine — had infused a lot of good humour into their deference. Charles Gould, to whom they were paying their court, was the visible sign of the stability that could be achieved on the shifting ground of revolutions. They felt hopeful about their various undertakings. One of the two Frenchmen, small, black, with glittering eyes lost in an immense growth of bushy beard, waved his tiny brown hands and delicate wrists. He had been travelling in the interior of the province for a syndicate of European capitalists. His forcible “Monsieur l’Administrateur” returning every minute shrilled above the steady hum of conversations. He was relating his discoveries. He was ecstatic. Charles Gould glanced down at him courteously.

At a given moment of these necessary receptions it was Mrs. Gould's habit to withdraw quietly into a little drawing-room, especially her own, next to the great sala. She had risen, and, waiting for Antonia, listened with a slightly worried graciousness to the engineer-in-chief of the railway, who stooped over her, relating slowly, without the slightest gesture, something apparently amusing, for his eyes had a humorous twinkle. Antonia, before she advanced into the room to join Mrs. Gould, turned her head over her shoulder towards Decoud, only for a moment.

"Why should any one of us think his aspirations unrealizable?" she said, rapidly.

"I am going to cling to mine to the end, Antonia," he answered, through clenched teeth, then bowed very low, a little distantly.

The engineer-in-chief had not finished telling his amusing story. The humours of railway building in South America appealed to his keen appreciation of the absurd, and he told his instances of ignorant prejudice and as ignorant cunning very well. Now, Mrs. Gould gave him all her attention as he walked by her side escorting the ladies out of the room. Finally all three passed unnoticed through the glass doors in the gallery. Only a tall priest stalking silently in the noise of the sala checked himself to look after them. Father Corbelan, whom Decoud had seen from the balcony turning into the gateway of the Casa Gould, had addressed no one since coming in. The long, skimpy soutane accentuated the tallness of his stature; he carried his powerful torso thrown forward; and the straight, black bar of his joined eyebrows, the pugnacious outline of the bony face, the white spot of a scar on the bluish shaven cheeks (a testimonial to his apostolic zeal from a party of unconverted Indians), suggested something unlawful behind his priesthood, the idea of a chaplain of bandits.

He separated his bony, knotted hands clasped behind his back, to shake his finger at Martin.

Decoud had stepped into the room after Antonia. But he did not go far. He had remained just within, against the curtain, with an expression of not quite genuine gravity, like a grown-up person taking part in a game of children. He gazed quietly at the threatening finger.

"I have watched your reverence converting General Barrios by a special sermon on the Plaza," he said, without making the slightest movement.

"What miserable nonsense!" Father Corbelan's deep voice resounded all over the room, making all the heads turn on the shoulders. "The man is a

drunkard. Senores, the God of your General is a bottle!"

His contemptuous, arbitrary voice caused an uneasy suspension of every sound, as if the self-confidence of the gathering had been staggered by a blow. But nobody took up Father Corbelan's declaration.

It was known that Father Corbelan had come out of the wilds to advocate the sacred rights of the Church with the same fanatical fearlessness with which he had gone preaching to bloodthirsty savages, devoid of human compassion or worship of any kind. Rumours of legendary proportions told of his successes as a missionary beyond the eye of Christian men. He had baptized whole nations of Indians, living with them like a savage himself. It was related that the padre used to ride with his Indians for days, half naked, carrying a bullock-hide shield, and, no doubt, a long lance, too — who knows? That he had wandered clothed in skins, seeking for proselytes somewhere near the snow line of the Cordillera. Of these exploits Padre Corbelan himself was never known to talk. But he made no secret of his opinion that the politicians of Sta. Marta had harder hearts and more corrupt minds than the heathen to whom he had carried the word of God. His injudicious zeal for the temporal welfare of the Church was damaging the Ribierist cause. It was common knowledge that he had refused to be made titular bishop of the Occidental diocese till justice was done to a despoiled Church. The political Gefe of Sulaco (the same dignitary whom Captain Mitchell saved from the mob afterwards) hinted with naive cynicism that doubtless their Excellencies the Ministers sent the padre over the mountains to Sulaco in the worst season of the year in the hope that he would be frozen to death by the icy blasts of the high paramos. Every year a few hardy muleteers — men inured to exposure — were known to perish in that way. But what would you have? Their Excellencies possibly had not realized what a tough priest he was. Meantime, the ignorant were beginning to murmur that the Ribierist reforms meant simply the taking away of the land from the people. Some of it was to be given to foreigners who made the railway; the greater part was to go to the padres.

These were the results of the Grand Vicar's zeal. Even from the short allocution to the troops on the Plaza (which only the first ranks could have heard) he had not been able to keep out his fixed idea of an outraged Church waiting for reparation from a penitent country. The political Gefe had been exasperated. But he could not very well throw the brother-in-law of Don Jose into the prison of the Cabildo. The chief magistrate, an easy-

going and popular official, visited the Casa Gould, walking over after sunset from the Intendencia, unattended, acknowledging with dignified courtesy the salutations of high and low alike. That evening he had walked up straight to Charles Gould and had hissed out to him that he would have liked to deport the Grand Vicar out of Sulaco, anywhere, to some desert island, to the Isabels, for instance. "The one without water preferably — eh, Don Carlos?" he had added in a tone between jest and earnest. This uncontrollable priest, who had rejected his offer of the episcopal palace for a residence and preferred to hang his shabby hammock amongst the rubble and spiders of the sequestered Dominican Convent, had taken into his head to advocate an unconditional pardon for Hernandez the Robber! And this was not enough; he seemed to have entered into communication with the most audacious criminal the country had known for years. The Sulaco police knew, of course, what was going on. Padre Corbelan had got hold of that reckless Italian, the Capataz de Cargadores, the only man fit for such an errand, and had sent a message through him. Father Corbelan had studied in Rome, and could speak Italian. The Capataz was known to visit the old Dominican Convent at night. An old woman who served the Grand Vicar had heard the name of Hernandez pronounced; and only last Saturday afternoon the Capataz had been observed galloping out of town. He did not return for two days. The police would have laid the Italian by the heels if it had not been for fear of the Cargadores, a turbulent body of men, quite apt to raise a tumult. Nowadays it was not so easy to govern Sulaco. Bad characters flocked into it, attracted by the money in the pockets of the railway workmen. The populace was made restless by Father Corbelan's discourses. And the first magistrate explained to Charles Gould that now the province was stripped of troops any outbreak of lawlessness would find the authorities with their boots off, as it were.

Then he went away moodily to sit in an armchair, smoking a long, thin cigar, not very far from Don Jose, with whom, bending over sideways, he exchanged a few words from time to time. He ignored the entrance of the priest, and whenever Father Corbelan's voice was raised behind him, he shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

Father Corbelan had remained quite motionless for a time with that something vengeful in his immobility which seemed to characterize all his attitudes. A lurid glow of strong convictions gave its peculiar aspect to the

black figure. But its fierceness became softened as the padre, fixing his eyes upon Decoud, raised his long, black arm slowly, impressively —

“And you — you are a perfect heathen,” he said, in a subdued, deep voice.

He made a step nearer, pointing a forefinger at the young man’s breast. Decoud, very calm, felt the wall behind the curtain with the back of his head. Then, with his chin tilted well up, he smiled.

“Very well,” he agreed with the slightly weary nonchalance of a man well used to these passages. “But is it perhaps that you have not discovered yet what is the God of my worship? It was an easier task with our Barrios.”

The priest suppressed a gesture of discouragement. “You believe neither in stick nor stone,” he said.

“Nor bottle,” added Decoud without stirring. “Neither does the other of your reverence’s confidants. I mean the Capataz of the Cargadores. He does not drink. Your reading of my character does honour to your perspicacity. But why call me a heathen?”

“True,” retorted the priest. “You are ten times worse. A miracle could not convert you.”

“I certainly do not believe in miracles,” said Decoud, quietly. Father Corbelan shrugged his high, broad shoulders doubtfully.

“A sort of Frenchman — godless — a materialist,” he pronounced slowly, as if weighing the terms of a careful analysis. “Neither the son of his own country nor of any other,” he continued, thoughtfully.

“Scarcely human, in fact,” Decoud commented under his breath, his head at rest against the wall, his eyes gazing up at the ceiling.

“The victim of this faithless age,” Father Corbelan resumed in a deep but subdued voice.

“But of some use as a journalist.” Decoud changed his pose and spoke in a more animated tone. “Has your worship neglected to read the last number of the *Porvenir*? I assure you it is just like the others. On the general policy it continues to call Montero a gran’ bestia, and stigmatize his brother, the guerrillero, for a combination of lackey and spy. What could be more effective? In local affairs it urges the Provincial Government to enlist bodily into the national army the band of Hernandez the Robber — who is apparently the protege of the Church — or at least of the Grand Vicar. Nothing could be more sound.”

The priest nodded and turned on the heels of his square-toed shoes with big steel buckles. Again, with his hands clasped behind his back, he paced to and fro, planting his feet firmly. When he swung about, the skirt of his soutane was inflated slightly by the brusqueness of his movements.

The great sala had been emptying itself slowly. When the Gefé Politico rose to go, most of those still remaining stood up suddenly in sign of respect, and Don Jose Avellanos stopped the rocking of his chair. But the good-natured First Official made a deprecatory gesture, waved his hand to Charles Gould, and went out discreetly.

In the comparative peace of the room the screaming “Monsieur l’Administrateur” of the frail, hairy Frenchman seemed to acquire a preternatural shrillness. The explorer of the Capitalist syndicate was still enthusiastic. “Ten million dollars’ worth of copper practically in sight, Monsieur l’Administrateur. Ten millions in sight! And a railway coming — a railway! They will never believe my report. C’est trop beau.” He fell a prey to a screaming ecstasy, in the midst of sagely nodding heads, before Charles Gould’s imperturbable calm.

And only the priest continued his pacing, flinging round the skirt of his soutane at each end of his beat. Decoud murmured to him ironically: “Those gentlemen talk about their gods.”

Father Corbelan stopped short, looked at the journalist of Sulaco fixedly for a moment, shrugged his shoulders slightly, and resumed his plodding walk of an obstinate traveller.

And now the Europeans were dropping off from the group around Charles Gould till the Administrador of the Great Silver Mine could be seen in his whole lank length, from head to foot, left stranded by the ebbing tide of his guests on the great square of carpet, as it were a multi-coloured shoal of flowers and arabesques under his brown boots. Father Corbelan approached the rocking-chair of Don Jose Avellanos.

“Come, brother,” he said, with kindly brusqueness and a touch of relieved impatience a man may feel at the end of a perfectly useless ceremony. “A la Casa! A la Casa! This has been all talk. Let us now go and think and pray for guidance from Heaven.”

He rolled his black eyes upwards. By the side of the frail diplomatist — the life and soul of the party — he seemed gigantic, with a gleam of fanaticism in the glance. But the voice of the party, or, rather, its mouthpiece, the “son Decoud” from Paris, turned journalist for the sake of



Antonia's eyes, knew very well that it was not so, that he was only a strenuous priest with one idea, feared by the women and execrated by the men of the people. Martin Decoud, the dilettante in life, imagined himself to derive an artistic pleasure from watching the picturesque extreme of wrongheadedness into which an honest, almost sacred, conviction may drive a man. "It is like madness. It must be — because it's self-destructive," Decoud had said to himself often. It seemed to him that every conviction, as soon as it became effective, turned into that form of dementia the gods send upon those they wish to destroy. But he enjoyed the bitter flavour of that example with the zest of a connoisseur in the art of his choice. Those two men got on well together, as if each had felt respectively that a masterful conviction, as well as utter scepticism, may lead a man very far on the by-paths of political action.

Don Jose obeyed the touch of the big hairy hand. Decoud followed out the brothers-in-law. And there remained only one visitor in the vast empty sala, bluishly hazy with tobacco smoke, a heavy-eyed, round-cheeked man, with a drooping moustache, a hide merchant from Esmeralda, who had come overland to Sulaco, riding with a few peons across the coast range. He was very full of his journey, undertaken mostly for the purpose of seeing the Senor Administrador of San Tome in relation to some assistance he required in his hide-exporting business. He hoped to enlarge it greatly now that the country was going to be settled. It was going to be settled, he repeated several times, degrading by a strange, anxious whine the sonority of the Spanish language, which he pattered rapidly, like some sort of cringing jargon. A plain man could carry on his little business now in the country, and even think of enlarging it — with safety. Was it not so? He seemed to beg Charles Gould for a confirmatory word, a grunt of assent, a simple nod even.

He could get nothing. His alarm increased, and in the pauses he would dart his eyes here and there; then, loth to give up, he would branch off into feeling allusion to the dangers of his journey. The audacious Hernandez, leaving his usual haunts, had crossed the Campo of Sulaco, and was known to be lurking in the ravines of the coast range. Yesterday, when distant only a few hours from Sulaco, the hide merchant and his servants had seen three men on the road arrested suspiciously, with their horses' heads together. Two of these rode off at once and disappeared in a shallow quebrada to the left. "We stopped," continued the man from Esmeralda, "and I tried to hide

behind a small bush. But none of my *mozos* would go forward to find out what it meant, and the third horseman seemed to be waiting for us to come up. It was no use. We had been seen. So we rode slowly on, trembling. He let us pass — a man on a grey horse with his hat down on his eyes — without a word of greeting; but by-and-by we heard him galloping after us. We faced about, but that did not seem to intimidate him. He rode up at speed, and touching my foot with the toe of his boot, asked me for a cigar, with a blood-curdling laugh. He did not seem armed, but when he put his hand back to reach for the matches I saw an enormous revolver strapped to his waist. I shuddered. He had very fierce whiskers, Don Carlos, and as he did not offer to go on we dared not move. At last, blowing the smoke of my cigar into the air through his nostrils, he said, ‘Senor, it would be perhaps better for you if I rode behind your party. You are not very far from Sulaco now. Go you with God.’ What would you? We went on. There was no resisting him. He might have been Hernandez himself; though my servant, who has been many times to Sulaco by sea, assured me that he had recognized him very well for the Capataz of the Steamship Company’s Cargadores. Later, that same evening, I saw that very man at the corner of the Plaza talking to a girl, a *Morenita*, who stood by the stirrup with her hand on the grey horse’s mane.”

“I assure you, Senor Hirsch,” murmured Charles Gould, “that you ran no risk on this occasion.”

“That may be, senor, though I tremble yet. A most fierce man — to look at. And what does it mean? A person employed by the Steamship Company talking with *salteadores* — no less, senor; the other horsemen were *salteadores* — in a lonely place, and behaving like a robber himself! A cigar is nothing, but what was there to prevent him asking me for my purse?”

“No, no, Senor Hirsch,” Charles Gould murmured, letting his glance stray away a little vacantly from the round face, with its hooked beak upturned towards him in an almost childlike appeal. “If it was the Capataz de Cargadores you met — and there is no doubt, is there? — you were perfectly safe.”

“Thank you. You are very good. A very fierce-looking man, Don Carlos. He asked me for a cigar in a most familiar manner. What would have happened if I had not had a cigar? I shudder yet. What business had he to be talking with robbers in a lonely place?”

But Charles Gould, openly preoccupied now, gave not a sign, made no sound. The impenetrability of the embodied Gould Concession had its surface shades. To be dumb is merely a fatal affliction; but the King of Sulaco had words enough to give him all the mysterious weight of a taciturn force. His silences, backed by the power of speech, had as many shades of significance as uttered words in the way of assent, of doubt, of negation — even of simple comment. Some seemed to say plainly, “Think it over”; others meant clearly, “Go ahead”; a simple, low “I see,” with an affirmative nod, at the end of a patient listening half-hour was the equivalent of a verbal contract, which men had learned to trust implicitly, since behind it all there was the great San Tome mine, the head and front of the material interests, so strong that it depended on no man’s goodwill in the whole length and breadth of the Occidental Province — that is, on no goodwill which it could not buy ten times over. But to the little hook-nosed man from Esmeralda, anxious about the export of hides, the silence of Charles Gould portended a failure. Evidently this was no time for extending a modest man’s business. He enveloped in a swift mental malediction the whole country, with all its inhabitants, partisans of Ribiera and Montero alike; and there were incipient tears in his mute anger at the thought of the innumerable ox-hides going to waste upon the dreamy expanse of the Campo, with its single palms rising like ships at sea within the perfect circle of the horizon, its clumps of heavy timber motionless like solid islands of leaves above the running waves of grass. There were hides there, rotting, with no profit to anybody — rotting where they had been dropped by men called away to attend the urgent necessities of political revolutions. The practical, mercantile soul of Senor Hirsch rebelled against all that foolishness, while he was taking a respectful but disconcerted leave of the might and majesty of the San Tome mine in the person of Charles Gould. He could not restrain a heart-broken murmur, wrung out of his very aching heart, as it were.

“It is a great, great foolishness, Don Carlos, all this. The price of hides in Hamburg is gone up — up. Of course the Ribierist Government will do away with all that — when it gets established firmly. Meantime — ”

He sighed.

“Yes, meantime,” repeated Charles Gould, inscrutably.

The other shrugged his shoulders. But he was not ready to go yet. There was a little matter he would like to mention very much if permitted. It appeared he had some good friends in Hamburg (he murmured the name of

the firm) who were very anxious to do business, in dynamite, he explained. A contract for dynamite with the San Tome mine, and then, perhaps, later on, other mines, which were sure to — The little man from Esmeralda was ready to enlarge, but Charles interrupted him. It seemed as though the patience of the Senor Administrador was giving way at last.

“Senor Hirsch,” he said, “I have enough dynamite stored up at the mountain to send it down crashing into the valley” — his voice rose a little — “to send half Sulaco into the air if I liked.”

Charles Gould smiled at the round, startled eyes of the dealer in hides, who was murmuring hastily, “Just so. Just so.” And now he was going. It was impossible to do business in explosives with an Administrador so well provided and so discouraging. He had suffered agonies in the saddle and had exposed himself to the atrocities of the bandit Hernandez for nothing at all. Neither hides nor dynamite — and the very shoulders of the enterprising Israelite expressed dejection. At the door he bowed low to the engineer-in-chief. But at the bottom of the stairs in the patio he stopped short, with his podgy hand over his lips in an attitude of meditative astonishment.

“What does he want to keep so much dynamite for?” he muttered. “And why does he talk like this to me?”

The engineer-in-chief, looking in at the door of the empty sala, whence the political tide had ebbed out to the last insignificant drop, nodded familiarly to the master of the house, standing motionless like a tall beacon amongst the deserted shoals of furniture.

“Good-night, I am going. Got my bike downstairs. The railway will know where to go for dynamite should we get short at any time. We have done cutting and chopping for a while now. We shall begin soon to blast our way through.”

“Don’t come to me,” said Charles Gould, with perfect serenity. “I shan’t have an ounce to spare for anybody. Not an ounce. Not for my own brother, if I had a brother, and he were the engineer-in-chief of the most promising railway in the world.”

“What’s that?” asked the engineer-in-chief, with equanimity. “Unkindness?”

“No,” said Charles Gould, stolidly. “Policy.”

“Radical, I should think,” the engineer-in-chief observed from the doorway.

“Is that the right name?” Charles Gould said, from the middle of the room.

“I mean, going to the roots, you know,” the engineer explained, with an air of enjoyment.

“Why, yes,” Charles pronounced, slowly. “The Gould Concession has struck such deep roots in this country, in this province, in that gorge of the mountains, that nothing but dynamite shall be allowed to dislodge it from there. It’s my choice. It’s my last card to play.”

The engineer-in-chief whistled low. “A pretty game,” he said, with a shade of discretion. “And have you told Holroyd of that extraordinary trump card you hold in your hand?”

“Card only when it’s played; when it falls at the end of the game. Till then you may call it a — a — ”

“Weapon,” suggested the railway man.

“No. You may call it rather an argument,” corrected Charles Gould, gently. “And that’s how I’ve presented it to Mr. Holroyd.”

“And what did he say to it?” asked the engineer, with undisguised interest.

“He” — Charles Gould spoke after a slight pause — “he said something about holding on like grim death and putting our trust in God. I should imagine he must have been rather startled. But then” — pursued the Administrador of the San Tome mine — “but then, he is very far away, you know, and, as they say in this country, God is very high above.”

The engineer’s appreciative laugh died away down the stairs, where the Madonna with the Child on her arm seemed to look after his shaking broad back from her shallow niche.

## CHAPTER SIX

A profound stillness reigned in the Casa Gould. The master of the house, walking along the corredor, opened the door of his room, and saw his wife sitting in a big armchair — his own smoking armchair — thoughtful, contemplating her little shoes. And she did not raise her eyes when he walked in.

“Tired?” asked Charles Gould.

“A little,” said Mrs. Gould. Still without looking up, she added with feeling, “There is an awful sense of unreality about all this.”

Charles Gould, before the long table strewn with papers, on which lay a hunting crop and a pair of spurs, stood looking at his wife: “The heat and dust must have been awful this afternoon by the waterside,” he murmured, sympathetically. “The glare on the water must have been simply terrible.”

“One could close one’s eyes to the glare,” said Mrs. Gould. “But, my dear Charley, it is impossible for me to close my eyes to our position; to this awful . . .”

She raised her eyes and looked at her husband’s face, from which all sign of sympathy or any other feeling had disappeared. “Why don’t you tell me something?” she almost wailed.

“I thought you had understood me perfectly from the first,” Charles Gould said, slowly. “I thought we had said all there was to say a long time ago. There is nothing to say now. There were things to be done. We have done them; we have gone on doing them. There is no going back now. I don’t suppose that, even from the first, there was really any possible way back. And, what’s more, we can’t even afford to stand still.”

“Ah, if one only knew how far you mean to go,” said his wife inwardly trembling, but in an almost playful tone.

“Any distance, any length, of course,” was the answer, in a matter-of-fact tone, which caused Mrs. Gould to make another effort to repress a shudder.

She stood up, smiling graciously, and her little figure seemed to be diminished still more by the heavy mass of her hair and the long train of her gown.

“But always to success,” she said, persuasively.

Charles Gould, enveloping her in the steely blue glance of his attentive eyes, answered without hesitation —

“Oh, there is no alternative.”

He put an immense assurance into his tone. As to the words, this was all that his conscience would allow him to say.

Mrs. Gould's smile remained a shade too long upon her lips. She murmured —

"I will leave you; I've a slight headache. The heat, the dust, were indeed — I suppose you are going back to the mine before the morning?"

"At midnight," said Charles Gould. "We are bringing down the silver tomorrow. Then I shall take three whole days off in town with you."

"Ah, you are going to meet the escort. I shall be on the balcony at five o'clock to see you pass. Till then, good-bye."

Charles Gould walked rapidly round the table, and, seizing her hands, bent down, pressing them both to his lips. Before he straightened himself up again to his full height she had disengaged one to smooth his cheek with a light touch, as if he were a little boy.

"Try to get some rest for a couple of hours," she murmured, with a glance at a hammock stretched in a distant part of the room. Her long train swished softly after her on the red tiles. At the door she looked back.

Two big lamps with unpolished glass globes bathed in a soft and abundant light the four white walls of the room, with a glass case of arms, the brass hilt of Henry Gould's cavalry sabre on its square of velvet, and the water-colour sketch of the San Tome gorge. And Mrs. Gould, gazing at the last in its black wooden frame, sighed out —

"Ah, if we had left it alone, Charley!"

"No," Charles Gould said, moodily; "it was impossible to leave it alone."

"Perhaps it was impossible," Mrs. Gould admitted, slowly. Her lips quivered a little, but she smiled with an air of dainty bravado. "We have disturbed a good many snakes in that Paradise, Charley, haven't we?"

"Yes, I remember," said Charles Gould, "it was Don Pepe who called the gorge the Paradise of snakes. No doubt we have disturbed a great many. But remember, my dear, that it is not now as it was when you made that sketch." He waved his hand towards the small water-colour hanging alone upon the great bare wall. "It is no longer a Paradise of snakes. We have brought mankind into it, and we cannot turn our backs upon them to go and begin a new life elsewhere."

He confronted his wife with a firm, concentrated gaze, which Mrs. Gould returned with a brave assumption of fearlessness before she went out, closing the door gently after her.

In contrast with the white glaring room the dimly lit corridor had a restful mysteriousness of a forest glade, suggested by the stems and the leaves of the plants ranged along the balustrade of the open side. In the streaks of light falling through the open doors of the reception-rooms, the blossoms, white and red and pale lilac, came out vivid with the brilliance of flowers in a stream of sunshine; and Mrs. Gould, passing on, had the vividness of a figure seen in the clear patches of sun that chequer the gloom of open glades in the woods. The stones in the rings upon her hand pressed to her forehead glittered in the lamplight abreast of the door of the sala.

"Who's there?" she asked, in a startled voice. "Is that you, Basilio?" She looked in, and saw Martin Decoud walking about, with an air of having lost something, amongst the chairs and tables.

"Antonia has forgotten her fan in here," said Decoud, with a strange air of distraction; "so I entered to see."

But, even as he said this, he had obviously given up his search, and walked straight towards Mrs. Gould, who looked at him with doubtful surprise.

"Senora," he began, in a low voice.

"What is it, Don Martin?" asked Mrs. Gould. And then she added, with a slight laugh, "I am so nervous to-day," as if to explain the eagerness of the question.

"Nothing immediately dangerous," said Decoud, who now could not conceal his agitation. "Pray don't distress yourself. No, really, you must not distress yourself."

Mrs. Gould, with her candid eyes very wide open, her lips composed into a smile, was steadying herself with a little bejewelled hand against the side of the door.

"Perhaps you don't know how alarming you are, appearing like this unexpectedly —"

"I! Alarming!" he protested, sincerely vexed and surprised. "I assure you that I am not in the least alarmed myself. A fan is lost; well, it will be found again. But I don't think it is here. It is a fan I am looking for. I cannot understand how Antonia could — Well! Have you found it, amigo?"

"No, senor," said behind Mrs. Gould the soft voice of Basilio, the head servant of the Casa. "I don't think the senorita could have left it in this house at all."



“Go and look for it in the patio again. Go now, my friend; look for it on the steps, under the gate; examine every flagstone; search for it till I come down again. . . . That fellow” — he addressed himself in English to Mrs. Gould — “is always stealing up behind one’s back on his bare feet. I set him to look for that fan directly I came in to justify my reappearance, my sudden return.”

He paused and Mrs. Gould said, amiably, “You are always welcome.” She paused for a second, too. “But I am waiting to learn the cause of your return.”

Decoud affected suddenly the utmost nonchalance.

“I can’t bear to be spied upon. Oh, the cause? Yes, there is a cause; there is something else that is lost besides Antonia’s favourite fan. As I was walking home after seeing Don Jose and Antonia to their house, the Capataz de Cargadores, riding down the street, spoke to me.”

“Has anything happened to the Violas?” inquired Mrs. Gould.

“The Violas? You mean the old Garibaldino who keeps the hotel where the engineers live? Nothing happened there. The Capataz said nothing of them; he only told me that the telegraphist of the Cable Company was walking on the Plaza, bareheaded, looking out for me. There is news from the interior, Mrs. Gould. I should rather say rumours of news.”

“Good news?” said Mrs. Gould in a low voice.

“Worthless, I should think. But if I must define them, I would say bad. They are to the effect that a two days’ battle had been fought near Sta. Marta, and that the Ribierists are defeated. It must have happened a few days ago — perhaps a week. The rumour has just reached Cayta, and the man in charge of the cable station there has telegraphed the news to his colleague here. We might just as well have kept Barrios in Sulaco.”

“What’s to be done now?” murmured Mrs. Gould.

“Nothing. He’s at sea with the troops. He will get to Cayta in a couple of days’ time and learn the news there. What he will do then, who can say? Hold Cayta? Offer his submission to Montero? Disband his army — this last most likely, and go himself in one of the O.S.N. Company’s steamers, north or south — to Valparaiso or to San Francisco, no matter where. Our Barrios has a great practice in exiles and repatriations, which mark the points in the political game.”

Decoud, exchanging a steady stare with Mrs. Gould, added, tentatively, as it were, “And yet, if we had could have been done.”

“Montero victorious, completely victorious!” Mrs. Gould breathed out in a tone of unbelief.

“A canard, probably. That sort of bird is hatched in great numbers in such times as these. And even if it were true? Well, let us put things at their worst, let us say it is true.”

“Then everything is lost,” said Mrs. Gould, with the calmness of despair.

Suddenly she seemed to divine, she seemed to see Decoud’s tremendous excitement under its cloak of studied carelessness. It was, indeed, becoming visible in his audacious and watchful stare, in the curve, half-reckless, half-contemptuous, of his lips. And a French phrase came upon them as if, for this Costaguanero of the Boulevard, that had been the only forcible language —

“Non, Madame. Rien n’est perdu.”

It electrified Mrs. Gould out of her benumbed attitude, and she said, vivaciously —

“What would you think of doing?”

But already there was something of mockery in Decoud’s suppressed excitement.

“What would you expect a true Costaguanero to do? Another revolution, of course. On my word of honour, Mrs. Gould, I believe I am a true hijo del pays, a true son of the country, whatever Father Corbelan may say. And I’m not so much of an unbeliever as not to have faith in my own ideas, in my own remedies, in my own desires.”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Gould, doubtfully.

“You don’t seem convinced,” Decoud went on again in French. “Say, then, in my passions.”

Mrs. Gould received this addition unflinchingly. To understand it thoroughly she did not require to hear his muttered assurance —

“There is nothing I would not do for the sake of Antonia. There is nothing I am not prepared to undertake. There is no risk I am not ready to run.”

Decoud seemed to find a fresh audacity in this voicing of his thoughts. “You would not believe me if I were to say that it is the love of the country which — ”

She made a sort of discouraged protest with her arm, as if to express that she had given up expecting that motive from any one.

“A Sulaco revolution,” Decoud pursued in a forcible undertone. “The Great Cause may be served here, on the very spot of its inception, in the place of its birth, Mrs. Gould.”

Frowning, and biting her lower lip thoughtfully, she made a step away from the door.

“You are not going to speak to your husband?” Decoud arrested her anxiously.

“But you will need his help?”

“No doubt,” Decoud admitted without hesitation. “Everything turns upon the San Tome mine, but I would rather he didn’t know anything as yet of my — my hopes.”

A puzzled look came upon Mrs. Gould’s face, and Decoud, approaching, explained confidentially —

“Don’t you see, he’s such an idealist.”

Mrs. Gould flushed pink, and her eyes grew darker at the same time.

“Charley an idealist!” she said, as if to herself, wonderingly. “What on earth do you mean?”

“Yes,” conceded Decoud, “it’s a wonderful thing to say with the sight of the San Tome mine, the greatest fact in the whole of South America, perhaps, before our very eyes. But look even at that, he has idealized this fact to a point — ” He paused. “Mrs. Gould, are you aware to what point he has idealized the existence, the worth, the meaning of the San Tome mine? Are you aware of it?”

He must have known what he was talking about.

The effect he expected was produced. Mrs. Gould, ready to take fire, gave it up suddenly with a low little sound that resembled a moan.

“What do you know?” she asked in a feeble voice.

“Nothing,” answered Decoud, firmly. “But, then, don’t you see, he’s an Englishman?”

“Well, what of that?” asked Mrs. Gould.

“Simply that he cannot act or exist without idealizing every simple feeling, desire, or achievement. He could not believe his own motives if he did not make them first a part of some fairy tale. The earth is not quite good enough for him, I fear. Do you excuse my frankness? Besides, whether you excuse it or not, it is part of the truth of things which hurts the — what do you call them? — the Anglo-Saxon’s susceptibilities, and at the present

moment I don't feel as if I could treat seriously either his conception of things or — if you allow me to say so — or yet yours.”

Mrs. Gould gave no sign of being offended. “I suppose Antonia understands you thoroughly?”

“Understands? Well, yes. But I am not sure that she approves. That, however, makes no difference. I am honest enough to tell you that, Mrs. Gould.”

“Your idea, of course, is separation,” she said.

“Separation, of course,” declared Martin. “Yes; separation of the whole Occidental Province from the rest of the unquiet body. But my true idea, the only one I care for, is not to be separated from Antonia.”

“And that is all?” asked Mrs. Gould, without severity.

“Absolutely. I am not deceiving myself about my motives. She won't leave Sulaco for my sake, therefore Sulaco must leave the rest of the Republic to its fate. Nothing could be clearer than that. I like a clearly defined situation. I cannot part with Antonia, therefore the one and indivisible Republic of Costaguana must be made to part with its western province. Fortunately it happens to be also a sound policy. The richest, the most fertile part of this land may be saved from anarchy. Personally, I care little, very little; but it's a fact that the establishment of Montero in power would mean death to me. In all the proclamations of general pardon which I have seen, my name, with a few others, is specially excepted. The brothers hate me, as you know very well, Mrs. Gould; and behold, here is the rumour of them having won a battle. You say that supposing it is true, I have plenty of time to run away.”

The slight, protesting murmur on the part of Mrs. Gould made him pause for a moment, while he looked at her with a sombre and resolute glance.

“Ah, but I would, Mrs. Gould. I would run away if it served that which at present is my only desire. I am courageous enough to say that, and to do it, too. But women, even our women, are idealists. It is Antonia that won't run away. A novel sort of vanity.”

“You call it vanity,” said Mrs. Gould, in a shocked voice.

“Say pride, then, which. Father Corbelan would tell you, is a mortal sin. But I am not proud. I am simply too much in love to run away. At the same time I want to live. There is no love for a dead man. Therefore it is necessary that Sulaco should not recognize the victorious Montero.”

“And you think my husband will give you his support?”

“I think he can be drawn into it, like all idealists, when he once sees a sentimental basis for his action. But I wouldn’t talk to him. Mere clear facts won’t appeal to his sentiment. It is much better for him to convince himself in his own way. And, frankly, I could not, perhaps, just now pay sufficient respect to either his motives or even, perhaps, to yours, Mrs. Gould.”

It was evident that Mrs. Gould was very determined not to be offended. She smiled vaguely, while she seemed to think the matter over. As far as she could judge from the girl’s half-confidences, Antonia understood that young man. Obviously there was promise of safety in his plan, or rather in his idea. Moreover, right or wrong, the idea could do no harm. And it was quite possible, also, that the rumour was false.

“You have some sort of a plan,” she said.

“Simplicity itself. Barrios has started, let him go on then; he will hold Cayta, which is the door of the sea route to Sulaco. They cannot send a sufficient force over the mountains. No; not even to cope with the band of Hernandez. Meantime we shall organize our resistance here. And for that, this very Hernandez will be useful. He has defeated troops as a bandit; he will no doubt accomplish the same thing if he is made a colonel or even a general. You know the country well enough not to be shocked by what I say, Mrs. Gould. I have heard you assert that this poor bandit was the living, breathing example of cruelty, injustice, stupidity, and oppression, that ruin men’s souls as well as their fortunes in this country. Well, there would be some poetical retribution in that man arising to crush the evils which had driven an honest ranchero into a life of crime. A fine idea of retribution in that, isn’t there?”

Decoud had dropped easily into English, which he spoke with precision, very correctly, but with too many z sounds.

“Think also of your hospitals, of your schools, of your ailing mothers and feeble old men, of all that population which you and your husband have brought into the rocky gorge of San Tome. Are you not responsible to your conscience for all these people? Is it not worth while to make another effort, which is not at all so desperate as it looks, rather than — ”

Decoud finished his thought with an upward toss of the arm, suggesting annihilation; and Mrs. Gould turned away her head with a look of horror.

“Why don’t you say all this to my husband?” she asked, without looking at Decoud, who stood watching the effect of his words.

“Ah! But Don Carlos is so English,” he began. Mrs. Gould interrupted —

“Leave that alone, Don Martin. He’s as much a Costaguanero — No! He’s more of a Costaguanero than yourself.”

“Sentimentalist, sentimentalist,” Decoud almost cooed, in a tone of gentle and soothing deference. “Sentimentalist, after the amazing manner of your people. I have been watching El Rey de Sulaco since I came here on a fool’s errand, and perhaps impelled by some treason of fate lurking behind the unaccountable turns of a man’s life. But I don’t matter, I am not a sentimentalist, I cannot endow my personal desires with a shining robe of silk and jewels. Life is not for me a moral romance derived from the tradition of a pretty fairy tale. No, Mrs. Gould; I am practical. I am not afraid of my motives. But, pardon me, I have been rather carried away. What I wish to say is that I have been observing. I won’t tell you what I have discovered — ”

“No. That is unnecessary,” whispered Mrs. Gould, once more averting her head.

“It is. Except one little fact, that your husband does not like me. It’s a small matter, which, in the circumstances, seems to acquire a perfectly ridiculous importance. Ridiculous and immense; for, clearly, money is required for my plan,” he reflected; then added, meaningly, “and we have two sentimentalists to deal with.”

“I don’t know that I understand you, Don Martin,” said Mrs. Gould, coldly, preserving the low key of their conversation. “But, speaking as if I did, who is the other?”

“The great Holroyd in San Francisco, of course,” Decoud whispered, lightly. “I think you understand me very well. Women are idealists; but then they are so perspicacious.”

But whatever was the reason of that remark, disparaging and complimentary at the same time, Mrs. Gould seemed not to pay attention to it. The name of Holroyd had given a new tone to her anxiety.

“The silver escort is coming down to the harbour tomorrow; a whole six months’ working, Don Martin!” she cried in dismay.

“Let it come down, then,” breathed out Decoud, earnestly, almost into her ear.

“But if the rumour should get about, and especially if it turned out true, troubles might break out in the town,” objected Mrs. Gould.

Decoud admitted that it was possible. He knew well the town children of the Sulaco Campo: sullen, thievish, vindictive, and bloodthirsty, whatever

great qualities their brothers of the plain might have had. But then there was that other sentimentalist, who attached a strangely idealistic meaning to concrete facts. This stream of silver must be kept flowing north to return in the form of financial backing from the great house of Holroyd. Up at the mountain in the strong room of the mine the silver bars were worth less for his purpose than so much lead, from which at least bullets may be run. Let it come down to the harbour, ready for shipment.

The next north-going steamer would carry it off for the very salvation of the San Tome mine, which had produced so much treasure. And, moreover, the rumour was probably false, he remarked, with much conviction in his hurried tone.

“Besides, senora,” concluded Decoud, “we may suppress it for many days. I have been talking with the telegraphist in the middle of the Plaza Mayor; thus I am certain that we could not have been overheard. There was not even a bird in the air near us. And also let me tell you something more. I have been making friends with this man called Nostromo, the Capataz. We had a conversation this very evening, I walking by the side of his horse as he rode slowly out of the town just now. He promised me that if a riot took place for any reason — even for the most political of reasons, you understand — his Cargadores, an important part of the populace, you will admit, should be found on the side of the Europeans.”

“He has promised you that?” Mrs. Gould inquired, with interest. “What made him make that promise to you?”

“Upon my word, I don’t know,” declared Decoud, in a slightly surprised tone. “He certainly promised me that, but now you ask me why, I could not tell you his reasons. He talked with his usual carelessness, which, if he had been anything else but a common sailor, I would call a pose or an affectation.”

Decoud, interrupting himself, looked at Mrs. Gould curiously.

“Upon the whole,” he continued, “I suppose he expects something to his advantage from it. You mustn’t forget that he does not exercise his extraordinary power over the lower classes without a certain amount of personal risk and without a great profusion in spending his money. One must pay in some way or other for such a solid thing as individual prestige. He told me after we made friends at a dance, in a Posada kept by a Mexican just outside the walls, that he had come here to make his fortune. I suppose he looks upon his prestige as a sort of investment.”

“Perhaps he prizes it for its own sake,” Mrs. Gould said in a tone as if she were repelling an undeserved aspersion. “Viola, the Garibaldino, with whom he has lived for some years, calls him the Incorruptible.”

“Ah! he belongs to the group of your proteges out there towards the harbour, Mrs. Gould. Muy bien. And Captain Mitchell calls him wonderful. I have heard no end of tales of his strength, his audacity, his fidelity. No end of fine things. H’m! incorruptible! It is indeed a name of honour for the Capataz of the Cargadores of Sulaco. Incorruptible! Fine, but vague. However, I suppose he’s sensible, too. And I talked to him upon that sane and practical assumption.”

“I prefer to think him disinterested, and therefore trustworthy,” Mrs. Gould said, with the nearest approach to curtness it was in her nature to assume.

“Well, if so, then the silver will be still more safe. Let it come down, senora. Let it come down, so that it may go north and return to us in the shape of credit.”

Mrs. Gould glanced along the corredor towards the door of her husband’s room. Decoud, watching her as if she had his fate in her hands, detected an almost imperceptible nod of assent. He bowed with a smile, and, putting his hand into the breast pocket of his coat, pulled out a fan of light feathers set upon painted leaves of sandal-wood. “I had it in my pocket,” he murmured, triumphantly, “for a plausible pretext.” He bowed again. “Good-night, senora.”

Mrs. Gould continued along the corredor away from her husband’s room. The fate of the San Tome mine was lying heavy upon her heart. It was a long time now since she had begun to fear it. It had been an idea. She had watched it with misgivings turning into a fetish, and now the fetish had grown into a monstrous and crushing weight. It was as if the inspiration of their early years had left her heart to turn into a wall of silver-bricks, erected by the silent work of evil spirits, between her and her husband. He seemed to dwell alone within a circumvallation of precious metal, leaving her outside with her school, her hospital, the sick mothers and the feeble old men, mere insignificant vestiges of the initial inspiration. “Those poor people!” she murmured to herself.

Below she heard the voice of Martin Decoud in the patio speaking loudly:

“I have found Dona Antonia’s fan, Basilio. Look, here it is!”





## CHAPTER SEVEN

It was part of what Decoud would have called his sane materialism that he did not believe in the possibility of friendship between man and woman.

The one exception he allowed confirmed, he maintained, that absolute rule. Friendship was possible between brother and sister, meaning by friendship the frank unreserve, as before another human being, of thoughts and sensations; all the objectless and necessary sincerity of one's innermost life trying to re-act upon the profound sympathies of another existence.

His favourite sister, the handsome, slightly arbitrary and resolute angel, ruling the father and mother Decoud in the first-floor apartments of a very fine Parisian house, was the recipient of Martin Decoud's confidences as to his thoughts, actions, purposes, doubts, and even failures. . . .

"Prepare our little circle in Paris for the birth of another South American Republic. One more or less, what does it matter? They may come into the world like evil flowers on a hotbed of rotten institutions; but the seed of this one has germinated in your brother's brain, and that will be enough for your devoted assent. I am writing this to you by the light of a single candle, in a sort of inn, near the harbour, kept by an Italian called Viola, a protege of Mrs. Gould. The whole building, which, for all I know, may have been contrived by a Conquistador farmer of the pearl fishery three hundred years ago, is perfectly silent. So is the plain between the town and the harbour; silent, but not so dark as the house, because the pickets of Italian workmen guarding the railway have lighted little fires all along the line. It was not so quiet around here yesterday. We had an awful riot — a sudden outbreak of the populace, which was not suppressed till late today. Its object, no doubt, was loot, and that was defeated, as you may have learned already from the cablegram sent via San Francisco and New York last night, when the cables were still open. You have read already there that the energetic action of the Europeans of the railway has saved the town from destruction, and you may believe that. I wrote out the cable myself. We have no Reuter's agency man here. I have also fired at the mob from the windows of the club, in company with some other young men of position. Our object was to keep the Calle de la Constitucion clear for the exodus of the ladies and children, who have taken refuge on board a couple of cargo ships now in the harbour here. That was yesterday. You should also have learned from the cable that the missing President, Ribiera, who had disappeared after the battle of Sta. Marta, has

turned up here in Sulaco by one of those strange coincidences that are almost incredible, riding on a lame mule into the very midst of the street fighting. It appears that he had fled, in company of a muleteer called Bonifacio, across the mountains from the threats of Montero into the arms of an enraged mob.

“The Capataz of Cargadores, that Italian sailor of whom I have written to you before, has saved him from an ignoble death. That man seems to have a particular talent for being on the spot whenever there is something picturesque to be done.

“He was with me at four o’clock in the morning at the offices of the Porvenir, where he had turned up so early in order to warn me of the coming trouble, and also to assure me that he would keep his Cargadores on the side of order. When the full daylight came we were looking together at the crowd on foot and on horseback, demonstrating on the Plaza and shying stones at the windows of the Intendencia. Nostromo (that is the name they call him by here) was pointing out to me his Cargadores interspersed in the mob.

“The sun shines late upon Sulaco, for it has first to climb above the mountains. In that clear morning light, brighter than twilight, Nostromo saw right across the vast Plaza, at the end of the street beyond the cathedral, a mounted man apparently in difficulties with a yelling knot of leperos. At once he said to me, ‘That’s a stranger. What is it they are doing to him?’ Then he took out the silver whistle he is in the habit of using on the wharf (this man seems to disdain the use of any metal less precious than silver) and blew into it twice, evidently a preconcerted signal for his Cargadores. He ran out immediately, and they rallied round him. I ran out, too, but was too late to follow them and help in the rescue of the stranger, whose animal had fallen. I was set upon at once as a hated aristocrat, and was only too glad to get into the club, where Don Jaime Berges (you may remember him visiting at our house in Paris some three years ago) thrust a sporting gun into my hands. They were already firing from the windows. There were little heaps of cartridges lying about on the open card-tables. I remember a couple of overturned chairs, some bottles rolling on the floor amongst the packs of cards scattered suddenly as the caballeros rose from their game to open fire upon the mob. Most of the young men had spent the night at the club in the expectation of some such disturbance. In two of the candelabra, on the consoles, the candles were burning down in their sockets. A large

iron nut, probably stolen from the railway workshops, flew in from the street as I entered, and broke one of the large mirrors set in the wall. I noticed also one of the club servants tied up hand and foot with the cords of the curtain and flung in a corner. I have a vague recollection of Don Jaime assuring me hastily that the fellow had been detected putting poison into the dishes at supper. But I remember distinctly he was shrieking for mercy, without stopping at all, continuously, and so absolutely disregarded that nobody even took the trouble to gag him. The noise he made was so disagreeable that I had half a mind to do it myself. But there was no time to waste on such trifles. I took my place at one of the windows and began firing.

“I didn’t learn till later in the afternoon whom it was that Nostromo, with his Cargadores and some Italian workmen as well, had managed to save from those drunken rascals. That man has a peculiar talent when anything striking to the imagination has to be done. I made that remark to him afterwards when we met after some sort of order had been restored in the town, and the answer he made rather surprised me. He said quite moodily, ‘And how much do I get for that, senor?’ Then it dawned upon me that perhaps this man’s vanity has been satiated by the adulation of the common people and the confidence of his superiors!”

Decoud paused to light a cigarette, then, with his head still over his writing, he blew a cloud of smoke, which seemed to rebound from the paper. He took up the pencil again.

“That was yesterday evening on the Plaza, while he sat on the steps of the cathedral, his hands between his knees, holding the bridle of his famous silver-grey mare. He had led his body of Cargadores splendidly all day long. He looked fatigued. I don’t know how I looked. Very dirty, I suppose. But I suppose I also looked pleased. From the time the fugitive President had been got off to the S. S. Minerva, the tide of success had turned against the mob. They had been driven off the harbour, and out of the better streets of the town, into their own maze of ruins and tolderias. You must understand that this riot, whose primary object was undoubtedly the getting hold of the San Tome silver stored in the lower rooms of the Custom House (besides the general looting of the Ricos), had acquired a political colouring from the fact of two Deputies to the Provincial Assembly, Senores Gamacho and Fuentes, both from Bolson, putting themselves at the head of it — late in the afternoon, it is true, when the mob, disappointed in their

hopes of loot, made a stand in the narrow streets to the cries of ‘Viva la Libertad! Down with Feudalism!’ (I wonder what they imagine feudalism to be?) ‘Down with the Goths and Paralytics.’ I suppose the Senores Gamacho and Fuentes knew what they were doing. They are prudent gentlemen. In the Assembly they called themselves Moderates, and opposed every energetic measure with philanthropic pensiveness. At the first rumours of Montero’s victory, they showed a subtle change of the pensive temper, and began to defy poor Don Juste Lopez in his Presidential tribune with an effrontery to which the poor man could only respond by a dazed smoothing of his beard and the ringing of the presidential bell. Then, when the downfall of the Ribierist cause became confirmed beyond the shadow of a doubt, they have blossomed into convinced Liberals, acting together as if they were Siamese twins, and ultimately taking charge, as it were, of the riot in the name of Monterist principles.

“Their last move of eight o’clock last night was to organize themselves into a Monterist Committee which sits, as far as I know, in a posada kept by a retired Mexican bull-fighter, a great politician, too, whose name I have forgotten. Thence they have issued a communication to us, the Goths and Paralytics of the Amarilla Club (who have our own committee), inviting us to come to some provisional understanding for a truce, in order, they have the impudence to say, that the noble cause of Liberty ‘should not be stained by the criminal excesses of Conservative selfishness!’ As I came out to sit with Nostromo on the cathedral steps the club was busy considering a proper reply in the principal room, littered with exploded cartridges, with a lot of broken glass, blood smears, candlesticks, and all sorts of wreckage on the floor. But all this is nonsense. Nobody in the town has any real power except the railway engineers, whose men occupy the dismantled houses acquired by the Company for their town station on one side of the Plaza, and Nostromo, whose Cargadores were sleeping under the arcades along the front of Anzani’s shops. A fire of broken furniture out of the Intendencia saloons, mostly gilt, was burning on the Plaza, in a high flame swaying right upon the statue of Charles IV. The dead body of a man was lying on the steps of the pedestal, his arms thrown wide open, and his sombrero covering his face — the attention of some friend, perhaps. The light of the flames touched the foliage of the first trees on the Alameda, and played on the end of a side street near by, blocked up by a jumble of ox-carts and dead bullocks. Sitting on one of the carcasses, a lepero, muffled up, smoked a

cigarette. It was a truce, you understand. The only other living being on the Plaza besides ourselves was a Cargador walking to and fro, with a long, bare knife in his hand, like a sentry before the Arcades, where his friends were sleeping. And the only other spot of light in the dark town were the lighted windows of the club, at the corner of the Calle."

After having written so far, Don Martin Decoud, the exotic dandy of the Parisian boulevard, got up and walked across the sanded floor of the cafe at one end of the Albergo of United Italy, kept by Giorgio Viola, the old companion of Garibaldi. The highly coloured lithograph of the Faithful Hero seemed to look dimly, in the light of one candle, at the man with no faith in anything except the truth of his own sensations. Looking out of the window, Decoud was met by a darkness so impenetrable that he could see neither the mountains nor the town, nor yet the buildings near the harbour; and there was not a sound, as if the tremendous obscurity of the Placid Gulf, spreading from the waters over the land, had made it dumb as well as blind. Presently Decoud felt a light tremor of the floor and a distant clank of iron. A bright white light appeared, deep in the darkness, growing bigger with a thundering noise. The rolling stock usually kept on the sidings in Rincon was being run back to the yards for safe keeping. Like a mysterious stirring of the darkness behind the headlight of the engine, the train passed in a gust of hollow uproar, by the end of the house, which seemed to vibrate all over in response. And nothing was clearly visible but, on the end of the last flat car, a negro, in white trousers and naked to the waist, swinging a blazing torch basket incessantly with a circular movement of his bare arm. Decoud did not stir.

Behind him, on the back of the chair from which he had risen, hung his elegant Parisian overcoat, with a pearl-grey silk lining. But when he turned back to come to the table the candlelight fell upon a face that was grimy and scratched. His rosy lips were blackened with heat, the smoke of gun-powder. Dirt and rust tarnished the lustre of his short beard. His shirt collar and cuffs were crumpled; the blue silken tie hung down his breast like a rag; a greasy smudge crossed his white brow. He had not taken off his clothing nor used water, except to snatch a hasty drink greedily, for some forty hours. An awful restlessness had made him its own, had marked him with all the signs of desperate strife, and put a dry, sleepless stare into his eyes. He murmured to himself in a hoarse voice, "I wonder if there's any bread here," looked vaguely about him, then dropped into the chair and took the

pencil up again. He became aware he had not eaten anything for many hours.

It occurred to him that no one could understand him so well as his sister. In the most sceptical heart there lurks at such moments, when the chances of existence are involved, a desire to leave a correct impression of the feelings, like a light by which the action may be seen when personality is gone, gone where no light of investigation can ever reach the truth which every death takes out of the world. Therefore, instead of looking for something to eat, or trying to snatch an hour or so of sleep, Decoud was filling the pages of a large pocket-book with a letter to his sister.

In the intimacy of that intercourse he could not keep out his weariness, his great fatigue, the close touch of his bodily sensations. He began again as if he were talking to her. With almost an illusion of her presence, he wrote the phrase, "I am very hungry."

"I have the feeling of a great solitude around me," he continued. "Is it, perhaps, because I am the only man with a definite idea in his head, in the complete collapse of every resolve, intention, and hope about me? But the solitude is also very real. All the engineers are out, and have been for two days, looking after the property of the National Central Railway, of that great Costaguana undertaking which is to put money into the pockets of Englishmen, Frenchmen, Americans, Germans, and God knows who else. The silence about me is ominous. There is above the middle part of this house a sort of first floor, with narrow openings like loopholes for windows, probably used in old times for the better defence against the savages, when the persistent barbarism of our native continent did not wear the black coats of politicians, but went about yelling, half-naked, with bows and arrows in its hands. The woman of the house is dying up there, I believe, all alone with her old husband. There is a narrow staircase, the sort of staircase one man could easily defend against a mob, leading up there, and I have just heard, through the thickness of the wall, the old fellow going down into their kitchen for something or other. It was a sort of noise a mouse might make behind the plaster of a wall. All the servants they had ran away yesterday and have not returned yet, if ever they do. For the rest, there are only two children here, two girls. The father has sent them downstairs, and they have crept into this cafe, perhaps because I am here. They huddle together in a corner, in each other's arms; I just noticed them a few minutes ago, and I feel more lonely than ever."

Decoud turned half round in his chair, and asked, "Is there any bread here?"

Linda's dark head was shaken negatively in response, above the fair head of her sister nestling on her breast.

"You couldn't get me some bread?" insisted Decoud. The child did not move; he saw her large eyes stare at him very dark from the corner. "You're not afraid of me?" he said.

"No," said Linda, "we are not afraid of you. You came here with Gian' Battista."

"You mean Nostromo?" said Decoud.

"The English call him so, but that is no name either for man or beast," said the girl, passing her hand gently over her sister's hair.

"But he lets people call him so," remarked Decoud.

"Not in this house," retorted the child.

"Ah! well, I shall call him the Capataz then."

Decoud gave up the point, and after writing steadily for a while turned round again.

"When do you expect him back?" he asked.

"After he brought you here he rode off to fetch the Senor Doctor from the town for mother. He will be back soon."

"He stands a good chance of getting shot somewhere on the road," Decoud murmured to himself audibly; and Linda declared in her high-pitched voice —

"Nobody would dare to fire a shot at Gian' Battista."

"You believe that," asked Decoud, "do you?"

"I know it," said the child, with conviction. "There is no one in this place brave enough to attack Gian' Battista."

"It doesn't require much bravery to pull a trigger behind a bush," muttered Decoud to himself. "Fortunately, the night is dark, or there would be but little chance of saving the silver of the mine."

He turned again to his pocket-book, glanced back through the pages, and again started his pencil.

"That was the position yesterday, after the Minerva with the fugitive President had gone out of harbour, and the rioters had been driven back into the side lanes of the town. I sat on the steps of the cathedral with Nostromo, after sending out the cable message for the information of a more or less attentive world. Strangely enough, though the offices of the Cable Company



are in the same building as the Porvenir, the mob, which has thrown my presses out of the window and scattered the type all over the Plaza, has been kept from interfering with the instruments on the other side of the courtyard. As I sat talking with Nostromo, Bernhardt, the telegraphist, came out from under the Arcades with a piece of paper in his hand. The little man had tied himself up to an enormous sword and was hung all over with revolvers. He is ridiculous, but the bravest German of his size that ever tapped the key of a Morse transmitter. He had received the message from Cayta reporting the transports with Barrios's army just entering the port, and ending with the words, 'The greatest enthusiasm prevails.' I walked off to drink some water at the fountain, and I was shot at from the Alameda by somebody hiding behind a tree. But I drank, and didn't care; with Barrios in Cayta and the great Cordillera between us and Montero's victorious army I seemed, notwithstanding Messrs. Gamacho and Fuentes, to hold my new State in the hollow of my hand. I was ready to sleep, but when I got as far as the Casa Gould I found the patio full of wounded laid out on straw. Lights were burning, and in that enclosed courtyard on that hot night a faint odour of chloroform and blood hung about. At one end Doctor Monygham, the doctor of the mine, was dressing the wounds; at the other, near the stairs, Father Corbelan, kneeling, listened to the confession of a dying Cargador. Mrs. Gould was walking about through these shambles with a large bottle in one hand and a lot of cotton wool in the other. She just looked at me and never even winked. Her camerista was following her, also holding a bottle, and sobbing gently to herself.

"I busied myself for some time in fetching water from the cistern for the wounded. Afterwards I wandered upstairs, meeting some of the first ladies of Sulaco, paler than I had ever seen them before, with bandages over their arms. Not all of them had fled to the ships. A good many had taken refuge for the day in the Casa Gould. On the landing a girl, with her hair half down, was kneeling against the wall under the niche where stands a Madonna in blue robes and a gilt crown on her head. I think it was the eldest Miss Lopez; I couldn't see her face, but I remember looking at the high French heel of her little shoe. She did not make a sound, she did not stir, she was not sobbing; she remained there, perfectly still, all black against the white wall, a silent figure of passionate piety. I am sure she was no more frightened than the other white-faced ladies I met carrying bandages. One was sitting on the top step tearing a piece of linen hastily

into strips — the young wife of an elderly man of fortune here. She interrupted herself to wave her hand to my bow, as though she were in her carriage on the Alameda. The women of our country are worth looking at during a revolution. The rouge and pearl powder fall off, together with that passive attitude towards the outer world which education, tradition, custom impose upon them from the earliest infancy. I thought of your face, which from your infancy had the stamp of intelligence instead of that patient and resigned cast which appears when some political commotion tears down the veil of cosmetics and usage.

“In the great sala upstairs a sort of Junta of Notables was sitting, the remnant of the vanished Provincial Assembly. Don Juste Lopez had had half his beard singed off at the muzzle of a trabuco loaded with slugs, of which every one missed him, providentially. And as he turned his head from side to side it was exactly as if there had been two men inside his frock-coat, one nobly whiskered and solemn, the other untidy and scared.

“They raised a cry of ‘Decoud! Don Martin!’ at my entrance. I asked them, ‘What are you deliberating upon, gentlemen?’ There did not seem to be any president, though Don Jose Avellanos sat at the head of the table. They all answered together, ‘On the preservation of life and property.’ ‘Till the new officials arrive,’ Don Juste explained to me, with the solemn side of his face offered to my view. It was as if a stream of water had been poured upon my glowing idea of a new State. There was a hissing sound in my ears, and the room grew dim, as if suddenly filled with vapour.

“I walked up to the table blindly, as though I had been drunk. ‘You are deliberating upon surrender,’ I said. They all sat still, with their noses over the sheet of paper each had before him, God only knows why. Only Don Jose hid his face in his hands, muttering, ‘Never, never!’ But as I looked at him, it seemed to me that I could have blown him away with my breath, he looked so frail, so weak, so worn out. Whatever happens, he will not survive. The deception is too great for a man of his age; and hasn’t he seen the sheets of ‘Fifty Years of Misrule,’ which we have begun printing on the presses of the Porvenir, littering the Plaza, floating in the gutters, fired out as wads for trabucos loaded with handfuls of type, blown in the wind, trampled in the mud? I have seen pages floating upon the very waters of the harbour. It would be unreasonable to expect him to survive. It would be cruel.

“‘Do you know,’ I cried, ‘what surrender means to you, to your women, to your children, to your property?’

“I declaimed for five minutes without drawing breath, it seems to me, harping on our best chances, on the ferocity of Montero, whom I made out to be as great a beast as I have no doubt he would like to be if he had intelligence enough to conceive a systematic reign of terror. And then for another five minutes or more I poured out an impassioned appeal to their courage and manliness, with all the passion of my love for Antonia. For if ever man spoke well, it would be from a personal feeling, denouncing an enemy, defending himself, or pleading for what really may be dearer than life. My dear girl, I absolutely thundered at them. It seemed as if my voice would burst the walls asunder, and when I stopped I saw all their scared eyes looking at me dubiously. And that was all the effect I had produced! Only Don Jose’s head had sunk lower and lower on his breast. I bent my ear to his withered lips, and made out his whisper, something like, ‘In God’s name, then, Martin, my son!’ I don’t know exactly. There was the name of God in it, I am certain. It seems to me I have caught his last breath — the breath of his departing soul on his lips.

“He lives yet, it is true. I have seen him since; but it was only a senile body, lying on its back, covered to the chin, with open eyes, and so still that you might have said it was breathing no longer. I left him thus, with Antonia kneeling by the side of the bed, just before I came to this Italian’s posada, where the ubiquitous death is also waiting. But I know that Don Jose has really died there, in the Casa Gould, with that whisper urging me to attempt what no doubt his soul, wrapped up in the sanctity of diplomatic treaties and solemn declarations, must have abhorred. I had exclaimed very loud, ‘There is never any God in a country where men will not help themselves.’

“Meanwhile, Don Juste had begun a pondered oration whose solemn effect was spoiled by the ridiculous disaster to his beard. I did not wait to make it out. He seemed to argue that Montero’s (he called him The General) intentions were probably not evil, though, he went on, ‘that distinguished man’ (only a week ago we used to call him a gran’ bestia) ‘was perhaps mistaken as to the true means.’ As you may imagine, I didn’t stay to hear the rest. I know the intentions of Montero’s brother, Pedrito, the guerrillero, whom I exposed in Paris, some years ago, in a cafe frequented by South American students, where he tried to pass himself off for a Secretary of

Legation. He used to come in and talk for hours, twisting his felt hat in his hairy paws, and his ambition seemed to become a sort of Duc de Morny to a sort of Napoleon. Already, then, he used to talk of his brother in inflated terms. He seemed fairly safe from being found out, because the students, all of the Blanco families, did not, as you may imagine, frequent the Legation. It was only Decoud, a man without faith and principles, as they used to say, that went in there sometimes for the sake of the fun, as it were to an assembly of trained monkeys. I know his intentions. I have seen him change the plates at table. Whoever is allowed to live on in terror, I must die the death.

“No, I didn’t stay to the end to hear Don Juste Lopez trying to persuade himself in a grave oration of the clemency and justice, and honesty, and purity of the brothers Montero. I went out abruptly to seek Antonia. I saw her in the gallery. As I opened the door, she extended to me her clasped hands.

“‘What are they doing in there?’ she asked.

“‘Talking,’ I said, with my eyes looking into hers.

“‘Yes, yes, but — ’

“‘Empty speeches,’ I interrupted her. ‘Hiding their fears behind imbecile hopes. They are all great Parliamentarians there — on the English model, as you know.’ I was so furious that I could hardly speak. She made a gesture of despair.

“Through the door I held a little ajar behind me, we heard Dun Juste’s measured mouthing monotone go on from phrase to phrase, like a sort of awful and solemn madness.

“‘After all, the Democratic aspirations have, perhaps, their legitimacy. The ways of human progress are inscrutable, and if the fate of the country is in the hand of Montero, we ought — ’

“I crashed the door to on that; it was enough; it was too much. There was never a beautiful face expressing more horror and despair than the face of Antonia. I couldn’t bear it; I seized her wrists.

“‘Have they killed my father in there?’ she asked.

“Her eyes blazed with indignation, but as I looked on, fascinated, the light in them went out.

“‘It is a surrender,’ I said. And I remember I was shaking her wrists I held apart in my hands. ‘But it’s more than talk. Your father told me to go on in God’s name.’

“My dear girl, there is that in Antonia which would make me believe in the feasibility of anything. One look at her face is enough to set my brain on fire. And yet I love her as any other man would — with the heart, and with that alone. She is more to me than his Church to Father Corbelan (the Grand Vicar disappeared last night from the town; perhaps gone to join the band of Hernandez). She is more to me than his precious mine to that sentimental Englishman. I won’t speak of his wife. She may have been sentimental once. The San Tome mine stands now between those two people. ‘Your father himself, Antonia,’ I repeated; ‘your father, do you understand? has told me to go on.’

“She averted her face, and in a pained voice —

“‘He has?’ she cried. ‘Then, indeed, I fear he will never speak again.’

“She freed her wrists from my clutch and began to cry in her handkerchief. I disregarded her sorrow; I would rather see her miserable than not see her at all, never any more; for whether I escaped or stayed to die, there was for us no coming together, no future. And that being so, I had no pity to waste upon the passing moments of her sorrow. I sent her off in tears to fetch Dona Emilia and Don Carlos, too. Their sentiment was necessary to the very life of my plan; the sentimentalism of the people that will never do anything for the sake of their passionate desire, unless it comes to them clothed in the fair robes of an idea.

“Late at night we formed a small junta of four — the two women, Don Carlos, and myself — in Mrs. Gould’s blue-and-white boudoir.

“El Rey de Sulaco thinks himself, no doubt, a very honest man. And so he is, if one could look behind his taciturnity. Perhaps he thinks that this alone makes his honesty unstained. Those Englishmen live on illusions which somehow or other help them to get a firm hold of the substance. When he speaks it is by a rare ‘yes’ or ‘no’ that seems as impersonal as the words of an oracle. But he could not impose on me by his dumb reserve. I knew what he had in his head; he has his mine in his head; and his wife had nothing in her head but his precious person, which he has bound up with the Gould Concession and tied up to that little woman’s neck. No matter. The thing was to make him present the affair to Holroyd (the Steel and Silver King) in such a manner as to secure his financial support. At that time last night, just twenty-four hours ago, we thought the silver of the mine safe in the Custom House vaults till the north-bound steamer came to take it away. And as long as the treasure flowed north, without a break, that utter

sentimentalist, Holroyd, would not drop his idea of introducing, not only justice, industry, peace, to the benighted continents, but also that pet dream of his of a purer form of Christianity. Later on, the principal European really in Sulaco, the engineer-in-chief of the railway, came riding up the Calle, from the harbour, and was admitted to our conclave. Meantime, the Junta of the Notables in the great sala was still deliberating; only, one of them had run out in the corredor to ask the servant whether something to eat couldn't be sent in. The first words the engineer-in-chief said as he came into the boudoir were, 'What is your house, dear Mrs. Gould? A war hospital below, and apparently a restaurant above. I saw them carrying trays full of good things into the sala.'

"And here, in this boudoir,' I said, 'you behold the inner cabinet of the Occidental Republic that is to be.'

"He was so preoccupied that he didn't smile at that, he didn't even look surprised.

"He told us that he was attending to the general dispositions for the defence of the railway property at the railway yards when he was sent for to go into the railway telegraph office. The engineer of the railhead, at the foot of the mountains, wanted to talk to him from his end of the wire. There was nobody in the office but himself and the operator of the railway telegraph, who read off the clicks aloud as the tape coiled its length upon the floor. And the purport of that talk, clicked nervously from a wooden shed in the depths of the forests, had informed the chief that President Ribiera had been, or was being, pursued. This was news, indeed, to all of us in Sulaco. Ribiera himself, when rescued, revived, and soothed by us, had been inclined to think that he had not been pursued.

"Ribiera had yielded to the urgent solicitations of his friends, and had left the headquarters of his discomfited army alone, under the guidance of Bonifacio, the muleteer, who had been willing to take the responsibility with the risk. He had departed at daybreak of the third day. His remaining forces had melted away during the night. Bonifacio and he rode hard on horses towards the Cordillera; then they obtained mules, entered the passes, and crossed the Paramo of Ivie just before a freezing blast swept over that stony plateau, burying in a drift of snow the little shelter-hut of stones in which they had spent the night. Afterwards poor Ribiera had many adventures, got separated from his guide, lost his mount, struggled down to the Campo on foot, and if he had not thrown himself on the mercy of a

ranchero would have perished a long way from Sulaco. That man, who, as a matter of fact, recognized him at once, let him have a fresh mule, which the fugitive, heavy and unskilful, had ridden to death. And it was true he had been pursued by a party commanded by no less a person than Pedro Montero, the brother of the general. The cold wind of the Paramo luckily caught the pursuers on the top of the pass. Some few men, and all the animals, perished in the icy blast. The stragglers died, but the main body kept on. They found poor Bonifacio lying half-dead at the foot of a snow slope, and bayoneted him promptly in the true Civil War style. They would have had Ribiera, too, if they had not, for some reason or other, turned off the track of the old Camino Real, only to lose their way in the forests at the foot of the lower slopes. And there they were at last, having stumbled in unexpectedly upon the construction camp. The engineer at the railhead told his chief by wire that he had Pedro Montero absolutely there, in the very office, listening to the clicks. He was going to take possession of Sulaco in the name of the Democracy. He was very overbearing. His men slaughtered some of the Railway Company's cattle without asking leave, and went to work broiling the meat on the embers. Pedrito made many pointed inquiries as to the silver mine, and what had become of the product of the last six months' working. He had said peremptorily, 'Ask your chief up there by wire, he ought to know; tell him that Don Pedro Montero, Chief of the Campo and Minister of the Interior of the new Government, desires to be correctly informed.'

"He had his feet wrapped up in blood-stained rags, a lean, haggard face, ragged beard and hair, and had walked in limping, with a crooked branch of a tree for a staff. His followers were perhaps in a worse plight, but apparently they had not thrown away their arms, and, at any rate, not all their ammunition. Their lean faces filled the door and the windows of the telegraph hut. As it was at the same time the bedroom of the engineer-in-charge there, Montero had thrown himself on his clean blankets and lay there shivering and dictating requisitions to be transmitted by wire to Sulaco. He demanded a train of cars to be sent down at once to transport his men up.

"'To this I answered from my end,' the engineer-in-chief related to us, 'that I dared not risk the rolling-stock in the interior, as there had been attempts to wreck trains all along the line several times. I did that for your sake, Gould,' said the chief engineer. 'The answer to this was, in the words

of my subordinate, "The filthy brute on my bed said, 'Suppose I were to have you shot?'" To which my subordinate, who, it appears, was himself operating, remarked that it would not bring the cars up. Upon that, the other, yawning, said, "Never mind, there is no lack of horses on the Campo." And, turning over, went to sleep on Harris's bed.'

"This is why, my dear girl, I am a fugitive to-night. The last wire from railhead says that Pedro Montero and his men left at daybreak, after feeding on asado beef all night. They took all the horses; they will find more on the road; they'll be here in less than thirty hours, and thus Sulaco is no place either for me or the great store of silver belonging to the Gould Concession.

"But that is not the worst. The garrison of Esmeralda has gone over to the victorious party. We have heard this by means of the telegraphist of the Cable Company, who came to the Casa Gould in the early morning with the news. In fact, it was so early that the day had not yet quite broken over Sulaco. His colleague in Esmeralda had called him up to say that the garrison, after shooting some of their officers, had taken possession of a Government steamer laid up in the harbour. It is really a heavy blow for me. I thought I could depend on every man in this province. It was a mistake. It was a Monterist Revolution in Esmeralda, just such as was attempted in Sulaco, only that that one came off. The telegraphist was signalling to Bernhardt all the time, and his last transmitted words were, 'They are bursting in the door, and taking possession of the cable office. You are cut off. Can do no more.'

"But, as a matter of fact, he managed somehow to escape the vigilance of his captors, who had tried to stop the communication with the outer world. He did manage it. How it was done I don't know, but a few hours afterwards he called up Sulaco again, and what he said was, 'The insurgent army has taken possession of the Government transport in the bay and are filling her with troops, with the intention of going round the coast to Sulaco. Therefore look out for yourselves. They will be ready to start in a few hours, and may be upon you before daybreak.'

"This is all he could say. They drove him away from his instrument this time for good, because Bernhardt has been calling up Esmeralda ever since without getting an answer."

After setting these words down in the pocket-book which he was filling up for the benefit of his sister, Decoud lifted his head to listen. But there were no sounds, neither in the room nor in the house, except the drip of the



water from the filter into the vast earthenware jar under the wooden stand. And outside the house there was a great silence. Decoud lowered his head again over the pocket-book.

“I am not running away, you understand,” he wrote on. “I am simply going away with that great treasure of silver which must be saved at all costs. Pedro Montero from the Campo and the revolted garrison of Esmeralda from the sea are converging upon it. That it is there lying ready for them is only an accident. The real objective is the San Tome mine itself, as you may well imagine; otherwise the Occidental Province would have been, no doubt, left alone for many weeks, to be gathered at leisure into the arms of the victorious party. Don Carlos Gould will have enough to do to save his mine, with its organization and its people; this ‘Imperium in Imperio,’ this wealth-producing thing, to which his sentimentalism attaches a strange idea of justice. He holds to it as some men hold to the idea of love or revenge. Unless I am much mistaken in the man, it must remain inviolate or perish by an act of his will alone. A passion has crept into his cold and idealistic life. A passion which I can only comprehend intellectually. A passion that is not like the passions we know, we men of another blood. But it is as dangerous as any of ours.

“His wife has understood it, too. That is why she is such a good ally of mine. She seizes upon all my suggestions with a sure instinct that in the end they make for the safety of the Gould Concession. And he defers to her because he trusts her perhaps, but I fancy rather as if he wished to make up for some subtle wrong, for that sentimental unfaithfulness which surrenders her happiness, her life, to the seduction of an idea. The little woman has discovered that he lives for the mine rather than for her. But let them be. To each his fate, shaped by passion or sentiment. The principal thing is that she has backed up my advice to get the silver out of the town, out of the country, at once, at any cost, at any risk. Don Carlos’ mission is to preserve unstained the fair fame of his mine; Mrs. Gould’s mission is to save him from the effects of that cold and overmastering passion, which she dreads more than if it were an infatuation for another woman. Nostromo’s mission is to save the silver. The plan is to load it into the largest of the Company’s lighters, and send it across the gulf to a small port out of Costaguana territory just on the other side the Azuera, where the first northbound steamer will get orders to pick it up. The waters here are calm. We shall slip away into the darkness of the gulf before the Esmeralda rebels arrive; and

by the time the day breaks over the ocean we shall be out of sight, invisible, hidden by Azuera, which itself looks from the Sulaco shore like a faint blue cloud on the horizon.

“The incorruptible Capataz de Cargadores is the man for that work; and I, the man with a passion, but without a mission, I go with him to return — to play my part in the farce to the end, and, if successful, to receive my reward, which no one but Antonia can give me.

“I shall not see her again now before I depart. I left her, as I have said, by Don Jose’s bedside. The street was dark, the houses shut up, and I walked out of the town in the night. Not a single street-lamp had been lit for two days, and the archway of the gate was only a mass of darkness in the vague form of a tower, in which I heard low, dismal groans, that seemed to answer the murmurs of a man’s voice.

“I recognized something impassive and careless in its tone, characteristic of that Genoese sailor who, like me, has come casually here to be drawn into the events for which his scepticism as well as mine seems to entertain a sort of passive contempt. The only thing he seems to care for, as far as I have been able to discover, is to be well spoken of. An ambition fit for noble souls, but also a profitable one for an exceptionally intelligent scoundrel. Yes. His very words, ‘To be well spoken of. Si, senor.’ He does not seem to make any difference between speaking and thinking. Is it sheer naiveness or the practical point of view, I wonder? Exceptional individualities always interest me, because they are true to the general formula expressing the moral state of humanity.

“He joined me on the harbour road after I had passed them under the dark archway without stopping. It was a woman in trouble he had been talking to. Through discretion I kept silent while he walked by my side. After a time he began to talk himself. It was not what I expected. It was only an old woman, an old lace-maker, in search of her son, one of the street-sweepers employed by the municipality. Friends had come the day before at daybreak to the door of their hovel calling him out. He had gone with them, and she had not seen him since; so she had left the food she had been preparing half-cooked on the extinct embers and had crawled out as far as the harbour, where she had heard that some town mozos had been killed on the morning of the riot. One of the Cargadores guarding the Custom House had brought out a lantern, and had helped her to look at the few dead left lying about there. Now she was creeping back, having failed in her search. So she sat

down on the stone seat under the arch, moaning, because she was very tired. The Capataz had questioned her, and after hearing her broken and groaning tale had advised her to go and look amongst the wounded in the patio of the Casa Gould. He had also given her a quarter dollar, he mentioned carelessly.”

““Why did you do that?’ I asked. ‘Do you know her?’

““No, senor. I don’t suppose I have ever seen her before. How should I? She has not probably been out in the streets for years. She is one of those old women that you find in this country at the back of huts, crouching over fireplaces, with a stick on the ground by their side, and almost too feeble to drive away the stray dogs from their cooking-pots. Caramba! I could tell by her voice that death had forgotten her. But, old or young, they like money, and will speak well of the man who gives it to them.’ He laughed a little. ‘Senor, you should have felt the clutch of her paw as I put the piece in her palm.’ He paused. ‘My last, too,’ he added.

“I made no comment. He’s known for his liberality and his bad luck at the game of monte, which keeps him as poor as when he first came here.

““I suppose, Don Martin,’ he began, in a thoughtful, speculative tone, ‘that the Senor Administrador of San Tome will reward me some day if I save his silver?’

“I said that it could not be otherwise, surely. He walked on, muttering to himself. ‘Si, si, without doubt, without doubt; and, look you, Senor Martin, what it is to be well spoken of! There is not another man that could have been even thought of for such a thing. I shall get something great for it some day. And let it come soon,’ he mumbled. ‘Time passes in this country as quick as anywhere else.’

“This, soeur cherie, is my companion in the great escape for the sake of the great cause. He is more naive than shrewd, more masterful than crafty, more generous with his personality than the people who make use of him are with their money. At least, that is what he thinks himself with more pride than sentiment. I am glad I have made friends with him. As a companion he acquires more importance than he ever had as a sort of minor genius in his way — as an original Italian sailor whom I allowed to come in in the small hours and talk familiarly to the editor of the Porvenir while the paper was going through the press. And it is curious to have met a man for whom the value of life seems to consist in personal prestige.

“I am waiting for him here now. On arriving at the posada kept by Viola we found the children alone down below, and the old Genoese shouted to his countryman to go and fetch the doctor. Otherwise we would have gone on to the wharf, where it appears Captain Mitchell with some volunteer Europeans and a few picked Cargadores are loading the lighter with the silver that must be saved from Montero’s clutches in order to be used for Montero’s defeat. Nostromo galloped furiously back towards the town. He has been long gone already. This delay gives me time to talk to you. By the time this pocket-book reaches your hands much will have happened. But now it is a pause under the hovering wing of death in this silent house buried in the black night, with this dying woman, the two children crouching without a sound, and that old man whom I can hear through the thickness of the wall passing up and down with a light rubbing noise no louder than a mouse. And I, the only other with them, don’t really know whether to count myself with the living or with the dead. ‘Quien sabe?’ as the people here are prone to say in answer to every question. But no! feeling for you is certainly not dead, and the whole thing, the house, the dark night, the silent children in this dim room, my very presence here — all this is life, must be life, since it is so much like a dream.”

With the writing of the last line there came upon Decoud a moment of sudden and complete oblivion. He swayed over the table as if struck by a bullet. The next moment he sat up, confused, with the idea that he had heard his pencil roll on the floor. The low door of the cafe, wide open, was filled with the glare of a torch in which was visible half of a horse, switching its tail against the leg of a rider with a long iron spur strapped to the naked heel. The two girls were gone, and Nostromo, standing in the middle of the room, looked at him from under the round brim of the sombrero low down over his brow.

“I have brought that sour-faced English doctor in Senora Gould’s carriage,” said Nostromo. “I doubt if, with all his wisdom, he can save the Padrona this time. They have sent for the children. A bad sign that.”

He sat down on the end of a bench. “She wants to give them her blessing, I suppose.”

Dazedly Decoud observed that he must have fallen sound asleep, and Nostromo said, with a vague smile, that he had looked in at the window and had seen him lying still across the table with his head on his arms. The English senora had also come in the carriage, and went upstairs at once with

the doctor. She had told him not to wake up Don Martin yet; but when they sent for the children he had come into the cafe.

The half of the horse with its half of the rider swung round outside the door; the torch of tow and resin in the iron basket which was carried on a stick at the saddle-bow flared right into the room for a moment, and Mrs. Gould entered hastily with a very white, tired face. The hood of her dark, blue cloak had fallen back. Both men rose.

"Teresa wants to see you, Nostromo," she said. The Capataz did not move. Decoud, with his back to the table, began to button up his coat.

"The silver, Mrs. Gould, the silver," he murmured in English. "Don't forget that the Esmeralda garrison have got a steamer. They may appear at any moment at the harbour entrance."

"The doctor says there is no hope," Mrs. Gould spoke rapidly, also in English. "I shall take you down to the wharf in my carriage and then come back to fetch away the girls." She changed swiftly into Spanish to address Nostromo. "Why are you wasting time? Old Giorgio's wife wishes to see you."

"I am going to her, senora," muttered the Capataz. Dr. Monygham now showed himself, bringing back the children. To Mrs. Gould's inquiring glance he only shook his head and went outside at once, followed by Nostromo.

The horse of the torch-bearer, motionless, hung his head low, and the rider had dropped the reins to light a cigarette. The glare of the torch played on the front of the house crossed by the big black letters of its inscription in which only the word Italia was lighted fully. The patch of wavering glare reached as far as Mrs. Gould's carriage waiting on the road, with the yellow-faced, portly Ignacio apparently dozing on the box. By his side Basilio, dark and skinny, held a Winchester carbine in front of him, with both hands, and peered fearfully into the darkness. Nostromo touched lightly the doctor's shoulder.

"Is she really dying, senior doctor?"

"Yes," said the doctor, with a strange twitch of his scarred cheek. "And why she wants to see you I cannot imagine."

"She has been like that before," suggested Nostromo, looking away.

"Well, Capataz, I can assure you she will never be like that again," snarled Dr. Monygham. "You may go to her or stay away. There is very little to be got from talking to the dying. But she told Dona Emilia in my

hearing that she has been like a mother to you ever since you first set foot ashore here.”

“Si! And she never had a good word to say for me to anybody. It is more as if she could not forgive me for being alive, and such a man, too, as she would have liked her son to be.”

“Maybe!” exclaimed a mournful deep voice near them. “Women have their own ways of tormenting themselves.” Giorgio Viola had come out of the house. He threw a heavy black shadow in the torchlight, and the glare fell on his big face, on the great bushy head of white hair. He motioned the Capataz indoors with his extended arm.

Dr. Monygham, after busying himself with a little medicament box of polished wood on the seat of the landau, turned to old Giorgio and thrust into his big, trembling hand one of the glass-stoppered bottles out of the case.

“Give her a spoonful of this now and then, in water,” he said. “It will make her easier.”

“And there is nothing more for her?” asked the old man, patiently.

“No. Not on earth,” said the doctor, with his back to him, clicking the lock of the medicine case.

Nostromo slowly crossed the large kitchen, all dark but for the glow of a heap of charcoal under the heavy mantel of the cooking-range, where water was boiling in an iron pot with a loud bubbling sound. Between the two walls of a narrow staircase a bright light streamed from the sick-room above; and the magnificent Capataz de Cargadores stepping noiselessly in soft leather sandals, bushy whiskered, his muscular neck and bronzed chest bare in the open check shirt, resembled a Mediterranean sailor just come ashore from some wine or fruit-laden felucca. At the top he paused, broad shouldered, narrow hipped and supple, looking at the large bed, like a white couch of state, with a profusion of snowy linen, amongst which the Padrona sat unpropped and bowed, her handsome, black-browed face bent over her chest. A mass of raven hair with only a few white threads in it covered her shoulders; one thick strand fallen forward half veiled her cheek. Perfectly motionless in that pose, expressing physical anxiety and unrest, she turned her eyes alone towards Nostromo.

The Capataz had a red sash wound many times round his waist, and a heavy silver ring on the forefinger of the hand he raised to give a twist to his moustache.

“Their revolutions, their revolutions,” gasped Senora Teresa. “Look, Gian’ Battista, it has killed me at last!”

Nostromo said nothing, and the sick woman with an upward glance insisted. “Look, this one has killed me, while you were away fighting for what did not concern you, foolish man.”

“Why talk like this?” mumbled the Capataz between his teeth. “Will you never believe in my good sense? It concerns me to keep on being what I am: every day alike.”

“You never change, indeed,” she said, bitterly. “Always thinking of yourself and taking your pay out in fine words from those who care nothing for you.”

There was between them an intimacy of antagonism as close in its way as the intimacy of accord and affection. He had not walked along the way of Teresa’s expectations. It was she who had encouraged him to leave his ship, in the hope of securing a friend and defender for the girls. The wife of old Giorgio was aware of her precarious health, and was haunted by the fear of her aged husband’s loneliness and the unprotected state of the children. She had wanted to annex that apparently quiet and steady young man, affectionate and pliable, an orphan from his tenderest age, as he had told her, with no ties in Italy except an uncle, owner and master of a felucca, from whose ill-usage he had run away before he was fourteen. He had seemed to her courageous, a hard worker, determined to make his way in the world. From gratitude and the ties of habit he would become like a son to herself and Giorgio; and then, who knows, when Linda had grown up. . . . Ten years’ difference between husband and wife was not so much. Her own great man was nearly twenty years older than herself. Gian’ Battista was an attractive young fellow, besides; attractive to men, women, and children, just by that profound quietness of personality which, like a serene twilight, rendered more seductive the promise of his vigorous form and the resolution of his conduct.

Old Giorgio, in profound ignorance of his wife’s views and hopes, had a great regard for his young countryman. “A man ought not to be tame,” he used to tell her, quoting the Spanish proverb in defence of the splendid Capataz. She was growing jealous of his success. He was escaping from her, she feared. She was practical, and he seemed to her to be an absurd spendthrift of these qualities which made him so valuable. He got too little for them. He scattered them with both hands amongst too many people, she

thought. He laid no money by. She railed at his poverty, his exploits, his adventures, his loves and his reputation; but in her heart she had never given him up, as though, indeed, he had been her son.

Even now, ill as she was, ill enough to feel the chill, black breath of the approaching end, she had wished to see him. It was like putting out her benumbed hand to regain her hold. But she had presumed too much on her strength. She could not command her thoughts; they had become dim, like her vision. The words faltered on her lips, and only the paramount anxiety and desire of her life seemed to be too strong for death.

The Capataz said, "I have heard these things many times. You are unjust, but it does not hurt me. Only now you do not seem to have much strength to talk, and I have but little time to listen. I am engaged in a work of very great moment."

She made an effort to ask him whether it was true that he had found time to go and fetch a doctor for her. Nostromo nodded affirmatively.

She was pleased: it relieved her sufferings to know that the man had condescended to do so much for those who really wanted his help. It was a proof of his friendship. Her voice became stronger.

"I want a priest more than a doctor," she said, pathetically. She did not move her head; only her eyes ran into the corners to watch the Capataz standing by the side of her bed. "Would you go to fetch a priest for me now? Think! A dying woman asks you!"

Nostromo shook his head resolutely. He did not believe in priests in their sacerdotal character. A doctor was an efficacious person; but a priest, as priest, was nothing, incapable of doing either good or harm. Nostromo did not even dislike the sight of them as old Giorgio did. The utter uselessness of the errand was what struck him most.

"Padrona," he said, "you have been like this before, and got better after a few days. I have given you already the very last moments I can spare. Ask Senora Gould to send you one."

He was feeling uneasy at the impiety of this refusal. The Padrona believed in priests, and confessed herself to them. But all women did that. It could not be of much consequence. And yet his heart felt oppressed for a moment — at the thought what absolution would mean to her if she believed in it only ever so little. No matter. It was quite true that he had given her already the very last moment he could spare.

"You refuse to go?" she gasped. "Ah! you are always yourself, indeed."



“Listen to reason, Padrona,” he said. “I am needed to save the silver of the mine. Do you hear? A greater treasure than the one which they say is guarded by ghosts and devils on Azuera. It is true. I am resolved to make this the most desperate affair I was ever engaged on in my whole life.”

She felt a despairing indignation. The supreme test had failed. Standing above her, Nostromo did not see the distorted features of her face, distorted by a paroxysm of pain and anger. Only she began to tremble all over. Her bowed head shook. The broad shoulders quivered.

“Then God, perhaps, will have mercy upon me! But do you look to it, man, that you get something for yourself out of it, besides the remorse that shall overtake you some day.”

She laughed feebly. “Get riches at least for once, you indispensable, admired Gian’ Battista, to whom the peace of a dying woman is less than the praise of people who have given you a silly name — and nothing besides — in exchange for your soul and body.”

The Capataz de Cargadores swore to himself under his breath.

“Leave my soul alone, Padrona, and I shall know how to take care of my body. Where is the harm of people having need of me? What are you envying me that I have robbed you and the children of? Those very people you are throwing in my teeth have done more for old Giorgio than they ever thought of doing for me.”

He struck his breast with his open palm; his voice had remained low though he had spoken in a forcible tone. He twisted his moustaches one after another, and his eyes wandered a little about the room.

“Is it my fault that I am the only man for their purposes? What angry nonsense are you talking, mother? Would you rather have me timid and foolish, selling water-melons on the market-place or rowing a boat for passengers along the harbour, like a soft Neapolitan without courage or reputation? Would you have a young man live like a monk? I do not believe it. Would you want a monk for your eldest girl? Let her grow. What are you afraid of? You have been angry with me for everything I did for years; ever since you first spoke to me, in secret from old Giorgio, about your Linda. Husband to one and brother to the other, did you say? Well, why not! I like the little ones, and a man must marry some time. But ever since that time you have been making little of me to everyone. Why? Did you think you could put a collar and chain on me as if I were one of the watch-dogs they keep over there in the railway yards? Look here, Padrona, I am the same

man who came ashore one evening and sat down in the thatched ranche you lived in at that time on the other side of the town and told you all about himself. You were not unjust to me then. What has happened since? I am no longer an insignificant youth. A good name, Giorgio says, is a treasure, Padrona."

"They have turned your head with their praises," gasped the sick woman. "They have been paying you with words. Your folly shall betray you into poverty, misery, starvation. The very leperos shall laugh at you — the great Capataz."

Nostromo stood for a time as if struck dumb. She never looked at him. A self-confident, mirthless smile passed quickly from his lips, and then he backed away. His disregarded figure sank down beyond the doorway. He descended the stairs backwards, with the usual sense of having been somehow baffled by this woman's disparagement of this reputation he had obtained and desired to keep.

Downstairs in the big kitchen a candle was burning, surrounded by the shadows of the walls, of the ceiling, but no ruddy glare filled the open square of the outer door. The carriage with Mrs. Gould and Don Martin, preceded by the horseman bearing the torch, had gone on to the jetty. Dr. Monygham, who had remained, sat on the corner of a hard wood table near the candlestick, his seamed, shaven face inclined sideways, his arms crossed on his breast, his lips pursed up, and his prominent eyes glaring stonily upon the floor of black earth. Near the overhanging mantel of the fireplace, where the pot of water was still boiling violently, old Giorgio held his chin in his hand, one foot advanced, as if arrested by a sudden thought.

"Adios, viejo," said Nostromo, feeling the handle of his revolver in the belt and loosening his knife in its sheath. He picked up a blue poncho lined with red from the table, and put it over his head. "Adios, look after the things in my sleeping-room, and if you hear from me no more, give up the box to Paquita. There is not much of value there, except my new serape from Mexico, and a few silver buttons on my best jacket. No matter! The things will look well enough on the next lover she gets, and the man need not be afraid I shall linger on earth after I am dead, like those Gringos that haunt the Azuera."

Dr. Monygham twisted his lips into a bitter smile. After old Giorgio, with an almost imperceptible nod and without a word, had gone up the narrow stairs, he said —

“Why, Capataz! I thought you could never fail in anything.”

Nostromo, glancing contemptuously at the doctor, lingered in the doorway rolling a cigarette, then struck a match, and, after lighting it, held the burning piece of wood above his head till the flame nearly touched his fingers.

“No wind!” he muttered to himself. “Look here, senor — do you know the nature of my undertaking?”

Dr. Monygham nodded sourly.

“It is as if I were taking up a curse upon me, senor doctor. A man with a treasure on this coast will have every knife raised against him in every place upon the shore. You see that, senor doctor? I shall float along with a spell upon my life till I meet somewhere the north-bound steamer of the Company, and then indeed they will talk about the Capataz of the Sulaco Cargadores from one end of America to another.”

Dr. Monygham laughed his short, throaty laugh. Nostromo turned round in the doorway.

“But if your worship can find any other man ready and fit for such business I will stand back. I am not exactly tired of my life, though I am so poor that I can carry all I have with myself on my horse’s back.”

“You gamble too much, and never say ‘no’ to a pretty face, Capataz,” said Dr. Monygham, with sly simplicity. “That’s not the way to make a fortune. But nobody that I know ever suspected you of being poor. I hope you have made a good bargain in case you come back safe from this adventure.”

“What bargain would your worship have made?” asked Nostromo, blowing the smoke out of his lips through the doorway.

Dr. Monygham listened up the staircase for a moment before he answered, with another of his short, abrupt laughs —

“Illustrious Capataz, for taking the curse of death upon my back, as you call it, nothing else but the whole treasure would do.”

Nostromo vanished out of the doorway with a grunt of discontent at this jeering answer. Dr. Monygham heard him gallop away. Nostromo rode furiously in the dark. There were lights in the buildings of the O.S.N. Company near the wharf, but before he got there he met the Gould carriage. The horseman preceded it with the torch, whose light showed the white mules trotting, the portly Ignacio driving, and Basilio with the carbine on the box. From the dark body of the landau Mrs. Gould’s voice cried, “They

are waiting for you, Capataz!" She was returning, chilly and excited, with Decoud's pocket-book still held in her hand. He had confided it to her to send to his sister. "Perhaps my last words to her," he had said, pressing Mrs. Gould's hand.

The Capataz never checked his speed. At the head of the wharf vague figures with rifles leapt to the head of his horse; others closed upon him — cargadores of the company posted by Captain Mitchell on the watch. At a word from him they fell back with subservient murmurs, recognizing his voice. At the other end of the jetty, near a cargo crane, in a dark group with glowing cigars, his name was pronounced in a tone of relief. Most of the Europeans in Sulaco were there, rallied round Charles Gould, as if the silver of the mine had been the emblem of a common cause, the symbol of the supreme importance of material interests. They had loaded it into the lighter with their own hands. Nostromo recognized Don Carlos Gould, a thin, tall shape standing a little apart and silent, to whom another tall shape, the engineer-in-chief, said aloud, "If it must be lost, it is a million times better that it should go to the bottom of the sea."

Martin Decoud called out from the lighter, "Au revoir, messieurs, till we clasp hands again over the new-born Occidental Republic." Only a subdued murmur responded to his clear, ringing tones; and then it seemed to him that the wharf was floating away into the night; but it was Nostromo, who was already pushing against a pile with one of the heavy sweeps. Decoud did not move; the effect was that of being launched into space. After a splash or two there was not a sound but the thud of Nostromo's feet leaping about the boat. He hoisted the big sail; a breath of wind fanned Decoud's cheek. Everything had vanished but the light of the lantern Captain Mitchell had hoisted upon the post at the end of the jetty to guide Nostromo out of the harbour.

The two men, unable to see each other, kept silent till the lighter, slipping before the fitful breeze, passed out between almost invisible headlands into the still deeper darkness of the gulf. For a time the lantern on the jetty shone after them. The wind failed, then fanned up again, but so faintly that the big, half-decked boat slipped along with no more noise than if she had been suspended in the air.

"We are out in the gulf now," said the calm voice of Nostromo. A moment after he added, "Senor Mitchell has lowered the light."

"Yes," said Decoud; "nobody can find us now."

A great recrudescence of obscurity embraced the boat. The sea in the gulf was as black as the clouds above. Nostromo, after striking a couple of matches to get a glimpse of the boat-compass he had with him in the lighter, steered by the feel of the wind on his cheek.

It was a new experience for Decoud, this mysteriousness of the great waters spread out strangely smooth, as if their restlessness had been crushed by the weight of that dense night. The Placido was sleeping profoundly under its black poncho.

The main thing now for success was to get away from the coast and gain the middle of the gulf before day broke. The Isabels were somewhere at hand. "On your left as you look forward, senor," said Nostromo, suddenly. When his voice ceased, the enormous stillness, without light or sound, seemed to affect Decoud's senses like a powerful drug. He didn't even know at times whether he were asleep or awake. Like a man lost in slumber, he heard nothing, he saw nothing. Even his hand held before his face did not exist for his eyes. The change from the agitation, the passions and the dangers, from the sights and sounds of the shore, was so complete that it would have resembled death had it not been for the survival of his thoughts. In this foretaste of eternal peace they floated vivid and light, like unearthly clear dreams of earthly things that may haunt the souls freed by death from the misty atmosphere of regrets and hopes. Decoud shook himself, shuddered a bit, though the air that drifted past him was warm. He had the strangest sensation of his soul having just returned into his body from the circumambient darkness in which land, sea, sky, the mountains, and the rocks were as if they had not been.

Nostromo's voice was speaking, though he, at the tiller, was also as if he were not. "Have you been asleep, Don Martin? Caramba! If it were possible I would think that I, too, have dozed off. I have a strange notion somehow of having dreamt that there was a sound of blubbering, a sound a sorrowing man could make, somewhere near this boat. Something between a sigh and a sob."

"Strange!" muttered Decoud, stretched upon the pile of treasure boxes covered by many tarpaulins. "Could it be that there is another boat near us in the gulf? We could not see it, you know."

Nostromo laughed a little at the absurdity of the idea. They dismissed it from their minds. The solitude could almost be felt. And when the breeze ceased, the blackness seemed to weigh upon Decoud like a stone.

“This is overpowering,” he muttered. “Do we move at all, Capataz?”

“Not so fast as a crawling beetle tangled in the grass,” answered Nostromo, and his voice seemed deadened by the thick veil of obscurity that felt warm and hopeless all about them. There were long periods when he made no sound, invisible and inaudible as if he had mysteriously stepped out of the lighter.

In the featureless night Nostromo was not even certain which way the lighter headed after the wind had completely died out. He peered for the islands. There was not a hint of them to be seen, as if they had sunk to the bottom of the gulf. He threw himself down by the side of Decoud at last, and whispered into his ear that if daylight caught them near the Sulaco shore through want of wind, it would be possible to sweep the lighter behind the cliff at the high end of the Great Isabel, where she would lie concealed. Decoud was surprised at the grimness of his anxiety. To him the removal of the treasure was a political move. It was necessary for several reasons that it should not fall into the hands of Montero, but here was a man who took another view of this enterprise. The Caballeros over there did not seem to have the slightest idea of what they had given him to do. Nostromo, as if affected by the gloom around, seemed nervously resentful. Decoud was surprised. The Capataz, indifferent to those dangers that seemed obvious to his companion, allowed himself to become scornfully exasperated by the deadly nature of the trust put, as a matter of course, into his hands. It was more dangerous, Nostromo said, with a laugh and a curse, than sending a man to get the treasure that people said was guarded by devils and ghosts in the deep ravines of Azuera. “Senor,” he said, “we must catch the steamer at sea. We must keep out in the open looking for her till we have eaten and drunk all that has been put on board here. And if we miss her by some mischance, we must keep away from the land till we grow weak, and perhaps mad, and die, and drift dead, until one or another of the steamers of the Compania comes upon the boat with the two dead men who have saved the treasure. That, senor, is the only way to save it; for, don’t you see? for us to come to the land anywhere in a hundred miles along this coast with this silver in our possession is to run the naked breast against the point of a knife. This thing has been given to me like a deadly disease. If men discover it I am dead, and you, too, senor, since you would come with me. There is enough silver to make a whole province rich, let alone a seaboard pueblo inhabited by thieves and vagabonds. Senor, they would

think that heaven itself sent these riches into their hands, and would cut our throats without hesitation. I would trust no fair words from the best man around the shores of this wild gulf. Reflect that, even by giving up the treasure at the first demand, we would not be able to save our lives. Do you understand this, or must I explain?"

"No, you needn't explain," said Decoud, a little listlessly. "I can see it well enough myself, that the possession of this treasure is very much like a deadly disease for men situated as we are. But it had to be removed from Sulaco, and you were the man for the task."

"I was; but I cannot believe," said Nostromo, "that its loss would have impoverished Don Carlos Gould very much. There is more wealth in the mountain. I have heard it rolling down the shoots on quiet nights when I used to ride to Rincon to see a certain girl, after my work at the harbour was done. For years the rich rocks have been pouring down with a noise like thunder, and the miners say that there is enough at the heart of the mountain to thunder on for years and years to come. And yet, the day before yesterday, we have been fighting to save it from the mob, and to-night I am sent out with it into this darkness, where there is no wind to get away with; as if it were the last lot of silver on earth to get bread for the hungry with. Ha! ha! Well, I am going to make it the most famous and desperate affair of my life — wind or no wind. It shall be talked about when the little children are grown up and the grown men are old. Aha! the Monterists must not get hold of it, I am told, whatever happens to Nostromo the Capataz; and they shall not have it, I tell you, since it has been tied for safety round Nostromo's neck."

"I see it," murmured Decoud. He saw, indeed, that his companion had his own peculiar view of this enterprise.

Nostromo interrupted his reflections upon the way men's qualities are made use of, without any fundamental knowledge of their nature, by the proposal they should slip the long oars out and sweep the lighter in the direction of the Isabels. It wouldn't do for daylight to reveal the treasure floating within a mile or so of the harbour entrance. The denser the darkness generally, the smarter were the puffs of wind on which he had reckoned to make his way; but tonight the gulf, under its poncho of clouds, remained breathless, as if dead rather than asleep.

Don Martin's soft hands suffered cruelly, tugging at the thick handle of the enormous oar. He stuck to it manfully, setting his teeth. He, too, was in

the toils of an imaginative existence, and that strange work of pulling a lighter seemed to belong naturally to the inception of a new state, acquired an ideal meaning from his love for Antonia. For all their efforts, the heavily laden lighter hardly moved. Nostromo could be heard swearing to himself between the regular splashes of the sweeps. "We are making a crooked path," he muttered to himself. "I wish I could see the islands."

In his unskilfulness Don Martin over-exerted himself. Now and then a sort of muscular faintness would run from the tips of his aching fingers through every fibre of his body, and pass off in a flush of heat. He had fought, talked, suffered mentally and physically, exerting his mind and body for the last forty-eight hours without intermission. He had had no rest, very little food, no pause in the stress of his thoughts and his feelings. Even his love for Antonia, whence he drew his strength and his inspiration, had reached the point of tragic tension during their hurried interview by Don Jose's bedside. And now, suddenly, he was thrown out of all this into a dark gulf, whose very gloom, silence, and breathless peace added a torment to the necessity for physical exertion. He imagined the lighter sinking to the bottom with an extraordinary shudder of delight. "I am on the verge of delirium," he thought. He mastered the trembling of all his limbs, of his breast, the inward trembling of all his body exhausted of its nervous force.

"Shall we rest, Capataz?" he proposed in a careless tone. "There are many hours of night yet before us."

"True. It is but a mile or so, I suppose. Rest your arms, senor, if that is what you mean. You will find no other sort of rest, I can promise you, since you let yourself be bound to this treasure whose loss would make no poor man poorer. No, senor; there is no rest till we find a north-bound steamer, or else some ship finds us drifting about stretched out dead upon the Englishman's silver. Or rather — no; por Dios! I shall cut down the gunwale with the axe right to the water's edge before thirst and hunger rob me of my strength. By all the saints and devils I shall let the sea have the treasure rather than give it up to any stranger. Since it was the good pleasure of the Caballeros to send me off on such an errand, they shall learn I am just the man they take me for."

Decoud lay on the silver boxes panting. All his active sensations and feelings from as far back as he could remember seemed to him the maddest of dreams. Even his passionate devotion to Antonia into which he had worked himself up out of the depths of his scepticism had lost all



appearance of reality. For a moment he was the prey of an extremely languid but not unpleasant indifference.

"I am sure they didn't mean you to take such a desperate view of this affair," he said.

"What was it, then? A joke?" snarled the man, who on the pay-sheets of the O.S.N. Company's establishment in Sulaco was described as "Foreman of the wharf" against the figure of his wages. "Was it for a joke they woke me up from my sleep after two days of street fighting to make me stake my life upon a bad card? Everybody knows, too, that I am not a lucky gambler."

"Yes, everybody knows of your good luck with women, Capataz," Decoud propitiated his companion in a weary drawl.

"Look here, senor," Nostromo went on. "I never even remonstrated about this affair. Directly I heard what was wanted I saw what a desperate affair it must be, and I made up my mind to see it out. Every minute was of importance. I had to wait for you first. Then, when we arrived at the Italia Una, old Giorgio shouted to me to go for the English doctor. Later on, that poor dying woman wanted to see me, as you know. Senor, I was reluctant to go. I felt already this cursed silver growing heavy upon my back, and I was afraid that, knowing herself to be dying, she would ask me to ride off again for a priest. Father Corbelan, who is fearless, would have come at a word; but Father Corbelan is far away, safe with the band of Hernandez, and the populace, that would have liked to tear him to pieces, are much incensed against the priests. Not a single fat padre would have consented to put his head out of his hiding-place to-night to save a Christian soul, except, perhaps, under my protection. That was in her mind. I pretended I did not believe she was going to die. Senor, I refused to fetch a priest for a dying woman. . . ."

Decoud was heard to stir.

"You did, Capataz!" he exclaimed. His tone changed. "Well, you know — it was rather fine."

"You do not believe in priests, Don Martin? Neither do I. What was the use of wasting time? But she — she believes in them. The thing sticks in my throat. She may be dead already, and here we are floating helpless with no wind at all. Curse on all superstition. She died thinking I deprived her of Paradise, I suppose. It shall be the most desperate affair of my life."

Decoud remained lost in reflection. He tried to analyze the sensations awaked by what he had been told. The voice of the Capataz was heard again:

“Now, Don Martin, let us take up the sweeps and try to find the Isabels. It is either that or sinking the lighter if the day overtakes us. We must not forget that the steamer from Esmeralda with the soldiers may be coming along. We will pull straight on now. I have discovered a bit of a candle here, and we must take the risk of a small light to make a course by the boat compass. There is not enough wind to blow it out — may the curse of Heaven fall upon this blind gulf!”

A small flame appeared burning quite straight. It showed fragmentarily the stout ribs and planking in the hollow, empty part of the lighter. Decoud could see Nostromo standing up to pull. He saw him as high as the red sash on his waist, with a gleam of a white-handled revolver and the wooden haft of a long knife protruding on his left side. Decoud nerved himself for the effort of rowing. Certainly there was not enough wind to blow the candle out, but its flame swayed a little to the slow movement of the heavy boat. It was so big that with their utmost efforts they could not move it quicker than about a mile an hour. This was sufficient, however, to sweep them amongst the Isabels long before daylight came. There was a good six hours of darkness before them, and the distance from the harbour to the Great Isabel did not exceed two miles. Decoud put this heavy toil to the account of the Capataz's impatience. Sometimes they paused, and then strained their ears to hear the boat from Esmeralda. In this perfect quietness a steamer moving would have been heard from far off. As to seeing anything it was out of the question. They could not see each other. Even the lighter's sail, which remained set, was invisible. Very often they rested.

“Caramba!” said Nostromo, suddenly, during one of those intervals when they lolled idly against the heavy handles of the sweeps. “What is it? Are you distressed, Don Martin?”

Decoud assured him that he was not distressed in the least. Nostromo for a time kept perfectly still, and then in a whisper invited Martin to come aft.

With his lips touching Decoud's ear he declared his belief that there was somebody else besides themselves upon the lighter. Twice now he had heard the sound of stifled sobbing.

“Senor,” he whispered with awed wonder, “I am certain that there is somebody weeping in this lighter.”

Decoud had heard nothing. He expressed his incredulity. However, it was easy to ascertain the truth of the matter.

“It is most amazing,” muttered Nostromo. “Could anybody have concealed himself on board while the lighter was lying alongside the wharf?”

“And you say it was like sobbing?” asked Decoud, lowering his voice, too. “If he is weeping, whoever he is he cannot be very dangerous.”

Clambering over the precious pile in the middle, they crouched low on the foreside of the mast and groped under the half-deck. Right forward, in the narrowest part, their hands came upon the limbs of a man, who remained as silent as death. Too startled themselves to make a sound, they dragged him aft by one arm and the collar of his coat. He was limp — lifeless.

The light of the bit of candle fell upon a round, hook-nosed face with black moustaches and little side-whiskers. He was extremely dirty. A greasy growth of beard was sprouting on the shaven parts of the cheeks. The thick lips were slightly parted, but the eyes remained closed. Decoud, to his immense astonishment, recognized Senor Hirsch, the hide merchant from Esmeralda. Nostromo, too, had recognized him. And they gazed at each other across the body, lying with its naked feet higher than its head, in an absurd pretence of sleep, faintness, or death.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

For a moment, before this extraordinary find, they forgot their own concerns and sensations. Senor Hirsch's sensations as he lay there must have been those of extreme terror. For a long time he refused to give a sign of life, till at last Decoud's objurgations, and, perhaps more, Nostromo's impatient suggestion that he should be thrown overboard, as he seemed to be dead, induced him to raise one eyelid first, and then the other.

It appeared that he had never found a safe opportunity to leave Sulaco. He lodged with Anzani, the universal storekeeper, on the Plaza Mayor. But when the riot broke out he had made his escape from his host's house before daylight, and in such a hurry that he had forgotten to put on his shoes. He had run out impulsively in his socks, and with his hat in his hand, into the garden of Anzani's house. Fear gave him the necessary agility to climb over several low walls, and afterwards he blundered into the overgrown cloisters of the ruined Franciscan convent in one of the by-streets. He forced himself into the midst of matted bushes with the recklessness of desperation, and this accounted for his scratched body and his torn clothing. He lay hidden there all day, his tongue cleaving to the roof of his mouth with all the intensity of thirst engendered by heat and fear. Three times different bands of men invaded the place with shouts and imprecations, looking for Father Corbelan; but towards the evening, still lying on his face in the bushes, he thought he would die from the fear of silence. He was not very clear as to what had induced him to leave the place, but evidently he had got out and slunk successfully out of town along the deserted back lanes. He wandered in the darkness near the railway, so maddened by apprehension that he dared not even approach the fires of the pickets of Italian workmen guarding the line. He had a vague idea evidently of finding refuge in the railway yards, but the dogs rushed upon him, barking; men began to shout; a shot was fired at random. He fled away from the gates. By the merest accident, as it happened, he took the direction of the O.S.N. Company's offices. Twice he stumbled upon the bodies of men killed during the day. But everything living frightened him much more. He crouched, crept, crawled, made dashes, guided by a sort of animal instinct, keeping away from every light and from every sound of voices. His idea was to throw himself at the feet of Captain Mitchell and beg for shelter in the Company's offices. It was all dark there as he approached on his hands

and knees, but suddenly someone on guard challenged loudly, "Quien vive?" There were more dead men lying about, and he flattened himself down at once by the side of a cold corpse. He heard a voice saying, "Here is one of those wounded rascals crawling about. Shall I go and finish him?" And another voice objected that it was not safe to go out without a lantern upon such an errand; perhaps it was only some negro Liberal looking for a chance to stick a knife into the stomach of an honest man. Hirsch didn't stay to hear any more, but crawling away to the end of the wharf, hid himself amongst a lot of empty casks. After a while some people came along, talking, and with glowing cigarettes. He did not stop to ask himself whether they would be likely to do him any harm, but bolted incontinently along the jetty, saw a lighter lying moored at the end, and threw himself into it. In his desire to find cover he crept right forward under the half-deck, and he had remained there more dead than alive, suffering agonies of hunger and thirst, and almost fainting with terror, when he heard numerous footsteps and the voices of the Europeans who came in a body escorting the wagonload of treasure, pushed along the rails by a squad of Cargadores. He understood perfectly what was being done from the talk, but did not disclose his presence from the fear that he would not be allowed to remain. His only idea at the time, overpowering and masterful, was to get away from this terrible Sulaco. And now he regretted it very much. He had heard Nostromo talk to Decoud, and wished himself back on shore. He did not desire to be involved in any desperate affair — in a situation where one could not run away. The involuntary groans of his anguished spirit had betrayed him to the sharp ears of the Capataz.

They had propped him up in a sitting posture against the side of the lighter, and he went on with the moaning account of his adventures till his voice broke, his head fell forward. "Water," he whispered, with difficulty. Decoud held one of the cans to his lips. He revived after an extraordinarily short time, and scrambled up to his feet wildly. Nostromo, in an angry and threatening voice, ordered him forward. Hirsch was one of those men whom fear lashes like a whip, and he must have had an appalling idea of the Capataz's ferocity. He displayed an extraordinary agility in disappearing forward into the darkness. They heard him getting over the tarpaulin; then there was the sound of a heavy fall, followed by a weary sigh. Afterwards all was still in the fore-part of the lighter, as though he had killed himself in his headlong tumble. Nostromo shouted in a menacing voice —

“Lie still there! Do not move a limb. If I hear as much as a loud breath from you I shall come over there and put a bullet through your head.”

The mere presence of a coward, however passive, brings an element of treachery into a dangerous situation. Nostromo's nervous impatience passed into gloomy thoughtfulness. Decoud, in an undertone, as if speaking to himself, remarked that, after all, this bizarre event made no great difference. He could not conceive what harm the man could do. At most he would be in the way, like an inanimate and useless object — like a block of wood, for instance.

“I would think twice before getting rid of a piece of wood,” said Nostromo, calmly. “Something may happen unexpectedly where you could make use of it. But in an affair like ours a man like this ought to be thrown overboard. Even if he were as brave as a lion we would not want him here. We are not running away for our lives. Senor, there is no harm in a brave man trying to save himself with ingenuity and courage; but you have heard his tale, Don Martin. His being here is a miracle of fear — ” Nostromo paused. “There is no room for fear in this lighter,” he added through his teeth.

Decoud had no answer to make. It was not a position for argument, for a display of scruples or feelings. There were a thousand ways in which a panic-stricken man could make himself dangerous. It was evident that Hirsch could not be spoken to, reasoned with, or persuaded into a rational line of conduct. The story of his own escape demonstrated that clearly enough. Decoud thought that it was a thousand pities the wretch had not died of fright. Nature, who had made him what he was, seemed to have calculated cruelly how much he could bear in the way of atrocious anguish without actually expiring. Some compassion was due to so much terror. Decoud, though imaginative enough for sympathy, resolved not to interfere with any action that Nostromo would take. But Nostromo did nothing. And the fate of Senor Hirsch remained suspended in the darkness of the gulf at the mercy of events which could not be foreseen.

The Capataz, extending his hand, put out the candle suddenly. It was to Decoud as if his companion had destroyed, by a single touch, the world of affairs, of loves, of revolution, where his complacent superiority analyzed fearlessly all motives and all passions, including his own.

He gasped a little. Decoud was affected by the novelty of his position. Intellectually self-confident, he suffered from being deprived of the only

weapon he could use with effect. No intelligence could penetrate the darkness of the Placid Gulf. There remained only one thing he was certain of, and that was the overweening vanity of his companion. It was direct, uncomplicated, naive, and effectual. Decoud, who had been making use of him, had tried to understand his man thoroughly. He had discovered a complete singleness of motive behind the varied manifestations of a consistent character. This was why the man remained so astonishingly simple in the jealous greatness of his conceit. And now there was a complication. It was evident that he resented having been given a task in which there were so many chances of failure. "I wonder," thought Decoud, "how he would behave if I were not here."

He heard Nostromo mutter again, "No! there is no room for fear on this lighter. Courage itself does not seem good enough. I have a good eye and a steady hand; no man can say he ever saw me tired or uncertain what to do; but por Dios, Don Martin, I have been sent out into this black calm on a business where neither a good eye, nor a steady hand, nor judgment are any use. . . ." He swore a string of oaths in Spanish and Italian under his breath. "Nothing but sheer desperation will do for this affair."

These words were in strange contrast to the prevailing peace — to this almost solid stillness of the gulf. A shower fell with an abrupt whispering sound all round the boat, and Decoud took off his hat, and, letting his head get wet, felt greatly refreshed. Presently a steady little draught of air caressed his cheek. The lighter began to move, but the shower distanced it. The drops ceased to fall upon his head and hands, the whispering died out in the distance. Nostromo emitted a grunt of satisfaction, and grasping the tiller, chirruped softly, as sailors do, to encourage the wind. Never for the last three days had Decoud felt less the need for what the Capataz would call desperation.

"I fancy I hear another shower on the water," he observed in a tone of quiet content. "I hope it will catch us up."

Nostromo ceased chirruping at once. "You hear another shower?" he said, doubtfully. A sort of thinning of the darkness seemed to have taken place, and Decoud could see now the outline of his companion's figure, and even the sail came out of the night like a square block of dense snow.

The sound which Decoud had detected came along the water harshly. Nostromo recognized that noise partaking of a hiss and a rustle which spreads out on all sides of a steamer making her way through a smooth

water on a quiet night. It could be nothing else but the captured transport with troops from Esmeralda. She carried no lights. The noise of her steaming, growing louder every minute, would stop at times altogether, and then begin again abruptly, and sound startlingly nearer; as if that invisible vessel, whose position could not be precisely guessed, were making straight for the lighter. Meantime, that last kept on sailing slowly and noiselessly before a breeze so faint that it was only by leaning over the side and feeling the water slip through his fingers that Decoud convinced himself they were moving at all. His drowsy feeling had departed. He was glad to know that the lighter was moving. After so much stillness the noise of the steamer seemed uproarious and distracting. There was a weirdness in not being able to see her. Suddenly all was still. She had stopped, but so close to them that the steam, blowing off, sent its rumbling vibration right over their heads.

"They are trying to make out where they are," said Decoud in a whisper. Again he leaned over and put his fingers into the water. "We are moving quite smartly," he informed Nostromo.

"We seem to be crossing her bows," said the Capataz in a cautious tone. "But this is a blind game with death. Moving on is of no use. We mustn't be seen or heard."

His whisper was hoarse with excitement. Of all his face there was nothing visible but a gleam of white eyeballs. His fingers gripped Decoud's shoulder. "That is the only way to save this treasure from this steamer full of soldiers. Any other would have carried lights. But you observe there is not a gleam to show us where she is."

Decoud stood as if paralyzed; only his thoughts were wildly active. In the space of a second he remembered the desolate glance of Antonia as he left her at the bedside of her father in the gloomy house of Avellanos, with shuttered windows, but all the doors standing open, and deserted by all the servants except an old negro at the gate. He remembered the Casa Gould on his last visit, the arguments, the tones of his voice, the impenetrable attitude of Charles, Mrs. Gould's face so blanched with anxiety and fatigue that her eyes seemed to have changed colour, appearing nearly black by contrast. Even whole sentences of the proclamation which he meant to make Barrios issue from his headquarters at Cayta as soon as he got there passed through his mind; the very germ of the new State, the Separationist proclamation which he had tried before he left to read hurriedly to Don Jose, stretched out on his bed under the fixed gaze of his daughter. God knows whether the old



statesman had understood it; he was unable to speak, but he had certainly lifted his arm off the coverlet; his hand had moved as if to make the sign of the cross in the air, a gesture of blessing, of consent. Decoud had that very draft in his pocket, written in pencil on several loose sheets of paper, with the heavily-printed heading, "Administration of the San Tome Silver Mine. Sulaco. Republic of Costaguana." He had written it furiously, snatching page after page on Charles Gould's table. Mrs. Gould had looked several times over his shoulder as he wrote; but the Senor Administrador, standing straddle-legged, would not even glance at it when it was finished. He had waved it away firmly. It must have been scorn, and not caution, since he never made a remark about the use of the Administration's paper for such a compromising document. And that showed his disdain, the true English disdain of common prudence, as if everything outside the range of their own thoughts and feelings were unworthy of serious recognition. Decoud had the time in a second or two to become furiously angry with Charles Gould, and even resentful against Mrs. Gould, in whose care, tacitly it is true, he had left the safety of Antonia. Better perish a thousand times than owe your preservation to such people, he exclaimed mentally. The grip of Nostromo's fingers never removed from his shoulder, tightening fiercely, recalled him to himself.

"The darkness is our friend," the Capataz murmured into his ear. "I am going to lower the sail, and trust our escape to this black gulf. No eyes could make us out lying silent with a naked mast. I will do it now, before this steamer closes still more upon us. The faint creak of a block would betray us and the San Tome treasure into the hands of those thieves."

He moved about as warily as a cat. Decoud heard no sound; and it was only by the disappearance of the square blotch of darkness that he knew the yard had come down, lowered as carefully as if it had been made of glass. Next moment he heard Nostromo's quiet breathing by his side.

"You had better not move at all from where you are, Don Martin," advised the Capataz, earnestly. "You might stumble or displace something which would make a noise. The sweeps and the punting poles are lying about. Move not for your life. Por Dios, Don Martin," he went on in a keen but friendly whisper, "I am so desperate that if I didn't know your worship to be a man of courage, capable of standing stock still whatever happens, I would drive my knife into your heart."

A deathlike stillness surrounded the lighter. It was difficult to believe that there was near a steamer full of men with many pairs of eyes peering from her bridge for some hint of land in the night. Her steam had ceased blowing off, and she remained stopped too far off apparently for any other sound to reach the lighter.

“Perhaps you would, Capataz,” Decoud began in a whisper. “However, you need not trouble. There are other things than the fear of your knife to keep my heart steady. It shall not betray you. Only, have you forgotten — ”

“I spoke to you openly as to a man as desperate as myself,” explained the Capataz. “The silver must be saved from the Monterists. I told Captain Mitchell three times that I preferred to go alone. I told Don Carlos Gould, too. It was in the Casa Gould. They had sent for me. The ladies were there; and when I tried to explain why I did not wish to have you with me, they promised me, both of them, great rewards for your safety. A strange way to talk to a man you are sending out to an almost certain death. Those gentlefolk do not seem to have sense enough to understand what they are giving one to do. I told them I could do nothing for you. You would have been safer with the bandit Hernandez. It would have been possible to ride out of the town with no greater risk than a chance shot sent after you in the dark. But it was as if they had been deaf. I had to promise I would wait for you under the harbour gate. I did wait. And now because you are a brave man you are as safe as the silver. Neither more nor less.”

At that moment, as if by way of comment upon Nostromo’s words, the invisible steamer went ahead at half speed only, as could be judged by the leisurely beat of her propeller. The sound shifted its place markedly, but without coming nearer. It even grew a little more distant right abeam of the lighter, and then ceased again.

“They are trying for a sight of the Isabels,” muttered Nostromo, “in order to make for the harbour in a straight line and seize the Custom House with the treasure in it. Have you ever seen the Commandant of Esmeralda, Sotillo? A handsome fellow, with a soft voice. When I first came here I used to see him in the Calle talking to the señoritas at the windows of the houses, and showing his white teeth all the time. But one of my Cargadores, who had been a soldier, told me that he had once ordered a man to be flayed alive in the remote Campo, where he was sent recruiting amongst the people of the Estancias. It has never entered his head that the Compania had a man capable of baffling his game.”

The murmuring loquacity of the Capataz disturbed Decoud like a hint of weakness. And yet, talkative resolution may be as genuine as grim silence.

“Sotillo is not baffled so far,” he said. “Have you forgotten that crazy man forward?”

Nostromo had not forgotten Senor Hirsch. He reproached himself bitterly for not having visited the lighter carefully before leaving the wharf. He reproached himself for not having stabbed and flung Hirsch overboard at the very moment of discovery without even looking at his face. That would have been consistent with the desperate character of the affair. Whatever happened, Sotillo was already baffled. Even if that wretch, now as silent as death, did anything to betray the nearness of the lighter, Sotillo — if Sotillo it was in command of the troops on board — would be still baffled of his plunder.

“I have an axe in my hand,” Nostromo whispered, wrathfully, “that in three strokes would cut through the side down to the water’s edge. Moreover, each lighter has a plug in the stern, and I know exactly where it is. I feel it under the sole of my foot.”

Decoud recognized the ring of genuine determination in the nervous murmurs, the vindictive excitement of the famous Capataz. Before the steamer, guided by a shriek or two (for there could be no more than that, Nostromo said, gnashing his teeth audibly), could find the lighter there would be plenty of time to sink this treasure tied up round his neck.

The last words he hissed into Decoud’s ear. Decoud said nothing. He was perfectly convinced. The usual characteristic quietness of the man was gone. It was not equal to the situation as he conceived it. Something deeper, something unsuspected by everyone, had come to the surface. Decoud, with careful movements, slipped off his overcoat and divested himself of his boots; he did not consider himself bound in honour to sink with the treasure. His object was to get down to Barrios, in Cayta, as the Capataz knew very well; and he, too, meant, in his own way, to put into that attempt all the desperation of which he was capable. Nostromo muttered, “True, true! You are a politician, senor. Rejoin the army, and start another revolution.” He pointed out, however, that there was a little boat belonging to every lighter fit to carry two men, if not more. Theirs was towing behind.

Of that Decoud had not been aware. Of course, it was too dark to see, and it was only when Nostromo put his hand upon its painter fastened to a cleat in the stern that he experienced a full measure of relief. The prospect of

finding himself in the water and swimming, overwhelmed by ignorance and darkness, probably in a circle, till he sank from exhaustion, was revolting. The barren and cruel futility of such an end intimidated his affectation of careless pessimism. In comparison to it, the chance of being left floating in a boat, exposed to thirst, hunger, discovery, imprisonment, execution, presented itself with an aspect of amenity worth securing even at the cost of some self-contempt. He did not accept Nostromo's proposal that he should get into the boat at once. "Something sudden may overwhelm us, senor," the Capataz remarked promising faithfully, at the same time, to let go the painter at the moment when the necessity became manifest.

But Decoud assured him lightly that he did not mean to take to the boat till the very last moment, and that then he meant the Capataz to come along, too. The darkness of the gulf was no longer for him the end of all things. It was part of a living world since, pervading it, failure and death could be felt at your elbow. And at the same time it was a shelter. He exulted in its impenetrable obscurity. "Like a wall, like a wall," he muttered to himself.

The only thing which checked his confidence was the thought of Senor Hirsch. Not to have bound and gagged him seemed to Decoud now the height of improvident folly. As long as the miserable creature had the power to raise a yell he was a constant danger. His abject terror was mute now, but there was no saying from what cause it might suddenly find vent in shrieks.

This very madness of fear which both Decoud and Nostromo had seen in the wild and irrational glances, and in the continuous twitchings of his mouth, protected Senor Hirsch from the cruel necessities of this desperate affair. The moment of silencing him for ever had passed. As Nostromo remarked, in answer to Decoud's regrets, it was too late! It could not be done without noise, especially in the ignorance of the man's exact position. Wherever he had elected to crouch and tremble, it was too hazardous to go near him. He would begin probably to yell for mercy. It was much better to leave him quite alone since he was keeping so still. But to trust to his silence became every moment a greater strain upon Decoud's composure.

"I wish, Capataz, you had not let the right moment pass," he murmured.

"What! To silence him for ever? I thought it good to hear first how he came to be here. It was too strange. Who could imagine that it was all an accident? Afterwards, senor, when I saw you giving him water to drink, I could not do it. Not after I had seen you holding up the can to his lips as though he were your brother. Senor, that sort of necessity must not be

thought of too long. And yet it would have been no cruelty to take away from him his wretched life. It is nothing but fear. Your compassion saved him then, Don Martin, and now it is too late. It couldn't be done without noise."

In the steamer they were keeping a perfect silence, and the stillness was so profound that Decoud felt as if the slightest sound conceivable must travel unchecked and audible to the end of the world. What if Hirsch coughed or sneezed? To feel himself at the mercy of such an idiotic contingency was too exasperating to be looked upon with irony. Nostromo, too, seemed to be getting restless. Was it possible, he asked himself, that the steamer, finding the night too dark altogether, intended to remain stopped where she was till daylight? He began to think that this, after all, was the real danger. He was afraid that the darkness, which was his protection, would, in the end, cause his undoing.

Sotillo, as Nostromo had surmised, was in command on board the transport. The events of the last forty-eight hours in Sulaco were not known to him; neither was he aware that the telegraphist in Esmeralda had managed to warn his colleague in Sulaco. Like a good many officers of the troops garrisoning the province, Sotillo had been influenced in his adoption of the Ribierist cause by the belief that it had the enormous wealth of the Gould Concession on its side. He had been one of the frequenters of the Casa Gould, where he had aired his Blanco convictions and his ardour for reform before Don Jose Avellanos, casting frank, honest glances towards Mrs. Gould and Antonia the while. He was known to belong to a good family persecuted and impoverished during the tyranny of Guzman Bento. The opinions he expressed appeared eminently natural and proper in a man of his parentage and antecedents. And he was not a deceiver; it was perfectly natural for him to express elevated sentiments while his whole faculties were taken up with what seemed then a solid and practical notion — the notion that the husband of Antonia Avellanos would be, naturally, the intimate friend of the Gould Concession. He even pointed this out to Anzani once, when negotiating the sixth or seventh small loan in the gloomy, damp apartment with enormous iron bars, behind the principal shop in the whole row under the Arcades. He hinted to the universal shopkeeper at the excellent terms he was on with the emancipated senorita, who was like a sister to the Englishwoman. He would advance one leg and put his arms

akimbo, posing for Anzani's inspection, and fixing him with a haughty stare.

"Look, miserable shopkeeper! How can a man like me fail with any woman, let alone an emancipated girl living in scandalous freedom?" he seemed to say.

His manner in the Casa Gould was, of course, very different — devoid of all truculence, and even slightly mournful. Like most of his countrymen, he was carried away by the sound of fine words, especially if uttered by himself. He had no convictions of any sort upon anything except as to the irresistible power of his personal advantages. But that was so firm that even Decoud's appearance in Sulaco, and his intimacy with the Goulds and the Avellanos, did not disquiet him. On the contrary, he tried to make friends with that rich Costaguanero from Europe in the hope of borrowing a large sum by-and-by. The only guiding motive of his life was to get money for the satisfaction of his expensive tastes, which he indulged recklessly, having no self-control. He imagined himself a master of intrigue, but his corruption was as simple as an animal instinct. At times, in solitude, he had his moments of ferocity, and also on such occasions as, for instance, when alone in a room with Anzani trying to get a loan.

He had talked himself into the command of the Esmeralda garrison. That small seaport had its importance as the station of the main submarine cable connecting the Occidental Provinces with the outer world, and the junction with it of the Sulaco branch. Don Jose Avellanos proposed him, and Barrios, with a rude and jeering guffaw, had said, "Oh, let Sotillo go. He is a very good man to keep guard over the cable, and the ladies of Esmeralda ought to have their turn." Barrios, an indubitably brave man, had no great opinion of Sotillo.

It was through the Esmeralda cable alone that the San Tome mine could be kept in constant touch with the great financier, whose tacit approval made the strength of the Ribierist movement. This movement had its adversaries even there. Sotillo governed Esmeralda with repressive severity till the adverse course of events upon the distant theatre of civil war forced upon him the reflection that, after all, the great silver mine was fated to become the spoil of the victors. But caution was necessary. He began by assuming a dark and mysterious attitude towards the faithful Ribierist municipality of Esmeralda. Later on, the information that the commandant was holding assemblies of officers in the dead of night (which had leaked

out somehow) caused those gentlemen to neglect their civil duties altogether, and remain shut up in their houses. Suddenly one day all the letters from Sulaco by the overland courier were carried off by a file of soldiers from the post office to the Commandancia, without disguise, concealment, or apology. Sotillo had heard through Cayta of the final defeat of Ribiera.

This was the first open sign of the change in his convictions. Presently notorious democrats, who had been living till then in constant fear of arrest, leg irons, and even floggings, could be observed going in and out at the great door of the Commandancia, where the horses of the orderlies doze under their heavy saddles, while the men, in ragged uniforms and pointed straw hats, lounge on a bench, with their naked feet stuck out beyond the strip of shade; and a sentry, in a red baize coat with holes at the elbows, stands at the top of the steps glaring haughtily at the common people, who uncover their heads to him as they pass.

Sotillo's ideas did not soar above the care for his personal safety and the chance of plundering the town in his charge, but he feared that such a late adhesion would earn but scant gratitude from the victors. He had believed just a little too long in the power of the San Tome mine. The seized correspondence had confirmed his previous information of a large amount of silver ingots lying in the Sulaco Custom House. To gain possession of it would be a clear Monterist move; a sort of service that would have to be rewarded. With the silver in his hands he could make terms for himself and his soldiers. He was aware neither of the riots, nor of the President's escape to Sulaco and the close pursuit led by Montero's brother, the guerrillero. The game seemed in his own hands. The initial moves were the seizure of the cable telegraph office and the securing of the Government steamer lying in the narrow creek which is the harbour of Esmeralda. The last was effected without difficulty by a company of soldiers swarming with a rush over the gangways as she lay alongside the quay; but the lieutenant charged with the duty of arresting the telegraphist halted on the way before the only cafe in Esmeralda, where he distributed some brandy to his men, and refreshed himself at the expense of the owner, a known Ribierist. The whole party became intoxicated, and proceeded on their mission up the street yelling and firing random shots at the windows. This little festivity, which might have turned out dangerous to the telegraphist's life, enabled him in the end to send his warning to Sulaco. The lieutenant, staggering upstairs

with a drawn sabre, was before long kissing him on both cheeks in one of those swift changes of mood peculiar to a state of drunkenness. He clasped the telegraphist close round the neck, assuring him that all the officers of the Esmeralda garrison were going to be made colonels, while tears of happiness streamed down his sodden face. Thus it came about that the town major, coming along later, found the whole party sleeping on the stairs and in passages, and the telegraphist (who scorned this chance of escape) very busy clicking the key of the transmitter. The major led him away bareheaded, with his hands tied behind his back, but concealed the truth from Sotillo, who remained in ignorance of the warning despatched to Sulaco.

The colonel was not the man to let any sort of darkness stand in the way of the planned surprise. It appeared to him a dead certainty; his heart was set upon his object with an ungovernable, childlike impatience. Ever since the steamer had rounded Punta Mala, to enter the deeper shadow of the gulf, he had remained on the bridge in a group of officers as excited as himself. Distracted between the coaxings and menaces of Sotillo and his Staff, the miserable commander of the steamer kept her moving with as much prudence as they would let him exercise. Some of them had been drinking heavily, no doubt; but the prospect of laying hands on so much wealth made them absurdly foolhardy, and, at the same time, extremely anxious. The old major of the battalion, a stupid, suspicious man, who had never been afloat in his life, distinguished himself by putting out suddenly the binnacle light, the only one allowed on board for the necessities of navigation. He could not understand of what use it could be for finding the way. To the vehement protestations of the ship's captain, he stamped his foot and tapped the handle of his sword. "Aha! I have unmasked you," he cried, triumphantly. "You are tearing your hair from despair at my acuteness. Am I a child to believe that a light in that brass box can show you where the harbour is? I am an old soldier, I am. I can smell a traitor a league off. You wanted that gleam to betray our approach to your friend the Englishman. A thing like that show you the way! What a miserable lie! Que picardia! You Sulaco people are all in the pay of those foreigners. You deserve to be run through the body with my sword." Other officers, crowding round, tried to calm his indignation, repeating persuasively, "No, no! This is an appliance of the mariners, major. This is no treachery." The captain of the transport flung



himself face downwards on the bridge, and refused to rise. "Put an end to me at once," he repeated in a stifled voice. Sotillo had to interfere.

The uproar and confusion on the bridge became so great that the helmsman fled from the wheel. He took refuge in the engine-room, and alarmed the engineers, who, disregarding the threats of the soldiers set on guard over them, stopped the engines, protesting that they would rather be shot than run the risk of being drowned down below.

This was the first time Nostromo and Decoud heard the steamer stop. After order had been restored, and the binnacle lamp relighted, she went ahead again, passing wide of the lighter in her search for the Isabels. The group could not be made out, and, at the pitiful entreaties of the captain, Sotillo allowed the engines to be stopped again to wait for one of those periodical lightnings of darkness caused by the shifting of the cloud canopy spread above the waters of the gulf.

Sotillo, on the bridge, muttered from time to time angrily to the captain. The other, in an apologetic and cringing tone, begged su merced the colonel to take into consideration the limitations put upon human faculties by the darkness of the night. Sotillo swelled with rage and impatience. It was the chance of a lifetime.

"If your eyes are of no more use to you than this, I shall have them put out," he yelled.

The captain of the steamer made no answer, for just then the mass of the Great Isabel loomed up darkly after a passing shower, then vanished, as if swept away by a wave of greater obscurity preceding another downpour. This was enough for him. In the voice of a man come back to life again, he informed Sotillo that in an hour he would be alongside the Sulaco wharf. The ship was put then full speed on the course, and a great bustle of preparation for landing arose among the soldiers on her deck.

It was heard distinctly by Decoud and Nostromo. The Capataz understood its meaning. They had made out the Isabels, and were going on now in a straight line for Sulaco. He judged that they would pass close; but believed that lying still like this, with the sail lowered, the lighter could not be seen. "No, not even if they rubbed sides with us," he muttered.

The rain began to fall again; first like a wet mist, then with a heavier touch, thickening into a smart, perpendicular downpour; and the hiss and thump of the approaching steamer was coming extremely near. Decoud, with his eyes full of water, and lowered head, asked himself how long it

would be before she drew past, when unexpectedly he felt a lurch. An inrush of foam broke swishing over the stern, simultaneously with a crack of timbers and a staggering shock. He had the impression of an angry hand laying hold of the lighter and dragging it along to destruction. The shock, of course, had knocked him down, and he found himself rolling in a lot of water at the bottom of the lighter. A violent churning went on alongside; a strange and amazed voice cried out something above him in the night. He heard a piercing shriek for help from Senor Hirsch. He kept his teeth hard set all the time. It was a collision!

The steamer had struck the lighter obliquely, heeling her over till she was half swamped, starting some of her timbers, and swinging her head parallel to her own course with the force of the blow. The shock of it on board of her was hardly perceptible. All the violence of that collision was, as usual, felt only on board the smaller craft. Even Nostromo himself thought that this was perhaps the end of his desperate adventure. He, too, had been flung away from the long tiller, which took charge in the lurch. Next moment the steamer would have passed on, leaving the lighter to sink or swim after having shouldered her thus out of her way, and without even getting a glimpse of her form, had it not been that, being deeply laden with stores and the great number of people on board, her anchor was low enough to hook itself into one of the wire shrouds of the lighter's mast. For the space of two or three gasping breaths that new rope held against the sudden strain. It was this that gave Decoud the sensation of the snatching pull, dragging the lighter away to destruction. The cause of it, of course, was inexplicable to him. The whole thing was so sudden that he had no time to think. But all his sensations were perfectly clear; he had kept complete possession of himself; in fact, he was even pleasantly aware of that calmness at the very moment of being pitched head first over the transom, to struggle on his back in a lot of water. Senor Hirsch's shriek he had heard and recognized while he was regaining his feet, always with that mysterious sensation of being dragged headlong through the darkness. Not a word, not a cry escaped him; he had no time to see anything; and following upon the despairing screams for help, the dragging motion ceased so suddenly that he staggered forward with open arms and fell against the pile of the treasure boxes. He clung to them instinctively, in the vague apprehension of being flung about again; and immediately he heard another lot of shrieks for help, prolonged and despairing, not near him at all, but unaccountably in the distance, away

from the lighter altogether, as if some spirit in the night were mocking at Senor Hirsch's terror and despair.

Then all was still — as still as when you wake up in your bed in a dark room from a bizarre and agitated dream. The lighter rocked slightly; the rain was still falling. Two groping hands took hold of his bruised sides from behind, and the Capataz's voice whispered, in his ear, "Silence, for your life! Silence! The steamer has stopped."

Decoud listened. The gulf was dumb. He felt the water nearly up to his knees. "Are we sinking?" he asked in a faint breath.

"I don't know," Nostromo breathed back to him. "Senor, make not the slightest sound."

Hirsch, when ordered forward by Nostromo, had not returned into his first hiding-place. He had fallen near the mast, and had no strength to rise; moreover, he feared to move. He had given himself up for dead, but not on any rational grounds. It was simply a cruel and terrifying feeling. Whenever he tried to think what would become of him his teeth would start chattering violently. He was too absorbed in the utter misery of his fear to take notice of anything.

Though he was stifling under the lighter's sail which Nostromo had unwittingly lowered on top of him, he did not even dare to put out his head till the very moment of the steamer striking. Then, indeed, he leaped right out, spurred on to new miracles of bodily vigour by this new shape of danger. The inrush of water when the lighter heeled over unsealed his lips. His shriek, "Save me!" was the first distinct warning of the collision for the people on board the steamer. Next moment the wire shroud parted, and the released anchor swept over the lighter's forecastle. It came against the breast of Senor Hirsch, who simply seized hold of it, without in the least knowing what it was, but curling his arms and legs upon the part above the fluke with an invincible, unreasonable tenacity. The lighter yawed off wide, and the steamer, moving on, carried him away, clinging hard, and shouting for help. It was some time, however, after the steamer had stopped that his position was discovered. His sustained yelping for help seemed to come from somebody swimming in the water. At last a couple of men went over the bows and hauled him on board. He was carried straight off to Sotillo on the bridge. His examination confirmed the impression that some craft had been run over and sunk, but it was impracticable on such a dark night to look for the positive proof of floating wreckage. Sotillo was more anxious

than ever now to enter the harbour without loss of time; the idea that he had destroyed the principal object of his expedition was too intolerable to be accepted. This feeling made the story he had heard appear the more incredible. Senor Hirsch, after being beaten a little for telling lies, was thrust into the chartroom. But he was beaten only a little. His tale had taken the heart out of Sotillo's Staff, though they all repeated round their chief, "Impossible! impossible!" with the exception of the old major, who triumphed gloomily.

"I told you; I told you," he mumbled. "I could smell some treachery, some diableria a league off."

Meantime, the steamer had kept on her way towards Sulaco, where only the truth of that matter could be ascertained. Decoud and Nostromo heard the loud churning of her propeller diminish and die out; and then, with no useless words, busied themselves in making for the Isabels. The last shower had brought with it a gentle but steady breeze. The danger was not over yet, and there was no time for talk. The lighter was leaking like a sieve. They splashed in the water at every step. The Capataz put into Decoud's hands the handle of the pump which was fitted at the side aft, and at once, without question or remark, Decoud began to pump in utter forgetfulness of every desire but that of keeping the treasure afloat. Nostromo hoisted the sail, flew back to the tiller, pulled at the sheet like mad. The short flare of a match (they had been kept dry in a tight tin box, though the man himself was completely wet), disclosed to the toiling Decoud the eagerness of his face, bent low over the box of the compass, and the attentive stare of his eyes. He knew now where he was, and he hoped to run the sinking lighter ashore in the shallow cove where the high, cliff-like end of the Great Isabel is divided in two equal parts by a deep and overgrown ravine.

Decoud pumped without intermission. Nostromo steered without relaxing for a second the intense, peering effort of his stare. Each of them was as if utterly alone with his task. It did not occur to them to speak. There was nothing in common between them but the knowledge that the damaged lighter must be slowly but surely sinking. In that knowledge, which was like the crucial test of their desires, they seemed to have become completely estranged, as if they had discovered in the very shock of the collision that the loss of the lighter would not mean the same thing to them both. This common danger brought their differences in aim, in view, in character, and in position, into absolute prominence in the private vision of each. There

was no bond of conviction, of common idea; they were merely two adventurers pursuing each his own adventure, involved in the same imminence of deadly peril. Therefore they had nothing to say to each other. But this peril, this only incontrovertible truth in which they shared, seemed to act as an inspiration to their mental and bodily powers.

There was certainly something almost miraculous in the way the Capataz made the cove with nothing but the shadowy hint of the island's shape and the vague gleam of a small sandy strip for a guide. Where the ravine opens between the cliffs, and a slender, shallow rivulet meanders out of the bushes to lose itself in the sea, the lighter was run ashore; and the two men, with a taciturn, undaunted energy, began to discharge her precious freight, carrying each ox-hide box up the bed of the rivulet beyond the bushes to a hollow place which the caving in of the soil had made below the roots of a large tree. Its big smooth trunk leaned like a falling column far over the trickle of water running amongst the loose stones.

A couple of years before Nostromo had spent a whole Sunday, all alone, exploring the island. He explained this to Decoud after their task was done, and they sat, weary in every limb, with their legs hanging down the low bank, and their backs against the tree, like a pair of blind men aware of each other and their surroundings by some indefinable sixth sense.

"Yes," Nostromo repeated, "I never forget a place I have carefully looked at once." He spoke slowly, almost lazily, as if there had been a whole leisurely life before him, instead of the scanty two hours before daylight. The existence of the treasure, barely concealed in this improbable spot, laid a burden of secrecy upon every contemplated step, upon every intention and plan of future conduct. He felt the partial failure of this desperate affair entrusted to the great reputation he had known how to make for himself. However, it was also a partial success. His vanity was half appeased. His nervous irritation had subsided.

"You never know what may be of use," he pursued with his usual quietness of tone and manner. "I spent a whole miserable Sunday in exploring this crumb of land."

"A misanthropic sort of occupation," muttered Decoud, viciously. "You had no money, I suppose, to gamble with, and to fling about amongst the girls in your usual haunts, Capataz."

"E vero!" exclaimed the Capataz, surprised into the use of his native tongue by so much perspicacity. "I had not! Therefore I did not want to go

amongst those beggarly people accustomed to my generosity. It is looked for from the Capataz of the Cargadores, who are the rich men, and, as it were, the Caballeros amongst the common people. I don't care for cards but as a pastime; and as to those girls that boast of having opened their doors to my knock, you know I wouldn't look at any one of them twice except for what the people would say. They are queer, the good people of Sulaco, and I have got much useful information simply by listening patiently to the talk of the women that everybody believed I was in love with. Poor Teresa could never understand that. On that particular Sunday, senor, she scolded so that I went out of the house swearing that I would never darken their door again unless to fetch away my hammock and my chest of clothes. Senor, there is nothing more exasperating than to hear a woman you respect rail against your good reputation when you have not a single brass coin in your pocket. I untied one of the small boats and pulled myself out of the harbour with nothing but three cigars in my pocket to help me spend the day on this island. But the water of this rivulet you hear under your feet is cool and sweet and good, senor, both before and after a smoke." He was silent for a while, then added reflectively, "That was the first Sunday after I brought down the white-whiskered English rico all the way down the mountains from the Paramo on the top of the Entrada Pass — and in the coach, too! No coach had gone up or down that mountain road within the memory of man, senor, till I brought this one down in charge of fifty peons working like one man with ropes, pickaxes, and poles under my direction. That was the rich Englishman who, as people say, pays for the making of this railway. He was very pleased with me. But my wages were not due till the end of the month."

He slid down the bank suddenly. Decoud heard the splash of his feet in the brook and followed his footsteps down the ravine. His form was lost among the bushes till he had reached the strip of sand under the cliff. As often happens in the gulf when the showers during the first part of the night had been frequent and heavy, the darkness had thinned considerably towards the morning though there were no signs of daylight as yet.

The cargo-lighter, relieved of its precious burden, rocked feebly, half-afloat, with her fore-foot on the sand. A long rope stretched away like a black cotton thread across the strip of white beach to the grapnel Nostromo had carried ashore and hooked to the stem of a tree-like shrub in the very opening of the ravine.

There was nothing for Decoud but to remain on the island. He received from Nostromo's hands whatever food the foresight of Captain Mitchell had put on board the lighter and deposited it temporarily in the little dinghy which on their arrival they had hauled up out of sight amongst the bushes. It was to be left with him. The island was to be a hiding-place, not a prison; he could pull out to a passing ship. The O.S.N. Company's mail boats passed close to the islands when going into Sulaco from the north. But the Minerva, carrying off the ex-president, had taken the news up north of the disturbances in Sulaco. It was possible that the next steamer down would get instructions to miss the port altogether since the town, as far as the Minerva's officers knew, was for the time being in the hands of the rabble. This would mean that there would be no steamer for a month, as far as the mail service went; but Decoud had to take his chance of that. The island was his only shelter from the proscription hanging over his head. The Capataz was, of course, going back. The unloaded lighter leaked much less, and he thought that she would keep afloat as far as the harbour.

He passed to Decoud, standing knee-deep alongside, one of the two spades which belonged to the equipment of each lighter for use when ballasting ships. By working with it carefully as soon as there was daylight enough to see, Decoud could loosen a mass of earth and stones overhanging the cavity in which they had deposited the treasure, so that it would look as if it had fallen naturally. It would cover up not only the cavity, but even all traces of their work, the footsteps, the displaced stones, and even the broken bushes.

"Besides, who would think of looking either for you or the treasure here?" Nostromo continued, as if he could not tear himself away from the spot. "Nobody is ever likely to come here. What could any man want with this piece of earth as long as there is room for his feet on the mainland! The people in this country are not curious. There are even no fishermen here to intrude upon your worship. All the fishing that is done in the gulf goes on near Zapiga, over there. Senor, if you are forced to leave this island before anything can be arranged for you, do not try to make for Zapiga. It is a settlement of thieves and matreros, where they would cut your throat promptly for the sake of your gold watch and chain. And, senor, think twice before confiding in any one whatever; even in the officers of the Company's steamers, if you ever get on board one. Honesty alone is not enough for security. You must look to discretion and prudence in a man. And always

remember, senor, before you open your lips for a confidence, that this treasure may be left safely here for hundreds of years. Time is on its side, senor. And silver is an incorruptible metal that can be trusted to keep its value for ever. . . . An incorruptible metal,” he repeated, as if the idea had given him a profound pleasure.

“As some men are said to be,” Decoud pronounced, inscrutably, while the Capataz, who busied himself in baling out the lighter with a wooden bucket, went on throwing the water over the side with a regular splash. Decoud, incorrigible in his scepticism, reflected, not cynically, but with general satisfaction, that this man was made incorruptible by his enormous vanity, that finest form of egoism which can take on the aspect of every virtue.

Nostromo ceased baling, and, as if struck with a sudden thought, dropped the bucket with a clatter into the lighter.

“Have you any message?” he asked in a lowered voice. “Remember, I shall be asked questions.”

“You must find the hopeful words that ought to be spoken to the people in town. I trust for that your intelligence and your experience, Capataz. You understand?”

“Si, senor. . . . For the ladies.”

“Yes, yes,” said Decoud, hastily. “Your wonderful reputation will make them attach great value to your words; therefore be careful what you say. I am looking forward,” he continued, feeling the fatal touch of contempt for himself to which his complex nature was subject, “I am looking forward to a glorious and successful ending to my mission. Do you hear, Capataz? Use the words glorious and successful when you speak to the senorita. Your own mission is accomplished gloriously and successfully. You have indubitably saved the silver of the mine. Not only this silver, but probably all the silver that shall ever come out of it.”

Nostromo detected the ironic tone. “I dare say, Senor Don Martin,” he said, moodily. “There are very few things that I am not equal to. Ask the foreign signori. I, a man of the people, who cannot always understand what you mean. But as to this lot which I must leave here, let me tell you that I would believe it in greater safety if you had not been with me at all.”

An exclamation escaped Decoud, and a short pause followed. “Shall I go back with you to Sulaco?” he asked in an angry tone.



“Shall I strike you dead with my knife where you stand?” retorted Nostromo, contemptuously. “It would be the same thing as taking you to Sulaco. Come, señor. Your reputation is in your politics, and mine is bound up with the fate of this silver. Do you wonder I wish there had been no other man to share my knowledge? I wanted no one with me, señor.”

“You could not have kept the lighter afloat without me,” Decoud almost shouted. “You would have gone to the bottom with her.”

“Yes,” uttered Nostromo, slowly; “alone.”

Here was a man, Decoud reflected, that seemed as though he would have preferred to die rather than deface the perfect form of his egoism. Such a man was safe. In silence he helped the Capataz to get the grapnel on board. Nostromo cleared the shelving shore with one push of the heavy oar, and Decoud found himself solitary on the beach like a man in a dream. A sudden desire to hear a human voice once more seized upon his heart. The lighter was hardly distinguishable from the black water upon which she floated.

“What do you think has become of Hirsch?” he shouted.

“Knocked overboard and drowned,” cried Nostromo’s voice confidently out of the black wastes of sky and sea around the islet. “Keep close in the ravine, señor. I shall try to come out to you in a night or two.”

A slight swishing rustle showed that Nostromo was setting the sail. It filled all at once with a sound as of a single loud drum-tap. Decoud went back to the ravine. Nostromo, at the tiller, looked back from time to time at the vanishing mass of the Great Isabel, which, little by little, merged into the uniform texture of the night. At last, when he turned his head again, he saw nothing but a smooth darkness, like a solid wall.

Then he, too, experienced that feeling of solitude which had weighed heavily on Decoud after the lighter had slipped off the shore. But while the man on the island was oppressed by a bizarre sense of unreality affecting the very ground upon which he walked, the mind of the Capataz of the Cargadores turned alertly to the problem of future conduct. Nostromo’s faculties, working on parallel lines, enabled him to steer straight, to keep a look-out for Hermosa, near which he had to pass, and to try to imagine what would happen tomorrow in Sulaco. To-morrow, or, as a matter of fact, to-day, since the dawn was not very far, Sotillo would find out in what way the treasure had gone. A gang of Cargadores had been employed in loading it into a railway truck from the Custom House store-rooms, and running the

truck on to the wharf. There would be arrests made, and certainly before noon Sotillo would know in what manner the silver had left Sulaco, and who it was that took it out.

Nostromo's intention had been to sail right into the harbour; but at this thought by a sudden touch of the tiller he threw the lighter into the wind and checked her rapid way. His re-appearance with the very boat would raise suspicions, would cause surmises, would absolutely put Sotillo on the track. He himself would be arrested; and once in the Calabozo there was no saying what they would do to him to make him speak. He trusted himself, but he stood up to look round. Near by, Hermosa showed low its white surface as flat as a table, with the slight run of the sea raised by the breeze washing over its edges noisily. The lighter must be sunk at once.

He allowed her to drift with her sail aback. There was already a good deal of water in her. He allowed her to drift towards the harbour entrance, and, letting the tiller swing about, squatted down and busied himself in loosening the plug. With that out she would fill very quickly, and every lighter carried a little iron ballast — enough to make her go down when full of water. When he stood up again the noisy wash about the Hermosa sounded far away, almost inaudible; and already he could make out the shape of land about the harbour entrance. This was a desperate affair, and he was a good swimmer. A mile was nothing to him, and he knew of an easy place for landing just below the earthworks of the old abandoned fort. It occurred to him with a peculiar fascination that this fort was a good place in which to sleep the day through after so many sleepless nights.

With one blow of the tiller he unshipped for the purpose, he knocked the plug out, but did not take the trouble to lower the sail. He felt the water welling up heavily about his legs before he leaped on to the taffrail. There, upright and motionless, in his shirt and trousers only, he stood waiting. When he had felt her settle he sprang far away with a mighty splash.

At once he turned his head. The gloomy, clouded dawn from behind the mountains showed him on the smooth waters the upper corner of the sail, a dark wet triangle of canvas waving slightly to and fro. He saw it vanish, as if jerked under, and then struck out for the shore.

## **PART THIRD THE LIGHTHOUSE**

## CHAPTER ONE

Directly the cargo boat had slipped away from the wharf and got lost in the darkness of the harbour the Europeans of Sulaco separated, to prepare for the coming of the Monterist regime, which was approaching Sulaco from the mountains, as well as from the sea.

This bit of manual work in loading the silver was their last concerted action. It ended the three days of danger, during which, according to the newspaper press of Europe, their energy had preserved the town from the calamities of popular disorder. At the shore end of the jetty, Captain Mitchell said good-night and turned back. His intention was to walk the planks of the wharf till the steamer from Esmeralda turned up. The engineers of the railway staff, collecting their Basque and Italian workmen, marched them away to the railway yards, leaving the Custom House, so well defended on the first day of the riot, standing open to the four winds of heaven. Their men had conducted themselves bravely and faithfully during the famous "three days" of Sulaco. In a great part this faithfulness and that courage had been exercised in self-defence rather than in the cause of those material interests to which Charles Gould had pinned his faith. Amongst the cries of the mob not the least loud had been the cry of death to foreigners. It was, indeed, a lucky circumstance for Sulaco that the relations of those imported workmen with the people of the country had been uniformly bad from the first.

Doctor Monygham, going to the door of Viola's kitchen, observed this retreat marking the end of the foreign interference, this withdrawal of the army of material progress from the field of Costaguana revolutions.

Algarrobe torches carried on the outskirts of the moving body sent their penetrating aroma into his nostrils. Their light, sweeping along the front of the house, made the letters of the inscription, "Albergo d'Italia Una," leap out black from end to end of the long wall. His eyes blinked in the clear blaze. Several young men, mostly fair and tall, shepherding this mob of dark bronzed heads, surmounted by the glint of slanting rifle barrels, nodded to him familiarly as they went by. The doctor was a well-known character. Some of them wondered what he was doing there. Then, on the flank of their workmen they tramped on, following the line of rails.

"Withdrawing your people from the harbour?" said the doctor, addressing himself to the chief engineer of the railway, who had accompanied Charles Gould so far on his way to the town, walking by the side of the horse, with

his hand on the saddle-bow. They had stopped just outside the open door to let the workmen cross the road.

“As quick as I can. We are not a political faction,” answered the engineer, meaningly. “And we are not going to give our new rulers a handle against the railway. You approve me, Gould?”

“Absolutely,” said Charles Gould’s impassive voice, high up and outside the dim parallelogram of light falling on the road through the open door.

With Sotillo expected from one side, and Pedro Montero from the other, the engineer-in-chief’s only anxiety now was to avoid a collision with either. Sulaco, for him, was a railway station, a terminus, workshops, a great accumulation of stores. As against the mob the railway defended its property, but politically the railway was neutral. He was a brave man; and in that spirit of neutrality he had carried proposals of truce to the self-appointed chiefs of the popular party, the deputies Fuentes and Gamacho. Bullets were still flying about when he had crossed the Plaza on that mission, waving above his head a white napkin belonging to the table linen of the Amarilla Club.

He was rather proud of this exploit; and reflecting that the doctor, busy all day with the wounded in the patio of the Casa Gould, had not had time to hear the news, he began a succinct narrative. He had communicated to them the intelligence from the Construction Camp as to Pedro Montero. The brother of the victorious general, he had assured them, could be expected at Sulaco at any time now. This news (as he anticipated), when shouted out of the window by Senor Gamacho, induced a rush of the mob along the Campo Road towards Rincon. The two deputies also, after shaking hands with him effusively, mounted and galloped off to meet the great man. “I have misled them a little as to the time,” the chief engineer confessed. “However hard he rides, he can scarcely get here before the morning. But my object is attained. I’ve secured several hours’ peace for the losing party. But I did not tell them anything about Sotillo, for fear they would take it into their heads to try to get hold of the harbour again, either to oppose him or welcome him — there’s no saying which. There was Gould’s silver, on which rests the remnant of our hopes. Decoud’s retreat had to be thought of, too. I think the railway has done pretty well by its friends without compromising itself hopelessly. Now the parties must be left to themselves.”

“Costaguana for the Costaguaneros,” interjected the doctor, sardonically. “It is a fine country, and they have raised a fine crop of hates, vengeance, murder, and rapine — those sons of the country.”

“Well, I am one of them,” Charles Gould’s voice sounded, calmly, “and I must be going on to see to my own crop of trouble. My wife has driven straight on, doctor?”

“Yes. All was quiet on this side. Mrs. Gould has taken the two girls with her.”

Charles Gould rode on, and the engineer-in-chief followed the doctor indoors.

“That man is calmness personified,” he said, appreciatively, dropping on a bench, and stretching his well-shaped legs in cycling stockings nearly across the doorway. “He must be extremely sure of himself.”

“If that’s all he is sure of, then he is sure of nothing,” said the doctor. He had perched himself again on the end of the table. He nursed his cheek in the palm of one hand, while the other sustained the elbow. “It is the last thing a man ought to be sure of.” The candle, half-consumed and burning dimly with a long wick, lighted up from below his inclined face, whose expression affected by the drawn-in cicatrices in the cheeks, had something vaguely unnatural, an exaggerated remorseful bitterness. As he sat there he had the air of meditating upon sinister things. The engineer-in-chief gazed at him for a time before he protested.

“I really don’t see that. For me there seems to be nothing else. However — — ”

He was a wise man, but he could not quite conceal his contempt for that sort of paradox; in fact. Dr. Monygham was not liked by the Europeans of Sulaco. His outward aspect of an outcast, which he preserved even in Mrs. Gould’s drawing-room, provoked unfavourable criticism. There could be no doubt of his intelligence; and as he had lived for over twenty years in the country, the pessimism of his outlook could not be altogether ignored. But instinctively, in self-defence of their activities and hopes, his hearers put it to the account of some hidden imperfection in the man’s character. It was known that many years before, when quite young, he had been made by Guzman Bento chief medical officer of the army. Not one of the Europeans then in the service of Costaguana had been so much liked and trusted by the fierce old Dictator.

Afterwards his story was not so clear. It lost itself amongst the innumerable tales of conspiracies and plots against the tyrant as a stream is lost in an arid belt of sandy country before it emerges, diminished and troubled, perhaps, on the other side. The doctor made no secret of it that he had lived for years in the wildest parts of the Republic, wandering with almost unknown Indian tribes in the great forests of the far interior where the great rivers have their sources. But it was mere aimless wandering; he had written nothing, collected nothing, brought nothing for science out of the twilight of the forests, which seemed to cling to his battered personality limping about Sulaco, where it had drifted in casually, only to get stranded on the shores of the sea.

It was also known that he had lived in a state of destitution till the arrival of the Goulds from Europe. Don Carlos and Dona Emilia had taken up the mad English doctor, when it became apparent that for all his savage independence he could be tamed by kindness. Perhaps it was only hunger that had tamed him. In years gone by he had certainly been acquainted with Charles Gould's father in Sta. Marta; and now, no matter what were the dark passages of his history, as the medical officer of the San Tome mine he became a recognized personality. He was recognized, but not unreservedly accepted. So much defiant eccentricity and such an outspoken scorn for mankind seemed to point to mere recklessness of judgment, the bravado of guilt. Besides, since he had become again of some account, vague whispers had been heard that years ago, when fallen into disgrace and thrown into prison by Guzman Bento at the time of the so-called Great Conspiracy, he had betrayed some of his best friends amongst the conspirators. Nobody pretended to believe that whisper; the whole story of the Great Conspiracy was hopelessly involved and obscure; it is admitted in Costaguana that there never had been a conspiracy except in the diseased imagination of the Tyrant; and, therefore, nothing and no one to betray; though the most distinguished Costaguaneros had been imprisoned and executed upon that accusation. The procedure had dragged on for years, decimating the better class like a pestilence. The mere expression of sorrow for the fate of executed kinsmen had been punished with death. Don Jose Avellanos was perhaps the only one living who knew the whole story of those unspeakable cruelties. He had suffered from them himself, and he, with a shrug of the shoulders and a nervous, jerky gesture of the arm, was wont to put away from him, as it were, every allusion to it. But whatever the reason, Dr.

Monygham, a personage in the administration of the Gould Concession, treated with reverent awe by the miners, and indulged in his peculiarities by Mrs. Gould, remained somehow outside the pale.

It was not from any liking for the doctor that the engineer-in-chief had lingered in the inn upon the plain. He liked old Viola much better. He had come to look upon the Albergo d'Italia Una as a dependence of the railway. Many of his subordinates had their quarters there. Mrs. Gould's interest in the family conferred upon it a sort of distinction. The engineer-in-chief, with an army of workers under his orders, appreciated the moral influence of the old Garibaldino upon his countrymen. His austere, old-world Republicanism had a severe, soldier-like standard of faithfulness and duty, as if the world were a battlefield where men had to fight for the sake of universal love and brotherhood, instead of a more or less large share of booty.

"Poor old chap!" he said, after he had heard the doctor's account of Teresa. "He'll never be able to keep the place going by himself. I shall be sorry."

"He's quite alone up there," grunted Doctor Monygham, with a toss of his heavy head towards the narrow staircase. "Every living soul has cleared out, and Mrs. Gould took the girls away just now. It might not be over-safe for them out here before very long. Of course, as a doctor I can do nothing more here; but she has asked me to stay with old Viola, and as I have no horse to get back to the mine, where I ought to be, I made no difficulty to stay. They can do without me in the town."

"I have a good mind to remain with you, doctor, till we see whether anything happens to-night at the harbour," declared the engineer-in-chief. "He must not be molested by Sotillo's soldiery, who may push on as far as this at once. Sotillo used to be very cordial to me at the Goulds' and at the club. How that man'll ever dare to look any of his friends here in the face I can't imagine."

"He'll no doubt begin by shooting some of them to get over the first awkwardness," said the doctor. "Nothing in this country serves better your military man who has changed sides than a few summary executions." He spoke with a gloomy positiveness that left no room for protest. The engineer-in-chief did not attempt any. He simply nodded several times regretfully, then said —



“I think we shall be able to mount you in the morning, doctor. Our peons have recovered some of our stampeded horses. By riding hard and taking a wide circuit by Los Hatos and along the edge of the forest, clear of Rincon altogether, you may hope to reach the San Tome bridge without being interfered with. The mine is just now, to my mind, the safest place for anybody at all compromised. I only wish the railway was as difficult to touch.”

“Am I compromised?” Doctor Monygham brought out slowly after a short silence.

“The whole Gould Concession is compromised. It could not have remained for ever outside the political life of the country — if those convulsions may be called life. The thing is — can it be touched? The moment was bound to come when neutrality would become impossible, and Charles Gould understood this well. I believe he is prepared for every extremity. A man of his sort has never contemplated remaining indefinitely at the mercy of ignorance and corruption. It was like being a prisoner in a cavern of banditti with the price of your ransom in your pocket, and buying your life from day to day. Your mere safety, not your liberty, mind, doctor. I know what I am talking about. The image at which you shrug your shoulders is perfectly correct, especially if you conceive such a prisoner endowed with the power of replenishing his pocket by means as remote from the faculties of his captors as if they were magic. You must have understood that as well as I do, doctor. He was in the position of the goose with the golden eggs. I broached this matter to him as far back as Sir John’s visit here. The prisoner of stupid and greedy banditti is always at the mercy of the first imbecile ruffian, who may blow out his brains in a fit of temper or for some prospect of an immediate big haul. The tale of killing the goose with the golden eggs has not been evolved for nothing out of the wisdom of mankind. It is a story that will never grow old. That is why Charles Gould in his deep, dumb way has countenanced the Ribierist Mandate, the first public act that promised him safety on other than venal grounds. Ribierism has failed, as everything merely rational fails in this country. But Gould remains logical in wishing to save this big lot of silver. Decoud’s plan of a counter-revolution may be practicable or not, it may have a chance, or it may not have a chance. With all my experience of this revolutionary continent, I can hardly yet look at their methods seriously. Decoud has been reading to us his draft of a proclamation, and talking very well for two

hours about his plan of action. He had arguments which should have appeared solid enough if we, members of old, stable political and national organizations, were not startled by the mere idea of a new State evolved like this out of the head of a scoffing young man fleeing for his life, with a proclamation in his pocket, to a rough, jeering, half-bred swashbuckler, who in this part of the world is called a general. It sounds like a comic fairy tale — and behold, it may come off; because it is true to the very spirit of the country.”

“Is the silver gone off, then?” asked the doctor, moodily.

The chief engineer pulled out his watch. “By Captain Mitchell’s reckoning — and he ought to know — it has been gone long enough now to be some three or four miles outside the harbour; and, as Mitchell says, Nostromo is the sort of seaman to make the best of his opportunities.” Here the doctor grunted so heavily that the other changed his tone.

“You have a poor opinion of that move, doctor? But why? Charles Gould has got to play his game out, though he is not the man to formulate his conduct even to himself, perhaps, let alone to others. It may be that the game has been partly suggested to him by Holroyd; but it accords with his character, too; and that is why it has been so successful. Haven’t they come to calling him ‘El Rey de Sulaco’ in Sta. Marta? A nickname may be the best record of a success. That’s what I call putting the face of a joke upon the body of a truth. My dear sir, when I first arrived in Sta. Marta I was struck by the way all those journalists, demagogues, members of Congress, and all those generals and judges cringed before a sleepy-eyed advocate without practice simply because he was the plenipotentiary of the Gould Concession. Sir John when he came out was impressed, too.”

“A new State, with that plump dandy, Decoud, for the first President,” mused Dr. Monygham, nursing his cheek and swinging his legs all the time.

“Upon my word, and why not?” the chief engineer retorted in an unexpectedly earnest and confidential voice. It was as if something subtle in the air of Costaguana had inoculated him with the local faith in “pronunciamientos.” All at once he began to talk, like an expert revolutionist, of the instrument ready to hand in the intact army at Cayta, which could be brought back in a few days to Sulaco if only Decoud managed to make his way at once down the coast. For the military chief there was Barrios, who had nothing but a bullet to expect from Montero, his former professional rival and bitter enemy. Barrios’s concurrence was

assured. As to his army, it had nothing to expect from Montero either; not even a month's pay. From that point of view the existence of the treasure was of enormous importance. The mere knowledge that it had been saved from the Monterists would be a strong inducement for the Cayta troops to embrace the cause of the new State.

The doctor turned round and contemplated his companion for some time.

"This Decoud, I see, is a persuasive young beggar," he remarked at last. "And pray is it for this, then, that Charles Gould has let the whole lot of ingots go out to sea in charge of that Nostromo?"

"Charles Gould," said the engineer-in-chief, "has said no more about his motive than usual. You know, he doesn't talk. But we all here know his motive, and he has only one — the safety of the San Tome mine with the preservation of the Gould Concession in the spirit of his compact with Holroyd. Holroyd is another uncommon man. They understand each other's imaginative side. One is thirty, the other nearly sixty, and they have been made for each other. To be a millionaire, and such a millionaire as Holroyd, is like being eternally young. The audacity of youth reckons upon what it fancies an unlimited time at its disposal; but a millionaire has unlimited means in his hand — which is better. One's time on earth is an uncertain quantity, but about the long reach of millions there is no doubt. The introduction of a pure form of Christianity into this continent is a dream for a youthful enthusiast, and I have been trying to explain to you why Holroyd at fifty-eight is like a man on the threshold of life, and better, too. He's not a missionary, but the San Tome mine holds just that for him. I assure you, in sober truth, that he could not manage to keep this out of a strictly business conference upon the finances of Costaguana he had with Sir John a couple of years ago. Sir John mentioned it with amazement in a letter he wrote to me here, from San Francisco, when on his way home. Upon my word, doctor, things seem to be worth nothing by what they are in themselves. I begin to believe that the only solid thing about them is the spiritual value which everyone discovers in his own form of activity — —"

"Bah!" interrupted the doctor, without stopping for an instant the idle swinging movement of his legs. "Self-flattery. Food for that vanity which makes the world go round. Meantime, what do you think is going to happen to the treasure floating about the gulf with the great Capataz and the great politician?"

"Why are you uneasy about it, doctor?"

“I uneasy! And what the devil is it to me? I put no spiritual value into my desires, or my opinions, or my actions. They have not enough vastness to give me room for self-flattery. Look, for instance, I should certainly have liked to ease the last moments of that poor woman. And I can’t. It’s impossible. Have you met the impossible face to face — or have you, the Napoleon of railways, no such word in your dictionary?”

“Is she bound to have a very bad time of it?” asked the chief engineer, with humane concern.

Slow, heavy footsteps moved across the planks above the heavy hard wood beams of the kitchen. Then down the narrow opening of the staircase made in the thickness of the wall, and narrow enough to be defended by one man against twenty enemies, came the murmur of two voices, one faint and broken, the other deep and gentle answering it, and in its graver tone covering the weaker sound.

The two men remained still and silent till the murmurs ceased, then the doctor shrugged his shoulders and muttered —

“Yes, she’s bound to. And I could do nothing if I went up now.”

A long period of silence above and below ensued.

“I fancy,” began the engineer, in a subdued voice, “that you mistrust Captain Mitchell’s Capataz.”

“Mistrust him!” muttered the doctor through his teeth. “I believe him capable of anything — even of the most absurd fidelity. I am the last person he spoke to before he left the wharf, you know. The poor woman up there wanted to see him, and I let him go up to her. The dying must not be contradicted, you know. She seemed then fairly calm and resigned, but the scoundrel in those ten minutes or so has done or said something which seems to have driven her into despair. You know,” went on the doctor, hesitatingly, “women are so very unaccountable in every position, and at all times of life, that I thought sometimes she was in a way, don’t you see? in love with him — the Capataz. The rascal has his own charm indubitably, or he would not have made the conquest of all the populace of the town. No, no, I am not absurd. I may have given a wrong name to some strong sentiment for him on her part, to an unreasonable and simple attitude a woman is apt to take up emotionally towards a man. She used to abuse him to me frequently, which, of course, is not inconsistent with my idea. Not at all. It looked to me as if she were always thinking of him. He was something important in her life. You know, I have seen a lot of those

people. Whenever I came down from the mine Mrs. Gould used to ask me to keep my eye on them. She likes Italians; she has lived a long time in Italy, I believe, and she took a special fancy to that old Garibaldino. A remarkable chap enough. A rugged and dreamy character, living in the republicanism of his young days as if in a cloud. He has encouraged much of the Capataz's confounded nonsense — the high-strung, exalted old beggar!"

"What sort of nonsense?" wondered the chief engineer. "I found the Capataz always a very shrewd and sensible fellow, absolutely fearless, and remarkably useful. A perfect handy man. Sir John was greatly impressed by his resourcefulness and attention when he made that overland journey from Sta. Marta. Later on, as you might have heard, he rendered us a service by disclosing to the then chief of police the presence in the town of some professional thieves, who came from a distance to wreck and rob our monthly pay train. He has certainly organized the lighterage service of the harbour for the O.S.N. Company with great ability. He knows how to make himself obeyed, foreigner though he is. It is true that the Cargadores are strangers here, too, for the most part — immigrants, Islenos."

"His prestige is his fortune," muttered the doctor, sourly.

"The man has proved his trustworthiness up to the hilt on innumerable occasions and in all sorts of ways," argued the engineer. "When this question of the silver arose, Captain Mitchell naturally was very warmly of the opinion that his Capataz was the only man fit for the trust. As a sailor, of course, I suppose so. But as a man, don't you know, Gould, Decoud, and myself judged that it didn't matter in the least who went. Any boatman would have done just as well. Pray, what could a thief do with such a lot of ingots? If he ran off with them he would have in the end to land somewhere, and how could he conceal his cargo from the knowledge of the people ashore? We dismissed that consideration from our minds. Moreover, Decoud was going. There have been occasions when the Capataz has been more implicitly trusted."

"He took a slightly different view," the doctor said. "I heard him declare in this very room that it would be the most desperate affair of his life. He made a sort of verbal will here in my hearing, appointing old Viola his executor; and, by Jove! do you know, he — he's not grown rich by his fidelity to you good people of the railway and the harbour. I suppose he obtains some — how do you say that? — some spiritual value for his

labours, or else I don't know why the devil he should be faithful to you, Gould, Mitchell, or anybody else. He knows this country well. He knows, for instance, that Gamacho, the Deputy from Javira, has been nothing else but a 'tramposo' of the commonest sort, a petty pedlar of the Campo, till he managed to get enough goods on credit from Anzani to open a little store in the wilds, and got himself elected by the drunken mozos that hang about the Estancias and the poorest sort of rancheros who were in his debt. And Gamacho, who to-morrow will be probably one of our high officials, is a stranger, too — an Isleno. He might have been a Cargador on the O. S. N. wharf had he not (the posadero of Rincon is ready to swear it) murdered a pedlar in the woods and stolen his pack to begin life on. And do you think that Gamacho, then, would have ever become a hero with the democracy of this place, like our Capataz? Of course not. He isn't half the man. No; decidedly, I think that Nostromo is a fool."

The doctor's talk was distasteful to the builder of railways. "It is impossible to argue that point," he said, philosophically. "Each man has his gifts. You should have heard Gamacho haranguing his friends in the street. He has a howling voice, and he shouted like mad, lifting his clenched fist right above his head, and throwing his body half out of the window. At every pause the rabble below yelled, 'Down with the Oligarchs! Viva la Libertad!' Fuentes inside looked extremely miserable. You know, he is the brother of Jorge Fuentes, who has been Minister of the Interior for six months or so, some few years back. Of course, he has no conscience; but he is a man of birth and education — at one time the director of the Customs of Cayta. That idiot-brute Gamacho fastened himself upon him with his following of the lowest rabble. His sickly fear of that ruffian was the most rejoicing sight imaginable."

He got up and went to the door to look out towards the harbour. "All quiet," he said; "I wonder if Sotillo really means to turn up here?"

## CHAPTER TWO

Captain Mitchell, pacing the wharf, was asking himself the same question. There was always the doubt whether the warning of the Esmeralda telegraphist — a fragmentary and interrupted message — had been properly understood. However, the good man had made up his mind not to go to bed till daylight, if even then. He imagined himself to have rendered an enormous service to Charles Gould. When he thought of the saved silver he rubbed his hands together with satisfaction. In his simple way he was proud at being a party to this extremely clever expedient. It was he who had given it a practical shape by suggesting the possibility of intercepting at sea the north-bound steamer. And it was advantageous to his Company, too, which would have lost a valuable freight if the treasure had been left ashore to be confiscated. The pleasure of disappointing the Monterists was also very great. Authoritative by temperament and the long habit of command, Captain Mitchell was no democrat. He even went so far as to profess a contempt for parliamentarism itself. “His Excellency Don Vincente Ribiera,” he used to say, “whom I and that fellow of mine, Nostromo, had the honour, sir, and the pleasure of saving from a cruel death, deferred too much to his Congress. It was a mistake — a distinct mistake, sir.”

The guileless old seaman superintending the O.S.N. service imagined that the last three days had exhausted every startling surprise the political life of Costaguana could offer. He used to confess afterwards that the events which followed surpassed his imagination. To begin with, Sulaco (because of the seizure of the cables and the disorganization of the steam service) remained for a whole fortnight cut off from the rest of the world like a besieged city.

“One would not have believed it possible; but so it was, sir. A full fortnight.”

The account of the extraordinary things that happened during that time, and the powerful emotions he experienced, acquired a comic impressiveness from the pompous manner of his personal narrative. He opened it always by assuring his hearer that he was “in the thick of things from first to last.” Then he would begin by describing the getting away of the silver, and his natural anxiety lest “his fellow” in charge of the lighter should make some mistake. Apart from the loss of so much precious metal, the life of Senor Martin Decoud, an agreeable, wealthy, and well-informed

young gentleman, would have been jeopardized through his falling into the hands of his political enemies. Captain Mitchell also admitted that in his solitary vigil on the wharf he had felt a certain measure of concern for the future of the whole country.

“A feeling, sir,” he explained, “perfectly comprehensible in a man properly grateful for the many kindnesses received from the best families of merchants and other native gentlemen of independent means, who, barely saved by us from the excesses of the mob, seemed, to my mind’s eye, destined to become the prey in person and fortune of the native soldiery, which, as is well known, behave with regrettable barbarity to the inhabitants during their civil commotions. And then, sir, there were the Goulds, for both of whom, man and wife, I could not but entertain the warmest feelings deserved by their hospitality and kindness. I felt, too, the dangers of the gentlemen of the Amarilla Club, who had made me honorary member, and had treated me with uniform regard and civility, both in my capacity of Consular Agent and as Superintendent of an important Steam Service. Miss Antonia Avellanos, the most beautiful and accomplished young lady whom it had ever been my privilege to speak to, was not a little in my mind, I confess. How the interests of my Company would be affected by the impending change of officials claimed a large share of my attention, too. In short, sir, I was extremely anxious and very tired, as you may suppose, by the exciting and memorable events in which I had taken my little part. The Company’s building containing my residence was within five minutes’ walk, with the attraction of some supper and of my hammock (I always take my nightly rest in a hammock, as the most suitable to the climate); but somehow, sir, though evidently I could do nothing for any one by remaining about, I could not tear myself away from that wharf, where the fatigue made me stumble painfully at times. The night was excessively dark — the darkest I remember in my life; so that I began to think that the arrival of the transport from Esmeralda could not possibly take place before daylight, owing to the difficulty of navigating the gulf. The mosquitoes bit like fury. We have been infested here with mosquitoes before the late improvements; a peculiar harbour brand, sir, renowned for its ferocity. They were like a cloud about my head, and I shouldn’t wonder that but for their attacks I would have dozed off as I walked up and down, and got a heavy fall. I kept on smoking cigar after cigar, more to protect myself from being eaten up alive than from any real relish for the weed. Then, sir, when perhaps for the



twentieth time I was approaching my watch to the lighted end in order to see the time, and observing with surprise that it wanted yet ten minutes to midnight, I heard the splash of a ship's propeller — an unmistakable sound to a sailor's ear on such a calm night. It was faint indeed, because they were advancing with precaution and dead slow, both on account of the darkness and from their desire of not revealing too soon their presence: a very unnecessary care, because, I verily believe, in all the enormous extent of this harbour I was the only living soul about. Even the usual staff of watchmen and others had been absent from their posts for several nights owing to the disturbances. I stood stock still, after dropping and stamping out my cigar — a circumstance highly agreeable, I should think, to the mosquitoes, if I may judge from the state of my face next morning. But that was a trifling inconvenience in comparison with the brutal proceedings I became victim of on the part of Sotillo. Something utterly inconceivable, sir; more like the proceedings of a maniac than the action of a sane man, however lost to all sense of honour and decency. But Sotillo was furious at the failure of his thievish scheme."

In this Captain Mitchell was right. Sotillo was indeed infuriated. Captain Mitchell, however, had not been arrested at once; a vivid curiosity induced him to remain on the wharf (which is nearly four hundred feet long) to see, or rather hear, the whole process of disembarkation. Concealed by the railway truck used for the silver, which had been run back afterwards to the shore end of the jetty, Captain Mitchell saw the small detachment thrown forward, pass by, taking different directions upon the plain. Meantime, the troops were being landed and formed into a column, whose head crept up gradually so close to him that he made it out, barring nearly the whole width of the wharf, only a very few yards from him. Then the low, shuffling, murmuring, clinking sounds ceased, and the whole mass remained for about an hour motionless and silent, awaiting the return of the scouts. On land nothing was to be heard except the deep baying of the mastiffs at the railway yards, answered by the faint barking of the curs infesting the outer limits of the town. A detached knot of dark shapes stood in front of the head of the column.

Presently the picket at the end of the wharf began to challenge in undertones single figures approaching from the plain. Those messengers sent back from the scouting parties flung to their comrades brief sentences and passed on rapidly, becoming lost in the great motionless mass, to make

their report to the Staff. It occurred to Captain Mitchell that his position could become disagreeable and perhaps dangerous, when suddenly, at the head of the jetty, there was a shout of command, a bugle call, followed by a stir and a rattling of arms, and a murmuring noise that ran right up the column. Near by a loud voice directed hurriedly, "Push that railway car out of the way!" At the rush of bare feet to execute the order Captain Mitchell skipped back a pace or two; the car, suddenly impelled by many hands, flew away from him along the rails, and before he knew what had happened he found himself surrounded and seized by his arms and the collar of his coat.

"We have caught a man hiding here, *mi teniente!*" cried one of his captors.

"Hold him on one side till the rearguard comes along," answered the voice. The whole column streamed past Captain Mitchell at a run, the thundering noise of their feet dying away suddenly on the shore. His captors held him tightly, disregarding his declaration that he was an Englishman and his loud demands to be taken at once before their commanding officer. Finally he lapsed into dignified silence. With a hollow rumble of wheels on the planks a couple of field guns, dragged by hand, rolled by. Then, after a small body of men had marched past escorting four or five figures which walked in advance, with a jingle of steel scabbards, he felt a tug at his arms, and was ordered to come along. During the passage from the wharf to the Custom House it is to be feared that Captain Mitchell was subjected to certain indignities at the hands of the soldiers — such as jerks, thumps on the neck, forcible application of the butt of a rifle to the small of his back. Their ideas of speed were not in accord with his notion of his dignity. He became flustered, flushed, and helpless. It was as if the world were coming to an end.

The long building was surrounded by troops, which were already piling arms by companies and preparing to pass the night lying on the ground in their ponchos with their sacks under their heads. Corporals moved with swinging lanterns posting sentries all round the walls wherever there was a door or an opening. Sotillo was taking his measures to protect his conquest as if it had indeed contained the treasure. His desire to make his fortune at one audacious stroke of genius had overmastered his reasoning faculties. He would not believe in the possibility of failure; the mere hint of such a thing made his brain reel with rage. Every circumstance pointing to it appeared incredible. The statement of Hirsch, which was so absolutely fatal to his

hopes, could by no means be admitted. It is true, too, that Hirsch's story had been told so incoherently, with such excessive signs of distraction, that it really looked improbable. It was extremely difficult, as the saying is, to make head or tail of it. On the bridge of the steamer, directly after his rescue, Sotillo and his officers, in their impatience and excitement, would not give the wretched man time to collect such few wits as remained to him. He ought to have been quieted, soothed, and reassured, whereas he had been roughly handled, cuffed, shaken, and addressed in menacing tones. His struggles, his wriggles, his attempts to get down on his knees, followed by the most violent efforts to break away, as if he meant incontinently to jump overboard, his shrieks and shrinkings and cowering wild glances had filled them first with amazement, then with a doubt of his genuineness, as men are wont to suspect the sincerity of every great passion. His Spanish, too, became so mixed up with German that the better half of his statements remained incomprehensible. He tried to propitiate them by calling them *hochwohlgeboren herren*, which in itself sounded suspicious. When admonished sternly not to trifle he repeated his entreaties and protestations of loyalty and innocence again in German, obstinately, because he was not aware in what language he was speaking. His identity, of course, was perfectly known as an inhabitant of Esmeralda, but this made the matter no clearer. As he kept on forgetting Decoud's name, mixing him up with several other people he had seen in the Casa Gould, it looked as if they all had been in the lighter together; and for a moment Sotillo thought that he had drowned every prominent Ribierist of Sulaco. The improbability of such a thing threw a doubt upon the whole statement. Hirsch was either mad or playing a part — pretending fear and distraction on the spur of the moment to cover the truth. Sotillo's rapacity, excited to the highest pitch by the prospect of an immense booty, could believe in nothing adverse. This Jew might have been very much frightened by the accident, but he knew where the silver was concealed, and had invented this story, with his Jewish cunning, to put him entirely off the track as to what had been done.

Sotillo had taken up his quarters on the upper floor in a vast apartment with heavy black beams. But there was no ceiling, and the eye lost itself in the darkness under the high pitch of the roof. The thick shutters stood open. On a long table could be seen a large inkstand, some stumpy, inky quill pens, and two square wooden boxes, each holding half a hundred-weight of sand. Sheets of grey coarse official paper bestrewed the floor. It must have

been a room occupied by some higher official of the Customs, because a large leathern armchair stood behind the table, with other high-backed chairs scattered about. A net hammock was swung under one of the beams — for the official's afternoon siesta, no doubt. A couple of candles stuck into tall iron candlesticks gave a dim reddish light. The colonel's hat, sword, and revolver lay between them, and a couple of his more trusty officers lounged gloomily against the table. The colonel threw himself into the armchair, and a big negro with a sergeant's stripes on his ragged sleeve, kneeling down, pulled off his boots. Sotillo's ebony moustache contrasted violently with the livid colouring of his cheeks. His eyes were sombre and as if sunk very far into his head. He seemed exhausted by his perplexities, languid with disappointment; but when the sentry on the landing thrust his head in to announce the arrival of a prisoner, he revived at once.

"Let him be brought in," he shouted, fiercely.

The door flew open, and Captain Mitchell, bareheaded, his waistcoat open, the bow of his tie under his ear, was hustled into the room.

Sotillo recognized him at once. He could not have hoped for a more precious capture; here was a man who could tell him, if he chose, everything he wished to know — and directly the problem of how best to make him talk to the point presented itself to his mind. The resentment of a foreign nation had no terrors for Sotillo. The might of the whole armed Europe would not have protected Captain Mitchell from insults and ill-usage, so well as the quick reflection of Sotillo that this was an Englishman who would most likely turn obstinate under bad treatment, and become quite unmanageable. At all events, the colonel smoothed the scowl on his brow.

"What! The excellent Senor Mitchell!" he cried, in affected dismay. The pretended anger of his swift advance and of his shout, "Release the caballero at once," was so effective that the astounded soldiers positively sprang away from their prisoner. Thus suddenly deprived of forcible support, Captain Mitchell reeled as though about to fall. Sotillo took him familiarly under the arm, led him to a chair, waved his hand at the room. "Go out, all of you," he commanded.

When they had been left alone he stood looking down, irresolute and silent, watching till Captain Mitchell had recovered his power of speech.

Here in his very grasp was one of the men concerned in the removal of the silver. Sotillo's temperament was of that sort that he experienced an

ardent desire to beat him; just as formerly when negotiating with difficulty a loan from the cautious Anzani, his fingers always itched to take the shopkeeper by the throat. As to Captain Mitchell, the suddenness, unexpectedness, and general inconceivableness of this experience had confused his thoughts. Moreover, he was physically out of breath.

"I've been knocked down three times between this and the wharf," he gasped out at last. "Somebody shall be made to pay for this." He had certainly stumbled more than once, and had been dragged along for some distance before he could regain his stride. With his recovered breath his indignation seemed to madden him. He jumped up, crimson, all his white hair bristling, his eyes glaring vengefully, and shook violently the flaps of his ruined waistcoat before the disconcerted Sotillo. "Look! Those uniformed thieves of yours downstairs have robbed me of my watch."

The old sailor's aspect was very threatening. Sotillo saw himself cut off from the table on which his sabre and revolver were lying.

"I demand restitution and apologies," Mitchell thundered at him, quite beside himself. "From you! Yes, from you!"

For the space of a second or so the colonel stood with a perfectly stony expression of face; then, as Captain Mitchell flung out an arm towards the table as if to snatch up the revolver, Sotillo, with a yell of alarm, bounded to the door and was gone in a flash, slamming it after him. Surprise calmed Captain Mitchell's fury. Behind the closed door Sotillo shouted on the landing, and there was a great tumult of feet on the wooden staircase.

"Disarm him! Bind him!" the colonel could be heard vociferating.

Captain Mitchell had just the time to glance once at the windows, with three perpendicular bars of iron each and some twenty feet from the ground, as he well knew, before the door flew open and the rush upon him took place. In an incredibly short time he found himself bound with many turns of a hide rope to a high-backed chair, so that his head alone remained free. Not till then did Sotillo, who had been leaning in the doorway trembling visibly, venture again within. The soldiers, picking up from the floor the rifles they had dropped to grapple with the prisoner, filed out of the room. The officers remained leaning on their swords and looking on.

"The watch! the watch!" raved the colonel, pacing to and fro like a tiger in a cage. "Give me that man's watch."

It was true, that when searched for arms in the hall downstairs, before being taken into Sotillo's presence, Captain Mitchell had been relieved of

his watch and chain; but at the colonel's clamour it was produced quickly enough, a corporal bringing it up, carried carefully in the palms of his joined hands. Sotillo snatched it, and pushed the clenched fist from which it dangled close to Captain Mitchell's face.

"Now then! You arrogant Englishman! You dare to call the soldiers of the army thieves! Behold your watch."

He flourished his fist as if aiming blows at the prisoner's nose. Captain Mitchell, helpless as a swathed infant, looked anxiously at the sixty-guinea gold half-chronometer, presented to him years ago by a Committee of Underwriters for saving a ship from total loss by fire. Sotillo, too, seemed to perceive its valuable appearance. He became silent suddenly, stepped aside to the table, and began a careful examination in the light of the candles. He had never seen anything so fine. His officers closed in and craned their necks behind his back.

He became so interested that for an instant he forgot his precious prisoner. There is always something childish in the rapacity of the passionate, clear-minded, Southern races, wanting in the misty idealism of the Northerners, who at the smallest encouragement dream of nothing less than the conquest of the earth. Sotillo was fond of jewels, gold trinkets, of personal adornment. After a moment he turned about, and with a commanding gesture made all his officers fall back. He laid down the watch on the table, then, negligently, pushed his hat over it.

"Ha!" he began, going up very close to the chair. "You dare call my valiant soldiers of the Esmeralda regiment, thieves. You dare! What impudence! You foreigners come here to rob our country of its wealth. You never have enough! Your audacity knows no bounds."

He looked towards the officers, amongst whom there was an approving murmur. The older major was moved to declare —

"Si, mi colonel. They are all traitors."

"I shall say nothing," continued Sotillo, fixing the motionless and powerless Mitchell with an angry but uneasy stare. "I shall say nothing of your treacherous attempt to get possession of my revolver to shoot me while I was trying to treat you with consideration you did not deserve. You have forfeited your life. Your only hope is in my clemency."

He watched for the effect of his words, but there was no obvious sign of fear on Captain Mitchell's face. His white hair was full of dust, which covered also the rest of his helpless person. As if he had heard nothing, he

twitched an eyebrow to get rid of a bit of straw which hung amongst the hairs.

Sotillo advanced one leg and put his arms akimbo. "It is you, Mitchell," he said, emphatically, "who are the thief, not my soldiers!" He pointed at his prisoner a forefinger with a long, almond-shaped nail. "Where is the silver of the San Tome mine? I ask you, Mitchell, where is the silver that was deposited in this Custom House? Answer me that! You stole it. You were a party to stealing it. It was stolen from the Government. Aha! you think I do not know what I say; but I am up to your foreign tricks. It is gone, the silver! No? Gone in one of your lanchas, you miserable man! How dared you?"

This time he produced his effect. "How on earth could Sotillo know that?" thought Mitchell. His head, the only part of his body that could move, betrayed his surprise by a sudden jerk.

"Ha! you tremble," Sotillo shouted, suddenly. "It is a conspiracy. It is a crime against the State. Did you not know that the silver belongs to the Republic till the Government claims are satisfied? Where is it? Where have you hidden it, you miserable thief?"

At this question Captain Mitchell's sinking spirits revived. In whatever incomprehensible manner Sotillo had already got his information about the lighter, he had not captured it. That was clear. In his outraged heart, Captain Mitchell had resolved that nothing would induce him to say a word while he remained so disgracefully bound, but his desire to help the escape of the silver made him depart from this resolution. His wits were very much at work. He detected in Sotillo a certain air of doubt, of irresolution.

"That man," he said to himself, "is not certain of what he advances." For all his pomposity in social intercourse, Captain Mitchell could meet the realities of life in a resolute and ready spirit. Now he had got over the first shock of the abominable treatment he was cool and collected enough. The immense contempt he felt for Sotillo steadied him, and he said oracularly, "No doubt it is well concealed by this time."

Sotillo, too, had time to cool down. "Muy bien, Mitchell," he said in a cold and threatening manner. "But can you produce the Government receipt for the royalty and the Custom House permit of embarkation, hey? Can you? No. Then the silver has been removed illegally, and the guilty shall be made to suffer, unless it is produced within five days from this." He gave orders for the prisoner to be unbound and locked up in one of the smaller

rooms downstairs. He walked about the room, moody and silent, till Captain Mitchell, with each of his arms held by a couple of men, stood up, shook himself, and stamped his feet.

“How did you like to be tied up, Mitchell?” he asked, derisively.

“It is the most incredible, abominable use of power!” Captain Mitchell declared in a loud voice. “And whatever your purpose, you shall gain nothing from it, I can promise you.”

The tall colonel, livid, with his coal-black ringlets and moustache, crouched, as it were, to look into the eyes of the short, thick-set, red-faced prisoner with rumpled white hair.

“That we shall see. You shall know my power a little better when I tie you up to a post outside in the sun for a whole day.” He drew himself up haughtily, and made a sign for Captain Mitchell to be led away.

“What about my watch?” cried Captain Mitchell, hanging back from the efforts of the men pulling him towards the door.

Sotillo turned to his officers. “No! But only listen to this picaro, caballeros,” he pronounced with affected scorn, and was answered by a chorus of derisive laughter. “He demands his watch!” . . . He ran up again to Captain Mitchell, for the desire to relieve his feelings by inflicting blows and pain upon this Englishman was very strong within him. “Your watch! You are a prisoner in war time, Mitchell! In war time! You have no rights and no property! Caramba! The very breath in your body belongs to me. Remember that.”

“Bosh!” said Captain Mitchell, concealing a disagreeable impression.

Down below, in a great hall, with the earthen floor and with a tall mound thrown up by white ants in a corner, the soldiers had kindled a small fire with broken chairs and tables near the arched gateway, through which the faint murmur of the harbour waters on the beach could be heard. While Captain Mitchell was being led down the staircase, an officer passed him, running up to report to Sotillo the capture of more prisoners. A lot of smoke hung about in the vast gloomy place, the fire crackled, and, as if through a haze, Captain Mitchell made out, surrounded by short soldiers with fixed bayonets, the heads of three tall prisoners — the doctor, the engineer-in-chief, and the white leonine mane of old Viola, who stood half-turned away from the others with his chin on his breast and his arms crossed. Mitchell’s astonishment knew no bounds. He cried out; the other two exclaimed also. But he hurried on, diagonally, across the big cavern-like hall. Lots of



thoughts, surmises, hints of caution, and so on, crowded his head to distraction.

“Is he actually keeping you?” shouted the chief engineer, whose single eyeglass glittered in the firelight.

An officer from the top of the stairs was shouting urgently, “Bring them all up — all three.”

In the clamour of voices and the rattle of arms, Captain Mitchell made himself heard imperfectly: “By heavens! the fellow has stolen my watch.”

The engineer-in-chief on the staircase resisted the pressure long enough to shout, “What? What did you say?”

“My chronometer!” Captain Mitchell yelled violently at the very moment of being thrust head foremost through a small door into a sort of cell, perfectly black, and so narrow that he fetched up against the opposite wall. The door had been instantly slammed. He knew where they had put him. This was the strong room of the Custom House, whence the silver had been removed only a few hours earlier. It was almost as narrow as a corridor, with a small square aperture, barred by a heavy grating, at the distant end. Captain Mitchell staggered for a few steps, then sat down on the earthen floor with his back to the wall. Nothing, not even a gleam of light from anywhere, interfered with Captain Mitchell’s meditation. He did some hard but not very extensive thinking. It was not of a gloomy cast. The old sailor, with all his small weaknesses and absurdities, was constitutionally incapable of entertaining for any length of time a fear of his personal safety. It was not so much firmness of soul as the lack of a certain kind of imagination — the kind whose undue development caused intense suffering to Senor Hirsch; that sort of imagination which adds the blind terror of bodily suffering and of death, envisaged as an accident to the body alone, strictly — to all the other apprehensions on which the sense of one’s existence is based. Unfortunately, Captain Mitchell had not much penetration of any kind; characteristic, illuminating trifles of expression, action, or movement, escaped him completely. He was too pompously and innocently aware of his own existence to observe that of others. For instance, he could not believe that Sotillo had been really afraid of him, and this simply because it would never have entered into his head to shoot any one except in the most pressing case of self-defence. Anybody could see he was not a murdering kind of man, he reflected quite gravely. Then why this preposterous and insulting charge? he asked himself. But his thoughts

mainly clung around the astounding and unanswerable question: How the devil the fellow got to know that the silver had gone off in the lighter? It was obvious that he had not captured it. And, obviously, he could not have captured it! In this last conclusion Captain Mitchell was misled by the assumption drawn from his observation of the weather during his long vigil on the wharf. He thought that there had been much more wind than usual that night in the gulf; whereas, as a matter of fact, the reverse was the case.

“How in the name of all that’s marvellous did that confounded fellow get wind of the affair?” was the first question he asked directly after the bang, clatter, and flash of the open door (which was closed again almost before he could lift his dropped head) informed him that he had a companion of captivity. Dr. Monygham’s voice stopped muttering curses in English and Spanish.

“Is that you, Mitchell?” he made answer, surlily. “I struck my forehead against this confounded wall with enough force to fell an ox. Where are you?”

Captain Mitchell, accustomed to the darkness, could make out the doctor stretching out his hands blindly.

“I am sitting here on the floor. Don’t fall over my legs,” Captain Mitchell’s voice announced with great dignity of tone. The doctor, entreated not to walk about in the dark, sank down to the ground, too. The two prisoners of Sotillo, with their heads nearly touching, began to exchange confidences.

“Yes,” the doctor related in a low tone to Captain Mitchell’s vehement curiosity, “we have been nabbed in old Viola’s place. It seems that one of their pickets, commanded by an officer, pushed as far as the town gate. They had orders not to enter, but to bring along every soul they could find on the plain. We had been talking in there with the door open, and no doubt they saw the glimmer of our light. They must have been making their approaches for some time. The engineer laid himself on a bench in a recess by the fire-place, and I went upstairs to have a look. I hadn’t heard any sound from there for a long time. Old Viola, as soon as he saw me come up, lifted his arm for silence. I stole in on tiptoe. By Jove, his wife was lying down and had gone to sleep. The woman had actually dropped off to sleep! ‘Senor Doctor,’ Viola whispers to me, ‘it looks as if her oppression was going to get better.’ ‘Yes,’ I said, very much surprised; ‘your wife is a wonderful woman, Giorgio.’ Just then a shot was fired in the kitchen, which

made us jump and cower as if at a thunder-clap. It seems that the party of soldiers had stolen quite close up, and one of them had crept up to the door. He looked in, thought there was no one there, and, holding his rifle ready, entered quietly. The chief told me that he had just closed his eyes for a moment. When he opened them, he saw the man already in the middle of the room peering into the dark corners. The chief was so startled that, without thinking, he made one leap from the recess right out in front of the fireplace. The soldier, no less startled, up with his rifle and pulls the trigger, deafening and singeing the engineer, but in his flurry missing him completely. But, look what happens! At the noise of the report the sleeping woman sat up, as if moved by a spring, with a shriek, 'The children, Gian' Battista! Save the children!' I have it in my ears now. It was the truest cry of distress I ever heard. I stood as if paralyzed, but the old husband ran across to the bedside, stretching out his hands. She clung to them! I could see her eyes go glazed; the old fellow lowered her down on the pillows and then looked round at me. She was dead! All this took less than five minutes, and then I ran down to see what was the matter. It was no use thinking of any resistance. Nothing we two could say availed with the officer, so I volunteered to go up with a couple of soldiers and fetch down old Viola. He was sitting at the foot of the bed, looking at his wife's face, and did not seem to hear what I said; but after I had pulled the sheet over her head, he got up and followed us downstairs quietly, in a sort of thoughtful way. They marched us off along the road, leaving the door open and the candle burning. The chief engineer strode on without a word, but I looked back once or twice at the feeble gleam. After we had gone some considerable distance, the Garibaldino, who was walking by my side, suddenly said, 'I have buried many men on battlefields on this continent. The priests talk of consecrated ground! Bah! All the earth made by God is holy; but the sea, which knows nothing of kings and priests and tyrants, is the holiest of all. Doctor! I should like to bury her in the sea. No mummeries, candles, incense, no holy water mumbled over by priests. The spirit of liberty is upon the waters.' . . . Amazing old man. He was saying all this in an undertone as if talking to himself."

"Yes, yes," interrupted Captain Mitchell, impatiently. "Poor old chap! But have you any idea how that ruffian Sotillo obtained his information? He did not get hold of any of our Cargadores who helped with the truck, did he? But no, it is impossible! These were picked men we've had in our boats

for these five years, and I paid them myself specially for the job, with instructions to keep out of the way for twenty-four hours at least. I saw them with my own eyes march on with the Italians to the railway yards. The chief promised to give them rations as long as they wanted to remain there.”

“Well,” said the doctor, slowly, “I can tell you that you may say good-bye for ever to your best lighter, and to the Capataz of Cargadores.”

At this, Captain Mitchell scrambled up to his feet in the excess of his excitement. The doctor, without giving him time to exclaim, stated briefly the part played by Hirsch during the night.

Captain Mitchell was overcome. “Drowned!” he muttered, in a bewildered and appalled whisper. “Drowned!” Afterwards he kept still, apparently listening, but too absorbed in the news of the catastrophe to follow the doctor’s narrative with attention.

The doctor had taken up an attitude of perfect ignorance, till at last Sotillo was induced to have Hirsch brought in to repeat the whole story, which was got out of him again with the greatest difficulty, because every moment he would break out into lamentations. At last, Hirsch was led away, looking more dead than alive, and shut up in one of the upstairs rooms to be close at hand. Then the doctor, keeping up his character of a man not admitted to the inner councils of the San Tome Administration, remarked that the story sounded incredible. Of course, he said, he couldn’t tell what had been the action of the Europeans, as he had been exclusively occupied with his own work in looking after the wounded, and also in attending Don Jose Avellanos. He had succeeded in assuming so well a tone of impartial indifference, that Sotillo seemed to be completely deceived. Till then a show of regular inquiry had been kept up; one of the officers sitting at the table wrote down the questions and the answers, the others, lounging about the room, listened attentively, puffing at their long cigars and keeping their eyes on the doctor. But at that point Sotillo ordered everybody out.

## CHAPTER THREE

Directly they were alone, the colonel's severe official manner changed. He rose and approached the doctor. His eyes shone with rapacity and hope; he became confidential. "The silver might have been indeed put on board the lighter, but it was not conceivable that it should have been taken out to sea." The doctor, watching every word, nodded slightly, smoking with apparent relish the cigar which Sotillo had offered him as a sign of his friendly intentions. The doctor's manner of cold detachment from the rest of the Europeans led Sotillo on, till, from conjecture to conjecture, he arrived at hinting that in his opinion this was a putup job on the part of Charles Gould, in order to get hold of that immense treasure all to himself. The doctor, observant and self-possessed, muttered, "He is very capable of that."

Here Captain Mitchell exclaimed with amazement, amusement, and indignation, "You said that of Charles Gould!" Disgust, and even some suspicion, crept into his tone, for to him, too, as to other Europeans, there appeared to be something dubious about the doctor's personality.

"What on earth made you say that to this watch-stealing scoundrel?" he asked. "What's the object of an infernal lie of that sort? That confounded pick-pocket was quite capable of believing you."

He snorted. For a time the doctor remained silent in the dark.

"Yes, that is exactly what I did say," he uttered at last, in a tone which would have made it clear enough to a third party that the pause was not of a reluctant but of a reflective character. Captain Mitchell thought that he had never heard anything so brazenly impudent in his life.

"Well, well!" he muttered to himself, but he had not the heart to voice his thoughts. They were swept away by others full of astonishment and regret. A heavy sense of discomfiture crushed him: the loss of the silver, the death of Nostromo, which was really quite a blow to his sensibilities, because he had become attached to his Capataz as people get attached to their inferiors from love of ease and almost unconscious gratitude. And when he thought of Decoud being drowned, too, his sensibility was almost overcome by this miserable end. What a heavy blow for that poor young woman! Captain Mitchell did not belong to the species of crabbed old bachelors; on the contrary, he liked to see young men paying attentions to young women. It seemed to him a natural and proper thing. Proper especially. As to sailors, it was different; it was not their place to marry, he maintained, but it was on

moral grounds as a matter of self-denial, for, he explained, life on board ship is not fit for a woman even at best, and if you leave her on shore, first of all it is not fair, and next she either suffers from it or doesn't care a bit, which, in both cases, is bad. He couldn't have told what upset him most — Charles Gould's immense material loss, the death of Nostromo, which was a heavy loss to himself, or the idea of that beautiful and accomplished young woman being plunged into mourning.

"Yes," the doctor, who had been apparently reflecting, began again, "he believed me right enough. I thought he would have hugged me. 'Si, si,' he said, 'he will write to that partner of his, the rich Americano in San Francisco, that it is all lost. Why not? There is enough to share with many people.'"

"But this is perfectly imbecile!" cried Captain Mitchell.

The doctor remarked that Sotillo was imbecile, and that his imbecility was ingenious enough to lead him completely astray. He had helped him only but a little way.

"I mentioned," the doctor said, "in a sort of casual way, that treasure is generally buried in the earth rather than set afloat upon the sea. At this my Sotillo slapped his forehead. 'Por Dios, yes,' he said; 'they must have buried it on the shores of this harbour somewhere before they sailed out.'"

"Heavens and earth!" muttered Captain Mitchell, "I should not have believed that anybody could be ass enough — " He paused, then went on mournfully: "But what's the good of all this? It would have been a clever enough lie if the lighter had been still afloat. It would have kept that inconceivable idiot perhaps from sending out the steamer to cruise in the gulf. That was the danger that worried me no end." Captain Mitchell sighed profoundly.

"I had an object," the doctor pronounced, slowly.

"Had you?" muttered Captain Mitchell. "Well, that's lucky, or else I would have thought that you went on fooling him for the fun of the thing. And perhaps that was your object. Well, I must say I personally wouldn't condescend to that sort of thing. It is not to my taste. No, no. Blackening a friend's character is not my idea of fun, if it were to fool the greatest blackguard on earth."

Had it not been for Captain Mitchell's depression, caused by the fatal news, his disgust of Dr. Monygham would have taken a more outspoken

shape; but he thought to himself that now it really did not matter what that man, whom he had never liked, would say and do.

"I wonder," he grumbled, "why they have shut us up together, or why Sotillo should have shut you up at all, since it seems to me you have been fairly chummy up there?"

"Yes, I wonder," said the doctor grimly.

Captain Mitchell's heart was so heavy that he would have preferred for the time being a complete solitude to the best of company. But any company would have been preferable to the doctor's, at whom he had always looked askance as a sort of beachcomber of superior intelligence partly reclaimed from his abased state. That feeling led him to ask —

"What has that ruffian done with the other two?"

"The chief engineer he would have let go in any case," said the doctor. "He wouldn't like to have a quarrel with the railway upon his hands. Not just yet, at any rate. I don't think, Captain Mitchell, that you understand exactly what Sotillo's position is — "

"I don't see why I should bother my head about it," snarled Captain Mitchell.

"No," assented the doctor, with the same grim composure. "I don't see why you should. It wouldn't help a single human being in the world if you thought ever so hard upon any subject whatever."

"No," said Captain Mitchell, simply, and with evident depression. "A man locked up in a confounded dark hole is not much use to anybody."

"As to old Viola," the doctor continued, as though he had not heard, "Sotillo released him for the same reason he is presently going to release you."

"Eh? What?" exclaimed Captain Mitchell, staring like an owl in the darkness. "What is there in common between me and old Viola? More likely because the old chap has no watch and chain for the pickpocket to steal. And I tell you what, Dr. Monygham," he went on with rising choler, "he will find it more difficult than he thinks to get rid of me. He will burn his fingers over that job yet, I can tell you. To begin with, I won't go without my watch, and as to the rest — we shall see. I dare say it is no great matter for you to be locked up. But Joe Mitchell is a different kind of man, sir. I don't mean to submit tamely to insult and robbery. I am a public character, sir."

And then Captain Mitchell became aware that the bars of the opening had become visible, a black grating upon a square of grey. The coming of the day silenced Captain Mitchell as if by the reflection that now in all the future days he would be deprived of the invaluable services of his Capataz. He leaned against the wall with his arms folded on his breast, and the doctor walked up and down the whole length of the place with his peculiar hobbling gait, as if slinking about on damaged feet. At the end furthest from the grating he would be lost altogether in the darkness. Only the slight limping shuffle could be heard. There was an air of moody detachment in that painful prowling kept up without a pause. When the door of the prison was suddenly flung open and his name shouted out he showed no surprise. He swerved sharply in his walk, and passed out at once, as though much depended upon his speed; but Captain Mitchell remained for some time with his shoulders against the wall, quite undecided in the bitterness of his spirit whether it wouldn't be better to refuse to stir a limb in the way of protest. He had half a mind to get himself carried out, but after the officer at the door had shouted three or four times in tones of remonstrance and surprise he condescended to walk out.

Sotillo's manner had changed. The colonel's off-hand civility was slightly irresolute, as though he were in doubt if civility were the proper course in this case. He observed Captain Mitchell attentively before he spoke from the big armchair behind the table in a condescending voice —

"I have concluded not to detain you, Senor Mitchell. I am of a forgiving disposition. I make allowances. Let this be a lesson to you, however."

The peculiar dawn of Sulaco, which seems to break far away to the westward and creep back into the shade of the mountains, mingled with the reddish light of the candles. Captain Mitchell, in sign of contempt and indifference, let his eyes roam all over the room, and he gave a hard stare to the doctor, perched already on the casement of one of the windows, with his eyelids lowered, careless and thoughtful — or perhaps ashamed.

Sotillo, ensconced in the vast armchair, remarked, "I should have thought that the feelings of a caballero would have dictated to you an appropriate reply."

He waited for it, but Captain Mitchell remaining mute, more from extreme resentment than from reasoned intention, Sotillo hesitated, glanced towards the doctor, who looked up and nodded, then went on with a slight effort —



“Here, Senor Mitchell, is your watch. Learn how hasty and unjust has been your judgment of my patriotic soldiers.”

Lying back in his seat, he extended his arm over the table and pushed the watch away slightly. Captain Mitchell walked up with undisguised eagerness, put it to his ear, then slipped it into his pocket coolly.

Sotillo seemed to overcome an immense reluctance. Again he looked aside at the doctor, who stared at him unwinkingly.

But as Captain Mitchell was turning away, without as much as a nod or a glance, he hastened to say —

“You may go and wait downstairs for the senor doctor, whom I am going to liberate, too. You foreigners are insignificant, to my mind.”

He forced a slight, discordant laugh out of himself, while Captain Mitchell, for the first time, looked at him with some interest.

“The law shall take note later on of your transgressions,” Sotillo hurried on. “But as for me, you can live free, unguarded, unobserved. Do you hear, Senor Mitchell? You may depart to your affairs. You are beneath my notice. My attention is claimed by matters of the very highest importance.”

Captain Mitchell was very nearly provoked to an answer. It displeased him to be liberated insultingly; but want of sleep, prolonged anxieties, a profound disappointment with the fatal ending of the silver-saving business weighed upon his spirits. It was as much as he could do to conceal his uneasiness, not about himself perhaps, but about things in general. It occurred to him distinctly that something underhand was going on. As he went out he ignored the doctor pointedly.

“A brute!” said Sotillo, as the door shut.

Dr. Monygham slipped off the window-sill, and, thrusting his hands into the pockets of the long, grey dust coat he was wearing, made a few steps into the room.

Sotillo got up, too, and, putting himself in the way, examined him from head to foot.

“So your countrymen do not confide in you very much, senor doctor. They do not love you, eh? Why is that, I wonder?”

The doctor, lifting his head, answered by a long, lifeless stare and the words, “Perhaps because I have lived too long in Costaguana.”

Sotillo had a gleam of white teeth under the black moustache.

“Aha! But you love yourself,” he said, encouragingly.

“If you leave them alone,” the doctor said, looking with the same lifeless stare at Sotillo’s handsome face, “they will betray themselves very soon. Meantime, I may try to make Don Carlos speak?”

“Ah! senor doctor,” said Sotillo, wagging his head, “you are a man of quick intelligence. We were made to understand each other.” He turned away. He could bear no longer that expressionless and motionless stare, which seemed to have a sort of impenetrable emptiness like the black depth of an abyss.

Even in a man utterly devoid of moral sense there remains an appreciation of rascality which, being conventional, is perfectly clear. Sotillo thought that Dr. Monygham, so different from all Europeans, was ready to sell his countrymen and Charles Gould, his employer, for some share of the San Tome silver. Sotillo did not despise him for that. The colonel’s want of moral sense was of a profound and innocent character. It bordered upon stupidity, moral stupidity. Nothing that served his ends could appear to him really reprehensible. Nevertheless, he despised Dr. Monygham. He had for him an immense and satisfactory contempt. He despised him with all his heart because he did not mean to let the doctor have any reward at all. He despised him, not as a man without faith and honour, but as a fool. Dr. Monygham’s insight into his character had deceived Sotillo completely. Therefore he thought the doctor a fool.

Since his arrival in Sulaco the colonel’s ideas had undergone some modification.

He no longer wished for a political career in Montero’s administration. He had always doubted the safety of that course. Since he had learned from the chief engineer that at daylight most likely he would be confronted by Pedro Montero his misgivings on that point had considerably increased. The guerrillero brother of the general — the Pedrito of popular speech — had a reputation of his own. He wasn’t safe to deal with. Sotillo had vaguely planned seizing not only the treasure but the town itself, and then negotiating at leisure. But in the face of facts learned from the chief engineer (who had frankly disclosed to him the whole situation) his audacity, never of a very dashing kind, had been replaced by a most cautious hesitation.

“An army — an army crossed the mountains under Pedrito already,” he had repeated, unable to hide his consternation. “If it had not been that I am

given the news by a man of your position I would never have believed it. Astonishing!”

“An armed force,” corrected the engineer, suavely. His aim was attained. It was to keep Sulaco clear of any armed occupation for a few hours longer, to let those whom fear impelled leave the town. In the general dismay there were families hopeful enough to fly upon the road towards Los Hatos, which was left open by the withdrawal of the armed rabble under Senores Fuentes and Gamacho, to Rincon, with their enthusiastic welcome for Pedro Montero. It was a hasty and risky exodus, and it was said that Hernandez, occupying with his band the woods about Los Hatos, was receiving the fugitives. That a good many people he knew were contemplating such a flight had been well known to the chief engineer.

Father Corbelan’s efforts in the cause of that most pious robber had not been altogether fruitless. The political chief of Sulaco had yielded at the last moment to the urgent entreaties of the priest, had signed a provisional nomination appointing Hernandez a general, and calling upon him officially in this new capacity to preserve order in the town. The fact is that the political chief, seeing the situation desperate, did not care what he signed. It was the last official document he signed before he left the palace of the Intendencia for the refuge of the O.S.N. Company’s office. But even had he meant his act to be effective it was already too late. The riot which he feared and expected broke out in less than an hour after Father Corbelan had left him. Indeed, Father Corbelan, who had appointed a meeting with Nostromo in the Dominican Convent, where he had his residence in one of the cells, never managed to reach the place. From the Intendencia he had gone straight on to the Avellanos’s house to tell his brother-in-law, and though he stayed there no more than half an hour he had found himself cut off from his ascetic abode. Nostromo, after waiting there for some time, watching uneasily the increasing uproar in the street, had made his way to the offices of the Porvenir, and stayed there till daylight, as Decoud had mentioned in the letter to his sister. Thus the Capataz, instead of riding towards the Los Hatos woods as bearer of Hernandez’s nomination, had remained in town to save the life of the President Dictator, to assist in repressing the outbreak of the mob, and at last to sail out with the silver of the mine.

But Father Corbelan, escaping to Hernandez, had the document in his pocket, a piece of official writing turning a bandit into a general in a

memorable last official act of the Ribierist party, whose watchwords were honesty, peace, and progress. Probably neither the priest nor the bandit saw the irony of it. Father Corbelan must have found messengers to send into the town, for early on the second day of the disturbances there were rumours of Hernandez being on the road to Los Hatos ready to receive those who would put themselves under his protection. A strange-looking horseman, elderly and audacious, had appeared in the town, riding slowly while his eyes examined the fronts of the houses, as though he had never seen such high buildings before. Before the cathedral he had dismounted, and, kneeling in the middle of the Plaza, his bridle over his arm and his hat lying in front of him on the ground, had bowed his head, crossing himself and beating his breast for some little time. Remounting his horse, with a fearless but not unfriendly look round the little gathering formed about his public devotions, he had asked for the Casa Avellanos. A score of hands were extended in answer, with fingers pointing up the Calle de la Constitucion.

The horseman had gone on with only a glance of casual curiosity upwards to the windows of the Amarilla Club at the corner. His stentorian voice shouted periodically in the empty street, "Which is the Casa Avellanos?" till an answer came from the scared porter, and he disappeared under the gate. The letter he was bringing, written by Father Corbelan with a pencil by the camp-fire of Hernandez, was addressed to Don Jose, of whose critical state the priest was not aware. Antonia read it, and, after consulting Charles Gould, sent it on for the information of the gentlemen garrisoning the Amarilla Club. For herself, her mind was made up; she would rejoin her uncle; she would entrust the last day — the last hours perhaps — of her father's life to the keeping of the bandit, whose existence was a protest against the irresponsible tyranny of all parties alike, against the moral darkness of the land. The gloom of Los Hatos woods was preferable; a life of hardships in the train of a robber band less debasing. Antonia embraced with all her soul her uncle's obstinate defiance of misfortune. It was grounded in the belief in the man whom she loved.

In his message the Vicar-General answered upon his head for Hernandez's fidelity. As to his power, he pointed out that he had remained unsubdued for so many years. In that letter Decoud's idea of the new Occidental State (whose flourishing and stable condition is a matter of common knowledge now) was for the first time made public and used as an

argument. Hernandez, ex-bandit and the last general of Ribierist creation, was confident of being able to hold the tract of country between the woods of Los Hatos and the coast range till that devoted patriot, Don Martin Decoud, could bring General Barrios back to Sulaco for the reconquest of the town.

“Heaven itself wills it. Providence is on our side,” wrote Father Corbelan; there was no time to reflect upon or to controvert his statement; and if the discussion started upon the reading of that letter in the Amarilla Club was violent, it was also shortlived. In the general bewilderment of the collapse some jumped at the idea with joyful astonishment as upon the amazing discovery of a new hope. Others became fascinated by the prospect of immediate personal safety for their women and children. The majority caught at it as a drowning man catches at a straw. Father Corbelan was unexpectedly offering them a refuge from Pedrito Montero with his llaneros allied to Senores Fuentes and Gamacho with their armed rabble.

All the latter part of the afternoon an animated discussion went on in the big rooms of the Amarilla Club. Even those members posted at the windows with rifles and carbines to guard the end of the street in case of an offensive return of the populace shouted their opinions and arguments over their shoulders. As dusk fell Don Juste Lopez, inviting those caballeros who were of his way of thinking to follow him, withdrew into the corredor, where at a little table in the light of two candles he busied himself in composing an address, or rather a solemn declaration to be presented to Pedrito Montero by a deputation of such members of Assembly as had elected to remain in town. His idea was to propitiate him in order to save the form at least of parliamentary institutions. Seated before a blank sheet of paper, a goose-quill pen in his hand and surged upon from all sides, he turned to the right and to the left, repeating with solemn insistence —

“Caballeros, a moment of silence! A moment of silence! We ought to make it clear that we bow in all good faith to the accomplished facts.”

The utterance of that phrase seemed to give him a melancholy satisfaction. The hubbub of voices round him was growing strained and hoarse. In the sudden pauses the excited grimacing of the faces would sink all at once into the stillness of profound dejection.

Meantime, the exodus had begun. Carretas full of ladies and children rolled swaying across the Plaza, with men walking or riding by their side; mounted parties followed on mules and horses; the poorest were setting out

on foot, men and women carrying bundles, clasping babies in their arms, leading old people, dragging along the bigger children. When Charles Gould, after leaving the doctor and the engineer at the Casa Viola, entered the town by the harbour gate, all those that had meant to go were gone, and the others had barricaded themselves in their houses. In the whole dark street there was only one spot of flickering lights and moving figures, where the Senor Administrador recognized his wife's carriage waiting at the door of the Avellanos's house. He rode up, almost unnoticed, and looked on without a word while some of his own servants came out of the gate carrying Don Jose Avellanos, who, with closed eyes and motionless features, appeared perfectly lifeless. His wife and Antonia walked on each side of the improvised stretcher, which was put at once into the carriage. The two women embraced; while from the other side of the landau Father Corbelan's emissary, with his ragged beard all streaked with grey, and high, bronzed cheek-bones, stared, sitting upright in the saddle. Then Antonia, dry-eyed, got in by the side of the stretcher, and, after making the sign of the cross rapidly, lowered a thick veil upon her face. The servants and the three or four neighbours who had come to assist, stood back, uncovering their heads. On the box, Ignacio, resigned now to driving all night (and to having perhaps his throat cut before daylight) looked back surlily over his shoulder.

"Drive carefully," cried Mrs. Gould in a tremulous voice.

"Si, carefully; si nina," he mumbled, chewing his lips, his round leathery cheeks quivering. And the landau rolled slowly out of the light.

"I will see them as far as the ford," said Charles Gould to his wife. She stood on the edge of the sidewalk with her hands clasped lightly, and nodded to him as he followed after the carriage. And now the windows of the Amarilla Club were dark. The last spark of resistance had died out. Turning his head at the corner, Charles Gould saw his wife crossing over to their own gate in the lighted patch of the street. One of their neighbours, a well-known merchant and landowner of the province, followed at her elbow, talking with great gestures. As she passed in all the lights went out in the street, which remained dark and empty from end to end.

The houses of the vast Plaza were lost in the night. High up, like a star, there was a small gleam in one of the towers of the cathedral; and the equestrian statue gleamed pale against the black trees of the Alameda, like a ghost of royalty haunting the scenes of revolution. The rare prowlers they

met ranged themselves against the wall. Beyond the last houses the carriage rolled noiselessly on the soft cushion of dust, and with a greater obscurity a feeling of freshness seemed to fall from the foliage of the trees bordering the country road. The emissary from Hernandez's camp pushed his horse close to Charles Gould.

"Caballero," he said in an interested voice, "you are he whom they call the King of Sulaco, the master of the mine? Is it not so?"

"Yes, I am the master of the mine," answered Charles Gould.

The man cantered for a time in silence, then said, "I have a brother, a sereno in your service in the San Tome valley. You have proved yourself a just man. There has been no wrong done to any one since you called upon the people to work in the mountains. My brother says that no official of the Government, no oppressor of the Campo, has been seen on your side of the stream. Your own officials do not oppress the people in the gorge. Doubtless they are afraid of your severity. You are a just man and a powerful one," he added.

He spoke in an abrupt, independent tone, but evidently he was communicative with a purpose. He told Charles Gould that he had been a ranchero in one of the lower valleys, far south, a neighbour of Hernandez in the old days, and godfather to his eldest boy; one of those who joined him in his resistance to the recruiting raid which was the beginning of all their misfortunes. It was he that, when his compadre had been carried off, had buried his wife and children, murdered by the soldiers.

"Si, senor," he muttered, hoarsely, "I and two or three others, the lucky ones left at liberty, buried them all in one grave near the ashes of their ranch, under the tree that had shaded its roof."

It was to him, too, that Hernandez came after he had deserted, three years afterwards. He had still his uniform on with the sergeant's stripes on the sleeve, and the blood of his colonel upon his hands and breast. Three troopers followed him, of those who had started in pursuit but had ridden on for liberty. And he told Charles Gould how he and a few friends, seeing those soldiers, lay in ambush behind some rocks ready to pull the trigger on them, when he recognized his compadre and jumped up from cover, shouting his name, because he knew that Hernandez could not have been coming back on an errand of injustice and oppression. Those three soldiers, together with the party who lay behind the rocks, had formed the nucleus of the famous band, and he, the narrator, had been the favourite lieutenant of

Hernandez for many, many years. He mentioned proudly that the officials had put a price upon his head, too; but it did not prevent it getting sprinkled with grey upon his shoulders. And now he had lived long enough to see his compadre made a general.

He had a burst of muffled laughter. "And now from robbers we have become soldiers. But look, Caballero, at those who made us soldiers and him a general! Look at these people!"

Ignacio shouted. The light of the carriage lamps, running along the nopal hedges that crowned the bank on each side, flashed upon the scared faces of people standing aside in the road, sunk deep, like an English country lane, into the soft soil of the Campo. They cowered; their eyes glistened very big for a second; and then the light, running on, fell upon the half-denuded roots of a big tree, on another stretch of nopal hedge, caught up another bunch of faces glaring back apprehensively. Three women — of whom one was carrying a child — and a couple of men in civilian dress — one armed with a sabre and another with a gun — were grouped about a donkey carrying two bundles tied up in blankets. Further on Ignacio shouted again to pass a carreta, a long wooden box on two high wheels, with the door at the back swinging open. Some ladies in it must have recognized the white mules, because they screamed out, "Is it you, Dona Emilia?"

At the turn of the road the glare of a big fire filled the short stretch vaulted over by the branches meeting overhead. Near the ford of a shallow stream a roadside rancho of woven rushes and a roof of grass had been set on fire by accident, and the flames, roaring viciously, lit up an open space blocked with horses, mules, and a distracted, shouting crowd of people. When Ignacio pulled up, several ladies on foot assailed the carriage, begging Antonia for a seat. To their clamour she answered by pointing silently to her father.

"I must leave you here," said Charles Gould, in the uproar. The flames leaped up sky-high, and in the recoil from the scorching heat across the road the stream of fugitives pressed against the carriage. A middle-aged lady dressed in black silk, but with a coarse manta over her head and a rough branch for a stick in her hand, staggered against the front wheel. Two young girls, frightened and silent, were clinging to her arms. Charles Gould knew her very well.

"Misericordia! We are getting terribly bruised in this crowd!" she exclaimed, smiling up courageously to him. "We have started on foot. All



our servants ran away yesterday to join the democrats. We are going to put ourselves under the protection of Father Corbelan, of your sainted uncle, Antonia. He has wrought a miracle in the heart of a most merciless robber. A miracle!”

She raised her voice gradually up to a scream as she was borne along by the pressure of people getting out of the way of some carts coming up out of the ford at a gallop, with loud yells and cracking of whips. Great masses of sparks mingled with black smoke flew over the road; the bamboos of the walls detonated in the fire with the sound of an irregular fusillade. And then the bright blaze sank suddenly, leaving only a red dusk crowded with aimless dark shadows drifting in contrary directions; the noise of voices seemed to die away with the flame; and the tumult of heads, arms, quarrelling, and imprecations passed on fleeing into the darkness.

“I must leave you now,” repeated Charles Gould to Antonia. She turned her head slowly and uncovered her face. The emissary and compadre of Hernandez spurred his horse close up.

“Has not the master of the mine any message to send to Hernandez, the master of the Campo?”

The truth of the comparison struck Charles Gould heavily. In his determined purpose he held the mine, and the indomitable bandit held the Campo by the same precarious tenure. They were equals before the lawlessness of the land. It was impossible to disentangle one’s activity from its debasing contacts. A close-meshed net of crime and corruption lay upon the whole country. An immense and weary discouragement sealed his lips for a time.

“You are a just man,” urged the emissary of Hernandez. “Look at those people who made my compadre a general and have turned us all into soldiers. Look at those oligarchs fleeing for life, with only the clothes on their backs. My compadre does not think of that, but our followers may be wondering greatly, and I would speak for them to you. Listen, senor! For many months now the Campo has been our own. We need ask no man for anything; but soldiers must have their pay to live honestly when the wars are over. It is believed that your soul is so just that a prayer from you would cure the sickness of every beast, like the orison of the upright judge. Let me have some words from your lips that would act like a charm upon the doubts of our partida, where all are men.”

“Do you hear what he says?” Charles Gould said in English to Antonia.

“Forgive us our misery!” she exclaimed, hurriedly. “It is your character that is the inexhaustible treasure which may save us all yet; your character, Carlos, not your wealth. I entreat you to give this man your word that you will accept any arrangement my uncle may make with their chief. One word. He will want no more.”

On the site of the roadside hut there remained nothing but an enormous heap of embers, throwing afar a darkening red glow, in which Antonia’s face appeared deeply flushed with excitement. Charles Gould, with only a short hesitation, pronounced the required pledge. He was like a man who had ventured on a precipitous path with no room to turn, where the only chance of safety is to press forward. At that moment he understood it thoroughly as he looked down at Don Jose stretched out, hardly breathing, by the side of the erect Antonia, vanquished in a lifelong struggle with the powers of moral darkness, whose stagnant depths breed monstrous crimes and monstrous illusions. In a few words the emissary from Hernandez expressed his complete satisfaction. Stoically Antonia lowered her veil, resisting the longing to inquire about Decoud’s escape. But Ignacio leered morosely over his shoulder.

“Take a good look at the mules, mi amo,” he grumbled. “You shall never see them again!”

## CHAPTER FOUR

Charles Gould turned towards the town. Before him the jagged peaks of the Sierra came out all black in the clear dawn. Here and there a muffled lepero whisked round the corner of a grass-grown street before the ringing hoofs of his horse. Dogs barked behind the walls of the gardens; and with the colourless light the chill of the snows seemed to fall from the mountains upon the disjointed pavements and the shuttered houses with broken cornices and the plaster peeling in patches between the flat pilasters of the fronts. The daybreak struggled with the gloom under the arcades on the Plaza, with no signs of country people disposing their goods for the day's market, piles of fruit, bundles of vegetables ornamented with flowers, on low benches under enormous mat umbrellas; with no cheery early morning bustle of villagers, women, children, and loaded donkeys. Only a few scattered knots of revolutionists stood in the vast space, all looking one way from under their slouched hats for some sign of news from Rincon. The largest of those groups turned about like one man as Charles Gould passed, and shouted, "Viva la libertad!" after him in a menacing tone.

Charles Gould rode on, and turned into the archway of his house. In the patio littered with straw, a practicante, one of Dr. Monygham's native assistants, sat on the ground with his back against the rim of the fountain, fingering a guitar discreetly, while two girls of the lower class, standing up before him, shuffled their feet a little and waved their arms, humming a popular dance tune.

Most of the wounded during the two days of rioting had been taken away already by their friends and relations, but several figures could be seen sitting up balancing their bandaged heads in time to the music. Charles Gould dismounted. A sleepy mozo coming out of the bakery door took hold of the horse's bridle; the practicante endeavoured to conceal his guitar hastily; the girls, unabashed, stepped back smiling; and Charles Gould, on his way to the staircase, glanced into a dark corner of the patio at another group, a mortally wounded Cargador with a woman kneeling by his side; she mumbled prayers rapidly, trying at the same time to force a piece of orange between the stiffening lips of the dying man.

The cruel futility of things stood unveiled in the levity and sufferings of that incorrigible people; the cruel futility of lives and of deaths thrown away in the vain endeavour to attain an enduring solution of the problem.

Unlike Decoud, Charles Gould could not play lightly a part in a tragic farce. It was tragic enough for him in all conscience, but he could see no farcical element. He suffered too much under a conviction of irremediable folly. He was too severely practical and too idealistic to look upon its terrible humours with amusement, as Martin Decoud, the imaginative materialist, was able to do in the dry light of his scepticism. To him, as to all of us, the compromises with his conscience appeared uglier than ever in the light of failure. His taciturnity, assumed with a purpose, had prevented him from tampering openly with his thoughts; but the Gould Concession had insidiously corrupted his judgment. He might have known, he said to himself, leaning over the balustrade of the corredor, that Ribierism could never come to anything. The mine had corrupted his judgment by making him sick of bribing and intriguing merely to have his work left alone from day to day. Like his father, he did not like to be robbed. It exasperated him. He had persuaded himself that, apart from higher considerations, the backing up of Don Jose's hopes of reform was good business. He had gone forth into the senseless fray as his poor uncle, whose sword hung on the wall of his study, had gone forth — in the defence of the commonest decencies of organized society. Only his weapon was the wealth of the mine, more far-reaching and subtle than an honest blade of steel fitted into a simple brass guard.

More dangerous to the wielder, too, this weapon of wealth, double-edged with the cupidity and misery of mankind, steeped in all the vices of self-indulgence as in a concoction of poisonous roots, tainting the very cause for which it is drawn, always ready to turn awkwardly in the hand. There was nothing for it now but to go on using it. But he promised himself to see it shattered into small bits before he let it be wrenched from his grasp.

After all, with his English parentage and English upbringing, he perceived that he was an adventurer in Costaguana, the descendant of adventurers enlisted in a foreign legion, of men who had sought fortune in a revolutionary war, who had planned revolutions, who had believed in revolutions. For all the uprightness of his character, he had something of an adventurer's easy morality which takes count of personal risk in the ethical appraising of his action. He was prepared, if need be, to blow up the whole San Tome mountain sky high out of the territory of the Republic. This resolution expressed the tenacity of his character, the remorse of that subtle conjugal infidelity through which his wife was no longer the sole mistress

of his thoughts, something of his father's imaginative weakness, and something, too, of the spirit of a buccaneer throwing a lighted match into the magazine rather than surrender his ship.

Down below in the patio the wounded Cargador had breathed his last. The woman cried out once, and her cry, unexpected and shrill, made all the wounded sit up. The practicante scrambled to his feet, and, guitar in hand, gazed steadily in her direction with elevated eyebrows. The two girls — sitting now one on each side of their wounded relative, with their knees drawn up and long cigars between their lips — nodded at each other significantly.

Charles Gould, looking down over the balustrade, saw three men dressed ceremoniously in black frock-coats with white shirts, and wearing European round hats, enter the patio from the street. One of them, head and shoulders taller than the two others, advanced with marked gravity, leading the way. This was Don Juste Lopez, accompanied by two of his friends, members of Assembly, coming to call upon the Administrador of the San Tome mine at this early hour. They saw him, too, waved their hands to him urgently, walking up the stairs as if in procession.

Don Juste, astonishingly changed by having shaved off altogether his damaged beard, had lost with it nine-tenths of his outward dignity. Even at that time of serious pre-occupation Charles Gould could not help noting the revealed ineptitude in the aspect of the man. His companions looked crestfallen and sleepy. One kept on passing the tip of his tongue over his parched lips; the other's eyes strayed dully over the tiled floor of the corredor, while Don Juste, standing a little in advance, harangued the Senor Administrador of the San Tome mine. It was his firm opinion that forms had to be observed. A new governor is always visited by deputations from the Cabildo, which is the Municipal Council, from the Consulado, the commercial Board, and it was proper that the Provincial Assembly should send a deputation, too, if only to assert the existence of parliamentary institutions. Don Juste proposed that Don Carlos Gould, as the most prominent citizen of the province, should join the Assembly's deputation. His position was exceptional, his personality known through the length and breadth of the whole Republic. Official courtesies must not be neglected, if they are gone through with a bleeding heart. The acceptance of accomplished facts may save yet the precious vestiges of parliamentary institutions. Don Juste's eyes glowed dully; he believed in parliamentary

institutions — and the convinced drone of his voice lost itself in the stillness of the house like the deep buzzing of some ponderous insect.

Charles Gould had turned round to listen patiently, leaning his elbow on the balustrade. He shook his head a little, refusing, almost touched by the anxious gaze of the President of the Provincial Assembly. It was not Charles Gould's policy to make the San Tome mine a party to any formal proceedings.

"My advice, senores, is that you should wait for your fate in your houses. There is no necessity for you to give yourselves up formally into Montero's hands. Submission to the inevitable, as Don Juste calls it, is all very well, but when the inevitable is called Pedrito Montero there is no need to exhibit pointedly the whole extent of your surrender. The fault of this country is the want of measure in political life. Flat acquiescence in illegality, followed by sanguinary reaction — that, senores, is not the way to a stable and prosperous future."

Charles Gould stopped before the sad bewilderment of the faces, the wondering, anxious glances of the eyes. The feeling of pity for those men, putting all their trust into words of some sort, while murder and rapine stalked over the land, had betrayed him into what seemed empty loquacity. Don Juste murmured —

"You are abandoning us, Don Carlos. . . . And yet, parliamentary institutions —"

He could not finish from grief. For a moment he put his hand over his eyes. Charles Gould, in his fear of empty loquacity, made no answer to the charge. He returned in silence their ceremonious bows. His taciturnity was his refuge. He understood that what they sought was to get the influence of the San Tome mine on their side. They wanted to go on a conciliating errand to the victor under the wing of the Gould Concession. Other public bodies — the Cabildo, the Consulado — would be coming, too, presently, seeking the support of the most stable, the most effective force they had ever known to exist in their province.

The doctor, arriving with his sharp, jerky walk, found that the master had retired into his own room with orders not to be disturbed on any account. But Dr. Monygham was not anxious to see Charles Gould at once. He spent some time in a rapid examination of his wounded. He gazed down upon each in turn, rubbing his chin between his thumb and forefinger; his steady stare met without expression their silently inquisitive look. All these cases

were doing well; but when he came to the dead Cargador he stopped a little longer, surveying not the man who had ceased to suffer, but the woman kneeling in silent contemplation of the rigid face, with its pinched nostrils and a white gleam in the imperfectly closed eyes. She lifted her head slowly, and said in a dull voice —

“It is not long since he had become a Cargador — only a few weeks. His worship the Capataz had accepted him after many entreaties.”

“I am not responsible for the great Capataz,” muttered the doctor, moving off.

Directing his course upstairs towards the door of Charles Gould’s room, the doctor at the last moment hesitated; then, turning away from the handle with a shrug of his uneven shoulders, slunk off hastily along the corredor in search of Mrs. Gould’s camerista.

Leonardo told him that the senora had not risen yet. The senora had given into her charge the girls belonging to that Italian posadero. She, Leonarda, had put them to bed in her own room. The fair girl had cried herself to sleep, but the dark one — the bigger — had not closed her eyes yet. She sat up in bed clutching the sheets right up under her chin and staring before her like a little witch. Leonarda did not approve of the Viola children being admitted to the house. She made this feeling clear by the indifferent tone in which she inquired whether their mother was dead yet. As to the senora, she must be asleep. Ever since she had gone into her room after seeing the departure of Dona Antonia with her dying father, there had been no sound behind her door.

The doctor, rousing himself out of profound reflection, told her abruptly to call her mistress at once. He hobbled off to wait for Mrs. Gould in the sala. He was very tired, but too excited to sit down. In this great drawing-room, now empty, in which his withered soul had been refreshed after many arid years and his outcast spirit had accepted silently the toleration of many side-glances, he wandered haphazard amongst the chairs and tables till Mrs. Gould, enveloped in a morning wrapper, came in rapidly.

“You know that I never approved of the silver being sent away,” the doctor began at once, as a preliminary to the narrative of his night’s adventures in association with Captain Mitchell, the engineer-in-chief, and old Viola, at Sotillo’s headquarters. To the doctor, with his special conception of this political crisis, the removal of the silver had seemed an irrational and ill-omened measure. It was as if a general were sending the

best part of his troops away on the eve of battle upon some recondite pretext. The whole lot of ingots might have been concealed somewhere where they could have been got at for the purpose of staving off the dangers which were menacing the security of the Gould Concession. The Administrador had acted as if the immense and powerful prosperity of the mine had been founded on methods of probity, on the sense of usefulness. And it was nothing of the kind. The method followed had been the only one possible. The Gould Concession had ransomed its way through all those years. It was a nauseous process. He quite understood that Charles Gould had got sick of it and had left the old path to back up that hopeless attempt at reform. The doctor did not believe in the reform of Costaguana. And now the mine was back again in its old path, with the disadvantage that henceforth it had to deal not only with the greed provoked by its wealth, but with the resentment awakened by the attempt to free itself from its bondage to moral corruption. That was the penalty of failure. What made him uneasy was that Charles Gould seemed to him to have weakened at the decisive moment when a frank return to the old methods was the only chance. Listening to Decoud's wild scheme had been a weakness.

The doctor flung up his arms, exclaiming, "Decoud! Decoud!" He hobbled about the room with slight, angry laughs. Many years ago both his ankles had been seriously damaged in the course of a certain investigation conducted in the castle of Sta. Marta by a commission composed of military men. Their nomination had been signified to them unexpectedly at the dead of night, with scowling brow, flashing eyes, and in a tempestuous voice, by Guzman Bento. The old tyrant, maddened by one of his sudden accesses of suspicion, mingled spluttering appeals to their fidelity with imprecations and horrible menaces. The cells and casements of the castle on the hill had been already filled with prisoners. The commission was charged now with the task of discovering the iniquitous conspiracy against the Citizen-Saviour of his country.

Their dread of the raving tyrant translated itself into a hasty ferocity of procedure. The Citizen-Saviour was not accustomed to wait. A conspiracy had to be discovered. The courtyards of the castle resounded with the clanking of leg-irons, sounds of blows, yells of pain; and the commission of high officers laboured feverishly, concealing their distress and apprehensions from each other, and especially from their secretary, Father Beron, an army chaplain, at that time very much in the confidence of the



Citizen-Saviour. That priest was a big round-shouldered man, with an unclean-looking, overgrown tonsure on the top of his flat head, of a dingy, yellow complexion, softly fat, with greasy stains all down the front of his lieutenant's uniform, and a small cross embroidered in white cotton on his left breast. He had a heavy nose and a pendant lip. Dr. Monygham remembered him still. He remembered him against all the force of his will striving its utmost to forget. Father Beron had been adjoined to the commission by Guzman Bento expressly for the purpose that his enlightened zeal should assist them in their labours. Dr. Monygham could by no manner of means forget the zeal of Father Beron, or his face, or the pitiless, monotonous voice in which he pronounced the words, "Will you confess now?"

This memory did not make him shudder, but it had made of him what he was in the eyes of respectable people, a man careless of common decencies, something between a clever vagabond and a disreputable doctor. But not all respectable people would have had the necessary delicacy of sentiment to understand with what trouble of mind and accuracy of vision Dr. Monygham, medical officer of the San Tome mine, remembered Father Beron, army chaplain, and once a secretary of a military commission. After all these years Dr. Monygham, in his rooms at the end of the hospital building in the San Tome gorge, remembered Father Beron as distinctly as ever. He remembered that priest at night, sometimes, in his sleep. On such nights the doctor waited for daylight with a candle lighted, and walking the whole length of his rooms to and fro, staring down at his bare feet, his arms hugging his sides tightly. He would dream of Father Beron sitting at the end of a long black table, behind which, in a row, appeared the heads, shoulders, and epaulettes of the military members, nibbling the feather of a quill pen, and listening with weary and impatient scorn to the protestations of some prisoner calling heaven to witness of his innocence, till he burst out, "What's the use of wasting time over that miserable nonsense! Let me take him outside for a while." And Father Beron would go outside after the clanking prisoner, led away between two soldiers. Such interludes happened on many days, many times, with many prisoners. When the prisoner returned he was ready to make a full confession, Father Beron would declare, leaning forward with that dull, surfeited look which can be seen in the eyes of gluttonous persons after a heavy meal.

The priest's inquisitorial instincts suffered but little from the want of classical apparatus of the Inquisition. At no time of the world's history have men been at a loss how to inflict mental and bodily anguish upon their fellow-creatures. This aptitude came to them in the growing complexity of their passions and the early refinement of their ingenuity. But it may safely be said that primeval man did not go to the trouble of inventing tortures. He was indolent and pure of heart. He brained his neighbour ferociously with a stone axe from necessity and without malice. The stupidest mind may invent a rankling phrase or brand the innocent with a cruel aspersion. A piece of string and a ramrod; a few muskets in combination with a length of hide rope; or even a simple mallet of heavy, hard wood applied with a swing to human fingers or to the joints of a human body is enough for the infliction of the most exquisite torture. The doctor had been a very stubborn prisoner, and, as a natural consequence of that "bad disposition" (so Father Beron called it), his subjugation had been very crushing and very complete. That is why the limp in his walk, the twist of his shoulders, the scars on his cheeks were so pronounced. His confessions, when they came at last, were very complete, too. Sometimes on the nights when he walked the floor, he wondered, grinding his teeth with shame and rage, at the fertility of his imagination when stimulated by a sort of pain which makes truth, honour, selfrespect, and life itself matters of little moment.

And he could not forget Father Beron with his monotonous phrase, "Will you confess now?" reaching him in an awful iteration and lucidity of meaning through the delirious incoherence of unbearable pain. He could not forget. But that was not the worst. Had he met Father Beron in the street after all these years Dr. Monygham was sure he would have quailed before him. This contingency was not to be feared now. Father Beron was dead; but the sickening certitude prevented Dr. Monygham from looking anybody in the face.

Dr. Monygham had become, in a manner, the slave of a ghost. It was obviously impossible to take his knowledge of Father Beron home to Europe. When making his extorted confessions to the Military Board, Dr. Monygham was not seeking to avoid death. He longed for it. Sitting half-naked for hours on the wet earth of his prison, and so motionless that the spiders, his companions, attached their webs to his matted hair, he consoled the misery of his soul with acute reasonings that he had confessed to crimes

enough for a sentence of death — that they had gone too far with him to let him live to tell the tale.

But, as if by a refinement of cruelty, Dr. Monygham was left for months to decay slowly in the darkness of his grave-like prison. It was no doubt hoped that it would finish him off without the trouble of an execution; but Dr. Monygham had an iron constitution. It was Guzman Bento who died, not by the knife thrust of a conspirator, but from a stroke of apoplexy, and Dr. Monygham was liberated hastily. His fetters were struck off by the light of a candle, which, after months of gloom, hurt his eyes so much that he had to cover his face with his hands. He was raised up. His heart was beating violently with the fear of this liberty. When he tried to walk the extraordinary lightness of his feet made him giddy, and he fell down. Two sticks were thrust into his hands, and he was pushed out of the passage. It was dusk; candles glimmered already in the windows of the officers' quarters round the courtyard; but the twilight sky dazed him by its enormous and overwhelming brilliance. A thin poncho hung over his naked, bony shoulders; the rags of his trousers came down no lower than his knees; an eighteen months' growth of hair fell in dirty grey locks on each side of his sharp cheek-bones. As he dragged himself past the guard-room door, one of the soldiers, lolling outside, moved by some obscure impulse, leaped forward with a strange laugh and rammed a broken old straw hat on his head. And Dr. Monygham, after having tottered, continued on his way. He advanced one stick, then one maimed foot, then the other stick; the other foot followed only a very short distance along the ground, toilfully, as though it were almost too heavy to be moved at all; and yet his legs under the hanging angles of the poncho appeared no thicker than the two sticks in his hands. A ceaseless trembling agitated his bent body, all his wasted limbs, his bony head, the conical, ragged crown of the sombrero, whose ample flat rim rested on his shoulders.

In such conditions of manner and attire did Dr. Monygham go forth to take possession of his liberty. And these conditions seemed to bind him indissolubly to the land of Costaguana like an awful procedure of naturalization, involving him deep in the national life, far deeper than any amount of success and honour could have done. They did away with his Europeanism; for Dr. Monygham had made himself an ideal conception of his disgrace. It was a conception eminently fit and proper for an officer and a gentleman. Dr. Monygham, before he went out to Costaguana, had been

surgeon in one of Her Majesty's regiments of foot. It was a conception which took no account of physiological facts or reasonable arguments; but it was not stupid for all that. It was simple. A rule of conduct resting mainly on severe rejections is necessarily simple. Dr. Monygham's view of what it behoved him to do was severe; it was an ideal view, in so much that it was the imaginative exaggeration of a correct feeling. It was also, in its force, influence, and persistency, the view of an eminently loyal nature.

There was a great fund of loyalty in Dr. Monygham's nature. He had settled it all on Mrs. Gould's head. He believed her worthy of every devotion. At the bottom of his heart he felt an angry uneasiness before the prosperity of the San Tome mine, because its growth was robbing her of all peace of mind. Costaguana was no place for a woman of that kind. What could Charles Gould have been thinking of when he brought her out there! It was outrageous! And the doctor had watched the course of events with a grim and distant reserve which, he imagined, his lamentable history imposed upon him.

Loyalty to Mrs. Gould could not, however, leave out of account the safety of her husband. The doctor had contrived to be in town at the critical time because he mistrusted Charles Gould. He considered him hopelessly infected with the madness of revolutions. That is why he hobbled in distress in the drawing-room of the Casa Gould on that morning, exclaiming, "Decoud, Decoud!" in a tone of mournful irritation.

Mrs. Gould, her colour heightened, and with glistening eyes, looked straight before her at the sudden enormity of that disaster. The finger-tips on one hand rested lightly on a low little table by her side, and the arm trembled right up to the shoulder. The sun, which looks late upon Sulaco, issuing in all the fulness of its power high up on the sky from behind the dazzling snow-edge of Higuerota, had precipitated the delicate, smooth, pearly greyness of light, in which the town lies steeped during the early hours, into sharp-cut masses of black shade and spaces of hot, blinding glare. Three long rectangles of sunshine fell through the windows of the sala; while just across the street the front of the Avellanos's house appeared very sombre in its own shadow seen through the flood of light.

A voice said at the door, "What of Decoud?"

It was Charles Gould. They had not heard him coming along the corredor. His glance just glided over his wife and struck full at the doctor.

"You have brought some news, doctor?"

Dr. Monygham blurted it all out at once, in the rough. For some time after he had done, the Administrador of the San Tome mine remained looking at him without a word. Mrs. Gould sank into a low chair with her hands lying on her lap. A silence reigned between those three motionless persons. Then Charles Gould spoke —

“You must want some breakfast.”

He stood aside to let his wife pass first. She caught up her husband’s hand and pressed it as she went out, raising her handkerchief to her eyes. The sight of her husband had brought Antonia’s position to her mind, and she could not contain her tears at the thought of the poor girl. When she rejoined the two men in the diningroom after having bathed her face, Charles Gould was saying to the doctor across the table —

“No, there does not seem any room for doubt.”

And the doctor assented.

“No, I don’t see myself how we could question that wretched Hirsch’s tale. It’s only too true, I fear.”

She sat down desolately at the head of the table and looked from one to the other. The two men, without absolutely turning their heads away, tried to avoid her glance. The doctor even made a show of being hungry; he seized his knife and fork, and began to eat with emphasis, as if on the stage. Charles Gould made no pretence of the sort; with his elbows raised squarely, he twisted both ends of his flaming moustaches — they were so long that his hands were quite away from his face.

“I am not surprised,” he muttered, abandoning his moustaches and throwing one arm over the back of his chair. His face was calm with that immobility of expression which betrays the intensity of a mental struggle. He felt that this accident had brought to a point all the consequences involved in his line of conduct, with its conscious and subconscious intentions. There must be an end now of this silent reserve, of that air of impenetrability behind which he had been safeguarding his dignity. It was the least ignoble form of dissembling forced upon him by that parody of civilized institutions which offended his intelligence, his uprightness, and his sense of right. He was like his father. He had no ironic eye. He was not amused at the absurdities that prevail in this world. They hurt him in his innate gravity. He felt that the miserable death of that poor Decoud took from him his inaccessible position of a force in the background. It committed him openly unless he wished to throw up the game — and that

was impossible. The material interests required from him the sacrifice of his aloofness — perhaps his own safety too. And he reflected that Decoud's separationist plan had not gone to the bottom with the lost silver.

The only thing that was not changed was his position towards Mr. Holroyd. The head of silver and steel interests had entered into Costaguana affairs with a sort of passion. Costaguana had become necessary to his existence; in the San Tome mine he had found the imaginative satisfaction which other minds would get from drama, from art, or from a risky and fascinating sport. It was a special form of the great man's extravagance, sanctioned by a moral intention, big enough to flatter his vanity. Even in this aberration of his genius he served the progress of the world. Charles Gould felt sure of being understood with precision and judged with the indulgence of their common passion. Nothing now could surprise or startle this great man. And Charles Gould imagined himself writing a letter to San Francisco in some such words: ". . . The men at the head of the movement are dead or have fled; the civil organization of the province is at an end for the present; the Blanco party in Sulaco has collapsed inexcusably, but in the characteristic manner of this country. But Barrios, untouched in Cayta, remains still available. I am forced to take up openly the plan of a provincial revolution as the only way of placing the enormous material interests involved in the prosperity and peace of Sulaco in a position of permanent safety. . . ." That was clear. He saw these words as if written in letters of fire upon the wall at which he was gazing abstractedly.

Mrs Gould watched his abstraction with dread. It was a domestic and frightful phenomenon that darkened and chilled the house for her like a thundercloud passing over the sun. Charles Gould's fits of abstraction depicted the energetic concentration of a will haunted by a fixed idea. A man haunted by a fixed idea is insane. He is dangerous even if that idea is an idea of justice; for may he not bring the heaven down pitilessly upon a loved head? The eyes of Mrs. Gould, watching her husband's profile, filled with tears again. And again she seemed to see the despair of the unfortunate Antonia.

"What would I have done if Charley had been drowned while we were engaged?" she exclaimed, mentally, with horror. Her heart turned to ice, while her cheeks flamed up as if scorched by the blaze of a funeral pyre consuming all her earthly affections. The tears burst out of her eyes.

"Antonia will kill herself!" she cried out.

This cry fell into the silence of the room with strangely little effect. Only the doctor, crumbling up a piece of bread, with his head inclined on one side, raised his face, and the few long hairs sticking out of his shaggy eyebrows stirred in a slight frown. Dr. Monygham thought quite sincerely that Decoud was a singularly unworthy object for any woman's affection. Then he lowered his head again, with a curl of his lip, and his heart full of tender admiration for Mrs. Gould.

"She thinks of that girl," he said to himself; "she thinks of the Viola children; she thinks of me; of the wounded; of the miners; she always thinks of everybody who is poor and miserable! But what will she do if Charles gets the worst of it in this infernal scrimmage those confounded Avellanos have drawn him into? No one seems to be thinking of her."

Charles Gould, staring at the wall, pursued his reflections subtly.

"I shall write to Holroyd that the San Tome mine is big enough to take in hand the making of a new State. It'll please him. It'll reconcile him to the risk."

But was Barrios really available? Perhaps. But he was inaccessible. To send off a boat to Cayta was no longer possible, since Sotillo was master of the harbour, and had a steamer at his disposal. And now, with all the democrats in the province up, and every Campo township in a state of disturbance, where could he find a man who would make his way successfully overland to Cayta with a message, a ten days' ride at least; a man of courage and resolution, who would avoid arrest or murder, and if arrested would faithfully eat the paper? The Capataz de Cargadores would have been just such a man. But the Capataz of the Cargadores was no more.

And Charles Gould, withdrawing his eyes from the wall, said gently, "That Hirsch! What an extraordinary thing! Saved himself by clinging to the anchor, did he? I had no idea that he was still in Sulaco. I thought he had gone back overland to Esmeralda more than a week ago. He came here once to talk to me about his hide business and some other things. I made it clear to him that nothing could be done."

"He was afraid to start back on account of Hernandez being about," remarked the doctor.

"And but for him we might not have known anything of what has happened," marvelled Charles Gould.

Mrs. Gould cried out —

"Antonia must not know! She must not be told. Not now."

“Nobody’s likely to carry the news,” remarked the doctor. “It’s no one’s interest. Moreover, the people here are afraid of Hernandez as if he were the devil.” He turned to Charles Gould. “It’s even awkward, because if you wanted to communicate with the refugees you could find no messenger. When Hernandez was ranging hundreds of miles away from here the Sulaco populace used to shudder at the tales of him roasting his prisoners alive.”

“Yes,” murmured Charles Gould; “Captain Mitchell’s Capataz was the only man in the town who had seen Hernandez eye to eye. Father Corbelan employed him. He opened the communications first. It is a pity that — ”

His voice was covered by the booming of the great bell of the cathedral. Three single strokes, one after another, burst out explosively, dying away in deep and mellow vibrations. And then all the bells in the tower of every church, convent, or chapel in town, even those that had remained shut up for years, pealed out together with a crash. In this furious flood of metallic uproar there was a power of suggesting images of strife and violence which blanched Mrs. Gould’s cheek. Basilio, who had been waiting at table, shrinking within himself, clung to the sideboard with chattering teeth. It was impossible to hear yourself speak.

“Shut these windows!” Charles Gould yelled at him, angrily. All the other servants, terrified at what they took for the signal of a general massacre, had rushed upstairs, tumbling over each other, men and women, the obscure and generally invisible population of the ground floor on the four sides of the patio. The women, screaming “Misericordia!” ran right into the room, and, falling on their knees against the walls, began to cross themselves convulsively. The staring heads of men blocked the doorway in an instant — mozos from the stable, gardeners, nondescript helpers living on the crumbs of the munificent house — and Charles Gould beheld all the extent of his domestic establishment, even to the gatekeeper. This was a half-paralyzed old man, whose long white locks fell down to his shoulders: an heirloom taken up by Charles Gould’s familial piety. He could remember Henry Gould, an Englishman and a Costaguanero of the second generation, chief of the Sulaco province; he had been his personal mozo years and years ago in peace and war; had been allowed to attend his master in prison; had, on the fatal morning, followed the firing squad; and, peeping from behind one of the cypresses growing along the wall of the Franciscan Convent, had seen, with his eyes starting out of his head, Don Enrique throw up his hands and fall with his face in the dust. Charles Gould noted particularly the big



patriarchal head of that witness in the rear of the other servants. But he was surprised to see a shrivelled old hag or two, of whose existence within the walls of his house he had not been aware. They must have been the mothers, or even the grandmothers of some of his people. There were a few children, too, more or less naked, crying and clinging to the legs of their elders. He had never before noticed any sign of a child in his patio. Even Leonarda, the camerista, came in a fright, pushing through, with her spoiled, pouting face of a favourite maid, leading the Viola girls by the hand. The crockery rattled on table and sideboard, and the whole house seemed to sway in the deafening wave of sound.

## CHAPTER FIVE

During the night the expectant populace had taken possession of all the belfries in the town in order to welcome Pedrito Montero, who was making his entry after having slept the night in Rincon. And first came straggling in through the land gate the armed mob of all colours, complexions, types, and states of raggedness, calling themselves the Sulaco National Guard, and commanded by Senor Gamacho. Through the middle of the street streamed, like a torrent of rubbish, a mass of straw hats, ponchos, gun-barrels, with an enormous green and yellow flag flapping in their midst, in a cloud of dust, to the furious beating of drums. The spectators recoiled against the walls of the houses shouting their Vivas! Behind the rabble could be seen the lances of the cavalry, the "army" of Pedro Montero. He advanced between Senores Fuentes and Gamacho at the head of his llaneros, who had accomplished the feat of crossing the Paramos of the Higuerota in a snow-storm. They rode four abreast, mounted on confiscated Campo horses, clad in the heterogeneous stock of roadside stores they had looted hurriedly in their rapid ride through the northern part of the province; for Pedro Montero had been in a great hurry to occupy Sulaco. The handkerchiefs knotted loosely around their bare throats were glaringly new, and all the right sleeves of their cotton shirts had been cut off close to the shoulder for greater freedom in throwing the lazo. Emaciated greybeards rode by the side of lean dark youths, marked by all the hardships of campaigning, with strips of raw beef twined round the crowns of their hats, and huge iron spurs fastened to their naked heels. Those that in the passes of the mountain had lost their lances had provided themselves with the goads used by the Campo cattlemen: slender shafts of palm fully ten feet long, with a lot of loose rings jingling under the ironshod point. They were armed with knives and revolvers. A haggard fearlessness characterized the expression of all these sun-blackened countenances; they glared down haughtily with their scorched eyes at the crowd, or, blinking upwards insolently, pointed out to each other some particular head amongst the women at the windows. When they had ridden into the Plaza and caught sight of the equestrian statue of the King dazzlingly white in the sunshine, towering enormous and motionless above the surges of the crowd, with its eternal gesture of saluting, a murmur of surprise ran through their ranks. "What is that saint in the big hat?" they asked each other.

They were a good sample of the cavalry of the plains with which Pedro Montero had helped so much the victorious career of his brother the general. The influence which that man, brought up in coast towns, acquired in a short time over the plainsmen of the Republic can be ascribed only to a genius for treachery of so effective a kind that it must have appeared to those violent men but little removed from a state of utter savagery, as the perfection of sagacity and virtue. The popular lore of all nations testifies that duplicity and cunning, together with bodily strength, were looked upon, even more than courage, as heroic virtues by primitive mankind. To overcome your adversary was the great affair of life. Courage was taken for granted. But the use of intelligence awakened wonder and respect. Stratagems, providing they did not fail, were honourable; the easy massacre of an unsuspecting enemy evoked no feelings but those of gladness, pride, and admiration. Not perhaps that primitive men were more faithless than their descendants of to-day, but that they went straighter to their aim, and were more artless in their recognition of success as the only standard of morality.

We have changed since. The use of intelligence awakens little wonder and less respect. But the ignorant and barbarous plainsmen engaging in civil strife followed willingly a leader who often managed to deliver their enemies bound, as it were, into their hands. Pedro Montero had a talent for lulling his adversaries into a sense of security. And as men learn wisdom with extreme slowness, and are always ready to believe promises that flatter their secret hopes, Pedro Montero was successful time after time. Whether only a servant or some inferior official in the Costaguana Legation in Paris, he had rushed back to his country directly he heard that his brother had emerged from the obscurity of his frontier commandancia. He had managed to deceive by his gift of plausibility the chiefs of the Ribierist movement in the capital, and even the acute agent of the San Tome mine had failed to understand him thoroughly. At once he had obtained an enormous influence over his brother. They were very much alike in appearance, both bald, with bunches of crisp hair above their ears, arguing the presence of some negro blood. Only Pedro was smaller than the general, more delicate altogether, with an ape-like faculty for imitating all the outward signs of refinement and distinction, and with a parrot-like talent for languages. Both brothers had received some elementary instruction by the munificence of a great European traveller, to whom their father had been a body-servant during his

journeys in the interior of the country. In General Montero's case it enabled him to rise from the ranks. Pedrito, the younger, incorrigibly lazy and slovenly, had drifted aimlessly from one coast town to another, hanging about counting-houses, attaching himself to strangers as a sort of valet-de-place, picking up an easy and disreputable living. His ability to read did nothing for him but fill his head with absurd visions. His actions were usually determined by motives so improbable in themselves as to escape the penetration of a rational person.

Thus at first sight the agent of the Gould Concession in Sta. Marta had credited him with the possession of sane views, and even with a restraining power over the general's everlastingly discontented vanity. It could never have entered his head that Pedrito Montero, lackey or inferior scribe, lodged in the garrets of the various Parisian hotels where the Costaguana Legation used to shelter its diplomatic dignity, had been devouring the lighter sort of historical works in the French language, such, for instance as the books of Imbert de Saint Amand upon the Second Empire. But Pedrito had been struck by the splendour of a brilliant court, and had conceived the idea of an existence for himself where, like the Duc de Morny, he would associate the command of every pleasure with the conduct of political affairs and enjoy power supremely in every way. Nobody could have guessed that. And yet this was one of the immediate causes of the Monterist Revolution. This will appear less incredible by the reflection that the fundamental causes were the same as ever, rooted in the political immaturity of the people, in the indolence of the upper classes and the mental darkness of the lower.

Pedrito Montero saw in the elevation of his brother the road wide open to his wildest imaginings. This was what made the Monterist pronunciamiento so unpreventable. The general himself probably could have been bought off, pacified with flatteries, despatched on a diplomatic mission to Europe. It was his brother who had egged him on from first to last. He wanted to become the most brilliant statesman of South America. He did not desire supreme power. He would have been afraid of its labour and risk, in fact. Before all, Pedrito Montero, taught by his European experience, meant to acquire a serious fortune for himself. With this object in view he obtained from his brother, on the very morrow of the successful battle, the permission to push on over the mountains and take possession of Sulaco. Sulaco was the land of future prosperity, the chosen land of material progress, the only province in the Republic of interest to European

capitalists. Pedrito Montero, following the example of the Duc de Morny, meant to have his share of this prosperity. This is what he meant literally. Now his brother was master of the country, whether as President, Dictator, or even as Emperor — why not as an Emperor? — he meant to demand a share in every enterprise — in railways, in mines, in sugar estates, in cotton mills, in land companies, in each and every undertaking — as the price of his protection. The desire to be on the spot early was the real cause of the celebrated ride over the mountains with some two hundred llaneros, an enterprise of which the dangers had not appeared at first clearly to his impatience. Coming from a series of victories, it seemed to him that a Montero had only to appear to be master of the situation. This illusion had betrayed him into a rashness of which he was becoming aware. As he rode at the head of his llaneros he regretted that there were so few of them. The enthusiasm of the populace reassured him. They yelled “Viva Montero! Viva Pedrito!” In order to make them still more enthusiastic, and from the natural pleasure he had in dissembling, he dropped the reins on his horse’s neck, and with a tremendous effect of familiarity and confidence slipped his hands under the arms of Senores Fuentes and Gamacho. In that posture, with a ragged town mozo holding his horse by the bridle, he rode triumphantly across the Plaza to the door of the Intendencia. Its old gloomy walls seemed to shake in the acclamations that rent the air and covered the crashing peals of the cathedral bells.

Pedro Montero, the brother of the general, dismounted into a shouting and perspiring throng of enthusiasts whom the ragged Nationals were pushing back fiercely. Ascending a few steps he surveyed the large crowd gaping at him and the bullet-speckled walls of the houses opposite lightly veiled by a sunny haze of dust. The word “Pourvenir” in immense black capitals, alternating with broken windows, stared at him across the vast space; and he thought with delight of the hour of vengeance, because he was very sure of laying his hands upon Decoud. On his left hand, Gamacho, big and hot, wiping his hairy wet face, uncovered a set of yellow fangs in a grin of stupid hilarity. On his right, Senor Fuentes, small and lean, looked on with compressed lips. The crowd stared literally open-mouthed, lost in eager stillness, as though they had expected the great guerrillero, the famous Pedrito, to begin scattering at once some sort of visible largesse. What he began was a speech. He began it with the shouted word “Citizens!” which reached even those in the middle of the Plaza. Afterwards the greater

part of the citizens remained fascinated by the orator's action alone, his tip-toeing, the arms flung above his head with the fists clenched, a hand laid flat upon the heart, the silver gleam of rolling eyes, the sweeping, pointing, embracing gestures, a hand laid familiarly on Gamacho's shoulder; a hand waved formally towards the little black-coated person of Senor Fuentes, advocate and politician and a true friend of the people. The vivas of those nearest to the orator bursting out suddenly propagated themselves irregularly to the confines of the crowd, like flames running over dry grass, and expired in the opening of the streets. In the intervals, over the swarming Plaza brooded a heavy silence, in which the mouth of the orator went on opening and shutting, and detached phrases — "The happiness of the people," "Sons of the country," "The entire world, el mundo entero" — reached even the packed steps of the cathedral with a feeble clear ring, thin as the buzzing of a mosquito. But the orator struck his breast; he seemed to prance between his two supporters. It was the supreme effort of his peroration. Then the two smaller figures disappeared from the public gaze and the enormous Gamacho, left alone, advanced, raising his hat high above his head. Then he covered himself proudly and yelled out, "Ciudadanos!" A dull roar greeted Senor Gamacho, ex-pedlar of the Campo, Commandante of the National Guards.

Upstairs Pedrito Montero walked about rapidly from one wrecked room of the Intendencia to another, snarling incessantly —

"What stupidity! What destruction!"

Senor Fuentes, following, would relax his taciturn disposition to murmur —

"It is all the work of Gamacho and his Nationals;" and then, inclining his head on his left shoulder, would press together his lips so firmly that a little hollow would appear at each corner. He had his nomination for Political Chief of the town in his pocket, and was all impatience to enter upon his functions.

In the long audience room, with its tall mirrors all starred by stones, the hangings torn down and the canopy over the platform at the upper end pulled to pieces, the vast, deep muttering of the crowd and the howling voice of Gamacho speaking just below reached them through the shutters as they stood idly in dimness and desolation.

"The brute!" observed his Excellency Don Pedro Montero through clenched teeth. "We must contrive as quickly as possible to send him and

his Nationals out there to fight Hernandez.”

The new Gefe Politico only jerked his head sideways, and took a puff at his cigarette in sign of his agreement with this method for ridding the town of Gamacho and his inconvenient rabble.

Pedrito Montero looked with disgust at the absolutely bare floor, and at the belt of heavy gilt picture-frames running round the room, out of which the remnants of torn and slashed canvases fluttered like dingy rags.

“We are not barbarians,” he said.

This was what said his Excellency, the popular Pedrito, the guerrillero skilled in the art of laying ambushes, charged by his brother at his own demand with the organization of Sulaco on democratic principles. The night before, during the consultation with his partisans, who had come out to meet him in Rincon, he had opened his intentions to Senor Fuentes —

“We shall organize a popular vote, by yes or no, confiding the destinies of our beloved country to the wisdom and valiance of my heroic brother, the invincible general. A plebiscite. Do you understand?”

And Senor Fuentes, puffing out his leathery cheeks, had inclined his head slightly to the left, letting a thin, bluish jet of smoke escape through his pursed lips. He had understood.

His Excellency was exasperated at the devastation. Not a single chair, table, sofa, etagere or console had been left in the state rooms of the Intendencia. His Excellency, though twitching all over with rage, was restrained from bursting into violence by a sense of his remoteness and isolation. His heroic brother was very far away. Meantime, how was he going to take his siesta? He had expected to find comfort and luxury in the Intendencia after a year of hard camp life, ending with the hardships and privations of the daring dash upon Sulaco — upon the province which was worth more in wealth and influence than all the rest of the Republic’s territory. He would get even with Gamacho by-and-by. And Senor Gamacho’s oration, delectable to popular ears, went on in the heat and glare of the Plaza like the uncouth howlings of an inferior sort of devil cast into a white-hot furnace. Every moment he had to wipe his streaming face with his bare fore-arm; he had flung off his coat, and had turned up the sleeves of his shirt high above the elbows; but he kept on his head the large cocked hat with white plumes. His ingenuousness cherished this sign of his rank as Commandante of the National Guards. Approving and grave murmurs greeted his periods. His opinion was that war should be declared at once

against France, England, Germany, and the United States, who, by introducing railways, mining enterprises, colonization, and under such other shallow pretences, aimed at robbing poor people of their lands, and with the help of these Goths and paralytics, the aristocrats would convert them into toiling and miserable slaves. And the leperos, flinging about the corners of their dirty white mantas, yelled their approbation. General Montero, Gamacho howled with conviction, was the only man equal to the patriotic task. They assented to that, too.

The morning was wearing on; there were already signs of disruption, currents and eddies in the crowd. Some were seeking the shade of the walls and under the trees of the Alameda. Horsemen spurred through, shouting; groups of sombreros set level on heads against the vertical sun were drifting away into the streets, where the open doors of pulperias revealed an enticing gloom resounding with the gentle tinkling of guitars. The National Guards were thinking of siesta, and the eloquence of Gamacho, their chief, was exhausted. Later on, when, in the cooler hours of the afternoon, they tried to assemble again for further consideration of public affairs, detachments of Montero's cavalry camped on the Alameda charged them without parley, at speed, with long lances levelled at their flying backs as far as the ends of the streets. The National Guards of Sulaco were surprised by this proceeding. But they were not indignant. No Costaguanero had ever learned to question the eccentricities of a military force. They were part of the natural order of things. This must be, they concluded, some kind of administrative measure, no doubt. But the motive of it escaped their unaided intelligence, and their chief and orator, Gamacho, Commandante of the National Guard, was lying drunk and asleep in the bosom of his family. His bare feet were upturned in the shadows repulsively, in the manner of a corpse. His eloquent mouth had dropped open. His youngest daughter, scratching her head with one hand, with the other waved a green bough over his scorched and peeling face.



## CHAPTER SIX

The declining sun had shifted the shadows from west to east amongst the houses of the town. It had shifted them upon the whole extent of the immense Campo, with the white walls of its haciendas on the knolls dominating the green distances; with its grass-thatched ranches crouching in the folds of ground by the banks of streams; with the dark islands of clustered trees on a clear sea of grass, and the precipitous range of the Cordillera, immense and motionless, emerging from the billows of the lower forests like the barren coast of a land of giants. The sunset rays striking the snow-slope of Higuerota from afar gave it an air of rosy youth, while the serrated mass of distant peaks remained black, as if calcined in the fiery radiance. The undulating surface of the forests seemed powdered with pale gold dust; and away there, beyond Rincon, hidden from the town by two wooded spurs, the rocks of the San Tome gorge, with the flat wall of the mountain itself crowned by gigantic ferns, took on warm tones of brown and yellow, with red rusty streaks, and the dark green clumps of bushes rooted in crevices. From the plain the stamp sheds and the houses of the mine appeared dark and small, high up, like the nests of birds clustered on the ledges of a cliff. The zigzag paths resembled faint tracings scratched on the wall of a cyclopean blockhouse. To the two serenos of the mine on patrol duty, strolling, carbine in hand, and watchful eyes, in the shade of the trees lining the stream near the bridge, Don Pepe, descending the path from the upper plateau, appeared no bigger than a large beetle.

With his air of aimless, insect-like going to and fro upon the face of the rock, Don Pepe's figure kept on descending steadily, and, when near the bottom, sank at last behind the roofs of store-houses, forges, and workshops. For a time the pair of serenos strolled back and forth before the bridge, on which they had stopped a horseman holding a large white envelope in his hand. Then Don Pepe, emerging in the village street from amongst the houses, not a stone's throw from the frontier bridge, approached, striding in wide dark trousers tucked into boots, a white linen jacket, sabre at his side, and revolver at his belt. In this disturbed time nothing could find the Senor Gobernador with his boots off, as the saying is.

At a slight nod from one of the serenos, the man, a messenger from the town, dismounted, and crossed the bridge, leading his horse by the bridle.

Don Pepe received the letter from his other hand, slapped his left side and his hips in succession, feeling for his spectacle case. After settling the heavy silvermounted affair astride his nose, and adjusting it carefully behind his ears, he opened the envelope, holding it up at about a foot in front of his eyes. The paper he pulled out contained some three lines of writing. He looked at them for a long time. His grey moustache moved slightly up and down, and the wrinkles, radiating at the corners of his eyes, ran together. He nodded serenely. "Bueno," he said. "There is no answer."

Then, in his quiet, kindly way, he engaged in a cautious conversation with the man, who was willing to talk cheerily, as if something lucky had happened to him recently. He had seen from a distance Sotillo's infantry camped along the shore of the harbour on each side of the Custom House. They had done no damage to the buildings. The foreigners of the railway remained shut up within the yards. They were no longer anxious to shoot poor people. He cursed the foreigners; then he reported Montero's entry and the rumours of the town. The poor were going to be made rich now. That was very good. More he did not know, and, breaking into propitiatory smiles, he intimated that he was hungry and thirsty. The old major directed him to go to the alcalde of the first village. The man rode off, and Don Pepe, striding slowly in the direction of a little wooden belfry, looked over a hedge into a little garden, and saw Father Roman sitting in a white hammock slung between two orange trees in front of the presbytery.

An enormous tamarind shaded with its dark foliage the whole white framehouse. A young Indian girl with long hair, big eyes, and small hands and feet, carried out a wooden chair, while a thin old woman, crabbed and vigilant, watched her all the time from the verandah.

Don Pepe sat down in the chair and lighted a cigar; the priest drew in an immense quantity of snuff out of the hollow of his palm. On his reddish-brown face, worn, hollowed as if crumbled, the eyes, fresh and candid, sparkled like two black diamonds.

Don Pepe, in a mild and humorous voice, informed Father Roman that Pedrito Montero, by the hand of Senor Fuentes, had asked him on what terms he would surrender the mine in proper working order to a legally constituted commission of patriotic citizens, escorted by a small military force. The priest cast his eyes up to heaven. However, Don Pepe continued, the mozo who brought the letter said that Don Carlos Gould was alive, and so far unmolested.

Father Roman expressed in a few words his thankfulness at hearing of the Senor Administrador's safety.

The hour of oration had gone by in the silvery ringing of a bell in the little belfry. The belt of forest closing the entrance of the valley stood like a screen between the low sun and the street of the village. At the other end of the rocky gorge, between the walls of basalt and granite, a forest-clad mountain, hiding all the range from the San Tome dwellers, rose steeply, lighted up and leafy to the very top. Three small rosy clouds hung motionless overhead in the great depth of blue. Knots of people sat in the street between the wattled huts. Before the casa of the alcalde, the foremen of the night-shift, already assembled to lead their men, squatted on the ground in a circle of leather skull-caps, and, bowing their bronze backs, were passing round the gourd of mate. The mozo from the town, having fastened his horse to a wooden post before the door, was telling them the news of Sulaco as the blackened gourd of the decoction passed from hand to hand. The grave alcalde himself, in a white waistcloth and a flowered chintz gown with sleeves, open wide upon his naked stout person with an effect of a gaudy bathing robe, stood by, wearing a rough beaver hat at the back of his head, and grasping a tall staff with a silver knob in his hand. These insignia of his dignity had been conferred upon him by the Administration of the mine, the fountain of honour, of prosperity, and peace. He had been one of the first immigrants into this valley; his sons and sons-in-law worked within the mountain which seemed with its treasures to pour down the thundering ore shoots of the upper mesa, the gifts of well-being, security, and justice upon the toilers. He listened to the news from the town with curiosity and indifference, as if concerning another world than his own. And it was true that they appeared to him so. In a very few years the sense of belonging to a powerful organization had been developed in these harassed, half-wild Indians. They were proud of, and attached to, the mine. It had secured their confidence and belief. They invested it with a protecting and invincible virtue as though it were a fetish made by their own hands, for they were ignorant, and in other respects did not differ appreciably from the rest of mankind which puts infinite trust in its own creations. It never entered the alcalde's head that the mine could fail in its protection and force. Politics were good enough for the people of the town and the Campo. His yellow, round face, with wide nostrils, and motionless in expression, resembled a fierce full moon. He listened to the excited

vapourings of the mozo without misgivings, without surprise, without any active sentiment whatever.

Padre Roman sat dejectedly balancing himself, his feet just touching the ground, his hands gripping the edge of the hammock. With less confidence, but as ignorant as his flock, he asked the major what did he think was going to happen now.

Don Pepe, bolt upright in the chair, folded his hands peacefully on the hilt of his sword, standing perpendicular between his thighs, and answered that he did not know. The mine could be defended against any force likely to be sent to take possession. On the other hand, from the arid character of the valley, when the regular supplies from the Campo had been cut off, the population of the three villages could be starved into submission. Don Pepe exposed these contingencies with serenity to Father Roman, who, as an old campaigner, was able to understand the reasoning of a military man. They talked with simplicity and directness. Father Roman was saddened at the idea of his flock being scattered or else enslaved. He had no illusions as to their fate, not from penetration, but from long experience of political atrocities, which seemed to him fatal and unavoidable in the life of a State. The working of the usual public institutions presented itself to him most distinctly as a series of calamities overtaking private individuals and flowing logically from each other through hate, revenge, folly, and rapacity, as though they had been part of a divine dispensation. Father Roman's clear-sightedness was served by an uninformed intelligence; but his heart, preserving its tenderness amongst scenes of carnage, spoliation, and violence, abhorred these calamities the more as his association with the victims was closer. He entertained towards the Indians of the valley feelings of paternal scorn. He had been marrying, baptizing, confessing, absolving, and burying the workers of the San Tome mine with dignity and unction for five years or more; and he believed in the sacredness of these ministrations, which made them his own in a spiritual sense. They were dear to his sacerdotal supremacy. Mrs. Gould's earnest interest in the concerns of these people enhanced their importance in the priest's eyes, because it really augmented his own. When talking over with her the innumerable Marias and Brigidas of the villages, he felt his own humanity expand. Padre Roman was incapable of fanaticism to an almost reprehensible degree. The English senora was evidently a heretic; but at the same time she seemed to him wonderful and angelic. Whenever that confused state of his feelings

occurred to him, while strolling, for instance, his breviary under his arm, in the wide shade of the tamarind, he would stop short to inhale with a strong snuffling noise a large quantity of snuff, and shake his head profoundly. At the thought of what might befall the illustrious senora presently, he became gradually overcome with dismay. He voiced it in an agitated murmur. Even Don Pepe lost his serenity for a moment. He leaned forward stiffly.

“Listen, Padre. The very fact that those thieving macaques in Sulaco are trying to find out the price of my honour proves that Senor Don Carlos and all in the Casa Gould are safe. As to my honour, that also is safe, as every man, woman, and child knows. But the negro Liberals who have snatched the town by surprise do not know that. Bueno. Let them sit and wait. While they wait they can do no harm.”

And he regained his composure. He regained it easily, because whatever happened his honour of an old officer of Paez was safe. He had promised Charles Gould that at the approach of an armed force he would defend the gorge just long enough to give himself time to destroy scientifically the whole plant, buildings, and workshops of the mine with heavy charges of dynamite; block with ruins the main tunnel, break down the pathways, blow up the dam of the water-power, shatter the famous Gould Concession into fragments, flying sky high out of a horrified world. The mine had got hold of Charles Gould with a grip as deadly as ever it had laid upon his father. But this extreme resolution had seemed to Don Pepe the most natural thing in the world. His measures had been taken with judgment. Everything was prepared with a careful completeness. And Don Pepe folded his hands pacifically on his sword hilt, and nodded at the priest. In his excitement, Father Roman had flung snuff in handfuls at his face, and, all besmeared with tobacco, round-eyed, and beside himself, had got out of the hammock to walk about, uttering exclamations.

Don Pepe stroked his grey and pendant moustache, whose fine ends hung far below the clean-cut line of his jaw, and spoke with a conscious pride in his reputation.

“So, Padre, I don’t know what will happen. But I know that as long as I am here Don Carlos can speak to that macaque, Pedrito Montero, and threaten the destruction of the mine with perfect assurance that he will be taken seriously. For people know me.”

He began to turn the cigar in his lips a little nervously, and went on —

“But that is talk — good for the politicians. I am a military man. I do not know what may happen. But I know what ought to be done — the mine should march upon the town with guns, axes, knives tied up to sticks — por Dios. That is what should be done. Only — ”

His folded hands twitched on the hilt. The cigar turned faster in the corner of his lips.

“And who should lead but I? Unfortunately — observe — I have given my word of honour to Don Carlos not to let the mine fall into the hands of these thieves. In war — you know this, Padre — the fate of battles is uncertain, and whom could I leave here to act for me in case of defeat? The explosives are ready. But it would require a man of high honour, of intelligence, of judgment, of courage, to carry out the prepared destruction. Somebody I can trust with my honour as I can trust myself. Another old officer of Paez, for instance. Or — or — perhaps one of Paez’s old chaplains would do.”

He got up, long, lank, upright, hard, with his martial moustache and the bony structure of his face, from which the glance of the sunken eyes seemed to transfix the priest, who stood still, an empty wooden snuff-box held upside down in his hand, and glared back, speechless, at the governor of the mine.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

At about that time, in the Intendencia of Sulaco, Charles Gould was assuring Pedrito Montero, who had sent a request for his presence there, that he would never let the mine pass out of his hands for the profit of a Government who had robbed him of it. The Gould Concession could not be resumed. His father had not desired it. The son would never surrender it. He would never surrender it alive. And once dead, where was the power capable of resuscitating such an enterprise in all its vigour and wealth out of the ashes and ruin of destruction? There was no such power in the country. And where was the skill and capital abroad that would condescend to touch such an ill-omened corpse? Charles Gould talked in the impassive tone which had for many years served to conceal his anger and contempt. He suffered. He was disgusted with what he had to say. It was too much like heroics. In him the strictly practical instinct was in profound discord with the almost mystic view he took of his right. The Gould Concession was symbolic of abstract justice. Let the heavens fall. But since the San Tome mine had developed into world-wide fame his threat had enough force and effectiveness to reach the rudimentary intelligence of Pedro Montero, wrapped up as it was in the futilities of historical anecdotes. The Gould Concession was a serious asset in the country's finance, and, what was more, in the private budgets of many officials as well. It was traditional. It was known. It was said. It was credible. Every Minister of Interior drew a salary from the San Tome mine. It was natural. And Pedrito intended to be Minister of the Interior and President of the Council in his brother's Government. The Duc de Morny had occupied those high posts during the Second French Empire with conspicuous advantage to himself.

A table, a chair, a wooden bedstead had been procured for His Excellency, who, after a short siesta, rendered absolutely necessary by the labours and the pomps of his entry into Sulaco, had been getting hold of the administrative machine by making appointments, giving orders, and signing proclamations. Alone with Charles Gould in the audience room, His Excellency managed with his well-known skill to conceal his annoyance and consternation. He had begun at first to talk loftily of confiscation, but the want of all proper feeling and mobility in the Senor Administrador's features ended by affecting adversely his power of masterful expression. Charles Gould had repeated: "The Government can certainly bring about

the destruction of the San Tome mine if it likes; but without me it can do nothing else.” It was an alarming pronouncement, and well calculated to hurt the sensibilities of a politician whose mind is bent upon the spoils of victory. And Charles Gould said also that the destruction of the San Tome mine would cause the ruin of other undertakings, the withdrawal of European capital, the withholding, most probably, of the last instalment of the foreign loan. That stony fiend of a man said all these things (which were accessible to His Excellency’s intelligence) in a coldblooded manner which made one shudder.

A long course of reading historical works, light and gossipy in tone, carried out in garrets of Parisian hotels, sprawling on an untidy bed, to the neglect of his duties, menial or otherwise, had affected the manners of Pedro Montero. Had he seen around him the splendour of the old Intendencia, the magnificent hangings, the gilt furniture ranged along the walls; had he stood upon a dais on a noble square of red carpet, he would have probably been very dangerous from a sense of success and elevation. But in this sacked and devastated residence, with the three pieces of common furniture huddled up in the middle of the vast apartment, Pedrito’s imagination was subdued by a feeling of insecurity and impermanence. That feeling and the firm attitude of Charles Gould who had not once, so far, pronounced the word “Excellency,” diminished him in his own eyes. He assumed the tone of an enlightened man of the world, and begged Charles Gould to dismiss from his mind every cause for alarm. He was now conversing, he reminded him, with the brother of the master of the country, charged with a reorganizing mission. The trusted brother of the master of the country, he repeated. Nothing was further from the thoughts of that wise and patriotic hero than ideas of destruction. “I entreat you, Don Carlos, not to give way to your anti-democratic prejudices,” he cried, in a burst of condescending effusion.

Pedrito Montero surprised one at first sight by the vast development of his bald forehead, a shiny yellow expanse between the crinkly coal-black tufts of hair without any lustre, the engaging form of his mouth, and an unexpectedly cultivated voice. But his eyes, very glistening as if freshly painted on each side of his hooked nose, had a round, hopeless, birdlike stare when opened fully. Now, however, he narrowed them agreeably, throwing his square chin up and speaking with closed teeth slightly through the nose, with what he imagined to be the manner of a grand seigneur.



In that attitude, he declared suddenly that the highest expression of democracy was Caesarism: the imperial rule based upon the direct popular vote. Caesarism was conservative. It was strong. It recognized the legitimate needs of democracy which requires orders, titles, and distinctions. They would be showered upon deserving men. Caesarism was peace. It was progressive. It secured the prosperity of a country. Pedrito Montero was carried away. Look at what the Second Empire had done for France. It was a regime which delighted to honour men of Don Carlos's stamp. The Second Empire fell, but that was because its chief was devoid of that military genius which had raised General Montero to the pinnacle of fame and glory. Pedrito elevated his hand jerkily to help the idea of pinnacle, of fame. "We shall have many talks yet. We shall understand each other thoroughly, Don Carlos!" he cried in a tone of fellowship. Republicanism had done its work. Imperial democracy was the power of the future. Pedrito, the guerrillero, showing his hand, lowered his voice forcibly. A man singled out by his fellow-citizens for the honourable nickname of El Rey de Sulaco could not but receive a full recognition from an imperial democracy as a great captain of industry and a person of weighty counsel, whose popular designation would be soon replaced by a more solid title. "Eh, Don Carlos? No! What do you say? Conde de Sulaco — Eh? — or marquis . . ."

He ceased. The air was cool on the Plaza, where a patrol of cavalry rode round and round without penetrating into the streets, which resounded with shouts and the strumming of guitars issuing from the open doors of pulperias. The orders were not to interfere with the enjoyments of the people. And above the roofs, next to the perpendicular lines of the cathedral towers the snowy curve of Higuerota blocked a large space of darkening blue sky before the windows of the Intendencia. After a time Pedrito Montero, thrusting his hand in the bosom of his coat, bowed his head with slow dignity. The audience was over.

Charles Gould on going out passed his hand over his forehead as if to disperse the mists of an oppressive dream, whose grotesque extravagance leaves behind a subtle sense of bodily danger and intellectual decay. In the passages and on the staircases of the old palace Montero's troopers lounged about insolently, smoking and making way for no one; the clanking of sabres and spurs resounded all over the building. Three silent groups of civilians in severe black waited in the main gallery, formal and helpless, a

little huddled up, each keeping apart from the others, as if in the exercise of a public duty they had been overcome by a desire to shun the notice of every eye. These were the deputations waiting for their audience. The one from the Provincial Assembly, more restless and uneasy in its corporate expression, was overtopped by the big face of Don Juste Lopez, soft and white, with prominent eyelids and wreathed in impenetrable solemnity as if in a dense cloud. The President of the Provincial Assembly, coming bravely to save the last shred of parliamentary institutions (on the English model), averted his eyes from the Administrador of the San Tome mine as a dignified rebuke of his little faith in that only saving principle.

The mournful severity of that reproof did not affect Charles Gould, but he was sensible to the glances of the others directed upon him without reproach, as if only to read their own fate upon his face. All of them had talked, shouted, and declaimed in the great sala of the Casa Gould. The feeling of compassion for those men, struck with a strange impotence in the toils of moral degradation, did not induce him to make a sign. He suffered from his fellowship in evil with them too much. He crossed the Plaza unmolested. The Amarilla Club was full of festive ragamuffins. Their frowsy heads protruded from every window, and from within came drunken shouts, the thumping of feet, and the twanging of harps. Broken bottles strewn the pavement below. Charles Gould found the doctor still in his house.

Dr. Monygham came away from the crack in the shutter through which he had been watching the street.

“Ah! You are back at last!” he said in a tone of relief. “I have been telling Mrs. Gould that you were perfectly safe, but I was not by any means certain that the fellow would have let you go.”

“Neither was I,” confessed Charles Gould, laying his hat on the table.

“You will have to take action.”

The silence of Charles Gould seemed to admit that this was the only course. This was as far as Charles Gould was accustomed to go towards expressing his intentions.

“I hope you did not warn Montero of what you mean to do,” the doctor said, anxiously.

“I tried to make him see that the existence of the mine was bound up with my personal safety,” continued Charles Gould, looking away from the doctor, and fixing his eyes upon the water-colour sketch upon the wall.

“He believed you?” the doctor asked, eagerly.

“God knows!” said Charles Gould. “I owed it to my wife to say that much. He is well enough informed. He knows that I have Don Pepe there. Fuentes must have told him. They know that the old major is perfectly capable of blowing up the San Tome mine without hesitation or compunction. Had it not been for that I don’t think I’d have left the Intendencia a free man. He would blow everything up from loyalty and from hate — from hate of these Liberals, as they call themselves. Liberals! The words one knows so well have a nightmarish meaning in this country. Liberty, democracy, patriotism, government — all of them have a flavour of folly and murder. Haven’t they, doctor? . . . I alone can restrain Don Pepe. If they were to — to do away with me, nothing could prevent him.”

“They will try to tamper with him,” the doctor suggested, thoughtfully.

“It is very possible,” Charles Gould said very low, as if speaking to himself, and still gazing at the sketch of the San Tome gorge upon the wall. “Yes, I expect they will try that.” Charles Gould looked for the first time at the doctor. “It would give me time,” he added.

“Exactly,” said Dr. Monygham, suppressing his excitement. “Especially if Don Pepe behaves diplomatically. Why shouldn’t he give them some hope of success? Eh? Otherwise you wouldn’t gain so much time. Couldn’t he be instructed to — ”

Charles Gould, looking at the doctor steadily, shook his head, but the doctor continued with a certain amount of fire —

“Yes, to enter into negotiations for the surrender of the mine. It is a good notion. You would mature your plan. Of course, I don’t ask what it is. I don’t want to know. I would refuse to listen to you if you tried to tell me. I am not fit for confidences.”

“What nonsense!” muttered Charles Gould, with displeasure.

He disapproved of the doctor’s sensitiveness about that far-off episode of his life. So much memory shocked Charles Gould. It was like morbidity. And again he shook his head. He refused to tamper with the open rectitude of Don Pepe’s conduct, both from taste and from policy. Instructions would have to be either verbal or in writing. In either case they ran the risk of being intercepted. It was by no means certain that a messenger could reach the mine; and, besides, there was no one to send. It was on the tip of Charles’s tongue to say that only the late Capataz de Cargadores could have been employed with some chance of success and the certitude of discretion.

But he did not say that. He pointed out to the doctor that it would have been bad policy. Directly Don Pepe let it be supposed that he could be bought over, the Administrador's personal safety and the safety of his friends would become endangered. For there would be then no reason for moderation. The incorruptibility of Don Pepe was the essential and restraining fact. The doctor hung his head and admitted that in a way it was so.

He couldn't deny to himself that the reasoning was sound enough. Don Pepe's usefulness consisted in his unstained character. As to his own usefulness, he reflected bitterly it was also his own character. He declared to Charles Gould that he had the means of keeping Sotillo from joining his forces with Montero, at least for the present.

"If you had had all this silver here," the doctor said, "or even if it had been known to be at the mine, you could have bribed Sotillo to throw off his recent Monterism. You could have induced him either to go away in his steamer or even to join you."

"Certainly not that last," Charles Gould declared, firmly. "What could one do with a man like that, afterwards — tell me, doctor? The silver is gone, and I am glad of it. It would have been an immediate and strong temptation. The scramble for that visible plunder would have precipitated a disastrous ending. I would have had to defend it, too. I am glad we've removed it — even if it is lost. It would have been a danger and a curse."

"Perhaps he is right," the doctor, an hour later, said hurriedly to Mrs. Gould, whom he met in the corridor. "The thing is done, and the shadow of the treasure may do just as well as the substance. Let me try to serve you to the whole extent of my evil reputation. I am off now to play my game of betrayal with Sotillo, and keep him off the town."

She put out both her hands impulsively. "Dr. Monygham, you are running a terrible risk," she whispered, averting from his face her eyes, full of tears, for a short glance at the door of her husband's room. She pressed both his hands, and the doctor stood as if rooted to the spot, looking down at her, and trying to twist his lips into a smile.

"Oh, I know you will defend my memory," he uttered at last, and ran tottering down the stairs across the patio, and out of the house. In the street he kept up a great pace with his smart hobbling walk, a case of instruments under his arm. He was known for being loco. Nobody interfered with him. From under the seaward gate, across the dusty, arid plain, interspersed with

low bushes, he saw, more than a mile away, the ugly enormity of the Custom House, and the two or three other buildings which at that time constituted the seaport of Sulaco. Far away to the south groves of palm trees edged the curve of the harbour shore. The distant peaks of the Cordillera had lost their identity of clearcut shapes in the steadily deepening blue of the eastern sky. The doctor walked briskly. A darkling shadow seemed to fall upon him from the zenith. The sun had set. For a time the snows of Higuerota continued to glow with the reflected glory of the west. The doctor, holding a straight course for the Custom House, appeared lonely, hopping amongst the dark bushes like a tall bird with a broken wing.

Tints of purple, gold, and crimson were mirrored in the clear water of the harbour. A long tongue of land, straight as a wall, with the grass-grown ruins of the fort making a sort of rounded green mound, plainly visible from the inner shore, closed its circuit; while beyond the Placid Gulf repeated those splendours of colouring on a greater scale and with a more sombre magnificence. The great mass of cloud filling the head of the gulf had long red smears amongst its convoluted folds of grey and black, as of a floating mantle stained with blood. The three Isabels, overshadowed and clear cut in a great smoothness confounding the sea and sky, appeared suspended, purple-black, in the air. The little wavelets seemed to be tossing tiny red sparks upon the sandy beaches. The glassy bands of water along the horizon gave out a fiery red glow, as if fire and water had been mingled together in the vast bed of the ocean.

At last the conflagration of sea and sky, lying embraced and still in a flaming contact upon the edge of the world, went out. The red sparks in the water vanished together with the stains of blood in the black mantle draping the sombre head of the Placid Gulf; a sudden breeze sprang up and died out after rustling heavily the growth of bushes on the ruined earthwork of the fort. Nostromo woke up from a fourteen hours' sleep, and arose full length from his lair in the long grass. He stood knee deep amongst the whispering undulations of the green blades with the lost air of a man just born into the world. Handsome, robust, and supple, he threw back his head, flung his arms open, and stretched himself with a slow twist of the waist and a leisurely growling yawn of white teeth, as natural and free from evil in the moment of waking as a magnificent and unconscious wild beast. Then, in the suddenly steadied glance fixed upon nothing from under a thoughtful frown, appeared the man.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

After landing from his swim Nostromo had scrambled up, all dripping, into the main quadrangle of the old fort; and there, amongst ruined bits of walls and rotting remnants of roofs and sheds, he had slept the day through. He had slept in the shadow of the mountains, in the white blaze of noon, in the stillness and solitude of that overgrown piece of land between the oval of the harbour and the spacious semi-circle of the gulf. He lay as if dead. A rey-zamuro, appearing like a tiny black speck in the blue, stooped, circling prudently with a stealthiness of flight startling in a bird of that great size. The shadow of his pearly-white body, of his black-tipped wings, fell on the grass no more silently than he alighted himself on a hillock of rubbish within three yards of that man, lying as still as a corpse. The bird stretched his bare neck, craned his bald head, loathsome in the brilliance of varied colouring, with an air of voracious anxiety towards the promising stillness of that prostrate body. Then, sinking his head deeply into his soft plumage, he settled himself to wait. The first thing upon which Nostromo's eyes fell on waking was this patient watcher for the signs of death and corruption. When the man got up the vulture hopped away in great, side-long, fluttering jumps. He lingered for a while, morose and reluctant, before he rose, circling noiselessly with a sinister droop of beak and claws.

Long after he had vanished, Nostromo, lifting his eyes up to the sky, muttered, "I am not dead yet."

The Capataz of the Sulaco Cargadores had lived in splendour and publicity up to the very moment, as it were, when he took charge of the lighter containing the treasure of silver ingots.

The last act he had performed in Sulaco was in complete harmony with his vanity, and as such perfectly genuine. He had given his last dollar to an old woman moaning with the grief and fatigue of a dismal search under the arch of the ancient gate. Performed in obscurity and without witnesses, it had still the characteristics of splendour and publicity, and was in strict keeping with his reputation. But this awakening in solitude, except for the watchful vulture, amongst the ruins of the fort, had no such characteristics. His first confused feeling was exactly this — that it was not in keeping. It was more like the end of things. The necessity of living concealed somehow, for God knows how long, which assailed him on his return to

consciousness, made everything that had gone before for years appear vain and foolish, like a flattering dream come suddenly to an end.

He climbed the crumbling slope of the rampart, and, putting aside the bushes, looked upon the harbour. He saw a couple of ships at anchor upon the sheet of water reflecting the last gleams of light, and Sotillo's steamer moored to the jetty. And behind the pale long front of the Custom House, there appeared the extent of the town like a grove of thick timber on the plain with a gateway in front, and the cupolas, towers, and miradors rising above the trees, all dark, as if surrendered already to the night. The thought that it was no longer open to him to ride through the streets, recognized by everyone, great and little, as he used to do every evening on his way to play monte in the posada of the Mexican Domingo; or to sit in the place of honour, listening to songs and looking at dances, made it appear to him as a town that had no existence.

For a long time he gazed on, then let the parted bushes spring back, and, crossing over to the other side of the fort, surveyed the vaster emptiness of the great gulf. The Isabels stood out heavily upon the narrowing long band of red in the west, which gleamed low between their black shapes, and the Capataz thought of Decoud alone there with the treasure. That man was the only one who cared whether he fell into the hands of the Monterists or not, the Capataz reflected bitterly. And that merely would be an anxiety for his own sake. As to the rest, they neither knew nor cared. What he had heard Giorgio Viola say once was very true. Kings, ministers, aristocrats, the rich in general, kept the people in poverty and subjection; they kept them as they kept dogs, to fight and hunt for their service.

The darkness of the sky had descended to the line of the horizon, enveloping the whole gulf, the islets, and the lover of Antonia alone with the treasure on the Great Isabel. The Capataz, turning his back on these things invisible and existing, sat down and took his face between his fists. He felt the pinch of poverty for the first time in his life. To find himself without money after a run of bad luck at monte in the low, smoky room of Domingo's posada, where the fraternity of Cargadores gambled, sang, and danced of an evening; to remain with empty pockets after a burst of public generosity to some peyne d'oro girl or other (for whom he did not care), had none of the humiliation of destitution. He remained rich in glory and reputation. But since it was no longer possible for him to parade the streets



of the town, and be hailed with respect in the usual haunts of his leisure, this sailor felt himself destitute indeed.

His mouth was dry. It was dry with heavy sleep and extremely anxious thinking, as it had never been dry before. It may be said that Nostromo tasted the dust and ashes of the fruit of life into which he had bitten deeply in his hunger for praise. Without removing his head from between his fists, he tried to spit before him — "Tfui" — and muttered a curse upon the selfishness of all the rich people.

Since everything seemed lost in Sulaco (and that was the feeling of his waking), the idea of leaving the country altogether had presented itself to Nostromo. At that thought he had seen, like the beginning of another dream, a vision of steep and tideless shores, with dark pines on the heights and white houses low down near a very blue sea. He saw the quays of a big port, where the coasting feluccas, with their lateen sails outspread like motionless wings, enter gliding silently between the end of long moles of squared blocks that project angularly towards each other, hugging a cluster of shipping to the superb bosom of a hill covered with palaces. He remembered these sights not without some filial emotion, though he had been habitually and severely beaten as a boy on one of these feluccas by a short-necked, shaven Genoese, with a deliberate and distrustful manner, who (he firmly believed) had cheated him out of his orphan's inheritance. But it is mercifully decreed that the evils of the past should appear but faintly in retrospect. Under the sense of loneliness, abandonment, and failure, the idea of return to these things appeared tolerable. But, what? Return? With bare feet and head, with one check shirt and a pair of cotton calzoneros for all worldly possessions?

The renowned Capataz, his elbows on his knees and a fist dug into each cheek, laughed with self-derision, as he had spat with disgust, straight out before him into the night. The confused and intimate impressions of universal dissolution which beset a subjective nature at any strong check to its ruling passion had a bitterness approaching that of death itself. He was simple. He was as ready to become the prey of any belief, superstition, or desire as a child.

The facts of his situation he could appreciate like a man with a distinct experience of the country. He saw them clearly. He was as if sobered after a long bout of intoxication. His fidelity had been taken advantage of. He had persuaded the body of Cargadores to side with the Blancos against the rest

of the people; he had had interviews with Don Jose; he had been made use of by Father Corbelan for negotiating with Hernandez; it was known that Don Martin Decoud had admitted him to a sort of intimacy, so that he had been free of the offices of the Porvenir. All these things had flattered him in the usual way. What did he care about their politics? Nothing at all. And at the end of it all — Nostromo here and Nostromo there — where is Nostromo? Nostromo can do this and that — work all day and ride all night — behold! he found himself a marked Ribierist for any sort of vengeance Gamacho, for instance, would choose to take, now the Montero party, had, after all, mastered the town. The Europeans had given up; the Caballeros had given up. Don Martin had indeed explained it was only temporary — that he was going to bring Barrios to the rescue. Where was that now — with Don Martin (whose ironic manner of talk had always made the Capataz feel vaguely uneasy) stranded on the Great Isabel? Everybody had given up. Even Don Carlos had given up. The hurried removal of the treasure out to sea meant nothing else than that. The Capataz de Cargadores, on a revulsion of subjectiveness, exasperated almost to insanity, beheld all his world without faith and courage. He had been betrayed!

With the boundless shadows of the sea behind him, out of his silence and immobility, facing the lofty shapes of the lower peaks crowded around the white, misty sheen of Higuerota, Nostromo laughed aloud again, sprang abruptly to his feet, and stood still. He must go. But where?

“There is no mistake. They keep us and encourage us as if we were dogs born to fight and hunt for them. The vecchio is right,” he said, slowly and scathingly. He remembered old Giorgio taking his pipe out of his mouth to throw these words over his shoulder at the cafe, full of engine-drivers and fitters from the railway workshops. This image fixed his wavering purpose. He would try to find old Giorgio if he could. God knows what might have happened to him! He made a few steps, then stopped again and shook his head. To the left and right, in front and behind him, the scrubby bush rustled mysteriously in the darkness.

“Teresa was right, too,” he added in a low tone touched with awe. He wondered whether she was dead in her anger with him or still alive. As if in answer to this thought, half of remorse and half of hope, with a soft flutter and oblique flight, a big owl, whose appalling cry: “Ya-acabo! Ya-acabo! — it is finished; it is finished” — announces calamity and death in the popular belief, drifted vaguely like a large dark ball across his path. In the downfall

of all the realities that made his force, he was affected by the superstition, and shuddered slightly. Signora Teresa must have died, then. It could mean nothing else. The cry of the ill-omened bird, the first sound he was to hear on his return, was a fitting welcome for his betrayed individuality. The unseen powers which he had offended by refusing to bring a priest to a dying woman were lifting up their voice against him. She was dead. With admirable and human consistency he referred everything to himself. She had been a woman of good counsel always. And the bereaved old Giorgio remained stunned by his loss just as he was likely to require the advice of his sagacity. The blow would render the dreamy old man quite stupid for a time.

As to Captain Mitchell, Nostromo, after the manner of trusted subordinates, considered him as a person fitted by education perhaps to sign papers in an office and to give orders, but otherwise of no use whatever, and something of a fool. The necessity of winding round his little finger, almost daily, the pompous and testy self-importance of the old seaman had grown irksome with use to Nostromo. At first it had given him an inward satisfaction. But the necessity of overcoming small obstacles becomes wearisome to a self-confident personality as much by the certitude of success as by the monotony of effort. He mistrusted his superior's proneness to fussy action. That old Englishman had no judgment, he said to himself. It was useless to suppose that, acquainted with the true state of the case, he would keep it to himself. He would talk of doing impracticable things. Nostromo feared him as one would fear saddling one's self with some persistent worry. He had no discretion. He would betray the treasure. And Nostromo had made up his mind that the treasure should not be betrayed.

The word had fixed itself tenaciously in his intelligence. His imagination had seized upon the clear and simple notion of betrayal to account for the dazed feeling of enlightenment as to being done for, of having inadvertently gone out of his existence on an issue in which his personality had not been taken into account. A man betrayed is a man destroyed. Signora Teresa (may God have her soul!) had been right. He had never been taken into account. Destroyed! Her white form sitting up bowed in bed, the falling black hair, the wide-browed suffering face raised to him, the anger of her denunciations appeared to him now majestic with the awfulness of inspiration and of death. For it was not for nothing that the evil bird had

uttered its lamentable shriek over his head. She was dead — may God have her soul!

Sharing in the anti-priestly freethought of the masses, his mind used the pious formula from the superficial force of habit, but with a deep-seated sincerity. The popular mind is incapable of scepticism; and that incapacity delivers their helpless strength to the wiles of swindlers and to the pitiless enthusiasms of leaders inspired by visions of a high destiny. She was dead. But would God consent to receive her soul? She had died without confession or absolution, because he had not been willing to spare her another moment of his time. His scorn of priests as priests remained; but after all, it was impossible to know whether what they affirmed was not true. Power, punishment, pardon, are simple and credible notions. The magnificent Capataz de Cargadores, deprived of certain simple realities, such as the admiration of women, the adulation of men, the admired publicity of his life, was ready to feel the burden of sacrilegious guilt descend upon his shoulders.

Bareheaded, in a thin shirt and drawers, he felt the lingering warmth of the fine sand under the soles of his feet. The narrow strand gleamed far ahead in a long curve, defining the outline of this wild side of the harbour. He flitted along the shore like a pursued shadow between the sombre palm-groves and the sheet of water lying as still as death on his right hand. He strode with headlong haste in the silence and solitude as though he had forgotten all prudence and caution. But he knew that on this side of the water he ran no risk of discovery. The only inhabitant was a lonely, silent, apathetic Indian in charge of the palmarias, who brought sometimes a load of cocoanuts to the town for sale. He lived without a woman in an open shed, with a perpetual fire of dry sticks smouldering near an old canoe lying bottom up on the beach. He could be easily avoided.

The barking of the dogs about that man's ranche was the first thing that checked his speed. He had forgotten the dogs. He swerved sharply, and plunged into the palm-grove, as into a wilderness of columns in an immense hall, whose dense obscurity seemed to whisper and rustle faintly high above his head. He traversed it, entered a ravine, and climbed to the top of a steep ridge free of trees and bushes.

From there, open and vague in the starlight, he saw the plain between the town and the harbour. In the woods above some night-bird made a strange drumming noise. Below beyond the palmaria on the beach, the Indian's

dogs continued to bark uproariously. He wondered what had upset them so much, and, peering down from his elevation, was surprised to detect unaccountable movements of the ground below, as if several oblong pieces of the plain had been in motion. Those dark, shifting patches, alternately catching and eluding the eye, altered their place always away from the harbour, with a suggestion of consecutive order and purpose. A light dawned upon him. It was a column of infantry on a night march towards the higher broken country at the foot of the hills. But he was too much in the dark about everything for wonder and speculation.

The plain had resumed its shadowy immobility. He descended the ridge and found himself in the open solitude, between the harbour and the town. Its spaciousness, extended indefinitely by an effect of obscurity, rendered more sensible his profound isolation. His pace became slower. No one waited for him; no one thought of him; no one expected or wished his return. "Betrayed! Betrayed!" he muttered to himself. No one cared. He might have been drowned by this time. No one would have cared — unless, perhaps, the children, he thought to himself. But they were with the English signora, and not thinking of him at all.

He wavered in his purpose of making straight for the Casa Viola. To what end? What could he expect there? His life seemed to fail him in all its details, even to the scornful reproaches of Teresa. He was aware painfully of his reluctance. Was it that remorse which she had prophesied with, what he saw now, was her last breath?

Meantime, he had deviated from the straight course, inclining by a sort of instinct to the right, towards the jetty and the harbour, the scene of his daily labours. The great length of the Custom House loomed up all at once like the wall of a factory. Not a soul challenged his approach, and his curiosity became excited as he passed cautiously towards the front by the unexpected sight of two lighted windows.

They had the fascination of a lonely vigil kept by some mysterious watcher up there, those two windows shining dimly upon the harbour in the whole vast extent of the abandoned building. The solitude could almost be felt. A strong smell of wood smoke hung about in a thin haze, which was faintly perceptible to his raised eyes against the glitter of the stars. As he advanced in the profound silence, the shrilling of innumerable cicadas in the dry grass seemed positively deafening to his strained ears. Slowly, step by step, he found himself in the great hall, sombre and full of acrid smoke.

A fire built against the staircase had burnt down impotently to a low heap of embers. The hard wood had failed to catch; only a few steps at the bottom smouldered, with a creeping glow of sparks defining their charred edges. At the top he saw a streak of light from an open door. It fell upon the vast landing, all foggy with a slow drift of smoke. That was the room. He climbed the stairs, then checked himself, because he had seen within the shadow of a man cast upon one of the walls. It was a shapeless, high-shouldered shadow of somebody standing still, with lowered head, out of his line of sight. The Capataz, remembering that he was totally unarmed, stepped aside, and, effacing himself upright in a dark corner, waited with his eyes fixed on the door.

The whole enormous ruined barrack of a place, unfinished, without ceilings under its lofty roof, was pervaded by the smoke swaying to and fro in the faint cross draughts playing in the obscurity of many lofty rooms and barnlike passages. Once one of the swinging shutters came against the wall with a single sharp crack, as if pushed by an impatient hand. A piece of paper scurried out from somewhere, rustling along the landing. The man, whoever he was, did not darken the lighted doorway. Twice the Capataz, advancing a couple of steps out of his corner, craned his neck in the hope of catching sight of what he could be at, so quietly, in there. But every time he saw only the distorted shadow of broad shoulders and bowed head. He was doing apparently nothing, and stirred not from the spot, as though he were meditating — or, perhaps, reading a paper. And not a sound issued from the room.

Once more the Capataz stepped back. He wondered who it was — some Monterist? But he dreaded to show himself. To discover his presence on shore, unless after many days, would, he believed, endanger the treasure. With his own knowledge possessing his whole soul, it seemed impossible that anybody in Sulaco should fail to jump at the right surmise. After a couple of weeks or so it would be different. Who could tell he had not returned overland from some port beyond the limits of the Republic? The existence of the treasure confused his thoughts with a peculiar sort of anxiety, as though his life had become bound up with it. It rendered him timorous for a moment before that enigmatic, lighted door. Devil take the fellow! He did not want to see him. There would be nothing to learn from his face, known or unknown. He was a fool to waste his time there in waiting.

Less than five minutes after entering the place the Capataz began his retreat. He got away down the stairs with perfect success, gave one upward look over his shoulder at the light on the landing, and ran stealthily across the hall. But at the very moment he was turning out of the great door, with his mind fixed upon escaping the notice of the man upstairs, somebody he had not heard coming briskly along the front ran full into him. Both muttered a stifled exclamation of surprise, and leaped back and stood still, each indistinct to the other. Nostromo was silent. The other man spoke first, in an amazed and deadened tone.

“Who are you?”

Already Nostromo had seemed to recognize Dr. Monygham. He had no doubt now. He hesitated the space of a second. The idea of bolting without a word presented itself to his mind. No use! An inexplicable repugnance to pronounce the name by which he was known kept him silent a little longer. At last he said in a low voice —

“A Cargador.”

He walked up to the other. Dr. Monygham had received a shock. He flung his arms up and cried out his wonder aloud, forgetting himself before the marvel of this meeting. Nostromo angrily warned him to moderate his voice. The Custom House was not so deserted as it looked. There was somebody in the lighted room above.

There is no more evanescent quality in an accomplished fact than its wonderfulness. Solicited incessantly by the considerations affecting its fears and desires, the human mind turns naturally away from the marvellous side of events. And it was in the most natural way possible that the doctor asked this man whom only two minutes before he believed to have been drowned in the gulf —

“You have seen somebody up there? Have you?”

“No, I have not seen him.”

“Then how do you know?”

“I was running away from his shadow when we met.”

“His shadow?”

“Yes. His shadow in the lighted room,” said Nostromo, in a contemptuous tone. Leaning back with folded arms at the foot of the immense building, he dropped his head, biting his lips slightly, and not looking at the doctor. “Now,” he thought to himself, “he will begin asking me about the treasure.”

But the doctor's thoughts were concerned with an event not as marvellous as Nostromo's appearance, but in itself much less clear. Why had Sotillo taken himself off with his whole command with this suddenness and secrecy? What did this move portend? However, it dawned upon the doctor that the man upstairs was one of the officers left behind by the disappointed colonel to communicate with him.

"I believe he is waiting for me," he said.

"It is possible."

"I must see. Do not go away yet, Capataz."

"Go away where?" muttered Nostromo.

Already the doctor had left him. He remained leaning against the wall, staring at the dark water of the harbour; the shrilling of cicalas filled his ears. An invincible vagueness coming over his thoughts took from them all power to determine his will.

"Capataz! Capataz!" the doctor's voice called urgently from above.

The sense of betrayal and ruin floated upon his sombre indifference as upon a sluggish sea of pitch. But he stepped out from under the wall, and, looking up, saw Dr. Monygham leaning out of a lighted window.

"Come up and see what Sotillo has done. You need not fear the man up here."

He answered by a slight, bitter laugh. Fear a man! The Capataz of the Sulaco Cargadores fear a man! It angered him that anybody should suggest such a thing. It angered him to be disarmed and skulking and in danger because of the accursed treasure, which was of so little account to the people who had tied it round his neck. He could not shake off the worry of it. To Nostromo the doctor represented all these people. . . . And he had never even asked after it. Not a word of inquiry about the most desperate undertaking of his life.

Thinking these thoughts, Nostromo passed again through the cavernous hall, where the smoke was considerably thinned, and went up the stairs, not so warm to his feet now, towards the streak of light at the top. The doctor appeared in it for a moment, agitated and impatient.

"Come up! Come up!"

At the moment of crossing the doorway the Capataz experienced a shock of surprise. The man had not moved. He saw his shadow in the same place. He started, then stepped in with a feeling of being about to solve a mystery.



It was very simple. For an infinitesimal fraction of a second, against the light of two flaring and guttering candles, through a blue, pungent, thin haze which made his eyes smart, he saw the man standing, as he had imagined him, with his back to the door, casting an enormous and distorted shadow upon the wall. Swifter than a flash of lightning followed the impression of his constrained, toppling attitude — the shoulders projecting forward, the head sunk low upon the breast. Then he distinguished the arms behind his back, and wrenched so terribly that the two clenched fists, lashed together, had been forced up higher than the shoulder-blades. From there his eyes traced in one instantaneous glance the hide rope going upwards from the tied wrists over a heavy beam and down to a staple in the wall. He did not want to look at the rigid legs, at the feet hanging down nervelessly, with their bare toes some six inches above the floor, to know that the man had been given the estrapade till he had swooned. His first impulse was to dash forward and sever the rope at one blow. He felt for his knife. He had no knife — not even a knife. He stood quivering, and the doctor, perched on the edge of the table, facing thoughtfully the cruel and lamentable sight, his chin in his hand, uttered, without stirring —

“Tortured — and shot dead through the breast — getting cold.”

This information calmed the Capataz. One of the candles flickering in the socket went out. “Who did this?” he asked.

“Sotillo, I tell you. Who else? Tortured — of course. But why shot?” The doctor looked fixedly at Nostromo, who shrugged his shoulders slightly. “And mark, shot suddenly, on impulse. It is evident. I wish I had his secret.”

Nostromo had advanced, and stooped slightly to look. “I seem to have seen that face somewhere,” he muttered. “Who is he?”

The doctor turned his eyes upon him again. “I may yet come to envying his fate. What do you think of that, Capataz, eh?”

But Nostromo did not even hear these words. Seizing the remaining light, he thrust it under the drooping head. The doctor sat oblivious, with a lost gaze. Then the heavy iron candlestick, as if struck out of Nostromo’s hand, clattered on the floor.

“Hullo!” exclaimed the doctor, looking up with a start. He could hear the Capataz stagger against the table and gasp. In the sudden extinction of the light within, the dead blackness sealing the window-frames became alive with stars to his sight.

“Of course, of course,” the doctor muttered to himself in English. “Enough to make him jump out of his skin.”

Nostromo’s heart seemed to force itself into his throat. His head swam. Hirsch! The man was Hirsch! He held on tight to the edge of the table.

“But he was hiding in the lighter,” he almost shouted. His voice fell. “In the lighter, and — and — ”

“And Sotillo brought him in,” said the doctor. “He is no more startling to you than you were to me. What I want to know is how he induced some compassionate soul to shoot him.”

“So Sotillo knows — ” began Nostromo, in a more equable voice.

“Everything!” interrupted the doctor.

The Capataz was heard striking the table with his fist. “Everything? What are you saying, there? Everything? Know everything? It is impossible! Everything?”

“Of course. What do you mean by impossible? I tell you I have heard this Hirsch questioned last night, here, in this very room. He knew your name, Decoud’s name, and all about the loading of the silver. . . . The lighter was cut in two. He was grovelling in abject terror before Sotillo, but he remembered that much. What do you want more? He knew least about himself. They found him clinging to their anchor. He must have caught at it just as the lighter went to the bottom.”

“Went to the bottom?” repeated Nostromo, slowly. “Sotillo believes that? Bueno!”

The doctor, a little impatiently, was unable to imagine what else could anybody believe. Yes, Sotillo believed that the lighter was sunk, and the Capataz de Cargadores, together with Martin Decoud and perhaps one or two other political fugitives, had been drowned.

“I told you well, senor doctor,” remarked Nostromo at that point, “that Sotillo did not know everything.”

“Eh? What do you mean?”

“He did not know I was not dead.”

“Neither did we.”

“And you did not care — none of you caballeros on the wharf — once you got off a man of flesh and blood like yourselves on a fool’s business that could not end well.”

“You forget, Capataz, I was not on the wharf. And I did not think well of the business. So you need not taunt me. I tell you what, man, we had but

little leisure to think of the dead. Death stands near behind us all. You were gone.”

“I went, indeed!” broke in Nostromo. “And for the sake of what — tell me?”

“Ah! that is your own affair,” the doctor said, roughly. “Do not ask me.”

Their flowing murmurs paused in the dark. Perched on the edge of the table with slightly averted faces, they felt their shoulders touch, and their eyes remained directed towards an upright shape nearly lost in the obscurity of the inner part of the room, that with projecting head and shoulders, in ghastly immobility, seemed intent on catching every word.

“Muy bien!” Nostromo muttered at last. “So be it. Teresa was right. It is my own affair.”

“Teresa is dead,” remarked the doctor, absently, while his mind followed a new line of thought suggested by what might have been called Nostromo’s return to life. “She died, the poor woman.”

“Without a priest?” the Capataz asked, anxiously.

“What a question! Who could have got a priest for her last night?”

“May God keep her soul!” ejaculated Nostromo, with a gloomy and hopeless fervour which had no time to surprise Dr. Monygham, before, reverting to their previous conversation, he continued in a sinister tone, “Si, senor doctor. As you were saying, it is my own affair. A very desperate affair.”

“There are no two men in this part of the world that could have saved themselves by swimming as you have done,” the doctor said, admiringly.

And again there was silence between those two men. They were both reflecting, and the diversity of their natures made their thoughts born from their meeting swing afar from each other. The doctor, impelled to risky action by his loyalty to the Goulds, wondered with thankfulness at the chain of accident which had brought that man back where he would be of the greatest use in the work of saving the San Tome mine. The doctor was loyal to the mine. It presented itself to his fifty-years’ old eyes in the shape of a little woman in a soft dress with a long train, with a head attractively overweighted by a great mass of fair hair and the delicate preciousness of her inner worth, partaking of a gem and a flower, revealed in every attitude of her person. As the dangers thickened round the San Tome mine this illusion acquired force, permanency, and authority. It claimed him at last! This claim, exalted by a spiritual detachment from the usual sanctions of

hope and reward, made Dr. Monygham's thinking, acting, individuality extremely dangerous to himself and to others, all his scruples vanishing in the proud feeling that his devotion was the only thing that stood between an admirable woman and a frightful disaster.

It was a sort of intoxication which made him utterly indifferent to Decoud's fate, but left his wits perfectly clear for the appreciation of Decoud's political idea. It was a good idea — and Barrios was the only instrument of its realization. The doctor's soul, withered and shrunk by the shame of a moral disgrace, became implacable in the expansion of its tenderness. Nostromo's return was providential. He did not think of him humanely, as of a fellow-creature just escaped from the jaws of death. The Capataz for him was the only possible messenger to Cayta. The very man. The doctor's misanthropic mistrust of mankind (the bitterer because based on personal failure) did not lift him sufficiently above common weaknesses. He was under the spell of an established reputation. Trumpeted by Captain Mitchell, grown in repetition, and fixed in general assent, Nostromo's faithfulness had never been questioned by Dr. Monygham as a fact. It was not likely to be questioned now he stood in desperate need of it himself. Dr. Monygham was human; he accepted the popular conception of the Capataz's incorruptibility simply because no word or fact had ever contradicted a mere affirmation. It seemed to be a part of the man, like his whiskers or his teeth. It was impossible to conceive him otherwise. The question was whether he would consent to go on such a dangerous and desperate errand. The doctor was observant enough to have become aware from the first of something peculiar in the man's temper. He was no doubt sore about the loss of the silver.

"It will be necessary to take him into my fullest confidence," he said to himself, with a certain acuteness of insight into the nature he had to deal with.

On Nostromo's side the silence had been full of black irresolution, anger, and mistrust. He was the first to break it, however.

"The swimming was no great matter," he said. "It is what went before — and what comes after that — "

He did not quite finish what he meant to say, breaking off short, as though his thought had butted against a solid obstacle. The doctor's mind pursued its own schemes with Machiavellian subtlety. He said as sympathetically as he was able —

“It is unfortunate, Capataz. But no one would think of blaming you. Very unfortunate. To begin with, the treasure ought never to have left the mountain. But it was Decoud who — however, he is dead. There is no need to talk of him.”

“No,” assented Nostromo, as the doctor paused, “there is no need to talk of dead men. But I am not dead yet.”

“You are all right. Only a man of your intrepidity could have saved himself.”

In this Dr. Monygham was sincere. He esteemed highly the intrepidity of that man, whom he valued but little, being disillusioned as to mankind in general, because of the particular instance in which his own manhood had failed. Having had to encounter singlehanded during his period of eclipse many physical dangers, he was well aware of the most dangerous element common to them all: of the crushing, paralyzing sense of human littleness, which is what really defeats a man struggling with natural forces, alone, far from the eyes of his fellows. He was eminently fit to appreciate the mental image he made for himself of the Capataz, after hours of tension and anxiety, precipitated suddenly into an abyss of waters and darkness, without earth or sky, and confronting it not only with an undismayed mind, but with sensible success. Of course, the man was an incomparable swimmer, that was known, but the doctor judged that this instance testified to a still greater intrepidity of spirit. It was pleasing to him; he augured well from it for the success of the arduous mission with which he meant to entrust the Capataz so marvellously restored to usefulness. And in a tone vaguely gratified, he observed —

“It must have been terribly dark!”

“It was the worst darkness of the Golfo,” the Capataz assented, briefly. He was mollified by what seemed a sign of some faint interest in such things as had befallen him, and dropped a few descriptive phrases with an affected and curt nonchalance. At that moment he felt communicative. He expected the continuance of that interest which, whether accepted or rejected, would have restored to him his personality — the only thing lost in that desperate affair. But the doctor, engrossed by a desperate adventure of his own, was terrible in the pursuit of his idea. He let an exclamation of regret escape him.

“I could almost wish you had shouted and shown a light.”

This unexpected utterance astounded the Capataz by its character of cold-blooded atrocity. It was as much as to say, "I wish you had shown yourself a coward; I wish you had had your throat cut for your pains." Naturally he referred it to himself, whereas it related only to the silver, being uttered simply and with many mental reservations. Surprise and rage rendered him speechless, and the doctor pursued, practically unheard by Nostromo, whose stirred blood was beating violently in his ears.

"For I am convinced Sotillo in possession of the silver would have turned short round and made for some small port abroad. Economically it would have been wasteful, but still less wasteful than having it sunk. It was the next best thing to having it at hand in some safe place, and using part of it to buy up Sotillo. But I doubt whether Don Carlos would have ever made up his mind to it. He is not fit for Costaguana, and that is a fact, Capataz."

The Capataz had mastered the fury that was like a tempest in his ears in time to hear the name of Don Carlos. He seemed to have come out of it a changed man — a man who spoke thoughtfully in a soft and even voice.

"And would Don Carlos have been content if I had surrendered this treasure?"

"I should not wonder if they were all of that way of thinking now," the doctor said, grimly. "I was never consulted. Decoud had it his own way. Their eyes are opened by this time, I should think. I for one know that if that silver turned up this moment miraculously ashore I would give it to Sotillo. And, as things stand, I would be approved."

"Turned up miraculously," repeated the Capataz very low; then raised his voice. "That, senor, would be a greater miracle than any saint could perform."

"I believe you, Capataz," said the doctor, drily.

He went on to develop his view of Sotillo's dangerous influence upon the situation. And the Capataz, listening as if in a dream, felt himself of as little account as the indistinct, motionless shape of the dead man whom he saw upright under the beam, with his air of listening also, disregarded, forgotten, like a terrible example of neglect.

"Was it for an unconsidered and foolish whim that they came to me, then?" he interrupted suddenly. "Had I not done enough for them to be of some account, por Dios? Is it that the hombres finos — the gentlemen — need not think as long as there is a man of the people ready to risk his body and soul? Or, perhaps, we have no souls — like dogs?"

“There was Decoud, too, with his plan,” the doctor reminded him again.

“Si! And the rich man in San Francisco who had something to do with that treasure, too — what do I know? No! I have heard too many things. It seems to me that everything is permitted to the rich.”

“I understand, Capataz,” the doctor began.

“What Capataz?” broke in Nostromo, in a forcible but even voice. “The Capataz is undone, destroyed. There is no Capataz. Oh, no! You will find the Capataz no more.”

“Come, this is childish!” remonstrated the doctor; and the other calmed down suddenly.

“I have been indeed like a little child,” he muttered.

And as his eyes met again the shape of the murdered man suspended in his awful immobility, which seemed the uncomplaining immobility of attention, he asked, wondering gently —

“Why did Sotillo give the estrapade to this pitiful wretch? Do you know? No torture could have been worse than his fear. Killing I can understand. His anguish was intolerable to behold. But why should he torment him like this? He could tell no more.”

“No; he could tell nothing more. Any sane man would have seen that. He had told him everything. But I tell you what it is, Capataz. Sotillo would not believe what he was told. Not everything.”

“What is it he would not believe? I cannot understand.”

“I can, because I have seen the man. He refuses to believe that the treasure is lost.”

“What?” the Capataz cried out in a discomposed tone.

“That startles you — eh?”

“Am I to understand, senor,” Nostromo went on in a deliberate and, as it were, watchful tone, “that Sotillo thinks the treasure has been saved by some means?”

“No! no! That would be impossible,” said the doctor, with conviction; and Nostromo emitted a grunt in the dark. “That would be impossible. He thinks that the silver was no longer in the lighter when she was sunk. He has convinced himself that the whole show of getting it away to sea is a mere sham got up to deceive Gamacho and his Nationals, Pedrito Montero, Senor Fuentes, our new Gefe Politico, and himself, too. Only, he says, he is no such fool.”

“But he is devoid of sense. He is the greatest imbecile that ever called himself a colonel in this country of evil,” growled Nostromo.

“He is no more unreasonable than many sensible men,” said the doctor. “He has convinced himself that the treasure can be found because he desires passionately to possess himself of it. And he is also afraid of his officers turning upon him and going over to Pedrito, whom he has not the courage either to fight or trust. Do you see that, Capataz? He need fear no desertion as long as some hope remains of that enormous plunder turning up. I have made it my business to keep this very hope up.”

“You have?” the Capataz de Cargadores repeated cautiously. “Well, that is wonderful. And how long do you think you are going to keep it up?”

“As long as I can.”

“What does that mean?”

“I can tell you exactly. As long as I live,” the doctor retorted in a stubborn voice. Then, in a few words, he described the story of his arrest and the circumstances of his release. “I was going back to that silly scoundrel when we met,” he concluded.

Nostromo had listened with profound attention. “You have made up your mind, then, to a speedy death,” he muttered through his clenched teeth.

“Perhaps, my illustrious Capataz,” the doctor said, testily. “You are not the only one here who can look an ugly death in the face.”

“No doubt,” mumbled Nostromo, loud enough to be overheard. “There may be even more than two fools in this place. Who knows?”

“And that is my affair,” said the doctor, curtly.

“As taking out the accursed silver to sea was my affair,” retorted Nostromo. “I see. Bueno! Each of us has his reasons. But you were the last man I conversed with before I started, and you talked to me as if I were a fool.”

Nostromo had a great distaste for the doctor’s sardonic treatment of his great reputation. Decoud’s faintly ironic recognition used to make him uneasy; but the familiarity of a man like Don Martin was flattering, whereas the doctor was a nobody. He could remember him a penniless outcast, slinking about the streets of Sulaco, without a single friend or acquaintance, till Don Carlos Gould took him into the service of the mine.

“You may be very wise,” he went on, thoughtfully, staring into the obscurity of the room, pervaded by the gruesome enigma of the tortured and



murdered Hirsch. "But I am not such a fool as when I started. I have learned one thing since, and that is that you are a dangerous man."

Dr. Monygham was too startled to do more than exclaim —

"What is it you say?"

"If he could speak he would say the same thing," pursued Nostromo, with a nod of his shadowy head silhouetted against the starlit window.

"I do not understand you," said Dr. Monygham, faintly.

"No? Perhaps, if you had not confirmed Sotillo in his madness, he would have been in no haste to give the estrapade to that miserable Hirsch."

The doctor started at the suggestion. But his devotion, absorbing all his sensibilities, had left his heart steeled against remorse and pity. Still, for complete relief, he felt the necessity of repelling it loudly and contemptuously.

"Bah! You dare to tell me that, with a man like Sotillo. I confess I did not give a thought to Hirsch. If I had it would have been useless. Anybody can see that the luckless wretch was doomed from the moment he caught hold of the anchor. He was doomed, I tell you! Just as I myself am doomed — most probably."

This is what Dr. Monygham said in answer to Nostromo's remark, which was plausible enough to prick his conscience. He was not a callous man. But the necessity, the magnitude, the importance of the task he had taken upon himself dwarfed all merely humane considerations. He had undertaken it in a fanatical spirit. He did not like it. To lie, to deceive, to circumvent even the basest of mankind was odious to him. It was odious to him by training, instinct, and tradition. To do these things in the character of a traitor was abhorrent to his nature and terrible to his feelings. He had made that sacrifice in a spirit of abasement. He had said to himself bitterly, "I am the only one fit for that dirty work." And he believed this. He was not subtle. His simplicity was such that, though he had no sort of heroic idea of seeking death, the risk, deadly enough, to which he exposed himself, had a sustaining and comforting effect. To that spiritual state the fate of Hirsch presented itself as part of the general atrocity of things. He considered that episode practically. What did it mean? Was it a sign of some dangerous change in Sotillo's delusion? That the man should have been killed like this was what the doctor could not understand.

"Yes. But why shot?" he murmured to himself.

Nostromo kept very still.



## CHAPTER NINE

Distracted between doubts and hopes, dismayed by the sound of bells pealing out the arrival of Pedrito Montero, Sotillo had spent the morning in battling with his thoughts; a contest to which he was unequal, from the vacuity of his mind and the violence of his passions. Disappointment, greed, anger, and fear made a tumult, in the colonel's breast louder than the din of bells in the town. Nothing he had planned had come to pass. Neither Sulaco nor the silver of the mine had fallen into his hands. He had performed no military exploit to secure his position, and had obtained no enormous booty to make off with. Pedrito Montero, either as friend or foe, filled him with dread. The sound of bells maddened him.

Imagining at first that he might be attacked at once, he had made his battalion stand to arms on the shore. He walked to and fro all the length of the room, stopping sometimes to gnaw the finger-tips of his right hand with a lurid sideways glare fixed on the floor; then, with a sullen, repelling glance all round, he would resume his tramping in savage aloofness. His hat, horsewhip, sword, and revolver were lying on the table. His officers, crowding the window giving the view of the town gate, disputed amongst themselves the use of his field-glass bought last year on long credit from Anzani. It passed from hand to hand, and the possessor for the time being was besieged by anxious inquiries.

"There is nothing; there is nothing to see!" he would repeat impatiently.

There was nothing. And when the picket in the bushes near the Casa Viola had been ordered to fall back upon the main body, no stir of life appeared on the stretch of dusty and arid land between the town and the waters of the port. But late in the afternoon a horseman issuing from the gate was made out riding up fearlessly. It was an emissary from Senor Fuentes. Being all alone he was allowed to come on. Dismounting at the great door he greeted the silent bystanders with cheery impudence, and begged to be taken up at once to the "muy valliente" colonel.

Senor Fuentes, on entering upon his functions of Gefe Politico, had turned his diplomatic abilities to getting hold of the harbour as well as of the mine. The man he pitched upon to negotiate with Sotillo was a Notary Public, whom the revolution had found languishing in the common jail on a charge of forging documents. Liberated by the mob along with the other

“victims of Blanco tyranny,” he had hastened to offer his services to the new Government.

He set out determined to display much zeal and eloquence in trying to induce Sotillo to come into town alone for a conference with Pedrito Montero. Nothing was further from the colonel’s intentions. The mere fleeting idea of trusting himself into the famous Pedrito’s hands had made him feel unwell several times. It was out of the question — it was madness. And to put himself in open hostility was madness, too. It would render impossible a systematic search for that treasure, for that wealth of silver which he seemed to feel somewhere about, to scent somewhere near.

But where? Where? Heavens! Where? Oh! why had he allowed that doctor to go! Imbecile that he was. But no! It was the only right course, he reflected distractedly, while the messenger waited downstairs chatting agreeably to the officers. It was in that scoundrelly doctor’s true interest to return with positive information. But what if anything stopped him? A general prohibition to leave the town, for instance! There would be patrols!

The colonel, seizing his head in his hands, turned in his tracks as if struck with vertigo. A flash of craven inspiration suggested to him an expedient not unknown to European statesmen when they wish to delay a difficult negotiation. Booted and spurred, he scrambled into the hammock with undignified haste. His handsome face had turned yellow with the strain of weighty cares. The ridge of his shapely nose had grown sharp; the audacious nostrils appeared mean and pinched. The velvety, caressing glance of his fine eyes seemed dead, and even decomposed; for these almond-shaped, languishing orbs had become inappropriately bloodshot with much sinister sleeplessness. He addressed the surprised envoy of Senor Fuentes in a deadened, exhausted voice. It came pathetically feeble from under a pile of ponchos, which buried his elegant person right up to the black moustaches, uncurled, pendant, in sign of bodily prostration and mental incapacity. Fever, fever — a heavy fever had overtaken the “muy valliente” colonel. A wavering wildness of expression, caused by the passing spasms of a slight colic which had declared itself suddenly, and the rattling teeth of repressed panic, had a genuineness which impressed the envoy. It was a cold fit. The colonel explained that he was unable to think, to listen, to speak. With an appearance of superhuman effort the colonel gasped out that he was not in a state to return a suitable reply or to execute any of his Excellency’s orders. But to-morrow! To-morrow! Ah! to-

morrow! Let his Excellency Don Pedro be without uneasiness. The brave Esmeralda Regiment held the harbour, held — And closing his eyes, he rolled his aching head like a half-delirious invalid under the inquisitive stare of the envoy, who was obliged to bend down over the hammock in order to catch the painful and broken accents. Meantime, Colonel Sotillo trusted that his Excellency's humanity would permit the doctor, the English doctor, to come out of town with his case of foreign remedies to attend upon him. He begged anxiously his worship the caballero now present for the grace of looking in as he passed the Casa Gould, and informing the English doctor, who was probably there, that his services were immediately required by Colonel Sotillo, lying ill of fever in the Custom House. Immediately. Most urgently required. Awaited with extreme impatience. A thousand thanks. He closed his eyes wearily and would not open them again, lying perfectly still, deaf, dumb, insensible, overcome, vanquished, crushed, annihilated by the fell disease.

But as soon as the other had shut after him the door of the landing, the colonel leaped out with a fling of both feet in an avalanche of woollen coverings. His spurs having become entangled in a perfect welter of ponchos he nearly pitched on his head, and did not recover his balance till the middle of the room. Concealed behind the half-closed jalousies he listened to what went on below.

The envoy had already mounted, and turning to the morose officers occupying the great doorway, took off his hat formally.

"Caballeros," he said, in a very loud tone, "allow me to recommend you to take great care of your colonel. It has done me much honour and gratification to have seen you all, a fine body of men exercising the soldierly virtue of patience in this exposed situation, where there is much sun, and no water to speak of, while a town full of wine and feminine charms is ready to embrace you for the brave men you are. Caballeros, I have the honour to salute you. There will be much dancing to-night in Sulaco. Good-bye!"

But he reined in his horse and inclined his head sideways on seeing the old major step out, very tall and meagre, in a straight narrow coat coming down to his ankles as it were the casing of the regimental colours rolled round their staff.

The intelligent old warrior, after enunciating in a dogmatic tone the general proposition that the "world was full of traitors," went on

pronouncing deliberately a panegyric upon Sotillo. He ascribed to him with leisurely emphasis every virtue under heaven, summing it all up in an absurd colloquialism current amongst the lower class of Occidentals (especially about Esmeralda). "And," he concluded, with a sudden rise in the voice, "a man of many teeth — 'hombre de muchos dientes.' Si, señor. As to us," he pursued, portentous and impressive, "your worship is beholding the finest body of officers in the Republic, men unequalled for valour and sagacity, 'y hombres de muchos dientes.'" "

"What? All of them?" inquired the disreputable envoy of Senor Fuentes, with a faint, derisive smile.

"Todos. Si, señor," the major affirmed, gravely, with conviction. "Men of many teeth."

The other wheeled his horse to face the portal resembling the high gate of a dismal barn. He raised himself in his stirrups, extended one arm. He was a facetious scoundrel, entertaining for these stupid Occidentals a feeling of great scorn natural in a native from the central provinces. The folly of Esmeraldians especially aroused his amused contempt. He began an oration upon Pedro Montero, keeping a solemn countenance. He flourished his hand as if introducing him to their notice. And when he saw every face set, all the eyes fixed upon his lips, he began to shout a sort of catalogue of perfections: "Generous, valorous, affable, profound" — (he snatched off his hat enthusiastically) — "a statesman, an invincible chief of partisans — " He dropped his voice startlingly to a deep, hollow note — "and a dentist."

He was off instantly at a smart walk; the rigid straddle of his legs, the turned-out feet, the stiff back, the rakish slant of the sombrero above the square, motionless set of the shoulders expressing an infinite, awe-inspiring impudence.

Upstairs, behind the jalousies, Sotillo did not move for a long time. The audacity of the fellow appalled him. What were his officers saying below? They were saying nothing. Complete silence. He quaked. It was not thus that he had imagined himself at that stage of the expedition. He had seen himself triumphant, unquestioned, appeased, the idol of the soldiers, weighing in secret complacency the agreeable alternatives of power and wealth open to his choice. Alas! How different! Distracted, restless, supine, burning with fury, or frozen with terror, he felt a dread as fathomless as the sea creep upon him from every side. That rogue of a doctor had to come out with his information. That was clear. It would be of no use to him — alone.

He could do nothing with it. Malediction! The doctor would never come out. He was probably under arrest already, shut up together with Don Carlos. He laughed aloud insanely. Ha! ha! ha! ha! It was Pedrito Montero who would get the information. Ha! ha! ha! ha! — and the silver. Ha!

All at once, in the midst of the laugh, he became motionless and silent as if turned into stone. He too, had a prisoner. A prisoner who must, must know the real truth. He would have to be made to speak. And Sotillo, who all that time had not quite forgotten Hirsch, felt an inexplicable reluctance at the notion of proceeding to extremities.

He felt a reluctance — part of that unfathomable dread that crept on all sides upon him. He remembered reluctantly, too, the dilated eyes of the hide merchant, his contortions, his loud sobs and protestations. It was not compassion or even mere nervous sensibility. The fact was that though Sotillo did never for a moment believe his story — he could not believe it; nobody could believe such nonsense — yet those accents of despairing truth impressed him disagreeably. They made him feel sick. And he suspected also that the man might have gone mad with fear. A lunatic is a hopeless subject. Bah! A pretence. Nothing but a pretence. He would know how to deal with that.

He was working himself up to the right pitch of ferocity. His fine eyes squinted slightly; he clapped his hands; a bare-footed orderly appeared noiselessly, a corporal, with his bayonet hanging on his thigh and a stick in his hand.

The colonel gave his orders, and presently the miserable Hirsch, pushed in by several soldiers, found him frowning awfully in a broad armchair, hat on head, knees wide apart, arms akimbo, masterful, imposing, irresistible, haughty, sublime, terrible.

Hirsch, with his arms tied behind his back, had been bundled violently into one of the smaller rooms. For many hours he remained apparently forgotten, stretched lifelessly on the floor. From that solitude, full of despair and terror, he was torn out brutally, with kicks and blows, passive, sunk in hebetude. He listened to threats and admonitions, and afterwards made his usual answers to questions, with his chin sunk on his breast, his hands tied behind his back, swaying a little in front of Sotillo, and never looking up. When he was forced to hold up his head, by means of a bayonet-point prodding him under the chin, his eyes had a vacant, trance-like stare, and

drops of perspiration as big as peas were seen hailing down the dirt, bruises, and scratches of his white face. Then they stopped suddenly.

Sotillo looked at him in silence. "Will you depart from your obstinacy, you rogue?" he asked. Already a rope, whose one end was fastened to Senor Hirsch's wrists, had been thrown over a beam, and three soldiers held the other end, waiting. He made no answer. His heavy lower lip hung stupidly. Sotillo made a sign. Hirsch was jerked up off his feet, and a yell of despair and agony burst out in the room, filled the passage of the great buildings, rent the air outside, caused every soldier of the camp along the shore to look up at the windows, started some of the officers in the hall babbling excitedly, with shining eyes; others, setting their lips, looked gloomily at the floor.

Sotillo, followed by the soldiers, had left the room. The sentry on the landing presented arms. Hirsch went on screaming all alone behind the half-closed jalousies while the sunshine, reflected from the water of the harbour, made an ever-running ripple of light high up on the wall. He screamed with uplifted eyebrows and a wide-open mouth — incredibly wide, black, enormous, full of teeth — comical.

In the still burning air of the windless afternoon he made the waves of his agony travel as far as the O. S. N. Company's offices. Captain Mitchell on the balcony, trying to make out what went on generally, had heard him faintly but distinctly, and the feeble and appalling sound lingered in his ears after he had retreated indoors with blanched cheeks. He had been driven off the balcony several times during that afternoon.

Sotillo, irritable, moody, walked restlessly about, held consultations with his officers, gave contradictory orders in this shrill clamour pervading the whole empty edifice. Sometimes there would be long and awful silences. Several times he had entered the torture-chamber where his sword, horsewhip, revolver, and field-glass were lying on the table, to ask with forced calmness, "Will you speak the truth now? No? I can wait." But he could not afford to wait much longer. That was just it. Every time he went in and came out with a slam of the door, the sentry on the landing presented arms, and got in return a black, venomous, unsteady glance, which, in reality, saw nothing at all, being merely the reflection of the soul within — a soul of gloomy hatred, irresolution, avarice, and fury.

The sun had set when he went in once more. A soldier carried in two lighted candles and slunk out, shutting the door without noise.



“Speak, thou Jewish child of the devil! The silver! The silver, I say! Where is it? Where have you foreign rogues hidden it? Confess or — ”

A slight quiver passed up the taut rope from the racked limbs, but the body of Senor Hirsch, enterprising business man from Esmeralda, hung under the heavy beam perpendicular and silent, facing the colonel awfully. The inflow of the night air, cooled by the snows of the Sierra, spread gradually a delicious freshness through the close heat of the room.

“Speak — thief — scoundrel — picaro — or — ”

Sotillo had seized the riding-whip, and stood with his arm lifted up. For a word, for one little word, he felt he would have knelt, cringed, grovelled on the floor before the drowsy, conscious stare of those fixed eyeballs starting out of the grimy, dishevelled head that drooped very still with its mouth closed askew. The colonel ground his teeth with rage and struck. The rope vibrated leisurely to the blow, like the long string of a pendulum starting from a rest. But no swinging motion was imparted to the body of Senor Hirsch, the well-known hide merchant on the coast. With a convulsive effort of the twisted arms it leaped up a few inches, curling upon itself like a fish on the end of a line. Senor Hirsch's head was flung back on his straining throat; his chin trembled. For a moment the rattle of his chattering teeth pervaded the vast, shadowy room, where the candles made a patch of light round the two flames burning side by side. And as Sotillo, staying his raised hand, waited for him to speak, with the sudden flash of a grin and a straining forward of the wrenched shoulders, he spat violently into his face.

The uplifted whip fell, and the colonel sprang back with a low cry of dismay, as if aspersed by a jet of deadly venom. Quick as thought he snatched up his revolver, and fired twice. The report and the concussion of the shots seemed to throw him at once from ungovernable rage into idiotic stupor. He stood with drooping jaw and stony eyes. What had he done, Sangre de Dios! What had he done? He was basely appalled at his impulsive act, sealing for ever these lips from which so much was to be extorted. What could he say? How could he explain? Ideas of headlong flight somewhere, anywhere, passed through his mind; even the craven and absurd notion of hiding under the table occurred to his cowardice. It was too late; his officers had rushed in tumultuously, in a great clatter of scabbards, clamouring, with astonishment and wonder. But since they did not immediately proceed to plunge their swords into his breast, the brazen side of his character asserted itself. Passing the sleeve of his uniform over

his face he pulled himself together, His truculent glance turned slowly here and there, checked the noise where it fell; and the stiff body of the late Senor Hirsch, merchant, after swaying imperceptibly, made a half turn, and came to a rest in the midst of awed murmurs and uneasy shuffling.

A voice remarked loudly, "Behold a man who will never speak again." And another, from the back row of faces, timid and pressing, cried out —

"Why did you kill him, mi colonel?"

"Because he has confessed everything," answered Sotillo, with the hardihood of desperation. He felt himself cornered. He brazened it out on the strength of his reputation with very fair success. His hearers thought him very capable of such an act. They were disposed to believe his flattering tale. There is no credulity so eager and blind as the credulity of covetousness, which, in its universal extent, measures the moral misery and the intellectual destitution of mankind. Ah! he had confessed everything, this fractious Jew, this bribon. Good! Then he was no longer wanted. A sudden dense guffaw was heard from the senior captain — a big-headed man, with little round eyes and monstrously fat cheeks which never moved. The old major, tall and fantastically ragged like a scarecrow, walked round the body of the late Senor Hirsch, muttering to himself with ineffable complacency that like this there was no need to guard against any future treacheries of that scoundrel. The others stared, shifting from foot to foot, and whispering short remarks to each other.

Sotillo buckled on his sword and gave curt, peremptory orders to hasten the retirement decided upon in the afternoon. Sinister, impressive, his sombrero pulled right down upon his eyebrows, he marched first through the door in such disorder of mind that he forgot utterly to provide for Dr. Monygham's possible return. As the officers trooped out after him, one or two looked back hastily at the late Senor Hirsch, merchant from Esmeralda, left swinging rigidly at rest, alone with the two burning candles. In the emptiness of the room the burly shadow of head and shoulders on the wall had an air of life.

Below, the troops fell in silently and moved off by companies without drum or trumpet. The old scarecrow major commanded the rearguard; but the party he left behind with orders to fire the Custom House (and "burn the carcass of the treacherous Jew where it hung") failed somehow in their haste to set the staircase properly alight. The body of the late Senor Hirsch dwelt alone for a time in the dismal solitude of the unfinished building,

resounding weirdly with sudden slams and clicks of doors and latches, with rustling scurries of torn papers, and the tremulous sighs that at each gust of wind passed under the high roof. The light of the two candles burning before the perpendicular and breathless immobility of the late Senor Hirsch threw a gleam afar over land and water, like a signal in the night. He remained to startle Nostromo by his presence, and to puzzle Dr. Monygham by the mystery of his atrocious end.

“But why shot?” the doctor again asked himself, audibly. This time he was answered by a dry laugh from Nostromo.

“You seem much concerned at a very natural thing, senor doctor. I wonder why? It is very likely that before long we shall all get shot one after another, if not by Sotillo, then by Pedrito, or Fuentes, or Gamacho. And we may even get the estrapade, too, or worse — *quien sabe?* — with your pretty tale of the silver you put into Sotillo’s head.”

“It was in his head already,” the doctor protested. “I only — ”

“Yes. And you only nailed it there so that the devil himself — ”

“That is precisely what I meant to do,” caught up the doctor.

“That is what you meant to do. Bueno. It is as I say. You are a dangerous man.”

Their voices, which without rising had been growing quarrelsome, ceased suddenly. The late Senor Hirsch, erect and shadowy against the stars, seemed to be waiting attentive, in impartial silence.

But Dr. Monygham had no mind to quarrel with Nostromo. At this supremely critical point of Sulaco’s fortunes it was borne upon him at last that this man was really indispensable, more indispensable than ever the infatuation of Captain Mitchell, his proud discoverer, could conceive; far beyond what Decoud’s best dry raillery about “my illustrious friend, the unique Capataz de Cargadores,” had ever intended. The fellow was unique. He was not “one in a thousand.” He was absolutely the only one. The doctor surrendered. There was something in the genius of that Genoese seaman which dominated the destinies of great enterprises and of many people, the fortunes of Charles Gould, the fate of an admirable woman. At this last thought the doctor had to clear his throat before he could speak.

In a completely changed tone he pointed out to the Capataz that, to begin with, he personally ran no great risk. As far as everybody knew he was dead. It was an enormous advantage. He had only to keep out of sight in the Casa Viola, where the old Garibaldino was known to be alone — with his

dead wife. The servants had all run away. No one would think of searching for him there, or anywhere else on earth, for that matter.

“That would be very true,” Nostromo spoke up, bitterly, “if I had not met you.”

For a time the doctor kept silent. “Do you mean to say that you think I may give you away?” he asked in an unsteady voice. “Why? Why should I do that?”

“What do I know? Why not? To gain a day perhaps. It would take Sotillo a day to give me the estrapade, and try some other things perhaps, before he puts a bullet through my heart — as he did to that poor wretch here. Why not?”

The doctor swallowed with difficulty. His throat had gone dry in a moment. It was not from indignation. The doctor, pathetically enough, believed that he had forfeited the right to be indignant with any one — for anything. It was simple dread. Had the fellow heard his story by some chance? If so, there was an end of his usefulness in that direction. The indispensable man escaped his influence, because of that indelible blot which made him fit for dirty work. A feeling as of sickness came upon the doctor. He would have given anything to know, but he dared not clear up the point. The fanaticism of his devotion, fed on the sense of his abasement, hardened his heart in sadness and scorn.

“Why not, indeed?” he reechoed, sardonically. “Then the safe thing for you is to kill me on the spot. I would defend myself. But you may just as well know I am going about unarmed.”

“Por Dios!” said the Capataz, passionately. “You fine people are all alike. All dangerous. All betrayers of the poor who are your dogs.”

“You do not understand,” began the doctor, slowly.

“I understand you all!” cried the other with a violent movement, as shadowy to the doctor’s eyes as the persistent immobility of the late Senor Hirsch. “A poor man amongst you has got to look after himself. I say that you do not care for those that serve you. Look at me! After all these years, suddenly, here I find myself like one of these curs that bark outside the walls — without a kennel or a dry bone for my teeth. Caramba!” But he relented with a contemptuous fairness. “Of course,” he went on, quietly, “I do not suppose that you would hasten to give me up to Sotillo, for example. It is not that. It is that I am nothing! Suddenly — ” He swung his arm downwards. “Nothing to any one,” he repeated.

The doctor breathed freely. "Listen, Capataz," he said, stretching out his arm almost affectionately towards Nostromo's shoulder. "I am going to tell you a very simple thing. You are safe because you are needed. I would not give you away for any conceivable reason, because I want you."

In the dark Nostromo bit his lip. He had heard enough of that. He knew what that meant. No more of that for him. But he had to look after himself now, he thought. And he thought, too, that it would not be prudent to part in anger from his companion. The doctor, admitted to be a great healer, had, amongst the populace of Sulaco, the reputation of being an evil sort of man. It was based solidly on his personal appearance, which was strange, and on his rough ironic manner — proofs visible, sensible, and incontrovertible of the doctor's malevolent disposition. And Nostromo was of the people. So he only grunted incredulously.

"You, to speak plainly, are the only man," the doctor pursued. "It is in your power to save this town and . . . everybody from the destructive rapacity of men who —"

"No, senor," said Nostromo, sullenly. "It is not in my power to get the treasure back for you to give up to Sotillo, or Pedrito, or Gamacho. What do I know?"

"Nobody expects the impossible," was the answer.

"You have said it yourself — nobody," muttered Nostromo, in a gloomy, threatening tone.

But Dr. Monygham, full of hope, disregarded the enigmatic words and the threatening tone. To their eyes, accustomed to obscurity, the late Senor Hirsch, growing more distinct, seemed to have come nearer. And the doctor lowered his voice in exposing his scheme as though afraid of being overheard.

He was taking the indispensable man into his fullest confidence. Its implied flattery and suggestion of great risks came with a familiar sound to the Capataz. His mind, floating in irresolution and discontent, recognized it with bitterness. He understood well that the doctor was anxious to save the San Tome mine from annihilation. He would be nothing without it. It was his interest. Just as it had been the interest of Senor Decoud, of the Blancos, and of the Europeans to get his Cargadores on their side. His thought became arrested upon Decoud. What would happen to him?

Nostromo's prolonged silence made the doctor uneasy. He pointed out, quite unnecessarily, that though for the present he was safe, he could not

live concealed for ever. The choice was between accepting the mission to Barrios, with all its dangers and difficulties, and leaving Sulaco by stealth, ingloriously, in poverty.

“None of your friends could reward you and protect you just now, Capataz. Not even Don Carlos himself.”

“I would have none of your protection and none of your rewards. I only wish I could trust your courage and your sense. When I return in triumph, as you say, with Barrios, I may find you all destroyed. You have the knife at your throat now.”

It was the doctor’s turn to remain silent in the contemplation of horrible contingencies.

“Well, we would trust your courage and your sense. And you, too, have a knife at your throat.”

“Ah! And whom am I to thank for that? What are your politics and your mines to me — your silver and your constitutions — your Don Carlos this, and Don Jose that — ”

“I don’t know,” burst out the exasperated doctor. “There are innocent people in danger whose little finger is worth more than you or I and all the Ribierists together. I don’t know. You should have asked yourself before you allowed Decoud to lead you into all this. It was your place to think like a man; but if you did not think then, try to act like a man now. Did you imagine Decoud cared very much for what would happen to you?”

“No more than you care for what will happen to me,” muttered the other.

“No; I care for what will happen to you as little as I care for what will happen to myself.”

“And all this because you are such a devoted Ribierist?” Nostromo said in an incredulous tone.

“All this because I am such a devoted Ribierist,” repeated Dr. Monygham, grimly.

Again Nostromo, gazing abstractedly at the body of the late Senor Hirsch, remained silent, thinking that the doctor was a dangerous person in more than one sense. It was impossible to trust him.

“Do you speak in the name of Don Carlos?” he asked at last.

“Yes. I do,” the doctor said, loudly, without hesitation. “He must come forward now. He must,” he added in a mutter, which Nostromo did not catch.

“What did you say, senor?”

The doctor started. "I say that you must be true to yourself, Capataz. It would be worse than folly to fail now."

"True to myself," repeated Nostromo. "How do you know that I would not be true to myself if I told you to go to the devil with your propositions?"

"I do not know. Maybe you would," the doctor said, with a roughness of tone intended to hide the sinking of his heart and the faltering of his voice. "All I know is, that you had better get away from here. Some of Sotillo's men may turn up here looking for me."

He slipped off the table, listening intently. The Capataz, too, stood up.

"Suppose I went to Cayta, what would you do meantime?" he asked.

"I would go to Sotillo directly you had left — in the way I am thinking of."

"A very good way — if only that engineer-in-chief consents. Remind him, senor, that I looked after the old rich Englishman who pays for the railway, and that I saved the lives of some of his people that time when a gang of thieves came from the south to wreck one of his pay-trains. It was I who discovered it all at the risk of my life, by pretending to enter into their plans. Just as you are doing with Sotillo."

"Yes. Yes, of course. But I can offer him better arguments," the doctor said, hastily. "Leave it to me."

"Ah, yes! True. I am nothing."

"Not at all. You are everything."

They moved a few paces towards the door. Behind them the late Senor Hirsch preserved the immobility of a disregarded man.

"That will be all right. I know what to say to the engineer," pursued the doctor, in a low tone. "My difficulty will be with Sotillo."

And Dr. Monygham stopped short in the doorway as if intimidated by the difficulty. He had made the sacrifice of his life. He considered this a fitting opportunity. But he did not want to throw his life away too soon. In his quality of betrayer of Don Carlos' confidence, he would have ultimately to indicate the hiding-place of the treasure. That would be the end of his deception, and the end of himself as well, at the hands of the infuriated colonel. He wanted to delay him to the very last moment; and he had been racking his brains to invent some place of concealment at once plausible and difficult of access.

He imparted his trouble to Nostromo, and concluded —

“Do you know what, Capataz? I think that when the time comes and some information must be given, I shall indicate the Great Isabel. That is the best place I can think of. What is the matter?”

A low exclamation had escaped Nostromo. The doctor waited, surprised, and after a moment of profound silence, heard a thick voice stammer out, “Utter folly,” and stop with a gasp.

“Why folly?”

“Ah! You do not see it,” began Nostromo, scathingly, gathering scorn as he went on. “Three men in half an hour would see that no ground had been disturbed anywhere on that island. Do you think that such a treasure can be buried without leaving traces of the work — eh! senor doctor? Why! you would not gain half a day more before having your throat cut by Sotillo. The Isabel! What stupidity! What miserable invention! Ah! you are all alike, you fine men of intelligence. All you are fit for is to betray men of the people into undertaking deadly risks for objects that you are not even sure about. If it comes off you get the benefit. If not, then it does not matter. He is only a dog. Ah! Madre de Dios, I would — ” He shook his fists above his head.

The doctor was overwhelmed at first by this fierce, hissing vehemence.

“Well! It seems to me on your own showing that the men of the people are no mean fools, too,” he said, sullenly. “No, but come. You are so clever. Have you a better place?”

Nostromo had calmed down as quickly as he had flared up.

“I am clever enough for that,” he said, quietly, almost with indifference. “You want to tell him of a hiding-place big enough to take days in ransacking — a place where a treasure of silver ingots can be buried without leaving a sign on the surface.”

“And close at hand,” the doctor put in.

“Just so, senor. Tell him it is sunk.”

“This has the merit of being the truth,” the doctor said, contemptuously. “He will not believe it.”

“You tell him that it is sunk where he may hope to lay his hands on it, and he will believe you quick enough. Tell him it has been sunk in the harbour in order to be recovered afterwards by divers. Tell him you found out that I had orders from Don Carlos Gould to lower the cases quietly overboard somewhere in a line between the end of the jetty and the entrance. The depth is not too great there. He has no divers, but he has a



ship, boats, ropes, chains, sailors — of a sort. Let him fish for the silver. Let him set his fools to drag backwards and forwards and crossways while he sits and watches till his eyes drop out of his head.”

“Really, this is an admirable idea,” muttered the doctor.

“Si. You tell him that, and see whether he will not believe you! He will spend days in rage and torment — and still he will believe. He will have no thought for anything else. He will not give up till he is driven off — why, he may even forget to kill you. He will neither eat nor sleep. He — ”

“The very thing! The very thing!” the doctor repeated in an excited whisper. “Capataz, I begin to believe that you are a great genius in your way.”

Nostromo had paused; then began again in a changed tone, sombre, speaking to himself as though he had forgotten the doctor’s existence.

“There is something in a treasure that fastens upon a man’s mind. He will pray and blaspheme and still persevere, and will curse the day he ever heard of it, and will let his last hour come upon him unawares, still believing that he missed it only by a foot. He will see it every time he closes his eyes. He will never forget it till he is dead — and even then — — Doctor, did you ever hear of the miserable gringos on Azuera, that cannot die? Ha! ha! Sailors like myself. There is no getting away from a treasure that once fastens upon your mind.”

“You are a devil of a man, Capataz. It is the most plausible thing.”

Nostromo pressed his arm.

“It will be worse for him than thirst at sea or hunger in a town full of people. Do you know what that is? He shall suffer greater torments than he inflicted upon that terrified wretch who had no invention. None! none! Not like me. I could have told Sotillo a deadly tale for very little pain.”

He laughed wildly and turned in the doorway towards the body of the late Senor Hirsch, an opaque long blotch in the semi-transparent obscurity of the room between the two tall parallelograms of the windows full of stars.

“You man of fear!” he cried. “You shall be avenged by me — Nostromo. Out of my way, doctor! Stand aside — or, by the suffering soul of a woman dead without confession, I will strangle you with my two hands.”

He bounded downwards into the black, smoky hall. With a grunt of astonishment, Dr. Monygham threw himself recklessly into the pursuit. At the bottom of the charred stairs he had a fall, pitching forward on his face with a force that would have stunned a spirit less intent upon a task of love

and devotion. He was up in a moment, jarred, shaken, with a queer impression of the terrestrial globe having been flung at his head in the dark. But it wanted more than that to stop Dr. Monygham's body, possessed by the exaltation of self-sacrifice; a reasonable exaltation, determined not to lose whatever advantage chance put into its way. He ran with headlong, tottering swiftness, his arms going like a windmill in his effort to keep his balance on his crippled feet. He lost his hat; the tails of his open gaberdine flew behind him. He had no mind to lose sight of the indispensable man. But it was a long time, and a long way from the Custom House, before he managed to seize his arm from behind, roughly, out of breath.

"Stop! Are you mad?"

Already Nostromo was walking slowly, his head dropping, as if checked in his pace by the weariness of irresolution.

"What is that to you? Ah! I forgot you want me for something. Always. Siempre Nostromo."

"What do you mean by talking of strangling me?" panted the doctor.

"What do I mean? I mean that the king of the devils himself has sent you out of this town of cowards and talkers to meet me to-night of all the nights of my life."

Under the starry sky the Albergo d'Italia Una emerged, black and low, breaking the dark level of the plain. Nostromo stopped altogether.

"The priests say he is a tempter, do they not?" he added, through his clenched teeth.

"My good man, you drivel. The devil has nothing to do with this. Neither has the town, which you may call by what name you please. But Don Carlos Gould is neither a coward nor an empty talker. You will admit that?" He waited. "Well?"

"Could I see Don Carlos?"

"Great heavens! No! Why? What for?" exclaimed the doctor in agitation. "I tell you it is madness. I will not let you go into the town for anything."

"I must."

"You must not!" hissed the doctor, fiercely, almost beside himself with the fear of the man doing away with his usefulness for an imbecile whim of some sort. "I tell you you shall not. I would rather — —"

He stopped at loss for words, feeling fagged out, powerless, holding on to Nostromo's sleeve, absolutely for support after his run.

"I am betrayed!" muttered the Capataz to himself; and the doctor, who overheard the last word, made an effort to speak calmly.

"That is exactly what would happen to you. You would be betrayed."

He thought with a sickening dread that the man was so well known that he could not escape recognition. The house of the Senor Administrador was beset by spies, no doubt. And even the very servants of the casa were not to be trusted. "Reflect, Capataz," he said, impressively. . . . "What are you laughing at?"

"I am laughing to think that if somebody that did not approve of my presence in town, for instance — you understand, senor doctor — if somebody were to give me up to Pedrito, it would not be beyond my power to make friends even with him. It is true. What do you think of that?"

"You are a man of infinite resource, Capataz," said Dr. Monygham, dismally. "I recognize that. But the town is full of talk about you; and those few Cargadores that are not in hiding with the railway people have been shouting 'Viva Montero' on the Plaza all day."

"My poor Cargadores!" muttered Nostromo. "Betrayed! Betrayed!"

"I understand that on the wharf you were pretty free in laying about you with a stick amongst your poor Cargadores," the doctor said in a grim tone, which showed that he was recovering from his exertions. "Make no mistake. Pedrito is furious at Senor Ribiera's rescue, and at having lost the pleasure of shooting Decoud. Already there are rumours in the town of the treasure having been spirited away. To have missed that does not please Pedrito either; but let me tell you that if you had all that silver in your hand for ransom it would not save you."

Turning swiftly, and catching the doctor by the shoulders, Nostromo thrust his face close to his.

"Maladetta! You follow me speaking of the treasure. You have sworn my ruin. You were the last man who looked upon me before I went out with it. And Sidoni the engine-driver says you have an evil eye."

"He ought to know. I saved his broken leg for him last year," the doctor said, stoically. He felt on his shoulders the weight of these hands famed amongst the populace for snapping thick ropes and bending horseshoes. "And to you I offer the best means of saving yourself — let me go — and of retrieving your great reputation. You boasted of making the Capataz de Cargadores famous from one end of America to the other about this wretched silver. But I bring you a better opportunity — let me go, hombre!"

Nostromo released him abruptly, and the doctor feared that the indispensable man would run off again. But he did not. He walked on slowly. The doctor hobbled by his side till, within a stone's throw from the Casa Viola, Nostromo stopped again.

Silent in inhospitable darkness, the Casa Viola seemed to have changed its nature; his home appeared to repel him with an air of hopeless and inimical mystery. The doctor said —

“You will be safe there. Go in, Capataz.”

“How can I go in?” Nostromo seemed to ask himself in a low, inward tone. “She cannot unsay what she said, and I cannot undo what I have done.”

“I tell you it is all right. Viola is all alone in there. I looked in as I came out of the town. You will be perfectly safe in that house till you leave it to make your name famous on the Campo. I am going now to arrange for your departure with the engineer-in-chief, and I shall bring you news here long before daybreak.”

Dr. Monygham, disregarding, or perhaps fearing to penetrate the meaning of Nostromo's silence, clapped him lightly on the shoulder, and starting off with his smart, lame walk, vanished utterly at the third or fourth hop in the direction of the railway track. Arrested between the two wooden posts for people to fasten their horses to, Nostromo did not move, as if he, too, had been planted solidly in the ground. At the end of half an hour he lifted his head to the deep baying of the dogs at the railway yards, which had burst out suddenly, tumultuous and deadened as if coming from under the plain. That lame doctor with the evil eye had got there pretty fast.

Step by step Nostromo approached the Albergo d'Italia Una, which he had never known so lightless, so silent, before. The door, all black in the pale wall, stood open as he had left it twenty-four hours before, when he had nothing to hide from the world. He remained before it, irresolute, like a fugitive, like a man betrayed. Poverty, misery, starvation! Where had he heard these words? The anger of a dying woman had prophesied that fate for his folly. It looked as if it would come true very quickly. And the leperos would laugh — she had said. Yes, they would laugh if they knew that the Capataz de Cargadores was at the mercy of the mad doctor whom they could remember, only a few years ago, buying cooked food from a stall on the Plaza for a copper coin — like one of themselves.

At that moment the notion of seeking Captain Mitchell passed through his mind. He glanced in the direction of the jetty and saw a small gleam of light in the O.S.N. Company's building. The thought of lighted windows was not attractive. Two lighted windows had decoyed him into the empty Custom House, only to fall into the clutches of that doctor. No! He would not go near lighted windows again on that night. Captain Mitchell was there. And what could he be told? That doctor would worm it all out of him as if he were a child.

On the threshold he called out "Giorgio!" in an undertone. Nobody answered. He stepped in. "Ola! viejo! Are you there? . . ." In the impenetrable darkness his head swam with the illusion that the obscurity of the kitchen was as vast as the Placid Gulf, and that the floor dipped forward like a sinking lighter. "Ola! viejo!" he repeated, falteringly, swaying where he stood. His hand, extended to steady himself, fell upon the table. Moving a step forward, he shifted it, and felt a box of matches under his fingers. He fancied he had heard a quiet sigh. He listened for a moment, holding his breath; then, with trembling hands, tried to strike a light.

The tiny piece of wood flamed up quite blindingly at the end of his fingers, raised above his blinking eyes. A concentrated glare fell upon the leonine white head of old Giorgio against the black fire-place — showed him leaning forward in a chair in staring immobility, surrounded, overhung, by great masses of shadow, his legs crossed, his cheek in his hand, an empty pipe in the corner of his mouth. It seemed hours before he attempted to turn his face; at the very moment the match went out, and he disappeared, overwhelmed by the shadows, as if the walls and roof of the desolate house had collapsed upon his white head in ghostly silence.

Nostromo heard him stir and utter dispassionately the words —

"It may have been a vision."

"No," he said, softly. "It is no vision, old man."

A strong chest voice asked in the dark —

"Is that you I hear, Giovann' Battista?"

"Si, viejo. Steady. Not so loud."

After his release by Sotillo, Giorgio Viola, attended to the very door by the good-natured engineer-in-chief, had reentered his house, which he had been made to leave almost at the very moment of his wife's death. All was still. The lamp above was burning. He nearly called out to her by name; and the thought that no call from him would ever again evoke the answer of her

voice, made him drop heavily into the chair with a loud groan, wrung out by the pain as of a keen blade piercing his breast.

The rest of the night he made no sound. The darkness turned to grey, and on the colourless, clear, glassy dawn the jagged sierra stood out flat and opaque, as if cut out of paper.

The enthusiastic and severe soul of Giorgio Viola, sailor, champion of oppressed humanity, enemy of kings, and, by the grace of Mrs. Gould, hotel-keeper of the Sulaco harbour, had descended into the open abyss of desolation amongst the shattered vestiges of his past. He remembered his wooing between two campaigns, a single short week in the season of gathering olives. Nothing approached the grave passion of that time but the deep, passionate sense of his bereavement. He discovered all the extent of his dependence upon the silenced voice of that woman. It was her voice that he missed. Abstracted, busy, lost in inward contemplation, he seldom looked at his wife in those later years. The thought of his girls was a matter of concern, not of consolation. It was her voice that he would miss. And he remembered the other child — the little boy who died at sea. Ah! a man would have been something to lean upon. And, alas! even Gian' Battista — he of whom, and of Linda, his wife had spoken to him so anxiously before she dropped off into her last sleep on earth, he on whom she had called aloud to save the children, just before she died — even he was dead!

And the old man, bent forward, his head in his hand, sat through the day in immobility and solitude. He never heard the brazen roar of the bells in town. When it ceased the earthenware filter in the corner of the kitchen kept on its swift musical drip, drip into the great porous jar below.

Towards sunset he got up, and with slow movements disappeared up the narrow staircase. His bulk filled it; and the rubbing of his shoulders made a small noise as of a mouse running behind the plaster of a wall. While he remained up there the house was as dumb as a grave. Then, with the same faint rubbing noise, he descended. He had to catch at the chairs and tables to regain his seat. He seized his pipe off the high mantel of the fire-place — but made no attempt to reach the tobacco — thrust it empty into the corner of his mouth, and sat down again in the same staring pose. The sun of Pedrito's entry into Sulaco, the last sun of Senor Hirsch's life, the first of Decoud's solitude on the Great Isabel, passed over the Albergo d'Italia Una on its way to the west. The tinkling drip, drip of the filter had ceased, the lamp upstairs had burnt itself out, and the night beset Giorgio Viola and his

dead wife with its obscurity and silence that seemed invincible till the Capataz de Cargadores, returning from the dead, put them to flight with the splutter and flare of a match.

“Si, viejo. It is me. Wait.”

Nostromo, after barricading the door and closing the shutters carefully, groped upon a shelf for a candle, and lit it.

Old Viola had risen. He followed with his eyes in the dark the sounds made by Nostromo. The light disclosed him standing without support, as if the mere presence of that man who was loyal, brave, incorruptible, who was all his son would have been, were enough for the support of his decaying strength.

He extended his hand grasping the briar-wood pipe, whose bowl was charred on the edge, and knitted his bushy eyebrows heavily at the light.

“You have returned,” he said, with shaky dignity. “Ah! Very well! I — —”

He broke off. Nostromo, leaning back against the table, his arms folded on his breast, nodded at him slightly.

“You thought I was drowned! No! The best dog of the rich, of the aristocrats, of these fine men who can only talk and betray the people, is not dead yet.”

The Garibaldino, motionless, seemed to drink in the sound of the well-known voice. His head moved slightly once as if in sign of approval; but Nostromo saw clearly that the old man understood nothing of the words. There was no one to understand; no one he could take into the confidence of Decoud’s fate, of his own, into the secret of the silver. That doctor was an enemy of the people — a tempter. . . .

Old Giorgio’s heavy frame shook from head to foot with the effort to overcome his emotion at the sight of that man, who had shared the intimacies of his domestic life as though he had been a grown-up son.

“She believed you would return,” he said, solemnly.

Nostromo raised his head.

“She was a wise woman. How could I fail to come back — —?”

He finished the thought mentally: “Since she has prophesied for me an end of poverty, misery, and starvation.” These words of Teresa’s anger, from the circumstances in which they had been uttered, like the cry of a soul prevented from making its peace with God, stirred the obscure superstition of personal fortune from which even the greatest genius

amongst men of adventure and action is seldom free. They reigned over Nostromo's mind with the force of a potent malediction. And what a curse it was that which her words had laid upon him! He had been orphaned so young that he could remember no other woman whom he called mother. Henceforth there would be no enterprise in which he would not fail. The spell was working already. Death itself would elude him now. . . . He said violently —

“Come, viejo! Get me something to eat. I am hungry! Sangre de Dios! The emptiness of my belly makes me lightheaded.”

With his chin dropped again upon his bare breast above his folded arms, barefooted, watching from under a gloomy brow the movements of old Viola foraging amongst the cupboards, he seemed as if indeed fallen under a curse — a ruined and sinister Capataz.

Old Viola walked out of a dark corner, and, without a word, emptied upon the table out of his hollowed palms a few dry crusts of bread and half a raw onion.

While the Capataz began to devour this beggar's fare, taking up with stony-eyed voracity piece after piece lying by his side, the Garibaldino went off, and squatting down in another corner filled an earthenware mug with red wine out of a wicker-covered demijohn. With a familiar gesture, as when serving customers in the cafe, he had thrust his pipe between his teeth to have his hands free.

The Capataz drank greedily. A slight flush deepened the bronze of his cheek. Before him, Viola, with a turn of his white and massive head towards the staircase, took his empty pipe out of his mouth, and pronounced slowly —

“After the shot was fired down here, which killed her as surely as if the bullet had struck her oppressed heart, she called upon you to save the children. Upon you, Gian' Battista.”

The Capataz looked up.

“Did she do that, Padrone? To save the children! They are with the English senora, their rich benefactress. Hey! old man of the people. Thy benefactress. . . .”

“I am old,” muttered Giorgio Viola. “An Englishwoman was allowed to give a bed to Garibaldi lying wounded in prison. The greatest man that ever lived. A man of the people, too — a sailor. I may let another keep a roof over my head. Si . . . I am old. I may let her. Life lasts too long sometimes.”



“And she herself may not have a roof over her head before many days are out, unless I . . . What do you say? Am I to keep a roof over her head? Am I to try — and save all the Blancos together with her?”

“You shall do it,” said old Viola in a strong voice. “You shall do it as my son would have. . . .”

“Thy son, viejo! .. There never has been a man like thy son. Ha, I must try. . . . But what if it were only a part of the curse to lure me on? . . . And so she called upon me to save — and then — — ?”

“She spoke no more.” The heroic follower of Garibaldi, at the thought of the eternal stillness and silence fallen upon the shrouded form stretched out on the bed upstairs, averted his face and raised his hand to his furrowed brow. “She was dead before I could seize her hands,” he stammered out, pitifully.

Before the wide eyes of the Capataz, staring at the doorway of the dark staircase, floated the shape of the Great Isabel, like a strange ship in distress, freighted with enormous wealth and the solitary life of a man. It was impossible for him to do anything. He could only hold his tongue, since there was no one to trust. The treasure would be lost, probably — unless Decoud. . . . And his thought came abruptly to an end. He perceived that he could not imagine in the least what Decoud was likely to do.

Old Viola had not stirred. And the motionless Capataz dropped his long, soft eyelashes, which gave to the upper part of his fierce, black-whiskered face a touch of feminine ingenuousness. The silence had lasted for a long time.

“God rest her soul!” he murmured, gloomily.

## CHAPTER TEN

The next day was quiet in the morning, except for the faint sound of firing to the northward, in the direction of Los Hatos. Captain Mitchell had listened to it from his balcony anxiously. The phrase, "In my delicate position as the only consular agent then in the port, everything, sir, everything was a just cause for anxiety," had its place in the more or less stereotyped relation of the "historical events" which for the next few years was at the service of distinguished strangers visiting Sulaco. The mention of the dignity and neutrality of the flag, so difficult to preserve in his position, "right in the thick of these events between the lawlessness of that piratical villain Sotillo and the more regularly established but scarcely less atrocious tyranny of his Excellency Don Pedro Montero," came next in order. Captain Mitchell was not the man to enlarge upon mere dangers much. But he insisted that it was a memorable day. On that day, towards dusk, he had seen "that poor fellow of mine — Nostromo. The sailor whom I discovered, and, I may say, made, sir. The man of the famous ride to Cayta, sir. An historical event, sir!"

Regarded by the O. S. N. Company as an old and faithful servant, Captain Mitchell was allowed to attain the term of his usefulness in ease and dignity at the head of the enormously extended service. The augmentation of the establishment, with its crowds of clerks, an office in town, the old office in the harbour, the division into departments — passenger, cargo, lighterage, and so on — secured a greater leisure for his last years in the regenerated Sulaco, the capital of the Occidental Republic. Liked by the natives for his good nature and the formality of his manner, self-important and simple, known for years as a "friend of our country," he felt himself a personality of mark in the town. Getting up early for a turn in the market-place while the gigantic shadow of Higuerota was still lying upon the fruit and flower stalls piled up with masses of gorgeous colouring, attending easily to current affairs, welcomed in houses, greeted by ladies on the Alameda, with his entry into all the clubs and a footing in the Casa Gould, he led his privileged old bachelor, man-about-town existence with great comfort and solemnity. But on mail-boat days he was down at the Harbour Office at an early hour, with his own gig, manned by a smart crew in white and blue, ready to dash off and board the ship directly she showed her bows between the harbour heads.

It would be into the Harbour Office that he would lead some privileged passenger he had brought off in his own boat, and invite him to take a seat for a moment while he signed a few papers. And Captain Mitchell, seating himself at his desk, would keep on talking hospitably —

“There isn’t much time if you are to see everything in a day. We shall be off in a moment. We’ll have lunch at the Amarilla Club — though I belong also to the Anglo-American — mining engineers and business men, don’t you know — and to the Mirliflores as well, a new club — English, French, Italians, all sorts — lively young fellows mostly, who wanted to pay a compliment to an old resident, sir. But we’ll lunch at the Amarilla. Interest you, I fancy. Real thing of the country. Men of the first families. The President of the Occidental Republic himself belongs to it, sir. Fine old bishop with a broken nose in the patio. Remarkable piece of statuary, I believe. Cavaliere Parrochetti — you know Parrochetti, the famous Italian sculptor — was working here for two years — thought very highly of our old bishop. . . . There! I am very much at your service now.”

Proud of his experience, penetrated by the sense of historical importance of men, events, and buildings, he talked pompously in jerky periods, with slight sweeps of his short, thick arm, letting nothing “escape the attention” of his privileged captive.

“Lot of building going on, as you observe. Before the Separation it was a plain of burnt grass smothered in clouds of dust, with an ox-cart track to our Jetty. Nothing more. This is the Harbour Gate. Picturesque, is it not? Formerly the town stopped short there. We enter now the Calle de la Constitucion. Observe the old Spanish houses. Great dignity. Eh? I suppose it’s just as it was in the time of the Viceroy, except for the pavement. Wood blocks now. Sulaco National Bank there, with the sentry boxes each side of the gate. Casa Avellanos this side, with all the ground-floor windows shuttered. A wonderful woman lives there — Miss Avellanos — the beautiful Antonia. A character, sir! A historical woman! Opposite — Casa Gould. Noble gateway. Yes, the Goulds of the original Gould Concession, that all the world knows of now. I hold seventeen of the thousand-dollar shares in the Consolidated San Tome mines. All the poor savings of my lifetime, sir, and it will be enough to keep me in comfort to the end of my days at home when I retire. I got in on the ground-floor, you see. Don Carlos, great friend of mine. Seventeen shares — quite a little fortune to leave behind one, too. I have a niece — married a parson — most worthy

man, incumbent of a small parish in Sussex; no end of children. I was never married myself. A sailor should exercise self-denial. Standing under that very gateway, sir, with some young engineer-fellows, ready to defend that house where we had received so much kindness and hospitality, I saw the first and last charge of Pedrito's horsemen upon Barrios's troops, who had just taken the Harbour Gate. They could not stand the new rifles brought out by that poor Decoud. It was a murderous fire. In a moment the street became blocked with a mass of dead men and horses. They never came on again."

And all day Captain Mitchell would talk like this to his more or less willing victim —

"The Plaza. I call it magnificent. Twice the area of Trafalgar Square."

From the very centre, in the blazing sunshine, he pointed out the buildings —

"The Intendencia, now President's Palace — Cabildo, where the Lower Chamber of Parliament sits. You notice the new houses on that side of the Plaza? Compania Anzani, a great general store, like those cooperative things at home. Old Anzani was murdered by the National Guards in front of his safe. It was even for that specific crime that the deputy Gamacho, commanding the Nationals, a bloodthirsty and savage brute, was executed publicly by garrotte upon the sentence of a court-martial ordered by Barrios. Anzani's nephews converted the business into a company. All that side of the Plaza had been burnt; used to be colonnaded before. A terrible fire, by the light of which I saw the last of the fighting, the llaneros flying, the Nationals throwing their arms down, and the miners of San Tome, all Indians from the Sierra, rolling by like a torrent to the sound of pipes and cymbals, green flags flying, a wild mass of men in white ponchos and green hats, on foot, on mules, on donkeys. Such a sight, sir, will never be seen again. The miners, sir, had marched upon the town, Don Pepe leading on his black horse, and their very wives in the rear on burros, screaming encouragement, sir, and beating tambourines. I remember one of these women had a green parrot seated on her shoulder, as calm as a bird of stone. They had just saved their Senor Administrador; for Barrios, though he ordered the assault at once, at night, too, would have been too late. Pedrito Montero had Don Carlos led out to be shot — like his uncle many years ago — and then, as Barrios said afterwards, 'Sulaco would not have been worth fighting for.' Sulaco without the Concession was nothing; and there were

tons and tons of dynamite distributed all over the mountain with detonators arranged, and an old priest, Father Roman, standing by to annihilate the San Tome mine at the first news of failure. Don Carlos had made up his mind not to leave it behind, and he had the right men to see to it, too."

Thus Captain Mitchell would talk in the middle of the Plaza, holding over his head a white umbrella with a green lining; but inside the cathedral, in the dim light, with a faint scent of incense floating in the cool atmosphere, and here and there a kneeling female figure, black or all white, with a veiled head, his lowered voice became solemn and impressive.

"Here," he would say, pointing to a niche in the wall of the dusky aisle, "you see the bust of Don Jose Avellanos, 'Patriot and Statesman,' as the inscription says, 'Minister to Courts of England and Spain, etc., etc., died in the woods of Los Hatos worn out with his lifelong struggle for Right and Justice at the dawn of the New Era.' A fair likeness. Parrochetti's work from some old photographs and a pencil sketch by Mrs. Gould. I was well acquainted with that distinguished Spanish-American of the old school, a true Hidalgo, beloved by everybody who knew him. The marble medallion in the wall, in the antique style, representing a veiled woman seated with her hands clasped loosely over her knees, commemorates that unfortunate young gentleman who sailed out with Nostromo on that fatal night, sir. See, 'To the memory of Martin Decoud, his betrothed Antonia Avellanos.' Frank, simple, noble. There you have that lady, sir, as she is. An exceptional woman. Those who thought she would give way to despair were mistaken, sir. She has been blamed in many quarters for not having taken the veil. It was expected of her. But Dona Antonia is not the stuff they make nuns of. Bishop Corbelan, her uncle, lives with her in the Corbelan town house. He is a fierce sort of priest, everlastingly worrying the Government about the old Church lands and convents. I believe they think a lot of him in Rome. Now let us go to the Amarilla Club, just across the Plaza, to get some lunch."

Directly outside the cathedral on the very top of the noble flight of steps, his voice rose pompously, his arm found again its sweeping gesture.

"Porvenir, over there on that first floor, above those French plate-glass shop-fronts; our biggest daily. Conservative, or, rather, I should say, Parliamentary. We have the Parliamentary party here of which the actual Chief of the State, Don Juste Lopez, is the head; a very sagacious man, I think. A first-rate intellect, sir. The Democratic party in opposition rests

mostly, I am sorry to say, on these socialistic Italians, sir, with their secret societies, camorras, and such-like. There are lots of Italians settled here on the railway lands, dismissed navvies, mechanics, and so on, all along the trunk line. There are whole villages of Italians on the Campo. And the natives, too, are being drawn into these ways . . . American bar? Yes. And over there you can see another. New Yorkers mostly frequent that one — Here we are at the Amarilla. Observe the bishop at the foot of the stairs to the right as we go in.”

And the lunch would begin and terminate its lavish and leisurely course at a little table in the gallery, Captain Mitchell nodding, bowing, getting up to speak for a moment to different officials in black clothes, merchants in jackets, officers in uniform, middle-aged caballeros from the Campo — sallow, little, nervous men, and fat, placid, swarthy men, and Europeans or North Americans of superior standing, whose faces looked very white amongst the majority of dark complexions and black, glistening eyes.

Captain Mitchell would lie back in the chair, casting around looks of satisfaction, and tender over the table a case full of thick cigars.

“Try a weed with your coffee. Local tobacco. The black coffee you get at the Amarilla, sir, you don’t meet anywhere in the world. We get the bean from a famous cafeteria in the foot-hills, whose owner sends three sacks every year as a present to his fellow members in remembrance of the fight against Gamacho’s Nationals, carried on from these very windows by the caballeros. He was in town at the time, and took part, sir, to the bitter end. It arrives on three mules — not in the common way, by rail; no fear! — right into the patio, escorted by mounted peons, in charge of the Mayoral of his estate, who walks upstairs, booted and spurred, and delivers it to our committee formally with the words, ‘For the sake of those fallen on the third of May.’ We call it Tres de Mayo coffee. Taste it.”

Captain Mitchell, with an expression as though making ready to hear a sermon in a church, would lift the tiny cup to his lips. And the nectar would be sipped to the bottom during a restful silence in a cloud of cigar smoke.

“Look at this man in black just going out,” he would begin, leaning forward hastily. “This is the famous Hernandez, Minister of War. The Times’ special correspondent, who wrote that striking series of letters calling the Occidental Republic the ‘Treasure House of the World,’ gave a whole article to him and the force he has organized — the renowned Carabineers of the Campo.”

Captain Mitchell's guest, staring curiously, would see a figure in a long-tailed black coat walking gravely, with downcast eyelids in a long, composed face, a brow furrowed horizontally, a pointed head, whose grey hair, thin at the top, combed down carefully on all sides and rolled at the ends, fell low on the neck and shoulders. This, then, was the famous bandit of whom Europe had heard with interest. He put on a high-crowned sombrero with a wide flat brim; a rosary of wooden beads was twisted about his right wrist. And Captain Mitchell would proceed —

"The protector of the Sulaco refugees from the rage of Pedrito. As general of cavalry with Barrios he distinguished himself at the storming of Tonoro, where Senor Fuentes was killed with the last remnant of the Monterists. He is the friend and humble servant of Bishop Corbelan. Hears three Masses every day. I bet you he will step into the cathedral to say a prayer or two on his way home to his siesta."

He took several puffs at his cigar in silence; then, in his most important manner, pronounced:

"The Spanish race, sir, is prolific of remarkable characters in every rank of life. . . . I propose we go now into the billiard-room, which is cool, for a quiet chat. There's never anybody there till after five. I could tell you episodes of the Separationist revolution that would astonish you. When the great heat's over, we'll take a turn on the Alameda."

The programme went on relentless, like a law of Nature. The turn on the Alameda was taken with slow steps and stately remarks.

"All the great world of Sulaco here, sir." Captain Mitchell bowed right and left with no end of formality; then with animation, "Dona Emilia, Mrs. Gould's carriage. Look. Always white mules. The kindest, most gracious woman the sun ever shone upon. A great position, sir. A great position. First lady in Sulaco — far before the President's wife. And worthy of it." He took off his hat; then, with a studied change of tone, added, negligently, that the man in black by her side, with a high white collar and a scarred, snarly face, was Dr. Monygham, Inspector of State Hospitals, chief medical officer of the Consolidated San Tome mines. "A familiar of the house. Everlastingly there. No wonder. The Goulds made him. Very clever man and all that, but I never liked him. Nobody does. I can recollect him limping about the streets in a check shirt and native sandals with a watermelon under his arm — all he would get to eat for the day. A big-wig now, sir, and as nasty as ever. However . . . There's no doubt he played his part fairly

well at the time. He saved us all from the deadly incubus of Sotillo, where a more particular man might have failed — — ”

His arm went up.

“The equestrian statue that used to stand on the pedestal over there has been removed. It was an anachronism,” Captain Mitchell commented, obscurely. “There is some talk of replacing it by a marble shaft commemorative of Separation, with angels of peace at the four corners, and bronze Justice holding an even balance, all gilt, on the top. Cavaliere Parrochetti was asked to make a design, which you can see framed under glass in the Municipal Sala. Names are to be engraved all round the base. Well! They could do no better than begin with the name of Nostromo. He has done for Separation as much as anybody else, and,” added Captain Mitchell, “has got less than many others by it — when it comes to that.” He dropped on to a stone seat under a tree, and tapped invitingly at the place by his side. “He carried to Barrios the letters from Sulaco which decided the General to abandon Cayta for a time, and come back to our help here by sea. The transports were still in harbour fortunately. Sir, I did not even know that my Capataz de Cargadores was alive. I had no idea. It was Dr. Monygham who came upon him, by chance, in the Custom House, evacuated an hour or two before by the wretched Sotillo. I was never told; never given a hint, nothing — as if I were unworthy of confidence. Monygham arranged it all. He went to the railway yards, and got admission to the engineer-in-chief, who, for the sake of the Goulds as much as for anything else, consented to let an engine make a dash down the line, one hundred and eighty miles, with Nostromo aboard. It was the only way to get him off. In the Construction Camp at the railhead, he obtained a horse, arms, some clothing, and started alone on that marvellous ride — four hundred miles in six days, through a disturbed country, ending by the feat of passing through the Monterist lines outside Cayta. The history of that ride, sir, would make a most exciting book. He carried all our lives in his pocket. Devotion, courage, fidelity, intelligence were not enough. Of course, he was perfectly fearless and incorruptible. But a man was wanted that would know how to succeed. He was that man, sir. On the fifth of May, being practically a prisoner in the Harbour Office of my Company, I suddenly heard the whistle of an engine in the railway yards, a quarter of a mile away. I could not believe my ears. I made one jump on to the balcony, and beheld a locomotive under a great head of steam run out of the yard gates,



screeching like mad, enveloped in a white cloud, and then, just abreast of old Viola's inn, check almost to a standstill. I made out, sir, a man — I couldn't tell who — dash out of the Albergo d'Italia Una, climb into the cab, and then, sir, that engine seemed positively to leap clear of the house, and was gone in the twinkling of an eye. As you blow a candle out, sir! There was a first-rate driver on the foot-plate, sir, I can tell you. They were fired heavily upon by the National Guards in Rincon and one other place. Fortunately the line had not been torn up. In four hours they reached the Construction Camp. Nostromo had his start. . . . The rest you know. You've got only to look round you. There are people on this Alameda that ride in their carriages, or even are alive at all to-day, because years ago I engaged a runaway Italian sailor for a foreman of our wharf simply on the strength of his looks. And that's a fact. You can't get over it, sir. On the seventeenth of May, just twelve days after I saw the man from the Casa Viola get on the engine, and wondered what it meant, Barrios's transports were entering this harbour, and the 'Treasure House of the World,' as The Times man calls Sulaco in his book, was saved intact for civilization — for a great future, sir. Pedrito, with Hernandez on the west, and the San Tome miners pressing on the land gate, was not able to oppose the landing. He had been sending messages to Sotillo for a week to join him. Had Sotillo done so there would have been massacres and proscription that would have left no man or woman of position alive. But that's where Dr. Monygham comes in. Sotillo, blind and deaf to everything, stuck on board his steamer watching the dragging for silver, which he believed to be sunk at the bottom of the harbour. They say that for the last three days he was out of his mind raving and foaming with disappointment at getting nothing, flying about the deck, and yelling curses at the boats with the drags, ordering them in, and then suddenly stamping his foot and crying out, 'And yet it is there! I see it! I feel it!'

"He was preparing to hang Dr. Monygham (whom he had on board) at the end of the after-derrick, when the first of Barrios's transports, one of our own ships at that, steamed right in, and ranging close alongside opened a small-arm fire without as much preliminaries as a hail. It was the completest surprise in the world, sir. They were too astounded at first to bolt below. Men were falling right and left like ninepins. It's a miracle that Monygham, standing on the after-hatch with the rope already round his neck, escaped being riddled through and through like a sieve. He told me

since that he had given himself up for lost, and kept on yelling with all the strength of his lungs: 'Hoist a white flag! Hoist a white flag!' Suddenly an old major of the Esmeralda regiment, standing by, unsheathed his sword with a shriek: 'Die, perjured traitor!' and ran Sotillo clean through the body, just before he fell himself shot through the head."

Captain Mitchell stopped for a while.

"Begad, sir! I could spin you a yarn for hours. But it's time we started off to Rincon. It would not do for you to pass through Sulaco and not see the lights of the San Tome mine, a whole mountain ablaze like a lighted palace above the dark Campo. It's a fashionable drive. . . . But let me tell you one little anecdote, sir; just to show you. A fortnight or more later, when Barrios, declared Generalissimo, was gone in pursuit of Pedrito away south, when the Provisional Junta, with Don Juste Lopez at its head, had promulgated the new Constitution, and our Don Carlos Gould was packing up his trunks bound on a mission to San Francisco and Washington (the United States, sir, were the first great power to recognize the Occidental Republic) — a fortnight later, I say, when we were beginning to feel that our heads were safe on our shoulders, if I may express myself so, a prominent man, a large shipper by our line, came to see me on business, and, says he, the first thing: 'I say, Captain Mitchell, is that fellow' (meaning Nostromo) 'still the Capataz of your Cargadores or not?' 'What's the matter?' says I. 'Because, if he is, then I don't mind; I send and receive a good lot of cargo by your ships; but I have observed him several days loafing about the wharf, and just now he stopped me as cool as you please, with a request for a cigar. Now, you know, my cigars are rather special, and I can't get them so easily as all that.' 'I hope you stretched a point,' I said, very gently. 'Why, yes. But it's a confounded nuisance. The fellow's everlastingly cadging for smokes.' Sir, I turned my eyes away, and then asked, 'Weren't you one of the prisoners in the Cabildo?' 'You know very well I was, and in chains, too,' says he. 'And under a fine of fifteen thousand dollars?' He coloured, sir, because it got about that he fainted from fright when they came to arrest him, and then behaved before Fuentes in a manner to make the very policianos, who had dragged him there by the hair of his head, smile at his cringing. 'Yes,' he says, in a sort of shy way. 'Why?' 'Oh, nothing. You stood to lose a tidy bit,' says I, 'even if you saved your life. . . . But what can I do for you?' He never even saw the point. Not he. And that's how the world wags, sir."

He rose a little stiffly, and the drive to Rincon would be taken with only one philosophical remark, uttered by the merciless cicerone, with his eyes fixed upon the lights of San Tome, that seemed suspended in the dark night between earth and heaven.

“A great power, this, for good and evil, sir. A great power.”

And the dinner of the Mirliflores would be eaten, excellent as to cooking, and leaving upon the traveller’s mind an impression that there were in Sulaco many pleasant, able young men with salaries apparently too large for their discretion, and amongst them a few, mostly Anglo-Saxon, skilled in the art of, as the saying is, “taking a rise” out of his kind host.

With a rapid, jingling drive to the harbour in a two-wheeled machine (which Captain Mitchell called a curricule) behind a fleet and scraggy mule beaten all the time by an obviously Neapolitan driver, the cycle would be nearly closed before the lighted-up offices of the O. S. N. Company, remaining open so late because of the steamer. Nearly — but not quite.

“Ten o’clock. Your ship won’t be ready to leave till half-past twelve, if by then. Come in for a brandy-and-soda and one more cigar.”

And in the superintendent’s private room the privileged passenger by the Ceres, or Juno, or Pallas, stunned and as it were annihilated mentally by a sudden surfeit of sights, sounds, names, facts, and complicated information imperfectly apprehended, would listen like a tired child to a fairy tale; would hear a voice, familiar and surprising in its pompousness, tell him, as if from another world, how there was “in this very harbour” an international naval demonstration, which put an end to the Costaguana-Sulaco War. How the United States cruiser, Powhattan, was the first to salute the Occidental flag — white, with a wreath of green laurel in the middle encircling a yellow amarilla flower. Would hear how General Montero, in less than a month after proclaiming himself Emperor of Costaguana, was shot dead (during a solemn and public distribution of orders and crosses) by a young artillery officer, the brother of his then mistress.

“The abominable Pedrito, sir, fled the country,” the voice would say. And it would continue: “A captain of one of our ships told me lately that he recognized Pedrito the Guerrillero, arrayed in purple slippers and a velvet smoking-cap with a gold tassel, keeping a disorderly house in one of the southern ports.”

“Abominable Pedrito! Who the devil was he?” would wonder the distinguished bird of passage hovering on the confines of waking and sleep

with resolutely open eyes and a faint but amiable curl upon his lips, from between which stuck out the eighteenth or twentieth cigar of that memorable day.

“He appeared to me in this very room like a haunting ghost, sir” — Captain Mitchell was talking of his Nostromo with true warmth of feeling and a touch of wistful pride. “You may imagine, sir, what an effect it produced on me. He had come round by sea with Barrios, of course. And the first thing he told me after I became fit to hear him was that he had picked up the lighter’s boat floating in the gulf! He seemed quite overcome by the circumstance. And a remarkable enough circumstance it was, when you remember that it was then sixteen days since the sinking of the silver. At once I could see he was another man. He stared at the wall, sir, as if there had been a spider or something running about there. The loss of the silver preyed on his mind. The first thing he asked me about was whether Dona Antonia had heard yet of Decoud’s death. His voice trembled. I had to tell him that Dona Antonia, as a matter of fact, was not back in town yet. Poor girl! And just as I was making ready to ask him a thousand questions, with a sudden, ‘Pardon me, senor,’ he cleared out of the office altogether. I did not see him again for three days. I was terribly busy, you know. It seems that he wandered about in and out of the town, and on two nights turned up to sleep in the baracoons of the railway people. He seemed absolutely indifferent to what went on. I asked him on the wharf, ‘When are you going to take hold again, Nostromo? There will be plenty of work for the Cargadores presently.’

“‘Senor,’ says he, looking at me in a slow, inquisitive manner, ‘would it surprise you to hear that I am too tired to work just yet? And what work could I do now? How can I look my Cargadores in the face after losing a lighter?’

“I begged him not to think any more about the silver, and he smiled. A smile that went to my heart, sir. ‘It was no mistake,’ I told him. ‘It was a fatality. A thing that could not be helped.’ ‘Si, si!’ he said, and turned away. I thought it best to leave him alone for a bit to get over it. Sir, it took him years really, to get over it. I was present at his interview with Don Carlos. I must say that Gould is rather a cold man. He had to keep a tight hand on his feelings, dealing with thieves and rascals, in constant danger of ruin for himself and wife for so many years, that it had become a second nature.

They looked at each other for a long time. Don Carlos asked what he could do for him, in his quiet, reserved way.

“‘My name is known from one end of Sulaco to the other,’ he said, as quiet as the other. ‘What more can you do for me?’ That was all that passed on that occasion. Later, however, there was a very fine coasting schooner for sale, and Mrs. Gould and I put our heads together to get her bought and presented to him. It was done, but he paid all the price back within the next three years. Business was booming all along this seaboard, sir. Moreover, that man always succeeded in everything except in saving the silver. Poor Dona Antonia, fresh from her terrible experiences in the woods of Los Hatos, had an interview with him, too. Wanted to hear about Decoud: what they said, what they did, what they thought up to the last on that fatal night. Mrs. Gould told me his manner was perfect for quietness and sympathy. Miss Avellanos burst into tears only when he told her how Decoud had happened to say that his plan would be a glorious success. . . . And there’s no doubt, sir, that it is. It is a success.”

The cycle was about to close at last. And while the privileged passenger, shivering with the pleasant anticipations of his berth, forgot to ask himself, “What on earth Decoud’s plan could be?” Captain Mitchell was saying, “Sorry we must part so soon. Your intelligent interest made this a pleasant day to me. I shall see you now on board. You had a glimpse of the ‘Treasure House of the World.’ A very good name that.” And the coxswain’s voice at the door, announcing that the gig was ready, closed the cycle.

Nostromo had, indeed, found the lighter’s boat, which he had left on the Great Isabel with Decoud, floating empty far out in the gulf. He was then on the bridge of the first of Barrios’s transports, and within an hour’s steaming from Sulaco. Barrios, always delighted with a feat of daring and a good judge of courage, had taken a great liking to the Capataz. During the passage round the coast the General kept Nostromo near his person, addressing him frequently in that abrupt and boisterous manner which was the sign of his high favour.

Nostromo’s eyes were the first to catch, broad on the bow, the tiny, elusive dark speck, which, alone with the forms of the Three Isabels right ahead, appeared on the flat, shimmering emptiness of the gulf. There are times when no fact should be neglected as insignificant; a small boat so far from the land might have had some meaning worth finding out. At a nod of consent from Barrios the transport swept out of her course, passing near

enough to ascertain that no one manned the little cockle-shell. It was merely a common small boat gone adrift with her oars in her. But Nostromo, to whose mind Decoud had been insistently present for days, had long before recognized with excitement the dinghy of the lighter.

There could be no question of stopping to pick up that thing. Every minute of time was momentous with the lives and futures of a whole town. The head of the leading ship, with the General on board, fell off to her course. Behind her, the fleet of transports, scattered haphazard over a mile or so in the offing, like the finish of an ocean race, pressed on, all black and smoking on the western sky.

“Mi General,” Nostromo’s voice rang out loud, but quiet, from behind a group of officers, “I should like to save that little boat. Por Dios, I know her. She belongs to my Company.”

“And, por Dios,” guffawed Barrios, in a noisy, good-humoured voice, “you belong to me. I am going to make you a captain of cavalry directly we get within sight of a horse again.”

“I can swim far better than I can ride, mi General,” cried Nostromo, pushing through to the rail with a set stare in his eyes. “Let me — —”

“Let you? What a conceited fellow that is,” bantered the General, jovially, without even looking at him. “Let him go! Ha! ha! ha! He wants me to admit that we cannot take Sulaco without him! Ha! ha! ha! Would you like to swim off to her, my son?”

A tremendous shout from one end of the ship to the other stopped his guffaw. Nostromo had leaped overboard; and his black head bobbed up far away already from the ship. The General muttered an appalled “Cielo! Sinner that I am!” in a thunderstruck tone. One anxious glance was enough to show him that Nostromo was swimming with perfect ease; and then he thundered terribly, “No! no! We shall not stop to pick up this impertinent fellow. Let him drown — that mad Capataz.”

Nothing short of main force would have kept Nostromo from leaping overboard. That empty boat, coming out to meet him mysteriously, as if rowed by an invisible spectre, exercised the fascination of some sign, of some warning, seemed to answer in a startling and enigmatic way the persistent thought of a treasure and of a man’s fate. He would have leaped if there had been death in that half-mile of water. It was as smooth as a pond, and for some reason sharks are unknown in the Placid Gulf, though on the other side of the Punta Mala the coastline swarms with them.

The Capataz seized hold of the stern and blew with force. A queer, faint feeling had come over him while he swam. He had got rid of his boots and coat in the water. He hung on for a time, regaining his breath. In the distance the transports, more in a bunch now, held on straight for Sulaco, with their air of friendly contest, of nautical sport, of a regatta; and the united smoke of their funnels drove like a thin, sulphurous fogbank right over his head. It was his daring, his courage, his act that had set these ships in motion upon the sea, hurrying on to save the lives and fortunes of the Blancos, the taskmasters of the people; to save the San Tome mine; to save the children.

With a vigorous and skilful effort he clambered over the stern. The very boat! No doubt of it; no doubt whatever. It was the dinghy of the lighter No. 3 — the dinghy left with Martin Decoud on the Great Isabel so that he should have some means to help himself if nothing could be done for him from the shore. And here she had come out to meet him empty and inexplicable. What had become of Decoud? The Capataz made a minute examination. He looked for some scratch, for some mark, for some sign. All he discovered was a brown stain on the gunwale abreast of the thwart. He bent his face over it and rubbed hard with his finger. Then he sat down in the stern sheets, passive, with his knees close together and legs aslant.

Streaming from head to foot, with his hair and whiskers hanging lank and dripping and a lustreless stare fixed upon the bottom boards, the Capataz of the Sulaco Cargadores resembled a drowned corpse come up from the bottom to idle away the sunset hour in a small boat. The excitement of his adventurous ride, the excitement of the return in time, of achievement, of success, all this excitement centred round the associated ideas of the great treasure and of the only other man who knew of its existence, had departed from him. To the very last moment he had been cudgelling his brains as to how he could manage to visit the Great Isabel without loss of time and undetected. For the idea of secrecy had come to be connected with the treasure so closely that even to Barrios himself he had refrained from mentioning the existence of Decoud and of the silver on the island. The letters he carried to the General, however, made brief mention of the loss of the lighter, as having its bearing upon the situation in Sulaco. In the circumstances, the one-eyed tiger-slayer, scenting battle from afar, had not wasted his time in making inquiries from the messenger. In fact, Barrios, talking with Nostromo, assumed that both Don Martin Decoud and the

ingots of San Tome were lost together, and Nostromo, not questioned directly, had kept silent, under the influence of some indefinable form of resentment and distrust. Let Don Martin speak of everything with his own lips — was what he told himself mentally.

And now, with the means of gaining the Great Isabel thrown thus in his way at the earliest possible moment, his excitement had departed, as when the soul takes flight leaving the body inert upon an earth it knows no more. Nostromo did not seem to know the gulf. For a long time even his eyelids did not flutter once upon the glazed emptiness of his stare. Then slowly, without a limb having stirred, without a twitch of muscle or quiver of an eyelash, an expression, a living expression came upon the still features, deep thought crept into the empty stare — as if an outcast soul, a quiet, brooding soul, finding that untenanted body in its way, had come in stealthily to take possession.

The Capataz frowned: and in the immense stillness of sea, islands, and coast, of cloud forms on the sky and trails of light upon the water, the knitting of that brow had the emphasis of a powerful gesture. Nothing else budged for a long time; then the Capataz shook his head and again surrendered himself to the universal repose of all visible things. Suddenly he seized the oars, and with one movement made the dinghy spin round, head-on to the Great Isabel. But before he began to pull he bent once more over the brown stain on the gunwale.

“I know that thing,” he muttered to himself, with a sagacious jerk of the head. “That’s blood.”

His stroke was long, vigorous, and steady. Now and then he looked over his shoulder at the Great Isabel, presenting its low cliff to his anxious gaze like an impenetrable face. At last the stem touched the strand. He flung rather than dragged the boat up the little beach. At once, turning his back upon the sunset, he plunged with long strides into the ravine, making the water of the stream spurt and fly upwards at every step, as if spurning its shallow, clear, murmuring spirit with his feet. He wanted to save every moment of daylight.

A mass of earth, grass, and smashed bushes had fallen down very naturally from above upon the cavity under the leaning tree. Decoud had attended to the concealment of the silver as instructed, using the spade with some intelligence. But Nostromo’s half-smile of approval changed into a scornful curl of the lip by the sight of the spade itself flung there in full



view, as if in utter carelessness or sudden panic, giving away the whole thing. Ah! They were all alike in their folly, these hombres finos that invented laws and governments and barren tasks for the people.

The Capataz picked up the spade, and with the feel of the handle in his palm the desire of having a look at the horse-hide boxes of treasure came upon him suddenly. In a very few strokes he uncovered the edges and corners of several; then, clearing away more earth, became aware that one of them had been slashed with a knife.

He exclaimed at that discovery in a stifled voice, and dropped on his knees with a look of irrational apprehension over one shoulder, then over the other. The stiff hide had closed, and he hesitated before he pushed his hand through the long slit and felt the ingots inside. There they were. One, two, three. Yes, four gone. Taken away. Four ingots. But who? Decoud? Nobody else. And why? For what purpose? For what cursed fancy? Let him explain. Four ingots carried off in a boat, and — blood!

In the face of the open gulf, the sun, clear, unclouded, unaltered, plunged into the waters in a grave and untroubled mystery of self-immolation consummated far from all mortal eyes, with an infinite majesty of silence and peace. Four ingots short! — and blood!

The Capataz got up slowly.

“He might simply have cut his hand,” he muttered. “But, then — — ”

He sat down on the soft earth, unresisting, as if he had been chained to the treasure, his drawn-up legs clasped in his hands with an air of hopeless submission, like a slave set on guard. Once only he lifted his head smartly: the rattle of hot musketry fire had reached his ears, like pouring from on high a stream of dry peas upon a drum. After listening for a while, he said, half aloud —

“He will never come back to explain.”

And he lowered his head again.

“Impossible!” he muttered, gloomily.

The sounds of firing died out. The loom of a great conflagration in Sulaco flashed up red above the coast, played on the clouds at the head of the gulf, seemed to touch with a ruddy and sinister reflection the forms of the Three Isabels. He never saw it, though he raised his head.

“But, then, I cannot know,” he pronounced, distinctly, and remained silent and staring for hours.

He could not know. Nobody was to know. As might have been supposed, the end of Don Martin Decoud never became a subject of speculation for any one except Nostromo. Had the truth of the facts been known, there would always have remained the question. Why? Whereas the version of his death at the sinking of the lighter had no uncertainty of motive. The young apostle of Separation had died striving for his idea by an ever-lamented accident. But the truth was that he died from solitude, the enemy known but to few on this earth, and whom only the simplest of us are fit to withstand. The brilliant Costaguanero of the boulevards had died from solitude and want of faith in himself and others.

For some good and valid reasons beyond mere human comprehension, the sea-birds of the gulf shun the Isabels. The rocky head of Azuera is their haunt, whose stony levels and chasms resound with their wild and tumultuous clamour as if they were for ever quarrelling over the legendary treasure.

At the end of his first day on the Great Isabel, Decoud, turning in his lair of coarse grass, under the shade of a tree, said to himself —

“I have not seen as much as one single bird all day.”

And he had not heard a sound, either, all day but that one now of his own muttering voice. It had been a day of absolute silence — the first he had known in his life. And he had not slept a wink. Not for all these wakeful nights and the days of fighting, planning, talking; not for all that last night of danger and hard physical toil upon the gulf, had he been able to close his eyes for a moment. And yet from sunrise to sunset he had been lying prone on the ground, either on his back or on his face.

He stretched himself, and with slow steps descended into the gully to spend the night by the side of the silver. If Nostromo returned — as he might have done at any moment — it was there that he would look first; and night would, of course, be the proper time for an attempt to communicate. He remembered with profound indifference that he had not eaten anything yet since he had been left alone on the island.

He spent the night open-eyed, and when the day broke he ate something with the same indifference. The brilliant “Son Decoud,” the spoiled darling of the family, the lover of Antonia and journalist of Sulaco, was not fit to grapple with himself single-handed. Solitude from mere outward condition of existence becomes very swiftly a state of soul in which the affectations of irony and scepticism have no place. It takes possession of the mind, and

drives forth the thought into the exile of utter unbelief. After three days of waiting for the sight of some human face, Decoud caught himself entertaining a doubt of his own individuality. It had merged into the world of cloud and water, of natural forces and forms of nature. In our activity alone do we find the sustaining illusion of an independent existence as against the whole scheme of things of which we form a helpless part. Decoud lost all belief in the reality of his action past and to come. On the fifth day an immense melancholy descended upon him palpably. He resolved not to give himself up to these people in Sulaco, who had beset him, unreal and terrible, like jibbering and obscene spectres. He saw himself struggling feebly in their midst, and Antonia, gigantic and lovely like an allegorical statue, looking on with scornful eyes at his weakness.

Not a living being, not a speck of distant sail, appeared within the range of his vision; and, as if to escape from this solitude, he absorbed himself in his melancholy. The vague consciousness of a misdirected life given up to impulses whose memory left a bitter taste in his mouth was the first moral sentiment of his manhood. But at the same time he felt no remorse. What should he regret? He had recognized no other virtue than intelligence, and had erected passions into duties. Both his intelligence and his passion were swallowed up easily in this great unbroken solitude of waiting without faith. Sleeplessness had robbed his will of all energy, for he had not slept seven hours in the seven days. His sadness was the sadness of a sceptical mind. He beheld the universe as a succession of incomprehensible images. Nostromo was dead. Everything had failed ignominiously. He no longer dared to think of Antonia. She had not survived. But if she survived he could not face her. And all exertion seemed senseless.

On the tenth day, after a night spent without even dozing off once (it had occurred to him that Antonia could not possibly have ever loved a being so impalpable as himself), the solitude appeared like a great void, and the silence of the gulf like a tense, thin cord to which he hung suspended by both hands, without fear, without surprise, without any sort of emotion whatever. Only towards the evening, in the comparative relief of coolness, he began to wish that this cord would snap. He imagined it snapping with a report as of a pistol — a sharp, full crack. And that would be the end of him. He contemplated that eventuality with pleasure, because he dreaded the sleepless nights in which the silence, remaining unbroken in the shape of a cord to which he hung with both hands, vibrated with senseless

phrases, always the same but utterly incomprehensible, about Nostromo, Antonia, Barrios, and proclamations mingled into an ironical and senseless buzzing. In the daytime he could look at the silence like a still cord stretched to breaking-point, with his life, his vain life, suspended to it like a weight.

“I wonder whether I would hear it snap before I fell,” he asked himself.

The sun was two hours above the horizon when he got up, gaunt, dirty, white-faced, and looked at it with his red-rimmed eyes. His limbs obeyed him slowly, as if full of lead, yet without tremor; and the effect of that physical condition gave to his movements an unhesitating, deliberate dignity. He acted as if accomplishing some sort of rite. He descended into the gully; for the fascination of all that silver, with its potential power, survived alone outside of himself. He picked up the belt with the revolver, that was lying there, and buckled it round his waist. The cord of silence could never snap on the island. It must let him fall and sink into the sea, he thought. And sink! He was looking at the loose earth covering the treasure. In the sea! His aspect was that of a somnambulist. He lowered himself down on his knees slowly and went on grubbing with his fingers with industrious patience till he uncovered one of the boxes. Without a pause, as if doing some work done many times before, he slit it open and took four ingots, which he put in his pockets. He covered up the exposed box again and step by step came out of the gully. The bushes closed after him with a swish.

It was on the third day of his solitude that he had dragged the dinghy near the water with an idea of rowing away somewhere, but had desisted partly at the whisper of lingering hope that Nostromo would return, partly from conviction of utter uselessness of all effort. Now she wanted only a slight shove to be set afloat. He had eaten a little every day after the first, and had some muscular strength left yet. Taking up the oars slowly, he pulled away from the cliff of the Great Isabel, that stood behind him warm with sunshine, as if with the heat of life, bathed in a rich light from head to foot as if in a radiance of hope and joy. He pulled straight towards the setting sun. When the gulf had grown dark, he ceased rowing and flung the sculls in. The hollow clatter they made in falling was the loudest noise he had ever heard in his life. It was a revelation. It seemed to recall him from far away, Actually the thought, “Perhaps I may sleep to-night,” passed through his

mind. But he did not believe it. He believed in nothing; and he remained sitting on the thwart.

The dawn from behind the mountains put a gleam into his unwinking eyes. After a clear daybreak the sun appeared splendidly above the peaks of the range. The great gulf burst into a glitter all around the boat; and in this glory of merciless solitude the silence appeared again before him, stretched taut like a dark, thin string.

His eyes looked at it while, without haste, he shifted his seat from the thwart to the gunwale. They looked at it fixedly, while his hand, feeling about his waist, unbuttoned the flap of the leather case, drew the revolver, cocked it, brought it forward pointing at his breast, pulled the trigger, and, with convulsive force, sent the still-smoking weapon hurtling through the air. His eyes looked at it while he fell forward and hung with his breast on the gunwale and the fingers of his right hand hooked under the thwart. They looked — —

“It is done,” he stammered out, in a sudden flow of blood. His last thought was: “I wonder how that Capataz died.” The stiffness of the fingers relaxed, and the lover of Antonia Avellanos rolled overboard without having heard the cord of silence snap in the solitude of the Placid Gulf, whose glittering surface remained untroubled by the fall of his body.

A victim of the disillusioned weariness which is the retribution meted out to intellectual audacity, the brilliant Don Martin Decoud, weighted by the bars of San Tome silver, disappeared without a trace, swallowed up in the immense indifference of things. His sleepless, crouching figure was gone from the side of the San Tome silver; and for a time the spirits of good and evil that hover near every concealed treasure of the earth might have thought that this one had been forgotten by all mankind. Then, after a few days, another form appeared striding away from the setting sun to sit motionless and awake in the narrow black gully all through the night, in nearly the same pose, in the same place in which had sat that other sleepless man who had gone away for ever so quietly in a small boat, about the time of sunset. And the spirits of good and evil that hover about a forbidden treasure understood well that the silver of San Tome was provided now with a faithful and lifelong slave.

The magnificent Capataz de Cargadores, victim of the disenchanted vanity which is the reward of audacious action, sat in the weary pose of a hunted outcast through a night of sleeplessness as tormenting as any known

to Decoud, his companion in the most desperate affair of his life. And he wondered how Decoud had died. But he knew the part he had played himself. First a woman, then a man, abandoned both in their last extremity, for the sake of this accursed treasure. It was paid for by a soul lost and by a vanished life. The blank stillness of awe was succeeded by a gust of immense pride. There was no one in the world but Gian' Battista Fidanza, Capataz de Cargadores, the incorruptible and faithful Nostromo, to pay such a price.

He had made up his mind that nothing should be allowed now to rob him of his bargain. Nothing. Decoud had died. But how? That he was dead he had not a shadow of a doubt. But four ingots? . . . What for? Did he mean to come for more — some other time?

The treasure was putting forth its latent power. It troubled the clear mind of the man who had paid the price. He was sure that Decoud was dead. The island seemed full of that whisper. Dead! Gone! And he caught himself listening for the swish of bushes and the splash of the footfalls in the bed of the brook. Dead! The talker, the novio of Dona Antonia!

"Ha!" he murmured, with his head on his knees, under the livid clouded dawn breaking over the liberated Sulaco and upon the gulf as gray as ashes. "It is to her that he will fly. To her that he will fly!"

And four ingots! Did he take them in revenge, to cast a spell, like the angry woman who had prophesied remorse and failure, and yet had laid upon him the task of saving the children? Well, he had saved the children. He had defeated the spell of poverty and starvation. He had done it all alone — or perhaps helped by the devil. Who cared? He had done it, betrayed as he was, and saving by the same stroke the San Tome mine, which appeared to him hateful and immense, lording it by its vast wealth over the valour, the toil, the fidelity of the poor, over war and peace, over the labours of the town, the sea, and the Campo.

The sun lit up the sky behind the peaks of the Cordillera. The Capataz looked down for a time upon the fall of loose earth, stones, and smashed bushes, concealing the hiding-place of the silver.

"I must grow rich very slowly," he meditated, aloud.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

Sulaco outstripped Nostromo's prudence, growing rich swiftly on the hidden treasures of the earth, hovered over by the anxious spirits of good and evil, torn out by the labouring hands of the people. It was like a second youth, like a new life, full of promise, of unrest, of toil, scattering lavishly its wealth to the four corners of an excited world. Material changes swept along in the train of material interests. And other changes more subtle, outwardly unmarked, affected the minds and hearts of the workers. Captain Mitchell had gone home to live on his savings invested in the San Tome mine; and Dr. Monygham had grown older, with his head steel-grey and the unchanged expression of his face, living on the inexhaustible treasure of his devotion drawn upon in the secret of his heart like a store of unlawful wealth.

The Inspector-General of State Hospitals (whose maintenance is a charge upon the Gould Concession), Official Adviser on Sanitation to the Municipality, Chief Medical Officer of the San Tome Consolidated Mines (whose territory, containing gold, silver, copper, lead, cobalt, extends for miles along the foot-hills of the Cordillera), had felt poverty-stricken, miserable, and starved during the prolonged, second visit the Goulds paid to Europe and the United States of America. Intimate of the casa, proved friend, a bachelor without ties and without establishment (except of the professional sort), he had been asked to take up his quarters in the Gould house. In the eleven months of their absence the familiar rooms, recalling at every glance the woman to whom he had given all his loyalty, had grown intolerable. As the day approached for the arrival of the mail boat *Hermes* (the latest addition to the O. S. N. Co.'s splendid fleet), the doctor hobbled about more vivaciously, snapped more sardonically at simple and gentle out of sheer nervousness.

He packed up his modest trunk with speed, with fury, with enthusiasm, and saw it carried out past the old porter at the gate of the Casa Gould with delight, with intoxication; then, as the hour approached, sitting alone in the great landau behind the white mules, a little sideways, his drawn-in face positively venomous with the effort of self-control, and holding a pair of new gloves in his left hand, he drove to the harbour.

His heart dilated within him so, when he saw the Goulds on the deck of the *Hermes*, that his greetings were reduced to a casual mutter. Driving

back to town, all three were silent. And in the patio the doctor, in a more natural manner, said —

“I’ll leave you now to yourselves. I’ll call to-morrow if I may?”

“Come to lunch, dear Dr. Monygham, and come early,” said Mrs. Gould, in her travelling dress and her veil down, turning to look at him at the foot of the stairs; while at the top of the flight the Madonna, in blue robes and the Child on her arm, seemed to welcome her with an aspect of pitying tenderness.

“Don’t expect to find me at home,” Charles Gould warned him. “I’ll be off early to the mine.”

After lunch, Dona Emilia and the senior doctor came slowly through the inner gateway of the patio. The large gardens of the Casa Gould, surrounded by high walls, and the red-tile slopes of neighbouring roofs, lay open before them, with masses of shade under the trees and level surfaces of sunlight upon the lawns. A triple row of old orange trees surrounded the whole. Barefooted, brown gardeners, in snowy white shirts and wide calzoneras, dotted the grounds, squatting over flowerbeds, passing between the trees, dragging slender India-rubber tubes across the gravel of the paths; and the fine jets of water crossed each other in graceful curves, sparkling in the sunshine with a slight pattering noise upon the bushes, and an effect of showered diamonds upon the grass.

Dona Emilia, holding up the train of a clear dress, walked by the side of Dr. Monygham, in a longish black coat and severe black bow on an immaculate shirtfront. Under a shady clump of trees, where stood scattered little tables and wicker easy-chairs, Mrs. Gould sat down in a low and ample seat.

“Don’t go yet,” she said to Dr. Monygham, who was unable to tear himself away from the spot. His chin nestling within the points of his collar, he devoured her stealthily with his eyes, which, luckily, were round and hard like clouded marbles, and incapable of disclosing his sentiments. His pitying emotion at the marks of time upon the face of that woman, the air of frailty and weary fatigue that had settled upon the eyes and temples of the “Never-tired Senora” (as Don Pepe years ago used to call her with admiration), touched him almost to tears. “Don’t go yet. To-day is all my own,” Mrs. Gould urged, gently. “We are not back yet officially. No one will come. It’s only to-morrow that the windows of the Casa Gould are to be lit up for a reception.”



The doctor dropped into a chair.

“Giving a tertulia?” he said, with a detached air.

“A simple greeting for all the kind friends who care to come.”

“And only to-morrow?”

“Yes. Charles would be tired out after a day at the mine, and so I — — It would be good to have him to myself for one evening on our return to this house I love. It has seen all my life.”

“Ah, yes!” snarled the doctor, suddenly. “Women count time from the marriage feast. Didn’t you live a little before?”

“Yes; but what is there to remember? There were no cares.”

Mrs. Gould sighed. And as two friends, after a long separation, will revert to the most agitated period of their lives, they began to talk of the Sulaco Revolution. It seemed strange to Mrs. Gould that people who had taken part in it seemed to forget its memory and its lesson.

“And yet,” struck in the doctor, “we who played our part in it had our reward. Don Pepe, though superannuated, still can sit a horse. Barrios is drinking himself to death in jovial company away somewhere on his fundacion beyond the Bolson de Tonoro. And the heroic Father Roman — I imagine the old padre blowing up systematically the San Tome mine, uttering a pious exclamation at every bang, and taking handfuls of snuff between the explosions — the heroic Padre Roman says that he is not afraid of the harm Holroyd’s missionaries can do to his flock, as long as he is alive.”

Mrs. Gould shuddered a little at the allusion to the destruction that had come so near to the San Tome mine.

“Ah, but you, dear friend?”

“I did the work I was fit for.”

“You faced the most cruel dangers of all. Something more than death.”

“No, Mrs. Gould! Only death — by hanging. And I am rewarded beyond my deserts.”

Noticing Mrs. Gould’s gaze fixed upon him, he dropped his eyes.

“I’ve made my career — as you see,” said the Inspector-General of State Hospitals, taking up lightly the lapels of his superfine black coat. The doctor’s self-respect marked inwardly by the almost complete disappearance from his dreams of Father Beron appeared visibly in what, by contrast with former carelessness, seemed an immoderate cult of personal appearance. Carried out within severe limits of form and colour,

and in perpetual freshness, this change of apparel gave to Dr. Monygham an air at the same time professional and festive; while his gait and the unchanged crabbed character of his face acquired from it a startling force of incongruity.

“Yes,” he went on. “We all had our rewards — the engineer-in-chief, Captain Mitchell — — ”

“We saw him,” interrupted Mrs. Gould, in her charming voice. “The poor dear man came up from the country on purpose to call on us in our hotel in London. He comported himself with great dignity, but I fancy he regrets Sulaco. He rambled feebly about ‘historical events’ till I felt I could have a cry.”

“H’m,” grunted the doctor; “getting old, I suppose. Even Nostromo is getting older — though he is not changed. And, speaking of that fellow, I wanted to tell you something — — ”

For some time the house had been full of murmurs, of agitation. Suddenly the two gardeners, busy with rose trees at the side of the garden arch, fell upon their knees with bowed heads on the passage of Antonia Avellanos, who appeared walking beside her uncle.

Invested with the red hat after a short visit to Rome, where he had been invited by the Propaganda, Father Corbelan, missionary to the wild Indians, conspirator, friend and patron of Hernandez the robber, advanced with big, slow strides, gaunt and leaning forward, with his powerful hands clasped behind his back. The first Cardinal-Archbishop of Sulaco had preserved his fanatical and morose air; the aspect of a chaplain of bandits. It was believed that his unexpected elevation to the purple was a counter-move to the Protestant invasion of Sulaco organized by the Holroyd Missionary Fund. Antonia, the beauty of her face as if a little blurred, her figure slightly fuller, advanced with her light walk and her high serenity, smiling from a distance at Mrs. Gould. She had brought her uncle over to see dear Emilia, without ceremony, just for a moment before the siesta.

When all were seated again, Dr. Monygham, who had come to dislike heartily everybody who approached Mrs. Gould with any intimacy, kept aside, pretending to be lost in profound meditation. A louder phrase of Antonia made him lift his head.

“How can we abandon, groaning under oppression, those who have been our countrymen only a few years ago, who are our countrymen now?” Miss

Avellanos was saying. "How can we remain blind, and deaf without pity to the cruel wrongs suffered by our brothers? There is a remedy."

"Annex the rest of Costaguana to the order and prosperity of Sulaco," snapped the doctor. "There is no other remedy."

"I am convinced, senor doctor," Antonia said, with the earnest calm of invincible resolution, "that this was from the first poor Martin's intention."

"Yes, but the material interests will not let you jeopardize their development for a mere idea of pity and justice," the doctor muttered grumpily. "And it is just as well perhaps."

The Cardinal-Archbishop straightened up his gaunt, bony frame.

"We have worked for them; we have made them, these material interests of the foreigners," the last of the Corbelans uttered in a deep, denunciatory tone.

"And without them you are nothing," cried the doctor from the distance. "They will not let you."

"Let them beware, then, lest the people, prevented from their aspirations, should rise and claim their share of the wealth and their share of the power," the popular Cardinal-Archbishop of Sulaco declared, significantly, menacingly.

A silence ensued, during which his Eminence stared, frowning at the ground, and Antonia, graceful and rigid in her chair, breathed calmly in the strength of her convictions. Then the conversation took a social turn, touching on the visit of the Goulds to Europe. The Cardinal-Archbishop, when in Rome, had suffered from neuralgia in the head all the time. It was the climate — the bad air.

When uncle and niece had gone away, with the servants again falling on their knees, and the old porter, who had known Henry Gould, almost totally blind and impotent now, creeping up to kiss his Eminence's extended hand, Dr. Monygham, looking after them, pronounced the one word —

"Incorrigible!"

Mrs. Gould, with a look upwards, dropped wearily on her lap her white hands flashing with the gold and stones of many rings.

"Conspiring. Yes!" said the doctor. "The last of the Avellanos and the last of the Corbelans are conspiring with the refugees from Sta. Marta that flock here after every revolution. The Cafe Lambroso at the corner of the Plaza is full of them; you can hear their chatter across the street like the noise of a parrot-house. They are conspiring for the invasion of Costaguana. And do

you know where they go for strength, for the necessary force? To the secret societies amongst immigrants and natives, where Nostromo — I should say Captain Fidanza — is the great man. What gives him that position? Who can say? Genius? He has genius. He is greater with the populace than ever he was before. It is as if he had some secret power; some mysterious means to keep up his influence. He holds conferences with the Archbishop, as in those old days which you and I remember. Barrios is useless. But for a military head they have the pious Hernandez. And they may raise the country with the new cry of the wealth for the people.”

“Will there be never any peace? Will there be no rest?” Mrs. Gould whispered. “I thought that we — — ”

“No!” interrupted the doctor. “There is no peace and no rest in the development of material interests. They have their law, and their justice. But it is founded on expediency, and is inhuman; it is without rectitude, without the continuity and the force that can be found only in a moral principle. Mrs. Gould, the time approaches when all that the Gould Concession stands for shall weigh as heavily upon the people as the barbarism, cruelty, and misrule of a few years back.”

“How can you say that, Dr. Monygham?” she cried out, as if hurt in the most sensitive place of her soul.

“I can say what is true,” the doctor insisted, obstinately. “It’ll weigh as heavily, and provoke resentment, bloodshed, and vengeance, because the men have grown different. Do you think that now the mine would march upon the town to save their Senor Administrador? Do you think that?”

She pressed the backs of her entwined hands on her eyes and murmured hopelessly —

“Is it this we have worked for, then?”

The doctor lowered his head. He could follow her silent thought. Was it for this that her life had been robbed of all the intimate felicities of daily affection which her tenderness needed as the human body needs air to breathe? And the doctor, indignant with Charles Gould’s blindness, hastened to change the conversation.

“It is about Nostromo that I wanted to talk to you. Ah! that fellow has some continuity and force. Nothing will put an end to him. But never mind that. There’s something inexplicable going on — or perhaps only too easy to explain. You know, Linda is practically the lighthouse keeper of the Great Isabel light. The Garibaldino is too old now. His part is to clean the

lamps and to cook in the house; but he can't get up the stairs any longer. The black-eyed Linda sleeps all day and watches the light all night. Not all day, though. She is up towards five in the afternoon, when our Nostromo, whenever he is in harbour with his schooner, comes out on his courting visit, pulling in a small boat."

"Aren't they married yet?" Mrs. Gould asked. "The mother wished it, as far as I can understand, while Linda was yet quite a child. When I had the girls with me for a year or so during the War of Separation, that extraordinary Linda used to declare quite simply that she was going to be Gian' Battista's wife."

"They are not married yet," said the doctor, curtly. "I have looked after them a little."

"Thank you, dear Dr. Monygham," said Mrs. Gould; and under the shade of the big trees her little, even teeth gleamed in a youthful smile of gentle malice. "People don't know how really good you are. You will not let them know, as if on purpose to annoy me, who have put my faith in your good heart long ago."

The doctor, with a lifting up of his upper lip, as though he were longing to bite, bowed stiffly in his chair. With the utter absorption of a man to whom love comes late, not as the most splendid of illusions, but like an enlightening and priceless misfortune, the sight of that woman (of whom he had been deprived for nearly a year) suggested ideas of adoration, of kissing the hem of her robe. And this excess of feeling translated itself naturally into an augmented grimness of speech.

"I am afraid of being overwhelmed by too much gratitude. However, these people interest me. I went out several times to the Great Isabel light to look after old Giorgio."

He did not tell Mrs. Gould that it was because he found there, in her absence, the relief of an atmosphere of congenial sentiment in old Giorgio's austere admiration for the "English signora — the benefactress"; in black-eyed Linda's voluble, torrential, passionate affection for "our Dona Emilia — that angel"; in the white-throated, fair Giselle's adoring upward turn of the eyes, which then glided towards him with a sidelong, half-arch, half-candid glance, which made the doctor exclaim to himself mentally, "If I weren't what I am, old and ugly, I would think the minx is making eyes at me. And perhaps she is. I dare say she would make eyes at anybody." Dr.

Monygham said nothing of this to Mrs. Gould, the providence of the Viola family, but reverted to what he called “our great Nostromo.”

“What I wanted to tell you is this: Our great Nostromo did not take much notice of the old man and the children for some years. It’s true, too, that he was away on his coasting voyages certainly ten months out of the twelve. He was making his fortune, as he told Captain Mitchell once. He seems to have done uncommonly well. It was only to be expected. He is a man full of resource, full of confidence in himself, ready to take chances and risks of every sort. I remember being in Mitchell’s office one day, when he came in with that calm, grave air he always carries everywhere. He had been away trading in the Gulf of California, he said, looking straight past us at the wall, as his manner is, and was glad to see on his return that a lighthouse was being built on the cliff of the Great Isabel. Very glad, he repeated. Mitchell explained that it was the O. S. N. Co. who was building it, for the convenience of the mail service, on his own advice. Captain Fidanza was good enough to say that it was excellent advice. I remember him twisting up his moustaches and looking all round the cornice of the room before he proposed that old Giorgio should be made the keeper of that light.”

“I heard of this. I was consulted at the time,” Mrs. Gould said. “I doubted whether it would be good for these girls to be shut up on that island as if in a prison.”

“The proposal fell in with the old Garibaldino’s humour. As to Linda, any place was lovely and delightful enough for her as long as it was Nostromo’s suggestion. She could wait for her Gian’ Battista’s good pleasure there as well as anywhere else. My opinion is that she was always in love with that incorruptible Capataz. Moreover, both father and sister were anxious to get Giselle away from the attentions of a certain Ramirez.”

“Ah!” said Mrs. Gould, interested. “Ramirez? What sort of man is that?”

“Just a mozo of the town. His father was a Cargador. As a lanky boy he ran about the wharf in rags, till Nostromo took him up and made a man of him. When he got a little older, he put him into a lighter and very soon gave him charge of the No. 3 boat — the boat which took the silver away, Mrs. Gould. Nostromo selected that lighter for the work because she was the best sailing and the strongest boat of all the Company’s fleet. Young Ramirez was one of the five Cargadores entrusted with the removal of the treasure from the Custom House on that famous night. As the boat he had charge of was sunk, Nostromo, on leaving the Company’s service, recommended him

to Captain Mitchell for his successor. He had trained him in the routine of work perfectly, and thus Mr. Ramirez, from a starving waif, becomes a man and the Capataz of the Sulaco Cargadores.”

“Thanks to Nostromo,” said Mrs. Gould, with warm approval.

“Thanks to Nostromo,” repeated Dr. Monygham. “Upon my word, the fellow’s power frightens me when I think of it. That our poor old Mitchell was only too glad to appoint somebody trained to the work, who saved him trouble, is not surprising. What is wonderful is the fact that the Sulaco Cargadores accepted Ramirez for their chief, simply because such was Nostromo’s good pleasure. Of course, he is not a second Nostromo, as he fondly imagined he would be; but still, the position was brilliant enough. It emboldened him to make up to Giselle Viola, who, you know, is the recognized beauty of the town. The old Garibaldino, however, took a violent dislike to him. I don’t know why. Perhaps because he was not a model of perfection like his Gian’ Battista, the incarnation of the courage, the fidelity, the honour of ‘the people.’ Signor Viola does not think much of Sulaco natives. Both of them, the old Spartan and that white-faced Linda, with her red mouth and coal-black eyes, were looking rather fiercely after the fair one. Ramirez was warned off. Father Viola, I am told, threatened him with his gun once.”

“But what of Giselle herself?” asked Mrs. Gould.

“She’s a bit of a flirt, I believe,” said the doctor. “I don’t think she cared much one way or another. Of course she likes men’s attentions. Ramirez was not the only one, let me tell you, Mrs. Gould. There was one engineer, at least, on the railway staff who got warned off with a gun, too. Old Viola does not allow any trifling with his honour. He has grown uneasy and suspicious since his wife died. He was very pleased to remove his youngest girl away from the town. But look what happens, Mrs. Gould. Ramirez, the honest, lovelorn swain, is forbidden the island. Very well. He respects the prohibition, but naturally turns his eyes frequently towards the Great Isabel. It seems as though he had been in the habit of gazing late at night upon the light. And during these sentimental vigils he discovers that Nostromo, Captain Fidanza that is, returns very late from his visits to the Violas. As late as midnight at times.”

The doctor paused and stared meaningly at Mrs. Gould.

“Yes. But I don’t understand,” she began, looking puzzled.

“Now comes the strange part,” went on Dr. Monygham. “Viola, who is king on his island, will allow no visitor on it after dark. Even Captain Fidanza has got to leave after sunset, when Linda has gone up to tend the light. And Nostromo goes away obediently. But what happens afterwards? What does he do in the gulf between half-past six and midnight? He has been seen more than once at that late hour pulling quietly into the harbour. Ramirez is devoured by jealousy. He dared not approach old Viola; but he plucked up courage to rail at Linda about it on Sunday morning as she came on the mainland to hear mass and visit her mother’s grave. There was a scene on the wharf, which, as a matter of fact, I witnessed. It was early morning. He must have been waiting for her on purpose. I was there by the merest chance, having been called to an urgent consultation by the doctor of the German gunboat in the harbour. She poured wrath, scorn, and flame upon Ramirez, who seemed out of his mind. It was a strange sight, Mrs. Gould: the long jetty, with this raving Cargador in his crimson sash and the girl all in black, at the end; the early Sunday morning quiet of the harbour in the shade of the mountains; nothing but a canoe or two moving between the ships at anchor, and the German gunboat’s gig coming to take me off. Linda passed me within a foot. I noticed her wild eyes. I called out to her. She never heard me. She never saw me. But I looked at her face. It was awful in its anger and wretchedness.”

Mrs. Gould sat up, opening her eyes very wide.

“What do you mean, Dr. Monygham? Do you mean to say that you suspect the younger sister?”

“Quien sabe! Who can tell?” said the doctor, shrugging his shoulders like a born Costaguanero. “Ramirez came up to me on the wharf. He reeled — he looked insane. He took his head into his hands. He had to talk to someone — simply had to. Of course for all his mad state he recognized me. People know me well here. I have lived too long amongst them to be anything else but the evil-eyed doctor, who can cure all the ills of the flesh, and bring bad luck by a glance. He came up to me. He tried to be calm. He tried to make it out that he wanted merely to warn me against Nostromo. It seems that Captain Fidanza at some secret meeting or other had mentioned me as the worst despiser of all the poor — of the people. It’s very possible. He honours me with his undying dislike. And a word from the great Fidanza may be quite enough to send some fool’s knife into my back. The Sanitary Commission I preside over is not in favour with the populace.



‘Beware of him, senor doctor. Destroy him, senor doctor,’ Ramirez hissed right into my face. And then he broke out. ‘That man,’ he spluttered, ‘has cast a spell upon both these girls.’ As to himself, he had said too much. He must run away now — run away and hide somewhere. He moaned tenderly about Giselle, and then called her names that cannot be repeated. If he thought she could be made to love him by any means, he would carry her off from the island. Off into the woods. But it was no good. . . . He strode away, flourishing his arms above his head. Then I noticed an old negro, who had been sitting behind a pile of cases, fishing from the wharf. He wound up his lines and slunk away at once. But he must have heard something, and must have talked, too, because some of the old Garibaldino’s railway friends, I suppose, warned him against Ramirez. At any rate, the father has been warned. But Ramirez has disappeared from the town.”

“I feel I have a duty towards these girls,” said Mrs. Gould, uneasily. “Is Nostromo in Sulaco now?”

“He is, since last Sunday.”

“He ought to be spoken to — at once.”

“Who will dare speak to him? Even the love-mad Ramirez runs away from the mere shadow of Captain Fidanza.”

“I can. I will,” Mrs. Gould declared. “A word will be enough for a man like Nostromo.”

The doctor smiled sourly.

“He must end this situation which lends itself to — — I can’t believe it of that child,” pursued Mrs. Gould.

“He’s very attractive,” muttered the doctor, gloomily.

“He’ll see it, I am sure. He must put an end to all this by marrying Linda at once,” pronounced the first lady of Sulaco with immense decision.

Through the garden gate emerged Basilio, grown fat and sleek, with an elderly hairless face, wrinkles at the corners of his eyes, and his jet-black, coarse hair plastered down smoothly. Stooping carefully behind an ornamental clump of bushes, he put down with precaution a small child he had been carrying on his shoulder — his own and Leonarda’s last born. The pouting, spoiled Camerista and the head mozo of the Casa Gould had been married for some years now.

He remained squatting on his heels for a time, gazing fondly at his offspring, which returned his stare with imperturbable gravity; then, solemn

and respectable, walked down the path.

“What is it, Basilio?” asked Mrs. Gould.

“A telephone came through from the office of the mine. The master remains to sleep at the mountain to-night.”

Dr. Monygham had got up and stood looking away. A profound silence reigned for a time under the shade of the biggest trees in the lovely gardens of the Casa Gould.

“Very well, Basilio,” said Mrs. Gould. She watched him walk away along the path, step aside behind the flowering bush, and reappear with the child seated on his shoulder. He passed through the gateway between the garden and the patio with measured steps, careful of his light burden.

The doctor, with his back to Mrs. Gould, contemplated a flower-bed away in the sunshine. People believed him scornful and soured. The truth of his nature consisted in his capacity for passion and in the sensitiveness of his temperament. What he lacked was the polished callousness of men of the world, the callousness from which springs an easy tolerance for oneself and others; the tolerance wide as poles asunder from true sympathy and human compassion. This want of callousness accounted for his sardonic turn of mind and his biting speeches.

In profound silence, and glaring viciously at the brilliant flower-bed, Dr. Monygham poured mental imprecations on Charles Gould’s head. Behind him the immobility of Mrs. Gould added to the grace of her seated figure the charm of art, of an attitude caught and interpreted for ever. Turning abruptly, the doctor took his leave.

Mrs. Gould leaned back in the shade of the big trees planted in a circle. She leaned back with her eyes closed and her white hands lying idle on the arms of her seat. The half-light under the thick mass of leaves brought out the youthful prettiness of her face; made the clear, light fabrics and white lace of her dress appear luminous. Small and dainty, as if radiating a light of her own in the deep shade of the interlaced boughs, she resembled a good fairy, weary with a long career of well-doing, touched by the withering suspicion of the uselessness of her labours, the powerlessness of her magic.

Had anybody asked her of what she was thinking, alone in the garden of the Casa, with her husband at the mine and the house closed to the street like an empty dwelling, her frankness would have had to evade the question. It had come into her mind that for life to be large and full, it must contain the care of the past and of the future in every passing moment of the

present. Our daily work must be done to the glory of the dead, and for the good of those who come after. She thought that, and sighed without opening her eyes — without moving at all. Mrs. Gould's face became set and rigid for a second, as if to receive, without flinching, a great wave of loneliness that swept over her head. And it came into her mind, too, that no one would ever ask her with solicitude what she was thinking of. No one. No one, but perhaps the man who had just gone away. No; no one who could be answered with careless sincerity in the ideal perfection of confidence.

The word "incorrigible" — a word lately pronounced by Dr. Monygham — floated into her still and sad immobility. Incorrigible in his devotion to the great silver mine was the Senor Administrador! Incorrigible in his hard, determined service of the material interests to which he had pinned his faith in the triumph of order and justice. Poor boy! She had a clear vision of the grey hairs on his temples. He was perfect — perfect. What more could she have expected? It was a colossal and lasting success; and love was only a short moment of forgetfulness, a short intoxication, whose delight one remembered with a sense of sadness, as if it had been a deep grief lived through. There was something inherent in the necessities of successful action which carried with it the moral degradation of the idea. She saw the San Tome mountain hanging over the Campo, over the whole land, feared, hated, wealthy; more soulless than any tyrant, more pitiless and autocratic than the worst Government; ready to crush innumerable lives in the expansion of its greatness. He did not see it. He could not see it. It was not his fault. He was perfect, perfect; but she would never have him to herself. Never; not for one short hour altogether to herself in this old Spanish house she loved so well! Incorrigible, the last of the Corbelans, the last of the Avellanos, the doctor had said; but she saw clearly the San Tome mine possessing, consuming, burning up the life of the last of the Costaguana Goulds; mastering the energetic spirit of the son as it had mastered the lamentable weakness of the father. A terrible success for the last of the Goulds. The last! She had hoped for a long, long time, that perhaps — — But no! There were to be no more. An immense desolation, the dread of her own continued life, descended upon the first lady of Sulaco. With a prophetic vision she saw herself surviving alone the degradation of her young ideal of life, of love, of work — all alone in the Treasure House of the World. The profound, blind, suffering expression of a painful dream settled on her face with its closed eyes. In the indistinct voice of an unlucky

sleeper lying passive in the grip of a merciless nightmare, she stammered out aimlessly the words —

“Material interest.”

## CHAPTER TWELVE

Nostromo had been growing rich very slowly. It was an effect of his prudence. He could command himself even when thrown off his balance. And to become the slave of a treasure with full self-knowledge is an occurrence rare and mentally disturbing. But it was also in a great part because of the difficulty of converting it into a form in which it could become available. The mere act of getting it away from the island piecemeal, little by little, was surrounded by difficulties, by the dangers of imminent detection. He had to visit the Great Isabel in secret, between his voyages along the coast, which were the ostensible source of his fortune. The crew of his own schooner were to be feared as if they had been spies upon their dreaded captain. He did not dare stay too long in port. When his coaster was unloaded, he hurried away on another trip, for he feared arousing suspicion even by a day's delay. Sometimes during a week's stay, or more, he could only manage one visit to the treasure. And that was all. A couple of ingots. He suffered through his fears as much as through his prudence. To do things by stealth humiliated him. And he suffered most from the concentration of his thought upon the treasure.

A transgression, a crime, entering a man's existence, eats it up like a malignant growth, consumes it like a fever. Nostromo had lost his peace; the genuineness of all his qualities was destroyed. He felt it himself, and often cursed the silver of San Tome. His courage, his magnificence, his leisure, his work, everything was as before, only everything was a sham. But the treasure was real. He clung to it with a more tenacious, mental grip. But he hated the feel of the ingots. Sometimes, after putting away a couple of them in his cabin — the fruit of a secret night expedition to the Great Isabel — he would look fixedly at his fingers, as if surprised they had left no stain on his skin.

He had found means of disposing of the silver bars in distant ports. The necessity to go far afield made his coasting voyages long, and caused his visits to the Viola household to be rare and far between. He was fated to have his wife from there. He had said so once to Giorgio himself. But the Garibaldino had put the subject aside with a majestic wave of his hand, clutching a smouldering black briar-root pipe. There was plenty of time; he was not the man to force his girls upon anybody.

As time went on, Nostromo discovered his preference for the younger of the two. They had some profound similarities of nature, which must exist for complete confidence and understanding, no matter what outward differences of temperament there may be to exercise their own fascination of contrast. His wife would have to know his secret or else life would be impossible. He was attracted by Giselle, with her candid gaze and white throat, pliable, silent, fond of excitement under her quiet indolence; whereas Linda, with her intense, passionately pale face, energetic, all fire and words, touched with gloom and scorn, a chip of the old block, true daughter of the austere republican, but with Teresa's voice, inspired him with a deep-seated mistrust. Moreover, the poor girl could not conceal her love for Gian' Battista. He could see it would be violent, exacting, suspicious, uncompromising — like her soul. Giselle, by her fair but warm beauty, by the surface placidity of her nature holding a promise of submissiveness, by the charm of her girlish mysteriousness, excited his passion and allayed his fears as to the future.

His absences from Sulaco were long. On returning from the longest of them, he made out lighters loaded with blocks of stone lying under the cliff of the Great Isabel; cranes and scaffolding above; workmen's figures moving about, and a small lighthouse already rising from its foundations on the edge of the cliff.

At this unexpected, undreamt-of, startling sight, he thought himself lost irretrievably. What could save him from detection now? Nothing! He was struck with amazed dread at this turn of chance, that would kindle a far-reaching light upon the only secret spot of his life; that life whose very essence, value, reality, consisted in its reflection from the admiring eyes of men. All of it but that thing which was beyond common comprehension; which stood between him and the power that hears and gives effect to the evil intention of curses. It was dark. Not every man had such a darkness. And they were going to put a light there. A light! He saw it shining upon disgrace, poverty, contempt. Somebody was sure to. . . . Perhaps somebody had already. . . .

The incomparable Nostromo, the Capataz, the respected and feared Captain Fidanza, the unquestioned patron of secret societies, a republican like old Giorgio, and a revolutionist at heart (but in another manner), was on the point of jumping overboard from the deck of his own schooner. That man, subjective almost to insanity, looked suicide deliberately in the face.

But he never lost his head. He was checked by the thought that this was no escape. He imagined himself dead, and the disgrace, the shame going on. Or, rather, properly speaking, he could not imagine himself dead. He was possessed too strongly by the sense of his own existence, a thing of infinite duration in its changes, to grasp the notion of finality. The earth goes on for ever.

And he was courageous. It was a corrupt courage, but it was as good for his purposes as the other kind. He sailed close to the cliff of the Great Isabel, throwing a penetrating glance from the deck at the mouth of the ravine, tangled in an undisturbed growth of bushes. He sailed close enough to exchange hails with the workmen, shading their eyes on the edge of the sheer drop of the cliff overhung by the jib-head of a powerful crane. He perceived that none of them had any occasion even to approach the ravine where the silver lay hidden; let alone to enter it. In the harbour he learned that no one slept on the island. The labouring gangs returned to port every evening, singing chorus songs in the empty lighters towed by a harbour tug. For the moment he had nothing to fear.

But afterwards? he asked himself. Later, when a keeper came to live in the cottage that was being built some hundred and fifty yards back from the low lighthouse, and four hundred or so from the dark, shaded, jungly ravine, containing the secret of his safety, of his influence, of his magnificence, of his power over the future, of his defiance of ill-luck, of every possible betrayal from rich and poor alike — what then? He could never shake off the treasure. His audacity, greater than that of other men, had welded that vein of silver into his life. And the feeling of fearful and ardent subjection, the feeling of his slavery — so irremediable and profound that often, in his thoughts, he compared himself to the legendary Gringos, neither dead nor alive, bound down to their conquest of unlawful wealth on Azuera — weighed heavily on the independent Captain Fidanza, owner and master of a coasting schooner, whose smart appearance (and fabulous good-luck in trading) were so well known along the western seaboard of a vast continent.

Fiercely whiskered and grave, a shade less supple in his walk, the vigour and symmetry of his powerful limbs lost in the vulgarity of a brown tweed suit, made by Jews in the slums of London, and sold by the clothing department of the *Compania Anzani*, Captain Fidanza was seen in the streets of Sulaco attending to his business, as usual, that trip. And, as usual, he allowed it to get about that he had made a great profit on his cargo. It

was a cargo of salt fish, and Lent was approaching. He was seen in tramcars going to and fro between the town and the harbour; he talked with people in a cafe or two in his measured, steady voice. Captain Fidanza was seen. The generation that would know nothing of the famous ride to Cayta was not born yet.

Nostromo, the miscalled Capataz de Cargadores, had made for himself, under his rightful name, another public existence, but modified by the new conditions, less picturesque, more difficult to keep up in the increased size and varied population of Sulaco, the progressive capital of the Occidental Republic.

Captain Fidanza, unpicturesque, but always a little mysterious, was recognized quite sufficiently under the lofty glass and iron roof of the Sulaco railway station. He took a local train, and got out in Rincon, where he visited the widow of the Cargador who had died of his wounds (at the dawn of the New Era, like Don Jose Avellanos) in the patio of the Casa Gould. He consented to sit down and drink a glass of cool lemonade in the hut, while the woman, standing up, poured a perfect torrent of words to which he did not listen. He left some money with her, as usual. The orphaned children, growing up and well schooled, calling him uncle, clamoured for his blessing. He gave that, too; and in the doorway paused for a moment to look at the flat face of the San Tome mountain with a faint frown. This slight contraction of his bronzed brow casting a marked tinge of severity upon his usual unbending expression, was observed at the Lodge which he attended — but went away before the banquet. He wore it at the meeting of some good comrades, Italians and Occidentals, assembled in his honour under the presidency of an indigent, sickly, somewhat hunchbacked little photographer, with a white face and a magnanimous soul dyed crimson by a bloodthirsty hate of all capitalists, oppressors of the two hemispheres. The heroic Giorgio Viola, old revolutionist, would have understood nothing of his opening speech; and Captain Fidanza, lavishly generous as usual to some poor comrades, made no speech at all. He had listened, frowning, with his mind far away, and walked off unapproachable, silent, like a man full of cares.

His frown deepened as, in the early morning, he watched the stonemasons go off to the Great Isabel, in lighters loaded with squared blocks of stone, enough to add another course to the squat light-tower. That was the rate of the work. One course per day.



And Captain Fidanza meditated. The presence of strangers on the island would cut him completely off the treasure. It had been difficult and dangerous enough before. He was afraid, and he was angry. He thought with the resolution of a master and the cunning of a cowed slave. Then he went ashore.

He was a man of resource and ingenuity; and, as usual, the expedient he found at a critical moment was effective enough to alter the situation radically. He had the gift of evolving safety out of the very danger, this incomparable Nostromo, this “fellow in a thousand.” With Giorgio established on the Great Isabel, there would be no need for concealment. He would be able to go openly, in daylight, to see his daughters — one of his daughters — and stay late talking to the old Garibaldino. Then in the dark . . . Night after night . . . He would dare to grow rich quicker now. He yearned to clasp, embrace, absorb, subjugate in unquestioned possession this treasure, whose tyranny had weighed upon his mind, his actions, his very sleep.

He went to see his friend Captain Mitchell — and the thing was done as Dr. Monygham had related to Mrs. Gould. When the project was mooted to the Garibaldino, something like the faint reflection, the dim ghost of a very ancient smile, stole under the white and enormous moustaches of the old hater of kings and ministers. His daughters were the object of his anxious care. The younger, especially. Linda, with her mother’s voice, had taken more her mother’s place. Her deep, vibrating “Eh, Padre?” seemed, but for the change of the word, the very echo of the impassioned, remonstrating “Eh, Giorgio?” of poor Signora Teresa. It was his fixed opinion that the town was no proper place for his girls. The infatuated but guileless Ramirez was the object of his profound aversion, as resuming the sins of the country whose people were blind, vile esclavos.

On his return from his next voyage, Captain Fidanza found the Violas settled in the light-keeper’s cottage. His knowledge of Giorgio’s idiosyncrasies had not played him false. The Garibaldino had refused to entertain the idea of any companion whatever, except his girls. And Captain Mitchell, anxious to please his poor Nostromo, with that felicity of inspiration which only true affection can give, had formally appointed Linda Viola as under-keeper of the Isabel’s Light.

“The light is private property,” he used to explain. “It belongs to my Company. I’ve the power to nominate whom I like, and Viola it shall be. It’s about the only thing Nostromo — a man worth his weight in gold, mind you — has ever asked me to do for him.”

Directly his schooner was anchored opposite the New Custom House, with its sham air of a Greek temple, flatroofed, with a colonnade, Captain Fidanza went pulling his small boat out of the harbour, bound for the Great Isabel, openly in the light of a declining day, before all men’s eyes, with a sense of having mastered the fates. He must establish a regular position. He would ask him for his daughter now. He thought of Giselle as he pulled. Linda loved him, perhaps, but the old man would be glad to keep the elder, who had his wife’s voice.

He did not pull for the narrow strand where he had landed with Decoud, and afterwards alone on his first visit to the treasure. He made for the beach at the other end, and walked up the regular and gentle slope of the wedge-shaped island. Giorgio Viola, whom he saw from afar, sitting on a bench under the front wall of the cottage, lifted his arm slightly to his loud hail. He walked up. Neither of the girls appeared.

“It is good here,” said the old man, in his austere, far-away manner.

Nostromo nodded; then, after a short silence —

“You saw my schooner pass in not two hours ago? Do you know why I am here before, so to speak, my anchor has fairly bitten into the ground of this port of Sulaco?”

“You are welcome like a son,” the old man declared, quietly, staring away upon the sea.

“Ah! thy son. I know. I am what thy son would have been. It is well, viejo. It is a very good welcome. Listen, I have come to ask you for — — ”

A sudden dread came upon the fearless and incorruptible Nostromo. He dared not utter the name in his mind. The slight pause only imparted a marked weight and solemnity to the changed end of the phrase.

“For my wife!” . . . His heart was beating fast. “It is time you — — ”

The Garibaldino arrested him with an extended arm. “That was left for you to judge.”

He got up slowly. His beard, unclipped since Teresa’s death, thick, snow-white, covered his powerful chest. He turned his head to the door, and called out in his strong voice —

“Linda.”

Her answer came sharp and faint from within; and the appalled Nostromo stood up, too, but remained mute, gazing at the door. He was afraid. He was not afraid of being refused the girl he loved — no mere refusal could stand between him and a woman he desired — but the shining spectre of the treasure rose before him, claiming his allegiance in a silence that could not be gainsaid. He was afraid, because, neither dead nor alive, like the Gringos on Azuera, he belonged body and soul to the unlawfulness of his audacity. He was afraid of being forbidden the island. He was afraid, and said nothing.

Seeing the two men standing up side by side to await her, Linda stopped in the doorway. Nothing could alter the passionate dead whiteness of her face; but her black eyes seemed to catch and concentrate all the light of the low sun in a flaming spark within the black depths, covered at once by the slow descent of heavy eyelids.

“Behold thy husband, master, and benefactor.” Old Viola’s voice resounded with a force that seemed to fill the whole gulf.

She stepped forward with her eyes nearly closed, like a sleep-walker in a beatific dream.

Nostromo made a superhuman effort. “It is time, Linda, we two were betrothed,” he said, steadily, in his level, careless, unbending tone.

She put her hand into his offered palm, lowering her head, dark with bronze glints, upon which her father’s hand rested for a moment.

“And so the soul of the dead is satisfied.”

This came from Giorgio Viola, who went on talking for a while of his dead wife; while the two, sitting side by side, never looked at each other. Then the old man ceased; and Linda, motionless, began to speak.

“Ever since I felt I lived in the world, I have lived for you alone, Gian’ Battista. And that you knew! You knew it . . . Battistino.”

She pronounced the name exactly with her mother’s intonation. A gloom as of the grave covered Nostromo’s heart.

“Yes. I knew,” he said.

The heroic Garibaldino sat on the same bench bowing his hoary head, his old soul dwelling alone with its memories, tender and violent, terrible and dreary — solitary on the earth full of men.

And Linda, his best-loved daughter, was saying, “I was yours ever since I can remember. I had only to think of you for the earth to become empty to my eyes. When you were there, I could see no one else. I was yours.

Nothing is changed. The world belongs to you, and you let me live in it.” . . . She dropped her low, vibrating voice to a still lower note, and found other things to say — torturing for the man at her side. Her murmur ran on ardent and voluble. She did not seem to see her sister, who came out with an altar-cloth she was embroidering in her hands, and passed in front of them, silent, fresh, fair, with a quick glance and a faint smile, to sit a little away on the other side of Nostromo.

The evening was still. The sun sank almost to the edge of a purple ocean; and the white lighthouse, livid against the background of clouds filling the head of the gulf, bore the lantern red and glowing, like a live ember kindled by the fire of the sky. Giselle, indolent and demure, raised the altar-cloth from time to time to hide nervous yawns, as of a young panther.

Suddenly Linda rushed at her sister, and seizing her head, covered her face with kisses. Nostromo’s brain reeled. When she left her, as if stunned by the violent caresses, with her hands lying in her lap, the slave of the treasure felt as if he could shoot that woman. Old Giorgio lifted his leonine head.

“Where are you going, Linda?”

“To the light, padre mio.”

“Si, si — to your duty.”

He got up, too, looked after his eldest daughter; then, in a tone whose festive note seemed the echo of a mood lost in the night of ages —

“I am going in to cook something. Aha! Son! The old man knows where to find a bottle of wine, too.”

He turned to Giselle, with a change to austere tenderness.

“And you, little one, pray not to the God of priests and slaves, but to the God of orphans, of the oppressed, of the poor, of little children, to give thee a man like this one for a husband.”

His hand rested heavily for a moment on Nostromo’s shoulder; then he went in. The hopeless slave of the San Tome silver felt at these words the venomous fangs of jealousy biting deep into his heart. He was appalled by the novelty of the experience, by its force, by its physical intimacy. A husband! A husband for her! And yet it was natural that Giselle should have a husband at some time or other. He had never realized that before. In discovering that her beauty could belong to another he felt as though he could kill this one of old Giorgio’s daughters also. He muttered moodily —

“They say you love Ramirez.”

She shook her head without looking at him. Coppery glints rippled to and fro on the wealth of her gold hair. Her smooth forehead had the soft, pure sheen of a priceless pearl in the splendour of the sunset, mingling the gloom of starry spaces, the purple of the sea, and the crimson of the sky in a magnificent stillness.

“No,” she said, slowly. “I never loved him. I think I never . . . He loves me — perhaps.”

The seduction of her slow voice died out of the air, and her raised eyes remained fixed on nothing, as if indifferent and without thought.

“Ramirez told you he loved you?” asked Nostromo, restraining himself.

“Ah! once — one evening . . .”

“The miserable . . . Ha!”

He had jumped up as if stung by a gad-fly, and stood before her mute with anger.

“Misericordia Divina! You, too, Gian’ Battista! Poor wretch that I am!” she lamented in ingenuous tones. “I told Linda, and she scolded — she scolded. Am I to live blind, dumb, and deaf in this world? And she told father, who took down his gun and cleaned it. Poor Ramirez! Then you came, and she told you.”

He looked at her. He fastened his eyes upon the hollow of her white throat, which had the invincible charm of things young, palpitating, delicate, and alive. Was this the child he had known? Was it possible? It dawned upon him that in these last years he had really seen very little — nothing — of her. Nothing. She had come into the world like a thing unknown. She had come upon him unawares. She was a danger. A frightful danger. The instinctive mood of fierce determination that had never failed him before the perils of this life added its steady force to the violence of his passion. She, in a voice that recalled to him the song of running water, the tinkling of a silver bell, continued —

“And between you three you have brought me here into this captivity to the sky and water. Nothing else. Sky and water. Oh, Sanctissima Madre. My hair shall turn grey on this tedious island. I could hate you, Gian’ Battista!”

He laughed loudly. Her voice enveloped him like a caress. She bemoaned her fate, spreading unconsciously, like a flower its perfume in the coolness of the evening, the indefinable seduction of her person. Was it her fault that nobody ever had admired Linda? Even when they were little, going out with their mother to Mass, she remembered that people took no notice of Linda,

who was fearless, and chose instead to frighten her, who was timid, with their attention. It was her hair like gold, she supposed.

He broke out —

“Your hair like gold, and your eyes like violets, and your lips like the rose; your round arms, your white throat.” . . .

Imperturbable in the indolence of her pose, she blushed deeply all over to the roots of her hair. She was not conceited. She was no more self-conscious than a flower. But she was pleased. And perhaps even a flower loves to hear itself praised. He glanced down, and added, impetuously —

“Your little feet!”

Leaning back against the rough stone wall of the cottage, she seemed to bask languidly in the warmth of the rosy flush. Only her lowered eyes glanced at her little feet.

“And so you are going at last to marry our Linda. She is terrible. Ah! now she will understand better since you have told her you love her. She will not be so fierce.”

“Chica!” said Nostromo, “I have not told her anything.”

“Then make haste. Come to-morrow. Come and tell her, so that I may have some peace from her scolding and — perhaps — who knows . . .”

“Be allowed to listen to your Ramirez, eh? Is that it? You . . .”

“Mercy of God! How violent you are, Giovanni,” she said, unmoved. “Who is Ramirez . . . Ramirez . . . Who is he?” she repeated, dreamily, in the dusk and gloom of the clouded gulf, with a low red streak in the west like a hot bar of glowing iron laid across the entrance of a world sombre as a cavern, where the magnificent Capataz de Cargadores had hidden his conquests of love and wealth.

“Listen, Giselle,” he said, in measured tones; “I will tell no word of love to your sister. Do you want to know why?”

“Alas! I could not understand perhaps, Giovanni. Father says you are not like other men; that no one had ever understood you properly; that the rich will be surprised yet. . . . Oh! saints in heaven! I am weary.”

She raised her embroidery to conceal the lower part of her face, then let it fall on her lap. The lantern was shaded on the land side, but slanting away from the dark column of the lighthouse they could see the long shaft of light, kindled by Linda, go out to strike the expiring glow in a horizon of purple and red.

Giselle Viola, with her head resting against the wall of the house, her eyes half closed, and her little feet, in white stockings and black slippers, crossed over each other, seemed to surrender herself, tranquil and fatal, to the gathering dusk. The charm of her body, the promising mysteriousness of her indolence, went out into the night of the Placid Gulf like a fresh and intoxicating fragrance spreading out in the shadows, impregnating the air. The incorruptible Nostromo breathed her ambient seduction in the tumultuous heaving of his breast. Before leaving the harbour he had thrown off the store clothing of Captain Fidanza, for greater ease in the long pull out to the islands. He stood before her in the red sash and check shirt as he used to appear on the Company's wharf — a Mediterranean sailor come ashore to try his luck in Costaguana. The dusk of purple and red enveloped him, too — close, soft, profound, as no more than fifty yards from that spot it had gathered evening after evening about the self-destructive passion of Don Martin Decoud's utter scepticism, flaming up to death in solitude.

"You have got to hear," he began at last, with perfect self-control. "I shall say no word of love to your sister, to whom I am betrothed from this evening, because it is you that I love. It is you!" . . .

The dusk let him see yet the tender and voluptuous smile that came instinctively upon her lips shaped for love and kisses, freeze hard in the drawn, haggard lines of terror. He could not restrain himself any longer. While she shrank from his approach, her arms went out to him, abandoned and regal in the dignity of her languid surrender. He held her head in his two hands, and showered rapid kisses upon the upturned face that gleamed in the purple dusk. Masterful and tender, he was entering slowly upon the fulness of his possession. And he perceived that she was crying. Then the incomparable Capataz, the man of careless loves, became gentle and caressing, like a woman to the grief of a child. He murmured to her fondly. He sat down by her and nursed her fair head on his breast. He called her his star and his little flower.

It had grown dark. From the living-room of the light-keeper's cottage, where Giorgio, one of the Immortal Thousand, was bending his leonine and heroic head over a charcoal fire, there came the sound of sizzling and the aroma of an artistic *frittura*.

In the obscure disarray of that thing, happening like a cataclysm, it was in her feminine head that some gleam of reason survived. He was lost to the world in their embraced stillness. But she said, whispering into his ear —

“God of mercy! What will become of me — here — now — between this sky and this water I hate? Linda, Linda — I see her!” . . . She tried to get out of his arms, suddenly relaxed at the sound of that name. But there was no one approaching their black shapes, enlaced and struggling on the white background of the wall. “Linda! Poor Linda! I tremble! I shall die of fear before my poor sister Linda, betrothed to-day to Giovanni — my lover! Giovanni, you must have been mad! I cannot understand you! You are not like other men! I will not give you up — never — only to God himself! But why have you done this blind, mad, cruel, frightful thing?”

Released, she hung her head, let fall her hands. The altar-cloth, as if tossed by a great wind, lay far away from them, gleaming white on the black ground.

“From fear of losing my hope of you,” said Nostromo.

“You knew that you had my soul! You know everything! It was made for you! But what could stand between you and me? What? Tell me!” she repeated, without impatience, in superb assurance.

“Your dead mother,” he said, very low.

“Ah! . . . Poor mother! She has always . . . She is a saint in heaven now, and I cannot give you up to her. No, Giovanni. Only to God alone. You were mad — but it is done. Oh! what have you done? Giovanni, my beloved, my life, my master, do not leave me here in this grave of clouds. You cannot leave me now. You must take me away — at once — this instant — in the little boat. Giovanni, carry me off to-night, from my fear of Linda’s eyes, before I have to look at her again.”

She nestled close to him. The slave of the San Tome silver felt the weight as of chains upon his limbs, a pressure as of a cold hand upon his lips. He struggled against the spell.

“I cannot,” he said. “Not yet. There is something that stands between us two and the freedom of the world.”

She pressed her form closer to his side with a subtle and naive instinct of seduction.

“You rave, Giovanni — my lover!” she whispered, engagingly. “What can there be? Carry me off — in thy very hands — to Dona Emilia — away from here. I am not very heavy.”

It seemed as though she expected him to lift her up at once in his two palms. She had lost the notion of all impossibility. Anything could happen



on this night of wonder. As he made no movement, she almost cried aloud —

“I tell you I am afraid of Linda!” And still he did not move. She became quiet and wily. “What can there be?” she asked, coaxingly.

He felt her warm, breathing, alive, quivering in the hollow of his arm. In the exulting consciousness of his strength, and the triumphant excitement of his mind, he struck out for his freedom.

“A treasure,” he said. All was still. She did not understand. “A treasure. A treasure of silver to buy a gold crown for thy brow.”

“A treasure?” she repeated in a faint voice, as if from the depths of a dream. “What is it you say?”

She disengaged herself gently. He got up and looked down at her, aware of her face, of her hair, her lips, the dimples on her cheeks — seeing the fascination of her person in the night of the gulf as if in the blaze of noonday. Her nonchalant and seductive voice trembled with the excitement of admiring awe and ungovernable curiosity.

“A treasure of silver!” she stammered out. Then pressed on faster: “What? Where? How did you get it, Giovanni?”

He wrestled with the spell of captivity. It was as if striking a heroic blow that he burst out —

“Like a thief!”

The densest blackness of the Placid Gulf seemed to fall upon his head. He could not see her now. She had vanished into a long, obscure abysmal silence, whence her voice came back to him after a time with a faint glimmer, which was her face.

“I love you! I love you!”

These words gave him an unwonted sense of freedom; they cast a spell stronger than the accursed spell of the treasure; they changed his weary subjection to that dead thing into an exulting conviction of his power. He would cherish her, he said, in a splendour as great as Dona Emilia’s. The rich lived on wealth stolen from the people, but he had taken from the rich nothing — nothing that was not lost to them already by their folly and their betrayal. For he had been betrayed — he said — deceived, tempted. She believed him. . . . He had kept the treasure for purposes of revenge; but now he cared nothing for it. He cared only for her. He would put her beauty in a palace on a hill crowned with olive trees — a white palace above a blue sea. He would keep her there like a jewel in a casket. He would get land for her

— her own land fertile with vines and corn — to set her little feet upon. He kissed them. . . . He had already paid for it all with the soul of a woman and the life of a man. . . . The Capataz de Cargadores tasted the supreme intoxication of his generosity. He flung the mastered treasure superbly at her feet in the impenetrable darkness of the gulf, in the darkness defying — as men said — the knowledge of God and the wit of the devil. But she must let him grow rich first — he warned her.

She listened as if in a trance. Her fingers stirred in his hair. He got up from his knees reeling, weak, empty, as though he had flung his soul away.

“Make haste, then,” she said. “Make haste, Giovanni, my lover, my master, for I will give thee up to no one but God. And I am afraid of Linda.”

He guessed at her shudder, and swore to do his best. He trusted the courage of her love. She promised to be brave in order to be loved always — far away in a white palace upon a hill above a blue sea. Then with a timid, tentative eagerness she murmured —

“Where is it? Where? Tell me that, Giovanni.”

He opened his mouth and remained silent — thunderstruck.

“Not that! Not that!” he gasped out, appalled at the spell of secrecy that had kept him dumb before so many people falling upon his lips again with unimpaired force. Not even to her. Not even to her. It was too dangerous. “I forbid thee to ask,” he cried at her, deadening cautiously the anger of his voice.

He had not regained his freedom. The spectre of the unlawful treasure arose, standing by her side like a figure of silver, pitiless and secret, with a finger on its pale lips. His soul died within him at the vision of himself creeping in presently along the ravine, with the smell of earth, of damp foliage in his nostrils — creeping in, determined in a purpose that numbed his breast, and creeping out again loaded with silver, with his ears alert to every sound. It must be done on this very night — that work of a craven slave!

He stooped low, pressed the hem of her skirt to his lips, with a muttered command —

“Tell him I would not stay,” and was gone suddenly from her, silent, without as much as a footfall in the dark night.

She sat still, her head resting indolently against the wall, and her little feet in white stockings and black slippers crossed over each other. Old Giorgio, coming out, did not seem to be surprised at the intelligence as

much as she had vaguely feared. For she was full of inexplicable fear now — fear of everything and everybody except of her Giovanni and his treasure. But that was incredible.

The heroic Garibaldino accepted Nostromo's abrupt departure with a sagacious indulgence. He remembered his own feelings, and exhibited a masculine penetration of the true state of the case.

"Va bene. Let him go. Ha! ha! No matter how fair the woman, it galls a little. Liberty, liberty. There's more than one kind! He has said the great word, and son Gian' Battista is not tame." He seemed to be instructing the motionless and scared Giselle. . . . "A man should not be tame," he added, dogmatically out of the doorway. Her stillness and silence seemed to displease him. "Do not give way to the enviousness of your sister's lot," he admonished her, very grave, in his deep voice.

Presently he had to come to the door again to call in his younger daughter. It was late. He shouted her name three times before she even moved her head. Left alone, she had become the helpless prey of astonishment. She walked into the bedroom she shared with Linda like a person profoundly asleep. That aspect was so marked that even old Giorgio, spectacled, raising his eyes from the Bible, shook his head as she shut the door behind her.

She walked right across the room without looking at anything, and sat down at once by the open window. Linda, stealing down from the tower in the exuberance of her happiness, found her with a lighted candle at her back, facing the black night full of sighing gusts of wind and the sound of distant showers — a true night of the gulf, too dense for the eye of God and the wiles of the devil. She did not turn her head at the opening of the door.

There was something in that immobility which reached Linda in the depths of her paradise. The elder sister guessed angrily: the child is thinking of that wretched Ramirez. Linda longed to talk. She said in her arbitrary voice, "Giselle!" and was not answered by the slightest movement.

The girl that was going to live in a palace and walk on ground of her own was ready to die with terror. Not for anything in the world would she have turned her head to face her sister. Her heart was beating madly. She said with subdued haste —

"Do not speak to me. I am praying."

Linda, disappointed, went out quietly; and Giselle sat on unbelieving, lost, dazed, patient, as if waiting for the confirmation of the incredible. The

hopeless blackness of the clouds seemed part of a dream, too. She waited.

She did not wait in vain. The man whose soul was dead within him, creeping out of the ravine, weighted with silver, had seen the gleam of the lighted window, and could not help retracing his steps from the beach.

On that impenetrable background, obliterating the lofty mountains by the seaboard, she saw the slave of the San Tome silver, as if by an extraordinary power of a miracle. She accepted his return as if henceforth the world could hold no surprise for all eternity.

She rose, compelled and rigid, and began to speak long before the light from within fell upon the face of the approaching man.

“You have come back to carry me off. It is well! Open thy arms, Giovanni, my lover. I am coming.”

His prudent footsteps stopped, and with his eyes glistening wildly, he spoke in a harsh voice:

“Not yet. I must grow rich slowly.” . . . A threatening note came into his tone. “Do not forget that you have a thief for your lover.”

“Yes! Yes!” she whispered, hastily. “Come nearer! Listen! Do not give me up, Giovanni! Never, never! . . . I will be patient! . . .”

Her form drooped consolingly over the low casement towards the slave of the unlawful treasure. The light in the room went out, and weighted with silver, the magnificent Capataz clasped her round her white neck in the darkness of the gulf as a drowning man clutches at a straw.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

On the day Mrs. Gould was going, in Dr. Monygham's words, to "give a tertulia," Captain Fidanza went down the side of his schooner lying in Sulaco harbour, calm, unbending, deliberate in the way he sat down in his dinghy and took up his sculls. He was later than usual. The afternoon was well advanced before he landed on the beach of the Great Isabel, and with a steady pace climbed the slope of the island.

From a distance he made out Giselle sitting in a chair tilted back against the end of the house, under the window of the girl's room. She had her embroidery in her hands, and held it well up to her eyes. The tranquillity of that girlish figure exasperated the feeling of perpetual struggle and strife he carried in his breast. He became angry. It seemed to him that she ought to hear the clanking of his fetters — his silver fetters, from afar. And while ashore that day, he had met the doctor with the evil eye, who had looked at him very hard.

The raising of her eyes mollified him. They smiled in their flower-like freshness straight upon his heart. Then she frowned. It was a warning to be cautious. He stopped some distance away, and in a loud, indifferent tone, said —

"Good day, Giselle. Is Linda up yet?"

"Yes. She is in the big room with father."

He approached then, and, looking through the window into the bedroom for fear of being detected by Linda returning there for some reason, he said, moving only his lips —

"You love me?"

"More than my life." She went on with her embroidery under his contemplating gaze and continued to speak, looking at her work, "Or I could not live. I could not, Giovanni. For this life is like death. Oh, Giovanni, I shall perish if you do not take me away."

He smiled carelessly. "I will come to the window when it's dark," he said.

"No, don't, Giovanni. Not-to-night. Linda and father have been talking together for a long time today."

"What about?"

"Ramirez, I fancy I heard. I do not know. I am afraid. I am always afraid. It is like dying a thousand times a day. Your love is to me like your treasure

to you. It is there, but I can never get enough of it.”

He looked at her very still. She was beautiful. His desire had grown within him. He had two masters now. But she was incapable of sustained emotion. She was sincere in what she said, but she slept placidly at night. When she saw him she flamed up always. Then only an increased taciturnity marked the change in her. She was afraid of betraying herself. She was afraid of pain, of bodily harm, of sharp words, of facing anger, and witnessing violence. For her soul was light and tender with a pagan sincerity in its impulses. She murmured —

“Give up the palazzo, Giovanni, and the vineyard on the hills, for which we are starving our love.”

She ceased, seeing Linda standing silent at the corner of the house.

Nostromo turned to his affianced wife with a greeting, and was amazed at her sunken eyes, at her hollow cheeks, at the air of illness and anguish in her face.

“Have you been ill?” he asked, trying to put some concern into this question.

Her black eyes blazed at him. “Am I thinner?” she asked.

“Yes — perhaps — a little.”

“And older?”

“Every day counts — for all of us.”

“I shall go grey, I fear, before the ring is on my finger,” she said, slowly, keeping her gaze fastened upon him.

She waited for what he would say, rolling down her turned-up sleeves.

“No fear of that,” he said, absently.

She turned away as if it had been something final, and busied herself with household cares while Nostromo talked with her father. Conversation with the old Garibaldino was not easy. Age had left his faculties unimpaired, only they seemed to have withdrawn somewhere deep within him. His answers were slow in coming, with an effect of august gravity. But that day he was more animated, quicker; there seemed to be more life in the old lion. He was uneasy for the integrity of his honour. He believed Sidoni’s warning as to Ramirez’s designs upon his younger daughter. And he did not trust her. She was flighty. He said nothing of his cares to “Son Gian’ Battista.” It was a touch of senile vanity. He wanted to show that he was equal yet to the task of guarding alone the honour of his house.

Nostromo went away early. As soon as he had disappeared, walking towards the beach, Linda stepped over the threshold and, with a haggard smile, sat down by the side of her father.

Ever since that Sunday, when the infatuated and desperate Ramirez had waited for her on the wharf, she had no doubts whatever. The jealous ravings of that man were no revelation. They had only fixed with precision, as with a nail driven into her heart, that sense of unreality and deception which, instead of bliss and security, she had found in her intercourse with her promised husband. She had passed on, pouring indignation and scorn upon Ramirez; but, that Sunday, she nearly died of wretchedness and shame, lying on the carved and lettered stone of Teresa's grave, subscribed for by the engine-drivers and the fitters of the railway workshops, in sign of their respect for the hero of Italian Unity. Old Viola had not been able to carry out his desire of burying his wife in the sea; and Linda wept upon the stone.

The gratuitous outrage appalled her. If he wished to break her heart — well and good. Everything was permitted to Gian' Battista. But why trample upon the pieces; why seek to humiliate her spirit? Aha! He could not break that. She dried her tears. And Giselle! Giselle! The little one that, ever since she could toddle, had always clung to her skirt for protection. What duplicity! But she could not help it probably. When there was a man in the case the poor featherheaded wretch could not help herself.

Linda had a good share of the Viola stoicism. She resolved to say nothing. But woman-like she put passion into her stoicism. Giselle's short answers, prompted by fearful caution, drove her beside herself by their curtness that resembled disdain. One day she flung herself upon the chair in which her indolent sister was lying and impressed the mark of her teeth at the base of the whitest neck in Sulaco. Giselle cried out. But she had her share of the Viola heroism. Ready to faint with terror, she only said, in a lazy voice, "Madre de Dios! Are you going to eat me alive, Linda?" And this outburst passed off leaving no trace upon the situation. "She knows nothing. She cannot know any thing," reflected Giselle. "Perhaps it is not true. It cannot be true," Linda tried to persuade herself.

But when she saw Captain Fidanza for the first time after her meeting with the distracted Ramirez, the certitude of her misfortune returned. She watched him from the doorway go away to his boat, asking herself stoically, "Will they meet to-night?" She made up her mind not to leave the tower for

a second. When he had disappeared she came out and sat down by her father.

The venerable Garibaldino felt, in his own words, “a young man yet.” In one way or another a good deal of talk about Ramirez had reached him of late; and his contempt and dislike of that man who obviously was not what his son would have been, had made him restless. He slept very little now; but for several nights past instead of reading — or only sitting, with Mrs. Gould’s silver spectacles on his nose, before the open Bible, he had been prowling actively all about the island with his old gun, on watch over his honour.

Linda, laying her thin brown hand on his knee, tried to soothe his excitement. Ramirez was not in Sulaco. Nobody knew where he was. He was gone. His talk of what he would do meant nothing.

“No,” the old man interrupted. “But son Gian’ Battista told me — quite of himself — that the cowardly esclavo was drinking and gambling with the rascals of Zapiga, over there on the north side of the gulf. He may get some of the worst scoundrels of that scoundrelly town of negroes to help him in his attempt upon the little one. . . . But I am not so old. No!”

She argued earnestly against the probability of any attempt being made; and at last the old man fell silent, chewing his white moustache. Women had their obstinate notions which must be humoured — his poor wife was like that, and Linda resembled her mother. It was not seemly for a man to argue. “May be. May be,” he mumbled.

She was by no means easy in her mind. She loved Nostromo. She turned her eyes upon Giselle, sitting at a distance, with something of maternal tenderness, and the jealous anguish of a rival outraged in her defeat. Then she rose and walked over to her.

“Listen — you,” she said, roughly.

The invincible candour of the gaze, raised up all violet and dew, excited her rage and admiration. She had beautiful eyes — the Chica — this vile thing of white flesh and black deception. She did not know whether she wanted to tear them out with shouts of vengeance or cover up their mysterious and shameless innocence with kisses of pity and love. And suddenly they became empty, gazing blankly at her, except for a little fear not quite buried deep enough with all the other emotions in Giselle’s heart.

Linda said, “Ramirez is boasting in town that he will carry you off from the island.”



“What folly!” answered the other, and in a perversity born of long restraint, she added: “He is not the man,” in a jesting tone with a trembling audacity.

“No?” said Linda, through her clenched teeth. “Is he not? Well, then, look to it; because father has been walking about with a loaded gun at night.”

“It is not good for him. You must tell him not to, Linda. He will not listen to me.”

“I shall say nothing — never any more — to anybody,” cried Linda, passionately.

This could not last, thought Giselle. Giovanni must take her away soon — the very next time he came. She would not suffer these terrors for ever so much silver. To speak with her sister made her ill. But she was not uneasy at her father’s watchfulness. She had begged Nostromo not to come to the window that night. He had promised to keep away for this once. And she did not know, could not guess or imagine, that he had another reason for coming on the island.

Linda had gone straight to the tower. It was time to light up. She unlocked the little door, and went heavily up the spiral staircase, carrying her love for the magnificent Capataz de Cargadores like an ever-increasing load of shameful fetters. No; she could not throw it off. No; let Heaven dispose of these two. And moving about the lantern, filled with twilight and the sheen of the moon, with careful movements she lighted the lamp. Then her arms fell along her body.

“And with our mother looking on,” she murmured. “My own sister — the Chica!”

The whole refracting apparatus, with its brass fittings and rings of prisms, glittered and sparkled like a domeshaped shrine of diamonds, containing not a lamp, but some sacred flame, dominating the sea. And Linda, the keeper, in black, with a pale face, drooped low in a wooden chair, alone with her jealousy, far above the shames and passions of the earth. A strange, dragging pain as if somebody were pulling her about brutally by her dark hair with bronze glints, made her put her hands up to her temples. They would meet. They would meet. And she knew where, too. At the window. The sweat of torture fell in drops on her cheeks, while the moonlight in the offing closed as if with a colossal bar of silver the entrance of the Placid

Gulf — the sombre cavern of clouds and stillness in the surf-fretted seaboard.

Linda Viola stood up suddenly with a finger on her lip. He loved neither her nor her sister. The whole thing seemed so objectless as to frighten her, and also give her some hope. Why did he not carry her off? What prevented him? He was incomprehensible. What were they waiting for? For what end were these two lying and deceiving? Not for the ends of their love. There was no such thing. The hope of regaining him for herself made her break her vow of not leaving the tower that night. She must talk at once to her father, who was wise, and would understand. She ran down the spiral stairs. At the moment of opening the door at the bottom she heard the sound of the first shot ever fired on the Great Isabel.

She felt a shock, as though the bullet had struck her breast. She ran on without pausing. The cottage was dark. She cried at the door, "Giselle! Giselle!" then dashed round the corner and screamed her sister's name at the open window, without getting an answer; but as she was rushing, distracted, round the house, Giselle came out of the door, and darted past her, running silently, her hair loose, and her eyes staring straight ahead. She seemed to skim along the grass as if on tiptoe, and vanished.

Linda walked on slowly, with her arms stretched out before her. All was still on the island; she did not know where she was going. The tree under which Martin Decoud spent his last days, beholding life like a succession of senseless images, threw a large blotch of black shade upon the grass. Suddenly she saw her father, standing quietly all alone in the moonlight.

The Garibaldino — big, erect, with his snow-white hair and beard — had a monumental repose in his immobility, leaning upon a rifle. She put her hand upon his arm lightly. He never stirred.

"What have you done?" she asked, in her ordinary voice.

"I have shot Ramirez — infame!" he answered, with his eyes directed to where the shade was blackest. "Like a thief he came, and like a thief he fell. The child had to be protected."

He did not offer to move an inch, to advance a single step. He stood there, rugged and unstirring, like a statue of an old man guarding the honour of his house. Linda removed her trembling hand from his arm, firm and steady like an arm of stone, and, without a word, entered the blackness of the shade. She saw a stir of formless shapes on the ground, and stopped short. A murmur of despair and tears grew louder to her strained hearing.

“I entreated you not to come to-night. Oh, my Giovanni! And you promised. Oh! Why — why did you come, Giovanni?”

It was her sister’s voice. It broke on a heartrending sob. And the voice of the resourceful Capataz de Cargadores, master and slave of the San Tome treasure, who had been caught unawares by old Giorgio while stealing across the open towards the ravine to get some more silver, answered careless and cool, but sounding startlingly weak from the ground.

“It seemed as though I could not live through the night without seeing thee once more — my star, my little flower.”

The brilliant tertulia was just over, the last guests had departed, and the Senor Administrador had gone to his room already, when Dr. Monygham, who had been expected in the evening but had not turned up, arrived driving along the wood-block pavement under the electric-lamps of the deserted Calle de la Constitucion, and found the great gateway of the Casa still open.

He limped in, stumped up the stairs, and found the fat and sleek Basilio on the point of turning off the lights in the sala. The prosperous majordomo remained open-mouthed at this late invasion.

“Don’t put out the lights,” commanded the doctor. “I want to see the senora.”

“The senora is in the Senor Administrador’s cancellaria,” said Basilio, in an unctuous voice. “The Senor Administrador starts for the mountain in an hour. There is some trouble with the workmen to be feared, it appears. A shameless people without reason and decency. And idle, senor. Idle.”

“You are shamelessly lazy and imbecile yourself,” said the doctor, with that faculty for exasperation which made him so generally beloved. “Don’t put the lights out.”

Basilio retired with dignity. Dr. Monygham, waiting in the brilliantly lighted sala, heard presently a door close at the further end of the house. A jingle of spurs died out. The Senor Administrador was off to the mountain.

With a measured swish of her long train, flashing with jewels and the shimmer of silk, her delicate head bowed as if under the weight of a mass of fair hair, in which the silver threads were lost, the “first lady of Sulaco,” as Captain Mitchell used to describe her, moved along the lighted corredor, wealthy beyond great dreams of wealth, considered, loved, respected, honoured, and as solitary as any human being had ever been, perhaps, on this earth.

The doctor's "Mrs. Gould! One minute!" stopped her with a start at the door of the lighted and empty sala. From the similarity of mood and circumstance, the sight of the doctor, standing there all alone amongst the groups of furniture, recalled to her emotional memory her unexpected meeting with Martin Decoud; she seemed to hear in the silence the voice of that man, dead miserably so many years ago, pronounce the words, "Antonia left her fan here." But it was the doctor's voice that spoke, a little altered by his excitement. She remarked his shining eyes.

"Mrs. Gould, you are wanted. Do you know what has happened? You remember what I told you yesterday about Nostromo. Well, it seems that a lancha, a decked boat, coming from Zapiga, with four negroes in her, passing close to the Great Isabel, was hailed from the cliff by a woman's voice — Linda's, as a matter of fact — commanding them (it's a moonlight night) to go round to the beach and take up a wounded man to the town. The patron (from whom I've heard all this), of course, did so at once. He told me that when they got round to the low side of the Great Isabel, they found Linda Viola waiting for them. They followed her: she led them under a tree not far from the cottage. There they found Nostromo lying on the ground with his head in the younger girl's lap, and father Viola standing some distance off leaning on his gun. Under Linda's direction they got a table out of the cottage for a stretcher, after breaking off the legs. They are here, Mrs. Gould. I mean Nostromo and — and Giselle. The negroes brought him in to the first-aid hospital near the harbour. He made the attendant send for me. But it was not me he wanted to see — it was you, Mrs. Gould! It was you."

"Me?" whispered Mrs. Gould, shrinking a little.

"Yes, you!" the doctor burst out. "He begged me — his enemy, as he thinks — to bring you to him at once. It seems he has something to say to you alone."

"Impossible!" murmured Mrs. Gould.

"He said to me, 'Remind her that I have done something to keep a roof over her head.' . . . Mrs. Gould," the doctor pursued, in the greatest excitement. "Do you remember the silver? The silver in the lighter — that was lost?"

Mrs. Gould remembered. But she did not say she hated the mere mention of that silver. Frankness personified, she remembered with an exaggerated horror that for the first and last time of her life she had concealed the truth

from her husband about that very silver. She had been corrupted by her fears at that time, and she had never forgiven herself. Moreover, that silver, which would never have come down if her husband had been made acquainted with the news brought by Decoud, had been in a roundabout way nearly the cause of Dr. Monygham's death. And these things appeared to her very dreadful.

"Was it lost, though?" the doctor exclaimed. "I've always felt that there was a mystery about our Nostromo ever since. I do believe he wants now, at the point of death — —"

"The point of death?" repeated Mrs. Gould.

"Yes. Yes. . . . He wants perhaps to tell you something concerning that silver which — —"

"Oh, no! No!" exclaimed Mrs. Gould, in a low voice. "Isn't it lost and done with? Isn't there enough treasure without it to make everybody in the world miserable?"

The doctor remained still, in a submissive, disappointed silence. At last he ventured, very low —

"And there is that Viola girl, Giselle. What are we to do? It looks as though father and sister had — —"

Mrs. Gould admitted that she felt in duty bound to do her best for these girls.

"I have a volante here," the doctor said. "If you don't mind getting into that — —"

He waited, all impatience, till Mrs. Gould reappeared, having thrown over her dress a grey cloak with a deep hood.

It was thus that, cloaked and monastically hooded over her evening costume, this woman, full of endurance and compassion, stood by the side of the bed on which the splendid Capataz de Cargadores lay stretched out motionless on his back. The whiteness of sheets and pillows gave a sombre and energetic relief to his bronzed face, to the dark, nervous hands, so good on a tiller, upon a bridle and on a trigger, lying open and idle upon a white coverlet.

"She is innocent," the Capataz was saying in a deep and level voice, as though afraid that a louder word would break the slender hold his spirit still kept upon his body. "She is innocent. It is I alone. But no matter. For these things I would answer to no man or woman alive."

He paused. Mrs. Gould's face, very white within the shadow of the hood, bent over him with an invincible and dreary sadness. And the low sobs of Giselle Viola, kneeling at the end of the bed, her gold hair with coppery gleams loose and scattered over the Capataz's feet, hardly troubled the silence of the room.

"Ha! Old Giorgio — the guardian of thine honour! Fancy the Vecchio coming upon me so light of foot, so steady of aim. I myself could have done no better. But the price of a charge of powder might have been saved. The honour was safe. . . . Senora, she would have followed to the end of the world Nostromo the thief. . . . I have said the word. The spell is broken!"

A low moan from the girl made him cast his eyes down.

"I cannot see her. . . . No matter," he went on, with the shadow of the old magnificent carelessness in his voice. "One kiss is enough, if there is no time for more. An airy soul, senora! Bright and warm, like sunshine — soon clouded, and soon serene. They would crush it there between them. Senora, cast on her the eye of your compassion, as famed from one end of the land to the other as the courage and daring of the man who speaks to you. She will console herself in time. And even Ramirez is not a bad fellow. I am not angry. No! It is not Ramirez who overcame the Capataz of the Sulaco Cargadores." He paused, made an effort, and in louder voice, a little wildly, declared —

"I die betrayed — betrayed by — — "

But he did not say by whom or by what he was dying betrayed.

"She would not have betrayed me," he began again, opening his eyes very wide. "She was faithful. We were going very far — very soon. I could have torn myself away from that accursed treasure for her. For that child I would have left boxes and boxes of it — full. And Decoud took four. Four ingots. Why? Picardia! To betray me? How could I give back the treasure with four ingots missing? They would have said I had purloined them. The doctor would have said that. Alas! it holds me yet!"

Mrs. Gould bent low, fascinated — cold with apprehension.

"What became of Don Martin on that night, Nostromo?"

"Who knows? I wondered what would become of me. Now I know. Death was to come upon me unawares. He went away! He betrayed me. And you think I have killed him! You are all alike, you fine people. The silver has killed me. It has held me. It holds me yet. Nobody knows where it is. But you are the wife of Don Carlos, who put it into my hands and said,

‘Save it on your life.’ And when I returned, and you all thought it was lost, what do I hear? ‘It was nothing of importance. Let it go. Up, Nostromo, the faithful, and ride away to save us, for dear life!’“

“Nostromo!” Mrs. Gould whispered, bending very low. “I, too, have hated the idea of that silver from the bottom of my heart.”

“Marvellous! — that one of you should hate the wealth that you know so well how to take from the hands of the poor. The world rests upon the poor, as old Giorgio says. You have been always good to the poor. But there is something accursed in wealth. Senora, shall I tell you where the treasure is? To you alone. . . . Shining! Incorruptible!”

A pained, involuntary reluctance lingered in his tone, in his eyes, plain to the woman with the genius of sympathetic intuition. She averted her glance from the miserable subjection of the dying man, appalled, wishing to hear no more of the silver.

“No, Capataz,” she said. “No one misses it now. Let it be lost for ever.”

After hearing these words, Nostromo closed his eyes, uttered no word, made no movement. Outside the door of the sick-room Dr. Monygham, excited to the highest pitch, his eyes shining with eagerness, came up to the two women.

“Now, Mrs. Gould,” he said, almost brutally in his impatience, “tell me, was I right? There is a mystery. You have got the word of it, have you not? He told you — — ”

“He told me nothing,” said Mrs. Gould, steadily.

The light of his temperamental enmity to Nostromo went out of Dr. Monygham’s eyes. He stepped back submissively. He did not believe Mrs. Gould. But her word was law. He accepted her denial like an inexplicable fatality affirming the victory of Nostromo’s genius over his own. Even before that woman, whom he loved with secret devotion, he had been defeated by the magnificent Capataz de Cargadores, the man who had lived his own life on the assumption of unbroken fidelity, rectitude, and courage!

“Pray send at once somebody for my carriage,” spoke Mrs. Gould from within her hood. Then, turning to Giselle Viola, “Come nearer me, child; come closer. We will wait here.”

Giselle Viola, heartbroken and childlike, her face veiled in her falling hair, crept up to her side. Mrs. Gould slipped her hand through the arm of the unworthy daughter of old Viola, the immaculate republican, the hero without a stain. Slowly, gradually, as a withered flower droops, the head of

the girl, who would have followed a thief to the end of the world, rested on the shoulder of Dona Emilia, the first lady of Sulaco, the wife of the Senor Administrador of the San Tome mine. And Mrs. Gould, feeling her suppressed sobbing, nervous and excited, had the first and only moment of bitterness in her life. It was worthy of Dr. Monygham himself.

“Console yourself, child. Very soon he would have forgotten you for his treasure.”

“Senora, he loved me. He loved me,” Giselle whispered, despairingly. “He loved me as no one had ever been loved before.”

“I have been loved, too,” Mrs. Gould said in a severe tone.

Giselle clung to her convulsively. “Oh, senora, but you shall live adored to the end of your life,” she sobbed out.

Mrs. Gould kept an unbroken silence till the carriage arrived. She helped in the half-fainting girl. After the doctor had shut the door of the landau, she leaned over to him.

“You can do nothing?” she whispered.

“No, Mrs. Gould. Moreover, he won’t let us touch him. It does not matter. I just had one look. . . . Useless.”

But he promised to see old Viola and the other girl that very night. He could get the police-boat to take him off to the island. He remained in the street, looking after the landau rolling away slowly behind the white mules.

The rumour of some accident — an accident to Captain Fidanza — had been spreading along the new quays with their rows of lamps and the dark shapes of towering cranes. A knot of night prowlers — the poorest of the poor — hung about the door of the first-aid hospital, whispering in the moonlight of the empty street.

There was no one with the wounded man but the pale photographer, small, frail, bloodthirsty, the hater of capitalists, perched on a high stool near the head of the bed with his knees up and his chin in his hands. He had been fetched by a comrade who, working late on the wharf, had heard from a negro belonging to a lancha, that Captain Fidanza had been brought ashore mortally wounded.

“Have you any dispositions to make, comrade?” he asked, anxiously. “Do not forget that we want money for our work. The rich must be fought with their own weapons.”

Nostromo made no answer. The other did not insist, remaining huddled up on the stool, shock-headed, wildly hairy, like a hunchbacked monkey.



Then, after a long silence —

“Comrade Fidanza,” he began, solemnly, “you have refused all aid from that doctor. Is he really a dangerous enemy of the people?”

In the dimly lit room Nostromo rolled his head slowly on the pillow and opened his eyes, directing at the weird figure perched by his bedside a glance of enigmatic and profound inquiry. Then his head rolled back, his eyelids fell, and the Capataz de Cargadores died without a word or moan after an hour of immobility, broken by short shudders testifying to the most atrocious sufferings.

Dr. Monygham, going out in the police-galley to the islands, beheld the glitter of the moon upon the gulf and the high black shape of the Great Isabel sending a shaft of light afar, from under the canopy of clouds.

“Pull easy,” he said, wondering what he would find there. He tried to imagine Linda and her father, and discovered a strange reluctance within himself. “Pull easy,” he repeated.

\* \* \* \* \*

From the moment he fired at the thief of his honour, Giorgio Viola had not stirred from the spot. He stood, his old gun grounded, his hand grasping the barrel near the muzzle. After the lancha carrying off Nostromo for ever from her had left the shore, Linda, coming up, stopped before him. He did not seem to be aware of her presence, but when, losing her forced calmness, she cried out —

“Do you know whom you have killed?” he answered —

“Ramirez the vagabond.”

White, and staring insanely at her father, Linda laughed in his face. After a time he joined her faintly in a deep-toned and distant echo of her peals. Then she stopped, and the old man spoke as if startled —

“He cried out in son Gian’ Battista’s voice.”

The gun fell from his opened hand, but the arm remained extended for a moment as if still supported. Linda seized it roughly.

“You are too old to understand. Come into the house.”

He let her lead him. On the threshold he stumbled heavily, nearly coming to the ground together with his daughter. His excitement, his activity of the last few days, had been like the flare of a dying lamp. He caught at the back of his chair.

“In son Gian’ Battista’s voice,” he repeated in a severe tone. “I heard him — Ramirez — the miserable — — ”

Linda helped him into the chair, and, bending low, hissed into his ear —

“You have killed Gian’ Battista.”

The old man smiled under his thick moustache. Women had strange fancies.

“Where is the child?” he asked, surprised at the penetrating chilliness of the air and the unwonted dimness of the lamp by which he used to sit up half the night with the open Bible before him.

Linda hesitated a moment, then averted her eyes.

“She is asleep,” she said. “We shall talk of her tomorrow.”

She could not bear to look at him. He filled her with terror and with an almost unbearable feeling of pity. She had observed the change that came over him. He would never understand what he had done; and even to her the whole thing remained incomprehensible. He said with difficulty —

“Give me the book.”

Linda laid on the table the closed volume in its worn leather cover, the Bible given him ages ago by an Englishman in Palermo.

“The child had to be protected,” he said, in a strange, mournful voice.

Behind his chair Linda wrung her hands, crying without noise. Suddenly she started for the door. He heard her move.

“Where are you going?” he asked.

“To the light,” she answered, turning round to look at him balefully.

“The light! Si — duty.”

Very upright, white-haired, leonine, heroic in his absorbed quietness, he felt in the pocket of his red shirt for the spectacles given him by Dona Emilia. He put them on. After a long period of immobility he opened the book, and from on high looked through the glasses at the small print in double columns. A rigid, stern expression settled upon his features with a slight frown, as if in response to some gloomy thought or unpleasant sensation. But he never detached his eyes from the book while he swayed forward, gently, gradually, till his snow-white head rested upon the open pages. A wooden clock ticked methodically on the white-washed wall, and growing slowly cold the Garibaldino lay alone, rugged, undecayed, like an old oak uprooted by a treacherous gust of wind.

The light of the Great Isabel burned unfailing above the lost treasure of the San Tome mine. Into the bluish sheen of a night without stars the lantern

sent out a yellow beam towards the far horizon. Like a black speck upon the shining panes, Linda, crouching in the outer gallery, rested her head on the rail. The moon, drooping in the western board, looked at her radiantly.

Below, at the foot of the cliff, the regular splash of oars from a passing boat ceased, and Dr. Monygham stood up in the stern sheets.

“Linda!” he shouted, throwing back his head. “Linda!”

Linda stood up. She had recognized the voice.

“Is he dead?” she cried, bending over.

“Yes, my poor girl. I am coming round,” the doctor answered from below. “Pull to the beach,” he said to the rowers.

Linda’s black figure detached itself upright on the light of the lantern with her arms raised above her head as though she were going to throw herself over.

“It is I who loved you,” she whispered, with a face as set and white as marble in the moonlight. “I! Only I! She will forget thee, killed miserably for her pretty face. I cannot understand. I cannot understand. But I shall never forget thee. Never!”

She stood silent and still, collecting her strength to throw all her fidelity, her pain, bewilderment, and despair into one great cry.

“Never! Gian’ Battista!”

Dr. Monygham, pulling round in the police-galley, heard the name pass over his head. It was another of Nostromo’s triumphs, the greatest, the most enviable, the most sinister of all. In that true cry of undying passion that seemed to ring aloud from Punta Mala to Azuera and away to the bright line of the horizon, overhung by a big white cloud shining like a mass of solid silver, the genius of the magnificent Capataz de Cargadores dominated the dark gulf containing his conquests of treasure and love.

# ***THE SECRET AGENT***



## A SIMPLE TALE

First published in 1907, this novel is set in London in 1886 and concerns the life of Mr. Verloc and his job as a spy. *The Secret Agent* is notable as a political novel, moving away from Conrad's typical tales of seafaring. The novel also deals broadly with the notions of anarchism, espionage and terrorism.

TO

H. G. WELLS

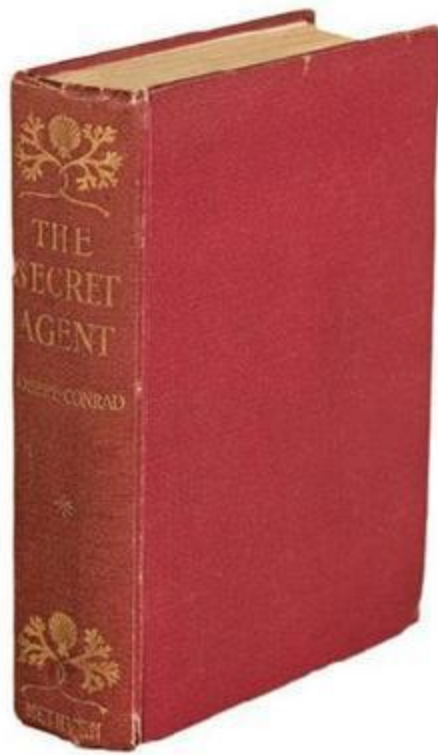
THE CHRONICLER OF MR LEWISHAM'S LOVE

THE BIOGRAPHER OF KIPPS AND THE

HISTORIAN OF THE AGES TO COME

THIS SIMPLE TALE OF THE XIX CENTURY

IS AFFECTIONATELY OFFERED



*The first edition*

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*Conrad with his son at Pent Farm, Ashford. It was in this home that Conrad wrote 'The Secret Agent'*



## CHAPTER I

Mr Verloc, going out in the morning, left his shop nominally in charge of his brother-in-law. It could be done, because there was very little business at any time, and practically none at all before the evening. Mr Verloc cared but little about his ostensible business. And, moreover, his wife was in charge of his brother-in-law.

The shop was small, and so was the house. It was one of those grimy brick houses which existed in large quantities before the era of reconstruction dawned upon London. The shop was a square box of a place, with the front glazed in small panes. In the daytime the door remained closed; in the evening it stood discreetly but suspiciously ajar.

The window contained photographs of more or less undressed dancing girls; nondescript packages in wrappers like patent medicines; closed yellow paper envelopes, very flimsy, and marked two-and-six in heavy black figures; a few numbers of ancient French comic publications hung across a string as if to dry; a dingy blue china bowl, a casket of black wood, bottles of marking ink, and rubber stamps; a few books, with titles hinting at impropriety; a few apparently old copies of obscure newspapers, badly printed, with titles like *The Torch*, *The Gong* — rousing titles. And the two gas jets inside the panes were always turned low, either for economy's sake or for the sake of the customers.

These customers were either very young men, who hung about the window for a time before slipping in suddenly; or men of a more mature age, but looking generally as if they were not in funds. Some of that last kind had the collars of their overcoats turned right up to their moustaches, and traces of mud on the bottom of their nether garments, which had the appearance of being much worn and not very valuable. And the legs inside them did not, as a general rule, seem of much account either. With their hands plunged deep in the side pockets of their coats, they dodged in sideways, one shoulder first, as if afraid to start the bell going.

The bell, hung on the door by means of a curved ribbon of steel, was difficult to circumvent. It was hopelessly cracked; but of an evening, at the slightest provocation, it clattered behind the customer with impudent virulence.

It clattered; and at that signal, through the dusty glass door behind the painted deal counter, Mr Verloc would issue hastily from the parlour at the

back. His eyes were naturally heavy; he had an air of having wallowed, fully dressed, all day on an unmade bed. Another man would have felt such an appearance a distinct disadvantage. In a commercial transaction of the retail order much depends on the seller's engaging and amiable aspect. But Mr Verloc knew his business, and remained undisturbed by any sort of æsthetic doubt about his appearance. With a firm, steady-eyed impudence, which seemed to hold back the threat of some abominable menace, he would proceed to sell over the counter some object looking obviously and scandalously not worth the money which passed in the transaction: a small cardboard box with apparently nothing inside, for instance, or one of those carefully closed yellow flimsy envelopes, or a soiled volume in paper covers with a promising title. Now and then it happened that one of the faded, yellow dancing girls would get sold to an amateur, as though she had been alive and young.

Sometimes it was Mrs Verloc who would appear at the call of the cracked bell. Winnie Verloc was a young woman with a full bust, in a tight bodice, and with broad hips. Her hair was very tidy. Steady-eyed like her husband, she preserved an air of unfathomable indifference behind the rampart of the counter. Then the customer of comparatively tender years would get suddenly disconcerted at having to deal with a woman, and with rage in his heart would proffer a request for a bottle of marking ink, retail value sixpence (price in Verloc's shop one-and-sixpence), which, once outside, he would drop stealthily into the gutter.

The evening visitors — the men with collars turned up and soft hats rammed down — nodded familiarly to Mrs Verloc, and with a muttered greeting, lifted up the flap at the end of the counter in order to pass into the back parlour, which gave access to a passage and to a steep flight of stairs. The door of the shop was the only means of entrance to the house in which Mr Verloc carried on his business of a seller of shady wares, exercised his vocation of a protector of society, and cultivated his domestic virtues. These last were pronounced. He was thoroughly domesticated. Neither his spiritual, nor his mental, nor his physical needs were of the kind to take him much abroad. He found at home the ease of his body and the peace of his conscience, together with Mrs Verloc's wifely attentions and Mrs Verloc's mother's deferential regard.

Winnie's mother was a stout, wheezy woman, with a large brown face. She wore a black wig under a white cap. Her swollen legs rendered her

inactive. She considered herself to be of French descent, which might have been true; and after a good many years of married life with a licensed victualler of the more common sort, she provided for the years of widowhood by letting furnished apartments for gentlemen near Vauxhall Bridge Road in a square once of some splendour and still included in the district of Belgravia. This topographical fact was of some advantage in advertising her rooms; but the patrons of the worthy widow were not exactly of the fashionable kind. Such as they were, her daughter Winnie helped to look after them. Traces of the French descent which the widow boasted of were apparent in Winnie too. They were apparent in the extremely neat and artistic arrangement of her glossy dark hair. Winnie had also other charms: her youth; her full, rounded form; her clear complexion; the provocation of her unfathomable reserve, which never went so far as to prevent conversation, carried on on the lodgers' part with animation, and on hers with an equable amiability. It must be that Mr Verloc was susceptible to these fascinations. Mr Verloc was an intermittent patron. He came and went without any very apparent reason. He generally arrived in London (like the influenza) from the Continent, only he arrived unheralded by the Press; and his visitations set in with great severity. He breakfasted in bed, and remained wallowing there with an air of quiet enjoyment till noon every day — and sometimes even to a later hour. But when he went out he seemed to experience a great difficulty in finding his way back to his temporary home in the Belgravian square. He left it late, and returned to it early — as early as three or four in the morning; and on waking up at ten addressed Winnie, bringing in the breakfast tray, with jocular, exhausted civility, in the hoarse, failing tones of a man who had been talking vehemently for many hours together. His prominent, heavy-lidded eyes rolled sideways amorously and languidly, the bedclothes were pulled up to his chin, and his dark smooth moustache covered his thick lips capable of much honeyed banter.

In Winnie's mother's opinion Mr Verloc was a very nice gentleman. From her life's experience gathered in various "business houses" the good woman had taken into her retirement an ideal of gentlemanliness as exhibited by the patrons of private-saloon bars. Mr Verloc approached that ideal; he attained it, in fact.

"Of course, we'll take over your furniture, mother," Winnie had remarked.

The lodging-house was to be given up. It seems it would not answer to carry it on. It would have been too much trouble for Mr Verloc. It would not have been convenient for his other business. What his business was he did not say; but after his engagement to Winnie he took the trouble to get up before noon, and descending the basement stairs, make himself pleasant to Winnie's mother in the breakfast-room downstairs where she had her motionless being. He stroked the cat, poked the fire, had his lunch served to him there. He left its slightly stuffy cosiness with evident reluctance, but, all the same, remained out till the night was far advanced. He never offered to take Winnie to theatres, as such a nice gentleman ought to have done. His evenings were occupied. His work was in a way political, he told Winnie once. She would have, he warned her, to be very nice to his political friends.

And with her straight, unfathomable glance she answered that she would be so, of course.

How much more he told her as to his occupation it was impossible for Winnie's mother to discover. The married couple took her over with the furniture. The mean aspect of the shop surprised her. The change from the Belgravian square to the narrow street in Soho affected her legs adversely. They became of an enormous size. On the other hand, she experienced a complete relief from material cares. Her son-in-law's heavy good nature inspired her with a sense of absolute safety. Her daughter's future was obviously assured, and even as to her son Stevie she need have no anxiety. She had not been able to conceal from herself that he was a terrible encumbrance, that poor Stevie. But in view of Winnie's fondness for her delicate brother, and of Mr Verloc's kind and generous disposition, she felt that the poor boy was pretty safe in this rough world. And in her heart of hearts she was not perhaps displeased that the Verlocs had no children. As that circumstance seemed perfectly indifferent to Mr Verloc, and as Winnie found an object of quasi-maternal affection in her brother, perhaps this was just as well for poor Stevie.

For he was difficult to dispose of, that boy. He was delicate and, in a frail way, good-looking too, except for the vacant droop of his lower lip. Under our excellent system of compulsory education he had learned to read and write, notwithstanding the unfavourable aspect of the lower lip. But as errand-boy he did not turn out a great success. He forgot his messages; he was easily diverted from the straight path of duty by the attractions of stray

cats and dogs, which he followed down narrow alleys into unsavoury courts; by the comedies of the streets, which he contemplated open-mouthed, to the detriment of his employer's interests; or by the dramas of fallen horses, whose pathos and violence induced him sometimes to shriek piercingly in a crowd, which disliked to be disturbed by sounds of distress in its quiet enjoyment of the national spectacle. When led away by a grave and protecting policeman, it would often become apparent that poor Stevie had forgotten his address — at least for a time. A brusque question caused him to stutter to the point of suffocation. When startled by anything perplexing he used to squint horribly. However, he never had any fits (which was encouraging); and before the natural outbursts of impatience on the part of his father he could always, in his childhood's days, run for protection behind the short skirts of his sister Winnie. On the other hand, he might have been suspected of hiding a fund of reckless naughtiness. When he had reached the age of fourteen a friend of his late father, an agent for a foreign preserved milk firm, having given him an opening as office-boy, he was discovered one foggy afternoon, in his chief's absence, busy letting off fireworks on the staircase. He touched off in quick succession a set of fierce rockets, angry catherine wheels, loudly exploding squibs — and the matter might have turned out very serious. An awful panic spread through the whole building. Wild-eyed, choking clerks stampeded through the passages full of smoke, silk hats and elderly business men could be seen rolling independently down the stairs. Stevie did not seem to derive any personal gratification from what he had done. His motives for this stroke of originality were difficult to discover. It was only later on that Winnie obtained from him a misty and confused confession. It seems that two other office-boys in the building had worked upon his feelings by tales of injustice and oppression till they had wrought his compassion to the pitch of that frenzy. But his father's friend, of course, dismissed him summarily as likely to ruin his business. After that altruistic exploit Stevie was put to help wash the dishes in the basement kitchen, and to black the boots of the gentlemen patronising the Belgravian mansion. There was obviously no future in such work. The gentlemen tipped him a shilling now and then. Mr Verloc showed himself the most generous of lodgers. But altogether all that did not amount to much either in the way of gain or prospects; so that when Winnie announced her engagement to Mr Verloc her mother could not

help wondering, with a sigh and a glance towards the scullery, what would become of poor Stephen now.

It appeared that Mr Verloc was ready to take him over together with his wife's mother and with the furniture, which was the whole visible fortune of the family. Mr Verloc gathered everything as it came to his broad, good-natured breast. The furniture was disposed to the best advantage all over the house, but Mrs Verloc's mother was confined to two back rooms on the first floor. The luckless Stevie slept in one of them. By this time a growth of thin fluffy hair had come to blur, like a golden mist, the sharp line of his small lower jaw. He helped his sister with blind love and docility in her household duties. Mr Verloc thought that some occupation would be good for him. His spare time he occupied by drawing circles with compass and pencil on a piece of paper. He applied himself to that pastime with great industry, with his elbows spread out and bowed low over the kitchen table. Through the open door of the parlour at the back of the shop Winnie, his sister, glanced at him from time to time with maternal vigilance.

## CHAPTER II

Such was the house, the household, and the business Mr Verloc left behind him on his way westward at the hour of half-past ten in the morning. It was unusually early for him; his whole person exhaled the charm of almost dewy freshness; he wore his blue cloth overcoat unbuttoned; his boots were shiny; his cheeks, freshly shaven, had a sort of gloss; and even his heavy-lidded eyes, refreshed by a night of peaceful slumber, sent out glances of comparative alertness. Through the park railings these glances beheld men and women riding in the Row, couples cantering past harmoniously, others advancing sedately at a walk, loitering groups of three or four, solitary horsemen looking unsociable, and solitary women followed at a long distance by a groom with a cockade to his hat and a leather belt over his tight-fitting coat. Carriages went bowling by, mostly two-horse broughams, with here and there a victoria with the skin of some wild beast inside and a woman's face and hat emerging above the folded hood. And a peculiarly London sun — against which nothing could be said except that it looked bloodshot — glorified all this by its stare. It hung at a moderate elevation above Hyde Park Corner with an air of punctual and benign vigilance. The very pavement under Mr Verloc's feet had an old-gold tinge in that diffused light, in which neither wall, nor tree, nor beast, nor man cast a shadow. Mr Verloc was going westward through a town without shadows in an atmosphere of powdered old gold. There were red, coppery gleams on the roofs of houses, on the corners of walls, on the panels of carriages, on the very coats of the horses, and on the broad back of Mr Verloc's overcoat, where they produced a dull effect of rustiness. But Mr Verloc was not in the least conscious of having got rusty. He surveyed through the park railings the evidences of the town's opulence and luxury with an approving eye. All these people had to be protected. Protection is the first necessity of opulence and luxury. They had to be protected; and their horses, carriages, houses, servants had to be protected; and the source of their wealth had to be protected in the heart of the city and the heart of the country; the whole social order favourable to their hygienic idleness had to be protected against the shallow enviousness of unhygienic labour. It had to — and Mr Verloc would have rubbed his hands with satisfaction had he not been constitutionally averse from every superfluous exertion. His idleness was not hygienic, but it suited him very well. He was in a manner devoted

to it with a sort of inert fanaticism, or perhaps rather with a fanatical inertness. Born of industrious parents for a life of toil, he had embraced indolence from an impulse as profound as inexplicable and as imperious as the impulse which directs a man's preference for one particular woman in a given thousand. He was too lazy even for a mere demagogue, for a workman orator, for a leader of labour. It was too much trouble. He required a more perfect form of ease; or it might have been that he was the victim of a philosophical unbelief in the effectiveness of every human effort. Such a form of indolence requires, implies, a certain amount of intelligence. Mr Verloc was not devoid of intelligence — and at the notion of a menaced social order he would perhaps have winked to himself if there had not been an effort to make in that sign of scepticism. His big, prominent eyes were not well adapted to winking. They were rather of the sort that closes solemnly in slumber with majestic effect.

Undemonstrative and burly in a fat-pig style, Mr Verloc, without either rubbing his hands with satisfaction or winking sceptically at his thoughts, proceeded on his way. He trod the pavement heavily with his shiny boots, and his general get-up was that of a well-to-do mechanic in business for himself. He might have been anything from a picture-frame maker to a lock-smith; an employer of labour in a small way. But there was also about him an indescribable air which no mechanic could have acquired in the practice of his handicraft however dishonestly exercised: the air common to men who live on the vices, the follies, or the baser fears of mankind; the air of moral nihilism common to keepers of gambling hells and disorderly houses; to private detectives and inquiry agents; to drink sellers and, I should say, to the sellers of invigorating electric belts and to the inventors of patent medicines. But of that last I am not sure, not having carried my investigations so far into the depths. For all I know, the expression of these last may be perfectly diabolic. I shouldn't be surprised. What I want to affirm is that Mr Verloc's expression was by no means diabolic.

Before reaching Knightsbridge, Mr Verloc took a turn to the left out of the busy main thoroughfare, uproarious with the traffic of swaying omnibuses and trotting vans, in the almost silent, swift flow of hansoms. Under his hat, worn with a slight backward tilt, his hair had been carefully brushed into respectful sleekness; for his business was with an Embassy. And Mr Verloc, steady like a rock — a soft kind of rock — marched now along a street which could with every propriety be described as private. In



its breadth, emptiness, and extent it had the majesty of inorganic nature, of matter that never dies. The only reminder of mortality was a doctor's brougham arrested in august solitude close to the curbstone. The polished knockers of the doors gleamed as far as the eye could reach, the clean windows shone with a dark opaque lustre. And all was still. But a milk cart rattled noisily across the distant perspective; a butcher boy, driving with the noble recklessness of a charioteer at Olympic Games, dashed round the corner sitting high above a pair of red wheels. A guilty-looking cat issuing from under the stones ran for a while in front of Mr Verloc, then dived into another basement; and a thick police constable, looking a stranger to every emotion, as if he too were part of inorganic nature, surging apparently out of a lamp-post, took not the slightest notice of Mr Verloc. With a turn to the left Mr Verloc pursued his way along a narrow street by the side of a yellow wall which, for some inscrutable reason, had No. 1 Chesham Square written on it in black letters. Chesham Square was at least sixty yards away, and Mr Verloc, cosmopolitan enough not to be deceived by London's topographical mysteries, held on steadily, without a sign of surprise or indignation. At last, with business-like persistency, he reached the Square, and made diagonally for the number 10. This belonged to an imposing carriage gate in a high, clean wall between two houses, of which one rationally enough bore the number 9 and the other was numbered 37; but the fact that this last belonged to Porthill Street, a street well known in the neighbourhood, was proclaimed by an inscription placed above the ground-floor windows by whatever highly efficient authority is charged with the duty of keeping track of London's strayed houses. Why powers are not asked of Parliament (a short act would do) for compelling those edifices to return where they belong is one of the mysteries of municipal administration. Mr Verloc did not trouble his head about it, his mission in life being the protection of the social mechanism, not its perfectionment or even its criticism.

It was so early that the porter of the Embassy issued hurriedly out of his lodge still struggling with the left sleeve of his livery coat. His waistcoat was red, and he wore knee-breeches, but his aspect was flustered. Mr Verloc, aware of the rush on his flank, drove it off by simply holding out an envelope stamped with the arms of the Embassy, and passed on. He produced the same talisman also to the footman who opened the door, and stood back to let him enter the hall.

A clear fire burned in a tall fireplace, and an elderly man standing with his back to it, in evening dress and with a chain round his neck, glanced up from the newspaper he was holding spread out in both hands before his calm and severe face. He didn't move; but another lackey, in brown trousers and claw-hammer coat edged with thin yellow cord, approaching Mr Verloc listened to the murmur of his name, and turning round on his heel in silence, began to walk, without looking back once. Mr Verloc, thus led along a ground-floor passage to the left of the great carpeted staircase, was suddenly motioned to enter a quite small room furnished with a heavy writing-table and a few chairs. The servant shut the door, and Mr Verloc remained alone. He did not take a seat. With his hat and stick held in one hand he glanced about, passing his other podgy hand over his uncovered sleek head.

Another door opened noiselessly, and Mr Verloc immobilising his glance in that direction saw at first only black clothes, the bald top of a head, and a drooping dark grey whisker on each side of a pair of wrinkled hands. The person who had entered was holding a batch of papers before his eyes and walked up to the table with a rather mincing step, turning the papers over the while. Privy Councillor Wurmt, Chancelier d'Ambassade, was rather short-sighted. This meritorious official laying the papers on the table, disclosed a face of pasty complexion and of melancholy ugliness surrounded by a lot of fine, long dark grey hairs, barred heavily by thick and bushy eyebrows. He put on a black-framed pince-nez upon a blunt and shapeless nose, and seemed struck by Mr Verloc's appearance. Under the enormous eyebrows his weak eyes blinked pathetically through the glasses.

He made no sign of greeting; neither did Mr Verloc, who certainly knew his place; but a subtle change about the general outlines of his shoulders and back suggested a slight bending of Mr Verloc's spine under the vast surface of his overcoat. The effect was of unobtrusive deference.

"I have here some of your reports," said the bureaucrat in an unexpectedly soft and weary voice, and pressing the tip of his forefinger on the papers with force. He paused; and Mr Verloc, who had recognised his own handwriting very well, waited in an almost breathless silence. "We are not very satisfied with the attitude of the police here," the other continued, with every appearance of mental fatigue.

The shoulders of Mr Verloc, without actually moving, suggested a shrug. And for the first time since he left his home that morning his lips opened.

“Every country has its police,” he said philosophically. But as the official of the Embassy went on blinking at him steadily he felt constrained to add: “Allow me to observe that I have no means of action upon the police here.”

“What is desired,” said the man of papers, “is the occurrence of something definite which should stimulate their vigilance. That is within your province — is it not so?”

Mr Verloc made no answer except by a sigh, which escaped him involuntarily, for instantly he tried to give his face a cheerful expression. The official blinked doubtfully, as if affected by the dim light of the room. He repeated vaguely.

“The vigilance of the police — and the severity of the magistrates. The general leniency of the judicial procedure here, and the utter absence of all repressive measures, are a scandal to Europe. What is wished for just now is the accentuation of the unrest — of the fermentation which undoubtedly exists — ”

“Undoubtedly, undoubtedly,” broke in Mr Verloc in a deep deferential bass of an oratorical quality, so utterly different from the tone in which he had spoken before that his interlocutor remained profoundly surprised. “It exists to a dangerous degree. My reports for the last twelve months make it sufficiently clear.”

“Your reports for the last twelve months,” State Councillor Wurmt began in his gentle and dispassionate tone, “have been read by me. I failed to discover why you wrote them at all.”

A sad silence reigned for a time. Mr Verloc seemed to have swallowed his tongue, and the other gazed at the papers on the table fixedly. At last he gave them a slight push.

“The state of affairs you expose there is assumed to exist as the first condition of your employment. What is required at present is not writing, but the bringing to light of a distinct, significant fact — I would almost say of an alarming fact.”

“I need not say that all my endeavours shall be directed to that end,” Mr Verloc said, with convinced modulations in his conversational husky tone. But the sense of being blinked at watchfully behind the blind glitter of these eye-glasses on the other side of the table disconcerted him. He stopped short with a gesture of absolute devotion. The useful, hard-working, if

obscure member of the Embassy had an air of being impressed by some newly-born thought.

“You are very corpulent,” he said.

This observation, really of a psychological nature, and advanced with the modest hesitation of an officeman more familiar with ink and paper than with the requirements of active life, stung Mr Verloc in the manner of a rude personal remark. He stepped back a pace.

“Eh? What were you pleased to say?” he exclaimed, with husky resentment.

The Chancelier d’Ambassade entrusted with the conduct of this interview seemed to find it too much for him.

“I think,” he said, “that you had better see Mr Vladimir. Yes, decidedly I think you ought to see Mr Vladimir. Be good enough to wait here,” he added, and went out with mincing steps.

At once Mr Verloc passed his hand over his hair. A slight perspiration had broken out on his forehead. He let the air escape from his pursed-up lips like a man blowing at a spoonful of hot soup. But when the servant in brown appeared at the door silently, Mr Verloc had not moved an inch from the place he had occupied throughout the interview. He had remained motionless, as if feeling himself surrounded by pitfalls.

He walked along a passage lighted by a lonely gas-jet, then up a flight of winding stairs, and through a glazed and cheerful corridor on the first floor. The footman threw open a door, and stood aside. The feet of Mr Verloc felt a thick carpet. The room was large, with three windows; and a young man with a shaven, big face, sitting in a roomy arm-chair before a vast mahogany writing-table, said in French to the Chancelier d’Ambassade, who was going out with the papers in his hand:

“You are quite right, mon cher. He’s fat — the animal.”

Mr Vladimir, First Secretary, had a drawing-room reputation as an agreeable and entertaining man. He was something of a favourite in society. His wit consisted in discovering droll connections between incongruous ideas; and when talking in that strain he sat well forward of his seat, with his left hand raised, as if exhibiting his funny demonstrations between the thumb and forefinger, while his round and clean-shaven face wore an expression of merry perplexity.

But there was no trace of merriment or perplexity in the way he looked at Mr Verloc. Lying far back in the deep arm-chair, with squarely spread

elbows, and throwing one leg over a thick knee, he had with his smooth and rosy countenance the air of a preternaturally thriving baby that will not stand nonsense from anybody.

“You understand French, I suppose?” he said.

Mr Verloc stated huskily that he did. His whole vast bulk had a forward inclination. He stood on the carpet in the middle of the room, clutching his hat and stick in one hand; the other hung lifelessly by his side. He muttered unobtrusively somewhere deep down in his throat something about having done his military service in the French artillery. At once, with contemptuous perversity, Mr Vladimir changed the language, and began to speak idiomatic English without the slightest trace of a foreign accent.

“Ah! Yes. Of course. Let’s see. How much did you get for obtaining the design of the improved breech-block of their new field-gun?”

“Five years’ rigorous confinement in a fortress,” Mr Verloc answered unexpectedly, but without any sign of feeling.

“You got off easily,” was Mr Vladimir’s comment. “And, anyhow, it served you right for letting yourself get caught. What made you go in for that sort of thing — eh?”

Mr Verloc’s husky conversational voice was heard speaking of youth, of a fatal infatuation for an unworthy —

“Aha! Cherchez la femme,” Mr Vladimir deigned to interrupt, unbending, but without affability; there was, on the contrary, a touch of grimness in his condescension. “How long have you been employed by the Embassy here?” he asked.

“Ever since the time of the late Baron Stott-Wartenheim,” Mr Verloc answered in subdued tones, and protruding his lips sadly, in sign of sorrow for the deceased diplomat. The First Secretary observed this play of physiognomy steadily.

“Ah! ever since. Well! What have you got to say for yourself?” he asked sharply.

Mr Verloc answered with some surprise that he was not aware of having anything special to say. He had been summoned by a letter — And he plunged his hand busily into the side pocket of his overcoat, but before the mocking, cynical watchfulness of Mr Vladimir, concluded to leave it there.

“Bah!” said that latter. “What do you mean by getting out of condition like this? You haven’t got even the physique of your profession. You — a

member of a starving proletariat — never! You — a desperate socialist or anarchist — which is it?”

“Anarchist,” stated Mr Verloc in a deadened tone.

“Bosh!” went on Mr Vladimir, without raising his voice. “You startled old Wurmt himself. You wouldn’t deceive an idiot. They all are that by-the-by, but you seem to me simply impossible. So you began your connection with us by stealing the French gun designs. And you got yourself caught. That must have been very disagreeable to our Government. You don’t seem to be very smart.”

Mr Verloc tried to exculpate himself huskily.

“As I’ve had occasion to observe before, a fatal infatuation for an unworthy — ”

Mr Vladimir raised a large white, plump hand. “Ah, yes. The unlucky attachment — of your youth. She got hold of the money, and then sold you to the police — eh?”

The doleful change in Mr Verloc’s physiognomy, the momentary drooping of his whole person, confessed that such was the regrettable case. Mr Vladimir’s hand clasped the ankle reposing on his knee. The sock was of dark blue silk.

“You see, that was not very clever of you. Perhaps you are too susceptible.”

Mr Verloc intimated in a throaty, veiled murmur that he was no longer young.

“Oh! That’s a failing which age does not cure,” Mr Vladimir remarked, with sinister familiarity. “But no! You are too fat for that. You could not have come to look like this if you had been at all susceptible. I’ll tell you what I think is the matter: you are a lazy fellow. How long have you been drawing pay from this Embassy?”

“Eleven years,” was the answer, after a moment of sulky hesitation. “I’ve been charged with several missions to London while His Excellency Baron Stott-Wartenheim was still Ambassador in Paris. Then by his Excellency’s instructions I settled down in London. I am English.”

“You are! Are you? Eh?”

“A natural-born British subject,” Mr Verloc said stolidly. “But my father was French, and so — ”

“Never mind explaining,” interrupted the other. “I daresay you could have been legally a Marshal of France and a Member of Parliament in

England — and then, indeed, you would have been of some use to our Embassy.”

This flight of fancy provoked something like a faint smile on Mr Verloc’s face. Mr Vladimir retained an imperturbable gravity.

“But, as I’ve said, you are a lazy fellow; you don’t use your opportunities. In the time of Baron Stott-Wartenheim we had a lot of soft-headed people running this Embassy. They caused fellows of your sort to form a false conception of the nature of a secret service fund. It is my business to correct this misapprehension by telling you what the secret service is not. It is not a philanthropic institution. I’ve had you called here on purpose to tell you this.”

Mr Vladimir observed the forced expression of bewilderment on Verloc’s face, and smiled sarcastically.

“I see that you understand me perfectly. I daresay you are intelligent enough for your work. What we want now is activity — activity.”

On repeating this last word Mr Vladimir laid a long white forefinger on the edge of the desk. Every trace of huskiness disappeared from Verloc’s voice. The nape of his gross neck became crimson above the velvet collar of his overcoat. His lips quivered before they came widely open.

“If you’ll only be good enough to look up my record,” he boomed out in his great, clear oratorical bass, “you’ll see I gave a warning only three months ago, on the occasion of the Grand Duke Romuald’s visit to Paris, which was telegraphed from here to the French police, and — ”

“Tut, tut!” broke out Mr Vladimir, with a frowning grimace. “The French police had no use for your warning. Don’t roar like this. What the devil do you mean?”

With a note of proud humility Mr Verloc apologised for forgetting himself. His voice, — famous for years at open-air meetings and at workmen’s assemblies in large halls, had contributed, he said, to his reputation of a good and trustworthy comrade. It was, therefore, a part of his usefulness. It had inspired confidence in his principles. “I was always put up to speak by the leaders at a critical moment,” Mr Verloc declared, with obvious satisfaction. There was no uproar above which he could not make himself heard, he added; and suddenly he made a demonstration.

“Allow me,” he said. With lowered forehead, without looking up, swiftly and ponderously he crossed the room to one of the French windows. As if giving way to an uncontrollable impulse, he opened it a little. Mr Vladimir,

jumping up amazed from the depths of the arm-chair, looked over his shoulder; and below, across the courtyard of the Embassy, well beyond the open gate, could be seen the broad back of a policeman watching idly the gorgeous perambulator of a wealthy baby being wheeled in state across the Square.

“Constable!” said Mr Verloc, with no more effort than if he were whispering; and Mr Vladimir burst into a laugh on seeing the policeman spin round as if prodded by a sharp instrument. Mr Verloc shut the window quietly, and returned to the middle of the room.

“With a voice like that,” he said, putting on the husky conversational pedal, “I was naturally trusted. And I knew what to say, too.”

Mr Vladimir, arranging his cravat, observed him in the glass over the mantelpiece.

“I daresay you have the social revolutionary jargon by heart well enough,” he said contemptuously. “Vox et. . . You haven’t ever studied Latin — have you?”

“No,” growled Mr Verloc. “You did not expect me to know it. I belong to the million. Who knows Latin? Only a few hundred imbeciles who aren’t fit to take care of themselves.”

For some thirty seconds longer Mr Vladimir studied in the mirror the fleshy profile, the gross bulk, of the man behind him. And at the same time he had the advantage of seeing his own face, clean-shaved and round, rosy about the gills, and with the thin sensitive lips formed exactly for the utterance of those delicate witticisms which had made him such a favourite in the very highest society. Then he turned, and advanced into the room with such determination that the very ends of his quaintly old-fashioned bow necktie seemed to bristle with unspeakable menaces. The movement was so swift and fierce that Mr Verloc, casting an oblique glance, quailed inwardly.

“Aha! You dare be impudent,” Mr Vladimir began, with an amazingly guttural intonation not only utterly un-English, but absolutely un-European, and startling even to Mr Verloc’s experience of cosmopolitan slums. “You dare! Well, I am going to speak plain English to you. Voice won’t do. We have no use for your voice. We don’t want a voice. We want facts — startling facts — damn you,” he added, with a sort of ferocious discretion, right into Mr Verloc’s face.



“Don’t you try to come over me with your Hyperborean manners,” Mr Verloc defended himself huskily, looking at the carpet. At this his interlocutor, smiling mockingly above the bristling bow of his necktie, switched the conversation into French.

“You give yourself for an ‘agent provocateur.’ The proper business of an ‘agent provocateur’ is to provoke. As far as I can judge from your record kept here, you have done nothing to earn your money for the last three years.”

“Nothing!” exclaimed Verloc, stirring not a limb, and not raising his eyes, but with the note of sincere feeling in his tone. “I have several times prevented what might have been — ”

“There is a proverb in this country which says prevention is better than cure,” interrupted Mr Vladimir, throwing himself into the arm-chair. “It is stupid in a general way. There is no end to prevention. But it is characteristic. They dislike finality in this country. Don’t you be too English. And in this particular instance, don’t be absurd. The evil is already here. We don’t want prevention — we want cure.”

He paused, turned to the desk, and turning over some papers lying there, spoke in a changed business-like tone, without looking at Mr Verloc.

“You know, of course, of the International Conference assembled in Milan?”

Mr Verloc intimated hoarsely that he was in the habit of reading the daily papers. To a further question his answer was that, of course, he understood what he read. At this Mr Vladimir, smiling faintly at the documents he was still scanning one after another, murmured “As long as it is not written in Latin, I suppose.”

“Or Chinese,” added Mr Verloc stolidly.

“H’m. Some of your revolutionary friends’ effusions are written in a charabia every bit as incomprehensible as Chinese — ” Mr Vladimir let fall disdainfully a grey sheet of printed matter. “What are all these leaflets headed F. P., with a hammer, pen, and torch crossed? What does it mean, this F. P.?” Mr Verloc approached the imposing writing-table.

“The Future of the Proletariat. It’s a society,” he explained, standing ponderously by the side of the arm-chair, “not anarchist in principle, but open to all shades of revolutionary opinion.”

“Are you in it?”

“One of the Vice-Presidents,” Mr Verloc breathed out heavily; and the First Secretary of the Embassy raised his head to look at him.

“Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself,” he said incisively. “Isn’t your society capable of anything else but printing this prophetic bosh in blunt type on this filthy paper eh? Why don’t you do something? Look here. I’ve this matter in hand now, and I tell you plainly that you will have to earn your money. The good old Stott-Wartenheim times are over. No work, no pay.”

Mr Verloc felt a queer sensation of faintness in his stout legs. He stepped back one pace, and blew his nose loudly.

He was, in truth, startled and alarmed. The rusty London sunshine struggling clear of the London mist shed a lukewarm brightness into the First Secretary’s private room; and in the silence Mr Verloc heard against a window-pane the faint buzzing of a fly — his first fly of the year — heralding better than any number of swallows the approach of spring. The useless fussing of that tiny energetic organism affected unpleasantly this big man threatened in his indolence.

In the pause Mr Vladimir formulated in his mind a series of disparaging remarks concerning Mr Verloc’s face and figure. The fellow was unexpectedly vulgar, heavy, and impudently unintelligent. He looked uncommonly like a master plumber come to present his bill. The First Secretary of the Embassy, from his occasional excursions into the field of American humour, had formed a special notion of that class of mechanic as the embodiment of fraudulent laziness and incompetency.

This was then the famous and trusty secret agent, so secret that he was never designated otherwise but by the symbol [delta] in the late Baron Stott-Wartenheim’s official, semi-official, and confidential correspondence; the celebrated agent [delta], whose warnings had the power to change the schemes and the dates of royal, imperial, grand ducal journeys, and sometimes caused them to be put off altogether! This fellow! And Mr Vladimir indulged mentally in an enormous and derisive fit of merriment, partly at his own astonishment, which he judged naive, but mostly at the expense of the universally regretted Baron Stott-Wartenheim. His late Excellency, whom the august favour of his Imperial master had imposed as Ambassador upon several reluctant Ministers of Foreign Affairs, had enjoyed in his lifetime a fame for an owlish, pessimistic gullibility. His Excellency had the social revolution on the brain. He imagined himself to

be a diplomatist set apart by a special dispensation to watch the end of diplomacy, and pretty nearly the end of the world, in a horrid democratic upheaval. His prophetic and doleful despatches had been for years the joke of Foreign Offices. He was said to have exclaimed on his deathbed (visited by his Imperial friend and master): "Unhappy Europe! Thou shalt perish by the moral insanity of thy children!" He was fated to be the victim of the first humbugging rascal that came along, thought Mr Vladimir, smiling vaguely at Mr Verloc.

"You ought to venerate the memory of Baron Stott-Wartenheim," he exclaimed suddenly.

The lowered physiognomy of Mr Verloc expressed a sombre and weary annoyance.

"Permit me to observe to you," he said, "that I came here because I was summoned by a peremptory letter. I have been here only twice before in the last eleven years, and certainly never at eleven in the morning. It isn't very wise to call me up like this. There is just a chance of being seen. And that would be no joke for me."

Mr Vladimir shrugged his shoulders.

"It would destroy my usefulness," continued the other hotly.

"That's your affair," murmured Mr Vladimir, with soft brutality. "When you cease to be useful you shall cease to be employed. Yes. Right off. Cut short. You shall — " Mr Vladimir, frowning, paused, at a loss for a sufficiently idiomatic expression, and instantly brightened up, with a grin of beautifully white teeth. "You shall be chucked," he brought out ferociously.

Once more Mr Verloc had to react with all the force of his will against that sensation of faintness running down one's legs which once upon a time had inspired some poor devil with the felicitous expression: "My heart went down into my boots." Mr Verloc, aware of the sensation, raised his head bravely.

Mr Vladimir bore the look of heavy inquiry with perfect serenity.

"What we want is to administer a tonic to the Conference in Milan," he said airily. "Its deliberations upon international action for the suppression of political crime don't seem to get anywhere. England lags. This country is absurd with its sentimental regard for individual liberty. It's intolerable to think that all your friends have got only to come over to — "

"In that way I have them all under my eye," Mr Verloc interrupted huskily.

“It would be much more to the point to have them all under lock and key. England must be brought into line. The imbecile bourgeoisie of this country make themselves the accomplices of the very people whose aim is to drive them out of their houses to starve in ditches. And they have the political power still, if they only had the sense to use it for their preservation. I suppose you agree that the middle classes are stupid?”

Mr Verloc agreed hoarsely.

“They are.”

“They have no imagination. They are blinded by an idiotic vanity. What they want just now is a jolly good scare. This is the psychological moment to set your friends to work. I have had you called here to develop to you my idea.”

And Mr Vladimir developed his idea from on high, with scorn and condescension, displaying at the same time an amount of ignorance as to the real aims, thoughts, and methods of the revolutionary world which filled the silent Mr Verloc with inward consternation. He confounded causes with effects more than was excusable; the most distinguished propagandists with impulsive bomb throwers; assumed organisation where in the nature of things it could not exist; spoke of the social revolutionary party one moment as of a perfectly disciplined army, where the word of chiefs was supreme, and at another as if it had been the loosest association of desperate brigands that ever camped in a mountain gorge. Once Mr Verloc had opened his mouth for a protest, but the raising of a shapely, large white hand arrested him. Very soon he became too appalled to even try to protest. He listened in a stillness of dread which resembled the immobility of profound attention.

“A series of outrages,” Mr Vladimir continued calmly, “executed here in this country; not only planned here — that would not do — they would not mind. Your friends could set half the Continent on fire without influencing the public opinion here in favour of a universal repressive legislation. They will not look outside their backyard here.”

Mr Verloc cleared his throat, but his heart failed him, and he said nothing.

“These outrages need not be especially sanguinary,” Mr Vladimir went on, as if delivering a scientific lecture, “but they must be sufficiently startling — effective. Let them be directed against buildings, for instance.

What is the fetish of the hour that all the bourgeoisie recognise — eh, Mr Verloc?”

Mr Verloc opened his hands and shrugged his shoulders slightly.

“You are too lazy to think,” was Mr Vladimir’s comment upon that gesture. “Pay attention to what I say. The fetish of to-day is neither royalty nor religion. Therefore the palace and the church should be left alone. You understand what I mean, Mr Verloc?”

The dismay and the scorn of Mr Verloc found vent in an attempt at levity.

“Perfectly. But what of the Embassies? A series of attacks on the various Embassies,” he began; but he could not withstand the cold, watchful stare of the First Secretary.

“You can be facetious, I see,” the latter observed carelessly. “That’s all right. It may enliven your oratory at socialistic congresses. But this room is no place for it. It would be infinitely safer for you to follow carefully what I am saying. As you are being called upon to furnish facts instead of cock-and-bull stories, you had better try to make your profit off what I am taking the trouble to explain to you. The sacrosanct fetish of to-day is science. Why don’t you get some of your friends to go for that wooden-faced panjandrum — eh? Is it not part of these institutions which must be swept away before the F. P. comes along?”

Mr Verloc said nothing. He was afraid to open his lips lest a groan should escape him.

“This is what you should try for. An attempt upon a crowned head or on a president is sensational enough in a way, but not so much as it used to be. It has entered into the general conception of the existence of all chiefs of state. It’s almost conventional — especially since so many presidents have been assassinated. Now let us take an outrage upon — say a church. Horrible enough at first sight, no doubt, and yet not so effective as a person of an ordinary mind might think. No matter how revolutionary and anarchist in inception, there would be fools enough to give such an outrage the character of a religious manifestation. And that would detract from the especial alarming significance we wish to give to the act. A murderous attempt on a restaurant or a theatre would suffer in the same way from the suggestion of non-political passion: the exasperation of a hungry man, an act of social revenge. All this is used up; it is no longer instructive as an object lesson in revolutionary anarchism. Every newspaper has ready-made phrases to explain such manifestations away. I am about to give you the

philosophy of bomb throwing from my point of view; from the point of view you pretend to have been serving for the last eleven years. I will try not to talk above your head. The sensibilities of the class you are attacking are soon blunted. Property seems to them an indestructible thing. You can't count upon their emotions either of pity or fear for very long. A bomb outrage to have any influence on public opinion now must go beyond the intention of vengeance or terrorism. It must be purely destructive. It must be that, and only that, beyond the faintest suspicion of any other object. You anarchists should make it clear that you are perfectly determined to make a clean sweep of the whole social creation. But how to get that appallingly absurd notion into the heads of the middle classes so that there should be no mistake? That's the question. By directing your blows at something outside the ordinary passions of humanity is the answer. Of course, there is art. A bomb in the National Gallery would make some noise. But it would not be serious enough. Art has never been their fetish. It's like breaking a few back windows in a man's house; whereas, if you want to make him really sit up, you must try at least to raise the roof. There would be some screaming of course, but from whom? Artists — art critics and such like — people of no account. Nobody minds what they say. But there is learning — science. Any imbecile that has got an income believes in that. He does not know why, but he believes it matters somehow. It is the sacrosanct fetish. All the damned professors are radicals at heart. Let them know that their great panjandrum has got to go too, to make room for the Future of the Proletariat. A howl from all these intellectual idiots is bound to help forward the labours of the Milan Conference. They will be writing to the papers. Their indignation would be above suspicion, no material interests being openly at stake, and it will alarm every selfishness of the class which should be impressed. They believe that in some mysterious way science is at the source of their material prosperity. They do. And the absurd ferocity of such a demonstration will affect them more profoundly than the mangling of a whole street — or theatre — full of their own kind. To that last they can always say: 'Oh! it's mere class hate.' But what is one to say to an act of destructive ferocity so absurd as to be incomprehensible, inexplicable, almost unthinkable; in fact, mad? Madness alone is truly terrifying, inasmuch as you cannot placate it either by threats, persuasion, or bribes. Moreover, I am a civilised man. I would never dream of directing you to organise a mere butchery, even if I expected the

best results from it. But I wouldn't expect from a butchery the result I want. Murder is always with us. It is almost an institution. The demonstration must be against learning — science. But not every science will do. The attack must have all the shocking senselessness of gratuitous blasphemy. Since bombs are your means of expression, it would be really telling if one could throw a bomb into pure mathematics. But that is impossible. I have been trying to educate you; I have expounded to you the higher philosophy of your usefulness, and suggested to you some serviceable arguments. The practical application of my teaching interests you mostly. But from the moment I have undertaken to interview you I have also given some attention to the practical aspect of the question. What do you think of having a go at astronomy?"

For sometime already Mr Verloc's immobility by the side of the arm-chair resembled a state of collapsed coma — a sort of passive insensibility interrupted by slight convulsive starts, such as may be observed in the domestic dog having a nightmare on the hearthrug. And it was in an uneasy doglike growl that he repeated the word:

"Astronomy."

He had not recovered thoroughly as yet from that state of bewilderment brought about by the effort to follow Mr Vladimir's rapid incisive utterance. It had overcome his power of assimilation. It had made him angry. This anger was complicated by incredulity. And suddenly it dawned upon him that all this was an elaborate joke. Mr Vladimir exhibited his white teeth in a smile, with dimples on his round, full face posed with a complacent inclination above the bristling bow of his neck-tie. The favourite of intelligent society women had assumed his drawing-room attitude accompanying the delivery of delicate witticisms. Sitting well forward, his white hand upraised, he seemed to hold delicately between his thumb and forefinger the subtlety of his suggestion.

"There could be nothing better. Such an outrage combines the greatest possible regard for humanity with the most alarming display of ferocious imbecility. I defy the ingenuity of journalists to persuade their public that any given member of the proletariat can have a personal grievance against astronomy. Starvation itself could hardly be dragged in there — eh? And there are other advantages. The whole civilised world has heard of Greenwich. The very boot-blacks in the basement of Charing Cross Station know something of it. See?"

The features of Mr Vladimir, so well known in the best society by their humorous urbanity, beamed with cynical self-satisfaction, which would have astonished the intelligent women his wit entertained so exquisitely. "Yes," he continued, with a contemptuous smile, "the blowing up of the first meridian is bound to raise a howl of execration."

"A difficult business," Mr Verloc mumbled, feeling that this was the only safe thing to say.

"What is the matter? Haven't you the whole gang under your hand? The very pick of the basket? That old terrorist Yundt is here. I see him walking about Piccadilly in his green havelock almost every day. And Michaelis, the ticket-of-leave apostle — you don't mean to say you don't know where he is? Because if you don't, I can tell you," Mr Vladimir went on menacingly. "If you imagine that you are the only one on the secret fund list, you are mistaken."

This perfectly gratuitous suggestion caused Mr Verloc to shuffle his feet slightly.

"And the whole Lausanne lot — eh? Haven't they been flocking over here at the first hint of the Milan Conference? This is an absurd country."

"It will cost money," Mr Verloc said, by a sort of instinct.

"That cock won't fight," Mr Vladimir retorted, with an amazingly genuine English accent. "You'll get your screw every month, and no more till something happens. And if nothing happens very soon you won't get even that. What's your ostensible occupation? What are you supposed to live by?"

"I keep a shop," answered Mr Verloc.

"A shop! What sort of shop?"

"Stationery, newspapers. My wife —"

"Your what?" interrupted Mr Vladimir in his guttural Central Asian tones.

"My wife." Mr Verloc raised his husky voice slightly. "I am married."

"That be damned for a yarn," exclaimed the other in unfeigned astonishment. "Married! And you a professed anarchist, too! What is this confounded nonsense? But I suppose it's merely a manner of speaking. Anarchists don't marry. It's well known. They can't. It would be apostasy."

"My wife isn't one," Mr Verloc mumbled sulkily. "Moreover, it's no concern of yours."



“Oh yes, it is,” snapped Mr Vladimir. “I am beginning to be convinced that you are not at all the man for the work you’ve been employed on. Why, you must have discredited yourself completely in your own world by your marriage. Couldn’t you have managed without? This is your virtuous attachment — eh? What with one sort of attachment and another you are doing away with your usefulness.”

Mr Verloc, puffing out his cheeks, let the air escape violently, and that was all. He had armed himself with patience. It was not to be tried much longer. The First Secretary became suddenly very curt, detached, final.

“You may go now,” he said. “A dynamite outrage must be provoked. I give you a month. The sittings of the Conference are suspended. Before it reassembles again something must have happened here, or your connection with us ceases.”

He changed the note once more with an unprincipled versatility.

“Think over my philosophy, Mr — Mr — Verloc,” he said, with a sort of chaffing condescension, waving his hand towards the door. “Go for the first meridian. You don’t know the middle classes as well as I do. Their sensibilities are jaded. The first meridian. Nothing better, and nothing easier, I should think.”

He had got up, and with his thin sensitive lips twitching humorously, watched in the glass over the mantelpiece Mr Verloc backing out of the room heavily, hat and stick in hand. The door closed.

The footman in trousers, appearing suddenly in the corridor, let Mr Verloc another way out and through a small door in the corner of the courtyard. The porter standing at the gate ignored his exit completely; and Mr Verloc retraced the path of his morning’s pilgrimage as if in a dream — an angry dream. This detachment from the material world was so complete that, though the mortal envelope of Mr Verloc had not hastened unduly along the streets, that part of him to which it would be unwarrantably rude to refuse immortality, found itself at the shop door all at once, as if borne from west to east on the wings of a great wind. He walked straight behind the counter, and sat down on a wooden chair that stood there. No one appeared to disturb his solitude. Stevie, put into a green baize apron, was now sweeping and dusting upstairs, intent and conscientious, as though he were playing at it; and Mrs Verloc, warned in the kitchen by the clatter of the cracked bell, had merely come to the glazed door of the parlour, and putting the curtain aside a little, had peered into the dim shop. Seeing her

husband sitting there shadowy and bulky, with his hat tilted far back on his head, she had at once returned to her stove. An hour or more later she took the green baize apron off her brother Stevie, and instructed him to wash his hands and face in the peremptory tone she had used in that connection for fifteen years or so — ever since she had, in fact, ceased to attend to the boy's hands and face herself. She spared presently a glance away from her dishing-up for the inspection of that face and those hands which Stevie, approaching the kitchen table, offered for her approval with an air of self-assurance hiding a perpetual residue of anxiety. Formerly the anger of the father was the supremely effective sanction of these rites, but Mr Verloc's placidity in domestic life would have made all mention of anger incredible even to poor Stevie's nervousness. The theory was that Mr Verloc would have been inexpressibly pained and shocked by any deficiency of cleanliness at meal times. Winnie after the death of her father found considerable consolation in the feeling that she need no longer tremble for poor Stevie. She could not bear to see the boy hurt. It maddened her. As a little girl she had often faced with blazing eyes the irascible licensed victualler in defence of her brother. Nothing now in Mrs Verloc's appearance could lead one to suppose that she was capable of a passionate demonstration.

She finished her dishing-up. The table was laid in the parlour. Going to the foot of the stairs, she screamed out "Mother!" Then opening the glazed door leading to the shop, she said quietly "Adolf!" Mr Verloc had not changed his position; he had not apparently stirred a limb for an hour and a half. He got up heavily, and came to his dinner in his overcoat and with his hat on, without uttering a word. His silence in itself had nothing startlingly unusual in this household, hidden in the shades of the sordid street seldom touched by the sun, behind the dim shop with its wares of disreputable rubbish. Only that day Mr Verloc's taciturnity was so obviously thoughtful that the two women were impressed by it. They sat silent themselves, keeping a watchful eye on poor Stevie, lest he should break out into one of his fits of loquacity. He faced Mr Verloc across the table, and remained very good and quiet, staring vacantly. The endeavour to keep him from making himself objectionable in any way to the master of the house put no inconsiderable anxiety into these two women's lives. "That boy," as they alluded to him softly between themselves, had been a source of that sort of anxiety almost from the very day of his birth. The late licensed victualler's

humiliation at having such a very peculiar boy for a son manifested itself by a propensity to brutal treatment; for he was a person of fine sensibilities, and his sufferings as a man and a father were perfectly genuine. Afterwards Stevie had to be kept from making himself a nuisance to the single gentlemen lodgers, who are themselves a queer lot, and are easily aggrieved. And there was always the anxiety of his mere existence to face. Visions of a workhouse infirmary for her child had haunted the old woman in the basement breakfast-room of the decayed Belgravian house. "If you had not found such a good husband, my dear," she used to say to her daughter, "I don't know what would have become of that poor boy."

Mr Verloc extended as much recognition to Stevie as a man not particularly fond of animals may give to his wife's beloved cat; and this recognition, benevolent and perfunctory, was essentially of the same quality. Both women admitted to themselves that not much more could be reasonably expected. It was enough to earn for Mr Verloc the old woman's reverential gratitude. In the early days, made sceptical by the trials of friendless life, she used sometimes to ask anxiously: "You don't think, my dear, that Mr Verloc is getting tired of seeing Stevie about?" To this Winnie replied habitually by a slight toss of her head. Once, however, she retorted, with a rather grim pertness: "He'll have to get tired of me first." A long silence ensued. The mother, with her feet propped up on a stool, seemed to be trying to get to the bottom of that answer, whose feminine profundity had struck her all of a heap. She had never really understood why Winnie had married Mr Verloc. It was very sensible of her, and evidently had turned out for the best, but her girl might have naturally hoped to find somebody of a more suitable age. There had been a steady young fellow, only son of a butcher in the next street, helping his father in business, with whom Winnie had been walking out with obvious gusto. He was dependent on his father, it is true; but the business was good, and his prospects excellent. He took her girl to the theatre on several evenings. Then just as she began to dread to hear of their engagement (for what could she have done with that big house alone, with Stevie on her hands), that romance came to an abrupt end, and Winnie went about looking very dull. But Mr Verloc, turning up providentially to occupy the first-floor front bedroom, there had been no more question of the young butcher. It was clearly providential.

### CHAPTER III

“ . . . All idealisation makes life poorer. To beautify it is to take away its character of complexity — it is to destroy it. Leave that to the moralists, my boy. History is made by men, but they do not make it in their heads. The ideas that are born in their consciousness play an insignificant part in the march of events. History is dominated and determined by the tool and the production — by the force of economic conditions. Capitalism has made socialism, and the laws made by the capitalism for the protection of property are responsible for anarchism. No one can tell what form the social organisation may take in the future. Then why indulge in prophetic phantasies? At best they can only interpret the mind of the prophet, and can have no objective value. Leave that pastime to the moralists, my boy.”

Michaelis, the ticket-of-leave apostle, was speaking in an even voice, a voice that wheezed as if deadened and oppressed by the layer of fat on his chest. He had come out of a highly hygienic prison round like a tub, with an enormous stomach and distended cheeks of a pale, semi-transparent complexion, as though for fifteen years the servants of an outraged society had made a point of stuffing him with fattening foods in a damp and lightless cellar. And ever since he had never managed to get his weight down as much as an ounce.

It was said that for three seasons running a very wealthy old lady had sent him for a cure to Marienbad — where he was about to share the public curiosity once with a crowned head — but the police on that occasion ordered him to leave within twelve hours. His martyrdom was continued by forbidding him all access to the healing waters. But he was resigned now.

With his elbow presenting no appearance of a joint, but more like a bend in a dummy's limb, thrown over the back of a chair, he leaned forward slightly over his short and enormous thighs to spit into the grate.

“Yes! I had the time to think things out a little,” he added without emphasis. “Society has given me plenty of time for meditation.”

On the other side of the fireplace, in the horse-hair arm-chair where Mrs Verloc's mother was generally privileged to sit, Karl Yundt giggled grimly, with a faint black grimace of a toothless mouth. The terrorist, as he called himself, was old and bald, with a narrow, snow-white wisp of a goatee hanging limply from his chin. An extraordinary expression of underhand malevolence survived in his extinguished eyes. When he rose painfully the

thrusting forward of a skinny groping hand deformed by gouty swellings suggested the effort of a moribund murderer summoning all his remaining strength for a last stab. He leaned on a thick stick, which trembled under his other hand.

“I have always dreamed,” he mouthed fiercely, “of a band of men absolute in their resolve to discard all scruples in the choice of means, strong enough to give themselves frankly the name of destroyers, and free from the taint of that resigned pessimism which rots the world. No pity for anything on earth, including themselves, and death enlisted for good and all in the service of humanity — that’s what I would have liked to see.”

His little bald head quivered, imparting a comical vibration to the wisp of white goatee. His enunciation would have been almost totally unintelligible to a stranger. His worn-out passion, resembling in its impotent fierceness the excitement of a senile sensualist, was badly served by a dried throat and toothless gums which seemed to catch the tip of his tongue. Mr Verloc, established in the corner of the sofa at the other end of the room, emitted two hearty grunts of assent.

The old terrorist turned slowly his head on his skinny neck from side to side.

“And I could never get as many as three such men together. So much for your rotten pessimism,” he snarled at Michaelis, who uncrossed his thick legs, similar to bolsters, and slid his feet abruptly under his chair in sign of exasperation.

He a pessimist! Preposterous! He cried out that the charge was outrageous. He was so far from pessimism that he saw already the end of all private property coming along logically, unavoidably, by the mere development of its inherent viciousness. The possessors of property had not only to face the awakened proletariat, but they had also to fight amongst themselves. Yes. Struggle, warfare, was the condition of private ownership. It was fatal. Ah! he did not depend upon emotional excitement to keep up his belief, no declamations, no anger, no visions of blood-red flags waving, or metaphorical lurid suns of vengeance rising above the horizon of a doomed society. Not he! Cold reason, he boasted, was the basis of his optimism. Yes, optimism —

His laborious wheezing stopped, then, after a gasp or two, he added:

“Don’t you think that, if I had not been the optimist I am, I could not have found in fifteen years some means to cut my throat? And, in the last

instance, there were always the walls of my cell to dash my head against.”

The shortness of breath took all fire, all animation out of his voice; his great, pale cheeks hung like filled pouches, motionless, without a quiver; but in his blue eyes, narrowed as if peering, there was the same look of confident shrewdness, a little crazy in its fixity, they must have had while the indomitable optimist sat thinking at night in his cell. Before him, Karl Yundt remained standing, one wing of his faded greenish havelock thrown back cavalierly over his shoulder. Seated in front of the fireplace, Comrade Ossipon, ex-medical student, the principal writer of the F. P. leaflets, stretched out his robust legs, keeping the soles of his boots turned up to the glow in the grate. A bush of crinkly yellow hair topped his red, freckled face, with a flattened nose and prominent mouth cast in the rough mould of the negro type. His almond-shaped eyes leered languidly over the high cheek-bones. He wore a grey flannel shirt, the loose ends of a black silk tie hung down the buttoned breast of his serge coat; and his head resting on the back of his chair, his throat largely exposed, he raised to his lips a cigarette in a long wooden tube, puffing jets of smoke straight up at the ceiling.

Michaelis pursued his idea — the idea of his solitary reclusion — the thought vouchsafed to his captivity and growing like a faith revealed in visions. He talked to himself, indifferent to the sympathy or hostility of his hearers, indifferent indeed to their presence, from the habit he had acquired of thinking aloud hopefully in the solitude of the four whitewashed walls of his cell, in the sepulchral silence of the great blind pile of bricks near a river, sinister and ugly like a colossal mortuary for the socially drowned.

He was no good in discussion, not because any amount of argument could shake his faith, but because the mere fact of hearing another voice disconcerted him painfully, confusing his thoughts at once — these thoughts that for so many years, in a mental solitude more barren than a waterless desert, no living voice had ever combatted, commented, or approved.

No one interrupted him now, and he made again the confession of his faith, mastering him irresistible and complete like an act of grace: the secret of fate discovered in the material side of life; the economic condition of the world responsible for the past and shaping the future; the source of all history, of all ideas, guiding the mental development of mankind and the very impulses of their passion —

A harsh laugh from Comrade Ossipon cut the tirade dead short in a sudden faltering of the tongue and a bewildered unsteadiness of the apostle's mildly exalted eyes. He closed them slowly for a moment, as if to collect his routed thoughts. A silence fell; but what with the two gas-jets over the table and the glowing grate the little parlour behind Mr Verloc's shop had become frightfully hot. Mr Verloc, getting off the sofa with ponderous reluctance, opened the door leading into the kitchen to get more air, and thus disclosed the innocent Stevie, seated very good and quiet at a deal table, drawing circles, circles, circles; innumerable circles, concentric, eccentric; a coruscating whirl of circles that by their tangled multitude of repeated curves, uniformity of form, and confusion of intersecting lines suggested a rendering of cosmic chaos, the symbolism of a mad art attempting the inconceivable. The artist never turned his head; and in all his soul's application to the task his back quivered, his thin neck, sunk into a deep hollow at the base of the skull, seemed ready to snap.

Mr Verloc, after a grunt of disapproving surprise, returned to the sofa. Alexander Ossipon got up, tall in his threadbare blue serge suit under the low ceiling, shook off the stiffness of long immobility, and strolled away into the kitchen (down two steps) to look over Stevie's shoulder. He came back, pronouncing oracularly: "Very good. Very characteristic, perfectly typical."

"What's very good?" grunted inquiringly Mr Verloc, settled again in the corner of the sofa. The other explained his meaning negligently, with a shade of condescension and a toss of his head towards the kitchen:

"Typical of this form of degeneracy — these drawings, I mean."

"You would call that lad a degenerate, would you?" mumbled Mr Verloc.

Comrade Alexander Ossipon — nicknamed the Doctor, ex-medical student without a degree; afterwards wandering lecturer to working-men's associations upon the socialistic aspects of hygiene; author of a popular quasi-medical study (in the form of a cheap pamphlet seized promptly by the police) entitled "The Corroding Vices of the Middle Classes"; special delegate of the more or less mysterious Red Committee, together with Karl Yundt and Michaelis for the work of literary propaganda — turned upon the obscure familiar of at least two Embassies that glance of insufferable, hopelessly dense sufficiency which nothing but the frequentation of science can give to the dulness of common mortals.

“That’s what he may be called scientifically. Very good type too, altogether, of that sort of degenerate. It’s enough to glance at the lobes of his ears. If you read Lombroso — ”

Mr Verloc, moody and spread largely on the sofa, continued to look down the row of his waistcoat buttons; but his cheeks became tinged by a faint blush. Of late even the merest derivative of the word science (a term in itself inoffensive and of indefinite meaning) had the curious power of evoking a definitely offensive mental vision of Mr Vladimir, in his body as he lived, with an almost supernatural clearness. And this phenomenon, deserving justly to be classed amongst the marvels of science, induced in Mr Verloc an emotional state of dread and exasperation tending to express itself in violent swearing. But he said nothing. It was Karl Yundt who was heard, implacable to his last breath.

“Lombroso is an ass.”

Comrade Ossipon met the shock of this blasphemy by an awful, vacant stare. And the other, his extinguished eyes without gleams blackening the deep shadows under the great, bony forehead, mumbled, catching the tip of his tongue between his lips at every second word as though he were chewing it angrily:

“Did you ever see such an idiot? For him the criminal is the prisoner. Simple, is it not? What about those who shut him up there — forced him in there? Exactly. Forced him in there. And what is crime? Does he know that, this imbecile who has made his way in this world of gorged fools by looking at the ears and teeth of a lot of poor, luckless devils? Teeth and ears mark the criminal? Do they? And what about the law that marks him still better — the pretty branding instrument invented by the overfed to protect themselves against the hungry? Red-hot applications on their vile skins — hey? Can’t you smell and hear from here the thick hide of the people burn and sizzle? That’s how criminals are made for your Lombrosos to write their silly stuff about.”

The knob of his stick and his legs shook together with passion, whilst the trunk, draped in the wings of the havelock, preserved his historic attitude of defiance. He seemed to sniff the tainted air of social cruelty, to strain his ear for its atrocious sounds. There was an extraordinary force of suggestion in this posturing. The all but moribund veteran of dynamite wars had been a great actor in his time — actor on platforms, in secret assemblies, in private interviews. The famous terrorist had never in his life raised



personally as much as his little finger against the social edifice. He was no man of action; he was not even an orator of torrential eloquence, sweeping the masses along in the rushing noise and foam of a great enthusiasm. With a more subtle intention, he took the part of an insolent and venomous evoker of sinister impulses which lurk in the blind envy and exasperated vanity of ignorance, in the suffering and misery of poverty, in all the hopeful and noble illusions of righteous anger, pity, and revolt. The shadow of his evil gift clung to him yet like the smell of a deadly drug in an old vial of poison, emptied now, useless, ready to be thrown away upon the rubbish-heap of things that had served their time.

Michaelis, the ticket-of-leave apostle, smiled vaguely with his glued lips; his pasty moon face drooped under the weight of melancholy assent. He had been a prisoner himself. His own skin had sizzled under the red-hot brand, he murmured softly. But Comrade Ossipon, nicknamed the Doctor, had got over the shock by that time.

“You don’t understand,” he began disdainfully, but stopped short, intimidated by the dead blackness of the cavernous eyes in the face turned slowly towards him with a blind stare, as if guided only by the sound. He gave the discussion up, with a slight shrug of the shoulders.

Stevie, accustomed to move about disregarded, had got up from the kitchen table, carrying off his drawing to bed with him. He had reached the parlour door in time to receive in full the shock of Karl Yundt’s eloquent imagery. The sheet of paper covered with circles dropped out of his fingers, and he remained staring at the old terrorist, as if rooted suddenly to the spot by his morbid horror and dread of physical pain. Stevie knew very well that hot iron applied to one’s skin hurt very much. His scared eyes blazed with indignation: it would hurt terribly. His mouth dropped open.

Michaelis by staring unwinkingly at the fire had regained that sentiment of isolation necessary for the continuity of his thought. His optimism had begun to flow from his lips. He saw Capitalism doomed in its cradle, born with the poison of the principle of competition in its system. The great capitalists devouring the little capitalists, concentrating the power and the tools of production in great masses, perfecting industrial processes, and in the madness of self-aggrandisement only preparing, organising, enriching, making ready the lawful inheritance of the suffering proletariat. Michaelis pronounced the great word “Patience” — and his clear blue glance, raised

to the low ceiling of Mr Verloc's parlour, had a character of seraphic trustfulness. In the doorway Stevie, calmed, seemed sunk in hebetude.

Comrade Ossipon's face twitched with exasperation.

"Then it's no use doing anything — no use whatever."

"I don't say that," protested Michaelis gently. His vision of truth had grown so intense that the sound of a strange voice failed to rout it this time. He continued to look down at the red coals. Preparation for the future was necessary, and he was willing to admit that the great change would perhaps come in the upheaval of a revolution. But he argued that revolutionary propaganda was a delicate work of high conscience. It was the education of the masters of the world. It should be as careful as the education given to kings. He would have it advance its tenets cautiously, even timidly, in our ignorance of the effect that may be produced by any given economic change upon the happiness, the morals, the intellect, the history of mankind. For history is made with tools, not with ideas; and everything is changed by economic conditions — art, philosophy, love, virtue — truth itself!

The coals in the grate settled down with a slight crash; and Michaelis, the hermit of visions in the desert of a penitentiary, got up impetuously. Round like a distended balloon, he opened his short, thick arms, as if in a pathetically hopeless attempt to embrace and hug to his breast a self-regenerated universe. He gasped with ardour.

"The future is as certain as the past — slavery, feudalism, individualism, collectivism. This is the statement of a law, not an empty prophecy."

The disdainful pout of Comrade Ossipon's thick lips accentuated the negro type of his face.

"Nonsense," he said calmly enough. "There is no law and no certainty. The teaching propaganda be hanged. What the people knows does not matter, were its knowledge ever so accurate. The only thing that matters to us is the emotional state of the masses. Without emotion there is no action."

He paused, then added with modest firmness:

"I am speaking now to you scientifically — scientifically — Eh? What did you say, Verloc?"

"Nothing," growled from the sofa Mr Verloc, who, provoked by the abhorrent sound, had merely muttered a "Damn."

The venomous spluttering of the old terrorist without teeth was heard.

“Do you know how I would call the nature of the present economic conditions? I would call it cannibalistic. That’s what it is! They are nourishing their greed on the quivering flesh and the warm blood of the people — nothing else.”

Stevie swallowed the terrifying statement with an audible gulp, and at once, as though it had been swift poison, sank limply in a sitting posture on the steps of the kitchen door.

Michaelis gave no sign of having heard anything. His lips seemed glued together for good; not a quiver passed over his heavy cheeks. With troubled eyes he looked for his round, hard hat, and put it on his round head. His round and obese body seemed to float low between the chairs under the sharp elbow of Karl Yundt. The old terrorist, raising an uncertain and clawlike hand, gave a swaggering tilt to a black felt sombrero shading the hollows and ridges of his wasted face. He got in motion slowly, striking the floor with his stick at every step. It was rather an affair to get him out of the house because, now and then, he would stop, as if to think, and did not offer to move again till impelled forward by Michaelis. The gentle apostle grasped his arm with brotherly care; and behind them, his hands in his pockets, the robust Ossipon yawned vaguely. A blue cap with a patent leather peak set well at the back of his yellow bush of hair gave him the aspect of a Norwegian sailor bored with the world after a thundering spree. Mr Verloc saw his guests off the premises, attending them bareheaded, his heavy overcoat hanging open, his eyes on the ground.

He closed the door behind their backs with restrained violence, turned the key, shot the bolt. He was not satisfied with his friends. In the light of Mr Vladimir’s philosophy of bomb throwing they appeared hopelessly futile. The part of Mr Verloc in revolutionary politics having been to observe, he could not all at once, either in his own home or in larger assemblies, take the initiative of action. He had to be cautious. Moved by the just indignation of a man well over forty, menaced in what is dearest to him — his repose and his security — he asked himself scornfully what else could have been expected from such a lot, this Karl Yundt, this Michaelis — this Ossipon.

Pausing in his intention to turn off the gas burning in the middle of the shop, Mr Verloc descended into the abyss of moral reflections. With the insight of a kindred temperament he pronounced his verdict. A lazy lot — this Karl Yundt, nursed by a blear-eyed old woman, a woman he had years

ago enticed away from a friend, and afterwards had tried more than once to shake off into the gutter. Jolly lucky for Yundt that she had persisted in coming up time after time, or else there would have been no one now to help him out of the 'bus by the Green Park railings, where that spectre took its constitutional crawl every fine morning. When that indomitable snarling old witch died the swaggering spectre would have to vanish too — there would be an end to fiery Karl Yundt. And Mr Verloc's morality was offended also by the optimism of Michaelis, annexed by his wealthy old lady, who had taken lately to sending him to a cottage she had in the country. The ex-prisoner could moon about the shady lanes for days together in a delicious and humanitarian idleness. As to Ossipon, that beggar was sure to want for nothing as long as there were silly girls with savings-bank books in the world. And Mr Verloc, temperamentally identical with his associates, drew fine distinctions in his mind on the strength of insignificant differences. He drew them with a certain complacency, because the instinct of conventional respectability was strong within him, being only overcome by his dislike of all kinds of recognised labour — a temperamental defect which he shared with a large proportion of revolutionary reformers of a given social state. For obviously one does not revolt against the advantages and opportunities of that state, but against the price which must be paid for the same in the coin of accepted morality, self-restraint, and toil. The majority of revolutionists are the enemies of discipline and fatigue mostly. There are natures too, to whose sense of justice the price exacted looms up monstrously enormous, odious, oppressive, worrying, humiliating, extortionate, intolerable. Those are the fanatics. The remaining portion of social rebels is accounted for by vanity, the mother of all noble and vile illusions, the companion of poets, reformers, charlatans, prophets, and incendiaries.

Lost for a whole minute in the abyss of meditation, Mr Verloc did not reach the depth of these abstract considerations. Perhaps he was not able. In any case he had not the time. He was pulled up painfully by the sudden recollection of Mr Vladimir, another of his associates, whom in virtue of subtle moral affinities he was capable of judging correctly. He considered him as dangerous. A shade of envy crept into his thoughts. Loafing was all very well for these fellows, who knew not Mr Vladimir, and had women to fall back upon; whereas he had a woman to provide for —

At this point, by a simple association of ideas, Mr Verloc was brought face to face with the necessity of going to bed some time or other that evening. Then why not go now — at once? He sighed. The necessity was not so normally pleasurable as it ought to have been for a man of his age and temperament. He dreaded the demon of sleeplessness, which he felt had marked him for its own. He raised his arm, and turned off the flaring gas-jet above his head.

A bright band of light fell through the parlour door into the part of the shop behind the counter. It enabled Mr Verloc to ascertain at a glance the number of silver coins in the till. These were but few; and for the first time since he opened his shop he took a commercial survey of its value. This survey was unfavourable. He had gone into trade for no commercial reasons. He had been guided in the selection of this peculiar line of business by an instinctive leaning towards shady transactions, where money is picked up easily. Moreover, it did not take him out of his own sphere — the sphere which is watched by the police. On the contrary, it gave him a publicly confessed standing in that sphere, and as Mr Verloc had unconfessed relations which made him familiar with yet careless of the police, there was a distinct advantage in such a situation. But as a means of livelihood it was by itself insufficient.

He took the cash-box out of the drawer, and turning to leave the shop, became aware that Stevie was still downstairs.

What on earth is he doing there? Mr Verloc asked himself. What's the meaning of these antics? He looked dubiously at his brother-in-law, but he did not ask him for information. Mr Verloc's intercourse with Stevie was limited to the casual mutter of a morning, after breakfast, "My boots," and even that was more a communication at large of a need than a direct order or request. Mr Verloc perceived with some surprise that he did not know really what to say to Stevie. He stood still in the middle of the parlour, and looked into the kitchen in silence. Nor yet did he know what would happen if he did say anything. And this appeared very queer to Mr Verloc in view of the fact, borne upon him suddenly, that he had to provide for this fellow too. He had never given a moment's thought till then to that aspect of Stevie's existence.

Positively he did not know how to speak to the lad. He watched him gesticulating and murmuring in the kitchen. Stevie prowled round the table like an excited animal in a cage. A tentative "Hadn't you better go to bed

now?” produced no effect whatever; and Mr Verloc, abandoning the stony contemplation of his brother-in-law’s behaviour, crossed the parlour wearily, cash-box in hand. The cause of the general lassitude he felt while climbing the stairs being purely mental, he became alarmed by its inexplicable character. He hoped he was not sickening for anything. He stopped on the dark landing to examine his sensations. But a slight and continuous sound of snoring pervading the obscurity interfered with their clearness. The sound came from his mother-in-law’s room. Another one to provide for, he thought — and on this thought walked into the bedroom.

Mrs Verloc had fallen asleep with the lamp (no gas was laid upstairs) turned up full on the table by the side of the bed. The light thrown down by the shade fell dazzlingly on the white pillow sunk by the weight of her head reposing with closed eyes and dark hair done up in several plaits for the night. She woke up with the sound of her name in her ears, and saw her husband standing over her.

“Winnie! Winnie!”

At first she did not stir, lying very quiet and looking at the cash-box in Mr Verloc’s hand. But when she understood that her brother was “capering all over the place downstairs” she swung out in one sudden movement on to the edge of the bed. Her bare feet, as if poked through the bottom of an unadorned, sleeved calico sack buttoned tightly at neck and wrists, felt over the rug for the slippers while she looked upward into her husband’s face.

“I don’t know how to manage him,” Mr Verloc explained peevishly. “Won’t do to leave him downstairs alone with the lights.”

She said nothing, glided across the room swiftly, and the door closed upon her white form.

Mr Verloc deposited the cash-box on the night table, and began the operation of undressing by flinging his overcoat on to a distant chair. His coat and waistcoat followed. He walked about the room in his stockinged feet, and his burly figure, with the hands worrying nervously at his throat, passed and repassed across the long strip of looking-glass in the door of his wife’s wardrobe. Then after slipping his braces off his shoulders he pulled up violently the venetian blind, and leaned his forehead against the cold window-pane — a fragile film of glass stretched between him and the enormity of cold, black, wet, muddy, inhospitable accumulation of bricks, slates, and stones, things in themselves unlovely and unfriendly to man.

Mr Verloc felt the latent unfriendliness of all out of doors with a force approaching to positive bodily anguish. There is no occupation that fails a man more completely than that of a secret agent of police. It's like your horse suddenly falling dead under you in the midst of an uninhabited and thirsty plain. The comparison occurred to Mr Verloc because he had sat astride various army horses in his time, and had now the sensation of an incipient fall. The prospect was as black as the window-pane against which he was leaning his forehead. And suddenly the face of Mr Vladimir, clean-shaved and witty, appeared enhaloed in the glow of its rosy complexion like a sort of pink seal, impressed on the fatal darkness.

This luminous and mutilated vision was so ghastly physically that Mr Verloc started away from the window, letting down the venetian blind with a great rattle. Discomposed and speechless with the apprehension of more such visions, he beheld his wife re-enter the room and get into bed in a calm business-like manner which made him feel hopelessly lonely in the world. Mrs Verloc expressed her surprise at seeing him up yet.

"I don't feel very well," he muttered, passing his hands over his moist brow.

"Giddiness?"

"Yes. Not at all well."

Mrs Verloc, with all the placidity of an experienced wife, expressed a confident opinion as to the cause, and suggested the usual remedies; but her husband, rooted in the middle of the room, shook his lowered head sadly.

"You'll catch cold standing there," she observed.

Mr Verloc made an effort, finished undressing, and got into bed. Down below in the quiet, narrow street measured footsteps approached the house, then died away unhurried and firm, as if the passer-by had started to pace out all eternity, from gas-lamp to gas-lamp in a night without end; and the drowsy ticking of the old clock on the landing became distinctly audible in the bedroom.

Mrs Verloc, on her back, and staring at the ceiling, made a remark.

"Takings very small to-day."

Mr Verloc, in the same position, cleared his throat as if for an important statement, but merely inquired:

"Did you turn off the gas downstairs?"

"Yes; I did," answered Mrs Verloc conscientiously. "That poor boy is in a very excited state to-night," she murmured, after a pause which lasted for

three ticks of the clock.

Mr Verloc cared nothing for Stevie's excitement, but he felt horribly wakeful, and dreaded facing the darkness and silence that would follow the extinguishing of the lamp. This dread led him to make the remark that Stevie had disregarded his suggestion to go to bed. Mrs Verloc, falling into the trap, started to demonstrate at length to her husband that this was not "impudence" of any sort, but simply "excitement." There was no young man of his age in London more willing and docile than Stephen, she affirmed; none more affectionate and ready to please, and even useful, as long as people did not upset his poor head. Mrs Verloc, turning towards her recumbent husband, raised herself on her elbow, and hung over him in her anxiety that he should believe Stevie to be a useful member of the family. That ardour of protecting compassion exalted morbidly in her childhood by the misery of another child tinged her sallow cheeks with a faint dusky blush, made her big eyes gleam under the dark lids. Mrs Verloc then looked younger; she looked as young as Winnie used to look, and much more animated than the Winnie of the Belgravian mansion days had ever allowed herself to appear to gentlemen lodgers. Mr Verloc's anxieties had prevented him from attaching any sense to what his wife was saying. It was as if her voice were talking on the other side of a very thick wall. It was her aspect that recalled him to himself.

He appreciated this woman, and the sentiment of this appreciation, stirred by a display of something resembling emotion, only added another pang to his mental anguish. When her voice ceased he moved uneasily, and said:

"I haven't been feeling well for the last few days."

He might have meant this as an opening to a complete confidence; but Mrs Verloc laid her head on the pillow again, and staring upward, went on:

"That boy hears too much of what is talked about here. If I had known they were coming to-night I would have seen to it that he went to bed at the same time I did. He was out of his mind with something he overheard about eating people's flesh and drinking blood. What's the good of talking like that?"

There was a note of indignant scorn in her voice. Mr Verloc was fully responsive now.

"Ask Karl Yundt," he growled savagely.

Mrs Verloc, with great decision, pronounced Karl Yundt "a disgusting old man." She declared openly her affection for Michaelis. Of the robust



Ossipon, in whose presence she always felt uneasy behind an attitude of stony reserve, she said nothing whatever. And continuing to talk of that brother, who had been for so many years an object of care and fears:

“He isn’t fit to hear what’s said here. He believes it’s all true. He knows no better. He gets into his passions over it.”

Mr Verloc made no comment.

“He glared at me, as if he didn’t know who I was, when I went downstairs. His heart was going like a hammer. He can’t help being excitable. I woke mother up, and asked her to sit with him till he went to sleep. It isn’t his fault. He’s no trouble when he’s left alone.”

Mr Verloc made no comment.

“I wish he had never been to school,” Mrs Verloc began again brusquely. “He’s always taking away those newspapers from the window to read. He gets a red face poring over them. We don’t get rid of a dozen numbers in a month. They only take up room in the front window. And Mr Ossipon brings every week a pile of these F. P. tracts to sell at a halfpenny each. I wouldn’t give a halfpenny for the whole lot. It’s silly reading — that’s what it is. There’s no sale for it. The other day Stevie got hold of one, and there was a story in it of a German soldier officer tearing half-off the ear of a recruit, and nothing was done to him for it. The brute! I couldn’t do anything with Stevie that afternoon. The story was enough, too, to make one’s blood boil. But what’s the use of printing things like that? We aren’t German slaves here, thank God. It’s not our business — is it?”

Mr Verloc made no reply.

“I had to take the carving knife from the boy,” Mrs Verloc continued, a little sleepily now. “He was shouting and stamping and sobbing. He can’t stand the notion of any cruelty. He would have stuck that officer like a pig if he had seen him then. It’s true, too! Some people don’t deserve much mercy.” Mrs Verloc’s voice ceased, and the expression of her motionless eyes became more and more contemplative and veiled during the long pause. “Comfortable, dear?” she asked in a faint, far-away voice. “Shall I put out the light now?”

The dreary conviction that there was no sleep for him held Mr Verloc mute and hopelessly inert in his fear of darkness. He made a great effort.

“Yes. Put it out,” he said at last in a hollow tone.

## CHAPTER IV

Most of the thirty or so little tables covered by red cloths with a white design stood ranged at right angles to the deep brown wainscoting of the underground hall. Bronze chandeliers with many globes depended from the low, slightly vaulted ceiling, and the fresco paintings ran flat and dull all round the walls without windows, representing scenes of the chase and of outdoor revelry in mediæval costumes. Varlets in green jerkins brandished hunting knives and raised on high tankards of foaming beer.

“Unless I am very much mistaken, you are the man who would know the inside of this confounded affair,” said the robust Ossipon, leaning over, his elbows far out on the table and his feet tucked back completely under his chair. His eyes stared with wild eagerness.

An upright semi-grand piano near the door, flanked by two palms in pots, executed suddenly all by itself a valse tune with aggressive virtuosity. The din it raised was deafening. When it ceased, as abruptly as it had started, the be-spectacled, dingy little man who faced Ossipon behind a heavy glass mug full of beer emitted calmly what had the sound of a general proposition.

“In principle what one of us may or may not know as to any given fact can’t be a matter for inquiry to the others.”

“Certainly not,” Comrade Ossipon agreed in a quiet undertone. “In principle.”

With his big florid face held between his hands he continued to stare hard, while the dingy little man in spectacles coolly took a drink of beer and stood the glass mug back on the table. His flat, large ears departed widely from the sides of his skull, which looked frail enough for Ossipon to crush between thumb and forefinger; the dome of the forehead seemed to rest on the rim of the spectacles; the flat cheeks, of a greasy, unhealthy complexion, were merely smudged by the miserable poverty of a thin dark whisker. The lamentable inferiority of the whole physique was made ludicrous by the supremely self-confident bearing of the individual. His speech was curt, and he had a particularly impressive manner of keeping silent.

Ossipon spoke again from between his hands in a mutter.

“Have you been out much to-day?”

“No. I stayed in bed all the morning,” answered the other. “Why?”

“Oh! Nothing,” said Ossipon, gazing earnestly and quivering inwardly with the desire to find out something, but obviously intimidated by the little man’s overwhelming air of unconcern. When talking with this comrade — which happened but rarely — the big Ossipon suffered from a sense of moral and even physical insignificance. However, he ventured another question. “Did you walk down here?”

“No; omnibus,” the little man answered readily enough. He lived far away in Islington, in a small house down a shabby street, littered with straw and dirty paper, where out of school hours a troop of assorted children ran and squabbled with a shrill, joyless, rowdy clamour. His single back room, remarkable for having an extremely large cupboard, he rented furnished from two elderly spinsters, dressmakers in a humble way with a clientele of servant girls mostly. He had a heavy padlock put on the cupboard, but otherwise he was a model lodger, giving no trouble, and requiring practically no attendance. His oddities were that he insisted on being present when his room was being swept, and that when he went out he locked his door, and took the key away with him.

Ossipon had a vision of these round black-rimmed spectacles progressing along the streets on the top of an omnibus, their self-confident glitter falling here and there on the walls of houses or lowered upon the heads of the unconscious stream of people on the pavements. The ghost of a sickly smile altered the set of Ossipon’s thick lips at the thought of the walls nodding, of people running for life at the sight of those spectacles. If they had only known! What a panic! He murmured interrogatively: “Been sitting long here?”

“An hour or more,” answered the other negligently, and took a pull at the dark beer. All his movements — the way he grasped the mug, the act of drinking, the way he set the heavy glass down and folded his arms — had a firmness, an assured precision which made the big and muscular Ossipon, leaning forward with staring eyes and protruding lips, look the picture of eager indecision.

“An hour,” he said. “Then it may be you haven’t heard yet the news I’ve heard just now — in the street. Have you?”

The little man shook his head negatively the least bit. But as he gave no indication of curiosity Ossipon ventured to add that he had heard it just outside the place. A newspaper boy had yelled the thing under his very nose, and not being prepared for anything of that sort, he was very much

startled and upset. He had to come in there with a dry mouth. "I never thought of finding you here," he added, murmuring steadily, with his elbows planted on the table.

"I come here sometimes," said the other, preserving his provoking coolness of demeanour.

"It's wonderful that you of all people should have heard nothing of it," the big Ossipon continued. His eyelids snapped nervously upon the shining eyes. "You of all people," he repeated tentatively. This obvious restraint argued an incredible and inexplicable timidity of the big fellow before the calm little man, who again lifted the glass mug, drank, and put it down with brusque and assured movements. And that was all.

Ossipon after waiting for something, word or sign, that did not come, made an effort to assume a sort of indifference.

"Do you," he said, deadening his voice still more, "give your stuff to anybody who's up to asking you for it?"

"My absolute rule is never to refuse anybody — as long as I have a pinch by me," answered the little man with decision.

"That's a principle?" commented Ossipon.

"It's a principle."

"And you think it's sound?"

The large round spectacles, which gave a look of staring self-confidence to the sallow face, confronted Ossipon like sleepless, unwinking orbs flashing a cold fire.

"Perfectly. Always. Under every circumstance. What could stop me? Why should I not? Why should I think twice about it?"

Ossipon gasped, as it were, discreetly.

"Do you mean to say you would hand it over to a 'teck' if one came to ask you for your wares?"

The other smiled faintly.

"Let them come and try it on, and you will see," he said. "They know me, but I know also every one of them. They won't come near me — not they."

His thin livid lips snapped together firmly. Ossipon began to argue.

"But they could send someone — rig a plant on you. Don't you see? Get the stuff from you in that way, and then arrest you with the proof in their hands."

“Proof of what? Dealing in explosives without a licence perhaps.” This was meant for a contemptuous jeer, though the expression of the thin, sickly face remained unchanged, and the utterance was negligent. “I don’t think there’s one of them anxious to make that arrest. I don’t think they could get one of them to apply for a warrant. I mean one of the best. Not one.”

“Why?” Ossipon asked.

“Because they know very well I take care never to part with the last handful of my wares. I’ve it always by me.” He touched the breast of his coat lightly. “In a thick glass flask,” he added.

“So I have been told,” said Ossipon, with a shade of wonder in his voice. “But I didn’t know if — ”

“They know,” interrupted the little man crisply, leaning against the straight chair back, which rose higher than his fragile head. “I shall never be arrested. The game isn’t good enough for any policeman of them all. To deal with a man like me you require sheer, naked, inglorious heroism.” Again his lips closed with a self-confident snap. Ossipon repressed a movement of impatience.

“Or recklessness — or simply ignorance,” he retorted. “They’ve only to get somebody for the job who does not know you carry enough stuff in your pocket to blow yourself and everything within sixty yards of you to pieces.”

“I never affirmed I could not be eliminated,” rejoined the other. “But that wouldn’t be an arrest. Moreover, it’s not so easy as it looks.”

“Bah!” Ossipon contradicted. “Don’t be too sure of that. What’s to prevent half-a-dozen of them jumping upon you from behind in the street? With your arms pinned to your sides you could do nothing — could you?”

“Yes; I could. I am seldom out in the streets after dark,” said the little man impassively, “and never very late. I walk always with my right hand closed round the india-rubber ball which I have in my trouser pocket. The pressing of this ball actuates a detonator inside the flask I carry in my pocket. It’s the principle of the pneumatic instantaneous shutter for a camera lens. The tube leads up — ”

With a swift disclosing gesture he gave Ossipon a glimpse of an india-rubber tube, resembling a slender brown worm, issuing from the armhole of his waistcoat and plunging into the inner breast pocket of his jacket. His clothes, of a nondescript brown mixture, were threadbare and marked with stains, dusty in the folds, with ragged button-holes. “The detonator is partly mechanical, partly chemical,” he explained, with casual condescension.

“It is instantaneous, of course?” murmured Ossipon, with a slight shudder.

“Far from it,” confessed the other, with a reluctance which seemed to twist his mouth dolorously. “A full twenty seconds must elapse from the moment I press the ball till the explosion takes place.”

“Phew!” whistled Ossipon, completely appalled. “Twenty seconds! Horrors! You mean to say that you could face that? I should go crazy — ”

“Wouldn’t matter if you did. Of course, it’s the weak point of this special system, which is only for my own use. The worst is that the manner of exploding is always the weak point with us. I am trying to invent a detonator that would adjust itself to all conditions of action, and even to unexpected changes of conditions. A variable and yet perfectly precise mechanism. A really intelligent detonator.”

“Twenty seconds,” muttered Ossipon again. “Ough! And then — ”

With a slight turn of the head the glitter of the spectacles seemed to gauge the size of the beer saloon in the basement of the renowned Silenus Restaurant.

“Nobody in this room could hope to escape,” was the verdict of that survey. “Nor yet this couple going up the stairs now.”

The piano at the foot of the staircase clanged through a mazurka with brazen impetuosity, as though a vulgar and impudent ghost were showing off. The keys sank and rose mysteriously. Then all became still. For a moment Ossipon imagined the overlighted place changed into a dreadful black hole belching horrible fumes choked with ghastly rubbish of smashed brickwork and mutilated corpses. He had such a distinct perception of ruin and death that he shuddered again. The other observed, with an air of calm sufficiency:

“In the last instance it is character alone that makes for one’s safety. There are very few people in the world whose character is as well established as mine.”

“I wonder how you managed it,” growled Ossipon.

“Force of personality,” said the other, without raising his voice; and coming from the mouth of that obviously miserable organism the assertion caused the robust Ossipon to bite his lower lip. “Force of personality,” he repeated, with ostentatious calm. “I have the means to make myself deadly, but that by itself, you understand, is absolutely nothing in the way of protection. What is effective is the belief those people have in my will to

use the means. That's their impression. It is absolute. Therefore I am deadly."

"There are individuals of character amongst that lot too," muttered Ossipon ominously.

"Possibly. But it is a matter of degree obviously, since, for instance, I am not impressed by them. Therefore they are inferior. They cannot be otherwise. Their character is built upon conventional morality. It leans on the social order. Mine stands free from everything artificial. They are bound in all sorts of conventions. They depend on life, which, in this connection, is a historical fact surrounded by all sorts of restraints and considerations, a complex organised fact open to attack at every point; whereas I depend on death, which knows no restraint and cannot be attacked. My superiority is evident."

"This is a transcendental way of putting it," said Ossipon, watching the cold glitter of the round spectacles. "I've heard Karl Yundt say much the same thing not very long ago."

"Karl Yundt," mumbled the other contemptuously, "the delegate of the International Red Committee, has been a posturing shadow all his life. There are three of you delegates, aren't there? I won't define the other two, as you are one of them. But what you say means nothing. You are the worthy delegates for revolutionary propaganda, but the trouble is not only that you are as unable to think independently as any respectable grocer or journalist of them all, but that you have no character whatever."

Ossipon could not restrain a start of indignation.

"But what do you want from us?" he exclaimed in a deadened voice. "What is it you are after yourself?"

"A perfect detonator," was the peremptory answer. "What are you making that face for? You see, you can't even bear the mention of something conclusive."

"I am not making a face," growled the annoyed Ossipon bearishly.

"You revolutionists," the other continued, with leisurely self-confidence, "are the slaves of the social convention, which is afraid of you; slaves of it as much as the very police that stands up in the defence of that convention. Clearly you are, since you want to revolutionise it. It governs your thought, of course, and your action too, and thus neither your thought nor your action can ever be conclusive." He paused, tranquil, with that air of close, endless silence, then almost immediately went on. "You are not a bit better

than the forces arrayed against you — than the police, for instance. The other day I came suddenly upon Chief Inspector Heat at the corner of Tottenham Court Road. He looked at me very steadily. But I did not look at him. Why should I give him more than a glance? He was thinking of many things — of his superiors, of his reputation, of the law courts, of his salary, of newspapers — of a hundred things. But I was thinking of my perfect detonator only. He meant nothing to me. He was as insignificant as — I can't call to mind anything insignificant enough to compare him with — except Karl Yundt perhaps. Like to like. The terrorist and the policeman both come from the same basket. Revolution, legality — counter moves in the same game; forms of idleness at bottom identical. He plays his little game — so do you propagandists. But I don't play; I work fourteen hours a day, and go hungry sometimes. My experiments cost money now and again, and then I must do without food for a day or two. You're looking at my beer. Yes. I have had two glasses already, and shall have another presently. This is a little holiday, and I celebrate it alone. Why not? I've the grit to work alone, quite alone, absolutely alone. I've worked alone for years."

Ossipon's face had turned dusky red.

"At the perfect detonator — eh?" he sneered, very low.

"Yes," retorted the other. "It is a good definition. You couldn't find anything half so precise to define the nature of your activity with all your committees and delegations. It is I who am the true propagandist."

"We won't discuss that point," said Ossipon, with an air of rising above personal considerations. "I am afraid I'll have to spoil your holiday for you, though. There's a man blown up in Greenwich Park this morning."

"How do you know?"

"They have been yelling the news in the streets since two o'clock. I bought the paper, and just ran in here. Then I saw you sitting at this table. I've got it in my pocket now."

He pulled the newspaper out. It was a good-sized rosy sheet, as if flushed by the warmth of its own convictions, which were optimistic. He scanned the pages rapidly.

"Ah! Here it is. Bomb in Greenwich Park. There isn't much so far. Half-past eleven. Foggy morning. Effects of explosion felt as far as Romney Road and Park Place. Enormous hole in the ground under a tree filled with smashed roots and broken branches. All round fragments of a



man's body blown to pieces. That's all. The rest's mere newspaper gup. No doubt a wicked attempt to blow up the Observatory, they say. H'm. That's hardly credible."

He looked at the paper for a while longer in silence, then passed it to the other, who after gazing abstractedly at the print laid it down without comment.

It was Ossipon who spoke first — still resentful.

"The fragments of only one man, you note. Ergo: blew himself up. That spoils your day off for you — don't it? Were you expecting that sort of move? I hadn't the slightest idea — not the ghost of a notion of anything of the sort being planned to come off here — in this country. Under the present circumstances it's nothing short of criminal."

The little man lifted his thin black eyebrows with dispassionate scorn.

"Criminal! What is that? What is crime? What can be the meaning of such an assertion?"

"How am I to express myself? One must use the current words," said Ossipon impatiently. "The meaning of this assertion is that this business may affect our position very adversely in this country. Isn't that crime enough for you? I am convinced you have been giving away some of your stuff lately."

Ossipon stared hard. The other, without flinching, lowered and raised his head slowly.

"You have!" burst out the editor of the F. P. leaflets in an intense whisper. "No! And are you really handing it over at large like this, for the asking, to the first fool that comes along?"

"Just so! The condemned social order has not been built up on paper and ink, and I don't fancy that a combination of paper and ink will ever put an end to it, whatever you may think. Yes, I would give the stuff with both hands to every man, woman, or fool that likes to come along. I know what you are thinking about. But I am not taking my cue from the Red Committee. I would see you all hounded out of here, or arrested — or beheaded for that matter — without turning a hair. What happens to us as individuals is not of the least consequence."

He spoke carelessly, without heat, almost without feeling, and Ossipon, secretly much affected, tried to copy this detachment.

"If the police here knew their business they would shoot you full of holes with revolvers, or else try to sand-bag you from behind in broad daylight."

The little man seemed already to have considered that point of view in his dispassionate self-confident manner.

“Yes,” he assented with the utmost readiness. “But for that they would have to face their own institutions. Do you see? That requires uncommon grit. Grit of a special kind.”

Ossipon blinked.

“I fancy that’s exactly what would happen to you if you were to set up your laboratory in the States. They don’t stand on ceremony with their institutions there.”

“I am not likely to go and see. Otherwise your remark is just,” admitted the other. “They have more character over there, and their character is essentially anarchistic. Fertile ground for us, the States — very good ground. The great Republic has the root of the destructive matter in her. The collective temperament is lawless. Excellent. They may shoot us down, but — ”

“You are too transcendental for me,” growled Ossipon, with moody concern.

“Logical,” protested the other. “There are several kinds of logic. This is the enlightened kind. America is all right. It is this country that is dangerous, with her idealistic conception of legality. The social spirit of this people is wrapped up in scrupulous prejudices, and that is fatal to our work. You talk of England being our only refuge! So much the worse. Capua! What do we want with refuges? Here you talk, print, plot, and do nothing. I daresay it’s very convenient for such Karl Yundts.”

He shrugged his shoulders slightly, then added with the same leisurely assurance: “To break up the superstition and worship of legality should be our aim. Nothing would please me more than to see Inspector Heat and his likes take to shooting us down in broad daylight with the approval of the public. Half our battle would be won then; the disintegration of the old morality would have set in in its very temple. That is what you ought to aim at. But you revolutionists will never understand that. You plan the future, you lose yourselves in reveries of economical systems derived from what is; whereas what’s wanted is a clean sweep and a clear start for a new conception of life. That sort of future will take care of itself if you will only make room for it. Therefore I would shovel my stuff in heaps at the corners of the streets if I had enough for that; and as I haven’t, I do my best by perfecting a really dependable detonator.”

Ossipon, who had been mentally swimming in deep waters, seized upon the last word as if it were a saving plank.

“Yes. Your detonators. I shouldn’t wonder if it weren’t one of your detonators that made a clean sweep of the man in the park.”

A shade of vexation darkened the determined sallow face confronting Ossipon.

“My difficulty consists precisely in experimenting practically with the various kinds. They must be tried after all. Besides — ”

Ossipon interrupted.

“Who could that fellow be? I assure you that we in London had no knowledge — Couldn’t you describe the person you gave the stuff to?”

The other turned his spectacles upon Ossipon like a pair of searchlights.

“Describe him,” he repeated slowly. “I don’t think there can be the slightest objection now. I will describe him to you in one word — Verloc.”

Ossipon, whom curiosity had lifted a few inches off his seat, dropped back, as if hit in the face.

“Verloc! Impossible.”

The self-possessed little man nodded slightly once.

“Yes. He’s the person. You can’t say that in this case I was giving my stuff to the first fool that came along. He was a prominent member of the group as far as I understand.”

“Yes,” said Ossipon. “Prominent. No, not exactly. He was the centre for general intelligence, and usually received comrades coming over here. More useful than important. Man of no ideas. Years ago he used to speak at meetings — in France, I believe. Not very well, though. He was trusted by such men as Latorre, Moser and all that old lot. The only talent he showed really was his ability to elude the attentions of the police somehow. Here, for instance, he did not seem to be looked after very closely. He was regularly married, you know. I suppose it’s with her money that he started that shop. Seemed to make it pay, too.”

Ossipon paused abruptly, muttered to himself “I wonder what that woman will do now?” and fell into thought.

The other waited with ostentatious indifference. His parentage was obscure, and he was generally known only by his nickname of Professor. His title to that designation consisted in his having been once assistant demonstrator in chemistry at some technical institute. He quarrelled with the authorities upon a question of unfair treatment. Afterwards he obtained

a post in the laboratory of a manufactory of dyes. There too he had been treated with revolting injustice. His struggles, his privations, his hard work to raise himself in the social scale, had filled him with such an exalted conviction of his merits that it was extremely difficult for the world to treat him with justice — the standard of that notion depending so much upon the patience of the individual. The Professor had genius, but lacked the great social virtue of resignation.

“Intellectually a nonentity,” Ossipon pronounced aloud, abandoning suddenly the inward contemplation of Mrs Verloc’s bereaved person and business. “Quite an ordinary personality. You are wrong in not keeping more in touch with the comrades, Professor,” he added in a reproving tone. “Did he say anything to you — give you some idea of his intentions? I hadn’t seen him for a month. It seems impossible that he should be gone.”

“He told me it was going to be a demonstration against a building,” said the Professor. “I had to know that much to prepare the missile. I pointed out to him that I had hardly a sufficient quantity for a completely destructive result, but he pressed me very earnestly to do my best. As he wanted something that could be carried openly in the hand, I proposed to make use of an old one-gallon copal varnish can I happened to have by me. He was pleased at the idea. It gave me some trouble, because I had to cut out the bottom first and solder it on again afterwards. When prepared for use, the can enclosed a wide-mouthed, well-corked jar of thick glass packed around with some wet clay and containing sixteen ounces of X2 green powder. The detonator was connected with the screw top of the can. It was ingenious — a combination of time and shock. I explained the system to him. It was a thin tube of tin enclosing a — ”

Ossipon’s attention had wandered.

“What do you think has happened?” he interrupted.

“Can’t tell. Screwed the top on tight, which would make the connection, and then forgot the time. It was set for twenty minutes. On the other hand, the time contact being made, a sharp shock would bring about the explosion at once. He either ran the time too close, or simply let the thing fall. The contact was made all right — that’s clear to me at any rate. The system’s worked perfectly. And yet you would think that a common fool in a hurry would be much more likely to forget to make the contact altogether. I was worrying myself about that sort of failure mostly. But there are more kinds

of fools than one can guard against. You can't expect a detonator to be absolutely fool-proof."

He beckoned to a waiter. Ossipon sat rigid, with the abstracted gaze of mental travail. After the man had gone away with the money he roused himself, with an air of profound dissatisfaction.

"It's extremely unpleasant for me," he mused. "Karl has been in bed with bronchitis for a week. There's an even chance that he will never get up again. Michaelis's luxuriating in the country somewhere. A fashionable publisher has offered him five hundred pounds for a book. It will be a ghastly failure. He has lost the habit of consecutive thinking in prison, you know."

The Professor on his feet, now buttoning his coat, looked about him with perfect indifference.

"What are you going to do?" asked Ossipon wearily. He dreaded the blame of the Central Red Committee, a body which had no permanent place of abode, and of whose membership he was not exactly informed. If this affair eventuated in the stoppage of the modest subsidy allotted to the publication of the F. P. pamphlets, then indeed he would have to regret Verloc's inexplicable folly.

"Solidarity with the extremest form of action is one thing, and silly recklessness is another," he said, with a sort of moody brutality. "I don't know what came to Verloc. There's some mystery there. However, he's gone. You may take it as you like, but under the circumstances the only policy for the militant revolutionary group is to disclaim all connection with this damned freak of yours. How to make the disclaimer convincing enough is what bothers me."

The little man on his feet, buttoned up and ready to go, was no taller than the seated Ossipon. He levelled his spectacles at the latter's face point-blank.

"You might ask the police for a testimonial of good conduct. They know where every one of you slept last night. Perhaps if you asked them they would consent to publish some sort of official statement."

"No doubt they are aware well enough that we had nothing to do with this," mumbled Ossipon bitterly. "What they will say is another thing." He remained thoughtful, disregarding the short, owlsh, shabby figure standing by his side. "I must lay hands on Michaelis at once, and get him to speak from his heart at one of our gatherings. The public has a sort of sentimental

regard for that fellow. His name is known. And I am in touch with a few reporters on the big dailies. What he would say would be utter bosh, but he has a turn of talk that makes it go down all the same.”

“Like treacle,” interjected the Professor, rather low, keeping an impassive expression.

The perplexed Ossipon went on communing with himself half audibly, after the manner of a man reflecting in perfect solitude.

“Confounded ass! To leave such an imbecile business on my hands. And I don’t even know if — ”

He sat with compressed lips. The idea of going for news straight to the shop lacked charm. His notion was that Verloc’s shop might have been turned already into a police trap. They will be bound to make some arrests, he thought, with something resembling virtuous indignation, for the even tenor of his revolutionary life was menaced by no fault of his. And yet unless he went there he ran the risk of remaining in ignorance of what perhaps it would be very material for him to know. Then he reflected that, if the man in the park had been so very much blown to pieces as the evening papers said, he could not have been identified. And if so, the police could have no special reason for watching Verloc’s shop more closely than any other place known to be frequented by marked anarchists — no more reason, in fact, than for watching the doors of the Silenus. There would be a lot of watching all round, no matter where he went. Still —

“I wonder what I had better do now?” he muttered, taking counsel with himself.

A rasping voice at his elbow said, with sedate scorn:

“Fasten yourself upon the woman for all she’s worth.”

After uttering these words the Professor walked away from the table. Ossipon, whom that piece of insight had taken unawares, gave one ineffectual start, and remained still, with a helpless gaze, as though nailed fast to the seat of his chair. The lonely piano, without as much as a music stool to help it, struck a few chords courageously, and beginning a selection of national airs, played him out at last to the tune of “Blue Bells of Scotland.” The painfully detached notes grew faint behind his back while he went slowly upstairs, across the hall, and into the street.

In front of the great doorway a dismal row of newspaper sellers standing clear of the pavement dealt out their wares from the gutter. It was a raw,

gloomy day of the early spring; and the grimy sky, the mud of the streets, the rags of the dirty men, harmonised excellently with the eruption of the damp, rubbishy sheets of paper soiled with printers' ink. The posters, maculated with filth, garnished like tapestry the sweep of the curbstone. The trade in afternoon papers was brisk, yet, in comparison with the swift, constant march of foot traffic, the effect was of indifference, of a disregarded distribution. Ossipon looked hurriedly both ways before stepping out into the cross-currents, but the Professor was already out of sight.

## CHAPTER V

The Professor had turned into a street to the left, and walked along, with his head carried rigidly erect, in a crowd whose every individual almost overtopped his stunted stature. It was vain to pretend to himself that he was not disappointed. But that was mere feeling; the stoicism of his thought could not be disturbed by this or any other failure. Next time, or the time after next, a telling stroke would be delivered—something really startling — a blow fit to open the first crack in the imposing front of the great edifice of legal conceptions sheltering the atrocious injustice of society. Of humble origin, and with an appearance really so mean as to stand in the way of his considerable natural abilities, his imagination had been fired early by the tales of men rising from the depths of poverty to positions of authority and affluence. The extreme, almost ascetic purity of his thought, combined with an astounding ignorance of worldly conditions, had set before him a goal of power and prestige to be attained without the medium of arts, graces, tact, wealth — by sheer weight of merit alone. On that view he considered himself entitled to undisputed success. His father, a delicate dark enthusiast with a sloping forehead, had been an itinerant and rousing preacher of some obscure but rigid Christian sect — a man supremely confident in the privileges of his righteousness. In the son, individualist by temperament, once the science of colleges had replaced thoroughly the faith of conventicles, this moral attitude translated itself into a frenzied puritanism of ambition. He nursed it as something secularly holy. To see it thwarted opened his eyes to the true nature of the world, whose morality was artificial, corrupt, and blasphemous. The way of even the most justifiable revolutions is prepared by personal impulses disguised into creeds. The Professor's indignation found in itself a final cause that absolved him from the sin of turning to destruction as the agent of his ambition. To destroy public faith in legality was the imperfect formula of his pedantic fanaticism; but the subconscious conviction that the framework of an established social order cannot be effectually shattered except by some form of collective or individual violence was precise and correct. He was a moral agent — that was settled in his mind. By exercising his agency with ruthless defiance he procured for himself the appearances of power and personal prestige. That was undeniable to his vengeful bitterness. It pacified its unrest; and in their own way the most ardent of revolutionaries are perhaps doing no more but



seeking for peace in common with the rest of mankind — the peace of soothed vanity, of satisfied appetites, or perhaps of appeased conscience.

Lost in the crowd, miserable and undersized, he meditated confidently on his power, keeping his hand in the left pocket of his trousers, grasping lightly the india-rubber ball, the supreme guarantee of his sinister freedom; but after a while he became disagreeably affected by the sight of the roadway thronged with vehicles and of the pavement crowded with men and women. He was in a long, straight street, peopled by a mere fraction of an immense multitude; but all round him, on and on, even to the limits of the horizon hidden by the enormous piles of bricks, he felt the mass of mankind mighty in its numbers. They swarmed numerous like locusts, industrious like ants, thoughtless like a natural force, pushing on blind and orderly and absorbed, impervious to sentiment, to logic, to terror too perhaps.

That was the form of doubt he feared most. Impervious to fear! Often while walking abroad, when he happened also to come out of himself, he had such moments of dreadful and sane mistrust of mankind. What if nothing could move them? Such moments come to all men whose ambition aims at a direct grasp upon humanity — to artists, politicians, thinkers, reformers, or saints. A despicable emotional state this, against which solitude fortifies a superior character; and with severe exultation the Professor thought of the refuge of his room, with its padlocked cupboard, lost in a wilderness of poor houses, the hermitage of the perfect anarchist. In order to reach sooner the point where he could take his omnibus, he turned brusquely out of the populous street into a narrow and dusky alley paved with flagstones. On one side the low brick houses had in their dusty windows the sightless, moribund look of incurable decay — empty shells awaiting demolition. From the other side life had not departed wholly as yet. Facing the only gas-lamp yawned the cavern of a second-hand furniture dealer, where, deep in the gloom of a sort of narrow avenue winding through a bizarre forest of wardrobes, with an undergrowth tangle of table legs, a tall pier-glass glimmered like a pool of water in a wood. An unhappy, homeless couch, accompanied by two unrelated chairs, stood in the open. The only human being making use of the alley besides the Professor, coming stalwart and erect from the opposite direction, checked his swinging pace suddenly.

“Hallo!” he said, and stood a little on one side watchfully.

The Professor had already stopped, with a ready half turn which brought his shoulders very near the other wall. His right hand fell lightly on the back of the outcast couch, the left remained purposefully plunged deep in the trousers pocket, and the roundness of the heavy rimmed spectacles imparted an owlsh character to his moody, unperturbed face.

It was like a meeting in a side corridor of a mansion full of life. The stalwart man was buttoned up in a dark overcoat, and carried an umbrella. His hat, tilted back, uncovered a good deal of forehead, which appeared very white in the dusk. In the dark patches of the orbits the eyeballs glimmered piercingly. Long, drooping moustaches, the colour of ripe corn, framed with their points the square block of his shaved chin.

“I am not looking for you,” he said curtly.

The Professor did not stir an inch. The blended noises of the enormous town sank down to an inarticulate low murmur. Chief Inspector Heat of the Special Crimes Department changed his tone.

“Not in a hurry to get home?” he asked, with mocking simplicity.

The unwholesome-looking little moral agent of destruction exulted silently in the possession of personal prestige, keeping in check this man armed with the defensive mandate of a menaced society. More fortunate than Caligula, who wished that the Roman Senate had only one head for the better satisfaction of his cruel lust, he beheld in that one man all the forces he had set at defiance: the force of law, property, oppression, and injustice. He beheld all his enemies, and fearlessly confronted them all in a supreme satisfaction of his vanity. They stood perplexed before him as if before a dreadful portent. He gloated inwardly over the chance of this meeting affirming his superiority over all the multitude of mankind.

It was in reality a chance meeting. Chief Inspector Heat had had a disagreeably busy day since his department received the first telegram from Greenwich a little before eleven in the morning. First of all, the fact of the outrage being attempted less than a week after he had assured a high official that no outbreak of anarchist activity was to be apprehended was sufficiently annoying. If he ever thought himself safe in making a statement, it was then. He had made that statement with infinite satisfaction to himself, because it was clear that the high official desired greatly to hear that very thing. He had affirmed that nothing of the sort could even be thought of without the department being aware of it within twenty-four hours; and he had spoken thus in his consciousness of being the great expert

of his department. He had gone even so far as to utter words which true wisdom would have kept back. But Chief Inspector Heat was not very wise — at least not truly so. True wisdom, which is not certain of anything in this world of contradictions, would have prevented him from attaining his present position. It would have alarmed his superiors, and done away with his chances of promotion. His promotion had been very rapid.

“There isn’t one of them, sir, that we couldn’t lay our hands on at any time of night and day. We know what each of them is doing hour by hour,” he had declared. And the high official had deigned to smile. This was so obviously the right thing to say for an officer of Chief Inspector Heat’s reputation that it was perfectly delightful. The high official believed the declaration, which chimed in with his idea of the fitness of things. His wisdom was of an official kind, or else he might have reflected upon a matter not of theory but of experience that in the close-woven stuff of relations between conspirator and police there occur unexpected solutions of continuity, sudden holes in space and time. A given anarchist may be watched inch by inch and minute by minute, but a moment always comes when somehow all sight and touch of him are lost for a few hours, during which something (generally an explosion) more or less deplorable does happen. But the high official, carried away by his sense of the fitness of things, had smiled, and now the recollection of that smile was very annoying to Chief Inspector Heat, principal expert in anarchist procedure.

This was not the only circumstance whose recollection depressed the usual serenity of the eminent specialist. There was another dating back only to that very morning. The thought that when called urgently to his Assistant Commissioner’s private room he had been unable to conceal his astonishment was distinctly vexing. His instinct of a successful man had taught him long ago that, as a general rule, a reputation is built on manner as much as on achievement. And he felt that his manner when confronted with the telegram had not been impressive. He had opened his eyes widely, and had exclaimed “Impossible!” exposing himself thereby to the unanswerable retort of a finger-tip laid forcibly on the telegram which the Assistant Commissioner, after reading it aloud, had flung on the desk. To be crushed, as it were, under the tip of a forefinger was an unpleasant experience. Very damaging, too! Furthermore, Chief Inspector Heat was conscious of not having mended matters by allowing himself to express a conviction.

“One thing I can tell you at once: none of our lot had anything to do with this.”

He was strong in his integrity of a good detective, but he saw now that an impenetrably attentive reserve towards this incident would have served his reputation better. On the other hand, he admitted to himself that it was difficult to preserve one's reputation if rank outsiders were going to take a hand in the business. Outsiders are the bane of the police as of other professions. The tone of the Assistant Commissioner's remarks had been sour enough to set one's teeth on edge.

And since breakfast Chief Inspector Heat had not managed to get anything to eat.

Starting immediately to begin his investigation on the spot, he had swallowed a good deal of raw, unwholesome fog in the park. Then he had walked over to the hospital; and when the investigation in Greenwich was concluded at last he had lost his inclination for food. Not accustomed, as the doctors are, to examine closely the mangled remains of human beings, he had been shocked by the sight disclosed to his view when a waterproof sheet had been lifted off a table in a certain apartment of the hospital.

Another waterproof sheet was spread over that table in the manner of a table-cloth, with the corners turned up over a sort of mound — a heap of rags, scorched and bloodstained, half concealing what might have been an accumulation of raw material for a cannibal feast. It required considerable firmness of mind not to recoil before that sight. Chief Inspector Heat, an efficient officer of his department, stood his ground, but for a whole minute he did not advance. A local constable in uniform cast a sidelong glance, and said, with stolid simplicity:

“He's all there. Every bit of him. It was a job.”

He had been the first man on the spot after the explosion. He mentioned the fact again. He had seen something like a heavy flash of lightning in the fog. At that time he was standing at the door of the King William Street Lodge talking to the keeper. The concussion made him tingle all over. He ran between the trees towards the Observatory. “As fast as my legs would carry me,” he repeated twice.

Chief Inspector Heat, bending forward over the table in a gingerly and horrified manner, let him run on. The hospital porter and another man turned down the corners of the cloth, and stepped aside. The Chief

Inspector's eyes searched the gruesome detail of that heap of mixed things, which seemed to have been collected in shambles and rag shops.

"You used a shovel," he remarked, observing a sprinkling of small gravel, tiny brown bits of bark, and particles of splintered wood as fine as needles.

"Had to in one place," said the stolid constable. "I sent a keeper to fetch a spade. When he heard me scraping the ground with it he leaned his forehead against a tree, and was as sick as a dog."

The Chief Inspector, stooping guardedly over the table, fought down the unpleasant sensation in his throat. The shattering violence of destruction which had made of that body a heap of nameless fragments affected his feelings with a sense of ruthless cruelty, though his reason told him the effect must have been as swift as a flash of lightning. The man, whoever he was, had died instantaneously; and yet it seemed impossible to believe that a human body could have reached that state of disintegration without passing through the pangs of inconceivable agony. No physiologist, and still less of a metaphysician, Chief Inspector Heat rose by the force of sympathy, which is a form of fear, above the vulgar conception of time. Instantaneous! He remembered all he had ever read in popular publications of long and terrifying dreams dreamed in the instant of waking; of the whole past life lived with frightful intensity by a drowning man as his doomed head bobs up, streaming, for the last time. The inexplicable mysteries of conscious existence beset Chief Inspector Heat till he evolved a horrible notion that ages of atrocious pain and mental torture could be contained between two successive winks of an eye. And meantime the Chief Inspector went on, peering at the table with a calm face and the slightly anxious attention of an indigent customer bending over what may be called the by-products of a butcher's shop with a view to an inexpensive Sunday dinner. All the time his trained faculties of an excellent investigator, who scorns no chance of information, followed the self-satisfied, disjointed loquacity of the constable.

"A fair-haired fellow," the last observed in a placid tone, and paused. "The old woman who spoke to the sergeant noticed a fair-haired fellow coming out of Maze Hill Station." He paused. "And he was a fair-haired fellow. She noticed two men coming out of the station after the uptrain had gone on," he continued slowly. "She couldn't tell if they were together.

She took no particular notice of the big one, but the other was a fair, slight chap, carrying a tin varnish can in one hand.” The constable ceased.

“Know the woman?” muttered the Chief Inspector, with his eyes fixed on the table, and a vague notion in his mind of an inquest to be held presently upon a person likely to remain for ever unknown.

“Yes. She’s housekeeper to a retired publican, and attends the chapel in Park Place sometimes,” the constable uttered weightily, and paused, with another oblique glance at the table.

Then suddenly: “Well, here he is — all of him I could see. Fair. Slight — slight enough. Look at that foot there. I picked up the legs first, one after another. He was that scattered you didn’t know where to begin.”

The constable paused; the least flicker of an innocent self-laudatory smile invested his round face with an infantile expression.

“Stumbled,” he announced positively. “I stumbled once myself, and pitched on my head too, while running up. Them roots do stick out all about the place. Stumbled against the root of a tree and fell, and that thing he was carrying must have gone off right under his chest, I expect.”

The echo of the words “Person unknown” repeating itself in his inner consciousness bothered the Chief Inspector considerably. He would have liked to trace this affair back to its mysterious origin for his own information. He was professionally curious. Before the public he would have liked to vindicate the efficiency of his department by establishing the identity of that man. He was a loyal servant. That, however, appeared impossible. The first term of the problem was unreadable — lacked all suggestion but that of atrocious cruelty.

Overcoming his physical repugnance, Chief Inspector Heat stretched out his hand without conviction for the salving of his conscience, and took up the least soiled of the rags. It was a narrow strip of velvet with a larger triangular piece of dark blue cloth hanging from it. He held it up to his eyes; and the police constable spoke.

“Velvet collar. Funny the old woman should have noticed the velvet collar. Dark blue overcoat with a velvet collar, she has told us. He was the chap she saw, and no mistake. And here he is all complete, velvet collar and all. I don’t think I missed a single piece as big as a postage stamp.”

At this point the trained faculties of the Chief Inspector ceased to hear the voice of the constable. He moved to one of the windows for better light. His face, averted from the room, expressed a startled intense interest while

he examined closely the triangular piece of broad-cloth. By a sudden jerk he detached it, and only after stuffing it into his pocket turned round to the room, and flung the velvet collar back on the table —

“Cover up,” he directed the attendants curtly, without another look, and, saluted by the constable, carried off his spoil hastily.

A convenient train whirled him up to town, alone and pondering deeply, in a third-class compartment. That singed piece of cloth was incredibly valuable, and he could not defend himself from astonishment at the casual manner it had come into his possession. It was as if Fate had thrust that clue into his hands. And after the manner of the average man, whose ambition is to command events, he began to mistrust such a gratuitous and accidental success — just because it seemed forced upon him. The practical value of success depends not a little on the way you look at it. But Fate looks at nothing. It has no discretion. He no longer considered it eminently desirable all round to establish publicly the identity of the man who had blown himself up that morning with such horrible completeness. But he was not certain of the view his department would take. A department is to those it employs a complex personality with ideas and even fads of its own. It depends on the loyal devotion of its servants, and the devoted loyalty of trusted servants is associated with a certain amount of affectionate contempt, which keeps it sweet, as it were. By a benevolent provision of Nature no man is a hero to his valet, or else the heroes would have to brush their own clothes. Likewise no department appears perfectly wise to the intimacy of its workers. A department does not know so much as some of its servants. Being a dispassionate organism, it can never be perfectly informed. It would not be good for its efficiency to know too much. Chief Inspector Heat got out of the train in a state of thoughtfulness entirely untainted with disloyalty, but not quite free of that jealous mistrust which so often springs on the ground of perfect devotion, whether to women or to institutions.

It was in this mental disposition, physically very empty, but still nauseated by what he had seen, that he had come upon the Professor. Under these conditions which make for irascibility in a sound, normal man, this meeting was specially unwelcome to Chief Inspector Heat. He had not been thinking of the Professor; he had not been thinking of any individual anarchist at all. The complexion of that case had somehow forced upon

him the general idea of the absurdity of things human, which in the abstract is sufficiently annoying to an unphilosophical temperament, and in concrete instances becomes exasperating beyond endurance. At the beginning of his career Chief Inspector Heat had been concerned with the more energetic forms of thieving. He had gained his spurs in that sphere, and naturally enough had kept for it, after his promotion to another department, a feeling not very far removed from affection. Thieving was not a sheer absurdity. It was a form of human industry, perverse indeed, but still an industry exercised in an industrious world; it was work undertaken for the same reason as the work in potteries, in coal mines, in fields, in tool-grinding shops. It was labour, whose practical difference from the other forms of labour consisted in the nature of its risk, which did not lie in ankylosis, or lead poisoning, or fire-damp, or gritty dust, but in what may be briefly defined in its own special phraseology as "Seven years hard." Chief Inspector Heat was, of course, not insensible to the gravity of moral differences. But neither were the thieves he had been looking after. They submitted to the severe sanctions of a morality familiar to Chief Inspector Heat with a certain resignation.

They were his fellow-citizens gone wrong because of imperfect education, Chief Inspector Heat believed; but allowing for that difference, he could understand the mind of a burglar, because, as a matter of fact, the mind and the instincts of a burglar are of the same kind as the mind and the instincts of a police officer. Both recognise the same conventions, and have a working knowledge of each other's methods and of the routine of their respective trades. They understand each other, which is advantageous to both, and establishes a sort of amenity in their relations. Products of the same machine, one classed as useful and the other as noxious, they take the machine for granted in different ways, but with a seriousness essentially the same. The mind of Chief Inspector Heat was inaccessible to ideas of revolt. But his thieves were not rebels. His bodily vigour, his cool inflexible manner, his courage and his fairness, had secured for him much respect and some adulation in the sphere of his early successes. He had felt himself revered and admired. And Chief Inspector Heat, arrested within six paces of the anarchist nick-named the Professor, gave a thought of regret to the world of thieves — sane, without morbid ideals, working by routine, respectful of constituted authorities, free from all taint of hate and despair.



After paying this tribute to what is normal in the constitution of society (for the idea of thieving appeared to his instinct as normal as the idea of property), Chief Inspector Heat felt very angry with himself for having stopped, for having spoken, for having taken that way at all on the ground of it being a short cut from the station to the headquarters. And he spoke again in his big authoritative voice, which, being moderated, had a threatening character.

“You are not wanted, I tell you,” he repeated.

The anarchist did not stir. An inward laugh of derision uncovered not only his teeth but his gums as well, shook him all over, without the slightest sound. Chief Inspector Heat was led to add, against his better judgment:

“Not yet. When I want you I will know where to find you.”

Those were perfectly proper words, within the tradition and suitable to his character of a police officer addressing one of his special flock. But the reception they got departed from tradition and propriety. It was outrageous. The stunted, weakly figure before him spoke at last.

“I’ve no doubt the papers would give you an obituary notice then. You know best what that would be worth to you. I should think you can imagine easily the sort of stuff that would be printed. But you may be exposed to the unpleasantness of being buried together with me, though I suppose your friends would make an effort to sort us out as much as possible.”

With all his healthy contempt for the spirit dictating such speeches, the atrocious allusiveness of the words had its effect on Chief Inspector Heat. He had too much insight, and too much exact information as well, to dismiss them as rot. The dusk of this narrow lane took on a sinister tint from the dark, frail little figure, its back to the wall, and speaking with a weak, self-confident voice. To the vigorous, tenacious vitality of the Chief Inspector, the physical wretchedness of that being, so obviously not fit to live, was ominous; for it seemed to him that if he had the misfortune to be such a miserable object he would not have cared how soon he died. Life had such a strong hold upon him that a fresh wave of nausea broke out in slight perspiration upon his brow. The murmur of town life, the subdued rumble of wheels in the two invisible streets to the right and left, came through the curve of the sordid lane to his ears with a precious familiarity and an appealing sweetness. He was human. But Chief Inspector Heat was also a man, and he could not let such words pass.

“All this is good to frighten children with,” he said. “I’ll have you yet.”

It was very well said, without scorn, with an almost austere quietness.

"Doubtless," was the answer; "but there's no time like the present, believe me. For a man of real convictions this is a fine opportunity of self-sacrifice. You may not find another so favourable, so humane. There isn't even a cat near us, and these condemned old houses would make a good heap of bricks where you stand. You'll never get me at so little cost to life and property, which you are paid to protect."

"You don't know who you're speaking to," said Chief Inspector Heat firmly. "If I were to lay my hands on you now I would be no better than yourself."

"Ah! The game!"

"You may be sure our side will win in the end. It may yet be necessary to make people believe that some of you ought to be shot at sight like mad dogs. Then that will be the game. But I'll be damned if I know what yours is. I don't believe you know yourselves. You'll never get anything by it."

"Meantime it's you who get something from it — so far. And you get it easily, too. I won't speak of your salary, but haven't you made your name simply by not understanding what we are after?"

"What are you after, then?" asked Chief Inspector Heat, with scornful haste, like a man in a hurry who perceives he is wasting his time.

The perfect anarchist answered by a smile which did not part his thin colourless lips; and the celebrated Chief Inspector felt a sense of superiority which induced him to raise a warning finger.

"Give it up — whatever it is," he said in an admonishing tone, but not so kindly as if he were condescending to give good advice to a cracksman of repute. "Give it up. You'll find we are too many for you."

The fixed smile on the Professor's lips wavered, as if the mocking spirit within had lost its assurance. Chief Inspector Heat went on:

"Don't you believe me eh? Well, you've only got to look about you. We are. And anyway, you're not doing it well. You're always making a mess of it. Why, if the thieves didn't know their work better they would starve."

The hint of an invincible multitude behind that man's back roused a sombre indignation in the breast of the Professor. He smiled no longer his enigmatic and mocking smile. The resisting power of numbers, the unattackable stolidity of a great multitude, was the haunting fear of his sinister loneliness. His lips trembled for some time before he managed to say in a strangled voice:

“I am doing my work better than you’re doing yours.”

“That’ll do now,” interrupted Chief Inspector Heat hurriedly; and the Professor laughed right out this time. While still laughing he moved on; but he did not laugh long. It was a sad-faced, miserable little man who emerged from the narrow passage into the bustle of the broad thoroughfare. He walked with the nerveless gait of a tramp going on, still going on, indifferent to rain or sun in a sinister detachment from the aspects of sky and earth. Chief Inspector Heat, on the other hand, after watching him for a while, stepped out with the purposeful briskness of a man disregarding indeed the inclemencies of the weather, but conscious of having an authorised mission on this earth and the moral support of his kind. All the inhabitants of the immense town, the population of the whole country, and even the teeming millions struggling upon the planet, were with him — down to the very thieves and mendicants. Yes, the thieves themselves were sure to be with him in his present work. The consciousness of universal support in his general activity heartened him to grapple with the particular problem.

The problem immediately before the Chief Inspector was that of managing the Assistant Commissioner of his department, his immediate superior. This is the perennial problem of trusty and loyal servants; anarchism gave it its particular complexion, but nothing more. Truth to say, Chief Inspector Heat thought but little of anarchism. He did not attach undue importance to it, and could never bring himself to consider it seriously. It had more the character of disorderly conduct; disorderly without the human excuse of drunkenness, which at any rate implies good feeling and an amiable leaning towards festivity. As criminals, anarchists were distinctly no class — no class at all. And recalling the Professor, Chief Inspector Heat, without checking his swinging pace, muttered through his teeth:

“Lunatic.”

Catching thieves was another matter altogether. It had that quality of seriousness belonging to every form of open sport where the best man wins under perfectly comprehensible rules. There were no rules for dealing with anarchists. And that was distasteful to the Chief Inspector. It was all foolishness, but that foolishness excited the public mind, affected persons in high places, and touched upon international relations. A hard, merciless contempt settled rigidly on the Chief Inspector’s face as he walked on. His

mind ran over all the anarchists of his flock. Not one of them had half the spunk of this or that burglar he had known. Not half — not one-tenth.

At headquarters the Chief Inspector was admitted at once to the Assistant Commissioner's private room. He found him, pen in hand, bent over a great table bestrewn with papers, as if worshipping an enormous double inkstand of bronze and crystal. Speaking tubes resembling snakes were tied by the heads to the back of the Assistant Commissioner's wooden arm-chair, and their gaping mouths seemed ready to bite his elbows. And in this attitude he raised only his eyes, whose lids were darker than his face and very much creased. The reports had come in: every anarchist had been exactly accounted for.

After saying this he lowered his eyes, signed rapidly two single sheets of paper, and only then laid down his pen, and sat well back, directing an inquiring gaze at his renowned subordinate. The Chief Inspector stood it well, deferential but inscrutable.

"I daresay you were right," said the Assistant Commissioner, "in telling me at first that the London anarchists had nothing to do with this. I quite appreciate the excellent watch kept on them by your men. On the other hand, this, for the public, does not amount to more than a confession of ignorance."

The Assistant Commissioner's delivery was leisurely, as it were cautious. His thought seemed to rest poised on a word before passing to another, as though words had been the stepping-stones for his intellect picking its way across the waters of error. "Unless you have brought something useful from Greenwich," he added.

The Chief Inspector began at once the account of his investigation in a clear matter-of-fact manner. His superior turning his chair a little, and crossing his thin legs, leaned sideways on his elbow, with one hand shading his eyes. His listening attitude had a sort of angular and sorrowful grace. Gleams as of highly burnished silver played on the sides of his ebony black head when he inclined it slowly at the end.

Chief Inspector Heat waited with the appearance of turning over in his mind all he had just said, but, as a matter of fact, considering the advisability of saying something more. The Assistant Commissioner cut his hesitation short.

“You believe there were two men?” he asked, without uncovering his eyes.

The Chief Inspector thought it more than probable. In his opinion, the two men had parted from each other within a hundred yards from the Observatory walls. He explained also how the other man could have got out of the park speedily without being observed. The fog, though not very dense, was in his favour. He seemed to have escorted the other to the spot, and then to have left him there to do the job single-handed. Taking the time those two were seen coming out of Maze Hill Station by the old woman, and the time when the explosion was heard, the Chief Inspector thought that the other man might have been actually at the Greenwich Park Station, ready to catch the next train up, at the moment his comrade was destroying himself so thoroughly.

“Very thoroughly — eh?” murmured the Assistant Commissioner from under the shadow of his hand.

The Chief Inspector in a few vigorous words described the aspect of the remains. “The coroner’s jury will have a treat,” he added grimly.

The Assistant Commissioner uncovered his eyes.

“We shall have nothing to tell them,” he remarked languidly.

He looked up, and for a time watched the markedly non-committal attitude of his Chief Inspector. His nature was one that is not easily accessible to illusions. He knew that a department is at the mercy of its subordinate officers, who have their own conceptions of loyalty. His career had begun in a tropical colony. He had liked his work there. It was police work. He had been very successful in tracking and breaking up certain nefarious secret societies amongst the natives. Then he took his long leave, and got married rather impulsively. It was a good match from a worldly point of view, but his wife formed an unfavourable opinion of the colonial climate on hearsay evidence. On the other hand, she had influential connections. It was an excellent match. But he did not like the work he had to do now. He felt himself dependent on too many subordinates and too many masters. The near presence of that strange emotional phenomenon called public opinion weighed upon his spirits, and alarmed him by its irrational nature. No doubt that from ignorance he exaggerated to himself its power for good and evil — especially for evil; and the rough east winds of the English spring (which agreed with his wife) augmented his general mistrust of men’s motives and of the efficiency of their organisation. The

futility of office work especially appalled him on those days so trying to his sensitive liver.

He got up, unfolding himself to his full height, and with a heaviness of step remarkable in so slender a man, moved across the room to the window. The panes streamed with rain, and the short street he looked down into lay wet and empty, as if swept clear suddenly by a great flood. It was a very trying day, choked in raw fog to begin with, and now drowned in cold rain. The flickering, blurred flames of gas-lamps seemed to be dissolving in a watery atmosphere. And the lofty pretensions of a mankind oppressed by the miserable indignities of the weather appeared as a colossal and hopeless vanity deserving of scorn, wonder, and compassion.

“Horrible, horrible!” thought the Assistant Commissioner to himself, with his face near the window-pane. “We have been having this sort of thing now for ten days; no, a fortnight — a fortnight.” He ceased to think completely for a time. That utter stillness of his brain lasted about three seconds. Then he said perfunctorily: “You have set inquiries on foot for tracing that other man up and down the line?”

He had no doubt that everything needful had been done. Chief Inspector Heat knew, of course, thoroughly the business of man-hunting. And these were the routine steps, too, that would be taken as a matter of course by the merest beginner. A few inquiries amongst the ticket collectors and the porters of the two small railway stations would give additional details as to the appearance of the two men; the inspection of the collected tickets would show at once where they came from that morning. It was elementary, and could not have been neglected. Accordingly the Chief Inspector answered that all this had been done directly the old woman had come forward with her deposition. And he mentioned the name of a station. “That’s where they came from, sir,” he went on. “The porter who took the tickets at Maze Hill remembers two chaps answering to the description passing the barrier. They seemed to him two respectable working men of a superior sort — sign painters or house decorators. The big man got out of a third-class compartment backward, with a bright tin can in his hand. On the platform he gave it to carry to the fair young fellow who followed him. All this agrees exactly with what the old woman told the police sergeant in Greenwich.”

The Assistant Commissioner, still with his face turned to the window, expressed his doubt as to these two men having had anything to do with the

outrage. All this theory rested upon the utterances of an old charwoman who had been nearly knocked down by a man in a hurry. Not a very substantial authority indeed, unless on the ground of sudden inspiration, which was hardly tenable.

“Frankly now, could she have been really inspired?” he queried, with grave irony, keeping his back to the room, as if entranced by the contemplation of the town’s colossal forms half lost in the night. He did not even look round when he heard the mutter of the word “Providential” from the principal subordinate of his department, whose name, printed sometimes in the papers, was familiar to the great public as that of one of its zealous and hard-working protectors. Chief Inspector Heat raised his voice a little.

“Strips and bits of bright tin were quite visible to me,” he said. “That’s a pretty good corroboration.”

“And these men came from that little country station,” the Assistant Commissioner mused aloud, wondering. He was told that such was the name on two tickets out of three given up out of that train at Maze Hill. The third person who got out was a hawker from Gravesend well known to the porters. The Chief Inspector imparted that information in a tone of finality with some ill humour, as loyal servants will do in the consciousness of their fidelity and with the sense of the value of their loyal exertions. And still the Assistant Commissioner did not turn away from the darkness outside, as vast as a sea.

“Two foreign anarchists coming from that place,” he said, apparently to the window-pane. “It’s rather unaccountable.”

“Yes, sir. But it would be still more unaccountable if that Michaelis weren’t staying in a cottage in the neighbourhood.”

At the sound of that name, falling unexpectedly into this annoying affair, the Assistant Commissioner dismissed brusquely the vague remembrance of his daily whist party at his club. It was the most comforting habit of his life, in a mainly successful display of his skill without the assistance of any subordinate. He entered his club to play from five to seven, before going home to dinner, forgetting for those two hours whatever was distasteful in his life, as though the game were a beneficent drug for allaying the pangs of moral discontent. His partners were the gloomily humorous editor of a celebrated magazine; a silent, elderly barrister with malicious little eyes; and a highly martial, simple-minded old Colonel with nervous brown hands. They were his club acquaintances merely. He never met them

elsewhere except at the card-table. But they all seemed to approach the game in the spirit of co-sufferers, as if it were indeed a drug against the secret ills of existence; and every day as the sun declined over the countless roofs of the town, a mellow, pleasurable impatience, resembling the impulse of a sure and profound friendship, lightened his professional labours. And now this pleasurable sensation went out of him with something resembling a physical shock, and was replaced by a special kind of interest in his work of social protection — an improper sort of interest, which may be defined best as a sudden and alert mistrust of the weapon in his hand.



## CHAPTER VI

The lady patroness of Michaelis, the ticket-of-leave apostle of humanitarian hopes, was one of the most influential and distinguished connections of the Assistant Commissioner's wife, whom she called Annie, and treated still rather as a not very wise and utterly inexperienced young girl. But she had consented to accept him on a friendly footing, which was by no means the case with all of his wife's influential connections. Married young and splendidly at some remote epoch of the past, she had had for a time a close view of great affairs and even of some great men. She herself was a great lady. Old now in the number of her years, she had that sort of exceptional temperament which defies time with scornful disregard, as if it were a rather vulgar convention submitted to by the mass of inferior mankind. Many other conventions easier to set aside, alas! failed to obtain her recognition, also on temperamental grounds — either because they bored her, or else because they stood in the way of her scorns and sympathies. Admiration was a sentiment unknown to her (it was one of the secret griefs of her most noble husband against her) — first, as always more or less tainted with mediocrity, and next as being in a way an admission of inferiority. And both were frankly inconceivable to her nature. To be fearlessly outspoken in her opinions came easily to her, since she judged solely from the standpoint of her social position. She was equally untrammelled in her actions; and as her tactfulness proceeded from genuine humanity, her bodily vigour remained remarkable and her superiority was serene and cordial, three generations had admired her infinitely, and the last she was likely to see had pronounced her a wonderful woman. Meantime intelligent, with a sort of lofty simplicity, and curious at heart, but not like many women merely of social gossip, she amused her age by attracting within her ken through the power of her great, almost historical, social prestige everything that rose above the dead level of mankind, lawfully or unlawfully, by position, wit, audacity, fortune or misfortune. Royal Highnesses, artists, men of science, young statesmen, and charlatans of all ages and conditions, who, unsubstantial and light, bobbing up like corks, show best the direction of the surface currents, had been welcomed in that house, listened to, penetrated, understood, appraised, for her own edification. In her own words, she liked to watch what the world was coming to. And as she had a practical mind her judgment of men and

things, though based on special prejudices, was seldom totally wrong, and almost never wrong-headed. Her drawing-room was probably the only place in the wide world where an Assistant Commissioner of Police could meet a convict liberated on a ticket-of-leave on other than professional and official ground. Who had brought Michaelis there one afternoon the Assistant Commissioner did not remember very well. He had a notion it must have been a certain Member of Parliament of illustrious parentage and unconventional sympathies, which were the standing joke of the comic papers. The notabilities and even the simple notorieties of the day brought each other freely to that temple of an old woman's not ignoble curiosity. You never could guess whom you were likely to come upon being received in semi-privacy within the faded blue silk and gilt frame screen, making a cosy nook for a couch and a few arm-chairs in the great drawing-room, with its hum of voices and the groups of people seated or standing in the light of six tall windows.

Michaelis had been the object of a revulsion of popular sentiment, the same sentiment which years ago had applauded the ferocity of the life sentence passed upon him for complicity in a rather mad attempt to rescue some prisoners from a police van. The plan of the conspirators had been to shoot down the horses and overpower the escort. Unfortunately, one of the police constables got shot too. He left a wife and three small children, and the death of that man aroused through the length and breadth of a realm for whose defence, welfare, and glory men die every day as matter of duty, an outburst of furious indignation, of a raging implacable pity for the victim. Three ring-leaders got hanged. Michaelis, young and slim, locksmith by trade, and great frequenter of evening schools, did not even know that anybody had been killed, his part with a few others being to force open the door at the back of the special conveyance. When arrested he had a bunch of skeleton keys in one pocket a heavy chisel in another, and a short crowbar in his hand: neither more nor less than a burglar. But no burglar would have received such a heavy sentence. The death of the constable had made him miserable at heart, but the failure of the plot also. He did not conceal either of these sentiments from his empanelled countrymen, and that sort of compunction appeared shockingly imperfect to the crammed court. The judge on passing sentence commented feelingly upon the depravity and callousness of the young prisoner.

That made the groundless fame of his condemnation; the fame of his release was made for him on no better grounds by people who wished to exploit the sentimental aspect of his imprisonment either for purposes of their own or for no intelligible purpose. He let them do so in the innocence of his heart and the simplicity of his mind. Nothing that happened to him individually had any importance. He was like those saintly men whose personality is lost in the contemplation of their faith. His ideas were not in the nature of convictions. They were inaccessible to reasoning. They formed in all their contradictions and obscurities an invincible and humanitarian creed, which he confessed rather than preached, with an obstinate gentleness, a smile of pacific assurance on his lips, and his candid blue eyes cast down because the sight of faces troubled his inspiration developed in solitude. In that characteristic attitude, pathetic in his grotesque and incurable obesity which he had to drag like a galley slave's bullet to the end of his days, the Assistant Commissioner of Police beheld the ticket-of-leave apostle filling a privileged arm-chair within the screen. He sat there by the head of the old lady's couch, mild-voiced and quiet, with no more self-consciousness than a very small child, and with something of a child's charm — the appealing charm of trustfulness. Confident of the future, whose secret ways had been revealed to him within the four walls of a well-known penitentiary, he had no reason to look with suspicion upon anybody. If he could not give the great and curious lady a very definite idea as to what the world was coming to, he had managed without effort to impress her by his unembittered faith, by the sterling quality of his optimism.

A certain simplicity of thought is common to serene souls at both ends of the social scale. The great lady was simple in her own way. His views and beliefs had nothing in them to shock or startle her, since she judged them from the standpoint of her lofty position. Indeed, her sympathies were easily accessible to a man of that sort. She was not an exploiting capitalist herself; she was, as it were, above the play of economic conditions. And she had a great capacity of pity for the more obvious forms of common human miseries, precisely because she was such a complete stranger to them that she had to translate her conception into terms of mental suffering before she could grasp the notion of their cruelty. The Assistant Commissioner remembered very well the conversation between these two. He had listened in silence. It was something as exciting in a way, and even

touching in its foredoomed futility, as the efforts at moral intercourse between the inhabitants of remote planets. But this grotesque incarnation of humanitarian passion appealed somehow, to one's imagination. At last Michaelis rose, and taking the great lady's extended hand, shook it, retained it for a moment in his great cushioned palm with unembarrassed friendliness, and turned upon the semi-private nook of the drawing-room his back, vast and square, and as if distended under the short tweed jacket. Glancing about in serene benevolence, he waddled along to the distant door between the knots of other visitors. The murmur of conversations paused on his passage. He smiled innocently at a tall, brilliant girl, whose eyes met his accidentally, and went out unconscious of the glances following him across the room. Michaelis' first appearance in the world was a success — a success of esteem unmarred by a single murmur of derision. The interrupted conversations were resumed in their proper tone, grave or light. Only a well-set-up, long-limbed, active-looking man of forty talking with two ladies near a window remarked aloud, with an unexpected depth of feeling: "Eighteen stone, I should say, and not five foot six. Poor fellow! It's terrible — terrible."

The lady of the house, gazing absently at the Assistant Commissioner, left alone with her on the private side of the screen, seemed to be rearranging her mental impressions behind her thoughtful immobility of a handsome old face. Men with grey moustaches and full, healthy, vaguely smiling countenances approached, circling round the screen; two mature women with a matronly air of gracious resolution; a clean-shaved individual with sunken cheeks, and dangling a gold-mounted eyeglass on a broad black ribbon with an old-world, dandified effect. A silence deferential, but full of reserves, reigned for a moment, and then the great lady exclaimed, not with resentment, but with a sort of protesting indignation:

"And that officially is supposed to be a revolutionist! What nonsense." She looked hard at the Assistant Commissioner, who murmured apologetically:

"Not a dangerous one perhaps."

"Not dangerous — I should think not indeed. He is a mere believer. It's the temperament of a saint," declared the great lady in a firm tone. "And they kept him shut up for twenty years. One shudders at the stupidity of it. And now they have let him out everybody belonging to him is gone away

somewhere or dead. His parents are dead; the girl he was to marry has died while he was in prison; he has lost the skill necessary for his manual occupation. He told me all this himself with the sweetest patience; but then, he said, he had had plenty of time to think out things for himself. A pretty compensation! If that's the stuff revolutionists are made of some of us may well go on their knees to them," she continued in a slightly bantering voice, while the banal society smiles hardened on the worldly faces turned towards her with conventional deference. "The poor creature is obviously no longer in a position to take care of himself. Somebody will have to look after him a little."

"He should be recommended to follow a treatment of some sort," the soldierly voice of the active-looking man was heard advising earnestly from a distance. He was in the pink of condition for his age, and even the texture of his long frock coat had a character of elastic soundness, as if it were a living tissue. "The man is virtually a cripple," he added with unmistakable feeling.

Other voices, as if glad of the opening, murmured hasty compassion. "Quite startling," "Monstrous," "Most painful to see." The lank man, with the eyeglass on a broad ribbon, pronounced mincingly the word "Grotesque," whose justness was appreciated by those standing near him. They smiled at each other.

The Assistant Commissioner had expressed no opinion either then or later, his position making it impossible for him to ventilate any independent view of a ticket-of-leave convict. But, in truth, he shared the view of his wife's friend and patron that Michaelis was a humanitarian sentimentalist, a little mad, but upon the whole incapable of hurting a fly intentionally. So when that name cropped up suddenly in this vexing bomb affair he realised all the danger of it for the ticket-of-leave apostle, and his mind reverted at once to the old lady's well-established infatuation. Her arbitrary kindness would not brook patiently any interference with Michaelis' freedom. It was a deep, calm, convinced infatuation. She had not only felt him to be inoffensive, but she had said so, which last by a confusion of her absolutist mind became a sort of incontrovertible demonstration. It was as if the monstrosity of the man, with his candid infant's eyes and a fat angelic smile, had fascinated her. She had come to believe almost his theory of the future, since it was not repugnant to her prejudices. She disliked the new element of plutocracy in the social compound, and industrialism as a

method of human development appeared to her singularly repulsive in its mechanical and unfeeling character. The humanitarian hopes of the mild Michaelis tended not towards utter destruction, but merely towards the complete economic ruin of the system. And she did not really see where was the moral harm of it. It would do away with all the multitude of the “parvenus,” whom she disliked and mistrusted, not because they had arrived anywhere (she denied that), but because of their profound unintelligence of the world, which was the primary cause of the crudity of their perceptions and the aridity of their hearts. With the annihilation of all capital they would vanish too; but universal ruin (providing it was universal, as it was revealed to Michaelis) would leave the social values untouched. The disappearance of the last piece of money could not affect people of position. She could not conceive how it could affect her position, for instance. She had developed these discoveries to the Assistant Commissioner with all the serene fearlessness of an old woman who had escaped the blight of indifference. He had made for himself the rule to receive everything of that sort in a silence which he took care from policy and inclination not to make offensive. He had an affection for the aged disciple of Michaelis, a complex sentiment depending a little on her prestige, on her personality, but most of all on the instinct of flattered gratitude. He felt himself really liked in her house. She was kindness personified. And she was practically wise too, after the manner of experienced women. She made his married life much easier than it would have been without her generously full recognition of his rights as Annie’s husband. Her influence upon his wife, a woman devoured by all sorts of small selfishnesses, small envies, small jealousies, was excellent. Unfortunately, both her kindness and her wisdom were of unreasonable complexion, distinctly feminine, and difficult to deal with. She remained a perfect woman all along her full tale of years, and not as some of them do become — a sort of slippery, pestilential old man in petticoats. And it was as of a woman that he thought of her — the specially choice incarnation of the feminine, wherein is recruited the tender, ingenuous, and fierce bodyguard for all sorts of men who talk under the influence of an emotion, true or fraudulent; for preachers, seers, prophets, or reformers.

Appreciating the distinguished and good friend of his wife, and himself, in that way, the Assistant Commissioner became alarmed at the convict Michaelis’ possible fate. Once arrested on suspicion of being in some way,

however remote, a party to this outrage, the man could hardly escape being sent back to finish his sentence at least. And that would kill him; he would never come out alive. The Assistant Commissioner made a reflection extremely unbecoming his official position without being really creditable to his humanity.

“If the fellow is laid hold of again,” he thought, “she will never forgive me.”

The frankness of such a secretly outspoken thought could not go without some derisive self-criticism. No man engaged in a work he does not like can preserve many saving illusions about himself. The distaste, the absence of glamour, extend from the occupation to the personality. It is only when our appointed activities seem by a lucky accident to obey the particular earnestness of our temperament that we can taste the comfort of complete self-deception. The Assistant Commissioner did not like his work at home. The police work he had been engaged on in a distant part of the globe had the saving character of an irregular sort of warfare or at least the risk and excitement of open-air sport. His real abilities, which were mainly of an administrative order, were combined with an adventurous disposition. Chained to a desk in the thick of four millions of men, he considered himself the victim of an ironic fate — the same, no doubt, which had brought about his marriage with a woman exceptionally sensitive in the matter of colonial climate, besides other limitations testifying to the delicacy of her nature — and her tastes. Though he judged his alarm sardonically he did not dismiss the improper thought from his mind. The instinct of self-preservation was strong within him. On the contrary, he repeated it mentally with profane emphasis and a fuller precision: “Damn it! If that infernal Heat has his way the fellow’ll die in prison smothered in his fat, and she’ll never forgive me.”

His black, narrow figure, with the white band of the collar under the silvery gleams on the close-cropped hair at the back of the head, remained motionless. The silence had lasted such a long time that Chief Inspector Heat ventured to clear his throat. This noise produced its effect. The zealous and intelligent officer was asked by his superior, whose back remained turned to him immovably:

“You connect Michaelis with this affair?”

Chief Inspector Heat was very positive, but cautious.

“Well, sir,” he said, “we have enough to go upon. A man like that has no business to be at large, anyhow.”

“You will want some conclusive evidence,” came the observation in a murmur.

Chief Inspector Heat raised his eyebrows at the black, narrow back, which remained obstinately presented to his intelligence and his zeal.

“There will be no difficulty in getting up sufficient evidence against him,” he said, with virtuous complacency. “You may trust me for that, sir,” he added, quite unnecessarily, out of the fulness of his heart; for it seemed to him an excellent thing to have that man in hand to be thrown down to the public should it think fit to roar with any special indignation in this case. It was impossible to say yet whether it would roar or not. That in the last instance depended, of course, on the newspaper press. But in any case, Chief Inspector Heat, purveyor of prisons by trade, and a man of legal instincts, did logically believe that incarceration was the proper fate for every declared enemy of the law. In the strength of that conviction he committed a fault of tact. He allowed himself a little conceited laugh, and repeated:

“Trust me for that, sir.”

This was too much for the forced calmness under which the Assistant Commissioner had for upwards of eighteen months concealed his irritation with the system and the subordinates of his office. A square peg forced into a round hole, he had felt like a daily outrage that long established smooth roundness into which a man of less sharply angular shape would have fitted himself, with voluptuous acquiescence, after a shrug or two. What he resented most was just the necessity of taking so much on trust. At the little laugh of Chief Inspector Heat’s he spun swiftly on his heels, as if whirled away from the window-pane by an electric shock. He caught on the latter’s face not only the complacency proper to the occasion lurking under the moustache, but the vestiges of experimental watchfulness in the round eyes, which had been, no doubt, fastened on his back, and now met his glance for a second before the intent character of their stare had the time to change to a merely startled appearance.

The Assistant Commissioner of Police had really some qualifications for his post. Suddenly his suspicion was awakened. It is but fair to say that his suspicions of the police methods (unless the police happened to be a semi-military body organised by himself) was not difficult to arouse. If it ever



slumbered from sheer weariness, it was but lightly; and his appreciation of Chief Inspector Heat's zeal and ability, moderate in itself, excluded all notion of moral confidence. "He's up to something," he exclaimed mentally, and at once became angry. Crossing over to his desk with headlong strides, he sat down violently. "Here I am stuck in a litter of paper," he reflected, with unreasonable resentment, "supposed to hold all the threads in my hands, and yet I can but hold what is put in my hand, and nothing else. And they can fasten the other ends of the threads where they please."

He raised his head, and turned towards his subordinate a long, meagre face with the accentuated features of an energetic Don Quixote.

"Now what is it you've got up your sleeve?"

The other stared. He stared without winking in a perfect immobility of his round eyes, as he was used to stare at the various members of the criminal class when, after being duly cautioned, they made their statements in the tones of injured innocence, or false simplicity, or sullen resignation. But behind that professional and stony fixity there was some surprise too, for in such a tone, combining nicely the note of contempt and impatience, Chief Inspector Heat, the right-hand man of the department, was not used to be addressed. He began in a procrastinating manner, like a man taken unawares by a new and unexpected experience.

"What I've got against that man Michaelis you mean, sir?"

The Assistant Commissioner watched the bullet head; the points of that Norse rover's moustache, falling below the line of the heavy jaw; the whole full and pale physiognomy, whose determined character was marred by too much flesh; at the cunning wrinkles radiating from the outer corners of the eyes — and in that purposeful contemplation of the valuable and trusted officer he drew a conviction so sudden that it moved him like an inspiration.

"I have reason to think that when you came into this room," he said in measured tones, "it was not Michaelis who was in your mind; not principally — perhaps not at all."

"You have reason to think, sir?" muttered Chief Inspector Heat, with every appearance of astonishment, which up to a certain point was genuine enough. He had discovered in this affair a delicate and perplexing side, forcing upon the discoverer a certain amount of insincerity — that sort of insincerity which, under the names of skill, prudence, discretion, turns up at one point or another in most human affairs. He felt at the moment like a

tight-rope artist might feel if suddenly, in the middle of the performance, the manager of the Music Hall were to rush out of the proper managerial seclusion and begin to shake the rope. Indignation, the sense of moral insecurity engendered by such a treacherous proceeding joined to the immediate apprehension of a broken neck, would, in the colloquial phrase, put him in a state. And there would be also some scandalised concern for his art too, since a man must identify himself with something more tangible than his own personality, and establish his pride somewhere, either in his social position, or in the quality of the work he is obliged to do, or simply in the superiority of the idleness he may be fortunate enough to enjoy.

“Yes,” said the Assistant Commissioner; “I have. I do not mean to say that you have not thought of Michaelis at all. But you are giving the fact you’ve mentioned a prominence which strikes me as not quite candid, Inspector Heat. If that is really the track of discovery, why haven’t you followed it up at once, either personally or by sending one of your men to that village?”

“Do you think, sir, I have failed in my duty there?” the Chief Inspector asked, in a tone which he sought to make simply reflective. Forced unexpectedly to concentrate his faculties upon the task of preserving his balance, he had seized upon that point, and exposed himself to a rebuke; for, the Assistant Commissioner frowning slightly, observed that this was a very improper remark to make.

“But since you’ve made it,” he continued coldly, “I’ll tell you that this is not my meaning.”

He paused, with a straight glance of his sunken eyes which was a full equivalent of the unspoken termination “and you know it.” The head of the so-called Special Crimes Department debarred by his position from going out of doors personally in quest of secrets locked up in guilty breasts, had a propensity to exercise his considerable gifts for the detection of incriminating truth upon his own subordinates. That peculiar instinct could hardly be called a weakness. It was natural. He was a born detective. It had unconsciously governed his choice of a career, and if it ever failed him in life it was perhaps in the one exceptional circumstance of his marriage — which was also natural. It fed, since it could not roam abroad, upon the human material which was brought to it in its official seclusion. We can never cease to be ourselves.

His elbow on the desk, his thin legs crossed, and nursing his cheek in the palm of his meagre hand, the Assistant Commissioner in charge of the Special Crimes branch was getting hold of the case with growing interest. His Chief Inspector, if not an absolutely worthy foeman of his penetration, was at any rate the most worthy of all within his reach. A mistrust of established reputations was strictly in character with the Assistant Commissioner's ability as detector. His memory evoked a certain old fat and wealthy native chief in the distant colony whom it was a tradition for the successive Colonial Governors to trust and make much of as a firm friend and supporter of the order and legality established by white men; whereas, when examined sceptically, he was found out to be principally his own good friend, and nobody else's. Not precisely a traitor, but still a man of many dangerous reservations in his fidelity, caused by a due regard for his own advantage, comfort, and safety. A fellow of some innocence in his naive duplicity, but none the less dangerous. He took some finding out. He was physically a big man, too, and (allowing for the difference of colour, of course) Chief Inspector Heat's appearance recalled him to the memory of his superior. It was not the eyes nor yet the lips exactly. It was bizarre. But does not Alfred Wallace relate in his famous book on the Malay Archipelago how, amongst the Aru Islanders, he discovered in an old and naked savage with a sooty skin a peculiar resemblance to a dear friend at home?

For the first time since he took up his appointment the Assistant Commissioner felt as if he were going to do some real work for his salary. And that was a pleasurable sensation. "I'll turn him inside out like an old glove," thought the Assistant Commissioner, with his eyes resting pensively upon Chief Inspector Heat.

"No, that was not my thought," he began again. "There is no doubt about you knowing your business — no doubt at all; and that's precisely why I —" He stopped short, and changing his tone: "What could you bring up against Michaelis of a definite nature? I mean apart from the fact that the two men under suspicion — you're certain there were two of them — came last from a railway station within three miles of the village where Michaelis is living now."

"This by itself is enough for us to go upon, sir, with that sort of man," said the Chief Inspector, with returning composure. The slight approving movement of the Assistant Commissioner's head went far to pacify the

resentful astonishment of the renowned officer. For Chief Inspector Heat was a kind man, an excellent husband, a devoted father; and the public and departmental confidence he enjoyed acting favourably upon an amiable nature, disposed him to feel friendly towards the successive Assistant Commissioners he had seen pass through that very room. There had been three in his time. The first one, a soldierly, abrupt, red-faced person, with white eyebrows and an explosive temper, could be managed with a silken thread. He left on reaching the age limit. The second, a perfect gentleman, knowing his own and everybody else's place to a nicety, on resigning to take up a higher appointment out of England got decorated for (really) Inspector Heat's services. To work with him had been a pride and a pleasure. The third, a bit of a dark horse from the first, was at the end of eighteen months something of a dark horse still to the department. Upon the whole Chief Inspector Heat believed him to be in the main harmless — odd-looking, but harmless. He was speaking now, and the Chief Inspector listened with outward deference (which means nothing, being a matter of duty) and inwardly with benevolent toleration.

“Michaelis reported himself before leaving London for the country?”

“Yes, sir. He did.”

“And what may he be doing there?” continued the Assistant Commissioner, who was perfectly informed on that point. Fitted with painful tightness into an old wooden arm-chair, before a worm-eaten oak table in an upstairs room of a four-roomed cottage with a roof of moss-grown tiles, Michaelis was writing night and day in a shaky, slanting hand that “Autobiography of a Prisoner” which was to be like a book of Revelation in the history of mankind. The conditions of confined space, seclusion, and solitude in a small four-roomed cottage were favourable to his inspiration. It was like being in prison, except that one was never disturbed for the odious purpose of taking exercise according to the tyrannical regulations of his old home in the penitentiary. He could not tell whether the sun still shone on the earth or not. The perspiration of the literary labour dropped from his brow. A delightful enthusiasm urged him on. It was the liberation of his inner life, the letting out of his soul into the wide world. And the zeal of his guileless vanity (first awakened by the offer of five hundred pounds from a publisher) seemed something predestined and holy.

“It would be, of course, most desirable to be informed exactly,” insisted the Assistant Commissioner uncandidly.

Chief Inspector Heat, conscious of renewed irritation at this display of scrupulousness, said that the county police had been notified from the first of Michaelis’ arrival, and that a full report could be obtained in a few hours. A wire to the superintendent —

Thus he spoke, rather slowly, while his mind seemed already to be weighing the consequences. A slight knitting of the brow was the outward sign of this. But he was interrupted by a question.

“You’ve sent that wire already?”

“No, sir,” he answered, as if surprised.

The Assistant Commissioner uncrossed his legs suddenly. The briskness of that movement contrasted with the casual way in which he threw out a suggestion.

“Would you think that Michaelis had anything to do with the preparation of that bomb, for instance?”

The Chief Inspector assumed a reflective manner.

“I wouldn’t say so. There’s no necessity to say anything at present. He associates with men who are classed as dangerous. He was made a delegate of the Red Committee less than a year after his release on licence. A sort of compliment, I suppose.”

And the Chief Inspector laughed a little angrily, a little scornfully. With a man of that sort scrupulousness was a misplaced and even an illegal sentiment. The celebrity bestowed upon Michaelis on his release two years ago by some emotional journalists in want of special copy had rankled ever since in his breast. It was perfectly legal to arrest that man on the barest suspicion. It was legal and expedient on the face of it. His two former chiefs would have seen the point at once; whereas this one, without saying either yes or no, sat there, as if lost in a dream. Moreover, besides being legal and expedient, the arrest of Michaelis solved a little personal difficulty which worried Chief Inspector Heat somewhat. This difficulty had its bearing upon his reputation, upon his comfort, and even upon the efficient performance of his duties. For, if Michaelis no doubt knew something about this outrage, the Chief Inspector was fairly certain that he did not know too much. This was just as well. He knew much less — the Chief Inspector was positive — than certain other individuals he had in his mind, but whose arrest seemed to him inexpedient, besides being a more

complicated matter, on account of the rules of the game. The rules of the game did not protect so much Michaelis, who was an ex-convict. It would be stupid not to take advantage of legal facilities, and the journalists who had written him up with emotional gush would be ready to write him down with emotional indignation.

This prospect, viewed with confidence, had the attraction of a personal triumph for Chief Inspector Heat. And deep down in his blameless bosom of an average married citizen, almost unconscious but potent nevertheless, the dislike of being compelled by events to meddle with the desperate ferocity of the Professor had its say. This dislike had been strengthened by the chance meeting in the lane. The encounter did not leave behind with Chief Inspector Heat that satisfactory sense of superiority the members of the police force get from the unofficial but intimate side of their intercourse with the criminal classes, by which the vanity of power is soothed, and the vulgar love of domination over our fellow-creatures is flattered as worthily as it deserves.

The perfect anarchist was not recognised as a fellow-creature by Chief Inspector Heat. He was impossible — a mad dog to be left alone. Not that the Chief Inspector was afraid of him; on the contrary, he meant to have him some day. But not yet; he meant to get hold of him in his own time, properly and effectively according to the rules of the game. The present was not the right time for attempting that feat, not the right time for many reasons, personal and of public service. This being the strong feeling of Inspector Heat, it appeared to him just and proper that this affair should be shunted off its obscure and inconvenient track, leading goodness knows where, into a quiet (and lawful) siding called Michaelis. And he repeated, as if reconsidering the suggestion conscientiously:

“The bomb. No, I would not say that exactly. We may never find that out. But it’s clear that he is connected with this in some way, which we can find out without much trouble.”

His countenance had that look of grave, overbearing indifference once well known and much dreaded by the better sort of thieves. Chief Inspector Heat, though what is called a man, was not a smiling animal. But his inward state was that of satisfaction at the passively receptive attitude of the Assistant Commissioner, who murmured gently:

“And you really think that the investigation should be made in that direction?”

“I do, sir.”

“Quite convinced?”

“I am, sir. That’s the true line for us to take.”

The Assistant Commissioner withdrew the support of his hand from his reclining head with a suddenness that, considering his languid attitude, seemed to menace his whole person with collapse. But, on the contrary, he sat up, extremely alert, behind the great writing-table on which his hand had fallen with the sound of a sharp blow.

“What I want to know is what put it out of your head till now.”

“Put it out of my head,” repeated the Chief Inspector very slowly.

“Yes. Till you were called into this room — you know.”

The Chief Inspector felt as if the air between his clothing and his skin had become unpleasantly hot. It was the sensation of an unprecedented and incredible experience.

“Of course,” he said, exaggerating the deliberation of his utterance to the utmost limits of possibility, “if there is a reason, of which I know nothing, for not interfering with the convict Michaelis, perhaps it’s just as well I didn’t start the county police after him.”

This took such a long time to say that the unflagging attention of the Assistant Commissioner seemed a wonderful feat of endurance. His retort came without delay.

“No reason whatever that I know of. Come, Chief Inspector, this finessing with me is highly improper on your part — highly improper. And it’s also unfair, you know. You shouldn’t leave me to puzzle things out for myself like this. Really, I am surprised.”

He paused, then added smoothly: “I need scarcely tell you that this conversation is altogether unofficial.”

These words were far from pacifying the Chief Inspector. The indignation of a betrayed tight-rope performer was strong within him. In his pride of a trusted servant he was affected by the assurance that the rope was not shaken for the purpose of breaking his neck, as by an exhibition of impudence. As if anybody were afraid! Assistant Commissioners come and go, but a valuable Chief Inspector is not an ephemeral office phenomenon. He was not afraid of getting a broken neck. To have his performance spoiled was more than enough to account for the glow of honest indignation. And as thought is no respecter of persons, the thought of Chief Inspector Heat took a threatening and prophetic shape. “You, my

boy,” he said to himself, keeping his round and habitually roving eyes fastened upon the Assistant Commissioner’s face — ”you, my boy, you don’t know your place, and your place won’t know you very long either, I bet.”

As if in provoking answer to that thought, something like the ghost of an amiable smile passed on the lips of the Assistant Commissioner. His manner was easy and business-like while he persisted in administering another shake to the tight rope.

“Let us come now to what you have discovered on the spot, Chief Inspector,” he said.

“A fool and his job are soon parted,” went on the train of prophetic thought in Chief Inspector Heat’s head. But it was immediately followed by the reflection that a higher official, even when “fired out” (this was the precise image), has still the time as he flies through the door to launch a nasty kick at the shin-bones of a subordinate. Without softening very much the basilisk nature of his stare, he said impassively:

“We are coming to that part of my investigation, sir.”

“That’s right. Well, what have you brought away from it?”

The Chief Inspector, who had made up his mind to jump off the rope, came to the ground with gloomy frankness.

“I’ve brought away an address,” he said, pulling out of his pocket without haste a singed rag of dark blue cloth. “This belongs to the overcoat the fellow who got himself blown to pieces was wearing. Of course, the overcoat may not have been his, and may even have been stolen. But that’s not at all probable if you look at this.”

The Chief Inspector, stepping up to the table, smoothed out carefully the rag of blue cloth. He had picked it up from the repulsive heap in the mortuary, because a tailor’s name is found sometimes under the collar. It is not often of much use, but still — He only half expected to find anything useful, but certainly he did not expect to find — not under the collar at all, but stitched carefully on the under side of the lapel — a square piece of calico with an address written on it in marking ink.

The Chief Inspector removed his smoothing hand.

“I carried it off with me without anybody taking notice,” he said. “I thought it best. It can always be produced if required.”

The Assistant Commissioner, rising a little in his chair, pulled the cloth over to his side of the table. He sat looking at it in silence. Only the



number 32 and the name of Brett Street were written in marking ink on a piece of calico slightly larger than an ordinary cigarette paper. He was genuinely surprised.

“Can’t understand why he should have gone about labelled like this,” he said, looking up at Chief Inspector Heat. “It’s a most extraordinary thing.”

“I met once in the smoking-room of a hotel an old gentleman who went about with his name and address sewn on in all his coats in case of an accident or sudden illness,” said the Chief Inspector. “He professed to be eighty-four years old, but he didn’t look his age. He told me he was also afraid of losing his memory suddenly, like those people he has been reading of in the papers.”

A question from the Assistant Commissioner, who wanted to know what was No. 32 Brett Street, interrupted that reminiscence abruptly. The Chief Inspector, driven down to the ground by unfair artifices, had elected to walk the path of unreserved openness. If he believed firmly that to know too much was not good for the department, the judicious holding back of knowledge was as far as his loyalty dared to go for the good of the service. If the Assistant Commissioner wanted to mismanage this affair nothing, of course, could prevent him. But, on his own part, he now saw no reason for a display of alacrity. So he answered concisely:

“It’s a shop, sir.”

The Assistant Commissioner, with his eyes lowered on the rag of blue cloth, waited for more information. As that did not come he proceeded to obtain it by a series of questions propounded with gentle patience. Thus he acquired an idea of the nature of Mr Verloc’s commerce, of his personal appearance, and heard at last his name. In a pause the Assistant Commissioner raised his eyes, and discovered some animation on the Chief Inspector’s face. They looked at each other in silence.

“Of course,” said the latter, “the department has no record of that man.”

“Did any of my predecessors have any knowledge of what you have told me now?” asked the Assistant Commissioner, putting his elbows on the table and raising his joined hands before his face, as if about to offer prayer, only that his eyes had not a pious expression.

“No, sir; certainly not. What would have been the object? That sort of man could never be produced publicly to any good purpose. It was sufficient for me to know who he was, and to make use of him in a way that could be used publicly.”

“And do you think that sort of private knowledge consistent with the official position you occupy?”

“Perfectly, sir. I think it’s quite proper. I will take the liberty to tell you, sir, that it makes me what I am — and I am looked upon as a man who knows his work. It’s a private affair of my own. A personal friend of mine in the French police gave me the hint that the fellow was an Embassy spy. Private friendship, private information, private use of it — that’s how I look upon it.”

The Assistant Commissioner after remarking to himself that the mental state of the renowned Chief Inspector seemed to affect the outline of his lower jaw, as if the lively sense of his high professional distinction had been located in that part of his anatomy, dismissed the point for the moment with a calm “I see.” Then leaning his cheek on his joined hands:

“Well then — speaking privately if you like — how long have you been in private touch with this Embassy spy?”

To this inquiry the private answer of the Chief Inspector, so private that it was never shaped into audible words, was:

“Long before you were even thought of for your place here.”

The so-to-speak public utterance was much more precise.

“I saw him for the first time in my life a little more than seven years ago, when two Imperial Highnesses and the Imperial Chancellor were on a visit here. I was put in charge of all the arrangements for looking after them. Baron Stott-Wartenheim was Ambassador then. He was a very nervous old gentleman. One evening, three days before the Guildhall Banquet, he sent word that he wanted to see me for a moment. I was downstairs, and the carriages were at the door to take the Imperial Highnesses and the Chancellor to the opera. I went up at once. I found the Baron walking up and down his bedroom in a pitiable state of distress, squeezing his hands together. He assured me he had the fullest confidence in our police and in my abilities, but he had there a man just come over from Paris whose information could be trusted implicitly. He wanted me to hear what that man had to say. He took me at once into a dressing-room next door, where I saw a big fellow in a heavy overcoat sitting all alone on a chair, and holding his hat and stick in one hand. The Baron said to him in French ‘Speak, my friend.’ The light in that room was not very good. I talked with him for some five minutes perhaps. He certainly gave me a piece of very startling news. Then the Baron took me aside nervously to praise him up to

me, and when I turned round again I discovered that the fellow had vanished like a ghost. Got up and sneaked out down some back stairs, I suppose. There was no time to run after him, as I had to hurry off after the Ambassador down the great staircase, and see the party started safe for the opera. However, I acted upon the information that very night. Whether it was perfectly correct or not, it did look serious enough. Very likely it saved us from an ugly trouble on the day of the Imperial visit to the City.

“Some time later, a month or so after my promotion to Chief Inspector, my attention was attracted to a big burly man, I thought I had seen somewhere before, coming out in a hurry from a jeweller’s shop in the Strand. I went after him, as it was on my way towards Charing Cross, and there seeing one of our detectives across the road, I beckoned him over, and pointed out the fellow to him, with instructions to watch his movements for a couple of days, and then report to me. No later than next afternoon my man turned up to tell me that the fellow had married his landlady’s daughter at a registrar’s office that very day at 11.30 a.m., and had gone off with her to Margate for a week. Our man had seen the luggage being put on the cab. There were some old Paris labels on one of the bags. Somehow I couldn’t get the fellow out of my head, and the very next time I had to go to Paris on service I spoke about him to that friend of mine in the Paris police. My friend said: ‘From what you tell me I think you must mean a rather well-known hanger-on and emissary of the Revolutionary Red Committee. He says he is an Englishman by birth. We have an idea that he has been for a good few years now a secret agent of one of the foreign Embassies in London.’ This woke up my memory completely. He was the vanishing fellow I saw sitting on a chair in Baron Stott-Wartenheim’s bathroom. I told my friend that he was quite right. The fellow was a secret agent to my certain knowledge. Afterwards my friend took the trouble to ferret out the complete record of that man for me. I thought I had better know all there was to know; but I don’t suppose you want to hear his history now, sir?”

The Assistant Commissioner shook his supported head. “The history of your relations with that useful personage is the only thing that matters just now,” he said, closing slowly his weary, deep-set eyes, and then opening them swiftly with a greatly refreshed glance.

“There’s nothing official about them,” said the Chief Inspector bitterly. “I went into his shop one evening, told him who I was, and reminded him of our first meeting. He didn’t as much as twitch an eyebrow. He said that he

was married and settled now, and that all he wanted was not to be interfered in his little business. I took it upon myself to promise him that, as long as he didn't go in for anything obviously outrageous, he would be left alone by the police. That was worth something to him, because a word from us to the Custom-House people would have been enough to get some of these packages he gets from Paris and Brussels opened in Dover, with confiscation to follow for certain, and perhaps a prosecution as well at the end of it."

"That's a very precarious trade," murmured the Assistant Commissioner. "Why did he go in for that?"

The Chief Inspector raised scornful eyebrows dispassionately.

"Most likely got a connection — friends on the Continent — amongst people who deal in such wares. They would be just the sort he would consort with. He's a lazy dog, too — like the rest of them."

"What do you get from him in exchange for your protection?"

The Chief Inspector was not inclined to enlarge on the value of Mr Verloc's services.

"He would not be much good to anybody but myself. One has got to know a good deal beforehand to make use of a man like that. I can understand the sort of hint he can give. And when I want a hint he can generally furnish it to me."

The Chief Inspector lost himself suddenly in a discreet reflective mood; and the Assistant Commissioner repressed a smile at the fleeting thought that the reputation of Chief Inspector Heat might possibly have been made in a great part by the Secret Agent Verloc.

"In a more general way of being of use, all our men of the Special Crimes section on duty at Charing Cross and Victoria have orders to take careful notice of anybody they may see with him. He meets the new arrivals frequently, and afterwards keeps track of them. He seems to have been told off for that sort of duty. When I want an address in a hurry, I can always get it from him. Of course, I know how to manage our relations. I haven't seen him to speak to three times in the last two years. I drop him a line, unsigned, and he answers me in the same way at my private address."

From time to time the Assistant Commissioner gave an almost imperceptible nod. The Chief Inspector added that he did not suppose Mr Verloc to be deep in the confidence of the prominent members of the Revolutionary International Council, but that he was generally trusted of

that there could be no doubt. "Whenever I've had reason to think there was something in the wind," he concluded, "I've always found he could tell me something worth knowing."

The Assistant Commissioner made a significant remark.

"He failed you this time."

"Neither had I wind of anything in any other way," retorted Chief Inspector Heat. "I asked him nothing, so he could tell me nothing. He isn't one of our men. It isn't as if he were in our pay."

"No," muttered the Assistant Commissioner. "He's a spy in the pay of a foreign government. We could never confess to him."

"I must do my work in my own way," declared the Chief Inspector. "When it comes to that I would deal with the devil himself, and take the consequences. There are things not fit for everybody to know."

"Your idea of secrecy seems to consist in keeping the chief of your department in the dark. That's stretching it perhaps a little too far, isn't it? He lives over his shop?"

"Who — Verloc? Oh yes. He lives over his shop. The wife's mother, I fancy, lives with them."

"Is the house watched?"

"Oh dear, no. It wouldn't do. Certain people who come there are watched. My opinion is that he knows nothing of this affair."

"How do you account for this?" The Assistant Commissioner nodded at the cloth rag lying before him on the table.

"I don't account for it at all, sir. It's simply unaccountable. It can't be explained by what I know." The Chief Inspector made those admissions with the frankness of a man whose reputation is established as if on a rock. "At any rate not at this present moment. I think that the man who had most to do with it will turn out to be Michaelis."

"You do?"

"Yes, sir; because I can answer for all the others."

"What about that other man supposed to have escaped from the park?"

"I should think he's far away by this time," opined the Chief Inspector.

The Assistant Commissioner looked hard at him, and rose suddenly, as though having made up his mind to some course of action. As a matter of fact, he had that very moment succumbed to a fascinating temptation. The Chief Inspector heard himself dismissed with instructions to meet his superior early next morning for further consultation upon the case. He

listened with an impenetrable face, and walked out of the room with measured steps.

Whatever might have been the plans of the Assistant Commissioner they had nothing to do with that desk work, which was the bane of his existence because of its confined nature and apparent lack of reality. It could not have had, or else the general air of alacrity that came upon the Assistant Commissioner would have been inexplicable. As soon as he was left alone he looked for his hat impulsively, and put it on his head. Having done that, he sat down again to reconsider the whole matter. But as his mind was already made up, this did not take long. And before Chief Inspector Heat had gone very far on the way home, he also left the building.

## CHAPTER VII

The Assistant Commissioner walked along a short and narrow street like a wet, muddy trench, then crossing a very broad thoroughfare entered a public edifice, and sought speech with a young private secretary (unpaid) of a great personage.

This fair, smooth-faced young man, whose symmetrically arranged hair gave him the air of a large and neat schoolboy, met the Assistant Commissioner's request with a doubtful look, and spoke with bated breath.

"Would he see you? I don't know about that. He has walked over from the House an hour ago to talk with the permanent Under-Secretary, and now he's ready to walk back again. He might have sent for him; but he does it for the sake of a little exercise, I suppose. It's all the exercise he can find time for while this session lasts. I don't complain; I rather enjoy these little strolls. He leans on my arm, and doesn't open his lips. But, I say, he's very tired, and — well — not in the sweetest of tempers just now."

"It's in connection with that Greenwich affair."

"Oh! I say! He's very bitter against you people. But I will go and see, if you insist."

"Do. That's a good fellow," said the Assistant Commissioner.

The unpaid secretary admired this pluck. Composing for himself an innocent face, he opened a door, and went in with the assurance of a nice and privileged child. And presently he reappeared, with a nod to the Assistant Commissioner, who passing through the same door left open for him, found himself with the great personage in a large room.

Vast in bulk and stature, with a long white face, which, broadened at the base by a big double chin, appeared egg-shaped in the fringe of thin greyish whisker, the great personage seemed an expanding man. Unfortunate from a tailoring point of view, the cross-folds in the middle of a buttoned black coat added to the impression, as if the fastenings of the garment were tried to the utmost. From the head, set upward on a thick neck, the eyes, with puffy lower lids, stared with a haughty droop on each side of a hooked aggressive nose, nobly salient in the vast pale circumference of the face. A shiny silk hat and a pair of worn gloves lying ready on the end of a long table looked expanded too, enormous.

He stood on the hearthrug in big, roomy boots, and uttered no word of greeting.

“I would like to know if this is the beginning of another dynamite campaign,” he asked at once in a deep, very smooth voice. “Don’t go into details. I have no time for that.”

The Assistant Commissioner’s figure before this big and rustic Presence had the frail slenderness of a reed addresssing an oak. And indeed the unbroken record of that man’s descent surpassed in the number of centuries the age of the oldest oak in the country.

“No. As far as one can be positive about anything I can assure you that it is not.”

“Yes. But your idea of assurances over there,” said the great man, with a contemptuous wave of his hand towards a window giving on the broad thoroughfare, “seems to consist mainly in making the Secretary of State look a fool. I have been told positively in this very room less than a month ago that nothing of the sort was even possible.”

The Assistant Commissioner glanced in the direction of the window calmly.

“You will allow me to remark, Sir Ethelred, that so far I have had no opportunity to give you assurances of any kind.”

The haughty droop of the eyes was focussed now upon the Assistant Commissioner.

“True,” confessed the deep, smooth voice. “I sent for Heat. You are still rather a novice in your new berth. And how are you getting on over there?”

“I believe I am learning something every day.”

“Of course, of course. I hope you will get on.”

“Thank you, Sir Ethelred. I’ve learned something to-day, and even within the last hour or so. There is much in this affair of a kind that does not meet the eye in a usual anarchist outrage, even if one looked into it as deep as can be. That’s why I am here.”

The great man put his arms akimbo, the backs of his big hands resting on his hips.

“Very well. Go on. Only no details, pray. Spare me the details.”

“You shall not be troubled with them, Sir Ethelred,” the Assistant Commissioner began, with a calm and untroubled assurance. While he was speaking the hands on the face of the clock behind the great man’s back — a heavy, glistening affair of massive scrolls in the same dark marble as the mantelpiece, and with a ghostly, evanescent tick — had moved through the space of seven minutes. He spoke with a studious fidelity to a parenthetical



manner, into which every little fact — that is, every detail — fitted with delightful ease. Not a murmur nor even a movement hinted at interruption. The great Personage might have been the statue of one of his own princely ancestors stripped of a crusader's war harness, and put into an ill-fitting frock coat. The Assistant Commissioner felt as though he were at liberty to talk for an hour. But he kept his head, and at the end of the time mentioned above he broke off with a sudden conclusion, which, reproducing the opening statement, pleasantly surprised Sir Ethelred by its apparent swiftness and force.

“The kind of thing which meets us under the surface of this affair, otherwise without gravity, is unusual — in this precise form at least — and requires special treatment.”

The tone of Sir Ethelred was deepened, full of conviction.

“I should think so — involving the Ambassador of a foreign power!”

“Oh! The Ambassador!” protested the other, erect and slender, allowing himself a mere half smile. “It would be stupid of me to advance anything of the kind. And it is absolutely unnecessary, because if I am right in my surmises, whether ambassador or hall porter it's a mere detail.”

Sir Ethelred opened a wide mouth, like a cavern, into which the hooked nose seemed anxious to peer; there came from it a subdued rolling sound, as from a distant organ with the scornful indignation stop.

“No! These people are too impossible. What do they mean by importing their methods of Crim-Tartary here? A Turk would have more decency.”

“You forget, Sir Ethelred, that strictly speaking we know nothing positively — as yet.”

“No! But how would you define it? Shortly?”

“Barefaced audacity amounting to childishness of a peculiar sort.”

“We can't put up with the innocence of nasty little children,” said the great and expanded personage, expanding a little more, as it were. The haughty drooping glance struck crushingly the carpet at the Assistant Commissioner's feet. “They'll have to get a hard rap on the knuckles over this affair. We must be in a position to — What is your general idea, stated shortly? No need to go into details.”

“No, Sir Ethelred. In principle, I should lay it down that the existence of secret agents should not be tolerated, as tending to augment the positive dangers of the evil against which they are used. That the spy will fabricate his information is a mere commonplace. But in the sphere of political and

revolutionary action, relying partly on violence, the professional spy has every facility to fabricate the very facts themselves, and will spread the double evil of emulation in one direction, and of panic, hasty legislation, unreflecting hate, on the other. However, this is an imperfect world — ”

The deep-voiced Presence on the hearthrug, motionless, with big elbows stuck out, said hastily:

“Be lucid, please.”

“Yes, Sir Ethelred — An imperfect world. Therefore directly the character of this affair suggested itself to me, I thought it should be dealt with with special secrecy, and ventured to come over here.”

“That’s right,” approved the great Personage, glancing down complacently over his double chin. “I am glad there’s somebody over at your shop who thinks that the Secretary of State may be trusted now and then.”

The Assistant Commissioner had an amused smile.

“I was really thinking that it might be better at this stage for Heat to be replaced by — ”

“What! Heat? An ass — eh?” exclaimed the great man, with distinct animosity.

“Not at all. Pray, Sir Ethelred, don’t put that unjust interpretation on my remarks.”

“Then what? Too clever by half?”

“Neither — at least not as a rule. All the grounds of my surmises I have from him. The only thing I’ve discovered by myself is that he has been making use of that man privately. Who could blame him? He’s an old police hand. He told me virtually that he must have tools to work with. It occurred to me that this tool should be surrendered to the Special Crimes division as a whole, instead of remaining the private property of Chief Inspector Heat. I extend my conception of our departmental duties to the suppression of the secret agent. But Chief Inspector Heat is an old departmental hand. He would accuse me of perverting its morality and attacking its efficiency. He would define it bitterly as protection extended to the criminal class of revolutionists. It would mean just that to him.”

“Yes. But what do you mean?”

“I mean to say, first, that there’s but poor comfort in being able to declare that any given act of violence — damaging property or destroying life — is not the work of anarchism at all, but of something else altogether — some

species of authorised scoundrelism. This, I fancy, is much more frequent than we suppose. Next, it's obvious that the existence of these people in the pay of foreign governments destroys in a measure the efficiency of our supervision. A spy of that sort can afford to be more reckless than the most reckless of conspirators. His occupation is free from all restraint. He's without as much faith as is necessary for complete negation, and without that much law as is implied in lawlessness. Thirdly, the existence of these spies amongst the revolutionary groups, which we are reproached for harbouring here, does away with all certitude. You have received a reassuring statement from Chief Inspector Heat some time ago. It was by no means groundless — and yet this episode happens. I call it an episode, because this affair, I make bold to say, is episodic; it is no part of any general scheme, however wild. The very peculiarities which surprise and perplex Chief Inspector Heat establish its character in my eyes. I am keeping clear of details, Sir Ethelred."

The Personage on the hearthrug had been listening with profound attention.

"Just so. Be as concise as you can."

The Assistant Commissioner intimated by an earnest deferential gesture that he was anxious to be concise.

"There is a peculiar stupidity and feebleness in the conduct of this affair which gives me excellent hopes of getting behind it and finding there something else than an individual freak of fanaticism. For it is a planned thing, undoubtedly. The actual perpetrator seems to have been led by the hand to the spot, and then abandoned hurriedly to his own devices. The inference is that he was imported from abroad for the purpose of committing this outrage. At the same time one is forced to the conclusion that he did not know enough English to ask his way, unless one were to accept the fantastic theory that he was a deaf mute. I wonder now — But this is idle. He has destroyed himself by an accident, obviously. Not an extraordinary accident. But an extraordinary little fact remains: the address on his clothing discovered by the merest accident, too. It is an incredible little fact, so incredible that the explanation which will account for it is bound to touch the bottom of this affair. Instead of instructing Heat to go on with this case, my intention is to seek this explanation personally — by myself, I mean — where it may be picked up. That is in a certain shop in Brett Street, and on the lips of a certain secret agent once upon a time the

confidential and trusted spy of the late Baron Stott-Wartenheim, Ambassador of a Great Power to the Court of St James.”

The Assistant Commissioner paused, then added: “Those fellows are a perfect pest.” In order to raise his drooping glance to the speaker’s face, the Personage on the hearthrug had gradually tilted his head farther back, which gave him an aspect of extraordinary haughtiness.

“Why not leave it to Heat?”

“Because he is an old departmental hand. They have their own morality. My line of inquiry would appear to him an awful perversion of duty. For him the plain duty is to fasten the guilt upon as many prominent anarchists as he can on some slight indications he had picked up in the course of his investigation on the spot; whereas I, he would say, am bent upon vindicating their innocence. I am trying to be as lucid as I can in presenting this obscure matter to you without details.”

“He would, would he?” muttered the proud head of Sir Ethelred from its lofty elevation.

“I am afraid so — with an indignation and disgust of which you or I can have no idea. He’s an excellent servant. We must not put an undue strain on his loyalty. That’s always a mistake. Besides, I want a free hand — a freer hand than it would be perhaps advisable to give Chief Inspector Heat. I haven’t the slightest wish to spare this man Verloc. He will, I imagine, be extremely startled to find his connection with this affair, whatever it may be, brought home to him so quickly. Frightening him will not be very difficult. But our true objective lies behind him somewhere. I want your authority to give him such assurances of personal safety as I may think proper.”

“Certainly,” said the Personage on the hearthrug. “Find out as much as you can; find it out in your own way.”

“I must set about it without loss of time, this very evening,” said the Assistant Commissioner.

Sir Ethelred shifted one hand under his coat tails, and tilting back his head, looked at him steadily.

“We’ll have a late sitting to-night,” he said. “Come to the House with your discoveries if we are not gone home. I’ll warn Toodles to look out for you. He’ll take you into my room.”

The numerous family and the wide connections of the youthful-looking Private Secretary cherished for him the hope of an austere and exalted

destiny. Meantime the social sphere he adorned in his hours of idleness chose to pet him under the above nickname. And Sir Ethelred, hearing it on the lips of his wife and girls every day (mostly at breakfast-time), had conferred upon it the dignity of unsmiling adoption.

The Assistant Commissioner was surprised and gratified extremely.

"I shall certainly bring my discoveries to the House on the chance of you having the time to — "

"I won't have the time," interrupted the great Personage. "But I will see you. I haven't the time now — And you are going yourself?"

"Yes, Sir Ethelred. I think it the best way."

The Personage had tilted his head so far back that, in order to keep the Assistant Commissioner under his observation, he had to nearly close his eyes.

"H'm. Ha! And how do you propose — Will you assume a disguise?"

"Hardly a disguise! I'll change my clothes, of course."

"Of course," repeated the great man, with a sort of absent-minded loftiness. He turned his big head slowly, and over his shoulder gave a haughty oblique stare to the ponderous marble timepiece with the sly, feeble tick. The gilt hands had taken the opportunity to steal through no less than five and twenty minutes behind his back.

The Assistant Commissioner, who could not see them, grew a little nervous in the interval. But the great man presented to him a calm and undismayed face.

"Very well," he said, and paused, as if in deliberate contempt of the official clock. "But what first put you in motion in this direction?"

"I have been always of opinion," began the Assistant Commissioner.

"Ah. Yes! Opinion. That's of course. But the immediate motive?"

"What shall I say, Sir Ethelred? A new man's antagonism to old methods. A desire to know something at first hand. Some impatience. It's my old work, but the harness is different. It has been chafing me a little in one or two tender places."

"I hope you'll get on over there," said the great man kindly, extending his hand, soft to the touch, but broad and powerful like the hand of a glorified farmer. The Assistant Commissioner shook it, and withdrew.

In the outer room Toodles, who had been waiting perched on the edge of a table, advanced to meet him, subduing his natural buoyancy.

"Well? Satisfactory?" he asked, with airy importance.

“Perfectly. You’ve earned my undying gratitude,” answered the Assistant Commissioner, whose long face looked wooden in contrast with the peculiar character of the other’s gravity, which seemed perpetually ready to break into ripples and chuckles.

“That’s all right. But seriously, you can’t imagine how irritated he is by the attacks on his Bill for the Nationalisation of Fisheries. They call it the beginning of social revolution. Of course, it is a revolutionary measure. But these fellows have no decency. The personal attacks — ”

“I read the papers,” remarked the Assistant Commissioner.

“Odious? Eh? And you have no notion what a mass of work he has got to get through every day. He does it all himself. Seems unable to trust anyone with these Fisheries.”

“And yet he’s given a whole half hour to the consideration of my very small sprat,” interjected the Assistant Commissioner.

“Small! Is it? I’m glad to hear that. But it’s a pity you didn’t keep away, then. This fight takes it out of him frightfully. The man’s getting exhausted. I feel it by the way he leans on my arm as we walk over. And, I say, is he safe in the streets? Mullins has been marching his men up here this afternoon. There’s a constable stuck by every lamp-post, and every second person we meet between this and Palace Yard is an obvious ‘tec.’ It will get on his nerves presently. I say, these foreign scoundrels aren’t likely to throw something at him — are they? It would be a national calamity. The country can’t spare him.”

“Not to mention yourself. He leans on your arm,” suggested the Assistant Commissioner soberly. “You would both go.”

“It would be an easy way for a young man to go down into history? Not so many British Ministers have been assassinated as to make it a minor incident. But seriously now — ”

“I am afraid that if you want to go down into history you’ll have to do something for it. Seriously, there’s no danger whatever for both of you but from overwork.”

The sympathetic Toodles welcomed this opening for a chuckle.

“The Fisheries won’t kill me. I am used to late hours,” he declared, with ingenuous levity. But, feeling an instant compunction, he began to assume an air of statesman-like moodiness, as one draws on a glove. “His massive intellect will stand any amount of work. It’s his nerves that I am afraid of.

The reactionary gang, with that abusive brute Cheeseman at their head, insult him every night.”

“If he will insist on beginning a revolution!” murmured the Assistant Commissioner.

“The time has come, and he is the only man great enough for the work,” protested the revolutionary Toodles, flaring up under the calm, speculative gaze of the Assistant Commissioner. Somewhere in a corridor a distant bell tinkled urgently, and with devoted vigilance the young man pricked up his ears at the sound. “He’s ready to go now,” he exclaimed in a whisper, snatched up his hat, and vanished from the room.

The Assistant Commissioner went out by another door in a less elastic manner. Again he crossed the wide thoroughfare, walked along a narrow street, and re-entered hastily his own departmental buildings. He kept up this accelerated pace to the door of his private room. Before he had closed it fairly his eyes sought his desk. He stood still for a moment, then walked up, looked all round on the floor, sat down in his chair, rang a bell, and waited.

“Chief Inspector Heat gone yet?”

“Yes, sir. Went away half-an-hour ago.”

He nodded. “That will do.” And sitting still, with his hat pushed off his forehead, he thought that it was just like Heat’s confounded cheek to carry off quietly the only piece of material evidence. But he thought this without animosity. Old and valued servants will take liberties. The piece of overcoat with the address sewn on was certainly not a thing to leave about. Dismissing from his mind this manifestation of Chief Inspector Heat’s mistrust, he wrote and despatched a note to his wife, charging her to make his apologies to Michaelis’ great lady, with whom they were engaged to dine that evening.

The short jacket and the low, round hat he assumed in a sort of curtained alcove containing a washstand, a row of wooden pegs and a shelf, brought out wonderfully the length of his grave, brown face. He stepped back into the full light of the room, looking like the vision of a cool, reflective Don Quixote, with the sunken eyes of a dark enthusiast and a very deliberate manner. He left the scene of his daily labours quickly like an unobtrusive shadow. His descent into the street was like the descent into a slimy aquarium from which the water had been run off. A murky, gloomy dampness enveloped him. The walls of the houses were wet, the mud of the

roadway glistened with an effect of phosphorescence, and when he emerged into the Strand out of a narrow street by the side of Charing Cross Station the genius of the locality assimilated him. He might have been but one more of the queer foreign fish that can be seen of an evening about there flitting round the dark corners.

He came to a stand on the very edge of the pavement, and waited. His exercised eyes had made out in the confused movements of lights and shadows thronging the roadway the crawling approach of a hansom. He gave no sign; but when the low step gliding along the curbstone came to his feet he dodged in skilfully in front of the big turning wheel, and spoke up through the little trap door almost before the man gazing supinely ahead from his perch was aware of having been boarded by a fare.

It was not a long drive. It ended by signal abruptly, nowhere in particular, between two lamp-posts before a large drapery establishment — a long range of shops already lapped up in sheets of corrugated iron for the night. Tendering a coin through the trap door the fare slipped out and away, leaving an effect of uncanny, eccentric ghastliness upon the driver's mind. But the size of the coin was satisfactory to his touch, and his education not being literary, he remained untroubled by the fear of finding it presently turned to a dead leaf in his pocket. Raised above the world of fares by the nature of his calling, he contemplated their actions with a limited interest. The sharp pulling of his horse right round expressed his philosophy.

Meantime the Assistant Commissioner was already giving his order to a waiter in a little Italian restaurant round the corner — one of those traps for the hungry, long and narrow, baited with a perspective of mirrors and white napery; without air, but with an atmosphere of their own — an atmosphere of fraudulent cookery mocking an abject mankind in the most pressing of its miserable necessities. In this immoral atmosphere the Assistant Commissioner, reflecting upon his enterprise, seemed to lose some more of his identity. He had a sense of loneliness, of evil freedom. It was rather pleasant. When, after paying for his short meal, he stood up and waited for his change, he saw himself in the sheet of glass, and was struck by his foreign appearance. He contemplated his own image with a melancholy and inquisitive gaze, then by sudden inspiration raised the collar of his jacket. This arrangement appeared to him commendable, and he completed it by giving an upward twist to the ends of his black moustache. He was satisfied by the subtle modification of his personal aspect caused by these



small changes. "That'll do very well," he thought. "I'll get a little wet, a little splashed — "

He became aware of the waiter at his elbow and of a small pile of silver coins on the edge of the table before him. The waiter kept one eye on it, while his other eye followed the long back of a tall, not very young girl, who passed up to a distant table looking perfectly sightless and altogether unapproachable. She seemed to be a habitual customer.

On going out the Assistant Commissioner made to himself the observation that the patrons of the place had lost in the frequentation of fraudulent cookery all their national and private characteristics. And this was strange, since the Italian restaurant is such a peculiarly British institution. But these people were as denationalised as the dishes set before them with every circumstance of unstamped respectability. Neither was their personality stamped in any way, professionally, socially or racially. They seemed created for the Italian restaurant, unless the Italian restaurant had been perchance created for them. But that last hypothesis was unthinkable, since one could not place them anywhere outside those special establishments. One never met these enigmatical persons elsewhere. It was impossible to form a precise idea what occupations they followed by day and where they went to bed at night. And he himself had become unplaced. It would have been impossible for anybody to guess his occupation. As to going to bed, there was a doubt even in his own mind. Not indeed in regard to his domicile itself, but very much so in respect of the time when he would be able to return there. A pleasurable feeling of independence possessed him when he heard the glass doors swing to behind his back with a sort of imperfect baffled thud. He advanced at once into an immensity of greasy slime and damp plaster interspersed with lamps, and enveloped, oppressed, penetrated, choked, and suffocated by the blackness of a wet London night, which is composed of soot and drops of water.

Brett Street was not very far away. It branched off, narrow, from the side of an open triangular space surrounded by dark and mysterious houses, temples of petty commerce emptied of traders for the night. Only a fruiterer's stall at the corner made a violent blaze of light and colour. Beyond all was black, and the few people passing in that direction vanished at one stride beyond the glowing heaps of oranges and lemons. No footsteps echoed. They would never be heard of again. The adventurous head of the Special Crimes Department watched these disappearances from

a distance with an interested eye. He felt light-hearted, as though he had been ambushed all alone in a jungle many thousands of miles away from departmental desks and official inkstands. This joyousness and dispersion of thought before a task of some importance seems to prove that this world of ours is not such a very serious affair after all. For the Assistant Commissioner was not constitutionally inclined to levity.

The policeman on the beat projected his sombre and moving form against the luminous glory of oranges and lemons, and entered Brett Street without haste. The Assistant Commissioner, as though he were a member of the criminal classes, lingered out of sight, awaiting his return. But this constable seemed to be lost for ever to the force. He never returned: must have gone out at the other end of Brett Street.

The Assistant Commissioner, reaching this conclusion, entered the street in his turn, and came upon a large van arrested in front of the dimly lit window-panes of a carter's eating-house. The man was refreshing himself inside, and the horses, their big heads lowered to the ground, fed out of nose-bags steadily. Farther on, on the opposite side of the street, another suspect patch of dim light issued from Mr Verloc's shop front, hung with papers, heaving with vague piles of cardboard boxes and the shapes of books. The Assistant Commissioner stood observing it across the roadway. There could be no mistake. By the side of the front window, encumbered by the shadows of nondescript things, the door, standing ajar, let escape on the pavement a narrow, clear streak of gas-light within.

Behind the Assistant Commissioner the van and horses, merged into one mass, seemed something alive — a square-backed black monster blocking half the street, with sudden iron-shod stampings, fierce jingles, and heavy, blowing sighs. The harshly festive, ill-omened glare of a large and prosperous public-house faced the other end of Brett Street across a wide road. This barrier of blazing lights, opposing the shadows gathered about the humble abode of Mr Verloc's domestic happiness, seemed to drive the obscurity of the street back upon itself, make it more sullen, brooding, and sinister.

## CHAPTER VIII

Having infused by persistent importunities some sort of heat into the chilly interest of several licensed victuallers (the acquaintances once upon a time of her late unlucky husband), Mrs Verloc's mother had at last secured her admission to certain almshouses founded by a wealthy innkeeper for the destitute widows of the trade.

This end, conceived in the astuteness of her uneasy heart, the old woman had pursued with secrecy and determination. That was the time when her daughter Winnie could not help passing a remark to Mr Verloc that "mother has been spending half-crowns and five shillings almost every day this last week in cab fares." But the remark was not made grudgingly. Winnie respected her mother's infirmities. She was only a little surprised at this sudden mania for locomotion. Mr Verloc, who was sufficiently magnificent in his way, had grunted the remark impatiently aside as interfering with his meditations. These were frequent, deep, and prolonged; they bore upon a matter more important than five shillings. Distinctly more important, and beyond all comparison more difficult to consider in all its aspects with philosophical serenity.

Her object attained in astute secrecy, the heroic old woman had made a clean breast of it to Mrs Verloc. Her soul was triumphant and her heart tremulous. Inwardly she quaked, because she dreaded and admired the calm, self-contained character of her daughter Winnie, whose displeasure was made redoubtable by a diversity of dreadful silences. But she did not allow her inward apprehensions to rob her of the advantage of venerable placidity conferred upon her outward person by her triple chin, the floating ampleness of her ancient form, and the impotent condition of her legs.

The shock of the information was so unexpected that Mrs Verloc, against her usual practice when addressed, interrupted the domestic occupation she was engaged upon. It was the dusting of the furniture in the parlour behind the shop. She turned her head towards her mother.

"Whatever did you want to do that for?" she exclaimed, in scandalised astonishment.

The shock must have been severe to make her depart from that distant and uninquiring acceptance of facts which was her force and her safeguard in life.

"Weren't you made comfortable enough here?"

She had lapsed into these inquiries, but next moment she saved the consistency of her conduct by resuming her dusting, while the old woman sat scared and dumb under her dingy white cap and lustreless dark wig.

Winnie finished the chair, and ran the duster along the mahogany at the back of the horse-hair sofa on which Mr Verloc loved to take his ease in hat and overcoat. She was intent on her work, but presently she permitted herself another question.

“How in the world did you manage it, mother?”

As not affecting the inwardness of things, which it was Mrs Verloc’s principle to ignore, this curiosity was excusable. It bore merely on the methods. The old woman welcomed it eagerly as bringing forward something that could be talked about with much sincerity.

She favoured her daughter by an exhaustive answer, full of names and enriched by side comments upon the ravages of time as observed in the alteration of human countenances. The names were principally the names of licensed victuallers — “poor daddy’s friends, my dear.” She enlarged with special appreciation on the kindness and condescension of a large brewer, a Baronet and an M. P., the Chairman of the Governors of the Charity. She expressed herself thus warmly because she had been allowed to interview by appointment his Private Secretary — “a very polite gentleman, all in black, with a gentle, sad voice, but so very, very thin and quiet. He was like a shadow, my dear.”

Winnie, prolonging her dusting operations till the tale was told to the end, walked out of the parlour into the kitchen (down two steps) in her usual manner, without the slightest comment.

Shedding a few tears in sign of rejoicing at her daughter’s mansuetude in this terrible affair, Mrs Verloc’s mother gave play to her astuteness in the direction of her furniture, because it was her own; and sometimes she wished it hadn’t been. Heroism is all very well, but there are circumstances when the disposal of a few tables and chairs, brass bedsteads, and so on, may be big with remote and disastrous consequences. She required a few pieces herself, the Foundation which, after many importunities, had gathered her to its charitable breast, giving nothing but bare planks and cheaply papered bricks to the objects of its solicitude. The delicacy guiding her choice to the least valuable and most dilapidated articles passed unacknowledged, because Winnie’s philosophy consisted in not taking notice of the inside of facts; she assumed that mother took what suited her

best. As to Mr Verloc, his intense meditation, like a sort of Chinese wall, isolated him completely from the phenomena of this world of vain effort and illusory appearances.

Her selection made, the disposal of the rest became a perplexing question in a particular way. She was leaving it in Brett Street, of course. But she had two children. Winnie was provided for by her sensible union with that excellent husband, Mr Verloc. Stevie was destitute — and a little peculiar. His position had to be considered before the claims of legal justice and even the promptings of partiality. The possession of the furniture would not be in any sense a provision. He ought to have it — the poor boy. But to give it to him would be like tampering with his position of complete dependence. It was a sort of claim which she feared to weaken. Moreover, the susceptibilities of Mr Verloc would perhaps not brook being beholden to his brother-in-law for the chairs he sat on. In a long experience of gentlemen lodgers, Mrs Verloc's mother had acquired a dismal but resigned notion of the fantastic side of human nature. What if Mr Verloc suddenly took it into his head to tell Stevie to take his blessed sticks somewhere out of that? A division, on the other hand, however carefully made, might give some cause of offence to Winnie. No, Stevie must remain destitute and dependent. And at the moment of leaving Brett Street she had said to her daughter: "No use waiting till I am dead, is there? Everything I leave here is altogether your own now, my dear."

Winnie, with her hat on, silent behind her mother's back, went on arranging the collar of the old woman's cloak. She got her hand-bag, an umbrella, with an impassive face. The time had come for the expenditure of the sum of three-and-sixpence on what might well be supposed the last cab drive of Mrs Verloc's mother's life. They went out at the shop door.

The conveyance awaiting them would have illustrated the proverb that "truth can be more cruel than caricature," if such a proverb existed. Crawling behind an infirm horse, a metropolitan hackney carriage drew up on wobbly wheels and with a maimed driver on the box. This last peculiarity caused some embarrassment. Catching sight of a hooked iron contrivance protruding from the left sleeve of the man's coat, Mrs Verloc's mother lost suddenly the heroic courage of these days. She really couldn't trust herself. "What do you think, Winnie?" She hung back. The passionate expostulations of the big-faced cabman seemed to be squeezed out of a blocked throat. Leaning over from his box, he whispered with

mysterious indignation. What was the matter now? Was it possible to treat a man so? His enormous and unwashed countenance flamed red in the muddy stretch of the street. Was it likely they would have given him a licence, he inquired desperately, if —

The police constable of the locality quieted him by a friendly glance; then addressing himself to the two women without marked consideration, said:

“He’s been driving a cab for twenty years. I never knew him to have an accident.”

“Accident!” shouted the driver in a scornful whisper.

The policeman’s testimony settled it. The modest assemblage of seven people, mostly under age, dispersed. Winnie followed her mother into the cab. Stevie climbed on the box. His vacant mouth and distressed eyes depicted the state of his mind in regard to the transactions which were taking place. In the narrow streets the progress of the journey was made sensible to those within by the near fronts of the houses gliding past slowly and shakily, with a great rattle and jingling of glass, as if about to collapse behind the cab; and the infirm horse, with the harness hung over his sharp backbone flapping very loose about his thighs, appeared to be dancing mincingly on his toes with infinite patience. Later on, in the wider space of Whitehall, all visual evidences of motion became imperceptible. The rattle and jingle of glass went on indefinitely in front of the long Treasury building — and time itself seemed to stand still.

At last Winnie observed: “This isn’t a very good horse.”

Her eyes gleamed in the shadow of the cab straight ahead, immovable. On the box, Stevie shut his vacant mouth first, in order to ejaculate earnestly: “Don’t.”

The driver, holding high the reins twisted around the hook, took no notice. Perhaps he had not heard. Stevie’s breast heaved.

“Don’t whip.”

The man turned slowly his bloated and sodden face of many colours bristling with white hairs. His little red eyes glistened with moisture. His big lips had a violet tint. They remained closed. With the dirty back of his whip-hand he rubbed the stubble sprouting on his enormous chin.

“You mustn’t,” stammered out Stevie violently. “It hurts.”

“Mustn’t whip,” queried the other in a thoughtful whisper, and immediately whipped. He did this, not because his soul was cruel and his

heart evil, but because he had to earn his fare. And for a time the walls of St Stephen's, with its towers and pinnacles, contemplated in immobility and silence a cab that jingled. It rolled too, however. But on the bridge there was a commotion. Stevie suddenly proceeded to get down from the box. There were shouts on the pavement, people ran forward, the driver pulled up, whispering curses of indignation and astonishment. Winnie lowered the window, and put her head out, white as a ghost. In the depths of the cab, her mother was exclaiming, in tones of anguish: "Is that boy hurt? Is that boy hurt?"

Stevie was not hurt, he had not even fallen, but excitement as usual had robbed him of the power of connected speech. He could do no more than stammer at the window. "Too heavy. Too heavy." Winnie put out her hand on to his shoulder.

"Stevie! Get up on the box directly, and don't try to get down again."

"No. No. Walk. Must walk."

In trying to state the nature of that necessity he stammered himself into utter incoherence. No physical impossibility stood in the way of his whim. Stevie could have managed easily to keep pace with the infirm, dancing horse without getting out of breath. But his sister withheld her consent decisively. "The idea! Whoever heard of such a thing! Run after a cab!" Her mother, frightened and helpless in the depths of the conveyance, entreated: "Oh, don't let him, Winnie. He'll get lost. Don't let him."

"Certainly not. What next! Mr Verloc will be sorry to hear of this nonsense, Stevie, — I can tell you. He won't be happy at all."

The idea of Mr Verloc's grief and unhappiness acting as usual powerfully upon Stevie's fundamentally docile disposition, he abandoned all resistance, and climbed up again on the box, with a face of despair.

The cabby turned at him his enormous and inflamed countenance truculently. "Don't you go for trying this silly game again, young fellow."

After delivering himself thus in a stern whisper, strained almost to extinction, he drove on, ruminating solemnly. To his mind the incident remained somewhat obscure. But his intellect, though it had lost its pristine vivacity in the benumbing years of sedentary exposure to the weather, lacked not independence or sanity. Gravely he dismissed the hypothesis of Stevie being a drunken young nipper.

Inside the cab the spell of silence, in which the two women had endured shoulder to shoulder the jolting, rattling, and jingling of the journey, had

been broken by Stevie's outbreak. Winnie raised her voice.

"You've done what you wanted, mother. You'll have only yourself to thank for it if you aren't happy afterwards. And I don't think you'll be. That I don't. Weren't you comfortable enough in the house? Whatever people'll think of us — you throwing yourself like this on a Charity?"

"My dear," screamed the old woman earnestly above the noise, "you've been the best of daughters to me. As to Mr Verloc — there — "

Words failing her on the subject of Mr Verloc's excellence, she turned her old tearful eyes to the roof of the cab. Then she averted her head on the pretence of looking out of the window, as if to judge of their progress. It was insignificant, and went on close to the curbstone. Night, the early dirty night, the sinister, noisy, hopeless and rowdy night of South London, had overtaken her on her last cab drive. In the gas-light of the low-fronted shops her big cheeks glowed with an orange hue under a black and mauve bonnet.

Mrs Verloc's mother's complexion had become yellow by the effect of age and from a natural predisposition to biliousness, favoured by the trials of a difficult and worried existence, first as wife, then as widow. It was a complexion, that under the influence of a blush would take on an orange tint. And this woman, modest indeed but hardened in the fires of adversity, of an age, moreover, when blushes are not expected, had positively blushed before her daughter. In the privacy of a four-wheeler, on her way to a charity cottage (one of a row) which by the exiguity of its dimensions and the simplicity of its accommodation, might well have been devised in kindness as a place of training for the still more straitened circumstances of the grave, she was forced to hid from her own child a blush of remorse and shame.

Whatever people will think? She knew very well what they did think, the people Winnie had in her mind — the old friends of her husband, and others too, whose interest she had solicited with such flattering success. She had not known before what a good beggar she could be. But she guessed very well what inference was drawn from her application. On account of that shrinking delicacy, which exists side by side with aggressive brutality in masculine nature, the inquiries into her circumstances had not been pushed very far. She had checked them by a visible compression of the lips and some display of an emotion determined to be eloquently silent. And the men would become suddenly incurious, after the manner of their kind. She



congratulated herself more than once on having nothing to do with women, who being naturally more callous and avid of details, would have been anxious to be exactly informed by what sort of unkind conduct her daughter and son-in-law had driven her to that sad extremity. It was only before the Secretary of the great brewer M. P. and Chairman of the Charity, who, acting for his principal, felt bound to be conscientiously inquisitive as to the real circumstances of the applicant, that she had burst into tears outright and aloud, as a cornered woman will weep. The thin and polite gentleman, after contemplating her with an air of being “struck all of a heap,” abandoned his position under the cover of soothing remarks. She must not distress herself. The deed of the Charity did not absolutely specify “childless widows.” In fact, it did not by any means disqualify her. But the discretion of the Committee must be an informed discretion. One could understand very well her unwillingness to be a burden, etc. etc. Thereupon, to his profound disappointment, Mrs Verloc’s mother wept some more with an augmented vehemence.

The tears of that large female in a dark, dusty wig, and ancient silk dress festooned with dingy white cotton lace, were the tears of genuine distress. She had wept because she was heroic and unscrupulous and full of love for both her children. Girls frequently get sacrificed to the welfare of the boys. In this case she was sacrificing Winnie. By the suppression of truth she was slandering her. Of course, Winnie was independent, and need not care for the opinion of people that she would never see and who would never see her; whereas poor Stevie had nothing in the world he could call his own except his mother’s heroism and unscrupulousness.

The first sense of security following on Winnie’s marriage wore off in time (for nothing lasts), and Mrs Verloc’s mother, in the seclusion of the back bedroom, had recalled the teaching of that experience which the world impresses upon a widowed woman. But she had recalled it without vain bitterness; her store of resignation amounted almost to dignity. She reflected stoically that everything decays, wears out, in this world; that the way of kindness should be made easy to the well disposed; that her daughter Winnie was a most devoted sister, and a very self-confident wife indeed. As regards Winnie’s sisterly devotion, her stoicism flinched. She excepted that sentiment from the rule of decay affecting all things human and some things divine. She could not help it; not to do so would have frightened her too much. But in considering the conditions of her

daughter's married state, she rejected firmly all flattering illusions. She took the cold and reasonable view that the less strain put on Mr Verloc's kindness the longer its effects were likely to last. That excellent man loved his wife, of course, but he would, no doubt, prefer to keep as few of her relations as was consistent with the proper display of that sentiment. It would be better if its whole effect were concentrated on poor Stevie. And the heroic old woman resolved on going away from her children as an act of devotion and as a move of deep policy.

The "virtue" of this policy consisted in this (Mrs Verloc's mother was subtle in her way), that Stevie's moral claim would be strengthened. The poor boy — a good, useful boy, if a little peculiar — had not a sufficient standing. He had been taken over with his mother, somewhat in the same way as the furniture of the Belgravian mansion had been taken over, as if on the ground of belonging to her exclusively. What will happen, she asked herself (for Mrs Verloc's mother was in a measure imaginative), when I die? And when she asked herself that question it was with dread. It was also terrible to think that she would not then have the means of knowing what happened to the poor boy. But by making him over to his sister, by going thus away, she gave him the advantage of a directly dependent position. This was the more subtle sanction of Mrs Verloc's mother's heroism and unscrupulousness. Her act of abandonment was really an arrangement for settling her son permanently in life. Other people made material sacrifices for such an object, she in that way. It was the only way. Moreover, she would be able to see how it worked. Ill or well she would avoid the horrible incertitude on the death-bed. But it was hard, hard, cruelly hard.

The cab rattled, jingled, jolted; in fact, the last was quite extraordinary. By its disproportionate violence and magnitude it obliterated every sensation of onward movement; and the effect was of being shaken in a stationary apparatus like a mediæval device for the punishment of crime, or some very newfangled invention for the cure of a sluggish liver. It was extremely distressing; and the raising of Mrs Verloc's mother's voice sounded like a wail of pain.

"I know, my dear, you'll come to see me as often as you can spare the time. Won't you?"

"Of course," answered Winnie shortly, staring straight before her.

And the cab jolted in front of a steamy, greasy shop in a blaze of gas and in the smell of fried fish.

The old woman raised a wail again.

“And, my dear, I must see that poor boy every Sunday. He won’t mind spending the day with his old mother — ”

Winnie screamed out stolidly:

“Mind! I should think not. That poor boy will miss you something cruel. I wish you had thought a little of that, mother.”

Not think of it! The heroic woman swallowed a playful and inconvenient object like a billiard ball, which had tried to jump out of her throat. Winnie sat mute for a while, pouting at the front of the cab, then snapped out, which was an unusual tone with her:

“I expect I’ll have a job with him at first, he’ll be that restless — ”

“Whatever you do, don’t let him worry your husband, my dear.”

Thus they discussed on familiar lines the bearings of a new situation. And the cab jolted. Mrs Verloc’s mother expressed some misgivings. Could Stevie be trusted to come all that way alone? Winnie maintained that he was much less “absent-minded” now. They agreed as to that. It could not be denied. Much less — hardly at all. They shouted at each other in the jingle with comparative cheerfulness. But suddenly the maternal anxiety broke out afresh. There were two omnibuses to take, and a short walk between. It was too difficult! The old woman gave way to grief and consternation.

Winnie stared forward.

“Don’t you upset yourself like this, mother. You must see him, of course.”

“No, my dear. I’ll try not to.”

She mopped her streaming eyes.

“But you can’t spare the time to come with him, and if he should forget himself and lose his way and somebody spoke to him sharply, his name and address may slip his memory, and he’ll remain lost for days and days — ”

The vision of a workhouse infirmary for poor Stevie — if only during inquiries — wrung her heart. For she was a proud woman. Winnie’s stare had grown hard, intent, inventive.

“I can’t bring him to you myself every week,” she cried. “But don’t you worry, mother. I’ll see to it that he don’t get lost for long.”

They felt a peculiar bump; a vision of brick pillars lingered before the rattling windows of the cab; a sudden cessation of atrocious jolting and uproarious jingling dazed the two women. What had happened? They sat motionless and scared in the profound stillness, till the door came open, and a rough, strained whispering was heard:

“Here you are!”

A range of gabled little houses, each with one dim yellow window, on the ground floor, surrounded the dark open space of a grass plot planted with shrubs and railed off from the patchwork of lights and shadows in the wide road, resounding with the dull rumble of traffic. Before the door of one of these tiny houses — one without a light in the little downstairs window — the cab had come to a standstill. Mrs Verloc’s mother got out first, backwards, with a key in her hand. Winnie lingered on the flagstone path to pay the cabman. Stevie, after helping to carry inside a lot of small parcels, came out and stood under the light of a gas-lamp belonging to the Charity. The cabman looked at the pieces of silver, which, appearing very minute in his big, grimy palm, symbolised the insignificant results which reward the ambitious courage and toil of a mankind whose day is short on this earth of evil.

He had been paid decently — four one-shilling pieces — and he contemplated them in perfect stillness, as if they had been the surprising terms of a melancholy problem. The slow transfer of that treasure to an inner pocket demanded much laborious groping in the depths of decayed clothing. His form was squat and without flexibility. Stevie, slender, his shoulders a little up, and his hands thrust deep in the side pockets of his warm overcoat, stood at the edge of the path, pouting.

The cabman, pausing in his deliberate movements, seemed struck by some misty recollection.

“Oh! ‘Ere you are, young fellow,” he whispered. “You’ll know him again — won’t you?”

Stevie was staring at the horse, whose hind quarters appeared unduly elevated by the effect of emaciation. The little stiff tail seemed to have been fitted in for a heartless joke; and at the other end the thin, flat neck, like a plank covered with old horse-hide, drooped to the ground under the weight of an enormous bony head. The ears hung at different angles, negligently; and the macabre figure of that mute dweller on the earth

steamed straight up from ribs and backbone in the muggy stillness of the air.

The cabman struck lightly Stevie's breast with the iron hook protruding from a ragged, greasy sleeve.

"Look 'ere, young feller. 'Ow'd you like to sit behind this 'oss up to two o'clock in the morning p'raps?"

Stevie looked vacantly into the fierce little eyes with red-edged lids.

"He ain't lame," pursued the other, whispering with energy. "He ain't got no sore places on 'im. 'Ere he is. 'Ow would you like — "

His strained, extinct voice invested his utterance with a character of vehement secrecy. Stevie's vacant gaze was changing slowly into dread.

"You may well look! Till three and four o'clock in the morning. Cold and 'ungry. Looking for fares. Drunks."

His jovial purple cheeks bristled with white hairs; and like Virgil's Silenus, who, his face smeared with the juice of berries, discoursed of Olympian Gods to the innocent shepherds of Sicily, he talked to Stevie of domestic matters and the affairs of men whose sufferings are great and immortality by no means assured.

"I am a night cabby, I am," he whispered, with a sort of boastful exasperation. "I've got to take out what they will blooming well give me at the yard. I've got my missus and four kids at 'ome."

The monstrous nature of that declaration of paternity seemed to strike the world dumb. A silence reigned during which the flanks of the old horse, the steed of apocalyptic misery, smoked upwards in the light of the charitable gas-lamp.

The cabman grunted, then added in his mysterious whisper:

"This ain't an easy world." Stevie's face had been twitching for some time, and at last his feelings burst out in their usual concise form.

"Bad! Bad!"

His gaze remained fixed on the ribs of the horse, self-conscious and sombre, as though he were afraid to look about him at the badness of the world. And his slenderness, his rosy lips and pale, clear complexion, gave him the aspect of a delicate boy, notwithstanding the fluffy growth of golden hair on his cheeks. He pouted in a scared way like a child. The cabman, short and broad, eyed him with his fierce little eyes that seemed to smart in a clear and corroding liquid.

“‘Ard on ‘osses, but dam’ sight ‘arder on poor chaps like me,” he wheezed just audibly.

“Poor! Poor!” stammered out Stevie, pushing his hands deeper into his pockets with convulsive sympathy. He could say nothing; for the tenderness to all pain and all misery, the desire to make the horse happy and the cabman happy, had reached the point of a bizarre longing to take them to bed with him. And that, he knew, was impossible. For Stevie was not mad. It was, as it were, a symbolic longing; and at the same time it was very distinct, because springing from experience, the mother of wisdom. Thus when as a child he cowered in a dark corner scared, wretched, sore, and miserable with the black, black misery of the soul, his sister Winnie used to come along, and carry him off to bed with her, as into a heaven of consoling peace. Stevie, though apt to forget mere facts, such as his name and address for instance, had a faithful memory of sensations. To be taken into a bed of compassion was the supreme remedy, with the only one disadvantage of being difficult of application on a large scale. And looking at the cabman, Stevie perceived this clearly, because he was reasonable.

The cabman went on with his leisurely preparations as if Stevie had not existed. He made as if to hoist himself on the box, but at the last moment from some obscure motive, perhaps merely from disgust with carriage exercise, desisted. He approached instead the motionless partner of his labours, and stooping to seize the bridle, lifted up the big, weary head to the height of his shoulder with one effort of his right arm, like a feat of strength.

“Come on,” he whispered secretly.

Limping, he led the cab away. There was an air of austerity in this departure, the scrunched gravel of the drive crying out under the slowly turning wheels, the horse’s lean thighs moving with ascetic deliberation away from the light into the obscurity of the open space bordered dimly by the pointed roofs and the feebly shining windows of the little alms-houses. The plaint of the gravel travelled slowly all round the drive. Between the lamps of the charitable gateway the slow cortege reappeared, lighted up for a moment, the short, thick man limping busily, with the horse’s head held aloft in his fist, the lank animal walking in stiff and forlorn dignity, the dark, low box on wheels rolling behind comically with an air of waddling. They turned to the left. There was a pub down the street, within fifty yards of the gate.

Stevie left alone beside the private lamp-post of the Charity, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, glared with vacant sulkiness. At the bottom of his pockets his incapable weak hands were clinched hard into a pair of angry fists. In the face of anything which affected directly or indirectly his morbid dread of pain, Stevie ended by turning vicious. A magnanimous indignation swelled his frail chest to bursting, and caused his candid eyes to squint. Supremely wise in knowing his own powerlessness, Stevie was not wise enough to restrain his passions. The tenderness of his universal charity had two phases as indissolubly joined and connected as the reverse and obverse sides of a medal. The anguish of immoderate compassion was succeeded by the pain of an innocent but pitiless rage. Those two states expressing themselves outwardly by the same signs of futile bodily agitation, his sister Winnie soothed his excitement without ever fathoming its twofold character. Mrs Verloc wasted no portion of this transient life in seeking for fundamental information. This is a sort of economy having all the appearances and some of the advantages of prudence. Obviously it may be good for one not to know too much. And such a view accords very well with constitutional indolence.

On that evening on which it may be said that Mrs Verloc's mother having parted for good from her children had also departed this life, Winnie Verloc did not investigate her brother's psychology. The poor boy was excited, of course. After once more assuring the old woman on the threshold that she would know how to guard against the risk of Stevie losing himself for very long on his pilgrimages of filial piety, she took her brother's arm to walk away. Stevie did not even mutter to himself, but with the special sense of sisterly devotion developed in her earliest infancy, she felt that the boy was very much excited indeed. Holding tight to his arm, under the appearance of leaning on it, she thought of some words suitable to the occasion.

"Now, Stevie, you must look well after me at the crossings, and get first into the 'bus, like a good brother."

This appeal to manly protection was received by Stevie with his usual docility. It flattered him. He raised his head and threw out his chest.

"Don't be nervous, Winnie. Mustn't be nervous! 'Bus all right," he answered in a brusque, slurring stammer partaking of the timorousness of a child and the resolution of a man. He advanced fearlessly with the woman on his arm, but his lower lip dropped. Nevertheless, on the pavement of the squalid and wide thoroughfare, whose poverty in all the amenities of life

stood foolishly exposed by a mad profusion of gas-lights, their resemblance to each other was so pronounced as to strike the casual passers-by.

Before the doors of the public-house at the corner, where the profusion of gas-light reached the height of positive wickedness, a four-wheeled cab standing by the curbstone with no one on the box, seemed cast out into the gutter on account of irremediable decay. Mrs Verloc recognised the conveyance. Its aspect was so profoundly lamentable, with such a perfection of grotesque misery and weirdness of macabre detail, as if it were the Cab of Death itself, that Mrs Verloc, with that ready compassion of a woman for a horse (when she is not sitting behind him), exclaimed vaguely:

“Poor brute!”

Hanging back suddenly, Stevie inflicted an arresting jerk upon his sister.

“Poor! Poor!” he ejaculated appreciatively. “Cabman poor too. He told me himself.”

The contemplation of the infirm and lonely steed overcame him. Jostled, but obstinate, he would remain there, trying to express the view newly opened to his sympathies of the human and equine misery in close association. But it was very difficult. “Poor brute, poor people!” was all he could repeat. It did not seem forcible enough, and he came to a stop with an angry splutter: “Shame!” Stevie was no master of phrases, and perhaps for that very reason his thoughts lacked clearness and precision. But he felt with greater completeness and some profundity. That little word contained all his sense of indignation and horror at one sort of wretchedness having to feed upon the anguish of the other — at the poor cabman beating the poor horse in the name, as it were, of his poor kids at home. And Stevie knew what it was to be beaten. He knew it from experience. It was a bad world. Bad! Bad!

Mrs Verloc, his only sister, guardian, and protector, could not pretend to such depths of insight. Moreover, she had not experienced the magic of the cabman’s eloquence. She was in the dark as to the inwardness of the word “Shame.” And she said placidly:

“Come along, Stevie. You can’t help that.”

The docile Stevie went along; but now he went along without pride, shamblingly, and muttering half words, and even words that would have been whole if they had not been made up of halves that did not belong to each other. It was as though he had been trying to fit all the words he could



remember to his sentiments in order to get some sort of corresponding idea. And, as a matter of fact, he got it at last. He hung back to utter it at once.

“Bad world for poor people.”

Directly he had expressed that thought he became aware that it was familiar to him already in all its consequences. This circumstance strengthened his conviction immensely, but also augmented his indignation. Somebody, he felt, ought to be punished for it — punished with great severity. Being no sceptic, but a moral creature, he was in a manner at the mercy of his righteous passions.

“Beastly!” he added concisely.

It was clear to Mrs Verloc that he was greatly excited.

“Nobody can help that,” she said. “Do come along. Is that the way you’re taking care of me?”

Stevie mended his pace obediently. He prided himself on being a good brother. His morality, which was very complete, demanded that from him. Yet he was pained at the information imparted by his sister Winnie who was good. Nobody could help that! He came along gloomily, but presently he brightened up. Like the rest of mankind, perplexed by the mystery of the universe, he had his moments of consoling trust in the organised powers of the earth.

“Police,” he suggested confidently.

“The police aren’t for that,” observed Mrs Verloc cursorily, hurrying on her way.

Stevie’s face lengthened considerably. He was thinking. The more intense his thinking, the slacker was the droop of his lower jaw.

And it was with an aspect of hopeless vacancy that he gave up his intellectual enterprise.

“Not for that?” he mumbled, resigned but surprised. “Not for that?” He had formed for himself an ideal conception of the metropolitan police as a sort of benevolent institution for the suppression of evil. The notion of benevolence especially was very closely associated with his sense of the power of the men in blue. He had liked all police constables tenderly, with a guileless trustfulness. And he was pained. He was irritated, too, by a suspicion of duplicity in the members of the force. For Stevie was frank and as open as the day himself. What did they mean by pretending then? Unlike his sister, who put her trust in face values, he wished to go to the

bottom of the matter. He carried on his inquiry by means of an angry challenge.

“What for are they then, Winn? What are they for? Tell me.”

Winnie disliked controversy. But fearing most a fit of black depression consequent on Stevie missing his mother very much at first, she did not altogether decline the discussion. Guiltless of all irony, she answered yet in a form which was not perhaps unnatural in the wife of Mr Verloc, Delegate of the Central Red Committee, personal friend of certain anarchists, and a votary of social revolution.

“Don’t you know what the police are for, Stevie? They are there so that them as have nothing shouldn’t take anything away from them who have.”

She avoided using the verb “to steal,” because it always made her brother uncomfortable. For Stevie was delicately honest. Certain simple principles had been instilled into him so anxiously (on account of his “queerness”) that the mere names of certain transgressions filled him with horror. He had been always easily impressed by speeches. He was impressed and startled now, and his intelligence was very alert.

“What?” he asked at once anxiously. “Not even if they were hungry? Mustn’t they?”

The two had paused in their walk.

“Not if they were ever so,” said Mrs Verloc, with the equanimity of a person untroubled by the problem of the distribution of wealth, and exploring the perspective of the roadway for an omnibus of the right colour. “Certainly not. But what’s the use of talking about all that? You aren’t ever hungry.”

She cast a swift glance at the boy, like a young man, by her side. She saw him amiable, attractive, affectionate, and only a little, a very little, peculiar. And she could not see him otherwise, for he was connected with what there was of the salt of passion in her tasteless life — the passion of indignation, of courage, of pity, and even of self-sacrifice. She did not add: “And you aren’t likely ever to be as long as I live.” But she might very well have done so, since she had taken effectual steps to that end. Mr Verloc was a very good husband. It was her honest impression that nobody could help liking the boy. She cried out suddenly:

“Quick, Stevie. Stop that green ‘bus.’”

And Stevie, tremulous and important with his sister Winnie on his arm, flung up the other high above his head at the approaching ‘bus, with

complete success.

An hour afterwards Mr Verloc raised his eyes from a newspaper he was reading, or at any rate looking at, behind the counter, and in the expiring clatter of the door-bell beheld Winnie, his wife, enter and cross the shop on her way upstairs, followed by Stevie, his brother-in-law. The sight of his wife was agreeable to Mr Verloc. It was his idiosyncrasy. The figure of his brother-in-law remained imperceptible to him because of the morose thoughtfulness that lately had fallen like a veil between Mr Verloc and the appearances of the world of senses. He looked after his wife fixedly, without a word, as though she had been a phantom. His voice for home use was husky and placid, but now it was heard not at all. It was not heard at supper, to which he was called by his wife in the usual brief manner: "Adolf." He sat down to consume it without conviction, wearing his hat pushed far back on his head. It was not devotion to an outdoor life, but the frequentation of foreign cafés which was responsible for that habit, investing with a character of unceremonious impermanency Mr Verloc's steady fidelity to his own fireside. Twice at the clatter of the cracked bell he arose without a word, disappeared into the shop, and came back silently. During these absences Mrs Verloc, becoming acutely aware of the vacant place at her right hand, missed her mother very much, and stared stonily; while Stevie, from the same reason, kept on shuffling his feet, as though the floor under the table were uncomfortably hot. When Mr Verloc returned to sit in his place, like the very embodiment of silence, the character of Mrs Verloc's stare underwent a subtle change, and Stevie ceased to fidget with his feet, because of his great and awed regard for his sister's husband. He directed at him glances of respectful compassion. Mr Verloc was sorry. His sister Winnie had impressed upon him (in the omnibus) that Mr Verloc would be found at home in a state of sorrow, and must not be worried. His father's anger, the irritability of gentlemen lodgers, and Mr Verloc's predisposition to immoderate grief, had been the main sanctions of Stevie's self-restraint. Of these sentiments, all easily provoked, but not always easy to understand, the last had the greatest moral efficiency — because Mr Verloc was good. His mother and his sister had established that ethical fact on an unshakable foundation. They had established, erected, consecrated it behind Mr Verloc's back, for reasons that had nothing to do with abstract morality. And Mr Verloc was not aware of it. It is but bare justice to him to say that he had no notion of appearing good to Stevie. Yet so it was. He

was even the only man so qualified in Stevie's knowledge, because the gentlemen lodgers had been too transient and too remote to have anything very distinct about them but perhaps their boots; and as regards the disciplinary measures of his father, the desolation of his mother and sister shrank from setting up a theory of goodness before the victim. It would have been too cruel. And it was even possible that Stevie would not have believed them. As far as Mr Verloc was concerned, nothing could stand in the way of Stevie's belief. Mr Verloc was obviously yet mysteriously good. And the grief of a good man is august.

Stevie gave glances of reverential compassion to his brother-in-law. Mr Verloc was sorry. The brother of Winnie had never before felt himself in such close communion with the mystery of that man's goodness. It was an understandable sorrow. And Stevie himself was sorry. He was very sorry. The same sort of sorrow. And his attention being drawn to this unpleasant state, Stevie shuffled his feet. His feelings were habitually manifested by the agitation of his limbs.

"Keep your feet quiet, dear," said Mrs Verloc, with authority and tenderness; then turning towards her husband in an indifferent voice, the masterly achievement of instinctive tact: "Are you going out to-night?" she asked.

The mere suggestion seemed repugnant to Mr Verloc. He shook his head moodily, and then sat still with downcast eyes, looking at the piece of cheese on his plate for a whole minute. At the end of that time he got up, and went out — went right out in the clatter of the shop-door bell. He acted thus inconsistently, not from any desire to make himself unpleasant, but because of an unconquerable restlessness. It was no earthly good going out. He could not find anywhere in London what he wanted. But he went out. He led a cortege of dismal thoughts along dark streets, through lighted streets, in and out of two flash bars, as if in a half-hearted attempt to make a night of it, and finally back again to his menaced home, where he sat down fatigued behind the counter, and they crowded urgently round him, like a pack of hungry black hounds. After locking up the house and putting out the gas he took them upstairs with him — a dreadful escort for a man going to bed. His wife had preceded him some time before, and with her ample form defined vaguely under the counterpane, her head on the pillow, and a hand under the cheek offered to his distraction the view of early drowsiness

arguing the possession of an equable soul. Her big eyes stared wide open, inert and dark against the snowy whiteness of the linen. She did not move.

She had an equable soul. She felt profoundly that things do not stand much looking into. She made her force and her wisdom of that instinct. But the taciturnity of Mr Verloc had been lying heavily upon her for a good many days. It was, as a matter of fact, affecting her nerves. Recumbent and motionless, she said placidly:

“You’ll catch cold walking about in your socks like this.”

This speech, becoming the solicitude of the wife and the prudence of the woman, took Mr Verloc unawares. He had left his boots downstairs, but he had forgotten to put on his slippers, and he had been turning about the bedroom on noiseless pads like a bear in a cage. At the sound of his wife’s voice he stopped and stared at her with a somnambulistic, expressionless gaze so long that Mrs Verloc moved her limbs slightly under the bed-clothes. But she did not move her black head sunk in the white pillow one hand under her cheek and the big, dark, unwinking eyes.

Under her husband’s expressionless stare, and remembering her mother’s empty room across the landing, she felt an acute pang of loneliness. She had never been parted from her mother before. They had stood by each other. She felt that they had, and she said to herself that now mother was gone — gone for good. Mrs Verloc had no illusions. Stevie remained, however. And she said:

“Mother’s done what she wanted to do. There’s no sense in it that I can see. I’m sure she couldn’t have thought you had enough of her. It’s perfectly wicked, leaving us like that.”

Mr Verloc was not a well-read person; his range of allusive phrases was limited, but there was a peculiar aptness in circumstances which made him think of rats leaving a doomed ship. He very nearly said so. He had grown suspicious and embittered. Could it be that the old woman had such an excellent nose? But the unreasonableness of such a suspicion was patent, and Mr Verloc held his tongue. Not altogether, however. He muttered heavily:

“Perhaps it’s just as well.”

He began to undress. Mrs Verloc kept very still, perfectly still, with her eyes fixed in a dreamy, quiet stare. And her heart for the fraction of a second seemed to stand still too. That night she was “not quite herself,” as the saying is, and it was borne upon her with some force that a simple

sentence may hold several diverse meanings — mostly disagreeable. How was it just as well? And why? But she did not allow herself to fall into the idleness of barren speculation. She was rather confirmed in her belief that things did not stand being looked into. Practical and subtle in her way, she brought Stevie to the front without loss of time, because in her the singleness of purpose had the unerring nature and the force of an instinct.

“What I am going to do to cheer up that boy for the first few days I’m sure I don’t know. He’ll be worrying himself from morning till night before he gets used to mother being away. And he’s such a good boy. I couldn’t do without him.”

Mr Verloc went on divesting himself of his clothing with the unnoticing inward concentration of a man undressing in the solitude of a vast and hopeless desert. For thus inhospitably did this fair earth, our common inheritance, present itself to the mental vision of Mr Verloc. All was so still without and within that the lonely ticking of the clock on the landing stole into the room as if for the sake of company.

Mr Verloc, getting into bed on his own side, remained prone and mute behind Mrs Verloc’s back. His thick arms rested abandoned on the outside of the counterpane like dropped weapons, like discarded tools. At that moment he was within a hair’s breadth of making a clean breast of it all to his wife. The moment seemed propitious. Looking out of the corners of his eyes, he saw her ample shoulders draped in white, the back of her head, with the hair done for the night in three plaits tied up with black tapes at the ends. And he forbore. Mr Verloc loved his wife as a wife should be loved — that is, maritally, with the regard one has for one’s chief possession. This head arranged for the night, those ample shoulders, had an aspect of familiar sacredness — the sacredness of domestic peace. She moved not, massive and shapeless like a recumbent statue in the rough; he remembered her wide-open eyes looking into the empty room. She was mysterious, with the mysteriousness of living beings. The far-famed secret agent [delta] of the late Baron Stott-Wartenheim’s alarmist despatches was not the man to break into such mysteries. He was easily intimidated. And he was also indolent, with the indolence which is so often the secret of good nature. He forbore touching that mystery out of love, timidity, and indolence. There would be always time enough. For several minutes he bore his sufferings silently in the drowsy silence of the room. And then he disturbed it by a resolute declaration.

“I am going on the Continent to-morrow.”

His wife might have fallen asleep already. He could not tell. As a matter of fact, Mrs Verloc had heard him. Her eyes remained very wide open, and she lay very still, confirmed in her instinctive conviction that things don't bear looking into very much. And yet it was nothing very unusual for Mr Verloc to take such a trip. He renewed his stock from Paris and Brussels. Often he went over to make his purchases personally. A little select connection of amateurs was forming around the shop in Brett Street, a secret connection eminently proper for any business undertaken by Mr Verloc, who, by a mystic accord of temperament and necessity, had been set apart to be a secret agent all his life.

He waited for a while, then added: “I'll be away a week or perhaps a fortnight. Get Mrs Neale to come for the day.”

Mrs Neale was the charwoman of Brett Street. Victim of her marriage with a debauched joiner, she was oppressed by the needs of many infant children. Red-armed, and aproned in coarse sacking up to the arm-pits, she exhaled the anguish of the poor in a breath of soap-suds and rum, in the uproar of scrubbing, in the clatter of tin pails.

Mrs Verloc, full of deep purpose, spoke in the tone of the shallowest indifference.

“There is no need to have the woman here all day. I shall do very well with Stevie.”

She let the lonely clock on the landing count off fifteen ticks into the abyss of eternity, and asked:

“Shall I put the light out?”

Mr Verloc snapped at his wife huskily.

“Put it out.”

## CHAPTER IX

Mr Verloc returning from the Continent at the end of ten days, brought back a mind evidently unrefreshed by the wonders of foreign travel and a countenance unlighted by the joys of home-coming. He entered in the clatter of the shop bell with an air of sombre and vexed exhaustion. His bag in hand, his head lowered, he strode straight behind the counter, and let himself fall into the chair, as though he had tramped all the way from Dover. It was early morning. Stevie, dusting various objects displayed in the front windows, turned to gape at him with reverence and awe.

“Here!” said Mr Verloc, giving a slight kick to the gladstone bag on the floor; and Stevie flung himself upon it, seized it, bore it off with triumphant devotion. He was so prompt that Mr Verloc was distinctly surprised.

Already at the clatter of the shop bell Mrs Neale, blackleading the parlour grate, had looked through the door, and rising from her knees had gone, aproned, and grimy with everlasting toll, to tell Mrs Verloc in the kitchen that “there was the master come back.”

Winnie came no farther than the inner shop door.

“You’ll want some breakfast,” she said from a distance.

Mr Verloc moved his hands slightly, as if overcome by an impossible suggestion. But once enticed into the parlour he did not reject the food set before him. He ate as if in a public place, his hat pushed off his forehead, the skirts of his heavy overcoat hanging in a triangle on each side of the chair. And across the length of the table covered with brown oil-cloth Winnie, his wife, talked evenly at him the wifely talk, as artfully adapted, no doubt, to the circumstances of this return as the talk of Penelope to the return of the wandering Odysseus. Mrs Verloc, however, had done no weaving during her husband’s absence. But she had had all the upstairs room cleaned thoroughly, had sold some wares, had seen Mr Michaelis several times. He had told her the last time that he was going away to live in a cottage in the country, somewhere on the London, Chatham, and Dover line. Karl Yundt had come too, once, led under the arm by that “wicked old housekeeper of his.” He was “a disgusting old man.” Of Comrade Ossipon, whom she had received curtly, entrenched behind the counter with a stony face and a faraway gaze, she said nothing, her mental reference to the robust anarchist being marked by a short pause, with the faintest possible blush. And bringing in her brother Stevie as soon as she could into



the current of domestic events, she mentioned that the boy had moped a good deal.

“It’s all along of mother leaving us like this.”

Mr Verloc neither said, “Damn!” nor yet “Stevie be hanged!” And Mrs Verloc, not let into the secret of his thoughts, failed to appreciate the generosity of this restraint.

“It isn’t that he doesn’t work as well as ever,” she continued. “He’s been making himself very useful. You’d think he couldn’t do enough for us.”

Mr Verloc directed a casual and somnolent glance at Stevie, who sat on his right, delicate, pale-faced, his rosy mouth open vacantly. It was not a critical glance. It had no intention. And if Mr Verloc thought for a moment that his wife’s brother looked uncommonly useless, it was only a dull and fleeting thought, devoid of that force and durability which enables sometimes a thought to move the world. Leaning back, Mr Verloc uncovered his head. Before his extended arm could put down the hat Stevie pounced upon it, and bore it off reverently into the kitchen. And again Mr Verloc was surprised.

“You could do anything with that boy, Adolf,” Mrs Verloc said, with her best air of inflexible calmness. “He would go through fire for you. He — ”

She paused attentive, her ear turned towards the door of the kitchen.

There Mrs Neale was scrubbing the floor. At Stevie’s appearance she groaned lamentably, having observed that he could be induced easily to bestow for the benefit of her infant children the shilling his sister Winnie presented him with from time to time. On all fours amongst the puddles, wet and begrimed, like a sort of amphibious and domestic animal living in ash-bins and dirty water, she uttered the usual exordium: “It’s all very well for you, kept doing nothing like a gentleman.” And she followed it with the everlasting plaint of the poor, pathetically mendacious, miserably authenticated by the horrible breath of cheap rum and soap-suds. She scrubbed hard, snuffling all the time, and talking volubly. And she was sincere. And on each side of her thin red nose her bleared, misty eyes swam in tears, because she felt really the want of some sort of stimulant in the morning.

In the parlour Mrs Verloc observed, with knowledge:

“There’s Mrs Neale at it again with her harrowing tales about her little children. They can’t be all so little as she makes them out. Some of them

must be big enough by now to try to do something for themselves. It only makes Stevie angry.”

These words were confirmed by a thud as of a fist striking the kitchen table. In the normal evolution of his sympathy Stevie had become angry on discovering that he had no shilling in his pocket. In his inability to relieve at once Mrs Neale’s “little ‘uns’,” privations he felt that somebody should be made to suffer for it. Mrs Verloc rose, and went into the kitchen to “stop that nonsense.” And she did it firmly but gently. She was well aware that directly Mrs Neale received her money she went round the corner to drink ardent spirits in a mean and musty public-house — the unavoidable station on the *via dolorosa* of her life. Mrs Verloc’s comment upon this practice had an unexpected profundity, as coming from a person disinclined to look under the surface of things. “Of course, what is she to do to keep up? If I were like Mrs Neale I expect I wouldn’t act any different.”

In the afternoon of the same day, as Mr Verloc, coming with a start out of the last of a long series of dozes before the parlour fire, declared his intention of going out for a walk, Winnie said from the shop:

“I wish you would take that boy out with you, Adolf.”

For the third time that day Mr Verloc was surprised. He stared stupidly at his wife. She continued in her steady manner. The boy, whenever he was not doing anything, moped in the house. It made her uneasy; it made her nervous, she confessed. And that from the calm Winnie sounded like exaggeration. But, in truth, Stevie moped in the striking fashion of an unhappy domestic animal. He would go up on the dark landing, to sit on the floor at the foot of the tall clock, with his knees drawn up and his head in his hands. To come upon his pallid face, with its big eyes gleaming in the dusk, was discomposing; to think of him up there was uncomfortable.

Mr Verloc got used to the startling novelty of the idea. He was fond of his wife as a man should be — that is, generously. But a weighty objection presented itself to his mind, and he formulated it.

“He’ll lose sight of me perhaps, and get lost in the street,” he said.

Mrs Verloc shook her head competently.

“He won’t. You don’t know him. That boy just worships you. But if you should miss him — ”

Mrs Verloc paused for a moment, but only for a moment.

“You just go on, and have your walk out. Don’t worry. He’ll be all right. He’s sure to turn up safe here before very long.”

This optimism procured for Mr Verloc his fourth surprise of the day.

“Is he?” he grunted doubtfully. But perhaps his brother-in-law was not such an idiot as he looked. His wife would know best. He turned away his heavy eyes, saying huskily: “Well, let him come along, then,” and relapsed into the clutches of black care, that perhaps prefers to sit behind a horseman, but knows also how to tread close on the heels of people not sufficiently well off to keep horses — like Mr Verloc, for instance.

Winnie, at the shop door, did not see this fatal attendant upon Mr Verloc’s walks. She watched the two figures down the squalid street, one tall and burly, the other slight and short, with a thin neck, and the peaked shoulders raised slightly under the large semi-transparent ears. The material of their overcoats was the same, their hats were black and round in shape. Inspired by the similarity of wearing apparel, Mrs Verloc gave rein to her fancy.

“Might be father and son,” she said to herself. She thought also that Mr Verloc was as much of a father as poor Stevie ever had in his life. She was aware also that it was her work. And with peaceful pride she congratulated herself on a certain resolution she had taken a few years before. It had cost her some effort, and even a few tears.

She congratulated herself still more on observing in the course of days that Mr Verloc seemed to be taking kindly to Stevie’s companionship. Now, when ready to go out for his walk, Mr Verloc called aloud to the boy, in the spirit, no doubt, in which a man invites the attendance of the household dog, though, of course, in a different manner. In the house Mr Verloc could be detected staring curiously at Stevie a good deal. His own demeanour had changed. Taciturn still, he was not so listless. Mrs Verloc thought that he was rather jumpy at times. It might have been regarded as an improvement. As to Stevie, he moped no longer at the foot of the clock, but muttered to himself in corners instead in a threatening tone. When asked “What is it you’re saying, Stevie?” he merely opened his mouth, and squinted at his sister. At odd times he clenched his fists without apparent cause, and when discovered in solitude would be scowling at the wall, with the sheet of paper and the pencil given him for drawing circles lying blank and idle on the kitchen table. This was a change, but it was no improvement. Mrs Verloc including all these vagaries under the general definition of excitement, began to fear that Stevie was hearing more than was good for him of her husband’s conversations with his friends. During his “walks” Mr Verloc, of course, met and conversed with various persons.

It could hardly be otherwise. His walks were an integral part of his outdoor activities, which his wife had never looked deeply into. Mrs Verloc felt that the position was delicate, but she faced it with the same impenetrable calmness which impressed and even astonished the customers of the shop and made the other visitors keep their distance a little wonderingly. No! She feared that there were things not good for Stevie to hear of, she told her husband. It only excited the poor boy, because he could not help them being so. Nobody could.

It was in the shop. Mr Verloc made no comment. He made no retort, and yet the retort was obvious. But he refrained from pointing out to his wife that the idea of making Stevie the companion of his walks was her own, and nobody else's. At that moment, to an impartial observer, Mr Verloc would have appeared more than human in his magnanimity. He took down a small cardboard box from a shelf, peeped in to see that the contents were all right, and put it down gently on the counter. Not till that was done did he break the silence, to the effect that most likely Stevie would profit greatly by being sent out of town for a while; only he supposed his wife could not get on without him.

"Could not get on without him!" repeated Mrs Verloc slowly. "I couldn't get on without him if it were for his good! The idea! Of course, I can get on without him. But there's nowhere for him to go."

Mr Verloc got out some brown paper and a ball of string; and meanwhile he muttered that Michaelis was living in a little cottage in the country. Michaelis wouldn't mind giving Stevie a room to sleep in. There were no visitors and no talk there. Michaelis was writing a book.

Mrs Verloc declared her affection for Michaelis; mentioned her abhorrence of Karl Yundt, "nasty old man"; and of Ossipon she said nothing. As to Stevie, he could be no other than very pleased. Mr Michaelis was always so nice and kind to him. He seemed to like the boy. Well, the boy was a good boy.

"You too seem to have grown quite fond of him of late," she added, after a pause, with her inflexible assurance.

Mr Verloc tying up the cardboard box into a parcel for the post, broke the string by an injudicious jerk, and muttered several swear words confidentially to himself. Then raising his tone to the usual husky mutter, he announced his willingness to take Stevie into the country himself, and leave him all safe with Michaelis.

He carried out this scheme on the very next day. Stevie offered no objection. He seemed rather eager, in a bewildered sort of way. He turned his candid gaze inquisitively to Mr Verloc's heavy countenance at frequent intervals, especially when his sister was not looking at him. His expression was proud, apprehensive, and concentrated, like that of a small child entrusted for the first time with a box of matches and the permission to strike a light. But Mrs Verloc, gratified by her brother's docility, recommended him not to dirty his clothes unduly in the country. At this Stevie gave his sister, guardian and protector a look, which for the first time in his life seemed to lack the quality of perfect childlike trustfulness. It was haughtily gloomy. Mrs Verloc smiled.

"Goodness me! You needn't be offended. You know you do get yourself very untidy when you get a chance, Stevie."

Mr Verloc was already gone some way down the street.

Thus in consequence of her mother's heroic proceedings, and of her brother's absence on this villegiature, Mrs Verloc found herself oftener than usual all alone not only in the shop, but in the house. For Mr Verloc had to take his walks. She was alone longer than usual on the day of the attempted bomb outrage in Greenwich Park, because Mr Verloc went out very early that morning and did not come back till nearly dusk. She did not mind being alone. She had no desire to go out. The weather was too bad, and the shop was cosier than the streets. Sitting behind the counter with some sewing, she did not raise her eyes from her work when Mr Verloc entered in the aggressive clatter of the bell. She had recognised his step on the pavement outside.

She did not raise her eyes, but as Mr Verloc, silent, and with his hat rammed down upon his forehead, made straight for the parlour door, she said serenely:

"What a wretched day. You've been perhaps to see Stevie?"

"No! I haven't," said Mr Verloc softly, and slammed the glazed parlour door behind him with unexpected energy.

For some time Mrs Verloc remained quiescent, with her work dropped in her lap, before she put it away under the counter and got up to light the gas. This done, she went into the parlour on her way to the kitchen. Mr Verloc would want his tea presently. Confident of the power of her charms, Winnie did not expect from her husband in the daily intercourse of their married life a ceremonious amenity of address and courtliness of manner;

vain and antiquated forms at best, probably never very exactly observed, discarded nowadays even in the highest spheres, and always foreign to the standards of her class. She did not look for courtesies from him. But he was a good husband, and she had a loyal respect for his rights.

Mrs Verloc would have gone through the parlour and on to her domestic duties in the kitchen with the perfect serenity of a woman sure of the power of her charms. But a slight, very slight, and rapid rattling sound grew upon her hearing. Bizarre and incomprehensible, it arrested Mrs Verloc's attention. Then as its character became plain to the ear she stopped short, amazed and concerned. Striking a match on the box she held in her hand, she turned on and lighted, above the parlour table, one of the two gas-burners, which, being defective, first whistled as if astonished, and then went on purring comfortably like a cat.

Mr Verloc, against his usual practice, had thrown off his overcoat. It was lying on the sofa. His hat, which he must also have thrown off, rested overturned under the edge of the sofa. He had dragged a chair in front of the fireplace, and his feet planted inside the fender, his head held between his hands, he was hanging low over the glowing grate. His teeth rattled with an ungovernable violence, causing his whole enormous back to tremble at the same rate. Mrs Verloc was startled.

"You've been getting wet," she said.

"Not very," Mr Verloc managed to falter out, in a profound shudder. By a great effort he suppressed the rattling of his teeth.

"I'll have you laid up on my hands," she said, with genuine uneasiness.

"I don't think so," remarked Mr Verloc, snuffling huskily.

He had certainly contrived somehow to catch an abominable cold between seven in the morning and five in the afternoon. Mrs Verloc looked at his bowed back.

"Where have you been to-day?" she asked.

"Nowhere," answered Mr Verloc in a low, choked nasal tone. His attitude suggested aggrieved sulks or a severe headache. The unsufficiency and uncandidness of his answer became painfully apparent in the dead silence of the room. He snuffled apologetically, and added: "I've been to the bank."

Mrs Verloc became attentive.

"You have!" she said dispassionately. "What for?"

Mr Verloc mumbled, with his nose over the grate, and with marked unwillingness.

“Draw the money out!”

“What do you mean? All of it?”

“Yes. All of it.”

Mrs Verloc spread out with care the scanty table-cloth, got two knives and two forks out of the table drawer, and suddenly stopped in her methodical proceedings.

“What did you do that for?”

“May want it soon,” snuffled vaguely Mr Verloc, who was coming to the end of his calculated indiscretions.

“I don’t know what you mean,” remarked his wife in a tone perfectly casual, but standing stock still between the table and the cupboard.

“You know you can trust me,” Mr Verloc remarked to the grate, with hoarse feeling.

Mrs Verloc turned slowly towards the cupboard, saying with deliberation:

“Oh yes. I can trust you.”

And she went on with her methodical proceedings. She laid two plates, got the bread, the butter, going to and fro quietly between the table and the cupboard in the peace and silence of her home. On the point of taking out the jam, she reflected practically: “He will be feeling hungry, having been away all day,” and she returned to the cupboard once more to get the cold beef. She set it under the purring gas-jet, and with a passing glance at her motionless husband hugging the fire, she went (down two steps) into the kitchen. It was only when coming back, carving knife and fork in hand, that she spoke again.

“If I hadn’t trusted you I wouldn’t have married you.”

Bowed under the overmantel, Mr Verloc, holding his head in both hands, seemed to have gone to sleep. Winnie made the tea, and called out in an undertone:

“Adolf.”

Mr Verloc got up at once, and staggered a little before he sat down at the table. His wife examining the sharp edge of the carving knife, placed it on the dish, and called his attention to the cold beef. He remained insensible to the suggestion, with his chin on his breast.

“You should feed your cold,” Mrs Verloc said dogmatically.

He looked up, and shook his head. His eyes were bloodshot and his face red. His fingers had ruffled his hair into a dissipated untidiness. Altogether he had a disreputable aspect, expressive of the discomfort, the irritation and the gloom following a heavy debauch. But Mr Verloc was not a debauched man. In his conduct he was respectable. His appearance might have been the effect of a feverish cold. He drank three cups of tea, but abstained from food entirely. He recoiled from it with sombre aversion when urged by Mrs Verloc, who said at last:

“Aren’t your feet wet? You had better put on your slippers. You aren’t going out any more this evening.”

Mr Verloc intimated by morose grunts and signs that his feet were not wet, and that anyhow he did not care. The proposal as to slippers was disregarded as beneath his notice. But the question of going out in the evening received an unexpected development. It was not of going out in the evening that Mr Verloc was thinking. His thoughts embraced a vaster scheme. From moody and incomplete phrases it became apparent that Mr Verloc had been considering the expediency of emigrating. It was not very clear whether he had in his mind France or California.

The utter unexpectedness, improbability, and inconceivableness of such an event robbed this vague declaration of all its effect. Mrs Verloc, as placidly as if her husband had been threatening her with the end of the world, said:

“The idea!”

Mr Verloc declared himself sick and tired of everything, and besides — She interrupted him.

“You’ve a bad cold.”

It was indeed obvious that Mr Verloc was not in his usual state, physically and even mentally. A sombre irresolution held him silent for a while. Then he murmured a few ominous generalities on the theme of necessity.

“Will have to,” repeated Winnie, sitting calmly back, with folded arms, opposite her husband. “I should like to know who’s to make you. You ain’t a slave. No one need be a slave in this country — and don’t you make yourself one.” She paused, and with invincible and steady candour. “The business isn’t so bad,” she went on. “You’ve a comfortable home.”

She glanced all round the parlour, from the corner cupboard to the good fire in the grate. Ensconced cosily behind the shop of doubtful wares, with



the mysteriously dim window, and its door suspiciously ajar in the obscure and narrow street, it was in all essentials of domestic propriety and domestic comfort a respectable home. Her devoted affection missed out of it her brother Stevie, now enjoying a damp villegiature in the Kentish lanes under the care of Mr Michaelis. She missed him poignantly, with all the force of her protecting passion. This was the boy's home too — the roof, the cupboard, the stoked grate. On this thought Mrs Verloc rose, and walking to the other end of the table, said in the fulness of her heart:

“And you are not tired of me.”

Mr Verloc made no sound. Winnie leaned on his shoulder from behind, and pressed her lips to his forehead. Thus she lingered. Not a whisper reached them from the outside world.

The sound of footsteps on the pavement died out in the discreet dimness of the shop. Only the gas-jet above the table went on purring equably in the brooding silence of the parlour.

During the contact of that unexpected and lingering kiss Mr Verloc, gripping with both hands the edges of his chair, preserved a hieratic immobility. When the pressure was removed he let go the chair, rose, and went to stand before the fireplace. He turned no longer his back to the room. With his features swollen and an air of being drugged, he followed his wife's movements with his eyes.

Mrs Verloc went about serenely, clearing up the table. Her tranquil voice commented the idea thrown out in a reasonable and domestic tone. It wouldn't stand examination. She condemned it from every point of view. But her only real concern was Stevie's welfare. He appeared to her thought in that connection as sufficiently “peculiar” not to be taken rashly abroad. And that was all. But talking round that vital point, she approached absolute vehemence in her delivery. Meanwhile, with brusque movements, she arrayed herself in an apron for the washing up of cups. And as if excited by the sound of her uncontradicted voice, she went so far as to say in a tone almost tart:

“If you go abroad you'll have to go without me.”

“You know I wouldn't,” said Mr Verloc huskily, and the unresonant voice of his private life trembled with an enigmatical emotion.

Already Mrs Verloc was regretting her words. They had sounded more unkind than she meant them to be. They had also the unwisdom of unnecessary things. In fact, she had not meant them at all. It was a sort of

phrase that is suggested by the demon of perverse inspiration. But she knew a way to make it as if it had not been.

She turned her head over her shoulder and gave that man planted heavily in front of the fireplace a glance, half arch, half cruel, out of her large eyes — a glance of which the Winnie of the Belgravian mansion days would have been incapable, because of her respectability and her ignorance. But the man was her husband now, and she was no longer ignorant. She kept it on him for a whole second, with her grave face motionless like a mask, while she said playfully:

“You couldn’t. You would miss me too much.”

Mr Verloc started forward.

“Exactly,” he said in a louder tone, throwing his arms out and making a step towards her. Something wild and doubtful in his expression made it appear uncertain whether he meant to strangle or to embrace his wife. But Mrs Verloc’s attention was called away from that manifestation by the clatter of the shop bell.

“Shop, Adolf. You go.”

He stopped, his arms came down slowly.

“You go,” repeated Mrs Verloc. “I’ve got my apron on.”

Mr Verloc obeyed woodenly, stony-eyed, and like an automaton whose face had been painted red. And this resemblance to a mechanical figure went so far that he had an automaton’s absurd air of being aware of the machinery inside of him.

He closed the parlour door, and Mrs Verloc moving briskly, carried the tray into the kitchen. She washed the cups and some other things before she stopped in her work to listen. No sound reached her. The customer was a long time in the shop. It was a customer, because if he had not been Mr Verloc would have taken him inside. Undoing the strings of her apron with a jerk, she threw it on a chair, and walked back to the parlour slowly.

At that precise moment Mr Verloc entered from the shop.

He had gone in red. He came out a strange papery white. His face, losing its drugged, feverish stupor, had in that short time acquired a bewildered and harassed expression. He walked straight to the sofa, and stood looking down at his overcoat lying there, as though he were afraid to touch it.

“What’s the matter?” asked Mrs Verloc in a subdued voice. Through the door left ajar she could see that the customer was not gone yet.

“I find I’ll have to go out this evening,” said Mr Verloc. He did not attempt to pick up his outer garment.

Without a word Winnie made for the shop, and shutting the door after her, walked in behind the counter. She did not look overtly at the customer till she had established herself comfortably on the chair. But by that time she had noted that he was tall and thin, and wore his moustaches twisted up. In fact, he gave the sharp points a twist just then. His long, bony face rose out of a turned-up collar. He was a little splashed, a little wet. A dark man, with the ridge of the cheek-bone well defined under the slightly hollow temple. A complete stranger. Not a customer either.

Mrs Verloc looked at him placidly.

“You came over from the Continent?” she said after a time.

The long, thin stranger, without exactly looking at Mrs Verloc, answered only by a faint and peculiar smile.

Mrs Verloc’s steady, incurious gaze rested on him.

“You understand English, don’t you?”

“Oh yes. I understand English.”

There was nothing foreign in his accent, except that he seemed in his slow enunciation to be taking pains with it. And Mrs Verloc, in her varied experience, had come to the conclusion that some foreigners could speak better English than the natives. She said, looking at the door of the parlour fixedly:

“You don’t think perhaps of staying in England for good?”

The stranger gave her again a silent smile. He had a kindly mouth and probing eyes. And he shook his head a little sadly, it seemed.

“My husband will see you through all right. Meantime for a few days you couldn’t do better than take lodgings with Mr Giugliani. Continental Hotel it’s called. Private. It’s quiet. My husband will take you there.”

“A good idea,” said the thin, dark man, whose glance had hardened suddenly.

“You knew Mr Verloc before — didn’t you? Perhaps in France?”

“I have heard of him,” admitted the visitor in his slow, painstaking tone, which yet had a certain curtness of intention.

There was a pause. Then he spoke again, in a far less elaborate manner.

“Your husband has not gone out to wait for me in the street by chance?”

“In the street!” repeated Mrs Verloc, surprised. “He couldn’t. There’s no other door to the house.”

For a moment she sat impassive, then left her seat to go and peep through the glazed door. Suddenly she opened it, and disappeared into the parlour.

Mr Verloc had done no more than put on his overcoat. But why he should remain afterwards leaning over the table propped up on his two arms as though he were feeling giddy or sick, she could not understand. "Adolf," she called out half aloud; and when he had raised himself:

"Do you know that man?" she asked rapidly.

"I've heard of him," whispered uneasily Mr Verloc, darting a wild glance at the door.

Mrs Verloc's fine, incurious eyes lighted up with a flash of abhorrence.

"One of Karl Yundt's friends — beastly old man."

"No! No!" protested Mr Verloc, busy fishing for his hat. But when he got it from under the sofa he held it as if he did not know the use of a hat.

"Well — he's waiting for you," said Mrs Verloc at last. "I say, Adolf, he ain't one of them Embassy people you have been bothered with of late?"

"Bothered with Embassy people," repeated Mr Verloc, with a heavy start of surprise and fear. "Who's been talking to you of the Embassy people?"

"Yourself."

"I! I! Talked of the Embassy to you!"

Mr Verloc seemed scared and bewildered beyond measure. His wife explained:

"You've been talking a little in your sleep of late, Adolf."

"What — what did I say? What do you know?"

"Nothing much. It seemed mostly nonsense. Enough to let me guess that something worried you."

Mr Verloc rammed his hat on his head. A crimson flood of anger ran over his face.

"Nonsense — eh? The Embassy people! I would cut their hearts out one after another. But let them look out. I've got a tongue in my head."

He fumed, pacing up and down between the table and the sofa, his open overcoat catching against the angles. The red flood of anger ebbed out, and left his face all white, with quivering nostrils. Mrs Verloc, for the purposes of practical existence, put down these appearances to the cold.

"Well," she said, "get rid of the man, whoever he is, as soon as you can, and come back home to me. You want looking after for a day or two."

Mr Verloc calmed down, and, with resolution imprinted on his pale face, had already opened the door, when his wife called him back in a whisper:

“Adolf! Adolf!” He came back startled. “What about that money you drew out?” she asked. “You’ve got it in your pocket? Hadn’t you better —”

Mr Verloc gazed stupidly into the palm of his wife’s extended hand for some time before he slapped his brow.

“Money! Yes! Yes! I didn’t know what you meant.”

He drew out of his breast pocket a new pigskin pocket-book. Mrs Verloc received it without another word, and stood still till the bell, clattering after Mr Verloc and Mr Verloc’s visitor, had quieted down. Only then she peeped in at the amount, drawing the notes out for the purpose. After this inspection she looked round thoughtfully, with an air of mistrust in the silence and solitude of the house. This abode of her married life appeared to her as lonely and unsafe as though it had been situated in the midst of a forest. No receptacle she could think of amongst the solid, heavy furniture seemed other but flimsy and particularly tempting to her conception of a house-breaker. It was an ideal conception, endowed with sublime faculties and a miraculous insight. The till was not to be thought of. It was the first spot a thief would make for. Mrs Verloc unfastening hastily a couple of hooks, slipped the pocket-book under the bodice of her dress. Having thus disposed of her husband’s capital, she was rather glad to hear the clatter of the door bell, announcing an arrival. Assuming the fixed, unabashed stare and the stony expression reserved for the casual customer, she walked in behind the counter.

A man standing in the middle of the shop was inspecting it with a swift, cool, all-round glance. His eyes ran over the walls, took in the ceiling, noted the floor — all in a moment. The points of a long fair moustache fell below the line of the jaw. He smiled the smile of an old if distant acquaintance, and Mrs Verloc remembered having seen him before. Not a customer. She softened her “customer stare” to mere indifference, and faced him across the counter.

He approached, on his side, confidentially, but not too markedly so.

“Husband at home, Mrs Verloc?” he asked in an easy, full tone.

“No. He’s gone out.”

“I am sorry for that. I’ve called to get from him a little private information.”

This was the exact truth. Chief Inspector Heat had been all the way home, and had even gone so far as to think of getting into his slippers, since

practically he was, he told himself, chucked out of that case. He indulged in some scornful and in a few angry thoughts, and found the occupation so unsatisfactory that he resolved to seek relief out of doors. Nothing prevented him paying a friendly call to Mr Verloc, casually as it were. It was in the character of a private citizen that walking out privately he made use of his customary conveyances. Their general direction was towards Mr Verloc's home. Chief Inspector Heat respected his own private character so consistently that he took especial pains to avoid all the police constables on point and patrol duty in the vicinity of Brett Street. This precaution was much more necessary for a man of his standing than for an obscure Assistant Commissioner. Private Citizen Heat entered the street, manoeuvring in a way which in a member of the criminal classes would have been stigmatised as slinking. The piece of cloth picked up in Greenwich was in his pocket. Not that he had the slightest intention of producing it in his private capacity. On the contrary, he wanted to know just what Mr Verloc would be disposed to say voluntarily. He hoped Mr Verloc's talk would be of a nature to incriminate Michaelis. It was a conscientiously professional hope in the main, but not without its moral value. For Chief Inspector Heat was a servant of justice. Finding Mr Verloc from home, he felt disappointed.

"I would wait for him a little if I were sure he wouldn't be long," he said.

Mrs Verloc volunteered no assurance of any kind.

"The information I need is quite private," he repeated. "You understand what I mean? I wonder if you could give me a notion where he's gone to?"

Mrs Verloc shook her head.

"Can't say."

She turned away to range some boxes on the shelves behind the counter. Chief Inspector Heat looked at her thoughtfully for a time.

"I suppose you know who I am?" he said.

Mrs Verloc glanced over her shoulder. Chief Inspector Heat was amazed at her coolness.

"Come! You know I am in the police," he said sharply.

"I don't trouble my head much about it," Mrs Verloc remarked, returning to the ranging of her boxes.

"My name is Heat. Chief Inspector Heat of the Special Crimes section."

Mrs Verloc adjusted nicely in its place a small cardboard box, and turning round, faced him again, heavy-eyed, with idle hands hanging down. A

silence reigned for a time.

“So your husband went out a quarter of an hour ago! And he didn’t say when he would be back?”

“He didn’t go out alone,” Mrs Verloc let fall negligently.

“A friend?”

Mrs Verloc touched the back of her hair. It was in perfect order.

“A stranger who called.”

“I see. What sort of man was that stranger? Would you mind telling me?”

Mrs Verloc did not mind. And when Chief Inspector Heat heard of a man dark, thin, with a long face and turned up moustaches, he gave signs of perturbation, and exclaimed:

“Dash me if I didn’t think so! He hasn’t lost any time.”

He was intensely disgusted in the secrecy of his heart at the unofficial conduct of his immediate chief. But he was not quixotic. He lost all desire to await Mr Verloc’s return. What they had gone out for he did not know, but he imagined it possible that they would return together. The case is not followed properly, it’s being tampered with, he thought bitterly.

“I am afraid I haven’t time to wait for your husband,” he said.

Mrs Verloc received this declaration listlessly. Her detachment had impressed Chief Inspector Heat all along. At this precise moment it whetted his curiosity. Chief Inspector Heat hung in the wind, swayed by his passions like the most private of citizens.

“I think,” he said, looking at her steadily, “that you could give me a pretty good notion of what’s going on if you liked.”

Forcing her fine, inert eyes to return his gaze, Mrs Verloc murmured:

“Going on! What is going on?”

“Why, the affair I came to talk about a little with your husband.”

That day Mrs Verloc had glanced at a morning paper as usual. But she had not stirred out of doors. The newsboys never invaded Brett Street. It was not a street for their business. And the echo of their cries drifting along the populous thoroughfares, expired between the dirty brick walls without reaching the threshold of the shop. Her husband had not brought an evening paper home. At any rate she had not seen it. Mrs Verloc knew nothing whatever of any affair. And she said so, with a genuine note of wonder in her quiet voice.

Chief Inspector Heat did not believe for a moment in so much ignorance. Curtly, without amiability, he stated the bare fact.

Mrs Verloc turned away her eyes.

"I call it silly," she pronounced slowly. She paused. "We ain't downtrodden slaves here."

The Chief Inspector waited watchfully. Nothing more came.

"And your husband didn't mention anything to you when he came home?"

Mrs Verloc simply turned her face from right to left in sign of negation. A languid, baffling silence reigned in the shop. Chief Inspector Heat felt provoked beyond endurance.

"There was another small matter," he began in a detached tone, "which I wanted to speak to your husband about. There came into our hands a — a — what we believe is — a stolen overcoat."

Mrs Verloc, with her mind specially aware of thieves that evening, touched lightly the bosom of her dress.

"We have lost no overcoat," she said calmly.

"That's funny," continued Private Citizen Heat. "I see you keep a lot of marking ink here — "

He took up a small bottle, and looked at it against the gas-jet in the middle of the shop.

"Purple — isn't it?" he remarked, setting it down again. "As I said, it's strange. Because the overcoat has got a label sewn on the inside with your address written in marking ink."

Mrs Verloc leaned over the counter with a low exclamation.

"That's my brother's, then."

"Where's your brother? Can I see him?" asked the Chief Inspector briskly. Mrs Verloc leaned a little more over the counter.

"No. He isn't here. I wrote that label myself."

"Where's your brother now?"

"He's been away living with — a friend — in the country."

"The overcoat comes from the country. And what's the name of the friend?"

"Michaelis," confessed Mrs Verloc in an awed whisper.

The Chief Inspector let out a whistle. His eyes snapped.

"Just so. Capital. And your brother now, what's he like — a sturdy, darkish chap — eh?"



“Oh no,” exclaimed Mrs Verloc fervently. “That must be the thief. Stevie’s slight and fair.”

“Good,” said the Chief Inspector in an approving tone. And while Mrs Verloc, wavering between alarm and wonder, stared at him, he sought for information. Why have the address sewn like this inside the coat? And he heard that the mangled remains he had inspected that morning with extreme repugnance were those of a youth, nervous, absent-minded, peculiar, and also that the woman who was speaking to him had had the charge of that boy since he was a baby.

“Easily excitable?” he suggested.

“Oh yes. He is. But how did he come to lose his coat — ”

Chief Inspector Heat suddenly pulled out a pink newspaper he had bought less than half-an-hour ago. He was interested in horses. Forced by his calling into an attitude of doubt and suspicion towards his fellow-citizens, Chief Inspector Heat relieved the instinct of credulity implanted in the human breast by putting unbounded faith in the sporting prophets of that particular evening publication. Dropping the extra special on to the counter, he plunged his hand again into his pocket, and pulling out the piece of cloth fate had presented him with out of a heap of things that seemed to have been collected in shambles and rag shops, he offered it to Mrs Verloc for inspection.

“I suppose you recognise this?”

She took it mechanically in both her hands. Her eyes seemed to grow bigger as she looked.

“Yes,” she whispered, then raised her head, and staggered backward a little.

“Whatever for is it torn out like this?”

The Chief Inspector snatched across the counter the cloth out of her hands, and she sat heavily on the chair. He thought: identification’s perfect. And in that moment he had a glimpse into the whole amazing truth. Verloc was the “other man.”

“Mrs Verloc,” he said, “it strikes me that you know more of this bomb affair than even you yourself are aware of.”

Mrs Verloc sat still, amazed, lost in boundless astonishment. What was the connection? And she became so rigid all over that she was not able to turn her head at the clatter of the bell, which caused the private investigator

Heat to spin round on his heel. Mr Verloc had shut the door, and for a moment the two men looked at each other.

Mr Verloc, without looking at his wife, walked up to the Chief Inspector, who was relieved to see him return alone.

"You here!" muttered Mr Verloc heavily. "Who are you after?"

"No one," said Chief Inspector Heat in a low tone. "Look here, I would like a word or two with you."

Mr Verloc, still pale, had brought an air of resolution with him. Still he didn't look at his wife. He said:

"Come in here, then." And he led the way into the parlour.

The door was hardly shut when Mrs Verloc, jumping up from the chair, ran to it as if to fling it open, but instead of doing so fell on her knees, with her ear to the keyhole. The two men must have stopped directly they were through, because she heard plainly the Chief Inspector's voice, though she could not see his finger pressed against her husband's breast emphatically.

"You are the other man, Verloc. Two men were seen entering the park."

And the voice of Mr Verloc said:

"Well, take me now. What's to prevent you? You have the right."

"Oh no! I know too well who you have been giving yourself away to. He'll have to manage this little affair all by himself. But don't you make a mistake, it's I who found you out."

Then she heard only muttering. Inspector Heat must have been showing to Mr Verloc the piece of Stevie's overcoat, because Stevie's sister, guardian, and protector heard her husband a little louder.

"I never noticed that she had hit upon that dodge."

Again for a time Mrs Verloc heard nothing but murmurs, whose mysteriousness was less nightmarish to her brain than the horrible suggestions of shaped words. Then Chief Inspector Heat, on the other side of the door, raised his voice.

"You must have been mad."

And Mr Verloc's voice answered, with a sort of gloomy fury:

"I have been mad for a month or more, but I am not mad now. It's all over. It shall all come out of my head, and hang the consequences."

There was a silence, and then Private Citizen Heat murmured:

"What's coming out?"

"Everything," exclaimed the voice of Mr Verloc, and then sank very low. After a while it rose again.

“You have known me for several years now, and you’ve found me useful, too. You know I was a straight man. Yes, straight.”

This appeal to old acquaintance must have been extremely distasteful to the Chief Inspector.

His voice took on a warning note.

“Don’t you trust so much to what you have been promised. If I were you I would clear out. I don’t think we will run after you.”

Mr Verloc was heard to laugh a little.

“Oh yes; you hope the others will get rid of me for you — don’t you? No, no; you don’t shake me off now. I have been a straight man to those people too long, and now everything must come out.”

“Let it come out, then,” the indifferent voice of Chief Inspector Heat assented. “But tell me now how did you get away.”

“I was making for Chesterfield Walk,” Mrs Verloc heard her husband’s voice, “when I heard the bang. I started running then. Fog. I saw no one till I was past the end of George Street. Don’t think I met anyone till then.”

“So easy as that!” marvelled the voice of Chief Inspector Heat. “The bang startled you, eh?”

“Yes; it came too soon,” confessed the gloomy, husky voice of Mr Verloc.

Mrs Verloc pressed her ear to the keyhole; her lips were blue, her hands cold as ice, and her pale face, in which the two eyes seemed like two black holes, felt to her as if it were enveloped in flames.

On the other side of the door the voices sank very low. She caught words now and then, sometimes in her husband’s voice, sometimes in the smooth tones of the Chief Inspector. She heard this last say:

“We believe he stumbled against the root of a tree?”

There was a husky, voluble murmur, which lasted for some time, and then the Chief Inspector, as if answering some inquiry, spoke emphatically.

“Of course. Blown to small bits: limbs, gravel, clothing, bones, splinters — all mixed up together. I tell you they had to fetch a shovel to gather him up with.”

Mrs Verloc sprang up suddenly from her crouching position, and stopping her ears, reeled to and fro between the counter and the shelves on the wall towards the chair. Her crazed eyes noted the sporting sheet left by the Chief Inspector, and as she knocked herself against the counter she snatched it up, fell into the chair, tore the optimistic, rosy sheet right across

in trying to open it, then flung it on the floor. On the other side of the door, Chief Inspector Heat was saying to Mr Verloc, the secret agent:

“So your defence will be practically a full confession?”

“It will. I am going to tell the whole story.”

“You won’t be believed as much as you fancy you will.”

And the Chief Inspector remained thoughtful. The turn this affair was taking meant the disclosure of many things — the laying waste of fields of knowledge, which, cultivated by a capable man, had a distinct value for the individual and for the society. It was sorry, sorry meddling. It would leave Michaelis unscathed; it would drag to light the Professor’s home industry; disorganise the whole system of supervision; make no end of a row in the papers, which, from that point of view, appeared to him by a sudden illumination as invariably written by fools for the reading of imbeciles. Mentally he agreed with the words Mr Verloc let fall at last in answer to his last remark.

“Perhaps not. But it will upset many things. I have been a straight man, and I shall keep straight in this — ”

“If they let you,” said the Chief Inspector cynically. “You will be preached to, no doubt, before they put you into the dock. And in the end you may yet get let in for a sentence that will surprise you. I wouldn’t trust too much the gentleman who’s been talking to you.”

Mr Verloc listened, frowning.

“My advice to you is to clear out while you may. I have no instructions. There are some of them,” continued Chief Inspector Heat, laying a peculiar stress on the word “them,” “who think you are already out of the world.”

“Indeed!” Mr Verloc was moved to say. Though since his return from Greenwich he had spent most of his time sitting in the tap-room of an obscure little public-house, he could hardly have hoped for such favourable news.

“That’s the impression about you.” The Chief Inspector nodded at him. “Vanish. Clear out.”

“Where to?” snarled Mr Verloc. He raised his head, and gazing at the closed door of the parlour, muttered feelingly: “I only wish you would take me away to-night. I would go quietly.”

“I daresay,” assented sardonically the Chief Inspector, following the direction of his glance.

The brow of Mr Verloc broke into slight moisture. He lowered his husky voice confidentially before the unmoved Chief Inspector.

“The lad was half-witted, irresponsible. Any court would have seen that at once. Only fit for the asylum. And that was the worst that would’ve happened to him if — ”

The Chief Inspector, his hand on the door handle, whispered into Mr Verloc’s face.

“He may’ve been half-witted, but you must have been crazy. What drove you off your head like this?”

Mr Verloc, thinking of Mr Vladimir, did not hesitate in the choice of words.

“A Hyperborean swine,” he hissed forcibly. “A what you might call a — a gentleman.”

The Chief Inspector, steady-eyed, nodded briefly his comprehension, and opened the door. Mrs Verloc, behind the counter, might have heard but did not see his departure, pursued by the aggressive clatter of the bell. She sat at her post of duty behind the counter. She sat rigidly erect in the chair with two dirty pink pieces of paper lying spread out at her feet. The palms of her hands were pressed convulsively to her face, with the tips of the fingers contracted against the forehead, as though the skin had been a mask which she was ready to tear off violently. The perfect immobility of her pose expressed the agitation of rage and despair, all the potential violence of tragic passions, better than any shallow display of shrieks, with the beating of a distracted head against the walls, could have done. Chief Inspector Heat, crossing the shop at his busy, swinging pace, gave her only a cursory glance. And when the cracked bell ceased to tremble on its curved ribbon of steel nothing stirred near Mrs Verloc, as if her attitude had the locking power of a spell. Even the butterfly-shaped gas flames posed on the ends of the suspended T-bracket burned without a quiver. In that shop of shady wares fitted with deal shelves painted a dull brown, which seemed to devour the sheen of the light, the gold circlet of the wedding ring on Mrs Verloc’s left hand glittered exceedingly with the untarnished glory of a piece from some splendid treasure of jewels, dropped in a dust-bin.

## CHAPTER X

The Assistant Commissioner, driven rapidly in a hansom from the neighbourhood of Soho in the direction of Westminster, got out at the very centre of the Empire on which the sun never sets. Some stalwart constables, who did not seem particularly impressed by the duty of watching the august spot, saluted him. Penetrating through a portal by no means lofty into the precincts of the House which is the House, par excellence in the minds of many millions of men, he was met at last by the volatile and revolutionary Toodles.

That neat and nice young man concealed his astonishment at the early appearance of the Assistant Commissioner, whom he had been told to look out for some time about midnight. His turning up so early he concluded to be the sign that things, whatever they were, had gone wrong. With an extremely ready sympathy, which in nice youngsters goes often with a joyous temperament, he felt sorry for the great Presence he called "The Chief," and also for the Assistant Commissioner, whose face appeared to him more ominously wooden than ever before, and quite wonderfully long. "What a queer, foreign-looking chap he is," he thought to himself, smiling from a distance with friendly buoyancy. And directly they came together he began to talk with the kind intention of burying the awkwardness of failure under a heap of words. It looked as if the great assault threatened for that night were going to fizzle out. An inferior henchman of "that brute Cheeseman" was up boring mercilessly a very thin House with some shamelessly cooked statistics. He, Toodles, hoped he would bore them into a count out every minute. But then he might be only marking time to let that guzzling Cheeseman dine at his leisure. Anyway, the Chief could not be persuaded to go home.

"He will see you at once, I think. He's sitting all alone in his room thinking of all the fishes of the sea," concluded Toodles airily. "Come along."

Notwithstanding the kindness of his disposition, the young private secretary (unpaid) was accessible to the common failings of humanity. He did not wish to harrow the feelings of the Assistant Commissioner, who looked to him uncommonly like a man who has made a mess of his job. But his curiosity was too strong to be restrained by mere compassion. He could not help, as they went along, to throw over his shoulder lightly:

“And your sprat?”

“Got him,” answered the Assistant Commissioner with a concision which did not mean to be repellent in the least.

“Good. You’ve no idea how these great men dislike to be disappointed in small things.”

After this profound observation the experienced Toodles seemed to reflect. At any rate he said nothing for quite two seconds. Then:

“I’m glad. But — I say — is it really such a very small thing as you make it out?”

“Do you know what may be done with a sprat?” the Assistant Commissioner asked in his turn.

“He’s sometimes put into a sardine box,” chuckled Toodles, whose erudition on the subject of the fishing industry was fresh and, in comparison with his ignorance of all other industrial matters, immense. “There are sardine canneries on the Spanish coast which — ”

The Assistant Commissioner interrupted the apprentice statesman.

“Yes. Yes. But a sprat is also thrown away sometimes in order to catch a whale.”

“A whale. Phew!” exclaimed Toodles, with bated breath. “You’re after a whale, then?”

“Not exactly. What I am after is more like a dog-fish. You don’t know perhaps what a dog-fish is like.”

“Yes; I do. We’re buried in special books up to our necks — whole shelves full of them — with plates. . . . It’s a noxious, rascally-looking, altogether detestable beast, with a sort of smooth face and moustaches.”

“Described to a T,” commended the Assistant Commissioner. “Only mine is clean-shaven altogether. You’ve seen him. It’s a witty fish.”

“I have seen him!” said Toodles incredulously. “I can’t conceive where I could have seen him.”

“At the Explorers, I should say,” dropped the Assistant Commissioner calmly. At the name of that extremely exclusive club Toodles looked scared, and stopped short.

“Nonsense,” he protested, but in an awe-struck tone. “What do you mean? A member?”

“Honorary,” muttered the Assistant Commissioner through his teeth.

“Heavens!”

Toodles looked so thunderstruck that the Assistant Commissioner smiled faintly.

“That’s between ourselves strictly,” he said.

“That’s the beastliest thing I’ve ever heard in my life,” declared Toodles feebly, as if astonishment had robbed him of all his buoyant strength in a second.

The Assistant Commissioner gave him an unsmiling glance. Till they came to the door of the great man’s room, Toodles preserved a scandalised and solemn silence, as though he were offended with the Assistant Commissioner for exposing such an unsavoury and disturbing fact. It revolutionised his idea of the Explorers’ Club’s extreme selectness, of its social purity. Toodles was revolutionary only in politics; his social beliefs and personal feelings he wished to preserve unchanged through all the years allotted to him on this earth which, upon the whole, he believed to be a nice place to live on.

He stood aside.

“Go in without knocking,” he said.

Shades of green silk fitted low over all the lights imparted to the room something of a forest’s deep gloom. The haughty eyes were physically the great man’s weak point. This point was wrapped up in secrecy. When an opportunity offered, he rested them conscientiously.

The Assistant Commissioner entering saw at first only a big pale hand supporting a big head, and concealing the upper part of a big pale face. An open despatch-box stood on the writing-table near a few oblong sheets of paper and a scattered handful of quill pens. There was absolutely nothing else on the large flat surface except a little bronze statuette draped in a toga, mysteriously watchful in its shadowy immobility. The Assistant Commissioner, invited to take a chair, sat down. In the dim light, the salient points of his personality, the long face, the black hair, his lankness, made him look more foreign than ever.

The great man manifested no surprise, no eagerness, no sentiment whatever. The attitude in which he rested his menaced eyes was profoundly meditative. He did not alter it the least bit. But his tone was not dreamy.

“Well! What is it that you’ve found out already? You came upon something unexpected on the first step.”

“Not exactly unexpected, Sir Ethelred. What I mainly came upon was a psychological state.”



The Great Presence made a slight movement. "You must be lucid, please."

"Yes, Sir Ethelred. You know no doubt that most criminals at some time or other feel an irresistible need of confessing — of making a clean breast of it to somebody — to anybody. And they do it often to the police. In that Verloc whom Heat wished so much to screen I've found a man in that particular psychological state. The man, figuratively speaking, flung himself on my breast. It was enough on my part to whisper to him who I was and to add 'I know that you are at the bottom of this affair.' It must have seemed miraculous to him that we should know already, but he took it all in the stride. The wonderfulness of it never checked him for a moment. There remained for me only to put to him the two questions: Who put you up to it? and Who was the man who did it? He answered the first with remarkable emphasis. As to the second question, I gather that the fellow with the bomb was his brother-in-law — quite a lad — a weak-minded creature. . . . It is rather a curious affair — too long perhaps to state fully just now."

"What then have you learned?" asked the great man.

"First, I've learned that the ex-convict Michaelis had nothing to do with it, though indeed the lad had been living with him temporarily in the country up to eight o'clock this morning. It is more than likely that Michaelis knows nothing of it to this moment."

"You are positive as to that?" asked the great man.

"Quite certain, Sir Ethelred. This fellow Verloc went there this morning, and took away the lad on the pretence of going out for a walk in the lanes. As it was not the first time that he did this, Michaelis could not have the slightest suspicion of anything unusual. For the rest, Sir Ethelred, the indignation of this man Verloc had left nothing in doubt — nothing whatever. He had been driven out of his mind almost by an extraordinary performance, which for you or me it would be difficult to take as seriously meant, but which produced a great impression obviously on him."

The Assistant Commissioner then imparted briefly to the great man, who sat still, resting his eyes under the screen of his hand, Mr Verloc's appreciation of Mr Vladimir's proceedings and character. The Assistant Commissioner did not seem to refuse it a certain amount of competency. But the great personage remarked:

"All this seems very fantastic."

“Doesn’t it? One would think a ferocious joke. But our man took it seriously, it appears. He felt himself threatened. In the time, you know, he was in direct communication with old Stott-Wartenheim himself, and had come to regard his services as indispensable. It was an extremely rude awakening. I imagine that he lost his head. He became angry and frightened. Upon my word, my impression is that he thought these Embassy people quite capable not only to throw him out but, to give him away too in some manner or other — ”

“How long were you with him,” interrupted the Presence from behind his big hand.

“Some forty minutes, Sir Ethelred, in a house of bad repute called Continental Hotel, closeted in a room which by-the-by I took for the night. I found him under the influence of that reaction which follows the effort of crime. The man cannot be defined as a hardened criminal. It is obvious that he did not plan the death of that wretched lad — his brother-in-law. That was a shock to him — I could see that. Perhaps he is a man of strong sensibilities. Perhaps he was even fond of the lad — who knows? He might have hoped that the fellow would get clear away; in which case it would have been almost impossible to bring this thing home to anyone. At any rate he risked consciously nothing more but arrest for him.”

The Assistant Commissioner paused in his speculations to reflect for a moment.

“Though how, in that last case, he could hope to have his own share in the business concealed is more than I can tell,” he continued, in his ignorance of poor Stevie’s devotion to Mr Verloc (who was good), and of his truly peculiar dumbness, which in the old affair of fireworks on the stairs had for many years resisted entreaties, coaxing, anger, and other means of investigation used by his beloved sister. For Stevie was loyal. . . . “No, I can’t imagine. It’s possible that he never thought of that at all. It sounds an extravagant way of putting it, Sir Ethelred, but his state of dismay suggested to me an impulsive man who, after committing suicide with the notion that it would end all his troubles, had discovered that it did nothing of the kind.”

The Assistant Commissioner gave this definition in an apologetic voice. But in truth there is a sort of lucidity proper to extravagant language, and the great man was not offended. A slight jerky movement of the big body half lost in the gloom of the green silk shades, of the big head leaning on

the big hand, accompanied an intermittent stifled but powerful sound. The great man had laughed.

“What have you done with him?”

The Assistant Commissioner answered very readily:

“As he seemed very anxious to get back to his wife in the shop I let him go, Sir Ethelred.”

“You did? But the fellow will disappear.”

“Pardon me. I don’t think so. Where could he go to? Moreover, you must remember that he has got to think of the danger from his comrades too. He’s there at his post. How could he explain leaving it? But even if there were no obstacles to his freedom of action he would do nothing. At present he hasn’t enough moral energy to take a resolution of any sort. Permit me also to point out that if I had detained him we would have been committed to a course of action on which I wished to know your precise intentions first.”

The great personage rose heavily, an imposing shadowy form in the greenish gloom of the room.

“I’ll see the Attorney-General to-night, and will send for you to-morrow morning. Is there anything more you’d wish to tell me now?”

The Assistant Commissioner had stood up also, slender and flexible.

“I think not, Sir Ethelred, unless I were to enter into details which — ”

“No. No details, please.”

The great shadowy form seemed to shrink away as if in physical dread of details; then came forward, expanded, enormous, and weighty, offering a large hand. “And you say that this man has got a wife?”

“Yes, Sir Ethelred,” said the Assistant Commissioner, pressing deferentially the extended hand. “A genuine wife and a genuinely, respectably, marital relation. He told me that after his interview at the Embassy he would have thrown everything up, would have tried to sell his shop, and leave the country, only he felt certain that his wife would not even hear of going abroad. Nothing could be more characteristic of the respectable bond than that,” went on, with a touch of grimness, the Assistant Commissioner, whose own wife too had refused to hear of going abroad. “Yes, a genuine wife. And the victim was a genuine brother-in-law. From a certain point of view we are here in the presence of a domestic drama.”

The Assistant Commissioner laughed a little; but the great man's thoughts seemed to have wandered far away, perhaps to the questions of his country's domestic policy, the battle-ground of his crusading valour against the paynim Cheeseman. The Assistant Commissioner withdrew quietly, unnoticed, as if already forgotten.

He had his own crusading instincts. This affair, which, in one way or another, disgusted Chief Inspector Heat, seemed to him a providentially given starting-point for a crusade. He had it much at heart to begin. He walked slowly home, meditating that enterprise on the way, and thinking over Mr Verloc's psychology in a composite mood of repugnance and satisfaction. He walked all the way home. Finding the drawing-room dark, he went upstairs, and spent some time between the bedroom and the dressing-room, changing his clothes, going to and fro with the air of a thoughtful somnambulist. But he shook it off before going out again to join his wife at the house of the great lady patroness of Michaelis.

He knew he would be welcomed there. On entering the smaller of the two drawing-rooms he saw his wife in a small group near the piano. A youngish composer in pass of becoming famous was discoursing from a music stool to two thick men whose backs looked old, and three slender women whose backs looked young. Behind the screen the great lady had only two persons with her: a man and a woman, who sat side by side on arm-chairs at the foot of her couch. She extended her hand to the Assistant Commissioner.

"I never hoped to see you here to-night. Annie told me — "

"Yes. I had no idea myself that my work would be over so soon."

The Assistant Commissioner added in a low tone. "I am glad to tell you that Michaelis is altogether clear of this — "

The patroness of the ex-convict received this assurance indignantly.

"Why? Were your people stupid enough to connect him with — "

"Not stupid," interrupted the Assistant Commissioner, contradicting deferentially. "Clever enough — quite clever enough for that."

A silence fell. The man at the foot of the couch had stopped speaking to the lady, and looked on with a faint smile.

"I don't know whether you ever met before," said the great lady.

Mr Vladimir and the Assistant Commissioner, introduced, acknowledged each other's existence with punctilious and guarded courtesy.

“He’s been frightening me,” declared suddenly the lady who sat by the side of Mr Vladimir, with an inclination of the head towards that gentleman. The Assistant Commissioner knew the lady.

“You do not look frightened,” he pronounced, after surveying her conscientiously with his tired and equable gaze. He was thinking meantime to himself that in this house one met everybody sooner or later. Mr Vladimir’s rosy countenance was wreathed in smiles, because he was witty, but his eyes remained serious, like the eyes of a convinced man.

“Well, he tried to at least,” amended the lady.

“Force of habit perhaps,” said the Assistant Commissioner, moved by an irresistible inspiration.

“He has been threatening society with all sorts of horrors,” continued the lady, whose enunciation was caressing and slow, “apropos of this explosion in Greenwich Park. It appears we all ought to quake in our shoes at what’s coming if those people are not suppressed all over the world. I had no idea this was such a grave affair.”

Mr Vladimir, affecting not to listen, leaned towards the couch, talking amiably in subdued tones, but he heard the Assistant Commissioner say:

“I’ve no doubt that Mr Vladimir has a very precise notion of the true importance of this affair.”

Mr Vladimir asked himself what that confounded and intrusive policeman was driving at. Descended from generations victimised by the instruments of an arbitrary power, he was racially, nationally, and individually afraid of the police. It was an inherited weakness, altogether independent of his judgment, of his reason, of his experience. He was born to it. But that sentiment, which resembled the irrational horror some people have of cats, did not stand in the way of his immense contempt for the English police. He finished the sentence addressed to the great lady, and turned slightly in his chair.

“You mean that we have a great experience of these people. Yes; indeed, we suffer greatly from their activity, while you” — Mr Vladimir hesitated for a moment, in smiling perplexity — “while you suffer their presence gladly in your midst,” he finished, displaying a dimple on each clean-shaven cheek. Then he added more gravely: “I may even say — because you do.”

When Mr Vladimir ceased speaking the Assistant Commissioner lowered his glance, and the conversation dropped. Almost immediately afterwards

Mr Vladimir took leave.

Directly his back was turned on the couch the Assistant Commissioner rose too.

“I thought you were going to stay and take Annie home,” said the lady patroness of Michaelis.

“I find that I’ve yet a little work to do to-night.”

“In connection — ?”

“Well, yes — in a way.”

“Tell me, what is it really — this horror?”

“It’s difficult to say what it is, but it may yet be a cause célèbre,” said the Assistant Commissioner.

He left the drawing-room hurriedly, and found Mr Vladimir still in the hall, wrapping up his throat carefully in a large silk handkerchief. Behind him a footman waited, holding his overcoat. Another stood ready to open the door. The Assistant Commissioner was duly helped into his coat, and let out at once. After descending the front steps he stopped, as if to consider the way he should take. On seeing this through the door held open, Mr Vladimir lingered in the hall to get out a cigar and asked for a light. It was furnished to him by an elderly man out of livery with an air of calm solicitude. But the match went out; the footman then closed the door, and Mr Vladimir lighted his large Havana with leisurely care.

When at last he got out of the house, he saw with disgust the “confounded policeman” still standing on the pavement.

“Can he be waiting for me,” thought Mr Vladimir, looking up and down for some signs of a hansom. He saw none. A couple of carriages waited by the curbstone, their lamps blazing steadily, the horses standing perfectly still, as if carved in stone, the coachmen sitting motionless under the big fur capes, without as much as a quiver stirring the white thongs of their big whips. Mr Vladimir walked on, and the “confounded policeman” fell into step at his elbow. He said nothing. At the end of the fourth stride Mr Vladimir felt infuriated and uneasy. This could not last.

“Rotten weather,” he growled savagely.

“Mild,” said the Assistant Commissioner without passion. He remained silent for a little while. “We’ve got hold of a man called Verloc,” he announced casually.

Mr Vladimir did not stumble, did not stagger back, did not change his stride. But he could not prevent himself from exclaiming: “What?” The

Assistant Commissioner did not repeat his statement. "You know him," he went on in the same tone.

Mr Vladimir stopped, and became guttural. "What makes you say that?"

"I don't. It's Verloc who says that."

"A lying dog of some sort," said Mr Vladimir in somewhat Oriental phraseology. But in his heart he was almost awed by the miraculous cleverness of the English police. The change of his opinion on the subject was so violent that it made him for a moment feel slightly sick. He threw away his cigar, and moved on.

"What pleased me most in this affair," the Assistant went on, talking slowly, "is that it makes such an excellent starting-point for a piece of work which I've felt must be taken in hand — that is, the clearing out of this country of all the foreign political spies, police, and that sort of — of — dogs. In my opinion they are a ghastly nuisance; also an element of danger. But we can't very well seek them out individually. The only way is to make their employment unpleasant to their employers. The thing's becoming indecent. And dangerous too, for us, here."

Mr Vladimir stopped again for a moment.

"What do you mean?"

"The prosecution of this Verloc will demonstrate to the public both the danger and the indecency."

"Nobody will believe what a man of that sort says," said Mr Vladimir contemptuously.

"The wealth and precision of detail will carry conviction to the great mass of the public," advanced the Assistant Commissioner gently.

"So that is seriously what you mean to do."

"We've got the man; we have no choice."

"You will be only feeding up the lying spirit of these revolutionary scoundrels," Mr Vladimir protested. "What do you want to make a scandal for? — from morality — or what?"

Mr Vladimir's anxiety was obvious. The Assistant Commissioner having ascertained in this way that there must be some truth in the summary statements of Mr Verloc, said indifferently:

"There's a practical side too. We have really enough to do to look after the genuine article. You can't say we are not effective. But we don't intend to let ourselves be bothered by shams under any pretext whatever."

Mr Vladimir's tone became lofty.

“For my part, I can’t share your view. It is selfish. My sentiments for my own country cannot be doubted; but I’ve always felt that we ought to be good Europeans besides — I mean governments and men.”

“Yes,” said the Assistant Commissioner simply. “Only you look at Europe from its other end. But,” he went on in a good-natured tone, “the foreign governments cannot complain of the inefficiency of our police. Look at this outrage; a case specially difficult to trace inasmuch as it was a sham. In less than twelve hours we have established the identity of a man literally blown to shreds, have found the organiser of the attempt, and have had a glimpse of the inciter behind him. And we could have gone further; only we stopped at the limits of our territory.”

“So this instructive crime was planned abroad,” Mr Vladimir said quickly. “You admit it was planned abroad?”

“Theoretically. Theoretically only, on foreign territory; abroad only by a fiction,” said the Assistant Commissioner, alluding to the character of Embassies, which are supposed to be part and parcel of the country to which they belong. “But that’s a detail. I talked to you of this business because it’s your government that grumbles most at our police. You see that we are not so bad. I wanted particularly to tell you of our success.”

“I’m sure I’m very grateful,” muttered Mr Vladimir through his teeth.

“We can put our finger on every anarchist here,” went on the Assistant Commissioner, as though he were quoting Chief Inspector Heat. “All that’s wanted now is to do away with the agent provocateur to make everything safe.”

Mr Vladimir held up his hand to a passing hansom.

“You’re not going in here,” remarked the Assistant Commissioner, looking at a building of noble proportions and hospitable aspect, with the light of a great hall falling through its glass doors on a broad flight of steps.

But Mr Vladimir, sitting, stony-eyed, inside the hansom, drove off without a word.

The Assistant Commissioner himself did not turn into the noble building. It was the Explorers’ Club. The thought passed through his mind that Mr Vladimir, honorary member, would not be seen very often there in the future. He looked at his watch. It was only half-past ten. He had had a very full evening.



## CHAPTER XI

After Chief Inspector Heat had left him Mr Verloc moved about the parlour. From time to time he eyed his wife through the open door. "She knows all about it now," he thought to himself with commiseration for her sorrow and with some satisfaction as regarded himself. Mr Verloc's soul, if lacking greatness perhaps, was capable of tender sentiments. The prospect of having to break the news to her had put him into a fever. Chief Inspector Heat had relieved him of the task. That was good as far as it went. It remained for him now to face her grief.

Mr Verloc had never expected to have to face it on account of death, whose catastrophic character cannot be argued away by sophisticated reasoning or persuasive eloquence. Mr Verloc never meant Stevie to perish with such abrupt violence. He did not mean him to perish at all. Stevie dead was a much greater nuisance than ever he had been when alive. Mr Verloc had augured a favourable issue to his enterprise, basing himself not on Stevie's intelligence, which sometimes plays queer tricks with a man, but on the blind docility and on the blind devotion of the boy. Though not much of a psychologist, Mr Verloc had gauged the depth of Stevie's fanaticism. He dared cherish the hope of Stevie walking away from the walls of the Observatory as he had been instructed to do, taking the way shown to him several times previously, and rejoining his brother-in-law, the wise and good Mr Verloc, outside the precincts of the park. Fifteen minutes ought to have been enough for the veriest fool to deposit the engine and walk away. And the Professor had guaranteed more than fifteen minutes. But Stevie had stumbled within five minutes of being left to himself. And Mr Verloc was shaken morally to pieces. He had foreseen everything but that. He had foreseen Stevie distracted and lost — sought for — found in some police station or provincial workhouse in the end. He had foreseen Stevie arrested, and was not afraid, because Mr Verloc had a great opinion of Stevie's loyalty, which had been carefully indoctrinated with the necessity of silence in the course of many walks. Like a peripatetic philosopher, Mr Verloc, strolling along the streets of London, had modified Stevie's view of the police by conversations full of subtle reasonings. Never had a sage a more attentive and admiring disciple. The submission and worship were so apparent that Mr Verloc had come to feel something like a liking for the boy. In any case, he had not foreseen the swift bringing

home of his connection. That his wife should hit upon the precaution of sewing the boy's address inside his overcoat was the last thing Mr Verloc would have thought of. One can't think of everything. That was what she meant when she said that he need not worry if he lost Stevie during their walks. She had assured him that the boy would turn up all right. Well, he had turned up with a vengeance!

"Well, well," muttered Mr Verloc in his wonder. What did she mean by it? Spare him the trouble of keeping an anxious eye on Stevie? Most likely she had meant well. Only she ought to have told him of the precaution she had taken.

Mr Verloc walked behind the counter of the shop. His intention was not to overwhelm his wife with bitter reproaches. Mr Verloc felt no bitterness. The unexpected march of events had converted him to the doctrine of fatalism. Nothing could be helped now. He said:

"I didn't mean any harm to come to the boy."

Mrs Verloc shuddered at the sound of her husband's voice. She did not uncover her face. The trusted secret agent of the late Baron Stott-Wartenheim looked at her for a time with a heavy, persistent, undiscerning glance. The torn evening paper was lying at her feet. It could not have told her much. Mr Verloc felt the need of talking to his wife.

"It's that damned Heat — eh?" he said. "He upset you. He's a brute, blurting it out like this to a woman. I made myself ill thinking how to break it to you. I sat for hours in the little parlour of Cheshire Cheese thinking over the best way. You understand I never meant any harm to come to that boy."

Mr Verloc, the Secret Agent, was speaking the truth. It was his marital affection that had received the greatest shock from the premature explosion. He added:

"I didn't feel particularly gay sitting there and thinking of you."

He observed another slight shudder of his wife, which affected his sensibility. As she persisted in hiding her face in her hands, he thought he had better leave her alone for a while. On this delicate impulse Mr Verloc withdrew into the parlour again, where the gas jet purred like a contented cat. Mrs Verloc's wifely forethought had left the cold beef on the table with carving knife and fork and half a loaf of bread for Mr Verloc's supper. He noticed all these things now for the first time, and cutting himself a piece of bread and meat, began to eat.

His appetite did not proceed from callousness. Mr Verloc had not eaten any breakfast that day. He had left his home fasting. Not being an energetic man, he found his resolution in nervous excitement, which seemed to hold him mainly by the throat. He could not have swallowed anything solid. Michaelis' cottage was as destitute of provisions as the cell of a prisoner. The ticket-of-leave apostle lived on a little milk and crusts of stale bread. Moreover, when Mr Verloc arrived he had already gone upstairs after his frugal meal. Absorbed in the toil and delight of literary composition, he had not even answered Mr Verloc's shout up the little staircase.

"I am taking this young fellow home for a day or two."

And, in truth, Mr Verloc did not wait for an answer, but had marched out of the cottage at once, followed by the obedient Stevie.

Now that all action was over and his fate taken out of his hands with unexpected swiftness, Mr Verloc felt terribly empty physically. He carved the meat, cut the bread, and devoured his supper standing by the table, and now and then casting a glance towards his wife. Her prolonged immobility disturbed the comfort of his refectation. He walked again into the shop, and came up very close to her. This sorrow with a veiled face made Mr Verloc uneasy. He expected, of course, his wife to be very much upset, but he wanted her to pull herself together. He needed all her assistance and all her loyalty in these new conjunctures his fatalism had already accepted.

"Can't be helped," he said in a tone of gloomy sympathy. "Come, Winnie, we've got to think of to-morrow. You'll want all your wits about you after I am taken away."

He paused. Mrs Verloc's breast heaved convulsively. This was not reassuring to Mr Verloc, in whose view the newly created situation required from the two people most concerned in it calmness, decision, and other qualities incompatible with the mental disorder of passionate sorrow. Mr Verloc was a humane man; he had come home prepared to allow every latitude to his wife's affection for her brother.

Only he did not understand either the nature or the whole extent of that sentiment. And in this he was excusable, since it was impossible for him to understand it without ceasing to be himself. He was startled and disappointed, and his speech conveyed it by a certain roughness of tone.

"You might look at a fellow," he observed after waiting a while.

As if forced through the hands covering Mrs Verloc's face the answer came, deadened, almost pitiful.

"I don't want to look at you as long as I live."

"Eh? What!" Mr Verloc was merely startled by the superficial and literal meaning of this declaration. It was obviously unreasonable, the mere cry of exaggerated grief. He threw over it the mantle of his marital indulgence. The mind of Mr Verloc lacked profundity. Under the mistaken impression that the value of individuals consists in what they are in themselves, he could not possibly comprehend the value of Stevie in the eyes of Mrs Verloc. She was taking it confoundedly hard, he thought to himself. It was all the fault of that damned Heat. What did he want to upset the woman for? But she mustn't be allowed, for her own good, to carry on so till she got quite beside herself.

"Look here! You can't sit like this in the shop," he said with affected severity, in which there was some real annoyance; for urgent practical matters must be talked over if they had to sit up all night. "Somebody might come in at any minute," he added, and waited again. No effect was produced, and the idea of the finality of death occurred to Mr Verloc during the pause. He changed his tone. "Come. This won't bring him back," he said gently, feeling ready to take her in his arms and press her to his breast, where impatience and compassion dwelt side by side. But except for a short shudder Mrs Verloc remained apparently unaffected by the force of that terrible truism. It was Mr Verloc himself who was moved. He was moved in his simplicity to urge moderation by asserting the claims of his own personality.

"Do be reasonable, Winnie. What would it have been if you had lost me!"

He had vaguely expected to hear her cry out. But she did not budge. She leaned back a little, quieted down to a complete unreadable stillness. Mr Verloc's heart began to beat faster with exasperation and something resembling alarm. He laid his hand on her shoulder, saying:

"Don't be a fool, Winnie."

She gave no sign. It was impossible to talk to any purpose with a woman whose face one cannot see. Mr Verloc caught hold of his wife's wrists. But her hands seemed glued fast. She swayed forward bodily to his tug, and nearly went off the chair. Startled to feel her so helplessly limp, he was trying to put her back on the chair when she stiffened suddenly all over, tore

herself out of his hands, ran out of the shop, across the parlour, and into the kitchen. This was very swift. He had just a glimpse of her face and that much of her eyes that he knew she had not looked at him.

It all had the appearance of a struggle for the possession of a chair, because Mr Verloc instantly took his wife's place in it. Mr Verloc did not cover his face with his hands, but a sombre thoughtfulness veiled his features. A term of imprisonment could not be avoided. He did not wish now to avoid it. A prison was a place as safe from certain unlawful vengeance as the grave, with this advantage, that in a prison there is room for hope. What he saw before him was a term of imprisonment, an early release and then life abroad somewhere, such as he had contemplated already, in case of failure. Well, it was a failure, if not exactly the sort of failure he had feared. It had been so near success that he could have positively terrified Mr Vladimir out of his ferocious scoffing with this proof of occult efficiency. So at least it seemed now to Mr Verloc. His prestige with the Embassy would have been immense if — if his wife had not had the unlucky notion of sewing on the address inside Stevie's overcoat. Mr Verloc, who was no fool, had soon perceived the extraordinary character of the influence he had over Stevie, though he did not understand exactly its origin — the doctrine of his supreme wisdom and goodness inculcated by two anxious women. In all the eventualities he had foreseen Mr Verloc had calculated with correct insight on Stevie's instinctive loyalty and blind discretion. The eventuality he had not foreseen had appalled him as a humane man and a fond husband. From every other point of view it was rather advantageous. Nothing can equal the everlasting discretion of death. Mr Verloc, sitting perplexed and frightened in the small parlour of the Cheshire Cheese, could not help acknowledging that to himself, because his sensibility did not stand in the way of his judgment. Stevie's violent disintegration, however disturbing to think about, only assured the success; for, of course, the knocking down of a wall was not the aim of Mr Vladimir's menaces, but the production of a moral effect. With much trouble and distress on Mr Verloc's part the effect might be said to have been produced. When, however, most unexpectedly, it came home to roost in Brett Street, Mr Verloc, who had been struggling like a man in a nightmare for the preservation of his position, accepted the blow in the spirit of a convinced fatalist. The position was gone through no one's fault

really. A small, tiny fact had done it. It was like slipping on a bit of orange peel in the dark and breaking your leg.

Mr Verloc drew a weary breath. He nourished no resentment against his wife. He thought: She will have to look after the shop while they keep me locked up. And thinking also how cruelly she would miss Stevie at first, he felt greatly concerned about her health and spirits. How would she stand her solitude — absolutely alone in that house? It would not do for her to break down while he was locked up? What would become of the shop then? The shop was an asset. Though Mr Verloc's fatalism accepted his undoing as a secret agent, he had no mind to be utterly ruined, mostly, it must be owned, from regard for his wife.

Silent, and out of his line of sight in the kitchen, she frightened him. If only she had had her mother with her. But that silly old woman — An angry dismay possessed Mr Verloc. He must talk with his wife. He could tell her certainly that a man does get desperate under certain circumstances. But he did not go incontinently to impart to her that information. First of all, it was clear to him that this evening was no time for business. He got up to close the street door and put the gas out in the shop.

Having thus assured a solitude around his hearthstone Mr Verloc walked into the parlour, and glanced down into the kitchen. Mrs Verloc was sitting in the place where poor Stevie usually established himself of an evening with paper and pencil for the pastime of drawing these coruscations of innumerable circles suggesting chaos and eternity. Her arms were folded on the table, and her head was lying on her arms. Mr Verloc contemplated her back and the arrangement of her hair for a time, then walked away from the kitchen door. Mrs Verloc's philosophical, almost disdainful incuriosity, the foundation of their accord in domestic life made it extremely difficult to get into contact with her, now this tragic necessity had arisen. Mr Verloc felt this difficulty acutely. He turned around the table in the parlour with his usual air of a large animal in a cage.

Curiosity being one of the forms of self-revelation, — a systematically incurious person remains always partly mysterious. Every time he passed near the door Mr Verloc glanced at his wife uneasily. It was not that he was afraid of her. Mr Verloc imagined himself loved by that woman. But she had not accustomed him to make confidences. And the confidence he had to make was of a profound psychological order. How with his want of practice could he tell her what he himself felt but vaguely: that there are

conspiracies of fatal destiny, that a notion grows in a mind sometimes till it acquires an outward existence, an independent power of its own, and even a suggestive voice? He could not inform her that a man may be haunted by a fat, witty, clean-shaved face till the wildest expedient to get rid of it appears a child of wisdom.

On this mental reference to a First Secretary of a great Embassy, Mr Verloc stopped in the doorway, and looking down into the kitchen with an angry face and clenched fists, addressed his wife.

“You don’t know what a brute I had to deal with.”

He started off to make another perambulation of the table; then when he had come to the door again he stopped, glaring in from the height of two steps.

“A silly, jeering, dangerous brute, with no more sense than — After all these years! A man like me! And I have been playing my head at that game. You didn’t know. Quite right, too. What was the good of telling you that I stood the risk of having a knife stuck into me any time these seven years we’ve been married? I am not a chap to worry a woman that’s fond of me. You had no business to know.” Mr Verloc took another turn round the parlour, fuming.

“A venomous beast,” he began again from the doorway. “Drive me out into a ditch to starve for a joke. I could see he thought it was a damned good joke. A man like me! Look here! Some of the highest in the world got to thank me for walking on their two legs to this day. That’s the man you’ve got married to, my girl!”

He perceived that his wife had sat up. Mrs Verloc’s arms remained lying stretched on the table. Mr Verloc watched at her back as if he could read there the effect of his words.

“There isn’t a murdering plot for the last eleven years that I hadn’t my finger in at the risk of my life. There’s scores of these revolutionists I’ve sent off, with their bombs in their blamed pockets, to get themselves caught on the frontier. The old Baron knew what I was worth to his country. And here suddenly a swine comes along — an ignorant, overbearing swine.”

Mr Verloc, stepping slowly down two steps, entered the kitchen, took a tumbler off the dresser, and holding it in his hand, approached the sink, without looking at his wife. “It wasn’t the old Baron who would have had the wicked folly of getting me to call on him at eleven in the morning. There are two or three in this town that, if they had seen me going in, would

have made no bones about knocking me on the head sooner or later. It was a silly, murderous trick to expose for nothing a man — like me.”

Mr Verloc, turning on the tap above the sink, poured three glasses of water, one after another, down his throat to quench the fires of his indignation. Mr Vladimir’s conduct was like a hot brand which set his internal economy in a blaze. He could not get over the disloyalty of it. This man, who would not work at the usual hard tasks which society sets to its humbler members, had exercised his secret industry with an indefatigable devotion. There was in Mr Verloc a fund of loyalty. He had been loyal to his employers, to the cause of social stability, — and to his affections too — as became apparent when, after standing the tumbler in the sink, he turned about, saying:

“If I hadn’t thought of you I would have taken the bullying brute by the throat and rammed his head into the fireplace. I’d have been more than a match for that pink-faced, smooth-shaved — ”

Mr Verloc, neglected to finish the sentence, as if there could be no doubt of the terminal word. For the first time in his life he was taking that incurious woman into his confidence. The singularity of the event, the force and importance of the personal feelings aroused in the course of this confession, drove Stevie’s fate clean out of Mr Verloc’s mind. The boy’s stuttering existence of fears and indignations, together with the violence of his end, had passed out of Mr Verloc’s mental sight for a time. For that reason, when he looked up he was startled by the inappropriate character of his wife’s stare. It was not a wild stare, and it was not inattentive, but its attention was peculiar and not satisfactory, inasmuch that it seemed concentrated upon some point beyond Mr Verloc’s person. The impression was so strong that Mr Verloc glanced over his shoulder. There was nothing behind him: there was just the whitewashed wall. The excellent husband of Winnie Verloc saw no writing on the wall. He turned to his wife again, repeating, with some emphasis:

“I would have taken him by the throat. As true as I stand here, if I hadn’t thought of you then I would have half choked the life out of the brute before I let him get up. And don’t you think he would have been anxious to call the police either. He wouldn’t have dared. You understand why — don’t you?”

He blinked at his wife knowingly.



“No,” said Mrs Verloc in an unresonant voice, and without looking at him at all. “What are you talking about?”

A great discouragement, the result of fatigue, came upon Mr Verloc. He had had a very full day, and his nerves had been tried to the utmost. After a month of maddening worry, ending in an unexpected catastrophe, the storm-tossed spirit of Mr Verloc longed for repose. His career as a secret agent had come to an end in a way no one could have foreseen; only, now, perhaps he could manage to get a night’s sleep at last. But looking at his wife, he doubted it. She was taking it very hard — not at all like herself, he thought. He made an effort to speak.

“You’ll have to pull yourself together, my girl,” he said sympathetically. “What’s done can’t be undone.”

Mrs Verloc gave a slight start, though not a muscle of her white face moved in the least. Mr Verloc, who was not looking at her, continued ponderously.

“You go to bed now. What you want is a good cry.”

This opinion had nothing to recommend it but the general consent of mankind. It is universally understood that, as if it were nothing more substantial than vapour floating in the sky, every emotion of a woman is bound to end in a shower. And it is very probable that had Stevie died in his bed under her despairing gaze, in her protecting arms, Mrs Verloc’s grief would have found relief in a flood of bitter and pure tears. Mrs Verloc, in common with other human beings, was provided with a fund of unconscious resignation sufficient to meet the normal manifestation of human destiny. Without “troubling her head about it,” she was aware that it “did not stand looking into very much.” But the lamentable circumstances of Stevie’s end, which to Mr Verloc’s mind had only an episodic character, as part of a greater disaster, dried her tears at their very source. It was the effect of a white-hot iron drawn across her eyes; at the same time her heart, hardened and chilled into a lump of ice, kept her body in an inward shudder, set her features into a frozen contemplative immobility addressed to a whitewashed wall with no writing on it. The exigencies of Mrs Verloc’s temperament, which, when stripped of its philosophical reserve, was maternal and violent, forced her to roll a series of thoughts in her motionless head. These thoughts were rather imagined than expressed. Mrs Verloc was a woman of singularly few words, either for public or private use. With the rage and dismay of a betrayed woman, she reviewed

the tenor of her life in visions concerned mostly with Stevie's difficult existence from its earliest days. It was a life of single purpose and of a noble unity of inspiration, like those rare lives that have left their mark on the thoughts and feelings of mankind. But the visions of Mrs Verloc lacked nobility and magnificence. She saw herself putting the boy to bed by the light of a single candle on the deserted top floor of a "business house," dark under the roof and scintillating exceedingly with lights and cut glass at the level of the street like a fairy palace. That meretricious splendour was the only one to be met in Mrs Verloc's visions. She remembered brushing the boy's hair and tying his pinafores — herself in a pinafore still; the consolations administered to a small and badly scared creature by another creature nearly as small but not quite so badly scared; she had the vision of the blows intercepted (often with her own head), of a door held desperately shut against a man's rage (not for very long); of a poker flung once (not very far), which stilled that particular storm into the dumb and awful silence which follows a thunder-clap. And all these scenes of violence came and went accompanied by the unrefined noise of deep vociferations proceeding from a man wounded in his paternal pride, declaring himself obviously accursed since one of his kids was a "slobbering idjut and the other a wicked she-devil." It was of her that this had been said many years ago.

Mrs Verloc heard the words again in a ghostly fashion, and then the dreary shadow of the Belgravian mansion descended upon her shoulders. It was a crushing memory, an exhausting vision of countless breakfast trays carried up and down innumerable stairs, of endless haggling over pence, of the endless drudgery of sweeping, dusting, cleaning, from basement to attics; while the impotent mother, staggering on swollen legs, cooked in a grimy kitchen, and poor Stevie, the unconscious presiding genius of all their toil, blacked the gentlemen's boots in the scullery. But this vision had a breath of a hot London summer in it, and for a central figure a young man wearing his Sunday best, with a straw hat on his dark head and a wooden pipe in his mouth. Affectionate and jolly, he was a fascinating companion for a voyage down the sparkling stream of life; only his boat was very small. There was room in it for a girl-partner at the oar, but no accommodation for passengers. He was allowed to drift away from the threshold of the Belgravian mansion while Winnie averted her tearful eyes. He was not a lodger. The lodger was Mr Verloc, indolent, and keeping late hours, sleepily jocular of a morning from under his bed-clothes, but with

gleams of infatuation in his heavy lidded eyes, and always with some money in his pockets. There was no sparkle of any kind on the lazy stream of his life. It flowed through secret places. But his barque seemed a roomy craft, and his taciturn magnanimity accepted as a matter of course the presence of passengers.

Mrs Verloc pursued the visions of seven years' security for Stevie, loyally paid for on her part; of security growing into confidence, into a domestic feeling, stagnant and deep like a placid pool, whose guarded surface hardly shuddered on the occasional passage of Comrade Ossipon, the robust anarchist with shamelessly inviting eyes, whose glance had a corrupt clearness sufficient to enlighten any woman not absolutely imbecile.

A few seconds only had elapsed since the last word had been uttered aloud in the kitchen, and Mrs Verloc was staring already at the vision of an episode not more than a fortnight old. With eyes whose pupils were extremely dilated she stared at the vision of her husband and poor Stevie walking up Brett Street side by side away from the shop. It was the last scene of an existence created by Mrs Verloc's genius; an existence foreign to all grace and charm, without beauty and almost without decency, but admirable in the continuity of feeling and tenacity of purpose. And this last vision has such plastic relief, such nearness of form, such a fidelity of suggestive detail, that it wrung from Mrs Verloc an anguished and faint murmur, reproducing the supreme illusion of her life, an appalled murmur that died out on her blanched lips.

"Might have been father and son."

Mr Verloc stopped, and raised a care-worn face. "Eh? What did you say?" he asked. Receiving no reply, he resumed his sinister tramping. Then with a menacing flourish of a thick, fleshy fist, he burst out:

"Yes. The Embassy people. A pretty lot, ain't they! Before a week's out I'll make some of them wish themselves twenty feet underground. Eh? What?"

He glanced sideways, with his head down. Mrs Verloc gazed at the whitewashed wall. A blank wall — perfectly blank. A blankness to run at and dash your head against. Mrs Verloc remained immovably seated. She kept still as the population of half the globe would keep still in astonishment and despair, were the sun suddenly put out in the summer sky by the perfidy of a trusted providence.

“The Embassy,” Mr Verloc began again, after a preliminary grimace which bared his teeth wolfishly. “I wish I could get loose in there with a cudgel for half-an-hour. I would keep on hitting till there wasn’t a single unbroken bone left amongst the whole lot. But never mind, I’ll teach them yet what it means trying to throw out a man like me to rot in the streets. I’ve a tongue in my head. All the world shall know what I’ve done for them. I am not afraid. I don’t care. Everything’ll come out. Every damned thing. Let them look out!”

In these terms did Mr Verloc declare his thirst for revenge. It was a very appropriate revenge. It was in harmony with the promptings of Mr Verloc’s genius. It had also the advantage of being within the range of his powers and of adjusting itself easily to the practice of his life, which had consisted precisely in betraying the secret and unlawful proceedings of his fellow-men. Anarchists or diplomats were all one to him. Mr Verloc was temperamentally no respecter of persons. His scorn was equally distributed over the whole field of his operations. But as a member of a revolutionary proletariat — which he undoubtedly was — he nourished a rather inimical sentiment against social distinction.

“Nothing on earth can stop me now,” he added, and paused, looking fixedly at his wife, who was looking fixedly at a blank wall.

The silence in the kitchen was prolonged, and Mr Verloc felt disappointed. He had expected his wife to say something. But Mrs Verloc’s lips, composed in their usual form, preserved a statuesque immobility like the rest of her face. And Mr Verloc was disappointed. Yet the occasion did not, he recognised, demand speech from her. She was a woman of very few words. For reasons involved in the very foundation of his psychology, Mr Verloc was inclined to put his trust in any woman who had given herself to him. Therefore he trusted his wife. Their accord was perfect, but it was not precise. It was a tacit accord, congenial to Mrs Verloc’s incuriosity and to Mr Verloc’s habits of mind, which were indolent and secret. They refrained from going to the bottom of facts and motives.

This reserve, expressing, in a way, their profound confidence in each other, introduced at the same time a certain element of vagueness into their intimacy. No system of conjugal relations is perfect. Mr Verloc presumed that his wife had understood him, but he would have been glad to hear her say what she thought at the moment. It would have been a comfort.

There were several reasons why this comfort was denied him. There was a physical obstacle: Mrs Verloc had no sufficient command over her voice. She did not see any alternative between screaming and silence, and instinctively she chose the silence. Winnie Verloc was temperamentally a silent person. And there was the paralysing atrocity of the thought which occupied her. Her cheeks were blanched, her lips ashy, her immobility amazing. And she thought without looking at Mr Verloc: "This man took the boy away to murder him. He took the boy away from his home to murder him. He took the boy away from me to murder him!"

Mrs Verloc's whole being was racked by that inconclusive and maddening thought. It was in her veins, in her bones, in the roots of her hair. Mentally she assumed the biblical attitude of mourning — the covered face, the rent garments; the sound of wailing and lamentation filled her head. But her teeth were violently clenched, and her tearless eyes were hot with rage, because she was not a submissive creature. The protection she had extended over her brother had been in its origin of a fierce and indignant complexion. She had to love him with a militant love. She had battled for him — even against herself. His loss had the bitterness of defeat, with the anguish of a baffled passion. It was not an ordinary stroke of death. Moreover, it was not death that took Stevie from her. It was Mr Verloc who took him away. She had seen him. She had watched him, without raising a hand, take the boy away. And she had let him go, like — like a fool — a blind fool. Then after he had murdered the boy he came home to her. Just came home like any other man would come home to his wife. . . .

Through her set teeth Mrs Verloc muttered at the wall:

"And I thought he had caught a cold."

Mr Verloc heard these words and appropriated them.

"It was nothing," he said moodily. "I was upset. I was upset on your account."

Mrs Verloc, turning her head slowly, transferred her stare from the wall to her husband's person. Mr Verloc, with the tips of his fingers between his lips, was looking on the ground.

"Can't be helped," he mumbled, letting his hand fall. "You must pull yourself together. You'll want all your wits about you. It is you who brought the police about our ears. Never mind, I won't say anything more about it," continued Mr Verloc magnanimously. "You couldn't know."

"I couldn't," breathed out Mrs Verloc. It was as if a corpse had spoken. Mr Verloc took up the thread of his discourse.

"I don't blame you. I'll make them sit up. Once under lock and key it will be safe enough for me to talk — you understand. You must reckon on me being two years away from you," he continued, in a tone of sincere concern. "It will be easier for you than for me. You'll have something to do, while I — Look here, Winnie, what you must do is to keep this business going for two years. You know enough for that. You've a good head on you. I'll send you word when it's time to go about trying to sell. You'll have to be extra careful. The comrades will be keeping an eye on you all the time. You'll have to be as artful as you know how, and as close as the grave. No one must know what you are going to do. I have no mind to get a knock on the head or a stab in the back directly I am let out."

Thus spoke Mr Verloc, applying his mind with ingenuity and forethought to the problems of the future. His voice was sombre, because he had a correct sentiment of the situation. Everything which he did not wish to pass had come to pass. The future had become precarious. His judgment, perhaps, had been momentarily obscured by his dread of Mr Vladimir's truculent folly. A man somewhat over forty may be excusably thrown into considerable disorder by the prospect of losing his employment, especially if the man is a secret agent of political police, dwelling secure in the consciousness of his high value and in the esteem of high personages. He was excusable.

Now the thing had ended in a crash. Mr Verloc was cool; but he was not cheerful. A secret agent who throws his secrecy to the winds from desire of vengeance, and flaunts his achievements before the public eye, becomes the mark for desperate and bloodthirsty indignations. Without unduly exaggerating the danger, Mr Verloc tried to bring it clearly before his wife's mind. He repeated that he had no intention to let the revolutionists do away with him.

He looked straight into his wife's eyes. The enlarged pupils of the woman received his stare into their unfathomable depths.

"I am too fond of you for that," he said, with a little nervous laugh.

A faint flush coloured Mrs Verloc's ghastly and motionless face. Having done with the visions of the past, she had not only heard, but had also understood the words uttered by her husband. By their extreme disaccord with her mental condition these words produced on her a slightly

suffocating effect. Mrs Verloc's mental condition had the merit of simplicity; but it was not sound. It was governed too much by a fixed idea. Every nook and cranny of her brain was filled with the thought that this man, with whom she had lived without distaste for seven years, had taken the "poor boy" away from her in order to kill him — the man to whom she had grown accustomed in body and mind; the man whom she had trusted, took the boy away to kill him! In its form, in its substance, in its effect, which was universal, altering even the aspect of inanimate things, it was a thought to sit still and marvel at for ever and ever. Mrs Verloc sat still. And across that thought (not across the kitchen) the form of Mr Verloc went to and fro, familiarly in hat and overcoat, stamping with his boots upon her brain. He was probably talking too; but Mrs Verloc's thought for the most part covered the voice.

Now and then, however, the voice would make itself heard. Several connected words emerged at times. Their purport was generally hopeful. On each of these occasions Mrs Verloc's dilated pupils, losing their far-off fixity, followed her husband's movements with the effect of black care and impenetrable attention. Well informed upon all matters relating to his secret calling, Mr Verloc augured well for the success of his plans and combinations. He really believed that it would be upon the whole easy for him to escape the knife of infuriated revolutionists. He had exaggerated the strength of their fury and the length of their arm (for professional purposes) too often to have many illusions one way or the other. For to exaggerate with judgment one must begin by measuring with nicety. He knew also how much virtue and how much infamy is forgotten in two years — two long years. His first really confidential discourse to his wife was optimistic from conviction. He also thought it good policy to display all the assurance he could muster. It would put heart into the poor woman. On his liberation, which, harmonising with the whole tenor of his life, would be secret, of course, they would vanish together without loss of time. As to covering up the tracks, he begged his wife to trust him for that. He knew how it was to be done so that the devil himself —

He waved his hand. He seemed to boast. He wished only to put heart into her. It was a benevolent intention, but Mr Verloc had the misfortune not to be in accord with his audience.

The self-confident tone grew upon Mrs Verloc's ear which let most of the words go by; for what were words to her now? What could words do to

her, for good or evil in the face of her fixed idea? Her black glance followed that man who was asserting his impunity — the man who had taken poor Stevie from home to kill him somewhere. Mrs Verloc could not remember exactly where, but her heart began to beat very perceptibly.

Mr Verloc, in a soft and conjugal tone, was now expressing his firm belief that there were yet a good few years of quiet life before them both. He did not go into the question of means. A quiet life it must be and, as it were, nestling in the shade, concealed among men whose flesh is grass; modest, like the life of violets. The words used by Mr Verloc were: “Lie low for a bit.” And far from England, of course. It was not clear whether Mr Verloc had in his mind Spain or South America; but at any rate somewhere abroad.

This last word, falling into Mrs Verloc’s ear, produced a definite impression. This man was talking of going abroad. The impression was completely disconnected; and such is the force of mental habit that Mrs Verloc at once and automatically asked herself: “And what of Stevie?”

It was a sort of forgetfulness; but instantly she became aware that there was no longer any occasion for anxiety on that score. There would never be any occasion any more. The poor boy had been taken out and killed. The poor boy was dead.

This shaking piece of forgetfulness stimulated Mrs Verloc’s intelligence. She began to perceive certain consequences which would have surprised Mr Verloc. There was no need for her now to stay there, in that kitchen, in that house, with that man — since the boy was gone for ever. No need whatever. And on that Mrs Verloc rose as if raised by a spring. But neither could she see what there was to keep her in the world at all. And this inability arrested her. Mr Verloc watched her with marital solicitude.

“You’re looking more like yourself,” he said uneasily. Something peculiar in the blackness of his wife’s eyes disturbed his optimism. At that precise moment Mrs Verloc began to look upon herself as released from all earthly ties.

She had her freedom. Her contract with existence, as represented by that man standing over there, was at an end. She was a free woman. Had this view become in some way perceptible to Mr Verloc he would have been extremely shocked. In his affairs of the heart Mr Verloc had been always carelessly generous, yet always with no other idea than that of being loved



for himself. Upon this matter, his ethical notions being in agreement with his vanity, he was completely incorrigible. That this should be so in the case of his virtuous and legal connection he was perfectly certain. He had grown older, fatter, heavier, in the belief that he lacked no fascination for being loved for his own sake. When he saw Mrs Verloc starting to walk out of the kitchen without a word he was disappointed.

“Where are you going to?” he called out rather sharply. “Upstairs?”

Mrs Verloc in the doorway turned at the voice. An instinct of prudence born of fear, the excessive fear of being approached and touched by that man, induced her to nod at him slightly (from the height of two steps), with a stir of the lips which the conjugal optimism of Mr Verloc took for a wan and uncertain smile.

“That’s right,” he encouraged her gruffly. “Rest and quiet’s what you want. Go on. It won’t be long before I am with you.”

Mrs Verloc, the free woman who had had really no idea where she was going to, obeyed the suggestion with rigid steadiness.

Mr Verloc watched her. She disappeared up the stairs. He was disappointed. There was that within him which would have been more satisfied if she had been moved to throw herself upon his breast. But he was generous and indulgent. Winnie was always undemonstrative and silent. Neither was Mr Verloc himself prodigal of endearments and words as a rule. But this was not an ordinary evening. It was an occasion when a man wants to be fortified and strengthened by open proofs of sympathy and affection. Mr Verloc sighed, and put out the gas in the kitchen. Mr Verloc’s sympathy with his wife was genuine and intense. It almost brought tears into his eyes as he stood in the parlour reflecting on the loneliness hanging over her head. In this mood Mr Verloc missed Stevie very much out of a difficult world. He thought mournfully of his end. If only that lad had not stupidly destroyed himself!

The sensation of unappeasable hunger, not unknown after the strain of a hazardous enterprise to adventurers of tougher fibre than Mr Verloc, overcame him again. The piece of roast beef, laid out in the likeness of funereal baked meats for Stevie’s obsequies, offered itself largely to his notice. And Mr Verloc again partook. He partook ravenously, without restraint and decency, cutting thick slices with the sharp carving knife, and swallowing them without bread. In the course of that refecton it occurred to Mr Verloc that he was not hearing his wife move about the bedroom as

he should have done. The thought of finding her perhaps sitting on the bed in the dark not only cut Mr Verloc's appetite, but also took from him the inclination to follow her upstairs just yet. Laying down the carving knife, Mr Verloc listened with careworn attention.

He was comforted by hearing her move at last. She walked suddenly across the room, and threw the window up. After a period of stillness up there, during which he figured her to himself with her head out, he heard the sash being lowered slowly. Then she made a few steps, and sat down. Every resonance of his house was familiar to Mr Verloc, who was thoroughly domesticated. When next he heard his wife's footsteps overhead he knew, as well as if he had seen her doing it, that she had been putting on her walking shoes. Mr Verloc wriggled his shoulders slightly at this ominous symptom, and moving away from the table, stood with his back to the fireplace, his head on one side, and gnawing perplexedly at the tips of his fingers. He kept track of her movements by the sound. She walked here and there violently, with abrupt stoppages, now before the chest of drawers, then in front of the wardrobe. An immense load of weariness, the harvest of a day of shocks and surprises, weighed Mr Verloc's energies to the ground.

He did not raise his eyes till he heard his wife descending the stairs. It was as he had guessed. She was dressed for going out.

Mrs Verloc was a free woman. She had thrown open the window of the bedroom either with the intention of screaming Murder! Help! or of throwing herself out. For she did not exactly know what use to make of her freedom. Her personality seemed to have been torn into two pieces, whose mental operations did not adjust themselves very well to each other. The street, silent and deserted from end to end, repelled her by taking sides with that man who was so certain of his impunity. She was afraid to shout lest no one should come. Obviously no one would come. Her instinct of self-preservation recoiled from the depth of the fall into that sort of slimy, deep trench. Mrs Verloc closed the window, and dressed herself to go out into the street by another way. She was a free woman. She had dressed herself thoroughly, down to the tying of a black veil over her face. As she appeared before him in the light of the parlour, Mr Verloc observed that she had even her little handbag hanging from her left wrist. . . . Flying off to her mother, of course.

The thought that women were wearisome creatures after all presented itself to his fatigued brain. But he was too generous to harbour it for more than an instant. This man, hurt cruelly in his vanity, remained magnanimous in his conduct, allowing himself no satisfaction of a bitter smile or of a contemptuous gesture. With true greatness of soul, he only glanced at the wooden clock on the wall, and said in a perfectly calm but forcible manner:

“Five and twenty minutes past eight, Winnie. There’s no sense in going over there so late. You will never manage to get back to-night.”

Before his extended hand Mrs Verloc had stopped short. He added heavily: “Your mother will be gone to bed before you get there. This is the sort of news that can wait.”

Nothing was further from Mrs Verloc’s thoughts than going to her mother. She recoiled at the mere idea, and feeling a chair behind her, she obeyed the suggestion of the touch, and sat down. Her intention had been simply to get outside the door for ever. And if this feeling was correct, its mental form took an unrefined shape corresponding to her origin and station. “I would rather walk the streets all the days of my life,” she thought. But this creature, whose moral nature had been subjected to a shock of which, in the physical order, the most violent earthquake of history could only be a faint and languid rendering, was at the mercy of mere trifles, of casual contacts. She sat down. With her hat and veil she had the air of a visitor, of having looked in on Mr Verloc for a moment. Her instant docility encouraged him, whilst her aspect of only temporary and silent acquiescence provoked him a little.

“Let me tell you, Winnie,” he said with authority, “that your place is here this evening. Hang it all! you brought the damned police high and low about my ears. I don’t blame you — but it’s your doing all the same. You’d better take this confounded hat off. I can’t let you go out, old girl,” he added in a softened voice.

Mrs Verloc’s mind got hold of that declaration with morbid tenacity. The man who had taken Stevie out from under her very eyes to murder him in a locality whose name was at the moment not present to her memory would not allow her go out. Of course he wouldn’t.

Now he had murdered Stevie he would never let her go. He would want to keep her for nothing. And on this characteristic reasoning, having all the force of insane logic, Mrs Verloc’s disconnected wits went to work

practically. She could slip by him, open the door, run out. But he would dash out after her, seize her round the body, drag her back into the shop. She could scratch, kick, and bite — and stab too; but for stabbing she wanted a knife. Mrs Verloc sat still under her black veil, in her own house, like a masked and mysterious visitor of impenetrable intentions.

Mr Verloc's magnanimity was not more than human. She had exasperated him at last.

"Can't you say something? You have your own dodges for vexing a man. Oh yes! I know your deaf-and-dumb trick. I've seen you at it before to-day. But just now it won't do. And to begin with, take this damned thing off. One can't tell whether one is talking to a dummy or to a live woman."

He advanced, and stretching out his hand, dragged the veil off, unmasking a still, unreadable face, against which his nervous exasperation was shattered like a glass bubble flung against a rock. "That's better," he said, to cover his momentary uneasiness, and retreated back to his old station by the mantelpiece. It never entered his head that his wife could give him up. He felt a little ashamed of himself, for he was fond and generous. What could he do? Everything had been said already. He protested vehemently.

"By heavens! You know that I hunted high and low. I ran the risk of giving myself away to find somebody for that accursed job. And I tell you again I couldn't find anyone crazy enough or hungry enough. What do you take me for — a murderer, or what? The boy is gone. Do you think I wanted him to blow himself up? He's gone. His troubles are over. Ours are just going to begin, I tell you, precisely because he did blow himself. I don't blame you. But just try to understand that it was a pure accident; as much an accident as if he had been run over by a 'bus while crossing the street."

His generosity was not infinite, because he was a human being — and not a monster, as Mrs Verloc believed him to be. He paused, and a snarl lifting his moustaches above a gleam of white teeth gave him the expression of a reflective beast, not very dangerous — a slow beast with a sleek head, gloomier than a seal, and with a husky voice.

"And when it comes to that, it's as much your doing as mine. That's so. You may glare as much as you like. I know what you can do in that way. Strike me dead if I ever would have thought of the lad for that purpose. It

was you who kept on shoving him in my way when I was half distracted with the worry of keeping the lot of us out of trouble. What the devil made you? One would think you were doing it on purpose. And I am damned if I know that you didn't. There's no saying how much of what's going on you have got hold of on the sly with your infernal don't-care-a-damn way of looking nowhere in particular, and saying nothing at all. . . . "

His husky domestic voice ceased for a while. Mrs Verloc made no reply. Before that silence he felt ashamed of what he had said. But as often happens to peaceful men in domestic tiffs, being ashamed he pushed another point.

"You have a devilish way of holding your tongue sometimes," he began again, without raising his voice. "Enough to make some men go mad. It's lucky for you that I am not so easily put out as some of them would be by your deaf-and-dumb sulks. I am fond of you. But don't you go too far. This isn't the time for it. We ought to be thinking of what we've got to do. And I can't let you go out to-night, galloping off to your mother with some crazy tale or other about me. I won't have it. Don't you make any mistake about it: if you will have it that I killed the boy, then you've killed him as much as I."

In sincerity of feeling and openness of statement, these words went far beyond anything that had ever been said in this home, kept up on the wages of a secret industry eked out by the sale of more or less secret wares: the poor expedients devised by a mediocre mankind for preserving an imperfect society from the dangers of moral and physical corruption, both secret too of their kind. They were spoken because Mr Verloc had felt himself really outraged; but the reticent decencies of this home life, nestling in a shady street behind a shop where the sun never shone, remained apparently undisturbed. Mrs Verloc heard him out with perfect propriety, and then rose from her chair in her hat and jacket like a visitor at the end of a call. She advanced towards her husband, one arm extended as if for a silent leave-taking. Her net veil dangling down by one end on the left side of her face gave an air of disorderly formality to her restrained movements. But when she arrived as far as the hearthrug, Mr Verloc was no longer standing there. He had moved off in the direction of the sofa, without raising his eyes to watch the effect of his tirade. He was tired, resigned in a truly marital spirit. But he felt hurt in the tender spot of his secret weakness. If she would go on sulking in that dreadful overcharged silence — why then she

must. She was a master in that domestic art. Mr Verloc flung himself heavily upon the sofa, disregarding as usual the fate of his hat, which, as if accustomed to take care of itself, made for a safe shelter under the table.

He was tired. The last particle of his nervous force had been expended in the wonders and agonies of this day full of surprising failures coming at the end of a harassing month of scheming and insomnia. He was tired. A man isn't made of stone. Hang everything! Mr Verloc reposed characteristically, clad in his outdoor garments. One side of his open overcoat was lying partly on the ground. Mr Verloc wallowed on his back. But he longed for a more perfect rest — for sleep — for a few hours of delicious forgetfulness. That would come later. Provisionally he rested. And he thought: "I wish she would give over this damned nonsense. It's exasperating."

There must have been something imperfect in Mrs Verloc's sentiment of regained freedom. Instead of taking the way of the door she leaned back, with her shoulders against the tablet of the mantelpiece, as a wayfarer rests against a fence. A tinge of wildness in her aspect was derived from the black veil hanging like a rag against her cheek, and from the fixity of her black gaze where the light of the room was absorbed and lost without the trace of a single gleam. This woman, capable of a bargain the mere suspicion of which would have been infinitely shocking to Mr Verloc's idea of love, remained irresolute, as if scrupulously aware of something wanting on her part for the formal closing of the transaction.

On the sofa Mr Verloc wriggled his shoulders into perfect comfort, and from the fulness of his heart emitted a wish which was certainly as pious as anything likely to come from such a source.

"I wish to goodness," he growled huskily, "I had never seen Greenwich Park or anything belonging to it."

The veiled sound filled the small room with its moderate volume, well adapted to the modest nature of the wish. The waves of air of the proper length, propagated in accordance with correct mathematical formulas, flowed around all the inanimate things in the room, lapped against Mrs Verloc's head as if it had been a head of stone. And incredible as it may appear, the eyes of Mrs Verloc seemed to grow still larger. The audible wish of Mr Verloc's overflowing heart flowed into an empty place in his wife's memory. Greenwich Park. A park! That's where the boy was killed. A park — smashed branches, torn leaves, gravel, bits of brotherly

flesh and bone, all spouting up together in the manner of a firework. She remembered now what she had heard, and she remembered it pictorially. They had to gather him up with the shovel. Trembling all over with irrepressible shudders, she saw before her the very implement with its ghastly load scraped up from the ground. Mrs Verloc closed her eyes desperately, throwing upon that vision the night of her eyelids, where after a rainlike fall of mangled limbs the decapitated head of Stevie lingered suspended alone, and fading out slowly like the last star of a pyrotechnic display. Mrs Verloc opened her eyes.

Her face was no longer stony. Anybody could have noted the subtle change on her features, in the stare of her eyes, giving her a new and startling expression; an expression seldom observed by competent persons under the conditions of leisure and security demanded for thorough analysis, but whose meaning could not be mistaken at a glance. Mrs Verloc's doubts as to the end of the bargain no longer existed; her wits, no longer disconnected, were working under the control of her will. But Mr Verloc observed nothing. He was reposing in that pathetic condition of optimism induced by excess of fatigue. He did not want any more trouble — with his wife too — of all people in the world. He had been unanswerable in his vindication. He was loved for himself. The present phase of her silence he interpreted favourably. This was the time to make it up with her. The silence had lasted long enough. He broke it by calling to her in an undertone.

“Winnie.”

“Yes,” answered obediently Mrs Verloc the free woman. She commanded her wits now, her vocal organs; she felt herself to be in an almost preternaturally perfect control of every fibre of her body. It was all her own, because the bargain was at an end. She was clear sighted. She had become cunning. She chose to answer him so readily for a purpose. She did not wish that man to change his position on the sofa which was very suitable to the circumstances. She succeeded. The man did not stir. But after answering him she remained leaning negligently against the mantelpiece in the attitude of a resting wayfarer. She was unhurried. Her brow was smooth. The head and shoulders of Mr Verloc were hidden from her by the high side of the sofa. She kept her eyes fixed on his feet.

She remained thus mysteriously still and suddenly collected till Mr Verloc was heard with an accent of marital authority, and moving slightly to

make room for her to sit on the edge of the sofa.

“Come here,” he said in a peculiar tone, which might have been the tone of brutality, but was intimately known to Mrs Verloc as the note of wooing.

She started forward at once, as if she were still a loyal woman bound to that man by an unbroken contract. Her right hand skimmed slightly the end of the table, and when she had passed on towards the sofa the carving knife had vanished without the slightest sound from the side of the dish. Mr Verloc heard the creaky plank in the floor, and was content. He waited. Mrs Verloc was coming. As if the homeless soul of Stevie had flown for shelter straight to the breast of his sister, guardian and protector, the resemblance of her face with that of her brother grew at every step, even to the droop of the lower lip, even to the slight divergence of the eyes. But Mr Verloc did not see that. He was lying on his back and staring upwards. He saw partly on the ceiling and partly on the wall the moving shadow of an arm with a clenched hand holding a carving knife. It flickered up and down. Its movements were leisurely. They were leisurely enough for Mr Verloc to recognise the limb and the weapon.

They were leisurely enough for him to take in the full meaning of the portent, and to taste the flavour of death rising in his gorge. His wife had gone raving mad — murdering mad. They were leisurely enough for the first paralysing effect of this discovery to pass away before a resolute determination to come out victorious from the ghastly struggle with that armed lunatic. They were leisurely enough for Mr Verloc to elaborate a plan of defence involving a dash behind the table, and the felling of the woman to the ground with a heavy wooden chair. But they were not leisurely enough to allow Mr Verloc the time to move either hand or foot. The knife was already planted in his breast. It met no resistance on its way. Hazard has such accuracies. Into that plunging blow, delivered over the side of the couch, Mrs Verloc had put all the inheritance of her immemorial and obscure descent, the simple ferocity of the age of caverns, and the unbalanced nervous fury of the age of bar-rooms. Mr Verloc, the Secret Agent, turning slightly on his side with the force of the blow, expired without stirring a limb, in the muttered sound of the word “Don’t” by way of protest.

Mrs Verloc had let go the knife, and her extraordinary resemblance to her late brother had faded, had become very ordinary now. She drew a deep breath, the first easy breath since Chief Inspector Heat had exhibited to her



the labelled piece of Stevie's overcoat. She leaned forward on her folded arms over the side of the sofa. She adopted that easy attitude not in order to watch or gloat over the body of Mr Verloc, but because of the undulatory and swinging movements of the parlour, which for some time behaved as though it were at sea in a tempest. She was giddy but calm. She had become a free woman with a perfection of freedom which left her nothing to desire and absolutely nothing to do, since Stevie's urgent claim on her devotion no longer existed. Mrs Verloc, who thought in images, was not troubled now by visions, because she did not think at all. And she did not move. She was a woman enjoying her complete irresponsibility and endless leisure, almost in the manner of a corpse. She did not move, she did not think. Neither did the mortal envelope of the late Mr Verloc reposing on the sofa. Except for the fact that Mrs Verloc breathed these two would have been perfect in accord: that accord of prudent reserve without superfluous words, and sparing of signs, which had been the foundation of their respectable home life. For it had been respectable, covering by a decent reticence the problems that may arise in the practice of a secret profession and the commerce of shady wares. To the last its decorum had remained undisturbed by unseemly shrieks and other misplaced sincerities of conduct. And after the striking of the blow, this respectability was continued in immobility and silence.

Nothing moved in the parlour till Mrs Verloc raised her head slowly and looked at the clock with inquiring mistrust. She had become aware of a ticking sound in the room. It grew upon her ear, while she remembered clearly that the clock on the wall was silent, had no audible tick. What did it mean by beginning to tick so loudly all of a sudden? Its face indicated ten minutes to nine. Mrs Verloc cared nothing for time, and the ticking went on. She concluded it could not be the clock, and her sullen gaze moved along the walls, wavered, and became vague, while she strained her hearing to locate the sound. Tic, tic, tic.

After listening for some time Mrs Verloc lowered her gaze deliberately on her husband's body. Its attitude of repose was so home-like and familiar that she could do so without feeling embarrassed by any pronounced novelty in the phenomena of her home life. Mr Verloc was taking his habitual ease. He looked comfortable.

By the position of the body the face of Mr Verloc was not visible to Mrs Verloc, his widow. Her fine, sleepy eyes, travelling downward on the track

of the sound, became contemplative on meeting a flat object of bone which protruded a little beyond the edge of the sofa. It was the handle of the domestic carving knife with nothing strange about it but its position at right angles to Mr Verloc's waistcoat and the fact that something dripped from it. Dark drops fell on the floorcloth one after another, with a sound of ticking growing fast and furious like the pulse of an insane clock. At its highest speed this ticking changed into a continuous sound of trickling. Mrs Verloc watched that transformation with shadows of anxiety coming and going on her face. It was a trickle, dark, swift, thin. . . . Blood!

At this unforeseen circumstance Mrs Verloc abandoned her pose of idleness and irresponsibility.

With a sudden snatch at her skirts and a faint shriek she ran to the door, as if the trickle had been the first sign of a destroying flood. Finding the table in her way she gave it a push with both hands as though it had been alive, with such force that it went for some distance on its four legs, making a loud, scraping racket, whilst the big dish with the joint crashed heavily on the floor.

Then all became still. Mrs Verloc on reaching the door had stopped. A round hat disclosed in the middle of the floor by the moving of the table rocked slightly on its crown in the wind of her flight.

## CHAPTER XII

Winnie Verloc, the widow of Mr Verloc, the sister of the late faithful Stevie (blown to fragments in a state of innocence and in the conviction of being engaged in a humanitarian enterprise), did not run beyond the door of the parlour. She had indeed run away so far from a mere trickle of blood, but that was a movement of instinctive repulsion. And there she had paused, with staring eyes and lowered head. As though she had run through long years in her flight across the small parlour, Mrs Verloc by the door was quite a different person from the woman who had been leaning over the sofa, a little swimmy in her head, but otherwise free to enjoy the profound calm of idleness and irresponsibility. Mrs Verloc was no longer giddy. Her head was steady. On the other hand, she was no longer calm. She was afraid.

If she avoided looking in the direction of her reposing husband it was not because she was afraid of him. Mr Verloc was not frightful to behold. He looked comfortable. Moreover, he was dead. Mrs Verloc entertained no vain delusions on the subject of the dead. Nothing brings them back, neither love nor hate. They can do nothing to you. They are as nothing. Her mental state was tinged by a sort of austere contempt for that man who had let himself be killed so easily. He had been the master of a house, the husband of a woman, and the murderer of her Stevie. And now he was of no account in every respect. He was of less practical account than the clothing on his body, than his overcoat, than his boots — than that hat lying on the floor. He was nothing. He was not worth looking at. He was even no longer the murderer of poor Stevie. The only murderer that would be found in the room when people came to look for Mr Verloc would be — herself!

Her hands shook so that she failed twice in the task of refastening her veil. Mrs Verloc was no longer a person of leisure and responsibility. She was afraid. The stabbing of Mr Verloc had been only a blow. It had relieved the pent-up agony of shrieks strangled in her throat, of tears dried up in her hot eyes, of the maddening and indignant rage at the atrocious part played by that man, who was less than nothing now, in robbing her of the boy.

It had been an obscurely prompted blow. The blood trickling on the floor off the handle of the knife had turned it into an extremely plain case of

murder. Mrs Verloc, who always refrained from looking deep into things, was compelled to look into the very bottom of this thing. She saw there no haunting face, no reproachful shade, no vision of remorse, no sort of ideal conception. She saw there an object. That object was the gallows. Mrs Verloc was afraid of the gallows.

She was terrified of them ideally. Having never set eyes on that last argument of men's justice except in illustrative woodcuts to a certain type of tales, she first saw them erect against a black and stormy background, festooned with chains and human bones, circled about by birds that peck at dead men's eyes. This was frightful enough, but Mrs Verloc, though not a well-informed woman, had a sufficient knowledge of the institutions of her country to know that gallows are no longer erected romantically on the banks of dismal rivers or on wind-swept headlands, but in the yards of jails. There within four high walls, as if into a pit, at dawn of day, the murderer was brought out to be executed, with a horrible quietness and, as the reports in the newspapers always said, "in the presence of the authorities." With her eyes staring on the floor, her nostrils quivering with anguish and shame, she imagined herself all alone amongst a lot of strange gentlemen in silk hats who were calmly proceeding about the business of hanging her by the neck. That — never! Never! And how was it done? The impossibility of imagining the details of such quiet execution added something maddening to her abstract terror. The newspapers never gave any details except one, but that one with some affectation was always there at the end of a meagre report. Mrs Verloc remembered its nature. It came with a cruel burning pain into her head, as if the words "The drop given was fourteen feet" had been scratched on her brain with a hot needle. "The drop given was fourteen feet."

These words affected her physically too. Her throat became convulsed in waves to resist strangulation; and the apprehension of the jerk was so vivid that she seized her head in both hands as if to save it from being torn off her shoulders. "The drop given was fourteen feet." No! that must never be. She could not stand that. The thought of it even was not bearable. She could not stand thinking of it. Therefore Mrs Verloc formed the resolution to go at once and throw herself into the river off one of the bridges.

This time she managed to refasten her veil. With her face as if masked, all black from head to foot except for some flowers in her hat, she looked up mechanically at the clock. She thought it must have stopped. She could

not believe that only two minutes had passed since she had looked at it last. Of course not. It had been stopped all the time. As a matter of fact, only three minutes had elapsed from the moment she had drawn the first deep, easy breath after the blow, to this moment when Mrs Verloc formed the resolution to drown herself in the Thames. But Mrs Verloc could not believe that. She seemed to have heard or read that clocks and watches always stopped at the moment of murder for the undoing of the murderer. She did not care. "To the bridge — and over I go." . . . But her movements were slow.

She dragged herself painfully across the shop, and had to hold on to the handle of the door before she found the necessary fortitude to open it. The street frightened her, since it led either to the gallows or to the river. She floundered over the doorstep head forward, arms thrown out, like a person falling over the parapet of a bridge. This entrance into the open air had a foretaste of drowning; a slimy dampness enveloped her, entered her nostrils, clung to her hair. It was not actually raining, but each gas lamp had a rusty little halo of mist. The van and horses were gone, and in the black street the curtained window of the carters' eating-house made a square patch of soiled blood-red light glowing faintly very near the level of the pavement. Mrs Verloc, dragging herself slowly towards it, thought that she was a very friendless woman. It was true. It was so true that, in a sudden longing to see some friendly face, she could think of no one else but of Mrs Neale, the charwoman. She had no acquaintances of her own. Nobody would miss her in a social way. It must not be imagined that the Widow Verloc had forgotten her mother. This was not so. Winnie had been a good daughter because she had been a devoted sister. Her mother had always leaned on her for support. No consolation or advice could be expected there. Now that Stevie was dead the bond seemed to be broken. She could not face the old woman with the horrible tale. Moreover, it was too far. The river was her present destination. Mrs Verloc tried to forget her mother.

Each step cost her an effort of will which seemed the last possible. Mrs Verloc had dragged herself past the red glow of the eating-house window. "To the bridge — and over I go," she repeated to herself with fierce obstinacy. She put out her hand just in time to steady herself against a lamp-post. "I'll never get there before morning," she thought. The fear of death paralysed her efforts to escape the gallows. It seemed to her she had been staggering in that street for hours. "I'll never get there," she thought.

“They’ll find me knocking about the streets. It’s too far.” She held on, panting under her black veil.

“The drop given was fourteen feet.”

She pushed the lamp-post away from her violently, and found herself walking. But another wave of faintness overtook her like a great sea, washing away her heart clean out of her breast. “I will never get there,” she muttered, suddenly arrested, swaying lightly where she stood. “Never.”

And perceiving the utter impossibility of walking as far as the nearest bridge, Mrs Verloc thought of a flight abroad.

It came to her suddenly. Murderers escaped. They escaped abroad. Spain or California. Mere names. The vast world created for the glory of man was only a vast blank to Mrs Verloc. She did not know which way to turn. Murderers had friends, relations, helpers — they had knowledge. She had nothing. She was the most lonely of murderers that ever struck a mortal blow. She was alone in London: and the whole town of marvels and mud, with its maze of streets and its mass of lights, was sunk in a hopeless night, rested at the bottom of a black abyss from which no unaided woman could hope to scramble out.

She swayed forward, and made a fresh start blindly, with an awful dread of falling down; but at the end of a few steps, unexpectedly, she found a sensation of support, of security. Raising her head, she saw a man’s face peering closely at her veil. Comrade Ossipon was not afraid of strange women, and no feeling of false delicacy could prevent him from striking an acquaintance with a woman apparently very much intoxicated. Comrade Ossipon was interested in women. He held up this one between his two large palms, peering at her in a business-like way till he heard her say faintly “Mr Ossipon!” and then he very nearly let her drop to the ground.

“Mrs Verloc!” he exclaimed. “You here!”

It seemed impossible to him that she should have been drinking. But one never knows. He did not go into that question, but attentive not to discourage kind fate surrendering to him the widow of Comrade Verloc, he tried to draw her to his breast. To his astonishment she came quite easily, and even rested on his arm for a moment before she attempted to disengage herself. Comrade Ossipon would not be brusque with kind fate. He withdrew his arm in a natural way.

“You recognised me,” she faltered out, standing before him, fairly steady on her legs.

“Of course I did,” said Ossipon with perfect readiness. “I was afraid you were going to fall. I’ve thought of you too often lately not to recognise you anywhere, at any time. I’ve always thought of you — ever since I first set eyes on you.”

Mrs Verloc seemed not to hear. “You were coming to the shop?” she said nervously.

“Yes; at once,” answered Ossipon. “Directly I read the paper.”

In fact, Comrade Ossipon had been skulking for a good two hours in the neighbourhood of Brett Street, unable to make up his mind for a bold move. The robust anarchist was not exactly a bold conqueror. He remembered that Mrs Verloc had never responded to his glances by the slightest sign of encouragement. Besides, he thought the shop might be watched by the police, and Comrade Ossipon did not wish the police to form an exaggerated notion of his revolutionary sympathies. Even now he did not know precisely what to do. In comparison with his usual amatory speculations this was a big and serious undertaking. He ignored how much there was in it and how far he would have to go in order to get hold of what there was to get — supposing there was a chance at all. These perplexities checking his elation imparted to his tone a soberness well in keeping with the circumstances.

“May I ask you where you were going?” he inquired in a subdued voice.

“Don’t ask me!” cried Mrs Verloc with a shuddering, repressed violence. All her strong vitality recoiled from the idea of death. “Never mind where I was going. . . .”

Ossipon concluded that she was very much excited but perfectly sober. She remained silent by his side for moment, then all at once she did something which he did not expect. She slipped her hand under his arm. He was startled by the act itself certainly, and quite as much too by the palpably resolute character of this movement. But this being a delicate affair, Comrade Ossipon behaved with delicacy. He contented himself by pressing the hand slightly against his robust ribs. At the same time he felt himself being impelled forward, and yielded to the impulse. At the end of Brett Street he became aware of being directed to the left. He submitted.

The fruiterer at the corner had put out the blazing glory of his oranges and lemons, and Brett Place was all darkness, interspersed with the misty halos of the few lamps defining its triangular shape, with a cluster of three lights on one stand in the middle. The dark forms of the man and woman

glided slowly arm in arm along the walls with a loverlike and homeless aspect in the miserable night.

“What would you say if I were to tell you that I was going to find you?” Mrs Verloc asked, gripping his arm with force.

“I would say that you couldn’t find anyone more ready to help you in your trouble,” answered Ossipon, with a notion of making tremendous headway. In fact, the progress of this delicate affair was almost taking his breath away.

“In my trouble!” Mrs Verloc repeated slowly.

“Yes.”

“And do you know what my trouble is?” she whispered with strange intensity.

“Ten minutes after seeing the evening paper,” explained Ossipon with ardour, “I met a fellow whom you may have seen once or twice at the shop perhaps, and I had a talk with him which left no doubt whatever in my mind. Then I started for here, wondering whether you — I’ve been fond of you beyond words ever since I set eyes on your face,” he cried, as if unable to command his feelings.

Comrade Ossipon assumed correctly that no woman was capable of wholly disbelieving such a statement. But he did not know that Mrs Verloc accepted it with all the fierceness the instinct of self-preservation puts into the grip of a drowning person. To the widow of Mr Verloc the robust anarchist was like a radiant messenger of life.

They walked slowly, in step. “I thought so,” Mrs Verloc murmured faintly.

“You’ve read it in my eyes,” suggested Ossipon with great assurance.

“Yes,” she breathed out into his inclined ear.

“A love like mine could not be concealed from a woman like you,” he went on, trying to detach his mind from material considerations such as the business value of the shop, and the amount of money Mr Verloc might have left in the bank. He applied himself to the sentimental side of the affair. In his heart of hearts he was a little shocked at his success. Verloc had been a good fellow, and certainly a very decent husband as far as one could see. However, Comrade Ossipon was not going to quarrel with his luck for the sake of a dead man. Resolutely he suppressed his sympathy for the ghost of Comrade Verloc, and went on.



“I could not conceal it. I was too full of you. I daresay you could not help seeing it in my eyes. But I could not guess it. You were always so distant. . . .”

“What else did you expect?” burst out Mrs Verloc. “I was a respectable woman — ”

She paused, then added, as if speaking to herself, in sinister resentment: “Till he made me what I am.”

Ossipon let that pass, and took up his running. “He never did seem to me to be quite worthy of you,” he began, throwing loyalty to the winds. “You were worthy of a better fate.”

Mrs Verloc interrupted bitterly:

“Better fate! He cheated me out of seven years of life.”

“You seemed to live so happily with him.” Ossipon tried to exculpate the lukewarmness of his past conduct. “It’s that what’s made me timid. You seemed to love him. I was surprised — and jealous,” he added.

“Love him!” Mrs Verloc cried out in a whisper, full of scorn and rage. “Love him! I was a good wife to him. I am a respectable woman. You thought I loved him! You did! Look here, Tom — ”

The sound of this name thrilled Comrade Ossipon with pride. For his name was Alexander, and he was called Tom by arrangement with the most familiar of his intimates. It was a name of friendship — of moments of expansion. He had no idea that she had ever heard it used by anybody. It was apparent that she had not only caught it, but had treasured it in her memory — perhaps in her heart.

“Look here, Tom! I was a young girl. I was done up. I was tired. I had two people depending on what I could do, and it did seem as if I couldn’t do any more. Two people — mother and the boy. He was much more mine than mother’s. I sat up nights and nights with him on my lap, all alone upstairs, when I wasn’t more than eight years old myself. And then — He was mine, I tell you. . . . You can’t understand that. No man can understand it. What was I to do? There was a young fellow — ”

The memory of the early romance with the young butcher survived, tenacious, like the image of a glimpsed ideal in that heart quailing before the fear of the gallows and full of revolt against death.

“That was the man I loved then,” went on the widow of Mr Verloc. “I suppose he could see it in my eyes too. Five and twenty shillings a week, and his father threatened to kick him out of the business if he made such a

fool of himself as to marry a girl with a crippled mother and a crazy idiot of a boy on her hands. But he would hang about me, till one evening I found the courage to slam the door in his face. I had to do it. I loved him dearly. Five and twenty shillings a week! There was that other man — a good lodger. What is a girl to do? Could I've gone on the streets? He seemed kind. He wanted me, anyhow. What was I to do with mother and that poor boy? Eh? I said yes. He seemed good-natured, he was freehanded, he had money, he never said anything. Seven years — seven years a good wife to him, the kind, the good, the generous, the — And he loved me. Oh yes. He loved me till I sometimes wished myself — Seven years. Seven years a wife to him. And do you know what he was, that dear friend of yours? Do you know what he was? He was a devil!"

The superhuman vehemence of that whispered statement completely stunned Comrade Ossipon. Winnie Verloc turning about held him by both arms, facing him under the falling mist in the darkness and solitude of Brett Place, in which all sounds of life seemed lost as if in a triangular well of asphalt and bricks, of blind houses and unfeeling stones.

"No; I didn't know," he declared, with a sort of flabby stupidity, whose comical aspect was lost upon a woman haunted by the fear of the gallows, "but I do now. I — I understand," he floundered on, his mind speculating as to what sort of atrocities Verloc could have practised under the sleepy, placid appearances of his married estate. It was positively awful. "I understand," he repeated, and then by a sudden inspiration uttered an — "Unhappy woman!" of lofty commiseration instead of the more familiar "Poor darling!" of his usual practice. This was no usual case. He felt conscious of something abnormal going on, while he never lost sight of the greatness of the stake. "Unhappy, brave woman!"

He was glad to have discovered that variation; but he could discover nothing else.

"Ah, but he is dead now," was the best he could do. And he put a remarkable amount of animosity into his guarded exclamation. Mrs Verloc caught at his arm with a sort of frenzy.

"You guessed then he was dead," she murmured, as if beside herself. "You! You guessed what I had to do. Had to!"

There were suggestions of triumph, relief, gratitude in the indefinable tone of these words. It engrossed the whole attention of Ossipon to the detriment of mere literal sense. He wondered what was up with her, why

she had worked herself into this state of wild excitement. He even began to wonder whether the hidden causes of that Greenwich Park affair did not lie deep in the unhappy circumstances of the Verlocs' married life. He went so far as to suspect Mr Verloc of having selected that extraordinary manner of committing suicide. By Jove! that would account for the utter inanity and wrong-headedness of the thing. No anarchist manifestation was required by the circumstances. Quite the contrary; and Verloc was as well aware of that as any other revolutionist of his standing. What an immense joke if Verloc had simply made fools of the whole of Europe, of the revolutionary world, of the police, of the press, and of the cocksure Professor as well. Indeed, thought Ossipon, in astonishment, it seemed almost certain that he did! Poor beggar! It struck him as very possible that of that household of two it wasn't precisely the man who was the devil.

Alexander Ossipon, nicknamed the Doctor, was naturally inclined to think indulgently of his men friends. He eyed Mrs Verloc hanging on his arm. Of his women friends he thought in a specially practical way. Why Mrs Verloc should exclaim at his knowledge of Mr Verloc's death, which was no guess at all, did not disturb him beyond measure. They often talked like lunatics. But he was curious to know how she had been informed. The papers could tell her nothing beyond the mere fact: the man blown to pieces in Greenwich Park not having been identified. It was inconceivable on any theory that Verloc should have given her an inkling of his intention — whatever it was. This problem interested Comrade Ossipon immensely. He stopped short. They had gone then along the three sides of Brett Place, and were near the end of Brett Street again.

"How did you first come to hear of it?" he asked in a tone he tried to render appropriate to the character of the revelations which had been made to him by the woman at his side.

She shook violently for a while before she answered in a listless voice.

"From the police. A chief inspector came, Chief Inspector Heat he said he was. He showed me —"

Mrs Verloc choked. "Oh, Tom, they had to gather him up with a shovel."

Her breast heaved with dry sobs. In a moment Ossipon found his tongue.

"The police! Do you mean to say the police came already? That Chief Inspector Heat himself actually came to tell you."

"Yes," she confirmed in the same listless tone. "He came just like this. He came. I didn't know. He showed me a piece of overcoat, and — just

like that. Do you know this? he says.”

“Heat! Heat! And what did he do?”

Mrs Verloc’s head dropped. “Nothing. He did nothing. He went away. The police were on that man’s side,” she murmured tragically. “Another one came too.”

“Another — another inspector, do you mean?” asked Ossipon, in great excitement, and very much in the tone of a scared child.

“I don’t know. He came. He looked like a foreigner. He may have been one of them Embassy people.”

Comrade Ossipon nearly collapsed under this new shock.

“Embassy! Are you aware what you are saying? What Embassy? What on earth do you mean by Embassy?”

“It’s that place in Chesham Square. The people he cursed so. I don’t know. What does it matter!”

“And that fellow, what did he do or say to you?”

“I don’t remember. . . . Nothing . . . . I don’t care. Don’t ask me,” she pleaded in a weary voice.

“All right. I won’t,” assented Ossipon tenderly. And he meant it too, not because he was touched by the pathos of the pleading voice, but because he felt himself losing his footing in the depths of this tenebrous affair. Police! Embassy! Phew! For fear of adventuring his intelligence into ways where its natural lights might fail to guide it safely he dismissed resolutely all suppositions, surmises, and theories out of his mind. He had the woman there, absolutely flinging herself at him, and that was the principal consideration. But after what he had heard nothing could astonish him any more. And when Mrs Verloc, as if startled suddenly out of a dream of safety, began to urge upon him wildly the necessity of an immediate flight on the Continent, he did not exclaim in the least. He simply said with unaffected regret that there was no train till the morning, and stood looking thoughtfully at her face, veiled in black net, in the light of a gas lamp veiled in a gauze of mist.

Near him, her black form merged in the night, like a figure half chiselled out of a block of black stone. It was impossible to say what she knew, how deep she was involved with policemen and Embassies. But if she wanted to get away, it was not for him to object. He was anxious to be off himself. He felt that the business, the shop so strangely familiar to chief inspectors

and members of foreign Embassies, was not the place for him. That must be dropped. But there was the rest. These savings. The money!

"You must hide me till the morning somewhere," she said in a dismayed voice.

"Fact is, my dear, I can't take you where I live. I share the room with a friend."

He was somewhat dismayed himself. In the morning the blessed 'tecs will be out in all the stations, no doubt. And if they once got hold of her, for one reason or another she would be lost to him indeed.

"But you must. Don't you care for me at all — at all? What are you thinking of?"

She said this violently, but she let her clasped hands fall in discouragement. There was a silence, while the mist fell, and darkness reigned undisturbed over Brett Place. Not a soul, not even the vagabond, lawless, and amorous soul of a cat, came near the man and the woman facing each other.

"It would be possible perhaps to find a safe lodging somewhere," Ossipon spoke at last. "But the truth is, my dear, I have not enough money to go and try with — only a few pence. We revolutionists are not rich."

He had fifteen shillings in his pocket. He added:

"And there's the journey before us, too — first thing in the morning at that."

She did not move, made no sound, and Comrade Ossipon's heart sank a little. Apparently she had no suggestion to offer. Suddenly she clutched at her breast, as if she had felt a sharp pain there.

"But I have," she gasped. "I have the money. I have enough money. Tom! Let us go from here."

"How much have you got?" he inquired, without stirring to her tug; for he was a cautious man.

"I have the money, I tell you. All the money."

"What do you mean by it? All the money there was in the bank, or what?" he asked incredulously, but ready not to be surprised at anything in the way of luck.

"Yes, yes!" she said nervously. "All there was. I've it all."

"How on earth did you manage to get hold of it already?" he marvelled.

"He gave it to me," she murmured, suddenly subdued and trembling. Comrade Ossipon put down his rising surprise with a firm hand.

“Why, then — we are saved,” he uttered slowly.

She leaned forward, and sank against his breast. He welcomed her there. She had all the money. Her hat was in the way of very marked effusion; her veil too. He was adequate in his manifestations, but no more. She received them without resistance and without abandonment, passively, as if only half-sensible. She freed herself from his lax embraces without difficulty.

“You will save me, Tom,” she broke out, recoiling, but still keeping her hold on him by the two lapels of his damp coat. “Save me. Hide me. Don’t let them have me. You must kill me first. I couldn’t do it myself — I couldn’t, I couldn’t — not even for what I am afraid of.”

She was confoundedly bizarre, he thought. She was beginning to inspire him with an indefinite uneasiness. He said surlily, for he was busy with important thoughts:

“What the devil are you afraid of?”

“Haven’t you guessed what I was driven to do!” cried the woman. Distracted by the vividness of her dreadful apprehensions, her head ringing with forceful words, that kept the horror of her position before her mind, she had imagined her incoherence to be clearness itself. She had no conscience of how little she had audibly said in the disjointed phrases completed only in her thought. She had felt the relief of a full confession, and she gave a special meaning to every sentence spoken by Comrade Ossipon, whose knowledge did not in the least resemble her own. “Haven’t you guessed what I was driven to do!” Her voice fell. “You needn’t be long in guessing then what I am afraid of,” she continued, in a bitter and sombre murmur. “I won’t have it. I won’t. I won’t. I won’t. You must promise to kill me first!” She shook the lapels of his coat. “It must never be!”

He assured her curtly that no promises on his part were necessary, but he took good care not to contradict her in set terms, because he had had much to do with excited women, and he was inclined in general to let his experience guide his conduct in preference to applying his sagacity to each special case. His sagacity in this case was busy in other directions. Women’s words fell into water, but the shortcomings of time-tables remained. The insular nature of Great Britain obtruded itself upon his notice in an odious form. “Might just as well be put under lock and key every night,” he thought irritably, as nonplussed as though he had a wall to scale with the woman on his back. Suddenly he slapped his forehead. He

had by dint of cudgelling his brains just thought of the Southampton — St Malo service. The boat left about midnight. There was a train at 10.30. He became cheery and ready to act.

“From Waterloo. Plenty of time. We are all right after all. . . . What’s the matter now? This isn’t the way,” he protested.

Mrs Verloc, having hooked her arm into his, was trying to drag him into Brett Street again.

“I’ve forgotten to shut the shop door as I went out,” she whispered, terribly agitated.

The shop and all that was in it had ceased to interest Comrade Ossipon. He knew how to limit his desires. He was on the point of saying “What of that? Let it be,” but he refrained. He disliked argument about trifles. He even mended his pace considerably on the thought that she might have left the money in the drawer. But his willingness lagged behind her feverish impatience.

The shop seemed to be quite dark at first. The door stood ajar. Mrs Verloc, leaning against the front, gasped out:

“Nobody has been in. Look! The light — the light in the parlour.”

Ossipon, stretching his head forward, saw a faint gleam in the darkness of the shop.

“There is,” he said.

“I forgot it.” Mrs Verloc’s voice came from behind her veil faintly. And as he stood waiting for her to enter first, she said louder: “Go in and put it out — or I’ll go mad.”

He made no immediate objection to this proposal, so strangely motivated. “Where’s all that money?” he asked.

“On me! Go, Tom. Quick! Put it out. . . . Go in!” she cried, seizing him by both shoulders from behind.

Not prepared for a display of physical force, Comrade Ossipon stumbled far into the shop before her push. He was astonished at the strength of the woman and scandalised by her proceedings. But he did not retrace his steps in order to remonstrate with her severely in the street. He was beginning to be disagreeably impressed by her fantastic behaviour. Moreover, this or never was the time to humour the woman. Comrade Ossipon avoided easily the end of the counter, and approached calmly the glazed door of the parlour. The curtain over the panes being drawn back a little he, by a very natural impulse, looked in, just as he made ready to turn the handle. He

looked in without a thought, without intention, without curiosity of any sort. He looked in because he could not help looking in. He looked in, and discovered Mr Verloc reposing quietly on the sofa.

A yell coming from the innermost depths of his chest died out unheard and transformed into a sort of greasy, sickly taste on his lips. At the same time the mental personality of Comrade Ossipon executed a frantic leap backward. But his body, left thus without intellectual guidance, held on to the door handle with the unthinking force of an instinct. The robust anarchist did not even totter. And he stared, his face close to the glass, his eyes protruding out of his head. He would have given anything to get away, but his returning reason informed him that it would not do to let go the door handle. What was it — madness, a nightmare, or a trap into which he had been decoyed with fiendish artfulness? Why — what for? He did not know. Without any sense of guilt in his breast, in the full peace of his conscience as far as these people were concerned, the idea that he would be murdered for mysterious reasons by the couple Verloc passed not so much across his mind as across the pit of his stomach, and went out, leaving behind a trail of sickly faintness — an indisposition. Comrade Ossipon did not feel very well in a very special way for a moment — a long moment. And he stared. Mr Verloc lay very still meanwhile, simulating sleep for reasons of his own, while that savage woman of his was guarding the door — invisible and silent in the dark and deserted street. Was all this a some sort of terrifying arrangement invented by the police for his especial benefit? His modesty shrank from that explanation.

But the true sense of the scene he was beholding came to Ossipon through the contemplation of the hat. It seemed an extraordinary thing, an ominous object, a sign. Black, and rim upward, it lay on the floor before the couch as if prepared to receive the contributions of pence from people who would come presently to behold Mr Verloc in the fullness of his domestic ease reposing on a sofa. From the hat the eyes of the robust anarchist wandered to the displaced table, gazed at the broken dish for a time, received a kind of optical shock from observing a white gleam under the imperfectly closed eyelids of the man on the couch. Mr Verloc did not seem so much asleep now as lying down with a bent head and looking insistently at his left breast. And when Comrade Ossipon had made out the handle of the knife he turned away from the glazed door, and retched violently.



The crash of the street door flung to made his very soul leap in a panic. This house with its harmless tenant could still be made a trap of — a trap of a terrible kind. Comrade Ossipon had no settled conception now of what was happening to him. Catching his thigh against the end of the counter, he spun round, staggered with a cry of pain, felt in the distracting clatter of the bell his arms pinned to his side by a convulsive hug, while the cold lips of a woman moved creepily on his very ear to form the words:

“Policeman! He has seen me!”

He ceased to struggle; she never let him go. Her hands had locked themselves with an inseparable twist of fingers on his robust back. While the footsteps approached, they breathed quickly, breast to breast, with hard, laboured breaths, as if theirs had been the attitude of a deadly struggle, while, in fact, it was the attitude of deadly fear. And the time was long.

The constable on the beat had in truth seen something of Mrs Verloc; only coming from the lighted thoroughfare at the other end of Brett Street, she had been no more to him than a flutter in the darkness. And he was not even quite sure that there had been a flutter. He had no reason to hurry up. On coming abreast of the shop he observed that it had been closed early. There was nothing very unusual in that. The men on duty had special instructions about that shop: what went on about there was not to be meddled with unless absolutely disorderly, but any observations made were to be reported. There were no observations to make; but from a sense of duty and for the peace of his conscience, owing also to that doubtful flutter of the darkness, the constable crossed the road, and tried the door. The spring latch, whose key was reposing for ever off duty in the late Mr Verloc’s waistcoat pocket, held as well as usual. While the conscientious officer was shaking the handle, Ossipon felt the cold lips of the woman stirring again creepily against his very ear:

“If he comes in kill me — kill me, Tom.”

The constable moved away, flashing as he passed the light of his dark lantern, merely for form’s sake, at the shop window. For a moment longer the man and the woman inside stood motionless, panting, breast to breast; then her fingers came unlocked, her arms fell by her side slowly. Ossipon leaned against the counter. The robust anarchist wanted support badly. This was awful. He was almost too disgusted for speech. Yet he managed to utter a plaintive thought, showing at least that he realised his position.

“Only a couple of minutes later and you’d have made me blunder against the fellow poking about here with his damned dark lantern.”

The widow of Mr Verloc, motionless in the middle of the shop, said insistently:

“Go in and put that light out, Tom. It will drive me crazy.”

She saw vaguely his vehement gesture of refusal. Nothing in the world would have induced Ossipon to go into the parlour. He was not superstitious, but there was too much blood on the floor; a beastly pool of it all round the hat. He judged he had been already far too near that corpse for his peace of mind — for the safety of his neck, perhaps!

“At the meter then! There. Look. In that corner.”

The robust form of Comrade Ossipon, striding brusque and shadowy across the shop, squatted in a corner obediently; but this obedience was without grace. He fumbled nervously — and suddenly in the sound of a muttered curse the light behind the glazed door flicked out to a gasping, hysterical sigh of a woman. Night, the inevitable reward of men’s faithful labours on this earth, night had fallen on Mr Verloc, the tried revolutionist — “one of the old lot” — the humble guardian of society; the invaluable Secret Agent [delta] of Baron Stott-Wartenheim’s despatches; a servant of law and order, faithful, trusted, accurate, admirable, with perhaps one single amiable weakness: the idealistic belief in being loved for himself.

Ossipon groped his way back through the stuffy atmosphere, as black as ink now, to the counter. The voice of Mrs Verloc, standing in the middle of the shop, vibrated after him in that blackness with a desperate protest.

“I will not be hanged, Tom. I will not — ”

She broke off. Ossipon from the counter issued a warning: “Don’t shout like this,” then seemed to reflect profoundly. “You did this thing quite by yourself?” he inquired in a hollow voice, but with an appearance of masterful calmness which filled Mrs Verloc’s heart with grateful confidence in his protecting strength.

“Yes,” she whispered, invisible.

“I wouldn’t have believed it possible,” he muttered. “Nobody would.” She heard him move about and the snapping of a lock in the parlour door. Comrade Ossipon had turned the key on Mr Verloc’s repose; and this he did not from reverence for its eternal nature or any other obscurely sentimental consideration, but for the precise reason that he was not at all sure that there was not someone else hiding somewhere in the house. He did not believe

the woman, or rather he was incapable by now of judging what could be true, possible, or even probable in this astounding universe. He was terrified out of all capacity for belief or disbelief in regard of this extraordinary affair, which began with police inspectors and Embassies and would end goodness knows where — on the scaffold for someone. He was terrified at the thought that he could not prove the use he made of his time ever since seven o'clock, for he had been skulking about Brett Street. He was terrified at this savage woman who had brought him in there, and would probably saddle him with complicity, at least if he were not careful. He was terrified at the rapidity with which he had been involved in such dangers — decoyed into it. It was some twenty minutes since he had met her — not more.

The voice of Mrs Verloc rose subdued, pleading piteously: "Don't let them hang me, Tom! Take me out of the country. I'll work for you. I'll slave for you. I'll love you. I've no one in the world. . . . Who would look at me if you don't!" She ceased for a moment; then in the depths of the loneliness made round her by an insignificant thread of blood trickling off the handle of a knife, she found a dreadful inspiration to her — who had been the respectable girl of the Belgravian mansion, the loyal, respectable wife of Mr Verloc. "I won't ask you to marry me," she breathed out in shame-faced accents.

She moved a step forward in the darkness. He was terrified at her. He would not have been surprised if she had suddenly produced another knife destined for his breast. He certainly would have made no resistance. He had really not enough fortitude in him just then to tell her to keep back. But he inquired in a cavernous, strange tone: "Was he asleep?"

"No," she cried, and went on rapidly. "He wasn't. Not he. He had been telling me that nothing could touch him. After taking the boy away from under my very eyes to kill him — the loving, innocent, harmless lad. My own, I tell you. He was lying on the couch quite easy — after killing the boy — my boy. I would have gone on the streets to get out of his sight. And he says to me like this: 'Come here,' after telling me I had helped to kill the boy. You hear, Tom? He says like this: 'Come here,' after taking my very heart out of me along with the boy to smash in the dirt."

She ceased, then dreamily repeated twice: "Blood and dirt. Blood and dirt." A great light broke upon Comrade Ossipon. It was that half-witted lad then who had perished in the park. And the fooling of everybody all

round appeared more complete than ever — colossal. He exclaimed scientifically, in the extremity of his astonishment: “The degenerate — by heavens!”

“Come here.” The voice of Mrs Verloc rose again. “What did he think I was made of? Tell me, Tom. Come here! Me! Like this! I had been looking at the knife, and I thought I would come then if he wanted me so much. Oh yes! I came — for the last time. . . . With the knife.”

He was excessively terrified at her — the sister of the degenerate — a degenerate herself of a murdering type . . . or else of the lying type. Comrade Ossipon might have been said to be terrified scientifically in addition to all other kinds of fear. It was an immeasurable and composite funk, which from its very excess gave him in the dark a false appearance of calm and thoughtful deliberation. For he moved and spoke with difficulty, being as if half frozen in his will and mind — and no one could see his ghastly face. He felt half dead.

He leaped a foot high. Unexpectedly Mrs Verloc had desecrated the unbroken reserved decency of her home by a shrill and terrible shriek.

“Help, Tom! Save me. I won’t be hanged!”

He rushed forward, groping for her mouth with a silencing hand, and the shriek died out. But in his rush he had knocked her over. He felt her now clinging round his legs, and his terror reached its culminating point, became a sort of intoxication, entertained delusions, acquired the characteristics of delirium tremens. He positively saw snakes now. He saw the woman twined round him like a snake, not to be shaken off. She was not deadly. She was death itself — the companion of life.

Mrs Verloc, as if relieved by the outburst, was very far from behaving noisily now. She was pitiful.

“Tom, you can’t throw me off now,” she murmured from the floor. “Not unless you crush my head under your heel. I won’t leave you.”

“Get up,” said Ossipon.

His face was so pale as to be quite visible in the profound black darkness of the shop; while Mrs Verloc, veiled, had no face, almost no discernible form. The trembling of something small and white, a flower in her hat, marked her place, her movements.

It rose in the blackness. She had got up from the floor, and Ossipon regretted not having, run out at once into the street. But he perceived easily that it would not do. It would not do. She would run after him. She would

pursue him shrieking till she sent every policeman within hearing in chase. And then goodness only knew what she would say of him. He was so frightened that for a moment the insane notion of strangling her in the dark passed through his mind. And he became more frightened than ever! She had him! He saw himself living in abject terror in some obscure hamlet in Spain or Italy; till some fine morning they found him dead too, with a knife in his breast — like Mr Verloc. He sighed deeply. He dared not move. And Mrs Verloc waited in silence the good pleasure of her saviour, deriving comfort from his reflective silence.

Suddenly he spoke up in an almost natural voice. His reflections had come to an end.

“Let’s get out, or we will lose the train.”

“Where are we going to, Tom?” she asked timidly. Mrs Verloc was no longer a free woman.

“Let’s get to Paris first, the best way we can. . . . Go out first, and see if the way’s clear.”

She obeyed. Her voice came subdued through the cautiously opened door.

“It’s all right.”

Ossipon came out. Notwithstanding his endeavours to be gentle, the cracked bell clattered behind the closed door in the empty shop, as if trying in vain to warn the reposing Mr Verloc of the final departure of his wife — accompanied by his friend.

In the hansom, they presently picked up, the robust anarchist became explanatory. He was still awfully pale, with eyes that seemed to have sunk a whole half-inch into his tense face. But he seemed to have thought of everything with extraordinary method.

“When we arrive,” he discoursed in a queer, monotonous tone, “you must go into the station ahead of me, as if we did not know each other. I will take the tickets, and slip in yours into your hand as I pass you. Then you will go into the first-class ladies’ waiting-room, and sit there till ten minutes before the train starts. Then you come out. I will be outside. You go in first on the platform, as if you did not know me. There may be eyes watching there that know what’s what. Alone you are only a woman going off by train. I am known. With me, you may be guessed at as Mrs Verloc running away. Do you understand, my dear?” he added, with an effort.

“Yes,” said Mrs Verloc, sitting there against him in the hansom all rigid with the dread of the gallows and the fear of death. “Yes, Tom.” And she added to herself, like an awful refrain: “The drop given was fourteen feet.”

Ossipon, not looking at her, and with a face like a fresh plaster cast of himself after a wasting illness, said: “By-the-by, I ought to have the money for the tickets now.”

Mrs Verloc, undoing some hooks of her bodice, while she went on staring ahead beyond the splashboard, handed over to him the new pigskin pocket-book. He received it without a word, and seemed to plunge it deep somewhere into his very breast. Then he slapped his coat on the outside.

All this was done without the exchange of a single glance; they were like two people looking out for the first sight of a desired goal. It was not till the hansom swung round a corner and towards the bridge that Ossipon opened his lips again.

“Do you know how much money there is in that thing?” he asked, as if addressing slowly some hobgoblin sitting between the ears of the horse.

“No,” said Mrs Verloc. “He gave it to me. I didn’t count. I thought nothing of it at the time. Afterwards — ”

She moved her right hand a little. It was so expressive that little movement of that right hand which had struck the deadly blow into a man’s heart less than an hour before that Ossipon could not repress a shudder. He exaggerated it then purposely, and muttered:

“I am cold. I got chilled through.”

Mrs Verloc looked straight ahead at the perspective of her escape. Now and then, like a sable streamer blown across a road, the words “The drop given was fourteen feet” got in the way of her tense stare. Through her black veil the whites of her big eyes gleamed lustrously like the eyes of a masked woman.

Ossipon’s rigidity had something business-like, a queer official expression. He was heard again all of a sudden, as though he had released a catch in order to speak.

“Look here! Do you know whether your — whether he kept his account at the bank in his own name or in some other name.”

Mrs Verloc turned upon him her masked face and the big white gleam of her eyes.

“Other name?” she said thoughtfully.

“Be exact in what you say,” Ossipon lectured in the swift motion of the hansom. “It’s extremely important. I will explain to you. The bank has the numbers of these notes. If they were paid to him in his own name, then when his — his death becomes known, the notes may serve to track us since we have no other money. You have no other money on you?”

She shook her head negatively.

“None whatever?” he insisted.

“A few coppers.”

“It would be dangerous in that case. The money would have then to be dealt specially with. Very specially. We’d have perhaps to lose more than half the amount in order to get these notes changed in a certain safe place I know of in Paris. In the other case I mean if he had his account and got paid out under some other name — say Smith, for instance — the money is perfectly safe to use. You understand? The bank has no means of knowing that Mr Verloc and, say, Smith are one and the same person. Do you see how important it is that you should make no mistake in answering me? Can you answer that query at all? Perhaps not. Eh?”

She said composedly:

“I remember now! He didn’t bank in his own name. He told me once that it was on deposit in the name of Prozor.”

“You are sure?”

“Certain.”

“You don’t think the bank had any knowledge of his real name? Or anybody in the bank or — ”

She shrugged her shoulders.

“How can I know? Is it likely, Tom?”

“No. I suppose it’s not likely. It would have been more comfortable to know. . . . Here we are. Get out first, and walk straight in. Move smartly.”

He remained behind, and paid the cabman out of his own loose silver. The programme traced by his minute foresight was carried out. When Mrs Verloc, with her ticket for St Malo in her hand, entered the ladies’ waiting-room, Comrade Ossipon walked into the bar, and in seven minutes absorbed three goes of hot brandy and water.

“Trying to drive out a cold,” he explained to the barmaid, with a friendly nod and a grimacing smile. Then he came out, bringing out from that festive interlude the face of a man who had drunk at the very Fountain of Sorrow. He raised his eyes to the clock. It was time. He waited.

Punctual, Mrs Verloc came out, with her veil down, and all black — black as commonplace death itself, crowned with a few cheap and pale flowers. She passed close to a little group of men who were laughing, but whose laughter could have been struck dead by a single word. Her walk was indolent, but her back was straight, and Comrade Ossipon looked after it in terror before making a start himself.

The train was drawn up, with hardly anybody about its row of open doors. Owing to the time of the year and to the abominable weather there were hardly any passengers. Mrs Verloc walked slowly along the line of empty compartments till Ossipon touched her elbow from behind.

“In here.”

She got in, and he remained on the platform looking about. She bent forward, and in a whisper:

“What is it, Tom? Is there any danger? Wait a moment. There’s the guard.”

She saw him accost the man in uniform. They talked for a while. She heard the guard say “Very well, sir,” and saw him touch his cap. Then Ossipon came back, saying: “I told him not to let anybody get into our compartment.”

She was leaning forward on her seat. “You think of everything. . . . You’ll get me off, Tom?” she asked in a gust of anguish, lifting her veil brusquely to look at her saviour.

She had uncovered a face like adamant. And out of this face the eyes looked on, big, dry, enlarged, lightless, burnt out like two black holes in the white, shining globes.

“There is no danger,” he said, gazing into them with an earnestness almost rapt, which to Mrs Verloc, flying from the gallows, seemed to be full of force and tenderness. This devotion deeply moved her — and the adamant face lost the stern rigidity of its terror. Comrade Ossipon gazed at it as no lover ever gazed at his mistress’s face. Alexander Ossipon, anarchist, nicknamed the Doctor, author of a medical (and improper) pamphlet, late lecturer on the social aspects of hygiene to working men’s clubs, was free from the trammels of conventional morality — but he submitted to the rule of science. He was scientific, and he gazed scientifically at that woman, the sister of a degenerate, a degenerate herself — of a murdering type. He gazed at her, and invoked Lombroso, as an Italian peasant recommends himself to his favourite saint. He gazed



scientifically. He gazed at her cheeks, at her nose, at her eyes, at her ears. . . . Bad! . . . Fatal! Mrs Verloc's pale lips parting, slightly relaxed under his passionately attentive gaze, he gazed also at her teeth. . . . Not a doubt remained . . . a murdering type. . . . If Comrade Ossipon did not recommend his terrified soul to Lombroso, it was only because on scientific grounds he could not believe that he carried about him such a thing as a soul. But he had in him the scientific spirit, which moved him to testify on the platform of a railway station in nervous jerky phrases.

"He was an extraordinary lad, that brother of yours. Most interesting to study. A perfect type in a way. Perfect!"

He spoke scientifically in his secret fear. And Mrs Verloc, hearing these words of commendation vouchsafed to her beloved dead, swayed forward with a flicker of light in her sombre eyes, like a ray of sunshine heralding a tempest of rain.

"He was that indeed," she whispered softly, with quivering lips. "You took a lot of notice of him, Tom. I loved you for it."

"It's almost incredible the resemblance there was between you two," pursued Ossipon, giving a voice to his abiding dread, and trying to conceal his nervous, sickening impatience for the train to start. "Yes; he resembled you."

These words were not especially touching or sympathetic. But the fact of that resemblance insisted upon was enough in itself to act upon her emotions powerfully. With a little faint cry, and throwing her arms out, Mrs Verloc burst into tears at last.

Ossipon entered the carriage, hastily closed the door and looked out to see the time by the station clock. Eight minutes more. For the first three of these Mrs Verloc wept violently and helplessly without pause or interruption. Then she recovered somewhat, and sobbed gently in an abundant fall of tears. She tried to talk to her saviour, to the man who was the messenger of life.

"Oh, Tom! How could I fear to die after he was taken away from me so cruelly! How could I! How could I be such a coward!"

She lamented aloud her love of life, that life without grace or charm, and almost without decency, but of an exalted faithfulness of purpose, even unto murder. And, as often happens in the lament of poor humanity, rich in suffering but indigent in words, the truth — the very cry of truth — was

found in a worn and artificial shape picked up somewhere among the phrases of sham sentiment.

“How could I be so afraid of death! Tom, I tried. But I am afraid. I tried to do away with myself. And I couldn’t. Am I hard? I suppose the cup of horrors was not full enough for such as me. Then when you came. . . .”

She paused. Then in a gust of confidence and gratitude, “I will live all my days for you, Tom!” she sobbed out.

“Go over into the other corner of the carriage, away from the platform,” said Ossipon solicitously. She let her saviour settle her comfortably, and he watched the coming on of another crisis of weeping, still more violent than the first. He watched the symptoms with a sort of medical air, as if counting seconds. He heard the guard’s whistle at last. An involuntary contraction of the upper lip bared his teeth with all the aspect of savage resolution as he felt the train beginning to move. Mrs Verloc heard and felt nothing, and Ossipon, her saviour, stood still. He felt the train roll quicker, rumbling heavily to the sound of the woman’s loud sobs, and then crossing the carriage in two long strides he opened the door deliberately, and leaped out.

He had leaped out at the very end of the platform; and such was his determination in sticking to his desperate plan that he managed by a sort of miracle, performed almost in the air, to slam to the door of the carriage. Only then did he find himself rolling head over heels like a shot rabbit. He was bruised, shaken, pale as death, and out of breath when he got up. But he was calm, and perfectly able to meet the excited crowd of railway men who had gathered round him in a moment. He explained, in gentle and convincing tones, that his wife had started at a moment’s notice for Brittany to her dying mother; that, of course, she was greatly up-set, and he considerably concerned at her state; that he was trying to cheer her up, and had absolutely failed to notice at first that the train was moving out. To the general exclamation, “Why didn’t you go on to Southampton, then, sir?” he objected the inexperience of a young sister-in-law left alone in the house with three small children, and her alarm at his absence, the telegraph offices being closed. He had acted on impulse. “But I don’t think I’ll ever try that again,” he concluded; smiled all round; distributed some small change, and marched without a limp out of the station.

Outside, Comrade Ossipon, flush of safe banknotes as never before in his life, refused the offer of a cab.

“I can walk,” he said, with a little friendly laugh to the civil driver.

He could walk. He walked. He crossed the bridge. Later on the towers of the Abbey saw in their massive immobility the yellow bush of his hair passing under the lamps. The lights of Victoria saw him too, and Sloane Square, and the railings of the park. And Comrade Ossipon once more found himself on a bridge. The river, a sinister marvel of still shadows and flowing gleams mingling below in a black silence, arrested his attention. He stood looking over the parapet for a long time. The clock tower boomed a brazen blast above his drooping head. He looked up at the dial. . . . Half-past twelve of a wild night in the Channel.

And again Comrade Ossipon walked. His robust form was seen that night in distant parts of the enormous town slumbering monstrously on a carpet of mud under a veil of raw mist. It was seen crossing the streets without life and sound, or diminishing in the interminable straight perspectives of shadowy houses bordering empty roadways lined by strings of gas lamps. He walked through Squares, Places, Ovals, Commons, through monotonous streets with unknown names where the dust of humanity settles inert and hopeless out of the stream of life. He walked. And suddenly turning into a strip of a front garden with a mangy grass plot, he let himself into a small grimy house with a latch-key he took out of his pocket.

He threw himself down on his bed all dressed, and lay still for a whole quarter of an hour. Then he sat up suddenly, drawing up his knees, and clasping his legs. The first dawn found him open-eyed, in that same posture. This man who could walk so long, so far, so aimlessly, without showing a sign of fatigue, could also remain sitting still for hours without stirring a limb or an eyelid. But when the late sun sent its rays into the room he unclasped his hands, and fell back on the pillow. His eyes stared at the ceiling. And suddenly they closed. Comrade Ossipon slept in the sunlight.

## CHAPTER XIII

The enormous iron padlock on the doors of the wall cupboard was the only object in the room on which the eye could rest without becoming afflicted by the miserable unloveliness of forms and the poverty of material. Unsaleable in the ordinary course of business on account of its noble proportions, it had been ceded to the Professor for a few pence by a marine dealer in the east of London. The room was large, clean, respectable, and poor with that poverty suggesting the starvation of every human need except mere bread. There was nothing on the walls but the paper, an expanse of arsenical green, soiled with indelible smudges here and there, and with stains resembling faded maps of uninhabited continents.

At a deal table near a window sat Comrade Ossipon, holding his head between his fists. The Professor, dressed in his only suit of shoddy tweeds, but flapping to and fro on the bare boards a pair of incredibly dilapidated slippers, had thrust his hands deep into the overstrained pockets of his jacket. He was relating to his robust guest a visit he had lately been paying to the Apostle Michaelis. The Perfect Anarchist had even been unbending a little.

“The fellow didn’t know anything of Verloc’s death. Of course! He never looks at the newspapers. They make him too sad, he says. But never mind. I walked into his cottage. Not a soul anywhere. I had to shout half-a-dozen times before he answered me. I thought he was fast asleep yet, in bed. But not at all. He had been writing his book for four hours already. He sat in that tiny cage in a litter of manuscript. There was a half-eaten raw carrot on the table near him. His breakfast. He lives on a diet of raw carrots and a little milk now.”

“How does he look on it?” asked Comrade Ossipon listlessly.

“Angelic. . . . I picked up a handful of his pages from the floor. The poverty of reasoning is astonishing. He has no logic. He can’t think consecutively. But that’s nothing. He has divided his biography into three parts, entitled — ‘Faith, Hope, Charity.’ He is elaborating now the idea of a world planned out like an immense and nice hospital, with gardens and flowers, in which the strong are to devote themselves to the nursing of the weak.”

The Professor paused.

“Conceive you this folly, Ossipon? The weak! The source of all evil on this earth!” he continued with his grim assurance. “I told him that I dreamt of a world like shambles, where the weak would be taken in hand for utter extermination.”

“Do you understand, Ossipon? The source of all evil! They are our sinister masters — the weak, the flabby, the silly, the cowardly, the faint of heart, and the slavish of mind. They have power. They are the multitude. Theirs is the kingdom of the earth. Exterminate, exterminate! That is the only way of progress. It is! Follow me, Ossipon. First the great multitude of the weak must go, then the only relatively strong. You see? First the blind, then the deaf and the dumb, then the halt and the lame — and so on. Every taint, every vice, every prejudice, every convention must meet its doom.”

“And what remains?” asked Ossipon in a stifled voice.

“I remain — if I am strong enough,” asserted the sallow little Professor, whose large ears, thin like membranes, and standing far out from the sides of his frail skull, took on suddenly a deep red tint.

“Haven’t I suffered enough from this oppression of the weak?” he continued forcibly. Then tapping the breast-pocket of his jacket: “And yet I am the force,” he went on. “But the time! The time! Give me time! Ah! that multitude, too stupid to feel either pity or fear. Sometimes I think they have everything on their side. Everything — even death — my own weapon.”

“Come and drink some beer with me at the Silenus,” said the robust Ossipon after an interval of silence pervaded by the rapid flap, flap of the slippers on the feet of the Perfect Anarchist. This last accepted. He was jovial that day in his own peculiar way. He slapped Ossipon’s shoulder.

“Beer! So be it! Let us drink and be merry, for we are strong, and tomorrow we die.”

He busied himself with putting on his boots, and talked meanwhile in his curt, resolute tones.

“What’s the matter with you, Ossipon? You look glum and seek even my company. I hear that you are seen constantly in places where men utter foolish things over glasses of liquor. Why? Have you abandoned your collection of women? They are the weak who feed the strong — eh?”

He stamped one foot, and picked up his other laced boot, heavy, thick-soled, unblackened, mended many times. He smiled to himself grimly.

“Tell me, Ossipon, terrible man, has ever one of your victims killed herself for you — or are your triumphs so far incomplete — for blood alone puts a seal on greatness? Blood. Death. Look at history.”

“You be damned,” said Ossipon, without turning his head.

“Why? Let that be the hope of the weak, whose theology has invented hell for the strong. Ossipon, my feeling for you is amicable contempt. You couldn’t kill a fly.”

But rolling to the feast on the top of the omnibus the Professor lost his high spirits. The contemplation of the multitudes thronging the pavements extinguished his assurance under a load of doubt and uneasiness which he could only shake off after a period of seclusion in the room with the large cupboard closed by an enormous padlock.

“And so,” said over his shoulder Comrade Ossipon, who sat on the seat behind. “And so Michaelis dreams of a world like a beautiful and cheery hospital.”

“Just so. An immense charity for the healing of the weak,” assented the Professor sardonically.

“That’s silly,” admitted Ossipon. “You can’t heal weakness. But after all Michaelis may not be so far wrong. In two hundred years doctors will rule the world. Science reigns already. It reigns in the shade maybe — but it reigns. And all science must culminate at last in the science of healing — not the weak, but the strong. Mankind wants to live — to live.”

“Mankind,” asserted the Professor with a self-confident glitter of his iron-rimmed spectacles, “does not know what it wants.”

“But you do,” growled Ossipon. “Just now you’ve been crying for time — time. Well. The doctors will serve you out your time — if you are good. You profess yourself to be one of the strong — because you carry in your pocket enough stuff to send yourself and, say, twenty other people into eternity. But eternity is a damned hole. It’s time that you need. You — if you met a man who could give you for certain ten years of time, you would call him your master.”

“My device is: No God! No Master,” said the Professor sententiously as he rose to get off the ‘bus.

Ossipon followed. “Wait till you are lying flat on your back at the end of your time,” he retorted, jumping off the footboard after the other. “Your scurvy, shabby, mangy little bit of time,” he continued across the street, and hopping on to the curbstone.

“Ossipon, I think that you are a humbug,” the Professor said, opening masterfully the doors of the renowned Silenus. And when they had established themselves at a little table he developed further this gracious thought. “You are not even a doctor. But you are funny. Your notion of a humanity universally putting out the tongue and taking the pill from pole to pole at the bidding of a few solemn jokers is worthy of the prophet. Prophecy! What’s the good of thinking of what will be!” He raised his glass. “To the destruction of what is,” he said calmly.

He drank and relapsed into his peculiarly close manner of silence. The thought of a mankind as numerous as the sands of the sea-shore, as indestructible, as difficult to handle, oppressed him. The sound of exploding bombs was lost in their immensity of passive grains without an echo. For instance, this Verloc affair. Who thought of it now?

Ossipon, as if suddenly compelled by some mysterious force, pulled a much-folded newspaper out of his pocket. The Professor raised his head at the rustle.

“What’s that paper? Anything in it?” he asked.

Ossipon started like a scared somnambulist.

“Nothing. Nothing whatever. The thing’s ten days old. I forgot it in my pocket, I suppose.”

But he did not throw the old thing away. Before returning it to his pocket he stole a glance at the last lines of a paragraph. They ran thus: “An impenetrable mystery seems destined to hang for ever over this act of madness or despair.”

Such were the end words of an item of news headed: “Suicide of Lady Passenger from a cross-Channel Boat.” Comrade Ossipon was familiar with the beauties of its journalistic style. “An impenetrable mystery seems destined to hang for ever. . . .” He knew every word by heart. “An impenetrable mystery. . . .”

And the robust anarchist, hanging his head on his breast, fell into a long reverie.

He was menaced by this thing in the very sources of his existence. He could not issue forth to meet his various conquests, those that he courted on benches in Kensington Gardens, and those he met near area railings, without the dread of beginning to talk to them of an impenetrable mystery destined. . . . He was becoming scientifically afraid of insanity lying in wait for him amongst these lines. “To hang for ever over.” It was an obsession,

a torture. He had lately failed to keep several of these appointments, whose note used to be an unbounded trustfulness in the language of sentiment and manly tenderness. The confiding disposition of various classes of women satisfied the needs of his self-love, and put some material means into his hand. He needed it to live. It was there. But if he could no longer make use of it, he ran the risk of starving his ideals and his body . . . “This act of madness or despair.”

“An impenetrable mystery” was sure “to hang for ever” as far as all mankind was concerned. But what of that if he alone of all men could never get rid of the cursed knowledge? And Comrade Ossipon’s knowledge was as precise as the newspaper man could make it — up to the very threshold of the “mystery destined to hang for ever. . . .”

Comrade Ossipon was well informed. He knew what the gangway man of the steamer had seen: “A lady in a black dress and a black veil, wandering at midnight alongside, on the quay. ‘Are you going by the boat, ma’am,’ he had asked her encouragingly. ‘This way.’ She seemed not to know what to do. He helped her on board. She seemed weak.”

And he knew also what the stewardess had seen: A lady in black with a white face standing in the middle of the empty ladies’ cabin. The stewardess induced her to lie down there. The lady seemed quite unwilling to speak, and as if she were in some awful trouble. The next the stewardess knew she was gone from the ladies’ cabin. The stewardess then went on deck to look for her, and Comrade Ossipon was informed that the good woman found the unhappy lady lying down in one of the hooded seats. Her eyes were open, but she would not answer anything that was said to her.

She seemed very ill. The stewardess fetched the chief steward, and those two people stood by the side of the hooded seat consulting over their extraordinary and tragic passenger. They talked in audible whispers (for she seemed past hearing) of St Malo and the Consul there, of communicating with her people in England. Then they went away to arrange for her removal down below, for indeed by what they could see of her face she seemed to them to be dying. But Comrade Ossipon knew that behind that white mask of despair there was struggling against terror and despair a vigour of vitality, a love of life that could resist the furious anguish which drives to murder and the fear, the blind, mad fear of the gallows. He knew. But the stewardess and the chief steward knew nothing, except that when they came back for her in less than five minutes the lady



in black was no longer in the hooded seat. She was nowhere. She was gone. It was then five o'clock in the morning, and it was no accident either. An hour afterwards one of the steamer's hands found a wedding ring left lying on the seat. It had stuck to the wood in a bit of wet, and its glitter caught the man's eye. There was a date, 24th June 1879, engraved inside. "An impenetrable mystery is destined to hang for ever. . . ."

And Comrade Ossipon raised his bowed head, beloved of various humble women of these isles, Apollo-like in the sunniness of its bush of hair.

The Professor had grown restless meantime. He rose.

"Stay," said Ossipon hurriedly. "Here, what do you know of madness and despair?"

The Professor passed the tip of his tongue on his dry, thin lips, and said doctorally:

"There are no such things. All passion is lost now. The world is mediocre, limp, without force. And madness and despair are a force. And force is a crime in the eyes of the fools, the weak and the silly who rule the roost. You are mediocre. Verloc, whose affair the police has managed to smother so nicely, was mediocre. And the police murdered him. He was mediocre. Everybody is mediocre. Madness and despair! Give me that for a lever, and I'll move the world. Ossipon, you have my cordial scorn. You are incapable of conceiving even what the fat-fed citizen would call a crime. You have no force." He paused, smiling sardonically under the fierce glitter of his thick glasses.

"And let me tell you that this little legacy they say you've come into has not improved your intelligence. You sit at your beer like a dummy. Good-bye."

"Will you have it?" said Ossipon, looking up with an idiotic grin.

"Have what?"

"The legacy. All of it."

The incorruptible Professor only smiled. His clothes were all but falling off him, his boots, shapeless with repairs, heavy like lead, let water in at every step. He said:

"I will send you by-and-by a small bill for certain chemicals which I shall order to-morrow. I need them badly. Understood — eh?"

Ossipon lowered his head slowly. He was alone. "An impenetrable mystery. . . ." It seemed to him that suspended in the air before him he saw

his own brain pulsating to the rhythm of an impenetrable mystery. It was diseased clearly. . . . “This act of madness or despair.”

The mechanical piano near the door played through a valse cheekily, then fell silent all at once, as if gone grumpy.

Comrade Ossipon, nicknamed the Doctor, went out of the Silenus beer-hall. At the door he hesitated, blinking at a not too splendid sunlight — and the paper with the report of the suicide of a lady was in his pocket. His heart was beating against it. The suicide of a lady — this act of madness or despair.

He walked along the street without looking where he put his feet; and he walked in a direction which would not bring him to the place of appointment with another lady (an elderly nursery governess putting her trust in an Apollo-like ambrosial head). He was walking away from it. He could face no woman. It was ruin. He could neither think, work, sleep, nor eat. But he was beginning to drink with pleasure, with anticipation, with hope. It was ruin. His revolutionary career, sustained by the sentiment and trustfulness of many women, was menaced by an impenetrable mystery — the mystery of a human brain pulsating wrongfully to the rhythm of journalistic phrases. “ . . . Will hang for ever over this act. . . . It was inclining towards the gutter . . . of madness or despair.”

“I am seriously ill,” he muttered to himself with scientific insight. Already his robust form, with an Embassy’s secret-service money (inherited from Mr Verloc) in his pockets, was marching in the gutter as if in training for the task of an inevitable future. Already he bowed his broad shoulders, his head of ambrosial locks, as if ready to receive the leather yoke of the sandwich board. As on that night, more than a week ago, Comrade Ossipon walked without looking where he put his feet, feeling no fatigue, feeling nothing, seeing nothing, hearing not a sound. “An impenetrable mystery. . . .” He walked disregarded. . . . “This act of madness or despair.”

And the incorruptible Professor walked too, averting his eyes from the odious multitude of mankind. He had no future. He disdained it. He was a force. His thoughts caressed the images of ruin and destruction. He walked frail, insignificant, shabby, miserable — and terrible in the simplicity of his idea calling madness and despair to the regeneration of the world. Nobody looked at him. He passed on unsuspected and deadly, like a pest in the street full of men.

## ***UNDER WESTERN EYES***



This 1911 novel takes place in St. Petersburg, Russia and Geneva, Switzerland and is viewed as Conrad's reply to the themes explored in *Crime and Punishment*, as Conrad was reputed to have detested Dostoyevsky. This novel is considered to be one of Conrad's major works and is close in subject matter to *The Secret Agent*. It is full of cynicism and conflict about the historical failures of revolutionary movements and ideals.



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## PART FIRST

To begin with I wish to disclaim the possession of those high gifts of imagination and expression which would have enabled my pen to create for the reader the personality of the man who called himself, after the Russian custom, Cyril son of Isidor — Kirylo Sidorovitch — Razumov.

If I have ever had these gifts in any sort of living form they have been smothered out of existence a long time ago under a wilderness of words. Words, as is well known, are the great foes of reality. I have been for many years a teacher of languages. It is an occupation which at length becomes fatal to whatever share of imagination, observation, and insight an ordinary person may be heir to. To a teacher of languages there comes a time when the world is but a place of many words and man appears a mere talking animal not much more wonderful than a parrot.

This being so, I could not have observed Mr. Razumov or guessed at his reality by the force of insight, much less have imagined him as he was. Even to invent the mere bald facts of his life would have been utterly beyond my powers. But I think that without this declaration the readers of these pages will be able to detect in the story the marks of documentary evidence. And that is perfectly correct. It is based on a document; all I have brought to it is my knowledge of the Russian language, which is sufficient for what is attempted here. The document, of course, is something in the nature of a journal, a diary, yet not exactly that in its actual form. For instance, most of it was not written up from day to day, though all the entries are dated. Some of these entries cover months of time and extend over dozens of pages. All the earlier part is a retrospect, in a narrative form, relating to an event which took place about a year before.

I must mention that I have lived for a long time in Geneva. A whole quarter of that town, on account of many Russians residing there, is called La Petite Russie — Little Russia. I had a rather extensive connexion in Little Russia at that time. Yet I confess that I have no comprehension of the Russian character. The illogicality of their attitude, the arbitrariness of their conclusions, the frequency of the exceptional, should present no difficulty to a student of many grammars; but there must be something else in the way, some special human trait — one of those subtle differences that are beyond the ken of mere professors. What must remain striking to a teacher

of languages is the Russians' extraordinary love of words. They gather them up; they cherish them, but they don't hoard them in their breasts; on the contrary, they are always ready to pour them out by the hour or by the night with an enthusiasm, a sweeping abundance, with such an aptness of application sometimes that, as in the case of very accomplished parrots, one can't defend oneself from the suspicion that they really understand what they say. There is a generosity in their ardour of speech which removes it as far as possible from common loquacity; and it is ever too disconnected to be classed as eloquence.... But I must apologize for this digression.

It would be idle to inquire why Mr. Razumov has left this record behind him. It is inconceivable that he should have wished any human eye to see it. A mysterious impulse of human nature comes into play here. Putting aside Samuel Pepys, who has forced in this way the door of immortality, innumerable people, criminals, saints, philosophers, young girls, statesmen, and simple imbeciles, have kept self-revealing records from vanity no doubt, but also from other more inscrutable motives. There must be a wonderful soothing power in mere words since so many men have used them for self-communion. Being myself a quiet individual I take it that what all men are really after is some form or perhaps only some formula of peace. Certainly they are crying loud enough for it at the present day. What sort of peace Kirylo Sidorovitch Razumov expected to find in the writing up of his record it passeth my understanding to guess.

The fact remains that he has written it.

Mr. Razumov was a tall, well-proportioned young man, quite unusually dark for a Russian from the Central Provinces. His good looks would have been unquestionable if it had not been for a peculiar lack of fineness in the features. It was as if a face modelled vigorously in wax (with some approach even to a classical correctness of type) had been held close to a fire till all sharpness of line had been lost in the softening of the material. But even thus he was sufficiently good-looking. His manner, too, was good. In discussion he was easily swayed by argument and authority. With his younger compatriots he took the attitude of an inscrutable listener, a listener of the kind that hears you out intelligently and then — just changes the subject.

This sort of trick, which may arise either from intellectual insufficiency or from an imperfect trust in one's own convictions, procured for Mr. Razumov a reputation of profundity. Amongst a lot of exuberant talkers, in

the habit of exhausting themselves daily by ardent discussion, a comparatively taciturn personality is naturally credited with reserve power. By his comrades at the St. Petersburg University, Kirylo Sidorovitch Razumov, third year's student in philosophy, was looked upon as a strong nature — an altogether trustworthy man. This, in a country where an opinion may be a legal crime visited by death or sometimes by a fate worse than mere death, meant that he was worthy of being trusted with forbidden opinions. He was liked also for his amiability and for his quiet readiness to oblige his comrades even at the cost of personal inconvenience.

Mr. Razumov was supposed to be the son of an Archpriest and to be protected by a distinguished nobleman — perhaps of his own distant province. But his outward appearance accorded badly with such humble origin. Such a descent was not credible. It was, indeed, suggested that Mr. Razumov was the son of an Archpriest's pretty daughter — which, of course, would put a different complexion on the matter. This theory also rendered intelligible the protection of the distinguished nobleman. All this, however, had never been investigated maliciously or otherwise. No one knew or cared who the nobleman in question was. Razumov received a modest but very sufficient allowance from the hands of an obscure attorney, who seemed to act as his guardian in some measure. Now and then he appeared at some professor's informal reception. Apart from that Razumov was not known to have any social relations in the town. He attended the obligatory lectures regularly and was considered by the authorities as a very promising student. He worked at home in the manner of a man who means to get on, but did not shut himself up severely for that purpose. He was always accessible, and there was nothing secret or reserved in his life.

I

The origin of Mr. Razumov's record is connected with an event characteristic of modern Russia in the actual fact: the assassination of a prominent statesman — and still more characteristic of the moral corruption of an oppressed society where the noblest aspirations of humanity, the desire of freedom, an ardent patriotism, the love of justice, the sense of pity, and even the fidelity of simple minds are prostituted to the lusts of hate and fear, the inseparable companions of an uneasy despotism.

The fact alluded to above is the successful attempt on the life of Mr. de P —, the President of the notorious Repressive Commission of some years ago, the Minister of State invested with extraordinary powers. The



newspapers made noise enough about that fanatical, narrow-chested figure in gold-laced uniform, with a face of crumpled parchment, insipid, bespectacled eyes, and the cross of the Order of St. Procopius hung under the skinny throat. For a time, it may be remembered, not a month passed without his portrait appearing in some one of the illustrated papers of Europe. He served the monarchy by imprisoning, exiling, or sending to the gallows men and women, young and old, with an equable, unwearied industry. In his mystic acceptance of the principle of autocracy he was bent on extirpating from the land every vestige of anything that resembled freedom in public institutions; and in his ruthless persecution of the rising generation he seemed to aim at the destruction of the very hope of liberty itself.

It is said that this execrated personality had not enough imagination to be aware of the hate he inspired. It is hardly credible; but it is a fact that he took very few precautions for his safety. In the preamble of a certain famous State paper he had declared once that “the thought of liberty has never existed in the Act of the Creator. From the multitude of men’s counsel nothing could come but revolt and disorder; and revolt and disorder in a world created for obedience and stability is sin. It was not Reason but Authority which expressed the Divine Intention. God was the Autocrat of the Universe....” It may be that the man who made this declaration believed that heaven itself was bound to protect him in his remorseless defence of Autocracy on this earth.

No doubt the vigilance of the police saved him many times; but, as a matter of fact, when his appointed fate overtook him, the competent authorities could not have given him any warning. They had no knowledge of any conspiracy against the Minister’s life, had no hint of any plot through their usual channels of information, had seen no signs, were aware of no suspicious movements or dangerous persons.

Mr. de P — - was being driven towards the railway station in a two-horse uncovered sleigh with footman and coachman on the box. Snow had been falling all night, making the roadway, uncleared as yet at this early hour, very heavy for the horses. It was still falling thickly. But the sleigh must have been observed and marked down. As it drew over to the left before taking a turn, the footman noticed a peasant walking slowly on the edge of the pavement with his hands in the pockets of his sheepskin coat and his

shoulders hunched up to his ears under the falling snow. On being overtaken this peasant suddenly faced about and swung his arm. In an instant there was a terrible shock, a detonation muffled in the multitude of snowflakes; both horses lay dead and mangled on the ground and the coachman, with a shrill cry, had fallen off the box mortally wounded. The footman (who survived) had no time to see the face of the man in the sheepskin coat. After throwing the bomb this last got away, but it is supposed that, seeing a lot of people surging up on all sides of him in the falling snow, and all running towards the scene of the explosion, he thought it safer to turn back with them.

In an incredibly short time an excited crowd assembled round the sledge. The Minister-President, getting out unhurt into the deep snow, stood near the groaning coachman and addressed the people repeatedly in his weak, colourless voice: "I beg of you to keep off: For the love of God, I beg of you good people to keep off."

It was then that a tall young man who had remained standing perfectly still within a carriage gateway, two houses lower down, stepped out into the street and walking up rapidly flung another bomb over the heads of the crowd. It actually struck the Minister-President on the shoulder as he stooped over his dying servant, then falling between his feet exploded with a terrific concentrated violence, striking him dead to the ground, finishing the wounded man and practically annihilating the empty sledge in the twinkling of an eye. With a yell of horror the crowd broke up and fled in all directions, except for those who fell dead or dying where they stood nearest to the Minister-President, and one or two others who did not fall till they had run a little way.

The first explosion had brought together a crowd as if by enchantment, the second made as swiftly a solitude in the street for hundreds of yards in each direction. Through the falling snow people looked from afar at the small heap of dead bodies lying upon each other near the carcasses of the two horses. Nobody dared to approach till some Cossacks of a street-patrol galloped up and, dismounting, began to turn over the dead. Amongst the innocent victims of the second explosion laid out on the pavement there was a body dressed in a peasant's sheepskin coat; but the face was unrecognisable, there was absolutely nothing found in the pockets of its poor clothing, and it was the only one whose identity was never established.

That day Mr. Razumov got up at his usual hour and spent the morning within the University buildings listening to the lectures and working for some time in the library. He heard the first vague rumour of something in the way of bomb-throwing at the table of the students' ordinary, where he was accustomed to eat his two o'clock dinner. But this rumour was made up of mere whispers, and this was Russia, where it was not always safe, for a student especially, to appear too much interested in certain kinds of whispers. Razumov was one of those men who, living in a period of mental and political unrest, keep an instinctive hold on normal, practical, everyday life. He was aware of the emotional tension of his time; he even responded to it in an indefinite way. But his main concern was with his work, his studies, and with his own future.

Officially and in fact without a family (for the daughter of the Archpriest had long been dead), no home influences had shaped his opinions or his feelings. He was as lonely in the world as a man swimming in the deep sea. The word Razumov was the mere label of a solitary individuality. There were no Razumovs belonging to him anywhere. His closest parentage was defined in the statement that he was a Russian. Whatever good he expected from life would be given to or withheld from his hopes by that connexion alone. This immense parentage suffered from the throes of internal dissensions, and he shrank mentally from the fray as a good-natured man may shrink from taking definite sides in a violent family quarrel.

Razumov, going home, reflected that having prepared all the matters of the forthcoming examination, he could now devote his time to the subject of the prize essay. He hankered after the silver medal. The prize was offered by the Ministry of Education; the names of the competitors would be submitted to the Minister himself. The mere fact of trying would be considered meritorious in the higher quarters; and the possessor of the prize would have a claim to an administrative appointment of the better sort after he had taken his degree. The student Razumov in an access of elation forgot the dangers menacing the stability of the institutions which give rewards and appointments. But remembering the medallist of the year before, Razumov, the young man of no parentage, was sobered. He and some others happened to be assembled in their comrade's rooms at the very time when that last received the official advice of his success. He was a quiet, unassuming young man: "Forgive me," he had said with a faint apologetic smile and taking up his cap, "I am going out to order up some wine. But I

must first send a telegram to my folk at home. I say! Won't the old people make it a festive time for the neighbours for twenty miles around our place."

Razumov thought there was nothing of that sort for him in the world. His success would matter to no one. But he felt no bitterness against the nobleman his protector, who was not a provincial magnate as was generally supposed. He was in fact nobody less than Prince K — -, once a great and splendid figure in the world and now, his day being over, a Senator and a gouty invalid, living in a still splendid but more domestic manner. He had some young children and a wife as aristocratic and proud as himself.

In all his life Razumov was allowed only once to come into personal contact with the Prince.

It had the air of a chance meeting in the little attorney's office. One day Razumov, coming in by appointment, found a stranger standing there — a tall, aristocratic-looking Personage with silky, grey sidewhiskers. The bald-headed, sly little lawyer-fellow called out, "Come in — come in, Mr. Razumov," with a sort of ironic heartiness. Then turning deferentially to the stranger with the grand air, "A ward of mine, your Excellency. One of the most promising students of his faculty in the St. Petersburg University."

To his intense surprise Razumov saw a white shapely hand extended to him. He took it in great confusion (it was soft and passive) and heard at the same time a condescending murmur in which he caught only the words "Satisfactory" and "Persevere." But the most amazing thing of all was to feel suddenly a distinct pressure of the white shapely hand just before it was withdrawn: a light pressure like a secret sign. The emotion of it was terrible. Razumov's heart seemed to leap into his throat. When he raised his eyes the aristocratic personage, motioning the little lawyer aside, had opened the door and was going out.

The attorney rummaged amongst the papers on his desk for a time. "Do you know who that was?" he asked suddenly.

Razumov, whose heart was thumping hard yet, shook his head in silence.

"That was Prince K — -. You wonder what he could be doing in the hole of a poor legal rat like myself — eh? These awfully great people have their sentimental curiosities like common sinners. But if I were you, Kirylo Sidorovitch," he continued, leering and laying a peculiar emphasis on the patronymic, "I wouldn't boast at large of the introduction. It would not be

prudent, Kirylo Sidorovitch. Oh dear no! It would be in fact dangerous for your future.”

The young man’s ears burned like fire; his sight was dim. “That man!” Razumov was saying to himself. “He!”

Henceforth it was by this monosyllable that Mr. Razumov got into the habit of referring mentally to the stranger with grey silky side-whiskers. From that time too, when walking in the more fashionable quarters, he noted with interest the magnificent horses and carriages with Prince K — -’s liveries on the box. Once he saw the Princess get out — she was shopping — followed by two girls, of which one was nearly a head taller than the other. Their fair hair hung loose down their backs in the English style; they had merry eyes, their coats, muffs, and little fur caps were exactly alike, and their cheeks and noses were tinged a cheerful pink by the frost. They crossed the pavement in front of him, and Razumov went on his way smiling shyly to himself. “His” daughters. They resembled “Him.” The young man felt a glow of warm friendliness towards these girls who would never know of his existence. Presently they would marry Generals or Kammerherrns and have girls and boys of their own, who perhaps would be aware of him as a celebrated old professor, decorated, possibly a Privy Councillor, one of the glories of Russia — nothing more!

But a celebrated professor was a somebody. Distinction would convert the label Razumov into an honoured name. There was nothing strange in the student Razumov’s wish for distinction. A man’s real life is that accorded to him in the thoughts of other men by reason of respect or natural love. Returning home on the day of the attempt on Mr. de P — -’s life Razumov resolved to have a good try for the silver medal.

Climbing slowly the four flights of the dark, dirty staircase in the house where he had his lodgings, he felt confident of success. The winner’s name would be published in the papers on New Year’s Day. And at the thought that “He” would most probably read it there, Razumov stopped short on the stairs for an instant, then went on smiling faintly at his own emotion. “This is but a shadow,” he said to himself, “but the medal is a solid beginning.”

With those ideas of industry in his head the warmth of his room was agreeable and encouraging. “I shall put in four hours of good work,” he thought. But no sooner had he closed the door than he was horribly startled. All black against the usual tall stove of white tiles gleaming in the dusk, stood a strange figure, wearing a skirted, close-fitting, brown cloth coat

strapped round the waist, in long boots, and with a little Astrakhan cap on its head. It loomed lithe and martial. Razumov was utterly confounded. It was only when the figure advancing two paces asked in an untroubled, grave voice if the outer door was closed that he regained his power of speech.

“Haldin!... Victor Victorovitch!... Is that you?... Yes. The outer door is shut all right. But this is indeed unexpected.”

Victor Haldin, a student older than most of his contemporaries at the University, was not one of the industrious set. He was hardly ever seen at lectures; the authorities had marked him as “restless” and “unsound” — very bad notes. But he had a great personal prestige with his comrades and influenced their thoughts. Razumov had never been intimate with him. They had met from time to time at gatherings in other students’ houses. They had even had a discussion together — one of those discussions on first principles dear to the sanguine minds of youth.

Razumov wished the man had chosen some other time to come for a chat. He felt in good trim to tackle the prize essay. But as Haldin could not be slightly dismissed Razumov adopted the tone of hospitality, asking him to sit down and smoke.

“Kirylo Sidorovitch,” said the other, flinging off his cap, “we are not perhaps in exactly the same camp. Your judgment is more philosophical. You are a man of few words, but I haven’t met anybody who dared to doubt the generosity of your sentiments. There is a solidity about your character which cannot exist without courage.”

Razumov felt flattered and began to murmur shyly something about being very glad of his good opinion, when Haldin raised his hand.

“That is what I was saying to myself,” he continued, “as I dodged in the woodyard down by the river-side. ‘He has a strong character this young man,’ I said to myself. ‘He does not throw his soul to the winds.’ Your reserve has always fascinated me, Kirylo Sidorovitch. So I tried to remember your address. But look here — it was a piece of luck. Your dvornik was away from the gate talking to a sleigh-driver on the other side of the street. I met no one on the stairs, not a soul. As I came up to your floor I caught sight of your landlady coming out of your rooms. But she did not see me. She crossed the landing to her own side, and then I slipped in. I have been here two hours expecting you to come in every moment.”

Razumov had listened in astonishment; but before he could open his mouth Haldin added, speaking deliberately, "It was I who removed de P — - this morning." Razumov kept down a cry of dismay. The sentiment of his life being utterly ruined by this contact with such a crime expressed itself quaintly by a sort of half-derisive mental exclamation, "There goes my silver medal!"

Haldin continued after waiting a while —

"You say nothing, Kirylo Sidorovitch! I understand your silence. To be sure, I cannot expect you with your frigid English manner to embrace me. But never mind your manners. You have enough heart to have heard the sound of weeping and gnashing of teeth this man raised in the land. That would be enough to get over any philosophical hopes. He was uprooting the tender plant. He had to be stopped. He was a dangerous man — a convinced man. Three more years of his work would have put us back fifty years into bondage — and look at all the lives wasted, at all the souls lost in that time."

His curt, self-confident voice suddenly lost its ring and it was in a dull tone that he added, "Yes, brother, I have killed him. It's weary work."

Razumov had sunk into a chair. Every moment he expected a crowd of policemen to rush in. There must have been thousands of them out looking for that man walking up and down in his room. Haldin was talking again in a restrained, steady voice. Now and then he flourished an arm, slowly, without excitement.

He told Razumov how he had brooded for a year; how he had not slept properly for weeks. He and "Another" had a warning of the Minister's movements from "a certain person" late the evening before. He and that "Another" prepared their "engines" and resolved to have no sleep till "the deed" was done. They walked the streets under the falling snow with the "engines" on them, exchanging not a word the livelong night. When they happened to meet a police patrol they took each other by the arm and pretended to be a couple of peasants on the spree. They reeled and talked in drunken hoarse voices. Except for these strange outbreaks they kept silence, moving on ceaselessly. Their plans had been previously arranged. At daybreak they made their way to the spot which they knew the sledge must pass. When it appeared in sight they exchanged a muttered good-bye and separated. The "other" remained at the corner, Haldin took up a position a little farther up the street....

After throwing his “engine” he ran off and in a moment was overtaken by the panic-struck people flying away from the spot after the second explosion. They were wild with terror. He was jostled once or twice. He slowed down for the rush to pass him and then turned to the left into a narrow street. There he was alone.

He marvelled at this immediate escape. The work was done. He could hardly believe it. He fought with an almost irresistible longing to lie down on the pavement and sleep. But this sort of faintness — a drowsy faintness — passed off quickly. He walked faster, making his way to one of the poorer parts of the town in order to look up Ziemianitch.

This Ziemianitch, Razumov understood, was a sort of town-peasant who had got on; owner of a small number of sledges and horses for hire. Haldin paused in his narrative to exclaim —

“A bright spirit! A hardy soul! The best driver in St. Petersburg. He has a team of three horses there.... Ah! He’s a fellow!”

This man had declared himself willing to take out safely, at any time, one or two persons to the second or third railway station on one of the southern lines. But there had been no time to warn him the night before. His usual haunt seemed to be a low-class eating-house on the outskirts of the town. When Haldin got there the man was not to be found. He was not expected to turn up again till the evening. Haldin wandered away restlessly.

He saw the gate of a woodyard open and went in to get out of the wind which swept the bleak broad thoroughfare. The great rectangular piles of cut wood loaded with snow resembled the huts of a village. At first the watchman who discovered him crouching amongst them talked in a friendly manner. He was a dried-up old man wearing two ragged army coats one over the other; his wizened little face, tied up under the jaw and over the ears in a dirty red handkerchief, looked comical. Presently he grew sulky, and then all at once without rhyme or reason began to shout furiously.

“Aren’t you ever going to clear out of this, you loafer? We know all about factory hands of your sort. A big, strong, young chap! You aren’t even drunk. What do you want here? You don’t frighten us. Take yourself and your ugly eyes away.”

Haldin stopped before the sitting Razumov. His supple figure, with the white forehead above which the fair hair stood straight up, had an aspect of lofty daring.

“He did not like my eyes,” he said. “And so...here I am.”



Razumov made an effort to speak calmly.

“But pardon me, Victor Victorovitch. We know each other so little.... I don’t see why you....”

“Confidence,” said Haldin.

This word sealed Razumov’s lips as if a hand had been clapped on his mouth. His brain seethed with arguments.

“And so — here you are,” he muttered through his teeth.

The other did not detect the tone of anger. Never suspected it.

“Yes. And nobody knows I am here. You are the last person that could be suspected — should I get caught. That’s an advantage, you see. And then — speaking to a superior mind like yours I can well say all the truth. It occurred to me that you — you have no one belonging to you — no ties, no one to suffer for it if this came out by some means. There have been enough ruined Russian homes as it is. But I don’t see how my passage through your rooms can be ever known. If I should be got hold of, I’ll know how to keep silent — no matter what they may be pleased to do to me,” he added grimly.

He began to walk again while Razumov sat still appalled.

“You thought that — ” he faltered out almost sick with indignation.

“Yes, Razumov. Yes, brother. Some day you shall help to build. You suppose that I am a terrorist, now — a destructor of what is, But consider that the true destroyers are they who destroy the spirit of progress and truth, not the avengers who merely kill the bodies of the persecutors of human dignity. Men like me are necessary to make room for self-contained, thinking men like you. Well, we have made the sacrifice of our lives, but all the same I want to escape if it can be done. It is not my life I want to save, but my power to do. I won’t live idle. Oh no! Don’t make any mistake, Razumov. Men like me are rare. And, besides, an example like this is more awful to oppressors when the perpetrator vanishes without a trace. They sit in their offices and palaces and quake. All I want you to do is to help me to vanish. No great matter that. Only to go by and by and see Ziemianitch for me at that place where I went this morning. Just tell him, ‘He whom you know wants a well-horsed sledge to pull up half an hour after midnight at the seventh lamp-post on the left counting from the upper end of Karabelnaya. If nobody gets in, the sledge is to run round a block or two, so as to come back past the same spot in ten minutes’ time.’”

Razumov wondered why he had not cut short that talk and told this man to go away long before. Was it weakness or what?

He concluded that it was a sound instinct. Haldin must have been seen. It was impossible that some people should not have noticed the face and appearance of the man who threw the second bomb. Haldin was a noticeable person. The police in their thousands must have had his description within the hour. With every moment the danger grew. Sent out to wander in the streets he could not escape being caught in the end.

The police would very soon find out all about him. They would set about discovering a conspiracy. Everybody Haldin had ever known would be in the greatest danger. Unguarded expressions, little facts in themselves innocent would be counted for crimes. Razumov remembered certain words he said, the speeches he had listened to, the harmless gatherings he had attended — it was almost impossible for a student to keep out of that sort of thing, without becoming suspect to his comrades.

Razumov saw himself shut up in a fortress, worried, badgered, perhaps ill-used. He saw himself deported by an administrative order, his life broken, ruined, and robbed of all hope. He saw himself — at best — leading a miserable existence under police supervision, in some small, faraway provincial town, without friends to assist his necessities or even take any steps to alleviate his lot — as others had. Others had fathers, mothers, brothers, relations, connexions, to move heaven and earth on their behalf — he had no one. The very officials that sentenced him some morning would forget his existence before sunset.

He saw his youth pass away from him in misery and half starvation — his strength give way, his mind become an abject thing. He saw himself creeping, broken down and shabby, about the streets — dying unattended in some filthy hole of a room, or on the sordid bed of a Government hospital.

He shuddered. Then the peace of bitter calmness came over him. It was best to keep this man out of the streets till he could be got rid of with some chance of escaping. That was the best that could be done. Razumov, of course, felt the safety of his lonely existence to be permanently endangered. This evening's doings could turn up against him at any time as long as this man lived and the present institutions endured. They appeared to him rational and indestructible at that moment. They had a force of harmony — in contrast with the horrible discord of this man's presence. He hated the man. He said quietly —

“Yes, of course, I will go. ‘You must give me precise directions, and for the rest — depend on me.’”

“Ah! You are a fellow! Collected — cool as a cucumber. A regular Englishman. Where did you get your soul from? There aren’t many like you. Look here, brother! Men like me leave no posterity, but their souls are not lost. No man’s soul is ever lost. It works for itself — or else where would be the sense of self-sacrifice, of martyrdom, of conviction, of faith — the labours of the soul? What will become of my soul when I die in the way I must die — soon — very soon perhaps? It shall not perish. Don’t make a mistake, Razumov. This is not murder — it is war, war. My spirit shall go on warring in some Russian body till all falsehood is swept out of the world. The modern civilization is false, but a new revelation shall come out of Russia. Ha! you say nothing. You are a sceptic. I respect your philosophical scepticism, Razumov, but don’t touch the soul. The Russian soul that lives in all of us. It has a future. It has a mission, I tell you, or else why should I have been moved to do this — reckless — like a butcher — in the middle of all these innocent people — scattering death — I! I!... I wouldn’t hurt a fly!”

“Not so loud,” warned Razumov harshly.

Haldin sat down abruptly, and leaning his head on his folded arms burst into tears. He wept for a long time. The dusk had deepened in the room. Razumov, motionless in sombre wonder, listened to the sobs.

The other raised his head, got up and with an effort mastered his voice.

“Yes. Men like me leave no posterity,” he repeated in a subdued tone, “I have a sister though. She’s with my old mother — I persuaded them to go abroad this year — thank God. Not a bad little girl my sister. She has the most trustful eyes of any human being that ever walked this earth. She will marry well, I hope. She may have children — sons perhaps. Look at me. My father was a Government official in the provinces, He had a little land too. A simple servant of God — a true Russian in his way. His was the soul of obedience. But I am not like him. They say I resemble my mother’s eldest brother, an officer. They shot him in ‘28. Under Nicholas, you know. Haven’t I told you that this is war, war... But God of Justice! This is weary work.”

Razumov, in his chair, leaning his head on his hand, spoke as if from the bottom of an abyss.

“You believe in God, Haldin?”

“There you go catching at words that are wrung from one. What does it matter? What was it the Englishman said: ‘There is a divine soul in

things...’ Devil take him — I don’t remember now. But he spoke the truth. When the day of you thinkers comes don’t you forget what’s divine in the Russian soul — and that’s resignation. Respect that in your intellectual restlessness and don’t let your arrogant wisdom spoil its message to the world. I am speaking to you now like a man with a rope round his neck. What do you imagine I am? A being in revolt? No. It’s you thinkers who are in everlasting revolt. I am one of the resigned. When the necessity of this heavy work came to me and I understood that it had to be done — what did I do? Did I exult? Did I take pride in my purpose? Did I try to weigh its worth and consequences? No! I was resigned. I thought ‘God’s will be done.’“

He threw himself full length on Razumov’s bed and putting the backs of his hands over his eyes remained perfectly motionless and silent. Not even the sound of his breathing could be heard. The dead stillness of the room remained undisturbed till in the darkness Razumov said gloomily —

“Haldin.”

“Yes,” answered the other readily, quite invisible now on the bed and without the slightest stir.

“Isn’t it time for me to start?”

“Yes, brother.” The other was heard, lying still in the darkness as though he were talking in his sleep. “The time has come to put fate to the test.”

He paused, then gave a few lucid directions in the quiet impersonal voice of a man in a trance. Razumov made ready without a word of answer. As he was leaving the room the voice on the bed said after him —

“Go with God, thou silent soul.”

On the landing, moving softly, Razumov locked the door and put the key in his pocket.

## II

The words and events of that evening must have been graven as if with a steel tool on Mr. Razumov’s brain since he was able to write his relation with such fullness and precision a good many months afterwards.

The record of the thoughts which assailed him in the street is even more minute and abundant. They seem to have rushed upon him with the greater freedom because his thinking powers were no longer crushed by Haldin’s presence — the appalling presence of a great crime and the stunning force of a great fanaticism. On looking through the pages of Mr. Razumov’s diary I own that a “rush of thoughts” is not an adequate image.

The more adequate description would be a tumult of thoughts — the faithful reflection of the state of his feelings. The thoughts in themselves were not numerous — they were like the thoughts of most human beings, few and simple — but they cannot be reproduced here in all their exclamatory repetitions which went on in an endless and weary turmoil — for the walk was long.

If to the Western reader they appear shocking, inappropriate, or even improper, it must be remembered that as to the first this may be the effect of my crude statement. For the rest I will only remark here that this is not a story of the West of Europe.

Nations it may be have fashioned their Governments, but the Governments have paid them back in the same coin. It is unthinkable that any young Englishman should find himself in Razumov's situation. This being so it would be a vain enterprise to imagine what he would think. The only safe surmise to make is that he would not think as Mr. Razumov thought at this crisis of his fate. He would not have an hereditary and personal knowledge or the means by which historical autocracy represses ideas, guards its power, and defends its existence. By an act of mental extravagance he might imagine himself arbitrarily thrown into prison, but it would never occur to him unless he were delirious (and perhaps not even then) that he could be beaten with whips as a practical measure either of investigation or of punishment.

This is but a crude and obvious example of the different conditions of Western thought. I don't know that this danger occurred, specially, to Mr. Razumov. No doubt it entered unconsciously into the general dread and the general appallingness of this crisis. Razumov, as has been seen, was aware of more subtle ways in which an individual may be undone by the proceedings of a despotic Government. A simple expulsion from the University (the very least that could happen to him), with an impossibility to continue his studies anywhere, was enough to ruin utterly a young man depending entirely upon the development of his natural abilities for his place in the world. He was a Russian: and for him to be implicated meant simply sinking into the lowest social depths amongst the hopeless and the destitute — the night birds of the city.

The peculiar circumstances of Razumov's parentage, or rather of his lack of parentage, should be taken into the account of his thoughts. And he remembered them too. He had been lately reminded of them in a peculiarly

atrocious way by this fatal Haldin. "Because I haven't that, must everything else be taken away from me?" he thought.

He nerved himself for another effort to go on. Along the roadway sledges glided phantom-like and jingling through a fluttering whiteness on the black face of the night. "For it is a crime," he was saying to himself. "A murder is a murder. Though, of course, some sort of liberal institutions...."

A feeling of horrible sickness came over him. "I must be courageous," he exhorted himself mentally. All his strength was suddenly gone as if taken out by a hand. Then by a mighty effort of will it came back because he was afraid of fainting in the street and being picked up by the police with the key of his lodgings in his pocket. They would find Haldin there, and then, indeed, he would be undone.

Strangely enough it was this fear which seems to have kept him up to the end. The passers-by were rare. They came upon him suddenly, looming up black in the snowflakes close by, then vanishing all at once-without footfalls.

It was the quarter of the very poor. Razumov noticed an elderly woman tied up in ragged shawls. Under the street lamp she seemed a beggar off duty. She walked leisurely in the blizzard as though she had no home to hurry to, she hugged under one arm a round loaf of black bread with an air of guarding a priceless booty: and Razumov averting his glance envied her the peace of her mind and the serenity of her fate.

To one reading Mr. Razumov's narrative it is really a wonder how he managed to keep going as he did along one interminable street after another on pavements that were gradually becoming blocked with snow. It was the thought of Haldin locked up in his rooms and the desperate desire to get rid of his presence which drove him forward. No rational determination had any part in his exertions. Thus, when on arriving at the low eating-house he heard that the man of horses, Ziemianitch, was not there, he could only stare stupidly.

The waiter, a wild-haired youth in tarred boots and a pink shirt, exclaimed, uncovering his pale gums in a silly grin, that Ziemianitch had got his skinful early in the afternoon and had gone away with a bottle under each arm to keep it up amongst the horses — he supposed.

The owner of the vile den, a bony short man in a dirty cloth caftan coming down to his heels, stood by, his hands tucked into his belt, and nodded confirmation.

The reek of spirits, the greasy rancid steam of food got Razumov by the throat. He struck a table with his clenched hand and shouted violently —

“You lie.”

Bleary unwashed faces were turned to his direction. A mild-eyed ragged tramp drinking tea at the next table moved farther away. A murmur of wonder arose with an undertone of uneasiness. A laugh was heard too, and an exclamation, “There! there!” jeeringly soothing. The waiter looked all round and announced to the room —

“The gentleman won’t believe that Ziemianitch is drunk.”

From a distant corner a hoarse voice belonging to a horrible, nondescript, shaggy being with a black face like the muzzle of a bear grunted angrily —

“The cursed driver of thieves. What do we want with his gentlemen here? We are all honest folk in this place.”

Razumov, biting his lip till blood came to keep himself from bursting into imprecations, followed the owner of the den, who, whispering “Come along, little father,” led him into a tiny hole of a place behind the wooden counter, whence proceeded a sound of splashing. A wet and bedraggled creature, a sort of sexless and shivering scarecrow, washed glasses in there, bending over a wooden tub by the light of a tallow dip.

“Yes, little father,” the man in the long caftan said plaintively. He had a brown, cunning little face, a thin greyish beard. Trying to light a tin lantern he hugged it to his breast and talked garrulously the while.

He would show Ziemianitch to the gentleman to prove there were no lies told. And he would show him drunk. His woman, it seems, ran away from him last night. “Such a hag she was! Thin! Pfui!” He spat. They were always running away from that driver of the devil — and he sixty years old too; could never get used to it. But each heart knows sorrow after its own kind and Ziemianitch was a born fool all his days. And then he would fly to the bottle. “‘Who could bear life in our land without the bottle?’ he says. A proper Russian man — the little pig.... Be pleased to follow me.”

Razumov crossed a quadrangle of deep snow enclosed between high walls with innumerable windows. Here and there a dim yellow light hung within the four-square mass of darkness. The house was an enormous slum, a hive of human vermin, a monumental abode of misery towering on the verge of starvation and despair.

In a corner the ground sloped sharply down, and Razumov followed the light of the lantern through a small doorway into a long cavernous place

like a neglected subterranean byre. Deep within, three shaggy little horses tied up to rings hung their heads together, motionless and shadowy in the dim light of the lantern. It must have been the famous team of Haldin's escape. Razumov peered fearfully into the gloom. His guide pawed in the straw with his foot.

"Here he is. Ah! the little pigeon. A true Russian man. 'No heavy hearts for me,' he says. 'Bring out the bottle and take your ugly mug out of my sight.' Ha! ha! ha! That's the fellow he is."

He held the lantern over a prone form of a man, apparently fully dressed for outdoors. His head was lost in a pointed cloth hood. On the other side of a heap of straw protruded a pair of feet in monstrous thick boots.

"Always ready to drive," commented the keeper of the eating-house. "A proper Russian driver that. Saint or devil, night or day is all one to Ziemianitch when his heart is free from sorrow. 'I don't ask who you are, but where you want to go,' he says. He would drive Satan himself to his own abode and come back chirruping to his horses. Many a one he has driven who is clanking his chains in the Nertchinsk mines by this time."

Razumov shuddered.

"Call him, wake him up," he faltered out.

The other set down his light, stepped back and launched a kick at the prostrate sleeper. The man shook at the impact but did not move. At the third kick he grunted but remained inert as before.

The eating-house keeper desisted and fetched a deep sigh.

"You see for yourself how it is. We have done what we can for you."

He picked up the lantern. The intense black spokes of shadow swung about in the circle of light. A terrible fury — the blind rage of self-preservation — possessed Razumov.

"Ah! The vile beast," he bellowed out in an unearthly tone which made the lantern jump and tremble! "I shall wake you! Give me...give me..."

He looked round wildly, seized the handle of a stablefork and rushing forward struck at the prostrate body with inarticulate cries. After a time his cries ceased, and the rain of blows fell in the stillness and shadows of the cellar-like stable. Razumov belaboured Ziemianitch with an insatiable fury, in great volleys of sounding thwacks. Except for the violent movements of Razumov nothing stirred, neither the beaten man nor the spoke-like shadows on the walls. And only the sound of blows was heard. It was a weird scene.



Suddenly there was a sharp crack. The stick broke and half of it flew far away into the gloom beyond the light. At the same time Ziemianitch sat up. At this Razumov became as motionless as the man with the lantern — only his breast heaved for air as if ready to burst.

Some dull sensation of pain must have penetrated at last the consoling night of drunkenness enwrapping the “bright Russian soul” of Haldin’s enthusiastic praise. But Ziemianitch evidently saw nothing. His eyeballs blinked all white in the light once, twice — then the gleam went out. For a moment he sat in the straw with closed eyes with a strange air of weary meditation, then fell over slowly on his side without making the slightest sound. Only the straw rustled a little. Razumov stared wildly, fighting for his breath. After a second or two he heard a light snore.

He flung from him the piece of stick remaining in his grasp, and went off with great hasty strides without looking back once.

After going heedlessly for some fifty yards along the street he walked into a snowdrift and was up to his knees before he stopped.

This recalled him to himself; and glancing about he discovered he had been going in the wrong direction. He retraced his steps, but now at a more moderate pace. When passing before the house he had just left he flourished his fist at the sombre refuge of misery and crime rearing its sinister bulk on the white ground. It had an air of brooding. He let his arm fall by his side — discouraged.

Ziemianitch’s passionate surrender to sorrow and consolation had baffled him. That was the people. A true Russian man! Razumov was glad he had beaten that brute — the “bright soul” of the other. Here they were: the people and the enthusiast.

Between the two he was done for. Between the drunkenness of the peasant incapable of action and the dream-intoxication of the idealist incapable of perceiving the reason of things, and the true character of men. It was a sort of terrible childishness. But children had their masters. “Ah! the stick, the stick, the stern hand,” thought Razumov, longing for power to hurt and destroy.

He was glad he had thrashed that brute. The physical exertion had left his body in a comfortable glow. His mental agitation too was clarified as if all the feverishness had gone out of him in a fit of outward violence. Together with the persisting sense of terrible danger he was conscious now of a tranquil, unquenchable hate.

He walked slower and slower. And indeed, considering the guest he had in his rooms, it was no wonder he lingered on the way. It was like harbouring a pestilential disease that would not perhaps take your life, but would take from you all that made life worth living — a subtle pest that would convert earth into a hell.

What was he doing now? Lying on the bed as if dead, with the back of his hands over his eyes? Razumov had a morbidly vivid vision of Haldin on his bed — the white pillow hollowed by the head, the legs in long boots, the upturned feet. And in his abhorrence he said to himself, “I’ll kill him when I get home.” But he knew very well that that was of no use. The corpse hanging round his neck would be nearly as fatal as the living man. Nothing short of complete annihilation would do. And that was impossible. What then? Must one kill oneself to escape this visitation?

Razumov’s despair was too profoundly tinged with hate to accept that issue.

And yet it was despair — nothing less — at the thought of having to live with Haldin for an indefinite number of days in mortal alarm at every sound. But perhaps when he heard that this “bright soul” of Ziemianitch suffered from a drunken eclipse the fellow would take his infernal resignation somewhere else. And that was not likely on the face of it.

Razumov thought: “I am being crushed — and I can’t even run away.” Other men had somewhere a corner of the earth — some little house in the provinces where they had a right to take their troubles. A material refuge. He had nothing. He had not even a moral refuge — the refuge of confidence. To whom could he go with this tale — in all this great, great land?

Razumov stamped his foot — and under the soft carpet of snow felt the hard ground of Russia, inanimate, cold, inert, like a sullen and tragic mother hiding her face under a winding-sheet — his native soil! — his very own — without a fireside, without a heart!

He cast his eyes upwards and stood amazed. The snow had ceased to fall, and now, as if by a miracle, he saw above his head the clear black sky of the northern winter, decorated with the sumptuous fires of the stars. It was a canopy fit for the resplendent purity of the snows.

Razumov received an almost physical impression of endless space and of countless millions.

He responded to it with the readiness of a Russian who is born to an inheritance of space and numbers. Under the sumptuous immensity of the sky, the snow covered the endless forests, the frozen rivers, the plains of an immense country, obliterating the landmarks, the accidents of the ground, levelling everything under its uniform whiteness, like a monstrous blank page awaiting the record of an inconceivable history. It covered the passive land with its lives of countless people like Ziemianitch and its handful of agitators like this Haldin — murdering foolishly.

It was a sort of sacred inertia. Razumov felt a respect for it. A voice seemed to cry within him, “Don’t touch it.” It was a guarantee of duration, of safety, while the travail of maturing destiny went on — a work not of revolutions with their passionate levity of action and their shifting impulses — but of peace. What it needed was not the conflicting aspirations of a people, but a will strong and one: it wanted not the babble of many voices, but a man — strong and one!

Razumov stood on the point of conversion. He was fascinated by its approach, by its overpowering logic. For a train of thought is never false. The falsehood lies deep in the necessities of existence, in secret fears and half-formed ambitions, in the secret confidence combined with a secret mistrust of ourselves, in the love of hope and the dread of uncertain days.

In Russia, the land of spectral ideas and disembodied aspirations, many brave minds have turned away at last from the vain and endless conflict to the one great historical fact of the land. They turned to autocracy for the peace of their patriotic conscience as a weary unbeliever, touched by grace, turns to the faith of his fathers for the blessing of spiritual rest. Like other Russians before him, Razumov, in conflict with himself, felt the touch of grace upon his forehead.

“Haldin means disruption,” he thought to himself, beginning to walk again. “What is he with his indignation, with his talk of bondage — with his talk of God’s justice? All that means disruption. Better that thousands should suffer than that a people should become a disintegrated mass, helpless like dust in the wind. Obscurantism is better than the light of incendiary torches. The seed germinates in the night. Out of the dark soil springs the perfect plant. But a volcanic eruption is sterile, the ruin of the fertile ground. And am I, who love my country — who have nothing but that to love and put my faith in — am I to have my future, perhaps my usefulness, ruined by this sanguinary fanatic?”

The grace entered into Razumov. He believed now in the man who would come at the appointed time.

What is a throne? A few pieces of wood upholstered in velvet. But a throne is a seat of power too. The form of government is the shape of a tool — an instrument. But twenty thousand bladders inflated by the noblest sentiments and jostling against each other in the air are a miserable incumbrance of space, holding no power, possessing no will, having nothing to give.

He went on thus, heedless of the way, holding a discourse with himself with extraordinary abundance and facility. Generally his phrases came to him slowly, after a conscious and painstaking wooing. Some superior power had inspired him with a flow of masterly argument as certain converted sinners become overwhelmingly loquacious.

He felt an austere exultation.

“What are the luridly smoky lucubrations of that fellow to the clear grasp of my intellect?” he thought. “Is not this my country? Have I not got forty million brothers?” he asked himself, unanswerably victorious in the silence of his breast. And the fearful thrashing he had given the inanimate Ziemianitch seemed to him a sign of intimate union, a pathetically severe necessity of brotherly love. “No! If I must suffer let me at least suffer for my convictions, not for a crime my reason — my cool superior reason — rejects.”

He ceased to think for a moment. The silence in his breast was complete. But he felt a suspicious uneasiness, such as we may experience when we enter an unlighted strange place — the irrational feeling that something may jump upon us in the dark — the absurd dread of the unseen.

Of course he was far from being a moss-grown reactionary. Everything was not for the best. Despotic bureaucracy... abuses... corruption... and so on. Capable men were wanted. Enlightened intelligences. Devoted hearts. But absolute power should be preserved — the tool ready for the man — for the great autocrat of the future. Razumov believed in him. The logic of history made him unavoidable. The state of the people demanded him, “What else?” he asked himself ardently, “could move all that mass in one direction? Nothing could. Nothing but a single will.”

He was persuaded that he was sacrificing his personal longings of liberalism — rejecting the attractive error for the stern Russian truth.

“That’s patriotism,” he observed mentally, and added, “There’s no stopping midway on that road,” and then remarked to himself, “I am not a coward.”

And again there was a dead silence in Razumov’s breast. He walked with lowered head, making room for no one. He walked slowly and his thoughts returning spoke within him with solemn slowness.

“What is this Haldin? And what am I? Only two grains of sand. But a great mountain is made up of just such insignificant grains. And the death of a man or of many men is an insignificant thing. Yet we combat a contagious pestilence. Do I want his death? No! I would save him if I could — but no one can do that — he is the withered member which must be cut off. If I must perish through him, let me at least not perish with him, and associated against my will with his sombre folly that understands nothing either of men or things. Why should I leave a false memory?”

It passed through his mind that there was no one in the world who cared what sort of memory he left behind him. He exclaimed to himself instantly, “Perish vainly for a falsehood!... What a miserable fate!”

He was now in a more animated part of the town. He did not remark the crash of two colliding sledges close to the curb. The driver of one bellowed tearfully at his fellow —

“Oh, thou vile wretch!”

This hoarse yell, let out nearly in his ear, disturbed Razumov. He shook his head impatiently and went on looking straight before him. Suddenly on the snow, stretched on his back right across his path, he saw Haldin, solid, distinct, real, with his inverted hands over his eyes, clad in a brown close-fitting coat and long boots. He was lying out of the way a little, as though he had selected that place on purpose. The snow round him was untrodden.

This hallucination had such a solidity of aspect that the first movement of Razumov was to reach for his pocket to assure himself that the key of his rooms was there. But he checked the impulse with a disdainful curve of his lips. He understood. His thought, concentrated intensely on the figure left lying on his bed, had culminated in this extraordinary illusion of the sight. Razumov tackled the phenomenon calmly. With a stern face, without a check and gazing far beyond the vision, he walked on, experiencing nothing but a slight tightening of the chest. After passing he turned his head for a glance, and saw only the unbroken track of his footsteps over the place where the breast of the phantom had been lying.

Razumov walked on and after a little time whispered his wonder to himself.

“Exactly as if alive! Seemed to breathe! And right in my way too! I have had an extraordinary experience.”

He made a few steps and muttered through his set teeth —

“I shall give him up.”

Then for some twenty yards or more all was blank. He wrapped his cloak closer round him. He pulled his cap well forward over his eyes.

“Betray. A great word. What is betrayal? They talk of a man betraying his country, his friends, his sweetheart. There must be a moral bond first. All a man can betray is his conscience. And how is my conscience engaged here; by what bond of common faith, of common conviction, am I obliged to let that fanatical idiot drag me down with him? On the contrary — every obligation of true courage is the other way.”

Razumov looked round from under his cap.

“What can the prejudice of the world reproach me with? Have I provoked his confidence? No! Have I by a single word, look, or gesture given him reason to suppose that I accepted his trust in me? No! It is true that I consented to go and see his Ziemianitch. Well, I have been to see him. And I broke a stick on his back too — the brute.”

Something seemed to turn over in his head bringing uppermost a singularly hard, clear facet of his brain.

“It would be better, however,” he reflected with a quite different mental accent, “to keep that circumstance altogether to myself.”

He had passed beyond the turn leading to his lodgings, and had reached a wide and fashionable street. Some shops were still open, and all the restaurants. Lights fell on the pavement where men in expensive fur coats, with here and there the elegant figure of a woman, walked with an air of leisure. Razumov looked at them with the contempt of an austere believer for the frivolous crowd. It was the world — those officers, dignitaries, men of fashion, officials, members of the Yacht Club. The event of the morning affected them all. What would they say if they knew what this student in a cloak was going to do?

“Not one of them is capable of feeling and thinking as deeply as I can. How many of them could accomplish an act of conscience?”

Razumov lingered in the well-lighted street. He was firmly decided. Indeed, it could hardly be called a decision. He had simply discovered what

he had meant to do all along. And yet he felt the need of some other mind's sanction.

With something resembling anguish he said to himself —

“I want to be understood.” The universal aspiration with all its profound and melancholy meaning assailed heavily Razumov, who, amongst eighty millions of his kith and kin, had no heart to which he could open himself.

The attorney was not to be thought of. He despised the little agent of chicane too much. One could not go and lay one's conscience before the policeman at the corner. Neither was Razumov anxious to go to the chief of his district's police — a common-looking person whom he used to see sometimes in the street in a shabby uniform and with a smouldering cigarette stuck to his lower lip. “He would begin by locking me up most probably. At any rate, he is certain to get excited and create an awful commotion,” thought Razumov practically.

An act of conscience must be done with outward dignity.

Razumov longed desperately for a word of advice, for moral support. Who knows what true loneliness is — not the conventional word, but the naked terror? To the lonely themselves it wears a mask. The most miserable outcast hugs some memory or some illusion. Now and then a fatal conjunction of events may lift the veil for an instant. For an instant only. No human being could bear a steady view of moral solitude without going mad.

Razumov had reached that point of vision. To escape from it he embraced for a whole minute the delirious purpose of rushing to his lodgings and flinging himself on his knees by the side of the bed with the dark figure stretched on it; to pour out a full confession in passionate words that would stir the whole being of that man to its innermost depths; that would end in embraces and tears; in an incredible fellowship of souls — such as the world had never seen. It was sublime!

Inwardly he wept and trembled already. But to the casual eyes that were cast upon him he was aware that he appeared as a tranquil student in a cloak, out for a leisurely stroll. He noted, too, the sidelong, brilliant glance of a pretty woman — with a delicate head, and covered in the hairy skins of wild beasts down to her feet, like a frail and beautiful savage — which rested for a moment with a sort of mocking tenderness on the deep abstraction of that good-looking young man.

Suddenly Razumov stood still. The glimpse of a passing grey whisker, caught and lost in the same instant, had evoked the complete image of

Prince K — -, the man who once had pressed his hand as no other man had pressed it — a faint but lingering pressure like a secret sign, like a half-unwilling caress.

And Razumov marvelled at himself. Why did he not think of him before!

“A senator, a dignitary, a great personage, the very man — He!”

A strange softening emotion came over Razumov — made his knees shake a little. He repressed it with a new-born austerity. All that sentiment was pernicious nonsense. He couldn't be quick enough; and when he got into a sledge he shouted to the driver — ”to the K — - Palace. Get on — you! Fly!” The startled moujik, bearded up to the very whites of his eyes, answered obsequiously —

“I hear, your high Nobility.”

It was lucky for Razumov that Prince K — - was not a man of timid character. On the day of Mr. de P — -'s murder an extreme alarm and despondency prevailed in the high official spheres.

Prince K — -, sitting sadly alone in his study, was told by his alarmed servants that a mysterious young man had forced his way into the hall, refused to tell his name and the nature of his business, and would not move from there till he had seen his Excellency in private. Instead of locking himself up and telephoning for the police, as nine out of ten high personages would have done that evening, the Prince gave way to curiosity and came quietly to the door of his study.

In the hall, the front door standing wide open, he recognised at once Razumov, pale as death, his eyes blazing, and surrounded by perplexed lackeys.

The Prince was vexed beyond measure, and even indignant. But his humane instincts and a subtle sense of self-respect could not allow him to let this young man be thrown out into the street by base menials. He retreated unseen into his room, and after a little rang his bell. Razumov heard in the hall an ominously raised harsh voice saying somewhere far away —

“Show the gentleman in here.”

Razumov walked in without a tremor. He felt himself invulnerable — raised far above the shallowness of common judgment. Though he saw the Prince looking at him with black displeasure, the lucidity of his mind, of which he was very conscious, gave him an extraordinary assurance. He was not asked to sit down.



Half an hour later they appeared in the hall together. The lackeys stood up, and the Prince, moving with difficulty on his gouty feet, was helped into his furs. The carriage had been ordered before. When the great double door was flung open with a crash, Razumov, who had been standing silent with a lost gaze but with every faculty intensely on the alert, heard the Prince's voice —

“Your arm, young man.”

The mobile, superficial mind of the ex-Guards officer, man of showy missions, experienced in nothing but the arts of gallant intrigue and worldly success, had been equally impressed by the more obvious difficulties of such a situation and by Razumov's quiet dignity in stating them.

He had said, “No. Upon the whole I can't condemn the step you ventured to take by coming to me with your story. It is not an affair for police understrappers. The greatest importance is attached to.... Set your mind at rest. I shall see you through this most extraordinary and difficult situation.”

Then the Prince rose to ring the bell, and Razumov, making a short bow, had said with deference —

“I have trusted my instinct. A young man having no claim upon anybody in the world has in an hour of trial involving his deepest political convictions turned to an illustrious Russian — that's all.”

The Prince had exclaimed hastily —

“You have done well.”

In the carriage — it was a small brougham on sleigh runners — Razumov broke the silence in a voice that trembled slightly.

“My gratitude surpasses the greatness of my presumption.”

He gasped, feeling unexpectedly in the dark a momentary pressure on his arm.

“You have done well,” repeated the Prince.

When the carriage stopped the Prince murmured to Razumov, who had never ventured a single question —

“The house of General T — -.”

In the middle of the snow-covered roadway blazed a great bonfire. Some Cossacks, the bridles of their horses over the arm, were warming themselves around. Two sentries stood at the door, several gendarmes lounged under the great carriage gateway, and on the first-floor landing two orderlies rose and stood at attention. Razumov walked at the Prince's elbow.

A surprising quantity of hot-house plants in pots cumbered the floor of the ante-room. Servants came forward. A young man in civilian clothes arrived hurriedly, was whispered to, bowed low, and exclaiming zealously, "Certainly — this minute," fled within somewhere. The Prince signed to Razumov.

They passed through a suite of reception-rooms all barely lit and one of them prepared for dancing. The wife of the General had put off her party. An atmosphere of consternation pervaded the place. But the General's own room, with heavy sombre hangings, two massive desks, and deep armchairs, had all the lights turned on. The footman shut the door behind them and they waited.

There was a coal fire in an English grate; Razumov had never before seen such a fire; and the silence of the room was like the silence of the grave; perfect, measureless, for even the clock on the mantelpiece made no sound. Filling a corner, on a black pedestal, stood a quarter-life-size smooth-limbed bronze of an adolescent figure, running. The Prince observed in an undertone —

"Spontini's. 'Flight of Youth.' Exquisite."

"Admirable," assented Razumov faintly.

They said nothing more after this, the Prince silent with his grand air, Razumov staring at the statue. He was worried by a sensation resembling the gnawing of hunger.

He did not turn when he heard an inner door fly open, and a quick footstep, muffled on the carpet.

The Prince's voice immediately exclaimed, thick with excitement —

"We have got him — ce miserable. A worthy young man came to me — No! It's incredible...."

Razumov held his breath before the bronze as if expecting a crash. Behind his back a voice he had never heard before insisted politely —

"Asseyez-vous donc."

The Prince almost shrieked, "Mais comprenez-vous, mon cher! L'assassin! the murderer — we have got him...."

Razumov spun round. The General's smooth big cheeks rested on the stiff collar of his uniform. He must have been already looking at Razumov, because that last saw the pale blue eyes fastened on him coldly.

The Prince from a chair waved an impressive hand.

“This is a most honourable young man whom Providence itself... Mr. Razumov.”

The General acknowledged the introduction by frowning at Razumov, who did not make the slightest movement.

Sitting down before his desk the General listened with compressed lips. It was impossible to detect any sign of emotion on his face.

Razumov watched the immobility of the fleshy profile. But it lasted only a moment, till the Prince had finished; and when the General turned to the providential young man, his florid complexion, the blue, unbelieving eyes and the bright white flash of an automatic smile had an air of jovial, careless cruelty. He expressed no wonder at the extraordinary story — no pleasure or excitement — no incredulity either. He betrayed no sentiment whatever. Only with a politeness almost deferential suggested that “the bird might have flown while Mr. — Mr. Razumov was running about the streets.”

Razumov advanced to the middle of the room and said, “The door is locked and I have the key in my pocket.”

His loathing for the man was intense. It had come upon him so unawares that he felt he had not kept it out of his voice. The General looked up at him thoughtfully, and Razumov grinned.

All this went over the head of Prince K — - seated in a deep armchair, very tired and impatient.

“A student called Haldin,” said the General thoughtfully.

Razumov ceased to grin.

“That is his name,” he said unnecessarily loud. “Victor Victorovitch Haldin — a student.”

The General shifted his position a little.

“How is he dressed? Would you have the goodness to tell me?”

Razumov angrily described Haldin’s clothing in a few jerky words. The General stared all the time, then addressing the Prince —

“We were not without some indications,” he said in French. “A good woman who was in the street described to us somebody wearing a dress of the sort as the thrower of the second bomb. We have detained her at the Secretariat, and every one in a Tcherkess coat we could lay our hands on has been brought to her to look at. She kept on crossing herself and shaking her head at them. It was exasperating....” He turned to Razumov, and in Russian, with friendly reproach —

“Take a chair, Mr. Razumov — do. Why are you standing?”

Razumov sat down carelessly and looked at the General.

“This goggle-eyed imbecile understands nothing,” he thought.

The Prince began to speak loftily.

“Mr. Razumov is a young man of conspicuous abilities. I have it at heart that his future should not....”

“Certainly,” interrupted the General, with a movement of the hand. “Has he any weapons on him, do you think, Mr. Razumov?”

The General employed a gentle musical voice. Razumov answered with suppressed irritation —

“No. But my razors are lying about — you understand.”

The General lowered his head approvingly.

“Precisely.”

Then to the Prince, explaining courteously —

“We want that bird alive. It will be the devil if we can’t make him sing a little before we are done with him.”

The grave-like silence of the room with its mute clock fell upon the polite modulations of this terrible phrase. The Prince, hidden in the chair, made no sound.

The General unexpectedly developed a thought.

“Fidelity to menaced institutions on which depend the safety of a throne and of a people is no child’s play. We know that, mon Prince, and — tenez — ” he went on with a sort of flattering harshness, “Mr. Razumov here begins to understand that too.”

His eyes which he turned upon Razumov seemed to be starting out of his head. This grotesqueness of aspect no longer shocked Razumov. He said with gloomy conviction —

“Haldin will never speak.”

“That remains to be seen,” muttered the General.

“I am certain,” insisted Razumov. “A man like this never speaks.... Do you imagine that I am here from fear?” he added violently. He felt ready to stand by his opinion of Haldin to the last extremity.

“Certainly not,” protested the General, with great simplicity of tone. “And I don’t mind telling you, Mr. Razumov, that if he had not come with his tale to such a staunch and loyal Russian as you, he would have disappeared like a stone in the water... which would have had a detestable

effect,” he added, with a bright, cruel smile under his stony stare. “So you see, there can be no suspicion of any fear here.”

The Prince intervened, looking at Razumov round the back of the armchair.

“Nobody doubts the moral soundness of your action. Be at ease in that respect, pray.”

He turned to the General uneasily.

“That’s why I am here. You may be surprised why I should....”

The General hastened to interrupt.

“Not at all. Extremely natural. You saw the importance....”

“Yes,” broke in the Prince. “And I venture to ask insistently that mine and Mr. Razumov’s intervention should not become public. He is a young man of promise — of remarkable aptitudes.”

“I haven’t a doubt of it,” murmured the General. “He inspires confidence.”

“All sorts of pernicious views are so widespread nowadays — they taint such unexpected quarters — that, monstrous as it seems, he might suffer ...his studies...his...”

The General, with his elbows on the desk, took his head between his hands.

“Yes. Yes. I am thinking it out.... How long is it since you left him at your rooms, Mr. Razumov?”

Razumov mentioned the hour which nearly corresponded with the time of his distracted flight from the big slum house. He had made up his mind to keep Ziemianitch out of the affair completely. To mention him at all would mean imprisonment for the “bright soul,” perhaps cruel floggings, and in the end a journey to Siberia in chains. Razumov, who had beaten Ziemianitch, felt for him now a vague, remorseful tenderness.

The General, giving way for the first time to his secret sentiments, exclaimed contemptuously —

“And you say he came in to make you this confidence like this — for nothing — a propos des bottes.”

Razumov felt danger in the air. The merciless suspicion of despotism had spoken openly at last. Sudden fear sealed Razumov’s lips. The silence of the room resembled now the silence of a deep dungeon, where time does not count, and a suspect person is sometimes forgotten for ever. But the Prince came to the rescue.

“Providence itself has led the wretch in a moment of mental aberration to seek Mr. Razumov on the strength of some old, utterly misinterpreted exchange of ideas — some sort of idle speculative conversation — months ago — I am told — and completely forgotten till now by Mr. Razumov.”

“Mr. Razumov,” queried the General meditatively, after a short silence, “do you often indulge in speculative conversation?”

“No, Excellency,” answered Razumov, coolly, in a sudden access of self-confidence. “I am a man of deep convictions. Crude opinions are in the air. They are not always worth combating. But even the silent contempt of a serious mind may be misinterpreted by headlong utopists.”

The General stared from between his hands. Prince K — - murmured —

“A serious young man. Un esprit superieur.”

“I see that, mon cher Prince,” said the General. “Mr. Razumov is quite safe with me. I am interested in him. He has, it seems, the great and useful quality of inspiring confidence. What I was wondering at is why the other should mention anything at all — I mean even the bare fact alone — if his object was only to obtain temporary shelter for a few hours. For, after all, nothing was easier than to say nothing about it unless, indeed, he were trying, under a crazy misapprehension of your true sentiments, to enlist your assistance — eh, Mr. Razumov?”

It seemed to Razumov that the floor was moving slightly. This grotesque man in a tight uniform was terrible. It was right that he should be terrible.

“I can see what your Excellency has in your mind. But I can only answer that I don’t know why.”

“I have nothing in my mind,” murmured the General, with gentle surprise.

“I am his prey — his helpless prey,” thought Razumov. The fatigues and the disgusts of that afternoon, the need to forget, the fear which he could not keep off, reawakened his hate for Haldin.

“Then I can’t help your Excellency. I don’t know what he meant. I only know there was a moment when I wished to kill him. There was also a moment when I wished myself dead. I said nothing. I was overcome. I provoked no confidence — I asked for no explanations — ”

Razumov seemed beside himself; but his mind was lucid. It was really a calculated outburst.

“It is rather a pity,” the General said, “that you did not. Don’t you know at all what he means to do?” Razumov calmed down and saw an opening

there.

“He told me he was in hopes that a sledge would meet him about half an hour after midnight at the seventh lamp-post on the left from the upper end of Karabelnaya. At any rate, he meant to be there at that time. He did not even ask me for a change of clothes.”

“Ah voila!” said the General, turning to Prince K with an air of satisfaction. “There is a way to keep your protege, Mr. Razumov, quite clear of any connexion with the actual arrest. We shall be ready for that gentleman in Karabelnaya.”

The Prince expressed his gratitude. There was real emotion in his voice. Razumov, motionless, silent, sat staring at the carpet. The General turned to him.

“Half an hour after midnight. Till then we have to depend on you, Mr. Razumov. You don’t think he is likely to change his purpose?”

“How can I tell?” said Razumov. “Those men are not of the sort that ever changes its purpose.”

“What men do you mean?”

“Fanatical lovers of liberty in general. Liberty with a capital L, Excellency. Liberty that means nothing precise. Liberty in whose name crimes are committed.”

The General murmured —

“I detest rebels of every kind. I can’t help it. It’s my nature!”

He clenched a fist and shook it, drawing back his arm. “They shall be destroyed, then.”

“They have made a sacrifice of their lives beforehand,” said Razumov with malicious pleasure and looking the General straight in the face. “If Haldin does change his purpose to-night, you may depend on it that it will not be to save his life by flight in some other way. He would have thought then of something else to attempt. But that is not likely.”

The General repeated as if to himself, “They shall be destroyed.”

Razumov assumed an impenetrable expression.

The Prince exclaimed —

“What a terrible necessity!”

The General’s arm was lowered slowly.

“One comfort there is. That brood leaves no posterity. I’ve always said it, one effort, pitiless, persistent, steady — and we are done with them for ever.”

Razumov thought to himself that this man entrusted with so much arbitrary power must have believed what he said or else he could not have gone on bearing the responsibility.

“I detest rebels. These subversive minds! These intellectual debauches! My existence has been built on fidelity. It’s a feeling. To defend it I am ready to lay down my life — and even my honour — if that were needed. But pray tell me what honour can there be as against rebels — against people that deny God Himself — perfect unbelievers! Brutes. It is horrible to think of.”

During this tirade Razumov, facing the General, had nodded slightly twice. Prince K — -, standing on one side with his grand air, murmured, casting up his eyes —

“Helas!”

Then lowering his glance and with great decision declared —

“This young man, General, is perfectly fit to apprehend the bearing of your memorable words.”

The General’s whole expression changed from dull resentment to perfect urbanity.

“I would ask now, Mr. Razumov,” he said, “to return to his home. Note that I don’t ask Mr. Razumov whether he has justified his absence to his guest. No doubt he did this sufficiently. But I don’t ask. Mr. Razumov inspires confidence. It is a great gift. I only suggest that a more prolonged absence might awaken the criminal’s suspicions and induce him perhaps to change his plans.”

He rose and with a scrupulous courtesy escorted his visitors to the ante-room encumbered with flower-pots.

Razumov parted with the Prince at the corner of a street. In the carriage he had listened to speeches where natural sentiment struggled with caution. Evidently the Prince was afraid of encouraging any hopes of future intercourse. But there was a touch of tenderness in the voice uttering in the dark the guarded general phrases of goodwill. And the Prince too said —

“I have perfect confidence in you, Mr. Razumov.”

“They all, it seems, have confidence in me,” thought Razumov dully. He had an indulgent contempt for the man sitting shoulder to shoulder with him in the confined space. Probably he was afraid of scenes with his wife. She was said to be proud and violent.



It seemed to him bizarre that secrecy should play such a large part in the comfort and safety of lives. But he wanted to put the Prince's mind at ease; and with a proper amount of emphasis he said that, being conscious of some small abilities and confident in his power of work, he trusted his future to his own exertions. He expressed his gratitude for the helping hand. Such dangerous situations did not occur twice in the course of one life — he added.

“And you have met this one with a firmness of mind and correctness of feeling which give me a high idea of your worth,” the Prince said solemnly. “You have now only to persevere — to persevere.”

On getting out on the pavement Razumov saw an ungloved hand extended to him through the lowered window of the brougham. It detained his own in its grasp for a moment, while the light of a street lamp fell upon the Prince's long face and old-fashioned grey whiskers.

“I hope you are perfectly reassured now as to the consequences...”

“After what your Excellency has condescended to do for me, I can only rely on my conscience.”

“Adieu,” said the whiskered head with feeling.

Razumov bowed. The brougham glided away with a slight swish in the snow — he was alone on the edge of the pavement.

He said to himself that there was nothing to think about, and began walking towards his home.

He walked quietly. It was a common experience to walk thus home to bed after an evening spent somewhere with his fellows or in the cheaper seats of a theatre. After he had gone a little way the familiarity of things got hold of him. Nothing was changed. There was the familiar corner; and when he turned it he saw the familiar dim light of the provision shop kept by a German woman. There were loaves of stale bread, bunches of onions and strings of sausages behind the small window-panes. They were closing it. The sickly lame fellow whom he knew so well by sight staggered out into the snow embracing a large shutter.

Nothing would change. There was the familiar gateway yawning black with feeble glimmers marking the arches of the different staircases.

The sense of life's continuity depended on trifling bodily impressions. The trivialities of daily existence were an armour for the soul. And this thought reinforced the inward quietness of Razumov as he began to climb the stairs familiar to his feet in the dark, with his hand on the familiar

clammy banister. The exceptional could not prevail against the material contacts which make one day resemble another. To-morrow would be like yesterday.

It was only on the stage that the unusual was outwardly acknowledged.

"I suppose," thought Razumov, "that if I had made up my mind to blow out my brains on the landing I would be going up these stairs as quietly as I am doing it now. What's a man to do? What must be must be. Extraordinary things do happen. But when they have happened they are done with. Thus, too, when the mind is made up. That question is done with. And the daily concerns, the familiarities of our thought swallow it up — and the life goes on as before with its mysterious and secret sides quite out of sight, as they should be. Life is a public thing."

Razumov unlocked his door and took the key out; entered very quietly and bolted the door behind him carefully.

He thought, "He hears me," and after bolting the door he stood still holding his breath. There was not a sound. He crossed the bare outer room, stepping deliberately in the darkness. Entering the other, he felt all over his table for the matchbox. The silence, but for the groping of his hand, was profound. Could the fellow be sleeping so soundly?

He struck a light and looked at the bed. Haldin was lying on his back as before, only both his hands were under his head. His eyes were open. He stared at the ceiling.

Razumov held the match up. He saw the clear-cut features, the firm chin, the white forehead and the topknot of fair hair against the white pillow. There he was, lying flat on his back. Razumov thought suddenly, "I have walked over his chest."

He continued to stare till the match burnt itself out; then struck another and lit the lamp in silence without looking towards the bed any more. He had turned his back on it and was hanging his coat on a peg when he heard Haldin sigh profoundly, then ask in a tired voice —

"Well! And what have you arranged?"

The emotion was so great that Razumov was glad to put his hands against the wall. A diabolical impulse to say, "I have given you up to the police," frightened him exceedingly. But he did not say that. He said, without turning round, in a muffled voice —

"It's done."

Again he heard Haldin sigh. He walked to the table, sat down with the lamp before him, and only then looked towards the bed.

In the distant corner of the large room far away from the lamp, which was small and provided with a very thick china shade, Haldin appeared like a dark and elongated shape — rigid with the immobility of death. This body seemed to have less substance than its own phantom walked over by Razumov in the street white with snow. It was more alarming in its shadowy, persistent reality than the distinct but vanishing illusion.

Haldin was heard again.

“You must have had a walk — such a walk,...” he murmured deprecatingly. “This weather....”

Razumov answered with energy —

“Horrible walk.... A nightmare of a walk.”

He shuddered audibly. Haldin sighed once more, then —

“And so you have seen Ziemianitch — brother?”

“I’ve seen him.”

Razumov, remembering the time he had spent with the Prince, thought it prudent to add, “I had to wait some time.”

“A character — eh? It’s extraordinary what a sense of the necessity of freedom there is in that man. And he has sayings too — simple, to the point, such as only the people can invent in their rough sagacity. A character that....”

“I, you understand, haven’t had much opportunity....” Razumov muttered through his teeth.

Haldin continued to stare at the ceiling.

“You see, brother, I have been a good deal in that house of late. I used to take there books — leaflets. Not a few of the poor people who live there can read. And, you see, the guests for the feast of freedom must be sought for in byways and hedges. The truth is, I have almost lived in that house of late. I slept sometimes in the stable. There is a stable....”

“That’s where I had my interview with Ziemianitch,” interrupted Razumov gently. A mocking spirit entered into him and he added, “It was satisfactory in a sense. I came away from it much relieved.”

“Ah! he’s a fellow,” went on Haldin, talking slowly at the ceiling. “I came to know him in that way, you see. For some weeks now, ever since I resigned myself to do what had to be done, I tried to isolate myself. I gave up my rooms. What was the good of exposing a decent widow woman to

the risk of being worried out of her mind by the police? I gave up seeing any of our comrades....”

Razumov drew to himself a half-sheet of paper and began to trace lines on it with a pencil.

“Upon my word,” he thought angrily, “he seems to have thought of everybody’s safety but mine.”

Haldin was talking on.

“This morning — ah! this morning — that was different. How can I explain to you? Before the deed was done I wandered at night and lay hid in the day, thinking it out, and I felt restful. Sleepless but restful. What was there for me to torment myself about? But this morning — after! Then it was that I became restless. I could not have stopped in that big house full of misery. The miserable of this world can’t give you peace. Then when that silly caretaker began to shout, I said to myself, ‘There is a young man in this town head and shoulders above common prejudices.’”

“Is he laughing at me?” Razumov asked himself, going on with his aimless drawing of triangles and squares. And suddenly he thought: “My behaviour must appear to him strange. Should he take fright at my manner and rush off somewhere I shall be undone completely. That infernal General...”

He dropped the pencil and turned abruptly towards the bed with the shadowy figure extended full length on it — so much more indistinct than the one over whose breast he had walked without faltering. Was this, too, a phantom?

The silence had lasted a long time. “He is no longer here,” was the thought against which Razumov struggled desperately, quite frightened at its absurdity. “He is already gone and this...only...”

He could resist no longer. He sprang to his feet, saying aloud, “I am intolerably anxious,” and in a few headlong strides stood by the side of the bed. His hand fell lightly on Haldin’s shoulder, and directly he felt its reality he was beset by an insane temptation to grip that exposed throat and squeeze the breath out of that body, lest it should escape his custody, leaving only a phantom behind.

Haldin did not stir a limb, but his overshadowed eyes moving a little gazed upwards at Razumov with wistful gratitude for this manifestation of feeling.

Razumov turned away and strode up and down the room. "It would have been possibly a kindness," he muttered to himself, and was appalled by the nature of that apology for a murderous intention his mind had found somewhere within him. And all the same he could not give it up. He became lucid about it. "What can he expect?" he thought. "The halter — in the end. And I...."

This argument was interrupted by Haldin's voice.

"Why be anxious for me? They can kill my body, but they cannot exile my soul from this world. I tell you what — I believe in this world so much that I cannot conceive eternity otherwise than as a very long life. That is perhaps the reason I am so ready to die."

"H'm," muttered Razumov, and biting his lower lip he continued to walk up and down and to carry on his strange argument.

Yes, to a man in such a situation — of course it would be an act of kindness. The question, however, was not how to be kind, but how to be firm. He was a slippery customer.

"I too, Victor Victorovitch, believe in this world of ours," he said with force. "I too, while I live.... But you seem determined to haunt it. You can't seriously...mean..."

The voice of the motionless Haldin began —

"Haunt it! Truly, the oppressors of thought which quickens the world, the destroyers of souls which aspire to perfection of human dignity, they shall be haunted. As to the destroyers of my mere body, I have forgiven them beforehand."

Razumov had stopped apparently to listen, but at the same time he was observing his own sensations. He was vexed with himself for attaching so much importance to what Haldin said.

"The fellow's mad," he thought firmly, but this opinion did not mollify him towards Haldin. It was a particularly impudent form of lunacy — and when it got loose in the sphere of public life of a country, it was obviously the duty of every good citizen....

This train of thought broke off short there and was succeeded by a paroxysm of silent hatred towards Haldin, so intense that Razumov hastened to speak at random.

"Yes. Eternity, of course. I, too, can't very well represent it to myself.... I imagine it, however, as something quiet and dull. There would be nothing unexpected — don't you see? The element of time would be wanting."

He pulled out his watch and gazed at it. Haldin turned over on his side and looked on intently.

Razumov got frightened at this movement. A slippery customer this fellow with a phantom. It was not midnight yet. He hastened on —

“And unfathomable mysteries! Can you conceive secret places in Eternity? Impossible. Whereas life is full of them. There are secrets of birth, for instance. One carries them on to the grave. There is something comical...but never mind. And there are secret motives of conduct. A man’s most open actions have a secret side to them. That is interesting and so unfathomable! For instance, a man goes out of a room for a walk. Nothing more trivial in appearance. And yet it may be momentous. He comes back — he has seen perhaps a drunken brute, taken particular notice of the snow on the ground — and behold he is no longer the same man. The most unlikely things have a secret power over one’s thoughts — the grey whiskers of a particular person — the goggle eyes of another.”

Razumov’s forehead was moist. He took a turn or two in the room, his head low and smiling to himself viciously.

“Have you ever reflected on the power of goggle eyes and grey whiskers? Excuse me. You seem to think I must be crazy to talk in this vein at such a time. But I am not talking lightly. I have seen instances. It has happened to me once to be talking to a man whose fate was affected by physical facts of that kind. And the man did not know it. Of course, it was a case of conscience, but the material facts such as these brought about the solution.... And you tell me, Victor Victorovitch, not to be anxious! Why! I am responsible for you,” Razumov almost shrieked.

He avoided with difficulty a burst of Mephistophelian laughter. Haldin, very pale, raised himself on his elbow.

“And the surprises of life,” went on Razumov, after glancing at the other uneasily. “Just consider their astonishing nature. A mysterious impulse induces you to come here. I don’t say you have done wrong. Indeed, from a certain point of view you could not have done better. You might have gone to a man with affections and family ties. You have such ties yourself. As to me, you know I have been brought up in an educational institute where they did not give us enough to eat. To talk of affection in such a connexion — you perceive yourself.... As to ties, the only ties I have in the world are social. I must get acknowledged in some way before I can act at all. I sit here working.... And don’t you think I am working for progress too? I’ve

got to find my own ideas of the true way.... Pardon me,” continued Razumov, after drawing breath and with a short, throaty laugh, “but I haven’t inherited a revolutionary inspiration together with a resemblance from an uncle.”

He looked again at his watch and noticed with sickening disgust that there were yet a good many minutes to midnight. He tore watch and chain off his waistcoat and laid them on the table well in the circle of bright lamplight. Haldin, reclining on his elbow, did not stir. Razumov was made uneasy by this attitude. “What move is he meditating over so quietly?” he thought. “He must be prevented. I must keep on talking to him.”

He raised his voice.

“You are a son, a brother, a nephew, a cousin — I don’t know what — to no end of people. I am just a man. Here I stand before you. A man with a mind. Did it ever occur to you how a man who had never heard a word of warm affection or praise in his life would think on matters on which you would think first with or against your class, your domestic tradition — your fireside prejudices?... Did you ever consider how a man like that would feel? I have no domestic tradition. I have nothing to think against. My tradition is historical. What have I to look back to but that national past from which you gentlemen want to wrench away your future? Am I to let my intelligence, my aspirations towards a better lot, be robbed of the only thing it has to go upon at the will of violent enthusiasts? You come from your province, but all this land is mine — or I have nothing. No doubt you shall be looked upon as a martyr some day — a sort of hero — a political saint. But I beg to be excused. I am content in fitting myself to be a worker. And what can you people do by scattering a few drops of blood on the snow? On this Immensity. On this unhappy Immensity! I tell you,” he cried, in a vibrating, subdued voice, and advancing one step nearer the bed, “that what it needs is not a lot of haunting phantoms that I could walk through — but a man!”

Haldin threw his arms forward as if to keep him off in horror.

“I understand it all now,” he exclaimed, with awestruck dismay. “I understand — at last.”

Razumov staggered back against the table. His forehead broke out in perspiration while a cold shudder ran down his spine.

“What have I been saying?” he asked himself. “Have I let him slip through my fingers after all?”

“He felt his lips go stiff like buckram, and instead of a reassuring smile only achieved an uncertain grimace.

“What will you have?” he began in a conciliating voice which got steady after the first trembling word or two. “What will you have? Consider — a man of studious, retired habits — and suddenly like this.... I am not practised in talking delicately. But...”

He felt anger, a wicked anger, get hold of him again.

“What were we to do together till midnight? Sit here opposite each other and think of your — your — shambles?”

Haldin had a subdued, heartbroken attitude. He bowed his head; his hands hung between his knees. His voice was low and pained but calm.

“I see now how it is, Razumov — brother. You are a magnanimous soul, but my action is abhorrent to you — alas....”

Razumov stared. From fright he had set his teeth so hard that his whole face ached. It was impossible for him to make a sound.

“And even my person, too, is loathsome to you perhaps,” Haldin added mournfully, after a short pause, looking up for a moment, then fixing his gaze on the floor. “For indeed, unless one....”

He broke off evidently waiting for a word. Razumov remained silent. Haldin nodded his head dejectedly twice.

“Of course. Of course,” he murmured.... “Ah! weary work!”

He remained perfectly still for a moment, then made Razumov’s leaden heart strike a ponderous blow by springing up briskly.

“So be it,” he cried sadly in a low, distinct tone. “Farewell then.”

Razumov started forward, but the sight of Haldin’s raised hand checked him before he could get away from the table. He leaned on it heavily, listening to the faint sounds of some town clock tolling the hour. Haldin, already at the door, tall and straight as an arrow, with his pale face and a hand raised attentively, might have posed for the statue of a daring youth listening to an inner voice. Razumov mechanically glanced down at his watch. When he looked towards the door again Haldin had vanished. There was a faint rustling in the outer room, the feeble click of a bolt drawn back lightly. He was gone — almost as noiseless as a vision.

Razumov ran forward unsteadily, with parted, voiceless lips. The outer door stood open. Staggering out on the landing, he leaned far over the banister. Gazing down into the deep black shaft with a tiny glimmering flame at the bottom, he traced by ear the rapid spiral descent of somebody



running down the stairs on tiptoe. It was a light, swift, pattering sound, which sank away from him into the depths: a fleeting shadow passed over the glimmer — a wink of the tiny flame. Then stillness.

Razumov hung over, breathing the cold raw air tainted by the evil smells of the unclean staircase. All quiet.

He went back into his room slowly, shutting the doors after him. The peaceful steady light of his reading-lamp shone on the watch. Razumov stood looking down at the little white dial. It wanted yet three minutes to midnight. He took the watch into his hand fumblingly.

“Slow,” he muttered, and a strange fit of nervelessness came over him. His knees shook, the watch and chain slipped through his fingers in an instant and fell on the floor. He was so startled that he nearly fell himself. When at last he regained enough confidence in his limbs to stoop for it he held it to his ear at once. After a while he growled —

“Stopped,” and paused for quite a long time before he muttered sourly —

“It’s done.... And now to work.”

He sat down, reached haphazard for a book, opened it in middle and began to read; but after going conscientiously over two lines he lost his hold on the print completely and did not try to regain it. He thought —

“There was to a certainty a police agent of some sort watching the house across the street.”

He imagined him lurking in a dark gateway, goggle-eyed, muffled up in a cloak to the nose and with a General’s plumed, cocked hat on his head. This absurdity made him start in the chair convulsively. He literally had to shake his head violently to get rid of it. The man would be disguised perhaps as a peasant... a beggar.... Perhaps he would be just buttoned up in a dark overcoat and carrying a loaded stick — a shifty-eyed rascal, smelling of raw onions and spirits.

This evocation brought on positive nausea. “Why do I want to bother about this?” thought Razumov with disgust. “Am I a gendarme? Moreover, it is done.”

He got up in great agitation. It was not done. Not yet. Not till half-past twelve. And the watch had stopped. This reduced him to despair. Impossible to know the time! The landlady and all the people across the landing were asleep. How could he go and... God knows what they would imagine, or how much they would guess. He dared not go into the streets to find out. “I am a suspect now. There’s no use shirking that fact,” he said to

himself bitterly. If Haldin from some cause or another gave them the slip and failed to turn up in the Karabelnaya the police would be invading his lodging. And if he were not in he could never clear himself. Never. Razumov looked wildly about as if for some means of seizing upon time which seemed to have escaped him altogether. He had never, as far as he could remember, heard the striking of that town clock in his rooms before this night. And he was not even sure now whether he had heard it really on this night.

He went to the window and stood there with slightly bent head on the watch for the faint sound. "I will stay here till I hear something," he said to himself. He stood still, his ear turned to the panes. An atrocious aching numbness with shooting pains in his back and legs tortured him. He did not budge. His mind hovered on the borders of delirium. He heard himself suddenly saying, "I confess," as a person might do on the rack. "I am on the rack," he thought. He felt ready to swoon. The faint deep boom of the distant clock seemed to explode in his head — he heard it so clearly.... One!

If Haldin had not turned up the police would have been already here ransacking the house. No sound reached him. This time it was done.

He dragged himself painfully to the table and dropped into the chair. He flung the book away and took a square sheet of paper. It was like the pile of sheets covered with his neat minute handwriting, only blank. He took a pen brusquely and dipped it with a vague notion of going on with the writing of his essay — but his pen remained poised over the sheet. It hung there for some time before it came down and formed long scrawly letters.

Still-faced and his lips set hard, Razumov began to write. When he wrote a large hand his neat writing lost its character altogether — became unsteady, almost childish. He wrote five lines one under the other. History not Theory. Patriotism not Internationalism. Evolution not Revolution. Direction not Destruction. Unity not Disruption.

He gazed at them dully. Then his eyes strayed to the bed and remained fixed there for a good many minutes, while his right hand groped all over the table for the penknife.

He rose at last, and walking up with measured steps stabbed the paper with the penknife to the lath and plaster wall at the head of the bed. This done he stepped back a pace and flourished his hand with a glance round the room.

After that he never looked again at the bed. He took his big cloak down from its peg and, wrapping himself up closely, went to lie down on the hard horse-hair sofa at the other side of his room. A leaden sleep closed his eyelids at once. Several times that night he woke up shivering from a dream of walking through drifts of snow in a Russia where he was as completely alone as any betrayed autocrat could be; an immense, wintry Russia which, somehow, his view could embrace in all its enormous expanse as if it were a map. But after each shuddering start his heavy eyelids fell over his glazed eyes and he slept again.

### III

Approaching this part of Mr. Razumov's story, my mind, the decent mind of an old teacher of languages, feels more and more the difficulty of the task.

The task is not in truth the writing in the narrative form a precis of a strange human document, but the rendering — I perceive it now clearly — of the moral conditions ruling over a large portion of this earth's surface; conditions not easily to be understood, much less discovered in the limits of a story, till some key-word is found; a word that could stand at the back of all the words covering the pages; a word which, if not truth itself, may perchance hold truth enough to help the moral discovery which should be the object of every tale.

I turn over for the hundredth time the leaves of Mr. Razumov's record, I lay it aside, I take up the pen — and the pen being ready for its office of setting down black on white I hesitate. For the word that persists in creeping under its point is no other word than "cynicism."

For that is the mark of Russian autocracy and of Russian revolt. In its pride of numbers, in its strange pretensions of sanctity, and in the secret readiness to abase itself in suffering, the spirit of Russia is the spirit of cynicism. It informs the declarations of her statesmen, the theories of her revolutionists, and the mystic vaticinations of prophets to the point of making freedom look like a form of debauch, and the Christian virtues themselves appear actually indecent.... But I must apologize for the digression. It proceeds from the consideration of the course taken by the story of Mr. Razumov after his conservative convictions, diluted in a vague liberalism natural to the ardour of his age, had become crystallized by the shock of his contact with Haldin.

Razumov woke up for the tenth time perhaps with a heavy shiver. Seeing the light of day in his window, he resisted the inclination to lay himself down again. He did not remember anything, but he did not think it strange to find himself on the sofa in his cloak and chilled to the bone. The light coming through the window seemed strangely cheerless, containing no promise as the light of each new day should for a young man. It was the awakening of a man mortally ill, or of a man ninety years old. He looked at the lamp which had burnt itself out. It stood there, the extinguished beacon of his labours, a cold object of brass and porcelain, amongst the scattered pages of his notes and small piles of books — a mere litter of blackened paper — dead matter — without significance or interest.

He got on his feet, and divesting himself of his cloak hung it on the peg, going through all the motions mechanically. An incredible dullness, a ditch-water stagnation was sensible to his perceptions as though life had withdrawn itself from all things and even from his own thoughts. There was not a sound in the house.

Turning away from the peg, he thought in that same lifeless manner that it must be very early yet; but when he looked at the watch on his table he saw both hands arrested at twelve o'clock.

“Ah! yes,” he mumbled to himself, and as if beginning to get roused a little he took a survey of his room. The paper stabbed to the wall arrested his attention. He eyed it from the distance without approval or perplexity; but when he heard the servant-girl beginning to bustle about in the outer room with the samovar for his morning tea, he walked up to it and took it down with an air of profound indifference.

While doing this he glanced down at the bed on which he had not slept that night. The hollow in the pillow made by the weight of Haldin's head was very noticeable.

Even his anger at this sign of the man's passage was dull. He did not try to nurse it into life. He did nothing all that day; he neglected even to brush his hair. The idea of going out never occurred to him — and if he did not start a connected train of thought it was not because he was unable to think. It was because he was not interested enough.

He yawned frequently. He drank large quantities of tea, he walked about aimlessly, and when he sat down he did not budge for a long time. He spent some time drumming on the window with his finger-tips quietly. In his listless wanderings round about the table he caught sight of his own face in

the looking-glass and that arrested him. The eyes which returned his stare were the most unhappy eyes he had ever seen. And this was the first thing which disturbed the mental stagnation of that day.

He was not affected personally. He merely thought that life without happiness is impossible. What was happiness? He yawned and went on shuffling about and about between the walls of his room. Looking forward was happiness — that's all — nothing more. To look forward to the gratification of some desire, to the gratification of some passion, love, ambition, hate — hate too indubitably. Love and hate. And to escape the dangers of existence, to live without fear, was also happiness. There was nothing else. Absence of fear — looking forward. "Oh! the miserable lot of humanity!" he exclaimed mentally; and added at once in his thought, "I ought to be happy enough as far as that goes." But he was not excited by that assurance. On the contrary, he yawned again as he had been yawning all day. He was mildly surprised to discover himself being overtaken by night. The room grew dark swiftly though time had seemed to stand still. How was it that he had not noticed the passing of that day? Of course, it was the watch being stopped....

He did not light his lamp, but went over to the bed and threw himself on it without any hesitation. Lying on his back, he put his hands under his head and stared upward. After a moment he thought, "I am lying here like that man. I wonder if he slept while I was struggling with the blizzard in the streets. No, he did not sleep. But why should I not sleep?" and he felt the silence of the night press upon all his limbs like a weight.

In the calm of the hard frost outside, the clear-cut strokes of the town clock counting off midnight penetrated the quietness of his suspended animation.

Again he began to think. It was twenty-four hours since that man left his room. Razumov had a distinct feeling that Haldin in the fortress was sleeping that night. It was a certitude which made him angry because he did not want to think of Haldin, but he justified it to himself by physiological and psychological reasons. The fellow had hardly slept for weeks on his own confession, and now every incertitude was at an end for him. No doubt he was looking forward to the consummation of his martyrdom. A man who resigns himself to kill need not go very far for resignation to die. Haldin slept perhaps more soundly than General T — -, whose task — weary work

too — was not done, and over whose head hung the sword of revolutionary vengeance.

Razumov, remembering the thick-set man with his heavy jowl resting on the collar of his uniform, the champion of autocracy, who had let no sign of surprise, incredulity, or joy escape him, but whose goggle eyes could express a mortal hatred of all rebellion — Razumov moved uneasily on the bed.

“He suspected me,” he thought. “I suppose he must suspect everybody. He would be capable of suspecting his own wife, if Haldin had gone to her boudoir with his confession.”

Razumov sat up in anguish. Was he to remain a political suspect all his days? Was he to go through life as a man not wholly to be trusted — with a bad secret police note tacked on to his record? What sort of future could he look forward to?

“I am now a suspect,” he thought again; but the habit of reflection and that desire of safety, of an ordered life, which was so strong in him came to his assistance as the night wore on. His quiet, steady, and laborious existence would vouch at length for his loyalty. There were many permitted ways to serve one’s country. There was an activity that made for progress without being revolutionary. The field of influence was great and infinitely varied — once one had conquered a name.

His thought like a circling bird reverted after four-and-twenty hours to the silver medal, and as it were poised itself there.

When the day broke he had not slept, not for a moment, but he got up not very tired and quite sufficiently self-possessed for all practical purposes.

He went out and attended three lectures in the morning. But the work in the library was a mere dumb show of research. He sat with many volumes open before him trying to make notes and extracts. His new tranquillity was like a flimsy garment, and seemed to float at the mercy of a casual word. Betrayal! Why! the fellow had done all that was necessary to betray himself. Precious little had been needed to deceive him.

“I have said no word to him that was not strictly true. Not one word,” Razumov argued with himself.

Once engaged on this line of thought there could be no question of doing useful work. The same ideas went on passing through his mind, and he pronounced mentally the same words over and over again. He shut up all

the books and rammed all his papers into his pocket with convulsive movements, raging inwardly against Haldin.

As he was leaving the library a long bony student in a threadbare overcoat joined him, stepping moodily by his side. Razumov answered his mumbled greeting without looking at him at all.

“What does he want with me?” he thought with a strange dread of the unexpected which he tried to shake off lest it should fasten itself upon his life for good and all. And the other, muttering cautiously with downcast eyes, supposed that his comrade had seen the news of de P — -’s executioner — that was the expression he used — having been arrested the night before last....

“I’ve been ill — shut up in my rooms,” Razumov mumbled through his teeth.

The tall student, raising his shoulders, shoved his hands deep into his pockets. He had a hairless, square, tallowy chin which trembled slightly as he spoke, and his nose nipped bright red by the sharp air looked like a false nose of painted cardboard between the sallow cheeks. His whole appearance was stamped with the mark of cold and hunger. He stalked deliberately at Razumov’s elbow with his eyes on the ground.

“It’s an official statement,” he continued in the same cautious mutter. “It may be a lie. But there was somebody arrested between midnight and one in the morning on Tuesday. This is certain.”

And talking rapidly under the cover of his downcast air, he told Razumov that this was known through an inferior Government clerk employed at the Central Secretariat. That man belonged to one of the revolutionary circles. “The same, in fact, I am affiliated to,” remarked the student.

They were crossing a wide quadrangle. An infinite distress possessed Razumov, annihilated his energy, and before his eyes everything appeared confused and as if evanescent. He dared not leave the fellow there. “He may be affiliated to the police,” was the thought that passed through his mind. “Who could tell?” But eyeing the miserable frost-nipped, famine-struck figure of his companion he perceived the absurdity of his suspicion.

“But I — you know — I don’t belong to any circle. I....”

He dared not say any more. Neither dared he mend his pace. The other, raising and setting down his lamentably shod feet with exact deliberation, protested in a low tone that it was not necessary for everybody to belong to an organization. The most valuable personalities remained outside. Some of

the best work was done outside the organization. Then very fast, with whispering, feverish lips —

“The man arrested in the street was Haldin.”

And accepting Razumov’s dismayed silence as natural enough, he assured him that there was no mistake. That Government clerk was on night duty at the Secretariat. Hearing a great noise of footsteps in the hall and aware that political prisoners were brought over sometimes at night from the fortress, he opened the door of the room in which he was working, suddenly. Before the gendarme on duty could push him back and slam the door in his face, he had seen a prisoner being partly carried, partly dragged along the hall by a lot of policemen. He was being used very brutally. And the clerk had recognized Haldin perfectly. Less than half an hour afterwards General T — - arrived at the Secretariat to examine that prisoner personally.

“Aren’t you astonished?” concluded the gaunt student.

“No,” said Razumov roughly — and at once regretted his answer.

“Everybody supposed Haldin was in the provinces — with his people. Didn’t you?”

The student turned his big hollow eyes upon Razumov, who said unguardedly —

“His people are abroad.”

He could have bitten his tongue out with vexation. The student pronounced in a tone of profound meaning —

“So! You alone were aware,...” and stopped.

“They have sworn my ruin,” thought Razumov. “Have you spoken of this to anyone else?” he asked with bitter curiosity.

The other shook his head.

“No, only to you. Our circle thought that as Haldin had been often heard expressing a warm appreciation of your character....”

Razumov could not restrain a gesture of angry despair which the other must have misunderstood in some way, because he ceased speaking and turned away his black, lack-lustre eyes.

They moved side by side in silence. Then the gaunt student began to whisper again, with averted gaze —

“As we have at present no one affiliated inside the fortress so as to make it possible to furnish him with a packet of poison, we have considered already some sort of retaliatory action — to follow very soon....”

Razumov trudging on interrupted —



“Were you acquainted with Haldin? Did he know where you live?”

“I had the happiness to hear him speak twice,” his companion answered in the feverish whisper contrasting with the gloomy apathy of his face and bearing. “He did not know where I live.... I am lodging poorly with an artisan family.... I have just a corner in a room. It is not very practicable to see me there, but if you should need me for anything I am ready....”

Razumov trembled with rage and fear. He was beside himself, but kept his voice low.

“You are not to come near me. You are not to speak to me. Never address a single word to me. I forbid you.”

“Very well,” said the other submissively, showing no surprise whatever at this abrupt prohibition. “You don’t wish for secret reasons... perfectly... I understand.”

He edged away at once, not looking up even; and Razumov saw his gaunt, shabby, famine-stricken figure cross the street obliquely with lowered head and that peculiar exact motion of the feet.

He watched him as one would watch a vision out of a nightmare, then he continued on his way, trying not to think. On his landing the landlady seemed to be waiting for him. She was a short, thick, shapeless woman with a large yellow face wrapped up everlastingly in a black woollen shawl. When she saw him come up the last flight of stairs she flung both her arms up excitedly, then clasped her hands before her face.

“Kirylo Sidorovitch — little father — what have you been doing? And such a quiet young man, too! The police are just gone this moment after searching your rooms.”

Razumov gazed down at her with silent, scrutinizing attention. Her puffy yellow countenance was working with emotion. She screwed up her eyes at him entreatingly.

“Such a sensible young man! Anybody can see you are sensible. And now — like this — all at once.... What is the good of mixing yourself up with these Nihilists? Do give over, little father. They are unlucky people.”

Razumov moved his shoulders slightly.

“Or is it that some secret enemy has been calumniating you, Kirylo Sidorovitch? The world is full of black hearts and false denunciations nowadays. There is much fear about.”

“Have you heard that I have been denounced by some one?” asked Razumov, without taking his eyes off her quivering face.

But she had not heard anything. She had tried to find out by asking the police captain while his men were turning the room upside down. The police captain of the district had known her for the last eleven years and was a humane person. But he said to her on the landing, looking very black and vexed —

“My good woman, do not ask questions. I don’t know anything myself. The order comes from higher quarters.”

And indeed there had appeared, shortly after the arrival of the policemen of the district, a very superior gentleman in a fur coat and a shiny hat, who sat down in the room and looked through all the papers himself. He came alone and went away by himself, taking nothing with him. She had been trying to put things straight a little since they left.

Razumov turned away brusquely and entered his rooms.

All his books had been shaken and thrown on the floor. His landlady followed him, and stooping painfully began to pick them up into her apron. His papers and notes which were kept always neatly sorted (they all related to his studies) had been shuffled up and heaped together into a ragged pile in the middle of the table.

This disorder affected him profoundly, unreasonably. He sat down and stared. He had a distinct sensation of his very existence being undermined in some mysterious manner, of his moral supports falling away from him one by one. He even experienced a slight physical giddiness and made a movement as if to reach for something to steady himself with.

The old woman, rising to her feet with a low groan, shot all the books she had collected in her apron on to the sofa and left the room muttering and sighing.

It was only then that he noticed that the sheet of paper which for one night had remained stabbed to the wall above his empty bed was lying on top of the pile.

When he had taken it down the day before he had folded it in four, absent-mindedly, before dropping it on the table. And now he saw it lying uppermost, spread out, smoothed out even and covering all the confused pile of pages, the record of his intellectual life for the last three years. It had not been flung there. It had been placed there — smoothed out, too! He guessed in that an intention of profound meaning — or perhaps some inexplicable mockery.

He sat staring at the piece of paper till his eyes began to smart. He did not attempt to put his papers in order, either that evening or the next day — which he spent at home in a state of peculiar irresolution. This irresolution bore upon the question whether he should continue to live — neither more nor less. But its nature was very far removed from the hesitation of a man contemplating suicide. The idea of laying violent hands upon his body did not occur to Razumov. The unrelated organism bearing that label, walking, breathing, wearing these clothes, was of no importance to anyone, unless maybe to the landlady. The true Razumov had his being in the willed, in the determined future — in that future menaced by the lawlessness of autocracy — for autocracy knows no law — and the lawlessness of revolution. The feeling that his moral personality was at the mercy of these lawless forces was so strong that he asked himself seriously if it were worth while to go on accomplishing the mental functions of that existence which seemed no longer his own.

“What is the good of exerting my intelligence, of pursuing the systematic development of my faculties and all my plans of work?” he asked himself. “I want to guide my conduct by reasonable convictions, but what security have I against something — some destructive horror — walking in upon me as I sit here?...”

Razumov looked apprehensively towards the door of the outer room as if expecting some shape of evil to turn the handle and appear before him silently.

“A common thief,” he said to himself, “finds more guarantees in the law he is breaking, and even a brute like Ziemianitch has his consolation.” Razumov envied the materialism of the thief and the passion of the incorrigible lover. The consequences of their actions were always clear and their lives remained their own.

But he slept as soundly that night as though he had been consoling himself in the manner of Ziemianitch. He dropped off suddenly, lay like a log, remembered no dream on waking. But it was as if his soul had gone out in the night to gather the flowers of wrathful wisdom. He got up in a mood of grim determination and as if with a new knowledge of his own nature. He looked mockingly on the heap of papers on his table; and left his room to attend the lectures, muttering to himself, “We shall see.”

He was in no humour to talk to anybody or hear himself questioned as to his absence from lectures the day before. But it was difficult to repulse

rudely a very good comrade with a smooth pink face and fair hair, bearing the nickname amongst his fellow-students of "Madcap Kostia." He was the idolized only son of a very wealthy and illiterate Government contractor, and attended the lectures only during the periodical fits of contrition following upon tearful paternal remonstrances. Noisily blundering like a retriever puppy, his elated voice and great gestures filled the bare academy corridors with the joy of thoughtless animal life, provoking indulgent smiles at a great distance. His usual discourses treated of trotting horses, wine-parties in expensive restaurants, and the merits of persons of easy virtue, with a disarming artlessness of outlook. He pounced upon Razumov about midday, somewhat less uproariously than his habit was, and led him aside.

"Just a moment, Kirylo Sidorovitch. A few words here in this quiet corner."

He felt Razumov's reluctance, and insinuated his hand under his arm caressingly.

"No — pray do. I don't want to talk to you about any of my silly scrapes. What are my scrapes? Absolutely nothing. Mere childishness. The other night I flung a fellow out of a certain place where I was having a fairly good time. A tyrannical little beast of a quill-driver from the Treasury department. He was bullying the people of the house. I rebuked him. 'You are not behaving humanely to God's creatures that are a jolly sight more estimable than yourself,' I said. I can't bear to see any tyranny, Kirylo Sidorovitch. Upon my word I can't. He didn't take it in good part at all. 'Who's that impudent puppy?' he begins to shout. I was in excellent form as it happened, and he went through the closed window very suddenly. He flew quite a long way into the yard. I raged like — like a — minotaur. The women clung to me and screamed, the fiddlers got under the table.... Such fun! My dad had to put his hand pretty deep into his pocket, I can tell you." He chuckled.

"My dad is a very useful man. Jolly good thing it is for me, too. I do get into unholy scrapes."

His elation fell. That was just it. What was his life? Insignificant; no good to anyone; a mere festivity. It would end some fine day in his getting his skull split with a champagne bottle in a drunken brawl. At such times, too, when men were sacrificing themselves to ideas. But he could never get any ideas into his head. His head wasn't worth anything better than to be split by a champagne bottle.

Razumov, protesting that he had no time, made an attempt to get away. The other's tone changed to confidential earnestness.

"For God's sake, Kirylo, my dear soul, let me make some sort of sacrifice. It would not be a sacrifice really. I have my rich dad behind me. There's positively no getting to the bottom of his pocket."

And rejecting indignantly Razumov's suggestion that this was drunken raving, he offered to lend him some money to escape abroad with. He could always get money from his dad. He had only to say that he had lost it at cards or something of that sort, and at the same time promise solemnly not to miss a single lecture for three months on end. That would fetch the old man; and he, Kostia, was quite equal to the sacrifice. Though he really did not see what was the good for him to attend the lectures. It was perfectly hopeless.

"Won't you let me be of some use?" he pleaded to the silent Razumov, who with his eyes on the ground and utterly unable to penetrate the real drift of the other's intention, felt a strange reluctance to clear up the point.

"What makes you think I want to go abroad?" he asked at last very quietly.

Kostia lowered his voice.

"You had the police in your rooms yesterday. There are three or four of us who have heard of that. Never mind how we know. It is sufficient that we do. So we have been consulting together."

"Ah! You got to know that so soon," muttered Razumov negligently.

"Yes. We did. And it struck us that a man like you..."

"What sort of a man do you take me to be?" Razumov interrupted him.

"A man of ideas — and a man of action too. But you are very deep, Kirylo. There's no getting to the bottom of your mind. Not for fellows like me. But we all agreed that you must be preserved for our country. Of that we have no doubt whatever — I mean all of us who have heard Haldin speak of you on certain occasions. A man doesn't get the police ransacking his rooms without there being some devilry hanging over his head.... And so if you think that it would be better for you to bolt at once...."

Razumov tore himself away and walked down the corridor, leaving the other motionless with his mouth open. But almost at once he returned and stood before the amazed Kostia, who shut his mouth slowly. Razumov looked him straight in the eyes, before saying with marked deliberation and separating his words —

“I thank — you — very — much.”

He went away again rapidly. Kostia, recovering from his surprise at these manoeuvres, ran up behind him pressing.

“No! Wait! Listen. I really mean it. It would be like giving your compassion to a starving fellow. Do you hear, Kirylo? And any disguise you may think of, that too I could procure from a costumier, a Jew I know. Let a fool be made serviceable according to his folly. Perhaps also a false beard or something of that kind may be needed.

“Razumov turned at bay.

“There are no false beards needed in this business, Kostia — you good-hearted lunatic, you. What do you know of my ideas? My ideas may be poison to you.” The other began to shake his head in energetic protest.

“What have you got to do with ideas? Some of them would make an end of your dad’s money-bags. Leave off meddling with what you don’t understand. Go back to your trotting horses and your girls, and then you’ll be sure at least of doing no harm to anybody, and hardly any to yourself.”

The enthusiastic youth was overcome by this disdain.

“You’re sending me back to my pig’s trough, Kirylo. That settles it. I am an unlucky beast — and I shall die like a beast too. But mind — it’s your contempt that has done for me.”

Razumov went off with long strides. That this simple and grossly festive soul should have fallen too under the revolutionary curse affected him as an ominous symptom of the time. He reproached himself for feeling troubled. Personally he ought to have felt reassured. There was an obvious advantage in this conspiracy of mistaken judgment taking him for what he was not. But was it not strange?

Again he experienced that sensation of his conduct being taken out of his hands by Haldin’s revolutionary tyranny. His solitary and laborious existence had been destroyed — the only thing he could call his own on this earth. By what right? he asked himself furiously. In what name?

What infuriated him most was to feel that the “thinkers” of the University were evidently connecting him with Haldin — as a sort of confidant in the background apparently. A mysterious connexion! Ha ha! ...He had been made a personage without knowing anything about it. How that wretch Haldin must have talked about him! Yet it was likely that Haldin had said very little. The fellow’s casual utterances were caught up and treasured and

pondered over by all these imbeciles. And was not all secret revolutionary action based upon folly, self-deception, and lies?

“Impossible to think of anything else,” muttered Razumov to himself. “I’ll become an idiot if this goes on. The scoundrels and the fools are murdering my intelligence.”

He lost all hope of saving his future, which depended on the free use of his intelligence.

He reached the doorway of his house in a state of mental discouragement which enabled him to receive with apparent indifference an official-looking envelope from the dirty hand of the dvornik.

“A gendarme brought it,” said the man. “He asked if you were at home. I told him ‘No, he’s not at home.’ So he left it. ‘Give it into his own hands,’ says he. Now you’ve got it — eh?”

He went back to his sweeping, and Razumov climbed his stairs, envelope in hand. Once in his room he did not hasten to open it. Of course this official missive was from the superior direction of the police. A suspect! A suspect!

He stared in dreary astonishment at the absurdity of his position. He thought with a sort of dry, unemotional melancholy; three years of good work gone, the course of forty more perhaps jeopardized — turned from hope to terror, because events started by human folly link themselves into a sequence which no sagacity can foresee and no courage can break through. Fatality enters your rooms while your landlady’s back is turned; you come home and find it in possession bearing a man’s name, clothed in flesh — wearing a brown cloth coat and long boots — lounging against the stove. It asks you, “Is the outer door closed?” — and you don’t know enough to take it by the throat and fling it downstairs. You don’t know. You welcome the crazy fate. “Sit down,” you say. And it is all over. You cannot shake it off any more. It will cling to you for ever. Neither halter nor bullet can give you back the freedom of your life and the sanity of your thought.... It was enough to dash one’s head against a wall.

Razumov looked slowly all round the walls as if to select a spot to dash his head against. Then he opened the letter. It directed the student Kirylo Sidorovitch Razumov to present himself without delay at the General Secretariat.

Razumov had a vision of General T — -’s goggle eyes waiting for him — the embodied power of autocracy, grotesque and terrible. He embodied the

whole power of autocracy because he was its guardian. He was the incarnate suspicion, the incarnate anger, the incarnate ruthlessness of a political and social regime on its defence. He loathed rebellion by instinct. And Razumov reflected that the man was simply unable to understand a reasonable adherence to the doctrine of absolutism.

“What can he want with me precisely — I wonder?” he asked himself.

As if that mental question had evoked the familiar phantom, Haldin stood suddenly before him in the room with an extraordinary completeness of detail. Though the short winter day had passed already into the sinister twilight of a land buried in snow, Razumov saw plainly the narrow leather strap round the Tcherkess coat. The illusion of that hateful presence was so perfect that he half expected it to ask, “Is the outer door closed?” He looked at it with hatred and contempt. Souls do not take a shape of clothing. Moreover, Haldin could not be dead yet. Razumov stepped forward menacingly; the vision vanished — and turning short on his heel he walked out of his room with infinite disdain.

But after going down the first flight of stairs it occurred to him that perhaps the superior authorities of police meant to confront him with Haldin in the flesh. This thought struck him like a bullet, and had he not clung with both hands to the banister he would have rolled down to the next landing most likely. His legs were of no use for a considerable time.... But why? For what conceivable reason? To what end?

There could be no rational answer to these questions; but Razumov remembered the promise made by the General to Prince K — -. His action was to remain unknown.

He got down to the bottom of the stairs, lowering himself as it were from step to step, by the banister. Under the gate he regained much of his firmness of thought and limb. He went out into the street without staggering visibly. Every moment he felt steadier mentally. And yet he was saying to himself that General T — - was perfectly capable of shutting him up in the fortress for an indefinite time. His temperament fitted his remorseless task, and his omnipotence made him inaccessible to reasonable argument.

But when Razumov arrived at the Secretariat he discovered that he would have nothing to do with General T — -. It is evident from Mr. Razumov's diary that this dreaded personality was to remain in the background. A civilian of superior rank received him in a private room after a period of



waiting in outer offices where a lot of scribbling went on at many tables in a heated and stuffy atmosphere.

The clerk in uniform who conducted him said in the corridor —

“You are going before Gregor Matvieitch Mikulin.”

There was nothing formidable about the man bearing that name. His mild, expectant glance was turned on the door already when Razumov entered. At once, with the penholder he was holding in his hand, he pointed to a deep sofa between two windows. He followed Razumov with his eyes while that last crossed the room and sat down. The mild gaze rested on him, not curious, not inquisitive — certainly not suspicious — almost without expression. In its passionless persistence there was something resembling sympathy.

Razumov, who had prepared his will and his intelligence to encounter General T — - himself, was profoundly troubled. All the moral bracing up against the possible excesses of power and passion went for nothing before this sallow man, who wore a full unclipped beard. It was fair, thin, and very fine. The light fell in coppery gleams on the protuberances of a high, rugged forehead. And the aspect of the broad, soft physiognomy was so homely and rustic that the careful middle parting of the hair seemed a pretentious affectation.

The diary of Mr. Razumov testifies to some irritation on his part. I may remark here that the diary proper consisting of the more or less daily entries seems to have been begun on that very evening after Mr. Razumov had returned home.

Mr. Razumov, then, was irritated. His strung-up individuality had gone to pieces within him very suddenly.

“I must be very prudent with him,” he warned himself in the silence during which they sat gazing at each other. It lasted some little time, and was characterized (for silences have their character) by a sort of sadness imparted to it perhaps by the mild and thoughtful manner of the bearded official. Razumov learned later that he was the chief of a department in the General Secretariat, with a rank in the civil service equivalent to that of a colonel in the army.

Razumov’s mistrust became acute. The main point was, not to be drawn into saying too much. He had been called there for some reason. What reason? To be given to understand that he was a suspect — and also no doubt to be pumped. As to what precisely? There was nothing. Or perhaps

Haldin had been telling lies.... Every alarming uncertainty beset Razumov. He could bear the silence no longer, and cursing himself for his weakness spoke first, though he had promised himself not to do so on any account.

“I haven’t lost a moment’s time,” he began in a hoarse, provoking tone; and then the faculty of speech seemed to leave him and enter the body of Councillor Mikulin, who chimed in approvingly —

“Very proper. Very proper. Though as a matter of fact....”

But the spell was broken, and Razumov interrupted him boldly, under a sudden conviction that this was the safest attitude to take. With a great flow of words he complained of being totally misunderstood. Even as he talked with a perception of his own audacity he thought that the word “misunderstood” was better than the word “mistrusted,” and he repeated it again with insistence. Suddenly he ceased, being seized with fright before the attentive immobility of the official. “What am I talking about?” he thought, eyeing him with a vague gaze. Mistrusted — not misunderstood — was the right symbol for these people. Misunderstood was the other kind of curse. Both had been brought on his head by that fellow Haldin. And his head ached terribly. He passed his hand over his brow — an involuntary gesture of suffering, which he was too careless to restrain. At that moment Razumov beheld his own brain suffering on the rack — a long, pale figure drawn asunder horizontally with terrific force in the darkness of a vault, whose face he failed to see. It was as though he had dreamed for an infinitesimal fraction of time of some dark print of the Inquisition.

It is not to be seriously supposed that Razumov had actually dozed off and had dreamed in the presence of Councillor Mikulin, of an old print of the Inquisition. He was indeed extremely exhausted, and he records a remarkably dream-like experience of anguish at the circumstance that there was no one whatever near the pale and extended figure. The solitude of the racked victim was particularly horrible to behold. The mysterious impossibility to see the face, he also notes, inspired a sort of terror. All these characteristics of an ugly dream were present. Yet he is certain that he never lost the consciousness of himself on the sofa, leaning forward with his hands between his knees and turning his cap round and round in his fingers. But everything vanished at the voice of Councillor Mikulin. Razumov felt profoundly grateful for the even simplicity of its tone.

“Yes. I have listened with interest. I comprehend in a measure your... But, indeed, you are mistaken in what you....” Councillor Mikulin uttered a

series of broken sentences. Instead of finishing them he glanced down his beard. It was a deliberate curtailment which somehow made the phrases more impressive. But he could talk fluently enough, as became apparent when changing his tone to persuasiveness he went on: "By listening to you as I did, I think I have proved that I do not regard our intercourse as strictly official. In fact, I don't want it to have that character at all.... Oh yes! I admit that the request for your presence here had an official form. But I put it to you whether it was a form which would have been used to secure the attendance of a...."

"Suspect," exclaimed Razumov, looking straight into the official's eyes. They were big with heavy eyelids, and met his boldness with a dim, steadfast gaze. "A suspect." The open repetition of that word which had been haunting all his waking hours gave Razumov a strange sort of satisfaction. Councillor Mikulin shook his head slightly. "Surely you do know that I've had my rooms searched by the police?"

"I was about to say a 'misunderstood person,' when you interrupted me," insinuated quietly Councillor Mikulin.

Razumov smiled without bitterness. The renewed sense of his intellectual superiority sustained him in the hour of danger. He said a little disdainfully —

"I know I am but a reed. But I beg you to allow me the superiority of the thinking reed over the unthinking forces that are about to crush him out of existence. Practical thinking in the last instance is but criticism. I may perhaps be allowed to express my wonder at this action of the police being delayed for two full days during which, of course, I could have annihilated everything compromising by burning it — let us say — and getting rid of the very ashes, for that matter."

"You are angry," remarked the official, with an unutterable simplicity of tone and manner. "Is that reasonable?"

Razumov felt himself colouring with annoyance.

"I am reasonable. I am even — permit me to say — a thinker, though to be sure, this name nowadays seems to be the monopoly of hawkers of revolutionary wares, the slaves of some French or German thought — devil knows what foreign notions. But I am not an intellectual mongrel. I think like a Russian. I think faithfully — and I take the liberty to call myself a thinker. It is not a forbidden word, as far as I know."

“No. Why should it be a forbidden word?” Councillor Mikulin turned in his seat with crossed legs and resting his elbow on the table propped his head on the knuckles of a half-closed hand. Razumov noticed a thick forefinger clasped by a massive gold band set with a blood-red stone — a signet ring that, looking as if it could weigh half a pound, was an appropriate ornament for that ponderous man with the accurate middle-parting of glossy hair above a rugged Socratic forehead.

“Could it be a wig?” Razumov detected himself wondering with an unexpected detachment. His self-confidence was much shaken. He resolved to chatter no more. Reserve! Reserve! All he had to do was to keep the Ziemianitch episode secret with absolute determination, when the questions came. Keep Ziemianitch strictly out of all the answers.

Councillor Mikulin looked at him dimly. Razumov’s self-confidence abandoned him completely. It seemed impossible to keep Ziemianitch out. Every question would lead to that, because, of course, there was nothing else. He made an effort to brace himself up. It was a failure. But Councillor Mikulin was surprisingly detached too.

“Why should it be forbidden?” he repeated. “I too consider myself a thinking man, I assure you. The principal condition is to think correctly. I admit it is difficult sometimes at first for a young man abandoned to himself — with his generous impulses undisciplined, so to speak — at the mercy of every wild wind that blows. Religious belief, of course, is a great...”

Councillor Mikulin glanced down his beard, and Razumov, whose tension was relaxed by that unexpected and discursive turn, murmured with gloomy discontent —

“That man, Haldin, believed in God.”

“Ah! You are aware,” breathed out Councillor Mikulin, making the point softly, as if with discretion, but making it nevertheless plainly enough, as if he too were put off his guard by Razumov’s remark. The young man preserved an impassive, moody countenance, though he reproached himself bitterly for a pernicious fool, to have given thus an utterly false impression of intimacy. He kept his eyes on the floor. “I must positively hold my tongue unless I am obliged to speak,” he admonished himself. And at once against his will the question, “Hadn’t I better tell him everything?” presented itself with such force that he had to bite his lower lip. Councillor Mikulin could not, however, have nourished any hope of confession. He went on —

“You tell me more than his judges were able to get out of him. He was judged by a commission of three. He would tell them absolutely nothing. I have the report of the interrogatories here, by me. After every question there stands ‘Refuses to answer — refuses to answer.’ It’s like that page after page. You see, I have been entrusted with some further investigations around and about this affair. He has left me nothing to begin my investigations on. A hardened miscreant. And so, you say, he believed in....”

Again Councillor Mikulin glanced down his beard with a faint grimace; but he did not pause for long. Remarking with a shade of scorn that blasphemers also had that sort of belief, he concluded by supposing that Mr. Razumov had conversed frequently with Haldin on the subject.

“No,” said Razumov loudly, without looking up. “He talked and I listened. That is not a conversation.”

“Listening is a great art,” observed Mikulin parenthetically.

“And getting people to talk is another,” mumbled Razumov.

“Well, no — that is not very difficult,” Mikulin said innocently, “except, of course, in special cases. For instance, this Haldin. Nothing could induce him to talk. He was brought four times before the delegated judges. Four secret interrogatories — and even during the last, when your personality was put forward....”

“My personality put forward?” repeated Razumov, raising his head brusquely. “I don’t understand.” Councillor Mikulin turned squarely to the table, and taking up some sheets of grey foolscap dropped them one after another, retaining only the last in his hand. He held it before his eyes while speaking.

“It was — you see — judged necessary. In a case of that gravity no means of action upon the culprit should be neglected. You understand that yourself, I am certain.

“Razumov stared with enormous wide eyes at the side view of Councillor Mikulin, who now was not looking at him at all.

“So it was decided (I was consulted by General T — -) that a certain question should be put to the accused. But in deference to the earnest wishes of Prince K — - your name has been kept out of the documents and even from the very knowledge of the judges themselves. Prince K — - recognized the propriety, the necessity of what we proposed to do, but he was concerned for your safety. Things do leak out — that we can’t deny. One cannot always answer for the discretion of inferior officials. There was,

of course, the secretary of the special tribunal — one or two gendarmes in the room. Moreover, as I have said, in deference to Prince K — - even the judges themselves were to be left in ignorance. The question ready framed was sent to them by General T — - (I wrote it out with my own hand) with instructions to put it to the prisoner the very last of all. Here it is.

“Councillor Mikulin threw back his head into proper focus and went on reading monotonously: ‘Question — Has the man well known to you, in whose rooms you remained for several hours on Monday and on whose information you have been arrested — has he had any previous knowledge of your intention to commit a political murder?...’ Prisoner refuses to reply.

“Question repeated. Prisoner preserves the same stubborn silence.

“The venerable Chaplain of the Fortress being then admitted and exhorting the prisoner to repentance, entreating him also to atone for his crime by an unreserved and full confession which should help to liberate from the sin of rebellion against the Divine laws and the sacred Majesty of the Ruler, our Christ-loving land — the prisoner opens his lips for the first time during this morning’s audience and in a loud, clear voice rejects the venerable Chaplain’s ministrations.

“At eleven o’clock the Court pronounces in summary form the death sentence.

“The execution is fixed for four o’clock in the afternoon, subject to further instructions from superior authorities.”

Councillor Mikulin dropped the page of foolscap, glanced down his beard, and turning to Razumov, added in an easy, explanatory tone —

“We saw no object in delaying the execution. The order to carry out the sentence was sent by telegraph at noon. I wrote out the telegram myself. He was hanged at four o’clock this afternoon.”

The definite information of Haldin’s death gave Razumov the feeling of general lassitude which follows a great exertion or a great excitement. He kept very still on the sofa, but a murmur escaped him —

“He had a belief in a future existence.”

Councillor Mikulin shrugged his shoulders slightly, and Razumov got up with an effort. There was nothing now to stay for in that room. Haldin had been hanged at four o’clock. There could be no doubt of that. He had, it seemed, entered upon his future existence, long boots, Astrakhan fur cap and all, down to the very leather strap round his waist. A flickering, vanishing sort of existence. It was not his soul, it was his mere phantom he

had left behind on this earth — thought Razumov, smiling caustically to himself while he crossed the room, utterly forgetful of where he was and of Councillor Mikulin's existence. The official could have set a lot of bells ringing all over the building without leaving his chair. He let Razumov go quite up to the door before he spoke.

"Come, Kirylo Sidorovitch — what are you doing?"

Razumov turned his head and looked at him in silence. He was not in the least disconcerted. Councillor Mikulin's arms were stretched out on the table before him and his body leaned forward a little with an effort of his dim gaze.

"Was I actually going to clear out like this?" Razumov wondered at himself with an impassive countenance. And he was aware of this impassiveness concealing a lucid astonishment.

"Evidently I was going out if he had not spoken," he thought. "What would he have done then? I must end this affair one way or another. I must make him show his hand."

For a moment longer he reflected behind the mask as it were, then let go the door-handle and came back to the middle of the room.

"I'll tell you what you think," he said explosively, but not raising his voice. "You think that you are dealing with a secret accomplice of that unhappy man. No, I do not know that he was unhappy. He did not tell me. He was a wretch from my point of view, because to keep alive a false idea is a greater crime than to kill a man. I suppose you will not deny that? I hated him! Visionaries work everlasting evil on earth. Their Utopias inspire in the mass of mediocre minds a disgust of reality and a contempt for the secular logic of human development."

Razumov shrugged his shoulders and stared. "What a tirade!" he thought. The silence and immobility of Councillor Mikulin impressed him. The bearded bureaucrat sat at his post, mysteriously self-possessed like an idol with dim, unreadable eyes. Razumov's voice changed involuntarily.

"If you were to ask me where is the necessity of my hate for such as Haldin, I would answer you — there is nothing sentimental in it. I did not hate him because he had committed the crime of murder. Abhorrence is not hate. I hated him simply because I am sane. It is in that character that he outraged me. His death..."

Razumov felt his voice growing thick in his throat. The dimness of Councillor Mikulin's eyes seemed to spread all over his face and made it

indistinct to Razumov's sight. He tried to disregard these phenomena.

"Indeed," he pursued, pronouncing each word carefully, "what is his death to me? If he were lying here on the floor I could walk over his breast.... The fellow is a mere phantom...."

Razumov's voice died out very much against his will. Mikulin behind the table did not allow himself the slightest movement. The silence lasted for some little time before Razumov could go on again.



“He went about talking of me. Those intellectual fellows sit in each other’s rooms and get drunk on foreign ideas in the same way young Guards’ officers treat each other with foreign wines. Merest debauchery. ...Upon my Word,” — Razumov, enraged by a sudden recollection of Ziemianitch, lowered his voice forcibly, — ”upon my word, we Russians are a drunken lot. Intoxication of some sort we must have: to get ourselves wild with sorrow or maudlin with resignation; to lie inert like a log or set fire to the house. What is a sober man to do, I should like to know? To cut oneself entirely from one’s kind is impossible. To live in a desert one must be a saint. But if a drunken man runs out of the grog-shop, falls on your neck and kisses you on both cheeks because something about your appearance has taken his fancy, what then — kindly tell me? You may break, perhaps, a cudgel on his back and yet not succeed in beating him off....”

Councillor Mikulin raised his hand and passed it down his face deliberately.

“That’s... of course,” he said in an undertone.

The quiet gravity of that gesture made Razumov pause. It was so unexpected, too. What did it mean? It had an alarming aloofness. Razumov remembered his intention of making him show his hand.

“I have said all this to Prince K — -,” he began with assumed indifference, but lost it on seeing Councillor Mikulin’s slow nod of assent. “You know it? You’ve heard.... Then why should I be called here to be told of Haldin’s execution? Did you want to confront me with his silence now that the man is dead? What is his silence to me! This is incomprehensible. You want in some way to shake my moral balance.”

“No. Not that,” murmured Councillor Mikulin, just audibly. “The service you have rendered is appreciated....”

“Is it?” interrupted Razumov ironically.

“...and your position too.” Councillor Mikulin did not raise his voice. “But only think! You fall into Prince K — -’s study as if from the sky with your startling information.... You are studying yet, Mr. Razumov, but we are serving already — don’t forget that.... And naturally some curiosity was bound to....”

Councillor Mikulin looked down his beard. Razumov’s lips trembled.

“An occurrence of that sort marks a man,” the homely murmur went on. “I admit I was curious to see you. General T — - thought it would be

useful, too.... Don't think I am incapable of understanding your sentiments. When I was young like you I studied...."

"Yes — you wished to see me," said Razumov in a tone of profound distaste. "Naturally you have the right — I mean the power. It all amounts to the same thing. But it is perfectly useless, if you were to look at me and listen to me for a year. I begin to think there is something about me which people don't seem able to make out. It's unfortunate. I imagine, however, that Prince K — - understands. He seemed to."

Councillor Mikulin moved slightly and spoke.

"Prince K — - is aware of everything that is being done, and I don't mind informing you that he approved my intention of becoming personally acquainted with you."

Razumov concealed an immense disappointment under the accents of railing surprise.

"So he is curious too!... Well — after all, Prince K — - knows me very little. It is really very unfortunate for me, but — it is not exactly my fault."

Councillor Mikulin raised a hasty deprecatory hand and inclined his head slightly over his shoulder.

"Now, Mr. Razumov — is it necessary to take it in that way? Everybody I am sure can...."

He glanced rapidly down his beard, and when he looked up again there was for a moment an interested expression in his misty gaze. Razumov discouraged it with a cold, repellent smile.

"No. That's of no importance to be sure — except that in respect of all this curiosity being aroused by a very simple matter.... What is to be done with it? It is unappeasable. I mean to say there is nothing to appease it with. I happen to have been born a Russian with patriotic instincts — whether inherited or not I am not in a position to say."

Razumov spoke consciously with elaborate steadiness.

"Yes, patriotic instincts developed by a faculty of independent thinking — of detached thinking. In that respect I am more free than any social democratic revolution could make me. It is more than probable that I don't think exactly as you are thinking. Indeed, how could it be? You would think most likely at this moment that I am elaborately lying to cover up the track of my repentance."

Razumov stopped. His heart had grown too big for his breast. Councillor Mikulin did not flinch.

“Why so?” he said simply. “I assisted personally at the search of your rooms. I looked through all the papers myself. I have been greatly impressed by a sort of political confession of faith. A very remarkable document. Now may I ask for what purpose....”

“To deceive the police naturally,” said Razumov savagely.... “What is all this mockery? Of course you can send me straight from this room to Siberia. That would be intelligible. To what is intelligible I can submit. But I protest against this comedy of persecution. The whole affair is becoming too comical altogether for my taste. A comedy of errors, phantoms, and suspicions. It’s positively indecent....”

Councillor Mikulin turned an attentive ear. “Did you say phantoms?” he murmured.

“I could walk over dozens of them.” Razumov, with an impatient wave of his hand, went on headlong, “But, really, I must claim the right to be done once for all with that man. And in order to accomplish this I shall take the liberty....”

Razumov on his side of the table bowed slightly to the seated bureaucrat.

“... To retire — simply to retire,” he finished with great resolution.

He walked to the door, thinking, “Now he must show his hand. He must ring and have me arrested before I am out of the building, or he must let me go. And either way....”

An unhurried voice said —

“Kirylo Sidorovitch.” Razumov at the door turned his head.

“To retire,” he repeated.

“Where to?” asked Councillor Mikulin softly.

## PART SECOND

### I

In the conduct of an invented story there are, no doubt, certain proprieties to be observed for the sake of clearness and effect. A man of imagination, however inexperienced in the art of narrative, has his instinct to guide him in the choice of his words, and in the development of the action. A grain of talent excuses many mistakes. But this is not a work of imagination; I have no talent; my excuse for this undertaking lies not in its art, but in its

artlessness. Aware of my limitations and strong in the sincerity of my purpose, I would not try (were I able) to invent anything. I push my scruples so far that I would not even invent a transition.

Dropping then Mr. Razumov's record at the point where Councillor Mikulin's question "Where to?" comes in with the force of an insoluble problem, I shall simply say that I made the acquaintance of these ladies about six months before that time. By "these ladies" I mean, of course, the mother and the sister of the unfortunate Haldin.

By what arguments he had induced his mother to sell their little property and go abroad for an indefinite time, I cannot tell precisely. I have an idea that Mrs. Haldin, at her son's wish, would have set fire to her house and emigrated to the moon without any sign of surprise or apprehension; and that Miss Haldin — Nathalie, caressingly Natalka — would have given her assent to the scheme.

Their proud devotion to that young man became clear to me in a very short time. Following his directions they went straight to Switzerland — to Zurich — where they remained the best part of a year. From Zurich, which they did not like, they came to Geneva. A friend of mine in Lausanne, a lecturer in history at the University (he had married a Russian lady, a distant connection of Mrs. Haldin's), wrote to me suggesting I should call on these ladies. It was a very kindly meant business suggestion. Miss Haldin wished to go through a course of reading the best English authors with a competent teacher.

Mrs. Haldin received me very kindly. Her bad French, of which she was smilingly conscious, did away with the formality of the first interview. She was a tall woman in a black silk dress. A wide brow, regular features, and delicately cut lips, testified to her past beauty. She sat upright in an easy chair and in a rather weak, gentle voice told me that her Natalka simply thirsted after knowledge. Her thin hands were lying on her lap, her facial immobility had in it something monachal. "In Russia," she went on, "all knowledge was tainted with falsehood. Not chemistry and all that, but education generally," she explained. The Government corrupted the teaching for its own purposes. Both her children felt that. Her Natalka had obtained a diploma of a Superior School for Women and her son was a student at the St. Petersburg University. He had a brilliant intellect, a most noble unselfish nature, and he was the oracle of his comrades. Early next year, she hoped he would join them and they would then go to Italy

together. In any other country but their own she would have been certain of a great future for a man with the extraordinary abilities and the lofty character of her son — but in Russia....

The young lady sitting by the window turned her head and said —

“Come, mother. Even with us things change with years.”

Her voice was deep, almost harsh, and yet caressing in its harshness. She had a dark complexion, with red lips and a full figure. She gave the impression of strong vitality. The old lady sighed.

“You are both young — you two. It is easy for you to hope. But I, too, am not hopeless. Indeed, how could I be with a son like this.”

I addressed Miss Haldin, asking her what authors she wished to read. She directed upon me her grey eyes shaded by black eyelashes, and I became aware, notwithstanding my years, how attractive physically her personality could be to a man capable of appreciating in a woman something else than the mere grace of femininity. Her glance was as direct and trustful as that of a young man yet unspoiled by the world’s wise lessons. And it was intrepid, but in this intrepidity there was nothing aggressive. A naive yet thoughtful assurance is a better definition. She had reflected already (in Russia the young begin to think early), but she had never known deception as yet because obviously she had never yet fallen under the sway of passion. She was — to look at her was enough — very capable of being roused by an idea or simply by a person. At least, so I judged with I believe an unbiassed mind; for clearly my person could not be the person — and as to my ideas!...

We became excellent friends in the course of our reading. It was very pleasant. Without fear of provoking a smile, I shall confess that I became very much attached to that young girl. At the end of four months I told her that now she could very well go on reading English by herself. It was time for the teacher to depart. My pupil looked unpleasantly surprised.

Mrs. Haldin, with her immobility of feature and kindly expression of the eyes, uttered from her armchair in her uncertain French, “Mais l’ami reviendra.” And so it was settled. I returned — not four times a week as before, but pretty frequently. In the autumn we made some short excursions together in company with other Russians. My friendship with these ladies gave me a standing in the Russian colony which otherwise I could not have had.

The day I saw in the papers the news of Mr. de P — -'s assassination — it was a Sunday — I met the two ladies in the street and walked with them for some distance. Mrs. Haldin wore a heavy grey cloak, I remember, over her black silk dress, and her fine eyes met mine with a very quiet expression.

“We have been to the late service,” she said. “Natalka came with me. Her girl-friends, the students here, of course don't.... With us in Russia the church is so identified with oppression, that it seems almost necessary when one wishes to be free in this life, to give up all hope of a future existence. But I cannot give up praying for my son.”

She added with a sort of stony grimness, colouring slightly, and in French, “Ce n'est peut etre qu'une habitude.” (“It may be only habit.”)

Miss Haldin was carrying the prayer-book. She did not glance at her mother.

“You and Victor are both profound believers,” she said.

I communicated to them the news from their country which I had just read in a cafe. For a whole minute we walked together fairly briskly in silence. Then Mrs. Haldin murmured —

“There will be more trouble, more persecutions for this. They may be even closing the University. There is neither peace nor rest in Russia for one but in the grave.

“Yes. The way is hard,” came from the daughter, looking straight before her at the Chain of Jura covered with snow, like a white wall closing the end of the street. “But concord is not so very far off.”

“That is what my children think,” observed Mrs. Haldin to me.

I did not conceal my feeling that these were strange times to talk of concord. Nathalie Haldin surprised me by saying, as if she had thought very much on the subject, that the occidentals did not understand the situation. She was very calm and youthfully superior.

“You think it is a class conflict, or a conflict of interests, as social contests are with you in Europe. But it is not that at all. It is something quite different.”

“It is quite possible that I don't understand,” I admitted.

That propensity of lifting every problem from the plane of the understandable by means of some sort of mystic expression, is very Russian. I knew her well enough to have discovered her scorn for all the practical forms of political liberty known to the western world. I suppose

one must be a Russian to understand Russian simplicity, a terrible corroding simplicity in which mystic phrases clothe a naive and hopeless cynicism. I think sometimes that the psychological secret of the profound difference of that people consists in this, that they detest life, the irremediable life of the earth as it is, whereas we westerners cherish it with perhaps an equal exaggeration of its sentimental value. But this is a digression indeed....

I helped these ladies into the tramcar and they asked me to call in the afternoon. At least Mrs. Haldin asked me as she climbed up, and her Nataika smiled down at the dense westerner indulgently from the rear platform of the moving car. The light of the clear wintry forenoon was softened in her grey eyes.

Mr. Razumov's record, like the open book of fate, revives for me the memory of that day as something startlingly pitiless in its freedom from all forebodings. Victor Haldin was still with the living, but with the living whose only contact with life is the expectation of death. He must have been already referring to the last of his earthly affections, the hours of that obstinate silence, which for him was to be prolonged into eternity. That afternoon the ladies entertained a good many of their compatriots — more than was usual for them to receive at one time; and the drawing-room on the ground floor of a large house on the Boulevard des Philosophes was very much crowded.

I outstayed everybody; and when I rose Miss Haldin stood up too. I took her hand and was moved to revert to that morning's conversation in the street.

"Admitting that we occidentals do not understand the character of your..." I began.

It was as if she had been prepared for me by some mysterious foreknowledge. She checked me gently —

"Their impulses — their..." she sought the proper expression and found it, but in French..."their mouvements d'ame."

Her voice was not much above a whisper.

"Very well," I said. "But still we are looking at a conflict. You say it is not a conflict of classes and not a conflict of interests. Suppose I admitted that. Are antagonistic ideas then to be reconciled more easily — can they be cemented with blood and violence into that concord which you proclaim to be so near?"

She looked at me searchingly with her clear grey eyes, without answering my reasonable question — my obvious, my unanswerable question.

“It is inconceivable,” I added, with something like annoyance.

“Everything is inconceivable,” she said. “The whole world is inconceivable to the strict logic of ideas. And yet the world exists to our senses, and we exist in it. There must be a necessity superior to our conceptions. It is a very miserable and a very false thing to belong to the majority. We Russians shall find some better form of national freedom than an artificial conflict of parties — which is wrong because it is a conflict and contemptible because it is artificial. It is left for us Russians to discover a better way.”

Mrs. Haldin had been looking out of the window. She turned upon me the almost lifeless beauty of her face, and the living benign glance of her big dark eyes.

“That’s what my children think,” she declared.

“I suppose,” I addressed Miss Haldin, “that you will be shocked if I tell you that I haven’t understood — I won’t say a single word; I’ve understood all the words.... But what can be this era of disembodied concord you are looking forward to. Life is a thing of form. It has its plastic shape and a definite intellectual aspect. The most idealistic conceptions of love and forbearance must be clothed in flesh as it were before they can be made understandable.”

I took my leave of Mrs. Haldin, whose beautiful lips never stirred. She smiled with her eyes only. Nathalie Haldin went with me as far as the door, very amiable.

“Mother imagines that I am the slavish echo of my brother Victor. It is not so. He understands me better than I can understand him. When he joins us and you come to know him you will see what an exceptional soul it is.” She paused. “He is not a strong man in the conventional sense, you know,” she added. “But his character is without a flaw.”

“I believe that it will not be difficult for me to make friends with your brother Victor.”

“Don’t expect to understand him quite,” she said, a little maliciously. “He is not at all — at all — western at bottom.”

And on this unnecessary warning I left the room with another bow in the doorway to Mrs. Haldin in her armchair by the window. The shadow of autocracy all unperceived by me had already fallen upon the Boulevard des



Philosophes, in the free, independent and democratic city of Geneva, where there is a quarter called “La Petite Russie.” Whenever two Russians come together, the shadow of autocracy is with them, tinging their thoughts, their views, their most intimate feelings, their private life, their public utterances — haunting the secret of their silences.

What struck me next in the course of a week or so was the silence of these ladies. I used to meet them walking in the public garden near the University. They greeted me with their usual friendliness, but I could not help noticing their taciturnity. By that time it was generally known that the assassin of M. de P — - had been caught, judged, and executed. So much had been declared officially to the news agencies. But for the world at large he remained anonymous. The official secrecy had withheld his name from the public. I really cannot imagine for what reason.

One day I saw Miss Haldin walking alone in the main valley of the Bastions under the naked trees.

“Mother is not very well,” she explained.

As Mrs. Haldin had, it seemed, never had a day’s illness in her life, this indisposition was disquieting. It was nothing definite, too.

“I think she is fretting because we have not heard from my brother for rather a long time.”

“No news — good news,” I said cheerfully, and we began to walk slowly side by side.

“Not in Russia,” she breathed out so low that I only just caught the words. I looked at her with more attention.

“You too are anxious?”

She admitted after a moment of hesitation that she was.

“It is really such a long time since we heard....”

And before I could offer the usual banal suggestions she confided in me.

“Oh! But it is much worse than that. I wrote to a family we know in Petersburg. They had not seen him for more than a month. They thought he was already with us. They were even offended a little that he should have left Petersburg without calling on them. The husband of the lady went at once to his lodgings. Victor had left there and they did not know his address.”

I remember her catching her breath rather pitifully. Her brother had not been seen at lectures for a very long time either. He only turned up now and then at the University gate to ask the porter for his letters. And the

gentleman friend was told that the student Haldin did not come to claim the last two letters for him. But the police came to inquire if the student Haldin ever received any correspondence at the University and took them away.

“My two last letters,” she said.

We faced each other. A few snow-flakes fluttered under the naked boughs. The sky was dark.

“What do you think could have happened?” I asked.

Her shoulders moved slightly.

“One can never tell — in Russia.”

I saw then the shadow of autocracy lying upon Russian lives in their submission or their revolt. I saw it touch her handsome open face nestled in a fur collar and darken her clear eyes that shone upon me brilliantly grey in the murky light of a beclouded, inclement afternoon.

“Let us move on,” she said. “It is cold standing — to-day.”

She shuddered a little and stamped her little feet. We moved briskly to the end of the alley and back to the great gates of the garden.

“Have you told your mother?” I ventured to ask.

“No. Not yet. I came out to walk off the impression of this letter.”

I heard a rustle of paper somewhere. It came from her muff. She had the letter with her in there.

“What is it that you are afraid of?” I asked.

To us Europeans of the West, all ideas of political plots and conspiracies seem childish, crude inventions for the theatre or a novel. I did not like to be more definite in my inquiry.

“For us — for my mother specially, what I am afraid of is incertitude. People do disappear. Yes, they do disappear. I leave you to imagine what it is — the cruelty of the dumb weeks — months — years! This friend of ours has abandoned his inquiries when he heard of the police getting hold of the letters. I suppose he was afraid of compromising himself. He has a wife and children — and why should he, after all.... Moreover, he is without influential connections and not rich. What could he do?... Yes, I am afraid of silence — for my poor mother. She won’t be able to bear it. For my brother I am afraid of...” she became almost indistinct, “of anything.”

We were now near the gate opposite the theatre. She raised her voice.

“But lost people do turn up even in Russia. Do you know what my last hope is? Perhaps the next thing we know, we shall see him walking into our rooms.”

I raised my hat and she passed out of the gardens, graceful and strong, after a slight movement of the head to me, her hands in the muff, crumpling the cruel Petersburg letter.

On returning home I opened the newspaper I receive from London, and glancing down the correspondence from Russia — not the telegrams but the correspondence — the first thing that caught my eye was the name of Haldin. Mr. de P — -'s death was no longer an actuality, but the enterprising correspondent was proud of having ferreted out some unofficial information about that fact of modern history. He had got hold of Haldin's name, and had picked up the story of the midnight arrest in the street. But the sensation from a journalistic point of view was already well in the past. He did not allot to it more than twenty lines out of a full column. It was quite enough to give me a sleepless night. I perceived that it would have been a sort of treason to let Miss Haldin come without preparation upon that journalistic discovery which would infallibly be reproduced on the morrow by French and Swiss newspapers. I had a very bad time of it till the morning, wakeful with nervous worry and night-marish with the feeling of being mixed up with something theatrical and morbidly affected. The incongruity of such a complication in those two women's lives was sensible to me all night in the form of absolute anguish. It seemed due to their refined simplicity that it should remain concealed from them for ever. Arriving at an unconscionably early hour at the door of their apartment, I felt as if I were about to commit an act of vandalism....

The middle-aged servant woman led me into the drawing-room where there was a duster on a chair and a broom leaning against the centre table. The motes danced in the sunshine; I regretted I had not written a letter instead of coming myself, and was thankful for the brightness of the day. Miss Haldin in a plain black dress came lightly out of her mother's room with a fixed uncertain smile on her lips.

I pulled the paper out of my pocket. I did not imagine that a number of the Standard could have the effect of Medusa's head. Her face went stony in a moment — her eyes — her limbs. The most terrible thing was that being stony she remained alive. One was conscious of her palpitating heart. I hope she forgave me the delay of my clumsy circumlocution. It was not very prolonged; she could not have kept so still from head to foot for more than a second or two; and then I heard her draw a breath. As if the shock had paralysed her moral resistance, and affected the firmness of her muscles, the

contours of her face seemed to have given way. She was frightfully altered. She looked aged — ruined. But only for a moment. She said with decision

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“I am going to tell my mother at once.”

“Would that be safe in her state?” I objected.

“What can be worse than the state she has been in for the last month? We understand this in another way. The crime is not at his door. Don’t imagine I am defending him before you.”

She went to the bedroom door, then came back to ask me in a low murmur not to go till she returned. For twenty interminable minutes not a sound reached me. At last Miss Haldin came out and walked across the room with her quick light step. When she reached the armchair she dropped into it heavily as if completely exhausted.

Mrs. Haldin, she told me, had not shed a tear. She was sitting up in bed, and her immobility, her silence, were very alarming. At last she lay down gently and had motioned her daughter away.

“She will call me in presently,” added Miss Haldin. “I left a bell near the bed.”

I confess that my very real sympathy had no standpoint. The Western readers for whom this story is written will understand what I mean. It was, if I may say so, the want of experience. Death is a remorseless spoliator. The anguish of irreparable loss is familiar to us all. There is no life so lonely as to be safe against that experience. But the grief I had brought to these two ladies had gruesome associations. It had the associations of bombs and gallows — a lurid, Russian colouring which made the complexion of my sympathy uncertain.

I was grateful to Miss Haldin for not embarrassing me by an outward display of deep feeling. I admired her for that wonderful command over herself, even while I was a little frightened at it. It was the stillness of a great tension. What if it should suddenly snap? Even the door of Mrs. Haldin’s room, with the old mother alone in there, had a rather awful aspect.

Nathalie Haldin murmured sadly —

“I suppose you are wondering what my feelings are?”

Essentially that was true. It was that very wonder which unsettled my sympathy of a dense Occidental. I could get hold of nothing but of some commonplace phrases, those futile phrases that give the measure of our

impotence before each other's trials I mumbled something to the effect that, for the young, life held its hopes and compensations. It held duties too — but of that I was certain it was not necessary to remind her.

She had a handkerchief in her hands and pulled at it nervously.

"I am not likely to forget my mother," she said. "We used to be three. Now we are two — two women. She's not so very old. She may live quite a long time yet. What have we to look for in the future? For what hope and what consolation?"

"You must take a wider view," I said resolutely, thinking that with this exceptional creature this was the right note to strike. She looked at me steadily for a moment, and then the tears she had been keeping down flowed unrestrained. She jumped up and stood in the window with her back to me.

I slipped away without attempting even to approach her. Next day I was told at the door that Mrs. Haldin was better. The middle-aged servant remarked that a lot of people — Russians — had called that day, but Miss Haldin had not seen anybody. A fortnight later, when making my daily call, I was asked in and found Mrs. Haldin sitting in her usual place by the window.

At first one would have thought that nothing was changed. I saw across the room the familiar profile, a little sharper in outline and overspread by a uniform pallor as might have been expected in an invalid. But no disease could have accounted for the change in her black eyes, smiling no longer with gentle irony. She raised them as she gave me her hand. I observed the three weeks' old number of the Standard folded with the correspondence from Russia uppermost, lying on a little table by the side of the armchair. Mrs. Haldin's voice was startlingly weak and colourless. Her first words to me framed a question.

"Has there been anything more in papers?"

I released her long emaciated hand, shook my head negatively, and sat down.

"The English press is wonderful. Nothing can be kept secret from it, and all the world must hear. Only our Russian news is not always easy to understand. Not always easy.... But English mothers do not look for news like that...."

She laid her hand on the newspaper and took it away again. I said —

"We too have had tragic times in our history."

“A long time ago. A very long time ago.”

“Yes.”

“There are nations that have made their bargain with fate,” said Miss Haldin, who had approached us. “We need not envy them.”

“Why this scorn?” I asked gently. “It may be that our bargain was not a very lofty one. But the terms men and nations obtain from Fate are hallowed by the price.”

Mrs. Haldin turned her head away and looked out of the window for a time, with that new, sombre, extinct gaze of her sunken eyes which so completely made another woman of her.

“That Englishman, this correspondent,” she addressed me suddenly, “do you think it is possible that he knew my son?”

To this strange question I could only say that it was possible of course. She saw my surprise.

“If one knew what sort of man he was one could perhaps write to him,” she murmured.

“Mother thinks,” explained Miss Haldin, standing between us, with one hand resting on the back of my chair, “that my poor brother perhaps did not try to save himself.”

I looked up at Miss Haldin in sympathetic consternation, but Miss Haldin was looking down calmly at her mother. The latter said —

“We do not know the address of any of his friends. Indeed, we know nothing of his Petersburg comrades. He had a multitude of young friends, only he never spoke much of them. One could guess that they were his disciples and that they idolized him. But he was so modest. One would think that with so many devoted....”

She averted her head again and looked down the Boulevard des Philosophes, a singularly arid and dusty thoroughfare, where nothing could be seen at the moment but two dogs, a little girl in a pinafore hopping on one leg, and in the distance a workman wheeling a bicycle.

“Even amongst the Apostles of Christ there was found a Judas,” she whispered as if to herself, but with the evident intention to be heard by me.

The Russian visitors assembled in little knots, conversed amongst themselves meantime, in low murmurs, and with brief glances in our direction. It was a great contrast to the usual loud volubility of these gatherings. Miss Haldin followed me into the ante-room.

“People will come,” she said. “We cannot shut the door in their faces.”

While I was putting on my overcoat she began to talk to me of her mother. Poor Mrs. Haldin was fretting after more news. She wanted to go on hearing about her unfortunate son. She could not make up her mind to abandon him quietly to the dumb unknown. She would persist in pursuing him in there through the long days of motionless silence face to face with the empty Boulevard des Philosophes. She could not understand why he had not escaped — as so many other revolutionists and conspirators had managed to escape in other instances of that kind. It was really inconceivable that the means of secret revolutionary organisations should have failed so inexcusably to preserve her son. But in reality the inconceivable that staggered her mind was nothing but the cruel audacity of Death passing over her head to strike at that young and precious heart.

Miss Haldin mechanically, with an absorbed look, handed me my hat. I understood from her that the poor woman was possessed by the sombre and simple idea that her son must have perished because he did not want to be saved. It could not have been that he despaired of his country's future. That was impossible. Was it possible that his mother and sister had not known how to merit his confidence; and that, after having done what he was compelled to do, his spirit became crushed by an intolerable doubt, his mind distracted by a sudden mistrust.

I was very much shocked by this piece of ingenuity.

“Our three lives were like that!” Miss Haldin twined the fingers of both her hands together in demonstration, then separated them slowly, looking straight into my face. “That’s what poor mother found to torment herself and me with, for all the years to come,” added the strange girl. At that moment her indefinable charm was revealed to me in the conjunction of passion and stoicism. I imagined what her life was likely to be by the side of Mrs. Haldin’s terrible immobility, inhabited by that fixed idea. But my concern was reduced to silence by my ignorance of her modes of feeling. Difference of nationality is a terrible obstacle for our complex Western natures. But Miss Haldin probably was too simple to suspect my embarrassment. She did not wait for me to say anything, but as if reading my thoughts on my face she went on courageously —

“At first poor mother went numb, as our peasants say; then she began to think and she will go on now thinking and thinking in that unfortunate strain. You see yourself how cruel that is....”

I never spoke with greater sincerity than when I agreed with her that it would be deplorable in the highest degree. She took an anxious breath.

“But all these strange details in the English paper,” she exclaimed suddenly. “What is the meaning of them? I suppose they are true? But is it not terrible that my poor brother should be caught wandering alone, as if in despair, about the streets at night....”

We stood so close to each other in the dark anteroom that I could see her biting her lower lip to suppress a dry sob. After a short pause she said —

“I suggested to mother that he may have been betrayed by some false friend or simply by some cowardly creature. It may be easier for her to believe that.”

I understood now the poor woman’s whispered allusion to Judas.

“It may be easier,” I admitted, admiring inwardly the directness and the subtlety of the girl’s outlook. She was dealing with life as it was made for her by the political conditions of her country. She faced cruel realities, not morbid imaginings of her own making. I could not defend myself from a certain feeling of respect when she added simply —

“Time they say can soften every sort of bitterness. But I cannot believe that it has any power over remorse. It is better that mother should think some person guilty of Victor’s death, than that she should connect it with a weakness of her son or a shortcoming of her own.”

“But you, yourself, don’t suppose that....” I began.

She compressed her lips and shook her head. She harboured no evil thoughts against any one, she declared — and perhaps nothing that happened was unnecessary. On these words, pronounced low and sounding mysterious in the half obscurity of the ante-room, we parted with an expressive and warm handshake. The grip of her strong, shapely hand had a seductive frankness, a sort of exquisite virility. I do not know why she should have felt so friendly to me. It may be that she thought I understood her much better than I was able to do. The most precise of her sayings seemed always to me to have enigmatical prolongations vanishing somewhere beyond my reach. I am reduced to suppose that she appreciated my attention and my silence. The attention she could see was quite sincere, so that the silence could not be suspected of coldness. It seemed to satisfy her. And it is to be noted that if she confided in me it was clearly not with the expectation of receiving advice, for which, indeed she never asked.



Our daily relations were interrupted at this period for something like a fortnight. I had to absent myself unexpectedly from Geneva. On my return I lost no time in directing my steps up the Boulevard des Philosophes.

Through the open door of the drawing-room I was annoyed to hear a visitor holding forth steadily in an unctuous deep voice.

Mrs. Haldin's armchair by the window stood empty. On the sofa, Nathalie Haldin raised her charming grey eyes in a glance of greeting accompanied by the merest hint of a welcoming smile. But she made no movement. With her strong white hands lying inverted in the lap of her mourning dress she faced a man who presented to me a robust back covered with black broadcloth, and well in keeping with the deep voice. He turned his head sharply over his shoulder, but only for a moment.

"Ah! your English friend. I know. I know. That's nothing."

He wore spectacles with smoked glasses, a tall silk hat stood on the floor by the side of his chair. Flourishing slightly a big soft hand he went on with his discourse, precipitating his delivery a little more.

"I have never changed the faith I held while wandering in the forests and bogs of Siberia. It sustained me then — it sustains me now. The great Powers of Europe are bound to disappear — and the cause of their collapse will be very simple. They will exhaust themselves struggling against their proletariat. In Russia it is different. In Russia we have no classes to combat each other, one holding the power of wealth, and the other mighty with the strength of numbers. We have only an unclean bureaucracy in the face of a people as great and as incorruptible as the ocean. No, we have no classes. But we have the Russian woman. The admirable Russian woman! I receive most remarkable letters signed by women. So elevated in tone, so courageous, breathing such a noble ardour of service! The greatest part of our hopes rests on women. I behold their thirst for knowledge. It is admirable. Look how they absorb, how they are making it their own. It is miraculous. But what is knowledge? ...I understand that you have not been studying anything especially — medicine for instance. No? That's right. Had I been honoured by being asked to advise you on the use of your time when you arrived here I would have been strongly opposed to such a course. Knowledge in itself is mere dross."

He had one of those bearded Russian faces without shape, a mere appearance of flesh and hair with not a single feature having any sort of character. His eyes being hidden by the dark glasses there was an utter

absence of all expression. I knew him by sight. He was a Russian refugee of mark. All Geneva knew his burly black-coated figure. At one time all Europe was aware of the story of his life written by himself and translated into seven or more languages. In his youth he had led an idle, dissolute life. Then a society girl he was about to marry died suddenly and thereupon he abandoned the world of fashion, and began to conspire in a spirit of repentance, and, after that, his native autocracy took good care that the usual things should happen to him. He was imprisoned in fortresses, beaten within an inch of his life, and condemned to work in mines, with common criminals. The great success of his book, however, was the chain.

I do not remember now the details of the weight and length of the fetters riveted on his limbs by an "Administrative" order, but it was in the number of pounds and the thickness of links an appalling assertion of the divine right of autocracy. Appalling and futile too, because this big man managed to carry off that simple engine of government with him into the woods. The sensational clink of these fetters is heard all through the chapters describing his escape — a subject of wonder to two continents. He had begun by concealing himself successfully from his guard in a hole on a river bank. It was the end of the day; with infinite labour he managed to free one of his legs. Meantime night fell. He was going to begin on his other leg when he was overtaken by a terrible misfortune. He dropped his file.

All this is precise yet symbolic; and the file had its pathetic history. It was given to him unexpectedly one evening, by a quiet, pale-faced girl. The poor creature had come out to the mines to join one of his fellow convicts, a delicate young man, a mechanic and a social democrat, with broad cheekbones and large staring eyes. She had worked her way across half Russia and nearly the whole of Siberia to be near him, and, as it seems, with the hope of helping him to escape. But she arrived too late. Her lover had died only a week before.

Through that obscure episode, as he says, in the history of ideas in Russia, the file came into his hands, and inspired him with an ardent resolution to regain his liberty. When it slipped through his fingers it was as if it had gone straight into the earth. He could by no manner of means put his hand on it again in the dark. He groped systematically in the loose earth, in the mud, in the water; the night was passing meantime, the precious night on which he counted to get away into the forests, his only chance of escape. For a moment he was tempted by despair to give up; but recalling the quiet,

sad face of the heroic girl, he felt profoundly ashamed of his weakness. She had selected him for the gift of liberty and he must show himself worthy of the favour conferred by her feminine, indomitable soul. It appeared to be a sacred trust. To fail would have been a sort of treason against the sacredness of self-sacrifice and womanly love.

There are in his book whole pages of self-analysis whence emerges like a white figure from a dark confused sea the conviction of woman's spiritual superiority — his new faith confessed since in several volumes. His first tribute to it, the great act of his conversion, was his extraordinary existence in the endless forests of the Okhotsk Province, with the loose end of the chain wound about his waist. A strip torn off his convict shirt secured the end firmly. Other strips fastened it at intervals up his left leg to deaden the clanking and to prevent the slack links from getting hooked in the bushes. He became very fierce. He developed an unsuspected genius for the arts of a wild and hunted existence. He learned to creep into villages without betraying his presence by anything more than an occasional faint jingle. He broke into outhouses with an axe he managed to purloin in a wood-cutters' camp. In the deserted tracts of country he lived on wild berries and hunted for honey. His clothing dropped off him gradually. His naked tawny figure glimpsed vaguely through the bushes with a cloud of mosquitoes and flies hovering about the shaggy head, spread tales of terror through whole districts. His temper grew savage as the days went by, and he was glad to discover that that there was so much of a brute in him. He had nothing else to put his trust in. For it was as though there had been two human beings indissolubly joined in that enterprise. The civilized man, the enthusiast of advanced humanitarian ideals thirsting for the triumph of spiritual love and political liberty; and the stealthy, primeval savage, pitilessly cunning in the preservation of his freedom from day to day, like a tracked wild beast.

The wild beast was making its way instinctively eastward to the Pacific coast, and the civilised humanitarian in fearful anxious dependence watched the proceedings with awe. Through all these weeks he could never make up his mind to appeal to human compassion. In the wary primeval savage this shyness might have been natural, but the other too, the civilized creature, the thinker, the escaping "political" had developed an absurd form of morbid pessimism, a form of temporary insanity, originating perhaps in the physical worry and discomfort of the chain. These links, he fancied, made him odious to the rest of mankind. It was a repugnant and suggestive load.

Nobody could feel any pity at the disgusting sight of a man escaping with a broken chain. His imagination became affected by his fetters in a precise, matter-of-fact manner. It seemed to him impossible that people could resist the temptation of fastening the loose end to a staple in the wall while they went for the nearest police official. Crouching in holes or hidden in thickets, he had tried to read the faces of unsuspecting free settlers working in the clearings or passing along the paths within a foot or two of his eyes. His feeling was that no man on earth could be trusted with the temptation of the chain.

One day, however, he chanced to come upon a solitary woman. It was on an open slope of rough grass outside the forest. She sat on the bank of a narrow stream; she had a red handkerchief on her head and a small basket was lying on the ground near her hand. At a little distance could be seen a cluster of log cabins, with a water-mill over a dammed pool shaded by birch trees and looking bright as glass in the twilight. He approached her silently, his hatchet stuck in his iron belt, a thick cudgel in his hand; there were leaves and bits of twig in his tangled hair, in his matted beard; bunches of rags he had wound round the links fluttered from his waist. A faint clink of his fetters made the woman turn her head. Too terrified by this savage apparition to jump up or even to scream, she was yet too stout-hearted to faint.... Expecting nothing less than to be murdered on the spot she covered her eyes with her hands to avoid the sight of the descending axe. When at last she found courage to look again, she saw the shaggy wild man sitting on the bank six feet away from her. His thin, sinewy arms hugged his naked legs; the long beard covered the knees on which he rested his chin; all these clasped, folded limbs, the bare shoulders, the wild head with red staring eyes, shook and trembled violently while the bestial creature was making efforts to speak. It was six weeks since he had heard the sound of his own voice. It seemed as though he had lost the faculty of speech. He had become a dumb and despairing brute, till the woman's sudden, unexpected cry of profound pity, the insight of her feminine compassion discovering the complex misery of the man under the terrifying aspect of the monster, restored him to the ranks of humanity. This point of view is presented in his book, with a very effective eloquence. She ended, he says, by shedding tears over him, sacred, redeeming tears, while he also wept with joy in the manner of a converted sinner. Directing him to hide in the bushes and wait

patiently (a police patrol was expected in the Settlement) she went away towards the houses, promising to return at night.

As if providentially appointed to be the newly wedded wife of the village blacksmith, the woman persuaded her husband to come out with her, bringing some tools of his trade, a hammer, a chisel, a small anvil.... “My fetters” — the book says — “were struck off on the banks of the stream, in the starlight of a calm night by an athletic, taciturn young man of the people, kneeling at my feet, while the woman like a liberating genius stood by with clasped hands.” Obviously a symbolic couple. At the same time they furnished him with some decent clothing, and put heart into the new man by the information that the seacoast of the Pacific was only a very few miles away. It could be seen, in fact, from the top of the next ridge....

The rest of his escape does not lend itself to mystic treatment and symbolic interpretation. He ended by finding his way to the West by the Suez Canal route in the usual manner. Reaching the shores of South Europe he sat down to write his autobiography — the great literary success of its year. This book was followed by other books written with the declared purpose of elevating humanity. In these works he preached generally the cult of the woman. For his own part he practised it under the rites of special devotion to the transcendental merits of a certain Madame de S — , a lady of advanced views, no longer very young, once upon a time the intriguing wife of a now dead and forgotten diplomat. Her loud pretensions to be one of the leaders of modern thought and of modern sentiment, she sheltered (like Voltaire and Mme. de Stael) on the republican territory of Geneva. Driving through the streets in her big landau she exhibited to the indifference of the natives and the stares of the tourists a long-waisted, youthful figure of hieratic stiffness, with a pair of big gleaming eyes, rolling restlessly behind a short veil of black lace, which, coming down no further than her vividly red lips, resembled a mask. Usually the “heroic fugitive” (this name was bestowed upon him in a review of the English edition of his book) — the “heroic fugitive” accompanied her, sitting, portentously bearded and darkly bespectacled, not by her side, but opposite her, with his back to the horses. Thus, facing each other, with no one else in the roomy carriage, their airings suggested a conscious public manifestation. Or it may have been unconscious. Russian simplicity often marches innocently on the edge of cynicism for some lofty purpose. But it is a vain enterprise for

sophisticated Europe to try and understand these doings. Considering the air of gravity extending even to the physiognomy of the coachman and the action of the showy horses, this quaint display might have possessed a mystic significance, but to the corrupt frivolity of a Western mind, like my own, it seemed hardly decent.

However, it is not becoming for an obscure teacher of languages to criticize a “heroic fugitive” of worldwide celebrity. I was aware from hearsay that he was an industrious busy-body, hunting up his compatriots in hotels, in private lodgings, and — I was told — conferring upon them the honour of his notice in public gardens when a suitable opening presented itself. I was under the impression that after a visit or two, several months before, he had given up the ladies Haldin — no doubt reluctantly, for there could be no question of his being a determined person. It was perhaps to be expected that he should reappear again on this terrible occasion, as a Russian and a revolutionist, to say the right thing, to strike the true, perhaps a comforting, note. But I did not like to see him sitting there. I trust that an unbecoming jealousy of my privileged position had nothing to do with it. I made no claim to a special standing for my silent friendship. Removed by the difference of age and nationality as if into the sphere of another existence, I produced, even upon myself, the effect of a dumb helpless ghost, of an anxious immaterial thing that could only hover about without the power to protect or guide by as much as a whisper. Since Miss Haldin with her sure instinct had refrained from introducing me to the burly celebrity, I would have retired quietly and returned later on, had I not met a peculiar expression in her eyes which I interpreted as a request to stay, with the view, perhaps, of shortening an unwelcome visit.

He picked up his hat, but only to deposit it on his knees.

“We shall meet again, Natalia Victorovna. To-day I have called only to mark those feelings towards your honoured mother and yourself, the nature of which you cannot doubt. I needed no urging, but Eleanor — Madame de S — herself has in a way sent me. She extends to you the hand of feminine fellowship. There is positively in all the range of human sentiments no joy and no sorrow that woman cannot understand, elevate, and spiritualize by her interpretation. That young man newly arrived from St. Petersburg, I have mentioned to you, is already under the charm.”

At this point Miss Haldin got up abruptly. I was glad. He did not evidently expect anything so decisive and, at first, throwing his head back,

he tilted up his dark glasses with bland curiosity. At last, recollecting himself, he stood up hastily, seizing his hat off his knees with great adroitness.

“How is it, Natalia Victorovna, that you have kept aloof so long, from what after all is — let disparaging tongues say what they like — a unique centre of intellectual freedom and of effort to shape a high conception of our future? In the case of your honoured mother I understand in a measure. At her age new ideas — new faces are not perhaps.... But you! Was it mistrust — or indifference? You must come out of your reserve. We Russians have no right to be reserved with each other. In our circumstances it is almost a crime against humanity. The luxury of private grief is not for us. Nowadays the devil is not combated by prayers and fasting. And what is fasting after all but starvation. You must not starve yourself, Natalia Victorovna. Strength is what we want. Spiritual strength, I mean. As to the other kind, what could withstand us Russians if we only put it forth? Sin is different in our day, and the way of salvation for pure souls is different too. It is no longer to be found in monasteries but in the world, in the...”

The deep sound seemed to rise from under the floor, and one felt steeped in it to the lips. Miss Haldin’s interruption resembled the effort of a drowning person to keep above water. She struck in with an accent of impatience —

“But, Peter Ivanovitch, I don’t mean to retire into a monastery. Who would look for salvation there?”

“I spoke figuratively,” he boomed.

“Well, then, I am speaking figuratively too. But sorrow is sorrow and pain is pain in the old way. They make their demands upon people. One has got to face them the best way one can. I know that the blow which has fallen upon us so unexpectedly is only an episode in the fate of a people. You may rest assured that I don’t forget that. But just now I have to think of my mother. How can you expect me to leave her to herself...?”

“That is putting it in a very crude way,” he protested in his great effortless voice.

Miss Haldin did not wait for the vibration to die out.

“And run about visiting amongst a lot of strange people. The idea is distasteful for me; and I do not know what else you may mean?”

He towered before her, enormous, deferential, cropped as close as a convict and this big pinkish poll evoked for me the vision of a wild head

with matted locks peering through parted bushes, glimpses of naked, tawny limbs slinking behind the masses of sodden foliage under a cloud of flies and mosquitoes. It was an involuntary tribute to the vigour of his writing. Nobody could doubt that he had wandered in Siberian forests, naked and girt with a chain. The black broadcloth coat invested his person with a character of austere decency — something recalling a missionary.

“Do you know what I want, Natalia Victorovna?” he uttered solemnly. “I want you to be a fanatic.”

“A fanatic?”

“Yes. Faith alone won’t do.”

His voice dropped to a still lower tone. He raised for a moment one thick arm; the other remained hanging down against his thigh, with the fragile silk hat at the end.

“I shall tell you now something which I entreat you to ponder over carefully. Listen, we need a force that would move heaven and earth — nothing less.”

The profound, subterranean note of this “nothing less” made one shudder, almost, like the deep muttering of wind in the pipes of an organ.

“And are we to find that force in the salon of Madame de S — ? Excuse me, Peter Ivanovitch, if I permit myself to doubt it. Is not that lady a woman of the great world, an aristocrat?”

“Prejudice!” he cried. “You astonish me. And suppose she was all that! She is also a woman of flesh and blood. There is always something to weigh down the spiritual side in all of us. But to make of it a reproach is what I did not expect from you. No! I did not expect that. One would think you have listened to some malevolent scandal.”

“I have heard no gossip, I assure you. In our province how could we? But the world speaks of her. What can there be in common in a lady of that sort and an obscure country girl like me?”

“She is a perpetual manifestation of a noble and peerless spirit,” he broke in. “Her charm — no, I shall not speak of her charm. But, of course, everybody who approaches her falls under the spell.... Contradictions vanish, trouble falls away from one.... Unless I am mistaken — but I never make a mistake in spiritual matters — you are troubled in your soul, Natalia Victorovna.”

Miss Haldin’s clear eyes looked straight at his soft enormous face; I received the impression that behind these dark spectacles of his he could be



as impudent as he chose.

“Only the other evening walking back to town from Chateau Borel with our latest interesting arrival from Petersburg, I could notice the powerful soothing influence — I may say reconciling influence.... There he was, all these kilometres along the shores of the lake, silent, like a man who has been shown the way of peace. I could feel the leaven working in his soul, you understand. For one thing he listened to me patiently. I myself was inspired that evening by the firm and exquisite genius of Eleanor — Madame de S — , you know. It was a full moon and I could observe his face. I cannot be deceived....”

Miss Haldin, looking down, seemed to hesitate.

“Well! I will think of what you said, Peter Ivanovitch. I shall try to call as soon as I can leave mother for an hour or two safely.”

Coldly as these words were said I was amazed at the concession. He snatched her right hand with such fervour that I thought he was going to press it to his lips or his breast. But he only held it by the finger-tips in his great paw and shook it a little up and down while he delivered his last volley of words.

“That’s right. That’s right. I haven’t obtained your full confidence as yet, Natalia Victorovna, but that will come. All in good time. The sister of Viktor Haldin cannot be without importance.... It’s simply impossible. And no woman can remain sitting on the steps. Flowers, tears, applause — that has had its time; it’s a mediaeval conception. The arena, the arena itself is the place for women!”

He relinquished her hand with a flourish, as if giving it to her for a gift, and remained still, his head bowed in dignified submission before her femininity.

“The arena!... You must descend into the arena, Natalia.”

He made one step backwards, inclined his enormous body, and was gone swiftly. The door fell to behind him. But immediately the powerful resonance of his voice was heard addressing in the ante-room the middle-aged servant woman who was letting him out. Whether he exhorted her too to descend into the arena I cannot tell. The thing sounded like a lecture, and the slight crash of the outer door cut it short suddenly.

### III

“We remained looking at each other for a time.”

“Do you know who he is?”

Miss Haldin, coming forward, put this question to me in English.

I took her offered hand.

“Everybody knows. He is a revolutionary feminist, a great writer, if you like, and — how shall I say it — the — the familiar guest of Madame de S — ’s mystic revolutionary salon.”

Miss Haldin passed her hand over her forehead.

“You know, he was with me for more than an hour before you came in. I was so glad mother was lying down. She has many nights without sleep, and then sometimes in the middle of the day she gets a rest of several hours. It is sheer exhaustion — but still, I am thankful.... If it were not for these intervals....”

She looked at me and, with that extraordinary penetration which used to disconcert me, shook her head.

“No. She would not go mad.”

“My dear young lady,” I cried, by way of protest, the more shocked because in my heart I was far from thinking Mrs. Haldin quite sane.

“You don’t know what a fine, lucid intellect mother had,” continued Nathalie Haldin, with her calm, clear-eyed simplicity, which seemed to me always to have a quality of heroism.

“I am sure....” I murmured.

“I darkened mother’s room and came out here. I’ve wanted for so long to think quietly.”

She paused, then, without giving any sign of distress, added, “It’s so difficult,” and looked at me with a strange fixity, as if watching for a sign of dissent or surprise.

I gave neither. I was irresistibly impelled to say —

“The visit from that gentleman has not made it any easier, I fear.”

Miss Haldin stood before me with a peculiar expression in her eyes.

“I don’t pretend to understand completely. Some guide one must have, even if one does not wholly give up the direction of one’s conduct to him. I am an inexperienced girl, but I am not slavish, There has been too much of that in Russia. Why should I not listen to him? There is no harm in having one’s thoughts directed. But I don’t mind confessing to you that I have not been completely candid with Peter Ivanovitch. I don’t quite know what prevented me at the moment....”

She walked away suddenly from me to a distant part of the room; but it was only to open and shut a drawer in a bureau. She returned with a piece

of paper in her hand. It was thin and blackened with close handwriting. It was obviously a letter.

“I wanted to read you the very words,” she said. “This is one of my poor brother’s letters. He never doubted. How could he doubt? They make only such a small handful, these miserable oppressors, before the unanimous will of our people.”

“Your brother believed in the power of a people’s will to achieve anything?”

“It was his religion,” declared Miss Haldin.

I looked at her calm face and her animated eyes.

“Of course the will must be awakened, inspired, concentrated,” she went on. “That is the true task of real agitators. One has got to give up one’s life to it. The degradation of servitude, the absolutist lies must be uprooted and swept out. Reform is impossible. There is nothing to reform. There is no legality, there are no institutions. There are only arbitrary decrees. There is only a handful of cruel — perhaps blind — officials against a nation.”

The letter rustled slightly in her hand. I glanced down at the flimsy blackened pages whose very handwriting seemed cabalistic, incomprehensible to the experience of Western Europe.

“Stated like this,” I confessed, “the problem seems simple enough. But I fear I shall not see it solved. And if you go back to Russia I know that I shall not see you again. Yet once more I say: go back! Don’t suppose that I am thinking of your preservation. No! I know that you will not be returning to personal safety. But I had much rather think of you in danger there than see you exposed to what may be met here.”

“I tell you what,” said Miss Haldin, after a moment of reflection. “I believe that you hate revolution; you fancy it’s not quite honest. You belong to a people which has made a bargain with fate and wouldn’t like to be rude to it. But we have made no bargain. It was never offered to us — so much liberty for so much hard cash. You shrink from the idea of revolutionary action for those you think well of as if it were something — how shall I say it — not quite decent.”

I bowed my head.

“You are quite right,” I said. “I think very highly of you”

“Don’t suppose I do not know it,” she began hurriedly. “Your friendship has been very valuable.”

“I have done little else but look on.”

She was a little flushed under the eyes.

“There is a way of looking on which is valuable I have felt less lonely because of it. It’s difficult to explain.”

“Really? Well, I too have felt less lonely. That’s easy to explain, though. But it won’t go on much longer. The last thing I want to tell you is this: in a real revolution — not a simple dynastic change or a mere reform of institutions — in a real revolution the best characters do not come to the front. A violent revolution falls into the hands of narrow-minded fanatics and of tyrannical hypocrites at first. Afterwards comes the turn of all the pretentious intellectual failures of the time. Such are the chiefs and the leaders. You will notice that I have left out the mere rogues. The scrupulous and the just, the noble, humane, and devoted natures; the unselfish and the intelligent may begin a movement — but it passes away from them. They are not the leaders of a revolution. They are its victims: the victims of disgust, of disenchantment — often of remorse. Hopes grotesquely betrayed, ideals caricatured — that is the definition of revolutionary success. There have been in every revolution hearts broken by such successes. But enough of that. My meaning is that I don’t want you to be a victim.”

“If I could believe all you have said I still wouldn’t think of myself,” protested Miss Haldin. “I would take liberty from any hand as a hungry man would snatch at a piece of bread. The true progress must begin after. And for that the right men shall be found. They are already amongst us. One comes upon them in their obscurity, unknown, preparing themselves....”

She spread out the letter she had kept in her hand all the time, and looking down at it —

“Yes! One comes upon such men!” she repeated, and then read out the words, “Unstained, lofty, and solitary existences.”

Folding up the letter, while I looked at her interrogatively, she explained —

“These are the words which my brother applies to a young man he came to know in St. Petersburg. An intimate friend, I suppose. It must be. His is the only name my brother mentions in all his correspondence with me. Absolutely the only one, and — would you believe it? — the man is here. He arrived recently in Geneva.”

“Have you seen him?” I inquired. “But, of course; you must have seen him.”

“No! No! I haven’t! I didn’t know he was here. It’s Peter Ivanovitch himself who told me. You have heard him yourself mentioning a new arrival from Petersburg.... Well, that is the man of ‘unstained, lofty, and solitary existence.’ My brother’s friend!”

“Compromised politically, I suppose,” I remarked.

“I don’t know. Yes. It must be so. Who knows! Perhaps it was this very friendship with my brother which.... But no! It is scarcely possible. Really, I know nothing except what Peter Ivanovitch told me of him. He has brought a letter of introduction from Father Zosim — you know, the priest-democrat; you have heard of Father Zosim?”

“Oh yes. The famous Father Zosim was staying here in Geneva for some two months about a year ago,” I said. “When he left here he seems to have disappeared from the world.”

“It appears that he is at work in Russia again. Somewhere in the centre,” Miss Haldin said, with animation. “But please don’t mention that to any one — don’t let it slip from you, because if it got into the papers it would be dangerous for him.”

“You are anxious, of course, to meet that friend of your brother?” I asked.

Miss Haldin put the letter into her pocket. Her eyes looked beyond my shoulder at the door of her mother’s room.

“Not here,” she murmured. “Not for the first time, at least.”

After a moment of silence I said good-bye, but Miss Haldin followed me into the ante-room, closing the door behind us carefully.

“I suppose you guess where I mean to go tomorrow?”

“You have made up your mind to call on Madame de S — .”

“Yes. I am going to the Chateau Borel. I must.”

“What do you expect to hear there?” I asked, in a low voice.

I wondered if she were not deluding herself with some impossible hope. It was not that, however.

“Only think — such a friend. The only man mentioned in his letters. He would have something to give me, if nothing more than a few poor words. It may be something said and thought in those last days. Would you want me to turn my back on what is left of my poor brother — a friend?”

“Certainly not,” I said. “I quite understand your pious curiosity.”

“ — Unstained, lofty, and solitary existences,” she murmured to herself. “There are! There are! Well, let me question one of them about the loved dead.”

“How do you know, though, that you will meet him there? Is he staying in the Chateau as a guest — do you suppose?”

“I can’t really tell,” she confessed. “He brought a written introduction from Father Zosim — who, it seems, is a friend of Madame de S — too. She can’t be such a worthless woman after all.”

“There were all sorts of rumours afloat about Father Zosim himself,” I observed.

She shrugged her shoulders.

“Calumny is a weapon of our government too. It’s well known. Oh yes! It is a fact that Father Zosim had the protection of the Governor-General of a certain province. We talked on the subject with my brother two years ago, I remember. But his work was good. And now he is proscribed. What better proof can one require. But no matter what that priest was or is. All that cannot affect my brother’s friend. If I don’t meet him there I shall ask these people for his address. And, of course, mother must see him too, later on. There is no guessing what he may have to tell us. It would be a mercy if mamma could be soothed. You know what she imagines. Some explanation perhaps may be found, or — or even made up, perhaps. It would be no sin.”

“Certainly,” I said, “it would be no sin. It may be a mistake, though.”

“I want her only to recover some of her old spirit. While she is like this I cannot think of anything calmly.”

“Do you mean to invent some sort of pious fraud for your mother’s sake?” I asked.

“Why fraud? Such a friend is sure to know something of my brother in these last days. He could tell us.... There is something in the facts which will not let me rest. I am certain he meant to join us abroad — that he had some plans — some great patriotic action in view; not only for himself, but for both of us. I trusted in that. I looked forward to the time! Oh! with such hope and impatience. I could have helped. And now suddenly this appearance of recklessness — as if he had not cared....”

She remained silent for a time, then obstinately she concluded —

“I want to know....”

Thinking it over, later on, while I walked slowly away from the Boulevard des Philosophes, I asked myself critically, what precisely was it

that she wanted to know? What I had heard of her history was enough to give me a clue. In the educational establishment for girls where Miss Haldin finished her studies she was looked upon rather unfavourably. She was suspected of holding independent views on matters settled by official teaching. Afterwards, when the two ladies returned to their country place, both mother and daughter, by speaking their minds openly on public events, had earned for themselves a reputation of liberalism. The three-horse trap of the district police-captain began to be seen frequently in their village. "I must keep an eye on the peasants" — so he explained his visits up at the house. "Two lonely ladies must be looked after a little." He would inspect the walls as though he wanted to pierce them with his eyes, peer at the photographs, turn over the books in the drawing-room negligently, and after the usual refreshments, would depart. But the old priest of the village came one evening in the greatest distress and agitation, to confess that he — the priest — had been ordered to watch and ascertain in other ways too (such as using his spiritual power with the servants) all that was going on in the house, and especially in respect of the visitors these ladies received, who they were, the length of their stay, whether any of them were strangers to that part of the country, and so on. The poor, simple old man was in an agony of humiliation and terror. "I came to warn you. Be cautious in your conduct, for the love of God. I am burning with shame, but there is no getting out from under the net. I shall have to tell them what I see, because if I did not there is my deacon. He would make the worst of things to curry favour. And then my son-in-law, the husband of my Parasha, who is a writer in the Government Domain office; they would soon kick him out — and maybe send him away somewhere." The old man lamented the necessities of the times — "when people do not agree somehow" and wiped his eyes. He did not wish to spend the evening of his days with a shaven head in the penitent's cell of some monastery — "and subjected to all the severities of ecclesiastical discipline; for they would show no mercy to an old man," he groaned. He became almost hysterical, and the two ladies, full of commiseration, soothed him the best they could before they let him go back to his cottage. But, as a matter of fact, they had very few visitors. The neighbours — some of them old friends — began to keep away; a few from timidity, others with marked disdain, being grand people that came only for the summer — Miss Haldin explained to me — aristocrats, reactionaries. It was a solitary existence for a young girl. Her relations with her mother were

of the tenderest and most open kind; but Mrs. Haldin had seen the experiences of her own generation, its sufferings, its deceptions, its apostasies too. Her affection for her children was expressed by the suppression of all signs of anxiety. She maintained a heroic reserve. To Nathalie Haldin, her brother with his Petersburg existence, not enigmatical in the least (there could be no doubt of what he felt or thought) but conducted a little mysteriously, was the only visible representative of a proscribed liberty. All the significance of freedom, its indefinite promises, lived in their long discussions, which breathed the loftiest hope of action and faith in success. Then, suddenly, the action, the hopes, came to an end with the details ferreted out by the English journalist. The concrete fact, the fact of his death remained! but it remained obscure in its deeper causes. She felt herself abandoned without explanation. But she did not suspect him. What she wanted was to learn almost at any cost how she could remain faithful to his departed spirit.

#### IV

Several days elapsed before I met Nathalie Haldin again. I was crossing the place in front of the theatre when I made out her shapely figure in the very act of turning between the gate pillars of the unattractive public promenade of the Bastions. She walked away from me, but I knew we should meet as she returned down the main alley — unless, indeed, she were going home. In that case, I don't think I should have called on her yet. My desire to keep her away from these people was as strong as ever, but I had no illusions as to my power. I was but a Westerner, and it was clear that Miss Haldin would not, could not listen to my wisdom; and as to my desire of listening to her voice, it were better, I thought, not to indulge overmuch in that pleasure. No, I should not have gone to the Boulevard des Philosophes; but when at about the middle of the principal alley I saw Miss Haldin coming towards me, I was too curious, and too honest, perhaps, to run away.

There was something of the spring harshness in the air. The blue sky was hard, but the young leaves clung like soft mist about the uninteresting range of trees; and the clear sun put little points of gold into the grey of Miss Haldin's frank eyes, turned to me with a friendly greeting.

I inquired after the health of her mother.

She had a slight movement of the shoulders and a little sad sigh.



“But, you see, I did come out for a walk...for exercise, as you English say.”

I smiled approvingly, and she added an unexpected remark —

“It is a glorious day.”

Her voice, slightly harsh, but fascinating with its masculine and bird-like quality, had the accent of spontaneous conviction. I was glad of it. It was as though she had become aware of her youth — for there was but little of spring-like glory in the rectangular railed space of grass and trees, framed visibly by the orderly roof-slopes of that town, comely without grace, and hospitable without sympathy. In the very air through which she moved there was but little warmth; and the sky, the sky of a land without horizons, swept and washed clean by the April showers, extended a cold cruel blue, without elevation, narrowed suddenly by the ugly, dark wall of the Jura where, here and there, lingered yet a few miserable trails and patches of snow. All the glory of the season must have been within herself — and I was glad this feeling had come into her life, if only for a little time.

“I am pleased to hear you say these words.” She gave me a quick look. Quick, not stealthy. If there was one thing of which she was absolutely incapable, it was stealthiness. Her sincerity was expressed in the very rhythm of her walk. It was I who was looking at her covertly — if I may say so. I knew where she had been, but I did not know what she had seen and heard in that nest of aristocratic conspiracies. I use the word aristocratic, for want of a better term. The Chateau Borel, embowered in the trees and thickets of its neglected grounds, had its fame in our day, like the residence of that other dangerous and exiled woman, Madame de Stael, in the Napoleonic era. Only the Napoleonic despotism, the booted heir of the Revolution, which counted that intellectual woman for an enemy worthy to be watched, was something quite unlike the autocracy in mystic vestments, engendered by the slavery of a Tartar conquest. And Madame de S — was very far from resembling the gifted author of *Corinne*. She made a great noise about being persecuted. I don’t know if she were regarded in certain circles as dangerous. As to being watched, I imagine that the Chateau Borel could be subjected only to a most distant observation. It was in its exclusiveness an ideal abode for hatching superior plots — whether serious or futile. But all this did not interest me. I wanted to know the effect its extraordinary inhabitants and its special atmosphere had produced on a girl like Miss Haldin, so true, so honest, but so dangerously inexperienced! Her

unconsciously lofty ignorance of the baser instincts of mankind left her disarmed before her own impulses. And there was also that friend of her brother, the significant new arrival from Russia.... I wondered whether she had managed to meet him.

We walked for some time, slowly and in silence.

“You know,” I attacked her suddenly, “if you don’t intend telling me anything, you must say so distinctly, and then, of course, it shall be final. But I won’t play at delicacy. I ask you point-blank for all the details.”

She smiled faintly at my threatening tone.

“You are as curious as a child.”

“No. I am only an anxious old man,” I replied earnestly.

She rested her glance on me as if to ascertain the degree of my anxiety or the number of my years. My physiognomy has never been expressive, I believe, and as to my years I am not ancient enough as yet to be strikingly decrepit. I have no long beard like the good hermit of a romantic ballad; my footsteps are not tottering, my aspect not that of a slow, venerable sage. Those picturesque advantages are not mine. I am old, alas, in a brisk, commonplace way. And it seemed to me as though there were some pity for me in Miss Haldin’s prolonged glance. She stepped out a little quicker.

“You ask for all the details. Let me see. I ought to remember them. It was novel enough for a — a village girl like me.”

After a moment of silence she began by saying that the Chateau Borel was almost as neglected inside as outside. It was nothing to wonder at, a Hamburg banker, I believe, retired from business, had it built to cheer his remaining days by the view of that lake whose precise, orderly, and well-to-do beauty must have been attractive to the unromantic imagination of a business man. But he died soon. His wife departed too (but only to Italy), and this house of moneyed ease, presumably unsaleable, had stood empty for several years. One went to it up a gravel drive, round a large, coarse grass-plot, with plenty of time to observe the degradation of its stuccoed front. Miss Haldin said that the impression was unpleasant. It grew more depressing as one came nearer.

She observed green stains of moss on the steps of the terrace. The front door stood wide open. There was no one about. She found herself in a wide, lofty, and absolutely empty hall, with a good many doors. These doors were all shut. A broad, bare stone staircase faced her, and the effect of the whole was of an untenanted house. She stood still, disconcerted by the solitude,

but after a while she became aware of a voice speaking continuously somewhere.

“You were probably being observed all the time,” I suggested. “There must have been eyes.”

“I don’t see how that could be,” she retorted. “I haven’t seen even a bird in the grounds. I don’t remember hearing a single twitter in the trees. The whole place appeared utterly deserted except for the voice.”

She could not make out the language — Russian, French, or German. No one seemed to answer it. It was as though the voice had been left behind by the departed inhabitants to talk to the bare walls. It went on volubly, with a pause now and then. It was lonely and sad. The time seemed very long to Miss Haldin. An invincible repugnance prevented her from opening one of the doors in the hall. It was so hopeless. No one would come, the voice would never stop. She confessed to me that she had to resist an impulse to turn round and go away unseen, as she had come.

“Really? You had that impulse?” I cried, full of regret. “What a pity you did not obey it.”

She shook her head.

“What a strange memory it would have been for one. Those deserted grounds, that empty hall, that impersonal, voluble voice, and — nobody, nothing, not a soul.”

The memory would have been unique and harmless. But she was not a girl to run away from an intimidating impression of solitude and mystery. “No, I did not run away,” she said. “I stayed where I was — and I did see a soul. Such a strange soul.”

As she was gazing up the broad staircase, and had concluded that the voice came from somewhere above, a rustle of dress attracted her attention. She looked down and saw a woman crossing the hall, having issued apparently through one of the many doors. Her face was averted, so that at first she was not aware of Miss Haldin.

On turning her head and seeing a stranger, she appeared very much startled. From her slender figure Miss Haldin had taken her for a young girl; but if her face was almost childishly round, it was also sallow and wrinkled, with dark rings under the eyes. A thick crop of dusty brown hair was parted boyishly on the side with a lateral wave above the dry, furrowed forehead. After a moment of dumb blinking, she suddenly squatted down on the floor.

“What do you mean by squatted down?” I asked, astonished. “This is a very strange detail.”

Miss Haldin explained the reason. This person when first seen was carrying a small bowl in her hand. She had squatted down to put it on the floor for the benefit of a large cat, which appeared then from behind her skirts, and hid its head into the bowl greedily. She got up, and approaching Miss Haldin asked with nervous bluntness —

“What do you want? Who are you?”

Miss Haldin mentioned her name and also the name of Peter Ivanovitch. The girlish, elderly woman nodded and puckered her face into a momentary expression of sympathy. Her black silk blouse was old and even frayed in places; the black serge skirt was short and shabby. She continued to blink at close quarters, and her eyelashes and eyebrows seemed shabby too. Miss Haldin, speaking gently to her, as if to an unhappy and sensitive person, explained how it was that her visit could not be an altogether unexpected event to Madame de S — .

“Ah! Peter Ivanovitch brought you an invitation. How was I to know? A dame de compagnie is not consulted, as you may imagine.”

The shabby woman laughed a little. Her teeth, splendidly white and admirably even, looked absurdly out of place, like a string of pearls on the neck of a ragged tramp. “Peter Ivanovitch is the greatest genius of the century perhaps, but he is the most inconsiderate man living. So if you have an appointment with him you must not be surprised to hear that he is not here.”

Miss Haldin explained that she had no appointment with Peter Ivanovitch. She became interested at once in that bizarre person.

“Why should he put himself out for you or any one else? Oh! these geniuses. If you only knew! Yes! And their books — I mean, of course, the books that the world admires, the inspired books. But you have not been behind the scenes. Wait till you have to sit at a table for a half a day with a pen in your hand. He can walk up and down his rooms for hours and hours. I used to get so stiff and numb that I was afraid I would lose my balance and fall off the chair all at once.”

She kept her hands folded in front of her, and her eyes, fixed on Miss Haldin’s face, betrayed no animation whatever. Miss Haldin, gathering that the lady who called herself a dame de compagnie was proud of having acted as secretary to Peter Ivanovitch, made an amiable remark.

“You could not imagine a more trying experience,” declared the lady. “There is an Anglo-American journalist interviewing Madame de S — now, or I would take you up,” she continued in a changed tone and glancing towards the staircase. “I act as master of ceremonies.”

It appeared that Madame de S — could not bear Swiss servants about her person; and, indeed, servants would not stay for very long in the Chateau Borel. There were always difficulties. Miss Haldin had already noticed that the hall was like a dusty barn of marble and stucco with cobwebs in the corners and faint tracks of mud on the black and white tessellated floor.

“I look also after this animal,” continued the dame de compagnie, keeping her hands folded quietly in front of her; and she bent her worn gaze upon the cat. “I don’t mind a bit. Animals have their rights; though, strictly speaking, I see no reason why they should not suffer as well as human beings. Do you? But of course they never suffer so much. That is impossible. Only, in their case it is more pitiful because they cannot make a revolution. I used to be a Republican. I suppose you are a Republican?”

Miss Haldin confessed to me that she did not know what to say. But she nodded slightly, and asked in her turn —

“And are you no longer a Republican?”

“After taking down Peter Ivanovitch from dictation for two years, it is difficult for me to be anything. First of all, you have to sit perfectly motionless. The slightest movement you make puts to flight the ideas of Peter Ivanovitch. You hardly dare to breathe. And as to coughing — God forbid! Peter Ivanovitch changed the position of the table to the wall because at first I could not help raising my eyes to look out of the window, while waiting for him to go on with his dictation. That was not allowed. He said I stared so stupidly. I was likewise not permitted to look at him over my shoulder. Instantly Peter Ivanovitch stamped his foot, and would roar, ‘Look down on the paper!’ It seems my expression, my face, put him off. Well, I know that I am not beautiful, and that my expression is not hopeful either. He said that my air of unintelligent expectation irritated him. These are his own words.”

Miss Haldin was shocked, but admitted to me that she was not altogether surprised.

“Is it possible that Peter Ivanovitch could treat any woman so rudely?” she cried.

The dame de compagnie nodded several times with an air of discretion, then assured Miss Haldin that she did not mind in the least. The trying part of it was to have the secret of the composition laid bare before her; to see the great author of the revolutionary gospels grope for words as if he were in the dark as to what he meant to say.

“I am quite willing to be the blind instrument of higher ends. To give one’s life for the cause is nothing. But to have one’s illusions destroyed — that is really almost more than one can bear. I really don’t exaggerate,” she insisted. “It seemed to freeze my very beliefs in me — the more so that when we worked in winter Peter Ivanovitch, walking up and down the room, required no artificial heat to keep himself warm. Even when we move to the South of France there are bitterly cold days, especially when you have to sit still for six hours at a stretch. The walls of these villas on the Riviera are so flimsy. Peter Ivanovitch did not seem to be aware of anything. It is true that I kept down my shivers from fear of putting him out. I used to set my teeth till my jaws felt absolutely locked. In the moments when Peter Ivanovitch interrupted his dictation, and sometimes these intervals were very long — often twenty minutes, no less, while he walked to and fro behind my back muttering to himself — I felt I was dying by inches, I assure you. Perhaps if I had let my teeth rattle Peter Ivanovitch might have noticed my distress, but I don’t think it would have had any practical effect. She’s very miserly in such matters.”

The dame de compagnie glanced up the staircase. The big cat had finished the milk and was rubbing its whiskered cheek sinuously against her skirt. She dived to snatch it up from the floor.

“Miserliness is rather a quality than otherwise, you know,” she continued, holding the cat in her folded arms. “With us it is misers who can spare money for worthy objects — not the so-called generous natures. But pray don’t think I am a sybarite. My father was a clerk in the Ministry of Finances with no position at all. You may guess by this that our home was far from luxurious, though of course we did not actually suffer from cold. I ran away from my parents, you know, directly I began to think by myself. It is not very easy, such thinking. One has got to be put in the way of it, awakened to the truth. I am indebted for my salvation to an old apple-woman, who had her stall under the gateway of the house we lived in. She had a kind wrinkled face, and the most friendly voice imaginable. One day, casually, we began to talk about a child, a ragged little girl we had seen

begging from men in the streets at dusk; and from one thing to another my eyes began to open gradually to the horrors from which innocent people are made to suffer in this world, only in order that governments might exist. After I once understood the crime of the upper classes, I could not go on living with my parents. Not a single charitable word was to be heard in our home from year's end to year's end; there was nothing but the talk of vile office intrigues, and of promotion and of salaries, and of courting the favour of the chiefs. The mere idea of marrying one day such another man as my father made me shudder. I don't mean that there was anyone wanting to marry me. There was not the slightest prospect of anything of the kind. But was it not sin enough to live on a Government salary while half Russia was dying of hunger? The Ministry of Finances! What a grotesque horror it is! What does the starving, ignorant people want with a Ministry of Finances? I kissed my old folks on both cheeks, and went away from them to live in cellars, with the proletariat. I tried to make myself useful to the utterly hopeless. I suppose you understand what I mean? I mean the people who have nowhere to go and nothing to look forward to in this life. Do you understand how frightful that is — nothing to look forward to! Sometimes I think that it is only in Russia that there are such people and such a depth of misery can be reached. Well, I plunged into it, and — do you know — there isn't much that one can do in there. No, indeed — at least as long as there are Ministries of Finances and such like grotesque horrors to stand in the way. I suppose I would have gone mad there just trying to fight the vermin, if it had not been for a man. It was my old friend and teacher, the poor saintly apple-woman, who discovered him for me, quite accidentally. She came to fetch me late one evening in her quiet way. I followed her where she would lead; that part of my life was in her hands altogether, and without her my spirit would have perished miserably. The man was a young workman, a lithographer by trade, and he had got into trouble in connexion with that affair of temperance tracts — you remember. There was a lot of people put in prison for that. The Ministry of Finances again! What would become of it if the poor folk ceased making beasts of themselves with drink? Upon my word, I would think that finances and all the rest of it are an invention of the devil; only that a belief in a supernatural source of evil is not necessary; men alone are quite capable of every wickedness. Finances indeed!"

Hatred and contempt hissed in her utterance of the word “finances,” but at the very moment she gently stroked the cat reposing in her arms. She even raised them slightly, and inclining her head rubbed her cheek against the fur of the animal, which received this caress with the complete detachment so characteristic of its kind. Then looking at Miss Haldin she excused herself once more for not taking her upstairs to Madame S — The interview could not be interrupted. Presently the journalist would be seen coming down the stairs. The best thing was to remain in the hall; and besides, all these rooms (she glanced all round at the many doors), all these rooms on the ground floor were unfurnished.

“Positively there is no chair down here to offer you,” she continued. “But if you prefer your own thoughts to my chatter, I will sit down on the bottom step here and keep silent.”

Miss Haldin hastened to assure her that, on the contrary, she was very much interested in the story of the journeyman lithographer. He was a revolutionist, of course.

“A martyr, a simple man,” said the dame de compangnie, with a faint sigh, and gazing through the open front door dreamily. She turned her misty brown eyes on Miss Haldin.

“I lived with him for four months. It was like a nightmare.”

As Miss Haldin looked at her inquisitively she began to describe the emaciated face of the man, his fleshless limbs, his destitution. The room into which the apple-woman had led her was a tiny garret, a miserable den under the roof of a sordid house. The plaster fallen off the walls covered the floor, and when the door was opened a horrible tapestry of black cobwebs waved in the draught. He had been liberated a few days before — flung out of prison into the streets. And Miss Haldin seemed to see for the first time, a name and a face upon the body of that suffering people whose hard fate had been the subject of so many conversations, between her and her brother, in the garden of their country house.

He had been arrested with scores and scores of other people in that affair of the lithographed temperance tracts. Unluckily, having got hold of a great many suspected persons, the police thought they could extract from some of them other information relating to the revolutionist propaganda.

“They beat him so cruelly in the course of investigation,” went on the dame de compangnie, “that they injured him internally. When they had done with him he was doomed. He could do nothing for himself. I beheld him



lying on a wooden bedstead without any bedding, with his head on a bundle of dirty rags, lent to him out of charity by an old rag-picker, who happened to live in the basement of the house. There he was, uncovered, burning with fever, and there was not even a jug in the room for the water to quench his thirst with. There was nothing whatever — just that bedstead and the bare floor.”

“Was there no one in all that great town amongst the liberals and revolutionaries, to extend a helping hand to a brother?” asked Miss Haldin indignantly.

“Yes. But you do not know the most terrible part of that man’s misery. Listen. It seems that they ill-used him so atrociously that, at last, his firmness gave way, and he did let out some information. Poor soul, the flesh is weak, you know. What it was he did not tell me. There was a crushed spirit in that mangled body. Nothing I found to say could make him whole. When they let him out, he crept into that hole, and bore his remorse stoically. He would not go near anyone he knew. I would have sought assistance for him, but, indeed, where could I have gone looking for it? Where was I to look for anyone who had anything to spare or any power to help? The people living round us were all starving and drunken. They were the victims of the Ministry of Finances. Don’t ask me how we lived. I couldn’t tell you. It was like a miracle of wretchedness. I had nothing to sell, and I assure you my clothes were in such a state that it was impossible for me to go out in the daytime. I was indecent. I had to wait till it was dark before I ventured into the streets to beg for a crust of bread, or whatever I could get, to keep him and me alive. Often I got nothing, and then I would crawl back and lie on the floor by the side of his couch. Oh yes, I can sleep quite soundly on bare boards. That is nothing, and I am only mentioning it to you so that you should not think I am a sybarite. It was infinitely less killing than the task of sitting for hours at a table in a cold study to take the books of Peter Ivanovitch from dictation. But you shall see yourself what that is like, so I needn’t say any more about it.”

“It is by no means certain that I will ever take Peter Ivanovitch from dictation,” said Miss Haldin.

“No!” cried the other incredulously. “Not certain? You mean to say that you have not made up your mind?”

When Miss Haldin assured her that there never had been any question of that between her and Peter Ivanovitch, the woman with the cat compressed

her lips tightly for a moment.

“Oh, you will find yourself settled at the table before you know that you have made up your mind. Don’t make a mistake, it is disenchanting to hear Peter Ivanovitch dictate, but at the same time there is a fascination about it. He is a man of genius. Your face is certain not to irritate him; you may perhaps even help his inspiration, make it easier for him to deliver his message. As I look at you, I feel certain that you are the kind of woman who is not likely to check the flow of his inspiration.”

Miss Haldin thought it useless to protest against all these assumptions.

“But this man — this workman did he die under your care?” she said, after a short silence.

The dame de compagnie, listening up the stairs where now two voices were alternating with some animation, made no answer for a time. When the loud sounds of the discussion had sunk into an almost inaudible murmur, she turned to Miss Haldin.

“Yes, he died, but not, literally speaking, in my arms, as you might suppose. As a matter of fact, I was asleep when he breathed his last. So even now I cannot say I have seen anybody die. A few days before the end, some young men found us out in our extremity. They were revolutionists, as you might guess. He ought to have trusted in his political friends when he came out of prison. He had been liked and respected before, and nobody would have dreamed of reproaching him with his indiscretion before the police. Everybody knows how they go to work, and the strongest man has his moments of weakness before pain. Why, even hunger alone is enough to give one queer ideas as to what may be done. A doctor came, our lot was alleviated as far as physical comforts go, but otherwise he could not be consoled — poor man. I assure you, Miss Haldin, that he was very lovable, but I had not the strength to weep. I was nearly dead myself. But there were kind hearts to take care of me. A dress was found to clothe my nakedness. I tell you, I was not decent — and after a time the revolutionists placed me with a Jewish family going abroad, as governess. Of course I could teach the children, I finished the sixth class of the Lyceum; but the real object was, that I should carry some important papers across the frontier. I was entrusted with a packet which I carried next my heart. The gendarmes at the station did not suspect the governess of a Jewish family, busy looking after three children. I don’t suppose those Hebrews knew what I had on me, for I had been introduced to them in a very roundabout way by persons who did

not belong to the revolutionary movement, and naturally I had been instructed to accept a very small salary. When we reached Germany I left that family and delivered my papers to a revolutionist in Stuttgart; after this I was employed in various ways. But you do not want to hear all that. I have never felt that I was very useful, but I live in hopes of seeing all the Ministries destroyed, finances and all. The greatest joy of my life has been to hear what your brother has done.”

She directed her round eyes again to the sunshine outside, while the cat reposed within her folded arms in lordly beatitude and sphinx-like meditation.

“Yes! I rejoiced,” she began again. “For me there is a heroic ring about the very name of Haldin. They must have been trembling with fear in their Ministries — all those men with fiendish hearts. Here I stand talking to you, and when I think of all the cruelties, oppressions, and injustices that are going on at this very moment, my head begins to swim. I have looked closely at what would seem inconceivable if one’s own eyes had not to be trusted. I have looked at things that made me hate myself for my helplessness. I hated my hands that had no power, my voice that could not be heard, my very mind that would not become unhinged. Ah! I have seen things. And you?”

Miss Haldin was moved. She shook her head slightly.

“No, I have seen nothing for myself as yet,” she murmured “We have always lived in the country. It was my brother’s wish.”

“It is a curious meeting — this — between you and me,” continued the other. “Do you believe in chance, Miss Haldin? How could I have expected to see you, his sister, with my own eyes? Do you know that when the news came the revolutionaries here were as much surprised as pleased, every bit? No one seemed to know anything about your brother. Peter Ivanovitch himself had not foreseen that such a blow was going to be struck. I suppose your brother was simply inspired. I myself think that such deeds should be done by inspiration. It is a great privilege to have the inspiration and the opportunity. Did he resemble you at all? Don’t you rejoice, Miss Haldin?”

“You must not expect too much from me,” said Miss Haldin, repressing an inclination to cry which came over her suddenly. She succeeded, then added calmly, “I am not a heroic person!”

“You think you couldn’t have done such a thing yourself perhaps?”

“I don’t know. I must not even ask myself till I have lived a little longer, seen more....”

The other moved her head appreciatively. The purring of the cat had a loud complacency in the empty hall. No sound of voices came from upstairs. Miss Haldin broke the silence.

“What is it precisely that you heard people say about my brother? You said that they were surprised. Yes, I supposed they were. Did it not seem strange to them that my brother should have failed to save himself after the most difficult part — that is, getting away from the spot — was over? Conspirators should understand these things well. There are reasons why I am very anxious to know how it is he failed to escape.”

The dame de compagnie had advanced to the open hall-door. She glanced rapidly over her shoulder at Miss Haldin, who remained within the hall.

“Failed to escape,” she repeated absently. “Didn’t he make the sacrifice of his life? Wasn’t he just simply inspired? Wasn’t it an act of abnegation? Aren’t you certain?”

“What I am certain of,” said Miss Haldin, “is that it was not an act of despair. Have you not heard some opinion expressed here upon his miserable capture?”

The dame de compagnie mused for a while in the doorway.

“Did I hear? Of course, everything is discussed here. Has not all the world been speaking about your brother? For my part, the mere mention of his achievement plunges me into an envious ecstasy. Why should a man certain of immortality think of his life at all?”

She kept her back turned to Miss Haldin. Upstairs from behind a great dingy white and gold door, visible behind the balustrade of the first floor landing, a deep voice began to drone formally, as if reading over notes or something of the sort. It paused frequently, and then ceased altogether.

“I don’t think I can stay any longer now,” said Miss Haldin. “I may return another day.”

She waited for the dame de compagnie to make room for her exit; but the woman appeared lost in the contemplation of sunshine and shadows, sharing between themselves the stillness of the deserted grounds. She concealed the view of the drive from Miss Haldin. Suddenly she said —

“It will not be necessary; here is Peter Ivanovitch himself coming up. But he is not alone. He is seldom alone now.”

Hearing that Peter Ivanovitch was approaching, Miss Haldin was not so pleased as she might have been expected to be. Somehow she had lost the desire to see either the heroic captive or Madame de S — , and the reason of that shrinking which came upon her at the very last minute is accounted for by the feeling that those two people had not been treating the woman with the cat kindly.

“Would you please let me pass?” said Miss Haldin at last, touching lightly the shoulder of the dame de compagnie.

But the other, pressing the cat to her breast, did not budge.

“I know who is with him,” she said, without even looking back.

More unaccountably than ever Miss Haldin felt a strong impulse to leave the house.

“Madame de S — may be engaged for some time yet, and what I have got to say to Peter Ivanovitch is just a simple question which I might put to him when I meet him in the grounds on my way down. I really think I must go. I have been some time here, and I am anxious to get back to my mother. Will you let me pass, please?”

The dame de compagnie turned her head at last.

“I never supposed that you really wanted to see Madame de S — ,” she said, with unexpected insight. “Not for a moment.” There was something confidential and mysterious in her tone. She passed through the door, with Miss Haldin following her, on to the terrace, and they descended side by side the moss-grown stone steps. There was no one to be seen on the part of the drive visible from the front of the house.

“They are hidden by the trees over there,” explained Miss Haldin’s new acquaintance, “but you shall see them directly. I don’t know who that young man is to whom Peter Ivanovitch has taken such a fancy. He must be one of us, or he would not be admitted here when the others come. You know what I mean by the others. But I must say that he is not at all mystically inclined. I don’t know that I have made him out yet. Naturally I am never for very long in the drawing-room. There is always something to do for me, though the establishment here is not so extensive as the villa on the Riviera. But still there are plenty of opportunities for me to make myself useful.”

To the left, passing by the ivy-grown end of the stables, appeared Peter Ivanovitch and his companion. They walked very slowly, conversing with some animation. They stopped for a moment, and Peter Ivanovitch was seen to gesticulate, while the young man listened motionless, with his arms

hanging down and his head bowed a little. He was dressed in a dark brown suit and a black hat. The round eyes of the dame de compagnie remained fixed on the two figures, which had resumed their leisurely approach.

“An extremely polite young man,” she said. “You shall see what a bow he will make; and it won’t altogether be so exceptional either. He bows in the same way when he meets me alone in the hall.”

She moved on a few steps, with Miss Haldin by her side, and things happened just as she had foretold. The young man took off his hat, bowed and fell back, while Peter Ivanovitch advanced quicker, his black, thick arms extended heartily, and seized hold of both Miss Haldin’s hands, shook them, and peered at her through his dark glasses.

“That’s right, that’s right!” he exclaimed twice, approvingly. “And so you have been looked after by....” He frowned slightly at the dame de compagnie, who was still nursing the cat. “I conclude Eleanor — Madame de S — is engaged. I know she expected somebody to-day. So the newspaper man did turn up, eh? She is engaged?”

For all answer the dame de compagnie turned away her head.

“It is very unfortunate — very unfortunate indeed. I very much regret that you should have been....” He lowered suddenly his voice. “But what is it — surely you are not departing, Natalia Victorovna? You got bored waiting, didn’t you?”

“Not in the least,” Miss Haldin protested. “Only I have been here some time, and I am anxious to get back to my mother.”

“The time seemed long, eh? I am afraid our worthy friend here” (Peter Ivanovitch suddenly jerked his head sideways towards his right shoulder and jerked it up again), — “our worthy friend here has not the art of shortening the moments of waiting. No, distinctly she has not the art; and in that respect good intentions alone count for nothing.”

The dame de compagnie dropped her arms, and the cat found itself suddenly on the ground. It remained quite still after alighting, one hind leg stretched backwards. Miss Haldin was extremely indignant on behalf of the lady companion.

“Believe me, Peter Ivanovitch, that the moments I have passed in the hall of this house have been not a little interesting, and very instructive too. They are memorable. I do not regret the waiting, but I see that the object of my call here can be attained without taking up Madame de S — ’s time.”

At this point I interrupted Miss Haldin. The above relation is founded on her narrative, which I have not so much dramatized as might be supposed. She had rendered, with extraordinary feeling and animation, the very accent almost of the disciple of the old apple-woman, the irreconcilable hater of Ministries, the voluntary servant of the poor. Miss Haldin's true and delicate humanity had been extremely shocked by the uncongenial fate of her new acquaintance, that lady companion, secretary, whatever she was. For my own part, I was pleased to discover in it one more obstacle to intimacy with Madame de S — . I had a positive abhorrence for the painted, bedizened, dead-faced, glassy-eyed Egeria of Peter Ivanovitch. I do not know what was her attitude to the unseen, but I know that in the affairs of this world she was avaricious, greedy, and unscrupulous. It was within my knowledge that she had been worsted in a sordid and desperate quarrel about money matters with the family of her late husband, the diplomatist. Some very august personages indeed (whom in her fury she had insisted upon scandalously involving in her affairs) had incurred her animosity. I find it perfectly easy to believe that she had come to within an ace of being spirited away, for reasons of state, into some discreet maison de sante — a madhouse of sorts, to be plain. It appears, however, that certain high-placed personages opposed it for reasons which....

But it's no use to go into details.

Wonder may be expressed at a man in the position of a teacher of languages knowing all this with such definiteness. A novelist says this and that of his personages, and if only he knows how to say it earnestly enough he may not be questioned upon the inventions of his brain in which his own belief is made sufficiently manifest by a telling phrase, a poetic image, the accent of emotion. Art is great! But I have no art, and not having invented Madame de S — , I feel bound to explain how I came to know so much about her.

My informant was the Russian wife of a friend of mine already mentioned, the professor of Lausanne University. It was from her that I learned the last fact of Madame de S — 's history, with which I intend to trouble my readers. She told me, speaking positively, as a person who trusts her sources, of the cause of Madame de S — 's flight from Russia, some years before. It was neither more nor less than this: that she became suspect to the police in connexion with the assassination of the Emperor Alexander. The ground of this suspicion was either some unguarded expressions that

escaped her in public, or some talk overheard in her salon. Overheard, we must believe, by some guest, perhaps a friend, who hastened to play the informer, I suppose. At any rate, the overheard matter seemed to imply her foreknowledge of that event, and I think she was wise in not waiting for the investigation of such a charge. Some of my readers may remember a little book from her pen, published in Paris, a mystically bad-tempered, declamatory, and frightfully disconnected piece of writing, in which she all but admits the foreknowledge, more than hints at its supernatural origin, and plainly suggests in venomous innuendoes that the guilt of the act was not with the terrorists, but with a palace intrigue. When I observed to my friend, the professor's wife, that the life of Madame de S — , with its unofficial diplomacy, its intrigues, lawsuits, favours, disgrace, expulsions, its atmosphere of scandal, occultism, and charlatanism, was more fit for the eighteenth century than for the conditions of our own time, she assented with a smile, but a moment after went on in a reflective tone: "Charlatanism? — yes, in a certain measure. Still, times are changed. There are forces now which were non-existent in the eighteenth century. I should not be surprised if she were more dangerous than an Englishman would be willing to believe. And what's more, she is looked upon as really dangerous by certain people — chez nous."

Chez nous in this connexion meant Russia in general, and the Russian political police in particular. The object of my digression from the straight course of Miss Haldin's relation (in my own words) of her visit to the Chateau Borel, was to bring forward that statement of my friend, the professor's wife. I wanted to bring it forward simply to make what I have to say presently of Mr. Razumov's presence in Geneva, a little more credible — for this is a Russian story for Western ears, which, as I have observed already, are not attuned to certain tones of cynicism and cruelty, of moral negation, and even of moral distress already silenced at our end of Europe. And this I state as my excuse for having left Miss Haldin standing, one of the little group of two women and two men who had come together below the terrace of the Chateau Borel.

The knowledge which I have just stated was in my mind when, as I have said, I interrupted Miss Haldin. I interrupted her with the cry of profound satisfaction —

"So you never saw Madame de S — , after all?"



Miss Haldin shook her head. It was very satisfactory to me. She had not seen Madame de S — ! That was excellent, excellent! I welcomed the conviction that she would never know Madame de S — now. I could not explain the reason of the conviction but by the knowledge that Miss Haldin was standing face to face with her brother's wonderful friend. I preferred him to Madame de S — as the companion and guide of that young girl, abandoned to her inexperience by the miserable end of her brother. But, at any rate, that life now ended had been sincere, and perhaps its thoughts might have been lofty, its moral sufferings profound, its last act a true sacrifice. It is not for us, the staid lovers calmed by the possession of a conquered liberty, to condemn without appeal the fierceness of thwarted desire.

I am not ashamed of the warmth of my regard for Miss Haldin. It was, it must be admitted, an unselfish sentiment, being its own reward. The late Victor Haldin — in the light of that sentiment — appeared to me not as a sinister conspirator, but as a pure enthusiast. I did not wish indeed to judge him, but the very fact that he did not escape, that fact which brought so much trouble to both his mother and his sister, spoke to me in his favour. Meantime, in my fear of seeing the girl surrender to the influence of the Chateau Borel revolutionary feminism, I was more than willing to put my trust in that friend of the late Victor Haldin. He was nothing but a name, you will say. Exactly! A name! And what's more, the only name; the only name to be found in the correspondence between brother and sister. The young man had turned up; they had come face to face, and, fortunately, without the direct interference of Madame de S — . What will come of it? what will she tell me presently? I was asking myself.

It was only natural that my thought should turn to the young man, the bearer of the only name uttered in all the dream-talk of a future to be brought about by a revolution. And my thought took the shape of asking myself why this young man had not called upon these ladies. He had been in Geneva for some days before Miss Haldin heard of him first in my presence from Peter Ivanovitch. I regretted that last's presence at their meeting. I would rather have had it happen somewhere out of his spectacted sight. But I supposed that, having both these young people there, he introduced them to each other.

I broke the silence by beginning a question on that point —  
“I suppose Peter Ivanovitch....”

Miss Haldin gave vent to her indignation. Peter Ivanovitch directly he had got his answer from her had turned upon the dame de compagnie in a shameful manner.

“Turned upon her?” I wondered. “What about? For what reason?”

“It was unheard of; it was shameful,” Miss Haldin pursued, with angry eyes. “Il lui a fait une scene — like this, before strangers. And for what? You would never guess. For some eggs.... Oh!”

I was astonished. “Eggs, did you say?”

“For Madame de S — . That lady observes a special diet, or something of the sort. It seems she complained the day before to Peter Ivanovitch that the eggs were not rightly prepared. Peter Ivanovitch suddenly remembered this against the poor woman, and flew out at her. It was most astonishing. I stood as if rooted.”

“Do you mean to say that the great feminist allowed himself to be abusive to a woman?” I asked.

“Oh, not that! It was something you have no conception of. It was an odious performance. Imagine, he raised his hat to begin with. He made his voice soft and deprecatory. ‘Ah! you are not kind to us — you will not deign to remember...’ This sort of phrases, that sort of tone. The poor creature was terribly upset. Her eyes ran full of tears. She did not know where to look. I shouldn’t wonder if she would have preferred abuse, or even a blow.”

I did not remark that very possibly she was familiar with both on occasions when no one was by. Miss Haldin walked by my side, her head up in scornful and angry silence.

“Great men have their surprising peculiarities,” I observed inanely. “Exactly like men who are not great. But that sort of thing cannot be kept up for ever. How did the great feminist wind up this very characteristic episode?”

Miss Haldin, without turning her face my way, told me that the end was brought about by the appearance of the interviewer, who had been closeted with Madame de S — .

He came up rapidly, unnoticed, lifted his hat slightly, and paused to say in French: “The Baroness has asked me, in case I met a lady on my way out, to desire her to come in at once.”

After delivering this message, he hurried down the drive. The dame de compagnie flew towards the house, and Peter Ivanovitch followed her

hastily, looking uneasy. In a moment Miss Haldin found herself alone with the young man, who undoubtedly must have been the new arrival from Russia. She wondered whether her brother's friend had not already guessed who she was.

I am in a position to say that, as a matter of fact, he had guessed. It is clear to me that Peter Ivanovitch, for some reason or other, had refrained from alluding to these ladies' presence in Geneva. But Razumov had guessed. The trustful girl! Every word uttered by Haldin lived in Razumov's memory. They were like haunting shapes; they could not be exorcised. The most vivid amongst them was the mention of the sister. The girl had existed for him ever since. But he did not recognize her at once. Coming up with Peter Ivanovitch, he did observe her; their eyes had met, even. He had responded, as no one could help responding, to the harmonious charm of her whole person, its strength, its grace, its tranquil frankness — and then he had turned his gaze away. He said to himself that all this was not for him; the beauty of women and the friendship of men were not for him. He accepted that feeling with a purposeful sternness, and tried to pass on. It was only her outstretched hand which brought about the recognition. It stands recorded in the pages of his self-confession, that it nearly suffocated him physically with an emotional reaction of hate and dismay, as though her appearance had been a piece of accomplished treachery.

He faced about. The considerable elevation of the terrace concealed them from anyone lingering in the doorway of the house; and even from the upstairs windows they could not have been seen. Through the thickets run wild, and the trees of the gently sloping grounds, he had cold, placid glimpses of the lake. A moment of perfect privacy had been vouchsafed to them at this juncture. I wondered to myself what use they had made of that fortunate circumstance.

"Did you have time for more than a few words?" I asked.

That animation with which she had related to me the incidents of her visit to the Chateau Borel had left her completely. Strolling by my side, she looked straight before her; but I noticed a little colour on her cheek. She did not answer me.

After some little time I observed that they could not have hoped to remain forgotten for very long, unless the other two had discovered Madame de S — swooning with fatigue, perhaps, or in a state of morbid

exaltation after the long interview. Either would require their devoted ministrations. I could depict to myself Peter Ivanovitch rushing busily out of the house again, bareheaded, perhaps, and on across the terrace with his swinging gait, the black skirts of the frock-coat floating clear of his stout light grey legs. I confess to having looked upon these young people as the quarry of the “heroic fugitive.” I had the notion that they would not be allowed to escape capture. But of that I said nothing to Miss Haldin, only as she still remained uncommunicative, I pressed her a little.

“Well — but you can tell me at least your impression.”

She turned her head to look at me, and turned away again.

“Impression?” she repeated slowly, almost dreamily; then in a quicker tone —

“He seems to be a man who has suffered more from his thoughts than from evil fortune.”

“From his thoughts, you say?”

“And that is natural enough in a Russian,” she took me up. “In a young Russian; so many of them are unfit for action, and yet unable to rest.”

“And you think he is that sort of man?”

“No, I do not judge him. How could I, so suddenly? You asked for my impression — I explain my impression. I — I — don’t know the world, nor yet the people in it; I have been too solitary — I am too young to trust my own opinions.”

“Trust your instinct,” I advised her. “Most women trust to that, and make no worse mistakes than men. In this case you have your brother’s letter to help you.”

She drew a deep breath like a light sigh. “Unstained, lofty, and solitary existences,” she quoted as if to herself. But I caught the wistful murmur distinctly.

“High praise,” I whispered to her.

“The highest possible.”

“So high that, like the award of happiness, it is more fit to come only at the end of a life. But still no common or altogether unworthy personality could have suggested such a confident exaggeration of praise and...”

“Ah!” She interrupted me ardently. “And if you had only known the heart from which that judgment has come!”

She ceased on that note, and for a space I reflected on the character of the words which I perceived very well must tip the scale of the girl’s feelings in

that young man's favour. They had not the sound of a casual utterance. Vague they were to my Western mind and to my Western sentiment, but I could not forget that, standing by Miss Haldin's side, I was like a traveller in a strange country. It had also become clear to me that Miss Haldin was unwilling to enter into the details of the only material part of their visit to the Chateau Borel. But I was not hurt. Somehow I didn't feel it to be a want of confidence. It was some other difficulty — a difficulty I could not resent. And it was without the slightest resentment that I said —

"Very well. But on that high ground, which I will not dispute, you, like anyone else in such circumstances, you must have made for yourself a representation of that exceptional friend, a mental image of him, and — please tell me — you were not disappointed?"

"What do you mean? His personal appearance?"

"I don't mean precisely his good looks, or otherwise."

We turned at the end of the alley and made a few steps without looking at each other.

"His appearance is not ordinary," said Miss Haldin at last.

"No, I should have thought not — from the little you've said of your first impression. After all, one has to fall back on that word. Impression! What I mean is that something indescribable which is likely to mark a 'not ordinary' person."

I perceived that she was not listening. There was no mistaking her expression; and once more I had the sense of being out of it — not because of my age, which at any rate could draw inferences — but altogether out of it, on another plane whence I could only watch her from afar. And so ceasing to speak I watched her stepping out by my side.

"No," she exclaimed suddenly, "I could not have been disappointed with a man of such strong feeling."

"Aha! Strong feeling," I muttered, thinking to myself censoriously: like this, at once, all in a moment!

"What did you say?" inquired Miss Haldin innocently.

"Oh, nothing. I beg your pardon. Strong feeling. I am not surprised."

"And you don't know how abruptly I behaved to him!" she cried remorsefully.

I suppose I must have appeared surprised, for, looking at me with a still more heightened colour, she said she was ashamed to admit that she had not been sufficiently collected; she had failed to control her words and actions

as the situation demanded. She lost the fortitude worthy of both the men, the dead and the living; the fortitude which should have been the note of the meeting of Victor Haldin's sister with Victor Haldin's only known friend. He was looking at her keenly, but said nothing, and she was — she confessed — painfully affected by his want of comprehension. All she could say was: "You are Mr. Razumov." A slight frown passed over his forehead. After a short, watchful pause, he made a little bow of assent, and waited.

At the thought that she had before her the man so highly regarded by her brother, the man who had known his value, spoken to him, understood him, had listened to his confidences, perhaps had encouraged him — her lips trembled, her eyes ran full of tears; she put out her hand, made a step towards him impulsively, saying with an effort to restrain her emotion, "Can't you guess who I am?" He did not take the proffered hand. He even recoiled a pace, and Miss Haldin imagined that he was unpleasantly affected. Miss Haldin excused him, directing her displeasure at herself. She had behaved unworthily, like an emotional French girl. A manifestation of that kind could not be welcomed by a man of stern, self-contained character.

He must have been stern indeed, or perhaps very timid with women, not to respond in a more human way to the advances of a girl like Nathalie Haldin — I thought to myself. Those lofty and solitary existences (I remembered the words suddenly) make a young man shy and an old man savage — often.

"Well," I encouraged Miss Haldin to proceed.

She was still very dissatisfied with herself.

"I went from bad to worse," she said, with an air of discouragement very foreign to her. "I did everything foolish except actually bursting into tears. I am thankful to say I did not do that. But I was unable to speak for quite a long time."

She had stood before him, speechless, swallowing her sobs, and when she managed at last to utter something, it was only her brother's name — "Victor — Victor Haldin!" she gasped out, and again her voice failed her.

"Of course," she commented to me, "this distressed him. He was quite overcome. I have told you my opinion that he is a man of deep feeling — it is impossible to doubt it. You should have seen his face. He positively reeled. He leaned against the wall of the terrace. Their friendship must have

been the very brotherhood of souls! I was grateful to him for that emotion, which made me feel less ashamed of my own lack of self-control. Of course I had regained the power of speech at once, almost. All this lasted not more than a few seconds. 'I am his sister,' I said. 'Maybe you have heard of me.'"

"And had he?" I interrupted.

"I don't know. How could it have been otherwise? And yet.... But what does that matter? I stood there before him, near enough to be touched and surely not looking like an impostor. All I know is, that he put out both his hands then to me, I may say flung them out at me, with the greatest readiness and warmth, and that I seized and pressed them, feeling that I was finding again a little of what I thought was lost to me for ever, with the loss of my brother — some of that hope, inspiration, and support which I used to get from my dear dead...."

I understood quite well what she meant. We strolled on slowly. I refrained from looking at her. And it was as if answering my own thoughts that I murmured —

"No doubt it was a great friendship — as you say. And that young man ended by welcoming your name, so to speak, with both hands. After that, of course, you would understand each other. Yes, you would understand each other quickly."

It was a moment before I heard her voice.

"Mr. Razumov seems to be a man of few words. A reserved man — even when he is strongly moved."

Unable to forget — -or even to forgive — the bass-toned expansiveness of Peter Ivanovitch, the Archpatron of revolutionary parties, I said that I took this for a favourable trait of character. It was associated with sincerity — in my mind.

"And, besides, we had not much time," she added.

"No, you would not have, of course." My suspicion and even dread of the feminist and his Egeria was so ineradicable that I could not help asking with real anxiety, which I made smiling —

"But you escaped all right?"

She understood me, and smiled too, at my uneasiness.

"Oh yes! I escaped, if you like to call it that. I walked away quickly. There was no need to run. I am neither frightened nor yet fascinated, like that poor woman who received me so strangely."

"And Mr. — Mr. Razumov...?"

“He remained there, of course. I suppose he went into the house after I left him. You remember that he came here strongly recommended to Peter Ivanovitch — possibly entrusted with important messages for him.”

“Ah yes! From that priest who...”

“Father Zosim — yes. Or from others, perhaps.”

“You left him, then. But have you seen him since, may I ask?”

For some time Miss Haldin made no answer to this very direct question, then —

“I have been expecting to see him here to-day,” she said quietly.

“You have! Do you meet, then, in this garden? In that case I had better leave you at once.”

“No, why leave me? And we don’t meet in this garden. I have not seen Mr. Razumov since that first time. Not once. But I have been expecting him....”

She paused. I wondered to myself why that young revolutionist should show so little alacrity.

“Before we parted I told Mr. Razumov that I walked here for an hour every day at this time. I could not explain to him then why I did not ask him to come and see us at once. Mother must be prepared for such a visit. And then, you see, I do not know myself what Mr. Razumov has to tell us. He, too, must be told first how it is with poor mother. All these thoughts flashed through my mind at once. So I told him hurriedly that there was a reason why I could not ask him to see us at home, but that I was in the habit of walking here.... This is a public place, but there are never many people about at this hour. I thought it would do very well. And it is so near our apartments. I don’t like to be very far away from mother. Our servant knows where I am in case I should be wanted suddenly.”

“Yes. It is very convenient from that point of view,” I agreed.

In fact, I thought the Bastions a very convenient place, since the girl did not think it prudent as yet to introduce that young man to her mother. It was here, then, I thought, looking round at that plot of ground of deplorable banality, that their acquaintance will begin and go on in the exchange of generous indignations and of extreme sentiments, too poignant, perhaps, for a non-Russian mind to conceive. I saw these two, escaped out of four score of millions of human beings ground between the upper and nether millstone, walking under these trees, their young heads close together. Yes, an excellent place to stroll and talk in. It even occurred to me, while we



turned once more away from the wide iron gates, that when tired they would have plenty of accommodation to rest themselves. There was a quantity of tables and chairs displayed between the restaurant chalet and the bandstand, a whole raft of painted deals spread out under the trees. In the very middle of it I observed a solitary Swiss couple, whose fate was made secure from the cradle to the grave by the perfected mechanism of democratic institutions in a republic that could almost be held in the palm of one's hand. The man, colourlessly uncouth, was drinking beer out of a glittering glass; the woman, rustic and placid, leaning back in the rough chair, gazed idly around.

There is little logic to be expected on this earth, not only in the matter of thought, but also of sentiment. I was surprised to discover myself displeased with that unknown young man. A week had gone by since they met. Was he callous, or shy, or very stupid? I could not make it out.

"Do you think," I asked Miss Haldin, after we had gone some distance up the great alley, "that Mr Razumov understood your intention?"

"Understood what I meant?" she wondered. "He was greatly moved. That I know! In my own agitation I could see it. But I spoke distinctly. He heard me; he seemed, indeed, to hang on my words..."

Unconsciously she had hastened her pace. Her utterance, too, became quicker.

I waited a little before I observed thoughtfully —

"And yet he allowed all these days to pass."

"How can we tell what work he may have to do here? He is not an idler travelling for his pleasure. His time may not be his own — nor yet his thoughts, perhaps."

She slowed her pace suddenly, and in a lowered voice added —

"Or his very life" — then paused and stood still "For all I know, he may have had to leave Geneva the very day he saw me."

"Without telling you!" I exclaimed incredulously.

"I did not give him time. I left him quite abruptly. I behaved emotionally to the end. I am sorry for it. Even if I had given him the opportunity he would have been justified in taking me for a person not to be trusted. An emotional, tearful girl is not a person to confide in. But even if he has left Geneva for a time, I am confident that we shall meet again."

"Ah! you are confident.... I dare say. But on what ground?"

“Because I’ve told him that I was in great need of some one, a fellow-countryman, a fellow-believer, to whom I could give my confidence in a certain matter.”

“I see. I don’t ask you what answer he made. I confess that this is good ground for your belief in Mr. Razumov’s appearance before long. But he has not turned up to-day?”

“No,” she said quietly, “not to-day;” and we stood for a time in silence, like people that have nothing more to say to each other and let their thoughts run widely asunder before their bodies go off their different ways. Miss Haldin glanced at the watch on her wrist and made a brusque movement. She had already overstayed her time, it seemed.

“I don’t like to be away from mother,” she murmured, shaking her head. “It is not that she is very ill now. But somehow when I am not with her I am more uneasy than ever.”

Mrs. Haldin had not made the slightest allusion to her son for the last week or more. She sat, as usual, in the arm-chair by the window, looking out silently on that hopeless stretch of the Boulevard des Philosophes. When she spoke, a few lifeless words, it was of indifferent, trivial things.

“For anyone who knows what the poor soul is thinking of, that sort of talk is more painful than her silence. But that is bad too; I can hardly endure it, and I dare not break it.”

Miss Haldin sighed, refastening a button of her glove which had come undone. I knew well enough what a hard time of it she must be having. The stress, its causes, its nature, would have undermined the health of an Occidental girl; but Russian natures have a singular power of resistance against the unfair strains of life. Straight and supple, with a short jacket open on her black dress, which made her figure appear more slender and her fresh but colourless face more pale, she compelled my wonder and admiration.

“I can’t stay a moment longer. You ought to come soon to see mother. You know she calls you ‘L’ami.’ It is an excellent name, and she really means it. And now au revoir; I must run.”

She glanced vaguely down the broad walk — the hand she put out to me eluded my grasp by an unexpected upward movement, and rested upon my shoulder. Her red lips were slightly parted, not in a smile, however, but expressing a sort of startled pleasure. She gazed towards the gates and said quickly, with a gasp —

“There! I knew it. Here he comes!”

I understood that she must mean Mr. Razumov. A young man was walking up the alley, without haste. His clothes were some dull shade of brown, and he carried a stick. When my eyes first fell on him, his head was hanging on his breast as if in deep thought. While I was looking at him he raised it sharply, and at once stopped. I am certain he did, but that pause was nothing more perceptible than a faltering check in his gait, instantaneously overcome. Then he continued his approach, looking at us steadily. Miss Haldin signed to me to remain, and advanced a step or two to meet him.

I turned my head away from that meeting, and did not look at them again till I heard Miss Haldin’s voice uttering his name in the way of introduction. Mr. Razumov was informed, in a warm, low tone, that, besides being a wonderful teacher, I was a great support “in our sorrow and distress.”

Of course I was described also as an Englishman. Miss Haldin spoke rapidly, faster than I have ever heard her speak, and that by contrast made the quietness of her eyes more expressive.

“I have given him my confidence,” she added, looking all the time at Mr. Razumov. That young man did, indeed, rest his gaze on Miss Haldin, but certainly did not look into her eyes which were so ready for him. Afterwards he glanced backwards and forwards at us both, while the faint commencement of a forced smile, followed by the suspicion of a frown, vanished one after another; I detected them, though neither could have been noticed by a person less intensely bent upon divining him than myself. I don’t know what Nathalie Haldin had observed, but my attention seized the very shades of these movements. The attempted smile was given up, the incipient frown was checked, and smoothed so that there should be no sign; but I imagined him exclaiming inwardly —

“Her confidence! To this elderly person — this foreigner!”

I imagined this because he looked foreign enough to me. I was upon the whole favourably impressed. He had an air of intelligence and even some distinction quite above the average of the students and other inhabitants of the Petite Russie. His features were more decided than in the generality of Russian faces; he had a line of the jaw, a clean-shaven, sallow cheek; his nose was a ridge, and not a mere protuberance. He wore the hat well down over his eyes, his dark hair curled low on the nape of his neck; in the ill-fitting brown clothes there were sturdy limbs; a slight stoop brought out a

satisfactory breadth of shoulders. Upon the whole I was not disappointed. Studious — robust — shy.

Before Miss Haldin had ceased speaking I felt the grip of his hand on mine, a muscular, firm grip, but unexpectedly hot and dry. Not a word or even a mutter assisted this short and arid handshake.

I intended to leave them to themselves, but Miss Haldin touched me lightly on the forearm with a significant contact, conveying a distinct wish. Let him smile who likes, but I was only too ready to stay near Nathalie Haldin, and I am not ashamed to say that it was no smiling matter to me. I stayed, not as a youth would have stayed, uplifted, as it were poised in the air, but soberly, with my feet on the ground and my mind trying to penetrate her intention. She had turned to Razumov.

“Well. This is the place. Yes, it is here that I meant you to come. I have been walking every day.... Don’t excuse yourself — I understand. I am grateful to you for coming to-day, but all the same I cannot stay now. It is impossible. I must hurry off home. Yes, even with you standing before me, I must run off. I have been too long away.... You know how it is?”

These last words were addressed to me. I noticed that Mr. Razumov passed the tip of his tongue over his lips just as a parched, feverish man might do. He took her hand in its black glove, which closed on his, and held it — detained it quite visibly to me against a drawing-back movement.

“Thank you once more for — for understanding me,” she went on warmly. He interrupted her with a certain effect of roughness. I didn’t like him speaking to this frank creature so much from under the brim of his hat, as it were. And he produced a faint, rasping voice quite like a man with a parched throat.

“What is there to thank me for? Understand you?... How did I understand you?... You had better know that I understand nothing. I was aware that you wanted to see me in this garden. I could not come before. I was hindered. And even to-day, you see...late.”

She still held his hand.

“I can, at any rate, thank you for not dismissing me from your mind as a weak, emotional girl. No doubt I want sustaining. I am very ignorant. But I can be trusted. Indeed I can!”

“You are ignorant,” he repeated thoughtfully. He had raised his head, and was looking straight into her face now, while she held his hand. They stood

like this for a long moment. She released his hand.

“Yes. You did come late. It was good of you to come on the chance of me having loitered beyond my time. I was talking with this good friend here. I was talking of you. Yes, Kirylo Sidorovitch, of you. He was with me when I first heard of your being here in Geneva. He can tell you what comfort it was to my bewildered spirit to hear that news. He knew I meant to seek you out. It was the only object of my accepting the invitation of Peter Ivanovitch....

“Peter Ivanovitch talked to you of me,” he interrupted, in that wavering, hoarse voice which suggested a horribly dry throat.

“Very little. Just told me your name, and that you had arrived here. Why should I have asked for more? What could he have told me that I did not know already from my brother’s letter? Three lines! And how much they meant to me! I will show them to you one day, Kirylo Sidorovitch. But now I must go. The first talk between us cannot be a matter of five minutes, so we had better not begin....”

I had been standing a little aside, seeing them both in profile. At that moment it occurred to me that Mr. Razumov’s face was older than his age.

“If mother” — the girl had turned suddenly to me, “were to wake up in my absence (so much longer than usual) she would perhaps question me. She seems to miss me more, you know, of late. She would want to know what delayed me — and, you see, it would be painful for me to dissemble before her.”

I understood the point very well. For the same reason she checked what seemed to be on Mr. Razumov’s part a movement to accompany her.

“No! No! I go alone, but meet me here as soon as possible.” Then to me in a lower, significant tone —

“Mother may be sitting at the window at this moment, looking down the street. She must not know anything of Mr. Razumov’s presence here till — till something is arranged.” She paused before she added a little louder, but still speaking to me, “Mr. Razumov does not quite understand my difficulty, but you know what it is.”

V

With a quick inclination of the head for us both, and an earnest, friendly glance at the young man, Miss Haldin left us covering our heads and looking after her straight, supple figure receding rapidly. Her walk was not that hybrid and uncertain gliding affected by some women, but a frank,

strong, healthy movement forward. Rapidly she increased the distance — disappeared with suddenness at last. I discovered only then that Mr. Razumov, after ramming his hat well over his brow, was looking me over from head to foot. I dare say I was a very unexpected fact for that young Russian to stumble upon. I caught in his physiognomy, in his whole bearing, an expression compounded of curiosity and scorn, tempered by alarm — as though he had been holding his breath while I was not looking. But his eyes met mine with a gaze direct enough. I saw then for the first time that they were of a clear brown colour and fringed with thick black eyelashes. They were the youngest feature of his face. Not at all unpleasant eyes. He swayed slightly, leaning on his stick and generally hung in the wind. It flashed upon me that in leaving us together Miss Haldin had an intention — that something was entrusted to me, since, by a mere accident I had been found at hand. On this assumed ground I put all possible friendliness into my manner. I cast about for some right thing to say, and suddenly in Miss Haldin's last words I perceived the clue to the nature of my mission.

“No,” I said gravely, if with a smile, “you cannot be expected to understand.”

His clean-shaven lip quivered ever so little before he said, as if wickedly amused —

“But haven't you heard just now? I was thanked by that young lady for understanding so well.”

I looked at him rather hard. Was there a hidden and inexplicable sneer in this retort? No. It was not that. It might have been resentment. Yes. But what had he to resent? He looked as though he had not slept very well of late. I could almost feel on me the weight of his unrefreshed, motionless stare, the stare of a man who lies unwinking in the dark, angrily passive in the toils of disastrous thoughts. Now, when I know how true it was, I can honestly affirm that this was the effect he produced on me. It was painful in a curiously indefinite way — for, of course, the definition comes to me now while I sit writing in the fullness of my knowledge. But this is what the effect was at that time of absolute ignorance. This new sort of uneasiness which he seemed to be forcing upon me I attempted to put down by assuming a conversational, easy familiarity.

“That extremely charming and essentially admirable young girl (I am — as you see — old enough to be frank in my expressions) was referring to

her own feelings. Surely you must have understood that much?"

He made such a brusque movement that he even tottered a little.

"Must understand this! Not expected to understand that! I may have other things to do. And the girl is charming and admirable. Well — and if she is! I suppose I can see that for myself."

This sally would have been insulting if his voice had not been practically extinct, dried up in his throat; and the rustling effort of his speech too painful to give real offence.

I remained silent, checked between the obvious fact and the subtle impression. It was open to me to leave him there and then; but the sense of having been entrusted with a mission, the suggestion of Miss Haldin's last glance, was strong upon me. After a moment of reflection I said —

"Shall we walk together a little?"

He shrugged his shoulders so violently that he tottered again. I saw it out of the corner of my eye as I moved on, with him at my elbow. He had fallen back a little and was practically out of my sight, unless I turned my head to look at him. I did not wish to indispose him still further by an appearance of marked curiosity. It might have been distasteful to such a young and secret refugee from under the pestilential shadow hiding the true, kindly face of his land. And the shadow, the attendant of his countrymen, stretching across the middle of Europe, was lying on him too, darkening his figure to my mental vision. "Without doubt," I said to myself, "he seems a sombre, even a desperate revolutionist; but he is young, he may be unselfish and humane, capable of compassion, of..."

I heard him clear gratingly his parched throat, and became all attention.

"This is beyond everything," were his first words. "It is beyond everything! I find you here, for no reason that I can understand, in possession of something I cannot be expected to understand! A confidant! A foreigner! Talking about an admirable Russian girl. Is the admirable girl a fool, I begin to wonder? What are you at? What is your object?"

He was barely audible, as if his throat had no more resonance than a dry rag, a piece of tinder. It was so pitiful that I found it extremely easy to control my indignation.

"When you have lived a little longer, Mr. Razumov, you will discover that no woman is an absolute fool. I am not a feminist, like that illustrious author, Peter Ivanovitch, who, to say the truth, is not a little suspect to me...."

He interrupted me, in a surprising note of whispering astonishment.

“Suspect to you! Peter Ivanovitch suspect to you! To you!...”

“Yes, in a certain aspect he is,” I said, dismissing my remark lightly. “As I was saying, Mr. Razumov, when you have lived long enough, you will learn to discriminate between the noble trustfulness of a nature foreign to every meanness and the flattered credulity of some women; though even the credulous, silly as they may be, unhappy as they are sure to be, are never absolute fools. It is my belief that no woman is ever completely deceived. Those that are lost leap into the abyss with their eyes open, if all the truth were known.”

“Upon my word,” he cried at my elbow, “what is it to me whether women are fools or lunatics? I really don’t care what you think of them. I — I am not interested in them. I let them be. I am not a young man in a novel. How do you know that I want to learn anything about women?... What is the meaning of all this?”

“The object, you mean, of this conversation, which I admit I have forced upon you in a measure.”

“Forced! Object!” he repeated, still keeping half a pace or so behind me. “You wanted to talk about women, apparently. That’s a subject. But I don’t care for it. I have never.... In fact, I have had other subjects to think about.”

“I am concerned here with one woman only — a young girl — the sister of your dead friend — Miss Haldin. Surely you can think a little of her. What I meant from the first was that there is a situation which you cannot be expected to understand.”

I listened to his unsteady footfalls by my side for the space of several strides.

“I think that it may prepare the ground for your next interview with Miss Haldin if I tell you of it. I imagine that she might have had something of the kind in her mind when she left us together. I believe myself authorized to speak. The peculiar situation I have alluded to has arisen in the first grief and distress of Victor Haldin’s execution. There was something peculiar in the circumstances of his arrest. You no doubt know the whole truth....”

I felt my arm seized above the elbow, and next instant found myself swung so as to face Mr. Razumov.

“You spring up from the ground before me with this talk. Who the devil are you? This is not to be borne! Why! What for? What do you know what



is or is not peculiar? What have you to do with any confounded circumstances, or with anything that happens in Russia, anyway?"

He leaned on his stick with his other hand, heavily; and when he let go my arm, I was certain in my mind that he was hardly able to keep on his feet.

"Let us sit down at one of these vacant tables," I proposed, disregarding this display of unexpectedly profound emotion. It was not without its effect on me, I confess. I was sorry for him.

"What tables? What are you talking about? Oh — the empty tables? The tables there. Certainly. I will sit at one of the empty tables."

I led him away from the path to the very centre of the raft of deals before the chalet. The Swiss couple were gone by that time. We were alone on the raft, so to speak. Mr. Razumov dropped into a chair, let fall his stick, and propped on his elbows, his head between his hands, stared at me persistently, openly, and continuously, while I signalled the waiter and ordered some beer. I could not quarrel with this silent inspection very well, because, truth to tell, I felt somewhat guilty of having been sprung on him with some abruptness — of having "sprung from the ground," as he expressed it.

While waiting to be served I mentioned that, born from parents settled in St. Petersburg, I had acquired the language as a child. The town I did not remember, having left it for good as a boy of nine, but in later years I had renewed my acquaintance with the language. He listened, without as much as moving his eyes the least little bit. He had to change his position when the beer came, and the instant draining of his glass revived him. He leaned back in his chair and, folding his arms across his chest, continued to stare at me squarely. It occurred to me that his clean-shaven, almost swarthy face was really of the very mobile sort, and that the absolute stillness of it was the acquired habit of a revolutionist, of a conspirator everlastingly on his guard against self-betrayal in a world of secret spies.

"But you are an Englishman — a teacher of English literature," he murmured, in a voice that was no longer issuing from a parched throat. "I have heard of you. People told me you have lived here for years."

"Quite true. More than twenty years. And I have been assisting Miss Haldin with her English studies."

"You have been reading English poetry with her," he said, immovable now, like another man altogether, a complete stranger to the man of the

heavy and uncertain footfalls a little while ago — at my elbow.

“Yes, English poetry,” I said. “But the trouble of which I speak was caused by an English newspaper.”

He continued to stare at me. I don’t think he was aware that the story of the midnight arrest had been ferreted out by an English journalist and given to the world. When I explained this to him he muttered contemptuously, “It may have been altogether a lie.”

“I should think you are the best judge of that,” I retorted, a little disconcerted. “I must confess that to me it looks to be true in the main.”

“How can you tell truth from lies?” he queried in his new, immovable manner.

“I don’t know how you do it in Russia,” I began, rather nettled by his attitude. He interrupted me.

“In Russia, and in general everywhere — in a newspaper, for instance. The colour of the ink and the shapes of the letters are the same.”

“Well, there are other trifles one can go by. The character of the publication, the general verisimilitude of the news, the consideration of the motive, and so on. I don’t trust blindly the accuracy of special correspondents — but why should this one have gone to the trouble of concocting a circumstantial falsehood on a matter of no importance to the world?”

“That’s what it is,” he grumbled. “What’s going on with us is of no importance — a mere sensational story to amuse the readers of the papers — the superior contemptuous Europe. It is hateful to think of. But let them wait a bit!”

He broke off on this sort of threat addressed to the western world. Disregarding the anger in his stare, I pointed out that whether the journalist was well- or ill-informed, the concern of the friends of these ladies was with the effect the few lines of print in question had produced — the effect alone. And surely he must be counted as one of the friends — if only for the sake of his late comrade and intimate fellow-revolutionist. At that point I thought he was going to speak vehemently; but he only astounded me by the convulsive start of his whole body. He restrained himself, folded his loosened arms tighter across his chest, and sat back with a smile in which there was a twitch of scorn and malice.

“Yes, a comrade and an intimate.... Very well,” he said.

“I ventured to speak to you on that assumption. And I cannot be mistaken. I was present when Peter Ivanovitch announced your arrival here to Miss Haldin, and I saw her relief and thankfulness when your name was mentioned. Afterwards she showed me her brother’s letter, and read out the few words in which he alludes to you. What else but a friend could you have been?”

“Obviously. That’s perfectly well known. A friend. Quite correct.... Go on. You were talking of some effect.”

I said to myself: “He puts on the callousness of a stern revolutionist, the insensibility to common emotions of a man devoted to a destructive idea. He is young, and his sincerity assumes a pose before a stranger, a foreigner, an old man. Youth must assert itself....” As concisely as possible I exposed to him the state of mind poor Mrs. Haldin had been thrown into by the news of her son’s untimely end.

He listened — I felt it — with profound attention. His level stare deflected gradually downwards, left my face, and rested at last on the ground at his feet.

“You can enter into the sister’s feelings. As you said, I have only read a little English poetry with her, and I won’t make myself ridiculous in your eyes by trying to speak of her. But you have seen her. She is one of these rare human beings that do not want explaining. At least I think so. They had only that son, that brother, for a link with the wider world, with the future. The very groundwork of active existence for Nathalie Haldin is gone with him. Can you wonder then that she turns with eagerness to the only man her brother mentions in his letters. Your name is a sort of legacy.”

“What could he have written of me?” he cried, in a low, exasperated tone.

“Only a few words. It is not for me to repeat them to you, Mr. Razumov; but you may believe my assertion that these words are forcible enough to make both his mother and his sister believe implicitly in the worth of your judgment and in the truth of anything you may have to say to them. It’s impossible for you now to pass them by like strangers.”

I paused, and for a moment sat listening to the footsteps of the few people passing up and down the broad central walk. While I was speaking his head had sunk upon his breast above his folded arms. He raised it sharply.

“Must I go then and lie to that old woman!”

It was not anger; it was something else, something more poignant, and not so simple. I was aware of it sympathetically, while I was profoundly concerned at the nature of that exclamation.

“Dear me! Won’t the truth do, then? I hoped you could have told them something consoling. I am thinking of the poor mother now. Your Russia is a cruel country.”

He moved a little in his chair.

“Yes,” I repeated. “I thought you would have had something authentic to tell.”

The twitching of his lips before he spoke was curious.

“What if it is not worth telling?”

“Not worth — from what point of view? I don’t understand.”

“From every point of view.”

I spoke with some asperity.

“I should think that anything which could explain the circumstances of that midnight arrest....”

“Reported by a journalist for the amusement of the civilized Europe,” he broke in scornfully.

“Yes, reported.... But aren’t they true? I can’t make out your attitude in this? Either the man is a hero to you, or...”

He approached his face with fiercely distended nostrils close to mine so suddenly that I had the greatest difficulty in not starting back.

“You ask me! I suppose it amuses you, all this. Look here! I am a worker. I studied. Yes, I studied very hard. There is intelligence here.” (He tapped his forehead with his finger-tips.) “Don’t you think a Russian may have sane ambitions? Yes — I had even prospects. Certainly! I had. And now you see me here, abroad, everything gone, lost, sacrificed. You see me here — and you ask! You see me, don’t you? — sitting before you.”

He threw himself back violently. I kept outwardly calm.

“Yes, I see you here; and I assume you are here on account of the Haldin affair?”

His manner changed.

“You call it the Haldin affair — do you?” he observed indifferently.

“I have no right to ask you anything,” I said. “I wouldn’t presume. But in that case the mother and the sister of him who must be a hero in your eyes cannot be indifferent to you. The girl is a frank and generous creature, having the noblest — well — illusions. You will tell her nothing — or you

will tell her everything. But speaking now of the object with which I've approached you first, we have to deal with the morbid state of the mother. Perhaps something could be invented under your authority as a cure for a distracted and suffering soul filled with maternal affection."

His air of weary indifference was accentuated, I could not help thinking, wilfully.

“Oh yes. Something might,” he mumbled carelessly.

He put his hand over his mouth to conceal a yawn. When he uncovered his lips they were smiling faintly.

“Pardon me. This has been a long conversation, and I have not had much sleep the last two nights.”

This unexpected, somewhat insolent sort of apology had the merit of being perfectly true. He had had no nightly rest to speak of since that day when, in the grounds of the Chateau Borel, the sister of Victor Haldin had appeared before him. The perplexities and the complex terrors — I may say — of this sleeplessness are recorded in the document I was to see later — the document which is the main source of this narrative. At the moment he looked to me convincingly tired, gone slack all over, like a man who has passed through some sort of crisis.

“I have had a lot of urgent writing to do,” he added.

I rose from my chair at once, and he followed my example, without haste, a little heavily.

“I must apologize for detaining you so long,” I said.

“Why apologize? One can’t very well go to bed before night. And you did not detain me. I could have left you at any time.”

I had not stayed with him to be offended.

“I am glad you have been sufficiently interested,” I said calmly. “No merit of mine, though — the commonest sort of regard for the mother of your friend was enough.... As to Miss Haldin herself, she at one time was disposed to think that her brother had been betrayed to the police in some way.”

To my great surprise Mr. Razumov sat down again suddenly. I stared at him, and I must say that he returned my stare without winking for quite a considerable time.

“In some way,” he mumbled, as if he had not understood or could not believe his ears.

“Some unforeseen event, a sheer accident might have done that,” I went on. “Or, as she characteristically put it to me, the folly or weakness of some unhappy fellow-revolutionist.”

“Folly or weakness,” he repeated bitterly.

“She is a very generous creature,” I observed after a time. The man admired by Victor Haldin fixed his eyes on the ground. I turned away and moved off, apparently unnoticed by him. I nourished no resentment of the

moody brusqueness with which he had treated me. The sentiment I was carrying away from that conversation was that of hopelessness. Before I had got fairly clear of the raft of chairs and tables he had rejoined me.

“H’m, yes!” I heard him at my elbow again. “But what do you think?”

I did not look round even.

“I think that you people are under a curse.”

He made no sound. It was only on the pavement outside the gate that I heard him again.

“I should like to walk with you a little.”

After all, I preferred this enigmatical young man to his celebrated compatriot, the great Peter Ivanovitch. But I saw no reason for being particularly gracious.

“I am going now to the railway station, by the shortest way from here, to meet a friend from England,” I said, for all answer to his unexpected proposal. I hoped that something informing could come of it. As we stood on the curbstone waiting for a tramcar to pass, he remarked gloomily —

“I like what you said just now.”

“Do you?”

We stepped off the pavement together.

“The great problem,” he went on, “is to understand thoroughly the nature of the curse.”

“That’s not very difficult, I think.”

“I think so too,” he agreed with me, and his readiness, strangely enough, did not make him less enigmatical in the least.

“A curse is an evil spell,” I tried him again. “And the important, the great problem, is to find the means to break it.”

“Yes. To find the means.”

That was also an assent, but he seemed to be thinking of something else. We had crossed diagonally the open space before the theatre, and began to descend a broad, sparsely frequented street in the direction of one of the smaller bridges. He kept on by my side without speaking for a long time.

“You are not thinking of leaving Geneva soon?” I asked.

He was silent for so long that I began to think I had been indiscreet, and should get no answer at all. Yet on looking at him I almost believed that my question had caused him something in the nature of positive anguish. I detected it mainly in the claspings of his hands, in which he put a great force stealthily. Once, however, he had overcome that sort of agonizing hesitation

sufficiently to tell me that he had no such intention, he became rather communicative — at least relatively to the former off-hand curtness of his speeches. The tone, too, was more amiable. He informed me that he intended to study and also to write. He went even so far as to tell me he had been to Stuttgart. Stuttgart, I was aware, was one of the revolutionary centres. The directing committee of one of the Russian parties (I can't tell now which) was located in that town. It was there that he got into touch with the active work of the revolutionists outside Russia.

"I have never been abroad before," he explained, in a rather inanimate voice now. Then, after a slight hesitation, altogether different from the agonizing irresolution my first simple question "whether he meant to stay in Geneva" had aroused, he made me an unexpected confidence —

"The fact is, I have received a sort of mission from them."

"Which will keep you here in Geneva?"

"Yes. Here. In this odious...."

I was satisfied with my faculty for putting two and two together when I drew the inference that the mission had something to do with the person of the great Peter Ivanovitch. But I kept that surmise to myself naturally, and Mr. Razumov said nothing more for some considerable time. It was only when we were nearly on the bridge we had been making for that he opened his lips again, abruptly —

"Could I see that precious article anywhere?"

I had to think for a moment before I saw what he was referring to.

"It has been reproduced in parts by the Press here. There are files to be seen in various places. My copy of the English newspaper I have left with Miss Haldin, I remember, on the day after it reached me. I was sufficiently worried by seeing it lying on a table by the side of the poor mother's chair for weeks. Then it disappeared. It was a relief, I assure you."

He had stopped short.

"I trust," I continued, "that you will find time to see these ladies fairly often — that you will make time."

He stared at me so queerly that I hardly know how to define his aspect. I could not understand it in this connexion at all. What ailed him? I asked myself. What strange thought had come into his head? What vision of all the horrors that can be seen in his hopeless country had come suddenly to haunt his brain? If it were anything connected with the fate of Victor Haldin, then I hoped earnestly he would keep it to himself for ever. I was, to



speaking plainly, so shocked that I tried to conceal my impression by — Heaven forgive me — a smile and the assumption of a light manner.

“Surely,” I exclaimed, “that needn’t cost you a great effort.”

He turned away from me and leaned over the parapet of the bridge. For a moment I waited, looking at his back. And yet, I assure you, I was not anxious just then to look at his face again. He did not move at all. He did not mean to move. I walked on slowly on my way towards the station, and at the end of the bridge I glanced over my shoulder. No, he had not moved. He hung well over the parapet, as if captivated by the smooth rush of the blue water under the arch. The current there is swift, extremely swift; it makes some people dizzy; I myself can never look at it for any length of time without experiencing a dread of being suddenly snatched away by its destructive force. Some brains cannot resist the suggestion of irresistible power and of headlong motion.

It apparently had a charm for Mr. Razumov. I left him hanging far over the parapet of the bridge. The way he had behaved to me could not be put down to mere boorishness. There was something else under his scorn and impatience. Perhaps, I thought, with sudden approach to hidden truth, it was the same thing which had kept him over a week, nearly ten days indeed, from coming near Miss Haldin. But what it was I could not tell.

## PART THIRD

I

The water under the bridge ran violent and deep. Its slightly undulating rush seemed capable of scouring out a channel for itself through solid granite while you looked. But had it flowed through Razumov’s breast, it could not have washed away the accumulated bitterness the wrecking of his life had deposited there.

“What is the meaning of all this?” he thought, staring downwards at the headlong flow so smooth and clean that only the passage of a faint air-bubble, or a thin vanishing streak of foam like a white hair, disclosed its vertiginous rapidity, its terrible force. “Why has that meddlesome old Englishman blundered against me? And what is this silly tale of a crazy old woman?”

He was trying to think brutally on purpose, but he avoided any mental reference to the young girl. "A crazy old woman," he repeated to himself. "It is a fatality! Or ought I to despise all this as absurd? But no! I am wrong! I can't afford to despise anything. An absurdity may be the starting-point of the most dangerous complications. How is one to guard against it? It puts to rout one's intelligence. The more intelligent one is the less one suspects an absurdity."

A wave of wrath choked his thoughts for a moment. It even made his body leaning over the parapet quiver; then he resumed his silent thinking, like a secret dialogue with himself. And even in that privacy, his thought had some reservations of which he was vaguely conscious.

"After all, this is not absurd. It is insignificant. It is absolutely insignificant — absolutely. The craze of an old woman — the fussy officiousness of a blundering elderly Englishman. What devil put him in the way? Haven't I treated him cavalierly enough? Haven't I just? That's the way to treat these meddlesome persons. Is it possible that he still stands behind my back, waiting?"

Razumov felt a faint chill run down his spine. It was not fear. He was certain that it was not fear — not fear for himself — but it was, all the same, a sort of apprehension as if for another, for some one he knew without being able to put a name on the personality. But the recollection that the officious Englishman had a train to meet tranquillized him for a time. It was too stupid to suppose that he should be wasting his time in waiting. It was unnecessary to look round and make sure.

But what did the man mean by his extraordinary rigmarole about the newspaper, and that crazy old woman? he thought suddenly. It was a damnable presumption, anyhow, something that only an Englishman could be capable of. All this was a sort of sport for him — the sport of revolution — a game to look at from the height of his superiority. And what on earth did he mean by his exclamation, "Won't the truth do?"

Razumov pressed his folded arms to the stone coping over which he was leaning with force. "Won't the truth do? The truth for the crazy old mother of the — "

The young man shuddered again. Yes. The truth would do! Apparently it would do. Exactly. And receive thanks, he thought, formulating the unspoken words cynically. "Fall on my neck in gratitude, no doubt," he jeered mentally. But this mood abandoned him at once. He felt sad, as if his

heart had become empty suddenly. "Well, I must be cautious," he concluded, coming to himself as though his brain had been awakened from a trance. "There is nothing, no one, too insignificant, too absurd to be disregarded," he thought wearily. "I must be cautious."

Razumov pushed himself with his hand away from the balustrade and, retracing his steps along the bridge, walked straight to his lodgings, where, for a few days, he led a solitary and retired existence. He neglected Peter Ivanovitch, to whom he was accredited by the Stuttgart group; he never went near the refugee revolutionists, to whom he had been introduced on his arrival. He kept out of that world altogether. And he felt that such conduct, causing surprise and arousing suspicion, contained an element of danger for himself.

This is not to say that during these few days he never went out. I met him several times in the streets, but he gave me no recognition. Once, going home after an evening call on the ladies Haldin, I saw him crossing the dark roadway of the Boulevard des Philosophes. He had a broad-brimmed soft hat, and the collar of his coat turned up. I watched him make straight for the house, but, instead of going in, he stopped opposite the still lighted windows, and after a time went away down a side-street.

I knew that he had not been to see Mrs. Haldin yet. Miss Haldin told me he was reluctant; moreover, the mental condition of Mrs. Haldin had changed. She seemed to think now that her son was living, and she perhaps awaited his arrival. Her immobility in the great arm-chair in front of the window had an air of expectancy, even when the blind was down and the lamps lighted.

For my part, I was convinced that she had received her death-stroke; Miss Haldin, to whom, of course, I said nothing of my forebodings, thought that no good would come from introducing Mr. Razumov just then, an opinion which I shared fully. I knew that she met the young man on the Bastions. Once or twice I saw them strolling slowly up the main alley. They met every day for weeks. I avoided passing that way during the hour when Miss Haldin took her exercise there. One day, however, in a fit of absent-mindedness, I entered the gates and came upon her walking alone. I stopped to exchange a few words. Mr. Razumov failed to turn up, and we began to talk about him — naturally.

"Did he tell you anything definite about your brother's activities — his end?" I ventured to ask.

“No,” admitted Miss Haldin, with some hesitation. “Nothing definite.”

I understood well enough that all their conversations must have been referred mentally to that dead man who had brought them together. That was unavoidable. But it was in the living man that she was interested. That was unavoidable too, I suppose. And as I pushed my inquiries I discovered that he had disclosed himself to her as a by no means conventional revolutionist, contemptuous of catchwords, of theories, of men too. I was rather pleased at that — but I was a little puzzled.

“His mind goes forward, far ahead of the struggle,” Miss Haldin explained. “Of course, he is an actual worker too,” she added.

“And do you understand him?” I inquired point-blank.

She hesitated again. “Not altogether,” she murmured.

I perceived that he had fascinated her by an assumption of mysterious reserve.

“Do you know what I think?” she went on, breaking through her reserved, almost reluctant attitude: “I think that he is observing, studying me, to discover whether I am worthy of his trust....”

“And that pleases you?”

She kept mysteriously silent for a moment. Then with energy, but in a confidential tone —

“I am convinced;” she declared, “that this extraordinary man is meditating some vast plan, some great undertaking; he is possessed by it — he suffers from it — and from being alone in the world.”

“And so he’s looking for helpers?” I commented, turning away my head.

Again there was a silence.

“Why not?” she said at last.

The dead brother, the dying mother, the foreign friend, had fallen into a distant background. But, at the same time, Peter Ivanovitch was absolutely nowhere now. And this thought consoled me. Yet I saw the gigantic shadow of Russian life deepening around her like the darkness of an advancing night. It would devour her presently. I inquired after Mrs. Haldin — that other victim of the deadly shade.

A remorseful uneasiness appeared in her frank eyes. Mother seemed no worse, but if I only knew what strange fancies she had sometimes! Then Miss Haldin, glancing at her watch, declared that she could not stay a moment longer, and with a hasty hand-shake ran off lightly.

Decidedly, Mr. Razumov was not to turn up that day. Incomprehensible youth!

But less than an hour afterwards, while crossing the Place Mollard, I caught sight of him boarding a South Shore tramcar.

“He’s going to the Chateau Borel,” I thought.

After depositing Razumov at the gates of the Chateau Borel, some half a mile or so from the town, the car continued its journey between two straight lines of shady trees. Across the roadway in the sunshine a short wooden pier jutted into the shallow pale water, which farther out had an intense blue tint contrasting unpleasantly with the green orderly slopes on the opposite shore. The whole view, with the harbour jetties of white stone underlining vividly the dark front of the town to the left, and the expanding space of water to the right with jutting promontories of no particular character, had the uninspiring, glittering quality of a very fresh oleograph. Razumov turned his back on it with contempt. He thought it odious — oppressively odious — in its unsuggestive finish: the very perfection of mediocrity attained at last after centuries of toil and culture. And turning his back on it, he faced the entrance to the grounds of the Chateau Borel.

The bars of the central way and the wrought-iron arch between the dark weather-stained stone piers were very rusty; and, though fresh tracks of wheels ran under it, the gate looked as if it had not been opened for a very long time. But close against the lodge, built of the same grey stone as the piers (its windows were all boarded up), there was a small side entrance. The bars of that were rusty too; it stood ajar and looked as though it had not been closed for a long time. In fact, Razumov, trying to push it open a little wider, discovered it was immovable.

“Democratic virtue. There are no thieves here, apparently,” he muttered to himself, with displeasure. Before advancing into the grounds he looked back sourly at an idle working man lounging on a bench in the clean, broad avenue. The fellow had thrown his feet up; one of his arms hung over the low back of the public seat; he was taking a day off in lordly repose, as if everything in sight belonged to him.

“Elector! Eligible! Enlightened!” Razumov muttered to himself. “A brute, all the same.”

Razumov entered the grounds and walked fast up the wide sweep of the drive, trying to think of nothing — to rest his head, to rest his emotions too. But arriving at the foot of the terrace before the house he faltered, affected

physically by some invisible interference. The mysteriousness of his quickened heart-beats startled him. He stopped short and looked at the brick wall of the terrace, faced with shallow arches, meagrely clothed by a few unthriving creepers, with an ill-kept narrow flower-bed along its foot.

“It is here!” he thought, with a sort of awe. “It is here — on this very spot....”

He was tempted to flight at the mere recollection of his first meeting with Nathalie Haldin. He confessed it to himself; but he did not move, and that not because he wished to resist an unworthy weakness, but because he knew that he had no place to fly to. Moreover, he could not leave Geneva. He recognized, even without thinking, that it was impossible. It would have been a fatal admission, an act of moral suicide. It would have been also physically dangerous. Slowly he ascended the stairs of the terrace, flanked by two stained greenish stone urns of funereal aspect.

Across the broad platform, where a few blades of grass sprouted on the discoloured gravel, the door of the house, with its ground-floor windows shuttered, faced him, wide open. He believed that his approach had been noted, because, framed in the doorway, without his tall hat, Peter Ivanovitch seemed to be waiting for his approach.

The ceremonious black frock-coat and the bared head of Europe’s greatest feminist accentuated the dubiousness of his status in the house rented by Madame de S — , his Egeria. His aspect combined the formality of the caller with the freedom of the proprietor. Florid and bearded and masked by the dark blue glasses, he met the visitor, and at once took him familiarly under the arm.

Razumov suppressed every sign of repugnance by an effort which the constant necessity of prudence had rendered almost mechanical. And this necessity had settled his expression in a cast of austere, almost fanatical, aloofness. The “heroic fugitive,” impressed afresh by the severe detachment of this new arrival from revolutionary Russia, took a conciliatory, even a confidential tone. Madame de S — was resting after a bad night. She often had bad nights. He had left his hat upstairs on the landing and had come down to suggest to his young friend a stroll and a good open-hearted talk in one of the shady alleys behind the house. After voicing this proposal, the great man glanced at the unmoved face by his side, and could not restrain himself from exclaiming —

“On my word, young man, you are an extraordinary person.”

“I fancy you are mistaken, Peter Ivanovitch. If I were really an extraordinary person, I would not be here, walking with you in a garden in Switzerland, Canton of Geneva, Commune of — what’s the name of the Commune this place belongs to?... Never mind — the heart of democracy, anyhow. A fit heart for it; no bigger than a parched pea and about as much value. I am no more extraordinary than the rest of us Russians, wandering abroad.”

But Peter Ivanovitch dissented emphatically —

“No! No! You are not ordinary. I have some experience of Russians who are — well — living abroad. You appear to me, and to others too, a marked personality.”

“What does he mean by this?” Razumov asked himself, turning his eyes fully on his companion. The face of Peter Ivanovitch expressed a meditative seriousness.

“You don’t suppose, Kirylo Sidorovitch, that I have not heard of you from various points where you made yourself known on your way here? I have had letters.”

“Oh, we are great in talking about each other,” interjected Razumov, who had listened with great attention. “Gossip, tales, suspicions, and all that sort of thing, we know how to deal in to perfection. Calumny, even.”

In indulging in this sally, Razumov managed very well to conceal the feeling of anxiety which had come over him. At the same time he was saying to himself that there could be no earthly reason for anxiety. He was relieved by the evident sincerity of the protesting voice.

“Heavens!” cried Peter Ivanovitch. “What are you talking about? What reason can you have to...?”

The great exile flung up his arms as if words had failed him in sober truth. Razumov was satisfied. Yet he was moved to continue in the same vein.

“I am talking of the poisonous plants which flourish in the world of conspirators, like evil mushrooms in a dark cellar.”

“You are casting aspersions,” remonstrated Peter Ivanovitch, “which as far as you are concerned — ”

“No!” Razumov interrupted without heat. “Indeed, I don’t want to cast aspersions, but it’s just as well to have no illusions.”

Peter Ivanovitch gave him an inscrutable glance of his dark spectacles, accompanied by a faint smile.

“The man who says that he has no illusions has at least that one,” he said, in a very friendly tone. “But I see how it is, Kirylo Sidorovitch. You aim at stoicism.”

“Stoicism! That’s a pose of the Greeks and the Romans. Let’s leave it to them. We are Russians, that is — children; that is — sincere; that is — cynical, if you like. But that’s not a pose.”

A long silence ensued. They strolled slowly under the lime-trees. Peter Ivanovitch had put his hands behind his back. Razumov felt the ungravelled ground of the deeply shaded walk damp and as if slippery under his feet. He asked himself, with uneasiness, if he were saying the right things. The direction of the conversation ought to have been more under his control, he reflected. The great man appeared to be reflecting on his side too. He cleared his throat slightly, and Razumov felt at once a painful reawakening of scorn and fear.

“I am astonished,” began Peter Ivanovitch gently. “Supposing you are right in your indictment, how can you raise any question of calumny or gossip, in your case? It is unreasonable. The fact is, Kirylo Sidorovitch, there is not enough known of you to give hold to gossip or even calumny. Just now you are a man associated with a great deed, which had been hoped for, and tried for too, without success. People have perished for attempting that which you and Haldin have done at last. You come to us out of Russia, with that prestige. But you cannot deny that you have not been communicative, Kirylo Sidorovitch. People you have met imparted their impressions to me; one wrote this, another that, but I form my own opinions. I waited to see you first. You are a man out of the common. That’s positively so. You are close, very close. This taciturnity, this severe brow, this something inflexible and secret in you, inspires hopes and a little wonder as to what you may mean. There is something of a Brutus....”

“Pray spare me those classical allusions!” burst out Razumov nervously. “What comes Junius Brutus to do here? It is ridiculous! Do you mean to say,” he added sarcastically, but lowering his voice, “that the Russian revolutionists are all patricians and that I am an aristocrat?”

Peter Ivanovitch, who had been helping himself with a few gestures, clasped his hands again behind his back, and made a few steps, pondering.

“Not all patricians,” he muttered at last. “But you, at any rate, are one of us.”

Razumov smiled bitterly.



“To be sure my name is not Gugenheimer,” he said in a sneering tone. “I am not a democratic Jew. How can I help it? Not everybody has such luck. I have no name, I have no....”

The European celebrity showed a great concern. He stepped back a pace and his arms flew in front of his person, extended, deprecatory, almost entreating. His deep bass voice was full of pain.

“But, my dear young friend!” he cried. “My dear Kirylo Sidorovitch....”

Razumov shook his head.

“The very patronymic you are so civil as to use when addressing me I have no legal right to — but what of that? I don’t wish to claim it. I have no father. So much the better. But I will tell you what: my mother’s grandfather was a peasant — a serf. See how much I am one of you. I don’t want anyone to claim me. But Russia can’t disown me. She cannot!”

Razumov struck his breast with his fist.

“I am it!”

Peter Ivanovitch walked on slowly, his head lowered. Razumov followed, vexed with himself. That was not the right sort of talk. All sincerity was an imprudence. Yet one could not renounce truth altogether, he thought, with despair. Peter Ivanovitch, meditating behind his dark glasses, became to him suddenly so odious that if he had had a knife, he fancied he could have stabbed him not only without compunction, but with a horrible, triumphant satisfaction. His imagination dwelt on that atrocity in spite of himself. It was as if he were becoming light-headed. “It is not what is expected of me,” he repeated to himself. “It is not what is — I could get away by breaking the fastening on the little gate I see there in the back wall. It is a flimsy lock. Nobody in the house seems to know he is here with me. Oh yes. The hat! These women would discover presently the hat he has left on the landing. They would come upon him, lying dead in this damp, gloomy shade — but I would be gone and no one could ever...Lord! Am I going mad?” he asked himself in a fright.

The great man was heard — musing in an undertone.

“H’m, yes! That — no doubt — in a certain sense....” He raised his voice. “There is a deal of pride about you....”

The intonation of Peter Ivanovitch took on a homely, familiar ring, acknowledging, in a way, Razumov’s claim to peasant descent.

“A great deal of pride, brother Kirylo. And I don’t say that you have no justification for it. I have admitted you had. I have ventured to allude to the

facts of your birth simply because I attach no mean importance to it. You are one of us — un des nôtres. I reflect on that with satisfaction.”

“I attach some importance to it also,” said Razumov quietly. “I won’t even deny that it may have some importance for you too,” he continued, after a slight pause and with a touch of grimness of which he was himself aware, with some annoyance. He hoped it had escaped the perception of Peter Ivanovitch. “But suppose we talk no more about it?”

“Well, we shall not — not after this one time, Kirylo Sidorovitch,” persisted the noble arch-priest of Revolution. “This shall be the last occasion. You cannot believe for a moment that I had the slightest idea of wounding your feelings. You are clearly a superior nature — that’s how I read you. Quite above the common — h’m — susceptibilities. But the fact is, Kirylo Sidorovitch, I don’t know your susceptibilities. Nobody, out of Russia, knows much of you — as yet!”

“You have been watching me?” suggested Razumov.

“Yes.”

The great man had spoken in a tone of perfect frankness, but as they turned their faces to each other Razumov felt baffled by the dark spectacles. Under their cover, Peter Ivanovitch hinted that he had felt for some time the need of meeting a man of energy and character, in view of a certain project. He said nothing more precise, however; and after some critical remarks upon the personalities of the various members of the committee of revolutionary action in Stuttgart, he let the conversation lapse for quite a long while. They paced the alley from end to end. Razumov, silent too, raised his eyes from time to time to cast a glance at the back of the house. It offered no sign of being inhabited. With its grimy, weather-stained walls and all the windows shuttered from top to bottom, it looked damp and gloomy and deserted. It might very well have been haunted in traditional style by some doleful, groaning, futile ghost of a middle-class order. The shades evoked, as worldly rumour had it, by Madame de S — to meet statesmen, diplomatists, deputies of various European Parliaments, must have been of another sort. Razumov had never seen Madame de S — but in the carriage.

Peter Ivanovitch came out of his abstraction.

“Two things I may say to you at once. I believe, first, that neither a leader nor any decisive action can come out of the dregs of a people. Now, if you ask me what are the dregs of a people — h’m — it would take too long to

tell. You would be surprised at the variety of ingredients that for me go to the making up of these dregs — of that which ought, must remain at the bottom. Moreover, such a statement might be subject to discussion. But I can tell you what is not the dregs. On that it is impossible for us to disagree. The peasantry of a people is not the dregs; neither is its highest class — well — the nobility. Reflect on that, Kirylo Sidorovitch! I believe you are well fitted for reflection. Everything in a people that is not genuine, not its own by origin or development, is — well — dirt! Intelligence in the wrong place is that. Foreign-bred doctrines are that. Dirt! Dregs! The second thing I would offer to your meditation is this: that for us at this moment there yawns a chasm between the past and the future. It can never be bridged by foreign liberalism. All attempts at it are either folly or cheating. Bridged it can never be! It has to be filled up.”

A sort of sinister jocularly had crept into the tones of the burly feminist. He seized Razumov’s arm above the elbow, and gave it a slight shake.

“Do you understand, enigmatical young man? It has got to be just filled up.”

Razumov kept an unmoved countenance.

“Don’t you think that I have already gone beyond meditation on that subject?” he said, freeing his arm by a quiet movement which increased the distance a little between himself and Peter Ivanovitch, as they went on strolling abreast. And he added that surely whole cartloads of words and theories could never fill that chasm. No meditation was necessary. A sacrifice of many lives could alone — He fell silent without finishing the phrase.

Peter Ivanovitch inclined his big hairy head slowly. After a moment he proposed that they should go and see if Madame de S — was now visible.

“We shall get some tea,” he said, turning out of the shaded gloomy walk with a brisker step.

The lady companion had been on the look out. Her dark skirt whisked into the doorway as the two men came in sight round the corner. She ran off somewhere altogether, and had disappeared when they entered the hall. In the crude light falling from the dusty glass skylight upon the black and white tessellated floor, covered with muddy tracks, their footsteps echoed faintly. The great feminist led the way up the stairs. On the balustrade of the first-floor landing a shiny tall hat reposed, rim upwards, opposite the double door of the drawing-room, haunted, it was said, by evoked ghosts, and

frequented, it was to be supposed, by fugitive revolutionists. The cracked white paint of the panels, the tarnished gilt of the mouldings, permitted one to imagine nothing but dust and emptiness within. Before turning the massive brass handle, Peter Ivanovitch gave his young companion a sharp, partly critical, partly preparatory glance.

“No one is perfect,” he murmured discreetly. Thus, the possessor of a rare jewel might, before opening the casket, warn the profane that no gem perhaps is flawless.

He remained with his hand on the door-handle so long that Razumov assented by a moody “No.”

“Perfection itself would not produce that effect,” pursued Peter Ivanovitch, “in a world not meant for it. But you shall find there a mind — no! — the quintessence of feminine intuition which will understand any perplexity you may be suffering from by the irresistible, enlightening force of sympathy. Nothing can remain obscure before that — that — inspired, yes, inspired penetration, this true light of femininity.”

The gaze of the dark spectacles in its glossy steadfastness gave his face an air of absolute conviction. Razumov felt a momentary shrinking before that closed door.

“Penetration? Light,” he stammered out. “Do you mean some sort of thought-reading?”

Peter Ivanovitch seemed shocked.

“I mean something utterly different,” he retorted, with a faint, pitying smile.

Razumov began to feel angry, very much against his wish.

“This is very mysterious,” he muttered through his teeth.

“You don’t object to being understood, to being guided?” queried the great feminist. Razumov exploded in a fierce whisper.

“In what sense? Be pleased to understand that I am a serious person. Who do you take me for?”

They looked at each other very closely. Razumov’s temper was cooled by the impenetrable earnestness of the blue glasses meeting his stare. Peter Ivanovitch turned the handle at last.

“You shall know directly,” he said, pushing the door open.

A low-pitched grating voice was heard within the room.

“Enfin.”

In the doorway, his black-coated bulk blocking the view, Peter Ivanovitch boomed in a hearty tone with something boastful in it.

“Yes. Here I am!”

He glanced over his shoulder at Razumov, who waited for him to move on.

“And I am bringing you a proved conspirator — a real one this time. Un vrai celui la.”

This pause in the doorway gave the “proved conspirator” time to make sure that his face did not betray his angry curiosity and his mental disgust.

These sentiments stand confessed in Mr. Razumov’s memorandum of his first interview with Madame de S — . The very words I use in my narrative are written where their sincerity cannot be suspected. The record, which could not have been meant for anyone’s eyes but his own, was not, I think, the outcome of that strange impulse of indiscretion common to men who lead secret lives, and accounting for the invariable existence of “compromising documents” in all the plots and conspiracies of history. Mr. Razumov looked at it, I suppose, as a man looks at himself in a mirror, with wonder, perhaps with anguish, with anger or despair. Yes, as a threatened man may look fearfully at his own face in the glass, formulating to himself reassuring excuses for his appearance marked by the taint of some insidious hereditary disease.

## II

The Egeria of the “Russian Mazzini” produced, at first view, a strong effect by the death-like immobility of an obviously painted face. The eyes appeared extraordinarily brilliant. The figure, in a close-fitting dress, admirably made, but by no means fresh, had an elegant stiffness. The rasping voice inviting him to sit down; the rigidity of the upright attitude with one arm extended along the back of the sofa, the white gleam of the big eyeballs setting off the black, fathomless stare of the enlarged pupils, impressed Razumov more than anything he had seen since his hasty and secret departure from St. Petersburg. A witch in Parisian clothes, he thought. A portent! He actually hesitated in his advance, and did not even comprehend, at first, what the rasping voice was saying.

“Sit down. Draw your chair nearer me. There — ”

He sat down. At close quarters the rouged cheekbones, the wrinkles, the fine lines on each side of the vivid lips, astounded him. He was being received graciously, with a smile which made him think of a grinning skull.

“We have been hearing about you for some time.”

He did not know what to say, and murmured some disconnected words. The grinning skull effect vanished.

“And do you know that the general complaint is that you have shown yourself very reserved everywhere?”

Razumov remained silent for a time, thinking of his answer.

“I, don’t you see, am a man of action,” he said huskily, glancing upwards.

Peter Ivanovitch stood in portentous expectant silence by the side of his chair. A slight feeling of nausea came over Razumov. What could be the relations of these two people to each other? She like a galvanized corpse out of some Hoffman’s Tale — he the preacher of feminist gospel for all the world, and a super-revolutionist besides! This ancient, painted mummy with unfathomable eyes, and this burly, bull-necked, deferential...what was it? Witchcraft, fascination.... “It’s for her money,” he thought. “She has millions!”

The walls, the floor of the room were bare like a barn. The few pieces of furniture had been discovered in the garrets and dragged down into service without having been properly dusted, even. It was the refuse the banker’s widow had left behind her. The windows without curtains had an indigent, sleepless look. In two of them the dirty yellowy-white blinds had been pulled down. All this spoke, not of poverty, but of sordid penuriousness.

The hoarse voice on the sofa uttered angrily —

“You are looking round, Kirylo Sidorovitch. I have been shamefully robbed, positively ruined.”

A rattling laugh, which seemed beyond her control, interrupted her for a moment.

“A slavish nature would find consolation in the fact that the principal robber was an exalted and almost a sacrosanct person — a Grand Duke, in fact. Do you understand, Mr. Razumov? A Grand Duke — No! You have no idea what thieves those people are! Downright thieves!”

Her bosom heaved, but her left arm remained rigidly extended along the back of the couch.

“You will only upset yourself,” breathed out a deep voice, which, to Razumov’s startled glance, seemed to proceed from under the steady spectacles of Peter Ivanovitch, rather than from his lips, which had hardly moved.

“What of hat? I say thieves! Voleurs! Voleurs!”

Razumov was quite confounded by this unexpected clamour, which had in it something of wailing and croaking, and more than a suspicion of hysteria.

“Voleurs! Voleurs! Vol...”

“No power on earth can rob you of your genius,” shouted Peter Ivanovitch in an overpowering bass, but without stirring, without a gesture of any kind. A profound silence fell.

Razumov remained outwardly impassive. “What is the meaning of this performance?” he was asking himself. But with a preliminary sound of bumping outside some door behind him, the lady companion, in a threadbare black skirt and frayed blouse, came in rapidly, walking on her heels, and carrying in both hands a big Russian samovar, obviously too heavy for her. Razumov made an instinctive movement to help, which startled her so much that she nearly dropped her hissing burden. She managed, however, to land it on the table, and looked so frightened that Razumov hastened to sit down. She produced then, from an adjacent room, four glass tumblers, a teapot, and a sugar-basin, on a black iron tray.

The rasping voice asked from the sofa abruptly —

“Les gateaux? Have you remembered to bring the cakes?”

Peter Ivanovitch, without a word, marched out on to the landing, and returned instantly with a parcel wrapped up in white glazed paper, which he must have extracted from the interior of his hat. With imperturbable gravity he undid the string and smoothed the paper open on a part of the table within reach of Madame de S — ’s hand. The lady companion poured out the tea, then retired into a distant corner out of everybody’s sight. From time to time Madame de S — extended a claw-like hand, glittering with costly rings, towards the paper of cakes, took up one and devoured it, displaying her big false teeth ghoulishly. Meantime she talked in a hoarse tone of the political situation in the Balkans. She built great hopes on some complication in the peninsula for arousing a great movement of national indignation in Russia against “these thieves — thieves thieves.”

“You will only upset yourself,” Peter Ivanovitch interposed, raising his glassy gaze. He smoked cigarettes and drank tea in silence, continuously. When he had finished a glass, he flourished his hand above his shoulder. At that signal the lady companion, ensconced in her corner, with round eyes like a watchful animal, would dart out to the table and pour him out another tumblerful.

Razumov looked at her once or twice. She was anxious, tremulous, though neither Madame de S — nor Peter Ivanovitch paid the slightest attention to her. “What have they done between them to that forlorn creature?” Razumov asked himself. “Have they terrified her out of her senses with ghosts, or simply have they only been beating her?” When she gave him his second glass of tea, he noticed that her lips trembled in the manner of a scared person about to burst into speech. But of course she said nothing, and retired into her corner, as if hugging to herself the smile of thanks he gave her.

“She may be worth cultivating,” thought Razumov suddenly.

He was calming down, getting hold of the actuality into which he had been thrown — for the first time perhaps since Victor Haldin had entered his room...and had gone out again. He was distinctly aware of being the object of the famous — or notorious — Madame de S — ’s ghastly graciousness.

Madame de S — was pleased to discover that this young man was different from the other types of revolutionist members of committees, secret emissaries, vulgar and unmannerly fugitive professors, rough students, ex-cobblers with apostolic faces, consumptive and ragged enthusiasts, Hebrew youths, common fellows of all sorts that used to come and go around Peter Ivanovitch — fanatics, pedants, proletarians all. It was pleasant to talk to this young man of notably good appearance — for Madame de S — was not always in a mystical state of mind. Razumov’s taciturnity only excited her to a quicker, more voluble utterance. It still dealt with the Balkans. She knew all the statesmen of that region, Turks, Bulgarians, Montenegrins, Roumanians, Greeks, Armenians, and nondescripts, young and old, the living and the dead. With some money an intrigue could be started which would set the Peninsula in a blaze and outrage the sentiment of the Russian people. A cry of abandoned brothers could be raised, and then, with the nation seething with indignation, a couple of regiments or so would be enough to begin a military revolution in St. Petersburg and make an end of these thieves....

“Apparently I’ve got only to sit still and listen,” the silent Razumov thought to himself. “As to that hairy and obscene brute” (in such terms did Mr. Razumov refer mentally to the popular expounder of a feministic conception of social state), “as to him, for all his cunning he too shall speak out some day.”



Razumov ceased to think for a moment. Then a sombre-toned reflection formulated itself in his mind, ironical and bitter. "I have the gift of inspiring confidence." He heard himself laughing aloud. It was like a goad to the painted, shiny-eyed harridan on the sofa.

"You may well laugh!" she cried hoarsely. "What else can one do! Perfect swindlers — and what base swindlers at that! Cheap Germans — Holstein-Gottorps! Though, indeed, it's hardly safe to say who and what they are. A family that counts a creature like Catherine the Great in its ancestry — you understand!"

"You are only upsetting yourself," said Peter Ivanovitch, patiently but in a firm tone. This admonition had its usual effect on the Egeria. She dropped her thick, discoloured eyelids and changed her position on the sofa. All her angular and lifeless movements seemed completely automatic now that her eyes were closed. Presently she opened them very full. Peter Ivanovitch drank tea steadily, without haste.

"Well, I declare!" She addressed Razumov directly. "The people who have seen you on your way here are right. You are very reserved. You haven't said twenty words altogether since you came in. You let nothing of your thoughts be seen in your face either."

"I have been listening, Madame," said Razumov, using French for the first time, hesitatingly, not being certain of his accent. But it seemed to produce an excellent impression. Madame de S — looked meaningly into Peter Ivanovitch's spectacles, as if to convey her conviction of this young man's merit. She even nodded the least bit in his direction, and Razumov heard her murmur under her breath the words, "Later on in the diplomatic service," which could not but refer to the favourable impression he had made. The fantastic absurdity of it revolted him because it seemed to outrage his ruined hopes with the vision of a mock-career. Peter Ivanovitch, impassive as though he were deaf, drank some more tea. Razumov felt that he must say something.

"Yes," he began deliberately, as if uttering a meditated opinion. "Clearly. Even in planning a purely military revolution the temper of the people should be taken into account."

"You have understood me perfectly. The discontent should be spiritualized. That is what the ordinary heads of revolutionary committees will not understand. They aren't capable of it. For instance, Mordatiev was in Geneva last month. Peter Ivanovitch brought him here. You know

Mordatiev? Well, yes — you have heard of him. They call him an eagle — a hero! He has never done half as much as you have. Never attempted — not half....”

Madame de S — agitated herself angularly on the sofa.

“We, of course, talked to him. And do you know what he said to me? ‘What have we to do with Balkan intrigues? We must simply extirpate the scoundrels.’ Extirpate is all very well — but what then? The imbecile! I screamed at him, ‘But you must spiritualize — don’t you understand? — spiritualize the discontent.’...”

She felt nervously in her pocket for a handkerchief; she pressed it to her lips.

“Spiritualize?” said Razumov interrogatively, watching her heaving breast. The long ends of an old black lace scarf she wore over her head slipped off her shoulders and hung down on each side of her ghastly rosy cheeks.

“An odious creature,” she burst out again. “Imagine a man who takes five lumps of sugar in his tea.... Yes, I said spiritualize! How else can you make discontent effective and universal?”

“Listen to this, young man.” Peter Ivanovitch made himself heard solemnly. “Effective and universal.”

Razumov looked at him suspiciously.

“Some say hunger will do that,” he remarked.

“Yes. I know. Our people are starving in heaps. But you can’t make famine universal. And it is not despair that we want to create. There is no moral support to be got out of that. It is indignation....”

Madame de S — let her thin, extended arm sink on her knees.

“I am not a Mordatiev,” began Razumov.

“Bien sur!” murmured Madame de S — .

“Though I too am ready to say extirpate, extirpate! But in my ignorance of political work, permit me to ask: A Balkan — well — intrigue, wouldn’t that take a very long time?”

Peter Ivanovitch got up and moved off quietly, to stand with his face to the window. Razumov heard a door close; he turned his head and perceived that the lady companion had scuttled out of the room.

“In matters of politics I am a supernaturalist.” Madame de S — broke the silence harshly.

Peter Ivanovitch moved away from the window and struck Razumov lightly on the shoulder. This was a signal for leaving, but at the same time he addressed Madame de S — in a peculiar reminding tone — -

“Eleanor!”

Whatever it meant, she did not seem to hear him. She leaned back in the corner of the sofa like a wooden figure. The immovable peevishness of the face, framed in the limp, rusty lace, had a character of cruelty.

“As to extirpating,” she croaked at the attentive Razumov, “there is only one class in Russia which must be extirpated. Only one. And that class consists of only one family. You understand me? That one family must be extirpated.”

Her rigidity was frightful, like the rigor of a corpse galvanized into harsh speech and glittering stare by the force of murderous hate. The sight fascinated Razumov — yet he felt more self-possessed than at any other time since he had entered this weirdly bare room. He was interested. But the great feminist by his side again uttered his appeal —

“Eleanor!”

She disregarded it. Her carmine lips vaticinated with an extraordinary rapidity. The liberating spirit would use arms before which rivers would part like Jordan, and ramparts fall down like the walls of Jericho. The deliverance from bondage would be effected by plagues and by signs, by wonders and by war. The women....

“Eleanor!”

She ceased; she had heard him at last. She pressed her hand to her forehead.

“What is it? Ah yes! That girl — the sister of....”

It was Miss Haldin that she meant. That young girl and her mother had been leading a very retired life. They were provincial ladies — were they not? The mother had been very beautiful — traces were left yet. Peter Ivanovitch, when he called there for the first time, was greatly struck....But the cold way they received him was really surprising.

“He is one of our national glories,” Madams de S — cried out, with sudden vehemence. “All the world listens to him.”

“I don’t know these ladies,” said Razumov loudly rising from his chair.

“What are you saying, Kirylo Sidorovitch? I understand that she was talking to you here, in the garden, the other day.”

“Yes, in the garden,” said Razumov gloomily. Then, with an effort, “She made herself known to me.”

“And then ran away from us all,” Madame de S — continued, with ghastly vivacity. “After coming to the very door! What a peculiar proceeding! Well, I have been a shy little provincial girl at one time. Yes, Razumov” (she fell into this familiarity intentionally, with an appalling grimace of graciousness. Razumov gave a perceptible start), “yes, that’s my origin. A simple provincial family.

“You are a marvel,” Peter Ivanovich uttered.

But it was to Razumov that she gave her death’s-head smile. Her tone was quite imperious.

“You must bring the wild young thing here. She is wanted. I reckon upon your success — mind!”

“She is not a wild young thing,” muttered Razumov, in a surly voice.

“Well, then — that’s all the same. She may be one of these young conceited democrats. Do you know what I think? I think she is very much like you in character. There is a smouldering fire of scorn in you. You are darkly self-sufficient, but I can see your very soul.”

Her shiny eyes had a dry, intense stare, which, missing Razumov, gave him an absurd notion that she was looking at something which was visible to her behind him. He cursed himself for an impressionable fool, and asked with forced calmness —

“What is it you see? Anything resembling me?”

She moved her rigidly set face from left to right, negatively.

“Some sort of phantom in my image?” pursued Razumov slowly. “For, I suppose, a soul when it is seen is just that. A vain thing. There are phantoms of the living as well as of the dead.”

The tenseness of Madame de S — ’s stare had relaxed, and now she looked at Razumov in a silence that became disconcerting.

“I myself have had an experience,” he stammered out, as if compelled. “I’ve seen a phantom once.” The unnaturally red lips moved to frame a question harshly.

“Of a dead person?”

“No. Living.”

“A friend?”

“No.”

“An enemy?”

“I hated him.”

“Ah! It was not a woman, then?”

“A woman!” repeated Razumov, his eyes looking straight into the eyes of Madame de S — . “Why should it have been a woman? And why this conclusion? Why should I not have been able to hate a woman?”

As a matter of fact, the idea of hating a woman was new to him. At that moment he hated Madame de S — . But it was not exactly hate. It was more like the abhorrence that may be caused by a wooden or plaster figure of a repulsive kind. She moved no more than if she were such a figure; even her eyes, whose unwinking stare plunged into his own, though shining, were lifeless, as though they were as artificial as her teeth. For the first time Razumov became aware of a faint perfume, but faint as it was it nauseated him exceedingly. Again Peter Ivanovitch tapped him slightly on the shoulder. Thereupon he bowed, and was about to turn away when he received the unexpected favour of a bony, inanimate hand extended to him, with the two words in hoarse French —

“Au revoir!”

He bowed over the skeleton hand and left the room, escorted by the great man, who made him go out first. The voice from the sofa cried after them —

“You remain here, Pierre.”

“Certainly, ma chere amie.”

But he left the room with Razumov, shutting the door behind him. The landing was prolonged into a bare corridor, right and left, desolate perspectives of white and gold decoration without a strip of carpet. The very light, pouring through a large window at the end, seemed dusty; and a solitary speck reposing on the balustrade of white marble — the silk top-hat of the great feminist — asserted itself extremely, black and glossy in all that crude whiteness.

Peter Ivanovitch escorted the visitor without opening his lips. Even when they had reached the head of the stairs Peter Ivanovitch did not break the silence. Razumov’s impulse to continue down the flight and out of the house without as much as a nod abandoned him suddenly. He stopped on the first step and leaned his back against the wall. Below him the great hall with its chequered floor of black and white seemed absurdly large and like some public place where a great power of resonance awaits the provocation

of footfalls and voices. As if afraid of awakening the loud echoes of that empty house, Razumov adopted a low tone.

“I really have no mind to turn into a dilettante spiritualist.”

Peter Ivanovitch shook his head slightly, very serious.

“Or spend my time in spiritual ecstasies or sublime meditations upon the gospel of feminism,” continued Razumov. “I made my way here for my share of action — action, most respected Peter Ivanovitch! It was not the great European writer who attracted me, here, to this odious town of liberty. It was somebody much greater. It was the idea of the chief which attracted me. There are starving young men in Russia who believe in you so much that it seems the only thing that keeps them alive in their misery. Think of that, Peter Ivanovitch! No! But only think of that!”

The great man, thus entreated, perfectly motionless and silent, was the very image of patient, placid respectability.

“Of course I don’t speak of the people. They are brutes,” added Razumov, in the same subdued but forcible tone. At this, a protesting murmur issued from the “heroic fugitive’s” beard. A murmur of authority.

“Say — children.”

“No! Brutes!” Razumov insisted bluntly.

“But they are sound, they are innocent,” the great man pleaded in a whisper.

“As far as that goes, a brute is sound enough.” Razumov raised his voice at last. “And you can’t deny the natural innocence of a brute. But what’s the use of disputing about names? You just try to give these children the power and stature of men and see what they will be like. You just give it to them and see.... But never mind. I tell you, Peter Ivanovitch, that half a dozen young men do not come together nowadays in a shabby student’s room without your name being whispered, not as a leader of thought, but as a centre of revolutionary energies — the centre of action. What else has drawn me near you, do you think? It is not what all the world knows of you, surely. It’s precisely what the world at large does not know. I was irresistibly drawn-let us say impelled, yes, impelled; or, rather, compelled, driven — driven,” repented Razumov loudly, and ceased, as if startled by the hollow reverberation of the word “driven” along two bare corridors and in the great empty hall.

Peter Ivanovitch did not seem startled in the least. The young man could not control a dry, uneasy laugh. The great revolutionist remained unmoved

with an effect of commonplace, homely superiority.

“Curse him,” said Razumov to himself, “he is waiting behind his spectacles for me to give myself away.” Then aloud, with a satanic enjoyment of the scorn prompting him to play with the greatness of the great man —

“Ah, Peter Ivanovitch, if you only knew the force which drew — no, which drove me towards you! The irresistible force.”

He did not feel any desire to laugh now. This time Peter Ivanovitch moved his head sideways, knowingly, as much as to say, “Don’t I?” This expressive movement was almost imperceptible. Razumov went on in secret derision —

“All these days you have been trying to read me, Peter Ivanovitch. That is natural. I have perceived it and I have been frank. Perhaps you may think I have not been very expansive? But with a man like you it was not needed; it would have looked like an impertinence, perhaps. And besides, we Russians are prone to talk too much as a rule. I have always felt that. And yet, as a nation, we are dumb. I assure you that I am not likely to talk to you so much again — ha! ha! — ”

Razumov, still keeping on the lower step, came a little nearer to the great man.

“You have been condescending enough. I quite understood it was to lead me on. You must render me the justice that I have not tried to please. I have been impelled, compelled, or rather sent — let us say sent — towards you for a work that no one but myself can do. You would call it a harmless delusion: a ridiculous delusion at which you don’t even smile. It is absurd of me to talk like this, yet some day you shall remember these words, I hope. Enough of this. Here I stand before you-confessed! But one thing more I must add to complete it: a mere blind tool I can never consent to be.”

Whatever acknowledgment Razumov was prepared for, he was not prepared to have both his hands seized in the great man’s grasp. The swiftness of the movement was aggressive enough to startle. The burly feminist could not have been quicker had his purpose been to jerk Razumov treacherously up on the landing and bundle him behind one of the numerous closed doors near by. This idea actually occurred to Razumov; his hands being released after a darkly eloquent squeeze, he smiled, with a beating heart, straight at the beard and the spectacles hiding that impenetrable man.

He thought to himself (it stands confessed in his handwriting), "I won't move from here till he either speaks or turns away. This is a duel." Many seconds passed without a sign or sound.

"Yes, yes," the great man said hurriedly, in subdued tones, as if the whole thing had been a stolen, breathless interview. "Exactly. Come to see us here in a few days. This must be gone into deeply — deeply, between you and me. Quite to the bottom. To the...And, by the by, you must bring along Natalia Victorovna — you know, the Haldin girl....

"Am I to take this as my first instruction from you?" inquired Razumov stiffly.

Peter Ivanovitch seemed perplexed by this new attitude.

"Ah! h'm! You are naturally the proper person — *la personne indiquée*. Every one shall be wanted presently. Every one."

He bent down from the landing over Razumov, who had lowered his eyes.

"The moment of action approaches," he murmured.

Razumov did not look up. He did not move till he heard the door of the drawing-room close behind the greatest of feminists returning to his painted Egeria. Then he walked down slowly into the hall. The door stood open, and the shadow of the house was lying aslant over the greatest part of the terrace. While crossing it slowly, he lifted his hat and wiped his damp forehead, expelling his breath with force to get rid of the last vestiges of the air he had been breathing inside. He looked at the palms of his hands, and rubbed them gently against his thighs.

He felt, bizarre as it may seem, as though another self, an independent sharer of his mind, had been able to view his whole person very distinctly indeed. "This is curious," he thought. After a while he formulated his opinion of it in the mental ejaculation: "Beastly!" This disgust vanished before a marked uneasiness. "This is an effect of nervous exhaustion," he reflected with weary sagacity. "How am I to go on day after day if I have no more power of resistance — moral resistance?"

He followed the path at the foot of the terrace. "Moral resistance, moral resistance," he kept on repeating these words mentally. Moral endurance. Yes, that was the necessity of the situation. An immense longing to make his way out of these grounds and to the other end of the town, of throwing himself on his bed and going to sleep for hours, swept everything clean out



of his mind for a moment. "Is it possible that I am but a weak creature after all?" he asked himself, in sudden alarm. "Eh! What's that?"

He gave a start as if awakened from a dream. He even swayed a little before recovering himself.

"Ah! You stole away from us quietly to walk about here," he said.

The lady companion stood before him, but how she came there he had not the slightest idea. Her folded arms were closely cherishing the cat.

"I have been unconscious as I walked, it's a positive fact," said Razumov to himself in wonder. He raised his hat with marked civility.

The sallow woman blushed duskily. She had her invariably scared expression, as if somebody had just disclosed to her some terrible news. But she held her ground, Razumov noticed, without timidity. "She is incredibly shabby," he thought. In the sunlight her black costume looked greenish, with here and there threadbare patches where the stuff seemed decomposed by age into a velvety, black, furry state. Her very hair and eyebrows looked shabby. Razumov wondered whether she were sixty years old. Her figure, though, was young enough. He observed that she did not appear starved, but rather as if she had been fed on unwholesome scraps and leavings of plates.

Razumov smiled amiably and moved out of her way. She turned her head to keep her scared eyes on him.

"I know what you have been told in there," she affirmed, without preliminaries. Her tone, in contrast with her manner, had an unexpectedly assured character which put Razumov at his ease.

"Do you? You must have heard all sorts of talk on many occasions in there."

She varied her phrase, with the same incongruous effect of positiveness.

"I know to a certainty what you have been told to do."

"Really?" Razumov shrugged his shoulders a little. He was about to pass on with a bow, when a sudden thought struck him. "Yes. To be sure! In your confidential position you are aware of many things," he murmured, looking at the cat.

That animal got a momentary convulsive hug from the lady companion.

"Everything was disclosed to me a long time ago," she said.

"Everything," Razumov repeated absently.

"Peter Ivanovitch is an awful despot," she jerked out.

Razumov went on studying the stripes on the grey fur of the cat.

“An iron will is an integral part of such a temperament. How else could he be a leader? And I think that you are mistaken in — ”

“There!” she cried. “You tell me that I am mistaken. But I tell you all the same that he cares for no one.” She jerked her head up. “Don’t you bring that girl here. That’s what you have been told to do — to bring that girl here. Listen to me; you had better tie a stone round her neck and throw her into the lake.”

Razumov had a sensation of chill and gloom, as if a heavy cloud had passed over the sun.

“The girl?” he said. “What have I to do with her?”

“But you have been told to bring Nathalie Haldin here. Am I not right? Of course I am right. I was not in the room, but I know. I know Peter Ivanovitch sufficiently well. He is a great man. Great men are horrible. Well, that’s it. Have nothing to do with her. That’s the best you can do, unless you want her to become like me — disillusioned! Disillusioned!”

“Like you,” repeated Razumov, glaring at her face, as devoid of all comeliness of feature and complexion as the most miserable beggar is of money. He smiled, still feeling chilly: a peculiar sensation which annoyed him. “Disillusioned as to Peter Ivanovitch! Is that all you have lost?”

She declared, looking frightened, but with immense conviction, “Peter Ivanovitch stands for everything.” Then she added, in another tone, “Keep the girl away from this house.”

“And are you absolutely inciting me to disobey Peter Ivanovitch just because — because you are disillusioned?”

She began to blink.

“Directly I saw you for the first time I was comforted. You took your hat off to me. You looked as if one could trust you. Oh!”

She shrank before Razumov’s savage snarl of, “I have heard something like this before.”

She was so confounded that she could do nothing but blink for a long time.

“It was your humane manner,” she explained plaintively. “I have been starving for, I won’t say kindness, but just for a little civility, for I don’t know how long. And now you are angry....”

“But no, on the contrary,” he protested. “I am very glad you trust me. It’s possible that later on I may...”

“Yes, if you were to get ill,” she interrupted eagerly, “or meet some bitter trouble, you would find I am not a useless fool. You have only to let me know. I will come to you. I will indeed. And I will stick to you. Misery and I are old acquaintances — but this life here is worse than starving.”

She paused anxiously, then in a voice for the first time sounding really timid, she added —

“Or if you were engaged in some dangerous work. Sometimes a humble companion — I would not want to know anything. I would follow you with joy. I could carry out orders. I have the courage.”

Razumov looked attentively at the scared round eyes, at the withered, sallow, round cheeks. They were quivering about the corners of the mouth.

“She wants to escape from here,” he thought.

“Suppose I were to tell you that I am engaged in dangerous work?” he uttered slowly.

She pressed the cat to her threadbare bosom with a breathless exclamation. “Ah!” Then not much above a whisper: “Under Peter Ivanovitch?”

“No, not under Peter Ivanovitch.”

He read admiration in her eyes, and made an effort to smile.

“Then — alone?”

He held up his closed hand with the index raised. “Like this finger,” he said.

She was trembling slightly. But it occurred to Razumov that they might have been observed from the house, and he became anxious to be gone. She blinked, raising up to him her puckered face, and seemed to beg mutely to be told something more, to be given a word of encouragement for her starving, grotesque, and pathetic devotion.

“Can we be seen from the house?” asked Razumov confidentially.

She answered, without showing the slightest surprise at the question —

“No, we can’t, on account of this end of the stables.” And she added, with an acuteness which surprised Razumov, “But anybody looking out of an upstairs window would know that you have not passed through the gates yet.”

“Who’s likely to spy out of the window?” queried Razumov. “Peter Ivanovitch?”

She nodded.

“Why should he trouble his head?”

“He expects somebody this afternoon.”

“You know the person?”

“There’s more than one.”

She had lowered her eyelids. Razumov looked at her curiously.

“Of course. You hear everything they say.”

She murmured without any animosity —

“So do the tables and chairs.”

He understood that the bitterness accumulated in the heart of that helpless creature had got into her veins, and, like some subtle poison, had decomposed her fidelity to that hateful pair. It was a great piece of luck for him, he reflected; because women are seldom venal after the manner of men, who can be bought for material considerations. She would be a good ally, though it was not likely that she was allowed to hear as much as the tables and chairs of the Chateau Borel. That could not be expected. But still.... And, at any rate, she could be made to talk.

When she looked up her eyes met the fixed stare of Razumov, who began to speak at once.

“Well, well, dear...but upon my word, I haven’t the pleasure of knowing your name yet. Isn’t it strange?”

For the first time she made a movement of the shoulders.

“Is it strange? No one is told my name. No one cares. No one talks to me, no one writes to me. My parents don’t even know if I’m alive. I have no use for a name, and I have almost forgotten it myself.”

Razumov murmured gravely, “Yes, but still...”

She went on much slower, with indifference —

“You may call me Tekla, then. My poor Andrei called me so. I was devoted to him. He lived in wretchedness and suffering, and died in misery. That is the lot of all us Russians, nameless Russians. There is nothing else for us, and no hope anywhere, unless...”

“Unless what?”

“Unless all these people with names are done away with,” she finished, blinking and pursing up her lips.

“It will be easier to call you Tekla, as you direct me,” said Razumov, “if you consent to call me Kirylo, when we are talking like this — quietly — only you and me.”

And he said to himself, “Here’s a being who must be terribly afraid of the world, else she would have run away from this situation before.” Then he

reflected that the mere fact of leaving the great man abruptly would make her a suspect. She could expect no support or countenance from anyone. This revolutionist was not fit for an independent existence.

She moved with him a few steps, blinking and nursing the cat with a small balancing movement of her arms.

“Yes — only you and I. That’s how I was with my poor Andrei, only he was dying, killed by these official brutes — while you! You are strong. You kill the monsters. You have done a great deed. Peter Ivanovitch himself must consider you. Well — don’t forget me — especially if you are going back to work in Russia. I could follow you, carrying anything that was wanted — at a distance, you know. Or I could watch for hours at the corner of a street if necessary, — in wet or snow — yes, I could — all day long. Or I could write for you dangerous documents, lists of names or instructions, so that in case of mischance the handwriting could not compromise you. And you need not be afraid if they were to catch me. I would know how to keep dumb. We women are not so easily daunted by pain. I heard Peter Ivanovitch say it is our blunt nerves or something. We can stand it better. And it’s true; I would just as soon bite my tongue out and throw it at them as not. What’s the good of speech to me? Who would ever want to hear what I could say? Ever since I closed the eyes of my poor Andrei I haven’t met a man who seemed to care for the sound of my voice. I should never have spoken to you if the very first time you appeared here you had not taken notice of me so nicely. I could not help speaking of you to that charming dear girl. Oh, the sweet creature! And strong! One can see that at once. If you have a heart don’t let her set her foot in here. Good-bye!”

Razumov caught her by the arm. Her emotion at being thus seized manifested itself by a short struggle, after which she stood still, not looking at him.

“But you can tell me,” he spoke in her ear, “why they — these people in that house there — are so anxious to get hold of her?”

She freed herself to turn upon him, as if made angry by the question.

“Don’t you understand that Peter Ivanovitch must direct, inspire, influence? It is the breath of his life. There can never be too many disciples. He can’t bear thinking of anyone escaping him. And a woman, too! There is nothing to be done without women, he says. He has written it. He — ”

The young man was staring at her passion when she broke off suddenly and ran away behind the stable.

### III

Razumov, thus left to himself, took the direction of the gate. But on this day of many conversations, he discovered that very probably he could not leave the grounds without having to hold another one.

Stepping in view from beyond the lodge appeared the expected visitors of Peter Ivanovitch: a small party composed of two men and a woman. They noticed him too, immediately, and stopped short as if to consult. But in a moment the woman, moving aside, motioned with her arm to the two men, who, leaving the drive at once, struck across the large neglected lawn, or rather grass-plot, and made directly for the house. The woman remained on the path waiting for Razumov's approach. She had recognized him. He, too, had recognized her at the first glance. He had been made known to her at Zurich, where he had broken his journey while on his way from Dresden. They had been much together for the three days of his stay.

She was wearing the very same costume in which he had seen her first. A blouse of crimson silk made her noticeable at a distance. With that she wore a short brown skirt and a leather belt. Her complexion was the colour of coffee and milk, but very clear; her eyes black and glittering, her figure erect. A lot of thick hair, nearly white, was done up loosely under a dusty Tyrolese hat of dark cloth, which seemed to have lost some of its trimmings.

The expression of her face was grave, intent; so grave that Razumov, after approaching her close, felt obliged to smile. She greeted him with a manly hand-grasp.

"What! Are you going away?" she exclaimed. "How is that, Razumov?"

"I am going away because I haven't been asked to stay," Razumov answered, returning the pressure of her hand with much less force than she had put into it.

She jerked her head sideways like one who understands. Meantime Razumov's eyes had strayed after the two men. They were crossing the grass-plot obliquely, without haste. The shorter of the two was buttoned up in a narrow overcoat of some thin grey material, which came nearly to his heels. His companion, much taller and broader, wore a short, close-fitting jacket and tight trousers tucked into shabby top-boots.

The woman, who had sent them out of Razumov's way apparently, spoke in a businesslike voice.

“I had to come rushing from Zurich on purpose to meet the train and take these two along here to see Peter Ivanovitch. I’ve just managed it.”

“Ah! indeed,” Razumov said perfunctorily, and very vexed at her staying behind to talk to him “From Zurich — yes, of course. And these two, they come from....”

She interrupted, without emphasis —

“From quite another direction. From a distance, too. A considerable distance.”

Razumov shrugged his shoulders. The two men from a distance, after having reached the wall of the terrace, disappeared suddenly at its foot as if the earth had opened to swallow them up.

“Oh, well, they have just come from America.” The woman in the crimson blouse shrugged her shoulders too a little before making that statement. “The time is drawing near,” she interjected, as if speaking to herself. “I did not tell them who you were. Yakovlitch would have wanted to embrace you.”

“Is that he with the wisp of hair hanging from his chin, in the long coat?”

“You’ve guessed aright. That’s Yakovlitch.”

“And they could not find their way here from the station without you coming on purpose from Zurich to show it to them? Verily, without women we can do nothing. So it stands written, and apparently so it is.”

He was conscious of an immense lassitude under his effort to be sarcastic. And he could see that she had detected it with those steady, brilliant black eyes.

“What is the matter with you?”

“I don’t know. Nothing. I’ve had a devil of a day.”

She waited, with her black eyes fixed on his face. Then —

“What of that? You men are so impressionable and self-conscious. One day is like another, hard, hard — and there’s an end of it, till the great day comes. I came over for a very good reason. They wrote to warn Peter Ivanovitch of their arrival. But where from? Only from Cherbourg on a bit of ship’s notepaper. Anybody could have done that. Yakovlitch has lived for years and years in America. I am the only one at hand who had known him well in the old days. I knew him very well indeed. So Peter Ivanovitch telegraphed, asking me to come. It’s natural enough, is it not?”

“You came to vouch for his identity?” inquired Razumov.

“Yes. Something of the kind. Fifteen years of a life like his make changes in a man. Lonely, like a crow in a strange country. When I think of Yakovlitch before he went to America — ”

The softness of the low tone caused Razumov to glance at her sideways. She sighed; her black eyes were looking away; she had plunged the fingers of her right hand deep into the mass of nearly white hair, and stirred them there absently. When she withdrew her hand the little hat perched on the top of her head remained slightly tilted, with a queer inquisitive effect, contrasting strongly with the reminiscent murmur that escaped her.

“We were not in our first youth even then. But a man is a child always.”

Razumov thought suddenly, “They have been living together.” Then aloud —

“Why didn’t you follow him to America?” he asked point-blank.

She looked up at him with a perturbed air.

“Don’t you remember what was going on fifteen years ago? It was a time of activity. The Revolution has its history by this time. You are in it and yet you don’t seem to know it. Yakovlitch went away then on a mission; I went back to Russia. It had to be so. Afterwards there was nothing for him to come back to.”

“Ah! indeed,” muttered Razumov, with affected surprise. “Nothing!”

“What are you trying to insinuate” she exclaimed quickly. “Well, and what then if he did get discouraged a little....”

“He looks like a Yankee, with that goatee hanging from his chin. A regular Uncle Sam,” growled Razumov. “Well, and you? You who went to Russia? You did not get discouraged.”

“Never mind. Yakovlitch is a man who cannot be doubted. He, at any rate, is the right sort.”

Her black, penetrating gaze remained fixed upon Razumov while she spoke, and for a moment afterwards.

“Pardon me,” Razumov inquired coldly, “but does it mean that you, for instance, think that I am not the right sort?”

She made no protest, gave no sign of having heard the question; she continued looking at him in a manner which he judged not to be absolutely unfriendly. In Zurich when he passed through she had taken him under her charge, in a way, and was with him from morning till night during his stay of two days. She took him round to see several people. At first she talked to him a great deal and rather unreservedly, but always avoiding all reference



to herself; towards the middle of the second day she fell silent, attending him zealously as before, and even seeing him off at the railway station, where she pressed his hand firmly through the lowered carriage window, and, stepping back without a word, waited till the train moved. He had noticed that she was treated with quiet regard. He knew nothing of her parentage, nothing of her private history or political record; he judged her from his own private point of view, as being a distinct danger in his path. "Judged" is not perhaps the right word. It was more of a feeling, the summing up of slight impressions aided by the discovery that he could not despise her as he despised all the others. He had not expected to see her again so soon.

No, decidedly; her expression was not unfriendly. Yet he perceived an acceleration in the beat of his heart. The conversation could not be abandoned at that point. He went on in accents of scrupulous inquiry —

"Is it perhaps because I don't seem to accept blindly every development of the general doctrine — such for instance as the feminism of our great Peter Ivanovitch? If that is what makes me suspect, then I can only say I would scorn to be a slave even to an idea."

She had been looking at him all the time, not as a listener looks at one, but as if the words he chose to say were only of secondary interest. When he finished she slipped her hand, by a sudden and decided movement, under his arm and impelled him gently towards the gate of the grounds. He felt her firmness and obeyed the impulsion at once, just as the other two men had, a moment before, obeyed unquestioningly the wave of her hand.

They made a few steps like this.

"No, Razumov, your ideas are probably all right," she said. "You may be valuable — very valuable. What's the matter with you is that you don't like us."

She released him. He met her with a frosty smile.

"Am I expected then to have love as well as convictions?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"You know very well what I mean. People have been thinking you not quite whole-hearted. I have heard that opinion from one side and another. But I have understood you at the end of the first day...."

Razumov interrupted her, speaking steadily.

"I assure you that your perspicacity is at fault here."

“What phrases he uses!” she exclaimed parenthetically. “Ah! Kirylo Sidorovitch, you like other men are fastidious, full of self-love and afraid of trifles. Moreover, you had no training. What you want is to be taken in hand by some woman. I am sorry I am not staying here a few days. I am going back to Zurich to-morrow, and shall take Yakovlitch with me most likely.”

This information relieved Razumov.

“I am sorry too,” he said. “But, all the same, I don’t think you understand me.”

He breathed more freely; she did not protest, but asked, “And how did you get on with Peter Ivanovitch? You have seen a good deal of each other. How is it between you two?”

Not knowing what answer to make, the young man inclined his head slowly.

Her lips had been parted in expectation. She pressed them together, and seemed to reflect.

“That’s all right.”

This had a sound of finality, but she did not leave him. It was impossible to guess what she had in her mind. Razumov muttered —

“It is not of me that you should have asked that question. In a moment you shall see Peter Ivanovitch himself, and the subject will come up naturally. He will be curious to know what has delayed you so long in this garden.”

“No doubt Peter Ivanovitch will have something to say to me. Several things. He may even speak of you — question me. Peter Ivanovitch is inclined to trust me generally.”

“Question you? That’s very likely.”

She smiled, half serious.

“Well — and what shall I say to him?”

“I don’t know. You may tell him of your discovery.”

“What’s that?”

“Why — my lack of love for...”

“Oh! That’s between ourselves,” she interrupted, it was hard to say whether in jest or earnest.

“I see that you want to tell Peter Ivanovitch something in my favour,” said Razumov, with grim playfulness. “Well, then, you can tell him that I am very much in earnest about my mission. I mean to succeed.”

“You have been given a mission!” she exclaimed quickly.

“It amounts to that. I have been told to bring about a certain event.”

She looked at him searchingly.

“A mission,” she repeated, very grave and interested all at once. “What sort of mission?”

“Something in the nature of propaganda work.”

“Ah! Far away from here?”

“No. Not very far,” said Razumov, restraining a sudden desire to laugh, although he did not feel joyous in the least.

“So!” she said thoughtfully. “Well, I am not asking questions. It’s sufficient that Peter Ivanovitch should know what each of us is doing. Everything is bound to come right in the end.”

“You think so?”

“I don’t think, young man. I just simply believe it.”

“And is it to Peter Ivanovitch that you owe that faith?”

She did not answer the question, and they stood idle, silent, as if reluctant to part with each other.

“That’s just like a man,” she murmured at last. “As if it were possible to tell how a belief comes to one.” Her thin Mephistophelian eyebrows moved a little. “Truly there are millions of people in Russia who would envy the life of dogs in this country. It is a horror and a shame to confess this even between ourselves. One must believe for very pity. This can’t go on. No! It can’t go on. For twenty years I have been coming and going, looking neither to the left nor to the right.... What are you smiling to yourself for? You are only at the beginning. You have begun well, but you just wait till you have trodden every particle of yourself under your feet in your comings and goings. For that is what it comes to. You’ve got to trample down every particle of your own feelings; for stop you cannot, you must not. I have been young, too — but perhaps you think that I am complaining-eh?”

“I don’t think anything of the sort,” protested Razumov indifferently.

“I dare say you don’t, you dear superior creature. You don’t care.”

She plunged her fingers into the bunch of hair on the left side, and that brusque movement had the effect of setting the Tyrolese hat straight on her head. She frowned under it without animosity, in the manner of an investigator. Razumov averted his face carelessly.

“You men are all alike. You mistake luck for merit. You do it in good faith too! I would not be too hard on you. It’s masculine nature. You men are ridiculously pitiful in your aptitude to cherish childish illusions down to

the very grave. There are a lot of us who have been at work for fifteen years — I mean constantly — trying one way after another, underground and above ground, looking neither to the right nor to the left! I can talk about it. I have been one of these that never rested.... There! What's the use of talking.... Look at my grey hairs! And here two babies come along — I mean you and Haldin — you come along and manage to strike a blow at the very first try."

At the name of Haldin falling from the rapid and energetic lips of the woman revolutionist, Razumov had the usual brusque consciousness of the irrevocable. But in all the months which had passed over his head he had become hardened to the experience. The consciousness was no longer accompanied by the blank dismay and the blind anger of the early days. He had argued himself into new beliefs; and he had made for himself a mental atmosphere of gloomy and sardonic reverie, a sort of murky medium through which the event appeared like a featureless shadow having vaguely the shape of a man; a shape extremely familiar, yet utterly inexpressive, except for its air of discreet waiting in the dusk. It was not alarming.

"What was he like?" the woman revolutionist asked unexpectedly.

"What was he like?" echoed Razumov, making a painful effort not to turn upon her savagely. But he relieved himself by laughing a little while he stole a glance at her out of the corners of his eyes. This reception of her inquiry disturbed her.

"How like a woman," he went on. "What is the good of concerning yourself with his appearance? Whatever it was, he is removed beyond all feminine influences now."

A frown, making three folds at the root of her nose, accentuated the Mephistophelian slant of her eyebrows.

"You suffer, Razumov," she suggested, in her low, confident voice.

"What nonsense!" Razumov faced the woman fairly. "But now I think of it, I am not sure that he is beyond the influence of one woman at least; the one over there — Madame de S — , you know. Formerly the dead were allowed to rest, but now it seems they are at the beck and call of a crazy old harridan. We revolutionists make wonderful discoveries. It is true that they are not exactly our own. We have nothing of our own. But couldn't the friend of Peter Ivanovitch satisfy your feminine curiosity? Couldn't she conjure him up for you?" — he jested like a man in pain.

Her concentrated frowning expression relaxed, and she said, a little wearily, "Let us hope she will make an effort and conjure up some tea for us. But that is by no means certain. I am tired, Razumov."

"You tired! What a confession! Well, there has been tea up there. I had some. If you hurry on after Yakovlitch, instead of wasting your time with such an unsatisfactory sceptical person as myself, you may find the ghost of it — the cold ghost of it — still lingering in the temple. But as to you being tired I can hardly believe it. We are not supposed to be. We mustn't, We can't. The other day I read in some paper or other an alarmist article on the tireless activity of the revolutionary parties. It impresses the world. It's our prestige."

"He flings out continually these flouts and sneers;" the woman in the crimson blouse spoke as if appealing quietly to a third person, but her black eyes never left Razumov's face. "And what for, pray? Simply because some of his conventional notions are shocked, some of his petty masculine standards. You might think he was one of these nervous sensitives that come to a bad end. And yet," she went on, after a short, reflective pause and changing the mode of her address, "and yet I have just learned something which makes me think that you are a man of character, Kirylo Sidorovitch. Yes! indeed — you are."

The mysterious positiveness of this assertion startled Razumov. Their eyes met. He looked away and, through the bars of the rusty gate, stared at the clean, wide road shaded by the leafy trees. An electric tramcar, quite empty, ran along the avenue with a metallic rustle. It seemed to him he would have given anything to be sitting inside all alone. He was inexpressibly weary, weary in every fibre of his body, but he had a reason for not being the first to break off the conversation. At any instant, in the visionary and criminal babble of revolutionists, some momentous words might fall on his ear; from her lips, from anybody's lips. As long as he managed to preserve a clear mind and to keep down his irritability there was nothing to fear. The only condition of success and safety was indomitable will-power, he reminded himself.

He longed to be on the other side of the bars, as though he were actually a prisoner within the grounds of this centre of revolutionary plots, of this house of folly, of blindness, of villainy and crime. Silently he indulged his wounded spirit in a feeling of immense moral and mental remoteness. He did not even smile when he heard her repeat the words —

“Yes! A strong character.”

He continued to gaze through the bars like a moody prisoner, not thinking of escape, but merely pondering upon the faded memories of freedom.

“If you don’t look out,” he mumbled, still looking away, “you shall certainly miss seeing as much as the mere ghost of that tea.”

She was not to be shaken off in such a way. As a matter of fact he had not expected to succeed.

“Never mind, it will be no great loss. I mean the missing of her tea and only the ghost of it at that. As to the lady, you must understand that she has her positive uses. See that, Razumov.”

He turned his head at this imperative appeal and saw the woman revolutionist making the motions of counting money into the palm of her hand.

“That’s what it is. You see?”

Razumov uttered a slow “I see,” and returned to his prisoner-like gazing upon the neat and shady road.

“Material means must be obtained in some way, and this is easier than breaking into banks. More certain too. There! I am joking.... What is he muttering to himself now?” she cried under her breath.

“My admiration of Peter Ivanovitch’s devoted self-sacrifice, that’s all. It’s enough to make one sick.”

“Oh, you squeamish, masculine creature. Sick! Makes him sick! And what do you know of the truth of it? There’s no looking into the secrets of the heart. Peter Ivanovitch knew her years ago, in his worldly days, when he was a young officer in the Guards. It is not for us to judge an inspired person. That’s where you men have an advantage. You are inspired sometimes both in thought and action. I have always admitted that when you are inspired, when you manage to throw off your masculine cowardice and prudishness you are not to be equalled by us. Only, how seldom.... Whereas the silliest woman can always be made of use. And why? Because we have passion, unappeasable passion.... I should like to know what he is smiling at?”

“I am not smiling,” protested Razumov gloomily.

“Well! How is one to call it? You made some sort of face. Yes, I know! You men can love here and hate there and desire something or other — and you make a great to-do about it, and you call it passion! Yes! While it lasts.

But we women are in love with love, and with hate, with these very things I tell you, and with desire itself. That's why we can't be bribed off so easily as you men. In life, you see, there is not much choice. You have either to rot or to burn. And there is not one of us, painted or unpainted, that would not rather burn than rot."

She spoke with energy, but in a matter-of-fact tone. Razumov's attention had wandered away on a track of its own — outside the bars of the gate — but not out of earshot. He stuck his hands into the pockets of his coat.

"Rot or burn! Powerfully stated. Painted or unpainted. Very vigorous. Painted or...Do tell me — she would be infernally jealous of him, wouldn't she?"

"Who? What? The Baroness? Eleanor Maximovna? Jealous of Peter Ivanovitch? Heavens! Are these the questions the man's mind is running on? Such a thing is not to be thought of."

"Why? Can't a wealthy old woman be jealous? Or, are they all pure spirits together?"

"But what put it into your head to ask such a question?" she wondered.

"Nothing. I just asked. Masculine frivolity, if you like."

"I don't like," she retorted at once. "It is not the time to be frivolous. What are you flinging your very heart against? Or, perhaps, you are only playing a part."

Razumov had felt that woman's observation of him like a physical contact, like a hand resting lightly on his shoulder. At that moment he received the mysterious impression of her having made up her mind for a closer grip. He stiffened himself inwardly to bear it without betraying himself.

"Playing a Part," he repeated, presenting to her an unmoved profile. "It must be done very badly since you see through the assumption."

She watched him, her forehead drawn into perpendicular folds, the thin black eyebrows diverging upwards like the antennae of an insect. He added hardly audibly —

"You are mistaken. I am doing it no more than the rest of us."

"Who is doing it?" she snapped out.

"Who? Everybody," he said impatiently. "You are a materialist, aren't you?"

"Eh! My dear soul, I have outlived all that nonsense."

“But you must remember the definition of Cabanis: ‘Man is a digestive tube.’ I imagine now....”

“I spit on him.”

“What? On Cabanis? All right. But you can’t ignore the importance of a good digestion. The joy of life — you know the joy of life? — depends on a sound stomach, whereas a bad digestion inclines one to scepticism, breeds black fancies and thoughts of death. These are facts ascertained by physiologists. Well, I assure you that ever since I came over from Russia I have been stuffed with indigestible foreign concoctions of the most nauseating kind — pah!”

“You are joking,” she murmured incredulously. He assented in a detached way.

“Yes. It is all a joke. It’s hardly worth while talking to a man like me. Yet for that very reason men have been known to take their own life.”

“On the contrary, I think it is worth while talking to you.”

He kept her in the corner of his eye. She seemed to be thinking out some scathing retort, but ended by only shrugging her shoulders slightly.

“Shallow talk! I suppose one must pardon this weakness in you,” she said, putting a special accent on the last word. There was something anxious in her indulgent conclusion.

Razumov noted the slightest shades in this conversation, which he had not expected, for which he was not prepared. That was it. “I was not prepared,” he said to himself. “It has taken me unawares.” It seemed to him that if he only could allow himself to pant openly like a dog for a time this oppression would pass away. “I shall never be found prepared,” he thought, with despair. He laughed a little, saying as lightly as he could —

“Thanks. I don’t ask for mercy.” Then affecting a playful uneasiness, “But aren’t you afraid Peter Ivanovitch might suspect us of plotting something unauthorized together by the gate here?”

“No, I am not afraid. You are quite safe from suspicions while you are with me, my dear young man.” The humorous gleam in her black eyes went out. “Peter Ivanovitch trusts me,” she went on, quite austere. “He takes my advice. I am his right hand, as it were, in certain most important things.... That amuses you what? Do you think I am boasting?”

“God forbid. I was just only saying to myself that Peter Ivanovitch seems to have solved the woman question pretty completely.”



Even as he spoke he reproached himself for his words, for his tone. All day long he had been saying the wrong things. It was folly, worse than folly. It was weakness; it was this disease of perversity overcoming his will. Was this the way to meet speeches which certainly contained the promise of future confidences from that woman who apparently had a great store of secret knowledge and so much influence? Why give her this puzzling impression? But she did not seem inimical. There was no anger in her voice. It was strangely speculative.

“One does not know what to think, Razumov. You must have bitten something bitter in your cradle.” Razumov gave her a sidelong glance.

“H’m! Something bitter? That’s an explanation,” he muttered. “Only it was much later. And don’t you think, Sophia Antonovna, that you and I come from the same cradle?”

The woman, whose name he had forced himself at last to pronounce (he had experienced a strong repugnance in letting it pass his lips), the woman revolutionist murmured, after a pause —

“You mean — Russia?”

He disdained even to nod. She seemed softened, her black eyes very still, as though she were pursuing the simile in her thoughts to all its tender associations. But suddenly she knitted her brows in a Mephistophelian frown.

“Yes. Perhaps no wonder, then. Yes. One lies there lapped up in evils, watched over by beings that are worse than ogres, ghouls, and vampires. They must be driven away, destroyed utterly. In regard of that task nothing else matters if men and women are determined and faithful. That’s how I came to feel in the end. The great thing is not to quarrel amongst ourselves about all sorts of conventional trifles. Remember that, Razumov.”

Razumov was not listening. He had even lost the sense of being watched in a sort of heavy tranquillity. His uneasiness, his exasperation, his scorn were blunted at last by all these trying hours. It seemed to him that now they were blunted for ever. “I am a match for them all,” he thought, with a conviction too firm to be exulting. The woman revolutionist had ceased speaking; he was not looking at her; there was no one passing along the road. He almost forgot that he was not alone. He heard her voice again, curt, businesslike, and yet betraying the hesitation which had been the real reason of her prolonged silence.

“I say, Razumov!”

Razumov, whose face was turned away from her, made a grimace like a man who hears a false note.

“Tell me: is it true that on the very morning of the deed you actually attended the lectures at the University?”

An appreciable fraction of a second elapsed before the real import of the question reached him, like a bullet which strikes some time after the flash of the fired shot. Luckily his disengaged hand was ready to grip a bar of the gate. He held it with a terrible force, but his presence of mind was gone. He could make only a sort of gurgling, grumpy sound.

“Come, Kirylo Sidorovitch!” she urged him. “I know you are not a boastful man. That one must say for you. You are a silent man. Too silent, perhaps. You are feeding on some bitterness of your own. You are not an enthusiast. You are, perhaps, all the stronger for that. But you might tell me. One would like to understand you a little more. I was so immensely struck.... Have you really done it?”

He got his voice back. The shot had missed him. It had been fired at random, altogether, more like a signal for coming to close quarters. It was to be a plain struggle for self-preservation. And she was a dangerous adversary too. But he was ready for battle; he was so ready that when he turned towards her not a muscle of his face moved.

“Certainly,” he said, without animation, secretly strung up but perfectly sure of himself. “Lectures — certainly, But what makes you ask?”

It was she who was animated.

“I had it in a letter, written by a young man in Petersburg; one of us, of course. You were seen — you were observed with your notebook, impassible, taking notes....”

He enveloped her with his fixed stare.

“What of that?”

“I call such coolness superb — that’s all. It is a proof of uncommon strength of character. The young man writes that nobody could have guessed from your face and manner the part you had played only some two hours before — the great, momentous, glorious part....”

“Oh no. Nobody could have guessed,” assented Razumov gravely, “because, don’t you see, nobody at that time....”

“Yes, yes. But all the same you are a man of exceptional fortitude, it seems. You looked exactly as usual. It was remembered afterwards with wonder....”

“It cost me no effort,” Razumov declared, with the same staring gravity.

“Then it’s almost more wonderful still!” she exclaimed, and fell silent while Razumov asked himself whether he had not said there something utterly unnecessary — or even worse.

She raised her head eagerly.

“Your intention was to stay in Russia? You had planned....”

“No,” interrupted Razumov without haste. “I had made no plans of any sort.”

“You just simply walked away?” she struck in.

He bowed his head in slow assent. “Simply — yes.” He had gradually released his hold on the bar of the gate, as though he had acquired the conviction that no random shot could knock him over now. And suddenly he was inspired to add, “The snow was coming down very thick, you know.”

She had a slight appreciative movement of the head, like an expert in such enterprises, very interested, capable of taking every point professionally. Razumov remembered something he had heard.

“I turned into a narrow side street, you understand,” he went on negligently, and paused as if it were not worth talking about. Then he remembered another detail and dropped it before her, like a disdainful dole to her curiosity.

“I felt inclined to lie down and go to sleep there.”

She clicked her tongue at that symptom, very struck indeed. Then —

“But the notebook! The amazing notebook, man. You don’t mean to say you had put it in your pocket beforehand!” she cried.

Razumov gave a start. It might have been a sign of impatience.

“I went home. Straight home to my rooms,” he said distinctly.

“The coolness of the man! You dared?”

“Why not? I assure you I was perfectly calm. Ha! Calmer than I am now perhaps.”

“I like you much better as you are now than when you indulge that bitter vein of yours, Razumov. And nobody in the house saw you return — eh? That might have appeared queer.”

“No one,” Razumov said firmly. “Dvornik, landlady, girl, all out of the way. I went up like a shadow. It was a murky morning. The stairs were dark. I glided up like a phantom. Fate? Luck? What do you think?”

“I just see it!” The eyes of the woman revolutionist snapped darkly. “Well — and then you considered....”

Razumov had it all ready in his head.

“No. I looked at my watch, since you want to know. There was just time. I took that notebook, and ran down the stairs on tiptoe. Have you ever listened to the pit-pat of a man running round and round the shaft of a deep staircase? They have a gaslight at the bottom burning night and day. I suppose it’s gleaming down there now.... The sound dies out — the flame winks....”

He noticed the vacillation of surprise passing over the steady curiosity of the black eyes fastened on his face as if the woman revolutionist received the sound of his voice into her pupils instead of her ears. He checked himself, passed his hand over his forehead, confused, like a man who has been dreaming aloud.

“Where could a student be running if not to his lectures in the morning? At night it’s another matter. I did not care if all the house had been there to look at me. But I don’t suppose there was anyone. It’s best not to be seen or heard. Aha! The people that are neither seen nor heard are the lucky ones — in Russia. Don’t you admire my luck?”

“Astonishing,” she said. “If you have luck as well as determination, then indeed you are likely to turn out an invaluable acquisition for the work in hand.”

Her tone was earnest; and it seemed to Razumov that it was speculative, even as though she were already apportioning him, in her mind, his share of the work. Her eyes were cast down. He waited, not very alert now, but with the grip of the ever-present danger giving him an air of attentive gravity. Who could have written about him in that letter from Petersburg? A fellow student, surely — some imbecile victim of revolutionary propaganda, some foolish slave of foreign, subversive ideals. A long, famine-stricken, red-nosed figure presented itself to his mental search. That must have been the fellow!

He smiled inwardly at the absolute wrong-headedness of the whole thing, the self-deception of a criminal idealist shattering his existence like a thunder-clap out of a clear sky, and re-echoing amongst the wreckage in the false assumptions of those other fools. Fancy that hungry and piteous imbecile furnishing to the curiosity of the revolutionist refugees this utterly fantastic detail! He appreciated it as by no means constituting a danger. On

the contrary. As things stood it was for his advantage rather, a piece of sinister luck which had only to be accepted with proper caution.

“And yet, Razumov,” he heard the musing voice of the woman, “you have not the face of a lucky man.” She raised her eyes with renewed interest. “And so that was the way of it. After doing your work you simply walked off and made for your rooms. That sort of thing succeeds sometimes. I suppose it was agreed beforehand that, once the business over, each of you would go his own way?”

Razumov preserved the seriousness of his expression and the deliberate, if cautious, manner of speaking.

“Was not that the best thing to do?” he asked, in a dispassionate tone. “And anyway,” he added, after waiting a moment, “we did not give much thought to what would come after. We never discussed formally any line of conduct. It was understood, I think.”

She approved his statement with slight nods.

“You, of course, wished to remain in Russia?”

“In St. Petersburg itself,” emphasized Razumov. “It was the only safe course for me. And, moreover, I had nowhere else to go.”

“Yes! Yes! I know. Clearly. And the other — this wonderful Haldin appearing only to be regretted — you don’t know what he intended?”

Razumov had foreseen that such a question would certainly come to meet him sooner or later. He raised his hands a little and let them fall helplessly by his side — nothing more.

It was the white-haired woman conspirator who was the first to break the silence.

“Very curious,” she pronounced slowly. “And you did not think, Kirylo Sidorovitch, that he might perhaps wish to get in touch with you again?”

Razumov discovered that he could not suppress the trembling of his lips. But he thought that he owed it to himself to speak. A negative sign would not do again. Speak he must, if only to get at the bottom of what that St. Petersburg letter might have contained.

“I stayed at home next day,” he said, bending down a little and plunging his glance into the black eyes of the woman so that she should not observe the trembling of his lips. “Yes, I stayed at home. As my actions are remembered and written about, then perhaps you are aware that I was not seen at the lectures next day. Eh? You didn’t know? Well, I stopped at home-the live-long day.”

As if moved by his agitated tone, she murmured a sympathetic "I see! It must have been trying enough."

"You seem to understand one's feelings," said Razumov steadily. "It was trying. It was horrible; it was an atrocious day. It was not the last."

"Yes, I understand. Afterwards, when you heard they had got him. Don't I know how one feels after losing a comrade in the good fight? One's ashamed of being left. And I can remember so many. Never mind. They shall be avenged before long. And what is death? At any rate, it is not a shameful thing like some kinds of life."

Razumov felt something stir in his breast, a sort of feeble and unpleasant tremor.

"Some kinds of life?" he repeated, looking at her searchingly.

"The subservient, submissive life. Life? No! Vegetation on the filthy heap of iniquity which the world is. Life, Razumov, not to be vile must be a revolt — a pitiless protest — all the time."

She calmed down, the gleam of suffused tears in her eyes dried out instantly by the heat of her passion, and it was in her capable, businesslike manner that she went on —

"You understand me, Razumov. You are not an enthusiast, but there is an immense force of revolt in you. I felt it from the first, directly I set my eyes on you — you remember — in Zurich. Oh! You are full of bitter revolt. That is good. Indignation flags sometimes, revenge itself may become a weariness, but that uncompromising sense of necessity and justice which armed your and Haldin's hands to strike down that fanatical brute...for it was that — nothing but that! I have been thinking it out. It could have been nothing else but that."

Razumov made a slight bow, the irony of which was concealed by an almost sinister immobility of feature.

"I can't speak for the dead. As for myself, I can assure you that my conduct was dictated by necessity and by the sense of — well — retributive justice."

"Good, that," he said to himself, while her eyes rested upon him, black and impenetrable like the mental caverns where revolutionary thought should sit plotting the violent way of its dream of changes. As if anything could be changed! In this world of men nothing can be changed — neither happiness nor misery. They can only be displaced at the cost of corrupted consciences and broken lives — a futile game for arrogant philosophers and

sanguinary triflers. Those thoughts darted through Razumov's head while he stood facing the old revolutionary hand, the respected, trusted, and influential Sophia Antonovna, whose word had such a weight in the "active" section of every party. She was much more representative than the great Peter Ivanovitch. Stripped of rhetoric, mysticism, and theories, she was the true spirit of destructive revolution. And she was the personal adversary he had to meet. It gave him a feeling of triumphant pleasure to deceive her out of her own mouth. The epigrammatic saying that speech has been given to us for the purpose of concealing our thoughts came into his mind. Of that cynical theory this was a very subtle and a very scornful application, flouting in its own words the very spirit of ruthless revolution, embodied in that woman with her white hair and black eyebrows, like slightly sinuous lines of Indian ink, drawn together by the perpendicular folds of a thoughtful frown.

"That's it. Retributive. No pity!" was the conclusion of her silence. And this once broken, she went on impulsively in short, vibrating sentences —

"Listen to my story, Razumov!..." Her father was a clever but unlucky artisan. No joy had lighted up his laborious days. He died at fifty; all the years of his life he had panted under the thumb of masters whose rapacity exacted from him the price of the water, of the salt, of the very air he breathed; taxed the sweat of his brow and claimed the blood of his sons. No protection, no guidance! What had society to say to him? Be submissive and be honest. If you rebel I shall kill you. If you steal I shall imprison you. But if you suffer I have nothing for you — nothing except perhaps a beggarly dole of bread — but no consolation for your trouble, no respect for your manhood, no pity for the sorrows of your miserable life.

And so he laboured, he suffered, and he died. He died in the hospital. Standing by the common grave she thought of his tormented existence — she saw it whole. She reckoned the simple joys of life, the birthright of the humblest, of which his gentle heart had been robbed by the crime of a society which nothing can absolve.

"Yes, Razumov," she continued, in an impressive, lowered voice, "it was like a lurid light in which I stood, still almost a child, and cursed not the toil, not the misery which had been his lot, but the great social iniquity of the system resting on unrequited toil and unpitied sufferings. From that moment I was a revolutionist."

Razumov, trying to raise himself above the dangerous weaknesses of contempt or compassion, had preserved an impassive countenance. She, with an unaffected touch of mere bitterness, the first he could notice since he had come in contact with the woman, went on —

“As I could not go to the Church where the priests of the system exhorted such unconsidered vermin as I to resignation, I went to the secret societies as soon as I knew how to find my way. I was sixteen years old — no more, Razumov! And — look at my white hair.”

In these last words there was neither pride nor sadness. The bitterness too was gone.

“There is a lot of it. I had always magnificent hair, even as a chit of a girl. Only, at that time we were cutting it short and thinking that there was the first step towards crushing the social infamy. Crush the Infamy! A fine watchword! I would placard it on the walls of prisons and palaces, carve it on hard rocks, hang it out in letters of fire on that empty sky for a sign of hope and terror — a portent of the end...”

“You are eloquent, Sophia Antonovna,” Razumov interrupted suddenly. “Only, so far you seem to have been writing it in water...”

She was checked but not offended. “Who knows? Very soon it may become a fact written all over that great land of ours,” she hinted meaningly. “And then one would have lived long enough. White hair won’t matter.”

Razumov looked at her white hair: and this mark of so many uneasy years seemed nothing but a testimony to the invincible vigour of revolt. It threw out into an astonishing relief the unwrinkled face, the brilliant black glance, the upright compact figure, the simple, brisk self-possession of the mature personality — as though in her revolutionary pilgrimage she had discovered the secret, not of everlasting youth, but of everlasting endurance.

How un-Russian she looked, thought Razumov. Her mother might have been a Jewess or an Armenian or devil knew what. He reflected that a revolutionist is seldom true to the settled type. All revolt is the expression of strong individualism — ran his thought vaguely. One can tell them a mile off in any society, in any surroundings. It was astonishing that the police....

“We shall not meet again very soon, I think,” she was saying. “I am leaving to-morrow.”

“For Zurich?” Razumov asked casually, but feeling relieved, not from any distinct apprehension, but from a feeling of stress as if after a wrestling



match.

“Yes, Zurich — and farther on, perhaps, much farther. Another journey. When I think of all my journeys! The last must come some day. Never mind, Razumov. We had to have a good long talk. I would have certainly tried to see you if we had not met. Peter Ivanovitch knows where you live? Yes. I meant to have asked him — but it’s better like this. You see, we expect two more men; and I had much rather wait here talking with you than up there at the house with....”

Having cast a glance beyond the gate, she interrupted herself. “Here they are,” she said rapidly. “Well, Kirylo Sidorovitch, we shall have to say good-bye, presently.”

#### IV

In his incertitude of the ground on which he stood Razumov felt perturbed. Turning his head quickly, he saw two men on the opposite side of the road. Seeing themselves noticed by Sophia Antonovna, they crossed over at once, and passed one after another through the little gate by the side of the empty lodge. They looked hard at the stranger, but without mistrust, the crimson blouse being a flaring safety signal. The first, great white hairless face, double chin, prominent stomach, which he seemed to carry forward consciously within a strongly distended overcoat, only nodded and averted his eyes peevishly; his companion — lean, flushed cheekbones, a military red moustache below a sharp, salient nose — approached at once Sophia Antonovna, greeting her warmly. His voice was very strong but inarticulate. It sounded like a deep buzzing. The woman revolutionist was quietly cordial.

“This is Razumov,” she announced in a clear voice.

The lean new-comer made an eager half-turn. “He will want to embrace me,” thought our young man with a deep recoil of all his being, while his limbs seemed too heavy to move. But it was a groundless alarm. He had to do now with a generation of conspirators who did not kiss each other on both cheeks; and raising an arm that felt like lead he dropped his hand into a largely-outstretched palm, fleshless and hot as if dried up by fever, giving a bony pressure, expressive, seeming to say, “Between us there’s no need of words.” The man had big, wide-open eyes. Razumov fancied he could see a smile behind their sadness.

“This is Razumov,” Sophia Antonovna repeated loudly for the benefit of the fat man, who at some distance displayed the profile of his stomach.

No one moved. Everything, sounds, attitudes, movements, and immobility seemed to be part of an experiment, the result of which was a thin voice piping with comic peevishness —

“Oh yes! Razumov. We have been hearing of nothing but Mr. Razumov for months. For my part, I confess I would rather have seen Haldin on this spot instead of Mr. Razumov.”

The squeaky stress put on the name “Razumov — Mr. Razumov” pierced the ear ridiculously, like the falsetto of a circus clown beginning an elaborate joke. Astonishment was Razumov’s first response, followed by sudden indignation.

“What’s the meaning of this?” he asked in a stern tone.

“Tut! Silliness. He’s always like that.” Sophia Antonovna was obviously vexed. But she dropped the information, “Necator,” from her lips just loud enough to be heard by Razumov. The abrupt squeaks of the fat man seemed to proceed from that thing like a balloon he carried under his overcoat. The stolidity of his attitude, the big feet, the lifeless, hanging hands, the enormous bloodless cheek, the thin wisps of hair straggling down the fat nape of the neck, fascinated Razumov into a stare on the verge of horror and laughter.

Nikita, surnamed Necator, with a sinister aptness of alliteration! Razumov had heard of him. He had heard so much since crossing the frontier of these celebrities of the militant revolution; the legends, the stories, the authentic chronicle, which now and then peeps out before a half-incredulous world. Razumov had heard of him. He was supposed to have killed more, gendarmes and police agents than any revolutionist living. He had been entrusted with executions.

The paper with the letters N.N., the very pseudonym of murder, found pinned on the stabbed breast of a certain notorious spy (this picturesque detail of a sensational murder case had got into the newspapers), was the mark of his handiwork. “By order of the Committee. — N.N.” A corner of the curtain lifted to strike the imagination of the gaping world. He was said to have been innumerable times in and out of Russia, the Necator of bureaucrats, of provincial governors, of obscure informers. He lived between whiles, Razumov had heard, on the shores of the Lake of Como, with a charming wife, devoted to the cause, and two young children. But how could that creature, so grotesque as to set town dogs barking at its mere

sight, go about on those deadly errands and slip through the meshes of the police?

“What now? what now?” the voice squeaked. “I am only sincere. It’s not denied that the other was the leading spirit. Well, it would have been better if he had been the one spared to us. More useful. I am not a sentimentalist. Say what I think...only natural.”

Squeak, squeak, squeak, without a gesture, without a stir — the horrible squeaky burlesque of professional jealousy — this man of a sinister alliterative nickname, this executioner of revolutionary verdicts, the terrifying N.N. exasperated like a fashionable tenor by the attention attracted to the performance of an obscure amateur. Sophia Antonovna shrugged her shoulders. The comrade with the martial red moustache hurried towards Razumov full of conciliatory intentions in his strong buzzing voice.

“Devil take it! And in this place, too, in the public street, so to speak. But you can see yourself how it is. One of his fantastic sallies. Absolutely of no consequence.”

“Pray don’t concern yourself,” cried Razumov, going off into a long fit of laughter. “Don’t mention it.”

The other, his hectic flush like a pair of burns on his cheek-bones, stared for a moment and burst out laughing too. Razumov, whose hilarity died out all at once, made a step forward.

“Enough of this,” he began in a clear, incisive voice, though he could hardly control the trembling of his legs. “I will have no more of it. I shall not permit anyone.... I can see very well what you are at with those allusions.... Inquire, investigate! I defy you, but I will not be played with.”

He had spoken such words before. He had been driven to cry them out in the face of other suspicions. It was an infernal cycle bringing round that protest like a fatal necessity of his existence. But it was no use. He would be always played with. Luckily life does not last for ever.

“I won’t have it!” he shouted, striking his fist into the palm of his other hand.

“Kirylo Sidorovitch — what has come to you?” The woman revolutionist interfered with authority. They were all looking at Razumov now; the slayer of spies and gendarmes had turned about, presenting his enormous stomach in full, like a shield.

“Don’t shout. There are people passing.” Sophia Antonovna was apprehensive of another outburst. A steam-launch from Monrepos had come to the landing-stage opposite the gate, its hoarse whistle and the churning noise alongside all unnoticed, had landed a small bunch of local passengers who were dispersing their several ways. Only a specimen of early tourist in knickerbockers, conspicuous by a brand-new yellow leather glass-case, hung about for a moment, scenting something unusual about these four people within the rusty iron gates of what looked the grounds run wild of an unoccupied private house. Ah! If he had only known what the chance of commonplace travelling had suddenly put in his way! But he was a well-bred person; he averted his gaze and moved off with short steps along the avenue, on the watch for a tramcar.

A gesture from Sophia Antonovna, “Leave him to me,” had sent the two men away — the buzzing of the inarticulate voice growing fainter and fainter, and the thin pipe of “What now? what’s the matter?” reduced to the proportions of a squeaking toy by the distance. They had left him to her. So many things could be left safely to the experience of Sophia Antonovna. And at once, her black eyes turned to Razumov, her mind tried to get at the heart of that outburst. It had some meaning. No one is born an active revolutionist. The change comes disturbingly, with the force of a sudden vocation, bringing in its train agonizing doubts, assertive violences, an unstable state of the soul, till the final appeasement of the convert in the perfect fierceness of conviction. She had seen — often had only divined — scores of these young men and young women going through an emotional crisis. This young man looked like a moody egotist. And besides, it was a special — a unique case. She had never met an individuality which interested and puzzled her so much.

“Take care, Razumov, my good friend. If you carry on like this you will go mad. You are angry with everybody and bitter with yourself, and on the look out for something to torment yourself with.”

“It’s intolerable!” Razumov could only speak in gasps. “You must admit that I can have no illusions on the attitude which...it isn’t clear...or rather only too clear.”

He made a gesture of despair. It was not his courage that failed him. The choking fumes of falsehood had taken him by the throat — the thought of being condemned to struggle on and on in that tainted atmosphere without the hope of ever renewing his strength by a breath of fresh air.

“A glass of cold water is what you want.” Sophia Antonovna glanced up the grounds at the house and shook her head, then out of the gate at the brimful placidity of the lake. With a half-comical shrug of the shoulders, she gave the remedy up in the face of that abundance.

“It is you, my dear soul, who are flinging yourself at something which does not exist. What is it? Self-reproach, or what? It’s absurd. You couldn’t have gone and given yourself up because your comrade was taken.”

She remonstrated with him reasonably, at some length too. He had nothing to complain of in his reception. Every new-comer was discussed more or less. Everybody had to be thoroughly understood before being accepted. No one that she could remember had been shown from the first so much confidence. Soon, very soon, perhaps sooner than he expected, he would be given an opportunity of showing his devotion to the sacred task of crushing the Infamy.

Razumov, listening quietly, thought: “It may be that she is trying to lull my suspicions to sleep. On the other hand, it is obvious that most of them are fools.” He moved aside a couple of paces and, folding his arms on his breast, leaned back against the stone pillar of the gate.

“As to what remains obscure in the fate of that poor Haldin,” Sophia Antonovna dropped into a slowness of utterance which was to Razumov like the falling of molten lead drop by drop; “as to that — though no one ever hinted that either from fear or neglect your conduct has not been what it should have been — well, I have a bit of intelligence....”

Razumov could not prevent himself from raising his head, and Sophia Antonovna nodded slightly.

“I have. You remember that letter from St. Petersburg I mentioned to you a moment ago?”

“The letter? Perfectly. Some busybody has been reporting my conduct on a certain day. It’s rather sickening. I suppose our police are greatly edified when they open these interesting and — and — superfluous letters.”

“Oh dear no! The police do not get hold of our letters as easily as you imagine. The letter in question did not leave St. Petersburg till the ice broke up. It went by the first English steamer which left the Neva this spring. They have a fireman on board — one of us, in fact. It has reached me from Hull....”

She paused as if she were surprised at the sullen fixity of Razumov’s gaze, but went on at once, and much faster.

“We have some of our people there who...but never mind. The writer of the letter relates an incident which he thinks may possibly be connected with Haldin’s arrest. I was just going to tell you when those two men came along.”

“That also was an incident,” muttered Razumov, “of a very charming kind — for me.”

“Leave off that!” cried Sophia Antonovna. “Nobody cares for Nikita’s barking. There’s no malice in him. Listen to what I have to say. You may be able to throw a light. There was in St. Petersburg a sort of town peasant — a man who owned horses. He came to town years ago to work for some relation as a driver and ended by owning a cab or two.”

She might well have spared herself the slight effort of the gesture: “Wait!” Razumov did not mean to speak; he could not have interrupted her now, not to save his life. The contraction of his facial muscles had been involuntary, a mere surface stir, leaving him sullenly attentive as before.

“He was not a quite ordinary man of his class — it seems,” she went on. “The people of the house — my informant talked with many of them — you know, one of those enormous houses of shame and misery....”

Sophia Antonovna need not have enlarged on the character of the house. Razumov saw clearly, towering at her back, a dark mass of masonry veiled in snowflakes, with the long row of windows of the eating-shop shining greasily very near the ground. The ghost of that night pursued him. He stood up to it with rage and with weariness.

“Did the late Haldin ever by chance speak to you of that house?” Sophia Antonovna was anxious to know.

“Yes.” Razumov, making that answer, wondered whether he were falling into a trap. It was so humiliating to lie to these people that he probably

could not have said no. "He mentioned to me once," he added, as if making an effort of memory, "a house of that sort. He used to visit some workmen there."

"Exactly."

Sophia Antonovna triumphed. Her correspondent had discovered that fact quite accidentally from the talk of the people of the house, having made friends with a workman who occupied a room there. They described Haldin's appearance perfectly. He brought comforting words of hope into their misery. He came irregularly, but he came very often, and — her correspondent wrote — sometimes he spent a night in the house, sleeping, they thought, in a stable which opened upon the inner yard.

"Note that, Razumov! In a stable."

Razumov had listened with a sort of ferocious but amused acquiescence.

"Yes. In the straw. It was probably the cleanest spot in the whole house."

"No doubt," assented the woman with that deep frown which seemed to draw closer together her black eyes in a sinister fashion. No four-footed beast could stand the filth and wretchedness so many human beings were condemned to suffer from in Russia. The point of this discovery was that it proved Haldin to have been familiar with that horse-owning peasant — a reckless, independent, free-living fellow not much liked by the other inhabitants of the house. He was believed to have been the associate of a band of housebreakers. Some of these got captured. Not while he was driving them, however; but still there was a suspicion against the fellow of having given a hint to the police and...

The woman revolutionist checked herself suddenly.

"And you? Have you ever heard your friend refer to a certain Ziemianitch?"

Razumov was ready for the name. He had been looking out for the question. "When it comes I shall own up," he had said to himself. But he took his time.

"To be sure!" he began slowly. "Ziemianitch, a peasant owning a team of horses. Yes. On one occasion. Ziemianitch! Certainly! Ziemianitch of the horses.... How could it have slipped my memory like this? One of the last conversations we had together."

"That means," — Sophia Antonovna looked very grave, — "that means, Razumov, it was very shortly before — eh?"

“Before what?” shouted Razumov, advancing at the woman, who looked astonished but stood her ground. “Before.... Oh! Of course, it was before! How could it have been after? Only a few hours before.”

“And he spoke of him favourably?”

“With enthusiasm! The horses of Ziemianitch! The free soul of Ziemianitch!”

Razumov took a savage delight in the loud utterance of that name, which had never before crossed his lips audibly. He fixed his blazing eyes on the woman till at last her fascinated expression recalled him to himself.

“The late Haldin,” he said, holding himself in, with downcast eyes, “was inclined to take sudden fancies to people, on — on — what shall I say — insufficient grounds.”

“There!” Sophia Antonovna clapped her hands. “That, to my mind, settles it. The suspicions of my correspondent were aroused....”

“Aha! Your correspondent,” Razumov said in an almost openly mocking tone. “What suspicions? How aroused? By this Ziemianitch? Probably some drunken, gabbling, plausible...”

“You talk as if you had known him.”

Razumov looked up.

“No. But I knew Haldin.”

Sophia Antonovna nodded gravely.

“I see. Every word you say confirms to my mind the suspicion communicated to me in that very interesting letter. This Ziemianitch was found one morning hanging from a hook in the stable — dead.”

Razumov felt a profound trouble. It was visible, because Sophia Antonovna was moved to observe vivaciously —

“Aha! You begin to see.”

He saw it clearly enough — in the light of a lantern casting spokes of shadow in a cellar-like stable, the body in a sheepskin coat and long boots hanging against the wall. A pointed hood, with the ends wound about up to the eyes, hid the face. “But that does not concern me,” he reflected. “It does not affect my position at all. He never knew who had thrashed him. He could not have known.” Razumov felt sorry for the old lover of the bottle and women.

“Yes. Some of them end like that,” he muttered. “What is your idea, Sophia Antonovna?”



It was really the idea of her correspondent, but Sophia Antonovna had adopted it fully. She stated it in one word — "Remorse." Razumov opened his eyes very wide at that. Sophia Antonovna's informant, by listening to the talk of the house, by putting this and that together, had managed to come very near to the truth of Haldin's relation to Ziemianitch.

"It is I who can tell you what you were not certain of — that your friend had some plan for saving himself afterwards, for getting out of St. Petersburg, at any rate. Perhaps that and no more, trusting to luck for the rest. And that fellow's horses were part of the plan."

"They have actually got at the truth," Razumov marvelled to himself, while he nodded judicially. "Yes, that's possible, very possible." But the woman revolutionist was very positive that it was so. First of all, a conversation about horses between Haldin and Ziemianitch had been partly overheard. Then there were the suspicions of the people in the house when their "young gentleman" (they did not know Haldin by his name) ceased to call at the house. Some of them used to charge Ziemianitch with knowing something of this absence. He denied it with exasperation; but the fact was that ever since Haldin's disappearance he was not himself, growing moody and thin. Finally, during a quarrel with some woman (to whom he was making up), in which most of the inmates of the house took part apparently, he was openly abused by his chief enemy, an athletic pedlar, for an informer, and for having driven "our young gentleman to Siberia, the same as you did those young fellows who broke into houses." In consequence of this there was a fight, and Ziemianitch got flung down a flight of stairs. Thereupon he drank and moped for a week, and then hanged himself.

Sophia Antonovna drew her conclusions from the tale. She charged Ziemianitch either with drunken indiscretion as to a driving job on a certain date, overheard by some spy in some low grog-shop — perhaps in the very eating-shop on the ground floor of the house — or, maybe, a downright denunciation, followed by remorse. A man like that would be capable of anything. People said he was a flighty old chap. And if he had been once before mixed up with the police — as seemed certain, though he always denied it — in connexion with these thieves, he would be sure to be acquainted with some police underlings, always on the look out for something to report. Possibly at first his tale was not made anything of till the day that scoundrel de P — - got his deserts. Ah! But then every bit and

scrap of hint and information would be acted on, and fatally they were bound to get Haldin.

Sophia Antonovna spread out her hands — "Fatally."

Fatality — chance! Razumov meditated in silent astonishment upon the queer verisimilitude of these inferences. They were obviously to his advantage.

"It is right now to make this conclusive evidence known generally." Sophia Antonovna was very calm and deliberate again. She had received the letter three days ago, but did not write at once to Peter Ivanovitch. She knew then that she would have the opportunity presently of meeting several men of action assembled for an important purpose.

"I thought it would be more effective if I could show the letter itself at large. I have it in my pocket now. You understand how pleased I was to come upon you."

Razumov was saying to himself, "She won't offer to show the letter to me. Not likely. Has she told me everything that correspondent of hers has found out?" He longed to see the letter, but he felt he must not ask.

"Tell me, please, was this an investigation ordered, as it were?"

"No, no," she protested. "There you are again with your sensitiveness. It makes you stupid. Don't you see, there was no starting-point for an investigation even if any one had thought of it. A perfect blank! That's exactly what some people were pointing out as the reason for receiving you cautiously. It was all perfectly accidental, arising from my informant striking an acquaintance with an intelligent skindresser lodging in that particular slum-house. A wonderful coincidence!"

"A pious person," suggested Razumov, with a pale smile, "would say that the hand of God has done it all."

"My poor father would have said that." Sophia Antonovna did not smile. She dropped her eyes. "Not that his God ever helped him. It's a long time since God has done anything for the people. Anyway, it's done."

"All this would be quite final," said Razumov, with every appearance of reflective impartiality, "if there was any certitude that the 'our young gentleman' of these people was Victor Haldin. Have we got that?"

"Yes. There's no mistake. My correspondent was as familiar with Haldin's personal appearance as with your own," the woman affirmed decisively.

“It’s the red-nosed fellow beyond a doubt,” Razumov said to himself, with reawakened uneasiness. Had his own visit to that accursed house passed unnoticed? It was barely possible. Yet it was hardly probable. It was just the right sort of food for the popular gossip that gaunt busybody had been picking up. But the letter did not seem to contain any allusion to that. Unless she had suppressed it. And, if so, why? If it had really escaped the prying of that hunger-stricken democrat with a confounded genius for recognizing people from description, it could only be for a time. He would come upon it presently and hasten to write another letter — and then!

For all the envenomed recklessness of his temper, fed on hate and disdain, Razumov shuddered inwardly. It guarded him from common fear, but it could not defend him from disgust at being dealt with in any way by these people. It was a sort of superstitious dread. Now, since his position had been made more secure by their own folly at the cost of Ziemianitch, he felt the need of perfect safety, with its freedom from direct lying, with its power of moving amongst them silent, unquestioning, listening, impenetrable, like the very fate of their crimes and their folly. Was this advantage his already? Or not yet? Or never would be?

“Well, Sophia Antonovna,” his air of reluctant concession was genuine in so far that he was really loath to part with her without testing her sincerity by a question it was impossible to bring about in any way; “well, Sophia Antonovna, if that is so, then — ”

“The creature has done justice to himself,” the woman observed, as if thinking aloud.

“What? Ah yes! Remorse,” Razumov muttered, with equivocal contempt.

“Don’t be harsh, Kirylo Sidorovitch, if you have lost a friend.” There was no hint of softness in her tone, only the black glitter of her eyes seemed detached for an instant from vengeful visions. “He was a man of the people. The simple Russian soul is never wholly impenitent. It’s something to know that.”

“Consoling?” insinuated Razumov, in a tone of inquiry.

“Leave off railing,” she checked him explosively. “Remember, Razumov, that women, children, and revolutionists hate irony, which is the negation of all saving instincts, of all faith, of all devotion, of all action. Don’t rail! Leave off.... I don’t know how it is, but there are moments when you are abhorrent to me....”

She averted her face. A languid silence, as if all the electricity of the situation had been discharged in this flash of passion, lasted for some time. Razumov had not flinched. Suddenly she laid the tips of her fingers on his sleeve.

“Don’t mind.”

“I don’t mind,” he said very quietly.

He was proud to feel that she could read nothing on his face. He was really mollified, relieved, if only for a moment, from an obscure oppression. And suddenly he asked himself, “Why the devil did I go to that house? It was an imbecile thing to do.”

A profound disgust came over him. Sophia Antonovna lingered, talking in a friendly manner with an evident conciliatory intention. And it was still about the famous letter, referring to various minute details given by her informant, who had never seen Ziemianitch. The “victim of remorse” had been buried several weeks before her correspondent began frequenting the house. It — the house — contained very good revolutionary material. The spirit of the heroic Haldin had passed through these dens of black wretchedness with a promise of universal redemption from all the miseries that oppress mankind. Razumov listened without hearing, gnawed by the newborn desire of safety with its independence from that degrading method of direct lying which at times he found it almost impossible to practice.

No. The point he wanted to hear about could never come into this conversation. There was no way of bringing it forward. He regretted not having composed a perfect story for use abroad, in which his fatal connexion with the house might have been owned up to. But when he left Russia he did not know that Ziemianitch had hanged himself. And, anyway, who could have foreseen this woman’s “informant” stumbling upon that particular slum, of all the slums awaiting destruction in the purifying flame of social revolution? Who could have foreseen? Nobody! “It’s a perfect, diabolic surprise,” thought Razumov, calm-faced in his attitude of inscrutable superiority, nodding assent to Sophia Antonovna’s remarks upon the psychology of “the people,” “Oh yes — certainly,” rather coldly, but with a nervous longing in his fingers to tear some sort of confession out of her throat.

Then, at the very last, on the point of separating, the feeling of relaxed tension already upon him, he heard Sophia Antonovna allude to the subject of his uneasiness. How it came about he could only guess, his mind being

absent at the moment, but it must have sprung from Sophia Antonovna's complaints of the illogical absurdity of the people. For instance — that Ziemianitch was notoriously irreligious, and yet, in the last weeks of his life, he suffered from the notion that he had been beaten by the devil.

"The devil," repeated Razumov, as though he had not heard aright.

"The actual devil. The devil in person. You may well look astonished, Kirylo Sidorovitch. Early on the very night poor Haldin was taken, a complete stranger turned up and gave Ziemianitch a most fearful thrashing while he was lying dead-drunk in the stable. The wretched creature's body was one mass of bruises. He showed them to the people in the house."

"But you, Sophia Antonovna, you don't believe in the actual devil?"

"Do you?" retorted the woman curtly. "Not but that there are plenty of men worse than devils to make a hell of this earth," she muttered to herself.

Razumov watched her, vigorous and white-haired, with the deep fold between her thin eyebrows, and her black glance turned idly away. It was obvious that she did not make much of the story — unless, indeed, this was the perfection of duplicity. "A dark young man," she explained further. "Never seen there before, never seen afterwards. Why are you smiling, Razumov?"

"At the devil being still young after all these ages," he answered composedly. "But who was able to describe him, since the victim, you say, was dead-drunk at the time?"

"Oh! The eating-house keeper has described him. An overbearing, swarthy young man in a student's cloak, who came rushing in, demanded Ziemianitch, beat him furiously, and rushed away without a word, leaving the eating-house keeper paralysed with astonishment."

"Does he, too, believe it was the devil?"

"That I can't say. I am told he's very reserved on the matter. Those sellers of spirits are great scoundrels generally. I should think he knows more of it than anybody."

"Well, and you, Sophia Antonovna, what's your theory?" asked Razumov in a tone of great interest. "Yours and your informant's, who is on the spot."

"I agree with him. Some police-hound in disguise. Who else could beat a helpless man so unmercifully? As for the rest, if they were out that day on every trail, old and new, it is probable enough that they might have thought it just as well to have Ziemianitch at hand for more information, or for identification, or what not. Some scoundrelly detective was sent to fetch

him along, and being vexed at finding him so drunk broke a stable fork over his ribs. Later on, after they had the big game safe in the net, they troubled their heads no more about that peasant.”

Such were the last words of the woman revolutionist in this conversation, keeping so close to the truth, departing from it so far in the verisimilitude of thoughts and conclusions as to give one the notion of the invincible nature of human error, a glimpse into the utmost depths of self-deception. Razumov, after shaking hands with Sophia Antonovna, left the grounds, crossed the road, and walking out on the little steamboat pier leaned over the rail.

His mind was at ease; ease such as he had not known for many days, ever since that night...the night. The conversation with the woman revolutionist had given him the view of his danger at the very moment this danger vanished, characteristically enough. “I ought to have foreseen the doubts that would arise in those people’s minds,” he thought. Then his attention being attracted by a stone of peculiar shape, which he could see clearly lying at the bottom, he began to speculate as to the depth of water in that spot. But very soon, with a start of wonder at this extraordinary instance of ill-timed detachment, he returned to his train of thought. “I ought to have told very circumstantial lies from the first,” he said to himself, with a mortal distaste of the mere idea which silenced his mental utterance for quite a perceptible interval. “Luckily, that’s all right now,” he reflected, and after a time spoke to himself, half aloud, “Thanks to the devil,” and laughed a little.

The end of Ziemianitch then arrested his wandering thoughts. He was not exactly amused at the interpretation, but he could not help detecting in it a certain piquancy. He owned to himself that, had he known of that suicide before leaving Russia, he would have been incapable of making such excellent use of it for his own purposes. He ought to be infinitely obliged to the fellow with the red nose for his patience and ingenuity, “A wonderful psychologist apparently,” he said to himself sarcastically. Remorse, indeed! It was a striking example of your true conspirator’s blindness, of the stupid subtlety of people with one idea. This was a drama of love, not of conscience, Razumov continued to himself mockingly. A woman the old fellow was making up to! A robust pedlar, clearly a rival, throwing him down a flight of stairs.... And at sixty, for a lifelong lover, it was not an easy matter to get over. That was a feminist of a different stamp from Peter

Ivanovitch. Even the comfort of the bottle might conceivably fail him in this supreme crisis. At such an age nothing but a halter could cure the pangs of an unquenchable passion. And, besides, there was the wild exasperation aroused by the unjust aspersions and the contumely of the house, with the maddening impossibility to account for that mysterious thrashing, added to these simple and bitter sorrows. "Devil, eh?" Razumov exclaimed, with mental excitement, as if he had made an interesting discovery. "Ziemianitch ended by falling into mysticism. So many of our true Russian souls end in that way! Very characteristic." He felt pity for Ziemianitch, a large neutral pity, such as one may feel for an unconscious multitude, a great people seen from above — like a community of crawling ants working out its destiny. It was as if this Ziemianitch could not possibly have done anything else. And Sophia Antonovna's cocksure and contemptuous "some police-hound" was characteristically Russian in another way. But there was no tragedy there. This was a comedy of errors. It was as if the devil himself were playing a game with all of them in turn. First with him, then with Ziemianitch, then with those revolutionists. The devil's own game this.... He interrupted his earnest mental soliloquy with a jocular thought at his own expense. "Hallo! I am falling into mysticism too."

His mind was more at ease than ever. Turning about he put his back against the rail comfortably. "All this fits with marvellous aptness," he continued to think. "The brilliance of my reputed exploit is no longer darkened by the fate of my supposed colleague. The mystic Ziemianitch accounts for that. An incredible chance has served me. No more need of lies. I shall have only to listen and to keep my scorn from getting the upper hand of my caution."

He sighed, folded his arms, his chin dropped on his breast, and it was a long time before he started forward from that pose, with the recollection that he had made up his mind to do something important that day. What it was he could not immediately recall, yet he made no effort of memory, for he was uneasily certain that he would remember presently.

He had not gone more than a hundred yards towards the town when he slowed down, almost faltered in his walk, at the sight of a figure walking in the contrary direction, draped in a cloak, under a soft, broad-brimmed hat, picturesque but diminutive, as if seen through the big end of an opera-glass. It was impossible to avoid that tiny man, for there was no issue for retreat.

“Another one going to that mysterious meeting,” thought Razumov. He was right in his surmise, only this one, unlike the others who came from a distance, was known to him personally. Still, he hoped to pass on with a mere bow, but it was impossible to ignore the little thin hand with hairy wrist and knuckles protruded in a friendly wave from under the folds of the cloak, worn Spanish-wise, in disregard of a fairly warm day, a corner flung over the shoulder.

“And how is Herr Razumov?” sounded the greeting in German, by that alone made more odious to the object of the affable recognition. At closer quarters the diminutive personage looked like a reduction of an ordinary-sized man, with a lofty brow bared for a moment by the raising of the hat, the great pepper-and salt full beard spread over the proportionally broad chest. A fine bold nose jutted over a thin mouth hidden in the mass of fine hair. All this, accented features, strong limbs in their relative smallness, appeared delicate without the slightest sign of debility. The eyes alone, almond-shaped and brown, were too big, with the whites slightly bloodshot by much pen labour under a lamp. The obscure celebrity of the tiny man was well known to Razumov. Polyglot, of unknown parentage, of indefinite nationality, anarchist, with a pedantic and ferocious temperament, and an amazingly inflammatory capacity for invective, he was a power in the background, this violent pamphleteer clamouring for revolutionary justice, this Julius Laspara, editor of the Living Word, confidant of conspirators, inditer of sanguinary menaces and manifestos, suspected of being in the secret of every plot. Laspara lived in the old town in a sombre, narrow house presented to him by a naive middle-class admirer of his humanitarian eloquence. With him lived his two daughters, who overtopped him head and shoulders, and a pasty-faced, lean boy of six, languishing in the dark rooms in blue cotton overalls and clumsy boots, who might have belonged to either one of them or to neither. No stranger could tell. Julius Laspara no doubt knew which of his girls it was who, after casually vanishing for a few years, had as casually returned to him possessed of that child; but, with admirable pedantry, he had refrained from asking her for details — no, not so much as the name of the father, because maternity should be an anarchist function. Razumov had been admitted twice to that suite of several small dark rooms on the top floor: dusty window-panes, litter of all sorts of sweepings all over the place, half-full glasses of tea forgotten on every table, the two Laspara daughters prowling about enigmatically silent,



sleepy-eyed, corsetless, and generally, in their want of shape and the disorder of their rumpled attire, resembling old dolls; the great but obscure Julius, his feet twisted round his three-legged stool, always ready to receive the visitors, the pen instantly dropped, the body screwed round with a striking display of the lofty brow and of the great austere beard. When he got down from his stool it was as though he had descended from the heights of Olympus. He was dwarfed by his daughters, by the furniture, by any caller of ordinary stature. But he very seldom left it, and still more rarely was seen walking in broad daylight.

It must have been some matter of serious importance which had driven him out in that direction that afternoon. Evidently he wished to be amiable to that young man whose arrival had made some sensation in the world of political refugees. In Russian now, which he spoke, as he spoke and wrote four or five other European languages, without distinction and without force (other than that of invective), he inquired if Razumov had taken his inscriptions at the University as yet. And the young man, shaking his head negatively —

“There’s plenty of time for that. But, meantime, are you not going to write something for us?”

He could not understand how any one could refrain from writing on anything, social, economic, historical — anything. Any subject could be treated in the right spirit, and for the ends of social revolution. And, as it happened, a friend of his in London had got in touch with a review of advanced ideas. “We must educate, educate everybody — develop the great thought of absolute liberty and of revolutionary justice.”

Razumov muttered rather surlily that he did not even know English.

“Write in Russian. We’ll have it translated. There can be no difficulty. Why, without seeking further, there is Miss Haldin. My daughters go to see her sometimes.” He nodded significantly. “She does nothing, has never done anything in her life. She would be quite competent, with a little assistance. Only write. You know you must. And so good-bye for the present.”

He raised his arm and went on. Razumov backed against the low wall, looked after him, spat violently, and went on his way with an angry mutter —

“Cursed Jew!”

He did not know anything about it. Julius Laspara might have been a Transylvanian, a Turk, an Andalusian, or a citizen of one of the Hanse towns for anything he could tell to the contrary. But this is not a story of the West, and this exclamation must be recorded, accompanied by the comment that it was merely an expression of hate and contempt, best adapted to the nature of the feelings Razumov suffered from at the time. He was boiling with rage, as though he had been grossly insulted. He walked as if blind, following instinctively the shore of the diminutive harbour along the quay, through a pretty, dull garden, where dull people sat on chairs under the trees, till, his fury abandoning him, he discovered himself in the middle of a long, broad bridge. He slowed down at once. To his right, beyond the toy-like jetties, he saw the green slopes framing the Petit Lac in all the marvellous banality of the picturesque made of painted cardboard, with the more distant stretch of water inanimate and shining like a piece of tin.

He turned his head away from that view for the tourists, and walked on slowly, his eyes fixed on the ground. One or two persons had to get out of his way, and then turned round to give a surprised stare to his profound absorption. The insistence of the celebrated subversive journalist rankled in his mind strangely. Write. Must write! He! Write! A sudden light flashed upon him. To write was the very thing he had made up his mind to do that day. He had made up his mind irrevocably to that step and then had forgotten all about it. That incorrigible tendency to escape from the grip of the situation was fraught with serious danger. He was ready to despise himself for it. What was it? Levity, or deep-seated weakness? Or an unconscious dread?

“Is it that I am shrinking? It can’t be! It’s impossible. To shrink now would be worse than moral suicide; it would be nothing less than moral damnation,” he thought. “Is it possible that I have a conventional conscience?”

He rejected that hypothesis with scorn, and, checked on the edge of the pavement, made ready to cross the road and proceed up the wide street facing the head of the bridge; and that for no other reason except that it was there before him. But at the moment a couple of carriages and a slow-moving cart interposed, and suddenly he turned sharp to the left, following the quay again, but now away from the lake.

“It may be just my health,” he thought, allowing himself a very unusual doubt of his soundness; for, with the exception of a childish ailment or two,

he had never been ill in his life. But that was a danger, too. Only, it seemed as though he were being looked after in a specially remarkable way. "If I believed in an active Providence," Razumov said to himself, amused grimly, "I would see here the working of an ironical finger. To have a Julius Laspara put in my way as if expressly to remind me of my purpose is — Write, he had said. I must write — I must, indeed! I shall write — never fear. Certainly. That's why I am here. And for the future I shall have something to write about."

He was exciting himself by this mental soliloquy. But the idea of writing evoked the thought of a place to write in, of shelter, of privacy, and naturally of his lodgings, mingled with a distaste for the necessary exertion of getting there, with a mistrust as of some hostile influence awaiting him within those odious four walls.

"Suppose one of these revolutionists," he asked himself, "were to take a fancy to call on me while I am writing?" The mere prospect of such an interruption made him shudder. One could lock one's door, or ask the tobacconist downstairs (some sort of a refugee himself) to tell inquirers that one was not in. Not very good precautions those. The manner of his life, he felt, must be kept clear of every cause for suspicion or even occasion for wonder, down to such trifling occurrences as a delay in opening a locked door. "I wish I were in the middle of some field miles away from everywhere," he thought.

He had unconsciously turned to the left once more and now was aware of being on a bridge again. This one was much narrower than the other, and instead of being straight, made a sort of elbow or angle. At the point of that angle a short arm joined it to a hexagonal islet with a soil of gravel and its shores faced with dressed stone, a perfection of puerile neatness. A couple of tall poplars and a few other trees stood grouped on the clean, dark gravel, and under them a few garden benches and a bronze effigy of Jean Jacques Rousseau seated on its pedestal.

On setting his foot on it Razumov became aware that, except for the woman in charge of the refreshment chalet, he would be alone on the island. There was something of naive, odious, and inane simplicity about that unfrequented tiny crumb of earth named after Jean Jacques Rousseau. Something pretentious and shabby, too. He asked for a glass of milk, which he drank standing, at one draught (nothing but tea had passed his lips since the morning), and was going away with a weary, lagging step when a

thought stopped him short. He had found precisely what he needed. If solitude could ever be secured in the open air in the middle of a town, he would have it there on this absurd island, together with the faculty of watching the only approach.

He went back heavily to a garden seat, dropped into it. This was the place for making a beginning of that writing which had to be done. The materials he had on him. "I shall always come here," he said to himself, and afterwards sat for quite a long time motionless, without thought and sight and hearing, almost without life. He sat long enough for the declining sun to dip behind the roofs of the town at his back, and throw the shadow of the houses on the lake front over the islet, before he pulled out of his pocket a fountain pen, opened a small notebook on his knee, and began to write quickly, raising his eyes now and then at the connecting arm of the bridge. These glances were needless; the people crossing over in the distance seemed unwilling even to look at the islet where the exiled effigy of the author of the Social Contract sat enthroned above the bowed head of Razumov in the sombre immobility of bronze. After finishing his scribbling, Razumov, with a sort of feverish haste, put away the pen, then rammed the notebook into his pocket, first tearing out the written pages with an almost convulsive brusqueness. But the folding of the flimsy batch on his knee was executed with thoughtful nicety. That done, he leaned back in his seat and remained motionless, the papers holding in his left hand. The twilight had deepened. He got up and began to pace to and fro slowly under the trees.

"There can be no doubt that now I am safe," he thought. His fine ear could detect the faintly accentuated murmurs of the current breaking against the point of the island, and he forgot himself in listening to them with interest. But even to his acute sense of hearing the sound was too elusive.

"Extraordinary occupation I am giving myself up to," he murmured. And it occurred to him that this was about the only sound he could listen to innocently, and for his own pleasure, as it were. Yes, the sound of water, the voice of the wind — completely foreign to human passions. All the other sounds of this earth brought contamination to the solitude of a soul.

This was Mr. Razumov's feeling, the soul, of course, being his own, and the word being used not in the theological sense, but standing, as far as I can understand it, for that part of Mr. Razumov which was not his body, and more specially in danger from the fires of this earth. And it must be

admitted that in Mr. Razumov's case the bitterness of solitude from which he suffered was not an altogether morbid phenomenon.

## PART FOUR

### I

That I should, at the beginning of this retrospect, mention again that Mr. Razumov's youth had no one in the world, as literally no one as it can be honestly affirmed of any human being, is but a statement of fact from a man who believes in the psychological value of facts. There is also, perhaps, a desire of punctilious fairness. Unidentified with anyone in this narrative where the aspects of honour and shame are remote from the ideas of the Western world, and taking my stand on the ground of common humanity, it is for that very reason that I feel a strange reluctance to state baldly here what every reader has most likely already discovered himself. Such reluctance may appear absurd if it were not for the thought that because of the imperfection of language there is always something ungracious (and even disgraceful) in the exhibition of naked truth. But the time has come when Councillor of State Mikulin can no longer be ignored. His simple question "Where to?" on which we left Mr. Razumov in St. Petersburg, throws a light on the general meaning of this individual case.

"Where to?" was the answer in the form of a gentle question to what we may call Mr. Razumov's declaration of independence. The question was not menacing in the least and, indeed, had the ring of innocent inquiry. Had it been taken in a merely topographical sense, the only answer to it would have appeared sufficiently appalling to Mr. Razumov. Where to? Back to his rooms, where the Revolution had sought him out to put to a sudden test his dormant instincts, his half-conscious thoughts and almost wholly unconscious ambitions, by the touch as of some furious and dogmatic religion, with its call to frantic sacrifices, its tender resignations, its dreams and hopes uplifting the soul by the side of the most sombre moods of despair. And Mr. Razumov had let go the door-handle and had come back to the middle of the room, asking Councillor Mikulin angrily, "What do you mean by it?"

As far as I can tell, Councillor Mikulin did not answer that question. He drew Mr. Razumov into familiar conversation. It is the peculiarity of Russian natures that, however strongly engaged in the drama of action, they are still turning their ear to the murmur of abstract ideas. This conversation (and others later on) need not be recorded. Suffice it to say that it brought Mr. Razumov as we know him to the test of another faith. There was nothing official in its expression, and Mr. Razumov was led to defend his attitude of detachment. But Councillor Mikulin would have none of his arguments. "For a man like you," were his last weighty words in the discussion, "such a position is impossible. Don't forget that I have seen that interesting piece of paper. I understand your liberalism. I have an intellect of that kind myself. Reform for me is mainly a question of method. But the principle of revolt is a physical intoxication, a sort of hysteria which must be kept away from the masses. You agree to this without reserve, don't you? Because, you see, Kirylo Sidorovitch, abstention, reserve, in certain situations, come very near to political crime. The ancient Greeks understood that very well."

Mr. Razumov, listening with a faint smile, asked Councillor Mikulin point-blank if this meant that he was going to have him watched.

The high official took no offence at the cynical inquiry.

"No, Kirylo Sidorovitch," he answered gravely. "I don't mean to have you watched."

Razumov, suspecting a lie, affected yet the greatest liberty of mind during the short remainder of that interview. The older man expressed himself throughout in familiar terms, and with a sort of shrewd simplicity. Razumov concluded that to get to the bottom of that mind was an impossible feat. A great disquiet made his heart beat quicker. The high official, issuing from behind the desk, was actually offering to shake hands with him.

"Good-bye, Mr Razumov. An understanding between intelligent men is always a satisfactory occurrence. Is it not? And, of course, these rebel gentlemen have not the monopoly of intelligence."

"I presume that I shall not be wanted any more?" Razumov brought out that question while his hand was still being grasped. Councillor Mikulin released it slowly.

"That, Mr. Razumov," he said with great earnestness, "is as it may be. God alone knows the future. But you may rest assured that I never thought

of having you watched. You are a young man of great independence. Yes. You are going away free as air, but you shall end by coming back to us.”

“I! I!” Razumov exclaimed in an appalled murmur of protest. “What for?” he added feebly.

“Yes! You yourself, Kirylo Sidorovitch,” the high police functionary insisted in a low, severe tone of conviction. “You shall be coming back to us. Some of our greatest minds had to do that in the end.”

“You have no better friend than Prince K — -, and as to myself it is a long time now since I’ve been honoured by his....”

He glanced down his beard.

“I won’t detain you any longer. We live in difficult times, in times of monstrous chimeras and evil dreams and criminal follies. We shall certainly meet once more. It may be some little time, though, before we do. Till then may Heaven send you fruitful reflections!” Once in the street, Razumov started off rapidly, without caring for the direction. At first he thought of nothing; but in a little while the consciousness of his position presented itself to him as something so ugly, dangerous, and absurd, the difficulty of ever freeing himself from the toils of that complication so insoluble, that the idea of going back and, as he termed it to himself, confessing to Councillor Mikulin flashed through his mind.

Go back! What for? Confess! To what? “I have been speaking to him with the greatest openness,” he said to himself with perfect truth. “What else could I tell him? That I have undertaken to carry a message to that brute Ziemianitch? Establish a false complicity and destroy what chance of safety I have won for nothing — what folly!”

Yet he could not defend himself from fancying that Councillor Mikulin was, perhaps, the only man in the world able to understand his conduct. To be understood appeared extremely fascinating.

On the way home he had to stop several times; all his strength seemed to run out of his limbs; and in the movement of the busy streets, isolated as if in a desert, he remained suddenly motionless for a minute or so before he could proceed on his way. He reached his rooms at last.

Then came an illness, something in the nature of a low fever, which all at once removed him to a great distance from the perplexing actualities, from his very room, even. He never lost consciousness; he only seemed to himself to be existing languidly somewhere very far away from everything that had ever happened to him. He came out of this state slowly, with an

effect, that is to say, of extreme slowness, though the actual number of days was not very great. And when he had got back into the middle of things they were all changed, subtly and provokingly in their nature: inanimate objects, human faces, the landlady, the rustic servant-girl, the staircase, the streets, the very air. He tackled these changed conditions in a spirit of severity. He walked to and fro to the University, ascended stairs, paced the passages, listened to lectures, took notes, crossed courtyards in angry aloofness, his teeth set hard till his jaws ached.

He was perfectly aware of madcap Kostia gazing like a young retriever from a distance, of the famished student with the red drooping nose, keeping scrupulously away as desired; of twenty others, perhaps, he knew well enough to speak to. And they all had an air of curiosity and concern as if they expected something to happen. "This can't last much longer," thought Razumov more than once. On certain days he was afraid that anyone addressing him suddenly in a certain way would make him scream out insanely a lot of filthy abuse. Often, after returning home, he would drop into a chair in his cap and cloak and remain still for hours holding some book he had got from the library in his hand; or he would pick up the little penknife and sit there scraping his nails endlessly and feeling furious all the time — simply furious. "This is impossible," he would mutter suddenly to the empty room.

Fact to be noted: this room might conceivably have become physically repugnant to him, emotionally intolerable, morally uninhabitable. But no. Nothing of the sort (and he had himself dreaded it at first), nothing of the sort happened. On the contrary, he liked his lodgings better than any other shelter he, who had never known a home, had ever hired before. He liked his lodgings so well that often, on that very account, he found a certain difficulty in making up his mind to go out. It resembled a physical seduction such as, for instance, makes a man reluctant to leave the neighbourhood of a fire on a cold day.

For as, at that time, he seldom stirred except to go to the University (what else was there to do?) it followed that whenever he went abroad he felt himself at once closely involved in the moral consequences of his act. It was there that the dark prestige of the Haldin mystery fell on him, clung to him like a poisoned robe it was impossible to fling off. He suffered from it exceedingly, as well as from the conversational, commonplace, unavoidable intercourse with the other kind of students. "They must be wondering at the



change in me," he reflected anxiously. He had an uneasy recollection of having savagely told one or two innocent, nice enough fellows to go to the devil. Once a married professor he used to call upon formerly addressed him in passing: "How is it we never see you at our Wednesdays now, Kirylo Sidorovitch?" Razumov was conscious of meeting this advance with odious, muttering boorishness. The professor was obviously too astonished to be offended. All this was bad. And all this was Haldin, always Haldin — nothing but Haldin — everywhere Haldin: a moral spectre infinitely more effective than any visible apparition of the dead. It was only the room through which that man had blundered on his way from crime to death that his spectre did not seem to be able to haunt. Not, to be exact, that he was ever completely absent from it, but that there he had no sort of power. There it was Razumov who had the upper hand, in a composed sense of his own superiority. A vanquished phantom — nothing more. Often in the evening, his repaired watch faintly ticking on the table by the side of the lighted lamp, Razumov would look up from his writing and stare at the bed with an expectant, dispassionate attention. Nothing was to be seen there. He never really supposed that anything ever could be seen there. After a while he would shrug his shoulders slightly and bend again over his work. For he had gone to work and, at first, with some success. His unwillingness to leave that place where he was safe from Haldin grew so strong that at last he ceased to go out at all. From early morning till far into the night he wrote, he wrote for nearly a week; never looking at the time, and only throwing himself on the bed when he could keep his eyes open no longer. Then, one afternoon, quite casually, he happened to glance at his watch. He laid down his pen slowly.

"At this very hour," was his thought, "the fellow stole unseen into this room while I was out. And there he sat quiet as a mouse — perhaps in this very chair." Razumov got up and began to pace the floor steadily, glancing at the watch now and then. "This is the time when I returned and found him standing against the stove," he observed to himself. When it grew dark he lit his lamp. Later on he interrupted his tramping once more, only to wave away angrily the girl who attempted to enter the room with tea and something to eat on a tray. And presently he noted the watch pointing at the hour of his own going forth into the falling snow on that terrible errand.

"Complicity," he muttered faintly, and resumed his pacing, keeping his eye on the hands as they crept on slowly to the time of his return.

“And, after all,” he thought suddenly, “I might have been the chosen instrument of Providence. This is a manner of speaking, but there may be truth in every manner of speaking. What if that absurd saying were true in its essence?”

He meditated for a while, then sat down, his legs stretched out, with stony eyes, and with his arms hanging down on each side of the chair like a man totally abandoned by Providence — desolate.

He noted the time of Haldin’s departure and continued to sit still for another half-hour; then muttering, “And now to work,” drew up to the table, seized the pen and instantly dropped it under the influence of a profoundly disquieting reflection: “There’s three weeks gone by and no word from Mikulin.”

What did it mean! Was he forgotten? Possibly. Then why not remain forgotten — creep in somewhere? Hide. But where? How? With whom? In what hole? And was it to be for ever, or what?

But a retreat was big with shadowy dangers. The eye of the social revolution was on him, and Razumov for a moment felt an unnamed and despairing dread, mingled with an odious sense of humiliation. Was it possible that he no longer belonged to himself? This was damnable. But why not simply keep on as before? Study. Advance. Work hard as if nothing had happened (and first of all win the Silver Medal), acquire distinction, become a great reforming servant of the greatest of States. Servant, too, of the mightiest homogeneous mass of mankind with a capability for logical, guided development in a brotherly solidarity of force and aim such as the world had never dreamt of... the Russian nation!

Calm, resolved, steady in his great purpose, he was stretching his hand towards the pen when he happened to glance towards the bed. He rushed at it, enraged, with a mental scream: “it’s you, crazy fanatic, who stands in the way!” He flung the pillow on the floor violently, tore the blankets aside.... Nothing there. And, turning away, he caught for an instant in the air, like a vivid detail in a dissolving view of two heads, the eyes of General T — - and of Privy-Councillor Mikulin side by side fixed upon him, quite different in character, but with the same unflinching and weary and yet purposeful expression...servants of the nation!

Razumov tottered to the washstand very alarmed about himself, drank some water and bathed his forehead. “This will pass and leave no trace,” he thought confidently. “I am all right.” But as to supposing that he had been

forgotten it was perfect nonsense. He was a marked man on that side. And that was nothing. It was what that miserable phantom stood for which had to be got out of the way.... "If one only could go and spit it all out at some of them — and take the consequences."

He imagined himself accosting the red-nosed student and suddenly shaking his fist in his face. "From that one, though," he reflected, "there's nothing to be got, because he has no mind of his own. He's living in a red democratic trance. Ah! you want to smash your way into universal happiness, my boy. I will give you universal happiness, you silly, hypnotized ghoul, you! And what about my own happiness, eh? Haven't I got any right to it, just because I can think for myself?..."

And again, but with a different mental accent, Razumov said to himself, "I am young. Everything can be lived down." At that moment he was crossing the room slowly, intending to sit down on the sofa and try to compose his thoughts. But before he had got so far everything abandoned him — hope, courage, belief in himself trust in men. His heart had, as it were, suddenly emptied itself. It was no use struggling on. Rest, work, solitude, and the frankness of intercourse with his kind were alike forbidden to him. Everything was gone. His existence was a great cold blank, something like the enormous plain of the whole of Russia levelled with snow and fading gradually on all sides into shadows and mists.

He sat down, with swimming head, closed his eyes, and remained like that, sitting bolt upright on the sofa and perfectly awake for the rest of the night; till the girl bustling into the outer room with the samovar thumped with her fist on the door, calling out, "Kirylo Sidorovitch, please! It is time for you to get up!"

Then, pale like a corpse obeying the dread summons of judgement, Razumov opened his eyes and got up.

Nobody will be surprised to hear, I suppose, that when the summons came he went to see Councillor Mikulin. It came that very morning, while, looking white and shaky, like an invalid just out of bed, he was trying to shave himself. The envelope was addressed in the little attorney's handwriting. That envelope contained another, superscribed to Razumov, in Prince K — -'s hand, with the request "Please forward under cover at once" in a corner. The note inside was an autograph of Councillor Mikulin. The writer stated candidly that nothing had arisen which needed clearing up, but

nevertheless appointed a meeting with Mr. Razumov at a certain address in town which seemed to be that of an oculist.

Razumov read it, finished shaving, dressed, looked at the note again, and muttered gloomily, "Oculist." He pondered over it for a time, lit a match, and burned the two envelopes and the enclosure carefully. Afterwards he waited, sitting perfectly idle and not even looking at anything in particular till the appointed hour drew near — and then went out.

Whether, looking at the unofficial character of the summons, he might have refrained from attending to it is hard to say. Probably not. At any rate, he went; but, what's more, he went with a certain eagerness, which may appear incredible till it is remembered that Councillor Mikulin was the only person on earth with whom Razumov could talk, taking the Haldin adventure for granted. And Haldin, when once taken for granted, was no longer a haunting, falsehood-breeding spectre. Whatever troubling power he exercised in all the other places of the earth, Razumov knew very well that at this oculist's address he would be merely the hanged murderer of M. de P — - and nothing more. For the dead can live only with the exact intensity and quality of the life imparted to them by the living. So Mr. Razumov, certain of relief, went to meet Councillor Mikulin with the eagerness of a pursued person welcoming any sort of shelter.

This much said, there is no need to tell anything more of that first interview and of the several others. To the morality of a Western reader an account of these meetings would wear perhaps the sinister character of old legendary tales where the Enemy of Mankind is represented holding subtly mendacious dialogues with some tempted soul. It is not my part to protest. Let me but remark that the Evil One, with his single passion of satanic pride for the only motive, is yet, on a larger, modern view, allowed to be not quite so black as he used to be painted. With what greater latitude, then, should we appraise the exact shade of mere mortal man, with his many passions and his miserable ingenuity in error, always dazzled by the base glitter of mixed motives, everlastingly betrayed by a short-sighted wisdom.

Councillor Mikulin was one of those powerful officials who, in a position not obscure, not occult, but simply inconspicuous, exercise a great influence over the methods rather than over the conduct of affairs. A devotion to Church and Throne is not in itself a criminal sentiment; to prefer the will of one to the will of many does not argue the possession of a black heart or prove congenital idiocy. Councillor Mikulin was not only a clever but also a

faithful official. Privately he was a bachelor with a love of comfort, living alone in an apartment of five rooms luxuriously furnished; and was known by his intimates to be an enlightened patron of the art of female dancing. Later on the larger world first heard of him in the very hour of his downfall, during one of those State trials which astonish and puzzle the average plain man who reads the newspapers, by a glimpse of unsuspected intrigues. And in the stir of vaguely seen monstrosities, in that momentary, mysterious disturbance of muddy waters, Councillor Mikulin went under, dignified, with only a calm, emphatic protest of his innocence — nothing more. No disclosures damaging to a harassed autocracy, complete fidelity to the secrets of the miserable arcana imperii deposited in his patriotic breast, a display of bureaucratic stoicism in a Russian official's ineradicable, almost sublime contempt for truth; stoicism of silence understood only by the very few of the initiated, and not without a certain cynical grandeur of self-sacrifice on the part of a sybarite. For the terribly heavy sentence turned Councillor Mikulin civilly into a corpse, and actually into something very much like a common convict.

It seems that the savage autocracy, no more than the divine democracy, does not limit its diet exclusively to the bodies of its enemies. It devours its friends and servants as well. The downfall of His Excellency Gregory Gregorievitch Mikulin (which did not occur till some years later) completes all that is known of the man. But at the time of M. de P — -'s murder (or execution) Councillor Mikulin, under the modest style of Head of Department at the General Secretariat, exercised a wide influence as the confidant and right-hand man of his former schoolfellow and lifelong friend, General T — -. One can imagine them talking over the case of Mr. Razumov, with the full sense of their unbounded power over all the lives in Russia, with cursory disdain, like two Olympians glancing at a worm. The relationship with Prince K — - was enough to save Razumov from some carelessly arbitrary proceeding, and it is also very probable that after the interview at the Secretariat he would have been left alone. Councillor Mikulin would not have forgotten him (he forgot no one who ever fell under his observation), but would have simply dropped him for ever. Councillor Mikulin was a good-natured man and wished no harm to anyone. Besides (with his own reforming tendencies) he was favourably impressed by that young student, the son of Prince K — -, and apparently no fool.

But as fate would have it, while Mr. Razumov was finding that no way of life was possible to him, Councillor Mikulin's discreet abilities were rewarded by a very responsible post — nothing less than the direction of the general police supervision over Europe. And it was then, and then only, when taking in hand the perfecting of the service which watches the revolutionist activities abroad, that he thought again of Mr. Razumov. He saw great possibilities of special usefulness in that uncommon young man on whom he had a hold already, with his peculiar temperament, his unsettled mind and shaken conscience, a struggling in the toils of a false position.... It was as if the revolutionists themselves had put into his hand that tool so much finer than the common base instruments, so perfectly fitted, if only vested with sufficient credit, to penetrate into places inaccessible to common informers. Providential! Providential! And Prince K — -, taken into the secret, was ready enough to adopt that mystical view too. "It will be necessary, though, to make a career for him afterwards," he had stipulated anxiously. "Oh! absolutely. We shall make that our affair," Mikulin had agreed. Prince K — -'s mysticism was of an artless kind; but Councillor Mikulin was astute enough for two.

Things and men have always a certain sense, a certain side by which they must be got hold of if one wants to obtain a solid grasp and a perfect command. The power of Councillor Mikulin consisted in the ability to seize upon that sense, that side in the men he used. It did not matter to him what it was — vanity, despair, love, hate, greed, intelligent pride or stupid conceit, it was all one to him as long as the man could be made to serve. The obscure, unrelated young student Razumov, in the moment of great moral loneliness, was allowed to feel that he was an object of interest to a small group of people of high position. Prince K — - was persuaded to intervene personally, and on a certain occasion gave way to a manly emotion which, all unexpected as it was, quite upset Mr. Razumov. The sudden embrace of that man, agitated by his loyalty to a throne and by suppressed paternal affection, was a revelation to Mr. Razumov of something within his own breast.

"So that was it!" he exclaimed to himself. A sort of contemptuous tenderness softened the young man's grim view of his position as he reflected upon that agitated interview with Prince K — -. This simpleminded, worldly ex-Guardsman and senator whose soft grey official whiskers had brushed against his cheek, his aristocratic and convinced

father, was he a whit less estimable or more absurd than that famine-stricken, fanatical revolutionist, the red-nosed student?

And there was some pressure, too, besides the persuasiveness. Mr. Razumov was always being made to feel that he had committed himself. There was no getting away from that feeling, from that soft, unanswerable, "Where to?" of Councillor Mikulin. But no susceptibilities were ever hurt. It was to be a dangerous mission to Geneva for obtaining, at a critical moment, absolutely reliable information from a very inaccessible quarter of the inner revolutionary circle. There were indications that a very serious plot was being matured.... The repose indispensable to a great country was at stake.... A great scheme of orderly reforms would be endangered.... The highest personages in the land were patriotically uneasy, and so on. In short, Councillor Mikulin knew what to say. This skill is to be inferred clearly from the mental and psychological self-confession, self-analysis of Mr. Razumov's written journal — the pitiful resource of a young man who had near him no trusted intimacy, no natural affection to turn to.

How all this preliminary work was concealed from observation need not be recorded. The expedient of the oculist gives a sufficient instance. Councillor Mikulin was resourceful, and the task not very difficult. Any fellow-student, even the red-nosed one, was perfectly welcome to see Mr. Razumov entering a private house to consult an oculist. Ultimate success depended solely on the revolutionary self-delusion which credited Razumov with a mysterious complicity in the Haldin affair. To be compromised in it was credit enough-and it was their own doing. It was precisely that which stamped Mr. Razumov as a providential man, wide as poles apart from the usual type of agent for "European supervision."

And it was that which the Secretariat set itself the task to foster by a course of calculated and false indiscretions.

It came at last to this, that one evening Mr. Razumov was unexpectedly called upon by one of the "thinking" students whom formerly, before the Haldin affair, he used to meet at various private gatherings; a big fellow with a quiet, unassuming manner and a pleasant voice.

Recognizing his voice raised in the ante-room, "May one come in?" Razumov, lounging idly on his couch, jumped up. "Suppose he were coming to stab me?" he thought sardonically, and, assuming a green shade over his left eye, said in a severe tone, "Come in."

The other was embarrassed; hoped he was not intruding.

“You haven’t been seen for several days, and I’ve wondered.” He coughed a little. “Eye better?”

“Nearly well now.”

“Good. I won’t stop a minute; but you see I, that is, we — anyway, I have undertaken the duty to warn you, Kirylo Sidorovitch, that you are living in false security maybe.”

Razumov sat still with his head leaning on his hand, which nearly concealed the unshaded eye.

“I have that idea, too.”

“That’s all right, then. Everything seems quiet now, but those people are preparing some move of general repression. That’s of course. But it isn’t that I came to tell you.” He hitched his chair closer, dropped his voice. “You will be arrested before long — we fear.”

An obscure scribe in the Secretariat had overheard a few words of a certain conversation, and had caught a glimpse of a certain report. This intelligence was not to be neglected.

Razumov laughed a little, and his visitor became very anxious.

“Ah! Kirylo Sidorovitch, this is no laughing matter. They have left you alone for a while, but...! Indeed, you had better try to leave the country, Kirylo Sidorovitch, while there’s yet time.”

Razumov jumped up and began to thank him for the advice with mocking effusiveness, so that the other, colouring up, took himself off with the notion that this mysterious Razumov was not a person to be warned or advised by inferior mortals.

Councillor Mikulin, informed the next day of the incident, expressed his satisfaction. “H’m! Ha! Exactly what was wanted to...” and glanced down his beard.

“I conclude,” said Razumov, “that the moment has come for me to start on my mission.”

“The psychological Moment,” Councillor Mikulin insisted softly — very gravely — as if awed.

All the arrangements to give verisimilitude to the appearance of a difficult escape were made. Councillor Mikulin did not expect to see Mr. Razumov again before his departure. These meetings were a risk, and there was nothing more to settle.

“We have said everything to each other by now, Kirylo Sidorovitch,” said the high official feelingly, pressing Razumov’s hand with that unreserved



heartiness a Russian can convey in his manner. “There is nothing obscure between us. And I will tell you what! I consider myself fortunate in having — h’m — your...”

He glanced down his beard, and, after a moment of thoughtful silence, handed to Razumov a half-sheet of notepaper — an abbreviated note of matters already discussed, certain points of inquiry, the line of conduct agreed on, a few hints as to personalities, and so on. It was the only compromising document in the case, but, as Councillor Mikulin observed, “it could be easily destroyed. Mr. Razumov had better not see any one now — till on the other side of the frontier, when, of course, it will be just that.... See and hear and...”

He glanced down his beard; but when Razumov declared his intention to see one person at least before leaving St. Petersburg, Councillor Mikulin failed to conceal a sudden uneasiness. The young man’s studious, solitary, and austere existence was well known to him. It was the greatest guarantee of fitness. He became deprecatory. Had his dear Kirylo Sidorovitch considered whether, in view of such a momentous enterprise, it wasn’t really advisable to sacrifice every sentiment....

Razumov interrupted the remonstrance scornfully. It was not a young woman, it was a young fool he wished to see for a certain purpose. Councillor Mikulin was relieved, but surprised.

“Ah! And what for — precisely?”

“For the sake of improving the aspect of verisimilitude,” said Razumov curtly, in a desire to affirm his independence. “I must be trusted in what I do.”

Councillor Mikulin gave way tactfully, murmuring, “Oh, certainly, certainly. Your judgment...”

And with another handshake they parted.

The fool of whom Mr. Razumov had thought was the rich and festive student known as madcap Kostia. Feather-headed, loquacious, excitable, one could make certain of his utter and complete indiscretion. But that riotous youth, when reminded by Razumov of his offers of service some time ago, passed from his usual elation into boundless dismay.

“Oh, Kirylo Sidorovitch, my dearest friend — my saviour — what shall I do? I’ve blown last night every rouble I had from my dad the other day. Can’t you give me till Thursday? I shall rush round to all the usurers I know.... No, of course, you can’t! Don’t look at me like that. What shall I

do? No use asking the old man. I tell you he's given me a fistful of big notes three days ago. Miserable wretch that I am."

He wrung his hands in despair. Impossible to confide in the old man. "They" had given him a decoration, a cross on the neck only last year, and he had been cursing the modern tendencies ever since. Just then he would see all the intellectuals in Russia hanged in a row rather than part with a single rouble.

"Kirylo Sidorovitch, wait a moment. Don't despise me. I have it. I'll, yes — I'll do it — I'll break into his desk. There's no help for it. I know the drawer where he keeps his plunder, and I can buy a chisel on my way home. He will be terribly upset, but, you know, the dear old duffer really loves me. He'll have to get over it — and I, too. Kirylo, my dear soul, if you can only wait for a few hours-till this evening — I shall steal all the blessed lot I can lay my hands on! You doubt me! Why? You've only to say the word."

"Steal, by all means," said Razumov, fixing him stonily.

"To the devil with the ten commandments!" cried the other, with the greatest animation. "It's the new future now."

But when he entered Razumov's room late in the evening it was with an unaccustomed soberness of manner, almost solemnly.

"It's done," he said.

Razumov sitting bowed, his clasped hands hanging between his knees, shuddered at the familiar sound of these words. Kostia deposited slowly in the circle of lamplight a small brown-paper parcel tied with a piece of string.

"As I've said — all I could lay my hands on. The old boy'll think the end of the world has come." Razumov nodded from the couch, and contemplated the hare-brained fellow's gravity with a feeling of malicious pleasure.

"I've made my little sacrifice," sighed mad Kostia. "And I've to thank you, Kirylo Sidorovitch, for the opportunity."

"It has cost you something?"

"Yes, it has. You see, the dear old duffer really loves me. He'll be hurt."

"And you believe all they tell you of the new future and the sacred will of the people?"

"Implicitly. I would give my life.... Only, you see, I am like a pig at a trough. I am no good. It's my nature."

Razumov, lost in thought, had forgotten his existence till the youth's voice, entreating him to fly without loss of time, roused him unpleasantly.

"All right. Well — good-bye."

"I am not going to leave you till I've seen you out of St. Petersburg," declared Kostia unexpectedly, with calm determination. "You can't refuse me that now. For God's sake, Kirylo, my soul, the police may be here any moment, and when they get you they'll immure you somewhere for ages — till your hair turns grey. I have down there the best trotter of dad's stables and a light sledge. We shall do thirty miles before the moon sets, and find some roadside station...."

Razumov looked up amazed. The journey was decided — unavoidable. He had fixed the next day for his departure on the mission. And now he discovered suddenly that he had not believed in it. He had gone about listening, speaking, thinking, planning his simulated flight, with the growing conviction that all this was preposterous. As if anybody ever did such things! It was like a game of make-believe. And now he was amazed! Here was somebody who believed in it with desperate earnestness. "If I don't go now, at once," thought Razumov, with a start of fear, "I shall never go." He rose without a word, and the anxious Kostia thrust his cap on him, helped him into his cloak, or else he would have left the room bareheaded as he stood. He was walking out silently when a sharp cry arrested him.

"Kirylo!"

"What?" He turned reluctantly in the doorway. Upright, with a stiffly extended arm, Kostia, his face set and white, was pointing an eloquent forefinger at the brown little packet lying forgotten in the circle of bright light on the table. Razumov hesitated, came back for it under the severe eyes of his companion, at whom he tried to smile. But the boyish, mad youth was frowning. "It's a dream," thought Razumov, putting the little parcel into his pocket and descending the stairs; "nobody does such things." The other held him under the arm, whispering of dangers ahead, and of what he meant to do in certain contingencies. "Preposterous," murmured Razumov, as he was being tucked up in the sledge. He gave himself up to watching the development of the dream with extreme attention. It continued on foreseen lines, inexorably logical — the long drive, the wait at the small station sitting by a stove. They did not exchange half a dozen words altogether. Kostia, gloomy himself, did not care to break the silence. At

parting they embraced twice — it had to be done; and then Kostia vanished out of the dream.

When dawn broke, Razumov, very still in a hot, stuffy railway-car full of bedding and of sleeping people in all its dimly lighted length, rose quietly, lowered the glass a few inches, and flung out on the great plain of snow a small brown-paper parcel. Then he sat down again muffled up and motionless. “For the people,” he thought, staring out of the window. The great white desert of frozen, hard earth glided past his eyes without a sign of human habitation.

That had been a waking act; and then the dream had him again: Prussia, Saxony, Wurtemberg, faces, sights, words — all a dream, observed with an angry, compelled attention. Zurich, Geneva — still a dream, minutely followed, wearing one into harsh laughter, to fury, to death — with the fear of awakening at the end.

## II

“Perhaps life is just that,” reflected Razumov, pacing to and fro under the trees of the little island, all alone with the bronze statue of Rousseau. “A dream and a fear.” The dusk deepened. The pages written over and torn out of his notebook were the first-fruit of his “mission.” No dream that. They contained the assurance that he was on the eve of real discoveries. “I think there is no longer anything in the way of my being completely accepted.”

He had resumed his impressions in those pages, some of the conversations. He even went so far as to write: “By the by, I have discovered the personality of that terrible N.N. A horrible, paunchy brute. If I hear anything of his future movements I shall send a warning.”

The futility of all this overcame him like a curse. Even then he could not believe in the reality of his mission. He looked round despairingly, as if for some way to redeem his existence from that unconquerable feeling. He crushed angrily in his hand the pages of the notebook. “This must be posted,” he thought.

He gained the bridge and returned to the north shore, where he remembered having seen in one of the narrower streets a little obscure shop stocked with cheap wood carvings, its walls lined with extremely dirty cardboard-bound volumes of a small circulating library. They sold stationery there, too. A morose, shabby old man dozed behind the counter. A thin woman in black, with a sickly face, produced the envelope he had asked for without even looking at him. Razumov thought that these people

were safe to deal with because they no longer cared for anything in the world. He addressed the envelope on the counter with the German name of a certain person living in Vienna. But Razumov knew that this, his first communication for Councillor Mikulin, would find its way to the Embassy there, be copied in cypher by somebody trustworthy, and sent on to its destination, all safe, along with the diplomatic correspondence. That was the arrangement contrived to cover up the track of the information from all unfaithful eyes, from all indiscretions, from all mishaps and treacheries. It was to make him safe — absolutely safe.

He wandered out of the wretched shop and made for the post office. It was then that I saw him for the second time that day. He was crossing the Rue Mont Blanc with every appearance of an aimless stroller. He did not recognize me, but I made him out at some distance. He was very good-looking, I thought, this remarkable friend of Miss Haldin's brother. I watched him go up to the letter-box and then retrace his steps. Again he passed me very close, but I am certain he did not see me that time, either. He carried his head well up, but he had the expression of a somnambulist struggling with the very dream which drives him forth to wander in dangerous places. My thoughts reverted to Natalia Haldin, to her mother. He was all that was left to them of their son and brother.

The westerner in me was discomposed. There was something shocking in the expression of that face. Had I been myself a conspirator, a Russian political refugee, I could have perhaps been able to draw some practical conclusion from this chance glimpse. As it was, it only discomposed me strongly, even to the extent of awakening an indefinite apprehension in regard to Natalia Haldin. All this is rather inexplicable, but such was the origin of the purpose I formed there and then to call on these ladies in the evening, after my solitary dinner. It was true that I had met Miss Haldin only a few hours before, but Mrs. Haldin herself I had not seen for some considerable time. The truth is, I had shirked calling of late.

Poor Mrs. Haldin! I confess she frightened me a little. She was one of those natures, rare enough, luckily, in which one cannot help being interested, because they provoke both terror and pity. One dreads their contact for oneself, and still more for those one cares for, so clear it is that they are born to suffer and to make others suffer, too. It is strange to think that, I won't say liberty, but the mere liberalism of outlook which for us is a matter of words, of ambitions, of votes (and if of feeling at all, then of the

sort of feeling which leaves our deepest affections untouched), may be for other beings very much like ourselves and living under the same sky, a heavy trial of fortitude, a matter of tears and anguish and blood. Mrs. Haldin had felt the pangs of her own generation. There was that enthusiast brother of hers — the officer they shot under Nicholas. A faintly ironic resignation is no armour for a vulnerable heart. Mrs. Haldin, struck at through her children, was bound to suffer afresh from the past, and to feel the anguish of the future. She was of those who do not know how to heal themselves, of those who are too much aware of their heart, who, neither cowardly nor selfish, look passionately at its wounds — and count the cost.

Such thoughts as these seasoned my modest, lonely bachelor's meal. If anybody wishes to remark that this was a roundabout way of thinking of Natalia Haldin, I can only retort that she was well worth some concern. She had all her life before her. Let it be admitted, then, that I was thinking of Natalia Haldin's life in terms of her mother's character, a manner of thinking about a girl permissible for an old man, not too old yet to have become a stranger to pity. There was almost all her youth before her; a youth robbed arbitrarily of its natural lightness and joy, overshadowed by an un-European despotism; a terribly sombre youth given over to the hazards of a furious strife between equally ferocious antagonisms.

I lingered over my thoughts more than I should have done. One felt so helpless, and even worse — so unrelated, in a way. At the last moment I hesitated as to going there at all. What was the good?

The evening was already advanced when, turning into the Boulevard des Philosophes, I saw the light in the window at the corner. The blind was down, but I could imagine behind it Mrs. Haldin seated in the chair, in her usual attitude, looking out for some one, which had lately acquired the poignant quality of mad expectation.

I thought that I was sufficiently authorized by the light to knock at the door. The ladies had not retired as yet. I only hoped they would not have any visitors of their own nationality. A broken-down, retired Russian official was to be found there sometimes in the evening. He was infinitely forlorn and wearisome by his mere dismal presence. I think these ladies tolerated his frequent visits because of an ancient friendship with Mr. Haldin, the father, or something of that sort. I made up my mind that if I found him prosing away there in his feeble voice I should remain but a very few minutes.

The door surprised me by swinging open before I could ring the bell. I was confronted by Miss Haldin, in hat and jacket, obviously on the point of going out. At that hour! For the doctor, perhaps?

Her exclamation of welcome reassured me. It sounded as if I had been the very man she wanted to see. My curiosity was awakened. She drew me in, and the faithful Anna, the elderly German maid, closed the door, but did not go away afterwards. She remained near it as if in readiness to let me out presently. It appeared that Miss Haldin had been on the point of going out to find me.

She spoke in a hurried manner very unusual with her. She would have gone straight and rung at Mrs. Ziegler's door, late as it was, for Mrs. Ziegler's habits....

Mrs. Ziegler, the widow of a distinguished professor who was an intimate friend of mine, lets me have three rooms out of her very large and fine apartment, which she didn't give up after her husband's death; but I have my own entrance opening on the same landing. It was an arrangement of at least ten years' standing. I said that I was very glad that I had the idea to....

Miss Haldin made no motion to take off her outdoor things. I observed her heightened colour, something pronouncedly resolute in her tone. Did I know where Mr. Razumov lived?

Where Mr. Razumov lived? Mr. Razumov? At this hour — so urgently? I threw my arms up in sign of utter ignorance. I had not the slightest idea where he lived. If I could have foreseen her question only three hours ago, I might have ventured to ask him on the pavement before the new post office building, and possibly he would have told me, but very possibly, too, he would have dismissed me rudely to mind my own business. And possibly, I thought, remembering that extraordinary hallucinated, anguished, and absent expression, he might have fallen down in a fit from the shock of being spoken to. I said nothing of all this to Miss Haldin, not even mentioning that I had a glimpse of the young man so recently. The impression had been so extremely unpleasant that I would have been glad to forget it myself.

"I don't see where I could make inquiries," I murmured helplessly. I would have been glad to be of use in any way, and would have set off to fetch any man, young or old, for I had the greatest confidence in her common sense. "What made you think of coming to me for that information?" I asked.

“It wasn’t exactly for that,” she said, in a low voice. She had the air of some one confronted by an unpleasant task.

“Am I to understand that you must communicate with Mr. Razumov this evening?”

Natalia Haldin moved her head affirmatively; then, after a glance at the door of the drawing-room, said in French —

“C’est maman,” and remained perplexed for a moment. Always serious, not a girl to be put out by any imaginary difficulties, my curiosity was suspended on her lips, which remained closed for a moment. What was Mr. Razumov’s connexion with this mention of her mother? Mrs. Haldin had not been informed of her son’s friend’s arrival in Geneva.

“May I hope to see your mother this evening?” I inquired.

Miss Haldin extended her hand as if to bar the way.

“She is in a terrible state of agitation. Oh, you would not be able to detect.... It’s inward, but I who know mother, I am appalled. I haven’t the courage to face it any longer. It’s all my fault; I suppose I cannot play a part; I’ve never before hidden anything from mother. There has never been an occasion for anything of that sort between us. But you know yourself the reason why I refrained from telling her at once of Mr. Razumov’s arrival here. You understand, don’t you? Owing to her unhappy state. And — there — I am no actress. My own feelings being strongly engaged, I somehow.... I don’t know. She noticed something in my manner. She thought I was concealing something from her. She noticed my longer absences, and, in fact, as I have been meeting Mr. Razumov daily, I used to stay away longer than usual when I went out. Goodness knows what suspicions arose in her mind. You know that she has not been herself ever since.... So this evening she — who has been so awfully silent: for weeks-began to talk all at once. She said that she did not want to reproach me; that I had my character as she had her own; that she did not want to pry into my affairs or even into my thoughts; for her part, she had never had anything to conceal from her children...cruel things to listen to. And all this in her quiet voice, with that poor, wasted face as calm as a stone. It was unbearable.”

Miss Haldin talked in an undertone and more rapidly than I had ever heard her speak before. That in itself was disturbing. The ante-room being strongly lighted, I could see under the veil the heightened colour of her face. She stood erect, her left hand was resting lightly on a small table. The



other hung by her side without stirring. Now and then she caught her breath slightly.

“It was too startling. Just fancy! She thought that I was making preparations to leave her without saying anything. I knelt by the side of her chair and entreated her to think of what she was saying! She put her hand on my head, but she persists in her delusion all the same. She had always thought that she was worthy of her children’s confidence, but apparently it was not so. Her son could not trust her love nor yet her understanding — and now I was planning to abandon her in the same cruel and unjust manner, and so on, and so on. Nothing I could say.... It is morbid obstinacy.... She said that she felt there was something, some change in me.... If my convictions were calling me away, why this secrecy, as though she had been a coward or a weakling not safe to trust? ‘As if my heart could play traitor to my children,’ she said.... It was hardly to be borne. And she was smoothing my head all the time.... It was perfectly useless to protest. She is ill. Her very soul is....”

I did not venture to break the silence which fell between us. I looked into her eyes, glistening through the veil.

“I! Changed!” she exclaimed in the same low tone. “My convictions calling me away! It was cruel to hear this, because my trouble is that I am weak and cannot see what I ought to do. You know that. And to end it all I did a selfish thing. To remove her suspicions of myself I told her of Mr. Razumov. It was selfish of me. You know we were completely right in agreeing to keep the knowledge away from her. Perfectly right. Directly I told her of our poor Victor’s friend being here I saw how right we have been. She ought to have been prepared; but in my distress I just blurted it out. Mother got terribly excited at once. How long has he been here? What did he know, and why did he not come to see us at once, this friend of her Victor? What did that mean? Was she not to be trusted even with such memories as there were left of her son?... Just think how I felt seeing her, white like a sheet, perfectly motionless, with her thin hands gripping the arms of the chair. I told her it was all my fault.”

I could imagine the motionless dumb figure of the mother in her chair, there, behind the door, near which the daughter was talking to me. The silence in there seemed to call aloud for vengeance against an historical fact and the modern instances of its working. That view flashed through my mind, but I could not doubt that Miss Haldin had had an atrocious time of it.

I quite understood when she said that she could not face the night upon the impression of that scene. Mrs. Haldin had given way to most awful imaginings, to most fantastic and cruel suspicions. All this had to be lulled at all costs and without loss of time. It was no shock to me to learn that Miss Haldin had said to her, "I will go and bring him here at once." There was nothing absurd in that cry, no exaggeration of sentiment. I was not even doubtful in my "Very well, but how?"

It was perfectly right that she should think of me, but what could I do in my ignorance of Mr. Razumov's quarters.

"And to think he may be living near by, within a stone's-throw, perhaps!" she exclaimed.

I doubted it; but I would have gone off cheerfully to fetch him from the other end of Geneva. I suppose she was certain of my readiness, since her first thought was to come to me. But the service she meant to ask of me really was to accompany her to the Chateau Borel.

I had an unpleasant mental vision of the dark road, of the sombre grounds, and the desolately suspicious aspect of that home of necromancy and intrigue and feminist adoration. I objected that Madame de S — most likely would know nothing of what we wanted to find out. Neither did I think it likely that the young man would be found there. I remembered my glimpse of his face, and somehow gained the conviction that a man who looked worse than if he had seen the dead would want to shut himself up somewhere where he could be alone. I felt a strange certitude that Mr. Razumov was going home when I saw him.

"It is really of Peter Ivanovitch that I was thinking," said Miss Haldin quietly.

Ah! He, of course, would know. I looked at my watch. It was twenty minutes past nine only.... Still.

"I would try his hotel, then," I advised. "He has rooms at the Cosmopolitan, somewhere on the top floor."

I did not offer to go by myself, simply from mistrust of the reception I should meet with. But I suggested the faithful Anna, with a note asking for the information.

Anna was still waiting by the door at the other end of the room, and we two discussed the matter in whispers. Miss Haldin thought she must go herself. Anna was timid and slow. Time would be lost in bringing back the

answer, and from that point of view it was getting late, for it was by no means certain that Mr. Razumov lived near by.

“If I go myself,” Miss Haldin argued, “I can go straight to him from the hotel. And in any case I should have to go out, because I must explain to Mr. Razumov personally — prepare him in a way. You have no idea of mother’s state of mind.”

Her colour came and went. She even thought that both for her mother’s sake and for her own it was better that they should not be together for a little time. Anna, whom her mother liked, would be at hand.

“She could take her sewing into the room,” Miss Haldin continued, leading the way to the door. Then, addressing in German the maid who opened it before us, “You may tell my mother that this gentleman called and is gone with me to find Mr. Razumov. She must not be uneasy if I am away for some length of time.”

We passed out quickly into the street, and she took deep breaths of the cool night air. “I did not even ask you,” she murmured.

“I should think not,” I said, with a laugh. The manner of my reception by the great feminist could not be considered now. That he would be annoyed to see me, and probably treat me to some solemn insolence, I had no doubt, but I supposed that he would not absolutely dare to throw me out. And that was all I cared for. “Won’t you take my arm?” I asked.

She did so in silence, and neither of us said anything worth recording till I let her go first into the great hall of the hotel. It was brilliantly lighted, and with a good many people lounging about.

“I could very well go up there without you,” I suggested.

“I don’t like to be left waiting in this place,” she said in a low voice.

“I will come too.”

I led her straight to the lift then. At the top floor the attendant directed us to the right: “End of the corridor.”

The walls were white, the carpet red, electric lights blazed in profusion, and the emptiness, the silence, the closed doors all alike and numbered, made me think of the perfect order of some severely luxurious model penitentiary on the solitary confinement principle. Up there under the roof of that enormous pile for housing travellers no sound of any kind reached us, the thick crimson felt muffled our footsteps completely. We hastened on, not looking at each other till we found ourselves before the very last door of

that long passage. Then our eyes met, and we stood thus for a moment lending ear to a faint murmur of voices inside.

"I suppose this is it," I whispered unnecessarily. I saw Miss Haldin's lips move without a sound, and after my sharp knock the murmur of voices inside ceased. A profound stillness lasted for a few seconds, and then the door was brusquely opened by a short, black-eyed woman in a red blouse, with a great lot of nearly white hair, done up negligently in an untidy and unpicturesque manner. Her thin, jetty eyebrows were drawn together. I learned afterwards with interest that she was the famous — or the notorious — Sophia Antonovna, but I was struck then by the quaint Mephistophelian character of her inquiring glance, because it was so curiously evil-less, so — I may say — un-devilish. It got softened still more as she looked up at Miss Haldin, who stated, in her rich, even voice, her wish to see Peter Ivanovitch for a moment.

"I am Miss Haldin," she added.

At this, with her brow completely smoothed out now, but without a word in answer, the woman in the red blouse walked away to a sofa and sat down, leaving the door wide open.

And from the sofa, her hands lying on her lap, she watched us enter, with her black, glittering eyes.

Miss Haldin advanced into the middle of the room; I, faithful to my part of mere attendant, remained by the door after closing it behind me. The room, quite a large one, but with a low ceiling, was scantily furnished, and an electric bulb with a porcelain shade pulled low down over a big table (with a very large map spread on it) left its distant parts in a dim, artificial twilight. Peter Ivanovitch was not to be seen, neither was Mr. Razumov present. But, on the sofa, near Sophia Antonovna, a bony-faced man with a goatee beard leaned forward with his hands on his knees, staring hard with a kindly expression. In a remote corner a broad, pale face and a bulky shape could be made out, uncouth, and as if insecure on the low seat on which it rested. The only person known to me was little Julius Laspara, who seemed to have been poring over the map, his feet twined tightly round the chair-legs. He got down briskly and bowed to Miss Haldin, looking absurdly like a hooknosed boy with a beautiful false pepper-and-salt beard. He advanced, offering his seat, which Miss Haldin declined. She had only come in for a moment to say a few words to Peter Ivanovitch.

His high-pitched voice became painfully audible in the room.

“Strangely enough, I was thinking of you this very afternoon, Natalia Victorovna. I met Mr. Razumov. I asked him to write me an article on anything he liked. You could translate it into English — with such a teacher.”

He nodded complimentarily in my direction. At the name of Razumov an indescribable sound, a sort of feeble squeak, as of some angry small animal, was heard in the corner occupied by the man who seemed much too large for the chair on which he sat. I did not hear what Miss Haldin said. Laspara spoke again.

“It’s time to do something, Natalia Victorovna. But I suppose you have your own ideas. Why not write something yourself? Suppose you came to see us soon? We could talk it over. Any advice...”

Again I did not catch Miss Haldin’s words. It was Laspara’s voice once more.

“Peter Ivanovitch? He’s retired for a moment into the other room. We are all waiting for him.” The great man, entering at that moment, looked bigger, taller, quite imposing in a long dressing-gown of some dark stuff. It descended in straight lines down to his feet. He suggested a monk or a prophet, a robust figure of some desert-dweller — something Asiatic; and the dark glasses in conjunction with this costume made him more mysterious than ever in the subdued light.

Little Laspara went back to his chair to look at the map, the only brilliantly lit object in the room. Even from my distant position by the door I could make out, by the shape of the blue part representing the water, that it was a map of the Baltic provinces. Peter Ivanovitch exclaimed slightly, advancing towards Miss Haldin, checked himself on perceiving me, very vaguely no doubt; and peered with his dark, bespectacled stare. He must have recognized me by my grey hair, because, with a marked shrug of his broad shoulders, he turned to Miss Haldin in benevolent indulgence. He seized her hand in his thick cushioned palm, and put his other big paw over it like a lid.

While those two standing in the middle of the floor were exchanging a few inaudible phrases no one else moved in the room: Laspara, with his back to us, kneeling on the chair, his elbows propped on the big-scale map, the shadowy enormity in the corner, the frankly staring man with the goatee on the sofa, the woman in the red blouse by his side — not one of them stirred. I suppose that really they had no time, for Miss Haldin withdrew her

hand immediately from Peter Ivanovitch and before I was ready for her was moving to the door. A disregarded Westerner, I threw it open hurriedly and followed her out, my last glance leaving them all motionless in their varied poses: Peter Ivanovitch alone standing up, with his dark glasses like an enormous blind teacher, and behind him the vivid patch of light on the coloured map, pored over by the diminutive Laspara.

Later on, much later on, at the time of the newspaper rumours (they were vague and soon died out) of an abortive military conspiracy in Russia, I remembered the glimpse I had of that motionless group with its central figure. No details ever came out, but it was known that the revolutionary parties abroad had given their assistance, had sent emissaries in advance, that even money was found to dispatch a steamer with a cargo of arms and conspirators to invade the Baltic provinces. And while my eyes scanned the imperfect disclosures (in which the world was not much interested) I thought that the old, settled Europe had been given in my person attending that Russian girl something like a glimpse behind the scenes. A short, strange glimpse on the top floor of a great hotel of all places in the world: the great man himself; the motionless great bulk in the corner of the slayer of spies and gendarmes; Yakovlitch, the veteran of ancient terrorist campaigns; the woman, with her hair as white as mine and the lively black eyes, all in a mysterious half-light, with the strongly lighted map of Russia on the table. The woman I had the opportunity to see again. As we were waiting for the lift she came hurrying along the corridor, with her eyes fastened on Miss Haldin's face, and drew her aside as if for a confidential communication. It was not long. A few words only.

Going down in the lift, Natalia Haldin did not break the silence. It was only when out of the hotel and as we moved along the quay in the fresh darkness spangled by the quay lights, reflected in the black water of the little port on our left hand, and with lofty piles of hotels on our right, that she spoke.

"That was Sophia Antonovna — you know the woman?..."

"Yes, I know — the famous..."

"The same. It appears that after we went out Peter Ivanovitch told them why I had come. That was the reason she ran out after us. She named herself to me, and then she said, 'You are the sister of a brave man who shall be remembered. You may see better times.' I told her I hoped to see the time when all this would be forgotten, even if the name of my brother

were to be forgotten too. Something moved me to say that, but you understand?"

"Yes," I said. "You think of the era of concord and justice."

"Yes. There is too much hate and revenge in that work. It must be done. It is a sacrifice — and so let it be all the greater. Destruction is the work of anger. Let the tyrants and the slayers be forgotten together, and only the reconstructors be remembered."

"And did Sophia Antonovna agree with you?" I asked sceptically.

"She did not say anything except, 'It is good for you to believe in love.' I should think she understood me. Then she asked me if I hoped to see Mr. Razumov presently. I said I trusted I could manage to bring him to see my mother this evening, as my mother had learned of his being here and was morbidly impatient to learn if he could tell us something of Victor. He was the only friend of my brother we knew of, and a great intimate. She said, 'Oh! Your brother — yes. Please tell Mr. Razumov that I have made public the story which came to me from St. Petersburg. It concerns your brother's arrest,' she added. 'He was betrayed by a man of the people who has since hanged himself. Mr. Razumov will explain it all to you. I gave him the full information this afternoon. And please tell Mr. Razumov that Sophia Antonovna sends him her greetings. I am going away early in the morning — far away.'"

And Miss Haldin added, after a moment of silence — "I was so moved by what I heard so unexpectedly that I simply could not speak to you before.... A man of the people! Oh, our poor people!"

She walked slowly, as if tired out suddenly. Her head drooped; from the windows of a building with terraces and balconies came the banal sound of hotel music; before the low mean portals of the Casino two red posters blazed under the electric lamps, with a cheap provincial effect. — and the emptiness of the quays, the desert aspect of the streets, had an air of hypocritical respectability and of inexpressible dreariness.

I had taken for granted she had obtained the address, and let myself be guided by her. On the Mont Blanc bridge, where a few dark figures seemed lost in the wide and long perspective defined by the lights, she said —

"It isn't very far from our house. I somehow thought it couldn't be. The address is Rue de Carouge. I think it must be one of those big new houses for artisans."

She took my arm confidently, familiarly, and accelerated her pace. There was something primitive in our proceedings. We did not think of the resources of civilization. A late tramcar overtook us; a row of fiacres stood by the railing of the gardens. It never entered our heads to make use of these conveyances. She was too hurried, perhaps, and as to myself — well, she had taken my arm confidently. As we were ascending the easy incline of the Corraterie, all the shops shuttered and no light in any of the windows (as if all the mercenary population had fled at the end of the day), she said tentatively —

“I could run in for a moment to have a look at mother. It would not be much out of the way.”

I dissuaded her. If Mrs. Haldin really expected to see Razumov that night it would have been unwise to show herself without him. The sooner we got hold of the young man and brought him along to calm her mother’s agitation the better. She assented to my reasoning, and we crossed diagonally the Place de Theatre, bluish grey with its floor of slabs of stone, under the electric light, and the lonely equestrian statue all black in the middle. In the Rue de Carouge we were in the poorer quarters and approaching the outskirts of the town. Vacant building plots alternated with high, new houses. At the corner of a side street the crude light of a whitewashed shop fell into the night, fan-like, through a wide doorway. One could see from a distance the inner wall with its scantily furnished shelves, and the deal counter painted brown. That was the house. Approaching it along the dark stretch of a fence of tarred planks, we saw the narrow pallid face of the cut angle, five single windows high, without a gleam in them, and crowned by the heavy shadow of a jutting roof slope.

“We must inquire in the shop,” Miss Haldin directed me.

A sallow, thinly whiskered man, wearing a dingy white collar and a frayed tie, laid down a newspaper, and, leaning familiarly on both elbows far over the bare counter, answered that the person I was inquiring for was indeed his locataire on the third floor, but that for the moment he was out.

“For the moment,” I repeated, after a glance at Miss Haldin. “Does this mean that you expect him back at once?”

He was very gentle, with ingratiating eyes and soft lips. He smiled faintly as though he knew all about everything. Mr. Razumov, after being absent all day, had returned early in the evening. He was very surprised about half an hour or a little more since to see him come down again. Mr. Razumov left



his key, and in the course of some words which passed between them had remarked that he was going out because he needed air.

From behind the bare counter he went on smiling at us, his head held between his hands. Air. Air. But whether that meant a long or a short absence it was difficult to say. The night was very close, certainly.

After a pause, his ingratiating eyes turned to the door, he added —

“The storm shall drive him in.”

“There’s going to be a storm?” I asked.

“Why, yes!”

As if to confirm his words we heard a very distant, deep rumbling noise.

Consulting Miss Haldin by a glance, I saw her so reluctant to give up her quest that I asked the shopkeeper, in case Mr. Razumov came home within half an hour, to beg him to remain downstairs in the shop. We would look in again presently.

For all answer he moved his head imperceptibly. The approval of Miss Haldin was expressed by her silence. We walked slowly down the street, away from the town; the low garden walls of the modest villas doomed to demolition were overhung by the boughs of trees and masses of foliage, lighted from below by gas lamps. The violent and monotonous noise of the icy waters of the Arve falling over a low dam swept towards us with a chilly draught of air across a great open space, where a double line of lamp-lights outlined a street as yet without houses. But on the other shore, overhung by the awful blackness of the thunder-cloud, a solitary dim light seemed to watch us with a weary stare. When we had strolled as far as the bridge, I said —

“We had better get back....”

In the shop the sickly man was studying his smudgy newspaper, now spread out largely on the counter. He just raised his head when I looked in and shook it negatively, pursing up his lips. I rejoined Miss Haldin outside at once, and we moved off at a brisk pace. She remarked that she would send Anna with a note the first thing in the morning. I respected her taciturnity, silence being perhaps the best way to show my concern.

The semi-rural street we followed on our return changed gradually to the usual town thoroughfare, broad and deserted. We did not meet four people altogether, and the way seemed interminable, because my companion’s natural anxiety had communicated itself sympathetically to me. At last we turned into the Boulevard des Philosophes, more wide, more empty, more

dead — the very desolation of slumbering respectability. At the sight of the two lighted windows, very conspicuous from afar, I had the mental vision of Mrs. Haldin in her armchair keeping a dreadful, tormenting vigil under the evil spell of an arbitrary rule: a victim of tyranny and revolution, a sight at once cruel and absurd.

### III

“You will come in for a moment?” said Natalia Haldin.

I demurred on account of the late hour. “You know mother likes you so much,” she insisted.

“I will just come in to hear how your mother is.”

She said, as if to herself, “I don’t even know whether she will believe that I could not find Mr. Razumov, since she has taken it into her head that I am concealing something from her. You may be able to persuade her....”

“Your mother may mistrust me too,” I observed.

“You! Why? What could you have to conceal from her? You are not a Russian nor a conspirator.”

I felt profoundly my European remoteness, and said nothing, but I made up my mind to play my part of helpless spectator to the end. The distant rolling of thunder in the valley of the Rhone was coming nearer to the sleeping town of prosaic virtues and universal hospitality. We crossed the street opposite the great dark gateway, and Miss Haldin rang at the door of the apartment. It was opened almost instantly, as if the elderly maid had been waiting in the ante-room for our return. Her flat physiognomy had an air of satisfaction. The gentleman was there, she declared, while closing the door.

Neither of us understood. Miss Haldin turned round brusquely to her. “Who?”

“Herr Razumov,” she explained.

She had heard enough of our conversation before we left to know why her young mistress was going out. Therefore, when the gentleman gave his name at the door, she admitted him at once.

“No one could have foreseen that,” Miss Haldin murmured, with her serious grey eyes fixed upon mine. And, remembering the expression of the young man’s face seen not much more than four hours ago, the look of a haunted somnambulist, I wondered with a sort of awe.

“You asked my mother first?” Miss Haldin inquired of the maid.

“No. I announced the gentleman,” she answered, surprised at our troubled faces.

“Still,” I said in an undertone, “your mother was prepared.”

“Yes. But he has no idea....”

It seemed to me she doubted his tact. To her question how long the gentleman had been with her mother, the maid told us that Der Herr had been in the drawing-room no more than a short quarter of an hour.

She waited a moment, then withdrew, looking a little scared. Miss Haldin gazed at me in silence.

“As things have turned out,” I said, “you happen to know exactly what your brother’s friend has to tell your mother. And surely after that...”

“Yes,” said Natalia Haldin slowly. “I only wonder, as I was not here when he came, if it wouldn’t be better not to interrupt now.”

We remained silent, and I suppose we both strained our ears, but no sound reached us through the closed door. The features of Miss Haldin expressed a painful irresolution; she made a movement as if to go in, but checked herself. She had heard footsteps on the other side of the door. It came open, and Razumov, without pausing, stepped out into the ante-room. The fatigue of that day and the struggle with himself had changed him so much that I would have hesitated to recognize that face which, only a few hours before, when he brushed against me in front of the post office, had been startling enough but quite different. It had been not so livid then, and its eyes not so sombre. They certainly looked more sane now, but there was upon them the shadow of something consciously evil.

I speak of that, because, at first, their glance fell on me, though without any sort of recognition or even comprehension. I was simply in the line of his stare. I don’t know if he had heard the bell or expected to see anybody. He was going out, I believe, and I do not think that he saw Miss Haldin till she advanced towards him a step or two. He disregarded the hand she put out.

“It’s you, Natalia Victorovna.... Perhaps you are surprised...at this late hour. But, you see, I remembered our conversations in that garden. I thought really it was your wish that I should — without loss of time...so I came. No other reason. Simply to tell...”

He spoke with difficulty. I noticed that, and remembered his declaration to the man in the shop that he was going out because he “needed air.” If that

was his object, then it was clear that he had miserably failed. With downcast eyes and lowered head he made an effort to pick up the strangled phrase.

“To tell what I have heard myself only to-day — to-day....”

Through the door he had not closed I had a view of the drawing-room. It was lighted only by a shaded lamp — Mrs. Haldin’s eyes could not support either gas or electricity. It was a comparatively big room, and in contrast with the strongly lighted ante-room its length was lost in semi-transparent gloom backed by heavy shadows; and on that ground I saw the motionless figure of Mrs. Haldin, inclined slightly forward, with a pale hand resting on the arm of the chair.

She did not move. With the window before her she had no longer that attitude suggesting expectation. The blind was down; and outside there was only the night sky harbouring a thunder-cloud, and the town indifferent and hospitable in its cold, almost scornful, toleration — a respectable town of refuge to which all these sorrows and hopes were nothing. Her white head was bowed.

The thought that the real drama of autocracy is not played on the great stage of politics came to me as, fated to be a spectator, I had this other glimpse behind the scenes, something more profound than the words and gestures of the public play. I had the certitude that this mother, refused in her heart to give her son up after all. It was more than Rachel’s inconsolable mourning, it was something deeper, more inaccessible in its frightful tranquillity. Lost in the ill-defined mass of the high-backed chair, her white, inclined profile suggested the contemplation of something in her lap, as though a beloved head were resting there.

I had this glimpse behind the scenes, and then Miss Haldin, passing by the young man, shut the door. It was not done without hesitation. For a moment I thought that she would go to her mother, but she sent in only an anxious glance. Perhaps if Mrs. Haldin had moved...but no. There was in the immobility of that bloodless face the dreadful aloofness of suffering without remedy.

Meantime the young man kept his eyes fixed on the floor. The thought that he would have to repeat the story he had told already was intolerable to him. He had expected to find the two women together. And then, he had said to himself, it would be over for all time — for all time. “It’s lucky I don’t believe in another world,” he had thought cynically.

Alone in his room after having posted his secret letter, he had regained a certain measure of composure by writing in his secret diary. He was aware of the danger of that strange self-indulgence. He alludes to it himself, but he could not refrain. It calmed him — it reconciled him to his existence. He sat there scribbling by the light of a solitary candle, till it occurred to him that having heard the explanation of Haldin's arrest, as put forward by Sophia Antonovna, it behoved him to tell these ladies himself. They were certain to hear the tale through some other channel, and then his abstention would look strange, not only to the mother and sister of Haldin, but to other people also. Having come to this conclusion, he did not discover in himself any marked reluctance to face the necessity, and very soon an anxiety to be done with it began to torment him. He looked at his watch. No; it was not absolutely too late.

The fifteen minutes with Mrs. Haldin were like the revenge of the unknown: that white face, that weak, distinct voice; that head, at first turned to him eagerly, then, after a while, bowed again and motionless — in the dim, still light of the room in which his words which he tried to subdue resounded so loudly — had troubled him like some strange discovery. And there seemed to be a secret obstinacy in that sorrow, something he could not understand; at any rate, something he had not expected. Was it hostile? But it did not matter. Nothing could touch him now; in the eyes of the revolutionists there was now no shadow on his past. The phantom of Haldin had been indeed walked over, was left behind lying powerless and passive on the pavement covered with snow. And this was the phantom's mother consumed with grief and white as a ghost. He had felt a pitying surprise. But that, of course, was of no importance. Mothers did not matter. He could not shake off the poignant impression of that silent, quiet, white-haired woman, but a sort of sternness crept into his thoughts. These were the consequences. Well, what of it? "Am I then on a bed of roses?" he had exclaimed to himself, sitting at some distance with his eyes fixed upon that figure of sorrow. He had said all he had to say to her, and when he had finished she had not uttered a word. She had turned away her head while he was speaking. The silence which had fallen on his last words had lasted for five minutes or more. What did it mean? Before its incomprehensible character he became conscious of anger in his stern mood, the old anger against Haldin reawakened by the contemplation of Haldin's mother. And was it not something like enviousness which gripped his heart, as if of a

privilege denied to him alone of all the men that had ever passed through this world? It was the other who had attained to repose and yet continued to exist in the affection of that mourning old woman, in the thoughts of all these people posing for lovers of humanity. It was impossible to get rid of him. "It's myself whom I have given up to destruction," thought Razumov. "He has induced me to do it. I can't shake him off."

Alarmed by that discovery, he got up and strode out of the silent, dim room with its silent old woman in the chair, that mother! He never looked back. It was frankly a flight. But on opening the door he saw his retreat cut off: There was the sister. He had never forgotten the sister, only he had not expected to see her then — or ever any more, perhaps. Her presence in the ante-room was as unforeseen as the apparition of her brother had been. Razumov gave a start as though he had discovered himself cleverly trapped. He tried to smile, but could not manage it, and lowered his eyes. "Must I repeat that silly story now?" he asked himself, and felt a sinking sensation. Nothing solid had passed his lips since the day before, but he was not in a state to analyse the origins of his weakness. He meant to take up his hat and depart with as few words as possible, but Miss Haldin's swift movement to shut the door took him by surprise. He half turned after her, but without raising his eyes, passively, just as a feather might stir in the disturbed air. The next moment she was back in the place she had started from, with another half-turn on his part, so that they came again into the same relative positions.

"Yes, yes," she said hurriedly. "I am very grateful to you, Kirylo Sidorovitch, for coming at once — like this.... Only, I wish I had.... Did mother tell you?"

"I wonder what she could have told me that I did not know before," he said, obviously to himself, but perfectly audible. "Because I always did know it," he added louder, as if in despair.

He hung his head. He had such a strong sense of Natalia Haldin's presence that to look at her he felt would be a relief. It was she who had been haunting him now. He had suffered that persecution ever since she had suddenly appeared before him in the garden of the Villa Borel with an extended hand and the name of her brother on her lips.... The ante-room had a row of hooks on the wall nearest to the outer door, while against the wall opposite there stood a small dark table and one chair. The paper, bearing a very faint design, was all but white. The light of an electric bulb high up

under the ceiling searched that clear square box into its four bare corners, crudely, without shadows — a strange stage for an obscure drama.

“What do you mean?” asked Miss Haldin. “What is it that you knew always?”

He raised his face, pale, full of unexpressed suffering. But that look in his eyes of dull, absent obstinacy, which struck and surprised everybody he was talking to, began to pass away. It was as though he were coming to himself in the awakened consciousness of that marvellous harmony of feature, of lines, of glances, of voice, which made of the girl before him a being so rare, outside, and, as it were, above the common notion of beauty. He looked at her so long that she coloured slightly.

“What is it that you knew?” she repeated vaguely.

That time he managed to smile.

“Indeed, if it had not been for a word of greeting or two, I would doubt whether your mother was aware at all of my existence. You understand?”

Natalia Haldin nodded; her hands moved slightly by her side.

“Yes. Is it not heart-breaking? She has not shed a tear yet — not a single tear.”

“Not a tear! And you, Natalia Victorovna? You have been able to cry?”

“I have. And then I am young enough, Kirylo Sidorovitch, to believe in the future. But when I see my mother so terribly distracted, I almost forget everything. I ask myself whether one should feel proud — or only resigned. We had such a lot of people coming to see us. There were utter strangers who wrote asking for permission to call to present their respects. It was impossible to keep our door shut for ever. You know that Peter Ivanovitch himself.... Oh yes, there was much sympathy, but there were persons who exulted openly at that death. Then, when I was left alone with poor mother, all this seemed so wrong in spirit, something not worth the price she is paying for it. But directly I heard you were here in Geneva, Kirylo Sidorovitch, I felt that you were the only person who could assist me....”

“In comforting a bereaved mother? Yes!” he broke in in a manner which made her open her clear unsuspecting eyes. “But there is a question of fitness. Has this occurred to you?”

There was a breathlessness in his utterance which contrasted with the monstrous hint of mockery in his intention.

“Why!” whispered Natalia Haldin with feeling. “Who more fit than you?”

He had a convulsive movement of exasperation, but controlled himself.

“Indeed! Directly you heard that I was in Geneva, before even seeing me? It is another proof of that confidence which....”

All at once his tone changed, became more incisive and more detached.

“Men are poor creatures, Natalia Victorovna. They have no intuition of sentiment. In order to speak fittingly to a mother of her lost son one must have had some experience of the filial relation. It is not the case with me — if you must know the whole truth. Your hopes have to deal here with ‘a breast unwarmed by any affection,’ as the poet says.... That does not mean it is insensible,” he added in a lower tone.

“I am certain your heart is not unfeeling,” said Miss Haldin softly.

“No. It is not as hard as a stone,” he went on in the same introspective voice, and looking as if his heart were lying as heavy as a stone in that unwarmed breast of which he spoke. “No, not so hard. But how to prove what you give me credit for — ah! that’s another question. No one has ever expected such a thing from me before. No one whom my tenderness would have been of any use to. And now you come. You! Now! No, Natalia Victorovna. It’s too late. You come too late. You must expect nothing from me.”

She recoiled from him a little, though he had made no movement, as if she had seen some change in his face, charging his words with the significance of some hidden sentiment they shared together. To me, the silent spectator, they looked like two people becoming conscious of a spell which had been lying on them ever since they first set eyes on each other. Had either of them cast a glance then in my direction, I would have opened the door quietly and gone out. But neither did; and I remained, every fear of indiscretion lost in the sense of my enormous remoteness from their captivity within the sombre horizon of Russian problems, the boundary of their eyes, of their feelings — the prison of their souls.

Frank, courageous, Miss Haldin controlled her voice in the midst of her trouble.

“What can this mean?” she asked, as if speaking to herself.

“It may mean that you have given yourself up to vain imaginings while I have managed to remain amongst the truth of things and the realities of life — our Russian life — such as they are.”

“They are cruel,” she murmured.



“And ugly. Don’t forget that — and ugly. Look where you like. Look near you, here abroad where you are, and then look back at home, whence you came.”

“One must look beyond the present.” Her tone had an ardent conviction.

“The blind can do that best. I have had the misfortune to be born clear-eyed. And if you only knew what strange things I have seen! What amazing and unexpected apparitions!... But why talk of all this?”

“On the contrary, I want to talk of all this with you,” she protested with earnest serenity. The sombre humours of her brother’s friend left her unaffected, as though that bitterness, that suppressed anger, were the signs of an indignant rectitude. She saw that he was not an ordinary person, and perhaps she did not want him to be other than he appeared to her trustful eyes. “Yes, with you especially,” she insisted. “With you of all the Russian people in the world...” A faint smile dwelt for a moment on her lips. “I am like poor mother in a way. I too seem unable to give up our beloved dead, who, don’t forget, was all in all to us. I don’t want to abuse your sympathy, but you must understand that it is in you that we can find all that is left of his generous soul.”

I was looking at him; not a muscle of his face moved in the least. And yet, even at the time, I did not suspect him of insensibility. It was a sort of rapt thoughtfulness. Then he stirred slightly.

“You are going, Kirylo Sidorovitch?” she asked.

“I! Going? Where? Oh yes, but I must tell you first...” His voice was muffled and he forced himself to produce it with visible repugnance, as if speech were something disgusting or deadly. “That story, you know — the story I heard this afternoon....”

“I know the story already,” she said sadly.

“You know it! Have you correspondents in St. Petersburg too?”

“No. It’s Sophia Antonovna. I have seen her just now. She sends you her greetings. She is going away to-morrow.”

He had lowered at last his fascinated glance; she too was looking down, and standing thus before each other in the glaring light, between the four bare walls, they seemed brought out from the confused immensity of the Eastern borders to be exposed cruelly to the observation of my Western eyes. And I observed them. There was nothing else to do. My existence seemed so utterly forgotten by these two that I dared not now make a movement. And I thought to myself that, of course, they had to come

together, the sister and the friend of that dead man. The ideas, the hopes, the aspirations, the cause of Freedom, expressed in their common affection for Victor Haldin, the moral victim of autocracy, — all this must draw them to each other fatally. Her very ignorance and his loneliness to which he had alluded so strangely must work to that end. And, indeed, I saw that the work was done already. Of course. It was manifest that they must have been thinking of each other for a long time before they met. She had the letter from that beloved brother kindling her imagination by the severe praise attached to that one name; and for him to see that exceptional girl was enough. The only cause for surprise was his gloomy aloofness before her clearly expressed welcome. But he was young, and however austere and devoted to his revolutionary ideals, he was not blind. The period of reserve was over; he was coming forward in his own way. I could not mistake the significance of this late visit, for in what he had to say there was nothing urgent. The true cause dawned upon me: he had discovered that he needed her and she was moved by the same feeling. It was the second time that I saw them together, and I knew that next time they met I would not be there, either remembered or forgotten. I would have virtually ceased to exist for both these young people.

I made this discovery in a very few moments. Meantime, Natalia Haldin was telling Razumov briefly of our peregrinations from one end of Geneva to the other. While speaking she raised her hands above her head to untie her veil, and that movement displayed for an instant the seductive grace of her youthful figure, clad in the simplest of mourning. In the transparent shadow the hat rim threw on her face her grey eyes had an enticing lustre. Her voice, with its unfeminine yet exquisite timbre, was steady, and she spoke quickly, frank, unembarrassed. As she justified her action by the mental state of her mother, a spasm of pain marred the generously confiding harmony of her features. I perceived that with his downcast eyes he had the air of a man who is listening to a strain of music rather than to articulated speech. And in the same way, after she had ceased, he seemed to listen yet, motionless, as if under the spell of suggestive sound. He came to himself, muttering —

“Yes, yes. She has not shed a tear. She did not seem to hear what I was saying. I might have told her anything. She looked as if no longer belonging to this world.”

Miss Haldin gave signs of profound distress. Her voice faltered. "You don't know how bad it has come to be. She expects now to see him!" The veil dropped from her fingers and she clasped her hands in anguish. "It shall end by her seeing him," she cried.

Razumov raised his head sharply and attached on her a prolonged thoughtful glance.

"H'm. That's very possible," he muttered in a peculiar tone, as if giving his opinion on a matter of fact. "I wonder what..." He checked himself.

"That would be the end. Her mind shall be gone then, and her spirit will follow."

Miss Haldin unclasped her hands and let them fall by her side.

"You think so?" he queried profoundly. Miss Haldin's lips were slightly parted. Something unexpected and unfathomable in that young man's character had fascinated her from the first. "No! There's neither truth nor consolation to be got from the phantoms of the dead," he added after a weighty pause. "I might have told her something true; for instance, that your brother meant to save his life — to escape. There can be no doubt of that. But I did not."

"You did not! But why?"

"I don't know. Other thoughts came into my head," he answered. He seemed to me to be watching himself inwardly, as though he were trying to count his own heart-beats, while his eyes never for a moment left the face of the girl. "You were not there," he continued. "I had made up my mind never to see you again."

This seemed to take her breath away for a moment.

"You.... How is it possible?"

"You may well ask.... However, I think that I refrained from telling your mother from prudence. I might have assured her that in the last conversation he held as a free man he mentioned you both...."

"That last conversation was with you," she struck in her deep, moving voice. "Some day you must...."

"It was with me. Of you he said that you had trustful eyes. And why I have not been able to forget that phrase I don't know. It meant that there is in you no guile, no deception, no falsehood, no suspicion — nothing in your heart that could give you a conception of a living, acting, speaking lie, if ever it came in your way. That you are a predestined victim.... Ha! what a devilish suggestion!"

The convulsive, uncontrolled tone of the last words disclosed the precarious hold he had over himself. He was like a man defying his own dizziness in high places and tottering suddenly on the very edge of the precipice. Miss Haldin pressed her hand to her breast. The dropped black veil lay on the floor between them. Her movement steadied him. He looked intently on that hand till it descended slowly, and then raised again his eyes to her face. But he did not give her time to speak.

“No? You don’t understand? Very well.” He had recovered his calm by a miracle of will. “So you talked with Sophia Antonovna?”

“Yes. Sophia Antonovna told me....” Miss Haldin stopped, wonder growing in her wide eyes.

“H’m. That’s the respectable enemy,” he muttered, as though he were alone.

“The tone of her references to you was extremely friendly,” remarked Miss Haldin, after waiting for a while.

“Is that your impression? And she the most intelligent of the lot, too. Things then are going as well as possible. Everything conspires to...Ah! these conspirators,” he said slowly, with an accent of scorn; “they would get hold of you in no time! You know, Natalia Victorovna, I have the greatest difficulty in saving myself from the superstition of an active Providence. It’s irresistible.... The alternative, of course, would be the personal Devil of our simple ancestors. But, if so, he has overdone it altogether — the old Father of Lies — our national patron — our domestic god, whom we take with us when we go abroad. He has overdone it. It seems that I am not simple enough.... That’s it! I ought to have known.... And I did know it,” he added in a tone of poignant distress which overcame my astonishment.

“This man is deranged,” I said to myself, very much frightened.

The next moment he gave me a very special impression beyond the range of commonplace definitions. It was as though he had stabbed himself outside and had come in there to show it; and more than that — as though he were turning the knife in the wound and watching the effect. That was the impression, rendered in physical terms. One could not defend oneself from a certain amount of pity. But it was for Miss Haldin, already so tried in her deepest affections, that I felt a serious concern. Her attitude, her face, expressed compassion struggling with doubt on the verge of terror.

“What is it, Kirylo Sidorovitch?” There was a hint of tenderness in that cry. He only stared at her in that complete surrender of all his faculties

which in a happy lover would have had the name of ecstasy.

“Why are you looking at me like this, Kirylo Sidorovitch? I have approached you frankly. I need at this time to see clearly in myself....” She ceased for a moment as if to give him an opportunity to utter at last some word worthy of her exalted trust in her brother’s friend. His silence became impressive, like a sign of a momentous resolution.

In the end Miss Haldin went on, appealingly —

“I have waited for you anxiously. But now that you have been moved to come to us in your kindness, you alarm me. You speak obscurely. It seems as if you were keeping back something from me.”

“Tell me, Natalia Victorovna,” he was heard at last in a strange unringing voice, “whom did you see in that place?”

She was startled, and as if deceived in her expectations.

“Where? In Peter Ivanovitch’s rooms? There was Mr. Laspara and three other people.”

“Ha! The vanguard — the forlorn hope of the great plot,” he commented to himself. “Bearers of the spark to start an explosion which is meant to change fundamentally the lives of so many millions in order that Peter Ivanovitch should be the head of a State.”

“You are teasing me,” she said. “Our dear one told me once to remember that men serve always something greater than themselves — the idea.”

“Our dear one,” he repeated slowly. The effort he made to appear unmoved absorbed all the force of his soul. He stood before her like a being with hardly a breath of life. His eyes, even as under great physical suffering, had lost all their fire. “Ah! your brother.... But on your lips, in your voice, it sounds...and indeed in you everything is divine.... I wish I could know the innermost depths of your thoughts, of your feelings.”

“But why, Kirylo Sidorovitch?” she cried, alarmed by these words coming out of strangely lifeless lips.

“Have no fear. It is not to betray you. So you went there?... And Sophia Antonovna, what did she tell you, then?”

“She said very little, really. She knew that I should hear everything from you. She had no time for more than a few words.” Miss Haldin’s voice dropped and she became silent for a moment. “The man, it appears, has taken his life,” she said sadly.

“Tell me, Natalia Victorovna,” he asked after a pause, “do you believe in remorse?”

“What a question!”

“What can you know of it?” he muttered thickly. “It is not for such as you.... What I meant to ask was whether you believed in the efficacy of remorse?”

She hesitated as though she had not understood, then her face lighted up.

“Yes,” she said firmly.

“So he is absolved. Moreover, that Ziemianitch was a brute, a drunken brute.”

A shudder passed through Natalia Haldin.

“But a man of the people,” Razumov went on, “to whom they, the revolutionists, tell a tale of sublime hopes. Well, the people must be forgiven.... And you must not believe all you’ve heard from that source, either,” he added, with a sort of sinister reluctance.

“You are concealing something from me,” she exclaimed.

“Do you, Natalia Victorovna, believe in the duty of revenge?”

“Listen, Kirylo Sidorovitch. I believe that the future shall be merciful to us all. Revolutionist and reactionary, victim and executioner, betrayer and betrayed, they shall all be pitied together when the light breaks on our black sky at last. Pitied and forgotten; for without that there can be no union and no love.”

“I hear. No revenge for you, then? Never? Not the least bit?” He smiled bitterly with his colourless lips. “You yourself are like the very spirit of that merciful future. Strange that it does not make it easier.... No! But suppose that the real betrayer of your brother — Ziemianitch had a part in it too, but insignificant and quite involuntary — suppose that he was a young man, educated, an intellectual worker, thoughtful, a man your brother might have trusted lightly, perhaps, but still — suppose.... But there’s a whole story there.”

“And you know the story! But why, then — ”

“I have heard it. There is a staircase in it, and even phantoms, but that does not matter if a man always serves something greater than himself — the idea. I wonder who is the greatest victim in that tale?”

“In that tale!” Miss Haldin repeated. She seemed turned into stone.

“Do you know why I came to you? It is simply because there is no one anywhere in the whole great world I could go to. Do you understand what I

say? Not one to go to. Do you conceive the desolation of the thought — no one — to — go — to?”

Utterly misled by her own enthusiastic interpretation of two lines in the letter of a visionary, under the spell of her own dread of lonely days, in their overshadowed world of angry strife, she was unable to see the truth struggling on his lips. What she was conscious of was the obscure form of his suffering. She was on the point of extending her hand to him impulsively when he spoke again.

“An hour after I saw you first I knew how it would be. The terrors of remorse, revenge, confession, anger, hate, fear, are like nothing to the atrocious temptation which you put in my way the day you appeared before me with your voice, with your face, in the garden of that accursed villa.”

She looked utterly bewildered for a moment; then, with a sort of despairing insight went straight to the point.

“The story, Kirylo Sidorovitch, the story!”

“There is no more to tell!” He made a movement forward, and she actually put her hand on his shoulder to push him away; but her strength failed her, and he kept his ground, though trembling in every limb. “It ends here — on this very spot.” He pressed a denunciatory finger to his breast with force, and became perfectly still.

I ran forward, snatching up the chair, and was in time to catch hold of Miss Haldin and lower her down. As she sank into it she swung half round on my arm, and remained averted from us both, drooping over the back. He looked at her with an appalling expressionless tranquillity. Incredulity, struggling with astonishment, anger, and disgust, deprived me for a time of the power of speech. Then I turned on him, whispering from very rage —

“This is monstrous. What are you staying for? Don’t let her catch sight of you again. Go away!...” He did not budge. “Don’t you understand that your presence is intolerable — even to me? If there’s any sense of shame in you....”

Slowly his sullen eyes moved in my direction. “How did this old man come here?” he muttered, astounded.

Suddenly Miss Haldin sprang up from the chair, made a few steps, and tottered. Forgetting my indignation, and even the man himself, I hurried to her assistance. I took her by the arm, and she let me lead her into the drawing-room. Away from the lamp, in the deeper dusk of the distant end, the profile of Mrs. Haldin, her hands, her whole figure had the stillness of a

sombre painting. Miss Haldin stopped, and pointed mournfully at the tragic immobility of her mother, who seemed to watch a beloved head lying in her lap.

That gesture had an unequalled force of expression, so far-reaching in its human distress that one could not believe that it pointed out merely the ruthless working of political institutions. After assisting Miss Haldin to the sofa, I turned round to go back and shut the door. Framed in the opening, in the searching glare of the white anteroom, my eyes fell on Razumov, still there, standing before the empty chair, as if rooted for ever to the spot of his atrocious confession. A wonder came over me that the mysterious force which had torn it out of him had failed to destroy his life, to shatter his body. It was there unscathed. I stared at the broad line of his shoulders, his dark head, the amazing immobility of his limbs. At his feet the veil dropped by Miss Haldin looked intensely black in the white crudity of the light. He was gazing at it spell-bound. Next moment, stooping with an incredible, savage swiftness, he snatched it up and pressed it to his face with both hands. Something, extreme astonishment perhaps, dimmed my eyes, so that he seemed to vanish before he moved.

The slamming of the outer door restored my sight, and I went on contemplating the empty chair in the empty ante-room. The meaning of what I had seen reached my mind with a staggering shock. I seized Natalia Haldin by the shoulder.

“That miserable wretch has carried off your veil!” I cried, in the scared, deadened voice of an awful discovery. “He...”

The rest remained unspoken. I stepped back and looked down at her, in silent horror. Her hands were lying lifelessly, palms upwards, on her lap. She raised her grey eyes slowly. Shadows seemed to come and go in them as if the steady flame of her soul had been made to vacillate at last in the cross-currents of poisoned air from the corrupted dark immensity claiming her for its own, where virtues themselves fester into crimes in the cynicism of oppression and revolt.

“It is impossible to be more unhappy...” The languid whisper of her voice struck me with dismay. “It is impossible.... I feel my heart becoming like ice.”

#### IV

Razumov walked straight home on the wet glistening pavement. A heavy shower passed over him; distant lightning played faintly against the fronts



of the dumb houses with the shuttered shops all along the Rue de Carouge; and now and then, after the faint flash, there was a faint, sleepy rumble; but the main forces of the thunderstorm remained massed down the Rhone valley as if loath to attack the respectable and passionless abode of democratic liberty, the serious-minded town of dreary hotels, tendering the same indifferent, hospitality to tourists of all nations and to international conspirators of every shade.

The owner of the shop was making ready to close when Razumov entered and without a word extended his hand for the key of his room. On reaching it for him, from a shelf, the man was about to pass a small joke as to taking the air in a thunderstorm, but, after looking at the face of his lodger, he only observed, just to say something —

“You’ve got very wet.”

“Yes, I am washed clean,” muttered Razumov, who was dripping from head to foot, and passed through the inner door towards the staircase leading to his room.

He did not change his clothes, but, after lighting the candle, took off his watch and chain, laid them on the table, and sat down at once to write. The book of his compromising record was kept in a locked drawer, which he pulled out violently, and did not even trouble to push back afterwards.

In this queer pedantism of a man who had read, thought, lived, pen in hand, there is the sincerity of the attempt to grapple by the same means with another profounder knowledge. After some passages which have been already made use of in the building up of this narrative, or add nothing new to the psychological side of this disclosure (there is even one more allusion to the silver medal in this last entry), comes a page and a half of incoherent writing where his expression is baffled by the novelty and the mysteriousness of that side of our emotional life to which his solitary existence had been a stranger. Then only he begins to address directly the reader he had in his mind, trying to express in broken sentences, full of wonder and awe, the sovereign (he uses that very word) power of her person over his imagination, in which lay the dormant seed of her brother’s words.

“... The most trustful eyes in the world — your brother said of you when he was as well as a dead man already. And when you stood before me with your hand extended, I remembered the very sound of his voice, and I looked into your eyes — and that was enough. I knew that something had

happened, but I did not know then what.... But don't be deceived, Natalia Victorovna. I believed that I had in my breast nothing but an inexhaustible fund of anger and hate for you both. I remembered that he had looked to you for the perpetuation of his visionary soul. He, this man who had robbed me of my hard-working, purposeful existence. I, too, had my guiding idea; and remember that, amongst us, it is more difficult to lead a life of toil and self-denial than to go out in the street and kill from conviction. But enough of that. Hate or no hate, I felt at once that, while shunning the sight of you, I could never succeed in driving away your image. I would say, addressing that dead man, 'Is this the way you are going to haunt me?' It is only later on that I understood — only to-day, only a few hours ago. What could I have known of what was tearing me to pieces and dragging the secret for ever to my lips? You were appointed to undo the evil by making me betray myself back into truth and peace. You! And you have done it in the same way, too, in which he ruined me: by forcing upon me your confidence. Only what I detested him for, in you ended by appearing noble and exalted. But, I repeat, be not deceived. I was given up to evil. I exulted in having induced that silly innocent fool to steal his father's money. He was a fool, but not a thief. I made him one. It was necessary. I had to confirm myself in my contempt and hate for what I betrayed. I have suffered from as many vipers in my heart as any social democrat of them all — vanity, ambitions, jealousies, shameful desires, evil passions of envy and revenge. I had my security stolen from me, years of good work, my best hopes. Listen — now comes the true confession. The other was nothing. To save me, your trustful eyes had to entice my thought to the very edge of the blackest treachery. I could see them constantly looking at me with the confidence of your pure heart which had not been touched by evil things. Victor Haldin had stolen the truth of my life from me, who had nothing else in the world, and he boasted of living on through you on this earth where I had no place to lay my head on. She will marry some day, he had said — and your eyes were trustful. And do you know what I said to myself? I shall steal his sister's soul from her. When we met that first morning in the gardens, and you spoke to me confidingly in the generosity of your spirit, I was thinking, 'Yes, he himself by talking of her trustful eyes has delivered her into my hands!' If you could have looked then into my heart, you would have cried out aloud with terror and disgust.

“Perhaps no one will believe the baseness of such an intention to be possible. It’s certain that, when we parted that morning, I gloated over it. I brooded upon the best way. The old man you introduced me to insisted on walking with me. I don’t know who he is. He talked of you, of your lonely, helpless state, and every word of that friend of yours was egging me on to the unpardonable sin of stealing a soul. Could he have been the devil himself in the shape of an old Englishman? Natalia Victorovna, I was possessed! I returned to look at you every day, and drink in your presence the poison of my infamous intention. But I foresaw difficulties. Then Sophia Antonovna, of whom I was not thinking — I had forgotten her existence — appears suddenly with that tale from St. Petersburg.... The only thing needed to make me safe — a trusted revolutionist for ever.

“It was as if Ziemianitch had hanged himself to help me on to further crime. The strength of falsehood seemed irresistible. These people stood doomed by the folly and the illusion that was in them — they being themselves the slaves of lies. Natalia Victorovna, I embraced the might of falsehood, I exulted in it — I gave myself up to it for a time. Who could have resisted! You yourself were the prize of it. I sat alone in my room, planning a life, the very thought of which makes me shudder now, like a believer who had been tempted to an atrocious sacrilege. But I brooded ardently over its images. The only thing was that there seemed to be no air in it. And also I was afraid of your mother. I never knew mine. I’ve never known any kind of love. There is something in the mere word.... Of you, I was not afraid — forgive me for telling you this. No, not of you. You were truth itself. You could not suspect me. As to your mother, you yourself feared already that her mind had given way from grief. Who could believe anything against me? Had not Ziemianitch hanged himself from remorse? I said to myself, ‘Let’s put it to the test, and be done with it once for all.’ I trembled when I went in; but your mother hardly listened to what I was saying to her, and, in a little while, seemed to have forgotten my very existence. I sat looking at her. There was no longer anything between you and me. You were defenceless — and soon, very soon, you would be alone.... I thought of you. Defenceless. For days you have talked with me — opening your heart. I remembered the shadow of your eyelashes over your grey trustful eyes. And your pure forehead! It is low like the forehead of statues — calm, unstained. It was as if your pure brow bore a light which fell on me, searched my heart and saved me from ignominy, from ultimate

undoing. And it saved you too. Pardon my presumption. But there was that in your glances which seemed to tell me that you.... Your light! your truth! I felt that I must tell you that I had ended by loving you. And to tell you that I must first confess. Confess, go out — and perish.

“Suddenly you stood before me! You alone in all the world to whom I must confess. You fascinated me — you have freed me from the blindness of anger and hate — the truth shining in you drew the truth out of me. Now I have done it; and as I write here, I am in the depths depths of anguish, but there is air to breathe at last — air! And, by the by, that old man sprang up from somewhere as I was speaking to you, and raged at me like a disappointed devil. I suffer horribly, but I am not in despair. There is only one more thing to do for me. After that — if they let me — I shall go away and bury myself in obscure misery. In giving Victor Haldin up, it was myself, after all, whom I have betrayed most basely. You must believe what I say now, you can’t refuse to believe this. Most basely. It is through you that I came to feel this so deeply. After all, it is they and not I who have the right on their side? — theirs is the strength of invisible powers. So be it. Only don’t be deceived, Natalia Victorovna, I am not converted. Have I then the soul of a slave? No! I am independent — and therefore perdition is my lot.”

On these words, he stopped writing, shut the book, and wrapped it in the black veil he had carried off. He then ransacked the drawers for paper and string, made up a parcel which he addressed to Miss Haldin, Boulevard des Philosophes, and then flung the pen away from him into a distant corner.

This done, he sat down with the watch before him. He could have gone out at once, but the hour had not struck yet. The hour would be midnight. There was no reason for that choice except that the facts and the words of a certain evening in his past were timing his conduct in the present. The sudden power Natalia Haldin had gained over him he ascribed to the same cause. “You don’t walk with impunity over a phantom’s breast,” he heard himself mutter. “Thus he saves me,” he thought suddenly. “He himself, the betrayed man.” The vivid image of Miss Haldin seemed to stand by him, watching him relentlessly. She was not disturbing. He had done with life, and his thought even in her presence tried to take an impartial survey. Now his scorn extended to himself. “I had neither the simplicity nor the courage nor the self-possession to be a scoundrel, or an exceptionally able man. For

who, with us in Russia, is to tell a scoundrel from an exceptionally able man?..."

He was the puppet of his past, because at the very stroke of midnight he jumped up and ran swiftly downstairs as if confident that, by the power of destiny, the house door would fly open before the absolute necessity of his errand. And as a matter of fact, just as he got to the bottom of the stairs, it was opened for him by some people of the house coming home late — two men and a woman. He slipped out through them into the street, swept then by a fitful gust of wind. They were, of course, very much startled. A flash of lightning enabled them to observe him walking away quickly. One of the men shouted, and was starting in pursuit, but the woman had recognized him. "It's all right. It's only that young Russian from the third floor." The darkness returned with a single clap of thunder, like a gun fired for a warning of his escape from the prison of lies.

He must have heard at some time or other and now remembered unconsciously that there was to be a gathering of revolutionists at the house of Julius Laspara that evening. At any rate, he made straight for the Laspara house, and found himself without surprise ringing at its street door, which, of course, was closed. By that time the thunderstorm had attacked in earnest. The steep incline of the street ran with water, the thick fall of rain enveloped him like a luminous veil in the play of lightning. He was perfectly calm, and, between the crashes, listened attentively to the delicate tinkling of the doorbell somewhere within the house.

There was some difficulty before he was admitted. His person was not known to that one of the guests who had volunteered to go downstairs and see what was the matter. Razumov argued with him patiently. There could be no harm in admitting a caller. He had something to communicate to the company upstairs.

"Something of importance?"

"That'll be for the hearers to judge."

"Urgent?"

"Without a moment's delay."

Meantime, one of the Laspara daughters descended the stairs, small lamp in hand, in a grimy and crumpled gown, which seemed to hang on her by a miracle, and looking more than ever like an old doll with a dusty brown wig, dragged from under a sofa. She recognized Razumov at once.

"How do you do? Of course you may come in."

Following her light, Razumov climbed two flights of stairs from the lower darkness. Leaving the lamp on a bracket on the landing, she opened a door, and went in, accompanied by the sceptical guest. Razumov entered last. He closed the door behind him, and stepping on one side, put his back against the wall.

The three little rooms en suite, with low, smoky ceilings and lit by paraffin lamps, were crammed with people. Loud talking was going on in all three, and tea-glasses, full, half-full, and empty, stood everywhere, even on the floor. The other Laspara girl sat, dishevelled and languid, behind an enormous samovar. In the inner doorway Razumov had a glimpse of the protuberance of a large stomach, which he recognized. Only a few feet from him Julius Laspara was getting down hurriedly from his high stool.

The appearance of the midnight visitor caused no small sensation. Laspara is very summary in his version of that night's happenings. After some words of greeting, disregarded by Razumov, Laspara (ignoring purposely his guest's soaked condition and his extraordinary manner of presenting himself) mentioned something about writing an article. He was growing uneasy, and Razumov appeared absent-minded. "I have written already all I shall ever write," he said at last, with a little laugh.

The whole company's attention was riveted on the new-comer, dripping with water, deadly pale, and keeping his position against the wall. Razumov put Laspara gently aside, as though he wished to be seen from head to foot by everybody. By then the buzz of conversations had died down completely, even in the most distant of the three rooms. The doorway facing Razumov became blocked by men and women, who craned their necks and certainly seemed to expect something startling to happen.

A squeaky, insolent declaration was heard from that group.

"I know this ridiculously conceited individual."

"What individual?" asked Razumov, raising his bowed head, and searching with his eyes all the eyes fixed upon him. An intense surprised silence lasted for a time. "If it's me...."

He stopped, thinking over the form of his confession, and found it suddenly, unavoidably suggested by the fateful evening of his life.

"I am come here," he began, in a clear voice, "to talk of an individual called Ziemianitch. Sophia Antonovna has informed me that she would make public a certain letter from St. Petersburg...."

“Sophia Antonovna has left us early in the evening,” said Laspara. “It’s quite correct. Everybody here has heard....”

“Very well,” Razumov interrupted, with a shade of impatience, for his heart was beating strongly. Then, mastering his voice so far that there was even a touch of irony in his clear, forcible enunciation —

“In justice to that individual, the much ill-used peasant, Ziemianitch, I now declare solemnly that the conclusions of that letter calumniate a man of the people — a bright Russian soul. Ziemianitch had nothing to do with the actual arrest of Victor Haldin.”

Razumov dwelt on the name heavily, and then waited till the faint, mournful murmur which greeted it had died out.

“Victor Victorovitch Haldin,” he began again, “acting with, no doubt, noble-minded imprudence, took refuge with a certain student of whose opinions he knew nothing but what his own illusions suggested to his generous heart. It was an unwise display of confidence. But I am not here to appreciate the actions of Victor Haldin. Am I to tell you of the feelings of that student, sought out in his obscure solitude, and menaced by the complicity forced upon him? Am I to tell you what he did? It’s a rather complicated story. In the end the student went to General T — - himself, and said, ‘I have the man who killed de P — - locked up in my room, Victor Haldin — a student like myself.’“

A great buzz arose, in which Razumov raised his voice.

“Observe — that man had certain honest ideals in view. But I didn’t come here to explain him.”

“No. But you must explain how you know all this,” came in grave tones from somebody.

“A vile coward!” This simple cry vibrated with indignation. “Name him!” shouted other voices.

“What are you clamouring for?” said Razumov disdainfully, in the profound silence which fell on the raising of his hand. “Haven’t you all understood that I am that man?”

Laspara went away brusquely from his side and climbed upon his stool. In the first forward surge of people towards him, Razumov expected to be torn to pieces, but they fell back without touching him, and nothing came of it but noise. It was bewildering. His head ached terribly. In the confused uproar he made out several times the name of Peter Ivanovitch, the word “judgement,” and the phrase, “But this is a confession,” uttered by

somebody in a desperate shriek. In the midst of the tumult, a young man, younger than himself, approached him with blazing eyes.

"I must beg you," he said, with venomous politeness, "to be good enough not to move from this spot till you are told what you are to do."

Razumov shrugged his shoulders. "I came in voluntarily."

"Maybe. But you won't go out till you are permitted," retorted the other.

He beckoned with his hand, calling out, "Louisa! Louisa! come here, please"; and, presently, one of the Laspara girls (they had been staring at Razumov from behind the samovar) came along, trailing a bedraggled tail of dirty flounces, and dragging with her a chair, which she set against the door, and, sitting down on it, crossed her legs. The young man thanked her effusively, and rejoined a group carrying on an animated discussion in low tones. Razumov lost himself for a moment.

A squeaky voice screamed, "Confession or no confession, you are a police spy!"

The revolutionist Nikita had pushed his way in front of Razumov, and faced him with his big, livid cheeks, his heavy paunch, bull neck, and enormous hands. Razumov looked at the famous slayer of gendarmes in silent disgust.

"And what are you?" he said, very low, then shut his eyes, and rested the back of his head against the wall.

"It would be better for you to depart now." Razumov heard a mild, sad voice, and opened his eyes. The gentle speaker was an elderly man, with a great brush of fine hair making a silvery halo all round his keen, intelligent face. "Peter Ivanovitch shall be informed of your confession — and you shall be directed...."

Then, turning to Nikita, nicknamed Necator, standing by, he appealed to him in a murmur —

"What else can we do? After this piece of sincerity he cannot be dangerous any longer."

The other muttered, "Better make sure of that before we let him go. Leave that to me. I know how to deal with such gentlemen."

He exchanged meaning glances with two or three men, who nodded slightly, then turning roughly to Razumov, "You have heard? You are not wanted here. Why don't you get out?"

The Laspara girl on guard rose, and pulled the chair out of the way unemotionally. She gave a sleepy stare to Razumov, who started, looked



round the room and passed slowly by her as if struck by some sudden thought.

“I beg you to observe,” he said, already on the landing, “that I had only to hold my tongue. To-day, of all days since I came amongst you, I was made safe, and to-day I made myself free from falsehood, from remorse — independent of every single human being on this earth.”

He turned his back on the room, and walked towards the stairs, but, at the violent crash of the door behind him, he looked over his shoulder and saw that Nikita, with three others, had followed him out. “They are going to kill me, after all,” he thought.

Before he had time to turn round and confront them fairly, they set on him with a rush. He was driven headlong against the wall. “I wonder how,” he completed his thought. Nikita cried, with a shrill laugh right in his face, “We shall make you harmless. You wait a bit.”

Razumov did not struggle. The three men held him pinned against the wall, while Nikita, taking up a position a little on one side, deliberately swung off his enormous arm. Razumov, looking for a knife in his hand, saw it come at him open, unarmed, and received a tremendous blow on the side of his head over his ear. At the same time he heard a faint, dull detonating sound, as if some one had fired a pistol on the other side of the wall. A raging fury awoke in him at this outrage. The people in Laspara’s rooms, holding their breath, listened to the desperate scuffling of four men all over the landing; thuds against the walls, a terrible crash against the very door, then all of them went down together with a violence which seemed to shake the whole house. Razumov, overpowered, breathless, crushed under the weight of his assailants, saw the monstrous Nikita squatting on his heels near his head, while the others held him down, kneeling on his chest, gripping his throat, lying across his legs.

“Turn his face the other way,” the paunchy terrorist directed, in an excited, gleeful squeak.

Razumov could struggle no longer. He was exhausted; he had to watch passively the heavy open hand of the brute descend again in a degrading blow over his other ear. It seemed to split his head in two, and all at once the men holding him became perfectly silent — soundless as shadows. In silence they pulled him brutally to his feet, rushed with him noiselessly down the staircase, and, opening the door, flung him out into the street.

He fell forward, and at once rolled over and over helplessly, going down the short slope together with the rush of running rain water. He came to rest in the roadway of the street at the bottom, lying on his back, with a great flash of lightning over his face — a vivid, silent flash of lightning which blinded him utterly. He picked himself up, and put his arm over his eyes to recover his sight. Not a sound reached him from anywhere, and he began to walk, staggering, down a long, empty street. The lightning waved and darted round him its silent flames, the water of the deluge fell, ran, leaped, drove — noiseless like the drift of mist. In this unearthly stillness his footsteps fell silent on the pavement, while a dumb wind drove him on and on, like a lost mortal in a phantom world ravaged by a soundless thunderstorm. God only knows where his noiseless feet took him to that night, here and there, and back again without pause or rest. Of one place, at least, where they did lead him, we heard afterwards; and, in the morning, the driver of the first south-shore tramcar, clanging his bell desperately, saw a bedraggled, soaked man without a hat, and walking in the roadway unsteadily with his head down, step right in front of his car, and go under.

When they picked him up, with two broken limbs and a crushed side, Razumov had not lost consciousness. It was as though he had tumbled, smashing himself, into a world of mutes. Silent men, moving unheard, lifted him up, laid him on the sidewalk, gesticulating and grimacing round him their alarm, horror, and compassion. A red face with moustaches stooped close over him, lips moving, eyes rolling. Razumov tried hard to understand the reason of this dumb show. To those who stood around him, the features of that stranger, so grievously hurt, seemed composed in meditation. Afterwards his eyes sent out at them a look of fear and closed slowly. They stared at him. Razumov made an effort to remember some French words.

“Je suis sourd,” he had time to utter feebly, before he fainted.

“He is deaf,” they exclaimed to each other. “That’s why he did not hear the car.”

They carried him off in that same car. Before it started on its journey, a woman in a shabby black dress, who had run out of the iron gate of some private grounds up the road, clambered on to the rear platform and would not be put off.

“I am a relation,” she insisted, in bad French. “This young man is a Russian, and I am his relation.” On this plea they let her have her way. She sat down calmly, and took his head on her lap; her scared faded eyes

avoided looking at his deathlike face. At the corner of a street, on the other side of the town, a stretcher met the car. She followed it to the door of the hospital, where they let her come in and see him laid on a bed. Razumov's new-found relation never shed a tear, but the officials had some difficulty in inducing her to go away. The porter observed her lingering on the opposite pavement for a long time. Suddenly, as though she had remembered something, she ran off.

The ardent hater of all Finance ministers, the slave of Madame de S — , had made up her mind to offer her resignation as lady companion to the Egeria of Peter Ivanovitch. She had found work to do after her own heart.

But hours before, while the thunderstorm still raged in the night, there had been in the rooms of Julius Laspara a great sensation. The terrible Nikita, coming in from the landing, uplifted his squeaky voice in horrible glee before all the company —

“Razumov! Mr. Razumov! The wonderful Razumov! He shall never be any use as a spy on any one. He won't talk, because he will never hear anything in his life — not a thing! I have burst the drums of his ears for him. Oh, you may trust me. I know the trick. Ha! Ha! Ha! I know the trick.”

V

It was nearly a fortnight after her mother's funeral that I saw Natalia Haldin for the last time.

In those silent, sombre days the doors of the appartement on the Boulevard des Philosophes were closed to every one but myself. I believe I was of some use, if only in this, that I alone was aware of the incredible part of the situation. Miss Haldin nursed her mother alone to the last moment. If Razumov's visit had anything to do with Mrs. Haldin's end (and I cannot help thinking that it hastened it considerably), it is because the man, trusted impulsively by the ill-fated Victor Haldin, had failed to gain the confidence of Victor Haldin's mother. What tale, precisely, he told her cannot be known — at any rate, I do not know it — but to me she seemed to die from the shock of an ultimate disappointment borne in silence. She had not believed him. Perhaps she could not longer believe any one, and consequently had nothing to say to any one — not even to her daughter. I suspect that Miss Haldin lived the heaviest hours of her life by that silent death-bed. I confess I was angry with the broken-hearted old woman passing away in the obstinacy of her mute distrust of her daughter.

When it was all over I stood aside. Miss Haldin had her compatriots round her then. A great number of them attended the funeral. I was there too, but afterwards managed to keep away from Miss Haldin, till I received a short note rewarding my self-denial. "It is as you would have it. I am going back to Russia at once. My mind is made up. Come and see me."

Verily, it was a reward of discretion. I went without delay to receive it. The appartement of the Boulevard des Philosophes presented the dreary signs of impending abandonment. It looked desolate and as if already empty to my eyes.

Standing, we exchanged a few words about her health, mine, remarks as to some people of the Russian colony, and then Natalia Haldin, establishing me on the sofa, began to talk openly of her future work, of her plans. It was all to be as I had wished it. And it was to be for life. We should never see each other again. Never!

I gathered this success to my breast. Natalia Haldin looked matured by her open and secret experiences. With her arms folded she walked up and down the whole length of the room, talking slowly, smooth-browed, with a resolute profile. She gave me a new view of herself, and I marvelled at that something grave and measured in her voice, in her movements, in her manner. It was the perfection of collected independence. The strength of her nature had come to surface because the obscure depths had been stirred.

"We two can talk of it now," she observed, after a silence and stopping short before me. "Have you been to inquire at the hospital lately?"

"Yes, I have." And as she looked at me fixedly, "He will live, the doctors say. But I thought that Tekla...."

"Tekla has not been near me for several days," explained Miss Haldin quickly. "As I never offered to go to the hospital with her, she thinks that I have no heart. She is disillusioned about me."

And Miss Haldin smiled faintly.

"Yes. She sits with him as long and as often as they will let her," I said. "She says she must never abandon him — never as long as she lives. He'll need somebody — a hopeless cripple, and stone deaf with that."

"Stone deaf? I didn't know," murmured Natalia Haldin.

"He is. It seems strange. I am told there were no apparent injuries to the head. They say, too, that it is not very likely that he will live so very long for Tekla to take care of him."

Miss Haldin shook her head.

“While there are travellers ready to fall by the way our Tekla shall never be idle. She is a good Samaritan by an irresistible vocation. The revolutionists didn’t understand her. Fancy a devoted creature like that being employed to carry about documents sewn in her dress, or made to write from dictation.”

“There is not much perspicacity in the world.”

No sooner uttered, I regretted that observation. Natalia Haldin, looking me straight in the face, assented by a slight movement of her head. She was not offended, but turning away began to pace the room again. To my western eyes she seemed to be getting farther and farther from me, quite beyond my reach now, but undiminished in the increasing distance. I remained silent as though it were hopeless to raise my voice. The sound of hers, so close to me, made me start a little.

“Tekla saw him picked up after the accident. The good soul never explained to me really how it came about. She affirms that there was some understanding between them — some sort of compact — that in any sore need, in misfortune, or difficulty, or pain, he was to come to her.”

“Was there?” I said. “It is lucky for him that there was, then. He’ll need all the devotion of the good Samaritan.”

It was a fact that Tekla, looking out of her window at five in the morning, for some reason or other, had beheld Razumov in the grounds of the Chateau Borel, standing stockstill, bare-headed in the rain, at the foot of the terrace. She had screamed out to him, by name, to know what was the matter. He never even raised his head. By the time she had dressed herself sufficiently to run downstairs he was gone. She started in pursuit, and rushing out into the road, came almost directly upon the arrested tramcar and the small knot of people picking up Razumov. That much Tekla had told me herself one afternoon we happened to meet at the door of the hospital, and without any kind of comment. But I did not want to meditate very long on the inwardness of this peculiar episode.

“Yes, Natalia Victorovna, he shall need somebody when they dismiss him, on crutches and stone deaf from the hospital. But I do not think that when he rushed like an escaped madman into the grounds of the Chateau Borel it was to seek the help of that good Tekla.”

“No,” said Natalia, stopping short before me, “perhaps not.” She sat down and leaned her head on her hand thoughtfully. The silence lasted for several minutes. During that time I remembered the evening of his atrocious

confession — the plaint she seemed to have hardly enough life left in her to utter, “It is impossible to be more unhappy....” The recollection would have given me a shudder if I had not been lost in wonder at her force and her tranquillity. There was no longer any Natalia Haldin, because she had completely ceased to think of herself. It was a great victory, a characteristically Russian exploit in self-suppression.

She recalled me to myself by getting up suddenly like a person who has come to a decision. She walked to the writing-table, now stripped of all the small objects associated with her by daily use — a mere piece of dead furniture; but it contained something living, still, since she took from a recess a flat parcel which she brought to me.

“It’s a book,” she said rather abruptly. “It was sent to me wrapped up in my veil. I told you nothing at the time, but now I’ve decided to leave it with you. I have the right to do that. It was sent to me. It is mine. You may preserve it, or destroy it after you have read it. And while you read it, please remember that I was defenceless. And that he..”

“Defenceless!” I repeated, surprised, looking hard at her.

“You’ll find the very word written there,” she whispered. “Well, it’s true! I was defenceless — but perhaps you were able to see that for yourself.” Her face coloured, then went deadly pale. “In justice to the man, I want you to remember that I was. Oh, I was, I was!”

I rose, a little shakily.

“I am not likely to forget anything you say at this our last parting.”

Her hand fell into mine.

“It’s difficult to believe that it must be good-bye with us.”

She returned my pressure and our hands separated.

“Yes. I am leaving here to-morrow. My eyes are open at last and my hands are free now. As for the rest — which of us can fail to hear the stifled cry of our great distress? It may be nothing to the world.”

“The world is more conscious of your discordant voices,” I said. “It is the way of the world.”

“Yes.” She bowed her head in assent, and hesitated for a moment. “I must own to you that I shall never give up looking forward to the day when all discord shall be silenced. Try to imagine its dawn! The tempest of blows and of execrations is over; all is still; the new sun is rising, and the weary men united at last, taking count in their conscience of the ended contest, feel saddened by their victory, because so many ideas have perished for the

triumph of one, so many beliefs have abandoned them without support. They feel alone on the earth and gather close together. Yes, there must be many bitter hours! But at last the anguish of hearts shall be extinguished in love.”

And on this last word of her wisdom, a word so sweet, so bitter, so cruel sometimes, I said good-bye to Natalia Haldin. It is hard to think I shall never look any more into the trustful eyes of that girl — wedded to an invincible belief in the advent of loving concord springing like a heavenly flower from the soil of men’s earth, soaked in blood, torn by struggles, watered with tears.

It must be understood that at that time I didn’t know anything of Mr. Razumov’s confession to the assembled revolutionists. Natalia Haldin might have guessed what was the “one thing more” which remained for him to do; but this my western eyes had failed to see.

Tekla, the ex-lady companion of Madame de S — , haunted his bedside at the hospital. We met once or twice at the door of that establishment, but on these occasions she was not communicative. She gave me news of Mr. Razumov as concisely as possible. He was making a slow recovery, but would remain a hopeless cripple all his life. Personally, I never went near him: I never saw him again, after the awful evening when I stood by, a watchful but ignored spectator of his scene with Miss Haldin. He was in due course discharged from the hospital, and his “relative” — so I was told — had carried him off somewhere.

My information was completed nearly two years later. The opportunity, certainly, was not of my seeking; it was quite accidentally that I met a much-trusted woman revolutionist at the house of a distinguished Russian gentleman of liberal convictions, who came to live in Geneva for a time.

He was a quite different sort of celebrity from Peter Ivanovitch — a dark-haired man with kind eyes, high-shouldered, courteous, and with something hushed and circumspect in his manner. He approached me, choosing the moment when there was no one near, followed by a grey-haired, alert lady in a crimson blouse.

“Our Sophia Antonovna wishes to be made known to you,” he addressed me, in his guarded voice. “And so I leave you two to have a talk together.”

“I would never have intruded myself upon your notice,” the grey-haired lady began at once, “if I had not been charged with a message for you.”

It was a message of a few friendly words from Natalia Haldin. Sophia Antonovna had just returned from a secret excursion into Russia, and had seen Miss Haldin. She lived in a town “in the centre,” sharing her compassionate labours between the horrors of overcrowded jails, and the heartrending misery of bereaved homes. She did not spare herself in good service, Sophia Antonovna assured me.

“She has a faithful soul, an undaunted spirit and an indefatigable body,” the woman revolutionist summed it all up, with a touch of enthusiasm.

A conversation thus engaged was not likely to drop from want of interest on my side. We went to sit apart in a corner where no one interrupted us. In the course of our talk about Miss Haldin, Sophia Antonovna remarked suddenly —

“I suppose you remember seeing me before? That evening when Natalia came to ask Peter Ivanovitch for the address of a certain Razumov, that young man who...”

“I remember perfectly,” I said. When Sophia Antonovna learned that I had in my possession that young man’s journal given me by Miss Haldin she became intensely interested. She did not conceal her curiosity to see the document.

I offered to show it to her, and she at once volunteered to call on me next day for that purpose.

She turned over the pages greedily for an hour or more, and then handed me the book with a faint sigh. While moving about Russia, she had seen Razumov too. He lived, not “in the centre,” but “in the south.” She described to me a little two-roomed wooden house, in the suburb of some very small town, hiding within the high plank-fence of a yard overgrown with nettles. He was crippled, ill, getting weaker every day, and Tekla the Samaritan tended him unweariedly with the pure joy of unselfish devotion. There was nothing in that task to become disillusioned about.

I did not hide from Sophia Antonovna my surprise that she should have visited Mr. Razumov. I did not even understand the motive. But she informed me that she was not the only one.

“Some of us always go to see him when passing through. He is intelligent. We has ideas.... He talks well, too.”

Presently I heard for the first time of Razumov’s public confession in Laspara’s house. Sophia Antonovna gave me a detailed relation of what had occurred there. Razumov himself had told her all about it, most minutely.



Then, looking hard at me with her brilliant black eyes —

“There are evil moments in every life. A false suggestion enters one’s brain, and then fear is born — fear of oneself, fear for oneself. Or else a false courage — who knows? Well, call it what you like; but tell me, how many of them would deliver themselves up deliberately to perdition (as he himself says in that book) rather than go on living, secretly debased in their own eyes? How many?... And please mark this — he was safe when he did it. It was just when he believed himself safe and more — infinitely more — when the possibility of being loved by that admirable girl first dawned upon him, that he discovered that his bitterest railings, the worst wickedness, the devil work of his hate and pride, could never cover up the ignominy of the existence before him. There’s character in such a discovery.”

I accepted her conclusion in silence. Who would care to question the grounds of forgiveness or compassion? However, it appeared later on, that there was some compunction, too, in the charity extended by the revolutionary world to Razumov the betrayer. Sophia Antonovna continued uneasily —

“And then, you know, he was the victim of an outrage. It was not authorized. Nothing was decided as to what was to be done with him. He had confessed voluntarily. And that Nikita who burst the drums of his ears purposely, out on the landing, you know, as if carried away by indignation — well, he has turned out to be a scoundrel of the worst kind — a traitor himself, a betrayer — a spy! Razumov told me he had charged him with it by a sort of inspiration....”

“I had a glimpse of that brute,” I said. “How any of you could have been deceived for half a day passes my comprehension!”

She interrupted me.

“There! There! Don’t talk of it. The first time I saw him, I, too, was appalled. They cried me down. We were always telling each other, ‘Oh! you mustn’t mind his appearance.’ And then he was always ready to kill. There was no doubt of it. He killed — yes! in both camps. The fiend....”

Then Sophia Antonovna, after mastering the angry trembling of her lips, told me a very queer tale. It went that Councillor Mikulin, travelling in Germany (shortly after Razumov’s disappearance from Geneva), happened to meet Peter Ivanovitch in a railway carriage. Being alone in the compartment, these two talked together half the night, and it was then that Mikulin the Police Chief gave a hint to the Arch-Revolutionist as to the true

character of the arch-slayer of gendarmes. It looks as though Mikulin had wanted to get rid of that particular agent of his own! He might have grown tired of him, or frightened of him. It must also be said that Mikulin had inherited the sinister Nikita from his predecessor in office.

And this story, too, I received without comment in my character of a mute witness of things Russian, unrolling their Eastern logic under my Western eyes. But I permitted myself a question —

“Tell me, please, Sophia Antonovna, did Madame de S — leave all her fortune to Peter Ivanovitch?”

“Not a bit of it.” The woman revolutionist shrugged her shoulders in disgust. “She died without making a will. A lot of nephews and nieces came down from St. Petersburg, like a flock of vultures, and fought for her money amongst themselves. All beastly Kammerherrns and Maids of Honour — abominable court flunkeys. Tfui!”

“One does not hear much of Peter Ivanovitch now,” I remarked, after a pause.

“Peter Ivanovitch,” said Sophia Antonovna gravely, “has united himself to a peasant girl.”

I was truly astonished.

“What! On the Riviera?”

“What nonsense! Of course not.”

Sophia Antonovna’s tone was slightly tart.

“Is he, then, living actually in Russia? It’s a tremendous risk — isn’t it?” I cried. “And all for the sake of a peasant girl. Don’t you think it’s very wrong of him?”

Sophia Antonovna preserved a mysterious silence for a while, then made a statement. “He just simply adores her.”

“Does he? Well, then, I hope that she won’t hesitate to beat him.”

Sophia Antonovna got up and wished me good-bye, as though she had not heard a word of my impious hope; but, in the very doorway, where I attended her, she turned round for an instant, and declared in a firm voice —

“Peter Ivanovitch is an inspired man.”

# *CHANCE*



A TALE IN TWO PARTS

Those that hold that all things are governed by Fortune had not erred, had  
they not persisted there

SIR THOMAS BROWNE

TO SIR HUGH CLIFFORD, K.C.M.G. WHO STEADFAST FRIENDSHIP  
IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE EXISTENCE OF THESE PAGES

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# **PART I — THE DAMSEL**

## **CHAPTER ONE — YOUNG POWELL AND HIS CHANCE**

I believe he had seen us out of the window coming off to dine in the dinghy of a fourteen-ton yawl belonging to Marlow my host and skipper. We helped the boy we had with us to haul the boat up on the landing-stage before we went up to the riverside inn, where we found our new acquaintance eating his dinner in dignified loneliness at the head of a long table, white and inhospitable like a snow bank.

The red tint of his clear-cut face with trim short black whiskers under a cap of curly iron-grey hair was the only warm spot in the dinginess of that room cooled by the cheerless tablecloth. We knew him already by sight as the owner of a little five-ton cutter, which he sailed alone apparently, a fellow yachtsman in the unpretending band of fanatics who cruise at the mouth of the Thames. But the first time he addressed the waiter sharply as ‘steward’ we knew him at once for a sailor as well as a yachtsman.

Presently he had occasion to reprove that same waiter for the slovenly manner in which the dinner was served. He did it with considerable energy and then turned to us.

“If we at sea,” he declared, “went about our work as people ashore high and low go about theirs we should never make a living. No one would employ us. And moreover no ship navigated and sailed in the happy-go-lucky manner people conduct their business on shore would ever arrive into port.”

Since he had retired from the sea he had been astonished to discover that the educated people were not much better than the others. No one seemed to take any proper pride in his work: from plumbers who were simply thieves to, say, newspaper men (he seemed to think them a specially intellectual class) who never by any chance gave a correct version of the simplest affair. This universal inefficiency of what he called “the shore gang” he ascribed in general to the want of responsibility and to a sense of security.

“They see,” he went on, “that no matter what they do this tight little island won’t turn turtle with them or spring a leak and go to the bottom with their wives and children.”

From this point the conversation took a special turn relating exclusively to sea-life. On that subject he got quickly in touch with Marlow who in his time had followed the sea. They kept up a lively exchange of reminiscences while I listened. They agreed that the happiest time in their lives was as youngsters in good ships, with no care in the world but not to lose a watch below when at sea and not a moment’s time in going ashore after work hours when in harbour. They agreed also as to the proudest moment they had known in that calling which is never embraced on rational and practical grounds, because of the glamour of its romantic associations. It was the moment when they had passed successfully their first examination and left the seamanship Examiner with the little precious slip of blue paper in their hands.

“That day I wouldn’t have called the Queen my cousin,” declared our new acquaintance enthusiastically.

At that time the Marine Board examinations took place at the St. Katherine’s Dock House on Tower Hill, and he informed us that he had a special affection for the view of that historic locality, with the Gardens to the left, the front of the Mint to the right, the miserable tumble-down little houses farther away, a cabstand, boot-blacks squatting on the edge of the pavement and a pair of big policemen gazing with an air of superiority at the doors of the Black Horse public-house across the road. This was the part of the world, he said, his eyes first took notice of, on the finest day of his life. He had emerged from the main entrance of St. Katherine’s Dock House a full-fledged second mate after the hottest time of his life with Captain R-, the most dreaded of the three seamanship Examiners who at the time were responsible for the merchant service officers qualifying in the Port of London.

“We all who were preparing to pass,” he said, “used to shake in our shoes at the idea of going before him. He kept me for an hour and a half in the torture chamber and behaved as though he hated me. He kept his eyes shaded with one of his hands. Suddenly he let it drop saying, “You will do!” Before I realised what he meant he was pushing the blue slip across the table. I jumped up as if my chair had caught fire.

“Thank you, sir,” says I, grabbing the paper.



“Good morning, good luck to you,” he growls at me.

“The old doorkeeper fussed out of the cloak-room with my hat. They always do. But he looked very hard at me before he ventured to ask in a sort of timid whisper: “Got through all right, sir?” For all answer I dropped a half-crown into his soft broad palm. “Well,” says he with a sudden grin from ear to ear, “I never knew him keep any of you gentlemen so long. He failed two second mates this morning before your turn came. Less than twenty minutes each: that’s about his usual time.”

“I found myself downstairs without being aware of the steps as if I had floated down the staircase. The finest day in my life. The day you get your first command is nothing to it. For one thing a man is not so young then and for another with us, you know, there is nothing much more to expect. Yes, the finest day of one’s life, no doubt, but then it is just a day and no more. What comes after is about the most unpleasant time for a youngster, the trying to get an officer’s berth with nothing much to show but a brand-new certificate. It is surprising how useless you find that piece of ass’s skin that you have been putting yourself in such a state about. It didn’t strike me at the time that a Board of Trade certificate does not make an officer, not by a long long way. But the slippers of the ships I was haunting with demands for a job knew that very well. I don’t wonder at them now, and I don’t blame them either. But this ‘trying to get a ship’ is pretty hard on a youngster all the same . . . “

He went on then to tell us how tired he was and how discouraged by this lesson of disillusion following swiftly upon the finest day of his life. He told us how he went the round of all the ship-owners’ offices in the City where some junior clerk would furnish him with printed forms of application which he took home to fill up in the evening. He used to run out just before midnight to post them in the nearest pillar-box. And that was all that ever came of it. In his own words: he might just as well have dropped them all properly addressed and stamped into the sewer grating.

Then one day, as he was wending his weary way to the docks, he met a friend and former shipmate a little older than himself outside the Fenchurch Street Railway Station.

He craved for sympathy but his friend had just “got a ship” that very morning and was hurrying home in a state of outward joy and inward uneasiness usual to a sailor who after many days of waiting suddenly gets a berth. This friend had the time to condole with him but briefly. He must be

moving. Then as he was running off, over his shoulder as it were, he suggested: "Why don't you go and speak to Mr. Powell in the Shipping Office." Our friend objected that he did not know Mr. Powell from Adam. And the other already pretty near round the corner shouted back advice: "Go to the private door of the Shipping Office and walk right up to him. His desk is by the window. Go up boldly and say I sent you."

Our new acquaintance looking from one to the other of us declared: "Upon my word, I had grown so desperate that I'd have gone boldly up to the devil himself on the mere hint that he had a second mate's job to give away."

It was at this point that interrupting his flow of talk to light his pipe but holding us with his eye he inquired whether we had known Powell. Marlow with a slight reminiscent smile murmured that he "remembered him very well."

Then there was a pause. Our new acquaintance had become involved in a vexatious difficulty with his pipe which had suddenly betrayed his trust and disappointed his anticipation of self-indulgence. To keep the ball rolling I asked Marlow if this Powell was remarkable in any way.

"He was not exactly remarkable," Marlow answered with his usual nonchalance. "In a general way it's very difficult for one to become remarkable. People won't take sufficient notice of one, don't you know. I remember Powell so well simply because as one of the Shipping Masters in the Port of London he dispatched me to sea on several long stages of my sailor's pilgrimage. He resembled Socrates. I mean he resembled him genuinely: that is in the face. A philosophical mind is but an accident. He reproduced exactly the familiar bust of the immortal sage, if you will imagine the bust with a high top hat riding far on the back of the head, and a black coat over the shoulders. As I never saw him except from the other side of the long official counter bearing the five writing desks of the five Shipping Masters, Mr. Powell has remained a bust to me."

Our new acquaintance advanced now from the mantelpiece with his pipe in good working order.

"What was the most remarkable about Powell," he enunciated dogmatically with his head in a cloud of smoke, "is that he should have had just that name. You see, my name happens to be Powell too."

It was clear that this intelligence was not imparted to us for social purposes. It required no acknowledgment. We continued to gaze at him

with expectant eyes.

He gave himself up to the vigorous enjoyment of his pipe for a silent minute or two. Then picking up the thread of his story he told us how he had started hot foot for Tower Hill. He had not been that way since the day of his examination — the finest day of his life — the day of his overweening pride. It was very different now. He would not have called the Queen his cousin, still, but this time it was from a sense of profound abasement. He didn't think himself good enough for anybody's kinship. He envied the purple-nosed old cab-drivers on the stand, the boot-black boys at the edge of the pavement, the two large bobbies pacing slowly along the Tower Gardens railings in the consciousness of their infallible might, and the bright scarlet sentries walking smartly to and fro before the Mint. He envied them their places in the scheme of world's labour. And he envied also the miserable sallow, thin-faced loafers blinking their obscene eyes and rubbing their greasy shoulders against the door-jambs of the Black Horse pub, because they were too far gone to feel their degradation.

I must render the man the justice that he conveyed very well to us the sense of his youthful hopelessness surprised at not finding its place in the sun and no recognition of its right to live.

He went up the outer steps of St. Katherine's Dock House, the very steps from which he had some six weeks before surveyed the cabstand, the buildings, the policemen, the boot-blacks, the paint, gilt, and plateglass of the Black Horse, with the eye of a Conqueror. At the time he had been at the bottom of his heart surprised that all this had not greeted him with songs and incense, but now (he made no secret of it) he made his entry in a slinking fashion past the doorkeeper's glass box. "I hadn't any half-crowns to spare for tips," he remarked grimly. The man, however, ran out after him asking: "What do you require?" but with a grateful glance up at the first floor in remembrance of Captain R-'s examination room (how easy and delightful all that had been) he bolted down a flight leading to the basement and found himself in a place of dusk and mystery and many doors. He had been afraid of being stopped by some rule of no-admittance. However he was not pursued.

The basement of St. Katherine's Dock House is vast in extent and confusing in its plan. Pale shafts of light slant from above into the gloom of its chilly passages. Powell wandered up and down there like an early Christian refugee in the catacombs; but what little faith he had in the

success of his enterprise was oozing out at his finger-tips. At a dark turn under a gas bracket whose flame was half turned down his self-confidence abandoned him altogether.

"I stood there to think a little," he said. "A foolish thing to do because of course I got scared. What could you expect? It takes some nerve to tackle a stranger with a request for a favour. I wished my namesake Powell had been the devil himself. I felt somehow it would have been an easier job. You see, I never believed in the devil enough to be scared of him; but a man can make himself very unpleasant. I looked at a lot of doors, all shut tight, with a growing conviction that I would never have the pluck to open one of them. Thinking's no good for one's nerve. I concluded I would give up the whole business. But I didn't give up in the end, and I'll tell you what stopped me. It was the recollection of that confounded doorkeeper who had called after me. I felt sure the fellow would be on the look-out at the head of the stairs. If he asked me what I had been after, as he had the right to do, I wouldn't know what to answer that wouldn't make me look silly if no worse. I got very hot. There was no chance of slinking out of this business.

"I had lost my bearings somehow down there. Of the many doors of various sizes, right and left, a good few had glazed lights above; some however must have led merely into lumber rooms or such like, because when I brought myself to try one or two I was disconcerted to find that they were locked. I stood there irresolute and uneasy like a baffled thief. The confounded basement was as still as a grave and I became aware of my heart beats. Very uncomfortable sensation. Never happened to me before or since. A bigger door to the left of me, with a large brass handle looked as if it might lead into the Shipping Office. I tried it, setting my teeth. "Here goes!"

"It came open quite easily. And lo! the place it opened into was hardly any bigger than a cupboard. Anyhow it wasn't more than ten feet by twelve; and as I in a way expected to see the big shadowy cellar-like extent of the Shipping Office where I had been once or twice before, I was extremely startled. A gas bracket hung from the middle of the ceiling over a dark, shabby writing-desk covered with a litter of yellowish dusty documents. Under the flame of the single burner which made the place ablaze with light, a plump, little man was writing hard, his nose very near the desk. His head was perfectly bald and about the same drab tint as the papers. He appeared pretty dusty too.

“I didn’t notice whether there were any cobwebs on him, but I shouldn’t wonder if there were because he looked as though he had been imprisoned for years in that little hole. The way he dropped his pen and sat blinking my way upset me very much. And his dungeon was hot and musty; it smelt of gas and mushrooms, and seemed to be somewhere 120 feet below the ground. Solid, heavy stacks of paper filled all the corners half-way up to the ceiling. And when the thought flashed upon me that these were the premises of the Marine Board and that this fellow must be connected in some way with ships and sailors and the sea, my astonishment took my breath away. One couldn’t imagine why the Marine Board should keep that bald, fat creature slaving down there. For some reason or other I felt sorry and ashamed to have found him out in his wretched captivity. I asked gently and sorrowfully: “The Shipping Office, please.”

He piped up in a contemptuous squeaky voice which made me start: “Not here. Try the passage on the other side. Street side. This is the Dock side. You’ve lost your way . . . “

He spoke in such a spiteful tone that I thought he was going to round off with the words: “You fool” . . . and perhaps he meant to. But what he finished sharply with was: “Shut the door quietly after you.”

And I did shut it quietly — you bet. Quick and quiet. The indomitable spirit of that chap impressed me. I wonder sometimes whether he has succeeded in writing himself into liberty and a pension at last, or had to go out of his gas-lighted grave straight into that other dark one where nobody would want to intrude. My humanity was pleased to discover he had so much kick left in him, but I was not comforted in the least. It occurred to me that if Mr. Powell had the same sort of temper . . . However, I didn’t give myself time to think and scuttled across the space at the foot of the stairs into the passage where I’d been told to try. And I tried the first door I came to, right away, without any hanging back, because coming loudly from the hall above an amazed and scandalized voice wanted to know what sort of game I was up to down there. “Don’t you know there’s no admittance that way?” it roared. But if there was anything more I shut it out of my hearing by means of a door marked Private on the outside. It let me into a six-foot wide strip between a long counter and the wall, taken off a spacious, vaulted room with a grated window and a glazed door giving daylight to the further end. The first thing I saw right in front of me were three middle-aged men having a sort of romp together round about another

fellow with a thin, long neck and sloping shoulders who stood up at a desk writing on a large sheet of paper and taking no notice except that he grinned quietly to himself. They turned very sour at once when they saw me. I heard one of them mutter 'Hullo! What have we here?'

"'I want to see Mr. Powell, please,' I said, very civil but firm; I would let nothing scare me away now. This was the Shipping Office right enough. It was after 3 o'clock and the business seemed over for the day with them. The long-necked fellow went on with his writing steadily. I observed that he was no longer grinning. The three others tossed their heads all together towards the far end of the room where a fifth man had been looking on at their antics from a high stool. I walked up to him as boldly as if he had been the devil himself. With one foot raised up and resting on the cross-bar of his seat he never stopped swinging the other which was well clear of the stone floor. He had unbuttoned the top of his waistcoat and he wore his tall hat very far at the back of his head. He had a full unwrinkled face and such clear-shining eyes that his grey beard looked quite false on him, stuck on for a disguise. You said just now he resembled Socrates — didn't you? I don't know about that. This Socrates was a wise man, I believe?"

"He was," assented Marlow. "And a true friend of youth. He lectured them in a peculiarly exasperating manner. It was a way he had."

"Then give me Powell every time," declared our new acquaintance sturdily. "He didn't lecture me in any way. Not he. He said: 'How do you do?' quite kindly to my mumble. Then says he looking very hard at me: 'I don't think I know you — do I?'

"No, sir," I said and down went my heart sliding into my boots, just as the time had come to summon up all my cheek. There's nothing meaner in the world than a piece of impudence that isn't carried off well. For fear of appearing shamefaced I started about it so free and easy as almost to frighten myself. He listened for a while looking at my face with surprise and curiosity and then held up his hand. I was glad enough to shut up, I can tell you.

"Well, you are a cool hand," says he. "And that friend of yours too. He pestered me coming here every day for a fortnight till a captain I'm acquainted with was good enough to give him a berth. And no sooner he's provided for than he turns you on. You youngsters don't seem to mind whom you get into trouble."

“It was my turn now to stare with surprise and curiosity. He hadn’t been talking loud but he lowered his voice still more.

“Don’t you know it’s illegal?”

“I wondered what he was driving at till I remembered that procuring a berth for a sailor is a penal offence under the Act. That clause was directed of course against the swindling practices of the boarding-house crimps. It had never struck me it would apply to everybody alike no matter what the motive, because I believed then that people on shore did their work with care and foresight.

“I was confounded at the idea, but Mr. Powell made me soon see that an Act of Parliament hasn’t any sense of its own. It has only the sense that’s put into it; and that’s precious little sometimes. He didn’t mind helping a young man to a ship now and then, he said, but if we kept on coming constantly it would soon get about that he was doing it for money.

“A pretty thing that would be: the Senior Shipping-Master of the Port of London hauled up in a police court and fined fifty pounds,” says he. “I’ve another four years to serve to get my pension. It could be made to look very black against me and don’t you make any mistake about it,” he says.

“And all the time with one knee well up he went on swinging his other leg like a boy on a gate and looking at me very straight with his shining eyes. I was confounded I tell you. It made me sick to hear him imply that somebody would make a report against him.

“Oh!” I asked shocked, “who would think of such a scurvy trick, sir?” I was half disgusted with him for having the mere notion of it.

“Who?” says he, speaking very low. “Anybody. One of the office messengers maybe. I’ve risen to be the Senior of this office and we are all very good friends here, but don’t you think that my colleague that sits next to me wouldn’t like to go up to this desk by the window four years in advance of the regulation time? Or even one year for that matter. It’s human nature.”

“I could not help turning my head. The three fellows who had been skylarking when I came in were now talking together very soberly, and the long-necked chap was going on with his writing still. He seemed to me the most dangerous of the lot. I saw him sideface and his lips were set very tight. I had never looked at mankind in that light before. When one’s young human nature shocks one. But what startled me most was to see the door I had come through open slowly and give passage to a head in a

uniform cap with a Board of Trade badge. It was that blamed old doorkeeper from the hall. He had run me to earth and meant to dig me out too. He walked up the office smirking craftily, cap in hand.

“What is it, Symons?” asked Mr. Powell.

“I was only wondering where this ‘ere gentleman ‘ad gone to, sir. He slipped past me upstairs, sir.”

I felt mighty uncomfortable.

“That’s all right, Symons. I know the gentleman,” says Mr. Powell as serious as a judge.

“Very well, sir. Of course, sir. I saw the gentleman running races all by ‘isself down ‘ere, so I . . .”

“It’s all right I tell you,” Mr. Powell cut him short with a wave of his hand; and, as the old fraud walked off at last, he raised his eyes to me. I did not know what to do: stay there, or clear out, or say that I was sorry.

“Let’s see,” says he, “what did you tell me your name was?”

“Now, observe, I hadn’t given him my name at all and his question embarrassed me a bit. Somehow or other it didn’t seem proper for me to fling his own name at him as it were. So I merely pulled out my new certificate from my pocket and put it into his hand unfolded, so that he could read Charles Powell written very plain on the parchment.

“He dropped his eyes on to it and after a while laid it quietly on the desk by his side. I didn’t know whether he meant to make any remark on this coincidence. Before he had time to say anything the glass door came open with a bang and a tall, active man rushed in with great strides. His face looked very red below his high silk hat. You could see at once he was the skipper of a big ship.

“Mr. Powell after telling me in an undertone to wait a little addressed him in a friendly way.

“I’ve been expecting you in every moment to fetch away your Articles, Captain. Here they are all ready for you.” And turning to a pile of agreements lying at his elbow he took up the topmost of them. From where I stood I could read the words: “Ship Ferndale” written in a large round hand on the first page.

“No, Mr. Powell, they aren’t ready, worse luck,” says that skipper. “I’ve got to ask you to strike out my second officer.” He seemed excited and bothered. He explained that his second mate had been working on board all the morning. At one o’clock he went out to get a bit of dinner and didn’t



turn up at two as he ought to have done. Instead there came a messenger from the hospital with a note signed by a doctor. Collar bone and one arm broken. Let himself be knocked down by a pair horse van while crossing the road outside the dock gate, as if he had neither eyes nor ears. And the ship ready to leave the dock at six o'clock to-morrow morning!

"Mr. Powell dipped his pen and began to turn the leaves of the agreement over. "We must then take his name off," he says in a kind of unconcerned sing-song.

"What am I to do?" burst out the skipper. "This office closes at four o'clock. I can't find a man in half an hour."

"This office closes at four," repeats Mr. Powell glancing up and down the pages and touching up a letter here and there with perfect indifference.

"Even if I managed to lay hold some time to-day of a man ready to go at such short notice I couldn't ship him regularly here — could I?"

"Mr. Powell was busy drawing his pen through the entries relating to that unlucky second mate and making a note in the margin.

"You could sign him on yourself on board," says he without looking up. "But I don't think you'll find easily an officer for such a pier-head jump."

"Upon this the fine-looking skipper gave signs of distress. The ship mustn't miss the next morning's tide. He had to take on board forty tons of dynamite and a hundred and twenty tons of gunpowder at a place down the river before proceeding to sea. It was all arranged for next day. There would be no end of fuss and complications if the ship didn't turn up in time . . . I couldn't help hearing all this, while wishing him to take himself off, because I wanted to know why Mr. Powell had told me to wait. After what he had been saying there didn't seem any object in my hanging about. If I had had my certificate in my pocket I should have tried to slip away quietly; but Mr. Powell had turned about into the same position I found him in at first and was again swinging his leg. My certificate open on the desk was under his left elbow and I couldn't very well go up and jerk it away.

"I don't know," says he carelessly, addressing the helpless captain but looking fixedly at me with an expression as if I hadn't been there. "I don't know whether I ought to tell you that I know of a disengaged second mate at hand."

"Do you mean you've got him here?" shouts the other looking all over the empty public part of the office as if he were ready to fling himself bodily upon anything resembling a second mate. He had been so full of his

difficulty that I verify believe he had never noticed me. Or perhaps seeing me inside he may have thought I was some understrapper belonging to the place. But when Mr. Powell nodded in my direction he became very quiet and gave me a long stare. Then he stooped to Mr. Powell's ear — I suppose he imagined he was whispering, but I heard him well enough.

"Looks very respectable."

"Certainly," says the shipping-master quite calm and staring all the time at me. "His name's Powell."

"Oh, I see!" says the skipper as if struck all of a heap. "But is he ready to join at once?"

"I had a sort of vision of my lodgings — in the North of London, too, beyond Dalston, away to the devil — and all my gear scattered about, and my empty sea-chest somewhere in an outhouse the good people I was staying with had at the end of their sooty strip of garden. I heard the Shipping Master say in the coolest sort of way:

"He'll sleep on board to-night."

"He had better," says the Captain of the Ferndale very businesslike, as if the whole thing were settled. I can't say I was dumb for joy as you may suppose. It wasn't exactly that. I was more by way of being out of breath with the quickness of it. It didn't seem possible that this was happening to me. But the skipper, after he had talked for a while with Mr. Powell, too low for me to hear became visibly perplexed.

"I suppose he had heard I was freshly passed and without experience as an officer, because he turned about and looked me over as if I had been exposed for sale.

"He's young," he mutters. "Looks smart, though . . . You're smart and willing (this to me very sudden and loud) and all that, aren't you?"

"I just managed to open and shut my mouth, no more, being taken unawares. But it was enough for him. He made as if I had deafened him with protestations of my smartness and willingness.

"Of course, of course. All right." And then turning to the Shipping Master who sat there swinging his leg, he said that he certainly couldn't go to sea without a second officer. I stood by as if all these things were happening to some other chap whom I was seeing through with it. Mr. Powell stared at me with those shining eyes of his. But that bothered skipper turns upon me again as though he wanted to snap my head off.

“You aren’t too big to be told how to do things — are you? You’ve a lot to learn yet though you mayn’t think so.”

“I had half a mind to save my dignity by telling him that if it was my seamanship he was alluding to I wanted him to understand that a fellow who had survived being turned inside out for an hour and a half by Captain R- was equal to any demand his old ship was likely to make on his competence. However he didn’t give me a chance to make that sort of fool of myself because before I could open my mouth he had gone round on another tack and was addressing himself affably to Mr. Powell who swinging his leg never took his eyes off me.

“I’ll take your young friend willingly, Mr. Powell. If you let him sign on as second-mate at once I’ll take the Articles away with me now.”

“It suddenly dawned upon me that the innocent skipper of the Ferndale had taken it for granted that I was a relative of the Shipping Master! I was quite astonished at this discovery, though indeed the mistake was natural enough under the circumstances. What I ought to have admired was the reticence with which this misunderstanding had been established and acted upon. But I was too stupid then to admire anything. All my anxiety was that this should be cleared up. I was ass enough to wonder exceedingly at Mr. Powell failing to notice the misapprehension. I saw a slight twitch come and go on his face; but instead of setting right that mistake the Shipping Master swung round on his stool and addressed me as ‘Charles.’ He did. And I detected him taking a hasty squint at my certificate just before, because clearly till he did so he was not sure of my christian name. “Now then come round in front of the desk, Charles,” says he in a loud voice.

“Charles! At first, I declare to you, it didn’t seem possible that he was addressing himself to me. I even looked round for that Charles but there was nobody behind me except the thin-necked chap still hard at his writing, and the other three Shipping Masters who were changing their coats and reaching for their hats, making ready to go home. It was the industrious thin-necked man who without laying down his pen lifted with his left hand a flap near his desk and said kindly:

“Pass this way.”

I walked through in a trance, faced Mr. Powell, from whom I learned that we were bound to Port Elizabeth first, and signed my name on the Articles of the ship Ferndale as second mate — the voyage not to exceed two years.

“You won’t fail to join — eh?” says the captain anxiously. “It would cause no end of trouble and expense if you did. You’ve got a good six hours to get your gear together, and then you’ll have time to snatch a sleep on board before the crew joins in the morning.”

“It was easy enough for him to talk of getting ready in six hours for a voyage that was not to exceed two years. He hadn’t to do that trick himself, and with his sea-chest locked up in an outhouse the key of which had been mislaid for a week as I remembered. But neither was I much concerned. The idea that I was absolutely going to sea at six o’clock next morning hadn’t got quite into my head yet. It had been too sudden.

“Mr. Powell, slipping the Articles into a long envelope, spoke up with a sort of cold half-laugh without looking at either of us.

“Mind you don’t disgrace the name, Charles.”

“And the skipper chimes in very kindly:

“He’ll do well enough I dare say. I’ll look after him a bit.”

“Upon this he grabs the Articles, says something about trying to run in for a minute to see that poor devil in the hospital, and off he goes with his heavy swinging step after telling me sternly: “Don’t you go like that poor fellow and get yourself run over by a cart as if you hadn’t either eyes or ears.”

“Mr. Powell,” says I timidly (there was by then only the thin-necked man left in the office with us and he was already by the door, standing on one leg to turn the bottom of his trousers up before going away). “Mr. Powell,” says I, “I believe the Captain of the Ferndale was thinking all the time that I was a relation of yours.”

“I was rather concerned about the propriety of it, you know, but Mr. Powell didn’t seem to be in the least.

“Did he?” says he. “That’s funny, because it seems to me too that I’ve been a sort of good uncle to several of you young fellows lately. Don’t you think so yourself? However, if you don’t like it you may put him right — when you get out to sea.” At this I felt a bit queer. Mr. Powell had rendered me a very good service:- because it’s a fact that with us merchant sailors the first voyage as officer is the real start in life. He had given me no less than that. I told him warmly that he had done for me more that day than all my relations put together ever did.

“Oh, no, no,” says he. “I guess it’s that shipment of explosives waiting down the river which has done most for you. Forty tons of dynamite have

been your best friend to-day, young man."

"That was true too, perhaps. Anyway I saw clearly enough that I had nothing to thank myself for. But as I tried to thank him, he checked my stammering.

"Don't be in a hurry to thank me," says he. "The voyage isn't finished yet."

Our new acquaintance paused, then added meditatively: "Queer man. As if it made any difference. Queer man."

"It's certainly unwise to admit any sort of responsibility for our actions, whose consequences we are never able to foresee," remarked Marlow by way of assent.

"The consequence of his action was that I got a ship," said the other. "That could not do much harm," he added with a laugh which argued a probably unconscious contempt of general ideas.

But Marlow was not put off. He was patient and reflective. He had been at sea many years and I verily believe he liked sea-life because upon the whole it is favourable to reflection. I am speaking of the now nearly vanished sea-life under sail. To those who may be surprised at the statement I will point out that this life secured for the mind of him who embraced it the inestimable advantages of solitude and silence. Marlow had the habit of pursuing general ideas in a peculiar manner, between jest and earnest.

"Oh, I wouldn't suggest," he said, "that your namesake Mr. Powell, the Shipping Master, had done you much harm. Such was hardly his intention. And even if it had been he would not have had the power. He was but a man, and the incapacity to achieve anything distinctly good or evil is inherent in our earthly condition. Mediocrity is our mark. And perhaps it's just as well, since, for the most part, we cannot be certain of the effect of our actions."

"I don't know about the effect," the other stood up to Marlow manfully. "What effect did you expect anyhow? I tell you he did something uncommonly kind."

"He did what he could," Marlow retorted gently, "and on his own showing that was not a very great deal. I cannot help thinking that there was some malice in the way he seized the opportunity to serve you. He managed to make you uncomfortable. You wanted to go to sea, but he jumped at the chance of accommodating your desire with a vengeance. I

am inclined to think your cheek alarmed him. And this was an excellent occasion to suppress you altogether. For if you accepted he was relieved of you with every appearance of humanity, and if you made objections (after requesting his assistance, mind you) it was open to him to drop you as a sort of impostor. You might have had to decline that berth for some very valid reason. From sheer necessity perhaps. The notice was too uncommonly short. But under the circumstances you'd have covered yourself with ignominy."

Our new friend knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

"Quite a mistake," he said. "I am not of the declining sort, though I'll admit it was something like telling a man that you would like a bath and in consequence being instantly knocked overboard to sink or swim with your clothes on. However, I didn't feel as if I were in deep water at first. I left the shipping office quietly and for a time strolled along the street as easy as if I had a week before me to fit myself out. But by and by I reflected that the notice was even shorter than it looked. The afternoon was well advanced; I had some things to get, a lot of small matters to attend to, one or two persons to see. One of them was an aunt of mine, my only relation, who quarrelled with poor father as long as he lived about some silly matter that had neither right nor wrong to it. She left her money to me when she died. I used always to go and see her for decency's sake. I had so much to do before night that I didn't know where to begin. I felt inclined to sit down on the kerb and hold my head in my hands. It was as if an engine had been started going under my skull. Finally I sat down in the first cab that came along and it was a hard matter to keep on sitting there I can tell you, while we rolled up and down the streets, pulling up here and there, the parcels accumulating round me and the engine in my head gathering more way every minute. The composure of the people on the pavements was provoking to a degree, and as to the people in shops, they were benumbed, more than half frozen — imbecile. Funny how it affects you to be in a peculiar state of mind: everybody that does not act up to your excitement seems so confoundedly unfriendly. And my state of mind what with the hurry, the worry and a growing exultation was peculiar enough. That engine in my head went round at its top speed hour after hour till eleven at about at night it let up on me suddenly at the entrance to the Dock before large iron gates in a dead wall."

\* \* \* \* \*

These gates were closed and locked. The cabby, after shooting his things off the roof of his machine into young Powell's arms, drove away leaving him alone with his sea-chest, a sail cloth bag and a few parcels on the pavement about his feet. It was a dark, narrow thoroughfare he told us. A mean row of houses on the other side looked empty: there wasn't the smallest gleam of light in them. The white-hot glare of a gin palace a good way off made the intervening piece of the street pitch black. Some human shapes appearing mysteriously, as if they had sprung up from the dark ground, shunned the edge of the faint light thrown down by the gateway lamps. These figures were wary in their movements and perfectly silent of foot, like beasts of prey slinking about a camp fire. Powell gathered up his belongings and hovered over them like a hen over her brood. A gruffly insinuating voice said:

"Let's carry your things in, Capt'in! I've got my pal 'ere."

He was a tall, bony, grey-haired ruffian with a bulldog jaw, in a torn cotton shirt and moleskin trousers. The shadow of his hobnailed boots was enormous and coffinlike. His pal, who didn't come up much higher than his elbow, stepping forward exhibited a pale face with a long drooping nose and no chin to speak of. He seemed to have just scrambled out of a dust-bin in a tam-o'shanter cap and a tattered soldier's coat much too long for him. Being so deadly white he looked like a horrible dirty invalid in a ragged dressing gown. The coat flapped open in front and the rest of his apparel consisted of one brace which crossed his naked, bony chest, and a pair of trousers. He blinked rapidly as if dazed by the faint light, while his patron, the old bandit, glowered at young Powell from under his beetling brow.

"Say the word, Capt'in. The bobby'll let us in all right. 'E knows both of us."

"I didn't answer him," continued Mr. Powell. "I was listening to footsteps on the other side of the gate, echoing between the walls of the warehouses as if in an uninhabited town of very high buildings dark from basement to roof. You could never have guessed that within a stone's throw there was an open sheet of water and big ships lying afloat. The few gas lamps showing up a bit of brick work here and there, appeared in the blackness like penny dips in a range of cellars — and the solitary footsteps came on, tramp, tramp. A dock policeman strode into the light on the other side of the gate, very broad-chested and stern.

“Hallo! What’s up here?”

“He was really surprised, but after some palaver he let me in together with the two loafers carrying my luggage. He grumbled at them however and slammed the gate violently with a loud clang. I was startled to discover how many night prowlers had collected in the darkness of the street in such a short time and without my being aware of it. Directly we were through they came surging against the bars, silent, like a mob of ugly spectres. But suddenly, up the street somewhere, perhaps near that public-house, a row started as if Bedlam had broken loose: shouts, yells, an awful shrill shriek — and at that noise all these heads vanished from behind the bars.

“Look at this,” marvelled the constable. “It’s a wonder to me they didn’t make off with your things while you were waiting.”

“I would have taken good care of that,” I said defiantly. But the constable wasn’t impressed.

“Much you would have done. The bag going off round one dark corner; the chest round another. Would you have run two ways at once? And anyhow you’d have been tripped up and jumped upon before you had run three yards. I tell you you’ve had a most extraordinary chance that there wasn’t one of them regular boys about to-night, in the High Street, to twig your loaded cab go by. Ted here is honest . . . You are on the honest lay, Ted, ain’t you?”

“Always was, orficer,” said the big ruffian with feeling. The other frail creature seemed dumb and only hopped about with the edge of its soldier coat touching the ground.

“Oh yes, I dare say,” said the constable. “Now then, forward, march . . . He’s that because he ain’t game for the other thing,” he confided to me. “He hasn’t got the nerve for it. However, I ain’t going to lose sight of them two till they go out through the gate. That little chap’s a devil. He’s got the nerve for anything, only he hasn’t got the muscle. Well! Well! You’ve had a chance to get in with a whole skin and with all your things.”

“I was incredulous a little. It seemed impossible that after getting ready with so much hurry and inconvenience I should have lost my chance of a start in life from such a cause. I asked:

“Does that sort of thing happen often so near the dock gates?”

“Often! No! Of course not often. But it ain’t often either that a man comes along with a cabload of things to join a ship at this time of night. I’ve been in the dock police thirteen years and haven’t seen it done once.”



“Meantime we followed my sea-chest which was being carried down a sort of deep narrow lane, separating two high warehouses, between honest Ted and his little devil of a pal who had to keep up a trot to the other’s stride. The skirt of his soldier’s coat floating behind him nearly swept the ground so that he seemed to be running on castors. At the corner of the gloomy passage a rigged jib boom with a dolphin-striker ending in an arrow-head stuck out of the night close to a cast iron lamp-post. It was the quay side. They set down their load in the light and honest Ted asked hoarsely:

“Where’s your ship, guv’nor?”

“I didn’t know. The constable was interested at my ignorance.

“Don’t know where your ship is?” he asked with curiosity. “And you the second officer! Haven’t you been working on board of her?”

“I couldn’t explain that the only work connected with my appointment was the work of chance. I told him briefly that I didn’t know her at all. At this he remarked:

“So I see. Here she is, right before you. That’s her.”

“At once the head-gear in the gas light inspired me with interest and respect; the spars were big, the chains and ropes stout and the whole thing looked powerful and trustworthy. Barely touched by the light her bows rose faintly alongside the narrow strip of the quay; the rest of her was a black smudge in the darkness. Here I was face to face with my start in life. We walked in a body a few steps on a greasy pavement between her side and the towering wall of a warehouse and I hit my shins cruelly against the end of the gangway. The constable hailed her quietly in a bass undertone ‘Ferndale there!’ A feeble and dismal sound, something in the nature of a buzzing groan, answered from behind the bulwarks.

“I distinguished vaguely an irregular round knob, of wood, perhaps, resting on the rail. It did not move in the least; but as another broken-down buzz like a still fainter echo of the first dismal sound proceeded from it I concluded it must be the head of the ship-keeper. The stalwart constable jeered in a mock-official manner.

“Second officer coming to join. Move yourself a bit.”

“The truth of the statement touched me in the pit of the stomach (you know that’s the spot where emotion gets home on a man) for it was borne upon me that really and truly I was nothing but a second officer of a ship just like any other second officer, to that constable. I was moved by this

solid evidence of my new dignity. Only his tone offended me. Nevertheless I gave him the tip he was looking for. Thereupon he lost all interest in me, humorous or otherwise, and walked away driving sternly before him the honest Ted, who went off grumbling to himself like a hungry ogre, and his horrible dumb little pal in the soldier's coat, who, from first to last, never emitted the slightest sound.

"It was very dark on the quarter deck of the Ferndale between the deep bulwarks overshadowed by the break of the poop and frowned upon by the front of the warehouse. I plumped down on to my chest near the after hatch as if my legs had been jerked from under me. I felt suddenly very tired and languid. The ship-keeper, whom I could hardly make out hung over the capstan in a fit of weak pitiful coughing. He gasped out very low 'Oh! dear! Oh! dear!' and struggled for breath so long that I got up alarmed and irresolute.

"I've been took like this since last Christmas twelvemonth. It ain't nothing."

"He seemed a hundred years old at least. I never saw him properly because he was gone ashore and out of sight when I came on deck in the morning; but he gave me the notion of the feeblest creature that ever breathed. His voice was thin like the buzzing of a mosquito. As it would have been cruel to demand assistance from such a shadowy wreck I went to work myself, dragging my chest along a pitch-black passage under the poop deck, while he sighed and moaned around me as if my exertions were more than his weakness could stand. At last as I banged pretty heavily against the bulkheads he warned me in his faint breathless wheeze to be more careful.

"What's the matter?" I asked rather roughly, not relishing to be admonished by this forlorn broken-down ghost.

"Nothing! Nothing, sir," he protested so hastily that he lost his poor breath again and I felt sorry for him. "Only the captain and his missus are sleeping on board. She's a lady that mustn't be disturbed. They came about half-past eight, and we had a permit to have lights in the cabin till ten to-night."

"This struck me as a considerable piece of news. I had never been in a ship where the captain had his wife with him. I'd heard fellows say that captains' wives could work a lot of mischief on board ship if they happened to take a dislike to anyone; especially the new wives if young and pretty.

The old and experienced wives on the other hand fancied they knew more about the ship than the skipper himself and had an eye like a hawk's for what went on. They were like an extra chief mate of a particularly sharp and unfeeling sort who made his report in the evening. The best of them were a nuisance. In the general opinion a skipper with his wife on board was more difficult to please; but whether to show off his authority before an admiring female or from loving anxiety for her safety or simply from irritation at her presence — nobody I ever heard on the subject could tell for certain.

"After I had bundled in my things somehow I struck a match and had a dazzling glimpse of my berth; then I pitched the roll of my bedding into the bunk but took no trouble to spread it out. I wasn't sleepy now, neither was I tired. And the thought that I was done with the earth for many many months to come made me feel very quiet and self-contained as it were. Sailors will understand what I mean."

Marlow nodded. "It is a strictly professional feeling," he commented. "But other professions or trades know nothing of it. It is only this calling whose primary appeal lies in the suggestion of restless adventure which holds out that deep sensation to those who embrace it. It is difficult to define, I admit."

"I should call it the peace of the sea," said Mr. Charles Powell in an earnest tone but looking at us as though he expected to be met by a laugh of derision and were half prepared to salve his reputation for common sense by joining in it. But neither of us laughed at Mr. Charles Powell in whose start in life we had been called to take a part. He was lucky in his audience.

"A very good name," said Marlow looking at him approvingly. "A sailor finds a deep feeling of security in the exercise of his calling. The exacting life of the sea has this advantage over the life of the earth that its claims are simple and cannot be evaded."

"Gospel truth," assented Mr. Powell. "No! they cannot be evaded."

That an excellent understanding should have established itself between my old friend and our new acquaintance was remarkable enough. For they were exactly dissimilar — one individuality projecting itself in length and the other in breadth, which is already a sufficient ground for irreconcilable difference. Marlow who was lanky, loose, quietly composed in varied shades of brown robbed of every vestige of gloss, had a narrow, veiled glance, the neutral bearing and the secret irritability which go together with

a predisposition to congestion of the liver. The other, compact, broad and sturdy of limb, seemed extremely full of sound organs functioning vigorously all the time in order to keep up the brilliance of his colouring, the light curl of his coal-black hair and the lustre of his eyes, which asserted themselves roundly in an open, manly face. Between two such organisms one would not have expected to find the slightest temperamental accord. But I have observed that profane men living in ships like the holy men gathered together in monasteries develop traits of profound resemblance. This must be because the service of the sea and the service of a temple are both detached from the vanities and errors of a world which follows no severe rule. The men of the sea understand each other very well in their view of earthly things, for simplicity is a good counsellor and isolation not a bad educator. A turn of mind composed of innocence and scepticism is common to them all, with the addition of an unexpected insight into motives, as of disinterested lookers-on at a game. Mr. Powell took me aside to say,

“I like the things he says.”

“You understand each other pretty well,” I observed.

“I know his sort,” said Powell, going to the window to look at his cutter still riding to the flood. “He’s the sort that’s always chasing some notion or other round and round his head just for the fun of the thing.”

“Keeps them in good condition,” I said.

“Lively enough I dare say,” he admitted.

“Would you like better a man who let his notions lie curled up?”

“That I wouldn’t,” answered our new acquaintance. Clearly he was not difficult to get on with. “I like him, very well,” he continued, “though it isn’t easy to make him out. He seems to be up to a thing or two. What’s he doing?”

I informed him that our friend Marlow had retired from the sea in a sort of half-hearted fashion some years ago.

Mr. Powell’s comment was: “Fancied had enough of it?”

“Fancied’s the very word to use in this connection,” I observed, remembering the subtly provisional character of Marlow’s long sojourn amongst us. From year to year he dwelt on land as a bird rests on the branch of a tree, so tense with the power of brusque flight into its true element that it is incomprehensible why it should sit still minute after minute. The sea is the sailor’s true element, and Marlow, lingering on

shore, was to me an object of incredulous commiseration like a bird, which, secretly, should have lost its faith in the high virtue of flying.

## CHAPTER TWO — THE FYNES AND THE GIRL-FRIEND

We were on our feet in the room by then, and Marlow, brown and deliberate, approached the window where Mr. Powell and I had retired. “What was the name of your chance again?” he asked. Mr. Powell stared for a moment.

“Oh! The Ferndale. A Liverpool ship. Composite built.”

“Ferndale,” repeated Marlow thoughtfully. “Ferndale.”

“Know her?”

“Our friend,” I said, “knows something of every ship. He seems to have gone about the seas prying into things considerably.”

Marlow smiled.

“I’ve seen her, at least once.”

“The finest sea-boat ever launched,” declared Mr. Powell sturdily. “Without exception.”

“She looked a stout, comfortable ship,” assented Marlow. “Uncommonly comfortable. Not very fast tho’.”

“She was fast enough for any reasonable man — when I was in her,” growled Mr. Powell with his back to us.

“Any ship is that — for a reasonable man,” generalized Marlow in a conciliatory tone. “A sailor isn’t a globe-trotter.”

“No,” muttered Mr. Powell.

“Time’s nothing to him,” advanced Marlow.

“I don’t suppose it’s much,” said Mr. Powell. “All the same a quick passage is a feather in a man’s cap.”

“True. But that ornament is for the use of the master only. And by the by what was his name?”

“The master of the Ferndale? Anthony. Captain Anthony.”

“Just so. Quite right,” approved Marlow thoughtfully. Our new acquaintance looked over his shoulder.

“What do you mean? Why is it more right than if it had been Brown?”

“He has known him probably,” I explained. “Marlow here appears to know something of every soul that ever went afloat in a sailor’s body.”

Mr. Powell seemed wonderfully amenable to verbal suggestions for looking again out of the window, he muttered:

“He was a good soul.”

This clearly referred to Captain Anthony of the Ferndale. Marlow addressed his protest to me.

"I did not know him. I really didn't. He was a good soul. That's nothing very much out of the way — is it? And I didn't even know that much of him. All I knew of him was an accident called Fyne.

At this Mr. Powell who evidently could be rebellious too turned his back squarely on the window.

"What on earth do you mean?" he asked. "An — accident — called Fyne," he repeated separating the words with emphasis.

Marlow was not disconcerted.

"I don't mean accident in the sense of a mishap. Not in the least. Fyne was a good little man in the Civil Service. By accident I mean that which happens blindly and without intelligent design. That's generally the way a brother-in-law happens into a man's life."

Marlow's tone being apologetic and our new acquaintance having again turned to the window I took it upon myself to say:

"You are justified. There is very little intelligent design in the majority of marriages; but they are none the worse for that. Intelligence leads people astray as far as passion sometimes. I know you are not a cynic."

Marlow smiled his retrospective smile which was kind as though he bore no grudge against people he used to know.

"Little Fyne's marriage was quite successful. There was no design at all in it. Fyne, you must know, was an enthusiastic pedestrian. He spent his holidays tramping all over our native land. His tastes were simple. He put infinite conviction and perseverance into his holidays. At the proper season you would meet in the fields, Fyne, a serious-faced, broad-chested, little man, with a shabby knap-sack on his back, making for some church steeple. He had a horror of roads. He wrote once a little book called the 'Tramp's Itinerary,' and was recognised as an authority on the footpaths of England. So one year, in his favourite over-the-fields, back-way fashion he entered a pretty Surrey village where he met Miss Anthony. Pure accident, you see. They came to an understanding, across some stile, most likely. Little Fyne held very solemn views as to the destiny of women on this earth, the nature of our sublunary love, the obligations of this transient life and so on. He probably disclosed them to his future wife. Miss Anthony's views of life were very decided too but in a different way. I don't know the

story of their wooing. I imagine it was carried on clandestinely and, I am certain, with portentous gravity, at the back of copses, behind hedges . . .

“Why was it carried on clandestinely?” I inquired.

“Because of the lady’s father. He was a savage sentimentalist who had his own decided views of his paternal prerogatives. He was a terror; but the only evidence of imaginative faculty about Fyne was his pride in his wife’s parentage. It stimulated his ingenuity too. Difficult — is it not? — to introduce one’s wife’s maiden name into general conversation. But my simple Fyne made use of Captain Anthony for that purpose, or else I would never even have heard of the man. “My wife’s sailor-brother” was the phrase. He trotted out the sailor-brother in a pretty wide range of subjects: Indian and colonial affairs, matters of trade, talk of travels, of seaside holidays and so on. Once I remember “My wife’s sailor-brother Captain Anthony” being produced in connection with nothing less recondite than a sunset. And little Fyne never failed to add “The son of Carleon Anthony, the poet — you know.” He used to lower his voice for that statement, and people were impressed or pretended to be.”

The late Carleon Anthony, the poet, sang in his time of the domestic and social amenities of our age with a most felicitous versification, his object being, in his own words, “to glorify the result of six thousand years’ evolution towards the refinement of thought, manners and feelings.” Why he fixed the term at six thousand years I don’t know. His poems read like sentimental novels told in verse of a really superior quality. You felt as if you were being taken out for a delightful country drive by a charming lady in a pony carriage. But in his domestic life that same Carleon Anthony showed traces of the primitive cave-dweller’s temperament. He was a massive, implacable man with a handsome face, arbitrary and exacting with his dependants, but marvellously suave in his manner to admiring strangers. These contrasted displays must have been particularly exasperating to his long-suffering family. After his second wife’s death his boy, whom he persisted by a mere whim in educating at home, ran away in conventional style and, as if disgusted with the amenities of civilization, threw himself, figuratively speaking, into the sea. The daughter (the elder of the two children) either from compassion or because women are naturally more enduring, remained in bondage to the poet for several years, till she too seized a chance of escape by throwing herself into the arms, the muscular arms, of the pedestrian Fyne. This was either great luck or great



sagacity. A civil servant is, I should imagine, the last human being in the world to preserve those traits of the cave-dweller from which she was fleeing. Her father would never consent to see her after the marriage. Such unforgiving selfishness is difficult to understand unless as a perverse sort of refinement. There were also doubts as to Carleon Anthony's complete sanity for some considerable time before he died.

Most of the above I elicited from Marlow, for all I knew of Carleon Anthony was his unexciting but fascinating verse. Marlow assured me that the Fyne marriage was perfectly successful and even happy, in an earnest, unplayful fashion, being blessed besides by three healthy, active, self-reliant children, all girls. They were all pedestrians too. Even the youngest would wander away for miles if not restrained. Mrs. Fyne had a ruddy out-of-doors complexion and wore blouses with a starched front like a man's shirt, a stand-up collar and a long necktie. Marlow had made their acquaintance one summer in the country, where they were accustomed to take a cottage for the holidays . . .

At this point we were interrupted by Mr. Powell who declared that he must leave us. The tide was on the turn, he announced coming away from the window abruptly. He wanted to be on board his cutter before she swung and of course he would sleep on board. Never slept away from the cutter while on a cruise. He was gone in a moment, unceremoniously, but giving us no offence and leaving behind an impression as though we had known him for a long time. The ingenuous way he had told us of his start in life had something to do with putting him on that footing with us. I gave no thought to seeing him again.

Marlow expressed a confident hope of coming across him before long.

"He cruises about the mouth of the river all the summer. He will be easy to find any week-end," he remarked ringing the bell so that we might settle up with the waiter.

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Later on I asked Marlow why he wished to cultivate this chance acquaintance. He confessed apologetically that it was the commonest sort of curiosity. I flatter myself that I understand all sorts of curiosity. Curiosity about daily facts, about daily things, about daily men. It is the most respectable faculty of the human mind — in fact I cannot conceive the uses of an incurious mind. It would be like a chamber perpetually locked

up. But in this particular case Mr. Powell seemed to have given us already a complete insight into his personality such as it was; a personality capable of perception and with a feeling for the vagaries of fate, but essentially simple in itself.

Marlow agreed with me so far. He explained however that his curiosity was not excited by Mr. Powell exclusively. It originated a good way further back in the fact of his accidental acquaintance with the Fynes, in the country. This chance meeting with a man who had sailed with Captain Anthony had revived it. It had revived it to some purpose, to such purpose that to me too was given the knowledge of its origin and of its nature. It was given to me in several stages, at intervals which are not indicated here. On this first occasion I remarked to Marlow with some surprise:

“But, if I remember rightly you said you didn’t know Captain Anthony.”

“No. I never saw the man. It’s years ago now, but I seem to hear solemn little Fyne’s deep voice announcing the approaching visit of his wife’s brother “the son of the poet, you know.” He had just arrived in London from a long voyage, and, directly his occupations permitted, was coming down to stay with his relatives for a few weeks. No doubt we two should find many things to talk about by ourselves in reference to our common calling, added little Fyne portentously in his grave undertones, as if the Mercantile Marine were a secret society.

You must understand that I cultivated the Fynes only in the country, in their holiday time. This was the third year. Of their existence in town I knew no more than may be inferred from analogy. I played chess with Fyne in the late afternoon, and sometimes came over to the cottage early enough to have tea with the whole family at a big round table. They sat about it, an unsmiling, sunburnt company of very few words indeed. Even the children were silent and as if contemptuous of each other and of their elders. Fyne muttered sometimes deep down in his chest some insignificant remark. Mrs. Fyne smiled mechanically (she had splendid teeth) while distributing tea and bread and butter. A something which was not coldness, nor yet indifference, but a sort of peculiar self-possession gave her the appearance of a very trustworthy, very capable and excellent governess; as if Fyne were a widower and the children not her own but only entrusted to her calm, efficient, unemotional care. One expected her to address Fyne as Mr. When she called him John it surprised one like a shocking familiarity. The atmosphere of that holiday was — if I may put it so — brightly dull.

Healthy faces, fair complexions, clear eyes, and never a frank smile in the whole lot, unless perhaps from a girl-friend.

The girl-friend problem exercised me greatly. How and where the Fynes got all these pretty creatures to come and stay with them I can't imagine. I had at first the wild suspicion that they were obtained to amuse Fyne. But I soon discovered that he could hardly tell one from the other, though obviously their presence met with his solemn approval. These girls in fact came for Mrs. Fyne. They treated her with admiring deference. She answered to some need of theirs. They sat at her feet. They were like disciples. It was very curious. Of Fyne they took but scanty notice. As to myself I was made to feel that I did not exist.

After tea we would sit down to chess and then Fyne's everlasting gravity became faintly tinged by an attenuated gleam of something inward which resembled sly satisfaction. Of the divine frivolity of laughter he was only capable over a chess-board. Certain positions of the game struck him as humorous, which nothing else on earth could do . . .

"He used to beat you," I asserted with confidence.

"Yes. He used to beat me," Marlow owned up hastily.

So he and Fyne played two games after tea. The children romped together outside, gravely, unplayfully, as one would expect from Fyne's children, and Mrs. Fyne would be gone to the bottom of the garden with the girl-friend of the week. She always walked off directly after tea with her arm round the girl-friend's waist. Marlow said that there was only one girl-friend with whom he had conversed at all. It had happened quite unexpectedly, long after he had given up all hope of getting into touch with these reserved girl-friends.

One day he saw a woman walking about on the edge of a high quarry, which rose a sheer hundred feet, at least, from the road winding up the hill out of which it had been excavated. He shouted warningly to her from below where he happened to be passing. She was really in considerable danger. At the sound of his voice she started back and retreated out of his sight amongst some young Scotch firs growing near the very brink of the precipice.

"I sat down on a bank of grass," Marlow went on. "She had given me a turn. The hem of her skirt seemed to float over that awful sheer drop, she was so close to the edge. An absurd thing to do. A perfectly mad trick — for no conceivable object! I was reflecting on the foolhardiness of the

average girl and remembering some other instances of the kind, when she came into view walking down the steep curve of the road. She had Mrs. Fyne's walking-stick and was escorted by the Fyne dog. Her dead white face struck me with astonishment, so that I forgot to raise my hat. I just sat and stared. The dog, a vivacious and amiable animal which for some inscrutable reason had bestowed his friendship on my unworthy self, rushed up the bank demonstratively and insinuated himself under my arm.

The girl-friend (it was one of them) went past some way as though she had not seen me, then stopped and called the dog to her several times; but he only nestled closer to my side, and when I tried to push him away developed that remarkable power of internal resistance by which a dog makes himself practically immovable by anything short of a kick. She looked over her shoulder and her arched eyebrows frowned above her blanched face. It was almost a scowl. Then the expression changed. She looked unhappy. "Come here!" she cried once more in an angry and distressed tone. I took off my hat at last, but the dog hanging out his tongue with that cheerfully imbecile expression some dogs know so well how to put on when it suits their purpose, pretended to be deaf.

She cried from the distance desperately.

"Perhaps you will take him to the cottage then. I can't wait."

"I won't be responsible for that dog," I protested getting down the bank and advancing towards her. She looked very hurt, apparently by the desertion of the dog. "But if you let me walk with you he will follow us all right," I suggested.

She moved on without answering me. The dog launched himself suddenly full speed down the road receding from us in a small cloud of dust. It vanished in the distance, and presently we came up with him lying on the grass. He panted in the shade of the hedge with shining eyes but pretended not to see us. We had not exchanged a word so far. The girl by my side gave him a scornful glance in passing.

"He offered to come with me," she remarked bitterly.

"And then abandoned you!" I sympathized. "It looks very unchivalrous. But that's merely his want of tact. I believe he meant to protest against your reckless proceedings. What made you come so near the edge of that quarry? The earth might have given way. Haven't you noticed a smashed fir tree at the bottom? Tumbled over only the other morning after a night's rain."

“I don’t see why I shouldn’t be as reckless as I please.”

I was nettled by her brusque manner of asserting her folly, and I told her that neither did I as far as that went, in a tone which almost suggested that she was welcome to break her neck for all I cared. This was considerably more than I meant, but I don’t like rude girls. I had been introduced to her only the day before — at the round tea-table — and she had barely acknowledged the introduction. I had not caught her name but I had noticed her fine, arched eyebrows which, so the physiognomists say, are a sign of courage.

I examined her appearance quietly. Her hair was nearly black, her eyes blue, deeply shaded by long dark eyelashes. She had a little colour now. She looked straight before her; the corner of her lip on my side drooped a little; her chin was fine, somewhat pointed. I went on to say that some regard for others should stand in the way of one’s playing with danger. I urged playfully the distress of the poor Fynes in case of accident, if nothing else. I told her that she did not know the bucolic mind. Had she given occasion for a coroner’s inquest the verdict would have been suicide, with the implication of unhappy love. They would never be able to understand that she had taken the trouble to climb over two post-and-rail fences only for the fun of being reckless. Indeed even as I talked chaffingly I was greatly struck myself by the fact.

She retorted that once one was dead what horrid people thought of one did not matter. It was said with infinite contempt; but something like a suppressed quaver in the voice made me look at her again. I perceived then that her thick eyelashes were wet. This surprising discovery silenced me as you may guess. She looked unhappy. And — I don’t know how to say it — well — it suited her. The clouded brow, the pained mouth, the vague fixed glance! A victim. And this characteristic aspect made her attractive; an individual touch — you know.

The dog had run on ahead and now gazed at us by the side of the Fyne’s garden-gate in a tense attitude and wagging his stumpy tail very, very slowly, with an air of concentrated attention. The girl-friend of the Fynes bolted violently through the aforesaid gate and into the cottage leaving me on the road — astounded.

A couple of hours afterwards I returned to the cottage for chess as usual. I saw neither the girl nor Mrs. Fyne then. We had our two games and on parting I warned Fyne that I was called to town on business and might be

away for some time. He regretted it very much. His brother-in-law was expected next day but he didn't know whether he was a chess-player. Captain Anthony ("the son of the poet — you know") was of a retiring disposition, shy with strangers, unused to society and very much devoted to his calling, Fyne explained. All the time they had been married he could be induced only once before to come and stay with them for a few days. He had had a rather unhappy boyhood; and it made him a silent man. But no doubt, concluded Fyne, as if dealing portentously with a mystery, we two sailors should find much to say to one another.

This point was never settled. I was detained in town from week to week till it seemed hardly worth while to go back. But as I had kept on my rooms in the farmhouse I concluded to go down again for a few days.

It was late, deep dusk, when I got out at our little country station. My eyes fell on the unmistakable broad back and the muscular legs in cycling stockings of little Fyne. He passed along the carriages rapidly towards the rear of the train, which presently pulled out and left him solitary at the end of the rustic platform. When he came back to where I waited I perceived that he was much perturbed, so perturbed as to forget the convention of the usual greetings. He only exclaimed Oh! on recognizing me, and stopped irresolute. When I asked him if he had been expecting somebody by that train he didn't seem to know. He stammered disconnectedly. I looked hard at him. To all appearances he was perfectly sober; moreover to suspect Fyne of a lapse from the proprieties high or low, great or small, was absurd. He was also a too serious and deliberate person to go mad suddenly. But as he seemed to have forgotten that he had a tongue in his head I concluded I would leave him to his mystery. To my surprise he followed me out of the station and kept by my side, though I did not encourage him. I did not however repulse his attempts at conversation. He was no longer expecting me, he said. He had given me up. The weather had been uniformly fine — and so on. I gathered also that the son of the poet had curtailed his stay somewhat and gone back to his ship the day before.

That information touched me but little. Believing in heredity in moderation I knew well how sea-life fashions a man outwardly and stamps his soul with the mark of a certain prosaic fitness — because a sailor is not an adventurer. I expressed no regret at missing Captain Anthony and we proceeded in silence till, on approaching the holiday cottage, Fyne suddenly

and unexpectedly broke it by the hurried declaration that he would go on with me a little farther.

“Go with you to your door,” he mumbled and started forward to the little gate where the shadowy figure of Mrs. Fyne hovered, clearly on the lookout for him. She was alone. The children must have been already in bed and I saw no attending girl-friend shadow near her vague but unmistakable form, half-lost in the obscurity of the little garden.

I heard Fyne exclaim “Nothing” and then Mrs. Fyne’s well-trained, responsible voice uttered the words, “It’s what I have said,” with incisive equanimity. By that time I had passed on, raising my hat. Almost at once Fyne caught me up and slowed down to my strolling gait which must have been infinitely irksome to his high pedestrian faculties. I am sure that all his muscular person must have suffered from awful physical boredom; but he did not attempt to charm it away by conversation. He preserved a portentous and dreary silence. And I was bored too. Suddenly I perceived the menace of even worse boredom. Yes! He was so silent because he had something to tell me.

I became extremely frightened. But man, reckless animal, is so made that in him curiosity, the paltriest curiosity, will overcome all terrors, every disgust, and even despair itself. To my laconic invitation to come in for a drink he answered by a deep, gravely accented: “Thanks, I will” as though it were a response in church. His face as seen in the lamplight gave me no clue to the character of the impending communication; as indeed from the nature of things it couldn’t do, its normal expression being already that of the utmost possible seriousness. It was perfect and immovable; and for a certainty if he had something excruciatingly funny to tell me it would be all the same.

He gazed at me earnestly and delivered himself of some weighty remarks on Mrs. Fyne’s desire to befriend, counsel, and guide young girls of all sorts on the path of life. It was a voluntary mission. He approved his wife’s action and also her views and principles in general.

All this with a solemn countenance and in deep measured tones. Yet somehow I got an irresistible conviction that he was exasperated by something in particular. In the unworthy hope of being amused by the misfortunes of a fellow-creature I asked him point-blank what was wrong now.

What was wrong was that a girl-friend was missing. She had been missing precisely since six o'clock that morning. The woman who did the work of the cottage saw her going out at that hour, for a walk. The pedestrian Fyne's ideas of a walk were extensive, but the girl did not turn up for lunch, nor yet for tea, nor yet for dinner. She had not turned up by footpath, road or rail. He had been reluctant to make inquiries. It would have set all the village talking. The Fynes had expected her to reappear every moment, till the shades of the night and the silence of slumber had stolen gradually over the wide and peaceful rural landscape commanded by the cottage.

After telling me that much Fyne sat helpless in unconclusive agony. Going to bed was out of the question — neither could any steps be taken just then. What to do with himself he did not know!

I asked him if this was the same young lady I saw a day or two before I went to town? He really could not remember. Was she a girl with dark hair and blue eyes? I asked further. He really couldn't tell what colour her eyes were. He was very unobservant except as to the peculiarities of footpaths, on which he was an authority.

I thought with amazement and some admiration that Mrs. Fyne's young disciples were to her husband's gravity no more than evanescent shadows. However, with but little hesitation Fyne ventured to affirm that — yes, her hair was of some dark shade.

"We had a good deal to do with that girl first and last," he explained solemnly; then getting up as if moved by a spring he snatched his cap off the table. "She may be back in the cottage," he cried in his bass voice. I followed him out on the road.

It was one of those dewy, clear, starry nights, oppressing our spirit, crushing our pride, by the brilliant evidence of the awful loneliness, of the hopeless obscure insignificance of our globe lost in the splendid revelation of a glittering, soulless universe. I hate such skies. Daylight is friendly to man toiling under a sun which warms his heart; and cloudy soft nights are more kindly to our littleness. I nearly ran back again to my lighted parlour; Fyne fussing in a knicker-bocker suit before the hosts of heaven, on a shadowy earth, about a transient, phantom-like girl, seemed too ridiculous to associate with. On the other hand there was something fascinating in the very absurdity. He cut along in his best pedestrian style and I found myself let in for a spell of severe exercise at eleven o'clock at night.



In the distance over the fields and trees smudging and blotching the vast obscurity, one lighted window of the cottage with the blind up was like a bright beacon kept alight to guide the lost wanderer. Inside, at the table bearing the lamp, we saw Mrs. Fyne sitting with folded arms and not a hair of her head out of place. She looked exactly like a governess who had put the children to bed; and her manner to me was just the neutral manner of a governess. To her husband, too, for that matter.

Fyne told her that I was fully informed. Not a muscle of her ruddy smooth handsome face moved. She had schooled herself into that sort of thing. Having seen two successive wives of the delicate poet chivied and worried into their graves, she had adopted that cool, detached manner to meet her gifted father's outbreaks of selfish temper. It had now become a second nature. I suppose she was always like that; even in the very hour of elopement with Fyne. That transaction when one remembered it in her presence acquired a quaintly marvellous aspect to one's imagination. But somehow her self-possession matched very well little Fyne's invariable solemnity.

I was rather sorry for him. Wasn't he worried! The agony of solemnity. At the same time I was amused. I didn't take a gloomy view of that "vanishing girl" trick. Somehow I couldn't. But I said nothing. None of us said anything. We sat about that big round table as if assembled for a conference and looked at each other in a sort of fatuous consternation. I would have ended by laughing outright if I had not been saved from that impropriety by poor Fyne becoming preposterous.

He began with grave anguish to talk of going to the police in the morning, of printing descriptive bills, of setting people to drag the ponds for miles around. It was extremely gruesome. I murmured something about communicating with the young lady's relatives. It seemed to me a very natural suggestion; but Fyne and his wife exchanged such a significant glance that I felt as though I had made a tactless remark.

But I really wanted to help poor Fyne; and as I could see that, manlike, he suffered from the present inability to act, the passive waiting, I said: "Nothing of this can be done till to-morrow. But as you have given me an insight into the nature of your thoughts I can tell you what may be done at once. We may go and look at the bottom of the old quarry which is on the level of the road, about a mile from here."

The couple made big eyes at this, and then I told them of my meeting with the girl. You may be surprised but I assure you I had not perceived this aspect of it till that very moment. It was like a startling revelation; the past throwing a sinister light on the future. Fyne opened his mouth gravely and as gravely shut it. Nothing more. Mrs. Fyne said, "You had better go," with an air as if her self-possession had been pricked with a pin in some secret place.

And I — you know how stupid I can be at times — I perceived with dismay for the first time that by pandering to Fyne's morbid fancies I had let myself in for some more severe exercise. And wasn't I sorry I spoke! You know how I hate walking — at least on solid, rural earth; for I can walk a ship's deck a whole foggy night through, if necessary, and think little of it. There is some satisfaction too in playing the vagabond in the streets of a big town till the sky pales above the ridges of the roofs. I have done that repeatedly for pleasure — of a sort. But to tramp the slumbering countryside in the dark is for me a wearisome nightmare of exertion.

With perfect detachment Mrs. Fyne watched me go out after her husband. That woman was flint.

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The fresh night had a smell of soil, of turned-up sods like a grave — an association particularly odious to a sailor by its idea of confinement and narrowness; yes, even when he has given up the hope of being buried at sea; about the last hope a sailor gives up consciously after he has been, as it does happen, decoyed by some chance into the toils of the land. A strong grave-like sniff. The ditch by the side of the road must have been freshly dug in front of the cottage.

Once clear of the garden Fyne gathered way like a racing cutter. What was a mile to him — or twenty miles? You think he might have gone shrinkingly on such an errand. But not a bit of it. The force of pedestrian genius I suppose. I raced by his side in a mood of profound self-derision, and infinitely vexed with that minx. Because dead or alive I thought of her as a minx . . ."

I smiled incredulously at Marlow's ferocity; but Marlow pausing with a whimsically retrospective air, never flinched.

"Yes, yes. Even dead. And now you are shocked. You see, you are such a chivalrous masculine beggar. But there is enough of the woman in my

nature to free my judgment of women from glamorous reticency. And then, why should I upset myself? A woman is not necessarily either a doll or an angel to me. She is a human being, very much like myself. And I have come across too many dead souls lying so to speak at the foot of high unscaleable places for a merely possible dead body at the bottom of a quarry to strike my sincerity dumb.

The cliff-like face of the quarry looked forbiddingly impressive. I will admit that Fyne and I hung back for a moment before we made a plunge off the road into the bushes growing in a broad space at the foot of the towering limestone wall. These bushes were heavy with dew. There were also concealed mudholes in there. We crept and tumbled and felt about with our hands along the ground. We got wet, scratched, and plastered with mire all over our nether garments. Fyne fell suddenly into a strange cavity — probably a disused lime-kiln. His voice uplifted in grave distress sounded more than usually rich, solemn and profound. This was the comic relief of an absurdly dramatic situation. While hauling him out I permitted myself to laugh aloud at last. Fyne, of course, didn't.

I need not tell you that we found nothing after a most conscientious search. Fyne even pushed his way into a decaying shed half-buried in dew-soaked vegetation. He struck matches, several of them too, as if to make absolutely sure that the vanished girl-friend of his wife was not hiding there. The short flares illuminated his grave, immovable countenance while I let myself go completely and laughed in peals.

I asked him if he really and truly supposed that any sane girl would go and hide in that shed; and if so why?

Disdainful of my mirth he merely muttered his basso-profundo thankfulness that we had not found her anywhere about there. Having grown extremely sensitive (an effect of irritation) to the tonalities, I may say, of this affair, I felt that it was only an imperfect, reserved, thankfulness, with one eye still on the possibilities of the several ponds in the neighbourhood. And I remember I snorted, I positively snorted, at that poor Fyne.

What really jarred upon me was the rate of his walking. Differences in politics, in ethics and even in aesthetics need not arouse angry antagonism. One's opinion may change; one's tastes may alter — in fact they do. One's very conception of virtue is at the mercy of some felicitous temptation which may be sprung on one any day. All these things are perpetually on

the swing. But a temperamental difference, temperament being immutable, is the parent of hate. That's why religious quarrels are the fiercest of all. My temperament, in matters pertaining to solid land, is the temperament of leisurely movement, of deliberate gait. And there was that little Fyne pounding along the road in a most offensive manner; a man wedded to thick-soled, laced boots; whereas my temperament demands thin shoes of the lightest kind. Of course there could never have been question of friendship between us; but under the provocation of having to keep up with his pace I began to dislike him actively. I begged sarcastically to know whether he could tell me if we were engaged in a farce or in a tragedy. I wanted to regulate my feelings which, I told him, were in an unbecoming state of confusion.

But Fyne was as impervious to sarcasm as a turtle. He tramped on, and all he did was to ejaculate twice out of his deep chest, vaguely, doubtfully.

"I am afraid . . . I am afraid! . . ."

This was tragic. The thump of his boots was the only sound in a shadowy world. I kept by his side with a comparatively ghostly, silent tread. By a strange illusion the road appeared to run up against a lot of low stars at no very great distance, but as we advanced new stretches of whitey-brown ribbon seemed to come up from under the black ground. I observed, as we went by, the lamp in my parlour in the farmhouse still burning. But I did not leave Fyne to run in and put it out. The impetus of his pedestrian excellence carried me past in his wake before I could make up my mind.

"Tell me, Fyne," I cried, "you don't think the girl was mad — do you?"

He answered nothing. Soon the lighted beacon-like window of the cottage came into view. Then Fyne uttered a solemn: "Certainly not," with profound assurance. But immediately after he added a "Very highly strung young person indeed," which unsettled me again. Was it a tragedy?

"Nobody ever got up at six o'clock in the morning to commit suicide," I declared crustily. "It's unheard of! This is a farce."

As a matter of fact it was neither farce nor tragedy.

Coming up to the cottage we had a view of Mrs. Fyne inside still sitting in the strong light at the round table with folded arms. It looked as though she had not moved her very head by as much as an inch since we went away. She was amazing in a sort of unsubtle way; crudely amazing — I thought. Why crudely? I don't know. Perhaps because I saw her then in a crude light. I mean this materially — in the light of an unshaded lamp. Our

mental conclusions depend so much on momentary physical sensations — don't they? If the lamp had been shaded I should perhaps have gone home after expressing politely my concern at the Fynes' unpleasant predicament.

Losing a girl-friend in that manner is unpleasant. It is also mysterious. So mysterious that a certain mystery attaches to the people to whom such a thing does happen. Moreover I had never really understood the Fynes; he with his solemnity which extended to the very eating of bread and butter; she with that air of detachment and resolution in breasting the commonplace current of their unexciting life, in which the cutting of bread and butter appeared to me, by a long way, the most dangerous episode. Sometimes I amused myself by supposing that to their minds this world of ours must be wearing a perfectly overwhelming aspect, and that their heads contained respectively awfully serious and extremely desperate thoughts — and trying to imagine what an exciting time they must be having of it in the inscrutable depths of their being. This last was difficult to a volatile person (I am sure that to the Fynes I was a volatile person) and the amusement in itself was not very great; but still — in the country — away from all mental stimulants! . . . My efforts had invested them with a sort of amusing profundity.

But when Fyne and I got back into the room, then in the searching, domestic, glare of the lamp, inimical to the play of fancy, I saw these two stripped of every vesture it had amused me to put on them for fun. Queer enough they were. Is there a human being that isn't that — more or less secretly? But whatever their secret, it was manifest to me that it was neither subtle nor profound. They were a good, stupid, earnest couple and very much bothered. They were that — with the usual unshaded crudity of average people. There was nothing in them that the lamplight might not touch without the slightest risk of indiscretion.

Directly we had entered the room Fyne announced the result by saying "Nothing" in the same tone as at the gate on his return from the railway station. And as then Mrs. Fyne uttered an incisive "It's what I've said," which might have been the veriest echo of her words in the garden. We three looked at each other as if on the brink of a disclosure. I don't know whether she was vexed at my presence. It could hardly be called intrusion — could it? Little Fyne began it. It had to go on. We stood before her, plastered with the same mud (Fyne was a sight!), scratched by the same brambles, conscious of the same experience. Yes. Before her. And she

looked at us with folded arms, with an extraordinary fulness of assumed responsibility. I addressed her.

“You don’t believe in an accident, Mrs. Fyne, do you?”

She shook her head in curt negation while, caked in mud and inexpressibly serious-faced, Fyne seemed to be backing her up with all the weight of his solemn presence. Nothing more absurd could be conceived. It was delicious. And I went on in deferential accents: “Am I to understand then that you entertain the theory of suicide?”

I don’t know that I am liable to fits of delirium but by a sudden and alarming aberration while waiting for her answer I became mentally aware of three trained dogs dancing on their hind legs. I don’t know why. Perhaps because of the pervading solemnity. There’s nothing more solemn on earth than a dance of trained dogs.

“She has chosen to disappear. That’s all.”

In these words Mrs. Fyne answered me. The aggressive tone was too much for my endurance. In an instant I found myself out of the dance and down on all-fours so to speak, with liberty to bark and bite.

“The devil she has,” I cried. “Has chosen to . . . Like this, all at once, anyhow, regardless . . . I’ve had the privilege of meeting that reckless and brusque young lady and I must say that with her air of an angry victim . . . “

“Precisely,” Mrs. Fyne said very unexpectedly like a steel trap going off. I stared at her. How provoking she was! So I went on to finish my tirade. “She struck me at first sight as the most inconsiderate wrong-headed girl that I ever . . . “

“Why should a girl be more considerate than anyone else? More than any man, for instance?” inquired Mrs. Fyne with a still greater assertion of responsibility in her bearing.

Of course I exclaimed at this, not very loudly it is true, but forcibly. Were then the feelings of friends, relations and even of strangers to be disregarded? I asked Mrs. Fyne if she did not think it was a sort of duty to show elementary consideration not only for the natural feelings but even for the prejudices of one’s fellow-creatures.

Her answer knocked me over.

“Not for a woman.”

Just like that. I confess that I went down flat. And while in that collapsed state I learned the true nature of Mrs. Fyne’s feminist doctrine. It was not political, it was not social. It was a knock-me-down doctrine — a

practical individualistic doctrine. You would not thank me for expounding it to you at large. Indeed I think that she herself did not enlighten me fully. There must have been things not fit for a man to hear. But shortly, and as far as my bewilderment allowed me to grasp its naïve atrociousness, it was something like this: that no consideration, no delicacy, no tenderness, no scruples should stand in the way of a woman (who by the mere fact of her sex was the predestined victim of conditions created by men's selfish passions, their vices and their abominable tyranny) from taking the shortest cut towards securing for herself the easiest possible existence. She had even the right to go out of existence without considering anyone's feelings or convenience since some women's existences were made impossible by the shortsighted baseness of men.

I looked at her, sitting before the lamp at one o'clock in the morning, with her mature, smooth-cheeked face of masculine shape robbed of its freshness by fatigue; at her eyes dimmed by this senseless vigil. I looked also at Fyne; the mud was drying on him; he was obviously tired. The weariness of solemnity. But he preserved an unflinching, endorsing, gravity of expression. Endorsing it all as became a good, convinced husband.

"Oh! I see," I said. "No consideration . . . Well I hope you like it."

They amused me beyond the wildest imaginings of which I was capable. After the first shock, you understand, I recovered very quickly. The order of the world was safe enough. He was a civil servant and she his good and faithful wife. But when it comes to dealing with human beings anything, anything may be expected. So even my astonishment did not last very long. How far she developed and illustrated that conscienceless and austere doctrine to the girl-friends, who were mere transient shadows to her husband, I could not tell. Any length I supposed. And he looked on, acquiesced, approved, just for that very reason — because these pretty girls were but shadows to him. O! Most virtuous Fyne! He cast his eyes down. He didn't like it. But I eyed him with hidden animosity for he had got me to run after him under somewhat false pretences.

Mrs. Fyne had only smiled at me very expressively, very self-confidently. "Oh I quite understand that you accept the fullest responsibility," I said. "I am the only ridiculous person in this — this — I don't know how to call it — performance. However, I've nothing more to do here, so I'll say good-night — or good morning, for it must be past one."

But before departing, in common decency, I offered to take any wires they might write. My lodgings were nearer the post-office than the cottage and I would send them off the first thing in the morning. I supposed they would wish to communicate, if only as to the disposal of the luggage, with the young lady's relatives . . .

Fyne, he looked rather downcast by then, thanked me and declined.

"There is really no one," he said, very grave.

"No one," I exclaimed.

"Practically," said curt Mrs. Fyne.

And my curiosity was aroused again.

"Ah! I see. An orphan."

Mrs. Fyne looked away weary and sombre, and Fyne said "Yes" impulsively, and then qualified the affirmative by the quaint statement: "To a certain extent."

I became conscious of a languid, exhausted embarrassment, bowed to Mrs. Fyne, and went out of the cottage to be confronted outside its door by the bespangled, cruel revelation of the Immensity of the Universe. The night was not sufficiently advanced for the stars to have paled; and the earth seemed to me more profoundly asleep — perhaps because I was alone now. Not having Fyne with me to set the pace I let myself drift, rather than walk, in the direction of the farmhouse. To drift is the only reposeful sort of motion (ask any ship if it isn't) and therefore consistent with thoughtfulness. And I pondered: How is one an orphan "to a certain extent"?

No amount of solemnity could make such a statement other than bizarre. What a strange condition to be in. Very likely one of the parents only was dead? But no; it couldn't be, since Fyne had said just before that "there was really no one" to communicate with. No one! And then remembering Mrs. Fyne's snappy "Practically" my thoughts fastened upon that lady as a more tangible object of speculation.

I wondered — and wondering I doubted — whether she really understood herself the theory she had propounded to me. Everything may be said — indeed ought to be said — providing we know how to say it. She probably did not. She was not intelligent enough for that. She had no knowledge of the world. She had got hold of words as a child might get hold of some poisonous pills and play with them for "dear, tiny little marbles." No! The domestic-slave daughter of Carleon Anthony and the



little Fyne of the Civil Service (that flower of civilization) were not intelligent people. They were commonplace, earnest, without smiles and without guile. But he had his solemnities and she had her reveries, her lurid, violent, crude reveries. And I thought with some sadness that all these revolts and indignations, all these protests, revulsions of feeling, pangs of suffering and of rage, expressed but the uneasiness of sensual beings trying for their share in the joys of form, colour, sensations — the only riches of our world of senses. A poet may be a simple being but he is bound to be various and full of wiles, ingenious and irritable. I reflected on the variety of ways the ingenuity of the late bard of civilization would be able to invent for the tormenting of his dependants. Poets not being generally foresighted in practical affairs, no vision of consequences would restrain him. Yes. The Fynes were excellent people, but Mrs. Fyne wasn't the daughter of a domestic tyrant for nothing. There were no limits to her revolt. But they were excellent people. It was clear that they must have been extremely good to that girl whose position in the world seemed somewhat difficult, with her face of a victim, her obvious lack of resignation and the bizarre status of orphan "to a certain extent."

Such were my thoughts, but in truth I soon ceased to trouble about all these people. I found that my lamp had gone out leaving behind an awful smell. I fled from it up the stairs and went to bed in the dark. My slumbers — I suppose the one good in pedestrian exercise, confound it, is that it helps our natural callousness — my slumbers were deep, dreamless and refreshing.

My appetite at breakfast was not affected by my ignorance of the facts, motives, events and conclusions. I think that to understand everything is not good for the intellect. A well-stocked intelligence weakens the impulse to action; an overstocked one leads gently to idiocy. But Mrs. Fyne's individualist woman-doctrine, naïvely unscrupulous, flitted through my mind. The salad of unprincipled notions she put into these girl-friends' heads! Good innocent creature, worthy wife, excellent mother (of the strict governess type), she was as guileless of consequences as any determinist philosopher ever was.

As to honour — you know — it's a very fine medieval inheritance which women never got hold of. It wasn't theirs. Since it may be laid as a general principle that women always get what they want we must suppose they didn't want it. In addition they are devoid of decency. I mean masculine

decency. Cautiousness too is foreign to them — the heavy reasonable cautiousness which is our glory. And if they had it they would make of it a thing of passion, so that its own mother — I mean the mother of cautiousness — wouldn't recognize it. Prudence with them is a matter of thrill like the rest of sublunary contrivances. "Sensation at any cost," is their secret device. All the virtues are not enough for them; they want also all the crimes for their own. And why? Because in such completeness there is power — the kind of thrill they love most . . . "

"Do you expect me to agree to all this?" I interrupted.

"No, it isn't necessary," said Marlow, feeling the check to his eloquence but with a great effort at amiability. "You need not even understand it. I continue: with such disposition what prevents women — to use the phrase an old boatswain of my acquaintance applied descriptively to his captain — what prevents them from "coming on deck and playing hell with the ship" generally, is that something in them precise and mysterious, acting both as restraint and as inspiration; their femininity in short which they think they can get rid of by trying hard, but can't, and never will. Therefore we may conclude that, for all their enterprises, the world is and remains safe enough. Feeling, in my character of a lover of peace, soothed by that conclusion I prepared myself to enjoy a fine day.

And it was a fine day; a delicious day, with the horror of the Infinite veiled by the splendid tent of blue; a day innocently bright like a child with a washed face, fresh like an innocent young girl, suave in welcoming one's respects like — like a Roman prelate. I love such days. They are perfection for remaining indoors. And I enjoyed it temperamentally in a chair, my feet up on the sill of the open window, a book in my hands and the murmured harmonies of wind and sun in my heart making an accompaniment to the rhythms of my author. Then looking up from the page I saw outside a pair of grey eyes thatched by ragged yellowy-white eyebrows gazing at me solemnly over the toes of my slippers. There was a grave, furrowed brow surmounting that portentous gaze, a brown tweed cap set far back on the perspiring head.

"Come inside," I cried as heartily as my sinking heart would permit.

After a short but severe scuffle with his dog at the outer door, Fyne entered. I treated him without ceremony and only waved my hand towards a chair. Even before he sat down he gasped out:

"We've heard — midday post."

Gasped out! The grave, immovable Fyne of the Civil Service, gasped! This was enough, you'll admit, to cause me to put my feet to the ground swiftly. That fellow was always making me do things in subtle discord with my meditative temperament. No wonder that I had but a qualified liking for him. I said with just a suspicion of jeering tone:

"Of course. I told you last night on the road that it was a farce we were engaged in."

He made the little parlour resound to its foundations with a note of anger positively sepulchral in its depth of tone. "Farce be hanged! She has bolted with my wife's brother, Captain Anthony." This outburst was followed by complete subsidence. He faltered miserably as he added from force of habit: "The son of the poet, you know."

A silence fell. Fyne's several expressions were so many examples of varied consistency. This was the discomfiture of solemnity. My interest of course was revived.

"But hold on," I said. "They didn't go together. Is it a suspicion or does she actually say that . . ."

"She has gone after him," stated Fyne in comminatory tones. "By previous arrangement. She confesses that much."

He added that it was very shocking. I asked him whether he should have preferred them going off together; and on what ground he based that preference. This was sheer fun for me in regard of the fact that Fyne's too was a runaway match, which even got into the papers in its time, because the late indignant poet had no discretion and sought to avenge this outrage publicly in some absurd way before a bewigged judge. The dejected gesture of little Fyne's hand disarmed my mocking mood. But I could not help expressing my surprise that Mrs. Fyne had not detected at once what was brewing. Women were supposed to have an unerring eye.

He told me that his wife had been very much engaged in a certain work. I had always wondered how she occupied her time. It was in writing. Like her husband she too published a little book. Much later on I came upon it. It had nothing to do with pedestrianism. It was a sort of hand-book for women with grievances (and all women had them), a sort of compendious theory and practice of feminine free morality. It made you laugh at its transparent simplicity. But that authorship was revealed to me much later. I didn't of course ask Fyne what work his wife was engaged on; but I marvelled to myself at her complete ignorance of the world, of her own sex

and of the other kind of sinners. Yet, where could she have got any experience? Her father had kept her strictly cloistered. Marriage with Fyne was certainly a change but only to another kind of claustration. You may tell me that the ordinary powers of observation ought to have been enough. Why, yes! But, then, as she had set up for a guide and teacher, there was nothing surprising for me in the discovery that she was blind. That's quite in order. She was a profoundly innocent person; only it would not have been proper to tell her husband so.

### CHAPTER THREE — THRIFT — AND THE CHILD

But there was nothing improper in my observing to Fyne that, last night, Mrs. Fyne seemed to have some idea where that enterprising young lady had gone to. Fyne shook his head. No; his wife had been by no means so certain as she had pretended to be. She merely had her reasons to think, to hope, that the girl might have taken a room somewhere in London, had buried herself in town — in readiness or perhaps in horror of the approaching day —

He ceased and sat solemnly dejected, in a brown study. “What day?” I asked at last; but he did not hear me apparently. He diffused such portentous gloom into the atmosphere that I lost patience with him.

“What on earth are you so dismal about?” I cried, being genuinely surprised and puzzled. “One would think the girl was a state prisoner under your care.”

And suddenly I became still more surprised at myself, at the way I had somehow taken for granted things which did appear queer when one thought them out.

“But why this secrecy? Why did they elope — if it is an elopement? Was the girl afraid of your wife? And your brother-in-law? What on earth possesses him to make a clandestine match of it? Was he afraid of your wife too?”

Fyne made an effort to rouse himself.

“Of course my brother-in-law, Captain Anthony, the son of . . . “ He checked himself as if trying to break a bad habit. “He would be persuaded by her. We have been most friendly to the girl!”

“She struck me as a foolish and inconsiderate little person. But why should you and your wife take to heart so strongly mere folly — or even a want of consideration?”

“It’s the most unscrupulous action,” declared Fyne weightily — and sighed.

“I suppose she is poor,” I observed after a short silence. “But after all . . . “

“You don’t know who she is.” Fyne had regained his average solemnity.

I confessed that I had not caught her name when his wife had introduced us to each other. “It was something beginning with an S- wasn’t it?” And

then with the utmost coolness Fyne remarked that it did not matter. The name was not her name.

“Do you mean to say that you made a young lady known to me under a false name?” I asked, with the amused feeling that the days of wonders and portents had not passed away yet. That the eminently serious Fynes should do such an exceptional thing was simply staggering. With a more hasty enunciation than usual little Fyne was sure that I would not demand an apology for this irregularity if I knew what her real name was. A sort of warmth crept into his deep tone.

“We have tried to befriend that girl in every way. She is the daughter and only child of de Barral.”

Evidently he expected to produce a sensation; he kept his eyes fixed upon me prepared for some sign of it. But I merely returned his intense, awaiting gaze. For a time we stared at each other. Conscious of being reprehensibly dense I groped in the darkness of my mind: De Barral, De Barral — and all at once noise and light burst on me as if a window of my memory had been suddenly flung open on a street in the City. De Barral! But could it be the same? Surely not!

“The financier?” I suggested half incredulous.

“Yes,” said Fyne; and in this instance his native solemnity of tone seemed to be strangely appropriate. “The convict.”

Marlow looked at me, significantly, and remarked in an explanatory tone:

“One somehow never thought of de Barral as having any children, or any other home than the offices of the “Orb”; or any other existence, associations or interests than financial. I see you remember the crash . . . “

“I was away in the Indian Seas at the time,” I said. “But of course — ”

“Of course,” Marlow struck in. “All the world . . . You may wonder at my slowness in recognizing the name. But you know that my memory is merely a mausoleum of proper names. There they lie inanimate, awaiting the magic touch — and not very prompt in arising when called, either. The name is the first thing I forget of a man. It is but just to add that frequently it is also the last, and this accounts for my possession of a good many anonymous memories. In de Barral’s case, he got put away in my mausoleum in company with so many names of his own creation that really he had to throw off a monstrous heap of grisly bones before he stood before me at the call of the wizard Fyne. The fellow had a pretty fancy in names: the “Orb” Deposit Bank, the “Sceptre” Mutual Aid Society, the “Thrift and

Independence” Association. Yes, a very pretty taste in names; and nothing else besides — absolutely nothing — no other merit. Well yes. He had another name, but that’s pure luck — his own name of de Barral which he did not invent. I don’t think that a mere Jones or Brown could have fished out from the depths of the Incredible such a colossal manifestation of human folly as that man did. But it may be that I am underestimating the alacrity of human folly in rising to the bait. No doubt I am. The greed of that absurd monster is incalculable, unfathomable, inconceivable. The career of de Barral demonstrates that it will rise to a naked hook. He didn’t lure it with a fairy tale. He hadn’t enough imagination for it . . . “

“Was he a foreigner?” I asked. “It’s clearly a French name. I suppose it was his name?”

“Oh, he didn’t invent it. He was born to it, in Bethnal Green, as it came out during the proceedings. He was in the habit of alluding to his Scotch connections. But every great man has done that. The mother, I believe, was Scotch, right enough. The father de Barral whatever his origins retired from the Customs Service (tide-waiter I think), and started lending money in a very, very small way in the East End to people connected with the docks, stevedores, minor barge-owners, ship-chandlers, tally clerks, all sorts of very small fry. He made his living at it. He was a very decent man I believe. He had enough influence to place his only son as junior clerk in the account department of one of the Dock Companies. “Now, my boy,” he said to him, “I’ve given you a fine start.” But de Barral didn’t start. He stuck. He gave perfect satisfaction. At the end of three years he got a small rise of salary and went out courting in the evenings. He went courting the daughter of an old sea-captain who was a churchwarden of his parish and lived in an old badly preserved Georgian house with a garden: one of these houses standing in a reduced bit of “grounds” that you discover in a labyrinth of the most sordid streets, exactly alike and composed of six-roomed hutches.

Some of them were the vicarages of slum parishes. The old sailor had got hold of one cheap, and de Barral got hold of his daughter — which was a good bargain for him. The old sailor was very good to the young couple and very fond of their little girl. Mrs. de Barral was an equable, unassuming woman, at that time with a fund of simple gaiety, and with no ambitions; but, woman-like, she longed for change and for something interesting to happen now and then. It was she who encouraged de Barral

to accept the offer of a post in the west-end branch of a great bank. It appears he shrank from such a great adventure for a long time. At last his wife's arguments prevailed. Later on she used to say: 'It's the only time he ever listened to me; and I wonder now if it hadn't been better for me to die before I ever made him go into that bank.'

You may be surprised at my knowledge of these details. Well, I had them ultimately from Mrs. Fyne. Mrs. Fyne while yet Miss Anthony, in her days of bondage, knew Mrs. de Barral in her days of exile. Mrs. de Barral was living then in a big stone mansion with mullioned windows in a large damp park, called the Priory, adjoining the village where the refined poet had built himself a house.

These were the days of de Barral's success. He had bought the place without ever seeing it and had packed off his wife and child at once there to take possession. He did not know what to do with them in London. He himself had a suite of rooms in an hotel. He gave there dinner parties followed by cards in the evening. He had developed the gambling passion — or else a mere card mania — but at any rate he played heavily, for relaxation, with a lot of dubious hangers on.

Meantime Mrs. de Barral, expecting him every day, lived at the Priory, with a carriage and pair, a governess for the child and many servants. The village people would see her through the railings wandering under the trees with her little girl lost in her strange surroundings. Nobody ever came near her. And there she died as some faithful and delicate animals die — from neglect, absolutely from neglect, rather unexpectedly and without any fuss. The village was sorry for her because, though obviously worried about something, she was good to the poor and was always ready for a chat with any of the humble folks. Of course they knew that she wasn't a lady — not what you would call a real lady. And even her acquaintance with Miss Anthony was only a cottage-door, a village-street acquaintance. Carleon Anthony was a tremendous aristocrat (his father had been a "restoring" architect) and his daughter was not allowed to associate with anyone but the county young ladies. Nevertheless in defiance of the poet's wrathful concern for undefiled refinement there were some quiet, melancholy strolls to and fro in the great avenue of chestnuts leading to the park-gate, during which Mrs. de Barral came to call Miss Anthony 'my dear' — and even 'my poor dear.' The lonely soul had no one to talk to but that not very happy girl. The governess despised her. The housekeeper was distant in



her manner. Moreover Mrs. de Barral was no foolish gossiping woman. But she made some confidences to Miss Anthony. Such wealth was a terrific thing to have thrust upon one she affirmed. Once she went so far as to confess that she was dying with anxiety. Mr. de Barral (so she referred to him) had been an excellent husband and an exemplary father but “you see my dear I have had a great experience of him. I am sure he won’t know what to do with all that money people are giving to him to take care of for them. He’s as likely as not to do something rash. When he comes here I must have a good long serious talk with him, like the talks we often used to have together in the good old times of our life.” And then one day a cry of anguish was wrung from her: ‘My dear, he will never come here, he will never, never come!’

She was wrong. He came to the funeral, was extremely cut up, and holding the child tightly by the hand wept bitterly at the side of the grave. Miss Anthony, at the cost of a whole week of sneers and abuse from the poet, saw it all with her own eyes. De Barral clung to the child like a drowning man. He managed, though, to catch the half-past five fast train, travelling to town alone in a reserved compartment, with all the blinds down . . . “

“Leaving the child?” I said interrogatively.

“Yes. Leaving . . . He shirked the problem. He was born that way. He had no idea what to do with her or for that matter with anything or anybody including himself. He bolted back to his suite of rooms in the hotel. He was the most helpless . . . She might have been left in the Priory to the end of time had not the high-toned governess threatened to send in her resignation. She didn’t care for the child a bit, and the lonely, gloomy Priory had got on her nerves. She wasn’t going to put up with such a life and, having just come out of some ducal family, she bullied de Barral in a very lofty fashion. To pacify her he took a splendidly furnished house in the most expensive part of Brighton for them, and now and then ran down for a week-end, with a trunk full of exquisite sweets and with his hat full of money. The governess spent it for him in extra ducal style. She was nearly forty and harboured a secret taste for patronizing young men of sorts — of a certain sort. But of that Mrs. Fyne of course had no personal knowledge then; she told me however that even in the Priory days she had suspected her of being an artificial, heartless, vulgar-minded woman with the lowest

possible ideals. But de Barral did not know it. He literally did not know anything . . . “

“But tell me, Marlow,” I interrupted, “how do you account for this opinion? He must have been a personality in a sense — in some one sense surely. You don’t work the greatest material havoc of a decade at least, in a commercial community, without having something in you.”

Marlow shook his head.

“He was a mere sign, a portent. There was nothing in him. Just about that time the word Thrift was to the fore. You know the power of words. We pass through periods dominated by this or that word — it may be development, or it may be competition, or education, or purity or efficiency or even sanctity. It is the word of the time. Well just then it was the word Thrift which was out in the streets walking arm in arm with righteousness, the inseparable companion and backer up of all such national catch-words, looking everybody in the eye as it were. The very drabs of the pavement, poor things, didn’t escape the fascination . . . However! . . . Well the greatest portion of the press were screeching in all possible tones, like a confounded company of parrots instructed by some devil with a taste for practical jokes, that the financier de Barral was helping the great moral evolution of our character towards the newly-discovered virtue of Thrift. He was helping it by all these great establishments of his, which made the moral merits of Thrift manifest to the most callous hearts, simply by promising to pay ten per cent. interest on all deposits. And you didn’t want necessarily to belong to the well-to-do classes in order to participate in the advantages of virtue. If you had but a spare sixpence in the world and went and gave it to de Barral it was Thrift! It’s quite likely that he himself believed it. He must have. It’s inconceivable that he alone should stand out against the infatuation of the whole world. He hadn’t enough intelligence for that. But to look at him one couldn’t tell . . . “

“You did see him then?” I said with some curiosity.

“I did. Strange, isn’t it? It was only once, but as I sat with the distressed Fyne who had suddenly resuscitated his name buried in my memory with other dead labels of the past, I may say I saw him again, I saw him with great vividness of recollection, as he appeared in the days of his glory or splendour. No! Neither of these words will fit his success. There was never any glory or splendour about that figure. Well, let us say in the days when he was, according to the majority of the daily press, a financial force

working for the improvement of the character of the people. I'll tell you how it came about.

At that time I used to know a podgy, wealthy, bald little man having chambers in the Albany; a financier too, in his way, carrying out transactions of an intimate nature and of no moral character; mostly with young men of birth and expectations — though I dare say he didn't withhold his ministrations from elderly plebeians either. He was a true democrat; he would have done business (a sharp kind of business) with the devil himself. Everything was fly that came into his web. He received the applicants in an alert, jovial fashion which was quite surprising. It gave relief without giving too much confidence, which was just as well perhaps. His business was transacted in an apartment furnished like a drawing-room, the walls hung with several brown, heavily-framed, oil paintings. I don't know if they were good, but they were big, and with their elaborate, tarnished gilt-frames had a melancholy dignity. The man himself sat at a shining, inlaid writing table which looked like a rare piece from a museum of art; his chair had a high, oval, carved back, upholstered in faded tapestry; and these objects made of the costly black Havana cigar, which he rolled incessantly from the middle to the left corner of his mouth and back again, an inexpressibly cheap and nasty object. I had to see him several times in the interest of a poor devil so unlucky that he didn't even have a more competent friend than myself to speak for him at a very difficult time in his life.

I don't know at what hour my private financier began his day, but he used to give one appointments at unheard of times: such as a quarter to eight in the morning, for instance. On arriving one found him busy at that marvellous writing table, looking very fresh and alert, exhaling a faint fragrance of scented soap and with the cigar already well alight. You may believe that I entered on my mission with many unpleasant forebodings; but there was in that fat, admirably washed, little man such a profound contempt for mankind that it amounted to a species of good nature; which, unlike the milk of genuine kindness, was never in danger of turning sour. Then, once, during a pause in business, while we were waiting for the production of a document for which he had sent (perhaps to the cellar?) I happened to remark, glancing round the room, that I had never seen so many fine things assembled together out of a collection. Whether this was unconscious diplomacy on my part, or not, I shouldn't like to say — but the

remark was true enough, and it pleased him extremely. "It is a collection," he said emphatically. "Only I live right in it, which most collectors don't. But I see that you know what you are looking at. Not many people who come here on business do. Stable fittings are more in their way."

I don't know whether my appreciation helped to advance my friend's business but at any rate it helped our intercourse. He treated me with a shade of familiarity as one of the initiated.

The last time I called on him to conclude the transaction we were interrupted by a person, something like a cross between a bookmaker and a private secretary, who, entering through a door which was not the anteroom door, walked up and stooped to whisper into his ear.

"Eh? What? Who, did you say?"

The nondescript person stooped and whispered again, adding a little louder: "Says he won't detain you a moment."

My little man glanced at me, said "Ah! Well," irresolutely. I got up from my chair and offered to come again later. He looked whimsically alarmed. "No, no. It's bad enough to lose my money but I don't want to waste any more of my time over your friend. We must be done with this to-day. Just go and have a look at that garniture de cheminée yonder. There's another, something like it, in the castle of Laeken, but mine's much superior in design."

I moved accordingly to the other side of that big room. The garniture was very fine. But while pretending to examine it I watched my man going forward to meet a tall visitor, who said, "I thought you would be disengaged so early. It's only a word or two" — and after a whispered confabulation of no more than a minute, reconduct him to the door and shake hands ceremoniously. "Not at all, not at all. Very pleased to be of use. You can depend absolutely on my information" — "Oh thank you, thank you. I just looked in." "Certainly, quite right. Any time . . . Good morning."

I had a good look at the visitor while they were exchanging these civilities. He was clad in black. I remember perfectly that he wore a flat, broad, black satin tie in which was stuck a large cameo pin; and a small turn down collar. His hair, discoloured and silky, curled slightly over his ears. His cheeks were hairless and round, and apparently soft. He held himself very upright, walked with small steps and spoke gently in an inward voice. Perhaps from contrast with the magnificent polish of the room and the

neatness of its owner, he struck me as dingy, indigent, and, if not exactly humble, then much subdued by evil fortune.

I wondered greatly at my fat little financier's civility to that dubious personage when he asked me, as we resumed our respective seats, whether I knew who it was that had just gone out. On my shaking my head negatively he smiled queerly, said "De Barral," and enjoyed my surprise. Then becoming grave: "That's a deep fellow, if you like. We all know where he started from and where he got to; but nobody knows what he means to do." He became thoughtful for a moment and added as if speaking to himself, "I wonder what his game is."

And, you know, there was no game, no game of any sort, or shape or kind. It came out plainly at the trial. As I've told you before, he was a clerk in a bank, like thousands of others. He got that berth as a second start in life and there he stuck again, giving perfect satisfaction. Then one day as though a supernatural voice had whispered into his ear or some invisible fly had stung him, he put on his hat, went out into the street and began advertising. That's absolutely all that there was to it. He caught in the street the word of the time and harnessed it to his preposterous chariot.

One remembers his first modest advertisements headed with the magic word Thrift, Thrift, Thrift, thrice repeated; promising ten per cent. on all deposits and giving the address of the Thrift and Independence Aid Association in Vauxhall Bridge Road. Apparently nothing more was necessary. He didn't even explain what he meant to do with the money he asked the public to pour into his lap. Of course he meant to lend it out at high rates of interest. He did so — but he did it without system, plan, foresight or judgment. And as he frittered away the sums that flowed in, he advertised for more — and got it. During a period of general business prosperity he set up The Orb Bank and The Sceptre Trust, simply, it seems for advertising purposes. They were mere names. He was totally unable to organize anything, to promote any sort of enterprise if it were only for the purpose of juggling with the shares. At that time he could have had for the asking any number of Dukes, retired Generals, active M.P.'s, ex-ambassadors and so on as Directors to sit at the wildest boards of his invention. But he never tried. He had no real imagination. All he could do was to publish more advertisements and open more branch offices of the Thrift and Independence, of The Orb, of The Sceptre, for the receipt of deposits; first in this town, then in that town, north and south — everywhere

where he could find suitable premises at a moderate rent. For this was the great characteristic of the management. Modesty, moderation, simplicity. Neither The Orb nor The Sceptre nor yet their parent the Thrift and Independence had built for themselves the usual palaces. For this abstention they were praised in silly public prints as illustrating in their management the principle of Thrift for which they were founded. The fact is that de Barral simply didn't think of it. Of course he had soon moved from Vauxhall Bridge Road. He knew enough for that. What he got hold of next was an old, enormous, rat-infested brick house in a small street off the Strand. Strangers were taken in front of the meanest possible, begrimed, yellowy, flat brick wall, with two rows of unadorned window-holes one above the other, and were exhorted with bated breath to behold and admire the simplicity of the head-quarters of the great financial force of the day. The word THRIFT perched right up on the roof in giant gilt letters, and two enormous shield-like brass-plates curved round the corners on each side of the doorway were the only shining spots in de Barral's business outfit. Nobody knew what operations were carried on inside except this — that if you walked in and tendered your money over the counter it would be calmly taken from you by somebody who would give you a printed receipt. That and no more. It appears that such knowledge is irresistible. People went in and tendered; and once it was taken from their hands their money was more irretrievably gone from them than if they had thrown it into the sea. This then, and nothing else was being carried on in there . . . “

“Come, Marlow,” I said, “you exaggerate surely — if only by your way of putting things. It's too startling.”

“I exaggerate!” he defended himself. “My way of putting things! My dear fellow I have merely stripped the rags of business verbiage and financial jargon off my statements. And you are startled! I am giving you the naked truth. It's true too that nothing lays itself open to the charge of exaggeration more than the language of naked truth. What comes with a shock is admitted with difficulty. But what will you say to the end of his career?

It was of course sensational and tolerably sudden. It began with the Orb Deposit Bank. Under the name of that institution de Barral with the frantic obstinacy of an unimaginative man had been financing an Indian prince who was prosecuting a claim for immense sums of money against the government. It was an enormous number of scores of lakhs — a miserable

remnant of his ancestors' treasures — that sort of thing. And it was all authentic enough. There was a real prince; and the claim too was sufficiently real — only unfortunately it was not a valid claim. So the prince lost his case on the last appeal and the beginning of de Barral's end became manifest to the public in the shape of a half-sheet of note paper wafered by the four corners on the closed door of The Orb offices notifying that payment was stopped at that establishment.

Its consort The Sceptre collapsed within the week. I won't say in American parlance that suddenly the bottom fell out of the whole of de Barral concerns. There never had been any bottom to it. It was like the cask of Danaides into which the public had been pleased to pour its deposits. That they were gone was clear; and the bankruptcy proceedings which followed were like a sinister farce, bursts of laughter in a setting of mute anguish — that of the depositors; hundreds of thousands of them. The laughter was irresistible; the accompaniment of the bankrupt's public examination.

I don't know if it was from utter lack of all imagination or from the possession in undue proportion of a particular kind of it, or from both — and the three alternatives are possible — but it was discovered that this man who had been raised to such a height by the credulity of the public was himself more gullible than any of his depositors. He had been the prey of all sorts of swindlers, adventurers, visionaries and even lunatics. Wrapping himself up in deep and imbecile secrecy he had gone in for the most fantastic schemes: a harbour and docks on the coast of Patagonia, quarries in Labrador — such like speculations. Fisheries to feed a canning Factory on the banks of the Amazon was one of them. A principality to be bought in Madagascar was another. As the grotesque details of these incredible transactions came out one by one ripples of laughter ran over the closely packed court — each one a little louder than the other. The audience ended by fairly roaring under the cumulative effect of absurdity. The Registrar laughed, the barristers laughed, the reporters laughed, the serried ranks of the miserable depositors watching anxiously every word, laughed like one man. They laughed hysterically — the poor wretches — on the verge of tears.

There was only one person who remained unmoved. It was de Barral himself. He preserved his serene, gentle expression, I am told (for I have not witnessed those scenes myself), and looked around at the people with an

air of placid sufficiency which was the first hint to the world of the man's overweening, unmeasurable conceit, hidden hitherto under a diffident manner. It could be seen too in his dogged assertion that if he had been given enough time and a lot more money everything would have come right. And there were some people (yes, amongst his very victims) who more than half believed him, even after the criminal prosecution which soon followed. When placed in the dock he lost his steadiness as if some sustaining illusion had gone to pieces within him suddenly. He ceased to be himself in manner completely, and even in disposition, in so far that his faded neutral eyes matching his discoloured hair so well, were discovered then to be capable of expressing a sort of underhand hate. He was at first defiant, then insolent, then broke down and burst into tears; but it might have been from rage. Then he calmed down, returned to his soft manner of speech and to that unassuming quiet bearing which had been usual with him even in his greatest days. But it seemed as though in this moment of change he had at last perceived what a power he had been; for he remarked to one of the prosecuting counsel who had assumed a lofty moral tone in questioning him, that — yes, he had gambled — he liked cards. But that only a year ago a host of smart people would have been only too pleased to take a hand at cards with him. Yes — he went on — some of the very people who were there accommodated with seats on the bench; and turning upon the counsel "You yourself as well," he cried. He could have had half the town at his rooms to fawn upon him if he had cared for that sort of thing. "Why, now I think of it, it took me most of my time to keep people, just of your sort, off me," he ended with a good humoured — quite unobtrusive, contempt, as though the fact had dawned upon him for the first time.

This was the moment, the only moment, when he had perhaps all the audience in Court with him, in a hush of dreary silence. And then the dreary proceedings were resumed. For all the outside excitement it was the most dreary of all celebrated trials. The bankruptcy proceedings had exhausted all the laughter there was in it. Only the fact of wide-spread ruin remained, and the resentment of a mass of people for having been fooled by means too simple to save their self-respect from a deep wound which the cleverness of a consummate scoundrel would not have inflicted. A shamefaced amazement attended these proceedings in which de Barral was not being exposed alone. For himself his only cry was: Time! Time! Time



would have set everything right. In time some of these speculations of his were certain to have succeeded. He repeated this defence, this excuse, this confession of faith, with wearisome iteration. Everything he had done or left undone had been to gain time. He had hypnotized himself with the word. Sometimes, I am told, his appearance was ecstatic, his motionless pale eyes seemed to be gazing down the vista of future ages. Time — and of course, more money. “Ah! If only you had left me alone for a couple of years more,” he cried once in accents of passionate belief. “The money was coming in all right.” The deposits you understand — the savings of Thrift. Oh yes they had been coming in to the very last moment. And he regretted them. He had arrived to regard them as his own by a sort of mystical persuasion. And yet it was a perfectly true cry, when he turned once more on the counsel who was beginning a question with the words “You have had all these immense sums . . .” with the indignant retort “What have I had out of them?”

“It was perfectly true. He had had nothing out of them — nothing of the prestigious or the desirable things of the earth, craved for by predatory natures. He had gratified no tastes, had known no luxury; he had built no gorgeous palaces, had formed no splendid galleries out of these “immense sums.” He had not even a home. He had gone into these rooms in an hotel and had stuck there for years, giving no doubt perfect satisfaction to the management. They had twice raised his rent to show I suppose their high sense of his distinguished patronage. He had bought for himself out of all the wealth streaming through his fingers neither adulation nor love, neither splendour nor comfort. There was something perfect in his consistent mediocrity. His very vanity seemed to miss the gratification of even the mere show of power. In the days when he was most fully in the public eye the invincible obscurity of his origins clung to him like a shadowy garment. He had handled millions without ever enjoying anything of what is counted as precious in the community of men, because he had neither the brutality of temperament nor the fineness of mind to make him desire them with the will power of a masterful adventurer . . .”

“You seem to have studied the man,” I observed.

“Studied,” repeated Marlow thoughtfully. “No! Not studied. I had no opportunities. You know that I saw him only on that one occasion I told you of. But it may be that a glimpse and no more is the proper way of seeing an individuality; and de Barral was that, in virtue of his very

deficiencies for they made of him something quite unlike one's preconceived ideas. There were also very few materials accessible to a man like me to form a judgment from. But in such a case I verify believe that a little is as good as a feast — perhaps better. If one has a taste for that kind of thing the merest starting-point becomes a coign of vantage, and then by a series of logically deducted verisimilitudes one arrives at truth — or very near the truth — as near as any circumstantial evidence can do. I have not studied de Barral but that is how I understand him so far as he could be understood through the din of the crash; the wailing and gnashing of teeth, the newspaper contents bills, "The Thrift Frauds. Cross-examination of the accused. Extra special" — blazing fiercely; the charitable appeals for the victims, the grave tones of the dailies rumbling with compassion as if they were the national bowels. All this lasted a whole week of industrious sittings. A pressman whom I knew told me "He's an idiot." Which was possible. Before that I overheard once somebody declaring that he had a criminal type of face; which I knew was untrue. The sentence was pronounced by artificial light in a stifling poisonous atmosphere. Something edifying was said by the judge weightily, about the retribution overtaking the perpetrator of "the most heartless frauds on an unprecedented scale." I don't understand these things much, but it appears that he had juggled with accounts, cooked balance sheets, had gathered in deposits months after he ought to have known himself to be hopelessly insolvent, and done enough of other things, highly reprehensible in the eyes of the law, to earn for himself seven years' penal servitude. The sentence making its way outside met with a good reception. A small mob composed mainly of people who themselves did not look particularly clever and scrupulous, leavened by a slight sprinkling of genuine pickpockets amused itself by cheering in the most penetrating, abominable cold drizzle that I remember. I happened to be passing there on my way from the East End where I had spent my day about the Docks with an old chum who was looking after the fitting out of a new ship. I am always eager, when allowed, to call on a new ship. They interest me like charming young persons.

I got mixed up in that crowd seething with an animosity as senseless as things of the street always are, and it was while I was laboriously making my way out of it that the pressman of whom I spoke was jostled against me. He did me the justice to be surprised. "What? You here! The last

person in the world . . . If I had known I could have got you inside. Plenty of room. Interest been over for the last three days. Got seven years. Well, I am glad.”

“Why are you glad? Because he’s got seven years?” I asked, greatly incommoded by the pressure of a hulking fellow who was remarking to some of his equally oppressive friends that the “beggar ought to have been poleaxed.” I don’t know whether he had ever confided his savings to de Barral but if so, judging from his appearance, they must have been the proceeds of some successful burglary. The pressman by my side said ‘No,’ to my question. He was glad because it was all over. He had suffered greatly from the heat and the bad air of the court. The clammy, raw, chill of the streets seemed to affect his liver instantly. He became contemptuous and irritable and plied his elbows viciously making way for himself and me.

A dull affair this. All such cases were dull. No really dramatic moments. The book-keeping of The Orb and all the rest of them was certainly a burlesque revelation but the public did not care for revelations of that kind. Dull dog that de Barral — he grumbled. He could not or would not take the trouble to characterize for me the appearance of that man now officially a criminal (we had gone across the road for a drink) but told me with a sourly, derisive snigger that, after the sentence had been pronounced the fellow clung to the dock long enough to make a sort of protest. ‘You haven’t given me time. If I had been given time I would have ended by being made a peer like some of them.’ And he had permitted himself his very first and last gesture in all these days, raising a hard-clenched fist above his head.

The pressman disapproved of that manifestation. It was not his business to understand it. Is it ever the business of any pressman to understand anything? I guess not. It would lead him too far away from the actualities which are the daily bread of the public mind. He probably thought the display worth very little from a picturesque point of view; the weak voice; the colourless personality as incapable of an attitude as a bed-post, the very fatuity of the clenched hand so ineffectual at that time and place — no, it wasn’t worth much. And then, for him, an accomplished craftsman in his trade, thinking was distinctly “bad business.” His business was to write a readable account. But I who had nothing to write, I permitted myself to use my mind as we sat before our still untouched glasses. And the disclosure which so often rewards a moment of detachment from mere visual

impressions gave me a thrill very much approaching a shudder. I seemed to understand that, with the shock of the agonies and perplexities of his trial, the imagination of that man, whose moods, notions and motives wore frequently an air of grotesque mystery — that his imagination had been at last roused into activity. And this was awful. Just try to enter into the feelings of a man whose imagination wakes up at the very moment he is about to enter the tomb . . . “

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“You must not think,” went on Marlow after a pause, “that on that morning with Fyne I went consciously in my mind over all this, let us call it information; no, better say, this fund of knowledge which I had, or rather which existed, in me in regard to de Barral. Information is something one goes out to seek and puts away when found as you might do a piece of lead: ponderous, useful, unvibrating, dull. Whereas knowledge comes to one, this sort of knowledge, a chance acquisition preserving in its repose a fine resonant quality . . . But as such distinctions touch upon the transcendental I shall spare you the pain of listening to them. There are limits to my cruelty. No! I didn’t reckon up carefully in my mind all this I have been telling you. How could I have done so, with Fyne right there in the room? He sat perfectly still, statuesque in homely fashion, after having delivered himself of his effective assent: “Yes. The convict,” and I, far from indulging in a reminiscent excursion into the past, remained sufficiently in the present to muse in a vague, absent-minded way on the respectable proportions and on the (upon the whole) comely shape of his great pedestrian’s calves, for he had thrown one leg over his knee, carelessly, to conceal the trouble of his mind by an air of ease. But all the same the knowledge was in me, the awakened resonance of which I spoke just now; I was aware of it on that beautiful day, so fresh, so warm and friendly, so accomplished — an exquisite courtesy of the much abused English climate when it makes up its meteorological mind to behave like a perfect gentleman. Of course the English climate is never a rough. It suffers from spleen somewhat frequently — but that is gentlemanly too, and I don’t mind going to meet him in that mood. He has his days of grey, veiled, polite melancholy, in which he is very fascinating. How seldom he lapses into a blustering manner, after all! And then it is mostly in a season when, appropriately enough, one may go out and kill something. But his fine days

are the best for stopping at home, to read, to think, to muse — even to dream; in fact to live fully, intensely and quietly, in the brightness of comprehension, in that receptive glow of the mind, the gift of the clear, luminous and serene weather.

That day I had intended to live intensely and quietly, basking in the weather's glory which would have lent enchantment to the most unpromising of intellectual prospects. For a companion I had found a book, not bemused with the cleverness of the day — a fine-weather book, simple and sincere like the talk of an unselfish friend. But looking at little Fyne seated in the room I understood that nothing would come of my contemplative aspirations; that in one way or another I should be let in for some form of severe exercise. Walking, it would be, I feared, since, for me, that idea was inseparably associated with the visual impression of Fyne. Where, why, how, a rapid striding rush could be brought in helpful relation to the good Fyne's present trouble and perplexity I could not imagine; except on the principle that senseless pedestrianism was Fyne's panacea for all the ills and evils bodily and spiritual of the universe. It could be of no use for me to say or do anything. It was bound to come. Contemplating his muscular limb encased in a golf-stockings, and under the strong impression of the information he had just imparted I said wondering, rather irrationally:

“And so de Barral had a wife and child! That girl's his daughter. And how . . . “

Fyne interrupted me by stating again earnestly, as though it were something not easy to believe, that his wife and himself had tried to befriend the girl in every way — indeed they had! I did not doubt him for a moment, of course, but my wonder at this was more rational. At that hour of the morning, you mustn't forget, I knew nothing as yet of Mrs. Fyne's contact (it was hardly more) with de Barral's wife and child during their exile at the Priory, in the culminating days of that man's fame.

Fyne who had come over, it was clear, solely to talk to me on that subject, gave me the first hint of this initial, merely out of doors, connection. “The girl was quite a child then,” he continued. “Later on she was removed out of Mrs. Fyne's reach in charge of a governess — a very unsatisfactory person,” he explained. His wife had then — h'm — met him; and on her marriage she lost sight of the child completely. But after the birth of Polly (Polly was the third Fyne girl) she did not get on very well, and went to Brighton for some months to recover her strength — and

there, one day in the street, the child (she wore her hair down her back still) recognized her outside a shop and rushed, actually rushed, into Mrs. Fyne's arms. Rather touching this. And so, disregarding the cold impertinence of that . . . h'm . . . governess, his wife naturally responded.

He was solemnly fragmentary. I broke in with the observation that it must have been before the crash.

Fyne nodded with deepened gravity, stating in his bass tone —

“Just before,” and indulged himself with a weighty period of solemn silence.

De Barral, he resumed suddenly, was not coming to Brighton for week-ends regularly, then. Must have been conscious already of the approaching disaster. Mrs. Fyne avoided being drawn into making his acquaintance, and this suited the views of the governess person, very jealous of any outside influence. But in any case it would not have been an easy matter. Extraordinary, stiff-backed, thin figure all in black, the observed of all, while walking hand-in-hand with the girl; apparently shy, but — and here Fyne came very near showing something like insight — probably nursing under a diffident manner a considerable amount of secret arrogance. Mrs. Fyne pitied Flora de Barral's fate long before the catastrophe. Most unfortunate guidance. Very unsatisfactory surroundings. The girl was known in the streets, was stared at in public places as if she had been a sort of princess, but she was kept with a very ominous consistency, from making any acquaintances — though of course there were many people no doubt who would have been more than willing to — h'm — make themselves agreeable to Miss de Barral. But this did not enter into the plans of the governess, an intriguing person hatching a most sinister plot under her severe air of distant, fashionable exclusiveness. Good little Fyne's eyes bulged with solemn horror as he revealed to me, in agitated speech, his wife's more than suspicions, at the time, of that, Mrs., Mrs. What's her name's perfidious conduct. She actually seemed to have — Mrs. Fyne asserted — formed a plot already to marry eventually her charge to an impecunious relation of her own — a young man with furtive eyes and something impudent in his manner, whom that woman called her nephew, and whom she was always having down to stay with her.

“And perhaps not her nephew. No relation at all” — Fyne emitted with a convulsive effort this, the most awful part of the suspicions Mrs. Fyne used to impart to him piecemeal when he came down to spend his week-ends

gravely with her and the children. The Fynes, in their good-natured concern for the unlucky child of the man busied in stirring casually so many millions, spent the moments of their weekly reunion in wondering earnestly what could be done to defeat the most wicked of conspiracies, trying to invent some tactful line of conduct in such extraordinary circumstances. I could see them, simple, and scrupulous, worrying honestly about that unprotected big girl while looking at their own little girls playing on the sea-shore. Fyne assured me that his wife's rest was disturbed by the great problem of interference.

"It was very acute of Mrs. Fyne to spot such a deep game," I said, wondering to myself where her acuteness had gone to now, to let her be taken unawares by a game so much simpler and played to the end under her very nose. But then, at that time, when her nightly rest was disturbed by the dread of the fate preparing for de Barral's unprotected child, she was not engaged in writing a compendious and ruthless hand-book on the theory and practice of life, for the use of women with a grievance. She could as yet, before the task of evolving the philosophy of rebellious action had affected her intuitive sharpness, perceive things which were, I suspect, moderately plain. For I am inclined to believe that the woman whom chance had put in command of Flora de Barral's destiny took no very subtle pains to conceal her game. She was conscious of being a complete master of the situation, having once for all established her ascendancy over de Barral. She had taken all her measures against outside observation of her conduct; and I could not help smiling at the thought what a ghastly nuisance the serious, innocent Fynes must have been to her. How exasperated she must have been by that couple falling into Brighton as completely unforeseen as a bolt from the blue — if not so prompt. How she must have hated them!

But I conclude she would have carried out whatever plan she might have formed. I can imagine de Barral accustomed for years to defer to her wishes and, either through arrogance, or shyness, or simply because of his unimaginative stupidity, remaining outside the social pale, knowing no one but some card-playing cronies; I can picture him to myself terrified at the prospect of having the care of a marriageable girl thrust on his hands, forcing on him a complete change of habits and the necessity of another kind of existence which he would not even have known how to begin. It is evident to me that Mrs. What's her name would have had her atrocious way

with very little trouble even if the excellent Fynes had been able to do something. She would simply have bullied de Barral in a lofty style. There's nothing more subservient than an arrogant man when his arrogance has once been broken in some particular instance.

However there was no time and no necessity for any one to do anything. The situation itself vanished in the financial crash as a building vanishes in an earthquake — here one moment and gone the next with only an ill-omened, slight, preliminary rumble. Well, to say 'in a moment' is an exaggeration perhaps; but that everything was over in just twenty-four hours is an exact statement. Fyne was able to tell me all about it; and the phrase that would depict the nature of the change best is: an instant and complete destitution. I don't understand these matters very well, but from Fyne's narrative it seemed as if the creditors or the depositors, or the competent authorities, had got hold in the twinkling of an eye of everything de Barral possessed in the world, down to his watch and chain, the money in his trousers' pocket, his spare suits of clothes, and I suppose the cameo pin out of his black satin cravat. Everything! I believe he gave up the very wedding ring of his late wife. The gloomy Priory with its damp park and a couple of farms had been made over to Mrs. de Barral; but when she died (without making a will) it reverted to him, I imagine. They got that of course; but it was a mere crumb in a Sahara of starvation, a drop in the thirsty ocean. I dare say that not a single soul in the world got the comfort of as much as a recovered threepenny bit out of the estate. Then, less than crumbs, less than drops, there were to be grabbed, the lease of the big Brighton house, the furniture therein, the carriage and pair, the girl's riding horse, her costly trinkets; down to the heavily gold-mounted collar of her pedigree St. Bernard. The dog too went: the most noble-looking item in the beggarly assets.

What however went first of all or rather vanished was nothing in the nature of an asset. It was that plotting governess with the trick of a "perfect lady" manner (severely conventional) and the soul of a remorseless brigand. When a woman takes to any sort of unlawful man-trade, there's nothing to beat her in the way of thoroughness. It's true that you will find people who'll tell you that this terrific virulence in breaking through all established things, is altogether the fault of men. Such people will ask you with a clever air why the servile wars were always the most fierce, desperate and atrocious of all wars. And you may make such answer as you



can — even the eminently feminine one, if you choose, so typical of the women's literal mind "I don't see what this has to do with it!" How many arguments have been knocked over (I won't say knocked down) by these few words! For if we men try to put the spaciousness of all experiences into our reasoning and would fain put the Infinite itself into our love, it isn't, as some writer has remarked, "It isn't women's doing." Oh no. They don't care for these things. That sort of aspiration is not much in their way; and it shall be a funny world, the world of their arranging, where the Irrelevant would fantastically step in to take the place of the sober humdrum Imaginative . . . "

I raised my hand to stop my friend Marlow.

"Do you really believe what you have said?" I asked, meaning no offence, because with Marlow one never could be sure.

"Only on certain days of the year," said Marlow readily with a malicious smile. "To-day I have been simply trying to be spacious and I perceive I've managed to hurt your susceptibilities which are consecrated to women. When you sit alone and silent you are defending in your mind the poor women from attacks which cannot possibly touch them. I wonder what can touch them? But to soothe your uneasiness I will point out again that an Irrelevant world would be very amusing, if the women take care to make it as charming as they alone can, by preserving for us certain well-known, well-established, I'll almost say hackneyed, illusions, without which the average male creature cannot get on. And that condition is very important. For there is nothing more provoking than the Irrelevant when it has ceased to amuse and charm; and then the danger would be of the subjugated masculinity in its exasperation, making some brusque, unguarded movement and accidentally putting its elbow through the fine tissue of the world of which I speak. And that would be fatal to it. For nothing looks more irretrievably deplorable than fine tissue which has been damaged. The women themselves would be the first to become disgusted with their own creation.

There was something of women's highly practical sanity and also of their irrelevancy in the conduct of Miss de Barral's amazing governess. It appeared from Fyne's narrative that the day before the first rumble of the cataclysm the questionable young man arrived unexpectedly in Brighton to stay with his "Aunt." To all outward appearance everything was going on normally; the fellow went out riding with the girl in the afternoon as he

often used to do — a sight which never failed to fill Mrs. Fyne with indignation. Fyne himself was down there with his family for a whole week and was called to the window to behold the iniquity in its progress and to share in his wife's feelings. There was not even a groom with them. And Mrs. Fyne's distress was so strong at this glimpse of the unlucky girl all unconscious of her danger riding smilingly by, that Fyne began to consider seriously whether it wasn't their plain duty to interfere at all risks — simply by writing a letter to de Barral. He said to his wife with a solemnity I can easily imagine "You ought to undertake that task, my dear. You have known his wife after all. That's something at any rate." On the other hand the fear of exposing Mrs. Fyne to some nasty rebuff worried him exceedingly. Mrs. Fyne on her side gave way to despondency. Success seemed impossible. Here was a woman for more than five years in charge of the girl and apparently enjoying the complete confidence of the father. What, that would be effective, could one say, without proofs, without . . . This Mr. de Barral must be, Mrs. Fyne pronounced, either a very stupid or a downright bad man, to neglect his child so.

You will notice that perhaps because of Fyne's solemn view of our transient life and Mrs. Fyne's natural capacity for responsibility, it had never occurred to them that the simplest way out of the difficulty was to do nothing and dismiss the matter as no concern of theirs. Which in a strict worldly sense it certainly was not. But they spent, Fyne told me, a most disturbed afternoon, considering the ways and means of dealing with the danger hanging over the head of the girl out for a ride (and no doubt enjoying herself) with an abominable scamp.

## CHAPTER FOUR — THE GOVERNESS

And the best of it was that the danger was all over already. There was no danger any more. The supposed nephew's appearance had a purpose. He had come, full, full to trembling — with the bigness of his news. There must have been rumours already as to the shaky position of the de Barral's concerns; but only amongst those in the very inmost know. No rumour or echo of rumour had reached the profane in the West-End — let alone in the guileless marine suburb of Hove. The Fynes had no suspicion; the governess, playing with cold, distinguished exclusiveness the part of mother to the fabulously wealthy Miss de Barral, had no suspicion; the masters of music, of drawing, of dancing to Miss de Barral, had no idea; the minds of her medical man, of her dentist, of the servants in the house, of the tradesmen proud of having the name of de Barral on their books, were in a state of absolute serenity. Thus, that fellow, who had unexpectedly received a most alarming straight tip from somebody in the City arrived in Brighton, at about lunch-time, with something very much in the nature of a deadly bomb in his possession. But he knew better than to throw it on the public pavement. He ate his lunch impenetrably, sitting opposite Flora de Barral, and then, on some excuse, closeted himself with the woman whom little Fyne's charity described (with a slight hesitation of speech however) as his "Aunt."

What they said to each other in private we can imagine. She came out of her own sitting-room with red spots on her cheek-bones, which having provoked a question from her "beloved" charge, were accounted for by a curt "I have a headache coming on." But we may be certain that the talk being over she must have said to that young blackguard: "You had better take her out for a ride as usual." We have proof positive of this in Fyne and Mrs. Fyne observing them mount at the door and pass under the windows of their sitting-room, talking together, and the poor girl all smiles; because she enjoyed in all innocence the company of Charley. She made no secret of it whatever to Mrs. Fyne; in fact, she had confided to her, long before, that she liked him very much: a confidence which had filled Mrs. Fyne with desolation and that sense of powerless anguish which is experienced in certain kinds of nightmare. For how could she warn the girl? She did venture to tell her once that she didn't like Mr. Charley. Miss de Barral heard her with astonishment. How was it possible not to like Charley?

Afterwards with naïve loyalty she told Mrs. Fyne that, immensely as she was fond of her she could not hear a word against Charley — the wonderful Charley.

The daughter of de Barral probably enjoyed her jolly ride with the jolly Charley (infinitely more jolly than going out with a stupid old riding-master), very much indeed, because the Fynes saw them coming back at a later hour than usual. In fact it was getting nearly dark. On dismounting, helped off by the delightful Charley, she patted the neck of her horse and went up the steps. Her last ride. She was then within a few days of her sixteenth birthday, a slight figure in a riding habit, rather shorter than the average height for her age, in a black bowler hat from under which her fine rippling dark hair cut square at the ends was hanging well down her back. The delightful Charley mounted again to take the two horses round to the mews. Mrs. Fyne remaining at the window saw the house door close on Miss de Barral returning from her last ride.

And meantime what had the governess (out of a nobleman's family) so judiciously selected (a lady, and connected with well-known county people as she said) to direct the studies, guard the health, form the mind, polish the manners, and generally play the perfect mother to that luckless child — what had she been doing? Well, having got rid of her charge by the most natural device possible, which proved her practical sense, she started packing her belongings, an act which showed her clear view of the situation. She had worked methodically, rapidly, and well, emptying the drawers, clearing the tables in her special apartment of that big house, with something silently passionate in her thoroughness; taking everything belonging to her and some things of less unquestionable ownership, a jewelled penholder, an ivory and gold paper knife (the house was full of common, costly objects), some chased silver boxes presented by de Barral and other trifles; but the photograph of Flora de Barral, with the loving inscription, which stood on her writing desk, of the most modern and expensive style, in a silver-gilt frame, she neglected to take. Having accidentally, in the course of the operations, knocked it off on the floor she let it lie there after a downward glance. Thus it, or the frame at least, became, I suppose, part of the assets in the de Barral bankruptcy.

At dinner that evening the child found her company dull and brusque. It was uncommonly slow. She could get nothing from her governess but monosyllables, and the jolly Charley actually snubbed the various cheery

openings of his “little chum” — as he used to call her at times, — but not at that time. No doubt the couple were nervous and preoccupied. For all this we have evidence, and for the fact that Flora being offended with the delightful nephew of her profoundly respected governess sulked through the rest of the evening and was glad to retire early. Mrs., Mrs. — I’ve really forgotten her name — the governess, invited her nephew to her sitting-room, mentioning aloud that it was to talk over some family matters. This was meant for Flora to hear, and she heard it — without the slightest interest. In fact there was nothing sufficiently unusual in such an invitation to arouse in her mind even a passing wonder. She went bored to bed and being tired with her long ride slept soundly all night. Her last sleep, I won’t say of innocence — that word would not render my exact meaning, because it has a special meaning of its own — but I will say: of that ignorance, or better still, of that unconsciousness of the world’s ways, the unconsciousness of danger, of pain, of humiliation, of bitterness, of falsehood. An unconsciousness which in the case of other beings like herself is removed by a gradual process of experience and information, often only partial at that, with saving reserves, softening doubts, veiling theories. Her unconsciousness of the evil which lives in the secret thoughts and therefore in the open acts of mankind, whenever it happens that evil thought meets evil courage; her unconsciousness was to be broken into with profane violence with desecrating circumstances, like a temple violated by a mad, vengeful impiety. Yes, that very young girl, almost no more than a child — this was what was going to happen to her. And if you ask me, how, wherefore, for what reason? I will answer you: Why, by chance! By the merest chance, as things do happen, lucky and unlucky, terrible or tender, important or unimportant; and even things which are neither, things so completely neutral in character that you would wonder why they do happen at all if you didn’t know that they, too, carry in their insignificance the seeds of further incalculable chances.

Of course, all the chances were that de Barral should have fallen upon a perfectly harmless, naïve, usual, inefficient specimen of respectable governess for his daughter; or on a commonplace silly adventuress who would have tried, say, to marry him or work some other sort of common mischief in a small way. Or again he might have chanced on a model of all the virtues, or the repository of all knowledge, or anything equally harmless, conventional, and middle class. All calculations were in his

favour; but, chance being incalculable, he fell upon an individuality whom it is much easier to define by opprobrious names than to classify in a calm and scientific spirit — but an individuality certainly, and a temperament as well. Rare? No. There is a certain amount of what I would politely call unscrupulousness in all of us. Think for instance of the excellent Mrs. Fyne, who herself, and in the bosom of her family, resembled a governess of a conventional type. Only, her mental excesses were theoretical, hedged in by so much humane feeling and conventional reserves, that they amounted to no more than mere libertinage of thought; whereas the other woman, the governess of Flora de Barral, was, as you may have noticed, severely practical — terribly practical. No! Hers was not a rare temperament, except in its fierce resentment of repression; a feeling which like genius or lunacy is apt to drive people into sudden irrelevancy. Hers was feminine irrelevancy. A male genius, a male ruffian, or even a male lunatic, would not have behaved exactly as she did behave. There is a softness in masculine nature, even the most brutal, which acts as a check.

While the girl slept those two, the woman of forty, an age in itself terrible, and that hopeless young “wrong ‘un” of twenty-three (also well connected I believe) had some sort of subdued row in the cleared rooms: wardrobes open, drawers half pulled out and empty, trunks locked and strapped, furniture in idle disarray, and not so much as a single scrap of paper left behind on the tables. The maid, whom the governess and the pupil shared between them, after finishing with Flora, came to the door as usual, but was not admitted. She heard the two voices in dispute before she knocked, and then being sent away retreated at once — the only person in the house convinced at that time that there was “something up.”

Dark and, so to speak, inscrutable spaces being met with in life there must be such places in any statement dealing with life. In what I am telling you of now — an episode of one of my humdrum holidays in the green country, recalled quite naturally after all the years by our meeting a man who has been a blue-water sailor — this evening confabulation is a dark, inscrutable spot. And we may conjecture what we like. I have no difficulty in imagining that the woman — of forty, and the chief of the enterprise — must have raged at large. And perhaps the other did not rage enough. Youth feels deeply it is true, but it has not the same vivid sense of lost opportunities. It believes in the absolute reality of time. And then, in that abominable scamp with his youth already soiled, withered like a plucked

flower ready to be flung on some rotting heap of rubbish, no very genuine feeling about anything could exist — not even about the hazards of his own unclean existence. A sneering half-laugh with some such remark as: “We are properly sold and no mistake” would have been enough to make trouble in that way. And then another sneer, “Waste time enough over it too,” followed perhaps by the bitter retort from the other party “You seemed to like it well enough though, playing the fool with that chit of a girl.” Something of that sort. Don’t you see it — eh . . . “

Marlow looked at me with his dark penetrating glance. I was struck by the absolute verisimilitude of this suggestion. But we were always tilting at each other. I saw an opening and pushed my uncandid thrust.

“You have a ghastly imagination,” I said with a cheerfully sceptical smile.

“Well, and if I have,” he returned unabashed. “But let me remind you that this situation came to me unasked. I am like a puzzle-headed chief-mate we had once in the dear old Samarcand when I was a youngster. The fellow went gravely about trying to “account to himself” — his favourite expression — for a lot of things no one would care to bother one’s head about. He was an old idiot but he was also an accomplished practical seaman. I was quite a boy and he impressed me. I must have caught the disposition from him.”

“Well — go on with your accounting then,” I said, assuming an air of resignation.

“That’s just it.” Marlow fell into his stride at once. “That’s just it. Mere disappointed cupidity cannot account for the proceedings of the next morning; proceedings which I shall not describe to you — but which I shall tell you of presently, not as a matter of conjecture but of actual fact. Meantime returning to that evening altercation in deadened tones within the private apartment of Miss de Barral’s governess, what if I were to tell you that disappointment had most likely made them touchy with each other, but that perhaps the secret of his careless, railing behaviour, was in the thought, springing up within him with an emphatic oath of relief “Now there’s nothing to prevent me from breaking away from that old woman.” And that the secret of her envenomed rage, not against this miserable and attractive wretch, but against fate, accident and the whole course of human life, concentrating its venom on de Barral and including the innocent girl

herself, was in the thought, in the fear crying within her “Now I have nothing to hold him with . . . “

I couldn’t refuse Marlow the tribute of a prolonged whistle “Phew! So you suppose that . . . “

He waved his hand impatiently.

“I don’t suppose. It was so. And anyhow why shouldn’t you accept the supposition. Do you look upon governesses as creatures above suspicion or necessarily of moral perfection? I suppose their hearts would not stand looking into much better than other people’s. Why shouldn’t a governess have passions, all the passions, even that of libertinage, and even ungovernable passions; yet suppressed by the very same means which keep the rest of us in order: early training — necessity — circumstances — fear of consequences; till there comes an age, a time when the restraint of years becomes intolerable — and infatuation irresistible . . . “

“But if infatuation — quite possible I admit,” I argued, “how do you account for the nature of the conspiracy.”

“You expect a cogency of conduct not usual in women,” said Marlow. “The subterfuges of a menaced passion are not to be fathomed. You think it is going on the way it looks, whereas it is capable, for its own ends, of walking backwards into a precipice.

When one once acknowledges that she was not a common woman, then all this is easily understood. She was abominable but she was not common. She had suffered in her life not from its constant inferiority but from constant self-repression. A common woman finding herself placed in a commanding position might have formed the design to become the second Mrs. de Barral. Which would have been impracticable. De Barral would not have known what to do with a wife. But even if by some impossible chance he had made advances, this governess would have repulsed him with scorn. She had treated him always as an inferior being with an assured, distant politeness. In her composed, schooled manner she despised and disliked both father and daughter exceedingly. I have a notion that she had always disliked intensely all her charges including the two ducal (if they were ducal) little girls with whom she had dazzled de Barral. What an odious, ungratified existence it must have been for a woman as avid of all the sensuous emotions which life can give as most of her betters.

She had seen her youth vanish, her freshness disappear, her hopes die, and now she felt her flaming middle-age slipping away from her. No



wonder that with her admirably dressed, abundant hair, thickly sprinkled with white threads and adding to her elegant aspect the piquant distinction of a powdered coiffure — no wonder, I say, that she clung desperately to her last infatuation for that graceless young scamp, even to the extent of hatching for him that amazing plot. He was not so far gone in degradation as to make him utterly hopeless for such an attempt. She hoped to keep him straight with that enormous bribe. She was clearly a woman uncommon enough to live without illusions — which, of course, does not mean that she was reasonable. She had said to herself, perhaps with a fury of self-contempt “In a few years I shall be too old for anybody. Meantime I shall have him — and I shall hold him by throwing to him the money of that ordinary, silly, little girl of no account.” Well, it was a desperate expedient — but she thought it worth while. And besides there is hardly a woman in the world, no matter how hard, depraved or frantic, in whom something of the maternal instinct does not survive, unconsumed like a salamander, in the fires of the most abandoned passion. Yes there might have been that sentiment for him too. There was no doubt. So I say again: No wonder! No wonder that she raged at everything — and perhaps even at him, with contradictory reproaches: for regretting the girl, a little fool who would never in her life be worth anybody’s attention, and for taking the disaster itself with a cynical levity in which she perceived a flavour of revolt.

And so the altercation in the night went on, over the irremediable. He arguing “What’s the hurry? Why clear out like this?” perhaps a little sorry for the girl and as usual without a penny in his pocket, appreciating the comfortable quarters, wishing to linger on as long as possible in the shameless enjoyment of this already doomed luxury. There was really no hurry for a few days. Always time enough to vanish. And, with that, a touch of masculine softness, a sort of regard for appearances surviving his degradation: “You might behave decently at the last, Eliza.” But there was no softness in the sallow face under the gala effect of powdered hair, its formal calmness gone, the dark-ringed eyes glaring at him with a sort of hunger. “No! No! If it is as you say then not a day, not an hour, not a moment.” She stuck to it, very determined that there should be no more of that boy and girl philandering since the object of it was gone; angry with herself for having suffered from it so much in the past, furious at its having been all in vain.

But she was reasonable enough not to quarrel with him finally. What was the good? She found means to placate him. The only means. As long as there was some money to be got she had hold of him. "Now go away. We shall do no good by any more of this sort of talk. I want to be alone for a bit." He went away, sulkily acquiescent. There was a room always kept ready for him on the same floor, at the further end of a short thickly carpeted passage.

How she passed the night, this woman with no illusions to help her through the hours which must have been sleepless I shouldn't like to say. It ended at last; and this strange victim of the de Barral failure, whose name would never be known to the Official Receiver, came down to breakfast, impenetrable in her everyday perfection. From the very first, somehow, she had accepted the fatal news for true. All her life she had never believed in her luck, with that pessimism of the passionate who at bottom feel themselves to be the outcasts of a morally restrained universe. But this did not make it any easier, on opening the morning paper feverishly, to see the thing confirmed. Oh yes! It was there. The Orb had suspended payment — the first growl of the storm faint as yet, but to the initiated the forerunner of a deluge. As an item of news it was not indecently displayed. It was not displayed at all in a sense. The serious paper, the only one of the great dailies which had always maintained an attitude of reserve towards the de Barral group of banks, had its "manner." Yes! a modest item of news! But there was also, on another page, a special financial article in a hostile tone beginning with the words "We have always feared" and a guarded, half-column leader, opening with the phrase: "It is a deplorable sign of the times" what was, in effect, an austere, general rebuke to the absurd infatuations of the investing public. She glanced through these articles, a line here and a line there — no more was necessary to catch beyond doubt the murmur of the oncoming flood. Several slighting references by name to de Barral revived her animosity against the man, suddenly, as by the effect of unforeseen moral support. The miserable wretch! . . . "

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" — You understand," Marlow interrupted the current of his narrative, "that in order to be consecutive in my relation of this affair I am telling you at once the details which I heard from Mrs. Fyne later in the day, as well as what little Fyne imparted to me with his usual solemnity during that

morning call. As you may easily guess the Fynes, in their apartments, had read the news at the same time, and, as a matter of fact, in the same august and highly moral newspaper, as the governess in the luxurious mansion a few doors down on the opposite side of the street. But they read them with different feelings. They were thunderstruck. Fyne had to explain the full purport of the intelligence to Mrs. Fyne whose first cry was that of relief. Then that poor child would be safe from these designing, horrid people. Mrs. Fyne did not know what it might mean to be suddenly reduced from riches to absolute penury. Fyne with his masculine imagination was less inclined to rejoice extravagantly at the girl's escape from the moral dangers which had been menacing her defenceless existence. It was a confoundingly big price to pay. What an unfortunate little thing she was! "We might be able to do something to comfort that poor child at any rate for the time she is here," said Mrs. Fyne. She felt under a sort of moral obligation not to be indifferent. But no comfort for anyone could be got by rushing out into the street at this early hour; and so, following the advice of Fyne not to act hastily, they both sat down at the window and stared feelingly at the great house, awful to their eyes in its stolid, prosperous, expensive respectability with ruin absolutely standing at the door.

By that time, or very soon after, all Brighton had the information and formed a more or less just appreciation of its gravity. The butler in Miss de Barral's big house had seen the news, perhaps earlier than anybody within a mile of the Parade, in the course of his morning duties of which one was to dry the freshly delivered paper before the fire — an occasion to glance at it which no intelligent man could have neglected. He communicated to the rest of the household his vaguely forcible impression that something had gone d — -bly wrong with the affairs of "her father in London."

This brought an atmosphere of constraint through the house, which Flora de Barral coming down somewhat later than usual could not help noticing in her own way. Everybody seemed to stare so stupidly somehow; she feared a dull day.

In the dining-room the governess in her place, a newspaper half-concealed under the cloth on her lap, after a few words exchanged with lips that seemed hardly to move, remaining motionless, her eyes fixed before her in an enduring silence; and presently Charley coming in to whom she did not even give a glance. He hardly said good morning, though he had a half-hearted try to smile at the girl, and sitting opposite her with his eyes on

his plate and slight quivers passing along the line of his clean-shaven jaw, he too had nothing to say. It was dull, horribly dull to begin one's day like this; but she knew what it was. These never-ending family affairs! It was not for the first time that she had suffered from their depressing after-effects on these two. It was a shame that the delightful Charley should be made dull by these stupid talks, and it was perfectly stupid of him to let himself be upset like this by his aunt.

When after a period of still, as if calculating, immobility, her governess got up abruptly and went out with the paper in her hand, almost immediately afterwards followed by Charley who left his breakfast half eaten, the girl was positively relieved. They would have it out that morning whatever it was, and be themselves again in the afternoon. At least Charley would be. To the moods of her governess she did not attach so much importance.

For the first time that morning the Fynes saw the front door of the awful house open and the objectionable young man issue forth, his rascality visible to their prejudiced eyes in his very bowler hat and in the smart cut of his short fawn overcoat. He walked away rapidly like a man hurrying to catch a train, glancing from side to side as though he were carrying something off. Could he be departing for good? Undoubtedly, undoubtedly! But Mrs. Fyne's fervent "thank goodness" turned out to be a bit, as the Americans — some Americans — say "previous." In a very short time the odious fellow appeared again, strolling, absolutely strolling back, his hat now tilted a little on one side, with an air of leisure and satisfaction. Mrs. Fyne groaned not only in the spirit, at this sight, but in the flesh, audibly; and asked her husband what it might mean. Fyne naturally couldn't say. Mrs. Fyne believed that there was something horrid in progress and meantime the object of her detestation had gone up the steps and had knocked at the door which at once opened to admit him.

He had been only as far as the bank.

His reason for leaving his breakfast unfinished to run after Miss de Barral's governess, was to speak to her in reference to that very errand possessing the utmost possible importance in his eyes. He shrugged his shoulders at the nervousness of her eyes and hands, at the half-strangled whisper "I had to go out. I could hardly contain myself." That was her affair. He was, with a young man's squeamishness, rather sick of her ferocity. He did not understand it. Men do not accumulate hate against

each other in tiny amounts, treasuring every pinch carefully till it grows at last into a monstrous and explosive hoard. He had run out after her to remind her of the balance at the bank. What about lifting that money without wasting any more time? She had promised him to leave nothing behind.

An account opened in her name for the expenses of the establishment in Brighton, had been fed by de Barral with deferential lavishness. The governess crossed the wide hall into a little room at the side where she sat down to write the cheque, which he hastened out to go and cash as if it were stolen or a forgery. As observed by the Fynes, his uneasy appearance on leaving the house arose from the fact that his first trouble having been caused by a cheque of doubtful authenticity, the possession of a document of the sort made him unreasonably uncomfortable till this one was safely cashed. And after all, you know it was stealing of an indirect sort; for the money was de Barral's money if the account was in the name of the accomplished lady. At any rate the cheque was cashed. On getting hold of the notes and gold he recovered his jaunty bearing, it being well known that with certain natures the presence of money (even stolen) in the pocket, acts as a tonic, or at least as a stimulant. He cocked his hat a little on one side as though he had had a drink or two — which indeed he might have had in reality, to celebrate the occasion.

The governess had been waiting for his return in the hall, disregarding the side-glances of the butler as he went in and out of the dining-room clearing away the breakfast things. It was she, herself, who had opened the door so promptly. "It's all right," he said touching his breast-pocket; and she did not dare, the miserable wretch without illusions, she did not dare ask him to hand it over. They looked at each other in silence. He nodded significantly: "Where is she now?" and she whispered "Gone into the drawing-room. Want to see her again?" with an archly black look which he acknowledged by a muttered, surly: "I am damned if I do. Well, as you want to bolt like this, why don't we go now?"

She set her lips with cruel obstinacy and shook her head. She had her idea, her completed plan. At that moment the Fynes, still at the window and watching like a pair of private detectives, saw a man with a long grey beard and a jovial face go up the steps helping himself with a thick stick, and knock at the door. Who could he be?

He was one of Miss de Barral's masters. She had lately taken up painting in water-colours, having read in a high-class woman's weekly paper that a great many princesses of the European royal houses were cultivating that art. This was the water-colour morning; and the teacher, a veteran of many exhibitions, of a venerable and jovial aspect, had turned up with his usual punctuality. He was no great reader of morning papers, and even had he seen the news it is very likely he would not have understood its real purport. At any rate he turned up, as the governess expected him to do, and the Fynes saw him pass through the fateful door.

He bowed cordially to the lady in charge of Miss de Barral's education, whom he saw in the hall engaged in conversation with a very good-looking but somewhat raffish young gentleman. She turned to him graciously: "Flora is already waiting for you in the drawing-room."

The cultivation of the art said to be patronized by princesses was pursued in the drawing-room from considerations of the right kind of light. The governess preceded the master up the stairs and into the room where Miss de Barral was found arrayed in a holland pinafore (also of the right kind for the pursuit of the art) and smilingly expectant. The water-colour lesson enlivened by the jocular conversation of the kindly, humorous, old man was always great fun; and she felt she would be compensated for the tiresome beginning of the day.

Her governess generally was present at the lesson; but on this occasion she only sat down till the master and pupil had gone to work in earnest, and then as though she had suddenly remembered some order to give, rose quietly and went out of the room.

Once outside, the servants summoned by the passing maid without a bell being rung, and quick, quick, let all this luggage be taken down into the hall, and let one of you call a cab. She stood outside the drawing-room door on the landing, looking at each piece, trunk, leather cases, portmanteaus, being carried past her, her brows knitted and her aspect so sombre and absorbed that it took some little time for the butler to muster courage enough to speak to her. But he reflected that he was a free-born Briton and had his rights. He spoke straight to the point but in the usual respectful manner.

"Beg you pardon, ma'am — but are you going away for good?"

He was startled by her tone. Its unexpected, unlady-like harshness fell on his trained ear with the disagreeable effect of a false note. "Yes. I am going

away. And the best thing for all of you is to go away too, as soon as you like. You can go now, to-day, this moment. You had your wages paid you only last week. The longer you stay the greater your loss. But I have nothing to do with it now. You are the servants of Mr. de Barral — you know.”

The butler was astounded by the manner of this advice, and as his eyes wandered to the drawing-room door the governess extended her arm as if to bar the way. “Nobody goes in there.” And that was said still in another tone, such a tone that all trace of the trained respectfulness vanished from the butler’s bearing. He stared at her with a frank wondering gaze. “Not till I am gone,” she added, and there was such an expression on her face that the man was daunted by the mystery of it. He shrugged his shoulders slightly and without another word went down the stairs on his way to the basement, brushing in the hall past Mr. Charles who hat on head and both hands rammed deep into his overcoat pockets paced up and down as though on sentry duty there.

The ladies’ maid was the only servant upstairs, hovering in the passage on the first floor, curious and as if fascinated by the woman who stood there guarding the door. Being beckoned closer imperiously and asked by the governess to bring out of the now empty rooms the hat and veil, the only objects besides the furniture still to be found there, she did so in silence but inwardly fluttered. And while waiting uneasily, with the veil, before that woman who, without moving a step away from the drawing-room door was pinning with careless haste her hat on her head, she heard within a sudden burst of laughter from Miss de Barral enjoying the fun of the water-colour lesson given her for the last time by the cheery old man.

Mr. and Mrs. Fyne ambushed at their window — a most incredible occupation for people of their kind — saw with renewed anxiety a cab come to the door, and watched some luggage being carried out and put on its roof. The butler appeared for a moment, then went in again. What did it mean? Was Flora going to be taken to her father; or were these people, that woman and her horrible nephew, about to carry her off somewhere? Fyne couldn’t tell. He doubted the last, Flora having now, he judged, no value, either positive or speculative. Though no great reader of character he did not credit the governess with humane intentions. He confessed to me naïvely that he was excited as if watching some action on the stage. Then the thought struck him that the girl might have had some money settled on

her, be possessed of some means, of some little fortune of her own and therefore —

He imparted this theory to his wife who shared fully his consternation. “I can’t believe the child will go away without running in to say good-bye to us,” she murmured. “We must find out! I shall ask her.” But at that very moment the cab rolled away, empty inside, and the door of the house which had been standing slightly ajar till then was pushed to.

They remained silent staring at it till Mrs. Fyne whispered doubtfully “I really think I must go over.” Fyne didn’t answer for a while (his is a reflective mind, you know), and then as if Mrs. Fyne’s whispers had an occult power over that door it opened wide again and the white-bearded man issued, astonishingly active in his movements, using his stick almost like a leaping-pole to get down the steps; and hobbled away briskly along the pavement. Naturally the Fynes were too far off to make out the expression of his face. But it would not have helped them very much to a guess at the conditions inside the house. The expression was humorously puzzled — nothing more.

For, at the end of his lesson, seizing his trusty stick and coming out with his habitual vivacity, he very nearly cannoned just outside the drawing-room door into the back of Miss de Barral’s governess. He stopped himself in time and she turned round swiftly. It was embarrassing; he apologised; but her face was not startled; it was not aware of him; it wore a singular expression of resolution. A very singular expression which, as it were, detained him for a moment. In order to cover his embarrassment, he made some inane remark on the weather, upon which, instead of returning another inane remark according to the tacit rules of the game, she only gave him a smile of unfathomable meaning. Nothing could have been more singular. The good-looking young gentleman of questionable appearance took not the slightest notice of him in the hall. No servant was to be seen. He let himself out pulling the door to behind him with a crash as, in a manner, he was forced to do to get it shut at all.

When the echo of it had died away the woman on the landing leaned over the banister and called out bitterly to the man below “Don’t you want to come up and say good-bye.” He had an impatient movement of the shoulders and went on pacing to and fro as though he had not heard. But suddenly he checked himself, stood still for a moment, then with a gloomy face and without taking his hands out of his pockets ran smartly up the



stairs. Already facing the door she turned her head for a whispered taunt: "Come! Confess you were dying to see her stupid little face once more," — to which he disdained to answer.

Flora de Barral, still seated before the table at which she had been working on her sketch, raised her head at the noise of the opening door. The invading manner of their entrance gave her the sense of something she had never seen before. She knew them well. She knew the woman better than she knew her father. There had been between them an intimacy of relation as great as it can possibly be without the final closeness of affection. The delightful Charley walked in, with his eyes fixed on the back of her governess whose raised veil hid her forehead like a brown band above the black line of the eyebrows. The girl was astounded and alarmed by the altogether unknown expression in the woman's face. The stress of passion often discloses an aspect of the personality completely ignored till then by its closest intimates. There was something like an emanation of evil from her eyes and from the face of the other, who, exactly behind her and overtopping her by half a head, kept his eyelids lowered in a sinister fashion — which in the poor girl, reached, stirred, set free that faculty of unreasoning explosive terror lying locked up at the bottom of all human hearts and of the hearts of animals as well. With suddenly enlarged pupils and a movement as instinctive almost as the bounding of a startled fawn, she jumped up and found herself in the middle of the big room, exclaiming at those amazing and familiar strangers.

"What do you want?"

You will note that she cried: What do you want? Not: What has happened? She told Mrs. Fyne that she had received suddenly the feeling of being personally attacked. And that must have been very terrifying. The woman before her had been the wisdom, the authority, the protection of life, security embodied and visible and undisputed.

You may imagine then the force of the shock in the intuitive perception not merely of danger, for she did not know what was alarming her, but in the sense of the security being gone. And not only security. I don't know how to explain it clearly. Look! Even a small child lives, plays and suffers in terms of its conception of its own existence. Imagine, if you can, a fact coming in suddenly with a force capable of shattering that very conception itself. It was only because of the girl being still so much of a child that she escaped mental destruction; that, in other words she got over it. Could one

conceive of her more mature, while still as ignorant as she was, one must conclude that she would have become an idiot on the spot — long before the end of that experience. Luckily, people, whether mature or not mature (and who really is ever mature?) are for the most part quite incapable of understanding what is happening to them: a merciful provision of nature to preserve an average amount of sanity for working purposes in this world . . . “

“But we, my dear Marlow, have the inestimable advantage of understanding what is happening to others,” I struck in. “Or at least some of us seem to. Is that too a provision of nature? And what is it for? Is it that we may amuse ourselves gossiping about each other’s affairs? You for instance seem — ”

“I don’t know what I seem,” Marlow silenced me, “and surely life must be amused somehow. It would be still a very respectable provision if it were only for that end. But from that same provision of understanding, there springs in us compassion, charity, indignation, the sense of solidarity; and in minds of any largeness an inclination to that indulgence which is next door to affection. I don’t mean to say that I am inclined to an indulgent view of the precious couple which broke in upon an unsuspecting girl. They came marching in (it’s the very expression she used later on to Mrs. Fyne) but at her cry they stopped. It must have been startling enough to them. It was like having the mask torn off when you don’t expect it. The man stopped for good; he didn’t offer to move a step further. But, though the governess had come in there for the very purpose of taking the mask off for the first time in her life, she seemed to look upon the frightened cry as a fresh provocation. “What are you screaming for, you little fool?” she said advancing alone close to the girl who was affected exactly as if she had seen Medusa’s head with serpentine locks set mysteriously on the shoulders of that familiar person, in that brown dress, under that hat she knew so well. It made her lose all her hold on reality. She told Mrs. Fyne: “I didn’t know where I was. I didn’t even know that I was frightened. If she had told me it was a joke I would have laughed. If she had told me to put on my hat and go out with her I would have gone to put on my hat and gone out with her and never said a single word; I should have been convinced I had been mad for a minute or so, and I would have worried myself to death rather than breathe a hint of it to her or anyone. But the wretch put her face

close to mine and I could not move. Directly I had looked into her eyes I felt grown on to the carpet.”

It was years afterwards that she used to talk like this to Mrs. Fyne — and to Mrs. Fyne alone. Nobody else ever heard the story from her lips. But it was never forgotten. It was always felt; it remained like a mark on her soul, a sort of mystic wound, to be contemplated, to be meditated over. And she said further to Mrs. Fyne, in the course of many confidences provoked by that contemplation, that, as long as that woman called her names, it was almost soothing, it was in a manner reassuring. Her imagination had, like her body, gone off in a wild bound to meet the unknown; and then to hear after all something which more in its tone than in its substance was mere venomous abuse, had steadied the inward flutter of all her being.

“She called me a little fool more times than I can remember. I! A fool! Why, Mrs. Fyne! I do assure you I had never yet thought at all; never of anything in the world, till then. I just went on living. And one can’t be a fool without one has at least tried to think. But what had I ever to think about?”

“And no doubt,” commented Marlow, “her life had been a mere life of sensations — the response to which can neither be foolish nor wise. It can only be temperamental; and I believe that she was of a generally happy disposition, a child of the average kind. Even when she was asked violently whether she imagined that there was anything in her, apart from her money, to induce any intelligent person to take any sort of interest in her existence, she only caught her breath in one dry sob and said nothing, made no other sound, made no movement. When she was viciously assured that she was in heart, mind, manner and appearance, an utterly common and insipid creature, she remained still, without indignation, without anger. She stood, a frail and passive vessel into which the other went on pouring all the accumulated dislike for all her pupils, her scorn of all her employers (the ducal one included), the accumulated resentment, the infinite hatred of all these unrelieved years of — I won’t say hypocrisy. The practice of perfect hypocrisy is a relief in itself, a secret triumph of the vilest sort, no doubt, but still a way of getting even with the common morality from which some of us appear to suffer so much. No! I will say the years, the passionate, bitter years, of restraint, the iron, admirably mannered restraint at every moment, in a never-failing perfect correctness of speech, glances, movements, smiles, gestures, establishing for her a high reputation, an

impressive record of success in her sphere. It had been like living half strangled for years.

And all this torture for nothing, in the end! What looked at last like a possible prize (oh, without illusions! but still a prize) broken in her hands, fallen in the dust, the bitter dust, of disappointment, she revelled in the miserable revenge — pretty safe too — only regretting the unworthiness of the girlish figure which stood for so much she had longed to be able to spit venom at, if only once, in perfect liberty. The presence of the young man at her back increased both her satisfaction and her rage. But the very violence of the attack seemed to defeat its end by rendering the representative victim as it were insensible. The cause of this outrage naturally escaping the girl's imagination her attitude was in effect that of dense, hopeless stupidity. And it is a fact that the worst shocks of life are often received without outcries, without gestures, without a flow of tears and the convulsions of sobbing. The insatiable governess missed these signs exceedingly. This pitiful stolidity was only a fresh provocation. Yet the poor girl was deadly pale.

"I was cold," she used to explain to Mrs. Fyne. "I had had time to get terrified. She had pushed her face so near mine and her teeth looked as though she wanted to bite me. Her eyes seemed to have become quite dry, hard and small in a lot of horrible wrinkles. I was too afraid of her to shudder, too afraid of her to put my fingers to my ears. I didn't know what I expected her to call me next, but when she told me I was no better than a beggar — that there would be no more masters, no more servants, no more horses for me — I said to myself: Is that all? I should have laughed if I hadn't been too afraid of her to make the least little sound."

It seemed that poor Flora had to know all the possible phases of that sort of anguish, beginning with instinctive panic, through the bewildered stage, the frozen stage and the stage of blanched apprehension, down to the instinctive prudence of extreme terror — the stillness of the mouse. But when she heard herself called the child of a cheat and a swindler, the very monstrous unexpectedness of this caused in her a revulsion towards letting herself go. She screamed out all at once "You mustn't speak like this of Papa!"

The effort of it uprooted her from that spot where her little feet seemed dug deep into the thick luxurious carpet, and she retreated backwards to a distant part of the room, hearing herself repeat "You mustn't, you mustn't" as if it were somebody else screaming. She came to a chair and flung

herself into it. Thereupon the somebody else ceased screaming and she lolled, exhausted, sightless, in a silent room, as if indifferent to everything and without a single thought in her head.

The next few seconds seemed to last for ever so long; a black abyss of time separating what was past and gone from the reappearance of the governess and the reawakening of fear. And that woman was forcing the words through her set teeth: "You say I mustn't, I mustn't. All the world will be speaking of him like this to-morrow. They will say it, and they'll print it. You shall hear it and you shall read it — and then you shall know whose daughter you are."

Her face lighted up with an atrocious satisfaction. "He's nothing but a thief," she cried, "this father of yours. As to you I have never been deceived in you for a moment. I have been growing more and more sick of you for years. You are a vulgar, silly nonentity, and you shall go back to where you belong, whatever low place you have sprung from, and beg your bread — that is if anybody's charity will have anything to do with you, which I doubt — "

She would have gone on regardless of the enormous eyes, of the open mouth of the girl who sat up suddenly with the wild staring expression of being choked by invisible fingers on her throat, and yet horribly pale. The effect on her constitution was so profound, Mrs. Fyne told me, that she who as a child had a rather pretty delicate colouring, showed a white bloodless face for a couple of years afterwards, and remained always liable at the slightest emotion to an extraordinary ghost-like whiteness. The end came in the abomination of desolation of the poor child's miserable cry for help: "Charley! Charley!" coming from her throat in hidden gasping efforts. Her enlarged eyes had discovered him where he stood motionless and dumb.

He started from his immobility, a hand withdrawn brusquely from the pocket of his overcoat, strode up to the woman, seized her by the arm from behind, saying in a rough commanding tone: "Come away, Eliza." In an instant the child saw them close together and remote, near the door, gone through the door, which she neither heard nor saw being opened or shut. But it was shut. Oh yes, it was shut. Her slow unseeing glance wandered all over the room. For some time longer she remained leaning forward, collecting her strength, doubting if she would be able to stand. She stood up at last. Everything about her spun round in an oppressive silence. She remembered perfectly — as she told Mrs. Fyne — that clinging to the arm

of the chair she called out twice "Papa! Papa!" At the thought that he was far away in London everything about her became quite still. Then, frightened suddenly by the solitude of that empty room, she rushed out of it blindly.

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With that fatal diffidence in well doing, inherent in the present condition of humanity, the Fynes continued to watch at their window. "It's always so difficult to know what to do for the best," Fyne assured me. It is. Good intentions stand in their own way so much. Whereas if you want to do harm to anyone you needn't hesitate. You have only to go on. No one will reproach you with your mistakes or call you a confounded, clumsy meddler. The Fynes watched the door, the closed street door inimical somehow to their benevolent thoughts, the face of the house cruelly impenetrable. It was just as on any other day. The unchanged daily aspect of inanimate things is so impressive that Fyne went back into the room for a moment, picked up the paper again, and ran his eyes over the item of news. No doubt of it. It looked very bad. He came back to the window and Mrs. Fyne. Tired out as she was she sat there resolute and ready for responsibility. But she had no suggestion to offer. People do fear a rebuff wonderfully, and all her audacity was in her thoughts. She shrank from the incomparably insolent manner of the governess. Fyne stood by her side, as in those old-fashioned photographs of married couples where you see a husband with his hand on the back of his wife's chair. And they were about as efficient as an old photograph, and as still, till Mrs. Fyne started slightly. The street door had swung open, and, bursting out, appeared the young man, his hat (Mrs. Fyne observed) tilted forward over his eyes. After him the governess slipped through, turning round at once to shut the door behind her with care. Meantime the man went down the white steps and strode along the pavement, his hands rammed deep into the pockets of his fawn overcoat. The woman, that woman of composed movements, of deliberate superior manner, took a little run to catch up with him, and directly she had caught up with him tried to introduce her hand under his arm. Mrs. Fyne saw the brusque half turn of the fellow's body as one avoids an importunate contact, defeating her attempt rudely. She did not try again but kept pace with his stride, and Mrs. Fyne watched them, walking independently, turn the corner of the street side by side, disappear for ever.

The Fynes looked at each other eloquently, doubtfully: What do you think of this? Then with common accord turned their eyes back to the street door, closed, massive, dark; the great, clear-brass knocker shining in a quiet slant of sunshine cut by a diagonal line of heavy shade filling the further end of the street. Could the girl be already gone? Sent away to her father? Had she any relations? Nobody but de Barral himself ever came to see her, Mrs. Fyne remembered; and she had the instantaneous, profound, maternal perception of the child's loneliness — and a girl too! It was irresistible. And, besides, the departure of the governess was not without its encouraging influence. "I am going over at once to find out," she declared resolutely but still staring across the street. Her intention was arrested by the sight of that awful, sombrely glistening door, swinging back suddenly on the yawning darkness of the hall, out of which literally flew out, right out on the pavement, almost without touching the white steps, a little figure swathed in a holland pinafore up to the chin, its hair streaming back from its head, darting past a lamp-post, past the red pillar-box . . . "Here," cried Mrs. Fyne; "she's coming here! Run, John! Run!"

Fyne bounded out of the room. This is his own word. Bounded! He assured me with intensified solemnity that he bounded; and the sight of the short and muscular Fyne bounding gravely about the circumscribed passages and staircases of a small, very high class, private hotel, would have been worth any amount of money to a man greedy of memorable impressions. But as I looked at him, the desire of laughter at my very lips, I asked myself: how many men could be found ready to compromise their cherished gravity for the sake of the unimportant child of a ruined financier with an ugly, black cloud already wreathing his head. I didn't laugh at little Fyne. I encouraged him: "You did! — very good . . . Well?"

His main thought was to save the child from some unpleasant interference. There was a porter downstairs, page boys; some people going away with their trunks in the passage; a railway omnibus at the door, white-breasted waiters dodging about the entrance.

He was in time. He was at the door before she reached it in her blind course. She did not recognize him; perhaps she did not see him. He caught her by the arm as she ran past and, very sensibly, without trying to check her, simply darted in with her and up the stairs, causing no end of consternation amongst the people in his way. They scattered. What might

have been their thoughts at the spectacle of a shameless middle-aged man abducting headlong into the upper regions of a respectable hotel a terrified young girl obviously under age, I don't know. And Fyne (he told me so) did not care for what people might think. All he wanted was to reach his wife before the girl collapsed. For a time she ran with him but at the last flight of stairs he had to seize and half drag, half carry her to his wife. Mrs. Fyne waited at the door with her quite unmoved physiognomy and her readiness to confront any sort of responsibility, which already characterized her, long before she became a ruthless theorist. Relieved, his mission accomplished, Fyne closed hastily the door of the sitting-room.

But before long both Fynes became frightened. After a period of immobility in the arms of Mrs. Fyne, the girl, who had not said a word, tore herself out from that slightly rigid embrace. She struggled dumbly between them, they did not know why, soundless and ghastly, till she sank exhausted on a couch. Luckily the children were out with the two nurses. The hotel housemaid helped Mrs. Fyne to put Flora de Barral to bed. She was as if gone speechless and insane. She lay on her back, her face white like a piece of paper, her dark eyes staring at the ceiling, her awful immobility broken by sudden shivering fits with a loud chattering of teeth in the shadowy silence of the room, the blinds pulled down, Mrs. Fyne sitting by patiently, her arms folded, yet inwardly moved by the riddle of that distress of which she could not guess the word, and saying to herself: "That child is too emotional — much too emotional to be ever really sound!" As if anyone not made of stone could be perfectly sound in this world. And then how sound? In what sense — to resist what? Force or corruption? And even in the best armour of steel there are joints a treacherous stroke can always find if chance gives the opportunity.

General considerations never had the power to trouble Mrs. Fyne much. The girl not being in a state to be questioned she waited by the bedside. Fyne had crossed over to the house, his scruples overcome by his anxiety to discover what really had happened. He did not have to lift the knocker; the door stood open on the inside gloom of the hall; he walked into it and saw no one about, the servants having assembled for a fatuous consultation in the basement. Fyne's uplifted bass voice startled them down there, the butler coming up, staring and in his shirt sleeves, very suspicious at first, and then, on Fyne's explanation that he was the husband of a lady who had called several times at the house — Miss de Barral's mother's friend —



becoming humanely concerned and communicative, in a man to man tone, but preserving his trained high-class servant's voice: "Oh bless you, sir, no! She does not mean to come back. She told me so herself" — he assured Fyne with a faint shade of contempt creeping into his tone.

As regards their young lady nobody downstairs had any idea that she had run out of the house. He dared say they all would have been willing to do their very best for her, for the time being; but since she was now with her mother's friends . . .

He fidgeted. He murmured that all this was very unexpected. He wanted to know what he had better do with letters or telegrams which might arrive in the course of the day.

"Letters addressed to Miss de Barral, you had better bring over to my hotel over there," said Fyne beginning to feel extremely worried about the future. The man said "Yes, sir," adding, "and if a letter comes addressed to Mrs. . . ."

Fyne stopped him by a gesture. "I don't know . . . Anything you like."

"Very well, sir."

The butler did not shut the street door after Fyne, but remained on the doorstep for a while, looking up and down the street in the spirit of independent expectation like a man who is again his own master. Mrs. Fyne hearing her husband return came out of the room where the girl was lying in bed. "No change," she whispered; and Fyne could only make a hopeless sign of ignorance as to what all this meant and how it would end.

He feared future complications — naturally; a man of limited means, in a public position, his time not his own. Yes. He owned to me in the parlour of my farmhouse that he had been very much concerned then at the possible consequences. But as he was making this artless confession I said to myself that, whatever consequences and complications he might have imagined, the complication from which he was suffering now could never, never have presented itself to his mind. Slow but sure (for I conceive that the Book of Destiny has been written up from the beginning to the last page) it had been coming for something like six years — and now it had come. The complication was there! I looked at his unshaken solemnity with the amused pity we give the victim of a funny if somewhat ill-natured practical joke.

"Oh hang it," he exclaimed — in no logical connection with what he had been relating to me. Nevertheless the exclamation was intelligible enough.

However at first there were, he admitted, no untoward complications, no embarrassing consequences. To a telegram in guarded terms dispatched to de Barral no answer was received for more than twenty-four hours. This certainly caused the Fynes some anxiety. When the answer arrived late on the evening of next day it was in the shape of an elderly man. An unexpected sort of man. Fyne explained to me with precision that he evidently belonged to what is most respectable in the lower middle classes. He was calm and slow in his speech. He was wearing a frock-coat, had grey whiskers meeting under his chin, and declared on entering that Mr. de Barral was his cousin. He hastened to add that he had not seen his cousin for many years, while he looked upon Fyne (who received him alone) with so much distrust that Fyne felt hurt (the person actually refusing at first the chair offered to him) and retorted tartly that he, for his part, had never seen Mr. de Barral, in his life, and that, since the visitor did not want to sit down, he, Fyne, begged him to state his business as shortly as possible. The man in black sat down then with a faint superior smile.

He had come for the girl. His cousin had asked him in a note delivered by a messenger to go to Brighton at once and take "his girl" over from a gentleman named Fyne and give her house-room for a time in his family. And there he was. His business had not allowed him to come sooner. His business was the manufacture on a large scale of cardboard boxes. He had two grown-up girls of his own. He had consulted his wife and so that was all right. The girl would get a welcome in his home. His home most likely was not what she had been used to but, etc. etc.

All the time Fyne felt subtly in that man's manner a derisive disapproval of everything that was not lower middle class, a profound respect for money, a mean sort of contempt for speculators that fail, and a conceited satisfaction with his own respectable vulgarity.

With Mrs. Fyne the manner of the obscure cousin of de Barral was but little less offensive. He looked at her rather slyly but her cold, decided demeanour impressed him. Mrs. Fyne on her side was simply appalled by the personage, but did not show it outwardly. Not even when the man remarked with false simplicity that Florrie — her name was Florrie wasn't it? would probably miss at first all her grand friends. And when he was informed that the girl was in bed, not feeling well at all he showed an unsympathetic alarm. She wasn't an invalid was she? No. What was the matter with her then?

An extreme distaste for that respectable member of society was depicted in Fyne's face even as he was telling me of him after all these years. He was a specimen of precisely the class of which people like the Fynes have the least experience; and I imagine he jarred on them painfully. He possessed all the civic virtues in their very meanest form, and the finishing touch was given by a low sort of consciousness he manifested of possessing them. His industry was exemplary. He wished to catch the earliest possible train next morning. It seems that for seven and twenty years he had never missed being seated on his office-stool at the factory punctually at ten o'clock every day. He listened to Mrs. Fyne's objections with undisguised impatience. Why couldn't Florrie get up and have her breakfast at eight like other people? In his house the breakfast was at eight sharp. Mrs. Fyne's polite stoicism overcame him at last. He had come down at a very great personal inconvenience, he assured her with displeasure, but he gave up the early train.

The good Fynes didn't dare to look at each other before this unforeseen but perfectly authorized guardian, the same thought springing up in their minds: Poor girl! Poor girl! If the women of the family were like this too! . . . And of course they would be. Poor girl! But what could they have done even if they had been prepared to raise objections. The person in the frock-coat had the father's note; he had shown it to Fyne. Just a request to take care of the girl — as her nearest relative — without any explanation or a single allusion to the financial catastrophe, its tone strangely detached and in its very silence on the point giving occasion to think that the writer was not uneasy as to the child's future. Probably it was that very idea which had set the cousin so readily in motion. Men had come before out of commercial crashes with estates in the country and a comfortable income, if not for themselves then for their wives. And if a wife could be made comfortable by a little dexterous management then why not a daughter? Yes. This possibility might have been discussed in the person's household and judged worth acting upon.

The man actually hinted broadly that such was his belief and in face of Fyne's guarded replies gave him to understand that he was not the dupe of such reticences. Obviously he looked upon the Fynes as being disappointed because the girl was taken away from them. They, by a diplomatic sacrifice in the interests of poor Flora, had asked the man to dinner. He accepted

ungraciously, remarking that he was not used to late hours. He had generally a bit of supper about half-past eight or nine. However . . .

He gazed contemptuously round the prettily decorated dining-room. He wrinkled his nose in a puzzled way at the dishes offered to him by the waiter but refused none, devouring the food with a great appetite and drinking ("swilling" Fyne called it) gallons of ginger beer, which was procured for him (in stone bottles) at his request. The difficulty of keeping up a conversation with that being exhausted Mrs. Fyne herself, who had come to the table armed with adamant resolution. The only memorable thing he said was when, in a pause of gorging himself "with these French dishes" he deliberately let his eyes roam over the little tables occupied by parties of diners, and remarked that his wife did for a moment think of coming down with him, but that he was glad she didn't do so. "She wouldn't have been at all happy seeing all this alcohol about. Not at all happy," he declared weightily.

"You must have had a charming evening," I said to Fyne, "if I may judge from the way you have kept the memory green."

"Delightful," he growled with, positively, a flash of anger at the recollection, but lapsed back into his solemnity at once. After we had been silent for a while I asked whether the man took away the girl next day.

Fyne said that he did; in the afternoon, in a fly, with a few clothes the maid had got together and brought across from the big house. He only saw Flora again ten minutes before they left for the railway station, in the Fynes' sitting-room at the hotel. It was a most painful ten minutes for the Fynes. The respectable citizen addressed Miss de Barral as "Florrie" and "my dear," remarking to her that she was not very big "there's not much of you my dear" in a familiarly disparaging tone. Then turning to Mrs. Fyne, and quite loud "She's very white in the face. Why's that?" To this Mrs. Fyne made no reply. She had put the girl's hair up that morning with her own hands. It changed her very much, observed Fyne. He, naturally, played a subordinate, merely approving part. All he could do for Miss de Barral personally was to go downstairs and put her into the fly himself, while Miss de Barral's nearest relation, having been shouldered out of the way, stood by, with an umbrella and a little black bag, watching this proceeding with grim amusement, as it seemed. It was difficult to guess what the girl thought or what she felt. She no longer looked a child. She whispered to Fyne a faint "Thank you," from the fly, and he said to her in

very distinct tones and while still holding her hand: "Pray don't forget to write fully to my wife in a day or two, Miss de Barral." Then Fyne stepped back and the cousin climbed into the fly muttering quite audibly: "I don't think you'll be troubled much with her in the future;" without however looking at Fyne on whom he did not even bestow a nod. The fly drove away.

## CHAPTER FIVE — THE TEA-PARTY

“Amiable personality,” I observed seeing Fyne on the point of falling into a brown study. But I could not help adding with meaning: “He hadn’t the gift of prophecy though.”

Fyne got up suddenly with a muttered “No, evidently not.” He was gloomy, hesitating. I supposed that he would not wish to play chess that afternoon. This would dispense me from leaving my rooms on a day much too fine to be wasted in walking exercise. And I was disappointed when picking up his cap he intimated to me his hope of seeing me at the cottage about four o’clock — as usual.

“It wouldn’t be as usual.” I put a particular stress on that remark. He admitted, after a short reflection, that it would not be. No. Not as usual. In fact it was his wife who hoped, rather, for my presence. She had formed a very favourable opinion of my practical sagacity.

This was the first I ever heard of it. I had never suspected that Mrs. Fyne had taken the trouble to distinguish in me the signs of sagacity or folly. The few words we had exchanged last night in the excitement — or the bother — of the girl’s disappearance, were the first moderately significant words which had ever passed between us. I had felt myself always to be in Mrs. Fyne’s view her husband’s chess-player and nothing else — a convenience — almost an implement.

“I am highly flattered,” I said. “I have always heard that there are no limits to feminine intuition; and now I am half inclined to believe it is so. But still I fail to see in what way my sagacity, practical or otherwise, can be of any service to Mrs. Fyne. One man’s sagacity is very much like any other man’s sagacity. And with you at hand — ”

Fyne, manifestly not attending to what I was saying, directed straight at me his worried solemn eyes and struck in:

“Yes, yes. Very likely. But you will come — won’t you?”

I had made up my mind that no Fyne of either sex would make me walk three miles (there and back to their cottage) on this fine day. If the Fynes had been an average sociable couple one knows only because leisure must be got through somehow, I would have made short work of that special invitation. But they were not that. Their undeniable humanity had to be acknowledged. At the same time I wanted to have my own way. So I

proposed that I should be allowed the pleasure of offering them a cup of tea at my rooms.

A short reflective pause — and Fyne accepted eagerly in his own and his wife's name. A moment after I heard the click of the gate-latch and then in an ecstasy of barking from his demonstrative dog his serious head went past my window on the other side of the hedge, its troubled gaze fixed forward, and the mind inside obviously employed in earnest speculation of an intricate nature. One at least of his wife's girl-friends had become more than a mere shadow for him. I surmised however that it was not of the girl-friend but of his wife that Fyne was thinking. He was an excellent husband.

I prepared myself for the afternoon's hospitalities, calling in the farmer's wife and reviewing with her the resources of the house and the village. She was a helpful woman. But the resources of my sagacity I did not review. Except in the gross material sense of the afternoon tea I made no preparations for Mrs. Fyne.

It was impossible for me to make any such preparations. I could not tell what sort of sustenance she would look for from my sagacity. And as to taking stock of the wares of my mind no one I imagine is anxious to do that sort of thing if it can be avoided. A vaguely grandiose state of mental self-confidence is much too agreeable to be disturbed recklessly by such a delicate investigation. Perhaps if I had had a helpful woman at my elbow, a dear, flattering acute, devoted woman . . . There are in life moments when one positively regrets not being married. No! I don't exaggerate. I have said — moments, not years or even days. Moments. The farmer's wife obviously could not be asked to assist. She could not have been expected to possess the necessary insight and I doubt whether she would have known how to be flattering enough. She was being helpful in her own way, with an extraordinary black bonnet on her head, a good mile off by that time, trying to discover in the village shops a piece of eatable cake. The pluck of women! The optimism of the dear creatures!

And she managed to find something which looked eatable. That's all I know as I had no opportunity to observe the more intimate effects of that comestible. I myself never eat cake, and Mrs. Fyne, when she arrived punctually, brought with her no appetite for cake. She had no appetite for anything. But she had a thirst — the sign of deep, of tormenting emotion. Yes it was emotion, not the brilliant sunshine — more brilliant than warm as is the way of our discreet self-repressed, distinguished, insular sun,

which would not turn a real lady scarlet — not on any account. Mrs. Fyne looked even cool. She wore a white skirt and coat; a white hat with a large brim reposed on her smoothly arranged hair. The coat was cut something like an army mess-jacket and the style suited her. I dare say there are many youthful subalterns, and not the worst-looking too, who resemble Mrs. Fyne in the type of face, in the sunburnt complexion, down to that something alert in bearing. But not many would have had that aspect breathing a readiness to assume any responsibility under Heaven. This is the sort of courage which ripens late in life and of course Mrs. Fyne was of mature years for all her unwrinkled face.

She looked round the room, told me positively that I was very comfortable there; to which I assented, humbly, acknowledging my undeserved good fortune.

“Why undeserved?” she wanted to know.

“I engaged these rooms by letter without asking any questions. It might have been an abominable hole,” I explained to her. “I always do things like that. I don’t like to be bothered. This is no great proof of sagacity — is it? Sagacious people I believe like to exercise that faculty. I have heard that they can’t even help showing it in the veriest trifles. It must be very delightful. But I know nothing of it. I think that I have no sagacity — no practical sagacity.”

Fyne made an inarticulate bass murmur of protest. I asked after the children whom I had not seen yet since my return from town. They had been very well. They were always well. Both Fyne and Mrs. Fyne spoke of the rude health of their children as if it were a result of moral excellence; in a peculiar tone which seemed to imply some contempt for people whose children were liable to be unwell at times. One almost felt inclined to apologize for the inquiry. And this annoyed me; unreasonably, I admit, because the assumption of superior merit is not a very exceptional weakness. Anxious to make myself disagreeable by way of retaliation I observed in accents of interested civility that the dear girls must have been wondering at the sudden disappearance of their mother’s young friend. Had they been putting any awkward questions about Miss Smith. Wasn’t it as Miss Smith that Miss de Barral had been introduced to me?

Mrs. Fyne, staring fixedly but also colouring deeper under her tan, told me that the children had never liked Flora very much. She hadn’t the high spirits which endear grown-ups to healthy children, Mrs. Fyne explained



unflinchingly. Flora had been staying at the cottage several times before. Mrs. Fyne assured me that she often found it very difficult to have her in the house.

“But what else could we do?” she exclaimed.

That little cry of distress quite genuine in its inexpressiveness, altered my feeling towards Mrs. Fyne. It would have been so easy to have done nothing and to have thought no more about it. My liking for her began while she was trying to tell me of the night she spent by the girl’s bedside, the night before her departure with her unprepossessing relative. That Mrs. Fyne found means to comfort the child I doubt very much. She had not the genius for the task of undoing that which the hate of an infuriated woman had planned so well.

You will tell me perhaps that children’s impressions are not durable. That’s true enough. But here, child is only a manner of speaking. The girl was within a few days of her sixteenth birthday; she was old enough to be matured by the shock. The very effort she had to make in conveying the impression to Mrs. Fyne, in remembering the details, in finding adequate words — or any words at all — was in itself a terribly enlightening, an ageing process. She had talked a long time, uninterrupted by Mrs. Fyne, childlike enough in her wonder and pain, pausing now and then to interject the pitiful query: “It was cruel of her. Wasn’t it cruel, Mrs. Fyne?”

For Charley she found excuses. He at any rate had not said anything, while he had looked very gloomy and miserable. He couldn’t have taken part against his aunt — could he? But after all he did, when she called upon him, take “that cruel woman away.” He had dragged her out by the arm. She had seen that plainly. She remembered it. That was it! The woman was mad. “Oh! Mrs. Fyne, don’t tell me she wasn’t mad. If you had only seen her face . . . “

But Mrs. Fyne was unflinching in her idea that as much truth as could be told was due in the way of kindness to the girl, whose fate she feared would be to live exposed to the hardest realities of unprivileged existences. She explained to her that there were in the world evil-minded, selfish people. Unscrupulous people . . . These two persons had been after her father’s money. The best thing she could do was to forget all about them.

“After papa’s money? I don’t understand,” poor Flora de Barral had murmured, and lay still as if trying to think it out in the silence and shadows of the room where only a night-light was burning. Then she had a long

shivering fit while holding tight the hand of Mrs. Fyne whose patient immobility by the bedside of that brutally murdered childhood did infinite honour to her humanity. That vigil must have been the more trying because I could see very well that at no time did she think the victim particularly charming or sympathetic. It was a manifestation of pure compassion, of compassion in itself, so to speak, not many women would have been capable of displaying with that unflinching steadiness. The shivering fit over, the girl's next words in an outburst of sobs were, "Oh! Mrs. Fyne, am I really such a horrid thing as she has made me out to be?"

"No, no!" protested Mrs. Fyne. "It is your former governess who is horrid and odious. She is a vile woman. I cannot tell you that she was mad but I think she must have been beside herself with rage and full of evil thoughts. You must try not to think of these abominations, my dear child."

They were not fit for anyone to think of much, Mrs. Fyne commented to me in a curt positive tone. All that had been very trying. The girl was like a creature struggling under a net.

"But how can I forget? she called my father a cheat and a swindler! Do tell me Mrs. Fyne that it isn't true. It can't be true. How can it be true?"

She sat up in bed with a sudden wild motion as if to jump out and flee away from the sound of the words which had just passed her own lips. Mrs. Fyne restrained her, soothed her, induced her at last to lay her head on her pillow again, assuring her all the time that nothing this woman had had the cruelty to say deserved to be taken to heart. The girl, exhausted, cried quietly for a time. It may be she had noticed something evasive in Mrs. Fyne's assurances. After a while, without stirring, she whispered brokenly:

"That awful woman told me that all the world would call papa these awful names. Is it possible? Is it possible?"

Mrs. Fyne kept silent.

"Do say something to me, Mrs. Fyne," the daughter of de Barral insisted in the same feeble whisper.

Again Mrs. Fyne assured me that it had been very trying. Terribly trying. "Yes, thanks, I will." She leaned back in the chair with folded arms while I poured another cup of tea for her, and Fyne went out to pacify the dog which, tied up under the porch, had become suddenly very indignant at somebody having the audacity to walk along the lane. Mrs. Fyne stirred her tea for a long time, drank a little, put the cup down and said with that air of accepting all the consequences:

“Silence would have been unfair. I don’t think it would have been kind either. I told her that she must be prepared for the world passing a very severe judgment on her father . . . “

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“Wasn’t it admirable,” cried Marlow interrupting his narrative. “Admirable!” And as I looked dubiously at this unexpected enthusiasm he started justifying it after his own manner.

“I say admirable because it was so characteristic. It was perfect. Nothing short of genius could have found better. And this was nature! As they say of an artist’s work: this was a perfect Fyne. Compassion — judiciousness — something correctly measured. None of your dishevelled sentiment. And right! You must confess that nothing could have been more right. I had a mind to shout “Brava! Brava!” but I did not do that. I took a piece of cake and went out to bribe the Fyne dog into some sort of self-control. His sharp comical yapping was unbearable, like stabs through one’s brain, and Fyne’s deeply modulated remonstrances abashed the vivacious animal no more than the deep, patient murmur of the sea abashes a nigger minstrel on a popular beach. Fyne was beginning to swear at him in low, sepulchral tones when I appeared. The dog became at once wildly demonstrative, half strangling himself in his collar, his eyes and tongue hanging out in the excess of his incomprehensible affection for me. This was before he caught sight of the cake in my hand. A series of vertical springs high up in the air followed, and then, when he got the cake, he instantly lost his interest in everything else.

Fyne was slightly vexed with me. As kind a master as any dog could wish to have, he yet did not approve of cake being given to dogs. The Fyne dog was supposed to lead a Spartan existence on a diet of repulsive biscuits with an occasional dry, hygienic, bone thrown in. Fyne looked down gloomily at the appeased animal, I too looked at that fool-dog; and (you know how one’s memory gets suddenly stimulated) I was reminded visually, with an almost painful distinctness, of the ghostly white face of the girl I saw last accompanied by that dog — deserted by that dog. I almost heard her distressed voice as if on the verge of resentful tears calling to the dog, the unsympathetic dog. Perhaps she had not the power of evoking sympathy, that personal gift of direct appeal to the feelings. I said to Fyne, mistrusting the supine attitude of the dog:

“Why don’t you let him come inside?”

Oh dear no! He couldn’t think of it! I might indeed have saved my breath, I knew it was one of the Fynes’ rules of life, part of their solemnity and responsibility, one of those things that were part of their unassertive but ever present superiority, that their dog must not be allowed in. It was most improper to intrude the dog into the houses of the people they were calling on — if it were only a careless bachelor in farmhouse lodgings and a personal friend of the dog. It was out of the question. But they would let him bark one’s sanity away outside one’s window. They were strangely consistent in their lack of imaginative sympathy. I didn’t insist but simply led the way back to the parlour, hoping that no wayfarer would happen along the lane for the next hour or so to disturb the dog’s composure.

Mrs. Fyne seated immovable before the table charged with plates, cups, jugs, a cold teapot, crumbs, and the general litter of the entertainment turned her head towards us.

“You see, Mr. Marlow,” she said in an unexpectedly confidential tone: “they are so utterly unsuited for each other.”

At the moment I did not know how to apply this remark. I thought at first of Fyne and the dog. Then I adjusted it to the matter in hand which was neither more nor less than an elopement. Yes, by Jove! It was something very much like an elopement — with certain unusual characteristics of its own which made it in a sense equivocal. With amused wonder I remembered that my sagacity was requisitioned in such a connection. How unexpected! But we never know what tests our gifts may be put to. Sagacity dictated caution first of all. I believe caution to be the first duty of sagacity. Fyne sat down as if preparing himself to witness a joust, I thought.

“Do you think so, Mrs. Fyne?” I said sagaciously. “Of course you are in a position . . . “ I was continuing with caution when she struck out vivaciously for immediate assent.

“Obviously! Clearly! You yourself must admit . . . “

“But, Mrs. Fyne,” I remonstrated, “you forget that I don’t know your brother.”

This argument which was not only sagacious but true, overwhelmingly true, unanswerably true, seemed to surprise her.

I wondered why. I did not know enough of her brother for the remotest guess at what he might be like. I had never set eyes on the man. I didn’t

know him so completely that by contrast I seemed to have known Miss de Barral — whom I had seen twice (altogether about sixty minutes) and with whom I had exchanged about sixty words — from the cradle so to speak. And perhaps, I thought, looking down at Mrs. Fyne (I had remained standing) perhaps she thinks that this ought to be enough for a sagacious assent.

She kept silent; and I looking at her with polite expectation, went on addressing her mentally in a mood of familiar approval which would have astonished her had it been audible: You my dear at any rate are a sincere woman . . . “

“I call a woman sincere,” Marlow began again after giving me a cigar and lighting one himself, “I call a woman sincere when she volunteers a statement resembling remotely in form what she really would like to say, what she really thinks ought to be said if it were not for the necessity to spare the stupid sensitiveness of men. The women’s rougher, simpler, more upright judgment, embraces the whole truth, which their tact, their mistrust of masculine idealism, ever prevents them from speaking in its entirety. And their tact is unerring. We could not stand women speaking the truth. We could not bear it. It would cause infinite misery and bring about most awful disturbances in this rather mediocre, but still idealistic fool’s paradise in which each of us lives his own little life — the unit in the great sum of existence. And they know it. They are merciful. This generalization does not apply exactly to Mrs. Fyne’s outburst of sincerity in a matter in which neither my affections nor my vanity were engaged. That’s why, may be, she ventured so far. For a woman she chose to be as open as the day with me. There was not only the form but almost the whole substance of her thought in what she said. She believed she could risk it. She had reasoned somewhat in this way; there’s a man, possessing a certain amount of sagacity . . . “

Marlow paused with a whimsical look at me. The last few words he had spoken with the cigar in his teeth. He took it out now by an ample movement of his arm and blew a thin cloud.

“You smile? It would have been more kind to spare my blushes. But as a matter of fact I need not blush. This is not vanity; it is analysis. We’ll let sagacity stand. But we must also note what sagacity in this connection stands for. When you see this you shall see also that there was nothing in it to alarm my modesty. I don’t think Mrs. Fyne credited me with the

possession of wisdom tempered by common sense. And had I had the wisdom of the Seven Sages of Antiquity, she would not have been moved to confidence or admiration. The secret scorn of women for the capacity to consider judiciously and to express profoundly a meditated conclusion is unbounded. They have no use for these lofty exercises which they look upon as a sort of purely masculine game — game meaning a respectable occupation devised to kill time in this man-arranged life which must be got through somehow. What women's acuteness really respects are the inept "ideas" and the sheeplike impulses by which our actions and opinions are determined in matters of real importance. For if women are not rational they are indeed acute. Even Mrs. Fyne was acute. The good woman was making up to her husband's chess-player simply because she had scented in him that small portion of 'femininity,' that drop of superior essence of which I am myself aware; which, I gratefully acknowledge, has saved me from one or two misadventures in my life either ridiculous or lamentable, I am not very certain which. It matters very little. Anyhow misadventures. Observe that I say 'femininity,' a privilege — not 'feminism,' an attitude. I am not a feminist. It was Fyne who on certain solemn grounds had adopted that mental attitude; but it was enough to glance at him sitting on one side, to see that he was purely masculine to his finger-tips, masculine solidly, densely, amusingly, — hopelessly.

I did glance at him. You don't get your sagacity recognized by a man's wife without feeling the propriety and even the need to glance at the man now and again. So I glanced at him. Very masculine. So much so that "hopelessly" was not the last word of it. He was helpless. He was bound and delivered by it. And if by the obscure promptings of my composite temperament I beheld him with malicious amusement, yet being in fact, by definition and especially from profound conviction, a man, I could not help sympathizing with him largely. Seeing him thus disarmed, so completely captive by the very nature of things I was moved to speak to him kindly.

"Well. And what do you think of it?"

"I don't know. How's one to tell? But I say that the thing is done now and there's an end of it," said the masculine creature as bluntly as his innate solemnity permitted.

Mrs. Fyne moved a little in her chair. I turned to her and remarked gently that this was a charge, a criticism, which was often made. Some people

always ask: What could he see in her? Others wonder what she could have seen in him? Expressions of unsuitability.

She said with all the emphasis of her quietly folded arms:

“I know perfectly well what Flora has seen in my brother.”

I bowed my head to the gust but pursued my point.

“And then the marriage in most cases turns out no worse than the average, to say the least of it.”

Mrs. Fyne was disappointed by the optimistic turn of my sagacity. She rested her eyes on my face as though in doubt whether I had enough femininity in my composition to understand the case.

I waited for her to speak. She seemed to be asking herself; Is it after all, worth while to talk to that man? You understand how provoking this was. I looked in my mind for something appallingly stupid to say, with the object of distressing and teasing Mrs. Fyne. It is humiliating to confess a failure. One would think that a man of average intelligence could command stupidity at will. But it isn't so. I suppose it's a special gift or else the difficulty consists in being relevant. Discovering that I could find no really telling stupidity, I turned to the next best thing; a platitude. I advanced, in a common-sense tone, that, surely, in the matter of marriage a man had only himself to please.

Mrs. Fyne received this without the flutter of an eyelid. Fyne's masculine breast, as might have been expected, was pierced by that old, regulation shaft. He grunted most feelingly. I turned to him with false simplicity. “Don't you agree with me?”

“The very thing I've been telling my wife,” he exclaimed in his extra-manly bass. “We have been discussing — ”

A discussion in the Fyne ménage! How portentous! Perhaps the very first difference they had ever had: Mrs. Fyne unflinching and ready for any responsibility, Fyne solemn and shrinking — the children in bed upstairs; and outside the dark fields, the shadowy contours of the land on the starry background of the universe, with the crude light of the open window like a beacon for the truant who would never come back now; a truant no longer but a downright fugitive. Yet a fugitive carrying off spoils. It was the flight of a raider — or a traitor? This affair of the purloined brother, as I had named it to myself, had a very puzzling physiognomy. The girl must have been desperate, I thought, hearing the grave voice of Fyne well enough but

catching the sense of his words not at all, except the very last words which were:

“Of course, it’s extremely distressing.”

I looked at him inquisitively. What was distressing him? The purloining of the son of the poet-tyrant by the daughter of the financier-convict. Or only, if I may say so, the wind of their flight disturbing the solemn placidity of the Fynes’ domestic atmosphere. My incertitude did not last long, for he added:

“Mrs. Fyne urges me to go to London at once.”

One could guess at, almost see, his profound distaste for the journey, his distress at a difference of feeling with his wife. With his serious view of the sublunary comedy Fyne suffered from not being able to agree solemnly with her sentiment as he was accustomed to do, in recognition of having had his way in one supreme instance; when he made her elope with him — the most momentous step imaginable in a young lady’s life. He had been really trying to acknowledge it by taking the rightness of her feeling for granted on every other occasion. It had become a sort of habit at last. And it is never pleasant to break a habit. The man was deeply troubled. I said: “Really! To go to London!”

He looked dumbly into my eyes. It was pathetic and funny. “And you of course feel it would be useless,” I pursued.

He evidently felt that, though he said nothing. He only went on blinking at me with a solemn and comical slowness. “Unless it be to carry there the family’s blessing,” I went on, indulging my chaffing humour steadily, in a rather sneaking fashion, for I dared not look at Mrs. Fyne, to my right. No sound or movement came from that direction. “You think very naturally that to match mere good, sound reasons, against the passionate conclusions of love is a waste of intellect bordering on the absurd.”

He looked surprised as if I had discovered something very clever. He, dear man, had thought of nothing at all.

He simply knew that he did not want to go to London on that mission. Mere masculine delicacy. In a moment he became enthusiastic.

“Yes! Yes! Exactly. A man in love . . . You hear, my dear? Here you have an independent opinion — ”

“Can anything be more hopeless,” I insisted to the fascinated little Fyne, “than to pit reason against love. I must confess however that in this case when I think of that poor girl’s sharp chin I wonder if . . . ”



My levity was too much for Mrs. Fyne. Still leaning back in her chair she exclaimed:

“Mr. Marlow!”

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As if mysteriously affected by her indignation the absurd Fyne dog began to bark in the porch. It might have been at a trespassing bumble-bee however. That animal was capable of any eccentricity. Fyne got up quickly and went out to him. I think he was glad to leave us alone to discuss that matter of his journey to London. A sort of anti-sentimental journey. He, too, apparently, had confidence in my sagacity. It was touching, this confidence. It was at any rate more genuine than the confidence his wife pretended to have in her husband's chess-player, of three successive holidays. Confidence be hanged! Sagacity — indeed! She had simply marched in without a shadow of misgiving to make me back her up. But she had delivered herself into my hands . . . “

Interrupting his narrative Marlow addressed me in his tone between grim jest and grim earnest:

“Perhaps you didn't know that my character is upon the whole rather vindictive.”

“No, I didn't know,” I said with a grin. “That's rather unusual for a sailor. They always seemed to me the least vindictive body of men in the world.”

“H'm! Simple souls,” Marlow muttered moodily. “Want of opportunity. The world leaves them alone for the most part. For myself it's towards women that I feel vindictive mostly, in my small way. I admit that it is small. But then the occasions in themselves are not great. Mainly I resent that pretence of winding us round their dear little fingers, as of right. Not that the result ever amounts to much generally. There are so very few momentous opportunities. It is the assumption that each of us is a combination of a kid and an imbecile which I find provoking — in a small way; in a very small way. You needn't stare as though I were breathing fire and smoke out of my nostrils. I am not a women-devouring monster. I am not even what is technically called “a brute.” I hope there's enough of a kid and an imbecile in me to answer the requirements of some really good woman eventually — some day . . . Some day. Why do you gasp? You

don't suppose I should be afraid of getting married? That supposition would be offensive . . . “

“I wouldn't dream of offending you,” I said.

“Very well. But meantime please remember that I was not married to Mrs. Fyne. That lady's little finger was none of my legal property. I had not run off with it. It was Fyne who had done that thing. Let him be wound round as much as his backbone could stand — or even more, for all I cared. His rushing away from the discussion on the transparent pretence of quieting the dog confirmed my notion of there being a considerable strain on his elasticity. I confronted Mrs. Fyne resolved not to assist her in her eminently feminine occupation of thrusting a stick in the spokes of another woman's wheel.

She tried to preserve her calm-eyed superiority. She was familiar and olympian, fenced in by the tea-table, that excellent symbol of domestic life in its lighter hour and its perfect security. In a few severely unadorned words she gave me to understand that she had ventured to hope for some really helpful suggestion from me. To this almost chiding declaration — because my vindictiveness seldom goes further than a bit of teasing — I said that I was really doing my best. And being a physiognomist . . . “

“Being what?” she interrupted me.

“A physiognomist,” I repeated raising my voice a little. “A physiognomist, Mrs. Fyne. And on the principles of that science a pointed little chin is a sufficient ground for interference. You want to interfere — do you not?”

Her eyes grew distinctly bigger. She had never been bantered before in her life. The late subtle poet's method of making himself unpleasant was merely savage and abusive. Fyne had been always solemnly subservient. What other men she knew I cannot tell but I assume they must have been gentlemanly creatures. The girl-friends sat at her feet. How could she recognize my intention. She didn't know what to make of my tone.

“Are you serious in what you say?” she asked slowly. And it was touching. It was as if a very young, confiding girl had spoken. I felt myself relenting.

“No. I am not, Mrs. Fyne,” I said. “I didn't know I was expected to be serious as well as sagacious. No. That science is farcical and therefore I am not serious. It's true that most sciences are farcical except those which teach us how to put things together.”

“The question is how to keep these two people apart,” she struck in. She had recovered. I admired the quickness of women’s wit. Mental agility is a rare perfection. And aren’t they agile! Aren’t they — just! And tenacious! When they once get hold you may uproot the tree but you won’t shake them off the branch. In fact the more you shake . . . But only look at the charm of contradictory perfections! No wonder men give in — generally. I won’t say I was actually charmed by Mrs. Fyne. I was not delighted with her. What affected me was not what she displayed but something which she could not conceal. And that was emotion — nothing less. The form of her declaration was dry, almost peremptory — but not its tone. Her voice faltered just the least bit, she smiled faintly; and as we were looking straight at each other I observed that her eyes were glistening in a peculiar manner. She was distressed. And indeed that Mrs. Fyne should have appealed to me at all was in itself the evidence of her profound distress. “By Jove she’s desperate too,” I thought. This discovery was followed by a movement of instinctive shrinking from this unreasonable and unmasculine affair. They were all alike, with their supreme interest aroused only by fighting with each other about some man: a lover, a son, a brother.

“But do you think there’s time yet to do anything?” I asked.

She had an impatient movement of her shoulders without detaching herself from the back of the chair. Time! Of course? It was less than forty-eight hours since she had followed him to London . . . I am no great clerk at those matters but I murmured vaguely an allusion to special licences. We couldn’t tell what might have happened to-day already. But she knew better, scornfully. Nothing had happened.

“Nothing’s likely to happen before next Friday week, — if then.”

This was wonderfully precise. Then after a pause she added that she should never forgive herself if some effort were not made, an appeal.

“To your brother?” I asked.

“Yes. John ought to go to-morrow. Nine o’clock train.”

“So early as that!” I said. But I could not find it in my heart to pursue this discussion in a jocular tone. I submitted to her several obvious arguments, dictated apparently by common sense but in reality by my secret compassion. Mrs. Fyne brushed them aside, with the semi-conscious egoism of all safe, established, existences. They had known each other so little. Just three weeks. And of that time, too short for the birth of any

serious sentiment, the first week had to be deducted. They would hardly look at each other to begin with. Flora barely consented to acknowledge Captain Anthony's presence. Good morning — good night — that was all — absolutely the whole extent of their intercourse. Captain Anthony was a silent man, completely unused to the society of girls of any sort and so shy in fact that he avoided raising his eyes to her face at the table. It was perfectly absurd. It was even inconvenient, embarrassing to her — Mrs. Fyne. After breakfast Flora would go off by herself for a long walk and Captain Anthony (Mrs. Fyne referred to him at times also as Roderick) joined the children. But he was actually too shy to get on terms with his own nieces.

This would have sounded pathetic if I hadn't known the Fyne children who were at the same time solemn and malicious, and nursed a secret contempt for all the world. No one could get on terms with those fresh and comely young monsters! They just tolerated their parents and seemed to have a sort of mocking understanding among themselves against all outsiders, yet with no visible affection for each other. They had the habit of exchanging derisive glances which to a shy man must have been very trying. They thought their uncle no doubt a bore and perhaps an ass.

I was not surprised to hear that very soon Anthony formed the habit of crossing the two neighbouring fields to seek the shade of a clump of elms at a good distance from the cottage. He lay on the grass and smoked his pipe all the morning. Mrs. Fyne wondered at her brother's indolent habits. He had asked for books it is true but there were but few in the cottage. He read them through in three days and then continued to lie contentedly on his back with no other companion but his pipe. Amazing indolence! The live-long morning, Mrs. Fyne, busy writing upstairs in the cottage, could see him out of the window. She had a very long sight, and these elms were grouped on a rise of the ground. His indolence was plainly exposed to her criticism on a gentle green slope. Mrs. Fyne wondered at it; she was disgusted too. But having just then 'commenced author,' as you know, she could not tear herself away from the fascinating novelty. She let him wallow in his vice. I imagine Captain Anthony must have had a rather pleasant time in a quiet way. It was, I remember, a hot dry summer, favourable to contemplative life out of doors. And Mrs. Fyne was scandalized. Women don't understand the force of a contemplative temperament. It simply shocks them. They feel instinctively that it is the

one which escapes best the domination of feminine influences. The dear girls were exchanging jeering remarks about “lazy uncle Roderick” openly, in her indulgent hearing. And it was so strange, she told me, because as a boy he was anything but indolent. On the contrary. Always active.

I remarked that a man of thirty-five was no longer a boy. It was an obvious remark but she received it without favour. She told me positively that the best, the nicest men remained boys all their lives. She was disappointed not to be able to detect anything boyish in her brother. Very, very sorry. She had not seen him for fifteen years or thereabouts, except on three or four occasions for a few hours at a time. No. Not a trace of the boy, he used to be, left in him.

She fell silent for a moment and I mused idly on the boyhood of little Fyne. I could not imagine what it might have been like. His dominant trait was clearly the remnant of still earlier days, because I’ve never seen such staring solemnity as Fyne’s except in a very young baby. But where was he all that time? Didn’t he suffer contamination from the indolence of Captain Anthony, I inquired. I was told that Mr. Fyne was very little at the cottage at the time. Some colleague of his was convalescing after a severe illness in a little seaside village in the neighbourhood and Fyne went off every morning by train to spend the day with the elderly invalid who had no one to look after him. It was a very praiseworthy excuse for neglecting his brother-in-law “the son of the poet, you know,” with whom he had nothing in common even in the remotest degree. If Captain Anthony (Roderick) had been a pedestrian it would have been sufficient; but he was not. Still, in the afternoon, he went sometimes for a slow casual stroll, by himself of course, the children having definitely cold-shouldered him, and his only sister being busy with that inflammatory book which was to blaze upon the world a year or more afterwards. It seems however that she was capable of detaching her eyes from her task now and then, if only for a moment, because it was from that garret fitted out for a study that one afternoon she observed her brother and Flora de Barral coming down the road side by side. They had met somewhere accidentally (which of them crossed the other’s path, as the saying is, I don’t know), and were returning to tea together. She noticed that they appeared to be conversing without constraint.

“I had the simplicity to be pleased,” Mrs. Fyne commented with a dry little laugh. “Pleased for both their sakes.” Captain Anthony shook off his

indolence from that day forth, and accompanied Miss Flora frequently on her morning walks. Mrs. Fyne remained pleased. She could now forget them comfortably and give herself up to the delights of audacious thought and literary composition. Only a week before the blow fell she, happening to raise her eyes from the paper, saw two figures seated on the grass under the shade of the elms. She could make out the white blouse. There could be no mistake.

"I suppose they imagined themselves concealed by the hedge. They forgot no doubt I was working in the garret," she said bitterly. "Or perhaps they didn't care. They were right. I am rather a simple person . . . " She laughed again . . . "I was incapable of suspecting such duplicity."

"Duplicity is a strong word, Mrs. Fyne — isn't it?" I expostulated. "And considering that Captain Anthony himself . . . "

"Oh well — perhaps," she interrupted me. Her eyes which never strayed away from mine, her set features, her whole immovable figure, how well I knew those appearances of a person who has "made up her mind." A very hopeless condition that, specially in women. I mistrusted her concession so easily, so stonily made. She reflected a moment. "Yes. I ought to have said — ingratitude, perhaps."

After having thus disengaged her brother and pushed the poor girl a little further off as it were — isn't women's cleverness perfectly diabolic when they are really put on their mettle? — after having done these things and also made me feel that I was no match for her, she went on scrupulously: "One doesn't like to use that word either. The claim is very small. It's so little one could do for her. Still . . . "

"I dare say," I exclaimed, throwing diplomacy to the winds. "But really, Mrs. Fyne, it's impossible to dismiss your brother like this out of the business . . . "

"She threw herself at his head," Mrs. Fyne uttered firmly.

"He had no business to put his head in the way, then," I retorted with an angry laugh. I didn't restrain myself because her fixed stare seemed to express the purpose to daunt me. I was not afraid of her, but it occurred to me that I was within an ace of drifting into a downright quarrel with a lady and, besides, my guest. There was the cold teapot, the emptied cups, emblems of hospitality. It could not be. I cut short my angry laugh while Mrs. Fyne murmured with a slight movement of her shoulders, "He! Poor man! Oh come . . . "

By a great effort of will I found myself able to smile amiably, to speak with proper softness.

“My dear Mrs. Fyne, you forget that I don’t know him — not even by sight. It’s difficult to imagine a victim as passive as all that; but granting you the (I very nearly said: imbecility, but checked myself in time) innocence of Captain Anthony, don’t you think now, frankly, that there is a little of your own fault in what has happened. You bring them together, you leave your brother to himself!”

She sat up and leaning her elbow on the table sustained her head in her open palm casting down her eyes. Compunction? It was indeed a very off-hand way of treating a brother come to stay for the first time in fifteen years. I suppose she discovered very soon that she had nothing in common with that sailor, that stranger, fashioned and marked by the sea of long voyages. In her strong-minded way she had scorned pretences, had gone to her writing which interested her immensely. A very praiseworthy thing your sincere conduct, — if it didn’t at times resemble brutality so much. But I don’t think it was compunction. That sentiment is rare in women . . .

“Is it?” I interrupted indignantly.

“You know more women than I do,” retorted the unabashed Marlow. “You make it your business to know them — don’t you? You go about a lot amongst all sorts of people. You are a tolerably honest observer. Well, just try to remember how many instances of compunction you have seen. I am ready to take your bare word for it. Compunction! Have you ever seen as much as its shadow? Have you ever? Just a shadow — a passing shadow! I tell you it is so rare that you may call it non-existent. They are too passionate. Too pedantic. Too courageous with themselves — perhaps. No I don’t think for a moment that Mrs. Fyne felt the slightest compunction at her treatment of her sea-going brother. What he thought of it who can tell? It is possible that he wondered why he had been so insistently urged to come. It is possible that he wondered bitterly — or contemptuously — or humbly. And it may be that he was only surprised and bored. Had he been as sincere in his conduct as his only sister he would have probably taken himself off at the end of the second day. But perhaps he was afraid of appearing brutal. I am not far removed from the conviction that between the sincerities of his sister and of his dear nieces, Captain Anthony of the Ferndale must have had his loneliness brought home to his bosom for the

first time of his life, at an age, thirty-five or thereabouts, when one is mature enough to feel the pang of such a discovery. Angry or simply sad but certainly disillusioned he wanders about and meets the girl one afternoon and under the sway of a strong feeling forgets his shyness. This is no supposition. It is a fact. There was such a meeting in which the shyness must have perished before we don't know what encouragement, or in the community of mood made apparent by some casual word. You remember that Mrs. Fyne saw them one afternoon coming back to the cottage together. Don't you think that I have hit on the psychology of the situation? . . . "

"Doubtless . . . " I began to ponder.

"I was very certain of my conclusions at the time," Marlow went on impatiently. "But don't think for a moment that Mrs. Fyne in her new attitude and toying thoughtfully with a teaspoon was about to surrender. She murmured:

"It's the last thing I should have thought could happen."

"You didn't suppose they were romantic enough," I suggested dryly.

She let it pass and with great decision but as if speaking to herself,

"Roderick really must be warned."

She didn't give me the time to ask of what precisely. She raised her head and addressed me.

"I am surprised and grieved more than I can tell you at Mr. Fyne's resistance. We have been always completely at one on every question. And that we should differ now on a point touching my brother so closely is a most painful surprise to me." Her hand rattled the teaspoon brusquely by an involuntary movement. "It is intolerable," she added tempestuously — for Mrs. Fyne that is. I suppose she had nerves of her own like any other woman.

Under the porch where Fyne had sought refuge with the dog there was silence. I took it for a proof of deep sagacity. I don't mean on the part of the dog. He was a confirmed fool.

I said:

"You want absolutely to interfere . . . ?" Mrs. Fyne nodded just perceptibly . . . "Well — for my part . . . but I don't really know how matters stand at the present time. You have had a letter from Miss de Barral. What does that letter say?"



“She asks for her valise to be sent to her town address,” Mrs. Fyne uttered reluctantly and stopped. I waited a bit — then exploded.

“Well! What’s the matter? Where’s the difficulty? Does your husband object to that? You don’t mean to say that he wants you to appropriate the girl’s clothes?”

“Mr. Marlow!”

“Well, but you talk of a painful difference of opinion with your husband, and then, when I ask for information on the point, you bring out a valise. And only a few moments ago you reproached me for not being serious. I wonder who is the serious person of us two now.”

She smiled faintly and in a friendly tone, from which I concluded at once that she did not mean to show me the girl’s letter, she said that undoubtedly the letter disclosed an understanding between Captain Anthony and Flora de Barral.

“What understanding?” I pressed her. “An engagement is an understanding.”

“There is no engagement — not yet,” she said decisively. “That letter, Mr. Marlow, is couched in very vague terms. That is why — ”

I interrupted her without ceremony.

“You still hope to interfere to some purpose. Isn’t it so? Yes? But how should you have liked it if anybody had tried to interfere between you and Mr. Fyne at the time when your understanding with each other could still have been described in vague terms?”

She had a genuine movement of astonished indignation. It is with the accent of perfect sincerity that she cried out at me:

“But it isn’t at all the same thing! How can you!”

Indeed how could I! The daughter of a poet and the daughter of a convict are not comparable in the consequences of their conduct if their necessity may wear at times a similar aspect. Amongst these consequences I could perceive undesirable cousins for these dear healthy girls, and such like, possible causes of embarrassment in the future.

“No! You can’t be serious,” Mrs. Fyne’s smouldering resentment broke out again. “You haven’t thought — ”

“Oh yes, Mrs. Fyne! I have thought. I am still thinking. I am even trying to think like you.”

“Mr. Marlow,” she said earnestly. “Believe me that I really am thinking of my brother in all this . . . ” I assured her that I quite believed she was.

For there is no law of nature making it impossible to think of more than one person at a time. Then I said:

“She has told him all about herself of course.”

“All about her life,” assented Mrs. Fyne with an air, however, of making some mental reservation which I did not pause to investigate. “Her life!” I repeated. “That girl must have had a mighty bad time of it.”

“Horrible,” Mrs. Fyne admitted with a ready frankness very creditable under the circumstances, and a warmth of tone which made me look at her with a friendly eye. “Horrible! No! You can’t imagine the sort of vulgar people she became dependent on . . . You know her father never attempted to see her while he was still at large. After his arrest he instructed that relative of his — the odious person who took her away from Brighton — not to let his daughter come to the court during the trial. He refused to hold any communication with her whatever.”

I remembered what Mrs. Fyne had told me before of the view she had years ago of de Barral clinging to the child at the side of his wife’s grave and later on of these two walking hand in hand the observed of all eyes by the sea. Pictures from Dickens — pregnant with pathos.

## CHAPTER SIX — FLORA

“A very singular prohibition,” remarked Mrs. Fyne after a short silence. “He seemed to love the child.”

She was puzzled. But I surmised that it might have been the sullenness of a man unconscious of guilt and standing at bay to fight his “persecutors,” as he called them; or else the fear of a softer emotion weakening his defiant attitude; perhaps, even, it was a self-denying ordinance, in order to spare the girl the sight of her father in the dock, accused of cheating, sentenced as a swindler — proving the possession of a certain moral delicacy.

Mrs. Fyne didn’t know what to think. She supposed it might have been mere callousness. But the people amongst whom the girl had fallen had positively not a grain of moral delicacy. Of that she was certain. Mrs. Fyne could not undertake to give me an idea of their abominable vulgarity. Flora used to tell her something of her life in that household, over there, down Limehouse way. It was incredible. It passed Mrs. Fyne’s comprehension. It was a sort of moral savagery which she could not have thought possible.

I, on the contrary, thought it very possible. I could imagine easily how the poor girl must have been bewildered and hurt at her reception in that household — envied for her past while delivered defenceless to the tender mercies of people without any fineness either of feeling or mind, unable to understand her misery, grossly curious, mistaking her manner for disdain, her silent shrinking for pride. The wife of the “odious person” was witless and fatuously conceited. Of the two girls of the house one was pious and the other a romp; both were coarse-minded — if they may be credited with any mind at all. The rather numerous men of the family were dense and grumpy, or dense and jocose. None in that grubbing lot had enough humanity to leave her alone. At first she was made much of, in an offensively patronising manner. The connection with the great de Barral gratified their vanity even in the moment of the smash. They dragged her to their place of worship, whatever it might have been, where the congregation stared at her, and they gave parties to other beings like themselves at which they exhibited her with ignoble self-satisfaction. She did not know how to defend herself from their importunities, insolence and exigencies. She lived amongst them, a passive victim, quivering in every nerve, as if she were flayed. After the trial her position became still worse. On the least occasion and even on no occasions at all she was scolded, or else taunted

with her dependence. The pious girl lectured her on her defects, the romping girl teased her with contemptuous references to her accomplishments, and was always trying to pick insensate quarrels with her about some "fellow" or other. The mother backed up her girls invariably, adding her own silly, wounding remarks. I must say they were probably not aware of the ugliness of their conduct. They were nasty amongst themselves as a matter of course; their disputes were nauseating in origin, in manner, in the spirit of mean selfishness. These women, too, seemed to enjoy greatly any sort of row and were always ready to combine together to make awful scenes to the luckless girl on incredibly flimsy pretences. Thus Flora on one occasion had been reduced to rage and despair, had her most secret feelings lacerated, had obtained a view of the utmost baseness to which common human nature can descend — I won't say *à propos de bottes* as the French would excellently put it, but literally *à propos* of some mislaid cheap lace trimmings for a nightgown the romping one was making for herself. Yes, that was the origin of one of the grossest scenes which, in their repetition, must have had a deplorable effect on the unformed character of the most pitiful of de Barral's victims. I have it from Mrs. Fyne. The girl turned up at the Fynes' house at half-past nine on a cold, drizzly evening. She had walked bareheaded, I believe, just as she ran out of the house, from somewhere in Poplar to the neighbourhood of Sloane Square — without stopping, without drawing breath, if only for a sob.

"We were having some people to dinner," said the anxious sister of Captain Anthony.

She had heard the front door bell and wondered what it might mean. The parlourmaid managed to whisper to her without attracting attention. The servants had been frightened by the invasion of that wild girl in a muddy skirt and with wisps of damp hair sticking to her pale cheeks. But they had seen her before. This was not the first occasion, nor yet the last.

Directly she could slip away from her guests Mrs. Fyne ran upstairs.

"I found her in the night nursery crouching on the floor, her head resting on the cot of the youngest of my girls. The eldest was sitting up in bed looking at her across the room."

Only a nightlight was burning there. Mrs. Fyne raised her up, took her over to Mr. Fyne's little dressing-room on the other side of the landing, to a fire by which she could dry herself, and left her there. She had to go back to her guests.

A most disagreeable surprise it must have been to the Fynes. Afterwards they both went up and interviewed the girl. She jumped up at their entrance. She had shaken her damp hair loose; her eyes were dry — with the heat of rage.

I can imagine little Fyne solemnly sympathetic, solemnly listening, solemnly retreating to the marital bedroom. Mrs. Fyne pacified the girl, and, fortunately, there was a bed which could be made up for her in the dressing-room.

“But — what could one do after all!” concluded Mrs. Fyne.

And this stereotyped exclamation, expressing the difficulty of the problem and the readiness (at any rate) of good intentions, made me, as usual, feel more kindly towards her.

Next morning, very early, long before Fyne had to start for his office, the “odious personage” turned up, not exactly unexpected perhaps, but startling all the same, if only by the promptness of his action. From what Flora herself related to Mrs. Fyne, it seems that without being very perceptibly less “odious” than his family he had in a rather mysterious fashion interposed his authority for the protection of the girl. “Not that he cares,” explained Flora. “I am sure he does not. I could not stand being liked by any of these people. If I thought he liked me I would drown myself rather than go back with him.”

For of course he had come to take “Florrie” home. The scene was the dining-room — breakfast interrupted, dishes growing cold, little Fyne’s toast growing leathery, Fyne out of his chair with his back to the fire, the newspaper on the carpet, servants shut out, Mrs. Fyne rigid in her place with the girl sitting beside her — the “odious person,” who had bustled in with hardly a greeting, looking from Fyne to Mrs. Fyne as though he were inwardly amused at something he knew of them; and then beginning ironically his discourse. He did not apologize for disturbing Fyne and his “good lady” at breakfast, because he knew they did not want (with a nod at the girl) to have more of her than could be helped. He came the first possible moment because he had his business to attend to. He wasn’t drawing a tip-top salary (this staring at Fyne) in a luxuriously furnished office. Not he. He had risen to be an employer of labour and was bound to give a good example.

I believe the fellow was aware of, and enjoyed quietly, the consternation his presence brought to the bosom of Mr. and Mrs. Fyne. He turned briskly

to the girl. Mrs. Fyne confessed to me that they had remained all three silent and inanimate. He turned to the girl: "What's this game, Florrie? You had better give it up. If you expect me to run all over London looking for you every time you happen to have a tiff with your auntie and cousins you are mistaken. I can't afford it."

Tiff — was the sort of definition to take one's breath away, having regard to the fact that both the word convict and the word pauper had been used a moment before Flora de Barral ran away from the quarrel about the lace trimmings. Yes, these very words! So at least the girl had told Mrs. Fyne the evening before. The word tiff in connection with her tale had a peculiar savour, a paralysing effect. Nobody made a sound. The relative of de Barral proceeded uninterrupted to a display of magnanimity. "Auntie told me to tell you she's sorry — there! And Amelia (the romping sister) shan't worry you again. I'll see to that. You ought to be satisfied. Remember your position."

Emboldened by the utter stillness pervading the room he addressed himself to Mrs. Fyne with stolid effrontery:

"What I say is that people should be good-natured. She can't stand being chaffed. She puts on her grand airs. She won't take a bit of a joke from people as good as herself anyway. We are a plain lot. We don't like it. And that's how trouble begins."

Insensible to the stony stare of three pairs of eyes, which, if the stories of our childhood as to the power of the human eye are true, ought to have been enough to daunt a tiger, that unabashed manufacturer from the East End fastened his fangs, figuratively speaking, into the poor girl and prepared to drag her away for a prey to his cubs of both sexes. "Auntie has thought of sending you your hat and coat. I've got them outside in the cab."

Mrs. Fyne looked mechanically out of the window. A four-wheeler stood before the gate under the weeping sky. The driver in his conical cape and tarpaulin hat, streamed with water. The drooping horse looked as though it had been fished out, half unconscious, from a pond. Mrs. Fyne found some relief in looking at that miserable sight, away from the room in which the voice of the amiable visitor resounded with a vulgar intonation exhorting the strayed sheep to return to the delightful fold. "Come, Florrie, make a move. I can't wait on you all day here."

Mrs. Fyne heard all this without turning her head away from the window. Fyne on the hearthrug had to listen and to look on too. I shall not try to form a surmise as to the real nature of the suspense. Their very goodness must have made it very anxious. The girl's hands were lying in her lap; her head was lowered as if in deep thought; and the other went on delivering a sort of homily. Ingratitude was condemned in it, the sinfulness of pride was pointed out — together with the proverbial fact that it “goes before a fall.” There were also some sound remarks as to the danger of nonsensical notions and the disadvantages of a quick temper. It sets one's best friends against one. “And if anybody ever wanted friends in the world it's you, my girl.” Even respect for parental authority was invoked. “In the first hour of his trouble your father wrote to me to take care of you — don't forget it. Yes, to me, just a plain man, rather than to any of his fine West-End friends. You can't get over that. And a father's a father no matter what a mess he's got himself into. You ain't going to throw over your own father — are you?”

It was difficult to say whether he was more absurd than cruel or more cruel than absurd. Mrs. Fyne, with the fine ear of a woman, seemed to detect a jeering intention in his meanly unctuous tone, something more vile than mere cruelty. She glanced quickly over her shoulder and saw the girl raise her two hands to her head, then let them fall again on her lap. Fyne in front of the fire was like the victim of an unholy spell — bereft of motion and speech but obviously in pain. It was a short pause of perfect silence, and then that “odious creature” (he must have been really a remarkable individual in his way) struck out into sarcasm.

“Well? . . . “ Again a silence. “If you have fixed it up with the lady and gentleman present here for your board and lodging you had better say so. I don't want to interfere in a bargain I know nothing of. But I wonder how your father will take it when he comes out . . . or don't you expect him ever to come out?”

At that moment, Mrs. Fyne told me she met the girl's eyes. There was that in them which made her shut her own. She also felt as though she would have liked to put her fingers in her ears. She restrained herself, however; and the “plain man” passed in his appalling versatility from sarcasm to veiled menace.

“You have — eh? Well and good. But before I go home let me ask you, my girl, to think if by any chance you throwing us over like this won't be

rather bad for your father later on? Just think it over.”

He looked at his victim with an air of cunning mystery. She jumped up so suddenly that he started back. Mrs. Fyne rose too, and even the spell was removed from her husband. But the girl dropped again into the chair and turned her head to look at Mrs. Fyne. This time it was no accidental meeting of fugitive glances. It was a deliberate communication. To my question as to its nature Mrs. Fyne said she did not know. “Was it appealing?” I suggested. “No,” she said. “Was it frightened, angry, crushed, resigned?” “No! No! Nothing of these.” But it had frightened her. She remembered it to this day. She had been ever since fancying she could detect the lingering reflection of that look in all the girl’s glances. In the attentive, in the casual — even in the grateful glances — in the expression of the softest moods.

“Has she her soft moods, then?” I asked with interest.

Mrs Fyne, much moved by her recollections, heeded not my inquiry. All her mental energy was concentrated on the nature of that memorable glance. The general tradition of mankind teaches us that glances occupy a considerable place in the self-expression of women. Mrs. Fyne was trying honestly to give me some idea, as much perhaps to satisfy her own uneasiness as my curiosity. She was frowning in the effort as you see sometimes a child do (what is delightful in women is that they so often resemble intelligent children — I mean the crustiest, the sourest, the most battered of them do — at times). She was frowning, I say, and I was beginning to smile faintly at her when all at once she came out with something totally unexpected.

“It was horribly merry,” she said.

I suppose she must have been satisfied by my sudden gravity because she looked at me in a friendly manner.

“Yes, Mrs. Fyne,” I said, smiling no longer. “I see. It would have been horrible even on the stage.”

“Ah!” she interrupted me — and I really believe her change of attitude back to folded arms was meant to check a shudder. “But it wasn’t on the stage, and it was not with her lips that she laughed.”

“Yes. It must have been horrible,” I assented. “And then she had to go away ultimately — I suppose. You didn’t say anything?”

“No,” said Mrs. Fyne. “I rang the bell and told one of the maids to go and bring the hat and coat out of the cab. And then we waited.”



I don't think that there ever was such waiting unless possibly in a jail at some moment or other on the morning of an execution. The servant appeared with the hat and coat, and then, still as on the morning of an execution, when the condemned, I believe, is offered a breakfast, Mrs. Fyne, anxious that the white-faced girl should swallow something warm (if she could) before leaving her house for an interminable drive through raw cold air in a damp four-wheeler — Mrs. Fyne broke the awful silence: "You really must try to eat something," in her best resolute manner. She turned to the "odious person" with the same determination. "Perhaps you will sit down and have a cup of coffee, too."

The worthy "employer of labour" sat down. He might have been awed by Mrs. Fyne's peremptory manner — for she did not think of conciliating him then. He sat down, provisionally, like a man who finds himself much against his will in doubtful company. He accepted ungraciously the cup handed to him by Mrs. Fyne, took an unwilling sip or two and put it down as if there were some moral contamination in the coffee of these "swells." Between whiles he directed mysteriously inexpressive glances at little Fyne, who, I gather, had no breakfast that morning at all. Neither had the girl. She never moved her hands from her lap till her appointed guardian got up, leaving his cup half full.

"Well. If you don't mean to take advantage of this lady's kind offer I may just as well take you home at once. I want to begin my day — I do."

After a few more dumb, leaden-footed minutes while Flora was putting on her hat and jacket, the Fynes without moving, without saying anything, saw these two leave the room.

"She never looked back at us," said Mrs. Fyne. "She just followed him out. I've never had such a crushing impression of the miserable dependence of girls — of women. This was an extreme case. But a young man — any man — could have gone to break stones on the roads or something of that kind — or enlisted — or —"

It was very true. Women can't go forth on the high roads and by-ways to pick up a living even when dignity, independence, or existence itself are at stake. But what made me interrupt Mrs. Fyne's tirade was my profound surprise at the fact of that respectable citizen being so willing to keep in his home the poor girl for whom it seemed there was no place in the world. And not only willing but anxious. I couldn't credit him with generous

impulses. For it seemed obvious to me from what I had learned that, to put it mildly, he was not an impulsive person.

“I confess that I can’t understand his motive,” I exclaimed.

“This is exactly what John wondered at, at first,” said Mrs. Fyne. By that time an intimacy — if not exactly confidence — had sprung up between us which permitted her in this discussion to refer to her husband as John. “You know he had not opened his lips all that time,” she pursued. “I don’t blame his restraint. On the contrary. What could he have said? I could see he was observing the man very thoughtfully.”

“And so, Mr. Fyne listened, observed and meditated,” I said. “That’s an excellent way of coming to a conclusion. And may I ask at what conclusion he had managed to arrive? On what ground did he cease to wonder at the inexplicable? For I can’t admit humanity to be the explanation. It would be too monstrous.”

It was nothing of the sort, Mrs. Fyne assured me with some resentment, as though I had aspersed little Fyne’s sanity. Fyne very sensibly had set himself the mental task of discovering the self-interest. I should not have thought him capable of so much cynicism. He said to himself that for people of that sort (religious fears or the vanity of righteousness put aside) money — not great wealth, but money, just a little money — is the measure of virtue, of expediency, of wisdom — of pretty well everything. But the girl was absolutely destitute. The father was in prison after the most terribly complete and disgraceful smash of modern times. And then it dawned upon Fyne that this was just it. The great smash, in the great dust of vanishing millions! Was it possible that they all had vanished to the last penny? Wasn’t there, somewhere, something palpable; some fragment of the fabric left?

“That’s it,” had exclaimed Fyne, startling his wife by this explosive unseating of his lips less than half an hour after the departure of de Barral’s cousin with de Barral’s daughter. It was still in the dining-room, very near the time for him to go forth affronting the elements in order to put in another day’s work in his country’s service. All he could say at the moment in elucidation of this breakdown from his usual placid solemnity was:

“The fellow imagines that de Barral has got some plunder put away somewhere.”

This being the theory arrived at by Fyne, his comment on it was that a good many bankrupts had been known to have taken such a precaution. It

was possible in de Barral's case. Fyne went so far in his display of cynical pessimism as to say that it was extremely probable.

He explained at length to Mrs. Fyne that de Barral certainly did not take anyone into his confidence. But the beastly relative had made up his low mind that it was so. He was selfish and pitiless in his stupidity, but he had clearly conceived the notion of making a claim on de Barral when de Barral came out of prison on the strength of having "looked after" (as he would have himself expressed it) his daughter. He nursed his hopes, such as they were, in secret, and it is to be supposed kept them even from his wife.

I could see it very well. That belief accounted for his mysterious air while he interfered in favour of the girl. He was the only protector she had. It was as though Flora had been fated to be always surrounded by treachery and lies stifling every better impulse, every instinctive aspiration of her soul to trust and to love. It would have been enough to drive a fine nature into the madness of universal suspicion — into any sort of madness. I don't know how far a sense of humour will stand by one. To the foot of the gallows, perhaps. But from my recollection of Flora de Barral I feared that she hadn't much sense of humour. She had cried at the desertion of the absurd Fyne dog. That animal was certainly free from duplicity. He was frank and simple and ridiculous. The indignation of the girl at his unhypocritical behaviour had been funny but not humorous.

As you may imagine I was not very anxious to resume the discussion on the justice, expediency, effectiveness or what not, of Fyne's journey to London. It isn't that I was unfaithful to little Fyne out in the porch with the dog. (They kept amazingly quiet there. Could they have gone to sleep?) What I felt was that either my sagacity or my conscience would come out damaged from that campaign. And no man will willingly put himself in the way of moral damage. I did not want a war with Mrs. Fyne. I much preferred to hear something more of the girl. I said:

"And so she went away with that respectable ruffian."

Mrs. Fyne moved her shoulders slightly — "What else could she have done?" I agreed with her by another hopeless gesture. It isn't so easy for a girl like Flora de Barral to become a factory hand, a pathetic seamstress or even a barmaid. She wouldn't have known how to begin. She was the captive of the meanest conceivable fate. And she wasn't mean enough for it. It is to be remarked that a good many people are born curiously unfitted for the fate awaiting them on this earth. As I don't want you to think that I

am unduly partial to the girl we shall say that she failed decidedly to endear herself to that simple, virtuous and, I believe, teetotal household. It's my conviction that an angel would have failed likewise. It's no use going into details; suffice it to state that before the year was out she was again at the Fynes' door.

This time she was escorted by a stout youth. His large pale face wore a smile of inane cunning soured by annoyance. His clothes were new and the indescribable smartness of their cut, a genre which had never been obtruded on her notice before, astonished Mrs. Fyne, who came out into the hall with her hat on; for she was about to go out to hear a new pianist (a girl) in a friend's house. The youth addressing Mrs. Fyne easily begged her not to let "that silly thing go back to us any more." There had been, he said, nothing but "ructions" at home about her for the last three weeks. Everybody in the family was heartily sick of quarrelling. His governor had charged him to bring her to this address and say that the lady and gentleman were quite welcome to all there was in it. She hadn't enough sense to appreciate a plain, honest English home and she was better out of it.

The young, pimply-faced fellow was vexed by this job his governor had sprung on him. It was the cause of his missing an appointment for that afternoon with a certain young lady. The lady he was engaged to. But he meant to dash back and try for a sight of her that evening yet "if he were to burst over it." "Good-bye, Florrie. Good luck to you — and I hope I'll never see your face again."

With that he ran out in lover-like haste leaving the hall-door wide open. Mrs. Fyne had not found a word to say. She had been too much taken aback even to gasp freely. But she had the presence of mind to grab the girl's arm just as she, too, was running out into the street — with the haste, I suppose, of despair and to keep I don't know what tragic tryst.

"You stopped her with your own hand, Mrs. Fyne," I said. "I presume she meant to get away. That girl is no comedian — if I am any judge."

"Yes! I had to use some force to drag her in."

Mrs. Fyne had no difficulty in stating the truth. "You see I was in the very act of letting myself out when these two appeared. So that, when that unpleasant young man ran off, I found myself alone with Flora. It was all I could do to hold her in the hall while I called to the servants to come and shut the door."

As is my habit, or my weakness, or my gift, I don't know which, I visualized the story for myself. I really can't help it. And the vision of Mrs. Fyne dressed for a rather special afternoon function, engaged in wrestling with a wild-eyed, white-faced girl had a certain dramatic fascination.

"Really!" I murmured.

"Oh! There's no doubt that she struggled," said Mrs. Fyne. She compressed her lips for a moment and then added: "As to her being a comedian that's another question."

Mrs. Fyne had returned to her attitude of folded arms. I saw before me the daughter of the refined poet accepting life whole with its unavoidable conditions of which one of the first is the instinct of self-preservation and the egoism of every living creature. "The fact remains nevertheless that you — yourself — have, in your own words, pulled her in," I insisted in a jocular tone, with a serious intention.

"What was one to do," exclaimed Mrs. Fyne with almost comic exasperation. "Are you reproaching me with being too impulsive?"

And she went on telling me that she was not that in the least. One of the recommendations she always insisted on (to the girl-friends, I imagine) was to be on guard against impulse. Always! But I had not been there to see the face of Flora at the time. If I had it would be haunting me to this day. Nobody unless made of iron would have allowed a human being with a face like that to rush out alone into the streets.

"And doesn't it haunt you, Mrs. Fyne?" I asked.

"No, not now," she said implacably. "Perhaps if I had let her go it might have done . . . Don't conclude, though, that I think she was playing a comedy then, because after struggling at first she ended by remaining. She gave up very suddenly. She collapsed in our arms, mine and the maid's who came running up in response to my calls, and . . ."

"And the door was then shut," I completed the phrase in my own way.

"Yes, the door was shut," Mrs. Fyne lowered and raised her head slowly.

I did not ask her for details. Of one thing I am certain, and that is that Mrs. Fyne did not go out to the musical function that afternoon. She was no doubt considerably annoyed at missing the privilege of hearing privately an interesting young pianist (a girl) who, since, had become one of the recognized performers. Mrs. Fyne did not dare leave her house. As to the feelings of little Fyne when he came home from the office, via his club, just

half an hour before dinner, I have no information. But I venture to affirm that in the main they were kindly, though it is quite possible that in the first moment of surprise he had to keep down a swear-word or two.

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The long and the short of it all is that next day the Fynes made up their minds to take into their confidence a certain wealthy old lady. With certain old ladies the passing years bring back a sort of mellowed youthfulness of feeling, an optimistic outlook, liking for novelty, readiness for experiment. The old lady was very much interested: "Do let me see the poor thing!" She was accordingly allowed to see Flora de Barral in Mrs. Fyne's drawing-room on a day when there was no one else there, and she preached to her with charming, sympathetic authority: "The only way to deal with our troubles, my dear child, is to forget them. You must forget yours. It's very simple. Look at me. I always forget mine. At your age one ought to be cheerful."

Later on when left alone with Mrs. Fyne she said to that lady: "I do hope the child will manage to be cheerful. I can't have sad faces near me. At my age one needs cheerful companions."

And in this hope she carried off Flora de Barral to Bournemouth for the winter months in the quality of reader and companion. She had said to her with kindly jocularly: "We shall have a good time together. I am not a grumpy old woman." But on their return to London she sought Mrs. Fyne at once. She had discovered that Flora was not naturally cheerful. When she made efforts to be it was still worse. The old lady couldn't stand the strain of that. And then, to have the whole thing out, she could not bear to have for a companion anyone who did not love her. She was certain that Flora did not love her. Why? She couldn't say. Moreover, she had caught the girl looking at her in a peculiar way at times. Oh no! — it was not an evil look — it was an unusual expression which one could not understand. And when one remembered that her father was in prison shut up together with a lot of criminals and so on — it made one uncomfortable. If the child had only tried to forget her troubles! But she obviously was incapable or unwilling to do so. And that was somewhat perverse — wasn't it? Upon the whole, she thought it would be better perhaps —

Mrs. Fyne assented hurriedly to the unspoken conclusion: "Oh certainly! Certainly," wondering to herself what was to be done with Flora next; but

she was not very much surprised at the change in the old lady's view of Flora de Barral. She almost understood it.

What came next was a German family, the continental acquaintances of the wife of one of Fyne's colleagues in the Home Office. Flora of the enigmatical glances was dispatched to them without much reflection. As it was not considered absolutely necessary to take them into full confidence, they neither expected the girl to be specially cheerful nor were they discomposed unduly by the indescribable quality of her glances. The German woman was quite ordinary; there were two boys to look after; they were ordinary, too, I presume; and Flora, I understand, was very attentive to them. If she taught them anything it must have been by inspiration alone, for she certainly knew nothing of teaching. But it was mostly "conversation" which was demanded from her. Flora de Barral conversing with two small German boys, regularly, industriously, conscientiously, in order to keep herself alive in the world which held for her the past we know and the future of an even more undesirable quality — seems to me a very fantastic combination. But I believe it was not so bad. She was being, she wrote, mercifully drugged by her task. She had learned to "converse" all day long, mechanically, absently, as if in a trance. An uneasy trance it must have been! Her worst moments were when off duty — alone in the evening, shut up in her own little room, her dulled thoughts waking up slowly till she started into the full consciousness of her position, like a person waking up in contact with something venomous — a snake, for instance — experiencing a mad impulse to fling the thing away and run off screaming to hide somewhere.

At this period of her existence Flora de Barral used to write to Mrs. Fyne not regularly but fairly often. I don't know how long she would have gone on "conversing" and, incidentally, helping to supervise the beautifully stocked linen closets of that well-to-do German household, if the man of it had not developed in the intervals of his avocations (he was a merchant and a thoroughly domesticated character) a psychological resemblance to the Bournemouth old lady. It appeared that he, too, wanted to be loved.

He was not, however, of a conquering temperament — a kiss-snatching, door-bursting type of libertine. In the very act of straying from the path of virtue he remained a respectable merchant. It would have been perhaps better for Flora if he had been a mere brute. But he set about his sinister enterprise in a sentimental, cautious, almost paternal manner; and thought

he would be safe with a pretty orphan. The girl for all her experience was still too innocent, and indeed not yet sufficiently aware of herself as a woman, to mistrust these masked approaches. She did not see them, in fact. She thought him sympathetic — the first expressively sympathetic person she had ever met. She was so innocent that she could not understand the fury of the German woman. For, as you may imagine, the wifely penetration was not to be deceived for any great length of time — the more so that the wife was older than the husband. The man with the peculiar cowardice of respectability never said a word in Flora's defence. He stood by and heard her reviled in the most abusive terms, only nodding and frowning vaguely from time to time. It will give you the idea of the girl's innocence when I say that at first she actually thought this storm of indignant reproaches was caused by the discovery of her real name and her relation to a convict. She had been sent out under an assumed name — a highly recommended orphan of honourable parentage. Her distress, her burning cheeks, her endeavours to express her regret for this deception were taken for a confession of guilt. "You attempted to bring dishonour to my home," the German woman screamed at her.

Here's a misunderstanding for you! Flora de Barral, who felt the shame but did not believe in the guilt of her father, retorted fiercely, "Nevertheless I am as honourable as you are." And then the German woman nearly went into a fit from rage. "I shall have you thrown out into the street."

Flora was not exactly thrown out into the street, I believe, but she was bundled bag and baggage on board a steamer for London. Did I tell you these people lived in Hamburg? Well yes — sent to the docks late on a rainy winter evening in charge of some sneering lackey or other who behaved to her insolently and left her on deck burning with indignation, her hair half down, shaking with excitement and, truth to say, scared as near as possible into hysterics. If it had not been for the stewardess who, without asking questions, good soul, took charge of her quietly in the ladies' saloon (luckily it was empty) it is by no means certain she would ever have reached England. I can't tell if a straw ever saved a drowning man, but I know that a mere glance is enough to make despair pause. For in truth we who are creatures of impulse are not creatures of despair. Suicide, I suspect, is very often the outcome of mere mental weariness — not an act of savage energy but the final symptom of complete collapse. The quiet, matter-of-fact attentions of a ship's stewardess, who did not seem aware of



other human agonies than sea-sickness, who talked of the probable weather of the passage — it would be a rough night, she thought — and who insisted in a professionally busy manner, “Let me make you comfortable down below at once, miss,” as though she were thinking of nothing else but her tip — was enough to dissipate the shades of death gathering round the mortal weariness of bewildered thinking which makes the idea of non-existence welcome so often to the young. Flora de Barral did lie down, and it may be presumed she slept. At any rate she survived the voyage across the North Sea and told Mrs. Fyne all about it, concealing nothing and receiving no rebuke — for Mrs. Fyne’s opinions had a large freedom in their pedantry. She held, I suppose, that a woman holds an absolute right — or possesses a perfect excuse — to escape in her own way from a man-mismanaged world.

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What is to be noted is that even in London, having had time to take a reflective view, poor Flora was far from being certain as to the true inwardness of her violent dismissal. She felt the humiliation of it with an almost maddened resentment.

“And did you enlighten her on the point?” I ventured to ask.

Mrs. Fyne moved her shoulders with a philosophical acceptance of all the necessities which ought not to be. Something had to be said, she murmured. She had told the girl enough to make her come to the right conclusion by herself.

“And she did?”

“Yes. Of course. She isn’t a goose,” retorted Mrs. Fyne tartly.

“Then her education is completed,” I remarked with some bitterness.

“Don’t you think she ought to be given a chance?”

Mrs. Fyne understood my meaning.

“Not this one,” she snapped in a quite feminine way. “It’s all very well for you to plead, but I — ”

“I do not plead. I simply asked. It seemed natural to ask what you thought.”

“It’s what I feel that matters. And I can’t help my feelings. You may guess,” she added in a softer tone, “that my feelings are mostly concerned with my brother. We were very fond of each other. The difference of our ages was not very great. I suppose you know he is a little younger than I

am. He was a sensitive boy. He had the habit of brooding. It is no use concealing from you that neither of us was happy at home. You have heard, no doubt . . . Yes? Well, I was made still more unhappy and hurt — I don't mind telling you that. He made his way to some distant relations of our mother's people who I believe were not known to my father at all. I don't wish to judge their action."

I interrupted Mrs. Fyne here. I had heard. Fyne was not very communicative in general, but he was proud of his father-in-law — "Carleon Anthony, the poet, you know." Proud of his celebrity without approving of his character. It was on that account, I strongly suspect, that he seized with avidity upon the theory of poetical genius being allied to madness, which he got hold of in some idiotic book everybody was reading a few years ago. It struck him as being truth itself — illuminating like the sun. He adopted it devoutly. He bored me with it sometimes. Once, just to shut him up, I asked quietly if this theory which he regarded as so incontrovertible did not cause him some uneasiness about his wife and the dear girls? He transfixed me with a pitying stare and requested me in his deep solemn voice to remember the "well-established fact" that genius was not transmissible.

I said only "Oh! Isn't it?" and he thought he had silenced me by an unanswerable argument. But he continued to talk of his glorious father-in-law, and it was in the course of that conversation that he told me how, when the Liverpool relations of the poet's late wife naturally addressed themselves to him in considerable concern, suggesting a friendly consultation as to the boy's future, the incensed (but always refined) poet wrote in answer a letter of mere polished badinage which offended mortally the Liverpool people. This witty outbreak of what was in fact mortification and rage appeared to them so heartless that they simply kept the boy. They let him go to sea not because he was in their way but because he begged hard to be allowed to go.

"Oh! You do know," said Mrs. Fyne after a pause. "Well — I felt myself very much abandoned. Then his choice of life — so extraordinary, so unfortunate, I may say. I was very much grieved. I should have liked him to have been distinguished — or at any rate to remain in the social sphere where we could have had common interests, acquaintances, thoughts. Don't think that I am estranged from him. But the precise truth is that I do

not know him. I was most painfully affected when he was here by the difficulty of finding a single topic we could discuss together.”

While Mrs. Fyne was talking of her brother I let my thoughts wander out of the room to little Fyne who by leaving me alone with his wife had, so to speak, entrusted his domestic peace to my honour.

“Well, then, Mrs. Fyne, does it not strike you that it would be reasonable under the circumstances to let your brother take care of himself?”

“And suppose I have grounds to think that he can’t take care of himself in a given instance.” She hesitated in a funny, bashful manner which roused my interest. Then:

“Sailors I believe are very susceptible,” she added with forced assurance.

I burst into a laugh which only increased the coldness of her observing stare.

“They are. Immensely! Hopelessly! My dear Mrs. Fyne, you had better give it up! It only makes your husband miserable.”

“And I am quite miserable too. It is really our first difference . . . “

“Regarding Miss de Barral?” I asked.

“Regarding everything. It’s really intolerable that this girl should be the occasion. I think he really ought to give way.”

She turned her chair round a little and picking up the book I had been reading in the morning began to turn the leaves absently.

Her eyes being off me, I felt I could allow myself to leave the room. Its atmosphere had become hopeless for little Fyne’s domestic peace. You may smile. But to the solemn all things are solemn. I had enough sagacity to understand that.

I slipped out into the porch. The dog was slumbering at Fyne’s feet. The muscular little man leaning on his elbow and gazing over the fields presented a forlorn figure. He turned his head quickly, but seeing I was alone, relapsed into his moody contemplation of the green landscape.

I said loudly and distinctly: “I’ve come out to smoke a cigarette,” and sat down near him on the little bench. Then lowering my voice: “Tolerance is an extremely difficult virtue,” I said. “More difficult for some than heroism. More difficult than compassion.”

I avoided looking at him. I knew well enough that he would not like this opening. General ideas were not to his taste. He mistrusted them. I lighted a cigarette, not that I wanted to smoke, but to give another moment to the

consideration of the advice — the diplomatic advice I had made up my mind to bowl him over with. And I continued in subdued tones.

“I have been led to make these remarks by what I have discovered since you left us. I suspected from the first. And now I am certain. What your wife cannot tolerate in this affair is Miss de Barral being what she is.”

He made a movement, but I kept my eyes away from him and went on steadily. “That is — her being a woman. I have some idea of Mrs. Fyne’s mental attitude towards society with its injustices, with its atrocious or ridiculous conventions. As against them there is no audacity of action your wife’s mind refuses to sanction. The doctrine which I imagine she stuffs into the pretty heads of your girl-guests is almost vengeful. A sort of moral fire-and-sword doctrine. How far the lesson is wise is not for me to say. I don’t permit myself to judge. I seem to see her very delightful disciples singeing themselves with the torches, and cutting their fingers with the swords of Mrs. Fyne’s furnishing.”

“My wife holds her opinions very seriously,” murmured Fyne suddenly.

“Yes. No doubt,” I assented in a low voice as before. “But it is a mere intellectual exercise. What I see is that in dealing with reality Mrs. Fyne ceases to be tolerant. In other words, that she can’t forgive Miss de Barral for being a woman and behaving like a woman. And yet this is not only reasonable and natural, but it is her only chance. A woman against the world has no resources but in herself. Her only means of action is to be what she is. You understand what I mean.”

Fyne mumbled between his teeth that he understood. But he did not seem interested. What he expected of me was to extricate him from a difficult situation. I don’t know how far credible this may sound, to less solemn married couples, but to remain at variance with his wife seemed to him a considerable incident. Almost a disaster.

“It looks as though I didn’t care what happened to her brother,” he said. “And after all if anything . . . “

I became a little impatient but without raising my tone:

“What thing?” I asked. “The liability to get penal servitude is so far like genius that it isn’t hereditary. And what else can be objected to the girl? All the energy of her deeper feelings, which she would use up vainly in the danger and fatigue of a struggle with society may be turned into devoted attachment to the man who offers her a way of escape from what can be only a life of moral anguish. I don’t mention the physical difficulties.”

Glancing at Fyne out of the corner of one eye I discovered that he was attentive. He made the remark that I should have said all this to his wife. It was a sensible enough remark. But I had given Mrs. Fyne up. I asked him if his impression was that his wife meant to entrust him with a letter for her brother?

No. He didn't think so. There were certain reasons which made Mrs. Fyne unwilling to commit her arguments to paper. Fyne was to be primed with them. But he had no doubt that if he persisted in his refusal she would make up her mind to write.

"She does not wish me to go unless with a full conviction that she is right," said Fyne solemnly.

"She's very exacting," I commented. And then I reflected that she was used to it. "Would nothing less do for once?"

"You don't mean that I should give way — do you?" asked Fyne in a whisper of alarmed suspicion.

As this was exactly what I meant, I let his fright sink into him. He fidgeted. If the word may be used of so solemn a personage, he wriggled. And when the horrid suspicion had descended into his very heels, so to speak, he became very still. He sat gazing stonily into space bounded by the yellow, burnt-up slopes of the rising ground a couple of miles away. The face of the down showed the white scar of the quarry where not more than sixteen hours before Fyne and I had been groping in the dark with horrible apprehension of finding under our hands the shattered body of a girl. For myself I had in addition the memory of my meeting with her. She was certainly walking very near the edge — courting a sinister solution. But, now, having by the most unexpected chance come upon a man, she had found another way to escape from the world. Such world as was open to her — without shelter, without bread, without honour. The best she could have found in it would have been a precarious dole of pity diminishing as her years increased. The appeal of the abandoned child Flora to the sympathies of the Fynes had been irresistible. But now she had become a woman, and Mrs. Fyne was presenting an implacable front to a particularly feminine transaction. I may say triumphantly feminine. It is true that Mrs. Fyne did not want women to be women. Her theory was that they should turn themselves into unscrupulous sexless nuisances. An offended theorist dwelt in her bosom somewhere. In what way she expected Flora de Barral to set about saving herself from a most miserable existence I can't conceive;

but I verify believe that she would have found it easier to forgive the girl an actual crime; say the rifling of the Bournemouth old lady's desk, for instance. And then — for Mrs. Fyne was very much of a woman herself — her sense of proprietorship was very strong within her; and though she had not much use for her brother, yet she did not like to see him annexed by another woman. By a chit of a girl. And such a girl, too. Nothing is truer than that, in this world, the luckless have no right to their opportunities — as if misfortune were a legal disqualification. Fyne's sentiments (as they naturally would be in a man) had more stability. A good deal of his sympathy survived. Indeed I heard him murmur "Ghastly nuisance," but I knew it was of the integrity of his domestic accord that he was thinking. With my eyes on the dog lying curled up in sleep in the middle of the porch I suggested in a subdued impersonal tone: "Yes. Why not let yourself be persuaded?"

I never saw little Fyne less solemn. He hissed through his teeth in unexpectedly figurative style that it would take a lot to persuade him to "push under the head of a poor devil of a girl quite sufficiently plucky" — and snorted. He was still gazing at the distant quarry, and I think he was affected by that sight. I assured him that I was far from advising him to do anything so cruel. I am convinced he had always doubted the soundness of my principles, because he turned on me swiftly as though he had been on the watch for a lapse from the straight path.

"Then what do you mean? That I should pretend!"

"No! What nonsense! It would be immoral. I may however tell you that if I had to make a choice I would rather do something immoral than something cruel. What I meant was that, not believing in the efficacy of the interference, the whole question is reduced to your consenting to do what your wife wishes you to do. That would be acting like a gentleman, surely. And acting unselfishly too, because I can very well understand how distasteful it may be to you. Generally speaking, an unselfish action is a moral action. I'll tell you what. I'll go with you."

He turned round and stared at me with surprise and suspicion. "You would go with me?" he repeated.

"You don't understand," I said, amused at the incredulous disgust of his tone. "I must run up to town, to-morrow morning. Let us go together. You have a set of travelling chessmen."

His physiognomy, contracted by a variety of emotions, relaxed to a certain extent at the idea of a game. I told him that as I had business at the Docks he should have my company to the very ship.

“We shall beguile the way to the wilds of the East by improving conversation,” I encouraged him.

“My brother-in-law is staying at an hotel — the Eastern Hotel,” he said, becoming sombre again. “I haven’t the slightest idea where it is.”

“I know the place. I shall leave you at the door with the comfortable conviction that you are doing what’s right since it pleases a lady and cannot do any harm to anybody whatever.”

“You think so? No harm to anybody?” he repeated doubtfully.

“I assure you it’s not the slightest use,” I said with all possible emphasis which seemed only to increase the solemn discontent of his expression.

“But in order that my going should be a perfectly candid proceeding I must first convince my wife that it isn’t the slightest use,” he objected portentously.

“Oh, you casuist!” I said. And I said nothing more because at that moment Mrs. Fyne stepped out into the porch. We rose together at her appearance. Her clear, colourless, unflinching glance enveloped us both critically. I sustained the chill smilingly, but Fyne stooped at once to release the dog. He was some time about it; then simultaneously with his recovery of upright position the animal passed at one bound from profoundest slumber into most tumultuous activity. Enveloped in the tornado of his inane scurryings and barkings I took Mrs. Fyne’s hand extended to me woodenly and bowed over it with deference. She walked down the path without a word; Fyne had preceded her and was waiting by the open gate. They passed out and walked up the road surrounded by a low cloud of dust raised by the dog gyrating madly about their two figures progressing side by side with rectitude and propriety, and (I don’t know why) looking to me as if they had annexed the whole country-side. Perhaps it was that they had impressed me somehow with the sense of their superiority. What superiority? Perhaps it consisted just in their limitations. It was obvious that neither of them had carried away a high opinion of me. But what affected me most was the indifference of the Fyne dog. He used to precipitate himself at full speed and with a frightful final upward spring upon my waistcoat, at least once at each of our meetings. He had neglected that ceremony this time notwithstanding my correct and even conventional

conduct in offering him a cake; it seemed to me symbolic of my final separation from the Fyne household. And I remembered against him how on a certain day he had abandoned poor Flora de Barral — who was morbidly sensitive.

I sat down in the porch and, maybe inspired by secret antagonism to the Fynes, I said to myself deliberately that Captain Anthony must be a fine fellow. Yet on the facts as I knew them he might have been a dangerous trifler or a downright scoundrel. He had made a miserable, hopeless girl follow him clandestinely to London. It is true that the girl had written since, only Mrs. Fyne had been remarkably vague as to the contents. They were unsatisfactory. They did not positively announce imminent nuptials as far as I could make it out from her rather mysterious hints. But then her inexperience might have led her astray. There was no fathoming the innocence of a woman like Mrs. Fyne who, venturing as far as possible in theory, would know nothing of the real aspect of things. It would have been comic if she were making all this fuss for nothing. But I rejected this suspicion for the honour of human nature.

I imagined to myself Captain Anthony as simple and romantic. It was much more pleasant. Genius is not hereditary but temperament may be. And he was the son of a poet with an admirable gift of individualising, of etherealizing the common-place; of making touching, delicate, fascinating the most hopeless conventions of the, so-called, refined existence.

What I could not understand was Mrs. Fyne's dog-in-the-manger attitude. Sentimentally she needed that brother of hers so little! What could it matter to her one way or another — setting aside common humanity which would suggest at least a neutral attitude. Unless indeed it was the blind working of the law that in our world of chances the luckless must be put in the wrong somehow.

And musing thus on the general inclination of our instincts towards injustice I met unexpectedly, at the turn of the road, as it were, a shape of duplicity. It might have been unconscious on Mrs. Fyne's part, but her leading idea appeared to me to be not to keep, not to preserve her brother, but to get rid of him definitely. She did not hope to stop anything. She had too much sense for that. Almost anyone out of an idiot asylum would have had enough sense for that. She wanted the protest to be made, emphatically, with Fyne's fullest concurrence in order to make all intercourse for the future impossible. Such an action would estrange the



pair for ever from the Fynes. She understood her brother and the girl too. Happy together, they would never forgive that outspoken hostility — and should the marriage turn out badly . . . Well, it would be just the same. Neither of them would be likely to bring their troubles to such a good prophet of evil.

Yes. That must have been her motive. The inspiration of a possibly unconscious Machiavellism! Either she was afraid of having a sister-in-law to look after during the husband's long absences; or dreaded the more or less distant eventuality of her brother being persuaded to leave the sea, the friendly refuge of his unhappy youth, and to settle on shore, bringing to her very door this undesirable, this embarrassing connection. She wanted to be done with it — maybe simply from the fatigue of continuous effort in good or evil, which, in the bulk of common mortals, accounts for so many surprising inconsistencies of conduct.

I don't know that I had classed Mrs. Fyne, in my thoughts, amongst common mortals. She was too quietly sure of herself for that. But little Fyne, as I spied him next morning (out of the carriage window) speeding along the platform, looked very much like a common, flustered mortal who has made a very near thing of catching his train: the starting wild eyes, the tense and excited face, the distracted gait, all the common symptoms were there, rendered more impressive by his native solemnity which flapped about him like a disordered garment. Had he — I asked myself with interest — resisted his wife to the very last minute and then bolted up the road from the last conclusive argument, as though it had been a loaded gun suddenly produced? I opened the carriage door, and a vigorous porter shoved him in from behind just as the end of the rustic platform went gliding swiftly from under his feet. He was very much out of breath, and I waited with some curiosity for the moment he would recover his power of speech. That moment came. He said "Good morning" with a slight gasp, remained very still for another minute and then pulled out of his pocket the travelling chessboard, and holding it in his hand, directed at me a glance of inquiry.

"Yes. Certainly," I said, very much disappointed.

## CHAPTER SEVEN — ON THE PAVEMENT

Fyne was not willing to talk; but as I had been already let into the secret, the fair-minded little man recognized that I had some right to information if I insisted on it. And I did insist, after the third game. We were yet some way from the end of our journey.

“Oh, if you want to know,” was his somewhat impatient opening. And then he talked rather volubly. First of all his wife had not given him to read the letter received from Flora (I had suspected him of having it in his pocket), but had told him all about the contents. It was not at all what it should have been even if the girl had wished to affirm her right to disregard the feelings of all the world. Her own had been trampled in the dirt out of all shape. Extraordinary thing to say — I would admit, for a young girl of her age. The whole tone of that letter was wrong, quite wrong. It was certainly not the product of a — say, of a well-balanced mind.

“If she were given some sort of footing in this world,” I said, “if only no bigger than the palm of my hand, she would probably learn to keep a better balance.”

Fyne ignored this little remark. His wife, he said, was not the sort of person to be addressed mockingly on a serious subject. There was an unpleasant strain of levity in that letter, extending even to the references to Captain Anthony himself. Such a disposition was enough, his wife had pointed out to him, to alarm one for the future, had all the circumstances of that preposterous project been as satisfactory as in fact they were not. Other parts of the letter seemed to have a challenging tone — as if daring them (the Fynes) to approve her conduct. And at the same time implying that she did not care, that it was for their own sakes that she hoped they would “go against the world — the horrid world which had crushed poor papa.”

Fyne called upon me to admit that this was pretty cool — considering. And there was another thing, too. It seems that for the last six months (she had been assisting two ladies who kept a kindergarten school in Bayswater — a mere pittance), Flora had insisted on devoting all her spare time to the study of the trial. She had been looking up files of old newspapers, and working herself up into a state of indignation with what she called the injustice and the hypocrisy of the prosecution. Her father, Fyne reminded me, had made some palpable hits in his answers in Court, and she had

fastened on them triumphantly. She had reached the conclusion of her father's innocence, and had been brooding over it. Mrs. Fyne had pointed out to him the danger of this.

The train ran into the station and Fyne, jumping out directly it came to a standstill, seemed glad to cut short the conversation. We walked in silence a little way, boarded a bus, then walked again. I don't suppose that since the days of his childhood, when surely he was taken to see the Tower, he had been once east of Temple Bar. He looked about him sullenly; and when I pointed out in the distance the rounded front of the Eastern Hotel at the bifurcation of two very broad, mean, shabby thoroughfares, rising like a grey stucco tower above the lowly roofs of the dirty-yellow, two-storey houses, he only grunted disapprovingly.

"I wouldn't lay too much stress on what you have been telling me," I observed quietly as we approached that unattractive building. "No man will believe a girl who has just accepted his suit to be not well balanced, — you know."

"Oh! Accepted his suit," muttered Fyne, who seemed to have been very thoroughly convinced indeed. "It may have been the other way about." And then he added: "I am going through with it."

I said that this was very praiseworthy but that a certain moderation of statement . . . He waved his hand at me and mended his pace. I guessed that he was anxious to get his mission over as quickly as possible. He barely gave himself time to shake hands with me and made a rush at the narrow glass door with the words Hotel Entrance on it. It swung to behind his back with no more noise than the snap of a toothless jaw.

The absurd temptation to remain and see what would come of it got over my better judgment. I hung about irresolute, wondering how long an embassy of that sort would take, and whether Fyne on coming out would consent to be communicative. I feared he would be shocked at finding me there, would consider my conduct incorrect, conceivably treat me with contempt. I walked off a few paces. Perhaps it would be possible to read something on Fyne's face as he came out; and, if necessary, I could always eclipse myself discreetly through the door of one of the bars. The ground floor of the Eastern Hotel was an unabashed pub, with plate-glass fronts, a display of brass rails, and divided into many compartments each having its own entrance.

But of course all this was silly. The marriage, the love, the affairs of Captain Anthony were none of my business. I was on the point of moving down the street for good when my attention was attracted by a girl approaching the hotel entrance from the west. She was dressed very modestly in black. It was the white straw hat of a good form and trimmed with a bunch of pale roses which had caught my eye. The whole figure seemed familiar. Of course! Flora de Barral. She was making for the hotel, she was going in. And Fyne was with Captain Anthony! To meet him could not be pleasant for her. I wished to save her from the awkwardness, and as I hesitated what to do she looked up and our eyes happened to meet just as she was turning off the pavement into the hotel doorway. Instinctively I extended my arm. It was enough to make her stop. I suppose she had some faint notion that she had seen me before somewhere. She walked slowly forward, prudent and attentive, watching my faint smile.

"Excuse me," I said directly she had approached me near enough. "Perhaps you would like to know that Mr. Fyne is upstairs with Captain Anthony at this moment."

She uttered a faint "Ah! Mr. Fyne!" I could read in her eyes that she had recognized me now. Her serious expression extinguished the imbecile grin of which I was conscious. I raised my hat. She responded with a slow inclination of the head while her luminous, mistrustful, maiden's glance seemed to whisper, "What is this one doing here?"

"I came up to town with Fyne this morning," I said in a businesslike tone. "I have to see a friend in East India Dock. Fyne and I parted this moment at the door here . . . " The girl regarded me with darkening eyes . . . "Mrs. Fyne did not come with her husband," I went on, then hesitated before that white face so still in the pearly shadow thrown down by the hat-brim. "But she sent him," I murmured by way of warning.

Her eyelids fluttered slowly over the fixed stare. I imagine she was not much disconcerted by this development. "I live a long way from here," she whispered.

I said perfunctorily, "Do you?" And we remained gazing at each other. The uniform paleness of her complexion was not that of an anaemic girl. It had a transparent vitality and at that particular moment the faintest possible rosy tinge, the merest suspicion of colour; an equivalent, I suppose, in any

other girl to blushing like a peony while she told me that Captain Anthony had arranged to show her the ship that morning.

It was easy to understand that she did not want to meet Fyne. And when I mentioned in a discreet murmur that he had come because of her letter she glanced at the hotel door quickly, and moved off a few steps to a position where she could watch the entrance without being seen. I followed her. At the junction of the two thoroughfares she stopped in the thin traffic of the broad pavement and turned to me with an air of challenge. "And so you know."

I told her that I had not seen the letter. I had only heard of it. She was a little impatient. "I mean all about me."

Yes. I knew all about her. The distress of Mr. and Mrs. Fyne — especially of Mrs. Fyne — was so great that they would have shared it with anybody almost — not belonging to their circle of friends. I happened to be at hand — that was all.

"You understand that I am not their friend. I am only a holiday acquaintance."

"She was not very much upset?" queried Flora de Barral, meaning, of course, Mrs. Fyne. And I admitted that she was less so than her husband — and even less than myself. Mrs. Fyne was a very self-possessed person which nothing could startle out of her extreme theoretical position. She did not seem startled when Fyne and I proposed going to the quarry.

"You put that notion into their heads," the girl said.

I advanced that the notion was in their heads already. But it was much more vividly in my head since I had seen her up there with my own eyes, tempting Providence.

She was looking at me with extreme attention, and murmured:

"Is that what you called it to them? Tempting . . ."

"No. I told them that you were making up your mind and I came along just then. I told them that you were saved by me. My shout checked you . . . " She moved her head gently from right to left in negation . . . "No? Well, have it your own way."

I thought to myself: She has found another issue. She wants to forget now. And no wonder. She wants to persuade herself that she had never known such an ugly and poignant minute in her life. "After all," I conceded aloud, "things are not always what they seem."

Her little head with its deep blue eyes, eyes of tenderness and anger under the black arch of fine eyebrows was very still. The mouth looked very red in the white face peeping from under the veil, the little pointed chin had in its form something aggressive. Slight and even angular in her modest black dress she was an appealing and — yes — she was a desirable little figure.

Her lips moved very fast asking me:

“And they believed you at once?”

“Yes, they believed me at once. Mrs. Fyne’s word to us was “Go!”

A white gleam between the red lips was so short that I remained uncertain whether it was a smile or a ferocious baring of little even teeth. The rest of the face preserved its innocent, tense and enigmatical expression. She spoke rapidly.

“No, it wasn’t your shout. I had been there some time before you saw me. And I was not there to tempt Providence, as you call it. I went up there for — for what you thought I was going to do. Yes. I climbed two fences. I did not mean to leave anything to Providence. There seem to be people for whom Providence can do nothing. I suppose you are shocked to hear me talk like that?”

I shook my head. I was not shocked. What had kept her back all that time, till I appeared on the scene below, she went on, was neither fear nor any other kind of hesitation. One reaches a point, she said with appalling youthful simplicity, where nothing that concerns one matters any longer. But something did keep her back. I should have never guessed what it was. She herself confessed that it seemed absurd to say. It was the Fyne dog.

Flora de Barral paused, looking at me, with a peculiar expression and then went on. You see, she imagined the dog had become extremely attached to her. She took it into her head that he might fall over or jump down after her. She tried to drive him away. She spoke sternly to him. It only made him more frisky. He barked and jumped about her skirt in his usual, idiotic, high spirits. He scampered away in circles between the pines charging upon her and leaping as high as her waist. She commanded, “Go away. Go home.” She even picked up from the ground a bit of a broken branch and threw it at him. At this his delight knew no bounds; his rushes became faster, his yapping louder; he seemed to be having the time of his life. She was convinced that the moment she threw herself down he would spring over after her as if it were part of the game. She was vexed almost to

tears. She was touched too. And when he stood still at some distance as if suddenly rooted to the ground wagging his tail slowly and watching her intensely with his shining eyes another fear came to her. She imagined herself gone and the creature sitting on the brink, its head thrown up to the sky and howling for hours. This thought was not to be borne. Then my shout reached her ears.

She told me all this with simplicity. My voice had destroyed her poise — the suicide poise of her mind. Every act of ours, the most criminal, the most mad presupposes a balance of thought, feeling and will, like a correct attitude for an effective stroke in a game. And I had destroyed it. She was no longer in proper form for the act. She was not very much annoyed. Next day would do. She would have to slip away without attracting the notice of the dog. She thought of the necessity almost tenderly. She came down the path carrying her despair with lucid calmness. But when she saw herself deserted by the dog, she had an impulse to turn round, go up again and be done with it. Not even that animal cared for her — in the end.

“I really did think that he was attached to me. What did he want to pretend for, like this? I thought nothing could hurt me any more. Oh yes. I would have gone up, but I felt suddenly so tired. So tired. And then you were there. I didn’t know what you would do. You might have tried to follow me and I didn’t think I could run — not up hill — not then.”

She had raised her white face a little, and it was queer to hear her say these things. At that time of the morning there are comparatively few people out in that part of the town. The broad interminable perspective of the East India Dock Road, the great perspective of drab brick walls, of grey pavement, of muddy roadway rumbling dismally with loaded carts and vans lost itself in the distance, imposing and shabby in its spacious meanness of aspect, in its immeasurable poverty of forms, of colouring, of life — under a harsh, unconcerned sky dried by the wind to a clear blue. It had been raining during the night. The sunshine itself seemed poor. From time to time a few bits of paper, a little dust and straw whirled past us on the broad flat promontory of the pavement before the rounded front of the hotel.

Flora de Barral was silent for a while. I said:

“And next day you thought better of it.”

Again she raised her eyes to mine with that peculiar expression of informed innocence; and again her white cheeks took on the faintest tinge of pink — the merest shadow of a blush.

“Next day,” she uttered distinctly, “I didn’t think. I remembered. That was enough. I remembered what I should never have forgotten. Never. And Captain Anthony arrived at the cottage in the evening.”

“Ah yes. Captain Anthony,” I murmured. And she repeated also in a murmur, “Yes! Captain Anthony.” The faint flush of warm life left her face. I subdued my voice still more and not looking at her: “You found him sympathetic?” I ventured.

Her long dark lashes went down a little with an air of calculated discretion. At least so it seemed to me. And yet no one could say that I was inimical to that girl. But there you are! Explain it as you may, in this world the friendless, like the poor, are always a little suspect, as if honesty and delicacy were only possible to the privileged few.

“Why do you ask?” she said after a time, raising her eyes suddenly to mine in an effect of candour which on the same principle (of the disinherited not being to be trusted) might have been judged equivocal.

“If you mean what right I have . . . “ She move slightly a hand in a worn brown glove as much as to say she could not question anyone’s right against such an outcast as herself.

I ought to have been moved perhaps; but I only noted the total absence of humility . . . “No right at all,” I continued, “but just interest. Mrs. Fyne — it’s too difficult to explain how it came about — has talked to me of you — well — extensively.”

No doubt Mrs. Fyne had told me the truth, Flora said brusquely with an unexpected hoarseness of tone. This very dress she was wearing had been given her by Mrs. Fyne. Of course I looked at it. It could not have been a recent gift. Close-fitting and black, with heliotrope silk facings under a figured net, it looked far from new, just on this side of shabbiness; in fact, it accentuated the slightness of her figure, it went well in its suggestion of half mourning with the white face in which the unsmiling red lips alone seemed warm with the rich blood of life and passion.

Little Fyne was staying up there an unconscionable time. Was he arguing, preaching, remonstrating? Had he discovered in himself a capacity and a taste for that sort of thing? Or was he perhaps, in an intense dislike for the job, beating about the bush and only puzzling Captain Anthony, the providential man, who, if he expected the girl to appear at any moment, must have been on tenterhooks all the time, and beside himself with impatience to see the back of his brother-in-law. How was it that he had not



got rid of Fyne long before in any case? I don't mean by actually throwing him out of the window, but in some other resolute manner.

Surely Fyne had not impressed him. That he was an impressionable man I could not doubt. The presence of the girl there on the pavement before me proved this up to the hilt — and, well, yes, touchingly enough.

It so happened that in their wanderings to and fro our glances met. They met and remained in contact more familiar than a hand-clasp, more communicative, more expressive. There was something comic too in the whole situation, in the poor girl and myself waiting together on the broad pavement at a corner public-house for the issue of Fyne's ridiculous mission. But the comic when it is human becomes quickly painful. Yes, she was infinitely anxious. And I was asking myself whether this poignant tension of her suspense depended — to put it plainly — on hunger or love.

The answer would have been of some interest to Captain Anthony. For my part, in the presence of a young girl I always become convinced that the dreams of sentiment — like the consoling mysteries of Faith — are invincible; that it is never never reason which governs men and women.

Yet what sentiment could there have been on her part? I remembered her tone only a moment since when she said: "That evening Captain Anthony arrived at the cottage." And considering, too, what the arrival of Captain Anthony meant in this connection, I wondered at the calmness with which she could mention that fact. He arrived at the cottage. In the evening. I knew that late train. He probably walked from the station. The evening would be well advanced. I could almost see a dark indistinct figure opening the wicket gate of the garden. Where was she? Did she see him enter? Was she somewhere near by and did she hear without the slightest premonition his chance and fateful footsteps on the flagged path leading to the cottage door? In the shadow of the night made more cruelly sombre for her by the very shadow of death he must have appeared too strange, too remote, too unknown to impress himself on her thought as a living force — such a force as a man can bring to bear on a woman's destiny.

She glanced towards the hotel door again; I followed suit and then our eyes met once more, this time intentionally. A tentative, uncertain intimacy was springing up between us two. She said simply: "You are waiting for Mr. Fyne to come out; are you?"

I admitted to her that I was waiting to see Mr. Fyne come out. That was all. I had nothing to say to him.

“I have said yesterday all I had to say to him,” I added meaningly. “I have said it to them both, in fact. I have also heard all they had to say.”

“About me?” she murmured.

“Yes. The conversation was about you.”

“I wonder if they told you everything.”

If she wondered I could do nothing else but wonder too. But I did not tell her that. I only smiled. The material point was that Captain Anthony should be told everything. But as to that I was very certain that the good sister would see to it. Was there anything more to disclose — some other misery, some other deception of which that girl had been a victim? It seemed hardly probable. It was not even easy to imagine. What struck me most was her — I suppose I must call it — composure. One could not tell whether she understood what she had done. One wondered. She was not so much unreadable as blank; and I did not know whether to admire her for it or dismiss her from my thoughts as a passive butt of ferocious misfortune.

Looking back at the occasion when we first got on speaking terms on the road by the quarry, I had to admit that she presented some points of a problematic appearance. I don’t know why I imagined Captain Anthony as the sort of man who would not be likely to take the initiative; not perhaps from indifference but from that peculiar timidity before women which often enough is found in conjunction with chivalrous instincts, with a great need for affection and great stability of feelings. Such men are easily moved. At the least encouragement they go forward with the eagerness, with the recklessness of starvation. This accounted for the suddenness of the affair. No! With all her inexperience this girl could not have found any great difficulty in her conquering enterprise. She must have begun it. And yet there she was, patient, almost unmoved, almost pitiful, waiting outside like a beggar, without a right to anything but compassion, for a promised dole.

Every moment people were passing close by us, singly, in two and threes; the inhabitants of that end of the town where life goes on unadorned by grace or splendour; they passed us in their shabby garments, with sallow faces, haggard, anxious or weary, or simply without expression, in an unsmiling sombre stream not made up of lives but of mere unconsidered existences whose joys, struggles, thoughts, sorrows and their very hopes were miserable, glamourless, and of no account in the world. And when one thought of their reality to themselves one’s heart became oppressed. But of all the individuals who passed by none appeared to me for the

moment so pathetic in unconscious patience as the girl standing before me; none more difficult to understand. It is perhaps because I was thinking of things which I could not ask her about.

In fact we had nothing to say to each other; but we two, strangers as we really were to each other, had dealt with the most intimate and final of subjects, the subject of death. It had created a sort of bond between us. It made our silence weighty and uneasy. I ought to have left her there and then; but, as I think I've told you before, the fact of having shouted her away from the edge of a precipice seemed somehow to have engaged my responsibility as to this other leap. And so we had still an intimate subject between us to lend more weight and more uneasiness to our silence. The subject of marriage. I use the word not so much in reference to the ceremony itself (I had no doubt of this, Captain Anthony being a decent fellow) or in view of the social institution in general, as to which I have no opinion, but in regard to the human relation. The first two views are not particularly interesting. The ceremony, I suppose, is adequate; the institution, I dare say, is useful or it would not have endured. But the human relation thus recognized is a mysterious thing in its origins, character and consequences. Unfortunately you can't buttonhole familiarly a young girl as you would a young fellow. I don't think that even another woman could really do it. She would not be trusted. There is not between women that fund of at least conditional loyalty which men may depend on in their dealings with each other. I believe that any woman would rather trust a man. The difficulty in such a delicate case was how to get on terms.

So we held our peace in the odious uproar of that wide roadway thronged with heavy carts. Great vans carrying enormous piled-up loads advanced swaying like mountains. It was as if the whole world existed only for selling and buying and those who had nothing to do with the movement of merchandise were of no account.

"You must be tired," I said. One had to say something if only to assert oneself against that wearisome, passionless and crushing uproar. She raised her eyes for a moment. No, she was not. Not very. She had not walked all the way. She came by train as far as Whitechapel Station and had only walked from there.

She had had an ugly pilgrimage; but whether of love or of necessity who could tell? And that precisely was what I should have liked to get at. This was not however a question to be asked point-blank, and I could not think

of any effective circumlocution. It occurred to me too that she might conceivably know nothing of it herself — I mean by reflection. That young woman had been obviously considering death. She had gone the length of forming some conception of it. But as to its companion fatality — love, she, I was certain, had never reflected upon its meaning.

With that man in the hotel, whom I did not know, and this girl standing before me in the street I felt that it was an exceptional case. He had broken away from his surroundings; she stood outside the pale. One aspect of conventions which people who declaim against them lose sight of is that conventions make both joy and suffering easier to bear in a becoming manner. But those two were outside all conventions. They would be as untrammelled in a sense as the first man and the first woman. The trouble was that I could not imagine anything about Flora de Barral and the brother of Mrs. Fyne. Or, if you like, I could imagine anything which comes practically to the same thing. Darkness and chaos are first cousins. I should have liked to ask the girl for a word which would give my imagination its line. But how was one to venture so far? I can be rough sometimes but I am not naturally impertinent. I would have liked to ask her for instance: “Do you know what you have done with yourself?” A question like that. Anyhow it was time for one of us to say something. A question it must be. And the question I asked was: “So he’s going to show you the ship?”

She seemed glad I had spoken at last and glad of the opportunity to speak herself.

“Yes. He said he would — this morning. Did you say you did not know Captain Anthony?”

“No. I don’t know him. Is he anything like his sister?”

She looked startled and murmured “Sister!” in a puzzled tone which astonished me. “Oh! Mrs. Fyne,” she exclaimed, recollecting herself, and avoiding my eyes while I looked at her curiously.

What an extraordinary detachment! And all the time the stream of shabby people was hastening by us, with the continuous dreary shuffling of weary footsteps on the flagstones. The sunshine falling on the grime of surfaces, on the poverty of tones and forms seemed of an inferior quality, its joy faded, its brilliance tarnished and dusty. I had to raise my voice in the dull vibrating noise of the roadway.

“You don’t mean to say you have forgotten the connection?”

She cried readily enough: "I wasn't thinking." And then, while I wondered what could have been the images occupying her brain at this time, she asked me: "You didn't see my letter to Mrs. Fyne — did you?"

"No. I didn't," I shouted. Just then the racket was distracting, a pair-horse trolley lightly loaded with loose rods of iron passing slowly very near us. "I wasn't trusted so far." And remembering Mrs. Fyne's hints that the girl was unbalanced, I added: "Was it an unreserved confession you wrote?"

She did not answer me for a time, and as I waited I thought that there's nothing like a confession to make one look mad; and that of all confessions a written one is the most detrimental all round. Never confess! Never, never! An untimely joke is a source of bitter regret always. Sometimes it may ruin a man; not because it is a joke, but because it is untimely. And a confession of whatever sort is always untimely. The only thing which makes it supportable for a while is curiosity. You smile? Ah, but it is so, or else people would be sent to the rightabout at the second sentence. How many sympathetic souls can you reckon on in the world? One in ten, one in a hundred — in a thousand — in ten thousand? Ah! What a sell these confessions are! What a horrible sell! You seek sympathy, and all you get is the most evanescent sense of relief — if you get that much. For a confession, whatever it may be, stirs the secret depths of the hearer's character. Often depths that he himself is but dimly aware of. And so the righteous triumph secretly, the lucky are amused, the strong are disgusted, the weak either upset or irritated with you according to the measure of their sincerity with themselves. And all of them in their hearts brand you for either mad or impudent . . . "

I had seldom seen Marlow so vehement, so pessimistic, so earnestly cynical before. I cut his declamation short by asking what answer Flora de Barral had given to his question. "Did the poor girl admit firing off her confidences at Mrs. Fyne — eight pages of close writing — that sort of thing?"

Marlow shook his head.

"She did not tell me. I accepted her silence, as a kind of answer and remarked that it would have been better if she had simply announced the fact to Mrs. Fyne at the cottage. "Why didn't you do it?" I asked point-blank.

She said: "I am not a very plucky girl." She looked up at me and added meaningly: "And you know it. And you know why."

I must remark that she seemed to have become very subdued since our first meeting at the quarry. Almost a different person from the defiant, angry and despairing girl with quivering lips and resentful glances.

"I thought it was very sensible of you to get away from that sheer drop," I said.

She looked up with something of that old expression.

"That's not what I mean. I see you will have it that you saved my life. Nothing of the kind. I was concerned for that vile little beast of a dog. No! It was the idea of — of doing away with myself which was cowardly. That's what I meant by saying I am not a very plucky girl."

"Oh!" I retorted airily. "That little dog. He isn't really a bad little dog." But she lowered her eyelids and went on:

"I was so miserable that I could think only of myself. This was mean. It was cruel too. And besides I had not given it up — not then."

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Marlow changed his tone.

"I don't know much of the psychology of self-destruction. It's a sort of subject one has few opportunities to study closely. I knew a man once who came to my rooms one evening, and while smoking a cigar confessed to me moodily that he was trying to discover some graceful way of retiring out of existence. I didn't study his case, but I had a glimpse of him the other day at a cricket match, with some women, having a good time. That seems a fairly reasonable attitude. Considered as a sin, it is a case for repentance before the throne of a merciful God. But I imagine that Flora de Barral's religion under the care of the distinguished governess could have been nothing but outward formality. Remorse in the sense of gnawing shame and unavailing regret is only understandable to me when some wrong had been done to a fellow-creature. But why she, that girl who existed on sufferance, so to speak — why she should writhe inwardly with remorse because she had once thought of getting rid of a life which was nothing in every respect but a curse — that I could not understand. I thought it was very likely some obscure influence of common forms of speech, some traditional or inherited feeling — a vague notion that suicide is a legal crime; words of old moralists and preachers which remain in the air and help to form all the authorized moral conventions. Yes, I was surprised at her remorse. But lowering her glance unexpectedly till her dark eye-lashes seemed to rest

against her white cheeks she presented a perfectly demure aspect. It was so attractive that I could not help a faint smile. That Flora de Barral should ever, in any aspect, have the power to evoke a smile was the very last thing I should have believed. She went on after a slight hesitation:

“One day I started for there, for that place.”

Look at the influence of a mere play of physiognomy! If you remember what we were talking about you will hardly believe that I caught myself grinning down at that demure little girl. I must say too that I felt more friendly to her at the moment than ever before.

“Oh, you did? To take that jump? You are a determined young person. Well, what happened that time?”

An almost imperceptible alteration in her bearing; a slight droop of her head perhaps — a mere nothing — made her look more demure than ever.

“I had left the cottage,” she began a little hurriedly. “I was walking along the road — you know, the road. I had made up my mind I was not coming back this time.”

I won’t deny that these words spoken from under the brim of her hat (oh yes, certainly, her head was down — she had put it down) gave me a thrill; for indeed I had never doubted her sincerity. It could never have been a make-believe despair.

“Yes,” I whispered. “You were going along the road.”

“When . . . “ Again she hesitated with an effect of innocent shyness worlds asunder from tragic issues; then glided on . . . “When suddenly Captain Anthony came through a gate out of a field.”

I coughed down the beginning of a most improper fit of laughter, and felt ashamed of myself. Her eyes raised for a moment seemed full of innocent suffering and unexpressed menace in the depths of the dilated pupils within the rings of sombre blue. It was — how shall I say it? — a night effect when you seem to see vague shapes and don’t know what reality you may come upon at any time. Then she lowered her eyelids again, shutting all mysteriousness out of the situation except for the sobering memory of that glance, nightlike in the sunshine, expressively still in the brutal unrest of the street.

“So Captain Anthony joined you — did he?”

“He opened a field-gate and walked out on the road. He crossed to my side and went on with me. He had his pipe in his hand. He said: ‘Are you going far this morning?’”

These words (I was watching her white face as she spoke) gave me a slight shudder. She remained demure, almost prim. And I remarked:

“You have been talking together before, of course.”

“Not more than twenty words altogether since he arrived,” she declared without emphasis. “That day he had said ‘Good morning’ to me when we met at breakfast two hours before. And I said good morning to him. I did not see him afterwards till he came out on the road.”

I thought to myself that this was not accidental. He had been observing her. I felt certain also that he had not been asking any questions of Mrs. Fyne.

“I wouldn’t look at him,” said Flora de Barral. “I had done with looking at people. He said to me: ‘My sister does not put herself out much for us. We had better keep each other company. I have read every book there is in that cottage.’ I walked on. He did not leave me. I thought he ought to. But he didn’t. He didn’t seem to notice that I would not talk to him.”

She was now perfectly still. The wretched little parasol hung down against her dress from her joined hands. I was rigid with attention. It isn’t every day that one culls such a volunteered tale on a girl’s lips. The ugly street-noises swelling up for a moment covered the next few words she said. It was vexing. The next word I heard was “worried.”

“It worried you to have him there, walking by your side.”

“Yes. Just that,” she went on with downcast eyes. There was something prettily comical in her attitude and her tone, while I pictured to myself a poor white-faced girl walking to her death with an unconscious man striding by her side. Unconscious? I don’t know. First of all, I felt certain that this was no chance meeting. Something had happened before. Was he a man for a coup-de-foudre, the lightning stroke of love? I don’t think so. That sort of susceptibility is luckily rare. A world of inflammable lovers of the Romeo and Juliet type would very soon end in barbarism and misery. But it is a fact that in every man (not in every woman) there lives a lover; a lover who is called out in all his potentialities often by the most insignificant little things — as long as they come at the psychological moment: the glimpse of a face at an unusual angle, an evanescent attitude, the curve of a cheek often looked at before, perhaps, but then, at the moment, charged with astonishing significance. These are great mysteries, of course. Magic signs.



I don't know in what the sign consisted in this case. It might have been her pallor (it wasn't pasty nor yet papery) that white face with eyes like blue gleams of fire and lips like red coals. In certain lights, in certain poises of head it suggested tragic sorrow. Or it might have been her wavy hair. Or even just that pointed chin stuck out a little, resentful and not particularly distinguished, doing away with the mysterious aloofness of her fragile presence. But any way at a given moment Anthony must have suddenly seen the girl. And then, that something had happened to him. Perhaps nothing more than the thought coming into his head that this was "a possible woman."

Followed this waylaying! Its resolute character makes me think it was the chin's doing; that "common mortal" touch which stands in such good stead to some women. Because men, I mean really masculine men, those whose generations have evolved an ideal woman, are often very timid. Who wouldn't be before the ideal? It's your sentimental trifter, who has just missed being nothing at all, who is enterprising, simply because it is easy to appear enterprising when one does not mean to put one's belief to the test.

Well, whatever it was that encouraged him, Captain Anthony stuck to Flora de Barral in a manner which in a timid man might have been called heroic if it had not been so simple. Whether policy, diplomacy, simplicity, or just inspiration, he kept up his talk, rather deliberate, with very few pauses. Then suddenly as if recollecting himself:

"It's funny. I don't think you are annoyed with me for giving you my company unasked. But why don't you say something?"

I asked Miss de Barral what answer she made to this query.

"I made no answer," she said in that even, unemotional low voice which seemed to be her voice for delicate confidences. "I walked on. He did not seem to mind. We came to the foot of the quarry where the road winds up hill, past the place where you were sitting by the roadside that day. I began to wonder what I should do. After we reached the top Captain Anthony said that he had not been for a walk with a lady for years and years — almost since he was a boy. We had then come to where I ought to have turned off and struck across a field. I thought of making a run of it. But he would have caught me up. I knew he would; and, of course, he would not have allowed me. I couldn't give him the slip."

"Why didn't you ask him to leave you?" I inquired curiously.

“He would not have taken any notice,” she went on steadily. “And what could I have done then? I could not have started quarrelling with him — could I? I hadn’t enough energy to get angry. I felt very tired suddenly. I just stumbled on straight along the road. Captain Anthony told me that the family — some relations of his mother — he used to know in Liverpool was broken up now, and he had never made any friends since. All gone their different ways. All the girls married. Nice girls they were and very friendly to him when he was but little more than a boy. He repeated: ‘Very nice, cheery, clever girls.’ I sat down on a bank against a hedge and began to cry.”

“You must have astonished him not a little,” I observed.

Anthony, it seems, remained on the road looking down at her. He did not offer to approach her, neither did he make any other movement or gesture. Flora de Barral told me all this. She could see him through her tears, blurred to a mere shadow on the white road, and then again becoming more distinct, but always absolutely still and as if lost in thought before a strange phenomenon which demanded the closest possible attention.

Flora learned later that he had never seen a woman cry; not in that way, at least. He was impressed and interested by the mysteriousness of the effect. She was very conscious of being looked at, but was not able to stop herself crying. In fact, she was not capable of any effort. Suddenly he advanced two steps, stooped, caught hold of her hands lying on her lap and pulled her up to her feet; she found herself standing close to him almost before she realized what he had done. Some people were coming briskly along the road and Captain Anthony muttered: “You don’t want to be stared at. What about that stile over there? Can we go back across the fields?”

She snatched her hands out of his grasp (it seems he had omitted to let them go), marched away from him and got over the stile. It was a big field sprinkled profusely with white sheep. A trodden path crossed it diagonally. After she had gone more than half way she turned her head for the first time. Keeping five feet or so behind, Captain Anthony was following her with an air of extreme interest. Interest or eagerness. At any rate she caught an expression on his face which frightened her. But not enough to make her run. And indeed it would have had to be something incredibly awful to scare into a run a girl who had come to the end of her courage to live.

As if encouraged by this glance over the shoulder Captain Anthony came up boldly, and now that he was by her side, she felt his nearness intimately, like a touch. She tried to disregard this sensation. But she was not angry with him now. It wasn't worth while. She was thankful that he had the sense not to ask questions as to this crying. Of course he didn't ask because he didn't care. No one in the world cared for her, neither those who pretended nor yet those who did not pretend. She preferred the latter.

Captain Anthony opened for her a gate into another field; when they got through he kept walking abreast, elbow to elbow almost. His voice growled pleasantly in her very ear. Staying in this dull place was enough to give anyone the blues. His sister scribbled all day. It was positively unkind. He alluded to his nieces as rude, selfish monkeys, without either feelings or manners. And he went on to talk about his ship being laid up for a month and dismantled for repairs. The worst was that on arriving in London he found he couldn't get the rooms he was used to, where they made him as comfortable as such a confirmed sea-dog as himself could be anywhere on shore.

In the effort to subdue by dint of talking and to keep in check the mysterious, the profound attraction he felt already for that delicate being of flesh and blood, with pale cheeks, with darkened eyelids and eyes scalded with hot tears, he went on speaking of himself as a confirmed enemy of life on shore — a perfect terror to a simple man, what with the fads and proprieties and the ceremonies and affectations. He hated all that. He wasn't fit for it. There was no rest and peace and security but on the sea.

This gave one a view of Captain Anthony as a hermit withdrawn from a wicked world. It was amusingly unexpected to me and nothing more. But it must have appealed straight to that bruised and battered young soul. Still shrinking from his nearness she had ended by listening to him with avidity. His deep murmuring voice soothed her. And she thought suddenly that there was peace and rest in the grave too.

She heard him say: "Look at my sister. She isn't a bad woman by any means. She asks me here because it's right and proper, I suppose, but she has no use for me. There you have your shore people. I quite understand anybody crying. I would have been gone already, only, truth to say, I haven't any friends to go to." He added brusquely: "And you?"

She made a slight negative sign. He must have been observing her, putting two and two together. After a pause he said simply: "When I first

came here I thought you were governess to these girls. My sister didn't say a word about you to me."

Then Flora spoke for the first time.

"Mrs. Fyne is my best friend."

"So she is mine," he said without the slightest irony or bitterness, but added with conviction: "That shows you what life ashore is. Much better be out of it."

As they were approaching the cottage he was heard again as though a long silent walk had not intervened: "But anyhow I shan't ask her anything about you."

He stopped short and she went on alone. His last words had impressed her. Everything he had said seemed somehow to have a special meaning under its obvious conversational sense. Till she went in at the door of the cottage she felt his eyes resting on her.

That is it. He had made himself felt. That girl was, one may say, washing about with slack limbs in the ugly surf of life with no opportunity to strike out for herself, when suddenly she had been made to feel that there was somebody beside her in the bitter water. A most considerable moral event for her; whether she was aware of it or not. They met again at the one o'clock dinner. I am inclined to think that, being a healthy girl under her frail appearance, and fast walking and what I may call relief-crying (there are many kinds of crying) making one hungry, she made a good meal. It was Captain Anthony who had no appetite. His sister commented on it in a curt, businesslike manner, and the eldest of his delightful nieces said mockingly: "You have been taking too much exercise this morning, Uncle Roderick." The mild Uncle Roderick turned upon her with a "What do you know about it, young lady?" so charged with suppressed savagery that the whole round table gave one gasp and went dumb for the rest of the meal. He took no notice whatever of Flora de Barral. I don't think it was from prudence or any calculated motive. I believe he was so full of her aspects that he did not want to look in her direction when there were other people to hamper his imagination.

You understand I am piecing here bits of disconnected statements. Next day Flora saw him leaning over the field-gate. When she told me this, I didn't of course ask her how it was she was there. Probably she could not have told me how it was she was there. The difficulty here is to keep

steadily in view the then conditions of her existence, a combination of dreariness and horror.

That hermit-like but not exactly misanthropic sailor was leaning over the gate moodily. When he saw the white-faced restless Flora drifting like a lost thing along the road he put his pipe in his pocket and called out "Good morning, Miss Smith" in a tone of amazing happiness. She, with one foot in life and the other in a nightmare, was at the same time inert and unstable, and very much at the mercy of sudden impulses. She swerved, came distractedly right up to the gate and looking straight into his eyes: "I am not Miss Smith. That's not my name. Don't call me by it."

She was shaking as if in a passion. His eyes expressed nothing; he only unlatched the gate in silence, grasped her arm and drew her in. Then closing it with a kick —

"Not your name? That's all one to me. Your name's the least thing about you I care for." He was leading her firmly away from the gate though she resisted slightly. There was a sort of joy in his eyes which frightened her. "You are not a princess in disguise," he said with an unexpected laugh she found blood-curdling. "And that's all I care for. You had better understand that I am not blind and not a fool. And then it's plain for even a fool to see that things have been going hard with you. You are on a lee shore and eating your heart out with worry."

What seemed most awful to her was the elated light in his eyes, the rapacious smile that would come and go on his lips as if he were gloating over her misery. But her misery was his opportunity and he rejoiced while the tenderest pity seemed to flood his whole being. He pointed out to her that she knew who he was. He was Mrs. Fyne's brother. And, well, if his sister was the best friend she had in the world, then, by Jove, it was about time somebody came along to look after her a little.

Flora had tried more than once to free herself, but he tightened his grasp of her arm each time and even shook it a little without ceasing to speak. The nearness of his face intimidated her. He seemed striving to look her through. It was obvious the world had been using her ill. And even as he spoke with indignation the very marks and stamp of this ill-usage of which he was so certain seemed to add to the inexplicable attraction he felt for her person. It was not pity alone, I take it. It was something more spontaneous, perverse and exciting. It gave him the feeling that if only he could get hold of her, no woman would belong to him so completely as this woman.

“Whatever your troubles,” he said, “I am the man to take you away from them; that is, if you are not afraid. You told me you had no friends. Neither have I. Nobody ever cared for me as far as I can remember. Perhaps you could. Yes, I live on the sea. But who would you be parting from? No one. You have no one belonging to you.”

At this point she broke away from him and ran. He did not pursue her. The tall hedges tossing in the wind, the wide fields, the clouds driving over the sky and the sky itself wheeled about her in masses of green and white and blue as if the world were breaking up silently in a whirl, and her foot at the next step were bound to find the void. She reached the gate all right, got out, and, once on the road, discovered that she had not the courage to look back. The rest of that day she spent with the Fyne girls who gave her to understand that she was a slow and unprofitable person. Long after tea, nearly at dusk, Captain Anthony (the son of the poet) appeared suddenly before her in the little garden in front of the cottage. They were alone for the moment. The wind had dropped. In the calm evening air the voices of Mrs. Fyne and the girls strolling aimlessly on the road could be heard. He said to her severely:

“You have understood?”

She looked at him in silence.

“That I love you,” he finished.

She shook her head the least bit.

“Don’t you believe me?” he asked in a low, infuriated voice.

“Nobody would love me,” she answered in a very quiet tone. “Nobody could.”

He was dumb for a time, astonished beyond measure, as he well might have been. He doubted his ears. He was outraged.

“Eh? What? Can’t love you? What do you know about it? It’s my affair, isn’t it? You dare say that to a man who has just told you! You must be mad!”

“Very nearly,” she said with the accent of pent-up sincerity, and even relieved because she was able to say something which she felt was true. For the last few days she had felt herself several times near that madness which is but an intolerable lucidity of apprehension.

The clear voices of Mrs. Fyne and the girls were coming nearer, sounding affected in the peace of the passion-laden earth. He began storming at her hastily.

“Nonsense! Nobody can . . . Indeed! Pah! You’ll have to be shown that somebody can. I can. Nobody . . . “ He made a contemptuous hissing noise. “More likely you can’t. They have done something to you. Something’s crushed your pluck. You can’t face a man — that’s what it is. What made you like this? Where do you come from? You have been put upon. The scoundrels — whoever they are, men or women, seem to have robbed you of your very name. You say you are not Miss Smith. Who are you, then?”

She did not answer. He muttered, “Not that I care,” and fell silent, because the fatuous self-confident chatter of the Fyne girls could be heard at the very gate. But they were not going to bed yet. They passed on. He waited a little in silence and immobility, then stamped his foot and lost control of himself. He growled at her in a savage passion. She felt certain that he was threatening her and calling her names. She was no stranger to abuse, as we know, but there seemed to be a particular kind of ferocity in this which was new to her. She began to tremble. The especially terrifying thing was that she could not make out the nature of these awful menaces and names. Not a word. Yet it was not the shrinking anguish of her other experiences of angry scenes. She made a mighty effort, though her knees were knocking together, and in an expiring voice demanded that he should let her go indoors. “Don’t stop me. It’s no use. It’s no use,” she repeated faintly, feeling an invincible obstinacy rising within her, yet without anger against that raging man.

He became articulate suddenly, and, without raising his voice, perfectly audible.

“No use! No use! You dare stand here and tell me that — you white-faced wisp, you wreath of mist, you little ghost of all the sorrow in the world. You dare! Haven’t I been looking at you? You are all eyes. What makes your cheeks always so white as if you had seen something . . . Don’t speak. I love it . . . No use! And you really think that I can now go to sea for a year or more, to the other side of the world somewhere, leaving you behind. Why! You would vanish . . . what little there is of you. Some rough wind will blow you away altogether. You have no holding ground on earth. Well, then trust yourself to me — to the sea — which is deep like your eyes.”

She said: “Impossible.” He kept quiet for a while, then asked in a totally changed tone, a tone of gloomy curiosity:

“You can’t stand me then? Is that it?”

“No,” she said, more steady herself. “I am not thinking of you at all.”

The inane voices of the Fyne girls were heard over the sombre fields calling to each other, thin and clear. He muttered: “You could try to. Unless you are thinking of somebody else.”

“Yes. I am thinking of somebody else, of someone who has nobody to think of him but me.”

His shadowy form stepped out of her way, and suddenly leaned sideways against the wooden support of the porch. And as she stood still, surprised by this staggering movement, his voice spoke up in a tone quite strange to her.

“Go in then. Go out of my sight — I thought you said nobody could love you.”

She was passing him when suddenly he struck her as so forlorn that she was inspired to say: “No one has ever loved me — not in that way — if that’s what you mean. Nobody would.”

He detached himself brusquely from the post, and she did not shrink; but Mrs. Fyne and the girls were already at the gate.

All he understood was that everything was not over yet. There was no time to lose; Mrs. Fyne and the girls had come in at the gate. He whispered “Wait” with such authority (he was the son of Carleon Anthony, the domestic autocrat) that it did arrest her for a moment, long enough to hear him say that he could not be left like this to puzzle over her nonsense all night. She was to slip down again into the garden later on, as soon as she could do so without being heard. He would be there waiting for her till — till daylight. She didn’t think he could go to sleep, did she? And she had better come, or — he broke off on an unfinished threat.

She vanished into the unlighted cottage just as Mrs. Fyne came up to the porch. Nervous, holding her breath in the darkness of the living-room, she heard her best friend say: “You ought to have joined us, Roderick.” And then: “Have you seen Miss Smith anywhere?”

Flora shuddered, expecting Anthony to break out into betraying imprecations on Miss Smith’s head, and cause a painful and humiliating explanation. She imagined him full of his mysterious ferocity. To her great surprise, Anthony’s voice sounded very much as usual, with perhaps a slight tinge of grimness. “Miss Smith! No. I’ve seen no Miss Smith.”

Mrs. Fyne seemed satisfied — and not much concerned really.



Flora, relieved, got clear away to her room upstairs, and shutting her door quietly, dropped into a chair. She was used to reproaches, abuse, to all sorts of wicked ill usage — short of actual beating on her body. Otherwise inexplicable angers had cut and slashed and trampled down her youth without mercy — and mainly, it appeared, because she was the financier de Barral's daughter and also condemned to a degrading sort of poverty through the action of treacherous men who had turned upon her father in his hour of need. And she thought with the tenderest possible affection of that upright figure buttoned up in a long frock-coat, soft-voiced and having but little to say to his girl. She seemed to feel his hand closed round hers. On his flying visits to Brighton he would always walk hand in hand with her. People stared covertly at them; the band was playing; and there was the sea — the blue gaiety of the sea. They were quietly happy together . . . It was all over!

An immense anguish of the present wrung her heart, and she nearly cried aloud. That dread of what was before her which had been eating up her courage slowly in the course of odious years, flamed up into an access of panic, that sort of headlong panic which had already driven her out twice to the top of the cliff-like quarry. She jumped up saying to herself: "Why not now? At once! Yes. I'll do it now — in the dark!" The very horror of it seemed to give her additional resolution.

She came down the staircase quietly, and only on the point of opening the door and because of the discovery that it was unfastened, she remembered Captain Anthony's threat to stay in the garden all night. She hesitated. She did not understand the mood of that man clearly. He was violent. But she had gone beyond the point where things matter. What would he think of her coming down to him — as he would naturally suppose. And even that didn't matter. He could not despise her more than she despised herself. She must have been light-headed because the thought came into her mind that should he get into ungovernable fury from disappointment, and perchance strangle her, it would be as good a way to be done with it as any.

"You had that thought," I exclaimed in wonder.

With downcast eyes and speaking with an almost painstaking precision (her very lips, her red lips, seemed to move just enough to be heard and no more), she said that, yes, the thought came into her head. This makes one shudder at the mysterious ways girls acquire knowledge. For this was a thought, wild enough, I admit, but which could only have come from the

depths of that sort of experience which she had not had, and went far beyond a young girl's possible conception of the strongest and most veiled of human emotions.

"He was there, of course?" I said.

"Yes, he was there." She saw him on the path directly she stepped outside the porch. He was very still. It was as though he had been standing there with his face to the door for hours.

Shaken up by the changing moods of passion and tenderness, he must have been ready for any extravagance of conduct. Knowing the profound silence each night brought to that nook of the country, I could imagine them having the feeling of being the only two people on the wide earth. A row of six or seven lofty elms just across the road opposite the cottage made the night more obscure in that little garden. If these two could just make out each other that was all.

"Well! And were you very much terrified?" I asked.

She made me wait a little before she said, raising her eyes: "He was gentleness itself."

I noticed three abominable, drink-sodden loafers, sallow and dirty, who had come to range themselves in a row within ten feet of us against the front of the public-house. They stared at Flora de Barral's back with unseeing, mournful fixity.

"Let's move this way a little," I proposed.

She turned at once and we made a few paces; not too far to take us out of sight of the hotel door, but very nearly. I could just keep my eyes on it. After all, I had not been so very long with the girl. If you were to disentangle the words we actually exchanged from my comments you would see that they were not so very many, including everything she had so unexpectedly told me of her story. No, not so very many. And now it seemed as though there would be no more. No! I could expect no more. The confidence was wonderful enough in its nature as far as it went, and perhaps not to have been expected from any other girl under the sun. And I felt a little ashamed. The origin of our intimacy was too gruesome. It was as if listening to her I had taken advantage of having seen her poor bewildered, scared soul without its veils. But I was curious, too; or, to render myself justice without false modesty — I was anxious; anxious to know a little more.

I felt like a blackmailer all the same when I made my attempt with a light-hearted remark.

“And so you gave up that walk you proposed to take?”

“Yes, I gave up the walk,” she said slowly before raising her downcast eyes. When she did so it was with an extraordinary effect. It was like catching sight of a piece of blue sky, of a stretch of open water. And for a moment I understood the desire of that man to whom the sea and sky of his solitary life had appeared suddenly incomplete without that glance which seemed to belong to them both. He was not for nothing the son of a poet. I looked into those unabashed eyes while the girl went on, her demure appearance and precise tone changed to a very earnest expression. Woman is various indeed.

“But I want you to understand, Mr. . . . “ she had actually to think of my name . . . “Mr. Marlow, that I have written to Mrs. Fyne that I haven’t been — that I have done nothing to make Captain Anthony behave to me as he had behaved. I haven’t. I haven’t. It isn’t my doing. It isn’t my fault — if she likes to put it in that way. But she, with her ideas, ought to understand that I couldn’t, that I couldn’t . . . I know she hates me now. I think she never liked me. I think nobody ever cared for me. I was told once nobody could care for me; and I think it is true. At any rate I can’t forget it.”

Her abominable experience with the governess had implanted in her unlucky breast a lasting doubt, an ineradicable suspicion of herself and of others. I said:

“Remember, Miss de Barral, that to be fair you must trust a man altogether — or not at all.”

She dropped her eyes suddenly. I thought I heard a faint sigh. I tried to take a light tone again, and yet it seemed impossible to get off the ground which gave me my standing with her.

“Mrs. Fyne is absurd. She’s an excellent woman, but really you could not be expected to throw away your chance of life simply that she might cherish a good opinion of your memory. That would be excessive.”

“It was not of my life that I was thinking while Captain Anthony was — was speaking to me,” said Flora de Barral with an effort.

I told her that she was wrong then. She ought to have been thinking of her life, and not only of her life but of the life of the man who was speaking to her too. She let me finish, then shook her head impatiently.

“I mean — death.”

“Well,” I said, “when he stood before you there, outside the cottage, he really stood between you and that. I have it out of your own mouth. You can’t deny it.”

“If you will have it that he saved my life, then he has got it. It was not for me. Oh no! It was not for me that I — It was not fear! There!” She finished petulantly: “And you may just as well know it.”

She hung her head and swung the parasol slightly to and fro. I thought a little.

“Do you know French, Miss de Barral?” I asked.

She made a sign with her head that she did, but without showing any surprise at the question and without ceasing to swing her parasol.

“Well then, somehow or other I have the notion that Captain Anthony is what the French call un galant homme. I should like to think he is being treated as he deserves.”

The form of her lips (I could see them under the brim of her hat) was suddenly altered into a line of seriousness. The parasol stopped swinging.

“I have given him what he wanted — that’s myself,” she said without a tremor and with a striking dignity of tone.

Impressed by the manner and the directness of the words, I hesitated for a moment what to say. Then made up my mind to clear up the point.

“And you have got what you wanted? Is that it?”

The daughter of the egregious financier de Barral did not answer at once this question going to the heart of things. Then raising her head and gazing wistfully across the street noisy with the endless transit of innumerable bargains, she said with intense gravity:

“He has been most generous.”

I was pleased to hear these words. Not that I doubted the infatuation of Roderick Anthony, but I was pleased to hear something which proved that she was sensible and open to the sentiment of gratitude which in this case was significant. In the face of man’s desire a girl is excusable if she thinks herself priceless. I mean a girl of our civilization which has established a dithyrambic phraseology for the expression of love. A man in love will accept any convention exalting the object of his passion and in this indirect way his passion itself. In what way the captain of the ship Ferndale gave proofs of lover-like lavishness I could not guess very well. But I was glad she was appreciative. It is lucky that small things please women. And it is not silly of them to be thus pleased. It is in small things that the deepest

loyalty, that which they need most, the loyalty of the passing moment, is best expressed.

She had remained thoughtful, letting her deep motionless eyes rest on the streaming jumble of traffic. Suddenly she said:

“And I wanted to ask you . . . I was really glad when I saw you actually here. Who would have expected you here, at this spot, before this hotel! I certainly never . . . You see it meant a lot to me. You are the only person who knows . . . who knows for certain . . . “

“Knows what?” I said, not discovering at first what she had in her mind. Then I saw it. “Why can’t you leave that alone?” I remonstrated, rather annoyed at the invidious position she was forcing on me in a sense. “It’s true that I was the only person to see,” I added. “But, as it happens, after your mysterious disappearance I told the Fynes the story of our meeting.”

Her eyes raised to mine had an expression of dreamy, unfathomable candour, if I dare say so. And if you wonder what I mean I can only say that I have seen the sea wear such an expression on one or two occasions shortly before sunrise on a calm, fresh day. She said as if meditating aloud that she supposed the Fynes were not likely to talk about that. She couldn’t imagine any connection in which . . . Why should they?

As her tone had become interrogatory I assented. “To be sure. There’s no reason whatever — ” thinking to myself that they would be more likely indeed to keep quiet about it. They had other things to talk of. And then remembering little Fyne stuck upstairs for an unconscionable time, enough to blurt out everything he ever knew in his life, I reflected that he would assume naturally that Captain Anthony had nothing to learn from him about Flora de Barral. It had been up to now my assumption too. I saw my mistake. The sincerest of women will make no unnecessary confidences to a man. And this is as it should be.

“No — no!” I said reassuringly. “It’s most unlikely. Are you much concerned?”

“Well, you see, when I came down,” she said again in that precise demure tone, “when I came down — into the garden Captain Anthony misunderstood — ”

“Of course he would. Men are so conceited,” I said.

I saw it well enough that he must have thought she had come down to him. What else could he have thought? And then he had been “gentleness itself.” A new experience for that poor, delicate, and yet so resisting

creature. Gentleness in passion! What could have been more seductive to the scared, starved heart of that girl? Perhaps had he been violent, she might have told him that what she came down to keep was the tryst of death — not of love. It occurred to me as I looked at her, young, fragile in aspect, and intensely alive in her quietness, that perhaps she did not know herself then what sort of tryst she was coming down to keep.

She smiled faintly, almost awkwardly as if she were totally unused to smiling, at my cheap jocularity. Then she said with that forced precision, a sort of conscious primness:

“I didn’t want him to know.”

I approved heartily. Quite right. Much better. Let him ever remain under his misapprehension which was so much more flattering for him.

I tried to keep it in the tone of comedy; but she was, I believe, too simple to understand my intention. She went on, looking down.

“Oh! You think so? When I saw you I didn’t know why you were here. I was glad when you spoke to me because this is exactly what I wanted to ask you for. I wanted to ask you if you ever meet Captain Anthony — by any chance — anywhere — you are a sailor too, are you not? — that you would never mention — never — that — that you had seen me over there.”

“My dear young lady,” I cried, horror-struck at the supposition. “Why should I? What makes you think I should dream of . . . “

She had raised her head at my vehemence. She did not understand it. The world had treated her so dishonourably that she had no notion even of what mere decency of feeling is like. It was not her fault. Indeed, I don’t know why she should have put her trust in anybody’s promises.

But I thought it would be better to promise. So I assured her that she could depend on my absolute silence.

“I am not likely to ever set eyes on Captain Anthony,” I added with conviction — as a further guarantee.

She accepted my assurance in silence, without a sign. Her gravity had in it something acute, perhaps because of that chin. While we were still looking at each other she declared:

“There’s no deception in it really. I want you to believe that if I am here, like this, to-day, it is not from fear. It is not!”

“I quite understand,” I said. But her firm yet self-conscious gaze became doubtful. “I do,” I insisted. “I understand perfectly that it was not of death that you were afraid.”

She lowered her eyes slowly, and I went on:

“As to life, that’s another thing. And I don’t know that one ought to blame you very much — though it seemed rather an excessive step. I wonder now if it isn’t the ugliness rather than the pain of the struggle which . . . “

She shuddered visibly: “But I do blame myself,” she exclaimed with feeling. “I am ashamed.” And, dropping her head, she looked in a moment the very picture of remorse and shame.

“Well, you will be going away from all its horrors,” I said. “And surely you are not afraid of the sea. You are a sailor’s granddaughter, I understand.”

She sighed deeply. She remembered her grandfather only a little. He was a clean-shaven man with a ruddy complexion and long, perfectly white hair. He used to take her on his knee, and putting his face near hers, talk to her in loving whispers. If only he were alive now . . . !

She remained silent for a while.

“Aren’t you anxious to see the ship?” I asked.

She lowered her head still more so that I could not see anything of her face.

“I don’t know,” she murmured.

I had already the suspicion that she did not know her own feelings. All this work of the merest chance had been so unexpected, so sudden. And she had nothing to fall back upon, no experience but such as to shake her belief in every human being. She was dreadfully and pitifully forlorn. It was almost in order to comfort my own depression that I remarked cheerfully:

“Well, I know of somebody who must be growing extremely anxious to see you.”

“I am before my time,” she confessed simply, rousing herself. “I had nothing to do. So I came out.”

I had the sudden vision of a shabby, lonely little room at the other end of the town. It had grown intolerable to her restlessness. The mere thought of it oppressed her. Flora de Barral was looking frankly at her chance confidant,

“And I came this way,” she went on. “I appointed the time myself yesterday, but Captain Anthony would not have minded. He told me he was going to look over some business papers till I came.”

The idea of the son of the poet, the rescuer of the most forlorn damsel of modern times, the man of violence, gentleness and generosity, sitting up to his neck in ship's accounts amused me. "I am sure he would not have minded," I said, smiling. But the girl's stare was sombre, her thin white face seemed pathetically careworn.

"I can hardly believe yet," she murmured anxiously.

"It's quite real. Never fear," I said encouragingly, but had to change my tone at once. "You had better go down that way a little," I directed her abruptly.

\* \* \* \* \*

I had seen Fyne come striding out of the hotel door. The intelligent girl, without staying to ask questions, walked away from me quietly down one street while I hurried on to meet Fyne coming up the other at his efficient pedestrian gait. My object was to stop him getting as far as the corner. He must have been thinking too hard to be aware of his surroundings. I put myself in his way, and he nearly walked into me.

"Hallo!" I said.

His surprise was extreme. "You here! You don't mean to say you have been waiting for me?"

I said negligently that I had been detained by unexpected business in the neighbourhood, and thus happened to catch sight of him coming out.

He stared at me with solemn distraction, obviously thinking of something else. I suggested that he had better take the next city-ward tramcar. He was inattentive, and I perceived that he was profoundly perturbed. As Miss de Barral (she had moved out of sight) could not possibly approach the hotel door as long as we remained where we were I proposed that we should wait for the car on the other side of the street. He obeyed rather the slight touch on his arm than my words, and while we were crossing the wide roadway in the midst of the lumbering wheeled traffic, he exclaimed in his deep tone, "I don't know which of these two is more mad than the other!"

"Really!" I said, pulling him forward from under the noses of two enormous sleepy-headed cart-horses. He skipped wildly out of the way and up on the curbstone with a purely instinctive precision; his mind had nothing to do with his movements. In the middle of his leap, and while in the act of sailing gravely through the air, he continued to relieve his outraged feelings.



“You would never believe! They are mad!”

I took care to place myself in such a position that to face me he had to turn his back on the hotel across the road. I believe he was glad I was there to talk to. But I thought there was some misapprehension in the first statement he shot out at me without loss of time, that Captain Anthony had been glad to see him. It was indeed difficult to believe that, directly he opened the door, his wife’s “sailor-brother” had positively shouted: “Oh, it’s you! The very man I wanted to see.”

“I found him sitting there,” went on Fyne impressively in his effortless, grave chest voice, “drafting his will.”

This was unexpected, but I preserved a noncommittal attitude, knowing full well that our actions in themselves are neither mad nor sane. But I did not see what there was to be excited about. And Fyne was distinctly excited. I understood it better when I learned that the captain of the Ferndale wanted little Fyne to be one of the trustees. He was leaving everything to his wife. Naturally, a request which involved him into sanctioning in a way a proceeding which he had been sent by his wife to oppose, must have appeared sufficiently mad to Fyne.

“Me! Me, of all people in the world!” he repeated portentously. But I could see that he was frightened. Such want of tact!

“He knew I came from his sister. You don’t put a man into such an awkward position,” complained Fyne. “It made me speak much more strongly against all this very painful business than I would have had the heart to do otherwise.”

I pointed out to him concisely, and keeping my eyes on the door of the hotel, that he and his wife were the only bond with the land Captain Anthony had. Who else could he have asked?

“I explained to him that he was breaking this bond,” declared Fyne solemnly. “Breaking it once for all. And for what — for what?”

He glared at me. I could perhaps have given him an inkling for what, but I said nothing. He started again:

“My wife assures me that the girl does not love him a bit. She goes by that letter she received from her. There is a passage in it where she practically admits that she was quite unscrupulous in accepting this offer of marriage, but says to my wife that she supposes she, my wife, will not blame her — as it was in self-defence. My wife has her own ideas, but this is an outrageous misapprehension of her views. Outrageous.”

The good little man paused and then added weightily:

"I didn't tell that to my brother-in-law — I mean, my wife's views."

"No," I said. "What would have been the good?"

"It's positive infatuation," agreed little Fyne, in the tone as though he had made an awful discovery. "I have never seen anything so hopeless and inexplicable in my life. I — I felt quite frightened and sorry," he added, while I looked at him curiously asking myself whether this excellent civil servant and notable pedestrian had felt the breath of a great and fatal love-spell passing him by in the room of that East-end hotel. He did look for a moment as though he had seen a ghost, an other-world thing. But that look vanished instantaneously, and he nodded at me with mere exasperation at something quite of this world — whatever it was. "It's a bad business. My brother-in-law knows nothing of women," he cried with an air of profound, experienced wisdom.

What he imagined he knew of women himself I can't tell. I did not know anything of the opportunities he might have had. But this is a subject which, if approached with undue solemnity, is apt to elude one's grasp entirely. No doubt Fyne knew something of a woman who was Captain Anthony's sister. But that, admittedly, had been a very solemn study. I smiled at him gently, and as if encouraged or provoked, he completed his thought rather explosively.

"And that girl understands nothing . . . It's sheer lunacy."

"I don't know," I said, "whether the circumstances of isolation at sea would be any alleviation to the danger. But it's certain that they shall have the opportunity to learn everything about each other in a lonely tête-à-tête."

"But dash it all," he cried in hollow accents which at the same time had the tone of bitter irony — I had never before heard a sound so quaintly ugly and almost horrible — "You forget Mr. Smith."

"What Mr. Smith?" I asked innocently.

Fyne made an extraordinary simiesque grimace. I believe it was quite involuntary, but you know that a grave, much-lined, shaven countenance when distorted in an unusual way is extremely apelike. It was a surprising sight, and rendered me not only speechless but stopped the progress of my thought completely. I must have presented a remarkably imbecile appearance.

"My brother-in-law considered it amusing to chaff me about us introducing the girl as Miss Smith," said Fyne, going surly in a moment.

“He said that perhaps if he had heard her real name from the first it might have restrained him. As it was, he made the discovery too late. Asked me to tell Zoe this together with a lot more nonsense.”

Fyne gave me the impression of having escaped from a man inspired by a grimly playful ebullition of high spirits. It must have been most distasteful to him; and his solemnity got damaged somehow in the process, I perceived. There were holes in it through which I could see a new, an unknown Fyne.

“You wouldn’t believe it,” he went on, “but she looks upon her father exclusively as a victim. I don’t know,” he burst out suddenly through an enormous rent in his solemnity, “if she thinks him absolutely a saint, but she certainly imagines him to be a martyr.”

It is one of the advantages of that magnificent invention, the prison, that you may forget people which are put there as though they were dead. One needn’t worry about them. Nothing can happen to them that you can help. They can do nothing which might possibly matter to anybody. They come out of it, though, but that seems hardly an advantage to themselves or anyone else. I had completely forgotten the financier de Barral. The girl for me was an orphan, but now I perceived suddenly the force of Fyne’s qualifying statement, “to a certain extent.” It would have been infinitely more kind all round for the law to have shot, beheaded, strangled, or otherwise destroyed this absurd de Barral, who was a danger to a moral world inhabited by a credulous multitude not fit to take care of itself. But I observed to Fyne that, however insane was the view she held, one could not declare the girl mad on that account.

“So she thinks of her father — does she? I suppose she would appear to us saner if she thought only of herself.”

“I am positive,” Fyne said earnestly, “that she went and made desperate eyes at Anthony . . . “

“Oh come!” I interrupted. “You haven’t seen her make eyes. You don’t know the colour of her eyes.”

“Very well! It don’t matter. But it could hardly have come to that if she hadn’t . . . It’s all one, though. I tell you she has led him on, or accepted him, if you like, simply because she was thinking of her father. She doesn’t care a bit about Anthony, I believe. She cares for no one. Never cared for anyone. Ask Zoe. For myself I don’t blame her,” added Fyne, giving me

another view of unsuspected things through the rags and tatters of his damaged solemnity. "No! by heavens, I don't blame her — the poor devil."

I agreed with him silently. I suppose affections are, in a sense, to be learned. If there exists a native spark of love in all of us, it must be fanned while we are young. Hers, if she ever had it, had been drenched in as ugly a lot of corrosive liquid as could be imagined. But I was surprised at Fyne obscurely feeling this.

"She loves no one except that preposterous advertising shark," he pursued venomously, but in a more deliberate manner. "And Anthony knows it."

"Does he?" I said doubtfully.

"She's quite capable of having told him herself," affirmed Fyne, with amazing insight. "But whether or no, I've told him."

"You did? From Mrs. Fyne, of course."

Fyne only blinked owlishly at this piece of my insight.

"And how did Captain Anthony receive this interesting information?" I asked further.

"Most improperly," said Fyne, who really was in a state in which he didn't mind what he blurted out. "He isn't himself. He begged me to tell his sister that he offered no remarks on her conduct. Very improper and inconsequent. He said . . . I was tired of this wrangling. I told him I made allowances for the state of excitement he was in."

"You know, Fyne," I said, "a man in jail seems to me such an incredible, cruel, nightmarish sort of thing that I can hardly believe in his existence. Certainly not in relation to any other existences."

"But dash it all," cried Fyne, "he isn't shut up for life. They are going to let him out. He's coming out! That's the whole trouble. What is he coming out to, I want to know? It seems a more cruel business than the shutting him up was. This has been the worry for weeks. Do you see now?"

I saw, all sorts of things! Immediately before me I saw the excitement of little Fyne — mere food for wonder. Further off, in a sort of gloom and beyond the light of day and the movement of the street, I saw the figure of a man, stiff like a ramrod, moving with small steps, a slight girlish figure by his side. And the gloom was like the gloom of villainous slums, of misery, of wretchedness, of a starved and degraded existence. It was a relief that I could see only their shabby hopeless backs. He was an awful ghost. But

indeed to call him a ghost was only a refinement of polite speech, and a manner of concealing one's terror of such things. Prisons are wonderful contrivances. Shut — open. Very neat. Shut — open. And out comes some sort of corpse, to wander awfully in a world in which it has no possible connections and carrying with it the appalling tainted atmosphere of its silent abode. Marvellous arrangement. It works automatically, and, when you look at it, the perfection makes you sick; which for a mere mechanism is no mean triumph. Sick and scared. It had nearly scared that poor girl to her death. Fancy having to take such a thing by the hand! Now I understood the remorseful strain I had detected in her speeches.

“By Jove!” I said. “They are about to let him out! I never thought of that.”

Fyne was contemptuous either of me or of things at large.

“You didn't suppose he was to be kept in jail for life?”

At that moment I caught sight of Flora de Barral at the junction of the two streets. Then some vehicles following each other in quick succession hid from my sight the black slight figure with just a touch of colour in her hat. She was walking slowly; and it might have been caution or reluctance. While listening to Fyne I stared hard past his shoulder trying to catch sight of her again. He was going on with positive heat, the rags of his solemnity dropping off him at every second sentence.

That was just it. His wife and he had been perfectly aware of it. Of course the girl never talked of her father with Mrs. Fyne. I suppose with her theory of innocence she found it difficult. But she must have been thinking of it day and night. What to do with him? Where to go? How to keep body and soul together? He had never made any friends. The only relations were the atrocious East-end cousins. We know what they were. Nothing but wretchedness, whichever way she turned in an unjust and prejudiced world. And to look at him helplessly she felt would be too much for her.

I won't say I was thinking these thoughts. It was not necessary. This complete knowledge was in my head while I stared hard across the wide road, so hard that I failed to hear little Fyne till he raised his deep voice indignantly.

“I don't blame the girl,” he was saying. “He is infatuated with her. Anybody can see that. Why she should have got such a hold on him I can't understand. She said “Yes” to him only for the sake of that fatuous,

swindling father of hers. It's perfectly plain if one thinks it over a moment. One needn't even think of it. We have it under her own hand. In that letter to my wife she says she has acted unscrupulously. She has owned up, then, for what else can it mean, I should like to know. And so they are to be married before that old idiot comes out . . . He will be surprised," commented Fyne suddenly in a strangely malignant tone. "He shall be met at the jail door by a Mrs. Anthony, a Mrs. Captain Anthony. Very pleasant for Zoe. And for all I know, my brother-in-law means to turn up dutifully too. A little family event. It's extremely pleasant to think of. Delightful. A charming family party. We three against the world — and all that sort of thing. And what for. For a girl that doesn't care twopence for him."

The demon of bitterness had entered into little Fyne. He amazed me as though he had changed his skin from white to black. It was quite as wonderful. And he kept it up, too.

"Luckily there are some advantages in the — the profession of a sailor. As long as they defy the world away at sea somewhere eighteen thousand miles from here, I don't mind so much. I wonder what that interesting old party will say. He will have another surprise. They mean to drag him along with them on board the ship straight away. Rescue work. Just think of Roderick Anthony, the son of a gentleman, after all . . . "

He gave me a little shock. I thought he was going to say the "son of the poet" as usual; but his mind was not running on such vanities now. His unspoken thought must have gone on "and uncle of my girls." I suspect that he had been roughly handled by Captain Anthony up there, and the resentment gave a tremendous fillip to the slow play of his wits. Those men of sober fancy, when anything rouses their imaginative faculty, are very thorough. "Just think!" he cried. "The three of them crowded into a four-wheeler, and Anthony sitting deferentially opposite that astonished old jail-bird!"

The good little man laughed. An improper sound it was to come from his manly chest; and what made it worse was the thought that for the least thing, by a mere hair's breadth, he might have taken this affair sentimentally. But clearly Anthony was no diplomatist. His brother-in-law must have appeared to him, to use the language of shore people, a perfect philistine with a heart like a flint. What Fyne precisely meant by "wrangling" I don't know, but I had no doubt that these two had "wrangled"

to a profoundly disturbing extent. How much the other was affected I could not even imagine; but the man before me was quite amazingly upset.

“In a four-wheeler! Take him on board!” I muttered, startled by the change in Fyne.

“That’s the plan — nothing less. If I am to believe what I have been told, his feet will scarcely touch the ground between the prison-gates and the deck of that ship.”

The transformed Fyne spoke in a forcibly lowered tone which I heard without difficulty. The rumbling, composite noises of the street were hushed for a moment, during one of these sudden breaks in the traffic as if the stream of commerce had dried up at its source. Having an unobstructed view past Fyne’s shoulder, I was astonished to see that the girl was still there. I thought she had gone up long before. But there was her black slender figure, her white face under the roses of her hat. She stood on the edge of the pavement as people stand on the bank of a stream, very still, as if waiting — or as if unconscious of where she was. The three dismal, sodden loafers (I could see them too; they hadn’t budged an inch) seemed to me to be watching her. Which was horrible.

Meantime Fyne was telling me rather remarkable things — for him. He declared first it was a mercy in a sense. Then he asked me if it were not real madness, to saddle one’s existence with such a perpetual reminder. The daily existence. The isolated sea-bound existence. To bring such an additional strain into the solitude already trying enough for two people was the craziest thing. Undesirable relations were bad enough on shore. One could cut them or at least forget their existence now and then. He himself was preparing to forget his brother-in-law’s existence as much as possible.

That was the general sense of his remarks, not his exact words. I thought that his wife’s brother’s existence had never been very embarrassing to him but that now of course he would have to abstain from his allusions to the “son of the poet — you know.” I said “yes, yes” in the pauses because I did not want him to turn round; and all the time I was watching the girl intently. I thought I knew now what she meant with her — “He was most generous.” Yes. Generosity of character may carry a man through any situation. But why didn’t she go then to her generous man? Why stand there as if clinging to this solid earth which she surely hated as one must hate the place where one has been tormented, hopeless, unhappy? Suddenly she stirred. Was she going to cross over? No. She turned and began to

walk slowly close to the curbstone, reminding me of the time when I discovered her walking near the edge of a ninety-foot sheer drop. It was the same impression, the same carriage, straight, slim, with rigid head and the two hands hanging lightly clasped in front — only now a small sunshade was dangling from them. I saw something fateful in that deliberate pacing towards the inconspicuous door with the words Hotel Entrance on the glass panels.

She was abreast of it now and I thought that she would stop again; but no! She swerved rigidly — at the moment there was no one near her; she had that bit of pavement to herself — with inanimate slowness as if moved by something outside herself.

“A confounded convict,” Fyne burst out.

With the sound of that word offending my ears I saw the girl extend her arm, push the door open a little way and glide in. I saw plainly that movement, the hand put out in advance with the gesture of a sleep-walker.

She had vanished, her black figure had melted in the darkness of the open door. For some time Fyne said nothing; and I thought of the girl going upstairs, appearing before the man. Were they looking at each other in silence and feeling they were alone in the world as lovers should at the moment of meeting? But that fine forgetfulness was surely impossible to Anthony the seaman directly after the wrangling interview with Fyne the emissary of an order of things which stops at the edge of the sea. How much he was disturbed I couldn't tell because I did not know what that impetuous lover had had to listen to.

“Going to take the old fellow to sea with them,” I said. “Well I really don't see what else they could have done with him. You told your brother-in-law what you thought of it? I wonder how he took it.”

“Very improperly,” repeated Fyne. “His manner was offensive, derisive, from the first. I don't mean he was actually rude in words. Hang it all, I am not a contemptible ass. But he was exulting at having got hold of a miserable girl.”

“It is pretty certain that she will be much less poor and miserable,” I murmured.

It looked as if the exultation of Captain Anthony had got on Fyne's nerves. “I told the fellow very plainly that he was abominably selfish in this,” he affirmed unexpectedly.



“You did! Selfish!” I said rather taken aback. “But what if the girl thought that, on the contrary, he was most generous.”

“What do you know about it,” growled Fyne. The rents and slashes of his solemnity were closing up gradually but it was going to be a surly solemnity. “Generosity! I am disposed to give it another name. No. Not folly,” he shot out at me as though I had meant to interrupt him. “Still another. Something worse. I need not tell you what it is,” he added with grim meaning.

“Certainly. You needn’t — unless you like,” I said blankly. Little Fyne had never interested me so much since the beginning of the de Barral-Anthony affair when I first perceived possibilities in him. The possibilities of dull men are exciting because when they happen they suggest legendary cases of “possession,” not exactly by the devil but, anyhow, by a strange spirit.

“I told him it was a shame,” said Fyne. “Even if the girl did make eyes at him — but I think with you that she did not. Yes! A shame to take advantage of a girl’s — a distresses girl that does not love him in the least.”

“You think it’s so bad as that?” I said. “Because you know I don’t.”

“What can you think about it,” he retorted on me with a solemn stare. “I go by her letter to my wife.”

“Ah! that famous letter. But you haven’t actually read it,” I said.

“No, but my wife told me. Of course it was a most improper sort of letter to write considering the circumstances. It pained Mrs. Fyne to discover how thoroughly she had been misunderstood. But what is written is not all. It’s what my wife could read between the lines. She says that the girl is really terrified at heart.”

“She had not much in life to give her any very special courage for it, or any great confidence in mankind. That’s very true. But this seems an exaggeration.”

“I should like to know what reasons you have to say that,” asked Fyne with offended solemnity. “I really don’t see any. But I had sufficient authority to tell my brother-in-law that if he thought he was going to do something chivalrous and fine he was mistaken. I can see very well that he will do everything she asks him to do — but, all the same, it is rather a pitiless transaction.”

For a moment I felt it might be so. Fyne caught sight of an approaching tram-car and stepped out on the road to meet it. “Have you a more

compassionate scheme ready?" I called after him. He made no answer, clambered on to the rear platform, and only then looked back. We exchanged a perfunctory wave of the hand. We also looked at each other, he rather angrily, I fancy, and I with wonder. I may also mention that it was for the last time. From that day I never set eyes on the Fynes. As usual the unexpected happened to me. It had nothing to do with Flora de Barral. The fact is that I went away. My call was not like her call. Mine was not urged on me with passionate vehemence or tender gentleness made all the finer and more compelling by the allurements of generosity which is a virtue as mysterious as any other but having a glamour of its own. No, it was just a prosaic offer of employment on rather good terms which, with a sudden sense of having wasted my time on shore long enough, I accepted without misgivings. And once started out of my indolence I went, as my habit was, very, very far away and for a long, long time. Which is another proof of my indolence. How far Flora went I can't say. But I will tell you my idea: my idea is that she went as far as she was able — as far as she could bear it — as far as she had to . . . "

## **PART II — THE KNIGHT**

## CHAPTER ONE — THE FERNDALE

I have said that the story of Flora de Barral was imparted to me in stages. At this stage I did not see Marlow for some time. At last, one evening rather early, very soon after dinner, he turned up in my rooms.

I had been waiting for his call primed with a remark which had not occurred to me till after he had gone away.

"I say," I tackled him at once, "how can you be certain that Flora de Barral ever went to sea? After all, the wife of the captain of the Ferndale — " the lady that mustn't be disturbed "of the old ship-keeper — may not have been Flora."

"Well, I do know," he said, "if only because I have been keeping in touch with Mr. Powell."

"You have!" I cried. "This is the first I hear of it. And since when?"

"Why, since the first day. You went up to town leaving me in the inn. I slept ashore. In the morning Mr. Powell came in for breakfast; and after the first awkwardness of meeting a man you have been yarning with over-night had worn off, we discovered a liking for each other."

As I had discovered the fact of their mutual liking before either of them, I was not surprised.

"And so you kept in touch," I said.

"It was not so very difficult. As he was always knocking about the river I hired Dingle's sloop-rigged three-tonner to be more on an equality. Powell was friendly but elusive. I don't think he ever wanted to avoid me. But it is a fact that he used to disappear out of the river in a very mysterious manner sometimes. A man may land anywhere and bolt inland — but what about his five-ton cutter? You can't carry that in your hand like a suit-case.

"Then as suddenly he would reappear in the river, after one had given him up. I did not like to be beaten. That's why I hired Dingle's decked boat. There was just the accommodation in her to sleep a man and a dog. But I had no dog-friend to invite. Fyne's dog who saved Flora de Barral's life is the last dog-friend I had. I was rather lonely cruising about; but that, too, on the river has its charm, sometimes. I chased the mystery of the vanishing Powell dreamily, looking about me at the ships, thinking of the girl Flora, of life's chances — and, do you know, it was very simple."

"What was very simple?" I asked innocently.

"The mystery."

“They generally are that,” I said.

Marlow eyed me for a moment in a peculiar manner.

“Well, I have discovered the mystery of Powell’s disappearances. The fellow used to run into one of these narrow tidal creeks on the Essex shore. These creeks are so inconspicuous that till I had studied the chart pretty carefully I did not know of their existence. One afternoon, I made Powell’s boat out, heading into the shore. By the time I got close to the mud-flat his craft had disappeared inland. But I could see the mouth of the creek by then. The tide being on the turn I took the risk of getting stuck in the mud suddenly and headed in. All I had to guide me was the top of the roof of some sort of small building. I got in more by good luck than by good management. The sun had set some time before; my boat glided in a sort of winding ditch between two low grassy banks; on both sides of me was the flatness of the Essex marsh, perfectly still. All I saw moving was a heron; he was flying low, and disappeared in the murk. Before I had gone half a mile, I was up with the building the roof of which I had seen from the river. It looked like a small barn. A row of piles driven into the soft bank in front of it and supporting a few planks made a sort of wharf. All this was black in the falling dusk, and I could just distinguish the whitish ruts of a cart-track stretching over the marsh towards the higher land, far away. Not a sound was to be heard. Against the low streak of light in the sky I could see the mast of Powell’s cutter moored to the bank some twenty yards, no more, beyond that black barn or whatever it was. I hailed him with a loud shout. Got no answer. After making fast my boat just astern, I walked along the bank to have a look at Powell’s. Being so much bigger than mine she was aground already. Her sails were furled; the slide of her scuttle hatch was closed and padlocked. Powell was gone. He had walked off into that dark, still marsh somewhere. I had not seen a single house anywhere near; there did not seem to be any human habitation for miles; and now as darkness fell denser over the land I couldn’t see the glimmer of a single light. However, I supposed that there must be some village or hamlet not very far away; or only one of these mysterious little inns one comes upon sometimes in most unexpected and lonely places.

“The stillness was oppressive. I went back to my boat, made some coffee over a spirit-lamp, devoured a few biscuits, and stretched myself aft, to smoke and gaze at the stars. The earth was a mere shadow, formless and silent, and empty, till a bullock turned up from somewhere, quite shadowy

too. He came smartly to the very edge of the bank as though he meant to step on board, stretched his muzzle right over my boat, blew heavily once, and walked off contemptuously into the darkness from which he had come. I had not expected a call from a bullock, though a moment's thought would have shown me that there must be lots of cattle and sheep on that marsh. Then everything became still as before. I might have imagined myself arrived on a desert island. In fact, as I reclined smoking a sense of absolute loneliness grew on me. And just as it had become intense, very abruptly and without any preliminary sound I heard firm, quick footsteps on the little wharf. Somebody coming along the cart-track had just stepped at a swinging gait on to the planks. That somebody could only have been Mr. Powell. Suddenly he stopped short, having made out that there were two masts alongside the bank where he had left only one. Then he came on silent on the grass. When I spoke to him he was astonished.

"Who would have thought of seeing you here!" he exclaimed, after returning my good evening.

"I told him I had run in for company. It was rigorously true."

"You knew I was here?" he exclaimed.

"Of course," I said. "I tell you I came in for company."

"He is a really good fellow," went on Marlow. "And his capacity for astonishment is quickly exhausted, it seems. It was in the most matter-of-fact manner that he said, 'Come on board of me, then; I have here enough supper for two.' He was holding a bulky parcel in the crook of his arm. I did not wait to be asked twice, as you may guess. His cutter has a very neat little cabin, quite big enough for two men not only to sleep but to sit and smoke in. We left the scuttle wide open, of course. As to his provisions for supper, they were not of a luxurious kind. He complained that the shops in the village were miserable. There was a big village within a mile and a half. It struck me he had been very long doing his shopping; but naturally I made no remark. I didn't want to talk at all except for the purpose of setting him going."

"And did you set him going?" I asked.

"I did," said Marlow, composing his features into an impenetrable expression which somehow assured me of his success better than an air of triumph could have done.

\* \* \* \* \*

“You made him talk?” I said after a silence.

“Yes, I made him . . . about himself.”

“And to the point?”

“If you mean by this,” said Marlow, “that it was about the voyage of the *Ferndale*, then again, yes. I brought him to talk about that voyage, which, by the by, was not the first voyage of *Flora de Barral*. The man himself, as I told you, is simple, and his faculty of wonder not very great. He’s one of those people who form no theories about facts. Straightforward people seldom do. Neither have they much penetration. But in this case it did not matter. I — we — have already the inner knowledge. We know the history of *Flora de Barral*. We know something of Captain Anthony. We have the secret of the situation. The man was intoxicated with the pity and tenderness of his part. Oh yes! Intoxicated is not too strong a word; for you know that love and desire take many disguises. I believe that the girl had been frank with him, with the frankness of women to whom perfect frankness is impossible, because so much of their safety depends on judicious reticences. I am not indulging in cheap sneers. There is necessity in these things. And moreover she could not have spoken with a certain voice in the face of his impetuosity, because she did not have time to understand either the state of her feelings, or the precise nature of what she was doing.

Had she spoken ever so clearly he was, I take it, too elated to hear her distinctly. I don’t mean to imply that he was a fool. Oh dear no! But he had no training in the usual conventions, and we must remember that he had no experience whatever of women. He could only have an ideal conception of his position. An ideal is often but a flaming vision of reality.

To him enters *Fyne*, wound up, if I may express myself so irreverently, wound up to a high pitch by his wife’s interpretation of the girl’s letter. He enters with his talk of meanness and cruelty, like a bucket of water on the flame. Clearly a shock. But the effects of a bucket of water are diverse. They depend on the kind of flame. A mere blaze of dry straw, of course . . . but there can be no question of straw there. Anthony of the *Ferndale* was not, could not have been, a straw-stuffed specimen of a man. There are flames a bucket of water sends leaping sky-high.

We may well wonder what happened when, after *Fyne* had left him, the hesitating girl went up at last and opened the door of that room where our

man, I am certain, was not extinguished. Oh no! Nor cold; whatever else he might have been.

It is conceivable he might have cried at her in the first moment of humiliation, of exasperation, "Oh, it's you! Why are you here? If I am so odious to you that you must write to my sister to say so, I give you back your word." But then, don't you see, it could not have been that. I have the practical certitude that soon afterwards they went together in a hansom to see the ship — as agreed. That was my reason for saying that Flora de Barral did go to sea . . . "

"Yes. It seems conclusive," I agreed. "But even without that — if, as you seem to think, the very desolation of that girlish figure had a sort of perversely seductive charm, making its way through his compassion to his senses (and everything is possible) — then such words could not have been spoken."

"They might have escaped him involuntarily," observed Marlow. "However, a plain fact settles it. They went off together to see the ship."

"Do you conclude from this that nothing whatever was said?" I inquired.

"I should have liked to see the first meeting of their glances upstairs there," mused Marlow. "And perhaps nothing was said. But no man comes out of such a 'wrangle' (as Fyne called it) without showing some traces of it. And you may be sure that a girl so bruised all over would feel the slightest touch of anything resembling coldness. She was mistrustful; she could not be otherwise; for the energy of evil is so much more forcible than the energy of good that she could not help looking still upon her abominable governess as an authority. How could one have expected her to throw off the unholy prestige of that long domination? She could not help believing what she had been told; that she was in some mysterious way odious and unlovable. It was cruelly true — to her. The oracle of so many years had spoken finally. Only other people did not find her out at once . . . I would not go so far as to say she believed it altogether. That would be hardly possible. But then haven't the most flattered, the most conceited of us their moments of doubt? Haven't they? Well, I don't know. There may be lucky beings in this world unable to believe any evil of themselves. For my own part I'll tell you that once, many years ago now, it came to my knowledge that a fellow I had been mixed up with in a certain transaction — a clever fellow whom I really despised — was going around telling people that I was a consummate hypocrite. He could know nothing of it. It

suited his humour to say so. I had given him no ground for that particular calumny. Yet to this day there are moments when it comes into my mind, and involuntarily I ask myself, 'What if it were true?' It's absurd, but it has on one or two occasions nearly affected my conduct. And yet I was not an impressionable ignorant young girl. I had taken the exact measure of the fellow's utter worthlessness long before. He had never been for me a person of prestige and power, like that awful governess to Flora de Barral. See the might of suggestion? We live at the mercy of a malevolent word. A sound, a mere disturbance of the air, sinks into our very soul sometimes. Flora de Barral had been more astounded than convinced by the first impetuosity of Roderick Anthony. She let herself be carried along by a mysterious force which her person had called into being, as her father had been carried away out of his depth by the unexpected power of successful advertising.

They went on board that morning. The Ferndale had just come to her loading berth. The only living creature on board was the ship-keeper — whether the same who had been described to us by Mr. Powell, or another, I don't know. Possibly some other man. He, looking over the side, saw, in his own words, 'the captain come sailing round the corner of the nearest cargo-shed, in company with a girl.' He lowered the accommodation ladder down on to the jetty . . . “

“How do you know all this?” I interrupted.

Marlow interjected an impatient:

“You shall see by and by . . . Flora went up first, got down on deck and stood stock-still till the captain took her by the arm and led her aft. The ship-keeper let them into the saloon. He had the keys of all the cabins, and stumped in after them. The captain ordered him to open all the doors, every blessed door; state-rooms, passages, pantry, fore-cabin — and then sent him away.

“The Ferndale had magnificent accommodation. At the end of a passage leading from the quarter-deck there was a long saloon, its sumptuousness slightly tarnished perhaps, but having a grand air of roominess and comfort. The harbour carpets were down, the swinging lamps hung, and everything in its place, even to the silver on the sideboard. Two large stern cabins opened out of it, one on each side of the rudder casing. These two cabins communicated through a small bathroom between them, and one was fitted up as the captain's state-room. The other was vacant, and furnished



with arm-chairs and a round table, more like a room on shore, except for the long curved settee following the shape of the ship's stern. In a dim inclined mirror, Flora caught sight down to the waist of a pale-faced girl in a white straw hat trimmed with roses, distant, shadowy, as if immersed in water, and was surprised to recognize herself in those surroundings. They seemed to her arbitrary, bizarre, strange. Captain Anthony moved on, and she followed him. He showed her the other cabins. He talked all the time loudly in a voice she seemed to have known extremely well for a long time; and yet, she reflected, she had not heard it often in her life. What he was saying she did not quite follow. He was speaking of comparatively indifferent things in a rather moody tone, but she felt it round her like a caress. And when he stopped she could hear, alarming in the sudden silence, the precipitated beating of her heart.

The ship-keeper dodged about the quarter-deck, out of hearing, and trying to keep out of sight. At the same time, taking advantage of the open doors with skill and prudence, he could see the captain and "that girl" the captain had brought aboard. The captain was showing her round very thoroughly. Through the whole length of the passage, far away aft in the perspective of the saloon the ship-keeper had interesting glimpses of them as they went in and out of the various cabins, crossing from side to side, remaining invisible for a time in one or another of the state-rooms, and then reappearing again in the distance. The girl, always following the captain, had her sunshade in her hands. Mostly she would hang her head, but now and then she would look up. They had a lot to say to each other, and seemed to forget they weren't alone in the ship. He saw the captain put his hand on her shoulder, and was preparing himself with a certain zest for what might follow, when the "old man" seemed to recollect himself, and came striding down all the length of the saloon. At this move the ship-keeper promptly dodged out of sight, as you may believe, and heard the captain slam the inner door of the passage. After that disappointment the ship-keeper waited resentfully for them to clear out of the ship. It happened much sooner than he had expected. The girl walked out on deck first. As before she did not look round. She didn't look at anything; and she seemed to be in such a hurry to get ashore that she made for the gangway and started down the ladder without waiting for the captain.

What struck the ship-keeper most was the absent, unseeing expression of the captain, striding after the girl. He passed him, the ship-keeper, without

notice, without an order, without so much as a look. The captain had never done so before. Always had a nod and a pleasant word for a man. From this slight the ship-keeper drew a conclusion unfavourable to the strange girl. He gave them time to get down on the wharf before crossing the deck to steal one more look at the pair over the rail. The captain took hold of the girl's arm just before a couple of railway trucks drawn by a horse came rolling along and hid them from the ship-keeper's sight for good.

Next day, when the chief mate joined the ship, he told him the tale of the visit, and expressed himself about the girl "who had got hold of the captain" disparagingly. She didn't look healthy, he explained. "Shabby clothes, too," he added spitefully.

The mate was very much interested. He had been with Anthony for several years, and had won for himself in the course of many long voyages, a footing of familiarity, which was to be expected with a man of Anthony's character. But in that slowly-grown intimacy of the sea, which in its duration and solitude had its unguarded moments, no words had passed, even of the most casual, to prepare him for the vision of his captain associated with any kind of girl. His impression had been that women did not exist for Captain Anthony. Exhibiting himself with a girl! A girl! What did he want with a girl? Bringing her on board and showing her round the cabin! That was really a little bit too much. Captain Anthony ought to have known better.

Franklin (the chief mate's name was Franklin) felt disappointed; almost disillusioned. Silly thing to do! Here was a confounded old ship-keeper set talking. He snubbed the ship-keeper, and tried to think of that insignificant bit of foolishness no more; for it diminished Captain Anthony in his eyes of a jealously devoted subordinate.

Franklin was over forty; his mother was still alive. She stood in the forefront of all women for him, just as Captain Anthony stood in the forefront of all men. We may suppose that these groups were not very large. He had gone to sea at a very early age. The feeling which caused these two people to partly eclipse the rest of mankind were of course not similar; though in time he had acquired the conviction that he was "taking care" of them both. The "old lady" of course had to be looked after as long as she lived. In regard to Captain Anthony, he used to say that: why should he leave him? It wasn't likely that he would come across a better sailor or a better man or a more comfortable ship. As to trying to better himself in the

way of promotion, commands were not the sort of thing one picked up in the streets, and when it came to that, Captain Anthony was as likely to give him a lift on occasion as anyone in the world.

From Mr. Powell's description Franklin was a short, thick black-haired man, bald on the top. His head sunk between the shoulders, his staring prominent eyes and a florid colour, gave him a rather apoplectic appearance. In repose, his congested face had a humorously melancholy expression.

The ship-keeper having given him up all the keys and having been chased forward with the admonition to mind his own business and not to chatter about what did not concern him, Mr. Franklin went under the poop. He opened one door after another; and, in the saloon, in the captain's state-room and everywhere, he stared anxiously as if expecting to see on the bulkheads, on the deck, in the air, something unusual — sign, mark, emanation, shadow — he hardly knew what — some subtle change wrought by the passage of a girl. But there was nothing. He entered the unoccupied stern cabin and spent some time there unscrewing the two stern ports. In the absence of all material evidences his uneasiness was passing away. With a last glance round he came out and found himself in the presence of his captain advancing from the other end of the saloon.

Franklin, at once, looked for the girl. She wasn't to be seen. The captain came up quickly. 'Oh! you are here, Mr. Franklin.' And the mate said, 'I was giving a little air to the place, sir.' Then the captain, his hat pulled down over his eyes, laid his stick on the table and asked in his kind way: 'How did you find your mother, Franklin?' — 'The old lady's first-rate, sir, thank you.' And then they had nothing to say to each other. It was a strange and disturbing feeling for Franklin. He, just back from leave, the ship just come to her loading berth, the captain just come on board, and apparently nothing to say! The several questions he had been anxious to ask as to various things which had to be done had slipped out of his mind. He, too, felt as though he had nothing to say.

The captain, picking up his stick off the table, marched into his state-room and shut the door after him. Franklin remained still for a moment and then started slowly to go on deck. But before he had time to reach the other end of the saloon he heard himself called by name. He turned round. The captain was staring from the doorway of his state-room. Franklin said, "Yes, sir." But the captain, silent, leaned a little forward grasping the door

handle. So he, Franklin, walked aft keeping his eyes on him. When he had come up quite close he said again, "Yes, sir?" interrogatively. Still silence. The mate didn't like to be stared at in that manner, a manner quite new in his captain, with a defiant and self-conscious stare, like a man who feels ill and dares you to notice it. Franklin gazed at his captain, felt that there was something wrong, and in his simplicity voiced his feelings by asking point-blank:

"What's wrong, sir?"

The captain gave a slight start, and the character of his stare changed to a sort of sinister surprise. Franklin grew very uncomfortable, but the captain asked negligently:

"What makes you think that there's something wrong?"

"I can't say exactly. You don't look quite yourself, sir," Franklin owned up.

"You seem to have a confoundedly piercing eye," said the captain in such an aggressive tone that Franklin was moved to defend himself.

"We have been together now over six years, sir, so I suppose I know you a bit by this time. I could see there was something wrong directly you came on board."

"Mr. Franklin," said the captain, "we have been more than six years together, it is true, but I didn't know you for a reader of faces. You are not a correct reader though. It's very far from being wrong. You understand? As far from being wrong as it can very well be. It ought to teach you not to make rash surmises. You should leave that to the shore people. They are great hands at spying out something wrong. I dare say they know what they have made of the world. A dam' poor job of it and that's plain. It's a confoundedly ugly place, Mr. Franklin. You don't know anything of it? Well — no, we sailors don't. Only now and then one of us runs against something cruel or underhand, enough to make your hair stand on end. And when you do see a piece of their wickedness you find that to set it right is not so easy as it looks . . . Oh! I called you back to tell you that there will be a lot of workmen, joiners and all that sent down on board first thing tomorrow morning to start making alterations in the cabin. You will see to it that they don't loaf. There isn't much time."

Franklin was impressed by this unexpected lecture upon the wickedness of the solid world surrounded by the salt, uncorruptible waters on which he and his captain had dwelt all their lives in happy innocence. What he could

not understand was why it should have been delivered, and what connection it could have with such a matter as the alterations to be carried out in the cabin. The work did not seem to him to be called for in such a hurry. What was the use of altering anything? It was a very good accommodation, spacious, well-distributed, on a rather old-fashioned plan, and with its decorations somewhat tarnished. But a dab of varnish, a touch of gilding here and there, was all that was necessary. As to comfort, it could not be improved by any alterations. He resented the notion of change; but he said dutifully that he would keep his eye on the workmen if the captain would only let him know what was the nature of the work he had ordered to be done.

“You’ll find a note of it on this table. I’ll leave it for you as I go ashore,” said Captain Anthony hastily. Franklin thought there was no more to hear, and made a movement to leave the saloon. But the captain continued after a slight pause, “You will be surprised, no doubt, when you look at it. There’ll be a good many alterations. It’s on account of a lady coming with us. I am going to get married, Mr. Franklin!”

## CHAPTER TWO — YOUNG POWELL SEES AND HEARS

“You remember,” went on Marlow, “how I feared that Mr. Powell’s want of experience would stand in his way of appreciating the unusual. The unusual I had in my mind was something of a very subtle sort: the unusual in marital relations. I may well have doubted the capacity of a young man too much concerned with the creditable performance of his professional duties to observe what in the nature of things is not easily observable in itself, and still less so under the special circumstances. In the majority of ships a second officer has not many points of contact with the captain’s wife. He sits at the same table with her at meals, generally speaking; he may now and then be addressed more or less kindly on insignificant matters, and have the opportunity to show her some small attentions on deck. And that is all. Under such conditions, signs can be seen only by a sharp and practised eye. I am alluding now to troubles which are subtle often to the extent of not being understood by the very hearts they devastate or uplift.

Yes, Mr. Powell, whom the chance of his name had thrown upon the floating stage of that tragicomedy would have been perfectly useless for my purpose if the unusual of an obvious kind had not aroused his attention from the first.

We know how he joined that ship so suddenly offered to his anxious desire to make a real start in his profession. He had come on board breathless with the hurried winding up of his shore affairs, accompanied by two horrible night-birds, escorted by a dock policeman on the make, received by an asthmatic shadow of a ship-keeper, warned not to make a noise in the darkness of the passage because the captain and his wife were already on board. That in itself was already somewhat unusual. Captains and their wives do not, as a rule, join a moment sooner than is necessary. They prefer to spend the last moments with their friends and relations. A ship in one of London’s older docks with their restrictions as to lights and so on is not the place for a happy evening. Still, as the tide served at six in the morning, one could understand them coming on board the evening before.

Just then young Powell felt as if anybody ought to be glad enough to be quit of the shore. We know he was an orphan from a very early age, without brothers or sisters — no near relations of any kind, I believe, except

that aunt who had quarrelled with his father. No affection stood in the way of the quiet satisfaction with which he thought that now all the worries were over, that there was nothing before him but duties, that he knew what he would have to do as soon as the dawn broke and for a long succession of days. A most soothing certitude. He enjoyed it in the dark, stretched out in his bunk with his new blankets pulled over him. Some clock ashore beyond the dock-gates struck two. And then he heard nothing more, because he went off into a light sleep from which he woke up with a start. He had not taken his clothes off, it was hardly worth while. He jumped up and went on deck.

The morning was clear, colourless, grey overhead; the dock like a sheet of darkling glass crowded with upside-down reflections of warehouses, of hulls and masts of silent ships. Rare figures moved here and there on the distant quays. A knot of men stood alongside with clothes-bags and wooden chests at their feet. Others were coming down the lane between tall, blind walls, surrounding a hand-cart loaded with more bags and boxes. It was the crew of the Ferndale. They began to come on board. He scanned their faces as they passed forward filling the roomy deck with the shuffle of their footsteps and the murmur of voices, like the awakening to life of a world about to be launched into space.

Far away down the clear glassy stretch in the middle of the long dock Mr. Powell watched the tugs coming in quietly through the open gates. A subdued firm voice behind him interrupted this contemplation. It was Franklin, the thick chief mate, who was addressing him with a watchful appraising stare of his prominent black eyes: "You'd better take a couple of these chaps with you and look out for her aft. We are going to cast off."

"Yes, sir," Powell said with proper alacrity; but for a moment they remained looking at each other fixedly. Something like a faint smile altered the set of the chief mate's lips just before he moved off forward with his brisk step.

Mr. Powell, getting up on the poop, touched his cap to Captain Anthony, who was there alone. He tells me that it was only then that he saw his captain for the first time. The day before, in the shipping office, what with the bad light and his excitement at this berth obtained as if by a brusque and unscrupulous miracle, did not count. He had then seemed to him much older and heavier. He was surprised at the lithe figure, broad of shoulder, narrow at the hips, the fire of the deep-set eyes, the springiness of the walk.

The captain gave him a steady stare, nodded slightly, and went on pacing the poop with an air of not being aware of what was going on, his head rigid, his movements rapid.

Powell stole several glances at him with a curiosity very natural under the circumstances. He wore a short grey jacket and a grey cap. In the light of the dawn, growing more limpid rather than brighter, Powell noticed the slightly sunken cheeks under the trimmed beard, the perpendicular fold on the forehead, something hard and set about the mouth.

It was too early yet for the work to have begun in the dock. The water gleamed placidly, no movement anywhere on the long straight lines of the quays, no one about to be seen except the few dock hands busy alongside the Ferndale, knowing their work, mostly silent or exchanging a few words in low tones as if they, too, had been aware of that lady 'who mustn't be disturbed.' The Ferndale was the only ship to leave that tide. The others seemed still asleep, without a sound, and only here and there a figure, coming up on the forecastle, leaned on the rail to watch the proceedings idly. Without trouble and fuss and almost without a sound was the Ferndale leaving the land, as if stealing away. Even the tugs, now with their engines stopped, were approaching her without a ripple, the burly-looking paddle-boat sheering forward, while the other, a screw, smaller and of slender shape, made for her quarter so gently that she did not divide the smooth water, but seemed to glide on its surface as if on a sheet of plate-glass, a man in her bow, the master at the wheel visible only from the waist upwards above the white screen of the bridge, both of them so still-eyed as to fascinate young Powell into curious self-forgetfulness and immobility. He was steeped, sunk in the general quietness, remembering the statement 'she's a lady that mustn't be disturbed,' and repeating to himself idly: 'No. She won't be disturbed. She won't be disturbed.' Then the first loud words of that morning breaking that strange hush of departure with a sharp hail: 'Look out for that line there,' made him start. The line whizzed past his head, one of the sailors aft caught it, and there was an end to the fascination, to the quietness of spirit which had stolen on him at the very moment of departure. From that moment till two hours afterwards, when the ship was brought up in one of the lower reaches of the Thames off an apparently uninhabited shore, near some sort of inlet where nothing but two anchored barges flying a red flag could be seen, Powell was too busy to think of the lady 'that mustn't be disturbed,' or of his captain — or of



anything else unconnected with his immediate duties. In fact, he had no occasion to go on the poop, or even look that way much; but while the ship was about to anchor, casting his eyes in that direction, he received an absurd impression that his captain (he was up there, of course) was sitting on both sides of the aftermost skylight at once. He was too occupied to reflect on this curious delusion, this phenomenon of seeing double as though he had had a drop too much. He only smiled at himself.

As often happens after a grey daybreak the sun had risen in a warm and glorious splendour above the smooth immense gleam of the enlarged estuary. Wisps of mist floated like trails of luminous dust, and in the dazzling reflections of water and vapour, the shores had the murky semi-transparent darkness of shadows cast mysteriously from below. Powell, who had sailed out of London all his young seaman's life, told me that it was then, in a moment of entranced vision an hour or so after sunrise, that the river was revealed to him for all time, like a fair face often seen before, which is suddenly perceived to be the expression of an inner and unsuspected beauty, of that something unique and only its own which rouses a passion of wonder and fidelity and an unappeasable memory of its charm. The hull of the *Ferndale*, swung head to the eastward, caught the light, her tall spars and rigging steeped in a bath of red-gold, from the water-line full of glitter to the trucks slight and gleaming against the delicate expanse of the blue.

"Time we had a mouthful to eat," said a voice at his side. It was Mr. Franklin, the chief mate, with his head sunk between his shoulders, and melancholy eyes. "Let the men have their breakfast, bo'sun," he went on, "and have the fire out in the galley in half an hour at the latest, so that we can call these barges of explosives alongside. Come along, young man. I don't know your name. Haven't seen the captain, to speak to, since yesterday afternoon when he rushed off to pick up a second mate somewhere. How did he get you?"

Young Powell, a little shy notwithstanding the friendly disposition of the other, answered him smilingly, aware somehow that there was something marked in this inquisitiveness, natural, after all — something anxious. His name was Powell, and he was put in the way of this berth by Mr. Powell, the shipping master. He blushed.

"Ah, I see. Well, you have been smart in getting ready. The ship-keeper, before he went away, told me you joined at one o'clock. I didn't sleep on

board last night. Not I. There was a time when I never cared to leave this ship for more than a couple of hours in the evening, even while in London, but now, since — ”

He checked himself with a roll of his prominent eyes towards that youngster, that stranger. Meantime, he was leading the way across the quarter-deck under the poop into the long passage with the door of the saloon at the far end. It was shut. But Mr. Franklin did not go so far. After passing the pantry he opened suddenly a door on the left of the passage, to Powell's great surprise.

“Our mess-room,” he said, entering a small cabin painted white, bare, lighted from part of the foremost skylight, and furnished only with a table and two settees with movable backs. “That surprises you? Well, it isn't usual. And it wasn't so in this ship either, before. It's only since — ”

He checked himself again. “Yes. Here we shall feed, you and I, facing each other for the next twelve months or more — God knows how much more! The bo'sun keeps the deck at meal-times in fine weather.”

He talked not exactly wheezing, but like a man whose breath is somewhat short, and the spirit (young Powell could not help thinking) embittered by some mysterious grievance.

There was enough of the unusual there to be recognized even by Powell's inexperience. The officers kept out of the cabin against the custom of the service, and then this sort of accent in the mate's talk. Franklin did not seem to expect conversational ease from the new second mate. He made several remarks about the old, deploring the accident. Awkward. Very awkward this thing to happen on the very eve of sailing.

“Collar-bone and arm broken,” he sighed. “Sad, very sad. Did you notice if the captain was at all affected? Eh? Must have been.”

Before this congested face, these globular eyes turned yearningly upon him, young Powell (one must keep in mind he was but a youngster then) who could not remember any signs of visible grief, confessed with an embarrassed laugh that, owing to the suddenness of this lucky chance coming to him, he was not in a condition to notice the state of other people.

“I was so pleased to get a ship at last,” he murmured, further disconcerted by the sort of pent-up gravity in Mr. Franklin's aspect.

“One man's food another man's poison,” the mate remarked. “That holds true beyond mere victuals. I suppose it didn't occur to you that it was a dam' poor way for a good man to be knocked out.”

Mr. Powell admitted openly that he had not thought of that. He was ready to admit that it was very reprehensible of him. But Franklin had no intention apparently to moralize. He did not fall silent either. His further remarks were to the effect that there had been a time when Captain Anthony would have showed more than enough concern for the least thing happening to one of his officers. Yes, there had been a time!

“And mind,” he went on, laying down suddenly a half-consumed piece of bread and butter and raising his voice, “poor Mathews was the second man the longest on board. I was the first. He joined a month later — about the same time as the steward by a few days. The bo’sun and the carpenter came the voyage after. Steady men. Still here. No good man need ever have thought of leaving the Ferndale unless he were a fool. Some good men are fools. Don’t know when they are well off. I mean the best of good men; men that you would do anything for. They go on for years, then all of a sudden — ”

Our young friend listened to the mate with a queer sense of discomfort growing on him. For it was as though Mr. Franklin were thinking aloud, and putting him into the delicate position of an unwilling eavesdropper. But there was in the mess-room another listener. It was the steward, who had come in carrying a tin coffee-pot with a long handle, and stood quietly by: a man with a middle-aged, sallow face, long features, heavy eyelids, a soldierly grey moustache. His body encased in a short black jacket with narrow sleeves, his long legs in very tight trousers, made up an agile, youthful, slender figure. He moved forward suddenly, and interrupted the mate’s monologue.

“More coffee, Mr. Franklin? Nice fresh lot. Piping hot. I am going to give breakfast to the saloon directly, and the cook is raking his fire out. Now’s your chance.”

The mate who, on account of his peculiar build, could not turn his head freely, twisted his thick trunk slightly, and ran his black eyes in the corners towards the steward.

“And is the precious pair of them out?” he growled.

The steward, pouring out the coffee into the mate’s cup, muttered moodily but distinctly: “The lady wasn’t when I was laying the table.”

Powell’s ears were fine enough to detect something hostile in this reference to the captain’s wife. For of what other person could they be speaking? The steward added with a gloomy sort of fairness: “But she will

be before I bring the dishes in. She never gives that sort of trouble. That she doesn't."

"No. Not in that way," Mr. Franklin agreed, and then both he and the steward, after glancing at Powell — the stranger to the ship — said nothing more.

But this had been enough to rouse his curiosity. Curiosity is natural to man. Of course it was not a malevolent curiosity which, if not exactly natural, is to be met fairly frequently in men and perhaps more frequently in women — especially if a woman be in question; and that woman under a cloud, in a manner of speaking. For under a cloud Flora de Barral was fated to be even at sea. Yes. Even that sort of darkness which attends a woman for whom there is no clear place in the world hung over her. Yes. Even at sea!

\* \* \* \* \*

And this is the pathos of being a woman. A man can struggle to get a place for himself or perish. But a woman's part is passive, say what you like, and shuffle the facts of the world as you may, hinting at lack of energy, of wisdom, of courage. As a matter of fact, almost all women have all that — of their own kind. But they are not made for attack. Wait they must. I am speaking here of women who are really women. And it's no use talking of opportunities, either. I know that some of them do talk of it. But not the genuine women. Those know better. Nothing can beat a true woman for a clear vision of reality; I would say a cynical vision if I were not afraid of wounding your chivalrous feelings — for which, by the by, women are not so grateful as you may think, to fellows of your kind . . .

"Upon my word, Marlow," I cried, "what are you flying out at me for like this? I wouldn't use an ill-sounding word about women, but what right have you to imagine that I am looking for gratitude?"

Marlow raised a soothing hand.

"There! There! I take back the ill-sounding word, with the remark, though, that cynicism seems to me a word invented by hypocrites. But let that pass. As to women, they know that the clamour for opportunities for them to become something which they cannot be is as reasonable as if mankind at large started asking for opportunities of winning immortality in this world, in which death is the very condition of life. You must understand that I am not talking here of material existence. That naturally

is implied; but you won't maintain that a woman who, say, enlisted, for instance (there have been cases) has conquered her place in the world. She has only got her living in it — which is quite meritorious, but not quite the same thing.

All these reflections which arise from my picking up the thread of Flora de Barral's existence did not, I am certain, present themselves to Mr. Powell — not the Mr. Powell we know taking solitary week-end cruises in the estuary of the Thames (with mysterious dashes into lonely creeks) but to the young Mr. Powell, the chance second officer of the ship *Ferndale*, commanded (and for the most part owned) by Roderick Anthony, the son of the poet — you know. A Mr. Powell, much slenderer than our robust friend is now, with the bloom of innocence not quite rubbed off his smooth cheeks, and apt not only to be interested but also to be surprised by the experience life was holding in store for him. This would account for his remembering so much of it with considerable vividness. For instance, the impressions attending his first breakfast on board the *Ferndale*, both visual and mental, were as fresh to him as if received yesterday.

The surprise, it is easy to understand, would arise from the inability to interpret aright the signs which experience (a thing mysterious in itself) makes to our understanding and emotions. For it is never more than that. Our experience never gets into our blood and bones. It always remains outside of us. That's why we look with wonder at the past. And this persists even when from practice and through growing callousness of fibre we come to the point when nothing that we meet in that rapid blinking stumble across a flick of sunshine — which our life is — nothing, I say, which we run against surprises us any more. Not at the time, I mean. If, later on, we recover the faculty with some such exclamation: 'Well! Well! I'll be hanged if I ever, . . . ' it is probably because this very thing that there should be a past to look back upon, other people's, is very astounding in itself when one has the time, a fleeting and immense instant to think of it . . .

“

I was on the point of interrupting Marlow when he stopped of himself, his eyes fixed on vacancy, or — perhaps — (I wouldn't be too hard on him) on a vision. He has the habit, or, say, the fault, of defective mantelpiece clocks, of suddenly stopping in the very fulness of the tick. If you have ever lived with a clock afflicted with that perversity, you know how vexing

it is — such a stoppage. I was vexed with Marlow. He was smiling faintly while I waited. He even laughed a little. And then I said acidly:

“Am I to understand that you have ferreted out something comic in the history of Flora de Barral?”

“Comic!” he exclaimed. “No! What makes you say? . . . Oh, I laughed — did I? But don’t you know that people laugh at absurdities that are very far from being comic? Didn’t you read the latest books about laughter written by philosophers, psychologists? There is a lot of them . . . “

“I dare say there has been a lot of nonsense written about laughter — and tears, too, for that matter,” I said impatiently.

“They say,” pursued the unabashed Marlow, “that we laugh from a sense of superiority. Therefore, observe, simplicity, honesty, warmth of feeling, delicacy of heart and of conduct, self-confidence, magnanimity are laughed at, because the presence of these traits in a man’s character often puts him into difficult, cruel or absurd situations, and makes us, the majority who are fairly free as a rule from these peculiarities, feel pleasantly superior.”

“Speak for yourself,” I said. “But have you discovered all these fine things in the story; or has Mr. Powell discovered them to you in his artless talk? Have you two been having good healthy laughs together? Come! Are your sides aching yet, Marlow?”

Marlow took no offence at my banter. He was quite serious.

“I should not like to say off-hand how much of that there was,” he pursued with amusing caution. “But there was a situation, tense enough for the signs of it to give many surprises to Mr. Powell — neither of them shocking in itself, but with a cumulative effect which made the whole unforgettable in the detail of its progress. And the first surprise came very soon, when the explosives (to which he owed his sudden chance of engagement) — dynamite in cases and blasting powder in barrels — taken on board, main hatch battened for sea, cook restored to his functions in the galley, anchor fished and the tug ahead, rounding the South Foreland, and with the sun sinking clear and red down the purple vista of the channel, he went on the poop, on duty, it is true, but with time to take the first freer breath in the busy day of departure. The pilot was still on board, who gave him first a silent glance, and then passed an insignificant remark before resuming his lounging to and fro between the steering wheel and the binnacle. Powell took his station modestly at the break of the poop. He had noticed across the skylight a head in a grey cap. But when, after a time, he

crossed over to the other side of the deck he discovered that it was not the captain's head at all. He became aware of grey hairs curling over the nape of the neck. How could he have made that mistake? But on board ship away from the land one does not expect to come upon a stranger.

Powell walked past the man. A thin, somewhat sunken face, with a tightly closed mouth, stared at the distant French coast, vague like a suggestion of solid darkness, lying abeam beyond the evening light reflected from the level waters, themselves growing more sombre than the sky; a stare, across which Powell had to pass and did pass with a quick side glance, noting its immovable stillness. His passage disturbed those eyes no more than if he had been as immaterial as a ghost. And this failure of his person in producing an impression affected him strangely. Who could that old man be?

He was so curious that he even ventured to ask the pilot in a low voice. The pilot turned out to be a good-natured specimen of his kind, condescending, sententious. He had been down to his meals in the main cabin, and had something to impart.

"That? Queer fish — eh? Mrs. Anthony's father. I've been introduced to him in the cabin at breakfast time. Name of Smith. Wonder if he has all his wits about him. They take him about with them, it seems. Don't look very happy — eh?"

Then, changing his tone abruptly, he desired Powell to get all hands on deck and make sail on the ship. "I shall be leaving you in half an hour. You'll have plenty of time to find out all about the old gent," he added with a thick laugh.

\* \* \* \* \*

In the secret emotion of giving his first order as a fully responsible officer, young Powell forgot the very existence of that old man in a moment. The following days, in the interest of getting in touch with the ship, with the men in her, with his duties, in the rather anxious period of settling down, his curiosity slumbered; for of course the pilot's few words had not extinguished it.

This settling down was made easy for him by the friendly character of his immediate superior — the chief. Powell could not defend himself from some sympathy for that thick, bald man, comically shaped, with his crimson complexion and something pathetic in the rolling of his very movable black

eyes in an apparently immovable head, who was so tactfully ready to take his competency for granted.

There can be nothing more reassuring to a young man tackling his life's work for the first time. Mr. Powell, his mind at ease about himself, had time to observe the people around with friendly interest. Very early in the beginning of the passage, he had discovered with some amusement that the marriage of Captain Anthony was resented by those to whom Powell (conscious of being looked upon as something of an outsider) referred in his mind as 'the old lot.'

They had the funny, regretful glances, intonations, nods of men who had seen other, better times. What difference it could have made to the bo'sun and the carpenter Powell could not very well understand. Yet these two pulled long faces and even gave hostile glances to the poop. The cook and the steward might have been more directly concerned. But the steward used to remark on occasion, 'Oh, she gives no extra trouble,' with scrupulous fairness of the most gloomy kind. He was rather a silent man with a great sense of his personal worth which made his speeches guarded. The cook, a neat man with fair side whiskers, who had been only three years in the ship, seemed the least concerned. He was even known to have inquired once or twice as to the success of some of his dishes with the captain's wife. This was considered a sort of disloyal falling away from the ruling feeling.

The mate's annoyance was yet the easiest to understand. As he let it out to Powell before the first week of the passage was over: 'You can't expect me to be pleased at being chucked out of the saloon as if I weren't good enough to sit down to meat with that woman.' But he hastened to add: 'Don't you think I'm blaming the captain. He isn't a man to be found fault with. You, Mr. Powell, are too young yet to understand such matters.'

Some considerable time afterwards, at the end of a conversation of that aggrieved sort, he enlarged a little more by repeating: 'Yes! You are too young to understand these things. I don't say you haven't plenty of sense. You are doing very well here. Jolly sight better than I expected, though I liked your looks from the first.'

It was in the trade-winds, at night, under a velvety, bespangled sky; a great multitude of stars watching the shadows of the sea gleaming mysteriously in the wake of the ship; while the leisurely swishing of the water to leeward was like a drowsy comment on her progress. Mr. Powell expressed his satisfaction by a half-bashful laugh. The mate mused on:



‘And of course you haven’t known the ship as she used to be. She was more than a home to a man. She was not like any other ship; and Captain Anthony was not like any other master to sail with. Neither is she now. But before one never had a care in the world as to her — and as to him, too. No, indeed, there was never anything to worry about.’

Young Powell couldn’t see what there was to worry about even then. The serenity of the peaceful night seemed as vast as all space, and as enduring as eternity itself. It’s true the sea is an uncertain element, but no sailor remembers this in the presence of its bewitching power any more than a lover ever thinks of the proverbial inconstancy of women. And Mr. Powell, being young, thought naïvely that the captain being married, there could be no occasion for anxiety as to his condition. I suppose that to him life, perhaps not so much his own as that of others, was something still in the nature of a fairy-tale with a ‘they lived happy ever after’ termination. We are the creatures of our light literature much more than is generally suspected in a world which prides itself on being scientific and practical, and in possession of incontrovertible theories. Powell felt in that way the more because the captain of a ship at sea is a remote, inaccessible creature, something like a prince of a fairy-tale, alone of his kind, depending on nobody, not to be called to account except by powers practically invisible and so distant, that they might well be looked upon as supernatural for all that the rest of the crew knows of them, as a rule.

So he did not understand the aggrieved attitude of the mate — or rather he understood it obscurely as a result of simple causes which did not seem to him adequate. He would have dismissed all this out of his mind with a contemptuous: ‘What the devil do I care?’ if the captain’s wife herself had not been so young. To see her the first time had been something of a shock to him. He had some preconceived ideas as to captain’s wives which, while he did not believe the testimony of his eyes, made him open them very wide. He had stared till the captain’s wife noticed it plainly and turned her face away. Captain’s wife! That girl covered with rugs in a long chair. Captain’s . . . ! He gasped mentally. It had never occurred to him that a captain’s wife could be anything but a woman to be described as stout or thin, as jolly or crabbed, but always mature, and even, in comparison with his own years, frankly old. But this! It was a sort of moral upset as though he had discovered a case of abduction or something as surprising as that. You understand that nothing is more disturbing than the upsetting of a

preconceived idea. Each of us arranges the world according to his own notion of the fitness of things. To behold a girl where your average mediocre imagination had placed a comparatively old woman may easily become one of the strongest shocks . . . “

Marlow paused, smiling to himself.

“Powell remained impressed after all these years by the very recollection,” he continued in a voice, amused perhaps but not mocking. “He said to me only the other day with something like the first awe of that discovery lingering in his tone — he said to me: “Why, she seemed so young, so girlish, that I looked round for some woman which would be the captain’s wife, though of course I knew there was no other woman on board that voyage.” The voyage before, it seems, there had been the steward’s wife to act as maid to Mrs. Anthony; but she was not taken that time for some reason he didn’t know. Mrs. Anthony . . . ! If it hadn’t been the captain’s wife he would have referred to her mentally as a kid, he said. I suppose there must be a sort of divinity hedging in a captain’s wife (however incredible) which prevented him applying to her that contemptuous definition in the secret of his thoughts.

I asked him when this had happened; and he told me that it was three days after parting from the tug, just outside the channel — to be precise. A head wind had set in with unpleasant damp weather. He had come up to leeward of the poop, still feeling very much of a stranger, and an untried officer, at six in the evening to take his watch. To see her was quite as unexpected as seeing a vision. When she turned away her head he recollected himself and dropped his eyes. What he could see then was only, close to the long chair on which she reclined, a pair of long, thin legs ending in black cloth boots tucked in close to the skylight seat. Whence he concluded that the ‘old gentleman,’ who wore a grey cap like the captain’s, was sitting by her — his daughter. In his first astonishment he had stopped dead short, with the consequence that now he felt very much abashed at having betrayed his surprise. But he couldn’t very well turn tail and bolt off the poop. He had come there on duty. So, still with downcast eyes, he made his way past them. Only when he got as far as the wheel-grating did he look up. She was hidden from him by the back of her deck-chair; but he had the view of the owner of the thin, aged legs seated on the skylight, his clean-shaved cheek, his thin compressed mouth with a hollow in each corner, the sparse grey locks escaping from under the tweed cap, and

curling slightly on the collar of the coat. He leaned forward a little over Mrs. Anthony, but they were not talking. Captain Anthony, walking with a springy hurried gait on the other side of the poop from end to end, gazed straight before him. Young Powell might have thought that his captain was not aware of his presence either. However, he knew better, and for that reason spent a most uncomfortable hour motionless by the compass before his captain stopped in his swift pacing and with an almost visible effort made some remark to him about the weather in a low voice. Before Powell, who was startled, could find a word of answer, the captain swung off again on his endless tramp with a fixed gaze. And till the supper bell rang silence dwelt over that poop like an evil spell. The captain walked up and down looking straight before him, the helmsman steered, looking upwards at the sails, the old gent on the skylight looked down on his daughter — and Mr. Powell confessed to me that he didn't know where to look, feeling as though he had blundered in where he had no business — which was absurd. At last he fastened his eyes on the compass card, took refuge, in spirit, inside the binnacle. He felt chilled more than he should have been by the chilly dusk falling on the muddy green sea of the soundings from a smoothly clouded sky. A fitful wind swept the cheerless waste, and the ship, hauled up so close as to check her way, seemed to progress by languid fits and starts against the short seas which swept along her sides with a snarling sound.

Young Powell thought that this was the dreariest evening aspect of the sea he had ever seen. He was glad when the other occupants of the poop left it at the sound of the bell. The captain first, with a sudden swerve in his walk towards the companion, and not even looking once towards his wife and his wife's father. Those two got up and moved towards the companion, the old gent very erect, his thin locks stirring gently about the nape of his neck, and carrying the rugs over his arm. The girl who was Mrs. Anthony went down first. The murky twilight had settled in deep shadow on her face. She looked at Mr. Powell in passing. He thought that she was very pale. Cold perhaps. The old gent stopped a moment, thin and stiff, before the young man, and in a voice which was low but distinct enough, and without any particular accent — not even of inquiry — he said:

“You are the new second officer, I believe.”

Mr. Powell answered in the affirmative, wondering if this were a friendly overture. He had noticed that Mr. Smith's eyes had a sort of inward look as

though he had disliked or disdained his surroundings. The captain's wife had disappeared then down the companion stairs. Mr. Smith said 'Ah!' and waited a little longer to put another question in his incurious voice.

"And did you know the man who was here before you?"

"No," said young Powell, "I didn't know anybody belonging to this ship before I joined."

"He was much older than you. Twice your age. Perhaps more. His hair was iron grey. Yes. Certainly more."

The low, repressed voice paused, but the old man did not move away. He added: "Isn't it unusual?"

Mr. Powell was surprised not only by being engaged in conversation, but also by its character. It might have been the suggestion of the word uttered by this old man, but it was distinctly at that moment that he became aware of something unusual not only in this encounter but generally around him, about everybody, in the atmosphere. The very sea, with short flashes of foam bursting out here and there in the gloomy distances, the unchangeable, safe sea sheltering a man from all passions, except its own anger, seemed queer to the quick glance he threw to windward where the already effaced horizon traced no reassuring limit to the eye. In the expiring, diffused twilight, and before the clouded night dropped its mysterious veil, it was the immensity of space made visible — almost palpable. Young Powell felt it. He felt it in the sudden sense of his isolation; the trustworthy, powerful ship of his first acquaintance reduced to a speck, to something almost undistinguishable, the mere support for the soles of his two feet before that unexpected old man becoming so suddenly articulate in a darkening universe.

It took him a moment or so to seize the drift of the question. He repeated slowly: 'Unusual . . . Oh, you mean for an elderly man to be the second of a ship. I don't know. There are a good many of us who don't get on. He didn't get on, I suppose.'

The other, his head bowed a little, had the air of listening with acute attention.

"And now he has been taken to the hospital," he said.

"I believe so. Yes. I remember Captain Anthony saying so in the shipping office."

"Possibly about to die," went on the old man, in his careful deliberate tone. "And perhaps glad enough to die."

Mr. Powell was young enough to be startled at the suggestion, which sounded confidential and blood-curdling in the dusk. He said sharply that it was not very likely, as if defending the absent victim of the accident from an unkind aspersion. He felt, in fact, indignant. The other emitted a short stifled laugh of a conciliatory nature. The second bell rang under the poop. He made a movement at the sound, but lingered.

“What I said was not meant seriously,” he murmured, with that strange air of fearing to be overheard. “Not in this case. I know the man.”

The occasion, or rather the want of occasion, for this conversation, had sharpened the perceptions of the unsophisticated second officer of the *Ferndale*. He was alive to the slightest shade of tone, and felt as if this “I know the man” should have been followed by a “he was no friend of mine.” But after the shortest possible break the old gentleman continued to murmur distinctly and evenly:

“Whereas you have never seen him. Nevertheless, when you have gone through as many years as I have, you will understand how an event putting an end to one’s existence may not be altogether unwelcome. Of course there are stupid accidents. And even then one needn’t be very angry. What is it to be deprived of life? It’s soon done. But what would you think of the feelings of a man who should have had his life stolen from him? Cheated out of it, I say!”

He ceased abruptly, and remained still long enough for the astonished Powell to stammer out an indistinct: “What do you mean? I don’t understand.” Then, with a low ‘Good-night’ glided a few steps, and sank through the shadow of the companion into the lamplight below which did not reach higher than the turn of the staircase.

The strange words, the cautious tone, the whole person left a strong uneasiness in the mind of Mr. Powell. He started walking the poop in great mental confusion. He felt all adrift. This was funny talk and no mistake. And this cautious low tone as though he were watched by someone was more than funny. The young second officer hesitated to break the established rule of every ship’s discipline; but at last could not resist the temptation of getting hold of some other human being, and spoke to the man at the wheel.

“Did you hear what this gentleman was saying to me?”

“No, sir,” answered the sailor quietly. Then, encouraged by this evidence of laxity in his officer, made bold to add, “A queer fish, sir.” This was

tentative, and Mr. Powell, busy with his own view, not saying anything, he ventured further. “They are more like passengers. One sees some queer passengers.”

“Who are like passengers?” asked Powell gruffly.

“Why, these two, sir.”

### CHAPTER THREE — DEVOTED SERVANTS — AND THE LIGHT OF A FLARE

Young Powell thought to himself: "The men, too, are noticing it." Indeed, the captain's behaviour to his wife and to his wife's father was noticeable enough. It was as if they had been a pair of not very congenial passengers. But perhaps it was not always like that. The captain might have been put out by something.

When the aggrieved Franklin came on deck Mr. Powell made a remark to that effect. For his curiosity was aroused.

The mate grumbled "Seems to you? . . . Putout? . . . eh?" He buttoned his thick jacket up to the throat, and only then added a gloomy "Aye, likely enough," which discouraged further conversation. But no encouragement would have induced the newly-joined second mate to enter the way of confidences. His was an instinctive prudence. Powell did not know why it was he had resolved to keep his own counsel as to his colloquy with Mr. Smith. But his curiosity did not slumber. Some time afterwards, again at the relief of watches, in the course of a little talk, he mentioned Mrs. Anthony's father quite casually, and tried to find out from the mate who he was.

"It would take a clever man to find that out, as things are on board now," Mr. Franklin said, unexpectedly communicative. "The first I saw of him was when she brought him alongside in a four-wheeler one morning about half-past eleven. The captain had come on board early, and was down in the cabin that had been fitted out for him. Did I tell you that if you want the captain for anything you must stamp on the port side of the deck? That's so. This ship is not only unlike what she used to be, but she is like no other ship, anyhow. Did you ever hear of the captain's room being on the port side? Both of them stern cabins have been fitted up afresh like a blessed palace. A gang of people from some tip-top West-End house were fussing here on board with hangings and furniture for a fortnight, as if the Queen were coming with us. Of course the starboard cabin is the bedroom one, but the poor captain hangs out to port on a couch, so that in case we want him on deck at night, Mrs. Anthony should not be startled. Nervous! Phoo! A woman who marries a sailor and makes up her mind to come to sea should have no blamed jumpiness about her, I say. But never mind.

Directly the old cab pointed round the corner of the warehouse I called out to the captain that his lady was coming aboard. He answered me, but as I didn't see him coming, I went down the gangway myself to help her alight. She jumps out excitedly without touching my arm, or as much as saying "thank you" or "good morning" or anything, turns back to the cab, and then that old joker comes out slowly. I hadn't noticed him inside. I hadn't expected to see anybody. It gave me a start. She says: "My father — Mr. Franklin." He was staring at me like an owl. "How do you do, sir?" says I. Both of them looked funny. It was as if something had happened to them on the way. Neither of them moved, and I stood by waiting. The captain showed himself on the poop; and I saw him at the side looking over, and then he disappeared; on the way to meet them on shore, I expected. But he just went down below again. So, not seeing him, I said: "Let me help you on board, sir." "On board!" says he in a silly fashion. "On board!" "It's not a very good ladder, but it's quite firm," says I, as he seemed to be afraid of it. And he didn't look a broken-down old man, either. You can see yourself what he is. Straight as a poker, and life enough in him yet. But he made no move, and I began to feel foolish. Then she comes forward. "Oh! Thank you, Mr. Franklin. I'll help my father up." Flabbergasted me — to be choked off like this. Pushed in between him and me without as much as a look my way. So of course I dropped it. What do you think? I fell back. I would have gone up on board at once and left them on the quay to come up or stay there till next week, only they were blocking the way. I couldn't very well shove them on one side. Devil only knows what was up between them. There she was, pale as death, talking to him very fast. He got as red as a turkey-cock — dash me if he didn't. A bad-tempered old bloke, I can tell you. And a bad lot, too. Never mind. I couldn't hear what she was saying to him, but she put force enough into it to shake her. It seemed — it seemed, mind! — that he didn't want to go on board. Of course it couldn't have been that. I know better. Well, she took him by the arm, above the elbow, as if to lead him, or push him rather. I was standing not quite ten feet off. Why should I have gone away? I was anxious to get back on board as soon as they would let me. I didn't want to overhear her blamed whispering either. But I couldn't stay there for ever, so I made a move to get past them if I could. And that's how I heard a few words. It was the old chap — something nasty about being "under the heel" of somebody or other. Then he says, "I don't want this sacrifice." What it meant I can't



tell. It was a quarrel — of that I am certain. She looks over her shoulder, and sees me pretty close to them. I don't know what she found to say into his ear, but he gave way suddenly. He looked round at me too, and they went up together so quickly then that when I got on the quarter-deck I was only in time to see the inner door of the passage close after them. Queer — eh? But if it were only queerness one wouldn't mind. Some luggage in new trunks came on board in the afternoon. We undocked at midnight. And may I be hanged if I know who or what he was or is. I haven't been able to find out. No, I don't know. He may have been anything. All I know is that once, years ago when I went to see the Derby with a friend, I saw a pea-and-thimble chap who looked just like that old mystery father out of a cab."

All this the goggle-eyed mate had said in a resentful and melancholy voice, with pauses, to the gentle murmur of the sea. It was for him a bitter sort of pleasure to have a fresh pair of ears, a newcomer, to whom he could repeat all these matters of grief and suspicion talked over endlessly by the band of Captain Anthony's faithful subordinates. It was evidently so refreshing to his worried spirit that it made him forget the advisability of a little caution with a complete stranger. But really with Mr. Powell there was no danger. Amused, at first, at these complaints, he provoked them for fun. Afterwards, turning them over in his mind, he became impressed, and as the impression grew stronger with the days his resolution to keep it to himself grew stronger too.

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What made it all the easier to keep — I mean the resolution — was that Powell's sentiment of amused surprise at what struck him at first as mere absurdity was not unmingled with indignation. And his years were too few, his position too novel, his reliance on his own opinion not yet firm enough to allow him to express it with any effect. And then — what would have been the use, anyhow — and where was the necessity?

But this thing, familiar and mysterious at the same time, occupied his imagination. The solitude of the sea intensifies the thoughts and the facts of one's experience which seems to lie at the very centre of the world, as the ship which carries one always remains the centre figure of the round horizon. He viewed the apoplectic, goggle-eyed mate and the saturnine, heavy-eyed steward as the victims of a peculiar and secret form of lunacy

which poisoned their lives. But he did not give them his sympathy on that account. No. That strange affliction awakened in him a sort of suspicious wonder.

Once — and it was at night again; for the officers of the Ferndale keeping watch and watch as was customary in those days, had but few occasions for intercourse — once, I say, the thick Mr. Franklin, a quaintly bulky figure under the stars, the usual witnesses of his outpourings, asked him with an abruptness which was not callous, but in his simple way:

“I believe you have no parents living?”

Mr. Powell said that he had lost his father and mother at a very early age.

“My mother is still alive,” declared Mr. Franklin in a tone which suggested that he was gratified by the fact. “The old lady is lasting well. Of course she’s got to be made comfortable. A woman must be looked after, and, if it comes to that, I say, give me a mother. I dare say if she had not lasted it out so well I might have gone and got married. I don’t know, though. We sailors haven’t got much time to look about us to any purpose. Anyhow, as the old lady was there I haven’t, I may say, looked at a girl in all my life. Not that I wasn’t partial to female society in my time,” he added with a pathetic intonation, while the whites of his goggle eyes gleamed amorously under the clear night sky. “Very partial, I may say.”

Mr. Powell was amused; and as these communications took place only when the mate was relieved off duty he had no serious objection to them. The mate’s presence made the first half-hour and sometimes even more of his watch on deck pass away. If his senior did not mind losing some of his rest it was not Mr. Powell’s affair. Franklin was a decent fellow. His intention was not to boast of his filial piety.

“Of course I mean respectable female society,” he explained. “The other sort is neither here nor there. I blame no man’s conduct, but a well-brought-up young fellow like you knows that there’s precious little fun to be got out of it.” He fetched a deep sigh. “I wish Captain Anthony’s mother had been a lasting sort like my old lady. He would have had to look after her and he would have done it well. Captain Anthony is a proper man. And it would have saved him from the most foolish — ”

He did not finish the phrase which certainly was turning bitter in his mouth. Mr. Powell thought to himself: “There he goes again.” He laughed a little.

“I don’t understand why you are so hard on the captain, Mr. Franklin. I thought you were a great friend of his.”

Mr. Franklin exclaimed at this. He was not hard on the captain. Nothing was further from his thoughts. Friend! Of course he was a good friend and a faithful servant. He begged Powell to understand that if Captain Anthony chose to strike a bargain with Old Nick to-morrow, and Old Nick were good to the captain, he (Franklin) would find it in his heart to love Old Nick for the captain’s sake. That was so. On the other hand, if a saint, an angel with white wings came along and — ”

He broke off short again as if his own vehemence had frightened him. Then in his strained pathetic voice (which he had never raised) he observed that it was no use talking. Anybody could see that the man was changed.

“As to that,” said young Powell, “it is impossible for me to judge.”

“Good Lord!” whispered the mate. “An educated, clever young fellow like you with a pair of eyes on him and some sense too! Is that how a happy man looks? Eh? Young you may be, but you aren’t a kid; and I dare you to say ‘Yes!’”

Mr. Powell did not take up the challenge. He did not know what to think of the mate’s view. Still, it seemed as if it had opened his understanding in a measure. He conceded that the captain did not look very well.

“Not very well,” repeated the mate mournfully. “Do you think a man with a face like that can hope to live his life out? You haven’t knocked about long in this world yet, but you are a sailor, you have been in three or four ships, you say. Well, have you ever seen a shipmaster walking his own deck as if he did not know what he had underfoot? Have you? Dam’me if I don’t think that he forgets where he is. Of course he can be no other than a prime seaman; but it’s lucky, all the same, he has me on board. I know by this time what he wants done without being told. Do you know that I have had no order given me since we left port? Do you know that he has never once opened his lips to me unless I spoke to him first? I? His chief officer; his shipmate for full six years, with whom he had no cross word — not once in all that time. Aye. Not a cross look even. True that when I do make him speak to me, there is his dear old self, the quick eye, the kind voice. Could hardly be other to his old Franklin. But what’s the good? Eyes, voice, everything’s miles away. And for all that I take good care never to address him when the poop isn’t clear. Yes! Only we two and nothing but the sea with us. You think it would be all right; the only chief

mate he ever had — Mr. Franklin here and Mr. Franklin there — when anything went wrong the first word you would hear about the decks was ‘Franklin!’ — I am thirteen years older than he is — you would think it would be all right, wouldn’t you? Only we two on this poop on which we saw each other first — he a young master — told me that he thought I would suit him very well — we two, and thirty-one days out at sea, and it’s no good! It’s like talking to a man standing on shore. I can’t get him back. I can’t get at him. I feel sometimes as if I must shake him by the arm: “Wake up! Wake up! You are wanted, sir . . . !”

Young Powell recognized the expression of a true sentiment, a thing so rare in this world where there are so many mutes and so many excellent reasons even at sea for an articulate man not to give himself away, that he felt something like respect for this outburst. It was not loud. The grotesque squat shape, with the knob of the head as if rammed down between the square shoulders by a blow from a club, moved vaguely in a circumscribed space limited by the two harness-casks lashed to the front rail of the poop, without gestures, hands in the pockets of the jacket, elbows pressed closely to its side; and the voice without resonance, passed from anger to dismay and back again without a single louder word in the hurried delivery, interrupted only by slight gasps for air as if the speaker were being choked by the suppressed passion of his grief.

Mr. Powell, though moved to a certain extent, was by no means carried away. And just as he thought that it was all over, the other, fidgeting in the darkness, was heard again explosive, bewildered but not very loud in the silence of the ship and the great empty peace of the sea.

“They have done something to him! What is it? What can it be? Can’t you guess? Don’t you know?”

“Good heavens!” Young Powell was astounded on discovering that this was an appeal addressed to him. “How on earth can I know?”

“You do talk to that white-faced, black-eyed . . . I’ve seen you talking to her more than a dozen times.”

Young Powell, his sympathy suddenly chilled, remarked in a disdainful tone that Mrs. Anthony’s eyes were not black.

“I wish to God she had never set them on the captain, whatever colour they are,” retorted Franklin. “She and that old chap with the scraped jaws who sits over her and stares down at her dead-white face with his yellow

eyes — confound them! Perhaps you will tell us that his eyes are not yellow?”

Powell, not interested in the colour of Mr. Smith’s eyes, made a vague gesture. Yellow or not yellow, it was all one to him.

The mate murmured to himself. “No. He can’t know. No! No more than a baby. It would take an older head.”

“I don’t even understand what you mean,” observed Mr. Powell coldly.

“And even the best head would be puzzled by such devil-work,” the mate continued, muttering. “Well, I have heard tell of women doing for a man in one way or another when they got him fairly ashore. But to bring their devilry to sea and fasten on such a man! . . . It’s something I can’t understand. But I can watch. Let them look out — I say!”

His short figure, unable to stoop, without flexibility, could not express dejection. He was very tired suddenly; he dragged his feet going off the poop. Before he left it with nearly an hour of his watch below sacrificed, he addressed himself once more to our young man who stood abreast of the mizzen rigging in an unreceptive mood expressed by silence and immobility. He did not regret, he said, having spoken openly on this very serious matter.

“I don’t know about its seriousness, sir,” was Mr. Powell’s frank answer. “But if you think you have been telling me something very new you are mistaken. You can’t keep that matter out of your speeches. It’s the sort of thing I’ve been hearing more or less ever since I came on board.”

Mr. Powell, speaking truthfully, did not mean to speak offensively. He had instincts of wisdom; he felt that this was a serious affair, for it had nothing to do with reason. He did not want to raise an enemy for himself in the mate. And Mr. Franklin did not take offence. To Mr. Powell’s truthful statement he answered with equal truth and simplicity that it was very likely, very likely. With a thing like that (next door to witchcraft almost) weighing on his mind, the wonder was that he could think of anything else. The poor man must have found in the restlessness of his thoughts the illusion of being engaged in an active contest with some power of evil; for his last words as he went lingeringly down the poop ladder expressed the quaint hope that he would get him, Powell, “on our side yet.”

Mr. Powell — just imagine a straightforward youngster assailed in this fashion on the high seas — answered merely by an embarrassed and uneasy laugh which reflected exactly the state of his innocent soul. The apoplectic

mate, already half-way down, went up again three steps of the poop ladder. Why, yes. A proper young fellow, the mate expected, wouldn't stand by and see a man, a good sailor and his own skipper, in trouble without taking his part against a couple of shore people who — Mr. Powell interrupted him impatiently, asking what was the trouble?

“What is it you are hinting at?” he cried with an inexplicable irritation.

“I don't like to think of him all alone down there with these two,” Franklin whispered impressively. “Upon my word I don't. God only knows what may be going on there . . . Don't laugh . . . It was bad enough last voyage when Mrs. Brown had a cabin aft; but now it's worse. It frightens me. I can't sleep sometimes for thinking of him all alone there, shut off from us all.”

Mrs. Brown was the steward's wife. You must understand that shortly after his visit to the Fyne cottage (with all its consequences), Anthony had got an offer to go to the Western Islands, and bring home the cargo of some ship which, damaged in a collision or a stranding, took refuge in St. Michael, and was condemned there. Roderick Anthony had connections which would put such paying jobs in his way. So Flora de Barral had but a five months' voyage, a mere excursion, for her first trial of sea-life. And Anthony, dearly trying to be most attentive, had induced this Mrs. Brown, the wife of his faithful steward, to come along as maid to his bride. But for some reason or other this arrangement was not continued. And the mate, tormented by indefinite alarms and forebodings, regretted it. He regretted that Jane Brown was no longer on board — as a sort of representative of Captain Anthony's faithful servants, to watch quietly what went on in that part of the ship this fatal marriage had closed to their vigilance. That had been excellent. For she was a dependable woman.

Powell did not detect any particular excellence in what seemed a spying employment. But in his simplicity he said that he should have thought Mrs. Anthony would have been glad anyhow to have another woman on board. He was thinking of the white-faced girlish personality which it seemed to him ought to have been cared for. The innocent young man always looked upon the girl as immature; something of a child yet.

“She! glad! Why it was she who had her fired out. She didn't want anybody around the cabin. Mrs. Brown is certain of it. She told her husband so. You ask the steward and hear what he has to say about it. That's why I don't like it. A capable woman who knew her place. But no.

Out she must go. For no fault, mind you. The captain was ashamed to send her away. But that wife of his — aye the precious pair of them have got hold of him. I can't speak to him for a minute on the poop without that thimble-rigging coon coming gliding up. I'll tell you what. I overheard once — God knows I didn't try to — only he forgot I was on the other side of the skylight with my sextant — I overheard him — you know how he sits hanging over her chair and talking away without properly opening his mouth — yes I caught the word right enough. He was alluding to the captain as “the jailer.” The jail . . . !”

Franklin broke off with a profane execration. A silence reigned for a long time and the slight, very gentle rolling of the ship slipping before the N.E. trade-wind seemed to be a soothing device for lulling to sleep the suspicions of men who trust themselves to the sea.

A deep sigh was heard followed by the mate's voice asking dismally if that was the way one would speak of a man to whom one wished well? No better proof of something wrong was needed. Therefore he hoped, as he vanished at last, that Mr. Powell would be on their side. And this time Mr. Powell did not answer this hope with an embarrassed laugh.

That young officer was more and more surprised at the nature of the incongruous revelations coming to him in the surroundings and in the atmosphere of the open sea. It is difficult for us to understand the extent, the completeness, the comprehensiveness of his inexperience, for us who didn't go to sea out of a small private school at the age of fourteen years and nine months. Leaning on his elbow in the mizzen rigging and so still that the helmsman over there at the other end of the poop might have (and he probably did) suspect him of being criminally asleep on duty, he tried to “get hold of that thing” by some side which would fit in with his simple notions of psychology. “What the deuce are they worrying about?” he asked himself in a dazed and contemptuous impatience. But all the same “jailer” was a funny name to give a man; unkind, unfriendly, nasty. He was sorry that Mr. Smith was guilty in that matter because, the truth must be told, he had been to a certain extent sensible of having been noticed in a quiet manner by the father of Mrs. Anthony. Youth appreciates that sort of recognition which is the subtlest form of flattery age can offer. Mr. Smith seized opportunities to approach him on deck. His remarks were sometimes weird and enigmatical.

He was doubtless an eccentric old gent. But from that to calling his son-in-law (whom he never approached on deck) nasty names behind his back was a long step.

And Mr. Powell marvelled . . . “

“While he was telling me all this,” — Marlow changed his tone — “I marvelled even more. It was as if misfortune marked its victims on the forehead for the dislike of the crowd. I am not thinking here of numbers. Two men may behave like a crowd, three certainly will when their emotions are engaged. It was as if the forehead of Flora de Barral were marked. Was the girl born to be a victim; to be always disliked and crushed as if she were too fine for this world? Or too luckless — since that also is often counted as sin.

Yes, I marvelled more since I knew more of the girl than Mr. Powell — if only her true name; and more of Captain Anthony — if only the fact that he was the son of a delicate erotic poet of a markedly refined and autocratic temperament. Yes, I knew their joint stories which Mr. Powell did not know. The chapter in it he was opening to me, the sea-chapter, with such new personages as the sentimental and apoplectic chief-mate and the morose steward, however astounding to him in its detached condition was much more so to me as a member of a series, following the chapter outside the Eastern Hotel in which I myself had played my part. In view of her declarations and my sage remarks it was very unexpected. She had meant well, and I had certainly meant well too. Captain Anthony — as far as I could gather from little Fyne — had meant well. As far as such lofty words may be applied to the obscure personages of this story we were all filled with the noblest sentiments and intentions. The sea was there to give them the shelter of its solitude free from the earth’s petty suggestions. I could well marvel in myself, as to what had happened.

I hope that if he saw it, Mr. Powell forgave me the smile of which I was guilty at that moment. The light in the cabin of his little cutter was dim. And the smile was dim too. Dim and fleeting. The girl’s life had presented itself to me as a tragi-comical adventure, the saddest thing on earth, slipping between frank laughter and unabashed tears. Yes, the saddest facts and the most common, and, being common perhaps the most worthy of our unreserved pity.

The purely human reality is capable of lyricism but not of abstraction. Nothing will serve for its understanding but the evidence of rational linking



up of characters and facts. And beginning with Flora de Barral, in the light of my memories I was certain that she at least must have been passive; for that is of necessity the part of women, this waiting on fate which some of them, and not the most intelligent, cover up by the vain appearances of agitation. Flora de Barral was not exceptionally intelligent but she was thoroughly feminine. She would be passive (and that does not mean inanimate) in the circumstances, where the mere fact of being a woman was enough to give her an occult and supreme significance. And she would be enduring which is the essence of woman's visible, tangible power. Of that I was certain. Had she not endured already? Yet it is so true that the germ of destruction lies in wait for us mortals, even at the very source of our strength, that one may die of too much endurance as well as of too little of it.

Such was my train of thought. And I was mindful also of my first view of her — toying or perhaps communing in earnest with the possibilities of a precipice. But I did not ask Mr. Powell anxiously what had happened to Mrs. Anthony in the end. I let him go on in his own way feeling that no matter what strange facts he would have to disclose, I was certain to know much more of them than he ever did know or could possibly guess . . . “

Marlow paused for quite a long time. He seemed uncertain as though he had advanced something beyond my grasp. Purposely I made no sign. “You understand?” he asked.

“Perfectly,” I said. “You are the expert in the psychological wilderness. This is like one of those Red-skin stories where the noble savages carry off a girl and the honest backwoodsman with his incomparable knowledge follows the track and reads the signs of her fate in a footprint here, a broken twig there, a trinket dropped by the way. I have always liked such stories. Go on.”

Marlow smiled indulgently at my jesting. “It is not exactly a story for boys,” he said. “I go on then. The sign, as you call it, was not very plentiful but very much to the purpose, and when Mr. Powell heard (at a certain moment I felt bound to tell him) when he heard that I had known Mrs. Anthony before her marriage, that, to a certain extent, I was her confidant . . . For you can't deny that to a certain extent . . . Well let us say that I had a look in . . . A young girl, you know, is something like a temple. You pass by and wonder what mysterious rites are going on in there, what prayers, what visions? The privileged men, the lover, the husband, who are

given the key of the sanctuary do not always know how to use it. For myself, without claim, without merit, simply by chance I had been allowed to look through the half-opened door and I had seen the saddest possible desecration, the withered brightness of youth, a spirit neither made cringing nor yet dulled but as if bewildered in quivering hopelessness by gratuitous cruelty; self-confidence destroyed and, instead, a resigned recklessness, a mournful callousness (and all this simple, almost naïve) — before the material and moral difficulties of the situation. The passive anguish of the luckless!

I asked myself: wasn't that ill-luck exhausted yet? Ill-luck which is like the hate of invisible powers interpreted, made sensible and injurious by the actions of men?

Mr. Powell as you may well imagine had opened his eyes at my statement. But he was full of his recalled experiences on board the *Ferndale*, and the strangeness of being mixed up in what went on aboard, simply because his name was also the name of a shipping-master, kept him in a state of wonder which made other coincidences, however unlikely, not so very surprising after all.

This astonishing occurrence was so present to his mind that he always felt as though he were there under false pretences. And this feeling was so uncomfortable that it nerved him to break through the awe-inspiring aloofness of his captain. He wanted to make a clean breast of it. I imagine that his youth stood in good stead to Mr. Powell. Oh, yes. Youth is a power. Even Captain Anthony had to take some notice of it, as if it refreshed him to see something untouched, unscarred, unhardened by suffering. Or perhaps the very novelty of that face, on board a ship where he had seen the same faces for years, attracted his attention.

Whether one day he dropped a word to his new second officer or only looked at him I don't know; but Mr. Powell seized the opportunity whatever it was. The captain who had started and stopped in his everlasting rapid walk smoothed his brow very soon, heard him to the end and then laughed a little.

"Ah! That's the story. And you felt you must put me right as to this."

"Yes, sir."

"It doesn't matter how you came on board," said Anthony. And then showing that perhaps he was not so utterly absent from his ship as Franklin supposed: "That's all right. You seem to be getting on very well with

everybody," he said in his curt hurried tone, as if talking hurt him, and his eyes already straying over the sea as usual.

"Yes, sir."

Powell tells me that looking then at the strong face to which that haggard expression was returning, he had the impulse, from some confused friendly feeling, to add: "I am very happy on board here, sir."

The quickly returning glance, its steadiness, abashed Mr. Powell and made him even step back a little. The captain looked as though he had forgotten the meaning of the word.

"You — what? Oh yes . . . You . . . of course . . . Happy. Why not?"

This was merely muttered; and next moment Anthony was off on his headlong tramp his eyes turned to the sea away from his ship.

A sailor indeed looks generally into the great distances, but in Captain Anthony's case there was — as Powell expressed it — something particular, something purposeful like the avoidance of pain or temptation. It was very marked once one had become aware of it. Before, one felt only a pronounced strangeness. Not that the captain — Powell was careful to explain — didn't see things as a ship-master should. The proof of it was that on that very occasion he desired him suddenly after a period of silent pacing, to have all the staysails sheets eased off, and he was going on with some other remarks on the subject of these staysails when Mrs. Anthony followed by her father emerged from the companion. She established herself in her chair to leeward of the skylight as usual. Thereupon the captain cut short whatever he was going to say, and in a little while went down below.

I asked Mr. Powell whether the captain and his wife never conversed on deck. He said no — or at any rate they never exchanged more than a couple of words. There was some constraint between them. For instance, on that very occasion, when Mrs. Anthony came out they did look at each other; the captain's eyes indeed followed her till she sat down; but he did not speak to her; he did not approach her; and afterwards left the deck without turning his head her way after this first silent exchange of glances.

I asked Mr. Powell what did he do then, the captain being out of the way. "I went over and talked to Mrs. Anthony. I was thinking that it must be very dull for her. She seemed to be such a stranger to the ship."

"The father was there of course?"

“Always,” said Powell. “He was always there sitting on the skylight, as if he were keeping watch over her. And I think,” he added, “that he was worrying her. Not that she showed it in any way. Mrs. Anthony was always very quiet and always ready to look one straight in the face.”

“You talked together a lot?” I pursued my inquiries. “She mostly let me talk to her,” confessed Mr. Powell. “I don’t know that she was very much interested — but still she let me. She never cut me short.”

All the sympathies of Mr. Powell were for Flora Anthony née de Barral. She was the only human being younger than himself on board that ship since the *Ferndale* carried no boys and was manned by a full crew of able seamen. Yes! their youth had created a sort of bond between them. Mr. Powell’s open countenance must have appeared to her distinctly pleasing amongst the mature, rough, crabbed or even inimical faces she saw around her. With the warm generosity of his age young Powell was on her side, as it were, even before he knew that there were sides to be taken on board that ship, and what this taking sides was about. There was a girl. A nice girl. He asked himself no questions. Flora de Barral was not so much younger in years than himself; but for some reason, perhaps by contrast with the accepted idea of a captain’s wife, he could not regard her otherwise but as an extremely youthful creature. At the same time, apart from her exalted position, she exercised over him the supremacy a woman’s earlier maturity gives her over a young man of her own age. As a matter of fact we can see that, without ever having more than a half an hour’s consecutive conversation together, and the distances duly preserved, these two were becoming friends — under the eye of the old man, I suppose.

How he first got in touch with his captain’s wife Powell relates in this way. It was long before his memorable conversation with the mate and shortly after getting clear of the channel. It was gloomy weather; dead head wind, blowing quite half a gale; the *Ferndale* under reduced sail was stretching close-hauled across the track of the homeward bound ships, just moving through the water and no more, since there was no object in pressing her and the weather looked threatening. About ten o’clock at night he was alone on the poop, in charge, keeping well aft by the weather rail and staring to windward, when amongst the white, breaking seas, under the black sky, he made out the lights of a ship. He watched them for some time. She was running dead before the wind of course. She will pass jolly close — he said to himself; and then suddenly he felt a great mistrust of that

approaching ship. She's heading straight for us — he thought. It was not his business to get out of the way. On the contrary. And his uneasiness grew by the recollection of the forty tons of dynamite in the body of the Ferndale; not the sort of cargo one thinks of with equanimity in connection with a threatened collision. He gazed at the two small lights in the dark immensity filled with the angry noise of the seas. They fascinated him till their plainness to his sight gave him a conviction that there was danger there. He knew in his mind what to do in the emergency, but very properly he felt that he must call the captain out at once.

He crossed the deck in one bound. By the immemorial custom and usage of the sea the captain's room is on the starboard side. You would just as soon expect your captain to have his nose at the back of his head as to have his state-room on the port side of the ship. Powell forgot all about the direction on that point given him by the chief. He flew over as I said, stamped with his foot and then putting his face to the cowl of the big ventilator shouted down there: "Please come on deck, sir," in a voice which was not trembling or scared but which we may call fairly expressive. There could not be a mistake as to the urgency of the call. But instead of the expected alert "All right!" and the sound of a rush down there, he heard only a faint exclamation — then silence.

Think of his astonishment! He remained there, his ear in the cowl of the ventilator, his eyes fastened on those menacing sidelights dancing on the gusts of wind which swept the angry darkness of the sea. It was as though he had waited an hour but it was something much less than a minute before he fairly bellowed into the wide tube "Captain Anthony!" An agitated "What is it?" was what he heard down there in Mrs. Anthony's voice, light rapid footsteps . . . Why didn't she try to wake him up! "I want the captain," he shouted, then gave it up, making a dash at the companion where a blue light was kept, resolved to act for himself.

On the way he glanced at the helmsman whose face lighted up by the binnacle lamps was calm. He said rapidly to him: "Stand by to spin that helm up at the first word." The answer "Aye, aye, sir," was delivered in a steady voice. Then Mr. Powell after a shout for the watch on deck to "lay aft," ran to the ship's side and struck the blue light on the rail.

A sort of nasty little spitting of sparks was all that came. The light (perhaps affected by damp) had failed to ignite. The time of all these various acts must be counted in seconds. Powell confessed to me that at

this failure he experienced a paralysis of thought, of voice, of limbs. The unexpectedness of this misfire positively overcame his faculties. It was the only thing for which his imagination was not prepared. It was knocked clean over. When it got up it was with the suggestion that he must do something at once or there would be a broadside smash accompanied by the explosion of dynamite, in which both ships would be blown up and every soul on board of them would vanish off the earth in an enormous flame and uproar.

He saw the catastrophe happening and at the same moment, before he could open his mouth or stir a limb to ward off the vision, a voice very near his ear, the measured voice of Captain Anthony said: "Wouldn't light — eh? Throw it down! Jump for the flare-up."

The spring of activity in Mr. Powell was released with great force. He jumped. The flare-up was kept inside the companion with a box of matches ready to hand. Almost before he knew he had moved he was diving under the companion slide. He got hold of the can in the dark and tried to strike a light. But he had to press the flare-holder to his breast with one arm, his fingers were damp and stiff, his hands trembled a little. One match broke. Another went out. In its flame he saw the colourless face of Mrs. Anthony a little below him, standing on the cabin stairs. Her eyes which were very close to his (he was in a crouching posture on the top step) seemed to burn darkly in the vanishing light. On deck the captain's voice was heard sudden and unexpectedly sardonic: "You had better look sharp, if you want to be in time."

"Let me have the box," said Mrs. Anthony in a hurried and familiar whisper which sounded amused as if they had been a couple of children up to some lark behind a wall. He was glad of the offer which seemed to him very natural, and without ceremony —

"Here you are. Catch hold."

Their hands touched in the dark and she took the box while he held the paraffin soaked torch in its iron holder. He thought of warning her: "Look out for yourself." But before he had the time to finish the sentence the flare blazed up violently between them and he saw her throw herself back with an arm across her face. "Hallo," he exclaimed; only he could not stop a moment to ask if she was hurt. He bolted out of the companion straight into his captain who took the flare from him and held it high above his head.

The fierce flame fluttered like a silk flag, throwing an angry swaying glare mingled with moving shadows over the poop, lighting up the concave surfaces of the sails, gleaming on the wet paint of the white rails. And young Powell turned his eyes to windward with a catch in his breath.

The strange ship, a darker shape in the night, did not seem to be moving onwards but only to grow more distinct right abeam, staring at the Ferndale with one green and one red eye which swayed and tossed as if they belonged to the restless head of some invisible monster ambushed in the night amongst the waves. A moment, long like eternity, elapsed, and, suddenly, the monster which seemed to take to itself the shape of a mountain shut its green eye without as much as a preparatory wink.

Mr. Powell drew a free breath. "All right now," said Captain Anthony in a quiet undertone. He gave the blazing flare to Powell and walked aft to watch the passing of that menace of destruction coming blindly with its parti-coloured stare out of a blind night on the wings of a sweeping wind. Her very form could be distinguished now black and elongated amongst the hissing patches of foam bursting along her path.

As is always the case with a ship running before wind and sea she did not seem to an onlooker to move very fast; but to be progressing indolently in long leisurely bounds and pauses in the midst of the overtaking waves. It was only when actually passing the stern within easy hail of the Ferndale, that her headlong speed became apparent to the eye. With the red light shut off and soaring like an immense shadow on the crest of a wave she was lost to view in one great, forward swing, melting into the lightless space.

"Close shave," said Captain Anthony in an indifferent voice just raised enough to be heard in the wind. "A blind lot on board that ship. Put out the flare now."

Silently Mr. Powell inverted the holder, smothering the flame in the can, bringing about by the mere turn of his wrist the fall of darkness upon the poop. And at the same time vanished out of his mind's eye the vision of another flame enormous and fierce shooting violently from a white churned patch of the sea, lighting up the very clouds and carrying upwards in its volcanic rush flying spars, corpses, the fragments of two destroyed ships. It vanished and there was an immense relief. He told me he did not know how scared he had been, not generally but of that very thing his imagination had conjured, till it was all over. He measured it (for fear is a great tension) by the feeling of slack weariness which came over him all at once.

He walked to the companion and stooping low to put the flare in its usual place saw in the darkness the motionless pale oval of Mrs. Anthony's face. She whispered quietly:

"Is anything going to happen? What is it?"

"It's all over now," he whispered back.

He remained bent low, his head inside the cover staring at that white ghostly oval. He wondered she had not rushed out on deck. She had remained quietly there. This was pluck. Wonderful self-restraint. And it was not stupidity on her part. She knew there was imminent danger and probably had some notion of its nature.

"You stayed here waiting for what would come," he murmured admiringly.

"Wasn't that the best thing to do?" she asked.

He didn't know. Perhaps. He confessed he could not have done it. Not he. His flesh and blood could not have stood it. He would have felt he must see what was coming. Then he remembered that the flare might have scorched her face, and expressed his concern.

"A bit. Nothing to hurt. Smell the singed hair?"

There was a sort of gaiety in her tone. She might have been frightened but she certainly was not overcome and suffered from no reaction. This confirmed and augmented if possible Mr. Powell's good opinion of her as a "jolly girl," though it seemed to him positively monstrous to refer in such terms to one's captain's wife. "But she doesn't look it," he thought in extenuation and was going to say something more to her about the lighting of that flare when another voice was heard in the companion, saying some indistinct words. Its tone was contemptuous; it came from below, from the bottom of the stairs. It was a voice in the cabin. And the only other voice which could be heard in the main cabin at this time of the evening was the voice of Mrs. Anthony's father. The indistinct white oval sank from Mr. Powell's sight so swiftly as to take him by surprise. For a moment he hung at the opening of the companion and now that her slight form was no longer obstructing the narrow and winding staircase the voices came up louder but the words were still indistinct. The old gentleman was excited about something and Mrs. Anthony was "managing him" as Powell expressed it. They moved away from the bottom of the stairs and Powell went away from the companion. Yet he fancied he had heard the words "Lost to me" before he withdrew his head. They had been uttered by Mr. Smith.



Captain Anthony had not moved away from the taffrail. He remained in the very position he took up to watch the other ship go by rolling and swinging all shadowy in the uproar of the following seas. He stirred not; and Powell keeping near by did not dare speak to him, so enigmatical in its contemplation of the night did his figure appear to his young eyes: indistinct — and in its immobility staring into gloom, the prey of some incomprehensible grief, longing or regret.

Why is it that the stillness of a human being is often so impressive, so suggestive of evil — as if our proper fate were a ceaseless agitation? The stillness of Captain Anthony became almost intolerable to his second officer. Mr. Powell loitering about the skylight wanted his captain off the deck now. “Why doesn’t he go below?” he asked himself impatiently. He ventured a cough.

Whether the effect of the cough or not Captain Anthony spoke. He did not move the least bit. With his back remaining turned to the whole length of the ship he asked Mr. Powell with some brusqueness if the chief mate had neglected to instruct him that the captain was to be found on the port side.

“Yes, sir,” said Mr. Powell approaching his back. “The mate told me to stamp on the port side when I wanted you; but I didn’t remember at the moment.”

“You should remember,” the captain uttered with an effort. Then added mumbling “I don’t want Mrs. Anthony frightened. Don’t you see? . . .”

“She wasn’t this time,” Powell said innocently: “She lighted the flare-up for me, sir.”

“This time,” Captain Anthony exclaimed and turned round. “Mrs. Anthony lighted the flare? Mrs. Anthony! . . .” Powell explained that she was in the companion all the time.

“All the time,” repeated the captain. It seemed queer to Powell that instead of going himself to see the captain should ask him:

“Is she there now?”

Powell said that she had gone below after the ship had passed clear of the Ferndale. Captain Anthony made a movement towards the companion himself, when Powell added the information. “Mr. Smith called to Mrs. Anthony from the saloon, sir. I believe they are talking there now.”

He was surprised to see the captain give up the idea of going below after all.

He began to walk the poop instead regardless of the cold, of the damp wind and of the sprays. And yet he had nothing on but his sleeping suit and slippers. Powell placing himself on the break of the poop kept a look-out. When after some time he turned his head to steal a glance at his eccentric captain he could not see his active and shadowy figure swinging to and fro. The second mate of the Ferndale walked aft peering about and addressed the seaman who steered.

“Captain gone below?”

“Yes, sir,” said the fellow who with a quid of tobacco bulging out his left cheek kept his eyes on the compass card. “This minute. He laughed.”

“Laughed,” repeated Powell incredulously. “Do you mean the captain did? You must be mistaken. What would he want to laugh for?”

“Don’t know, sir.”

The elderly sailor displayed a profound indifference towards human emotions. However, after a longish pause he conceded a few words more to the second officer’s weakness. “Yes. He was walking the deck as usual when suddenly he laughed a little and made for the companion. Thought of something funny all at once.”

Something funny! That Mr. Powell could not believe. He did not ask himself why, at the time. Funny thoughts come to men, though, in all sorts of situations; they come to all sorts of men. Nevertheless Mr. Powell was shocked to learn that Captain Anthony had laughed without visible cause on a certain night. The impression for some reason was disagreeable. And it was then, while finishing his watch, with the chilly gusts of wind sweeping at him out of the darkness where the short sea of the soundings growled spitefully all round the ship, that it occurred to his unsophisticated mind that perhaps things are not what they are confidently expected to be; that it was possible that Captain Anthony was not a happy man . . . In so far you will perceive he was to a certain extent prepared for the apoplectic and sensitive Franklin’s lamentations about his captain. And though he treated them with a contempt which was in a great measure sincere, yet he admitted to me that deep down within him an inexplicable and uneasy suspicion that all was not well in that cabin, so unusually cut off from the rest of the ship, came into being and grew against his will.

## CHAPTER FOUR — ANTHONY AND FLORA

Marlow emerged out of the shadow of the book-case to get himself a cigar from a box which stood on a little table by my side. In the full light of the room I saw in his eyes that slightly mocking expression with which he habitually covers up his sympathetic impulses of mirth and pity before the unreasonable complications the idealism of mankind puts into the simple but poignant problem of conduct on this earth.

He selected and lit the cigar with affected care, then turned upon me, I had been looking at him silently.

“I suppose,” he said, the mockery of his eyes giving a pellucid quality to his tone, “that you think it’s high time I told you something definite. I mean something about that psychological cabin mystery of discomfort (for it’s obvious that it must be psychological) which affected so profoundly Mr. Franklin the chief mate, and had even disturbed the serene innocence of Mr. Powell, the second of the ship *Ferndale*, commanded by Roderick Anthony — the son of the poet, you know.”

“You are going to confess now that you have failed to find it out,” I said in pretended indignation.

“It would serve you right if I told you that I have. But I won’t. I haven’t failed. I own though that for a time, I was puzzled. However, I have now seen our Powell many times under the most favourable conditions — and besides I came upon a most unexpected source of information . . . But never mind that. The means don’t concern you except in so far as they belong to the story. I’ll admit that for some time the old-maiden-lady-like occupation of putting two and two together failed to procure a coherent theory. I am speaking now as an investigator — a man of deductions. With what we know of Roderick Anthony and Flora de Barral I could not deduct an ordinary marital quarrel beautifully matured in less than a year — could I? If you ask me what is an ordinary marital quarrel I will tell you, that it is a difference about nothing; I mean, these nothings which, as Mr. Powell told us when we first met him, shore people are so prone to start a row about, and nurse into hatred from an idle sense of wrong, from perverted ambition, for spectacular reasons too. There are on earth no actors too humble and obscure not to have a gallery; that gallery which envenoms the play by stealthy jeers, counsels of anger, amused comments or words of perfidious compassion. However, the Anthonys were free from all demoralizing

influences. At sea, you know, there is no gallery. You hear no tormenting echoes of your own littleness there, where either a great elemental voice roars defiantly under the sky or else an elemental silence seems to be part of the infinite stillness of the universe.

Remembering Flora de Barral in the depths of moral misery, and Roderick Anthony carried away by a gust of tempestuous tenderness, I asked myself, Is it all forgotten already? What could they have found to estrange them from each other with this rapidity and this thoroughness so far from all temptations, in the peace of the sea and in an isolation so complete that if it had not been the jealous devotion of the sentimental Franklin stimulating the attention of Powell, there would have been no record, no evidence of it at all.

I must confess at once that it was Flora de Barral whom I suspected. In this world as at present organized women are the suspected half of the population. There are good reasons for that. These reasons are so discoverable with a little reflection that it is not worth my while to set them out for you. I will only mention this: that the part falling to women's share being all "influence" has an air of occult and mysterious action, something not altogether trustworthy like all natural forces which, for us, work in the dark because of our imperfect comprehension.

If women were not a force of nature, blind in its strength and capricious in its power, they would not be mistrusted. As it is one can't help it. You will say that this force having been in the person of Flora de Barral captured by Anthony . . . Why yes. He had dealt with her masterfully. But man has captured electricity too. It lights him on his way, it warms his home, it will even cook his dinner for him — very much like a woman. But what sort of conquest would you call it? He knows nothing of it. He has got to be mighty careful what he is about with his captive. And the greater the demand he makes on it in the exultation of his pride the more likely it is to turn on him and burn him to a cinder . . . “

“A far-fetched enough parallel,” I observed coldly to Marlow. He had returned to the arm-chair in the shadow of the bookcase. “But accepting the meaning you have in your mind it reduces itself to the knowledge of how to use it. And if you mean that this ravenous Anthony — ”

“Ravenous is good,” interrupted Marlow. “He was a-hungering and a-thirsting for femininity to enter his life in a way no mere feminist could have the slightest conception of. I reckon that this accounts for much of

Fyne's disgust with him. Good little Fyne. You have no idea what infernal mischief he had worked during his call at the hotel. But then who could have suspected Anthony of being a heroic creature. There are several kinds of heroism and one of them at least is idiotic. It is the one which wears the aspect of sublime delicacy. It is apparently the one of which the son of the delicate poet was capable.

He certainly resembled his father, who, by the way, wore out two women without any satisfaction to himself, because they did not come up to his supra-refined standard of the delicacy which is so perceptible in his verses. That's your poet. He demands too much from others. The inarticulate son had set up a standard for himself with that need for embodying in his conduct the dreams, the passion, the impulses the poet puts into arrangements of verses, which are dearer to him than his own self — and may make his own self appear sublime in the eyes of other people, and even in his own eyes.

Did Anthony wish to appear sublime in his own eyes? I should not like to make that charge; though indeed there are other, less noble, ambitions at which the world does not dare to smile. But I don't think so; I do not even think that there was in what he did a conscious and lofty confidence in himself, a particularly pronounced sense of power which leads men so often into impossible or equivocal situations. Looked at abstractedly (the way in which truth is often seen in its real shape) his life had been a life of solitude and silence — and desire.

Chance had thrown that girl in his way; and if we may smile at his violent conquest of Flora de Barral we must admit also that this eager appropriation was truly the act of a man of solitude and desire; a man also, who, unless a complete imbecile, must have been a man of long and ardent reveries wherein the faculty of sincere passion matures slowly in the unexplored recesses of the heart. And I know also that a passion, dominating or tyrannical, invading the whole man and subjugating all his faculties to its own unique end, may conduct him whom it spurs and drives, into all sorts of adventures, to the brink of unfathomable dangers, to the limits of folly, and madness, and death.

To the man then of a silence made only more impressive by the inarticulate thunders and mutters of the great seas, an utter stranger to the clatter of tongues, there comes the muscular little Fyne, the most marked representative of that mankind whose voice is so strange to him, the

husband of his sister, a personality standing out from the misty and remote multitude. He comes and throws at him more talk than he had ever heard boomed out in an hour, and certainly touching the deepest things Anthony had ever discovered in himself, and flings words like “unfair” whose very sound is abhorrent to him. Unfair! Undue advantage! He! Unfair to that girl? Cruel to her!

No scorn could stand against the impression of such charges advanced with heat and conviction. They shook him. They were yet vibrating in the air of that stuffy hotel-room, terrific, disturbing, impossible to get rid of, when the door opened and Flora de Barral entered.

He did not even notice that she was late. He was sitting on a sofa plunged in gloom. Was it true? Having himself always said exactly what he meant he imagined that people (unless they were liars, which of course his brother-in-law could not be) never said more than they meant. The deep chest voice of little Fyne was still in his ear. “He knows,” Anthony said to himself. He thought he had better go away and never see her again. But she stood there before him accusing and appealing. How could he abandon her? That was out of the question. She had no one. Or rather she had someone. That father. Anthony was willing to take him at her valuation. This father may have been the victim of the most atrocious injustice. But what could a man coming out of jail do? An old man too. And then — what sort of man? What would become of them both? Anthony shuddered slightly and the faint smile with which Flora had entered the room faded on her lips. She was used to his impetuous tenderness. She was no longer afraid of it. But she had never seen him look like this before, and she suspected at once some new cruelty of life. He got up with his usual ardour but as if sobered by a momentous resolve and said:

“No. I can’t let you out of my sight. I have seen you. You have told me your story. You are honest. You have never told me you loved me.”

She waited, saying to herself that he had never given her time, that he had never asked her! And that, in truth, she did not know!

I am inclined to believe that she did not. As abundance of experience is not precisely her lot in life, a woman is seldom an expert in matters of sentiment. It is the man who can and generally does “see himself” pretty well inside and out. Women’s self-possession is an outward thing; inwardly they flutter, perhaps because they are, or they feel themselves to be, engaged. All this speaking generally. In Flora de Barral’s particular case

ever since Anthony had suddenly broken his way into her hopeless and cruel existence she lived like a person liberated from a condemned cell by a natural cataclysm, a tempest, an earthquake; not absolutely terrified, because nothing can be worse than the eve of execution, but stunned, bewildered — abandoning herself passively. She did not want to make a sound, to move a limb. She hadn't the strength. What was the good? And deep down, almost unconsciously she was seduced by the feeling of being supported by this violence. A sensation she had never experienced before in her life.

She felt as if this whirlwind were calming down somehow! As if this feeling of support, which was tempting her to close her eyes deliciously and let herself be carried on and on into the unknown undefiled by vile experiences, were less certain, had wavered threateningly. She tried to read something in his face, in that energetic kindly face to which she had become accustomed so soon. But she was not yet capable of understanding its expression. Scared, discouraged on the threshold of adolescence, plunged in moral misery of the bitterest kind, she had not learned to read — not that sort of language.

If Anthony's love had been as egoistic as love generally is, it would have been greater than the egoism of his vanity — or of his generosity, if you like — and all this could not have happened. He would not have hit upon that renunciation at which one does not know whether to grin or shudder. It is true too that then his love would not have fastened itself upon the unhappy daughter of de Barral. But it was a love born of that rare pity which is not akin to contempt because rooted in an overwhelmingly strong capacity for tenderness — the tenderness of the fiery kind — the tenderness of silent solitary men, the voluntary, passionate outcasts of their kind. At the time I am forced to think that his vanity must have been enormous.

"What big eyes she has," he said to himself amazed. No wonder. She was staring at him with all the might of her soul awakening slowly from a poisoned sleep, in which it could only quiver with pain but could neither expand nor move. He plunged into them breathless and tense, deep, deep, like a mad sailor taking a desperate dive from the masthead into the blue unfathomable sea so many men have execrated and loved at the same time. And his vanity was immense. It had been touched to the quick by that muscular little feminist, Fyne. "I! I! Take advantage of her helplessness. I! Unfair to that creature — that wisp of mist, that white shadow homeless

in an ugly dirty world. I could blow her away with a breath," he was saying to himself with horror. "Never!" All the supremely refined delicacy of tenderness, expressed in so many fine lines of verse by Carleon Anthony, grew to the size of a passion filling with inward sobs the big frame of the man who had never in his life read a single one of those famous sonnets singing of the most highly civilized, chivalrous love, of those sonnets which . . . You know there's a volume of them. My edition has the portrait of the author at thirty, and when I showed it to Mr. Powell the other day he exclaimed: "Wonderful! One would think this the portrait of Captain Anthony himself if . . ." I wanted to know what that if was. But Powell could not say. There was something — a difference. No doubt there was — in fineness perhaps. The father, fastidious, cerebral, morbidly shrinking from all contacts, could only sing in harmonious numbers of what the son felt with a dumb and reckless sincerity.

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Possessed by most strong men's touching illusion as to the frailness of women and their spiritual fragility, it seemed to Anthony that he would be destroying, breaking something very precious inside that being. In fact nothing less than partly murdering her. This seems a very extreme effect to flow from Fyne's words. But Anthony, unaccustomed to the chatter of the firm earth, never stayed to ask himself what value these words could have in Fyne's mouth. And indeed the mere dark sound of them was utterly abhorrent to his native rectitude, sea-salted, hardened in the winds of wide horizons, open as the day.

He wished to blurt out his indignation but she regarded him with an expectant air which checked him. His visible discomfort made her uneasy. He could only repeat "Oh yes. You are perfectly honest. You might have, but I dare say you are right. At any rate you have never said anything to me which you didn't mean."

"Never," she whispered after a pause.

He seemed distracted, choking with an emotion she could not understand because it resembled embarrassment, a state of mind inconceivable in that man.

She wondered what it was she had said; remembering that in very truth she had hardly spoken to him except when giving him the bare outline of her story which he seemed to have hardly had the patience to hear, waving



it perpetually aside with exclamations of horror and anger, with fiercely sombre mutters “Enough! Enough!” and with alarming starts from a forced stillness, as though he meant to rush out at once and take vengeance on somebody. She was saying to herself that he caught her words in the air, never letting her finish her thought. Honest. Honest. Yes certainly she had been that. Her letter to Mrs. Fyne had been prompted by honesty. But she reflected sadly that she had never known what to say to him. That perhaps she had nothing to say.

“But you’ll find out that I can be honest too,” he burst out in a menacing tone, she had learned to appreciate with an amused thrill.

She waited for what was coming. But he hung in the wind. He looked round the room with disgust as if he could see traces on the walls of all the casual tenants that had ever passed through it. People had quarrelled in that room; they had been ill in it, there had been misery in that room, wickedness, crime perhaps — death most likely. This was not a fit place. He snatched up his hat. He had made up his mind. The ship — the ship he had known ever since she came off the stocks, his home — her shelter — the uncontaminated, honest ship, was the place.

“Let us go on board. We’ll talk there,” he said. “And you will have to listen to me. For whatever happens, no matter what they say, I cannot let you go.”

You can’t say that (misgivings or no misgivings) she could have done anything else but go on board. It was the appointed business of that morning. During the drive he was silent. Anthony was the last man to condemn conventionally any human being, to scorn and despise even deserved misfortune. He was ready to take old de Barral — the convict — on his daughter’s valuation without the slightest reserve. But love like his, though it may drive one into risky folly by the proud consciousness of its own strength, has a sagacity of its own. And now, as if lifted up into a higher and serene region by its purpose of renunciation, it gave him leisure to reflect for the first time in these last few days. He said to himself: “I don’t know that man. She does not know him either. She was barely sixteen when they locked him up. She was a child. What will he say? What will he do? No, he concluded, I cannot leave her behind with that man who would come into the world as if out of a grave.

They went on board in silence, and it was after showing her round and when they had returned to the saloon that he assailed her in his fiery,

masterful fashion. At first she did not understand. Then when she understood that he was giving her her liberty she went stiff all over, her hand resting on the edge of the table, her face set like a carving of white marble. It was all over. It was as that abominable governess had said. She was insignificant, contemptible. Nobody could love her. Humiliation clung to her like a cold shroud — never to be shaken off, unwarmed by this madness of generosity.

“Yes. Here. Your home. I can’t give it to you and go away, but it is big enough for us two. You need not be afraid. If you say so I shall not even look at you. Remember that grey head of which you have been thinking night and day. Where is it going to rest? Where else if not here, where nothing evil can touch it. Don’t you understand that I won’t let you buy shelter from me at the cost of your very soul. I won’t. You are too much part of me. I have found myself since I came upon you and I would rather sell my own soul to the devil than let you go out of my keeping. But I must have the right.”

He went away brusquely to shut the door leading on deck and came back the whole length of the cabin repeating:

“I must have the legal right. Are you ashamed of letting people think you are my wife?”

He opened his arms as if to clasp her to his breast but mastered the impulse and shook his clenched hands at her, repeating: “I must have the right if only for your father’s sake. I must have the right. Where would you take him? To that infernal cardboard box-maker. I don’t know what keeps me from hunting him up in his virtuous home and bashing his head in. I can’t bear the thought. Listen to me, Flora! Do you hear what I am saying to you? You are not so proud that you can’t understand that I as a man have my pride too?”

He saw a tear glide down her white cheek from under each lowered eyelid. Then, abruptly, she walked out of the cabin. He stood for a moment, concentrated, reckoning his own strength, interrogating his heart, before he followed her hastily. Already she had reached the wharf.

At the sound of his pursuing footsteps her strength failed her. Where could she escape from this? From this new perfidy of life taking upon itself the form of magnanimity. His very voice was changed. The sustaining whirlwind had let her down, to stumble on again, weakened by the fresh stab, bereft of moral support which is wanted in life more than all the

charities of material help. She had never had it. Never. Not from the Fynes. But where to go? Oh yes, this dock — a placid sheet of water close at hand. But there was that old man with whom she had walked hand in hand on the parade by the sea. She seemed to see him coming to meet her, pitiful, a little greyer, with an appealing look and an extended, tremulous arm. It was for her now to take the hand of that wronged man more helpless than a child. But where could she lead him? Where? And what was she to say to him? What words of cheer, of courage and of hope? There were none. Heaven and earth were mute, unconcerned at their meeting. But this other man was coming up behind her. He was very close now. His fiery person seemed to radiate heat, a tingling vibration into the atmosphere. She was exhausted, careless, afraid to stumble, ready to fall. She fancied she could hear his breathing. A wave of languid warmth overtook her, she seemed to lose touch with the ground under her feet; and when she felt him slip his hand under her arm she made no attempt to disengage herself from that grasp which closed upon her limb, insinuating and firm.

He conducted her through the dangers of the quayside. Her sight was dim. A moving truck was like a mountain gliding by. Men passed by as if in a mist; and the buildings, the sheds, the unexpected open spaces, the ships, had strange, distorted, dangerous shapes. She said to herself that it was good not to be bothered with what all these things meant in the scheme of creation (if indeed anything had a meaning), or were just piled-up matter without any sense. She felt how she had always been unrelated to this world. She was hanging on to it merely by that one arm grasped firmly just above the elbow. It was a captivity. So be it. Till they got out into the street and saw the hansom waiting outside the gates Anthony spoke only once, beginning brusquely but in a much gentler tone than she had ever heard from his lips.

“Of course I ought to have known that you could not care for a man like me, a stranger. Silence gives consent. Yes? Eh? I don’t want any of that sort of consent. And unless some day you find you can speak . . . No! No! I shall never ask you. For all the sign I will give you you may go to your grave with sealed lips. But what I have said you must do!”

He bent his head over her with tender care. At the same time she felt her arm pressed and shaken inconspicuously, but in an undeniable manner. “You must do it.” A little shake that no passer-by could notice; and this

was going on in a deserted part of the dock. "It must be done. You are listening to me — eh? or would you go again to my sister?"

His ironic tone, perhaps from want of use, had an awful grating ferocity.

"Would you go to her?" he pursued in the same strange voice. "Your best friend! And say nicely — I am sorry. Would you? No! You couldn't. There are things that even you, poor dear lost girl, couldn't stand. Eh? Die rather. That's it. Of course. Or can you be thinking of taking your father to that infernal cousin's house. No! Don't speak. I can't bear to think of it. I would follow you there and smash the door!"

The catch in his voice astonished her by its resemblance to a sob. It frightened her too. The thought that came to her head was: "He mustn't." He was putting her into the hansom. "Oh! He mustn't, he mustn't." She was still more frightened by the discovery that he was shaking all over. Bewildered, shrinking into the far off corner, avoiding his eyes, she yet saw the quivering of his mouth and made a wild attempt at a smile, which broke the rigidity of her lips and set her teeth chattering suddenly.

"I am not coming with you," he was saying. "I'll tell the man . . . I can't. Better not. What is it? Are you cold? Come! What is it? Only to go to a confounded stuffy room, a hole of an office. Not a quarter of an hour. I'll come for you — in ten days. Don't think of it too much. Think of no man, woman or child of all that silly crowd cumbering the ground. Don't think of me either. Think of yourself. Ha! Nothing will be able to touch you then — at last. Say nothing. Don't move. I'll have everything arranged; and as long as you don't hate the sight of me — and you don't — there's nothing to be frightened about. One of their silly offices with a couple of ink-slingers of no consequence; poor, scribbling devils."

The hansom drove away with Flora de Barral inside, without movement, without thought, only too glad to rest, to be alone and still moving away without effort, in solitude and silence.

Anthony roamed the streets for hours without being able to remember in the evening where he had been — in the manner of a happy and exulting lover. But nobody could have thought so from his face, which bore no signs of blissful anticipation. Exulting indeed he was but it was a special sort of exultation which seemed to take him by the throat like an enemy.

Anthony's last words to Flora referred to the registry office where they were married ten days later. During that time Anthony saw no one or anything, though he went about restlessly, here and there, amongst men and

things. This special state is peculiar to common lovers, who are known to have no eyes for anything except for the contemplation, actual or inward, of one human form which for them contains the soul of the whole world in all its beauty, perfection, variety and infinity. It must be extremely pleasant. But felicity was denied to Roderick Anthony's contemplation. He was not a common sort of lover; and he was punished for it as if Nature (which it is said abhors a vacuum) were so very conventional as to abhor every sort of exceptional conduct. Roderick Anthony had begun already to suffer. That is why perhaps he was so industrious in going about amongst his fellowmen who would have been surprised and humiliated, had they known how little solidity and even existence they had in his eyes. But they could not suspect anything so queer. They saw nothing extraordinary in him during that fortnight. The proof of this is that they were willing to transact business with him. Obviously they were; since it is then that the offer of chartering his ship for the special purpose of proceeding to the Western Islands was put in his way by a firm of shipbrokers who had no doubt of his sanity.

He probably looked sane enough for all the practical purposes of commercial life. But I am not so certain that he really was quite sane at that time.

However, he jumped at the offer. Providence itself was offering him this opportunity to accustom the girl to sea-life by a comparatively short trip. This was the time when everything that happened, everything he heard, casual words, unrelated phrases, seemed a provocation or an encouragement, confirmed him in his resolution. And indeed to be busy with material affairs is the best preservative against reflection, fears, doubts — all these things which stand in the way of achievement. I suppose a fellow proposing to cut his throat would experience a sort of relief while occupied in stropping his razor carefully.

And Anthony was extremely careful in preparing for himself and for the luckless Flora, an impossible existence. He went about it with no more tremors than if he had been stuffed with rags or made of iron instead of flesh and blood. An existence, mind you, which, on shore, in the thick of mankind, of varied interests, of distractions, of infinite opportunities to preserve your distance from each other, is hardly conceivable; but on board ship, at sea, *en tête-à-tête* for days and weeks and months together, could mean nothing but mental torture, an exquisite absurdity of torment. He was a simple soul. His hopelessly masculine ingenuousness is displayed in a

touching way by his care to procure some woman to attend on Flora. The condition of guaranteed perfect respectability gave him moments of anxious thought. When he remembered suddenly his steward's wife he must have exclaimed eureka with particular exultation. One does not like to call Anthony an ass. But really to put any woman within scenting distance of such a secret and suppose that she would not track it out!

No woman, however simple, could be as ingenuous as that. I don't know how Flora de Barral qualified him in her thoughts when he told her of having done this amongst other things intended to make her comfortable. I should think that, for all her simplicity, she must have been appalled. He stood before her on the appointed day outwardly calmer than she had ever seen him before. And this very calmness, that scrupulous attitude which he felt bound in honour to assume then and for ever, unless she would condescend to make a sign at some future time, added to the heaviness of her heart innocent of the most pardonable guile.

The night before she had slept better than she had done for the past ten nights. Both youth and weariness will assert themselves in the end against the tyranny of nerve-racking stress. She had slept but she woke up with her eyes full of tears. There were no traces of them when she met him in the shabby little parlour downstairs. She had swallowed them up. She was not going to let him see. She felt bound in honour to accept the situation for ever and ever unless . . . Ah, unless . . . She dissembled all her sentiments but it was not duplicity on her part. All she wanted was to get at the truth; to see what would come of it.

She beat him at his own honourable game and the thoroughness of her serenity disconcerted Anthony a bit. It was he who stammered when it came to talking. The suppressed fierceness of his character carried him on after the first word or two masterfully enough. But it was as if they both had taken a bite of the same bitter fruit. He was thinking with mournful regret not unmixed with surprise: "That fellow Fyne has been telling me the truth. She does not care for me a bit." It humiliated him and also increased his compassion for the girl who in this darkness of life, buffeted and despairing, had fallen into the grip of his stronger will, abandoning herself to his arms as on a night of shipwreck. Flora on her side with partial insight (for women are never blind with the complete masculine blindness) looked on him with some pity; and she felt pity for herself too. It was a rejection, a casting out; nothing new to her. But she who supposed all her sensibility

dead by this time, discovered in herself a resentment of this ultimate betrayal. She had no resignation for this one. With a sort of mental sullenness she said to herself: "Well, I am here. I am here without any nonsense. It is not my fault that I am a mere worthless object of pity."

And these things which she could tell herself with a clear conscience served her better than the passionate obstinacy of purpose could serve Roderick Anthony. She was much more sure of herself than he was. Such are the advantages of mere rectitude over the most exalted generosity.

And so they went out to get married, the people of the house where she lodged having no suspicion of anything of the sort. They were only excited at a "gentleman friend" (a very fine man too) calling on Miss Smith for the first time since she had come to live in the house. When she returned, for she did come back alone, there were allusions made to that outing. She had to take her meals with these rather vulgar people. The woman of the house, a scraggy, genteel person, tried even to provoke confidences. Flora's white face with the deep blue eyes did not strike their hearts as it did the heart of Captain Anthony, as the very face of the suffering world. Her pained reserve had no power to awe them into decency.

Well, she returned alone — as in fact might have been expected. After leaving the Registry Office Flora de Barral and Roderick Anthony had gone for a walk in a park. It must have been an East-End park but I am not sure. Anyway that's what they did. It was a sunny day. He said to her: "Everything I have in the world belongs to you. I have seen to that without troubling my brother-in-law. They have no call to interfere."

She walked with her hand resting lightly on his arm. He had offered it to her on coming out of the Registry Office, and she had accepted it silently. Her head drooped, she seemed to be turning matters over in her mind. She said, alluding to the Fynes: "They have been very good to me." At that he exclaimed:

"They have never understood you. Well, not properly. My sister is not a bad woman, but . . . "

Flora didn't protest; asking herself whether he imagined that he himself understood her so much better. Anthony dismissing his family out of his thoughts went on: "Yes. Everything is yours. I have kept nothing back. As to the piece of paper we have just got from that miserable quill-driver if it wasn't for the law, I wouldn't mind if you tore it up here, now, on this spot. But don't you do it. Unless you should some day feel that — "

He choked, unexpectedly. She, reflective, hesitated a moment then making up her mind bravely.

“Neither am I keeping anything back from you.”

She had said it! But he in his blind generosity assumed that she was alluding to her deplorable history and hastened to mutter:

“Of course! Of course! Say no more. I have been lying awake thinking of it all no end of times.”

He made a movement with his other arm as if restraining himself from shaking an indignant fist at the universe; and she never even attempted to look at him. His voice sounded strangely, incredibly lifeless in comparison with these tempestuous accents that in the broad fields, in the dark garden had seemed to shake the very earth under her weary and hopeless feet.

She regretted them. Hearing the sigh which escaped her Anthony instead of shaking his fist at the universe began to pat her hand resting on his arm and then desisted, suddenly, as though he had burnt himself. Then after a silence:

“You will have to go by yourself to-morrow. I . . . No, I think I mustn’t come. Better not. What you two will have to say to each other — ”

She interrupted him quickly:

“Father is an innocent man. He was cruelly wronged.”

“Yes. That’s why,” Anthony insisted earnestly. “And you are the only human being that can make it up to him. You alone must reconcile him with the world if anything can. But of course you shall. You’ll have to find words. Oh you’ll know. And then the sight of you, alone, would soothe — ”

“He’s the gentlest of men,” she interrupted again.

Anthony shook his head. “It would take no end of generosity, no end of gentleness to forgive such a dead set. For my part I would have liked better to have been killed and done with at once. It could not have been worse for you — and I suppose it was of you that he was thinking most while those infernal lawyers were badgering him in court. Of you. And now I think of it perhaps the sight of you may bring it all back to him. All these years, all these years — and you his child left alone in the world. I would have gone crazy. For even if he had done wrong — ”

“But he hasn’t,” insisted Flora de Barral with a quite unexpected fierceness. “You mustn’t even suppose it. Haven’t you read the accounts of the trial?”



“I am not supposing anything,” Anthony defended himself. He just remembered hearing of the trial. He assured her that he was away from England, the second voyage of the *Ferndale*. He was crossing the Pacific from Australia at the time and didn’t see any papers for weeks and weeks. He interrupted himself to suggest:

“You had better tell him at once that you are happy.”

He had stammered a little, and Flora de Barral uttered a deliberate and concise “Yes.”

A short silence ensued. She withdrew her hand from his arm. They stopped. Anthony looked as if a totally unexpected catastrophe had happened.

“Ah,” he said. “You mind . . . “

“No! I think I had better,” she murmured.

“I dare say. I dare say. Bring him along straight on board to-morrow. Stop nowhere.”

She had a movement of vague gratitude, a momentary feeling of peace which she referred to the man before her. She looked up at Anthony. His face was sombre. He was miles away and muttered as if to himself:

“Where could he want to stop though?”

“There’s not a single being on earth that I would want to look at his dear face now, to whom I would willingly take him,” she said extending her hand frankly and with a slight break in her voice, “but you — Roderick.”

He took that hand, felt it very small and delicate in his broad palm.

“That’s right. That’s right,” he said with a conscious and hasty heartiness and, as if suddenly ashamed of the sound of his voice, turned half round and absolutely walked away from the motionless girl. He even resisted the temptation to look back till it was too late. The gravel path lay empty to the very gate of the park. She was gone — vanished. He had an impression that he had missed some sort of chance. He felt sad. That excited sense of his own conduct which had kept him up for the last ten days buoyed him no more. He had succeeded!

He strolled on aimlessly a prey to gentle melancholy. He walked and walked. There were but few people about in this breathing space of a poor neighbourhood. Under certain conditions of life there is precious little time left for mere breathing. But still a few here and there were indulging in that luxury; yet few as they were Captain Anthony, though the least exclusive of men, resented their presence. Solitude had been his best friend. He wanted

some place where he could sit down and be alone. And in his need his thoughts turned to the sea which had given him so much of that congenial solitude. There, if always with his ship (but that was an integral part of him) he could always be as solitary as he chose. Yes. Get out to sea!

The night of the town with its strings of lights, rigid, and crossed like a net of flames, thrown over the sombre immensity of walls, closed round him, with its artificial brilliance overhung by an emphatic blackness, its unnatural animation of a restless, overdriven humanity. His thoughts which somehow were inclined to pity every passing figure, every single person glimpsed under a street lamp, fixed themselves at last upon a figure which certainly could not have been seen under the lamps on that particular night. A figure unknown to him. A figure shut up within high unscaleable walls of stone or bricks till next morning . . . The figure of Flora de Barral's father. De Barral the financier — the convict.

There is something in that word with its suggestions of guilt and retribution which arrests the thought. We feel ourselves in the presence of the power of organized society — a thing mysterious in itself and still more mysterious in its effect. Whether guilty or innocent, it was as if old de Barral had been down to the Nether Regions. Impossible to imagine what he would bring out from there to the light of this world of uncondemned men. What would he think? What would he have to say? And what was one to say to him?

Anthony, a little awed, as one is by a range of feelings stretching beyond one's grasp, comforted himself by the thought that probably the old fellow would have little to say. He wouldn't want to talk about it. No man would. It must have been a real hell to him.

And then Anthony, at the end of the day in which he had gone through a marriage ceremony with Flora de Barral, ceased to think of Flora's father except, as in some sort, the captive of his triumph. He turned to the mental contemplation of the white, delicate and appealing face with great blue eyes which he had seen weep and wonder and look profoundly at him, sometimes with incredulity, sometimes with doubt and pain, but always irresistible in the power to find their way right into his breast, to stir there a deep response which was something more than love — he said to himself, — as men understand it. More? Or was it only something other? Yes. It was something other. More or less. Something as incredible as the fulfilment of an amazing and startling dream in which he could take the

world in his arms — all the suffering world — not to possess its pathetic fairness but to console and cherish its sorrow.

Anthony walked slowly to the ship and that night slept without dreams.

## CHAPTER FIVE — THE GREAT DE BARRAL

Renovated certainly the saloon of the Ferndale was to receive the “strange woman.” The mellowness of its old-fashioned, tarnished decoration was gone. And Anthony looking round saw the glitter, the gleams, the colour of new things, untried, unused, very bright — too bright. The workmen had gone only last night; and the last piece of work they did was the hanging of the heavy curtains which looped midway the length of the saloon — divided it in two if released, cutting off the after end with its companion-way leading direct on the poop, from the forepart with its outlet on the deck; making a privacy within a privacy, as though Captain Anthony could not place obstacles enough between his new happiness and the men who shared his life at sea. He inspected that arrangement with an approving eye then made a particular visitation of the whole, ending by opening a door which led into a large state-room made of two knocked into one. It was very well furnished and had, instead of the usual bedplace of such cabins, an elaborate swinging cot of the latest pattern. Anthony tilted it a little by way of trial. “The old man will be very comfortable in here,” he said to himself, and stepped back into the saloon closing the door gently. Then another thought occurred to him obvious under the circumstances but strangely enough presenting itself for the first time. “Jove! Won’t he get a shock,” thought Roderick Anthony.

He went hastily on deck. “Mr. Franklin, Mr. Franklin.” The mate was not very far. “Oh! Here you are. Miss . . . Mrs. Anthony’ll be coming on board presently. Just give me a call when you see the cab.”

Then, without noticing the gloominess of the mate’s countenance he went in again. Not a friendly word, not a professional remark, or a small joke, not as much as a simple and inane “fine day.” Nothing. Just turned about and went in.

We know that, when the moment came, he thought better of it and decided to meet Flora’s father in that privacy of the main cabin which he had been so careful to arrange. Why Anthony appeared to shrink from the contact, he who was sufficiently self-confident not only to face but to absolutely create a situation almost insane in its audacious generosity, is difficult to explain. Perhaps when he came on the poop for a glance he found that man so different outwardly from what he expected that he decided to meet him for the first time out of everybody’s sight. Possibly the

general secrecy of his relation to the girl might have influenced him. Truly he may well have been dismayed. That man's coming brought him face to face with the necessity to speak and act a lie; to appear what he was not and what he could never be, unless, unless —

In short, we'll say if you like that for various reasons, all having to do with the delicate rectitude of his nature, Roderick Anthony (a man of whom his chief mate used to say: he doesn't know what fear is) was frightened. There is a Nemesis which overtakes generosity too, like all the other imprudences of men who dare to be lawless and proud . . . “

“Why do you say this?” I inquired, for Marlow had stopped abruptly and kept silent in the shadow of the bookcase.

“I say this because that man whom chance had thrown in Flora's way was both: lawless and proud. Whether he knew anything about it or not it does not matter. Very likely not. One may fling a glove in the face of nature and in the face of one's own moral endurance quite innocently, with a simplicity which wears the aspect of perfectly Satanic conceit. However, as I have said it does not matter. It's a transgression all the same and has got to be paid for in the usual way. But never mind that. I paused because, like Anthony, I find a difficulty, a sort of dread in coming to grips with old de Barral.

You remember I had a glimpse of him once. He was not an imposing personality: tall, thin, straight, stiff, faded, moving with short steps and with a gliding motion, speaking in an even low voice. When the sea was rough he wasn't much seen on deck — at least not walking. He caught hold of things then and dragged himself along as far as the after skylight where he would sit for hours. Our, then young, friend offered once to assist him and this service was the first beginning of a sort of friendship. He clung hard to one — Powell says, with no figurative intention. Powell was always on the lookout to assist, and to assist mainly Mrs. Anthony, because he clung so jolly hard to her that Powell was afraid of her being dragged down notwithstanding that she very soon became very sure-footed in all sorts of weather. And Powell was the only one ready to assist at hand because Anthony (by that time) seemed to be afraid to come near them; the unforgiving Franklin always looked wrathfully the other way; the boatswain, if up there, acted likewise but sheepishly; and any hands that happened to be on the poop (a feeling spreads mysteriously all over a ship) shunned him as though he had been the devil.

We know how he arrived on board. For my part I know so little of prisons that I haven't the faintest notion how one leaves them. It seems as abominable an operation as the other, the shutting up with its mental suggestions of bang, snap, crash and the empty silence outside — where an instant before you were — you were — and now no longer are. Perfectly devilish. And the release! I don't know which is worse. How do they do it? Pull the string, door flies open, man flies through: Out you go! Adios! And in the space where a second before you were not, in the silent space there is a figure going away, limping. Why limping? I don't know. That's how I see it. One has a notion of a maiming, crippling process; of the individual coming back damaged in some subtle way. I admit it is a fantastic hallucination, but I can't help it. Of course I know that the proceedings of the best machine-made humanity are employed with judicious care and so on. I am absurd, no doubt, but still . . . Oh yes it's idiotic. When I pass one of these places . . . did you notice that there is something infernal about the aspect of every individual stone or brick of them, something malicious as if matter were enjoying its revenge of the contemptuous spirit of man. Did you notice? You didn't? Eh? Well I am perhaps a little mad on that point. When I pass one of these places I must avert my eyes. I couldn't have gone to meet de Barral. I should have shrunk from the ordeal. You'll notice that it looks as if Anthony (a brave man indubitably) had shirked it too. Little Fyne's flight of fancy picturing three people in the fatal four wheeler — you remember? — went wide of the truth. There were only two people in the four wheeler. Flora did not shrink. Women can stand anything. The dear creatures have no imagination when it comes to solid facts of life. In sentimental regions — I won't say. It's another thing altogether. There they shrink from or rush to embrace ghosts of their own creation just the same as any fool-man would.

No. I suppose the girl Flora went on that errand reasonably. And then, why! This was the moment for which she had lived. It was her only point of contact with existence. Oh yes. She had been assisted by the Fynes. And kindly. Certainly. Kindly. But that's not enough. There is a kind way of assisting our fellow-creatures which is enough to break their hearts while it saves their outer envelope. How cold, how infernally cold she must have felt — unless when she was made to burn with indignation or shame. Man, we know, cannot live by bread alone but hang me if I don't believe that some women could live by love alone. If there be a flame in human beings

fed by varied ingredients earthly and spiritual which tinge it in different hues, then I seem to see the colour of theirs. It is azure . . . What the devil are you laughing at . . . “

Marlow jumped up and strode out of the shadow as if lifted by indignation but there was the flicker of a smile on his lips. “You say I don’t know women. Maybe. It’s just as well not to come too close to the shrine. But I have a clear notion of woman. In all of them, termagant, flirt, crank, washerwoman, blue-stockings, outcast and even in the ordinary fool of the ordinary commerce there is something left, if only a spark. And when there is a spark there can always be a flame . . . “

He went back into the shadow and sat down again.

“I don’t mean to say that Flora de Barral was one of the sort that could live by love alone. In fact she had managed to live without. But still, in the distrust of herself and of others she looked for love, any kind of love, as women will. And that confounded jail was the only spot where she could see it — for she had no reason to distrust her father.

She was there in good time. I see her gazing across the road at these walls which are, properly speaking, awful. You do indeed seem to feel along the very lines and angles of the unholy bulk, the fall of time, drop by drop, hour by hour, leaf by leaf, with a gentle and implacable slowness. And a voiceless melancholy comes over one, invading, overpowering like a dream, penetrating and mortal like poison.

When de Barral came out she experienced a sort of shock to see that he was exactly as she remembered him. Perhaps a little smaller. Otherwise unchanged. You come out in the same clothes, you know. I can’t tell whether he was looking for her. No doubt he was. Whether he recognized her? Very likely. She crossed the road and at once there was reproduced at a distance of years, as if by some mocking witchcraft, the sight so familiar on the Parade at Brighton of the financier de Barral walking with his only daughter. One comes out of prison in the same clothes one wore on the day of condemnation, no matter how long one has been put away there. Oh, they last! They last! But there is something which is preserved by prison life even better than one’s discarded clothing. It is the force, the vividness of one’s sentiments. A monastery will do that too; but in the unholy claustration of a jail you are thrown back wholly upon yourself — for God and Faith are not there. The people outside disperse their affections, you hoard yours, you nurse them into intensity. What they let slip, what they

forget in the movement and changes of free life, you hold on to, amplify, exaggerate into a rank growth of memories. They can look with a smile at the troubles and pains of the past; but you can't. Old pains keep on gnawing at your heart, old desires, old deceptions, old dreams, assailing you in the dead stillness of your present where nothing moves except the irrecoverable minutes of your life.

De Barral was out and, for a time speechless, being led away almost before he had taken possession of the free world, by his daughter. Flora controlled herself well. They walked along quickly for some distance. The cab had been left round the corner — round several corners for all I know. He was flustered, out of breath, when she helped him in and followed herself. Inside that rolling box, turning towards that recovered presence with her heart too full for words she felt the desire of tears she had managed to keep down abandon her suddenly, her half-mournful, half-triumphant exultation subside, every fibre of her body, relaxed in tenderness, go stiff in the close look she took at his face. He was different. There was something. Yes, there was something between them, something hard and impalpable, the ghost of these high walls.

How old he was, how unlike!

She shook off this impression, amazed and frightened by it of course. And remorseful too. Naturally. She threw her arms round his neck. He returned that hug awkwardly, as if not in perfect control of his arms, with a fumbling and uncertain pressure. She hid her face on his breast. It was as though she were pressing it against a stone. They released each other and presently the cab was rolling along at a jog-trot to the docks with those two people as far apart as they could get from each other, in opposite corners.

After a silence given up to mutual examination he uttered his first coherent sentence outside the walls of the prison.

“What has done for me was envy. Envy. There was a lot of them just bursting with it every time they looked my way. I was doing too well. So they went to the Public Prosecutor — ”

She said hastily “Yes! Yes! I know,” and he glared as if resentful that the child had turned into a young woman without waiting for him to come out. “What do you know about it?” he asked. “You were too young.” His speech was soft. The old voice, the old voice! It gave her a thrill. She recognized its pointless gentleness always the same no matter what he had to say. And she remembered that he never had much to say when he came



down to see her. It was she who chattered, chattered, on their walks, while stiff and with a rigidly-carried head, he dropped a gentle word now and then.

Moved by these recollections waking up within her, she explained to him that within the last year she had read and studied the report of the trial.

"I went through the files of several papers, papa."

He looked at her suspiciously. The reports were probably very incomplete. No doubt the reporters had garbled his evidence. They were determined to give him no chance either in court or before the public opinion. It was a conspiracy . . . "My counsel was a fool too," he added. "Did you notice? A perfect fool."

She laid her hand on his arm soothingly. "Is it worth while talking about that awful time? It is so far away now." She shuddered slightly at the thought of all the horrible years which had passed over her young head; never guessing that for him the time was but yesterday. He folded his arms on his breast, leaned back in his corner and bowed his head. But in a little while he made her jump by asking suddenly:

"Who has got hold of the Lone Valley Railway? That's what they were after mainly. Somebody has got it. Parfitts and Co. grabbed it — eh? Or was it that fellow Warner . . ."

"I — I don't know," she said quite scared by the twitching of his lips.

"Don't know!" he exclaimed softly. Hadn't her cousin told her? Oh yes. She had left them — of course. Why did she? It was his first question about herself but she did not answer it. She did not want to talk of these horrors. They were impossible to describe. She perceived though that he had not expected an answer, because she heard him muttering to himself that: "There was half a million's worth of work done and material accumulated there."

"You mustn't think of these things, papa," she said firmly. And he asked her with that invariable gentleness, in which she seemed now to detect some rather ugly shades, what else had he to think about? Another year or two, if they had only left him alone, he and everybody else would have been all right, rolling in money; and she, his daughter, could have married anybody — anybody. A lord.

All this was to him like yesterday, a long yesterday, a yesterday gone over innumerable times, analysed, meditated upon for years. It had a vividness and force for that old man of which his daughter who had not

been shut out of the world could have no idea. She was to him the only living figure out of that past, and it was perhaps in perfect good faith that he added, coldly, inexpressive and thin-lipped: "I lived only for you, I may say. I suppose you understand that. There were only you and me."

Moved by this declaration, wondering that it did not warm her heart more, she murmured a few endearing words while the uppermost thought in her mind was that she must tell him now of the situation. She had expected to be questioned anxiously about herself — and while she desired it she shrank from the answers she would have to make. But her father seemed strangely, unnaturally incurious. It looked as if there would be no questions. Still this was an opening. This seemed to be the time for her to begin. And she began. She began by saying that she had always felt like that. There were two of them, to live for each other. And if he only knew what she had gone through!

Ensconced in his corner, with his arms folded, he stared out of the cab window at the street. How little he was changed after all. It was the unmovable expression, the faded stare she used to see on the esplanade whenever walking by his side hand in hand she raised her eyes to his face — while she chattered, chattered. It was the same stiff, silent figure which at a word from her would turn rigidly into a shop and buy her anything it occurred to her that she would like to have. Flora de Barral's voice faltered. He bent on her that well-remembered glance in which she had never read anything as a child, except the consciousness of her existence. And that was enough for a child who had never known demonstrative affection. But she had lived a life so starved of all feeling that this was no longer enough for her. What was the good of telling him the story of all these miseries now past and gone, of all those bewildering difficulties and humiliations? What she must tell him was difficult enough to say. She approached it by remarking cheerfully:

"You haven't even asked me where I am taking you." He started like a somnambulist awakened suddenly, and there was now some meaning in his stare; a sort of alarmed speculation. He opened his mouth slowly. Flora struck in with forced gaiety. "You would never, guess."

He waited, still more startled and suspicious. "Guess! Why don't you tell me?"

He uncrossed his arms and leaned forward towards her. She got hold of one of his hands. "You must know first . . . " She paused, made an effort:

“I am married, papa.”

For a moment they kept perfectly still in that cab rolling on at a steady jog-trot through a narrow city street full of bustle. Whatever she expected she did not expect to feel his hand snatched away from her grasp as if from a burn or a contamination. De Barral fresh from the stagnant torment of the prison (where nothing happens) had not expected that sort of news. It seemed to stick in his throat. In strangled low tones he cried out, “You — married? You, Flora! When? Married! What for? Who to? Married!”

His eyes which were blue like hers, only faded, without depth, seemed to start out of their orbits. He did really look as if he were choking. He even put his hand to his collar . . . “

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“You know,” continued Marlow out of the shadow of the bookcase and nearly invisible in the depths of the arm-chair, “the only time I saw him he had given me the impression of absolute rigidity, as though he had swallowed a poker. But it seems that he could collapse. I can hardly picture this to myself. I understand that he did collapse to a certain extent in his corner of the cab. The unexpected had crumpled him up. She regarded him perplexed, pitying, a little disillusioned, and nodded at him gravely: Yes. Married. What she did not like was to see him smile in a manner far from encouraging to the devotion of a daughter. There was something unintentionally savage in it. Old de Barral could not quite command his muscles, as yet. But he had recovered command of his gentle voice.

“You were just saying that in this wide world there we were, only you and I, to stick to each other.”

She was dimly aware of the scathing intention lurking in these soft low tones, in these words which appealed to her poignantly. She defended herself. Never, never for a single moment had she ceased to think of him. Neither did he cease to think of her, he said, with as much sinister emphasis as he was capable of.

“But, papa,” she cried, “I haven’t been shut up like you.” She didn’t mind speaking of it because he was innocent. He hadn’t been understood. It was a misfortune of the most cruel kind but no more disgraceful than an illness, a maiming accident or some other visitation of blind fate. “I wish I

had been too. But I was alone out in the world, the horrid world, that very world which had used you so badly.”

“And you couldn’t go about in it without finding somebody to fall in love with?” he said. A jealous rage affected his brain like the fumes of wine, rising from some secret depths of his being so long deprived of all emotions. The hollows at the corners of his lips became more pronounced in the puffy roundness of his cheeks. Images, visions, obsess with particular force, men withdrawn from the sights and sounds of active life. “And I did nothing but think of you!” he exclaimed under his breath, contemptuously. “Think of you! You haunted me, I tell you.”

Flora said to herself that there was a being who loved her. “Then we have been haunting each other,” she declared with a pang of remorse. For indeed he had haunted her nearly out of the world, into a final and irremediable desertion. “Some day I shall tell you . . . No. I don’t think I can ever tell you. There was a time when I was mad. But what’s the good? It’s all over now. We shall forget all this. There shall be nothing to remind us.”

De Barral moved his shoulders.

“I should think you were mad to tie yourself to . . . How long is it since you are married?”

She answered “Not long” that being the only answer she dared to make. Everything was so different from what she imagined it would be. He wanted to know why she had said nothing of it in any of her letters; in her last letter. She said:

“It was after.”

“So recently!” he wondered. “Couldn’t you wait at least till I came out? You could have told me; asked me; consulted me! Let me see — ”

She shook her head negatively. And he was appalled. He thought to himself: Who can he be? Some miserable, silly youth without a penny. Or perhaps some scoundrel? Without making any expressive movement he wrung his loosely-clasped hands till the joints cracked. He looked at her. She was pretty. Some low scoundrel who will cast her off. Some plausible vagabond . . . “You couldn’t wait — eh?”

Again she made a slight negative sign.

“Why not? What was the hurry?” She cast down her eyes. “It had to be. Yes. It was sudden, but it had to be.”

He leaned towards her, his mouth open, his eyes wild with virtuous anger, but meeting the absolute candour of her raised glance threw himself back into his corner again.

“So tremendously in love with each other — was that it? Couldn’t let a father have his daughter all to himself even for a day after — after such a separation. And you know I never had anyone, I had no friends. What did I want with those people one meets in the City. The best of them are ready to cut your throat. Yes! Business men, gentlemen, any sort of men and women — out of spite, or to get something. Oh yes, they can talk fair enough if they think there’s something to be got out of you . . . “ His voice was a mere breath yet every word came to Flora as distinctly as if charged with all the moving power of passion . . . “My girl, I looked at them making up to me and I would say to myself: What do I care for all that! I am a business man. I am the great Mr. de Barral (yes, yes, some of them twisted their mouths at it, but I was the great Mr. de Barral) and I have my little girl. I wanted nobody and I have never had anybody.”

A true emotion had unsealed his lips but the words that came out of them were no louder than the murmur of a light wind. It died away.

“That’s just it,” said Flora de Barral under her breath. Without removing his eyes from her he took off his hat. It was a tall hat. The hat of the trial. The hat of the thumb-nail sketches in the illustrated papers. One comes out in the same clothes, but seclusion counts! It is well known that lurid visions haunt secluded men, monks, hermits — then why not prisoners? De Barral the convict took off the silk hat of the financier de Barral and deposited it on the front seat of the cab. Then he blew out his cheeks. He was red in the face.

“And then what happens?” he began again in his contained voice. “Here I am, overthrown, broken by envy, malice and all uncharitableness. I come out — and what do I find? I find that my girl Flora has gone and married some man or other, perhaps a fool, how do I know; or perhaps — anyway not good enough.”

“Stop, papa.”

“A silly love affair as likely as not,” he continued monotonously, his thin lips writhing between the ill-omened sunk corners. “And a very suspicious thing it is too, on the part of a loving daughter.”

She tried to interrupt him but he went on till she actually clapped her hand on his mouth. He rolled his eyes a bit but when she took her hand

away he remained silent.

“Wait. I must tell you . . . And first of all, papa, understand this, for everything’s in that: he is the most generous man in the world. He is . . . “

De Barral very still in his corner uttered with an effort “You are in love with him.”

“Papa! He came to me. I was thinking of you. I had no eyes for anybody. I could no longer bear to think of you. It was then that he came. Only then. At that time when — when I was going to give up.”

She gazed into his faded blue eyes as if yearning to be understood, to be given encouragement, peace — a word of sympathy. He declared without animation “I would like to break his neck.”

She had the mental exclamation of the overburdened.

“Oh my God!” and watched him with frightened eyes. But he did not appear insane or in any other way formidable. This comforted her. The silence lasted for some little time. Then suddenly he asked:

“What’s your name then?”

For a moment in the profound trouble of the task before her she did not understand what the question meant. Then, her face faintly flushing, she whispered: “Anthony.”

Her father, a red spot on each cheek, leaned his head back wearily in the corner of the cab.

“Anthony. What is he? Where did he spring from?”

“Papa, it was in the country, on a road — ”

He groaned, “On a road,” and closed his eyes.

“It’s too long to explain to you now. We shall have lots of time. There are things I could not tell you now. But some day. Some day. For now nothing can part us. Nothing. We are safe as long as we live — nothing can ever come between us.”

“You are infatuated with the fellow,” he remarked, without opening his eyes. And she said: “I believe in him,” in a low voice. “You and I must believe in him.”

“Who the devil is he?”

“He’s the brother of the lady — you know Mrs. Fyne, she knew mother — who was so kind to me. I was staying in the country, in a cottage, with Mr. and Mrs. Fyne. It was there that we met. He came on a visit. He noticed me. I — well — we are married now.”

She was thankful that his eyes were shut. It made it easier to talk of the future she had arranged, which now was an unalterable thing. She did not enter on the path of confidences. That was impossible. She felt he would not understand her. She felt also that he suffered. Now and then a great anxiety gripped her heart with a mysterious sense of guilt — as though she had betrayed him into the hands of an enemy. With his eyes shut he had an air of weary and pious meditation. She was a little afraid of it. Next moment a great pity for him filled her heart. And in the background there was remorse. His face twitched now and then just perceptibly. He managed to keep his eyelids down till he heard that the ‘husband’ was a sailor and that he, the father, was being taken straight on board ship ready to sail away from this abominable world of treacheries, and scorns and envies and lies, away, away over the blue sea, the sure, the inaccessible, the uncontaminated and spacious refuge for wounded souls.

Something like that. Not the very words perhaps but such was the general sense of her overwhelming argument — the argument of refuge.

I don’t think she gave a thought to material conditions. But as part of that argument set forth breathlessly, as if she were afraid that if she stopped for a moment she could never go on again, she mentioned that generosity of a stormy type, which had come to her from the sea, had caught her up on the brink of unmentionable failure, had whirled her away in its first ardent gust and could be trusted now, implicitly trusted, to carry them both, side by side, into absolute safety.

She believed it, she affirmed it. He understood thoroughly at last, and at once the interior of that cab, of an aspect so pacific in the eyes of the people on the pavements, became the scene of a great agitation. The generosity of Roderick Anthony — the son of the poet — affected the ex-financier de Barral in a manner which must have brought home to Flora de Barral the extreme arduousness of the business of being a woman. Being a woman is a terribly difficult trade since it consists principally of dealings with men. This man — the man inside the cab — cast oft his stiff placidity and behaved like an animal. I don’t mean it in an offensive sense. What he did was to give way to an instinctive panic. Like some wild creature scared by the first touch of a net falling on its back, old de Barral began to struggle, lank and angular, against the empty air — as much of it as there was in the cab — with staring eyes and gasping mouth from which his daughter shrank as far as she could in the confined space.

“Stop the cab. Stop him I tell you. Let me get out!” were the strangled exclamations she heard. Why? What for? To do what? He would hear nothing. She cried to him “Papa! Papa! What do you want to do?” And all she got from him was: “Stop. I must get out. I want to think. I must get out to think.”

It was a mercy that he didn’t attempt to open the door at once. He only stuck his head and shoulders out of the window crying to the cabman. She saw the consequences, the cab stopping, a crowd collecting around a raving old gentleman . . . In this terrible business of being a woman so full of fine shades, of delicate perplexities (and very small rewards) you can never know what rough work you may have to do, at any moment. Without hesitation Flora seized her father round the body and pulled back — being astonished at the ease with which she managed to make him drop into his seat again. She kept him there resolutely with one hand pressed against his breast, and leaning across him, she, in her turn put her head and shoulders out of the window. By then the cab had drawn up to the curbstone and was stopped. “No! I’ve changed my mind. Go on please where you were told first. To the docks.”

She wondered at the steadiness of her own voice. She heard a grunt from the driver and the cab began to roll again. Only then she sank into her place keeping a watchful eye on her companion. He was hardly anything more by this time. Except for her childhood’s impressions he was just — a man. Almost a stranger. How was one to deal with him? And there was the other too. Also almost a stranger. The trade of being a woman was very difficult. Too difficult. Flora closed her eyes saying to herself: “If I think too much about it I shall go mad.” And then opening them she asked her father if the prospect of living always with his daughter and being taken care of by her affection away from the world, which had no honour to give to his grey hairs, was such an awful prospect.

“Tell me, is it so bad as that?”

She put that question sadly, without bitterness. The famous — or notorious — de Barral had lost his rigidity now. He was bent. Nothing more deplorably futile than a bent poker. He said nothing. She added gently, suppressing an uneasy remorseful sigh:

“And it might have been worse. You might have found no one, no one in all this town, no one in all the world, not even me! Poor papa!”



She made a conscience-stricken movement towards him thinking: "Oh! I am horrible, I am horrible." And old de Barral, scared, tired, bewildered by the extraordinary shocks of his liberation, swayed over and actually leaned his head on her shoulder, as if sorrowing over his regained freedom.

The movement by itself was touching. Flora supporting him lightly imagined that he was crying; and at the thought that had she smashed in a quarry that shoulder, together with some other of her bones, this grey and pitiful head would have had nowhere to rest, she too gave way to tears. They flowed quietly, easing her overstrained nerves. Suddenly he pushed her away from him so that her head struck the side of the cab, pushing himself away too from her as if something had stung him.

All the warmth went out of her emotion. The very last tears turned cold on her cheek. But their work was done. She had found courage, resolution, as women do, in a good cry. With his hand covering the upper part of his face whether to conceal his eyes or to shut out an unbearable sight, he was stiffening up in his corner to his usual poker-like consistency. She regarded him in silence. His thin obstinate lips moved. He uttered the name of the cousin — the man, you remember, who did not approve of the Fynes, and whom rightly or wrongly little Fyne suspected of interested motives, in view of de Barral having possibly put away some plunder, somewhere before the smash.

I may just as well tell you at once that I don't know anything more of him. But de Barral was of the opinion, speaking in his low voice from under his hand, that this relation would have been only too glad to have secured his guidance.

"Of course I could not come forward in my own name, or person. But the advice of a man of my experience is as good as a fortune to anybody wishing to venture into finance. The same sort of thing can be done again."

He shuffled his feet a little, let fall his hand; and turning carefully toward his daughter his puffy round cheeks, his round chin resting on his collar, he bent on her the faded, resentful gaze of his pale eyes, which were wet.

"The start is really only a matter of judicious advertising. There's no difficulty. And here you go and . . ."

He turned his face away. "After all I am still de Barral, the de Barral. Didn't you remember that?"

"Papa," said Flora; "listen. It's you who must remember that there is no longer a de Barral . . ." He looked at her sideways anxiously. "There is

Mr. Smith, whom no harm, no trouble, no wicked lies of evil people can ever touch.”

“Mr. Smith,” he breathed out slowly. “Where does he belong to? There’s not even a Miss Smith.”

“There is your Flora.”

“My Flora! You went and . . . I can’t bear to think of it. It’s horrible.”

“Yes. It was horrible enough at times,” she said with feeling, because somehow, obscurely, what this man said appealed to her as if it were her own thought clothed in an enigmatic emotion. “I think with shame sometimes how I . . . No not yet. I shall not tell you. At least not now.”

The cab turned into the gateway of the dock. Flora handed the tall hat to her father. “Here, papa. And please be good. I suppose you love me. If you don’t, then I wonder who — ”

He put the hat on, and stiffened hard in his corner, kept a sidelong glance on his girl. “Try to be nice for my sake. Think of the years I have been waiting for you. I do indeed want support — and peace. A little peace.”

She clasped his arm suddenly with both hands pressing with all her might as if to crush the resistance she felt in him. “I could not have peace if I did not have you with me. I won’t let you go. Not after all I went through. I won’t.” The nervous force of her grip frightened him a little. She laughed suddenly. “It’s absurd. It’s as if I were asking you for a sacrifice. What am I afraid of? Where could you go? I mean now, to-day, to-night? You can’t tell me. Have you thought of it? Well I have been thinking of it for the last year. Longer. I nearly went mad trying to find out. I believe I was mad for a time or else I should never have thought . . . “

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“This was as near as she came to a confession,” remarked Marlow in a changed tone. “The confession I mean of that walk to the top of the quarry which she reproached herself with so bitterly. And he made of it what his fancy suggested. It could not possibly be a just notion. The cab stopped alongside the ship and they got out in the manner described by the sensitive Franklin. I don’t know if they suspected each other’s sanity at the end of that drive. But that is possible. We all seem a little mad to each other; an excellent arrangement for the bulk of humanity which finds in it an easy motive of forgiveness. Flora crossed the quarter-deck with a rapidity born of apprehension. It had grown unbearable. She wanted this business over.

She was thankful on looking back to see he was following her. "If he bolts away," she thought, "then I shall know that I am of no account indeed! That no one loves me, that words and actions and protestations and everything in the world is false — and I shall jump into the dock. That at least won't lie."

Well I don't know. If it had come to that she would have been most likely fished out, what with her natural want of luck and the good many people on the quay and on board. And just where the Ferndale was moored there hung on a wall (I know the berth) a coil of line, a pole, and a life-buoy kept there on purpose to save people who tumble into the dock. It's not so easy to get away from life's betrayals as she thought. However it did not come to that. He followed her with his quick gliding walk. Mr. Smith! The liberated convict de Barral passed off the solid earth for the last time, vanished for ever, and there was Mr. Smith added to that world of waters which harbours so many queer fishes. An old gentleman in a silk hat, darting wary glances. He followed, because mere existence has its claims which are obeyed mechanically. I have no doubt he presented a respectable figure. Father-in-law. Nothing more respectable. But he carried in his heart the confused pain of dismay and affection, of involuntary repulsion and pity. Very much like his daughter. Only in addition he felt a furious jealousy of the man he was going to see.

A residue of egoism remains in every affection — even paternal. And this man in the seclusion of his prison had thought himself into such a sense of ownership of that single human being he had to think about, as may well be inconceivable to us who have not had to serve a long (and wickedly unjust) sentence of penal servitude. She was positively the only thing, the one point where his thoughts found a resting-place, for years. She was the only outlet for his imagination. He had not much of that faculty to be sure, but there was in it the force of concentration. He felt outraged, and perhaps it was an absurdity on his part, but I venture to suggest rather in degree than in kind. I have a notion that no usual, normal father is pleased at parting with his daughter. No. Not even when he rationally appreciates "Jane being taken off his hands" or perhaps is able to exult at an excellent match. At bottom, quite deep down, down in the dark (in some cases only by digging), there is to be found a certain repugnance . . . With mothers of course it is different. Women are more loyal, not to each other, but to their

common femininity which they behold triumphant with a secret and proud satisfaction.

The circumstances of that match added to Mr. Smith's indignation. And if he followed his daughter into that ship's cabin it was as if into a house of disgrace and only because he was still bewildered by the suddenness of the thing. His will, so long lying fallow, was overborne by her determination and by a vague fear of that regained liberty.

You will be glad to hear that Anthony, though he did shirk the welcome on the quay, behaved admirably, with the simplicity of a man who has no small meannesses and makes no mean reservations. His eyes did not flinch and his tongue did not falter. He was, I have it on the best authority, admirable in his earnestness, in his sincerity and also in his restraint. He was perfect. Nevertheless the vital force of his unknown individuality addressing him so familiarly was enough to fluster Mr. Smith. Flora saw her father trembling in all his exiguous length, though he held himself stiffer than ever if that was possible. He muttered a little and at last managed to utter, not loud of course but very distinctly: "I am here under protest," the corners of his mouth sunk disparagingly, his eyes stony. "I am here under protest. I have been locked up by a conspiracy. I — "

He raised his hands to his forehead — his silk hat was on the table rim upwards; he had put it there with a despairing gesture as he came in — he raised his hands to his forehead. "It seems to me unfair. I — " He broke off again. Anthony looked at Flora who stood by the side of her father.

"Well, sir, you will soon get used to me. Surely you and she must have had enough of shore-people and their confounded half-and-half ways to last you both for a life-time. A particularly merciful lot they are too. You ask Flora. I am alluding to my own sister, her best friend, and not a bad woman either as they go."

The captain of the Ferndale checked himself. "Lucky thing I was there to step in. I want you to make yourself at home, and before long — "

The faded stare of the Great de Barral silenced Anthony by its inexpressive fixity. He signalled with his eyes to Flora towards the door of the state-room fitted specially to receive Mr. Smith, the free man. She seized the free man's hat off the table and took him caressingly under the arm. "Yes! This is home, come and see your room, papa!"

Anthony himself threw open the door and Flora took care to shut it carefully behind herself and her father. "See," she began but desisted

because it was clear that he would look at none of the contrivances for his comfort. She herself had hardly seen them before. He was looking only at the new carpet and she waited till he should raise his eyes.

He didn't do that but spoke in his usual voice. "So this is your husband, that . . . And I locked up!"

"Papa, what's the good of harping on that," she remonstrated no louder. "He is kind."

"And you went and . . . married him so that he should be kind to me. Is that it? How did you know that I wanted anybody to be kind to me?"

"How strange you are!" she said thoughtfully.

"It's hard for a man who has gone through what I have gone through to feel like other people. Has that occurred to you? . . . " He looked up at last . . . "Mrs. Anthony, I can't bear the sight of the fellow." She met his eyes without flinching and he added, "You want to go to him now." His mild automatic manner seemed the effect of tremendous self-restraint — and yet she remembered him always like that. She felt cold all over.

"Why, of course, I must go to him," she said with a slight start.

He gnashed his teeth at her and she went out.

Anthony had not moved from the spot. One of his hands was resting on the table. She went up to him, stopped, then deliberately moved still closer. "Thank you, Roderick."

"You needn't thank me," he murmured. "It's I who . . . "

"No, perhaps I needn't. You do what you like. But you are doing it well."

He sighed then hardly above a whisper because they were near the state-room door, "Upset, eh?"

She made no sign, no sound of any kind. The thorough falseness of the position weighed on them both. But he was the braver of the two. "I dare say. At first. Did you think of telling him you were happy?"

"He never asked me," she smiled faintly at him. She was disappointed by his quietness. "I did not say more than I was absolutely obliged to say — of myself." She was beginning to be irritated with this man a little. "I told him I had been very lucky," she said suddenly despondent, missing Anthony's masterful manner, that something arbitrary and tender which, after the first scare, she had accustomed herself to look forward to with pleasurable apprehension. He was contemplating her rather blankly. She had not taken off her outdoor things, hat, gloves. She was like a caller.

And she had a movement suggesting the end of a not very satisfactory business call. "Perhaps it would be just as well if we went ashore. Time yet."

He gave her a glimpse of his unconstrained self in the low vehement "You dare!" which sprang to his lips and out of them with a most menacing inflexion.

"You dare . . . What's the matter now?"

These last words were shot out not at her but at some target behind her back. Looking over her shoulder she saw the bald head with black bunches of hair of the congested and devoted Franklin (he had his cap in his hand) gazing sentimentally from the saloon doorway with his lobster eyes. He was heard from the distance in a tone of injured innocence reporting that the berthing master was alongside and that he wanted to move the ship into the basin before the crew came on board.

His captain growled "Well, let him," and waved away the ulcerated and pathetic soul behind these prominent eyes which lingered on the offensive woman while the mate backed out slowly. Anthony turned to Flora.

"You could not have meant it. You are as straight as they make them."

"I am trying to be."

"Then don't joke in that way. Think of what would become of — me."

"Oh yes. I forgot. No, I didn't mean it. It wasn't a joke. It was forgetfulness. You wouldn't have been wronged. I couldn't have gone. I — I am too tired."

He saw she was swaying where she stood and restrained himself violently from taking her into his arms, his frame trembling with fear as though he had been tempted to an act of unparalleled treachery. He stepped aside and lowering his eyes pointed to the door of the stern-cabin. It was only after she passed by him that he looked up and thus he did not see the angry glance she gave him before she moved on. He looked after her. She tottered slightly just before reaching the door and flung it to behind her nervously.

Anthony — he had felt this crash as if the door had been slammed inside his very breast — stood for a moment without moving and then shouted for Mrs. Brown. This was the steward's wife, his lucky inspiration to make Flora comfortable. "Mrs. Brown! Mrs. Brown!" At last she appeared from somewhere. "Mrs. Anthony has come on board. Just gone into the cabin. Hadn't you better see if you can be of any assistance?"

“Yes, sir.”

And again he was alone with the situation he had created in the hardihood and inexperience of his heart. He thought he had better go on deck. In fact he ought to have been there before. At any rate it would be the usual thing for him to be on deck. But a sound of muttering and of faint thuds somewhere near by arrested his attention. They proceeded from Mr. Smith’s room, he perceived. It was very extraordinary. “He’s talking to himself,” he thought. “He seems to be thumping the bulkhead with his fists — or his head.”

Anthony’s eyes grew big with wonder while he listened to these noises. He became so attentive that he did not notice Mrs. Brown till she actually stopped before him for a moment to say:

“Mrs. Anthony doesn’t want any assistance, sir.”

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This was you understand the voyage before Mr. Powell — young Powell then — joined the Ferndale; chance having arranged that he should get his start in life in that particular ship of all the ships then in the port of London. The most unrestful ship that ever sailed out of any port on earth. I am not alluding to her sea-going qualities. Mr. Powell tells me she was as steady as a church. I mean unrestful in the sense, for instance in which this planet of ours is unrestful — a matter of an uneasy atmosphere disturbed by passions, jealousies, loves, hates and the troubles of transcendental good intentions, which, though ethically valuable, I have no doubt cause often more unhappiness than the plots of the most evil tendency. For those who refuse to believe in chance he, I mean Mr. Powell, must have been obviously predestined to add his native ingenuousness to the sum of all the others carried by the honest ship Ferndale. He was too ingenuous. Everybody on board was, exception being made of Mr. Smith who, however, was simple enough in his way, with that terrible simplicity of the fixed idea, for which there is also another name men pronounce with dread and aversion. His fixed idea was to save his girl from the man who had possessed himself of her (I use these words on purpose because the image they suggest was clearly in Mr. Smith’s mind), possessed himself unfairly of her while he, the father, was locked up.

“I won’t rest till I have got you away from that man,” he would murmur to her after long periods of contemplation. We know from Powell how he

used to sit on the skylight near the long deck-chair on which Flora was reclining, gazing into her face from above with an air of guardianship and investigation at the same time.

It is almost impossible to say if he ever had considered the event rationally. The avatar of de Barral into Mr. Smith had not been effected without a shock — that much one must recognize. It may be that it drove all practical considerations out of his mind, making room for awful and precise visions which nothing could dislodge afterwards.

And it might have been the tenacity, the unintelligent tenacity, of the man who had persisted in throwing millions of other people's thrift into the Lone Valley Railway, the Labrador Docks, the Spotted Leopard Copper Mine, and other grotesque speculations exposed during the famous de Barral trial, amongst murmurs of astonishment mingled with bursts of laughter. For it is in the Courts of Law that Comedy finds its last refuge in our deadly serious world. As to tears and lamentations, these were not heard in the august precincts of comedy, because they were indulged in privately in several thousand homes, where, with a fine dramatic effect, hunger had taken the place of Thrift.

But there was one at least who did not laugh in court. That person was the accused. The notorious de Barral did not laugh because he was indignant. He was impervious to words, to facts, to inferences. It would have been impossible to make him see his guilt or his folly — either by evidence or argument — if anybody had tried to argue.

Neither did his daughter Flora try to argue with him. The cruelty of her position was so great, its complications so thorny, if I may express myself so, that a passive attitude was yet her best refuge — as it had been before her of so many women.

For that sort of inertia in woman is always enigmatic and therefore menacing. It makes one pause. A woman may be a fool, a sleepy fool, an agitated fool, a too awfully noxious fool, and she may even be simply stupid. But she is never dense. She's never made of wood through and through as some men are. There is in woman always, somewhere, a spring. Whatever men don't know about women (and it may be a lot or it may be very little) men and even fathers do know that much. And that is why so many men are afraid of them.

Mr. Smith I believe was afraid of his daughter's quietness though of course he interpreted it in his own way.



He would, as Mr. Powell depicts, sit on the skylight and bend over the reclining girl, wondering what there was behind the lost gaze under the darkened eyelids in the still eyes. He would look and look and then he would say, whisper rather, it didn't take much for his voice to drop to a mere breath — he would declare, transferring his faded stare to the horizon, that he would never rest till he had "got her away from that man."

"You don't know what you are saying, papa."

She would try not to show her weariness, the nervous strain of these two men's antagonism around her person which was the cause of her languid attitudes. For as a matter of fact the sea agreed with her.

As likely as not Anthony would be walking on the other side of the deck. The strain was making him restless. He couldn't sit still anywhere. He had tried shutting himself up in his cabin; but that was no good. He would jump up to rush on deck and tramp, tramp up and down that poop till he felt ready to drop, without being able to wear down the agitation of his soul, generous indeed, but weighted by its envelope of blood and muscle and bone; handicapped by the brain creating precise images and everlastingly speculating, speculating — looking out for signs, watching for symptoms.

And Mr. Smith with a slight backward jerk of his small head at the footsteps on the other side of the skylight would insist in his awful, hopelessly gentle voice that he knew very well what he was saying. Hadn't she given herself to that man while he was locked up.

"Helpless, in jail, with no one to think of, nothing to look forward to, but my daughter. And then when they let me out at last I find her gone — for it amounts to this. Sold. Because you've sold yourself; you know you have."

With his round unmoved face, a lot of fine white hair waving in the wind-eddies of the spanker, his glance levelled over the sea he seemed to be addressing the universe across her reclining form. She would protest sometimes.

"I wish you would not talk like this, papa. You are only tormenting me, and tormenting yourself."

"Yes, I am tormented enough," he admitted meaningly. But it was not talking about it that tormented him. It was thinking of it. And to sit and look at it was worse for him than it possibly could have been for her to go and give herself up, bad as that must have been.

"For of course you suffered. Don't tell me you didn't? You must have."

She had renounced very soon all attempts at protests. It was useless. It might have made things worse; and she did not want to quarrel with her father, the only human being that really cared for her, absolutely, evidently, completely — to the end. There was in him no pity, no generosity, nothing whatever of these fine things — it was for her, for her very own self such as it was, that this human being cared. This certitude would have made her put up with worse torments. For, of course, she too was being tormented. She felt also helpless, as if the whole enterprise had been too much for her. This is the sort of conviction which makes for quietude. She was becoming a fatalist.

What must have been rather appalling were the necessities of daily life, the intercourse of current trifles. That naturally had to go on. They wished good morning to each other, they sat down together to meals — and I believe there would be a game of cards now and then in the evening, especially at first. What frightened her most was the duplicity of her father, at least what looked like duplicity, when she remembered his persistent, insistent whispers on deck. However her father was a taciturn person as far back as she could remember him best — on the *Parade*. It was she who chattered, never troubling herself to discover whether he was pleased or displeased. And now she couldn't fathom his thoughts. Neither did she chatter to him. Anthony with a forced friendly smile as if frozen to his lips seemed only too thankful at not being made to speak. Mr. Smith sometimes forgot himself while studying his hand so long that Flora had to recall him to himself by a murmured "Papa — your lead." Then he apologized by a faint as if inward ejaculation "Beg your pardon, Captain." Naturally she addressed Anthony as Roderick and he addressed her as Flora. This was all the acting that was necessary to judge from the wincing twitch of the old man's mouth at every uttered "Flora." On hearing the rare "Rodericks" he had sometimes a scornful grimace as faint and faded and colourless as his whole stiff personality.

He would be the first to retire. He was not infirm. With him too the life on board ship seemed to agree; but from a sense of duty, of affection, or to placate his hidden fury, his daughter always accompanied him to his state-room "to make him comfortable." She lighted his lamp, helped him into his dressing-gown or got him a book from a bookcase fitted in there — but this last rarely, because Mr. Smith used to declare "I am no reader" with something like pride in his low tones. Very often after kissing her good-

night on the forehead he would treat her to some such fretful remark: "It's like being in jail — 'pon my word. I suppose that man is out there waiting for you. Head jailer! Ough!"

She would smile vaguely; murmur a conciliatory "How absurd." But once, out of patience, she said quite sharply "Leave off. It hurts me. One would think you hate me."

"It isn't you I hate," he went on monotonously breathing at her. "No, it isn't you. But if I saw that you loved that man I think I could hate you too."

That word struck straight at her heart. "You wouldn't be the first then," she muttered bitterly. But he was busy with his fixed idea and uttered an awfully equable "But you don't! Unfortunate girl!"

She looked at him steadily for a time then said "Good-night, papa."

As a matter of fact Anthony very seldom waited for her alone at the table with the scattered cards, glasses, water-jug, bottles and soon. He took no more opportunities to be alone with her than was absolutely necessary for the edification of Mrs. Brown. Excellent, faithful woman; the wife of his still more excellent and faithful steward. And Flora wished all these excellent people, devoted to Anthony, she wished them all further; and especially the nice, pleasant-spoken Mrs. Brown with her beady, mobile eyes and her "Yes certainly, ma'am," which seemed to her to have a mocking sound. And so this short trip — to the Western Islands only — came to an end. It was so short that when young Powell joined the Ferndale by a memorable stroke of chance, no more than seven months had elapsed since the — let us say the liberation of the convict de Barral and his avatar into Mr. Smith.

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For the time the ship was loading in London Anthony took a cottage near a little country station in Essex, to house Mr. Smith and Mr. Smith's daughter. It was altogether his idea. How far it was necessary for Mr. Smith to seek rural retreat I don't know. Perhaps to some extent it was a judicious arrangement. There were some obligations incumbent on the liberated de Barral (in connection with reporting himself to the police I imagine) which Mr. Smith was not anxious to perform. De Barral had to vanish; the theory was that de Barral had vanished, and it had to be upheld. Poor Flora liked the country, even if the spot had nothing more to recommend it than its retired character.

Now and then Captain Anthony ran down; but as the station was a real wayside one, with no early morning trains up, he could never stay for more than the afternoon. It appeared that he must sleep in town so as to be early on board his ship. The weather was magnificent and whenever the captain of the Ferndale was seen on a brilliant afternoon coming down the road Mr. Smith would seize his stick and toddle off for a solitary walk. But whether he would get tired or because it gave him some satisfaction to see “that man” go away — or for some cunning reason of his own, he was always back before the hour of Anthony’s departure. On approaching the cottage he would see generally “that man” lying on the grass in the orchard at some distance from his daughter seated in a chair brought out of the cottage’s living room. Invariably Mr. Smith made straight for them and as invariably had the feeling that his approach was not disturbing a very intimate conversation. He sat with them, through a silent hour or so, and then it would be time for Anthony to go. Mr. Smith, perhaps from discretion, would casually vanish a minute or so before, and then watch through the diamond panes of an upstairs room “that man” take a lingering look outside the gate at the invisible Flora, lift his hat, like a caller, and go off down the road. Then only Mr. Smith would join his daughter again.

These were the bad moments for her. Not always, of course, but frequently. It was nothing extraordinary to hear Mr. Smith begin gently with some observation like this:

“That man is getting tired of you.”

He would never pronounce Anthony’s name. It was always “that man.”

Generally she would remain mute with wide open eyes gazing at nothing between the gnarled fruit trees. Once, however, she got up and walked into the cottage. Mr. Smith followed her carrying the chair. He banged it down resolutely and in that smooth inexpressive tone so many ears used to bend eagerly to catch when it came from the Great de Barral he said:

“Let’s get away.”

She had the strength of mind not to spin round. On the contrary she went on to a shabby bit of a mirror on the wall. In the greenish glass her own face looked far off like the livid face of a drowned corpse at the bottom of a pool. She laughed faintly.

“I tell you that man’s getting — ”

“Papa,” she interrupted him. “I have no illusions as to myself. It has happened to me before but — ”

Her voice failing her suddenly her father struck in with quite an unwonted animation. “Let’s make a rush for it, then.”

Having mastered both her fright and her bitterness, she turned round, sat down and allowed her astonishment to be seen. Mr. Smith sat down too, his knees together and bent at right angles, his thin legs parallel to each other and his hands resting on the arms of the wooden arm-chair. His hair had grown long, his head was set stiffly, there was something fatuously venerable in his aspect.

“You can’t care for him. Don’t tell me. I understand your motive. And I have called you an unfortunate girl. You are that as much as if you had gone on the streets. Yes. Don’t interrupt me, Flora. I was everlastingly being interrupted at the trial and I can’t stand it any more. I won’t be interrupted by my own child. And when I think that it is on the very day before they let me out that you . . . “

He had wormed this fact out of her by that time because Flora had got tired of evading the question. He had been very much struck and distressed. Was that the trust she had in him? Was that a proof of confidence and love? The very day before! Never given him even half a chance. It was as at the trial. They never gave him a chance. They would not give him time. And there was his own daughter acting exactly as his bitterest enemies had done. Not giving him time!

The monotony of that subdued voice nearly lulled her dismay to sleep. She listened to the unavoidable things he was saying.

“But what induced that man to marry you? Of course he’s a gentleman. One can see that. And that makes it worse. Gentlemen don’t understand anything about city affairs — finance. Why! — the people who started the cry after me were a firm of gentlemen. The counsel, the judge — all gentlemen — quite out of it! No notion of . . . And then he’s a sailor too. Just a skipper — ”

“My grandfather was nothing else,” she interrupted. And he made an angular gesture of impatience.

“Yes. But what does a silly sailor know of business? Nothing. No conception. He can have no idea of what it means to be the daughter of Mr. de Barral — even after his enemies had smashed him. What on earth induced him — ”

She made a movement because the level voice was getting on her nerves. And he paused, but only to go on again in the same tone with the remark:

“Of course you are pretty. And that’s why you are lost — like many other poor girls. Unfortunate is the word for you.”

She said: “It may be. Perhaps it is the right word; but listen, papa. I mean to be honest.”

He began to exhale more speeches.

“Just the sort of man to get tired and then leave you and go off with his beastly ship. And anyway you can never be happy with him. Look at his face. I want to save you. You see I was not perhaps a very good husband to your poor mother. She would have done better to have left me long before she died. I have been thinking it all over. I won’t have you unhappy.”

He ran his eyes over her with an attention which was surprisingly noticeable. Then said, “H’m! Yes. Let’s clear out before it is too late. Quietly, you and I.”

She said as if inspired and with that calmness which despair often gives: “There is no money to go away with, papa.”

He rose up straightening himself as though he were a hinged figure. She said decisively:

“And of course you wouldn’t think of deserting me, papa?”

“Of course not,” sounded his subdued tone. And he left her, gliding away with his walk which Mr. Powell described to me as being as level and wary as his voice. He walked as if he were carrying a glass full of water on his head.

Flora naturally said nothing to Anthony of that edifying conversation. His generosity might have taken alarm at it and she did not want to be left behind to manage her father alone. And moreover she was too honest. She would be honest at whatever cost. She would not be the first to speak. Never. And the thought came into her head: “I am indeed an unfortunate creature!”

It was by the merest coincidence that Anthony coming for the afternoon two days later had a talk with Mr. Smith in the orchard. Flora for some reason or other had left them for a moment; and Anthony took that opportunity to be frank with Mr. Smith. He said: “It seems to me, sir, that you think Flora has not done very well for herself. Well, as to that I can’t say anything. All I want you to know is that I have tried to do the right

thing.” And then he explained that he had willed everything he was possessed of to her. “She didn’t tell you, I suppose?”

Mr. Smith shook his head slightly. And Anthony, trying to be friendly, was just saying that he proposed to keep the ship away from home for at least two years. “I think, sir, that from every point of view it would be best,” when Flora came back and the conversation, cut short in that direction, languished and died. Later in the evening, after Anthony had been gone for hours, on the point of separating for the night, Mr. Smith remarked suddenly to his daughter after a long period of brooding:

“A will is nothing. One tears it up. One makes another.” Then after reflecting for a minute he added unemotionally:

“One tells lies about it.”

Flora, patient, steeled against every hurt and every disgust to the point of wondering at herself, said: “You push your dislike of — of — Roderick too far, papa. You have no regard for me. You hurt me.”

He, as ever inexpressive to the point of terrifying her sometimes by the contrast of his placidity and his words, turned away from her a pair of faded eyes.

“I wonder how far your dislike goes,” he began. “His very name sticks in your throat. I’ve noticed it. It hurts me. What do you think of that? You might remember that you are not the only person that’s hurt by your folly, by your hastiness, by your recklessness.” He brought back his eyes to her face. “And the very day before they were going to let me out.” His feeble voice failed him altogether, the narrow compressed lips only trembling for a time before he added with that extraordinary equanimity of tone, “I call it sinful.”

Flora made no answer. She judged it simpler, kinder and certainly safer to let him talk himself out. This, Mr. Smith, being naturally taciturn, never took very long to do. And we must not imagine that this sort of thing went on all the time. She had a few good days in that cottage. The absence of Anthony was a relief and his visits were pleasurable. She was quieter. He was quieter too. She was almost sorry when the time to join the ship arrived. It was a moment of anguish, of excitement; they arrived at the dock in the evening and Flora after “making her father comfortable” according to established usage lingered in the state-room long enough to notice that he was surprised. She caught his pale eyes observing her quite stonily. Then she went out after a cheery good-night.

Contrary to her hopes she found Anthony yet in the saloon. Sitting in his arm-chair at the head of the table he was picking up some business papers which he put hastily in his breast pocket and got up. He asked her if her day, travelling up to town and then doing some shopping, had tired her. She shook her head. Then he wanted to know in a half-jocular way how she felt about going away, and for a long voyage this time.

“Does it matter how I feel?” she asked in a tone that cast a gloom over his face. He answered with repressed violence which she did not expect:

“No, it does not matter, because I cannot go without you. I’ve told you . . . You know it. You don’t think I could.”

“I assure you I haven’t the slightest wish to evade my obligations,” she said steadily. “Even if I could. Even if I dared, even if I had to die for it!”

He looked thunderstruck. They stood facing each other at the end of the saloon. Anthony stuttered. “Oh no. You won’t die. You don’t mean it. You have taken kindly to the sea.”

She laughed, but she felt angry.

“No, I don’t mean it. I tell you I don’t mean to evade my obligations. I shall live on . . . feeling a little crushed, nevertheless.”

“Crushed!” he repeated. “What’s crushing you?”

“Your magnanimity,” she said sharply. But her voice was softened after a time. “Yet I don’t know. There is a perfection in it — do you understand me, Roderick? — which makes it almost possible to bear.”

He sighed, looked away, and remarked that it was time to put out the lamp in the saloon. The permission was only till ten o’clock.

“But you needn’t mind that so much in your cabin. Just see that the curtains of the ports are drawn close and that’s all. The steward might have forgotten to do it. He lighted your reading lamp in there before he went ashore for a last evening with his wife. I don’t know if it was wise to get rid of Mrs. Brown. You will have to look after yourself, Flora.”

He was quite anxious; but Flora as a matter of fact congratulated herself on the absence of Mrs. Brown. No sooner had she closed the door of her state-room than she murmured fervently, “Yes! Thank goodness, she is gone.” There would be no gentle knock, followed by her appearance with her equivocal stare and the intolerable: “Can I do anything for you, ma’am?” which poor Flora had learned to fear and hate more than any voice or any words on board that ship — her only refuge from the world which had no use for her, for her imperfections and for her troubles.



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Mrs. Brown had been very much vexed at her dismissal. The Browns were a childless couple and the arrangement had suited them perfectly. Their resentment was very bitter. Mrs. Brown had to remain ashore alone with her rage, but the steward was nursing his on board. Poor Flora had no greater enemy, the aggrieved mate had no greater sympathizer. And Mrs. Brown, with a woman's quick power of observation and inference (the putting of two and two together) had come to a certain conclusion which she had imparted to her husband before leaving the ship. The morose steward permitted himself once to make an allusion to it in Powell's hearing. It was in the officers' mess-room at the end of a meal while he lingered after putting a fruit pie on the table. He and the chief mate started a dialogue about the alarming change in the captain, the sallow steward looking down with a sinister frown, Franklin rolling upwards his eyes, sentimental in a red face. Young Powell had heard a lot of that sort of thing by that time. It was growing monotonous; it had always sounded to him a little absurd. He struck in impatiently with the remark that such lamentations over a man merely because he had taken a wife seemed to him like lunacy.

Franklin muttered, "Depends on what the wife is up to." The steward leaning against the bulkhead near the door glowered at Powell, that newcomer, that ignoramus, that stranger without right or privileges. He snarled:

"Wife! Call her a wife, do you?"

"What the devil do you mean by this?" exclaimed young Powell.

"I know what I know. My old woman has not been six months on board for nothing. You had better ask her when we get back."

And meeting sullenly the withering stare of Mr. Powell the steward retreated backwards.

Our young friend turned at once upon the mate. "And you let that confounded bottle-washer talk like this before you, Mr. Franklin. Well, I am astonished."

"Oh, it isn't what you think. It isn't what you think." Mr. Franklin looked more apoplectic than ever. "If it comes to that I could astonish you. But it's no use. I myself can hardly . . . You couldn't understand. I hope you won't try to make mischief. There was a time, young fellow, when I

would have dared any man — any man, you hear? — to make mischief between me and Captain Anthony. But not now. Not now. There's a change! Not in me though . . . “

Young Powell rejected with indignation any suggestion of making mischief. “Who do you take me for?” he cried. “Only you had better tell that steward to be careful what he says before me or I'll spoil his good looks for him for a month and will leave him to explain the why of it to the captain the best way he can.”

This speech established Powell as a champion of Mrs. Anthony. Nothing more bearing on the question was ever said before him. He did not care for the steward's black looks; Franklin, never conversational even at the best of times and avoiding now the only topic near his heart, addressed him only on matters of duty. And for that, too, Powell cared very little. The woes of the apoplectic mate had begun to bore him long before. Yet he felt lonely a bit at times. Therefore the little intercourse with Mrs. Anthony either in one dog-watch or the other was something to be looked forward to. The captain did not mind it. That was evident from his manner. One night he inquired (they were then alone on the poop) what they had been talking about that evening? Powell had to confess that it was about the ship. Mrs. Anthony had been asking him questions.

“Takes interest — eh?” jerked out the captain moving rapidly up and down the weather side of the poop.

“Yes, sir. Mrs. Anthony seems to get hold wonderfully of what one's telling her.”

“Sailor's granddaughter. One of the old school. Old sea-dog of the best kind, I believe,” ejaculated the captain, swinging past his motionless second officer and leaving the words behind him like a trail of sparks succeeded by a perfect conversational darkness, because, for the next two hours till he left the deck, he didn't open his lips again.

On another occasion . . . we mustn't forget that the ship had crossed the line and was adding up south latitude every day by then . . . on another occasion, about seven in the evening, Powell on duty, heard his name uttered softly in the companion. The captain was on the stairs, thin-faced, his eyes sunk, on his arm a Shetland wool wrap.

“Mr. Powell — here.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Give this to Mrs. Anthony. Evenings are getting chilly.”

And the haggard face sank out of sight. Mrs. Anthony was surprised on seeing the shawl.

"The captain wants you to put this on," explained young Powell, and as she raised herself in her seat he dropped it on her shoulders. She wrapped herself up closely.

"Where was the captain?" she asked.

"He was in the companion. Called me on purpose," said Powell, and then retreated discreetly, because she looked as though she didn't want to talk any more that evening. Mr. Smith — the old gentleman — was as usual sitting on the skylight near her head, brooding over the long chair but by no means inimical, as far as his unreadable face went, to those conversations of the two youngest people on board. In fact they seemed to give him some pleasure. Now and then he would raise his faded china eyes to the animated face of Mr. Powell thoughtfully. When the young sailor was by, the old man became less rigid, and when his daughter, on rare occasions, smiled at some artless tale of Mr. Powell, the inexpressive face of Mr. Smith reflected dimly that flash of evanescent mirth. For Mr. Powell had come now to entertain his captain's wife with anecdotes from the not very distant past when he was a boy, on board various ships, — funny things do happen on board ship. Flora was quite surprised at times to find herself amused. She was even heard to laugh twice in the course of a month. It was not a loud sound but it was startling enough at the after-end of the Ferndale where low tones or silence were the rule. The second time this happened the captain himself must have been startled somewhere down below; because he emerged from the depths of his unobtrusive existence and began his tramping on the opposite side of the poop.

Almost immediately he called his young second officer over to him. This was not done in displeasure. The glance he fastened on Mr. Powell conveyed a sort of approving wonder. He engaged him in desultory conversation as if for the only purpose of keeping a man who could provoke such a sound, near his person. Mr. Powell felt himself liked. He felt it. Liked by that haggard, restless man who threw at him disconnected phrases to which his answers were, "Yes, sir," "No, sir," "Oh, certainly," "I suppose so, sir," — and might have been clearly anything else for all the other cared.

It was then, Mr. Powell told me, that he discovered in himself an already old-established liking for Captain Anthony. He also felt sorry for him

without being able to discover the origins of that sympathy of which he had become so suddenly aware.

Meantime Mr. Smith, bending forward stiffly as though he had a hinged back, was speaking to his daughter.

She was a child no longer. He wanted to know if she believed in — in hell. In eternal punishment?

His peculiar voice, as if filtered through cotton-wool was inaudible on the other side of the deck. Poor Flora, taken very much unawares, made an inarticulate murmur, shook her head vaguely, and glanced in the direction of the pacing Anthony who was not looking her way. It was no use glancing in that direction. Of young Powell, leaning against the mizzen-mast and facing his captain she could only see the shoulder and part of a blue serge back.

And the unworried, unaccented voice of her father went on tormenting her.

“You see, you must understand. When I came out of jail it was with joy. That is, my soul was fairly torn in two — but anyway to see you happy — I had made up my mind to that. Once I could be sure that you were happy then of course I would have had no reason to care for life — strictly speaking — which is all right for an old man; though naturally . . . no reason to wish for death either. But this sort of life! What sense, what meaning, what value has it either for you or for me? It’s just sitting down to look at the death, that’s coming, coming. What else is it? I don’t know how you can put up with that. I don’t think you can stand it for long. Some day you will jump overboard.”

Captain Anthony had stopped for a moment staring ahead from the break of the poop, and poor Flora sent at his back a look of despairing appeal which would have moved a heart of stone. But as though she had done nothing he did not stir in the least. She got out of the long chair and went towards the companion. Her father followed carrying a few small objects, a handbag, her handkerchief, a book. They went down together.

It was only then that Captain Anthony turned, looked at the place they had vacated and resumed his tramping, but not his desultory conversation with his second officer. His nervous exasperation had grown so much that now very often he used to lose control of his voice. If he did not watch himself it would suddenly die in his throat. He had to make sure before he ventured on the simplest saying, an order, a remark on the wind, a simple

good-morning. That's why his utterance was abrupt, his answers to people startlingly brusque and often not forthcoming at all.

It happens to the most resolute of men to find himself at grips not only with unknown forces, but with a well-known force the real might of which he had not understood. Anthony had discovered that he was not the proud master but the chafing captive of his generosity. It rose in front of him like a wall which his respect for himself forbade him to scale. He said to himself: "Yes, I was a fool — but she has trusted me!" Trusted! A terrible word to any man somewhat exceptional in a world in which success has never been found in renunciation and good faith. And it must also be said, in order not to make Anthony more stupidly sublime than he was, that the behaviour of Flora kept him at a distance. The girl was afraid to add to the exasperation of her father. It was her unhappy lot to be made more wretched by the only affection which she could not suspect. She could not be angry with it, however, and out of deference for that exaggerated sentiment she hardly dared to look otherwise than by stealth at the man whose masterful compassion had carried her off. And quite unable to understand the extent of Anthony's delicacy, she said to herself that "he didn't care." He probably was beginning at bottom to detest her — like the governess, like the maiden lady, like the German woman, like Mrs. Fyne, like Mr. Fyne — only he was extraordinary, he was generous. At the same time she had moments of irritation. He was violent, headstrong — perhaps stupid. Well, he had had his way.

A man who has had his way is seldom happy, for generally he finds that the way does not lead very far on this earth of desires which can never be fully satisfied. Anthony had entered with extreme precipitation the enchanted gardens of Armida saying to himself "At last!" As to Armida, herself, he was not going to offer her any violence. But now he had discovered that all the enchantment was in Armida herself, in Armida's smiles. This Armida did not smile. She existed, unapproachable, behind the blank wall of his renunciation. His force, fit for action, experienced the impatience, the indignation, almost the despair of his vitality arrested, bound, stilled, progressively worn down, frittered away by Time; by that force blind and insensible, which seems inert and yet uses one's life up by its imperceptible action, dropping minute after minute on one's living heart like drops of water wearing down a stone.

He upbraided himself. What else could he have expected? He had rushed in like a ruffian; he had dragged the poor defenceless thing by the hair of her head, as it were, on board that ship. It was really atrocious. Nothing assured him that his person could be attractive to this or any other woman. And his proceedings were enough in themselves to make anyone odious. He must have been bereft of his senses. She must fatally detest and fear him. Nothing could make up for such brutality. And yet somehow he resented this very attitude which seemed to him completely justifiable. Surely he was not too monstrous (morally) to be looked at frankly sometimes. But no! She wouldn't. Well, perhaps, some day . . . Only he was not going ever to attempt to beg for forgiveness. With the repulsion she felt for his person she would certainly misunderstand the most guarded words, the most careful advances. Never! Never!

It would occur to Anthony at the end of such meditations that death was not an unfriendly visitor after all. No wonder then that even young Powell, his faculties having been put on the alert, began to think that there was something unusual about the man who had given him his chance in life. Yes, decidedly, his captain was "strange." There was something wrong somewhere, he said to himself, never guessing that his young and candid eyes were in the presence of a passion profound, tyrannical and mortal, discovering its own existence, astounded at feeling itself helpless and dismayed at finding itself incurable.

Powell had never before felt this mysterious uneasiness so strongly as on that evening when it had been his good fortune to make Mrs. Anthony laugh a little by his artless prattle. Standing out of the way, he had watched his captain walk the weather-side of the poop, he took full cognizance of his liking for that inexplicably strange man and saw him swerve towards the companion and go down below with sympathetic if utterly uncomprehending eyes.

Shortly afterwards, Mr. Smith came up alone and manifested a desire for a little conversation. He, too, if not so mysterious as the captain, was not very comprehensible to Mr. Powell's uninformed candour. He often favoured thus the second officer. His talk alluded somewhat enigmatically and often without visible connection to Mr. Powell's friendliness towards himself and his daughter. "For I am well aware that we have no friends on board this ship, my dear young man," he would add, "except yourself. Flora feels that too."

And Mr. Powell, flattered and embarrassed, could but emit a vague murmur of protest. For the statement was true in a sense, though the fact was in itself insignificant. The feelings of the ship's company could not possibly matter to the captain's wife and to Mr. Smith — her father. Why the latter should so often allude to it was what surprised our Mr. Powell. This was by no means the first occasion. More like the twentieth rather. And in his weak voice, with his monotonous intonation, leaning over the rail and looking at the water the other continued this conversation, or rather his remarks, remarks of such a monstrous nature that Mr. Powell had no option but to accept them for gruesome jesting.

"For instance," said Mr. Smith, "that mate, Franklin, I believe he would just as soon see us both overboard as not."

"It's not so bad as that," laughed Mr. Powell, feeling uncomfortable, because his mind did not accommodate itself easily to exaggeration of statement. "He isn't a bad chap really," he added, very conscious of Mr. Franklin's offensive manner of which instances were not far to seek. "He's such a fool as to be jealous. He has been with the captain for years. It's not for me to say, perhaps, but I think the captain has spoiled all that gang of old servants. They are like a lot of pet old dogs. Wouldn't let anybody come near him if they could help it. I've never seen anything like it. And the second mate, I believe, was like that too."

"Well, he isn't here, luckily. There would have been one more enemy," said Mr. Smith. "There's enough of them without him. And you being here instead of him makes it much more pleasant for my daughter and myself. One feels there may be a friend in need. For really, for a woman all alone on board ship amongst a lot of unfriendly men . . . "

"But Mrs Anthony is not alone," exclaimed Powell. "There's you, and there's the . . . "

Mr. Smith interrupted him.

"Nobody's immortal. And there are times when one feels ashamed to live. Such an evening as this for instance."

It was a lovely evening; the colours of a splendid sunset had died out and the breath of a warm breeze seemed to have smoothed out the sea. Away to the south the sheet lightning was like the flashing of an enormous lantern hidden under the horizon. In order to change the conversation Mr. Powell said:

“Anyway no one can charge you with being a Jonah, Mr. Smith. We have had a magnificent quick passage so far. The captain ought to be pleased. And I suppose you are not sorry either.”

This diversion was not successful. Mr. Smith emitted a sort of bitter chuckle and said: “Jonah! That’s the fellow that was thrown overboard by some sailors. It seems to me it’s very easy at sea to get rid of a person one does not like. The sea does not give up its dead as the earth does.”

“You forget the whale, sir,” said young Powell.

Mr. Smith gave a start. “Eh? What whale? Oh! Jonah. I wasn’t thinking of Jonah. I was thinking of this passage which seems so quick to you. But only think what it is to me? It isn’t a life, going about the sea like this. And, for instance, if one were to fall ill, there isn’t a doctor to find out what’s the matter with one. It’s worrying. It makes me anxious at times.”

“Is Mrs. Anthony not feeling well?” asked Powell. But Mr. Smith’s remark was not meant for Mrs. Anthony. She was well. He himself was well. It was the captain’s health that did not seem quite satisfactory. Had Mr. Powell noticed his appearance?

Mr. Powell didn’t know enough of the captain to judge. He couldn’t tell. But he observed thoughtfully that Mr. Franklin had been saying the same thing. And Franklin had known the captain for years. The mate was quite worried about it.

This intelligence startled Mr. Smith considerably. “Does he think he is in danger of dying?” he exclaimed with an animation quite extraordinary for him, which horrified Mr. Powell.

“Heavens! Die! No! Don’t you alarm yourself, sir. I’ve never heard a word about danger from Mr. Franklin.”

“Well, well,” sighed Mr. Smith and left the poop for the saloon rather abruptly.

As a matter of fact Mr. Franklin had been on deck for some considerable time. He had come to relieve young Powell; but seeing him engaged in talk with the “enemy” — with one of the “enemies” at least — had kept at a distance, which, the poop of the Ferndale being over seventy feet long, he had no difficulty in doing. Mr. Powell saw him at the head of the ladder leaning on his elbow, melancholy and silent. “Oh! Here you are, sir.”

“Here I am. Here I’ve been ever since six o’clock. Didn’t want to interrupt the pleasant conversation. If you like to put in half of your watch below jawing with a dear friend, that’s not my affair. Funny taste though.”



“He isn’t a bad chap,” said the impartial Powell.

The mate snorted angrily, tapping the deck with his foot; then: “Isn’t he? Well, give him my love when you come together again for another nice long yarn.”

“I say, Mr. Franklin, I wonder the captain don’t take offence at your manners.”

“The captain. I wish to goodness he would start a row with me. Then I should know at least I am somebody on board. I’d welcome it, Mr. Powell. I’d rejoice. And dam’ me I would talk back too till I roused him. He’s a shadow of himself. He walks about his ship like a ghost. He’s fading away right before our eyes. But of course you don’t see. You don’t care a hang. Why should you?”

Mr. Powell did not wait for more. He went down on the main deck. Without taking the mate’s jeremiads seriously he put them beside the words of Mr. Smith. He had grown already attached to Captain Anthony. There was something not only attractive but compelling in the man. Only it is very difficult for youth to believe in the menace of death. Not in the fact itself, but in its proximity to a breathing, moving, talking, superior human being, showing no sign of disease. And Mr. Powell thought that this talk was all nonsense. But his curiosity was awakened. There was something, and at any time some circumstance might occur . . . No, he would never find out . . . There was nothing to find out, most likely. Mr. Powell went to his room where he tried to read a book he had already read a good many times. Presently a bell rang for the officers’ supper.

## CHAPTER SIX — . . . A MOONLESS NIGHT, THICK WITH STARS ABOVE, VERY DARK ON THE WATER

In the mess-room Powell found Mr. Franklin hacking at a piece of cold salt beef with a table knife. The mate, fiery in the face and rolling his eyes over that task, explained that the carver belonging to the mess-room could not be found. The steward, present also, complained savagely of the cook. The fellow got things into his galley and then lost them. Mr. Franklin tried to pacify him with mournful firmness.

“There, there! That will do. We who have been all these years together in the ship have other things to think about than quarrelling among ourselves.”

Mr. Powell thought with exasperation: “Here he goes again,” for this utterance had nothing cryptic for him. The steward having withdrawn morosely, he was not surprised to hear the mate strike the usual note. That morning the mizzen topsail tie had carried away (probably a defective link) and something like forty feet of chain and wire-rope, mixed up with a few heavy iron blocks, had crashed down from aloft on the poop with a terrifying racket.

“Did you notice the captain then, Mr. Powell. Did you notice?”

Powell confessed frankly that he was too scared himself when all that lot of gear came down on deck to notice anything.

“The gin-block missed his head by an inch,” went on the mate impressively. “I wasn’t three feet from him. And what did he do? Did he shout, or jump, or even look aloft to see if the yard wasn’t coming down too about our ears in a dozen pieces? It’s a marvel it didn’t. No, he just stopped short — no wonder; he must have felt the wind of that iron gin-block on his face — looked down at it, there, lying close to his foot — and went on again. I believe he didn’t even blink. It isn’t natural. The man is stupefied.”

He sighed ridiculously and Mr. Powell had suppressed a grin, when the mate added as if he couldn’t contain himself:

“He will be taking to drink next. Mark my words. That’s the next thing.”

Mr. Powell was disgusted.

“You are so fond of the captain and yet you don’t seem to care what you say about him. I haven’t been with him for seven years, but I know he isn’t the sort of man that takes to drink. And then — why the devil should he?”

“Why the devil, you ask. Devil — eh? Well, no man is safe from the devil — and that’s answer enough for you,” wheezed Mr. Franklin not unkindly. “There was a time, a long time ago, when I nearly took to drink myself. What do you say to that?”

Mr. Powell expressed a polite incredulity. The thick, congested mate seemed on the point of bursting with despondency. “That was bad example though. I was young and fell into dangerous company, made a fool of myself — yes, as true as you see me sitting here. Drank to forget. Thought it a great dodge.”

Powell looked at the grotesque Franklin with awakened interest and with that half-amused sympathy with which we receive unprovoked confidences from men with whom we have no sort of affinity. And at the same time he began to look upon him more seriously. Experience has its prestige. And the mate continued:

“If it hadn’t been for the old lady, I would have gone to the devil. I remembered her in time. Nothing like having an old lady to look after to steady a chap and make him face things. But as bad luck would have it, Captain Anthony has no mother living, not a blessed soul belonging to him as far as I know. Oh, aye, I fancy he said once something to me of a sister. But she’s married. She don’t need him. Yes. In the old days he used to talk to me as if we had been brothers,” exaggerated the mate sentimentally. “‘Franklin,’ — he would say — ‘this ship is my nearest relation and she isn’t likely to turn against me. And I suppose you are the man I’ve known the longest in the world.’ That’s how he used to speak to me. Can I turn my back on him? He has turned his back on his ship; that’s what it has come to. He has no one now but his old Franklin. But what’s a fellow to do to put things back as they were and should be. Should be — I say!”

His starting eyes had a terrible fixity. Mr. Powell’s irresistible thought, “he resembles a boiled lobster in distress,” was followed by annoyance. “Good Lord,” he said, “you don’t mean to hint that Captain Anthony has fallen into bad company. What is it you want to save him from?”

“I do mean it,” affirmed the mate, and the very absurdity of the statement made it impressive — because it seemed so absolutely audacious. “Well, you have a cheek,” said young Powell, feeling mentally helpless. “I have a

notion the captain would half kill you if he were to know how you carry on."

"And welcome," uttered the fervently devoted Franklin. "I am willing, if he would only clear the ship afterwards of that . . . You are but a youngster and you may go and tell him what you like. Let him knock the stuffing out of his old Franklin first and think it over afterwards. Anything to pull him together. But of course you wouldn't. You are all right. Only you don't know that things are sometimes different from what they look. There are friendships that are no friendships, and marriages that are no marriages. Phoo! Likely to be right — wasn't it? Never a hint to me. I go off on leave and when I come back, there it is — all over, settled! Not a word beforehand. No warning. If only: 'What do you think of it, Franklin?' — or anything of the sort. And that's a man who hardly ever did anything without asking my advice. Why! He couldn't take over a new coat from the tailor without . . . first thing, directly the fellow came on board with some new clothes, whether in London or in China, it would be: 'Pass the word along there for Mr. Franklin. Mr. Franklin wanted in the cabin.' In I would go. 'Just look at my back, Franklin. Fits all right, doesn't it?' And I would say: 'First rate, sir,' or whatever was the truth of it. That or anything else. Always the truth of it. Always. And well he knew it; and that's why he dared not speak right out. Talking about workmen, alterations, cabins . . . Phoo! . . . instead of a straightforward — 'Wish me joy, Mr. Franklin!' Yes, that was the way to let me know. God only knows what they are — perhaps she isn't his daughter any more than she is . . . She doesn't resemble that old fellow. Not a bit. Not a bit. It's very awful. You may well open your mouth, young man. But for goodness' sake, you who are mixed up with that lot, keep your eyes and ears open too in case — in case of . . . I don't know what. Anything. One wonders what can happen here at sea! Nothing. Yet when a man is called a jailer behind his back."

Mr. Franklin hid his face in his hands for a moment and Powell shut his mouth, which indeed had been open. He slipped out of the mess-room noiselessly. "The mate's crazy," he thought. It was his firm conviction. Nevertheless, that evening, he felt his inner tranquillity disturbed at last by the force and obstinacy of this craze. He couldn't dismiss it with the contempt it deserved. Had the word "jailer" really been pronounced? A strange word for the mate to even imagine he had heard. A senseless, unlikely word. But this word being the only clear and definite statement in

these grotesque and dismal ravings was comparatively restful to his mind. Powell's mind rested on it still when he came up at eight o'clock to take charge of the deck. It was a moonless night, thick with stars above, very dark on the water. A steady air from the west kept the sails asleep. Franklin mustered both watches in low tones as if for a funeral, then approaching Powell:

"The course is east-south-east," said the chief mate distinctly.

"East-south-east, sir."

"Everything's set, Mr. Powell."

"All right, sir."

The other lingered, his sentimental eyes gleamed silvery in the shadowy face. "A quiet night before us. I don't know that there are any special orders. A settled, quiet night. I dare say you won't see the captain. Once upon a time this was the watch he used to come up and start a chat with either of us then on deck. But now he sits in that infernal stern-cabin and mopes. Jailer — eh?"

Mr. Powell walked away from the mate and when at some distance said, "Damn!" quite heartily. It was a confounded nuisance. It had ceased to be funny; that hostile word "jailer" had given the situation an air of reality.

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Franklin's grotesque mortal envelope had disappeared from the poop to seek its needful repose, if only the worried soul would let it rest a while. Mr. Powell, half sorry for the thick little man, wondered whether it would let him. For himself, he recognized that the charm of a quiet watch on deck when one may let one's thoughts roam in space and time had been spoiled without remedy. What shocked him most was the implied aspersion of complicity on Mrs. Anthony. It angered him. In his own words to me, he felt very "enthusiastic" about Mrs. Anthony. "Enthusiastic" is good; especially as he couldn't exactly explain to me what he meant by it. But he felt enthusiastic, he says. That silly Franklin must have been dreaming. That was it. He had dreamed it all. Ass. Yet the injurious word stuck in Powell's mind with its associated ideas of prisoner, of escape. He became very uncomfortable. And just then (it might have been half an hour or more since he had relieved Franklin) just then Mr. Smith came up on the poop alone, like a gliding shadow and leaned over the rail by his side. Young Powell was affected disagreeably by his presence. He made a movement to

go away but the other began to talk — and Powell remained where he was as if retained by a mysterious compulsion. The conversation started by Mr. Smith had nothing peculiar. He began to talk of mail-boats in general and in the end seemed anxious to discover what were the services from Port Elizabeth to London. Mr. Powell did not know for certain but imagined that there must be communication with England at least twice a month. “Are you thinking of leaving us, sir; of going home by steam? Perhaps with Mrs. Anthony,” he asked anxiously.

“No! No! How can I?” Mr. Smith got quite agitated, for him, which did not amount to much. He was just asking for the sake of something to talk about. No idea at all of going home. One could not always do what one wanted and that’s why there were moments when one felt ashamed to live. This did not mean that one did not want to live. Oh no!

He spoke with careless slowness, pausing frequently and in such a low voice that Powell had to strain his hearing to catch the phrases dropped overboard as it were. And indeed they seemed not worth the effort. It was like the aimless talk of a man pursuing a secret train of thought far removed from the idle words we so often utter only to keep in touch with our fellow beings. An hour passed. It seemed as though Mr. Smith could not make up his mind to go below. He repeated himself. Again he spoke of lives which one was ashamed of. It was necessary to put up with such lives as long as there was no way out, no possible issue. He even alluded once more to mail-boat services on the East coast of Africa and young Powell had to tell him once more that he knew nothing about them.

“Every fortnight, I thought you said,” insisted Mr. Smith. He stirred, seemed to detach himself from the rail with difficulty. His long, slender figure straightened into stiffness, as if hostile to the enveloping soft peace of air and sea and sky, emitted into the night a weak murmur which Mr. Powell fancied was the word, “Abominable” repeated three times, but which passed into the faintly louder declaration: “The moment has come — to go to bed,” followed by a just audible sigh.

“I sleep very well,” added Mr. Smith in his restrained tone. “But it is the moment one opens one’s eyes that is horrible at sea. These days! Oh, these days! I wonder how anybody can . . . “

“I like the life,” observed Mr. Powell.

“Oh, you. You have only yourself to think of. You have made your bed. Well, it’s very pleasant to feel that you are friendly to us. My daughter has

taken quite a liking to you, Mr. Powell.”

He murmured, “Good-night” and glided away rigidly. Young Powell asked himself with some distaste what was the meaning of these utterances. His mind had been worried at last into that questioning attitude by no other person than the grotesque Franklin. Suspicion was not natural to him. And he took good care to carefully separate in his thoughts Mrs. Anthony from this man of enigmatic words — her father. Presently he observed that the sheen of the two deck dead-lights of Mr. Smith’s room had gone out. The old gentleman had been surprisingly quick in getting into bed. Shortly afterwards the lamp in the foremost skylight of the saloon was turned out; and this was the sign that the steward had taken in the tray and had retired for the night.

Young Powell had settled down to the regular officer-of-the-watch tramp in the dense shadow of the world decorated with stars high above his head, and on earth only a few gleams of light about the ship. The lamp in the after skylight was kept burning through the night. There were also the dead-lights of the stern-cabins glimmering dully in the deck far aft, catching his eye when he turned to walk that way. The brasses of the wheel glittered too, with the dimly lit figure of the man detached, as if phosphorescent, against the black and spangled background of the horizon.

Young Powell, in the silence of the ship, reinforced by the great silent stillness of the world, said to himself that there was something mysterious in such beings as the absurd Franklin, and even in such beings as himself. It was a strange and almost improper thought to occur to the officer of the watch of a ship on the high seas on no matter how quiet a night. Why on earth was he bothering his head? Why couldn’t he dismiss all these people from his mind? It was as if the mate had infected him with his own diseased devotion. He would not have believed it possible that he should be so foolish. But he was — clearly. He was foolish in a way totally unforeseen by himself. Pushing this self-analysis further, he reflected that the springs of his conduct were just as obscure.

“I may be catching myself any time doing things of which I have no conception,” he thought. And as he was passing near the mizzen-mast he perceived a coil of rope left lying on the deck by the oversight of the sweepers. By an impulse which had nothing mysterious in it, he stooped as he went by with the intention of picking it up and hanging it up on its proper pin. This movement brought his head down to the level of the

glazed end of the after skylight — the lighted skylight of the most private part of the saloon, consecrated to the exclusiveness of Captain Anthony's married life; the part, let me remind you, cut off from the rest of that forbidden space by a pair of heavy curtains. I mention these curtains because at this point Mr. Powell himself recalled the existence of that unusual arrangement to my mind.

He recalled them with simple-minded compunction at that distance of time. He said: "You understand that directly I stooped to pick up that coil of running gear — the spanker foot-outhaul, it was — I perceived that I could see right into that part of the saloon the curtains were meant to make particularly private. Do you understand me?" he insisted.

I told him that I understood; and he proceeded to call my attention to the wonderful linking up of small facts, with something of awe left yet, after all these years, at the precise workmanship of chance, fate, providence, call it what you will! "For, observe, Marlow," he said, making at me very round eyes which contrasted funnily with the austere touch of grey on his temples, "observe, my dear fellow, that everything depended on the men who cleared up the poop in the evening leaving that coil of rope on the deck, and on the topsail-tie carrying away in a most incomprehensible and surprising manner earlier in the day, and the end of the chain whipping round the coaming and shivering to bits the coloured glass-pane at the end of the skylight. It had the arms of the city of Liverpool on it; I don't know why unless because the *Ferndale* was registered in Liverpool. It was very thick plate glass. Anyhow, the upper part got smashed, and directly we had attended to things aloft Mr. Franklin had set the carpenter to patch up the damage with some pieces of plain glass. I don't know where they got them; I think the people who fitted up new bookcases in the captain's room had left some spare panes. Chips was there the whole afternoon on his knees, messing with putty and red-lead. It wasn't a neat job when it was done, not by any means, but it would serve to keep the weather out and let the light in. Clear glass. And of course I was not thinking of it. I just stooped to pick up that rope and found my head within three inches of that clear glass, and — dash it all! I found myself out. Not half an hour before I was saying to myself that it was impossible to tell what was in people's heads or at the back of their talk, or what they were likely to be up to. And here I found myself up to as low a trick as you can well think of. For, after I had stooped, there I remained prying, spying, anyway looking, where I had no business to look.



Not consciously at first, may be. He who has eyes, you know, nothing can stop him from seeing things as long as there are things to see in front of him. What I saw at first was the end of the table and the tray clamped on to it, a patent tray for sea use, fitted with holders for a couple of decanters, water-jug and glasses. The glitter of these things caught my eye first; but what I saw next was the captain down there, alone as far as I could see; and I could see pretty well the whole of that part up to the cottage piano, dark against the satin-wood panelling of the bulkhead. And I remained looking. I did. And I don't know that I was ashamed of myself either, then. It was the fault of that Franklin, always talking of the man, making free with him to that extent that really he seemed to have become our property, his and mine, in a way. It's funny, but one had that feeling about Captain Anthony. To watch him was not so much worse than listening to Franklin talking him over. Well, it's no use making excuses for what's inexcusable. I watched; but I dare say you know that there could have been nothing inimical in this low behaviour of mine. On the contrary. I'll tell you now what he was doing. He was helping himself out of a decanter. I saw every movement, and I said to myself mockingly as though jeering at Franklin in my thoughts, 'Hallo! Here's the captain taking to drink at last.' He poured a little brandy or whatever it was into a long glass, filled it with water, drank about a fourth of it and stood the glass back into the holder. Every sign of a bad drinking bout, I was saying to myself, feeling quite amused at the notions of that Franklin. He seemed to me an enormous ass, with his jealousy and his fears. At that rate a month would not have been enough for anybody to get drunk. The captain sat down in one of the swivel arm-chairs fixed around the table; I had him right under me and as he turned the chair slightly, I was looking, I may say, down his back. He took another little sip and then reached for a book which was lying on the table. I had not noticed it before. Altogether the proceedings of a desperate drunkard — weren't they? He opened the book and held it before his face. If this was the way he took to drink, then I needn't worry. He was in no danger from that, and as to any other, I assure you no human being could have looked safer than he did down there. I felt the greatest contempt for Franklin just then, while I looked at Captain Anthony sitting there with a glass of weak brandy-and-water at his elbow and reading in the cabin of his ship, on a quiet night — the quietest, perhaps the finest, of a prosperous passage. And if you wonder why I didn't leave off my ugly spying I will

tell you how it was. Captain Anthony was a great reader just about that time; and I, too, I have a great liking for books. To this day I can't come near a book but I must know what it is about. It was a thickish volume he had there, small close print, double columns — I can see it now. What I wanted to make out was the title at the top of the page. I have very good eyes but he wasn't holding it conveniently — I mean for me up there. Well, it was a history of some kind, that much I read and then suddenly he bangs the book face down on the table, jumps up as if something had bitten him and walks away aft.

“Funny thing shame is. I had been behaving badly and aware of it in a way, but I didn't feel really ashamed till the fright of being found out in my honourable occupation drove me from it. I slunk away to the forward end of the poop and lounged about there, my face and ears burning and glad it was a dark night, expecting every moment to hear the captain's footsteps behind me. For I made sure he was coming on deck. Presently I thought I had rather meet him face to face and I walked slowly aft prepared to see him emerge from the companion before I got that far. I even thought of his having detected me by some means. But it was impossible, unless he had eyes in the top of his head. I had never had a view of his face down there. It was impossible; I was safe; and I felt very mean, yet, explain it as you may, I seemed not to care. And the captain not appearing on deck, I had the impulse to go on being mean. I wanted another peep. I really don't know what was the beastly influence except that Mr. Franklin's talk was enough to demoralize any man by raising a sort of unhealthy curiosity which did away in my case with all the restraints of common decency.

“I did not mean to run the risk of being caught squatting in a suspicious attitude by the captain. There was also the helmsman to consider. So what I did — I am surprised at my low cunning — was to sit down naturally on the skylight-seat and then by bending forward I found that, as I expected, I could look down through the upper part of the end-pane. The worst that could happen to me then, if I remained too long in that position, was to be suspected by the seaman aft at the wheel of having gone to sleep there. For the rest my ears would give me sufficient warning of any movements in the companion.

“But in that way my angle of view was changed. The field too was smaller. The end of the table, the tray and the swivel-chair I had right under my eyes. The captain had not come back yet. The piano I could not see

now; but on the other hand I had a very oblique downward view of the curtains drawn across the cabin and cutting off the forward part of it just about the level of the skylight-end and only an inch or so from the end of the table. They were heavy stuff, travelling on a thick brass rod with some contrivance to keep the rings from sliding to and fro when the ship rolled. But just then the ship was as still almost as a model shut up in a glass case while the curtains, joined closely, and, perhaps on purpose, made a little too long moved no more than a solid wall.”

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Marlow got up to get another cigar. The night was getting on to what I may call its deepest hour, the hour most favourable to evil purposes of men’s hate, despair or greed — to whatever can whisper into their ears the unlawful counsels of protest against things that are; the hour of ill-omened silence and chill and stagnation, the hour when the criminal plies his trade and the victim of sleeplessness reaches the lowest depth of dreadful discouragement; the hour before the first sight of dawn. I know it, because while Marlow was crossing the room I looked at the clock on the mantelpiece. He however never looked that way though it is possible that he, too, was aware of the passage of time. He sat down heavily.

“Our friend Powell,” he began again, “was very anxious that I should understand the topography of that cabin. I was interested more by its moral atmosphere, that tension of falsehood, of desperate acting, which tainted the pure sea-atmosphere into which the magnanimous Anthony had carried off his conquest and — well — his self-conquest too, trying to act at the same time like a beast of prey, a pure spirit and the “most generous of men.” Too big an order clearly because he was nothing of a monster but just a common mortal, a little more self-willed and self-confident than most, may be, both in his roughness and in his delicacy.

As to the delicacy of Mr. Powell’s proceedings I’ll say nothing. He found a sort of depraved excitement in watching an unconscious man — and such an attractive and mysterious man as Captain Anthony at that. He wanted another peep at him. He surmised that the captain must come back soon because of the glass two-thirds full and also of the book put down so brusquely. God knows what sudden pang had made Anthony jump up so. I am convinced he used reading as an opiate against the pain of his magnanimity which like all abnormal growths was gnawing at his healthy

substance with cruel persistence. Perhaps he had rushed into his cabin simply to groan freely in absolute and delicate secrecy. At any rate he tarried there. And young Powell would have grown weary and compunctious at last if it had not become manifest to him that he had not been alone in the highly incorrect occupation of watching the movements of Captain Anthony.

Powell explained to me that no sound did or perhaps could reach him from the saloon. The first sign — and we must remember that he was using his eyes for all they were worth — was an unaccountable movement of the curtain. It was wavy and very slight; just perceptible in fact to the sharpened faculties of a secret watcher; for it can't be denied that our wits are much more alert when engaged in wrong-doing (in which one mustn't be found out) than in a righteous occupation.

He became suspicious, with no one and nothing definite in his mind. He was suspicious of the curtain itself and observed it. It looked very innocent. Then just as he was ready to put it down to a trick of imagination he saw trembling movements where the two curtains joined. Yes! Somebody else besides himself had been watching Captain Anthony. He owns artlessly that this roused his indignation. It was really too much of a good thing. In this state of intense antagonism he was startled to observe tips of fingers fumbling with the dark stuff. Then they grasped the edge of the further curtain and hung on there, just fingers and knuckles and nothing else. It made an abominable sight. He was looking at it with unaccountable repulsion when a hand came into view; a short, puffy, old, freckled hand projecting into the lamplight, followed by a white wrist, an arm in a grey coat-sleeve, up to the elbow, beyond the elbow, extended tremblingly towards the tray. Its appearance was weird and nauseous, fantastic and silly. But instead of grabbing the bottle as Powell expected, this hand, tremulous with senile eagerness, swerved to the glass, rested on its edge for a moment (or so it looked from above) and went back with a jerk. The gripping fingers of the other hand vanished at the same time, and young Powell staring at the motionless curtains could indulge for a moment the notion that he had been dreaming.

But that notion did not last long. Powell, after repressing his first impulse to spring for the companion and hammer at the captain's door, took steps to have himself relieved by the boatswain. He was in a state of

distraction as to his feelings and yet lucid as to his mind. He remained on the skylight so as to keep his eye on the tray.

Still the captain did not appear in the saloon. "If he had," said Mr. Powell, "I knew what to do. I would have put my elbow through the pane instantly — crash."

I asked him why?

"It was the quickest dodge for getting him away from that tray," he explained. "My throat was so dry that I didn't know if I could shout loud enough. And this was not a case for shouting, either."

The boatswain, sleepy and disgusted, arriving on the poop, found the second officer doubled up over the end of the skylight in a pose which might have been that of severe pain. And his voice was so changed that the man, though naturally vexed at being turned out, made no comment on the plea of sudden indisposition which young Powell put forward.

The rapidity with which the sick man got off the poop must have astonished the boatswain. But Powell, at the moment he opened the door leading into the saloon from the quarter-deck, had managed to control his agitation. He entered swiftly but without noise and found himself in the dark part of the saloon, the strong sheen of the lamp on the other side of the curtains visible only above the rod on which they ran. The door of Mr. Smith's cabin was in that dark part. He passed by it assuring himself by a quick side glance that it was imperfectly closed. "Yes," he said to me. "The old man must have been watching through the crack. Of that I am certain; but it was not for me that he was watching and listening. Horrible! Surely he must have been startled to hear and see somebody he did not expect. He could not possibly guess why I was coming in, but I suppose he must have been concerned." Concerned indeed! He must have been thunderstruck, appalled.

Powell's only distinct aim was to remove the suspected tumbler. He had no other plan, no other intention, no other thought. Do away with it in some manner. Snatch it up and run out with it.

You know that complete mastery of one fixed idea, not a reasonable but an emotional mastery, a sort of concentrated exaltation. Under its empire men rush blindly through fire and water and opposing violence, and nothing can stop them — unless, sometimes, a grain of sand. For his blind purpose (and clearly the thought of Mrs. Anthony was at the bottom of it) Mr. Powell had plenty of time. What checked him at the crucial moment was

the familiar, harmless aspect of common things, the steady light, the open book on the table, the solitude, the peace, the home-like effect of the place. He held the glass in his hand; all he had to do was to vanish back beyond the curtains, flee with it noiselessly into the night on deck, fling it unseen overboard. A minute or less. And then all that would have happened would have been the wonder at the utter disappearance of a glass tumbler, a ridiculous riddle in pantry-affairs beyond the wit of anyone on board to solve. The grain of sand against which Powell stumbled in his headlong career was a moment of incredulity as to the truth of his own conviction because it had failed to affect the safe aspect of familiar things. He doubted his eyes too. He must have dreamt it all! "I am dreaming now," he said to himself. And very likely for a few seconds he must have looked like a man in a trance or profoundly asleep on his feet, and with a glass of brandy-and-water in his hand.

What woke him up and, at the same time, fixed his feet immovably to the spot, was a voice asking him what he was doing there in tones of thunder. Or so it sounded to his ears. Anthony, opening the door of his stern-cabin had naturally exclaimed. What else could you expect? And the exclamation must have been fairly loud if you consider the nature of the sight which met his eye. There, before him, stood his second officer, a seemingly decent, well-bred young man, who, being on duty, had left the deck and had sneaked into the saloon, apparently for the inexpressibly mean purpose of drinking up what was left of his captain's brandy-and-water. There he was, caught absolutely with the glass in his hand.

But the very monstrosity of appearances silenced Anthony after the first exclamation; and young Powell felt himself pierced through and through by the overshadowed glance of his captain. Anthony advanced quietly. The first impulse of Mr. Powell, when discovered, had been to dash the glass on the deck. He was in a sort of panic. But deep down within him his wits were working, and the idea that if he did that he could prove nothing and that the story he had to tell was completely incredible, restrained him. The captain came forward slowly. With his eyes now close to his, Powell, spell-bound, numb all over, managed to lift one finger to the deck above mumbling the explanatory words, "Boatswain on the poop."

The captain moved his head slightly as much as to say, "That's all right" — and this was all. Powell had no voice, no strength. The air was unbreathable, thick, sticky, odious, like hot jelly in which all movements

became difficult. He raised the glass a little with immense difficulty and moved his trammelled lips sufficiently to form the words:

“Doctored.”

Anthony glanced at it for an instant, only for an instant, and again fastened his eyes on the face of his second mate. Powell added a fervent “I believe” and put the glass down on the tray. The captain’s glance followed the movement and returned sternly to his face. The young man pointed a finger once more upwards and squeezed out of his iron-bound throat six consecutive words of further explanation. “Through the skylight. The white pane.”

The captain raised his eyebrows very much at this, while young Powell, ashamed but desperate, nodded insistently several times. He meant to say that: Yes. Yes. He had done that thing. He had been spying . . . The captain’s gaze became thoughtful. And, now the confession was over, the iron-bound feeling of Powell’s throat passed away giving place to a general anxiety which from his breast seemed to extend to all the limbs and organs of his body. His legs trembled a little, his vision was confused, his mind became blankly expectant. But he was alert enough. At a movement of Anthony he screamed in a strangled whisper.

“Don’t, sir! Don’t touch it.”

The captain pushed aside Powell’s extended arm, took up the glass and raised it slowly against the lamplight. The liquid, of very pale amber colour, was clear, and by a glance the captain seemed to call Powell’s attention to the fact. Powell tried to pronounce the word, “dissolved” but he only thought of it with great energy which however failed to move his lips. Only when Anthony had put down the glass and turned to him he recovered such a complete command of his voice that he could keep it down to a hurried, forcible whisper — a whisper that shook him.

“Doctored! I swear it! I have seen. Doctored! I have seen.”

Not a feature of the captain’s face moved. His was a calm to take one’s breath away. It did so to young Powell. Then for the first time Anthony made himself heard to the point.

“You did! . . . Who was it?”

And Powell gasped freely at last. “A hand,” he whispered fearfully, “a hand and the arm — only the arm — like that.”

He advanced his own, slow, stealthy, tremulous in faithful reproduction, the tips of two fingers and the thumb pressed together and hovering above

the glass for an instant — then the swift jerk back, after the deed.

“Like that,” he repeated growing excited. “From behind this.” He grasped the curtain and glaring at the silent Anthony flung it back disclosing the forepart of the saloon. There was on one to be seen.

Powell had not expected to see anybody. “But,” he said to me, “I knew very well there was an ear listening and an eye glued to the crack of a cabin door. Awful thought. And that door was in that part of the saloon remaining in the shadow of the other half of the curtain. I pointed at it and I suppose that old man inside saw me pointing. The captain had a wonderful self-command. You couldn’t have guessed anything from his face. Well, it was perhaps more thoughtful than usual. And indeed this was something to think about. But I couldn’t think steadily. My brain would give a sort of jerk and then go dead again. I had lost all notion of time, and I might have been looking at the captain for days and months for all I knew before I heard him whisper to me fiercely: “Not a word!” This jerked me out of that trance I was in and I said “No! No! I didn’t mean even you.”

“I wanted to explain my conduct, my intentions, but I read in his eyes that he understood me and I was only too glad to leave off. And there we were looking at each other, dumb, brought up short by the question “What next?”

“I thought Captain Anthony was a man of iron till I saw him suddenly fling his head to the right and to the left fiercely, like a wild animal at bay not knowing which way to break out . . . “

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“Truly,” commented Marlow, “brought to bay was not a bad comparison; a better one than Mr. Powell was aware of. At that moment the appearance of Flora could not but bring the tension to the breaking point. She came out in all innocence but not without vague dread. Anthony’s exclamation on first seeing Powell had reached her in her cabin, where, it seems, she was brushing her hair. She had heard the very words. “What are you doing here?” And the unwonted loudness of the voice — his voice — breaking the habitual stillness of that hour would have startled a person having much less reason to be constantly apprehensive, than the captive of Anthony’s masterful generosity. She had no means to guess to whom the question was addressed and it echoed in her heart, as Anthony’s voice always did. Followed complete silence. She waited, anxious, expectant, till she could



stand the strain no longer, and with the weary mental appeal of the overburdened. "My God! What is it now?" she opened the door of her room and looked into the saloon. Her first glance fell on Powell. For a moment, seeing only the second officer with Anthony, she felt relieved and made as if to draw back; but her sharpened perception detected something suspicious in their attitudes, and she came forward slowly.

"I was the first to see Mrs. Anthony," related Powell, "because I was facing aft. The captain, noticing my eyes, looked quickly over his shoulder and at once put his finger to his lips to caution me. As if I were likely to let out anything before her! Mrs. Anthony had on a dressing-gown of some grey stuff with red facings and a thick red cord round her waist. Her hair was down. She looked a child; a pale-faced child with big blue eyes and a red mouth a little open showing a glimmer of white teeth. The light fell strongly on her as she came up to the end of the table. A strange child though; she hardly affected one like a child, I remember. Do you know," exclaimed Mr. Powell, who clearly must have been, like many seamen, an industrious reader, "do you know what she looked like to me with those big eyes and something appealing in her whole expression. She looked like a forsaken elf. Captain Anthony had moved towards her to keep her away from my end of the table, where the tray was. I had never seen them so near to each other before, and it made a great contrast. It was wonderful, for, with his beard cut to a point, his swarthy, sunburnt complexion, thin nose and his lean head there was something African, something Moorish in Captain Anthony. His neck was bare; he had taken off his coat and collar and had drawn on his sleeping jacket in the time that he had been absent from the saloon. I seem to see him now. Mrs. Anthony too. She looked from him to me — I suppose I looked guilty or frightened — and from me to him, trying to guess what there was between us two. Then she burst out with a "What has happened?" which seemed addressed to me. I mumbled "Nothing! Nothing, ma'am," which she very likely did not hear.

"You must not think that all this had lasted a long time. She had taken fright at our behaviour and turned to the captain pitifully. "What is it you are concealing from me?" A straight question — eh? I don't know what answer the captain would have made. Before he could even raise his eyes to her she cried out "Ah! Here's papa" in a sharp tone of relief, but directly afterwards she looked to me as if she were holding her breath with apprehension. I was so interested in her that, how shall I say it, her

exclamation made no connection in my brain at first. I also noticed that she had sidled up a little nearer to Captain Anthony, before it occurred to me to turn my head. I can tell you my neck stiffened in the twisted position from the shock of actually seeing that old man! He had dared! I suppose you think I ought to have looked upon him as mad. But I couldn't. It would have been certainly easier. But I could not. You should have seen him. First of all he was completely dressed with his very cap still on his head just as when he left me on deck two hours before, saying in his soft voice: "The moment has come to go to bed" — while he meant to go and do that thing and hide in his dark cabin, and watch the stuff do its work. A cold shudder ran down my back. He had his hands in the pockets of his jacket, his arms were pressed close to his thin, upright body, and he shuffled across the cabin with his short steps. There was a red patch on each of his old soft cheeks as if somebody had been pinching them. He drooped his head a little, and looked with a sort of underhand expectation at the captain and Mrs. Anthony standing close together at the other end of the saloon. The calculating horrible impudence of it! His daughter was there; and I am certain he had seen the captain putting his finger on his lips to warn me. And then he had coolly come out! He passed my imagination, I assure you. After that one shiver his presence killed every faculty in me — wonder, horror, indignation. I felt nothing in particular just as if he were still the old gentleman who used to talk to me familiarly every day on deck. Would you believe it?"

"Mr. Powell challenged my powers of wonder at this internal phenomenon," went on Marlow after a slight pause. "But even if they had not been fully engaged, together with all my powers of attention in following the facts of the case, I would not have been astonished by his statements about himself. Taking into consideration his youth they were by no means incredible; or, at any rate, they were the least incredible part of the whole. They were also the least interesting part. The interest was elsewhere, and there of course all he could do was to look at the surface. The inwardness of what was passing before his eyes was hidden from him, who had looked on, more impenetrably than from me who at a distance of years was listening to his words. What presently happened at this crisis in Flora de Barral's fate was beyond his power of comment, seemed in a sense natural. And his own presence on the scene was so strangely motivated that it

was left for me to marvel alone at this young man, a completely chance-comer, having brought it about on that night.

Each situation created either by folly or wisdom has its psychological moment. The behaviour of young Powell with its mixture of boyish impulses combined with instinctive prudence, had not created it — I can't say that — but had discovered it to the very people involved. What would have happened if he had made a noise about his discovery? But he didn't. His head was full of Mrs. Anthony and he behaved with a discretion beyond his years. Some nice children often do; and surely it is not from reflection. They have their own inspirations. Young Powell's inspiration consisted in being "enthusiastic" about Mrs. Anthony. 'Enthusiastic' is really good. And he was amongst them like a child, sensitive, impressionable, plastic — but unable to find for himself any sort of comment.

I don't know how much mine may be worth; but I believe that just then the tension of the false situation was at its highest. Of all the forms offered to us by life it is the one demanding a couple to realize it fully, which is the most imperative. Pairing off is the fate of mankind. And if two beings thrown together, mutually attracted, resist the necessity, fail in understanding and voluntarily stop short of the — the embrace, in the noblest meaning of the word, then they are committing a sin against life, the call of which is simple. Perhaps sacred. And the punishment of it is an invasion of complexity, a tormenting, forcibly tortuous involution of feelings, the deepest form of suffering from which indeed something significant may come at last, which may be criminal or heroic, may be madness or wisdom — or even a straight if despairing decision.

Powell on taking his eyes off the old gentleman noticed Captain Anthony, swarthy as an African, by the side of Flora whiter than the lilies, take his handkerchief out and wipe off his forehead the sweat of anguish — like a man who is overcome. "And no wonder," commented Mr. Powell here. Then the captain said, "Hadn't you better go back to your room." This was to Mrs. Anthony. He tried to smile at her. "Why do you look startled? This night is like any other night."

"Which," Powell again commented to me earnestly, "was a lie . . . No wonder he sweated." You see from this the value of Powell's comments. Mrs. Anthony then said: "Why are you sending me away?"

"Why! That you should go to sleep. That you should rest." And Captain Anthony frowned. Then sharply, "You stay here, Mr. Powell. I shall want

you presently.”

As a matter of fact Powell had not moved. Flora did not mind his presence. He himself had the feeling of being of no account to those three people. He was looking at Mrs. Anthony as unabashed as the proverbial cat looking at a king. Mrs. Anthony glanced at him. She did not move, gripped by an inexplicable premonition. She had arrived at the very limit of her endurance as the object of Anthony’s magnanimity; she was the prey of an intuitive dread of she did not know what mysterious influence; she felt herself being pushed back into that solitude, that moral loneliness, which had made all her life intolerable. And then, in that close communion established again with Anthony, she felt — as on that night in the garden — the force of his personal fascination. The passive quietness with which she looked at him gave her the appearance of a person bewitched — or, say, mesmerically put to sleep — beyond any notion of her surroundings.

After telling Mr. Powell not to go away the captain remained silent. Suddenly Mrs. Anthony pushed back her loose hair with a decisive gesture of her arms and moved still nearer to him. “Here’s papa up yet,” she said, but she did not look towards Mr. Smith. “Why is it? And you? I can’t go on like this, Roderick — between you two. Don’t.”

Anthony interrupted her as if something had untied his tongue.

“Oh yes. Here’s your father. And . . . Why not. Perhaps it is just as well you came out. Between us two? Is that it? I won’t pretend I don’t understand. I am not blind. But I can’t fight any longer for what I haven’t got. I don’t know what you imagine has happened. Something has though. Only you needn’t be afraid. No shadow can touch you — because I give up. I can’t say we had much talk about it, your father and I, but, the long and the short of it is, that I must learn to live without you — which I have told you was impossible. I was speaking the truth. But I have done fighting, or waiting, or hoping. Yes. You shall go.”

At this point Mr. Powell who (he confessed to me) was listening with uncomprehending awe, heard behind his back a triumphant chuckling sound. It gave him the shudders, he said, to mention it now; but at the time, except for another chill down the spine, it had not the power to destroy his absorption in the scene before his eyes, and before his ears too, because just then Captain Anthony raised his voice grimly. Perhaps he too had heard the chuckle of the old man.

“Your father has found an argument which makes me pause, if it does not convince me. No! I can’t answer it. I — I don’t want to answer it. I simply surrender. He shall have his way with you — and with me. Only,” he added in a gloomy lowered tone which struck Mr. Powell as if a pedal had been put down, “only it shall take a little time. I have never lied to you. Never. I renounce not only my chance but my life. In a few days, directly we get into port, the very moment we do, I, who have said I could never let you go, I shall let you go.”

To the innocent beholder Anthony seemed at this point to become physically exhausted. My view is that the utter falseness of his, I may say, aspirations, the vanity of grasping the empty air, had come to him with an overwhelming force, leaving him disarmed before the other’s mad and sinister sincerity. As he had said himself he could not fight for what he did not possess; he could not face such a thing as this for the sake of his mere magnanimity. The normal alone can overcome the abnormal. He could not even reproach that man over there. “I own myself beaten,” he said in a firmer tone. “You are free. I let you off since I must.”

Powell, the onlooker, affirms that at these incomprehensible words Mrs. Anthony stiffened into the very image of astonishment, with a frightened stare and frozen lips. But next minute a cry came out from her heart, not very loud but of a quality which made not only Captain Anthony (he was not looking at her), not only him but also the more distant (and equally unprepared) young man, catch their breath: “But I don’t want to be let off,” she cried.

She was so still that one asked oneself whether the cry had come from her. The restless shuffle behind Powell’s back stopped short, the intermittent shadowy chuckling ceased too. Young Powell, glancing round, saw Mr. Smith raise his head with his faded eyes very still, puckered at the corners, like a man perceiving something coming at him from a great distance. And Mrs. Anthony’s voice reached Powell’s ears, entreating and indignant.

“You can’t cast me off like this, Roderick. I won’t go away from you. I won’t — ”

Powell turned about and discovered then that what Mr. Smith was puckering his eyes at, was the sight of his daughter clinging round Captain Anthony’s neck — a sight not in itself improper, but which had the power to move young Powell with a bashfully profound emotion. It was different

from his emotion while spying at the revelations of the skylight, but in this case too he felt the discomfort, if not the guilt, of an unseen beholder. Experience was being piled up on his young shoulders. Mrs. Anthony's hair hung back in a dark mass like the hair of a drowned woman. She looked as if she would let go and sink to the floor if the captain were to withhold his sustaining arm. But the captain obviously had no such intention. Standing firm and still he gazed with sombre eyes at Mr. Smith. For a time the low convulsive sobbing of Mr. Smith's daughter was the only sound to trouble the silence. The strength of Anthony's clasp pressing Flora to his breast could not be doubted even at that distance, and suddenly, awakening to his opportunity, he began to partly support her, partly carry her in the direction of her cabin. His head was bent over her solicitously, then recollecting himself, with a glance full of unwonted fire, his voice ringing in a note unknown to Mr. Powell, he cried to him, "Don't you go on deck yet. I want you to stay down here till I come back. There are some instructions I want to give you."

And before the young man could answer, Anthony had disappeared in the stern-cabin, burdened and exulting.

"Instructions," commented Mr. Powell. "That was all right. Very likely; but they would be such instructions as, I thought to myself, no ship's officer perhaps had ever been given before. It made me feel a little sick to think what they would be dealing with, probably. But there! Everything that happens on board ship on the high seas has got to be dealt with somehow. There are no special people to fly to for assistance. And there I was with that old man left in my charge. When he noticed me looking at him he started to shuffle again athwart the saloon. He kept his hands rammed in his pockets, he was as stiff-backed as ever, only his head hung down. After a bit he says in his gentle soft tone: "Did you see it?"

There were in Powell's head no special words to fit the horror of his feelings. So he said — he had to say something, "Good God! What were you thinking of, Mr. Smith, to try to . . . " And then he left off. He dared not utter the awful word poison. Mr. Smith stopped his prow.

"Think! What do you know of thinking. I don't think. There is something in my head that thinks. The thoughts in men, it's like being drunk with liquor or — You can't stop them. A man who thinks will think anything. No! But have you seen it. Have you?"

“I tell you I have! I am certain!” said Powell forcibly. “I was looking at you all the time. You’ve done something to the drink in that glass.”

Then Powell lost his breath somehow. Mr. Smith looked at him curiously, with mistrust.

“My good young man, I don’t know what you are talking about. I ask you — have you seen? Who would have believed it? with her arms round his neck. When! Oh! Ha! Ha! You did see! Didn’t you? It wasn’t a delusion — was it? Her arms round . . . But I have never wholly trusted her.”

“Then I flew out at him, said Mr. Powell. I told him he was jolly lucky to have fallen upon Captain Anthony. A man in a million. He started again shuffling to and fro. “You too,” he said mournfully, keeping his eyes down. “Eh? Wonderful man? But have you a notion who I am? Listen! I have been the Great Mr. de Barral. So they printed it in the papers while they were getting up a conspiracy. And I have been doing time. And now I am brought low.” His voice died down to a mere breath. “Brought low.”

He took his hands out of his pocket, dragged the cap down on his head and stuck them back into his pockets, exactly as if preparing himself to go out into a great wind. “But not so low as to put up with this disgrace, to see her, fast in this fellow’s clutches, without doing something. She wouldn’t listen to me. Frightened? Silly? I had to think of some way to get her out of this. Did you think she cared for him? No! Would anybody have thought so? No! She pretended it was for my sake. She couldn’t understand that if I hadn’t been an old man I would have flown at his throat months ago. As it was I was tempted every time he looked at her. My girl. Ough! Any man but this. And all the time the wicked little fool was lying to me. It was their plot, their conspiracy! These conspiracies are the devil. She has been leading me on, till she has fairly put my head under the heel of that jailer, of that scoundrel, of her husband . . . Treachery! Bringing me low. Lower than herself. In the dirt. That’s what it means. Doesn’t it? Under his heel!”

He paused in his restless shuffle and again, seizing his cap with both hands, dragged it furiously right down on his ears. Powell had lost himself in listening to these broken ravings, in looking at that old feverish face when, suddenly, quick as lightning, Mr. Smith spun round, snatched up the captain’s glass and with a stifled, hurried exclamation, “Here’s luck,” tossed the liquor down his throat.

“I know now the meaning of the word ‘Consternation,’” went on Mr. Powell. “That was exactly my state of mind. I thought to myself directly: There’s nothing in that drink. I have been dreaming, I have made the awfulest mistake! . . .”

Mr. Smith put the glass down. He stood before Powell unharmed, quieted down, in a listening attitude, his head inclined on one side, chewing his thin lips. Suddenly he blinked queerly, grabbed Powell’s shoulder and collapsed, subsiding all at once as though he had gone soft all over, as a piece of silk stuff collapses. Powell seized his arm instinctively and checked his fall; but as soon as Mr. Smith was fairly on the floor he jerked himself free and backed away. Almost as quick he rushed forward again and tried to lift up the body. But directly he raised his shoulders he knew that the man was dead! Dead!

He lowered him down gently. He stood over him without fear or any other feeling, almost indifferent, far away, as it were. And then he made another start and, if he had not kept Mrs. Anthony always in his mind, he would have let out a yell for help. He staggered to her cabin-door, and, as it was, his call for “Captain Anthony” burst out of him much too loud; but he made a great effort of self-control. “I am waiting for my orders, sir,” he said outside that door distinctly, in a steady tone.

It was very still in there; still as death. Then he heard a shuffle of feet and the captain’s voice “All right. Coming.” He leaned his back against the bulkhead as you see a drunken man sometimes propped up against a wall, half doubled up. In that attitude the captain found him, when he came out, pulling the door to after him quickly. At once Anthony let his eyes run all over the cabin. Powell, without a word, clutched his forearm, led him round the end of the table and began to justify himself. “I couldn’t stop him,” he whispered shakily. “He was too quick for me. He drank it up and fell down.” But the captain was not listening. He was looking down at Mr. Smith, thinking perhaps that it was a mere chance his own body was not lying there. They did not want to speak. They made signs to each other with their eyes. The captain grasped Powell’s shoulder as if in a vice and glanced at Mrs. Anthony’s cabin door, and it was enough. He knew that the young man understood him. Rather! Silence! Silence for ever about this. Their very glances became stealthy. Powell looked from the body to the door of the dead man’s state-room. The captain nodded and let him go; and then Powell crept over, hooked the door open and crept back with fearful



glances towards Mrs. Anthony's cabin. They stooped over the corpse. Captain Anthony lifted up the shoulders.

Mr. Powell shuddered. "I'll never forget that interminable journey across the saloon, step by step, holding our breath. For part of the way the drawn half of the curtain concealed us from view had Mrs. Anthony opened her door; but I didn't draw a free breath till after we laid the body down on the swinging cot. The reflection of the saloon light left most of the cabin in the shadow. Mr. Smith's rigid, extended body looked shadowy too, shadowy and alive. You know he always carried himself as stiff as a poker. We stood by the cot as though waiting for him to make us a sign that he wanted to be left alone. The captain threw his arm over my shoulder and said in my very ear: "The steward'll find him in the morning."

"I made no answer. It was for him to say. It was perhaps the best way. It's no use talking about my thoughts. They were not concerned with myself, nor yet with that old man who terrified me more now than when he was alive. Him whom I pitied was the captain. He whispered. "I am certain of you, Mr. Powell. You had better go on deck now. As to me . . . " and I saw him raise his hands to his head as if distracted. But his last words before we stole out that cabin stick to my mind with the very tone of his mutter — to himself, not to me:

"No! No! I am not going to stumble now over that corpse."

\* \* \*

"This is what our Mr. Powell had to tell me," said Marlow, changing his tone. I was glad to learn that Flora de Barral had been saved from that sinister shadow at least falling upon her path.

We sat silent then, my mind running on the end of de Barral, on the irresistible pressure of imaginary griefs, crushing conscience, scruples, prudence, under their ever-expanding volume; on the sombre and venomous irony in the obsession which had mastered that old man.

"Well," I said.

"The steward found him," Mr. Powell roused himself. "He went in there with a cup of tea at five and of course dropped it. I was on watch again. He reeled up to me on deck pale as death. I had been expecting it; and yet I could hardly speak. "Go and tell the captain quietly," I managed to say. He ran off muttering "My God! My God!" and I'm hanged if he didn't get hysterical while trying to tell the captain, and start screaming in the saloon,

“Fully dressed! Dead! Fully dressed!” Mrs. Anthony ran out of course but she didn’t get hysterical. Franklin, who was there too, told me that she hid her face on the captain’s breast and then he went out and left them there. It was days before Mrs. Anthony was seen on deck. The first time I spoke to her she gave me her hand and said, “My poor father was quite fond of you, Mr. Powell.” She started wiping her eyes and I fled to the other side of the deck. One would like to forget all this had ever come near her.”

But clearly he could not, because after lighting his pipe he began musing aloud: “Very strong stuff it must have been. I wonder where he got it. It could hardly be at a common chemist. Well, he had it from somewhere — a mere pinch it must have been, no more.”

“I have my theory,” observed Marlow, “which to a certain extent does away with the added horror of a coldly premeditated crime. Chance had stepped in there too. It was not Mr. Smith who obtained the poison. It was the Great de Barral. And it was not meant for the obscure, magnanimous conqueror of Flora de Barral; it was meant for the notorious financier whose enterprises had nothing to do with magnanimity. He had his physician in his days of greatness. I even seem to remember that the man was called at the trial on some small point or other. I can imagine that de Barral went to him when he saw, as he could hardly help seeing, the possibility of a “triumph of envious rivals” — a heavy sentence.

I doubt if for love or even for money, but I think possibly, from pity that man provided him with what Mr. Powell called “strong stuff.” From what Powell saw of the very act I am fairly certain it must have been contained in a capsule and that he had it about him on the last day of his trial, perhaps secured by a stitch in his waistcoat pocket. He didn’t use it. Why? Did he think of his child at the last moment? Was it want of courage? We can’t tell. But he found it in his clothes when he came out of jail. It had escaped investigation if there was any. Chance had armed him. And chance alone, the chance of Mr. Powell’s life, forced him to turn the abominable weapon against himself.

I imparted my theory to Mr. Powell who accepted it at once as, in a sense, favourable to the father of Mrs. Anthony. Then he waved his hand. “Don’t let us think of it.”

I acquiesced and very soon he observed dreamily:

“I was with Captain and Mrs. Anthony sailing all over the world for near on six years. Almost as long as Franklin.”

“Oh yes! What about Franklin?” I asked.

Powell smiled. “He left the Ferndale a year or so afterwards, and I took his place. Captain Anthony recommended him for a command. You don’t think Captain Anthony would chuck a man aside like an old glove. But of course Mrs. Anthony did not like him very much. I don’t think she ever let out a whisper against him but Captain Anthony could read her thoughts.

And again Powell seemed to lose himself in the past. I asked, for suddenly the vision of the Fynes passed through my mind.

“Any children?”

Powell gave a start. “No! No! Never had any children,” and again subsided, puffing at his short briar pipe.

“Where are they now?” I inquired next as if anxious to ascertain that all Fyne’s fears had been misplaced and vain as our fears often are; that there were no undesirable cousins for his dear girls, no danger of intrusion on their spotless home. Powell looked round at me slowly, his pipe smouldering in his hand.

“Don’t you know?” he uttered in a deep voice.

“Know what?”

“That the Ferndale was lost this four years or more. Sunk. Collision. And Captain Anthony went down with her.”

“You don’t say so!” I cried quite affected as if I had known Captain Anthony personally. “Was — was Mrs. Anthony lost too?”

“You might as well ask if I was lost,” Mr. Powell rejoined so testily as to surprise me. “You see me here, — don’t you.”

He was quite huffy, but noticing my wondering stare he smoothed his ruffled plumes. And in a musing tone.

“Yes. Good men go out as if there was no use for them in the world. It seems as if there were things that, as the Turks say, are written. Or else fate has a try and sometimes misses its mark. You remember that close shave we had of being run down at night, I told you of, my first voyage with them. This go it was just at dawn. A flat calm and a fog thick enough to slice with a knife. Only there were no explosives on board. I was on deck and I remember the cursed, murderous thing looming up alongside and Captain Anthony (we were both on deck) calling out, “Good God! What’s this! Shout for all hands, Powell, to save themselves. There’s no dynamite on board now. I am going to get the wife! . . .” I yelled, all the watch on deck yelled. Crash!”

Mr. Powell gasped at the recollection. "It was a Belgian Green Star liner, the Westland," he went on, "commanded by one of those stop-for-nothing skippers. Flaherty was his name and I hope he will die without absolution. She cut half through the old Ferndale and after the blow there was a silence like death. Next I heard the captain back on deck shouting, "Set your engines slow ahead," and a howl of "Yes, yes," answering him from her forecastle; and then a whole crowd of people up there began making a row in the fog. They were throwing ropes down to us in dozens, I must say. I and the captain fastened one of them under Mrs. Anthony's arms: I remember she had a sort of dim smile on her face."

"Haul up carefully," I shouted to the people on the steamer's deck. "You've got a woman on that line."

The captain saw her landed up there safe. And then we made a rush round our decks to see no one was left behind. As we got back the captain says: "Here she's gone at last, Powell; the dear old thing! Run down at sea."

"Indeed she is gone," I said. "But it might have been worse. Shin up this rope, sir, for God's sake. I will steady it for you."

"What are you thinking about," he says angrily. "It isn't my turn. Up with you."

These were the last words he ever spoke on earth I suppose. I knew he meant to be the last to leave his ship, so I swarmed up as quick as I could, and those damned lunatics up there grab at me from above, lug me in, drag me along aft through the row and the riot of the silliest excitement I ever did see. Somebody hails from the bridge, "Have you got them all on board?" and a dozen silly asses start yelling all together, "All saved! All saved," and then that accursed Irishman on the bridge, with me roaring No! No! till I thought my head would burst, rings his engines astern. He rings the engines astern — I fighting like mad to make myself heard! And of course . . . "

I saw tears, a shower of them fall down Mr. Powell's face. His voice broke.

"The Ferndale went down like a stone and Captain Anthony went down with her, the finest man's soul that ever left a sailor's body. I raved like a maniac, like a devil, with a lot of fools crowding round me and asking, "Aren't you the captain?"

"I wasn't fit to tie the shoe-strings of the man you have drowned," I screamed at them . . . Well! Well! I could see for myself that it was no good lowering a boat. You couldn't have seen her alongside. No use. And only think, Marlow, it was I who had to go and tell Mrs. Anthony. They had taken her down below somewhere, first-class saloon. I had to go and tell her! That Flaherty, God forgive him, comes to me as white as a sheet, "I think you are the proper person." God forgive him. I wished to die a hundred times. A lot of kind ladies, passengers, were chattering excitedly around Mrs. Anthony — a real parrot house. The ship's doctor went before me. He whispers right and left and then there falls a sudden hush. Yes, I wished myself dead. But Mrs. Anthony was a brick.

Here Mr. Powell fairly burst into tears. "No one could help loving Captain Anthony. I leave you to imagine what he was to her. Yet before the week was out it was she who was helping me to pull myself together."

"Is Mrs. Anthony in England now?" I asked after a while.

He wiped his eyes without any false shame. "Oh yes." He began to look for matches, and while diving for the box under the table added: "And not very far from here either. That little village up there — you know."

"No! Really! Oh I see!"

Mr. Powell smoked austere, very detached. But I could not let him off like this. The sly beggar. So this was the secret of his passion for sailing about the river, the reason of his fondness for that creek.

"And I suppose," I said, "that you are still as 'enthusiastic' as ever. Eh? If I were you I would just mention my enthusiasm to Mrs. Anthony. Why not?"

He caught his falling pipe neatly. But if what the French call *effarement* was ever expressed on a human countenance it was on this occasion, testifying to his modesty, his sensibility and his innocence. He looked afraid of somebody overhearing my audacious — almost sacrilegious hint — as if there had not been a mile and a half of lonely marshland and dykes between us and the nearest human habitation. And then perhaps he remembered the soothing fact for he allowed a gleam to light up his eyes, like the reflection of some inward fire tended in the sanctuary of his heart by a devotion as pure as that of any vestal.

It flashed and went out. He smiled a bashful smile, sighed:

"Pah! Foolishness. You ought to know better," he said, more sad than annoyed. "But I forgot that you never knew Captain Anthony," he added

indulgently.

I reminded him that I knew Mrs. Anthony; even before he — an old friend now — had ever set eyes on her. And as he told me that Mrs. Anthony had heard of our meetings I wondered whether she would care to see me. Mr. Powell volunteered no opinion then; but next time we lay in the creek he said, “She will be very pleased. You had better go to-day.”

The afternoon was well advanced before I approached the cottage. The amenity of a fine day in its decline surrounded me with a beneficent, a calming influence; I felt it in the silence of the shady lane, in the pure air, in the blue sky. It is difficult to retain the memory of the conflicts, miseries, temptations and crimes of men’s self-seeking existence when one is alone with the charming serenity of the unconscious nature. Breathing the dreamless peace around the picturesque cottage I was approaching, it seemed to me that it must reign everywhere, over all the globe of water and land and in the hearts of all the dwellers on this earth.

Flora came down to the garden gate to meet me, no longer the perversely tempting, sorrowful, wisp of white mist drifting in the complicated bad dream of existence. Neither did she look like a forsaken elf. I stammered out stupidly, “Again in the country, Miss . . . Mrs . . . “ She was very good, returned the pressure of my hand, but we were slightly embarrassed. Then we laughed a little. Then we became grave.

I am no lover of day-breaks. You know how thin, equivocal, is the light of the dawn. But she was now her true self, she was like a fine tranquil afternoon — and not so very far advanced either. A woman not much over thirty, with a dazzling complexion and a little colour, a lot of hair, a smooth brow, a fine chin, and only the eyes of the Flora of the old days, absolutely unchanged.

In the room into which she led me we found a Miss Somebody — I didn’t catch the name, — an unobtrusive, even an indistinct, middle-aged person in black. A companion. All very proper. She came and went and even sat down at times in the room, but a little apart, with some sewing. By the time she had brought in a lighted lamp I had heard all the details which really matter in this story. Between me and her who was once Flora de Barral the conversation was not likely to keep strictly to the weather.

The lamp had a rosy shade; and its glow wreathed her in perpetual blushes, made her appear wonderfully young as she sat before me in a deep, high-backed arm-chair. I asked:

“Tell me what is it you said in that famous letter which so upset Mrs. Fyne, and caused little Fyne to interfere in this offensive manner?”

“It was simply crude,” she said earnestly. “I was feeling reckless and I wrote recklessly. I knew she would disapprove and I wrote foolishly. It was the echo of her own stupid talk. I said that I did not love her brother but that I had no scruples whatever in marrying him.”

She paused, hesitating, then with a shy half-laugh:

“I really believed I was selling myself, Mr. Marlow. And I was proud of it. What I suffered afterwards I couldn’t tell you; because I only discovered my love for my poor Roderick through agonies of rage and humiliation. I came to suspect him of despising me; but I could not put it to the test because of my father. Oh! I would not have been too proud. But I had to spare poor papa’s feelings. Roderick was perfect, but I felt as though I were on the rack and not allowed even to cry out. Papa’s prejudice against Roderick was my greatest grief. It was distracting. It frightened me. Oh! I have been miserable! That night when my poor father died suddenly I am certain they had some sort of discussion, about me. But I did not want to hold out any longer against my own heart! I could not.”

She stopped short, then impulsively:

“Truth will out, Mr. Marlow.”

“Yes,” I said.

She went on musingly.

“Sorrow and happiness were mingled at first like darkness and light. For months I lived in a dusk of feelings. But it was quiet. It was warm . . . “

Again she paused, then going back in her thoughts. “No! There was no harm in that letter. It was simply foolish. What did I know of life then? Nothing. But Mrs. Fyne ought to have known better. She wrote a letter to her brother, a little later. Years afterwards Roderick allowed me to glance at it. I found in it this sentence: ‘For years I tried to make a friend of that girl; but I warn you once more that she has the nature of a heartless adventuress . . . ‘ Adventuress!’” repeated Flora slowly. “So be it. I have had a fine adventure.”

“It was fine, then,” I said interested.

“The finest in the world! Only think! I loved and I was loved, untroubled, at peace, without remorse, without fear. All the world, all life were transformed for me. And how much I have seen! How good people were to me! Roderick was so much liked everywhere. Yes, I have known

kindness and safety. The most familiar things appeared lighted up with a new light, clothed with a loveliness I had never suspected. The sea itself! . . . You are a sailor. You have lived your life on it. But do you know how beautiful it is, how strong, how charming, how friendly, how mighty . . . “

I listened amazed and touched. She was silent only a little while.

“It was too good to last. But nothing can rob me of it now . . . Don’t think that I repine. I am not even sad now. Yes, I have been happy. But I remember also the time when I was unhappy beyond endurance, beyond desperation. Yes. You remember that. And later on, too. There was a time on board the Ferndale when the only moments of relief I knew were when I made Mr. Powell talk to me a little on the poop. You like him? — Don’t you?”

“Excellent fellow,” I said warmly. “You see him often?”

“Of course. I hardly know another soul in the world. I am alone. And he has plenty of time on his hands. His aunt died a few years ago. He’s doing nothing, I believe.”

“He is fond of the sea,” I remarked. “He loves it.”

“He seems to have given it up,” she murmured.

“I wonder why?”

She remained silent. “Perhaps it is because he loves something else better,” I went on. “Come, Mrs. Anthony, don’t let me carry away from here the idea that you are a selfish person, hugging the memory of your past happiness, like a rich man his treasure, forgetting the poor at the gate.”

I rose to go, for it was getting late. She got up in some agitation and went out with me into the fragrant darkness of the garden. She detained my hand for a moment and then in the very voice of the Flora of old days, with the exact intonation, showing the old mistrust, the old doubt of herself, the old scar of the blow received in childhood, pathetic and funny, she murmured, “Do you think it possible that he should care for me?”

“Just ask him yourself. You are brave.”

“Oh, I am brave enough,” she said with a sigh.

“Then do. For if you don’t you will be wronging that patient man cruelly.”

I departed leaving her dumb. Next day, seeing Powell making preparations to go ashore, I asked him to give my regards to Mrs. Anthony. He promised he would.

“Listen, Powell,” I said. “We got to know each other by chance?”



“Oh, quite!” he admitted, adjusting his hat.

“And the science of life consists in seizing every chance that presents itself,” I pursued. “Do you believe that?”

“Gospel truth,” he declared innocently.

“Well, don’t forget it.”

“Oh, I! I don’t expect now anything to present itself,” he said, jumping ashore.

He didn’t turn up at high water. I set my sail and just as I had cast off from the bank, round the black barn, in the dusk, two figures appeared and stood silent, indistinct.

“Is that you, Powell?” I hailed.

“And Mrs. Anthony,” his voice came impressively through the silence of the great marsh. “I am not sailing to-night. I have to see Mrs. Anthony home.”

“Then I must even go alone,” I cried.

Flora’s voice wished me “bon voyage” in a most friendly but tremulous tone.

“You shall hear from me before long,” shouted Powell, suddenly, just as my boat had cleared the mouth of the creek.

“This was yesterday,” added Marlow, lolling in the arm-chair lazily. “I haven’t heard yet; but I expect to hear any moment . . . What on earth are you grinning at in this sarcastic manner? I am not afraid of going to church with a friend. Hang it all, for all my belief in Chance I am not exactly a pagan . . . “

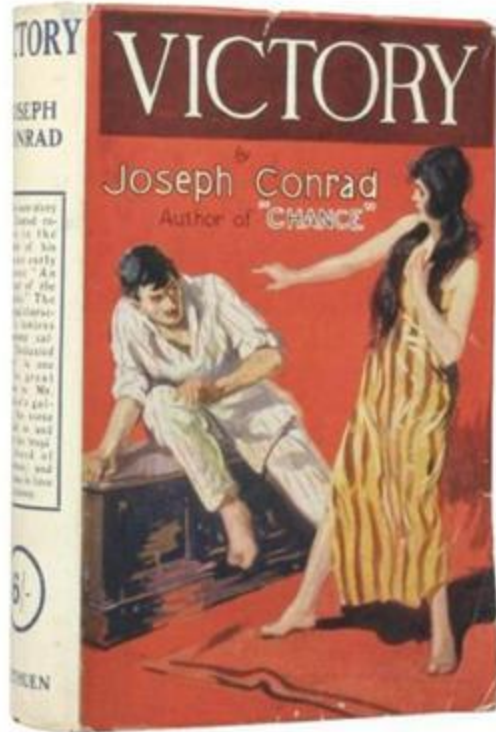
# **VICTORY**



## **AN ISLAND TALE**

This novel was first published in 1915, receiving mixed critical reviews. It features a shifting narrative and temporal perspective, with different viewpoints from different characters, as well as an omniscient narrator.

*Victory* tells the story of Axel Heyst, who ends up living on an island in Indonesia, after a business misadventure. Heyst visits a nearby island when a female band is playing at a hotel owned by Mr. Schomberg. Who attempts to rape one of the band members. She flees with Heyst back to his island and they become lovers.



*The first edition*

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

On approaching the task of writing this Note for Victory, the first thing I am conscious of is the actual nearness of the book, its nearness to me personally, to the vanished mood in which it was written, and to the mixed feelings aroused by the critical notices the book obtained when first published almost exactly a year after the beginning of the war. The writing of it was finished in 1914 long before the murder of an Austrian Archduke sounded the first note of warning for a world already full of doubts and fears.

The contemporaneous very short Author's Note which is preserved in this edition bears sufficient witness to the feelings with which I consented to the publication of the book. The fact of the book having been published in the United States early in the year made it difficult to delay its appearance in England any longer. It came out in the thirteenth month of the war, and my conscience was troubled by the awful incongruity of throwing this bit of imagined drama into the welter of reality, tragic enough in all conscience, but even more cruel than tragic and more inspiring than cruel. It seemed awfully presumptuous to think there would be eyes to spare for those pages in a community which in the crash of the big guns and in the din of brave words expressing the truth of an indomitable faith could not but feel the edge of a sharp knife at its throat.

The unchanging Man of history is wonderfully adaptable both by his power of endurance and in his capacity for detachment. The fact seems to be that the play of his destiny is too great for his fears and too mysterious for his understanding. Were the trump of the Last Judgement to sound suddenly on a working day the musician at his piano would go on with his performance of Beethoven's sonata and the cobbler at his stall stick to his last in undisturbed confidence in the virtues of the leather. And with perfect propriety. For what are we to let ourselves be disturbed by an angel's vengeful music too mighty for our ears and too awful for our terrors? Thus it happens to us to be struck suddenly by the lightning of wrath. The reader will go on reading if the book pleases him and the critic will go on criticizing with that faculty of detachment born perhaps from a sense of infinite littleness and which is yet the only faculty that seems to assimilate man to the immortal gods.

It is only when the catastrophe matches the natural obscurity of our fate that even the best representative of the race is liable to lose his detachment. It is very obvious that on the arrival of the gentlemanly Mr. Jones, the single-minded Ricardo, and the faithful Pedro, Heyst, the man of universal detachment, loses his mental self-possession, that fine attitude before the universally irremediable which wears the name of stoicism. It is all a matter of proportion. There should have been a remedy for that sort of thing. And yet there is no remedy. Behind this minute instance of life's hazards Heyst sees the power of blind destiny. Besides, Heyst in his fine detachment had lost the habit of asserting himself. I don't mean the courage of self-assertion, either moral or physical, but the mere way of it, the trick of the thing, the readiness of mind and the turn of the hand that come without reflection and lead the man to excellence in life, in art, in crime, in virtue, and, for the matter of that, even in love. Thinking is the great enemy of perfection. The habit of profound reflection, I am compelled to say, is the most pernicious of all the habits formed by the civilized man.

But I wouldn't be suspected even remotely of making fun of Axel Heyst. I have always liked him. The flesh-and-blood individual who stands behind the infinitely more familiar figure of the book I remember as a mysterious Swede right enough. Whether he was a baron, too, I am not so certain. He himself never laid claim to that distinction. His detachment was too great to make any claims, big or small, on one's credulity. I will not say where I met him because I fear to give my readers a wrong impression, since a marked incongruity between a man and his surroundings is often a very misleading circumstance. We became very friendly for a time, and I would not like to expose him to unpleasant suspicions though, personally, I am sure he would have been indifferent to suspicions as he was indifferent to all the other disadvantages of life. He was not the whole Heyst of course; he is only the physical and moral foundation of my Heyst laid on the ground of a short acquaintance. That it was short was certainly not my fault for he had charmed me by the mere amenity of his detachment which, in this case, I cannot help thinking he had carried to excess. He went away from his rooms without leaving a trace. I wondered where he had gone to — but now I know. He vanished from my ken only to drift into this adventure that, unavoidable, waited for him in a world which he persisted in looking upon as a malevolent shadow spinning in the sunlight. Often in the course of years an expressed sentiment, the particular sense of a phrase heard

casually, would recall him to my mind so that I have fastened on to him many words heard on other men's lips and belonging to other men's less perfect, less pathetic moods.

The same observation will apply *mutatis mutandis* to Mr. Jones, who is built on a much slenderer connection. Mr. Jones (or whatever his name was) did not drift away from me. He turned his back on me and walked out of the room. It was in a little hotel in the island of St. Thomas in the West Indies (in the year '75) where we found him one hot afternoon extended on three chairs, all alone in the loud buzzing of flies to which his immobility and his cadaverous aspect gave a most gruesome significance. Our invasion must have displeased him because he got off the chairs brusquely and walked out, leaving with me an indelibly weird impression of his thin shanks. One of the men with me said that the fellow was the most desperate gambler he had ever come across. I said: "A professional sharper?" and got for an answer: "He's a terror; but I must say that up to a certain point he will play fair. . . ." I wonder what the point was. I never saw him again because I believe he went straight on board a mail-boat which left within the hour for other ports of call in the direction of Aspinall. Mr. Jones's characteristic insolence belongs to another man of a quite different type. I will say nothing as to the origins of his mentality because I don't intend to make any damaging admissions.

It so happened that the very same year Ricardo — the physical Ricardo — was a fellow passenger of mine on board an extremely small and extremely dirty little schooner, during a four days' passage between two places in the Gulf of Mexico whose names don't matter. For the most part he lay on deck aft as it were at my feet, and raising himself from time to time on his elbow would talk about himself and go on talking, not exactly to me or even at me (he would not even look up but kept his eyes fixed on the deck) but more as if communing in a low voice with his familiar devil. Now and then he would give me a glance and make the hairs of his stiff little moustache stir quaintly. His eyes were green and every cat I see to this day reminds me of the exact contour of his face. What he was travelling for or what was his business in life he never confided to me. Truth to say, the only passenger on board that schooner who could have talked openly about his activities and purposes was a very snuffy and conversationally delightful friar, the superior of a convent, attended by a very young lay brother, of a particularly ferocious countenance. We had with us also, lying prostrate in



the dark and unspeakable cuddy of that schooner, an old Spanish gentleman, owner of much luggage and, as Ricardo assured me, very ill indeed. Ricardo seemed to be either a servant or the confidant of that aged and distinguished-looking invalid, who early on the passage held a long murmured conversation with the friar, and after that did nothing but groan feebly, smoke cigarettes, and now and then call for Martin in a voice full of pain. Then he who had become Ricardo in the book would go below into that beastly and noisome hole, remain there mysteriously, and coming up on deck again with a face on which nothing could be read, would as likely as not resume for my edification the exposition of his moral attitude towards life illustrated by striking particular instances of the most atrocious complexion. Did he mean to frighten me? Or seduce me? Or astonish me? Or arouse my admiration? All he did was to arouse my amused incredulity. As scoundrels go he was far from being a bore. For the rest my innocence was so great then that I could not take his philosophy seriously. All the time he kept one ear turned to the cuddy in the manner of a devoted servant, but I had the idea that in some way or other he had imposed the connection on the invalid for some end of his own. The reader, therefore, won't be surprised to hear that one morning I was told without any particular emotion by the padrone of the schooner that the "rich man" down there was dead: He had died in the night. I don't remember ever being so moved by the desolate end of a complete stranger. I looked down the skylight, and there was the devoted Martin busy cording cowhide trunks belonging to the deceased whose white beard and hooked nose were the only parts I could make out in the dark depths of a horrible stuffy bunk.

As it fell calm in the course of the afternoon and continued calm during all that night and the terrible, flaming day, the late "rich man" had to be thrown overboard at sunset, though as a matter of fact we were in sight of the low pestilential mangrove-lined coast of our destination. The excellent Father Superior mentioned to me with an air of immense commiseration: "The poor man has left a young daughter." Who was to look after her I don't know, but I saw the devoted Martin taking the trunks ashore with great care just before I landed myself. I would perhaps have tracked the ways of that man of immense sincerity for a little while, but I had some of my own very pressing business to attend to, which in the end got mixed up with an earthquake and so I had no time to give to Ricardo. The reader need not be told that I have not forgotten him, though.

My contact with the faithful Pedro was much shorter and my observation of him was less complete but incomparably more anxious. It ended in a sudden inspiration to get out of his way. It was in a hovel of sticks and mats by the side of a path. As I went in there only to ask for a bottle of lemonade I have not to this day the slightest idea what in my appearance or actions could have roused his terrible ire. It became manifest to me less than two minutes after I had set eyes on him for the first time, and though immensely surprised of course I didn't stop to think it out I took the nearest short cut — through the wall. This bestial apparition and a certain enormous buck nigger encountered in Haiti only a couple of months afterwards, have fixed my conception of blind, furious, unreasoning rage, as manifested in the human animal, to the end of my days. Of the nigger I used to dream for years afterwards. Of Pedro never. The impression was less vivid. I got away from him too quickly.

It seems to me but natural that those three buried in a corner of my memory should suddenly get out into the light of the world — so natural that I offer no excuse for their existence, They were there, they had to come out; and this is a sufficient excuse for a writer of tales who had taken to his trade without preparation, or premeditation, and without any moral intention but that which pervades the whole scheme of this world of senses.

Since this Note is mostly concerned with personal contacts and the origins of the persons in the tale, I am bound also to speak of Lena, because if I were to leave her out it would look like a slight; and nothing would be further from my thoughts than putting a slight on Lena. If of all the personages involved in the “mystery of Samburan” I have lived longest with Heyst (or with him I call Heyst) it was at her, whom I call Lena, that I have looked the longest and with a most sustained attention. This attention originated in idleness for which I have a natural talent. One evening I wandered into a cafe, in a town not of the tropics but of the South of France. It was filled with tobacco smoke, the hum of voices, the rattling of dominoes, and the sounds of strident music. The orchestra was rather smaller than the one that performed at Schomberg's hotel, had the air more of a family party than of an enlisted band, and, I must confess, seemed rather more respectable than the Zangiaco musical enterprise. It was less pretentious also, more homely and familiar, so to speak, insomuch that in the intervals when all the performers left the platform one of them went amongst the marble tables collecting offerings of sous and francs in a

battered tin receptacle recalling the shape of a sauceboat. It was a girl. Her detachment from her task seems to me now to have equalled or even surpassed Heyst's aloofness from all the mental degradations to which a man's intelligence is exposed in its way through life. Silent and wide-eyed she went from table to table with the air of a sleep-walker and with no other sound but the slight rattle of the coins to attract attention. It was long after the sea-chapter of my life had been closed but it is difficult to discard completely the characteristics of half a lifetime, and it was in something of the Jack-ashore spirit that I dropped a five-franc piece into the sauceboat; whereupon the sleep-walker turned her head to gaze at me and said "Merci, Monsieur" in a tone in which there was no gratitude but only surprise. I must have been idle indeed to take the trouble to remark on such slight evidence that the voice was very charming and when the performers resumed their seats I shifted my position slightly in order not to have that particular performer hidden from me by the little man with the beard who conducted, and who might for all I know have been her father, but whose real mission in life was to be a model for the Zangiacomo of Victory. Having got a clear line of sight I naturally (being idle) continued to look at the girl through all the second part of the programme. The shape of her dark head inclined over the violin was fascinating, and, while resting between the pieces of that interminable programme she was, in her white dress and with her brown hands reposing in her lap, the very image of dreamy innocence. The mature, bad-tempered woman at the piano might have been her mother, though there was not the slightest resemblance between them. All I am certain of in their personal relation to each other is that cruel pinch on the upper part of the arm. That I am sure I have seen! There could be no mistake. I was in too idle a mood to imagine such a gratuitous barbarity. It may have been playfulness, yet the girl jumped up as if she had been stung by a wasp. It may have been playfulness. Yet I saw plainly poor "dreamy innocence" rub gently the affected place as she filed off with the other performers down the middle aisle between the marble tables in the uproar of voices, the rattling of dominoes through a blue atmosphere of tobacco smoke. I believe that those people left the town next day.

Or perhaps they had only migrated to the other big cafe, on the other side of the Place de la Comedie. It is very possible. I did not go across to find out. It was my perfect idleness that had invested the girl with a peculiar charm, and I did not want to destroy it by any superfluous exertion. The

receptivity of my indolence made the impression so permanent that when the moment came for her meeting with Heyst I felt that she would be heroically equal to every demand of the risky and uncertain future. I was so convinced of it that I let her go with Heyst, I won't say without a pang but certainly without misgivings. And in view of her triumphant end what more could I have done for her rehabilitation and her happiness?

1920. J. C.

# **VICTORY: AN ISLAND TALE**

## **PART ONE**

## CHAPTER ONE

There is, as every schoolboy knows in this scientific age, a very close chemical relation between coal and diamonds. It is the reason, I believe, why some people allude to coal as “black diamonds.” Both these commodities represent wealth; but coal is a much less portable form of property. There is, from that point of view, a deplorable lack of concentration in coal. Now, if a coal-mine could be put into one’s waistcoat pocket — but it can’t! At the same time, there is a fascination in coal, the supreme commodity of the age in which we are camped like bewildered travellers in a garish, unrestful hotel. And I suppose those two considerations, the practical and the mystical, prevented Heyst — Axel Heyst — from going away.

The Tropical Belt Coal Company went into liquidation. The world of finance is a mysterious world in which, incredible as the fact may appear, evaporation precedes liquidation. First the capital evaporates, and then the company goes into liquidation. These are very unnatural physics, but they account for the persistent inertia of Heyst, at which we “out there” used to laugh among ourselves — but not inimically. An inert body can do no harm to anyone, provokes no hostility, is scarcely worth derision. It may, indeed, be in the way sometimes; but this could not be said of Axel Heyst. He was out of everybody’s way, as if he were perched on the highest peak of the Himalayas, and in a sense as conspicuous. Everyone in that part of the world knew of him, dwelling on his little island. An island is but the top of a mountain. Axel Heyst, perched on it immovably, was surrounded, instead of the imponderable stormy and transparent ocean of air merging into infinity, by a tepid, shallow sea; a passionless offshoot of the great waters which embrace the continents of this globe. His most frequent visitors were shadows, the shadows of clouds, relieving the monotony of the inanimate, brooding sunshine of the tropics. His nearest neighbour — I am speaking now of things showing some sort of animation — was an indolent volcano which smoked faintly all day with its head just above the northern horizon, and at night levelled at him, from amongst the clear stars, a dull red glow, expanding and collapsing spasmodically like the end of a gigantic cigar puffed at intermittently in the dark. Axel Heyst was also a smoker; and when he lounged out on his veranda with his cheroot, the last thing before

going to bed, he made in the night the same sort of glow and of the same size as that other one so many miles away.

In a sense, the volcano was company to him in the shades of the night — which were often too thick, one would think, to let a breath of air through. There was seldom enough wind to blow a feather along. On most evenings of the year Heyst could have sat outside with a naked candle to read one of the books left him by his late father. It was not a mean store. But he never did that. Afraid of mosquitoes, very likely. Neither was he ever tempted by the silence to address any casual remarks to the companion glow of the volcano. He was not mad. Queer chap — yes, that may have been said, and in fact was said; but there is a tremendous difference between the two, you will allow.

On the nights of full moon the silence around Samburan — the “Round Island” of the charts — was dazzling; and in the flood of cold light Heyst could see his immediate surroundings, which had the aspect of an abandoned settlement invaded by the jungle: vague roofs above low vegetation, broken shadows of bamboo fences in the sheen of long grass, something like an overgrown bit of road slanting among ragged thickets towards the shore only a couple of hundred yards away, with a black jetty and a mound of some sort, quite inky on its unlighted side. But the most conspicuous object was a gigantic blackboard raised on two posts and presenting to Heyst, when the moon got over that side, the white letters “T. B. C. Co.” in a row at least two feet high. These were the initials of the Tropical Belt Coal Company, his employers — his late employers, to be precise.

According to the unnatural mysteries of the financial world, the T. B. C. Company’s capital having evaporated in the course of two years, the company went into liquidation — forced, I believe, not voluntary. There was nothing forcible in the process, however. It was slow; and while the liquidation — in London and Amsterdam — pursued its languid course, Axel Heyst, styled in the prospectus “manager in the tropics,” remained at his post on Samburan, the No. 1 coaling-station of the company.

And it was not merely a coaling-station. There was a coal-mine there, with an outcrop in the hillside less than five hundred yards from the rickety wharf and the imposing blackboard. The company’s object had been to get hold of all the outcrops on tropical islands and exploit them locally. And, Lord knows, there were any amount of outcrops. It was Heyst who had

located most of them in this part of the tropical belt during his rather aimless wanderings, and being a ready letter-writer had written pages and pages about them to his friends in Europe. At least, so it was said.

We doubted whether he had any visions of wealth — for himself, at any rate. What he seemed mostly concerned for was the “stride forward,” as he expressed it, in the general organization of the universe, apparently. He was heard by more than a hundred persons in the islands talking of a “great stride forward for these regions.” The convinced wave of the hand which accompanied the phrase suggested tropical distances being impelled onward. In connection with the finished courtesy of his manner, it was persuasive, or at any rate silencing — for a time, at least. Nobody cared to argue with him when he talked in this strain. His earnestness could do no harm to anybody. There was no danger of anyone taking seriously his dream of tropical coal, so what was the use of hurting his feelings?

Thus reasoned men in reputable business offices where he had his entree as a person who came out East with letters of introduction — and modest letters of credit, too — some years before these coal-outcrops began to crop up in his playfully courteous talk. From the first there was some difficulty in making him out. He was not a traveller. A traveller arrives and departs, goes on somewhere. Heyst did not depart. I met a man once — the manager of the branch of the Oriental Banking Corporation in Malacca — to whom Heyst exclaimed, in no connection with anything in particular (it was in the billiard-room of the club):

“I am enchanted with these islands!”

He shot it out suddenly, a *propos des bottes*, as the French say, and while chalking his cue. And perhaps it was some sort of enchantment. There are more spells than your commonplace magicians ever dreamed of.

Roughly speaking, a circle with a radius of eight hundred miles drawn round a point in North Borneo was in Heyst’s case a magic circle. It just touched Manila, and he had been seen there. It just touched Saigon, and he was likewise seen there once. Perhaps these were his attempts to break out. If so, they were failures. The enchantment must have been an unbreakable one. The manager — the man who heard the exclamation — had been so impressed by the tone, fervour, rapture, what you will, or perhaps by the incongruity of it that he had related the experience to more than one person.

“Queer chap, that Swede,” was his only comment; but this is the origin of the name “Enchanted Heyst” which some fellows fastened on our man.



He also had other names. In his early years, long before he got so becomingly bald on the top, he went to present a letter of introduction to Mr. Tesman of Tesman Brothers, a Sourabaya firm — tip-top house. Well, Mr. Tesman was a kindly, benevolent old gentleman. He did not know what to make of that caller. After telling him that they wished to render his stay among the islands as pleasant as possible, and that they were ready to assist him in his plans, and so on, and after receiving Heyst's thanks — you know the usual kind of conversation — he proceeded to query in a slow, paternal tone:

“And you are interested in — ?”

“Facts,” broke in Heyst in his courtly voice. “There's nothing worth knowing but facts. Hard facts! Facts alone, Mr. Tesman.”

I don't know if old Tesman agreed with him or not, but he must have spoken about it, because, for a time, our man got the name of “Hard Facts.” He had the singular good fortune that his sayings stuck to him and became part of his name. Thereafter he mooned about the Java Sea in some of the Tesmans' trading schooners, and then vanished, on board an Arab ship, in the direction of New Guinea. He remained so long in that outlying part of his enchanted circle that he was nearly forgotten before he swam into view again in a native proa full of Goram vagabonds, burnt black by the sun, very lean, his hair much thinned, and a portfolio of sketches under his arm. He showed these willingly, but was very reserved as to anything else. He had had an “amusing time,” he said. A man who will go to New Guinea for fun — well!

Later, years afterwards, when the last vestiges of youth had gone off his face and all the hair off the top of his head, and his red-gold pair of horizontal moustaches had grown to really noble proportions, a certain disreputable white man fastened upon him an epithet. Putting down with a shaking hand a long glass emptied of its contents — paid for by Heyst — he said, with that deliberate sagacity which no mere water-drinker ever attained:

“Heyst's a puffect g'n'lman. Puffect! But he's a ut-uto-utopist.”

Heyst had just gone out of the place of public refreshment where this pronouncement was voiced. Utopist, eh? Upon my word, the only thing I heard him say which might have had a bearing on the point was his invitation to old McNab himself. Turning with that finished courtesy of

attitude, movement voice, which was his obvious characteristic, he had said with delicate playfulness:

“Come along and quench your thirst with us, Mr. McNab!”

Perhaps that was it. A man who could propose, even playfully, to quench old McNab’s thirst must have been a utopist, a pursuer of chimeras; for of downright irony Heyst was not prodigal. And, may be, this was the reason why he was generally liked. At that epoch in his life, in the fulness of his physical development, of a broad, martial presence, with his bald head and long moustaches, he resembled the portraits of Charles XII., of adventurous memory. However, there was no reason to think that Heyst was in any way a fighting man.

## CHAPTER TWO

It was about this time that Heyst became associated with Morrison on terms about which people were in doubt. Some said he was a partner, others said he was a sort of paying guest, but the real truth of the matter was more complex. One day Heyst turned up in Timor. Why in Timor, of all places in the world, no one knows. Well, he was mooning about Delli, that highly pestilential place, possibly in search of some undiscovered facts, when he came in the street upon Morrison, who, in his way, was also an “enchanted” man. When you spoke to Morrison of going home — he was from Dorsetshire — he shuddered. He said it was dark and wet there; that it was like living with your head and shoulders in a moist gunny-bag. That was only his exaggerated style of talking. Morrison was “one of us.” He was owner and master of the Capricorn, trading brig, and was understood to be doing well with her, except for the drawback of too much altruism. He was the dearly beloved friend of a quantity of God-forsaken villages up dark creeks and obscure bays, where he traded for produce. He would often sail, through awfully dangerous channels up to some miserable settlement, only to find a very hungry population clamorous for rice, and without so much “produce” between them as would have filled Morrison’s suitcase. Amid general rejoicings, he would land the rice all the same, explain to the people that it was an advance, that they were in debt to him now; would preach to them energy and industry, and make an elaborate note in a pocket-diary which he always carried; and this would be the end of that transaction. I don’t know if Morrison thought so, but the villagers had no doubt whatever about it. Whenever a coast village sighted the brig it would begin to beat all its gongs and hoist all its streamers, and all its girls would put flowers in their hair and the crowd would line the river bank, and Morrison would beam and glitter at all this excitement through his single eyeglass with an air of intense gratification. He was tall and lantern-jawed, and clean-shaven, and looked like a barrister who had thrown his wig to the dogs.

We used to remonstrate with him:

“You will never see any of your advances if you go on like this, Morrison.”

He would put on a knowing air.

“I shall squeeze them yet some day — never you fear. And that reminds me” — pulling out his inseparable pocketbook — “there’s that So-and-So

village. They are pretty well off again; I may just as well squeeze them to begin with.”

He would make a ferocious entry in the pocketbook.

Memo: Squeeze the So-and-So village at the first time of calling.

Then he would stick the pencil back and snap the elastic on with inflexible finality; but he never began the squeezing. Some men grumbled at him. He was spoiling the trade. Well, perhaps to a certain extent; not much. Most of the places he traded with were unknown not only to geography but also to the traders’ special lore which is transmitted by word of mouth, without ostentation, and forms the stock of mysterious local knowledge. It was hinted also that Morrison had a wife in each and every one of them, but the majority of us repulsed these innuendoes with indignation. He was a true humanitarian and rather ascetic than otherwise.

When Heyst met him in Delli, Morrison was walking along the street, his eyeglass tossed over his shoulder, his head down, with the hopeless aspect of those hardened tramps one sees on our roads trudging from workhouse to workhouse. Being hailed on the street he looked up with a wild worried expression. He was really in trouble. He had come the week before into Delli and the Portuguese authorities, on some pretence of irregularity in his papers, had inflicted a fine upon him and had arrested his brig.

Morrison never had any spare cash in hand. With his system of trading it would have been strange if he had; and all these debts entered in the pocketbook weren’t good enough to raise a millrei on — let alone a shilling. The Portuguese officials begged him not to distress himself. They gave him a week’s grace, and then proposed to sell the brig at auction. This meant ruin for Morrison; and when Heyst hailed him across the street in his usual courtly tone, the week was nearly out.

Heyst crossed over, and said with a slight bow, and in the manner of a prince addressing another prince on a private occasion:

“What an unexpected pleasure. Would you have any objection to drink something with me in that infamous wine-shop over there? The sun is really too strong to talk in the street.”

The haggard Morrison followed obediently into a sombre, cool hovel which he would have distained to enter at any other time. He was distracted. He did not know what he was doing. You could have led him over the edge of a precipice just as easily as into that wine-shop. He sat down like an automaton. He was speechless, but he saw a glass full of rough red wine

before him, and emptied it. Heyst meantime, politely watchful, had taken a seat opposite.

“You are in for a bout of fever, I fear,” he said sympathetically.

Poor Morrison’s tongue was loosened at that.

“Fever!” he cried. “Give me fever. Give me plague. They are diseases. One gets over them. But I am being murdered. I am being murdered by the Portuguese. The gang here downed me at last among them. I am to have my throat cut the day after tomorrow.”

In the face of this passion Heyst made, with his eyebrows, a slight motion of surprise which would not have been misplaced in a drawing-room. Morrison’s despairing reserve had broken down. He had been wandering with a dry throat all over that miserable town of mud hovels, silent, with no soul to turn to in his distress, and positively maddened by his thoughts; and suddenly he had stumbled on a white man, figuratively and actually white — for Morrison refused to accept the racial whiteness of the Portuguese officials. He let himself go for the mere relief of violent speech, his elbows planted on the table, his eyes blood-shot, his voice nearly gone, the brim of his round pith hat shading an unshaven, livid face. His white clothes, which he had not taken off for three days, were dingy. He had already gone to the bad, past redemption. The sight was shocking to Heyst; but he let nothing of it appear in his bearing, concealing his impression under that consummate good-society manner of his. Polite attention, what’s due from one gentleman listening to another, was what he showed; and, as usual, it was catching; so that Morrison pulled himself together and finished his narrative in a conversational tone, with a man-of-the-world air.

“It’s a villainous plot. Unluckily, one is helpless. That scoundrel Cousinho — Andreas, you know — has been coveting the brig for years. Naturally, I would never sell. She is not only my livelihood; she’s my life. So he has hatched this pretty little plot with the chief of the customs. The sale, of course, will be a farce. There’s no one here to bid. He will get the brig for a song — no, not even that — a line of a song. You have been some years now in the islands, Heyst. You know us all; you have seen how we live. Now you shall have the opportunity to see how some of us end; for it is the end, for me. I can’t deceive myself any longer. You see it — don’t you?”

Morrison had pulled himself together, but one felt the snapping strain on his recovered self-possession. Heyst was beginning to say that he “could

very well see all the bearings of this unfortunate — ” when Morrison interrupted him jerkily.

“Upon my word, I don’t know why I have been telling you all this. I suppose seeing a thoroughly white man made it impossible to keep my trouble to myself. Words can’t do it justice; but since I’ve told you so much I may as well tell you more. Listen. This morning on board, in my cabin I went down on my knees and prayed for help. I went down on my knees!”

“You are a believer, Morrison?” asked Heyst with a distinct note of respect.

“Surely I am not an infidel.”

Morrison was swiftly reproachful in his answer, and there came a pause, Morrison perhaps interrogating his conscience, and Heyst preserving a mien of unperturbed, polite interest.

“I prayed like a child, of course. I believe in children praying — well, women, too, but I rather think God expects men to be more self-reliant. I don’t hold with a man everlastingly bothering the Almighty with his silly troubles. It seems such cheek. Anyhow, this morning I — I have never done any harm to any God’s creature knowingly — I prayed. A sudden impulse — I went flop on my knees; so you may judge — ”

They were gazing earnestly into each other’s eyes. Poor Morrison added, as a discouraging afterthought:

“Only this is such a God-forsaken spot.”

Heyst inquired with a delicate intonation whether he might know the amount for which the brig was seized.

Morrison suppressed an oath, and named curtly a sum which was in itself so insignificant that any other person than Heyst would have exclaimed at it. And even Heyst could hardly keep incredulity out of his politely modulated voice as he asked if it was a fact that Morrison had not that amount in hand.

Morrison hadn’t. He had only a little English gold, a few sovereigns, on board. He had left all his spare cash with the Tesmans, in Samarang, to meet certain bills which would fall due while he was away on his cruise. Anyhow, that money would not have been any more good to him than if it had been in the innermost depths of the infernal regions. He said all this brusquely. He looked with sudden disfavour at that noble forehead, at those great martial moustaches, at the tired eyes of the man sitting opposite him. Who the devil was he? What was he, Morrison, doing there, talking like

this? Morrison knew no more of Heyst than the rest of us trading in the Archipelago did. Had the Swede suddenly risen and hit him on the nose, he could not have been taken more aback than when this stranger, this nondescript wanderer, said with a little bow across the table:

“Oh! If that’s the case I would be very happy if you’d allow me to be of use!”

Morrison didn’t understand. This was one of those things that don’t happen — unheard of things. He had no real inkling of what it meant, till Heyst said definitely:

“I can lend you the amount.”

“You have the money?” whispered Morrison. “Do you mean here, in your pocket?”

“Yes, on me. Glad to be of use.”

Morrison, staring open-mouthed, groped over his shoulder for the cord of the eyeglass hanging down his back. When he found it, he stuck it in his eye hastily. It was as if he expected Heyst’s usual white suit of the tropics to change into a shining garment, flowing down to his toes, and a pair of great dazzling wings to sprout out on the Swede’s shoulders — and didn’t want to miss a single detail of the transformation. But if Heyst was an angel from on high, sent in answer to prayer, he did not betray his heavenly origin by outward signs. So, instead of going on his knees, as he felt inclined to do, Morrison stretched out his hand, which Heyst grasped with formal alacrity and a polite murmur in which “Trifle — delighted — of service,” could just be distinguished.

“Miracles do happen,” thought the awestruck Morrison. To him, as to all of us in the Islands, this wandering Heyst, who didn’t toil or spin visibly, seemed the very last person to be the agent of Providence in an affair concerned with money. The fact of his turning up in Timor or anywhere else was no more wonderful than the settling of a sparrow on one’s window-sill at any given moment. But that he should carry a sum of money in his pocket seemed somehow inconceivable.

So inconceivable that as they were trudging together through the sand of the roadway to the custom-house — another mud hovel — to pay the fine, Morrison broke into a cold sweat, stopped short, and exclaimed in faltering accents:

“I say! You aren’t joking, Heyst?”

“Joking!” Heyst’s blue eyes went hard as he turned them on the discomposd Morrison. “In what way, may I ask?” he continued with austere politeness.

Morrison was abashed.

“Forgive me, Heyst. You must have been sent by God in answer to my prayer. But I have been nearly off my chump for three days with worry; and it suddenly struck me: ‘What if it’s the Devil who has sent him?’”

“I have no connection with the supernatural,” said Heyst graciously, moving on. “Nobody has sent me. I just happened along.”

“I know better,” contradicted Morrison. “I may be unworthy, but I have been heard. I know it. I feel it. For why should you offer — ”

Heyst inclined his head, as from respect for a conviction in which he could not share. But he stuck to his point by muttering that in the presence of an odious fact like this, it was natural —

Later in the day, the fine paid, and the two of them on board the brig, from which the guard had been removed, Morrison who, besides, being a gentleman was also an honest fellow began to talk about repayment. He knew very well his inability to lay by any sum of money. It was partly the fault of circumstances and partly of his temperament; and it would have been very difficult to apportion the responsibility between the two. Even Morrison himself could not say, while confessing to the fact. With a worried air he ascribed it to fatality:

“I don’t know how it is that I’ve never been able to save. It’s some sort of curse. There’s always a bill or two to meet.”

He plunged his hand into his pocket for the famous notebook so well known in the islands, the fetish of his hopes, and fluttered the pages feverishly.

“And yet — look,” he went on. “There it is — more than five thousand dollars owing. Surely that’s something.”

He ceased suddenly. Heyst, who had been all the time trying to look as unconcerned as he could, made reassuring noises in his throat. But Morrison was not only honest. He was honourable, too; and on this stressful day, before this amazing emissary of Providence and in the revulsion of his feelings, he made his great renunciation. He cast off the abiding illusion of his existence.

“No. No. They are not good. I’ll never be able to squeeze them. Never. I’ve been saying for years I would, but I give it up. I never really believed I



could. Don't reckon on that, Heyst. I have robbed you."

Poor Morrison actually laid his head on the cabin table, and remained in that crushed attitude while Heyst talked to him soothingly with the utmost courtesy. The Swede was as much distressed as Morrison; for he understood the other's feelings perfectly. No decent feeling was ever scorned by Heyst. But he was incapable of outward cordiality of manner, and he felt acutely his defect. Consummate politeness is not the right tonic for an emotional collapse. They must have had, both of them, a fairly painful time of it in the cabin of the brig. In the end Morrison, casting desperately for an idea in the blackness of his despondency, hit upon the notion of inviting Heyst to travel with him in his brig and have a share in his trading ventures up to the amount of his loan.

It is characteristic of Heyst's unattached, floating existence that he was in a position to accept this proposal. There is no reason to think that he wanted particularly just then to go poking aboard the brig into all the holes and corners of the Archipelago where Morrison picked up most of his trade. Far from it; but he would have consented to almost any arrangement in order to put an end to the harrowing scene in the cabin. There was at once a great transformation act: Morrison raising his diminished head, and sticking the glass in his eye to look affectionately at Heyst, a bottle being uncorked, and so on. It was agreed that nothing should be said to anyone of this transaction. Morrison, you understand, was not proud of the episode, and he was afraid of being unmercifully chaffed.

"An old bird like me! To let myself be trapped by those damned Portuguese rascals! I should never hear the last of it. We must keep it dark."

From quite other motives, among which his native delicacy was the principal, Heyst was even more anxious to bind himself to silence. A gentleman would naturally shrink from the part of heavenly messenger that Morrison would force upon him. It made Heyst uncomfortable, as it was. And perhaps he did not care that it should be known that he had some means, whatever they might have been — sufficient, at any rate, to enable him to lend money to people. These two had a duet down there, like conspirators in a comic opera, of "Sh — ssh, shssh! Secrecy! Secrecy!" It must have been funny, because they were very serious about it.

And for a time the conspiracy was successful in so far that we all concluded that Heyst was boarding with the good-natured — some said: sponging on the imbecile — Morrison, in his brig. But you know how it is

with all such mysteries. There is always a leak somewhere. Morrison himself, not a perfect vessel by any means, was bursting with gratitude, and under the stress he must have let out something vague — enough to give the island gossip a chance. And you know how kindly the world is in its comments on what it does not understand. A rumour sprang out that Heyst, having obtained some mysterious hold on Morrison, had fastened himself on him and was sucking him dry. Those who had traced these mutters back to their origin were very careful not to believe them. The originator, it seems, was a certain Schomberg, a big, manly, bearded creature of the Teutonic persuasion, with an ungovernable tongue which surely must have worked on a pivot. Whether he was a Lieutenant of the Reserve, as he declared, I don't know. Out there he was by profession a hotel-keeper, first in Bangkok, then somewhere else, and ultimately in Sourabaya. He dragged after him up and down that section of the tropical belt a silent, frightened, little woman with long ringlets, who smiled at one stupidly, showing a blue tooth. I don't know why so many of us patronized his various establishments. He was a noxious ass, and he satisfied his lust for silly gossip at the cost of his customers. It was he who, one evening, as Morrison and Heyst went past the hotel — they were not his regular patrons — whispered mysteriously to the mixed company assembled on the veranda:

“The spider and the fly just gone by, gentlemen.” Then, very important and confidential, his thick paw at the side of his mouth: “We are among ourselves; well, gentlemen, all I can say is, don't you ever get mixed up with that Swede. Don't you ever get caught in his web.”

## CHAPTER THREE

Human nature being what it is, having a silly side to it as well as a mean side, there were not a few who pretended to be indignant on no better authority than a general propensity to believe every evil report; and a good many others who found it simply funny to call Heyst the Spider — behind his back, of course. He was as serenely unconscious of this as of his several other nicknames. But soon people found other things to say of Heyst; not long afterwards he came very much to the fore in larger affairs. He blossomed out into something definite. He filled the public eye as the manager on the spot of the Tropical Belt Coal Company with offices in London and Amsterdam, and other things about it that sounded and looked grandiose. The offices in the two capitals may have consisted — and probably did — of one room in each; but at that distance, out East there, all this had an air. We were more puzzled than dazzled, it is true; but even the most sober-minded among us began to think that there was something in it. The Tesmans appointed agents, a contract for government mail-boats secured, the era of steam beginning for the islands — a great stride forward — Heyst's stride!

And all this sprang from the meeting of the cornered Morrison and of the wandering Heyst, which may or may not have been the direct outcome of a prayer. Morrison was not an imbecile, but he seemed to have got himself into a state of remarkable haziness as to his exact position towards Heyst. For, if Heyst had been sent with money in his pocket by a direct decree of the Almighty in answer to Morrison's prayer then there was no reason for special gratitude, since obviously he could not help himself. But Morrison believed both, in the efficacy of prayer and in the infinite goodness of Heyst. He thanked God with awed sincerity for his mercy, and could not thank Heyst enough for the service rendered as between man and man. In this (highly creditable) tangle of strong feelings Morrison's gratitude insisted on Heyst's partnership in the great discovery. Ultimately we heard that Morrison had gone home through the Suez Canal in order to push the magnificent coal idea personally in London. He parted from his brig and disappeared from our ken; but we heard that he had written a letter or letters to Heyst, saying that London was cold and gloomy; that he did not like either the men or things, that he was "as lonely as a crow in a strange country." In truth, he pined after the Capricorn — I don't mean only the

tropic; I mean the ship too. Finally he went into Dorsetshire to see his people, caught a bad cold, and died with extraordinary precipitation in the bosom of his appalled family. Whether his exertions in the City of London had enfeebled his vitality I don't know; but I believe it was this visit which put life into the coal idea. Be it as it may, the Tropical Belt Coal Company was born very shortly after Morrison, the victim of gratitude and his native climate, had gone to join his forefathers in a Dorsetshire churchyard.

Heyst was immensely shocked. He got the news in the Moluccas through the Tesmans, and then disappeared for a time. It appears that he stayed with a Dutch government doctor in Amboyna, a friend of his who looked after him for a bit in his bungalow. He became visible again rather suddenly, his eyes sunk in his head, and with a sort of guarded attitude, as if afraid someone would reproach him with the death of Morrison.

Naive Heyst! As if anybody would . . . Nobody amongst us had any interest in men who went home. They were all right; they did not count any more. Going to Europe was nearly as final as going to Heaven. It removed a man from the world of hazard and adventure.

As a matter of fact, many of us did not hear of this death till months afterwards — from Schomberg, who disliked Heyst gratuitously and made up a piece of sinister whispered gossip:

“That's what comes of having anything to do with that fellow. He squeezes you dry like a lemon, then chucks you out — sends you home to die. Take warning by Morrison!”

Of course, we laughed at the innkeeper's suggestions of black mystery. Several of us heard that Heyst was prepared to go to Europe himself, to push on his coal enterprise personally; but he never went. It wasn't necessary. The company was formed without him, and his nomination of manager in the tropics came out to him by post.

From the first he had selected Samburan, or Round Island, for the central station. Some copies of the prospectus issued in Europe, having found their way out East, were passed from hand to hand. We greatly admired the map which accompanied them for the edification of the shareholders. On it Samburan was represented as the central spot of the Eastern Hemisphere with its name engraved in enormous capitals. Heavy lines radiated from it in all directions through the tropics, figuring a mysterious and effective star — lines of influence or lines of distance, or something of that sort. Company promoters have an imagination of their own. There's no more

romantic temperament on earth than the temperament of a company promoter. Engineers came out, coolies were imported, bungalows were put up on Samburan, a gallery driven into the hillside, and actually some coal got out.

These manifestations shook the soberest minds. For a time everybody in the islands was talking of the Tropical Belt Coal, and even those who smiled quietly to themselves were only hiding their uneasiness. Oh, yes; it had come, and anybody could see what would be the consequences — the end of the individual trader, smothered under a great invasion of steamers. We could not afford to buy steamers. Not we. And Heyst was the manager.

“You know, Heyst, enchanted Heyst.”

“Oh, come! He has been no better than a loafer around here as far back as any of us can remember.”

“Yes, he said he was looking for facts. Well, he’s got hold of one that will do for all of us,” commented a bitter voice.

“That’s what they call development — and be hanged to it!” muttered another.

Never was Heyst talked about so much in the tropical belt before.

“Isn’t he a Swedish baron or something?”

“He, a baron? Get along with you!”

For my part I haven’t the slightest doubt that he was. While he was still drifting amongst the islands, enigmatical and disregarded like an insignificant ghost, he told me so himself on a certain occasion. It was a long time before he materialized in this alarming way into the destroyer of our little industry — Heyst the Enemy.

It became the fashion with a good many to speak of Heyst as the Enemy. He was very concrete, very visible now. He was rushing all over the Archipelago, jumping in and out of local mail-packets as if they had been tram-cars, here, there, and everywhere — organizing with all his might. This was no mooning about. This was business. And this sudden display of purposeful energy shook the incredulity of the most sceptical more than any scientific demonstration of the value of these coal-outcrops could have done. It was impressive. Schomberg was the only one who resisted the infection. Big, manly in a portly style, and profusely bearded, with a glass of beer in his thick paw, he would approach some table where the topic of the hour was being discussed, would listen for a moment, and then come out with his invariable declaration:

“All this is very well, gentlemen; but he can’t throw any of his coal-dust in my eyes. There’s nothing in it. Why, there can’t be anything in it. A fellow like that for manager? Phoo!”

Was it the clairvoyance of imbecile hatred, or mere stupid tenacity of opinion, which ends sometimes by scoring against the world in a most astonishing manner? Most of us can remember instances of triumphant folly; and that ass Schomberg triumphed. The T.B.C. Company went into liquidation, as I began by telling you. The Tesmans washed their hands of it. The Government cancelled those famous contracts, the talk died out, and presently it was remarked here and there that Heyst had faded completely away. He had become invisible, as in those early days when he used to make a bolt clear out of sight in his attempts to break away from the enchantment of “these isles,” either in the direction of New Guinea or in the direction of Saigon — to cannibals or to cafes. The enchanted Heyst! Had he at last broken the spell? Had he died? We were too indifferent to wonder overmuch. You see we had on the whole liked him well enough. And liking is not sufficient to keep going the interest one takes in a human being. With hatred, apparently, it is otherwise. Schomberg couldn’t forget Heyst. The keen, manly Teutonic creature was a good hater. A fool often is.

“Good evening, gentlemen. Have you got everything you want? So! Good! You see? What was I always telling you? Aha! There was nothing in it. I knew it. But what I would like to know is what became of that — Swede.”

He put a stress on the word Swede as if it meant scoundrel. He detested Scandinavians generally. Why? Goodness only knows. A fool like that is unfathomable. He continued:

“It’s five months or more since I have spoken to anybody who has seen him.”

As I have said, we were not much interested; but Schomberg, of course, could not understand that. He was grotesquely dense. Whenever three people came together in his hotel, he took good care that Heyst should be with them.

“I hope the fellow did not go and drown himself,” he would add with a comical earnestness that ought to have made us shudder; only our crowd was superficial, and did not apprehend the psychology of this pious hope.

“Why? Heyst isn’t in debt to you for drinks is he?” somebody asked him once with shallow scorn.

“Drinks! Oh, dear no!”

The innkeeper was not mercenary. Teutonic temperament seldom is. But he put on a sinister expression to tell us that Heyst had not paid perhaps three visits altogether to his “establishment.” This was Heyst’s crime, for which Schomberg wished him nothing less than a long and tormented existence. Observe the Teutonic sense of proportion and nice forgiving temper.

At last, one afternoon, Schomberg was seen approaching a group of his customers. He was obviously in high glee. He squared his manly chest with great importance.

“Gentlemen, I have news of him. Who? why, that Swede. He is still on Samburan. He’s never been away from it. The company is gone, the engineers are gone, the clerks are gone, the coolies are gone, everything’s gone; but there he sticks. Captain Davidson, coming by from the westward, saw him with his own eyes. Something white on the wharf, so he steamed in and went ashore in a small boat. Heyst, right enough. Put a book into his pocket, always very polite. Been strolling on the wharf and reading. ‘I remain in possession here,’ he told Captain Davidson. What I want to know is what he gets to eat there. A piece of dried fish now and then — what? That’s coming down pretty low for a man who turned up his nose at my table d’hôte!”

He winked with immense malice. A bell started ringing, and he led the way to the dining-room as if into a temple, very grave, with the air of a benefactor of mankind. His ambition was to feed it at a profitable price, and his delight was to talk of it behind its back. It was very characteristic of him to gloat over the idea of Heyst having nothing decent to eat.

## CHAPTER FOUR

A few of us who were sufficiently interested went to Davidson for details. These were not many. He told us that he passed to the north of Samburan on purpose to see what was going on. At first, it looked as if that side of the island had been altogether abandoned. This was what he expected. Presently, above the dense mass of vegetation that Samburan presents to view, he saw the head of the flagstaff without a flag. Then, while steaming across the slight indentation which for a time was known officially as Black Diamond Bay, he made out with his glass the white figure on the coaling-wharf. It could be no one but Heyst.

“I thought for certain he wanted to be taken off, so I steamed in. He made no signs. However, I lowered a boat. I could not see another living being anywhere. Yes. He had a book in his hand. He looked exactly as we have always seen him — very neat, white shoes, cork helmet. He explained to me that he had always had a taste for solitude. It was the first I ever heard of it, I told him. He only smiled. What could I say? He isn’t the sort of man one can speak familiarly to. There’s something in him. One doesn’t care to.

“‘But what’s the object? Are you thinking of keeping possession of the mine?’ I asked him.

“‘Something of the sort,’ he says. ‘I am keeping hold.’

“‘But all this is as dead as Julius Caesar,’ I cried. ‘In fact, you have nothing worth holding on to, Heyst.’

“‘Oh, I am done with facts,’ says he, putting his hand to his helmet sharply with one of his short bows.”

Thus dismissed, Davidson went on board his ship, swung her out, and as he was steaming away he watched from the bridge Heyst walking shoreward along the wharf. He marched into the long grass and vanished — all but the top of his white cork helmet, which seemed to swim in a green sea. Then that too disappeared, as if it had sunk into the living depths of the tropical vegetation, which is more jealous of men’s conquests than the ocean, and which was about to close over the last vestiges of the liquidated Tropical Belt Coal Company — A. Heyst, manager in the East.

Davidson, a good, simple fellow in his way, was strangely affected. It is to be noted that he knew very little of Heyst. He was one of those whom Heyst’s finished courtesy of attitude and intonation most strongly disconcerted. He himself was a fellow of fine feeling, I think, though of



course he had no more polish than the rest of us. We were naturally a hail-fellow-well-met crowd, with standards of our own — no worse, I daresay, than other people's; but polish was not one of them. Davidson's fineness was real enough to alter the course of the steamer he commanded. Instead of passing to the south of Samburan, he made it his practice to take the passage along the north shore, within about a mile of the wharf.

"He can see us if he likes to see us," remarked Davidson. Then he had an afterthought: "I say! I hope he won't think I am intruding, eh?"

We reassured him on the point of correct behaviour. The sea is open to all.

This slight deviation added some ten miles to Davidson's round trip, but as that was sixteen hundred miles it did not matter much.

"I have told my owner of it," said the conscientious commander of the Sissie.

His owner had a face like an ancient lemon. He was small and wizened — which was strange, because generally a Chinaman, as he grows in prosperity, puts on inches of girth and stature. To serve a Chinese firm is not so bad. Once they become convinced you deal straight by them, their confidence becomes unlimited. You can do no wrong. So Davidson's old Chinaman squeaked hurriedly:

"All right, all right, all right. You do what you like, captain — "

And there was an end of the matter; not altogether, though. From time to time the Chinaman used to ask Davidson about the white man. He was still there, eh?

"I never see him," Davidson had to confess to his owner, who would peer at him silently through round, horn-rimmed spectacles, several sizes too large for his little old face. "I never see him."

To me, on occasions he would say:

"I haven't a doubt he's there. He hides. It's very unpleasant." Davidson was a little vexed with Heyst. "Funny thing," he went on. "Of all the people I speak to, nobody ever asks after him but that Chinaman of mine — and Schomberg," he added after a while.

Yes, Schomberg, of course. He was asking everybody about everything, and arranging the information into the most scandalous shape his imagination could invent. From time to time he would step up, his blinking, cushioned eyes, his thick lips, his very chestnut beard, looking full of malice.

“Evening, gentlemen. Have you got all you want? So! Good! Well, I am told the jungle has choked the very sheds in Black Diamond Bay. Fact. He’s a hermit in the wilderness now. But what can this manager get to eat there? It beats me.”

Sometimes a stranger would inquire with natural curiosity:

“Who? What manager?”

“Oh, a certain Swede,” — with a sinister emphasis, as if he were saying “a certain brigand.” “Well known here. He’s turned hermit from shame. That’s what the devil does when he’s found out.”

Hermit. This was the latest of the more or less witty labels applied to Heyst during his aimless pilgrimage in this section of the tropical belt, where the inane clacking of Schomberg’s tongue vexed our ears.

But apparently Heyst was not a hermit by temperament. The sight of his land was not invincibly odious to him. We must believe this, since for some reason or other he did come out from his retreat for a while. Perhaps it was only to see whether there were any letters for him at the Tesmans. I don’t know. No one knows. But this reappearance shows that his detachment from the world was not complete. And incompleteness of any sort leads to trouble. Axel Heyst ought not to have cared for his letters — or whatever it was that brought him out after something more than a year and a half in Samburan. But it was of no use. He had not the hermit’s vocation! That was the trouble, it seems.

Be this as it may, he suddenly reappeared in the world, broad chest, bald forehead, long moustaches, polite manner, and all — the complete Heyst, even to the kindly sunken eyes on which there still rested the shadow of Morrison’s death. Naturally, it was Davidson who had given him a lift out of his forsaken island. There were no other opportunities, unless some native craft were passing by — a very remote and unsatisfactory chance to wait for. Yes, he came out with Davidson, to whom he volunteered the statement that it was only for a short time — a few days, no more. He meant to go back to Samburan.

Davidson expressing his horror and incredulity of such foolishness, Heyst explained that when the company came into being he had his few belongings sent out from Europe.

To Davidson, as to any of us, the idea of Heyst, the wandering drifting, unattached Heyst, having any belongings of the sort that can furnish a house

was startlingly novel. It was grotesquely fantastic. It was like a bird owning real property.

“Belongings? Do you mean chairs and tables?” Davidson asked with unconcealed astonishment.

Heyst did mean that. “My poor father died in London. It has been all stored there ever since,” he explained.

“For all these years?” exclaimed Davidson, thinking how long we all had known Heyst flitting from tree to tree in a wilderness.

“Even longer,” said Heyst, who had understood very well.

This seemed to imply that he had been wandering before he came under our observation. In what regions? And what early age? Mystery. Perhaps he was a bird that had never had a nest.

“I left school early,” he remarked once to Davidson, on the passage. “It was in England. A very good school. I was not a shining success there.”

The confessions of Heyst. Not one of us — with the probable exception of Morrison, who was dead — had ever heard so much of his history. It looks as if the experience of hermit life had the power to loosen one’s tongue, doesn’t it?

During that memorable passage, in the Sissie, which took about two days, he volunteered other hints — for you could not call it information — about his history. And Davidson was interested. He was interested not because the hints were exciting but because of that innate curiosity about our fellows which is a trait of human nature. Davidson’s existence, too, running the Sissie along the Java Sea and back again, was distinctly monotonous and, in a sense, lonely. He never had any sort of company on board. Native deck-passengers in plenty, of course, but never a white man, so the presence of Heyst for two days must have been a godsend. Davidson was telling us all about it afterwards. Heyst said that his father had written a lot of books. He was a philosopher.

“Seems to me he must have been something of a crank, too,” was Davidson’s comment. “Apparently he had quarrelled with his people in Sweden. Just the sort of father you would expect Heyst to have. Isn’t he a bit of a crank himself? He told me that directly his father died he lit out into the wide world on his own, and had been on the move till he fetched up against this famous coal business. Fits the son of the father somehow, don’t you think?”

For the rest, Heyst was as polite as ever. He offered to pay for his passage; but when Davidson refused to hear of it he seized him heartily by the hand, gave one of his courtly bows, and declared that he was touched by his friendly proceedings.

“I am not alluding to this trifling amount which you decline to take,” he went on, giving a shake to Davidson’s hand. “But I am touched by your humanity.” Another shake. “Believe me, I am profoundly aware of having been an object of it.” Final shake of the hand. All this meant that Heyst understood in a proper sense the little Sissie’s periodic appearance in sight of his hermitage.

“He’s a genuine gentleman,” Davidson said to us. “I was really sorry when he went ashore.”

We asked him where he had left Heyst.

“Why, in Sourabaya — where else?”

The Tesmans had their principal counting-house in Sourabaya. There had long existed a connection between Heyst and the Tesmans. The incongruity of a hermit having agents did not strike us, nor yet the absurdity of a forgotten cast-off, derelict manager of a wrecked, collapsed, vanished enterprise, having business to attend to. We said Sourabaya, of course, and took it for granted that he would stay with one of the Tesmans. One of us even wondered what sort of reception he would get; for it was known that Julius Tesman was unreasonably bitter about the Tropical Belt Coal fiasco. But Davidson set us right. It was nothing of the kind. Heyst went to stay in Schomberg’s hotel, going ashore in the hotel launch. Not that Schomberg would think of sending his launch alongside a mere trader like the Sissie. But she had been meeting a coasting mail-packet, and had been signalled to. Schomberg himself was steering her.

“You should have seen Schomberg’s eyes bulge out when Heyst jumped in with an ancient brown leather bag!” said Davidson. “He pretended not to know who it was — at first, anyway. I didn’t go ashore with them. We didn’t stay more than a couple of hours altogether. Landed two thousand coconuts and cleared out. I have agreed to pick him up again on my next trip in twenty days’ time.”

## CHAPTER FIVE

Davidson happened to be two days late on his return trip; no great matter, certainly, but he made a point of going ashore at once, during the hottest hour of the afternoon, to look for Heyst. Schomberg's hotel stood back in an extensive enclosure containing a garden, some large trees, and, under their spreading boughs, a detached "hall available for concerts and other performances," as Schomberg worded it in his advertisements. Torn, and fluttering bills, intimating in heavy red capitals CONCERTS EVERY NIGHT, were stuck on the brick pillars on each side of the gateway.

The walk had been long and confoundedly sunny. Davidson stood wiping his wet neck and face on what Schomberg called "the piazza." Several doors opened on to it, but all the screens were down. Not a soul was in sight, not even a China boy — nothing but a lot of painted iron chairs and tables. Solitude, shade, and gloomy silence — and a faint, treacherous breeze which came from under the trees and quite unexpectedly caused the melting Davidson to shiver slightly — the little shiver of the tropics which in Sourabaya, especially, often means fever and the hospital to the incautious white man.

The prudent Davidson sought shelter in the nearest darkened room. In the artificial dusk, beyond the levels of shrouded billiard-tables, a white form heaved up from two chairs on which it had been extended. The middle of the day, table d'hôte tiffin once over, was Schomberg's easy time. He lounged out, portly, deliberate, on the defensive, the great fair beard like a cuirass over his manly chest. He did not like Davidson, never a very faithful client of his. He hit a bell on one of the tables as he went by, and asked in a distant, Officer-in-Reserve manner:

"You desire?"

The good Davidson, still sponging his wet neck, declared with simplicity that he had come to fetch away Heyst, as agreed.

"Not here!"

A Chinaman appeared in response to the bell. Schomberg turned to him very severely:

"Take the gentleman's order."

Davidson had to be going. Couldn't wait — only begged that Heyst should be informed that the Sissie would leave at midnight.

"Not — here, I am telling you!"

Davidson slapped his thigh in concern.

"Dear me! Hospital, I suppose." A natural enough surmise in a very feverish locality.

The Lieutenant of the Reserve only pursed up his mouth and raised his eyebrows without looking at him. It might have meant anything, but Davidson dismissed the hospital idea with confidence. However, he had to get hold of Heyst between this and midnight:

"He has been staying here?" he asked.

"Yes, he was staying here."

"Can you tell me where he is now?" Davidson went on placidly. Within himself he was beginning to grow anxious, having developed the affection of a self-appointed protector towards Heyst. The answer he got was:

"Can't tell. It's none of my business," accompanied by majestic oscillations of the hotel-keeper's head, hinting at some awful mystery.

Davidson was placidity itself. It was his nature. He did not betray his sentiments, which were not favourable to Schomberg.

"I am sure to find out at the Tesmans' office," he thought. But it was a very hot hour, and if Heyst was down at the port he would have learned already that the Sissie was in. It was even possible that Heyst had already gone on board, where he could enjoy a coolness denied to the town. Davidson, being stout, was much preoccupied with coolness and inclined to immobility. He lingered awhile, as if irresolute. Schomberg, at the door, looking out, affected perfect indifference. He could not keep it up, though. Suddenly he turned inward and asked with brusque rage:

"You wanted to see him?"

"Why, yes," said Davidson. "We agreed to meet — "

"Don't you bother. He doesn't care about that now."

"Doesn't he?"

"Well, you can judge for yourself. He isn't here, is he? You take my word for it. Don't you bother about him. I am advising you as a friend."

"Thank you," said, Davidson, inwardly startled at the savage tone. "I think I will sit down for a moment and have a drink, after all."

This was not what Schomberg had expected to hear. He called brutally:

"Boy!"

The Chinaman approached, and after referring him to the white man by a nod the hotel-keeper departed, muttering to himself. Davidson heard him gnash his teeth as he went.

Davidson sat alone with the billiard-tables as if there had been not a soul staying in the hotel. His placidity was so genuine that he was not unduly, fretting himself over the absence of Heyst, or the mysterious manners Schomberg had treated him to. He was considering these things in his own fairly shrewd way. Something had happened; and he was loath to go away to investigate, being restrained by a presentiment that somehow enlightenment would come to him there. A poster of CONCERTS EVERY EVENING, like those on the gate, but in a good state of preservation, hung on the wall fronting him. He looked at it idly and was struck by the fact — then not so very common — that it was a ladies' orchestra; "Zangiacomo's eastern tour — eighteen performers." The poster stated that they had had the honour of playing their select repertoire before various colonial excellencies, also before pashas, sheiks, chiefs, H. H. the Sultan of Mascate, etc., etc.

Davidson felt sorry for the eighteen lady-performers. He knew what that sort of life was like, the sordid conditions and brutal incidents of such tours led by such Zangiacomos who often were anything but musicians by profession. While he was staring at the poster, a door somewhere at his back opened, and a woman came in who was looked upon as Schomberg's wife, no doubt with truth. As somebody remarked cynically once, she was too unattractive to be anything else. The opinion that he treated her abominably was based on her frightened expression. Davidson lifted his hat to her. Mrs. Schomberg gave him an inclination of her sallow head and incontinently sat down behind a sort of raised counter, facing the door, with a mirror and rows of bottles at her back. Her hair was very elaborately done with two ringlets on the left side of her scraggy neck; her dress was of silk, and she had come on duty for the afternoon. For some reason or other Schomberg exacted this from her, though she added nothing to the fascinations of the place. She sat there in the smoke and noise, like an enthroned idol, smiling stupidly over the billiards from time to time, speaking to no one, and no one speaking to her. Schomberg himself took no more interest in her than may be implied in a sudden and totally unmotivated scowl. Otherwise the very Chinamen ignored her existence.

She had interrupted Davidson in his reflections. Being alone with her, her silence and open-eyed immobility made him uncomfortable. He was easily sorry for people. It seemed rude not to take any notice of her. He said, in allusion to the poster:

“Are you having these people in the house?”

She was so unused to being addressed by customers that at the sound of his voice she jumped in her seat. Davidson was telling us afterwards that she jumped exactly like a figure made of wood, without losing her rigid immobility. She did not even move her eyes; but she answered him freely, though her very lips seemed made of wood.

“They stayed here over a month. They are gone now. They played every evening.”

“Pretty good, were they?”

To this she said nothing; and as she kept on staring fixedly in front of her, her silence disconcerted Davidson. It looked as if she had not heard him — which was impossible. Perhaps she drew the line of speech at the expression of opinions. Schomberg might have trained her, for domestic reasons, to keep them to herself. But Davidson felt in honour obliged to converse; so he said, putting his own interpretation on this surprising silence:

“I see — not much account. Such bands hardly ever are. An Italian lot, Mrs. Schomberg, to judge by the name of the boss?”

She shook her head negatively.

“No. He is a German really; only he dyes his hair and beard black for business. Zangiacomo is his business name.”

“That’s a curious fact,” said Davidson. His head being full of Heyst, it occurred to him that she might be aware of other facts. This was a very amazing discovery to anyone who looked at Mrs. Schomberg. Nobody had ever suspected her of having a mind. I mean even a little of it, I mean any at all. One was inclined to think of her as an It — an automaton, a very plain dummy, with an arrangement for bowing the head at times and smiling stupidly now and then. Davidson viewed her profile with a flattened nose, a hollow cheek, and one staring, unwinking, goggle eye. He asked himself: Did that speak just now? Will it speak again? It was as exciting, for the mere wonder of it, as trying to converse with a mechanism. A smile played about the fat features of Davidson; the smile of a man making an amusing experiment. He spoke again to her:

“But the other members of that orchestra were real Italians, were they not?”

Of course, he didn’t care. He wanted to see whether the mechanism would work again. It did. It said they were not. They were of all sorts,



apparently. It paused, with the one goggle eye immovably gazing down the whole length of the room and through the door opening on to the "piazza." It paused, then went on in the same low pitch:

"There was even one English girl."

"Poor devil!" — said Davidson, "I suppose these women are not much better than slaves really. Was that fellow with the dyed beard decent in his way?"

The mechanism remained silent. The sympathetic soul of Davidson drew its own conclusions.

"Beastly life for these women!" he said. "When you say an English girl, Mrs. Schomberg, do you really mean a young girl? Some of these orchestra girls are no chicks."

"Young enough," came the low voice out of Mrs. Schomberg's unmoved physiognomy.

Davidson, encouraged, remarked that he was sorry for her. He was easily sorry for people.

"Where did they go to from here?" he asked.

"She did not go with them. She ran away."

This was the pronouncement Davidson obtained next. It introduced a new sort of interest.

"Well! Well!" he exclaimed placidly; and then, with the air of a man who knows life: "Who with?" he inquired with assurance.

Mrs. Schomberg's immobility gave her an appearance of listening intently. Perhaps she was really listening; but Schomberg must have been finishing his sleep in some distant part of the house. The silence was profound, and lasted long enough to become startling. Then, enthroned above Davidson, she whispered at last:

"That friend of yours."

"Oh, you know I am here looking for a friend," said Davidson hopefully. "Won't you tell me — "

"I've told you"

"Eh?"

A mist seemed to roll away from before Davidson's eyes, disclosing something he could not believe.

"You can't mean it!" he cried. "He's not the man for it." But the last words came out in a faint voice. Mrs. Schomberg never moved her head the

least bit. Davidson, after the shock which made him sit up, went slack all over.

“Heyst! Such a perfect gentleman!” he exclaimed weakly.

Mrs. Schomberg did not seem to have heard him. This startling fact did not tally somehow with the idea Davidson had of Heyst. He never talked of women, he never seemed to think of them, or to remember that they existed; and then all at once — like this! Running off with a casual orchestra girl!

“You might have knocked me down with a feather,” Davidson told us some time afterwards.

By then he was taking an indulgent view of both the parties to that amazing transaction. First of all, on reflection, he was by no means certain that it prevented Heyst from being a perfect gentleman, as before. He confronted our open grins or quiet smiles with a serious round face. Heyst had taken the girl away to Samburan; and that was no joking matter. The loneliness, the ruins of the spot, had impressed Davidson’s simple soul. They were incompatible with the frivolous comments of people who had not seen it. That black jetty, sticking out of the jungle into the empty sea; these roof-ridges of deserted houses peeping dismally above the long grass! Ough! The gigantic and funereal blackboard sign of the Tropical Belt Coal Company, still emerging from a wild growth of bushes like an inscription stuck above a grave figured by the tall heap of unsold coal at the shore end of the wharf, added to the general desolation.

Thus was the sensitive Davidson. The girl must have been miserable indeed to follow such a strange man to such a spot. Heyst had, no doubt, told her the truth. He was a gentleman. But no words could do justice to the conditions of life on Samburan. A desert island was nothing to it. Moreover, when you were cast away on a desert island — why, you could not help yourself; but to expect a fiddle-playing girl out of an ambulant ladies’ orchestra to remain content there for a day, for one single day, was inconceivable. She would be frightened at the first sight of it. She would scream.

The capacity for sympathy in these stout, placid men! Davidson was stirred to the depths; and it was easy to see that it was about Heyst that he was concerned. We asked him if he had passed that way lately.

“Oh, yes. I always do — about half a mile off.”

“Seen anybody about?”

“No, not a soul. Not a shadow.”

“Did you blow your whistle?”

“Blow the whistle? You think I would do such a thing?”

He rejected the mere possibility of such an unwarrantable intrusion. Wonderfully delicate fellow, Davidson!

“Well, but how do you know that they are there?” he was naturally asked.

Heyst had entrusted Mrs. Schomberg with a message for Davidson — a few lines in pencil on a scrap of crumpled paper. It was to the effect: that an unforeseen necessity was driving him away before the appointed time. He begged Davidson’s indulgence for the apparent discourtesy. The woman of the house — meaning Mrs. Schomberg — would give him the facts, though unable to explain them, of course.

“What was there to explain?” wondered Davidson dubiously.

“He took a fancy to that fiddle-playing girl, and — ”

“And she to him, apparently,” I suggested.

“Wonderfully quick work,” reflected Davidson. “What do you think will come of it?”

“Repentance, I should say. But how is it that Mrs. Schomberg has been selected for a confidante?”

For indeed a waxwork figure would have seemed more useful than that woman whom we all were accustomed to see sitting elevated above the two billiard-tables — without expression, without movement, without voice, without sight.

“Why, she helped the girl to bolt,” said Davidson turning at me his innocent eyes, rounded by the state of constant amazement in which this affair had left him, like those shocks of terror or sorrow which sometimes leave their victim afflicted by nervous trembling. It looked as though he would never get over it.

“Mrs. Schomberg jerked Heyst’s note, twisted like a pipe-light, into my lap while I sat there unsuspecting,” Davidson went on. “Directly I had recovered my senses, I asked her what on earth she had to do with it that Heyst should leave it with her. And then, behaving like a painted image rather than a live woman, she whispered, just loud enough for me to hear:

“I helped them. I got her things together, tied them up in my own shawl, and threw them into the compound out of a back window. I did it.”

“That woman that you would say hadn’t the pluck to lift her little finger!” marvelled Davidson in his quiet, slightly panting voice. “What do you think of that?”

I thought she must have had some interest of her own to serve. She was too lifeless to be suspected of impulsive compassion. It was impossible to think that Heyst had bribed her. Whatever means he had, he had not the means to do that. Or could it be that she was moved by that disinterested passion for delivering a woman to a man which in respectable spheres is called matchmaking? — a highly irregular example of it!

“It must have been a very small bundle,” remarked Davidson further.

“I imagine the girl must have been specially attractive,” I said.

“I don’t know. She was miserable. I don’t suppose it was more than a little linen and a couple of those white frocks they wear on the platform.”

Davidson pursued his own train of thought. He supposed that such a thing had never been heard of in the history of the tropics. For where could you find anyone to steal a girl out of an orchestra? No doubt fellows here and there took a fancy to some pretty one — but it was not for running away with her. Oh dear no! It needed a lunatic like Heyst.

“Only think what it means,” wheezed Davidson, imaginative under his invincible placidity. “Just only try to think! Brooding alone on Samburan has upset his brain. He never stopped to consider, or he couldn’t have done it. No sane man . . . How is a thing like that to go on? What’s he going to do with her in the end? It’s madness.”

“You say that he’s mad. Schomberg tells us that he must be starving on his island; so he may end yet by eating her,” I suggested.

Mrs. Schomberg had had no time to enter into details, Davidson told us. Indeed, the wonder was that they had been left alone so long. The drowsy afternoon was slipping by. Footsteps and voices resounded on the veranda — I beg pardon, the piazza; the scraping of chairs, the ping of a smitten bell. Customers were turning up. Mrs. Schomberg was begging Davidson hurriedly, but without looking at him, to say nothing to anyone, when on a half-uttered word her nervous whisper was cut short. Through a small inner door Schomberg came in, his hair brushed, his beard combed neatly, but his eyelids still heavy from his nap. He looked with suspicion at Davidson, and even glanced at his wife; but he was baffled by the natural placidity of the one and the acquired habit of immobility in the other.

“Have you sent out the drinks?” he asked surlily.

She did not open her lips, because just then the head boy appeared with a loaded tray, on his way out. Schomberg went to the door and greeted the customers outside, but did not join them. He remained blocking half the

doorway, with his back to the room, and was still there when Davidson, after sitting still for a while, rose to go. At the noise he made Schomberg turned his head, watched him lift his hat to Mrs. Schomberg and receive her wooden bow accompanied by a stupid grin, and then looked away. He was loftily dignified. Davidson stopped at the door, deep in his simplicity.

“I am sorry you won’t tell me anything about my friend’s absence,” he said. “My friend Heyst, you know. I suppose the only course for me now is to make inquiries down at the port. I shall hear something there, I don’t doubt.”

“Make inquiries of the devil!” replied Schomberg in a hoarse mutter.

Davidson’s purpose in addressing the hotel-keeper had been mainly to make Mrs. Schomberg safe from suspicion; but he would fain have heard something more of Heyst’s exploit from another point of view. It was a shrewd try. It was successful in a rather startling way, because the hotel-keeper’s point of view was horribly abusive. All of a sudden, in the same hoarse sinister tone, he proceeded to call Heyst many names, of which “pig-dog” was not the worst, with such vehemence that he actually choked himself. Profiting from the pause, Davidson, whose temperament could withstand worse shocks, remonstrated in an undertone:

“It’s unreasonable to get so angry as that. Even if he had run off with your cash-box — ”

The big hotel-keeper bent down and put his infuriated face close to Davidson’s.

“My cash-box! My — he — look here, Captain Davidson! He ran off with a girl. What do I care for the girl? The girl is nothing to me.”

He shot out an infamous word which made Davidson start. That’s what the girl was; and he reiterated the assertion that she was nothing to him. What he was concerned for was the good name of his house. Wherever he had been established, he had always had “artist parties” staying in his house. One recommended him to the others; but what would happen now, when it got about that leaders ran the risk in his house — his house — of losing members of their troupe? And just now, when he had spent seven hundred and thirty-four guilders in building a concert-hall in his compound. Was that a thing to do in a respectable hotel? The cheek, the indecency, the impudence, the atrocity! Vagabond, impostor, swindler, ruffian, schwein-hund!

He had seized Davidson by a button of his coat, detaining him in the doorway, and exactly in the line of Mrs. Schomberg's stony gaze. Davidson stole a glance in that direction and thought of making some sort of reassuring sign to her, but she looked so bereft of senses, and almost of life, perched up there, that it seemed not worth while. He disengaged his button with firm placidity. Thereupon, with a last stifled curse, Schomberg vanished somewhere within, to try and compose his spirits in solitude. Davidson stepped out on the veranda. The party of customers there had become aware of the explosive interlude in the doorway. Davidson knew one of these men, and nodded to him in passing; but his acquaintance called out:

"Isn't he in a filthy temper? He's been like that ever since."

The speaker laughed aloud, while all the others sat smiling. Davidson stopped.

"Yes, rather." His feelings were, he told us, those of bewildered resignation; but of course that was no more visible to the others than the emotions of a turtle when it withdraws into its shell.

"It seems unreasonable," he murmured thoughtfully.

"Oh, but they had a scrap!" the other said.

"What do you mean? Was there a fight! — a fight with Heyst?" asked Davidson, much perturbed, if somewhat incredulous.

"Heyst? No, these two — the bandmaster, the fellow who's taking these women about and our Schomberg. Signor Zangiacomo ran amuck in the morning, and went for our worthy friend. I tell you, they were rolling on the floor together on this very veranda, after chasing each other all over the house, doors slamming, women screaming, seventeen of them, in the dining-room; Chinamen up the trees. Hey, John? You climb tree to see the fight, eh?"

The boy, almond-eyed and impassive, emitted a scornful grunt, finished wiping the table, and withdrew.

"That's what it was — a real, go-as-you-please scrap. And Zangiacomo began it. Oh, here's Schomberg. Say, Schomberg, didn't he fly at you, when the girl was missed, because it was you who insisted that the artists should go about the audience during the interval?"

Schomberg had reappeared in the doorway. He advanced. His bearing was stately, but his nostrils were extraordinarily expanded, and he controlled his voice with apparent effort.

“Certainly. That was only business. I quoted him special terms and all for your sake, gentlemen. I was thinking of my regular customers. There’s nothing to do in the evenings in this town. I think, gentlemen, you were all pleased at the opportunity of hearing a little good music; and where’s the harm of offering a grenadine, or what not, to a lady artist? But that fellow — that Swede — he got round the girl. He got round all the people out here. I’ve been watching him for years. You remember how he got round Morrison.”

He changed front abruptly, as if on parade, and marched off. The customers at the table exchanged glances silently. Davidson’s attitude was that of a spectator. Schomberg’s moody pacing of the billiard-room could be heard on the veranda.

“And the funniest part is,” resumed the man who had been speaking before — an English clerk in a Dutch house — ”the funniest part is that before nine o’clock that same morning those two were driving together in a gharry down to the port, to look for Heyst and the girl. I saw them rushing around making inquiries. I don’t know what they would have done to the girl, but they seemed quite ready to fall upon your Heyst, Davidson, and kill him on the quay.”

He had never, he said, seen anything so queer. Those two investigators working feverishly to the same end were glaring at each other with surprising ferocity. In hatred and mistrust they entered a steam-launch, and went flying from ship to ship all over the harbour, causing no end of sensation. The captains of vessels, coming on shore later in the day, brought tales of a strange invasion, and wanted to know who were the two offensive lunatics in a steam-launch, apparently after a man and a girl, and telling a story of which one could make neither head nor tail. Their reception by the roadstead was generally unsympathetic, even to the point of the mate of an American ship bundling them out over the rail with unseemly precipitation.

Meantime Heyst and the girl were a good few miles away, having gone in the night on board one of the Tesman schooners bound to the eastward. This was known afterwards from the Javanese boatmen whom Heyst hired for the purpose at three o’clock in the morning. The Tesman schooner had sailed at daylight with the usual land breeze, and was probably still in sight in the offing at the time. However, the two pursuers after their experience with the American mate, made for the shore. On landing, they had another violent row in the German language. But there was no second fight; and

finally, with looks of fierce animosity, they got together into a gharry — obviously with the frugal view of sharing expenses — and drove away, leaving an astonished little crowd of Europeans and natives on the quay.

After hearing this wondrous tale, Davidson went away from the hotel veranda, which was filling with Schomberg's regular customers. Heyst's escapade was the general topic of conversation. Never before had that unaccountable individual been the cause of so much gossip, he judged. No! Not even in the beginnings of the Tropical Belt Coal Company when becoming for a moment a public character was he the object of a silly criticism and unintelligent envy for every vagabond and adventurer in the islands. Davidson concluded that people liked to discuss that sort of scandal better than any other.

I asked him if he believed that this was such a great scandal after all.

"Heavens, no!" said that excellent man who, himself, was incapable of any impropriety of conduct. "But it isn't a thing I would have done myself; I mean even if I had not been married."

There was no implied condemnation in the statement; rather something like regret. Davidson shared my suspicion that this was in its essence the rescue of a distressed human being. Not that we were two romantics, tingeing the world to the hue of our temperament, but that both of us had been acute enough to discover a long time ago that Heyst was.

"I shouldn't have had the pluck," he continued. "I see a thing all round, as it were; but Heyst doesn't, or else he would have been scared. You don't take a woman into a desert jungle without being made sorry for it sooner or later, in one way or another; and Heyst being a gentleman only makes it worse."



## CHAPTER SIX

We said no more about Heyst on that occasion, and it so happened that I did not meet Davidson again for some three months. When we did come together, almost the first thing he said to me was:

“I’ve seen him.”

Before I could exclaim, he assured me that he had taken no liberty, that he had not intruded. He was called in. Otherwise he would not have dreamed of breaking in upon Heyst’s privacy.

“I am certain you wouldn’t,” I assured him, concealing my amusement at his wonderful delicacy. He was the most delicate man that ever took a small steamer to and fro among the islands. But his humanity, which was not less strong and praiseworthy, had induced him to take his steamer past Samburan wharf (at an average distance of a mile) every twenty-three days — exactly. Davidson was delicate, humane, and regular.

“Heyst called you in?” I asked, interested.

Yes, Heyst had called him in as he was going by on his usual date. Davidson was examining the shore through his glasses with his unwearied and punctual humanity as he steamed past Samburan.

I saw a man in white. It could only have been Heyst. He had fastened some sort of enormous flag to a bamboo pole, and was waving it at the end of the old wharf.

Davidson didn’t like to take his steamer alongside — for fear of being indiscreet, I suppose; but he steered close inshore, stopped his engines, and lowered a boat. He went himself in that boat, which was manned, of course, by his Malay seamen.

Heyst, when he saw the boat pulling towards him, dropped his signalling-pole; and when Davidson arrived, he was kneeling down engaged busily in unfastening the flag from it.

“Was there anything wrong?” I inquired, Davidson having paused in his narrative and my curiosity being naturally aroused. You must remember that Heyst as the Archipelago knew him was not — what shall I say — was not a signalling sort of man.

“The very words that came out of my mouth,” said Davidson, “before I laid the boat against the piles. I could not help it!”

Heyst got up from his knees and began carefully folding up the flag thing, which struck Davidson as having the dimensions of a blanket.

“No, nothing wrong,” he cried. His white teeth flashed agreeably below the coppery horizontal bar of his long moustaches.

I don’t know whether it was his delicacy or his obesity which prevented Davidson from clambering upon the wharf. He stood up in the boat, and, above him, Heyst stooped low with urbane smiles, thanking him and apologizing for the liberty, exactly in his usual manner. Davidson had expected some change in the man, but there was none. Nothing in him betrayed the momentous fact that within that jungle there was a girl, a performer in a ladies’ orchestra, whom he had carried straight off the concert platform into the wilderness. He was not ashamed or defiant or abashed about it. He might have been a shade confidential when addressing Davidson. And his words were enigmatical.

“I took this course of signalling to you,” he said to Davidson, “because to preserve appearances might be of the utmost importance. Not to me, of course. I don’t care what people may say, and of course no one can hurt me. I suppose I have done a certain amount of harm, since I allowed myself to be tempted into action. It seemed innocent enough, but all action is bound to be harmful. It is devilish. That is why this world is evil upon the whole. But I have done with it! I shall never lift a little finger again. At one time I thought that intelligent observation of facts was the best way of cheating the time which is allotted to us whether we want it or not; but now I, have done with observation, too.”

Imagine poor, simple Davidson being addressed in such terms alongside an abandoned, decaying wharf jutting out of tropical bush. He had never heard anybody speak like this before; certainly not Heyst, whose conversation was concise, polite, with a faint ring of playfulness in the cultivated tones of his voice.

“He’s gone mad,” Davidson thought to himself.

But, looking at the physiognomy above him on the wharf, he was obliged to dismiss the notion of common, crude lunacy. It was truly most unusual talk. Then he remembered — in his surprise he had lost sight of it — that Heyst now had a girl there. This bizarre discourse was probably the effect of the girl. Davidson shook off the absurd feeling, and asked, wishing to make clear his friendliness, and not knowing what else to say:

“You haven’t run short of stores or anything like that?”

Heyst smiled and shook his head:

“No, no. Nothing of the kind. We are fairly well off here. Thanks, all the same. If I have taken the liberty to detain you, it is not from any uneasiness for myself and my — companion. The person I was thinking of when I made up my mind to invoke your assistance is Mrs. Schomberg.”

“I have talked with her,” interjected Davidson.

“Oh! You? Yes, I hoped she would find means to — ”

“But she didn’t tell me much,” interrupted Davidson, who was not averse from hearing something — he hardly knew what.

“H’m — Yes. But that note of mine? Yes? She found an opportunity to give it to you? That’s good, very good. She’s more resourceful than one would give her credit for.”

“Women often are — ” remarked Davidson. The strangeness from which he had suffered, merely because his interlocutor had carried off a girl, wore off as the minutes went by. “There’s a lot of unexpectedness about women,” he generalized with a didactic aim which seemed to miss its mark; for the next thing Heyst said was:

“This is Mrs. Schomberg’s shawl.” He touched the stuff hanging over his arm. “An Indian thing, I believe,” he added, glancing at his arm sideways.

“It isn’t of particular value,” said Davidson truthfully.

“Very likely. The point is that it belongs to Schomberg’s wife. That Schomberg seems to be an unconscionable ruffian — don’t you think so?”

Davidson smiled faintly.

“We out here have got used to him,” he said, as if excusing a universal and guilty toleration of a manifest nuisance. “I’d hardly call him that. I only know him as a hotel-keeper.”

“I never knew him even as that — not till this time, when you were so obliging as to take me to Sourabaya, I went to stay there from economy. The Netherlands House is very expensive, and they expect you to bring your own servant with you. It’s a nuisance.”

“Of course, of course,” protested Davidson hastily.

After a short silence Heyst returned to the matter of the shawl. He wanted to send it back to Mrs. Schomberg. He said that it might be very awkward for her if she were unable, if asked, to produce it. This had given him, Heyst, much uneasiness. She was terrified of Schomberg. Apparently she had reason to be.

Davidson had remarked that, too. Which did not prevent her, he pointed out, from making a fool of him, in a way, for the sake of a stranger.

“Oh! You know!” said Heyst. “Yes, she helped me — us.”

“She told me so. I had quite a talk with her,” Davidson informed him. “Fancy anyone having a talk with Mrs. Schomberg! If I were to tell the fellows they wouldn’t believe me. How did you get round her, Heyst? How did you think of it? Why, she looks too stupid to understand human speech and too scared to shoo a chicken away. Oh, the women, the women! You don’t know what there may be in the quietest of them.”

“She was engaged in the task of defending her position in life,” said Heyst. “It’s a very respectable task.”

“Is that it? I had some idea it was that,” confessed Davidson.

He then imparted to Heyst the story of the violent proceedings following on the discovery of his flight. Heyst’s polite attention to the tale took on a sombre cast; but he manifested no surprise, and offered no comment. When Davidson had finished he handed down the shawl into the boat, and Davidson promised to do his best to return it to Mrs. Schomberg in some secret fashion. Heyst expressed his thanks in a few simple words, set off by his manner of finished courtesy. Davidson prepared to depart. They were not looking at each other. Suddenly Heyst spoke:

“You understand that this was a case of odious persecution, don’t you? I became aware of it and — ”

It was a view which the sympathetic Davidson was capable of appreciating.

“I am not surprised to hear it,” he said placidly. “Odious enough, I dare say. And you, of course — not being a married man — were free to step in. Ah, well!”

He sat down in the stern-sheets, and already had the steering lines in his hands when Heyst observed abruptly:

“The world is a bad dog. It will bite you if you give it a chance; but I think that here we can safely defy the fates.”

When relating all this to me, Davidson’s only comment was:

“Funny notion of defying the fates — to take a woman in tow!”

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Some considerable time afterwards — we did not meet very often — I asked Davidson how he had managed about the shawl and heard that he had tackled his mission in a direct way, and had found it easy enough. At the very first call he made in Samarang he rolled the shawl as tightly as he could into the smallest possible brown-paper parcel, which he carried ashore with him. His business in the town being transacted, he got into a gharry with the parcel and drove to the hotel. With his precious experience, he timed his arrival accurately for the hour of Schomberg's siesta. Finding the place empty as on the former occasion, he marched into the billiard-room, took a seat at the back, near the sort of dais which Mrs. Schomberg would in due course come to occupy, and broke the slumbering silence of the house by thumping a bell vigorously. Of course a Chinaman appeared promptly. Davidson ordered a drink and sat tight.

"I would have ordered twenty drinks one after another, if necessary," he said — Davidson's a very abstemious man — "rather than take that parcel out of the house again. Couldn't leave it in a corner without letting the woman know it was there. It might have turned out worse for her than not bringing the thing back at all."

And so he waited, ringing the bell again and again, and swallowing two or three iced drinks which he did not want. Presently, as he hoped it would happen, Mrs. Schomberg came in, silk dress, long neck, ringlets, scared eyes, and silly grin — all complete. Probably that lazy beast had sent her out to see who was the thirsty customer waking up the echoes of the house at this quiet hour. Bow, nod — and she clambered up to her post behind the raised counter, looking so helpless, so inane, as she sat there, that if it hadn't been for the parcel, Davidson declared, he would have thought he had merely dreamed all that had passed between them. He ordered another drink, to get the Chinaman out of the room, and then seized the parcel, which was reposing on a chair near him, and with no more than a mutter — "this is something of yours" — he rammed it swiftly into a recess in the counter, at her feet. There! The rest was her affair. And just in time, too. Schomberg turned up, yawning affectedly, almost before Davidson had regained his seat. He cast about suspicious and irate glances. An invincible placidity of expression helped Davidson wonderfully at the moment, and

the other, of course, could have no grounds for the slightest suspicion of any sort of understanding between his wife and this customer.

As to Mrs. Schomberg, she sat there like a joss. Davidson was lost in admiration. He believed, now, that the woman had been putting it on for years. She never even winked. It was immense! The insight he had obtained almost frightened him; he couldn't get over his wonder at knowing more of the real Mrs. Schomberg than anybody in the Islands, including Schomberg himself. She was a miracle of dissimulation. No wonder Heyst got the girl away from under two men's noses, if he had her to help with the job!

The greatest wonder, after all, was Heyst getting mixed up with petticoats. The fellow's life had been open to us for years and nothing could have been more detached from feminine associations. Except that he stood drinks to people on suitable occasions, like any other man, this observer of facts seemed to have no connection with earthly affairs and passions. The very courtesy of his manner, the flavour of playfulness in the voice set him apart. He was like a feather floating lightly in the workaday atmosphere which was the breath of our nostrils. For this reason whenever this looker-on took contact with things he attracted attention. First, it was the Morrison partnership of mystery, then came the great sensation of the Tropical Belt Coal where indeed varied interests were involved: a real business matter. And then came this elopement, this incongruous phenomenon of self-assertion, the greatest wonder of all, astonishing and amusing.

Davidson admitted to me that, the hubbub was subsiding; and the affair would have been already forgotten, perhaps, if that ass Schomberg had not kept on gnashing his teeth publicly about it. It was really provoking that Davidson should not be able to give one some idea of the girl. Was she pretty? He didn't know. He had stayed the whole afternoon in Schomberg's hotel, mainly for the purpose of finding out something about her. But the story was growing stale. The parties at the tables on the veranda had other, fresher, events to talk about and Davidson shrank from making direct inquiries. He sat placidly there, content to be disregarded and hoping for some chance word to turn up. I shouldn't wonder if the good fellow hadn't been dozing. It's difficult to give you an adequate idea of Davidson's placidity.

Presently Schomberg, wandering about, joined a party that had taken the table next to Davidson's.

“A man like that Swede, gentlemen, is a public danger,” he began. “I remember him for years. I won’t say anything of his spying — well, he used to say himself he was looking for out-of-the-way facts and what is that if not spying? He was spying into everybody’s business. He got hold of Captain Morrison, squeezed him dry, like you would an orange, and scared him off to Europe to die there. Everybody knows that Captain Morrison had a weak chest. Robbed first and murdered afterwards! I don’t mince words — not I. Next he gets up that swindle of the Belt Coal. You know all about it. And now, after lining his pockets with other people’s money, he kidnaps a white girl belonging to an orchestra which is performing in my public room for the benefit of my patrons, and goes off to live like a prince on that island, where nobody can get at him. A damn silly girl . . . It’s disgusting — tfui!”

He spat. He choked with rage — for he saw visions, no doubt. He jumped up from his chair, and went away to flee from them — perhaps. He went into the room where Mrs. Schomberg sat. Her aspect could not have been very soothing to the sort of torment from which he was suffering.

Davidson did not feel called upon to defend Heyst. His proceeding was to enter into conversation with one and another, casually, and showing no particular knowledge of the affair, in order to discover something about the girl. Was she anything out of the way? Was she pretty? She couldn’t have been markedly so. She had not attracted special notice. She was young — on that everybody agreed. The English clerk of Tesmans remembered that she had a sallow face. He was respectable and highly proper. He was not the sort to associate with such people. Most of these women were fairly battered specimens. Schomberg had them housed in what he called the Pavilion, in the grounds, where they were hard at it mending and washing their white dresses, and could be seen hanging them out to dry between the trees, like a lot of washerwomen. They looked very much like middle-aged washerwomen on the platform, too. But the girl had been living in the main building along with the boss, the director, the fellow with the black beard, and a hard-bitten, oldish woman who took the piano and was understood to be the fellow’s wife.

This was not a very satisfactory result. Davidson stayed on, and even joined the table d’hôte dinner, without gleaning any more information. He was resigned.

“I suppose,” he wheezed placidly, “I am bound to see her some day.”

He meant to take the Samburan channel every trip, as before of course.

“Yes,” I said. “No doubt you will. Some day Heyst will be signalling to you again; and I wonder what it will be for.”

Davidson made no reply. He had his own ideas about that, and his silence concealed a good deal of thought. We spoke no more of Heyst’s girl. Before we separated, he gave me a piece of unrelated observation.

“It’s funny,” he said, “but I fancy there’s some gambling going on in the evening at Schomberg’s place, on the quiet. I’ve noticed men strolling away in twos and threes towards that hall where the orchestra used to play. The windows must be specially well shuttered, because I could not spy the smallest gleam of light from that direction; but I can’t believe that those beggars would go in there only to sit and think of their sins in the dark.”

“That’s strange. It’s incredible that Schomberg should risk that sort of thing,” I said.



## **PART TWO**

## CHAPTER ONE

As we know, Heyst had gone to stay in Schomberg's hotel in complete ignorance that his person was odious to that worthy. When he arrived, Zangiacomo's Ladies' Orchestra had been established there for some time.

The business which had called him out from his seclusion in his lost corner of the Eastern seas was with the Tesmans, and it had something to do with money. He transacted it quickly, and then found himself with nothing to do while he awaited Davidson, who was to take him back to his solitude; for back to his solitude Heyst meant to go. He whom we used to refer to as the Enchanted Heyst was suffering from thorough disenchantment. Not with the islands, however. The Archipelago has a lasting fascination. It is not easy to shake off the spell of island life. Heyst was disenchanted with life as a whole. His scornful temperament, beguiled into action, suffered from failure in a subtle way unknown to men accustomed to grapple with the realities of common human enterprise. It was like the gnawing pain of useless apostasy, a sort of shame before his own betrayed nature; and in addition, he also suffered from plain, downright remorse. He deemed himself guilty of Morrison's death. A rather absurd feeling, since no one could possibly have foreseen the horrors of the cold, wet summer lying in wait for poor Morrison at home.

It was not in Heyst's character to turn morose; but his mental state was not compatible with a sociable mood. He spent his evenings sitting apart on the veranda of Schomberg's hotel. The lamentations of string instruments issued from the building in the hotel compound, the approaches to which were decorated with Japanese paper lanterns strung up between the trunks of several big trees. Scraps of tunes more or less plaintive reached his ears. They pursued him even into his bedroom, which opened into an upstairs veranda. The fragmentary and rasping character of these sounds made their intrusion inexpressibly tedious in the long run. Like most dreamers, to whom it is given sometimes to hear the music of the spheres, Heyst, the wanderer of the Archipelago, had a taste for silence which he had been able to gratify for years. The islands are very quiet. One sees them lying about, clothed in their dark garments of leaves, in a great hush of silver and azure, where the sea without murmurs meets the sky in a ring of magic stillness. A sort of smiling somnolence broods over them; the very voices of their people are soft and subdued, as if afraid to break some protecting spell.

Perhaps this was the very spell which had enchanted Heyst in the early days. For him, however, that was broken. He was no longer enchanted, though he was still a captive of the islands. He had no intention to leave them ever. Where could he have gone to, after all these years? Not a single soul belonging to him lived anywhere on earth. Of this fact — not such a remote one, after all — he had only lately become aware; for it is failure that makes a man enter into himself and reckon up his resources. And though he had made up his mind to retire from the world in hermit fashion, yet he was irrationally moved by this sense of loneliness which had come to him in the hour of renunciation. It hurt him. Nothing is more painful than the shock of sharp contradictions that lacerate our intelligence and our feelings.

Meantime Schomberg watched Heyst out of the corner of his eye. Towards the unconscious object of his enmity he preserved a distant lieutenant-of-the-Reserve demeanour. Nudging certain of his customers with his elbow, he begged them to observe what airs “that Swede” was giving himself.

“I really don’t know why he has come to stay in my house. This place isn’t good enough for him. I wish to goodness he had gone somewhere else to show off his superiority. Here I have got up this series of concerts for you gentlemen, just to make things a little brighter generally; and do you think he’ll condescend to step in and listen to a piece or two of an evening? Not he. I know him of old. There he sits at the dark end of the piazza, all the evening long — planning some new swindle, no doubt. For two-pence I would ask him to go and look for quarters somewhere else; only one doesn’t like to treat a white man like that out in the tropics. I don’t know how long he means to stay, but I’m willing to bet a trifle that he’ll never work himself up to the point of spending the fifty cents of entrance money for the sake of a little good music.”

Nobody cared to bet, or the hotel-keeper would have lost. One evening Heyst was driven to desperation by the rasped, squeaked, scraped snatches of tunes pursuing him even to his hard couch, with a mattress as thin as a pancake and a diaphanous mosquito net. He descended among the trees, where the soft glow of Japanese lanterns picked out parts of their great rugged trunks, here and there, in the great mass of darkness under the lofty foliage. More lanterns, of the shape of cylindrical concertinas, hanging in a row from a slack string, decorated the doorway of what Schomberg called

grandiloquently “my concert-hall.” In his desperate mood Heyst ascended three steps, lifted a calico curtain, and went in.

The uproar in that small, barn-like structure, built of imported pine boards, and raised clear of the ground, was simply stunning. An instrumental uproar, screaming, grunting, whining, sobbing, scraping, squeaking some kind of lively air; while a grand piano, operated upon by a bony, red-faced woman with bad-tempered nostrils, rained hard notes like hail through the tempest of fiddles. The small platform was filled with white muslin dresses and crimson sashes slanting from shoulders provided with bare arms, which sawed away without respite. Zangiacomo conducted. He wore a white mess-jacket, a black dress waistcoat, and white trousers. His longish, tousled hair and his great beard were purple-black. He was horrible. The heat was terrific. There were perhaps thirty people having drinks at several little tables. Heyst, quite overcome by the volume of noise, dropped into a chair. In the quick time of that music, in the varied, piercing clamour of the strings, in the movements of the bare arms, in the low dresses, the coarse faces, the stony eyes of the executants, there was a suggestion of brutality — something cruel, sensual and repulsive.

“This is awful!” Heyst murmured to himself.

But there is an unholy fascination in systematic noise. He did not flee from it incontinently, as one might have expected him to do. He remained, astonished at himself for remaining, since nothing could have been more repulsive to his tastes, more painful to his senses, and, so to speak, more contrary to his genius, than this rude exhibition of vigour. The Zangiacomo band was not making music; it was simply murdering silence with a vulgar, ferocious energy. One felt as if witnessing a deed of violence; and that impression was so strong that it seemed marvellous to see the people sitting so quietly on their chairs, drinking so calmly out of their glasses, and giving no signs of distress, anger, or fear. Heyst averted his gaze from the unnatural spectacle of their indifference.

When the piece of music came to an end the relief was so great that he felt slightly dizzy, as if a chasm of silence had yawned at his feet. When he raised his eyes, the audience, most perversely, was exhibiting signs of animation and interest in their faces, and the women in white muslin dresses were coming down in pairs from the platform into the body of Schomberg’s “concert-hall.” They dispersed themselves all over the place. The male creature with the hooked nose and purple-black beard disappeared

somewhere. This was the interval during which, as the astute Schomberg had stipulated, the members of the orchestra were encouraged to favour the members of the audience with their company — that is, such members as seemed inclined to fraternize with the arts in a familiar and generous manner; the symbol of familiarity and generosity consisting in offers of refreshment.

The procedure struck Heyst as highly incorrect. However, the impropriety of Schomberg's ingenious scheme was defeated by the circumstance that most of the women were no longer young, and that none of them had ever been beautiful. Their more or less worn cheeks were slightly rouged, but apart from that fact, which might have been simply a matter of routine, they did not seem to take the success of the scheme unduly to heart. The impulse to fraternize with the arts being obviously weak in the audience, some of the musicians sat down listlessly at unoccupied tables, while others went on perambulating the central passage: arm in arm, glad enough, no doubt, to stretch their legs while resting their arms. Their crimson sashes gave a factitious touch of gaiety to the smoky atmosphere of the concert-hall; and Heyst felt a sudden pity for these beings, exploited, hopeless, devoid of charm and grace, whose fate of cheerless dependence invested their coarse and joyless features with a touch of pathos.

Heyst was temperamentally sympathetic. To have them passing and repassing close to his little table was painful to him. He was preparing to rise and go out when he noticed that two white muslin dresses and crimson sashes had not yet left the platform. One of these dresses concealed the raw-boned frame of the woman with the bad-tempered curve to her nostrils. She was no less a personage than Mrs. Zangiacomo. She had left the piano, and, with her back to the hall, was preparing the parts for the second half of the concert, with a brusque, impatient action of her ugly elbow. This task done, she turned, and, perceiving the other white muslin dress motionless on a chair in the second row, she strode towards it between the music-stands with an aggressive and masterful gait. On the lap of that dress there lay, unclasped and idle, a pair of small hands, not very white, attached to well-formed arms. The next detail Heyst was led to observe was the arrangement of the hair — two thick, brown tresses rolled round an attractively shaped head.

“A girl, by Jove!” he exclaimed mentally.

It was evident that she was a girl. It was evident in the outline of the shoulders, in the slender white bust springing up, barred slantwise by the crimson sash, from the bell-shaped spread of muslin skirt hiding the chair on which she sat averted a little from the body of the hall. Her feet, in low white shoes, were crossed prettily.

She had captured Heyst's awakened faculty of observation; he had the sensation of a new experience. That was because his faculty of observation had never before been captured by any feminine creature in that marked and exclusive fashion. He looked at her anxiously, as no man ever looks at another man; and he positively forgot where he was. He had lost touch with his surroundings. The big woman, advancing, concealed the girl from his sight for a moment. She bent over the seated youthful figure, in passing it very close, as if to drop a word into its ear. Her lips did certainly move. But what sort of word could it have been to make the girl jump up so swiftly? Heyst, at his table, was surprised into a sympathetic start. He glanced quickly round. Nobody was looking towards the platform; and when his eyes swept back there again, the girl, with the big woman treading at her heels, was coming down the three steps from the platform to the floor of the hall. There she paused, stumbled one pace forward, and stood still again, while the other — the escort, the dragoon, the coarse big woman of the piano — passed her roughly, and, marching truculently down the centre aisle between the chairs and tables, went out to rejoin the hook-nosed Zangiacomo somewhere outside. During her extraordinary transit, as if everything in the hall were dirt under her feet, her scornful eyes met the upward glance of Heyst, who looked away at once towards the girl. She had not moved. Her arms hung down; her eyelids were lowered.

Heyst laid down his half-smoked cigar and compressed his lips. Then he got up. It was the same sort of impulse which years ago had made him cross the sandy street of the abominable town of Delli in the island of Timor and accost Morrison, practically a stranger to him then, a man in trouble, expressively harassed, dejected, lonely.

It was the same impulse. But he did not recognize it. He was not thinking of Morrison then. It may be said that, for the first time since the final abandonment of the Samburan coal mine, he had completely forgotten the late Morrison. It is true that to a certain extent he had forgotten also where he was. Thus, unchecked by any sort of self consciousness, Heyst walked up the central passage.

Several of the women, by this time, had found anchorage here and there among the occupied tables. They talked to the men, leaning on their elbows, and suggesting funnily — if it hadn't been for the crimson sashes — in their white dresses an assembly of middle-aged brides with free and easy manners and hoarse voices. The murmuring noise of conversations carried on with some spirit filled Schomberg's concert-room. Nobody remarked Heyst's movements; for indeed he was not the only man on his legs there. He had been confronting the girl for some time before she became aware of his presence. She was looking down, very still, without colour, without glances, without voice, without movement. It was only when Heyst addressed her in his courteous tone that she raised her eyes.

"Excuse me," he said in English, "but that horrible female has done something to you. She has pinched you, hasn't she? I am sure she pinched you just now, when she stood by your chair."

The girl received this overture with the wide, motionless stare of profound astonishment. Heyst, vexed with himself, suspected that she did not understand what he said. One could not tell what nationality these women were, except that they were of all sorts. But she was astonished almost more by the near presence of the man himself, by his largely bald head, by the white brow, the sunburnt cheeks, the long, horizontal moustaches of crinkly bronze hair, by the kindly expression of the man's blue eyes looking into her own. He saw the stony amazement in hers give way to a momentary alarm, which was succeeded by an expression of resignation.

"I am sure she pinched your arm most cruelly," he murmured, rather disconcerted now at what he had done.

It was a great comfort to hear her say:

"It wouldn't have been the first time. And suppose she did — what are you going to do about it?"

"I don't know," he said with a faint, remote playfulness in his tone which had not been heard in it lately, and which seemed to catch her ear pleasantly. "I am grieved to say that I don't know. But can I do anything? What would you wish me to do? Pray command me."

Again, the greatest astonishment became visible in her face; for she now perceived how different he was from the other men in the room. He was as different from them as she was different from the other members of the ladies' orchestra.

“Command you?” she breathed, after a time, in a bewildered tone. “Who are you?” she asked a little louder.

“I am staying in this hotel for a few days. I just dropped in casually here. This outrage — ”

“Don’t you try to interfere,” she said so earnestly that Heyst asked, in his faintly playful tone:

“Is it your wish that I should leave you?”

“I haven’t said that,” the girl answered. “She pinched me because I didn’t get down here quick enough — ”

“I can’t tell you how indignant I am — ” said Heyst. “But since you are down here now,” he went on, with the ease of a man of the world speaking to a young lady in a drawing-room, “hadn’t we better sit down?”

She obeyed his inviting gesture, and they sat down on the nearest chairs. They looked at each other across a little round table with a surprised, open gaze, self-consciousness growing on them so slowly that it was a long time before they averted their eyes; and very soon they met again, temporarily, only to rebound, as it were. At last they steadied in contact, but by that time, say some fifteen minutes from the moment when they sat down, the “interval” came to an end.

So much for their eyes. As to the conversation, it had been perfectly insignificant because naturally they had nothing to say to each other. Heyst had been interested by the girl’s physiognomy. Its expression was neither simple nor yet very clear. It was not distinguished — that could not be expected — but the features had more fineness than those of any other feminine countenance he had ever had the opportunity to observe so closely. There was in it something indefinably audacious and infinitely miserable — because the temperament and the existence of that girl were reflected in it. But her voice! It seduced Heyst by its amazing quality. It was a voice fit to utter the most exquisite things, a voice which would have made silly chatter supportable and the roughest talk fascinating. Heyst drank in its charm as one listens to the tone of some instrument without heeding the tune.

“Do you sing as well as play?” he asked her abruptly.

“Never sang a note in my life,” she said, obviously surprised by the irrelevant question; for they had not been discoursing of sweet sounds. She was clearly unaware of her voice. “I don’t remember that I ever had much reason to sing since I was little,” she added.



That inelegant phrase, by the mere vibrating, warm nobility of the sound, found its way into Heyst's heart. His mind, cool, alert, watched it sink there with a sort of vague concern at the absurdity of the occupation, till it rested at the bottom, deep down, where our unexpressed longings lie.

"You are English, of course?" he said.

"What do you think?" she answered in the most charming accents. Then, as if thinking that it was her turn to place a question: "Why do you always smile when you speak?"

It was enough to make anyone look grave, but her good faith was so evident that Heyst recovered himself at once.

"It's my unfortunate manner — " he said with his delicate, polished playfulness. "Is it very objectionable to you?"

She was very serious.

"No. I only noticed it. I haven't come across so many pleasant people as all that, in my life."

"It's certain that this woman who plays the piano is infinitely more disagreeable than any cannibal I have ever had to do with."

"I believe you!" She shuddered. "How did you come to have anything to do with cannibals?"

"It would be too long a tale," said Heyst with a faint smile. Heyst's smiles were rather melancholy, and accorded badly with his great moustaches, under which his mere playfulness lurked as comfortable as a shy bird in its native thicket. "Much too long. How did you get amongst this lot here?"

"Bad luck," she answered briefly.

"No doubt, no doubt," Heyst assented with slight nods. Then, still indignant at the pinch which he had divined rather than actually seen inflicted: "I say, couldn't you defend yourself somehow?"

She had risen already. The ladies of the orchestra were slowly regaining their places. Some were already seated, idle stony-eyed, before the music-stands. Heyst was standing up, too.

"They are too many for me," she said.

These few words came out of the common experience of mankind; yet by virtue of her voice, they thrilled Heyst like a revelation. His feelings were in a state of confusion, but his mind was clear.

"That's bad. But it isn't actual ill-usage that this girl is complaining of," he thought lucidly after she left him.



## CHAPTER TWO

That was how it began. How it was that it ended, as we know it did end, is not so easy to state precisely. It is very clear that Heyst was not indifferent, I won't say to the girl, but to the girl's fate. He was the same man who had plunged after the submerged Morrison whom he hardly knew otherwise than by sight and through the usual gossip of the islands. But this was another sort of plunge altogether, and likely to lead to a very different kind of partnership.

Did he reflect at all? Probably. He was sufficiently reflective. But if he did, it was with insufficient knowledge. For there is no evidence that he paused at any time between the date of that evening and the morning of the flight. Truth to say, Heyst was not one of those men who pause much. Those dreamy spectators of the world's agitation are terrible once the desire to act gets hold of them. They lower their heads and charge a wall with an amazing serenity which nothing but an indisciplined imagination can give.

He was not a fool. I suppose he knew — or at least he felt — where this was leading him. But his complete inexperience gave him the necessary audacity. The girl's voice was charming when she spoke to him of her miserable past, in simple terms, with a sort of unconscious cynicism inherent in the truth of the ugly conditions of poverty. And whether because he was humane or because her voice included all the modulations of pathos, cheerfulness, and courage in its compass, it was not disgust that the tale awakened in him, but the sense of an immense sadness.

On a later evening, during the interval between the two parts of the concert, the girl told Heyst about herself. She was almost a child of the streets. Her father was a musician in the orchestras of small theatres. Her mother ran away from him while she was little, and the landladies of various poor lodging-houses had attended casually to her abandoned childhood. It was never positive starvation and absolute rags, but it was the hopeless grip of poverty all the time. It was her father who taught her to play the violin. It seemed that he used to get drunk sometimes, but without pleasure, and only because he was unable to forget his fugitive wife. After he had a paralytic stroke, falling over with a crash in the well of a music-hall orchestra during the performance, she had joined the Zangiacomo company. He was now in a home for incurables.

“And I am here,” she finished, “with no one to care if I make a hole in the water the next chance I get or not.”

Heyst told her that he thought she could do a little better than that, if it was only a question of getting out of the world. She looked at him with special attention, and with a puzzled expression which gave to her face an air of innocence.

This was during one of the “intervals” between the two parts of the concert. She had come down that time without being incited thereto by a pinch from the awful Zangiacomo woman. It is difficult to suppose that she was seduced by the uncovered intellectual forehead and the long reddish moustaches of her new friend. New is not the right word. She had never had a friend before; and the sensation of this friendliness going out to her was exciting by its novelty alone. Besides, any man who did not resemble Schomberg appeared for that very reason attractive. She was afraid of the hotel-keeper, who, in the daytime, taking advantage of the fact that she lived in the hotel itself, and not in the Pavilion with the other “artists” prowled round her, mute, hungry, portentous behind his great beard, or else assailed her in quiet corners and empty passages with deep, mysterious murmurs from behind, which, notwithstanding their clear import, sounded horribly insane somehow.

The contrast of Heyst’s quiet, polished manner gave her special delight and filled her with admiration. She had never seen anything like that before. If she had, perhaps, known kindness in her life, she had never met the forms of simple courtesy. She was interested by it as a very novel experience, not very intelligible, but distinctly pleasurable.

“I tell you they are too many for me,” she repeated, sometimes recklessly, but more often shaking her head with ominous dejection.

She had, of course, no money at all. The quantities of “black men” all about frightened her. She really had no definite idea where she was on the surface of the globe. The orchestra was generally taken from the steamer to some hotel, and kept shut up there till it was time to go on board another steamer. She could not remember the names she heard.

“How do you call this place again?” she used to ask Heyst.

“Sourabaya,” he would say distinctly, and would watch the discouragement at the outlandish sound coming into her eyes, which were fastened on his face.

He could not defend himself from compassion. He suggested that she might go to the consul, but it was his conscience that dictated this advice, not his conviction. She had never heard of the animal or of its uses. A consul! What was it? Who was he? What could he do? And when she learned that perhaps he could be induced to send her home, her head dropped on her breast.

“What am I to do when I get there?” she murmured with an intonation so just, with an accent so penetrating — the charm of her voice did not fail her even in whispering — that Heyst seemed to see the illusion of human fellowship on earth vanish before the naked truth of her existence, and leave them both face to face in a moral desert as arid as the sands of Sahara, without restful shade, without refreshing water.

She leaned slightly over the little table, the same little table at which they had sat when they first met each other; and with no other memories but of the stones in the streets her childhood had known, in the distress of the incoherent, confused, rudimentary impressions of her travels inspiring her with a vague terror of the world she said rapidly, as one speaks in desperation:

“You do something! You are a gentleman. It wasn’t I who spoke to you first, was it? I didn’t begin, did I? It was you who came along and spoke to me when I was standing over there. What did you want to speak to me for? I don’t care what it is, but you must do something.”

Her attitude was fierce and entreating at the same time — clamorous, in fact though her voice had hardly risen above a breath. It was clamorous enough to be noticed. Heyst, on purpose, laughed aloud. She nearly choked with indignation at this brutal heartlessness.

“What did you mean, then, by saying ‘command me!’?” she almost hissed.

Something hard in his mirthless stare, and a quiet final “All right,” steadied her.

“I am not rich enough to buy you out,” he went on, speaking with an extraordinary detached grin, “even if it were to be done; but I can always steal you.”

She looked at him profoundly, as though these words had a hidden and very complicated meaning.

“Get away now,” he said rapidly, “and try to smile as you go.”

She obeyed with unexpected readiness; and as she had a set of very good white teeth, the effect of the mechanical, ordered smile was joyous, radiant. It astonished Heyst. No wonder, it flashed through his mind, women can deceive men so completely. The faculty was inherent in them; they seemed to be created with a special aptitude. Here was a smile the origin of which was well known to him; and yet it had conveyed a sensation of warmth, had given him a sort of ardour to live which was very new to his experience.

By this time she was gone from the table, and had joined the other "ladies of the orchestra." They trooped towards the platform, driven in truculently by the haughty mate of Zangiacomo, who looked as though she were restraining herself with difficulty from punching their backs. Zangiacomo followed, with his great, pendulous dyed beard and short mess-jacket, with an aspect of hang-dog concentration imparted by his drooping head and the uneasiness of his eyes, which were set very close together. He climbed the steps last of all, turned about, displaying his purple beard to the hall, and tapped with his bow. Heyst winced in anticipation of the horrible racket. It burst out immediately unabashed and awful. At the end of the platform the woman at the piano, presenting her cruel profile, her head tilted back, banged the keys without looking at the music.

Heyst could not stand the uproar for more than a minute. He went out, his brain racked by the rhythm of some more or less Hungarian dance music. The forests inhabited by the New Guinea cannibals where he had encountered the most exciting of his earlier futile adventures were silent. And this adventure, not in its execution, perhaps, but in its nature, required even more nerve than anything he had faced before. Walking among the paper lanterns suspended to trees he remembered with regret the gloom and the dead stillness of the forests at the back of Geelvink Bay, perhaps the wildest, the unsafest, the most deadly spot on earth from which the sea can be seen. Oppressed by his thoughts, he sought the obscurity and peace of his bedroom; but they were not complete. The distant sounds of the concert reached his ear, faint indeed, but still disturbing. Neither did he feel very safe in there; for that sentiment depends not on extraneous circumstances but on our inward conviction. He did not attempt to go to sleep; he did not even unbutton the top button of his tunic. He sat in a chair and mused. Formerly, in solitude and in silence, he had been used to think clearly and sometimes even profoundly, seeing life outside the flattering optical delusion of everlasting hope, of conventional self-deceptions, of an ever-

expected happiness. But now he was troubled; a light veil seemed to hang before his mental vision; the awakening of a tenderness, indistinct and confused as yet, towards an unknown woman.

Gradually silence, a real silence, had established itself round him. The concert was over; the audience had gone; the concert-hall was dark; and even the Pavilion, where the ladies' orchestra slept after its noisy labours, showed not a gleam of light. Heyst suddenly felt restless in all his limbs, as this reaction from the long immobility would not be denied, he humoured it by passing quietly along the back veranda and out into the grounds at the side of the house, into the black shadows under the trees, where the extinguished paper lanterns were gently swinging their globes like withered fruit.

He paced there to and fro for a long time, a calm, meditative ghost in his white drill-suit, revolving in his head thoughts absolutely novel, disquieting, and seductive; accustoming his mind to the contemplation of his purpose, in order that by being faced steadily it should appear praiseworthy and wise. For the use of reason is to justify the obscure desires that move our conduct, impulses, passions, prejudices, and follies, and also our fears.

He felt that he had engaged himself by a rash promise to an action big with incalculable consequences. And then he asked himself if the girl had understood what he meant. Who could tell? He was assailed by all sorts of doubts. Raising his head, he perceived something white flitting between the trees. It vanished almost at once; but there could be no mistake. He was vexed at being detected roaming like this in the middle of the night. Who could that be? It never occurred to him that perhaps the girl, too, would not be able to sleep. He advanced prudently. Then he saw the white, phantom-like apparition again; and the next moment all his doubts as to the state of her mind were laid at rest, because he felt her clinging to him after the manner of supplicants all the world over. Her whispers were so incoherent that he could not understand anything; but this did not prevent him from being profoundly moved. He had no illusions about her; but his sceptical mind was dominated by the fulness of his heart.

"Calm yourself, calm yourself," he murmured in her ear, returning her clasp at first mechanically, and afterwards with a growing appreciation of her distressed humanity. The heaving of her breast and the trembling of all her limbs, in the closeness of his embrace, seemed to enter his body, to

infect his very heart. While she was growing quieter in his arms, he was becoming more agitated, as if there were only a fixed quantity of violent emotion on this earth. The very night seemed more dumb, more still, and the immobility of the vague, black shapes, surrounding him more perfect.

"It will be all right," he tried to reassure her, with a tone of conviction, speaking into her ear, and of necessity clasping her more closely than before.

Either the words or the action had a very good effect. He heard a light sigh of relief. She spoke with a calmed ardour.

"Oh, I knew it would be all right from the first time you spoke to me! Yes, indeed, I knew directly you came up to me that evening. I knew it would be all right, if you only cared to make it so; but of course I could not tell if you meant it. 'Command me,' you said. Funny thing for a man like you to say. Did you really mean it? You weren't making fun of me?"

He protested that he had been a serious person all his life.

"I believe you," she said ardently. He was touched by this declaration. "It's the way you have of speaking as if you were amused with people," she went on. "But I wasn't deceived. I could see you were angry with that beast of a woman. And you are clever. You spotted something at once. You saw it in my face, eh? It isn't a bad face — say? You'll never be sorry. Listen — I'm not twenty yet. It's the truth, and I can't be so bad looking, or else — I will tell you straight that I have been worried and pestered by fellows like this before. I don't know what comes to them — "

She was speaking hurriedly. She choked, and then exclaimed, with an accent of despair:

"What is it? What's the matter?"

Heyst had removed his arms from her suddenly, and had recoiled a little. "Is it my fault? I didn't even look at them, I tell you straight. Never! Have I looked at you? Tell me. It was you that began it."

In truth, Heyst had shrunk from the idea of competition with fellows unknown, with Schomberg the hotel-keeper. The vaporous white figure before him swayed pitifully in the darkness. He felt ashamed of his fastidiousness.

"I am afraid we have been detected," he murmured. "I think I saw somebody on the path between the house and the bushes behind you."

He had seen no one. It was a compassionate lie, if there ever was one. His compassion was as genuine as his shrinking had been, and in his



judgement more honourable.

She didn't turn her head. She was obviously relieved.

"Would it be that brute?" she breathed out, meaning Schomberg, of course. "He's getting too forward with me now. What can you expect? Only this evening, after supper, he — but I slipped away. You don't mind him, do you? Why, I could face him myself now that I know you care for me. A girl can always put up a fight. You believe me? Only it isn't easy to stand up for yourself when you feel there's nothing and nobody at your back. There's nothing so lonely in the world as a girl who has got to look after herself. When I left poor dad in that home — it was in the country, near a village — I came out of the gates with seven shillings and threepence in my old purse, and my railway ticket. I tramped a mile, and got into a train — "

She broke off, and was silent for a moment.

"Don't you throw me over now," she went on. "If you did, what should I do? I should have to live, to be sure, because I'd be afraid to kill myself, but you would have done a thousand times worse than killing a body. You told me you had been always alone, you had never had a dog even. Well, then, I won't be in anybody's way if I live with you — not even a dog's. And what else did you mean when you came up and looked at me so close?"

"Close? Did I?" he murmured unstirring before her in the profound darkness. "So close as that?"

She had an outbreak of anger and despair in subdued tones.

"Have you forgotten, then? What did you expect to find? I know what sort of girl I am; but all the same I am not the sort that men turn their backs on — and you ought to know it, unless you aren't made like the others. Oh, forgive me! You aren't like the others; you are like no one in the world I ever spoke to. Don't you care for me? Don't you see — ?"

What he saw was that, white and spectral, she was putting out her arms to him out of the black shadows like an appealing ghost. He took her hands, and was affected, almost surprised, to find them so warm, so real, so firm, so living in his grasp. He drew her to him, and she dropped her head on his shoulder with a deep-sigh.

"I am dead tired," she whispered plaintively.

He put his arms around her, and only by the convulsive movements of her body became aware that she was sobbing without a sound. Sustaining her, he lost himself in the profound silence of the night. After a while she became still, and cried quietly. Then, suddenly, as if waking up, she asked:

“You haven’t seen any more of that somebody you thought was spying about?”

He started at her quick, sharp whisper, and answered that very likely he had been mistaken.

“If it was anybody at all,” she reflected aloud, “it wouldn’t have been anyone but that hotel woman — the landlord’s wife.”

“Mrs. Schomberg,” Heyst said, surprised.

“Yes. Another one that can’t sleep o’ nights. Why? Don’t you see why? Because, of course, she sees what’s going on. That beast doesn’t even try to keep it from her. If she had only the least bit of spirit! She knows how I feel, too, only she’s too frightened even to look him in the face, let alone open her mouth. He would tell her to go hang herself.”

For some time Heyst said nothing. A public, active contest with the hotel-keeper was not to be thought of. The idea was horrible. Whispering gently to the girl, he tried to explain to her that as things stood, an open withdrawal from the company would be probably opposed. She listened to his explanation anxiously, from time to time pressing the hand she had sought and got hold of in the dark.

“As I told you, I am not rich enough to buy you out so I shall steal you as soon as I can arrange some means of getting away from here. Meantime it would be fatal to be seen together at night. We mustn’t give ourselves away. We had better part at once. I think I was mistaken just now; but if, as you say, that poor Mrs. Schomberg can’t sleep o’ nights, we must be more careful. She would tell the fellow.”

The girl had disengaged herself from his loose hold while he talked, and now stood free of him, but still clasping his hand firmly.

“Oh, no,” she said with perfect assurance. “I tell you she daren’t open her mouth to him. And she isn’t as silly as she looks. She wouldn’t give us away. She knows a trick worth two of that. She’ll help — that’s what she’ll do, if she dares do anything at all.”

“You seem to have a very clear view of the situation,” said Heyst, and received a warm, lingering kiss for this commendation.

He discovered that to part from her was not such an easy matter as he had supposed it would be.

“Upon my word,” he said before they separated, “I don’t even know your name.”

“Don’t you? They call me Alma. I don’t know why. Silly name! Magdalen too. It doesn’t matter; you can call me by whatever name you choose. Yes, you give me a name. Think of one you would like the sound of — something quite new. How I should like to forget everything that has gone before, as one forgets a dream that’s done with, fright and all! I would try.”

“Would you really?” he asked in a murmur. “But that’s not forbidden. I understand that women easily forget whatever in their past diminishes them in their eyes.”

“It’s your eyes that I was thinking of, for I’m sure I’ve never wished to forget anything till you came up to me that night and looked me through and through. I know I’m not much account; but I know how to stand by a man. I stood by father ever since I could understand. He wasn’t a bad chap. Now that I can’t be of any use to him, I would just as soon forget all that and make a fresh start. But these aren’t things that I could talk to you about. What could I ever talk to you about?”

“Don’t let it trouble you,” Heyst said. “Your voice is enough. I am in love with it, whatever it says.”

She remained silent for a while, as if rendered breathless by this quiet statement.

“Oh! I wanted to ask you — ”

He remembered that she probably did not know his name, and expected the question to be put to him now; but after a moment of hesitation she went on:

“Why was it that you told me to smile this evening in the concert-room there — you remember?”

“I thought we were being observed. A smile is the best of masks. Schomberg was at a table next but one to us, drinking with some Dutch clerks from the town. No doubt he was watching us — watching you, at least. That’s why I asked you to smile.”

“Ah, that’s why. It never came into my head!”

“And you did it very well, too — very readily, as if you had understood my intention.”

“Readily!” she repeated. “Oh, I was ready enough to smile then. That’s the truth. It was the first time for years I may say that I felt disposed to smile. I’ve not had many chances to smile in my life, I can tell you; especially of late.”

“But you do it most charmingly — in a perfectly fascinating way.”

He paused. She stood still, waiting for more with the stillness of extreme delight, wishing to prolong the sensation.

“It astonished me,” he added. “It went as straight to my heart as though you had smiled for the purpose of dazzling me. I felt as if I had never seen a smile before in my life. I thought of it after I left you. It made me restless.”

“It did all that?” came her voice, unsteady, gentle, and incredulous.

“If you had not smiled as you did, perhaps I should not have come out here tonight,” he said, with his playful earnestness of tone. “It was your triumph.”

He felt her lips touch his lightly, and the next moment she was gone. Her white dress gleamed in the distance, and then the opaque darkness of the house seemed to swallow it. Heyst waited a little before he went the same way, round the corner, up the steps of the veranda, and into his room, where he lay down at last — not to sleep, but to go over in his mind all that had been said at their meeting.

“It’s exactly true about that smile,” he thought. There he had spoken the truth to her; and about her voice, too. For the rest — what must be must be.

A great wave of heat passed over him. He turned on his back, flung his arms crosswise on the broad, hard bed, and lay still, open-eyed under the mosquito net, till daylight entered his room, brightened swiftly, and turned to unfailing sunlight. He got up then, went to a small looking-glass hanging on the wall, and stared at himself steadily. It was not a new-born vanity which induced this long survey. He felt so strange that he could not resist the suspicion of his personal appearance having changed during the night. What he saw in the glass, however, was the man he knew before. It was almost a disappointment — a belittling of his recent experience. And then he smiled at his naiveness; for, being over five and thirty years of age, he ought to have known that in most cases the body is the unalterable mask of the soul, which even death itself changes but little, till it is put out of sight where no changes matter any more, either to our friends or to our enemies.

Heyst was not conscious of either friends or of enemies. It was the very essence of his life to be a solitary achievement, accomplished not by hermit-like withdrawal with its silence and immobility, but by a system of restless wandering, by the detachment of an impermanent dweller amongst changing scenes. In this scheme he had perceived the means of passing

through life without suffering and almost without a single care in the world  
— invulnerable because elusive.

## CHAPTER THREE

For fifteen years Heyst had wandered, invariably courteous and unapproachable, and in return was generally considered a "queer chap." He had started off on these travels of his after the death of his father, an expatriated Swede who died in London, dissatisfied with his country and angry with all the world, which had instinctively rejected his wisdom.

Thinker, stylist, and man of the world in his time, the elder Heyst had begun by coveting all the joys, those of the great and those of the humble, those of the fools and those of the sages. For more than sixty years he had dragged on this painful earth of ours the most weary, the most uneasy soul that civilization had ever fashioned to its ends of disillusion and regret. One could not refuse him a measure of greatness, for he was unhappy in a way unknown to mediocre souls. His mother Heyst had never known, but he kept his father's pale, distinguished face in affectionate memory. He remembered him mainly in an ample blue dressing-gown in a large house of a quiet London suburb. For three years, after leaving school at the age of eighteen, he had lived with the elder Heyst, who was then writing his last book. In this work, at the end of his life, he claimed for mankind that right to absolute moral and intellectual liberty of which he no longer believed them worthy.

Three years of such companionship at that plastic and impressionable age were bound to leave in the boy a profound mistrust of life. The young man learned to reflect, which is a destructive process, a reckoning of the cost. It is not the clear-sighted who lead the world. Great achievements are accomplished in a blessed, warm mental fog, which the pitiless cold blasts of the father's analysis had blown away from the son.

"I'll drift," Heyst had said to himself deliberately.

He did not mean intellectually or sentimentally or morally. He meant to drift altogether and literally, body and soul, like a detached leaf drifting in the wind-currents under the immovable trees of a forest glade; to drift without ever catching on to anything.

"This shall be my defence against life," he had said to himself with a sort of inward consciousness that for the son of his father there was no other worthy alternative.

He became a waif and stray, austere, from conviction, as others do through drink, from vice, from some weakness of character — with

deliberation, as others do in despair. This, stripped of its facts, had been Heyst's life up to that disturbing night. Next day, when he saw the girl called Alma, she managed to give him a glance of frank tenderness, quick as lightning and leaving a profound impression, a secret touch on the heart. It was in the grounds of the hotel, about tiffin time, while the Ladies of the orchestra were strolling back to their pavilion after rehearsal, or practice, or whatever they called their morning musical exercises in the hall. Heyst, returning from the town, where he had discovered that there would be difficulties in the way of getting away at once, was crossing the compound, disappointed and worried. He had walked almost unwittingly into the straggling group of Zangiacomo's performers. It was a shock to him, on coming out of his brown study, to find the girl so near to him, as if one waking suddenly should see the figure of his dream turned into flesh and blood. She did not raise her shapely head, but her glance was no dream thing. It was real, the most real impression of his detached existence — so far.

Heyst had not acknowledged it in any way, though it seemed to him impossible that its effect on him should not be visible to anyone who happened to be looking on. And there were several men on the veranda, steady customers of Schomberg's table d'hôte, gazing in his direction — at the ladies of the orchestra, in fact. Heyst's dread arose, not out of shame or timidity, but from his fastidiousness. On getting amongst them, however, he noticed no signs of interest or astonishment in their faces, any more than if they had been blind men. Even Schomberg himself, who had to make way for him at the top of the stairs, was completely unperturbed, and continued the conversation he was carrying on with a client.

Schomberg, indeed, had observed "that Swede" talking with the girl in the intervals. A crony of his had nudged him; and he had thought that it was so much the better; the silly fellow would keep everybody else off. He was rather pleased than otherwise and watched them out of the corner of his eye with a malicious enjoyment of the situation — a sort of Satanic glee. For he had little doubt of his personal fascination, and still less of his power to get hold of the girl, who seemed too ignorant to know how to help herself, and who was worse than friendless, since she had for some reason incurred the animosity of Mrs. Zangiacomo, a woman with no conscience. The aversion she showed him as far as she dared (for it is not always safe for the helpless to display the delicacy of their sentiments), Schomberg pardoned on the

score of feminine conventional silliness. He had told Alma, as an argument, that she was a clever enough girl to see that she could do no better than to put her trust in a man of substance, in the prime of life, who knew his way about. But for the excited trembling of his voice, and the extraordinary way in which his eyes seemed to be starting out of his crimson, hirsute countenance, such speeches had every character of calm, unselfish advice — which, after the manner of lovers, passed easily into sanguine plans for the future.

“We’ll soon get rid of the old woman,” he whispered to her hurriedly, with panting ferocity. “Hang her! I’ve never cared for her. The climate don’t suit her; I shall tell her to go to her people in Europe. She will have to go, too! I will see to it. Eins, zwei, march! And then we shall sell this hotel and start another somewhere else.”

He assured her that he didn’t care what he did for her sake; and it was true. Forty-five is the age of recklessness for many men, as if in defiance of the decay and death waiting with open arms in the sinister valley at the bottom of the inevitable hill. Her shrinking form, her downcast eyes, when she had to listen to him, cornered at the end of an empty corridor, he regarded as signs of submission to the overpowering force of his will, the recognition of his personal fascinations. For every age is fed on illusions, lest men should renounce life early and the human race come to an end.

It’s easy to imagine Schomberg’s humiliation, his shocked fury, when he discovered that the girl who had for weeks resisted his attacks, his prayers, and his fiercest protestations, had been snatched from under his nose by “that Swede,” apparently without any trouble worth speaking of. He refused to believe the fact. He would have it, at first, that the Zangiacomos, for some unfathomable reason, had played him a scurvy trick, but when no further doubt was possible, he changed his view of Heyst. The despised Swede became for Schomberg the deepest, the most dangerous, the most hateful of scoundrels. He could not believe that the creature he had coveted with so much force and with so little effect, was in reality tender, docile to her impulse, and had almost offered herself to Heyst without a sense of guilt, in a desire of safety, and from a profound need of placing her trust where her woman’s instinct guided her ignorance. Nothing would serve Schomberg but that she must have been circumvented by some occult exercise of force or craft, by the laying of some subtle trap. His wounded vanity wondered ceaselessly at the means “that Swede” had employed to



seduce her away from a man like him — Schomberg — as though those means were bound to have been extraordinary, unheard of, inconceivable. He slapped his forehead openly before his customers; he would sit brooding in silence or else would burst out unexpectedly declaiming against Heyst without measure, discretion, or prudence, with swollen features and an affectation of outraged virtue which could not have deceived the most childlike of moralists for a moment — and greatly amused his audience.

It became a recognized entertainment to go and hear his abuse of Heyst, while sipping iced drinks on the veranda of the hotel. It was, in a manner, a more successful draw than the Zangiacomo concerts had ever been — intervals and all. There was never any difficulty in starting the performer off. Anybody could do it, by almost any distant allusion. As likely as not he would start his endless denunciations in the very billiard-room where Mrs. Schomberg sat enthroned as usual, swallowing her sobs, concealing her tortures of abject humiliation and terror under her stupid, set, everlasting grin, which, having been provided for her by nature, was an excellent mask, in as much as nothing — not even death itself, perhaps — could tear it away.

But nothing lasts in this world, at least without changing its physiognomy. So, after a few weeks, Schomberg regained his outward calm, as if his indignation had dried up within him. And it was time. He was becoming a bore with his inability to talk of anything else but Heyst's unfitness to be at large, Heyst's wickedness, his wiles, his astuteness, and his criminality. Schomberg no longer pretended to despise him. He could not have done it. After what had happened he could not pretend, even to himself. But his bottled-up indignation was fermenting venomously. At the time of his immoderate loquacity one of his customers, an elderly man, had remarked one evening:

“If that ass keeps on like this, he will end by going crazy.”

And this belief was less than half wrong. Schomberg had Heyst on the brain. Even the unsatisfactory state of his affairs, which had never been so unpromising since he came out East directly after the Franco-Prussian War, he referred to some subtly noxious influence of Heyst. It seemed to him that he could never be himself again till he had got even with that artful Swede. He was ready to swear that Heyst had ruined his life. The girl so unfairly, craftily, basely decoyed away would have inspired him to success in a new start. Obviously Mrs. Schomberg, whom he terrified by savagely silent

moods combined with underhand, poisoned glances, could give him no inspiration. He had grown generally neglectful, but with a partiality for reckless expedients, as if he did not care when and how his career as a hotel-keeper was to be brought to an end. This demoralized state accounted for what Davidson had observed on his last visit to the Schomberg establishment, some two months after Heyst's secret departure with the girl to the solitude of Samburan.

The Schomberg of a few years ago — the Schomberg of the Bangkok days, for instance, when he started the first of his famed table d'hôte dinners — would never have risked anything of the sort. His genius ran to catering, “white man for white men” and to the inventing, elaborating, and retailing of scandalous gossip with asinine unction and impudent delight. But now his mind was perverted by the pangs of wounded vanity and of thwarted passion. In this state of moral weakness Schomberg allowed himself to be corrupted.

## CHAPTER FOUR

The business was done by a guest who arrived one fine morning by mail-boat — immediately from Celebes, having boarded her in Macassar, but generally, Schomberg understood, from up China Sea way; a wanderer clearly, even as Heyst was, but not alone and of quite another kind.

Schomberg, looking up from the stern-sheets of his steam-launch, which he used for boarding passenger ships on arrival, discovered a dark sunken stare plunging down on him over the rail of the first-class part of the deck. He was no great judge of physiognomy. Human beings, for him, were either the objects of scandalous gossip or else recipients of narrow strips of paper, with proper bill-heads stating the name of his hotel — "W. Schomberg, proprietor, accounts settled weekly."

So in the clean-shaven, extremely thin face hanging over the mail-boat's rail Schomberg saw only the face of a possible "account." The steam-launches of other hotels were also alongside, but he obtained the preference.

"You are Mr. Schomberg, aren't you?" the face asked quite unexpectedly.

"I am at your service," he answered from below; for business is business, and its forms and formulas must be observed, even if one's manly bosom is tortured by that dull rage which succeeds the fury of baffled passion, like the glow of embers after a fierce blaze.

Presently the possessor of the handsome but emaciated face was seated beside Schomberg in the stern-sheets of the launch. His body was long and loose-jointed, his slender fingers, intertwined, clasped the leg resting on the knee, as he lolled back in a careless yet tense attitude. On the other side of Schomberg sat another passenger, who was introduced by the clean-shaven man as —

"My secretary. He must have the room next to mine."

"We can manage that easily for you."

Schomberg steered with dignity, staring straight ahead, but very much interested by these two promising "accounts." Their belongings, a couple of large leather trunks browned by age and a few smaller packages, were piled up in the bows. A third individual — a nondescript, hairy creature — had modestly made his way forward and had perched himself on the luggage. The lower part of his physiognomy was over-developed; his narrow and low forehead, unintelligently furrowed by horizontal wrinkles, surmounted wildly hirsute cheeks and a flat nose with wide, baboon-like nostrils. There

was something equivocal in the appearance of his shaggy, hair-smothered humanity. He, too, seemed to be a follower of the clean-shaven man, and apparently had travelled on deck with native passengers, sleeping under the awnings. His broad, squat frame denoted great strength. Grasping the gunwales of the launch, he displayed a pair of remarkably long arms, terminating in thick, brown hairy paws of simian aspect.

“What shall we do with the fellow of mine?” the chief of the party asked Schomberg. “There must be a boarding-house somewhere near the port — some grog-shop where they could let him have a mat to sleep on?”

Schomberg said there was a place kept by a Portuguese half-caste.

“A servant of yours?” he asked.

“Well, he hangs on to me. He is an alligator-hunter. I picked him up in Colombia, you know. Ever been in Colombia?”

“No,” said Schomberg, very much surprised. “An alligator-hunter? Funny trade! Are you coming from Colombia, then?”

“Yes, but I have been coming for a long time. I come from a good many places. I am travelling west, you see.”

“For sport, perhaps?” suggested Schomberg.

“Yes. Sort of sport. What do you say to chasing the sun?”

“I see — a gentleman at large,” said Schomberg, watching a sailing canoe about to cross his bow, and ready to clear it by a touch of the helm.

The other passenger made himself heard suddenly.

“Hang these native craft! They always get in the way.”

He was a muscular, short man with eyes that gleamed and blinked, a harsh voice, and a round, toneless, pock-marked face ornamented by a thin, dishevelled moustache, sticking out quaintly under the tip of a rigid nose. Schomberg made the reflection that there was nothing secretarial about him. Both he and his long, lank principal wore the usual white suit of the tropics, cork helmets, pipe-clayed white shoes — all correct. The hairy nondescript creature perched on their luggage in the bow had a check shirt and blue dungaree trousers. He gazed in their direction from forward in an expectant, trained-animal manner.

“You spoke to me first,” said Schomberg in his manly tones. “You were acquainted with my name. Where did you hear of me, gentlemen, may I ask?”

“In Manila,” answered the gentleman at large, readily. “From a man with whom I had a game of cards one evening in the Hotel Castille.”

“What man? I’ve no friends in Manila that I know of,” wondered Schomberg with a severe frown.

“I can’t tell you his name. I’ve clean forgotten it; but don’t you worry. He was anything but a friend of yours. He called you all the names he could think of. He said you set a lot of scandal going about him once, somewhere — in Bangkok, I think. Yes, that’s it. You were running a table d’hôte in Bangkok at one time, weren’t you?”

Schomberg, astounded by the turn of the information, could only throw out his chest more and exaggerate his austere Lieutenant-of-the-Reserve manner. A table d’hôte? Yes, certainly. He always — for the sake of white men. And here in this place, too? Yes, in this place, too.

“That’s all right, then.” The stranger turned his black, cavernous, mesmerizing glance away from the bearded Schomberg, who sat gripping the brass tiller in a sweating palm. “Many people in the evening at your place?”

Schomberg had recovered somewhat.

“Twenty covers or so, take one day with another,” he answered feelingly, as befitted a subject on which he was sensitive. “Ought to be more, if only people would see that it’s for their own good. Precious little profit I get out of it. You are partial to tables d’hôte, gentlemen?”

The new guest made answer that he liked a hotel where one could find some local people in the evening. It was infernally dull otherwise. The secretary, in sign of approval, emitted a grunt of astonishing ferocity, as if proposing to himself to eat the local people. All this sounded like a longish stay, thought Schomberg, satisfied under his grave air; till, remembering the girl snatched away from him by the last guest who had made a prolonged stay in his hotel, he ground his teeth so audibly that the other two looked at him in wonder. The momentary convulsion of his florid physiognomy seemed to strike them dumb. They exchanged a quick glance. Presently the clean-shaven man fired out another question in his curt, unceremonious manner:

“You have no women in your hotel, eh?”

“Women!” Schomberg exclaimed indignantly, but also as if a little frightened. “What on earth do you mean by women? What women? There’s Mrs. Schomberg, of course,” he added, suddenly appeased, with lofty indifference.

“If she knows how to keep her place, then it will do. I can’t stand women near me. They give me the horrors,” declared the other. “They are a perfect curse!”

During this outburst the secretary wore a savage grin. The chief guest closed his sunken eyes, as if exhausted, and leaned the back of his head against the stanchion of the awning. In this pose, his long, feminine eyelashes were very noticeable, and his regular features, sharp line of the jaw, and well-cut chin were brought into prominence, giving him a used-up, weary, depraved distinction. He did not open his eyes till the steam-launch touched the quay. Then he and the other man got ashore quickly, entered a carriage, and drove away to the hotel, leaving Schomberg to look after their luggage and take care of their strange companion. The latter, looking more like a performing bear abandoned by his show men than a human being, followed all Schomberg’s movements step by step, close behind his back, muttering to himself in a language that sounded like some sort of uncouth Spanish. The hotel-keeper felt uncomfortable till at last he got rid of him at an obscure den where a very clean, portly Portuguese half-caste, standing serenely in the doorway, seemed to understand exactly how to deal with clients of every kind. He took from the creature the strapped bundle it had been hugging closely through all its peregrinations in that strange town, and cut short Schomberg’s attempts at explanation by a most confident —

“I comprehend very well, sir.”

“It’s more than I do,” thought Schomberg, going away thankful at being relieved of the alligator-hunter’s company. He wondered what these fellows were, without being able to form a guess of sufficient probability. Their names he learned that very day by direct inquiry “to enter in my books,” he explained in his formal military manner, chest thrown out, beard very much in evidence.

The shaven man, sprawling in a long chair, with his air of withered youth, raised his eyes languidly.

“My name? Oh, plain Mr. Jones — put that down — a gentleman at large. And this is Ricardo.” The pock-marked man, lying prostrate in another long chair, made a grimace, as if something had tickled the end of his nose, but did not come out of his supineness. “Martin Ricardo, secretary. You don’t want any more of our history, do you? Eh, what? Occupation? Put down, well — tourists. We’ve been called harder names before now; it won’t hurt our feelings. And that fellow of mine — where did you tuck him

away? Oh, he will be all right. When he wants anything he'll take it. He's Peter. Citizen of Colombia. Peter, Pedro — I don't know that he ever had any other name. Pedro, alligator hunter. Oh, yes — I'll pay his board with the half-caste. Can't help myself. He's so confoundedly devoted to me that if I were to give him the sack he would fly at my throat. Shall I tell you how I killed his brother in the wilds of Colombia? Well, perhaps some other time — it's a rather long story. What I shall always regret is that I didn't kill him, too. I could have done it without any extra trouble then; now it's too late. Great nuisance; but he's useful sometimes. I hope you are not going to put all this in your book?"

The offhand, hard manner and the contemptuous tone of "plain Mr. Jones" disconcerted Schomberg utterly. He had never been spoken to like this in his life. He shook his head in silence and withdrew, not exactly scared — though he was in reality of a timid disposition under his manly exterior — but distinctly mystified and impressed.

## CHAPTER FIVE

Three weeks later, after putting his cash-box away in the safe which filled with its iron bulk a corner of their room, Schomberg turned towards his wife, but without looking at her exactly, and said:

“I must get rid of these two. It won’t do!”

Mrs. Schomberg had entertained that very opinion from the first; but she had been broken years ago into keeping her opinions to herself. Sitting in her night attire in the light of a single candle, she was careful not to make a sound, knowing from experience that her very assent would be resented. With her eyes she followed the figure of Schomberg, clad in his sleeping suit, and moving restlessly about the room.

He never glanced her way, for the reason that Mrs. Schomberg, in her night attire, looked the most unattractive object in existence — miserable, insignificant, faded, crushed, old. And the contrast with the feminine form he had ever in his mind’s eye made his wife’s appearance painful to his aesthetic sense.

Schomberg walked about swearing and fuming for the purpose of screwing his courage up to the sticking point.

“Hang me if I ought not to go now, at once, this minute, into his bedroom, and tell him to be off — him and that secretary of his — early in the morning. I don’t mind a round game of cards, but to make a decoy of my table d’hôte — my blood boils! He came here because some lying rascal in Manila told him I kept a table d’hôte.”

He said these things, not for Mrs. Schomberg’s information, but simply thinking aloud, and trying to work his fury up to a point where it would give him courage enough to face “plain Mr. Jones.”

“Impudent overbearing, swindling sharper,” he went on. “I have a good mind to — ”

He was beside himself in his lurid, heavy, Teutonic manner, so unlike the picturesque, lively rage of the Latin races; and though his eyes strayed about irresolutely, yet his swollen, angry features awakened in the miserable woman over whom he had been tyrannizing for years a fear for his precious carcass, since the poor creature had nothing else but that to hold on to in the world. She knew him well; but she did not know him altogether. The last thing a woman will consent to discover in a man whom



she loves, or on whom she simply depends, is want of courage. And, timid in her corner, she ventured to say pressingly:

“Be careful, Wilhelm! Remember the knives and revolvers in their trunks.”

In guise of thanks for that anxious reminder, he swore horribly in the direction of her shrinking person. In her scanty nightdress, and barefooted, she recalled a mediaeval penitent being reproved for her sins in blasphemous terms. Those lethal weapons were always present to Schomberg’s mind. Personally, he had never seen them. His part, ten days after his guests’ arrival, had been to lounge in manly, careless attitudes on the veranda — keeping watch — while Mrs. Schomberg, provided with a bunch of assorted keys, her discoloured teeth chattering and her globular eyes absolutely idiotic with fright, was “going through” the luggage of these strange clients. Her terrible Wilhelm had insisted on it.

“I’ll be on the look-out, I tell you,” he said. “I shall give you a whistle when I see them coming back. You couldn’t whistle. And if he were to catch you at it, and chuck you out by the scruff of the neck, it wouldn’t hurt you much; but he won’t touch a woman. Not he! He has told me so. Affected beast. I must find out something about their little game, and so there’s an end of it. Go in! Go now! Quick march!”

It had been an awful job; but she did go in, because she was much more afraid of Schomberg than of any possible consequences of the act. Her greatest concern was lest no key of the bunch he had provided her with should fit the locks. It would have been such a disappointment for Wilhelm. However, the trunks, she found, had been left open; but her investigation did not last long. She was frightened of firearms, and generally of all weapons, not from personal cowardice, but as some women are, almost superstitiously, from an abstract horror of violence and murder. She was out again on the veranda long before Wilhelm had any occasion for a warning whistle. The instinctive, motiveless fear being the most difficult to overcome, nothing could induce her to return to her investigations, neither threatening growls nor ferocious hisses, nor yet a poke or two in the ribs.

“Stupid female!” muttered the hotel-keeper, perturbed by the notion of that armoury in one of his bedrooms. This was from no abstract sentiment, with him it was constitutional. “Get out of my sight,” he snarled. “Go and dress yourself for the table d’hôte.”

Left to himself, Schomberg had meditated. What the devil did this mean? His thinking processes were sluggish and spasmodic; but suddenly the truth came to him.

“By heavens, they are desperadoes!” he thought.

Just then he beheld “plain Mr. Jones” and his secretary with the ambiguous name of Ricardo entering the grounds of the hotel. They had been down to the port on some business, and now were returning; Mr. Jones lank, spare, opening his long legs with angular regularity like a pair of compasses, the other stepping out briskly by his side. Conviction entered Schomberg’s heart. They were two desperadoes — no doubt about it. But as the funk which he experienced was merely a general sensation, he managed to put on his most severe Officer-of-the-Reserve manner, long before they had closed with him.

“Good morning, gentlemen.”

Being answered with derisive civility, he became confirmed in his sudden conviction of their desperate character. The way Mr. Jones turned his hollow eyes on one, like an incurious spectre, and the way the other, when addressed, suddenly retracted his lips and exhibited his teeth without looking round — here was evidence enough to settle that point. Desperadoes! They passed through the billiard-room, inscrutably mysterious, to the back of the house, to join their violated trunks.

“Tiffin bell will ring in five minutes, gentlemen.” Schomberg called after them, exaggerating the deep manliness of his tone.

He had managed to upset himself very much. He expected to see them come back infuriated and begin to bully him with an odious lack of restraint. Desperadoes! However they didn’t; they had not noticed anything unusual about their trunks and Schomberg recovered his composure and said to himself that he must get rid of this deadly incubus as soon as practicable. They couldn’t possibly want to stay very long; this was not the town — the colony — for desperate characters. He shrank from action. He dreaded any kind of disturbance — “fracas” he called it — in his hotel. Such things were not good for business. Of course, sometimes one had to have a “fracas;” but it had been a comparatively trifling task to seize the frail Zangiacomo — whose bones were no larger than a chicken’s — round the ribs, lift him up bodily, dash him to the ground, and fall on him. It had been easy. The wretched, hook-nosed creature lay without movement, buried under its purple beard.

Suddenly, remembering the occasion of that “fracas,” Schomberg groaned with the pain as of a hot coal under his breastbone, and gave himself up to desolation. Ah, if he only had that girl with him he would have been masterful and resolute and fearless — fight twenty desperadoes — care for nobody on earth! Whereas the possession of Mrs. Schomberg was no incitement to a display of manly virtues. Instead of caring for no one, he felt that he cared for nothing. Life was a hollow sham; he wasn’t going to risk a shot through his lungs or his liver in order to preserve its integrity. It had no savour — damn it!

In his state of moral decomposition, Schomberg, master as he was of the art of hotel-keeping, and careful of giving no occasion for criticism to the powers regulating that branch of human activity, let things take their course; though he saw very well where that course was tending. It began first with a game or two after dinner — for the drinks, apparently — with some lingering customer, at one of the little tables ranged against the walls of the billiard-room. Schomberg detected the meaning of it at once. “That’s what it was! This was what they were!” And, moving about restlessly (at that time his morose silent period had set in), he cast sidelong looks at the game; but he said nothing. It was not worth while having a row with men who were so overbearing. Even when money appeared in connection with these postprandial games, into which more and more people were being drawn, he still refrained from raising the question; he was reluctant to draw unduly the attention of “plain Mr. Jones” and of the equivocal Ricardo, to his person. One evening, however, after the public rooms of the hotel had become empty, Schomberg made an attempt to grapple with the problem in an indirect way.

In a distant corner the tired China boy dozed on his heels, his back against the wall. Mrs. Schomberg had disappeared, as usual, between ten and eleven. Schomberg walked about slowly in and out of the room and the veranda, thoughtful, waiting for his two guests to go to bed. Then suddenly he approached them, militarily, his chest thrown out, his voice curt and soldierly.

“Hot night, gentlemen.”

Mr Jones, lolling back idly in a chair, looked up. Ricardo, as idle, but more upright, made no sign.

“Won’t you have a drink with me before retiring?” went on Schomberg, sitting down by the little table.

“By all means,” said Mr. Jones lazily.

Ricardo showed his teeth in a strange, quick grin. Schomberg felt painfully how difficult it was to get in touch with these men, both so quiet, so deliberate, so menacingly unceremonious. He ordered the Chinaman to bring in the drinks. His purpose was to discover how long these guests intended to stay. Ricardo displayed no conversational vein, but Mr. Jones appeared communicative enough. His voice somehow matched his sunken eyes. It was hollow without being in the least mournful; it sounded distant, uninterested, as though he were speaking from the bottom of a well. Schomberg learned that he would have the privilege of lodging and boarding these gentlemen for at least a month more. He could not conceal his discomfiture at this piece of news.

“What’s the matter? Don’t you like to have people in your house?” asked plain Mr. Jones languidly. “I should have thought the owner of a hotel would be pleased.”

He lifted his delicate and beautifully pencilled eyebrows. Schomberg muttered something about the locality being dull and uninteresting to travellers — nothing going on — too quiet altogether, but he only provoked the declaration that quiet had its charm sometimes, and even dullness was welcome as a change.

“We haven’t had time to be dull for the last three years,” added plain Mr. Jones, his eyes fixed darkly on Schomberg whom he further more invited to have another drink, this time with him, and not to worry himself about things he did not understand; and especially not to be inhospitable — which in a hotel-keeper is highly unprofessional.

“I don’t understand,” grumbled Schomberg. “Oh, yes, I understand perfectly well. I — ”

“You are frightened,” interrupted Mr. Jones. “What is the matter?”

“I don’t want any scandal in my place. That’s what’s the matter.”

Schomberg tried to face the situation bravely, but that steady, black stare affected him. And when he glanced aside uncomfortably, he met Ricardo’s grin uncovering a lot of teeth, though the man seemed absorbed in his thoughts all the time.

“And, moreover,” went on Mr. Jones in that distant tone of his, “you can’t help yourself. Here we are and here we stay. Would you try to put us out? I dare say you could do it; but you couldn’t do it without getting hurt — very badly hurt. We can promise him that, can’t we, Martin?”

The secretary retracted his lips and looked up sharply at Schomberg, as if only too anxious to leap upon him with teeth and claws.

Schomberg managed to produce a deep laugh.

“Ha! Ha! Ha!”

Mr Jones closed his eyes wearily, as if the light hurt them, and looked remarkably like a corpse for a moment. This was bad enough; but when he opened them again, it was almost a worse trial for Schomberg’s nerves. The spectral intensity of that glance, fixed on the hotel-keeper (and this was most frightful) without any definite expression, seemed to dissolve the last grain of resolution in his character.

“You don’t think, by any chance, that you have to do with ordinary people, do you?” inquired Mr. Jones, in his lifeless manner, which seemed to imply some sort of menace from beyond the grave.

“He’s a gentleman,” testified Martin Ricardo with a sudden snap of the lips, after which his moustaches stirred by themselves in an odd, feline manner.

“Oh, I wasn’t thinking of that,” said plain Mr. Jones, while Schomberg, dumb and planted heavily in his chair looked from one to the other, leaning forward a little. “Of course I am that; but Ricardo attaches too much importance to a social advantage. What I mean, for instance, is that he, quiet and inoffensive as you see him sitting here, would think nothing of setting fire to this house of entertainment of yours. It would blaze like a box of matches. Think of that! It wouldn’t advance your affairs much, would it? — whatever happened to us.”

“Come, come gentlemen,” remonstrated Schomberg, in a murmur. “This is very wild talk!”

“And you have been used to deal with tame people, haven’t you? But we aren’t tame. We once kept a whole angry town at bay for two days, and then we got away with our plunder. It was in Venezuela. Ask Martin here — he can tell you.”

Instinctively Schomberg looked at Ricardo, who only passed the tip of his tongue over his lips with an uncanny sort of gusto, but did not offer to begin.

“Well, perhaps it would be a rather long story,” Mr. Jones conceded after a short silence.

“I have no desire to hear it, I am sure,” said Schomberg. “This isn’t Venezuela. You wouldn’t get away from here like that. But all this is silly

talk of the worst sort. Do you mean to say you would make deadly trouble for the sake of a few guilders that you and that other” — eyeing Ricardo suspiciously, as one would look at a strange animal — ”gentleman can win of an evening? Isn’t as if my customers were a lot of rich men with pockets full of cash. I wonder you take so much trouble and risk for so little money.”

Schomberg’s argument was met by Mr. Jones’s statement that one must do something to kill time. Killing time was not forbidden. For the rest, being in a communicative mood, Mr. Jones said languidly and in a voice indifferent, as if issuing from a tomb, that he depended on himself, as if the world were still one great, wild jungle without law. Martin was something like that, too — for reasons of his own.

All these statements Ricardo confirmed by short, inhuman grins. Schomberg lowered his eyes, for the sight of these two men intimidated him; but he was losing patience.

“Of course, I could see at once that you were two desperate characters — something like what you say. But what would you think if I told you that I am pretty near as desperate as you two gentlemen? ‘Here’s that Schomberg has an easy time running his hotel,’ people think; and yet it seems to me I would just as soon let you rip me open and burn the whole show as not. There!”

A low whistle was heard. It came from Ricardo, and was derisive. Schomberg, breathing heavily, looked on the floor. He was really desperate. Mr. Jones remained languidly sceptical.

“Tut, tut! You have a tolerable business. You are perfectly tame; you — ” He paused, then added in a tone of disgust: “You have a wife.”

Schomberg tapped the floor angrily with his foot and uttered an indistinct, laughing curse.

“What do you mean by flinging that damned trouble at my head?” he cried. “I wish you would carry her off with you some where to the devil! I wouldn’t run after you.”

The unexpected outburst affected Mr. Jones strangely. He had a horrified recoil, chair and all, as if Schomberg had thrust a wriggling viper in his face.

“What’s this infernal nonsense?” he muttered thickly. “What do you mean? How dare you?”

Ricardo chuckled audibly.

“I tell you I am desperate,” Schomberg repeated. “I am as desperate as any man ever was. I don’t care a hang what happens to me!”

“Well, then” — Mr. Jones began to speak with a quietly threatening effect, as if the common words of daily use had some other deadly meaning to his mind — “well, then, why should you make yourself ridiculously disagreeable to us? If you don’t care, as you say, you might just as well let us have the key of that music-shed of yours for a quiet game; a modest bank — a dozen candles or so. It would be greatly appreciated by your clients, as far as I can judge from the way they betted on a game of ecarte I had with that fair, baby-faced man — what’s his name? They just yearn for a modest bank. And I am afraid Martin here would take it badly if you objected; but of course you won’t. Think of the calls for drinks!”

Schomberg, raising his eyes, at last met the gleams in two dark caverns under Mr. Jones’s devilish eyebrows, directed upon him impenetrably. He shuddered as if horrors worse than murder had been lurking there, and said, nodding towards Ricardo:

“I dare say he wouldn’t think twice about sticking me, if he had you at his back! I wish I had sunk my launch, and gone to the bottom myself in her, before I boarded the steamer you came by. Ah, well, I’ve been already living in hell for weeks, so you don’t make much difference. I’ll let you have the concert-room — and hang the consequences. But what about the boy on late duty? If he sees the cards and actual money passing, he will be sure to blab, and it will be all over the town in no time.”

A ghastly smile stirred the lips of Mr. Jones.

“Ah, I see you want to make a success of it. Very good. That’s the way to get on. Don’t let it disturb you. You chase all the Chinamen to bed early, and we’ll get Pedro here every evening. He isn’t the conventional waiter’s cut, but he will do to run to and fro with the tray, while you sit here from nine to eleven serving out drinks and gathering the money.”

“There will be three of them now,” thought the unlucky Schomberg.

But Pedro, at any rate, was just a simple, straightforward brute, if a murderous one. There was no mystery about him, nothing uncanny, no suggestion of a stealthy, deliberate wildcat turned into a man, or of an insolent spectre on leave from Hades, endowed with skin and bones and a subtle power of terror. Pedro with his fangs, his tangled beard, and queer stare of his little bear’s eyes was, by comparison, delightfully natural. Besides, Schomberg could no longer help himself.

“That will do very well,” he asserted mournfully. “But if you gentlemen, if you had turned up here only three months ago — ay, less than three months ago — you would have found somebody very different from what I am now to talk to you. It’s true. What do you think of that?”

“I scarcely know what to think. I should think it was a lie. You were probably as tame three months ago as you are now. You were born tame, like most people in the world.”

Mr Jones got up spectrally, and Ricardo imitated him with a snarl and a stretch. Schomberg, in a brown study, went on, as if to himself:

“There has been an orchestra here — eighteen women.”

Mr Jones let out an exclamation of dismay, and looked about as if the walls around him and the whole house had been infected with plague. Then he became very angry, and swore violently at Schomberg for daring to bring up such subjects. The hotel-keeper was too much surprised to get up. He gazed from his chair at Mr. Jones’s anger, which had nothing spectral in it but was not the more comprehensible for that.

“What’s the matter?” he stammered out. “What subject? Didn’t you hear me say it was an orchestra? There’s nothing wrong in that. Well, there was a girl amongst them — ” Schomberg’s eyes went stony; he clasped his hands in front of his breast with such force that his knuckles came out white. “Such a girl! Tame, am I? I would have kicked everything to pieces about me for her. And she, of course . . . I am in the prime of life . . . then a fellow bewitched her — a vagabond, a false, lying, swindling, underhand, stick-at-nothing brute. Ah!”

His entwined fingers cracked as he tore his hands apart, flung out his arms, and leaned his forehead on them in a passion of fury. The other two looked at his shaking back — the attenuated Mr. Jones with mingled scorn and a sort of fear, Ricardo with the expression of a cat which sees a piece of fish in the pantry out of reach. Schomberg flung himself backwards. He was dry-eyed, but he gulped as if swallowing sobs.

“No wonder you can do with me what you like. You have no idea — just let me tell you of my trouble — ”

“I don’t want to know anything of your beastly trouble,” said Mr. Jones, in his most lifelessly positive voice.

He stretched forth an arresting hand, and, as Schomberg remained open-mouthed, he walked out of the billiard-room in all the uncanniness of his



thin shanks. Ricardo followed at his leader's heels; but he showed his teeth to Schomberg over his shoulder.

## CHAPTER SIX

From that evening dated those mysterious but significant phenomena in Schomberg's establishment which attracted Captain Davidson's casual notice when he dropped in, placid yet astute, in order to return Mrs. Schomberg's Indian shawl. And strangely enough, they lasted some considerable time. It argued either honesty and bad luck or extraordinary restraint on the part of "plain Mr. Jones and Co." in their discreet operations with cards.

It was a curious and impressive sight, the inside of Schomberg's concert-hall, encumbered at one end by a great stack of chairs piled up on and about the musicians' platform, and lighted at the other by two dozen candles disposed about a long trestle table covered with green cloth. In the middle, Mr. Jones, a starved spectre turned into a banker, faced Ricardo, a rather nasty, slow-moving cat turned into a croupier. By contrast, the other faces round that table, anything between twenty and thirty, must have looked like collected samples of intensely artless, helpless humanity — pathetic in their innocent watch for the small turns of luck which indeed might have been serious enough for them. They had no notice to spare for the hairy Pedro, carrying a tray with the clumsiness of a creature caught in the woods and taught to walk on its hind legs.

As to Schomberg, he kept out of the way. He remained in the billiard-room, serving out drinks to the unspeakable Pedro with an air of not seeing the growling monster, of not knowing where the drinks went, of ignoring that there was such a thing as a music-room over there under the trees within fifty yards of the hotel. He submitted himself to the situation with a low-spirited stoicism compounded of fear and resignation. Directly the party had broken up, (he could see dark shapes of the men drifting singly and in knots through the gate of the compound), he would withdraw out of sight behind a door not quite closed, in order to avoid meeting his two extraordinary guests; but he would watch through the crack their contrasted forms pass through the billiard-room and disappear on their way to bed. Then he would hear doors being slammed upstairs; and a profound silence would fall upon the whole house, upon his hotel appropriated, haunted by those insolently outspoken men provided with a whole armoury of weapons in their trunks. A profound silence. Schomberg sometimes could not resist the notion that he must be dreaming. Shuddering, he would pull himself

together, and creep out, with movements strangely inappropriate to the Lieutenant-of-the-Reserve bearing by which he tried to keep up his self-respect before the world.

A great loneliness oppressed him. One after another he would extinguish the lamps, and move softly towards his bedroom, where Mrs. Schomberg waited for him — no fit companion for a man of his ability and “in the prime of life.” But that life, alas, was blighted. He felt it; and never with such force as when on opening the door he perceived that woman sitting patiently in a chair, her toes peeping out under the edge of her night-dress, an amazingly small amount of hair on her head drooping on the long stalk of scraggy neck, with that everlasting scared grin showing a blue tooth and meaning nothing — not even real fear. For she was used to him.

Sometimes he was tempted to screw the head off the stalk. He imagined himself doing it — with one hand, a twisting movement. Not seriously, of course. Just a simple indulgence for his exasperated feelings. He wasn’t capable of murder. He was certain of that. And, remembering suddenly the plain speeches of Mr. Jones, he would think: “I suppose I am too tame for that” — quite unaware that he had murdered the poor woman morally years ago. He was too unintelligent to have the notion of such a crime. Her bodily presence was bitterly offensive, because of its contrast with a very different feminine image. And it was no use getting rid of her. She was a habit of years, and there would be nothing to put in her place. At any rate, he could talk to that idiot half the night if he chose.

That night he had been vapouring before her as to his intention to face his two guests and, instead of that inspiration he needed, had merely received the usual warning: “Be careful, Wilhelm.” He did not want to be told to be careful by an imbecile female. What he needed was a pair of woman’s arms which, flung round his neck, would brace him up for the encounter. Inspire him, he called it to himself.

He lay awake a long time; and his slumbers, when they came, were unsatisfactory and short. The morning light had no joy for his eyes. He listened dismally to the movements in the house. The Chinamen were unlocking and flinging wide the doors of the public rooms which opened on the veranda. Horrors! Another poisoned day to get through somehow! The recollection of his resolve made him feel actually sick for a moment. First of all the lordly, abandoned attitudes of Mr. Jones disconcerted him. Then there was his contemptuous silence. Mr. Jones never addressed himself to

Schomberg with any general remarks, never opened his lips to him unless to say "Good morning" — two simple words which, uttered by that man, seemed a mockery of a threatening character. And, lastly, it was not a frank physical fear he inspired — for as to that, even a cornered rat will fight — but a superstitious shrinking awe, something like an invincible repugnance to seek speech with a wicked ghost. That it was a daylight ghost surprisingly angular in his attitudes, and for the most part spread out on three chairs, did not make it any easier. Daylight only made him a more weird, a more disturbing and unlawful apparition. Strangely enough in the evening when he came out of his mute supineness, this unearthly side of him was less obtrusive. At the gaming-table, when actually handling the cards, it was probably sunk quite out of sight; but Schomberg, having made up his mind in ostrich-like fashion to ignore what was going on, never entered the desecrated music-room. He had never seen Mr. Jones in the exercise of his vocation — or perhaps it was only his trade.

"I will speak to him tonight," Schomberg said to himself, while he drank his morning tea, in pyjamas, on the veranda, before the rising sun had topped the trees of the compound, and while the undried dew still lay silvery on the grass, sparkled on the blossoms of the central flower-bed, and darkened the yellow gravel of the drive. "That's what I'll do. I won't keep out of sight tonight. I shall come out and catch him as he goes to bed carrying the cash-box."

After all, what was the fellow but a common desperado? Murderous? Oh, yes; murderous enough, perhaps — and the muscles of Schomberg's stomach had a quivering contraction under his airy attire. But even a common desperado would think twice or, more likely, a hundred times, before openly murdering an inoffensive citizen in a civilized, European-ruled town. He jerked his shoulders. Of course! He shuddered again, and paddled back to his room to dress himself. His mind was made up, and he would think no more about it; but still he had his doubts. They grew and unfolded themselves with the progress of the day, as some plants do. At times they made him perspire more than usual, and they did away with the possibility of his afternoon siesta. After turning over on his couch more than a dozen times, he gave up this mockery of repose, got up, and went downstairs.

It was between three and four o'clock, the hour of profound peace. The very flowers seemed to doze on their stalks set with sleepy leaves. Not even

the air stirred, for the sea-breeze was not due till later. The servants were out of sight, catching naps in the shade somewhere behind the house. Mrs. Schomberg in a dim up-stair room with closed jalousies, was elaborating those two long pendant ringlets which were such a feature of her hairdressing for her afternoon duties. At that time no customers ever troubled the repose of the establishment. Wandering about his premises in profound solitude, Schomberg recoiled at the door of the billiard-room, as if he had seen a snake in his path. All alone with the billiards, the bare little tables, and a lot of untenanted chairs, Mr. Secretary Ricardo sat near the wall, performing with lightning rapidity something that looked like tricks with his own personal pack of cards, which he always carried about in his pocket. Schomberg would have backed out quietly if Ricardo had not turned his head. Having been seen, the hotel-keeper elected to walk in as the lesser risk of the two. The consciousness of his inwardly abject attitude towards these men caused him always to throw his chest out and assume a severe expression. Ricardo watched his approach, clasping the pack of cards in both hands.

“You want something, perhaps?” suggested Schomberg in his lieutenant-of-the-Reserve voice.

Ricardo shook his head in silence and looked expectant. With him Schomberg exchanged at least twenty words every day. He was infinitely more communicative than his patron. At times he looked very much like an ordinary human being of his class; and he seemed to be in an amiable mood at that moment. Suddenly spreading some ten cards face downward in the form of a fan, he thrust them towards Schomberg.

“Come, man, take one quick!”

Schomberg was so surprised that he took one hurriedly, after a very perceptible start. The eyes of Martin Ricardo gleamed phosphorescent in the half-light of the room screened from the heat and glare of the tropics.

“That’s the king of hearts you’ve got,” he chuckled, showing his teeth in a quick flash.

Schomberg, after looking at the card, admitted that it was, and laid it down on the table.

“I can make you take any card I like nine times out of ten,” exulted the secretary, with a strange curl of his lips and a green flicker in his raised eyes.

Schomberg looked down at him dumbly. For a few seconds neither of them stirred; then Ricardo lowered his glance, and, opening his fingers, let the whole pack fall on the table. Schomberg sat down. He sat down because of the faintness in his legs, and for no other reason. His mouth was dry. Having sat down, he felt that he must speak. He squared his shoulders in parade style.

“You are pretty good at that sort of thing,” he said.

“Practice makes perfect,” replied the secretary.

His precarious amiability made it impossible for Schomberg to get away. Thus, from his very timidity, the hotel-keeper found himself engaged in a conversation the thought of which filled him with apprehension. It must be said, in justice to Schomberg, that he concealed his funk very creditably. The habit of throwing out his chest and speaking in a severe voice stood him in good stead. With him, too, practice made perfect; and he would probably have kept it up to the end, to the very last moment, to the ultimate instant of breaking strain which would leave him grovelling on the floor. To add to his secret trouble, he was at a loss what to say. He found nothing else but the remark:

“I suppose you are fond of cards.”

“What would you expect?” asked Ricardo in a simple, philosophical tone. “It is likely I should not be?” Then, with sudden fire: “Fond of cards? Ay, passionately!”

The effect of this outburst was augmented by the quiet lowering of the eyelids, by a reserved pause as though this had been a confession of another kind of love. Schomberg cudgelled his brains for a new topic, but he could not find one. His usual scandalous gossip would not serve this turn. That desperado did not know anyone anywhere within a thousand miles. Schomberg was almost compelled to keep to the subject.

“I suppose you’ve always been so — from your early youth.”

Ricardo’s eyes remained cast down. His fingers toyed absently with the pack on the table.

“I don’t know that it was so early. I first got in the way of it playing for tobacco — in forecastles of ships, you know — common sailor games. We used to spend whole watches below at it, round a chest, under a slush lamp. We would hardly spare the time to get a bite of salt horse — neither eat nor sleep. We could hardly stand when the watches were mustered on deck.

Talk of gambling!” He dropped the reminiscent tone to add the information, “I was bred to the sea from a boy, you know.”

Schomberg had fallen into a reverie, but without losing the sense of impending calamity. The next words he heard were:

“I got on all right at sea, too. Worked up to be mate. I was mate of a schooner — a yacht, you might call her — a special good berth too, in the Gulf of Mexico, a soft job that you don’t run across more than once in a lifetime. Yes, I was mate of her when I left the sea to follow him.”

Ricardo tossed up his chin to indicate the room above; from which Schomberg, his wits painfully aroused by this reminder of Mr. Jones’s existence, concluded that the latter had withdrawn into his bedroom. Ricardo, observing him from under lowered eyelids, went on:

“It so happened that we were shipmates.”

“Mr Jones, you mean? Is he a sailor too?”

Ricardo raised his eyelids at that.

“He’s no more Mr. Jones than you are,” he said with obvious pride. “He a sailor! That just shows your ignorance. But there! A foreigner can’t be expected to know any better. I am an Englishman, and I know a gentleman at sight. I should know one drunk, in the gutter, in jail, under the gallows. There’s a something — it isn’t exactly the appearance, it’s a — no use me trying to tell you. You ain’t an Englishman, and if you were, you wouldn’t need to be told.”

An unsuspected stream of loquacity had broken its dam somewhere deep within the man, had diluted his fiery blood and softened his pitiless fibre. Schomberg experienced mingled relief and apprehension, as if suddenly an enormous savage cat had begun to wind itself about his legs in inexplicable friendliness. No prudent man under such circumstances would dare to stir. Schomberg didn’t stir. Ricardo assumed an easy attitude, with an elbow on the table. Schomberg squared his shoulders afresh.

“I was employed, in that there yacht — schooner, whatever you call it — by ten gentlemen at once. That surprises you, eh? Yes, yes, ten. Leastwise there were nine of them gents good enough in their way, and one downright gentleman, and that was . . .”

Ricardo gave another upward jerk of his chin as much as to say: He! The only one.

“And no mistake,” he went on. “I spotted him from the first day. How? Why? Ay, you may ask. Hadn’t seen that many gentlemen in my life. Well,

somehow I did. If you were an Englishman, you would — ”

“What was your yacht?” Schomberg interrupted as impatiently as he dared; for this harping on nationality jarred on his already tried nerves. “What was the game?”

“You have a headpiece on you! Game! ‘Xactly. That’s what it was — the sort of silliness gentlemen will get up among themselves to play at adventure. A treasure-hunting expedition. Each of them put down so much money, you understand, to buy the schooner. Their agent in the city engaged me and the skipper. The greatest secrecy and all that. I reckon he had a twinkle in his eye all the time — and no mistake. But that wasn’t our business. Let them bust their money as they like. The pity of it was that so little of it came our way. Just fair pay and no more. And damn any pay, much or little, anyhow — that’s what I say!”

He blinked his eyes greenishly in the dim light. The heat seemed to have stilled everything in the world but his voice. He swore at large, abundantly, in snarling undertones, it was impossible to say why, then calmed down as inexplicably, and went on, as a sailor yarns.

“At first there were only nine of them adventurous sparks, then, just a day or two before the sailing date, he turned up. Heard of it somehow, somewhere — I would say from some woman, if I didn’t know him as I do. He would give any woman a ten-mile berth. He can’t stand them. Or maybe in a flash bar. Or maybe in one of them grand clubs in Pall Mall. Anyway, the agent netted him in all right — cash down, and only about four and twenty hours for him to get ready; but he didn’t miss his ship. Not he! You might have called it a pier-head jump — for a gentleman. I saw him come along. Know the West India Docks, eh?”

Schomberg did not know the West India Docks. Ricardo looked at him pensively for a while, and then continued, as if such ignorance had to be disregarded.

“Our tug was already alongside. Two loafers were carrying his dunnage behind him. I told the dockman at our moorings to keep all fast for a minute. The gangway was down already; but he made nothing of it. Up he jumps, one leap, swings his long legs over the rail, and there he is on board. They pass up his swell dunnage, and he puts his hand in his trousers pocket and throws all his small change on the wharf for them chaps to pick up. They were still promenading that wharf on all fours when we cast off. It was only then that he looked at me — quietly, you know; in a slow way. He



wasn't so thin then as he is now; but I noticed he wasn't so young as he looked — not by a long chalk. He seemed to touch me inside somewhere. I went away pretty quick from there; I was wanted forward anyhow. I wasn't frightened. What should I be frightened for? I only felt touched — on the very spot. But Jee-miny, if anybody had told me we should be partners before the year was out — well, I would have — ”

He swore a variety of strange oaths, some common, others quaintly horrible to Schomberg's ears, and all mere innocent exclamations of wonder at the shifts and changes of human fortune. Schomberg moved slightly in his chair. But the admirer and partner of “plain Mr. Jones” seemed to have forgotten Schomberg's existence for the moment. The stream of ingenuous blasphemy — some of it in bad Spanish — had run dry, and Martin Ricardo, connoisseur in gentlemen, sat dumb with a stony gaze as if still marvelling inwardly at the amazing elections, conjunctions, and associations of events which influence man's pilgrimage on this earth.

At last Schomberg spoke tentatively:

“And so the — the gentleman, up there, talked you over into leaving a good berth?”

Ricardo started.

“Talked me over! Didn't need to talk me over. Just beckoned to me, and that was enough. By that time we were in the Gulf of Mexico. One night we were lying at anchor, close to a dry sandbank — to this day I am not sure where it was — off the Colombian coast or thereabouts. We were to start digging the next morning, and all hands had turned in early, expecting a hard day with the shovels. Up he comes, and in his quiet, tired way of speaking — you can tell a gentleman by that as much as by anything else almost — up he comes behind me and says, just like that into my ear, in a manner: ‘Well, what do you think of our treasure hunt now?’

“I didn't even turn my head; ‘xactly as I stood, I remained, and I spoke no louder than himself:

“‘If you want to know, sir, it's nothing but just damned tom-foolery.’

“We had, of course, been having short talks together at one time or another during the passage. I dare say he had read me like a book. There ain't much to me, except that I have never been tame, even when walking the pavement and cracking jokes and standing drinks to chums — ay, and to strangers, too. I would watch them lifting their elbows at my expense, or splitting their side at my fun — I can be funny when I like, you bet!”

A pause for self-complacent contemplation of his own fun and generosity checked the flow of Ricardo's speech. Schomberg was concerned to keep within bounds the enlargement of his eyes, which he seemed to feel growing bigger in his head.

"Yes, yes," he whispered hastily.

"I would watch them and think: 'You boys don't know who I am. If you did — !' With girls, too. Once I was courting a girl. I used to kiss her behind the ear and say to myself: 'If you only knew who's kissing you, my dear, you would scream and bolt!' Ha! ha! Not that I wanted to do them any harm; but I felt the power in myself. Now, here we sit, friendly like, and that's all right. You aren't in my way. But I am not friendly to you. I just don't care. Some men do say that; but I really don't. You are no more to me one way or another than that fly there. Just so. I'd squash you or leave you alone. I don't care what I do."

If real force of character consists in overcoming our sudden weaknesses, Schomberg displayed plenty of that quality. At the mention of the fly, he re-enforced the severe dignity of his attitude as one inflates a collapsing toy balloon with a great effort of breath. The easy-going, relaxed attitude of Ricardo was really appalling.

"That's so," he went on. "I am that sort of fellow. You wouldn't think it, would you? No. You have to be told. So I am telling you, and I dare say you only half believe it. But you can't say to yourself that I am drunk, stare at me as you may. I haven't had anything stronger than a glass of iced water all day. Takes a real gentleman to see through a fellow. Oh, yes — he spotted me. I told you we had a few talks at sea about one thing or another. And I used to watch him down the skylight, playing cards in the cuddy with the others. They had to pass the time away somehow. By the same token he caught me at it once, and it was then that I told him I was fond of cards — and generally lucky in gambling, too. Yes, he had sized me up. Why not? A gentleman's just like any other man — and something more."

It flashed through Schomberg's mind: that these two were indeed well matched in their enormous dissimilarity, identical souls in different disguises.

"Says he to me" — Ricardo started again in a gossiping manner — 'I'm packed up. It's about time to go, Martin.'

"It was the first time he called me Martin. Says I:

"'Is that it, sir?'

“‘You didn’t think I was after that sort of treasure, did you? I wanted to clear out from home quietly. It’s a pretty expensive way of getting a passage across, but it has served my turn.’

“I let him know very soon that I was game for anything, from pitch and toss to wilful murder, in his company.

“‘Wilful murder?’ says he in his quiet way. ‘What the deuce is that? What are you talking about? People do get killed sometimes when they get in one’s way, but that’s self-defence — you understand?’

“I told him I did. And then I said I would run below for a minute, to ram a few of my things into a sailor’s bag I had. I’ve never cared for a lot of dunnage; I believed in going about flying light when I was at sea. I came back and found him strolling up and down the deck, as if he were taking a breath of fresh air before turning in, like any other evening.

“‘Ready?’

“‘Yes, sir.’

“He didn’t even look at me. We had had a boat in the water astern ever since we came to anchor in the afternoon. He throws the stump of his cigar overboard.

“‘Can you get the captain out on deck?’ he asks.

“That was the last thing in the world I should have thought of doing. I lost my tongue for a moment.

“‘I can try,’ says I.

“‘Well, then, I am going below. You get him up and keep him with you till I come back on deck. Mind! Don’t let him go below till I return.’

“I could not help asking why he told me to rouse a sleeping man, when we wanted everybody on board to sleep sweetly till we got clear of the schooner. He laughs a little and says that I didn’t see all the bearings of this business.

“‘Mind,’ he says, ‘don’t let him leave you till you see me come up again.’ He puts his eyes close to mine. ‘Keep him with you at all costs.’

“‘And that means?’ says I.

“‘All costs to him — by every possible or impossible means. I don’t want to be interrupted in my business down below. He would give me lots of trouble. I take you with me to save myself trouble in various circumstances; and you’ve got to enter on your work right away.’

“‘Just so, sir,’ says I; and he slips down the companion.

“With a gentleman you know at once where you are; but it was a ticklish job. The skipper was nothing to me one way or another, any more than you are at this moment, Mr. Schomberg. You may light your cigar or blow your brains out this minute, and I don’t care a hang which you do, both or neither. To bring the skipper up was easy enough. I had only to stamp on the deck a few times over his head. I stamped hard. But how to keep him up when he got there?

“‘Anything the matter; Mr. Ricardo?’ I heard his voice behind me.

“There he was, and I hadn’t thought of anything to say to him; so I didn’t turn round. The moonlight was brighter than many a day I could remember in the North Sea.

“‘Why did you call me? What are you staring at out there, Mr. Ricardo?’

“He was deceived by my keeping my back to him. I wasn’t staring at anything, but his mistake gave me a notion.

“‘I am staring at something that looks like a canoe over there,’ I said very slowly.

“The skipper got concerned at once. It wasn’t any danger from the inhabitants, whoever they were.

“‘Oh, hang it!’ says he. ‘That’s very unfortunate.’ He had hoped that the schooner being on the coast would not get known so very soon. ‘Dashed awkward, with the business we’ve got in hand, to have a lot of niggers watching operations. But are you certain this is a canoe?’

“‘It may be a drift-log,’ I said; ‘but I thought you had better have a look with your own eyes. You may make it out better than I can.’

“His eyes weren’t anything as good as mine. But he says:

“‘Certainly. Certainly. You did quite right.’

“And it’s a fact I had seen some drift-logs at sunset. I saw what they were then and didn’t trouble my head about them, forgot all about it till that very moment. Nothing strange in seeing drift-logs off a coast like that; and I’m hanged if the skipper didn’t make one out in the wake of the moon. Strange what a little thing a man’s life hangs on sometimes — a single word! Here you are, sitting unsuspecting before me, and you may let out something unbeknown to you that would settle your hash. Not that I have any ill-feeling. I have no feelings. If the skipper had said, ‘O, bosh!’ and had turned his back on me, he would not have gone three steps towards his bed; but he stood there and stared. And now the job was to get him off the deck when he was no longer wanted there.

“‘We are just trying to make out if that object there is a canoe or a log,’ says he to Mr. Jones.

“Mr Jones had come up, lounging as carelessly as when he went below. While the skipper was jawing about boats and drifting logs. I asked by signs, from behind, if I hadn’t better knock him on the head and drop him quietly overboard. The night was slipping by, and we had to go. It couldn’t be put off till next night no more. No. No more. And do you know why?”

Schomberg made a slight negative sign with his head. This direct appeal annoyed him, jarred on the induced quietude of a great talker forced into the part of a listener and sunk in it as a man sinks into slumber. Mr. Ricardo struck a note of scorn.

“Don’t know why? Can’t you guess? No? Because the boss had got hold of the skipper’s cash-box by then. See?”

## CHAPTER SEVEN

“A common thief!”

Schomberg bit his tongue just too late, and woke up completely as he saw Ricardo retract his lips in a cat-like grin; but the companion of “plain Mr. Jones” didn’t alter his comfortable, gossiping attitude.

“Garn! What if he did want to see his money back, like any tame shopkeeper, hash-seller, gin-slinger, or ink-spewer does? Fancy a mud turtle like you trying to pass an opinion on a gentleman! A gentleman isn’t to be sized up so easily. Even I ain’t up to it sometimes. For instance, that night, all he did was to waggle his finger at me. The skipper stops his silly chatter, surprised.

“‘Eh? What’s the matter?’ asks he.

“The matter! It was his reprieve — that’s what was the matter.

“‘O, nothing, nothing,’ says my gentleman. ‘You are perfectly right. A log — nothing but a log.’

“Ha, ha! Reprieve, I call it, because if the skipper had gone on with his silly argument much longer he would have had to be knocked out of the way. I could hardly hold myself in on account of the precious minutes. However, his guardian angel put it into his head to shut up and go back to his bed. I was ramping mad about the lost time.”

“‘Why didn’t you let me give him one on his silly coconut sir?’ I asks.

“‘No ferocity, no ferocity,’ he says, raising his finger at me as calm as you please.

“You can’t tell how a gentleman takes that sort of thing. They don’t lose their temper. It’s bad form. You’ll never see him lose his temper — not for anybody to see anyhow. Ferocity ain’t good form, either — that much I’ve learned by this time, and more, too. I’ve had that schooling that you couldn’t tell by my face if I meant to rip you up the next minute — as of course I could do in less than a jiffy. I have a knife up the leg of my trousers.”

“You haven’t!” exclaimed Schomberg incredulously.

Mr Ricardo was as quick as lightning in changing his lounging, idle attitude for a stooping position, and exhibiting the weapon with one jerk at the left leg of his trousers. Schomberg had just a view of it, strapped to a very hairy limb, when Mr. Ricardo, jumping up, stamped his foot to get the

trouser-leg down, and resumed his careless pose with one elbow on the table.

“It’s a more handy way to carry a tool than you would think,” he went on, gazing abstractedly into Schomberg’s wide-open eyes. “Suppose some little difference comes up during a game. Well, you stoop to pick up a dropped card, and when you come up — there you are ready to strike, or with the thing up you sleeve ready to throw. Or you just dodge under the table when there’s some shooting coming. You wouldn’t believe the damage a fellow with a knife under the table can do to ill-conditioned skunks that want to raise trouble, before they begin to understand what the screaming’s about, and make a bolt — those that can, that is.”

The roses of Schomberg’s cheek at the root of his chestnut beard faded perceptibly. Ricardo chuckled faintly.

“But no ferocity — no ferocity! A gentleman knows. What’s the good of getting yourself into a state? And no shirking necessity, either. No gentleman ever shirks. What I learn I don’t forget. Why! We gambled on the plains, with a damn lot of cattlemen in ranches; played fair, mind — and then had to fight for our winnings afterwards as often as not. We’ve gambled on the hills and in the valleys and on the sea-shore, and out of sight of land — mostly fair. Generally it’s good enough. We began in Nicaragua first, after we left that schooner and her fool errand. There were one hundred and twenty-seven sovereigns and some Mexican dollars in that skipper’s cash-box. Hardly enough to knock a man on the head for from behind, I must confess; but that the skipper had a narrow escape the governor himself could not deny afterwards.

““Do you want me to understand, sir, that you mind there being one life more or less on this earth?’ I asked him, a few hours after we got away.

““Certainly not,’ says he.

““Well, then, why did you stop me?’

““There’s a proper way of doing things. You’ll have to learn to be correct. There’s also unnecessary exertion. That must be avoided, too — if only for the look of the thing.’ A gentleman’s way of putting things to you — and no mistake!

“At sunrise we got into a creek, to lie hidden in case the treasure hunt party had a mind to take a spell hunting for us. And dash me if they didn’t! We saw the schooner away out, running to leeward, with ten pairs of binoculars sweeping the sea, no doubt on all sides. I advised the governor to

give her time to beat back again before we made a start. So we stayed up that creek something like ten days, as snug as can be. On the seventh day we had to kill a man, though — the brother of this Pedro here. They were alligator-hunters, right enough. We got our lodgings in their hut. Neither the boss nor I could habla Espanol — speak Spanish, you know — much then. Dry bank, nice shade, jolly hammocks, fresh fish, good game, everything lovely. The governor chucked them a few dollars to begin with; but it was like boarding with a pair of savage apes, anyhow. By and by we noticed them talking a lot together. They had twigged the cash-box, and the leather portmanteaus, and my bag — a jolly lot of plunder to look at. They must have been saying to each other:

“‘No one’s ever likely to come looking for these two fellows, who seem to have fallen from the moon. Let’s cut their throats.’

“Why, of course! Clear as daylight. I didn’t need to spy one of them sharpening a devilish long knife behind some bushes, while glancing right and left with his wild eyes, to know what was in the wind. Pedro was standing by, trying the edge of another long knife. They thought we were away on our lookout at the mouth of the river, as was usual with us during the day. Not that we expected to see much of the schooner, but it was just as well to make certain, if possible; and then it was cooler out of the woods, in the breeze. Well, the governor was there right enough, lying comfortable on a rug, where he could watch the offing, but I had gone back to the hut to get a chew of tobacco out of my bag. I had not broken myself of the habit then, and I couldn’t be happy unless I had a lump as big as a baby’s fist in my cheek.”

At the cannibalistic comparison, Schomberg muttered a faint, sickly “don’t.” Ricardo hitched himself up in his seat and glanced down his outstretched legs complacently.

“I am tolerably light on my feet, as a general thing,” he went on. “Dash me if I don’t think I could drop a pinch of salt on a sparrow’s tail, if I tried. Anyhow, they didn’t hear me. I watched them two brown, hairy brutes not ten yards off. All they had on was white linen drawers rolled up on their thighs. Not a word they said to each other. Antonio was down on his thick hams, busy rubbing a knife on a flat stone; Pedro was leaning against a small tree and passing his thumb along the edge of his blade. I got away quieter than a mouse, you bet.”



“I didn’t say anything to the boss then. He was leaning on his elbow on his rug, and didn’t seem to want to be spoken to. He’s like that — sometimes that familiar you might think he would eat out of your hand, and at others he would snub you sharper than a devil — but always quiet. Perfect gentleman, I tell you. I didn’t bother him, then; but I wasn’t likely to forget them two fellows, so businesslike with their knives. At that time we had only one revolver between us two — the governor’s six-shooter, but loaded only in five chambers; and we had no more cartridges. He had left the box behind in a drawer in his cabin. Awkward! I had nothing but an old clasp-knife — no good at all for anything serious.

“In the evening we four sat round a bit of fire outside the sleeping-shed, eating broiled fish off plantain leaves, with roast yams for bread — the usual thing. The governor and I were on one side, and these two beauties cross-legged on the other, grunting a word or two to each other, now and then, hardly human speech at all, and their eyes down, fast on the ground. For the last three days we couldn’t get them to look us in the face. Presently I began to talk to the boss quietly, just as I am talking to you now, careless like, and I told him all I had observed. He goes on picking up pieces of fish and putting them into his mouth as calm as anything. It’s a pleasure to have anything to do with a gentleman. Never looked across at them once.

“‘And now,’ says I, yawning on purpose, ‘we’ve got to stand watch at night, turn about, and keep our eyes skinned all day, too, and mind we don’t get jumped upon suddenly.’

“‘It’s perfectly intolerable,’ says the governor. ‘And you with no weapon of any sort!’

“‘I mean to stick pretty close to you, sir, from this on, if you don’t mind,’ says I.

“He just nods the least bit, wipes his fingers on the plantain leaf, puts his hand behind his back, as if to help himself to rise from the ground, snatches his revolver from under his jacket and plugs a bullet plumb centre into Mr. Antonio’s chest. See what it is to have to do with a gentleman. No confounded fuss, and things done out of hand. But he might have tipped me a wink or something. I nearly jumped out of my skin. Scared ain’t in it! I didn’t even know who had fired. Everything had been so still just before that the bang of the shot seemed the loudest noise I had ever heard. The honourable Antonio pitches forward — they always do, towards the shot; you must have noticed that yourself — yes, he pitches forward on to the

embers, and all that lot of hair on his face and head flashes up like a pinch of gunpowder. Greasy, I expect; always scraping the fat off them alligators' hides — ”

“Look here,” exclaimed Schomberg violently, as if trying to burst some invisible bonds, “do you mean to say that all this happened?”

“No,” said Ricardo coolly. “I am making it all up as I go along, just to help you through the hottest part of the afternoon. So down he pitches his nose on the red embers, and up jumps our handsome Pedro and I at the same time, like two Jacks-in-the-box. He starts to bolt away, with his head over his shoulder, and I, hardly knowing what I was doing, spring on his back. I had the sense to get my hands round his neck at once, and it's about all I could do to lock my fingers tight under his jaw. You saw the beauty's neck, didn't you? Hard as iron, too. Down we both went. Seeing this the governor puts his revolver in his pocket.

““Tie his legs together, sir,’ I yell. ‘I'm trying to strangle him.’

“There was a lot of their fibre-lines lying about. I gave him a last squeeze and then got up.

““I might have shot you,’ says the governor, quite concerned.

““But you are glad to have saved a cartridge, sir,’ I tell him.

“My jump did save it. It wouldn't have done to let him get away in the dark like that, and have the beauty dodging around in the bushes, perhaps, with the rusty flint-lock gun they had. The governor owned up that the jump was the correct thing.

““But he isn't dead,’ says he, bending over him.

“Might as well hope to strangle an ox. We made haste to tie his elbows back, and then, before he came to himself, we dragged him to a small tree, sat him up, and bound him to it, not by the waist but by the neck — some twenty turns of small line round his throat and the trunk, finished off with a reef-knot under his ear. Next thing we did was to attend to the honourable Antonio, who was making a great smell frizzling his face on the red coals. We pushed and rolled him into the creek, and left the rest to the alligators.

“I was tired. That little scrap took it out of me something awful. The governor hadn't turned a hair. That's where a gentleman has the pull of you. He don't get excited. No gentleman does — or hardly ever. I fell asleep all of a sudden and left him smoking by the fire I had made up, his railway rug round his legs, as calm as if he were sitting in a first-class carriage. We hardly spoke ten words to each other after it was over, and from that day to

this we have never talked of the business. I wouldn't have known he remembered it if he hadn't alluded to it when talking with you the other day — you know, with regard to Pedro.”

“It surprised you, didn't it? That's why I am giving you this yarn of how he came to be with us, like a sort of dog — dashed sight more useful, though. You know how he can trot around with trays? Well, he could bring down an ox with his fist, at a word from the boss, just as cleverly. And fond of the governor! Oh, my word! More than any dog is of any man.”

Schomberg squared his chest.

“Oh, and that's one of the things I wanted to mention to Mr. Jones,” he said. “It's unpleasant to have that fellow round the house so early. He sits on the stairs at the back for hours before he is needed here, and frightens people so that the service suffers. The Chinamen — ”

Ricardo nodded and raised his hand.

“When I first saw him he was fit to frighten a grizzly bear, let alone a Chinaman. He's become civilized now to what he once was. Well, that morning, first thing on opening my eyes, I saw him sitting there, tied up by the neck to the tree. He was blinking. We spent the day watching the sea, and we actually made out the schooner working to windward, which showed that she had given us up. Good! When the sun rose again, I took a squint at our Pedro. He wasn't blinking. He was rolling his eyes, all white one minute and black the next, and his tongue was hanging out a yard. Being tied up short by the neck like this would daunt the arch devil himself — in time — in time, mind! I don't know but that even a real gentleman would find it difficult to keep a stiff lip to the end. Presently we went to work getting our boat ready. I was busying myself setting up the mast, when the governor passes the remark:

“‘I think he wants to say something.’

“I had heard a sort of croaking going on for some time, only I wouldn't take any notice; but then I got out of the boat and went up to him, with some water. His eyes were red — red and black and half out of his head. He drank all the water I gave him, but he hadn't much to say for himself. I walked back to the governor.

“‘He asks for a bullet in his head before we go,’ I said. I wasn't at all pleased.

“‘Oh, that's out of the question altogether,’ says the governor.

“He was right there. Only four shots left, and ninety miles of wild coast to put behind us before coming to the first place where you could expect to buy revolver cartridges.

“‘Anyhow,’ I tells him, ‘he wants to be killed some way or other, as a favour.’

“And then I go on setting up the boat’s mast. I didn’t care much for the notion of butchering a man bound hand and foot and fastened by the neck besides. I had a knife then — the honourable Antonio’s knife; and that knife is this knife.

“Ricardo gave his leg a resounding slap.

“First spoil in my new life,” he went on with harsh joviality. “The dodge of carrying it down there I learned later. I carried it stuck in my belt that day. No, I hadn’t much stomach for the job; but when you work with a gentleman of the real right sort you may depend on your feelings being seen through your skin. Says the governor suddenly:

“‘It may even be looked upon as his right’ — you hear a gentleman speaking there? — ’but what do you think of taking him with us in the boat?’

“And the governor starts arguing that the beggar would be useful in working our way along the coast. We could get rid of him before coming to the first place that was a little civilized. I didn’t want much talking over. Out I scrambled from the boat.

“‘Ay, but will he be manageable, sir?’

“‘Oh, yes. He’s daunted. Go on, cut him loose — I take the responsibility.’

“‘Right you are, sir.’

“He sees me come along smartly with his brother’s knife in my hand — I wasn’t thinking how it looked from his side of the fence, you know — and jiminy, it nearly killed him! He stared like a crazed bullock and began to sweat and twitch all over, something amazing. I was so surprised, that I stopped to look at him. The drops were pouring over his eyebrows, down his beard, off his nose — and he gurgled. Then it struck me that he couldn’t see what was in my mind. By favour or by right he didn’t like to die when it came to it; not in that way, anyhow. When I stepped round to get at the lashing, he let out a sort of soft bellow. Thought I was going to stick him from behind, I guess. I cut all the turns with one slash, and he went over on his side, flop, and started kicking with his tied legs. Laugh! I don’t know

what there was so funny about it, but I fairly shouted. What between my laughing and his wriggling, I had a job in cutting him free. As soon as he could feel his limbs he makes for the bank, where the governor was standing, crawls up to him on his hands and knees, and embraces his legs. Gratitude, eh? You could see that being allowed to live suited that chap down to the ground. The governor gets his legs away from him gently and just mutters to me:

“‘Let’s be off. Get him into the boat.’

“It was not difficult,” continued Ricardo, after eyeing Schomberg fixedly for a moment. “He was ready enough to get into the boat, and — here he is. He would let himself be chopped into small pieces — with a smile, mind; with a smile! — for the governor. I don’t know about him doing that much for me; but pretty near, pretty near. I did the tying up and the untying, but he could see who was the boss. And then he knows a gentleman. A dog knows a gentleman — any dog. It’s only some foreigners that don’t know; and nothing can teach them, either.”

“And you mean to say,” asked Schomberg, disregarding what might have been annoying for himself in the emphasis of the final remark, “you mean to say that you left steady employment at good wages for a life like this?”

“There!” began Ricardo quietly. “That’s just what a man like you would say. You are that tame! I follow a gentleman. That ain’t the same thing as to serve an employer. They give you wages as they’d fling a bone to a dog, and they expect you to be grateful. It’s worse than slavery. You don’t expect a slave that’s bought for money to be grateful. And if you sell your work — what is it but selling your own self? You’ve got so many days to live and you sell them one after another. Hey? Who can pay me enough for my life? Ay! But they throw at you your week’s money and expect you to say ‘thank you’ before you pick it up.”

He mumbled some curses, directed at employers generally, as it seemed, then blazed out:

“Work be damned! I ain’t a dog walking on its hind legs for a bone; I am a man who’s following a gentleman. There’s a difference which you will never understand, Mr. Tame Schomberg.”

He yawned slightly. Schomberg, preserving a military stiffness reinforced by a slight frown, had allowed his thoughts to stray away. They were busy detailing the image of a young girl — absent — gone — stolen from him. He became enraged. There was that rascal looking at him insolently. If the

girl had not been shamefully decoyed away from him, he would not have allowed anyone to look at him insolently. He would have made nothing of hitting that rogue between the eyes. Afterwards he would have kicked the other without hesitation. He saw himself doing it; and in sympathy with this glorious vision Schomberg's right foot, and arm moved convulsively.

At this moment he came out of his sudden reverie to note with alarm the wide-awake curiosity of Mr. Ricardo's stare.

"And so you go like this about the world, gambling," he remarked inanely, to cover his confusion. But Ricardo's stare did not change its character, and he continued vaguely:

"Here and there and everywhere." He pulled himself together, squared his shoulders. "Isn't it very precarious?" he said firmly.

The word precarious — seemed to be effective, because Ricardo's eyes lost their dangerously interested expression.

"No, not so bad," Ricardo said, with indifference. "It's my opinion that men will gamble as long as they have anything to put on a card. Gamble? That's nature. What's life itself? You never know what may turn up. The worst of it is that you never can tell exactly what sort of cards you are holding yourself. What's trumps? — that is the question. See? Any man will gamble if only he's given a chance, for anything or everything. You too —"

"I haven't touched a card now for twenty years," said Schomberg in an austere tone.

"Well, if you got your living that way you would be no worse than you are now, selling drinks to people — beastly beer and spirits, rotten stuff fit to make an old he-goat yell if you poured it down its throat. Pooh! I can't stand the confounded liquor. Never could. A whiff of neat brandy in a glass makes me feel sick. Always did. If everybody was like me, liquor would be going a-begging. You think it's funny in a man, don't you?"

Schomberg made a vague gesture of toleration. Ricardo hitched up his chair and settled his elbow afresh on the table.

"French siros I must say I do like. Saigon's the place for them. I see you have siros in the bar. Hang me if I ain't getting dry, conversing like this with you. Come, Mr. Schomberg, be hospitable, as the governor says."

Schomberg rose and walked with dignity to the counter. His footsteps echoed loudly on the floor of polished boards. He took down a bottle, labelled "Sirop de Groseille." The little sounds he made, the clink of glass,

the gurgling of the liquid, the pop of the soda-water cork had a preternatural sharpness. He came back carrying a pink and glistening tumbler. Mr. Ricardo had followed his movements with oblique, coyly expectant yellow eyes, like a cat watching the preparation of a saucer of milk, and the satisfied sound after he had drunk might have been a slightly modified form of purring, very soft and deep in his throat. It affected Schomberg unpleasantly as another example of something inhuman in those men wherein lay the difficulty of dealing with them. A spectre, a cat, an ape — there was a pretty association for a mere man to remonstrate with, he reflected with an inward shudder; for Schomberg had been overpowered, as it were, by his imagination, and his reason could not react against that fanciful view of his guests. And it was not only their appearance. The morals of Mr. Ricardo seemed to him to be pretty much the morals of a cat. Too much. What sort of argument could a mere man offer to a . . . or to a spectre, either! What the morals of a spectre could be, Schomberg had no idea. Something dreadful, no doubt. Compassion certainly had no place in them. As to the ape — well, everybody knew what an ape was. It had no morals. Nothing could be more hopeless.

Outwardly, however, having picked up the cigar which he had laid aside to get the drink, with his thick fingers, one of them ornamented by a gold ring, Schomberg smoked with moody composure. Facing him, Ricardo blinked slowly for a time, then closed his eyes altogether, with the placidity of the domestic cat dozing on the hearth-rug. In another moment he opened them very wide, and seemed surprised to see Schomberg there.

“You’re having a very slack time today, aren’t you?” he observed. “But then this whole town is confoundedly slack, anyhow; and I’ve never faced such a slack party at a table before. Come eleven o’clock, they begin to talk of breaking up. What’s the matter with them? Want to go to bed so early, or what?”

“I reckon you don’t lose a fortune by their wanting to go to bed,” said Schomberg, with sombre sarcasm.

“No,” admitted Ricardo, with a grin that stretched his thin mouth from ear to ear, giving a sudden glimpse of his white teeth. “Only, you see, when I once start, I would play for nuts, for parched peas, for any rubbish. I would play them for their souls. But these Dutchmen aren’t any good. They never seem to get warmed up properly, win or lose. I’ve tried them both ways, too. Hang them for a beggarly, bloodless lot of animated cucumbers!”

“And if anything out of the way was to happen, they would be just as cool in locking you and your gentleman up,” Schomberg snarled unpleasantly.

“Indeed!” said Ricardo slowly, taking Schomberg’s measure with his eyes. “And what about you?”

“You talk mighty big,” burst out the hotel-keeper. “You talk of ranging all over the world, and doing great things, and taking fortune by the scruff of the neck, but here you stick at this miserable business!”

“It isn’t much of a lay — that’s a fact,” admitted Ricardo unexpectedly.

Schomberg was red in the face with audacity.

“I call it paltry,” he spluttered.

“That’s how it looks. Can’t call it anything else.” Ricardo seemed to be in an accommodating mood. “I should be ashamed of it myself, only you see the governor is subject to fits — ”

“Fits!” Schomberg cried out, but in a low tone. “You don’t say so!” He exulted inwardly, as if this disclosure had in some way diminished the difficulty of the situation. “Fits! That’s a serious thing, isn’t it? You ought to take him to the civil hospital — a lovely place.”

Ricardo nodded slightly, with a faint grin.

“Serious enough. Regular fits of laziness, I call them. Now and then he lays down on me like this, and there’s no moving him. If you think I like it, you’re a long way out. Generally speaking, I can talk him over. I know how to deal with a gentleman. I am no daily-bread slave. But when he has said, ‘Martin, I am bored,’ then look out! There’s nothing to do but to shut up, confound it!”

Schomberg, very much cast down, had listened open-mouthed.

“What’s the cause of it?” he asked. “Why is he like this? I don’t understand.”

“I think I do,” said Ricardo. “A gentleman, you know, is not such a simple person as you or I; and not so easy to manage, either. If only I had something to lever him out with!”

“What do you mean, to lever him out with?” muttered Schomberg hopelessly.

Ricardo was impatient with this denseness.

“Don’t you understand English? Look here! I couldn’t make this billiard table move an inch if I talked to it from now till the end of days — could I? Well, the governor is like that, too, when the fits are on him. He’s bored.



Nothing's worthwhile, nothing's good enough, that's mere sense. But if I saw a capstan bar lying about here, I would soon manage to shift that billiard table of yours a good many inches. And that's all there is to it."

He rose noiselessly, stretched himself, supple and stealthy, with curious sideways movements of his head and unexpected elongations of his thick body, glanced out of the corners of his eyes in the direction of the door, and finally leaned back against the table, folding his arms on his breast comfortably, in a completely human attitude.

"That's another thing you can tell a gentleman by — his freakishness. A gentleman ain't accountable to nobody, any more than a tramp on the roads. He ain't got to keep time. The governor got like this once in a one-horse Mexican pueblo on the uplands, away from everywhere. He lay all day long in a dark room — "

"Drunk?" This word escaped Schomberg by inadvertence at which he became frightened. But the devoted secretary seemed to find it natural.

"No, that never comes on together with this kind of fit. He just lay there full length on a mat, while a ragged, bare-legged boy that he had picked up in the street sat in the patio, between two oleanders near the open door of his room, strumming on a guitar and singing tristes to him from morning to night. You know tristes — twang, twang, twang, aouh, hoo! Chroo, yah!"

Schomberg uplifted his hands in distress. This tribute seemed to flatter Ricardo. His mouth twitched grimly.

"Like that — enough to give colic to an ostrich, eh? Awful. Well, there was a cook there who loved me — an old fat, Negro woman with spectacles. I used to hide in the kitchen and turn her to, to make me dulces — sweet things, you know, mostly eggs and sugar — to pass the time away. I am like a kid for sweet things. And, by the way, why don't you ever have a pudding at your tablydott, Mr. Schomberg? Nothing but fruit, morning, noon, and night. Sickening! What do you think a fellow is — a wasp?"

Schomberg disregarded the injured tone.

"And how long did that fit, as you call it, last?" he asked anxiously.

"Weeks, months, years, centuries, it seemed to me," returned Mr. Ricardo with feeling. "Of an evening the governor would stroll out into the sala and fritter his life away playing cards with the juez of the place — a little Dago with a pair of black whiskers — ekarty, you know, a quick French game, for small change. And the comandante, a one-eyed, half-Indian, flat-nosed ruffian, and I, we had to stand around and bet on their hands. It was awful!"

“Awful,” echoed Schomberg, in a Teutonic throaty tone of despair. “Look here, I need your rooms.”

“To be sure. I have been thinking that for some time past,” said Ricardo indifferently.

“I was mad when I listened to you. This must end!”

“I think you are mad yet,” said Ricardo, not even unfolding his arms or shifting his attitude an inch. He lowered his voice to add: “And if I thought you had been to the police, I would tell Pedro to catch you round the waist and break your fat neck by jerking your head backward — snap! I saw him do it to a big buck nigger who was flourishing a razor in front of the governor. It can be done. You hear a low crack, that’s all — and the man drops down like a limp rag.”

Not even Ricardo’s head, slightly inclined on the left shoulder, had moved; but when he ceased the greenish irises which had been staring out of doors glided into the corners of his eyes nearest to Schomberg and stayed there with a coyly voluptuous expression.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

Schomberg felt desperation, that lamentable substitute for courage, ooze out of him. It was not so much the threat of death as the weirdly circumstantial manner of its declaration which affected him. A mere "I'll murder you," however ferocious in tone, and earnest, in purpose, he could have faced; but before this novel mode of speech and procedure, his imagination being very sensitive to the unusual, he collapsed as if indeed his moral neck had been broken — snap!

"Go to the police? Of course not. Never dreamed of it. Too late now. I've let myself be mixed up in this. You got my consent while I wasn't myself. I explained it to you at the time."

Ricardo's eye glided gently off Schomberg to stare far away.

"Ay! Some trouble with a girl. But that's nothing to us."

"Naturally. What I say is, what's the good of all that savage talk to me?" A bright argument occurred to him. "It's out of proportion; for even if I were fool enough to go to the police now, there's nothing serious to complain about. It would only mean deportation for you. They would put you on board the first west-bound steamer to Singapore." He had become animated. "Out of this to the devil," he added between his teeth for his own private satisfaction.

Ricardo made no comment, and gave no sign of having heard a single word. This discouraged Schomberg, who had looked up hopefully.

"Why do you want to stick here?" he cried. "It can't pay you people to fool around like this. Didn't you worry just now about moving your governor? Well, the police would move him for you; and from Singapore you can go on to the east coast of Africa."

"I'll be hanged if the fellow isn't up to that silly trick!" was Ricardo's comment, spoken in an ominous tone which recalled Schomberg to the realities of his position.

"No! No!" he protested. "It's a manner of speaking. Of course I wouldn't."

"I think that trouble about the girl has really muddled your brains, Mr. Schomberg. Believe me, you had better part friends with us; for, deportation or no deportation, you'll be seeing one of us turning up before long to pay you off for any nasty dodge you may be hatching in that fat head of yours."

“Gott im Himmel!” groaned Schomberg. “Will nothing move him out? Will he stop here immer — I mean always? Suppose I were to make it worth your while, couldn’t you — ”

“No,” Ricardo interrupted. “I couldn’t, unless I had something to lever him out with. I’ve told you that before.”

“An inducement?” muttered Schomberg.

“Ay. The east coast of Africa isn’t good enough. He told me the other day that it will have to wait till he is ready for it; and he may not be ready for a long time, because the east coast can’t run away, and no one is likely to run off with it.”

These remarks, whether considered as truisms or as depicting Mr. Jones’s mental state, were distinctly discouraging to the long-suffering Schomberg; but there is truth in the well-known saying that places the darkest hour before the dawn. The sound of words, apart from the context, has its power; and these two words, ‘run off,’ had a special affinity to the hotel-keeper’s, haunting idea. It was always present in his brain, and now it came forward evoked by a purely fortuitous expression. No, nobody could run off with a continent; but Heyst had run off with the girl!

Ricardo could have had no conception of the cause of Schomberg’s changed expression. Yet it was noticeable enough to interest him so much that he stopped the careless swinging of his leg and said, looking at the hotel-keeper:

“There’s not much use arguing against that sort of talk — is there?”

Schomberg was not listening.

“I could put you on another track,” he said slowly, and stopped, as if suddenly choked by an unholy emotion of intense eagerness combined with fear of failure. Ricardo waited, attentive, yet not without a certain contempt.

“On the track of a man!” Schomberg uttered convulsively, and paused again, consulting his rage and his conscience.

“The man in the moon, eh?” suggested Ricardo, in a jeering murmur.

Schomberg shook his head.

“It would be nearly as safe to rook him as if he were the Man in the moon. You go and try. It isn’t so very far.”

He reflected. These men were thieves and murderers as well as gamblers. Their fitness for purposes of vengeance was appallingly complete. But he preferred not to think of it in detail. He put it to himself summarily that he would be paying Heyst out and would, at the same time, relieve himself of

these men's oppression. He had only to let loose his natural gift for talking scandalously about his fellow creatures. And in this case his great practice in it was assisted by hate, which, like love, has an eloquence of its own. With the utmost ease he portrayed for Ricardo, now seriously attentive, a Heyst fattened by years of private and public rapines, the murderer of Morrison, the swindler of many shareholders, a wonderful mixture of craft and impudence, of deep purposes and simple wiles, of mystery and futility. In this exercise of his natural function Schomberg revived, the colour coming back to his face, loquacious, florid, eager, his manliness set off by the military bearing.

"That's the exact story. He was seen hanging about this part of the world for years, spying into everybody's business: but I am the only one who has seen through him from the first — contemptible, double-faced, stick-at-nothing, dangerous fellow."

"Dangerous, is he?"

Schomberg came to himself at the sound of Ricardo's voice.

"Well, you know what I mean," he said uneasily. "A lying, circumventing, soft-spoken, polite, stuck-up rascal. Nothing open about him."

Mr Ricardo had slipped off the table, and was prowling about the room in an oblique, noiseless manner. He flashed a grin at Schomberg in passing, and a snarling:

"Ah! H'm!"

"Well, what more dangerous do you want?" argued Schomberg. "He's in no way a fighting man, I believe," he added negligently.

"And you say he has been living alone there?"

"Like the man in the moon," answered Schomberg readily. "There's no one that cares a rap what becomes of him. He has been lying low, you understand, after bagging all that plunder."

"Plunder, eh? Why didn't he go home with it?" inquired Ricardo.

The henchman of plain Mr. Jones was beginning to think that this was something worth looking into. And he was pursuing truth in the manner of men of sounder morality and purer intentions than his own; that is he pursued it in the light of his own experience and prejudices. For facts, whatever their origin (and God only knows where they come from), can be only tested by our own particular suspicions. Ricardo was suspicious all

round. Schomberg, such is the tonic of recovered self-esteem, Schomberg retorted fearlessly:

“Go home? Why don’t you go home? To hear your talk, you must have made a pretty considerable pile going round winning people’s money. You ought to be ready by this time.”

Ricardo stopped to look at Schomberg with surprise.

“You think yourself very clever, don’t you?” he said.

Schomberg just then was so conscious of being clever that the snarling irony left him unmoved. There was positively a smile in his noble Teutonic beard, the first smile for weeks. He was in a felicitous vein.

“How do you know that he wasn’t thinking of going home? As a matter of fact, he was on his way home.”

“And how do I know that you are not amusing yourself by spinning out a blamed fairy tale?” interrupted Ricardo roughly. “I wonder at myself listening to the silly rot!”

Schomberg received this turn of temper unmoved. He did not require to be very subtly observant to notice that he had managed to arouse some sort of feeling, perhaps of greed, in Ricardo’s breast.

“You won’t believe me? Well! You can ask anybody that comes here if that — that Swede hadn’t got as far as this house on his way home. Why should he turn up here if not for that? You ask anybody.”

“Ask, indeed!” returned the other. “Catch me asking at large about a man I mean to drop on! Such jobs must be done on the quiet — or not at all.”

The peculiar intonation of the last phrase touched the nape of Schomberg’s neck with a chill. He cleared his throat slightly and looked away as though he had heard something indelicate. Then, with a jump as it were:

“Of course he didn’t tell me. Is it likely? But haven’t I got eyes? Haven’t I got my common sense to tell me? I can see through people. By the same token, he called on the Tesmans. Why did he call on the Tesmans two days running, eh? You don’t know? You can’t tell?”

He waited complacently till Ricardo had finished swearing quite openly at him for a confounded chatterer, and then went on:

“A fellow doesn’t go to a counting-house in business hours for a chat about the weather, two days running. Then why? To close his account with them one day, and to get his money out the next! Clear, what?”

Ricardo, with his trick of looking one way and moving another approached Schomberg slowly.

“To get his money?” he purred.

“Gewiss,” snapped Schomberg with impatient superiority. “What else? That is, only the money he had with the Tesmans. What he has buried or put away on the island, devil only knows. When you think of the lot of hard cash that passed through that man’s hands, for wages and stores and all that — and he’s just a cunning thief, I tell you.” Ricardo’s hard stare discomposed the hotel-keeper, and he added in an embarrassed tone: “I mean a common, sneaking thief — no account at all. And he calls himself a Swedish baron, too! Tfui!”

“He’s a baron, is he? That foreign nobility ain’t much,” commented Mr. Ricardo seriously. “And then what? He hung about here!”

“Yes, he hung about,” said Schomberg, making a wry mouth. “He — hung about. That’s it. Hung — ”

His voice died out. Curiosity was depicted in Ricardo’s countenance.

“Just like that; for nothing? And then turned about and went back to that island again?”

“And went back to that island again,” Schomberg echoed lifelessly, fixing his gaze on the floor.

“What’s the matter with you?” asked Ricardo with genuine surprise. “What is it?”

Schomberg, without looking up, made an impatient gesture. His face was crimson, and he kept it lowered. Ricardo went back to the point.

“Well, but how do you account for it? What was his reason? What did he go back to the island for?”

“Honeymoon!” spat out Schomberg viciously.

Perfectly still, his eyes downcast, he suddenly, with no preliminary stir, hit the table with his fist a blow which caused the utterly unprepared Ricardo to leap aside. And only then did Schomberg look up with a dull, resentful expression.

Ricardo stared hard for a moment, spun on his heel, walked to the end of the room, came back smartly, and muttered a profound “Ay! Ay!” above Schomberg’s rigid head. That the hotel-keeper was capable of a great moral effort was proved by a gradual return of his severe, Lieutenant-of-the-Reserve manner.

“Ay, ay!” repeated Ricardo more deliberately than before, and as if after a further survey of the circumstances, “I wish I hadn’t asked you, or that you had told me a lie. It don’t suit me to know that there’s a woman mixed up in this affair. What’s she like? It’s the girl you — ”

“Leave off!” muttered Schomberg, utterly pitiful behind his stiff military front.

“Ay, ay!” Ricardo ejaculated for the third time, more and more enlightened and perplexed. “Can’t bear to talk about it — so bad as that? And yet I would bet she isn’t a miracle to look at.”

Schomberg made a gesture as if he didn’t know, as if he didn’t care. Then he squared his shoulders and frowned at vacancy.

“Swedish baron — h’m!” Ricardo continued meditatively. “I believe the governor would think that business worth looking up, quite, if I put it to him properly. The governor likes a duel, if you will call it so; but I don’t know a man that can stand up to him on the square. Have you ever seen a cat play with a mouse? It’s a pretty sight!”

Ricardo, with his voluptuously gleaming eyes and the coy expression, looked so much like a cat that Schomberg would have felt all the alarm of a mouse if other feelings had not had complete possession of his breast.

“There are no lies between you and me,” he said, more steadily than he thought he could speak.

“What’s the good now? He funks women. In that Mexican pueblo where we lay grounded on our beef-bones, so to speak, I used to go to dances of an evening. The girls there would ask me if the English caballero in the posada was a monk in disguise, or if he had taken a vow to the sancissima madre not to speak to a woman, or whether — You can imagine what fairly free-spoken girls will ask when they come to the point of not caring what they say; and it used to vex me. Yes, the governor funks facing women.”

“One woman?” interjected Schomberg in guttural tones.

“One may be more awkward to deal with than two, or two hundred, for that matter. In a place that’s full of women you needn’t look at them unless you like; but if you go into a room where there is only one woman, young or old, pretty or ugly, you have got to face her. And, unless you are after her, then — the governor is right enough — she’s in the way.”

“Why notice them?” muttered Schomberg. “What can they do?”

“Make a noise, if nothing else,” opined Mr. Ricardo curtly, with the distaste of a man whose path is a path of silence; for indeed, nothing is



more odious than a noise when one is engaged in a weighty and absorbing card game. "Noise, noise, my friend," he went on forcibly; "confounded screeching about something or other, and I like it no more than the governor does. But with the governor there's something else besides. He can't stand them at all."

He paused to reflect on this psychological phenomenon, and as no philosopher was at hand to tell him that there is no strong sentiment without some terror, as there is no real religion without a little fetishism, he emitted his own conclusion, which surely could not go to the root of the matter.

"I'm hanged if I don't think they are to him what liquor is to me. Brandy — pah!"

He made a disgusted face, and produced a genuine shudder. Schomberg listened to him in wonder. It looked as if the very scoundrelism, of that — that Swede would protect him; the spoil of his iniquity standing between the thief and the retribution.

"That's so, old buck." Ricardo broke the silence after contemplating Schomberg's mute dejection with a sort of sympathy. "I don't think this trick will work."

"But that's silly," whispered the man deprived of the vengeance which he had seemed already to hold in his hand, by a mysterious and exasperating idiosyncrasy.

"Don't you set yourself to judge a gentleman." Ricardo without anger administered a moody rebuke. "Even I can't understand the governor thoroughly. And I am an Englishman and his follower. No, I don't think I care to put it before him, sick as I am of staying here."

Ricardo could not be more sick of staying than Schomberg was of seeing him stay. Schomberg believed so firmly in the reality of Heyst as created by his own power of false inferences, of his hate, of his love of scandal, that he could not contain a stifled cry of conviction as sincere as most of our convictions, the disguised servants of our passions, can appear at a supreme moment.

"It would have been like going to pick up a nugget of a thousand pounds, or two or three times as much, for all I know. No trouble, no — "

"The petticoat's the trouble," Ricardo struck in.

He had resumed his noiseless, feline, oblique prowling, in which an observer would have detected a new character of excitement, such as a wild animal of the cat species, anxious to make a spring, might betray.

Schomberg saw nothing. It would probably have cheered his drooping spirits; but in a general way he preferred not to look at Ricardo. Ricardo, however, with one of his slanting, gliding, restless glances, observed the bitter smile on Schomberg's bearded lips — the unmistakable smile of ruined hopes.

"You are a pretty unforgiving sort of chap," he said, stopping for a moment with an air of interest. "Hang me if I ever saw anybody look so disappointed! I bet you would send black plague to that island if you only knew how — eh, what? Plague too good for them? Ha, ha, ha!"

He bent down to stare at Schomberg who sat unstirring with stony eyes and set features, and apparently deaf to the rasping derision of that laughter so close to his red fleshy ear.

"Black plague too good for them, ha, ha!" Ricardo pressed the point on the tormented hotel-keeper. Schomberg kept his eyes down obstinately.

"I don't wish any harm to the girl — " he muttered.

"But did she bolt from you? A fair bilk? Come!"

"Devil only knows what that villainous Swede had done to her — what he promised her, how he frightened her. She couldn't have cared for him, I know." Schomberg's vanity clung to the belief in some atrocious, extraordinary means of seduction employed by Heyst. "Look how he bewitched that poor Morrison," he murmured.

"Ah, Morrison — got all his money, what?"

"Yes — and his life."

"Terrible fellow, that Swedish baron! How is one to get at him?"

Schomberg exploded.

"Three against one! Are you shy? Do you want me to give you a letter of introduction?"

"You ought to look at yourself in a glass," Ricardo said quietly. "Dash me if you don't get a stroke of some kind presently. And this is the fellow who says women can do nothing! That one will do for you, unless you manage to forget her."

"I wish I could," Schomberg admitted earnestly. "And it's all the doing of that Swede. I don't get enough sleep, Mr. Ricardo. And then, to finish me off, you gentlemen turn up . . . as if I hadn't enough worry."

"That's done you good," suggested the secretary with ironic seriousness.

"Takes your mind off that silly trouble. At your age too."

He checked himself, as if in pity, and changing his tone:

“I would really like to oblige you while doing a stroke of business at the same time.”

“A good stroke,” insisted Schomberg, as if it were mechanically. In his simplicity he was not able to give up the idea which had entered his head. An idea must be driven out by another idea, and with Schomberg ideas were rare and therefore tenacious. “Minted gold,” he murmured with a sort of anguish.

Such an expressive combination of words was not without effect upon Ricardo. Both these men were amenable to the influence of verbal suggestions. The secretary of “plain Mr. Jones” sighed and murmured.

“Yes. But how is one to get at it?”

“Being three to one,” said Schomberg, “I suppose you could get it for the asking.”

“One would think the fellow lived next door,” Ricardo growled impatiently. “Hang it all, can’t you understand a plain question? I have asked you the way.”

Schomberg seemed to revive.

“The way?”

The torpor of deceived hopes underlying his superficial changes of mood had been pricked by these words which seemed pointed with purpose.

“The way is over the water, of course,” said the hotel-keeper. “For people like you, three days in a good, big boat is nothing. It’s no more than a little outing, a bit of a change. At this season the Java Sea is a pond. I have an excellent, safe boat — a ship’s life-boat — carry thirty, let alone three, and a child could handle her. You wouldn’t get a wet face at this time of the year. You might call it a pleasure-trip.”

“And yet, having this boat, you didn’t go after her yourself — or after him? Well, you are a fine fellow for a disappointed lover.”

Schomberg gave a start at the suggestion.

“I am not three men,” he said sulkily, as the shortest answer of the several he could have given.

“Oh, I know your sort,” Ricardo let fall negligently. “You are like most people — or perhaps just a little more peaceable than the rest of the buying and selling gang that bosses this rotten show. Well, well, you respectable citizen,” he went on, “let us go thoroughly into the matter.”

When Schomberg had been made to understand that Mr. Jones’s henchman was ready to discuss, in his own words, “this boat of yours, with

courses and distances,” and such concrete matters of no good augury to that villainous Swede, he recovered his soldierly bearing, squared his shoulders, and asked in his military manner:

“You wish, then, to proceed with the business?”

Ricardo nodded. He had a great mind to, he said. A gentleman had to be humoured as much as possible; but he must be managed, too, on occasions, for his own good. And it was the business of the right sort of “follower” to know the proper time and the proper methods of that delicate part of his duty. Having exposed this theory Ricardo proceeded to the application.

“I’ve never actually lied to him,” he said, “and I ain’t going to now. I shall just say nothing about the girl. He will have to get over the shock the best he can. Hang it all! Too much humouring won’t do here.”

“Funny thing,” Schomberg observed crisply.

“Is it? Ay, you wouldn’t mind taking a woman by the throat in some dark corner and nobody by, I bet!”

Ricardo’s dreadful, vicious, cat-like readiness to get his claws out at any moment startled Schomberg as usual. But it was provoking too.

“And you?” he defended himself. “Don’t you want me to believe you are up to anything?”

“I, my boy? Oh, yes. I am not that gentleman; neither are you. Take ‘em by the throat or chuck ‘em under the chin is all one to me — almost,” affirmed Ricardo, with something obscurely ironical in his complacency. “Now, as to this business. A three days’ jaunt in a good boat isn’t a thing to frighten people like us. You are right, so far; but there are other details.”

Schomberg was ready enough to enter into details. He explained that he had a small plantation, with a fairly habitable hut on it, on Madura. He proposed that his guest should start from town in his boat, as if going for an excursion to that rural spot. The custom-house people on the quay were used to see his boat go off on such trips.

From Madura, after some repose and on a convenient day, Mr. Jones and party would make the real start. It would all be plain sailing. Schomberg undertook to provision the boat. The greatest hardship the voyagers need apprehend would be a mild shower of rain. At that season of the year there were no serious thunderstorms.

Schomberg’s heart began to thump as he saw himself nearing his vengeance. His speech was thick but persuasive.

“No risk at all — none whatever.”

Ricardo dismissed these assurances of safety with an impatient gesture. He was thinking of other risks.

“The getting away from here is all right; but we may be sighted at sea, and that may bring awkwardness later on. A ship’s boat with three white men in her, knocking about out of sight of land, is bound to make talk. Are we likely to be seen on our way?”

“No, unless by native craft,” said Schomberg.

Ricardo nodded, satisfied. Both these white men looked on native life as a mere play of shadows. A play of shadows the dominant race could walk through unaffected and disregarded in the pursuit of its incomprehensible aims and needs. No. Native craft did not count, of course. It was an empty, solitary part of the sea, Schomberg expounded further. Only the Ternate mail-boat crossed that region about the eighth of every month, regularly — nowhere near the island though. Rigid, his voice hoarse, his heart thumping, his mind concentrated on the success of his plan, the hotel-keeper multiplied words, as if to keep as many of them as possible between himself and the murderous aspect of his purpose.

“So, if you gentlemen depart from my plantation quietly at sunset on the eighth — always best to make a start at night, with a land breeze — it’s a hundred to one — What am I saying? — it’s a thousand to one that no human eye will see you on the passage. All you’ve got to do is keep her heading north-east for, say, fifty hours; perhaps not quite so long. There will always be draft enough to keep a boat moving; you may reckon on that; and then — ”

The muscles about his waist quivered under his clothes with eagerness, with impatience, and with something like apprehension, the true nature of which was not clear to him. And he did not want to investigate it. Ricardo regarded him steadily, with those dry eyes of his shining more like polished stones than living tissue.

“And then what?” he asked.

“And then — why, you will astonish der herr baron — ha, ha!”

Schomberg seemed to force the words and the laugh out of himself in a hoarse bass.

“And you believe he has all that plunder by him?” asked Ricardo, rather perfunctorily, because the fact seemed to him extremely probable when looked at all round by his acute mind.

Schomberg raised his hands and lowered them slowly.

“How can it be otherwise? He was going home, he was on his way, in this hotel. Ask people. Was it likely he would leave it behind him?”

Ricardo was thoughtful. Then, suddenly raising his head, he remarked:

“Steer north-east for fifty hours, eh? That’s not much of a sailing direction. I’ve heard of a port being missed before on better information. Can’t you say what sort of landfall a fellow may expect? But I suppose you have never seen that island yourself?”

Schomberg admitted that he had not seen it, in a tone in which a man congratulates himself on having escaped the contamination of an unsavoury experience. No, certainly not. He had never had any business to call there. But what of that? He could give Mr. Ricardo as good a sea-mark as anybody need wish for. He laughed nervously. Miss it! He defied anyone that came within forty miles of it to miss the retreat of that villainous Swede.

“What do you think of a pillar of smoke by day and a loom of fire at night? There’s a volcano in full blast near that island — enough to guide almost a blind man. What more do you want? An active volcano to steer by?”

These last words he roared out exultingly, then jumped up and glared. The door to the left of the bar had swung open, and Mrs. Schomberg, dressed for duty, stood facing him down the whole length of the room. She clung to the handle for a moment, then came in and glided to her place, where she sat down to stare straight before her, as usual.

## **PART THREE**

## CHAPTER ONE

Tropical nature had been kind to the failure of the commercial enterprise. The desolation of the headquarters of the Tropical Belt Coal Company had been screened from the side of the sea; from the side where prying eyes — if any were sufficiently interested, either in malice or in sorrow — could have noted the decaying bones of that once sanguine enterprise.

Heyst had been sitting among the bones buried so kindly in the grass of two wet seasons' growth. The silence of his surroundings, broken only by such sounds as a distant roll of thunder, the lash of rain through the foliage of some big trees, the noise of the wind tossing the leaves of the forest, and of the short seas breaking against the shore, favoured rather than hindered his solitary meditation.

A meditation is always — in a white man, at least — more or less an interrogative exercise. Heyst meditated in simple terms on the mystery of his actions; and he answered himself with the honest reflection:

“There must be a lot of the original Adam in me, after all.”

He reflected, too, with the sense of making a discovery, that this primeval ancestor is not easily suppressed. The oldest voice in the world is just the one that never ceases to speak. If anybody could have silenced its imperative echoes, it should have been Heyst's father, with his contemptuous, inflexible negation of all effort; but apparently he could not. There was in the son a lot of that first ancestor who, as soon as he could uplift his muddy frame from the celestial mould, started inspecting and naming the animals of that paradise which he was so soon to lose.

Action — the first thought, or perhaps the first impulse, on earth! The barbed hook, baited with the illusions of progress, to bring out of the lightless void the shoals of unnumbered generations!

“And I, the son of my father, have been caught too, like the silliest fish of them all.” Heyst said to himself.

He suffered. He was hurt by the sight of his own life, which ought to have been a masterpiece of aloofness. He remembered always his last evening with his father. He remembered the thin features, the great mass of white hair, and the ivory complexion. A five-branched candlestick stood on a little table by the side of the easy chair. They had been talking a long time. The noises of the street had died out one by one, till at last, in the



moonlight, the London houses began to look like the tombs of an unvisited, unhonoured, cemetery of hopes.

He had listened. Then, after a silence, he had asked — for he was really young then:

“Is there no guidance?”

His father was in an unexpectedly soft mood on that night, when the moon swam in a cloudless sky over the begrimed shadows of the town.

“You still believe in something, then?” he said in a clear voice, which had been growing feeble of late. “You believe in flesh and blood, perhaps? A full and equable contempt would soon do away with that, too. But since you have not attained to it, I advise you to cultivate that form of contempt which is called pity. It is perhaps the least difficult — always remembering that you, too, if you are anything, are as pitiful as the rest, yet never expecting any pity for yourself.”

“What is one to do, then?” sighed the young man, regarding his father, rigid in the high-backed chair.

“Look on — make no sound,” were the last words of the man who had spent his life in blowing blasts upon a terrible trumpet which filled heaven and earth with ruins, while mankind went on its way unheeding.

That very night he died in his bed, so quietly that they found him in his usual attitude of sleep, lying on his side, one hand under his cheek, and his knees slightly bent. He had not even straightened his legs.

His son buried the silenced destroyer of systems, of hopes, of beliefs. He observed that the death of that bitter contemner of life did not trouble the flow of life’s stream, where men and women go by thick as dust, revolving and jostling one another like figures cut out of cork and weighted with lead just sufficiently to keep them in their proudly upright posture.

After the funeral, Heyst sat alone, in the dusk, and his meditation took the form of a definite vision of the stream, of the fatuously jostling, nodding, spinning figures hurried irresistibly along, and giving no sign of being aware that the voice on the bank had been suddenly silenced . . . Yes. A few obituary notices generally insignificant and some grossly abusive. The son had read them all with mournful detachment.

“This is the hate and rage of their fear,” he thought to himself, “and also of wounded vanity. They shriek their little shriek as they fly past. I suppose I ought to hate him too . . .”

He became aware of his eyes being wet. It was not that the man was his father. For him it was purely a matter of hearsay which could not in itself cause this emotion. No! It was because he had looked at him so long that he missed him so much. The dead man had kept him on the bank by his side. And now Heyst felt acutely that he was alone on the bank of the stream. In his pride he determined not to enter it.

A few slow tears rolled down his face. The rooms, filling with shadows, seemed haunted by a melancholy, uneasy presence which could not express itself. The young man got up with a strange sense of making way for something impalpable that claimed possession, went out of the house, and locked the door. A fortnight later he started on his travels — to “look on and never make a sound.”

The elder Heyst had left behind him a little money and a certain quantity of movable objects, such as books, tables, chairs, and pictures, which might have complained of heartless desertion after many years of faithful service; for there is a soul in things. Heyst, our Heyst, had often thought of them, reproachful and mute, shrouded and locked up in those rooms, far away in London with the sounds of the street reaching them faintly, and sometimes a little sunshine, when the blinds were pulled up and the windows opened from time to time in pursuance of his original instructions and later reminders. It seemed as if in his conception of a world not worth touching, and perhaps not substantial enough to grasp, these objects familiar to his childhood and his youth, and associated with the memory of an old man, were the only realities, something having an absolute existence. He would never have them sold, or even moved from the places they occupied when he looked upon them last. When he was advised from London that his lease had expired, and that the house, with some others as like it as two peas, was to be demolished, he was surprisingly distressed.

He had entered by then the broad, human path of inconsistencies. Already the Tropical Belt Coal Company was in existence. He sent instructions to have some of the things sent out to him at Samburan, just as any ordinary, credulous person would have done. They came, torn out from their long repose — a lot of books, some chairs and tables, his father's portrait in oils, which surprised Heyst by its air of youth, because he remembered his father as a much older man; a lot of small objects, such as candlesticks, inkstands, and statuettes from his father's study, which surprised him because they looked so old and so much worn.

The manager of the Tropical Belt Coal Company, unpacking them on the veranda in the shade besieged by a fierce sunshine, must have felt like a remorseful apostate before these relics. He handled them tenderly; and it was perhaps their presence there which attached him to the island when he woke up to the failure of his apostasy. Whatever the decisive reason, Heyst had remained where another would have been glad to be off. The excellent Davidson had discovered the fact without discovering the reason, and took a humane interest in Heyst's strange existence, while at the same time his native delicacy kept him from intruding on the other's whim of solitude. He could not possibly guess that Heyst, alone on the island, felt neither more nor less lonely than in any other place, desert or populous. Davidson's concern was, if one may express it so, the danger of spiritual starvation; but this was a spirit which had renounced all outside nourishment, and was sustaining itself proudly on its own contempt of the usual coarse ailments which life offers to the common appetites of men.

Neither was Heyst's body in danger of starvation, as Schomberg had so confidently asserted. At the beginning of the company's operations the island had been provisioned in a manner which had outlasted the need. Heyst did not need to fear hunger; and his very loneliness had not been without some alleviation. Of the crowd of imported Chinese labourers, one at least had remained in Samburan, solitary and strange, like a swallow left behind at the migrating season of his tribe.

Wang was not a common coolie. He had been a servant to white men before. The agreement between him and Heyst consisted in the exchange of a few words on the day when the last batch of the mine coolies was leaving Samburan. Heyst, leaning over the balustrade of the veranda, was looking on, as calm in appearance as though he had never departed from the doctrine that this world, for the wise, is nothing but an amusing spectacle. Wang came round the house, and standing below, raised up his yellow, thin face.

"All finished?" he asked. Heyst nodded slightly from above, glancing towards the jetty. A crowd of blue-clad figures with yellow faces and calves was being hustled down into the boats of the chartered steamer lying well out, like a painted ship on a painted sea; painted in crude colours, without shadows, without feeling, with brutal precision.

"You had better hurry up if you don't want to be left behind."

But the Chinaman did not move.

“We stop,” he declared. Heyst looked down at him for the first time.

“You want to stop here?”

“Yes.”

“What were you? What was your work here?”

“Mess-loom boy.”

“Do you want to stay with me here as my boy?” inquired Heyst, surprised.

The Chinaman unexpectedly put on a deprecatory expression, and said, after a marked pause:

“Can do.”

“You needn’t,” said Heyst, “unless you like. I propose to stay on here — it may be for a very long time. I have no power to make you go if you wish to remain, but I don’t see why you should.”

“Catchee one piecee wife,” remarked Wang unemotionally, and marched off, turning his back on the wharf and the great world beyond, represented by the steamer waiting for her boats.

Heyst learned presently that Wang had persuaded one of the women of Alfuro village, on the west shore of the island, beyond the central ridge, to come over to live with him in a remote part of the company’s clearing. It was a curious case, inasmuch as the Alfuros, having been frightened by the sudden invasion of Chinamen, had blocked the path over the ridge by felling a few trees, and had kept strictly on their own side. The coolies, as a body, mistrusting the manifest mildness of these harmless fisher-folk, had kept to their lines, without attempting to cross the island. Wang was the brilliant exception. He must have been uncommonly fascinating, in a way that was not apparent to Heyst, or else uncommonly persuasive. The woman’s services to Heyst were limited to the fact that she had anchored Wang to the spot by her charms, which remained unknown to the white man, because she never came near the houses. The couple lived at the edge of the forest, and she could sometimes be seen gazing towards the bungalow shading her eyes with her hand. Even from a distance she appeared to be a shy, wild creature, and Heyst, anxious not to try her primitive nerves unduly, scrupulously avoided that side of the clearing in his strolls.

The day — or rather the first night — after his hermit life began, he was aware of vague sounds of revelry in that direction. Emboldened by the departure of the invading strangers, some Alfuros, the woman’s friends and

relations, had ventured over the ridge to attend something in the nature of a wedding feast. Wang had invited them. But this was the only occasion when any sound louder than the buzzing of insects had troubled the profound silence of the clearing. The natives were never invited again. Wang not only knew how to live according to conventional proprieties, but had strong personal views as to the manner of arranging his domestic existence. After a time Heyst perceived that Wang had annexed all the keys. Any keys left lying about vanished after Wang had passed that way. Subsequently some of them — those that did not belong to the store-rooms and the empty bungalows, and could not be regarded as the common property of this community of two — were returned to Heyst, tied in a bunch with a piece of string. He found them one morning lying by the side of his plate. He had not been inconvenienced by their absence, because he never locked up anything in the way of drawers and boxes. Heyst said nothing. Wang also said nothing. Perhaps he had always been a taciturn man; perhaps he was influenced by the genius of the locality, which was certainly that of silence. Till Heyst and Morrison had landed in Black Diamond Bay, and named it, that side of Samburan had hardly ever heard the sound of human speech. It was easy to be taciturn with Heyst, who had plunged himself into an abyss of meditation over books, and remained in it till the shadow of Wang falling across the page, and the sound of a rough, low voice uttering the Malay word “makan,” would force him to climb out to a meal.

Wang in his native province in China might have been an aggressively, sensitively genial person; but in Samburan he had clothed himself in a mysterious stolidity and did not seem to resent not being spoken to except in single words, at a rate which did not average half a dozen per day. And he gave no more than he got. It is to be presumed that if he suffered he made up for it with the Alfuro woman. He always went back to her at the first fall of dusk, vanishing from the bungalow suddenly at this hour, like a sort of topsy-turvy, day-hunting, Chinese ghost with a white jacket and a pigtail. Presently, giving way to a Chinaman’s ruling passion, he could be observed breaking the ground near his hut, between the mighty stumps of felled trees, with a miner’s pickaxe. After a time, he discovered a rusty but serviceable spade in one of the empty store-rooms, and it is to be supposed that he got on famously; but nothing of it could be seen, because he went to the trouble of pulling to pieces one of the company’s sheds in order to get materials for making a high and very close fence round his patch, as if the

growing of vegetables were a patented process, or an awful and holy mystery entrusted to the keeping of his race.

Heyst, following from a distance the progress of Wang's gardening and of these precautions — there was nothing else to look at — was amused at the thought that he, in his own person, represented the market for its produce. The Chinaman had found several packets of seeds in the store-rooms, and had surrendered to an irresistible impulse to put them into the ground. He would make his master pay for the vegetables which he was raising to satisfy his instinct. And, looking silently at the silent Wang going about his work in the bungalow in his unhasty, steady way; Heyst envied the Chinaman's obedience to his instincts, the powerful simplicity of purpose which made his existence appear almost automatic in the mysterious precision of its facts.

## CHAPTER TWO

During his master's absence at Sourabaya, Wang had busied himself with the ground immediately in front of the principal bungalow. Emerging from the fringe of grass growing across the shore end of the coal-jetty, Heyst beheld a broad, clear space, black and level, with only one or two clumps of charred twigs, where the flame had swept from the front of his house to the nearest trees of the forest.

"You took the risk of firing the grass?" Heyst asked.

Wang nodded. Hanging on the arm of the white man before whom he stood was the girl called Alma; but neither from the Chinaman's eyes nor from his expression could anyone have guessed that he was in the slightest degree aware of the fact.

"He has been tidying the place in his labour-saving way," explained Heyst, without looking at the girl, whose hand rested on his forearm. "He's the whole establishment, you see. I told you I hadn't even a dog to keep me company here."

Wang had marched off towards the wharf.

"He's like those waiters in that place," she said. That place was Schomberg's hotel.

"One Chinaman looks very much like another," Heyst remarked. "We shall find it useful to have him here. This is the house."

They faced, at some distance, the six shallow steps leading up to the veranda. The girl had abandoned Heyst's arm.

"This is the house," he repeated.

She did not offer to budge away from his side, but stood staring fixedly at the steps, as if they had been something unique and impracticable. He waited a little, but she did not move.

"Don't you want to go in?" he asked, without turning his head to look at her. "The sun's too heavy to stand about here." He tried to overcome a sort of fear, a sort of impatient faintness, and his voice sounded rough. "You had better go in," he concluded.

They both moved then, but at the foot of the stairs Heyst stopped, while the girl went on rapidly, as if nothing could stop her now. She crossed the veranda swiftly, and entered the twilight of the big central room opening upon it, and then the deeper twilight of the room beyond. She stood still in

the dusk, in which her dazzled eyes could scarcely make out the forms of objects, and sighed a sigh of relief. The impression of the sunlight, of sea and sky, remained with her like a memory of a painful trial gone through — done with at last!

Meanwhile Heyst had walked back slowly towards the jetty; but he did not get so far as that. The practical and automatic Wang had got hold of one of the little trucks that had been used for running baskets of coal alongside ships. He appeared pushing it before him, loaded lightly with Heyst's bag and the bundle of the girl's belongings, wrapped in Mrs. Schomberg's shawl. Heyst turned about and walked by the side of the rusty rails on which the truck ran. Opposite the house Wang stopped, lifted the bag to his shoulder, balanced it carefully, and then took the bundle in his hand.

"Leave those things on the table in the big room — understand?"

"Me savee," grunted Wang, moving off.

Heyst watched the Chinaman disappear from the veranda. It was not till he had seen Wang come out that he himself entered the twilight of the big room. By that time Wang was out of sight at the back of the house, but by no means out of hearing. The Chinaman could hear the voice of him who, when there were many people there, was generally referred to as "Number One." Wang was not able to understand the words, but the tone interested him.

"Where are you?" cried Number One.

Then Wang heard, much more faint, a voice he had never heard before — a novel impression which he acknowledged by cocking his head slightly to one side.

"I am here — out of the sun."

The new voice sounded remote and uncertain. Wang heard nothing more, though he waited for some time, very still, the top of his shaven poll exactly level with the floor of the back veranda. His face meanwhile preserved an inscrutable immobility. Suddenly he stooped to pick up the lid of a deal candle-box which was lying on the ground by his foot. Breaking it up with his fingers, he directed his steps towards the cook-shed, where, squatting on his heels, he proceeded to kindle a small fire under a very sooty kettle, possibly to make tea. Wang had some knowledge of the more superficial rites and ceremonies of white men's existence, otherwise so enigmatically remote to his mind, and containing unexpected possibilities of good and evil, which had to be watched for with prudence and care.





## CHAPTER THREE

That morning, as on all the others of the full tale of mornings since his return with the girl to Samburan, Heyst came out on the veranda and spread his elbows on the railing, in an easy attitude of proprietorship. The bulk of the central ridge of the island cut off the bungalow from sunrises, whether glorious or cloudy, angry or serene. The dwellers therein were debarred from reading early the fortune of the new-born day. It sprang upon them in its fulness with a swift retreat of the great shadow when the sun, clearing the ridge, looked down, hot and dry, with a devouring glare like the eye of an enemy. But Heyst, once the Number One of this locality, while it was comparatively teeming with mankind, appreciated the prolongation of early coolness, the subdued, lingering half-light, the faint ghost of the departed night, the fragrance of its dewy, dark soul captured for a moment longer between the great glow of the sky and the intense blaze of the uncovered sea.

It was naturally difficult for Heyst to keep his mind from dwelling on the nature and consequences of this, his latest departure from the part of an unconcerned spectator. Yet he had retained enough of his wrecked philosophy to prevent him from asking himself consciously how it would end. But at the same time he could not help being temperamentally, from long habit and from set purpose, a spectator still, perhaps a little less naive but (as he discovered with some surprise) not much more far sighted than the common run of men. Like the rest of us who act, all he could say to himself, with a somewhat affected grimness, was:

“We shall see!”

This mood of grim doubt intruded on him only when he was alone. There were not many such moments in his day now; and he did not like them when they came. On this morning he had no time to grow uneasy. Alma came out to join him long before the sun, rising above the Samburan ridge, swept the cool shadow of the early morning and the remnant of the night's coolness clear off the roof under which they had dwelt for more than three months already. She came out as on other mornings. He had heard her light footsteps in the big room — the room where he had unpacked the cases from London; the room now lined with the backs of books halfway up on its three sides. Above the cases the fine matting met the ceiling of tightly stretched white calico. In the dusk and coolness nothing gleamed except the

gilt frame of the portrait of Heyst's father, signed by a famous painter, lonely in the middle of a wall.

Heyst did not turn round.

"Do you know what I was thinking of?" he asked.

"No," she said. Her tone betrayed always a shade of anxiety, as though she were never certain how a conversation with him would end. She leaned on the guard-rail by his side.

"No," she repeated. "What was it?" She waited. Then, rather with reluctance than shyness, she asked:

"Were you thinking of me?"

"I was wondering when you would come out," said Heyst, still without looking at the girl — to whom, after several experimental essays in combining detached letters and loose syllables, he had given the name of Lena.

She remarked after a pause:

"I was not very far from you."

"Apparently you were not near enough for me."

"You could have called if you wanted me," she said. "And I wasn't so long doing my hair."

"Apparently it was too long for me."

"Well, you were thinking of me, anyhow. I am glad of it. Do you know, it seems to me, somehow, that if you were to stop thinking of me I shouldn't be in the world at all!"

He turned round and looked at her. She often said things which surprised him. A vague smile faded away on her lips before his scrutiny.

"What is it?" he asked. "Is it a reproach?"

"A reproach! Why, how could it be?" she defended herself.

"Well, what did it mean?" he insisted.

"What I said — just what I said. Why aren't you fair?"

"Ah, this is at least a reproach!"

She coloured to the roots of her hair.

"It looks as if you were trying to make out that I am disagreeable," she murmured. "Am I? You will make me afraid to open my mouth presently. I shall end by believing I am no good."

Her head drooped a little. He looked at her smooth, low brow, the faintly coloured cheeks, and the red lips parted slightly, with the gleam of her teeth within.

“And then I won’t be any good,” she added with conviction. “That I won’t! I can only be what you think I am.”

He made a slight movement. She put her hand on his arm, without raising her head, and went on, her voice animated in the stillness of her body:

“It is so. It couldn’t be any other way with a girl like me and a man like you. Here we are, we two alone, and I can’t even tell where we are.”

“A very well-known spot of the globe,” Heyst uttered gently. “There must have been at least fifty thousand circulars issued at the time — a hundred and fifty thousand, more likely. My friend was looking after that, and his ideas were large and his belief very strong. Of us two it was he who had the faith. A hundred and fifty thousand, certainly.”

“What is it you mean?” she asked in a low tone.

“What should I find fault with you for?” Heyst went on. “For being amiable, good, gracious — and pretty?”

A silence fell. Then she said:

“It’s all right that you should think that of me. There’s no one here to think anything of us, good or bad.”

The rare timbre of her voice gave a special value to what she uttered. The indefinable emotion which certain intonations gave him, he was aware, was more physical than moral. Every time she spoke to him she seemed to abandon to him something of herself — something excessively subtle and inexpressible, to which he was infinitely sensible, which he would have missed horribly if she were to go away. While he was looking into her eyes she raised her bare forearm, out of the short sleeve, and held it in the air till he noticed it and hastened to pose his great bronze moustaches on the whiteness of the skin. Then they went in.

Wang immediately appeared in front, and, squatting on his heels, began to potter mysteriously about some plants at the foot of the veranda. When Heyst and the girl came out again, the Chinaman had gone in his peculiar manner, which suggested vanishing out of existence rather than out of sight, a process of evaporation rather than of movement. They descended the steps, looking at each other, and started off smartly across the cleared ground; but they were not ten yards away when, without perceptible stir or sound, Wang materialized inside the empty room. The Chinaman stood still with roaming eyes, examining the walls as if for signs, for inscriptions; exploring the floor as if for pitfalls, for dropped coins. Then he cocked his head slightly at the profile of Heyst’s father, pen in hand above a white

sheet of paper on a crimson tablecloth; and, moving forward noiselessly, began to clear away the breakfast things.

Though he proceeded without haste, the unerring precision of his movements, the absolute soundlessness of the operation, gave it something of the quality of a conjuring trick. And, the trick having been performed, Wang vanished from the scene, to materialize presently in front of the house. He materialized walking away from it, with no visible or guessable intention; but at the end of some ten paces he stopped, made a half turn, and put his hand up to shade his eyes. The sun had topped the grey ridge of Samburan. The great morning shadow was gone; and far away in the devouring sunshine Wang was in time to see Number One and the woman, two remote white specks against the sombre line of the forest. In a moment they vanished. With the smallest display of action, Wang also vanished from the sunlight of the clearing.

Heyst and Lena entered the shade of the forest path which crossed the island, and which, near its highest point had been blocked by felled trees. But their intention was not to go so far. After keeping to the path for some distance, they left it at a point where the forest was bare of undergrowth, and the trees, festooned with creepers, stood clear of one another in the gloom of their own making. Here and there great splashes of light lay on the ground. They moved, silent in the great stillness, breathing the calmness, the infinite isolation, the repose of a slumber without dreams. They emerged at the upper limit of vegetation, among some rocks; and in a depression of the sharp slope, like a small platform, they turned about and looked from on high over the sea, lonely, its colour effaced by sunshine, its horizon a heat mist, a mere unsubstantial shimmer in the pale and blinding infinity overhung by the darker blaze of the sky.

"It makes my head swim," the girl murmured, shutting her eyes and putting her hand on his shoulder.

Heyst, gazing fixedly to the southward, exclaimed:

"Sail ho!"

A moment of silence ensued.

"It must be very far away," he went on. "I don't think you could see it. Some native craft making for the Moluccas, probably. Come, we mustn't stay here."

With his arm round her waist, he led her down a little distance, and they settled themselves in the shade; she, seated on the ground, he a little lower,

reclining at her feet.

“You don’t like to look at the sea from up there?” he said after a time.

She shook her head. That empty space was to her the abomination of desolation. But she only said again:

“It makes my head swim.”

“Too big?” he inquired.

“Too lonely. It makes my heart sink, too,” she added in a low voice, as if confessing a secret.

“I’m afraid,” said Heyst, “that you would be justified in reproaching me for these sensations. But what would you have?”

His tone was playful, but his eyes, directed at her face, were serious. She protested.

“I am not feeling lonely with you — not a bit. It is only when we come up to that place, and I look at all that water and all that light — ”

“We will never come here again, then,” he interrupted her.

She remained silent for a while, returning his gaze till he removed it.

“It seems as if everything that there is had gone under,” she said.

“Reminds you of the story of the deluge,” muttered the man, stretched at her feet and looking at them. “Are you frightened at it?”

“I should be rather frightened to be left behind alone. When I say, I, of course I mean we.”

“Do you?” . . . Heyst remained silent for a while. “The vision of a world destroyed,” he mused aloud. “Would you be sorry for it?”

“I should be sorry for the happy people in it,” she said simply.

His gaze travelled up her figure and reached her face, where he seemed to detect the veiled glow of intelligence, as one gets a glimpse of the sun through the clouds.

“I should have thought it’s they specially who ought to have been congratulated. Don’t you?”

“Oh, yes — I understand what you mean; but there were forty days before it was all over.”

“You seem to be in possession of all the details.”

Heyst spoke just to say something rather than to gaze at her in silence. She was not looking at him.

“Sunday school,” she murmured. “I went regularly from the time I was eight till I was thirteen. We lodged in the north of London, off Kingsland Road. It wasn’t a bad time. Father was earning good money then. The

woman of the house used to pack me off in the afternoon with her own girls. She was a good woman. Her husband was in the post office. Sorter or something. Such a quiet man. He used to go off after supper for night-duty, sometimes. Then one day they had a row, and broke up the home. I remember I cried when we had to pack up all of a sudden and go into other lodgings. I never knew what it was, though — ”

“The deluge,” muttered Heyst absently.

He felt intensely aware of her personality, as if this were the first moment of leisure he had found to look at her since they had come together. The peculiar timbre of her voice, with its modulations of audacity and sadness, would have given interest to the most inane chatter. But she was no chatterer. She was rather silent, with a capacity for immobility, an upright stillness, as when resting on the concert platform between the musical numbers, her feet crossed, her hands reposing on her lap. But in the intimacy of their life her grey, unabashed gaze forced upon him the sensation of something inexplicable reposing within her; stupidity or inspiration, weakness or force — or simply an abysmal emptiness, reserving itself even in the moments of complete surrender.

During a long pause she did not look at him. Then suddenly, as if the word “deluge” had stuck in her mind, she asked, looking up at the cloudless sky:

“Does it ever rain here?”

“There is a season when it rains almost every day,” said Heyst, surprised. “There are also thunderstorms. We once had a ‘mud-shower.’”

“Mud-shower?”

“Our neighbour there was shooting up ashes. He sometimes clears his red-hot gullet like that; and a thunderstorm came along at the same time. It was very messy; but our neighbour is generally well behaved — just smokes quietly, as he did that day when I first showed you the smudge in the sky from the schooner’s deck. He’s a good-natured, lazy fellow of a volcano.”

“I saw a mountain smoking like that before,” she said, staring at the slender stem of a tree-fern some dozen feet in front of her. “It wasn’t very long after we left England — some few days, though. I was so ill at first that I lost count of days. A smoking mountain — I can’t think how they called it.”

“Vesuvius, perhaps,” suggested Heyst.

“That’s the name.”

“I saw it, too, years, ages ago,” said Heyst.

“On your way here?”

“No, long before I ever thought of coming into this part of the world. I was yet a boy.”

She turned and looked at him attentively, as if seeking to discover some trace of that boyhood in the mature face of the man with the hair thin at the top and the long, thick moustaches. Heyst stood the frank examination with a playful smile, hiding the profound effect these veiled grey eyes produced — whether on his heart or on his nerves, whether sensuous or spiritual, tender or irritating, he was unable to say.

“Well, princess of Samburan,” he said at last, “have I found favour in your sight?”

She seemed to wake up, and shook her head.

“I was thinking,” she murmured very low.

“Thought, action — so many snares! If you begin to think you will be unhappy.”

“I wasn’t thinking of myself!” she declared with a simplicity which took Heyst aback somewhat.

“On the lips of a moralist this would sound like a rebuke,” he said, half seriously; “but I won’t suspect you of being one. Moralists and I haven’t been friends for many years.”

She had listened with an air of attention.

“I understood you had no friends,” she said. “I am pleased that there’s nobody to find fault with you for what you have done. I like to think that I am in no one’s way.”

Heyst would have said something, but she did not give him time. Unconscious of the movement he made she went on:

“What I was thinking to myself was, why are you here?”

Heyst let himself sink on his elbow again.

“If by ‘you’ you mean ‘we’ — well, you know why we are here.”

She bent her gaze down at him.

“No, it isn’t that. I meant before — all that time before you came across me and guessed at once that I was in trouble, with no one to turn to. And you know it was desperate trouble too.”

Her voice fell on the last words, as if she would end there; but there was something so expectant in Heyst’s attitude as he sat at her feet, looking up



at her steadily, that she continued, after drawing a short, quick breath:

“It was, really. I told you I had been worried before by bad fellows. It made me unhappy, disturbed — angry, too. But oh, how I hated, hated, hated that man!”

“That man” was the florid Schomberg with the military bearing, benefactor of white men (‘decent food to eat in decent company’) — mature victim of belated passion. The girl shuddered. The characteristic harmoniousness of her face became, as it were, decomposed for an instant. Heyst was startled.

“Why think of it now?” he cried.

“It’s because I was cornered that time. It wasn’t as before. It was worse, ever so much. I wished I could die of my fright — and yet it’s only now that I begin to understand what a horror it might have been. Yes, only now, since we — ”

Heyst stirred a little.

“Came here,” he finished.

Her tenseness relaxed, her flushed face went gradually back to its normal tint.

“Yes,” she said indifferently, but at the same time she gave him a stealthy glance of passionate appreciation; and then her face took on a melancholy cast, her whole figure drooped imperceptibly.

“But you were coming back here anyhow?” she asked.

“Yes. I was only waiting for Davidson. Yes, I was coming back here, to these ruins — to Wang, who perhaps did not expect to see me again. It’s impossible to guess at the way that Chinaman draws his conclusions, and how he looks upon one.”

“Don’t talk about him. He makes me feel uncomfortable. Talk about yourself!”

“About myself? I see you are still busy with the mystery of my existence here; but it isn’t at all mysterious. Primarily the man with the quill pen in his hand in that picture you so often look at is responsible for my existence. He is also responsible for what my existence is, or rather has been. He was a great man in his way. I don’t know much of his history. I suppose he began like other people; took fine words for good, ringing coin and noble ideals for valuable banknotes. He was a great master of both, himself, by the way. Later he discovered — how am I to explain it to you? Suppose the world were a factory and all mankind workmen in it. Well, he discovered

that the wages were not good enough. That they were paid in counterfeit money.”

“I see!” the girl said slowly.

“Do you?”

Heyst, who had been speaking as if to himself, looked up curiously.

“It wasn’t a new discovery, but he brought his capacity for scorn to bear on it. It was immense. It ought to have withered this globe. I don’t know how many minds he convinced. But my mind was very young then, and youth I suppose can be easily seduced — even by a negation. He was very ruthless, and yet he was not without pity. He dominated me without difficulty. A heartless man could not have done so. Even to fools he was not utterly merciless. He could be indignant, but he was too great for flouts and jeers. What he said was not meant for the crowd; it could not be; and I was flattered to find myself among the elect. They read his books, but I have heard his living word. It was irresistible. It was as if that mind were taking me into its confidence, giving me a special insight into its mastery of despair. Mistake, no doubt. There is something of my father in every man who lives long enough. But they don’t say anything. They can’t. They wouldn’t know how, or perhaps, they wouldn’t speak if they could. Man on this earth is an unforeseen accident which does not stand close investigation. However, that particular man died as quietly as a child goes to sleep. But, after listening to him, I could not take my soul down into the street to fight there. I started off to wander about, an independent spectator — if that is possible.”

For a long time the girl’s grey eyes had been watching his face. She discovered that, addressing her, he was really talking to himself. Heyst looked up, caught sight of her as it were, and caught himself up, with a low laugh and a change of tone.

“All this does not tell you why I ever came here. Why, indeed? It’s like prying into inscrutable mysteries which are not worth scrutinizing. A man drifts. The most successful men have drifted into their successes. I don’t want to tell you that this is a success. You wouldn’t believe me if I did. It isn’t; neither is it the ruinous failure it looks. It proves nothing, unless perhaps some hidden weakness in my character — and even that is not certain.”

He looked fixedly at her, and with such grave eyes that she felt obliged to smile faintly at him, since she did not understand what he meant. Her smile

was reflected, still fainter, on his lips.

“This does not advance you much in your inquiry,” he went on. “And in truth your question is unanswerable; but facts have a certain positive value, and I will tell you a fact. One day I met a cornered man. I use the word because it expresses the man’s situation exactly, and because you just used it yourself. You know what that means?”

“What do you say?” she whispered, astounded. “A man!”

Heyst laughed at her wondering eyes.

“No! No! I mean in his own way.”

“I knew very well it couldn’t be anything like that,” she observed under her breath.

“I won’t bother you with the story. It was a custom-house affair, strange as it may sound to you. He would have preferred to be killed outright — that is, to have his soul dispatched to another world, rather than to be robbed of his substance, his very insignificant substance, in this. I saw that he believed in another world because, being cornered, as I have told you, he went down on his knees and prayed. What do you think of that?”

Heyst paused. She looked at him earnestly.

“You didn’t make fun of him for that?” she said.

Heyst made a brusque movement of protest

“My dear girl, I am not a ruffian,” he cried. Then, returning to his usual tone: “I didn’t even have to conceal a smile. Somehow it didn’t look a smiling matter. No, it was not funny; it was rather pathetic; he was so representative of all the past victims of the Great Joke. But it is by folly alone that the world moves, and so it is a respectable thing upon the whole. And besides, he was what one would call a good man. I don’t mean especially because he had offered up a prayer. No! He was really a decent fellow, he was quite unfitted for this world, he was a failure, a good man cornered — a sight for the gods; for no decent mortal cares to look at that sort.” A thought seemed to occur to him. He turned his face to the girl. “And you, who have been cornered too — did you think of offering a prayer?”

Neither her eyes nor a single one of her features moved the least bit. She only let fall the words:

“I am not what they call a good girl.”

“That sounds evasive,” said Heyst after a short silence. “Well, the good fellow did pray and after he had confessed to it I was struck by the

comicality of the situation. No, don't misunderstand me — I am not alluding to his act, of course. And even the idea of Eternity, Infinity, Omnipotence, being called upon to defeat the conspiracy of two miserable Portuguese half-castes did not move my mirth. From the point of view of the supplicant, the danger to be conjured was something like the end of the world, or worse. No! What captivated my fancy was that I, Axel Heyst, the most detached of creatures in this earthly captivity, the veriest tramp on this earth, an indifferent stroller going through the world's bustle — that I should have been there to step into the situation of an agent of Providence. I, a man of universal scorn and unbelief. . . .”

“You are putting it on,” she interrupted in her seductive voice, with a coaxing intonation.

“No. I am not like that, born or fashioned, or both. I am not for nothing the son of my father, of that man in the painting. I am he, all but the genius. And there is even less in me than I make out, because the very scorn is falling away from me year after year. I have never been so amused as by that episode in which I was suddenly called to act such an incredible part. For a moment I enjoyed it greatly. It got him out of his corner, you know.”

“You saved a man for fun — is that what you mean? Just for fun?”

“Why this tone of suspicion?” remonstrated Heyst. “I suppose the sight of this particular distress was disagreeable to me. What you call fun came afterwards, when it dawned on me that I was for him a walking, breathing, incarnate proof of the efficacy of prayer. I was a little fascinated by it — and then, could I have argued with him? You don't argue against such evidence, and besides it would have looked as if I had wanted to claim all the merit. Already his gratitude was simply frightful. Funny position, wasn't it? The boredom came later, when we lived together on board his ship. I had, in a moment of inadvertence, created for myself a tie. How to define it precisely I don't know. One gets attached in a way to people one has done something for. But is that friendship? I am not sure what it was. I only know that he who forms a tie is lost. The germ of corruption has entered into his soul.”

Heyst's tone was light, with the flavour of playfulness which seasoned all his speeches and seemed to be of the very essence of his thoughts. The girl he had come across, of whom he had possessed himself, to whose presence he was not yet accustomed, with whom he did not yet know how to live;

that human being so near and still so strange, gave him a greater sense of his own reality than he had ever known in all his life.

## CHAPTER FOUR

With her knees drawn up, Lena rested her elbows on them and held her head in both her hands.

“Are you tired of sitting here?” Heyst asked.

An almost imperceptible negative movement of the head was all the answer she made.

“Why are you looking so serious?” he pursued, and immediately thought that habitual seriousness, in the long run, was much more bearable than constant gaiety. “However, this expression suits you exceedingly,” he added, not diplomatically, but because, by the tendency of his taste, it was a true statement. “And as long as I can be certain that it is not boredom which gives you this severe air, I am willing to sit here and look at you till you are ready to go.”

And this was true. He was still under the fresh sortilege of their common life, the surprise of novelty, the flattered vanity of his possession of this woman; for a man must feel that, unless he has ceased to be masculine. Her eyes moved in his direction, rested on him, then returned to their stare into the deeper gloom at the foot of the straight tree-trunks, whose spreading crowns were slowly withdrawing their shade. The warm air stirred slightly about her motionless head. She would not look at him, from some obscure fear of betraying herself. She felt in her innermost depths an irresistible desire to give herself up to him more completely, by some act of absolute sacrifice. This was something of which he did not seem to have an idea. He was a strange being without needs. She felt his eyes fixed upon her; and as he kept silent, she said uneasily — for she didn’t know what his silences might mean:

“And so you lived with that friend — that good man?”

“Excellent fellow,” Heyst responded, with a readiness that she did not expect. “But it was a weakness on my part. I really didn’t want to, only he wouldn’t let me off, and I couldn’t explain. He was the sort of man to whom you can’t explain anything. He was extremely sensitive, and it would have been a tigerish thing to do to mangle his delicate feelings by the sort of plain speaking that would have been necessary. His mind was like a white-walled, pure chamber, furnished with, say, six straw-bottomed chairs, and he was always placing and displacing them in various combinations. But they were always the same chairs. He was extremely easy to live with; but

then he got hold of this coal idea — or, rather, the idea got hold of him, it entered into that scantily furnished chamber of which I have just spoken, and sat on all the chairs. There was no dislodging it, you know! It was going to make his fortune, my fortune, everybody's fortune. In past years, in moments of doubt that will come to a man determined to remain free from absurdities of existence, I often asked myself, with a momentary dread, in what way would life try to get hold of me? And this was the way. He got it into his head that he could do nothing without me. And was I now, he asked me, to spurn and ruin him? Well, one morning — I wonder if he had gone down on his knees to pray that night! — one morning I gave in."

Heyst tugged violently at a tuft of dried grass, and cast it away from him with a nervous gesture.

"I gave in," he repeated.

Looking towards him with a movement of her eyes only, the girl noticed the strong feeling on his face with that intense interest which his person awakened in her mind and in her heart. But it soon passed away, leaving only a moody expression.

"It's difficult to resist where nothing matters," he observed. "And perhaps there is a grain of freakishness in my nature. It amused me to go about uttering silly, commonplace phrases. I was never so well thought of in the islands till I began to jabber commercial gibberish like the veriest idiot. Upon my word, I believe that I was actually respected for a time. I was as grave as an owl over it; I had to be loyal to the man. I have been, from first to last, completely, utterly loyal to the best of my ability. I thought he understood something about coal. And if I had been aware that he knew nothing of it, as in fact he didn't, well — I don't know what I could have done to stop him. In one way or another I should have had to be loyal. Truth, work, ambition, love itself, may be only counters in the lamentable or despicable game of life, but when one takes a hand one must play the game. No, the shade of Morrison needn't haunt me. What's the matter? I say, Lena, why are you staring like that? Do you feel ill?"

Heyst made as if to get on his feet. The girl extended her arm to arrest him, and he remained staring in a sitting posture, propped on one arm, observing her indefinable expression of anxiety, as if she were unable to draw breath.

"What has come to you?" he insisted, feeling strangely unwilling to move, to touch her.

“Nothing!” She swallowed painfully. “Of course it can’t be. What name did you say? I didn’t hear it properly.”

“Name?” repeated Heyst dazedly. “I only mentioned Morrison. It’s the name of that man of whom I’ve been speaking. What of it?”

“And you mean to say that he was your friend?”

“You have heard enough to judge for yourself. You know as much of our connection as I know myself. The people in this part of the world went by appearances, and called us friends, as far as I can remember. Appearances — what more, what better can you ask for? In fact you can’t have better. You can’t have anything else.”

“You are trying to confuse me with your talk,” she cried. “You can’t make fun of this.”

“Can’t? Well, no I can’t. It’s a pity. Perhaps it would have been the best way,” said Heyst, in a tone which for him could be called gloomy. “Unless one could forget the silly business altogether.” His faint playfulness of manner and speech returned, like a habit one has schooled oneself into, even before his forehead had cleared completely. “But why are you looking so hard at me? Oh, I don’t object, and I shall try not to flinch. Your eyes — ”

He was looking straight into them, and as a matter of fact had forgotten all about the late Morrison at that moment.

“No,” he exclaimed suddenly. “What an impenetrable girl you are Lena, with those grey eyes of yours! Windows of the soul, as some poet has said. The fellow must have been a glazier by vocation. Well, nature has provided excellently for the shyness of your soul.”

When he ceased speaking, the girl came to herself with a catch of her breath. He heard her voice, the varied charm of which he thought he knew so well, saying with an unfamiliar intonation:

“And that partner of yours is dead?”

“Morrison? Oh, yes, as I’ve told you, he — ”

“You never told me.”

“Didn’t I? I thought I did; or, rather, I thought you must know. It seems impossible that anybody with whom I speak should not know that Morrison is dead.”

She lowered her eyelids, and Heyst was startled by something like an expression of horror on her face.



“Morrison!” she whispered in an appalled tone. “Morrison!” Her head drooped. Unable to see her features, Heyst could tell from her voice that for some reason or other she was profoundly moved by the syllables of that unromantic name. A thought flashed through his head — could she have known Morrison? But the mere difference of their origins made it wildly improbable.

“This is very extraordinary!” he said. “Have you ever heard the name before?”

Her head moved quickly several times in tiny affirmative nods, as if she could not trust herself to speak, or even to look at him. She was biting her lower lip.

“Did you ever know anybody of that name?” he asked.

The girl answered by a negative sign; and then at last she spoke, jerkily, as if forcing herself against some doubt or fear. She had heard of that very man, she told Heyst.

“Impossible!” he said positively. “You are mistaken. You couldn’t have heard of him, it’s — ”

He stopped short, with the thought that to talk like this was perfectly useless; that one doesn’t argue against thin air.

“But I did hear of him; only I didn’t know then, I couldn’t guess, that it was your partner they were talking about.”

“Talking about my partner?” repeated Heyst slowly.

“No.” Her mind seemed almost as bewildered, as full of incredulity, as his. “No. They were talking of you really; only I didn’t know it.”

“Who were they?” Heyst raised his voice. “Who was talking of me? Talking where?”

With the first question he had lifted himself from his reclining position; at the last he was on his knees before her, their heads on a level.

“Why, in that town, in that hotel. Where else could it have been?” she said.

The idea of being talked about was always novel to Heyst’s simplified conception of himself. For a moment he was as much surprised as if he had believed himself to be a mere gliding shadow among men. Besides, he had in him a half-unconscious notion that he was above the level of island gossip.

“But you said first that it was of Morrison they talked,” he remarked to the girl, sinking on his heels, and no longer much interested. “Strange that

you should have the opportunity to hear any talk at all! I was rather under the impression that you never saw anybody belonging to the town except from the platform.”

“You forget that I was not living with the other girls,” she said. “After meals they used to go back to the Pavilion, but I had to stay in the hotel and do my sewing, or what not, in the room where they talked.”

“I didn’t think of that. By the by, you never told me who they were.”

“Why, that horrible red-faced beast,” she said, with all the energy of disgust which the mere thought of the hotel-keeper provoked in her.

“Oh, Schomberg!” Heyst murmured carelessly.

“He talked to the boss — to Zangiacomo, I mean. I had to sit there. That devil-woman sometimes wouldn’t let me go away. I mean Mrs. Zangiacomo.”

“I guessed,” murmured Heyst. “She liked to torment you in a variety of ways. But it is really strange that the hotel-keeper should talk of Morrison to Zangiacomo. As far as I can remember he saw very little of Morrison professionally. He knew many others much better.”

The girl shuddered slightly.

“That was the only name I ever overheard. I would get as far away from them as I could, to the other end of the room, but when that beast started shouting I could not help hearing. I wish I had never heard anything. If I had got up and gone out of the room I don’t suppose the woman would have killed me for it; but she would have rowed me in a nasty way. She would have threatened me and called me names. That sort, when they know you are helpless, there’s nothing to stop them. I don’t know how it is, but bad people, real bad people that you can see are bad, they get over me somehow. It’s the way they set about downing one. I am afraid of wickedness.”

Heyst watched the changing expressions of her face. He encouraged her, profoundly sympathetic, a little amused.

“I quite understand. You needn’t apologize for your great delicacy in the perception of inhuman evil. I am a little like you.”

“I am not very plucky,” she said.

“Well! I don’t know myself what I would do, what countenance I would have before a creature which would strike me as being evil incarnate. Don’t you be ashamed!”

She sighed, looked up with her pale, candid gaze and a timid expression on her face, and murmured:

“You don’t seem to want to know what he was saying.”

“About poor Morrison? It couldn’t have been anything bad, for the poor fellow was innocence itself. And then, you know, he is dead, and nothing can possibly matter to him now.”

“But I tell you that it was of you he was talking!” she cried.

“He was saying that Morrison’s partner first got all there was to get out of him, and then, and then — well, as good as murdered him — sent him out to die somewhere!”

“You believe that of me?” said Heyst, after a moment of perfect silence.

“I didn’t know it had anything to do with you. Schomberg was talking of some Swede. How was I to know? It was only when you began telling me about how you came here — ”

“And now you have my version.” Heyst forced himself to speak quietly. “So that’s how the business looked from outside!” he muttered.

“I remember him saying that everybody in these parts knew the story,” the girl added breathlessly.

“Strange that it should hurt me!” mused Heyst to himself; “yet it does. I seem to be as much of a fool as those everybodies who know the story and no doubt believe it. Can you remember any more?” he addressed the girl in a grimly polite tone. “I’ve often heard of the moral advantages of seeing oneself as others see one. Let us investigate further. Can’t you recall something else that everybody knows?”

“Oh! Don’t laugh!” she cried.

“Did I laugh? I assure you I was not aware of it. I won’t ask you whether you believe the hotel-keeper’s version. Surely you must know the value of human judgement!”

She unclasped her hands, moved them slightly, and twined her fingers as before. Protest? Assent? Was there to be nothing more? He was relieved when she spoke in that warm and wonderful voice which in itself comforted and fascinated one’s heart, which made her lovable.

“I heard this before you and I ever spoke to each other. It went out of my memory afterwards. Everything went out of my memory then; and I was glad of it. It was a fresh start for me, with you — and you know it. I wish I had forgotten who I was — that would have been best; and I very nearly did forget.”

He was moved by the vibrating quality of the last words. She seemed to be talking low of some wonderful enchantment, in mysterious terms of special significance. He thought that if she only could talk to him in some unknown tongue, she would enslave him altogether by the sheer beauty of the sound, suggesting infinite depths of wisdom and feeling.

“But,” she went on, “the name stuck in my head, it seems; and when you mentioned it — ”

“It broke the spell,” muttered Heyst in angry disappointment as if he had been deceived in some hope.

The girl, from her position a little above him, surveyed with still eyes the abstracted silence of the man on whom she now depended with a completeness of which she had not been vividly conscious before, because, till then, she had never felt herself swinging between the abysses of earth and heaven in the hollow of his arm. What if he should grow weary of the burden?

“And, moreover, nobody had ever believed that tale!”

Heyst came out with an abrupt burst of sound which made her open her steady eyes wider, with an effect of immense surprise. It was a purely mechanical effect, because she was neither surprised nor puzzled. In fact, she could understand him better than at any moment since she first set eyes on him.

He laughed scornfully.

“What am I thinking of?” he cried. “As if it could matter to me what anybody had ever said or believed, from the beginning of the world till the crack of doom!”

“I never heard you laugh till today,” she observed. “This is the second time!”

He scrambled to his feet and towered above her.

“That’s because, when one’s heart has been broken into in the way you have broken into mine, all sorts of weaknesses are free to enter — shame, anger, stupid indignation, stupid fears — stupid laughter, too. I wonder what interpretation you are putting on it?”

“It wasn’t gay, certainly,” she said. “But why are you angry with me? Are you sorry you took me away from those beasts? I told you who I was. You could see it.”

“Heavens!” he muttered. He had regained his command of himself. “I assure you I could see much more than you could tell me. I could see quite

a lot that you don't even suspect yet, but you can't be seen quite through."

He sank to the ground by her side and took her hand. She asked gently:

"What more do you want from me?"

He made no sound for a time.

"The impossible, I suppose," he said very low, as one makes a confidence, and pressing the hand he grasped.

It did not return the pressure. He shook his head as if to drive away the thought of this, and added in a louder, light tone:

"Nothing less. And it isn't because I think little of what I've got already. Oh, no! It is because I think so much of this possession of mine that I can't have it complete enough. I know it's unreasonable. You can't hold back anything — now."

"Indeed I couldn't," she whispered, letting her hand lie passive in his tight grasp. "I only wish I could give you something more, or better, or whatever it is you want."

He was touched by the sincere accent of these simple words.

"I tell you what you can do — you can tell me whether you would have gone with me like this if you had known of whom that abominable idiot of a hotel-keeper was speaking. A murderer — no less!"

"But I didn't know you at all then," she cried. "And I had the sense to understand what he was saying. It wasn't murder, really. I never thought it was."

"What made him invent such an atrocity?" Heyst exclaimed. "He seems a stupid animal. He is stupid. How did he manage to hatch that pretty tale? Have I a particularly vile countenance? Is black selfishness written all over my face? Or is that sort of thing so universally human that it might be said of anybody?"

"It wasn't murder," she insisted earnestly.

"I know. I understand. It was worse. As to killing a man, which would be a comparatively decent thing to do, well — I have never done that."

"Why should you do it?" she asked in a frightened voice.

"My dear girl, you don't know the sort of life I have been leading in unexplored countries, in the wilds; it's difficult to give you an idea. There are men who haven't been in such tight places as I have found myself in who have had to — to shed blood, as the saying is. Even the wilds hold prizes which tempt some people; but I had no schemes, no plans — and not even great firmness of mind to make me unduly obstinate. I was simply

moving on, while the others, perhaps, were going somewhere. An indifference as to roads and purposes makes one meeker, as it were. And I may say truly, too, that I never did care, I won't say for life — I had scorned what people call by that name from the first — but for being alive. I don't know if that is what men call courage, but I doubt it very much."

"You! You have no courage?" she protested.

"I really don't know. Not the sort that always itches for a weapon, for I have never been anxious to use one in the quarrels that a man gets into in the most innocent way sometimes. The differences for which men murder each other are, like everything else they do, the most contemptible, the most pitiful things to look back upon. No, I've never killed a man or loved a woman — not even in my thoughts, not even in my dreams."

He raised her hand to his lips, and let them rest on it for a space, during which she moved a little closer to him. After the lingering kiss he did not relinquish his hold.

"To slay, to love — the greatest enterprises of life upon a man! And I have no experience of either. You must forgive me anything that may have appeared to you awkward in my behaviour, inexpressive in my speeches, untimely in my silences."

He moved uneasily, a little disappointed by her attitude, but indulgent to it, and feeling, in this moment of perfect quietness, that in holding her surrendered hand he had found a closer communion than they had ever achieved before. But even then there still lingered in him a sense of incompleteness not altogether overcome — which, it seemed, nothing ever would overcome — the fatal imperfection of all the gifts of life, which makes of them a delusion and a snare.

All of a sudden he squeezed her hand angrily. His delicately playful equanimity, the product of kindness and scorn, had perished with the loss of his bitter liberty.

"Not murder, you say! I should think not. But when you led me to talk just now, when the name turned up, when you understood that it was of me that these things had been said, you showed a strange emotion. I could see it."

"I was a bit startled," she said.

"At the baseness of my conduct?" he asked.

"I wouldn't judge you, not for anything."

"Really?"

“It would be as if I dared to judge everything that there is.” With her other hand she made a gesture that seemed to embrace in one movement the earth and the heaven. “I wouldn’t do such a thing.”

Then came a silence, broken at last by Heyst:

“I! I! do a deadly wrong to my poor Morrison!” he cried. “I, who could not bear to hurt his feelings. I, who respected his very madness! Yes, this madness, the wreck of which you can see lying about the jetty of Diamond Bay. What else could I do? He insisted on regarding me as his saviour; he was always restraining the eternal obligation on the tip of his tongue, till I was burning with shame at his gratitude. What could I do? He was going to repay me with this infernal coal, and I had to join him as one joins a child’s game in a nursery. One would no more have thought of humiliating him than one would think of humiliating a child. What’s the use of talking of all this! Of course, the people here could not understand the truth of our relation to each other. But what business of theirs was it? Kill old Morrison! Well, it is less criminal, less base — I am not saying it is less difficult — to kill a man than to cheat him in that way. You understand that?”

She nodded slightly, but more than once and with evident conviction. His eyes rested on her, inquisitive, ready for tenderness.

“But it was neither one nor the other,” he went on. “Then, why your emotion? All you confess is that you wouldn’t judge me.”

She turned upon him her veiled, unseeing grey eyes in which nothing of her wonder could be read.

“I said I couldn’t,” she whispered.

“But you thought that there was no smoke without fire!” the playfulness of tone hardly concealed his irritation. “What power there must be in words, only imperfectly heard — for you did not listen with particular care, did you? What were they? What evil effort of invention drove them into that idiot’s mouth out of his lying throat? If you were to try to remember, they would perhaps convince me, too.”

“I didn’t listen,” she protested. “What was it to me what they said of anybody? He was saying that there never were such loving friends to look at as you two; then, when you got all you wanted out of him and got thoroughly tired of him, too, you kicked him out to go home and die.”

Indignation, with an undercurrent of some other feeling, rang in these quoted words, uttered in her pure and enchanting voice. She ceased abruptly and lowered her long, dark lashes, as if mortally weary, sick at heart.

“Of course, why shouldn’t you get tired of that or any other — company? You aren’t like anyone else, and — and the thought of it made me unhappy suddenly; but indeed, I did not believe anything bad of you. I — ”

A brusque movement of his arm, flinging her hand away, stopped her short. Heyst had again lost control of himself. He would have shouted, if shouting had been in his character.

“No, this earth must be the appointed hatching planet of calumny enough to furnish the whole universe. I feel a disgust at my own person, as if I had tumbled into some filthy hole. Pah! And you — all you can say is that you won’t judge me; that you — ”

She raised her head at this attack, though indeed he had not turned to her.

“I don’t believe anything bad of you,” she repeated. “I couldn’t.”

He made a gesture as if to say:

“That’s sufficient.”

In his soul and in his body he experienced a nervous reaction from tenderness. All at once, without transition, he detested her. But only for a moment. He remembered that she was pretty, and, more, that she had a special grace in the intimacy of life. She had the secret of individuality which excites — and escapes.

He jumped up and began to walk to and fro. Presently his hidden fury fell into dust within him, like a crazy structure, leaving behind emptiness, desolation, regret. His resentment was not against the girl, but against life itself — that commonest of snares, in which he felt himself caught, seeing clearly the plot of plots and unconsolated by the lucidity of his mind.

He swerved and, stepping up to her, sank to the ground by her side. Before she could make a movement or even turn her head his way, he took her in his arms and kissed her lips. He tasted on them the bitterness of a tear fallen there. He had never seen her cry. It was like another appeal to his tenderness — a new seduction. The girl glanced round, moved suddenly away, and averted her face. With her hand she signed imperiously to him to leave her alone — a command which Heyst did not obey.



## CHAPTER FIVE

When she opened her eyes at last and sat up, Heyst scrambled quickly to his feet and went to pick up her cork helmet, which had rolled a little way off. Meanwhile she busied herself in doing up her hair, plaited on the top of her head in two heavy, dark tresses, which had come loose. He tendered her the helmet in silence, and waited as if unwilling to hear the sound of his own voice.

“We had better go down now,” he suggested in a low tone.

He extended his hand to help her up. He had the intention to smile, but abandoned it at the nearer sight of her still face, in which was depicted the infinite lassitude of her soul. On their way to regain the forest path they had to pass through the spot from which the view of the sea could be obtained. The flaming abyss of emptiness, the liquid, undulating glare, the tragic brutality of the light, made her long for the friendly night, with its stars stilled by an austere spell; for the velvety dark sky and the mysterious great shadow of the sea, conveying peace to the day-weary heart. She put her hand to her eyes. Behind her back Heyst spoke gently.

“Let us get on, Lena.”

She walked ahead in silence. Heyst remarked that they had never been out before during the hottest hours. It would do her no good, he feared. This solicitude pleased and soothed her. She felt more and more like herself — a poor London girl playing in an orchestra, and snatched out from the humiliations, the squalid dangers of a miserable existence, by a man like whom there was not, there could not be, another in this world. She felt this with elation, with uneasiness, with an intimate pride — and with a peculiar sinking of the heart.

“I am not easily knocked out by any such thing as heat,” she said decisively.

“Yes, but I don’t forget that you’re not a tropical bird.”

“You weren’t born in these parts, either,” she returned.

“No, and perhaps I haven’t even your physique. I am a transplanted being. Transplanted! I ought to call myself uprooted — an unnatural state of existence; but a man is supposed to stand anything.”

She looked back at him and received a smile. He told her to keep in the shelter of the forest path, which was very still and close, full of heat if free from glare. Now and then they had glimpses of the company’s old clearing

blazing with light, in which the black stumps of trees stood charred, without shadows, miserable and sinister. They crossed the open in a direct line for the bungalow. On the veranda they fancied they had a glimpse of the vanishing Wang, though the girl was not at all sure that she had seen anything move. Heyst had no doubts.

“Wang has been looking out for us. We are late.”

“Was he? I thought I saw something white for a moment, and then I did not see it any more.”

“That’s it — he vanishes. It’s a very remarkable gift in that Chinaman.”

“Are they all like that?” she asked with naive curiosity and uneasiness.

“Not in such perfection,” said Heyst, amused.

He noticed with approval that she was not heated by the walk. The drops of perspiration on her forehead were like dew on the cool, white petal of a flower. He looked at her figure of grace and strength, solid and supple, with an ever-growing appreciation.

“Go in and rest yourself for a quarter of an hour; and then Mr. Wang will give us something to eat,” he said.

They had found the table laid. When they came together again and sat down to it, Wang materialized without a sound, unheard, uncalled, and did his office. Which being accomplished, at a given moment he was not.

A great silence brooded over Samburan — the silence of the great heat that seems pregnant with fatal issues, like the silence of ardent thought. Heyst remained alone in the big room. The girl seeing him take up a book, had retreated to her chamber. Heyst sat down under his father’s portrait; and the abominable calumny crept back into his recollection. The taste of it came on his lips, nauseating and corrosive like some kinds of poison. He was tempted to spit on the floor, naively, in sheer unsophisticated disgust of the physical sensation. He shook his head, surprised at himself. He was not used to receive his intellectual impressions in that way — reflected in movements of carnal emotion. He stirred impatiently in his chair, and raised the book to his eyes with both hands. It was one of his father’s. He opened it haphazard, and his eyes fell on the middle of the page. The elder Heyst had written of everything in many books — of space and of time, of animals and of stars; analysing ideas and actions, the laughter and the frowns of men, and the grimaces of their agony. The son read, shrinking into himself, composing his face as if under the author’s eye, with a vivid

consciousness of the portrait on his right hand, a little above his head; a wonderful presence in its heavy frame on the flimsy wall of mats, looking exiled and at home, out of place and masterful, in the painted immobility of profile.

And Heyst, the son, read:

Of the stratagems of life the most cruel is the consolation of love — the most subtle, too; for the desire is the bed of dreams.

He turned the pages of the little volume, “Storm and Dust,” glancing here and there at the broken text of reflections, maxims, short phrases, enigmatical sometimes and sometimes eloquent. It seemed to him that he was hearing his father’s voice, speaking and ceasing to speak again. Startled at first, he ended by finding a charm in the illusion. He abandoned himself to the half-belief that something of his father dwelt yet on earth — a ghostly voice, audible to the ear of his own flesh and blood. With what strange serenity, mingled with terrors, had that man considered the universal nothingness! He had plunged into it headlong, perhaps to render death, the answer that faced one at every inquiry, more supportable.

Heyst stirred, and the ghostly voice ceased; but his eyes followed the words on the last page of the book:

Men of tormented conscience, or of a criminal imagination, are aware of much that minds of a peaceful, resigned cast do not even suspect. It is not poets alone who dare descend into the abyss of infernal regions, or even who dream of such a descent. The most inexpressive of human beings must have said to himself, at one time or another: “Anything but this!” . . .

We all have our instants of clairvoyance. They are not very helpful. The character of the scheme does not permit that or anything else to be helpful. Properly speaking its character, judged by the standards established by its victims, is infamous. It excuses every violence of protest and at the same time never fails to crush it, just as it crushes the blindest assent. The so-called wickedness must be, like the so-called virtue, its own reward — to be anything at all . . .

Clairvoyance or no clairvoyance, men love their captivity. To the unknown force of negation they prefer the miserably tumbled bed of their servitude. Man alone can give one the disgust of pity; yet I find it easier to believe in the misfortune of mankind than in its wickedness.

These were the last words. Heyst lowered the book to his knees. Lena’s voice spoke above his drooping head:

“You sit there as if you were unhappy.”

“I thought you were asleep,” he said.

“I was lying down right enough, but I never closed my eyes.”

“The rest would have done you good after our walk. Didn’t you try?”

“I was lying down, I tell you, but sleep I couldn’t.”

“And you made no sound! What want of sincerity. Or did you want to be alone for a time?”

“I — alone?” she murmured.

He noticed her eyeing the book, and got up to put it back in the bookcase. When he turned round, he saw that she had dropped into the chair — it was the one she always used — and looked as if her strength had suddenly gone from her, leaving her only her youth, which seemed very pathetic, very much at his mercy. He moved quickly towards the chair.

“Tired, are you? It’s my fault, taking you up so high and keeping you out so long. Such a windless day, too!”

She watched his concern, her pose languid, her eyes raised to him, but as unreadable as ever. He avoided looking into them for that very reason. He forgot himself in the contemplation of those passive arms, of these defenceless lips, and — yes, one had to go back to them — of these wide-open eyes. Something wild in their grey stare made him think of sea-birds in the cold murkiness of high latitudes. He started when she spoke, all the charm of physical intimacy revealed suddenly in that voice.

“You should try to love me!” she said.

He made a movement of astonishment.

“Try,” he muttered. “But it seems to me — ” He broke off, saying to himself that if he loved her, he had never told her so in so many words. Simple words! They died on his lips. “What makes you say that?” he asked.

She lowered her eyelids and turned her head a little.

“I have done nothing,” she said in a low voice. “It’s you who have been good, helpful, and tender to me. Perhaps you love me for that — just for that; or perhaps you love me for company, and because — well! But sometimes it seems to me that you can never love me for myself, only for myself, as people do love each other when it is to be for ever.” Her head drooped. “Forever,” she breathed out again; then, still more faintly, she added an entreating: “Do try!”

These last words went straight to his heart — the sound of them more than the sense. He did not know what to say, either from want of practice in

dealing with women or simply from his innate honesty of thought. All his defences were broken now. Life had him fairly by the throat. But he managed a smile, though she was not looking at him; yes, he did manage it — the well-known Heyst smile of playful courtesy, so familiar to all sorts and conditions of men in the islands.

“My dear Lena,” he said, “it looks as if you were trying to pick a very unnecessary quarrel with me — of all people!”

She made no movement. With his elbows spread out he was twisting the ends of his long moustaches, very masculine and perplexed, enveloped in the atmosphere of femininity as in a cloud, suspecting pitfalls, and as if afraid to move.

“I must admit, though,” he added, “that there is no one else; and I suppose a certain amount of quarrelling is necessary for existence in this world.”

That girl, seated in her chair in graceful quietude, was to him like a script in an unknown language, or even more simply mysterious, like any writing to the illiterate. As far as women went he was altogether uninstructed and he had not the gift of intuition which is fostered in the days of youth by dreams and visions, exercises of the heart fitting it for the encounters of a world, in which love itself rests as much on antagonism as on attraction. His mental attitude was that of a man looking this way and that on a piece of writing which he is unable to decipher, but which may be big with some revelation. He didn’t know what to say. All he found to add was:

“I don’t even understand what I have done or left undone to distress you like this.”

He stopped, struck afresh by the physical and moral sense of the imperfections of their relations — a sense which made him desire her constant nearness, before his eyes, under his hand, and which, when she was out of his sight, made her so vague, so elusive and illusory, a promise that could not be embraced and held.

“No! I don’t see clearly what you mean. Is your mind turned towards the future?” he interpellated her with marked playfulness, because he was ashamed to let such a word pass his lips. But all his cherished negations were falling off him one by one.

“Because if it is so there is nothing easier than to dismiss it. In our future, as in what people call the other life, there is nothing to be frightened of.”

She raised her eyes to him; and if nature had formed them to express anything else but blank candour he would have learned how terrified she was by his talk and the fact that her sinking heart loved him more desperately than ever. He smiled at her.

“Dismiss all thought of it,” he insisted. “Surely you don’t suspect after what I have heard from you, that I am anxious to return to mankind. I! I! murder my poor Morrison! It’s possible that I may be really capable of that which they say I have done. The point is that I haven’t done it. But it is an unpleasant subject to me. I ought to be ashamed to confess it — but it is! Let us forget it. There’s that in you, Lena, which can console me for worse things, for uglier passages. And if we forget, there are no voices here to remind us.”

She had raised her head before he paused.

“Nothing can break in on us here,” he went on and, as if there had been an appeal or a provocation in her upward glance, he bent down and took her under the arms, raising her straight out of the chair into a sudden and close embrace. Her alacrity to respond, which made her seem as light as a feather, warmed his heart at that moment more than closer caresses had done before. He had not expected that ready impulse towards himself which had been dormant in her passive attitude. He had just felt the clasp of her arms round his neck, when, with a slight exclamation — “He’s here!” — she disengaged herself and bolted, away into her room.

## CHAPTER SIX

Heyst was astounded. Looking all round, as if to take the whole room to witness of this outrage, he became aware of Wang materialized in the doorway. The intrusion was as surprising as anything could be, in view of the strict regularity with which Wang made himself visible. Heyst was tempted to laugh at first. This practical comment on his affirmation that nothing could break in on them relieved the strain of his feelings. He was a little vexed, too. The Chinaman preserved a profound silence.

“What do you want?” asked Heyst sternly.

“Boat out there,” said the Chinaman.

“Where? What do you mean? Boat adrift in the straits?”

Some subtle change in Wang’s bearing suggested his being out of breath; but he did not pant, and his voice was steady.

“No — row.”

It was Heyst now who was startled and raised his voice.

“Malay man, eh?”

Wang made a slight negative movement with his head.

“Do you hear, Lena?” Heyst called out. “Wang says there is a boat in sight — somewhere near apparently. Where’s that boat Wang?”

“Round the point,” said Wang, leaping into Malay unexpectedly, and in a loud voice. “White men three.”

“So close as that?” exclaimed Heyst, moving out on the veranda followed by Wang. “White men? Impossible!”

Over the clearing the shadows were already lengthening. The sun hung low; a ruddy glare lay on the burnt black patch in front of the bungalow, and slanted on the ground between the straight, tall, mast-like trees soaring a hundred feet or more without a branch. The growth of bushes cut off all view of the jetty from the veranda. Far away to the right Wang’s hut, or rather its dark roof of mats, could be seen above the bamboo fence which insured the privacy of the Alfuro woman. The Chinaman looked that way swiftly. Heyst paused, and then stepped back a pace into the room.

“White men, Lena, apparently. What are you doing?”

“I am just bathing my eyes a little,” the girl’s voice said from the inner room.

“Oh, yes; all right!”

“Do you want me?”

“No. You had better — I am going down to the jetty. Yes, you had better stay in. What an extraordinary thing!”

It was so extraordinary that nobody could possibly appreciate how extraordinary it was but himself. His mind was full of mere exclamations, while his feet were carrying him in the direction of the jetty. He followed the line of the rails, escorted by Wang.

“Where were you when you first saw the boat?” he asked over his shoulder.

Wang explained in Malay that he had gone to the shore end of the wharf, to get a few lumps of coal from the big heap, when, happening to raise his eyes from the ground, he saw the boat — a white man boat, not a canoe. He had good eyes. He had seen the boat, with the men at the oars; and here Wang made a particular gesture over his eyes, as if his vision had received a blow. He had turned at once and run to the house to report.

“No mistake, eh?” said Heyst, moving on. At the very outer edge of the belt he stopped short. Wang halted behind him on the path, till the voice of Number One called him sharply forward into the open. He obeyed.

“Where’s that boat?” asked Heyst forcibly. “I say — where is it?”

Nothing whatever was to be seen between the point and the jetty. The stretch of Diamond Bay was like a piece of purple shadow, lustrous and empty, while beyond the land, the open sea lay blue and opaque under the sun. Heyst’s eyes swept all over the offing till they met, far off, the dark cone of the volcano, with its faint plume of smoke broadening and vanishing everlastingly at the top, without altering its shape in the glowing transparency of the evening.

“The fellow has been dreaming,” he muttered to himself.

He looked hard at the Chinaman. Wang seemed turned into stone. Suddenly, as if he had received a shock, he started, flung his arm out with a pointing forefinger, and made guttural noises to the effect that there, there, there, he had seen a boat.

It was very uncanny. Heyst thought of some strange hallucination. Unlikely enough; but that a boat with three men in it should have sunk between the point and the jetty, suddenly, like a stone, without leaving as much on the surface as a floating oar, was still more unlikely. The theory of a phantom boat would have been more credible than that.

“Confound it!” he muttered to himself.



He was unpleasantly affected by this mystery; but now a simple explanation occurred to him. He stepped hastily out on the wharf. The boat, if it had existed and had retreated, could perhaps be seen from the far end of the long jetty.

Nothing was to be seen. Heyst let his eyes roam idly over the sea. He was so absorbed in his perplexity that a hollow sound, as of somebody tumbling about in a boat, with a clatter of oars and spars, failed to make him move for a moment. When his mind seized its meaning, he had no difficulty in locating the sound. It had come from below — under the jetty!

He ran back for a dozen yards or so, and then looked over. His sight plunged straight into the stern-sheets of a big boat, the greater part of which was hidden from him by the planking of the jetty. His eyes fell on the thin back of a man doubled up over the tiller in a queer, uncomfortable attitude of drooping sorrow. Another man, more directly below Heyst, sprawled on his back from gunwale to gunwale, half off the after thwart, his head lower than his feet. This second man glared wildly upward, and struggled to raise himself, but to all appearance was much too drunk to succeed. The visible part of the boat contained also a flat, leather trunk, on which the first man's long legs were tucked up nervelessly. A large earthenware jug, with its wide mouth uncorked, rolled out on the bottom-boards from under the sprawling man.

Heyst had never been so much astonished in his life. He stared dumbly at the strange boat's crew. From the first he was positive that these men were not sailors. They wore the white drill-suit of tropical civilization; but their apparition in a boat Heyst could not connect with anything plausible. The civilization of the tropics could have had nothing to do with it. It was more like those myths, current in Polynesia, of amazing strangers, who arrive at an island, gods or demons, bringing good or evil to the innocence of the inhabitants — gifts of unknown things, words never heard before.

Heyst noticed a cork helmet floating alongside the boat, evidently fallen from the head of the man doubled over the tiller, who displayed a dark, bony poll. An oar, too, had been knocked overboard, probably by the sprawling man, who was still struggling, between the thwarts. By this time Heyst regarded the visitation no longer with surprise, but with the sustained attention demanded by a difficult problem. With one foot poised on the string-piece, and leaning on his raised knee, he was taking in everything. The sprawling man rolled off the thwart, collapsed, and, most unexpectedly,

got on his feet. He swayed dizzily, spreading his arms out and uttered faintly a hoarse, dreamy “Hallo!” His upturned face was swollen, red, peeling all over the nose and cheeks. His stare was irrational. Heyst perceived stains of dried blood all over the front of his dirty white coat, and also on one sleeve.

“What’s the matter? Are you wounded?”

The other glanced down, reeled — one of his feet was inside a large pith hat — and, recovering himself, let out a dismal, grating sound in the manner of a grim laugh.

“Blood — not mine. Thirst’s the matter. Exhausted’s the matter. Done up. Drink, man! Give us water!”

Thirst was in the very tone of his words, alternating a broken croak and a faint, throaty rustle which just reached Heyst’s ears. The man in the boat raised his hands to be helped up on the jetty, whispering:

“I tried. I am too weak. I tumbled down.”

Wang was coming along the jetty slowly, with intent, straining eyes.

“Run back and bring a crowbar here. There’s one lying by the coal-heap,” Heyst shouted to him.

The man standing in the boat sat down on the thwart behind him. A horrible coughing laugh came through his swollen lips.

“Crowbar? What’s that for?” he mumbled, and his head dropped on his chest mournfully.

Meantime, Heyst, as if he had forgotten the boat, started kicking hard at a large brass tap projecting above the planks. To accommodate ships that came for coal and happened to need water as well, a stream had been tapped in the interior and an iron pipe led along the jetty. It terminated with a curved end almost exactly where the strangers’ boat had been driven between the piles; but the tap was set fast.

“Hurry up!” Heyst yelled to the Chinaman, who was running with the crowbar in his hand.

Heyst snatched it from him and, obtaining a leverage against the string-piece, wrung the stiff tap round with a mighty jerk. “I hope that pipe hasn’t got choked!” he muttered to himself anxiously.

It hadn’t; but it did not yield a strong gush. The sound of a thin stream, partly breaking on the gunwale of the boat and partly splashing alongside, became at once audible. It was greeted by a cry of inarticulate and savage joy. Heyst knelt on the string-piece and peered down. The man who had

spoken was already holding his open mouth under the bright trickle. Water ran over his eyelids and over his nose, gurgled down his throat, flowed over his chin. Then some obstruction in the pipe gave way, and a sudden thick jet broke on his face. In a moment his shoulders were soaked, the front of his coat inundated; he streamed and dripped; water ran into his pockets, down his legs, into his shoes; but he had clutched the end of the pipe, and, hanging on with both hands, swallowed, spluttered, choked, snorted with the noises of a swimmer. Suddenly a curious dull roar reached Heyst's ears. Something hairy and black flew from under the jetty. A dishevelled head, coming on like a cannonball, took the man at the pipe in flank, with enough force to tear his grip loose and fling him headlong into the stern-sheets. He fell upon the folded legs of the man at the tiller, who, roused by the commotion in the boat, was sitting up, silent, rigid, and very much like a corpse. His eyes were but two black patches, and his teeth glistened with a death's head grin between his retracted lips, no thicker than blackish parchment glued over the gums.

From him Heyst's eyes wandered to the creature who had replaced the first man at the end of the water-pipe. Enormous brown paws clutched it savagely; the wild, big head hung back, and in a face covered with a wet mass of hair there gaped crookedly a wide mouth full of fangs. The water filled it, welled up in hoarse coughs, ran down on each side of the jaws and down the hairy throat, soaked the black pelt of the enormous chest, naked under a torn check shirt, heaving convulsively with a play of massive muscles carved in red mahogany.

As soon as the first man had recovered the breath knocked out of him by the irresistible charge, a scream of mad cursing issued from the stern-sheets. With a rigid, angular crooking of the elbow, the man at the tiller put his hand back to his hip.

"Don't shoot him, sir!" yelled the first man. "Wait! Let me have that tiller. I will teach him to shove himself in front of a caballero!"

Martin Ricardo flourished the heavy piece of wood, leaped forward with astonishing vigour, and brought it down on Pedro's head with a crash that resounded all over the quiet sweep of Black Diamond Bay. A crimson patch appeared on the matted hair, red veins appeared in the water flowing all over his face, and it dripped in rosy drops off his head. But the man hung on. Not till a second furious blow descended did the hairy paws let go their grip and the squirming body sink limply. Before it could touch the bottom-

boards, a tremendous kick in the ribs from Ricardo's foot shifted it forward out of sight, whence came the noise of a heavy thud, a clatter of spars, and a pitiful grunt. Ricardo stooped to look under the jetty.

"Aha, dog! This will teach you to keep back where you belong, you murdering brute, you slaughtering savage, you! You infidel, you robber of churches! Next time I will rip you open from neck to heel, you carrion-eater! Esclavo!"

He backed a little and straightened himself up.

"I don't mean it really," he remarked to Heyst, whose steady eyes met his from above. He ran aft briskly.

"Come along, sir. It's your turn. I oughtn't to have drunk first. 'S truth, I forgot myself! A gentleman like you will overlook that, I know." As he made these apologies, Ricardo extended his hand. "Let me steady you, sir."

Slowly Mr. Jones unfolded himself in all his slenderness, rocked, staggered, and caught Ricardo's shoulder. His henchman assisted him to the pipe, which went on gushing a clear stream of water, sparkling exceedingly against the black piles and the gloom under the jetty.

"Catch hold, sir," Ricardo advised solicitously. "All right?"

He stepped back, and, while Mr. Jones revelled in the abundance of water, he addressed himself to Heyst with a sort of justificatory speech, the tone of which, reflecting his feelings, partook of purring and spitting. They had been thirty hours tugging at the oars, he explained, and they had been more than forty hours without water, except that the night before they had licked the dew off the gunwales.

Ricardo did not explain to Heyst how it happened. At that precise moment he had no explanation ready for the man on the wharf, who, he guessed, must be wondering much more at the presence of his visitors than at their plight.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

The explanation lay in the two simple facts that the light winds and strong currents of the Java Sea had drifted the boat about until they partly lost their bearings; and that by some extra-ordinary mistake one of the two jars put into the boat by Schomberg's man contained salt water. Ricardo tried to put some pathos into his tones. Pulling for thirty hours with eighteen-foot oars! And the sun! Ricardo relieved his feelings by cursing the sun. They had felt their hearts and lungs shrivel within them. And then, as if all that hadn't been trouble enough, he complained bitterly, he had had to waste his fainting strength in beating their servant about the head with a stretcher. The fool had wanted to drink sea water, and wouldn't listen to reason. There was no stopping him otherwise. It was better to beat him into insensibility than to have him go crazy in the boat, and to be obliged to shoot him. The preventive, administered with enough force to brain an elephant, boasted Ricardo, had to be applied on two occasions — the second time all but in sight of the jetty.

"You have seen the beauty," Ricardo went on expansively, hiding his lack of some sort of probable story under this loquacity. "I had to hammer him away from the spout. Opened afresh all the old broken spots on his head. You saw how hard I had to hit. He has no restraint, no restraint at all. If it wasn't that he can be made useful in one way or another, I would just as soon have let the governor shoot him."

He smiled up at Heyst in his peculiar lip-retracting manner, and added by way of afterthought:

"That's what will happen to him in the end, if he doesn't learn to restrain himself. But I've taught him to mind his manners for a while, anyhow!"

And again he addressed his quick grin up to the man on the wharf. His round eyes had never left Heyst's face ever since he began to deliver his account of the voyage.

"So that's how he looks!" Ricardo was saying to himself.

He had not expected Heyst to be like this. He had formed for himself a conception containing the helpful suggestion of a vulnerable point. These solitary men were often tipplers. But no! — this was not a drinking man's face; nor could he detect the weakness of alarm, or even the weakness of surprise, on these features, in those steady eyes.

“We were too far gone to climb out,” Ricardo went on. “I heard you walking along though. I thought I shouted; I tried to. You didn’t hear me shout?”

Heyst made an almost imperceptible negative sign, which the greedy eyes of Ricardo — greedy for all signs — did not miss.

“Throat too parched. We didn’t even care to whisper to each other lately. Thirst chokes one. We might have died there under this wharf before you found us.”

“I couldn’t think where you had gone to.” Heyst was heard at last, addressing directly the newcomers from the sea. “You were seen as soon as you cleared that point.”

“We were seen, eh?” grunted Mr. Ricardo. “We pulled like machines — daren’t stop. The governor sat at the tiller, but he couldn’t speak to us. She drove in between the piles till she hit something, and we all tumbled off the thwarts as if we had been drunk. Drunk — ha, ha! Too dry, by George! We fetched in here with the very last of our strength, and no mistake. Another mile would have done for us. When I heard your footsteps, above, I tried to get up, and I fell down.”

“That was the first sound I heard,” said Heyst.

Mr Jones, the front of his soiled white tunic soaked and plastered against his breast-bone, staggered away from the water-pipe. Steadying himself on Ricardo’s shoulder, he drew a long breath, raised his dripping head, and produced a smile of ghastly amiability, which was lost upon the thoughtful Heyst. Behind his back the sun, touching the water, was like a disc of iron cooled to a dull red glow, ready to start rolling round the circular steel plate of the sea, which, under the darkening sky, looked more solid than the high ridge of Samburan; more solid than the point, whose long outlined slope melted into its own unfathomable shadow blurring the dim sheen on the bay. The forceful stream from the pipe broke like shattered glass on the boat’s gunwale. Its loud, fitful, and persistent splashing revealed the depths of the world’s silence.

“Great notion, to lead the water out here,” pronounced Ricardo appreciatively.

Water was life. He felt now as if he could run a mile, scale a ten-foot wall, sing a song. Only a few minutes ago he was next door to a corpse, done up, unable to stand, to lift a hand; unable to groan. A drop of water had done that miracle.

“Didn’t you feel life itself running and soaking into you, sir?” he asked his principal, with deferential but forced vivacity.

Without a word, Mr. Jones stepped off the thwart and sat down in the stern-sheets.

“Isn’t that man of yours bleeding to death in the bows under there?” inquired Heyst.

Ricardo ceased his ecstasies over the life-giving water and answered in a tone of innocence:

“He? You may call him a man, but his hide is a jolly sight tougher than the toughest alligator he ever skinned in the good old days. You don’t know how much he can stand: I do. We have tried him a long time ago. Ola, there! Pedro! Pedro!” he yelled, with a force of lung testifying to the regenerative virtues of water.

A weak “Senor?” came from under the wharf.

“What did I tell you?” said Ricardo triumphantly. “Nothing can hurt him. He’s all right. But, I say, the boat’s getting swamped. Can’t you turn this water off before you sink her under us? She’s half full already.”

At a sign from Heyst, Wang hammered at the brass tap on the wharf, then stood behind Number One, crowbar in hand, motionless as before. Ricardo was perhaps not so certain of Pedro’s toughness as he affirmed; for he stooped, peering under the wharf, then moved forward out of sight. The gush of water ceasing suddenly, made a silence which became complete when the after-trickle stopped. Afar, the sun was reduced to a red spark, glowing very low in the breathless immensity of twilight. Purple gleams lingered on the water all round the boat. The spectral figure in the stern-sheets spoke in a languid tone:

“That — er — companion — er — secretary of mine is a queer chap. I am afraid we aren’t presenting ourselves in a very favourable light.”

Heyst listened. It was the conventional voice of an educated man, only strangely lifeless. But more strange yet was this concern for appearances, expressed, he did not know, whether in jest or in earnest. Earnestness was hardly to be supposed under the circumstances, and no one had ever jested in such dead tones. It was something which could not be answered, and Heyst said nothing. The other went on:

“Travelling as I do, I find a man of his sort extremely useful. He has his little weaknesses, no doubt.”

“Indeed!” Heyst was provoked into speaking. “Weakness of the arm is not one of them; neither is an exaggerated humanity, as far as I can judge.”

“Defects of temper,” explained Mr. Jones from the stern-sheets.

The subject of this dialogue, coming out just then from under the wharf into the visible part of the boat, made himself heard in his own defence, in a voice full of life, and with nothing languid in his manner on the contrary, it was brisk, almost jocose. He begged pardon for contradicting. He was never out of temper with “our Pedro.” The fellow was a Dago of immense strength and of no sense whatever. This combination made him dangerous, and he had to be treated accordingly, in a manner which he could understand. Reasoning was beyond him.

“And so” — Ricardo addressed Heyst with animation — ”you mustn’t be surprised if — ”

“I assure you,” Heyst interrupted, “that my wonder at your arrival in your boat here is so great that it leaves no room for minor astonishments. But hadn’t you better land?”

“That’s the talk, sir!” Ricardo began to bustle about the boat, talking all the time. Finding himself unable to “size up” this man, he was inclined to credit him with extraordinary powers of penetration, which, it seemed to him, would be favoured by silence. Also, he feared some pointblank question. He had no ready-made story to tell. He and his patron had put off considering that rather important detail too long. For the last two days, the horrors of thirst, coming on them unexpectedly, had prevented consultation. They had had to pull for dear life. But the man on the wharf, were he in league with the devil himself, would pay for all their sufferings, thought Ricardo with an unholy joy.

Meantime, splashing in the water which covered the bottom-boards, Ricardo congratulated himself aloud on the luggage being out of the way of the wet. He had piled it up forward. He had roughly tied up Pedro’s head. Pedro had nothing to grumble about. On the contrary, he ought to be mighty thankful to him, Ricardo, for being alive at all.

“Well, now, let me give you a leg up, sir,” he said cheerily to his motionless principal in the stern-sheets. “All our troubles are over — for a time, anyhow. Ain’t it luck to find a white man on this island? I would have just as soon expected to meet an angel from heaven — eh, Mr. Jones? Now then — ready, sir? one, two, three, up you go!”



Helped from below by Ricardo, and from above by the man more unexpected than an angel, Mr. Jones scrambled up and stood on the wharf by the side of Heyst. He swayed like a reed. The night descending on Samburan turned into dense shadow the point of land and the wharf itself, and gave a dark solidity to the unshimmering water extending to the last faint trace of light away to the west. Heyst stared at the guests whom the renounced world had sent him thus at the end of the day. The only other vestige of light left on earth lurked in the hollows of the thin man's eyes. They gleamed, mobile and languidly evasive. The eyelids fluttered.

"You are feeling weak," said Heyst.

"For the moment, a little," confessed the other.

With loud panting, Ricardo scrambled on his hands and knees upon the wharf, energetic and unaided. He rose up at Heyst's elbow and stamped his foot on the planks, with a sharp, provocative, double beat, such as is heard sometimes in fencing-schools before the adversaries engage their foils. Not that the renegade seaman Ricardo knew anything of fencing. What he called "shooting-irons," were his weapons, or the still less aristocratic knife, such as was even then ingeniously strapped to his leg. He thought of it, at that moment. A swift stooping motion, then, on the recovery, a ripping blow, a shove off the wharf, and no noise except a splash in the water that would scarcely disturb the silence. Heyst would have no time for a cry. It would be quick and neat, and immensely in accord with Ricardo's humour. But he repressed this gust of savagery. The job was not such a simple one. This piece had to be played to another tune, and in much slower time. He returned to his note of talkative simplicity.

"Ay; and I too don't feel as strong as I thought I was when the first drink set me up. Great wonder-worker water is! And to get it right here on the spot! It was heaven — hey, sir?"

Mr Jones, being directly addressed, took up his part in the concerted piece:

"Really, when I saw a wharf on what might have been an uninhabited island, I couldn't believe my eyes. I doubted its existence. I thought it was a delusion till the boat actually drove between the piles, as you see her lying now."

While he was speaking faintly, in a voice which did not seem to belong to the earth, his henchman, in extremely loud and terrestrial accents, was fussing about their belongings in the boat, addressing himself to Pedro:

“Come, now — pass up the dunnage there! Move, yourself, hombre, or I’ll have to get down again and give you a tap on those bandages of yours, you growling bear, you!”

“Ah! You didn’t believe in the reality of the wharf?” Heyst was saying to Mr. Jones.

“You ought to kiss my hands!”

Ricardo caught hold of an ancient Gladstone bag and swung it on the wharf with a thump.

“Yes! You ought to burn a candle before me as they do before the saints in your country. No saint has ever done so much for you as I have, you ungrateful vagabond. Now then! Up you get!”

Helped by the talkative Ricardo, Pedro scrambled up on the wharf, where he remained for some time on all fours, swinging to and fro his shaggy head tied up in white rags. Then he got up clumsily, like a bulky animal in the dusk, balancing itself on its hind legs.

Mr Jones began to explain languidly to Heyst that they were in a pretty bad state that morning, when they caught sight of the smoke of the volcano. It nerved them to make an effort for their lives. Soon afterwards they made out the island.

“I had just wits enough left in my baked brain to alter the direction of the boat,” the ghostly voice went on. “As to finding assistance, a wharf, a white man — nobody would have dreamed of it. Simply preposterous!”

“That’s what I thought when my Chinaman came and told me he had seen a boat with white men pulling up,” said Heyst.

“Most extraordinary luck,” interjected Ricardo, standing by anxiously attentive to every word. “Seems a dream,” he added. “A lovely dream!”

A silence fell on that group of three, as if everyone had become afraid to speak, in an obscure sense of an impending crisis. Pedro on one side of them and Wang on the other had the air of watchful spectators. A few stars had come out pursuing the ebbing twilight. A light draught of air tepid enough in the thickening twilight after the scorching day, struck a chill into Mr. Jones in his soaked clothes.

“I may infer, then, that there is a settlement of white people here?” he murmured, shivering visibly.

Heyst roused himself.

“Oh, abandoned, abandoned. I am alone here — practically alone; but several empty houses are still standing. No lack of accommodation. We

may just as well — here, Wang, go back to the shore and run the trolley out here.”

The last words having been spoken in Malay, he explained courteously that he had given directions for the transport of the luggage. Wang had melted into the night — in his soundless manner.

“My word! Rails laid down and all,” exclaimed Ricardo softly, in a tone of admiration. “Well, I never!”

“We were working a coal-mine here,” said the late manager of the Tropical Belt Coal Company. “These are only the ghosts of things that have been.”

Mr Jones’s teeth were suddenly started chattering by another faint puff of wind, a mere sigh from the west, where Venus cast her rays on the dark edge of the horizon, like a bright lamp hung above the grave of the sun.

“We might be moving on,” proposed Heyst. “My Chinaman and that — ah — ungrateful servant of yours, with the broken head, can load the things and come along after us.”

The suggestion was accepted without words. Moving towards the shore, the three men met the trolley, a mere metallic rustle which whisked past them, the shadowy Wang running noiselessly behind. Only the sound of their footsteps accompanied them. It was a long time since so many footsteps had rung together on that jetty. Before they stepped on to the path trodden through the grass, Heyst said:

“I am prevented from offering you a share of my own quarters.” The distant courtliness of this beginning arrested the other two suddenly, as if amazed by some manifest incongruity. “I should regret it more,” he went on, “if I were not in a position to give you the choice of those empty bungalows for a temporary home.”

He turned round and plunged into the narrow track, the two others following in single file.

“Queer start!” Ricardo took the opportunity for whispering, as he fell behind Mr. Jones, who swayed in the gloom, enclosed by the stalks of tropical grass, almost as slender as a stalk of grass himself.

In this order they emerged into the open space kept clear of vegetation by Wang’s judicious system of periodic firing. The shapes of buildings, unlighted, high-roofed, looked mysteriously extensive and featureless against the increasing glitter of the stars. Heyst was pleased at the absence of light in his bungalow. It looked as uninhabited as the others. He

continued to lead the way, inclining to the right. His equable voice was heard:

“This one would be the best. It was our counting-house. There is some furniture in it yet. I am pretty certain that you’ll find a couple of camp bedsteads in one of the rooms.”

The high-pitched roof of the bungalow towered up very close, eclipsing the sky.

“Here we are. Three steps. As you see, there’s a wide veranda. Sorry to keep you waiting for a moment; the door is locked, I think.”

He was heard trying it. Then he leaned against the rail, saying:

“Wang will get the keys.”

The others waited, two vague shapes nearly mingled together in the darkness of the veranda, from which issued a sudden chattering of Mr. Jones’s teeth, directly suppressed, and a slight shuffle of Ricardo’s feet. Their guide and host, his back against the rail, seemed to have forgotten their existence. Suddenly he moved, and murmured:

“Ah, here’s the trolley.”

Then he raised his voice in Malay, and was answered, “Ya tuan,” from an indistinct group that could be made out in the direction of the track.

“I have sent Wang for the key and a light,” he said, in a voice that came out without any particular direction — a peculiarity which disconcerted Ricardo.

Wang did not tarry long on his mission. Very soon from the distant recesses of obscurity appeared the swinging lantern he carried. It cast a fugitive ray on the arrested trolley with the uncouth figure of the wild Pedro drooping over the load; then it moved towards the bungalow and ascended the stairs. After working at the stiff lock, Wang applied his shoulder to the door. It came open with explosive suddenness, as if in a passion at being thus disturbed after two years’ repose. From the dark slope of a tall stand-up writing-desk a forgotten, solitary sheet of paper flew up and settled gracefully on the floor.

Wang and Pedro came and went through the offended door, bringing the things off the trolley, one flitting swiftly in and out, the other staggering heavily. Later, directed by a few quiet words from Number One, Wang made several journeys with the lantern to the store-rooms, bringing in blankets, provisions in tins, coffee, sugar, and a packet of candles. He lighted one, and stuck it on the ledge of the stand-up desk. Meantime Pedro,

being introduced to some kindling-wood and a bundle of dry sticks, had busied himself outside in lighting a fire, on which he placed a ready-filled kettle handed to him by Wang impassively, at arm's length, as if across a chasm. Having received the thanks of his guests, Heyst wished them goodnight and withdrew, leaving them to their repose.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

Heyst walked away slowly. There was still no light in his bungalow, and he thought that perhaps it was just as well. By this time he was much less perturbed. Wang had preceded him with the lantern, as if in a hurry to get away from the two white men and their hairy attendant. The light was not dancing along any more; it was standing perfectly still by the steps of the veranda.

Heyst, glancing back casually, saw behind him still another light — the light of the strangers' open fire. A black, uncouth form, stooping over it monstrously, staggered away into the outlying shadows. The kettle had boiled, probably.

With that weird vision of something questionably human impressed upon his senses, Heyst moved on a pace or two. What could the people be who had such a creature for their familiar attendant? He stopped. The vague apprehension, of a distant future, in which he saw Lena unavoidably separated from him by profound and subtle differences; the sceptical carelessness which had accompanied every one of his attempts at action, like a secret reserve of his soul, fell away from him. He no longer belonged to himself. There was a call far more imperious and august. He came up to the bungalow, and at the very limit of the lantern's light, on the top step, he saw her feet and the bottom part of her dress. The rest of her person was suggested dimly as high as her waist. She sat on a chair, and the gloom of the low eaves descended upon her head and shoulders. She didn't stir.

"You haven't gone to sleep here?" he asked.

"Oh, no! I was waiting for you — in the dark."

Heyst, on the top step, leaned against a wooden pillar, after moving the lantern to one side.

"I have been thinking that it is just as well you had no light. But wasn't it dull for you to sit in the dark?"

"I don't need a light to think of you." Her charming voice gave a value to this banal answer, which had also the merit of truth. Heyst laughed a little, and said that he had had a curious experience. She made no remark. He tried to figure to himself the outlines of her easy pose. A spot of dim light here and there hinted at the unfailing grace of attitude which was one of her natural possessions.

She had thought of him, but not in connection with the strangers. She had admired him from the first; she had been attracted by his warm voice, his gentle eye, but she had felt him too wonderfully difficult to know. He had given to life a savour, a movement, a promise mingled with menaces, which she had not suspected were to be found in it — or, at any rate, not by a girl wedded to misery as she was. She said to herself that she must not be irritated because he seemed too self-contained, and as if shut up in a world of his own. When he took her in his arms, she felt that his embrace had a great and compelling force, that he was moved deeply, and that perhaps he would not get tired of her so very soon. She thought that he had opened to her the feelings of delicate joy, that the very uneasiness he caused her was delicious in its sadness, and that she would try to hold him as long as she could — till her fainting arms, her sinking soul, could cling to him no more.

“Wang’s not here, of course?” Heyst said suddenly. She answered as if in her sleep.

“He put this light down here without stopping, and ran.”

“Ran, did he? H’m! Well, it’s considerably later than his usual time to go home to his Alfuro wife; but to be seen running is a sort of degradation for Wang, who has mastered the art of vanishing. Do you think he was startled out of his perfection by something?”

“Why should he be startled?”

Her voice remained dreamy, a little uncertain.

“I have been startled,” Heyst said.

She was not listening to him. The lantern at their feet threw the shadows of her face upward. Her eyes glistened, as if frightened and attentive, above a lighted chin and a very white throat.

“Upon my word,” mused Heyst, “now that I don’t see them, I can hardly believe that those fellows exist!”

“And what about me?” she asked, so swiftly that he made a movement like somebody pounced upon from an ambush. “When you don’t see me, do you believe that I exist?”

“Exist? Most charmingly! My dear Lena, you don’t know your own advantages. Why, your voice alone would be enough to make you unforgettable!”

“Oh, I didn’t mean forgetting in that way. I dare say if I were to die you would remember me right enough. And what good would that be to anybody? It’s while I am alive that I want — ”

Heyst stood by her chair, a stalwart figure imperfectly lighted. The broad shoulders, the martial face that was like a disguise of his disarmed soul, were lost in the gloom above the plane of light in which his feet were planted. He suffered from a trouble with which she had nothing to do. She had no general conception of the conditions of the existence he had offered to her. Drawn into its peculiar stagnation she remained unrelated to it because of her ignorance.

For instance, she could never perceive the prodigious improbability of the arrival of that boat. She did not seem to be thinking of it. Perhaps she had already forgotten the fact herself. And Heyst resolved suddenly to say nothing more of it. It was not that he shrank from alarming her. Not feeling anything definite himself he could not imagine a precise effect being produced on her by any amount of explanation. There is a quality in events which is apprehended differently by different minds or even by the same mind at different times. Any man living at all consciously knows that embarrassing truth. Heyst was aware that this visit could bode nothing pleasant. In his present soured temper towards all mankind he looked upon it as a visitation of a particularly offensive kind.

He glanced along the veranda in the direction of the other bungalow. The fire of sticks in front of it had gone out. No faint glow of embers, not the slightest thread of light in that direction, hinted at the presence of strangers. The darker shapes in the obscurity, the dead silence, betrayed nothing of that strange intrusion. The peace of Samburan asserted itself as on any other night. Everything was as before, except — Heyst became aware of it suddenly — that for a whole minute, perhaps, with his hand on the back of the girl's chair and within a foot of her person, he had lost the sense of her existence, for the first time since he had brought her over to share this invincible, this undefiled peace. He picked up the lantern, and the act made a silent stir all along the veranda. A spoke of shadow swung swiftly across her face, and the strong light rested on the immobility of her features, as of a woman looking at a vision. Her eyes were still, her lips serious. Her dress, open at the neck, stirred slightly to her even breathing.

"We had better go in, Lena," suggested Heyst, very low, as if breaking a spell cautiously.

She rose without a word. Heyst followed her indoors. As they passed through the living-room, he left the lantern burning on the centre table.



## CHAPTER NINE

That night the girl woke up, for the first time in her new experience, with the sensation of having been abandoned to her own devices. She woke up from a painful dream of separation brought about in a way which she could not understand, and missed the relief of the waking instant. The desolate feeling of being alone persisted. She was really alone. A night-light made it plain enough, in the dim, mysterious manner of a dream; but this was reality. It startled her exceedingly.

In a moment she was at the curtain that hung in the doorway, and raised it with a steady hand. The conditions of their life in Samburan would have made peeping absurd; nor was such a thing in her character. This was not a movement of curiosity, but of downright alarm — the continued distress and fear of the dream. The night could not have been very far advanced. The light of the lantern was burning strongly, striping the floor and walls of the room with thick black bands. She hardly knew whether she expected to see Heyst or not; but she saw him at once, standing by the table in his sleeping-suit, his back to the doorway. She stepped in noiselessly with her bare feet, and let the curtain fall behind her. Something characteristic in Heyst's attitude made her say, almost in a whisper:

"You are looking for something."

He could not have heard her before; but he didn't start at the unexpected whisper. He only pushed the drawer of the table in and, without even looking over his shoulder, asked quietly, accepting her presence as if he had been aware of all her movements:

"I say, are you certain that Wang didn't go through this room this evening?"

"Wang? When?"

"After leaving the lantern, I mean."

"Oh, no. He ran on. I watched him."

"Or before, perhaps — while I was with these boat people? Do you know? Can you tell?"

"I hardly think so. I came out as the sun went down, and sat outside till you came back to me."

"He could have popped in for an instant through the back veranda."

"I heard nothing in here," she said. "What is the matter?"

“Naturally you wouldn’t hear. He can be as quiet as a shadow, when he likes. I believe he could steal the pillows from under our heads. He might have been here ten minutes ago.”

“What woke you up? Was it a noise?”

“Can’t say that. Generally one can’t tell, but is it likely, Lena? You are, I believe, the lighter sleeper of us two. A noise loud enough to wake me up would have awakened you, too. I tried to be as quiet as I could. What roused you?”

“I don’t know — a dream, perhaps. I woke up crying.”

“What was the dream?”

Heyst, with one hand resting on the table, had turned in her direction, his round, uncovered head set on a fighter’s muscular neck. She left his question unanswered, as if she had not heard it.

“What is it you have missed?” she asked in her turn, very grave.

Her dark hair, drawn smoothly back, was done in two thick tresses for the night. Heyst noticed the good form of her brow, the dignity of its width, its unshining whiteness. It was a sculptural forehead. He had a moment of acute appreciation intruding upon another order of thoughts. It was as if there could be no end of his discoveries about that girl, at the most incongruous moments.

She had on nothing but a hand-woven cotton sarong — one of Heyst’s few purchases, years ago, in Celebes, where they are made. He had forgotten all about it till she came, and then had found it at the bottom of an old sandalwood trunk dating back to pre-Morrison days. She had quickly learned to wind it up under her armpits with a safe twist, as Malay village girls do when going down to bathe in a river. Her shoulders and arms were bare; one of her tresses, hanging forward, looked almost black against the white skin. As she was taller than the average Malay woman, the sarong ended a good way above her ankles. She stood poised firmly, half-way between the table and the curtained doorway, the insteps of her bare feet gleaming like marble on the overshadowed matting of the floor. The fall of her lighted shoulders, the strong and fine modelling of her arms hanging down her sides, her immobility, too, had something statuesque, the charm of art tense with life. She was not very big — Heyst used to think of her, at first, as “that poor little girl,” — but revealed free from the shabby banality of a white platform dress, in the simple drapery of the sarong, there was that

in her form and in the proportions of her body which suggested a reduction from a heroic size.

She moved forward a step.

“What is it you have missed?” she asked again.

Heyst turned his back altogether on the table. The black spokes of darkness over the floor and the walls, joining up on the ceiling in a path of shadow, were like the bars of a cage about them. It was his turn to ignore a question.

“You woke up in a fright, you say?” he said.

She walked up to him, exotic yet familiar, with her white woman’s face and shoulders above the Malay sarong, as if it were an airy disguise, but her expression was serious.

“No,” she replied. “It was distress, rather. You see, you weren’t there, and I couldn’t tell why you had gone away from me. A nasty dream — the first I’ve had, too, since — ”

“You don’t believe in dreams, do you?” asked Heyst.

“I once knew a woman who did. Leastwise, she used to tell people what dreams mean, for a shilling.”

“Would you go now and ask her what this dream means?” inquired Heyst jocularly.

“She lived in Camberwell. She was a nasty old thing!”

Heyst laughed a little uneasily.

“Dreams are madness, my dear. It’s things that happen in the waking world, while one is asleep, that one would be glad to know the meaning of.”

“You have missed something out of this drawer,” she said positively.

“This or some other. I have looked into every single one of them and come back to this again, as people do. It’s difficult to believe the evidence of my own senses; but it isn’t there. Now, Lena, are you sure that you didn’t — ”

“I have touched nothing in the house but what you have given me.”

“Lena!” he cried.

He was painfully affected by this disclaimer of a charge which he had not made. It was what a servant might have said — an inferior open to suspicion — or, at any rate, a stranger. He was angry at being so wretchedly misunderstood; disenchanted at her not being instinctively aware of the place he had secretly given her in his thoughts.

“After all,” he said to himself, “we are strangers to each other.”

And then he felt sorry for her. He spoke calmly:

"I was about to say, are you sure you have no reason to think that the Chinaman has been in this room tonight?"

"You suspect him?" she asked, knitting her eyebrows.

"There is no one else to suspect. You may call it a certitude."

"You don't want to tell me what it is?" she inquired, in the equable tone in which one takes a fact into account.

Heyst only smiled faintly.

"Nothing very precious, as far as value goes," he replied.

"I thought it might have been money," she said.

"Money!" exclaimed Heyst, as if the suggestion had been altogether preposterous. She was so visibly surprised that he hastened to add: "Of course, there is some money in the house — there, in that writing-desk, the drawer on the left. It's not locked. You can pull it right out. There is a recess, and the board at the back pivots: a very simple hiding-place, when you know the way to it. I discovered it by accident, and I keep our store of sovereigns in there. The treasure, my dear, is not big enough to require a cavern."

He paused, laughed very low, and returned her steady stare.

"The loose silver, some guilders and dollars, I have always kept in that unlocked left drawer. I have no doubt Wang knows what there is in it, but he isn't a thief, and that's why I — no, Lena, what I've missed is not gold or jewels; and that's what makes the fact interesting — which the theft of money cannot be."

She took a long breath, relieved to hear that it was not money. A great curiosity was depicted on her face, but she refrained from pressing him with questions. She only gave him one of her deep-gleaming smiles.

"It isn't me so it must be Wang. You ought to make him give it back to you."

Heyst said nothing to that naive and practical suggestion, for the object that he missed from the drawer was his revolver.

It was a heavy weapon which he had owned for many years and had never used in his life. Ever since the London furniture had arrived in Samburan, it had been reposing in the drawer of the table. The real dangers of life, for him, were not those which could be repelled by swords or bullets. On the other hand neither his manner nor his appearance looked sufficiently inoffensive to expose him to light-minded aggression.

He could not have explained what had induced him to go to the drawer in the middle of the night. He had started up suddenly — which was very unusual with him. He had found himself sitting up and extremely wide awake all at once, with the girl reposing by his side, lying with her face away from him, a vague, characteristically feminine form in the dim light. She was perfectly still.

At that season of the year there were no mosquitoes in Samburan, and the sides of the mosquito net were looped up. Heyst swung his feet to the floor, and found himself standing there, almost before he had become aware of his intention to get up.

Why he did this he did not know. He didn't wish to wake her up, and the slight creak of the broad bedstead had sounded very loud to him. He turned round apprehensively and waited for her to move, but she did not stir. While he looked at her, he had a vision of himself lying there too, also fast asleep, and — it occurred to him for the first time in his life — very defenceless. This quite novel impression of the dangers of slumber made him think suddenly of his revolver. He left the bedroom with noiseless footsteps. The lightness of the curtain he had to lift as he passed out, and the outer door, wide open on the blackness of the veranda — for the roof eaves came down low, shutting out the starlight — gave him a sense of having been dangerously exposed, he could not have said to what. He pulled the drawer open. Its emptiness cut his train of self-communion short. He murmured to the assertive fact:

“Impossible! Somewhere else!”

He tried to remember where he had put the thing; but those provoked whispers of memory were not encouraging. Foraging in every receptacle and nook big enough to contain a revolver, he came slowly to the conclusion that it was not in that room. Neither was it in the other. The whole bungalow consisted of the two rooms and a profuse allowance of veranda all round. Heyst stepped out on the veranda.

“It's Wang, beyond a doubt,” he thought, staring into the night. “He has got hold of it for some reason.”

There was nothing to prevent that ghostly Chinaman from materializing suddenly at the foot of the stairs, or anywhere, at any moment, and toppling him over with a dead sure shot. The danger was so irremediable that it was not worth worrying about, any more than the general precariousness of human life. Heyst speculated on this added risk. How long had he been at

the mercy of a slender yellow finger on the trigger? That is, if that was the fellow's reason for purloining the revolver.

"Shoot and inherit," thought Heyst. "Very simple." Yet there was in his mind a marked reluctance to regard the domesticated grower of vegetables in the light of a murderer.

"No, it wasn't that. For Wang could have done it any time this last twelve months or more — "

Heyst's mind had worked on the assumption that Wang had possessed himself of the revolver during his own absence from Samburan; but at that period of his speculation his point of view changed. It struck him with the force of manifest certitude that the revolver had been taken only late in the day, or on that very night. Wang, of course. But why? So there had been no danger in the past. It was all ahead.

"He has me at his mercy now," thought Heyst, without particular excitement.

The sentiment he experienced was curiosity. He forgot himself in it: it was as if he were considering somebody else's strange predicament. But even that sort of interest was dying out when, looking to his left, he saw the accustomed shapes of the other bungalows looming in the night, and remembered the arrival of the thirsty company in the boat. Wang would hardly risk such a crime in the presence of other white men. It was a peculiar instance of the "safety in numbers," principle, which somehow was not much to Heyst's taste.

He went in gloomily, and stood over the empty drawer in deep and unsatisfactory thought. He had just made up his mind that he must breathe nothing of this to the girl, when he heard her voice behind him. She had taken him by surprise, but he resisted the impulse to turn round at once under the impression that she might read his trouble in his face. Yes, she had taken him by surprise, and for that reason the conversation which began was not exactly as he would have conducted it if he had been prepared for her pointblank question. He ought to have said at once: "I've missed nothing." It was a deplorable thing that he should have let it come so far as to have her ask what it was he missed. He closed the conversation by saying lightly:

"It's an object of very small value. Don't worry about it — it isn't worth while. The best you can do is to go and lie down again, Lena."

Reluctant she turned away, and only in the doorway asked: "And you?"

“I think I shall smoke a cheroot on the veranda. I don’t feel sleepy for the moment.”

“Well, don’t be long.”

He made no answer. She saw him standing there, very still, with a frown on his brow, and slowly dropped the curtain.

Heyst did really light a cheroot before going out again on the veranda. He glanced up from under the low eaves, to see by the stars how the night went on. It was going very slowly. Why it should have irked him he did not know, for he had nothing to expect from the dawn; but everything round him had become unreasonable, unsettled, and vaguely urgent, laying him under an obligation, but giving him no line of action. He felt contemptuously irritated with the situation. The outer world had broken upon him; and he did not know what wrong he had done to bring this on himself, any more than he knew what he had done to provoke the horrible calumny about his treatment of poor Morrison. For he could not forget this. It had reached the ears of one who needed to have the most perfect confidence in the rectitude of his conduct.

“And she only half disbelieves it,” he thought, with hopeless humiliation.

This moral stab in the back seemed to have taken some of his strength from him, as a physical wound would have done. He had no desire to do anything — neither to bring Wang to terms in the matter of the revolver nor to find out from the strangers who they were, and how their predicament had come about. He flung his glowing cigar away into the night. But Samburan was no longer a solitude wherein he could indulge in all his moods. The fiery parabolic path the cast-out stump traced in the air was seen from another veranda at a distance of some twenty yards. It was noted as a symptom of importance by an observer with his faculties greedy for signs, and in a state of alertness tense enough almost to hear the grass grow.

## CHAPTER TEN

The observer was Martin Ricardo. To him life was not a matter of passive renunciation, but of a particularly active warfare. He was not mistrustful of it, he was not disgusted with it, still less was he inclined to be suspicious of its disenchantments; but he was vividly aware that it held many possibilities of failure. Though very far from being a pessimist, he was not a man of foolish illusions. He did not like failure, not only because of its unpleasant and dangerous consequences, but also because of its damaging effect upon his own appreciation of Martin Ricardo. And this was a special job, of his own contriving, and of considerable novelty. It was not, so to speak, in his usual line of business — except, perhaps, from a moral standpoint, about which he was not likely to trouble his head. For these reasons Martin Ricardo was unable to sleep.

Mr Jones, after repeated shivering fits, and after drinking much hot tea, had apparently fallen into deep slumber. He had very peremptorily discouraged attempts at conversation on the part of his faithful follower. Ricardo listened to his regular breathing. It was all very well for the governor. He looked upon it as a sort of sport. A gentleman naturally would. But this ticklish and important job had to be pulled off at all costs, both for honour and for safety. Ricardo rose quietly, and made his way on the veranda. He could not lie still. He wanted to go out for air, and he had a feeling that by the force of his eagerness even the darkness and the silence could be made to yield something to his eyes and ears.

He noted the stars, and stepped back again into the dense darkness. He resisted the growing impulse to go out and steal towards the other bungalow. It would have been madness to start prowling in the dark on unknown ground. And for what end? Unless to relieve the oppression. Immobility lay on his limbs like a leaden garment. And yet he was unwilling to give up. He persisted in his objectless vigil. The man of the island was keeping quiet.

It was at that moment that Ricardo's eyes caught the vanishing red trail of light made by the cigar — a startling revelation of the man's wakefulness. He could not suppress a low "Hallo!" and began to sidle along towards the door, with his shoulders rubbing the wall. For all he knew, the man might have been out in front by this time, observing the veranda. As a matter of fact, after flinging away the cheroot, Heyst had gone indoors with the



feeling of a man who gives up an unprofitable occupation. But Ricardo fancied he could hear faint footfalls on the open ground, and dodged quickly into the room. There he drew breath, and meditated for a while. His next step was to feel for the matches on the tall desk, and to light the candle. He had to communicate to his governor views and reflections of such importance that it was absolutely necessary for him to watch their effect on the very countenance of the hearer. At first he had thought that these matters could have waited till daylight; but Heyst's wakefulness, disclosed in that startling way, made him feel suddenly certain that there could be no sleep for him that night.

He said as much to his governor. When the little dagger-like flame had done its best to dispel the darkness, Mr. Jones was to be seen reposing on a camp bedstead, in a distant part of the room. A railway rug concealed his spare form up to his very head, which rested on the other railway rug rolled up for a pillow. Ricardo plumped himself down cross-legged on the floor, very close to the low bedstead; so that Mr. Jones — who perhaps had not been so very profoundly asleep — on opening his eyes found them conveniently levelled at the face of his secretary.

"Eh? What is it you say? No sleep for you tonight? But why can't you let me sleep? Confound your fussiness!"

"Because that there fellow can't sleep — that's why. Dash me if he hasn't been doing a think just now! What business has he to think in the middle of the night?"

"How do you know?"

"He was out, sir — up in the middle of the night. My own eyes saw it."

"But how do you know that he was up to think?" inquired Mr. Jones. "It might have been anything — toothache, for instance. And you may have dreamed it for all I know. Didn't you try to sleep?"

"No, sir. I didn't even try to go to sleep."

Ricardo informed his patron of his vigil on the veranda, and of the revelation which put an end to it. He concluded that a man up with a cigar in the middle of the night must be doing a think.

Mr Jones raised himself on his elbow. This sign of interest comforted his faithful henchman.

"Seems to me it's time we did a little think ourselves," added Ricardo, with more assurance. Long as they had been together the moods of his governor were still a source of anxiety to his simple soul.

“You are always making a fuss,” remarked Mr. Jones, in a tolerant tone.

“Ay, but not for nothing, am I? You can’t say that, sir. Mine may not be a gentleman’s way of looking round a thing, but it isn’t a fool’s way, either. You’ve admitted that much yourself at odd times.”

Ricardo was growing warmly argumentative. Mr. Jones interrupted him without heat.

“You haven’t roused me to talk about yourself, I presume?”

“No, sir.” Ricardo remained silent for a minute, with the tip of his tongue caught between his teeth. “I don’t think I could tell you anything about myself that you don’t know,” he continued. There was a sort of amused satisfaction in his tone which changed completely as he went on. “It’s that man, over there, that’s got to be talked over. I don’t like him.”

He, failed to observe the flicker of a ghastly smile on his governor’s lips.

“Don’t you?” murmured Mr. Jones, whose face, as he reclined on his elbow, was on a level with the top of his follower’s head.

“No, sir,” said Ricardo emphatically. The candle from the other side of the room threw his monstrous black shadow on the wall. “He — I don’t know how to say it — he isn’t hearty-like.”

Mr Jones agreed languidly in his own manner:

“He seems to be a very self-possessed man.”

“Ay, that’s it. Self — ” Ricardo choked with indignation. “I would soon let out some of his self-possession through a hole between his ribs, if this weren’t a special job!”

Mr Jones had been making his own reflections, for he asked:

“Do you think he is suspicious?”

“I don’t see very well what he can be suspicious of,” pondered Ricardo. “Yet there he was doing a think. And what could be the object of it? What made him get out of his bed in the middle of the night. ‘Tain’t fleas, surely.”

“Bad conscience, perhaps,” suggested Mr. Jones jocularly.

His faithful secretary suffered from irritation, and did not see the joke. In a fretful tone he declared that there was no such thing as conscience. There was such a thing as funk; but there was nothing to make that fellow funky in any special way. He admitted, however, that the man might have been uneasy at the arrival of strangers, because of all that plunder of his put away somewhere.

Ricardo glanced here and there, as if he were afraid of being overheard by the heavy shadows cast by the dim light all over the room. His patron,

very quiet, spoke in a calm whisper:

“And perhaps that hotel-keeper has been lying to you about him. He may be a very poor devil indeed.”

Ricardo shook his head slightly. The Schombergian theory of Heyst had become in him a profound conviction, which he had absorbed as naturally as a sponge takes up water. His patron’s doubts were a wanton denying of what was self-evident; but Ricardo’s voice remained as before, a soft purring with a snarling undertone.

“I am sup-prised at you, sir! It’s the very way them tame ones — the common ‘yporcrits of the world — get on. When it comes to plunder drifting under one’s very nose, there’s not one of them that would keep his hands off. And I don’t blame them. It’s the way they do it that sets my back up. Just look at the story of how he got rid of that pal of his! Send a man home to croak of a cold on the chest — that’s one of your tame tricks. And d’you mean to say, sir, that a man that’s up to it wouldn’t bag whatever he could lay his hands in his ‘yporcritical way? What was all that coal business? Tame citizen dodge; ‘yporcrisy — nothing else. No, no, sir! The thing is to extract it from him as neatly as possible. That’s the job; and it isn’t so simple as it looks. I reckon you have looked at it all round, sir, before you took up the notion of this trip.”

“No.” Mr. Jones was hardly audible, staring far away from his couch. “I didn’t think about it much. I was bored.”

“Ay, that you were — bad. I was feeling pretty desperate that afternoon, when that bearded softy of a landlord got talking to me about this fellow here. Quite accidentally, it was. Well, sir, here we are after a mighty narrow squeak. I feel all limp yet; but never mind — his swag will pay for the lot!”

“He’s all alone here,” remarked Mr. Jones in a hollow murmur.

“Ye-es, in a way. Yes, alone enough. Yes, you may say he is.”

“There’s that Chinaman, though.”

“Ay, there’s the Chink,” assented Ricardo rather absentmindedly.

He was debating in his mind the advisability of making a clean breast of his knowledge of the girl’s existence. Finally he concluded he wouldn’t. The enterprise was difficult enough without complicating it with an upset to the sensibilities of the gentleman with whom he had the honour of being associated. Let the discovery come of itself, he thought, and then he could swear that he had known nothing of that offensive presence.

He did not need to lie. He had only to hold his tongue.

“Yes,” he muttered reflectively, “there’s that Chink, certainly.”

At bottom, he felt a certain ambiguous respect for his governor’s exaggerated dislike of women, as if that horror of feminine presence were a sort of depraved morality; but still morality, since he counted it as an advantage. It prevented many undesirable complications. He did not pretend to understand it. He did not even try to investigate this idiosyncrasy of his chief. All he knew was that he himself was differently inclined, and that it did not make him any happier or safer. He did not know how he would have acted if he had been knocking about the world on his own. Luckily he was a subordinate, not a wage-slave but a follower — which was a restraint. Yes! The other sort of disposition simplified matters in general; it wasn’t to be gainsaid. But it was clear that it could also complicate them — as in this most important and, in Ricardo’s view, already sufficiently delicate case. And the worst of it was that one could not tell exactly in what precise manner it would act.

It was unnatural, he thought somewhat peevishly. How was one to reckon up the unnatural? There were no rules for that. The faithful henchman of plain Mr. Jones, foreseeing many difficulties of a material order, decided to keep the girl out of the governor’s knowledge, out of his sight, too, for as long a time as it could be managed. That, alas, seemed to be at most a matter of a few hours; whereas Ricardo feared that to get the affair properly going would take some days. Once well started, he was not afraid of his gentleman failing him. As is often the case with lawless natures, Ricardo’s faith in any given individual was of a simple, unquestioning character. For man must have some support in life.

Cross-legged, his head drooping a little and perfectly still, he might have been meditating in a bonze-like attitude upon the sacred syllable “Om.” It was a striking illustration of the untruth of appearances, for his contempt for the world was of a severely practical kind. There was nothing oriental about Ricardo but the amazing quietness of his pose. Mr. Jones was also very quiet. He had let his head sink on the rolled-up rug, and lay stretched out on his side with his back to the light. In that position the shadows gathered in the cavities of his eyes made them look perfectly empty. When he spoke, his ghostly voice had only to travel a few inches straight into Ricardo’s left ear.

“Why don’t you say something, now that you’ve got me awake?”

"I wonder if you were sleeping as sound as you are trying to make out, sir," said the unmoved Ricardo.

"I wonder," repeated Mr. Jones. "At any rate, I was resting quietly!"

"Come, sir!" Ricardo's whisper was alarmed. "You don't mean to say you're going to be bored?"

"No."

"Quite right!" The secretary was very much relieved. "There's no occasion to be, I can tell you, sir," he whispered earnestly. "Anything but that! If I didn't say anything for a bit, it ain't because there isn't plenty to talk about. Ay, more than enough."

"What's the matter with you?" breathed out his patron. "Are you going to turn pessimist?"

"Me turn? No, sir! I ain't of those that turn. You may call me hard names, if you like, but you know very well that I ain't a croaker." Ricardo changed his tone. "If I said nothing for a while, it was because I was meditating over the Chink, sir."

"You were? Waste of time, my Martin. A Chinaman is unfathomable."

Ricardo admitted that this might be so. Anyhow, a Chink was neither here nor there, as a general thing, unfathomable as he might be; but a Swedish baron wasn't — couldn't be! The woods were full of such barons.

"I don't know that he is so tame," was Mr. Jones's remark, in a sepulchral undertone.

"How do you mean, sir? He ain't a rabbit, of course. You couldn't hypnotize him, as I saw you do to more than one Dago, and other kinds of tame citizens, when it came to the point of holding them down to a game."

"Don't you reckon on that," murmured plain Mr. Jones seriously.

"No, sir, I don't, though you have a wonderful power of the eye. It's a fact."

"I have a wonderful patience," remarked Mr. Jones dryly.

A dim smile flitted over the lips of the faithful Ricardo who never raised his head.

"I don't want to try you too much, sir, but this is like no other job we ever turned our minds to."

"Perhaps not. At any rate let us think so."

A weariness with the monotony of life was reflected in the tone of this qualified assent. It jarred on the nerves of the sanguine Ricardo.

“Let us think of the way to go to work,” he retorted a little impatiently. “He’s a deep one. Just look at the way he treated that chum of his. Did you ever hear of anything so low? And the artfulness of the beast — the dirty, tame artfulness!”

“Don’t you start moralizing, Martin,” said Mr. Jones warningly. “As far as I can make out the story that German hotel-keeper told you, it seems to show a certain amount of character; — and independence from common feelings which is not usual. It’s very remarkable, if true.”

“Ay, ay! Very remarkable. It’s mighty low down, all the same,” muttered, Ricardo obstinately. “I must say I am glad to think he will be paid off for it in a way that’ll surprise him!”

The tip of his tongue appeared lively for an instant, as if trying for the taste of that ferocious retribution on his compressed lips. For Ricardo was sincere in his indignation before the elementary principle of loyalty to a chum violated in cold blood, slowly, in a patient duplicity of years. There are standards in villainy as in virtue, and the act as he pictured it to himself acquired an additional horror from the slow pace of that treachery so atrocious and so tame. But he understood too the educated judgement of his governor, a gentleman looking on all this with the privileged detachment of a cultivated mind, of an elevated personality.

“Ay, he’s deep — he’s artful,” he mumbled between his sharp teeth.

“Confound you!” Mr. Jones’s calm whisper crept into his ear. “Come to the point.”

Obedient, the secretary shook off his thoughtfulness. There was a similarity of mind between these two — one the outcast of his vices, the other inspired by a spirit of scornful defiance, the aggressiveness of a beast of prey looking upon all the tame creatures of the earth as its natural victim. Both were astute enough, however, and both were aware that they had plunged into this adventure without a sufficient scrutiny of detail. The figure of a lonely man far from all assistance had loomed up largely, fascinating and defenceless in the middle of the sea, filling the whole field of their vision. There had not seemed to be any need for thinking. As Schomberg had been saying: “Three to one.”

But it did not look so simple now in the face of that solitude which was like an armour for this man. The feeling voiced by the henchman in his own way — “We don’t seem much forwarder now we are here” was acknowledged by the silence of the patron. It was easy enough to rip a

fellow up or drill a hole in him, whether he was alone or not, Ricardo reflected in low, confidential tones, but —

“He isn’t alone,” Mr. Jones said faintly, in his attitude of a man composed for sleep. “Don’t forget that Chinaman.” Ricardo started slightly.

“Oh, ay — the Chink!”

Ricardo had been on the point of confessing about the girl; but no! He wanted his governor to be unperturbed and steady. Vague thoughts, which he hardly dared to look in the face, were stirring his brain in connection with that girl. She couldn’t be much account, he thought. She could be frightened. And there were also other possibilities. The Chink, however, could be considered openly.

“What I was thinking about it, sir,” he went on earnestly, “is this — here we’ve got a man. He’s nothing. If he won’t be good, he can be made quiet. That’s easy. But then there’s his plunder. He doesn’t carry it in his pocket.”

“I hope not,” breathed Mr. Jones.

“Same here. It’s too big, we know, but if he were alone, he would not feel worried about it overmuch — I mean the safety of the pieces. He would just put the lot into any box or drawer that was handy.”

“Would he?”

“Yes, sir. He would keep it under his eye, as it were. Why not? It is natural. A fellow doesn’t put his swag underground, unless there’s a very good reason for it.”

“A very good reason, eh?”

“Yes, sir. What do you think a fellow is — a mole?”

From his experience, Ricardo declared that man was not a burrowing beast. Even the misers very seldom buried their hoard, unless for exceptional reasons. In the given situation of a man alone on an island, the company of a Chink was a very good reason. Drawers would not be safe, nor boxes, either, from a prying, slant-eyed Chink. No, sir, unless a safe — a proper office safe. But the safe was there in the room.

“Is there a safe in this room? I didn’t notice it,” whispered Mr. Jones.

That was because the thing was painted white, like the walls of the room; and besides, it was tucked away in the shadows of a corner. Mr. Jones had been too tired to observe anything on his first coming ashore; but Ricardo had very soon spotted the characteristic form. He only wished he could believe that the plunder of treachery, duplicity, and all the moral abominations of Heyst had been there. But no; the blamed thing was open.

“It might have been there at one time or another,” he commented gloomily, “but it isn’t there now.”

“The man did not elect to live in this house,” remarked Mr. Jones. “And by the by, what could he have meant by speaking of circumstances which prevented him lodging us in the other bungalow? You remember what he said, Martin? Sounded cryptic.”

Martin, who remembered and understood the phrase as directly motivated by the existence of the girl, waited a little before saying:

“Some of his artfulness, sir; and not the worst of it either. That manner of his to us, this asking no questions, is some more of his artfulness. A man’s bound to be curious, and he is; yet he goes on as if he didn’t care. He does care — or else what was he doing up with a cigar in the middle of the night, doing a think? I don’t like it.”

“He may be outside, observing the light here, and saying the very same thing to himself of our own wakefulness,” gravely suggested Ricardo’s governor.

“He may be, sir; but this is too important to be talked over in the dark. And the light is all right, it can be accounted for. There’s a light in this bungalow in the middle of the night because — why, because you are not well. Not well, sir — that’s what’s the matter, and you will have to act up to it.”

The consideration had suddenly occurred to the faithful henchman, in the light of a felicitous expedient to keep his governor and the girl apart as long as possible. Mr. Jones received the suggestion without the slightest stir, even in the deep sockets of his eyes, where a steady, faint gleam was the only thing telling of life and attention in his attenuated body. But Ricardo, as soon as he had enunciated his happy thought, perceived in it other possibilities more to the point and of greater practical advantage.

“With your looks, sir, it will be easy enough,” he went on evenly, as if no silence had intervened, always respectful, but frank, with perfect simplicity of purpose. “All you’ve got to do is just to lie down quietly. I noticed him looking sort of surprised at you on the wharf, sir.”

At these words, a naive tribute to the aspect of his physique, even more suggestive of the grave than of the sick-bed, a fold appeared on that side of the governor’s face which was exposed to the dim light — a deep, shadowy, semicircular fold from the side of the nose to bottom of the chin — a silent



smile. By a side-glance Ricardo had noted this play of features. He smiled, too, appreciative, encouraged.

“And you as hard as nails all the time,” he went on. “Hang me if anybody would believe you aren’t sick, if I were to swear myself black in the face! Give us a day or two to look into matters and size up that ‘yporcrit.’”

Ricardo’s eyes remained fixed on his crossed shins. The chief, in his lifeless accents, approved.

“Perhaps it would be a good idea.”

“The Chink, he’s nothing. He can be made quiet any time.”

One of Ricardo’s hands, reposing palm upwards on his folded legs, made a swift thrusting gesture, repeated by the enormous darting shadow of an arm very low on the wall. It broke the spell of perfect stillness in the room. The secretary eyed moodily the wall from which the shadow had gone. Anybody could be made quiet, he pointed out. It was not anything that the Chink could do; no, it was the effect that his company must have produced on the conduct of the doomed man. A man! What was a man? A Swedish baron could be ripped up, or else holed by a shot, as easily as any other creature; but that was exactly what was to be avoided, till one knew where he had hidden his plunder.

“I shouldn’t think it would be some sort of hole in his bungalow,” argued Ricardo with real anxiety.

No. A house can be burnt — set on fire accidentally, or on purpose, while a man’s asleep. Under the house — or in some crack, cranny, or crevice? Something told him it wasn’t that. The anguish of mental effort contracted Ricardo’s brow. The skin of his head seemed to move in this travail of vain and tormenting suppositions.

“What did you think a fellow is, sir — a baby?” he said, in answer to Mr. Jones’s objections. “I am trying to find out what I would do myself. He wouldn’t be likely to be cleverer than I am.”

“And what do you know about yourself?”

Mr Jones seemed to watch his follower’s perplexities with amusement concealed in a death-like composure.

Ricardo disregarded the question. The material vision of the spoil absorbed all his faculties. A great vision! He seemed to see it. A few small canvas bags tied up with thin cord, their distended rotundity showing the inside pressure of the disk-like forms of coins — gold, solid, heavy, eminently portable. Perhaps steel cash-boxes with a chased design, on the

covers; or perhaps a black and brass box with a handle on the top, and full of goodness knows what. Bank notes? Why not? The fellow had been going home; so it was surely something worth going home with.

“And he may have put it anywhere outside — anywhere!” cried Ricardo in a deadened voice, “in the forest — ”

That was it! A temporary darkness replaced the dim light of the room. The darkness of the forest at night and in it the gleam of a lantern, by which a figure is digging at the foot of a tree-trunk. As likely as not, another figure holding that lantern — ha, feminine! The girl!

The prudent Ricardo stifled a picturesque and profane exclamation, partly joy, partly dismay. Had the girl been trusted or mistrusted by that man? Whatever it was, it was bound to be wholly! With women there could be no half-measures. He could not imagine a fellow half-trusting a woman in that intimate relation to himself, and in those particular circumstances of conquest and loneliness where no confidences could appear dangerous since, apparently, there could be no one she could give him away to. Moreover, in nine cases out of ten the woman would be trusted. But, trusted or mistrusted, was her presence a favourable or unfavourable condition of the problem? That was the question!

The temptation to consult his chief, to talk over the weighty fact, and get his opinion on it, was great indeed. Ricardo resisted it; but the agony of his solitary mental conflict was extremely sharp. A woman in a problem is an incalculable quantity, even if you have something to go upon in forming your guess. How much more so when you haven't even once caught sight of her.

Swift as were his mental processes, he felt that a longer silence was inadvisable. He hastened to speak:

“And do you see us, sir, you and I, with a couple of spades having to tackle this whole confounded island?”

He allowed himself a slight movement of the arm. The shadow enlarged it into a sweeping gesture.

“This seems rather discouraging, Martin,” murmured the unmoved governor.

“We mustn't be discouraged — that's all!” retorted his henchman. “And after what we had to go through in that boat too! Why it would be — ”

He couldn't find the qualifying words. Very calm, faithful, and yet astute, he expressed his new-born hopes darkly.

“Something’s sure to turn up to give us a hint; only this job can’t be rushed. You may depend on me to pick up the least little bit of a hint; but you, sir — you’ve got to play him very gently. For the rest you can trust me.”

“Yes; but I ask myself what YOU are trusting to.”

“Our luck,” said the faithful Ricardo. “Don’t say a word against that. It might spoil the run of it.”

“You are a superstitious beggar. No, I won’t say anything against it.”

“That’s right, sir. Don’t you even think lightly of it. Luck’s not to be played with.”

“Yes, luck’s a delicate thing,” assented Mr. Jones in a dreamy whisper.

A short silence ensued, which Ricardo ended in a discreet and tentative voice.

“Talking of luck, I suppose he could be made to take a hand with you, sir — two-handed picket or ekkarty, you being seedy and keeping indoors — just to pass the time. For all we know, he may be one of them hot ones once they start — ”

“Is it likely?” came coldly from the principal. “Considering what we know of his history — say with his partner.”

“True, sir. He’s a cold-blooded beast; a cold-blooded, inhuman — ”

“And I’ll tell you another thing that isn’t likely. He would not be likely to let himself be stripped bare. We haven’t to do with a young fool that can be led on by chaff or flattery, and in the end simply overawed. This is a calculating man.”

Ricardo recognized that clearly. What he had in his mind was something on a small scale, just to keep the enemy busy while he, Ricardo, had time to nose around a bit.

“You could even lose a little money to him, sir,” he suggested.

“I could.”

Ricardo was thoughtful for a moment.

“He strikes me, too, as the sort of man to start prancing when one didn’t expect it. What do you think, sir? Is he a man that would prance? That is, if something startled him. More likely to prance than to run — what?”

The answer came at once, because Mr. Jones understood the peculiar idiom of his faithful follower.

“Oh, without doubt! Without doubt!”

“It does me good to hear that you think so. He’s a prancing beast, and so we mustn’t startle him — not till I have located the stuff. Afterwards — ”

Ricardo paused, sinister in the stillness of his pose. Suddenly he got up with a swift movement and gazed down at his chief in moody abstraction. Mr. Jones did not stir.

“There’s one thing that’s worrying me,” began Ricardo in a subdued voice.

“Only one?” was the faint comment from the motionless body on the bedstead.

“I mean more than all the others put together.”

“That’s grave news.”

“Ay, grave enough. It’s this — how do you feel in yourself, sir? Are you likely to get bored? I know them fits come on you suddenly; but surely you can tell — ”

“Martin, you are an ass.”

The moody face of the secretary brightened up.

“Really, sir? Well, I am quite content to be on these terms — I mean as long as you don’t get bored. It wouldn’t do, sir.”

For coolness, Ricardo had thrown open his shirt and rolled up his sleeves. He moved stealthily across the room, bare-footed, towards the candle, the shadow of his head and shoulders growing bigger behind him on the opposite wall, to which the face of plain Mr. Jones was turned. With a feline movement, Ricardo glanced over his shoulder at the thin back of the spectre reposing on the bed, and then blew out the candle.

“In fact, I am rather amused, Martin,” Mr. Jones said in the dark.

He heard the sound of a slapped thigh and the jubilant exclamation of his henchman:

“Good! That’s the way to talk, sir!”

## **PART FOUR**

## CHAPTER ONE

Ricardo advanced prudently by short darts from one tree-trunk to another, more in the manner of a squirrel than a cat. The sun had risen some time before. Already the sparkle of open sea was encroaching rapidly on the dark, cool, early-morning blue of Diamond Bay; but the deep dusk lingered yet under the mighty pillars of the forest, between which the secretary dodged.

He was watching Number One's bungalow with an animal-like patience, if with a very human complexity of purpose. This was the second morning of such watching. The first one had not been rewarded by success. Well, strictly speaking, there was no hurry.

The sun, swinging above the ridge all at once, inundated with light the space of burnt grass in front of Ricardo and the face of the bungalow, on which his eyes were fixed, leaving only the one dark spot of the doorway. To his right, to his left, and behind him, splashes of gold appeared in the deep shade of the forest, thinning the gloom under the ragged roof of leaves.

This was not a very favourable circumstance for Ricardo's purpose. He did not wish to be detected in his patient occupation. For what he was watching for was a sight of the girl — that girl! just a glimpse across the burnt patch to see what she was like. He had excellent eyes, and the distance was not so great. He would be able to distinguish her face quite easily if she only came out on the veranda; and she was bound to do that sooner or later. He was confident that he could form some opinion about her — which, he felt, was very necessary, before venturing on some steps to get in touch with her behind that Swedish baron's back. His theoretical view of the girl was such that he was quite prepared, on the strength of that distant examination, to show himself discreetly — perhaps even make a sign. It all depended on his reading of the face. She couldn't be much. He knew that sort!

By protruding his head a little he commanded, through the foliage of a festooning creeper, a view of the three bungalows. Irregularly disposed along a flat curve, over the veranda rail of the farthest one hung a dark rug of a tartan pattern, amazingly conspicuous. Ricardo could see the very checks. A brisk fire of sticks was burning on the ground in front of the steps, and in the sunlight the thin, fluttering flame had paled almost to

invisibility — a mere rosy stir under a faint wreath of smoke. He could see the white bandage on the head of Pedro bending over it, and the wisps of black hair standing up weirdly. He had wound that bandage himself, after breaking that shaggy and enormous head. The creature balanced it like a load, staggering towards the steps. Ricardo could see a small, long-handled saucepan at the end of a great hairy paw.

Yes, he could see all that there was to be seen, far and near. Excellent eyes! The only thing they could not penetrate was the dark oblong of the doorway on the veranda under the low eaves of the bungalow's roof. And that was vexing. It was an outrage. Ricardo was easily outraged. Surely she would come out presently! Why didn't she? Surely the fellow did not tie her up to the bedpost before leaving the house!

Nothing appeared. Ricardo was as still as the leafy cables of creepers depending in a convenient curtain from the mighty limb sixty feet above his head. His very eyelids were still, and this unblinking watchfulness gave him the dreamy air of a cat posed on a hearth-rug contemplating the fire. Was he dreaming? There, in plain sight, he had before him a white, blouse-like jacket, short blue trousers, a pair of bare yellow calves, a pigtail, long and slender —

"The confounded Chink!" he muttered, astounded.

He was not conscious of having looked away; and yet right there, in the middle of the picture, without having come round the right-hand corner or the left-hand corner of the house, without falling from the sky or surging up from the ground, Wang had become visible, large as life, and engaged in the young-ladyish occupation of picking flowers. Step by step, stooping repeatedly over the flower-beds at the foot of the veranda, the startlingly materialized Chinaman passed off the scene in a very commonplace manner, by going up the steps and disappearing in the darkness of the doorway.

Only then the yellow eyes of Martin Ricardo lost their intent fixity. He understood that it was time for him to be moving. That bunch of flowers going into the house in the hand of a Chinaman was for the breakfast-table. What else could it be for?

"I'll give you flowers!" he muttered threateningly. "You wait!"

Another moment, just for a glance towards the Jones bungalow, whence he expected Heyst to issue on his way to that breakfast so offensively decorated, and Ricardo began his retreat. His impulse, his desire, was for a

rush into the open, face to face with the appointed victim, for what he called a “ripping up,” visualized greedily, and always with the swift preliminary stooping movement on his part — the forerunner of certain death to his adversary. This was his impulse; and as it was, so to speak, constitutional, it was extremely difficult to resist when his blood was up. What could be more trying than to have to skulk and dodge and restrain oneself, mentally and physically, when one’s blood was up? Mr. Secretary Ricardo began his retreat from his post of observation behind a tree opposite Heyst’s bungalow, using great care to remain unseen. His proceedings were made easier by the declivity of the ground, which sloped sharply down to the water’s edge. There, his feet feeling the warmth of the island’s rocky foundation already heated by the sun, through the thin soles of his straw slippers he was, as it were, sunk out of sight of the houses. A short scramble of some twenty feet brought him up again to the upper level, at the place where the jetty had its root in the shore. He leaned his back against one of the lofty uprights which still held up the company’s signboard above the mound of derelict coal. Nobody could have guessed how much his blood was up. To contain himself he folded his arms tightly on his breast.

Ricardo was not used to a prolonged effort of self-control. His craft, his artfulness, felt themselves always at the mercy of his nature, which was truly feral and only held in subjection by the influence of the “governor,” the prestige of a gentleman. It had its cunning too, but it was being almost too severely tried since the feral solution of a growl and a spring was forbidden by the problem. Ricardo dared not venture out on the cleared ground. He dared not.

“If I meet the beggar,” he thought, “I don’t know what I mayn’t do. I daren’t trust myself.”

What exasperated him just now was his inability to understand Heyst. Ricardo was human enough to suffer from the discovery of his limitations. No, he couldn’t size Heyst up. He could kill him with extreme ease — a growl and a spring — but that was forbidden! However, he could not remain indefinitely under the funereal blackboard.

“I must make a move,” he thought.

He moved on, his head swimming a little with the repressed desire of violence, and came out openly in front of the bungalows, as if he had just been down to the jetty to look at the boat. The sunshine enveloped him,



very brilliant, very still, very hot. The three buildings faced him. The one with the rug on the balustrade was the most distant; next to it was the empty bungalow; the nearest, with the flower-beds at the foot of its veranda, contained that bothersome girl, who had managed so provokingly to keep herself invisible. That was why Ricardo's eyes lingered on that building. The girl would surely be easier to "size up" than Heyst. A sight of her, a mere glimpse, would have been something to go by, a step nearer to the goal — the first real move, in fact. Ricardo saw no other move. And any time she might appear on that veranda!

She did not appear; but, like a concealed magnet, she exercised her attraction. As he went on, he deviated towards the bungalow. Though his movements were deliberate, his feral instincts had such sway that if he had met Heyst walking towards him, he would have had to satisfy his need of violence. But he saw nobody. Wang was at the back of the house, keeping the coffee hot against Number One's return for breakfast. Even the simian Pedro was out of sight, no doubt crouching on the door-step, his red little eyes fastened with animal-like devotion on Mr. Jones, who was in discourse with Heyst in the other bungalow — the conversation of an evil spectre with a disarmed man, watched by an ape.

His will having very little to do with it, Ricardo, darting swift glances in all directions, found himself at the steps of the Heyst bungalow. Once there, falling under an uncontrollable force of attraction, he mounted them with a savage and stealthy action of his limbs, and paused for a moment under the eaves to listen to the silence. Presently he advanced over the threshold one leg — it seemed to stretch itself, like a limb of india-rubber — planted his foot within, brought up the other swiftly, and stood inside the room, turning his head from side to side. To his eyes, brought in there from the dazzling sunshine, all was gloom for a moment. His pupils, like a cat's, dilating swiftly, he distinguished an enormous quantity of books. He was amazed; and he was put off too. He was vexed in his astonishment. He had meant to note the aspect and nature of things, and hoped to draw some useful inference, some hint as to the man. But what guess could one make out of a multitude of books? He didn't know what to think; and he formulated his bewilderment in the mental exclamation:

"What the devil has this fellow been trying to set up here — a school?"

He gave a prolonged stare to the portrait of Heyst's father, that severe profile ignoring the vanities of this earth. His eyes gleamed sideways at the

heavy silver candlesticks — signs of opulence. He prowled as a stray cat entering a strange place might have done, for if Ricardo had not Wang's miraculous gift of materializing and vanishing, rather than coming and going, he could be nearly as noiseless in his less elusive movements. He noted the back door standing just ajar; and all the time his slightly pointed ears, at the utmost stretch of watchfulness, kept in touch with the profound silence outside enveloping the absolute stillness of the house.

He had not been in the room two minutes when it occurred to him that he must be alone in the bungalow. The woman, most likely, had sneaked out and was walking about somewhere in the grounds at the back. She had been probably ordered to keep out of sight. Why? Because the fellow mistrusted his guests; or was it because he mistrusted her?

Ricardo reflected that from a certain point of view it amounted nearly to the same thing. He remembered Schomberg's story. He felt that running away with somebody only to get clear of that beastly, tame, hotel-keeper's attention was no proof of hopeless infatuation. She could be got in touch with.

His moustaches stirred. For some time he had been looking at a closed door. He would peep into that other room, and perhaps see something more informing than a confounded lot of books. As he crossed over, he thought recklessly:

"If the beggar comes in suddenly, and starts to prance, I'll rip him up and be done with it!"

He laid his hand on the handle, and felt the door come unlatched. Before he pulled it open, he listened again to the silence. He felt it all about him, complete, without a flaw.

The necessity of prudence had exasperated his self-restraint. A mood of ferocity woke up in him, and, as always at such times, he became physically aware of the sheathed knife strapped to his leg. He pulled at the door with fierce curiosity. It came open without a squeak of hinge, without a rustle, with no sound at all; and he found himself glaring at the opaque surface of some rough blue stuff, like serge. A curtain was fitted inside, heavy enough and long enough not to stir.

A curtain! This unforeseen veil, baffling his curiosity checked his brusqueness. He did not fling it aside with an impatient movement; he only looked at it closely, as if its texture had to be examined before his hand could touch such stuff. In this interval of hesitation, he seemed to detect a

flaw in the perfection of the silence, the faintest possible rustle, which his ears caught and instantly, in the effort of conscious listening, lost again. No! Everything was still inside and outside the house, only he had no longer the sense of being alone there.

When he put out his hand towards the motionless folds it was with extreme caution, and merely to push the stuff aside a little, advancing his head at the same time to peep within. A moment of complete immobility ensued. Then, without anything else of him stirring, Ricardo's head shrank back on his shoulders, his arm descended slowly to his side. There was a woman in there. The very woman! Lighted dimly by the reflection of the outer glare, she loomed up strangely big and shadowy at the other end of the long, narrow room. With her back to the door, she was doing her hair with bare arms uplifted. One of them gleamed pearly white; the other detached its perfect form in black against the unshuttered, uncurtained square window-hole. She was there, her fingers busy with her dark hair, utterly unconscious, exposed and defenceless — and tempting.

Ricardo drew back one foot and pressed his elbows close to his sides; his chest started heaving convulsively as if he were wrestling or running a race; his body began to sway gently back and forth. The self-restraint was at an end: his psychology must have its way. The instinct for the feral spring could no longer be denied. Ravish or kill — it was all one to him, as long as by the act he liberated the suffering soul of savagery repressed for so long. After a quick glance over his shoulder, which hunters of big game tell us no lion or tiger omits to give before charging home, Ricardo charged, head down, straight at the curtain. The stuff, tossed up violently by his rush, settled itself with a slow, floating descent into vertical folds, motionless, without a shudder even, in the still, warm air.

## CHAPTER TWO

The clock — which once upon a time had measured the hours of philosophic meditation — could not have ticked away more than five seconds when Wang materialized within the living-room. His concern primarily was with the delayed breakfast, but at once his slanting eyes became immovably fixed upon the unstirring curtain. For it was behind it that he had located the strange, deadened scuffling sounds which filled the empty room. The slanting eyes of his race could not achieve a round, amazed stare, but they remained still, dead still, and his impassive yellow face grew all at once careworn and lean with the sudden strain of intense, doubtful, frightened watchfulness. Contrary impulses swayed his body, rooted to the floor-mats. He even went so far as to extend his hand towards the curtain. He could not reach it, and he didn't make the necessary step forward.

The mysterious struggle was going on with confused thuds of bare feet, in a mute wrestling match, no human sound, hiss, groan, murmur, or exclamation coming through the curtain. A chair fell over, not with a crash but lightly, as if just grazed, and a faint metallic ring of the tin bath succeeded. Finally the tense silence, as of two adversaries locked in a deadly grip, was ended by the heavy, dull thump of a soft body flung against the inner partition of planks. It seemed to shake the whole bungalow. By that time, walking backward, his eyes, his very throat, strained with fearful excitement, his extended arm still pointing at the curtain, Wang had disappeared through the back door. Once out in the compound, he bolted round the end of the house. Emerging innocently between the two bungalows he lingered and lounged in the open, where anybody issuing from any of the dwellings was bound to see him — a self-possessed Chinaman idling there, with nothing but perhaps an unserved breakfast on his mind.

It was at this time that Wang made up his mind to give up all connection with Number One, a man not only disarmed but already half vanquished. Till that morning he had had doubts as to his course of action, but this overheard scuffle decided the question. Number One was a doomed man — one of those beings whom it is unlucky to help. Even as he walked in the open with a fine air of unconcern, Wang wondered that no sound of any sort was to be heard inside the house. For all he knew, the white woman might

have been scuffling in there with an evil spirit, which had of course killed her. For nothing visible came out of the house he watched out of the slanting corner of his eye. The sunshine and the silence outside the bungalow reigned undisturbed.

But in the house the silence of the big room would not have struck an acute ear as perfect. It was troubled by a stir so faint that it could hardly be called a ghost of whispering from behind the curtain.

Ricardo, feeling his throat with tender care, breathed out admiringly:

“You have fingers like steel. Jimminy! You have muscles like a giant!”

Luckily for Lena, Ricardo’s onset had been so sudden — she was winding her two heavy tresses round her head — that she had no time to lower her arms. This, which saved them from being pinned to her sides, gave her a better chance to resist. His spring had nearly thrown her down. Luckily, again, she was standing so near the wall that, though she was driven against it headlong, yet the shock was not heavy enough to knock all the breath out of her body. On the contrary, it helped her first instinctive attempt to drive her assailant backward.

After the first gasp of a surprise that was really too over-powering for a cry, she was never in doubt of the nature of her danger. She defended herself in the full, clear knowledge of it, from the force of instinct which is the true source of every great display of energy, and with a determination which could hardly have been expected from a girl who, cornered in a dim corridor by the red-faced, stammering Schomberg, had trembled with shame, disgust, and fear; had drooped, terrified, before mere words spluttered out odiously by a man who had never in his life laid his big paw on her.

This new enemy’s attack was simple, straightforward violence. It was not the slimy, underhand plotting to deliver her up like a slave, which had sickened her heart and had made her feel in her loneliness that her oppressors were too many for her. She was no longer alone in the world now. She resisted without a moment of faltering, because she was no longer deprived of moral support; because she was a human being who counted; because she was no longer defending herself for herself alone; because of the faith that had been born in her — the faith in the man of her destiny, and perhaps in the Heaven which had sent him so wonderfully to cross her path.

She had defended herself principally by maintaining a desperate, murderous clutch on Ricardo’s windpipe, till she felt a sudden relaxation of

the terrific hug in which he stupidly and ineffectually persisted to hold her. Then with a supreme effort of her arms and of her suddenly raised knee, she sent him flying against the partition. The cedar-wood chest stood in the way, and Ricardo, with a thump which boomed hollow through the whole bungalow, fell on it in a sitting posture, half strangled, and exhausted not so much by the efforts as by the emotions of the struggle.

With the recoil of her exerted strength, she too reeled, staggered back, and sat on the edge of the bed. Out of breath, but calm and unabashed, she busied herself in readjusting under her arms the brown and yellow figured Celebes sarong, the tuck of which had come undone during the fight. Then, folding her bare arms tightly on her breast, she leaned forward on her crossed legs, determined and without fear.

Ricardo, leaning forward too, his nervous force gone, crestfallen like a beast of prey that has missed its spring, met her big grey eyes looking at him — wide open, observing, mysterious — from under the dark arches of her courageous eyebrows. Their faces were not a foot apart. He ceased feeling about his aching throat and dropped the palms of his hands heavily on his knees. He was not looking at her bare shoulders, at her strong arms; he was looking down at the floor. He had lost one of his straw slippers. A chair with a white dress on it had been overturned. These, with splashes of water on the floor out of a brusquely misplaced sponge-bath, were the only traces of the struggle.

Ricardo swallowed twice consciously, as if to make sure of his throat before he spoke again:

“All right. I never meant to hurt you — though I am no joker when it comes to it.”

He pulled up the leg of his pyjamas to exhibit the strapped knife. She glanced at it without moving her head, and murmured with scornful bitterness:

“Ah, yes — with that thing stuck in my side. In no other way.”

He shook his head with a shamefaced smile.

“Listen! I am quiet now. Straight — I am. I don’t need to explain why — you know how it is. And I can see, now, this wasn’t the way with you.”

She made no sound. Her still, upward gaze had a patient, mournfulness which troubled him like a suggestion of an inconceivable depth. He added thoughtfully:

“You are not going to make a noise about this silly try of mine?”

She moved her head the least bit.

“Jee-miny! You are a wonder — ” he murmured earnestly, relieved more than she could have guessed.

Of course, if she had attempted to run out, he would have stuck the knife between her shoulders, to stop her screaming; but all the fat would have been in the fire, the business utterly spoiled, and the rage of the governor — especially when he learned the cause — boundless. A woman that does not make a noise after an attempt of that kind has tacitly condoned the offence. Ricardo had no small vanities. But clearly, if she would pass it over like this, then he could not be so utterly repugnant to her. He felt flattered. And she didn’t seem afraid of him either. He already felt almost tender towards the girl — that plucky, fine girl who had not tried to run screaming from him.

“We shall be friends yet. I don’t give you up. Don’t think it. Friends as friends can be!” he whispered confidently. “Jee-miny! You aren’t a tame one. Neither am I. You will find that out before long.”

He could not know that if she had not run out, it was because that morning, under the stress of growing uneasiness at the presence of the incomprehensible visitors, Heyst had confessed to her that it was his revolver he had been looking for in the night; that it was gone, that he was a disarmed, defenceless man. She had hardly comprehended the meaning of his confession. Now she understood better what it meant. The effort of her self-control, her stillness, impressed Ricardo. Suddenly she spoke:

“What are you after?”

He did not raise his eyes. His hands reposing on his knees, his drooping head, something reflective in his pose, suggested the weariness of a simple soul, the fatigue of a mental rather than physical contest. He answered the direct question by a direct statement, as if he were too tired to dissemble:

“After the swag.”

The word was strange to her. The veiled ardour of her grey gaze from under the dark eyebrows never left Ricardo’s.

“A swag?” she murmured quietly. “What’s that?”

“Why, swag, plunder — what your gentleman has been pinching right and left for years — the pieces. Don’t you know? This!”

Without looking up, he made the motion of counting money into the palm of his hand. She lowered her eyes slightly to observe this bit of pantomime, but returned them to his face at once. Then, in a mere breath:

“How do you know anything about him?” she asked, concealing her puzzled alarm. “What has it got to do with you?”

“Everything,” was Ricardo’s concise answer, in a low, emphatic whisper. He reflected that this girl was really his best hope. Out of the unfaded impression of past violence there was growing the sort of sentiment which prevents a man from being indifferent to a woman he has once held in his arms — if even against her will — and still more so if she has pardoned the outrage. It becomes then a sort of bond. He felt positively the need to confide in her — a subtle trait of masculinity, this almost physical need of trust which can exist side by side with the most brutal readiness of suspicion.

“It’s a game of grab — see?” he went on, with a new inflection of intimacy in his murmur. He was looking straight at her now.

“That fat, tame slug of a gin-slinger, Schomberg, put us up to it.”

So strong is the impression of helpless and persecuted misery, that the girl who had fought down a savage assault without faltering could not completely repress a shudder at the mere sound of the abhorred name.

Ricardo became more rapid and confidential:

“He wants to pay him off — pay both of you, at that; so he told me. He was hot after you. He would have given all he had into those hands of yours that have nearly strangled me. But you couldn’t, eh? Nohow — what?” He paused. “So, rather than — you followed a gentleman?”

He noticed a slight movement of her head and spoke quickly.

“Same here — rather than be a wage-slave. Only these foreigners aren’t to be trusted. You’re too good for him. A man that will rob his best chum?” She raised her head. He went on, well pleased with his progress, whispering hurriedly: “Yes. I know all about him. So you may guess how he’s likely to treat a woman after a bit!”

He did not know that he was striking terror into her breast now. Still the grey eyes remained fixed on him unmovably watchful, as if sleepy under the white forehead. She was beginning to understand. His words conveyed a definite, dreadful meaning to her mind, which he proceeded to enlighten further in a convinced murmur.

“You and I are made to understand each other. Born alike, bred alike, I guess. You are not tame. Same here! You have been chucked out into this rotten world of ‘yporcrits. Same here!”



Her stillness, her appalled stillness, wore to him an air of fascinated attention. He asked abruptly:

“Where is it?”

She made an effort to breathe out:

“Where’s what?”

His tone expressed excited secrecy.

“The swag — plunder — pieces. It’s a game of grab. We must have it; but it isn’t easy, and so you will have to lend a hand. Come! is it kept in the house?”

As often with women, her wits were sharpened by the very terror of the glimpsed menace. She shook her head negatively.

“No.”

“Sure?”

“Sure,” she said.

“Ay! Thought so. Does your gentleman trust you?”

Again she shook her head.

“Blamed ‘yporcrit,” he said feelingly, and then reflected: “He’s one of the tame ones, ain’t he?”

“You had better find out for yourself,” she said.

“You trust me. I don’t want to die before you and I have made friends.” This was said with a strange air of feline gallantry. Then, tentatively: “But he could be brought to trust you, couldn’t he?”

“Trust me?” she said, in a tone which bordered on despair, but which he mistook for derision.

“Stand in with us,” he urged. “Give the chuck to all this blamed ‘yporcrisy. Perhaps, without being trusted, you have managed to find out something already, eh?”

“Perhaps I have,” she uttered with lips that seemed to her to be freezing fast.

Ricardo now looked at her calm face with something like respect. He was even a little awed by her stillness, by her economy of words. Womanlike, she felt the effect she had produced, the effect of knowing much and of keeping all her knowledge in reserve. So far, somehow, this had come, about of itself. Thus encouraged, directed in the way of duplicity, the refuge of the weak, she made a heroically conscious effort and forced her stiff, cold lips into a smile.

Duplicity — the refuge of the weak and the cowardly, but of the disarmed, too! Nothing stood between the enchanted dream of her existence and a cruel catastrophe but her duplicity. It seemed to her that the man sitting there before her was an unavoidable presence, which had attended all her life. He was the embodied evil of the world. She was not ashamed of her duplicity. With a woman's frank courage, as soon as she saw that opening she threw herself into it without reserve, with only one doubt — that of her own strength. She was appalled by the situation; but already all her aroused femininity, understanding that whether Heyst loved her or not she loved him, and feeling that she had brought this on his head, faced the danger with a passionate desire to defend her own.

## CHAPTER THREE

To Ricardo the girl had been so unforeseen that he was unable to bring upon her the light of his critical faculties. Her smile appeared to him full of promise. He had not expected her to be what she was. Who, from the talk he had heard, could expect to meet a girl like this? She was a blooming miracle, he said to himself, familiarly, yet with a tinge of respect. She was no meat for the likes of that tame, respectable gin-slinger. Ricardo grew hot with indignation. Her courage, her physical strength, demonstrated at the cost of his discomfiture, commanded his sympathy. He felt himself drawn to her by the proofs of her amazing spirit. Such a girl! She had a strong soul; and her reflective disposition to throw over her connection proved that she was no hypocrite.

“Is your gentleman a good shot?” he said, looking down on the floor again, as if indifferent.

She hardly understood the phrase; but in its form it suggested some accomplishment. It was safe to whisper an affirmative.

“Yes.”

“Mine, too — and better than good,” Ricardo murmured, and then, in a confidential burst: “I am not so good at it, but I carry a pretty deadly thing about me, all the same!”

He tapped his leg. She was past the stage of shudders now. Stiff all over, unable even to move her eyes, she felt an awful mental tension which was like blank forgetfulness. Ricardo tried to influence her in his own way.

“And my gentleman is not the sort that would drop me. He ain’t no foreigner; whereas you, with your baron, you don’t know what’s before you — or, rather, being a woman, you know only too well. Much better not to wait for the chuck. Pile in with us and get your share — of the plunder, I mean. You have some notion about it already.”

She felt that if she as much as hinted by word or sign that there was no such thing on the island, Heyst’s life wouldn’t be worth half an hour’s purchase; but all power of combining words had vanished in the tension of her mind. Words themselves were too difficult to think of — all except the word “yes,” the saving word! She whispered it with not a feature of her face moving. To Ricardo the faint and concise sound proved a cool, reserved assent, more worth having from that amazing mistress of herself than a thousand words from any other woman. He thought with exultation that he

had come upon one in a million — in ten millions! His whisper became frankly entreating.

“That’s good! Now all you’ve got to do is to make sure where he keeps his swag. Only do be quick about it! I can’t stand much longer this crawling-on-the-stomach business so as not to scare your gentleman. What do you think a fellow is — a reptile?”

She stared without seeing anyone, as a person in the night sits staring and listening to deadly sounds, to evil incantations. And always in her head there was that tension of the mind trying to get hold of something, of a saving idea which seemed to be so near and could not be captured. Suddenly she seized it. Yes — she had to get that man out of the house. At that very moment, raised outside, not very near, but heard distinctly, Heyst’s voice uttered the words:

“Have you been looking out for me, Wang?”

It was for her like a flash of lightning framed in the darkness which had beset her on all sides, showing a deadly precipice right under her feet. With a convulsive movement she sat up straight, but had no power to rise. Ricardo, on the contrary, was on his feet on the instant, as noiseless as a cat. His yellow eyes gleamed, gliding here and there; but he too seemed unable to make another movement. Only his moustaches stirred visibly, like the feelers of some animal.

Wang’s answer, “Ya tuan,” was heard by the two in the room, but more faintly. Then Heyst again:

“All right! You may bring the coffee in. Mem Putih out in the room yet?”

To this question Wang made no answer.

Ricardo’s and the girl’s eyes met, utterly without expression, all their faculties being absorbed in listening for the first sound of Heyst’s footsteps, for any sound outside which would mean that Ricardo’s retreat was cut off. Both understood perfectly well that Wang must have gone round the house, and that he was now at the back, making it impossible for Ricardo to slip out unseen that way before Heyst came in at the front.

A darkling shade settled on the face of the devoted secretary. Here was the business utterly spoiled! It was the gloom of anger, and even of apprehension. He would perhaps have made a dash for it through the back door, if Heyst had not been heard ascending the front steps. He climbed them slowly, very slowly, like a man who is discouraged or weary — or simply thoughtful; and Ricardo had a mental vision of his face, with its

martial moustache, the lofty forehead, the impassive features, and the quiet, meditative eyes. Trapped! Confound it! After all, perhaps the governor was right. Women had to be shunned. Fooling with this one had apparently ruined the whole business. For, trapped as he was he might just as well kill, since, anyhow, to be seen was to be unmasked. But he was too fair-minded to be angry with the girl.

Heyst had paused on the veranda, or in the very doorway.

“I shall be shot down like a dog if I ain’t quick,” Ricardo muttered excitedly to the girl.

He stooped to get hold of his knife; and the next moment would have hurled himself out through the curtain, nearly, as prompt and fully as deadly to Heyst as an unexpected thunderbolt. The feel more than the strength of the girl’s hand, clutching at his shoulder, checked him. He swung round, crouching with a yellow upward glare. Ah! Was she turning against him?

He would have stuck his knife into the hollow of her bare throat if he had not seen her other hand pointing to the window. It was a long opening, high up, close under the ceiling almost, with a single pivoting shutter.

While he was still looking at it she moved noiselessly away, picking up the overturned chair, and placed it under the wall. Then she looked round; but he didn’t need to be beckoned to. In two long, tiptoeing strides he was at her side.

“Be quick!” she gasped.

He seized her hand and wrung it with all the force of his dumb gratitude, as a man does to a chum when there is no time for words. Then he mounted the chair. Ricardo was short — too short to get over without a noisy scramble. He hesitated an instant; she, watchful, bore rigidly on the seat with her beautiful bare arms, while, light and sure, he used the back of the chair as a ladder. The masses of her brown hair fell all about her face.

Footsteps resounded in the next room, and Heyst’s voice, not very loud, called her by name.

“Lena!”

“Yes! In a minute,” she answered with a particular intonation which she knew would prevent Heyst from coming in at once.

When she looked up, Ricardo had vanished, letting himself down outside so lightly that she had not heard the slightest noise. She stood up then, bewildered, frightened, as if awakened from a drugged sleep, with heavy,

downcast, unseeing eyes, her fortitude tired out, her imagination as if dead within her and unable to keep her fear alive.

Heyst moved about aimlessly in the other room. This sound roused her exhausted wits. At once she began to think, hear, see; and what she saw — or rather recognized, for her eyes had been resting on it all the time — was Ricardo's straw slipper, lost in the scuffle, lying near the bath. She had just time to step forward and plant her foot on it when the curtains shook, and, pushed aside, disclosed Heyst in the doorway.

Out of the appeased enchantment of the senses she had found with him, like a sort of bewitched state, his danger brought a sensation of warmth to her breast. She felt something stir in there, something profound, like a new sort of life.

The room was in partial darkness, Ricardo having accidentally swung the pivoted shutter as he went out of the window. Heyst peered from the doorway.

"Why, you haven't done your hair yet," he said.

"I won't stop to do it now. I shan't be long," she replied steadily, and remained still, feeling Ricardo's slipper under the sole of her foot.

Heyst, with a movement of retreat, let the curtain drop slowly. On the instant she stooped for the slipper, and, with it in her hand, spun round wildly, looking for some hiding-place; but there was no such spot in the bare room. The chest, the leather bunk, a dress or two of hers hanging on pegs — there was no place where the merest hazard might not guide Heyst's hand at any moment. Her wildly roaming eyes were caught by the half-closed window. She ran to it, and by raising herself on her toes was able to reach the shutter with her fingertips. She pushed it square, stole back to the middle of the room, and, turning about, swung her arm, regulating the force of the throw so as not to let the slipper fly too far out and hit the edge of the overhanging eaves. It was a task of the nicest judgement for the muscles of those round arms, still quivering from the deadly wrestle with a man, for that brain, tense with the excitement of the situation and for the unstrung nerves flickering darkness before her eyes. At last the slipper left her hand. As soon as it passed the opening, it was out of her sight. She listened. She did not hear it strike anything; it just vanished, as if it had wings to fly on through the air. Not a sound! It had gone clear.

Her valiant arms hanging close against her side, she stood as if turned into stone. A faint whistle reached her ears. The forgetful Ricardo,

becoming very much aware of his loss, had been hanging about in great anxiety, which was relieved by the appearance of the slipper flying from under the eaves; and now, thoughtfully, he had ventured a whistle to put her mind at ease.

Suddenly the girl reeled forward. She saved herself from a fall only by embracing with both arms one of the tall, roughly carved posts holding the mosquito net above the bed. For a long time she clung to it, with her forehead leaning against the wood. One side of her loosened sarong had slipped down as low as her hip. The long brown tresses of her hair fell in lank wisps, as if wet, almost black against her white body. Her uncovered flank, damp with the sweat of anguish and fatigue, gleamed coldly with the immobility of polished marble in the hot, diffused light falling through the window above her head — a dim reflection of the consuming, passionate blaze of sunshine outside, all aquiver with the effort to set the earth on fire, to burn it to ashes.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Heyst, seated at the table with his chin on his breast, raised his head at the faint rustle of Lena's dress. He was startled by the dead pallor of her cheeks, by something lifeless in her eyes, which looked at him strangely, without recognition. But to his anxious inquiries she answered reassuringly that there was nothing the matter with her, really. She had felt giddy on rising. She had even had a moment of faintness, after her bath. She had to sit down to wait for it to pass. This had made her late dressing.

"I didn't try to do my hair. I didn't want to keep you waiting any longer," she said.

He was unwilling to press her with questions about her health, since she seemed to make light of this indisposition. She had not done her hair, but she had brushed it, and had tied it with a ribbon behind. With her forehead uncovered, she looked very young, almost a child, a careworn child; a child with something on its mind.

What surprised Heyst was the non-appearance of Wang. The Chinaman had always materialized at the precise moment of his service, neither too soon nor too late. This time the usual miracle failed. What was the meaning of this?

Heyst raised his voice — a thing he disliked doing. It was promptly answered from the compound:

"Ada tuan!"

Lena, leaning on her elbow, with her eyes on her plate, did not seem to hear anything. When Wang entered with a tray, his narrow eyes, tilted inward by the prominence of salient cheek-bones, kept her under stealthy observation all the time. Neither the one nor the other of that white couple paid the slightest attention to him and he withdrew without having heard them exchange a single word. He squatted on his heels on the back veranda. His Chinaman's mind, very clear but not far-reaching, was made up according to the plain reason of things, such as it appeared to him in the light of his simple feeling for self-preservation, untrammelled by any notions of romantic honour or tender conscience. His yellow hands, lightly clasped, hung idly between his knees. The graves of Wang's ancestors were far away, his parents were dead, his elder brother was a soldier in the yamen of some Mandarin away in Formosa. No one near by had a claim on his veneration or his obedience. He had been for years a labouring restless



vagabond. His only tie in the world was the Alfuro woman, in exchange for whom he had given away some considerable part of his hard-earned substance; and his duty, in reason, could be to no one but himself.

The scuffle behind the curtain was a thing of bad augury for that Number One for whom the Chinaman had neither love nor dislike. He had been awed enough by that development to hang back with the coffee-pot till at last the white man was induced to call him in. Wang went in with curiosity. Certainly, the white woman looked as if she had been wrestling with a spirit which had managed to tear half her blood out of her before letting her go. As to the man, Wang had long looked upon him as being in some sort bewitched; and now he was doomed. He heard their voices in the room. Heyst was urging the girl to go and lie down again. He was extremely concerned. She had eaten nothing.

“The best thing for you. You really must!”

She sat listless, shaking her head from time to time negatively, as if nothing could be any good. But he insisted; she saw the beginning of wonder in his eyes, and suddenly gave way.

“Perhaps I had better.”

She did not want to arouse his wonder, which would lead him straight to suspicion. He must not suspect!

Already, with the consciousness of her love for this man, of that something rapturous and profound going beyond the mere embrace, there was born in her a woman’s innate mistrust of masculinity, of that seductive strength allied to an absurd, delicate shrinking from the recognition of the naked necessity of facts, which never yet frightened a woman worthy of the name. She had no plan; but her mind, quieted down somewhat by the very effort to preserve outward composure for his sake, perceived that her behaviour had secured, at any rate, a short period of safety. Perhaps because of the similarity of their miserable origin in the dregs of mankind, she had understood Ricardo perfectly. He would keep quiet for a time now. In this momentarily soothing certitude her bodily fatigue asserted itself, the more overpoweringly since its cause was not so much the demand on her strength as the awful suddenness of the stress she had had to meet. She would have tried to overcome it from the mere instinct of resistance, if it had not been for Heyst’s alternate pleadings and commands. Before this eminently masculine fussing she felt the woman’s need to give way, the sweetness of surrender.

“I will do anything you like,” she said.

Getting up, she was surprised by a wave of languid weakness that came over her, embracing and enveloping her like warm water, with a noise in her ears as of a breaking sea.

“You must help me along,” she added quickly.

While he put his arm round her waist — not by any means an uncommon thing for him to do — she found a special satisfaction in the feeling of being thus sustained. She abandoned all her weight to that encircling and protecting pressure, while a thrill went through her at the sudden thought that it was she who would have to protect him, to be the defender of a man who was strong enough to lift her bodily, as he was doing even then in his two arms. For Heyst had done this as soon as they had crept through the doorway of the room. He thought it was quicker and simpler to carry her the last step or two. He had grown really too anxious to be aware of the effort. He lifted her high and deposited her on the bed, as one lays a child on its side in a cot. Then he sat down on the edge, masking his concern with a smile which obtained no response from the dreamy immobility of her eyes. But she sought his hand, seized it eagerly; and while she was pressing it with all the force of which she was capable, the sleep she needed overtook her suddenly, overwhelmingly, as it overtakes a child in a cot, with her lips parted for a safe, endearing word which she had thought of but had no time to utter.

The usual flaming silence brooded over Samburan.

“What in the world is this new mystery?” murmured Heyst to himself, contemplating her deep slumber.

It was so deep, this enchanted sleep, that when some time afterwards he gently tried to open her fingers and free his hand, he succeeded without provoking the slightest stir.

“There is some very simple explanation, no doubt,” he thought, as he stole out into the living-room.

Absent-mindedly he pulled a book out of the top shelf, and sat down with it; but even after he had opened it on his knee, and had been staring at the pages for a time, he had not the slightest idea of what it was about. He stared and stared at the crowded, parallel lines. It was only when, raising his eyes for no particular reason, he saw Wang standing motionless on the other side of the table, that he regained complete control of his faculties.

“Oh, yes,” he said, as if suddenly reminded of a forgotten appointment of a not particularly welcome sort.

He waited a little, and then, with reluctant curiosity, forced himself to ask the silent Wang what he had to say. He had some idea that the matter of the vanished revolver would come up at last; but the guttural sounds which proceeded from the Chinaman did not refer to that delicate subject. His speech was concerned with cups, saucers, plates, forks, and knives. All these things had been put away in the cupboards on the back veranda, where they belonged, perfectly clean, “all plopel.” Heyst wondered at the scrupulosity of a man who was about to abandon him; for he was not surprised to hear Wang conclude the account of his stewardship with the words:

“I go now.”

“Oh! You go now?” said Heyst, leaning back, his book on his knees.

“Yes. Me no likee. One man, two man, three man — no can do! Me go now.”

“What’s frightening you away like this?” asked Heyst, while through his mind flashed the hope that something enlightening might come from that being so unlike himself, taking contact with the world with a simplicity and directness of which his own mind was not capable. “Why?” he went on. “You are used to white men. You know them well.”

“Yes. Me savee them,” assented Wang inscrutably. “Me savee plenty.”

All that he really knew was his own mind. He had made it up to withdraw himself and the Alfuro woman from the uncertainties of the relations which were going to establish themselves between those white men. It was Pedro who had been the first cause of Wang’s suspicion and fear. The Chinaman had seen wild men. He had penetrated, in the train of a Chinese pedlar, up one or two of the Bornean rivers into the country of the Dyaks. He had also been in the interior of Mindanao, where there are people who live in trees — savages, no better than animals; but a hairy brute like Pedro, with his great fangs and ferocious growls, was altogether beyond his conception of anything that could be looked upon as human. The strong impression made on him by Pedro was the prime inducement which had led Wang to purloin the revolver. Reflection on the general situation, and on the insecurity of Number One, came later, after he had obtained possession of the revolver and of the box of cartridges out of the table drawer in the living-room.

“Oh, you savee plenty about white men,” Heyst went on in a slightly bantering tone, after a moment of silent reflection in which he had confessed to himself that the recovery of the revolver was not to be thought of, either by persuasion or by some more forcible means. “You speak in that fashion, but you are frightened of those white men over there.”

“Me no flightened,” protested Wang raucously, throwing up his head — which gave to his throat a more strained, anxious appearance than ever. “Me no likee,” he added in a quieter tone. “Me velly sick.”

He put his hand over the region under the breast-bone.

“That,” said Heyst, serenely positive, “belong one piecee lie. That isn’t proper man-talk at all. And after stealing my revolver, too!”

He had suddenly decided to speak about it, because this frankness could not make the situation much worse than it was. He did not suppose for a moment that Wang had the revolver anywhere about his person; and after having thought the matter over, he had arrived at the conclusion that the Chinaman never meant to use the weapon against him. After a slight start, because the direct charge had taken him unawares, Wang tore open the front of his jacket with a convulsive show of indignation.

“No hab got. Look see!” he mouthed in pretended anger.

He slapped his bare chest violently; he uncovered his very ribs, all astir with the panting of outraged virtue; his smooth stomach heaved with indignation. He started his wide blue breeches flapping about his yellow calves. Heyst watched him quietly.

“I never said you had it on you,” he observed, without raising his voice; “but the revolver is gone from where I kept it.”

“Me no savee levolver,” Wang said obstinately.

The book lying open on Heyst’s knee slipped suddenly and he made a sharp movement to catch it up. Wang was unable to see the reason of this because of the table, and leaped away from what seemed to him a threatening symptom. When Heyst looked up, the Chinaman was already at the door facing the room, not frightened, but alert.

“What’s the matter?” asked Heyst.

Wang nodded his shaven head significantly at the curtain closing the doorway of the bedroom.

“Me no likee,” he repeated.

“What the devil do you mean?” Heyst was genuinely amazed. “Don’t like what?”

Wang pointed a long lemon-coloured finger at the motionless folds.

“Two,” he said.

“Two what? I don’t understand.”

“Suppose you savee, you no like that fashion. Me savee plenty. Me go now.”

Heyst had risen from his chair, but Wang kept his ground in the doorway for a little longer. His almond-shaped eyes imparted to his face an expression of soft and sentimental melancholy. The muscles of his throat moved visibly while he uttered a distinct and guttural “Goodbye” and vanished from Number One’s sight.

The Chinaman’s departure altered the situation. Heyst reflected on what would be best to do in view of that fact. For a long time he hesitated; then, shrugging his shoulders wearily, he walked out on the veranda, down the steps, and continued at a steady gait, with a thoughtful mien, in the direction of his guests’ bungalow. He wanted to make an important communication to them, and he had no other object — least of all to give them the shock of a surprise call. Nevertheless, their brutish henchman not being on watch, it was Heyst’s fate to startle Mr. Jones and his secretary by his sudden appearance in the doorway. Their conversation must have been very interesting to prevent them from hearing the visitor’s approach. In the dim room — the shutters were kept constantly closed against the heat — Heyst saw them start apart. It was Mr. Jones who spoke:

“Ah, here you are again! Come in, come in!”

Heyst, taking his hat off in the doorway, entered the room.

## CHAPTER FIVE

Waking up suddenly, Lena looked, without raising her head from the pillow, at the room in which she was alone. She got up quickly, as if to counteract the awful sinking of her heart by the vigorous use of her limbs. But this sinking was only momentary. Mistress of herself from pride, from love, from necessity, and also because of a woman's vanity in self-sacrifice, she met Heyst, returning from the strangers' bungalow, with a clear glance and a smile.

The smile he managed to answer, but, noticing that he avoided her eyes, she composed her lips and lowered her gaze. For the same reason she hastened to speak to him in a tone of indifference, which she put on without effort, as if she had grown adept in duplicity since sunrise.

"You have been over there again?"

"I have. I thought — but you had better know first that we have lost Wang for good."

She repeated "For good?" as if she had not understood.

"For good or evil — I shouldn't know which if you were to ask me. He has dismissed himself. He's gone."

"You expected him to go, though, didn't you?"

Heyst sat down on the other side of the table.

"Yes. I expected it as soon as I discovered that he had annexed my revolver. He says he hasn't taken it. That's untrue of course. A Chinaman would not see the sense of confessing under any circumstances. To deny any charge is a principle of right conduct; but he hardly expected to be believed. He was a little enigmatic at the last, Lena. He startled me."

Heyst paused. The girl seemed absorbed in her own thoughts.

"He startled me," repeated Heyst. She noted the anxiety in his tone, and turned her head slightly to look at him across the table.

"It must have been something — to startle you," she said. In the depth of her parted lips, like a ripe pomegranate, there was a gleam of white teeth.

"It was only a single word — and some of his gestures. He had been making a good deal of noise. I wonder we didn't wake you up. How soundly you can sleep! I say, do you feel all right now?"

"As fresh as can be," she said, treating him to another deep gleam of a smile. "I heard no noise, and I'm glad of it. The way he talks in his harsh voice frightens me. I don't like all these foreign people."

“It was just before he went away — bolted out, I should say. He nodded and pointed at the curtain to our room. He knew you were there, of course. He seemed to think — he seemed to try to give me to understand that you were in special — well, danger. You know how he talks.”

She said nothing; she made no sound, only the faint tinge of colour ebbed out of her cheek.

“Yes,” Heyst went on. “He seemed to try to warn me. That must have been it. Did he imagine I had forgotten your existence? The only word he said was ‘two’. It sounded so, at least. Yes, ‘two’ — and that he didn’t like it.”

“What does that mean?” she whispered.

“We know what the word two means, don’t we, Lena? We are two. Never were such a lonely two out of the world, my dear! He might have tried to remind me that he himself has a woman to look after. Why are you so pale, Lena?”

“Am I pale?” she asked negligently.

“You are.” Heyst was really anxious.

“Well, it isn’t from fright,” she protested truthfully.

Indeed, what she felt was a sort of horror which left her absolutely in the full possession of all her faculties; more difficult to bear, perhaps, for that reason, but not paralysing to her fortitude.

Heyst in his turn smiled at her.

“I really don’t know that there is any reason to be frightened.”

“I mean I am not frightened for myself.”

“I believe you are very plucky,” he said. The colour had returned to her face. “I” continued Heyst, “am so rebellious to outward impressions that I can’t say that much about myself. I don’t react with sufficient distinctness.” He changed his tone. “You know I went to see those men first thing this morning.”

“I know. Be careful!” she murmured.

“I wonder how one can be careful! I had a long talk with — but I don’t believe you have seen them. One of them is a fantastically thin, long person, apparently ailing; I shouldn’t wonder if he were really so. He makes rather a point of it in a mysterious manner. I imagine he must have suffered from tropical fevers, but not so much as he tries to make out. He’s what people would call a gentleman. He seemed on the point of volunteering a

tale of his adventures — for which I didn't ask him — but remarked that it was a long story; some other time, perhaps.

“‘I suppose you would like to know who I am?’ he asked me.

“I told him I would leave it to him, in a tone which, between gentlemen, could have left no doubt in his mind. He raised himself on his elbow — he was lying down on the camp-bed — and said:

“‘I am he who is — ’“

Lena seemed not to be listening; but when Heyst paused, she turned her head quickly to him. He took it for a movement of inquiry, but in this he was wrong. A great vagueness enveloped her impressions, but all her energy was concentrated on the struggle that she wanted to take upon herself, in a great exaltation of love and self-sacrifice, which is woman's sublime faculty; altogether on herself, every bit of it, leaving him nothing, not even the knowledge of what she did, if that were possible. She would have liked to lock him up by some stratagem. Had she known of some means to put him to sleep for days she would have used incantations or philtres without misgivings. He seemed to her too good for such contacts, and not sufficiently equipped. This last feeling had nothing to do with the material fact of the revolver being stolen. She could hardly appreciate that fact at its full value.

Observing her eyes fixed and as if sightless — for the concentration on her purpose took all expression out of them — Heyst imagined it to be the effect of a great mental effort.

“No use asking me what he meant, Lena; I don't know, and I did not ask him. The gentleman, as I have told you before, seems devoted to mystification. I said nothing, and he laid down his head again on the bundle of rugs he uses for a pillow. He affects a state of great weakness, but I suspect that he's perfectly capable of leaping to his feet if he likes. Having been ejected, he said, from his proper social sphere because he had refused to conform to certain usual conventions, he was a rebel now, and was coming and going up and down the earth. As I really did not want to listen to all this nonsense, I told him that I had heard that sort of story about somebody else before. His grin is really ghastly. He confessed that I was very far from the sort of man he expected to meet. Then he said:

“‘As to me, I am no blacker than the gentleman you are thinking of, and I have neither more nor less determination.’“



Heyst looked across the table at Lena. Propped on her elbows, and holding her head in both hands, she moved it a little with an air of understanding.

“Nothing could be plainer, eh?” said Heyst grimly. “Unless, indeed, this is his idea of a pleasant joke; for, when he finished speaking, he burst into a loud long laugh. I didn’t join him!”

“I wish you had,” she breathed out.

“I didn’t join him. It did not occur to me. I am not much of a diplomatist. It would probably have been wise, for, indeed, I believe he had said more than he meant to say, and was trying to take it back by this affected jocularly. Yet when one thinks of it, diplomacy without force in the background is but a rotten reed to lean upon. And I don’t know whether I could have done it if I had thought of it. I don’t know. It would have been against the grain. Could I have done it? I have lived too long within myself, watching the mere shadows and shades of life. To deceive a man on some issue which could be decided quicker, by his destruction while one is disarmed, helpless, without even the power to run away — no! That seems to me too degrading. And yet I have you here. I have your very existence in my keeping. What do you say, Lena? Would I be capable of throwing you to the lions to save my dignity?”

She got up, walked quickly round the table, posed herself on his knees lightly, throwing one arm round his neck, and whispered in his ear:

“You may if you like. And may be that’s the only way I would consent to leave you. For something like that. If it were something no bigger than your little finger.”

She gave him a light kiss on the lips and was gone before he could detain her. She regained her seat and propped her elbows again on the table. It was hard to believe that she had moved from the spot at all. The fleeting weight of her body on his knees, the hug round his neck, the whisper in his ear, the kiss on his lips, might have been the unsubstantial sensations of a dream invading the reality of waking life; a sort of charming mirage in the barren aridity of his thoughts. He hesitated to speak till she said, businesslike:

“Well. And what then?”

Heyst gave a start.

“Oh, yes. I didn’t join him. I let him have his laugh out by himself. He was shaking all over, like a merry skeleton, under a cotton sheet he was covered with — I believe in order to conceal the revolver that he had in his

right hand. I didn't see it, but I have a distinct impression it was there in his fist. As he had not been looking at me for some time, but staring into a certain part of the room, I turned my head and saw a hairy, wild sort of creature which they take about with them, squatting on its heels in the angle of the walls behind me. He wasn't there when I came in. I didn't like the notion of that watchful monster behind my back. If I had been less at their mercy, I should certainly have changed my position. As things are now, to move would have been a mere weakness. So I remained where I was. The gentleman on the bed said he could assure me of one thing; and that was that his presence here was no more morally reprehensible than mine.

"‘We pursue the same ends,’ he said, ‘only perhaps I pursue them with more openness than you — with more simplicity.’

"That's what he said," Heyst went on, after looking at Lena in a sort of inquiring silence. "I asked him if he knew beforehand that I was living here; but he only gave me a ghastly grin. I didn't press him for an answer, Lena. I thought I had better not."

On her smooth forehead a ray of light always seemed to rest. Her loose hair, parted in the middle, covered the hands sustaining her head. She seemed spellbound by the interest of the narrative. Heyst did not pause long. He managed to continue his relation smoothly enough, beginning afresh with a piece of comment.

"He would have lied impudently — and I detest being told a lie. It makes me uncomfortable. It's pretty clear that I am not fitted for the affairs of the wide world. But I did not want him to think that I accepted his presence too meekly, so I said that his comings or goings on the earth were none of my business, of course, except that I had a natural curiosity to know when he would find it convenient to resume them.

"He asked me to look at the state he was in. Had I been all alone here, as they think I am, I should have laughed at him. But not being alone — I say, Lena, you are sure you haven't shown yourself where you could be seen?"

"Certain," she said promptly.

He looked relieved.

"You understand, Lena, that when I ask you to keep so strictly out of sight, it is because you are not for them to look at — to talk about. My poor Lena! I can't help that feeling. Do you understand it?"

She moved her head slightly in a manner that was neither affirmative nor negative.

“People will have to see me some day,” she said.

“I wonder how long it will be possible for you to keep out of sight?” murmured Heyst thoughtfully. He bent over the table. “Let me finish telling you. I asked him point blank what it was he wanted with me; he appeared extremely unwilling to come to the point. It was not really so pressing as all that, he said. His secretary, who was in fact his partner, was not present, having gone down to the wharf to look at their boat. Finally the fellow proposed that he should put off a certain communication he had to make till the day after tomorrow. I agreed; but I also told him that I was not at all anxious to hear it. I had no conception in what way his affairs could concern me.

“‘Ah, Mr. Heyst,’ he said, ‘you and I have much more in common than you think.’”

Heyst struck the table with his fist unexpectedly.

“It was a jeer; I am sure it was!”

He seemed ashamed of this outburst and smiled faintly into the motionless eyes of the girl.

“What could I have done — even if I had had my pockets full of revolvers?”

She made an appreciative sign.

“Killing’s a sin, sure enough,” she murmured.

“I went away,” Heyst continued. “I left him there, lying on his side with his eyes shut. When I got back here, I found you looking ill. What was it, Lena? You did give me a scare! Then I had the interview with Wang while you rested. You were sleeping quietly. I sat here to consider all these things calmly, to try to penetrate their inner meaning and their outward bearing. It struck me that the two days we have before us have the character of a sort of truce. The more I thought of it, the more I felt that this was tacitly understood between Jones and myself. It was to our advantage, if anything can be of advantage to people caught so completely unawares as we are. Wang was gone. He, at any rate, had declared himself, but as I did not know what he might take it into his head to do, I thought I had better warn these people that I was no longer responsible for the Chinaman. I did not want Mr. Wang making some move which would precipitate the action against us. Do you see my point of view?”

She made a sign that she did. All her soul was wrapped in her passionate determination, in an exalted belief in herself — in the contemplation of her amazing opportunity to win the certitude, the eternity, of that man's love.

"I never saw two men," Heyst was saying, "more affected by a piece of information than Jones and his secretary, who was back in the bungalow by then. They had not heard me come up. I told them I was sorry to intrude.

"Not at all! Not at all," said Jones.

"The secretary backed away into a corner and watched me like a wary cat. In fact, they both were visibly on their guard.

"I am come," I told them, "to let you know that my servant has deserted — gone off."

"At first they looked at each other as if they had not understood what I was saying; but very soon they seemed quite concerned.

"You mean to say your Chink's cleared out?" said Ricardo, coming forward from his corner. "Like this — all at once? What did he do it for?"

"I said that a Chinaman had always a simple and precise reason for what he did, but that to get such a reason out of him was not so easy. All he told me, I said, was that he 'didn't like'.

"They were extremely disturbed at this. Didn't like what, they wanted to know.

"The looks of you and your party," I told Jones.

"Nonsense!" he cried out, and immediately Ricardo, the short man, struck in.

"Told you that? What did he take you for, sir — an infant? Or do you take us for kids? — meaning no offence. Come, I bet you will tell us next that you've missed something."

"I didn't mean to tell you anything of the sort," I said, "but as a matter of fact it is so."

"He slapped his thigh.

"Thought so. What do you think of this trick, governor?"

"Jones made some sort of sign to him, and then that extraordinary cat-faced associate proposed that he and their servant should come out and help me catch or kill the Chink.

"My object, I said, was not to get assistance. I did not intend to chase the Chinaman. I had come only to warn them that he was armed, and that he really objected to their presence on the island. I wanted them to understand that I was not responsible for anything that might happen.

“‘Do you mean to tell us,’ asked Ricardo, ‘that there is a crazy Chink with a six-shooter broke loose on this island, and that you don’t care?’

“Strangely enough they did not seem to believe my story. They were exchanging significant looks all the time. Ricardo stole up close to his principal; they had a confabulation together, and then something happened which I did not expect. It’s rather awkward, too.

“Since I would not have their assistance to get hold of the Chink and recover my property, the least they could do was to send me their servant. It was Jones who said that, and Ricardo backed up the idea.

“‘Yes, yes — let our Pedro cook for all hands in your compound! He isn’t so bad as he looks. That’s what we will do!’

“He hustled out of the room to the veranda, and let out an ear-splitting whistle for their Pedro. Having heard the brute’s answering howl, Ricardo ran back into the room.

“‘Yes, Mr. Heyst. This will do capitally, Mr. Heyst. You just direct him to do whatever you are accustomed to have done for you in the way of attendance. See?’

“Lena, I confess to you that I was taken completely by surprise. I had not expected anything of the sort. I don’t know what I expected. I am so anxious about you that I can’t keep away from these infernal scoundrels. And only two months ago I would not have cared. I would have defied their scoundrelism as much as I have scorned all the other intrusions of life. But now I have you! You stole into my life, and — ”

Heyst drew a deep breath. The girl gave him a quick, wide-eyed glance.

“Ah! That’s what you are thinking of — that you have me!”

It was impossible to read the thoughts veiled by her steady grey eyes, to penetrate the meaning of her silences, her words, and even her embraces. He used to come out of her very arms with the feeling of a baffled man.

“If I haven’t you, if you are not here, then where are you?” cried Heyst. “You understand me very well.”

She shook her head a little. Her red lips, at which he looked now, her lips as fascinating as the voice that came out of them, uttered the words:

“I hear what you say; but what does it mean?”

“It means that I could lie and perhaps cringe for your sake.”

“No! No! Don’t you ever do that,” she said in haste, while her eyes glistened suddenly. “You would hate me for it afterwards!”

“Hate you?” repeated Heyst, who had recalled his polite manner. “No! You needn’t consider the extremity of the improbable — as yet. But I will confess to you that I — how shall I call it? — that I dissembled. First I dissembled my dismay at the unforeseen result of my idiotic diplomacy. Do you understand, my dear girl?”

It was evident that she did not understand the word. Heyst produced his playful smile, which contrasted oddly with the worried character of his whole expression. His temples seemed to have sunk in, his face looked a little leaner.

“A diplomatic statement, Lena, is a statement of which everything is true, but the sentiment which seems to prompt it. I have never been diplomatic in my relation with mankind — not from regard for its feelings, but from a certain regard for my own. Diplomacy doesn’t go well with consistent contempt. I cared little for life and still less for death.”

“Don’t talk like that!”

“I dissembled my extreme longing to take these wandering scoundrels by their throats,” he went on. “I have only two hands — I wish I had a hundred to defend you — and there were three throats. By that time their Pedro was in the room too. Had he seen me engaged with their two throats, he would have been at mine like a fierce dog, or any other savage and faithful brute. I had no difficulty in dissembling my longing for the vulgar, stupid, and hopeless argument of fight. I remarked that I really did not want a servant. I couldn’t think of depriving them of their man’s services; but they would not hear me. They had made up their minds.

“‘We shall send him over at once,’ Ricardo said, ‘to start cooking dinner for everybody. I hope you won’t mind me coming to eat it with you in your bungalow; and we will send the governor’s dinner over to him here.’

“I could do nothing but hold my tongue or bring on a quarrel — some manifestation of their dark purpose, which we have no means to resist. Of course, you may remain invisible this evening; but with that atrocious-brute prowling all the time at the back of the house, how long can your presence be concealed from these men?”

Heyst’s distress could be felt in his silence. The girl’s head, sustained by her hands buried in the thick masses of her hair, had a perfect immobility.

“You are certain you have not been seen so far?” he asked suddenly.

The motionless head spoke.

“How can I be certain? You told me you wanted me to keep out of the way. I kept out of the way. I didn’t ask your reason. I thought you didn’t want people to know that you had a girl like me about you.”

“What? Ashamed?” cried Heyst.

“It isn’t what’s right, perhaps — I mean for you — is it?”

Heyst lifted his hands, reproachfully courteous.

“I look upon it as so very much right that I couldn’t bear the idea of any other than sympathetic, respectful eyes resting on you. I disliked and mistrusted these fellows from the first. Didn’t you understand?”

“Yes; I did keep out of sight,” she said.

A silence fell. At last Heyst stirred slightly.

“All this is of very little importance now,” he said with a sigh. “This is a question of something infinitely worse than mere looks and thoughts, however base and contemptible. As I have told you, I met Ricardo’s suggestions by silence. As I was turning away he said:

“‘If you happen to have the key of that store-room of yours on you, Mr. Heyst, you may just as well let me have it; I will give it to our Pedro.’

“I had it on me, and I tendered it to him without speaking. The hairy creature was at the door by then, and caught the key, which Ricardo threw to him, better than any trained ape could have done. I came away. All the time I had been thinking anxiously of you, whom I had left asleep, alone here, and apparently ill.”

Heyst interrupted himself, with a listening turn of his head. He had heard the faint sound of sticks being snapped in the compound. He rose and crossed the room to look out of the back door.

“And here the creature is,” he said, returning to the table. “Here he is, already attending to the fire. Oh, my dear Lena!”

She had followed him with her eyes. She watched him go out on the front veranda cautiously. He lowered stealthily a couple of screens that hung between the column, and remained outside very still, as if interested by something on the open ground. Meantime she had risen in her turn, to take a peep into the compound. Heyst, glancing over his shoulder, saw her returning to her seat. He beckoned to her, and she continued to move, crossing the shady room, pure and bright in her white dress, her hair loose, with something of a sleep-walker in her unhurried motion, in her extended hand, in the sightless effect of her grey eyes luminous in the half-light. He had never seen such an expression in her face before. It had dreaminess in

it, intense attention, and something like sternness. Arrested in the doorway by Heyst's extended arm, she seemed to wake up, flushed faintly — and this flush, passing off, carried away with it the strange transfiguring mood. With a courageous gesture she pushed back the heavy masses of her hair. The light clung to her forehead. Her delicate nostrils quivered. Heyst seized her arm and whispered excitedly:

“Slip out here, quickly! The screens will conceal you. Only you must mind the stair-space. They are actually out — I mean the other two. You had better see them before you — ”

She made a barely perceptible movement of recoil, checked at once, and stood still. Heyst released her arm.

“Yes, perhaps I had better,” she said with unnatural deliberation, and stepped out on the veranda to stand close by his side.

Together, one on each side of the screen, they peeped between the edge of the canvas and the veranda-post entwined with creepers. A great heat ascended from the sun-smitten ground, in an ever-rising wave, as if from some secret store of earth's fiery heart; for the sky was growing cooler already, and the sun had declined sufficiently for the shadows of Mr. Jones and his henchman to be projected towards the bungalow side by side — one infinitely slender, the other short and broad.

The two visitors stood still and gazed. To keep up the fiction of his invalidism, Mr. Jones, the gentleman, leaned on the arm of Ricardo, the secretary, the top of whose hat just came up to his governor's shoulder.

“Do you see them?” Heyst whispered into the girl's ear. “Here they are, the envoys of the outer world. Here they are before you — evil intelligence, instinctive savagery, arm in arm. The brute force is at the back. A trio of fitting envoys perhaps — but what about the welcome? Suppose I were armed, could I shoot these two down where they stand? Could I?”

Without moving her head, the girl felt for Heyst's hand, pressed it and thereafter did not let it go. He continued, bitterly playful:

“I don't know. I don't think so. There is a strain in me which lays me under an insensate obligation to avoid even the appearance of murder. I have never pulled a trigger or lifted my hand on a man, even in self-defence.”

The suddenly tightened grip of her hand checked him.

“They are making a move,” she murmured.

“Can they be thinking of coming here?” Heyst wondered anxiously.



“No, they aren’t coming this way,” she said; and there was another pause. “They are going back to their house,” she reported finally.

After watching them a little longer, she let go Heyst’s hand and moved away from the screen. He followed her into the room.

“You have seen them now,” he began. “Think what it was to me to see them land in the dusk, fantasies from the sea — apparitions, chimeras! And they persist. That’s the worst of it — they persist. They have no right to be — but they are. They ought to have aroused my fury. But I have refined everything away by this time — anger, indignation, scorn itself. Nothing’s left but disgust. Since you have told me of that abominable calumny, it has become immense — it extends even to myself.” He looked up at her.

“But luckily I have you. And if only Wang had not carried off that miserable revolver — yes, Lena, here we are, we two!”

She put both her hands on his shoulders and looked straight into his eyes. He returned her penetrating gaze. It baffled him. He could not pierce the grey veil of her eyes; but the sadness of her voice thrilled him profoundly.

“You are not reproaching me?” she asked slowly.

“Reproach? What a word between us! It could only be myself — but the mention of Wang has given me an idea. I have been, not exactly cringing, not exactly lying, but still dissembling. You have been hiding yourself, to please me, but still you have been hiding. All this is very dignified. Why shouldn’t we try begging now? A noble art? Yes. Lena, we must go out together. I couldn’t think of leaving you alone, and I must — yes, I must speak to Wang. We shall go and seek that man, who knows what he wants and how to secure what he wants. We will go at once!”

“Wait till I put my hair up,” she agreed instantly, and vanished behind the curtain.

When the curtain had fallen behind her, she turned her head back with an expression of infinite and tender concern for him — for him whom she could never hope to understand, and whom she was afraid she could never satisfy, as if her passion were of a hopelessly lower quality, unable to appease some exalted and delicate desire of his superior soul. In a couple of minutes she reappeared. They left the house by the door of the compound, and passed within three feet of the thunderstruck Pedro, without even looking in his direction. He rose from stooping over a fire of sticks, and, balancing himself clumsily, uncovered his enormous fangs in gaping

astonishment. Then suddenly he set off rolling on his bandy legs to impart to his masters the astonishing discovery of a woman.

## CHAPTER SIX

As luck would have it, Ricardo was lounging alone on the veranda of the former counting-house. He scented some new development at once, and ran down to meet the trotting, bear-like figure. The deep, growling noises it made, though they had only a very remote resemblance to the Spanish language, or indeed to any sort of human speech, were from long practice quite intelligible to Mr. Jones's secretary. Ricardo was rather surprised. He had imagined that the girl would continue to keep out of sight. That line apparently was given up. He did not mistrust her. How could he? Indeed, he could not think of her existence calmly.

He tried to keep her image out of his mind so that he should be able to use its powers with some approach to that coolness which the complex nature of the situation demanded from him, both for his own sake and as the faithful follower of plain Mr. Jones, gentleman.

He collected his wits and thought. This was a change of policy, probably on the part of Heyst. If so, what could it mean? A deep fellow! Unless it was her doing; in which case — h'm — all right. Must be. She would know what she was doing. Before him Pedro, lifting his feet alternately, swayed to and fro sideways — his usual attitude of expectation. His little red eyes, lost in the mass of hair, were motionless. Ricardo stared into them with calculated contempt and said in a rough, angry voice:

"Woman! Of course there is. We know that without you!" He gave the tame monster a push. "Git! Vamos! Waddle! Get back and cook the dinner. Which way did they go, then?"

Pedro extended a huge, hairy forearm to show the direction, and went off on his bandy legs. Advancing a few steps, Ricardo was just in time to see, above some bushes, two white helmets moving side by side in the clearing. They disappeared. Now that he had managed to keep Pedro from informing the governor that there was a woman on the island, he could indulge in speculation as to the movements of these people. His attitude towards Mr. Jones had undergone a spiritual change, of which he himself was not yet fully aware.

That morning, before tiffin, after his escape from the Heyst bungalow, completed in such an inspiring way by the recovery of the slipper, Ricardo had made his way to their allotted house, reeling as he ran, his head in a whirl. He was wildly excited by visions of inconceivable promise. He

waited to compose himself before he dared to meet the governor. On entering the room, he found Mr. Jones sitting on the camp bedstead like a tailor on his board, cross-legged, his long back against the wall.

"I say, sir. You aren't going to tell me you are bored?"

"Bored! No! Where the devil have you been all this time?"

"Observing — watching — nosing around. What else? I knew you had company. Have you talked freely, sir?"

"Yes, I have," muttered Mr. Jones.

"Not downright plain, sir?"

"No. I wished you had been here. You loaf all the morning, and now you come in out of breath. What's the matter?"

"I haven't been wasting my time out there," said Ricardo. "Nothing's the matter. I — I — might have hurried a bit." He was in truth still panting; only it was not with running, but with the tumult of thoughts and sensations long repressed, which had been set free by the adventure of the morning. He was almost distracted by them now. He forgot himself in the maze of possibilities threatening and inspiring. "And so you had a long talk?" he said, to gain time.

"Confound you! The sun hasn't affected your head, has it? Why are you staring at me like a basilisk?"

"Beg pardon, sir. Wasn't aware I stared," Ricardo apologized good-humouredly. "The sun might well affect a thicker skull than mine. It blazes. Phew! What do you think a fellow is, sir — a salamander?"

"You ought to have been here," observed Mr. Jones.

"Did the beast give any signs of wanting to prance?" asked Ricardo quickly, with absolutely genuine anxiety. "It wouldn't do, sir. You must play him easy for at least a couple of days, sir. I have a plan. I have a notion that I can find out a lot in a couple of days."

"You have? In what way?"

"Why, by watching," Ricardo answered slowly.

Mr Jones grunted.

"Nothing new, that. Watch, eh? Why not pray a little, too?"

"Ha, ha, ha! That's a good one," burst out the secretary, fixing Mr. Jones with mirthless eyes.

The latter dropped the subject indolently.

"Oh, you may be certain of at least two days," he said.

Ricardo recovered himself. His eyes gleamed voluptuously.

“We’ll pull this off yet — clean — whole — right through, if you will only trust me, sir.”

“I am trusting you right enough,” said Mr. Jones. “It’s your interest, too.”

And, indeed, Ricardo was truthful enough in his statement. He did absolutely believe in success now. But he couldn’t tell his governor that he had intelligences in the enemy’s camp. It wouldn’t do to tell him of the girl. Devil only knew what he would do if he learned there was a woman about. And how could he begin to tell of it? He couldn’t confess his sudden escapade.

“We’ll pull it off, sir,” he said, with perfectly acted cheerfulness. He experienced gusts of awful joy expanding in his heart and hot like a fanned flame.

“We must,” pronounced Mr. Jones. “This thing, Martin, is not like our other tries. I have a peculiar feeling about this. It’s a different thing. It’s a sort of test.”

Ricardo was impressed by the governor’s manner; for the first time a hint of passion could be detected in him. But also a word he used, the word “test,” had struck him as particularly significant somehow. It was the last word uttered during that morning’s conversation. Immediately afterwards Ricardo went out of the room. It was impossible for him to keep still. An elation in which an extraordinary softness mingled with savage triumph would not allow it. It prevented his thinking, also. He walked up and down the veranda far into the afternoon, eyeing the other bungalow at every turn. It gave no sign of being inhabited. Once or twice he stopped dead short and looked down at his left slipper. Each time he chuckled audibly. His restlessness kept on increasing till at last it frightened him. He caught hold of the balustrade of the veranda and stood still, smiling not at his thought but at the strong sense of life within him. He abandoned himself to it carelessly, even recklessly. He cared for no one, friend or enemy. At that moment Mr. Jones called him by name from within. A shadow fell on the secretary’s face.

“Here, sir,” he answered; but it was a moment before he could make up his mind to go in.

He found the governor on his feet. Mr. Jones was tired of lying down when there was no necessity for it. His slender form, gliding about the room, came to a standstill.

“I’ve been thinking, Martin, of something you suggested. At the time it did not strike me as practical; but on reflection it seems to me that to propose a game is as good a way as any to let him understand that the time has come to disgorge. It’s less — how should I say? — vulgar. He will know what it means. It’s not a bad form to give to the business — which in itself is crude, Martin, crude.”

“Want to spare his feelings?” jeered the secretary in such a bitter tone that Mr. Jones was really surprised.

“Why, it was your own notion, confound you!”

“Who says it wasn’t?” retorted Ricardo sulkily. “But I am fairly sick of this crawling. No! No! Get the exact bearings of his swag and then a rip up. That’s plenty good enough for him.”

His passions being thoroughly aroused, a thirst for blood was allied in him with a thirst for tenderness — yes, tenderness. A sort of anxious, melting sensation pervaded and softened his heart when he thought of that girl — one of his own sort. And at the same time jealousy started gnawing at his breast as the image of Heyst intruded itself on his fierce anticipation of bliss.

“The crudeness of your ferocity is positively gross, Martin,” Mr. Jones said disdainfully. “You don’t even understand my purpose. I mean to have some sport out of him. Just try to imagine the atmosphere of the game — the fellow handling the cards — the agonizing mockery of it! Oh, I shall appreciate this greatly. Yes, let him lose his money instead of being forced to hand it over. You, of course, would shoot him at once, but I shall enjoy the refinement and the jest of it. He’s a man of the best society. I’ve been hounded out of my sphere by people very much like that fellow. How enraged and humiliated he will be! I promise myself some exquisite moments while watching his play.”

“Ay, and suppose he suddenly starts prancing. He may not appreciate the fun.”

“I mean you to be present,” Mr. Jones remarked calmly.

“Well, as long as I am free to plug him or rip him up whenever I think the time has come, you are welcome to your bit of sport, sir. I shan’t spoil it.”

## CHAPTER SEVEN

It was at this precise moment of their conversation that Heyst had intruded on Mr. Jones and his secretary with his warning about Wang, as he had related to Lena. When he left them, the two looked at each other in wondering silence. My Jones was the first to break it.

"I say, Martin!"

"Yes, sir."

"What does this mean?"

"It's some move. Blame me if I can understand."

"Too deep for you?" Mr. Jones inquired dryly.

"It's nothing but some of his infernal impudence," growled the secretary. "You don't believe all that about the Chink, do you, sir? 'Tain't true."

"It isn't necessary for it to be true to have a meaning for us. It's the why of his coming to tell us this tale that's important."

"Do you think he made it up to frighten us?" asked Ricardo.

Mr Jones scowled at him thoughtfully.

"The man looked worried," he muttered, as if to himself. "Suppose that Chinaman has really stolen his money! The man looked very worried."

"Nothing but his artfulness, sir," protested Ricardo earnestly, for the idea was too disconcerting to entertain. "Is it likely that he would have trusted a Chink with enough knowledge to make it possible?" he argued warmly. "Why, it's the very thing that he would keep close about. There's something else there. Ay, but what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Mr. Jones let out a ghostly, squeaky laugh. "I've never been placed in such a ridiculous position before," he went on, with a sepulchral equanimity of tone. "It's you, Martin, who dragged me into it. However, it's my own fault too. I ought to — but I was really too bored to use my brain, and yours is not to be trusted. You are a hothead!"

A blasphemous exclamation of grief escaped from Ricardo. Not to be trusted! Hothead! He was almost tearful.

"Haven't I heard you, sir, saying more than twenty times since we got fired out from Manila that we should want a lot of capital to work the East Coast with? You were always telling me that to prime properly all them officials and Portuguese scallywags we should have to lose heavily at first. Weren't you always worrying about some means of getting hold of a good lot of cash? It wasn't to be got hold of by allowing yourself to become

bored in that rotten Dutch town and playing a two-penny game with confounded beggarly bank clerks and such like. Well, I've brought you here, where there is cash to be got — and a big lot, to a moral," he added through his set teeth.

Silence fell. Each of them was staring into a different corner of the room. Suddenly, with a slight stamp of his foot, Mr. Jones made for the door. Ricardo caught him up outside.

"Put an arm through mine, sir," he begged him gently but firmly. "No use giving the game away. An invalid may well come out for a breath of fresh air after the sun's gone down a bit. That's it, sir. But where do you want to go? Why did you come out, sir?"

Mr Jones stopped short.

"I hardly know myself," he confessed in a hollow mutter, staring intently at the Number One bungalow. "It's quite irrational," he declared in a still lower tone.

"Better go in, sir," suggested Ricardo. "What's that? Those screens weren't down before. He's spying from behind them now, I bet — the dodging, artful, plotting beast!"

"Why not go over there and see if we can't get to the bottom of this game?" was the unexpected proposal uttered by Mr. Jones. "He will have to talk to us."

Ricardo repressed a start of dismay, but for a moment could not speak. He only pressed the governor's hand to his side instinctively.

"No, sir. What could you say? Do you expect to get to the bottom of his lies? How could you make him talk? It isn't time yet to come to grips with that gent. You don't think I would hang back, do you? His Chink, of course, I'll shoot like a dog the moment I catch sight of him; but as to that Mr. Blasted Heyst, the time isn't yet. My head's cooler just now than yours. Let's go in again. Why, we are exposed here. Suppose he took it into his head to let off a gun on us! He's an unaccountable, 'yporcritical skunk."

Allowing himself to be persuaded, Mr. Jones returned to his seclusion. The secretary, however, remained on the veranda — for the purpose, he said, of seeing whether that Chink wasn't sneaking around; in which case he proposed to take a long shot at the galoot and chance the consequences. His real reason was that he wanted to be alone, away from the governor's deep-sunk eyes. He felt a sentimental desire to indulge his fancies in



solitude. A great change had come over Mr. Ricardo since that morning. A whole side of him which from prudence, from necessity, from loyalty, had been kept dormant, was aroused now, colouring his thoughts and disturbing his mental poise by the vision of such staggering consequences as, for instance, the possibility of an active conflict with the governor. The appearance of the monstrous Pedro with his news drew Ricardo out of a feeling of dreaminess wrapped up in a sense of impending trouble. A woman? Yes, there was one; and it made all the difference. After driving away Pedro, and watching the white helmets of Heyst and Lena vanishing among the bushes he stood lost in meditation.

“Where could they be off to like this?” he mentally asked himself.

The answer found by his speculative faculties on their utmost stretch was — to meet that Chink. For in the desertion of Wang Ricardo did not believe. It was a lying yarn, the organic part of a dangerous plot. Heyst had gone to combine some fresh move. But then Ricardo felt sure that the girl was with him — the girl full of pluck, full of sense, full of understanding; an ally of his own kind!

He went indoors briskly. Mr. Jones had resumed his cross-legged pose at the head of the bed, with his back against the wall.

“Anything new?”

“No, sir.”

Ricardo walked about the room as if he had no care in the world. He hummed snatches of song. Mr. Jones raised his waspish eyebrows, at the sound. The secretary got down on his knees before an old leather trunk, and, rummaging in there, brought out a small looking-glass. He fell to examining his physiognomy in it with silent absorption.

“I think I’ll shave,” he decided, getting up.

He gave a sidelong glance to the governor, and repeated it several times during the operation, which did not take long, and even afterwards, when after putting away the implements, he resumed his walking, humming more snatches of unknown songs. Mr. Jones preserved a complete immobility, his thin lips compressed, his eyes veiled. His face was like a carving.

“So you would like to try your hand at cards with that skunk, sir?” said Ricardo, stopping suddenly and rubbing his hands.

Mr Jones gave no sign of having heard anything.

“Well, why not? Why shouldn’t he have the experience? You remember in that Mexican town — what’s its name? — the robber fellow they caught

in the mountains and condemned to be shot? He played cards half the night with the jailer and the sheriff. Well, this fellow is condemned, too. He must give you your game. Hang it all, a gentleman ought to have some little relaxation! And you have been uncommonly patient, sir.”

“You are uncommonly volatile all of a sudden,” Mr. Jones remarked in a bored voice. “What’s come to you?”

The secretary hummed for a while, and then said:

“I’ll try to get him over here for you tonight, after dinner. If I ain’t here myself, don’t you worry, sir. I shall be doing a bit of nosing around — see?”

“I see,” sneered Mr. Jones languidly. “But what do you expect to see in the dark?”

Ricardo made no answer, and after another turn or two slipped out of the room. He no longer felt comfortable alone with the governor.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

Meantime Heyst and Lena, walking rather fast, approached Wang's hut. Asking the girl to wait, Heyst ascended the little ladder of bamboos giving access to the door. It was as he had expected. The smoky interior was empty, except for a big chest of sandalwood too heavy for hurried removal. Its lid was thrown up, but whatever it might have contained was no longer there. All Wang's possessions were gone. Without tarrying in the hut, Heyst came back to the girl, who asked no questions, with her strange air of knowing or understanding everything.

"Let us push on," he said.

He went ahead, the rustle of her white skirt following him into the shades of the forest, along the path of their usual walk. Though the air lay heavy between straight denuded trunks, the sunlit patches moved on the ground, and raising her eyes Lena saw far above her head the flutter of the leaves, the surface shudder on the mighty limbs extended horizontally in the perfect immobility of patience. Twice Heyst looked over his shoulder at her. Behind the readiness of her answering smile there was a fund of devoted, concentrated passion, burning with the hope of a more perfect satisfaction. They passed the spot where it was their practice to turn towards the barren summit of the central hill. Heyst held steadily on his way towards the upper limit of the forest. The moment they left its shelter, a breeze enveloped them, and a great cloud, racing over the sun, threw a peculiar sombre tint over everything. Heyst pointed up a precipitous, rugged path clinging to the side of the hill. It ended in a barricade of felled trees, a primitively conceived obstacle which must have cost much labour to erect at just that spot.

"This," Heyst, explained in his urbane tone, "is a barrier against the march of civilization. The poor folk over there did not like it, as it appeared to them in the shape of my company — a great step forward, as some people used to call it with mistaken confidence. The advanced foot has been drawn back, but the barricade remains."

They went on climbing slowly. The cloud had driven over, leaving an added brightness on the face of the world.

"It's a very ridiculous thing," Heyst went on; "but then it is the product of honest fear — fear of the unknown, of the incomprehensible. It's pathetic,

too, in a way. And I heartily wish, Lena, that we were on the other side of it."

"Oh, stop, stop!" she cried, seizing his arm.

The face of the barricade they were approaching had been piled up with a lot of fresh-cut branches. The leaves were still green. A gentle breeze, sweeping over the top, stirred them a little; but what had startled the girl was the discovery of several spear-blades protruding from the mass of foliage. She had made them out suddenly. They did not gleam, but she saw them with extreme distinctness, very still, very vicious to look at.

"You had better let me go forward alone, Lena," said Heyst.

She tugged, persistently at his arm, but after a time, during which he never ceased to look smilingly into her terrified eyes, he ended by disengaging himself.

"It's a sign rather than a demonstration," he argued, persuasively. "Just wait here a moment. I promise not to approach near enough to be stabbed."

As in a nightmare she watched Heyst go up the few yards of the path as if he never meant to stop; and she heard his voice, like voices heard in dreams, shouting unknown words in an unearthly tone. Heyst was only demanding to see Wang. He was not kept waiting very long. Recovering from the first flurry of her fright, Lena noticed a commotion in the green top-dressing of the barricade. She exhaled a sigh of relief when the spear-blades retreated out of sight, sliding inward — the horrible things! in a spot facing Heyst a pair of yellow hands parted the leaves, and a face filled the small opening — a face with very noticeable eyes. It was Wang's face, of course, with no suggestion of a body belonging to it, like those cardboard faces at which she remembered gazing as a child in the window of a certain dim shop kept by a mysterious little man in Kingsland Road. Only this face, instead of mere holes, had eyes which blinked. She could see the beating of the eyelids. The hands on each side of the face, keeping the boughs apart, also did not look as if they belonged to any real body. One of them was holding a revolver — a weapon which she recognized merely by intuition, never having seen such an object before.

She leaned her shoulders against the rock of the perpendicular hillside and kept her eyes on Heyst, with comparative composure, since the spears were not menacing him any longer. Beyond the rigid and motionless back he presented to her, she saw Wang's unreal cardboard face moving its thin lips and grimacing artificially. She was too far down the path to hear the

dialogue, carried on in an ordinary voice. She waited patiently for its end. Her shoulders felt the warmth of the rock; now and then a whiff of cooler air seemed to slip down upon her head from above; the ravine at her feet, choked full of vegetation, emitted the faint, drowsy hum of insect life. Everything was very quiet. She failed to notice the exact moment when Wang's head vanished from the foliage, taking the unreal hands away with it. To her horror, the spear-blades came gliding slowly out. The very hair on her head stirred; but before she had time to cry out, Heyst, who seemed rooted to the ground, turned round abruptly and began to move towards her. His great moustaches did not quite hide an ugly but irresolute smile; and when he had come down near enough to touch her, he burst out into a harsh laugh:

“Ha, ha, ha!”

She looked at him, uncomprehending. He cut short his laugh and said curtly:

“We had better go down as we came.”

She followed him into the forest. The advance of the afternoon had filled it with gloom. Far away a slant of light between the trees closed the view. All was dark beyond. Heyst stopped.

“No reason to hurry, Lena,” he said in his ordinary, serenely polite tones. “We return unsuccessful. I suppose you know, or at least can guess, what was my object in coming up there?”

“No, I can't guess, dear,” she said, and smiled, noticing with emotion that his breast was heaving as if he had been out of breath. Nevertheless, he tried to command his speech, pausing only a little between the words.

“No? I went up to find Wang. I went up” — he gasped again here, but this was for the last time — “I made you come with me because I didn't like to leave you unprotected in the proximity of those fellows.” Suddenly he snatched his cork helmet off his head and dashed it on the ground. “No!” he cried roughly. “All this is too unreal altogether. It isn't to be borne! I can't protect you! I haven't the power.”

He glared at her for a moment, then hastened after his hat which had bounded away to some distance. He came back looking at her face, which was very white.

“I ought to beg your pardon for these antics,” he said, adjusting his hat. “A movement of childish petulance! Indeed, I feel very much like a child in my ignorance, in my powerlessness, in my want of resource, in everything

except in the dreadful consciousness of some evil hanging over your head — yours!”

“It’s you they are after,” she murmured.

“No doubt, but unfortunately — ”

“Unfortunately — what?”

“Unfortunately, I have not succeeded with Wang,” he said. “I failed to move his Celestial heart — that is, if there is such a thing. He told me with horrible Chinese reasonableness that he could not let us pass the barrier, because we should be pursued. He doesn’t like fights. He gave me to understand that he would shoot me with my own revolver without any sort of compunction, rather than risk a rude and distasteful contest with the strange barbarians for my sake. He has preached to the villagers. They respect him. He is the most remarkable man they have ever seen, and their kinsman by marriage. They understand his policy. And anyway only women and children and a few old fellows are left in the village. This is the season when the men are away in trading vessels. But it would have been all the same. None of them have a taste for fighting — and with white men too! They are peaceable, kindly folk and would have seen me shot with extreme satisfaction. Wang seemed to think my insistence — for I insisted, you know — very stupid and tactless. But a drowning man clutches at straws. We were talking in such Malay as we are both equal to.

“‘Your fears are foolish,’ I said to him.

“‘Foolish? of course I am foolish,’ he replied. ‘If I were a wise man, I would be a merchant with a big hong in Singapore, instead of being a mine coolie turned houseboy. But if you don’t go away in time, I will shoot you before it grows too dark to take aim. Not till then, Number One, but I will do it then. Now — finish!’

“‘All right,’ I said. ‘Finish as far as I am concerned; but you can have no objections to the mem putih coming over to stay with the Orang Kaya’s women for a few days. I will make a present in silver for it.’ Orang Kaya, is the head man of the village, Lena,” added Heyst.

She looked at him in astonishment.

“You wanted me to go to that village of savages?” she gasped. “You wanted me to leave you?”

“It would have given me a freer hand.”

Heyst stretched out his hands and looked at them for a moment, then let them fall by his side. Indignation was expressed more in the curve of her

lips than in her clear eyes, which never wavered.

"I believe Wang laughed," he went on. "He made a noise like a turkey-cock."

"That would be worse than anything," he told me.

"I was taken aback. I pointed out to him that he was talking nonsense. It could not make any difference to his security where you were, because the evil men, as he calls them, did not know of your existence. I did not lie exactly, Lena, though I did stretch the truth till it cracked; but the fellow seems to have an uncanny insight. He shook his head. He assured me they knew all about you. He made a horrible grimace at me."

"It doesn't matter," said the girl. "I didn't want — I would not have gone."

Heyst raised his eyes.

"Wonderful intuition! As I continued to press him, Wang made that very remark about you. When he smiles, his face looks like a conceited death's head. It was his very last remark that you wouldn't want to. I went away then."

She leaned back against a tree. Heyst faced her in the same attitude of leisure, as if they had done with time and all the other concerns of the earth. Suddenly, high above their heads the roof of leaves whispered at them tumultuously and then ceased.

"That was a strange notion of yours, to send me away," she said. "Send me away? What for? Yes, what for?"

"You seem indignant," he remarked listlessly.

"To these savages, too!" she pursued. "And you think I would have gone? You can do what you like with me — but not that, not that!"

Heyst looked into the dim aisles of the forest. Everything was so still now that the very ground on which they stood seemed to exhale silence into the shade.

"Why be indignant?" he remonstrated. "It has not happened. I gave up pleading with Wang. Here we are, repulsed! Not only without power to resist the evil, but unable to make terms for ourselves with the worthy envoys, the envoys extraordinary of the world we thought we had done with for years and years. And that's bad, Lena, very bad."

"It's funny," she said thoughtfully. "Bad? I suppose it is. I don't know that it is. But do you? Do you? You talk as if you didn't believe in it."

She gazed at him earnestly.

“Do I? Ah! That’s it. I don’t know how to talk. I have managed to refine everything away. I’ve said to the Earth that bore me: ‘I am I and you are a shadow.’ And, by Jove, it is so! But it appears that such words cannot be uttered with impunity. Here I am on a Shadow inhabited by Shades. How helpless a man is against the Shades! How is one to intimidate, persuade, resist, assert oneself against them? I have lost all belief in realities . . . Lena, give me your hand.”

She looked at him surprised, uncomprehending.

“Your hand,” he cried.

She obeyed; he seized it with avidity as if eager to raise it to his lips, but halfway up released his grasp. They looked at each other for a time.

“What’s the matter, dear?” she whispered timidly.

“Neither force nor conviction,” Heyst muttered wearily to himself. “How am I to meet this charmingly simple problem?”

“I am sorry,” she murmured.

“And so am I,” he confessed quickly. “And the bitterest of this humiliation is its complete uselessness — which I feel, I feel!”

She had never before seen him give such signs of feeling. Across his ghastly face the long moustaches flamed in the shade. He spoke suddenly:

“I wonder if I could find enough courage to creep among them in the night, with a knife, and cut their throats one after another, as they slept! I wonder — ”

She was frightened by his unwonted appearance more than by the words in his mouth, and said earnestly:

“Don’t you try to do such a thing! Don’t you think of it!”

“I don’t possess anything bigger than a penknife. As to thinking of it, Lena, there’s no saying what one may think of. I don’t think. Something in me thinks — something foreign to my nature. What is the matter?”

He noticed her parted lips, and the peculiar stare in her eyes, which had wandered from his face.

“There’s somebody after us. I saw something white moving,” she cried.

Heyst did not turn his head; he only glanced at her out-stretched arm.

“No doubt we are followed; we are watched.”

“I don’t see anything now,” she said.

“And it does not matter,” Heyst went on in his ordinary voice. “Here we are in the forest. I have neither strength nor persuasion. Indeed, it’s extremely difficult to be eloquent before a Chinaman’s head stuck at one



out of a lot of brushwood. But can we wander among these big trees indefinitely? Is this a refuge? No! What else is left to us? I did think for a moment of the mine; but even there we could not remain very long. And then that gallery is not safe. The props were too weak to begin with. Ants have been at work there — ants after the men. A death-trap, at best. One can die but once, but there are many manners of death.”

The girl glanced about fearfully, in search of the watcher or follower whom she had glimpsed once among the trees; but if he existed, he had concealed himself. Nothing met her eyes but the deepening shadows of the short vistas between the living columns of the still roof of leaves. She looked at the man beside her expectantly, tenderly, with suppressed affright and a sort of awed wonder.

“I have also thought of these people’s boat,” Heyst went on. “We could get into that, and — only they have taken everything out of her. I have seen her oars and mast in a corner of their room. To shove off in an empty boat would be nothing but a desperate expedient, supposing even that she would drift out a good distance between the islands before the morning. It would only be a complicated manner of committing suicide — to be found dead in a boat, dead from sun and thirst. A sea mystery. I wonder who would find us! Davidson, perhaps; but Davidson passed westward ten days ago. I watched him steaming past one early morning, from the jetty.”

“You never told me,” she said.

“He must have been looking at me through his big binoculars. Perhaps, if I had raised my arm — but what did we want with Davidson then, you and I? He won’t be back this way for three weeks or more, Lena. I wish I had raised my arm that morning.”

“What would have been the good of it?” she sighed out.

“What good? No good, of course. We had no forebodings. This seemed to be an inexpugnable refuge, where we could live untroubled and learn to know each other.”

“It’s perhaps in trouble that people get to know each other,” she suggested.

“Perhaps,” he said indifferently. “At any rate, we would not have gone away from here with him; though I believe he would have come in eagerly enough, and ready for any service he could render. It’s that fat man’s nature — a delightful fellow. You would not come on the wharf that time I sent the shawl back to Mrs. Schomberg through him. He has never seen you.”

“I didn’t know that you wanted anybody ever to see me,” she said.

He had folded his arms on his breast and hung his head.

“And I did not know that you cared to be seen as yet. A misunderstanding evidently. An honourable misunderstanding. But it does not matter now.”

He raised his head after a silence.

“How gloomy this forest has grown! Yet surely the sun cannot have set already.”

She looked round; and as if her eyes had just been opened, she perceived the shades of the forest surrounding her, not so much with gloom, but with a sullen, dumb, menacing hostility. Her heart sank in the engulfing stillness, at that moment she felt the nearness of death, breathing on her and on the man with her. If there had been a sudden stir of leaves, the crack of a dry branch, the faintest rustle, she would have screamed aloud. But she shook off the unworthy weakness. Such as she was, a fiddle-scraping girl picked up on the very threshold of infamy, she would try to rise above herself, triumphant and humble; and then happiness would burst on her like a torrent, flinging at her feet the man whom she loved.

Heyst stirred slightly.

“We had better be getting back, Lena, since we can’t stay all night in the woods — or anywhere else, for that matter. We are the slaves of this infernal surprise which has been sprung on us by — shall I say fate? — your fate, or mine.”

It was the man who had broken the silence, but it was the woman who led the way. At the very edge of the forest she stopped, concealed by a tree. He joined her cautiously.

“What is it? What do you see, Lena?” he whispered.

She said that it was only a thought that had come into her head. She hesitated for a moment giving him over her shoulder a shining gleam in her grey eyes. She wanted to know whether this trouble, this danger, this evil, whatever it was, finding them out in their retreat, was not a sort of punishment.

“Punishment?” repeated Heyst. He could not understand what she meant. When she explained, he was still more surprised. “A sort of retribution, from an angry Heaven?” he said in wonder. “On us? What on earth for?”

He saw her pale face darken in the dusk. She had blushed. Her whispering flowed very fast. It was the way they lived together — that

wasn't right, was it? It was a guilty life. For she had not been forced into it, driven, scared into it. No, no — she had come to him of her own free will, with her whole soul yearning unlawfully.

He was so profoundly touched that he could not speak for a moment. To conceal his trouble, he assumed his best Heystian manner.

“What? Are our visitors then messengers of morality, avengers of righteousness, agents of Providence? That's certainly an original view. How flattered they would be if they could hear you!”

“Now you are making fun of me,” she said in a subdued voice which broke suddenly.

“Are you conscious of sin?” Heyst asked gravely. She made no answer. “For I am not,” he added; “before Heaven, I am not!”

“You! You are different. Woman is the tempter. You took me up from pity. I threw myself at you.”

“Oh, you exaggerate, you exaggerate. It was not so bad as that,” he said playfully, keeping his voice steady with an effort.

He considered himself a dead man already, yet forced to pretend that he was alive for her sake, for her defence. He regretted that he had no Heaven to which he could recommend this fair, palpitating handful of ashes and dust — warm, living sentient his own — and exposed helplessly to insult, outrage, degradation, and infinite misery of the body.

She had averted her face from him and was still. He suddenly seized her passive hand.

“You will have it so?” he said. “Yes? Well, let us then hope for mercy together.”

She shook her head without looking at him, like an abashed child.

“Remember,” he went on incorrigible with his delicate raillery, “that hope is a Christian virtue, and surely you can't want all the mercy for yourself.”

Before their eyes the bungalow across the cleared ground stood bathed in a sinister light. An unexpected chill gust of wind made a noise in the tree-tops. She snatched her hand away and stepped out into the open; but before she had advanced more than three yards, she stood still and pointed to the west.

“Oh look there!” she exclaimed.

Beyond the headland of Diamond Bay, lying black on a purple sea, great masses of cloud stood piled up and bathed in a mist of blood. A crimson

crack like an open wound zigzagged between them, with a piece of dark red sun showing at the bottom. Heyst cast an indifferent glance at the ill-omened chaos of the sky.

“Thunderstorm making up. We shall hear it all night, but it won’t visit us, probably. The clouds generally gather round the volcano.”

She was not listening to him. Her eyes reflected the sombre and violent hues of the sunset.

“That does not look much like a sign of mercy,” she said slowly, as if to herself, and hurried on, followed by Heyst. Suddenly she stopped. “I don’t care. I would do more yet! And some day you’ll forgive me. You’ll have to forgive me!”

## CHAPTER NINE

Stumbling up the steps, as if suddenly exhausted, Lena entered the room and let herself fall on the nearest chair. Before following her, Heyst took a survey of the surroundings from the veranda. It was a complete solitude. There was nothing in the aspect of this familiar scene to tell him that he and the girl were not as completely alone as they had been in the early days of their common life on this abandoned spot, with only Wang discreetly materializing from time to time and the uncomplaining memory of Morrison to keep them company.

After the cold gust of wind there was an absolute stillness of the air. The thunder-charged mass hung unbroken beyond the low, ink-black headland, darkening the twilight. By contrast, the sky at the zenith displayed pellucid clearness, the sheen of a delicate glass bubble which the merest movement of air might shatter. A little to the left, between the black masses of the headland and of the forest, the volcano, a feather of smoke by day and a cigar-glow at night, took its first fiery expanding breath of the evening. Above it a reddish star came out like an expelled spark from the fiery bosom of the earth, enchanted into permanency by the mysterious spell of frozen spaces.

In front of Heyst the forest, already full of the deepest shades, stood like a wall. But he lingered, watching its edge, especially where it ended at the line of bushes, masking the land end of the jetty. Since the girl had spoken of catching a glimpse of something white among the trees, he believed pretty firmly that they had been followed in their excursion up the mountain by Mr. Jones's secretary. No doubt the fellow had watched them out of the forest, and now, unless he took the trouble to go back some distance and fetch a considerable circuit inland over the clearing, he was bound to walk out into the open space before the bungalows. Heyst did, indeed, imagine at one time some movement between the trees, lost as soon as perceived. He stared patiently, but nothing more happened. After all, why should he trouble about these people's actions? Why this stupid concern for the preliminaries, since, when the issue was joined, it would find him disarmed and shrinking from the ugliness and degradation of it?

He turned and entered the room. Deep dusk reigned in there already. Lena, near the door, did not move or speak. The sheen of the white tablecloth was very obtrusive. The brute these two vagabonds had tamed

had entered on its service while Heyst and Lena were away. The table was laid. Heyst walked up and down the room several times. The girl remained without sound or movement on the chair. But when Heyst, placing the two silver candelabra on the table, struck a match to light the candles, she got up suddenly and went into the bedroom. She came out again almost immediately, having taken off her hat. Heyst looked at her over his shoulder.

“What’s the good of shirking the evil hour? I’ve lighted these candles for a sign of our return. After all, we might not have been watched — while returning, I mean. Of course we were seen leaving the house.”

The girl sat down again. The great wealth of her hair looked very dark above her colourless face. She raised her eyes, glistening softly in the light with a sort of unreadable appeal, with a strange effect of unseeing innocence.

“Yes,” said Heyst across the table, the fingertips of one hand resting on the immaculate cloth. “A creature with an antediluvian lower jaw, hairy like a mastodon, and formed like a pre-historic ape, has laid this table. Are you awake, Lena? Am I? I would pinch myself, only I know that nothing would do away with this dream. Three covers. You know it is the shorter of the two who’s coming — the gentleman who, in the play of his shoulders as he walks, and in his facial structure, recalls a Jaguar. Ah, you don’t know what a jaguar is? But you have had a good look at these two. It’s the short one, you know, who’s to be our guest.”

She made a sign with her head that she knew; Heyst’s insistence brought Ricardo vividly before her mental vision. A sudden languor, like the physical echo of her struggle with the man, paralysed all her limbs. She lay still in the chair, feeling very frightened at this phenomenon — ready to pray aloud for strength.

Heyst had started to pace the room.

“Our guest! There is a proverb — in Russia, I believe — that when a guest enters the house, God enters the house. The sacred virtue of hospitality! But it leads one into trouble as well as any other.”

The girl unexpectedly got up from the chair, swaying her supple figure and stretching her arms above her head. He stopped to look at her curiously, paused, and then went on:

“I venture to think that God has nothing to do with such a hospitality and with such a guest!”

She had jumped to her feet to react against the numbness, to discover whether her body would obey her will. It did. She could stand up, and she could move her arms freely. Though no physiologist, she concluded that all that sudden numbness was in her head, not in her limbs. Her fears assuaged, she thanked God for it mentally, and to Heyst murmured a protest:

“Oh, yes! He’s got to do with everything — every little thing. Nothing can happen — ”

“Yes,” he said hastily, “one of the two sparrows can’t be struck to the ground — you are thinking of that.” The habitual playful smile faded on the kindly lips under the martial moustache. “Ah, you remember what you have been told — as a child — on Sundays.”

“Yes, I do remember.” She sank into the chair again. “It was the only decent bit of time I ever had when I was a kid, with our landlady’s two girls, you know.”

“I wonder, Lena,” Heyst said, with a return to his urbane playfulness, “whether you are just a little child, or whether you represent something as old as the world.”

She surprised Heyst by saying dreamily:

“Well — and what about you?”

“I? I date later — much later. I can’t call myself a child, but I am so recent that I may call myself a man of the last hour — or is it the hour before last? I have been out of it so long that I am not certain how far the hands of the clock have moved since — since — ”

He glanced at the portrait of his father, exactly above the head of the girl, as if it were ignoring her in its painted austerity of feeling. He did not finish the sentence; but he did not remain silent for long.

“Only what must be avoided are fallacious inferences, my dear Lena — especially at this hour.”

“Now you are making fun of me again,” she said without looking up.

“Am I?” he cried. “Making fun? No, giving warning. Hang it all, whatever truth people told you in the old days, there is also this one — that sparrows do fall to the ground, that they are brought to the ground. This is no vain assertion, but a fact. That’s why” — again his tone changed, while he picked up the table knife and let it fall disdainfully — “that’s why I wish these wretched round knives had some edge on them. Absolute rubbish — neither edge, point, nor substance. I believe one of these forks would make

a better weapon at a pinch. But can I go about with a fork in my pocket?" He gnashed his teeth with a rage very real, and yet comic.

"There used to be a carver here, but it was broken and thrown away a long time ago. Nothing much to carve here. It would have made a noble weapon, no doubt; but — "

He stopped. The girl sat very quiet, with downcast eyes. As he kept silence for some time, she looked up and said thoughtfully:

"Yes, a knife — it's a knife that you would want, wouldn't you, in case, in case — "

He shrugged his shoulders.

"There must be a crowbar or two in the sheds; but I have given up all the keys together. And then, do you see me walking about with a crowbar in my hand? Ha, ha! And besides, that edifying sight alone might start the trouble for all I know. In truth, why has it not started yet?"

"Perhaps they are afraid of you," she whispered, looking down again.

"By Jove, it looks like it," he assented meditatively. "They do seem to hang back for some reason. Is that reason prudence, or downright fear, or perhaps the leisurely method of certitude?"

Out in the black night, not very far from the bungalow, resounded a loud and prolonged whistle. Lena's hands grasped the sides of the chair, but she made no movement. Heyst started, and turned his face away from the door.

The startling sound had died away.

"Whistles, yells, omens, signals, portents — what do they matter?" he said. "But what about the crowbar? Suppose I had it! Could I stand in ambush at the side of the door — this door — and smash the first protruding head, scatter blood and brains over the floor, over these walls, and then run stealthily to the other door to do the same thing — and repeat the performance for a third time, perhaps? Could I? On suspicion, without compunction, with a calm and determined purpose? No, it is not in me. I date too late. Would you like to see me attempt this thing while that mysterious prestige of mine lasts — or their not less mysterious hesitation?"

"No, no!" she whispered ardently, as if compelled to speak by his eyes fixed on her face. "No, it's a knife you want to defend yourself with — to defend — there will be time — "

"And who knows if it isn't really my duty?" he began again, as if he had not heard her disjointed words at all. "It may be — my duty to you, to



myself. For why should I put up with the humiliation of their secret menaces? Do you know what the world would say?"

He emitted a low laugh, which struck her with terror. She would have got up, but he stooped so low over her that she could not move without first pushing him away.

"It would say, Lena, that I — the Swede — after luring my friend and partner to his death from mere greed of money, have murdered these unoffending shipwrecked strangers from sheer funk. That would be the story whispered — perhaps shouted — certainly spread out, and believed — and believed, my dear Lena!"

"Who would believe such awful things?"

"Perhaps you wouldn't — not at first, at any rate; but the power of calumny grows with time. It's insidious and penetrating. It can even destroy one's faith in oneself — dry-rot the soul."

All at once her eyes leaped to the door and remained fixed, stony, a little enlarged. Turning his head, Heyst beheld the figure of Ricardo framed in the doorway. For a moment none of the three moved, then, looking from the newcomer to the girl in the chair, Heyst formulated a sardonic introduction.

"Mr Ricardo, my dear."

Her head drooped a little. Ricardo's hand went up to his moustache. His voice exploded in the room.

"At your service, ma'am!"

He stepped in, taking his hat off with a flourish, and dropping it carelessly on a chair near the door.

"At your service," he repeated, in quite another tone. "I was made aware there was a lady about, by that Pedro of ours; only I didn't know I should have the privilege of seeing you tonight, ma'am."

Lena and Heyst looked at him covertly, but he, with a vague gaze avoiding them both, looked at nothing, seeming to pursue some point in space.

"Had a pleasant walk?" he asked suddenly.

"Yes. And you?" returned Heyst, who had managed to catch his glance.

"I haven't been a yard away from the governor this afternoon till I started for here." The genuineness of the accent surprised Heyst, without convincing him of the truth of the words.

"Why do you ask?" pursued Ricardo with every inflection of perfect candour.

“You might have wished to explore the island a little,” said Heyst, studying the man, who, to render him justice, did not try to free his captured gaze. “I may remind you that it wouldn’t be a perfectly safe proceeding.”

Ricardo presented a picture of innocence.

“Oh, yes — meaning that Chink that has ran away from you. He ain’t much!”

“He has a revolver,” observed Heyst meaningly.

“Well, and you have a revolver, too,” Mr. Ricardo argued unexpectedly. “I don’t worry myself about that.”

“That’s different. I am not afraid of you,” Heyst made answer after a short pause.

“Of me?”

“Of all of you.”

“You have a queer way of putting things,” began Ricardo.

At that moment the door on the compound side of the house came open with some noise, and Pedro entered, pressing the edge of a loaded tray to his breast. His big, hairy head rolled a little, his feet fell in front of each other with a short, hard thump on the floor. The arrival changed the current of Ricardo’s thought, perhaps, but certainly of his speech.

“You heard me whistling a little while ago outside? That was to give him a hint, as I came along, that it was time to bring in the dinner; and here it is.”

Lena rose and passed to the right of Ricardo, who lowered his glance for a moment. They sat down at the table. The enormous gorilla back of Pedro swayed out through the door.

“Extraordinary strong brute, ma’am,” said Ricardo. He, had a propensity to talk about “his Pedro,” as some men will talk of their dog. “He ain’t pretty, though. No, he ain’t pretty. And he has got to be kept under. I am his keeper, as it might be. The governor don’t trouble his head much about details. All that’s left to Martin. Martin, that’s me, ma’am.”

Heyst saw the girl’s eyes turn towards Mr. Jones’s secretary and rest blankly on his face. Ricardo, however, looked vaguely into space, and, with faint flickers of a smile about his lips, made conversation indefatigably against the silence of his entertainers. He boasted largely of his long association with Mr. Jones — over four years now, he said. Then, glancing rapidly at Heyst:

“You can see at once he’s a gentleman, can’t you?”

“You people,” Heyst said, his habitual playful intonation tinged with gloom, “are divorced from all reality in my eyes.”

Ricardo received this speech as if he had been expecting to hear those very words, or else did not mind at all what Heyst might say. He muttered an absent-minded “Ay, ay,” played with a bit of biscuit, sighed, and said, with a peculiar stare which did not seem to carry any distance, but to stop short at a point in the air very near his face:

“Anybody can see at once you are one. You and the governor ought to understand each other. He expects to see you tonight. The governor isn’t well, and we’ve got to think of getting away from here.”

While saying these words he turned himself full towards Lena, but without any marked expression. Leaning back with folded arms, the girl stared before her as if she had been alone in the room. But under that aspect of almost vacant unconcern the perils and emotion that had entered into her life warmed her heart, exalted her mind with a sense of an inconceivable intensity of existence.

“Really? Thinking of going away from here?” Heyst murmured.

“The best of friends must part,” Ricardo pronounced slowly. “And, as long as they part friends, there’s no harm done. We two are used to be on the move. You, I understand, prefer to stick in one place.”

It was obvious that all this was being said merely for the sake of talking, and that Ricardo’s mind was concentrated on some purpose unconnected with the words that were coming out of his mouth.

“I should like to know,” Heyst asked with incisive politeness, “how you have come to understand this or anything else about me? As far as I can remember, I’ve made you no confidences.”

Ricardo, gazing comfortably into space out of the back of his chair — for some time all three had given up any pretence of eating — answered abstractedly:

“Any fellow might have guessed it!” He sat up suddenly, and uncovered all his teeth in a grin of extraordinary ferocity, which was belied by the persistent amiability of his tone. “The governor will be the man to tell you something about that. I wish you would say you would see my governor. He’s the one who does all our talking. Let me take you to him this evening. He ain’t at all well; and he can’t make up his mind to go away without having a talk with you.”

Heyst, looking up, met Lena's eyes. Their expression of candour seemed to hide some struggling intention. Her head, he fancied, had made an imperceptible affirmative movement. Why? What reason could she have? Was it the prompting of some obscure instinct? Or was it simply a delusion of his own senses? But in this strange complication invading the quietude of his life, in his state of doubt and disdain and almost of despair with which he looked at himself, he would let even a delusive appearance guide him through a darkness so dense that it made for indifference.

"Well, suppose I do say so."

Ricardo did not conceal his satisfaction, which for a moment interested Heyst.

"It can't be my life they are after," he said to himself. "What good could it be to them?"

He looked across the table at the girl. What did it matter whether she had nodded or not? As always when looking into her unconscious eyes, he tasted something like the dregs of tender pity. He had decided to go. Her nod, imaginary or not imaginary, advice or illusion, had tipped the scale. He reflected that Ricardo's invitation could scarcely be anything in the nature of a trap. It would have been too absurd. Why carry subtly into a trap someone already bound hand and foot, as it were?

All this time he had been looking fixedly at the girl he called Lena. In the submissive quietness of her being, which had been her attitude ever since they had begun their life on the island, she remained as secret as ever. Heyst got up abruptly, with a smile of such enigmatic and despairing character that Mr. Secretary Ricardo, whose abstract gaze had an all-round efficiency, made a slight crouching start, as if to dive under the table for his leg-knife — a start that was repressed, as soon as begun. He had expected Heyst to spring on him or draw a revolver, because he created for himself a vision of him in his own image. Instead of doing either of these obvious things, Heyst walked across the room, opened the door and put his head through it to look out into the compound.

As soon as his back was turned, Ricardo's hand sought the girl's arm under the table. He was not looking at her, but she felt the groping, nervous touch of his search, felt suddenly the grip of his fingers above her wrist. He leaned forward a little; still he dared not look at her. His hard stare remained fastened on Heyst's back. In an extremely low hiss, his fixed idea of argument found expression scathingly:

“See! He’s no good. He’s not the man for you!”

He glanced at her at last. Her lips moved a little, and he was awed by that movement without a sound. Next instant the hard grasp of his fingers vanished from her arm. Heyst had shut the door. On his way back to the table, he crossed the path of the girl they had called Alma — she didn’t know why — also Magdalen, whose mind had remained so long in doubt as to the reason of her own existence. She no longer wondered at that bitter riddle, since her heart found its solution in a blinding, hot glow of passionate purpose.

## CHAPTER TEN

She passed by Heyst as if she had indeed been blinded by some secret, lurid, and consuming glare into which she was about to enter. The curtain of the bedroom door fell behind her into rigid folds. Ricardo's vacant gaze seemed to be watching the dancing flight of a fly in mid air.

"Extra dark outside, ain't it?" he muttered.

"Not so dark but that I could see that man of yours prowling about there," said Heyst in measured tones.

"What — Pedro? He's scarcely a man you know; or else I wouldn't be so fond of him as I am."

"Very well. Let's call him your worthy associate."

"Ay! Worthy enough for what we want of him. A great standby is Peter in a scrimmage. A growl and a bite — oh, my! And you don't want him about?"

"I don't."

"You want him out of the way?" insisted Ricardo with an affectation of incredulity which Heyst accepted calmly, though the air in the room seemed to grow more oppressive with every word spoken.

"That's it. I do want him out of the way." He forced himself to speak equably.

"Lor'! That's no great matter. Pedro's not much use here. The business my governor's after can be settled by ten minutes' rational talk with — with another gentleman. Quiet talk!"

He looked up suddenly with hard, phosphorescent eyes. Heyst didn't move a muscle. Ricardo congratulated himself on having left his revolver behind. He was so exasperated that he didn't know what he might have done. He said at last:

"You want poor, harmless Peter out of the way before you let me take you to see the governor — is that it?"

"Yes, that is it."

"H'm! One can see," Ricardo said with hidden venom, "that you are a gentleman; but all that gentlemanly fancifulness is apt to turn sour on a plain man's stomach. However — you'll have to pardon me."

He put his fingers into his mouth and let out a whistle which seemed to drive a thin, sharp shaft of air solidly against one's nearest ear-drum.

Though he greatly enjoyed Heyst's involuntary grimace, he sat perfectly stolid waiting for the effect of the call.

It brought Pedro in with an extraordinary, uncouth, primeval impetuosity. The door flew open with a clatter, and the wild figure it disclosed seemed anxious to devastate the room in leaps and bounds; but Ricardo raised his open palm, and the creature came in quietly. His enormous half-closed paws swung to and fro a little in front of his bowed trunk as he walked. Ricardo looked on truculently.

"You go to the boat — understand? Go now!"

The little red eyes of the tame monster blinked with painful attention in the mass of hair.

"Well? Why don't you get? Forgot human speech, eh? Don't you know any longer what a boat is?"

"Si — boat," the creature stammered out doubtfully.

"Well, go there — the boat at the jetty. March off to it and sit there, lie down there, do anything but go to sleep there — till you hear my call, and then fly here. Them's your orders. March! Get, vamos! No, not that way — out through the front door. No sulks!"

Pedro obeyed with uncouth alacrity. When he had gone, the gleam of pitiless savagery went out of Ricardo's yellow eyes, and his physiognomy took on, for the first time that evening, the expression of a domestic cat which is being noticed.

"You can watch him right into the bushes, if you like. Too dark, eh? Why not go with him to the very spot, then?"

Heyst made a gesture of vague protest.

"There's nothing to assure me that he will stay there. I have no doubt of his going, but it's an act without guarantee."

"There you are!" Ricardo shrugged his shoulders philosophically. "Can't be helped. Short of shooting our Pedro, nobody can make absolutely sure of his staying in the same place longer than he has a mind to; but I tell you, he lives in holy terror of my temper. That's why I put on my sudden-death air when I talk to him. And yet I wouldn't shoot him — not I, unless in such a fit of rage as would make a man shoot his favourite dog. Look here, sir! This deal is on the square. I didn't tip him a wink to do anything else. He won't budge from the jetty. Are you coming along now, sir?"

A short-silence ensued. Ricardo's jaws were working ominously under his skin. His eyes glided: voluptuously here and there, cruel and dreamy,

Heyst checked a sudden movement, reflected for a while, then said:

“You must wait a little.”

“Wait a little! Wait a little! What does he think a fellow is — a graven image?” grumbled Ricardo half audibly.

Heyst went into the bedroom, and shut the door after him with a bang. Coming from the light, he could not see a thing in there at first; yet he received the impression of the girl getting up from the floor. On the less opaque darkness of the shutter-hole, her head detached itself suddenly, very faint, a mere hint of a round, dark shape without a face.

“I am going, Lena. I am going to confront these scoundrels.” He was surprised to feel two arms falling on his shoulders. “I thought that you — ” he began.

“Yes, yes!” the girl whispered hastily.

She neither clung to him, nor yet did she try to draw him to her. Her hands grasped his shoulders, and she seemed to him to be staring into his face in the dark. And now he could see something of her face, too — an oval without features — and faintly distinguish her person, in the blackness, a form without definite lines.

“You have a black dress here, haven’t you, Lena?” he asked, speaking rapidly, and so low that she could just hear him.

“Yes — an old thing.”

“Very good. Put it on at once.”

“But why?”

“Not for mourning!” There was something peremptory in the slightly ironic murmur. “Can you find it and get into it in the dark?”

She could. She would try. He waited, very still. He could imagine her movements over there at the far end of the room; but his eyes, accustomed now to the darkness, had lost her completely. When she spoke, her voice surprised him by its nearness. She had done what he had told her to do, and had approached him, invisible.

“Good! Where’s that piece of purple veil I’ve seen lying about?” he asked.

There was no answer, only a slight rustle.

“Where is it?” he repeated impatiently.

Her unexpected breath was on his cheek.

“In my hands.”



“Capital! Listen, Lena. As soon as I leave the bungalow with that horrible scoundrel, you slip out at the back — instantly, lose no time! — and run round into the forest. That will be your time, while we are walking away, and I am sure he won’t give me the slip. Run into the forest behind the fringe of bushes between the big trees. You will know, surely, how to find a place in full view of the front door. I fear for you; but in this black dress, with most of your face muffled up in that dark veil, I defy anybody to find you there before daylight. Wait in the forest till the table is pushed into full view of the doorway, and you see three candles out of four blown out and one relighted — or, should the lights be put out here while you watch them, wait till three candles are lighted and then two put out. At either of these signals run back as hard as you can, for it will mean that I am waiting for you here.”

While he was speaking, the girl had sought and seized one of his hands. She did not press it; she held it loosely, as it were timidly, caressingly. It was no grasp; it was a mere contact, as if only to make sure that he was there, that he was real and no mere darker shadow in the obscurity. The warmth of her hand gave Heyst a strange, intimate sensation of all her person. He had to fight down a new sort of emotion, which almost unmanned him. He went on, whispering sternly:

“But if you see no such signals, don’t let anything — fear, curiosity, despair, or hope — entice you back to this house; and with the first sign of dawn steal away along the edge of the clearing till you strike the path. Wait no longer, because I shall probably be dead.”

The murmur of the word “Never!” floated into his ear as if it formed itself in the air.

“You know the path,” he continued. “Make your way to the barricade. Go to Wang — yes, to Wang. Let nothing stop you!” It seemed to him that the girl’s hand trembled a little. “The worst he can do to you is to shoot you, but he won’t. I really think he won’t, if I am not there. Stay with the villagers, with the wild people, and fear nothing. They will be more awed by you than you can be frightened of them. Davidson’s bound to turn up before very long. Keep a look-out for a passing steamer. Think of some sort of signal to call him.”

She made no answer. The sense of the heavy, brooding silence in the outside world seemed to enter and fill the room — the oppressive infinity of

it, without breath, without light. It was as if the heart of hearts had ceased to beat and the end of all things had come.

“Have you understood? You are to run out of the house at once,” Heyst whispered urgently.

She lifted his hand to her lips and let it go. He was startled.

“Lena!” he cried out under his breath.

She was gone from his side. He dared not trust himself — no, not even to the extent of a tender word.

Turning to go out he heard a thud somewhere in the house. To open the door, he had first to lift the curtain; he did so with his face over his shoulder. The merest trickle of light, coming through the keyhole and one or two cracks, was enough for his eyes to see her plainly, all black, down on her knees, with her head and arms flung on the foot of the bed — all black in the desolation of a mourning sinner. What was this? A suspicion that there were everywhere more things than he could understand crossed Heyst’s mind. Her arm, detached from the bed, motioned him away. He obeyed, and went out, full of disquiet.

The curtain behind him had not ceased to tremble when she was up on her feet, close against it, listening for sounds, for words, in a stooping, tragic attitude of stealthy attention, one hand clutching at her breast as if to compress, to make less loud the beating of her heart. Heyst had caught Mr. Jones’s secretary in the contemplation of his closed writing-desk. Ricardo might have been meditating how to break into it; but when he turned about suddenly, he showed so distorted a face that it made Heyst pause in wonder at the upturned whites of the eyes, which were blinking horribly, as if the man were inwardly convulsed.

“I thought you were never coming,” Ricardo mumbled.

“I didn’t know you were pressed for time. Even if your going away depends on this conversation, as you say, I doubt if you are the men to put to sea on such a night as this,” said Heyst, motioning Ricardo to precede him out of the house.

With feline undulations of hip and shoulder, the secretary left the room at once. There was something cruel in the absolute dumbness of the night. The great cloud covering half the sky hung right against one, like an enormous curtain hiding menacing preparations of violence. As the feet of the two men touched the ground, a rumble came from behind it, preceded by a swift, mysterious gleam of light on the waters of the bay.

“Ha!” said Ricardo. “It begins.”

“It may be nothing in the end,” observed Heyst, stepping along steadily.

“No! Let it come!” Ricardo said viciously. “I am in the humour for it!”

By the time the two men had reached the other bungalow, the far-off modulated rumble growled incessantly, while pale lightning in waves of cold fire flooded and ran off the island in rapid succession. Ricardo, unexpectedly, dashed ahead up the steps and put his head through the doorway.

“Here he is, governor! Keep him with you as long as you can — till you hear me whistle. I am on the track.”

He flung these words into the room with inconceivable speed, and stood aside to let the visitor pass through the doorway; but he had to wait an appreciable moment, because Heyst, seeing his purpose, had scornfully slowed his pace. When Heyst entered the room it was with a smile, the Heyst smile, lurking under his martial moustache.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

Two candles were burning on the stand-up desk. Mr. Jones, tightly enfolded in an old but gorgeous blue silk dressing-gown, kept his elbows close against his sides and his hands deeply plunged into the extraordinarily deep pockets of the garment. The costume accentuated his emaciation. He resembled a painted pole leaning against the edge of the desk, with a dried head of dubious distinction stuck on the top of it. Ricardo lounged in the doorway. Indifferent in appearance to what was going on, he was biding his time. At a given moment, between two flickers of lightning, he melted out of his frame into the outer air. His disappearance was observed on the instant by Mr. Jones, who abandoned his nonchalant immobility against the desk, and made a few steps calculated to put him between Heyst and the doorway.

“It’s awfully close,” he remarked

Heyst, in the middle of the room, had made up his mind to speak plainly.

“We haven’t met to talk about the weather. You favoured me earlier in the day with a rather cryptic phrase about yourself. ‘I am he that is,’ you said. What does that mean?”

Mr. Jones, without looking at Heyst, continued his absentminded movements till, attaining the desired position, he brought his shoulders with a thump against the wall near the door, and raised his head. In the emotion of the decisive moment his haggard face glistened with perspiration. Drops ran down his hollow cheeks and almost blinded the spectral eyes in their bony caverns.

“It means that I am a person to be reckoned with. No — stop! Don’t put your hand into your pocket — don’t.”

His voice had a wild, unexpected shrillness. Heyst started, and there ensued a moment of suspended animation, during which the thunder’s deep bass muttered distantly and the doorway to the right of Mr. Jones flickered with bluish light. At last Heyst shrugged his shoulders; he even looked at his hand. He didn’t put it in his pocket, however. Mr. Jones, glued against the wall, watched him raise both his hands to the ends of his horizontal moustaches, and answered the note of interrogation in his steady eyes.

“A matter of prudence,” said Mr. Jones in his natural hollow tones, and with a face of deathlike composure. “A man of your free life has surely perceived that. You are a much talked-about man, Mr. Heyst — and though,

as far as I understand, you are accustomed to employ the subtler weapons of intelligence, still I can't afford to take any risks of the — er — grosser methods. I am not unscrupulous enough to be a match for you in the use of intelligence; but I assure you, Mr. Heyst, that in the other way you are no match for me. I have you covered at this very moment. You have been covered ever since you entered this room. Yes — from my pocket."

During this harangue Heyst looked deliberately over his shoulder, stepped back a pace, and sat down on the end of the camp bedstead. Leaning his elbow on one knee, he laid his cheek in the palm of his hand and seemed to meditate on what he should say next. Mr. Jones, planted against the wall, was obviously waiting for some sort of overture. As nothing came, he resolved to speak himself; but he hesitated. For, though he considered that the most difficult step had been taken, he said to himself that every stage of progress required great caution, lest the man in Ricardo's phraseology, should "start to prance" — which would be most inconvenient. He fell back on a previous statement:

"And I am a person to be reckoned with."

The other man went on looking at the floor, as if he were alone in the room. There was a pause.

"You have heard of me, then?" Heyst said at length, looking up.

"I should think so! We have been staying at Schomberg's hotel."

"Schom — " Heyst choked on the word.

"What's the matter, Mr. Heyst?"

"Nothing. Nausea," Heyst said resignedly. He resumed his former attitude of meditative indifference. "What is this reckoning you are talking about?" he asked after a time, in the quietest possible tone. "I don't know you."

"It's obvious that we belong to the same — social sphere," began Mr. Jones with languid irony. Inwardly he was as watchful as he could be. "Something has driven you out — the originality of your ideas, perhaps. Or your tastes."

Mr Jones indulged in one of his ghastly smiles. In repose his features had a curious character of evil, exhausted austerity; but when he smiled, the whole mask took on an unpleasantly infantile expression. A recrudescence of the rolling thunder invaded the room loudly, and passed into silence.

"You are not taking this very well," observed Mr. Jones. This was what he said, but as a matter of fact he thought that the business was shaping

quite satisfactorily. The man, he said to himself, had no stomach for a fight. Aloud he continued: "Come! You can't expect to have it always your own way. You are a man of the world."

"And you?" Heyst interrupted him unexpectedly. "How do you define yourself?"

"I, my dear sir? In one way I am — yes, I am the world itself, come to pay you a visit. In another sense I am an outcast — almost an outlaw. If you prefer a less materialistic view, I am a sort of fate — the retribution that waits its time."

"I wish to goodness you were the commonest sort of ruffian!" said Heyst, raising his equable gaze to Mr. Jones. "One would be able to talk to you straight then, and hope for some humanity. As it is — "

"I dislike violence and ferocity of every sort as much as you do," Mr. Jones declared, looking very languid as he leaned against the wall, but speaking fairly loud. "You can ask my Martin if it is not so. This, Mr. Heyst, is a soft age. It is also an age without prejudices. I've heard that you are free from them yourself. You mustn't be shocked if I tell you plainly that we are after your money — or I am, if you prefer to make me alone responsible. Pedro, of course, knows no more of it than any other animal would. Ricardo is of the faithful-retainer class — absolutely identified with all my ideas, wishes, and even whims!"

Mr Jones pulled his left hand out of his pocket, got a handkerchief out of another, and began to wipe the perspiration from his forehead, neck, and chin. The excitement from which he suffered made his breathing visible. In his long dressing-gown he had the air of a convalescent invalid who had imprudently overtaxed his strength. Heyst, broad-shouldered, robust, watched the operation from the end of the camp bedstead, very calm, his hands on his knees.

"And by the by," he asked, "where is he now, that henchman of yours? Breaking into my desk?"

"That would be crude. Still, crudeness is one of life's conditions." There was the slightest flavour of banter in the tone of Ricardo's governor. "Conceivable, but unlikely. Martin is a little crude; but you are not, Mr. Heyst. To tell you the truth, I don't know precisely where he is. He has been a little mysterious of late; but he has my confidence. No, don't get up, Mr. Heyst!"

The viciousness of his spectral face was indescribable. Heyst, who had moved a little, was surprised by the disclosure.

“It was not my intention,” he said.

“Pray remain seated,” Mr. Jones insisted in a languid voice, but with a very determined glitter in his black eye-caverns.

“If you were more observant,” said Heyst with dispassionate contempt, “you would have known before I had been five minutes in the room that I had no weapon of any sort on me.”

“Possibly; but pray keep your hands still. They are very well where they are. This is too big an affair for me to take any risks.”

“Big? Too big?” Heyst repeated with genuine surprise. “Good Heavens! Whatever you are looking for, there’s very little of it here — very little of anything.”

“You would naturally say so, but that’s not what we have heard,” retorted Mr. Jones quickly, with a grin so ghastly that it was impossible to think it voluntary.

Heyst’s face had grown very gloomy. He knitted his brows.

“What have you heard?” he asked.

“A lot, Mr. Heyst — a lot,” affirmed Mr. Jones. He was vying to recover his manner of languid superiority. “We have heard, for instance, of a certain Mr. Morrison, once your partner.”

Heyst could not repress a slight movement.

“Aha!” said Mr. Jones, with a sort of ghostly glee on his face.

The muffled thunder resembled the echo of a distant cannonade below the horizon, and the two men seemed to be listening to it in sullen silence.

“This diabolical calumny will end in actually and literally taking my life from me,” thought Heyst.

Then, suddenly, he laughed. Portentously spectral, Mr. Jones frowned at the sound.

“Laugh as much as you please,” he said. “I, who have been hounded out from society by a lot of highly moral souls, can’t see anything funny in that story. But here we are, and you will now have to pay for your fun, Mr. Heyst.”

“You have heard a lot of ugly lies,” observed Heyst. “Take my word for it!”

“You would say so, of course — very natural. As a matter of fact I haven’t heard very much. Strictly speaking, it was Martin. He collects

information, and so on. You don't suppose I would talk to that Schomberg animal more than I could help? It was Martin whom he took into his confidence."

"The stupidity of that creature is so great that it becomes formidable," Heyst said, as if speaking to himself.

Involuntarily, his mind turned to the girl, wandering in the forest, alone and terrified. Would he ever see her again? At that thought he nearly lost his self-possession. But the idea that if she followed his instructions those men were not likely to find her steadied him a little. They did not know that the island had any inhabitants; and he himself once disposed of, they would be too anxious to get away to waste time hunting for a vanished girl.

All this passed through Heyst's mind in a flash, as men think in moments of danger. He looked speculatively at Mr. Jones, who, of course, had never for a moment taken his eyes from his intended victim. And, the conviction came to Heyst that this outlaw from the higher spheres was an absolutely hard and pitiless scoundrel.

Mr Jones's voice made him start.

"It would be useless, for instance, to tell me that your Chinaman has run off with your money. A man living alone with a Chinaman on an island takes care to conceal property of that kind so well that the devil himself —"

"Certainly," Heyst muttered.

Again, with his left hand, Mr. Jones mopped his frontal bone, his stalk-like neck, his razor jaws, his fleshless chin. Again his voice faltered and his aspect became still more gruesomely malevolent as of a wicked and pitiless corpse.

"I see what you mean," he cried, "but you mustn't put too much trust in your ingenuity. You don't strike me as a very ingenious person, Mr. Heyst. Neither am I. My talents lie another way. But Martin —"

"Who is now engaged in rifling my desk," interjected Heyst.

"I don't think so. What I was going to say is that Martin is much cleverer than a Chinaman. Do you believe in racial superiority, Mr. Heyst? I do, firmly. Martin is great at ferreting out such secrets as yours, for instance."

"Secrets like mine!" repeated Heyst bitterly. "Well I wish him joy of all he can ferret out!"

"That's very kind of you," remarked Mr. Jones. He was beginning to be anxious for Martin's return. Of iron self-possession at the gaming-table,



fearless in a sudden affray, he found that this rather special kind of work was telling on his nerves. "Keep still as you are!" he cried sharply.

"I've told you I am not armed," said Heyst, folding his arms on his breast.

"I am really inclined to believe that you are not," admitted Mr. Jones seriously. "Strange!" he mused aloud, the caverns of his eyes turned upon Heyst. Then briskly: "But my object is to keep you in this room. Don't provoke me, by some unguarded movement, to smash your knee or do something definite of that sort." He passed his tongue over his lips, which were dry and black, while his forehead glistened with moisture. "I don't know if it wouldn't be better to do it at once!"

"He who deliberates is lost," said Heyst with grave mockery.

Mr Jones disregarded the remark. He had the air of communing with himself.

"Physically I am no match for you," he said slowly, his black gaze fixed upon the man sitting on the end of the bed. "You could spring — "

"Are you trying to frighten yourself?" asked Heyst abruptly. "You don't seem to have quite enough pluck for your business. Why don't you do it at once?"

Mr Jones, taking violent offence, snorted like a savage skeleton.

"Strange as it may seem to you, it is because of my origin, my breeding, my traditions, my early associations, and such-like trifles. Not everybody can divest himself of the prejudices of a gentleman as easily as you have done, Mr. Heyst. But don't worry about my pluck. If you were to make a clean spring at me, you would receive in mid air, so to speak, something that would make you perfectly harmless by the time you landed. No, don't misapprehend us, Mr. Heyst. We are — er — adequate bandits; and we are after the fruit of your labours as a — er — successful swindler. It's the way of the world — gorge and disgorge!"

He leaned wearily the back of his head against the wall. His vitality seemed exhausted. Even his sunken eyelids drooped within the bony sockets. Only his thin, waspish, beautifully pencilled eyebrows, drawn together a little, suggested the will and the power to sting — something vicious, unconquerable, and deadly.

"Fruits! Swindler!" repeated Heyst, without heat, almost without contempt. "You are giving yourself no end of trouble, you and your faithful henchman, to crack an empty nut. There are no fruits here, as you imagine.

There are a few sovereigns, which you may have if you like; and since you have called yourself a bandit — ”

“Yaas!” drawled Mr. Jones. “That, rather than a swindler. Open warfare at least!”

“Very good! Only let me tell you that there were never in the world two more deluded bandits — never!”

Heyst uttered these words with such energy that Mr. Jones, stiffening up, seemed to become thinner and taller in his metallic blue dressing-gown against the whitewashed wall.

“Fooled by a silly, rascally innkeeper!” Heyst went on. “Talked over like a pair of children with a promise of sweets!”

“I didn’t talk with that disgusting animal,” muttered Mr. Jones sullenly; “but he convinced Martin, who is no fool.”

“I should think he wanted very much to be convinced,” said Heyst, with the courteous intonation so well known in the Islands. “I don’t want to disturb your touching trust in your — your follower, but he must be the most credulous brigand in existence. What do you imagine? If the story of my riches were ever so true, do you think Schomberg would have imparted it to you from sheer altruism? Is that the way of the world, Mr. Jones?”

For a moment the lower jaw of Ricardo’s gentleman dropped; but it came up with a snap of scorn, and he said with spectral intensity:

“The beast is cowardly! He was frightened, and wanted to get rid of us, if you want to know, Mr. Heyst. I don’t know that the material inducement was so very great, but I was bored, and we decided to accept the bribe. I don’t regret it. All my life I have been seeking new impressions, and you have turned out to be something quite out of the common. Martin, of course, looks to the material results. He’s simple — and faithful — and wonderfully acute.”

“Ah, yes! He’s on the track — ” and now Heyst’s speech had the character of politely grim raillery — ”but not sufficiently on the track, as yet, to make it quite convenient to shoot me without more ado. Didn’t Schomberg tell you precisely where I conceal the fruit of my rapines? Pah! Don’t you know he would have told you anything, true or false, from a very clear motive? Revenge! Mad hate — the unclean idiot!”

Mr Jones did not seem very much moved. On his right hand the doorway incessantly flickered with distant lightning, and the continuous rumble of

thunder went on irritatingly, like the growl of an inarticulate giant muttering fatuously.

Heyst overcame his immense repugnance to allude to her whose image, cowering in the forest was constantly before his eyes, with all the pathos and force of its appeal, august, pitiful, and almost holy to him. It was in a hurried, embarrassed manner that he went on:

“If it had not been for that girl whom he persecuted with his insane and odious passion, and who threw herself on my protection, he would never have — but you know well enough!”

“I don’t know!” burst out Mr. Jones with amazing heat. “That hotel-keeper tried to talk to me once of some girl he had lost, but I told him I didn’t want to hear any of his beastly women stories. It had something to do with you, had it?”

Heyst looked on serenely at this outburst, then lost his patience a little.

“What sort of comedy is this? You don’t mean to say that you didn’t know that I had — that there was a girl living with me here?”

One could see that the eyes of Mr. Jones had become fixed in the depths of their black holes by the gleam of white becoming steady there. The whole man seemed frozen still.

“Here! Here!” he screamed out twice. There was no mistaking his astonishment, his shocked incredulity — something like frightened disgust.

Heyst was disgusted also, but in another way. He too was incredulous. He regretted having mentioned the girl; but the thing was done, his repugnance had been overcome in the heat of his argument against the absurd bandit.

“Is it possible that you didn’t know of that significant fact?” he inquired. “Of the only effective truth in the welter of silly lies that deceived you so easily?”

“No, I didn’t!” Mr. Jones shouted. “But Martin did!” he added in a faint whisper, which Heyst’s ears just caught and no more.

“I kept her out of sight as long as I could,” said Heyst. “Perhaps, with your bringing up, traditions, and so on; you will understand my reason for it.”

“He knew. He knew before!” Mr. Jones mourned in a hollow voice. “He knew of her from the first!”

Backed hard against the wall he no longer watched Heyst. He had the air of a man who had seen an abyss yawning under his feet.

“If I want to kill him, this is my time,” thought Heyst; but he did not move.

Next moment Mr. Jones jerked his head up, glaring with sardonic fury.

“I have a good mind to shoot you, you woman-ridden hermit, you man in the moon, that can’t exist without — no, it won’t be you that I’ll shoot. It’s the other woman-lover — the prevaricating, sly, low-class, amorous cuss! And he shaved — shaved under my very nose. I’ll shoot him!”

“He’s gone mad,” thought Heyst, startled by the spectre’s sudden fury.

He felt himself more in danger, nearer death, than ever since he had entered that room. An insane bandit is a deadly combination. He did not, could not know that Mr. Jones was quick-minded enough to see already the end of his reign over his excellent secretary’s thoughts and feelings; the coming failure of Ricardo’s fidelity. A woman had intervened! A woman, a girl, who apparently possessed the power to awaken men’s disgusting folly. Her power had been proved in two instances already — the beastly innkeeper, and that man with moustaches, upon whom Mr. Jones, his deadly right hand twitching in his pocket, glared more in repulsion than in anger. The very object of the expedition was lost from view in his sudden and overwhelming sense of utter insecurity. And this made Mr. Jones feel very savage; but not against the man with the moustaches. Thus, while Heyst was really feeling that his life was not worth two minutes, purchase, he heard himself addressed with no affectation of languid impertinence but with a burst of feverish determination.

“Here! Let’s call a truce!” said Mr. Jones.

Heyst’s heart was too sick to allow him to smile.

“Have I been making war on you?” he asked wearily. “How do you expect me to attach any meaning to your words?” he went on. “You seem to be a morbid, senseless sort of bandit. We don’t speak the same language. If I were to tell you why I am here, talking to you, you wouldn’t believe me, because you would not understand me. It certainly isn’t the love of life, from which I have divorced myself long ago — not sufficiently, perhaps; but if you are thinking of yours, then I repeat to you that it has never been in danger from me. I am unarmed.”

Mr Jones was biting his lower lip, in a deep meditation. It was only towards the last that he looked at Heyst.

“Unarmed, eh?” Then he burst out violently: “I tell you, a gentleman is no match for the common herd. And yet one must make use of the brutes.

Unarmed, eh? And I suppose that creature is of the commonest sort. You could hardly have got her out of a drawing-room. Though they're all alike, for that matter. Unarmed! It's a pity. I am in much greater danger than you are or were — or I am much mistaken. But I am not — I know my man!"

He lost his air of mental vacancy and broke out into shrill exclamations. To Heyst they seemed madder than anything that had gone before.

"On the track! On the scent!" he cried, forgetting himself to the point of executing a dance of rage in the middle of the floor.

Heyst looked on, fascinated by this skeleton in a gay dressing-gown, jerkily agitated like a grotesque toy on the end of an invisible string. It became quiet suddenly.

"I might have smelt a rat! I always knew that this would be the danger." He changed suddenly to a confidential tone, fixing his sepulchral stare on Heyst. "And yet here I am, taken in by the fellow, like the veriest fool. I've been always on the watch for some beastly influence, but here I am, fairly caught. He shaved himself right in front of me and I never guessed!"

The shrill laugh, following on the low tone of secrecy, sounded so convincingly insane that Heyst got up as if moved by a spring. Mr. Jones stepped back two paces, but displayed no uneasiness.

"It's as clear as daylight!" he uttered mournfully, and fell silent.

Behind him the doorway flickered lividly, and the sound as of a naval action somewhere away on the horizon filled the breathless pause. Mr. Jones inclined his head on his shoulder. His mood had completely changed.

"What do you say, unarmed man? Shall we go and see what is detaining my trusted Martin so long? He asked me to keep you engaged in friendly conversation till he made a further examination of that track. Ha, ha, ha!"

"He is no doubt ransacking my house," said Heyst.

He was bewildered. It seemed to him that all this was an incomprehensible dream, or perhaps an elaborate other-world joke, contrived by that spectre in a gorgeous dressing gown.

Mr Jones looked at him with a horrible, cadaverous smile of inscrutable mockery, and pointed to the door. Heyst passed through it first. His feelings had become so blunted that he did not care how soon he was shot in the back.

"How oppressive the air is!" the voice of Mr. Jones said at his elbow. "This stupid storm gets on my nerves. I would welcome some rain, though it would be unpleasant to get wet. On the other hand, this exasperating

thunder has the advantage of covering the sound of our approach. The lightning's not so convenient. Ah, your house is fully illuminated! My clever Martin is punishing your stock of candles. He belongs to the unceremonious classes, which are also unlovely, untrustworthy, and so on."

"I left the candles burning," said Heyst, "to save him trouble."

"You really believed he would go to your house?" asked Mr. Jones with genuine interest.

"I had that notion, strongly. I do believe he is there now."

"And you don't mind?"

"No!"

"You don't!" Mr. Jones stopped to wonder. "You are an extraordinary man," he said suspiciously, and moved on, touching elbows with Heyst.

In the latter's breast dwelt a deep silence, the complete silence of unused faculties. At this moment, by simply shouldering Mr. Jones, he could have thrown him down and put himself, by a couple of leaps, beyond the certain aim of the revolver; but he did not even think of that. His very will seemed dead of weariness. He moved automatically, his head low, like a prisoner captured by the evil power of a masquerading skeleton out of a grave. Mr. Jones took charge of the direction. They fetched a wide sweep. The echoes of distant thunder seemed to dog their footsteps.

"By the by," said Mr. Jones, as if unable to restrain his curiosity, "aren't you anxious about that — ouch! — that fascinating creature to whom you owe whatever pleasure you can find in our visit?"

"I have placed her in safety," said Heyst. "I — I took good care of that."

Mr Jones laid a hand on his arm.

"You have? Look! is that what you mean?"

Heyst raised his head. In the flicker of lightning the desolation of the cleared ground on his left leaped out and sank into the night, together with the elusive forms of things distant, pale, unearthly. But in the brilliant square of the door he saw the girl — the woman he had longed to see once more as if enthroned, with her hands on the arms of the chair. She was in black; her face was white, her head dreamily inclined on her breast. He saw her only as low as her knees. He saw her — there, in the room, alive with a sombre reality. It was no mocking vision. She was not in the forest — but there! She sat there in the chair, seemingly without strength, yet without fear, tenderly stooping.

“Can you understand their power?” whispered the hot breath of Mr. Jones into his ear. “Can there be a more disgusting spectacle? It’s enough to make the earth detestable. She seems to have found her affinity. Move on closer. If I have to shoot you in the end, then perhaps you will die cured.”

Heyst obeyed the pushing pressure of a revolver barrel between his shoulders. He felt it distinctly, but he did not feel the ground under his feet. They found the steps, without his being aware that he was ascending them — slowly, one by one. Doubt entered into him — a doubt of a new kind, formless, hideous. It seemed to spread itself all over him, enter his limbs, and lodge in his entrails. He stopped suddenly, with a thought that he who experienced such a feeling had no business to live — or perhaps was no longer living.

Everything — the bungalow, the forest, the open ground — trembled incessantly, the earth, the sky itself, shivered all the time, and the only thing immovable in the shuddering universe was the interior of the lighted room and the woman in black sitting in the light of the eight candle-flames. They flung around her an intolerable brilliance which hurt his eyes, seemed to sear his very brain with the radiation of infernal heat. It was some time before his scorched eyes made out Ricardo seated on the floor at some little distance, his back to the doorway, but only partly so; one side of his upturned face showing the absorbed, all forgetful rapture of his contemplation.

The grip of Mr. Jones’s hard claw drew Heyst back a little. In the roll of thunder, swelling and subsiding, he whispered in his ear a sarcastic: “Of course!”

A great shame descended upon Heyst — the shame of guilt, absurd and maddening. Mr. Jones drew him still farther back into the darkness of the veranda.

“This is serious,” he went on, distilling his ghostly venom into Heyst’s very ear. “I had to shut my eyes many times to his little flings; but this is serious. He has found his soul-mate. Mud souls, obscene and cunning! Mud bodies, too — the mud of the gutter! I tell you, we are no match for the vile populace. I, even I, have been nearly caught. He asked me to detain you till he gave me the signal. It won’t be you that I’ll have to shoot, but him. I wouldn’t trust him near me for five minutes after this!”

He shook Heyst’s arm a little.

“If you had not happened to mention the creature, we should both have been dead before morning. He would have stabbed you as you came down the steps after leaving me and then he would have walked up to me and planted the same knife between my ribs. He has no prejudices. The viler the origin, the greater the freedom of these simple souls!”

He drew a cautious, hissing breath and added in an agitated murmur: “I can see right into his mind, I have been nearly caught napping by his cunning.”

He stretched his neck to peer into the room from the side. Heyst, too, made a step forward, under the slight impulse of that slender hand clasping his hand with a thin, bony grasp.

“Behold!” the skeleton of the crazy bandit jabbered thinly into his ear in spectral fellowship. “Behold the simple, Acis kissing the sandals of the nymph, on the way to her lips, all forgetful, while the menacing fife of Polyphemus already sounds close at hand — if he could only hear it! Stoop a little.”



## CHAPTER TWELVE

On returning to the Heyst bungalow, rapid as if on wings, Ricardo found Lena waiting for him. She was dressed in black; and at once his uplifting exultation was replaced by an awed and quivering patience before her white face, before the immobility of her reposeful pose, the more amazing to him who had encountered the strength of her limbs and the indomitable spirit in her body. She had come out after Heyst's departure, and had sat down under the portrait to wait for the return of the man of violence and death. While lifting the curtain, she felt the anguish of her disobedience to her lover, which was soothed by a feeling she had known before — a gentle flood of penetrating sweetness. She was not automatically obeying a momentary suggestion, she was under influences more deliberate, more vague, and of greater potency. She had been prompted, not by her will, but by a force that was outside of her and more worthy. She reckoned upon nothing definite; she had calculated nothing. She saw only her purpose of capturing death — savage, sudden, irresponsible death, prowling round the man who possessed her, death embodied in the knife ready to strike into his heart. No doubt it had been a sin to throw herself into his arms. With that inspiration that descends at times from above for the good or evil of our common mediocrity, she had a sense of having been for him only a violent and sincere choice of curiosity and pity — a thing that passes. She did not know him. If he were to go away from her and disappear, she would utter no reproach, she would not resent it; for she would hold in herself the impress of something most rare and precious — his embraces made her own by her courage in saving his life.

All she thought of — the essence of her tremors, her flushes of heat, and her shudders of cold — was the question how to get hold of that knife, the mark and sign of stalking death. A tremor of impatience to clutch the frightful thing, glimpsed once and unforgettable, agitated her hands.

The instinctive flinging forward of these hands stopped Ricardo dead short between the door and her chair, with the ready obedience of a conquered man who can bide his time. Her success disconcerted her. She listened to the man's impassioned transports of terrible eulogy and even more awful declarations of love. She was even able to meet his eyes, oblique, apt to glide away, throwing feral gleams of desire.

“No!” he was saying, after a fiery outpouring of words in which the most ferocious phrases of love were mingled with wooing accents of entreaty. “I will have no more of it! Don’t you mistrust me. I am sober in my talk. Feel how quietly my heart beats. Ten times today when you, you, you, swam in my eye, I thought it would burst one of my ribs or leap out of my throat. It has knocked itself dead and tired, waiting for this evening, for this very minute. And now it can do no more. Feel how quiet it is!”

He made a step forward, but she raised her clear voice commandingly:

“No nearer!”

He stopped with a smile of imbecile worship on his lips, and with the delighted obedience of a man who could at any moment seize her in his hands and dash her to the ground.

“Ah! If I had taken you by the throat this morning and had my way with you, I should never have known what you are. And now I do. You are a wonder! And so am I, in my way. I have nerve, and I have brains, too. We should have been lost many times but for me. I plan — I plot for my gentleman. Gentleman — pah! I am sick of him. And you are sick of yours, eh? You, you!”

He shook all over; he cooed at her a string of endearing names, obscene and tender, and then asked abruptly:

“Why don’t you speak to me?”

“It’s my part to listen,” she said, giving him an inscrutable smile, with a flush on her cheek and her lips cold as ice.

“But you will answer me?”

“Yes,” she said, her eyes dilated as if with sudden interest.

“Where’s that plunder? Do you know?”

“No! Not yet.”

“But there is plunder stowed somewhere that’s worth having?”

“Yes, I think so. But who knows?” she added after a pause.

“And who cares?” he retorted recklessly. “I’ve had enough of this crawling on my belly. It’s you who are my treasure. It’s I who found you out where a gentleman had buried you to rot for his accursed pleasure!”

He looked behind him and all around for a seat, then turned to her his troubled eyes and dim smile.

“I am dog-tired,” he said, and sat down on the floor. “I went tired this morning, since I came in here and started talking to you — as tired as if I

had been pouring my life-blood here on these planks for you to dabble your white feet in.”

Unmoved, she nodded at him thoughtfully. Woman-like, all her faculties remained concentrated on her heart's desire — on the knife — while the man went on babbling insanely at her feet, ingratiating and savage, almost crazy with elation. But he, too, was holding on to his purpose.

“For you! For you I will throw away money, lives — all the lives but mine! What you want is a man, a master that will let you put the heel of your shoe on his neck; not that skulker, who will get tired of you in a year — and you of him. And then what? You are not the one to sit still; neither am I. I live for myself, and you shall live for yourself, too — not for a Swedish baron. They make a convenience of people like you and me. A gentleman is better than an employer, but an equal partnership against all the ‘yporcrits is the thing for you and me. We’ll go on wandering the world over, you and I both free and both true. You are no cage bird. We’ll rove together, for we are of them that have no homes. We are born rovers!”

She listened to him with the utmost attention, as if any unexpected word might give her some sort of opening to get that dagger, that awful knife — to disarm murder itself, pleading for her love at her feet. Again she nodded at him thoughtfully, rousing a gleam in his yellow eyes, yearning devotedly upon her face. When he hitched himself a little closer, her soul had no movement of recoil. This had to be. Anything had to be which would bring the knife within her reach. He talked more confidentially now.

“We have met, and their time has come,” he began, looking up into her eyes. “The partnership between me and my gentleman has to be ripped up. There’s no room for him where we two are. Why, he would shoot me like a dog! Don’t you worry. This will settle it not later than tonight!”

He tapped his folded leg below the knee, and was surprised, flattered, by the lighting up of her face, which stooped towards him eagerly and remained expectant, the lips girlishly parted, red in the pale face, and quivering in the quickened drawing of her breath.

“You marvel, you miracle, you man’s luck and joy — one in a million! No, the only one. You have found your man in me,” he whispered tremulously. “Listen! They are having their last talk together; for I’ll do for your gentleman, too, by midnight.”

Without the slightest tremor she murmured, as soon as the tightening of her breast had eased off and the words would come:

“I wouldn’t be in too much of a hurry — with him.”

The pause, the tone, had all the value of meditated advice.

“Good, thrifty girl!” he laughed low, with a strange feline gaiety, expressed by the undulating movement of his shoulders and the sparkling snap of his oblique eyes. “You are still thinking about the chance of that swag. You’ll make a good partner, that you will! And, I say, what a decoy you will make! Jee-miny!”

He was carried away for a moment, but his face darkened swiftly.

“No! No reprieve. What do you think a fellow is — a scarecrow? All hat and clothes and no feeling, no inside, no brain to make fancies for himself? No!” he went on violently. “Never in his life will he go again into that room of yours — never any more!”

A silence fell. He was gloomy with the torment of his jealousy, and did not even look at her. She sat up and slowly, gradually, bent lower and lower over him, as if ready to fall into his arms. He looked up at last, and checked this droop unwittingly.

“Say! You, who are up to fighting a man with your bare hands, could you — eh? — could you manage to stick one with a thing like that knife of mine?”

She opened her eyes very wide and gave him a wild smile.

“How can I tell?” she whispered enchantingly. “Will you let me have a look at it?”

Without taking his eyes from her face, he pulled the knife out of its sheath — a short, broad, cruel double-edged blade with a bone handle — and only then looked down at it.

“A good friend,” he said simply. “Take it in your hand and feel the balance,” he suggested.

At the moment when she bent forward to receive it from him, there was a flash of fire in her mysterious eyes — a red gleam in the white mist which wrapped the promptings and longings of her soul. She had done it! The very sting of death was in her hands, the venom of the viper in her paradise, extracted, safe in her possession — and the viper’s head all but lying under her heel. Ricardo, stretched on the mats of the floor, crept closer and closer to the chair in which she sat.

All her thoughts were busy planning how to keep possession of that weapon which had seemed to have drawn into itself every danger and

menace on the death-ridden earth. She said with a low laugh, the exultation in which he failed to recognize:

“I didn’t think that you would ever trust me with that thing!”

“Why not?”

“For fear I should suddenly strike you with it.”

“What for? For this morning’s work? Oh, no! There’s no spite in you for that. You forgave me. You saved me. You got the better of me, too. And anyhow, what good would it be?”

“No, no good,” she admitted.

In her heart she felt that she would not know how to do it; that if it came to a struggle, she would have to drop the dagger and fight with her hands.

“Listen. When we are going about the world together, you shall always call me husband. Do you hear?”

“Yes,” she said bracing herself for the contest, in whatever shape it was coming.

The knife was lying in her lap. She let it slip into the fold of her dress, and laid her forearms with clasped fingers over her knees, which she pressed desperately together. The dreaded thing was out of sight at last. She felt a dampness break out all over her.

“I am not going to hide you, like that good-for-nothing, finicky, sneery gentleman. You shall be my pride and my chum. Isn’t that better than rotting on an island for the pleasure of a gentleman, till he gives you the chuck?”

“I’ll be anything you like,” she said.

In his intoxication he crept closer with every word she uttered, with every movement she made.

“Give your foot,” he begged in a timid murmur, and in the full consciousness of his power.

Anything! Anything to keep murder quiet and disarmed till strength had returned to her limbs and she could make up her mind what to do. Her fortitude had been shaken by the very facility of success that had come to her. She advanced her foot forward a little from under the hem of her skirt; and he threw himself on it greedily. She was not even aware of him. She had thought of the forest, to which she had been told to run. Yes, the forest — that was the place for her to carry off the terrible spoil, the sting of vanquished death. Ricardo, clasping her ankle, pressed his lips time after time to the instep, muttering gasping words that were like sobs, making

little noises that resembled the sounds of grief and distress. Unheard by them both, the thunder growled distantly with angry modulations of its tremendous voice, while the world outside shuddered incessantly around the dead stillness of the room where the framed profile of Heyst's father looked severely into space.

Suddenly Ricardo felt himself spurned by the foot he had been cherishing — spurned with a push of such violence into the very hollow of his throat that it swung him back instantly into an upright position on his knees. He read his danger in the stony eyes of the girl; and in the very act of leaping to his feet he heard sharply, detached on the comminatory voice of the storm the brief report of a shot which half stunned him, in the manner of a blow. He turned his burning head, and saw Heyst towering in the doorway. The thought that the beggar had started to prance darted through his mind. For a fraction of a second his distracted eyes sought for his weapon all over the floor. He couldn't see it.

"Stick him, you!" he called hoarsely to the girl, and dashed headlong for the door of the compound.

While he thus obeyed the instinct of self-preservation, his reason was telling him that he could not possibly reach it alive. It flew open, however, with a crash, before his launched weight, and instantly he swung it to behind him. There, his shoulder leaning against it, his hands clinging to the handle, dazed and alone in the night full of shudders and muttered menaces, he tried to pull himself together. He asked himself if he had been shot at more than once. His shoulder was wet with the blood trickling from his head. Feeling above his ear, he ascertained that it was only a graze, but the shock of the surprise had unmanned him for the moment.

What the deuce was the governor about to let the beggar break loose like this? Or — was the governor dead, perhaps?

The silence within the room awed him. Of going back there could be no question.

"But she knows how to take care of her self," he muttered.

She had his knife. It was she now who was deadly, while he was disarmed, no good for the moment. He stole away from the door, staggering, the warm trickle running down his neck, to find out what had become of the governor and to provide himself with a firearm from the armoury in the trunks.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Mr Jones, after firing his shot over Heyst's shoulder, had thought it proper to dodge away. Like the spectre he was, he noiselessly vanished from the veranda. Heyst stumbled into the room and looked around. All the objects in there — the books, portrait on the wall — seemed shadowy, unsubstantial, the dumb accomplices of an amazing dream-plot ending in an illusory effect of awakening and the impossibility of ever closing his eyes again. With dread he forced himself to look at the girl. Still in the chair, she was leaning forward far over her knees, and had hidden her face in her hands. Heyst remembered Wang suddenly. How clear all this was — and how extremely amusing! Very.

She sat up a little, then leaned back, and taking her hands from her face, pressed both of them to her breast as if moved to the heart by seeing him there looking at her with a black, horror-struck curiosity. He would have pitied her, if the triumphant expression of her face had not given him a shock which destroyed the balance of his feelings. She spoke with an accent of wild joy:

"I knew you would come back in time! You are safe now. I have done it! I would never, never have let him — " Her voice died out, while her eyes shone at him as when the sun breaks through a mist. "Never get it back. Oh, my beloved!"

He bowed his head gravely, and said in his polite. Heystian tone:

"No doubt you acted from instinct. Women have been provided with their own weapon. I was a disarmed man, I have been a disarmed man all my life as I see it now. You may glory in your resourcefulness and your profound knowledge of yourself; but I may say that the other attitude, suggestive of shame, had its charm. For you are full of charm!"

The exultation vanished from her face.

"You mustn't make fun of me now. I know no shame. I was thanking God with all my sinful heart for having been able to do it — for giving you to me in that way — oh, my beloved — all my own at last!"

He stared as if mad. Timidly she tried to excuse herself for disobeying his directions for her safety. Every modulation of her enchanting voice cut deep into his very breast, so that he could hardly understand the words for the sheer pain of it. He turned his back on her; but a sudden drop, an extraordinary faltering of her tone, made him spin round. On her white neck

her pale head dropped as in a cruel drought a withered flower droops on its stalk. He caught his breath, looked at her closely, and seemed to read some awful intelligence in her eyes. At the moment when her eyelids fell as if smitten from above by an the gleam of old silver familiar to him from boyhood, the very invisible power, he snatched her up bodily out of the chair, and disregarding an unexpected metallic clatter on the floor, carried her off into the other room. The limpness of her body frightened him. Laying her down on the bed, he ran out again, seized a four-branched candlestick on the table, and ran back, tearing down with a furious jerk the curtain that swung stupidly in his way, but after putting the candlestick on the table by the bed, he remained absolutely idle. There did not seem anything more for him to do. Holding his chin in his hand he looked down intently at her still face.

“Has she been stabbed with this thing?” asked Davidson, whom suddenly he saw standing by his side and holding up Ricardo’s dagger to his sight. Heyst uttered no word of recognition or surprise. He gave Davidson only a dumb look of unutterable awe, then, as if possessed with a sudden fury, started tearing open the front of the girls dress. She remained insensible under his hands, and Heyst let out a groan which made Davidson shudder inwardly the heavy plaint of a man who falls clubbed in the dark.

They stood side by side, looking mournfully at the little black hole made by Mr. Jones’s bullet under the swelling breast of a dazzling and as it were sacred whiteness. It rose and fell slightly — so slightly that only the eyes of the lover could detect the faint stir of life. Heyst, calm and utterly unlike himself in the face, moving about noiselessly, prepared a wet cloth, and laid it on the insignificant wound, round which there was hardly a trace of blood to mar the charm, the fascination, of that mortal flesh.

Her eyelids fluttered. She looked drowsily about, serene, as if fatigued only by the exertions of her tremendous victory, capturing the very sting of death in the service of love. But her eyes became very wide awake when they caught sight of Ricardo’s dagger, the spoil of vanquished death, which Davidson was still holding, unconsciously.

“Give it to me,” she said. “It’s mine.”

Davidson put the symbol of her victory into her feeble hands extended to him with the innocent gesture of a child reaching eagerly for a toy.

“For you,” she gasped, turning her eyes to Heyst. “Kill nobody.”



“No,” said Heyst, taking the dagger and laying it gently on her breast, while her hands fell powerless by her side.

The faint smile on her deep-cut lips waned, and her head sank deep into the pillow, taking on the majestic pallor and immobility of marble. But over the muscles, which seemed set in their transfigured beauty for ever, passed a slight and awful tremor. With an amazing strength she asked loudly:

“What’s the matter with me?”

“You have been shot, dear Lena,” Heyst said in a steady voice, while Davidson, at the question, turned away and leaned his forehead against the post of the foot of the bed.

“Shot? I did think, too, that something had struck me.”

Over Samburan the thunder had ceased to growl at last, and the world of material forms shuddered no more under the emerging stars. The spirit of the girl which was passing away from under them clung to her triumph convinced of the reality of her victory over death.

“No more,” she muttered. “There will be no more! Oh, my beloved,” she cried weakly, “I’ve saved you! Why don’t you take me into your arms and carry me out of this lonely place?”

Heyst bent low over her, cursing his fastidious soul, which even at that moment kept the true cry of love from his lips in its infernal mistrust of all life. He dared not touch her and she had no longer the strength to throw her arms about his neck.

“Who else could have done this for you?” she whispered gloriously.

“No one in the world,” he answered her in a murmur of unconcealed despair.

She tried to raise herself, but all she could do was to lift her head a little from the pillow. With a terrible and gentle movement, Heyst hastened to slip his arm under her neck. She felt relieved at once of an intolerable weight, and was content to surrender to him the infinite weariness of her tremendous achievement. Exulting, she saw herself extended on the bed, in a black dress, and profoundly at peace, while, stooping over her with a kindly, playful smile, he was ready to lift her up in his firm arms and take her into the sanctuary of his innermost heart — for ever! The flush of rapture flooding her whole being broke out in a smile of innocent, girlish happiness; and with that divine radiance on her lips she breathed her last — triumphant, seeking for his glance in the shades of death.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

“Yes, Excellency,” said Davidson in his placid voice; “there are more dead in this affair — more white people, I mean — than have been killed in many of the battles in the last Achin war.”

Davidson was talking with an Excellency, because what was alluded to in conversation as “the mystery of Samburan” had caused such a sensation in the Archipelago that even those in the highest spheres were anxious to hear something at first hand. Davidson had been summoned to an audience. It was a high official on his tour.

“You knew the late Baron Heyst well?”

“The truth is that nobody out here can boast of having known him well,” said Davidson. “He was a queer chap. I doubt if he himself knew how queer he was. But everybody was aware that I was keeping my eye on him in a friendly way. And that’s how I got the warning which made me turn round in my tracks. In the middle of my trip and steam back to Samburan, where, I am grieved to say, I arrived too late.”

Without enlarging very much, Davidson explained to the attentive Excellency how a woman, the wife of a certain hotel-keeper named Schomberg, had overheard two card-sharping rascals making inquiries from her husband as to the exact position of the island. She caught only a few words referring to the neighbouring volcano, but there were enough to arouse her suspicions — “which,” went on Davidson, “she imparted to me, your Excellency. They were only too well founded!”

“That was very clever of her,” remarked the great man.

“She’s much cleverer than people have any conception of,” said Davidson.

But he refrained from disclosing to the Excellency the real cause which had sharpened Mrs. Schomberg’s wits. The poor woman was in mortal terror of the girl being brought back within reach of her infatuated Wilhelm. Davidson only said that her agitation had impressed him; but he confessed that while going back, he began to have his doubts as to there being anything in it.

“I steamed into one of those silly thunderstorms that hang about the volcano, and had some trouble in making the island,” narrated Davidson. “I had to grope my way dead slow into Diamond Bay. I don’t suppose that

anybody, even if looking out for me, could have heard me let go the anchor.”

He admitted that he ought to have gone ashore at once; but everything was perfectly dark and absolutely quiet. He felt ashamed of his impulsiveness. What a fool he would have looked, waking up a man in the middle of the night just to ask him if he was all right! And then the girl being there, he feared that Heyst would look upon his visit as an unwarrantable intrusion.

The first intimation he had of there being anything wrong was a big white boat, adrift, with the dead body of a very hairy man inside, bumping against the bows of his steamer. Then indeed he lost no time in going ashore — alone, of course, from motives of delicacy.

“I arrived in time to see that poor girl die, as I have told your Excellency,” pursued Davidson. “I won’t tell you what a time I had with him afterwards. He talked to me. His father seems to have been a crank, and to have upset his head when he was young. He was a queer chap. Practically the last words he said to me, as we came out on the veranda, were:

“‘Ah, Davidson, woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love — and to put its trust in life!’

“As we stood there, just before I left him, for he said he wanted to be alone with his dead for a time, we heard a snarly sort of voice near the bushes by the shore calling out:

“‘Is that you, governor?’

“‘Yes, it’s me.’

“‘Jeeminy! I thought the beggar had done for you. He has started prancing and nearly had me. I have been dodging around, looking for you ever since.’

“‘Well, here I am,’ suddenly screamed the other voice, and then a shot rang out.

“‘This time he has not missed him,’ Heyst said to me bitterly, and went back into the house.

“I returned on board as he had insisted I should do. I didn’t want to intrude on his grief. Later, about five in the morning, some of my calashes came running to me, yelling that there was a fire ashore. I landed at once, of course. The principal bungalow was blazing. The heat drove us back. The

other two houses caught one after another like kindling-wood. There was no going beyond the shore end of the jetty till the afternoon."

Davidson sighed placidly.

"I suppose you are certain that Baron Heyst is dead?"

"He is — ashes, your Excellency," said Davidson, wheezing a little; "he and the girl together. I suppose he couldn't stand his thoughts before her dead body — and fire purifies everything. That Chinaman of whom I told your Excellency helped me to investigate next day, when the embers got cooled a little. We found enough to be sure. He's not a bad Chinaman. He told me that he had followed Heyst and the girl through the forest from pity, and partly out of curiosity. He watched the house till he saw Heyst go out, after dinner, and Ricardo come back alone. While he was dodging there, it occurred to him that he had better cast the boat adrift, for fear those scoundrels should come round by water and bombard the village from the sea with their revolvers and Winchesters. He judged that they were devils enough for anything. So he walked down the wharf quietly; and as he got into the boat, to cast her off, that hairy man who, it seems, was dozing in her, jumped up growling, and Wang shot him dead. Then he shoved the boat off as far as he could and went away."

There was a pause. Presently Davidson went on, in his tranquil manner:

"Let Heaven look after what has been purified. The wind and rain will take care of the ashes. The carcass of that follower, secretary, or whatever the unclean ruffian called himself, I left where it lay, to swell and rot in the sun. His principal had shot him neatly through the head. Then, apparently, this Jones went down to the wharf to look for the boat and for the hairy man. I suppose he tumbled into the water by accident — or perhaps not by accident. The boat and the man were gone, and the scoundrel saw himself alone, his game clearly up, and fairly trapped. Who knows? The water's very clear there, and I could see him huddled up on the bottom, between two piles, like a heap of bones in a blue silk bag, with only the head and the feet sticking out. Wang was very pleased when he discovered him. That made everything safe, he said, and he went at once over the hill to fetch his Alfuro woman back to the hut."

Davidson took out his handkerchief to wipe the perspiration off his forehead.

"And then, your Excellency, I went away. There was nothing to be done there."

“Clearly!” assented the Excellency.

Davidson, thoughtful, seemed to weigh the matter in his mind, and then murmured with placid sadness:

“Nothing!”

October 1912 — May 1914

# ***THE SHADOW-LINE***



## **A CONFESSION**

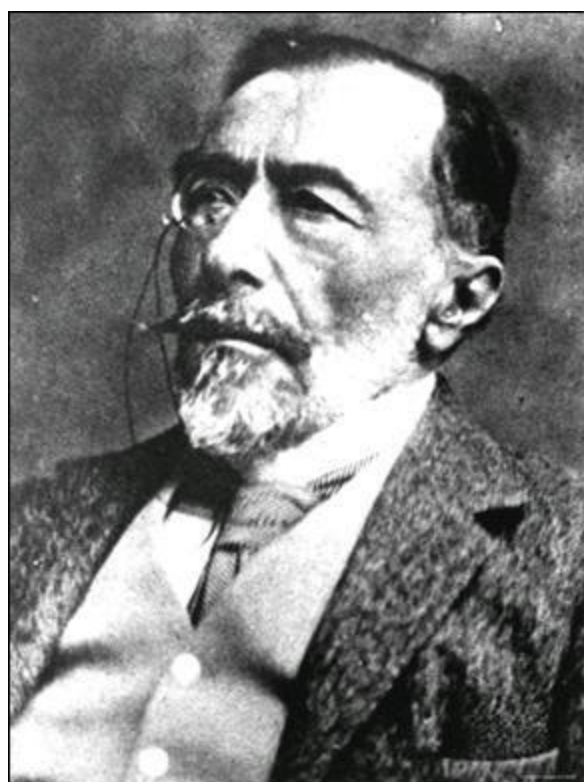
“Worthy of my undying regard”

To Borys And All Others Who,

Like Himself, Have Crossed In Early Youth

The Shadow-Line Of Their Generation With Love

— D’autre fois, calme plat, grand miroir De mon desespoir. — BAUDELAIRE



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## PART ONE

### I

Only the young have such moments. I don't mean the very young. No. The very young have, properly speaking, no moments. It is the privilege of early youth to live in advance of its days in all the beautiful continuity of hope which knows no pauses and no introspection.

One closes behind one the little gate of mere boyishness — and enters an enchanted garden. Its very shades glow with promise. Every turn of the path has its seduction. And it isn't because it is an undiscovered country. One knows well enough that all mankind had streamed that way. It is the charm of universal experience from which one expects an uncommon or personal sensation — a bit of one's own.

One goes on recognizing the landmarks of the predecessors, excited, amused, taking the hard luck and the good luck together — the kicks and the half-pence, as the saying is — the picturesque common lot that holds so many possibilities for the deserving or perhaps for the lucky. Yes. One goes on. And the time, too, goes on — till one perceives ahead a shadow-line warning one that the region of early youth, too, must be left behind.

This is the period of life in which such moments of which I have spoken are likely to come. What moments? Why, the moments of boredom, of weariness, of dissatisfaction. Rash moments. I mean moments when the still young are inclined to commit rash actions, such as getting married suddenly or else throwing up a job for no reason.

This is not a marriage story. It wasn't so bad as that with me. My action, rash as it was, had more the character of divorce — almost of desertion. For no reason on which a sensible person could put a finger I threw up my job — chucked my berth — left the ship of which the worst that could be said was that she was a steamship and therefore, perhaps, not entitled to that blind loyalty which. . . . However, it's no use trying to put a gloss on what even at the time I myself half suspected to be a caprice.

It was in an Eastern port. She was an Eastern ship, inasmuch as then she belonged to that port. She traded among dark islands on a blue reef-scarred sea, with the Red Ensign over the taffrail and at her masthead a house-flag, also red, but with a green border and with a white crescent in it. For an Arab owned her, and a Syed at that. Hence the green border on the flag. He was the head of a great House of Straits Arabs, but as loyal a subject of the complex British Empire as you could find east of the Suez Canal. World politics did not trouble him at all, but he had a great occult power amongst his own people.

It was all one to us who owned the ship. He had to employ white men in the shipping part of his business, and many of those he so employed had never set eyes on him from the first to the last day. I myself saw him but once, quite accidentally on a wharf — an old, dark little man blind in one eye, in a snowy robe and yellow slippers. He was having his hand severely kissed by a crowd of Malay pilgrims to whom he had done some favour, in the way of food and money. His alms-giving, I have heard, was most extensive, covering almost the whole Archipelago. For isn't it said that "The charitable man is the friend of Allah"?

Excellent (and picturesque) Arab owner, about whom one needed not to trouble one's head, a most excellent Scottish ship — for she was that from the keep up — excellent sea-boat, easy to keep clean, most handy in every way, and if it had not been for her internal propulsion, worthy of any man's love, I cherish to this day a profound respect for her memory. As to the kind of trade she was engaged in and the character of my shipmates, I could not have been happier if I had had the life and the men made to my order by a benevolent Enchanter.

And suddenly I left all this. I left it in that, to us, inconsequential manner in which a bird flies away from a comfortable branch. It was as though all unknowing I had heard a whisper or seen something. Well — perhaps! One day I was perfectly right and the next everything was gone — glamour, flavour, interest, contentment — everything. It was one of these moments, you know. The green sickness of late youth descended on me and carried me off. Carried me off that ship, I mean.

We were only four white men on board, with a large crew of Kalashes and two Malay petty officers. The Captain stared hard as if wondering what ailed me. But he was a sailor, and he, too, had been young at one time. Presently a smile came to lurk under his thick iron-gray moustache, and he

observed that, of course, if I felt I must go he couldn't keep me by main force. And it was arranged that I should be paid off the next morning. As I was going out of his cabin he added suddenly, in a peculiar wistful tone, that he hoped I would find what I was so anxious to go and look for. A soft, cryptic utterance which seemed to reach deeper than any diamond-hard tool could have done. I do believe he understood my case.

But the second engineer attacked me differently. He was a sturdy young Scot, with a smooth face and light eyes. His honest red countenance emerged out of the engine-room companion and then the whole robust man, with shirt sleeves turned up, wiping slowly the massive fore-arms with a lump of cotton-waste. And his light eyes expressed bitter distaste, as though our friendship had turned to ashes. He said weightily: "Oh! Aye! I've been thinking it was about time for you to run away home and get married to some silly girl."

It was tacitly understood in the port that John Nieven was a fierce misogynist; and the absurd character of the sally convinced me that he meant to be nasty — very nasty — had meant to say the most crushing thing he could think of. My laugh sounded deprecatory. Nobody but a friend could be so angry as that. I became a little crestfallen. Our chief engineer also took a characteristic view of my action, but in a kindlier spirit.

He was young, too, but very thin, and with a mist of fluffy brown beard all round his haggard face. All day long, at sea or in harbour, he could be seen walking hastily up and down the after-deck, wearing an intense, spiritually rapt expression, which was caused by a perpetual consciousness of unpleasant physical sensations in his internal economy. For he was a confirmed dyspeptic. His view of my case was very simple. He said it was nothing but deranged liver. Of course! He suggested I should stay for another trip and meantime dose myself with a certain patent medicine in which his own belief was absolute. "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll buy you two bottles, out of my own pocket. There. I can't say fairer than that, can I?"

I believe he would have perpetrated the atrocity (or generosity) at the merest sign of weakening on my part. By that time, however, I was more discontented, disgusted, and dogged than ever. The past eighteen months, so full of new and varied experience, appeared a dreary, prosaic waste of days. I felt — how shall I express it? — that there was no truth to be got out of them.

What truth? I should have been hard put to it to explain. Probably, if pressed, I would have burst into tears simply. I was young enough for that.

Next day the Captain and I transacted our business in the Harbour Office. It was a lofty, big, cool, white room, where the screened light of day glowed serenely. Everybody in it — the officials, the public — were in white. Only the heavy polished desks gleamed darkly in a central avenue, and some papers lying on them were blue. Enormous punkahs sent from on high a gentle draught through that immaculate interior and upon our perspiring heads.

The official behind the desk we approached grinned amiably and kept it up till, in answer to his perfunctory question, “Sign off and on again?” my Captain answered, “No! Signing off for good.” And then his grin vanished in sudden solemnity. He did not look at me again till he handed me my papers with a sorrowful expression, as if they had been my passports for Hades.

While I was putting them away he murmured some question to the Captain, and I heard the latter answer good-humouredly:

“No. He leaves us to go home.”

“Oh!” the other exclaimed, nodding mournfully over my sad condition.

I didn’t know him outside the official building, but he leaned forward the desk to shake hands with me, compassionately, as one would with some poor devil going out to be hanged; and I am afraid I performed my part ungraciously, in the hardened manner of an impenitent criminal.

No homeward-bound mail-boat was due for three or four days. Being now a man without a ship, and having for a time broken my connection with the sea — become, in fact, a mere potential passenger — it would have been more appropriate perhaps if I had gone to stay at an hotel. There it was, too, within a stone’s throw of the Harbour Office, low, but somehow palatial, displaying its white, pillared pavilions surrounded by trim grass plots. I would have felt a passenger indeed in there! I gave it a hostile glance and directed my steps toward the Officers’ Sailors’ Home.

I walked in the sunshine, disregarding it, and in the shade of the big trees on the esplanade without enjoying it. The heat of the tropical East descended through the leafy boughs, enveloping my thinly-clad body, clinging to my rebellious discontent, as if to rob it of its freedom.

The Officers’ Home was a large bungalow with a wide verandah and a curiously suburban-looking little garden of bushes and a few trees between

it and the street. That institution partook somewhat of the character of a residential club, but with a slightly Governmental flavour about it, because it was administered by the Harbour Office. Its manager was officially styled Chief Steward. He was an unhappy, wizened little man, who if put into a jockey's rig would have looked the part to perfection. But it was obvious that at some time or other in his life, in some capacity or other, he had been connected with the sea. Possibly in the comprehensive capacity of a failure.

I should have thought his employment a very easy one, but he used to affirm for some reason or other that his job would be the death of him some day. It was rather mysterious. Perhaps everything naturally was too much trouble for him. He certainly seemed to hate having people in the house.

On entering it I thought he must be feeling pleased. It was as still as a tomb. I could see no one in the living rooms; and the verandah, too, was empty, except for a man at the far end dozing prone in a long chair. At the noise of my footsteps he opened one horribly fish-like eye. He was a stranger to me. I retreated from there, and crossing the dining room — a very bare apartment with a motionless punkah hanging over the centre table — I knocked at a door labelled in black letters: "Chief Steward."

The answer to my knock being a vexed and doleful plaint: "Oh, dear! Oh, dear! What is it now?" I went in at once.

It was a strange room to find in the tropics. Twilight and stuffiness reigned in there. The fellow had hung enormously ample, dusty, cheap lace curtains over his windows, which were shut. Piles of cardboard boxes, such as milliners and dressmakers use in Europe, cumbered the corners; and by some means he had procured for himself the sort of furniture that might have come out of a respectable parlour in the East End of London — a horsehair sofa, arm-chairs of the same. I glimpsed grimy antimacassars scattered over that horrid upholstery, which was awe-inspiring, insomuch that one could not guess what mysterious accident, need, or fancy had collected it there. Its owner had taken off his tunic, and in white trousers and a thin, short-sleeved singlet prowled behind the chair-backs nursing his meagre elbows.

An exclamation of dismay escaped him when he heard that I had come for a stay; but he could not deny that there were plenty of vacant rooms.

"Very well. Can you give me the one I had before?"

He emitted a faint moan from behind a pile of cardboard boxes on the table, which might have contained gloves or handkerchiefs or neckties. I

wonder what the fellow did keep in them? There was a smell of decaying coral, or Oriental dust of zoological specimens in that den of his. I could only see the top of his head and his unhappy eyes levelled at me over the barrier.

“It’s only for a couple of days,” I said, intending to cheer him up.

“Perhaps you would like to pay in advance?” he suggested eagerly.

“Certainly not!” I burst out directly I could speak. “Never heard of such a thing! This is the most infernal cheek. . . .”

He had seized his head in both hands — a gesture of despair which checked my indignation.

“Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Don’t fly out like this. I am asking everybody.”

“I don’t believe it,” I said bluntly.

“Well, I am going to. And if you gentlemen all agreed to pay in advance I could make Hamilton pay up, too. He’s always turning up ashore dead broke, and even when he has some money he won’t settle his bills. I don’t know what to do with him. He swears at me and tells me I can’t chuck a white man out into the street here. So if you only would. . . .”

I was amazed. Incredulous, too. I suspected the fellow of gratuitous impertinence. I told him with marked emphasis that I would see him and Hamilton hanged first, and requested him to conduct me to my room with no more of his nonsense. He produced then a key from somewhere and led the way out of his lair, giving me a vicious sidelong look in passing.

“Any one I know staying here?” I asked him before he left my room.

He had recovered his usual pained impatient tone, and said that Captain Giles was there, back from a Solo Sea trip. Two other guests were staying also. He paused. And, of course, Hamilton, he added.

“Oh, yes! Hamilton,” I said, and the miserable creature took himself off with a final groan.

His impudence still rankled when I came into the dining room at tiffin time. He was there on duty overlooking the Chinamen servants. The tiffin was laid on one end only of the long table, and the punkah was stirring the hot air lazily — mostly above a barren waste of polished wood.

We were four around the cloth. The dozing stranger from the chair was one. Both his eyes were partly opened now, but they did not seem to see anything. He was supine. The dignified person next him, with short side whiskers and a carefully scraped chin, was, of course, Hamilton. I have never seen any one so full of dignity for the station in life Providence had

been pleased to place him in. I had been told that he regarded me as a rank outsider. He raised not only his eyes, but his eyebrows as well, at the sound I made pulling back my chair.

Captain Giles was at the head of the table. I exchanged a few words of greeting with him and sat down on his left. Stout and pale, with a great shiny dome of a bald forehead and prominent brown eyes, he might have been anything but a seaman. You would not have been surprised to learn that he was an architect. To me (I know how absurd it is) he looked like a churchwarden. He had the appearance of a man from whom you would expect sound advice, moral sentiments, with perhaps a platitude or two thrown in on occasion, not from a desire to dazzle, but from honest conviction.

Though very well known and appreciated in the shipping world, he had no regular employment. He did not want it. He had his own peculiar position. He was an expert. An expert in — how shall I say it? — in intricate navigation. He was supposed to know more about remote and imperfectly charted parts of the Archipelago than any man living. His brain must have been a perfect warehouse of reefs, positions, bearings, images of headlands, shapes of obscure coasts, aspects of innumerable islands, desert and otherwise. Any ship, for instance, bound on a trip to Palawan or somewhere that way would have Captain Giles on board, either in temporary command or “to assist the master.” It was said that he had a retaining fee from a wealthy firm of Chinese steamship owners, in view of such services. Besides, he was always ready to relieve any man who wished to take a spell ashore for a time. No owner was ever known to object to an arrangement of that sort. For it seemed to be the established opinion at the port that Captain Giles was as good as the best, if not a little better. But in Hamilton’s view he was an “outsider.” I believe that for Hamilton the generalisation “outsider” covered the whole lot of us; though I suppose that he made some distinctions in his mind.

I didn’t try to make conversation with Captain Giles, whom I had not seen more than twice in my life. But, of course, he knew who I was. After a while, inclining his big shiny head my way, he addressed me first in his friendly fashion. He presumed from seeing me there, he said, that I had come ashore for a couple of days’ leave.

He was a low-voiced man. I spoke a little louder, saying that: No — I had left the ship for good.

“A free man for a bit,” was his comment.

“I suppose I may call myself that — since eleven o’clock,” I said.

Hamilton had stopped eating at the sound of our voices. He laid down his knife and fork gently, got up, and muttering something about “this infernal heat cutting one’s appetite,” went out of the room. Almost immediately we heard him leave the house down the verandah steps.

On this Captain Giles remarked easily that the fellow had no doubt gone off to look after my old job. The Chief Steward, who had been leaning against the wall, brought his face of an unhappy goat nearer to the table and addressed us dolefully. His object was to unburden himself of his eternal grievance against Hamilton. The man kept him in hot water with the Harbour Office as to the state of his accounts. He wished to goodness he would get my job, though in truth what would it be? Temporary relief at best.

I said: “You needn’t worry. He won’t get my job. My successor is on board already.”

He was surprised, and I believe his face fell a little at the news. Captain Giles gave a soft laugh. We got up and went out on the verandah, leaving the supine stranger to be dealt with by the Chinamen. The last thing I saw they had put a plate with a slice of pine-apple on it before him and stood back to watch what would happen. But the experiment seemed a failure. He sat insensible.

It was imparted to me in a low voice by Captain Giles that this was an officer of some Rajah’s yacht which had come into our port to be dry-docked. Must have been “seeing life” last night, he added, wrinkling his nose in an intimate, confidential way which pleased me vastly. For Captain Giles had prestige. He was credited with wonderful adventures and with some mysterious tragedy in his life. And no man had a word to say against him. He continued:

“I remember him first coming ashore here some years ago. Seems only the other day. He was a nice boy. Oh! these nice boys!”

I could not help laughing aloud. He looked startled, then joined in the laugh. “No! No! I didn’t mean that,” he cried. “What I meant is that some of them do go soft mighty quick out here.”

Jocularly I suggested the beastly heat as the first cause. But Captain Giles disclosed himself possessed of a deeper philosophy. Things out East were made easy for white men. That was all right. The difficulty was to go on



keeping white, and some of these nice boys did not know how. He gave me a searching look, and in a benevolent, heavy-uncle manner asked point blank:

“Why did you throw up your berth?”

I became angry all of a sudden; for you can understand how exasperating such a question was to a man who didn’t know. I said to myself that I ought to shut up that moralist; and to him aloud I said with challenging politeness:

“Why . . . ? Do you disapprove?”

He was too disconcerted to do more than mutter confusedly: “I! . . . In a general way. . .” and then gave me up. But he retired in good order, under the cover of a heavily humorous remark that he, too, was getting soft, and that this was his time for taking his little siesta — when he was on shore. “Very bad habit. Very bad habit.”

There was a simplicity in the man which would have disarmed a touchiness even more youthful than mine. So when next day at tiffin he bent his head toward me and said that he had met my late Captain last evening, adding in an undertone: “He’s very sorry you left. He had never had a mate that suited him so well,” I answered him earnestly, without any affectation, that I certainly hadn’t been so comfortable in any ship or with any commander in all my sea-going days.

“Well — then,” he murmured.

“Haven’t you heard, Captain Giles, that I intend to go home?”

“Yes,” he said benevolently. “I have heard that sort of thing so often before.”

“What of that?” I cried. I thought he was the most dull, unimaginative man I had ever met. I don’t know what more I would have said, but the much-belated Hamilton came in just then and took his usual seat. So I dropped into a mumble.

“Anyhow, you shall see it done this time.”

Hamilton, beautifully shaved, gave Captain Giles a curt nod, but didn’t even condescend to raise his eyebrows at me; and when he spoke it was only to tell the Chief Steward that the food on his plate wasn’t fit to be set before a gentleman. The individual addressed seemed much too unhappy to groan. He cast his eyes up to the punkah and that was all.

Captain Giles and I got up from the table, and the stranger next to Hamilton followed our example, manoeuvring himself to his feet with difficulty. He, poor fellow, not because he was hungry but I verily believe

only to recover his self-respect, had tried to put some of that unworthy food into his mouth. But after dropping his fork twice and generally making a failure of it, he had sat still with an air of intense mortification combined with a ghastly glazed stare. Both Giles and I had avoided looking his way at table.

On the verandah he stopped short on purpose to address to us anxiously a long remark which I failed to understand completely. It sounded like some horrible unknown language. But when Captain Giles, after only an instant for reflection, assured him with homely friendliness, "Aye, to be sure. You are right there," he appeared very much gratified indeed, and went away (pretty straight, too) to seek a distant long chair.

"What was he trying to say?" I asked with disgust.

"I don't know. Mustn't be down too much on a fellow. He's feeling pretty wretched, you may be sure; and to-morrow he'll feel worse yet."

Judging by the man's appearance it seemed impossible. I wondered what sort of complicated debauch had reduced him to that unspeakable condition. Captain Giles' benevolence was spoiled by a curious air of complacency which I disliked. I said with a little laugh:

"Well, he will have you to look after him." He made a deprecatory gesture, sat down, and took up a paper. I did the same. The papers were old and uninteresting, filled up mostly with dreary stereotyped descriptions of Queen Victoria's first jubilee celebrations. Probably we should have quickly fallen into a tropical afternoon doze if it had not been for Hamilton's voice raised in the dining room. He was finishing his tiffin there. The big double doors stood wide open permanently, and he could not have had any idea how near to the doorway our chairs were placed. He was heard in a loud, supercilious tone answering some statement ventured by the Chief Steward.

"I am not going to be rushed into anything. They will be glad enough to get a gentleman I imagine. There is no hurry."

A loud whispering from the Steward succeeded and then again Hamilton was heard with even intenser scorn.

"What? That young ass who fancies himself for having been chief mate with Kent so long? . . . Preposterous."

Giles and I looked at each other. Kent being the name of my late commander, Captain Giles' whisper, "He's talking of you," seemed to me sheer waste of breath. The Chief Steward must have stuck to his point,

whatever it was, because Hamilton was heard again more supercilious if possible, and also very emphatic:

“Rubbish, my good man! One doesn’t *compete* with a rank outsider like that. There’s plenty of time.”

Then there were pushing of chairs, footsteps in the next room, and plaintive expostulations from the Steward, who was pursuing Hamilton, even out of doors through the main entrance.

“That’s a very insulting sort of man,” remarked Captain Giles — superfluously, I thought. “Very insulting. You haven’t offended him in some way, have you?”

“Never spoke to him in my life,” I said grumpily. “Can’t imagine what he means by competing. He has been trying for my job after I left — and didn’t get it. But that isn’t exactly competition.”

Captain Giles balanced his big benevolent head thoughtfully. “He didn’t get it,” he repeated very slowly. “No, not likely either, with Kent. Kent is no end sorry you left him. He gives you the name of a good seaman, too.”

I flung away the paper I was still holding. I sat up, I slapped the table with my open palm. I wanted to know why he would keep harping on that, my absolutely private affair. It was exasperating, really.

Captain Giles silenced me by the perfect equanimity of his gaze. “Nothing to be annoyed about,” he murmured reasonably, with an evident desire to soothe the childish irritation he had aroused. And he was really a man of an appearance so inoffensive that I tried to explain myself as much as I could. I told him that I did not want to hear any more about what was past and gone. It had been very nice while it lasted, but now it was done with I preferred not to talk about it or even think about it. I had made up my mind to go home.

He listened to the whole tirade in a particular lending-the-ear attitude, as if trying to detect a false note in it somewhere; then straightened himself up and appeared to ponder sagaciously over the matter.

“Yes. You told me you meant to go home. Anything in view there?”

Instead of telling him that it was none of his business I said sullenly:

“Nothing that I know of.”

I had indeed considered that rather blank side of the situation I had created for myself by leaving suddenly my very satisfactory employment. And I was not very pleased with it. I had it on the tip of my tongue to say that common sense had nothing to do with my action, and that therefore it

didn't deserve the interest Captain Giles seemed to be taking in it. But he was puffing at a short wooden pipe now, and looked so guileless, dense, and commonplace, that it seemed hardly worth while to puzzle him either with truth or sarcasm.

He blew a cloud of smoke, then surprised me by a very abrupt: "Paid your passage money yet?"

Overcome by the shameless pertinacity of a man to whom it was rather difficult to be rude, I replied with exaggerated meekness that I had not done so yet. I thought there would be plenty of time to do that to-morrow.

And I was about to turn away, withdrawing my privacy from his fatuous, objectless attempts to test what sort of stuff it was made of, when he laid down his pipe in an extremely significant manner, you know, as if a critical moment had come, and leaned sideways over the table between us.

"Oh! You haven't yet!" He dropped his voice mysteriously. "Well, then I think you ought to know that there's something going on here."

I had never in my life felt more detached from all earthly goings on. Freed from the sea for a time, I preserved the sailor's consciousness of complete independence from all land affairs. How could they concern me? I gazed at Captain Giles' animation with scorn rather than with curiosity.

To his obviously preparatory question whether our Steward had spoken to me that day I said he hadn't. And what's more he would have had precious little encouragement if he had tried to. I didn't want the fellow to speak to me at all.

Unrebuked by my petulance, Captain Giles, with an air of immense sagacity, began to tell me a minute tale about a Harbour Office peon. It was absolutely pointless. A peon was seen walking that morning on the verandah with a letter in his hand. It was in an official envelope. As the habit of these fellows is, he had shown it to the first white man he came across. That man was our friend in the arm-chair. He, as I knew, was not in a state to interest himself in any sublunary matters. He could only wave the peon away. The peon then wandered on along the verandah and came upon Captain Giles, who was there by an extraordinary chance. . . .

At this point he stopped with a profound look. The letter, he continued, was addressed to the Chief Steward. Now what could Captain Ellis, the Master Attendant, want to write to the Steward for? The fellow went every morning, anyhow, to the Harbour Office with his report, for orders or what

not. He hadn't been back more than an hour before there was an office peon chasing him with a note. Now what was that for?

And he began to speculate. It was not for this — and it could not be for that. As to that other thing it was unthinkable.

The fatuousness of all this made me stare. If the man had not been somehow a sympathetic personality I would have resented it like an insult. As it was, I felt only sorry for him. Something remarkably earnest in his gaze prevented me from laughing in his face. Neither did I yawn at him. I just stared.

His tone became a shade more mysterious. Directly the fellow (meaning the Steward) got that note he rushed for his hat and bolted out of the house. But it wasn't because the note called him to the Harbour Office. He didn't go there. He was not absent long enough for that. He came darting back in no time, flung his hat away, and raced about the dining room moaning and slapping his forehead. All these exciting facts and manifestations had been observed by Captain Giles. He had, it seems, been meditating upon them ever since.

I began to pity him profoundly. And in a tone which I tried to make as little sarcastic as possible I said that I was glad he had found something to occupy his morning hours.

With his disarming simplicity he made me observe, as if it were a matter of some consequence, how strange it was that he should have spent the morning indoors at all. He generally was out before tiffin, visiting various offices, seeing his friends in the harbour, and so on. He had felt out of sorts somewhat on rising. Nothing much. Just enough to make him feel lazy.

All this with a sustained, holding stare which, in conjunction with the general inanity of the discourse, conveyed the impression of mild, dreary lunacy. And when he hitched his chair a little and dropped his voice to the low note of mystery, it flashed upon me that high professional reputation was not necessarily a guarantee of sound mind.

It never occurred to me then that I didn't know in what soundness of mind exactly consisted and what a delicate and, upon the whole, unimportant matter it was. With some idea of not hurting his feelings I blinked at him in an interested manner. But when he proceeded to ask me mysteriously whether I remembered what had passed just now between that Steward of ours and "that man Hamilton," I only grunted sourly assent and turned away my head.

“Aye. But do you remember every word?” he insisted tactfully.

“I don’t know. It’s none of my business,” I snapped out, consigning, moreover, the Steward and Hamilton aloud to eternal perdition.

I meant to be very energetic and final, but Captain Giles continued to gaze at me thoughtfully. Nothing could stop him. He went on to point out that my personality was involved in that conversation. When I tried to preserve the semblance of unconcern he became positively cruel. I heard what the man had said? Yes? What did I think of it then? — he wanted to know.

Captain Giles’ appearance excluding the suspicion of mere sly malice, I came to the conclusion that he was simply the most tactless idiot on earth. I almost despised myself for the weakness of attempting to enlighten his common understanding. I started to explain that I did not think anything whatever. Hamilton was not worth a thought. What such an offensive loafer . . . “Aye! that he is,” interjected Captain Giles . . . thought or said was below any decent man’s contempt, and I did not propose to take the slightest notice of it.

This attitude seemed to me so simple and obvious that I was really astonished at Giles giving no sign of assent. Such perfect stupidity was almost interesting.

“What would you like me to do?” I asked, laughing. “I can’t start a row with him because of the opinion he has formed of me. Of course, I’ve heard of the contemptuous way he alludes to me. But he doesn’t intrude his contempt on my notice. He has never expressed it in my hearing. For even just now he didn’t know we could hear him. I should only make myself ridiculous.”

That hopeless Giles went on puffing at his pipe moodily. All at once his face cleared, and he spoke.

“You missed my point.”

“Have I? I am very glad to hear it,” I said.

With increasing animation he stated again that I had missed his point. Entirely. And in a tone of growing self-conscious complacency he told me that few things escaped his attention, and he was rather used to think them out, and generally from his experience of life and men arrived at the right conclusion.

This bit of self-praise, of course, fitted excellently the laborious inanity of the whole conversation. The whole thing strengthened in me that obscure

feeling of life being but a waste of days, which, half-unconsciously, had driven me out of a comfortable berth, away from men I liked, to flee from the menace of emptiness . . . and to find inanity at the first turn. Here was a man of recognized character and achievement disclosed as an absurd and dreary chatterer. And it was probably like this everywhere — from east to west, from the bottom to the top of the social scale.

A great discouragement fell on me. A spiritual drowsiness. Giles' voice was going on complacently; the very voice of the universal hollow conceit. And I was no longer angry with it. There was nothing original, nothing new, startling, informing, to expect from the world; no opportunities to find out something about oneself, no wisdom to acquire, no fun to enjoy. Everything was stupid and overrated, even as Captain Giles was. So be it.

The name of Hamilton suddenly caught my ear and roused me up.

"I thought we had done with him," I said, with the greatest possible distaste.

"Yes. But considering what we happened to hear just now I think you ought to do it."

"Ought to do it?" I sat up bewildered. "Do what?"

Captain Giles confronted me very much surprised.

"Why! Do what I have been advising you to try. You go and ask the Steward what was there in that letter from the Harbour Office. Ask him straight out."

I remained speechless for a time. Here was something unexpected and original enough to be altogether incomprehensible. I murmured, astounded:

"But I thought it was Hamilton that you . . ."

"Exactly. Don't you let him. You do what I tell you. You tackle that Steward. You'll make him jump, I bet," insisted Captain Giles, waving his smouldering pipe impressively at me. Then he took three rapid puffs at it.

His aspect of triumphant acuteness was indescribable. Yet the man remained a strangely sympathetic creature. Benevolence radiated from him ridiculously, mildly, impressively. It was irritating, too. But I pointed out coldly, as one who deals with the incomprehensible, that I didn't see any reason to expose myself to a snub from the fellow. He was a very unsatisfactory steward and a miserable wretch besides, but I would just as soon think of tweaking his nose.

"Tweaking his nose," said Captain Giles in a scandalized tone. "Much use it would be to you."

That remark was so irrelevant that one could make no answer to it. But the sense of the absurdity was beginning at last to exercise its well-known fascination. I felt I must not let the man talk to me any more. I got up, observing curtly that he was too much for me — that I couldn't make him out.

Before I had time to move away he spoke again in a changed tone of obstinacy and puffing nervously at his pipe.

“Well — he's a — no account cuss — anyhow. You just — ask him. That's all.”

That new manner impressed me — or rather made me pause. But sanity asserting its sway at once I left the verandah after giving him a mirthless smile. In a few strides I found myself in the dining room, now cleared and empty. But during that short time various thoughts occurred to me, such as: that Giles had been making fun of me, expecting some amusement at my expense; that I probably looked silly and gullible; that I knew very little of life. . . .

The door facing me across the dining room flew open to my extreme surprise. It was the door inscribed with the word “Steward” and the man himself ran out of his stuffy, Philistinish lair in his absurd, hunted-animal manner, making for the garden door.

To this day I don't know what made me call after him. “I say! Wait a minute.” Perhaps it was the sidelong glance he gave me; or possibly I was yet under the influence of Captain Giles' mysterious earnestness. Well, it was an impulse of some sort; an effect of that force somewhere within our lives which shapes them this way or that. For if these words had not escaped from my lips (my will had nothing to do with that) my existence would, to be sure, have been still a seaman's existence, but directed on now to me utterly inconceivable lines.

No. My will had nothing to do with it. Indeed, no sooner had I made that fateful noise than I became extremely sorry for it. Had the man stopped and faced me I would have had to retire in disorder. For I had no notion to carry out Captain Giles' idiotic joke, either at my own expense or at the expense of the Steward.

But here the old human instinct of the chase came into play. He pretended to be deaf, and I, without thinking a second about it, dashed along my own side of the dining table and cut him off at the very door.

“Why can't you answer when you are spoken to?” I asked roughly.



He leaned against the lintel of the door. He looked extremely wretched. Human nature is, I fear, not very nice right through. There are ugly spots in it. I found myself growing angry, and that, I believe, only because my quarry looked so woe-begone. Miserable beggar!

I went for him without more ado. "I understand there was an official communication to the Home from the Harbour Office this morning. Is that so?"

Instead of telling me to mind my own business, as he might have done, he began to whine with an undertone of impudence. He couldn't see me anywhere this morning. He couldn't be expected to run all over the town after me.

"Who wants you to?" I cried. And then my eyes became opened to the inwardness of things and speeches the triviality of which had been so baffling and tiresome.

I told him I wanted to know what was in that letter. My sternness of tone and behaviour was only half assumed. Curiosity can be a very fierce sentiment — at times.

He took refuge in a silly, muttering sulkiness. It was nothing to me, he mumbled. I had told him I was going home. And since I was going home he didn't see why he should. . . .

That was the line of his argument, and it was irrelevant enough to be almost insulting. Insulting to one's intelligence, I mean.

In that twilight region between youth and maturity, in which I had my being then, one is peculiarly sensitive to that kind of insult. I am afraid my behaviour to the Steward became very rough indeed. But it wasn't in him to face out anything or anybody. Drug habit or solitary tippling, perhaps. And when I forgot myself so far as to swear at him he broke down and began to shriek.

I don't mean to say that he made a great outcry. It was a cynical shrieking confession, only faint — piteously faint. It wasn't very coherent either, but sufficiently so to strike me dumb at first. I turned my eyes from him in righteous indignation, and perceived Captain Giles in the verandah doorway surveying quietly the scene, his own handiwork, if I may express it in that way. His smouldering black pipe was very noticeable in his big, paternal fist. So, too, was the glitter of his heavy gold watch-chain across the breast of his white tunic. He exhaled an atmosphere of virtuous sagacity serene enough for any innocent soul to fly to confidently. I flew to him.

“You would never believe it,” I cried. “It was a notification that a master is wanted for some ship. There’s a command apparently going about and this fellow puts the thing in his pocket.”

The Steward screamed out in accents of loud despair: “You will be the death of me!”

The mighty slap he gave his wretched forehead was very loud, too. But when I turned to look at him he was no longer there. He had rushed away somewhere out of sight. This sudden disappearance made me laugh.

This was the end of the incident — for me. Captain Giles, however, staring at the place where the Steward had been, began to haul at his gorgeous gold chain till at last the watch came up from the deep pocket like solid truth from a well. Solemnly he lowered it down again and only then said:

“Just three o’clock. You will be in time — if you don’t lose any, that is.”

“In time for what?” I asked.

“Good Lord! For the Harbour Office. This must be looked into.”

Strictly speaking, he was right. But I’ve never had much taste for investigation, for showing people up and all that no doubt ethically meritorious kind of work. And my view of the episode was purely ethical. If any one had to be the death of the Steward I didn’t see why it shouldn’t be Captain Giles himself, a man of age and standing, and a permanent resident. Whereas, I in comparison, felt myself a mere bird of passage in that port. In fact, it might have been said that I had already broken off my connection. I muttered that I didn’t think — it was nothing to me. . . .

“Nothing!” repeated Captain Giles, giving some signs of quiet, deliberate indignation. “Kent warned me you were a peculiar young fellow. You will tell me next that a command is nothing to you — and after all the trouble I’ve taken, too!”

“The trouble!” I murmured, uncomprehending. What trouble? All I could remember was being mystified and bored by his conversation for a solid hour after tiffin. And he called that taking a lot of trouble.

He was looking at me with a self-complacency which would have been odious in any other man. All at once, as if a page of a book had been turned over disclosing a word which made plain all that had gone before, I perceived that this matter had also another than an ethical aspect.

And still I did not move. Captain Giles lost his patience a little. With an angry puff at his pipe he turned his back on my hesitation.

But it was not hesitation on my part. I had been, if I may express myself so, put out of gear mentally. But as soon as I had convinced myself that this stale, unprofitable world of my discontent contained such a thing as a command to be seized, I recovered my powers of locomotion.

It's a good step from the Officers' Home to the Harbour Office; but with the magic word "Command" in my head I found myself suddenly on the quay as if transported there in the twinkling of an eye, before a portal of dressed white stone above a flight of shallow white steps.

All this seemed to glide toward me swiftly. The whole great roadstead to the right was just a mere flicker of blue, and the dim cool hall swallowed me up out of the heat and glare of which I had not been aware till the very moment I passed in from it.

The broad inner staircase insinuated itself under my feet somehow. Command is a strong magic. The first human beings I perceived distinctly since I had parted with the indignant back of Captain Giles were the crew of the harbour steam-launch lounging on the spacious landing about the curtained archway of the shipping office.

It was there that my buoyancy abandoned me. The atmosphere of officialdom would kill anything that breathes the air of human endeavour, would extinguish hope and fear alike in the supremacy of paper and ink. I passed heavily under the curtain which the Malay coxswain of the harbour launch raised for me. There was nobody in the office except the clerks, writing in two industrious rows. But the head Shipping-Master hopped down from his elevation and hurried along on the thick mats to meet me in the broad central passage.

He had a Scottish name, but his complexion was of a rich olive hue, his short beard was jet black, and his eyes, also black, had a languishing expression. He asked confidentially:

"You want to see Him?"

All lightness of spirit and body having departed from me at the touch of officialdom, I looked at the scribe without animation and asked in my turn wearily:

"What do you think? Is it any use?"

"My goodness! He has asked for you twice today."

This emphatic He was the supreme authority, the Marine Superintendent, the Harbour-Master — a very great person in the eyes of every single quill-

driver in the room. But that was nothing to the opinion he had of his own greatness.

Captain Ellis looked upon himself as a sort of divine (pagan) emanation, the deputy-Neptune for the circumambient seas. If he did not actually rule the waves, he pretended to rule the fate of the mortals whose lives were cast upon the waters.

This uplifting illusion made him inquisitorial and peremptory. And as his temperament was choleric there were fellows who were actually afraid of him. He was redoubtable, not in virtue of his office, but because of his unwarrantable assumptions. I had never had anything to do with him before.

I said: "Oh! He has asked for me twice. Then perhaps I had better go in."

"You must! You must!"

The Shipping-Master led the way with a mincing gait around the whole system of desks to a tall and important-looking door, which he opened with a deferential action of the arm.

He stepped right in (but without letting go of the handle) and, after gazing reverently down the room for a while, beckoned me in by a silent jerk of the head. Then he slipped out at once and shut the door after me most delicately.

Three lofty windows gave on the harbour. There was nothing in them but the dark-blue sparkling sea and the paler luminous blue of the sky. My eye caught in the depths and distances of these blue tones the white speck of some big ship just arrived and about to anchor in the outer roadstead. A ship from home — after perhaps ninety days at sea. There is something touching about a ship coming in from sea and folding her white wings for a rest.

The next thing I saw was the top-knot of silver hair surmounting Captain Ellis' smooth red face, which would have been apoplectic if it hadn't had such a fresh appearance.

Our deputy-Neptune had no beard on his chin, and there was no trident to be seen standing in a corner anywhere, like an umbrella. But his hand was holding a pen — the official pen, far mightier than the sword in making or marring the fortune of simple toiling men. He was looking over his shoulder at my advance.

When I had come well within range he saluted me by a nerve-shattering: "Where have you been all this time?"

As it was no concern of his I did not take the slightest notice of the shot. I said simply that I had heard there was a master needed for some vessel, and

being a sailing-ship man I thought I would apply. . . .

He interrupted me. "Why! Hang it! *You* are the right man for that job — if there had been twenty others after it. But no fear of that. They are all afraid to catch hold. That's what's the matter."

He was very irritated. I said innocently: "Are they, sir. I wonder why?"

"Why!" he fumed. "Afraid of the sails. Afraid of a white crew. Too much trouble. Too much work. Too long out here. Easy life and deck-chairs more their mark. Here I sit with the Consul-General's cable before me, and the only man fit for the job not to be found anywhere. I began to think you were funking it, too. . . ."

"I haven't been long getting to the office," I remarked calmly.

"You have a good name out here, though," he growled savagely without looking at me.

"I am very glad to hear it from you, sir," I said.

"Yes. But you are not on the spot when you are wanted. You know you weren't. That steward of yours wouldn't dare to neglect a message from this office. Where the devil did you hide yourself for the best part of the day?"

I only smiled kindly down on him, and he seemed to recollect himself, and asked me to take a seat. He explained that the master of a British ship having died in Bangkok the Consul-General had cabled to him a request for a competent man to be sent out to take command.

Apparently, in his mind, I was the man from the first, though for the looks of the thing the notification addressed to the Sailors' Home was general. An agreement had already been prepared. He gave it to me to read, and when I handed it back to him with the remark that I accepted its terms, the deputy-Neptune signed it, stamped it with his own exalted hand, folded it in four (it was a sheet of blue foolscap) and presented it to me — a gift of extraordinary potency, for, as I put it in my pocket, my head swam a little.

"This is your appointment to the command," he said with a certain gravity. "An official appointment binding the owners to conditions which you have accepted. Now — when will you be ready to go?"

I said I would be ready that very day if necessary. He caught me at my word with great alacrity. The steamer *Melita* was leaving for Bangkok that evening about seven. He would request her captain officially to give me a passage and wait for me till ten o'clock.

Then he rose from his office chair, and I got up, too. My head swam, there was no doubt about it, and I felt a certain heaviness of limbs as if they

had grown bigger since I had sat down on that chair. I made my bow.

A subtle change in Captain Ellis' manner became perceptible as though he had laid aside the trident of deputy-Neptune. In reality, it was only his official pen that he had dropped on getting up.

## II

He shook hands with me: "Well, there you are, on your own, appointed officially under my responsibility."

He was actually walking with me to the door. What a distance off it seemed! I moved like a man in bonds. But we reached it at last. I opened it with the sensation of dealing with mere dream-stuff, and then at the last moment the fellowship of seamen asserted itself, stronger than the difference of age and station. It asserted itself in Captain Ellis' voice.

"Good-bye — and good luck to you," he said so heartily that I could only give him a grateful glance. Then I turned and went out, never to see him again in my life. I had not made three steps into the outer office when I heard behind my back a gruff, loud, authoritative voice, the voice of our deputy-Neptune.

It was addressing the head Shipping-Master who, having let me in, had, apparently, remained hovering in the middle distance ever since. "Mr. R., let the harbour launch have steam up to take the captain here on board the Melita at half-past nine to-night."

I was amazed at the startled alacrity of R's "Yes, sir." He ran before me out on the landing. My new dignity sat yet so lightly on me that I was not aware that it was I, the Captain, the object of this last graciousness. It seemed as if all of a sudden a pair of wings had grown on my shoulders. I merely skimmed along the polished floor.

But R. was impressed.

"I say!" he exclaimed on the landing, while the Malay crew of the steam-launch standing by looked stonily at the man for whom they were going to be kept on duty so late, away from their gambling, from their girls, or their pure domestic joys. "I say! His own launch. What have you done to him?"

His stare was full of respectful curiosity. I was quite confounded.

"Was it for me? I hadn't the slightest notion," I stammered out.

He nodded many times. "Yes. And the last person who had it before you was a Duke. So, there!"

I think he expected me to faint on the spot. But I was in too much of a hurry for emotional displays. My feelings were already in such a whirl that this staggering information did not seem to make the slightest difference. It merely fell into the seething cauldron of my brain, and I carried it off with me after a short but effusive passage of leave-taking with R.

The favour of the great throws an aureole round the fortunate object of its selection. That excellent man enquired whether he could do anything for me. He had known me only by sight, and he was well aware he would never see me again; I was, in common with the other seamen of the port, merely a subject for official writing, filling up of forms with all the artificial superiority of a man of pen and ink to the men who grapple with realities outside the consecrated walls of official buildings. What ghosts we must have been to him! Mere symbols to juggle with in books and heavy registers, without brains and muscles and perplexities; something hardly useful and decidedly inferior.

And he — the office hours being over — wanted to know if he could be of any use to me!

I ought — properly speaking — I ought to have been moved to tears. But I did not even think of it. It was merely another miraculous manifestation of that day of miracles. I parted from him as if he were a mere symbol. I floated down the staircase. I floated out of the official and imposing portal. I went on floating along.

I use that word rather than the word "flew," because I have a distinct impression that, though uplifted by my aroused youth, my movements were deliberate enough. To that mixed white, brown, and yellow portion of mankind, out abroad on their own affairs, I presented the appearance of a man walking rather sedately. And nothing in the way of abstraction could have equalled my deep detachment from the forms and colours of this world. It was, as it were, final.

And yet, suddenly, I recognized Hamilton. I recognized him without effort, without a shock, without a start. There he was, strolling toward the Harbour Office with his stiff, arrogant dignity. His red face made him noticeable at a distance. It flamed, over there, on the shady side of the street.

He had perceived me, too. Something (unconscious exuberance of spirits perhaps) moved me to wave my hand to him elaborately. This lapse from good taste happened before I was aware that I was capable of it.

The impact of my impudence stopped him short, much as a bullet might have done. I verily believe he staggered, though as far as I could see he didn't actually fall. I had gone past in a moment and did not turn my head. I had forgotten his existence.

The next ten minutes might have been ten seconds or ten centuries for all my consciousness had to do with it. People might have been falling dead around me, houses crumbling, guns firing, I wouldn't have known. I was thinking: "By Jove! I have got it." *It* being the command. It had come about in a way utterly unforeseen in my modest day-dreams.

I perceived that my imagination had been running in conventional channels and that my hopes had always been drab stuff. I had envisaged a command as a result of a slow course of promotion in the employ of some highly respectable firm. The reward of faithful service. Well, faithful service was all right. One would naturally give that for one's own sake, for the sake of the ship, for the love of the life of one's choice; not for the sake of the reward.

There is something distasteful in the notion of a reward.

And now here I had my command, absolutely in my pocket, in a way undeniable indeed, but most unexpected; beyond my imaginings, outside all reasonable expectations, and even notwithstanding the existence of some sort of obscure intrigue to keep it away from me. It is true that the intrigue was feeble, but it helped the feeling of wonder — as if I had been specially destined for that ship I did not know, by some power higher than the prosaic agencies of the commercial world.

A strange sense of exultation began to creep into me. If I had worked for that command ten years or more there would have been nothing of the kind. I was a little frightened.

"Let us be calm," I said to myself.

Outside the door of the Officers' Home the wretched Steward seemed to be waiting for me. There was a broad flight of a few steps, and he ran to and fro on the top of it as if chained there. A distressed cur. He looked as though his throat were too dry for him to bark.

I regret to say I stopped before going in. There had been a revolution in my moral nature. He waited open-mouthed, breathless, while I looked at



him for half a minute.

“And you thought you could keep me out of it,” I said scathingly.

“You said you were going home,” he squeaked miserably. “You said so. You said so.”

“I wonder what Captain Ellis will have to say to that excuse,” I uttered slowly with a sinister meaning.

His lower jaw had been trembling all the time and his voice was like the bleating of a sick goat. “You have given me away? You have done for me?”

Neither his distress nor yet the sheer absurdity of it was able to disarm me. It was the first instance of harm being attempted to be done to me — at any rate, the first I had ever found out. And I was still young enough, still too much on this side of the shadow line, not to be surprised and indignant at such things.

I gazed at him inflexibly. Let the beggar suffer. He slapped his forehead and I passed in, pursued, into the dining room, by his screech: “I always said you’d be the death of me.”

This clamour not only overtook me, but went ahead as it were on to the verandah and brought out Captain Giles.

He stood before me in the doorway in all the commonplace solidity of his wisdom. The gold chain glittered on his breast. He clutched a smouldering pipe.

I extended my hand to him warmly and he seemed surprised, but did respond heartily enough in the end, with a faint smile of superior knowledge which cut my thanks short as if with a knife. I don’t think that more than one word came out. And even for that one, judging by the temperature of my face, I had blushed as if for a bad action. Assuming a detached tone, I wondered how on earth he had managed to spot the little underhand game that had been going on.

He murmured complacently that there were but few things done in the town that he could not see the inside of. And as to this house, he had been using it off and on for nearly ten years. Nothing that went on in it could escape his great experience. It had been no trouble to him. No trouble at all.

Then in his quiet, thick tone he wanted to know if I had complained formally of the Steward’s action.

I said that I hadn’t — though, indeed, it was not for want of opportunity. Captain Ellis had gone for me bald-headed in a most ridiculous fashion for being out of the way when wanted.

“Funny old gentleman,” interjected Captain Giles. “What did you say to that?”

“I said simply that I came along the very moment I heard of his message. Nothing more. I didn’t want to hurt the Steward. I would scorn to harm such an object. No. I made no complaint, but I believe he thinks I’ve done so. Let him think. He’s got a fright he won’t forget in a hurry, for Captain Ellis would kick him out into the middle of Asia. . . .”

“Wait a moment,” said Captain Giles, leaving me suddenly. I sat down feeling very tired, mostly in my head. Before I could start a train of thought he stood again before me, murmuring the excuse that he had to go and put the fellow’s mind at ease.

I looked up with surprise. But in reality I was indifferent. He explained that he had found the Steward lying face downward on the horsehair sofa. He was all right now.

“He would not have died of fright,” I said contemptuously.

“No. But he might have taken an overdose out of one of them little bottles he keeps in his room,” Captain Giles argued seriously. “The confounded fool has tried to poison himself once — a few years ago.”

“Really,” I said without emotion. “He doesn’t seem very fit to live, anyhow.”

“As to that, it may be said of a good many.”

“Don’t exaggerate like this!” I protested, laughing irritably. “But I wonder what this part of the world would do if you were to leave off looking after it, Captain Giles? Here you have got me a command and saved the Steward’s life in one afternoon. Though why you should have taken all that interest in either of us is more than I can understand.”

Captain Giles remained silent for a minute. Then gravely:

“He’s not a bad steward really. He can find a good cook, at any rate. And, what’s more, he can keep him when found. I remember the cooks we had here before his time! . . .”

I must have made a movement of impatience, because he interrupted himself with an apology for keeping me yarning there, while no doubt I needed all my time to get ready.

What I really needed was to be alone for a bit. I seized this opening hastily. My bedroom was a quiet refuge in an apparently uninhabited wing of the building. Having absolutely nothing to do (for I had not unpacked my

things), I sat down on the bed and abandoned myself to the influences of the hour. To the unexpected influences. . . .

And first I wondered at my state of mind. Why was I not more surprised? Why? Here I was, invested with a command in the twinkling of an eye, not in the common course of human affairs, but more as if by enchantment. I ought to have been lost in astonishment. But I wasn't. I was very much like people in fairy tales. Nothing ever astonishes them. When a fully appointed gala coach is produced out of a pumpkin to take her to a ball, Cinderella does not exclaim. She gets in quietly and drives away to her high fortune.

Captain Ellis (a fierce sort of fairy) had produced a command out of a drawer almost as unexpectedly as in a fairy tale. But a command is an abstract idea, and it seemed a sort of "lesser marvel" till it flashed upon me that it involved the concrete existence of a ship.

A ship! My ship! She was mine, more absolutely mine for possession and care than anything in the world; an object of responsibility and devotion. She was there waiting for me, spell-bound, unable to move, to live, to get out into the world (till I came), like an enchanted princess. Her call had come to me as if from the clouds. I had never suspected her existence. I didn't know how she looked, I had barely heard her name, and yet we were indissolubly united for a certain portion of our future, to sink or swim together!

A sudden passion of anxious impatience rushed through my veins, gave me such a sense of the intensity of existence as I have never felt before or since. I discovered how much of a seaman I was, in heart, in mind, and, as it were, physically — a man exclusively of sea and ships; the sea the only world that counted, and the ships, the test of manliness, of temperament, of courage and fidelity — and of love.

I had an exquisite moment. It was unique also. Jumping up from my seat, I paced up and down my room for a long time. But when I came downstairs I behaved with sufficient composure. Only I couldn't eat anything at dinner.

Having declared my intention not to drive but to walk down to the quay, I must render the wretched Steward justice that he bestirred himself to find me some coolies for the luggage. They departed, carrying all my worldly possessions (except a little money I had in my pocket) slung from a long pole. Captain Giles volunteered to walk down with me.

We followed the sombre, shaded alley across the Esplanade. It was moderately cool there under the trees. Captain Giles remarked, with a

sudden laugh: "I know who's jolly thankful at having seen the last of you."

I guessed that he meant the Steward. The fellow had borne himself to me in a sulkily frightened manner at the last. I expressed my wonder that he should have tried to do me a bad turn for no reason at all.

"Don't you see that what he wanted was to get rid of our friend Hamilton by dodging him in front of you for that job? That would have removed him for good. See?"

"Heavens!" I exclaimed, feeling humiliated somehow. "Can it be possible? What a fool he must be! That overbearing, impudent loafer! Why! He couldn't. . . . And yet he's nearly done it, I believe; for the Harbour Office was bound to send somebody."

"Aye. A fool like our Steward can be dangerous sometimes," declared Captain Giles sententiously. "Just because he is a fool," he added, imparting further instruction in his complacent low tones. "For," he continued in the manner of a set demonstration, "no sensible person would risk being kicked out of the only berth between himself and starvation just to get rid of a simple annoyance — a small worry. Would he now?"

"Well, no," I conceded, restraining a desire to laugh at that something mysteriously earnest in delivering the conclusions of his wisdom as though it were the product of prohibited operations. "But that fellow looks as if he were rather crazy. He must be."

"As to that, I believe everybody in the world is a little mad," he announced quietly.

"You make no exceptions?" I inquired, just to hear his manner.

"Why! Kent says that even of you."

"Does he?" I retorted, extremely embittered all at once against my former captain. "There's nothing of that in the written character from him which I've got in my pocket. Has he given you any instances of my lunacy?"

Captain Giles explained in a conciliating tone that it had been only a friendly remark in reference to my abrupt leaving the ship for no apparent reason.

I muttered grumpily: "Oh! leaving his ship," and mended my pace. He kept up by my side in the deep gloom of the avenue as if it were his conscientious duty to see me out of the colony as an undesirable character. He panted a little, which was rather pathetic in a way. But I was not moved. On the contrary. His discomfort gave me a sort of malicious pleasure.

Presently I relented, slowed down, and said:

“What I really wanted was to get a fresh grip. I felt it was time. Is that so very mad?”

He made no answer. We were issuing from the avenue. On the bridge over the canal a dark, irresolute figure seemed to be awaiting something or somebody.

It was a Malay policeman, barefooted, in his blue uniform. The silver band on his little round cap shone dimly in the light of the street lamp. He peered in our direction timidly.

Before we could come up to him he turned about and walked in front of us in the direction of the jetty. The distance was some hundred yards; and then I found my coolies squatting on their heels. They had kept the pole on their shoulders, and all my worldly goods, still tied to the pole, were resting on the ground between them. As far as the eye could reach along the quay there was not another soul abroad except the police peon, who saluted us.

It seems he had detained the coolies as suspicious characters, and had forbidden them the jetty. But at a sign from me he took off the embargo with alacrity. The two patient fellows, rising together with a faint grunt, trotted off along the planks, and I prepared to take my leave of Captain Giles, who stood there with an air as though his mission were drawing to a close. It could not be denied that he had done it all. And while I hesitated about an appropriate sentence he made himself heard:

“I expect you’ll have your hands pretty full of tangled-up business.”

I asked him what made him think so; and he answered that it was his general experience of the world. Ship a long time away from her port, owners inaccessible by cable, and the only man who could explain matters dead and buried.

“And you yourself new to the business in a way,” he concluded in a sort of unanswerable tone.

“Don’t insist,” I said. “I know it only too well. I only wish you could impart to me some small portion of your experience before I go. As it can’t be done in ten minutes I had better not begin to ask you. There’s that harbour launch waiting for me, too. But I won’t feel really at peace till I have that ship of mine out in the Indian Ocean.”

He remarked casually that from Bangkok to the Indian Ocean was a pretty long step. And this murmur, like a dim flash from a dark lantern, showed me for a moment the broad belt of islands and reefs between that

unknown ship, which was mine, and the freedom of the great waters of the globe.

But I felt no apprehension. I was familiar enough with the Archipelago by that time. Extreme patience and extreme care would see me through the region of broken land, of faint airs, and of dead water to where I would feel at last my command swing on the great swell and list over to the great breath of regular winds, that would give her the feeling of a large, more intense life. The road would be long. All roads are long that lead toward one's heart's desire. But this road my mind's eye could see on a chart, professionally, with all its complications and difficulties, yet simple enough in a way. One is a seaman or one is not. And I had no doubt of being one.

The only part I was a stranger to was the Gulf of Siam. And I mentioned this to Captain Giles. Not that I was concerned very much. It belonged to the same region the nature of which I knew, into whose very soul I seemed to have looked during the last months of that existence with which I had broken now, suddenly, as one parts with some enchanting company.

"The gulf . . . Ay! A funny piece of water — that," said Captain Giles.

Funny, in this connection, was a vague word. The whole thing sounded like an opinion uttered by a cautious person mindful of actions for slander.

I didn't inquire as to the nature of that funniness. There was really no time. But at the very last he volunteered a warning.

"Whatever you do keep to the east side of it. The west side is dangerous at this time of the year. Don't let anything tempt you over. You'll find nothing but trouble there."

Though I could hardly imagine what could tempt me to involve my ship amongst the currents and reefs of the Malay shore, I thanked him for the advice.

He gripped my extended arm warmly, and the end of our acquaintance came suddenly in the words: "Good-night."

That was all he said: "Good-night." Nothing more. I don't know what I intended to say, but surprise made me swallow it, whatever it was. I choked slightly, and then exclaimed with a sort of nervous haste: "Oh! Good-night, Captain Giles, good-night."

His movements were always deliberate, but his back had receded some distance along the deserted quay before I collected myself enough to follow his example and made a half turn in the direction of the jetty.

Only my movements were not deliberate. I hurried down to the steps, and leaped into the launch. Before I had fairly landed in her sternsheets the slim little craft darted away from the jetty with a sudden swirl of her propeller and the hard, rapid puffing of the exhaust in her vaguely gleaming brass funnel amidships.

The misty churning at her stern was the only sound in the world. The shore lay plunged in the silence of the deeper slumber. I watched the town recede still and soundless in the hot night, till the abrupt hail, "Steam-launch, ahoy!" made me spin round face forward. We were close to a white ghostly steamer. Lights shone on her decks, in her portholes. And the same voice shouted from her:

"Is that our passenger?"

"It is," I yelled.

Her crew had been obviously on the jump. I could hear them running about. The modern spirit of haste was loudly vocal in the orders to "Heave away on the cable" — to "Lower the sideladder," and in urgent requests to me to "Come along, sir! We have been delayed three hours for you. . . . Our time is seven o'clock, you know!"

I stepped on the deck. I said "No! I don't know." The spirit of modern hurry was embodied in a thin, long-armed, long-legged man, with a closely clipped gray beard. His meagre hand was hot and dry. He declared feverishly:

"I am hanged if I would have waited another five minutes Harbour-Master or no Harbour-Master."

"That's your own business," I said. "I didn't ask you to wait for me."

"I hope you don't expect any supper," he burst out. "This isn't a boarding-house afloat. You are the first passenger I ever had in my life and I hope to goodness you will be the last."

I made no answer to this hospitable communication; and, indeed, he didn't wait for any, bolting away on to his bridge to get his ship under way.

The three days he had me on board he did not depart from that half-hostile attitude. His ship having been delayed three hours on my account he couldn't forgive me for not being a more distinguished person. He was not exactly outspoken about it, but that feeling of annoyed wonder was peeping out perpetually in his talk.

He was absurd.

He was also a man of much experience, which he liked to trot out; but no greater contrast with Captain Giles could have been imagined. He would have amused me if I had wanted to be amused. But I did not want to be amused. I was like a lover looking forward to a meeting. Human hostility was nothing to me. I thought of my unknown ship. It was amusement enough, torment enough, occupation enough.

He perceived my state, for his wits were sufficiently sharp for that, and he poked sly fun at my preoccupation in the manner some nasty, cynical old men assume toward the dreams and illusions of youth. I, on my side, refrained from questioning him as to the appearance of my ship, though I knew that being in Bangkok every fortnight or so he must have known her by sight. I was not going to expose the ship, my ship! to some slighting reference.

He was the first really unsympathetic man I had ever come in contact with. My education was far from being finished, though I didn't know it. No! I didn't know it.

All I knew was that he disliked me and had some contempt for my person. Why? Apparently because his ship had been delayed three hours on my account. Who was I to have such a thing done for me? Such a thing had never been done for him. It was a sort of jealous indignation.

My expectation, mingled with fear, was wrought to its highest pitch. How slow had been the days of the passage and how soon they were over. One morning, early, we crossed the bar, and while the sun was rising splendidly over the flat spaces of the land we steamed up the innumerable bends, passed under the shadow of the great gilt pagoda, and reached the outskirts of the town.

There it was, spread largely on both banks, the Oriental capital which had as yet suffered no white conqueror; an expanse of brown houses of bamboo, of mats, of leaves, of a vegetable-matter style of architecture, sprung out of the brown soil on the banks of the muddy river. It was amazing to think that in those miles of human habitations there was not probably half a dozen pounds of nails. Some of those houses of sticks and grass, like the nests of an aquatic race, clung to the low shores. Others seemed to grow out of the water; others again floated in long anchored rows in the very middle of the stream. Here and there in the distance, above the crowded mob of low, brown roof ridges, towered great piles of masonry, King's Palace, temples, gorgeous and dilapidated, crumbling under the vertical sunlight,



tremendous, overpowering, almost palpable, which seemed to enter one's breast with the breath of one's nostrils and soak into one's limbs through every pore of one's skin.

The ridiculous victim of jealousy had for some reason or other to stop his engines just then. The steamer drifted slowly up with the tide. Oblivious of my new surroundings I walked the deck, in anxious, deadened abstraction, a commingling of romantic reverie with a very practical survey of my qualifications. For the time was approaching for me to behold my command and to prove my worth in the ultimate test of my profession.

Suddenly I heard myself called by that imbecile. He was beckoning me to come up on his bridge.

I didn't care very much for that, but as it seemed that he had something particular to say I went up the ladder.

He laid his hand on my shoulder and gave me a slight turn, pointing with his other arm at the same time.

"There! That's your ship, Captain," he said.

I felt a thump in my breast — only one, as if my heart had then ceased to beat. There were ten or more ships moored along the bank, and the one he meant was partly hidden away from my sight by her next astern. He said: "We'll drift abreast her in a moment."

What was his tone? Mocking? Threatening? Or only indifferent? I could not tell. I suspected some malice in this unexpected manifestation of interest.

He left me, and I leaned over the rail of the bridge looking over the side. I dared not raise my eyes. Yet it had to be done — and, indeed, I could not have helped myself. I believe I trembled.

But directly my eyes had rested on my ship all my fear vanished. It went off swiftly, like a bad dream. Only that a dream leaves no shame behind it, and that I felt a momentary shame at my unworthy suspicions.

Yes, there she was. Her hull, her rigging filled my eye with a great content. That feeling of life-emptiness which had made me so restless for the last few months lost its bitter plausibility, its evil influence, dissolved in a flow of joyous emotion.

At first glance I saw that she was a high-class vessel, a harmonious creature in the lines of her fine body, in the proportioned tallness of her spars. Whatever her age and her history, she had preserved the stamp of her origin. She was one of those craft that, in virtue of their design and

complete finish, will never look old. Amongst her companions moored to the bank, and all bigger than herself, she looked like a creature of high breed — an Arab steed in a string of cart-horses.

A voice behind me said in a nasty equivocal tone: "I hope you are satisfied with her, Captain." I did not even turn my head. It was the master of the steamer, and whatever he meant, whatever he thought of her, I knew that, like some rare women, she was one of those creatures whose mere existence is enough to awaken an unselfish delight. One feels that it is good to be in the world in which she has her being.

That illusion of life and character which charms one in men's finest handiwork radiated from her. An enormous bulk of teak-wood timber swung over her hatchway; lifeless matter, looking heavier and bigger than anything aboard of her. When they started lowering it the surge of the tackle sent a quiver through her from water-line to the trucks up the fine nerves of her rigging, as though she had shuddered at the weight. It seemed cruel to load her so. . . .

Half an hour later, putting my foot on her deck for the first time, I received the feeling of deep physical satisfaction. Nothing could equal the fullness of that moment, the ideal completeness of that emotional experience which had come to me without the preliminary toil and disenchantments of an obscure career.

My rapid glance ran over her, enveloped, appropriated the form concreting the abstract sentiment of my command. A lot of details perceptible to a seaman struck my eye, vividly in that instant. For the rest, I saw her disengaged from the material conditions of her being. The shore to which she was moored was as if it did not exist. What were to me all the countries of the globe? In all the parts of the world washed by navigable waters our relation to each other would be the same — and more intimate than there are words to express in the language. Apart from that, every scene and episode would be a mere passing show. The very gang of yellow coolies busy about the main hatch was less substantial than the stuff dreams are made of. For who on earth would dream of Chinamen? . . .

I went aft, ascended the poop, where, under the awning, gleamed the brasses of the yacht-like fittings, the polished surfaces of the rails, the glass of the skylights. Right aft two seamen, busy cleaning the steering gear, with the reflected ripples of light running playfully up their bent backs, went on

with their work, unaware of me and of the almost affectionate glance I threw at them in passing toward the companion-way of the cabin.

The doors stood wide open, the slide was pushed right back. The half-turn of the staircase cut off the view of the lobby. A low humming ascended from below, but it stopped abruptly at the sound of my descending footsteps.

### III

The first thing I saw down there was the upper part of a man's body projecting backward, as it were, from one of the doors at the foot of the stairs. His eyes looked at me very wide and still. In one hand he held a dinner plate, in the other a cloth.

"I am your new Captain," I said quietly.

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, he had got rid of the plate and the cloth and jumped to open the cabin door. As soon as I passed into the saloon he vanished, but only to reappear instantly, buttoning up a jacket he had put on with the swiftness of a "quick-change" artist.

"Where's the chief mate?" I asked.

"In the hold, I think, sir. I saw him go down the after-hatch ten minutes ago."

"Tell him I am on board."

The mahogany table under the skylight shone in the twilight like a dark pool of water. The sideboard, surmounted by a wide looking-glass in an ormolu frame, had a marble top. It bore a pair of silver-plated lamps and some other pieces — obviously a harbour display. The saloon itself was panelled in two kinds of wood in the excellent simple taste prevailing when the ship was built.

I sat down in the armchair at the head of the table — the captain's chair, with a small tell-tale compass swung above it — a mute reminder of unremitting vigilance.

A succession of men had sat in that chair. I became aware of that thought suddenly, vividly, as though each had left a little of himself between the four walls of these ornate bulkheads; as if a sort of composite soul, the soul

of command, had whispered suddenly to mine of long days at sea and of anxious moments.

“You, too!” it seemed to say, “you, too, shall taste of that peace and that unrest in a searching intimacy with your own self — obscure as we were and as supreme in the face of all the winds and all the seas, in an immensity that receives no impress, preserves no memories, and keeps no reckoning of lives.”

Deep within the tarnished ormolu frame, in the hot half-light sifted through the awning, I saw my own face propped between my hands. And I stared back at myself with the perfect detachment of distance, rather with curiosity than with any other feeling, except of some sympathy for this latest representative of what for all intents and purposes was a dynasty, continuous not in blood indeed, but in its experience, in its training, in its conception of duty, and in the blessed simplicity of its traditional point of view on life.

It struck me that this quietly staring man whom I was watching, both as if he were myself and somebody else, was not exactly a lonely figure. He had his place in a line of men whom he did not know, of whom he had never heard; but who were fashioned by the same influences, whose souls in relation to their humble life’s work had no secrets for him.

Suddenly I perceived that there was another man in the saloon, standing a little on one side and looking intently at me. The chief mate. His long, red moustache determined the character of his physiognomy, which struck me as pugnacious in (strange to say) a ghastly sort of way.

How long had he been there looking at me, appraising me in my unguarded day-dreaming state? I would have been more disconcerted if, having the clock set in the top of the mirror-frame right in front of me, I had not noticed that its long hand had hardly moved at all.

I could not have been in that cabin more than two minutes altogether. Say three. . . . So he could not have been watching me more than a mere fraction of a minute, luckily. Still, I regretted the occurrence.

But I showed nothing of it as I rose leisurely (it had to be leisurely) and greeted him with perfect friendliness.

There was something reluctant and at the same time attentive in his bearing. His name was Burns. We left the cabin and went round the ship together. His face in the full light of day appeared very pale, meagre, even haggard. Somehow I had a delicacy as to looking too often at him; his eyes,

on the contrary, remained fairly glued on my face. They were greenish and had an expectant expression.

He answered all my questions readily enough, but my ear seemed to catch a tone of unwillingness. The second officer, with three or four hands, was busy forward. The mate mentioned his name and I nodded to him in passing. He was very young. He struck me as rather a cub.

When we returned below, I sat down on one end of a deep, semi-circular, or, rather, semi-oval settee, upholstered in red plush. It extended right across the whole after-end of the cabin. Mr. Burns motioned to sit down, dropped into one of the swivel-chairs round the table, and kept his eyes on me as persistently as ever, and with that strange air as if all this were make-believe and he expected me to get up, burst into a laugh, slap him on the back, and vanish from the cabin.

There was an odd stress in the situation which began to make me uncomfortable. I tried to react against this vague feeling.

“It’s only my inexperience,” I thought.

In the face of that man, several years, I judged, older than myself, I became aware of what I had left already behind me — my youth. And that was indeed poor comfort. Youth is a fine thing, a mighty power — as long as one does not think of it. I felt I was becoming self-conscious. Almost against my will I assumed a moody gravity. I said: “I see you have kept her in very good order, Mr. Burns.”

Directly I had uttered these words I asked myself angrily why the deuce did I want to say that? Mr. Burns in answer had only blinked at me. What on earth did he mean?

I fell back on a question which had been in my thoughts for a long time — the most natural question on the lips of any seaman whatever joining a ship. I voiced it (confound this self-consciousness) in a degaged cheerful tone: “I suppose she can travel — what?”

Now a question like this might have been answered normally, either in accents of apologetic sorrow or with a visibly suppressed pride, in a “I don’t want to boast, but you shall see,” sort of tone. There are sailors, too, who would have been roughly outspoken: “Lazy brute,” or openly delighted: “She’s a flyer.” Two ways, if four manners.

But Mr. Burns found another way, a way of his own which had, at all events, the merit of saving his breath, if no other.

Again he did not say anything. He only frowned. And it was an angry frown. I waited. Nothing more came.

“What’s the matter? . . . Can’t you tell after being nearly two years in the ship?” I addressed him sharply.

He looked as startled for a moment as though he had discovered my presence only that very moment. But this passed off almost at once. He put on an air of indifference. But I suppose he thought it better to say something. He said that a ship needed, just like a man, the chance to show the best she could do, and that this ship had never had a chance since he had been on board of her. Not that he could remember. The last captain. . . . He paused.

“Has he been so very unlucky?” I asked with frank incredulity. Mr. Burns turned his eyes away from me. No, the late captain was not an unlucky man. One couldn’t say that. But he had not seemed to want to make use of his luck.

Mr. Burns — man of enigmatic moods — made this statement with an inanimate face and staring wilfully at the rudder casing. The statement itself was obscurely suggestive. I asked quietly:

“Where did he die?”

“In this saloon. Just where you are sitting now,” answered Mr. Burns.

I repressed a silly impulse to jump up; but upon the whole I was relieved to hear that he had not died in the bed which was now to be mine. I pointed out to the chief mate that what I really wanted to know was where he had buried his late captain.

Mr. Burns said that it was at the entrance to the gulf. A roomy grave; a sufficient answer. But the mate, overcoming visibly something within him — something like a curious reluctance to believe in my advent (as an irrevocable fact, at any rate), did not stop at that — though, indeed, he may have wished to do so.

As a compromise with his feelings, I believe, he addressed himself persistently to the rudder-casing, so that to me he had the appearance of a man talking in solitude, a little unconsciously, however.

His tale was that at seven bells in the forenoon watch he had all hands mustered on the quarterdeck and told them they had better go down to say good-bye to the captain.

Those words, as if grugged to an intruding personage, were enough for me to evoke vividly that strange ceremony: The bare-footed, bare-headed

seamen crowding shyly into that cabin, a small mob pressed against that sideboard, uncomfortable rather than moved, shirts open on sunburnt chests, weather-beaten faces, and all staring at the dying man with the same grave and expectant expression.

“Was he conscious?” I asked.

“He didn’t speak, but he moved his eyes to look at them,” said the mate.

After waiting a moment, Mr. Burns motioned the crew to leave the cabin, but he detained the two eldest men to stay with the captain while he went on deck with his sextant to “take the sun.” It was getting toward noon and he was anxious to obtain a good observation for latitude. When he returned below to put his sextant away he found that the two men had retreated out into the lobby. Through the open door he had a view of the captain lying easy against the pillows. He had “passed away” while Mr. Burns was taking this observation. As near noon as possible. He had hardly changed his position.

Mr. Burns sighed, glanced at me inquisitively, as much as to say, “Aren’t you going yet?” and then turned his thoughts from his new captain back to the old, who, being dead, had no authority, was not in anybody’s way, and was much easier to deal with.

Mr. Burns dealt with him at some length. He was a peculiar man — of sixty-five about — iron gray, hard-faced, obstinate, and uncommunicative. He used to keep the ship loafing at sea for inscrutable reasons. Would come on deck at night sometimes, take some sail off her, God only knows why or wherefore, then go below, shut himself up in his cabin, and play on the violin for hours — till daybreak perhaps. In fact, he spent most of his time day or night playing the violin. That was when the fit took him. Very loud, too.

It came to this, that Mr. Burns mustered his courage one day and remonstrated earnestly with the captain. Neither he nor the second mate could get a wink of sleep in their watches below for the noise. . . . And how could they be expected to keep awake while on duty? He pleaded. The answer of that stern man was that if he and the second mate didn’t like the noise, they were welcome to pack up their traps and walk over the side. When this alternative was offered the ship happened to be 600 miles from the nearest land.

Mr. Burns at this point looked at me with an air of curiosity. I began to think that my predecessor was a remarkably peculiar old man.

But I had to hear stranger things yet. It came out that this stern, grim, wind-tanned, rough, sea-salted, taciturn sailor of sixty-five was not only an artist, but a lover as well. In Haiphong, when they got there after a course of most unprofitable peregrinations (during which the ship was nearly lost twice), he got himself, in Mr. Burns' own words, "mixed up" with some woman. Mr. Burns had had no personal knowledge of that affair, but positive evidence of it existed in the shape of a photograph taken in Haiphong. Mr. Burns found it in one of the drawers in the captain's room.

In due course I, too, saw that amazing human document (I even threw it overboard later). There he sat, with his hands reposing on his knees, bald, squat, gray, bristly, recalling a wild boar somehow; and by his side towered an awful mature, white female with rapacious nostrils and a cheaply ill-omened stare in her enormous eyes. She was disguised in some semi-oriental, vulgar, fancy costume. She resembled a low-class medium or one of those women who tell fortunes by cards for half a crown. And yet she was striking. A professional sorceress from the slums. It was incomprehensible. There was something awful in the thought that she was the last reflection of the world of passion for the fierce soul which seemed to look at one out of the sardonically savage face of that old seaman. However, I noticed that she was holding some musical instrument — guitar or mandoline — in her hand. Perhaps that was the secret of her sortilege.

For Mr. Burns that photograph explained why the unloaded ship had kept sweltering at anchor for three weeks in a pestilential hot harbour without air. They lay there and gasped. The captain, appearing now and then on short visits, mumbled to Mr. Burns unlikely tales about some letters he was waiting for.

Suddenly, after vanishing for a week, he came on board in the middle of the night and took the ship out to sea with the first break of dawn. Daylight showed him looking wild and ill. The mere getting clear of the land took two days, and somehow or other they bumped slightly on a reef. However, no leak developed, and the captain, growling "no matter," informed Mr. Burns that he had made up his mind to take the ship to Hong-Kong and drydock her there.

At this Mr. Burns was plunged into despair. For indeed, to beat up to Hong-Kong against a fierce monsoon, with a ship not sufficiently ballasted and with her supply of water not completed, was an insane project.



But the captain growled peremptorily, “Stick her at it,” and Mr. Burns, dismayed and enraged, stuck her at it, and kept her at it, blowing away sails, straining the spars, exhausting the crew — nearly maddened by the absolute conviction that the attempt was impossible and was bound to end in some catastrophe.

Meantime the captain, shut up in his cabin and wedged in a corner of his settee against the crazy bounding of the ship, played the violin — or, at any rate, made continuous noise on it.

When he appeared on deck he would not speak and not always answer when spoken to. It was obvious that he was ill in some mysterious manner, and beginning to break up.

As the days went by the sounds of the violin became less and less loud, till at last only a feeble scratching would meet Mr. Burns’ ear as he stood in the saloon listening outside the door of the captain’s state-room.

One afternoon in perfect desperation he burst into that room and made such a scene, tearing his hair and shouting such horrid imprecations that he cowed the contemptuous spirit of the sick man. The water-tanks were low, they had not gained fifty miles in a fortnight. She would never reach Hong-Kong.

It was like fighting desperately toward destruction for the ship and the men. This was evident without argument. Mr. Burns, losing all restraint, put his face close to his captain’s and fairly yelled: “You, sir, are going out of the world. But I can’t wait till you are dead before I put the helm up. You must do it yourself. You must do it now!”

The man on the couch snarled in contempt. “So I am going out of the world — am I?”

“Yes, sir — you haven’t many days left in it,” said Mr. Burns calming down. “One can see it by your face.”

“My face, eh? . . . Well, put up the helm and be damned to you.”

Burns flew on deck, got the ship before the wind, then came down again composed, but resolute.

“I’ve shaped a course for Pulo Condor, sir,” he said. “When we make it, if you are still with us, you’ll tell me into what port you wish me to take the ship and I’ll do it.”

The old man gave him a look of savage spite, and said those atrocious words in deadly, slow tones.

“If I had my wish, neither the ship nor any of you would ever reach a port. And I hope you won’t.”

Mr. Burns was profoundly shocked. I believe he was positively frightened at the time. It seems, however, that he managed to produce such an effective laugh that it was the old man’s turn to be frightened. He shrank within himself and turned his back on him.

“And his head was not gone then,” Mr. Burns assured me excitedly. “He meant every word of it.”

“Such was practically the late captain’s last speech. No connected sentence passed his lips afterward. That night he used the last of his strength to throw his fiddle over the side. No one had actually seen him in the act, but after his death Mr. Burns couldn’t find the thing anywhere. The empty case was very much in evidence, but the fiddle was clearly not in the ship. And where else could it have gone to but overboard?”

“Threw his violin overboard!” I exclaimed.

“He did,” cried Mr. Burns excitedly. “And it’s my belief he would have tried to take the ship down with him if it had been in human power. He never meant her to see home again. He wouldn’t write to his owners, he never wrote to his old wife, either — he wasn’t going to. He had made up his mind to cut adrift from everything. That’s what it was. He didn’t care for business, or freights, or for making a passage — or anything. He meant to have gone wandering about the world till he lost her with all hands.”

Mr. Burns looked like a man who had escaped great danger. For a little he would have exclaimed: “If it hadn’t been for me!” And the transparent innocence of his indignant eyes was underlined quaintly by the arrogant pair of moustaches which he proceeded to twist, and as if extend, horizontally.

I might have smiled if I had not been busy with my own sensations, which were not those of Mr. Burns. I was already the man in command. My sensations could not be like those of any other man on board. In that community I stood, like a king in his country, in a class all by myself. I mean an hereditary king, not a mere elected head of a state. I was brought there to rule by an agency as remote from the people and as inscrutable almost to them as the Grace of God.

And like a member of a dynasty, feeling a semimystical bond with the dead, I was profoundly shocked by my immediate predecessor.

That man had been in all essentials but his age just such another man as myself. Yet the end of his life was a complete act of treason, the betrayal of a tradition which seemed to me as imperative as any guide on earth could be. It appeared that even at sea a man could become the victim of evil spirits. I felt on my face the breath of unknown powers that shape our destinies.

Not to let the silence last too long I asked Mr. Burns if he had written to his captain's wife. He shook his head. He had written to nobody.

In a moment he became sombre. He never thought of writing. It took him all his time to watch incessantly the loading of the ship by a rascally Chinese stevedore. In this Mr. Burns gave me the first glimpse of the real chief mate's soul which dwelt uneasily in his body.

He mused, then hastened on with gloomy force.

"Yes! The captain died as near noon as possible. I looked through his papers in the afternoon. I read the service over him at sunset and then I stuck the ship's head north and brought her in here. I — brought — her — in."

He struck the table with his fist.

"She would hardly have come in by herself," I observed. "But why didn't you make for Singapore instead?"

His eyes wavered. "The nearest port," he muttered sullenly.

I had framed the question in perfect innocence, but his answer (the difference in distance was insignificant) and his manner offered me a clue to the simple truth. He took the ship to a port where he expected to be confirmed in his temporary command from lack of a qualified master to put over his head. Whereas Singapore, he surmised justly, would be full of qualified men. But his naive reasoning forgot to take into account the telegraph cable reposing on the bottom of the very Gulf up which he had turned that ship which he imagined himself to have saved from destruction. Hence the bitter flavour of our interview. I tasted it more and more distinctly — and it was less and less to my taste.

"Look here, Mr. Burns," I began very firmly. "You may as well understand that I did not run after this command. It was pushed in my way. I've accepted it. I am here to take the ship home first of all, and you may be sure that I shall see to it that every one of you on board here does his duty to that end. This is all I have to say — for the present."

He was on his feet by this time, but instead of taking his dismissal he remained with trembling, indignant lips, and looking at me hard as though, really, after this, there was nothing for me to do in common decency but to vanish from his outraged sight. Like all very simple emotional states this was moving. I felt sorry for him — almost sympathetic, till (seeing that I did not vanish) he spoke in a tone of forced restraint.

“If I hadn’t a wife and a child at home you may be sure, sir, I would have asked you to let me go the very minute you came on board.”

I answered him with a matter-of-course calmness as though some remote third person were in question.

“And I, Mr. Burns, would not have let you go. You have signed the ship’s articles as chief officer, and till they are terminated at the final port of discharge I shall expect you to attend to your duty and give me the benefit of your experience to the best of your ability.”

Stony incredulity lingered in his eyes: but it broke down before my friendly attitude. With a slight upward toss of his arms (I got to know that gesture well afterward) he bolted out of the cabin.

We might have saved ourselves that little passage of harmless sparring. Before many days had elapsed it was Mr. Burns who was pleading with me anxiously not to leave him behind; while I could only return him but doubtful answers. The whole thing took on a somewhat tragic complexion.

And this horrible problem was only an extraneous episode, a mere complication in the general problem of how to get that ship — which was mine with her appurtenances and her men, with her body and her spirit now slumbering in that pestilential river — how to get her out to sea.

Mr. Burns, while still acting captain, had hastened to sign a charter-party which in an ideal world without guile would have been an excellent document. Directly I ran my eye over it I foresaw trouble ahead unless the people of the other part were quite exceptionally fair-minded and open to argument.

Mr. Burns, to whom I imparted my fears, chose to take great umbrage at them. He looked at me with that usual incredulous stare, and said bitterly:

“I suppose, sir, you want to make out I’ve acted like a fool?”

I told him, with my systematic kindness which always seemed to augment his surprise, that I did not want to make out anything. I would leave that to the future.

And, sure enough, the future brought in a lot of trouble. There were days when I used to remember Captain Giles with nothing short of abhorrence. His confounded acuteness had let me in for this job; while his prophecy that I “would have my hands full” coming true, made it appear as if done on purpose to play an evil joke on my young innocence.

Yes. I had my hands full of complications which were most valuable as “experience.” People have a great opinion of the advantages of experience. But in this connection experience means always something disagreeable as opposed to the charm and innocence of illusions.

I must say I was losing mine rapidly. But on these instructive complications I must not enlarge more than to say that they could all be resumed in the one word: Delay.

A mankind which has invented the proverb, “Time is money,” will understand my vexation. The word “Delay” entered the secret chamber of my brain, resounded there like a tolling bell which maddens the ear, affected all my senses, took on a black colouring, a bitter taste, a deadly meaning.

“I am really sorry to see you worried like this. Indeed, I am. . . .”

It was the only humane speech I used to hear at that time. And it came from a doctor, appropriately enough.

A doctor is humane by definition. But that man was so in reality. His speech was not professional. I was not ill. But other people were, and that was the reason of his visiting the ship.

He was the doctor of our Legation and, of course, of the Consulate, too. He looked after the ship’s health, which generally was poor, and trembling, as it were, on the verge of a break-up. Yes. The men ailed. And thus time was not only money, but life as well.

I had never seen such a steady ship’s company. As the doctor remarked to me: “You seem to have a most respectable lot of seamen.” Not only were they consistently sober, but they did not even want to go ashore. Care was taken to expose them as little as possible to the sun. They were employed on light work under the awnings. And the humane doctor commended me.

“Your arrangements appear to me to be very judicious, my dear Captain.”

It is difficult to express how much that pronouncement comforted me. The doctor’s round, full face framed in a light-coloured whisker was the perfection of a dignified amenity. He was the only human being in the

world who seemed to take the slightest interest in me. He would generally sit in the cabin for half an hour or so at every visit.

I said to him one day:

“I suppose the only thing now is to take care of them as you are doing till I can get the ship to sea?”

He inclined his head, shutting his eyes under the large spectacles, and murmured:

“The sea . . . undoubtedly.”

The first member of the crew fairly knocked over was the steward — the first man to whom I had spoken on board. He was taken ashore (with choleric symptoms) and died there at the end of a week. Then, while I was still under the startling impression of this first home-thrust of the climate, Mr. Burns gave up and went to bed in a raging fever without saying a word to anybody.

I believe he had partly fretted himself into that illness; the climate did the rest with the swiftness of an invisible monster ambushed in the air, in the water, in the mud of the river-bank. Mr. Burns was a predestined victim.

I discovered him lying on his back, glaring sullenly and radiating heat on one like a small furnace. He would hardly answer my questions, and only grumbled. Couldn't a man take an afternoon off duty with a bad headache — for once?

That evening, as I sat in the saloon after dinner, I could hear him muttering continuously in his room. Ransome, who was clearing the table, said to me:

“I am afraid, sir, I won't be able to give the mate all the attention he's likely to need. I will have to be forward in the galley a great part of my time.”

Ransome was the cook. The mate had pointed him out to me the first day, standing on the deck, his arms crossed on his broad chest, gazing on the river.

Even at a distance his well-proportioned figure, something thoroughly sailor-like in his poise, made him noticeable. On nearer view the intelligent, quiet eyes, a well-bred face, the disciplined independence of his manner made up an attractive personality. When, in addition, Mr. Burns told me that he was the best seaman in the ship, I expressed my surprise that in his earliest prime and of such appearance he should sign on as cook on board a ship.

“It’s his heart,” Mr. Burns had said. “There’s something wrong with it. He mustn’t exert himself too much or he may drop dead suddenly.”

And he was the only one the climate had not touched — perhaps because, carrying a deadly enemy in his breast, he had schooled himself into a systematic control of feelings and movements. When one was in the secret this was apparent in his manner. After the poor steward died, and as he could not be replaced by a white man in this Oriental port, Ransome had volunteered to do the double work.

“I can do it all right, sir, as long as I go about it quietly,” he had assured me.

But obviously he couldn’t be expected to take up sick-nursing in addition. Moreover, the doctor peremptorily ordered Mr. Burns ashore.

With a seaman on each side holding him up under the arms, the mate went over the gangway more sullen than ever. We built him up with pillows in the gharry, and he made an effort to say brokenly:

“Now — you’ve got — what you wanted — got me out of — the ship.”

“You were never more mistaken in your life, Mr. Burns,” I said quietly, duly smiling at him; and the trap drove off to a sort of sanatorium, a pavilion of bricks which the doctor had in the grounds of his residence.

I visited Mr. Burns regularly. After the first few days, when he didn’t know anybody, he received me as if I had come either to gloat over an enemy or else to curry favour with a deeply wronged person. It was either one or the other, just as it happened according to his fantastic sickroom moods. Whichever it was, he managed to convey it to me even during the period when he appeared almost too weak to talk. I treated him to my invariable kindness.

Then one day, suddenly, a surge of downright panic burst through all this craziness.

If I left him behind in this deadly place he would die. He felt it, he was certain of it. But I wouldn’t have the heart to leave him ashore. He had a wife and child in Sydney.

He produced his wasted forearms from under the sheet which covered him and clasped his fleshless claws. He would die! He would die here. . . .

He absolutely managed to sit up, but only for a moment, and when he fell back I really thought that he would die there and then. I called to the Bengali dispenser, and hastened away from the room.

Next day he upset me thoroughly by renewing his entreaties. I returned an evasive answer, and left him the picture of ghastly despair. The day after I went in with reluctance, and he attacked me at once in a much stronger voice and with an abundance of argument which was quite startling. He presented his case with a sort of crazy vigour, and asked me finally how would I like to have a man's death on my conscience? He wanted me to promise that I would not sail without him.

I said that I really must consult the doctor first. He cried out at that. The doctor! Never! That would be a death sentence.

The effort had exhausted him. He closed his eyes, but went on rambling in a low voice. I had hated him from the start. The late captain had hated him, too. Had wished him dead. Had wished all hands dead. . . .

"What do you want to stand in with that wicked corpse for, sir? He'll have you, too," he ended, blinking his glazed eyes vacantly.

"Mr. Burns," I cried, very much discomposed, "what on earth are you talking about?"

He seemed to come to himself, though he was too weak to start.

"I don't know," he said languidly. "But don't ask that doctor, sir. You and I are sailors. Don't ask him, sir. Some day perhaps you will have a wife and child yourself."

And again he pleaded for the promise that I would not leave him behind. I had the firmness of mind not to give it to him. Afterward this sternness seemed criminal; for my mind was made up. That prostrated man, with hardly strength enough to breathe and ravaged by a passion of fear, was irresistible. And, besides, he had happened to hit on the right words. He and I were sailors. That was a claim, for I had no other family. As to the wife and child (some day) argument, it had no force. It sounded merely bizarre.

I could imagine no claim that would be stronger and more absorbing than the claim of that ship, of these men snared in the river by silly commercial complications, as if in some poisonous trap.

However, I had nearly fought my way out. Out to sea. The sea — which was pure, safe, and friendly. Three days more.

That thought sustained and carried me on my way back to the ship. In the saloon the doctor's voice greeted me, and his large form followed his voice, issuing out of the starboard spare cabin where the ship's medicine chest was kept securely lashed in the bed-place.



Finding that I was not on board he had gone in there, he said, to inspect the supply of drugs, bandages, and so on. Everything was completed and in order.

I thanked him; I had just been thinking of asking him to do that very thing, as in a couple of days, as he knew, we were going to sea, where all our troubles of every sort would be over at last.

He listened gravely and made no answer. But when I opened to him my mind as to Mr. Burns he sat down by my side, and, laying his hand on my knee amicably, begged me to think what it was I was exposing myself to.

The man was just strong enough to bear being moved and no more. But he couldn't stand a return of the fever. I had before me a passage of sixty days perhaps, beginning with intricate navigation and ending probably with a lot of bad weather. Could I run the risk of having to go through it single-handed, with no chief officer and with a second quite a youth? . . .

He might have added that it was my first command, too. He did probably think of that fact, for he checked himself. It was very present to my mind.

He advised me earnestly to cable to Singapore for a chief officer, even if I had to delay my sailing for a week.

"Never," I said. The very thought gave me the shivers. The hands seemed fairly fit, all of them, and this was the time to get them away. Once at sea I was not afraid of facing anything. The sea was now the only remedy for all my troubles.

The doctor's glasses were directed at me like two lamps searching the genuineness of my resolution. He opened his lips as if to argue further, but shut them again without saying anything. I had a vision so vivid of poor Burns in his exhaustion, helplessness, and anguish, that it moved me more than the reality I had come away from only an hour before. It was purged from the drawbacks of his personality, and I could not resist it.

"Look here," I said. "Unless you tell me officially that the man must not be moved I'll make arrangements to have him brought on board tomorrow, and shall take the ship out of the river next morning, even if I have to anchor outside the bar for a couple of days to get her ready for sea."

"Oh! I'll make all the arrangements myself," said the doctor at once. "I spoke as I did only as a friend — as a well-wisher, and that sort of thing."

He rose in his dignified simplicity and gave me a warm handshake, rather solemnly, I thought. But he was as good as his word. When Mr. Burns appeared at the gangway carried on a stretcher, the doctor himself walked

by its side. The programme had been altered in so far that this transportation had been left to the last moment, on the very morning of our departure.

It was barely an hour after sunrise. The doctor waved his big arm to me from the shore and walked back at once to his trap, which had followed him empty to the river-side. Mr. Burns, carried across the quarter-deck, had the appearance of being absolutely lifeless. Ransome went down to settle him in his cabin. I had to remain on deck to look after the ship, for the tug had got hold of our towrope already.

The splash of our shore-fasts falling in the water produced a complete change of feeling in me. It was like the imperfect relief of awakening from a nightmare. But when the ship's head swung down the river away from that town, Oriental and squalid, I missed the expected elation of that striven-for moment. What there was, undoubtedly, was a relaxation of tension which translated itself into a sense of weariness after an inglorious fight.

About midday we anchored a mile outside the bar. The afternoon was busy for all hands. Watching the work from the poop, where I remained all the time, I detected in it some of the languor of the six weeks spent in the steaming heat of the river. The first breeze would blow that away. Now the calm was complete. I judged that the second officer — a callow youth with an unpromising face — was not, to put it mildly, of that invaluable stuff from which a commander's right hand is made. But I was glad to catch along the main deck a few smiles on those seamen's faces at which I had hardly had time to have a good look as yet. Having thrown off the mortal coil of shore affairs, I felt myself familiar with them and yet a little strange, like a long-lost wanderer among his kin.

Ransome flitted continually to and fro between the galley and the cabin. It was a pleasure to look at him. The man positively had grace. He alone of all the crew had not had a day's illness in port. But with the knowledge of that uneasy heart within his breast I could detect the restraint he put on the natural sailor-like agility of his movements. It was as though he had something very fragile or very explosive to carry about his person and was all the time aware of it.

I had occasion to address him once or twice. He answered me in his pleasant, quiet voice and with a faint, slightly wistful smile. Mr. Burns appeared to be resting. He seemed fairly comfortable.

After sunset I came out on deck again to meet only a still void. The thin, featureless crust of the coast could not be distinguished. The darkness had risen around the ship like a mysterious emanation from the dumb and lonely waters. I leaned on the rail and turned my ear to the shadows of the night. Not a sound. My command might have been a planet flying vertiginously on its appointed path in a space of infinite silence. I clung to the rail as if my sense of balance were leaving me for good. How absurd. I failed nervously.

“On deck there!”

The immediate answer, “Yes, sir,” broke the spell. The anchor-watch man ran up the poop ladder smartly. I told him to report at once the slightest sign of a breeze coming.

Going below I looked in on Mr. Burns. In fact, I could not avoid seeing him, for his door stood open. The man was so wasted that, in this white cabin, under a white sheet, and with his diminished head sunk in the white pillow, his red moustaches captured their eyes exclusively, like something artificial — a pair of moustaches from a shop exhibited there in the harsh light of the bulkhead-lamp without a shade.

While I stared with a sort of wonder he asserted himself by opening his eyes and even moving them in my direction. A minute stir.

“Dead calm, Mr. Burns,” I said resignedly.

In an unexpectedly distinct voice Mr. Burns began a rambling speech. Its tone was very strange, not as if affected by his illness, but as if of a different nature. It sounded unearthly. As to the matter, I seemed to make out that it was the fault of the “old man” — the late captain — ambushed down there under the sea with some evil intention. It was a weird story.

I listened to the end; then stepping into the cabin I laid my hand on the mate’s forehead. It was cool. He was light-headed only from extreme weakness. Suddenly he seemed to become aware of me, and in his own voice — of course, very feeble — he asked regretfully:

“Is there no chance at all to get under way, sir?”

“What’s the good of letting go our hold of the ground only to drift, Mr. Burns?” I answered.

He sighed and I left him to his immobility. His hold on life was as slender as his hold on sanity. I was oppressed by my lonely responsibilities. I went into my cabin to seek relief in a few hours’ sleep, but almost before I

closed my eyes the man on deck came down reporting a light breeze. Enough to get under way with, he said.

And it was no more than just enough. I ordered the windlass manned, the sails loosed, and the topsails set. But by the time I had cast the ship I could hardly feel any breath of wind. Nevertheless, I trimmed the yards and put everything on her. I was not going to give up the attempt.

## PART TWO

### IV

With her anchor at the bow and clothed in canvas to her very trucks, my command seemed to stand as motionless as a model ship set on the gleams and shadows of polished marble. It was impossible to distinguish land from water in the enigmatical tranquillity of the immense forces of the world. A sudden impatience possessed me.

“Won’t she answer the helm at all?” I said irritably to the man whose strong brown hands grasping the spokes of the wheel stood out lighted on the darkness; like a symbol of mankind’s claim to the direction of its own fate.

He answered me.

“Yes, sir. She’s coming-to slowly.”

“Let her head come up to south.”

“Aye, aye, sir.”

I paced the poop. There was not a sound but that of my footsteps, till the man spoke again.

“She is at south now, sir.”

I felt a slight tightness of the chest before I gave out the first course of my first command to the silent night, heavy with dew and sparkling with stars. There was a finality in the act committing me to the endless vigilance of my lonely task.

“Steady her head at that,” I said at last. “The course is south.”

“South, sir,” echoed the man.

I sent below the second mate and his watch and remained in charge, walking the deck through the chill, somnolent hours that precede the dawn.

Slight puffs came and went, and whenever they were strong enough to wake up the black water the murmur alongside ran through my very heart in a delicate crescendo of delight and died away swiftly. I was bitterly tired. The very stars seemed weary of waiting for daybreak. It came at last with a

mother-of-pearl sheen at the zenith, such as I had never seen before in the tropics, unglowing, almost gray, with a strange reminder of high latitudes.

The voice of the look-out man hailed from forward:

“Land on the port bow, sir.”

“All right.”

Leaning on the rail I never even raised my eyes.

The motion of the ship was imperceptible. Presently Ransome brought me the cup of morning coffee. After I had drunk it I looked ahead, and in the still streak of very bright pale orange light I saw the land profiled flatly as if cut out of black paper and seeming to float on the water as light as cork. But the rising sun turned it into mere dark vapour, a doubtful, massive shadow trembling in the hot glare.

The watch finished washing decks. I went below and stopped at Mr. Burns’ door (he could not bear to have it shut), but hesitated to speak to him till he moved his eyes. I gave him the news.

“Sighted Cape Liant at daylight. About fifteen miles.”

He moved his lips then, but I heard no sound till I put my ear down, and caught the peevish comment: “This is crawling. . . . No luck.”

“Better luck than standing still, anyhow,” I pointed out resignedly, and left him to whatever thoughts or fancies haunted his awful immobility.

Later that morning, when relieved by my second officer, I threw myself on my couch and for some three hours or so I really found oblivion. It was so perfect that on waking up I wondered where I was. Then came the immense relief of the thought: on board my ship! At sea! At sea!

Through the port-holes I beheld an unruffled, sun-smitten horizon. The horizon of a windless day. But its spaciousness alone was enough to give me a sense of a fortunate escape, a momentary exultation of freedom.

I stepped out into the saloon with my heart lighter than it had been for days. Ransome was at the sideboard preparing to lay the table for the first sea dinner of the passage. He turned his head, and something in his eyes checked my modest elation.

Instinctively I asked: “What is it now?” not expecting in the least the answer I got. It was given with that sort of contained serenity which was characteristic of the man.

“I am afraid we haven’t left all sickness behind us, sir.”

“We haven’t! What’s the matter?”

He told me then that two of our men had been taken bad with fever in the night. One of them was burning and the other was shivering, but he thought that it was pretty much the same thing. I thought so, too. I felt shocked by the news. "One burning, the other shivering, you say? No. We haven't left the sickness behind. Do they look very ill?"

"Middling bad, sir." Ransome's eyes gazed steadily into mine. We exchanged smiles. Ransome's a little wistful, as usual, mine no doubt grim enough, to correspond with my secret exasperation.

I asked:

"Was there any wind at all this morning?"

"Can hardly say that, sir. We've moved all the time though. The land ahead seems a little nearer."

That was it. A little nearer. Whereas if we had only had a little more wind, only a very little more, we might, we should, have been abreast of Liant by this time and increasing our distance from that contaminated shore. And it was not only the distance. It seemed to me that a stronger breeze would have blown away the contamination which clung to the ship. It obviously did cling to the ship. Two men. One burning, one shivering. I felt a distinct reluctance to go and look at them. What was the good? Poison is poison. Tropical fever is tropical fever. But that it should have stretched its claw after us over the sea seemed to me an extraordinary and unfair license. I could hardly believe that it could be anything worse than the last desperate pluck of the evil from which we were escaping into the clean breath of the sea. If only that breath had been a little stronger. However, there was the quinine against the fever. I went into the spare cabin where the medicine chest was kept to prepare two doses. I opened it full of faith as a man opens a miraculous shrine. The upper part was inhabited by a collection of bottles, all square-shouldered and as like each other as peas. Under that orderly array there were two drawers, stuffed as full of things as one could imagine — paper packages, bandages, cardboard boxes officially labelled. The lower of the two, in one of its compartments, contained our provision of quinine.

There were five bottles, all round and all of a size. One was about a third full. The other four remained still wrapped up in paper and sealed. But I did not expect to see an envelope lying on top of them. A square envelope, belonging, in fact, to the ship's stationery.

It lay so that I could see it was not closed down, and on picking it up and turning it over I perceived that it was addressed to myself. It contained a half-sheet of notepaper, which I unfolded with a queer sense of dealing with the uncanny, but without any excitement as people meet and do extraordinary things in a dream.

“My dear Captain,” it began, but I ran to the signature. The writer was the doctor. The date was that of the day on which, returning from my visit to Mr. Burns in the hospital, I had found the excellent doctor waiting for me in the cabin; and when he told me that he had been putting in time inspecting the medicine chest for me. How bizarre! While expecting me to come in at any moment he had been amusing himself by writing me a letter, and then as I came in had hastened to stuff it into the medicine-chest drawer. A rather incredible proceeding. I turned to the text in wonder.

In a large, hurried, but legible hand the good, sympathetic man for some reason, either of kindness or more likely impelled by the irresistible desire to express his opinion, with which he didn’t want to damp my hopes before, was warning me not to put my trust in the beneficial effects of a change from land to sea. “I didn’t want to add to your worries by discouraging your hopes,” he wrote. “I am afraid that, medically speaking, the end of your troubles is not yet.” In short, he expected me to have to fight a probable return of tropical illness. Fortunately I had a good provision of quinine. I should put my trust in that, and administer it steadily, when the ship’s health would certainly improve.

I crumpled up the letter and rammed it into my pocket. Ransome carried off two big doses to the men forward. As to myself, I did not go on deck as yet. I went instead to the door of Mr. Burns’ room, and gave him that news, too.

It was impossible to say the effect it had on him. At first I thought that he was speechless. His head lay sunk in the pillow. He moved his lips enough, however, to assure me that he was getting much stronger; a statement shockingly untrue on the face of it.

That afternoon I took my watch as a matter of course. A great overheated stillness enveloped the ship and seemed to hold her motionless in a flaming ambience composed in two shades of blue. Faint, hot puffs eddied nervelessly from her sails. And yet she moved. She must have. For, as the sun was setting, we had drawn abreast of Cape Liant and dropped it behind us: an ominous retreating shadow in the last gleams of twilight.



In the evening, under the crude glare of his lamp, Mr. Burns seemed to have come more to the surface of his bedding. It was as if a depressing hand had been lifted off him. He answered my few words by a comparatively long, connected speech. He asserted himself strongly. If he escaped being smothered by this stagnant heat, he said, he was confident that in a very few days he would be able to come up on deck and help me.

While he was speaking I trembled lest this effort of energy should leave him lifeless before my eyes. But I cannot deny that there was something comforting in his willingness. I made a suitable reply, but pointed out to him that the only thing that could really help us was wind — a fair wind.

He rolled his head impatiently on the pillow. And it was not comforting in the least to hear him begin to mutter crazily about the late captain, that old man buried in latitude 8 d 20', right in our way — ambushed at the entrance of the Gulf.

“Are you still thinking of your late captain, Mr. Burns?” I said. “I imagine the dead feel no animosity against the living. They care nothing for them.”

“You don’t know that one,” he breathed out feebly.

“No. I didn’t know him, and he didn’t know me. And so he can’t have any grievance against me, anyway.”

“Yes. But there’s all the rest of us on board,” he insisted.

I felt the inexpugnable strength of common sense being insidiously menaced by this gruesome, by this insane, delusion. And I said:

“You mustn’t talk so much. You will tire yourself.”

“And there is the ship herself,” he persisted in a whisper.

“Now, not a word more,” I said, stepping in and laying my hand on his cool forehead. It proved to me that this atrocious absurdity was rooted in the man himself and not in the disease, which, apparently, had emptied him of every power, mental and physical, except that one fixed idea.

I avoided giving Mr. Burns any opening for conversation for the next few days. I merely used to throw him a hasty, cheery word when passing his door. I believe that if he had had the strength he would have called out after me more than once. But he hadn’t the strength. Ransome, however, observed to me one afternoon that the mate “seemed to be picking up wonderfully.”

“Did he talk any nonsense to you of late?” I asked casually.

“No, sir.” Ransome was startled by the direct question; but, after a pause, he added equably: “He told me this morning, sir, that he was sorry he had to bury our late captain right in the ship’s way, as one may say, out of the Gulf.”

“Isn’t this nonsense enough for you?” I asked, looking confidently at the intelligent, quiet face on which the secret uneasiness in the man’s breast had thrown a transparent veil of care.

Ransome didn’t know. He had not given a thought to the matter. And with a faint smile he flitted away from me on his never-ending duties, with his usual guarded activity.

Two more days passed. We had advanced a little way — a very little way — into the larger space of the Gulf of Siam. Seizing eagerly upon the elation of the first command thrown into my lap, by the agency of Captain Giles, I had yet an uneasy feeling that such luck as this has got perhaps to be paid for in some way. I had held, professionally, a review of my chances. I was competent enough for that. At least, I thought so. I had a general sense of my preparedness which only a man pursuing a calling he loves can know. That feeling seemed to me the most natural thing in the world. As natural as breathing. I imagined I could not have lived without it.

I don’t know what I expected. Perhaps nothing else than that special intensity of existence which is the quintessence of youthful aspirations. Whatever I expected I did not expect to be beset by hurricanes. I knew better than that. In the Gulf of Siam there are no hurricanes. But neither did I expect to find myself bound hand and foot to the hopeless extent which was revealed to me as the days went on.

Not that the evil spell held us always motionless. Mysterious currents drifted us here and there, with a stealthy power made manifest only by the changing vistas of the islands fringing the east shore of the Gulf. And there were winds, too, fitful and deceitful. They raised hopes only to dash them into the bitterest disappointment, promises of advance ending in lost ground, expiring in sighs, dying into dumb stillness in which the currents had it all their own way — their own inimical way.

The island of Koh-ring, a great, black, upheaved ridge amongst a lot of tiny islets, lying upon the glassy water like a triton amongst minnows, seemed to be the centre of the fatal circle. It seemed impossible to get away from it. Day after day it remained in sight. More than once, in a favourable breeze, I would take its bearings in the fast-ebbing twilight, thinking that it

was for the last time. Vain hope. A night of fitful airs would undo the gains of temporary favour, and the rising sun would throw out the black relief of Koh-ring looking more barren, inhospitable, and grim than ever.

"It's like being bewitched, upon my word," I said once to Mr. Burns, from my usual position in the doorway.

He was sitting up in his bed-place. He was progressing toward the world of living men; if he could hardly have been said to have rejoined it yet. He nodded to me his frail and bony head in a wisely mysterious assent.

"Oh, yes, I know what you mean," I said. "But you cannot expect me to believe that a dead man has the power to put out of joint the meteorology of this part of the world. Though indeed it seems to have gone utterly wrong. The land and sea breezes have got broken up into small pieces. We cannot depend upon them for five minutes together."

"It won't be very long now before I can come up on deck," muttered Mr. Burns, "and then we shall see."

Whether he meant this for a promise to grapple with supernatural evil I couldn't tell. At any rate, it wasn't the kind of assistance I needed. On the other hand, I had been living on deck practically night and day so as to take advantage of every chance to get my ship a little more to the southward. The mate, I could see, was extremely weak yet, and not quite rid of his delusion, which to me appeared but a symptom of his disease. At all events, the hopefulness of an invalid was not to be discouraged. I said:

"You will be most welcome there, I am sure, Mr. Burns. If you go on improving at this rate you'll be presently one of the healthiest men in the ship."

This pleased him, but his extreme emaciation converted his self-satisfied smile into a ghastly exhibition of long teeth under the red moustache.

"Aren't the fellows improving, sir?" he asked soberly, with an extremely sensible expression of anxiety on his face.

I answered him only with a vague gesture and went away from the door. The fact was that disease played with us capriciously very much as the winds did. It would go from one man to another with a lighter or heavier touch, which always left its mark behind, staggering some, knocking others over for a time, leaving this one, returning to another, so that all of them had now an invalidish aspect and a hunted, apprehensive look in their eyes; while Ransome and I, the only two completely untouched, went amongst them assiduously distributing quinine. It was a double fight. The adverse

weather held us in front and the disease pressed on our rear. I must say that the men were very good. The constant toil of trimming yards they faced willingly. But all spring was out of their limbs, and as I looked at them from the poop I could not keep from my mind the dreadful impression that they were moving in poisoned air.

Down below, in his cabin, Mr. Burns had advanced so far as not only to be able to sit up, but even to draw up his legs. Clasping them with bony arms, like an animated skeleton, he emitted deep, impatient sighs.

"The great thing to do, sir," he would tell me on every occasion, when I gave him the chance, "the great thing is to get the ship past 8 d 20' of latitude. Once she's past that we're all right."

At first I used only to smile at him, though, God knows, I had not much heart left for smiles. But at last I lost my patience.

"Oh, yes. The latitude 8 d 20'. That's where you buried your late captain, isn't it?" Then with severity: "Don't you think, Mr. Burns, it's about time you dropped all that nonsense?"

He rolled at me his deep-sunken eyes in a glance of invincible obstinacy. But for the rest he only muttered, just loud enough for me to hear, something about "Not surprised . . . find . . . play us some beastly trick yet. . . ."

Such passages as this were not exactly wholesome for my resolution. The stress of adversity was beginning to tell on me. At the same time, I felt a contempt for that obscure weakness of my soul. I said to myself disdainfully that it should take much more than that to affect in the smallest degree my fortitude.

I didn't know then how soon and from what unexpected direction it would be attacked.

It was the very next day. The sun had risen clear of the southern shoulder of Koh-ring, which still hung, like an evil attendant, on our port quarter. It was intensely hateful to my sight. During the night we had been heading all round the compass, trimming the yards again and again, to what I fear must have been for the most part imaginary puffs of air. Then just about sunrise we got for an hour an inexplicable, steady breeze, right in our teeth. There was no sense in it. It fitted neither with the season of the year nor with the secular experience of seamen as recorded in books, nor with the aspect of the sky. Only purposeful malevolence could account for it. It sent us travelling at a great pace away from our proper course; and if we had been

out on pleasure sailing bent it would have been a delightful breeze, with the awakened sparkle of the sea, with the sense of motion and a feeling of unwonted freshness. Then, all at once, as if disdaining to carry farther the sorry jest, it dropped and died out completely in less than five minutes. The ship's head swung where it listed; the stilled sea took on the polish of a steel plate in the calm.

I went below, not because I meant to take some rest, but simply because I couldn't bear to look at it just then. The indefatigable Ransome was busy in the saloon. It had become a regular practice with him to give me an informal health report in the morning. He turned away from the sideboard with his usual pleasant, quiet gaze. No shadow rested on his intelligent forehead.

"There are a good many of them middling bad this morning, sir," he said in a calm tone.

"What? All knocked out?"

"Only two actually in their bunks, sir, but — "

"It's the last night that has done for them. We have had to pull and haul all the blessed time."

"I heard, sir. I had a mind to come out and help only, you know. . . ."

"Certainly not. You mustn't. . . . The fellows lie at night about the decks, too. It isn't good for them."

Ransome assented. But men couldn't be looked after like children. Moreover, one could hardly blame them for trying for such coolness and such air as there was to be found on deck. He himself, of course, knew better.

He was, indeed, a reasonable man. Yet it would have been hard to say that the others were not. The last few days had been for us like the ordeal of the fiery furnace. One really couldn't quarrel with their common, imprudent humanity making the best of the moments of relief, when the night brought in the illusion of coolness and the starlight twinkled through the heavy, dew-laden air. Moreover, most of them were so weakened that hardly anything could be done without everybody that could totter mustering on the braces. No, it was no use remonstrating with them. But I fully believed that quinine was of very great use indeed.

I believed in it. I pinned my faith to it. It would save the men, the ship, break the spell by its medicinal virtue, make time of no account, the weather but a passing worry and, like a magic powder working against

mysterious malefices, secure the first passage of my first command against the evil powers of calms and pestilence. I looked upon it as more precious than gold, and unlike gold, of which there ever hardly seems to be enough anywhere, the ship had a sufficient store of it. I went in to get it with the purpose of weighing out doses. I stretched my hand with the feeling of a man reaching for an unfailing panacea, took up a fresh bottle and unrolled the wrapper, noticing as I did so that the ends, both top and bottom, had come unsealed. . . .

But why record all the swift steps of the appalling discovery? You have guessed the truth already. There was the wrapper, the bottle, and the white powder inside, some sort of powder! But it wasn't quinine. One look at it was quite enough. I remember that at the very moment of picking up the bottle, before I even dealt with the wrapper, the weight of the object I had in my hand gave me an instant premonition. Quinine is as light as feathers; and my nerves must have been exasperated into an extraordinary sensibility. I let the bottle smash itself on the floor. The stuff, whatever it was, felt gritty under the sole of my shoe. I snatched up the next bottle and then the next. The weight alone told the tale. One after another they fell, breaking at my feet, not because I threw them down in my dismay, but slipping through my fingers as if this disclosure were too much for my strength.

It is a fact that the very greatness of a mental shock helps one to bear up against it by producing a sort of temporary insensibility. I came out of the state-room stunned, as if something heavy had dropped on my head. From the other side of the saloon, across the table, Ransome, with a duster in his hand, stared open-mouthed. I don't think that I looked wild. It is quite possible that I appeared to be in a hurry because I was instinctively hastening up on deck. An example this of training become instinct. The difficulties, the dangers, the problems of a ship at sea must be met on deck.

To this fact, as it were of nature, I responded instinctively; which may be taken as a proof that for a moment I must have been robbed of my reason.

I was certainly off my balance, a prey to impulse, for at the bottom of the stairs I turned and flung myself at the doorway of Mr. Burns' cabin. The wildness of his aspect checked my mental disorder. He was sitting up in his bunk, his body looking immensely long, his head drooping a little sideways, with affected complacency. He flourished, in his trembling hand, on the end of a forearm no thicker than a walking-stick, a shining pair of scissors which he tried before my very eyes to jab at his throat.

I was to a certain extent horrified; but it was rather a secondary sort of effect, not really strong enough to make me yell at him in some such manner as: "Stop!" . . . "Heavens!" . . . "What are you doing?"

In reality he was simply overtaxing his returning strength in a shaky attempt to clip off the thick growth of his red beard. A large towel was spread over his lap, and a shower of stiff hairs, like bits of copper wire, was descending on it at every snip of the scissors.

He turned to me his face grotesque beyond the fantasies of mad dreams, one cheek all bushy as if with a swollen flame, the other denuded and sunken, with the untouched long moustache on that side asserting itself, lonely and fierce. And while he stared thunderstruck, with the gaping scissors on his fingers, I shouted my discovery at him fiendishly, in six words, without comment.

## V

I heard the clatter of the scissors escaping from his hand, noted the perilous heave of his whole person over the edge of the bunk after them, and then, returning to my first purpose, pursued my course on the deck. The sparkle of the sea filled my eyes. It was gorgeous and barren, monotonous and without hope under the empty curve of the sky. The sails hung motionless and slack, the very folds of their sagging surfaces moved no more than carved granite. The impetuosity of my advent made the man at the helm start slightly. A block aloft squeaked incomprehensibly, for what on earth could have made it do so? It was a whistling note like a bird's. For a long, long time I faced an empty world, steeped in an infinity of silence, through which the sunshine poured and flowed for some mysterious purpose. Then I heard Ransome's voice at my elbow.

"I have put Mr. Burns back to bed, sir."

"You have."

"Well, sir, he got out, all of a sudden, but when he let go the edge of his bunk he fell down. He isn't light-headed, though, it seems to me."

"No," I said dully, without looking at Ransome. He waited for a moment, then cautiously, as if not to give offence: "I don't think we need lose much of that stuff, sir," he said, "I can sweep it up, every bit of it almost, and then

we could sift the glass out. I will go about it at once. It will not make the breakfast late, not ten minutes.”

“Oh, yes,” I said bitterly. “Let the breakfast wait, sweep up every bit of it, and then throw the damned lot overboard!”

The profound silence returned, and when I looked over my shoulder, Ransome — the intelligent, serene Ransome — had vanished from my side. The intense loneliness of the sea acted like poison on my brain. When I turned my eyes to the ship, I had a morbid vision of her as a floating grave. Who hasn’t heard of ships found floating, haphazard, with their crews all dead? I looked at the seaman at the helm, I had an impulse to speak to him, and, indeed, his face took on an expectant cast as if he had guessed my intention. But in the end I went below, thinking I would be alone with the greatness of my trouble for a little while. But through his open door Mr. Burns saw me come down, and addressed me grumpily: “Well, sir?”

I went in. “It isn’t well at all,” I said.

Mr. Burns, reestablished in his bed-place, was concealing his hirsute cheek in the palm of his hand.

“That confounded fellow has taken away the scissors from me,” were the next words he said.

The tension I was suffering from was so great that it was perhaps just as well that Mr. Burns had started on his grievance. He seemed very sore about it and grumbled, “Does he think I am mad, or what?”

“I don’t think so, Mr. Burns,” I said. I looked upon him at that moment as a model of self-possession. I even conceived on that account a sort of admiration for that man, who had (apart from the intense materiality of what was left of his beard) come as near to being a disembodied spirit as any man can do and live. I noticed the preternatural sharpness of the ridge of his nose, the deep cavities of his temples, and I envied him. He was so reduced that he would probably die very soon. Envidable man! So near extinction — while I had to bear within me a tumult of suffering vitality, doubt, confusion, self-reproach, and an indefinite reluctance to meet the horrid logic of the situation. I could not help muttering: “I feel as if I were going mad myself.”

Mr. Burns glared spectrally, but otherwise was wonderfully composed.

“I always thought he would play us some deadly trick,” he said, with a peculiar emphasis on the *he*.



It gave me a mental shock, but I had neither the mind, nor the heart, nor the spirit to argue with him. My form of sickness was indifference. The creeping paralysis of a hopeless outlook. So I only gazed at him. Mr. Burns broke into further speech.

“Eh! What! No! You won’t believe it? Well, how do you account for this? How do you think it could have happened?”

“Happened?” I repeated dully. “Why, yes, how in the name of the infernal powers did this thing happen?”

Indeed, on thinking it out, it seemed incomprehensible that it should just be like this: the bottles emptied, refilled, rewrapped, and replaced. A sort of plot, a sinister attempt to deceive, a thing resembling sly vengeance, but for what? Or else a fiendish joke. But Mr. Burns was in possession of a theory. It was simple, and he uttered it solemnly in a hollow voice.

“I suppose they have given him about fifteen pounds in Haiphong for that little lot.”

“Mr. Burns!” I cried.

He nodded grotesquely over his raised legs, like two broomsticks in the pyjamas, with enormous bare feet at the end.

“Why not? The stuff is pretty expensive in this part of the world, and they were very short of it in Tonkin. And what did he care? You have not known him. I have, and I have defied him. He feared neither God, nor devil, nor man, nor wind, nor sea, nor his own conscience. And I believe he hated everybody and everything. But I think he was afraid to die. I believe I am the only man who ever stood up to him. I faced him in that cabin where you live now, when he was sick, and I cowed him then. He thought I was going to twist his neck for him. If he had had his way we would have been beating up against the Nord-East monsoon, as long as he lived and afterward, too, for ages and ages. Acting the Flying Dutchman in the China Sea! Ha! Ha!”

“But why should he replace the bottles like this?” . . . I began.

“Why shouldn’t he? Why should he want to throw the bottles away? They fit the drawer. They belong to the medicine chest.”

“And they were wrapped up,” I cried.

“Well, the wrappers were there. Did it from habit, I suppose, and as to refilling, there is always a lot of stuff they send in paper parcels that burst after a time. And then, who can tell? I suppose you didn’t taste it, sir? But, of course, you are sure. . . .”

“No,” I said. “I didn’t taste it. It is all overboard now.”

Behind me, a soft, cultivated voice said: "I have tasted it. It seemed a mixture of all sorts, sweetish, saltish, very horrible."

Ransome, stepping out of the pantry, had been listening for some time, as it was very excusable in him to do.

"A dirty trick," said Mr. Burns. "I always said he would."

The magnitude of my indignation was unbounded. And the kind, sympathetic doctor, too. The only sympathetic man I ever knew . . . instead of writing that warning letter, the very refinement of sympathy, why didn't the man make a proper inspection? But, as a matter of fact, it was hardly fair to blame the doctor. The fittings were in order and the medicine chest is an officially arranged affair. There was nothing really to arouse the slightest suspicion. The person I could never forgive was myself. Nothing should ever be taken for granted. The seed of everlasting remorse was sown in my breast.

"I feel it's all my fault," I exclaimed, "mine and nobody else's. That's how I feel. I shall never forgive myself."

"That's very foolish, sir," said Mr. Burns fiercely.

And after this effort he fell back exhausted on his bed. He closed his eyes, he panted; this affair, this abominable surprise had shaken him up, too. As I turned away I perceived Ransome looking at me blankly. He appreciated what it meant, but managed to produce his pleasant, wistful smile. Then he stepped back into his pantry, and I rushed up on deck again to see whether there was any wind, any breath under the sky, any stir of the air, any sign of hope. The deadly stillness met me again. Nothing was changed except that there was a different man at the wheel. He looked ill. His whole figure drooped, and he seemed rather to cling to the spokes than hold them with a controlling grip. I said to him:

"You are not fit to be here."

"I can manage, sir," he said feebly.

As a matter of fact, there was nothing for him to do. The ship had no steerage way. She lay with her head to the westward, the everlasting Koh-ring visible over the stern, with a few small islets, black spots in the great blaze, swimming before my troubled eyes. And but for those bits of land there was no speck on the sky, no speck on the water, no shape of vapour, no wisp of smoke, no sail, no boat, no stir of humanity, no sign of life, nothing!

The first question was, what to do? What could one do? The first thing to do obviously was to tell the men. I did it that very day. I wasn't going to let the knowledge simply get about. I would face them. They were assembled on the quarterdeck for the purpose. Just before I stepped out to speak to them I discovered that life could hold terrible moments. No confessed criminal had ever been so oppressed by his sense of guilt. This is why, perhaps, my face was set hard and my voice curt and unemotional while I made my declaration that I could do nothing more for the sick in the way of drugs. As to such care as could be given them they knew they had had it.

I would have held them justified in tearing me limb from limb. The silence which followed upon my words was almost harder to bear than the angriest uproar. I was crushed by the infinite depth of its reproach. But, as a matter of fact, I was mistaken. In a voice which I had great difficulty in keeping firm, I went on: "I suppose, men, you have understood what I said, and you know what it means."

A voice or two were heard: "Yes, sir. . . . We understand."

They had kept silent simply because they thought that they were not called to say anything; and when I told them that I intended to run into Singapore and that the best chance for the ship and the men was in the efforts all of us, sick and well, must make to get her along out of this, I received the encouragement of a low assenting murmur and of a louder voice exclaiming: "Surely there is a way out of this blamed hole."

Here is an extract from the notes I wrote at the time.

"We have lost Koh-ring at last. For many days now I don't think I have been two hours below altogether. I remain on deck, of course, night and day, and the nights and the days wheel over us in succession, whether long or short, who can say? All sense of time is lost in the monotony of expectation, of hope, and of desire — which is only one: Get the ship to the southward! Get the ship to the southward! The effect is curiously mechanical; the sun climbs and descends, the night swings over our heads as if somebody below the horizon were turning a crank. It is the prettiest, the most aimless! . . . and all through that miserable performance I go on, tramping, tramping the deck. How many miles have I walked on the poop of that ship! A stubborn pilgrimage of sheer restlessness, diversified by short excursions below to look upon Mr. Burns. I don't know whether it is

an illusion, but he seems to become more substantial from day to day. He doesn't say much, for, indeed, the situation doesn't lend itself to idle remarks. I notice this even with the men as I watch them moving or sitting about the decks. They don't talk to each other. It strikes me that if there exists an invisible ear catching the whispers of the earth, it will find this ship the most silent spot on it. . . .

"No, Mr. Burns has not much to say to me. He sits in his bunk with his beard gone, his moustaches flaming, and with an air of silent determination on his chalky physiognomy. Ransome tells me he devours all the food that is given him to the last scrap, but that, apparently, he sleeps very little. Even at night, when I go below to fill my pipe, I notice that, though dozing flat on his back, he still looks very determined. From the side glance he gives me when awake it seems as though he were annoyed at being interrupted in some arduous mental operation; and as I emerge on deck the ordered arrangement of the stars meets my eye, unclouded, infinitely wearisome. There they are: stars, sun, sea, light, darkness, space, great waters; the formidable Work of the Seven Days, into which mankind seems to have blundered unbidden. Or else decoyed. Even as I have been decoyed into this awful, this death-haunted command. . . ."

The only spot of light in the ship at night was that of the compass-lamps, lighting up the faces of the succeeding helmsmen; for the rest we were lost in the darkness, I walking the poop and the men lying about the decks. They were all so reduced by sickness that no watches could be kept. Those who were able to walk remained all the time on duty, lying about in the shadows of the main deck, till my voice raised for an order would bring them to their enfeebled feet, a tottering little group, moving patiently about the ship, with hardly a murmur, a whisper amongst them all. And every time I had to raise my voice it was with a pang of remorse and pity.

Then about four o'clock in the morning a light would gleam forward in the galley. The unfailing Ransome with the uneasy heart, immune, serene, and active, was getting ready for the early coffee for the men. Presently he would bring me a cup up on the poop, and it was then that I allowed myself to drop into my deck chair for a couple of hours of real sleep. No doubt I must have been snatching short dozes when leaning against the rail for a moment in sheer exhaustion; but, honestly, I was not aware of them, except

in the painful form of convulsive starts that seemed to come on me even while I walked. From about five, however, until after seven I would sleep openly under the fading stars.

I would say to the helmsman: "Call me at need," and drop into that chair and close my eyes, feeling that there was no more sleep for me on earth. And then I would know nothing till, some time between seven and eight, I would feel a touch on my shoulder and look up at Ransome's face, with its faint, wistful smile and friendly, gray eyes, as though he were tenderly amused at my slumbers. Occasionally the second mate would come up and relieve me at early coffee time. But it didn't really matter. Generally it was a dead calm, or else faint airs so changing and fugitive that it really wasn't worth while to touch a brace for them. If the air steadied at all the seaman at the helm could be trusted for a warning shout: "Ship's all aback, sir!" which like a trumpet-call would make me spring a foot above the deck. Those were the words which it seemed to me would have made me spring up from eternal sleep. But this was not often. I have never met since such breathless sunrises. And if the second mate happened to be there (he had generally one day in three free of fever) I would find him sitting on the skylight half senseless, as it were, and with an idiotic gaze fastened on some object near by — a rope, a cleat, a belaying pin, a ringbolt.

That young man was rather troublesome. He remained cubbish in his sufferings. He seemed to have become completely imbecile; and when the return of fever drove him to his cabin below, the next thing would be that we would miss him from there. The first time it happened Ransome and I were very much alarmed. We started a quiet search and ultimately Ransome discovered him curled up in the sail-locker, which opened into the lobby by a sliding door. When remonstrated with, he muttered sulkily, "It's cool in there." That wasn't true. It was only dark there.

The fundamental defects of his face were not improved by its uniform livid hue. The disease disclosed its low type in a startling way. It was not so with many of the men. The wastage of ill-health seemed to idealise the general character of the features, bringing out the unsuspected nobility of some, the strength of others, and in one case revealing an essentially comic aspect. He was a short, gingery, active man with a nose and chin of the Punch type, and whom his shipmates called "Frenchy." I don't know why. He may have been a Frenchman, but I have never heard him utter a single word in French.

To see him coming aft to the wheel comforted one. The blue dungaree trousers turned up the calf, one leg a little higher than the other, the clean check shirt, the white canvas cap, evidently made by himself, made up a whole of peculiar smartness, and the persistent jauntness of his gait, even, poor fellow, when he couldn't help tottering, told of his invincible spirit. There was also a man called Gambriel. He was the only grizzled person in the ship. His face was of an austere type. But if I remember all their faces, wasting tragically before my eyes, most of their names have vanished from my memory.

The words that passed between us were few and puerile in regard of the situation. I had to force myself to look them in the face. I expected to meet reproachful glances. There were none. The expression of suffering in their eyes was indeed hard enough to bear. But that they couldn't help. For the rest, I ask myself whether it was the temper of their souls or the sympathy of their imagination that made them so wonderful, so worthy of my undying regard.

For myself, neither my soul was highly tempered, nor my imagination properly under control. There were moments when I felt, not only that I would go mad, but that I had gone mad already; so that I dared not open my lips for fear of betraying myself by some insane shriek. Luckily I had only orders to give, and an order has a steadying influence upon him who has to give it. Moreover, the seaman, the officer of the watch, in me was sufficiently sane. I was like a mad carpenter making a box. Were he ever so convinced that he was King of Jerusalem, the box he would make would be a sane box. What I feared was a shrill note escaping me involuntarily and upsetting my balance. Luckily, again, there was no necessity to raise one's voice. The brooding stillness of the world seemed sensitive to the slightest sound, like a whispering gallery. The conversational tone would almost carry a word from one end of the ship to the other. The terrible thing was that the only voice that I ever heard was my own. At night especially it reverberated very lonely amongst the planes of the unstirring sails.

Mr. Burns, still keeping to his bed with that air of secret determination, was moved to grumble at many things. Our interviews were short five-minute affairs, but fairly frequent. I was everlastingly diving down below to get a light, though I did not consume much tobacco at that time. The pipe was always going out; for in truth my mind was not composed enough to enable me to get a decent smoke. Likewise, for most of the time during the

twenty-four hours I could have struck matches on deck and held them aloft till the flame burnt my fingers. But I always used to run below. It was a change. It was the only break in the incessant strain; and, of course, Mr. Burns through the open door could see me come in and go out every time.

With his knees gathered up under his chin and staring with his greenish eyes over them, he was a weird figure, and with my knowledge of the crazy notion in his head, not a very attractive one for me. Still, I had to speak to him now and then, and one day he complained that the ship was very silent. For hours and hours, he said, he was lying there, not hearing a sound, till he did not know what to do with himself.

“When Ransome happens to be forward in his galley everything’s so still that one might think everybody in the ship was dead,” he grumbled. “The only voice I do hear sometimes is yours, sir, and that isn’t enough to cheer me up. What’s the matter with the men? Isn’t there one left that can sing out at the ropes?”

“Not one, Mr. Burns,” I said. “There is no breath to spare on board this ship for that. Are you aware that there are times when I can’t muster more than three hands to do anything?”

He asked swiftly but fearfully:

“Nobody dead yet, sir?”

“No.”

“It wouldn’t do,” Mr. Burns declared forcibly. “Mustn’t let him. If he gets hold of one he will get them all.”

I cried out angrily at this. I believe I even swore at the disturbing effect of these words. They attacked all the self-possession that was left to me. In my endless vigil in the face of the enemy I had been haunted by gruesome images enough. I had had visions of a ship drifting in calms and swinging in light airs, with all her crew dying slowly about her decks. Such things had been known to happen.

Mr. Burns met my outburst by a mysterious silence.

“Look here,” I said. “You don’t believe yourself what you say. You can’t. It’s impossible. It isn’t the sort of thing I have a right to expect from you. My position’s bad enough without being worried with your silly fancies.”

He remained unmoved. On account of the way in which the light fell on his head I could not be sure whether he had smiled faintly or not. I changed my tone.

“Listen,” I said. “It’s getting so desperate that I had thought for a moment, since we can’t make our way south, whether I wouldn’t try to steer west and make an attempt to reach the mailboat track. We could always get some quinine from her, at least. What do you think?”

He cried out: “No, no, no. Don’t do that, sir. You mustn’t for a moment give up facing that old ruffian. If you do he will get the upper hand of us.”

I left him. He was impossible. It was like a case of possession. His protest, however, was essentially quite sound. As a matter of fact, my notion of heading out west on the chance of sighting a problematical steamer could not bear calm examination. On the side where we were we had enough wind, at least from time to time, to struggle on toward the south. Enough, at least, to keep hope alive. But suppose that I had used those capricious gusts of wind to sail away to the westward, into some region where there was not a breath of air for days on end, what then? Perhaps my appalling vision of a ship floating with a dead crew would become a reality for the discovery weeks afterward by some horror-stricken mariners.

That afternoon Ransome brought me up a cup of tea, and while waiting there, tray in hand, he remarked in the exactly right tone of sympathy:

“You are holding out well, sir.”

“Yes,” I said. “You and I seem to have been forgotten.”

“Forgotten, sir?”

“Yes, by the fever-devil who has got on board this ship,” I said.

Ransome gave me one of his attractive, intelligent, quick glances and went away with the tray. It occurred to me that I had been talking somewhat in Mr. Burns’ manner. It annoyed me. Yet often in darker moments I forgot myself into an attitude toward our troubles more fit for a contest against a living enemy.

Yes. The fever-devil had not laid his hand yet either on Ransome or on me. But he might at any time. It was one of those thoughts one had to fight down, keep at arm’s length at any cost. It was unbearable to contemplate the possibility of Ransome, the housekeeper of the ship, being laid low. And what would happen to my command if I got knocked over, with Mr. Burns too weak to stand without holding on to his bed-place and the second mate reduced to a state of permanent imbecility? It was impossible to imagine, or rather, it was only too easy to imagine.



I was alone on the poop. The ship having no steerage way, I had sent the helmsman away to sit down or lie down somewhere in the shade. The men's strength was so reduced that all unnecessary calls on it had to be avoided. It was the austere Gambril with the grizzly beard. He went away readily enough, but he was so weakened by repeated bouts of fever, poor fellow, that in order to get down the poop ladder he had to turn sideways and hang on with both hands to the brass rail. It was just simply heart-breaking to watch. Yet he was neither very much worse nor much better than most of the half-dozen miserable victims I could muster up on deck.

It was a terribly lifeless afternoon. For several days in succession low clouds had appeared in the distance, white masses with dark convolutions resting on the water, motionless, almost solid, and yet all the time changing their aspects subtly. Toward evening they vanished as a rule. But this day they awaited the setting sun, which glowed and smouldered sulkily amongst them before it sank down. The punctual and wearisome stars reappeared over our mastheads, but the air remained stagnant and oppressive.

The unfailing Ransome lighted the binnaclelamps and glided, all shadowy, up to me.

"Will you go down and try to eat something, sir?" he suggested.

His low voice startled me. I had been standing looking out over the rail, saying nothing, feeling nothing, not even the weariness of my limbs, overcome by the evil spell.

"Ransome," I asked abruptly, "how long have I been on deck? I am losing the notion of time."

"Twelve days, sir," he said, "and it's just a fortnight since we left the anchorage."

His equable voice sounded mournful somehow. He waited a bit, then added: "It's the first time that it looks as if we were to have some rain."

I noticed then the broad shadow on the horizon, extinguishing the low stars completely, while those overhead, when I looked up, seemed to shine down on us through a veil of smoke.

How it got there, how it had crept up so high, I couldn't say. It had an ominous appearance. The air did not stir. At a renewed invitation from Ransome I did go down into the cabin to — in his own words — "try and eat something." I don't know that the trial was very successful. I suppose at that period I did exist on food in the usual way; but the memory is now that

in those days life was sustained on invincible anguish, as a sort of infernal stimulant exciting and consuming at the same time.

It's the only period of my life in which I attempted to keep a diary. No, not the only one. Years later, in conditions of moral isolation, I did put down on paper the thoughts and events of a score of days. But this was the first time. I don't remember how it came about or how the pocketbook and the pencil came into my hands. It's inconceivable that I should have looked for them on purpose. I suppose they saved me from the crazy trick of talking to myself.

Strangely enough, in both cases I took to that sort of thing in circumstances in which I did not expect, in colloquial phrase, "to come out of it." Neither could I expect the record to outlast me. This shows that it was purely a personal need for intimate relief and not a call of egotism.

Here I must give another sample of it, a few detached lines, now looking very ghostly to my own eyes, out of the part scribbled that very evening:

"There is something going on in the sky like a decomposition; like a corruption of the air, which remains as still as ever. After all, mere clouds, which may or may not hold wind or rain. Strange that it should trouble me so. I feel as if all my sins had found me out. But I suppose the trouble is that the ship is still lying motionless, not under command; and that I have nothing to do to keep my imagination from running wild amongst the disastrous images of the worst that may befall us. What's going to happen? Probably nothing. Or anything. It may be a furious squall coming, butt end foremost. And on deck there are five men with the vitality and the strength of, say, two. We may have all our sails blown away. Every stitch of canvas has been on her since we broke ground at the mouth of the Mei-nam, fifteen days ago . . . or fifteen centuries. It seems to me that all my life before that momentous day is infinitely remote, a fading memory of light-hearted youth, something on the other side of a shadow. Yes, sails may very well be blown away. And that would be like a death sentence on the men. We haven't strength enough on board to bend another suit; incredible thought, but it is true. Or we may even get dismasted. Ships have been dismasted in squalls simply because they weren't handled quick enough, and we have no power to whirl the yards around. It's like being bound hand and foot preparatory to having one's throat cut. And what appals me most of all is

that I shrink from going on deck to face it. It's due to the ship, it's due to the men who are there on deck — some of them, ready to put out the last remnant of their strength at a word from me. And I am shrinking from it. From the mere vision. My first command. Now I understand that strange sense of insecurity in my past. I always suspected that I might be no good. And here is proof positive. I am shirking it. I am no good."

At that moment, or, perhaps, the moment after, I became aware of Ransome standing in the cabin. Something in his expression startled me. It had a meaning which I could not make out. I exclaimed: "Somebody's dead."

It was his turn then to look startled.

"Dead? Not that I know of, sir. I have been in the forecabin only ten minutes ago and there was no dead man there then."

"You did give me a scare," I said.

His voice was extremely pleasant to listen to. He explained that he had come down below to close Mr. Burns' port in case it should come on to rain. "He did not know that I was in the cabin," he added.

"How does it look outside?" I asked him.

"Very black, indeed, sir. There is something in it for certain."

"In what quarter?"

"All round, sir."

I repeated idly: "All round. For certain," with my elbows on the table.

Ransome lingered in the cabin as if he had something to do there, but hesitated about doing it. I said suddenly:

"You think I ought to be on deck?"

He answered at once but without any particular emphasis or accent: "I do, sir."

I got to my feet briskly, and he made way for me to go out. As I passed through the lobby I heard Mr. Burns' voice saying:

"Shut the door of my room, will you, steward?" And Ransome's rather surprised: "Certainly, sir."

I thought that all my feelings had been dulled into complete indifference. But I found it as trying as ever to be on deck. The impenetrable blackness beset the ship so close that it seemed that by thrusting one's hand over the side one could touch some unearthly substance. There was in it an effect of

inconceivable terror and of inexpressible mystery. The few stars overhead shed a dim light upon the ship alone, with no gleams of any kind upon the water, in detached shafts piercing an atmosphere which had turned to soot. It was something I had never seen before, giving no hint of the direction from which any change would come, the closing in of a menace from all sides.

There was still no man at the helm. The immobility of all things was perfect. If the air had turned black, the sea, for all I knew, might have turned solid. It was no good looking in any direction, watching for any sign, speculating upon the nearness of the moment. When the time came the blackness would overwhelm silently the bit of starlight falling upon the ship, and the end of all things would come without a sigh, stir, or murmur of any kind, and all our hearts would cease to beat like run-down clocks.

It was impossible to shake off that sense of finality. The quietness that came over me was like a foretaste of annihilation. It gave me a sort of comfort, as though my soul had become suddenly reconciled to an eternity of blind stillness.

The seaman's instinct alone survived whole in my moral dissolution. I descended the ladder to the quarter-deck. The starlight seemed to die out before reaching that spot, but when I asked quietly: "Are you there, men?" my eyes made out shadow forms starting up around me, very few, very indistinct; and a voice spoke: "All here, sir." Another amended anxiously:

"All that are any good for anything, sir."

Both voices were very quiet and unringing; without any special character of readiness or discouragement. Very matter-of-fact voices.

"We must try to haul this mainsail close up," I said.

The shadows swayed away from me without a word. Those men were the ghosts of themselves, and their weight on a rope could be no more than the weight of a bunch of ghosts. Indeed, if ever a sail was hauled up by sheer spiritual strength it must have been that sail, for, properly speaking, there was not muscle enough for the task in the whole ship let alone the miserable lot of us on deck. Of course, I took the lead in the work myself. They wandered feebly after me from rope to rope, stumbling and panting. They toiled like Titans. We were half-an-hour at it at least, and all the time the black universe made no sound. When the last leech-line was made fast, my eyes, accustomed to the darkness, made out the shapes of exhausted men drooping over the rails, collapsed on hatches. One hung over the after-

capstan, sobbing for breath, and I stood amongst them like a tower of strength, impervious to disease and feeling only the sickness of my soul. I waited for some time fighting against the weight of my sins, against my sense of unworthiness, and then I said:

“Now, men, we’ll go aft and square the mainyard. That’s about all we can do for the ship; and for the rest she must take her chance.”

## VI

As we all went up it occurred to me that there ought to be a man at the helm. I raised my voice not much above a whisper, and, noiselessly, an uncomplaining spirit in a fever-wasted body appeared in the light aft, the head with hollow eyes illuminated against the blackness which had swallowed up our world — and the universe. The bared forearm extended over the upper spokes seemed to shine with a light of its own.

I murmured to that luminous appearance:

“Keep the helm right amidships.”

It answered in a tone of patient suffering:

“Right amidships, sir.”

Then I descended to the quarter-deck. It was impossible to tell whence the blow would come. To look round the ship was to look into a bottomless, black pit. The eye lost itself in inconceivable depths.

I wanted to ascertain whether the ropes had been picked up off the deck. One could only do that by feeling with one’s feet. In my cautious progress I came against a man in whom I recognized Ransome. He possessed an unimpaired physical solidity which was manifest to me at the contact. He was leaning against the quarter-deck capstan and kept silent. It was like a revelation. He was the collapsed figure sobbing for breath I had noticed before we went on the poop.

“You have been helping with the mainsail!” I exclaimed in a low tone.

“Yes, sir,” sounded his quiet voice.

“Man! What were you thinking of? You mustn’t do that sort of thing.”

After a pause he assented: “I suppose I mustn’t.” Then after another short silence he added: “I am all right now,” quickly, between the tell-tale gasps.

I could neither hear nor see anybody else; but when I spoke up, answering sad murmurs filled the quarter-deck, and its shadows seemed to shift here and there. I ordered all the halyards laid down on deck clear for running.

“I’ll see to that, sir,” volunteered Ransome in his natural, pleasant tone, which comforted one and aroused one’s compassion, too, somehow.

That man ought to have been in his bed, resting, and my plain duty was to send him there. But perhaps he would not have obeyed me; I had not the strength of mind to try. All I said was:

“Go about it quietly, Ransome.”

Returning on the poop I approached Gambril. His face, set with hollow shadows in the light, looked awful, finally silenced. I asked him how he felt, but hardly expected an answer. Therefore, I was astonished at his comparative loquacity.

“Them shakes leaves me as weak as a kitten, sir,” he said, preserving finely that air of unconsciousness as to anything but his business a helmsman should never lose. “And before I can pick up my strength that there hot fit comes along and knocks me over again.”

He sighed. There was no reproach in his tone, but the bare words were enough to give me a horrible pang of self-reproach. It held me dumb for a time. When the tormenting sensation had passed off I asked:

“Do you feel strong enough to prevent the rudder taking charge if she gets sternway on her? It wouldn’t do to get something smashed about the steering-gear now. We’ve enough difficulties to cope with as it is.”

He answered with just a shade of weariness that he was strong enough to hang on. He could promise me that she shouldn’t take the wheel out of his hands. More he couldn’t say.

At that moment Ransome appeared quite close to me, stepping out of the darkness into visibility suddenly, as if just created with his composed face and pleasant voice.

Every rope on deck, he said, was laid down clear for running, as far as one could make certain by feeling. It was impossible to see anything. Frenchy had stationed himself forward. He said he had a jump or two left in him yet.

Here a faint smile altered for an instant the clear, firm design of Ransome’s lips. With his serious clear, gray eyes, his serene temperament

— he was a priceless man altogether. Soul as firm as the muscles of his body.

He was the only man on board (except me, but I had to preserve my liberty of movement) who had a sufficiency of muscular strength to trust to. For a moment I thought I had better ask him to take the wheel. But the dreadful knowledge of the enemy he had to carry about him made me hesitate. In my ignorance of physiology it occurred to me that he might die suddenly, from excitement, at a critical moment.

While this gruesome fear restrained the ready words on the tip of my tongue, Ransome stepped back two paces and vanished from my sight.

At once an uneasiness possessed me, as if some support had been withdrawn. I moved forward, too, outside the circle of light, into the darkness that stood in front of me like a wall. In one stride I penetrated it. Such must have been the darkness before creation. It had closed behind me. I knew I was invisible to the man at the helm. Neither could I see anything. He was alone, I was alone, every man was alone where he stood. And every form was gone too, spar, sail, fittings, rails; everything was blotted out in the dreadful smoothness of that absolute night.

A flash of lightning would have been a relief — I mean physically. I would have prayed for it if it hadn't been for my shrinking apprehension of the thunder. In the tension of silence I was suffering from it seemed to me that the first crash must turn me into dust.

And thunder was, most likely, what would happen next. Stiff all over and hardly breathing, I waited with a horribly strained expectation. Nothing happened. It was maddening, but a dull, growing ache in the lower part of my face made me aware that I had been grinding my teeth madly enough, for God knows how long.

It's extraordinary I should not have heard myself doing it; but I hadn't. By an effort which absorbed all my faculties I managed to keep my jaw still. It required much attention, and while thus engaged I became bothered by curious, irregular sounds of faint tapping on the deck. They could be heard single, in pairs, in groups. While I wondered at this mysterious devilry, I received a slight blow under the left eye and felt an enormous tear run down my cheek. Raindrops. Enormous. Forerunners of something. Tap. Tap. Tap. . . .

I turned about, and, addressing Gambrel earnestly, entreated him to "hang on to the wheel." But I could hardly speak from emotion. The fatal moment

had come. I held my breath. The tapping had stopped as unexpectedly as it had begun, and there was a renewed moment of intolerable suspense; something like an additional turn of the racking screw. I don't suppose I would have ever screamed, but I remember my conviction that there was nothing else for it but to scream.

Suddenly — how am I to convey it? Well, suddenly the darkness turned into water. This is the only suitable figure. A heavy shower, a downpour, comes along, making a noise. You hear its approach on the sea, in the air, too, I verily believe. But this was different. With no preliminary whisper or rustle, without a splash, and even without the ghost of impact, I became instantaneously soaked to the skin. Not a very difficult matter, since I was wearing only my sleeping suit. My hair got full of water in an instant, water streamed on my skin, it filled my nose, my ears, my eyes. In a fraction of a second I swallowed quite a lot of it.

As to Gambril, he was fairly choked. He coughed pitifully, the broken cough of a sick man; and I beheld him as one sees a fish in an aquarium by the light of an electric bulb, an elusive, phosphorescent shape. Only he did not glide away. But something else happened. Both binnacle lamps went out. I suppose the water forced itself into them, though I wouldn't have thought that possible, for they fitted into the cowl perfectly.

The last gleam of light in the universe had gone, pursued by a low exclamation of dismay from Gambril. I groped for him and seized his arm. How startlingly wasted it was.

"Never mind," I said. "You don't want the light. All you need to do is to keep the wind, when it comes, at the back of your head. You understand?"

"Aye, aye, sir. . . . But I should like to have a light," he added nervously.

All that time the ship lay as steady as a rock. The noise of the water pouring off the sails and spars, flowing over the break of the poop, had stopped short. The poop scuppers gurgled and sobbed for a little while longer, and then perfect silence, joined to perfect immobility, proclaimed the yet unbroken spell of our helplessness, poised on the edge of some violent issue, lurking in the dark.

I started forward restlessly. I did not need my sight to pace the poop of my ill-starred first command with perfect assurance. Every square foot of her decks was impressed indelibly on my brain, to the very grain and knots of the planks. Yet, all of a sudden, I fell clean over something, landing full length on my hands and face.



It was something big and alive. Not a dog — more like a sheep, rather. But there were no animals in the ship. How could an animal. . . . It was an added and fantastic horror which I could not resist. The hair of my head stirred even as I picked myself up, awfully scared; not as a man is scared while his judgment, his reason still try to resist, but completely, boundlessly, and, as it were, innocently scared — like a little child.

I could see It — that Thing! The darkness, of which so much had just turned into water, had thinned down a little. There It was! But I did not hit upon the notion of Mr. Burns issuing out of the companion on all fours till he attempted to stand up, and even then the idea of a bear crossed my mind first.

He growled like one when I seized him round the body. He had buttoned himself up into an enormous winter overcoat of some woolly material, the weight of which was too much for his reduced state. I could hardly feel the incredibly thin lath of his body, lost within the thick stuff, but his growl had depth and substance: Confounded dump ship with a craven, tiptoeing crowd. Why couldn't they stamp and go with a brace? Wasn't there one Godforsaken lubber in the lot fit to raise a yell on a rope?

"Skulking's no good, sir," he attacked me directly. "You can't slink past the old murderous ruffian. It isn't the way. You must go for him boldly — as I did. Boldness is what you want. Show him that you don't care for any of his damned tricks. Kick up a jolly old row."

"Good God, Mr. Burns," I said angrily. "What on earth are you up to? What do you mean by coming up on deck in this state?"

"Just that! Boldness. The only way to scare the old bullying rascal."

I pushed him, still growling, against the rail. "Hold on to it," I said roughly. I did not know what to do with him. I left him in a hurry, to go to Gambriel, who had called faintly that he believed there was some wind aloft. Indeed, my own ears had caught a feeble flutter of wet canvas, high up overhead, the jingle of a slack chain sheet. . . .

These were eerie, disturbing, alarming sounds in the dead stillness of the air around me. All the instances I had heard of topmasts being whipped out of a ship while there was not wind enough on her deck to blow out a match rushed into my memory.

"I can't see the upper sails, sir," declared Gambriel shakily.

"Don't move the helm. You'll be all right," I said confidently.

The poor man's nerves were gone. Mine were not in much better case. It was the moment of breaking strain and was relieved by the abrupt sensation of the ship moving forward as if of herself under my feet. I heard plainly the souging of the wind aloft, the low cracks of the upper spars taking the strain, long before I could feel the least draught on my face turned aft, anxious and sightless like the face of a blind man.

Suddenly a louder-sounding note filled our ears, the darkness started streaming against our bodies, chilling them exceedingly. Both of us, Gambril and I, shivered violently in our clinging, soaked garments of thin cotton. I said to him:

"You are all right now, my man. All you've got to do is to keep the wind at the back of your head. Surely you are up to that. A child could steer this ship in smooth water."

He muttered: "Aye! A healthy child." And I felt ashamed of having been passed over by the fever which had been preying on every man's strength but mine, in order that my remorse might be the more bitter, the feeling of unworthiness more poignant, and the sense of responsibility heavier to bear.

The ship had gathered great way on her almost at once on the calm water. I felt her slipping through it with no other noise but a mysterious rustle alongside. Otherwise, she had no motion at all, neither lift nor roll. It was a disheartening steadiness which had lasted for eighteen days now; for never, never had we had wind enough in that time to raise the slightest run of the sea. The breeze freshened suddenly. I thought it was high time to get Mr. Burns off the deck. He worried me. I looked upon him as a lunatic who would be very likely to start roaming over the ship and break a limb or fall overboard.

I was truly glad to find he had remained holding on where I had left him, sensibly enough. He was, however, muttering to himself ominously.

This was discouraging. I remarked in a matter-of-fact tone:

"We have never had so much wind as this since we left the roads."

"There's some heart in it, too," he growled judiciously. It was a remark of a perfectly sane seaman. But he added immediately: "It was about time I should come on deck. I've been nursing my strength for this — just for this. Do you see it, sir?"

I said I did, and proceeded to hint that it would be advisable for him to go below now and take a rest.

His answer was an indignant "Go below! Not if I know it, sir."

Very cheerful! He was a horrible nuisance. And all at once he started to argue. I could feel his crazy excitement in the dark.

“You don’t know how to go about it, sir. How could you? All this whispering and tiptoeing is no good. You can’t hope to slink past a cunning, wide-awake, evil brute like he was. You never heard him talk. Enough to make your hair stand on end. No! No! He wasn’t mad. He was no more mad than I am. He was just downright wicked. Wicked so as to frighten most people. I will tell you what he was. He was nothing less than a thief and a murderer at heart. And do you think he’s any different now because he’s dead? Not he! His carcass lies a hundred fathom under, but he’s just the same . . . in latitude 8 d 20’ north.”

He snorted defiantly. I noted with weary resignation that the breeze had got lighter while he raved. He was at it again.

“I ought to have thrown the beggar out of the ship over the rail like a dog. It was only on account of the men. . . . Fancy having to read the Burial Service over a brute like that! . . . ‘Our departed brother’ . . . I could have laughed. That was what he couldn’t bear. I suppose I am the only man that ever stood up to laugh at him. When he got sick it used to scare that . . . brother. . . . Brother. . . . Departed. . . . Sooner call a shark brother.”

The breeze had let go so suddenly that the way of the ship brought the wet sails heavily against the mast. The spell of deadly stillness had caught us up again. There seemed to be no escape.

“Hallo!” exclaimed Mr. Burns in a startled voice. “Calm again!”

I addressed him as though he had been sane.

“This is the sort of thing we’ve been having for seventeen days, Mr. Burns,” I said with intense bitterness. “A puff, then a calm, and in a moment, you’ll see, she’ll be swinging on her heel with her head away from her course to the devil somewhere.”

He caught at the word. “The old dodging Devil,” he screamed piercingly and burst into such a loud laugh as I had never heard before. It was a provoking, mocking peal, with a hair-raising, screeching over-note of defiance. I stepped back, utterly confounded.

Instantly there was a stir on the quarter-deck; murmurs of dismay. A distressed voice cried out in the dark below us: “Who’s that gone crazy, now?”

Perhaps they thought it was their captain? Rush is not the word that could be applied to the utmost speed the poor fellows were up to; but in an

amazing short time every man in the ship able to walk upright had found his way on to that poop.

I shouted to them: "It's the mate. Lay hold of him a couple of you. . . ."

I expected this performance to end in a ghastly sort of fight. But Mr. Burns cut his derisive screeching dead short and turned upon them fiercely, yelling:

"Aha! Dog-gone ye! You've found your tongues — have ye? I thought you were dumb. Well, then — laugh! Laugh — I tell you. Now then — all together. One, two, three — laugh!"

A moment of silence ensued, of silence so profound that you could have heard a pin drop on the deck. Then Ransome's unperturbed voice uttered pleasantly the words:

"I think he has fainted, sir — " The little motionless knot of men stirred, with low murmurs of relief. "I've got him under the arms. Get hold of his legs, some one."

Yes. It was a relief. He was silenced for a time — for a time. I could not have stood another peal of that insane screeching. I was sure of it; and just then Gambрил, the austere Gambрил, treated us to another vocal performance. He began to sing out for relief. His voice wailed pitifully in the darkness: "Come aft somebody! I can't stand this. Here she'll be off again directly and I can't. . . ."

I dashed aft myself meeting on my way a hard gust of wind whose approach Gambрил's ear had detected from afar and which filled the sails on the main in a series of muffled reports mingled with the low plaint of the spars. I was just in time to seize the wheel while Frenchy who had followed me caught up the collapsing Gambрил. He hauled him out of the way, admonished him to lie still where he was, and then stepped up to relieve me, asking calmly:

"How am I to steer her, sir?"

"Dead before it for the present. I'll get you a light in a moment."

But going forward I met Ransome bringing up the spare binnacle lamp. That man noticed everything, attended to everything, shed comfort around him as he moved. As he passed me he remarked in a soothing tone that the stars were coming out. They were. The breeze was sweeping clear the sooty sky, breaking through the indolent silence of the sea.

The barrier of awful stillness which had encompassed us for so many days as though we had been accursed, was broken. I felt that. I let myself

fall on to the skylight seat. A faint white ridge of foam, thin, very thin, broke alongside. The first for ages — for ages. I could have cheered, if it hadn't been for the sense of guilt which clung to all my thoughts secretly. Ransome stood before me.

“What about the mate,” I asked anxiously. “Still unconscious?”

“Well, sir — it's funny,” Ransome was evidently puzzled. “He hasn't spoken a word, and his eyes are shut. But it looks to me more like sound sleep than anything else.”

I accepted this view as the least troublesome of any, or at any rate, least disturbing. Dead faint or deep slumber, Mr. Burns had to be left to himself for the present. Ransome remarked suddenly:

“I believe you want a coat, sir.”

“I believe I do,” I sighed out.

But I did not move. What I felt I wanted were new limbs. My arms and legs seemed utterly useless, fairly worn out. They didn't even ache. But I stood up all the same to put on the coat when Ransome brought it up. And when he suggested that he had better now “take Gambril forward,” I said:

“All right. I'll help you to get him down on the main deck.”

I found that I was quite able to help, too. We raised Gambril up between us. He tried to help himself along like a man but all the time he was inquiring piteously:

“You won't let me go when we come to the ladder? You won't let me go when we come to the ladder?”

The breeze kept on freshening and blew true, true to a hair. At daylight by careful manipulation of the helm we got the foreyards to run square by themselves (the water keeping smooth) and then went about hauling the ropes tight. Of the four men I had with me at night, I could see now only two. I didn't inquire as to the others. They had given in. For a time only I hoped.

Our various tasks forward occupied us for hours, the two men with me moved so slow and had to rest so often. One of them remarked that “every blamed thing in the ship felt about a hundred times heavier than its proper weight.” This was the only complaint uttered. I don't know what we should have done without Ransome. He worked with us, silent, too, with a little smile frozen on his lips. From time to time I murmured to him: “Go steady” — “Take it easy, Ransome” — and received a quick glance in reply.

When we had done all we could do to make things safe, he disappeared into his galley. Some time afterward, going forward for a look round, I caught sight of him through the open door. He sat upright on the locker in front of the stove, with his head leaning back against the bulkhead. His eyes were closed; his capable hands held open the front of his thin cotton shirt baring tragically his powerful chest, which heaved in painful and laboured gasps. He didn't hear me.

I retreated quietly and went straight on to the poop to relieve Frenchy, who by that time was beginning to look very sick. He gave me the course with great formality and tried to go off with a jaunty step, but reeled widely twice before getting out of my sight.

And then I remained all alone aft, steering my ship, which ran before the wind with a buoyant lift now and then, and even rolling a little. Presently Ransome appeared before me with a tray. The sight of food made me ravenous all at once. He took the wheel while I sat down of the after grating to eat my breakfast.

"This breeze seems to have done for our crowd," he murmured. "It just laid them low — all hands."

"Yes," I said. "I suppose you and I are the only two fit men in the ship."

"Frenchy says there's still a jump left in him. I don't know. It can't be much," continued Ransome with his wistful smile. "Good little man that. But suppose, sir, that this wind flies round when we are close to the land — what are we going to do with her?"

"If the wind shifts round heavily after we close in with the land she will either run ashore or get dismasted or both. We won't be able to do anything with her. She's running away with us now. All we can do is to steer her. She's a ship without a crew."

"Yes. All laid low," repeated Ransome quietly. "I do give them a look-in forward every now and then, but it's precious little I can do for them."

"I, and the ship, and every one on board of her, are very much indebted to you, Ransome," I said warmly.

He made as though he had not heard me, and steered in silence till I was ready to relieve him. He surrendered the wheel, picked up the tray, and for a parting shot informed me that Mr. Burns was awake and seemed to have a mind to come up on deck.

"I don't know how to prevent him, sir. I can't very well stop down below all the time."

It was clear that he couldn't. And sure enough Mr. Burns came on deck dragging himself painfully aft in his enormous overcoat. I beheld him with a natural dread. To have him around and raving about the wiles of a dead man while I had to steer a wildly rushing ship full of dying men was a rather dreadful prospect.

But his first remarks were quite sensible in meaning and tone. Apparently he had no recollection of the night scene. And if he had he didn't betray himself once. Neither did he talk very much. He sat on the skylight looking desperately ill at first, but that strong breeze, before which the last remnant of my crew had wilted down, seemed to blow a fresh stock of vigour into his frame with every gust. One could almost see the process.

By way of sanity test I alluded on purpose to the late captain. I was delighted to find that Mr. Burns did not display undue interest in the subject. He ran over the old tale of that savage ruffian's iniquities with a certain vindictive gusto and then concluded unexpectedly:

"I do believe, sir, that his brain began to go a year or more before he died."

A wonderful recovery. I could hardly spare it as much admiration as it deserved, for I had to give all my mind to the steering.

In comparison with the hopeless languour of the preceding days this was dizzy speed. Two ridges of foam streamed from the ship's bows; the wind sang in a strenuous note which under other circumstances would have expressed to me all the joy of life. Whenever the hauled-up mainsail started trying to slat and bang itself to pieces in its gear, Mr. Burns would look at me apprehensively.

"What would you have me to do, Mr. Burns? We can neither furl it nor set it. I only wish the old thing would thrash itself to pieces and be done with it. That beastly racket confuses me."

Mr. Burns wrung his hands, and cried out suddenly:

"How will you get the ship into harbour, sir, without men to handle her?"

And I couldn't tell him.

Well — it did get done about forty hours afterward. By the exorcising virtue of Mr. Burns' awful laugh, the malicious spectre had been laid, the evil spell broken, the curse removed. We were now in the hands of a kind and energetic Providence. It was rushing us on. . . .

I shall never forget the last night, dark, windy, and starry. I steered. Mr. Burns, after having obtained from me a solemn promise to give him a kick

if anything happened, went frankly to sleep on the deck close to the binnacle. Convalescents need sleep. Ransome, his back propped against the mizzen-mast and a blanket over his legs, remained perfectly still, but I don't suppose he closed his eyes for a moment. That embodiment of jauntness, Frenchy, still under the delusion that there was a "jump" left in him, had insisted on joining us; but mindful of discipline, had laid himself down as far on the forepart of the poop as he could get, alongside the bucket-rack.

And I steered, too tired for anxiety, too tired for connected thought. I had moments of grim exultation and then my heart would sink awfully at the thought of that forecastle at the other end of the dark deck, full of fever-stricken men — some of them dying. By my fault. But never mind. Remorse must wait. I had to steer.

In the small hours the breeze weakened, then failed altogether. About five it returned, gentle enough, enabling us to head for the roadstead. Daybreak found Mr. Burns sitting wedged up with coils of rope on the stern-grating, and from the depths of his overcoat steering the ship with very white bony hands; while Ransome and I rushed along the decks letting go all the sheets and halliards by the run. We dashed next up on to the forecastle head. The perspiration of labour and sheer nervousness simply poured off our heads as we toiled to get the anchors cock-billed. I dared not look at Ransome as we worked side by side. We exchanged curt words; I could hear him panting close to me and I avoided turning my eyes his way for fear of seeing him fall down and expire in the act of putting forth his strength — for what? Indeed for some distinct ideal.

The consummate seaman in him was aroused. He needed no directions. He knew what to do. Every effort, every movement was an act of consistent heroism. It was not for me to look at a man thus inspired.

At last all was ready and I heard him say:

"Hadn't I better go down and open the compressors now, sir?"

"Yes. Do," I said.

And even then I did not glance his way. After a time his voice came up from the main deck.

"When you like, sir. All clear on the windlass here."

I made a sign to Mr. Burns to put the helm down and let both anchors go one after another, leaving the ship to take as much cable as she wanted. She took the best part of them both before she brought up. The loose sails coming aback ceased their maddening racket above my head. A perfect



stillness reigned in the ship. And while I stood forward feeling a little giddy in that sudden peace, I caught faintly a moan or two and the incoherent mutterings of the sick in the forecastle.

As we had a signal for medical assistance flying on the mizzen it is a fact that before the ship was fairly at rest three steam launches from various men-of-war were alongside; and at least five naval surgeons had clambered on board. They stood in a knot gazing up and down the empty main deck, then looked aloft — where not a man could be seen, either.

I went toward them — a solitary figure, in a blue and gray striped sleeping suit and a pipe-clayed cork helmet on its head. Their disgust was extreme. They had expected surgical cases. Each one had brought his carving tools with him. But they soon got over their little disappointment. In less than five minutes one of the steam launches was rushing shoreward to order a big boat and some hospital people for the removal of the crew. The big steam pinnace went off to her ship to bring over a few bluejackets to furl my sails for me.

One of the surgeons had remained on board. He came out of the forecastle looking impenetrable, and noticed my inquiring gaze.

“There’s nobody dead in there, if that’s what you want to know,” he said deliberately. Then added in a tone of wonder: “The whole crew!”

“And very bad?”

“And very bad,” he repeated. His eyes were roaming all over the ship. “Heavens! What’s that?”

“That,” I said, glancing aft, “is Mr. Burns, my chief officer.”

Mr. Burns with his moribund head nodding on the stalk of his lean neck was a sight for any one to exclaim at. The surgeon asked:

“Is he going to the hospital, too?”

“Oh, no,” I said jocosely. “Mr. Burns can’t go on shore till the mainmast goes. I am very proud of him. He’s my only convalescent.”

“You look — ” began the doctor staring at me. But I interrupted him angrily:

“I am not ill.”

“No. . . . You look queer.”

“Well, you see, I have been seventeen days on deck.”

“Seventeen! . . . But you must have slept.”

“I suppose I must have. I don’t know. But I’m certain that I didn’t sleep for the last forty hours.”

“Phew! . . . You will be going ashore presently I suppose?”

“As soon as ever I can. There’s no end of business waiting for me there.”

The surgeon released my hand, which he had taken while we talked, pulled out his pocket-book, wrote in it rapidly, tore out the page and offered it to me.

“I strongly advise you to get this prescription made up for yourself ashore. Unless I am much mistaken you will need it this evening.”

“What is it, then?” I asked with suspicion.

“Sleeping draught,” answered the surgeon curtly; and moving with an air of interest toward Mr. Burns he engaged him in conversation.

As I went below to dress to go ashore, Ransome followed me. He begged my pardon; he wished, too, to be sent ashore and paid off.

I looked at him in surprise. He was waiting for my answer with an air of anxiety.

“You don’t mean to leave the ship!” I cried out.

“I do really, sir. I want to go and be quiet somewhere. Anywhere. The hospital will do.”

“But, Ransome,” I said. “I hate the idea of parting with you.”

“I must go,” he broke in. “I have a right!” . . . He gasped and a look of almost savage determination passed over his face. For an instant he was another being. And I saw under the worth and the comeliness of the man the humble reality of things. Life was a boon to him — this precarious hard life, and he was thoroughly alarmed about himself.

“Of course I shall pay you off if you wish it,” I hastened to say. “Only I must ask you to remain on board till this afternoon. I can’t leave Mr. Burns absolutely by himself in the ship for hours.”

He softened at once and assured me with a smile and in his natural pleasant voice that he understood that very well.

When I returned on deck everything was ready for the removal of the men. It was the last ordeal of that episode which had been maturing and tempering my character — though I did not know it.

It was awful. They passed under my eyes one after another — each of them an embodied reproach of the bitterest kind, till I felt a sort of revolt wake up in me. Poor Frenchy had gone suddenly under. He was carried past me insensible, his comic face horribly flushed and as if swollen, breathing stertorously. He looked more like Mr. Punch than ever; a disgracefully intoxicated Mr. Punch.

The austere Gambril, on the contrary, had improved temporarily. He insisted on walking on his own feet to the rail — of course with assistance on each side of him. But he gave way to a sudden panic at the moment of being swung over the side and began to wail pitifully:

“Don’t let them drop me, sir. Don’t let them drop me, sir!” While I kept on shouting to him in most soothing accents: “All right, Gambril. They won’t! They won’t!”

It was no doubt very ridiculous. The bluejackets on our deck were grinning quietly, while even Ransome himself (much to the fore in lending a hand) had to enlarge his wistful smile for a fleeting moment.

I left for the shore in the steam pinnace, and on looking back beheld Mr. Burns actually standing up by the taffrail, still in his enormous woolly overcoat. The bright sunlight brought out his weirdness amazingly. He looked like a frightful and elaborate scarecrow set up on the poop of a death-stricken ship, set up to keep the seabirds from the corpses.

Our story had got about already in town and everybody on shore was most kind. The Marine Office let me off the port dues, and as there happened to be a shipwrecked crew staying in the Home I had no difficulty in obtaining as many men as I wanted. But when I inquired if I could see Captain Ellis for a moment I was told in accents of pity for my ignorance that our deputy-Neptune had retired and gone home on a pension about three weeks after I left the port. So I suppose that my appointment was the last act, outside the daily routine, of his official life.

It is strange how on coming ashore I was struck by the springy step, the lively eyes, the strong vitality of every one I met. It impressed me enormously. And amongst those I met there was Captain Giles, of course. It would have been very extraordinary if I had not met him. A prolonged stroll in the business part of the town was the regular employment of all his mornings when he was ashore.

I caught the glitter of the gold watch-chain across his chest ever so far away. He radiated benevolence.

“What is it I hear?” he queried with a “kind uncle” smile, after shaking hands. “Twenty-one days from Bangkok?”

“Is this all you’ve heard?” I said. “You must come to tiffin with me. I want you to know exactly what you have let me in for.”

He hesitated for almost a minute.

“Well — I will,” he said condescendingly at last.

We turned into the hotel. I found to my surprise that I could eat quite a lot. Then over the cleared table-cloth I unfolded to Captain Giles the history of these twenty days in all its professional and emotional aspects, while he smoked patiently the big cigar I had given him.

Then he observed sagely:

“You must feel jolly well tired by this time.”

“No,” I said. “Not tired. But I’ll tell you, Captain Giles, how I feel. I feel old. And I must be. All of you on shore look to me just a lot of skittish youngsters that have never known a care in the world.”

He didn’t smile. He looked insufferably exemplary. He declared:

“That will pass. But you do look older — it’s a fact.”

“Aha!” I said.

“No! No! The truth is that one must not make too much of anything in life, good or bad.”

“Live at half-speed,” I murmured perversely. “Not everybody can do that.”

“You’ll be glad enough presently if you can keep going even at that rate,” he retorted with his air of conscious virtue. “And there’s another thing: a man should stand up to his bad luck, to his mistakes, to his conscience and all that sort of thing. Why — what else would you have to fight against.”

I kept silent. I don’t know what he saw in my face but he asked abruptly:

“Why — you aren’t faint-hearted?”

“God only knows, Captain Giles,” was my sincere answer.

“That’s all right,” he said calmly. “You will learn soon how not to be faint-hearted. A man has got to learn everything — and that’s what so many of them youngsters don’t understand.”

“Well, I am no longer a youngster.”

“No,” he conceded. “Are you leaving soon?”

“I am going on board directly,” I said. “I shall pick up one of my anchors and heave in to half-cable on the other directly my new crew comes on board and I shall be off at daylight to-morrow!”

“You will,” grunted Captain Giles approvingly, “that’s the way. You’ll do.”

“What did you think? That I would want to take a week ashore for a rest?” I said, irritated by his tone. “There’s no rest for me till she’s out in the Indian Ocean and not much of it even then.”

He puffed at his cigar moodily, as if transformed.

“Yes. That’s what it amounts to,” he said in a musing tone. It was as if a ponderous curtain had rolled up disclosing an unexpected Captain Giles. But it was only for a moment, just the time to let him add, “Precious little rest in life for anybody. Better not think of it.”

We rose, left the hotel, and parted from each other in the street with a warm handshake, just as he began to interest me for the first time in our intercourse.

The first thing I saw when I got back to the ship was Ransome on the quarter-deck sitting quietly on his neatly lashed sea-chest.

I beckoned him to follow me into the saloon where I sat down to write a letter of recommendation for him to a man I knew on shore.

When finished I pushed it across the table. “It may be of some good to you when you leave the hospital.”

He took it, put it in his pocket. His eyes were looking away from me — nowhere. His face was anxiously set.

“How are you feeling now?” I asked.

“I don’t feel bad now, sir,” he answered stiffly. “But I am afraid of its coming on. . . .” The wistful smile came back on his lips for a moment. “I — I am in a blue funk about my heart, sir.”

I approached him with extended hand. His eyes not looking at me had a strained expression. He was like a man listening for a warning call.

“Won’t you shake hands, Ransome?” I said gently.

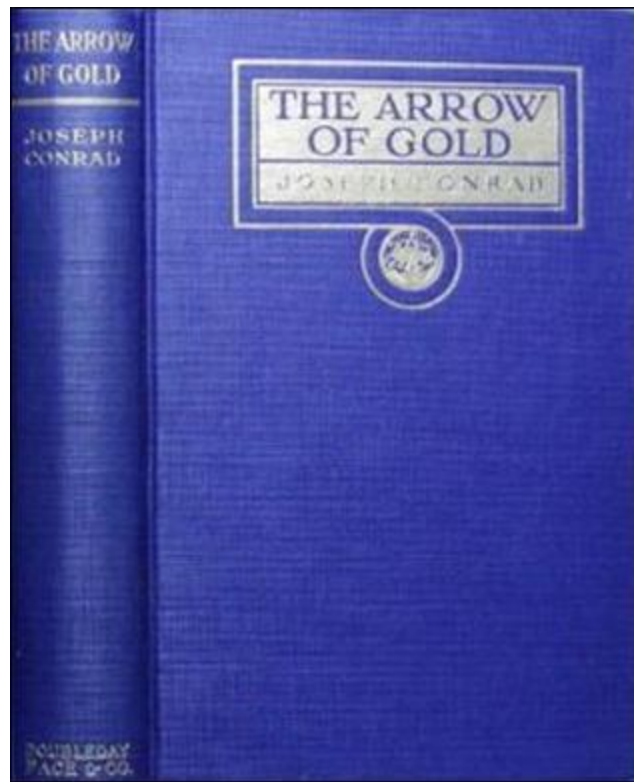
He exclaimed, flushed up dusky red, gave my hand a hard wrench — and next moment, left alone in the cabin, I listened to him going up the companion stairs cautiously, step by step, in mortal fear of starting into sudden anger our common enemy it was his hard fate to carry consciously within his faithful breast.

# ***THE ARROW OF GOLD***



## **A STORY BETWEEN TWO NOTES**

This novel was first published serially in *Lloyd's Magazine* from December 1918 to February 1920. The story is set in Marseille in the 1870s during the Third Carlist War. The characters of the novel are supporters of the Spanish Pretender Carlos, Duke of Madrid. The narrator of *The Arrow of Gold* has considerable involvement in the story and is unnamed, though some assume he is Conrad's regular narrator, Charles Marlow.



*The first edition*

Celui qui n'a connu que des hommes  
polis et raisonnables, ou ne connaît pas  
l'homme, ou ne le connaît qu'à demi.

Caracteres.

TO RICHARD CURLE



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## FIRST NOTE

The pages which follow have been extracted from a pile of manuscript which was apparently meant for the eye of one woman only. She seems to have been the writer's childhood's friend. They had parted as children, or very little more than children. Years passed. Then something recalled to the woman the companion of her young days and she wrote to him: "I have been hearing of you lately. I know where life has brought you. You certainly selected your own road. But to us, left behind, it always looked as if you had struck out into a pathless desert. We always regarded you as a person that must be given up for lost. But you have turned up again; and though we may never see each other, my memory welcomes you and I confess to you I should like to know the incidents on the road which has led you to where you are now."

And he answers her: "I believe you are the only one now alive who remembers me as a child. I have heard of you from time to time, but I wonder what sort of person you are now. Perhaps if I did know I wouldn't dare put pen to paper. But I don't know. I only remember that we were great chums. In fact, I chummed with you even more than with your brothers. But I am like the pigeon that went away in the fable of the Two Pigeons. If I once start to tell you I would want you to feel that you have been there yourself. I may overtax your patience with the story of my life so different from yours, not only in all the facts but altogether in spirit. You may not understand. You may even be shocked. I say all this to myself; but I know I shall succumb! I have a distinct recollection that in the old days, when you were about fifteen, you always could make me do whatever you liked."

He succumbed. He begins his story for her with the minute narration of this adventure which took about twelve months to develop. In the form in which it is presented here it has been pruned of all allusions to their common past, of all asides, disquisitions, and explanations addressed directly to the friend of his childhood. And even as it is the whole thing is of considerable length. It seems that he had not only a memory but that he also knew how to remember. But as to that opinions may differ.

This, his first great adventure, as he calls it, begins in Marseilles. It ends there, too. Yet it might have happened anywhere. This does not mean that

the people concerned could have come together in pure space. The locality had a definite importance. As to the time, it is easily fixed by the events at about the middle years of the seventies, when Don Carlos de Bourbon, encouraged by the general reaction of all Europe against the excesses of communistic Republicanism, made his attempt for the throne of Spain, arms in hand, amongst the hills and gorges of Guipuzcoa. It is perhaps the last instance of a Pretender's adventure for a Crown that History will have to record with the usual grave moral disapproval tinged by a shamefaced regret for the departing romance. Historians are very much like other people.

However, History has nothing to do with this tale. Neither is the moral justification or condemnation of conduct aimed at here. If anything it is perhaps a little sympathy that the writer expects for his buried youth, as he lives it over again at the end of his insignificant course on this earth. Strange person — yet perhaps not so very different from ourselves.

A few words as to certain facts may be added.

It may seem that he was plunged very abruptly into this long adventure. But from certain passages (suppressed here because mixed up with irrelevant matter) it appears clearly that at the time of the meeting in the café, Mills had already gathered, in various quarters, a definite view of the eager youth who had been introduced to him in that ultra-legitimist salon. What Mills had learned represented him as a young gentleman who had arrived furnished with proper credentials and who apparently was doing his best to waste his life in an eccentric fashion, with a bohemian set (one poet, at least, emerged out of it later) on one side, and on the other making friends with the people of the Old Town, pilots, coasters, sailors, workers of all sorts. He pretended rather absurdly to be a seaman himself and was already credited with an ill-defined and vaguely illegal enterprise in the Gulf of Mexico. At once it occurred to Mills that this eccentric youngster was the very person for what the legitimist sympathizers had very much at heart just then: to organize a supply by sea of arms and ammunition to the Carlist detachments in the South. It was precisely to confer on that matter with Doña Rita that Captain Blunt had been despatched from Headquarters.

Mills got in touch with Blunt at once and put the suggestion before him. The Captain thought this the very thing. As a matter of fact, on that evening of Carnival, those two, Mills and Blunt, had been actually looking everywhere for our man. They had decided that he should be drawn into

the affair if it could be done. Blunt naturally wanted to see him first. He must have estimated him a promising person, but, from another point of view, not dangerous. Thus lightly was the notorious (and at the same time mysterious) Monsieur George brought into the world; out of the contact of two minds which did not give a single thought to his flesh and blood.

Their purpose explains the intimate tone given to their first conversation and the sudden introduction of Doña Rita's history. Mills, of course, wanted to hear all about it. As to Captain Blunt — I suspect that, at the time, he was thinking of nothing else. In addition it was Doña Rita who would have to do the persuading; for, after all, such an enterprise with its ugly and desperate risks was not a trifle to put before a man — however young.

It cannot be denied that Mills seems to have acted somewhat unscrupulously. He himself appears to have had some doubt about it, at a given moment, as they were driving to the Prado. But perhaps Mills, with his penetration, understood very well the nature he was dealing with. He might even have envied it. But it's not my business to excuse Mills. As to him whom we may regard as Mills' victim it is obvious that he has never harboured a single reproachful thought. For him Mills is not to be criticized. A remarkable instance of the great power of mere individuality over the young.

# PART ONE

## CHAPTER I

Certain streets have an atmosphere of their own, a sort of universal fame and the particular affection of their citizens. One of such streets is the Cannebière, and the jest: "If Paris had a Cannebière it would be a little Marseilles" is the jocular expression of municipal pride. I, too, I have been under the spell. For me it has been a street leading into the unknown.

There was a part of it where one could see as many as five big cafés in a resplendent row. That evening I strolled into one of them. It was by no means full. It looked deserted, in fact, festal and overlighted, but cheerful. The wonderful street was distinctly cold (it was an evening of carnival), I was very idle, and I was feeling a little lonely. So I went in and sat down.

The carnival time was drawing to an end. Everybody, high and low, was anxious to have the last fling. Companies of masks with linked arms and whooping like red Indians swept the streets in crazy rushes while gusts of cold mistral swayed the gas lights as far as the eye could reach. There was a touch of bedlam in all this.

Perhaps it was that which made me feel lonely, since I was neither masked, nor disguised, nor yelling, nor in any other way in harmony with the bedlam element of life. But I was not sad. I was merely in a state of sobriety. I had just returned from my second West Indies voyage. My eyes were still full of tropical splendour, my memory of my experiences, lawful and lawless, which had their charm and their thrill; for they had startled me a little and had amused me considerably. But they had left me untouched. Indeed they were other men's adventures, not mine. Except for a little habit of responsibility which I had acquired they had not matured me. I was as young as before. Inconceivably young — still beautifully unthinking — infinitely receptive.

You may believe that I was not thinking of Don Carlos and his fight for a kingdom. Why should I? You don't want to think of things which you meet every day in the newspapers and in conversation. I had paid some calls since my return and most of my acquaintance were legitimists and

intensely interested in the events of the frontier of Spain, for political, religious, or romantic reasons. But I was not interested. Apparently I was not romantic enough. Or was it that I was even more romantic than all those good people? The affair seemed to me commonplace. That man was attending to his business of a Pretender.

On the front page of the illustrated paper I saw lying on a table near me, he looked picturesque enough, seated on a boulder, a big strong man with a square-cut beard, his hands resting on the hilt of a cavalry sabre — and all around him a landscape of savage mountains. He caught my eye on that spiritedly composed woodcut. (There were no inane snapshot-reproductions in those days.) It was the obvious romance for the use of royalists but it arrested my attention.

Just then some masks from outside invaded the café, dancing hand in hand in a single file led by a burly man with a cardboard nose. He gambolled in wildly and behind him twenty others perhaps, mostly Pierrots and Pierrettes holding each other by the hand and winding in and out between the chairs and tables: eyes shining in the holes of cardboard faces, breasts panting; but all preserving a mysterious silence.

They were people of the poorer sort (white calico with red spots, costumes), but amongst them there was a girl in a black dress sewn over with gold half moons, very high in the neck and very short in the skirt. Most of the ordinary clients of the café didn't even look up from their games or papers. I, being alone and idle, stared abstractedly. The girl costumed as Night wore a small black velvet mask, what is called in French a "loup." What made her daintiness join that obviously rough lot I can't imagine. Her uncovered mouth and chin suggested refined prettiness.

They filed past my table; the Night noticed perhaps my fixed gaze and throwing her body forward out of the wriggling chain shot out at me a slender tongue like a pink dart. I was not prepared for this, not even to the extent of an appreciative "Très foli," before she wriggled and hopped away. But having been thus distinguished I could do no less than follow her with my eyes to the door where the chain of hands being broken all the masks were trying to get out at once. Two gentlemen coming in out of the street stood arrested in the crush. The Night (it must have been her idiosyncrasy) put her tongue out at them, too. The taller of the two (he was in evening clothes under a light wide-open overcoat) with great presence of mind chucked her under the chin, giving me the view at the same time of a flash

of white teeth in his dark, lean face. The other man was very different; fair, with smooth, ruddy cheeks and burly shoulders. He was wearing a grey suit, obviously bought ready-made, for it seemed too tight for his powerful frame.

That man was not altogether a stranger to me. For the last week or so I had been rather on the look-out for him in all the public places where in a provincial town men may expect to meet each other. I saw him for the first time (wearing that same grey ready-made suit) in a legitimist drawing-room where, clearly, he was an object of interest, especially to the women. I had caught his name as Monsieur Mills. The lady who had introduced me took the earliest opportunity to murmur into my ear: "A relation of Lord X." (Un proche parent de Lord X.) And then she added, casting up her eyes: "A good friend of the King." Meaning Don Carlos of course.

I looked at the proche parent; not on account of the parentage but marvelling at his air of ease in that cumbrous body and in such tight clothes, too. But presently the same lady informed me further: "He has come here amongst us un naufragé."

I became then really interested. I had never seen a shipwrecked person before. All the boyishness in me was aroused. I considered a shipwreck as an unavoidable event sooner or later in my future.

Meantime the man thus distinguished in my eyes glanced quietly about and never spoke unless addressed directly by one of the ladies present. There were more than a dozen people in that drawing-room, mostly women eating fine pastry and talking passionately. It might have been a Carlist committee meeting of a particularly fatuous character. Even my youth and inexperience were aware of that. And I was by a long way the youngest person in the room. That quiet Monsieur Mills intimidated me a little by his age (I suppose he was thirty-five), his massive tranquillity, his clear, watchful eyes. But the temptation was too great — and I addressed him impulsively on the subject of that shipwreck.

He turned his big fair face towards me with surprise in his keen glance, which (as though he had seen through me in an instant and found nothing objectionable) changed subtly into friendliness. On the matter of the shipwreck he did not say much. He only told me that it had not occurred in the Mediterranean, but on the other side of Southern France — in the Bay of Biscay. "But this is hardly the place to enter on a story of that kind," he



observed, looking round at the room with a faint smile as attractive as the rest of his rustic but well-bred personality.

I expressed my regret. I should have liked to hear all about it. To this he said that it was not a secret and that perhaps next time we met. . .

“But where can we meet?” I cried. “I don’t come often to this house, you know.”

“Where? Why on the Cannebière to be sure. Everybody meets everybody else at least once a day on the pavement opposite the Bourse.”

This was absolutely true. But though I looked for him on each succeeding day he was nowhere to be seen at the usual times. The companions of my idle hours (and all my hours were idle just then) noticed my preoccupation and chaffed me about it in a rather obvious way. They wanted to know whether she, whom I expected to see, was dark or fair; whether that fascination which kept me on tenterhooks of expectation was one of my aristocrats or one of my marine beauties: for they knew I had a footing in both these — shall we say circles? As to themselves they were the bohemian circle, not very wide — half a dozen of us led by a sculptor whom we called Prax for short. My own nick-name was “Young Ulysses.”

I liked it.

But chaff or no chaff they would have been surprised to see me leave them for the burly and sympathetic Mills. I was ready to drop any easy company of equals to approach that interesting man with every mental deference. It was not precisely because of that shipwreck. He attracted and interested me the more because he was not to be seen. The fear that he might have departed suddenly for England — (or for Spain) — caused me a sort of ridiculous depression as though I had missed a unique opportunity. And it was a joyful reaction which emboldened me to signal to him with a raised arm across that café.

I was abashed immediately afterwards, when I saw him advance towards my table with his friend. The latter was eminently elegant. He was exactly like one of those figures one can see of a fine May evening in the neighbourhood of the Opera-house in Paris. Very Parisian indeed. And yet he struck me as not so perfectly French as he ought to have been, as if one’s nationality were an accomplishment with varying degrees of excellence. As to Mills, he was perfectly insular. There could be no doubt about him. They were both smiling faintly at me. The burly Mills attended to the introduction: “Captain Blunt.”

We shook hands. The name didn't tell me much. What surprised me was that Mills should have remembered mine so well. I don't want to boast of my modesty but it seemed to me that two or three days was more than enough for a man like Mills to forget my very existence. As to the Captain, I was struck on closer view by the perfect correctness of his personality. Clothes, slight figure, clear-cut, thin, sun-tanned face, pose, all this was so good that it was saved from the danger of banality only by the mobile black eyes of a keenness that one doesn't meet every day in the south of France and still less in Italy. Another thing was that, viewed as an officer in mufti, he did not look sufficiently professional. That imperfection was interesting, too.

You may think that I am subtilizing my impressions on purpose, but you may take it from a man who has lived a rough, a very rough life, that it is the subtleties of personalities, and contacts, and events, that count for interest and memory — and pretty well nothing else. This — you see — is the last evening of that part of my life in which I did not know that woman. These are like the last hours of a previous existence. It isn't my fault that they are associated with nothing better at the decisive moment than the banal splendours of a gilded café and the bedlamite yells of carnival in the street.

We three, however (almost complete strangers to each other), had assumed attitudes of serious amiability round our table. A waiter approached for orders and it was then, in relation to my order for coffee, that the absolutely first thing I learned of Captain Blunt was the fact that he was a sufferer from insomnia. In his immovable way Mills began charging his pipe. I felt extremely embarrassed all at once, but became positively annoyed when I saw our Prax enter the café in a sort of mediaeval costume very much like what Faust wears in the third act. I have no doubt it was meant for a purely operatic Faust. A light mantle floated from his shoulders. He strode theatrically up to our table and addressing me as "Young Ulysses" proposed I should go outside on the fields of asphalt and help him gather a few marguerites to decorate a truly infernal supper which was being organized across the road at the Maison Dorée — upstairs. With expostulatory shakes of the head and indignant glances I called his attention to the fact that I was not alone. He stepped back a pace as if astonished by the discovery, took off his plumed velvet toque with a low obeisance so that

the feathers swept the floor, and swaggered off the stage with his left hand resting on the hilt of the property dagger at his belt.

Meantime the well-connected but rustic Mills had been busy lighting his briar and the distinguished Captain sat smiling to himself. I was horribly vexed and apologized for that intrusion, saying that the fellow was a future great sculptor and perfectly harmless; but he had been swallowing lots of night air which had got into his head apparently.

Mills peered at me with his friendly but awfully searching blue eyes through the cloud of smoke he had wreathed about his big head. The slim, dark Captain's smile took on an amiable expression. Might he know why I was addressed as "Young Ulysses" by my friend? and immediately he added the remark with urbane playfulness that Ulysses was an astute person. Mills did not give me time for a reply. He struck in: "That old Greek was famed as a wanderer — the first historical seaman." He waved his pipe vaguely at me.

"Ah! Vraiment!" The polite Captain seemed incredulous and as if weary. "Are you a seaman? In what sense, pray?" We were talking French and he used the term *homme de mer*.

Again Mills interfered quietly. "In the same sense in which you are a military man." (*Homme de guerre*.)

It was then that I heard Captain Blunt produce one of his striking declarations. He had two of them, and this was the first.

"I live by my sword."

It was said in an extraordinary dandified manner which in conjunction with the matter made me forget my tongue in my head. I could only stare at him. He added more naturally: "2nd Reg. Castille, Cavalry." Then with marked stress in Spanish, "*En las filas legítimas*."

Mills was heard, unmoved, like Jove in his cloud: "He's on leave here."

"Of course I don't shout that fact on the housetops," the Captain addressed me pointedly, "any more than our friend his shipwreck adventure. We must not strain the toleration of the French authorities too much! It wouldn't be correct — and not very safe either."

I became suddenly extremely delighted with my company. A man who "lived by his sword," before my eyes, close at my elbow! So such people did exist in the world yet! I had not been born too late! And across the table with his air of watchful, unmoved benevolence, enough in itself to

arouse one's interest, there was the man with the story of a shipwreck that mustn't be shouted on housetops. Why?

I understood very well why, when he told me that he had joined in the Clyde a small steamer chartered by a relative of his, "a very wealthy man," he observed (probably Lord X, I thought), to carry arms and other supplies to the Carlist army. And it was not a shipwreck in the ordinary sense. Everything went perfectly well to the last moment when suddenly the Numancia (a Republican ironclad) had appeared and chased them ashore on the French coast below Bayonne. In a few words, but with evident appreciation of the adventure, Mills described to us how he swam to the beach clad simply in a money belt and a pair of trousers. Shells were falling all round till a tiny French gunboat came out of Bayonne and shooed the Numancia away out of territorial waters.

He was very amusing and I was fascinated by the mental picture of that tranquil man rolling in the surf and emerging breathless, in the costume you know, on the fair land of France, in the character of a smuggler of war material. However, they had never arrested or expelled him, since he was there before my eyes. But how and why did he get so far from the scene of his sea adventure was an interesting question. And I put it to him with most naïve indiscretion which did not shock him visibly. He told me that the ship being only stranded, not sunk, the contraband cargo aboard was doubtless in good condition. The French custom-house men were guarding the wreck. If their vigilance could be — h'm — removed by some means, or even merely reduced, a lot of these rifles and cartridges could be taken off quietly at night by certain Spanish fishing boats. In fact, salved for the Carlists, after all. He thought it could be done. . . .

I said with professional gravity that given a few perfectly quiet nights (rare on that coast) it could certainly be done.

Mr. Mills was not afraid of the elements. It was the highly inconvenient zeal of the French custom-house people that had to be dealt with in some way.

"Heavens!" I cried, astonished. "You can't bribe the French Customs. This isn't a South-American republic."

"Is it a republic?" he murmured, very absorbed in smoking his wooden pipe.

"Well, isn't it?"

He murmured again, "Oh, so little." At this I laughed, and a faintly humorous expression passed over Mills' face. No. Bribes were out of the question, he admitted. But there were many legitimist sympathies in Paris.

A proper person could set them in motion and a mere hint from high quarters to the officials on the spot not to worry over-much about that wreck. . . .

What was most amusing was the cool, reasonable tone of this amazing project. Mr. Blunt sat by very detached, his eyes roamed here and there all over the café; and it was while looking upward at the pink foot of a fleshy and very much foreshortened goddess of some sort depicted on the ceiling in an enormous composition in the Italian style that he let fall casually the words, "She will manage it for you quite easily."

"Every Carlist agent in Bayonne assured me of that," said Mr. Mills. "I would have gone straight to Paris only I was told she had fled here for a rest; tired, discontented. Not a very encouraging report."

"These flights are well known," muttered Mr. Blunt. "You shall see her all right."

"Yes. They told me that you . . ."

I broke in: "You mean to say that you expect a woman to arrange that sort of thing for you?"

"A trifle, for her," Mr. Blunt remarked indifferently. "At that sort of thing women are best. They have less scruples."

"More audacity," interjected Mr. Mills almost in a whisper.

Mr. Blunt kept quiet for a moment, then: "You see," he addressed me in a most refined tone, "a mere man may suddenly find himself being kicked down the stairs."

I don't know why I should have felt shocked by that statement. It could not be because it was untrue. The other did not give me time to offer any remark. He inquired with extreme politeness what did I know of South American republics? I confessed that I knew very little of them. Wandering about the Gulf of Mexico I had a look-in here and there; and amongst others I had a few days in Haiti which was of course unique, being a negro republic. On this Captain Blunt began to talk of negroes at large. He talked of them with knowledge, intelligence, and a sort of contemptuous affection. He generalized, he particularized about the blacks; he told anecdotes. I was interested, a little incredulous, and considerably surprised. What could this man with such a boulevardier exterior that he

looked positively like, an exile in a provincial town, and with his drawing-room manner — what could he know of negroes?

Mills, sitting silent with his air of watchful intelligence, seemed to read my thoughts, waved his pipe slightly and explained: “The Captain is from South Carolina.”

“Oh,” I murmured, and then after the slightest of pauses I heard the second of Mr. J. K. Blunt’s declarations.

“Yes,” he said. “Je suis Américain, catholique et gentil-homme,” in a tone contrasting so strongly with the smile, which, as it were, underlined the uttered words, that I was at a loss whether to return the smile in kind or acknowledge the words with a grave little bow. Of course I did neither and there fell on us an odd, equivocal silence. It marked our final abandonment of the French language. I was the one to speak first, proposing that my companions should sup with me, not across the way, which would be riotous with more than one “infernal” supper, but in another much more select establishment in a side street away from the Cannebière. It flattered my vanity a little to be able to say that I had a corner table always reserved in the Salon des Palmiers, otherwise Salon Blanc, where the atmosphere was legitimist and extremely decorous besides — even in Carnival time. “Nine tenths of the people there,” I said, “would be of your political opinions, if that’s an inducement. Come along. Let’s be festive,” I encouraged them.

I didn’t feel particularly festive. What I wanted was to remain in my company and break an inexplicable feeling of constraint of which I was aware. Mills looked at me steadily with a faint, kind smile.

“No,” said Blunt. “Why should we go there? They will be only turning us out in the small hours, to go home and face insomnia. Can you imagine anything more disgusting?”

He was smiling all the time, but his deep-set eyes did not lend themselves to the expression of whimsical politeness which he tried to achieve. He had another suggestion to offer. Why shouldn’t we adjourn to his rooms? He had there materials for a dish of his own invention for which he was famous all along the line of the Royal Cavalry outposts, and he would cook it for us. There were also a few bottles of some white wine, quite possible, which we could drink out of Venetian cut-glass goblets. A bivouac feast, in fact. And he wouldn’t turn us out in the small hours. Not he. He couldn’t sleep.

Need I say I was fascinated by the idea? Well, yes. But somehow I hesitated and looked towards Mills, so much my senior. He got up without a word. This was decisive; for no obscure premonition, and of something indefinite at that, could stand against the example of his tranquil personality.

## CHAPTER II

The street in which Mr. Blunt lived presented itself to our eyes, narrow, silent, empty, and dark, but with enough gas-lamps in it to disclose its most striking feature: a quantity of flag-poles sticking out above many of its closed portals. It was the street of Consuls and I remarked to Mr. Blunt that coming out in the morning he could survey the flags of all nations almost — except his own. (The U. S. consulate was on the other side of the town.) He mumbled through his teeth that he took good care to keep clear of his own consulate.

“Are you afraid of the consul’s dog?” I asked jocularly. The consul’s dog weighed about a pound and a half and was known to the whole town as exhibited on the consular fore-arm in all places, at all hours, but mainly at the hour of the fashionable promenade on the Prado.

But I felt my jest misplaced when Mills growled low in my ear: “They are all Yankees there.”

I murmured a confused “Of course.”

Books are nothing. I discovered that I had never been aware before that the Civil War in America was not printed matter but a fact only about ten years old. Of course. He was a South Carolinian gentleman. I was a little ashamed of my want of tact. Meantime, looking like the conventional conception of a fashionable reveller, with his opera-hat pushed off his forehead, Captain Blunt was having some slight difficulty with his latch-key; for the house before which we had stopped was not one of those many-storied houses that made up the greater part of the street. It had only one row of windows above the ground floor. Dead walls abutting on to it indicated that it had a garden. Its dark front presented no marked architectural character, and in the flickering light of a street lamp it looked a little as though it had gone down in the world. The greater then was my surprise to enter a hall paved in black and white marble and in its dimness appearing of palatial proportions. Mr. Blunt did not turn up the small solitary gas-jet, but led the way across the black and white pavement past the end of the staircase, past a door of gleaming dark wood with a heavy bronze handle. It gave access to his rooms he said; but he took us straight on to the studio at the end of the passage.

It was rather a small place tacked on in the manner of a lean-to to the garden side of the house. A large lamp was burning brightly there. The



floor was of mere flag-stones but the few rugs scattered about though extremely worn were very costly. There was also there a beautiful sofa upholstered in pink figured silk, an enormous divan with many cushions, some splendid arm-chairs of various shapes (but all very shabby), a round table, and in the midst of these fine things a small common iron stove. Somebody must have been attending it lately, for the fire roared and the warmth of the place was very grateful after the bone-searching cold blasts of mistral outside.

Mills without a word flung himself on the divan and, propped on his arm, gazed thoughtfully at a distant corner where in the shadow of a monumental carved wardrobe an articulated dummy without head or hands but with beautifully shaped limbs composed in a shrinking attitude, seemed to be embarrassed by his stare.

As we sat enjoying the bivouac hospitality (the dish was really excellent and our host in a shabby grey jacket still looked the accomplished man-about-town) my eyes kept on straying towards that corner. Blunt noticed this and remarked that I seemed to be attracted by the Empress.

"It's disagreeable," I said. "It seems to lurk there like a shy skeleton at the feast. But why do you give the name of Empress to that dummy?"

"Because it sat for days and days in the robes of a Byzantine Empress to a painter. . . I wonder where he discovered these priceless stuffs. . . You knew him, I believe?"

Mills lowered his head slowly, then tossed down his throat some wine out of a Venetian goblet.

"This house is full of costly objects. So are all his other houses, so is his place in Paris — that mysterious Pavilion hidden away in Passy somewhere."

Mills knew the Pavilion. The wine had, I suppose, loosened his tongue. Blunt, too, lost something of his reserve. From their talk I gathered the notion of an eccentric personality, a man of great wealth, not so much solitary as difficult of access, a collector of fine things, a painter known only to very few people and not at all to the public market. But as meantime I had been emptying my Venetian goblet with a certain regularity (the amount of heat given out by that iron stove was amazing; it parched one's throat, and the straw-coloured wine didn't seem much stronger than so much pleasantly flavoured water) the voices and the impressions they conveyed acquired something fantastic to my mind. Suddenly I perceived

that Mills was sitting in his shirt-sleeves. I had not noticed him taking off his coat. Blunt had unbuttoned his shabby jacket, exposing a lot of starched shirt-front with the white tie under his dark shaved chin. He had a strange air of insolence — or so it seemed to me. I addressed him much louder than I intended really.

“Did you know that extraordinary man?”

“To know him personally one had to be either very distinguished or very lucky. Mr. Mills here . . .”

“Yes, I have been lucky,” Mills struck in. “It was my cousin who was distinguished. That’s how I managed to enter his house in Paris — it was called the Pavilion — twice.”

“And saw Doña Rita twice, too?” asked Blunt with an indefinite smile and a marked emphasis. Mills was also emphatic in his reply but with a serious face.

“I am not an easy enthusiast where women are concerned, but she was without doubt the most admirable find of his amongst all the priceless items he had accumulated in that house — the most admirable. . . “

“Ah! But, you see, of all the objects there she was the only one that was alive,” pointed out Blunt with the slightest possible flavour of sarcasm.

“Immensely so,” affirmed Mills. “Not because she was restless, indeed she hardly ever moved from that couch between the windows — you know.”

“No. I don’t know. I’ve never been in there,” announced Blunt with that flash of white teeth so strangely without any character of its own that it was merely disturbing.

“But she radiated life,” continued Mills. “She had plenty of it, and it had a quality. My cousin and Henry Allègre had a lot to say to each other and so I was free to talk to her. At the second visit we were like old friends, which was absurd considering that all the chances were that we would never meet again in this world or in the next. I am not meddling with theology but it seems to me that in the Elysian fields she’ll have her place in a very special company.”

All this in a sympathetic voice and in his unmoved manner. Blunt produced another disturbing white flash and muttered:

“I should say mixed.” Then louder: “As for instance . . . “

“As for instance Cleopatra,” answered Mills quietly. He added after a pause: “Who was not exactly pretty.”

"I should have thought rather a La Vallière," Blunt dropped with an indifference of which one did not know what to make. He may have begun to be bored with the subject. But it may have been put on, for the whole personality was not clearly definable. I, however, was not indifferent. A woman is always an interesting subject and I was thoroughly awake to that interest. Mills pondered for a while with a sort of dispassionate benevolence, at last:

"Yes, Doña Rita as far as I know her is so varied in her simplicity that even that is possible," he said. "Yes. A romantic resigned La Vallière . . . who had a big mouth."

I felt moved to make myself heard.

"Did you know La Vallière, too?" I asked impertinently.

Mills only smiled at me. "No. I am not quite so old as that," he said. "But it's not very difficult to know facts of that kind about a historical personage. There were some ribald verses made at the time, and Louis XIV was congratulated on the possession — I really don't remember how it goes — on the possession of:

". . . de ce bec amoureux  
Qui d'une oreille à l'autre va,  
Tra là là.

or something of the sort. It needn't be from ear to ear, but it's a fact that a big mouth is often a sign of a certain generosity of mind and feeling. Young man, beware of women with small mouths. Beware of the others, too, of course; but a small mouth is a fatal sign. Well, the royalist sympathizers can't charge Doña Rita with any lack of generosity from what I hear. Why should I judge her? I have known her for, say, six hours altogether. It was enough to feel the seduction of her native intelligence and of her splendid physique. And all that was brought home to me so quickly," he concluded, "because she had what some Frenchman has called the 'terrible gift of familiarity'."

Blunt had been listening moodily. He nodded assent.

"Yes!" Mills' thoughts were still dwelling in the past. "And when saying good-bye she could put in an instant an immense distance between herself and you. A slight stiffening of that perfect figure, a change of the physiognomy: it was like being dismissed by a person born in the purple. Even if she did offer you her hand — as she did to me — it was as if across

a broad river. Trick of manner or a bit of truth peeping out? Perhaps she's really one of those inaccessible beings. What do you think, Blunt?"

It was a direct question which for some reason (as if my range of sensitiveness had been increased already) displeased or rather disturbed me strangely. Blunt seemed not to have heard it. But after a while he turned to me.

"That thick man," he said in a tone of perfect urbanity, "is as fine as a needle. All these statements about the seduction and then this final doubt expressed after only two visits which could not have included more than six hours altogether and this some three years ago! But it is Henry Allègre that you should ask this question, Mr. Mills."

"I haven't the secret of raising the dead," answered Mills good humouredly. "And if I had I would hesitate. It would seem such a liberty to take with a person one had known so slightly in life."

"And yet Henry Allègre is the only person to ask about her, after all this uninterrupted companionship of years, ever since he discovered her; all the time, every breathing moment of it, till, literally, his very last breath. I don't mean to say she nursed him. He had his confidential man for that. He couldn't bear women about his person. But then apparently he couldn't bear this one out of his sight. She's the only woman who ever sat to him, for he would never suffer a model inside his house. That's why the 'Girl in the Hat' and the 'Byzantine Empress' have that family air, though neither of them is really a likeness of Doña Rita. . . You know my mother?"

Mills inclined his body slightly and a fugitive smile vanished from his lips. Blunt's eyes were fastened on the very centre of his empty plate.

"Then perhaps you know my mother's artistic and literary associations," Blunt went on in a subtly changed tone. "My mother has been writing verse since she was a girl of fifteen. She's still writing verse. She's still fifteen — a spoiled girl of genius. So she requested one of her poet friends — no less than Versoy himself — to arrange for a visit to Henry Allègre's house. At first he thought he hadn't heard aright. You must know that for my mother a man that doesn't jump out of his skin for any woman's caprice is not chivalrous. But perhaps you do know? . . ."

Mills shook his head with an amused air. Blunt, who had raised his eyes from his plate to look at him, started afresh with great deliberation.

"She gives no peace to herself or her friends. My mother's exquisitely absurd. You understand that all these painters, poets, art collectors (and

dealers in bric-à-brac, he interjected through his teeth) of my mother are not in my way; but Versoy lives more like a man of the world. One day I met him at the fencing school. He was furious. He asked me to tell my mother that this was the last effort of his chivalry. The jobs she gave him to do were too difficult. But I daresay he had been pleased enough to show the influence he had in that quarter. He knew my mother would tell the world's wife all about it. He's a spiteful, gingery little wretch. The top of his head shines like a billiard ball. I believe he polishes it every morning with a cloth. Of course they didn't get further than the big drawing-room on the first floor, an enormous drawing-room with three pairs of columns in the middle. The double doors on the top of the staircase had been thrown wide open, as if for a visit from royalty. You can picture to yourself my mother, with her white hair done in some 18th century fashion and her sparkling black eyes, penetrating into those splendours attended by a sort of bald-headed, vexed squirrel — and Henry Allègre coming forward to meet them like a severe prince with the face of a tombstone Crusader, big white hands, muffled silken voice, half-shut eyes, as if looking down at them from a balcony. You remember that trick of his, Mills?"

Mills emitted an enormous cloud of smoke out of his distended cheeks.

"I daresay he was furious, too," Blunt continued dispassionately. "But he was extremely civil. He showed her all the 'treasures' in the room, ivories, enamels, miniatures, all sorts of monstrosities from Japan, from India, from Timbuctoo . . . for all I know. . . He pushed his condescension so far as to have the 'Girl in the Hat' brought down into the drawing-room — half length, unframed. They put her on a chair for my mother to look at. The 'Byzantine Empress' was already there, hung on the end wall — full length, gold frame weighing half a ton. My mother first overwhelms the 'Master' with thanks, and then absorbs herself in the adoration of the 'Girl in the Hat.' Then she sighs out: 'It should be called Diaphanéité, if there is such a word. Ah! This is the last expression of modernity!' She puts up suddenly her face-à-main and looks towards the end wall. 'And that — Byzantium itself! Who was she, this sullen and beautiful Empress?'

"The one I had in my mind was Theodosia!" Allègre consented to answer. 'Originally a slave girl — from somewhere.'

"My mother can be marvellously indiscreet when the whim takes her. She finds nothing better to do than to ask the 'Master' why he took his inspiration for those two faces from the same model. No doubt she was

proud of her discerning eye. It was really clever of her. Allègre, however, looked on it as a colossal impertinence; but he answered in his silkiest tones:

“‘Perhaps it is because I saw in that woman something of the women of all time.’

“My mother might have guessed that she was on thin ice there. She is extremely intelligent. Moreover, she ought to have known. But women can be miraculously dense sometimes. So she exclaims, ‘Then she is a wonder!’ And with some notion of being complimentary goes on to say that only the eyes of the discoverer of so many wonders of art could have discovered something so marvellous in life. I suppose Allègre lost his temper altogether then; or perhaps he only wanted to pay my mother out, for all these ‘Masters’ she had been throwing at his head for the last two hours. He insinuates with the utmost politeness:

“‘As you are honouring my poor collection with a visit you may like to judge for yourself as to the inspiration of these two pictures. She is upstairs changing her dress after our morning ride. But she wouldn’t be very long. She might be a little surprised at first to be called down like this, but with a few words of preparation and purely as a matter of art . . .’

“There were never two people more taken aback. Versoy himself confesses that he dropped his tall hat with a crash. I am a dutiful son, I hope, but I must say I should have liked to have seen the retreat down the great staircase. Ha! Ha! Ha!”

He laughed most undutifully and then his face twitched grimly.

“That implacable brute Allègre followed them down ceremoniously and put my mother into the fiacre at the door with the greatest deference. He didn’t open his lips though, and made a great bow as the fiacre drove away. My mother didn’t recover from her consternation for three days. I lunch with her almost daily and I couldn’t imagine what was the matter. Then one day . . .”

He glanced round the table, jumped up and with a word of excuse left the studio by a small door in a corner. This startled me into the consciousness that I had been as if I had not existed for these two men. With his elbows propped on the table Mills had his hands in front of his face clasping the pipe from which he extracted now and then a puff of smoke, staring stolidly across the room.

I was moved to ask in a whisper:

“Do you know him well?”

“I don’t know what he is driving at,” he answered drily. “But as to his mother she is not as volatile as all that. I suspect it was business. It may have been a deep plot to get a picture out of Allègre for somebody. My cousin as likely as not. Or simply to discover what he had. The Blunts lost all their property and in Paris there are various ways of making a little money, without actually breaking anything. Not even the law. And Mrs. Blunt really had a position once — in the days of the Second Empire — and so. . .”

I listened open-mouthed to these things into which my West-Indian experiences could not have given me an insight. But Mills checked himself and ended in a changed tone.

“It’s not easy to know what she would be at, either, in any given instance. For the rest, spotlessly honourable. A delightful, aristocratic old lady. Only poor.”

A bump at the door silenced him and immediately Mr. John Blunt, Captain of Cavalry in the Army of Legitimity, first-rate cook (as to one dish at least), and generous host, entered clutching the necks of four more bottles between the fingers of his hand.

“I stumbled and nearly smashed the lot,” he remarked casually. But even I, with all my innocence, never for a moment believed he had stumbled accidentally. During the uncorking and the filling up of glasses a profound silence reigned; but neither of us took it seriously — any more than his stumble.

“One day,” he went on again in that curiously flavoured voice of his, “my mother took a heroic decision and made up her mind to get up in the middle of the night. You must understand my mother’s phraseology. It meant that she would be up and dressed by nine o’clock. This time it was not Versoy that was commanded for attendance, but I. You may imagine how delighted I was. . . .”

It was very plain to me that Blunt was addressing himself exclusively to Mills: Mills the mind, even more than Mills the man. It was as if Mills represented something initiated and to be reckoned with. I, of course, could have no such pretensions. If I represented anything it was a perfect freshness of sensations and a refreshing ignorance, not so much of what life may give one (as to that I had some ideas at least) but of what it really contains. I knew very well that I was utterly insignificant in these men’s

eyes. Yet my attention was not checked by that knowledge. It's true they were talking of a woman, but I was yet at the age when this subject by itself is not of overwhelming interest. My imagination would have been more stimulated probably by the adventures and fortunes of a man. What kept my interest from flagging was Mr. Blunt himself. The play of the white gleams of his smile round the suspicion of grimness of his tone fascinated me like a moral incongruity.

So at the age when one sleeps well indeed but does feel sometimes as if the need of sleep were a mere weakness of a distant old age, I kept easily awake; and in my freshness I was kept amused by the contrast of personalities, of the disclosed facts and moral outlook with the rough initiations of my West-Indian experience. And all these things were dominated by a feminine figure which to my imagination had only a floating outline, now invested with the grace of girlhood, now with the prestige of a woman; and indistinct in both these characters. For these two men had seen her, while to me she was only being "presented," elusively, in vanishing words, in the shifting tones of an unfamiliar voice.

She was being presented to me now in the Bois de Boulogne at the early hour of the ultra-fashionable world (so I understood), on a light bay "bit of blood" attended on the off side by that Henry Allègre mounted on a dark brown powerful weight carrier; and on the other by one of Allègre's acquaintances (the man had no real friends), distinguished frequenters of that mysterious Pavilion. And so that side of the frame in which that woman appeared to one down the perspective of the great Allée was not permanent. That morning when Mr. Blunt had to escort his mother there for the gratification of her irresistible curiosity (of which he highly disapproved) there appeared in succession, at that woman's or girl's bridle-hand, a cavalry general in red breeches, on whom she was smiling; a rising politician in a grey suit, who talked to her with great animation but left her side abruptly to join a personage in a red fez and mounted on a white horse; and then, some time afterwards, the vexed Mr. Blunt and his indiscreet mother (though I really couldn't see where the harm was) had one more chance of a good stare. The third party that time was the Royal Pretender (Allègre had been painting his portrait lately), whose hearty, sonorous laugh was heard long before the mounted trio came riding very slowly abreast of the Blunts. There was colour in the girl's face. She was not laughing. Her expression was serious and her eyes thoughtfully downcast. Blunt admitted



that on that occasion the charm, brilliance, and force of her personality was adequately framed between those magnificently mounted, paladin-like attendants, one older than the other but the two composing together admirably in the different stages of their manhood. Mr. Blunt had never before seen Henry Allègre so close. Allègre was riding nearest to the path on which Blunt was dutifully giving his arm to his mother (they had got out of their fiacre) and wondering if that confounded fellow would have the impudence to take off his hat. But he did not. Perhaps he didn't notice. Allègre was not a man of wandering glances. There were silver hairs in his beard but he looked as solid as a statue. Less than three months afterwards he was gone.

"What was it?" asked Mills, who had not changed his pose for a very long time.

"Oh, an accident. But he lingered. They were on their way to Corsica. A yearly pilgrimage. Sentimental perhaps. It was to Corsica that he carried her off — I mean first of all."

There was the slightest contraction of Mr. Blunt's facial muscles. Very slight; but I, staring at the narrator after the manner of all simple souls, noticed it; the twitch of a pain which surely must have been mental. There was also a suggestion of effort before he went on: "I suppose you know how he got hold of her?" in a tone of ease which was astonishingly ill-assumed for such a worldly, self-controlled, drawing-room person.

Mills changed his attitude to look at him fixedly for a moment. Then he leaned back in his chair and with interest — I don't mean curiosity, I mean interest: "Does anybody know besides the two parties concerned?" he asked, with something as it were renewed (or was it refreshed?) in his unmoved quietness. "I ask because one has never heard any tales. I remember one evening in a restaurant seeing a man come in with a lady — a beautiful lady — very particularly beautiful, as though she had been stolen out of Mahomet's paradise. With Doña Rita it can't be anything as definite as that. But speaking of her in the same strain, I've always felt that she looked as though Allègre had caught her in the precincts of some temple . . . in the mountains."

I was delighted. I had never heard before a woman spoken about in that way, a real live woman that is, not a woman in a book. For this was no poetry and yet it seemed to put her in the category of visions. And I would

have lost myself in it if Mr. Blunt had not, most unexpectedly, addressed himself to me.

“I told you that man was as fine as a needle.”

And then to Mills: “Out of a temple? We know what that means.” His dark eyes flashed: “And must it be really in the mountains?” he added.

“Or in a desert,” conceded Mills, “if you prefer that. There have been temples in deserts, you know.”

Blunt had calmed down suddenly and assumed a nonchalant pose.

“As a matter of fact, Henry Allègre caught her very early one morning in his own old garden full of thrushes and other small birds. She was sitting on a stone, a fragment of some old balustrade, with her feet in the damp grass, and reading a tattered book of some kind. She had on a short, black, two-penny frock (*une petite robe de deux sous*) and there was a hole in one of her stockings. She raised her eyes and saw him looking down at her thoughtfully over that ambrosian beard of his, like Jove at a mortal. They exchanged a good long stare, for at first she was too startled to move; and then he murmured, “*Restez donc.*” She lowered her eyes again on her book and after a while heard him walk away on the path. Her heart thumped while she listened to the little birds filling the air with their noise. She was not frightened. I am telling you this positively because she has told me the tale herself. What better authority can you have . . .?” Blunt paused.

“That’s true. She’s not the sort of person to lie about her own sensations,” murmured Mills above his clasped hands.

“Nothing can escape his penetration,” Blunt remarked to me with that equivocal urbanity which made me always feel uncomfortable on Mills’ account. “Positively nothing.” He turned to Mills again. “After some minutes of immobility — she told me — she arose from her stone and walked slowly on the track of that apparition. Allègre was nowhere to be seen by that time. Under the gateway of the extremely ugly tenement house, which hides the Pavilion and the garden from the street, the wife of the porter was waiting with her arms akimbo. At once she cried out to Rita: ‘You were caught by our gentleman.’”

“As a matter of fact, that old woman, being a friend of Rita’s aunt, allowed the girl to come into the garden whenever Allègre was away. But Allègre’s goings and comings were sudden and unannounced; and that morning, Rita, crossing the narrow, thronged street, had slipped in through

the gateway in ignorance of Allègre's return and unseen by the porter's wife.

"The child, she was but little more than that then, expressed her regret of having perhaps got the kind porter's wife into trouble.

"The old woman said with a peculiar smile: 'Your face is not of the sort that gets other people into trouble. My gentleman wasn't angry. He says you may come in any morning you like.'

"Rita, without saying anything to this, crossed the street back again to the warehouse full of oranges where she spent most of her waking hours. Her dreaming, empty, idle, thoughtless, unperturbed hours, she calls them. She crossed the street with a hole in her stocking. She had a hole in her stocking not because her uncle and aunt were poor (they had around them never less than eight thousand oranges, mostly in cases) but because she was then careless and untidy and totally unconscious of her personal appearance. She told me herself that she was not even conscious then of her personal existence. She was a mere adjunct in the twilight life of her aunt, a Frenchwoman, and her uncle, the orange merchant, a Basque peasant, to whom her other uncle, the great man of the family, the priest of some parish in the hills near Tolosa, had sent her up at the age of thirteen or thereabouts for safe keeping. She is of peasant stock, you know. This is the true origin of the 'Girl in the Hat' and of the 'Byzantine Empress' which excited my dear mother so much; of the mysterious girl that the privileged personalities great in art, in letters, in politics, or simply in the world, could see on the big sofa during the gatherings in Allègre's exclusive Pavilion: the Doña Rita of their respectful addresses, manifest and mysterious, like an object of art from some unknown period; the Doña Rita of the initiated Paris. Doña Rita and nothing more — unique and indefinable." He stopped with a disagreeable smile.

"And of peasant stock?" I exclaimed in the strangely conscious silence that fell between Mills and Blunt.

"Oh! All these Basques have been ennobled by Don Sanche II," said Captain Blunt moodily. "You see coats of arms carved over the doorways of the most miserable caserios. As far as that goes she's Doña Rita right enough whatever else she is or is not in herself or in the eyes of others. In your eyes, for instance, Mills. Eh?"

For a time Mills preserved that conscious silence.

“Why think about it at all?” he murmured coldly at last. “A strange bird is hatched sometimes in a nest in an unaccountable way and then the fate of such a bird is bound to be ill-defined, uncertain, questionable. And so that is how Henry Allègre saw her first? And what happened next?”

“What happened next?” repeated Mr. Blunt, with an affected surprise in his tone. “Is it necessary to ask that question? If you had asked how the next happened. . . But as you may imagine she hasn’t told me anything about that. She didn’t,” he continued with polite sarcasm, “enlarge upon the facts. That confounded Allègre, with his impudent assumption of princely airs, must have (I shouldn’t wonder) made the fact of his notice appear as a sort of favour dropped from Olympus. I really can’t tell how the minds and the imaginations of such aunts and uncles are affected by such rare visitations. Mythology may give us a hint. There is the story of Danae, for instance.”

“There is,” remarked Mills calmly, “but I don’t remember any aunt or uncle in that connection.”

“And there are also certain stories of the discovery and acquisition of some unique objects of art. The sly approaches, the astute negotiations, the lying and the circumventing . . . for the love of beauty, you know.”

With his dark face and with the perpetual smiles playing about his grimness, Mr. Blunt appeared to me positively satanic. Mills’ hand was toying absently with an empty glass. Again they had forgotten my existence altogether.

“I don’t know how an object of art would feel,” went on Blunt, in an unexpectedly grating voice, which, however, recovered its tone immediately. “I don’t know. But I do know that Rita herself was not a Danae, never, not at any time of her life. She didn’t mind the holes in her stockings. She wouldn’t mind holes in her stockings now. . . That is if she manages to keep any stockings at all,” he added, with a sort of suppressed fury so funnily unexpected that I would have burst into a laugh if I hadn’t been lost in astonishment of the simplest kind.

“No — really!” There was a flash of interest from the quiet Mills.

“Yes, really,” Blunt nodded and knitted his brows very devilishly indeed. “She may yet be left without a single pair of stockings.”

“The world’s a thief,” declared Mills, with the utmost composure. “It wouldn’t mind robbing a lonely traveller.”

“He is so subtle.” Blunt remembered my existence for the purpose of that remark and as usual it made me very uncomfortable. “Perfectly true. A lonely traveller. They are all in the scramble from the lowest to the highest. Heavens! What a gang! There was even an Archbishop in it.”

“Vous plaisantez,” said Mills, but without any marked show of incredulity.

“I joke very seldom,” Blunt protested earnestly. “That’s why I haven’t mentioned His Majesty — whom God preserve. That would have been an exaggeration. . . However, the end is not yet. We were talking about the beginning. I have heard that some dealers in fine objects, quite mercenary people of course (my mother has an experience in that world), show sometimes an astonishing reluctance to part with some specimens, even at a good price. It must be very funny. It’s just possible that the uncle and the aunt have been rolling in tears on the floor, amongst their oranges, or beating their heads against the walls from rage and despair. But I doubt it. And in any case Allègre is not the sort of person that gets into any vulgar trouble. And it’s just possible that those people stood open-mouthed at all that magnificence. They weren’t poor, you know; therefore it wasn’t incumbent on them to be honest. They are still there in the old respectable warehouse, I understand. They have kept their position in their quartier, I believe. But they didn’t keep their niece. It might have been an act of sacrifice! For I seem to remember hearing that after attending for a while some school round the corner the child had been set to keep the books of that orange business. However it might have been, the first fact in Rita’s and Allègre’s common history is a journey to Italy, and then to Corsica. You know Allègre had a house in Corsica somewhere. She has it now as she has everything he ever had; and that Corsican palace is the portion that will stick the longest to Doña Rita, I imagine. Who would want to buy a place like that? I suppose nobody would take it for a gift. The fellow was having houses built all over the place. This very house where we are sitting belonged to him. Doña Rita has given it to her sister, I understand. Or at any rate the sister runs it. She is my landlady . . .”

“Her sister here!” I exclaimed. “Her sister!”

Blunt turned to me politely, but only for a long mute gaze. His eyes were in deep shadow and it struck me for the first time then that there was something fatal in that man’s aspect as soon as he fell silent. I think the

effect was purely physical, but in consequence whatever he said seemed inadequate and as if produced by a commonplace, if uneasy, soul.

“Doña Rita brought her down from her mountains on purpose. She is asleep somewhere in this house, in one of the vacant rooms. She lets them, you know, at extortionate prices, that is, if people will pay them, for she is easily intimidated. You see, she has never seen such an enormous town before in her life, nor yet so many strange people. She has been keeping house for the uncle-priest in some mountain gorge for years and years. It’s extraordinary he should have let her go. There is something mysterious there, some reason or other. It’s either theology or Family. The saintly uncle in his wild parish would know nothing of any other reasons. She wears a rosary at her waist. Directly she had seen some real money she developed a love of it. If you stay with me long enough, and I hope you will (I really can’t sleep), you will see her going out to mass at half-past six; but there is nothing remarkable in her; just a peasant woman of thirty-four or so. A rustic nun. . . .”

I may as well say at once that we didn’t stay as long as that. It was not that morning that I saw for the first time Therese of the whispering lips and downcast eyes slipping out to an early mass from the house of iniquity into the early winter murk of the city of perdition, in a world steeped in sin. No. It was not on that morning that I saw Doña Rita’s incredible sister with her brown, dry face, her gliding motion, and her really nun-like dress, with a black handkerchief enfolding her head tightly, with the two pointed ends hanging down her back. Yes, nun-like enough. And yet not altogether. People would have turned round after her if those dartings out to the half-past six mass hadn’t been the only occasion on which she ventured into the impious streets. She was frightened of the streets, but in a particular way, not as if of a danger but as if of a contamination. Yet she didn’t fly back to her mountains because at bottom she had an indomitable character, a peasant tenacity of purpose, predatory instincts. . . .

No, we didn’t remain long enough with Mr. Blunt to see even as much as her back glide out of the house on her prayerful errand. She was prayerful. She was terrible. Her one-ideal peasant mind was as inaccessible as a closed iron safe. She was fatal. . . It’s perfectly ridiculous to confess that they all seem fatal to me now; but writing to you like this in all sincerity I don’t mind appearing ridiculous. I suppose fatality must be expressed,

embodied, like other forces of this earth; and if so why not in such people as well as in other more glorious or more frightful figures?

We remained, however, long enough to let Mr. Blunt's half-hidden acrimony develop itself or prey on itself in further talk about the man Allègre and the girl Rita. Mr. Blunt, still addressing Mills with that story, passed on to what he called the second act, the disclosure, with, what he called, the characteristic Allègre impudence — which surpassed the impudence of kings, millionaires, or tramps, by many degrees — the revelation of Rita's existence to the world at large. It wasn't a very large world, but then it was most choicely composed. How is one to describe it shortly? In a sentence it was the world that rides in the morning in the Bois.

In something less than a year and a half from the time he found her sitting on a broken fragment of stone work buried in the grass of his wild garden, full of thrushes, starlings, and other innocent creatures of the air, he had given her amongst other accomplishments the art of sitting admirably on a horse, and directly they returned to Paris he took her out with him for their first morning ride.

"I leave you to judge of the sensation," continued Mr. Blunt, with a faint grimace, as though the words had an acrid taste in his mouth. "And the consternation," he added venomously. "Many of those men on that great morning had some one of their womankind with them. But their hats had to go off all the same, especially the hats of the fellows who were under some sort of obligation to Allègre. You would be astonished to hear the names of people, of real personalities in the world, who, not to mince matters, owed money to Allègre. And I don't mean in the world of art only. In the first rout of the surprise some story of an adopted daughter was set abroad hastily, I believe. You know 'adopted' with a peculiar accent on the word — and it was plausible enough. I have been told that at that time she looked extremely youthful by his side, I mean extremely youthful in expression, in the eyes, in the smile. She must have been . . ."

Blunt pulled himself up short, but not so short as not to let the confused murmur of the word "adorable" reach our attentive ears.

The heavy Mills made a slight movement in his chair. The effect on me was more inward, a strange emotion which left me perfectly still; and for the moment of silence Blunt looked more fatal than ever.

"I understand it didn't last very long," he addressed us politely again. "And no wonder! The sort of talk she would have heard during that first

springtime in Paris would have put an impress on a much less receptive personality; for of course Allègre didn't close his doors to his friends and this new apparition was not of the sort to make them keep away. After that first morning she always had somebody to ride at her bridle hand. Old Doyen, the sculptor, was the first to approach them. At that age a man may venture on anything. He rides a strange animal like a circus horse. Rita had spotted him out of the corner of her eye as he passed them, putting up his enormous paw in a still more enormous glove, airily, you know, like this" (Blunt waved his hand above his head), "to Allègre. He passes on. All at once he wheels his fantastic animal round and comes trotting after them. With the merest casual 'Bonjour, Allègre' he ranges close to her on the other side and addresses her, hat in hand, in that booming voice of his like a deferential roar of the sea very far away. His articulation is not good, and the first words she really made out were 'I am an old sculptor. . . Of course there is that habit. . . But I can see you through all that. . . '

He put his hat on very much on one side. 'I am a great sculptor of women,' he declared. 'I gave up my life to them, poor unfortunate creatures, the most beautiful, the wealthiest, the most loved. . . Two generations of them. . . Just look at me full in the eyes, mon enfant.'

"They stared at each other. Doña Rita confessed to me that the old fellow made her heart beat with such force that she couldn't manage to smile at him. And she saw his eyes run full of tears. He wiped them simply with the back of his hand and went on booming faintly. 'Thought so. You are enough to make one cry. I thought my artist's life was finished, and here you come along from devil knows where with this young friend of mine, who isn't a bad smearer of canvases — but it's marble and bronze that you want. . . I shall finish my artist's life with your face; but I shall want a bit of those shoulders, too. . . You hear, Allègre, I must have a bit of her shoulders, too. I can see through the cloth that they are divine. If they aren't divine I will eat my hat. Yes, I will do your head and then — nunc dimittis.'

"These were the first words with which the world greeted her, or should I say civilization did; already both her native mountains and the cavern of oranges belonged to a prehistoric age. 'Why don't you ask him to come this afternoon?' Allègre's voice suggested gently. 'He knows the way to the house.'



“The old man said with extraordinary fervour, ‘Oh, yes I will,’ pulled up his horse and they went on. She told me that she could feel her heart-beats for a long time. The remote power of that voice, those old eyes full of tears, that noble and ruined face, had affected her extraordinarily she said. But perhaps what affected her was the shadow, the still living shadow of a great passion in the man’s heart.

“Allègre remarked to her calmly: ‘He has been a little mad all his life.’”

### CHAPTER III

Mills lowered the hands holding the extinct and even cold pipe before his big face.

“H’m, shoot an arrow into that old man’s heart like this? But was there anything done?”

“A terra-cotta bust, I believe. Good? I don’t know. I rather think it’s in this house. A lot of things have been sent down from Paris here, when she gave up the Pavilion. When she goes up now she stays in hotels, you know. I imagine it is locked up in one of these things,” went on Blunt, pointing towards the end of the studio where amongst the monumental presses of dark oak lurked the shy dummy which had worn the stiff robes of the Byzantine Empress and the amazing hat of the “Girl,” rakishly. I wondered whether that dummy had travelled from Paris, too, and whether with or without its head. Perhaps that head had been left behind, having rolled into a corner of some empty room in the dismantled Pavilion. I represented it to myself very lonely, without features, like a turnip, with a mere peg sticking out where the neck should have been. And Mr. Blunt was talking on.

“There are treasures behind these locked doors, brocades, old jewels, unframed pictures, bronzes, chinoiseries, Japoneries.”

He growled as much as a man of his accomplished manner and voice could growl. “I don’t suppose she gave away all that to her sister, but I shouldn’t be surprised if that timid rustic didn’t lay a claim to the lot for the love of God and the good of the Church. . .

“And held on with her teeth, too,” he added graphically.

Mills’ face remained grave. Very grave. I was amused at those little venomous outbreaks of the fatal Mr. Blunt. Again I knew myself utterly forgotten. But I didn’t feel dull and I didn’t even feel sleepy. That last strikes me as strange at this distance of time, in regard of my tender years and of the depressing hour which precedes the dawn. We had been drinking that straw-coloured wine, too, I won’t say like water (nobody would have drunk water like that) but, well . . . and the haze of tobacco smoke was like the blue mist of great distances seen in dreams.

Yes, that old sculptor was the first who joined them in the sight of all Paris. It was that old glory that opened the series of companions of those morning rides; a series which extended through three successive Parisian

spring-times and comprised a famous physiologist, a fellow who seemed to hint that mankind could be made immortal or at least everlastingly old; a fashionable philosopher and psychologist who used to lecture to enormous audiences of women with his tongue in his cheek (but never permitted himself anything of the kind when talking to Rita); that surly dandy Cabanel (but he only once, from mere vanity), and everybody else at all distinguished including also a celebrated person who turned out later to be a swindler. But he was really a genius. . . All this according to Mr. Blunt, who gave us all those details with a sort of languid zest covering a secret irritation.

“Apart from that, you know,” went on Mr. Blunt, “all she knew of the world of men and women (I mean till Allègre’s death) was what she had seen of it from the saddle two hours every morning during four months of the year or so. Absolutely all, with Allègre self-denyingly on her right hand, with that impenetrable air of guardianship. Don’t touch! He didn’t like his treasures to be touched unless he actually put some unique object into your hands with a sort of triumphant murmur, ‘Look close at that.’ Of course I only have heard all this. I am much too small a person, you understand, to even . . .”

He flashed his white teeth at us most agreeably, but the upper part of his face, the shadowed setting of his eyes, and the slight drawing in of his eyebrows gave a fatal suggestion. I thought suddenly of the definition he applied to himself: “Américain, catholique et gentil-homme” completed by that startling “I live by my sword” uttered in a light drawing-room tone tinged by a flavour of mockery lighter even than air.

He insisted to us that the first and only time he had seen Allègre a little close was that morning in the Bois with his mother. His Majesty (whom God preserve), then not even an active Pretender, flanked the girl, still a girl, on the other side, the usual companion for a month past or so. Allègre had suddenly taken it into his head to paint his portrait. A sort of intimacy had sprung up. Mrs. Blunt’s remark was that of the two striking horsemen Allègre looked the more kingly.

“The son of a confounded millionaire soap-boiler,” commented Mr. Blunt through his clenched teeth. “A man absolutely without parentage. Without a single relation in the world. Just a freak.”

“That explains why he could leave all his fortune to her,” said Mills.

“The will, I believe,” said Mr. Blunt moodily, “was written on a half sheet of paper, with his device of an Assyrian bull at the head. What the devil did he mean by it? Anyway it was the last time that she surveyed the world of men and women from the saddle. Less than three months later. . .”

“Allègre died and. . .” murmured Mills in an interested manner.

“And she had to dismount,” broke in Mr. Blunt grimly. “Dismount right into the middle of it. Down to the very ground, you understand. I suppose you can guess what that would mean. She didn’t know what to do with herself. She had never been on the ground. She . . .”

“Aha!” said Mills.

“Even eh! eh! if you like,” retorted Mr. Blunt, in an unrefined tone, that made me open my eyes, which were well opened before, still wider.

He turned to me with that horrible trick of his of commenting upon Mills as though that quiet man whom I admired, whom I trusted, and for whom I had already something resembling affection had been as much of a dummy as that other one lurking in the shadows, pitiful and headless in its attitude of alarmed chastity.

“Nothing escapes his penetration. He can perceive a haystack at an enormous distance when he is interested.”

I thought this was going rather too far, even to the borders of vulgarity; but Mills remained untroubled and only reached for his tobacco pouch.

“But that’s nothing to my mother’s interest. She can never see a haystack, therefore she is always so surprised and excited. Of course Doña Rita was not a woman about whom the newspapers insert little paragraphs. But Allègre was the sort of man. A lot came out in print about him and a lot was talked in the world about her; and at once my dear mother perceived a haystack and naturally became unreasonably absorbed in it. I thought her interest would wear out. But it didn’t. She had received a shock and had received an impression by means of that girl. My mother has never been treated with impertinence before, and the aesthetic impression must have been of extraordinary strength. I must suppose that it amounted to a sort of moral revolution, I can’t account for her proceedings in any other way. When Rita turned up in Paris a year and a half after Allègre’s death some shabby journalist (smart creature) hit upon the notion of alluding to her as the heiress of Mr. Allègre. ‘The heiress of Mr. Allègre has taken up her residence again amongst the treasures of art in that Pavilion so well known to the élite of the artistic, scientific, and political world, not to speak of the

members of aristocratic and even royal families. . . ‘ You know the sort of thing. It appeared first in the Figaro, I believe. And then at the end a little phrase: ‘She is alone.’ She was in a fair way of becoming a celebrity of a sort. Daily little allusions and that sort of thing. Heaven only knows who stopped it. There was a rush of ‘old friends’ into that garden, enough to scare all the little birds away. I suppose one or several of them, having influence with the press, did it. But the gossip didn’t stop, and the name stuck, too, since it conveyed a very certain and very significant sort of fact, and of course the Venetian episode was talked about in the houses frequented by my mother. It was talked about from a royalist point of view with a kind of respect. It was even said that the inspiration and the resolution of the war going on now over the Pyrenees had come out from that head. . . Some of them talked as if she were the guardian angel of Legitimacy. You know what royalist gush is like.”

Mr. Blunt’s face expressed sarcastic disgust. Mills moved his head the least little bit. Apparently he knew.

“Well, speaking with all possible respect, it seems to have affected my mother’s brain. I was already with the royal army and of course there could be no question of regular postal communications with France. My mother hears or overhears somewhere that the heiress of Mr. Allègre is contemplating a secret journey. All the noble Salons were full of chatter about that secret naturally. So she sits down and pens an autograph: ‘Madame, Informed that you are proceeding to the place on which the hopes of all the right thinking people are fixed, I trust to your womanly sympathy with a mother’s anxious feelings, etc., etc.,’ and ending with a request to take messages to me and bring news of me. . . The coolness of my mother!”

Most unexpectedly Mills was heard murmuring a question which seemed to me very odd.

“I wonder how your mother addressed that note?”

A moment of silence ensued.

“Hardly in the newspaper style, I should think,” retorted Mr. Blunt, with one of his grins that made me doubt the stability of his feelings and the consistency of his outlook in regard to his whole tale. “My mother’s maid took it in a fiacre very late one evening to the Pavilion and brought an answer scrawled on a scrap of paper: ‘Write your messages at once’ and signed with a big capital R. So my mother sat down again to her charming

writing desk and the maid made another journey in a fiacre just before midnight; and ten days later or so I got a letter thrust into my hand at the avanzadas just as I was about to start on a night patrol, together with a note asking me to call on the writer so that she might allay my mother's anxieties by telling her how I looked.

"It was signed R only, but I guessed at once and nearly fell off my horse with surprise."

"You mean to say that Doña Rita was actually at the Royal Headquarters lately?" exclaimed Mills, with evident surprise. "Why, we — everybody — thought that all this affair was over and done with."

"Absolutely. Nothing in the world could be more done with than that episode. Of course the rooms in the hotel at Tolosa were retained for her by an order from Royal Headquarters. Two garret-rooms, the place was so full of all sorts of court people; but I can assure you that for the three days she was there she never put her head outside the door. General Mongroviejo called on her officially from the King. A general, not anybody of the household, you see. That's a distinct shade of the present relation. He stayed just five minutes. Some personage from the Foreign department at Headquarters was closeted for about a couple of hours. That was of course business. Then two officers from the staff came together with some explanations or instructions to her. Then Baron H., a fellow with a pretty wife, who had made so many sacrifices for the cause, raised a great to-do about seeing her and she consented to receive him for a moment. They say he was very much frightened by her arrival, but after the interview went away all smiles. Who else? Yes, the Archbishop came. Half an hour. This is more than is necessary to give a blessing, and I can't conceive what else he had to give her. But I am sure he got something out of her. Two peasants from the upper valley were sent for by military authorities and she saw them, too. That friar who hangs about the court has been in and out several times. Well, and lastly, I myself. I got leave from the outposts. That was the first time I talked to her. I would have gone that evening back to the regiment, but the friar met me in the corridor and informed me that I would be ordered to escort that most loyal and noble lady back to the French frontier as a personal mission of the highest honour. I was inclined to laugh at him. He himself is a cheery and jovial person and he laughed with me quite readily — but I got the order before dark all right. It was rather a job, as the Alphonsists were attacking the right flank of our whole

front and there was some considerable disorder there. I mounted her on a mule and her maid on another. We spent one night in a ruined old tower occupied by some of our infantry and got away at daybreak under the Alphonsist shells. The maid nearly died of fright and one of the troopers with us was wounded. To smuggle her back across the frontier was another job but it wasn't my job. It wouldn't have done for her to appear in sight of French frontier posts in the company of Carlist uniforms. She seems to have a fearless streak in her nature. At one time as we were climbing a slope absolutely exposed to artillery fire I asked her on purpose, being provoked by the way she looked about at the scenery, 'A little emotion, eh?' And she answered me in a low voice: 'Oh, yes! I am moved. I used to run about these hills when I was little.' And note, just then the trooper close behind us had been wounded by a shell fragment. He was swearing awfully and fighting with his horse. The shells were falling around us about two to the minute.

"Luckily the Alphonsist shells are not much better than our own. But women are funny. I was afraid the maid would jump down and clear out amongst the rocks, in which case we should have had to dismount and catch her. But she didn't do that; she sat perfectly still on her mule and shrieked. Just simply shrieked. Ultimately we came to a curiously shaped rock at the end of a short wooded valley. It was very still there and the sunshine was brilliant. I said to Doña Rita: 'We will have to part in a few minutes. I understand that my mission ends at this rock.' And she said: 'I know this rock well. This is my country.'

"Then she thanked me for bringing her there and presently three peasants appeared, waiting for us, two youths and one shaven old man, with a thin nose like a sword blade and perfectly round eyes, a character well known to the whole Carlist army. The two youths stopped under the trees at a distance, but the old fellow came quite close up and gazed at her, screwing up his eyes as if looking at the sun. Then he raised his arm very slowly and took his red boina off his bald head. I watched her smiling at him all the time. I daresay she knew him as well as she knew the old rock. Very old rock. The rock of ages — and the aged man — landmarks of her youth. Then the mules started walking smartly forward, with the three peasants striding alongside of them, and vanished between the trees. These fellows were most likely sent out by her uncle the Cura.

“It was a peaceful scene, the morning light, the bit of open country framed in steep stony slopes, a high peak or two in the distance, the thin smoke of some invisible caserios, rising straight up here and there. Far away behind us the guns had ceased and the echoes in the gorges had died out. I never knew what peace meant before. . .

“Nor since,” muttered Mr. Blunt after a pause and then went on. “The little stone church of her uncle, the holy man of the family, might have been round the corner of the next spur of the nearest hill. I dismounted to bandage the shoulder of my trooper. It was only a nasty long scratch. While I was busy about it a bell began to ring in the distance. The sound fell deliciously on the ear, clear like the morning light. But it stopped all at once. You know how a distant bell stops suddenly. I never knew before what stillness meant. While I was wondering at it the fellow holding our horses was moved to uplift his voice. He was a Spaniard, not a Basque, and he trolled out in Castilian that song you know,

“‘Oh bells of my native village,  
I am going away . . . good-bye!’

He had a good voice. When the last note had floated away I remounted, but there was a charm in the spot, something particular and individual because while we were looking at it before turning our horses’ heads away the singer said: ‘I wonder what is the name of this place,’ and the other man remarked: ‘Why, there is no village here,’ and the first one insisted: ‘No, I mean this spot, this very place.’ The wounded trooper decided that it had no name probably. But he was wrong. It had a name. The hill, or the rock, or the wood, or the whole had a name. I heard of it by chance later. It was — Lastaola.”

A cloud of tobacco smoke from Mills’ pipe drove between my head and the head of Mr. Blunt, who, strange to say, yawned slightly. It seemed to me an obvious affectation on the part of that man of perfect manners, and, moreover, suffering from distressing insomnia.

“This is how we first met and how we first parted,” he said in a weary, indifferent tone. “It’s quite possible that she did see her uncle on the way. It’s perhaps on this occasion that she got her sister to come out of the wilderness. I have no doubt she had a pass from the French Government giving her the completest freedom of action. She must have got it in Paris before leaving.”

Mr. Blunt broke out into worldly, slightly cynical smiles.



“She can get anything she likes in Paris. She could get a whole army over the frontier if she liked. She could get herself admitted into the Foreign Office at one o’clock in the morning if it so pleased her. Doors fly open before the heiress of Mr. Allègre. She has inherited the old friends, the old connections . . . Of course, if she were a toothless old woman . . . But, you see, she isn’t. The ushers in all the ministries bow down to the ground therefore, and voices from the innermost sanctums take on an eager tone when they say, ‘Faites entrer.’ My mother knows something about it. She has followed her career with the greatest attention. And Rita herself is not even surprised. She accomplishes most extraordinary things, as naturally as buying a pair of gloves. People in the shops are very polite and people in the world are like people in the shops. What did she know of the world? She had seen it only from the saddle. Oh, she will get your cargo released for you all right. How will she do it? . . . Well, when it’s done — you follow me, Mills? — when it’s done she will hardly know herself.”

“It’s hardly possible that she shouldn’t be aware,” Mills pronounced calmly.

“No, she isn’t an idiot,” admitted Mr. Blunt, in the same matter-of-fact voice. “But she confessed to myself only the other day that she suffered from a sense of unreality. I told her that at any rate she had her own feelings surely. And she said to me: Yes, there was one of them at least about which she had no doubt; and you will never guess what it was. Don’t try. I happen to know, because we are pretty good friends.”

At that moment we all changed our attitude slightly. Mills’ staring eyes moved for a glance towards Blunt, I, who was occupying the divan, raised myself on the cushions a little and Mr. Blunt, with half a turn, put his elbow on the table.

“I asked her what it was. I don’t see,” went on Mr. Blunt, with a perfectly horrible gentleness, “why I should have shown particular consideration to the heiress of Mr. Allègre. I don’t mean to that particular mood of hers. It was the mood of weariness. And so she told me. It’s fear. I will say it once again: Fear. . . .”

He added after a pause, “There can be not the slightest doubt of her courage. But she distinctly uttered the word fear.”

There was under the table the noise of Mills stretching his legs.

“A person of imagination,” he began, “a young, virgin intelligence, steeped for nearly five years in the talk of Allègre’s studio, where every

hard truth had been cracked and every belief had been worried into shreds. They were like a lot of intellectual dogs, you know . . .”

“Yes, yes, of course,” Blunt interrupted hastily, “the intellectual personality altogether adrift, a soul without a home . . . but I, who am neither very fine nor very deep, I am convinced that the fear is material.”

“Because she confessed to it being that?” insinuated Mills.

“No, because she didn’t,” contradicted Blunt, with an angry frown and in an extremely suave voice. “In fact, she bit her tongue. And considering what good friends we are (under fire together and all that) I conclude that there is nothing there to boast of. Neither is my friendship, as a matter of fact.”

Mills’ face was the very perfection of indifference. But I who was looking at him, in my innocence, to discover what it all might mean, I had a notion that it was perhaps a shade too perfect.

“My leave is a farce,” Captain Blunt burst out, with a most unexpected exasperation. “As an officer of Don Carlos, I have no more standing than a bandit. I ought to have been interned in those filthy old barracks in Avignon a long time ago. . . Why am I not? Because Doña Rita exists and for no other reason on earth. Of course it’s known that I am about. She has only to whisper over the wires to the Minister of the Interior, ‘Put that bird in a cage for me,’ and the thing would be done without any more formalities than that. . . Sad world this,” he commented in a changed tone. “Nowadays a gentleman who lives by his sword is exposed to that sort of thing.”

It was then for the first time I heard Mr. Mills laugh. It was a deep, pleasant, kindly note, not very loud and altogether free from that quality of derision that spoils so many laughs and gives away the secret hardness of hearts. But neither was it a very joyous laugh.

“But the truth of the matter is that I am ‘en mission,’” continued Captain Blunt. “I have been instructed to settle some things, to set other things going, and, by my instructions, Doña Rita is to be the intermediary for all those objects. And why? Because every bald head in this Republican Government gets pink at the top whenever her dress rustles outside the door. They bow with immense deference when the door opens, but the bow conceals a smirk because of those Venetian days. That confounded Versoy shoved his nose into that business; he says accidentally. He saw them together on the Lido and (those writing fellows are horrible) he wrote what he calls a vignette (I suppose accidentally, too) under that very title. There

was in it a Prince and a lady and a big dog. He described how the Prince on landing from the gondola emptied his purse into the hands of a picturesque old beggar, while the lady, a little way off, stood gazing back at Venice with the dog romantically stretched at her feet. One of Versoy's beautiful prose vignettes in a great daily that has a literary column. But some other papers that didn't care a cent for literature rehashed the mere fact. And that's the sort of fact that impresses your political man, especially if the lady is, well, such as she is . . ."

He paused. His dark eyes flashed fatally, away from us, in the direction of the shy dummy; and then he went on with cultivated cynicism.

"So she rushes down here. Overdone, weary, rest for her nerves. Nonsense. I assure you she has no more nerves than I have."

I don't know how he meant it, but at that moment, slim and elegant, he seemed a mere bundle of nerves himself, with the flitting expressions on his thin, well-bred face, with the restlessness of his meagre brown hands amongst the objects on the table. With some pipe ash amongst a little spilt wine his forefinger traced a capital R. Then he looked into an empty glass profoundly. I have a notion that I sat there staring and listening like a yokel at a play. Mills' pipe was lying quite a foot away in front of him, empty, cold. Perhaps he had no more tobacco. Mr. Blunt assumed his dandified air — nervously.

"Of course her movements are commented on in the most exclusive drawing-rooms and also in other places, also exclusive, but where the gossip takes on another tone. There they are probably saying that she has got a 'coup de coeur' for some one. Whereas I think she is utterly incapable of that sort of thing. That Venetian affair, the beginning of it and the end of it, was nothing but a coup de tête, and all those activities in which I am involved, as you see (by order of Headquarters, ha, ha, ha!), are nothing but that, all this connection, all this intimacy into which I have dropped . . . Not to speak of my mother, who is delightful, but as irresponsible as one of those crazy princesses that shock their Royal families. . . "

He seemed to bite his tongue and I observed that Mills' eyes seemed to have grown wider than I had ever seen them before. In that tranquil face it was a great play of feature. "An intimacy," began Mr. Blunt, with an extremely refined grimness of tone, "an intimacy with the heiress of Mr.

Allègre on the part of . . . on my part, well, it isn't exactly . . . it's open . . . well, I leave it to you, what does it look like?"

"Is there anybody looking on?" Mills let fall, gently, through his kindly lips.

"Not actually, perhaps, at this moment. But I don't need to tell a man of the world, like you, that such things cannot remain unseen. And that they are, well, compromising, because of the mere fact of the fortune."

Mills got on his feet, looked for his jacket and after getting into it made himself heard while he looked for his hat.

"Whereas the woman herself is, so to speak, priceless."

Mr. Blunt muttered the word "Obviously."

By then we were all on our feet. The iron stove glowed no longer and the lamp, surrounded by empty bottles and empty glasses, had grown dimmer.

I know that I had a great shiver on getting away from the cushions of the divan.

"We will meet again in a few hours," said Mr. Blunt.

"Don't forget to come," he said, addressing me. "Oh, yes, do. Have no scruples. I am authorized to make invitations."

He must have noticed my shyness, my surprise, my embarrassment. And indeed I didn't know what to say.

"I assure you there isn't anything incorrect in your coming," he insisted, with the greatest civility. "You will be introduced by two good friends, Mills and myself. Surely you are not afraid of a very charming woman. . . ."

I was not afraid, but my head swam a little and I only looked at him mutely.

"Lunch precisely at midday. Mills will bring you along. I am sorry you two are going. I shall throw myself on the bed for an hour or two, but I am sure I won't sleep."

He accompanied us along the passage into the black-and-white hall, where the low gas flame glimmered forlornly. When he opened the front door the cold blast of the mistral rushing down the street of the Consuls made me shiver to the very marrow of my bones.

Mills and I exchanged but a few words as we walked down towards the centre of the town. In the chill tempestuous dawn he strolled along musingly, disregarding the discomfort of the cold, the depressing influence of the hour, the desolation of the empty streets in which the dry dust rose in

whirls in front of us, behind us, flew upon us from the side streets. The masks had gone home and our footsteps echoed on the flagstones with unequal sound as of men without purpose, without hope.

“I suppose you will come,” said Mills suddenly.

“I really don’t know,” I said.

“Don’t you? Well, remember I am not trying to persuade you; but I am staying at the Hôtel de Louvre and I shall leave there at a quarter to twelve for that lunch. At a quarter to twelve, not a minute later. I suppose you can sleep?”

I laughed.

“Charming age, yours,” said Mills, as we came out on the quays.

Already dim figures of the workers moved in the biting dawn and the masted forms of ships were coming out dimly, as far as the eye could reach down the old harbour.

“Well,” Mills began again, “you may oversleep yourself.”

This suggestion was made in a cheerful tone, just as we shook hands at the lower end of the Cannebière. He looked very burly as he walked away from me. I went on towards my lodgings. My head was very full of confused images, but I was really too tired to think.

## **PART TWO**

## CHAPTER I

Sometimes I wonder yet whether Mills wished me to oversleep myself or not: that is, whether he really took sufficient interest to care. His uniform kindness of manner made it impossible for me to tell. And I can hardly remember my own feelings. Did I care? The whole recollection of that time of my life has such a peculiar quality that the beginning and the end of it are merged in one sensation of profound emotion, continuous and overpowering, containing the extremes of exultation, full of careless joy and of an invincible sadness — like a day-dream. The sense of all this having been gone through as if in one great rush of imagination is all the stronger in the distance of time, because it had something of that quality even then: of fate unprovoked, of events that didn't cast any shadow before.

Not that those events were in the least extraordinary. They were, in truth, commonplace. What to my backward glance seems startling and a little awful is their punctualness and inevitability. Mills was punctual. Exactly at a quarter to twelve he appeared under the lofty portal of the Hôtel de Louvre, with his fresh face, his ill-fitting grey suit, and enveloped in his own sympathetic atmosphere.

How could I have avoided him? To this day I have a shadowy conviction of his inherent distinction of mind and heart, far beyond any man I have ever met since. He was unavoidable: and of course I never tried to avoid him. The first sight on which his eyes fell was a victoria pulled up before the hotel door, in which I sat with no sentiment I can remember now but that of some slight shyness. He got in without a moment's hesitation, his friendly glance took me in from head to foot and (such was his peculiar gift) gave me a pleasurable sensation.

After we had gone a little way I couldn't help saying to him with a bashful laugh: "You know, it seems very extraordinary that I should be driving out with you like this."

He turned to look at me and in his kind voice:

"You will find everything extremely simple," he said. "So simple that you will be quite able to hold your own. I suppose you know that the world is selfish, I mean the majority of the people in it, often unconsciously I must admit, and especially people with a mission, with a fixed idea, with some fantastic object in view, or even with only some fantastic illusion. That

doesn't mean that they have no scruples. And I don't know that at this moment I myself am not one of them."

"That, of course, I can't say," I retorted.

"I haven't seen her for years," he said, "and in comparison with what she was then she must be very grown up by now. From what we heard from Mr. Blunt she had experiences which would have matured her more than they would teach her. There are of course people that are not teachable. I don't know that she is one of them. But as to maturity that's quite another thing. Capacity for suffering is developed in every human being worthy of the name."

"Captain Blunt doesn't seem to be a very happy person," I said. "He seems to have a grudge against everybody. People make him wince. The things they do, the things they say. He must be awfully mature."

Mills gave me a sidelong look. It met mine of the same character and we both smiled without openly looking at each other. At the end of the Rue de Rome the violent chilly breath of the mistral enveloped the victoria in a great widening of brilliant sunshine without heat. We turned to the right, circling at a stately pace about the rather mean obelisk which stands at the entrance to the Prado.

"I don't know whether you are mature or not," said Mills humorously. "But I think you will do. You . . ."

"Tell me," I interrupted, "what is really Captain Blunt's position there?"

And I nodded at the alley of the Prado opening before us between the rows of the perfectly leafless trees.

"Thoroughly false, I should think. It doesn't accord either with his illusions or his pretensions, or even with the real position he has in the world. And so what between his mother and the General Headquarters and the state of his own feelings he. . ."

"He is in love with her," I interrupted again.

"That wouldn't make it any easier. I'm not at all sure of that. But if so it can't be a very idealistic sentiment. All the warmth of his idealism is concentrated upon a certain 'Américain, Catholique et gentil-homme. . .'"

The smile which for a moment dwelt on his lips was not unkind.

"At the same time he has a very good grip of the material conditions that surround, as it were, the situation."

"What do you mean? That Doña Rita" (the name came strangely familiar to my tongue) "is rich, that she has a fortune of her own?"



“Yes, a fortune,” said Mills. “But it was Allègre’s fortune before. . . And then there is Blunt’s fortune: he lives by his sword. And there is the fortune of his mother, I assure you a perfectly charming, clever, and most aristocratic old lady, with the most distinguished connections. I really mean it. She doesn’t live by her sword. She . . . she lives by her wits. I have a notion that those two dislike each other heartily at times. . . Here we are.”

The victoria stopped in the side alley, bordered by the low walls of private grounds. We got out before a wrought-iron gateway which stood half open and walked up a circular drive to the door of a large villa of a neglected appearance. The mistral howled in the sunshine, shaking the bare bushes quite furiously. And everything was bright and hard, the air was hard, the light was hard, the ground under our feet was hard.

The door at which Mills rang came open almost at once. The maid who opened it was short, dark, and slightly pockmarked. For the rest, an obvious “femme-de-chambre,” and very busy. She said quickly, “Madame has just returned from her ride,” and went up the stairs leaving us to shut the front door ourselves.

The staircase had a crimson carpet. Mr. Blunt appeared from somewhere in the hall. He was in riding breeches and a black coat with ample square skirts. This get-up suited him but it also changed him extremely by doing away with the effect of flexible slimness he produced in his evening clothes. He looked to me not at all himself but rather like a brother of the man who had been talking to us the night before. He carried about him a delicate perfume of scented soap. He gave us a flash of his white teeth and said:

“It’s a perfect nuisance. We have just dismounted. I will have to lunch as I am. A lifelong habit of beginning her day on horseback. She pretends she is unwell unless she does. I daresay, when one thinks there has been hardly a day for five or six years that she didn’t begin with a ride. That’s the reason she is always rushing away from Paris where she can’t go out in the morning alone. Here, of course, it’s different. And as I, too, am a stranger here I can go out with her. Not that I particularly care to do it.”

These last words were addressed to Mills specially, with the addition of a mumbled remark: “It’s a confounded position.” Then calmly to me with a swift smile: “We have been talking of you this morning. You are expected with impatience.”

“Thank you very much,” I said, “but I can’t help asking myself what I am doing here.”

The upward cast in the eyes of Mills who was facing the staircase made us both, Blunt and I, turn round. The woman of whom I had heard so much, in a sort of way in which I had never heard a woman spoken of before, was coming down the stairs, and my first sensation was that of profound astonishment at this evidence that she did really exist. And even then the visual impression was more of colour in a picture than of the forms of actual life. She was wearing a wrapper, a sort of dressing-gown of pale blue silk embroidered with black and gold designs round the neck and down the front, lapped round her and held together by a broad belt of the same material. Her slippers were of the same colour, with black bows at the instep. The white stairs, the deep crimson of the carpet, and the light blue of the dress made an effective combination of colour to set off the delicate carnation of that face, which, after the first glance given to the whole person, drew irresistibly your gaze to itself by an indefinable quality of charm beyond all analysis and made you think of remote races, of strange generations, of the faces of women sculptured on immemorial monuments and of those lying unsung in their tombs. While she moved downwards from step to step with slightly lowered eyes there flashed upon me suddenly the recollection of words heard at night, of Allègre’s words about her, of there being in her “something of the women of all time.”

At the last step she raised her eyelids, treated us to an exhibition of teeth as dazzling as Mr. Blunt’s and looking even stronger; and indeed, as she approached us she brought home to our hearts (but after all I am speaking only for myself) a vivid sense of her physical perfection in beauty of limb and balance of nerves, and not so much of grace, probably, as of absolute harmony.

She said to us, “I am sorry I kept you waiting.” Her voice was low pitched, penetrating, and of the most seductive gentleness. She offered her hand to Mills very frankly as to an old friend. Within the extraordinarily wide sleeve, lined with black silk, I could see the arm, very white, with a pearly gleam in the shadow. But to me she extended her hand with a slight stiffening, as it were a recoil of her person, combined with an extremely straight glance. It was a finely shaped, capable hand. I bowed over it, and we just touched fingers. I did not look then at her face.

Next moment she caught sight of some envelopes lying on the round marble-topped table in the middle of the hall. She seized one of them with a wonderfully quick, almost feline, movement and tore it open, saying to us, "Excuse me, I must . . . Do go into the dining-room. Captain Blunt, show the way."

Her widened eyes stared at the paper. Mr. Blunt threw one of the doors open, but before we passed through it we heard a petulant exclamation accompanied by childlike stamping with both feet and ending in a laugh which had in it a note of contempt.

The door closed behind us; we had been abandoned by Mr. Blunt. He had remained on the other side, possibly to soothe. The room in which we found ourselves was long like a gallery and ended in a rotunda with many windows. It was long enough for two fireplaces of red polished granite. A table laid out for four occupied very little space. The floor inlaid in two kinds of wood in a bizarre pattern was highly waxed, reflecting objects like still water.

Before very long Doña Rita and Blunt rejoined us and we sat down around the table; but before we could begin to talk a dramatically sudden ring at the front door stilled our incipient animation. Doña Rita looked at us all in turn, with surprise and, as it were, with suspicion. "How did he know I was here?" she whispered after looking at the card which was brought to her. She passed it to Blunt, who passed it to Mills, who made a faint grimace, dropped it on the table-cloth, and only whispered to me, "A journalist from Paris."

"He has run me to earth," said Doña Rita. "One would bargain for peace against hard cash if these fellows weren't always ready to snatch at one's very soul with the other hand. It frightens me."

Her voice floated mysterious and penetrating from her lips, which moved very little. Mills was watching her with sympathetic curiosity. Mr. Blunt muttered: "Better not make the brute angry." For a moment Doña Rita's face, with its narrow eyes, its wide brow, and high cheek bones, became very still; then her colour was a little heightened. "Oh," she said softly, "let him come in. He would be really dangerous if he had a mind — you know," she said to Mills.

The person who had provoked all those remarks and as much hesitation as though he had been some sort of wild beast astonished me on being admitted, first by the beauty of his white head of hair and then by his

paternal aspect and the innocent simplicity of his manner. They laid a cover for him between Mills and Doña Rita, who quite openly removed the envelopes she had brought with her, to the other side of her plate. As openly the man's round china-blue eyes followed them in an attempt to make out the handwriting of the addresses.

He seemed to know, at least slightly, both Mills and Blunt. To me he gave a stare of stupid surprise. He addressed our hostess.

"Resting? Rest is a very good thing. Upon my word, I thought I would find you alone. But you have too much sense. Neither man nor woman has been created to live alone. . . ." After this opening he had all the talk to himself. It was left to him pointedly, and I verily believe that I was the only one who showed an appearance of interest. I couldn't help it. The others, including Mills, sat like a lot of deaf and dumb people. No. It was even something more detached. They sat rather like a very superior lot of waxworks, with the fixed but indetermined facial expression and with that odd air wax figures have of being aware of their existence being but a sham.

I was the exception; and nothing could have marked better my status of a stranger, the completest possible stranger in the moral region in which those people lived, moved, enjoying or suffering their incomprehensible emotions. I was as much of a stranger as the most hopeless castaway stumbling in the dark upon a hut of natives and finding them in the grip of some situation appertaining to the mentalities, prejudices, and problems of an undiscovered country — of a country of which he had not even had one single clear glimpse before.

It was even worse in a way. It ought to have been more disconcerting. For, pursuing the image of the cast-away blundering upon the complications of an unknown scheme of life, it was I, the castaway, who was the savage, the simple innocent child of nature. Those people were obviously more civilized than I was. They had more rites, more ceremonies, more complexity in their sensations, more knowledge of evil, more varied meanings to the subtle phrases of their language. Naturally! I was still so young! And yet I assure you, that just then I lost all sense of inferiority. And why? Of course the carelessness and the ignorance of youth had something to do with that. But there was something else besides. Looking at Doña Rita, her head leaning on her hand, with her dark lashes lowered on the slightly flushed cheek, I felt no longer alone in my youth. That woman of whom I had heard these things I have set down with all the exactness of

unfailing memory, that woman was revealed to me young, younger than anybody I had ever seen, as young as myself (and my sensation of my youth was then very acute); revealed with something peculiarly intimate in the conviction, as if she were young exactly in the same way in which I felt myself young; and that therefore no misunderstanding between us was possible and there could be nothing more for us to know about each other. Of course this sensation was momentary, but it was illuminating; it was a light which could not last, but it left no darkness behind. On the contrary, it seemed to have kindled magically somewhere within me a glow of assurance, of unaccountable confidence in myself: a warm, steady, and eager sensation of my individual life beginning for good there, on that spot, in that sense of solidarity, in that seduction.

## CHAPTER II

For this, properly speaking wonderful, reason I was the only one of the company who could listen without constraint to the unbidden guest with that fine head of white hair, so beautifully kept, so magnificently waved, so artistically arranged that respect could not be felt for it any more than for a very expensive wig in the window of a hair-dresser. In fact, I had an inclination to smile at it. This proves how unconstrained I felt. My mind was perfectly at liberty; and so of all the eyes in that room mine was the only pair able to look about in easy freedom. All the other listeners' eyes were cast down, including Mills' eyes, but that I am sure was only because of his perfect and delicate sympathy. He could not have been concerned otherwise.

The intruder devoured the cutlets — if they were cutlets. Notwithstanding my perfect liberty of mind I was not aware of what we were eating. I have a notion that the lunch was a mere show, except of course for the man with the white hair, who was really hungry and who, besides, must have had the pleasant sense of dominating the situation. He stooped over his plate and worked his jaw deliberately while his blue eyes rolled incessantly; but as a matter of fact he never looked openly at any one of us. Whenever he laid down his knife and fork he would throw himself back and start retailing in a light tone some Parisian gossip about prominent people.

He talked first about a certain politician of mark. His "dear Rita" knew him. His costume dated back to '48, he was made of wood and parchment and still swathed his neck in a white cloth; and even his wife had never been seen in a low-necked dress. Not once in her life. She was buttoned up to the chin like her husband. Well, that man had confessed to him that when he was engaged in political controversy, not on a matter of principle but on some special measure in debate, he felt ready to kill everybody.

He interrupted himself for a comment. "I am something like that myself. I believe it's a purely professional feeling. Carry one's point whatever it is. Normally I couldn't kill a fly. My sensibility is too acute for that. My heart is too tender also. Much too tender. I am a Republican. I am a Red. As to all our present masters and governors, all those people you are trying to turn round your little finger, they are all horrible Royalists in disguise. They are plotting the ruin of all the institutions to which I am devoted. But I have

never tried to spoil your little game, Rita. After all, it's but a little game. You know very well that two or three fearless articles, something in my style, you know, would soon put a stop to all that underhand backing of your king. I am calling him king because I want to be polite to you. He is an adventurer, a blood-thirsty, murderous adventurer, for me, and nothing else. Look here, my dear child, what are you knocking yourself about for? For the sake of that bandit? Allons donc! A pupil of Henry Allègre can have no illusions of that sort about any man. And such a pupil, too! Ah, the good old days in the Pavilion! Don't think I claim any particular intimacy. It was just enough to enable me to offer my services to you, Rita, when our poor friend died. I found myself handy and so I came. It so happened that I was the first. You remember, Rita? What made it possible for everybody to get on with our poor dear Allègre was his complete, equable, and impartial contempt for all mankind. There is nothing in that against the purest democratic principles; but that you, Rita, should elect to throw so much of your life away for the sake of a Royal adventurer, it really knocks me over. For you don't love him. You never loved him, you know."

He made a snatch at her hand, absolutely pulled it away from under her head (it was quite startling) and retaining it in his grasp, proceeded to a paternal patting of the most impudent kind. She let him go on with apparent insensibility. Meanwhile his eyes strayed round the table over our faces. It was very trying. The stupidity of that wandering stare had a paralysing power. He talked at large with husky familiarity.

"Here I come, expecting to find a good sensible girl who had seen at last the vanity of all those things; half-light in the rooms; surrounded by the works of her favourite poets, and all that sort of thing. I say to myself: I must just run in and see the dear wise child, and encourage her in her good resolutions. . . And I fall into the middle of an intime lunch-party. For I suppose it is intime. Eh? Very? H'm, yes . . ."

He was really appalling. Again his wandering stare went round the table, with an expression incredibly incongruous with the words. It was as though he had borrowed those eyes from some idiot for the purpose of that visit. He still held Doña Rita's hand, and, now and then, patted it.

"It's discouraging," he cooed. "And I believe not one of you here is a Frenchman. I don't know what you are all about. It's beyond me. But if we were a Republic — you know I am an old Jacobin, sans-culotte and terrorist — if this were a real Republic with the Convention sitting and a

Committee of Public Safety attending to national business, you would all get your heads cut off. Ha, ha . . . I am joking, ha, ha! . . . and serve you right, too. Don't mind my little joke."

While he was still laughing he released her hand and she leaned her head on it again without haste. She had never looked at him once.

During the rather humiliating silence that ensued he got a leather cigar case like a small valise out of his pocket, opened it and looked with critical interest at the six cigars it contained. The tireless femme-de-chambre set down a tray with coffee cups on the table. We each (glad, I suppose, of something to do) took one, but he, to begin with, sniffed at his. Doña Rita continued leaning on her elbow, her lips closed in a reposeful expression of peculiar sweetness. There was nothing drooping in her attitude. Her face with the delicate carnation of a rose and downcast eyes was as if veiled in firm immobility and was so appealing that I had an insane impulse to walk round and kiss the forearm on which it was leaning; that strong, well-shaped forearm, gleaming not like marble but with a living and warm splendour. So familiar had I become already with her in my thoughts! Of course I didn't do anything of the sort. It was nothing uncontrollable, it was but a tender longing of a most respectful and purely sentimental kind. I performed the act in my thought quietly, almost solemnly, while the creature with the silver hair leaned back in his chair, puffing at his cigar, and began to speak again.

It was all apparently very innocent talk. He informed his "dear Rita" that he was really on his way to Monte Carlo. A lifelong habit of his at this time of the year; but he was ready to run back to Paris if he could do anything for his "chère enfant," run back for a day, for two days, for three days, for any time; miss Monte Carlo this year altogether, if he could be of the slightest use and save her going herself. For instance he could see to it that proper watch was kept over the Pavilion stuffed with all these art treasures. What was going to happen to all those things? . . . Making herself heard for the first time Doña Rita murmured without moving that she had made arrangements with the police to have it properly watched. And I was enchanted by the almost imperceptible play of her lips.

But the anxious creature was not reassured. He pointed out that things had been stolen out of the Louvre, which was, he dared say, even better watched. And there was that marvellous cabinet on the landing, black lacquer with silver herons, which alone would repay a couple of burglars.



A wheelbarrow, some old sacking, and they could trundle it off under people's noses.

"Have you thought it all out?" she asked in a cold whisper, while we three sat smoking to give ourselves a countenance (it was certainly no enjoyment) and wondering what we would hear next.

No, he had not. But he confessed that for years and years he had been in love with that cabinet. And anyhow what was going to happen to the things? The world was greatly exercised by that problem. He turned slightly his beautifully groomed white head so as to address Mr. Blunt directly.

"I had the pleasure of meeting your mother lately."

Mr. Blunt took his time to raise his eyebrows and flash his teeth at him before he dropped negligently, "I can't imagine where you could have met my mother."

"Why, at Bing's, the curio-dealer," said the other with an air of the heaviest possible stupidity. And yet there was something in these few words which seemed to imply that if Mr. Blunt was looking for trouble he would certainly get it. "Bing was bowing her out of his shop, but he was so angry about something that he was quite rude even to me afterwards. I don't think it's very good for Madame votre mère to quarrel with Bing. He is a Parisian personality. He's quite a power in his sphere. All these fellows' nerves are upset from worry as to what will happen to the Allègre collection. And no wonder they are nervous. A big art event hangs on your lips, my dear, great Rita. And by the way, you too ought to remember that it isn't wise to quarrel with people. What have you done to that poor Azzolati? Did you really tell him to get out and never come near you again, or something awful like that? I don't doubt that he was of use to you or to your king. A man who gets invitations to shoot with the President at Rambouillet! I saw him only the other evening; I heard he had been winning immensely at cards; but he looked perfectly wretched, the poor fellow. He complained of your conduct — oh, very much! He told me you had been perfectly brutal with him. He said to me: 'I am no good for anything, mon cher. The other day at Rambouillet, whenever I had a hare at the end of my gun I would think of her cruel words and my eyes would run full of tears. I missed every shot' . . . You are not fit for diplomatic work, you know, ma chère. You are a mere child at it. When you want a middle-aged gentleman to do anything for you, you don't begin by reducing him to

tears. I should have thought any woman would have known that much. A nun would have known that much. What do you say? Shall I run back to Paris and make it up for you with Azzolati?"

He waited for her answer. The compression of his thin lips was full of significance. I was surprised to see our hostess shake her head negatively the least bit, for indeed by her pose, by the thoughtful immobility of her face she seemed to be a thousand miles away from us all, lost in an infinite reverie.

He gave it up. "Well, I must be off. The express for Nice passes at four o'clock. I will be away about three weeks and then you shall see me again. Unless I strike a run of bad luck and get cleaned out, in which case you shall see me before then."

He turned to Mills suddenly.

"Will your cousin come south this year, to that beautiful villa of his at Cannes?"

Mills hardly deigned to answer that he didn't know anything about his cousin's movements.

"A grand seigneur combined with a great connoisseur," opined the other heavily. His mouth had gone slack and he looked a perfect and grotesque imbecile under his wig-like crop of white hair. Positively I thought he would begin to slobber. But he attacked Blunt next.

"Are you on your way down, too? A little flutter. . . It seems to me you haven't been seen in your usual Paris haunts of late. Where have you been all this time?"

"Don't you know where I have been?" said Mr. Blunt with great precision.

"No, I only ferret out things that may be of some use to me," was the unexpected reply, uttered with an air of perfect vacancy and swallowed by Mr. Blunt in blank silence.

At last he made ready to rise from the table. "Think over what I have said, my dear Rita."

"It's all over and done with," was Doña Rita's answer, in a louder tone than I had ever heard her use before. It thrilled me while she continued: "I mean, this thinking." She was back from the remoteness of her meditation, very much so indeed. She rose and moved away from the table, inviting by a sign the other to follow her; which he did at once, yet slowly and as it were warily.

It was a conference in the recess of a window. We three remained seated round the table from which the dark maid was removing the cups and the plates with brusque movements. I gazed frankly at Doña Rita's profile, irregular, animated, and fascinating in an undefinable way, at her well-shaped head with the hair twisted high up and apparently held in its place by a gold arrow with a jewelled shaft. We couldn't hear what she said, but the movement of her lips and the play of her features were full of charm, full of interest, expressing both audacity and gentleness. She spoke with fire without raising her voice. The man listened round-shouldered, but seeming much too stupid to understand. I could see now and then that he was speaking, but he was inaudible. At one moment Doña Rita turned her head to the room and called out to the maid, "Give me my hand-bag off the sofa."

At this the other was heard plainly, "No, no," and then a little lower, "You have no tact, Rita. . . ." Then came her argument in a low, penetrating voice which I caught, "Why not? Between such old friends." However, she waved away the hand-bag, he calmed down, and their voices sank again. Presently I saw him raise her hand to his lips, while with her back to the room she continued to contemplate out of the window the bare and untidy garden. At last he went out of the room, throwing to the table an airy "Bonjour, bonjour," which was not acknowledged by any of us three.

### CHAPTER III

Mills got up and approached the figure at the window. To my extreme surprise, Mr. Blunt, after a moment of obviously painful hesitation, hastened out after the man with the white hair.

In consequence of these movements I was left to myself and I began to be uncomfortably conscious of it when Doña Rita, near the window, addressed me in a raised voice.

“We have no confidences to exchange, Mr. Mills and I.”

I took this for an encouragement to join them. They were both looking at me. Doña Rita added, “Mr. Mills and I are friends from old times, you know.”

Bathed in the softened reflection of the sunshine, which did not fall directly into the room, standing very straight with her arms down, before Mills, and with a faint smile directed to me, she looked extremely young, and yet mature. There was even, for a moment, a slight dimple in her cheek.

“How old, I wonder?” I said, with an answering smile.

“Oh, for ages, for ages,” she exclaimed hastily, frowning a little, then she went on addressing herself to Mills, apparently in continuation of what she was saying before.

. . . “This man’s is an extreme case, and yet perhaps it isn’t the worst. But that’s the sort of thing. I have no account to render to anybody, but I don’t want to be dragged along all the gutters where that man picks up his living.”

She had thrown her head back a little but there was no scorn, no angry flash under the dark-lashed eyelids. The words did not ring. I was struck for the first time by the even, mysterious quality of her voice.

“Will you let me suggest,” said Mills, with a grave, kindly face, “that being what you are, you have nothing to fear?”

“And perhaps nothing to lose,” she went on without bitterness. “No. It isn’t fear. It’s a sort of dread. You must remember that no nun could have had a more protected life. Henry Allègre had his greatness. When he faced the world he also masked it. He was big enough for that. He filled the whole field of vision for me.”

“You found that enough?” asked Mills.

“Why ask now?” she remonstrated. “The truth — the truth is that I never asked myself. Enough or not there was no room for anything else. He was the shadow and the light and the form and the voice. He would have it so. The morning he died they came to call me at four o’clock. I ran into his room bare-footed. He recognized me and whispered, ‘You are flawless.’ I was very frightened. He seemed to think, and then said very plainly, ‘Such is my character. I am like that.’ These were the last words he spoke. I hardly noticed them then. I was thinking that he was lying in a very uncomfortable position and I asked him if I should lift him up a little higher on the pillows. You know I am very strong. I could have done it. I had done it before. He raised his hand off the blanket just enough to make a sign that he didn’t want to be touched. It was the last gesture he made. I hung over him and then — and then I nearly ran out of the house just as I was, in my night-gown. I think if I had been dressed I would have run out of the garden, into the street — run away altogether. I had never seen death. I may say I had never heard of it. I wanted to run from it.”

She paused for a long, quiet breath. The harmonized sweetness and daring of her face was made pathetic by her downcast eyes.

“Fuir la mort,” she repeated, meditatively, in her mysterious voice.

Mills’ big head had a little movement, nothing more. Her glance glided for a moment towards me like a friendly recognition of my right to be there, before she began again.

“My life might have been described as looking at mankind from a fourth-floor window for years. When the end came it was like falling out of a balcony into the street. It was as sudden as that. Once I remember somebody was telling us in the Pavilion a tale about a girl who jumped down from a fourth-floor window. . . For love, I believe,” she interjected very quickly, “and came to no harm. Her guardian angel must have slipped his wings under her just in time. He must have. But as to me, all I know is that I didn’t break anything — not even my heart. Don’t be shocked, Mr. Mills. It’s very likely that you don’t understand.”

“Very likely,” Mills assented, unmoved. “But don’t be too sure of that.”

“Henry Allègre had the highest opinion of your intelligence,” she said unexpectedly and with evident seriousness. “But all this is only to tell you that when he was gone I found myself down there unhurt, but dazed, bewildered, not sufficiently stunned. It so happened that that creature was somewhere in the neighbourhood. How he found out. . . But it’s his

business to find out things. And he knows, too, how to worm his way in anywhere. Indeed, in the first days he was useful and somehow he made it look as if Heaven itself had sent him. In my distress I thought I could never sufficiently repay. . . Well, I have been paying ever since.”

“What do you mean?” asked Mills softly. “In hard cash?”

“Oh, it’s really so little,” she said. “I told you it wasn’t the worst case. I stayed on in that house from which I nearly ran away in my nightgown. I stayed on because I didn’t know what to do next. He vanished as he had come on the track of something else, I suppose. You know he really has got to get his living some way or other. But don’t think I was deserted. On the contrary. People were coming and going, all sorts of people that Henry Allègre used to know — or had refused to know. I had a sensation of plotting and intriguing around me, all the time. I was feeling morally bruised, sore all over, when, one day, Don Rafael de Villarel sent in his card. A grandee. I didn’t know him, but, as you are aware, there was hardly a personality of mark or position that hasn’t been talked about in the Pavilion before me. Of him I had only heard that he was a very austere and pious person, always at Mass, and that sort of thing. I saw a frail little man with a long, yellow face and sunken fanatical eyes, an Inquisitor, an unfrocked monk. One missed a rosary from his thin fingers. He gazed at me terribly and I couldn’t imagine what he might want. I waited for him to pull out a crucifix and sentence me to the stake there and then. But no; he dropped his eyes and in a cold, righteous sort of voice informed me that he had called on behalf of the prince — he called him His Majesty. I was amazed by the change. I wondered now why he didn’t slip his hands into the sleeves of his coat, you know, as begging Friars do when they come for a subscription. He explained that the Prince asked for permission to call and offer me his condolences in person. We had seen a lot of him our last two months in Paris that year. Henry Allègre had taken a fancy to paint his portrait. He used to ride with us nearly every morning. Almost without thinking I said I should be pleased. Don Rafael was shocked at my want of formality, but bowed to me in silence, very much as a monk bows, from the waist. If he had only crossed his hands flat on his chest it would have been perfect. Then, I don’t know why, something moved me to make him a deep curtsy as he backed out of the room, leaving me suddenly impressed, not only with him but with myself too. I had my door closed to everybody else that afternoon and the Prince came with a very proper sorrowful face, but

five minutes after he got into the room he was laughing as usual, made the whole little house ring with it. You know his big, irresistible laugh. . . .”

“No,” said Mills, a little abruptly, “I have never seen him.”

“No,” she said, surprised, “and yet you . . .”

“I understand,” interrupted Mills. “All this is purely accidental. You must know that I am a solitary man of books but with a secret taste for adventure which somehow came out; surprising even me.”

She listened with that enigmatic, still, under the eyelids glance, and a friendly turn of the head.

“I know you for a frank and loyal gentleman. . . Adventure — and books? Ah, the books! Haven’t I turned stacks of them over! Haven’t I? . . .”

“Yes,” murmured Mills. “That’s what one does.”

She put out her hand and laid it lightly on Mills’ sleeve.

“Listen, I don’t need to justify myself, but if I had known a single woman in the world, if I had only had the opportunity to observe a single one of them, I would have been perhaps on my guard. But you know I hadn’t. The only woman I had anything to do with was myself, and they say that one can’t know oneself. It never entered my head to be on my guard against his warmth and his terrible obviousness. You and he were the only two, infinitely different, people, who didn’t approach me as if I had been a precious object in a collection, an ivory carving or a piece of Chinese porcelain. That’s why I have kept you in my memory so well. Oh! you were not obvious! As to him — I soon learned to regret I was not some object, some beautiful, carved object of bone or bronze; a rare piece of porcelain, *pâte dure*, not *pâte tendre*. A pretty specimen.”

“Rare, yes. Even unique,” said Mills, looking at her steadily with a smile. “But don’t try to depreciate yourself. You were never pretty. You are not pretty. You are worse.”

Her narrow eyes had a mischievous gleam. “Do you find such sayings in your books?” she asked.

“As a matter of fact I have,” said Mills, with a little laugh, “found this one in a book. It was a woman who said that of herself. A woman far from common, who died some few years ago. She was an actress. A great artist.”

“A great! . . . Lucky person! She had that refuge, that garment, while I stand here with nothing to protect me from evil fame; a naked temperament

for any wind to blow upon. Yes, greatness in art is a protection. I wonder if there would have been anything in me if I had tried? But Henry Allègre would never let me try. He told me that whatever I could achieve would never be good enough for what I was. The perfection of flattery! Was it that he thought I had not talent of any sort? It's possible. He would know. I've had the idea since that he was jealous. He wasn't jealous of mankind any more than he was afraid of thieves for his collection; but he may have been jealous of what he could see in me, of some passion that could be aroused. But if so he never repented. I shall never forget his last words. He saw me standing beside his bed, defenceless, symbolic and forlorn, and all he found to say was, 'Well, I am like that.'

I forgot myself in watching her. I had never seen anybody speak with less play of facial muscles. In the fullness of its life her face preserved a sort of immobility. The words seemed to form themselves, fiery or pathetic, in the air, outside her lips. Their design was hardly disturbed; a design of sweetness, gravity, and force as if born from the inspiration of some artist; for I had never seen anything to come up to it in nature before or since.

All this was part of the enchantment she cast over me; and I seemed to notice that Mills had the aspect of a man under a spell. If he too was a captive then I had no reason to feel ashamed of my surrender.

"And you know," she began again abruptly, "that I have been accustomed to all the forms of respect."

"That's true," murmured Mills, as if involuntarily.

"Well, yes," she reaffirmed. "My instinct may have told me that my only protection was obscurity, but I didn't know how and where to find it. Oh, yes, I had that instinct . . . But there were other instincts and . . . How am I to tell you? I didn't know how to be on guard against myself, either. Not a soul to speak to, or to get a warning from. Some woman soul that would have known, in which perhaps I could have seen my own reflection. I assure you the only woman that ever addressed me directly, and that was in writing, was . . ."

She glanced aside, saw Mr. Blunt returning from the hall and added rapidly in a lowered voice,

"His mother."

The bright, mechanical smile of Mr. Blunt gleamed at us right down the room, but he didn't, as it were, follow it in his body. He swerved to the nearest of the two big fireplaces and finding some cigarettes on the



mantelpiece remained leaning on his elbow in the warmth of the bright wood fire. I noticed then a bit of mute play. The heiress of Henry Allègre, who could secure neither obscurity nor any other alleviation to that invidious position, looked as if she would speak to Blunt from a distance; but in a moment the confident eagerness of her face died out as if killed by a sudden thought. I didn't know then her shrinking from all falsehood and evasion; her dread of insincerity and disloyalty of every kind. But even then I felt that at the very last moment her being had recoiled before some shadow of a suspicion. And it occurred to me, too, to wonder what sort of business Mr. Blunt could have had to transact with our odious visitor, of a nature so urgent as to make him run out after him into the hall? Unless to beat him a little with one of the sticks that were to be found there? White hair so much like an expensive wig could not be considered a serious protection. But it couldn't have been that. The transaction, whatever it was, had been much too quiet. I must say that none of us had looked out of the window and that I didn't know when the man did go or if he was gone at all. As a matter of fact he was already far away; and I may just as well say here that I never saw him again in my life. His passage across my field of vision was like that of other figures of that time: not to be forgotten, a little fantastic, infinitely enlightening for my contempt, darkening for my memory which struggles still with the clear lights and the ugly shadows of those unforgotten days.

## CHAPTER IV

It was past four o'clock before I left the house, together with Mills. Mr. Blunt, still in his riding costume, escorted us to the very door. He asked us to send him the first fiacre we met on our way to town. "It's impossible to walk in this get-up through the streets," he remarked, with his brilliant smile.

At this point I propose to transcribe some notes I made at the time in little black books which I have hunted up in the litter of the past; very cheap, common little note-books that by the lapse of years have acquired a touching dimness of aspect, the frayed, worn-out dignity of documents.

Expression on paper has never been my forte. My life had been a thing of outward manifestations. I never had been secret or even systematically taciturn about my simple occupations which might have been foolish but had never required either caution or mystery. But in those four hours since midday a complete change had come over me. For good or evil I left that house committed to an enterprise that could not be talked about; which would have appeared to many senseless and perhaps ridiculous, but was certainly full of risks, and, apart from that, commanded discretion on the ground of simple loyalty. It would not only close my lips but it would to a certain extent cut me off from my usual haunts and from the society of my friends; especially of the light-hearted, young, harum-scarum kind. This was unavoidable. It was because I felt myself thrown back upon my own thoughts and forbidden to seek relief amongst other lives — it was perhaps only for that reason at first I started an irregular, fragmentary record of my days.

I made these notes not so much to preserve the memory (one cared not for any to-morrow then) but to help me to keep a better hold of the actuality. I scribbled them on shore and I scribbled them on the sea; and in both cases they are concerned not only with the nature of the facts but with the intensity of my sensations. It may be, too, that I learned to love the sea for itself only at that time. Woman and the sea revealed themselves to me together, as it were: two mistresses of life's values. The illimitable greatness of the one, the unfathomable seduction of the other working their immemorial spells from generation to generation fell upon my heart at last: a common fortune, an unforgettable memory of the sea's formless might

and of the sovereign charm in that woman's form wherein there seemed to beat the pulse of divinity rather than blood.

I begin here with the notes written at the end of that very day.

— Parted with Mills on the quay. We had walked side by side in absolute silence. The fact is he is too old for me to talk to him freely. For all his sympathy and seriousness I don't know what note to strike and I am not at all certain what he thinks of all this. As we shook hands at parting, I asked him how much longer he expected to stay. And he answered me that it depended on R. She was making arrangements for him to cross the frontier. He wanted to see the very ground on which the Principle of Legitimacy was actually asserting itself arms in hand. It sounded to my positive mind the most fantastic thing in the world, this elimination of personalities from what seemed but the merest political, dynastic adventure. So it wasn't Doña Rita, it wasn't Blunt, it wasn't the Pretender with his big infectious laugh, it wasn't all that lot of politicians, archbishops, and generals, of monks, guerrilleros, and smugglers by sea and land, of dubious agents and shady speculators and undoubted swindlers, who were pushing their fortunes at the risk of their precious skins. No. It was the Legitimist Principle asserting itself! Well, I would accept the view but with one reservation. All the others might have been merged into the idea, but I, the latest recruit, I would not be merged in the Legitimist Principle. Mine was an act of independent assertion. Never before had I felt so intensely aware of my personality. But I said nothing of that to Mills. I only told him I thought we had better not be seen very often together in the streets. He agreed. Hearty handshake. Looked affectionately after his broad back. It never occurred to him to turn his head. What was I in comparison with the Principle of Legitimacy?

Late that night I went in search of Dominic. That Mediterranean sailor was just the man I wanted. He had a great experience of all unlawful things that can be done on the seas and he brought to the practice of them much wisdom and audacity. That I didn't know where he lived was nothing since I knew where he loved. The proprietor of a small, quiet café on the quay, a certain Madame Léonore, a woman of thirty-five with an open Roman face and intelligent black eyes, had captivated his heart years ago. In that café with our heads close together over a marble table, Dominic and I held an earnest and endless confabulation while Madame Léonore, rustling a black silk skirt, with gold earrings, with her raven hair elaborately dressed and

something nonchalant in her movements, would take occasion, in passing to and fro, to rest her hand for a moment on Dominic's shoulder. Later when the little café had emptied itself of its habitual customers, mostly people connected with the work of ships and cargoes, she came quietly to sit at our table and looking at me very hard with her black, sparkling eyes asked Dominic familiarly what had happened to his Signorino. It was her name for me. I was Dominic's Signorino. She knew me by no other; and our connection has always been somewhat of a riddle to her. She said that I was somehow changed since she saw me last. In her rich voice she urged Dominic only to look at my eyes. I must have had some piece of luck come to me either in love or at cards, she bantered. But Dominic answered half in scorn that I was not of the sort that runs after that kind of luck. He stated generally that there were some young gentlemen very clever in inventing new ways of getting rid of their time and their money. However, if they needed a sensible man to help them he had no objection himself to lend a hand. Dominic's general scorn for the beliefs, and activities, and abilities of upper-class people covered the Principle of Legitimacy amply; but he could not resist the opportunity to exercise his special faculties in a field he knew of old. He had been a desperate smuggler in his younger days. We settled the purchase of a fast sailing craft. Agreed that it must be a balancelle and something altogether out of the common. He knew of one suitable but she was in Corsica. Offered to start for Bastia by mail-boat in the morning. All the time the handsome and mature Madame Léonore sat by, smiling faintly, amused at her great man joining like this in a frolic of boys. She said the last words of that evening: "You men never grow up," touching lightly the grey hair above his temple.

A fortnight later.

. . . In the afternoon to the Prado. Beautiful day. At the moment of ringing at the door a strong emotion of an anxious kind. Why? Down the length of the dining-room in the rotunda part full of afternoon light Doña R., sitting cross-legged on the divan in the attitude of a very old idol or a very young child and surrounded by many cushions, waves her hand from afar pleasantly surprised, exclaiming: "What! Back already!" I give her all the details and we talk for two hours across a large brass bowl containing a little water placed between us, lighting cigarettes and dropping them, innumerable, puffed at, yet untasted in the overwhelming interest of the conversation. Found her very quick in taking the points and very intelligent

in her suggestions. All formality soon vanished between us and before very long I discovered myself sitting cross-legged, too, while I held forth on the qualities of different Mediterranean sailing craft and on the romantic qualifications of Dominic for the task. I believe I gave her the whole history of the man, mentioning even the existence of Madame Léonore, since the little café would have to be the headquarters of the marine part of the plot.

She murmured, "Ah! Une belle Romaine," thoughtfully. She told me that she liked to hear people of that sort spoken of in terms of our common humanity. She observed also that she wished to see Dominic some day; to set her eyes for once on a man who could be absolutely depended on. She wanted to know whether he had engaged himself in this adventure solely for my sake.

I said that no doubt it was partly that. We had been very close associates in the West Indies from where we had returned together, and he had a notion that I could be depended on, too. But mainly, I suppose, it was from taste. And there was in him also a fine carelessness as to what he did and a love of venturesome enterprise.

"And you," she said. "Is it carelessness, too?"

"In a measure," I said. "Within limits."

"And very soon you will get tired."

"When I do I will tell you. But I may also get frightened. I suppose you know there are risks, I mean apart from the risk of life."

"As for instance," she said.

"For instance, being captured, tried, and sentenced to what they call 'the galleys,' in Ceuta."

"And all this from that love for . . ."

"Not for Legitimacy," I interrupted the inquiry lightly. "But what's the use asking such questions? It's like asking the veiled figure of fate. It doesn't know its own mind nor its own heart. It has no heart. But what if I were to start asking you — who have a heart and are not veiled to my sight?" She dropped her charming adolescent head, so firm in modelling, so gentle in expression. Her uncovered neck was round like the shaft of a column. She wore the same wrapper of thick blue silk. At that time she seemed to live either in her riding habit or in that wrapper folded tightly round her and open low to a point in front. Because of the absence of all trimming round the neck and from the deep view of her bare arms in the

wide sleeve this garment seemed to be put directly on her skin and gave one the impression of one's nearness to her body which would have been troubling but for the perfect unconsciousness of her manner. That day she carried no barbarous arrow in her hair. It was parted on one side, brushed back severely, and tied with a black ribbon, without any bronze mist about her forehead or temple. This smoothness added to the many varieties of her expression also that of child-like innocence.

Great progress in our intimacy brought about unconsciously by our enthusiastic interest in the matter of our discourse and, in the moments of silence, by the sympathetic current of our thoughts. And this rapidly growing familiarity (truly, she had a terrible gift for it) had all the varieties of earnestness: serious, excited, ardent, and even gay. She laughed in contralto; but her laugh was never very long; and when it had ceased, the silence of the room with the light dying in all its many windows seemed to lie about me warmed by its vibration.

As I was preparing to take my leave after a longish pause into which we had fallen as into a vague dream, she came out of it with a start and a quiet sigh. She said, "I had forgotten myself." I took her hand and was raising it naturally, without premeditation, when I felt suddenly the arm to which it belonged become insensible, passive, like a stuffed limb, and the whole woman go inanimate all over! Brusquely I dropped the hand before it reached my lips; and it was so lifeless that it fell heavily on to the divan.

I remained standing before her. She raised to me not her eyes but her whole face, inquisitively — perhaps in appeal.

"No! This isn't good enough for me," I said.

The last of the light gleamed in her long enigmatic eyes as if they were precious enamel in that shadowy head which in its immobility suggested a creation of a distant past: immortal art, not transient life. Her voice had a profound quietness. She excused herself.

"It's only habit — or instinct — or what you like. I have had to practise that in self-defence lest I should be tempted sometimes to cut the arm off."

I remembered the way she had abandoned this very arm and hand to the white-haired ruffian. It rendered me gloomy and idiotically obstinate.

"Very ingenious. But this sort of thing is of no use to me," I declared.

"Make it up," suggested her mysterious voice, while her shadowy figure remained unmoved, indifferent amongst the cushions.

I didn't stir either. I refused in the same low tone.

“No. Not before you give it to me yourself some day.”

“Yes — some day,” she repeated in a breath in which there was no irony but rather hesitation, reluctance what did I know?

I walked away from the house in a curious state of gloomy satisfaction with myself.

And this is the last extract. A month afterwards.

— This afternoon going up to the Villa I was for the first time accompanied in my way by some misgivings. To-morrow I sail.

First trip and therefore in the nature of a trial trip; and I can't overcome a certain gnawing emotion, for it is a trip that mustn't fail. In that sort of enterprise there is no room for mistakes. Of all the individuals engaged in it will every one be intelligent enough, faithful enough, bold enough? Looking upon them as a whole it seems impossible; but as each has got only a limited part to play they may be found sufficient each for his particular trust. And will they be all punctual, I wonder? An enterprise that hangs on the punctuality of many people, no matter how well disposed and even heroic, hangs on a thread. This I have perceived to be also the greatest of Dominic's concerns. He, too, wonders. And when he breathes his doubts the smile lurking under the dark curl of his moustaches is not reassuring.

But there is also something exciting in such speculations and the road to the Villa seemed to me shorter than ever before.

Let in by the silent, ever-active, dark lady's maid, who is always on the spot and always on the way somewhere else, opening the door with one hand, while she passes on, turning on one for a moment her quick, black eyes, which just miss being lustrous, as if some one had breathed on them lightly.

On entering the long room I perceive Mills established in an armchair which he had dragged in front of the divan. I do the same to another and there we sit side by side facing R., tenderly amiable yet somehow distant among her cushions, with an immemorial seriousness in her long, shaded eyes and her fugitive smile hovering about but never settling on her lips. Mills, who is just back from over the frontier, must have been asking R. whether she had been worried again by her devoted friend with the white hair. At least I concluded so because I found them talking of the heart-

broken Azzolati. And after having answered their greetings I sit and listen to Rita addressing Mills earnestly.

“No, I assure you Azzolati had done nothing to me. I knew him. He was a frequent visitor at the Pavilion, though I, personally, never talked with him very much in Henry Allègre’s lifetime. Other men were more interesting, and he himself was rather reserved in his manner to me. He was an international politician and financier — a nobody. He, like many others, was admitted only to feed and amuse Henry Allègre’s scorn of the world, which was insatiable — I tell you.”

“Yes,” said Mills. “I can imagine.”

“But I know. Often when we were alone Henry Allègre used to pour it into my ears. If ever anybody saw mankind stripped of its clothes as the child sees the king in the German fairy tale, it’s I! Into my ears! A child’s! Too young to die of fright. Certainly not old enough to understand — or even to believe. But then his arm was about me. I used to laugh, sometimes. Laugh! At this destruction — at these ruins!”

“Yes,” said Mills, very steady before her fire. “But you have at your service the everlasting charm of life; you are a part of the indestructible.”

“Am I? . . . But there is no arm about me now. The laugh! Where is my laugh? Give me back my laugh. . . .”

And she laughed a little on a low note. I don’t know about Mills, but the subdued shadowy vibration of it echoed in my breast which felt empty for a moment and like a large space that makes one giddy.

“The laugh is gone out of my heart, which at any rate used to feel protected. That feeling’s gone, too. And I myself will have to die some day.”

“Certainly,” said Mills in an unaltered voice. “As to this body you . . .”

“Oh, yes! Thanks. It’s a very poor jest. Change from body to body as travellers used to change horses at post houses. I’ve heard of this before. . . .”

“I’ve no doubt you have,” Mills put on a submissive air. “But are we to hear any more about Azzolati?”

“You shall. Listen. I had heard that he was invited to shoot at Rambouillet — a quiet party, not one of these great shoots. I hear a lot of things. I wanted to have a certain information, also certain hints conveyed to a diplomatic personage who was to be there, too. A personage that would never let me get in touch with him though I had tried many times.”



“Incredible!” mocked Mills solemnly.

“The personage mistrusts his own susceptibility. Born cautious,” explained Doña Rita crisply with the slightest possible quiver of her lips. “Suddenly I had the inspiration to make use of Azzolati, who had been reminding me by a constant stream of messages that he was an old friend. I never took any notice of those pathetic appeals before. But in this emergency I sat down and wrote a note asking him to come and dine with me in my hotel. I suppose you know I don’t live in the Pavilion. I can’t bear the Pavilion now. When I have to go there I begin to feel after an hour or so that it is haunted. I seem to catch sight of somebody I know behind columns, passing through doorways, vanishing here and there. I hear light footsteps behind closed doors. . . My own!”

Her eyes, her half-parted lips, remained fixed till Mills suggested softly, “Yes, but Azzolati.”

Her rigidity vanished like a flake of snow in the sunshine. “Oh! Azzolati. It was a most solemn affair. It had occurred to me to make a very elaborate toilet. It was most successful. Azzolati looked positively scared for a moment as though he had got into the wrong suite of rooms. He had never before seen me en toilette, you understand. In the old days once out of my riding habit I would never dress. I draped myself, you remember, Monsieur Mills. To go about like that suited my indolence, my longing to feel free in my body, as at that time when I used to herd goats. . . But never mind. My aim was to impress Azzolati. I wanted to talk to him seriously.”

There was something whimsical in the quick beat of her eyelids and in the subtle quiver of her lips. “And behold! the same notion had occurred to Azzolati. Imagine that for this tête-à-tête dinner the creature had got himself up as if for a reception at court. He displayed a brochette of all sorts of decorations on the lapel of his frac and had a broad ribbon of some order across his shirt front. An orange ribbon. Bavarian, I should say. Great Roman Catholic, Azzolati. It was always his ambition to be the banker of all the Bourbons in the world. The last remnants of his hair were dyed jet black and the ends of his moustache were like knitting needles. He was disposed to be as soft as wax in my hands. Unfortunately I had had some irritating interviews during the day. I was keeping down sudden impulses to smash a glass, throw a plate on the floor, do something violent to relieve my feelings. His submissive attitude made me still more nervous. He was ready to do anything in the world for me providing that I

would promise him that he would never find my door shut against him as long as he lived. You understand the impudence of it, don't you? And his tone was positively abject, too. I snapped back at him that I had no door, that I was a nomad. He bowed ironically till his nose nearly touched his plate but begged me to remember that to his personal knowledge I had four houses of my own about the world. And you know this made me feel a homeless outcast more than ever — like a little dog lost in the street — not knowing where to go. I was ready to cry and there the creature sat in front of me with an imbecile smile as much as to say 'here is a poser for you. . . .' I gnashed my teeth at him. Quietly, you know . . . I suppose you two think that I am stupid."

She paused as if expecting an answer but we made no sound and she continued with a remark.

"I have days like that. Often one must listen to false protestations, empty words, strings of lies all day long, so that in the evening one is not fit for anything, not even for truth if it comes in one's way. That idiot treated me to a piece of brazen sincerity which I couldn't stand. First of all he began to take me into his confidence; he boasted of his great affairs, then started groaning about his overstrained life which left him no time for the amenities of existence, for beauty, or sentiment, or any sort of ease of heart. His heart! He wanted me to sympathize with his sorrows. Of course I ought to have listened. One must pay for service. Only I was nervous and tired. He bored me. I told him at last that I was surprised that a man of such immense wealth should still keep on going like this reaching for more and more. I suppose he must have been sipping a good deal of wine while we talked and all at once he let out an atrocity which was too much for me. He had been moaning and sentimentalizing but then suddenly he showed me his fangs. 'No,' he cries, 'you can't imagine what a satisfaction it is to feel all that penniless, beggarly lot of the dear, honest, meritorious poor wriggling and slobbering under one's boots.' You may tell me that he is a contemptible animal anyhow, but you should have heard the tone! I felt my bare arms go cold like ice. A moment before I had been hot and faint with sheer boredom. I jumped up from the table, rang for Rose, and told her to bring me my fur cloak. He remained in his chair leering at me curiously. When I had the fur on my shoulders and the girl had gone out of the room I gave him the surprise of his life. 'Take yourself off instantly,' I said. 'Go trample on the poor if you like but never dare speak to me again.' At this he

leaned his head on his arm and sat so long at the table shading his eyes with his hand that I had to ask, calmly — you know — whether he wanted me to have him turned out into the corridor. He fetched an enormous sigh. ‘I have only tried to be honest with you, Rita.’ But by the time he got to the door he had regained some of his impudence. ‘You know how to trample on a poor fellow, too,’ he said. ‘But I don’t mind being made to wriggle under your pretty shoes, Rita. I forgive you. I thought you were free from all vulgar sentimentalism and that you had a more independent mind. I was mistaken in you, that’s all.’ With that he pretends to dash a tear from his eye-crocodile! — and goes out, leaving me in my fur by the blazing fire, my teeth going like castanets. . . Did you ever hear of anything so stupid as this affair?” she concluded in a tone of extreme candour and a profound unreadable stare that went far beyond us both. And the stillness of her lips was so perfect directly she ceased speaking that I wondered whether all this had come through them or only had formed itself in my mind.

Presently she continued as if speaking for herself only.

“It’s like taking the lids off boxes and seeing ugly toads staring at you. In every one. Every one. That’s what it is having to do with men more than mere — Good-morning — Good evening. And if you try to avoid meddling with their lids, some of them will take them off themselves. And they don’t even know, they don’t even suspect what they are showing you. Certain confidences — they don’t see it — are the bitterest kind of insult. I suppose Azzolati imagines himself a noble beast of prey. Just as some others imagine themselves to be most delicate, noble, and refined gentlemen. And as likely as not they would trade on a woman’s troubles — and in the end make nothing of that either. Idiots!”

The utter absence of all anger in this spoken meditation gave it a character of touching simplicity. And as if it had been truly only a meditation we conducted ourselves as though we had not heard it. Mills began to speak of his experiences during his visit to the army of the Legitimist King. And I discovered in his speeches that this man of books could be graphic and picturesque. His admiration for the devotion and bravery of the army was combined with the greatest distaste for what he had seen of the way its great qualities were misused. In the conduct of this great enterprise he had seen a deplorable levity of outlook, a fatal lack of decision, an absence of any reasoned plan.

He shook his head.

"I feel that you of all people, Doña Rita, ought to be told the truth. I don't know exactly what you have at stake."

She was rosy like some impassive statue in a desert in the flush of the dawn.

"Not my heart," she said quietly. "You must believe that."

"I do. Perhaps it would have been better if you. . ."

"No, Monsieur le Philosophe. It would not have been better. Don't make that serious face at me," she went on with tenderness in a playful note, as if tenderness had been her inheritance of all time and playfulness the very fibre of her being. "I suppose you think that a woman who has acted as I did and has not staked her heart on it is . . . How do you know to what the heart responds as it beats from day to day?"

"I wouldn't judge you. What am I before the knowledge you were born to? You are as old as the world."

She accepted this with a smile. I who was innocently watching them was amazed to discover how much a fleeting thing like that could hold of seduction without the help of any other feature and with that unchanging glance.

"With me it is pun d'onor. To my first independent friend."

"You were soon parted," ventured Mills, while I sat still under a sense of oppression.

"Don't think for a moment that I have been scared off," she said. "It is they who were frightened. I suppose you heard a lot of Headquarters gossip?"

"Oh, yes," Mills said meaningly. "The fair and the dark are succeeding each other like leaves blown in the wind dancing in and out. I suppose you have noticed that leaves blown in the wind have a look of happiness."

"Yes," she said, "that sort of leaf is dead. Then why shouldn't it look happy? And so I suppose there is no uneasiness, no occasion for fears amongst the 'responsibles.'"

"Upon the whole not. Now and then a leaf seems as if it would stick. There is for instance Madame . . ."

"Oh, I don't want to know, I understand it all, I am as old as the world."

"Yes," said Mills thoughtfully, "you are not a leaf, you might have been a tornado yourself."

"Upon my word," she said, "there was a time that they thought I could carry him off, away from them all — beyond them all. Verily, I am not very

proud of their fears. There was nothing reckless there worthy of a great passion. There was nothing sad there worthy of a great tenderness.”

“And is this the word of the Venetian riddle?” asked Mills, fixing her with his keen eyes.

“If it pleases you to think so, Señor,” she said indifferently. The movement of her eyes, their veiled gleam became mischievous when she asked, “And Don Juan Blunt, have you seen him over there?”

“I fancy he avoided me. Moreover, he is always with his regiment at the outposts. He is a most valorous captain. I heard some people describe him as foolhardy.”

“Oh, he needn’t seek death,” she said in an indefinable tone. “I mean as a refuge. There will be nothing in his life great enough for that.”

“You are angry. You miss him, I believe, Doña Rita.”

“Angry? No! Weary. But of course it’s very inconvenient. I can’t very well ride out alone. A solitary amazon swallowing the dust and the salt spray of the Corniche promenade would attract too much attention. And then I don’t mind you two knowing that I am afraid of going out alone.”

“Afraid?” we both exclaimed together.

“You men are extraordinary. Why do you want me to be courageous? Why shouldn’t I be afraid? Is it because there is no one in the world to care what would happen to me?”

There was a deep-down vibration in her tone for the first time. We had not a word to say. And she added after a long silence:

“There is a very good reason. There is a danger.”

With wonderful insight Mills affirmed at once:

“Something ugly.”

She nodded slightly several times. Then Mills said with conviction:

“Ah! Then it can’t be anything in yourself. And if so . . . “

I was moved to extravagant advice.

“You should come out with me to sea then. There may be some danger there but there’s nothing ugly to fear.”

She gave me a startled glance quite unusual with her, more than wonderful to me; and suddenly as though she had seen me for the first time she exclaimed in a tone of compunction:

“Oh! And there is this one, too! Why! Oh, why should he run his head into danger for those things that will all crumble into dust before long?”

I said: “You won’t crumble into dust.” And Mills chimed in:

“That young enthusiast will always have his sea.”

We were all standing up now. She kept her eyes on me, and repeated with a sort of whimsical enviousness:

“The sea! The violet sea — and he is longing to rejoin it! . . . At night! Under the stars! . . . A lovers’ meeting,” she went on, thrilling me from head to foot with those two words, accompanied by a wistful smile pointed by a suspicion of mockery. She turned away.

“And you, Monsieur Mills?” she asked.

“I am going back to my books,” he declared with a very serious face. “My adventure is over.”

“Each one to his love,” she bantered us gently. “Didn’t I love books, too, at one time! They seemed to contain all wisdom and hold a magic power, too. Tell me, Monsieur Mills, have you found amongst them in some black-letter volume the power of foretelling a poor mortal’s destiny, the power to look into the future? Anybody’s future . . .” Mills shook his head. . . “What, not even mine?” she coaxed as if she really believed in a magic power to be found in books.

Mills shook his head again. “No, I have not the power,” he said. “I am no more a great magician, than you are a poor mortal. You have your ancient spells. You are as old as the world. Of us two it’s you that are more fit to foretell the future of the poor mortals on whom you happen to cast your eyes.”

At these words she cast her eyes down and in the moment of deep silence I watched the slight rising and falling of her breast. Then Mills pronounced distinctly: “Good-bye, old Enchantress.”

They shook hands cordially. “Good-bye, poor Magician,” she said.

Mills made as if to speak but seemed to think better of it. Doña Rita returned my distant bow with a slight, charmingly ceremonious inclination of her body.

“Bon voyage and a happy return,” she said formally.

I was following Mills through the door when I heard her voice behind us raised in recall:

“Oh, a moment . . . I forgot . . .”

I turned round. The call was for me, and I walked slowly back wondering what she could have forgotten. She waited in the middle of the room with lowered head, with a mute gleam in her deep blue eyes. When I was near enough she extended to me without a word her bare white arm and

suddenly pressed the back of her hand against my lips. I was too startled to seize it with rapture. It detached itself from my lips and fell slowly by her side. We had made it up and there was nothing to say. She turned away to the window and I hurried out of the room.

## **PART THREE**



## CHAPTER I

It was on our return from that first trip that I took Dominic up to the Villa to be presented to Doña Rita. If she wanted to look on the embodiment of fidelity, resource, and courage, she could behold it all in that man. Apparently she was not disappointed. Neither was Dominic disappointed. During the half-hour's interview they got into touch with each other in a wonderful way as if they had some common and secret standpoint in life. Maybe it was their common lawlessness, and their knowledge of things as old as the world. Her seduction, his recklessness, were both simple, masterful and, in a sense, worthy of each other.

Dominic was, I won't say awed by this interview. No woman could awe Dominic. But he was, as it were, rendered thoughtful by it, like a man who had not so much an experience as a sort of revelation vouchsafed to him. Later, at sea, he used to refer to La Señora in a particular tone and I knew that henceforth his devotion was not for me alone. And I understood the inevitability of it extremely well. As to Doña Rita she, after Dominic left the room, had turned to me with animation and said: "But he is perfect, this man." Afterwards she often asked after him and used to refer to him in conversation. More than once she said to me: "One would like to put the care of one's personal safety into the hands of that man. He looks as if he simply couldn't fail one." I admitted that this was very true, especially at sea. Dominic couldn't fail. But at the same time I rather chaffed Rita on her preoccupation as to personal safety that so often cropped up in her talk.

"One would think you were a crowned head in a revolutionary world," I used to tell her.

"That would be different. One would be standing then for something, either worth or not worth dying for. One could even run away then and be done with it. But I can't run away unless I got out of my skin and left that behind. Don't you understand? You are very stupid . . ." But she had the grace to add, "On purpose."

I don't know about the on purpose. I am not certain about the stupidity. Her words bewildered one often and bewilderment is a sort of stupidity. I remedied it by simply disregarding the sense of what she said. The sound was there and also her poignant heart-gripping presence giving occupation enough to one's faculties. In the power of those things over one there was

mystery enough. It was more absorbing than the mere obscurity of her speeches. But I daresay she couldn't understand that.

Hence, at times, the amusing outbreaks of temper in word and gesture that only strengthened the natural, the invincible force of the spell. Sometimes the brass bowl would get upset or the cigarette box would fly up, dropping a shower of cigarettes on the floor. We would pick them up, re-establish everything, and fall into a long silence, so close that the sound of the first word would come with all the pain of a separation.

It was at that time, too, that she suggested I should take up my quarters in her house in the street of the Consuls. There were certain advantages in that move. In my present abode my sudden absences might have been in the long run subject to comment. On the other hand, the house in the street of Consuls was a known out-post of Legitimacy. But then it was covered by the occult influence of her who was referred to in confidential talks, secret communications, and discreet whispers of Royalist salons as: "Madame de Lastaola."

That was the name which the heiress of Henry Allègre had decided to adopt when, according to her own expression, she had found herself precipitated at a moment's notice into the crowd of mankind. It is strange how the death of Henry Allègre, which certainly the poor man had not planned, acquired in my view the character of a heartless desertion. It gave one a glimpse of amazing egoism in a sentiment to which one could hardly give a name, a mysterious appropriation of one human being by another as if in defiance of unexpressed things and for an unheard-of satisfaction of an inconceivable pride. If he had hated her he could not have flung that enormous fortune more brutally at her head. And his unrepentant death seemed to lift for a moment the curtain on something lofty and sinister like an Olympian's caprice.

Doña Rita said to me once with humorous resignation: "You know, it appears that one must have a name. That's what Henry Allègre's man of business told me. He was quite impatient with me about it. But my name, amigo, Henry Allègre had taken from me like all the rest of what I had been once. All that is buried with him in his grave. It wouldn't have been true. That is how I felt about it. So I took that one." She whispered to herself: "Lastaola," not as if to test the sound but as if in a dream.

To this day I am not quite certain whether it was the name of any human habitation, a lonely caserio with a half-effaced carving of a coat of arms

over its door, or of some hamlet at the dead end of a ravine with a stony slope at the back. It might have been a hill for all I know or perhaps a stream. A wood, or perhaps a combination of all these: just a bit of the earth's surface. Once I asked her where exactly it was situated and she answered, waving her hand cavalierly at the dead wall of the room: "Oh, over there." I thought that this was all that I was going to hear but she added moodily, "I used to take my goats there, a dozen or so of them, for the day. From after my uncle had said his Mass till the ringing of the evening bell."

I saw suddenly the lonely spot, sketched for me some time ago by a few words from Mr. Blunt, populated by the agile, bearded beasts with cynical heads, and a little misty figure dark in the sunlight with a halo of dishevelled rust-coloured hair about its head.

The epithet of rust-coloured comes from her. It was really tawny. Once or twice in my hearing she had referred to "my rust-coloured hair" with laughing vexation. Even then it was unruly, abhorring the restraints of civilization, and often in the heat of a dispute getting into the eyes of Madame de Lastaola, the possessor of coveted art treasures, the heiress of Henry Allègre. She proceeded in a reminiscent mood, with a faint flash of gaiety all over her face, except her dark blue eyes that moved so seldom out of their fixed scrutiny of things invisible to other human beings.

"The goats were very good. We clambered amongst the stones together. They beat me at that game. I used to catch my hair in the bushes."

"Your rust-coloured hair," I whispered.

"Yes, it was always this colour. And I used to leave bits of my frock on thorns here and there. It was pretty thin, I can tell you. There wasn't much at that time between my skin and the blue of the sky. My legs were as sunburnt as my face; but really I didn't tan very much. I had plenty of freckles though. There were no looking-glasses in the Presbytery but uncle had a piece not bigger than my two hands for his shaving. One Sunday I crept into his room and had a peep at myself. And wasn't I startled to see my own eyes looking at me! But it was fascinating, too. I was about eleven years old then, and I was very friendly with the goats, and I was as shrill as a cicada and as slender as a match. Heavens! When I overhear myself speaking sometimes, or look at my limbs, it doesn't seem to be possible. And yet it is the same one. I do remember every single goat. They were very clever. Goats are no trouble really; they don't scatter

much. Mine never did even if I had to hide myself out of their sight for ever so long.”

It was but natural to ask her why she wanted to hide, and she uttered vaguely what was rather a comment on my question:

“It was like fate.” But I chose to take it otherwise, teasingly, because we were often like a pair of children.

“Oh, really,” I said, “you talk like a pagan. What could you know of fate at that time? What was it like? Did it come down from Heaven?”

“Don’t be stupid. It used to come along a cart-track that was there and it looked like a boy. Wasn’t he a little devil though. You understand, I couldn’t know that. He was a wealthy cousin of mine. Round there we are all related, all cousins — as in Brittany. He wasn’t much bigger than myself but he was older, just a boy in blue breeches and with good shoes on his feet, which of course interested and impressed me. He yelled to me from below, I screamed to him from above, he came up and sat down near me on a stone, never said a word, let me look at him for half an hour before he condescended to ask me who I was. And the airs he gave himself! He quite intimidated me sitting there perfectly dumb. I remember trying to hide my bare feet under the edge of my skirt as I sat below him on the ground.

“C’est comique, eh!” she interrupted herself to comment in a melancholy tone. I looked at her sympathetically and she went on:

“He was the only son from a rich farmhouse two miles down the slope. In winter they used to send him to school at Tolosa. He had an enormous opinion of himself; he was going to keep a shop in a town by and by and he was about the most dissatisfied creature I have ever seen. He had an unhappy mouth and unhappy eyes and he was always wretched about something: about the treatment he received, about being kept in the country and chained to work. He was moaning and complaining and threatening all the world, including his father and mother. He used to curse God, yes, that boy, sitting there on a piece of rock like a wretched little Prometheus with a sparrow pecking at his miserable little liver. And the grand scenery of mountains all round, ha, ha, ha!”

She laughed in contralto: a penetrating sound with something generous in it; not infectious, but in others provoking a smile.

“Of course I, poor little animal, I didn’t know what to make of it, and I was even a little frightened. But at first because of his miserable eyes I was

sorry for him, almost as much as if he had been a sick goat. But, frightened or sorry, I don't know how it is, I always wanted to laugh at him, too, I mean from the very first day when he let me admire him for half an hour. Yes, even then I had to put my hand over my mouth more than once for the sake of good manners, you understand. And yet, you know, I was never a laughing child.

"One day he came up and sat down very dignified a little bit away from me and told me he had been thrashed for wandering in the hills.

"'To be with me?' I asked. And he said: 'To be with you! No. My people don't know what I do.' I can't tell why, but I was annoyed. So instead of raising a clamour of pity over him, which I suppose he expected me to do, I asked him if the thrashing hurt very much. He got up, he had a switch in his hand, and walked up to me, saying, 'I will soon show you.' I went stiff with fright; but instead of slashing at me he dropped down by my side and kissed me on the cheek. Then he did it again, and by that time I was gone dead all over and he could have done what he liked with the corpse but he left off suddenly and then I came to life again and I bolted away. Not very far. I couldn't leave the goats altogether. He chased me round and about the rocks, but of course I was too quick for him in his nice town boots. When he got tired of that game he started throwing stones. After that he made my life very lively for me. Sometimes he used to come on me unawares and then I had to sit still and listen to his miserable ravings, because he would catch me round the waist and hold me very tight. And yet, I often felt inclined to laugh. But if I caught sight of him at a distance and tried to dodge out of the way he would start stoning me into a shelter I knew of and then sit outside with a heap of stones at hand so that I daren't show the end of my nose for hours. He would sit there and rave and abuse me till I would burst into a crazy laugh in my hole; and then I could see him through the leaves rolling on the ground and biting his fists with rage. Didn't he hate me! At the same time I was often terrified. I am convinced now that if I had started crying he would have rushed in and perhaps strangled me there. Then as the sun was about to set he would make me swear that I would marry him when I was grown up. 'Swear, you little wretched beggar,' he would yell to me. And I would swear. I was hungry, and I didn't want to be made black and blue all over with stones. Oh, I swore ever so many times to be his wife. Thirty times a month for two months. I couldn't help myself. It was no use complaining to my sister

Therese. When I showed her my bruises and tried to tell her a little about my trouble she was quite scandalized. She called me a sinful girl, a shameless creature. I assure you it puzzled my head so that, between Therese my sister and José the boy, I lived in a state of idiocy almost. But luckily at the end of the two months they sent him away from home for good. Curious story to happen to a goatherd living all her days out under God's eye, as my uncle the Cura might have said. My sister Therese was keeping house in the Presbytery. She's a terrible person."

"I have heard of your sister Therese," I said.

"Oh, you have! Of my big sister Therese, six, ten years older than myself perhaps? She just comes a little above my shoulder, but then I was always a long thing. I never knew my mother. I don't even know how she looked. There are no paintings or photographs in our farmhouses amongst the hills. I haven't even heard her described to me. I believe I was never good enough to be told these things. Therese decided that I was a lump of wickedness, and now she believes that I will lose my soul altogether unless I take some steps to save it. Well, I have no particular taste that way. I suppose it is annoying to have a sister going fast to eternal perdition, but there are compensations. The funniest thing is that it's Therese, I believe, who managed to keep me out of the Presbytery when I went out of my way to look in on them on my return from my visit to the Quartel Real last year. I couldn't have stayed much more than half an hour with them anyway, but still I would have liked to get over the old doorstep. I am certain that Therese persuaded my uncle to go out and meet me at the bottom of the hill. I saw the old man a long way off and I understood how it was. I dismounted at once and met him on foot. We had half an hour together walking up and down the road. He is a peasant priest, he didn't know how to treat me. And of course I was uncomfortable, too. There wasn't a single goat about to keep me in countenance. I ought to have embraced him. I was always fond of the stern, simple old man. But he drew himself up when I approached him and actually took off his hat to me. So simple as that! I bowed my head and asked for his blessing. And he said 'I would never refuse a blessing to a good Legitimist.' So stern as that! And when I think that I was perhaps the only girl of the family or in the whole world that he ever in his priest's life patted on the head! When I think of that I . . . I believe at that moment I was as wretched as he was himself. I handed him an envelope with a big red seal which quite startled him. I had asked the

Marquis de Villarel to give me a few words for him, because my uncle has a great influence in his district; and the Marquis penned with his own hand some compliments and an inquiry about the spirit of the population. My uncle read the letter, looked up at me with an air of mournful awe, and begged me to tell his excellency that the people were all for God, their lawful King and their old privileges. I said to him then, after he had asked me about the health of His Majesty in an awfully gloomy tone — I said then: ‘There is only one thing that remains for me to do, uncle, and that is to give you two pounds of the very best snuff I have brought here for you.’ What else could I have got for the poor old man? I had no trunks with me. I had to leave behind a spare pair of shoes in the hotel to make room in my little bag for that snuff. And fancy! That old priest absolutely pushed the parcel away. I could have thrown it at his head; but I thought suddenly of that hard, prayerful life, knowing nothing of any ease or pleasure in the world, absolutely nothing but a pinch of snuff now and then. I remembered how wretched he used to be when he lacked a copper or two to get some snuff with. My face was hot with indignation, but before I could fly out at him I remembered how simple he was. So I said with great dignity that as the present came from the King and as he wouldn’t receive it from my hand there was nothing else for me to do but to throw it into the brook; and I made as if I were going to do it, too. He shouted: ‘Stay, unhappy girl! Is it really from His Majesty, whom God preserve?’ I said contemptuously, ‘Of course.’ He looked at me with great pity in his eyes, sighed deeply, and took the little tin from my hand. I suppose he imagined me in my abandoned way wheedling the necessary cash out of the King for the purchase of that snuff. You can’t imagine how simple he is. Nothing was easier than to deceive him; but don’t imagine I deceived him from the vainglory of a mere sinner. I lied to the dear man, simply because I couldn’t bear the idea of him being deprived of the only gratification his big, ascetic, gaunt body ever knew on earth. As I mounted my mule to go away he murmured coldly: ‘God guard you, Señora!’ Señora! What sternness! We were off a little way already when his heart softened and he shouted after me in a terrible voice: ‘The road to Heaven is repentance!’ And then, after a silence, again the great shout ‘Repentance!’ thundered after me. Was that sternness or simplicity, I wonder? Or a mere unmeaning superstition, a mechanical thing? If there lives anybody completely honest in this world, surely it must be my uncle. And yet — who knows?

“Would you guess what was the next thing I did? Directly I got over the frontier I wrote from Bayonne asking the old man to send me out my sister here. I said it was for the service of the King. You see, I had thought suddenly of that house of mine in which you once spent the night talking with Mr. Mills and Don Juan Blunt. I thought it would do extremely well for Carlist officers coming this way on leave or on a mission. In hotels they might have been molested, but I knew that I could get protection for my house. Just a word from the ministry in Paris to the Prefect. But I wanted a woman to manage it for me. And where was I to find a trustworthy woman? How was I to know one when I saw her? I don’t know how to talk to women. Of course my Rose would have done for me that or anything else; but what could I have done myself without her? She has looked after me from the first. It was Henry Allègre who got her for me eight years ago. I don’t know whether he meant it for a kindness but she’s the only human being on whom I can lean. She knows . . . What doesn’t she know about me! She has never failed to do the right thing for me unasked. I couldn’t part with her. And I couldn’t think of anybody else but my sister.

“After all it was somebody belonging to me. But it seemed the wildest idea. Yet she came at once. Of course I took care to send her some money. She likes money. As to my uncle there is nothing that he wouldn’t have given up for the service of the King. Rose went to meet her at the railway station. She told me afterwards that there had been no need for me to be anxious about her recognizing Mademoiselle Therese. There was nobody else in the train that could be mistaken for her. I should think not! She had made for herself a dress of some brown stuff like a nun’s habit and had a crooked stick and carried all her belongings tied up in a handkerchief. She looked like a pilgrim to a saint’s shrine. Rose took her to the house. She asked when she saw it: ‘And does this big place really belong to our Rita?’ My maid of course said that it was mine. ‘And how long did our Rita live here?’ — ‘Madame has never seen it unless perhaps the outside, as far as I know. I believe Mr. Allègre lived here for some time when he was a young man.’ — ‘The sinner that’s dead?’ — ‘Just so,’ says Rose. You know nothing ever startles Rose. ‘Well, his sins are gone with him,’ said my sister, and began to make herself at home.

“Rose was going to stop with her for a week but on the third day she was back with me with the remark that Mlle. Therese knew her way about very



well already and preferred to be left to herself. Some little time afterwards I went to see that sister of mine. The first thing she said to me, 'I wouldn't have recognized you, Rita,' and I said, 'What a funny dress you have, Therese, more fit for the portress of a convent than for this house.' — 'Yes,' she said, 'and unless you give this house to me, Rita, I will go back to our country. I will have nothing to do with your life, Rita. Your life is no secret for me.'

"I was going from room to room and Therese was following me. 'I don't know that my life is a secret to anybody,' I said to her, 'but how do you know anything about it?' And then she told me that it was through a cousin of ours, that horrid wretch of a boy, you know. He had finished his schooling and was a clerk in a Spanish commercial house of some kind, in Paris, and apparently had made it his business to write home whatever he could hear about me or ferret out from those relations of mine with whom I lived as a girl. I got suddenly very furious. I raged up and down the room (we were alone upstairs), and Therese scuttled away from me as far as the door. I heard her say to herself, 'It's the evil spirit in her that makes her like this.' She was absolutely convinced of that. She made the sign of the cross in the air to protect herself. I was quite astounded. And then I really couldn't help myself. I burst into a laugh. I laughed and laughed; I really couldn't stop till Therese ran away. I went downstairs still laughing and found her in the hall with her face to the wall and her fingers in her ears kneeling in a corner. I had to pull her out by the shoulders from there. I don't think she was frightened; she was only shocked. But I don't suppose her heart is desperately bad, because when I dropped into a chair feeling very tired she came and knelt in front of me and put her arms round my waist and entreated me to cast off from me my evil ways with the help of saints and priests. Quite a little programme for a reformed sinner. I got away at last. I left her sunk on her heels before the empty chair looking after me. 'I pray for you every night and morning, Rita,' she said. — 'Oh, yes. I know you are a good sister,' I said to her. I was letting myself out when she called after me, 'And what about this house, Rita?' I said to her, 'Oh, you may keep it till the day I reform and enter a convent.' The last I saw of her she was still on her knees looking after me with her mouth open. I have seen her since several times, but our intercourse is, at any rate on her side, as of a frozen nun with some great lady. But I believe she really knows how to make men comfortable. Upon my word I think she likes to

look after men. They don't seem to be such great sinners as women are. I think you could do worse than take up your quarters at number 10. She will no doubt develop a saintly sort of affection for you, too."

I don't know that the prospect of becoming a favourite of Doña Rita's peasant sister was very fascinating to me. If I went to live very willingly at No. 10 it was because everything connected with Doña Rita had for me a peculiar fascination. She had only passed through the house once as far as I knew; but it was enough. She was one of those beings that leave a trace. I am not unreasonable — I mean for those that knew her. That is, I suppose, because she was so unforgettable. Let us remember the tragedy of Azzolati the ruthless, the ridiculous financier with a criminal soul (or shall we say heart) and facile tears. No wonder, then, that for me, who may flatter myself without undue vanity with being much finer than that grotesque international intriguer, the mere knowledge that Doña Rita had passed through the very rooms in which I was going to live between the strenuous times of the sea-expeditions, was enough to fill my inner being with a great content. Her glance, her darkly brilliant blue glance, had run over the walls of that room which most likely would be mine to slumber in. Behind me, somewhere near the door, Therese, the peasant sister, said in a funnily compassionate tone and in an amazingly landlady-of-a-boarding-house spirit of false persuasiveness:

"You will be very comfortable here, Señor. It is so peaceful here in the street. Sometimes one may think oneself in a village. It's only a hundred and twenty-five francs for the friends of the King. And I shall take such good care of you that your very heart will be able to rest."

## CHAPTER II

Doña Rita was curious to know how I got on with her peasant sister and all I could say in return for that inquiry was that the peasant sister was in her own way amiable. At this she clicked her tongue amusingly and repeated a remark she had made before: "She likes young men. The younger the better." The mere thought of those two women being sisters aroused one's wonder. Physically they were altogether of different design. It was also the difference between living tissue of glowing loveliness with a divine breath, and a hard hollow figure of baked clay.

Indeed Therese did somehow resemble an achievement, wonderful enough in its way, in unglazed earthenware. The only gleam perhaps that one could find on her was that of her teeth, which one used to get between her dull lips unexpectedly, startlingly, and a little inexplicably, because it was never associated with a smile. She smiled with compressed mouth. It was indeed difficult to conceive of those two birds coming from the same nest. And yet . . . Contrary to what generally happens, it was when one saw those two women together that one lost all belief in the possibility of their relationship near or far. It extended even to their common humanity. One, as it were, doubted it. If one of the two was representative, then the other was either something more or less than human. One wondered whether these two women belonged to the same scheme of creation. One was secretly amazed to see them standing together, speaking to each other, having words in common, understanding each other. And yet! . . . Our psychological sense is the crudest of all; we don't know, we don't perceive how superficial we are. The simplest shades escape us, the secret of changes, of relations. No, upon the whole, the only feature (and yet with enormous differences) which Therese had in common with her sister, as I told Doña Rita, was amiability.

"For, you know, you are a most amiable person yourself," I went on. "It's one of your characteristics, of course much more precious than in other people. You transmute the commonest traits into gold of your own; but after all there are no new names. You are amiable. You were most amiable to me when I first saw you."

"Really. I was not aware. Not specially . . ."

"I had never the presumption to think that it was special. Moreover, my head was in a whirl. I was lost in astonishment first of all at what I had

been listening to all night. Your history, you know, a wonderful tale with a flavour of wine in it and wreathed in clouds, with that amazing decapitated, mutilated dummy of a woman lurking in a corner, and with Blunt's smile gleaming through a fog, the fog in my eyes, from Mills' pipe, you know. I was feeling quite inanimate as to body and frightfully stimulated as to mind all the time. I had never heard anything like that talk about you before. Of course I wasn't sleepy, but still I am not used to do altogether without sleep like Blunt . . ."

"Kept awake all night listening to my story!" She marvelled.

"Yes. You don't think I am complaining, do you? I wouldn't have missed it for the world. Blunt in a ragged old jacket and a white tie and that incisive polite voice of his seemed strange and weird. It seemed as though he were inventing it all rather angrily. I had doubts as to your existence."

"Mr. Blunt is very much interested in my story."

"Anybody would be," I said. "I was. I didn't sleep a wink. I was expecting to see you soon — and even then I had my doubts."

"As to my existence?"

"It wasn't exactly that, though of course I couldn't tell that you weren't a product of Captain Blunt's sleeplessness. He seemed to dread exceedingly to be left alone and your story might have been a device to detain us . . ."

"He hasn't enough imagination for that," she said.

"It didn't occur to me. But there was Mills, who apparently believed in your existence. I could trust Mills. My doubts were about the propriety. I couldn't see any good reason for being taken to see you. Strange that it should be my connection with the sea which brought me here to the Villa."

"Unexpected perhaps."

"No. I mean particularly strange and significant."

"Why?"

"Because my friends are in the habit of telling me (and each other) that the sea is my only love. They were always chaffing me because they couldn't see or guess in my life at any woman, open or secret. . ."

"And is that really so?" she inquired negligently.

"Why, yes. I don't mean to say that I am like an innocent shepherd in one of those interminable stories of the eighteenth century. But I don't throw the word love about indiscriminately. It may be all true about the sea; but some people would say that they love sausages."

"You are horrible."

“I am surprised.”

“I mean your choice of words.”

“And you have never uttered a word yet that didn’t change into a pearl as it dropped from your lips. At least not before me.”

She glanced down deliberately and said, “This is better. But I don’t see any of them on the floor.”

“It’s you who are horrible in the implications of your language. Don’t see any on the floor! Haven’t I caught up and treasured them all in my heart? I am not the animal from which sausages are made.”

She looked at me suavely and then with the sweetest possible smile breathed out the word: “No.”

And we both laughed very loud. O! days of innocence! On this occasion we parted from each other on a light-hearted note. But already I had acquired the conviction that there was nothing more lovable in the world than that woman; nothing more life-giving, inspiring, and illuminating than the emanation of her charm. I meant it absolutely — not excepting the light of the sun.

From this there was only one step further to take. The step into a conscious surrender; the open perception that this charm, warming like a flame, was also all-revealing like a great light; giving new depth to shades, new brilliance to colours, an amazing vividness to all sensations and vitality to all thoughts: so that all that had been lived before seemed to have been lived in a drab world and with a languid pulse.

A great revelation this. I don’t mean to say it was soul-shaking. The soul was already a captive before doubt, anguish, or dismay could touch its surrender and its exaltation. But all the same the revelation turned many things into dust; and, amongst others, the sense of the careless freedom of my life. If that life ever had any purpose or any aim outside itself I would have said that it threw a shadow across its path. But it hadn’t. There had been no path. But there was a shadow, the inseparable companion of all light. No illumination can sweep all mystery out of the world. After the departed darkness the shadows remain, more mysterious because as if more enduring; and one feels a dread of them from which one was free before. What if they were to be victorious at the last? They, or what perhaps lurks in them: fear, deception, desire, disillusion — all silent at first before the song of triumphant love vibrating in the light. Yes. Silent. Even desire itself! All silent. But not for long!

This was, I think, before the third expedition. Yes, it must have been the third, for I remember that it was boldly planned and that it was carried out without a hitch. The tentative period was over; all our arrangements had been perfected. There was, so to speak, always an unfailing smoke on the hill and an unfailing lantern on the shore. Our friends, mostly bought for hard cash and therefore valuable, had acquired confidence in us. This, they seemed to say, is no unfathomable roguery of penniless adventurers. This is but the reckless enterprise of men of wealth and sense and needn't be inquired into. The young caballero has got real gold pieces in the belt he wears next his skin; and the man with the heavy moustaches and unbelieving eyes is indeed very much of a man. They gave to Dominic all their respect and to me a great show of deference; for I had all the money, while they thought that Dominic had all the sense. That judgment was not exactly correct. I had my share of judgment and audacity which surprises me now that the years have chilled the blood without dimming the memory. I remember going about the business with light-hearted, clear-headed recklessness which, according as its decisions were sudden or considered, made Dominic draw his breath through his clenched teeth, or look hard at me before he gave me either a slight nod of assent or a sarcastic "Oh, certainly" — just as the humour of the moment prompted him.

One night as we were lying on a bit of dry sand under the lee of a rock, side by side, watching the light of our little vessel dancing away at sea in the windy distance, Dominic spoke suddenly to me.

"I suppose Alphonso and Carlos, Carlos and Alphonso, they are nothing to you, together or separately?"

I said: "Dominic, if they were both to vanish from the earth together or separately it would make no difference to my feelings."

He remarked: "Just so. A man mourns only for his friends. I suppose they are no more friends to you than they are to me. Those Carlists make a great consumption of cartridges. That is well. But why should we do all those mad things that you will insist on us doing till my hair," he pursued with grave, mocking exaggeration, "till my hair tries to stand up on my head? and all for that Carlos, let God and the devil each guard his own, for that Majesty as they call him, but after all a man like another and — no friend."

"Yes, why?" I murmured, feeling my body nestled at ease in the sand.

It was very dark under the overhanging rock on that night of clouds and of wind that died and rose and died again. Dominic's voice was heard speaking low between the short gusts.

"Friend of the Señora, eh?"

"That's what the world says, Dominic."

"Half of what the world says are lies," he pronounced dogmatically. "For all his majesty he may be a good enough man. Yet he is only a king in the mountains and to-morrow he may be no more than you. Still a woman like that — one, somehow, would grudge her to a better king. She ought to be set up on a high pillar for people that walk on the ground to raise their eyes up to. But you are otherwise, you gentlemen. You, for instance, Monsieur, you wouldn't want to see her set up on a pillar."

"That sort of thing, Dominic," I said, "that sort of thing, you understand me, ought to be done early."

He was silent for a time. And then his manly voice was heard in the shadow of the rock.

"I see well enough what you mean. I spoke of the multitude, that only raise their eyes. But for kings and suchlike that is not enough. Well, no heart need despair; for there is not a woman that wouldn't at some time or other get down from her pillar for no bigger bribe perhaps than just a flower which is fresh to-day and withered to-morrow. And then, what's the good of asking how long any woman has been up there? There is a true saying that lips that have been kissed do not lose their freshness."

I don't know what answer I could have made. I imagine Dominic thought himself unanswerable. As a matter of fact, before I could speak, a voice came to us down the face of the rock crying secretly, "Olà, down there! All is safe ashore."

It was the boy who used to hang about the stable of a muleteer's inn in a little shallow valley with a shallow little stream in it, and where we had been hiding most of the day before coming down to the shore. We both started to our feet and Dominic said, "A good boy that. You didn't hear him either come or go above our heads. Don't reward him with more than one peseta, Señor, whatever he does. If you were to give him two he would go mad at the sight of so much wealth and throw up his job at the Fonda, where he is so useful to run errands, in that way he has of skimming along the paths without displacing a stone."

Meantime he was busying himself with striking a fire to set alight a small heap of dry sticks he had made ready beforehand on that spot which in all the circuit of the Bay was perfectly screened from observation from the land side.

The clear flame shooting up revealed him in the black cloak with a hood of a Mediterranean sailor. His eyes watched the dancing dim light to seaward. And he talked the while.

“The only fault you have, Señor, is being too generous with your money. In this world you must give sparingly. The only things you may deal out without counting, in this life of ours which is but a little fight and a little love, is blows to your enemy and kisses to a woman. . . . Ah! here they are coming in.”

I noticed the dancing light in the dark west much closer to the shore now. Its motion had altered. It swayed slowly as it ran towards us, and, suddenly, the darker shadow as of a great pointed wing appeared gliding in the night. Under it a human voice shouted something confidently.

“Bueno,” muttered Dominic. From some receptacle I didn’t see he poured a lot of water on the blaze, like a magician at the end of a successful incantation that had called out a shadow and a voice from the immense space of the sea. And his hooded figure vanished from my sight in a great hiss and the warm feel of ascending steam.

“That’s all over,” he said, “and now we go back for more work, more toil, more trouble, more exertion with hands and feet, for hours and hours. And all the time the head turned over the shoulder, too.”

We were climbing a precipitous path sufficiently dangerous in the dark, Dominic, more familiar with it, going first and I scrambling close behind in order that I might grab at his cloak if I chanced to slip or miss my footing. I remonstrated against this arrangement as we stopped to rest. I had no doubt I would grab at his cloak if I felt myself falling. I couldn’t help doing that. But I would probably only drag him down with me.

With one hand grasping a shadowy bush above his head he growled that all this was possible, but that it was all in the bargain, and urged me onwards.

When we got on to the level that man whose even breathing no exertion, no danger, no fear or anger could disturb, remarked as we strode side by side:



“I will say this for us, that we are carrying out all this deadly foolishness as conscientiously as though the eyes of the Señora were on us all the time. And as to risk, I suppose we take more than she would approve of, I fancy, if she ever gave a moment’s thought to us out here. Now, for instance, in the next half hour, we may come any moment on three carabineers who would let off their pieces without asking questions. Even your way of flinging money about cannot make safety for men set on defying a whole big country for the sake of — what is it exactly? — the blue eyes, or the white arms of the Señora.”

He kept his voice equably low. It was a lonely spot and but for a vague shape of a dwarf tree here and there we had only the flying clouds for company. Very far off a tiny light twinkled a little way up the seaward shoulder of an invisible mountain. Dominic moved on.

“Fancy yourself lying here, on this wild spot, with a leg smashed by a shot or perhaps with a bullet in your side. It might happen. A star might fall. I have watched stars falling in scores on clear nights in the Atlantic. And it was nothing. The flash of a pinch of gunpowder in your face may be a bigger matter. Yet somehow it’s pleasant as we stumble in the dark to think of our Señora in that long room with a shiny floor and all that lot of glass at the end, sitting on that divan, you call it, covered with carpets as if expecting a king indeed. And very still . . .”

He remembered her — whose image could not be dismissed.

I laid my hand on his shoulder.

“That light on the mountain side flickers exceedingly, Dominic. Are we in the path?”

He addressed me then in French, which was between us the language of more formal moments.

“Prenez mon bras, monsieur. Take a firm hold, or I will have you stumbling again and falling into one of those beastly holes, with a good chance to crack your head. And there is no need to take offence. For, speaking with all respect, why should you, and I with you, be here on this lonely spot, barking our shins in the dark on the way to a confounded flickering light where there will be no other supper but a piece of a stale sausage and a draught of leathery wine out of a stinking skin. Pah!”

I had good hold of his arm. Suddenly he dropped the formal French and pronounced in his inflexible voice:

“For a pair of white arms, Señor. Bueno.”

He could understand.

### CHAPTER III

On our return from that expedition we came gliding into the old harbour so late that Dominic and I, making for the café kept by Madame Léonore, found it empty of customers, except for two rather sinister fellows playing cards together at a corner table near the door. The first thing done by Madame Léonore was to put her hands on Dominic's shoulders and look at arm's length into the eyes of that man of audacious deeds and wild stratagems who smiled straight at her from under his heavy and, at that time, uncurled moustaches.

Indeed we didn't present a neat appearance, our faces unshaven, with the traces of dried salt sprays on our smarting skins and the sleeplessness of full forty hours filming our eyes. At least it was so with me who saw as through a mist Madame Léonore moving with her mature nonchalant grace, setting before us wine and glasses with a faint swish of her ample black skirt. Under the elaborate structure of black hair her jet-black eyes sparkled like good-humoured stars and even I could see that she was tremendously excited at having this lawless wanderer Dominic within her reach and as it were in her power. Presently she sat down by us, touched lightly Dominic's curly head silvered on the temples (she couldn't really help it), gazed at me for a while with a quizzical smile, observed that I looked very tired, and asked Dominic whether for all that I was likely to sleep soundly to-night.

"I don't know," said Dominic, "He's young. And there is always the chance of dreams."

"What do you men dream of in those little barques of yours tossing for months on the water?"

"Mostly of nothing," said Dominic. "But it has happened to me to dream of furious fights."

"And of furious loves, too, no doubt," she caught him up in a mocking voice.

"No, that's for the waking hours," Dominic drawled, basking sleepily with his head between his hands in her ardent gaze. "The waking hours are longer."

"They must be, at sea," she said, never taking her eyes off him. "But I suppose you do talk of your loves sometimes."

"You may be sure, Madame Léonore," I interjected, noticing the hoarseness of my voice, "that you at any rate are talked about a lot at sea."

"I am not so sure of that now. There is that strange lady from the Prado that you took him to see, Signorino. She went to his head like a glass of wine into a tender youngster's. He is such a child, and I suppose that I am another. Shame to confess it, the other morning I got a friend to look after the café for a couple of hours, wrapped up my head, and walked out there to the other end of the town. . . . Look at these two sitting up! And I thought they were so sleepy and tired, the poor fellows!"

She kept our curiosity in suspense for a moment.

"Well, I have seen your marvel, Dominic," she continued in a calm voice. "She came flying out of the gate on horseback and it would have been all I would have seen of her if — and this is for you, Signorino — if she hadn't pulled up in the main alley to wait for a very good-looking cavalier. He had his moustaches so, and his teeth were very white when he smiled at her. But his eyes are too deep in his head for my taste. I didn't like it. It reminded me of a certain very severe priest who used to come to our village when I was young; younger even than your marvel, Dominic."

"It was no priest in disguise, Madame Léonore," I said, amused by her expression of disgust. "That's an American."

"Ah! Un Americano! Well, never mind him. It was her that I went to see."

"What! Walked to the other end of the town to see Doña Rita!" Dominic addressed her in a low bantering tone. "Why, you were always telling me you couldn't walk further than the end of the quay to save your life — or even mine, you said."

"Well, I did; and I walked back again and between the two walks I had a good look. And you may be sure — that will surprise you both — that on the way back — oh, Santa Madre, wasn't it a long way, too — I wasn't thinking of any man at sea or on shore in that connection."

"No. And you were not thinking of yourself, either, I suppose," I said. Speaking was a matter of great effort for me, whether I was too tired or too sleepy, I can't tell. "No, you were not thinking of yourself. You were thinking of a woman, though."

"Si. As much a woman as any of us that ever breathed in the world. Yes, of her! Of that very one! You see, we women are not like you men, indifferent to each other unless by some exception. Men say we are always against one another but that's only men's conceit. What can she be to me? I am not afraid of the big child here," and she tapped Dominic's forearm on

which he rested his head with a fascinated stare. "With us two it is for life and death, and I am rather pleased that there is something yet in him that can catch fire on occasion. I would have thought less of him if he hadn't been able to get out of hand a little, for something really fine. As for you, Signorino," she turned on me with an unexpected and sarcastic sally, "I am not in love with you yet." She changed her tone from sarcasm to a soft and even dreamy note. "A head like a gem," went on that woman born in some by-street of Rome, and a plaything for years of God knows what obscure fates. "Yes, Dominic! Antica. I haven't been haunted by a face since — since I was sixteen years old. It was the face of a young cavalier in the street. He was on horseback, too. He never looked at me, I never saw him again, and I loved him for — for days and days and days. That was the sort of face he had. And her face is of the same sort. She had a man's hat, too, on her head. So high!"

"A man's hat on her head," remarked with profound displeasure Dominic, to whom this wonder, at least, of all the wonders of the earth, was apparently unknown.

"Si. And her face has haunted me. Not so long as that other but more touchingly because I am no longer sixteen and this is a woman. Yes, I did think of her, I myself was once that age and I, too, had a face of my own to show to the world, though not so superb. And I, too, didn't know why I had come into the world any more than she does."

"And now you know," Dominic growled softly, with his head still between his hands.

She looked at him for a long time, opened her lips but in the end only sighed lightly.

"And what do you know of her, you who have seen her so well as to be haunted by her face?" I asked.

I wouldn't have been surprised if she had answered me with another sigh. For she seemed only to be thinking of herself and looked not in my direction. But suddenly she roused up.

"Of her?" she repeated in a louder voice. "Why should I talk of another woman? And then she is a great lady."

At this I could not repress a smile which she detected at once.

"Isn't she? Well, no, perhaps she isn't; but you may be sure of one thing, that she is both flesh and shadow more than any one that I have seen. Keep

that well in your mind: She is for no man! She would be vanishing out of their hands like water that cannot be held.”

I caught my breath. “Inconstant,” I whispered.

“I don’t say that. Maybe too proud, too wilful, too full of pity. Signorino, you don’t know much about women. And you may learn something yet or you may not; but what you learn from her you will never forget.”

“Not to be held,” I murmured; and she whom the quayside called Madame Léonore closed her outstretched hand before my face and opened it at once to show its emptiness in illustration of her expressed opinion. Dominic never moved.

I wished good-night to these two and left the café for the fresh air and the dark spaciousness of the quays augmented by all the width of the old Port where between the trails of light the shadows of heavy hulls appeared very black, merging their outlines in a great confusion. I left behind me the end of the Cannebière, a wide vista of tall houses and much-lighted pavements losing itself in the distance with an extinction of both shapes and lights. I slunk past it with only a side glance and sought the dimness of quiet streets away from the centre of the usual night gaieties of the town. The dress I wore was just that of a sailor come ashore from some coaster, a thick blue woollen shirt or rather a sort of jumper with a knitted cap like a tam-o’-shanter worn very much on one side and with a red tuft of wool in the centre. This was even the reason why I had lingered so long in the café. I didn’t want to be recognized in the streets in that costume and still less to be seen entering the house in the street of the Consuls. At that hour when the performances were over and all the sensible citizens in their beds I didn’t hesitate to cross the Place of the Opera. It was dark, the audience had already dispersed. The rare passers-by I met hurrying on their last affairs of the day paid no attention to me at all. The street of the Consuls I expected to find empty, as usual at that time of the night. But as I turned a corner into it I overtook three people who must have belonged to the locality. To me, somehow, they appeared strange. Two girls in dark cloaks walked ahead of a tall man in a top hat. I slowed down, not wishing to pass them by, the more so that the door of the house was only a few yards distant. But to my intense surprise those people stopped at it and the man in the top hat, producing a latchkey, let his two companions through, followed them, and

with a heavy slam cut himself off from my astonished self and the rest of mankind.

In the stupid way people have I stood and meditated on the sight, before it occurred to me that this was the most useless thing to do. After waiting a little longer to let the others get away from the hall I entered in my turn. The small gas-jet seemed not to have been touched ever since that distant night when Mills and I trod the black-and-white marble hall for the first time on the heels of Captain Blunt — who lived by his sword. And in the dimness and solitude which kept no more trace of the three strangers than if they had been the merest ghosts I seemed to hear the ghostly murmur, “Américain, Catholique et gentilhomme. Amér. . . “ Unseen by human eye I ran up the flight of steps swiftly and on the first floor stepped into my sitting-room of which the door was open . . . “et gentilhomme.” I tugged at the bell pull and somewhere down below a bell rang as unexpected for Therese as a call from a ghost.

I had no notion whether Therese could hear me. I seemed to remember that she slept in any bed that happened to be vacant. For all I knew she might have been asleep in mine. As I had no matches on me I waited for a while in the dark. The house was perfectly still. Suddenly without the slightest preliminary sound light fell into the room and Therese stood in the open door with a candlestick in her hand.

She had on her peasant brown skirt. The rest of her was concealed in a black shawl which covered her head, her shoulders, arms, and elbows completely, down to her waist. The hand holding the candle protruded from that envelope which the other invisible hand clasped together under her very chin. And her face looked like a face in a painting. She said at once:

“You startled me, my young Monsieur.”

She addressed me most frequently in that way as though she liked the very word “young.” Her manner was certainly peasant-like with a sort of plaint in the voice, while the face was that of a serving Sister in some small and rustic convent.

“I meant to do it,” I said. “I am a very bad person.”

“The young are always full of fun,” she said as if she were gloating over the idea. “It is very pleasant.”

“But you are very brave,” I chaffed her, “for you didn’t expect a ring, and after all it might have been the devil who pulled the bell.”

“It might have been. But a poor girl like me is not afraid of the devil. I have a pure heart. I have been to confession last evening. No. But it might have been an assassin that pulled the bell ready to kill a poor harmless woman. This is a very lonely street. What could prevent you to kill me now and then walk out again free as air?”

While she was talking like this she had lighted the gas and with the last words she glided through the bedroom door leaving me thunderstruck at the unexpected character of her thoughts.

I couldn't know that there had been during my absence a case of atrocious murder which had affected the imagination of the whole town; and though Therese did not read the papers (which she imagined to be full of impieties and immoralities invented by godless men) yet if she spoke at all with her kind, which she must have done at least in shops, she could not have helped hearing of it. It seems that for some days people could talk of nothing else. She returned gliding from the bedroom hermetically sealed in her black shawl just as she had gone in, with the protruding hand holding the lighted candle and relieved my perplexity as to her morbid turn of mind by telling me something of the murder story in a strange tone of indifference even while referring to its most horrible features. “That's what carnal sin (*pêché de chair*) leads to,” she commented severely and passed her tongue over her thin lips. “And then the devil furnishes the occasion.”

“I can't imagine the devil inciting me to murder you, Therese,” I said, “and I didn't like that ready way you took me for an example, as it were. I suppose pretty near every lodger might be a potential murderer, but I expected to be made an exception.”

With the candle held a little below her face, with that face of one tone and without relief she looked more than ever as though she had come out of an old, cracked, smoky painting, the subject of which was altogether beyond human conception. And she only compressed her lips.

“All right,” I said, making myself comfortable on a sofa after pulling off my boots. “I suppose any one is liable to commit murder all of a sudden. Well, have you got many murderers in the house?”

“Yes,” she said, “it's pretty good. Upstairs and downstairs,” she sighed. “God sees to it.”

“And by the by, who is that grey-headed murderer in a tall hat whom I saw shepherding two girls into this house?”



She put on a candid air in which one could detect a little of her peasant cunning.

“Oh, yes. They are two dancing girls at the Opera, sisters, as different from each other as I and our poor Rita. But they are both virtuous and that gentleman, their father, is very severe with them. Very severe indeed, poor motherless things. And it seems to be such a sinful occupation.”

“I bet you make them pay a big rent, Therese. With an occupation like that . . .”

She looked at me with eyes of invincible innocence and began to glide towards the door, so smoothly that the flame of the candle hardly swayed.

“Good-night,” she murmured.

“Good-night, Mademoiselle.”

Then in the very doorway she turned right round as a marionette would turn.

“Oh, you ought to know, my dear young Monsieur, that Mr. Blunt, the dear handsome man, has arrived from Navarre three days ago or more. Oh,” she added with a priceless air of compunction, “he is such a charming gentleman.”

And the door shut after her.

## CHAPTER IV

That night I passed in a state, mostly open-eyed, I believe, but always on the border between dreams and waking. The only thing absolutely absent from it was the feeling of rest. The usual sufferings of a youth in love had nothing to do with it. I could leave her, go away from her, remain away from her, without an added pang or any augmented consciousness of that torturing sentiment of distance so acute that often it ends by wearing itself out in a few days. Far or near was all one to me, as if one could never get any further but also never any nearer to her secret: the state like that of some strange wild faiths that get hold of mankind with the cruel mystic grip of unattainable perfection, robbing them of both liberty and felicity on earth. A faith presents one with some hope, though. But I had no hope, and not even desire as a thing outside myself, that would come and go, exhaust or excite. It was in me just like life was in me; that life of which a popular saying affirms that "it is sweet." For the general wisdom of mankind will always stop short on the limit of the formidable.

What is best in a state of brimful, equable suffering is that it does away with the gnawings of petty sensations. Too far gone to be sensible to hope and desire I was spared the inferior pangs of elation and impatience. Hours with her or hours without her were all alike, all in her possession! But still there are shades and I will admit that the hours of that morning were perhaps a little more difficult to get through than the others. I had sent word of my arrival of course. I had written a note. I had rung the bell. Therese had appeared herself in her brown garb and as monachal as ever. I had said to her:

"Have this sent off at once."

She had gazed at the addressed envelope, smiled (I was looking up at her from my desk), and at last took it up with an effort of sanctimonious repugnance. But she remained with it in her hand looking at me as though she were piously gloating over something she could read in my face.

"Oh, that Rita, that Rita," she murmured. "And you, too! Why are you trying, you, too, like the others, to stand between her and the mercy of God? What's the good of all this to you? And you such a nice, dear, young gentleman. For no earthly good only making all the kind saints in heaven angry, and our mother ashamed in her place amongst the blessed."

"Mademoiselle Therese," I said, "vous êtes folle."

I believed she was crazy. She was cunning, too. I added an imperious: “Allez,” and with a strange docility she glided out without another word. All I had to do then was to get dressed and wait till eleven o’clock.

The hour struck at last. If I could have plunged into a light wave and been transported instantaneously to Doña Rita’s door it would no doubt have saved me an infinity of pangs too complex for analysis; but as this was impossible I elected to walk from end to end of that long way. My emotions and sensations were childlike and chaotic inasmuch that they were very intense and primitive, and that I lay very helpless in their unrelaxing grasp. If one could have kept a record of one’s physical sensations it would have been a fine collection of absurdities and contradictions. Hardly touching the ground and yet leaden-footed; with a sinking heart and an excited brain; hot and trembling with a secret faintness, and yet as firm as a rock and with a sort of indifference to it all, I did reach the door which was frightfully like any other commonplace door, but at the same time had a fateful character: a few planks put together — and an awful symbol; not to be approached without awe — and yet coming open in the ordinary way to the ring of the bell.

It came open. Oh, yes, very much as usual. But in the ordinary course of events the first sight in the hall should have been the back of the ubiquitous, busy, silent maid hurrying off and already distant. But not at all! She actually waited for me to enter. I was extremely taken aback and I believe spoke to her for the first time in my life.

“Bonjour, Rose.”

She dropped her dark eyelids over those eyes that ought to have been lustrous but were not, as if somebody had breathed on them the first thing in the morning. She was a girl without smiles. She shut the door after me, and not only did that but in the incredible idleness of that morning she, who had never a moment to spare, started helping me off with my overcoat. It was positively embarrassing from its novelty. While busying herself with those trifles she murmured without any marked intention:

“Captain Blunt is with Madame.”

This didn’t exactly surprise me. I knew he had come up to town; I only happened to have forgotten his existence for the moment. I looked at the girl also without any particular intention. But she arrested my movement towards the dining-room door by a low, hurried, if perfectly unemotional appeal:

“Monsieur George!”

That of course was not my name. It served me then as it will serve for this story. In all sorts of strange places I was alluded to as “that young gentleman they call Monsieur George.” Orders came from “Monsieur George” to men who nodded knowingly. Events pivoted about “Monsieur George.” I haven’t the slightest doubt that in the dark and tortuous streets of the old Town there were fingers pointed at my back: there goes “Monsieur George.” I had been introduced discreetly to several considerable persons as “Monsieur George.” I had learned to answer to the name quite naturally; and to simplify matters I was also “Monsieur George” in the street of the Consuls and in the Villa on the Prado. I verily believe that at that time I had the feeling that the name of George really belonged to me. I waited for what the girl had to say. I had to wait some time, though during that silence she gave no sign of distress or agitation. It was for her obviously a moment of reflection. Her lips were compressed a little in a characteristic, capable manner. I looked at her with a friendliness I really felt towards her slight, unattractive, and dependable person.

“Well,” I said at last, rather amused by this mental hesitation. I never took it for anything else. I was sure it was not distrust. She appreciated men and things and events solely in relation to Doña Rita’s welfare and safety. And as to that I believed myself above suspicion. At last she spoke.

“Madame is not happy.” This information was given to me not emotionally but as it were officially. It hadn’t even a tone of warning. A mere statement. Without waiting to see the effect she opened the dining-room door, not to announce my name in the usual way but to go in and shut it behind her. In that short moment I heard no voices inside. Not a sound reached me while the door remained shut; but in a few seconds it came open again and Rose stood aside to let me pass.

Then I heard something: Doña Rita’s voice raised a little on an impatient note (a very, very rare thing) finishing some phrase of protest with the words “. . . Of no consequence.”

I heard them as I would have heard any other words, for she had that kind of voice which carries a long distance. But the maid’s statement occupied all my mind. “Madame n’est pas heureuse.” It had a dreadful precision . . . “Not happy . . .” This unhappiness had almost a concrete form — something resembling a horrid bat. I was tired, excited, and generally overwrought. My head felt empty. What were the appearances of

unhappiness? I was still naïve enough to associate them with tears, lamentations, extraordinary attitudes of the body and some sort of facial distortion, all very dreadful to behold. I didn't know what I should see; but in what I did see there was nothing startling, at any rate from that nursery point of view which apparently I had not yet outgrown.

With immense relief the apprehensive child within me beheld Captain Blunt warming his back at the more distant of the two fireplaces; and as to Doña Rita there was nothing extraordinary in her attitude either, except perhaps that her hair was all loose about her shoulders. I hadn't the slightest doubt they had been riding together that morning, but she, with her impatience of all costume (and yet she could dress herself admirably and wore her dresses triumphantly), had divested herself of her riding habit and sat cross-legged enfolded in that ample blue robe like a young savage chieftain in a blanket. It covered her very feet. And before the normal fixity of her enigmatical eyes the smoke of the cigarette ascended ceremonially, straight up, in a slender spiral.

"How are you," was the greeting of Captain Blunt with the usual smile which would have been more amiable if his teeth hadn't been, just then, clenched quite so tight. How he managed to force his voice through that shining barrier I could never understand. Doña Rita tapped the couch engagingly by her side but I sat down instead in the armchair nearly opposite her, which, I imagine, must have been just vacated by Blunt. She inquired with that particular gleam of the eyes in which there was something immemorial and gay:

"Well?"

"Perfect success."

"I could hug you."

At any time her lips moved very little but in this instance the intense whisper of these words seemed to form itself right in my very heart; not as a conveyed sound but as an imparted emotion vibrating there with an awful intimacy of delight. And yet it left my heart heavy.

"Oh, yes, for joy," I said bitterly but very low; "for your Royalist, Legitimist, joy." Then with that trick of very precise politeness which I must have caught from Mr. Blunt I added:

"I don't want to be embraced — for the King."

And I might have stopped there. But I didn't. With a perversity which should be forgiven to those who suffer night and day and are as if drunk

with an exalted unhappiness, I went on: "For the sake of an old cast-off glove; for I suppose a disdained love is not much more than a soiled, flabby thing that finds itself on a private rubbish heap because it has missed the fire."

She listened to me unreadable, unmoved, narrowed eyes, closed lips, slightly flushed face, as if carved six thousand years ago in order to fix for ever that something secret and obscure which is in all women. Not the gross immobility of a Sphinx proposing roadside riddles but the finer immobility, almost sacred, of a fateful figure seated at the very source of the passions that have moved men from the dawn of ages.

Captain Blunt, with his elbow on the high mantelpiece, had turned away a little from us and his attitude expressed excellently the detachment of a man who does not want to hear. As a matter of fact, I don't suppose he could have heard. He was too far away, our voices were too contained. Moreover, he didn't want to hear. There could be no doubt about it; but she addressed him unexpectedly.

"As I was saying to you, Don Juan, I have the greatest difficulty in getting myself, I won't say understood, but simply believed."

No pose of detachment could avail against the warm waves of that voice. He had to hear. After a moment he altered his position as it were reluctantly, to answer her.

"That's a difficulty that women generally have."

"Yet I have always spoken the truth."

"All women speak the truth," said Blunt imperturbably. And this annoyed her.

"Where are the men I have deceived?" she cried.

"Yes, where?" said Blunt in a tone of alacrity as though he had been ready to go out and look for them outside.

"No! But show me one. I say — where is he?"

He threw his affectation of detachment to the winds, moved his shoulders slightly, very slightly, made a step nearer to the couch, and looked down on her with an expression of amused courtesy.

"Oh, I don't know. Probably nowhere. But if such a man could be found I am certain he would turn out a very stupid person. You can't be expected to furnish every one who approaches you with a mind. To expect that would be too much, even from you who know how to work wonders at such little cost to yourself."

"To myself," she repeated in a loud tone.

"Why this indignation? I am simply taking your word for it."

"Such little cost!" she exclaimed under her breath.

"I mean to your person."

"Oh, yes," she murmured, glanced down, as it were upon herself, then added very low: "This body."

"Well, it is you," said Blunt with visibly contained irritation. "You don't pretend it's somebody else's. It can't be. You haven't borrowed it. . . . It fits you too well," he ended between his teeth.

"You take pleasure in tormenting yourself," she remonstrated, suddenly placated; "and I would be sorry for you if I didn't think it's the mere revolt of your pride. And you know you are indulging your pride at my expense. As to the rest of it, as to my living, acting, working wonders at a little cost. . . it has all but killed me morally. Do you hear? Killed."

"Oh, you are not dead yet," he muttered,

"No," she said with gentle patience. "There is still some feeling left in me; and if it is any satisfaction to you to know it, you may be certain that I shall be conscious of the last stab."

He remained silent for a while and then with a polite smile and a movement of the head in my direction he warned her.

"Our audience will get bored."

"I am perfectly aware that Monsieur George is here, and that he has been breathing a very different atmosphere from what he gets in this room. Don't you find this room extremely confined?" she asked me.

The room was very large but it is a fact that I felt oppressed at that moment. This mysterious quarrel between those two people, revealing something more close in their intercourse than I had ever before suspected, made me so profoundly unhappy that I didn't even attempt to answer. And she continued:

"More space. More air. Give me air, air." She seized the embroidered edges of her blue robe under her white throat and made as if to tear them apart, to fling it open on her breast, recklessly, before our eyes. We both remained perfectly still. Her hands dropped nervelessly by her side. "I envy you, Monsieur George. If I am to go under I should prefer to be drowned in the sea with the wind on my face. What luck, to feel nothing less than all the world closing over one's head!"

A short silence ensued before Mr. Blunt's drawing-room voice was heard with playful familiarity.

"I have often asked myself whether you weren't really a very ambitious person, Doña Rita."

"And I ask myself whether you have any heart." She was looking straight at him and he gratified her with the usual cold white flash of his even teeth before he answered.

"Asking yourself? That means that you are really asking me. But why do it so publicly? I mean it. One single, detached presence is enough to make a public. One alone. Why not wait till he returns to those regions of space and air — from which he came."

His particular trick of speaking of any third person as of a lay figure was exasperating. Yet at the moment I did not know how to resent it, but, in any case, Doña Rita would not have given me time. Without a moment's hesitation she cried out:

"I only wish he could take me out there with him."

For a moment Mr. Blunt's face became as still as a mask and then instead of an angry it assumed an indulgent expression. As to me I had a rapid vision of Dominic's astonishment, awe, and sarcasm which was always as tolerant as it is possible for sarcasm to be. But what a charming, gentle, gay, and fearless companion she would have made! I believed in her fearlessness in any adventure that would interest her. It would be a new occasion for me, a new viewpoint for that faculty of admiration she had awakened in me at sight — at first sight — before she opened her lips — before she ever turned her eyes on me. She would have to wear some sort of sailor costume, a blue woollen shirt open at the throat. . . . Dominic's hooded cloak would envelop her amply, and her face under the black hood would have a luminous quality, adolescent charm, and an enigmatic expression. The confined space of the little vessel's quarterdeck would lend itself to her cross-legged attitudes, and the blue sea would balance gently her characteristic immobility that seemed to hide thoughts as old and profound as itself. As restless, too — perhaps.

But the picture I had in my eye, coloured and simple like an illustration to a nursery-book tale of two venturesome children's escapade, was what fascinated me most. Indeed I felt that we two were like children under the gaze of a man of the world — who lived by his sword. And I said recklessly:



“Yes, you ought to come along with us for a trip. You would see a lot of things for yourself.”

Mr. Blunt’s expression had grown even more indulgent if that were possible. Yet there was something ineradicably ambiguous about that man. I did not like the indefinable tone in which he observed:

“You are perfectly reckless in what you say, Doña Rita. It has become a habit with you of late.”

“While with you reserve is a second nature, Don Juan.”

This was uttered with the gentlest, almost tender, irony. Mr. Blunt waited a while before he said:

“Certainly. . . . Would you have liked me to be otherwise?”

She extended her hand to him on a sudden impulse.

“Forgive me! I may have been unjust, and you may only have been loyal. The falseness is not in us. The fault is in life itself, I suppose. I have been always frank with you.”

“And I obedient,” he said, bowing low over her hand. He turned away, paused to look at me for some time and finally gave me the correct sort of nod. But he said nothing and went out, or rather lounged out with his worldly manner of perfect ease under all conceivable circumstances. With her head lowered Doña Rita watched him till he actually shut the door behind him. I was facing her and only heard the door close.

“Don’t stare at me,” were the first words she said.

It was difficult to obey that request. I didn’t know exactly where to look, while I sat facing her. So I got up, vaguely full of goodwill, prepared even to move off as far as the window, when she commanded:

“Don’t turn your back on me.”

I chose to understand it symbolically.

“You know very well I could never do that. I couldn’t. Not even if I wanted to.” And I added: “It’s too late now.”

“Well, then, sit down. Sit down on this couch.”

I sat down on the couch. Unwillingly? Yes. I was at that stage when all her words, all her gestures, all her silences were a heavy trial to me, put a stress on my resolution, on that fidelity to myself and to her which lay like a leaden weight on my untried heart. But I didn’t sit down very far away from her, though that soft and billowy couch was big enough, God knows! No, not very far from her. Self-control, dignity, hopelessness itself, have their limits. The halo of her tawny hair stirred as I let myself drop by her

side. Whereupon she flung one arm round my neck, leaned her temple against my shoulder and began to sob; but that I could only guess from her slight, convulsive movements because in our relative positions I could only see the mass of her tawny hair brushed back, yet with a halo of escaped hair which as I bent my head over her tickled my lips, my cheek, in a maddening manner.

We sat like two venturesome children in an illustration to a tale, scared by their adventure. But not for long. As I instinctively, yet timidly, sought for her other hand I felt a tear strike the back of mine, big and heavy as if fallen from a great height. It was too much for me. I must have given a nervous start. At once I heard a murmur: "You had better go away now."

I withdrew myself gently from under the light weight of her head, from this unspeakable bliss and inconceivable misery, and had the absurd impression of leaving her suspended in the air. And I moved away on tiptoe.

Like an inspired blind man led by Providence I found my way out of the room but really I saw nothing, till in the hall the maid appeared by enchantment before me holding up my overcoat. I let her help me into it. And then (again as if by enchantment) she had my hat in her hand.

"No. Madame isn't happy," I whispered to her distractedly.

She let me take my hat out of her hand and while I was putting it on my head I heard an austere whisper:

"Madame should listen to her heart."

Austere is not the word; it was almost freezing, this unexpected, dispassionate rustle of words. I had to repress a shudder, and as coldly as herself I murmured:

"She has done that once too often."

Rose was standing very close to me and I caught distinctly the note of scorn in her indulgent compassion.

"Oh, that! . . . Madame is like a child." It was impossible to get the bearing of that utterance from that girl who, as Doña Rita herself had told me, was the most taciturn of human beings; and yet of all human beings the one nearest to herself. I seized her head in my hands and turning up her face I looked straight down into her black eyes which should have been lustrous. Like a piece of glass breathed upon they reflected no light, revealed no depths, and under my ardent gaze remained tarnished, misty, unconscious.

“Will Monsieur kindly let me go. Monsieur shouldn’t play the child, either.” (I let her go.) “Madame could have the world at her feet. Indeed she has it there only she doesn’t care for it.”

How talkative she was, this maid with unsealed lips! For some reason or other this last statement of hers brought me immense comfort.

“Yes?” I whispered breathlessly.

“Yes! But in that case what’s the use of living in fear and torment?” she went on, revealing a little more of herself to my astonishment. She opened the door for me and added:

“Those that don’t care to stoop ought at least make themselves happy.”

I turned in the very doorway: “There is something which prevents that?” I suggested.

“To be sure there is. Bonjour, Monsieur.”

## **PART FOUR**

## CHAPTER I

“Such a charming lady in a grey silk dress and a hand as white as snow. She looked at me through such funny glasses on the end of a long handle. A very great lady but her voice was as kind as the voice of a saint. I have never seen anything like that. She made me feel so timid.”

The voice uttering these words was the voice of Therese and I looked at her from a bed draped heavily in brown silk curtains fantastically looped up from ceiling to floor. The glow of a sunshiny day was toned down by closed jalousies to a mere transparency of darkness. In this thin medium Therese’s form appeared flat, without detail, as if cut out of black paper. It glided towards the window and with a click and a scrape let in the full flood of light which smote my aching eyeballs painfully.

In truth all that night had been the abomination of desolation to me. After wrestling with my thoughts, if the acute consciousness of a woman’s existence may be called a thought, I had apparently dropped off to sleep only to go on wrestling with a nightmare, a senseless and terrifying dream of being in bonds which, even after waking, made me feel powerless in all my limbs. I lay still, suffering acutely from a renewed sense of existence, unable to lift an arm, and wondering why I was not at sea, how long I had slept, how long Therese had been talking before her voice had reached me in that purgatory of hopeless longing and unanswerable questions to which I was condemned.

It was Therese’s habit to begin talking directly she entered the room with the tray of morning coffee. This was her method for waking me up. I generally regained the consciousness of the external world on some pious phrase asserting the spiritual comfort of early mass, or on angry lamentations about the unconscionable rapacity of the dealers in fish and vegetables; for after mass it was Therese’s practice to do the marketing for the house. As a matter of fact the necessity of having to pay, to actually give money to people, infuriated the pious Therese. But the matter of this morning’s speech was so extraordinary that it might have been the prolongation of a nightmare: a man in bonds having to listen to weird and unaccountable speeches against which, he doesn’t know why, his very soul revolts.

In sober truth my soul remained in revolt though I was convinced that I was no longer dreaming. I watched Therese coming away from the window

with that helpless dread a man bound hand and foot may be excused to feel. For in such a situation even the absurd may appear ominous. She came up close to the bed and folding her hands meekly in front of her turned her eyes up to the ceiling.

“If I had been her daughter she couldn’t have spoken more softly to me,” she said sentimentally.

I made a great effort to speak.

“Mademoiselle Therese, you are raving.”

“She addressed me as Mademoiselle, too, so nicely. I was struck with veneration for her white hair but her face, believe me, my dear young Monsieur, has not so many wrinkles as mine.”

She compressed her lips with an angry glance at me as if I could help her wrinkles, then she sighed.

“God sends wrinkles, but what is our face?” she digressed in a tone of great humility. “We shall have glorious faces in Paradise. But meantime God has permitted me to preserve a smooth heart.”

“Are you going to keep on like this much longer?” I fairly shouted at her. “What are you talking about?”

“I am talking about the sweet old lady who came in a carriage. Not a fiacre. I can tell a fiacre. In a little carriage shut in with glass all in front. I suppose she is very rich. The carriage was very shiny outside and all beautiful grey stuff inside. I opened the door to her myself. She got out slowly like a queen. I was struck all of a heap. Such a shiny beautiful little carriage. There were blue silk tassels inside, beautiful silk tassels.”

Obviously Therese had been very much impressed by a brougham, though she didn’t know the name for it. Of all the town she knew nothing but the streets which led to a neighbouring church frequented only by the poorer classes and the humble quarter around, where she did her marketing. Besides, she was accustomed to glide along the walls with her eyes cast down; for her natural boldness would never show itself through that nun-like mien except when bargaining, if only on a matter of threepence. Such a turn-out had never been presented to her notice before. The traffic in the street of the Consuls was mostly pedestrian and far from fashionable. And anyhow Therese never looked out of the window. She lurked in the depths of the house like some kind of spider that shuns attention. She used to dart at one from some dark recesses which I never explored.

Yet it seemed to me that she exaggerated her raptures for some reason or other. With her it was very difficult to distinguish between craft and innocence.

“Do you mean to say,” I asked suspiciously, “that an old lady wants to hire an apartment here? I hope you told her there was no room, because, you know, this house is not exactly the thing for venerable old ladies.”

“Don’t make me angry, my dear young Monsieur. I have been to confession this morning. Aren’t you comfortable? Isn’t the house appointed richly enough for anybody?”

That girl with a peasant-nun’s face had never seen the inside of a house other than some half-ruined caserio in her native hills.

I pointed out to her that this was not a matter of splendour or comfort but of “convenances.” She pricked up her ears at that word which probably she had never heard before; but with woman’s uncanny intuition I believe she understood perfectly what I meant. Her air of saintly patience became so pronounced that with my own poor intuition I perceived that she was raging at me inwardly. Her weather-tanned complexion, already affected by her confined life, took on an extraordinary clayey aspect which reminded me of a strange head painted by El Greco which my friend Prax had hung on one of his walls and used to rail at; yet not without a certain respect.

Therese, with her hands still meekly folded about her waist, had mastered the feelings of anger so unbecoming to a person whose sins had been absolved only about three hours before, and asked me with an insinuating softness whether she wasn’t an honest girl enough to look after any old lady belonging to a world which after all was sinful. She reminded me that she had kept house ever since she was “so high” for her uncle the priest: a man well-known for his saintliness in a large district extending even beyond Pampeluna. The character of a house depended upon the person who ruled it. She didn’t know what impenitent wretches had been breathing within these walls in the time of that godless and wicked man who had planted every seed of perdition in “our Rita’s” ill-disposed heart. But he was dead and she, Therese, knew for certain that wickedness perished utterly, because of God’s anger (*la colère du bon Dieu*). She would have no hesitation in receiving a bishop, if need be, since “our, Rita,” with her poor, wretched, unbelieving heart, had nothing more to do with the house.

All this came out of her like an unctuous trickle of some acrid oil. The low, voluble delivery was enough by itself to compel my attention.

“You think you know your sister’s heart,” I asked.

She made small eyes at me to discover if I was angry. She seemed to have an invincible faith in the virtuous dispositions of young men. And as I had spoken in measured tones and hadn’t got red in the face she let herself go.

“Black, my dear young Monsieur. Black. I always knew it. Uncle, poor saintly man, was too holy to take notice of anything. He was too busy with his thoughts to listen to anything I had to say to him. For instance as to her shamelessness. She was always ready to run half naked about the hills. . . “

“Yes. After your goats. All day long. Why didn’t you mend her frocks?”

“Oh, you know about the goats. My dear young Monsieur, I could never tell when she would fling over her pretended sweetness and put her tongue out at me. Did she tell you about a boy, the son of pious and rich parents, whom she tried to lead astray into the wildness of thoughts like her own, till the poor dear child drove her off because she outraged his modesty? I saw him often with his parents at Sunday mass. The grace of God preserved him and made him quite a gentleman in Paris. Perhaps it will touch Rita’s heart, too, some day. But she was awful then. When I wouldn’t listen to her complaints she would say: ‘All right, sister, I would just as soon go clothed in rain and wind.’ And such a bag of bones, too, like the picture of a devil’s imp. Ah, my dear young Monsieur, you don’t know how wicked her heart is. You aren’t bad enough for that yourself. I don’t believe you are evil at all in your innocent little heart. I never heard you jeer at holy things. You are only thoughtless. For instance, I have never seen you make the sign of the cross in the morning. Why don’t you make a practice of crossing yourself directly you open your eyes. It’s a very good thing. It keeps Satan off for the day.”

She proffered that advice in a most matter-of-fact tone as if it were a precaution against a cold, compressed her lips, then returning to her fixed idea, “But the house is mine,” she insisted very quietly with an accent which made me feel that Satan himself would never manage to tear it out of her hands.

“And so I told the great lady in grey. I told her that my sister had given it to me and that surely God would not let her take it away again.”

“You told that grey-headed lady, an utter stranger! You are getting more crazy every day. You have neither good sense nor good feeling,



Mademoiselle Therese, let me tell you. Do you talk about your sister to the butcher and the greengrocer, too? A downright savage would have more restraint. What's your object? What do you expect from it? What pleasure do you get from it? Do you think you please God by abusing your sister? What do you think you are?"

"A poor lone girl amongst a lot of wicked people. Do you think I wanted to go forth amongst those abominations? it's that poor sinful Rita that wouldn't let me be where I was, serving a holy man, next door to a church, and sure of my share of Paradise. I simply obeyed my uncle. It's he who told me to go forth and attempt to save her soul, bring her back to us, to a virtuous life. But what would be the good of that? She is given over to worldly, carnal thoughts. Of course we are a good family and my uncle is a great man in the country, but where is the reputable farmer or God-fearing man of that kind that would dare to bring such a girl into his house to his mother and sisters. No, let her give her ill-gotten wealth up to the deserving and devote the rest of her life to repentance."

She uttered these righteous reflections and presented this programme for the salvation of her sister's soul in a reasonable convinced tone which was enough to give goose flesh to one all over.

"Mademoiselle Therese," I said, "you are nothing less than a monster."

She received that true expression of my opinion as though I had given her a sweet of a particularly delicious kind. She liked to be abused. It pleased her to be called names. I did let her have that satisfaction to her heart's content. At last I stopped because I could do no more, unless I got out of bed to beat her. I have a vague notion that she would have liked that, too, but I didn't try. After I had stopped she waited a little before she raised her downcast eyes.

"You are a dear, ignorant, flighty young gentleman," she said. "Nobody can tell what a cross my sister is to me except the good priest in the church where I go every day."

"And the mysterious lady in grey," I suggested sarcastically.

"Such a person might have guessed it," answered Therese, seriously, "but I told her nothing except that this house had been given me in full property by our Rita. And I wouldn't have done that if she hadn't spoken to me of my sister first. I can't tell too many people about that. One can't trust Rita. I know she doesn't fear God but perhaps human respect may keep her from taking this house back from me. If she doesn't want me to talk about

her to people why doesn't she give me a properly stamped piece of paper for it?"

She said all this rapidly in one breath and at the end had a sort of anxious gasp which gave me the opportunity to voice my surprise. It was immense.

"That lady, the strange lady, spoke to you of your sister first!" I cried.

"The lady asked me, after she had been in a little time, whether really this house belonged to Madame de Lastaola. She had been so sweet and kind and condescending that I did not mind humiliating my spirit before such a good Christian. I told her that I didn't know how the poor sinner in her mad blindness called herself, but that this house had been given to me truly enough by my sister. She raised her eyebrows at that but she looked at me at the same time so kindly, as much as to say, 'Don't trust much to that, my dear girl,' that I couldn't help taking up her hand, soft as down, and kissing it. She took it away pretty quick but she was not offended. But she only said, 'That's very generous on your sister's part,' in a way that made me run cold all over. I suppose all the world knows our Rita for a shameless girl. It was then that the lady took up those glasses on a long gold handle and looked at me through them till I felt very much abashed. She said to me, 'There is nothing to be unhappy about. Madame de Lastaola is a very remarkable person who has done many surprising things. She is not to be judged like other people and as far as I know she has never wronged a single human being. . . .' That put heart into me, I can tell you; and the lady told me then not to disturb her son. She would wait till he woke up. She knew he was a bad sleeper. I said to her: 'Why, I can hear the dear sweet gentleman this moment having his bath in the fencing-room,' and I took her into the studio. They are there now and they are going to have their lunch together at twelve o'clock."

"Why on earth didn't you tell me at first that the lady was Mrs. Blunt?"

"Didn't I? I thought I did," she said innocently. I felt a sudden desire to get out of that house, to fly from the reinforced Blunt element which was to me so oppressive.

"I want to get up and dress, Mademoiselle Therese," I said.

She gave a slight start and without looking at me again glided out of the room, the many folds of her brown skirt remaining undisturbed as she moved.

I looked at my watch; it was ten o'clock. Therese had been late with my coffee. The delay was clearly caused by the unexpected arrival of Mr.

Blunt's mother, which might or might not have been expected by her son. The existence of those Blunts made me feel uncomfortable in a peculiar way as though they had been the denizens of another planet with a subtly different point of view and something in the intelligence which was bound to remain unknown to me. It caused in me a feeling of inferiority which I intensely disliked. This did not arise from the actual fact that those people originated in another continent. I had met Americans before. And the Blunts were Americans. But so little! That was the trouble. Captain Blunt might have been a Frenchman as far as languages, tones, and manners went. But you could not have mistaken him for one. . . . Why? You couldn't tell. It was something indefinite. It occurred to me while I was towelling hard my hair, face, and the back of my neck, that I could not meet J. K. Blunt on equal terms in any relation of life except perhaps arms in hand, and in preference with pistols, which are less intimate, acting at a distance — but arms of some sort. For physically his life, which could be taken away from him, was exactly like mine, held on the same terms and of the same vanishing quality.

I would have smiled at my absurdity if all, even the most intimate, vestige of gaiety had not been crushed out of my heart by the intolerable weight of my love for Rita. It crushed, it overshadowed, too, it was immense. If there were any smiles in the world (which I didn't believe) I could not have seen them. Love for Rita . . . if it was love, I asked myself despairingly, while I brushed my hair before a glass. It did not seem to have any sort of beginning as far as I could remember. A thing the origin of which you cannot trace cannot be seriously considered. It is an illusion. Or perhaps mine was a physical state, some sort of disease akin to melancholia which is a form of insanity? The only moments of relief I could remember were when she and I would start squabbling like two passionate infants in a nursery, over anything under heaven, over a phrase, a word sometimes, in the great light of the glass rotunda, disregarding the quiet entrances and exits of the ever-active Rose, in great bursts of voices and peals of laughter.

. . .

I felt tears come into my eyes at the memory of her laughter, the true memory of the senses almost more penetrating than the reality itself. It haunted me. All that appertained to her haunted me with the same awful intimacy, her whole form in the familiar pose, her very substance in its colour and texture, her eyes, her lips, the gleam of her teeth, the tawny mist

of her hair, the smoothness of her forehead, the faint scent that she used, the very shape, feel, and warmth of her high-heeled slipper that would sometimes in the heat of the discussion drop on the floor with a crash, and which I would (always in the heat of the discussion) pick up and toss back on the couch without ceasing to argue. And besides being haunted by what was Rita on earth I was haunted also by her waywardness, her gentleness and her flame, by that which the high gods called Rita when speaking of her amongst themselves. Oh, yes, certainly I was haunted by her but so was her sister Therese — who was crazy. It proved nothing. As to her tears, since I had not caused them, they only aroused my indignation. To put her head on my shoulder, to weep these strange tears, was nothing short of an outrageous liberty. It was a mere emotional trick. She would have just as soon leaned her head against the over-mantel of one of those tall, red granite chimney-pieces in order to weep comfortably. And then when she had no longer any need of support she dispensed with it by simply telling me to go away. How convenient! The request had sounded pathetic, almost sacredly so, but then it might have been the exhibition of the coolest possible impudence. With her one could not tell. Sorrow, indifference, tears, smiles, all with her seemed to have a hidden meaning. Nothing could be trusted. . . Heavens! Am I as crazy as Therese I asked myself with a passing chill of fear, while occupied in equalizing the ends of my neck-tie.

I felt suddenly that “this sort of thing” would kill me. The definition of the cause was vague, but the thought itself was no mere morbid artificiality of sentiment but a genuine conviction. “That sort of thing” was what I would have to die from. It wouldn’t be from the innumerable doubts. Any sort of certitude would be also deadly. It wouldn’t be from a stab — a kiss would kill me as surely. It would not be from a frown or from any particular word or any particular act — but from having to bear them all, together and in succession — from having to live with “that sort of thing.” About the time I finished with my neck-tie I had done with life too. I absolutely did not care because I couldn’t tell whether, mentally and physically, from the roots of my hair to the soles of my feet — whether I was more weary or unhappy.

And now my toilet was finished, my occupation was gone. An immense distress descended upon me. It has been observed that the routine of daily life, that arbitrary system of trifles, is a great moral support. But my toilet was finished, I had nothing more to do of those things consecrated by usage

and which leave you no option. The exercise of any kind of volition by a man whose consciousness is reduced to the sensation that he is being killed by “that sort of thing” cannot be anything but mere trifling with death, an insincere pose before himself. I wasn’t capable of it. It was then that I discovered that being killed by “that sort of thing,” I mean the absolute conviction of it, was, so to speak, nothing in itself. The horrible part was the waiting. That was the cruelty, the tragedy, the bitterness of it. “Why the devil don’t I drop dead now?” I asked myself peevishly, taking a clean handkerchief out of the drawer and stuffing it in my pocket.

This was absolutely the last thing, the last ceremony of an imperative rite. I was abandoned to myself now and it was terrible. Generally I used to go out, walk down to the port, take a look at the craft I loved with a sentiment that was extremely complex, being mixed up with the image of a woman; perhaps go on board, not because there was anything for me to do there but just for nothing, for happiness, simply as a man will sit contented in the companionship of the beloved object. For lunch I had the choice of two places, one Bohemian, the other select, even aristocratic, where I had still my reserved table in the petit salon, up the white staircase. In both places I had friends who treated my erratic appearances with discretion, in one case tinged with respect, in the other with a certain amused tolerance. I owed this tolerance to the most careless, the most confirmed of those Bohemians (his beard had streaks of grey amongst its many other tints) who, once bringing his heavy hand down on my shoulder, took my defence against the charge of being disloyal and even foreign to that milieu of earnest visions taking beautiful and revolutionary shapes in the smoke of pipes, in the jingle of glasses.

“That fellow (ce garçon) is a primitive nature, but he may be an artist in a sense. He has broken away from his conventions. He is trying to put a special vibration and his own notion of colour into his life; and perhaps even to give it a modelling according to his own ideas. And for all you know he may be on the track of a masterpiece; but observe: if it happens to be one nobody will see it. It can be only for himself. And even he won’t be able to see it in its completeness except on his death-bed. There is something fine in that.”

I had blushed with pleasure; such fine ideas had never entered my head. But there was something fine. . . . How far all this seemed! How mute and how still! What a phantom he was, that man with a beard of at least seven

tones of brown. And those shades of the other kind such as Baptiste with the shaven diplomatic face, the maître d'hôtel in charge of the petit salon, taking my hat and stick from me with a deferential remark: "Monsieur is not very often seen nowadays." And those other well-groomed heads raised and nodding at my passage — "Bonjour." "Bonjour" — following me with interested eyes; these young X.s and Z.s, low-toned, markedly discreet, lounging up to my table on their way out with murmurs: "Are you well?" — "Will one see you anywhere this evening?" — not from curiosity, God forbid, but just from friendliness; and passing on almost without waiting for an answer. What had I to do with them, this elegant dust, these moulds of provincial fashion?

I also often lunched with Doña Rita without invitation. But that was now unthinkable. What had I to do with a woman who allowed somebody else to make her cry and then with an amazing lack of good feeling did her offensive weeping on my shoulder? Obviously I could have nothing to do with her. My five minutes' meditation in the middle of the bedroom came to an end without even a sigh. The dead don't sigh, and for all practical purposes I was that, except for the final consummation, the growing cold, the rigor mortis — that blessed state! With measured steps I crossed the landing to my sitting-room.

## CHAPTER II

The windows of that room gave out on the street of the Consuls which as usual was silent. And the house itself below me and above me was soundless, perfectly still. In general the house was quiet, dumbly quiet, without resonances of any sort, something like what one would imagine the interior of a convent would be. I suppose it was very solidly built. Yet that morning I missed in the stillness that feeling of security and peace which ought to have been associated with it. It is, I believe, generally admitted that the dead are glad to be at rest. But I wasn't at rest. What was wrong with that silence? There was something incongruous in that peace. What was it that had got into that stillness? Suddenly I remembered: the mother of Captain Blunt.

Why had she come all the way from Paris? And why should I bother my head about it? H'm — the Blunt atmosphere, the reinforced Blunt vibration stealing through the walls, through the thick walls and the almost more solid stillness. Nothing to me, of course — the movements of Mme. Blunt, mère. It was maternal affection which had brought her south by either the evening or morning *Rapide*, to take anxious stock of the ravages of that insomnia. Very good thing, insomnia, for a cavalry officer perpetually on outpost duty, a real godsend, so to speak; but on leave a truly devilish condition to be in.

The above sequence of thoughts was entirely unsympathetic and it was followed by a feeling of satisfaction that I, at any rate, was not suffering from insomnia. I could always sleep in the end. In the end. Escape into a nightmare. Wouldn't he revel in that if he could! But that wasn't for him. He had to toss about open-eyed all night and get up weary, weary. But oh, wasn't I weary, too, waiting for a sleep without dreams.

I heard the door behind me open. I had been standing with my face to the window and, I declare, not knowing what I was looking at across the road — the Desert of Sahara or a wall of bricks, a landscape of rivers and forests or only the Consulate of Paraguay. But I had been thinking, apparently, of Mr. Blunt with such intensity that when I saw him enter the room it didn't really make much difference. When I turned about the door behind him was already shut. He advanced towards me, correct, supple, hollow-eyed, and smiling; and as to his costume ready to go out except for the old shooting jacket which he must have affectioned particularly, for he never

lost any time in getting into it at every opportunity. Its material was some tweed mixture; it had gone inconceivably shabby, it was shrunk from old age, it was ragged at the elbows; but any one could see at a glance that it had been made in London by a celebrated tailor, by a distinguished specialist. Blunt came towards me in all the elegance of his slimness and affirming in every line of his face and body, in the correct set of his shoulders and the careless freedom of his movements, the superiority, the inexpressible superiority, the unconscious, the unmarked, the not-to-be-described, and even not-to-be-caught, superiority of the naturally born and the perfectly finished man of the world, over the simple young man. He was smiling, easy, correct, perfectly delightful, fit to kill.

He had come to ask me, if I had no other engagement, to lunch with him and his mother in about an hour's time. He did it in a most *déagé* tone. His mother had given him a surprise. The completest . . . The foundation of his mother's psychology was her delightful unexpectedness. She could never let things be (this in a peculiar tone which he checked at once) and he really would take it very kindly of me if I came to break the *tête-à-tête* for a while (that is if I had no other engagement. Flash of teeth). His mother was exquisitely and tenderly absurd. She had taken it into her head that his health was endangered in some way. And when she took anything into her head . . . Perhaps I might find something to say which would reassure her. His mother had two long conversations with Mills on his passage through Paris and had heard of me (I knew how that thick man could speak of people, he interjected ambiguously) and his mother, with an insatiable curiosity for anything that was rare (filially humorous accent here and a softer flash of teeth), was very anxious to have me presented to her (courteous intonation, but no teeth). He hoped I wouldn't mind if she treated me a little as an "interesting young man." His mother had never got over her seventeenth year, and the manner of the spoilt beauty of at least three counties at the back of the Carolinas. That again got overlaid by the *sans-façon* of a grande dame of the Second Empire.

I accepted the invitation with a worldly grin and a perfectly just intonation, because I really didn't care what I did. I only wondered vaguely why that fellow required all the air in the room for himself. There did not seem enough left to go down my throat. I didn't say that I would come with pleasure or that I would be delighted, but I said that I would come. He seemed to forget his tongue in his head, put his hands in his pockets and



moved about vaguely. "I am a little nervous this morning," he said in French, stopping short and looking me straight in the eyes. His own were deep sunk, dark, fatal. I asked with some malice, that no one could have detected in my intonation, "How's that sleeplessness?"

He muttered through his teeth, "Mal. Je ne dors plus." He moved off to stand at the window with his back to the room. I sat down on a sofa that was there and put my feet up, and silence took possession of the room.

"Isn't this street ridiculous?" said Blunt suddenly, and crossing the room rapidly waved his hand to me, "A bientôt donc," and was gone. He had seared himself into my mind. I did not understand him nor his mother then; which made them more impressive; but I have discovered since that those two figures required no mystery to make them memorable. Of course it isn't every day that one meets a mother that lives by her wits and a son that lives by his sword, but there was a perfect finish about their ambiguous personalities which is not to be met twice in a life-time. I shall never forget that grey dress with ample skirts and long corsage yet with infinite style, the ancient as if ghostly beauty of outlines, the black lace, the silver hair, the harmonious, restrained movements of those white, soft hands like the hands of a queen — or an abbess; and in the general fresh effect of her person the brilliant eyes like two stars with the calm reposeful way they had of moving on and off one, as if nothing in the world had the right to veil itself before their once sovereign beauty. Captain Blunt with smiling formality introduced me by name, adding with a certain relaxation of the formal tone the comment: "The Monsieur George! whose fame you tell me has reached even Paris." Mrs. Blunt's reception of me, glance, tones, even to the attitude of the admirably corseted figure, was most friendly, approaching the limit of half-familiarity. I had the feeling that I was beholding in her a captured ideal. No common experience! But I didn't care. It was very lucky perhaps for me that in a way I was like a very sick man who has yet preserved all his lucidity. I was not even wondering to myself at what on earth I was doing there. She breathed out: "Comme c'est romantique," at large to the dusty studio as it were; then pointing to a chair at her right hand, and bending slightly towards me she said:

"I have heard this name murmured by pretty lips in more than one royalist salon."

I didn't say anything to that ingratiating speech. I had only an odd thought that she could not have had such a figure, nothing like it, when she

was seventeen and wore snowy muslin dresses on the family plantation in South Carolina, in pre-abolition days.

“You won’t mind, I am sure, if an old woman whose heart is still young elects to call you by it,” she declared.

“Certainly, Madame. It will be more romantic,” I assented with a respectful bow.

She dropped a calm: “Yes — there is nothing like romance while one is young. So I will call you Monsieur George,” she paused and then added, “I could never get old,” in a matter-of-fact final tone as one would remark, “I could never learn to swim,” and I had the presence of mind to say in a tone to match, “C’est évident, Madame.” It was evident. She couldn’t get old; and across the table her thirty-year-old son who couldn’t get sleep sat listening with courteous detachment and the narrowest possible line of white underlining his silky black moustache.

“Your services are immensely appreciated,” she said with an amusing touch of importance as of a great official lady. “Immensely appreciated by people in a position to understand the great significance of the Carlist movement in the South. There it has to combat anarchism, too. I who have lived through the Commune . . .”

Therese came in with a dish, and for the rest of the lunch the conversation so well begun drifted amongst the most appalling inanities of the religious-royalist-legitimist order. The ears of all the Bourbons in the world must have been burning. Mrs. Blunt seemed to have come into personal contact with a good many of them and the marvellous insipidity of her recollections was astonishing to my inexperience. I looked at her from time to time thinking: She has seen slavery, she has seen the Commune, she knows two continents, she has seen a civil war, the glory of the Second Empire, the horrors of two sieges; she has been in contact with marked personalities, with great events, she has lived on her wealth, on her personality, and there she is with her plumage unruffled, as glossy as ever, unable to get old: — a sort of Phoenix free from the slightest signs of ashes and dust, all complacent amongst those inanities as if there had been nothing else in the world. In my youthful haste I asked myself what sort of airy soul she had.

At last Therese put a dish of fruit on the table, a small collection of oranges, raisins, and nuts. No doubt she had bought that lot very cheap and it did not look at all inviting. Captain Blunt jumped up. “My mother can’t

stand tobacco smoke. Will you keep her company, mon cher, while I take a turn with a cigar in that ridiculous garden. The brougham from the hotel will be here very soon."

He left us in the white flash of an apologetic grin. Almost directly he reappeared, visible from head to foot through the glass side of the studio, pacing up and down the central path of that "ridiculous" garden: for its elegance and its air of good breeding the most remarkable figure that I have ever seen before or since. He had changed his coat. Madame Blunt mère lowered the long-handled glasses through which she had been contemplating him with an appraising, absorbed expression which had nothing maternal in it. But what she said to me was:

"You understand my anxieties while he is campaigning with the King."

She had spoken in French and she had used the expression "mes trances" but for all the rest, intonation, bearing, solemnity, she might have been referring to one of the Bourbons. I am sure that not a single one of them looked half as aristocratic as her son.

"I understand perfectly, Madame. But then that life is so romantic."

"Hundreds of young men belonging to a certain sphere are doing that," she said very distinctly, "only their case is different. They have their positions, their families to go back to; but we are different. We are exiles, except of course for the ideals, the kindred spirit, the friendships of old standing we have in France. Should my son come out unscathed he has no one but me and I have no one but him. I have to think of his life. Mr. Mills (what a distinguished mind that is!) has reassured me as to my son's health. But he sleeps very badly, doesn't he?"

I murmured something affirmative in a doubtful tone and she remarked quaintly, with a certain curtness, "It's so unnecessary, this worry! The unfortunate position of an exile has its advantages. At a certain height of social position (wealth has got nothing to do with it, we have been ruined in a most righteous cause), at a certain established height one can disregard narrow prejudices. You see examples in the aristocracies of all the countries. A chivalrous young American may offer his life for a remote ideal which yet may belong to his familial tradition. We, in our great country, have every sort of tradition. But a young man of good connections and distinguished relations must settle down some day, dispose of his life."

"No doubt, Madame," I said, raising my eyes to the figure outside — "Américain, Catholique et gentilhomme" — walking up and down the path

with a cigar which he was not smoking. "For myself, I don't know anything about those necessities. I have broken away for ever from those things."

"Yes, Mr. Mills talked to me about you. What a golden heart that is. His sympathies are infinite."

I thought suddenly of Mills pronouncing on Mme. Blunt, whatever his text on me might have been: "She lives by her wits." Was she exercising her wits on me for some purpose of her own? And I observed coldly:

"I really know your son so very little."

"Oh, voyons," she protested. "I am aware that you are very much younger, but the similitudes of opinions, origins and perhaps at bottom, faintly, of character, of chivalrous devotion — no, you must be able to understand him in a measure. He is infinitely scrupulous and recklessly brave."

I listened deferentially to the end yet with every nerve in my body tingling in hostile response to the Blunt vibration, which seemed to have got into my very hair.

"I am convinced of it, Madame. I have even heard of your son's bravery. It's extremely natural in a man who, in his own words, 'lives by his sword.'"

She suddenly departed from her almost inhuman perfection, betrayed "nerves" like a common mortal, of course very slightly, but in her it meant more than a blaze of fury from a vessel of inferior clay. Her admirable little foot, marvellously shod in a black shoe, tapped the floor irritably. But even in that display there was something exquisitely delicate. The very anger in her voice was silvery, as it were, and more like the petulance of a seventeen-year-old beauty.

"What nonsense! A Blunt doesn't hire himself."

"Some princely families," I said, "were founded by men who have done that very thing. The great Condottieri, you know."

It was in an almost tempestuous tone that she made me observe that we were not living in the fifteenth century. She gave me also to understand with some spirit that there was no question here of founding a family. Her son was very far from being the first of the name. His importance lay rather in being the last of a race which had totally perished, she added in a completely drawing-room tone, "in our Civil War."

She had mastered her irritation and through the glass side of the room sent a wistful smile to his address, but I noticed the yet unextinguished anger in her eyes full of fire under her beautiful white eyebrows. For she was growing old! Oh, yes, she was growing old, and secretly weary, and perhaps desperate.

### CHAPTER III

Without caring much about it I was conscious of sudden illumination. I said to myself confidently that these two people had been quarrelling all the morning. I had discovered the secret of my invitation to that lunch. They did not care to face the strain of some obstinate, inconclusive discussion for fear, maybe, of it ending in a serious quarrel. And so they had agreed that I should be fetched downstairs to create a diversion. I cannot say I felt annoyed. I didn't care. My perspicacity did not please me either. I wished they had left me alone — but nothing mattered. They must have been in their superiority accustomed to make use of people, without compunction. From necessity, too. She especially. She lived by her wits. The silence had grown so marked that I had at last to raise my eyes; and the first thing I observed was that Captain Blunt was no longer to be seen in the garden. Must have gone indoors. Would rejoin us in a moment. Then I would leave mother and son to themselves.

The next thing I noticed was that a great mellowness had descended upon the mother of the last of his race. But these terms, irritation, mellowness, appeared gross when applied to her. It is impossible to give an idea of the refinement and subtlety of all her transformations. She smiled faintly at me.

“But all this is beside the point. The real point is that my son, like all fine natures, is a being of strange contradictions which the trials of life have not yet reconciled in him. With me it is a little different. The trials fell mainly to my share — and of course I have lived longer. And then men are much more complex than women, much more difficult, too. And you, Monsieur George? Are you complex, with unexpected resistances and difficulties in your être intime — your inner self? I wonder now . . .”

The Blunt atmosphere seemed to vibrate all over my skin. I disregarded the symptom. “Madame,” I said, “I have never tried to find out what sort of being I am.”

“Ah, that's very wrong. We ought to reflect on what manner of beings we are. Of course we are all sinners. My John is a sinner like the others,” she declared further, with a sort of proud tenderness as though our common lot must have felt honoured and to a certain extent purified by this condescending recognition.

“You are too young perhaps as yet . . . But as to my John,” she broke off, leaning her elbow on the table and supporting her head on her old, impeccably shaped, white fore-arm emerging from a lot of precious, still older, lace trimming the short sleeve. “The trouble is that he suffers from a profound discord between the necessary reactions to life and even the impulses of nature and the lofty idealism of his feelings; I may say, of his principles. I assure you that he won’t even let his heart speak uncontradicted.”

I am sure I don’t know what particular devil looks after the associations of memory, and I can’t even imagine the shock which it would have been for Mrs. Blunt to learn that the words issuing from her lips had awakened in me the visual perception of a dark-skinned, hard-driven lady’s maid with tarnished eyes; even of the tireless Rose handing me my hat while breathing out the enigmatic words: “Madame should listen to her heart.” A wave from the atmosphere of another house rolled in, overwhelming and fiery, seductive and cruel, through the Blunt vibration, bursting through it as through tissue paper and filling my heart with sweet murmurs and distracting images, till it seemed to break, leaving an empty stillness in my breast.

After that for a long time I heard Mme. Blunt mère talking with extreme fluency and I even caught the individual words, but I could not in the revulsion of my feelings get hold of the sense. She talked apparently of life in general, of its difficulties, moral and physical, of its surprising turns, of its unexpected contacts, of the choice and rare personalities that drift on it as if on the sea; of the distinction that letters and art gave to it, the nobility and consolations there are in aesthetics, of the privileges they confer on individuals and (this was the first connected statement I caught) that Mills agreed with her in the general point of view as to the inner worth of individualities and in the particular instance of it on which she had opened to him her innermost heart. Mills had a universal mind. His sympathy was universal, too. He had that large comprehension — oh, not cynical, not at all cynical, in fact rather tender — which was found in its perfection only in some rare, very rare Englishmen. The dear creature was romantic, too. Of course he was reserved in his speech but she understood Mills perfectly. Mills apparently liked me very much.

It was time for me to say something. There was a challenge in the reposeful black eyes resting upon my face. I murmured that I was very glad

to hear it. She waited a little, then uttered meaningly, "Mr. Mills is a little bit uneasy about you."

"It's very good of him," I said. And indeed I thought that it was very good of him, though I did ask myself vaguely in my dulled brain why he should be uneasy.

Somehow it didn't occur to me to ask Mrs. Blunt. Whether she had expected me to do so or not I don't know but after a while she changed the pose she had kept so long and folded her wonderfully preserved white arms. She looked a perfect picture in silver and grey, with touches of black here and there. Still I said nothing more in my dull misery. She waited a little longer, then she woke me up with a crash. It was as if the house had fallen, and yet she had only asked me:

"I believe you are received on very friendly terms by Madame de Lastaola on account of your common exertions for the cause. Very good friends, are you not?"

"You mean Rita," I said stupidly, but I felt stupid, like a man who wakes up only to be hit on the head.

"Oh, Rita," she repeated with unexpected acidity, which somehow made me feel guilty of an incredible breach of good manners. "H'm, Rita. . . . Oh, well, let it be Rita — for the present. Though why she should be deprived of her name in conversation about her, really I don't understand. Unless a very special intimacy . . ."

She was distinctly annoyed. I said sulkily, "It isn't her name."

"It is her choice, I understand, which seems almost a better title to recognition on the part of the world. It didn't strike you so before? Well, it seems to me that choice has got more right to be respected than heredity or law. Moreover, Mme. de Lastaola," she continued in an insinuating voice, "that most rare and fascinating young woman is, as a friend like you cannot deny, outside legality altogether. Even in that she is an exceptional creature. For she is exceptional — you agree?"

I had gone dumb, I could only stare at her.

"Oh, I see, you agree. No friend of hers could deny."

"Madame," I burst out, "I don't know where a question of friendship comes in here with a person whom you yourself call so exceptional. I really don't know how she looks upon me. Our intercourse is of course very close and confidential. Is that also talked about in Paris?"



“Not at all, not in the least,” said Mrs. Blunt, easy, equable, but with her calm, sparkling eyes holding me in angry subjection. “Nothing of the sort is being talked about. The references to Mme. de Lastaola are in a very different tone, I can assure you, thanks to her discretion in remaining here. And, I must say, thanks to the discreet efforts of her friends. I am also a friend of Mme. de Lastaola, you must know. Oh, no, I have never spoken to her in my life and have seen her only twice, I believe. I wrote to her though, that I admit. She or rather the image of her has come into my life, into that part of it where art and letters reign undisputed like a sort of religion of beauty to which I have been faithful through all the vicissitudes of my existence. Yes, I did write to her and I have been preoccupied with her for a long time. It arose from a picture, from two pictures and also from a phrase pronounced by a man, who in the science of life and in the perception of aesthetic truth had no equal in the world of culture. He said that there was something in her of the women of all time. I suppose he meant the inheritance of all the gifts that make up an irresistible fascination — a great personality. Such women are not born often. Most of them lack opportunities. They never develop. They end obscurely. Here and there one survives to make her mark even in history. . . . And even that is not a very enviable fate. They are at another pole from the so-called dangerous women who are merely coquettes. A coquette has got to work for her success. The others have nothing to do but simply exist. You perceive the view I take of the difference?”

I perceived the view. I said to myself that nothing in the world could be more aristocratic. This was the slave-owning woman who had never worked, even if she had been reduced to live by her wits. She was a wonderful old woman. She made me dumb. She held me fascinated by the well-bred attitude, something sublimely aloof in her air of wisdom.

I just simply let myself go admiring her as though I had been a mere slave of aesthetics: the perfect grace, the amazing poise of that venerable head, the assured as if royal — yes, royal even flow of the voice. . . . But what was it she was talking about now? These were no longer considerations about fatal women. She was talking about her son again. My interest turned into mere bitterness of contemptuous attention. For I couldn’t withhold it though I tried to let the stuff go by. Educated in the most aristocratic college in Paris . . . at eighteen . . . call of duty . . . with General Lee to the very last cruel minute . . . after that catastrophe end of

the world — return to France — to old friendships, infinite kindness — but a life hollow, without occupation. . . Then 1870 — and chivalrous response to adopted country's call and again emptiness, the chafing of a proud spirit without aim and handicapped not exactly by poverty but by lack of fortune. And she, the mother, having to look on at this wasting of a most accomplished man, of a most chivalrous nature that practically had no future before it.

“You understand me well, Monsieur George. A nature like this! It is the most refined cruelty of fate to look at. I don't know whether I suffered more in times of war or in times of peace. You understand?”

I bowed my head in silence. What I couldn't understand was why he delayed so long in joining us again. Unless he had had enough of his mother? I thought without any great resentment that I was being victimized; but then it occurred to me that the cause of his absence was quite simple. I was familiar enough with his habits by this time to know that he often managed to snatch an hour's sleep or so during the day. He had gone and thrown himself on his bed.

“I admire him exceedingly,” Mrs. Blunt was saying in a tone which was not at all maternal. “His distinction, his fastidiousness, the earnest warmth of his heart. I know him well. I assure you that I would never have dared to suggest,” she continued with an extraordinary haughtiness of attitude and tone that aroused my attention, “I would never have dared to put before him my views of the extraordinary merits and the uncertain fate of the exquisite woman of whom we speak, if I had not been certain that, partly by my fault, I admit, his attention has been attracted to her and his — his — his heart engaged.”

It was as if some one had poured a bucket of cold water over my head. I woke up with a great shudder to the acute perception of my own feelings and of that aristocrat's incredible purpose. How it could have germinated, grown and matured in that exclusive soil was inconceivable. She had been inciting her son all the time to undertake wonderful salvage work by annexing the heiress of Henry Allègre — the woman and the fortune.

There must have been an amazed incredulity in my eyes, to which her own responded by an unflinching black brilliance which suddenly seemed to develop a scorching quality even to the point of making me feel extremely thirsty all of a sudden. For a time my tongue literally clove to the roof of my mouth. I don't know whether it was an illusion but it

seemed to me that Mrs. Blunt had nodded at me twice as if to say: "You are right, that's so." I made an effort to speak but it was very poor. If she did hear me it was because she must have been on the watch for the faintest sound.

"His heart engaged. Like two hundred others, or two thousand, all around," I mumbled.

"Altogether different. And it's no disparagement to a woman surely. Of course her great fortune protects her in a certain measure."

"Does it?" I faltered out and that time I really doubt whether she heard me. Her aspect in my eyes had changed. Her purpose being disclosed, her well-bred ease appeared sinister, her aristocratic repose a treacherous device, her venerable graciousness a mask of unbounded contempt for all human beings whatever. She was a terrible old woman with those straight, white wolfish eye-brows. How blind I had been! Those eyebrows alone ought to have been enough to give her away. Yet they were as beautifully smooth as her voice when she admitted: "That protection naturally is only partial. There is the danger of her own self, poor girl. She requires guidance."

I marvelled at the villainy of my tone as I spoke, but it was only assumed.

"I don't think she has done badly for herself, so far," I forced myself to say. "I suppose you know that she began life by herding the village goats."

In the course of that phrase I noticed her wince just the least bit. Oh, yes, she winced; but at the end of it she smiled easily.

"No, I didn't know. So she told you her story! Oh, well, I suppose you are very good friends. A goatherd — really? In the fairy tale I believe the girl that marries the prince is — what is it? — a gardeuse d'oies. And what a thing to drag out against a woman. One might just as soon reproach any of them for coming unclothed into the world. They all do, you know. And then they become — what you will discover when you have lived longer, Monsieur George — for the most part futile creatures, without any sense of truth and beauty, drudges of all sorts, or else dolls to dress. In a word — ordinary."

The implication of scorn in her tranquil manner was immense. It seemed to condemn all those that were not born in the Blunt connection. It was the perfect pride of Republican aristocracy, which has no gradations and knows no limit, and, as if created by the grace of God, thinks it ennobles everything it touches: people, ideas, even passing tastes!

“How many of them,” pursued Mrs. Blunt, “have had the good fortune, the leisure to develop their intelligence and their beauty in aesthetic conditions as this charming woman had? Not one in a million. Perhaps not one in an age.”

“The heiress of Henry Allègre,” I murmured.

“Precisely. But John wouldn’t be marrying the heiress of Henry Allègre.”

It was the first time that the frank word, the clear idea, came into the conversation and it made me feel ill with a sort of enraged faintness.

“No,” I said. “It would be Mme. de Lastaola then.”

“Mme. la Comtesse de Lastaola as soon as she likes after the success of this war.”

“And you believe in its success?”

“Do you?”

“Not for a moment,” I declared, and was surprised to see her look pleased.

She was an aristocrat to the tips of her fingers; she really didn’t care for anybody. She had passed through the Empire, she had lived through a siege, had rubbed shoulders with the Commune, had seen everything, no doubt, of what men are capable in the pursuit of their desires or in the extremity of their distress, for love, for money, and even for honour; and in her precarious connection with the very highest spheres she had kept her own honourability unscathed while she had lost all her prejudices. She was above all that. Perhaps “the world” was the only thing that could have the slightest checking influence; but when I ventured to say something about the view it might take of such an alliance she looked at me for a moment with visible surprise.

“My dear Monsieur George, I have lived in the great world all my life. It’s the best that there is, but that’s only because there is nothing merely decent anywhere. It will accept anything, forgive anything, forget anything in a few days. And after all who will he be marrying? A charming, clever, rich and altogether uncommon woman. What did the world hear of her? Nothing. The little it saw of her was in the Bois for a few hours every year, riding by the side of a man of unique distinction and of exclusive tastes, devoted to the cult of aesthetic impressions; a man of whom, as far as aspect, manner, and behaviour goes, she might have been the daughter. I have seen her myself. I went on purpose. I was immensely struck. I was

even moved. Yes. She might have been — except for that something radiant in her that marked her apart from all the other daughters of men. The few remarkable personalities that count in society and who were admitted into Henry Allègre's Pavilion treated her with punctilious reserve. I know that, I have made enquiries. I know she sat there amongst them like a marvellous child, and for the rest what can they say about her? That when abandoned to herself by the death of Allègre she has made a mistake? I think that any woman ought to be allowed one mistake in her life. The worst they can say of her is that she discovered it, that she had sent away a man in love directly she found out that his love was not worth having; that she had told him to go and look for his crown, and that, after dismissing him she had remained generously faithful to his cause, in her person and fortune. And this, you will allow, is rather uncommon upon the whole."

"You make her out very magnificent," I murmured, looking down upon the floor.

"Isn't she?" exclaimed the aristocratic Mrs. Blunt, with an almost youthful ingenuousness, and in those black eyes which looked at me so calmly there was a flash of the Southern beauty, still naïve and romantic, as if altogether untouched by experience. "I don't think there is a single grain of vulgarity in all her enchanting person. Neither is there in my son. I suppose you won't deny that he is uncommon." She paused.

"Absolutely," I said in a perfectly conventional tone, I was now on my mettle that she should not discover what there was humanly common in my nature. She took my answer at her own valuation and was satisfied.

"They can't fail to understand each other on the very highest level of idealistic perceptions. Can you imagine my John thrown away on some enamoured white goose out of a stuffy old salon? Why, she couldn't even begin to understand what he feels or what he needs."

"Yes," I said impenetrably, "he is not easy to understand."

"I have reason to think," she said with a suppressed smile, "that he has a certain power over women. Of course I don't know anything about his intimate life but a whisper or two have reached me, like that, floating in the air, and I could hardly suppose that he would find an exceptional resistance in that quarter of all others. But I should like to know the exact degree."

I disregarded an annoying tendency to feel dizzy that came over me and was very careful in managing my voice.

"May I ask, Madame, why you are telling me all this?"

“For two reasons,” she condescended graciously. “First of all because Mr. Mills told me that you were much more mature than one would expect. In fact you look much younger than I was prepared for.”

“Madame,” I interrupted her, “I may have a certain capacity for action and for responsibility, but as to the regions into which this very unexpected conversation has taken me I am a great novice. They are outside my interest. I have had no experience.”

“Don’t make yourself out so hopeless,” she said in a spoilt-beauty tone. “You have your intuitions. At any rate you have a pair of eyes. You are everlastingly over there, so I understand. Surely you have seen how far they are . . .”

I interrupted again and this time bitterly, but always in a tone of polite enquiry:

“You think her facile, Madame?”

She looked offended. “I think her most fastidious. It is my son who is in question here.”

And I understood then that she looked on her son as irresistible. For my part I was just beginning to think that it would be impossible for me to wait for his return. I figured him to myself lying dressed on his bed sleeping like a stone. But there was no denying that the mother was holding me with an awful, tortured interest. Twice Therese had opened the door, had put her small head in and drawn it back like a tortoise. But for some time I had lost the sense of us two being quite alone in the studio. I had perceived the familiar dummy in its corner but it lay now on the floor as if Therese had knocked it down angrily with a broom for a heathen idol. It lay there prostrate, headless, without its head, pathetic, like the mangled victim of a crime.

“John is fastidious, too,” began Mrs. Blunt again. “Of course you wouldn’t suppose anything vulgar in his resistances to a very real sentiment. One has got to understand his psychology. He can’t leave himself in peace. He is exquisitely absurd.”

I recognized the phrase. Mother and son talked of each other in identical terms. But perhaps “exquisitely absurd” was the Blunt family saying? There are such sayings in families and generally there is some truth in them. Perhaps this old woman was simply absurd. She continued:

“We had a most painful discussion all this morning. He is angry with me for suggesting the very thing his whole being desires. I don’t feel guilty.

It's he who is tormenting himself with his infinite scrupulosity."

"Ah," I said, looking at the mangled dummy like the model of some atrocious murder. "Ah, the fortune. But that can be left alone."

"What nonsense! How is it possible? It isn't contained in a bag, you can't throw it into the sea. And moreover, it isn't her fault. I am astonished that you should have thought of that vulgar hypocrisy. No, it isn't her fortune that cheeks my son; it's something much more subtle. Not so much her history as her position. He is absurd. It isn't what has happened in her life. It's her very freedom that makes him torment himself and her, too — as far as I can understand."

I suppressed a groan and said to myself that I must really get away from there.

Mrs. Blunt was fairly launched now.

"For all his superiority he is a man of the world and shares to a certain extent its current opinions. He has no power over her. She intimidates him. He wishes he had never set eyes on her. Once or twice this morning he looked at me as if he could find it in his heart to hate his old mother. There is no doubt about it — he loves her, Monsieur George. He loves her, this poor, luckless, perfect *homme du monde*."

The silence lasted for some time and then I heard a murmur: "It's a matter of the utmost delicacy between two beings so sensitive, so proud. It has to be managed."

I found myself suddenly on my feet and saying with the utmost politeness that I had to beg her permission to leave her alone as I had an engagement; but she motioned me simply to sit down — and I sat down again.

"I told you I had a request to make," she said. "I have understood from Mr. Mills that you have been to the West Indies, that you have some interests there."

I was astounded. "Interests! I certainly have been there," I said, "but . . ."

She caught me up. "Then why not go there again? I am speaking to you frankly because . . ."

"But, Madame, I am engaged in this affair with Doña Rita, even if I had any interests elsewhere. I won't tell you about the importance of my work. I didn't suspect it but you brought the news of it to me, and so I needn't point it out to you."

And now we were frankly arguing with each other.

“But where will it lead you in the end? You have all your life before you, all your plans, prospects, perhaps dreams, at any rate your own tastes and all your life-time before you. And would you sacrifice all this to — the Pretender? A mere figure for the front page of illustrated papers.”“

“I never think of him,” I said curtly, “but I suppose Doña Rita’s feelings, instincts, call it what you like — or only her chivalrous fidelity to her mistakes — ”

“Doña Rita’s presence here in this town, her withdrawal from the possible complications of her life in Paris has produced an excellent effect on my son. It simplifies infinite difficulties, I mean moral as well as material. It’s extremely to the advantage of her dignity, of her future, and of her peace of mind. But I am thinking, of course, mainly of my son. He is most exacting.”

I felt extremely sick at heart. “And so I am to drop everything and vanish,” I said, rising from my chair again. And this time Mrs. Blunt got up, too, with a lofty and inflexible manner but she didn’t dismiss me yet.

“Yes,” she said distinctly. “All this, my dear Monsieur George, is such an accident. What have you got to do here? You look to me like somebody who would find adventures wherever he went as interesting and perhaps less dangerous than this one.”

She slurred over the word dangerous but I picked it up.

“What do you know of its dangers, Madame, may I ask?” But she did not condescend to hear.

“And then you, too, have your chivalrous feelings,” she went on, unswerving, distinct, and tranquil. “You are not absurd. But my son is. He would shut her up in a convent for a time if he could.”

“He isn’t the only one,” I muttered.

“Indeed!” she was startled, then lower, “Yes. That woman must be the centre of all sorts of passions,” she mused audibly. “But what have you got to do with all this? It’s nothing to you.”

She waited for me to speak.

“Exactly, Madame,” I said, “and therefore I don’t see why I should concern myself in all this one way or another.”

“No,” she assented with a weary air, “except that you might ask yourself what is the good of tormenting a man of noble feelings, however absurd. His Southern blood makes him very violent sometimes. I fear — ” And



then for the first time during this conversation, for the first time since I left Doña Rita the day before, for the first time I laughed.

“Do you mean to hint, Madame, that Southern gentlemen are dead shots? I am aware of that — from novels.”

I spoke looking her straight in the face and I made that exquisite, aristocratic old woman positively blink by my directness. There was a faint flush on her delicate old cheeks but she didn't move a muscle of her face. I made her a most respectful bow and went out of the studio.

## CHAPTER IV

Through the great arched window of the hall I saw the hotel brougham waiting at the door. On passing the door of the front room (it was originally meant for a drawing-room but a bed for Blunt was put in there) I banged with my fist on the panel and shouted: "I am obliged to go out. Your mother's carriage is at the door." I didn't think he was asleep. My view now was that he was aware beforehand of the subject of the conversation, and if so I did not wish to appear as if I had slunk away from him after the interview. But I didn't stop — I didn't want to see him — and before he could answer I was already half way up the stairs running noiselessly up the thick carpet which also covered the floor of the landing. Therefore opening the door of my sitting-room quickly I caught by surprise the person who was in there watching the street half concealed by the window curtain. It was a woman. A totally unexpected woman. A perfect stranger. She came away quickly to meet me. Her face was veiled and she was dressed in a dark walking costume and a very simple form of hat. She murmured: "I had an idea that Monsieur was in the house," raising a gloved hand to lift her veil. It was Rose and she gave me a shock. I had never seen her before but with her little black silk apron and a white cap with ribbons on her head. This outdoor dress was like a disguise. I asked anxiously:

"What has happened to Madame?"

"Nothing. I have a letter," she murmured, and I saw it appear between the fingers of her extended hand, in a very white envelope which I tore open impatiently. It consisted of a few lines only. It began abruptly:

"If you are gone to sea then I can't forgive you for not sending the usual word at the last moment. If you are not gone why don't you come? Why did you leave me yesterday? You leave me crying — I who haven't cried for years and years, and you haven't the sense to come back within the hour, within twenty hours! This conduct is idiotic" — and a sprawling signature of the four magic letters at the bottom.

While I was putting the letter in my pocket the girl said in an earnest undertone: "I don't like to leave Madame by herself for any length of time."

"How long have you been in my room?" I asked.

"The time seemed long. I hope Monsieur won't mind the liberty. I sat for a little in the hall but then it struck me I might be seen. In fact, Madame told me not to be seen if I could help it."

“Why did she tell you that?”

“I permitted myself to suggest that to Madame. It might have given a false impression. Madame is frank and open like the day but it won’t do with everybody. There are people who would put a wrong construction on anything. Madame’s sister told me Monsieur was out.”

“And you didn’t believe her?”

“Non, Monsieur. I have lived with Madame’s sister for nearly a week when she first came into this house. She wanted me to leave the message, but I said I would wait a little. Then I sat down in the big porter’s chair in the hall and after a while, everything being very quiet, I stole up here. I know the disposition of the apartments. I reckoned Madame’s sister would think that I got tired of waiting and let myself out.”

“And you have been amusing yourself watching the street ever since?”

“The time seemed long,” she answered evasively. “An empty coupé came to the door about an hour ago and it’s still waiting,” she added, looking at me inquisitively.

“It seems strange.”

“There are some dancing girls staying in the house,” I said negligently. “Did you leave Madame alone?”

“There’s the gardener and his wife in the house.”

“Those people keep at the back. Is Madame alone? That’s what I want to know.”

“Monsieur forgets that I have been three hours away; but I assure Monsieur that here in this town it’s perfectly safe for Madame to be alone.”

“And wouldn’t it be anywhere else? It’s the first I hear of it.”

“In Paris, in our apartments in the hotel, it’s all right, too; but in the Pavilion, for instance, I wouldn’t leave Madame by herself, not for half an hour.”

“What is there in the Pavilion?” I asked.

“It’s a sort of feeling I have,” she murmured reluctantly . . . “Oh! There’s that coupé going away.”

She made a movement towards the window but checked herself. I hadn’t moved. The rattle of wheels on the cobble-stones died out almost at once.

“Will Monsieur write an answer?” Rose suggested after a short silence.

“Hardly worth while,” I said. “I will be there very soon after you. Meantime, please tell Madame from me that I am not anxious to see any

more tears. Tell her this just like that, you understand. I will take the risk of not being received.”

She dropped her eyes, said: “Oui, Monsieur,” and at my suggestion waited, holding the door of the room half open, till I went downstairs to see the road clear.

It was a kind of deaf-and-dumb house. The black-and-white hall was empty and everything was perfectly still. Blunt himself had no doubt gone away with his mother in the brougham, but as to the others, the dancing girls, Therese, or anybody else that its walls may have contained, they might have been all murdering each other in perfect assurance that the house would not betray them by indulging in any unseemly murmurs. I emitted a low whistle which didn’t seem to travel in that peculiar atmosphere more than two feet away from my lips, but all the same Rose came tripping down the stairs at once. With just a nod to my whisper: “Take a fiacre,” she glided out and I shut the door noiselessly behind her.

The next time I saw her she was opening the door of the house on the Prado to me, with her cap and the little black silk apron on, and with that marked personality of her own, which had been concealed so perfectly in the dowdy walking dress, very much to the fore.

“I have given Madame the message,” she said in her contained voice, swinging the door wide open. Then after relieving me of my hat and coat she announced me with the simple words: “Voilà Monsieur,” and hurried away. Directly I appeared Doña Rita, away there on the couch, passed the tips of her fingers over her eyes and holding her hands up palms outwards on each side of her head, shouted to me down the whole length of the room: “The dry season has set in.” I glanced at the pink tips of her fingers perfunctorily and then drew back. She let her hands fall negligently as if she had no use for them any more and put on a serious expression.

“So it seems,” I said, sitting down opposite her. “For how long, I wonder.”

“For years and years. One gets so little encouragement. First you bolt away from my tears, then you send an impertinent message, and then when you come at last you pretend to behave respectfully, though you don’t know how to do it. You should sit much nearer the edge of the chair and hold yourself very stiff, and make it quite clear that you don’t know what to do with your hands.”

All this in a fascinating voice with a ripple of badinage that seemed to play upon the sober surface of her thoughts. Then seeing that I did not answer she altered the note a bit.

“Amigo George,” she said, “I take the trouble to send for you and here I am before you, talking to you and you say nothing.”

“What am I to say?”

“How can I tell? You might say a thousand things. You might, for instance, tell me that you were sorry for my tears.”

“I might also tell you a thousand lies. What do I know about your tears? I am not a susceptible idiot. It all depends upon the cause. There are tears of quiet happiness. Peeling onions also will bring tears.”

“Oh, you are not susceptible,” she flew out at me. “But you are an idiot all the same.”

“Is it to tell me this that you have written to me to come?” I asked with a certain animation.

“Yes. And if you had as much sense as the talking parrot I owned once you would have read between the lines that all I wanted you here for was to tell you what I think of you.”

“Well, tell me what you think of me.”

“I would in a moment if I could be half as impertinent as you are.”

“What unexpected modesty,” I said.

“These, I suppose, are your sea manners.”

“I wouldn’t put up with half that nonsense from anybody at sea. Don’t you remember you told me yourself to go away? What was I to do?”

“How stupid you are. I don’t mean that you pretend. You really are. Do you understand what I say? I will spell it for you. S-t-u-p-i-d. Ah, now I feel better. Oh, amigo George, my dear fellow-conspirator for the king — the king. Such a king! Vive le Roi! Come, why don’t you shout Vive le Roi, too?”

“I am not your parrot,” I said.

“No, he never sulked. He was a charming, good-mannered bird, accustomed to the best society, whereas you, I suppose, are nothing but a heartless vagabond like myself.”

“I daresay you are, but I suppose nobody had the insolence to tell you that to your face.”

“Well, very nearly. It was what it amounted to. I am not stupid. There is no need to spell out simple words for me. It just came out. Don Juan

struggled desperately to keep the truth in. It was most pathetic. And yet he couldn't help himself. He talked very much like a parrot."

"Of the best society," I suggested.

"Yes, the most honourable of parrots. I don't like parrot-talk. It sounds so uncanny. Had I lived in the Middle Ages I am certain I would have believed that a talking bird must be possessed by the devil. I am sure Therese would believe that now. My own sister! She would cross herself many times and simply quake with terror."

"But you were not terrified," I said. "May I ask when that interesting communication took place?"

"Yesterday, just before you blundered in here of all days in the year. I was sorry for him."

"Why tell me this? I couldn't help noticing it. I regretted I hadn't my umbrella with me."

"Those unforgiven tears! Oh, you simple soul! Don't you know that people never cry for anybody but themselves? . . . Amigo George, tell me — what are we doing in this world?"

"Do you mean all the people, everybody?"

"No, only people like you and me. Simple people, in this world which is eaten up with charlatanism of all sorts so that even we, the simple, don't know any longer how to trust each other."

"Don't we? Then why don't you trust him? You are dying to do so, don't you know?"

She dropped her chin on her breast and from under her straight eyebrows the deep blue eyes remained fixed on me, impersonally, as if without thought.

"What have you been doing since you left me yesterday?" she asked.

"The first thing I remember I abused your sister horribly this morning."

"And how did she take it?"

"Like a warm shower in spring. She drank it all in and unfolded her petals."

"What poetical expressions he uses! That girl is more perverted than one would think possible, considering what she is and whence she came. It's true that I, too, come from the same spot."

"She is slightly crazy. I am a great favourite with her. I don't say this to boast."

"It must be very comforting."

“Yes, it has cheered me immensely. Then after a morning of delightful musings on one thing and another I went to lunch with a charming lady and spent most of the afternoon talking with her.”

Doña Rita raised her head.

“A lady! Women seem such mysterious creatures to me. I don’t know them. Did you abuse her? Did she — how did you say that? — unfold her petals, too? Was she really and truly . . .?”

“She is simply perfection in her way and the conversation was by no means banal. I fancy that if your late parrot had heard it, he would have fallen off his perch. For after all, in that Allègre Pavilion, my dear Rita, you were but a crowd of glorified bourgeois.”

She was beautifully animated now. In her motionless blue eyes like melted sapphires, around those red lips that almost without moving could breathe enchanting sounds into the world, there was a play of light, that mysterious ripple of gaiety that seemed always to run and faintly quiver under her skin even in her gravest moods; just as in her rare moments of gaiety its warmth and radiance seemed to come to one through infinite sadness, like the sunlight of our life hiding the invincible darkness in which the universe must work out its impenetrable destiny.

“Now I think of it! . . . Perhaps that’s the reason I never could feel perfectly serious while they were demolishing the world about my ears. I fancy now that I could tell beforehand what each of them was going to say. They were repeating the same words over and over again, those great clever men, very much like parrots who also seem to know what they say. That doesn’t apply to the master of the house, who never talked much. He sat there mostly silent and looming up three sizes bigger than any of them.”

“The ruler of the aviary,” I muttered viciously.

“It annoys you that I should talk of that time?” she asked in a tender voice. “Well, I won’t, except for once to say that you must not make a mistake: in that aviary he was the man. I know because he used to talk to me afterwards sometimes. Strange! For six years he seemed to carry all the world and me with it in his hand. . . .”

“He dominates you yet,” I shouted.

She shook her head innocently as a child would do.

“No, no. You brought him into the conversation yourself. You think of him much more than I do.” Her voice drooped sadly to a hopeless note. “I hardly ever do. He is not the sort of person to merely flit through one’s

mind and so I have no time. Look. I had eleven letters this morning and there were also five telegrams before midday, which have tangled up everything. I am quite frightened.”

And she explained to me that one of them — the long one on the top of the pile, on the table over there — seemed to contain ugly inferences directed at herself in a menacing way. She begged me to read it and see what I could make of it.

I knew enough of the general situation to see at a glance that she had misunderstood it thoroughly and even amazingly. I proved it to her very quickly. But her mistake was so ingenious in its wrongheadedness and arose so obviously from the distraction of an acute mind, that I couldn't help looking at her admiringly.

“Rita,” I said, “you are a marvellous idiot.”

“Am I? Imbecile,” she retorted with an enchanting smile of relief. “But perhaps it only seems so to you in contrast with the lady so perfect in her way. What is her way?”

“Her way, I should say, lies somewhere between her sixtieth and seventieth year, and I have walked tête-à-tête with her for some little distance this afternoon.”

“Heavens,” she whispered, thunderstruck. “And meantime I had the son here. He arrived about five minutes after Rose left with that note for you,” she went on in a tone of awe. “As a matter of fact, Rose saw him across the street but she thought she had better go on to you.”

“I am furious with myself for not having guessed that much,” I said bitterly. “I suppose you got him out of the house about five minutes after you heard I was coming here. Rose ought to have turned back when she saw him on his way to cheer your solitude. That girl is stupid after all, though she has got a certain amount of low cunning which no doubt is very useful at times.”

“I forbid you to talk like this about Rose. I won't have it. Rose is not to be abused before me.”

“I only mean to say that she failed in this instance to read your mind, that's all.”

“This is, without exception, the most unintelligent thing you have said ever since I have known you. You may understand a lot about running contraband and about the minds of a certain class of people, but as to Rose's mind let me tell you that in comparison with hers yours is absolutely



infantile, my adventurous friend. It would be contemptible if it weren't so — what shall I call it? — babyish. You ought to be slapped and put to bed.” There was an extraordinary earnestness in her tone and when she ceased I listened yet to the seductive inflexions of her voice, that no matter in what mood she spoke seemed only fit for tenderness and love. And I thought suddenly of Azzolati being ordered to take himself off from her presence for ever, in that voice the very anger of which seemed to twine itself gently round one's heart. No wonder the poor wretch could not forget the scene and couldn't restrain his tears on the plain of Rambouillet. My moods of resentment against Rita, hot as they were, had no more duration than a blaze of straw. So I only said:

“Much you know about the management of children.” The corners of her lips stirred quaintly; her animosity, especially when provoked by a personal attack upon herself, was always tinged by a sort of wistful humour of the most disarming kind.

“Come, amigo George, let us leave poor Rose alone. You had better tell me what you heard from the lips of the charming old lady. Perfection, isn't she? I have never seen her in my life, though she says she has seen me several times. But she has written to me on three separate occasions and every time I answered her as if I were writing to a queen. Amigo George, how does one write to a queen? How should a goatherd that could have been mistress of a king, how should she write to an old queen from very far away; from over the sea?”

“I will ask you as I have asked the old queen: why do you tell me all this, Doña Rita?”

“To discover what's in your mind,” she said, a little impatiently.

“If you don't know that yet!” I exclaimed under my breath.

“No, not in your mind. Can any one ever tell what is in a man's mind? But I see you won't tell.”

“What's the good? You have written to her before, I understand. Do you think of continuing the correspondence?”

“Who knows?” she said in a profound tone. “She is the only woman that ever wrote to me. I returned her three letters to her with my last answer, explaining humbly that I preferred her to burn them herself. And I thought that would be the end of it. But an occasion may still arise.”

“Oh, if an occasion arises,” I said, trying to control my rage, “you may be able to begin your letter by the words ‘Chère Maman.’”

The cigarette box, which she had taken up without removing her eyes from me, flew out of her hand and opening in mid-air scattered cigarettes for quite a surprising distance all over the room. I got up at once and wandered off picking them up industriously. Doña Rita's voice behind me said indifferently:

"Don't trouble, I will ring for Rose."

"No need," I growled, without turning my head, "I can find my hat in the hall by myself, after I've finished picking up . . ."

"Bear!"

I returned with the box and placed it on the divan near her. She sat cross-legged, leaning back on her arms, in the blue shimmer of her embroidered robe and with the tawny halo of her unruly hair about her face which she raised to mine with an air of resignation.

"George, my friend," she said, "we have no manners."

"You would never have made a career at court, Doña Rita," I observed. "You are too impulsive."

"This is not bad manners, that's sheer insolence. This has happened to you before. If it happens again, as I can't be expected to wrestle with a savage and desperate smuggler single-handed, I will go upstairs and lock myself in my room till you leave the house. Why did you say this to me?"

"Oh, just for nothing, out of a full heart."

"If your heart is full of things like that, then my dear friend, you had better take it out and give it to the crows. No! you said that for the pleasure of appearing terrible. And you see you are not terrible at all, you are rather amusing. Go on, continue to be amusing. Tell me something of what you heard from the lips of that aristocratic old lady who thinks that all men are equal and entitled to the pursuit of happiness."

"I hardly remember now. I heard something about the unworthiness of certain white geese out of stuffy drawing-rooms. It sounds mad, but the lady knows exactly what she wants. I also heard your praises sung. I sat there like a fool not knowing what to say."

"Why? You might have joined in the singing."

"I didn't feel in the humour, because, don't you see, I had been incidentally given to understand that I was an insignificant and superfluous person who had better get out of the way of serious people."

"Ah, par exemple!"

“In a sense, you know, it was flattering; but for the moment it made me feel as if I had been offered a pot of mustard to sniff.”

She nodded with an amused air of understanding and I could see that she was interested. “Anything more?” she asked, with a flash of radiant eagerness in all her person and bending slightly forward towards me.

“Oh, it’s hardly worth mentioning. It was a sort of threat wrapped up, I believe, in genuine anxiety as to what might happen to my youthful insignificance. If I hadn’t been rather on the alert just then I wouldn’t even have perceived the meaning. But really an allusion to ‘hot Southern blood’ I could have only one meaning. Of course I laughed at it, but only ‘pour l’honneur’ and to show I understood perfectly. In reality it left me completely indifferent.”

Doña Rita looked very serious for a minute.

“Indifferent to the whole conversation?”

I looked at her angrily.

“To the whole . . . You see I got up rather out of sorts this morning. Unrefreshed, you know. As if tired of life.”

The liquid blue in her eyes remained directed at me without any expression except that of its usual mysterious immobility, but all her face took on a sad and thoughtful cast. Then as if she had made up her mind under the pressure of necessity:

“Listen, amigo,” she said, “I have suffered domination and it didn’t crush me because I have been strong enough to live with it; I have known caprice, you may call it folly if you like, and it left me unharmed because I was great enough not to be captured by anything that wasn’t really worthy of me. My dear, it went down like a house of cards before my breath. There is something in me that will not be dazzled by any sort of prestige in this world, worthy or unworthy. I am telling you this because you are younger than myself.”

“If you want me to say that there is nothing petty or mean about you, Doña Rita, then I do say it.”

She nodded at me with an air of accepting the rendered justice and went on with the utmost simplicity.

“And what is it that is coming to me now with all the airs of virtue? All the lawful conventions are coming to me, all the glammers of respectability! And nobody can say that I have made as much as the

slightest little sign to them. Not so much as lifting my little finger. I suppose you know that?"

"I don't know. I do not doubt your sincerity in anything you say. I am ready to believe. You are not one of those who have to work."

"Have to work — what do you mean?"

"It's a phrase I have heard. What I meant was that it isn't necessary for you to make any signs."

She seemed to meditate over this for a while.

"Don't be so sure of that," she said, with a flash of mischief, which made her voice sound more melancholy than before. "I am not so sure myself," she continued with a curious, vanishing, intonation of despair. "I don't know the truth about myself because I never had an opportunity to compare myself to anything in the world. I have been offered mock adulation, treated with mock reserve or with mock devotion, I have been fawned upon with an appalling earnestness of purpose, I can tell you; but these later honours, my dear, came to me in the shape of a very loyal and very scrupulous gentleman. For he is all that. And as a matter of fact I was touched."

"I know. Even to tears," I said provokingly. But she wasn't provoked, she only shook her head in negation (which was absurd) and pursued the trend of her spoken thoughts.

"That was yesterday," she said. "And yesterday he was extremely correct and very full of extreme self-esteem which expressed itself in the exaggerated delicacy with which he talked. But I know him in all his moods. I have known him even playful. I didn't listen to him. I was thinking of something else. Of things that were neither correct nor playful and that had to be looked at steadily with all the best that was in me. And that was why, in the end — I cried — yesterday."

"I saw it yesterday and I had the weakness of being moved by those tears for a time."

"If you want to make me cry again I warn you you won't succeed."

"No, I know. He has been here to-day and the dry season has set in."

"Yes, he has been here. I assure you it was perfectly unexpected. Yesterday he was railing at the world at large, at me who certainly have not made it, at himself and even at his mother. All this rather in parrot language, in the words of tradition and morality as understood by the members of that exclusive club to which he belongs. And yet when I

thought that all this, those poor hackneyed words, expressed a sincere passion I could have found in my heart to be sorry for him. But he ended by telling me that one couldn't believe a single word I said, or something like that. You were here then, you heard it yourself."

"And it cut you to the quick," I said. "It made you depart from your dignity to the point of weeping on any shoulder that happened to be there. And considering that it was some more parrot talk after all (men have been saying that sort of thing to women from the beginning of the world) this sensibility seems to me childish."

"What perspicacity," she observed, with an indulgent, mocking smile, then changed her tone. "Therefore he wasn't expected to-day when he turned up, whereas you, who were expected, remained subject to the charms of conversation in that studio. It never occurred to you . . . did it? No! What had become of your perspicacity?"

"I tell you I was weary of life," I said in a passion.

She had another faint smile of a fugitive and unrelated kind as if she had been thinking of far-off things, then roused herself to grave animation.

"He came in full of smiling playfulness. How well I know that mood! Such self-command has its beauty; but it's no great help for a man with such fateful eyes. I could see he was moved in his correct, restrained way, and in his own way, too, he tried to move me with something that would be very simple. He told me that ever since we became friends, we two, he had not an hour of continuous sleep, unless perhaps when coming back dead-tired from outpost duty, and that he longed to get back to it and yet hadn't the courage to tear himself away from here. He was as simple as that. He's a très galant homme of absolute probity, even with himself. I said to him: The trouble is, Don Juan, that it isn't love but mistrust that keeps you in torment. I might have said jealousy, but I didn't like to use that word. A parrot would have added that I had given him no right to be jealous. But I am no parrot. I recognized the rights of his passion which I could very well see. He is jealous. He is not jealous of my past or of the future; but he is jealously mistrustful of me, of what I am, of my very soul. He believes in a soul in the same way Therese does, as something that can be touched with grace or go to perdition; and he doesn't want to be damned with me before his own judgment seat. He is a most noble and loyal gentleman, but I have my own Basque peasant soul and don't want to think that every time he goes away from my feet — yes, mon cher, on this carpet, look for the marks

of scorching — that he goes away feeling tempted to brush the dust off his moral sleeve. That! Never!”

With brusque movements she took a cigarette out of the box, held it in her fingers for a moment, then dropped it unconsciously.

“And then, I don’t love him,” she uttered slowly as if speaking to herself and at the same time watching the very quality of that thought. “I never did. At first he fascinated me with his fatal aspect and his cold society smiles. But I have looked into those eyes too often. There are too many disdains in this aristocratic republican without a home. His fate may be cruel, but it will always be commonplace. While he sat there trying in a worldly tone to explain to me the problems, the scruples, of his suffering honour, I could see right into his heart and I was sorry for him. I was sorry enough for him to feel that if he had suddenly taken me by the throat and strangled me slowly, *avec délices*, I could forgive him while I choked. How correct he was! But bitterness against me peeped out of every second phrase. At last I raised my hand and said to him, ‘Enough.’ I believe he was shocked by my plebeian abruptness but he was too polite to show it. His conventions will always stand in the way of his nature. I told him that everything that had been said and done during the last seven or eight months was inexplicable unless on the assumption that he was in love with me, — and yet in everything there was an implication that he couldn’t forgive me my very existence. I did ask him whether he didn’t think that it was absurd on his part . . . “

“Didn’t you say that it was exquisitely absurd?” I asked.

“Exquisitely! . . . “ Doña Rita was surprised at my question. “No. Why should I say that?”

“It would have reconciled him to your abruptness. It’s their family expression. It would have come with a familiar sound and would have been less offensive.”

“Offensive,” Doña Rita repeated earnestly. “I don’t think he was offended; he suffered in another way, but I didn’t care for that. It was I that had become offended in the end, without spite, you understand, but past bearing. I didn’t spare him. I told him plainly that to want a woman formed in mind and body, mistress of herself, free in her choice, independent in her thoughts; to love her apparently for what she is and at the same time to demand from her the candour and the innocence that could be only a shocking pretence; to know her such as life had made her and at

the same time to despise her secretly for every touch with which her life had fashioned her — that was neither generous nor high minded; it was positively frantic. He got up and went away to lean against the mantelpiece, there, on his elbow and with his head in his hand. You have no idea of the charm and the distinction of his pose. I couldn't help admiring him: the expression, the grace, the fatal suggestion of his immobility. Oh, yes, I am sensible to aesthetic impressions, I have been educated to believe that there is a soul in them."

With that enigmatic, under the eyebrows glance fixed on me she laughed her deep contralto laugh without mirth but also without irony, and profoundly moving by the mere purity of the sound.

"I suspect he was never so disgusted and appalled in his life. His self-command is the most admirable worldly thing I have ever seen. What made it beautiful was that one could feel in it a tragic suggestion as in a great work of art."

She paused with an inscrutable smile that a great painter might have put on the face of some symbolic figure for the speculation and wonder of many generations. I said:

"I always thought that love for you could work great wonders. And now I am certain."

"Are you trying to be ironic?" she said sadly and very much as a child might have spoken.

"I don't know," I answered in a tone of the same simplicity. "I find it very difficult to be generous."

"I, too," she said with a sort of funny eagerness. "I didn't treat him very generously. Only I didn't say much more. I found I didn't care what I said — and it would have been like throwing insults at a beautiful composition. He was well inspired not to move. It has spared him some disagreeable truths and perhaps I would even have said more than the truth. I am not fair. I am no more fair than other people. I would have been harsh. My very admiration was making me more angry. It's ridiculous to say of a man got up in correct tailor clothes, but there was a funereal grace in his attitude so that he might have been reproduced in marble on a monument to some woman in one of those atrocious Campo Santos: the bourgeois conception of an aristocratic mourning lover. When I came to that conclusion I became glad that I was angry or else I would have laughed right out before him."

“I have heard a woman say once, a woman of the people — do you hear me, Doña Rita? — therefore deserving your attention, that one should never laugh at love.”

“My dear,” she said gently, “I have been taught to laugh at most things by a man who never laughed himself; but it’s true that he never spoke of love to me, love as a subject that is. So perhaps . . . But why?”

“Because (but maybe that old woman was crazy), because, she said, there was death in the mockery of love.”

Doña Rita moved slightly her beautiful shoulders and went on:

“I am glad, then, I didn’t laugh. And I am also glad I said nothing more. I was feeling so little generous that if I had known something then of his mother’s allusion to ‘white geese’ I would have advised him to get one of them and lead it away on a beautiful blue ribbon. Mrs. Blunt was wrong, you know, to be so scornful. A white goose is exactly what her son wants. But look how badly the world is arranged. Such white birds cannot be got for nothing and he has not enough money even to buy a ribbon. Who knows! Maybe it was this which gave that tragic quality to his pose by the mantelpiece over there. Yes, that was it. Though no doubt I didn’t see it then. As he didn’t offer to move after I had done speaking I became quite unaffectedly sorry and advised him very gently to dismiss me from his mind definitely. He moved forward then and said to me in his usual voice and with his usual smile that it would have been excellent advice but unfortunately I was one of those women who can’t be dismissed at will. And as I shook my head he insisted rather darkly: ‘Oh, yes, Doña Rita, it is so. Cherish no illusions about that fact.’ It sounded so threatening that in my surprise I didn’t even acknowledge his parting bow. He went out of that false situation like a wounded man retreating after a fight. No, I have nothing to reproach myself with. I did nothing. I led him into nothing. Whatever illusions have passed through my head I kept my distance, and he was so loyal to what he seemed to think the redeeming proprieties of the situation that he has gone from me for good without so much as kissing the tips of my fingers. He must have felt like a man who had betrayed himself for nothing. It’s horrible. It’s the fault of that enormous fortune of mine, and I wish with all my heart that I could give it to him; for he couldn’t help his hatred of the thing that is: and as to his love, which is just as real, well — could I have rushed away from him to shut myself up in a convent? Could I? After all I have a right to my share of daylight.”





## CHAPTER V

I took my eyes from her face and became aware that dusk was beginning to steal into the room. How strange it seemed. Except for the glazed rotunda part its long walls, divided into narrow panels separated by an order of flat pilasters, presented, depicted on a black background and in vivid colours, slender women with butterfly wings and lean youths with narrow birds' wings. The effect was supposed to be Pompeiian and Rita and I had often laughed at the delirious fancy of some enriched shopkeeper. But still it was a display of fancy, a sign of grace; but at that moment these figures appeared to me weird and intrusive and strangely alive in their attenuated grace of unearthly beings concealing a power to see and hear.

Without words, without gestures, Doña Rita was heard again. "It may have been as near coming to pass as this." She showed me the breadth of her little finger nail. "Yes, as near as that. Why? How? Just like that, for nothing. Because it had come up. Because a wild notion had entered a practical old woman's head. Yes. And the best of it is that I have nothing to complain of. Had I surrendered I would have been perfectly safe with these two. It is they or rather he who couldn't trust me, or rather that something which I express, which I stand for. Mills would never tell me what it was. Perhaps he didn't know exactly himself. He said it was something like genius. My genius! Oh, I am not conscious of it, believe me, I am not conscious of it. But if I were I wouldn't pluck it out and cast it away. I am ashamed of nothing, of nothing! Don't be stupid enough to think that I have the slightest regret. There is no regret. First of all because I am I — and then because . . . My dear, believe me, I have had a horrible time of it myself lately."

This seemed to be the last word. Outwardly quiet, all the time, it was only then that she became composed enough to light an enormous cigarette of the same pattern as those made specially for the king — *por el Rey!* After a time, tipping the ash into the bowl on her left hand, she asked me in a friendly, almost tender, tone:

"What are you thinking of, amigo?"

"I was thinking of your immense generosity. You want to give a crown to one man, a fortune to another. That is very fine. But I suppose there is a limit to your generosity somewhere."

“I don’t see why there should be any limit — to fine intentions! Yes, one would like to pay ransom and be done with it all.”

“That’s the feeling of a captive; and yet somehow I can’t think of you as ever having been anybody’s captive.”

“You do display some wonderful insight sometimes. My dear, I begin to suspect that men are rather conceited about their powers. They think they dominate us. Even exceptional men will think that; men too great for mere vanity, men like Henry Allègre for instance, who by his consistent and serene detachment was certainly fit to dominate all sorts of people. Yet for the most part they can only do it because women choose more or less consciously to let them do so. Henry Allègre, if any man, might have been certain of his own power; and yet, look: I was a chit of a girl, I was sitting with a book where I had no business to be, in his own garden, when he suddenly came upon me, an ignorant girl of seventeen, a most uninviting creature with a tousled head, in an old black frock and shabby boots. I could have run away. I was perfectly capable of it. But I stayed looking up at him and — in the end it was he who went away and it was I who stayed.”

“Consciously?” I murmured.

“Consciously? You may just as well ask my shadow that lay so still by me on the young grass in that morning sunshine. I never knew before how still I could keep. It wasn’t the stillness of terror. I remained, knowing perfectly well that if I ran he was not the man to run after me. I remember perfectly his deep-toned, politely indifferent ‘Restez donc.’ He was mistaken. Already then I hadn’t the slightest intention to move. And if you ask me again how far conscious all this was the nearest answer I can make you is this: that I remained on purpose, but I didn’t know for what purpose I remained. Really, that couldn’t be expected. . . . Why do you sigh like this? Would you have preferred me to be idiotically innocent or abominably wise?”

“These are not the questions that trouble me,” I said. “If I sighed it is because I am weary.”

“And getting stiff, too, I should say, in this Pompeiian armchair. You had better get out of it and sit on this couch as you always used to do. That, at any rate, is not Pompeiian. You have been growing of late extremely formal, I don’t know why. If it is a pose then for goodness’ sake drop it. Are you going to model yourself on Captain Blunt? You couldn’t, you know. You are too young.”

“I don’t want to model myself on anybody,” I said. “And anyway Blunt is too romantic; and, moreover, he has been and is yet in love with you — a thing that requires some style, an attitude, something of which I am altogether incapable.”

“You know it isn’t so stupid, this what you have just said. Yes, there is something in this.”

“I am not stupid,” I protested, without much heat.

“Oh, yes, you are. You don’t know the world enough to judge. You don’t know how wise men can be. Owls are nothing to them. Why do you try to look like an owl? There are thousands and thousands of them waiting for me outside the door: the staring, hissing beasts. You don’t know what a relief of mental ease and intimacy you have been to me in the frankness of gestures and speeches and thoughts, sane or insane, that we have been throwing at each other. I have known nothing of this in my life but with you. There had always been some fear, some constraint, lurking in the background behind everybody, everybody — except you, my friend.”

“An unmannerly, Arcadian state of affairs. I am glad you like it. Perhaps it’s because you were intelligent enough to perceive that I was not in love with you in any sort of style.”

“No, you were always your own self, unwise and reckless and with something in it kindred to mine, if I may say so without offence.”

“You may say anything without offence. But has it never occurred to your sagacity that I just, simply, loved you?”

“Just — simply,” she repeated in a wistful tone.

“You didn’t want to trouble your head about it, is that it?”

“My poor head. From your tone one might think you yearned to cut it off. No, my dear, I have made up my mind not to lose my head.”

“You would be astonished to know how little I care for your mind.”

“Would I? Come and sit on the couch all the same,” she said after a moment of hesitation. Then, as I did not move at once, she added with indifference: “You may sit as far away as you like, it’s big enough, goodness knows.”

The light was ebbing slowly out of the rotunda and to my bodily eyes she was beginning to grow shadowy. I sat down on the couch and for a long time no word passed between us. We made no movement. We did not even turn towards each other. All I was conscious of was the softness of the seat which seemed somehow to cause a relaxation of my stern mood, I won’t say

against my will but without any will on my part. Another thing I was conscious of, strangely enough, was the enormous brass bowl for cigarette ends. Quietly, with the least possible action, Doña Rita moved it to the other side of her motionless person. Slowly, the fantastic women with butterflies' wings and the slender-limbed youths with the gorgeous pinions on their shoulders were vanishing into their black backgrounds with an effect of silent discretion, leaving us to ourselves.

I felt suddenly extremely exhausted, absolutely overcome with fatigue since I had moved; as if to sit on that Pompeiian chair had been a task almost beyond human strength, a sort of labour that must end in collapse. I fought against it for a moment and then my resistance gave way. Not all at once but as if yielding to an irresistible pressure (for I was not conscious of any irresistible attraction) I found myself with my head resting, with a weight I felt must be crushing, on Doña Rita's shoulder which yet did not give way, did not flinch at all. A faint scent of violets filled the tragic emptiness of my head and it seemed impossible to me that I should not cry from sheer weakness. But I remained dry-eyed. I only felt myself slipping lower and lower and I caught her round the waist clinging to her not from any intention but purely by instinct. All that time she hadn't stirred. There was only the slight movement of her breathing that showed her to be alive; and with closed eyes I imagined her to be lost in thought, removed by an incredible meditation while I clung to her, to an immense distance from the earth. The distance must have been immense because the silence was so perfect, the feeling as if of eternal stillness. I had a distinct impression of being in contact with an infinity that had the slightest possible rise and fall, was pervaded by a warm, delicate scent of violets and through which came a hand from somewhere to rest lightly on my head. Presently my ear caught the faint and regular pulsation of her heart, firm and quick, infinitely touching in its persistent mystery, disclosing itself into my very ear — and my felicity became complete.

It was a dreamlike state combined with a dreamlike sense of insecurity. Then in that warm and scented infinity, or eternity, in which I rested lost in bliss but ready for any catastrophe, I heard the distant, hardly audible, and fit to strike terror into the heart, ringing of a bell. At this sound the greatness of spaces departed. I felt the world close about me; the world of darkened walls, of very deep grey dusk against the panes, and I asked in a pained voice:

“Why did you ring, Rita?”

There was a bell rope within reach of her hand. I had not felt her move, but she said very low:

“I rang for the lights.”

“You didn’t want the lights.”

“It was time,” she whispered secretly.

Somewhere within the house a door slammed. I got away from her feeling small and weak as if the best part of me had been torn away and irretrievably lost. Rose must have been somewhere near the door.

“It’s abominable,” I murmured to the still, idol-like shadow on the couch.

The answer was a hurried, nervous whisper: “I tell you it was time. I rang because I had no strength to push you away.”

I suffered a moment of giddiness before the door opened, light streamed in, and Rose entered, preceding a man in a green baize apron whom I had never seen, carrying on an enormous tray three Argand lamps fitted into vases of Pompeiian form. Rose distributed them over the room. In the flood of soft light the winged youths and the butterfly women reappeared on the panels, affected, gorgeous, callously unconscious of anything having happened during their absence. Rose attended to the lamp on the nearest mantelpiece, then turned about and asked in a confident undertone.

“Monsieur dîne?”

I had lost myself with my elbows on my knees and my head in my hands, but I heard the words distinctly. I heard also the silence which ensued. I sat up and took the responsibility of the answer on myself.

“Impossible. I am going to sea this evening.”

This was perfectly true only I had totally forgotten it till then. For the last two days my being was no longer composed of memories but exclusively of sensations of the most absorbing, disturbing, exhausting nature. I was like a man who has been buffeted by the sea or by a mob till he loses all hold on the world in the misery of his helplessness. But now I was recovering. And naturally the first thing I remembered was the fact that I was going to sea.

“You have heard, Rose,” Doña Rita said at last with some impatience.

The girl waited a moment longer before she said:

“Oh, yes! There is a man waiting for Monsieur in the hall. A seaman.”

It could be no one but Dominic. It dawned upon me that since the evening of our return I had not been near him or the ship, which was

completely unusual, unheard of, and well calculated to startle Dominic.

"I have seen him before," continued Rose, "and as he told me he has been pursuing Monsieur all the afternoon and didn't like to go away without seeing Monsieur for a moment, I proposed to him to wait in the hall till Monsieur was at liberty."

I said: "Very well," and with a sudden resumption of her extremely busy, not-a-moment-to-lose manner Rose departed from the room. I lingered in an imaginary world full of tender light, of unheard-of colours, with a mad riot of flowers and an inconceivable happiness under the sky arched above its yawning precipices, while a feeling of awe enveloped me like its own proper atmosphere. But everything vanished at the sound of Doña Rita's loud whisper full of boundless dismay, such as to make one's hair stir on one's head.

"Mon Dieu! And what is going to happen now?"

She got down from the couch and walked to a window. When the lights had been brought into the room all the panes had turned inky black; for the night had come and the garden was full of tall bushes and trees screening off the gas lamps of the main alley of the Prado. Whatever the question meant she was not likely to see an answer to it outside. But her whisper had offended me, had hurt something infinitely deep, infinitely subtle and infinitely clear-eyed in my nature. I said after her from the couch on which I had remained, "Don't lose your composure. You will always have some sort of bell at hand."

I saw her shrug her uncovered shoulders impatiently. Her forehead was against the very blackness of the panes; pulled upward from the beautiful, strong nape of her neck, the twisted mass of her tawny hair was held high upon her head by the arrow of gold.

"You set up for being unforgiving," she said without anger.

I sprang to my feet while she turned about and came towards me bravely, with a wistful smile on her bold, adolescent face.

"It seems to me," she went on in a voice like a wave of love itself, "that one should try to understand before one sets up for being unforgiving. Forgiveness is a very fine word. It is a fine invocation."

"There are other fine words in the language such as fascination, fidelity, also frivolity; and as for invocations there are plenty of them, too; for instance: alas, heaven help me."

We stood very close together, her narrow eyes were as enigmatic as ever, but that face, which, like some ideal conception of art, was incapable of anything like untruth and grimace, expressed by some mysterious means such a depth of infinite patience that I felt profoundly ashamed of myself.

"This thing is beyond words altogether," I said. "Beyond forgiveness, beyond forgetting, beyond anger or jealousy. . . . There is nothing between us two that could make us act together."

"Then we must fall back perhaps on something within us, that — you admit it? — we have in common."

"Don't be childish," I said. "You give one with a perpetual and intense freshness feelings and sensations that are as old as the world itself, and you imagine that your enchantment can be broken off anywhere, at any time! But it can't be broken. And forgetfulness, like everything else, can only come from you. It's an impossible situation to stand up against."

She listened with slightly parted lips as if to catch some further resonances.

"There is a sort of generous ardour about you," she said, "which I don't really understand. No, I don't know it. Believe me, it is not of myself I am thinking. And you — you are going out to-night to make another landing."

"Yes, it is a fact that before many hours I will be sailing away from you to try my luck once more."

"Your wonderful luck," she breathed out.

"Oh, yes, I am wonderfully lucky. Unless the luck really is yours — in having found somebody like me, who cares at the same time so much and so little for what you have at heart."

"What time will you be leaving the harbour?" she asked.

"Some time between midnight and daybreak. Our men may be a little late in joining, but certainly we will be gone before the first streak of light."

"What freedom!" she murmured enviously. "It's something I shall never know. . . ."

"Freedom!" I protested. "I am a slave to my word. There will be a siring of carts and mules on a certain part of the coast, and a most ruffianly lot of men, men you understand, men with wives and children and sweethearts, who from the very moment they start on a trip risk a bullet in the head at any moment, but who have a perfect conviction that I will never fail them. That's my freedom. I wonder what they would think if they knew of your existence."



"I don't exist," she said.

"That's easy to say. But I will go as if you didn't exist — yet only because you do exist. You exist in me. I don't know where I end and you begin. You have got into my heart and into my veins and into my brain."

"Take this fancy out and trample it down in the dust," she said in a tone of timid entreaty.

"Heroically," I suggested with the sarcasm of despair.

"Well, yes, heroically," she said; and there passed between us dim smiles, I have no doubt of the most touching imbecility on earth. We were standing by then in the middle of the room with its vivid colours on a black background, with its multitude of winged figures with pale limbs, with hair like halos or flames, all strangely tense in their strained, decorative attitudes. Doña Rita made a step towards me, and as I attempted to seize her hand she flung her arms round my neck. I felt their strength drawing me towards her and by a sort of blind and desperate effort I resisted. And all the time she was repeating with nervous insistence:

"But it is true that you will go. You will surely. Not because of those people but because of me. You will go away because you feel you must."

With every word urging me to get away, her clasp tightened, she hugged my head closer to her breast. I submitted, knowing well that I could free myself by one more effort which it was in my power to make. But before I made it, in a sort of desperation, I pressed a long kiss into the hollow of her throat. And lo — there was no need for any effort. With a stifled cry of surprise her arms fell off me as if she had been shot. I must have been giddy, and perhaps we both were giddy, but the next thing I knew there was a good foot of space between us in the peaceful glow of the ground-glass globes, in the everlasting stillness of the winged figures. Something in the quality of her exclamation, something utterly unexpected, something I had never heard before, and also the way she was looking at me with a sort of incredulous, concentrated attention, disconcerted me exceedingly. I knew perfectly well what I had done and yet I felt that I didn't understand what had happened. I became suddenly abashed and I muttered that I had better go and dismiss that poor Dominic. She made no answer, gave no sign. She stood there lost in a vision — or was it a sensation? — of the most absorbing kind. I hurried out into the hall, shamefaced, as if I were making my escape while she wasn't looking. And yet I felt her looking fixedly at

me, with a sort of stupefaction on her features — in her whole attitude — as though she had never even heard of such a thing as a kiss in her life.

A dim lamp (of Pompeiian form) hanging on a long chain left the hall practically dark. Dominic, advancing towards me from a distant corner, was but a little more opaque shadow than the others. He had expected me on board every moment till about three o'clock, but as I didn't turn up and gave no sign of life in any other way he started on his hunt. He sought news of me from the garçons at the various cafés, from the cochers de fiacre in front of the Exchange, from the tabacconist lady at the counter of the fashionable Débit de Tabac, from the old man who sold papers outside the cercle, and from the flower-girl at the door of the fashionable restaurant where I had my table. That young woman, whose business name was Irma, had come on duty about mid-day. She said to Dominic: "I think I've seen all his friends this morning but I haven't seen him for a week. What has become of him?"

"That's exactly what I want to know," Dominic replied in a fury and then went back to the harbour on the chance that I might have called either on board or at Madame Léonore's café.

I expressed to him my surprise that he should fuss about me like an old hen over a chick. It wasn't like him at all. And he said that "en effet" it was Madame Léonore who wouldn't give him any peace. He hoped I wouldn't mind, it was best to humour women in little things; and so he started off again, made straight for the street of the Consuls, was told there that I wasn't at home but the woman of the house looked so funny that he didn't know what to make of it. Therefore, after some hesitation, he took the liberty to inquire at this house, too, and being told that I couldn't be disturbed, had made up his mind not to go on board without actually setting his eyes on me and hearing from my own lips that nothing was changed as to sailing orders.

"There is nothing changed, Dominic," I said.

"No change of any sort?" he insisted, looking very sombre and speaking gloomily from under his black moustaches in the dim glow of the alabaster lamp hanging above his head. He peered at me in an extraordinary manner as if he wanted to make sure that I had all my limbs about me. I asked him to call for my bag at the other house, on his way to the harbour, and he departed reassured, not, however, without remarking ironically that ever

since she saw that American cavalier Madame Léonore was not easy in her mind about me.

As I stood alone in the hall, without a sound of any sort, Rose appeared before me.

“Monsieur will dine after all,” she whispered calmly.

“My good girl, I am going to sea to-night.”

“What am I going to do with Madame?” she murmured to herself. “She will insist on returning to Paris.”

“Oh, have you heard of it?”

“I never get more than two hours’ notice,” she said. “But I know how it will be,” her voice lost its calmness. “I can look after Madame up to a certain point but I cannot be altogether responsible. There is a dangerous person who is everlastingly trying to see Madame alone. I have managed to keep him off several times but there is a beastly old journalist who is encouraging him in his attempts, and I daren’t even speak to Madame about it.”

“What sort of person do you mean?”

“Why, a man,” she said scornfully.

I snatched up my coat and hat.

“Aren’t there dozens of them?”

“Oh! But this one is dangerous. Madame must have given him a hold on her in some way. I ought not to talk like this about Madame and I wouldn’t to anybody but Monsieur. I am always on the watch, but what is a poor girl to do? . . . Isn’t Monsieur going back to Madame?”

“No, I am not going back. Not this time.” A mist seemed to fall before my eyes. I could hardly see the girl standing by the closed door of the Pompeiian room with extended hand, as if turned to stone. But my voice was firm enough. “Not this time,” I repeated, and became aware of the great noise of the wind amongst the trees, with the lashing of a rain squall against the door.

“Perhaps some other time,” I added.

I heard her say twice to herself: “Mon Dieu! Mon, Dieu!” and then a dismayed: “What can Monsieur expect me to do?” But I had to appear insensible to her distress and that not altogether because, in fact, I had no option but to go away. I remember also a distinct wilfulness in my attitude and something half-contemptuous in my words as I laid my hand on the knob of the front door.

“You will tell Madame that I am gone. It will please her. Tell her that I am gone — heroically.”

Rose had come up close to me. She met my words by a despairing outward movement of her hands as though she were giving everything up.

“I see it clearly now that Madame has no friends,” she declared with such a force of restrained bitterness that it nearly made me pause. But the very obscurity of actuating motives drove me on and I stepped out through the doorway muttering: “Everything is as Madame wishes it.”

She shot at me a swift: “You should resist,” of an extraordinary intensity, but I strode on down the path. Then Rose’s schooled temper gave way at last and I heard her angry voice screaming after me furiously through the wind and rain: “No! Madame has no friends. Not one!”

## **PART FIVE**

## CHAPTER I

That night I didn't get on board till just before midnight and Dominic could not conceal his relief at having me safely there. Why he should have been so uneasy it was impossible to say but at the time I had a sort of impression that my inner destruction (it was nothing less) had affected my appearance, that my doom was as it were written on my face. I was a mere receptacle for dust and ashes, a living testimony to the vanity of all things. My very thoughts were like a ghostly rustle of dead leaves. But we had an extremely successful trip, and for most of the time Dominic displayed an unwonted jocularly of a dry and biting kind with which, he maintained, he had been infected by no other person than myself. As, with all his force of character, he was very responsive to the moods of those he liked I have no doubt he spoke the truth. But I know nothing about it. The observer, more or less alert, whom each of us carries in his own consciousness, failed me altogether, had turned away his face in sheer horror, or else had fainted from the strain. And thus I had to live alone, unobserved even by myself.

But the trip had been successful. We re-entered the harbour very quietly as usual and when our craft had been moored unostentatiously amongst the plebeian stone-carriers, Dominic, whose grim joviality had subsided in the last twenty-four hours of our homeward run, abandoned me to myself as though indeed I had been a doomed man. He only stuck his head for a moment into our little cuddy where I was changing my clothes and being told in answer to his question that I had no special orders to give went ashore without waiting for me.

Generally we used to step on the quay together and I never failed to enter for a moment Madame Léonore's café. But this time when I got on the quay Dominic was nowhere to be seen. What was it? Abandonment — discretion — or had he quarrelled with his Léonore before leaving on the trip?

My way led me past the café and through the glass panes I saw that he was already there. On the other side of the little marble table Madame Léonore, leaning with mature grace on her elbow, was listening to him absorbed. Then I passed on and — what would you have! — I ended by making my way into the street of the Consuls. I had nowhere else to go. There were my things in the apartment on the first floor. I couldn't bear the thought of meeting anybody I knew.

The feeble gas flame in the hall was still there, on duty, as though it had never been turned off since I last crossed the hall at half-past eleven in the evening to go to the harbour. The small flame had watched me letting myself out; and now, exactly of the same size, the poor little tongue of light (there was something wrong with that burner) watched me letting myself in, as indeed it had done many times before. Generally the impression was that of entering an untenanted house, but this time before I could reach the foot of the stairs Therese glided out of the passage leading into the studio. After the usual exclamations she assured me that everything was ready for me upstairs, had been for days, and offered to get me something to eat at once. I accepted and said I would be down in the studio in half an hour. I found her there by the side of the laid table ready for conversation. She began by telling me — the dear, poor young Monsieur — in a sort of plaintive chant, that there were no letters for me, no letters of any kind, no letters from anybody. Glances of absolutely terrifying tenderness mingled with flashes of cunning swept over me from head to foot while I tried to eat.

“Are you giving me Captain Blunt’s wine to drink?” I asked, noting the straw-coloured liquid in my glass.

She screwed up her mouth as if she had a twinge of toothache and assured me that the wine belonged to the house. I would have to pay her for it. As far as personal feelings go, Blunt, who addressed her always with polite seriousness, was not a favourite with her. The “charming, brave Monsieur” was now fighting for the King and religion against the impious Liberals. He went away the very morning after I had left and, oh! she remembered, he had asked her before going away whether I was still in the house. Wanted probably to say good-bye to me, shake my hand, the dear, polite Monsieur.

I let her run on in dread expectation of what she would say next but she stuck to the subject of Blunt for some time longer. He had written to her once about some of his things which he wanted her to send to Paris to his mother’s address; but she was going to do nothing of the kind. She announced this with a pious smile; and in answer to my questions I discovered that it was a stratagem to make Captain Blunt return to the house.

“You will get yourself into trouble with the police, Mademoiselle Therese, if you go on like that,” I said. But she was as obstinate as a mule and assured me with the utmost confidence that many people would be

ready to defend a poor honest girl. There was something behind this attitude which I could not fathom. Suddenly she fetched a deep sigh.

“Our Rita, too, will end by coming to her sister.”

The name for which I had been waiting deprived me of speech for the moment. The poor mad sinner had rushed off to some of her wickednesses in Paris. Did I know? No? How could she tell whether I did know or not? Well! I had hardly left the house, so to speak, when Rita was down with her maid behaving as if the house did really still belong to her. . .

“What time was it?” I managed to ask. And with the words my life itself was being forced out through my lips. But Therese, not noticing anything strange about me, said it was something like half-past seven in the morning. The “poor sinner” was all in black as if she were going to church (except for her expression, which was enough to shock any honest person), and after ordering her with frightful menaces not to let anybody know she was in the house she rushed upstairs and locked herself up in my bedroom, while “that French creature” (whom she seemed to love more than her own sister) went into my salon and hid herself behind the window curtain.

I had recovered sufficiently to ask in a quiet natural voice whether Doña Rita and Captain Blunt had seen each other. Apparently they had not seen each other. The polite captain had looked so stern while packing up his kit that Therese dared not speak to him at all. And he was in a hurry, too. He had to see his dear mother off to Paris before his own departure. Very stern. But he shook her hand with a very nice bow.

Therese elevated her right hand for me to see. It was broad and short with blunt fingers, as usual. The pressure of Captain Blunt’s handshake had not altered its unlovely shape.

“What was the good of telling him that our Rita was here?” went on Therese. “I would have been ashamed of her coming here and behaving as if the house belonged to her! I had already said some prayers at his intention at the half-past six mass, the brave gentleman. That maid of my sister Rita was upstairs watching him drive away with her evil eyes, but I made a sign of the cross after the fiacre, and then I went upstairs and banged at your door, my dear kind young Monsieur, and shouted to Rita that she had no right to lock herself in any of my locataires’ rooms. At last she opened it — and what do you think? All her hair was loose over her shoulders. I suppose it all came down when she flung her hat on your bed.



I noticed when she arrived that her hair wasn't done properly. She used your brushes to do it up again in front of your glass."

"Wait a moment," I said, and jumped up, upsetting my wine to run upstairs as fast as I could. I lighted the gas, all the three jets in the middle of the room, the jet by the bedside and two others flanking the dressing-table. I had been struck by the wild hope of finding a trace of Rita's passage, a sign or something. I pulled out all the drawers violently, thinking that perhaps she had hidden there a scrap of paper, a note. It was perfectly mad. Of course there was no chance of that. Therese would have seen to it. I picked up one after another all the various objects on the dressing-table. On laying my hands on the brushes I had a profound emotion, and with misty eyes I examined them meticulously with the new hope of finding one of Rita's tawny hairs entangled amongst the bristles by a miraculous chance. But Therese would have done away with that chance, too. There was nothing to be seen, though I held them up to the light with a beating heart. It was written that not even that trace of her passage on the earth should remain with me; not to help but, as it were, to soothe the memory. Then I lighted a cigarette and came downstairs slowly. My unhappiness became dulled, as the grief of those who mourn for the dead gets dulled in the overwhelming sensation that everything is over, that a part of themselves is lost beyond recall taking with it all the savour of life.

I discovered Therese still on the very same spot of the floor, her hands folded over each other and facing my empty chair before which the spilled wine had soaked a large portion of the table-cloth. She hadn't moved at all. She hadn't even picked up the overturned glass. But directly I appeared she began to speak in an ingratiating voice.

"If you have missed anything of yours upstairs, my dear young Monsieur, you mustn't say it's me. You don't know what our Rita is."

"I wish to goodness," I said, "that she had taken something."

And again I became inordinately agitated as though it were my absolute fate to be everlastingly dying and reviving to the tormenting fact of her existence. Perhaps she had taken something? Anything. Some small object. I thought suddenly of a Rhenish-stone match-box. Perhaps it was that. I didn't remember having seen it when upstairs. I wanted to make sure at once. At once. But I commanded myself to sit still.

"And she so wealthy," Therese went on. "Even you with your dear generous little heart can do nothing for our Rita. No man can do anything

for her — except perhaps one, but she is so evilly disposed towards him that she wouldn't even see him, if in the goodness of his forgiving heart he were to offer his hand to her. It's her bad conscience that frightens her. He loves her more than his life, the dear, charitable man."

"You mean some rascal in Paris that I believe persecutes Doña Rita. Listen, Mademoiselle Therese, if you know where he hangs out you had better let him have word to be careful. I believe he, too, is mixed up in the Carlist intrigue. Don't you know that your sister can get him shut up any day or get him expelled by the police?"

Therese sighed deeply and put on a look of pained virtue.

"Oh, the hardness of her heart. She tried to be tender with me. She is awful. I said to her, 'Rita, have you sold your soul to the Devil?' and she shouted like a fiend: 'For happiness! Ha, ha, ha!' She threw herself backwards on that couch in your room and laughed and laughed and laughed as if I had been tickling her, and she drummed on the floor with the heels of her shoes. She is possessed. Oh, my dear innocent young Monsieur, you have never seen anything like that. That wicked girl who serves her rushed in with a tiny glass bottle and put it to her nose; but I had a mind to run out and fetch the priest from the church where I go to early mass. Such a nice, stout, severe man. But that false, cheating creature (I am sure she is robbing our Rita from morning to night), she talked to our Rita very low and quieted her down. I am sure I don't know what she said. She must be leagued with the devil. And then she asked me if I would go down and make a cup of chocolate for her Madame. Madame — that's our Rita. Madame! It seems they were going off directly to Paris and her Madame had had nothing to eat since the morning of the day before. Fancy me being ordered to make chocolate for our Rita! However, the poor thing looked so exhausted and white-faced that I went. Ah! the devil can give you an awful shake up if he likes."

Therese fetched another deep sigh and raising her eyes looked at me with great attention. I preserved an inscrutable expression, for I wanted to hear all she had to tell me of Rita. I watched her with the greatest anxiety composing her face into a cheerful expression.

"So Doña Rita is gone to Paris?" I asked negligently.

"Yes, my dear Monsieur. I believe she went straight to the railway station from here. When she first got up from the couch she could hardly stand. But before, while she was drinking the chocolate which I made for

her, I tried to get her to sign a paper giving over the house to me, but she only closed her eyes and begged me to try and be a good sister and leave her alone for half an hour. And she lying there looking as if she wouldn't live a day. But she always hated me."

I said bitterly, "You needn't have worried her like this. If she had not lived for another day you would have had this house and everything else besides; a bigger bit than even your wolfish throat can swallow, Mademoiselle Therese."

I then said a few more things indicative of my disgust with her rapacity, but they were quite inadequate, as I wasn't able to find words strong enough to express my real mind. But it didn't matter really because I don't think Therese heard me at all. She seemed lost in rapt amazement.

"What do you say, my dear Monsieur? What! All for me without any sort of paper?"

She appeared distracted by my curt: "Yes." Therese believed in my truthfulness. She believed me implicitly, except when I was telling her the truth about herself, mincing no words, when she used to stand smilingly bashful as if I were overwhelming her with compliments. I expected her to continue the horrible tale but apparently she had found something to think about which checked the flow. She fetched another sigh and muttered:

"Then the law can be just, if it does not require any paper. After all, I am her sister."

"It's very difficult to believe that — at sight," I said roughly.

"Ah, but that I could prove. There are papers for that."

After this declaration she began to clear the table, preserving a thoughtful silence.

I was not very surprised at the news of Doña Rita's departure for Paris. It was not necessary to ask myself why she had gone. I didn't even ask myself whether she had left the leased Villa on the Prado for ever. Later talking again with Therese, I learned that her sister had given it up for the use of the Carlist cause and that some sort of unofficial Consul, a Carlist agent of some sort, either was going to live there or had already taken possession. This, Rita herself had told her before her departure on that agitated morning spent in the house — in my rooms. A close investigation demonstrated to me that there was nothing missing from them. Even the wretched match-box which I really hoped was gone turned up in a drawer after I had, delightedly, given it up. It was a great blow. She might have

taken that at least! She knew I used to carry it about with me constantly while ashore. She might have taken it! Apparently she meant that there should be no bond left even of that kind; and yet it was a long time before I gave up visiting and revisiting all the corners of all possible receptacles for something that she might have left behind on purpose. It was like the mania of those disordered minds who spend their days hunting for a treasure. I hoped for a forgotten hairpin, for some tiny piece of ribbon. Sometimes at night I reflected that such hopes were altogether insensate; but I remember once getting up at two in the morning to search for a little cardboard box in the bathroom, into which, I remembered, I had not looked before. Of course it was empty; and, anyway, Rita could not possibly have known of its existence. I got back to bed shivering violently, though the night was warm, and with a distinct impression that this thing would end by making me mad. It was no longer a question of "this sort of thing" killing me. The moral atmosphere of this torture was different. It would make me mad. And at that thought great shudders ran down my prone body, because, once, I had visited a famous lunatic asylum where they had shown me a poor wretch who was mad, apparently, because he thought he had been abominably fooled by a woman. They told me that his grievance was quite imaginary. He was a young man with a thin fair beard, huddled up on the edge of his bed, hugging himself forlornly; and his incessant and lamentable wailing filled the long bare corridor, striking a chill into one's heart long before one came to the door of his cell.

And there was no one from whom I could hear, to whom I could speak, with whom I could evoke the image of Rita. Of course I could utter that word of four letters to Therese; but Therese for some reason took it into her head to avoid all topics connected with her sister. I felt as if I could pull out great handfuls of her hair hidden modestly under the black handkerchief of which the ends were sometimes tied under her chin. But, really, I could not have given her any intelligible excuse for that outrage. Moreover, she was very busy from the very top to the very bottom of the house, which she persisted in running alone because she couldn't make up her mind to part with a few francs every month to a servant. It seemed to me that I was no longer such a favourite with her as I used to be. That, strange to say, was exasperating, too. It was as if some idea, some fruitful notion had killed in her all the softer and more humane emotions. She went about with brooms and dusters wearing an air of sanctimonious thoughtfulness.

The man who to a certain extent took my place in Therese's favour was the old father of the dancing girls inhabiting the ground floor. In a tall hat and a well-to-do dark blue overcoat he allowed himself to be button-holed in the hall by Therese who would talk to him interminably with downcast eyes. He smiled gravely down at her, and meanwhile tried to edge towards the front door. I imagine he didn't put a great value on Therese's favour. Our stay in harbour was prolonged this time and I kept indoors like an invalid. One evening I asked that old man to come in and drink and smoke with me in the studio. He made no difficulties to accept, brought his wooden pipe with him, and was very entertaining in a pleasant voice. One couldn't tell whether he was an uncommon person or simply a ruffian, but in any case with his white beard he looked quite venerable. Naturally he couldn't give me much of his company as he had to look closely after his girls and their admirers; not that the girls were unduly frivolous, but of course being very young they had no experience. They were friendly creatures with pleasant, merry voices and he was very much devoted to them. He was a muscular man with a high colour and silvery locks curling round his bald pate and over his ears, like a barocco apostle. I had an idea that he had had a lurid past and had seen some fighting in his youth. The admirers of the two girls stood in great awe of him, from instinct no doubt, because his behaviour to them was friendly and even somewhat obsequious, yet always with a certain truculent glint in his eye that made them pause in everything but their generosity — which was encouraged. I sometimes wondered whether those two careless, merry hard-working creatures understood the secret moral beauty of the situation.

My real company was the dummy in the studio and I can't say it was exactly satisfying. After taking possession of the studio I had raised it tenderly, dusted its mangled limbs and insensible, hard-wood bosom, and then had propped it up in a corner where it seemed to take on, of itself, a shy attitude. I knew its history. It was not an ordinary dummy. One day, talking with Doña Rita about her sister, I had told her that I thought Therese used to knock it down on purpose with a broom, and Doña Rita had laughed very much. This, she had said, was an instance of dislike from mere instinct. That dummy had been made to measure years before. It had to wear for days and days the Imperial Byzantine robes in which Doña Rita sat only once or twice herself; but of course the folds and bends of the stuff had to be preserved as in the first sketch. Doña Rita described amusingly how

she had to stand in the middle of her room while Rose walked around her with a tape measure noting the figures down on a small piece of paper which was then sent to the maker, who presently returned it with an angry letter stating that those proportions were altogether impossible in any woman. Apparently Rose had muddled them all up; and it was a long time before the figure was finished and sent to the Pavilion in a long basket to take on itself the robes and the hieratic pose of the Empress. Later, it wore with the same patience the marvellous hat of the "Girl in the Hat." But Doña Rita couldn't understand how the poor thing ever found its way to Marseilles minus its turnip head. Probably it came down with the robes and a quantity of precious brocades which she herself had sent down from Paris. The knowledge of its origin, the contempt of Captain Blunt's references to it, with Therese's shocked dislike of the dummy, invested that summary reproduction with a sort of charm, gave me a faint and miserable illusion of the original, less artificial than a photograph, less precise, too. . . . But it can't be explained. I felt positively friendly to it as if it had been Rita's trusted personal attendant. I even went so far as to discover that it had a sort of grace of its own. But I never went so far as to address set speeches to it where it lurked shyly in its corner, or drag it out from there for contemplation. I left it in peace. I wasn't mad. I was only convinced that I soon would be.

## CHAPTER II

Notwithstanding my misanthropy I had to see a few people on account of all these Royalist affairs which I couldn't very well drop, and in truth did not wish to drop. They were my excuse for remaining in Europe, which somehow I had not the strength of mind to leave for the West Indies, or elsewhere. On the other hand, my adventurous pursuit kept me in contact with the sea where I found occupation, protection, consolation, the mental relief of grappling with concrete problems, the sanity one acquires from close contact with simple mankind, a little self-confidence born from the dealings with the elemental powers of nature. I couldn't give all that up. And besides all this was related to Doña Rita. I had, as it were, received it all from her own hand, from that hand the clasp of which was as frank as a man's and yet conveyed a unique sensation. The very memory of it would go through me like a wave of heat. It was over that hand that we first got into the habit of quarrelling, with the irritability of sufferers from some obscure pain and yet half unconscious of their disease. Rita's own spirit hovered over the troubled waters of Legitimity. But as to the sound of the four magic letters of her name I was not very likely to hear it fall sweetly on my ear. For instance, the distinguished personality in the world of finance with whom I had to confer several times, alluded to the irresistible seduction of the power which reigned over my heart and my mind; which had a mysterious and unforgettable face, the brilliance of sunshine together with the unfathomable splendour of the night as — Madame de Lastaola. That's how that steel-grey man called the greatest mystery of the universe. When uttering that assumed name he would make for himself a guardedly solemn and reserved face as though he were afraid lest I should presume to smile, lest he himself should venture to smile, and the sacred formality of our relations should be outraged beyond mending.

He would refer in a studiously grave tone to Madame de Lastaola's wishes, plans, activities, instructions, movements; or picking up a letter from the usual litter of paper found on such men's desks, glance at it to refresh his memory; and, while the very sight of the handwriting would make my lips go dry, would ask me in a bloodless voice whether perchance I had "a direct communication from — er — Paris lately." And there would be other maddening circumstances connected with those visits. He would treat me as a serious person having a clear view of certain eventualities,

while at the very moment my vision could see nothing but streaming across the wall at his back, abundant and misty, unearthly and adorable, a mass of tawny hair that seemed to have hot sparks tangled in it. Another nuisance was the atmosphere of Royalism, of Legitimacy, that pervaded the room, thin as air, intangible, as though no Legitimist of flesh and blood had ever existed to the man's mind except perhaps myself. He, of course, was just simply a banker, a very distinguished, a very influential, and a very impeccable banker. He persisted also in deferring to my judgment and sense with an over-emphasis called out by his perpetual surprise at my youth. Though he had seen me many times (I even knew his wife) he could never get over my immature age. He himself was born about fifty years old, all complete, with his iron-grey whiskers and his bilious eyes, which he had the habit of frequently closing during a conversation. On one occasion he said to me. "By the by, the Marquis of Villarel is here for a time. He inquired after you the last time he called on me. May I let him know that you are in town?"

I didn't say anything to that. The Marquis of Villarel was the Don Rafael of Rita's own story. What had I to do with Spanish grandees? And for that matter what had she, the woman of all time, to do with all the villainous or splendid disguises human dust takes upon itself? All this was in the past, and I was acutely aware that for me there was no present, no future, nothing but a hollow pain, a vain passion of such magnitude that being locked up within my breast it gave me an illusion of lonely greatness with my miserable head uplifted amongst the stars. But when I made up my mind (which I did quickly, to be done with it) to call on the banker's wife, almost the first thing she said to me was that the Marquis de Villarel was "amongst us." She said it joyously. If in her husband's room at the bank legitimism was a mere unpopulated principle, in her salon Legitimacy was nothing but persons. "Il m'a causé beaucoup de vous," she said as if there had been a joke in it of which I ought to be proud. I slunk away from her. I couldn't believe that the grandee had talked to her about me. I had never felt myself part of the great Royalist enterprise. I confess that I was so indifferent to everything, so profoundly demoralized, that having once got into that drawing-room I hadn't the strength to get away; though I could see perfectly well my volatile hostess going from one to another of her acquaintances in order to tell them with a little gesture, "Look! Over there — in that corner. That's the notorious Monsieur George." At last she



herself drove me out by coming to sit by me vivaciously and going into ecstasies over “ce cher Monsieur Mills” and that magnificent Lord X; and ultimately, with a perfectly odious snap in the eyes and drop in the voice, dragging in the name of Madame de Lastaola and asking me whether I was really so much in the confidence of that astonishing person. “Vous devez bien regretter son départ pour Paris,” she cooed, looking with affected bashfulness at her fan. . . . How I got out of the room I really don’t know. There was also a staircase. I did not fall down it head first — that much I am certain of; and I also remember that I wandered for a long time about the seashore and went home very late, by the way of the Prado, giving in passing a fearful glance at the Villa. It showed not a gleam of light through the thin foliage of its trees.

I spent the next day with Dominic on board the little craft watching the shipwrights at work on her deck. From the way they went about their business those men must have been perfectly sane; and I felt greatly refreshed by my company during the day. Dominic, too, devoted himself to his business, but his taciturnity was sardonic. Then I dropped in at the café and Madame Léonore’s loud “Eh, Signorino, here you are at last!” pleased me by its resonant friendliness. But I found the sparkle of her black eyes as she sat down for a moment opposite me while I was having my drink rather difficult to bear. That man and that woman seemed to know something. What did they know? At parting she pressed my hand significantly. What did she mean? But I didn’t feel offended by these manifestations. The souls within these people’s breasts were not volatile in the manner of slightly scented and inflated bladders. Neither had they the impervious skins which seem the rule in the fine world that wants only to get on. Somehow they had sensed that there was something wrong; and whatever impression they might have formed for themselves I had the certitude that it would not be for them a matter of grins at my expense.

That day on returning home I found Therese looking out for me, a very unusual occurrence of late. She handed me a card bearing the name of the Marquis de Villarel.

“How did you come by this?” I asked. She turned on at once the tap of her volubility and I was not surprised to learn that the grandee had not done such an extraordinary thing as to call upon me in person. A young gentleman had brought it. Such a nice young gentleman, she interjected with her piously ghoulish expression. He was not very tall. He had a very

smooth complexion (that woman was incorrigible) and a nice, tiny black moustache. Therese was sure that he must have been an officer en las filas legitimas. With that notion in her head she had asked him about the welfare of that other model of charm and elegance, Captain Blunt. To her extreme surprise the charming young gentleman with beautiful eyes had apparently never heard of Blunt. But he seemed very much interested in his surroundings, looked all round the hall, noted the costly wood of the door panels, paid some attention to the silver statuette holding up the defective gas burner at the foot of the stairs, and, finally, asked whether this was in very truth the house of the most excellent Señora Doña Rita de Lastaola. The question staggered Therese, but with great presence of mind she answered the young gentleman that she didn't know what excellence there was about it, but that the house was her property, having been given to her by her own sister. At this the young gentleman looked both puzzled and angry, turned on his heel, and got back into his fiacre. Why should people be angry with a poor girl who had never done a single reprehensible thing in her whole life?

"I suppose our Rita does tell people awful lies about her poor sister." She sighed deeply (she had several kinds of sighs and this was the hopeless kind) and added reflectively, "Sin on sin, wickedness on wickedness! And the longer she lives the worse it will be. It would be better for our Rita to be dead."

I told "Mademoiselle Therese" that it was really impossible to tell whether she was more stupid or atrocious; but I wasn't really very much shocked. These outbursts did not signify anything in Therese. One got used to them. They were merely the expression of her rapacity and her righteousness; so that our conversation ended by my asking her whether she had any dinner ready for me that evening.

"What's the good of getting you anything to eat, my dear young Monsieur," she quizzed me tenderly. "You just only peck like a little bird. Much better let me save the money for you." It will show the super-terrestrial nature of my misery when I say that I was quite surprised at Therese's view of my appetite. Perhaps she was right. I certainly did not know. I stared hard at her and in the end she admitted that the dinner was in fact ready that very moment.

The new young gentleman within Therese's horizon didn't surprise me very much. Villarel would travel with some sort of suite, a couple of

secretaries at least. I had heard enough of Carlist headquarters to know that the man had been (very likely was still) Captain General of the Royal Bodyguard and was a person of great political (and domestic) influence at Court. The card was, under its social form, a mere command to present myself before the grandee. No Royalist devoted by conviction, as I must have appeared to him, could have mistaken the meaning. I put the card in my pocket and after dining or not dining — I really don't remember — spent the evening smoking in the studio, pursuing thoughts of tenderness and grief, visions exalting and cruel. From time to time I looked at the dummy. I even got up once from the couch on which I had been writhing like a worm and walked towards it as if to touch it, but refrained, not from sudden shame but from sheer despair. By and by Therese drifted in. It was then late and, I imagine, she was on her way to bed. She looked the picture of cheerful, rustic innocence and started propounding to me a conundrum which began with the words:

“If our Rita were to die before long . . .”

She didn't get any further because I had jumped up and frightened her by shouting: “Is she ill? What has happened? Have you had a letter?”

She had had a letter. I didn't ask her to show it to me, though I daresay she would have done so. I had an idea that there was no meaning in anything, at least no meaning that mattered. But the interruption had made Therese apparently forget her sinister conundrum. She observed me with her shrewd, unintelligent eyes for a bit, and then with the fatuous remark about the Law being just she left me to the horrors of the studio. I believe I went to sleep there from sheer exhaustion. Some time during the night I woke up chilled to the bone and in the dark. These were horrors and no mistake. I dragged myself upstairs to bed past the indefatigable statuette holding up the ever-miserable light. The black-and-white hall was like an ice-house.

The main consideration which induced me to call on the Marquis of Villarel was the fact that after all I was a discovery of Doña Rita's, her own recruit. My fidelity and steadfastness had been guaranteed by her and no one else. I couldn't bear the idea of her being criticized by every empty-headed chatterer belonging to the Cause. And as, apart from that, nothing mattered much, why, then — I would get this over.

But it appeared that I had not reflected sufficiently on all the consequences of that step. First of all the sight of the Villa looking shabbily

cheerful in the sunshine (but not containing her any longer) was so perturbing that I very nearly went away from the gate. Then when I got in after much hesitation — being admitted by the man in the green baize apron who recognized me — the thought of entering that room, out of which she was gone as completely as if she had been dead, gave me such an emotion that I had to steady myself against the table till the faintness was past. Yet I was irritated as at a treason when the man in the baize apron instead of letting me into the Pompeiian dining-room crossed the hall to another door not at all in the Pompeiian style (more Louis XV rather — that Villa was like a *Salade Russe* of styles) and introduced me into a big, light room full of very modern furniture. The portrait en pied of an officer in a sky-blue uniform hung on the end wall. The officer had a small head, a black beard cut square, a robust body, and leaned with gauntleted hands on the simple hilt of a straight sword. That striking picture dominated a massive mahogany desk, and, in front of this desk, a very roomy, tall-backed armchair of dark green velvet. I thought I had been announced into an empty room till glancing along the extremely loud carpet I detected a pair of feet under the armchair.

I advanced towards it and discovered a little man, who had made no sound or movement till I came into his view, sunk deep in the green velvet. He altered his position slowly and rested his hollow, black, quietly burning eyes on my face in prolonged scrutiny. I detected something comminatory in his yellow, emaciated countenance, but I believe now he was simply startled by my youth. I bowed profoundly. He extended a meagre little hand.

“Take a chair, Don Jorge.”

He was very small, frail, and thin, but his voice was not languid, though he spoke hardly above his breath. Such was the envelope and the voice of the fanatical soul belonging to the Grand-master of Ceremonies and Captain General of the Bodyguard at the Headquarters of the Legitimist Court, now detached on a special mission. He was all fidelity, inflexibility, and sombre conviction, but like some great saints he had very little body to keep all these merits in.

“You are very young,” he remarked, to begin with. “The matters on which I desired to converse with you are very grave.”

“I was under the impression that your Excellency wished to see me at once. But if your Excellency prefers it I will return in, say, seven years’

time when I may perhaps be old enough to talk about grave matters.”

He didn't stir hand or foot and not even the quiver of an eyelid proved that he had heard my shockingly unbecoming retort.

“You have been recommended to us by a noble and loyal lady, in whom His Majesty — whom God preserve — reposes an entire confidence. God will reward her as she deserves and you, too, Señor, according to the disposition you bring to this great work which has the blessing (here he crossed himself) of our Holy Mother the Church.”

“I suppose your Excellency understands that in all this I am not looking for reward of any kind.”

At this he made a faint, almost ethereal grimace.

“I was speaking of the spiritual blessing which rewards the service of religion and will be of benefit to your soul,” he explained with a slight touch of acidity. “The other is perfectly understood and your fidelity is taken for granted. His Majesty — whom God preserve — has been already pleased to signify his satisfaction with your services to the most noble and loyal Doña Rita by a letter in his own hand.”

Perhaps he expected me to acknowledge this announcement in some way, speech, or bow, or something, because before my immobility he made a slight movement in his chair which smacked of impatience. “I am afraid, Señor, that you are affected by the spirit of scoffing and irreverence which pervades this unhappy country of France in which both you and I are strangers, I believe. Are you a young man of that sort?”

“I am a very good gun-runner, your Excellency,” I answered quietly.

He bowed his head gravely. “We are aware. But I was looking for the motives which ought to have their pure source in religion.”

“I must confess frankly that I have not reflected on my motives,” I said. “It is enough for me to know that they are not dishonourable and that anybody can see they are not the motives of an adventurer seeking some sordid advantage.”

He had listened patiently and when he saw that there was nothing more to come he ended the discussion.

“Señor, we should reflect upon our motives. It is salutary for our conscience and is recommended (he crossed himself) by our Holy Mother the Church. I have here certain letters from Paris on which I would consult your young sagacity which is accredited to us by the most loyal Doña Rita.”

The sound of that name on his lips was simply odious. I was convinced that this man of forms and ceremonies and fanatical royalism was perfectly heartless. Perhaps he reflected on his motives; but it seemed to me that his conscience could be nothing else but a monstrous thing which very few actions could disturb appreciably. Yet for the credit of Doña Rita I did not withhold from him my young sagacity. What he thought of it I don't know. The matters we discussed were not of course of high policy, though from the point of view of the war in the south they were important enough. We agreed on certain things to be done, and finally, always out of regard for Doña Rita's credit, I put myself generally at his disposition or of any Carlist agent he would appoint in his place; for I did not suppose that he would remain very long in Marseilles. He got out of the chair laboriously, like a sick child might have done. The audience was over but he noticed my eyes wandering to the portrait and he said in his measured, breathed-out tones:

"I owe the pleasure of having this admirable work here to the gracious attention of Madame de Lastaola, who, knowing my attachment to the royal person of my Master, has sent it down from Paris to greet me in this house which has been given up for my occupation also through her generosity to the Royal Cause. Unfortunately she, too, is touched by the infection of this irreverent and unfaithful age. But she is young yet. She is young."

These last words were pronounced in a strange tone of menace as though he were supernaturally aware of some suspended disasters. With his burning eyes he was the image of an Inquisitor with an unconquerable soul in that frail body. But suddenly he dropped his eyelids and the conversation finished as characteristically as it had begun: with a slow, dismissing inclination of the head and an "Adios, Señor — may God guard you from sin."

### CHAPTER III

I must say that for the next three months I threw myself into my unlawful trade with a sort of desperation, dogged and hopeless, like a fairly decent fellow who takes deliberately to drink. The business was getting dangerous. The bands in the South were not very well organized, worked with no very definite plan, and now were beginning to be pretty closely hunted. The arrangements for the transport of supplies were going to pieces; our friends ashore were getting scared; and it was no joke to find after a day of skilful dodging that there was no one at the landing place and have to go out again with our compromising cargo, to slink and lurk about the coast for another week or so, unable to trust anybody and looking at every vessel we met with suspicion. Once we were ambushed by a lot of "rascally Carabineers," as Dominic called them, who hid themselves among the rocks after disposing a train of mules well in view on the seashore. Luckily, on evidence which I could never understand, Dominic detected something suspicious. Perhaps it was by virtue of some sixth sense that men born for unlawful occupations may be gifted with. "There is a smell of treachery about this," he remarked suddenly, turning at his oar. (He and I were pulling alone in a little boat to reconnoitre.) I couldn't detect any smell and I regard to this day our escape on that occasion as, properly speaking, miraculous. Surely some supernatural power must have struck upwards the barrels of the Carabineers' rifles, for they missed us by yards. And as the Carabineers have the reputation of shooting straight, Dominic, after swearing most horribly, ascribed our escape to the particular guardian angel that looks after crazy young gentlemen. Dominic believed in angels in a conventional way, but laid no claim to having one of his own. Soon afterwards, while sailing quietly at night, we found ourselves suddenly near a small coasting vessel, also without lights, which all at once treated us to a volley of rifle fire. Dominic's mighty and inspired yell: "A plat ventre!" and also an unexpected roll to windward saved all our lives. Nobody got a scratch. We were past in a moment and in a breeze then blowing we had the heels of anything likely to give us chase. But an hour afterwards, as we stood side by side peering into the darkness, Dominic was heard to mutter through his teeth: "Le métier se gâte." I, too, had the feeling that the trade, if not altogether spoiled, had seen its best days. But I did not care. In fact, for my purpose it was rather better, a more potent influence; like the

stronger intoxication of raw spirit. A volley in the dark after all was not such a bad thing. Only a moment before we had received it, there, in that calm night of the sea full of freshness and soft whispers, I had been looking at an enchanting turn of a head in a faint light of its own, the tawny hair with snared red sparks brushed up from the nape of a white neck and held up on high by an arrow of gold feathered with brilliants and with ruby gleams all along its shaft. That jewelled ornament, which I remember often telling Rita was of a very Philistinish conception (it was in some way connected with a tortoiseshell comb) occupied an undue place in my memory, tried to come into some sort of significance even in my sleep. Often I dreamed of her with white limbs shimmering in the gloom like a nymph haunting a riot of foliage, and raising a perfect round arm to take an arrow of gold out of her hair to throw it at me by hand, like a dart. It came on, a whizzing trail of light, but I always woke up before it struck. Always. Invariably. It never had a chance. A volley of small arms was much more likely to do the business some day — or night.

At last came the day when everything slipped out of my grasp. The little vessel, broken and gone like the only toy of a lonely child, the sea itself, which had swallowed it, throwing me on shore after a shipwreck that instead of a fair fight left in me the memory of a suicide. It took away all that there was in me of independent life, but just failed to take me out of the world, which looked then indeed like Another World fit for no one else but unrepentant sinners. Even Dominic failed me, his moral entity destroyed by what to him was a most tragic ending of our common enterprise. The lurid swiftness of it all was like a stunning thunder-clap — and, one evening, I found myself weary, heartsore, my brain still dazed and with awe in my heart entering Marseilles by way of the railway station, after many adventures, one more disagreeable than another, involving privations, great exertions, a lot of difficulties with all sorts of people who looked upon me evidently more as a discreditable vagabond deserving the attentions of gendarmes than a respectable (if crazy) young gentleman attended by a guardian angel of his own. I must confess that I slunk out of the railway station shunning its many lights as if, invariably, failure made an outcast of a man. I hadn't any money in my pocket. I hadn't even the bundle and the stick of a destitute wayfarer. I was unshaven and unwashed, and my heart was faint within me. My attire was such that I daren't approach the rank of



fiacres, where indeed I could perceive only two pairs of lamps, of which one suddenly drove away while I looked. The other I gave up to the fortunate of this earth. I didn't believe in my power of persuasion. I had no powers. I slunk on and on, shivering with cold, through the uproarious streets. Bedlam was loose in them. It was the time of Carnival.

Small objects of no value have the secret of sticking to a man in an astonishing way. I had nearly lost my liberty and even my life, I had lost my ship, a money-belt full of gold, I had lost my companions, had parted from my friend; my occupation, my only link with life, my touch with the sea, my cap and jacket were gone — but a small penknife and a latchkey had never parted company with me. With the latchkey I opened the door of refuge. The hall wore its deaf-and-dumb air, its black-and-white stillness.

The sickly gas-jet still struggled bravely with adversity at the end of the raised silver arm of the statuette which had kept to a hair's breadth its graceful pose on the toes of its left foot; and the staircase lost itself in the shadows above. Therese was parsimonious with the lights. To see all this was surprising. It seemed to me that all the things I had known ought to have come down with a crash at the moment of the final catastrophe on the Spanish coast. And there was Therese herself descending the stairs, frightened but plucky. Perhaps she thought that she would be murdered this time for certain. She had a strange, unemotional conviction that the house was particularly convenient for a crime. One could never get to the bottom of her wild notions which she held with the stolidity of a peasant allied to the outward serenity of a nun. She quaked all over as she came down to her doom, but when she recognized me she got such a shock that she sat down suddenly on the lowest step. She did not expect me for another week at least, and, besides, she explained, the state I was in made her blood take "one turn."

Indeed my plight seemed either to have called out or else repressed her true nature. But who had ever fathomed her nature! There was none of her treacly volubility. There were none of her "dear young gentlemen" and "poor little hearts" and references to sin. In breathless silence she ran about the house getting my room ready, lighting fires and gas-jets and even hauling at me to help me up the stairs. Yes, she did lay hands on me for that charitable purpose. They trembled. Her pale eyes hardly left my face. "What brought you here like this?" she whispered once.

“If I were to tell you, Mademoiselle Therese, you would see there the hand of God.”

She dropped the extra pillow she was carrying and then nearly fell over it. “Oh, dear heart,” she murmured, and ran off to the kitchen.

I sank into bed as into a cloud and Therese reappeared very misty and offering me something in a cup. I believe it was hot milk, and after I drank it she took the cup and stood looking at me fixedly. I managed to say with difficulty: “Go away,” whereupon she vanished as if by magic before the words were fairly out of my mouth. Immediately afterwards the sunlight forced through the slats of the jalousies its diffused glow, and Therese was there again as if by magic, saying in a distant voice: “It’s midday”. . . Youth will have its rights. I had slept like a stone for seventeen hours.

I suppose an honourable bankrupt would know such an awakening: the sense of catastrophe, the shrinking from the necessity of beginning life again, the faint feeling that there are misfortunes which must be paid for by a hanging. In the course of the morning Therese informed me that the apartment usually occupied by Mr. Blunt was vacant and added mysteriously that she intended to keep it vacant for a time, because she had been instructed to do so. I couldn’t imagine why Blunt should wish to return to Marseilles. She told me also that the house was empty except for myself and the two dancing girls with their father. Those people had been away for some time as the girls had engagements in some Italian summer theatres, but apparently they had secured a re-engagement for the winter and were now back. I let Therese talk because it kept my imagination from going to work on subjects which, I had made up my mind, were no concern of mine. But I went out early to perform an unpleasant task. It was only proper that I should let the Carlist agent ensconced in the Prado Villa know of the sudden ending of my activities. It would be grave enough news for him, and I did not like to be its bearer for reasons which were mainly personal. I resembled Dominic in so far that I, too, disliked failure.

The Marquis of Villarel had of course gone long before. The man who was there was another type of Carlist altogether, and his temperament was that of a trader. He was the chief purveyor of the Legitimist armies, an honest broker of stores, and enjoyed a great reputation for cleverness. His important task kept him, of course, in France, but his young wife, whose beauty and devotion to her King were well known, represented him worthily at Headquarters, where his own appearances were extremely rare.

The dissimilar but united loyalties of those two people had been rewarded by the title of baron and the ribbon of some order or other. The gossip of the Legitimist circles appreciated those favours with smiling indulgence. He was the man who had been so distressed and frightened by Doña Rita's first visit to Tolosa. He had an extreme regard for his wife. And in that sphere of clashing arms and unceasing intrigue nobody would have smiled then at his agitation if the man himself hadn't been somewhat grotesque.

He must have been startled when I sent in my name, for he didn't of course expect to see me yet — nobody expected me. He advanced soft-footed down the room. With his jutting nose, flat-topped skull and sable garments he recalled an obese raven, and when he heard of the disaster he manifested his astonishment and concern in a most plebeian manner by a low and expressive whistle. I, of course, could not share his consternation. My feelings in that connection were of a different order; but I was annoyed at his unintelligent stare.

"I suppose," I said, "you will take it on yourself to advise Doña Rita, who is greatly interested in this affair."

"Yes, but I was given to understand that Madame de Lastaola was to leave Paris either yesterday or this morning."

It was my turn to stare dumbly before I could manage to ask: "For Tolosa?" in a very knowing tone.

Whether it was the droop of his head, play of light, or some other subtle cause, his nose seemed to have grown perceptibly longer.

"That, Señor, is the place where the news has got to be conveyed without undue delay," he said in an agitated wheeze. "I could, of course, telegraph to our agent in Bayonne who would find a messenger. But I don't like, I don't like! The Alphonsists have agents, too, who hang about the telegraph offices. It's no use letting the enemy get that news."

He was obviously very confused, unhappy, and trying to think of two different things at once.

"Sit down, Don George, sit down." He absolutely forced a cigar on me. "I am extremely distressed. That — I mean Doña Rita is undoubtedly on her way to Tolosa. This is very frightful."

I must say, however, that there was in the man some sense of duty. He mastered his private fears. After some cogitation he murmured: "There is another way of getting the news to Headquarters. Suppose you write me a

formal letter just stating the facts, the unfortunate facts, which I will be able to forward. There is an agent of ours, a fellow I have been employing for purchasing supplies, a perfectly honest man. He is coming here from the north by the ten o'clock train with some papers for me of a confidential nature. I was rather embarrassed about it. It wouldn't do for him to get into any sort of trouble. He is not very intelligent. I wonder, Don George, whether you would consent to meet him at the station and take care of him generally till to-morrow. I don't like the idea of him going about alone. Then, to-morrow night, we would send him on to Tolosa by the west coast route, with the news; and then he can also call on Doña Rita who will no doubt be already there. . . ." He became again distracted all in a moment and actually went so far as to wring his fat hands. "Oh, yes, she will be there!" he exclaimed in most pathetic accents.

I was not in the humour to smile at anything, and he must have been satisfied with the gravity with which I beheld his extraordinary antics. My mind was very far away. I thought: Why not? Why shouldn't I also write a letter to Doña Rita, telling her that now nothing stood in the way of my leaving Europe, because, really, the enterprise couldn't be begun again; that things that come to an end can never be begun again. The idea — never again — had complete possession of my mind. I could think of nothing else. Yes, I would write. The worthy Commissary General of the Carlist forces was under the impression that I was looking at him; but what I had in my eye was a jumble of butterfly women and winged youths and the soft sheen of Argand lamps gleaming on an arrow of gold in the hair of a head that seemed to evade my outstretched hand.

"Oh, yes," I said, "I have nothing to do and even nothing to think of just now, I will meet your man as he gets off the train at ten o'clock to-night. What's he like?"

"Oh, he has a black moustache and whiskers, and his chin is shaved," said the newly-fledged baron cordially. "A very honest fellow. I always found him very useful. His name is José Ortega."

He was perfectly self-possessed now, and walking soft-footed accompanied me to the door of the room. He shook hands with a melancholy smile. "This is a very frightful situation. My poor wife will be quite distracted. She is such a patriot. Many thanks, Don George. You relieve me greatly. The fellow is rather stupid and rather bad-tempered. Queer creature, but very honest! Oh, very honest!"



## CHAPTER IV

It was the last evening of Carnival. The same masks, the same yells, the same mad rushes, the same bedlam of disguised humanity blowing about the streets in the great gusts of mistral that seemed to make them dance like dead leaves on an earth where all joy is watched by death.

It was exactly twelve months since that other carnival evening when I had felt a little weary and a little lonely but at peace with all mankind. It must have been — to a day or two. But on this evening it wasn't merely loneliness that I felt. I felt bereaved with a sense of a complete and universal loss in which there was perhaps more resentment than mourning; as if the world had not been taken away from me by an august decree but filched from my innocence by an underhand fate at the very moment when it had disclosed to my passion its warm and generous beauty. This consciousness of universal loss had this advantage that it induced something resembling a state of philosophic indifference. I walked up to the railway station caring as little for the cold blasts of wind as though I had been going to the scaffold. The delay of the train did not irritate me in the least. I had finally made up my mind to write a letter to Doña Rita; and this "honest fellow" for whom I was waiting would take it to her. He would have no difficulty in Tolosa in finding Madame de Lastaola. The General Headquarters, which was also a Court, would be buzzing with comments on her presence. Most likely that "honest fellow" was already known to Doña Rita. For all I knew he might have been her discovery just as I was. Probably I, too, was regarded as an "honest fellow" enough; but stupid — since it was clear that my luck was not inexhaustible. I hoped that while carrying my letter the man would not let himself be caught by some Alphonsist guerilla who would, of course, shoot him. But why should he? I, for instance, had escaped with my life from a much more dangerous enterprise than merely passing through the frontier line in charge of some trustworthy guide. I pictured the fellow to myself trudging over the stony slopes and scrambling down wild ravines with my letter to Doña Rita in his pocket. It would be such a letter of farewell as no lover had ever written, no woman in the world had ever read, since the beginning of love on earth. It would be worthy of the woman. No experience, no memories, no dead traditions of passion or language would inspire it. She herself would be its sole inspiration. She would see her own image in it as in a mirror; and

perhaps then she would understand what it was I was saying farewell to on the very threshold of my life. A breath of vanity passed through my brain. A letter as moving as her mere existence was moving would be something unique. I regretted I was not a poet.

I woke up to a great noise of feet, a sudden influx of people through the doors of the platform. I made out my man's whiskers at once — not that they were enormous, but because I had been warned beforehand of their existence by the excellent Commissary General. At first I saw nothing of him but his whiskers: they were black and cut somewhat in the shape of a shark's fin and so very fine that the least breath of air animated them into a sort of playful restlessness. The man's shoulders were hunched up and when he had made his way clear of the throng of passengers I perceived him as an unhappy and shivery being. Obviously he didn't expect to be met, because when I murmured an enquiring, "Señor Ortega?" into his ear he swerved away from me and nearly dropped a little handbag he was carrying. His complexion was uniformly pale, his mouth was red, but not engaging. His social status was not very definite. He was wearing a dark blue overcoat of no particular cut, his aspect had no relief; yet those restless side-whiskers flanking his red mouth and the suspicious expression of his black eyes made him noticeable. This I regretted the more because I caught sight of two skulking fellows, looking very much like policemen in plain clothes, watching us from a corner of the great hall. I hurried my man into a fiacre. He had been travelling from early morning on cross-country lines and after we got on terms a little confessed to being very hungry and cold. His red lips trembled and I noted an underhand, cynical curiosity when he had occasion to raise his eyes to my face. I was in some doubt how to dispose of him but as we rolled on at a jog trot I came to the conclusion that the best thing to do would be to organize for him a shake-down in the studio. Obscure lodging houses are precisely the places most looked after by the police, and even the best hotels are bound to keep a register of arrivals. I was very anxious that nothing should stop his projected mission of courier to headquarters. As we passed various street corners where the mistral blast struck at us fiercely I could feel him shivering by my side. However, Therese would have lighted the iron stove in the studio before retiring for the night, and, anyway, I would have to turn her out to make up a bed on the couch. Service of the King! I must say that she was amiable and didn't seem to mind anything one asked her to do. Thus while the

fellow slumbered on the divan I would sit upstairs in my room setting down on paper those great words of passion and sorrow that seethed in my brain and even must have forced themselves in murmurs on to my lips, because the man by my side suddenly asked me: "What did you say?" — "Nothing," I answered, very much surprised. In the shifting light of the street lamps he looked the picture of bodily misery with his chattering teeth and his whiskers blown back flat over his ears. But somehow he didn't arouse my compassion. He was swearing to himself, in French and Spanish, and I tried to soothe him by the assurance that we had not much farther to go. "I am starving," he remarked acidly, and I felt a little compunction. Clearly, the first thing to do was to feed him. We were then entering the Cannebière and as I didn't care to show myself with him in the fashionable restaurant where a new face (and such a face, too) would be remarked, I pulled up the fiacre at the door of the Maison Dorée. That was more of a place of general resort where, in the multitude of casual patrons, he would pass unnoticed.

For this last night of carnival the big house had decorated all its balconies with rows of coloured paper lanterns right up to the roof. I led the way to the grand salon, for as to private rooms they had been all retained days before. There was a great crowd of people in costume, but by a piece of good luck we managed to secure a little table in a corner. The revellers, intent on their pleasure, paid no attention to us. Señor Ortega trod on my heels and after sitting down opposite me threw an ill-natured glance at the festive scene. It might have been about half-past ten, then.

Two glasses of wine he drank one after another did not improve his temper. He only ceased to shiver. After he had eaten something it must have occurred to him that he had no reason to bear me a grudge and he tried to assume a civil and even friendly manner. His mouth, however, betrayed an abiding bitterness. I mean when he smiled. In repose it was a very expressionless mouth, only it was too red to be altogether ordinary. The whole of him was like that: the whiskers too black, the hair too shiny, the forehead too white, the eyes too mobile; and he lent you his attention with an air of eagerness which made you uncomfortable. He seemed to expect you to give yourself away by some unconsidered word that he would snap up with delight. It was that peculiarity that somehow put me on my guard. I had no idea who I was facing across the table and as a matter of fact I did not care. All my impressions were blurred; and even the promptings of my instinct were the haziest thing imaginable. Now and then I had acute



hallucinations of a woman with an arrow of gold in her hair. This caused alternate moments of exaltation and depression from which I tried to take refuge in conversation; but Señor Ortega was not stimulating. He was preoccupied with personal matters. When suddenly he asked me whether I knew why he had been called away from his work (he had been buying supplies from peasants somewhere in Central France), I answered that I didn't know what the reason was originally, but I had an idea that the present intention was to make of him a courier, bearing certain messages from Baron H. to the Quartel Real in Tolosa.

He glared at me like a basilisk. "And why have I been met like this?" he enquired with an air of being prepared to hear a lie.

I explained that it was the Baron's wish, as a matter of prudence and to avoid any possible trouble which might arise from enquiries by the police.

He took it badly. "What nonsense." He was — he said — an employé (for several years) of Hernandez Brothers in Paris, an importing firm, and he was travelling on their business — as he could prove. He dived into his side pocket and produced a handful of folded papers of all sorts which he plunged back again instantly.

And even then I didn't know whom I had there, opposite me, busy now devouring a slice of pâté de foie gras. Not in the least. It never entered my head. How could it? The Rita that haunted me had no history; she was but the principle of life charged with fatality. Her form was only a mirage of desire decoying one step by step into despair.

Señor Ortega gulped down some more wine and suggested I should tell him who I was. "It's only right I should know," he added.

This could not be gainsaid; and to a man connected with the Carlist organization the shortest way was to introduce myself as that "Monsieur George" of whom he had probably heard.

He leaned far over the table, till his very breast-bone was over the edge, as though his eyes had been stilettos and he wanted to drive them home into my brain. It was only much later that I understood how near death I had been at that moment. But the knives on the tablecloth were the usual restaurant knives with rounded ends and about as deadly as pieces of hoop-iron. Perhaps in the very gust of his fury he remembered what a French restaurant knife is like and something sane within him made him give up the sudden project of cutting my heart out where I sat. For it could have been nothing but a sudden impulse. His settled purpose was quite other. It

was not my heart that he was after. His fingers indeed were groping amongst the knife handles by the side of his plate but what captivated my attention for a moment were his red lips which were formed into an odd, sly, insinuating smile. Heard! To be sure he had heard! The chief of the great arms smuggling organization!

“Oh!” I said, “that’s giving me too much importance.” The person responsible and whom I looked upon as chief of all the business was, as he might have heard, too, a certain noble and loyal lady.

“I am as noble as she is,” he snapped peevishly, and I put him down at once as a very offensive beast. “And as to being loyal, what is that? It is being truthful! It is being faithful! I know all about her.”

I managed to preserve an air of perfect unconcern. He wasn’t a fellow to whom one could talk of Doña Rita.

“You are a Basque,” I said.

He admitted rather contemptuously that he was a Basque and even then the truth did not dawn upon me. I suppose that with the hidden egoism of a lover I was thinking of myself, of myself alone in relation to Doña Rita, not of Doña Rita herself. He, too, obviously. He said: “I am an educated man, but I know her people, all peasants. There is a sister, an uncle, a priest, a peasant, too, and perfectly unenlightened. One can’t expect much from a priest (I am a free-thinker of course), but he is really too bad, more like a brute beast. As to all her people, mostly dead now, they never were of any account. There was a little land, but they were always working on other people’s farms, a barefooted gang, a starved lot. I ought to know because we are distant relations. Twentieth cousins or something of the sort. Yes, I am related to that most loyal lady. And what is she, after all, but a Parisian woman with innumerable lovers, as I have been told.”

“I don’t think your information is very correct,” I said, affecting to yawn slightly. “This is mere gossip of the gutter and I am surprised at you, who really know nothing about it — ”

But the disgusting animal had fallen into a brown study. The hair of his very whiskers was perfectly still. I had now given up all idea of the letter to Rita. Suddenly he spoke again:

“Women are the origin of all evil. One should never trust them. They have no honour. No honour!” he repeated, striking his breast with his closed fist on which the knuckles stood out very white. “I left my village many years ago and of course I am perfectly satisfied with my position and

I don't know why I should trouble my head about this loyal lady. I suppose that's the way women get on in the world."

I felt convinced that he was no proper person to be a messenger to headquarters. He struck me as altogether untrustworthy and perhaps not quite sane. This was confirmed by him saying suddenly with no visible connection and as if it had been forced from him by some agonizing process: "I was a boy once," and then stopping dead short with a smile. He had a smile that frightened one by its association of malice and anguish.

"Will you have anything more to eat?" I asked.

He declined dully. He had had enough. But he drained the last of a bottle into his glass and accepted a cigar which I offered him. While he was lighting it I had a sort of confused impression that he wasn't such a stranger to me as I had assumed he was; and yet, on the other hand, I was perfectly certain I had never seen him before. Next moment I felt that I could have knocked him down if he hadn't looked so amazingly unhappy, while he came out with the astounding question: "Señor, have you ever been a lover in your young days?"

"What do you mean?" I asked. "How old do you think I am?"

"That's true," he said, gazing at me in a way in which the damned gaze out of their cauldrons of boiling pitch at some soul walking scot free in the place of torment. "It's true, you don't seem to have anything on your mind." He assumed an air of ease, throwing an arm over the back of his chair and blowing the smoke through the gash of his twisted red mouth. "Tell me," he said, "between men, you know, has this — wonderful celebrity — what does she call herself? How long has she been your mistress?"

I reflected rapidly that if I knocked him over, chair and all, by a sudden blow from the shoulder it would bring about infinite complications beginning with a visit to the Commissaire de Police on night-duty, and ending in God knows what scandal and disclosures of political kind; because there was no telling what, or how much, this outrageous brute might choose to say and how many people he might not involve in a most undesirable publicity. He was smoking his cigar with a poignantly mocking air and not even looking at me. One can't hit like that a man who isn't even looking at one; and then, just as I was looking at him swinging his leg with a caustic smile and stony eyes, I felt sorry for the creature. It was only his body that was there in that chair. It was manifest to me that his soul was

absent in some hell of its own. At that moment I attained the knowledge of who it was I had before me. This was the man of whom both Doña Rita and Rose were so much afraid. It remained then for me to look after him for the night and then arrange with Baron H. that he should be sent away the very next day — and anywhere but to Tolosa. Yes, evidently, I mustn't lose sight of him. I proposed in the calmest tone that we should go on where he could get his much-needed rest. He rose with alacrity, picked up his little hand-bag, and, walking out before me, no doubt looked a very ordinary person to all eyes but mine. It was then past eleven, not much, because we had not been in that restaurant quite an hour, but the routine of the town's night-life being upset during the Carnival the usual row of fiacres outside the Maison Dorée was not there; in fact, there were very few carriages about. Perhaps the coachmen had assumed Pierrot costumes and were rushing about the streets on foot yelling with the rest of the population. "We will have to walk," I said after a while. — "Oh, yes, let us walk," assented Señor Ortega, "or I will be frozen here." It was like a plaint of unutterable wretchedness. I had a fancy that all his natural heat had abandoned his limbs and gone to his brain. It was otherwise with me; my head was cool but I didn't find the night really so very cold. We stepped out briskly side by side. My lucid thinking was, as it were, enveloped by the wide shouting of the consecrated Carnival gaiety. I have heard many noises since, but nothing that gave me such an intimate impression of the savage instincts hidden in the breast of mankind; these yells of festivity suggested agonizing fear, rage of murder, ferocity of lust, and the irremediable joylessness of human condition: yet they were emitted by people who were convinced that they were amusing themselves supremely, traditionally, with the sanction of ages, with the approval of their conscience — and no mistake about it whatever! Our appearance, the soberness of our gait made us conspicuous. Once or twice, by common inspiration, masks rushed forward and forming a circle danced round us uttering discordant shouts of derision; for we were an outrage to the peculiar proprieties of the hour, and besides we were obviously lonely and defenceless. On those occasions there was nothing for it but to stand still till the flurry was over. My companion, however, would stamp his feet with rage, and I must admit that I myself regretted not having provided for our wearing a couple of false noses, which would have been enough to placate the just resentment of those people. We might have also joined in the

dance, but for some reason or other it didn't occur to us; and I heard once a high, clear woman's voice stigmatizing us for a "species of swelled heads" (*espèce d'enflés*). We proceeded sedately, my companion muttered with rage, and I was able to resume my thinking. It was based on the deep persuasion that the man at my side was insane with quite another than Carnavalesque lunacy which comes on at one stated time of the year. He was fundamentally mad, though not perhaps completely; which of course made him all the greater, I won't say danger but, nuisance.

I remember once a young doctor expounding the theory that most catastrophes in family circles, surprising episodes in public affairs and disasters in private life, had their origin in the fact that the world was full of half-mad people. He asserted that they were the real majority. When asked whether he considered himself as belonging to the majority, he said frankly that he didn't think so; unless the folly of voicing this view in a company, so utterly unable to appreciate all its horror, could be regarded as the first symptom of his own fate. We shouted down him and his theory, but there is no doubt that it had thrown a chill on the gaiety of our gathering.

We had now entered a quieter quarter of the town and Señor Ortega had ceased his muttering. For myself I had not the slightest doubt of my own sanity. It was proved to me by the way I could apply my intelligence to the problem of what was to be done with Señor Ortega. Generally, he was unfit to be trusted with any mission whatever. The unstability of his temper was sure to get him into a scrape. Of course carrying a letter to Headquarters was not a very complicated matter; and as to that I would have trusted willingly a properly trained dog. My private letter to Doña Rita, the wonderful, the unique letter of farewell, I had given up for the present. Naturally I thought of the Ortega problem mainly in the terms of Doña Rita's safety. Her image presided at every council, at every conflict of my mind, and dominated every faculty of my senses. It floated before my eyes, it touched my elbow, it guarded my right side and my left side; my ears seemed to catch the sound of her footsteps behind me, she enveloped me with passing whiffs of warmth and perfume, with filmy touches of the hair on my face. She penetrated me, my head was full of her . . . And his head, too, I thought suddenly with a side glance at my companion. He walked quietly with hunched-up shoulders carrying his little hand-bag and he looked the most commonplace figure imaginable.

Yes. There was between us a most horrible fellowship; the association of his crazy torture with the sublime suffering of my passion. We hadn't been a quarter of an hour together when that woman had surged up fatally between us; between this miserable wretch and myself. We were haunted by the same image. But I was sane! I was sane! Not because I was certain that the fellow must not be allowed to go to Tolosa, but because I was perfectly alive to the difficulty of stopping him from going there, since the decision was absolutely in the hands of Baron H.

If I were to go early in the morning and tell that fat, bilious man: "Look here, your Ortega's mad," he would certainly think at once that I was, get very frightened, and . . . one couldn't tell what course he would take. He would eliminate me somehow out of the affair. And yet I could not let the fellow proceed to where Doña Rita was, because, obviously, he had been molesting her, had filled her with uneasiness and even alarm, was an unhappy element and a disturbing influence in her life — incredible as the thing appeared! I couldn't let him go on to make himself a worry and a nuisance, drive her out from a town in which she wished to be (for whatever reason) and perhaps start some explosive scandal. And that girl Rose seemed to fear something graver even than a scandal. But if I were to explain the matter fully to H. he would simply rejoice in his heart. Nothing would please him more than to have Doña Rita driven out of Tolosa. What a relief from his anxieties (and his wife's, too); and if I were to go further, if I even went so far as to hint at the fears which Rose had not been able to conceal from me, why then — I went on thinking coldly with a stoical rejection of the most elementary faith in mankind's rectitude — why then, that accommodating husband would simply let the ominous messenger have his chance. He would see there only his natural anxieties being laid to rest for ever. Horrible? Yes. But I could not take the risk. In a twelvemonth I had travelled a long way in my mistrust of mankind.

We paced on steadily. I thought: "How on earth am I going to stop you?" Had this arisen only a month before, when I had the means at hand and Dominic to confide in, I would have simply kidnapped the fellow. A little trip to sea would not have done Señor Ortega any harm; though no doubt it would have been abhorrent to his feelings. But now I had not the means. I couldn't even tell where my poor Dominic was hiding his diminished head.

Again I glanced at him sideways. I was the taller of the two and as it happened I met in the light of the street lamp his own stealthy glance directed up at me with an agonized expression, an expression that made me fancy I could see the man's very soul writhing in his body like an impaled worm. In spite of my utter inexperience I had some notion of the images that rushed into his mind at the sight of any man who had approached Doña Rita. It was enough to awaken in any human being a movement of horrified compassion; but my pity went out not to him but to Doña Rita. It was for her that I felt sorry; I pitied her for having that damned soul on her track. I pitied her with tenderness and indignation, as if this had been both a danger and a dishonour.

I don't mean to say that those thoughts passed through my head consciously. I had only the resultant, settled feeling. I had, however, a thought, too. It came on me suddenly, and I asked myself with rage and astonishment: "Must I then kill that brute?" There didn't seem to be any alternative. Between him and Doña Rita I couldn't hesitate. I believe I gave a slight laugh of desperation. The suddenness of this sinister conclusion had in it something comic and unbelievable. It loosened my grip on my mental processes. A Latin tag came into my head about the facile descent into the abyss. I marvelled at its aptness, and also that it should have come to me so pat. But I believe now that it was suggested simply by the actual declivity of the street of the Consuls which lies on a gentle slope. We had just turned the corner. All the houses were dark and in a perspective of complete solitude our two shadows dodged and wheeled about our feet.

"Here we are," I said.

He was an extraordinarily chilly devil. When we stopped I could hear his teeth chattering again. I don't know what came over me, I had a sort of nervous fit, was incapable of finding my pockets, let alone the latchkey. I had the illusion of a narrow streak of light on the wall of the house as if it had been cracked. "I hope we will be able to get in," I murmured.

Señor Ortega stood waiting patiently with his handbag, like a rescued wayfarer. "But you live in this house, don't you?" he observed.

"No," I said, without hesitation. I didn't know how that man would behave if he were aware that I was staying under the same roof. He was half mad. He might want to talk all night, try crazily to invade my privacy. How could I tell? Moreover, I wasn't so sure that I would remain in the

house. I had some notion of going out again and walking up and down the street of the Consuls till daylight. "No, an absent friend lets me use . . . I had that latchkey this morning . . . Ah! here it is."

I let him go in first. The sickly gas flame was there on duty, undaunted, waiting for the end of the world to come and put it out. I think that the black-and-white hall surprised Ortega. I had closed the front door without noise and stood for a moment listening, while he glanced about furtively. There were only two other doors in the hall, right and left. Their panels of ebony were decorated with bronze applications in the centre. The one on the left was of course Blunt's door. As the passage leading beyond it was dark at the further end I took Señor Ortega by the hand and led him along, unresisting, like a child. For some reason or other I moved on tip-toe and he followed my example. The light and the warmth of the studio impressed him favourably; he laid down his little bag, rubbed his hands together, and produced a smile of satisfaction; but it was such a smile as a totally ruined man would perhaps force on his lips, or a man condemned to a short shrift by his doctor. I begged him to make himself at home and said that I would go at once and hunt up the woman of the house who would make him up a bed on the big couch there. He hardly listened to what I said. What were all those things to him! He knew that his destiny was to sleep on a bed of thorns, to feed on adders. But he tried to show a sort of polite interest. He asked: "What is this place?"

"It used to belong to a painter," I mumbled.

"Ah, your absent friend," he said, making a wry mouth. "I detest all those artists, and all those writers, and all politicians who are thieves; and I would go even farther and higher, laying a curse on all idle lovers of women. You think perhaps I am a Royalist? No. If there was anybody in heaven or hell to pray to I would pray for a revolution — a red revolution everywhere."

"You astonish me," I said, just to say something.

"No! But there are half a dozen people in the world with whom I would like to settle accounts. One could shoot them like partridges and no questions asked. That's what revolution would mean to me."

"It's a beautifully simple view," I said. "I imagine you are not the only one who holds it; but I really must look after your comforts. You mustn't forget that we have to see Baron H. early to-morrow morning." And I went out quietly into the passage wondering in what part of the house Therese



had elected to sleep that night. But, lo and behold, when I got to the foot of the stairs there was Therese coming down from the upper regions in her nightgown, like a sleep-walker. However, it wasn't that, because, before I could exclaim, she vanished off the first floor landing like a streak of white mist and without the slightest sound. Her attire made it perfectly clear that she could not have heard us coming in. In fact, she must have been certain that the house was empty, because she was as well aware as myself that the Italian girls after their work at the opera were going to a masked ball to dance for their own amusement, attended of course by their conscientious father. But what thought, need, or sudden impulse had driven Therese out of bed like this was something I couldn't conceive.

I didn't call out after her. I felt sure that she would return. I went up slowly to the first floor and met her coming down again, this time carrying a lighted candle. She had managed to make herself presentable in an extraordinarily short time.

"Oh, my dear young Monsieur, you have given me a fright."

"Yes. And I nearly fainted, too," I said. "You looked perfectly awful. What's the matter with you? Are you ill?"

She had lighted by then the gas on the landing and I must say that I had never seen exactly that manner of face on her before. She wriggled, confused and shifty-eyed, before me; but I ascribed this behaviour to her shocked modesty and without troubling myself any more about her feelings I informed her that there was a Carlist downstairs who must be put up for the night. Most unexpectedly she betrayed a ridiculous consternation, but only for a moment. Then she assumed at once that I would give him hospitality upstairs where there was a camp-bedstead in my dressing-room. I said:

"No. Give him a shake-down in the studio, where he is now. It's warm in there. And remember! I charge you strictly not to let him know that I sleep in this house. In fact, I don't know myself that I will; I have certain matters to attend to this very night. You will also have to serve him his coffee in the morning. I will take him away before ten o'clock."

All this seemed to impress her more than I had expected. As usual when she felt curious, or in some other way excited, she assumed a saintly, detached expression, and asked:

"The dear gentleman is your friend, I suppose?"

“I only know he is a Spaniard and a Carlist,” I said: “and that ought to be enough for you.”

Instead of the usual effusive exclamations she murmured: “Dear me, dear me,” and departed upstairs with the candle to get together a few blankets and pillows, I suppose. As for me I walked quietly downstairs on my way to the studio. I had a curious sensation that I was acting in a preordained manner, that life was not at all what I had thought it to be, or else that I had been altogether changed sometime during the day, and that I was a different person from the man whom I remembered getting out of my bed in the morning.

Also feelings had altered all their values. The words, too, had become strange. It was only the inanimate surroundings that remained what they had always been. For instance the studio. . . .

During my absence Señor Ortega had taken off his coat and I found him as it were in the air, sitting in his shirt sleeves on a chair which he had taken pains to place in the very middle of the floor. I repressed an absurd impulse to walk round him as though he had been some sort of exhibit. His hands were spread over his knees and he looked perfectly insensible. I don’t mean strange, or ghastly, or wooden, but just insensible — like an exhibit. And that effect persisted even after he raised his black suspicious eyes to my face. He lowered them almost at once. It was very mechanical. I gave him up and became rather concerned about myself. My thought was that I had better get out of that before any more queer notions came into my head. So I only remained long enough to tell him that the woman of the house was bringing down some bedding and that I hoped that he would have a good night’s rest. And directly I spoke it struck me that this was the most extraordinary speech that ever was addressed to a figure of that sort. He, however, did not seem startled by it or moved in any way. He simply said:

“Thank you.”

In the darkest part of the long passage outside I met Therese with her arms full of pillows and blankets.

## CHAPTER V

Coming out of the bright light of the studio I didn't make out Therese very distinctly. She, however, having groped in dark cupboards, must have had her pupils sufficiently dilated to have seen that I had my hat on my head. This has its importance because after what I had said to her upstairs it must have convinced her that I was going out on some midnight business. I passed her without a word and heard behind me the door of the studio close with an unexpected crash. It strikes me now that under the circumstances I might have without shame gone back to listen at the keyhole. But truth to say the association of events was not so clear in my mind as it may be to the reader of this story. Neither were the exact connections of persons present to my mind. And, besides, one doesn't listen at a keyhole but in pursuance of some plan; unless one is afflicted by a vulgar and fatuous curiosity. But that vice is not in my character. As to plan, I had none. I moved along the passage between the dead wall and the black-and-white marble elevation of the staircase with hushed footsteps, as though there had been a mortally sick person somewhere in the house. And the only person that could have answered to that description was Señor Ortega. I moved on, stealthy, absorbed, undecided; asking myself earnestly: "What on earth am I going to do with him?" That exclusive preoccupation of my mind was as dangerous to Señor Ortega as typhoid fever would have been. It strikes me that this comparison is very exact. People recover from typhoid fever, but generally the chance is considered poor. This was precisely his case. His chance was poor; though I had no more animosity towards him than a virulent disease has against the victim it lays low. He really would have nothing to reproach me with; he had run up against me, unwittingly, as a man enters an infected place, and now he was very ill, very ill indeed. No, I had no plans against him. I had only the feeling that he was in mortal danger.

I believe that men of the most daring character (and I make no claim to it) often do shrink from the logical processes of thought. It is only the devil, they say, that loves logic. But I was not a devil. I was not even a victim of the devil. It was only that I had given up the direction of my intelligence before the problem; or rather that the problem had dispossessed my intelligence and reigned in its stead side by side with a superstitious awe. A dreadful order seemed to lurk in the darkest shadows of life. The madness of that Carlist with the soul of a Jacobin, the vile fears of Baron

H., that excellent organizer of supplies, the contact of their two ferocious stupidities, and last, by a remote disaster at sea, my love brought into direct contact with the situation: all that was enough to make one shudder — not at the chance, but at the design.

For it was my love that was called upon to act here, and nothing else. And love which elevates us above all safeguards, above restraining principles, above all littlenesses of self-possession, yet keeps its feet always firmly on earth, remains marvellously practical in its suggestions.

I discovered that however much I had imagined I had given up Rita, that whatever agonies I had gone through, my hope of her had never been lost. Plucked out, stamped down, torn to shreds, it had remained with me secret, intact, invincible. Before the danger of the situation it sprang, full of life, up in arms — the undying child of immortal love. What incited me was independent of honour and compassion; it was the prompting of a love supreme, practical, remorseless in its aim; it was the practical thought that no woman need be counted as lost for ever, unless she be dead!

This excluded for the moment all considerations of ways and means and risks and difficulties. Its tremendous intensity robbed it of all direction and left me adrift in the big black-and-white hall as on a silent sea. It was not, properly speaking, irresolution. It was merely hesitation as to the next immediate step, and that step even of no great importance: hesitation merely as to the best way I could spend the rest of the night. I didn't think further forward for many reasons, more or less optimistic, but mainly because I have no homicidal vein in my composition. The disposition to gloat over homicide was in that miserable creature in the studio, the potential Jacobin; in that confounded buyer of agricultural produce, the punctual employé of Hernandez Brothers, the jealous wretch with an obscene tongue and an imagination of the same kind to drive him mad. I thought of him without pity but also without contempt. I reflected that there were no means of sending a warning to Doña Rita in Tolosa; for of course no postal communication existed with the Headquarters. And moreover what would a warning be worth in this particular case, supposing it would reach her, that she would believe it, and that she would know what to do? How could I communicate to another that certitude which was in my mind, the more absolute because without proofs that one could produce?

The last expression of Rose's distress rang again in my ears: "Madame has no friends. Not one!" and I saw Doña Rita's complete loneliness beset

by all sorts of insincerities, surrounded by pitfalls; her greatest dangers within herself, in her generosity, in her fears, in her courage, too. What I had to do first of all was to stop that wretch at all costs. I became aware of a great mistrust of Therese. I didn't want her to find me in the hall, but I was reluctant to go upstairs to my rooms from an unreasonable feeling that there I would be too much out of the way; not sufficiently on the spot. There was the alternative of a live-long night of watching outside, before the dark front of the house. It was a most distasteful prospect. And then it occurred to me that Blunt's former room would be an extremely good place to keep a watch from. I knew that room. When Henry Allègre gave the house to Rita in the early days (long before he made his will) he had planned a complete renovation and this room had been meant for the drawing-room. Furniture had been made for it specially, upholstered in beautiful ribbed stuff, made to order, of dull gold colour with a pale blue tracery of arabesques and oval medallions enclosing Rita's monogram, repeated on the backs of chairs and sofas, and on the heavy curtains reaching from ceiling to floor. To the same time belonged the ebony and bronze doors, the silver statuette at the foot of the stairs, the forged iron balustrade reproducing right up the marble staircase Rita's decorative monogram in its complicated design. Afterwards the work was stopped and the house had fallen into disrepair. When Rita devoted it to the Carlist cause a bed was put into that drawing-room, just simply the bed. The room next to that yellow salon had been in Allègre's young days fitted as a fencing-room containing also a bath, and a complicated system of all sorts of shower and jet arrangements, then quite up to date. That room was very large, lighted from the top, and one wall of it was covered by trophies of arms of all sorts, a choice collection of cold steel disposed on a background of Indian mats and rugs: Blunt used it as a dressing-room. It communicated by a small door with the studio.

I had only to extend my hand and make one step to reach the magnificent bronze handle of the ebony door, and if I didn't want to be caught by Therese there was no time to lose. I made the step and extended the hand, thinking that it would be just like my luck to find the door locked. But the door came open to my push. In contrast to the dark hall the room was most unexpectedly dazzling to my eyes, as if illuminated a giorno for a reception. No voice came from it, but nothing could have stopped me now. As I turned round to shut the door behind me noiselessly I caught sight of a

woman's dress on a chair, of other articles of apparel scattered about. The mahogany bed with a piece of light silk which Therese found somewhere and used for a counterpane was a magnificent combination of white and crimson between the gleaming surfaces of dark wood; and the whole room had an air of splendour with marble consoles, gilt carvings, long mirrors and a sumptuous Venetian lustre depending from the ceiling: a darkling mass of icy pendants catching a spark here and there from the candles of an eight-branched candelabra standing on a little table near the head of a sofa which had been dragged round to face the fireplace. The faintest possible whiff of a familiar perfume made my head swim with its suggestion.

I grabbed the back of the nearest piece of furniture and the splendour of marbles and mirrors, of cut crystals and carvings, swung before my eyes in the golden mist of walls and draperies round an extremely conspicuous pair of black stockings thrown over a music stool which remained motionless. The silence was profound. It was like being in an enchanted place. Suddenly a voice began to speak, clear, detached, infinitely touching in its calm weariness.

"Haven't you tormented me enough to-day?" it said. . . . My head was steady now but my heart began to beat violently. I listened to the end without moving, "Can't you make up your mind to leave me alone for to-night?" It pleaded with an accent of charitable scorn.

The penetrating quality of these tones which I had not heard for so many, many days made my eyes run full of tears. I guessed easily that the appeal was addressed to the atrocious Therese. The speaker was concealed from me by the high back of the sofa, but her apprehension was perfectly justified. For was it not I who had turned back Therese the pious, the insatiable, coming downstairs in her nightgown to torment her sister some more? Mere surprise at Doña Rita's presence in the house was enough to paralyze me; but I was also overcome by an enormous sense of relief, by the assurance of security for her and for myself. I didn't even ask myself how she came there. It was enough for me that she was not in Tolosa. I could have smiled at the thought that all I had to do now was to hasten the departure of that abominable lunatic — for Tolosa: an easy task, almost no task at all. Yes, I would have smiled, had not I felt outraged by the presence of Señor Ortega under the same roof with Doña Rita. The mere fact was repugnant to me, morally revolting; so that I should have liked to rush at him and throw him out into the street. But that was not to be done for

various reasons. One of them was pity. I was suddenly at peace with all mankind, with all nature. I felt as if I couldn't hurt a fly. The intensity of my emotion sealed my lips. With a fearful joy tugging at my heart I moved round the head of the couch without a word.

In the wide fireplace on a pile of white ashes the logs had a deep crimson glow; and turned towards them Doña Rita reclined on her side enveloped in the skins of wild beasts like a charming and savage young chieftain before a camp fire. She never even raised her eyes, giving me the opportunity to contemplate mutely that adolescent, delicately masculine head, so mysteriously feminine in the power of instant seduction, so infinitely suave in its firm design, almost childlike in the freshness of detail: altogether ravishing in the inspired strength of the modelling. That precious head reposed in the palm of her hand; the face was slightly flushed (with anger perhaps). She kept her eyes obstinately fixed on the pages of a book which she was holding with her other hand. I had the time to lay my infinite adoration at her feet whose white insteps gleamed below the dark edge of the fur out of quilted blue silk bedroom slippers, embroidered with small pearls. I had never seen them before; I mean the slippers. The gleam of the insteps, too, for that matter. I lost myself in a feeling of deep content, something like a foretaste of a time of felicity which must be quiet or it couldn't be eternal. I had never tasted such perfect quietness before. It was not of this earth. I had gone far beyond. It was as if I had reached the ultimate wisdom beyond all dreams and all passions. She was That which is to be contemplated to all Infinity.

The perfect stillness and silence made her raise her eyes at last, reluctantly, with a hard, defensive expression which I had never seen in them before. And no wonder! The glance was meant for Therese and assumed in self-defence. For some time its character did not change and when it did it turned into a perfectly stony stare of a kind which I also had never seen before. She had never wished so much to be left in peace. She had never been so astonished in her life. She had arrived by the evening express only two hours before Señor Ortega, had driven to the house, and after having something to eat had become for the rest of the evening the helpless prey of her sister who had fawned and scolded and wheedled and threatened in a way that outraged all Rita's feelings. Seizing this unexpected occasion Therese had displayed a distracting versatility of sentiment: rapacity, virtue, piety, spite, and false tenderness — while,

characteristically enough, she unpacked the dressing-bag, helped the sinner to get ready for bed, brushed her hair, and finally, as a climax, kissed her hands, partly by surprise and partly by violence. After that she had retired from the field of battle slowly, undefeated, still defiant, firing as a last shot the impudent question: "Tell me only, have you made your will, Rita?" To this poor Doña Rita with the spirit of opposition strung to the highest pitch answered: "No, and I don't mean to" — being under the impression that this was what her sister wanted her to do. There can be no doubt, however, that all Therese wanted was the information.

Rita, much too agitated to expect anything but a sleepless night, had not the courage to get into bed. She thought she would remain on the sofa before the fire and try to compose herself with a book. As she had no dressing-gown with her she put on her long fur coat over her night-gown, threw some logs on the fire, and lay down. She didn't hear the slightest noise of any sort till she heard me shut the door gently. Quietness of movement was one of Therese's accomplishments, and the harassed heiress of the Allègre millions naturally thought it was her sister coming again to renew the scene. Her heart sank within her. In the end she became a little frightened at the long silence, and raised her eyes. She didn't believe them for a long time. She concluded that I was a vision. In fact, the first word which I heard her utter was a low, awed "No," which, though I understood its meaning, chilled my blood like an evil omen.

It was then that I spoke. "Yes," I said, "it's me that you see," and made a step forward. She didn't start; only her other hand flew to the edges of the fur coat, gripping them together over her breast. Observing this gesture I sat down in the nearest chair. The book she had been reading slipped with a thump on the floor.

"How is it possible that you should be here?" she said, still in a doubting voice.

"I am really here," I said. "Would you like to touch my hand?"

She didn't move at all; her fingers still clutched the fur coat.

"What has happened?"

"It's a long story, but you may take it from me that all is over. The tie between us is broken. I don't know that it was ever very close. It was an external thing. The true misfortune is that I have ever seen you."

This last phrase was provoked by an exclamation of sympathy on her part. She raised herself on her elbow and looked at me intently. "All over,"



she murmured.

“Yes, we had to wreck the little vessel. It was awful. I feel like a murderer. But she had to be killed.”

“Why?”

“Because I loved her too much. Don’t you know that love and death go very close together?”

“I could feel almost happy that it is all over, if you hadn’t had to lose your love. Oh, amigo George, it was a safe love for you.”

“Yes,” I said. “It was a faithful little vessel. She would have saved us all from any plain danger. But this was a betrayal. It was — never mind. All that’s past. The question is what will the next one be.”

“Why should it be that?”

“I don’t know. Life seems but a series of betrayals. There are so many kinds of them. This was a betrayed plan, but one can betray confidence, and hope and — desire, and the most sacred . . .”

“But what are you doing here?” she interrupted.

“Oh, yes! The eternal why. Till a few hours ago I didn’t know what I was here for. And what are you here for?” I asked point blank and with a bitterness she disregarded. She even answered my question quite readily with many words out of which I could make very little. I only learned that for at least five mixed reasons, none of which impressed me profoundly, Doña Rita had started at a moment’s notice from Paris with nothing but a dressing-bag, and permitting Rose to go and visit her aged parents for two days, and then follow her mistress. That girl of late had looked so perturbed and worried that the sensitive Rita, fearing that she was tired of her place, proposed to settle a sum of money on her which would have enabled her to devote herself entirely to her aged parents. And did I know what that extraordinary girl said? She had said: “Don’t let Madame think that I would be too proud to accept anything whatever from her; but I can’t even dream of leaving Madame. I believe Madame has no friends. Not one.” So instead of a large sum of money Doña Rita gave the girl a kiss and as she had been worried by several people who wanted her to go to Tolosa she bolted down this way just to get clear of all those busybodies. “Hide from them,” she went on with ardour. “Yes, I came here to hide,” she repeated twice as if delighted at last to have hit on that reason among so many others. “How could I tell that you would be here?” Then with sudden fire which only added to the delight with which I had been watching

the play of her physiognomy she added: "Why did you come into this room?"

She enchanted me. The ardent modulations of the sound, the slight play of the beautiful lips, the still, deep sapphire gleam in those long eyes inherited from the dawn of ages and that seemed always to watch unimaginable things, that underlying faint ripple of gaiety that played under all her moods as though it had been a gift from the high gods moved to pity for this lonely mortal, all this within the four walls and displayed for me alone gave me the sense of almost intolerable joy. The words didn't matter. They had to be answered, of course.

"I came in for several reasons. One of them is that I didn't know you were here."

"Therese didn't tell you?"

"No."

"Never talked to you about me?"

I hesitated only for a moment. "Never," I said. Then I asked in my turn, "Did she tell you I was here?"

"No," she said.

"It's very clear she did not mean us to come together again."

"Neither did I, my dear."

"What do you mean by speaking like this, in this tone, in these words? You seem to use them as if they were a sort of formula. Am I a dear to you? Or is anybody? . . . or everybody? . . ."

She had been for some time raised on her elbow, but then as if something had happened to her vitality she sank down till her head rested again on the sofa cushion.

"Why do you try to hurt my feelings?" she asked.

"For the same reason for which you call me dear at the end of a sentence like that: for want of something more amusing to do. You don't pretend to make me believe that you do it for any sort of reason that a decent person would confess to."

The colour had gone from her face; but a fit of wickedness was on me and I pursued, "What are the motives of your speeches? What prompts your actions? On your own showing your life seems to be a continuous running away. You have just run away from Paris. Where will you run tomorrow? What are you everlastingly running from — or is it that you are

running after something? What is it? A man, a phantom — or some sensation that you don't like to own to?"

Truth to say, I was abashed by the silence which was her only answer to this sally. I said to myself that I would not let my natural anger, my just fury be disarmed by any assumption of pathos or dignity. I suppose I was really out of my mind and what in the middle ages would have been called "possessed" by an evil spirit. I went on enjoying my own villainy.

"Why aren't you in Tolosa? You ought to be in Tolosa. Isn't Tolosa the proper field for your abilities, for your sympathies, for your profusions, for your generosities — the king without a crown, the man without a fortune! But here there is nothing worthy of your talents. No, there is no longer anything worth any sort of trouble here. There isn't even that ridiculous Monsieur George. I understand that the talk of the coast from here to Cette is that Monsieur George is drowned. Upon my word I believe he is. And serve him right, too. There's Therese, but I don't suppose that your love for your sister . . ."

"For goodness' sake don't let her come in and find you here."

Those words recalled me to myself, exorcised the evil spirit by the mere enchanting power of the voice. They were also impressive by their suggestion of something practical, utilitarian, and remote from sentiment. The evil spirit left me and I remained taken aback slightly.

"Well," I said, "if you mean that you want me to leave the room I will confess to you that I can't very well do it yet. But I could lock both doors if you don't mind that."

"Do what you like as long as you keep her out. You two together would be too much for me to-night. Why don't you go and lock those doors? I have a feeling she is on the prowl."

I got up at once saying, "I imagine she has gone to bed by this time." I felt absolutely calm and responsible. I turned the keys one after another so gently that I couldn't hear the click of the locks myself. This done I recrossed the room with measured steps, with downcast eyes, and approaching the couch without raising them from the carpet I sank down on my knees and leaned my forehead on its edge. That penitential attitude had but little remorse in it. I detected no movement and heard no sound from her. In one place a bit of the fur coat touched my cheek softly, but no forgiving hand came to rest on my bowed head. I only breathed deeply the faint scent of violets, her own particular fragrance enveloping my body,

penetrating my very heart with an inconceivable intimacy, bringing me closer to her than the closest embrace, and yet so subtle that I sensed her existence in me only as a great, glowing, indeterminate tenderness, something like the evening light disclosing after the white passion of the day infinite depths in the colours of the sky and an unsuspected soul of peace in the protean forms of life. I had not known such quietness for months; and I detected in myself an immense fatigue, a longing to remain where I was without changing my position to the end of time. Indeed to remain seemed to me a complete solution for all the problems that life presents — even as to the very death itself.

Only the unwelcome reflection that this was impossible made me get up at last with a sigh of deep grief at the end of the dream. But I got up without despair. She didn't murmur, she didn't stir. There was something august in the stillness of the room. It was a strange peace which she shared with me in this unexpected shelter full of disorder in its neglected splendour. What troubled me was the sudden, as it were material, consciousness of time passing as water flows. It seemed to me that it was only the tenacity of my sentiment that held that woman's body, extended and tranquil above the flood. But when I ventured at last to look at her face I saw her flushed, her teeth clenched — it was visible — her nostrils dilated, and in her narrow, level-glancing eyes a look of inward and frightened ecstasy. The edges of the fur coat had fallen open and I was moved to turn away. I had the same impression as on the evening we parted that something had happened which I did not understand; only this time I had not touched her at all. I really didn't understand. At the slightest whisper I would now have gone out without a murmur, as though that emotion had given her the right to be obeyed. But there was no whisper; and for a long time I stood leaning on my arm, looking into the fire and feeling distinctly between the four walls of that locked room the unchecked time flow past our two stranded personalities.

And suddenly she spoke. She spoke in that voice that was so profoundly moving without ever being sad, a little wistful perhaps and always the supreme expression of her grace. She asked as if nothing had happened:

“What are you thinking of, amigo?”

I turned about. She was lying on her side, tranquil above the smooth flow of time, again closely wrapped up in her fur, her head resting on the old-gold sofa cushion bearing like everything else in that room the

decoratively enlaced letters of her monogram; her face a little pale now, with the crimson lobe of her ear under the tawny mist of her loose hair, the lips a little parted, and her glance of melted sapphire level and motionless, darkened by fatigue.

“Can I think of anything but you?” I murmured, taking a seat near the foot of the couch. “Or rather it isn’t thinking, it is more like the consciousness of you always being present in me, complete to the last hair, to the faintest shade of expression, and that not only when we are apart but when we are together, alone, as close as this. I see you now lying on this couch but that is only the insensible phantom of the real you that is in me. And it is the easier for me to feel this because that image which others see and call by your name — how am I to know that it is anything else but an enchanting mist? You have always eluded me except in one or two moments which seem still more dream-like than the rest. Since I came into this room you have done nothing to destroy my conviction of your unreality apart from myself. You haven’t offered me your hand to touch. Is it because you suspect that apart from me you are but a mere phantom, and that you fear to put it to the test?”

One of her hands was under the fur and the other under her cheek. She made no sound. She didn’t offer to stir. She didn’t move her eyes, not even after I had added after waiting for a while,

“Just what I expected. You are a cold illusion.”

She smiled mysteriously, right away from me, straight at the fire, and that was all.

## CHAPTER VI

I had a momentary suspicion that I had said something stupid. Her smile amongst many other things seemed to have meant that, too. And I answered it with a certain resignation:

“Well, I don’t know that you are so much mist. I remember once hanging on to you like a drowning man . . . But perhaps I had better not speak of this. It wasn’t so very long ago, and you may . . . “

“I don’t mind. Well . . .”

“Well, I have kept an impression of great solidity. I’ll admit that. A woman of granite.”

“A doctor once told me that I was made to last for ever,” she said.

“But essentially it’s the same thing,” I went on. “Granite, too, is insensible.”

I watched her profile against the pillow and there came on her face an expression I knew well when with an indignation full of suppressed laughter she used to throw at me the word “Imbecile.” I expected it to come, but it didn’t come. I must say, though, that I was swimmy in my head and now and then had a noise as of the sea in my ears, so I might not have heard it. The woman of granite, built to last for ever, continued to look at the glowing logs which made a sort of fiery ruin on the white pile of ashes. “I will tell you how it is,” I said. “When I have you before my eyes there is such a projection of my whole being towards you that I fail to see you distinctly. It was like that from the beginning. I may say that I never saw you distinctly till after we had parted and I thought you had gone from my sight for ever. It was then that you took body in my imagination and that my mind seized on a definite form of you for all its adorations — for its profanations, too. Don’t imagine me grovelling in spiritual abasement before a mere image. I got a grip on you that nothing can shake now.”

“Don’t speak like this,” she said. “It’s too much for me. And there is a whole long night before us.”

“You don’t think that I dealt with you sentimentally enough perhaps? But the sentiment was there; as clear a flame as ever burned on earth from the most remote ages before that eternal thing which is in you, which is your heirloom. And is it my fault that what I had to give was real flame, and not a mystic’s incense? It is neither your fault nor mine. And now whatever we say to each other at night or in daylight, that sentiment must be

taken for granted. It will be there on the day I die — when you won't be there."

She continued to look fixedly at the red embers; and from her lips that hardly moved came the quietest possible whisper: "Nothing would be easier than to die for you."

"Really," I cried. "And you expect me perhaps after this to kiss your feet in a transport of gratitude while I hug the pride of your words to my breast. But as it happens there is nothing in me but contempt for this sublime declaration. How dare you offer me this charlatanism of passion? What has it got to do between you and me who are the only two beings in the world that may safely say that we have no need of shams between ourselves? Is it possible that you are a charlatan at heart? Not from egoism, I admit, but from some sort of fear. Yet, should you be sincere, then — listen well to me — I would never forgive you. I would visit your grave every day to curse you for an evil thing."

"Evil thing," she echoed softly.

"Would you prefer to be a sham — that one could forget?"

"You will never forget me," she said in the same tone at the glowing embers. "Evil or good. But, my dear, I feel neither an evil nor a sham. I have got to be what I am, and that, amigo, is not so easy; because I may be simple, but like all those on whom there is no peace I am not One. No, I am not One!"

"You are all the women in the world," I whispered bending over her. She didn't seem to be aware of anything and only spoke — always to the glow.

"If I were that I would say: God help them then. But that would be more appropriate for Therese. For me, I can only give them my infinite compassion. I have too much reverence in me to invoke the name of a God of whom clever men have robbed me a long time ago. How could I help it? For the talk was clever and — and I had a mind. And I am also, as Therese says, naturally sinful. Yes, my dear, I may be naturally wicked but I am not evil and I could die for you."

"You!" I said. "You are afraid to die."

"Yes. But not for you."

The whole structure of glowing logs fell down, raising a small turmoil of white ashes and sparks. The tiny crash seemed to wake her up thoroughly. She turned her head upon the cushion to look at me.

“It’s a very extraordinary thing, we two coming together like this,” she said with conviction. “You coming in without knowing I was here and then telling me that you can’t very well go out of the room. That sounds funny. I wouldn’t have been angry if you had said that you wouldn’t. It would have hurt me. But nobody ever paid much attention to my feelings. Why do you smile like this?”

“At a thought. Without any charlatanism of passion I am able to tell you of something to match your devotion. I was not afraid for your sake to come within a hair’s breadth of what to all the world would have been a squalid crime. Note that you and I are persons of honour. And there might have been a criminal trial at the end of it for me. Perhaps the scaffold.”

“Do you say these horrors to make me tremble?”

“Oh, you needn’t tremble. There shall be no crime. I need not risk the scaffold, since now you are safe. But I entered this room meditating resolutely on the ways of murder, calculating possibilities and chances without the slightest compunction. It’s all over now. It was all over directly I saw you here, but it had been so near that I shudder yet.”

She must have been very startled because for a time she couldn’t speak. Then in a faint voice:

“For me! For me!” she faltered out twice.

“For you — or for myself? Yet it couldn’t have been selfish. What would it have been to me that you remained in the world? I never expected to see you again. I even composed a most beautiful letter of farewell. Such a letter as no woman had ever received.”

Instantly she shot out a hand towards me. The edges of the fur cloak fell apart. A wave of the faintest possible scent floated into my nostrils.

“Let me have it,” she said imperiously.

“You can’t have it. It’s all in my head. No woman will read it. I suspect it was something that could never have been written. But what a farewell! And now I suppose we shall say good-bye without even a handshake. But you are safe! Only I must ask you not to come out of this room till I tell you you may.”

I was extremely anxious that Señor Ortega should never even catch a glimpse of Doña Rita, never guess how near he had been to her. I was extremely anxious the fellow should depart for Tolosa and get shot in a ravine; or go to the Devil in his own way, as long as he lost the track of Doña Rita completely. He then, probably, would get mad and get shut up,



or else get cured, forget all about it, and devote himself to his vocation, whatever it was — keep a shop and grow fat. All this flashed through my mind in an instant and while I was still dazzled by those comforting images, the voice of Doña Rita pulled me up with a jerk.

“You mean not out of the house?”

“No, I mean not out of this room,” I said with some embarrassment.

“What do you mean? Is there something in the house then? This is most extraordinary! Stay in this room? And you, too, it seems? Are you also afraid for yourself?”

“I can’t even give you an idea how afraid I was. I am not so much now. But you know very well, Doña Rita, that I never carry any sort of weapon in my pocket.”

“Why don’t you, then?” she asked in a flash of scorn which bewitched me so completely for an instant that I couldn’t even smile at it.

“Because if I am unconventionalized I am an old European,” I murmured gently. “No, Excellentissima, I shall go through life without as much as a switch in my hand. It’s no use you being angry. Adapting to this great moment some words you’ve heard before: I am like that. Such is my character!”

Doña Rita frankly stared at me — a most unusual expression for her to have. Suddenly she sat up.

“Don George,” she said with lovely animation, “I insist upon knowing who is in my house.”

“You insist! . . . But Therese says it is her house.”

Had there been anything handy, such as a cigarette box, for instance, it would have gone sailing through the air spouting cigarettes as it went. Rosy all over, cheeks, neck, shoulders, she seemed lighted up softly from inside like a beautiful transparency. But she didn’t raise her voice.

“You and Therese have sworn my ruin. If you don’t tell me what you mean I will go outside and shout up the stairs to make her come down. I know there is no one but the three of us in the house.”

“Yes, three; but not counting my Jacobin. There is a Jacobin in the house.”

“A Jac . . . ! Oh, George, is this the time to jest?” she began in persuasive tones when a faint but peculiar noise stilled her lips as though they had been suddenly frozen. She became quiet all over instantly. I, on the contrary, made an involuntary movement before I, too, became as still as death. We

strained our ears; but that peculiar metallic rattle had been so slight and the silence now was so perfect that it was very difficult to believe one's senses. Doña Rita looked inquisitively at me. I gave her a slight nod. We remained looking into each other's eyes while we listened and listened till the silence became unbearable. Doña Rita whispered composedly: "Did you hear?"

"I am asking myself . . . I almost think I didn't."

"Don't shuffle with me. It was a scraping noise."

"Something fell."

"Something! What thing? What are the things that fall by themselves? Who is that man of whom you spoke? Is there a man?"

"No doubt about it whatever. I brought him here myself."

"What for?"

"Why shouldn't I have a Jacobin of my own? Haven't you one, too? But mine is a different problem from that white-haired humbug of yours. He is a genuine article. There must be plenty like him about. He has scores to settle with half a dozen people, he says, and he clamours for revolutions to give him a chance."

"But why did you bring him here?"

"I don't know — from sudden affection . . ."

All this passed in such low tones that we seemed to make out the words more by watching each other's lips than through our sense of hearing. Man is a strange animal. I didn't care what I said. All I wanted was to keep her in her pose, excited and still, sitting up with her hair loose, softly glowing, the dark brown fur making a wonderful contrast with the white lace on her breast. All I was thinking of was that she was adorable and too lovely for words! I cared for nothing but that sublimely aesthetic impression. It summed up all life, all joy, all poetry! It had a divine strain. I am certain that I was not in my right mind. I suppose I was not quite sane. I am convinced that at that moment of the four people in the house it was Doña Rita who upon the whole was the most sane. She observed my face and I am sure she read there something of my inward exaltation. She knew what to do. In the softest possible tone and hardly above her breath she commanded: "George, come to yourself."

Her gentleness had the effect of evening light. I was soothed. Her confidence in her own power touched me profoundly. I suppose my love was too great for madness to get hold of me. I can't say that I passed to a complete calm, but I became slightly ashamed of myself. I whispered:

“No, it was not from affection, it was for the love of you that I brought him here. That imbecile H. was going to send him to Tolosa.”

“That Jacobin!” Doña Rita was immensely surprised, as she might well have been. Then resigned to the incomprehensible: “Yes,” she breathed out, “what did you do with him?”

“I put him to bed in the studio.”

How lovely she was with the effort of close attention depicted in the turn of her head and in her whole face honestly trying to approve. “And then?” she inquired.

“Then I came in here to face calmly the necessity of doing away with a human life. I didn’t shirk it for a moment. That’s what a short twelvemonth has brought me to. Don’t think I am reproaching you, O blind force! You are justified because you are. Whatever had to happen you would not even have heard of it.”

Horror darkened her marvellous radiance. Then her face became utterly blank with the tremendous effort to understand. Absolute silence reigned in the house. It seemed to me that everything had been said now that mattered in the world; and that the world itself had reached its ultimate stage, had reached its appointed end of an eternal, phantom-like silence. Suddenly Doña Rita raised a warning finger. I had heard nothing and shook my head; but she nodded hers and murmured excitedly,

“Yes, yes, in the fencing-room, as before.”

In the same way I answered her: “Impossible! The door is locked and Therese has the key.” She asked then in the most cautious manner,

“Have you seen Therese to-night?”

“Yes,” I confessed without misgiving. “I left her making up the fellow’s bed when I came in here.”

“The bed of the Jacobin?” she said in a peculiar tone as if she were humouring a lunatic.

“I think I had better tell you he is a Spaniard — that he seems to know you from early days. . . .” I glanced at her face, it was extremely tense, apprehensive. For myself I had no longer any doubt as to the man and I hoped she would reach the correct conclusion herself. But I believe she was too distracted and worried to think consecutively. She only seemed to feel some terror in the air. In very pity I bent down and whispered carefully near her ear, “His name is Ortega.”

I expected some effect from that name but I never expected what happened. With the sudden, free, spontaneous agility of a young animal she leaped off the sofa, leaving her slippers behind, and in one bound reached almost the middle of the room. The vigour, the instinctive precision of that spring, were something amazing. I just escaped being knocked over. She landed lightly on her bare feet with a perfect balance, without the slightest suspicion of swaying in her instant immobility. It lasted less than a second, then she spun round distractedly and darted at the first door she could see. My own agility was just enough to enable me to grip the back of the fur coat and then catch her round the body before she could wriggle herself out of the sleeves. She was muttering all the time, "No, no, no." She abandoned herself to me just for an instant during which I got her back to the middle of the room. There she attempted to free herself and I let her go at once. With her face very close to mine, but apparently not knowing what she was looking at she repeated again twice, "No — No," with an intonation which might well have brought dampness to my eyes but which only made me regret that I didn't kill the honest Ortega at sight. Suddenly Doña Rita swung round and seizing her loose hair with both hands started twisting it up before one of the sumptuous mirrors. The wide fur sleeves slipped down her white arms. In a brusque movement like a downward stab she transfixed the whole mass of tawny glints and sparks with the arrow of gold which she perceived lying there, before her, on the marble console. Then she sprang away from the glass muttering feverishly, "Out — out — out of this house," and trying with an awful, senseless stare to dodge past me who had put myself in her way with open arms. At last I managed to seize her by the shoulders and in the extremity of my distress I shook her roughly. If she hadn't quieted down then I believe my heart would have broken. I spluttered right into her face: "I won't let you. Here you stay." She seemed to recognize me at last, and suddenly still, perfectly firm on her white feet, she let her arms fall and, from an abyss of desolation, whispered, "O! George! No! No! Not Ortega."

There was a passion of mature grief in this tone of appeal. And yet she remained as touching and helpless as a distressed child. It had all the simplicity and depth of a child's emotion. It tugged at one's heart-strings in the same direct way. But what could one do? How could one soothe her? It was impossible to pat her on the head, take her on the knee, give her a

chocolate or show her a picture-book. I found myself absolutely without resource. Completely at a loss.

“Yes, Ortega. Well, what of it?” I whispered with immense assurance.

## CHAPTER VII

My brain was in a whirl. I am safe to say that at this precise moment there was nobody completely sane in the house. Setting apart Therese and Ortega, both in the grip of unspeakable passions, all the moral economy of Doña Rita had gone to pieces. Everything was gone except her strong sense of life with all its implied menaces. The woman was a mere chaos of sensations and vitality. I, too, suffered most from inability to get hold of some fundamental thought. The one on which I could best build some hopes was the thought that, of course, Ortega did not know anything. I whispered this into the ear of Doña Rita, into her precious, her beautifully shaped ear.

But she shook her head, very much like an inconsolable child and very much with a child's complete pessimism she murmured, "Therese has told him."

The words, "Oh, nonsense," never passed my lips, because I could not cheat myself into denying that there had been a noise; and that the noise was in the fencing-room. I knew that room. There was nothing there that by the wildest stretch of imagination could be conceived as falling with that particular sound. There was a table with a tall strip of looking-glass above it at one end; but since Blunt took away his campaigning kit there was no small object of any sort on the console or anywhere else that could have been jarred off in some mysterious manner. Along one of the walls there was the whole complicated apparatus of solid brass pipes, and quite close to it an enormous bath sunk into the floor. The greatest part of the room along its whole length was covered with matting and had nothing else but a long, narrow leather-upholstered bench fixed to the wall. And that was all. And the door leading to the studio was locked. And Therese had the key. And it flashed on my mind, independently of Doña Rita's pessimism, by the force of personal conviction, that, of course, Therese would tell him. I beheld the whole succession of events perfectly connected and tending to that particular conclusion. Therese would tell him! I could see the contrasted heads of those two formidable lunatics close together in a dark mist of whispers compounded of greed, piety, and jealousy, plotting in a sense of perfect security as if under the very wing of Providence. So at least Therese would think. She could not be but under the impression that (providentially) I had been called out for the rest of the night.

And now there was one sane person in the house, for I had regained complete command of my thoughts. Working in a logical succession of images they showed me at last as clearly as a picture on a wall, Therese pressing with fervour the key into the fevered palm of the rich, prestigious, virtuous cousin, so that he should go and urge his self-sacrificing offer to Rita, and gain merit before Him whose Eye sees all the actions of men. And this image of those two with the key in the studio seemed to me a most monstrous conception of fanaticism, of a perfectly horrible aberration. For who could mistake the state that made José Ortega the figure he was, inspiring both pity and fear? I could not deny that I understood, not the full extent but the exact nature of his suffering. Young as I was I had solved for myself that grotesque and sombre personality. His contact with me, the personal contact with (as he thought) one of the actual lovers of that woman who brought to him as a boy the curse of the gods, had tipped over the trembling scales. No doubt I was very near death in the “grand salon” of the Maison Dorée, only that his torture had gone too far. It seemed to me that I ought to have heard his very soul scream while we were seated at supper. But in a moment he had ceased to care for me. I was nothing. To the crazy exaggeration of his jealousy I was but one amongst a hundred thousand. What was my death? Nothing. All mankind had possessed that woman. I knew what his wooing of her would be: Mine — or Dead.

All this ought to have had the clearness of noon-day, even to the veriest idiot that ever lived; and Therese was, properly speaking, exactly that. An idiot. A one-ideaed creature. Only the idea was complex; therefore it was impossible really to say what she wasn't capable of. This was what made her obscure processes so awful. She had at times the most amazing perceptions. Who could tell where her simplicity ended and her cunning began? She had also the faculty of never forgetting any fact bearing upon her one idea; and I remembered now that the conversation with me about the will had produced on her an indelible impression of the Law's surprising justice. Recalling her naïve admiration of the “just” law that required no “paper” from a sister, I saw her casting loose the raging fate with a sanctimonious air. And Therese would naturally give the key of the fencing-room to her dear, virtuous, grateful, disinterested cousin, to that damned soul with delicate whiskers, because she would think it just possible that Rita might have locked the door leading front her room into the hall; whereas there was no earthly reason, not the slightest likelihood,

that she would bother about the other. Righteousness demanded that the erring sister should be taken unawares.

All the above is the analysis of one short moment. Images are to words like light to sound — incomparably swifter. And all this was really one flash of light through my mind. A comforting thought succeeded it: that both doors were locked and that really there was no danger.

However, there had been that noise — the why and the how of it? Of course in the dark he might have fallen into the bath, but that wouldn't have been a faint noise. It wouldn't have been a rattle. There was absolutely nothing he could knock over. He might have dropped a candle-stick if Therese had left him her own. That was possible, but then those thick mats — and then, anyway, why should he drop it? and, hang it all, why shouldn't he have gone straight on and tried the door? I had suddenly a sickening vision of the fellow crouching at the key-hole, listening, listening, listening, for some movement or sigh of the sleeper he was ready to tear away from the world, alive or dead. I had a conviction that he was still listening. Why? Goodness knows! He may have been only gloating over the assurance that the night was long and that he had all these hours to himself.

I was pretty certain that he could have heard nothing of our whispers, the room was too big for that and the door too solid. I hadn't the same confidence in the efficiency of the lock. Still I . . . Guarding my lips with my hand I urged Doña Rita to go back to the sofa. She wouldn't answer me and when I got hold of her arm I discovered that she wouldn't move. She had taken root in that thick-pile Aubusson carpet; and she was so rigidly still all over that the brilliant stones in the shaft of the arrow of gold, with the six candles at the head of the sofa blazing full on them, emitted no sparkle.

I was extremely anxious that she shouldn't betray herself. I reasoned, save the mark, as a psychologist. I had no doubt that the man knew of her being there; but he only knew it by hearsay. And that was bad enough. I could not help feeling that if he obtained some evidence for his senses by any sort of noise, voice, or movement, his madness would gain strength enough to burst the lock. I was rather ridiculously worried about the locks. A horrid mistrust of the whole house possessed me. I saw it in the light of a deadly trap. I had no weapon, I couldn't say whether he had one or not. I wasn't afraid of a struggle as far as I, myself, was concerned, but I was afraid of it for Doña Rita. To be rolling at her feet, locked in a literally



tooth-and-nail struggle with Ortega would have been odious. I wanted to spare her feelings, just as I would have been anxious to save from any contact with mud the feet of that goatherd of the mountains with a symbolic face. I looked at her face. For immobility it might have been a carving. I wished I knew how to deal with that embodied mystery, to influence it, to manage it. Oh, how I longed for the gift of authority! In addition, since I had become completely sane, all my scruples against laying hold of her had returned. I felt shy and embarrassed. My eyes were fixed on the bronze handle of the fencing-room door as if it were something alive. I braced myself up against the moment when it would move. This was what was going to happen next. It would move very gently. My heart began to thump. But I was prepared to keep myself as still as death and I hoped Doña Rita would have sense enough to do the same. I stole another glance at her face and at that moment I heard the word: "Beloved!" form itself in the still air of the room, weak, distinct, piteous, like the last request of the dying.

With great presence of mind I whispered into Doña Rita's ear: "Perfect silence!" and was overjoyed to discover that she had heard me, understood me; that she even had command over her rigid lips. She answered me in a breath (our cheeks were nearly touching): "Take me out of this house."

I glanced at all her clothing scattered about the room and hissed forcibly the warning "Perfect immobility"; noticing with relief that she didn't offer to move, though animation was returning to her and her lips had remained parted in an awful, unintended effect of a smile. And I don't know whether I was pleased when she, who was not to be touched, gripped my wrist suddenly. It had the air of being done on purpose because almost instantly another: "Beloved!" louder, more agonized if possible, got into the room and, yes, went home to my heart. It was followed without any transition, preparation, or warning, by a positively bellowed: "Speak, perjured beast!" which I felt pass in a thrill right through Doña Rita like an electric shock, leaving her as motionless as before.

Till he shook the door handle, which he did immediately afterwards, I wasn't certain through which door he had spoken. The two doors (in different walls) were rather near each other. It was as I expected. He was in the fencing-room, thoroughly aroused, his senses on the alert to catch the slightest sound. A situation not to be trifled with. Leaving the room was for us out of the question. It was quite possible for him to dash round into

the hall before we could get clear of the front door. As to making a bolt of it upstairs there was the same objection; and to allow ourselves to be chased all over the empty house by this maniac would have been mere folly. There was no advantage in locking ourselves up anywhere upstairs where the original doors and locks were much lighter. No, true safety was in absolute stillness and silence, so that even his rage should be brought to doubt at last and die expended, or choke him before it died; I didn't care which.

For me to go out and meet him would have been stupid. Now I was certain that he was armed. I had remembered the wall in the fencing-room decorated with trophies of cold steel in all the civilized and savage forms; sheaves of assegais, in the guise of columns and grouped between them stars and suns of choppers, swords, knives; from Italy, from Damascus, from Abyssinia, from the ends of the world. Ortega had only to make his barbarous choice. I suppose he had got up on the bench, and fumbling about amongst them must have brought one down, which, falling, had produced that rattling noise. But in any case to go to meet him would have been folly, because, after all, I might have been overpowered (even with bare hands) and then Doña Rita would have been left utterly defenceless.

"He will speak," came to me the ghostly, terrified murmur of her voice. "Take me out of the house before he begins to speak."

"Keep still," I whispered. "He will soon get tired of this."

"You don't know him."

"Oh, yes, I do. Been with him two hours."

At this she let go my wrist and covered her face with her hands passionately. When she dropped them she had the look of one morally crushed.

"What did he say to you?"

"He raved."

"Listen to me. It was all true!"

"I daresay, but what of that?"

These ghostly words passed between us hardly louder than thoughts; but after my last answer she ceased and gave me a searching stare, then drew in a long breath. The voice on the other side of the door burst out with an impassioned request for a little pity, just a little, and went on begging for a few words, for two words, for one word — one poor little word. Then it gave up, then repeated once more, "Say you are there, Rita, Say one word, just one word. Say 'yes.' Come! Just one little yes."

“You see,” I said. She only lowered her eyelids over the anxious glance she had turned on me.

For a minute we could have had the illusion that he had stolen away, unheard, on the thick mats. But I don’t think that either of us was deceived. The voice returned, stammering words without connection, pausing and faltering, till suddenly steadied it soared into impassioned entreaty, sank to low, harsh tones, voluble, lofty sometimes and sometimes abject. When it paused it left us looking profoundly at each other.

“It’s almost comic,” I whispered.

“Yes. One could laugh,” she assented, with a sort of sinister conviction. Never had I seen her look exactly like that, for an instant another, an incredible Rita! “Haven’t I laughed at him innumerable times?” she added in a sombre whisper.

He was muttering to himself out there, and unexpectedly shouted: “What?” as though he had fancied he had heard something. He waited a while before he started up again with a loud: “Speak up, Queen of the goats, with your goat tricks. . .” All was still for a time, then came a most awful bang on the door. He must have stepped back a pace to hurl himself bodily against the panels. The whole house seemed to shake. He repeated that performance once more, and then varied it by a prolonged drumming with his fists. It was comic. But I felt myself struggling mentally with an invading gloom as though I were no longer sure of myself.

“Take me out,” whispered Doña Rita feverishly, “take me out of this house before it is too late.”

“You will have to stand it,” I answered.

“So be it; but then you must go away yourself. Go now, before it is too late.”

I didn’t condescend to answer this. The drumming on the panels stopped and the absurd thunder of it died out in the house. I don’t know why precisely then I had the acute vision of the red mouth of José Ortega wriggling with rage between his funny whiskers. He began afresh but in a tired tone:

“Do you expect a fellow to forget your tricks, you wicked little devil? Haven’t you ever seen me dodging about to get a sight of you amongst those pretty gentlemen, on horseback, like a princess, with pure cheeks like a carved saint? I wonder I didn’t throw stones at you, I wonder I didn’t run

after you shouting the tale — curse my timidity! But I daresay they knew as much as I did. More. All the new tricks — if that were possible.”

While he was making this uproar, Doña Rita put her fingers in her ears and then suddenly changed her mind and clapped her hands over my ears. Instinctively I disengaged my head but she persisted. We had a short tussle without moving from the spot, and suddenly I had my head free, and there was complete silence. He had screamed himself out of breath, but Doña Rita muttering: “Too late, too late,” got her hands away from my grip and slipping altogether out of her fur coat seized some garment lying on a chair near by (I think it was her skirt), with the intention of dressing herself, I imagine, and rushing out of the house. Determined to prevent this, but indeed without thinking very much what I was doing, I got hold of her arm. That struggle was silent, too; but I used the least force possible and she managed to give me an unexpected push. Stepping back to save myself from falling I overturned the little table, bearing the six-branched candlestick. It hit the floor, rebounded with a dull ring on the carpet, and by the time it came to a rest every single candle was out. He on the other side of the door naturally heard the noise and greeted it with a triumphant screech: “Aha! I’ve managed to wake you up,” the very savagery of which had a laughable effect. I felt the weight of Doña Rita grow on my arm and thought it best to let her sink on the floor, wishing to be free in my movements and really afraid that now he had actually heard a noise he would infallibly burst the door. But he didn’t even thump it. He seemed to have exhausted himself in that scream. There was no other light in the room but the darkened glow of the embers and I could hardly make out amongst the shadows of furniture Doña Rita sunk on her knees in a penitential and despairing attitude. Before this collapse I, who had been wrestling desperately with her a moment before, felt that I dare not touch her. This emotion, too, I could not understand; this abandonment of herself, this conscience-stricken humility. A humbly imploring request to open the door came from the other side. Ortega kept on repeating: “Open the door, open the door,” in such an amazing variety of intonations, imperative, whining, persuasive, insinuating, and even unexpectedly jocose, that I really stood there smiling to myself, yet with a gloomy and uneasy heart. Then he remarked, parenthetically as it were, “Oh, you know how to torment a man, you brown-skinned, lean, grinning, dishevelled imp, you. And mark,” he expounded further, in a curiously doctoral tone — ”you are in all your limbs

hateful: your eyes are hateful and your mouth is hateful, and your hair is hateful, and your body is cold and vicious like a snake — and altogether you are perdition.”

This statement was astonishingly deliberate. He drew a moaning breath after it and uttered in a heart-rending tone, “You know, Rita, that I cannot live without you. I haven’t lived. I am not living now. This isn’t life. Come, Rita, you can’t take a boy’s soul away and then let him grow up and go about the world, poor devil, while you go amongst the rich from one pair of arms to another, showing all your best tricks. But I will forgive you if you only open the door,” he ended in an inflated tone: “You remember how you swore time after time to be my wife. You are more fit to be Satan’s wife but I don’t mind. You shall be my wife!”

A sound near the floor made me bend down hastily with a stern: “Don’t laugh,” for in his grotesque, almost burlesque discourses there seemed to me to be truth, passion, and horror enough to move a mountain.

Suddenly suspicion seized him out there. With perfectly farcical unexpectedness he yelled shrilly: “Oh, you deceitful wretch! You won’t escape me! I will have you. . . .”

And in a manner of speaking he vanished. Of course I couldn’t see him but somehow that was the impression. I had hardly time to receive it when crash! . . . he was already at the other door. I suppose he thought that his prey was escaping him. His swiftness was amazing, almost inconceivable, more like the effect of a trick or of a mechanism. The thump on the door was awful as if he had not been able to stop himself in time. The shock seemed enough to stun an elephant. It was really funny. And after the crash there was a moment of silence as if he were recovering himself. The next thing was a low grunt, and at once he picked up the thread of his fixed idea.

“You will have to be my wife. I have no shame. You swore you would be and so you will have to be.” Stifled low sounds made me bend down again to the kneeling form, white in the flush of the dark red glow. “For goodness’ sake don’t,” I whispered down. She was struggling with an appalling fit of merriment, repeating to herself, “Yes, every day, for two months. Sixty times at least, sixty times at least.” Her voice was rising high. She was struggling against laughter, but when I tried to put my hand over her lips I felt her face wet with tears. She turned it this way and that, eluding my hand with repressed low, little moans. I lost my caution and

said, "Be quiet," so sharply as to startle myself (and her, too) into expectant stillness.

Ortega's voice in the hall asked distinctly: "Eh? What's this?" and then he kept still on his side listening, but he must have thought that his ears had deceived him. He was getting tired, too. He was keeping quiet out there — resting. Presently he sighed deeply; then in a harsh melancholy tone he started again.

"My love, my soul, my life, do speak to me. What am I that you should take so much trouble to pretend that you aren't there? Do speak to me," he repeated tremulously, following this mechanical appeal with a string of extravagantly endearing names, some of them quite childish, which all of a sudden stopped dead; and then after a pause there came a distinct, unutterably weary: "What shall I do now?" as though he were speaking to himself.

I shuddered to hear rising from the floor, by my side, a vibrating, scornful: "Do! Why, slink off home looking over your shoulder as you used to years ago when I had done with you — all but the laughter."

"Rita," I murmured, appalled. He must have been struck dumb for a moment. Then, goodness only knows why, in his dismay or rage he was moved to speak in French with a most ridiculous accent.

"So you have found your tongue at last — Catin! You were that from the cradle. Don't you remember how . . ."

Doña Rita sprang to her feet at my side with a loud cry, "No, George, no," which bewildered me completely. The suddenness, the loudness of it made the ensuing silence on both sides of the door perfectly awful. It seemed to me that if I didn't resist with all my might something in me would die on the instant. In the straight, falling folds of the night-dress she looked cold like a block of marble; while I, too, was turned into stone by the terrific clamour in the hall.

"Therese, Therese," yelled Ortega. "She has got a man in there." He ran to the foot of the stairs and screamed again, "Therese, Therese! There is a man with her. A man! Come down, you miserable, starved peasant, come down and see."

I don't know where Therese was but I am sure that this voice reached her, terrible, as if clamouring to heaven, and with a shrill over-note which made me certain that if she was in bed the only thing she would think of doing would be to put her head under the bed-clothes. With a final yell: "Come

down and see,” he flew back at the door of the room and started shaking it violently.

It was a double door, very tall, and there must have been a lot of things loose about its fittings, bolts, latches, and all those brass applications with broken screws, because it rattled, it clattered, it jingled; and produced also the sound as of thunder rolling in the big, empty hall. It was deafening, distressing, and vaguely alarming as if it could bring the house down. At the same time the futility of it had, it cannot be denied, a comic effect. The very magnitude of the racket he raised was funny. But he couldn't keep up that violent exertion continuously, and when he stopped to rest we could hear him shouting to himself in vengeful tones. He saw it all! He had been decoyed there! (Rattle, rattle, rattle.) He had been decoyed into that town, he screamed, getting more and more excited by the noise he made himself, in order to be exposed to this! (Rattle, rattle.) By this shameless “Catin! Catin! Catin!”

He started at the door again with superhuman vigour. Behind me I heard Doña Rita laughing softly, statuesque, turned all dark in the fading glow. I called out to her quite openly, “Do keep your self-control.” And she called back to me in a clear voice: “Oh, my dear, will you ever consent to speak to me after all this? But don't ask for the impossible. He was born to be laughed at.”

“Yes,” I cried. “But don't let yourself go.”

I don't know whether Ortega heard us. He was exerting then his utmost strength of lung against the infamous plot to expose him to the derision of the fiendish associates of that obscene woman! . . . Then he began another interlude upon the door, so sustained and strong that I had the thought that this was growing absurdly impossible, that either the plaster would begin to fall off the ceiling or he would drop dead next moment, out there.

He stopped, uttered a few curses at the door, and seemed calmer from sheer exhaustion.

“This story will be all over the world,” we heard him begin. “Deceived, decoyed, inveighed, in order to be made a laughing-stock before the most debased of all mankind, that woman and her associates.” This was really a meditation. And then he screamed: “I will kill you all.” Once more he started worrying the door but it was a startlingly feeble effort which he abandoned almost at once. He must have been at the end of his strength. Doña Rita from the middle of the room asked me recklessly loud: “Tell me!

Wasn't he born to be laughed at?" I didn't answer her. I was so near the door that I thought I ought to hear him panting there. He was terrifying, but he was not serious. He was at the end of his strength, of his breath, of every kind of endurance, but I did not know it. He was done up, finished; but perhaps he did not know it himself. How still he was! Just as I began to wonder at it, I heard him distinctly give a slap to his forehead. "I see it all!" he cried. "That miserable, canting peasant-woman upstairs has arranged it all. No doubt she consulted her priests. I must regain my self-respect. Let her die first." I heard him make a dash for the foot of the stairs. I was appalled; yet to think of Therese being hoisted with her own petard was like a turn of affairs in a farce. A very ferocious farce. Instinctively I unlocked the door. Doña Rita's contralto laugh rang out loud, bitter, and contemptuous; and I heard Ortega's distracted screaming as if under torture. "It hurts! It hurts! It hurts!" I hesitated just an instant, half a second, no more, but before I could open the door wide there was in the hall a short groan and the sound of a heavy fall.

The sight of Ortega lying on his back at the foot of the stairs arrested me in the doorway. One of his legs was drawn up, the other extended fully, his foot very near the pedestal of the silver statuette holding the feeble and tenacious gleam which made the shadows so heavy in that hall. One of his arms lay across his breast. The other arm was extended full length on the white-and-black pavement with the hand palm upwards and the fingers rigidly spread out. The shadow of the lowest step slanted across his face but one whisker and part of his chin could be made out. He appeared strangely flattened. He didn't move at all. He was in his shirt-sleeves. I felt an extreme distaste for that sight. The characteristic sound of a key worrying in the lock stole into my ears. I couldn't locate it but I didn't attend much to that at first. I was engaged in watching Señor Ortega. But for his raised leg he clung so flat to the floor and had taken on himself such a distorted shape that he might have been the mere shadow of Señor Ortega. It was rather fascinating to see him so quiet at the end of all that fury, clamour, passion, and uproar. Surely there was never anything so still in the world as this Ortega. I had a bizarre notion that he was not to be disturbed.

A noise like the rattling of chain links, a small grind and click exploded in the stillness of the hall and a voice began to swear in Italian. These surprising sounds were quite welcome, they recalled me to myself, and I



perceived they came from the front door which seemed pushed a little ajar. Was somebody trying to get in? I had no objection, I went to the door and said: "Wait a moment, it's on the chain." The deep voice on the other side said: "What an extraordinary thing," and I assented mentally. It was extraordinary. The chain was never put up, but Therese was a thorough sort of person, and on this night she had put it up to keep no one out except myself. It was the old Italian and his daughters returning from the ball who were trying to get in.

Suddenly I became intensely alive to the whole situation. I bounded back, closed the door of Blunt's room, and the next moment was speaking to the Italian. "A little patience." My hands trembled but I managed to take down the chain and as I allowed the door to swing open a little more I put myself in his way. He was burly, venerable, a little indignant, and full of thanks. Behind him his two girls, in short-skirted costumes, white stockings, and low shoes, their heads powdered and earrings sparkling in their ears, huddled together behind their father, wrapped up in their light mantles. One had kept her little black mask on her face, the other held hers in her hand.

The Italian was surprised at my blocking the way and remarked pleasantly, "It's cold outside, Signor." I said, "Yes," and added in a hurried whisper: "There is a dead man in the hall." He didn't say a single word but put me aside a little, projected his body in for one searching glance. "Your daughters," I murmured. He said kindly, "Va bene, va bene." And then to them, "Come in, girls."

There is nothing like dealing with a man who has had a long past of out-of-the-way experiences. The skill with which he rounded up and drove the girls across the hall, paternal and irresistible, venerable and reassuring, was a sight to see. They had no time for more than one scared look over the shoulder. He hustled them in and locked them up safely in their part of the house, then crossed the hall with a quick, practical stride. When near Señor Ortega he trod short just in time and said: "In truth, blood"; then selecting the place, knelt down by the body in his tall hat and respectable overcoat, his white beard giving him immense authority somehow. "But — this man is not dead," he exclaimed, looking up at me. With profound sagacity, inherent as it were in his great beard, he never took the trouble to put any questions to me and seemed certain that I had nothing to do with the ghastly sight. "He managed to give himself an enormous gash in his side," was his

calm remark. "And what a weapon!" he exclaimed, getting it out from under the body. It was an Abyssinian or Nubian production of a bizarre shape; the clumsiest thing imaginable, partaking of a sickle and a chopper with a sharp edge and a pointed end. A mere cruel-looking curio of inconceivable clumsiness to European eyes.

The old man let it drop with amused disdain. "You had better take hold of his legs," he decided without appeal. I certainly had no inclination to argue. When we lifted him up the head of Señor Ortega fell back desolately, making an awful, defenceless display of his large, white throat.

We found the lamp burning in the studio and the bed made up on the couch on which we deposited our burden. My venerable friend jerked the upper sheet away at once and started tearing it into strips.

"You may leave him to me," said that efficient sage, "but the doctor is your affair. If you don't want this business to make a noise you will have to find a discreet man."

He was most benevolently interested in all the proceedings. He remarked with a patriarchal smile as he tore the sheet noisily: "You had better not lose any time." I didn't lose any time. I crammed into the next hour an astonishing amount of bodily activity. Without more words I flew out bare-headed into the last night of Carnival. Luckily I was certain of the right sort of doctor. He was an iron-grey man of forty and of a stout habit of body but who was able to put on a spurt. In the cold, dark, and deserted by-streets, he ran with earnest, and ponderous footsteps, which echoed loudly in the cold night air, while I skimmed along the ground a pace or two in front of him. It was only on arriving at the house that I perceived that I had left the front door wide open. All the town, every evil in the world could have entered the black-and-white hall. But I had no time to meditate upon my imprudence. The doctor and I worked in silence for nearly an hour and it was only then while he was washing his hands in the fencing-room that he asked:

"What was he up to, that imbecile?"

"Oh, he was examining this curiosity," I said.

"Oh, yes, and it accidentally went off," said the doctor, looking contemptuously at the Nubian knife I had thrown on the table. Then while wiping his hands: "I would bet there is a woman somewhere under this; but that of course does not affect the nature of the wound. I hope this blood-letting will do him good."

“Nothing will do him any good,” I said.

“Curious house this,” went on the doctor, “It belongs to a curious sort of woman, too. I happened to see her once or twice. I shouldn’t wonder if she were to raise considerable trouble in the track of her pretty feet as she goes along. I believe you know her well.”

“Yes.”

“Curious people in the house, too. There was a Carlist officer here, a lean, tall, dark man, who couldn’t sleep. He consulted me once. Do you know what became of him?”

“No.”

The doctor had finished wiping his hands and flung the towel far away.

“Considerable nervous over-strain. Seemed to have a restless brain. Not a good thing, that. For the rest a perfect gentleman. And this Spaniard here, do you know him?”

“Enough not to care what happens to him,” I said, “except for the trouble he might cause to the Carlist sympathizers here, should the police get hold of this affair.”

“Well, then, he must take his chance in the seclusion of that conservatory sort of place where you have put him. I’ll try to find somebody we can trust to look after him. Meantime, I will leave the case to you.”

## CHAPTER VIII

Directly I had shut the door after the doctor I started shouting for Therese. "Come down at once, you wretched hypocrite," I yelled at the foot of the stairs in a sort of frenzy as though I had been a second Ortega. Not even an echo answered me; but all of a sudden a small flame flickered descending from the upper darkness and Therese appeared on the first floor landing carrying a lighted candle in front of a livid, hard face, closed against remorse, compassion, or mercy by the meanness of her righteousness and of her rapacious instincts. She was fully dressed in that abominable brown stuff with motionless folds, and as I watched her coming down step by step she might have been made of wood. I stepped back and pointed my finger at the darkness of the passage leading to the studio. She passed within a foot of me, her pale eyes staring straight ahead, her face still with disappointment and fury. Yet it is only my surmise. She might have been made thus inhuman by the force of an invisible purpose. I waited a moment, then, stealthily, with extreme caution, I opened the door of the so-called Captain Blunt's room.

The glow of embers was all but out. It was cold and dark in there; but before I closed the door behind me the dim light from the hall showed me Doña Rita standing on the very same spot where I had left her, statuesque in her night-dress. Even after I shut the door she loomed up enormous, indistinctly rigid and inanimate. I picked up the candelabra, groped for a candle all over the carpet, found one, and lighted it. All that time Doña Rita didn't stir. When I turned towards her she seemed to be slowly awakening from a trance. She was deathly pale and by contrast the melted, sapphire-blue of her eyes looked black as coal. They moved a little in my direction, incurious, recognizing me slowly. But when they had recognized me completely she raised her hands and hid her face in them. A whole minute or more passed. Then I said in a low tone: "Look at me," and she let them fall slowly as if accepting the inevitable.

"Shall I make up the fire?" . . . I waited. "Do you hear me?" She made no sound and with the tip of my finger I touched her bare shoulder. But for its elasticity it might have been frozen. At once I looked round for the fur coat; it seemed to me that there was not a moment to lose if she was to be saved, as though we had been lost on an Arctic plain. I had to put her arms into the sleeves, myself, one after another. They were cold, lifeless, but

flexible. Then I moved in front of her and buttoned the thing close round her throat. To do that I had actually to raise her chin with my finger, and it sank slowly down again. I buttoned all the other buttons right down to the ground. It was a very long and splendid fur. Before rising from my kneeling position I felt her feet. Mere ice. The intimacy of this sort of attendance helped the growth of my authority. "Lie down," I murmured, "I shall pile on you every blanket I can find here," but she only shook her head.

Not even in the days when she ran "shrill as a cicada and thin as a match" through the chill mists of her native mountains could she ever have felt so cold, so wretched, and so desolate. Her very soul, her grave, indignant, and fantastic soul, seemed to drowse like an exhausted traveller surrendering himself to the sleep of death. But when I asked her again to lie down she managed to answer me, "Not in this room." The dumb spell was broken. She turned her head from side to side, but oh! how cold she was! It seemed to come out of her, numbing me, too; and the very diamonds on the arrow of gold sparkled like hoar frost in the light of the one candle.

"Not in this room; not here," she protested, with that peculiar suavity of tone which made her voice unforgettable, irresistible, no matter what she said. "Not after all this! I couldn't close my eyes in this place. It's full of corruption and ugliness all round, in me, too, everywhere except in your heart, which has nothing to do where I breathe. And here you may leave me. But wherever you go remember that I am not evil, I am not evil."

I said: "I don't intend to leave you here. There is my room upstairs. You have been in it before."

"Oh, you have heard of that," she whispered. The beginning of a wan smile vanished from her lips.

"I also think you can't stay in this room; and, surely, you needn't hesitate . . ."

"No. It doesn't matter now. He has killed me. Rita is dead."

While we exchanged these words I had retrieved the quilted, blue slippers and had put them on her feet. She was very tractable. Then taking her by the arm I led her towards the door.

"He has killed me," she repeated in a sigh. "The little joy that was in me."

"He has tried to kill himself out there in the hall," I said. She put back like a frightened child but she couldn't be dragged on as a child can be.

I assured her that the man was no longer there but she only repeated, "I can't get through the hall. I can't walk. I can't . . ."

"Well," I said, flinging the door open and seizing her suddenly in my arms, "if you can't walk then you shall be carried," and I lifted her from the ground so abruptly that she could not help catching me round the neck as any child almost will do instinctively when you pick it up.

I ought really to have put those blue slippers in my pocket. One dropped off at the bottom of the stairs as I was stepping over an unpleasant-looking mess on the marble pavement, and the other was lost a little way up the flight when, for some reason (perhaps from a sense of insecurity), she began to struggle. Though I had an odd sense of being engaged in a sort of nursery adventure she was no child to carry. I could just do it. But not if she chose to struggle. I set her down hastily and only supported her round the waist for the rest of the way. My room, of course, was perfectly dark but I led her straight to the sofa at once and let her fall on it. Then as if I had in sober truth rescued her from an Alpine height or an Arctic floe, I busied myself with nothing but lighting the gas and starting the fire. I didn't even pause to lock my door. All the time I was aware of her presence behind me, nay, of something deeper and more my own — of her existence itself — of a small blue flame, blue like her eyes, flickering and clear within her frozen body. When I turned to her she was sitting very stiff and upright, with her feet posed hieratically on the carpet and her head emerging out of the ample fur collar, such as a gem-like flower above the rim of a dark vase. I tore the blankets and the pillows off my bed and piled them up in readiness in a great heap on the floor near the couch. My reason for this was that the room was large, too large for the fireplace, and the couch was nearest to the fire. She gave no sign but one of her wistful attempts at a smile. In a most business-like way I took the arrow out of her hair and laid it on the centre table. The tawny mass fell loose at once about her shoulders and made her look even more desolate than before. But there was an invincible need of gaiety in her heart. She said funnily, looking at the arrow sparkling in the gas light:

"Ah! That poor philistinish ornament!"

An echo of our early days, not more innocent but so much more youthful, was in her tone; and we both, as if touched with poignant regret, looked at each other with enlightened eyes.

“Yes,” I said, “how far away all this is. And you wouldn’t leave even that object behind when you came last in here. Perhaps it is for that reason it haunted me — mostly at night. I dreamed of you sometimes as a huntress nymph gleaming white through the foliage and throwing this arrow like a dart straight at my heart. But it never reached it. It always fell at my feet as I woke up. The huntress never meant to strike down that particular quarry.”

“The huntress was wild but she was not evil. And she was no nymph, but only a goatherd girl. Dream of her no more, my dear.”

I had the strength of mind to make a sign of assent and busied myself arranging a couple of pillows at one end of the sofa. “Upon my soul, goatherd, you are not responsible,” I said. “You are not! Lay down that uneasy head,” I continued, forcing a half-playful note into my immense sadness, “that has even dreamed of a crown — but not for itself.”

She lay down quietly. I covered her up, looked once into her eyes and felt the restlessness of fatigue over-power me so that I wanted to stagger out, walk straight before me, stagger on and on till I dropped. In the end I lost myself in thought. I woke with a start to her voice saying positively:

“No. Not even in this room. I can’t close my eyes. Impossible. I have a horror of myself. That voice in my ears. All true. All true.”

She was sitting up, two masses of tawny hair fell on each side of her tense face. I threw away the pillows from which she had risen and sat down behind her on the couch. “Perhaps like this,” I suggested, drawing her head gently on my breast. She didn’t resist, she didn’t even sigh, she didn’t look at me or attempt to settle herself in any way. It was I who settled her after taking up a position which I thought I should be able to keep for hours — for ages. After a time I grew composed enough to become aware of the ticking of the clock, even to take pleasure in it. The beat recorded the moments of her rest, while I sat, keeping as still as if my life depended upon it with my eyes fixed idly on the arrow of gold gleaming and glittering dimly on the table under the lowered gas-jet. And presently my breathing fell into the quiet rhythm of the sleep which descended on her at last. My thought was that now nothing mattered in the world because I had the world safe resting in my arms — or was it in my heart?

Suddenly my heart seemed torn in two within my breast and half of my breath knocked out of me. It was a tumultuous awakening. The day had come. Doña Rita had opened her eyes, found herself in my arms, and instantly had flung herself out of them with one sudden effort. I saw her

already standing in the filtered sunshine of the closed shutters, with all the childlike horror and shame of that night vibrating afresh in the awakened body of the woman.

“Daylight,” she whispered in an appalled voice. “Don’t look at me, George. I can’t face daylight. No — not with you. Before we set eyes on each other all that past was like nothing. I had crushed it all in my new pride. Nothing could touch the Rita whose hand was kissed by you. But now! Never in daylight.”

I sat there stupid with surprise and grief. This was no longer the adventure of venturesome children in a nursery-book. A grown man’s bitterness, informed, suspicious, resembling hatred, welled out of my heart.

“All this means that you are going to desert me again?” I said with contempt. “All right. I won’t throw stones after you . . . Are you going, then?”

She lowered her head slowly with a backward gesture of her arm as if to keep me off, for I had sprung to my feet all at once as if mad.

“Then go quickly,” I said. “You are afraid of living flesh and blood. What are you running after? Honesty, as you say, or some distinguished carcass to feed your vanity on? I know how cold you can be — and yet live. What have I done to you? You go to sleep in my arms, wake up and go away. Is it to impress me? Charlatanism of character, my dear.”

She stepped forward on her bare feet as firm on that floor which seemed to heave up and down before my eyes as she had ever been — goatherd child leaping on the rocks of her native hills which she was never to see again. I snatched the arrow of gold from the table and threw it after her.

“Don’t forget this thing,” I cried, “you would never forgive yourself for leaving it behind.”

It struck the back of the fur coat and fell on the floor behind her. She never looked round. She walked to the door, opened it without haste, and on the landing in the diffused light from the ground-glass skylight there appeared, rigid, like an implacable and obscure fate, the awful Therese — waiting for her sister. The heavy ends of a big black shawl thrown over her head hung massively in biblical folds. With a faint cry of dismay Doña Rita stopped just within my room.

The two women faced each other for a few moments silently. Therese spoke first. There was no austerity in her tone. Her voice was as usual,



pertinacious, unfeeling, with a slight plaint in it; terrible in its unchanged purpose.

“I have been standing here before this door all night,” she said. “I don’t know how I lived through it. I thought I would die a hundred times for shame. So that’s how you are spending your time? You are worse than shameless. But God may still forgive you. You have a soul. You are my sister. I will never abandon you — till you die.”

“What is it?” Doña Rita was heard wistfully, “my soul or this house that you won’t abandon.”

“Come out and bow your head in humiliation. I am your sister and I shall help you to pray to God and all the Saints. Come away from that poor young gentleman who like all the others can have nothing but contempt and disgust for you in his heart. Come and hide your head where no one will reproach you — but I, your sister. Come out and beat your breast: come, poor Sinner, and let me kiss you, for you are my sister!”

While Therese was speaking Doña Rita stepped back a pace and as the other moved forward still extending the hand of sisterly love, she slammed the door in Therese’s face. “You abominable girl!” she cried fiercely. Then she turned about and walked towards me who had not moved. I felt hardly alive but for the cruel pain that possessed my whole being. On the way she stooped to pick up the arrow of gold and then moved on quicker, holding it out to me in her open palm.

“You thought I wouldn’t give it to you. Amigo, I wanted nothing so much as to give it to you. And now, perhaps — you will take it.”

“Not without the woman,” I said sombrely.

“Take it,” she said. “I haven’t the courage to deliver myself up to Therese. No. Not even for your sake. Don’t you think I have been miserable enough yet?”

I snatched the arrow out of her hand then and ridiculously pressed it to my breast; but as I opened my lips she who knew what was struggling for utterance in my heart cried in a ringing tone:

“Speak no words of love, George! Not yet. Not in this house of ill-luck and falsehood. Not within a hundred miles of this house, where they came clinging to me all profaned from the mouth of that man. Haven’t you heard them — the horrible things? And what can words have to do between you and me?”

Her hands were stretched out imploringly, I said, childishly disconcerted:

“But, Rita, how can I help using words of love to you? They come of themselves on my lips!”

“They come! Ah! But I shall seal your lips with the thing itself,” she said. “Like this. . . “

#### SECOND NOTE

The narrative of our man goes on for some six months more, from this, the last night of the Carnival season up to and beyond the season of roses. The tone of it is much less of exultation than might have been expected. Love as is well known having nothing to do with reason, being insensible to forebodings and even blind to evidence, the surrender of those two beings to a precarious bliss has nothing very astonishing in itself; and its portrayal, as he attempts it, lacks dramatic interest. The sentimental interest could only have a fascination for readers themselves actually in love. The response of a reader depends on the mood of the moment, so much so that a book may seem extremely interesting when read late at night, but might appear merely a lot of vapid verbiage in the morning. My conviction is that the mood in which the continuation of his story would appear sympathetic is very rare. This consideration has induced me to suppress it — all but the actual facts which round up the previous events and satisfy such curiosity as might have been aroused by the foregoing narrative.

It is to be remarked that this period is characterized more by a deep and joyous tenderness than by sheer passion. All fierceness of spirit seems to have burnt itself out in their preliminary hesitations and struggles against each other and themselves. Whether love in its entirety has, speaking generally, the same elementary meaning for women as for men, is very doubtful. Civilization has been at work there. But the fact is that those two display, in every phase of discovery and response, an exact accord. Both show themselves amazingly ingenuous in the practice of sentiment. I believe that those who know women won't be surprised to hear me say that she was as new to love as he was. During their retreat in the region of the Maritime Alps, in a small house built of dry stones and embowered with roses, they appear all through to be less like released lovers than as companions who had found out each other's fitness in a specially intense way. Upon the whole, I think that there must be some truth in his insistence of there having always been something childlike in their relation. In the unreserved and instant sharing of all thoughts, all impressions, all sensations, we see the naïveness of a children's foolhardy adventure. This

unreserved expressed for him the whole truth of the situation. With her it may have been different. It might have been assumed; yet nobody is altogether a comedian; and even comedians themselves have got to believe in the part they play. Of the two she appears much the more assured and confident. But if in this she was a comedienne then it was but a great achievement of her ineradicable honesty. Having once renounced her honourable scruples she took good care that he should taste no flavour of misgivings in the cup. Being older it was she who imparted its character to the situation. As to the man if he had any superiority of his own it was simply the superiority of him who loves with the greater self-surrender.

This is what appears from the pages I have discreetly suppressed — partly out of regard for the pages themselves. In every, even terrestrial, mystery there is as it were a sacred core. A sustained commentary on love is not fit for every eye. A universal experience is exactly the sort of thing which is most difficult to appraise justly in a particular instance.

How this particular instance affected Rose, who was the only companion of the two hermits in their rose-embowered hut of stones, I regret not to be able to report; but I will venture to say that for reasons on which I need not enlarge, the girl could not have been very reassured by what she saw. It seems to me that her devotion could never be appeased; for the conviction must have been growing on her that, no matter what happened, Madame could never have any friends. It may be that Doña Rita had given her a glimpse of the unavoidable end, and that the girl's tarnished eyes masked a certain amount of apprehensive, helpless desolation.

What meantime was becoming of the fortune of Henry Allègre is another curious question. We have been told that it was too big to be tied up in a sack and thrown into the sea. That part of it represented by the fabulous collections was still being protected by the police. But for the rest, it may be assumed that its power and significance were lost to an interested world for something like six months. What is certain is that the late Henry Allègre's man of affairs found himself comparatively idle. The holiday must have done much good to his harassed brain. He had received a note from Doña Rita saying that she had gone into retreat and that she did not mean to send him her address, not being in the humour to be worried with letters on any subject whatever. "It's enough for you" — she wrote — "to know that I am alive." Later, at irregular intervals, he received scraps of paper bearing the stamps of various post offices and containing the simple

statement: "I am still alive," signed with an enormous, flourished exuberant R. I imagine Rose had to travel some distances by rail to post those messages. A thick veil of secrecy had been lowered between the world and the lovers; yet even this veil turned out not altogether impenetrable.

He — it would be convenient to call him Monsieur George to the end — shared with Doña Rita her perfect detachment from all mundane affairs; but he had to make two short visits to Marseilles. The first was prompted by his loyal affection for Dominic. He wanted to discover what had happened or was happening to Dominic and to find out whether he could do something for that man. But Dominic was not the sort of person for whom one can do much. Monsieur George did not even see him. It looked uncommonly as if Dominic's heart were broken. Monsieur George remained concealed for twenty-four hours in the very house in which Madame Léonore had her café. He spent most of that time in conversing with Madame Léonore about Dominic. She was distressed, but her mind was made up. That bright-eyed, nonchalant, and passionate woman was making arrangements to dispose of her café before departing to join Dominic. She would not say where. Having ascertained that his assistance was not required Monsieur George, in his own words, "managed to sneak out of the town without being seen by a single soul that mattered."

The second occasion was very prosaic and shockingly incongruous with the super-mundane colouring of these days. He had neither the fortune of Henry Allègre nor a man of affairs of his own. But some rent had to be paid to somebody for the stone hut and Rose could not go marketing in the tiny hamlet at the foot of the hill without a little money. There came a time when Monsieur George had to descend from the heights of his love in order, in his own words, "to get a supply of cash." As he had disappeared very suddenly and completely for a time from the eyes of mankind it was necessary that he should show himself and sign some papers. That business was transacted in the office of the banker mentioned in the story. Monsieur George wished to avoid seeing the man himself but in this he did not succeed. The interview was short. The banker naturally asked no questions, made no allusions to persons and events, and didn't even mention the great Legitimist Principle which presented to him now no interest whatever. But for the moment all the world was talking of the Carlist enterprise. It had collapsed utterly, leaving behind, as usual, a large crop of recriminations, charges of incompetency and treachery, and a

certain amount of scandalous gossip. The banker (his wife's salon had been very Carlist indeed) declared that he had never believed in the success of the cause. "You are well out of it," he remarked with a chilly smile to Monsieur George. The latter merely observed that he had been very little "in it" as a matter of fact, and that he was quite indifferent to the whole affair.

"You left a few of your feathers in it, nevertheless," the banker concluded with a wooden face and with the curtness of a man who knows.

Monsieur George ought to have taken the very next train out of the town but he yielded to the temptation to discover what had happened to the house in the street of the Consuls after he and Doña Rita had stolen out of it like two scared yet jubilant children. All he discovered was a strange, fat woman, a sort of virago, who had, apparently, been put in as a caretaker by the man of affairs. She made some difficulties to admit that she had been in charge for the last four months; ever since the person who was there before had eloped with some Spaniard who had been lying in the house ill with fever for more than six weeks. No, she never saw the person. Neither had she seen the Spaniard. She had only heard the talk of the street. Of course she didn't know where these people had gone. She manifested some impatience to get rid of Monsieur George and even attempted to push him towards the door. It was, he says, a very funny experience. He noticed the feeble flame of the gas-jet in the hall still waiting for extinction in the general collapse of the world.

Then he decided to have a bit of dinner at the Restaurant de la Gare where he felt pretty certain he would not meet any of his friends. He could not have asked Madame Léonore for hospitality because Madame Léonore had gone away already. His acquaintances were not the sort of people likely to happen casually into a restaurant of that kind and moreover he took the precaution to seat himself at a small table so as to face the wall. Yet before long he felt a hand laid gently on his shoulder, and, looking up, saw one of his acquaintances, a member of the Royalist club, a young man of a very cheerful disposition but whose face looked down at him with a grave and anxious expression.

Monsieur George was far from delighted. His surprise was extreme when in the course of the first phrases exchanged with him he learned that this acquaintance had come to the station with the hope of finding him there.

“You haven’t been seen for some time,” he said. “You were perhaps somewhere where the news from the world couldn’t reach you? There have been many changes amongst our friends and amongst people one used to hear of so much. There is Madame de Lastaola for instance, who seems to have vanished from the world which was so much interested in her. You have no idea where she may be now?”

Monsieur George remarked grumpily that he couldn’t say.

The other tried to appear at ease. Tongues were wagging about it in Paris. There was a sort of international financier, a fellow with an Italian name, a shady personality, who had been looking for her all over Europe and talked in clubs — astonishing how such fellows get into the best clubs — oh! Azzolati was his name. But perhaps what a fellow like that said did not matter. The funniest thing was that there was no man of any position in the world who had disappeared at the same time. A friend in Paris wrote to him that a certain well-known journalist had rushed South to investigate the mystery but had returned no wiser than he went.

Monsieur George remarked more unamiably than before that he really could not help all that.

“No,” said the other with extreme gentleness, “only of all the people more or less connected with the Carlist affair you are the only one that had also disappeared before the final collapse.”

“What!” cried Monsieur George.

“Just so,” said the other meaningly. “You know that all my people like you very much, though they hold various opinions as to your discretion. Only the other day Jane, you know my married sister, and I were talking about you. She was extremely distressed. I assured her that you must be very far away or very deeply buried somewhere not to have given a sign of life under this provocation.”

Naturally Monsieur George wanted to know what it was all about; and the other appeared greatly relieved.

“I was sure you couldn’t have heard. I don’t want to be indiscreet, I don’t want to ask you where you were. It came to my ears that you had been seen at the bank to-day and I made a special effort to lay hold of you before you vanished again; for, after all, we have been always good friends and all our lot here liked you very much. Listen. You know a certain Captain Blunt, don’t you?”

Monsieur George owned to knowing Captain Blunt but only very slightly. His friend then informed him that this Captain Blunt was apparently well acquainted with Madame de Lastaola, or, at any rate, pretended to be. He was an honourable man, a member of a good club, he was very Parisian in a way, and all this, he continued, made all the worse that of which he was under the painful necessity of warning Monsieur George. This Blunt on three distinct occasions when the name of Madame de Lastaola came up in conversation in a mixed company of men had expressed his regret that she should have become the prey of a young adventurer who was exploiting her shamelessly. He talked like a man certain of his facts and as he mentioned names . . .

“In fact,” the young man burst out excitedly, “it is your name that he mentions. And in order to fix the exact personality he always takes care to add that you are that young fellow who was known as Monsieur George all over the South amongst the initiated Carlists.”

How Blunt had got enough information to base that atrocious calumny upon, Monsieur George couldn’t imagine. But there it was. He kept silent in his indignation till his friend murmured, “I expect you will want him to know that you are here.”

“Yes,” said Monsieur George, “and I hope you will consent to act for me altogether. First of all, pray, let him know by wire that I am waiting for him. This will be enough to fetch him down here, I can assure you. You may ask him also to bring two friends with him. I don’t intend this to be an affair for Parisian journalists to write paragraphs about.”

“Yes. That sort of thing must be stopped at once,” the other admitted. He assented to Monsieur George’s request that the meeting should be arranged for at his elder brother’s country place where the family stayed very seldom. There was a most convenient walled garden there. And then Monsieur George caught his train promising to be back on the fourth day and leaving all further arrangements to his friend. He prided himself on his impenetrability before Doña Rita; on the happiness without a shadow of those four days. However, Doña Rita must have had the intuition of there being something in the wind, because on the evening of the very same day on which he left her again on some pretence or other, she was already ensconced in the house in the street of the Consuls, with the trustworthy Rose scouting all over the town to gain information.

Of the proceedings in the walled garden there is no need to speak in detail. They were conventionally correct, but an earnestness of purpose which could be felt in the very air lifted the business above the common run of affairs of honour. One bit of byplay unnoticed by the seconds, very busy for the moment with their arrangements, must be mentioned. Disregarding the severe rules of conduct in such cases Monsieur George approached his adversary and addressed him directly.

“Captain Blunt,” he said, “the result of this meeting may go against me. In that case you will recognize publicly that you were wrong. For you are wrong and you know it. May I trust your honour?”

In answer to that appeal Captain Blunt, always correct, didn’t open his lips but only made a little bow. For the rest he was perfectly ruthless. If he was utterly incapable of being carried away by love there was nothing equivocal about his jealousy. Such psychology is not very rare and really from the point of view of the combat itself one cannot very well blame him. What happened was this. Monsieur George fired on the word and, whether luck or skill, managed to hit Captain Blunt in the upper part of the arm which was holding the pistol. That gentleman’s arm dropped powerless by his side. But he did not drop his weapon. There was nothing equivocal about his determination. With the greatest deliberation he reached with his left hand for his pistol and taking careful aim shot Monsieur George through the left side of his breast. One may imagine the consternation of the four seconds and the activity of the two surgeons in the confined, drowsy heat of that walled garden. It was within an easy drive of the town and as Monsieur George was being conveyed there at a walking pace a little brougham coming from the opposite direction pulled up at the side of the road. A thickly veiled woman’s head looked out of the window, took in the state of affairs at a glance, and called out in a firm voice: “Follow my carriage.” The brougham turning round took the lead. Long before this convoy reached the town another carriage containing four gentlemen (of whom one was leaning back languidly with his arm in a sling) whisked past and vanished ahead in a cloud of white, Provençal dust. And this is the last appearance of Captain Blunt in Monsieur George’s narrative. Of course he was only told of it later. At the time he was not in a condition to notice things. Its interest in his surroundings remained of a hazy and nightmarish kind for many days together. From time to time he had the impression that he was in a room strangely familiar to him, that he



had unsatisfactory visions of Doña Rita, to whom he tried to speak as if nothing had happened, but that she always put her hand on his mouth to prevent him and then spoke to him herself in a very strange voice which sometimes resembled the voice of Rose. The face, too, sometimes resembled the face of Rose. There were also one or two men's faces which he seemed to know well enough though he didn't recall their names. He could have done so with a slight effort, but it would have been too much trouble. Then came a time when the hallucinations of Doña Rita and the faithful Rose left him altogether. Next came a period, perhaps a year, or perhaps an hour, during which he seemed to dream all through his past life. He felt no apprehension, he didn't try to speculate as to the future. He felt that all possible conclusions were out of his power, and therefore he was indifferent to everything. He was like that dream's disinterested spectator who doesn't know what is going to happen next. Suddenly for the first time in his life he had the soul-satisfying consciousness of floating off into deep slumber.

When he woke up after an hour, or a day, or a month, there was dusk in the room; but he recognized it perfectly. It was his apartment in Doña Rita's house; those were the familiar surroundings in which he had so often told himself that he must either die or go mad. But now he felt perfectly clear-headed and the full sensation of being alive came all over him, languidly delicious. The greatest beauty of it was that there was no need to move. This gave him a sort of moral satisfaction. Then the first thought independent of personal sensations came into his head. He wondered when Therese would come in and begin talking. He saw vaguely a human figure in the room but that was a man. He was speaking in a deadened voice which had yet a preternatural distinctness.

"This is the second case I have had in this house, and I am sure that directly or indirectly it was connected with that woman. She will go on like this leaving a track behind her and then some day there will be really a corpse. This young fellow might have been it."

"In this case, Doctor," said another voice, "one can't blame the woman very much. I assure you she made a very determined fight."

"What do you mean? That she didn't want to. . ."

"Yes. A very good fight. I heard all about it. It is easy to blame her, but, as she asked me despairingly, could she go through life veiled from head to

foot or go out of it altogether into a convent? No, she isn't guilty. She is simply — what she is.”

“And what's that?”

“Very much of a woman. Perhaps a little more at the mercy of contradictory impulses than other women. But that's not her fault. I really think she has been very honest.”

The voices sank suddenly to a still lower murmur and presently the shape of the man went out of the room. Monsieur George heard distinctly the door open and shut. Then he spoke for the first time, discovering, with a particular pleasure, that it was quite easy to speak. He was even under the impression that he had shouted:

“Who is here?”

From the shadow of the room (he recognized at once the characteristic outlines of the bulky shape) Mills advanced to the side of the bed. Doña Rita had telegraphed to him on the day of the duel and the man of books, leaving his retreat, had come as fast as boats and trains could carry him South. For, as he said later to Monsieur George, he had become fully awake to his part of responsibility. And he added: “It was not of you alone that I was thinking.” But the very first question that Monsieur George put to him was:

“How long is it since I saw you last?”

“Something like ten months,” answered Mills' kindly voice.

“Ah! Is Therese outside the door? She stood there all night, you know.”

“Yes, I heard of it. She is hundreds of miles away now.”

“Well, then, ask Rita to come in.”

“I can't do that, my dear boy,” said Mills with affectionate gentleness. He hesitated a moment. “Doña Rita went away yesterday,” he said softly.

“Went away? Why?” asked Monsieur George.

“Because, I am thankful to say, your life is no longer in danger. And I have told you that she is gone because, strange as it may seem, I believe you can stand this news better now than later when you get stronger.”

It must be believed that Mills was right. Monsieur George fell asleep before he could feel any pang at that intelligence. A sort of confused surprise was in his mind but nothing else, and then his eyes closed. The awakening was another matter. But that, too, Mills had foreseen. For days he attended the bedside patiently letting the man in the bed talk to him of

Doña Rita but saying little himself; till one day he was asked pointedly whether she had ever talked to him openly. And then he said that she had, on more than one occasion. "She told me amongst other things," Mills said, "if this is any satisfaction to you to know, that till she met you she knew nothing of love. That you were to her in more senses than one a complete revelation."

"And then she went away. Ran away from the revelation," said the man in the bed bitterly.

"What's the good of being angry?" remonstrated Mills, gently. "You know that this world is not a world for lovers, not even for such lovers as you two who have nothing to do with the world as it is. No, a world of lovers would be impossible. It would be a mere ruin of lives which seem to be meant for something else. What this something is, I don't know; and I am certain," he said with playful compassion, "that she and you will never find out."

A few days later they were again talking of Doña Rita Mills said:

"Before she left the house she gave me that arrow she used to wear in her hair to hand over to you as a keepsake and also to prevent you, she said, from dreaming of her. This message sounds rather cryptic."

"Oh, I understand perfectly," said Monsieur George. "Don't give me the thing now. Leave it somewhere where I can find it some day when I am alone. But when you write to her you may tell her that now at last — surer than Mr. Blunt's bullet — the arrow has found its mark. There will be no more dreaming. Tell her. She will understand."

"I don't even know where she is," murmured Mills.

"No, but her man of affairs knows. . . . Tell me, Mills, what will become of her?"

"She will be wasted," said Mills sadly. "She is a most unfortunate creature. Not even poverty could save her now. She cannot go back to her goats. Yet who can tell? She may find something in life. She may! It won't be love. She has sacrificed that chance to the integrity of your life — heroically. Do you remember telling her once that you meant to live your life integrally — oh, you lawless young pedant! Well, she is gone; but you may be sure that whatever she finds now in life it will not be peace. You understand me? Not even in a convent."

"She was supremely lovable," said the wounded man, speaking of her as if she were lying dead already on his oppressed heart.

“And elusive,” struck in Mills in a low voice. “Some of them are like that. She will never change. Amid all the shames and shadows of that life there will always lie the ray of her perfect honesty. I don’t know about your honesty, but yours will be the easier lot. You will always have your . . . other love — you pig-headed enthusiast of the sea.”

“Then let me go to it,” cried the enthusiast. “Let me go to it.”

He went to it as soon as he had strength enough to feel the crushing weight of his loss (or his gain) fully, and discovered that he could bear it without flinching. After this discovery he was fit to face anything. He tells his correspondent that if he had been more romantic he would never have looked at any other woman. But on the contrary. No face worthy of attention escaped him. He looked at them all; and each reminded him of Doña Rita, either by some profound resemblance or by the startling force of contrast.

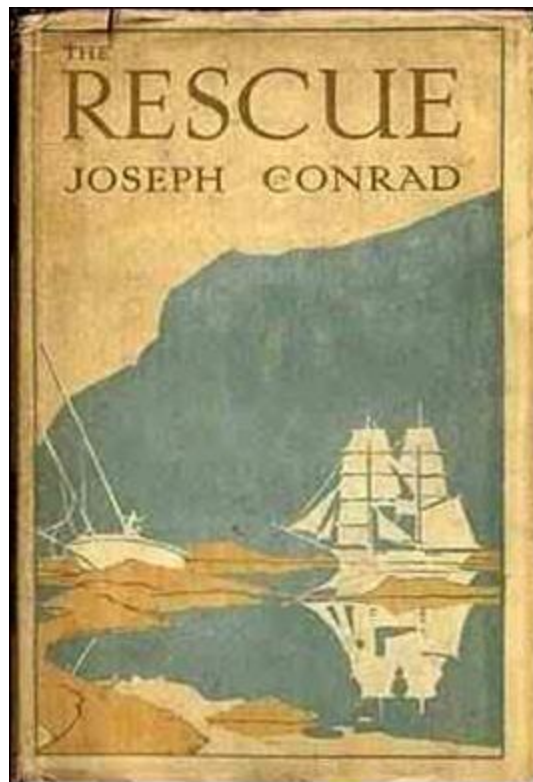
The faithful austerity of the sea protected him from the rumours that fly on the tongues of men. He never heard of her. Even the echoes of the sale of the great Allègre collection failed to reach him. And that event must have made noise enough in the world. But he never heard. He does not know. Then, years later, he was deprived even of the arrow. It was lost to him in a stormy catastrophe; and he confesses that next day he stood on a rocky, wind-assaulted shore, looking at the seas raging over the very spot of his loss and thought that it was well. It was not a thing that one could leave behind one for strange hands — for the cold eyes of ignorance. Like the old King of Thule with the gold goblet of his mistress he would have had to cast it into the sea, before he died. He says he smiled at the romantic notion. But what else could he have done with it?

## ***THE RESCUE***



### A ROMANCE OF THE SHALLOWS

First published in 1920, but begun in the 1890s, this novel concludes what is sometimes referred to as “The Lingard Trilogy”, a group of novels based on Conrad’s experience as mate on the steamer, Vidar. Although it is the last of the three novels to be published, after *Almayer’s Folly* (1895) and *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896), the events related in the novel precede those.



*The first edition*

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‘Allas!’ quod she, ‘that ever this sholde happe! For wende I never,  
by possibilittee, That swich a monstre or merveille mighte be!’  
— THE FRANKELEYN’S TALE

TO FREDERIC COURTLAND PENFIELD LAST AMBASSADOR OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE LATE AUSTRIAN EMPIRE, THIS OLD TIME  
TALE IS GRATEFULLY INSCRIBED IN MEMORY OF THE RESCUE OF CERTAIN DISTRESSED TRAVELLERS EFFECTED BY HIM IN THE WORLD’S GREAT STORM  
OF THE YEAR 1914



## AUTHOR'S NOTE

Of the three long novels of mine which suffered an interruption, "The Rescue" was the one that had to wait the longest for the good pleasure of the Fates. I am betraying no secret when I state here that it had to wait precisely for twenty years. I laid it aside at the end of the summer of 1898 and it was about the end of the summer of 1918 that I took it up again with the firm determination to see the end of it and helped by the sudden feeling that I might be equal to the task.

This does not mean that I turned to it with elation. I was well aware and perhaps even too much aware of the dangers of such an adventure. The amazingly sympathetic kindness which men of various temperaments, diverse views and different literary tastes have been for years displaying towards my work has done much for me, has done all — except giving me that over-weening self-confidence which may assist an adventurer sometimes but in the long run ends by leading him to the gallows.

As the characteristic I want most to impress upon these short Author's Notes prepared for my first Collected Edition is that of absolute frankness, I hasten to declare that I founded my hopes not on my supposed merits but on the continued goodwill of my readers. I may say at once that my hopes have been justified out of all proportion to my deserts. I met with the most considerate, most delicately expressed criticism free from all antagonism and in its conclusions showing an insight which in itself could not fail to move me deeply, but was associated also with enough commendation to make me feel rich beyond the dreams of avarice — I mean an artist's avarice which seeks its treasure in the hearts of men and women.

No! Whatever the preliminary anxieties might have been this adventure was not to end in sorrow. Once more Fortune favoured audacity; and yet I have never forgotten the jocular translation of *Audaces fortuna juvat* offered to me by my tutor when I was a small boy: "The Audacious get bitten." However he took care to mention that there were various kinds of audacity. Oh, there are, there are! . . . There is, for instance, the kind of audacity almost indistinguishable from impudence. . . . I must believe that in this case I have not been impudent for I am not conscious of having been bitten.

The truth is that when "The Rescue" was laid aside it was not laid aside in despair. Several reasons contributed to this abandonment and, no doubt, the first of them was the growing sense of general difficulty in the handling of the subject. The contents and the course of the story I had clearly in my mind. But as to the way of presenting the facts, and perhaps in a certain measure as to the nature of the facts themselves, I had many doubts. I mean the telling, representative facts, helpful to carry on the idea, and, at the same time, of such a nature as not to demand an elaborate creation of the atmosphere to the detriment of the action. I did not see how I could avoid becoming wearisome in the presentation of detail and in the pursuit of clearness. I saw the action plainly enough. What I had lost for the moment was the sense of the proper formula of expression, the only formula that would suit. This, of course, weakened my confidence in the intrinsic worth and in the possible interest of the story — that is in my invention. But I suspect that all the trouble was, in reality, the doubt of my prose, the doubt of its adequacy, of its power to master both the colours and the shades.

It is difficult to describe, exactly as I remember it, the complex state of my feelings; but those of my readers who take an interest in artistic perplexities will understand me best when I point out that I dropped "The Rescue" not to give myself up to idleness, regrets, or dreaming, but to begin "The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'" and to go on with it without hesitation and without a pause. A comparison of any page of "The Rescue" with any page of "The Nigger" will furnish an ocular demonstration of the nature and the inward meaning of this first crisis of my writing life. For it was a crisis undoubtedly. The laying aside of a work so far advanced was a very awful decision to take. It was wrung from me by a sudden conviction that there only was the road of salvation, the clear way out for an uneasy conscience. The finishing of "The Nigger" brought to my troubled mind the comforting sense of an accomplished task, and the first consciousness of a certain sort of mastery which could accomplish something with the aid of propitious stars. Why I did not return to "The Rescue" at once then, was not for the reason that I had grown afraid of it. Being able now to assume a firm attitude I said to myself deliberately: "That thing can wait." At the same time I was just as certain in my mind that "Youth," a story which I had then, so to speak, on the tip of my pen, could not wait. Neither could "Heart of Darkness" be put off; for the practical reason that Mr. Wm. Blackwood having requested me to write something for the No. M of his magazine I

had to stir up at once the subject of that tale which had been long lying quiescent in my mind, because, obviously, the venerable Maga at her patriarchal age of 1000 numbers could not be kept waiting. Then “Lord Jim,” with about seventeen pages already written at odd times, put in his claim which was irresistible. Thus every stroke of the pen was taking me further away from the abandoned “Rescue,” not without some compunction on my part but with a gradually diminishing resistance; till at last I let myself go as if recognising a superior influence against which it was useless to contend.

The years passed and the pages grew in number, and the long reveries of which they were the outcome stretched wide between me and the deserted “Rescue” like the smooth hazy spaces of a dreamy sea. Yet I never actually lost sight of that dark speck in the misty distance. It had grown very small but it asserted itself with the appeal of old associations. It seemed to me that it would be a base thing for me to slip out of the world leaving it out there all alone, waiting for its fate — that would never come?

Sentiment, pure sentiment as you see, prompted me in the last instance to face the pains and hazards of that return. As I moved slowly towards the abandoned body of the tale it loomed up big amongst the glittering shallows of the coast, lonely but not forbidding. There was nothing about it of a grim derelict. It had an air of expectant life. One after another I made out the familiar faces watching my approach with faint smiles of amused recognition. They had known well enough that I was bound to come back to them. But their eyes met mine seriously as was only to be expected since I, myself, felt very serious as I stood amongst them again after years of absence. At once, without wasting words, we went to work together on our renewed life; and every moment I felt more strongly that They Who had Waited bore no grudge to the man who however widely he may have wandered at times had played truant only once in his life.

1920. J. C.

## PART I. THE MAN AND THE BRIG

The shallow sea that foams and murmurs on the shores of the thousand islands, big and little, which make up the Malay Archipelago has been for centuries the scene of adventurous undertakings. The vices and the virtues of four nations have been displayed in the conquest of that region that even to this day has not been robbed of all the mystery and romance of its past — and the race of men who had fought against the Portuguese, the Spaniards, the Dutch and the English, has not been changed by the unavoidable defeat. They have kept to this day their love of liberty, their fanatical devotion to their chiefs, their blind fidelity in friendship and hate — all their lawful and unlawful instincts. Their country of land and water — for the sea was as much their country as the earth of their islands — has fallen a prey to the western race — the reward of superior strength if not of superior virtue. Tomorrow the advancing civilization will obliterate the marks of a long struggle in the accomplishment of its inevitable victory.

The adventurers who began that struggle have left no descendants. The ideas of the world changed too quickly for that. But even far into the present century they have had successors. Almost in our own day we have seen one of them — a true adventurer in his devotion to his impulse — a man of high mind and of pure heart, lay the foundation of a flourishing state on the ideas of pity and justice. He recognized chivalrously the claims of the conquered; he was a disinterested adventurer, and the reward of his noble instincts is in the veneration with which a strange and faithful race cherish his memory.

Misunderstood and traduced in life, the glory of his achievement has vindicated the purity of his motives. He belongs to history. But there were others — obscure adventurers who had not his advantages of birth, position, and intelligence; who had only his sympathy with the people of forests and sea he understood and loved so well. They can not be said to be forgotten since they have not been known at all. They were lost in the common crowd of seamen-traders of the Archipelago, and if they emerged from their obscurity it was only to be condemned as law-breakers. Their lives were thrown away for a cause that had no right to exist in the face of an

irresistible and orderly progress — their thoughtless lives guided by a simple feeling.

But the wasted lives, for the few who know, have tinged with romance the region of shallow waters and forest-clad islands, that lies far east, and still mysterious between the deep waters of two oceans.

## I

Out of the level blue of a shallow sea Carimata raises a lofty barrenness of grey and yellow tints, the drab eminence of its arid heights. Separated by a narrow strip of water, Suroeton, to the west, shows a curved and ridged outline resembling the backbone of a stooping giant. And to the eastward a troop of insignificant islets stand effaced, indistinct, with vague features that seem to melt into the gathering shadows. The night following from the eastward the retreat of the setting sun advanced slowly, swallowing the land and the sea; the land broken, tormented and abrupt; the sea smooth and inviting with its easy polish of continuous surface to wanderings facile and endless.

There was no wind, and a small brig that had lain all the afternoon a few miles to the northward and westward of Carimata had hardly altered its position half a mile during all these hours. The calm was absolute, a dead, flat calm, the stillness of a dead sea and of a dead atmosphere. As far as the eye could reach there was nothing but an impressive immobility. Nothing moved on earth, on the waters, and above them in the unbroken lustre of the sky. On the unruffled surface of the straits the brig floated tranquil and upright as if bolted solidly, keel to keel, with its own image reflected in the unframed and immense mirror of the sea. To the south and east the double islands watched silently the double ship that seemed fixed amongst them forever, a hopeless captive of the calm, a helpless prisoner of the shallow sea.

Since midday, when the light and capricious airs of these seas had abandoned the little brig to its lingering fate, her head had swung slowly to the westward and the end of her slender and polished jib-boom, projecting boldly beyond the graceful curve of the bow, pointed at the setting sun, like a spear poised high in the hand of an enemy. Right aft by the wheel the Malay quartermaster stood with his bare, brown feet firmly planted on the wheel-grating, and holding the spokes at right angles, in a solid grasp, as though the ship had been running before a gale. He stood there perfectly motionless, as if petrified but ready to tend the helm as soon as fate would permit the brig to gather way through the oily sea.

The only other human being then visible on the brig's deck was the person in charge: a white man of low stature, thick-set, with shaven cheeks, a grizzled moustache, and a face tinted a scarlet hue by the burning suns and by the sharp salt breezes of the seas. He had thrown off his light jacket,

and clad only in white trousers and a thin cotton singlet, with his stout arms crossed on his breast — upon which they showed like two thick lumps of raw flesh — he prowled about from side to side of the half-poop. On his bare feet he wore a pair of straw sandals, and his head was protected by an enormous pith hat — once white but now very dirty — which gave to the whole man the aspect of a phenomenal and animated mushroom. At times he would interrupt his uneasy shuffle athwart the break of the poop, and stand motionless with a vague gaze fixed on the image of the brig in the calm water. He could also see down there his own head and shoulders leaning out over the rail and he would stand long, as if interested by his own features, and mutter vague curses on the calm which lay upon the ship like an immovable burden, immense and burning.

At last, he sighed profoundly, nerved himself for a great effort, and making a start away from the rail managed to drag his slippers as far as the binnacle. There he stopped again, exhausted and bored. From under the lifted glass panes of the cabin skylight near by came the feeble chirp of a canary, which appeared to give him some satisfaction. He listened, smiled faintly muttered “Dicky, poor Dick — ” and fell back into the immense silence of the world. His eyes closed, his head hung low over the hot brass of the binnacle top. Suddenly he stood up with a jerk and said sharply in a hoarse voice:

“You’ve been sleeping — you. Shift the helm. She has got stern way on her.”

The Malay, without the least flinch of feature or pose, as if he had been an inanimate object called suddenly into life by some hidden magic of the words, spun the wheel rapidly, letting the spokes pass through his hands; and when the motion had stopped with a grinding noise, caught hold again and held on grimly. After a while, however, he turned his head slowly over his shoulder, glanced at the sea, and said in an obstinate tone:

“No catch wind — no get way.”

“No catch — no catch — that’s all you know about it,” growled the red-faced seaman. “By and by catch Ali — ” he went on with sudden condescension. “By and by catch, and then the helm will be the right way. See?”

The stolid seacannie appeared to see, and for that matter to hear, nothing. The white man looked at the impassive Malay with disgust, then glanced around the horizon — then again at the helmsman and ordered curtly:

“Shift the helm back again. Don’t you feel the air from aft? You are like a dummy standing there.”

The Malay revolved the spokes again with disdainful obedience, and the red-faced man was moving forward grunting to himself, when through the open skylight the hail “On deck there!” arrested him short, attentive, and with a sudden change to amiability in the expression of his face.

“Yes, sir,” he said, bending his ear toward the opening. “What’s the matter up there?” asked a deep voice from below.

The red-faced man in a tone of surprise said:

“Sir?”

“I hear that rudder grinding hard up and hard down. What are you up to, Shaw? Any wind?”

“Ye-es,” drawled Shaw, putting his head down the skylight and speaking into the gloom of the cabin. “I thought there was a light air, and — but it’s gone now. Not a breath anywhere under the heavens.”

He withdrew his head and waited a while by the skylight, but heard only the chirping of the indefatigable canary, a feeble twittering that seemed to ooze through the drooping red blossoms of geraniums growing in flower-pots under the glass panes. He strolled away a step or two before the voice from down below called hurriedly:

“Hey, Shaw? Are you there?”

“Yes, Captain Lingard,” he answered, stepping back. “Have we drifted anything this afternoon?”

“Not an inch, sir, not an inch. We might as well have been at anchor.”

“It’s always so,” said the invisible Lingard. His voice changed its tone as he moved in the cabin, and directly afterward burst out with a clear intonation while his head appeared above the slide of the cabin entrance:

“Always so! The currents don’t begin till it’s dark, when a man can’t see against what confounded thing he is being drifted, and then the breeze will come. Dead on end, too, I don’t doubt.”

Shaw moved his shoulders slightly. The Malay at the wheel, after making a dive to see the time by the cabin clock through the skylight, rang a double stroke on the small bell aft. Directly forward, on the main deck, a shrill whistle arose long drawn, modulated, dying away softly. The master of the brig stepped out of the companion upon the deck of his vessel, glanced aloft at the yards laid dead square; then, from the door-step, took a long, lingering look round the horizon.



He was about thirty-five, erect and supple. He moved freely, more like a man accustomed to stride over plains and hills, than like one who from his earliest youth had been used to counteract by sudden swayings of his body the rise and roll of cramped decks of small craft, tossed by the caprice of angry or playful seas.

He wore a grey flannel shirt, and his white trousers were held by a blue silk scarf wound tightly round his narrow waist. He had come up only for a moment, but finding the poop shaded by the main-topsail he remained on deck bareheaded. The light chestnut hair curled close about his well-shaped head, and the clipped beard glinted vividly when he passed across a narrow strip of sunlight, as if every hair in it had been a wavy and attenuated gold wire. His mouth was lost in the heavy moustache; his nose was straight, short, slightly blunted at the end; a broad band of deeper red stretched under the eyes, clung to the cheek bones. The eyes gave the face its remarkable expression. The eyebrows, darker than the hair, pencilled a straight line below the wide and unwrinkled brow much whiter than the sunburnt face. The eyes, as if glowing with the light of a hidden fire, had a red glint in their greyness that gave a scrutinizing ardour to the steadiness of their gaze.

That man, once so well known, and now so completely forgotten amongst the charming and heartless shores of the shallow sea, had amongst his fellows the nickname of "Red-Eyed Tom." He was proud of his luck but not of his good sense. He was proud of his brig, of the speed of his craft, which was reckoned the swiftest country vessel in those seas, and proud of what she represented.

She represented a run of luck on the Victorian goldfields; his sagacious moderation; long days of planning, of loving care in building; the great joy of his youth, the incomparable freedom of the seas; a perfect because a wandering home; his independence, his love — and his anxiety. He had often heard men say that Tom Lingard cared for nothing on earth but for his brig — and in his thoughts he would smilingly correct the statement by adding that he cared for nothing living but the brig.

To him she was as full of life as the great world. He felt her live in every motion, in every roll, in every sway of her tapering masts, of those masts whose painted trucks move forever, to a seaman's eye, against the clouds or against the stars. To him she was always precious — like old love; always desirable — like a strange woman; always tender — like a mother; always faithful — like the favourite daughter of a man's heart.

For hours he would stand elbow on rail, his head in his hand and listen — and listen in dreamy stillness to the cajoling and promising whisper of the sea, that slipped past in vanishing bubbles along the smooth black-painted sides of his craft. What passed in such moments of thoughtful solitude through the mind of that child of generations of fishermen from the coast of Devon, who like most of his class was dead to the subtle voices, and blind to the mysterious aspects of the world — the man ready for the obvious, no matter how startling, how terrible or menacing, yet defenceless as a child before the shadowy impulses of his own heart; what could have been the thoughts of such a man, when once surrendered to a dreamy mood, it is difficult to say.

No doubt he, like most of us, would be uplifted at times by the awakened lyricism of his heart into regions charming, empty, and dangerous. But also, like most of us, he was unaware of his barren journeys above the interesting cares of this earth. Yet from these, no doubt absurd and wasted moments, there remained on the man's daily life a tinge as that of a glowing and serene half-light. It softened the outlines of his rugged nature; and these moments kept close the bond between him and his brig.

He was aware that his little vessel could give him something not to be had from anybody or anything in the world; something specially his own. The dependence of that solid man of bone and muscle on that obedient thing of wood and iron, acquired from that feeling the mysterious dignity of love. She — the craft — had all the qualities of a living thing: speed, obedience, trustworthiness, endurance, beauty, capacity to do and to suffer — all but life. He — the man — was the inspirer of that thing that to him seemed the most perfect of its kind. His will was its will, his thought was its impulse, his breath was the breath of its existence. He felt all this confusedly, without ever shaping this feeling into the soundless formulas of thought. To him she was unique and dear, this brig of three hundred and fourteen tons register — a kingdom!

And now, bareheaded and burly, he walked the deck of his kingdom with a regular stride. He stepped out from the hip, swinging his arms with the free motion of a man starting out for a fifteen-mile walk into open country; yet at every twelfth stride he had to turn about sharply and pace back the distance to the taffrail.

Shaw, with his hands stuck in his waistband, had hooked himself with both elbows to the rail, and gazed apparently at the deck between his feet.

In reality he was contemplating a little house with a tiny front garden, lost in a maze of riverside streets in the east end of London. The circumstance that he had not, as yet, been able to make the acquaintance of his son — now aged eighteen months — worried him slightly, and was the cause of that flight of his fancy into the murky atmosphere of his home. But it was a placid flight followed by a quick return. In less than two minutes he was back in the brig. “All there,” as his saying was. He was proud of being always “all there.”

He was abrupt in manner and grumpy in speech with the seamen. To his successive captains, he was outwardly as deferential as he knew how, and as a rule inwardly hostile — so very few seemed to him of the “all there” kind. Of Lingard, with whom he had only been a short time — having been picked up in Madras Roads out of a home ship, which he had to leave after a thumping row with the master — he generally approved, although he recognized with regret that this man, like most others, had some absurd fads; he defined them as “bottom-upwards notions.”

He was a man — as there were many — of no particular value to anybody but himself, and of no account but as the chief mate of the brig, and the only white man on board of her besides the captain. He felt himself immeasurably superior to the Malay seamen whom he had to handle, and treated them with lofty toleration, notwithstanding his opinion that at a pinch those chaps would be found emphatically “not there.”

As soon as his mind came back from his home leave, he detached himself from the rail and, walking forward, stood by the break of the poop, looking along the port side of the main deck. Lingard on his own side stopped in his walk and also gazed absentmindedly before him. In the waist of the brig, in the narrow spars that were lashed on each side of the hatchway, he could see a group of men squatting in a circle around a wooden tray piled up with rice, which stood on the just swept deck. The dark-faced, soft-eyed silent men, squatting on their hams, fed decorously with an earnestness that did not exclude reserve.

Of the lot, only one or two wore sarongs, the others having submitted — at least at sea — to the indignity of European trousers. Only two sat on the spars. One, a man with a childlike, light yellow face, smiling with fatuous imbecility under the wisps of straight coarse hair dyed a mahogany tint, was the tindal of the crew — a kind of boatswain’s or serang’s mate. The other, sitting beside him on the booms, was a man nearly black, not much bigger

than a large ape, and wearing on his wrinkled face that look of comical truculence which is often characteristic of men from the southwestern coast of Sumatra.

This was the kassab or store-keeper, the holder of a position of dignity and ease. The kassab was the only one of the crew taking their evening meal who noticed the presence on deck of their commander. He muttered something to the tindal who directly cocked his old hat on one side, which senseless action invested him with an altogether foolish appearance. The others heard, but went on somnolently feeding with spidery movements of their lean arms.

The sun was no more than a degree or so above the horizon, and from the heated surface of the waters a slight low mist began to rise; a mist thin, invisible to the human eye; yet strong enough to change the sun into a mere glowing red disc, a disc vertical and hot, rolling down to the edge of the horizontal and cold-looking disc of the shining sea. Then the edges touched and the circular expanse of water took on suddenly a tint, sombre, like a frown; deep, like the brooding meditation of evil.

The falling sun seemed to be arrested for a moment in his descent by the sleeping waters, while from it, to the motionless brig, shot out on the polished and dark surface of the sea a track of light, straight and shining, resplendent and direct; a path of gold and crimson and purple, a path that seemed to lead dazzling and terrible from the earth straight into heaven through the portals of a glorious death. It faded slowly. The sea vanquished the light. At last only a vestige of the sun remained, far off, like a red spark floating on the water. It lingered, and all at once — without warning — went out as if extinguished by a treacherous hand.

“Gone,” cried Lingard, who had watched intently yet missed the last moment. “Gone! Look at the cabin clock, Shaw!”

“Nearly right, I think, sir. Three minutes past six.”

The helmsman struck four bells sharply. Another barefooted seacannie glided on the far side of the poop to relieve the wheel, and the serang of the brig came up the ladder to take charge of the deck from Shaw. He came up to the compass, and stood waiting silently.

“The course is south by east when you get the wind, serang,” said Shaw, distinctly.

“Sou’ by eas’,” repeated the elderly Malay with grave earnestness.

“Let me know when she begins to steer,” added Lingard.

“Ya, Tuan,” answered the man, glancing rapidly at the sky. “Wind coming,” he muttered.

“I think so, too,” whispered Lingard as if to himself.

The shadows were gathering rapidly round the brig. A mulatto put his head out of the companion and called out:

“Ready, sir.”

“Let’s get a mouthful of something to eat, Shaw,” said Lingard. “I say, just take a look around before coming below. It will be dark when we come up again.”

“Certainly, sir,” said Shaw, taking up a long glass and putting it to his eyes. “Blessed thing,” he went on in snatches while he worked the tubes in and out, “I can’t — never somehow — Ah! I’ve got it right at last!”

He revolved slowly on his heels, keeping the end of the tube on the skyline. Then he shut the instrument with a click, and said decisively:

“Nothing in sight, sir.”

He followed his captain down below rubbing his hands cheerfully.

For a good while there was no sound on the poop of the brig. Then the seacannie at the wheel spoke dreamily:

“Did the malim say there was no one on the sea?”

“Yes,” grunted the serang without looking at the man behind him.

“Between the islands there was a boat,” pronounced the man very softly.

The serang, his hands behind his back, his feet slightly apart, stood very straight and stiff by the side of the compass stand. His face, now hardly visible, was as inexpressive as the door of a safe.

“Now, listen to me,” insisted the helmsman in a gentle tone.

The man in authority did not budge a hair’s breadth. The seacannie bent down a little from the height of the wheel grating.

“I saw a boat,” he murmured with something of the tender obstinacy of a lover begging for a favour. “I saw a boat, O Haji Wasub! Ya! Haji Wasub!”

The serang had been twice a pilgrim, and was not insensible to the sound of his rightful title. There was a grim smile on his face.

“You saw a floating tree, O Sali,” he said, ironically.

“I am Sali, and my eyes are better than the bewitched brass thing that pulls out to a great length,” said the pertinacious helmsman. “There was a boat, just clear of the easternmost island. There was a boat, and they in her could see the ship on the light of the west — unless they are blind men lost on the sea. I have seen her. Have you seen her, too, O Haji Wasub?”

“Am I a fat white man?” snapped the serang. “I was a man of the sea before you were born, O Sali! The order is to keep silence and mind the rudder, lest evil befall the ship.”

After these words he resumed his rigid aloofness. He stood, his legs slightly apart, very stiff and straight, a little on one side of the compass stand. His eyes travelled incessantly from the illuminated card to the shadowy sails of the brig and back again, while his body was motionless as if made of wood and built into the ship’s frame. Thus, with a forced and tense watchfulness, Haji Wasub, serang of the brig Lightning, kept the captain’s watch unwearied and wakeful, a slave to duty.

In half an hour after sunset the darkness had taken complete possession of earth and heavens. The islands had melted into the night. And on the smooth water of the Straits, the little brig lying so still, seemed to sleep profoundly, wrapped up in a scented mantle of star light and silence.

## II

It was half-past eight o’clock before Lingard came on deck again. Shaw — now with a coat on — trotted up and down the poop leaving behind him a smell of tobacco smoke. An irregularly glowing spark seemed to run by itself in the darkness before the rounded form of his head. Above the masts of the brig the dome of the clear heaven was full of lights that flickered, as if some mighty breathings high up there had been swaying about the flame of the stars. There was no sound along the brig’s decks, and the heavy shadows that lay on it had the aspect, in that silence, of secret places concealing crouching forms that waited in perfect stillness for some decisive event. Lingard struck a match to light his cheroot, and his powerful face with narrowed eyes stood out for a moment in the night and vanished suddenly. Then two shadowy forms and two red sparks moved backward and forward on the poop. A larger, but a paler and oval patch of light from the compass lamps lay on the brasses of the wheel and on the breast of the Malay standing by the helm. Lingard’s voice, as if unable altogether to master the enormous silence of the sea, sounded muffled, very calm — without the usual deep ring in it.

“Not much change, Shaw,” he said.

“No, sir, not much. I can just see the island — the big one — still in the same place. It strikes me, sir, that, for calms, this here sea is a devil of locality.”

He cut “locality” in two with an emphatic pause. It was a good word. He was pleased with himself for thinking of it. He went on again:

“Now — since noon, this big island — ”

“Carimata, Shaw,” interrupted Lingard.

“Aye, sir; Carimata — I mean. I must say — being a stranger hereabouts — I haven’t got the run of those — ”

He was going to say “names” but checked himself and said, “appellations,” instead, sounding every syllable lovingly.

“Having for these last fifteen years,” he continued, “sailed regularly from London in East-Indiamen, I am more at home over there — in the Bay.”

He pointed into the night toward the northwest and stared as if he could see from where he stood that Bay of Bengal where — as he affirmed — he would be so much more at home.

“You’ll soon get used — ” muttered Lingard, swinging in his rapid walk past his mate. Then he turned round, came back, and asked sharply.

“You said there was nothing afloat in sight before dark? Hey?”

“Not that I could see, sir. When I took the deck again at eight, I asked that serang whether there was anything about; and I understood him to say there was no more as when I went below at six. This is a lonely sea at times — ain’t it, sir? Now, one would think at this time of the year the homeward-bounders from China would be pretty thick here.”

“Yes,” said Lingard, “we have met very few ships since we left Pedra Branca over the stern. Yes; it has been a lonely sea. But for all that, Shaw, this sea, if lonely, is not blind. Every island in it is an eye. And now, since our squadron has left for the China waters — ”

He did not finish his sentence. Shaw put his hands in his pockets, and propped his back against the sky-light, comfortably.

“They say there is going to be a war with China,” he said in a gossiping tone, “and the French are going along with us as they did in the Crimea five years ago. It seems to me we’re getting mighty good friends with the French. I’ve not much of an opinion about that. What do you think, Captain Lingard?”

“I have met their men-of-war in the Pacific,” said Lingard, slowly. “The ships were fine and the fellows in them were civil enough to me — and very curious about my business,” he added with a laugh. “However, I wasn’t there to make war on them. I had a rotten old cutter then, for trade, Shaw,” he went on with animation.

“Had you, sir?” said Shaw without any enthusiasm. “Now give me a big ship — a ship, I say, that one may — ”

“And later on, some years ago,” interrupted Lingard, “I chummed with a French skipper in Ampanam — being the only two white men in the whole place. He was a good fellow, and free with his red wine. His English was difficult to understand, but he could sing songs in his own language about ah-moor — Ah-moor means love, in French — Shaw.”

“So it does, sir — so it does. When I was second mate of a Sunderland barque, in forty-one, in the Mediterranean, I could pay out their lingo as easy as you would a five-inch warp over a ship’s side — ”

“Yes, he was a proper man,” pursued Lingard, meditatively, as if for himself only. “You could not find a better fellow for company ashore. He had an affair with a Bali girl, who one evening threw a red blossom at him from within a doorway, as we were going together to pay our respects to the Rajah’s nephew. He was a good-looking Frenchman, he was — but the girl belonged to the Rajah’s nephew, and it was a serious matter. The old Rajah got angry and said the girl must die. I don’t think the nephew cared particularly to have her krissed; but the old fellow made a great fuss and sent one of his own chief men to see the thing done — and the girl had enemies — her own relations approved! We could do nothing. Mind, Shaw, there was absolutely nothing else between them but that unlucky flower which the Frenchman pinned to his coat — and afterward, when the girl was dead, wore under his shirt, hung round his neck in a small box. I suppose he had nothing else to put it into.”

“Would those savages kill a woman for that?” asked Shaw, incredulously.

“Aye! They are pretty moral there. That was the first time in my life I nearly went to war on my own account, Shaw. We couldn’t talk those fellows over. We couldn’t bribe them, though the Frenchman offered the best he had, and I was ready to back him to the last dollar, to the last rag of cotton, Shaw! No use — they were that blamed respectable. So, says the Frenchman to me: ‘My friend, if they won’t take our gunpowder for a gift let us burn it to give them lead.’ I was armed as you see now; six eight-pounders on the main deck and a long eighteen on the forecastle — and I wanted to try ‘em. You may believe me! However, the Frenchman had nothing but a few old muskets; and the beggars got to windward of us by fair words, till one morning a boat’s crew from the Frenchman’s ship found the girl lying dead on the beach. That put an end to our plans. She was out



of her trouble anyhow, and no reasonable man will fight for a dead woman. I was never vengeful, Shaw, and — after all — she didn't throw that flower at me. But it broke the Frenchman up altogether. He began to mope, did no business, and shortly afterward sailed away. I cleared a good many pence out of that trip, I remember."

With these words he seemed to come to the end of his memories of that trip. Shaw stifled a yawn.

"Women are the cause of a lot of trouble," he said, dispassionately. "In the Morayshire, I remember, we had once a passenger — an old gentleman — who was telling us a yarn about them old-time Greeks fighting for ten years about some woman. The Turks kidnapped her, or something. Anyway, they fought in Turkey; which I may well believe. Them Greeks and Turks were always fighting. My father was master's mate on board one of the three-deckers at the battle of Navarino — and that was when we went to help those Greeks. But this affair about a woman was long before that time."

"I should think so," muttered Lingard, hanging over the rail, and watching the fleeting gleams that passed deep down in the water, along the ship's bottom.

"Yes. Times are changed. They were unenlightened in those old days. My grandfather was a preacher and, though my father served in the navy, I don't hold with war. Sinful the old gentleman called it — and I think so, too. Unless with Chinamen, or niggers, or such people as must be kept in order and won't listen to reason; having not sense enough to know what's good for them, when it's explained to them by their betters — missionaries, and such like au-tho-ri-ties. But to fight ten years. And for a woman!"

"I have read the tale in a book," said Lingard, speaking down over the side as if setting his words gently afloat upon the sea. "I have read the tale. She was very beautiful."

"That only makes it worse, sir — if anything. You may depend on it she was no good. Those pagan times will never come back, thank God. Ten years of murder and unrighteousness! And for a woman! Would anybody do it now? Would you do it, sir? Would you — "

The sound of a bell struck sharply interrupted Shaw's discourse. High aloft, some dry block sent out a screech, short and lamentable, like a cry of pain. It pierced the quietness of the night to the very core, and seemed to

destroy the reserve which it had imposed upon the tones of the two men, who spoke now loudly.

“Throw the cover over the binnacle,” said Lingard in his duty voice. “The thing shines like a full moon. We mustn’t show more lights than we can help, when becalmed at night so near the land. No use in being seen if you can’t see yourself — is there? Bear that in mind, Mr. Shaw. There may be some vagabonds prying about — ”

“I thought all this was over and done for,” said Shaw, busying himself with the cover, “since Sir Thomas Cochrane swept along the Borneo coast with his squadron some years ago. He did a rare lot of fighting — didn’t he? We heard about it from the chaps of the sloop *Diana* that was refitting in Calcutta when I was there in the Warwick Castle. They took some king’s town up a river hereabouts. The chaps were full of it.”

“Sir Thomas did good work,” answered Lingard, “but it will be a long time before these seas are as safe as the English Channel is in peace time. I spoke about that light more to get you in the way of things to be attended to in these seas than for anything else. Did you notice how few native craft we’ve sighted for all these days we have been drifting about — one may say — in this sea?”

“I can’t say I have attached any significance to the fact, sir.”

“It’s a sign that something is up. Once set a rumour afloat in these waters, and it will make its way from island to island, without any breeze to drive it along.”

“Being myself a deep-water man sailing steadily out of home ports nearly all my life,” said Shaw with great deliberation, “I cannot pretend to see through the peculiarities of them out-of-the-way parts. But I can keep a lookout in an ordinary way, and I have noticed that craft of any kind seemed scarce, for the last few days: considering that we had land aboard of us — one side or another — nearly every day.”

“You will get to know the peculiarities, as you call them, if you remain any time with me,” remarked Lingard, negligently.

“I hope I shall give satisfaction, whether the time be long or short!” said Shaw, accentuating the meaning of his words by the distinctness of his utterance. “A man who has spent thirty-two years of his life on saltwater can say no more. If being an officer of home ships for the last fifteen years I don’t understand the heathen ways of them there savages, in matters of seamanship and duty, you will find me all there, Captain Lingard.”

“Except, judging from what you said a little while ago — except in the matter of fighting,” said Lingard, with a short laugh.

“Fighting! I am not aware that anybody wants to fight me. I am a peaceable man, Captain Lingard, but when put to it, I could fight as well as any of them flat-nosed chaps we have to make shift with, instead of a proper crew of decent Christians. Fighting!” he went on with unexpected pugnacity of tone, “Fighting! If anybody comes to fight me, he will find me all there, I swear!”

“That’s all right. That’s all right,” said Lingard, stretching his arms above his head and wriggling his shoulders. “My word! I do wish a breeze would come to let us get away from here. I am rather in a hurry, Shaw.”

“Indeed, sir! Well, I never yet met a thorough seafaring man who was not in a hurry when a con-demned spell of calm had him by the heels. When a breeze comes . . . just listen to this, sir!”

“I hear it,” said Lingard. “Tide-rip, Shaw.”

“So I presume, sir. But what a fuss it makes. Seldom heard such a — ”

On the sea, upon the furthest limits of vision, appeared an advancing streak of seething foam, resembling a narrow white ribbon, drawn rapidly along the level surface of the water by its two ends, which were lost in the darkness. It reached the brig, passed under, stretching out on each side; and on each side the water became noisy, breaking into numerous and tiny wavelets, a mimicry of an immense agitation. Yet the vessel in the midst of this sudden and loud disturbance remained as motionless and steady as if she had been securely moored between the stone walls of a safe dock. In a few moments the line of foam and ripple running swiftly north passed at once beyond sight and earshot, leaving no trace on the unconquerable calm.

“Now this is very curious — ” began Shaw.

Lingard made a gesture to command silence. He seemed to listen yet, as if the wash of the ripple could have had an echo which he expected to hear. And a man’s voice that was heard forward had something of the impersonal ring of voices thrown back from hard and lofty cliffs upon the empty distances of the sea. It spoke in Malay — faintly.

“What?” hailed Shaw. “What is it?”

Lingard put a restraining hand for a moment on his chief officer’s shoulder, and moved forward smartly. Shaw followed, puzzled. The rapid exchange of incomprehensible words thrown backward and forward

through the shadows of the brig's main deck from his captain to the lookout man and back again, made him feel sadly out of it, somehow.

Lingard had called out sharply — "What do you see?" The answer direct and quick was — "I hear, Tuan. I hear oars."

"Whereabouts?"

"The night is all around us. I hear them near."

"Port or starboard?"

There was a short delay in answer this time. On the quarter-deck, under the poop, bare feet shuffled. Somebody coughed. At last the voice forward said doubtfully:

"Kanan."

"Call the serang, Mr. Shaw," said Lingard, calmly, "and have the hands turned up. They are all lying about the decks. Look sharp now. There's something near us. It's annoying to be caught like this," he added in a vexed tone.

He crossed over to the starboard side, and stood listening, one hand grasping the royal back-stay, his ear turned to the sea, but he could hear nothing from there. The quarter-deck was filled with subdued sounds. Suddenly, a long, shrill whistle soared, reverberated loudly amongst the flat surfaces of motionless sails, and gradually grew faint as if the sound had escaped and gone away, running upon the water. Haji Wasub was on deck and ready to carry out the white man's commands. Then silence fell again on the brig, until Shaw spoke quietly.

"I am going forward now, sir, with the tindal. We're all at stations."

"Aye, Mr. Shaw. Very good. Mind they don't board you — but I can hear nothing. Not a sound. It can't be much."

"The fellow has been dreaming, no doubt. I have good ears, too, and — "

He went forward and the end of his sentence was lost in an indistinct growl. Lingard stood attentive. One by one the three seacannies off duty appeared on the poop and busied themselves around a big chest that stood by the side of the cabin companion. A rattle and clink of steel weapons turned out on the deck was heard, but the men did not even whisper. Lingard peered steadily into the night, then shook his head.

"Serang!" he called, half aloud.

The spare old man ran up the ladder so smartly that his bony feet did not seem to touch the steps. He stood by his commander, his hands behind his back; a figure indistinct but straight as an arrow.

“Who was looking out?” asked Lingard.

“Badroon, the Bugis,” said Wasub, in his crisp, jerky manner.

“I can hear nothing. Badroon heard the noise in his mind.”

“The night hides the boat.”

“Have you seen it?”

“Yes, Tuan. Small boat. Before sunset. By the land. Now coming here — near. Badroon heard him.”

“Why didn’t you report it, then?” asked Lingard, sharply.

“Malim spoke. He said: ‘Nothing there,’ while I could see. How could I know what was in his mind or yours, Tuan?”

“Do you hear anything now?”

“No. They stopped now. Perhaps lost the ship — who knows? Perhaps afraid — ”

“Well!” muttered Lingard, moving his feet uneasily. “I believe you lie. What kind of boat?”

“White men’s boat. A four-men boat, I think. Small. Tuan, I hear him now! There!”

He stretched his arm straight out, pointing abeam for a time, then his arm fell slowly.

“Coming this way,” he added with decision.

From forward Shaw called out in a startled tone:

“Something on the water, sir! Broad on this bow!”

“All right!” called back Lingard.

A lump of blacker darkness floated into his view. From it came over the water English words — deliberate, reaching him one by one; as if each had made its own difficult way through the profound stillness of the night.

“What — ship — is — that — pray?”

“English brig,” answered Lingard, after a short moment of hesitation.

“A brig! I thought you were something bigger,” went on the voice from the sea with a tinge of disappointment in its deliberate tone. “I am coming alongside — if — you — please.”

“No! you don’t!” called Lingard back, sharply. The leisurely drawl of the invisible speaker seemed to him offensive, and woke up a hostile feeling. “No! you don’t if you care for your boat. Where do you spring from? Who are you — anyhow? How many of you are there in that boat?”

After these emphatic questions there was an interval of silence. During that time the shape of the boat became a little more distinct. She must have

carried some way on her yet, for she loomed up bigger and nearly abreast of where Lingard stood, before the self-possessed voice was heard again:

“I will show you.”

Then, after another short pause, the voice said, less loud but very plain:

“Strike on the gunwale. Strike hard, John!” and suddenly a blue light blazed out, illuminating with a livid flame a round patch in the night. In the smoke and splutter of that ghastly halo appeared a white, four-oared gig with five men sitting in her in a row. Their heads were turned toward the brig with a strong expression of curiosity on their faces, which, in this glare, brilliant and sinister, took on a deathlike aspect and resembled the faces of interested corpses. Then the bowman dropped into the water the light he held above his head and the darkness, rushing back at the boat, swallowed it with a loud and angry hiss.

“Five of us,” said the composed voice out of the night that seemed now darker than before. “Four hands and myself. We belong to a yacht — a British yacht — ”

“Come on board!” shouted Lingard. “Why didn’t you speak at once? I thought you might have been some masquerading Dutchmen from a dodging gunboat.”

“Do I speak like a blamed Dutchman? Pull a stroke, boys — oars! Tend bow, John.”

The boat came alongside with a gentle knock, and a man’s shape began to climb at once up the brig’s side with a kind of ponderous agility. It poised itself for a moment on the rail to say down into the boat — ”Sheer off a little, boys,” then jumped on deck with a thud, and said to Shaw who was coming aft: “Good evening . . . Captain, sir?”

“No. On the poop!” growled Shaw.

“Come up here. Come up,” called Lingard, impatiently.

The Malays had left their stations and stood clustered by the mainmast in a silent group. Not a word was spoken on the brig’s decks, while the stranger made his way to the waiting captain. Lingard saw approaching him a short, dapper man, who touched his cap and repeated his greeting in a cool drawl:

“Good evening. . . Captain, sir?”

“Yes, I am the master — what’s the matter? Adrift from your ship? Or what?”

“Adrift? No! We left her four days ago, and have been pulling that gig in a calm, nearly ever since. My men are done. So is the water. Lucky thing I sighted you.”

“You sighted me!” exclaimed Lingard. “When? What time?”

“Not in the dark, you may be sure. We’ve been knocking about amongst some islands to the southward, breaking our hearts tugging at the oars in one channel, then in another — trying to get clear. We got round an islet — a barren thing, in shape like a loaf of sugar — and I caught sight of a vessel a long way off. I took her bearing in a hurry and we buckled to; but another of them currents must have had hold of us, for it was a long time before we managed to clear that islet. I steered by the stars, and, by the Lord Harry, I began to think I had missed you somehow — because it must have been you I saw.”

“Yes, it must have been. We had nothing in sight all day,” assented Lingard. “Where’s your vessel?” he asked, eagerly.

“Hard and fast on middling soft mud — I should think about sixty miles from here. We are the second boat sent off for assistance. We parted company with the other on Tuesday. She must have passed to the northward of you to-day. The chief officer is in her with orders to make for Singapore. I am second, and was sent off toward the Straits here on the chance of falling in with some ship. I have a letter from the owner. Our gentry are tired of being stuck in the mud and wish for assistance.”

“What assistance did you expect to find down here?”

“The letter will tell you that. May I ask, Captain, for a little water for the chaps in my boat? And I myself would thank you for a drink. We haven’t had a mouthful since this afternoon. Our breaker leaked out somehow.”

“See to it, Mr. Shaw,” said Lingard. “Come down the cabin, Mr. — ”

“Carter is my name.”

“Ah! Mr. Carter. Come down, come down,” went on Lingard, leading the way down the cabin stairs.

The steward had lighted the swinging lamp, and had put a decanter and bottles on the table. The cuddy looked cheerful, painted white, with gold mouldings round the panels. Opposite the curtained recess of the stern windows there was a sideboard with a marble top, and, above it, a looking-glass in a gilt frame. The semicircular couch round the stern had cushions of crimson plush. The table was covered with a black Indian tablecloth embroidered in vivid colours. Between the beams of the poop-deck were

fitted racks for muskets, the barrels of which glinted in the light. There were twenty-four of them between the four beams. As many sword-bayonets of an old pattern encircled the polished teakwood of the rudder-casing with a double belt of brass and steel. All the doors of the state-rooms had been taken off the hinges and only curtains closed the doorways. They seemed to be made of yellow Chinese silk, and fluttered all together, the four of them, as the two men entered the cuddy.

Carter took in all at a glance, but his eyes were arrested by a circular shield hung slanting above the brass hilts of the bayonets. On its red field, in relief and brightly gilt, was represented a sheaf of conventional thunderbolts darting down the middle between the two capitals T. L. Lingard examined his guest curiously. He saw a young man, but looking still more youthful, with a boyish smooth face much sunburnt, twinkling blue eyes, fair hair and a slight moustache. He noticed his arrested gaze.

“Ah, you’re looking at that thing. It’s a present from the builder of this brig. The best man that ever launched a craft. It’s supposed to be the ship’s name between my initials — flash of lightning — d’you see? The brig’s name is Lightning and mine is Lingard.”

“Very pretty thing that: shows the cabin off well,” murmured Carter, politely.

They drank, nodding at each other, and sat down.

“Now for the letter,” said Lingard.

Carter passed it over the table and looked about, while Lingard took the letter out of an open envelope, addressed to the commander of any British ship in the Java Sea. The paper was thick, had an embossed heading: “Schooner-yacht Hermit” and was dated four days before. The message said that on a hazy night the yacht had gone ashore upon some outlying shoals off the coast of Borneo. The land was low. The opinion of the sailing-master was that the vessel had gone ashore at the top of high water, spring tides. The coast was completely deserted to all appearance. During the four days they had been stranded there they had sighted in the distance two small native vessels, which did not approach. The owner concluded by asking any commander of a homeward-bound ship to report the yacht’s position in Anjer on his way through Sunda Straits — or to any British or Dutch man-of-war he might meet. The letter ended by anticipatory thanks, the offer to pay any expenses in connection with the sending of messages from Anjer, and the usual polite expressions.



Folding the paper slowly in the old creases, Lingard said — "I am not going to Anjer — nor anywhere near."

"Any place will do, I fancy," said Carter.

"Not the place where I am bound to," answered Lingard, opening the letter again and glancing at it uneasily. "He does not describe very well the coast, and his latitude is very uncertain," he went on. "I am not clear in my mind where exactly you are stranded. And yet I know every inch of that land — over there."

Carter cleared his throat and began to talk in his slow drawl. He seemed to dole out facts, to disclose with sparing words the features of the coast, but every word showed the minuteness of his observation, the clear vision of a seaman able to master quickly the aspect of a strange land and of a strange sea. He presented, with concise lucidity, the picture of the tangle of reefs and sandbanks, through which the yacht had miraculously blundered in the dark before she took the ground.

"The weather seems clear enough at sea," he observed, finally, and stopped to drink a long draught. Lingard, bending over the table, had been listening with eager attention. Carter went on in his curt and deliberate manner:

"I noticed some high trees on what I take to be the mainland to the south — and whoever has business in that bight was smart enough to whitewash two of them: one on the point, and another farther in. Landmarks, I guess. . . . What's the matter, Captain?"

Lingard had jumped to his feet, but Carter's exclamation caused him to sit down again.

"Nothing, nothing . . . Tell me, how many men have you in that yacht?"

"Twenty-three, besides the gentry, the owner, his wife and a Spanish gentleman — a friend they picked up in Manila."

"So you were coming from Manila?"

"Aye. Bound for Batavia. The owner wishes to study the Dutch colonial system. Wants to expose it, he says. One can't help hearing a lot when keeping watch aft — you know how it is. Then we are going to Ceylon to meet the mail-boat there. The owner is going home as he came out, overland through Egypt. The yacht would return round the Cape, of course."

"A lady?" said Lingard. "You say there is a lady on board. Are you armed?"

“Not much,” replied Carter, negligently. “There are a few muskets and two sporting guns aft; that’s about all — I fancy it’s too much, or not enough,” he added with a faint smile.

Lingard looked at him narrowly.

“Did you come out from home in that craft?” he asked.

“Not I! I am not one of them regular yacht hands. I came out of the hospital in Hongkong. I’ve been two years on the China coast.”

He stopped, then added in an explanatory murmur:

“Opium clippers — you know. Nothing of brass buttons about me. My ship left me behind, and I was in want of work. I took this job but I didn’t want to go home particularly. It’s slow work after sailing with old Robinson in the Ly-e-moon. That was my ship. Heard of her, Captain?”

“Yes, yes,” said Lingard, hastily. “Look here, Mr. Carter, which way was your chief officer trying for Singapore? Through the Straits of Rhio?”

“I suppose so,” answered Carter in a slightly surprised tone; “why do you ask?”

“Just to know . . . What is it, Mr. Shaw?”

“There’s a black cloud rising to the northward, sir, and we shall get a breeze directly,” said Shaw from the doorway.

He lingered there with his eyes fixed on the decanters.

“Will you have a glass?” said Lingard, leaving his seat. “I will go up and have a look.”

He went on deck. Shaw approached the table and began to help himself, handling the bottles in profound silence and with exaggerated caution, as if he had been measuring out of fragile vessels a dose of some deadly poison. Carter, his hands in his pockets, and leaning back, examined him from head to foot with a cool stare. The mate of the brig raised the glass to his lips, and glaring above the rim at the stranger, drained the contents slowly.

“You have a fine nose for finding ships in the dark, Mister,” he said, distinctly, putting the glass on the table with extreme gentleness.

“Eh? What’s that? I sighted you just after sunset.”

“And you knew where to look, too,” said Shaw, staring hard.

“I looked to the westward where there was still some light, as any sensible man would do,” retorted the other a little impatiently. “What are you trying to get at?”

“And you have a ready tongue to blow about yourself — haven’t you?”

“Never saw such a man in my life,” declared Carter, with a return of his nonchalant manner. “You seem to be troubled about something.”

“I don’t like boats to come sneaking up from nowhere in particular, alongside a ship when I am in charge of the deck. I can keep a lookout as well as any man out of home ports, but I hate to be circumvented by muffled oars and such ungentlemanlike tricks. Yacht officer — indeed. These seas must be full of such yachtsmen. I consider you played a mean trick on me. I told my old man there was nothing in sight at sunset — and no more there was. I believe you blundered upon us by chance — for all your boasting about sunsets and bearings. Gammon! I know you came on blindly on top of us, and with muffled oars, too. D’ye call that decent?”

“If I did muffle the oars it was for a good reason. I wanted to slip past a cove where some native craft were moored. That was common prudence in such a small boat, and not armed — as I am. I saw you right enough, but I had no intention to startle anybody. Take my word for it.”

“I wish you had gone somewhere else,” growled Shaw. “I hate to be put in the wrong through accident and untruthfulness — there! Here’s my old man calling me — ”

He left the cabin hurriedly and soon afterward Lingard came down, and sat again facing Carter across the table. His face was grave but resolute.

“We shall get the breeze directly,” he said.

“Then, sir,” said Carter, getting up, “if you will give me back that letter I shall go on cruising about here to speak some other ship. I trust you will report us wherever you are going.”

“I am going to the yacht and I shall keep the letter,” answered Lingard with decision. “I know exactly where she is, and I must go to the rescue of those people. It’s most fortunate you’ve fallen in with me, Mr. Carter. Fortunate for them and fortunate for me,” he added in a lower tone.

“Yes,” drawled Carter, reflectively. “There may be a tidy bit of salvage money if you should get the vessel off, but I don’t think you can do much. I had better stay out here and try to speak some gunboat — ”

“You must come back to your ship with me,” said Lingard, authoritatively. “Never mind the gunboats.”

“That wouldn’t be carrying out my orders,” argued Carter. “I’ve got to speak a homeward-bound ship or a man-of-war — that’s plain enough. I am not anxious to knock about for days in an open boat, but — let me fill my fresh-water breaker, Captain, and I will be off.”

“Nonsense,” said Lingard, sharply. “You’ve got to come with me to show the place and — and help. I’ll take your boat in tow.”

Carter did not seem convinced. Lingard laid a heavy hand on his shoulder.

“Look here, young fellow. I am Tom Lingard and there’s not a white man among these islands, and very few natives, that have not heard of me. My luck brought you into my ship — and now I’ve got you, you must stay. You must!”

The last “must” burst out loud and sharp like a pistol-shot. Carter stepped back.

“Do you mean you would keep me by force?” he asked, startled.

“Force,” repeated Lingard. “It rests with you. I cannot let you speak any vessel. Your yacht has gone ashore in a most inconvenient place — for me; and with your boats sent off here and there, you would bring every infernal gunboat buzzing to a spot that was as quiet and retired as the heart of man could wish. You stranding just on that spot of the whole coast was my bad luck. And that I could not help. You coming upon me like this is my good luck. And that I hold!”

He dropped his clenched fist, big and muscular, in the light of the lamp on the black cloth, amongst the glitter of glasses, with the strong fingers closed tight upon the firm flesh of the palm. He left it there for a moment as if showing Carter that luck he was going to hold. And he went on:

“Do you know into what hornet’s nest your stupid people have blundered? How much d’ye think their lives are worth, just now? Not a brass farthing if the breeze fails me for another twenty-four hours. You may well open your eyes. It is so! And it may be too late now, while I am arguing with you here.”

He tapped the table with his knuckles, and the glasses, waking up, jingled a thin, plaintive finale to his speech. Carter stood leaning against the sideboard. He was amazed by the unexpected turn of the conversation; his jaw dropped slightly and his eyes never swerved for a moment from Lingard’s face. The silence in the cabin lasted only a few seconds, but to Carter, who waited breathlessly, it seemed very long. And all at once he heard in it, for the first time, the cabin clock tick distinctly, in pulsating beats, as though a little heart of metal behind the dial had been started into sudden palpitation.

“A gunboat!” shouted Lingard, suddenly, as if he had seen only in that moment, by the light of some vivid flash of thought, all the difficulties of the situation. “If you don’t go back with me there will be nothing left for you to go back to — very soon. Your gunboat won’t find a single ship’s rib or a single corpse left for a landmark. That she won’t. It isn’t a gunboat skipper you want. I am the man you want. You don’t know your luck when you see it, but I know mine, I do — and — look here — ”

He touched Carter’s chest with his forefinger, and said with a sudden gentleness of tone:

“I am a white man inside and out; I won’t let inoffensive people — and a woman, too — come to harm if I can help it. And if I can’t help, nobody can. You understand — nobody! There’s no time for it. But I am like any other man that is worth his salt: I won’t let the end of an undertaking go by the board while there is a chance to hold on — and it’s like this — ”

His voice was persuasive — almost caressing; he had hold now of a coat button and tugged at it slightly as he went on in a confidential manner:

“As it turns out, Mr. Carter, I would — in a manner of speaking — I would as soon shoot you where you stand as let you go to raise an alarm all over this sea about your confounded yacht. I have other lives to consider — and friends — and promises — and — and myself, too. I shall keep you,” he concluded, sharply.

Carter drew a long breath. On the deck above, the two men could hear soft footfalls, short murmurs, indistinct words spoken near the skylight. Shaw’s voice rang out loudly in growling tones:

“Furl the royals, you tindal!”

“It’s the queerest old go,” muttered Carter, looking down on to the floor. “You are a strange man. I suppose I must believe what you say — unless you and that fat mate of yours are a couple of escaped lunatics that got hold of a brig by some means. Why, that chap up there wanted to pick a quarrel with me for coming aboard, and now you threaten to shoot me rather than let me go. Not that I care much about that; for some time or other you would get hanged for it; and you don’t look like a man that will end that way. If what you say is only half true, I ought to get back to the yacht as quick as ever I can. It strikes me that your coming to them will be only a small mercy, anyhow — and I may be of some use — But this is the queerest. . . . May I go in my boat?”

“As you like,” said Lingard. “There’s a rain squall coming.”

"I am in charge and will get wet along of my chaps. Give us a good long line, Captain."

"It's done already," said Lingard. "You seem a sensible sailorman and can see that it would be useless to try and give me the slip."

"For a man so ready to shoot, you seem very trustful," drawled Carter. "If I cut adrift in a squall, I stand a pretty fair chance not to see you again."

"You just try," said Lingard, drily. "I have eyes in this brig, young man, that will see your boat when you couldn't see the ship. You are of the kind I like, but if you monkey with me I will find you — and when I find you I will run you down as surely as I stand here."

Carter slapped his thigh and his eyes twinkled.

"By the Lord Harry!" he cried. "If it wasn't for the men with me, I would try for sport. You are so cocksure about the lot you can do, Captain. You would aggravate a saint into open mutiny."

His easy good humour had returned; but after a short burst of laughter, he became serious.

"Never fear," he said, "I won't slip away. If there is to be any throat-cutting — as you seem to hint — mine will be there, too, I promise you, and. . . ."

He stretched his arms out, glanced at them, shook them a little.

"And this pair of arms to take care of it," he added, in his old, careless drawl.

But the master of the brig sitting with both his elbows on the table, his face in his hands, had fallen unexpectedly into a meditation so concentrated and so profound that he seemed neither to hear, see, nor breathe. The sight of that man's complete absorption in thought was to Carter almost more surprising than any other occurrence of that night. Had his strange host vanished suddenly from before his eyes, it could not have made him feel more uncomfortably alone in that cabin where the pertinacious clock kept ticking off the useless minutes of the calm before it would, with the same steady beat, begin to measure the aimless disturbance of the storm.

### III

After waiting a moment, Carter went on deck. The sky, the sea, the brig itself had disappeared in a darkness that had become impenetrable, palpable, and stifling. An immense cloud had come up running over the heavens, as if looking for the little craft, and now hung over it, arrested. To the south there was a livid trembling gleam, faint and sad, like a vanishing

memory of destroyed starlight. To the north, as if to prove the impossible, an incredibly blacker patch outlined on the tremendous blackness of the sky the heart of the coming squall. The glimmers in the water had gone out and the invisible sea all around lay mute and still as if it had died suddenly of fright.

Carter could see nothing. He felt about him people moving; he heard them in the darkness whispering faintly as if they had been exchanging secrets important or infamous. The night effaced even words, and its mystery had captured everything and every sound — had left nothing free but the unexpected that seemed to hover about one, ready to stretch out its stealthy hand in a touch sudden, familiar, and appalling. Even the careless disposition of the young ex-officer of an opium-clipper was affected by the ominous aspect of the hour. What was this vessel? What were those people? What would happen to-morrow? To the yacht? To himself? He felt suddenly without any additional reason but the darkness that it was a poor show, anyhow, a dashed poor show for all hands. The irrational conviction made him falter for a second where he stood and he gripped the slide of the companionway hard.

Shaw's voice right close to his ear relieved and cleared his troubled thoughts.

"Oh! it's you, Mister. Come up at last," said the mate of the brig slowly. "It appears we've got to give you a tow now. Of all the rum incidents, this beats all. A boat sneaks up from nowhere and turns out to be a long-expected friend! For you are one of them friends the skipper was going to meet somewhere here. Ain't you now? Come! I know more than you may think. Are we off to — you may just as well tell — off to — h'm ha . . . you know?"

"Yes. I know. Don't you?" articulated Carter, innocently.

Shaw remained very quiet for a minute.

"Where's my skipper?" he asked at last.

"I left him down below in a kind of trance. Where's my boat?"

"Your boat is hanging astern. And my opinion is that you are as uncivil as I've proved you to be untruthful. Egzz-actly."

Carter stumbled toward the taffrail and in the first step he made came full against somebody who glided away. It seemed to him that such a night brings men to a lower level. He thought that he might have been knocked on the head by anybody strong enough to lift a crow-bar. He felt strangely

irritated. He said loudly, aiming his words at Shaw whom he supposed somewhere near:

“And my opinion is that you and your skipper will come to a sudden bad end before — ”

“I thought you were in your boat. Have you changed your mind?” asked Lingard in his deep voice close to Carter’s elbow.

Carter felt his way along the rail, till his hand found a line that seemed, in the calm, to stream out of its own accord into the darkness. He hailed his boat, and directly heard the wash of water against her bows as she was hauled quickly under the counter. Then he loomed up shapeless on the rail, and the next moment disappeared as if he had fallen out of the universe. Lingard heard him say:

“Catch hold of my leg, John.” There were hollow sounds in the boat; a voice growled, “All right.”

“Keep clear of the counter,” said Lingard, speaking in quiet warning tones into the night. “The brig may get a lot of sternway on her should this squall not strike her fairly.”

“Aye, aye. I will mind,” was the muttered answer from the water.

Lingard crossed over to the port side, and looked steadily at the sooty mass of approaching vapours. After a moment he said curtly, “Brace up for the port tack, Mr. Shaw,” and remained silent, with his face to the sea. A sound, sorrowful and startling like the sigh of some immense creature, travelling across the starless space, passed above the vertical and lofty spars of the motionless brig.

It grew louder, then suddenly ceased for a moment, and the taut rigging of the brig was heard vibrating its answer in a singing note to this threatening murmur of the winds. A long and slow undulation lifted the level of the waters, as if the sea had drawn a deep breath of anxious suspense. The next minute an immense disturbance leaped out of the darkness upon the sea, kindling upon it a livid clearness of foam, and the first gust of the squall boarded the brig in a stinging flick of rain and spray. As if overwhelmed by the suddenness of the fierce onset, the vessel remained for a second upright where she floated, shaking with tremendous jerks from trucks to keel; while high up in the night the invisible canvas was heard rattling and beating about violently.

Then, with a quick double report, as of heavy guns, both topsails filled at once and the brig fell over swiftly on her side. Shaw was thrown headlong



against the skylight, and Lingard, who had encircled the weather rail with his arm, felt the vessel under his feet dart forward smoothly, and the deck become less slanting — the speed of the brig running off a little now, easing the overturning strain of the wind upon the distended surfaces of the sails. It was only the fineness of the little vessel's lines and the perfect shape of her hull that saved the canvas, and perhaps the spars, by enabling the ready craft to get way upon herself with such lightning-like rapidity. Lingard drew a long breath and yelled jubilantly at Shaw who was struggling up against wind and rain to his commander's side.

“She'll do. Hold on everything.”

Shaw tried to speak. He swallowed great mouthfuls of tepid water which the wind drove down his throat. The brig seemed to sail through undulating waves that passed swishing between the masts and swept over the decks with the fierce rush and noise of a cataract. From every spar and every rope a ragged sheet of water streamed flicking to leeward. The overpowering deluge seemed to last for an age; became unbearable — and, all at once, stopped. In a couple of minutes the shower had run its length over the brig and now could be seen like a straight grey wall, going away into the night under the fierce whispering of dissolving clouds. The wind eased. To the northward, low down in the darkness, three stars appeared in a row, leaping in and out between the crests of waves like the distant heads of swimmers in a running surf; and the retreating edge of the cloud, perfectly straight from east to west, slipped along the dome of the sky like an immense hemispheric, iron shutter pivoting down smoothly as if operated by some mighty engine. An inspiring and penetrating freshness flowed together with the shimmer of light, through the augmented glory of the heaven, a glory exalted, undimmed, and strangely startling as if a new world had been created during the short flight of the stormy cloud. It was a return to life, a return to space; the earth coming out from under a pall to take its place in the renewed and immense scintillation of the universe.

The brig, her yards slightly checked in, ran with an easy motion under the topsails, jib and driver, pushing contemptuously aside the turbulent crowd of noisy and agitated waves. As the craft went swiftly ahead she unrolled behind her over the uneasy darkness of the sea a broad ribbon of seething foam shot with wispy gleams of dark discs escaping from under the rudder. Far away astern, at the end of a line no thicker than a black thread, which dipped now and then its long curve in the bursting froth, a toy-like object

could be made out, elongated and dark, racing after the brig over the snowy whiteness of her wake.

Lingard walked aft, and, with both his hands on the taffrail, looked eagerly for Carter's boat. The first glance satisfied him that the yacht's gig was towing easily at the end of the long scope of line, and he turned away to look ahead and to leeward with a steady gaze. It was then half an hour past midnight and Shaw, relieved by Wasub, had gone below. Before he went, he said to Lingard, "I will be off, sir, if you're not going to make more sail yet." "Not yet for a while," had answered Lingard in a preoccupied manner; and Shaw departed aggrieved at such a neglect of making the best of a good breeze.

On the main deck dark-skinned men, whose clothing clung to their shivering limbs as if they had been overboard, had finished recoiling the braces, and clearing the gear. The kassab, after having hung the fore-topsail halyards in the becket, strutted into the waist toward a row of men who stood idly with their shoulders against the side of the long boat amidships. He passed along looking up close at the stolid faces. Room was made for him, and he took his place at the end.

"It was a great rain and a mighty wind, O men," he said, dogmatically, "but no wind can ever hurt this ship. That I knew while I stood minding the sail which is under my care."

A dull and inexpressive murmur was heard from the men. Over the high weather rail, a topping wave flung into their eyes a handful of heavy drops that stung like hail. There were low groans of indignation. A man sighed. Another emitted a spasmodic laugh through his chattering teeth. No one moved away. The little kassab wiped his face and went on in his cracked voice, to the accompaniment of the swishing sounds made by the seas that swept regularly astern along the ship's side.

"Have you heard him shout at the wind — louder than the wind? I have heard, being far forward. And before, too, in the many years I served this white man I have heard him often cry magic words that make all safe. Ya-wa! This is truth. Ask Wasub who is a Haji, even as I am."

"I have seen white men's ships with their masts broken — also wrecked like our own praus," remarked sadly a lean, lank fellow who shivered beside the kassab, hanging his head and trying to grasp his shoulder blades.

"True," admitted the kassab. "They are all the children of Satan but to some more favour is shown. To obey such men on the sea or in a fight is

good. I saw him who is master here fight with wild men who eat their enemies — far away to the eastward — and I dealt blows by his side without fear; for the charms he, no doubt, possesses protect his servants also. I am a believer and the Stoned One can not touch my forehead. Yet the reward of victory comes from the accursed. For six years have I sailed with that white man; first as one who minds the rudder, for I am a man of the sea, born in a prau, and am skilled in such work. And now, because of my great knowledge of his desires, I have the care of all things in this ship.”

Several voices muttered, “True. True.” They remained apathetic and patient, in the rush of wind, under the repeated short flights of sprays. The slight roll of the ship balanced them stiffly all together where they stood propped against the big boat. The breeze humming between the inclined masts enveloped their dark and silent figures in the unceasing resonance of its breath.

The brig’s head had been laid so as to pass a little to windward of the small islands of the Carimata group. They had been till then hidden in the night, but now both men on the lookout reported land ahead in one long cry. Lingard, standing to leeward abreast of the wheel, watched the islet first seen. When it was nearly abeam of the brig he gave his orders, and Wasub hurried off to the main deck. The helm was put down, the yards on the main came slowly square and the wet canvas of the main-topsail clung suddenly to the mast after a single heavy flap. The dazzling streak of the ship’s wake vanished. The vessel lost her way and began to dip her bows into the quick succession of the running head seas. And at every slow plunge of the craft, the song of the wind would swell louder amongst the waving spars, with a wild and mournful note.

Just as the brig’s boat had been swung out, ready for lowering, the yacht’s gig hauled up by its line appeared tossing and splashing on the lee quarter. Carter stood up in the stern sheets balancing himself cleverly to the disordered motion of his cockleshell. He hailed the brig twice to know what was the matter, not being able from below and in the darkness to make out what that confused group of men on the poop were about. He got no answer, though he could see the shape of a man standing by himself aft, and apparently watching him. He was going to repeat his hail for the third time when he heard the rattling of tackles followed by a heavy splash, a burst of voices, scrambling hollow sounds — and a dark mass detaching itself from the brig’s side swept past him on the crest of a passing wave. For less than a

second he could see on the shimmer of the night sky the shape of a boat, the heads of men, the blades of oars pointing upward while being got out hurriedly. Then all this sank out of sight, reappeared once more far off and hardly discernible, before vanishing for good.

“Why, they’ve lowered a boat!” exclaimed Carter, falling back in his seat. He remembered that he had seen only a few hours ago three native praus lurking amongst those very islands. For a moment he had the idea of casting off to go in chase of that boat, so as to find out. . . . Find out what? He gave up his idea at once. What could he do?

The conviction that the yacht, and everything belonging to her, were in some indefinite but very real danger, took afresh a strong hold of him, and the persuasion that the master of the brig was going there to help did not by any means assuage his alarm. The fact only served to complicate his uneasiness with a sense of mystery.

The white man who spoke as if that sea was all his own, or as if people intruded upon his privacy by taking the liberty of getting wrecked on a coast where he and his friends did some queer business, seemed to him an undesirable helper. That the boat had been lowered to communicate with the praus seen and avoided by him in the evening he had no doubt. The thought had flashed on him at once. It had an ugly look. Yet the best thing to do after all was to hang on and get back to the yacht and warn them. . . . Warn them against whom? The man had been perfectly open with him. Warn them against what? It struck him that he hadn’t the slightest conception of what would happen, of what was even likely to happen. That strange rescuer himself was bringing the news of danger. Danger from the natives of course. And yet he was in communication with those natives. That was evident. That boat going off in the night. . . . Carter swore heartily to himself. His perplexity became positive bodily pain as he sat, wet, uncomfortable, and still, one hand on the tiller, thrown up and down in headlong swings of his boat. And before his eyes, towering high, the black hull of the brig also rose and fell, setting her stern down in the sea, now and again, with a tremendous and foaming splash. Not a sound from her reached Carter’s ears. She seemed an abandoned craft but for the outline of a man’s head and body still visible in a watchful attitude above the taffrail.

Carter told his bowman to haul up closer and hailed:

“Brig ahoy. Anything wrong?”

He waited, listening. The shadowy man still watched. After some time a curt “No” came back in answer.

“Are you going to keep hove-to long?” shouted Carter.

“Don’t know. Not long. Drop your boat clear of the ship. Drop clear. Do damage if you don’t.”

“Slack away, John!” said Carter in a resigned tone to the elderly seaman in the bow. “Slack away and let us ride easy to the full scope. They don’t seem very talkative on board there.”

Even while he was speaking the line ran out and the regular undulations of the passing seas drove the boat away from the brig. Carter turned a little in his seat to look at the land. It loomed up dead to leeward like a lofty and irregular cone only a mile or a mile and a half distant. The noise of the surf beating upon its base was heard against the wind in measured detonations. The fatigue of many days spent in the boat asserted itself above the restlessness of Carter’s thoughts and, gradually, he lost the notion of the passing time without altogether losing the consciousness of his situation.

In the intervals of that benumbed stupor — rather than sleep — he was aware that the interrupted noise of the surf had grown into a continuous great rumble, swelling periodically into a loud roar; that the high islet appeared now bigger, and that a white fringe of foam was visible at its feet. Still there was no stir or movement of any kind on board the brig. He noticed that the wind was moderating and the sea going down with it, and then dozed off again for a minute. When next he opened his eyes with a start, it was just in time to see with surprise a new star soar noiselessly straight up from behind the land, take up its position in a brilliant constellation — and go out suddenly. Two more followed, ascending together, and after reaching about the same elevation, expired side by side.

“Them’s rockets, sir — ain’t they?” said one of the men in a muffled voice.

“Aye, rockets,” grunted Carter. “And now, what’s the next move?” he muttered to himself dismally.

He got his answer in the fierce swishing whirr of a slender ray of fire that, shooting violently upward from the sombre hull of the brig, dissolved at once into a dull red shower of falling sparks. Only one, white and brilliant, remained alone poised high overhead, and after glowing vividly for a second, exploded with a feeble report. Almost at the same time he saw the brig’s head fall off the wind, made out the yards swinging round to fill

the main topsail, and heard distinctly the thud of the first wave thrown off by the advancing bows. The next minute the tow-line got the strain and his boat started hurriedly after the brig with a sudden jerk.

Leaning forward, wide awake and attentive, Carter steered. His men sat one behind another with shoulders up, and arched backs, dozing, uncomfortable but patient, upon the thwarts. The care requisite to steer the boat properly in the track of the seething and disturbed water left by the brig in her rapid course prevented him from reflecting much upon the incertitude of the future and upon his own unusual situation.

Now he was only exceedingly anxious to see the yacht again, and it was with a feeling of very real satisfaction that he saw all plain sail being made on the brig. Through the remaining hours of the night he sat grasping the tiller and keeping his eyes on the shadowy and high pyramid of canvas gliding steadily ahead of his boat with a slight balancing movement from side to side.

#### IV

It was noon before the brig, piloted by Lingard through the deep channels between the outer coral reefs, rounded within pistol-shot a low hummock of sand which marked the end of a long stretch of stony ledges that, being mostly awash, showed a black head only, here and there amongst the hissing brown froth of the yellow sea. As the brig drew clear of the sandy patch there appeared, dead to windward and beyond a maze of broken water, sandspits, and clusters of rocks, the black hull of the yacht heeling over, high and motionless upon the great expanse of glittering shallows. Her long, naked spars were inclined slightly as if she had been sailing with a good breeze. There was to the lookers-on aboard the brig something sad and disappointing in the yacht's aspect as she lay perfectly still in an attitude that in a seaman's mind is associated with the idea of rapid motion.

"Here she is!" said Shaw, who, clad in a spotless white suit, came just then from forward where he had been busy with the anchors. "She is well on, sir — isn't she? Looks like a mudflat to me from here."

"Yes. It is a mudflat," said Lingard, slowly, raising the long glass to his eye. "Haul the mainsail up, Mr. Shaw," he went on while he took a steady look at the yacht. "We will have to work in short tacks here."

He put the glass down and moved away from the rail. For the next hour he handled his little vessel in the intricate and narrow channel with careless certitude, as if every stone, every grain of sand upon the treacherous bottom

had been plainly disclosed to his sight. He handled her in the fitful and unsteady breeze with a matter-of-fact audacity that made Shaw, forward at his station, gasp in sheer alarm. When heading toward the inshore shoals the brig was never put round till the quick, loud cries of the leadsmen announced that there were no more than three feet of water under her keel; and when standing toward the steep inner edge of the long reef, where the lead was of no use, the helm would be put down only when the cutwater touched the faint line of the bordering foam. Lingard's love for his brig was a man's love, and was so great that it could never be appeased unless he called on her to put forth all her qualities and her power, to repay his exacting affection by a faithfulness tried to the very utmost limit of endurance. Every flutter of the sails flew down from aloft along the taut leeches, to enter his heart in a sense of acute delight; and the gentle murmur of water alongside, which, continuous and soft, showed that in all her windings his incomparable craft had never, even for an instant, ceased to carry her way, was to him more precious and inspiring than the soft whisper of tender words would have been to another man. It was in such moments that he lived intensely, in a flush of strong feeling that made him long to press his little vessel to his breast. She was his perfect world full of trustful joy.

The people on board the yacht, who watched eagerly the first sail they had seen since they had been ashore on that deserted part of the coast, soon made her out, with some disappointment, to be a small merchant brig beating up tack for tack along the inner edge of the reef — probably with the intention to communicate and offer assistance. The general opinion among the seafaring portion of her crew was that little effective assistance could be expected from a vessel of that description. Only the sailing-master of the yacht remarked to the boatswain (who had the advantage of being his first cousin): "This man is well acquainted here; you can see that by the way he handles his brig. I shan't be sorry to have somebody to stand by us. Can't tell when we will get off this mud, George."

A long board, sailed very close, enabled the brig to fetch the southern limit of discoloured water over the bank on which the yacht had stranded. On the very edge of the muddy patch she was put in stays for the last time. As soon as she had paid off on the other tack, sail was shortened smartly, and the brig commenced the stretch that was to bring her to her anchorage, under her topsails, lower staysails and jib. There was then less than a

quarter of a mile of shallow water between her and the yacht; but while that vessel had gone ashore with her head to the eastward the brig was moving slowly in a west-northwest direction, and consequently, sailed — so to speak — past the whole length of the yacht. Lingard saw every soul in the schooner on deck, watching his advent in a silence which was as unbroken and perfect as that on board his own vessel.

A little man with a red face framed in white whiskers waved a gold-laced cap above the rail in the waist of the yacht. Lingard raised his arm in return. Further aft, under the white awnings, he could see two men and a woman. One of the men and the lady were in blue. The other man, who seemed very tall and stood with his arm entwined round an awning stanchion above his head, was clad in white. Lingard saw them plainly. They looked at the brig through binoculars, turned their faces to one another, moved their lips, seemed surprised. A large dog put his forepaws on the rail, and, lifting up his big, black head, sent out three loud and plaintive barks, then dropped down out of sight. A sudden stir and an appearance of excitement amongst all hands on board the yacht was caused by their perceiving that the boat towing astern of the stranger was their own second gig.

Arms were outstretched with pointing fingers. Someone shouted out a long sentence of which not a word could be made out; and then the brig, having reached the western limit of the bank, began to move diagonally away, increasing her distance from the yacht but bringing her stern gradually into view. The people aft, Lingard noticed, left their places and walked over to the taffrail so as to keep him longer in sight.

When about a mile off the bank and nearly in line with the stern of the yacht the brig's topsails fluttered and the yards came down slowly on the caps; the fore and aft canvas ran down; and for some time she floated quietly with folded wings upon the transparent sheet of water, under the radiant silence of the sky. Then her anchor went to the bottom with a rumbling noise resembling the roll of distant thunder. In a moment her head tended to the last puffs of the northerly airs and the ensign at the peak stirred, unfurled itself slowly, collapsed, flew out again, and finally hung down straight and still, as if weighted with lead.

"Dead calm, sir," said Shaw to Lingard. "Dead calm again. We got into this funny place in the nick of time, sir."

They stood for a while side by side, looking round upon the coast and the sea. The brig had been brought up in the middle of a broad belt of clear



water. To the north rocky ledges showed in black and white lines upon the slight swell setting in from there. A small island stood out from the broken water like the square tower of some submerged building. It was about two miles distant from the brig. To the eastward the coast was low; a coast of green forests fringed with dark mangroves. There was in its sombre dullness a clearly defined opening, as if a small piece had been cut out with a sharp knife. The water in it shone like a patch of polished silver. Lingard pointed it out to Shaw.

“This is the entrance to the place where we are going,” he said.

Shaw stared, round-eyed.

“I thought you came here on account of this here yacht,” he stammered, surprised.

“Ah. The yacht,” said Lingard, musingly, keeping his eyes on the break in the coast. “The yacht — ” He stamped his foot suddenly. “I would give all I am worth and throw in a few days of life into the bargain if I could get her off and away before to-night.”

He calmed down, and again stood gazing at the land. A little within the entrance from behind the wall of forests an invisible fire belched out steadily the black and heavy convolutions of thick smoke, which stood out high, like a twisted and shivering pillar against the clear blue of the sky.

“We must stop that game, Mr. Shaw,” said Lingard, abruptly.

“Yes, sir. What game?” asked Shaw, looking round in wonder.

“This smoke,” said Lingard, impatiently. “It’s a signal.”

“Certainly, sir — though I don’t see how we can do it. It seems far inland. A signal for what, sir?”

“It was not meant for us,” said Lingard in an unexpectedly savage tone. “Here, Shaw, make them put a blank charge into that forecandle gun. Tell ‘em to ram hard the wadding and grease the mouth. We want to make a good noise. If old Jorgenson hears it, that fire will be out before you have time to turn round twice. . . . In a minute, Mr. Carter.”

The yacht’s boat had come alongside as soon as the brig had been brought up, and Carter had been waiting to take Lingard on board the yacht. They both walked now to the gangway. Shaw, following his commander, stood by to take his last orders.

“Put all the boats in the water, Mr. Shaw,” Lingard was saying, with one foot on the rail, ready to leave his ship, “and mount the four-pounder swivel

in the longboat's bow. Cast off the sea lashings of the guns, but don't run 'em out yet. Keep the topsails loose and the jib ready for setting, I may want the sails in a hurry. Now, Mr. Carter, I am ready for you."

"Shove off, boys," said Carter as soon as they were seated in the boat. "Shove off, and give way for a last pull before you get a long rest."

The men lay back on their oars, grunting. Their faces were drawn, grey and streaked with the dried salt sprays. They had the worried expression of men who had a long call made upon their endurance. Carter, heavy-eyed and dull, steered for the yacht's gangway. Lingard asked as they were crossing the brig's bows:

"Water enough alongside your craft, I suppose?"

"Yes. Eight to twelve feet," answered Carter, hoarsely. "Say, Captain! Where's your show of cutthroats? Why! This sea is as empty as a church on a week-day."

The booming report, nearly over his head, of the brig's eighteen-pounder interrupted him. A round puff of white vapour, spreading itself lazily, clung in fading shreds about the foreyard. Lingard, turning half round in the stern sheets, looked at the smoke on the shore. Carter remained silent, staring sleepily at the yacht they were approaching. Lingard kept watching the smoke so intensely that he almost forgot where he was, till Carter's voice pronouncing sharply at his ear the words "way enough," recalled him to himself.

They were in the shadow of the yacht and coming alongside her ladder. The master of the brig looked upward into the face of a gentleman, with long whiskers and a shaved chin, staring down at him over the side through a single eyeglass. As he put his foot on the bottom step he could see the shore smoke still ascending, unceasing and thick; but even as he looked the very base of the black pillar rose above the ragged line of tree-tops. The whole thing floated clear away from the earth, and rolling itself into an irregularly shaped mass, drifted out to seaward, travelling slowly over the blue heavens, like a threatening and lonely cloud.

## PART II. THE SHORE OF REFUGE

### I

The coast off which the little brig, floating upright above her anchor, seemed to guard the high hull of the yacht has no distinctive features. It is land without form. It stretches away without cape or bluff, long and low — indefinitely; and when the heavy gusts of the northeast monsoon drive the thick rain slanting over the sea, it is seen faintly under the grey sky, black and with a blurred outline like the straight edge of a dissolving shore. In the long season of unclouded days, it presents to view only a narrow band of earth that appears crushed flat upon the vast level of waters by the weight of the sky, whose immense dome rests on it in a line as fine and true as that of the sea horizon itself.

Notwithstanding its nearness to the centres of European power, this coast has been known for ages to the armed wanderers of these seas as “The Shore of Refuge.” It has no specific name on the charts, and geography manuals don’t mention it at all; but the wreckage of many defeats unerringly drifts into its creeks. Its approaches are extremely difficult for a stranger. Looked at from seaward, the innumerable islets fringing what, on account of its vast size, may be called the mainland, merge into a background that presents not a single landmark to point the way through the intricate channels. It may be said that in a belt of sea twenty miles broad along that low shore there is much more coral, mud, sand, and stones than actual sea water. It was amongst the outlying shoals of this stretch that the yacht had gone ashore and the events consequent upon her stranding took place.

The diffused light of the short daybreak showed the open water to the westward, sleeping, smooth and grey, under a faded heaven. The straight coast threw a heavy belt of gloom along the shoals, which, in the calm of expiring night, were unmarked by the slightest ripple. In the faint dawn the low clumps of bushes on the sandbanks appeared immense.

Two figures, noiseless like two shadows, moved slowly over the beach of a rocky islet, and stopped side by side on the very edge of the water. Behind them, between the mats from which they had arisen, a small heap of black embers smouldered quietly. They stood upright and perfectly still, but for the slight movement of their heads from right to left and back again as they

swept their gaze through the grey emptiness of the waters where, about two miles distant, the hull of the yacht loomed up to seaward, black and shapeless, against the wan sky.

The two figures looked beyond without exchanging as much as a murmur. The taller of the two grounded, at arm's length, the stock of a gun with a long barrel; the hair of the other fell down to its waist; and, near by, the leaves of creepers drooping from the summit of the steep rock stirred no more than the festooned stone. The faint light, disclosing here and there a gleam of white sandbanks and the blurred hummocks of islets scattered within the gloom of the coast, the profound silence, the vast stillness all round, accentuated the loneliness of the two human beings who, urged by a sleepless hope, had risen thus, at break of day, to look afar upon the veiled face of the sea.

"Nothing!" said the man with a sigh, and as if awakening from a long period of musing.

He was clad in a jacket of coarse blue cotton, of the kind a poor fisherman might own, and he wore it wide open on a muscular chest the colour and smoothness of bronze. From the twist of threadbare sarong wound tightly on the hips protruded outward to the left the ivory hilt, ringed with six bands of gold, of a weapon that would not have disgraced a ruler. Silver glittered about the flintlock and the hardwood stock of his gun. The red and gold handkerchief folded round his head was of costly stuff, such as is woven by high-born women in the households of chiefs, only the gold threads were tarnished and the silk frayed in the folds. His head was thrown back, the dropped eyelids narrowed the gleam of his eyes. His face was hairless, the nose short with mobile nostrils, and the smile of careless good-humour seemed to have been permanently wrought, as if with a delicate tool, into the slight hollows about the corners of rather full lips. His upright figure had a negligent elegance. But in the careless face, in the easy gestures of the whole man there was something attentive and restrained.

After giving the offing a last searching glance, he turned and, facing the rising sun, walked bare-footed on the elastic sand. The trailed butt of his gun made a deep furrow. The embers had ceased to smoulder. He looked down at them pensively for a while, then called over his shoulder to the girl who had remained behind, still scanning the sea:

"The fire is out, Immada."

At the sound of his voice the girl moved toward the mats. Her black hair hung like a mantle. Her sarong, the kilt-like garment which both sexes wear, had the national check of grey and red, but she had not completed her attire by the belt, scarves, the loose upper wrappings, and the head-covering of a woman. A black silk jacket, like that of a man of rank, was buttoned over her bust and fitted closely to her slender waist. The edge of a stand-up collar, stiff with gold embroidery, rubbed her cheek. She had no bracelets, no anklets, and although dressed practically in man's clothes, had about her person no weapon of any sort. Her arms hung down in exceedingly tight sleeves slit a little way up from the wrist, gold-braided and with a row of small gold buttons. She walked, brown and alert, all of a piece, with short steps, the eyes lively in an impassive little face, the arched mouth closed firmly; and her whole person breathed in its rigid grace the fiery gravity of youth at the beginning of the task of life — at the beginning of beliefs and hopes.

This was the day of Lingard's arrival upon the coast, but, as is known, the brig, delayed by the calm, did not appear in sight of the shallows till the morning was far advanced. Disappointed in their hope to see the expected sail shining in the first rays of the rising sun, the man and the woman, without attempting to relight the fire, lounged on their sleeping mats. At their feet a common canoe, hauled out of the water, was, for more security, moored by a grass rope to the shaft of a long spear planted firmly on the white beach, and the incoming tide lapped monotonously against its stern.

The girl, twisting up her black hair, fastened it with slender wooden pins. The man, reclining at full length, had made room on his mat for the gun — as one would do for a friend — and, supported on his elbow, looked toward the yacht with eyes whose fixed dreaminess like a transparent veil would show the slow passage of every gloomy thought by deepening gradually into a sombre stare.

"We have seen three sunrises on this islet, and no friend came from the sea," he said without changing his attitude, with his back toward the girl who sat on the other side of the cold embers.

"Yes; and the moon is waning," she answered in a low voice. "The moon is waning. Yet he promised to be here when the nights are light and the water covers the sandbanks as far as the bushes."

"The traveller knows the time of his setting out, but not the time of his return," observed the man, calmly.

The girl sighed.

"The nights of waiting are long," she murmured.

"And sometimes they are vain," said the man with the same composure.

"Perhaps he will never return."

"Why?" exclaimed the girl.

"The road is long and the heart may grow cold," was the answer in a quiet voice. "If he does not return it is because he has forgotten."

"Oh, Hassim, it is because he is dead," cried the girl, indignantly.

The man, looking fixedly to seaward, smiled at the ardour of her tone.

They were brother and sister, and though very much alike, the family resemblance was lost in the more general traits common to the whole race.

They were natives of Wajo and it is a common saying amongst the Malay race that to be a successful traveller and trader a man must have some Wajo blood in his veins. And with those people trading, which means also travelling afar, is a romantic and an honourable occupation. The trader must possess an adventurous spirit and a keen understanding; he should have the fearlessness of youth and the sagacity of age; he should be diplomatic and courageous, so as to secure the favour of the great and inspire fear in evil-doers.

These qualities naturally are not expected in a shopkeeper or a Chinaman pedlar; they are considered indispensable only for a man who, of noble birth and perhaps related to the ruler of his own country, wanders over the seas in a craft of his own and with many followers; carries from island to island important news as well as merchandise; who may be trusted with secret messages and valuable goods; a man who, in short, is as ready to intrigue and fight as to buy and sell. Such is the ideal trader of Wajo.

Trading, thus understood, was the occupation of ambitious men who played an occult but important part in all those national risings, religious disturbances, and also in the organized piratical movements on a large scale which, during the first half of the last century, affected the fate of more than one native dynasty and, for a few years at least, seriously endangered the Dutch rule in the East. When, at the cost of much blood and gold, a comparative peace had been imposed on the islands the same occupation, though shorn of its glorious possibilities, remained attractive for the most adventurous of a restless race. The younger sons and relations of many a native ruler traversed the seas of the Archipelago, visited the innumerable and little-known islands, and the then practically unknown shores of New

Guinea; every spot where European trade had not penetrated — from Aru to Atjeh, from Sumbawa to Palawan.

## II

It was in the most unknown perhaps of such spots, a small bay on the coast of New Guinea, that young Pata Hassim, the nephew of one of the greatest chiefs of Wajo, met Lingard for the first time.

He was a trader after the Wajo manner, and in a stout sea-going prau armed with two guns and manned by young men who were related to his family by blood or dependence, had come in there to buy some birds of paradise skins for the old Sultan of Ternate; a risky expedition undertaken not in the way of business but as a matter of courtesy toward the aged Sultan who had entertained him sumptuously in that dismal brick palace at Ternate for a month or more.

While lying off the village, very much on his guard, waiting for the skins and negotiating with the treacherous coast-savages who are the go-betweens in that trade, Hassim saw one morning Lingard's brig come to an anchor in the bay, and shortly afterward observed a white man of great stature with a beard that shone like gold, land from a boat and stroll on unarmed, though followed by four Malays of the brig's crew, toward the native village.

Hassim was struck with wonder and amazement at the cool recklessness of such a proceeding; and, after, in true Malay fashion, discussing with his people for an hour or so the urgency of the case, he also landed, but well escorted and armed, with the intention of going to see what would happen.

The affair really was very simple, "such as" — Lingard would say — "such as might have happened to anybody." He went ashore with the intention to look for some stream where he could conveniently replenish his water casks, this being really the motive which had induced him to enter the bay.

While, with his men close by and surrounded by a mop-headed, sooty crowd, he was showing a few cotton handkerchiefs, and trying to explain by signs the object of his landing, a spear, lunged from behind, grazed his neck. Probably the Papuan wanted only to ascertain whether such a creature could be killed or hurt, and most likely firmly believed that it could not; but one of Lingard's seamen at once retaliated by striking at the experimenting savage with his parang — three such choppers brought for the purpose of clearing the bush, if necessary, being all the weapons the party from the brig possessed.

A deadly tumult ensued with such suddenness that Lingard, turning round swiftly, saw his defender, already speared in three places, fall forward at his feet. Wasub, who was there, and afterward told the story once a week on an average, used to horrify his hearers by showing how the man blinked his eyes quickly before he fell. Lingard was unarmed. To the end of his life he remained incorrigibly reckless in that respect, explaining that he was “much too quick tempered to carry firearms on the chance of a row. And if put to it,” he argued, “I can make shift to kill a man with my fist anyhow; and then — don’t ye see — you know what you’re doing and are not so apt to start a trouble from sheer temper or funk — see?”

In this case he did his best to kill a man with a blow from the shoulder and catching up another by the middle flung him at the naked, wild crowd. “He hurled men about as the wind hurls broken boughs. He made a broad way through our enemies!” related Wasub in his jerky voice. It is more probable that Lingard’s quick movements and the amazing aspect of such a strange being caused the warriors to fall back before his rush.

Taking instant advantage of their surprise and fear, Lingard, followed by his men, dashed along the kind of ruinous jetty leading to the village which was erected as usual over the water. They darted into one of the miserable huts built of rotten mats and bits of decayed canoes, and in this shelter showing daylight through all its sides, they had time to draw breath and realize that their position was not much improved.

The women and children screaming had cleared out into the bush, while at the shore end of the jetty the warriors capered and yelled, preparing for a general attack. Lingard noticed with mortification that his boat-keeper apparently had lost his head, for, instead of swimming off to the ship to give the alarm, as he was perfectly able to do, the man actually struck out for a small rock a hundred yards away and was frantically trying to climb up its perpendicular side. The tide being out, to jump into the horrible mud under the houses would have been almost certain death. Nothing remained therefore — since the miserable dwelling would not have withstood a vigorous kick, let alone a siege — but to rush back on shore and regain possession of the boat. To this Lingard made up his mind quickly and, arming himself with a crooked stick he found under his hand, sallied forth at the head of his three men. As he bounded along, far in advance, he had just time to perceive clearly the desperate nature of the undertaking, when he heard two shots fired to his right. The solid mass of black bodies and



frizzly heads in front of him wavered and broke up. They did not run away, however.

Lingard pursued his course, but now with that thrill of exultation which even a faint prospect of success inspires in a sanguine man. He heard a shout of many voices far off, then there was another report of a shot, and a musket ball fired at long range spurted a tiny jet of sand between him and his wild enemies. His next bound would have carried him into their midst had they awaited his onset, but his uplifted arm found nothing to strike. Black backs were leaping high or gliding horizontally through the grass toward the edge of the bush.

He flung his stick at the nearest pair of black shoulders and stopped short. The tall grasses swayed themselves into a rest, a chorus of yells and piercing shrieks died out in a dismal howl, and all at once the wooded shores and the blue bay seemed to fall under the spell of a luminous stillness. The change was as startling as the awakening from a dream. The sudden silence struck Lingard as amazing.

He broke it by lifting his voice in a stentorian shout, which arrested the pursuit of his men. They retired reluctantly, glaring back angrily at the wall of a jungle where not a single leaf stirred. The strangers, whose opportune appearance had decided the issue of that adventure, did not attempt to join in the pursuit but halted in a compact body on the ground lately occupied by the savages.

Lingard and the young leader of the Wajo traders met in the splendid light of noonday, and amidst the attentive silence of their followers, on the very spot where the Malay seaman had lost his life. Lingard, striding up from one side, thrust out his open palm; Hassim responded at once to the frank gesture and they exchanged their first hand-clasp over the prostrate body, as if fate had already exacted the price of a death for the most ominous of her gifts — the gift of friendship that sometimes contains the whole good or evil of a life.

“I’ll never forget this day,” cried Lingard in a hearty tone; and the other smiled quietly.

Then after a short pause — “Will you burn the village for vengeance?” asked the Malay with a quick glance down at the dead Lascar who, on his face and with stretched arms, seemed to cling desperately to that earth of which he had known so little.

Lingard hesitated.

“No,” he said, at last. “It would do good to no one.”

“True,” said Hassim, gently, “but was this man your debtor — a slave?”

“Slave?” cried Lingard. “This is an English brig. Slave? No. A free man like myself.”

“Hai. He is indeed free now,” muttered the Malay with another glance downward. “But who will pay the bereaved for his life?”

“If there is anywhere a woman or child belonging to him, I — my serang would know — I shall seek them out,” cried Lingard, remorsefully.

“You speak like a chief,” said Hassim, “only our great men do not go to battle with naked hands. O you white men! O the valour of you white men!”

“It was folly, pure folly,” protested Lingard, “and this poor fellow has paid for it.”

“He could not avoid his destiny,” murmured the Malay. “It is in my mind my trading is finished now in this place,” he added, cheerfully.

Lingard expressed his regret.

“It is no matter, it is no matter,” assured the other courteously, and after Lingard had given a pressing invitation for Hassim and his two companions of high rank to visit the brig, the two parties separated.

The evening was calm when the Malay craft left its berth near the shore and was rowed slowly across the bay to Lingard’s anchorage. The end of a stout line was thrown on board, and that night the white man’s brig and the brown man’s prau swung together to the same anchor.

The sun setting to seaward shot its last rays between the headlands, when the body of the killed Lascar, wrapped up decently in a white sheet, according to Mohammedan usage, was lowered gently below the still waters of the bay upon which his curious glances, only a few hours before, had rested for the first time. At the moment the dead man, released from slip-ropes, disappeared without a ripple before the eyes of his shipmates, the bright flash and the heavy report of the brig’s bow gun were succeeded by the muttering echoes of the encircling shores and by the loud cries of sea birds that, wheeling in clouds, seemed to scream after the departing seaman a wild and eternal good-bye. The master of the brig, making his way aft with hanging head, was followed by low murmurs of pleased surprise from his crew as well as from the strangers who crowded the main deck. In such acts performed simply, from conviction, what may be called the romantic side of the man’s nature came out; that responsive sensitiveness to the

shadowy appeals made by life and death, which is the groundwork of a chivalrous character.

Lingard entertained his three visitors far into the night. A sheep from the brig's sea stock was given to the men of the prau, while in the cabin, Hassim and his two friends, sitting in a row on the stern settee, looked very splendid with costly metals and flawed jewels. The talk conducted with hearty friendship on Lingard's part, and on the part of the Malays with the well-bred air of discreet courtesy, which is natural to the better class of that people, touched upon many subjects and, in the end, drifted to politics.

"It is in my mind that you are a powerful man in your own country," said Hassim, with a circular glance at the cuddy.

"My country is upon a far-away sea where the light breezes are as strong as the winds of the rainy weather here," said Lingard; and there were low exclamations of wonder. "I left it very young, and I don't know about my power there where great men alone are as numerous as the poor people in all your islands, Tuan Hassim. But here," he continued, "here, which is also my country — being an English craft and worthy of it, too — I am powerful enough. In fact, I am Rajah here. This bit of my country is all my own."

The visitors were impressed, exchanged meaning glances, nodded at each other.

"Good, good," said Hassim at last, with a smile. "You carry your country and your power with you over the sea. A Rajah upon the sea. Good!"

Lingard laughed thunderously while the others looked amused.

"Your country is very powerful — we know," began again Hassim after a pause, "but is it stronger than the country of the Dutch who steal our land?"

"Stronger?" cried Lingard. He opened a broad palm. "Stronger? We could take them in our hand like this — " and he closed his fingers triumphantly.

"And do you make them pay tribute for their land?" enquired Hassim with eagerness.

"No," answered Lingard in a sobered tone; "this, Tuan Hassim, you see, is not the custom of white men. We could, of course — but it is not the custom."

"Is it not?" said the other with a sceptical smile. "They are stronger than we are and they want tribute from us. And sometimes they get it — even from Wajo where every man is free and wears a kris."

There was a period of dead silence while Lingard looked thoughtful and the Malays gazed stonily at nothing.

“But we burn our powder amongst ourselves,” went on Hassim, gently, “and blunt our weapons upon one another.”

He sighed, paused, and then changing to an easy tone began to urge Lingard to visit Wajo “for trade and to see friends,” he said, laying his hand on his breast and inclining his body slightly.

“Aye. To trade with friends,” cried Lingard with a laugh, “for such a ship” — he waved his arm — “for such a vessel as this is like a household where there are many behind the curtain. It is as costly as a wife and children.”

The guests rose and took their leave.

“You fired three shots for me, Panglima Hassim,” said Lingard, seriously, “and I have had three barrels of powder put on board your prau; one for each shot. But we are not quits.”

The Malay’s eyes glittered with pleasure.

“This is indeed a friend’s gift. Come to see me in my country!”

“I promise,” said Lingard, “to see you — some day.”

The calm surface of the bay reflected the glorious night sky, and the brig with the prau riding astern seemed to be suspended amongst the stars in a peace that was almost unearthly in the perfection of its unstirring silence. The last hand-shakes were exchanged on deck, and the Malays went aboard their own craft. Next morning, when a breeze sprang up soon after sunrise, the brig and the prau left the bay together. When clear of the land Lingard made all sail and sheered alongside to say good-bye before parting company — the brig, of course, sailing three feet to the prau’s one. Hassim stood on the high deck aft.

“Prosperous road,” hailed Lingard.

“Remember the promise!” shouted the other. “And come soon!” he went on, raising his voice as the brig forged past. “Come soon — lest what perhaps is written should come to pass!”

The brig shot ahead.

“What?” yelled Lingard in a puzzled tone, “what’s written?”

He listened. And floating over the water came faintly the words:

“No one knows!”

III

“My word! I couldn’t help liking the chap,” would shout Lingard when telling the story; and looking around at the eyes that glittered at him through the smoke of cheroots, this Brixham trawler-boy, afterward a youth in colliers, deep-water man, gold-digger, owner and commander of “the finest brig afloat,” knew that by his listeners — seamen, traders, adventurers like himself — this was accepted not as the expression of a feeling, but as the highest commendation he could give his Malay friend.

“By heavens! I shall go to Wajo!” he cried, and a semicircle of heads nodded grave approbation while a slightly ironical voice said deliberately — “You are a made man, Tom, if you get on the right side of that Rajah of yours.”

“Go in — and look out for yourself,” cried another with a laugh.

A little professional jealousy was unavoidable, Wajo, on account of its chronic state of disturbance, being closed to the white traders; but there was no real ill-will in the banter of these men, who, rising with handshakes, dropped off one by one. Lingard went straight aboard his vessel and, till morning, walked the poop of the brig with measured steps. The riding lights of ships twinkled all round him; the lights ashore twinkled in rows, the stars twinkled above his head in a black sky; and reflected in the black water of the roadstead twinkled far below his feet. And all these innumerable and shining points were utterly lost in the immense darkness. Once he heard faintly the rumbling chain of some vessel coming to an anchor far away somewhere outside the official limits of the harbour. A stranger to the port — thought Lingard — one of us would have stood right in. Perhaps a ship from home? And he felt strangely touched at the thought of that ship, weary with months of wandering, and daring not to approach the place of rest. At sunrise, while the big ship from the West, her sides streaked with rust and grey with the salt of the sea, was moving slowly in to take up a berth near the shore, Lingard left the roadstead on his way to the eastward.

A heavy gulf thunderstorm was raging, when after a long passage and at the end of a sultry calm day, wasted in drifting helplessly in sight of his destination, Lingard, taking advantage of fitful gusts of wind, approached the shores of Wajo. With characteristic audacity, he held on his way, closing in with a coast to which he was a stranger, and on a night that would have appalled any other man; while at every dazzling flash, Hassim’s native land seemed to leap nearer at the brig — and disappear instantly as though it had crouched low for the next spring out of an impenetrable darkness. During

the long day of the calm, he had obtained from the deck and from aloft, such good views of the coast, and had noted the lay of the land and the position of the dangers so carefully that, though at the precise moment when he gave the order to let go the anchor, he had been for some time able to see no further than if his head had been wrapped in a woollen blanket, yet the next flickering bluish flash showed him the brig, anchored almost exactly where he had judged her to be, off a narrow white beach near the mouth of a river.

He could see on the shore a high cluster of bamboo huts perched upon piles, a small grove of tall palms all bowed together before the blast like stalks of grass, something that might have been a palisade of pointed stakes near the water, and far off, a sombre background resembling an immense wall — the forest-clad hills. Next moment, all this vanished utterly from his sight, as if annihilated and, before he had time to turn away, came back to view with a sudden crash, appearing unscathed and motionless under hooked darts of flame, like some legendary country of immortals, withstanding the wrath and fire of Heaven.

Made uneasy by the nature of his holding ground, and fearing that in one of the terrific off-shore gusts the brig would start her anchor, Lingard remained on deck to watch over the safety of his vessel. With one hand upon the lead-line which would give him instant warning of the brig beginning to drag, he stood by the rail, most of the time deafened and blinded, but also fascinated, by the repeated swift visions of an unknown shore, a sight always so inspiring, as much perhaps by its vague suggestion of danger as by the hopes of success it never fails to awaken in the heart of a true adventurer. And its immutable aspect of profound and still repose, seen thus under streams of fire and in the midst of a violent uproar, made it appear inconceivably mysterious and amazing.

Between the squalls there were short moments of calm, while now and then even the thunder would cease as if to draw breath. During one of those intervals. Lingard, tired and sleepy, was beginning to doze where he stood, when suddenly it occurred to him that, somewhere below, the sea had spoken in a human voice. It had said, "Praise be to God — " and the voice sounded small, clear, and confident, like the voice of a child speaking in a cathedral. Lingard gave a start and thought — I've dreamed this — and directly the sea said very close to him, "Give a rope."

The thunder growled wickedly, and Lingard, after shouting to the men on deck, peered down at the water, until at last he made out floating close alongside the upturned face of a man with staring eyes that gleamed at him and then blinked quickly to a flash of lightning. By that time all hands in the brig were wildly active and many ropes-ends had been thrown over. Then together with a gust of wind, and, as if blown on board, a man tumbled over the rail and fell all in a heap upon the deck. Before any one had the time to pick him up, he leaped to his feet, causing the people around him to step back hurriedly. A sinister blue glare showed the bewildered faces and the petrified attitudes of men completely deafened by the accompanying peal of thunder. After a time, as if to beings plunged in the abyss of eternal silence, there came to their ears an unfamiliar thin, far-away voice saying:

“I seek the white man.”

“Here,” cried Lingard. Then, when he had the stranger, dripping and naked but for a soaked waistcloth, under the lamp of the cabin, he said, “I don’t know you.”

“My name is Jaffir, and I come from Pata Hassim, who is my chief and your friend. Do you know this?”

He held up a thick gold ring, set with a fairly good emerald.

“I have seen it before on the Rajah’s finger,” said Lingard, looking very grave.

“It is the witness of the truth I speak — the message from Hassim is — ‘Depart and forget!’”

“I don’t forget,” said Lingard, slowly. “I am not that kind of man. What folly is this?”

It is unnecessary to give at full length the story told by Jaffir. It appears that on his return home, after the meeting with Lingard, Hassim found his relative dying and a strong party formed to oppose his rightful successor. The old Rajah Tulla died late at night and — as Jaffir put it — before the sun rose there were already blows exchanged in the courtyard of the ruler’s dalam. This was the preliminary fight of a civil war, fostered by foreign intrigues; a war of jungle and river, of assaulted stockades and forest ambushes. In this contest, both parties — according to Jaffir — displayed great courage, and one of them an unswerving devotion to what, almost from the first, was a lost cause. Before a month elapsed Hassim, though still

chief of an armed band, was already a fugitive. He kept up the struggle, however, with some vague notion that Lingard's arrival would turn the tide.

"For weeks we lived on wild rice; for days we fought with nothing but water in our bellies," declaimed Jaffir in the tone of a true fire-eater.

And then he went on to relate, how, driven steadily down to the sea, Hassim, with a small band of followers, had been for days holding the stockade by the waterside.

"But every night some men disappeared," confessed Jaffir. "They were weary and hungry and they went to eat with their enemies. We are only ten now — ten men and a woman with the heart of a man, who are tonight starving, and to-morrow shall die swiftly. We saw your ship afar all day; but you have come too late. And for fear of treachery and lest harm should befall you — his friend — the Rajah gave me the ring and I crept on my stomach over the sand, and I swam in the night — and I, Jaffir, the best swimmer in Wajo, and the slave of Hassim, tell you — his message to you is 'Depart and forget' — and this is his gift — take!"

He caught hold suddenly of Lingard's hand, thrust roughly into it the ring, and then for the first time looked round the cabin with wondering but fearless eyes. They lingered over the semicircle of bayonets and rested fondly on musket-racks. He grunted in admiration.

"Ya-wa, this is strength!" he murmured as if to himself. "But it has come too late."

"Perhaps not," cried Lingard.

"Too late," said Jaffir, "we are ten only, and at sunrise we go out to die." He went to the cabin door and hesitated there with a puzzled air, being unused to locks and door handles.

"What are you going to do?" asked Lingard.

"I shall swim back," replied Jaffir. "The message is spoken and the night can not last forever."

"You can stop with me," said Lingard, looking at the man searchingly.

"Hassim waits," was the curt answer.

"Did he tell you to return?" asked Lingard.

"No! What need?" said the other in a surprised tone.

Lingard seized his hand impulsively.

"If I had ten men like you!" he cried.

"We are ten, but they are twenty to one," said Jaffir, simply.

Lingard opened the door.



“Do you want anything that a man can give?” he asked.

The Malay had a moment of hesitation, and Lingard noticed the sunken eyes, the prominent ribs, and the worn-out look of the man.

“Speak out,” he urged with a smile; “the bearer of a gift must have a reward.”

“A drink of water and a handful of rice for strength to reach the shore,” said Jaffir sturdily. “For over there” — he tossed his head — “we had nothing to eat to-day.”

“You shall have it — give it to you with my own hands,” muttered Lingard.

He did so, and thus lowered himself in Jaffir’s estimation for a time. While the messenger, squatting on the floor, ate without haste but with considerable earnestness, Lingard thought out a plan of action. In his ignorance as to the true state of affairs in the country, to save Hassim from the immediate danger of his position was all that he could reasonably attempt. To that end Lingard proposed to swing out his long-boat and send her close inshore to take off Hassim and his men. He knew enough of Malays to feel sure that on such a night the besiegers, now certain of success, and being, Jaffir said, in possession of everything that could float, would not be very vigilant, especially on the sea front of the stockade. The very fact of Jaffir having managed to swim off undetected proved that much. The brig’s boat could — when the frequency of lightning abated — approach unseen close to the beach, and the defeated party, either stealing out one by one or making a rush in a body, would embark and be received in the brig.

This plan was explained to Jaffir, who heard it without the slightest mark of interest, being apparently too busy eating. When the last grain of rice was gone, he stood up, took a long pull at the water bottle, muttered: “I hear. Good. I will tell Hassim,” and tightening the rag round his loins, prepared to go. “Give me time to swim ashore,” he said, “and when the boat starts, put another light beside the one that burns now like a star above your vessel. We shall see and understand. And don’t send the boat till there is less lightning: a boat is bigger than a man in the water. Tell the rowers to pull for the palm-grove and cease when an oar, thrust down with a strong arm, touches the bottom. Very soon they will hear our hail; but if no one comes they must go away before daylight. A chief may prefer death to life, and we who are left are all of true heart. Do you understand, O big man?”

“The chap has plenty of sense,” muttered Lingard to himself, and when they stood side by side on the deck, he said: “But there may be enemies on the beach, O Jaffir, and they also may shout to deceive my men. So let your hail be Lightning! Will you remember?”

For a time Jaffir seemed to be choking.

“Lit-ing! Is that right? I say — is that right, O strong man?” Next moment he appeared upright and shadowy on the rail.

“Yes. That’s right. Go now,” said Lingard, and Jaffir leaped off, becoming invisible long before he struck the water. Then there was a splash; after a while a spluttering voice cried faintly, “Lit-ing! Ah, ha!” and suddenly the next thunder-squall burst upon the coast. In the crashing flares of light Lingard had again and again the quick vision of a white beach, the inclined palm-trees of the grove, the stockade by the sea, the forest far away: a vast landscape mysterious and still — Hassim’s native country sleeping unmoved under the wrath and fire of Heaven.

#### IV

A Traveller visiting Wajo to-day may, if he deserves the confidence of the common people, hear the traditional account of the last civil war, together with the legend of a chief and his sister, whose mother had been a great princess suspected of sorcery and on her death-bed had communicated to these two the secrets of the art of magic. The chief’s sister especially, “with the aspect of a child and the fearlessness of a great fighter,” became skilled in casting spells. They were defeated by the son of their uncle, because — will explain the narrator simply — “The courage of us Wajo people is so great that magic can do nothing against it. I fought in that war. We had them with their backs to the sea.” And then he will go on to relate in an awed tone how on a certain night “when there was such a thunderstorm as has been never heard of before or since” a ship, resembling the ships of white men, appeared off the coast, “as though she had sailed down from the clouds. She moved,” he will affirm, “with her sails bellying against the wind; in size she was like an island; the lightning played between her masts which were as high as the summits of mountains; a star burned low through the clouds above her. We knew it for a star at once because no flame of man’s kindling could have endured the wind and rain of that night. It was such a night that we on the watch hardly dared look upon the sea. The heavy rain was beating down our eyelids. And when day came, the ship was nowhere to be seen, and in the stockade where the day

before there were a hundred or more at our mercy, there was no one. The chief, Hassim, was gone, and the lady who was a princess in the country — and nobody knows what became of them from that day to this. Sometimes traders from our parts talk of having heard of them here, and heard of them there, but these are the lies of men who go afar for gain. We who live in the country believe that the ship sailed back into the clouds whence the Lady's magic made her come. Did we not see the ship with our own eyes? And as to Rajah Hassim and his sister, Mas Immada, some men say one thing and some another, but God alone knows the truth."

Such is the traditional account of Lingard's visit to the shores of Boni. And the truth is he came and went the same night; for, when the dawn broke on a cloudy sky the brig, under reefed canvas and smothered in sprays, was storming along to the southward on her way out of the Gulf. Lingard, watching over the rapid course of his vessel, looked ahead with anxious eyes and more than once asked himself with wonder, why, after all, was he thus pressing her under all the sail she could carry. His hair was blown about by the wind, his mind was full of care and the indistinct shapes of many new thoughts, and under his feet, the obedient brig dashed headlong from wave to wave.

Her owner and commander did not know where he was going. That adventurer had only a confused notion of being on the threshold of a big adventure. There was something to be done, and he felt he would have to do it. It was expected of him. The seas expected it; the land expected it. Men also. The story of war and of suffering; Jaffir's display of fidelity, the sight of Hassim and his sister, the night, the tempest, the coast under streams of fire — all this made one inspiring manifestation of a life calling to him distinctly for interference. But what appealed to him most was the silent, the complete, unquestioning, and apparently uncurious, trust of these people. They came away from death straight into his arms as it were, and remained in them passive as though there had been no such thing as doubt or hope or desire. This amazing unconcern seemed to put him under a heavy load of obligation.

He argued to himself that had not these defeated men expected everything from him they could not have been so indifferent to his action. Their dumb quietude stirred him more than the most ardent pleading. Not a word, not a whisper, not a questioning look even! They did not ask! It flattered him. He was also rather glad of it, because if the unconscious part

of him was perfectly certain of its action, he, himself, did not know what to do with those bruised and battered beings a playful fate had delivered suddenly into his hands.

He had received the fugitives personally, had helped some over the rail; in the darkness, slashed about by lightning, he had guessed that not one of them was unwounded, and in the midst of tottering shapes he wondered how on earth they had managed to reach the long-boat that had brought them off. He caught unceremoniously in his arms the smallest of these shapes and carried it into the cabin, then without looking at his light burden ran up again on deck to get the brig under way. While shouting out orders he was dimly aware of someone hovering near his elbow. It was Hassim.

“I am not ready for war,” he explained, rapidly, over his shoulder, “and to-morrow there may be no wind.” Afterward for a time he forgot everybody and everything while he conned the brig through the few outlying dangers. But in half an hour, and running off with the wind on the quarter, he was quite clear of the coast and breathed freely. It was only then that he approached two others on that poop where he was accustomed in moments of difficulty to commune alone with his craft. Hassim had called his sister out of the cabin; now and then Lingard could see them with fierce distinctness, side by side, and with twined arms, looking toward the mysterious country that seemed at every flash to leap away farther from the brig — unscathed and fading.

The thought uppermost in Lingard’s mind was: “What on earth am I going to do with them?” And no one seemed to care what he would do. Jaffir with eight others quartered on the main hatch, looked to each other’s wounds and conversed interminably in low tones, cheerful and quiet, like well-behaved children. Each of them had saved his kris, but Lingard had to make a distribution of cotton cloth out of his trade-goods. Whenever he passed by them, they all looked after him gravely. Hassim and Immada lived in the cuddy. The chief’s sister took the air only in the evening and those two could be heard every night, invisible and murmuring in the shadows of the quarter-deck. Every Malay on board kept respectfully away from them.

Lingard, on the poop, listened to the soft voices, rising and falling, in a melancholy cadence; sometimes the woman cried out as if in anger or in pain. He would stop short. The sound of a deep sigh would float up to him on the stillness of the night. Attentive stars surrounded the wandering brig

and on all sides their light fell through a vast silence upon a noiseless sea. Lingard would begin again to pace the deck, muttering to himself.

“Belarab’s the man for this job. His is the only place where I can look for help, but I don’t think I know enough to find it. I wish I had old Jorgenson here — just for ten minutes.”

This Jorgenson knew things that had happened a long time ago, and lived amongst men efficient in meeting the accidents of the day, but who did not care what would happen to-morrow and who had no time to remember yesterday. Strictly speaking, he did not live amongst them. He only appeared there from time to time. He lived in the native quarter, with a native woman, in a native house standing in the middle of a plot of fenced ground where grew plantains, and furnished only with mats, cooking pots, a queer fishing net on two sticks, and a small mahogany case with a lock and a silver plate engraved with the words “Captain H. C. Jorgenson. Barque Wild Rose.”

It was like an inscription on a tomb. The Wild Rose was dead, and so was Captain H. C. Jorgenson, and the sextant case was all that was left of them. Old Jorgenson, gaunt and mute, would turn up at meal times on board any trading vessel in the Roads, and the stewards — Chinamen or mulattos — would sulkily put on an extra plate without waiting for orders. When the seamen traders foregathered noisily round a glittering cluster of bottles and glasses on a lighted verandah, old Jorgenson would emerge up the stairs as if from a dark sea, and, stepping up with a kind of tottering jauntiness, would help himself in the first tumbler to hand.

“I drink to you all. No — no chair.”

He would stand silent over the talking group. His taciturnity was as eloquent as the repeated warning of the slave of the feast. His flesh had gone the way of all flesh, his spirit had sunk in the turmoil of his past, but his immense and bony frame survived as if made of iron. His hands trembled but his eyes were steady. He was supposed to know details about the end of mysterious men and of mysterious enterprises. He was an evident failure himself, but he was believed to know secrets that would make the fortune of any man; yet there was also a general impression that his knowledge was not of that nature which would make it profitable for a moderately prudent person.

This powerful skeleton, dressed in faded blue serge and without any kind of linen, existed anyhow. Sometimes, if offered the job, he piloted a home

ship through the Straits of Rhio, after, however, assuring the captain:

“You don’t want a pilot; a man could go through with his eyes shut. But if you want me, I’ll come. Ten dollars.”

Then, after seeing his charge clear of the last island of the group he would go back thirty miles in a canoe, with two old Malays who seemed to be in some way his followers. To travel thirty miles at sea under the equatorial sun and in a cranky dug-out where once down you must not move, is an achievement that requires the endurance of a fakir and the virtue of a salamander. Ten dollars was cheap and generally he was in demand. When times were hard he would borrow five dollars from any of the adventurers with the remark:

“I can’t pay you back, very soon, but the girl must eat, and if you want to know anything, I can tell you.”

It was remarkable that nobody ever smiled at that “anything.” The usual thing was to say:

“Thank you, old man; when I am pushed for a bit of information I’ll come to you.”

Jorgenson nodded then and would say: “Remember that unless you young chaps are like we men who ranged about here years ago, what I could tell you would be worse than poison.”

It was from Jorgenson, who had his favourites with whom he was less silent, that Lingard had heard of Darat-es-Salam, the “Shore of Refuge.” Jorgenson had, as he expressed it, “known the inside of that country just after the high old times when the white-clad Padris preached and fought all over Sumatra till the Dutch shook in their shoes.” Only he did not say “shook” and “shoes” but the above paraphrase conveys well enough his contemptuous meaning. Lingard tried now to remember and piece together the practical bits of old Jorgenson’s amazing tales; but all that had remained with him was an approximate idea of the locality and a very strong but confused notion of the dangerous nature of its approaches. He hesitated, and the brig, answering in her movements to the state of the man’s mind, lingered on the road, seemed to hesitate also, swinging this way and that on the days of calm.

It was just because of that hesitation that a big New York ship, loaded with oil in cases for Japan, and passing through the Billiton passage, sighted one morning a very smart brig being hove-to right in the fair-way and a little to the east of Carimata. The lank skipper, in a frock-coat, and the big

mate with heavy moustaches, judged her almost too pretty for a Britisher, and wondered at the man on board laying his topsail to the mast for no reason that they could see. The big ship's sails fanned her along, flapping in the light air, and when the brig was last seen far astern she had still her mainyard aback as if waiting for someone. But when, next day, a London tea-clipper passed on the same track, she saw no pretty brig hesitating, all white and still at the parting of the ways. All that night Lingard had talked with Hassim while the stars streamed from east to west like an immense river of sparks above their heads. Immada listened, sometimes exclaiming low, sometimes holding her breath. She clapped her hands once. A faint dawn appeared.

"You shall be treated like my father in the country," Hassim was saying. A heavy dew dripped off the rigging and the darkened sails were black on the pale azure of the sky. "You shall be the father who advises for good —"

"I shall be a steady friend, and as a friend I want to be treated — no more," said Lingard. "Take back your ring."

"Why do you scorn my gift?" asked Hassim, with a sad and ironic smile.

"Take it," said Lingard. "It is still mine. How can I forget that, when facing death, you thought of my safety? There are many dangers before us. We shall be often separated — to work better for the same end. If ever you and Immada need help at once and I am within reach, send me a message with this ring and if I am alive I will not fail you." He looked around at the pale daybreak. "I shall talk to Belarab straight — like we whites do. I have never seen him, but I am a strong man. Belarab must help us to reconquer your country and when our end is attained I won't let him eat you up."

Hassim took the ring and inclined his head.

"It's time for us to be moving," said Lingard. He felt a slight tug at his sleeve. He looked back and caught Immada in the act of pressing her forehead to the grey flannel. "Don't, child!" he said, softly.

The sun rose above the faint blue line of the Shore of Refuge.

The hesitation was over. The man and the vessel, working in accord, had found their way to the faint blue shore. Before the sun had descended half-way to its rest the brig was anchored within a gunshot of the slimy mangroves, in a place where for a hundred years or more no white man's vessel had been entrusted to the hold of the bottom. The adventurers of two centuries ago had no doubt known of that anchorage for they were very ignorant and incomparably audacious. If it is true, as some say, that the

spirits of the dead haunt the places where the living have sinned and toiled, then they might have seen a white long-boat, pulled by eight oars and steered by a man sunburnt and bearded, a cabbage-leaf hat on head, and pistols in his belt, skirting the black mud, full of twisted roots, in search of a likely opening.

Creek after creek was passed and the boat crept on slowly like a monstrous water-spider with a big body and eight slender legs. . . . Did you follow with your ghostly eyes the quest of this obscure adventurer of yesterday, you shades of forgotten adventurers who, in leather jerkins and sweating under steel helmets, attacked with long rapiers the palisades of the strange heathen, or, musket on shoulder and match in cock, guarded timber blockhouses built upon the banks of rivers that command good trade? You, who, wearied with the toil of fighting, slept wrapped in frieze mantles on the sand of quiet beaches, dreaming of fabulous diamonds and of a far-off home.

“Here’s an opening,” said Lingard to Hassim, who sat at his side, just as the sun was setting away to his left. “Here’s an opening big enough for a ship. It’s the entrance we are looking for, I believe. We shall pull all night up this creek if necessary and it’s the very devil if we don’t come upon Belarab’s lair before daylight.”

He shoved the tiller hard over and the boat, swerving sharply, vanished from the coast.

And perhaps the ghosts of old adventurers nodded wisely their ghostly heads and exchanged the ghost of a wistful smile.

V

“What’s the matter with King Tom of late?” would ask someone when, all the cards in a heap on the table, the traders lying back in their chairs took a spell from a hard gamble.

“Tom has learned to hold his tongue, he must be up to some dam’ good thing,” opined another; while a man with hooked features and of German extraction who was supposed to be agent for a Dutch crockery house — the famous “Sphinx” mark — broke in resentfully:

“Nefer mind him, shentlemens, he’s matt, matt as a Marsh Hase. Dree monats ago I call on board his prig to talk pizness. And he says like dis — ‘Glear oudt.’ ‘Vat for?’ I say. ‘Glear oudt before I shuck you oferboard.’ Gott-for-dam! Iss dat the vay to talk pizness? I vant sell him ein liddle case first chop grockery for trade and — ”



“Ha, ha, ha! I don’t blame Tom,” interrupted the owner of a pearling schooner, who had come into the Roads for stores. “Why, Mosey, there isn’t a mangy cannibal left in the whole of New Guinea that hasn’t got a cup and saucer of your providing. You’ve flooded the market, savee?”

Jorgenson stood by, a skeleton at the gaming table.

“Because you are a Dutch spy,” he said, suddenly, in an awful tone.

The agent of the Sphinx mark jumped up in a sudden fury.

“Vat? Vat? Shentlemens, you all know me!” Not a muscle moved in the faces around. “Know me,” he stammered with wet lips. “Vat, funf year — berfeghtly acquaint — grockery — Verfluchte sponsner. Ich? Spy. Vat for spy? Vordamte English pedlars!”

The door slammed. “Is that so?” asked a New England voice. “Why don’t you let daylight into him?”

“Oh, we can’t do that here,” murmured one of the players. “Your deal, Trench, let us get on.”

“Can’t you?” drawled the New England voice. “You law-abiding, get-a-summons, act-of — parliament lot of sons of Belial — can’t you? Now, look a-here, these Colt pistols I am selling — ” He took the pearler aside and could be heard talking earnestly in the corner. “See — you load — and — see?” There were rapid clicks. “Simple, isn’t it? And if any trouble — say with your divers” — click, click, click — ”Through and through — like a sieve — warranted to cure the worst kind of cussedness in any nigger. Yes, siree! A case of twenty-four or single specimens — as you like. No? Shot-guns — rifles? No! Waal, I guess you’re of no use to me, but I could do a deal with that Tom — what d’ye call him? Where d’ye catch him? Everywhere — eh? Waal — that’s nowhere. But I shall find him some day — yes, siree.”

Jorgenson, utterly disregarded, looked down dreamily at the falling cards. “Spy — I tell you,” he muttered to himself. “If you want to know anything, ask me.”

When Lingard returned from Wajo — after an uncommonly long absence — everyone remarked a great change. He was less talkative and not so noisy, he was still hospitable but his hospitality was less expansive, and the man who was never so happy as when discussing impossibly wild projects with half a dozen congenial spirits often showed a disinclination to meet his best friends. In a word, he returned much less of a good fellow than he went

away. His visits to the Settlements were not less frequent, but much shorter; and when there he was always in a hurry to be gone.

During two years the brig had, in her way, as hard a life of it as the man. Swift and trim she flitted amongst the islands of little known groups. She could be descried afar from lonely headlands, a white speck travelling fast over the blue sea; the apathetic keepers of rare lighthouses dotting the great highway to the east came to know the cut of her topsails. They saw her passing east, passing west. They had faint glimpses of her flying with masts aslant in the mist of a rain-squall, or could observe her at leisure, upright and with shivering sails, forging ahead through a long day of unsteady airs. Men saw her battling with a heavy monsoon in the Bay of Bengal, lying becalmed in the Java Sea, or gliding out suddenly from behind a point of land, graceful and silent in the clear moonlight. Her activity was the subject of excited but low-toned conversations, which would be interrupted when her master appeared.

“Here he is. Came in last night,” whispered the gossiping group.

Lingard did not see the covert glances of respect tempered by irony; he nodded and passed on.

“Hey, Tom! No time for a drink?” would shout someone.

He would shake his head without looking back — far away already.

Florid and burly he could be seen, for a day or two, getting out of dusty gharries, striding in sunshine from the Occidental Bank to the Harbour Office, crossing the Esplanade, disappearing down a street of Chinese shops, while at his elbow and as tall as himself, old Jorgenson paced along, lean and faded, obstinate and disregarded, like a haunting spirit from the past eager to step back into the life of men.

Lingard ignored this wreck of an adventurer, sticking to him closer than his shadow, and the other did not try to attract attention. He waited patiently at the doors of offices, would vanish at tiffin time, would invariably turn up again in the evening and then he kept his place till Lingard went aboard for the night. The police peons on duty looked disdainfully at the phantom of Captain H. C. Jorgenson, Barque Wild Rose, wandering on the silent quay or standing still for hours at the edge of the sombre roadstead speckled by the anchor lights of ships — an adventurous soul longing to recross the waters of oblivion.

The sampan-men, sculling lazily homeward past the black hull of the brig at anchor, could hear far into the night the drawl of the New England voice

escaping through the lifted panes of the cabin skylight. Snatches of nasal sentences floated in the stillness around the still craft.

“Yes, siree! Mexican war rifles — good as new — six in a case — my people in Baltimore — that’s so. Hundred and twenty rounds thrown in for each specimen — marked to suit your requirements. Suppose — musical instruments, this side up with care — how’s that for your taste? No, no! Cash down — my people in Balt — Shooting sea-gulls you say? Waal! It’s a risky business — see here — ten per cent. discount — it’s out of my own pocket — ”

As time wore on, and nothing happened, at least nothing that one could hear of, the excitement died out. Lingard’s new attitude was accepted as only “his way.” There was nothing in it, maintained some. Others dissented. A good deal of curiosity, however, remained and the faint rumour of something big being in preparation followed him into every harbour he went to, from Rangoon to Hongkong.

He felt nowhere so much at home as when his brig was anchored on the inner side of the great stretch of shoals. The centre of his life had shifted about four hundred miles — from the Straits of Malacca to the Shore of Refuge — and when there he felt himself within the circle of another existence, governed by his impulse, nearer his desire. Hassim and Immada would come down to the coast and wait for him on the islet. He always left them with regret.

At the end of the first stage in each trip, Jorgenson waited for him at the top of the boat-stairs and without a word fell into step at his elbow. They seldom exchanged three words in a day; but one evening about six months before Lingard’s last trip, as they were crossing the short bridge over the canal where native craft lie moored in clusters, Jorgenson lengthened his stride and came abreast. It was a moonlight night and nothing stirred on earth but the shadows of high clouds. Lingard took off his hat and drew in a long sigh in the tepid breeze. Jorgenson spoke suddenly in a cautious tone: “The new Rajah Tulla smokes opium and is sometimes dangerous to speak to. There is a lot of discontent in Wajo amongst the big people.”

“Good! Good!” whispered Lingard, excitedly, off his guard for once. Then — “How the devil do you know anything about it?” he asked.

Jorgenson pointed at the mass of praus, coasting boats, and sampans that, jammed up together in the canal, lay covered with mats and flooded by the

cold moonlight with here and there a dim lantern burning amongst the confusion of high sterns, spars, masts and lowered sails.

“There!” he said, as they moved on, and their hatted and clothed shadows fell heavily on the queer-shaped vessels that carry the fortunes of brown men upon a shallow sea. “There! I can sit with them, I can talk to them, I can come and go as I like. They know me now — it’s time-thirty-five years. Some of them give a plate of rice and a bit of fish to the white man. That’s all I get — after thirty-five years — given up to them.”

He was silent for a time.

“I was like you once,” he added, and then laying his hand on Lingard’s sleeve, murmured — “Are you very deep in this thing?”

“To the very last cent,” said Lingard, quietly, and looking straight before him.

The glitter of the roadstead went out, and the masts of anchored ships vanished in the invading shadow of a cloud.

“Drop it,” whispered Jorgenson.

“I am in debt,” said Lingard, slowly, and stood still.

“Drop it!”

“Never dropped anything in my life.”

“Drop it!”

“By God, I won’t!” cried Lingard, stamping his foot.

There was a pause.

“I was like you — once,” repeated Jorgenson. “Five and thirty years — never dropped anything. And what you can do is only child’s play to some jobs I have had on my hands — understand that — great man as you are, Captain Lingard of the Lightning. . . . You should have seen the Wild Rose,” he added with a sudden break in his voice.

Lingard leaned over the guard-rail of the pier. Jorgenson came closer.

“I set fire to her with my own hands!” he said in a vibrating tone and very low, as if making a monstrous confession.

“Poor devil,” muttered Lingard, profoundly moved by the tragic enormity of the act. “I suppose there was no way out?”

“I wasn’t going to let her rot to pieces in some Dutch port,” said Jorgenson, gloomily. “Did you ever hear of Dawson?”

“Something — I don’t remember now — ” muttered Lingard, who felt a chill down his back at the idea of his own vessel decaying slowly in some

Dutch port. "He died — didn't he?" he asked, absently, while he wondered whether he would have the pluck to set fire to the brig — on an emergency.

"Cut his throat on the beach below Fort Rotterdam," said Jorgenson. His gaunt figure wavered in the unsteady moonshine as though made of mist. "Yes. He broke some trade regulation or other and talked big about law-courts and legal trials to the lieutenant of the Komet. 'Certainly,' says the hound. 'Jurisdiction of Macassar, I will take your schooner there.' Then coming into the roads he tows her full tilt on a ledge of rocks on the north side — smash! When she was half full of water he takes his hat off to Dawson. 'There's the shore,' says he — 'go and get your legal trial, you — Englishman —'" He lifted a long arm and shook his fist at the moon which dodged suddenly behind a cloud. "All was lost. Poor Dawson walked the streets for months barefooted and in rags. Then one day he begged a knife from some charitable soul, went down to take a last look at the wreck, and —"

"I don't interfere with the Dutch," interrupted Lingard, impatiently. "I want Hassim to get back his own —"

"And suppose the Dutch want the things just so," returned Jorgenson. "Anyway there is a devil in such work — drop it!"

"Look here," said Lingard, "I took these people off when they were in their last ditch. That means something. I ought not to have meddled and it would have been all over in a few hours. I must have meant something when I interfered, whether I knew it or not. I meant it then — and did not know it. Very well. I mean it now — and do know it. When you save people from death you take a share in their life. That's how I look at it."

Jorgenson shook his head.

"Foolishness!" he cried, then asked softly in a voice that trembled with curiosity — "Where did you leave them?"

"With Belarab," breathed out Lingard. "You knew him in the old days."

"I knew him, I knew his father," burst out the other in an excited whisper. "Whom did I not know? I knew Sentot when he was King of the South Shore of Java and the Dutch offered a price for his head — enough to make any man's fortune. He slept twice on board the Wild Rose when things had begun to go wrong with him. I knew him, I knew all his chiefs, the priests, the fighting men, the old regent who lost heart and went over to the Dutch, I knew —" he stammered as if the words could not come out, gave it up and sighed — "Belarab's father escaped with me," he began again, quietly, "and

joined the Padris in Sumatra. He rose to be a great leader. Belarab was a youth then. Those were the times. I ranged the coast — and laughed at the cruisers; I saw every battle fought in the Battak country — and I saw the Dutch run; I was at the taking of Singal and escaped. I was the white man who advised the chiefs of Manangkabo. There was a lot about me in the Dutch papers at the time. They said I was a Frenchman turned Mohammedan — ” he swore a great oath, and, reeling against the guard-rail, panted, muttering curses on newspapers.

“Well, Belarab has the job in hand,” said Lingard, composedly. “He is the chief man on the Shore of Refuge. There are others, of course. He has sent messages north and south. We must have men.”

“All the devils unchained,” said Jorgenson. “You have done it and now — look out — look out. . . .”

“Nothing can go wrong as far as I can see,” argued Lingard. “They all know what’s to be done. I’ve got them in hand. You don’t think Belarab unsafe? Do you?”

“Haven’t seen him for fifteen years — but the whole thing’s unsafe,” growled Jorgenson.

“I tell you I’ve fixed it so that nothing can go wrong. It would be better if I had a white man over there to look after things generally. There is a good lot of stores and arms — and Belarab would bear watching — no doubt. Are you in any want?” he added, putting his hand in his pocket.

“No, there’s plenty to eat in the house,” answered Jorgenson, curtly. “Drop it,” he burst out. “It would be better for you to jump overboard at once. Look at me. I came out a boy of eighteen. I can speak English, I can speak Dutch, I can speak every cursed lingo of these islands — I remember things that would make your hair stand on end — but I have forgotten the language of my own country. I’ve traded, I’ve fought, I never broke my word to white or native. And, look at me. If it hadn’t been for the girl I would have died in a ditch ten years ago. Everything left me — youth, money, strength, hope — the very sleep. But she stuck by the wreck.”

“That says a lot for her and something for you,” said Lingard, cheerily.

Jorgenson shook his head.

“That’s the worst of all,” he said with slow emphasis. “That’s the end. I came to them from the other side of the earth and they took me and — see what they made of me.”

“What place do you belong to?” asked Lingard.

“Tromso,” groaned out Jorgenson; “I will never see snow again,” he sobbed out, his face in his hands.

Lingard looked at him in silence.

“Would you come with me?” he said. “As I told you, I am in want of a —”

“I would see you damned first!” broke out the other, savagely. “I am an old white loafer, but you don’t get me to meddle in their infernal affairs. They have a devil of their own —”

“The thing simply can’t fail. I’ve calculated every move. I’ve guarded against everything. I am no fool.”

“Yes — you are. Good-night.”

“Well, good-bye,” said Lingard, calmly.

He stepped into his boat, and Jorgenson walked up the jetty. Lingard, clearing the yoke lines, heard him call out from a distance:

“Drop it!”

“I sail before sunrise,” he shouted in answer, and went on board.

When he came up from his cabin after an uneasy night, it was dark yet. A lank figure strolled across the deck.

“Here I am,” said Jorgenson, huskily. “Die there or here — all one. But, if I die there, remember the girl must eat.”

Lingard was one of the few who had seen Jorgenson’s girl. She had a wrinkled brown face, a lot of tangled grey hair, a few black stumps of teeth, and had been married to him lately by an enterprising young missionary from Bukit Timah. What her appearance might have been once when Jorgenson gave for her three hundred dollars and several brass guns, it was impossible to say. All that was left of her youth was a pair of eyes, undimmed and mournful, which, when she was alone, seemed to look stonily into the past of two lives. When Jorgenson was near they followed his movements with anxious pertinacity. And now within the sarong thrown over the grey head they were dropping unseen tears while Jorgenson’s girl rocked herself to and fro, squatting alone in a corner of the dark hut.

“Don’t you worry about that,” said Lingard, grasping Jorgenson’s hand. “She shall want for nothing. All I expect you to do is to look a little after Belarab’s morals when I am away. One more trip I must make, and then we shall be ready to go ahead. I’ve foreseen every single thing. Trust me!”

In this way did the restless shade of Captain H. C. Jorgenson recross the water of oblivion to step back into the life of men.

## VI

For two years, Lingard, who had thrown himself body and soul into the great enterprise, had lived in the long intoxication of slowly preparing success. No thought of failure had crossed his mind, and no price appeared too heavy to pay for such a magnificent achievement. It was nothing less than bringing Hassim triumphantly back to that country seen once at night under the low clouds and in the incessant tumult of thunder. When at the conclusion of some long talk with Hassim, who for the twentieth time perhaps had related the story of his wrongs and his struggle, he lifted his big arm and shaking his fist above his head, shouted: "We will stir them up. We will wake up the country!" he was, without knowing it in the least, making a complete confession of the idealism hidden under the simplicity of his strength. He would wake up the country! That was the fundamental and unconscious emotion on which were engrafted his need of action, the primitive sense of what was due to justice, to gratitude, to friendship, the sentimental pity for the hard lot of Immada — poor child — the proud conviction that of all the men in the world, in his world, he alone had the means and the pluck "to lift up the big end" of such an adventure.

Money was wanted and men were wanted, and he had obtained enough of both in two years from that day when, pistols in his belt and a cabbage-leaf hat on head, he had unexpectedly, and at early dawn, confronted in perfect silence that mysterious Belarab, who himself was for a moment too astounded for speech at the sight of a white face.

The sun had not yet cleared the forests of the interior, but a sky already full of light arched over a dark oval lagoon, over wide fields as yet full of shadows, that seemed slowly changing into the whiteness of the morning mist. There were huts, fences, palisades, big houses that, erected on lofty piles, were seen above the tops of clustered fruit trees, as if suspended in the air.

Such was the aspect of Belarab's settlement when Lingard set his eyes on it for the first time. There were all these things, a great number of faces at the back of the spare and muffled-up figure confronting him, and in the swiftly increasing light a complete stillness that made the murmur of the word "Marhaba" (welcome), pronounced at last by the chief, perfectly audible to every one of his followers. The bodyguards who stood about him in black skull-caps and with long-shafted lances, preserved an impassive aspect. Across open spaces men could be seen running to the waterside. A



group of women standing on a low knoll gazed intently, and nothing of them but the heads showed above the unstirring stalks of a maize field. Suddenly within a cluster of empty huts near by the voice of an invisible hag was heard scolding with shrill fury an invisible young girl:

“Strangers! You want to see the strangers? O devoid of all decency! Must I so lame and old husk the rice alone? May evil befall thee and the strangers! May they never find favour! May they be pursued with swords! I am old. I am old. There is no good in strangers! O girl! May they burn.”

“Welcome,” repeated Belarab, gravely, and looking straight into Lingard’s eyes.

Lingard spent six days that time in Belarab’s settlement. Of these, three were passed in observing each other without a question being asked or a hint given as to the object in view. Lingard lounged on the fine mats with which the chief had furnished a small bamboo house outside a fortified enclosure, where a white flag with a green border fluttered on a high and slender pole but still below the walls of long, high-roofed buildings, raised forty feet or more on hard-wood posts.

Far away the inland forests were tinted a shimmering blue, like the forests of a dream. On the seaward side the belt of great trunks and matted undergrowth came to the western shore of the oval lagoon; and in the pure freshness of the air the groups of brown houses reflected in the water or seen above the waving green of the fields, the clumps of palm trees, the fenced-in plantations, the groves of fruit trees, made up a picture of sumptuous prosperity.

Above the buildings, the men, the women, the still sheet of water and the great plain of crops glistening with dew, stretched the exalted, the miraculous peace of a cloudless sky. And no road seemed to lead into this country of splendour and stillness. One could not believe the unquiet sea was so near, with its gifts and its unending menace. Even during the months of storms, the great clamour rising from the whitened expanse of the Shallows dwelt high in the air in a vast murmur, now feeble now stronger, that seemed to swing back and forth on the wind above the earth without any one being able to tell whence it came. It was like the solemn chant of a waterfall swelling and dying away above the woods, the fields, above the roofs of houses and the heads of men, above the secret peace of that hidden and flourishing settlement of vanquished fanatics, fugitives, and outcasts.

Every afternoon Belarab, followed by an escort that stopped outside the door, entered alone the house of his guest. He gave the salutation, inquired after his health, conversed about insignificant things with an inscrutable mien. But all the time the steadfast gaze of his thoughtful eyes seemed to seek the truth within that white face. In the cool of the evening, before the sun had set, they talked together, passing and repassing between the rugged pillars of the grove near the gate of the stockade. The escort away in the oblique sunlight, followed with their eyes the strolling figures appearing and vanishing behind the trees. Many words were pronounced, but nothing was said that would disclose the thoughts of the two men. They clasped hands demonstratively before separating, and the heavy slam of the gate was followed by the triple thud of the wooden bars dropped into iron clamps.

On the third night, Lingard was awakened from a light sleep by the sound of whispering outside. A black shadow obscured the stars in the doorway, and a man entering suddenly, stood above his couch while another could be seen squatting — a dark lump on the threshold of the hut.

“Fear not. I am Belarab,” said a cautious voice.

“I was not afraid,” whispered Lingard. “It is the man coming in the dark and without warning who is in danger.”

“And did you not come to me without warning? I said ‘welcome’ — it was as easy for me to say ‘kill him.’”

“You were within reach of my arm. We would have died together,” retorted Lingard, quietly.

The other clicked his tongue twice, and his indistinct shape seemed to sink half-way through the floor.

“It was not written thus before we were born,” he said, sitting cross-legged near the mats, and in a deadened voice. “Therefore you are my guest. Let the talk between us be straight like the shaft of a spear and shorter than the remainder of this night. What do you want?”

“First, your long life,” answered Lingard, leaning forward toward the gleam of a pair of eyes, “and then — your help.”

## VII

The faint murmur of the words spoken on that night lingered for a long time in Lingard’s ears, more persistent than the memory of an uproar; he looked with a fixed gaze at the stars burning peacefully in the square of the doorway, while after listening in silence to all he had to say, Belarab, as if

seduced by the strength and audacity of the white man, opened his heart without reserve. He talked of his youth surrounded by the fury of fanaticism and war, of battles on the hills, of advances through the forests, of men's unswerving piety, of their unextinguishable hate. Not a single wandering cloud obscured the gentle splendour of the rectangular patch of starlight framed in the opaque blackness of the hut. Belarab murmured on of a succession of reverses, of the ring of disasters narrowing round men's fading hopes and undiminished courage. He whispered of defeat and flight, of the days of despair, of the nights without sleep, of unending pursuit, of the bewildered horror and sombre fury, of their women and children killed in the stockade before the besieged sallied forth to die.

"I have seen all this before I was in years a man," he cried, low.

His voice vibrated. In the pause that succeeded they heard a light sigh of the sleeping follower who, clasping his legs above his ankles, rested his forehead on his knees.

"And there was amongst us," began Belarab again, "one white man who remained to the end, who was faithful with his strength, with his courage, with his wisdom. A great man. He had great riches but a greater heart."

The memory of Jorgenson, emaciated and grey-haired, and trying to borrow five dollars to get something to eat for the girl, passed before Lingard suddenly upon the pacific glitter of the stars.

"He resembled you," pursued Belarab, abruptly. "We escaped with him, and in his ship came here. It was a solitude. The forest came near to the sheet of water, the rank grass waved upon the heads of tall men. Telal, my father, died of weariness; we were only a few, and we all nearly died of trouble and sadness — here. On this spot! And no enemies could tell where we had gone. It was the Shore of Refuge — and starvation."

He droned on in the night, with rising and falling inflections. He told how his desperate companions wanted to go out and die fighting on the sea against the ships from the west, the ships with high sides and white sails; and how, unflinching and alone, he kept them battling with the thorny bush, with the rank grass, with the soaring and enormous trees. Lingard, leaning on his elbow and staring through the door, recalled the image of the wide fields outside, sleeping now, in an immensity of serenity and starlight. This quiet and almost invisible talker had done it all; in him was the origin, the creation, the fate; and in the wonder of that thought the shadowy murmuring figure acquired a gigantic greatness of significance, as if it had

been the embodiment of some natural force, of a force forever masterful and undying.

“And even now my life is unsafe as if I were their enemy,” said Belarab, mournfully. “Eyes do not kill, nor angry words; and curses have no power, else the Dutch would not grow fat living on our land, and I would not be alive to-night. Do you understand? Have you seen the men who fought in the old days? They have not forgotten the times of war. I have given them homes and quiet hearts and full bellies. I alone. And they curse my name in the dark, in each other’s ears — because they can never forget.”

This man, whose talk had been of war and violence, discovered unexpectedly a passionate craving for security and peace. No one would understand him. Some of those who would not understand had died. His white teeth gleamed cruelly in the dark. But there were others he could not kill. The fools. He wanted the land and the people in it to be forgotten as if they had been swallowed by the sea. But they had neither wisdom nor patience. Could they not wait? They chanted prayers five times every day, but they had not the faith.

“Death comes to all — and to the believers the end of trouble. But you white men who are too strong for us, you also die. You die. And there is a Paradise as great as all earth and all Heaven together, but not for you — not for you!”

Lingard, amazed, listened without a sound. The sleeper snored faintly. Belarab continued very calm after this almost involuntary outburst of a consoling belief. He explained that he wanted somebody at his back, somebody strong and whom he could trust, some outside force that would awe the unruly, that would inspire their ignorance with fear, and make his rule secure. He groped in the dark and seizing Lingard’s arm above the elbow pressed it with force — then let go. And Lingard understood why his temerity had been so successful.

Then and there, in return for Lingard’s open support, a few guns and a little money, Belarab promised his help for the conquest of Wajo. There was no doubt he could find men who would fight. He could send messages to friends at a distance and there were also many unquiet spirits in his own district ready for any adventure. He spoke of these men with fierce contempt and an angry tenderness, in mingled accents of envy and disdain. He was wearied by their folly, by their recklessness, by their impatience — and he seemed to resent these as if they had been gifts of which he himself

had been deprived by the fatality of his wisdom. They would fight. When the time came Lingard had only to speak, and a sign from him would send them to a vain death — those men who could not wait for an opportunity on this earth or for the eternal revenge of Heaven.

He ceased, and towered upright in the gloom.

“Awake!” he exclaimed, low, bending over the sleeping man.

Their black shapes, passing in turn, eclipsed for two successive moments the glitter of the stars, and Lingard, who had not stirred, remained alone. He lay back full length with an arm thrown across his eyes.

When three days afterward he left Belarab’s settlement, it was on a calm morning of unclouded peace. All the boats of the brig came up into the lagoon armed and manned to make more impressive the solemn fact of a concluded alliance. A staring crowd watched his imposing departure in profound silence and with an increased sense of wonder at the mystery of his apparition. The progress of the boats was smooth and slow while they crossed the wide lagoon. Lingard looked back once. A great stillness had laid its hand over the earth, the sky, and the men; upon the immobility of landscape and people. Hassim and Immada, standing out clearly by the side of the chief, raised their arms in a last salutation; and the distant gesture appeared sad, futile, lost in space, like a sign of distress made by castaways in the vain hope of an impossible help.

He departed, he returned, he went away again, and each time those two figures, lonely on some sandbank of the Shallows, made at him the same futile sign of greeting or good-bye. Their arms at each movement seemed to draw closer around his heart the bonds of a protecting affection. He worked prosaically, earning money to pay the cost of the romantic necessity that had invaded his life. And the money ran like water out of his hands. The owner of the New England voice remitted not a little of it to his people in Baltimore. But import houses in the ports of the Far East had their share. It paid for a fast prau which, commanded by Jaffir, sailed into unfrequented bays and up unexplored rivers, carrying secret messages, important news, generous bribes. A good part of it went to the purchase of the Emma.

The Emma was a battered and decrepit old schooner that, in the decline of her existence, had been much ill-used by a paunchy white trader of cunning and gluttonous aspect. This man boasted outrageously afterward of the good price he had got “for that rotten old hooker of mine — you know.” The Emma left port mysteriously in company with the brig and henceforth

vanished from the seas forever. Lingard had her towed up the creek and ran her aground upon that shore of the lagoon farthest from Belarab's settlement. There had been at that time a great rise of waters, which retiring soon after left the old craft cradled in the mud, with her bows grounded high between the trunks of two big trees, and leaning over a little as though after a hard life she had settled wearily to an everlasting rest. There, a few months later, Jorgenson found her when, called back into the life of men, he reappeared, together with Lingard, in the Land of Refuge.

"She is better than a fort on shore," said Lingard, as side by side they leant over the taffrail, looking across the lagoon on the houses and palm groves of the settlement. "All the guns and powder I have got together so far are stored in her. Good idea, wasn't it? There will be, perhaps, no other such flood for years, and now they can't come alongside unless right under the counter, and only one boat at a time. I think you are perfectly safe here; you could keep off a whole fleet of boats; she isn't easy to set fire to; the forest in front is better than a wall. Well?"

Jorgenson assented in grunts. He looked at the desolate emptiness of the decks, at the stripped spars, at the dead body of the dismantled little vessel that would know the life of the seas no more. The gloom of the forest fell on her, mournful like a winding sheet. The bushes of the bank tapped their twigs on the bluff of her bows, and a pendent spike of tiny brown blossoms swung to and fro over the ruins of her windlass.

Hassim's companions garrisoned the old hulk, and Jorgenson, left in charge, prowled about from stem to stern, taciturn and anxiously faithful to his trust. He had been received with astonishment, respect — and awe. Belarab visited him often. Sometimes those whom he had known in their prime years ago, during a struggle for faith and life, would come to talk with the white man. Their voices were like the echoes of stirring events, in the pale glamour of a youth gone by. They nodded their old heads. Do you remember? — they said. He remembered only too well! He was like a man raised from the dead, for whom the fascinating trust in the power of life is tainted by the black scepticism of the grave.

Only at times the invincible belief in the reality of existence would come back, insidious and inspiring. He squared his shoulders, held himself straight, and walked with a firmer step. He felt a glow within him and the quickened beat of his heart. Then he calculated in silent excitement Lingard's chances of success, and he lived for a time with the life of that

other man who knew nothing of the black scepticism of the grave. The chances were good, very good.

“I should like to see it through,” Jorgenson muttered to himself ardently; and his lustreless eyes would flash for a moment.

## PART III. THE CAPTURE

I

“Some people,” said Lingard, “go about the world with their eyes shut. You are right. The sea is free to all of us. Some work on it, and some play the fool on it — and I don’t care. Only you may take it from me that I will let no man’s play interfere with my work. You want me to understand you are a very great man — ”

Mr. Travers smiled, coldly.

“Oh, yes,” continued Lingard, “I understand that well enough. But remember you are very far from home, while I, here, I am where I belong. And I belong where I am. I am just Tom Lingard, no more, no less, wherever I happen to be, and — you may ask — ” A sweep of his hand along the western horizon entrusted with perfect confidence the remainder of his speech to the dumb testimony of the sea.

He had been on board the yacht for more than an hour, and nothing, for him, had come of it but the birth of an unreasoning hate. To the unconscious demand of these people’s presence, of their ignorance, of their faces, of their voices, of their eyes, he had nothing to give but a resentment that had in it a germ of reckless violence. He could tell them nothing because he had not the means. Their coming at this moment, when he had wandered beyond that circle which race, memories, early associations, all the essential conditions of one’s origin, trace round every man’s life, deprived him in a manner of the power of speech. He was confounded. It was like meeting exacting spectres in a desert.

He stared at the open sea, his arms crossed, with a reflective fierceness. His very appearance made him utterly different from everyone on board that vessel. The grey shirt, the blue sash, one rolled-up sleeve baring a sculptural forearm, the negligent masterfulness of his tone and pose were very distasteful to Mr. Travers, who, having made up his mind to wait for some kind of official assistance, regarded the intrusion of that inexplicable man with suspicion. From the moment Lingard came on board the yacht, every eye in that vessel had been fixed upon him. Only Carter, within earshot and leaning with his elbow upon the rail, stared down at the deck as if overcome with drowsiness or lost in thought.



Of the three other persons aft, Mr. Travers kept his hands in the side pockets of his jacket and did not conceal his growing disgust.

On the other side of the deck, a lady, in a long chair, had a passive attitude that to Mr. d'Alcacer, standing near her, seemed characteristic of the manner in which she accepted the necessities of existence. Years before, as an attache of his Embassy in London, he had found her an interesting hostess. She was even more interesting now, since a chance meeting and Mr. Travers' offer of a passage to Batavia had given him an opportunity of studying the various shades of scorn which he suspected to be the secret of her acquiescence in the shallowness of events and the monotony of a worldly existence.

There were things that from the first he had not been able to understand; for instance, why she should have married Mr. Travers. It must have been from ambition. He could not help feeling that such a successful mistake would explain completely her scorn and also her acquiescence. The meeting in Manila had been utterly unexpected to him, and he accounted for it to his uncle, the Governor-General of the colony, by pointing out that Englishmen, when worsted in the struggle of love or politics, travel extensively, as if by encompassing a large portion of earth's surface they hoped to gather fresh strength for a renewed contest. As to himself, he judged — but did not say — that his contest with fate was ended, though he also travelled, leaving behind him in the capitals of Europe a story in which there was nothing scandalous but the publicity of an excessive feeling, and nothing more tragic than the early death of a woman whose brilliant perfections were no better known to the great world than the discreet and passionate devotion she had innocently inspired.

The invitation to join the yacht was the culminating point of many exchanged civilities, and was mainly prompted by Mr. Travers' desire to have somebody to talk to. D'Alcacer had accepted with the reckless indifference of a man to whom one method of flight from a relentless enemy is as good as another. Certainly the prospect of listening to long monologues on commerce, administration, and politics did not promise much alleviation to his sorrow; and he could not expect much else from Mr. Travers, whose life and thought, ignorant of human passion, were devoted to extracting the greatest possible amount of personal advantage from human institutions. D'Alcacer found, however, that he could attain a

measure of forgetfulness — the most precious thing for him now — in the society of Edith Travers.

She had awakened his curiosity, which he thought nothing and nobody on earth could do any more.

These two talked of things indifferent and interesting, certainly not connected with human institutions, and only very slightly with human passions; but d'Alcacer could not help being made aware of her latent capacity for sympathy developed in those who are disenchanted with life or death. How far she was disenchanted he did not know, and did not attempt to find out. This restraint was imposed upon him by the chivalrous respect he had for the secrets of women and by a conviction that deep feeling is often impenetrably obscure, even to those it masters for their inspiration or their ruin. He believed that even she herself would never know; but his grave curiosity was satisfied by the observation of her mental state, and he was not sorry that the stranding of the yacht prolonged his opportunity.

Time passed on that mudbank as well as anywhere else, and it was not from a multiplicity of events, but from the lapse of time alone, that he expected relief. Yet in the sameness of days upon the Shallows, time flowing ceaselessly, flowed imperceptibly; and, since every man clings to his own, be it joy, be it grief, he was pleased after the unrest of his wanderings to be able to fancy the whole universe and even time itself apparently come to a standstill; as if unwilling to take him away further from his sorrow, which was fading indeed but undiminished, as things fade, not in the distance but in the mist.

## II

D'Alcacer was a man of nearly forty, lean and sallow, with hollow eyes and a drooping brown moustache. His gaze was penetrating and direct, his smile frequent and fleeting. He observed Lingard with great interest. He was attracted by that elusive something — a line, a fold, perhaps the form of the eye, the droop of an eyelid, the curve of a cheek, that trifling trait which on no two faces on earth is alike, that in each face is the very foundation of expression, as if, all the rest being heredity, mystery, or accident, it alone had been shaped consciously by the soul within.

Now and then he bent slightly over the slow beat of a red fan in the curve of the deck chair to say a few words to Mrs. Travers, who answered him without looking up, without a modulation of tone or a play of feature, as if she had spoken from behind the veil of an immense indifference stretched

between her and all men, between her heart and the meaning of events, between her eyes and the shallow sea which, like her gaze, appeared profound, forever stilled, and seemed, far off in the distance of a faint horizon, beyond the reach of eye, beyond the power of hand or voice, to lose itself in the sky.

Mr. Travers stepped aside, and speaking to Carter, overwhelmed him with reproaches.

“You misunderstood your instructions,” murmured Mr. Travers rapidly. “Why did you bring this man here? I am surprised — ”

“Not half so much as I was last night,” growled the young seaman, without any reverence in his tone, very provoking to Mr. Travers.

“I perceive now you were totally unfit for the mission I entrusted you with,” went on the owner of the yacht.

“It’s he who got hold of me,” said Carter. “Haven’t you heard him yourself, sir?”

“Nonsense,” whispered Mr. Travers, angrily. “Have you any idea what his intentions may be?”

“I half believe,” answered Carter, “that his intention was to shoot me in his cabin last night if I — ”

“That’s not the point,” interrupted Mr. Travers. “Have you any opinion as to his motives in coming here?”

Carter raised his weary, bloodshot eyes in a face scarlet and peeling as though it had been licked by a flame. “I know no more than you do, sir. Last night when he had me in that cabin of his, he said he would just as soon shoot me as let me go to look for any other help. It looks as if he were desperately bent upon getting a lot of salvage money out of a stranded yacht.”

Mr. Travers turned away, and, for a moment, appeared immersed in deep thought. This accident of stranding upon a deserted coast was annoying as a loss of time. He tried to minimize it by putting in order the notes collected during the year’s travel in the East. He had sent off for assistance; his sailing-master, very crestfallen, made bold to say that the yacht would most likely float at the next spring tides; d’Alcacer, a person of undoubted nobility though of inferior principles, was better than no company, in so far at least that he could play picquet.

Mr. Travers had made up his mind to wait. Then suddenly this rough man, looking as if he had stepped out from an engraving in a book about

buccaneers, broke in upon his resignation with mysterious allusions to danger, which sounded absurd yet were disturbing; with dark and warning sentences that sounded like disguised menaces.

Mr. Travers had a heavy and rather long chin which he shaved. His eyes were blue, a chill, naive blue. He faced Lingard untouched by travel, without a mark of weariness or exposure, with the air of having been born invulnerable. He had a full, pale face; and his complexion was perfectly colourless, yet amazingly fresh, as if he had been reared in the shade.

He thought:

“I must put an end to this preposterous hectoring. I won’t be intimidated into paying for services I don’t need.”

Mr. Travers felt a strong disgust for the impudence of the attempt; and all at once, incredibly, strangely, as though the thing, like a contest with a rival or a friend, had been of profound importance to his career, he felt inexplicably elated at the thought of defeating the secret purposes of that man.

Lingard, unconscious of everything and everybody, contemplated the sea. He had grown on it, he had lived with it; it had enticed him away from home; on it his thoughts had expanded and his hand had found work to do. It had suggested endeavour, it had made him owner and commander of the finest brig afloat; it had lulled him into a belief in himself, in his strength, in his luck — and suddenly, by its complicity in a fatal accident, it had brought him face to face with a difficulty that looked like the beginning of disaster.

He had said all he dared to say — and he perceived that he was not believed. This had not happened to him for years. It had never happened. It bewildered him as if he had suddenly discovered that he was no longer himself. He had come to them and had said: “I mean well by you. I am Tom Lingard — ” and they did not believe! Before such scepticism he was helpless, because he had never imagined it possible. He had said: “You are in the way of my work. You are in the way of what I can not give up for any one; but I will see you through all safe if you will only trust me — me, Tom Lingard.” And they would not believe him! It was intolerable. He imagined himself sweeping their disbelief out of his way. And why not? He did not know them, he did not care for them, he did not even need to lift his hand against them! All he had to do was to shut his eyes now for a day or two, and afterward he could forget that he had ever seen them. It would be easy.

Let their disbelief vanish, their folly disappear, their bodies perish. . . . It was that — or ruin!

### III

Lingard's gaze, detaching itself from the silent sea, travelled slowly over the silent figures clustering forward, over the faces of the seamen attentive and surprised, over the faces never seen before yet suggesting old days — his youth — other seas — the distant shores of early memories. Mr. Travers gave a start also, and the hand which had been busy with his left whisker went into the pocket of his jacket, as though he had plucked out something worth keeping. He made a quick step toward Lingard.

"I don't see my way to utilize your services," he said, with cold finality.

Lingard, grasping his beard, looked down at him thoughtfully for a short time.

"Perhaps it's just as well," he said, very slowly, "because I did not offer my services. I've offered to take you on board my brig for a few days, as your only chance of safety. And you asked me what were my motives. My motives! If you don't see them they are not for you to know."

And these men who, two hours before had never seen each other, stood for a moment close together, antagonistic, as if they had been life-long enemies, one short, dapper and glaring upward, the other towering heavily, and looking down in contempt and anger.

Mr. d'Alcacer, without taking his eyes off them, bent low over the deck chair.

"Have you ever seen a man dashing himself at a stone wall?" he asked, confidentially.

"No," said Mrs. Travers, gazing straight before her above the slow flutter of the fan. "No, I did not know it was ever done; men burrow under or slip round quietly while they look the other way."

"Ah! you define diplomacy," murmured d'Alcacer. "A little of it here would do no harm. But our picturesque visitor has none of it. I've a great liking for him."

"Already!" breathed out Mrs. Travers, with a smile that touched her lips with its bright wing and was flown almost before it could be seen.

"There is liking at first sight," affirmed d'Alcacer, "as well as love at first sight — the coup de foudre — you know."

She looked up for a moment, and he went on, gravely: "I think it is the truest, the most profound of sentiments. You do not love because of what is

in the other. You love because of something that is in you — something alive — in yourself.” He struck his breast lightly with the tip of one finger. “A capacity in you. And not everyone may have it — not everyone deserves to be touched by fire from heaven.”

“And die,” she said.

He made a slight movement.

“Who can tell? That is as it may be. But it is always a privilege, even if one must live a little after being burnt.”

Through the silence between them, Mr. Travers’ voice came plainly, saying with irritation:

“I’ve told you already that I do not want you. I’ve sent a messenger to the governor of the Straits. Don’t be importunate.”

Then Lingard, standing with his back to them, growled out something which must have exasperated Mr. Travers, because his voice was pitched higher:

“You are playing a dangerous game, I warn you. Sir John, as it happens, is a personal friend of mine. He will send a cruiser — ” and Lingard interrupted recklessly loud:

“As long as she does not get here for the next ten days, I don’t care. Cruisers are scarce just now in the Straits; and to turn my back on you is no hanging matter anyhow. I would risk that, and more! Do you hear? And more!”

He stamped his foot heavily, Mr. Travers stepped back.

“You will gain nothing by trying to frighten me,” he said. “I don’t know who you are.”

Every eye in the yacht was wide open. The men, crowded upon each other, stared stupidly like a flock of sheep. Mr. Travers pulled out a handkerchief and passed it over his forehead. The face of the sailing-master who leaned against the main mast — as near as he dared to approach the gentry — was shining and crimson between white whiskers, like a glowing coal between two patches of snow.

D’Alcacer whispered:

“It is a quarrel, and the picturesque man is angry. He is hurt.”

Mrs. Travers’ fan rested on her knees, and she sat still as if waiting to hear more.

“Do you think I ought to make an effort for peace?” asked d’Alcacer.

She did not answer, and after waiting a little, he insisted:

“What is your opinion? Shall I try to mediate — as a neutral, as a benevolent neutral? I like that man with the beard.”

The interchange of angry phrases went on aloud, amidst general consternation.

“I would turn my back on you only I am thinking of these poor devils here,” growled Lingard, furiously. “Did you ask them how they feel about it?”

“I ask no one,” spluttered Mr. Travers. “Everybody here depends on my judgment.”

“I am sorry for them then,” pronounced Lingard with sudden deliberation, and leaning forward with his arms crossed on his breast.

At this Mr. Travers positively jumped, and forgot himself so far as to shout:

“You are an impudent fellow. I have nothing more to say to you.”

D’Alcacer, after muttering to himself, “This is getting serious,” made a movement, and could not believe his ears when he heard Mrs. Travers say rapidly with a kind of fervour:

“Don’t go, pray; don’t stop them. Oh! This is truth — this is anger — something real at last.”

D’Alcacer leaned back at once against the rail.

Then Mr. Travers, with one arm extended, repeated very loudly:

“Nothing more to say. Leave my ship at once!”

And directly the black dog, stretched at his wife’s feet, muzzle on paws and blinking yellow eyes, growled discontentedly at the noise. Mrs. Travers laughed a faint, bright laugh, that seemed to escape, to glide, to dart between her white teeth. D’Alcacer, concealing his amazement, was looking down at her gravely: and after a slight gasp, she said with little bursts of merriment between every few words:

“No, but this is — such — such a fresh experience for me to hear — to see something — genuine and human. Ah! ah! one would think they had waited all their lives for this opportunity — ah! ah! ah! All their lives — for this! ah! ah! ah!”

These strange words struck d’Alcacer as perfectly just, as throwing an unexpected light. But after a smile, he said, seriously:

“This reality may go too far. A man who looks so picturesque is capable of anything. Allow me — ” And he left her side, moving toward Lingard,

loose-limbed and gaunt, yet having in his whole bearing, in his walk, in every leisurely movement, an air of distinction and ceremony.

Lingard spun round with aggressive mien to the light touch on his shoulder, but as soon as he took his eyes off Mr. Travers, his anger fell, seemed to sink without a sound at his feet like a rejected garment.

“Pardon me,” said d’Alcacer, composedly. The slight wave of his hand was hardly more than an indication, the beginning of a conciliating gesture. “Pardon me; but this is a matter requiring perfect confidence on both sides. Don Martin, here, who is a person of importance. . . .”

“I’ve spoken my mind plainly. I have said as much as I dare. On my word I have,” declared Lingard with an air of good temper.

“Ah!” said d’Alcacer, reflectively, “then your reserve is a matter of pledged faith — of — of honour?”

Lingard also appeared thoughtful for a moment.

“You may put it that way. And I owe nothing to a man who couldn’t see my hand when I put it out to him as I came aboard.”

“You have so much the advantage of us here,” replied d’Alcacer, “that you may well be generous and forget that oversight; and then just a little more confidence. . . .”

“My dear d’Alcacer, you are absurd,” broke in Mr. Travers, in a calm voice but with white lips. “I did not come out all this way to shake hands promiscuously and receive confidences from the first adventurer that comes along.”

D’Alcacer stepped back with an almost imperceptible inclination of the head at Lingard, who stood for a moment with twitching face.

“I am an adventurer,” he burst out, “and if I hadn’t been an adventurer, I would have had to starve or work at home for such people as you. If I weren’t an adventurer, you would be most likely lying dead on this deck with your cut throat gaping at the sky.”

Mr. Travers waved this speech away. But others also had heard. Carter listened watchfully and something, some alarming notion seemed to dawn all at once upon the thick little sailing-master, who rushed on his short legs, and tugging at Carter’s sleeve, stammered desperately:

“What’s he saying? Who’s he? What’s up? Are the natives unfriendly? My book says — ‘Natives friendly all along this coast!’ My book says — ”

Carter, who had glanced over the side, jerked his arm free.



“You go down into the pantry, where you belong, Skipper, and read that bit about the natives over again,” he said to his superior officer, with savage contempt. “I’ll be hanged if some of them ain’t coming aboard now to eat you — book and all. Get out of the way, and let the gentlemen have the first chance of a row.”

Then addressing Lingard, he drawled in his old way:

“That crazy mate of yours has sent your boat back, with a couple of visitors in her, too.”

Before he apprehended plainly the meaning of these words, Lingard caught sight of two heads rising above the rail, the head of Hassim and the head of Immada. Then their bodies ascended into view as though these two beings had gradually emerged from the Shallows. They stood for a moment on the platform looking down on the deck as if about to step into the unknown, then descended and walking aft entered the half-light under the awning shading the luxurious surroundings, the complicated emotions of the, to them, inconceivable existences.

Lingard without waiting a moment cried:

“What news, O Rajah?”

Hassim’s eyes made the round of the schooner’s decks. He had left his gun in the boat and advanced empty handed, with a tranquil assurance as if bearing a welcome offering in the faint smile of his lips. Immada, half hidden behind his shoulder, followed lightly, her elbows pressed close to her side. The thick fringe of her eyelashes was dropped like a veil; she looked youthful and brooding; she had an aspect of shy resolution.

They stopped within arm’s length of the whites, and for some time nobody said a word. Then Hassim gave Lingard a significant glance, and uttered rapidly with a slight toss of the head that indicated in a manner the whole of the yacht:

“I see no guns!”

“N — no!” said Lingard, looking suddenly confused. It had occurred to him that for the first time in two years or more he had forgotten, utterly forgotten, these people’s existence.

Immada stood slight and rigid with downcast eyes. Hassim, at his ease, scrutinized the faces, as if searching for elusive points of similitude or for subtle shades of difference.

“What is this new intrusion?” asked Mr. Travers, angrily.

“These are the fisher-folk, sir,” broke in the sailing-master, “we’ve observed these three days past flitting about in a canoe; but they never had the sense to answer our hail; and yet a bit of fish for your breakfast — ” He smiled obsequiously, and all at once, without provocation, began to bellow:

“Hey! Johnnie! Hab got fish? Fish! One peecee fish! Eh? Savee? Fish! Fish — ” He gave it up suddenly to say in a deferential tone — ”Can’t make them savages understand anything, sir,” and withdrew as if after a clever feat.

Hassim looked at Lingard.

“Why did the little white man make that outcry?” he asked, anxiously.

“Their desire is to eat fish,” said Lingard in an enraged tone.

Then before the air of extreme surprise which incontinently appeared on the other’s face, he could not restrain a short and hopeless laugh.

“Eat fish,” repeated Hassim, staring. “O you white people! O you white people! Eat fish! Good! But why make that noise? And why did you send them here without guns?” After a significant glance down upon the slope of the deck caused by the vessel being on the ground, he added with a slight nod at Lingard — ”And without knowledge?”

“You should not have come here, O Hassim,” said Lingard, testily. “Here no one understands. They take a rajah for a fisherman — ”

“Ya-wa! A great mistake, for, truly, the chief of ten fugitives without a country is much less than the headman of a fishing village,” observed Hassim, composedly. Immada sighed. “But you, Tuan, at least know the truth,” he went on with quiet irony; then after a pause — ”We came here because you had forgotten to look toward us, who had waited, sleeping little at night, and in the day watching with hot eyes the empty water at the foot of the sky for you.”

Immada murmured, without lifting her head:

“You never looked for us. Never, never once.”

“There was too much trouble in my eyes,” explained Lingard with that patient gentleness of tone and face which, every time he spoke to the young girl, seemed to disengage itself from his whole person, enveloping his fierceness, softening his aspect, such as the dreamy mist that in the early radiance of the morning weaves a veil of tender charm about a rugged rock in mid-ocean. “I must look now to the right and to the left as in a time of sudden danger,” he added after a moment and she whispered an appalled

“Why?” so low that its pain floated away in the silence of attentive men, without response, unheard, ignored, like the pain of an impalpable thought.

#### IV

D’Alcacer, standing back, surveyed them all with a profound and alert attention. Lingard seemed unable to tear himself away from the yacht, and remained, checked, as it were in the act of going, like a man who has stopped to think out the last thing to say; and that stillness of a body, forgotten by the labouring mind, reminded Carter of that moment in the cabin, when alone he had seen this man thus wrestling with his thought, motionless and locked in the grip of his conscience.

Mr. Travers muttered audibly through his teeth:

“How long is this performance going to last? I have desired you to go.”

“Think of these poor devils,” whispered Lingard, with a quick glance at the crew huddled up near by.

“You are the kind of man I would be least disposed to trust — in any case,” said Mr. Travers, incisively, very low, and with an inexplicable but very apparent satisfaction. “You are only wasting your time here.”

“You — You — ” He stammered and stared. He chewed with growls some insulting word and at last swallowed it with an effort. “My time pays for your life,” he said.

He became aware of a sudden stir, and saw that Mrs. Travers had risen from her chair.

She walked impulsively toward the group on the quarter-deck, making straight for Immada. Hassim had stepped aside and his detached gaze of a Malay gentleman passed by her as if she had been invisible.

She was tall, supple, moving freely. Her complexion was so dazzling in the shade that it seemed to throw out a halo round her head. Upon a smooth and wide brow an abundance of pale fair hair, fine as silk, undulating like the sea, heavy like a helmet, descended low without a trace of gloss, without a gleam in its coils, as though it had never been touched by a ray of light; and a throat white, smooth, palpitating with life, a round neck modelled with strength and delicacy, supported gloriously that radiant face and that pale mass of hair unvisited by sunshine.

She said with animation:

“Why, it’s a girl!”

Mrs. Travers extorted from d’Alcacer a fresh tribute of curiosity. A strong puff of wind fluttered the awnings and one of the screens blowing

out wide let in upon the quarter-deck the rippling glitter of the Shallows, showing to d'Alcacer the luminous vastness of the sea, with the line of the distant horizon, dark like the edge of the encompassing night, drawn at the height of Mrs. Travers' shoulder. . . . Where was it he had seen her last — a long time before, on the other side of the world? There was also the glitter of splendour around her then, and an impression of luminous vastness. The encompassing night, too, was there, the night that waits for its time to move forward upon the glitter, the splendour, the men, the women.

He could not remember for the moment, but he became convinced that of all the women he knew, she alone seemed to be made for action. Every one of her movements had firmness, ease, the meaning of a vital fact, the moral beauty of a fearless expression. Her supple figure was not dishonoured by any faltering of outlines under the plain dress of dark blue stuff moulding her form with bold simplicity.

She had only very few steps to make, but before she had stopped, confronting Immada, d'Alcacer remembered her suddenly as he had seen her last, out West, far away, impossibly different, as if in another universe, as if presented by the fantasy of a fevered memory. He saw her in a luminous perspective of palatial drawing rooms, in the restless eddy and flow of a human sea, at the foot of walls high as cliffs, under lofty ceilings that like a tropical sky flung light and heat upon the shallow glitter of uniforms, of stars, of diamonds, of eyes sparkling in the weary or impassive faces of the throng at an official reception. Outside he had found the unavoidable darkness with its aspect of patient waiting, a cloudy sky holding back the dawn of a London morning. It was difficult to believe.

Lingard, who had been looking dangerously fierce, slapped his thigh and showed signs of agitation.

“By heavens, I had forgotten all about you!” he pronounced in dismay.

Mrs. Travers fixed her eyes on Immada. Fairhaired and white she asserted herself before the girl of olive face and raven locks with the maturity of perfection, with the superiority of the flower over the leaf, of the phrase that contains a thought over the cry that can only express an emotion. Immense spaces and countless centuries stretched between them: and she looked at her as when one looks into one's own heart with absorbed curiosity, with still wonder, with an immense compassion. Lingard murmured, warningly:

“Don't touch her.”

Mrs. Travers looked at him.

“Do you think I could hurt her?” she asked, softly, and was so startled to hear him mutter a gloomy “Perhaps,” that she hesitated before she smiled.

“Almost a child! And so pretty! What a delicate face,” she said, while another deep sigh of the sea breeze lifted and let fall the screens, so that the sound, the wind, and the glitter seemed to rush in together and bear her words away into space. “I had no idea of anything so charmingly gentle,” she went on in a voice that without effort glowed, caressed, and had a magic power of delight to the soul. “So young! And she lives here — does she? On the sea — or where? Lives — ” Then faintly, as if she had been in the act of speaking, removed instantly to a great distance, she was heard again: “How does she live?”

Lingard had hardly seen Edith Travers till then. He had seen no one really but Mr. Travers. He looked and listened with something of the stupor of a new sensation.

Then he made a distinct effort to collect his thoughts and said with a remnant of anger:

“What have you got to do with her? She knows war. Do you know anything about it? And hunger, too, and thirst, and unhappiness; things you have only heard about. She has been as near death as I am to you — and what is all that to any of you here?”

“That child!” she said in slow wonder.

Immada turned upon Mrs. Travers her eyes black as coal, sparkling and soft like a tropical night; and the glances of the two women, their dissimilar and inquiring glances met, seemed to touch, clasp, hold each other with the grip of an intimate contact. They separated.

“What are they come for? Why did you show them the way to this place?” asked Immada, faintly.

Lingard shook his head in denial.

“Poor girl,” said Mrs. Travers. “Are they all so pretty?”

“Who-all?” mumbled Lingard. “There isn’t an other one like her if you were to ransack the islands all round the compass.”

“Edith!” ejaculated Mr. Travers in a remonstrating, acrimonious voice, and everyone gave him a look of vague surprise.

Then Mrs. Travers asked:

“Who is she?”

Lingard very red and grave declared curtly:

“A princess.”

Immediately he looked round with suspicion. No one smiled. D’Alcacer, courteous and nonchalant, lounged up close to Mrs. Travers’ elbow.

“If she is a princess, then this man is a knight,” he murmured with conviction. “A knight as I live! A descendant of the immortal hidalgo errant upon the sea. It would be good for us to have him for a friend. Seriously I think that you ought — ”

The two stepped aside and spoke low and hurriedly.

“Yes, you ought — ”

“How can I?” she interrupted, catching the meaning like a ball.

“By saying something.”

“Is it really necessary?” she asked, doubtfully.

“It would do no harm,” said d’Alcacer with sudden carelessness; “a friend is always better than an enemy.”

“Always?” she repeated, meaningly. “But what could I say?”

“Some words,” he answered; “I should think any words in your voice — ”

“Mr. d’Alcacer!”

“Or you could perhaps look at him once or twice as though he were not exactly a robber,” he continued.

“Mr. d’Alcacer, are you afraid?”

“Extremely,” he said, stooping to pick up the fan at her feet. “That is the reason I am so anxious to conciliate. And you must not forget that one of your queens once stepped on the cloak of perhaps such a man.”

Her eyes sparkled and she dropped them suddenly.

“I am not a queen,” she said, coldly.

“Unfortunately not,” he admitted; “but then the other was a woman with no charm but her crown.”

At that moment Lingard, to whom Hassim had been talking earnestly, protested aloud:

“I never saw these people before.”

Immada caught hold of her brother’s arm. Mr. Travers said harshly:

“Oblige me by taking these natives away.”

“Never before,” murmured Immada as if lost in ecstasy. D’Alcacer glanced at Mrs. Travers and made a step forward.

“Could not the difficulty, whatever it is, be arranged, Captain?” he said with careful politeness. “Observe that we are not only men here — ”

“Let them die!” cried Immada, triumphantly.

Though Lingard alone understood the meaning of these words, all on board felt oppressed by the uneasy silence which followed her cry.

“Ah! He is going. Now, Mrs. Travers,” whispered d’Alcacer.

“I hope!” said Mrs. Travers, impulsively, and stopped as if alarmed at the sound.

Lingard stood still.

“I hope,” she began again, “that this poor girl will know happier days —” She hesitated.

Lingard waited, attentive and serious.

“Under your care,” she finished. “And I believe you meant to be friendly to us.”

“Thank you,” said Lingard with dignity.

“You and d’Alcacer,” observed Mr. Travers, austere, “are unnecessarily detaining this — ah — person, and — ah — friends — ah!”

“I had forgotten you — and now — what? One must — it is hard — hard —” went on Lingard, disconnectedly, while he looked into Mrs. Travers’ violet eyes, and felt his mind overpowered and troubled as if by the contemplation of vast distances. “I — you don’t know — I — you — cannot . . . Ha! It’s all that man’s doing,” he burst out.

For a time, as if beside himself, he glared at Mrs. Travers, then flung up one arm and strode off toward the gangway, where Hassim and Immada waited for him, interested and patient. With a single word “Come,” he preceded them down into the boat. Not a sound was heard on the yacht’s deck, while these three disappeared one after another below the rail as if they had descended into the sea.

## V

The afternoon dragged itself out in silence. Mrs. Travers sat pensive and idle with her fan on her knees. D’Alcacer, who thought the incident should have been treated in a conciliatory spirit, attempted to communicate his view to his host, but that gentleman, purposely misunderstanding his motive, overwhelmed him with so many apologies and expressions of regret at the irksome and perhaps inconvenient delay “which you suffer from through your good-natured acceptance of our invitation” that the other was obliged to refrain from pursuing the subject further.

“Even my regard for you, my dear d’Alcacer, could not induce me to submit to such a bare-faced attempt at extortion,” affirmed Mr. Travers with

uncompromising virtue. "The man wanted to force his services upon me, and then put in a heavy claim for salvage. That is the whole secret — you may depend on it. I detected him at once, of course." The eye-glass glittered perspicuously. "He underrated my intelligence; and what a violent scoundrel! The existence of such a man in the time we live in is a scandal."

D'Alcacer retired, and, full of vague forebodings, tried in vain for hours to interest himself in a book. Mr. Travers walked up and down restlessly, trying to persuade himself that his indignation was based on purely moral grounds. The glaring day, like a mass of white-hot iron withdrawn from the fire, was losing gradually its heat and its glare in a richer deepening of tone. At the usual time two seamen, walking noiselessly aft in their yachting shoes, rolled up in silence the quarter-deck screens; and the coast, the shallows, the dark islets and the snowy sandbanks uncovered thus day after day were seen once more in their aspect of dumb watchfulness. The brig, swung end on in the foreground, her squared yards crossing heavily the soaring symmetry of the rigging, resembled a creature instinct with life, with the power of springing into action lurking in the light grace of its repose.

A pair of stewards in white jackets with brass buttons appeared on deck and began to flit about without a sound, laying the table for dinner on the flat top of the cabin skylight. The sun, drifting away toward other lands, toward other seas, toward other men; the sun, all red in a cloudless sky raked the yacht with a parting salvo of crimson rays that shattered themselves into sparks of fire upon the crystal and silver of the dinner-service, put a short flame into the blades of knives, and spread a rosy tint over the white of plates. A trail of purple, like a smear of blood on a blue shield, lay over the sea.

On sitting down Mr. Travers alluded in a vexed tone to the necessity of living on preserves, all the stock of fresh provisions for the passage to Batavia having been already consumed. It was distinctly unpleasant.

"I don't travel for my pleasure, however," he added; "and the belief that the sacrifice of my time and comfort will be productive of some good to the world at large would make up for any amount of privations."

Mrs. Travers and d'Alcacer seemed unable to shake off a strong aversion to talk, and the conversation, like an expiring breeze, kept on dying out repeatedly after each languid gust. The large silence of the horizon, the profound repose of all things visible, enveloping the bodies and penetrating



the souls with their quieting influence, stilled thought as well as voice. For a long time no one spoke. Behind the taciturnity of the masters the servants hovered without noise.

Suddenly, Mr. Travers, as if concluding a train of thought, muttered aloud:

“I own with regret I did in a measure lose my temper; but then you will admit that the existence of such a man is a disgrace to civilization.”

This remark was not taken up and he returned for a time to the nursing of his indignation, at the bottom of which, like a monster in a fog, crept a bizarre feeling of rancour. He waved away an offered dish.

“This coast,” he began again, “has been placed under the sole protection of Holland by the Treaty of 1820. The Treaty of 1820 creates special rights and obligations. . . .”

Both his hearers felt vividly the urgent necessity to hear no more. D’Alcacer, uncomfortable on a campstool, sat stiff and stared at the glass stopper of a carafe. Mrs. Travers turned a little sideways and leaning on her elbow rested her head on the palm of her hand like one thinking about matters of profound import. Mr. Travers talked; he talked inflexibly, in a harsh blank voice, as if reading a proclamation. The other two, as if in a state of incomplete trance, had their ears assailed by fragments of official verbiage.

“An international understanding — the duty to civilize — failed to carry out — compact — Canning — ” D’Alcacer became attentive for a moment. “ — not that this attempt, almost amusing in its impudence, influences my opinion. I won’t admit the possibility of any violence being offered to people of our position. It is the social aspect of such an incident I am desirous of criticising.”

Here d’Alcacer lost himself again in the recollection of Mrs. Travers and Immada looking at each other — the beginning and the end, the flower and the leaf, the phrase and the cry. Mr. Travers’ voice went on dogmatic and obstinate for a long time. The end came with a certain vehemence.

“And if the inferior race must perish, it is a gain, a step toward the perfecting of society which is the aim of progress.”

He ceased. The sparks of sunset in crystal and silver had gone out, and around the yacht the expanse of coast and Shallows seemed to await, unmoved, the coming of utter darkness. The dinner was over a long time

ago and the patient stewards had been waiting, stoical in the downpour of words like sentries under a shower.

Mrs. Travers rose nervously and going aft began to gaze at the coast. Behind her the sun, sunk already, seemed to force through the mass of waters the glow of an unextinguishable fire, and below her feet, on each side of the yacht, the lustrous sea, as if reflecting the colour of her eyes, was tinged a sombre violet hue.

D'Alcacer came up to her with quiet footsteps and for some time they leaned side by side over the rail in silence. Then he said — "How quiet it is!" and she seemed to perceive that the quietness of that evening was more profound and more significant than ever before. Almost without knowing it she murmured — "It's like a dream." Another long silence ensued; the tranquillity of the universe had such an August ampleness that the sounds remained on the lips as if checked by the fear of profanation. The sky was limpid like a diamond, and under the last gleams of sunset the night was spreading its veil over the earth. There was something precious and soothing in the beautifully serene end of that expiring day, of the day vibrating, glittering and ardent, and dying now in infinite peace, without a stir, without a tremor, without a sigh — in the certitude of resurrection.

Then all at once the shadow deepened swiftly, the stars came out in a crowd, scattering a rain of pale sparks upon the blackness of the water, while the coast stretched low down, a dark belt without a gleam. Above it the top-hamper of the brig loomed indistinct and high.

Mrs. Travers spoke first.

"How unnaturally quiet! It is like a desert of land and water without a living soul."

"One man at least dwells in it," said d'Alcacer, lightly, "and if he is to be believed there are other men, full of evil intentions."

"Do you think it is true?" Mrs. Travers asked.

Before answering d'Alcacer tried to see the expression of her face but the obscurity was too profound already.

"How can one see a dark truth on such a dark night?" he said, evasively. "But it is easy to believe in evil, here or anywhere else."

She seemed to be lost in thought for a while.

"And that man himself?" she asked.

After some time d'Alcacer began to speak slowly. "Rough, uncommon, decidedly uncommon of his kind. Not at all what Don Martin thinks him to

be. For the rest — mysterious to me. He is your countryman after all — ”

She seemed quite surprised by that view.

“Yes,” she said, slowly. “But you know, I can not — what shall I say? — imagine him at all. He has nothing in common with the mankind I know. There is nothing to begin upon. How does such a man live? What are his thoughts? His actions? His affections? His — ”

“His conventions,” suggested d’Alcacer. “That would include everything.”

Mr. Travers appeared suddenly behind them with a glowing cigar in his teeth. He took it between his fingers to declare with persistent acrimony that no amount of “scoundrelly intimidation” would prevent him from having his usual walk. There was about three hundred yards to the southward of the yacht a sandbank nearly a mile long, gleaming a silvery white in the darkness, plummeted in the centre with a thicket of dry bushes that rustled very loud in the slightest stir of the heavy night air. The day after the stranding they had landed on it “to stretch their legs a bit,” as the sailing-master defined it, and every evening since, as if exercising a privilege or performing a duty, the three paced there for an hour backward and forward lost in dusky immensity, threading at the edge of water the belt of damp sand, smooth, level, elastic to the touch like living flesh and sweating a little under the pressure of their feet.

This time d’Alcacer alone followed Mr. Travers. Mrs. Travers heard them get into the yacht’s smallest boat, and the night-watchman, tugging at a pair of sculls, pulled them off to the nearest point. Then the man returned. He came up the ladder and she heard him say to someone on deck:

“Orders to go back in an hour.”

His footsteps died out forward, and a somnolent, unbreathing repose took possession of the stranded yacht.

## VI

After a time this absolute silence which she almost could feel pressing upon her on all sides induced in Mrs. Travers a state of hallucination. She saw herself standing alone, at the end of time, on the brink of days. All was unmoving as if the dawn would never come, the stars would never fade, the sun would never rise any more; all was mute, still, dead — as if the shadow of the outer darkness, the shadow of the uninterrupted, of the everlasting night that fills the universe, the shadow of the night so profound and so vast that the blazing suns lost in it are only like sparks, like pin-points of fire, the

restless shadow that like a suspicion of an evil truth darkens everything upon the earth on its passage, had enveloped her, had stood arrested as if to remain with her forever.

And there was such a finality in that illusion, such an accord with the trend of her thought that when she murmured into the darkness a faint “so be it” she seemed to have spoken one of those sentences that resume and close a life.

As a young girl, often reproved for her romantic ideas, she had dreams where the sincerity of a great passion appeared like the ideal fulfilment and the only truth of life. Entering the world she discovered that ideal to be unattainable because the world is too prudent to be sincere. Then she hoped that she could find the truth of life an ambition which she understood as a lifelong devotion to some unselfish ideal. Mr. Travers’ name was on men’s lips; he seemed capable of enthusiasm and of devotion; he impressed her imagination by his impenetrability. She married him, found him enthusiastically devoted to the nursing of his own career, and had nothing to hope for now.

That her husband should be bewildered by the curious misunderstanding which had taken place and also permanently grieved by her disloyalty to his respectable ideals was only natural. He was, however, perfectly satisfied with her beauty, her brilliance, and her useful connections. She was admired, she was envied; she was surrounded by splendour and adulation; the days went on rapid, brilliant, uniform, without a glimpse of sincerity or true passion, without a single true emotion — not even that of a great sorrow. And swiftly and stealthily they had led her on and on, to this evening, to this coast, to this sea, to this moment of time and to this spot on the earth’s surface where she felt unerringly that the moving shadow of the unbroken night had stood still to remain with her forever.

“So be it!” she murmured, resigned and defiant, at the mute and smooth obscurity that hung before her eyes in a black curtain without a fold; and as if in answer to that whisper a lantern was run up to the foreyard-arm of the brig. She saw it ascend swinging for a short space, and suddenly remain motionless in the air, piercing the dense night between the two vessels by its glance of flame that strong and steady seemed, from afar, to fall upon her alone.

Her thoughts, like a fascinated moth, went fluttering toward that light — that man — that girl, who had known war, danger, seen death near, had

obtained evidently the devotion of that man. The occurrences of the afternoon had been strange in themselves, but what struck her artistic sense was the vigour of their presentation. They outlined themselves before her memory with the clear simplicity of some immortal legend. They were mysterious, but she felt certain they were absolutely true. They embodied artless and masterful feelings; such, no doubt, as had swayed mankind in the simplicity of its youth. She envied, for a moment, the lot of that humble and obscure sister. Nothing stood between that girl and the truth of her sensations. She could be sincerely courageous, and tender and passionate and — well — ferocious. Why not ferocious? She could know the truth of terror — and of affection, absolutely, without artificial trammels, without the pain of restraint.

Thinking of what such life could be Mrs. Travers felt invaded by that inexplicable exaltation which the consciousness of their physical capacities so often gives to intellectual beings. She glowed with a sudden persuasion that she also could be equal to such an existence; and her heart was dilated with a momentary longing to know the naked truth of things; the naked truth of life and passion buried under the growth of centuries.

She glowed and, suddenly, she quivered with the shock of coming to herself as if she had fallen down from a star. There was a sound of rippling water and a shapeless mass glided out of the dark void she confronted. A voice below her feet said:

“I made out your shape — on the sky.” A cry of surprise expired on her lips and she could only peer downward. Lingard, alone in the brig’s dinghy, with another stroke sent the light boat nearly under the yacht’s counter, laid his sculls in, and rose from the thwart. His head and shoulders loomed up alongside and he had the appearance of standing upon the sea. Involuntarily Mrs. Travers made a movement of retreat.

“Stop,” he said, anxiously, “don’t speak loud. No one must know. Where do your people think themselves, I wonder? In a dock at home? And you —”

“My husband is not on board,” she interrupted, hurriedly.

“I know.”

She bent a little more over the rail.

“Then you are having us watched. Why?”

“Somebody must watch. Your people keep such a good look-out — don’t they? Yes. Ever since dark one of my boats has been dodging astern here, in

the deep water. I swore to myself I would never see one of you, never speak to one of you here, that I would be dumb, blind, deaf. And — here I am!”

Mrs. Travers’ alarm and mistrust were replaced by an immense curiosity, burning, yet quiet, too, as if before the inevitable work of destiny. She looked downward at Lingard. His head was bared, and, with one hand upon the ship’s side, he seemed to be thinking deeply.

“Because you had something more to tell us,” Mrs. Travers suggested, gently.

“Yes,” he said in a low tone and without moving in the least.

“Will you come on board and wait?” she asked.

“Who? I!” He lifted his head so quickly as to startle her. “I have nothing to say to him; and I’ll never put my foot on board this craft. I’ve been told to go. That’s enough.”

“He is accustomed to be addressed deferentially,” she said after a pause, “and you — ”

“Who is he?” asked Lingard, simply.

These three words seemed to her to scatter her past in the air — like smoke. They robbed all the multitude of mankind of every vestige of importance. She was amazed to find that on this night, in this place, there could be no adequate answer to the searching naiveness of that question.

“I didn’t ask for much,” Lingard began again. “Did I? Only that you all should come on board my brig for five days. That’s all. . . . Do I look like a liar? There are things I could not tell him. I couldn’t explain — I couldn’t — not to him — to no man — to no man in the world — ”

His voice dropped.

“Not to myself,” he ended as if in a dream.

“We have remained unmolested so long here,” began Mrs. Travers a little unsteadily, “that it makes it very difficult to believe in danger, now. We saw no one all these days except those two people who came for you. If you may not explain — ”

“Of course, you can’t be expected to see through a wall,” broke in Lingard. “This coast’s like a wall, but I know what’s on the other side. . . . A yacht here, of all things that float! When I set eyes on her I could fancy she hadn’t been more than an hour from home. Nothing but the look of her spars made me think of old times. And then the faces of the chaps on board. I seemed to know them all. It was like home coming to me when I wasn’t thinking of it. And I hated the sight of you all.”

"If we are exposed to any peril," she said after a pause during which she tried to penetrate the secret of passion hidden behind that man's words, "it need not affect you. Our other boat is gone to the Straits and effective help is sure to come very soon."

"Affect me! Is that precious watchman of yours coming aft? I don't want anybody to know I came here again begging, even of you. Is he coming aft? . . . Listen! I've stopped your other boat."

His head and shoulders disappeared as though he had dived into a denser layer of obscurity floating on the water. The watchman, who had the intention to stretch himself in one of the deck chairs, catching sight of the owner's wife, walked straight to the lamp that hung under the ridge pole of the awning, and after fumbling with it for a time went away forward with an indolent gait.

"You dared!" Mrs. Travers whispered down in an intense tone; and directly, Lingard's head emerged again below her with an upturned face.

"It was dare — or give up. The help from the Straits would have been too late anyhow if I hadn't the power to keep you safe; and if I had the power I could see you through it — alone. I expected to find a reasonable man to talk to. I ought to have known better. You come from too far to understand these things. Well, I dared; I've sent after your other boat a fellow who, with me at his back, would try to stop the governor of the Straits himself. He will do it. Perhaps it's done already. You have nothing to hope for. But I am here. You said you believed I meant well — "

"Yes," she murmured.

"That's why I thought I would tell you everything. I had to begin with this business about the boat. And what do you think of me now? I've cut you off from the rest of the earth. You people would disappear like a stone in the water. You left one foreign port for another. Who's there to trouble about what became of you? Who would know? Who could guess? It would be months before they began to stir."

"I understand," she said, steadily, "we are helpless."

"And alone," he added.

After a pause she said in a deliberate, restrained voice:

"What does this mean? Plunder, captivity?"

"It would have meant death if I hadn't been here," he answered.

"But you have the power to — "

“Why, do you think, you are alive yet?” he cried. “Jorgenson has been arguing with them on shore,” he went on, more calmly, with a swing of his arm toward where the night seemed darkest. “Do you think he would have kept them back if they hadn’t expected me every day? His words would have been nothing without my fist.”

She heard a dull blow struck on the side of the yacht and concealed in the same darkness that wrapped the unconcern of the earth and sea, the fury and the pain of hearts; she smiled above his head, fascinated by the simplicity of images and expressions.

Lingard made a brusque movement, the lively little boat being unsteady under his feet, and she spoke slowly, absently, as if her thought had been lost in the vagueness of her sensations.

“And this — this — Jorgenson, you said? Who is he?”

“A man,” he answered, “a man like myself.”

“Like yourself?”

“Just like myself,” he said with strange reluctance, as if admitting a painful truth. “More sense, perhaps, but less luck. Though, since your yacht has turned up here, I begin to think that my luck is nothing much to boast of either.”

“Is our presence here so fatal?”

“It may be death to some. It may be worse than death to me. And it rests with you in a way. Think of that! I can never find such another chance again. But that’s nothing! A man who has saved my life once and that I passed my word to would think I had thrown him over. But that’s nothing! Listen! As true as I stand here in my boat talking to you, I believe the girl would die of grief.”

“You love her,” she said, softly.

“Like my own daughter,” he cried, low.

Mrs. Travers said, “Oh!” faintly, and for a moment there was a silence, then he began again:

“Look here. When I was a boy in a trawler, and looked at you yacht people, in the Channel ports, you were as strange to me as the Malays here are strange to you. I left home sixteen years ago and fought my way all round the earth. I had the time to forget where I began. What are you to me against these two? If I was to die here on the spot would you care? No one would care at home. No one in the whole world — but these two.”

“What can I do?” she asked, and waited, leaning over.



He seemed to reflect, then lifting his head, spoke gently:

“Do you understand the danger you are in? Are you afraid?”

“I understand the expression you used, of course. Understand the danger?” she went on. “No — decidedly no. And — honestly — I am not afraid.”

“Aren’t you?” he said in a disappointed voice. “Perhaps you don’t believe me? I believed you, though, when you said you were sure I meant well. I trusted you enough to come here asking for your help — telling you what no one knows.”

“You mistake me,” she said with impulsive earnestness. “This is so extraordinarily unusual — sudden — outside my experience.”

“Aye!” he murmured, “what would you know of danger and trouble? You! But perhaps by thinking it over — ”

“You want me to think myself into a fright!” Mrs. Travers laughed lightly, and in the gloom of his thought this flash of joyous sound was incongruous and almost terrible. Next moment the night appeared brilliant as day, warm as sunshine; but when she ceased the returning darkness gave him pain as if it had struck heavily against his breast. “I don’t think I could do that,” she finished in a serious tone.

“Couldn’t you?” He hesitated, perplexed. “Things are bad enough to make it no shame. I tell you,” he said, rapidly, “and I am not a timid man, I may not be able to do much if you people don’t help me.”

“You want me to pretend I am alarmed?” she asked, quickly.

“Aye, to pretend — as well you may. It’s a lot to ask of you — who perhaps never had to make-believe a thing in your life — isn’t it?”

“It is,” she said after a time.

The unexpected bitterness of her tone struck Lingard with dismay.

“Don’t be offended,” he entreated. “I’ve got to plan a way out of this mess. It’s no play either. Could you pretend?”

“Perhaps, if I tried very hard. But to what end?”

“You must all shift aboard the brig,” he began, speaking quickly, “and then we may get over this trouble without coming to blows. Now, if you were to say that you wish it; that you feel unsafe in the yacht — don’t you see?”

“I see,” she pronounced, thoughtfully.

“The brig is small but the cuddy is fit for a lady,” went on Lingard with animation.

“Has it not already sheltered a princess?” she commented, coolly.

“And I shall not intrude.”

“This is an inducement.”

“Nobody will dare to intrude. You needn’t even see me.”

“This is almost decisive, only — ”

“I know my place.”

“Only, I might not have the influence,” she finished.

“That I can not believe,” he said, roughly. “The long and the short of it is you don’t trust me because you think that only people of your own condition speak the truth always.”

“Evidently,” she murmured.

“You say to yourself — here’s a fellow deep in with pirates, thieves, niggers — ”

“To be sure — ”

“A man I never saw the like before,” went on Lingard, headlong, “a — ruffian.”

He checked himself, full of confusion. After a time he heard her saying, calmly:

“You are like other men in this, that you get angry when you can not have your way at once.”

“I angry!” he exclaimed in deadened voice. “You do not understand. I am thinking of you also — it is hard on me — ”

“I mistrust not you, but my own power. You have produced an unfortunate impression on Mr. Travers.”

“Unfortunate impression! He treated me as if I had been a long-shore loafer. Never mind that. He is your husband. Fear in those you care for is hard to bear for any man. And so, he — ”

“What Machiavellism!”

“Eh, what did you say?”

“I only wondered where you had observed that. On the sea?”

“Observed what?” he said, absently. Then pursuing his idea — “One word from you ought to be enough.”

“You think so?”

“I am sure of it. Why, even I, myself — ”

“Of course,” she interrupted. “But don’t you think that after parting with you on such — such — inimical terms, there would be a difficulty in resuming relations?”

“A man like me would do anything for money — don’t you see?”

After a pause she asked:

“And would you care for that argument to be used?”

“As long as you know better!”

His voice vibrated — she drew back disturbed, as if unexpectedly he had touched her.

“What can there be at stake?” she began, wonderingly.

“A kingdom,” said Lingard.

Mrs. Travers leaned far over the rail, staring, and their faces, one above the other, came very close together.

“Not for yourself?” she whispered.

He felt the touch of her breath on his forehead and remained still for a moment, perfectly still as if he did not intend to move or speak any more.

“Those things,” he began, suddenly, “come in your way, when you don’t think, and they get all round you before you know what you mean to do. When I went into that bay in New Guinea I never guessed where that course would take me to. I could tell you a story. You would understand! You! You!”

He stammered, hesitated, and suddenly spoke, liberating the visions of two years into the night where Mrs. Travers could follow them as if outlined in words of fire.

## VII

His tale was as startling as the discovery of a new world. She was being taken along the boundary of an exciting existence, and she looked into it through the guileless enthusiasm of the narrator. The heroic quality of the feelings concealed what was disproportionate and absurd in that gratitude, in that friendship, in that inexplicable devotion. The headlong fierceness of purpose invested his obscure design of conquest with the proportions of a great enterprise. It was clear that no vision of a subjugated world could have been more inspiring to the most famous adventurer of history.

From time to time he interrupted himself to ask, confidently, as if he had been speaking to an old friend, “What would you have done?” and hurried on without pausing for approval.

It struck her that there was a great passion in all this, the beauty of an implanted faculty of affection that had found itself, its immediate need of an object and the way of expansion; a tenderness expressed violently; a tenderness that could only be satisfied by backing human beings against

their own destiny. Perhaps her hatred of convention, trammelling the frankness of her own impulses, had rendered her more alert to perceive what is intrinsically great and profound within the forms of human folly, so simple and so infinitely varied according to the region of the earth and to the moment of time.

What of it that the narrator was only a roving seaman; the kingdom of the jungle, the men of the forest, the lives obscure! That simple soul was possessed by the greatness of the idea; there was nothing sordid in its flaming impulses. When she once understood that, the story appealed to the audacity of her thoughts, and she became so charmed with what she heard that she forgot where she was. She forgot that she was personally close to that tale which she saw detached, far away from her, truth or fiction, presented in picturesque speech, real only by the response of her emotion.

Lingard paused. In the cessation of the impassioned murmur she began to reflect. And at first it was only an oppressive notion of there being some significance that really mattered in this man's story. That mattered to her. For the first time the shadow of danger and death crossed her mind. Was that the significance? Suddenly, in a flash of acute discernment, she saw herself involved helplessly in that story, as one is involved in a natural cataclysm.

He was speaking again. He had not been silent more than a minute. It seemed to Mrs. Travers that years had elapsed, so different now was the effect of his words. Her mind was agitated as if his coming to speak and confide in her had been a tremendous occurrence. It was a fact of her own existence; it was part of the story also. This was the disturbing thought. She heard him pronounce several names: Belarab, Daman, Tengga, Ningrat. These belonged now to her life and she was appalled to find she was unable to connect these names with any human appearance. They stood out alone, as if written on the night; they took on a symbolic shape; they imposed themselves upon her senses. She whispered as if pondering: "Belarab, Daman, Ningrat," and these barbarous sounds seemed to possess an exceptional energy, a fatal aspect, the savour of madness.

"Not one of them but has a heavy score to settle with the whites. What's that to me! I had somehow to get men who would fight. I risked my life to get that lot. I made them promises which I shall keep — or — ! Can you see now why I dared to stop your boat? I am in so deep that I care for no Sir John in the world. When I look at the work ahead I care for nothing. I gave

you one chance — one good chance. That I had to do. No! I suppose I didn't look enough of a gentleman. Yes! Yes! That's it. Yet I know what a gentleman is. I lived with them for years. I chummed with them — yes — on gold-fields and in other places where a man has got to show the stuff that's in him. Some of them write from home to me here — such as you see me, because I — never mind! And I know what a gentleman would do. Come! Wouldn't he treat a stranger fairly? Wouldn't he remember that no man is a liar till you prove him so? Wouldn't he keep his word wherever given? Well, I am going to do that. Not a hair of your head shall be touched as long as I live!"

She had regained much of her composure but at these words she felt that staggering sense of utter insecurity which is given one by the first tremor of an earthquake. It was followed by an expectant stillness of sensations. She remained silent. He thought she did not believe him.

"Come! What on earth do you think brought me here — to — to — talk like this to you? There was Hassim — Rajah Tulla, I should say — who was asking me this afternoon: 'What will you do now with these, your people?' I believe he thinks yet I fetched you here for some reason. You can't tell what crooked notion they will get into their thick heads. It's enough to make one swear." He swore. "My people! Are you? How much? Say — how much? You're no more mine than I am yours. Would any of you fine folks at home face black ruin to save a fishing smack's crew from getting drowned?"

Notwithstanding that sense of insecurity which lingered faintly in her mind she had no image of death before her. She felt intensely alive. She felt alive in a flush of strength, with an impression of novelty as though life had been the gift of this very moment. The danger hidden in the night gave no sign to awaken her terror, but the workings of a human soul, simple and violent, were laid bare before her and had the disturbing charm of an unheard-of experience. She was listening to a man who concealed nothing. She said, interrogatively:

"And yet you have come?"

"Yes," he answered, "to you — and for you only."

The flood tide running strong over the banks made a placid trickling sound about the yacht's rudder.

"I would not be saved alone."

“Then you must bring them over yourself,” he said in a sombre tone. “There’s the brig. You have me — my men — my guns. You know what to do.

“I will try,” she said.

“Very well. I am sorry for the poor devils forward there if you fail. But of course you won’t. Watch that light on the brig. I had it hoisted on purpose. The trouble may be nearer than we think. Two of my boats are gone scouting and if the news they bring me is bad the light will be lowered. Think what that means. And I’ve told you what I have told nobody. Think of my feelings also. I told you because I — because I had to.”

He gave a shove against the yacht’s side and glided away from under her eyes. A rippling sound died out.

She walked away from the rail. The lamp and the skylights shone faintly along the dark stretch of the decks. This evening was like the last — like all the evenings before.

“Is all this I have heard possible?” she asked herself. “No — but it is true.”

She sat down in a deck chair to think and found she could only remember. She jumped up. She was sure somebody was hailing the yacht faintly. Was that man hailing? She listened, and hearing nothing was annoyed with herself for being haunted by a voice.

“He said he could trust me. Now, what is this danger? What is danger?” she meditated.

Footsteps were coming from forward. The figure of the watchman flitted vaguely over the gangway. He was whistling softly and vanished. Hollow sounds in the boat were succeeded by a splash of oars. The night swallowed these slight noises. Mrs. Travers sat down again and found herself much calmer.

She had the faculty of being able to think her own thoughts — and the courage. She could take no action of any kind till her husband’s return. Lingard’s warnings were not what had impressed her most. This man had presented his innermost self unclothed by any subterfuge. There were in plain sight his desires, his perplexities, affections, doubts, his violence, his folly; and the existence they made up was lawless but not vile. She had too much elevation of mind to look upon him from any other but a strictly human standpoint. If he trusted her (how strange; why should he? Was he wrong?) she accepted the trust with scrupulous fairness. And when it

dawned upon her that of all the men in the world this unquestionably was the one she knew best, she had a moment of wonder followed by an impression of profound sadness. It seemed an unfortunate matter that concerned her alone.

Her thought was suspended while she listened attentively for the return of the yacht's boat. She was dismayed at the task before her. Not a sound broke the stillness and she felt as if she were lost in empty space. Then suddenly someone amidships yawned immensely and said: "Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" A voice asked: "Ain't they back yet?" A negative grunt answered.

Mrs. Travers found that Lingard was touching, because he could be understood. How simple was life, she reflected. She was frank with herself. She considered him apart from social organization. She discovered he had no place in it. How delightful! Here was a human being and the naked truth of things was not so very far from her notwithstanding the growth of centuries. Then it occurred to her that this man by his action stripped her at once of her position, of her wealth, of her rank, of her past. "I am helpless. What remains?" she asked herself. Nothing! Anybody there might have suggested: "Your presence." She was too artificial yet to think of her beauty; and yet the power of personality is part of the naked truth of things.

She looked over her shoulder, and saw the light at the brig's foreyard-arm burning with a strong, calm flame in the dust of starlight suspended above the coast. She heard the heavy bump as of a boat run headlong against the ladder. They were back! She rose in sudden and extreme agitation. What should she say? How much? How to begin? Why say anything? It would be absurd, like talking seriously about a dream. She would not dare! In a moment she was driven into a state of mind bordering on distraction. She heard somebody run up the gangway steps. With the idea of gaining time she walked rapidly aft to the taffrail. The light of the brig faced her without a flicker, enormous amongst the suns scattered in the immensity of the night.

She fixed her eyes on it. She thought: "I shan't tell him anything. Impossible. No! I shall tell everything." She expected every moment to hear her husband's voice and the suspense was intolerable because she felt that then she must decide. Somebody on deck was babbling excitedly. She devoutly hoped d'Alcacer would speak first and thus put off the fatal moment. A voice said roughly: "What's that?" And in the midst of her distress she recognized Carter's voice, having noticed that young man who

was of a different stamp from the rest of the crew. She came to the conclusion that the matter could be related jocularly, or — why not pretend fear? At that moment the brig's yard-arm light she was looking at trembled distinctly, and she was dumfounded as if she had seen a commotion in the firmament. With her lips open for a cry she saw it fall straight down several feet, flicker, and go out. All perplexity passed from her mind. This first fact of the danger gave her a thrill of quite a new emotion. Something had to be done at once. For some remote reason she felt ashamed of her hesitations.

She moved swiftly forward and under the lamp came face to face with Carter who was coming aft. Both stopped, staring, the light fell on their faces, and both were struck by each other's expression. The four eyes shone wide.

"You have seen?" she asked, beginning to tremble.

"How do you know?" he said, at the same time, evidently surprised.

Suddenly she saw that everybody was on deck.

"The light is down," she stammered.

"The gentlemen are lost," said Carter. Then he perceived she did not seem to understand. "Kidnapped off the sandbank," he continued, looking at her fixedly to see how she would take it. She seemed calm. "Kidnapped like a pair of lambs! Not a squeak," he burst out with indignation. "But the sandbank is long and they might have been at the other end. You were on deck, ma'am?" he asked.

"Yes," she murmured. "In the chair here."

"We were all down below. I had to rest a little. When I came up the watchman was asleep. He swears he wasn't, but I know better. Nobody heard any noise, unless you did. But perhaps you were asleep?" he asked, deferentially.

"Yes — no — I must have been," she said, faintly.

### VIII

Lingard's soul was exalted by his talk with Mrs. Travers, by the strain of incertitude and by extreme fatigue. On returning on board he asked after Hassim and was told that the Rajah and his sister had gone off in their canoe promising to return before midnight. The boats sent to scout between the islets north and south of the anchorage had not come back yet. He went into his cabin and throwing himself on the couch closed his eyes thinking: "I must sleep or I shall go mad."



At times he felt an unshaken confidence in Mrs. Travers — then he remembered her face. Next moment the face would fade, he would make an effort to hold on to the image, fail — and then become convinced without the shadow of a doubt that he was utterly lost, unless he let all these people be wiped off the face of the earth.

“They all heard that man order me out of his ship,” he thought, and thereupon for a second or so he contemplated without flinching the lurid image of a massacre. “And yet I had to tell her that not a hair of her head shall be touched. Not a hair.”

And irrationally at the recollection of these words there seemed to be no trouble of any kind left in the world. Now and then, however, there were black instants when from sheer weariness he thought of nothing at all; and during one of these he fell asleep, losing the consciousness of external things as suddenly as if he had been felled by a blow on the head.

When he sat up, almost before he was properly awake, his first alarmed conviction was that he had slept the night through. There was a light in the cuddy and through the open door of his cabin he saw distinctly Mrs. Travers pass out of view across the lighted space.

“They did come on board after all,” he thought — “how is it I haven’t been called!”

He darted into the cuddy. Nobody! Looking up at the clock in the skylight he was vexed to see it had stopped till his ear caught the faint beat of the mechanism. It was going then! He could not have been asleep more than ten minutes. He had not been on board more than twenty!

So it was only a deception; he had seen no one. And yet he remembered the turn of the head, the line of the neck, the colour of the hair, the movement of the passing figure. He returned spiritlessly to his state-room muttering, “No more sleep for me to-night,” and came out directly, holding a few sheets of paper covered with a high, angular handwriting.

This was Jorgenson’s letter written three days before and entrusted to Hassim. Lingard had read it already twice, but he turned up the lamp a little higher and sat down to read it again. On the red shield above his head the gilt sheaf of thunderbolts darting between the initials of his name seemed to be aimed straight at the nape of his neck as he sat with bared elbows spread on the table, poring over the crumpled sheets. The letter began:

Hassim and Immada are going out to-night to look for you. You are behind your time and every passing day makes things worse.

Ten days ago three of Belarab's men, who had been collecting turtles' eggs on the islets, came flying back with a story of a ship stranded on the outer mudflats. Belarab at once forbade any boat from leaving the lagoon. So far good. There was a great excitement in the village. I judge it must be a schooner — probably some fool of a trader. However, you will know all about her when you read this. You may say I might have pulled out to sea to have a look for myself. But besides Belarab's orders to the contrary, which I would attend to for the sake of example, all you are worth in this world, Tom, is here in the Emma, under my feet, and I would not leave my charge even for half a day. Hassim attended the council held every evening in the shed outside Belarab's stockade. That holy man Ningrat was for looting that vessel. Hassim reproved him saying that the vessel probably was sent by you because no white men were known to come inside the shoals. Belarab backed up Hassim. Ningrat was very angry and reproached Belarab for keeping him, Ningrat, short of opium to smoke. He began by calling him "O! son," and ended by shouting, "O! you worse than an unbeliever!" There was a hullabaloo. The followers of Tengga were ready to interfere and you know how it is between Tengga and Belarab. Tengga always wanted to oust Belarab, and his chances were getting pretty good before you turned up and armed Belarab's bodyguard with muskets. However, Hassim stopped that row, and no one was hurt that time. Next day, which was Friday, Ningrat after reading the prayers in the mosque talked to the people outside. He bleated and capered like an old goat, prophesying misfortune, ruin, and extermination if these whites were allowed to get away. He is mad but then they think him a saint, and he had been fighting the Dutch for years in his young days. Six of Belarab's guard marched down the village street carrying muskets at full cock and the crowd cleared out. Ningrat was spirited away by Tengga's men into their master's stockade. If it was not for the fear of you turning up any moment there would have been a party-fight that evening. I think it is a pity Tengga is not chief of the land instead of Belarab. A brave and foresighted man, however treacherous at heart, can always be trusted to a certain extent. One can never get anything clear from Belarab. Peace! Peace! You know his fad. And this fad makes him act silly. The peace racket will get him into a row. It may cost him his life in the end. However, Tengga does not feel himself strong enough yet to act with his own followers only and Belarab has, on my advice, disarmed all villagers. His men went into the houses and took away by force all the firearms and as

many spears as they could lay hands on. The women screamed abuse of course, but there was no resistance. A few men were seen clearing out into the forest with their arms. Note this, for it means there is another power beside Belarab's in the village: the growing power of Tengga.

One morning — four days ago — I went to see Tengga. I found him by the shore trimming a plank with a small hatchet while a slave held an umbrella over his head. He is amusing himself in building a boat just now. He threw his hatchet down to meet me and led me by the hand to a shady spot. He told me frankly he had sent out two good swimmers to observe the stranded vessel. These men stole down the creek in a canoe and when on the sea coast swam from sandbank to sandbank until they approached unobserved — I think — to about fifty yards from that schooner. What can that craft be? I can't make it out. The men reported there were three chiefs on board. One with a glittering eye, one a lean man in white, and another without any hair on the face and dressed in a different style. Could it be a woman? I don't know what to think. I wish you were here. After a lot of chatter Tengga said: "Six years ago I was ruler of a country and the Dutch drove me out. The country was small but nothing is too small for them to take. They pretended to give it back to my nephew — may he burn! I ran away or they would have killed me. I am nothing here — but I remember. These white people out there can not run away and they are very few. There is perhaps a little to loot. I would give it to my men who followed me in my calamity because I am their chief and my father was the chief of their fathers." I pointed out the imprudence of this. He said: "The dead do not show the way." To this I remarked that the ignorant do not give information. Tengga kept quiet for a while, then said: "We must not touch them because their skin is like yours and to kill them would be wrong, but at the bidding of you whites we may go and fight with people of our own skin and our own faith — and that is good. I have promised to Tuan Lingard twenty men and a prau to make war in Wajo. The men are good and look at the prau; it is swift and strong." I must say, Tom, the prau is the best craft of the kind I have ever seen. I said you paid him well for the help. "And I also would pay," says he, "if you let me have a few guns and a little powder for my men. You and I shall share the loot of that ship outside, and Tuan Lingard will not know. It is only a little game. You have plenty of guns and powder under your care." He meant in the Emma. On that I spoke out pretty straight and we got rather warm until at last he gave me to understand that as he had

about forty followers of his own and I had only nine of Hassim's chaps to defend the Emma with, he could very well go for me and get the lot. "And then," says he, "I would be so strong that everybody would be on my side." I discovered in the course of further talk that there is a notion amongst many people that you have come to grief in some way and won't show up here any more. After this I saw the position was serious and I was in a hurry to get back to the Emma, but pretending I did not care I smiled and thanked Tengga for giving me warning of his intentions about me and the Emma. At this he nearly choked himself with his betel quid and fixing me with his little eyes, muttered: "Even a lizard will give a fly the time to say its prayers." I turned my back on him and was very thankful to get beyond the throw of a spear. I haven't been out of the Emma since.

## IX

The letter went on to enlarge on the intrigues of Tengga, the wavering conduct of Belarab, and the state of the public mind. It noted every gust of opinion and every event, with an earnestness of belief in their importance befitting the chronicle of a crisis in the history of an empire. The shade of Jorgenson had, indeed, stepped back into the life of men. The old adventurer looked on with a perfect understanding of the value of trifles, using his eyes for that other man whose conscience would have the task to unravel the tangle. Lingard lived through those days in the Settlement and was thankful to Jorgenson; only as he lived not from day to day but from sentence to sentence of the writing, there was an effect of bewildering rapidity in the succession of events that made him grunt with surprise sometimes or growl — "What?" to himself angrily and turn back several lines or a whole page more than once. Toward the end he had a heavy frown of perplexity and fidgeted as he read:

— and I began to think I could keep things quiet till you came or those wretched white people got their schooner off, when Sherif Daman arrived from the north on the very day he was expected, with two Illanun praus. He looks like an Arab. It was very evident to me he can wind the two Illanun pangerans round his little finger. The two praus are large and armed. They came up the creek, flags and streamers flying, beating drums and gongs, and entered the lagoon with their decks full of armed men brandishing two-handed swords and sounding the war cry. It is a fine force for you, only Belarab who is a perverse devil would not receive Sherif Daman at once. So Daman went to see Tengga who detained him a very long time. Leaving

Tengga he came on board the Emma, and I could see directly there was something up.

He began by asking me for the ammunition and weapons they are to get from you, saying he was anxious to sail at once toward Wajo, since it was agreed he was to precede you by a few days. I replied that that was true enough but that I could not think of giving him the powder and muskets till you came. He began to talk about you and hinted that perhaps you will never come. "And no matter," says he, "here is Rajah Hassim and the Lady Immada and we would fight for them if no white man was left in the world. Only we must have something to fight with." He pretended then to forget me altogether and talked with Hassim while I sat listening. He began to boast how well he got along the Bruni coast. No Illanun prau had passed down that coast for years.

Immada wanted me to give the arms he was asking for. The girl is beside herself with fear of something happening that would put a stopper on the Wajo expedition. She has set her mind on getting her country back. Hassim is very reserved but he is very anxious, too. Daman got nothing from me, and that very evening the praus were ordered by Belarab to leave the lagoon. He does not trust the Illanuns — and small blame to him. Sherif Daman went like a lamb. He has no powder for his guns. As the praus passed by the Emma he shouted to me he was going to wait for you outside the creek. Tengga has given him a man who would show him the place. All this looks very queer to me.

Look out outside then. The praus are dodging amongst the islets. Daman visits Tengga. Tengga called on me as a good friend to try and persuade me to give Daman the arms and gunpowder he is so anxious to get. Somehow or other they tried to get around Belarab, who came to see me last night and hinted I had better do so. He is anxious for these Illanuns to leave the neighbourhood. He thinks that if they loot the schooner they will be off at once. That's all he wants now. Immada has been to see Belarab's women and stopped two nights in the stockade. Belarab's youngest wife — he got married six weeks ago — is on the side of Tengga's party because she thinks Belarab would get a share of the loot and she got into her silly head there are jewels and silks in that schooner. What between Tengga worrying him outside and the women worrying him at home, Belarab had such a lively time of it that he concluded he would go to pray at his father's tomb. So for the last two days he has been away camping in that unhealthy place.

When he comes back he will be down with fever as sure as fate and then he will be no good for anything. Tengga lights up smoky fires often. Some signal to Daman. I go ashore with Hassim's men and put them out. This is risking a fight every time — for Tengga's men look very black at us. I don't know what the next move may be. Hassim's as true as steel. Immada is very unhappy. They will tell you many details I have no time to write.

The last page fluttered on the table out of Lingard's fingers. He sat very still for a moment looking straight before him, then went on deck.

"Our boats back yet?" he asked Shaw, whom he saw prowling on the quarter-deck.

"No, sir, I wish they were. I am waiting for them to go and turn in," answered the mate in an aggrieved manner.

"Lower that lantern forward there," cried Lingard, suddenly, in Malay.

"This trade isn't fit for a decent man," muttered Shaw to himself, and he moved away to lean on the rail, looking moodily to seaward. After a while: "There seems to be commotion on board that yacht," he said. "I see a lot of lights moving about her decks. Anything wrong, do you think, sir?"

"No, I know what it is," said Lingard in a tone of elation. She has done it! he thought.

He returned to the cabin, put away Jorgenson's letter and pulled out the drawer of the table. It was full of cartridges. He took a musket down, loaded it, then took another and another. He hammered at the waddings with fierce joyousness. The ramrods rang and jumped. It seemed to him he was doing his share of some work in which that woman was playing her part faithfully. "She has done it," he repeated, mentally. "She will sit in the cuddy. She will sleep in my berth. Well, I'm not ashamed of the brig. By heavens — no! I shall keep away: never come near them as I've promised. Now there's nothing more to say. I've told her everything at once. There's nothing more."

He felt a heaviness in his burning breast, in all his limbs as if the blood in his veins had become molten lead.

"I shall get the yacht off. Three, four days — no, a week."

He found he couldn't do it under a week. It occurred to him he would see her every day till the yacht was afloat. No, he wouldn't intrude, but he was master and owner of the brig after all. He didn't mean to skulk like a whipped cur about his own decks.

“It’ll be ten days before the schooner is ready. I’ll take every scrap of ballast out of her. I’ll strip her — I’ll take her lower masts out of her, by heavens! I’ll make sure. Then another week to fit out — and — goodbye. Wish I had never seen them. Good-bye — forever. Home’s the place for them. Not for me. On another coast she would not have listened. Ah, but she is a woman — every inch of her. I shall shake hands. Yes. I shall take her hand — just before she goes. Why the devil not? I am master here after all — in this brig — as good as any one — by heavens, better than any one — better than any one on earth.”

He heard Shaw walk smartly forward above his head hailing:

“What’s that — a boat?”

A voice answered indistinctly.

“One of my boats is back,” thought Lingard. “News about Daman perhaps. I don’t care if he kicks. I wish he would. I would soon show her I can fight as well as I can handle the brig. Two praus. Only two praus. I wouldn’t mind if there were twenty. I would sweep ‘em off the sea — I would blow ‘em out of the water — I would make the brig walk over them. ‘Now,’ I’d say to her, ‘you who are not afraid, look how it’s done!’”

He felt light. He had the sensation of being whirled high in the midst of an uproar and as powerless as a feather in a hurricane. He shuddered profoundly. His arms hung down, and he stood before the table staring like a man overcome by some fatal intelligence.

Shaw, going into the waist to receive what he thought was one of the brig’s boats, came against Carter making his way aft hurriedly.

“Hullo! Is it you again?” he said, swiftly, barring the way.

“I come from the yacht,” began Carter with some impatience.

“Where else could you come from?” said Shaw. “And what might you want now?”

“I want to see your skipper.”

“Well, you can’t,” declared Shaw, viciously. “He’s turned in for the night.”

“He expects me,” said Carter, stamping his foot. “I’ve got to tell him what happened.”

“Don’t you fret yourself, young man,” said Shaw in a superior manner; “he knows all about it.”

They stood suddenly silent in the dark. Carter seemed at a loss what to do. Shaw, though surprised by it, enjoyed the effect he had produced.

“Damn me, if I did not think so,” murmured Carter to himself; then drawling coolly asked — “And perhaps you know, too?”

“What do you think? Think I am a dummy here? I ain’t mate of this brig for nothing.”

“No, you are not,” said Carter with a certain bitterness of tone. “People do all kinds of queer things for a living, and I am not particular myself, but I would think twice before taking your billet.”

“What? What do you in-si-nu-ate. My billet? You ain’t fit for it, you yacht-swabbing brass-buttoned imposter.”

“What’s this? Any of our boats back?” asked Lingard from the poop. “Let the seacannie in charge come to me at once.”

“There’s only a message from the yacht,” began Shaw, deliberately.

“Yacht! Get the deck lamps along here in the waist! See the ladder lowered. Bear a hand, serang! Mr. Shaw! Burn the flare up aft. Two of them! Give light to the yacht’s boats that will be coming alongside. Steward! Where’s that steward? Turn him out then.”

Bare feet began to patter all round Carter. Shadows glided swiftly.

“Are these flares coming? Where’s the quartermaster on duty?” shouted Lingard in English and Malay. “This way, come here! Put it on a rocket stick — can’t you? Hold over the side — thus! Stand by with the lines for the boats forward there. Mr. Shaw — we want more light!”

“Aye, aye, sir,” called out Shaw, but he did not move, as if dazed by the vehemence of his commander.

“That’s what we want,” muttered Carter under his breath. “Imposter! What do you call yourself?” he said half aloud to Shaw.

The ruddy glare of the flares disclosed Lingard from head to foot, standing at the break of the poop. His head was bare, his face, crudely lighted, had a fierce and changing expression in the sway of flames.

“What can be his game?” thought Carter, impressed by the powerful and wild aspect of that figure. “He’s changed somehow since I saw him first,” he reflected. It struck him the change was serious, not exactly for the worse, perhaps — and yet. . . . Lingard smiled at him from the poop.

Carter went up the steps and without pausing informed him of what had happened.

“Mrs. Travers told me to go to you at once. She’s very upset as you may guess,” he drawled, looking Lingard hard in the face. Lingard knitted his eyebrows. “The hands, too, are scared,” Carter went on. “They fancy the



savages, or whatever they may be who stole the owner, are going to board the yacht every minute. I don't think so myself but — ”

“Quite right — most unlikely,” muttered Lingard.

“Aye, I daresay you know all about it,” continued Carter, coolly, “the men are startled and no mistake, but I can't blame them very much. There isn't enough even of carving knives aboard to go round. One old signal gun! A poor show for better men than they.”

“There's no mistake I suppose about this affair?” asked Lingard.

“Well, unless the gentlemen are having a lark with us at hide and seek. The man says he waited ten minutes at the point, then pulled slowly along the bank looking out, expecting to see them walking back. He made the trunk of a tree apparently stranded on the sand and as he was sculling past he says a man jumped up from behind that log, flung a stick at him and went off running. He backed water at once and began to shout, ‘Are you there, sir?’ No one answered. He could hear the bushes rustle and some strange noises like whisperings. It was very dark. After calling out several times, and waiting on his oars, he got frightened and pulled back to the yacht. That is clear enough. The only doubt in my mind is if they are alive or not. I didn't let on to Mrs. Travers. That's a kind of thing you keep to yourself, of course.”

“I don't think they are dead,” said Lingard, slowly, and as if thinking of something else.

“Oh! If you say so it's all right,” said Carter with deliberation.

“What?” asked Lingard, absently; “fling a stick, did they? Fling a spear!”

“That's it!” assented Carter, “but I didn't say anything. I only wondered if the same kind of stick hadn't been flung at the owner, that's all. But I suppose you know your business best, Captain.”

Lingard, grasping his whole beard, reflected profoundly, erect and with bowed head in the glare of the flares.

“I suppose you think it's my doing?” he asked, sharply, without looking up.

Carter surveyed him with a candidly curious gaze. “Well, Captain, Mrs. Travers did let on a bit to me about our chief-officer's boat. You've stopped it, haven't you? How she got to know God only knows. She was sorry she spoke, too, but it wasn't so much of news to me as she thought. I can put two and two together, sometimes. Those rockets, last night, eh? I wished I had bitten my tongue out before I told you about our first gig. But I was

taken unawares. Wasn't I? I put it to you: wasn't I? And so I told her when she asked me what passed between you and me on board this brig, not twenty-four hours ago. Things look different now, all of a sudden. Enough to scare a woman, but she is the best man of them all on board. The others are fairly off the chump because it's a bit dark and something has happened they ain't used to. But she has something on her mind. I can't make her out!" He paused, wriggled his shoulders slightly — "No more than I can make you out," he added.

"That's your trouble, is it?" said Lingard, slowly.

"Aye, Captain. Is it all clear to you? Stopping boats, kidnapping gentlemen. That's fun in a way, only — I am a youngster to you — but is it all clear to you? Old Robinson wasn't particular, you know, and he — "

"Clearer than daylight," cried Lingard, hotly. "I can't give up — "

He checked himself. Carter waited. The flare bearers stood rigid, turning their faces away from the flame, and in the play of gleams at its foot the mast near by, like a lofty column, ascended in the great darkness. A lot of ropes ran up slanting into a dark void and were lost to sight, but high aloft a brace block gleamed white, the end of a yard-arm could be seen suspended in the air and as if glowing with its own light. The sky had clouded over the brig without a breath of wind.

"Give up," repeated Carter with an uneasy shuffle of feet.

"Nobody," finished Lingard. "I can't. It's as clear as daylight. I can't! No! Nothing!"

He stared straight out afar, and after looking at him Carter felt moved by a bit of youthful intuition to murmur, "That's bad," in a tone that almost in spite of himself hinted at the dawning of a befogged compassion.

He had a sense of confusion within him, the sense of mystery without. He had never experienced anything like it all the time when serving with old Robinson in the Ly-e-moon. And yet he had seen and taken part in some queer doings that were not clear to him at the time. They were secret but they suggested something comprehensible. This affair did not. It had somehow a subtlety that affected him. He was uneasy as if there had been a breath of magic on events and men giving to this complication of a yachting voyage a significance impossible to perceive, but felt in the words, in the gestures, in the events, which made them all strangely, obscurely startling.

He was not one who could keep track of his sensations, and besides he had not the leisure. He had to answer Lingard's questions about the people

of the yacht. No, he couldn't say Mrs. Travers was what you may call frightened. She seemed to have something in her mind. Oh, yes! The chaps were in a funk. Would they fight? Anybody would fight when driven to it, funk or no funk. That was his experience. Naturally one liked to have something better than a handspike to do it with. Still — In the pause Carter seemed to weigh with composure the chances of men with handspikes.

"What do you want to fight us for?" he asked, suddenly.

Lingard started.

"I don't," he said; "I wouldn't be asking you."

"There's no saying what you would do, Captain," replied Carter; "it isn't twenty-four hours since you wanted to shoot me."

"I only said I would, rather than let you go raising trouble for me," explained Lingard.

"One night isn't like another," mumbled Carter, "but how am I to know? It seems to me you are making trouble for yourself as fast as you can."

"Well, supposing I am," said Lingard with sudden gloominess. "Would your men fight if I armed them properly?"

"What — for you or for themselves?" asked Carter.

"For the woman," burst out Lingard. "You forget there's a woman on board. I don't care that for their carcasses."

Carter pondered conscientiously.

"Not to-night," he said at last. "There's one or two good men amongst them, but the rest are struck all of a heap. Not to-night. Give them time to get steady a bit if you want them to fight."

He gave facts and opinions with a mixture of loyalty and mistrust. His own state puzzled him exceedingly. He couldn't make out anything, he did not know what to believe and yet he had an impulsive desire, an inspired desire to help the man. At times it appeared a necessity — at others policy; between whiles a great folly, which perhaps did not matter because he suspected himself of being helpless anyway. Then he had moments of anger. In those moments he would feel in his pocket the butt of a loaded pistol. He had provided himself with the weapon, when directed by Mrs. Travers to go on board the brig.

"If he wants to interfere with me, I'll let drive at him and take my chance of getting away," he had explained hurriedly.

He remembered how startled Mrs. Travers looked. Of course, a woman like that — not used to hear such talk. Therefore it was no use listening to

her, except for good manners' sake. Once bit twice shy. He had no mind to be kidnapped, not he, nor bullied either.

"I can't let him nab me, too. You will want me now, Mrs. Travers," he had said; "and I promise you not to fire off the old thing unless he jolly well forces me to."

He was youthfully wise in his resolution not to give way to her entreaties, though her extraordinary agitation did stagger him for a moment. When the boat was already on its way to the brig, he remembered her calling out after him:

"You must not! You don't understand."

Her voice coming faintly in the darkness moved him, it resembled so much a cry of distress.

"Give way, boys, give way," he urged his men.

He was wise, resolute, and he was also youthful enough to almost wish it should "come to it." And with foresight he even instructed the boat's crew to keep the gig just abaft the main rigging of the brig.

"When you see me drop into her all of a sudden, shove off and pull for dear life."

Somehow just then he was not so anxious for a shot, but he held on with a determined mental grasp to his fine resolution, lest it should slip away from him and perish in a sea of doubts.

"Hadn't I better get back to the yacht?" he asked, gently.

Getting no answer he went on with deliberation:

"Mrs. Travers ordered me to say that no matter how this came about she is ready to trust you. She is waiting for some kind of answer, I suppose."

"Ready to trust me," repeated Lingard. His eyes lit up fiercely.

Every sway of flares tossed slightly to and fro the massy shadows of the main deck, where here and there the figure of a man could be seen standing very still with a dusky face and glittering eyeballs.

Carter stole his hand warily into his breast pocket:

"Well, Captain," he said. He was not going to be bullied, let the owner's wife trust whom she liked.

"Have you got anything in writing for me there?" asked Lingard, advancing a pace, exultingly.

Carter, alert, stepped back to keep his distance. Shaw stared from the side; his rubicund cheeks quivered, his round eyes seemed starting out of

his head, and his mouth was open as though he had been ready to choke with pent-up curiosity, amazement, and indignation.

“No! Not in writing,” said Carter, steadily and low.

Lingard had the air of being awakened by a shout. A heavy and darkening frown seemed to fall out of the night upon his forehead and swiftly passed into the night again, and when it departed it left him so calm, his glance so lucid, his mien so composed that it was difficult to believe the man’s heart had undergone within the last second the trial of humiliation and of danger. He smiled sadly:

“Well, young man,” he asked with a kind of good-humoured resignation, “what is it you have there? A knife or a pistol?”

“A pistol,” said Carter. “Are you surprised, Captain?” He spoke with heat because a sense of regret was stealing slowly within him, as stealthily, as irresistibly as the flowing tide. “Who began these tricks?” He withdrew his hand, empty, and raised his voice. “You are up to something I can’t make out. You — you are not straight.”

The flares held on high streamed right up without swaying, and in that instant of profound calm the shadows on the brig’s deck became as still as the men.

“You think not?” said Lingard, thoughtfully.

Carter nodded. He resented the turn of the incident and the growing impulse to surrender to that man.

“Mrs. Travers trusts me though,” went on Lingard with gentle triumph as if advancing an unanswerable argument.

“So she says,” grunted Carter; “I warned her. She’s a baby. They’re all as innocent as babies there. And you know it. And I know it. I’ve heard of your kind. You would dump the lot of us overboard if it served your turn. That’s what I think.”

“And that’s all.”

Carter nodded slightly and looked away. There was a silence. Lingard’s eyes travelled over the brig. The lighted part of the vessel appeared in bright and wavering detail walled and canopied by the night. He felt a light breath on his face. The air was stirring, but the Shallows, silent and lost in the darkness, gave no sound of life.

This stillness oppressed Lingard. The world of his endeavours and his hopes seemed dead, seemed gone. His desire existed homeless in the obscurity that had devoured his corner of the sea, this stretch of the coast,

his certitude of success. And here in the midst of what was the domain of his adventurous soul there was a lost youngster ready to shoot him on suspicion of some extravagant treachery. Came ready to shoot! That's good, too! He was too weary to laugh — and perhaps too sad. Also the danger of the pistol-shot, which he believed real — the young are rash — irritated him. The night and the spot were full of contradictions. It was impossible to say who in this shadowy warfare was to be an enemy, and who were the allies. So close were the contacts issuing from this complication of a yachting voyage, that he seemed to have them all within his breast.

“Shoot me! He is quite up to that trick — damn him. Yet I would trust him sooner than any man in that yacht.”

Such were his thoughts while he looked at Carter, who was biting his lips, in the vexation of the long silence. When they spoke again to each other they talked soberly, with a sense of relief, as if they had come into cool air from an overheated room and when Carter, dismissed, went into his boat, he had practically agreed to the line of action traced by Lingard for the crew of the yacht. He had agreed as if in implicit confidence. It was one of the absurdities of the situation which had to be accepted and could never be understood.

“Do I talk straight now?” had asked Lingard.

“It seems straight enough,” assented Carter with an air of reserve; “I will work with you so far anyhow.”

“Mrs. Travers trusts me,” remarked Lingard again.

“By the Lord Harry!” cried Carter, giving way suddenly to some latent conviction. “I was warning her against you. Say, Captain, you are a devil of a man. How did you manage it?”

“I trusted her,” said Lingard.

“Did you?” cried the amazed Carter. “When? How? Where — ”

“You know too much already,” retorted Lingard, quietly. “Waste no time. I will be after you.”

Carter whistled low.

“There's a pair of you I can't make out,” he called back, hurrying over the side.

Shaw took this opportunity to approach. Beginning with hesitation: “A word with you, sir,” the mate went on to say he was a respectable man. He delivered himself in a ringing, unsteady voice. He was married, he had children, he abhorred illegality. The light played about his obese figure, he

had flung his mushroom hat on the deck, he was not afraid to speak the truth. The grey moustache stood out aggressively, his glances were uneasy; he pressed his hands to his stomach convulsively, opened his thick, short arms wide, wished it to be understood he had been chief-officer of home ships, with a spotless character and he hoped "quite up to his work." He was a peaceable man, none more; disposed to stretch a point when it "came to a difference with niggers of some kind — they had to be taught manners and reason" and he was not averse at a pinch to — but here were white people — gentlemen, ladies, not to speak of the crew. He had never spoken to a superior like this before, and this was prudence, his conviction, a point of view, a point of principle, a conscious superiority and a burst of resentment hoarded through years against all the successive and unsatisfactory captains of his existence. There never had been such an opportunity to show he could not be put upon. He had one of them on a string and he was going to lead him a dance. There was courage, too, in it, since he believed himself fallen unawares into the clutches of a particularly desperate man and beyond the reach of law.

A certain small amount of calculation entered the audacity of his remonstrance. Perhaps — it flashed upon him — the yacht's gentry will hear I stood up for them. This could conceivably be of advantage to a man who wanted a lift in the world. "Owner of a yacht — badly scared — a gentleman — money nothing to him." Thereupon Shaw declared with heat that he couldn't be an accessory either after or before the fact. Those that never went home — who had nothing to go to perhaps — he interjected, hurriedly, could do as they liked. He couldn't. He had a wife, a family, a little house — paid for — with difficulty. He followed the sea respectably out and home, all regular, not vagabonding here and there, chumming with the first nigger that came along and laying traps for his betters.

One of the two flare bearers sighed at his elbow, and shifted his weight to the other foot.

These two had been keeping so perfectly still that the movement was as startling as if a statue had changed its pose. After looking at the offender with cold malevolence, Shaw went on to speak of law-courts, of trials, and of the liberty of the subject; then he pointed out the certitude and the inconvenience of being found out, affecting for the moment the dispassionateness of wisdom.

“There will be fifteen years in gaol at the end of this job for everybody,” said Shaw, “and I have a boy that don’t know his father yet. Fine things for him to learn when he grows up. The innocent are dead certain here to catch it along with you. The missus will break her heart unless she starves first. Home sold up.”

He saw a mysterious iniquity in a dangerous relation to himself and began to lose his head. What he really wanted was to have his existence left intact, for his own cherishing and pride. It was a moral aspiration, but in his alarm the native grossness of his nature came clattering out like a devil out of a trap. He would blow the gaff, split, give away the whole show, he would back up honest people, kiss the book, say what he thought, let all the world know . . . and when he paused to draw breath, all around him was silent and still. Before the impetus of that respectable passion his words were scattered like chaff driven by a gale and rushed headlong into the night of the Shallows. And in the great obscurity, imperturbable, it heard him say he “washed his hands of everything.”

“And the brig?” asked Lingard, suddenly.

Shaw was checked. For a second the seaman in him instinctively admitted the claim of the ship.

“The brig. The brig. She’s right enough,” he mumbled. He had nothing to say against the brig — not he. She wasn’t like the big ships he was used to, but of her kind the best craft he ever. . . . And with a brusque return upon himself, he protested that he had been decoyed on board under false pretences. It was as bad as being shanghaied when in liquor. It was — upon his soul. And into a craft next thing to a pirate! That was the name for it or his own name was not Shaw. He said this glaring owlishly. Lingard, perfectly still and mute, bore the blows without a sign.

The silly fuss of that man seared his very soul. There was no end to this plague of fools coming to him from the forgotten ends of the earth. A fellow like that could not be told. No one could be told. Blind they came and blind they would go out. He admitted reluctantly, but without doubt, that as if pushed by a force from outside he would have to try and save two of them. To this end he foresaw the probable need of leaving his brig for a time. He would have to leave her with that man. The mate. He had engaged him himself — to make his insurance valid — to be able sometimes to speak — to have near him. Who would have believed such a fool-man could exist on the face of the sea! Who? Leave the brig with him. The brig!



Ever since sunset, the breeze kept off by the heat of the day had been trying to re-establish in the darkness its sway over the Shoals. Its approaches had been heard in the night, its patient murmurs, its foiled sighs; but now a surprisingly heavy puff came in a free rush as if, far away there to the northward, the last defence of the calm had been victoriously carried. The flames borne down streamed bluishly, horizontal and noisy at the end of tall sticks, like fluttering pennants; and behold, the shadows on the deck went mad and jostled each other as if trying to escape from a doomed craft, the darkness, held up dome-like by the brilliant glare, seemed to tumble headlong upon the brig in an overwhelming downfall, the men stood swaying as if ready to fall under the ruins of a black and noiseless disaster. The blurred outlines of the brig, the masts, the rigging, seemed to shudder in the terror of coming extinction — and then the darkness leaped upward again, the shadows returned to their places, the men were seen distinct, swarthy, with calm faces, with glittering eyeballs. The destruction in the breath had passed, was gone.

A discord of three voices raised together in a drawling wail trailed on the sudden immobility of the air.

“Brig ahoy! Give us a rope!”

The first boat-load from the yacht emerged floating slowly into the pool of purple light wavering round the brig on the black water. Two men squeezed in the bows pulled uncomfortably; in the middle, on a heap of seamen’s canvas bags, another sat, insecure, propped with both arms, stiff-legged, angularly helpless. The light from the poop brought everything out in lurid detail, and the boat floating slowly toward the brig had a suspicious and pitiful aspect. The shabby load lumbering her looked somehow as if it had been stolen by those men who resembled castaways. In the sternsheets Carter, standing up, steered with his leg. He had a smile of youthful sarcasm.

“Here they are!” he cried to Lingard. “You’ve got your own way, Captain. I thought I had better come myself with the first precious lot — ”

“Pull around the stern. The brig’s on the swing,” interrupted Lingard.

“Aye, aye! We’ll try not to smash the brig. We would be lost indeed if — fend off there, John; fend off, old reliable, if you care a pin for your salty hide. I like the old chap,” he said, when he stood by Lingard’s side looking down at the boat which was being rapidly cleared by whites and Malays working shoulder to shoulder in silence. “I like him. He don’t belong to that

yachting lot either. They picked him up on the road somewhere. Look at the old dog — carved out of a ship's timber — as talkative as a fish — grim as a gutted wreck. That's the man for me. All the others there are married, or going to be, or ought to be, or sorry they ain't. Every man jack of them has a petticoat in tow — dash me! Never heard in all my travels such a jabber about wives and kids. Hurry up with your dunnage — below there! Aye! I had no difficulty in getting them to clear out from the yacht. They never saw a pair of gents stolen before — you understand. It upset all their little notions of what a stranding means, hereabouts. Not that mine aren't mixed a bit, too — and yet I've seen a thing or two."

His excitement was revealed in this boyish impulse to talk.

"Look," he said, pointing at the growing pile of bags and bedding on the brig's quarter-deck. "Look. Don't they mean to sleep soft — and dream of home — maybe. Home. Think of that, Captain. These chaps can't get clear away from it. It isn't like you and me — "

Lingard made a movement.

"I ran away myself when so high. My old man's a Trinity pilot. That's a job worth staying at home for. Mother writes sometimes, but they can't miss me much. There's fourteen of us altogether — eight at home yet. No fear of the old country ever getting undermanned — let die who must. Only let it be a fair game, Captain. Let's have a fair show."

Lingard assured him briefly he should have it. That was the very reason he wanted the yacht's crew in the brig, he added. Then quiet and grave he inquired whether that pistol was still in Carter's pocket.

"Never mind that," said the young man, hurriedly. "Remember who began. To be shot at wouldn't rile me so much — it's being threatened, don't you see, that was heavy on my chest. Last night is very far off though — and I will be hanged if I know what I meant exactly when I took the old thing from its nail. There. More I can't say till all's settled one way or another. Will that do?"

Flushing brick red, he suspended his judgment and stayed his hand with the generosity of youth.

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Apparently it suited Lingard to be reprieved in that form. He bowed his head slowly. It would do. To leave his life to that youngster's ignorance seemed to redress the balance of his mind against a lot of secret intentions. It was distasteful and bitter as an expiation should be. He also held a life in

his hand; a life, and many deaths besides, but these were like one single feather in the scales of his conscience. That he should feel so was unavoidable because his strength would at no price permit itself to be wasted. It would not be — and there was an end of it. All he could do was to throw in another risk into the sea of risks. Thus was he enabled to recognize that a drop of water in the ocean makes a great difference. His very desire, unconquered, but exiled, had left the place where he could constantly hear its voice. He saw it, he saw himself, the past, the future, he saw it all, shifting and indistinct like those shapes the strained eye of a wanderer outlines in darker strokes upon the face of the night.

## X

When Lingard went to his boat to follow Carter, who had gone back to the yacht, Wasub, mast and sail on shoulder, preceded him down the ladder. The old man leaped in smartly and busied himself in getting the dinghy ready for his commander.

In that little boat Lingard was accustomed to traverse the Shallows alone. She had a short mast and a lug-sail, carried two easily, floated in a few inches of water. In her he was independent of a crew, and, if the wind failed, could make his way with a pair of sculls taking short cuts over shoal places. There were so many islets and sandbanks that in case of sudden bad weather there was always a lee to be found, and when he wished to land he could pull her up a beach, striding ahead, painter in hand, like a giant child dragging a toy boat. When the brig was anchored within the Shallows it was in her that he visited the lagoon. Once, when caught by a sudden freshening of the sea-breeze, he had waded up a shelving bank carrying her on his head and for two days they had rested together on the sand, while around them the shallow waters raged lividly, and across three miles of foam the brig would time after time dissolve in the mist and re-appear distinct, nodding her tall spars that seemed to touch a weeping sky of lamentable greyness.

Whenever he came into the lagoon tugging with bare arms, Jorgenson, who would be watching the entrance of the creek ever since a muffled detonation of a gun to seaward had warned him of the brig's arrival on the Shore of Refuge, would mutter to himself — "Here's Tom coming in his nutshell." And indeed she was in shape somewhat like half a nutshell and also in the colour of her dark varnished planks. The man's shoulders and head rose high above her gunwales; loaded with Lingard's heavy frame she would climb sturdily the steep ridges, slide squatting into the hollows of the

sea, or, now and then, take a sedate leap over a short wave. Her behaviour had a stout trustworthiness about it, and she reminded one of a surefooted mountain-pony carrying over difficult ground a rider much bigger than himself.

Wasub wiped the thwarts, ranged the mast and sail along the side, shipped the rowlocks. Lingard looked down at his old servant's spare shoulders upon which the light from above fell unsteady but vivid. Wasub worked for the comfort of his commander and his singleminded absorption in that task flashed upon Lingard the consolation of an act of friendliness. The elderly Malay at last lifted his head with a deferential murmur; his wrinkled old face with half a dozen wiry hairs pendulous at each corner of the dark lips expressed a kind of weary satisfaction, and the slightly oblique worn eyes stole a discreet upward glance containing a hint of some remote meaning. Lingard found himself compelled by the justice of that obscure claim to murmur as he stepped into the boat:

"These are times of danger."

He sat down and took up the sculls. Wasub held on to the gunwale as to a last hope of a further confidence. He had served in the brig five years. Lingard remembered that very well. This aged figure had been intimately associated with the brig's life and with his own, appearing silently ready for every incident and emergency in an unquestioning expectation of orders; symbolic of blind trust in his strength, of an unlimited obedience to his will. Was it unlimited?

"We shall require courage and fidelity," added Lingard, in a tentative tone.

"There are those who know me," snapped the old man, readily, as if the words had been waiting for a long time. "Observe, Tuan. I have filled with fresh water the little breaker in the bows."

"I know you, too," said Lingard.

"And the wind — and the sea," ejaculated the serang, jerkily. "These also are faithful to the strong. By Allah! I who am a pilgrim and have listened to words of wisdom in many places, I tell you, Tuan, there is strength in the knowledge of what is hidden in things without life, as well as in the living men. Will Tuan be gone long?"

"I come back in a short time — together with the rest of the whites from over there. This is the beginning of many stratagems. Wasub! Daman, the

son of a dog, has suddenly made prisoners two of my own people. My face is made black.”

“Tse! Tse! What ferocity is that! One should not offer shame to a friend or to a friend’s brother lest revenge come sweeping like a flood. Yet can an Illanun chief be other than tyrannical? My old eyes have seen much but they never saw a tiger change its stripes. Ya-wa! The tiger can not. This is the wisdom of us ignorant Malay men. The wisdom of white Tuans is great. They think that by the power of many speeches the tiger may — ” He broke off and in a crisp, busy tone said: “The rudder dwells safely under the aftermost seat should Tuan be pleased to sail the boat. This breeze will not die away before sunrise.” Again his voice changed as if two different souls had been flitting in and out of his body. “No, no, kill the tiger and then the stripes may be counted without fear — one by one, thus.”

He pointed a frail brown finger and, abruptly, made a mirthless dry sound as if a rattle had been sprung in his throat.

“The wretches are many,” said Lingard.

“Nay, Tuan. They follow their great men even as we in the brig follow you. That is right.”

Lingard reflected for a moment.

“My men will follow me then,” he said.

“They are poor calashes without sense,” commented Wasub with pitying superiority. “Some with no more comprehension than men of the bush freshly caught. There is Sali, the foolish son of my sister and by your great favour appointed to mind the tiller of this ship. His stupidity is extreme, but his eyes are good — nearly as good as mine that by praying and much exercise can see far into the night.”

Lingard laughed low and then looked earnestly at the serang. Above their heads a man shook a flare over the side and a thin shower of sparks floated downward and expired before touching the water.

“So you can see in the night, O serang! Well, then, look and speak. Speak! Fight — or no fight? Weapons or words? Which folly? Well, what do you see?”

“A darkness, a darkness,” whispered Wasub at last in a frightened tone. “There are nights — ” He shook his head and muttered. “Look. The tide has turned. Ya, Tuan. The tide has turned.”

Lingard looked downward where the water could be seen, gliding past the ship’s side, moving smoothly, streaked with lines of froth, across the

illuminated circle thrown round the brig by the lights on her poop. Air bubbles sparkled, lines of darkness, ripples of glitter appeared, glided, went astern without a splash, without a trickle, without a plaint, without a break. The unchecked gentleness of the flow captured the eye by a subtle spell, fastened insidiously upon the mind a disturbing sense of the irretrievable. The ebbing of the sea athwart the lonely sheen of flames resembled the eternal ebb-tide of time; and when at last Lingard looked up, the knowledge of that noiseless passage of the waters produced on his mind a bewildering effect. For a moment the speck of light lost in vast obscurity the brig, the boat, the hidden coast, the Shallows, the very walls and roof of darkness — the seen and the unseen alike seemed to be gliding smoothly onward through the enormous gloom of space. Then, with a great mental effort, he brought everything to a sudden standstill; and only the froth and bubbles went on streaming past ceaselessly, unchecked by the power of his will.

“The tide has turned — you say, serang? Has it — ? Well, perhaps it has, perhaps it has,” he finished, muttering to himself.

“Truly it has. Can not Tuan see it run under his own eyes?” said Wasub with an alarmed earnestness. “Look. Now it is in my mind that a prau coming from amongst the southern islands, if steered cunningly in the free set of the current, would approach the bows of this, our brig, drifting silently as a shape without a substance.”

“And board suddenly — is that it?” said Lingard.

“Daman is crafty and the Illanuns are very bloodthirsty. Night is nothing to them. They are certainly valorous. Are they not born in the midst of fighting and are they not inspired by the evil of their hearts even before they can speak? And their chiefs would be leading them while you, Tuan, are going from us even now — ”

“You don’t want me to go?” asked Lingard.

For a time Wasub listened attentively to the profound silence.

“Can we fight without a leader?” he began again. “It is the belief in victory that gives courage. And what would poor calashes do, sons of peasants and fishermen, freshly caught — without knowledge? They believe in your strength — and in your power — or else — Will those whites that came so suddenly avenge you? They are here like fish within the stakes. Ya-wa! Who will bring the news and who will come to find the truth and perchance to carry off your body? You go alone, Tuan!”

“There must be no fighting. It would be a calamity,” insisted Lingard. “There is blood that must not be spilt.”

“Hear, Tuan!” exclaimed Wasub with heat. “The waters are running out now.” He punctuated his speech by slight jerks at the dinghy. “The waters go and at the appointed time they shall return. And if between their going and coming the blood of all the men in the world were poured into it, the sea would not rise higher at the full by the breadth of my finger nail.”

“But the world would not be the same. You do not see that, serang. Give the boat a good shove.”

“Directly,” said the old Malay and his face became impassive. “Tuan knows when it is best to go, and death sometimes retreats before a firm tread like a startled snake. Tuan should take a follower with him, not a silly youth, but one who has lived — who has a steady heart — who would walk close behind watchfully — and quietly. Yes. Quietly and with quick eyes — like mine — perhaps with a weapon — I know how to strike.”

Lingard looked at the wrinkled visage very near his own and into the peering old eyes. They shone strangely. A tense eagerness was expressed in the squatting figure leaning out toward him. On the other side, within reach of his arm, the night stood like a wall -discouraging — opaque — impenetrable. No help would avail. The darkness he had to combat was too impalpable to be cleft by a blow — too dense to be pierced by the eye; yet as if by some enchantment in the words that made this vain offer of fidelity, it became less overpowering to his sight, less crushing to his thought. He had a moment of pride which soothed his heart for the space of two beats. His unreasonable and misjudged heart, shrinking before the menace of failure, expanded freely with a sense of generous gratitude. In the threatening dimness of his emotions this man’s offer made a point of clearness, the glimmer of a torch held aloft in the night. It was priceless, no doubt, but ineffectual; too small, too far, too solitary. It did not dispel the mysterious obscurity that had descended upon his fortunes so that his eyes could no longer see the work of his hands. The sadness of defeat pervaded the world.

“And what could you do, O Wasub?” he said.

“I could always call out — ‘Take care, Tuan.’”

“And then for these charm-words of mine. Hey? Turn danger aside? What? But perchance you would die all the same. Treachery is a strong magic, too — as you said.”

“Yes, indeed! The order might come to your servant. But I — Wasub — the son of a free man, a follower of Rajahs, a fugitive, a slave, a pilgrim — diver for pearls, serang of white men’s ships, I have had too many masters. Too many. You are the last.” After a silence he said in an almost indifferent voice: “If you go, Tuan, let us go together.”

For a time Lingard made no sound.

“No use,” he said at last. “No use, serang. One life is enough to pay for a man’s folly — and you have a household.”

“I have two — Tuan; but it is a long time since I sat on the ladder of a house to talk at ease with neighbours. Yes. Two households; one in — ” Lingard smiled faintly. “Tuan, let me follow you.”

“No. You have said it, serang — I am alone. That is true, and alone I shall go on this very night. But first I must bring all the white people here. Push.”

“Ready, Tuan? Look out!”

Wasub’s body swung over the sea with extended arms. Lingard caught up the sculls, and as the dinghy darted away from the brig’s side he had a complete view of the lighted poop — Shaw leaning massively over the taffrail in sulky dejection, the flare bearers erect and rigid, the heads along the rail, the eyes staring after him above the bulwarks. The fore-end of the brig was wrapped in a lurid and sombre mistiness; the sullen mingling of darkness and of light; her masts pointing straight up could be tracked by torn gleams and vanished above as if the trucks had been tall enough to pierce the heavy mass of vapours motionless overhead. She was beautifully precious. His loving eyes saw her floating at rest in a wavering halo, between an invisible sky and an invisible sea, like a miraculous craft suspended in the air. He turned his head away as if the sight had been too much for him at the moment of separation, and, as soon as his little boat had passed beyond the limit of the light thrown upon the water, he perceived very low in the black void of the west the stern lantern of the yacht shining feebly like a star about to set, unattainable, infinitely remote — belonging to another universe.



## PART IV. THE GIFT OF THE SHALLOWS

I

Lingard brought Mrs. Travers away from the yacht, going alone with her in the little boat. During the bustle of the embarkment, and till the last of the crew had left the schooner, he had remained towering and silent by her side. It was only when the murmuring and uneasy voices of the sailors going away in the boats had been completely lost in the distance that his voice was heard, grave in the silence, pronouncing the words — "Follow me." She followed him; their footsteps rang hollow and loud on the empty deck. At the bottom of the steps he turned round and said very low:

"Take care."

He got into the boat and held on. It seemed to him that she was intimidated by the darkness. She felt her arm gripped firmly — "I've got you," he said. She stepped in, headlong, trusting herself blindly to his grip, and sank on the stern seat catching her breath a little. She heard a slight splash, and the indistinct side of the deserted yacht melted suddenly into the body of the night.

Rowing, he faced her, a hooded and cloaked shape, and above her head he had before his eyes the gleam of the stern lantern expiring slowly on the abandoned vessel. When it went out without a warning flicker he could see nothing of the stranded yacht's outline. She had vanished utterly like a dream; and the occurrences of the last twenty-four hours seemed also to be a part of a vanished dream. The hooded and cloaked figure was part of it, too. It spoke not; it moved not; it would vanish presently. Lingard tried to remember Mrs. Travers' features, even as she sat within two feet of him in the boat. He seemed to have taken from that vanished schooner not a woman but a memory — the tormenting recollection of a human being he would see no more.

At every stroke of the short sculls Mrs. Travers felt the boat leap forward with her. Lingard, to keep his direction, had to look over his shoulder frequently — "You will be safe in the brig," he said. She was silent. A dream! A dream! He lay back vigorously; the water slapped loudly against the blunt bows. The ruddy glow thrown afar by the flares was reflected deep within the hood. The dream had a pale visage, the memory had living eyes.

“I had to come for you myself,” he said.

“I expected it of you.” These were the first words he had heard her say since they had met for the third time.

“And I swore — before you, too — that I would never put my foot on board your craft.”

“It was good of you to — ” she began.

“I forgot somehow,” he said, simply.

“I expected it of you,” she repeated. He gave three quick strokes before he asked very gently:

“What more do you expect?”

“Everything,” she said. He was rounding then the stern of the brig and had to look away. Then he turned to her.

“And you trust me to — ” he exclaimed.

“I would like to trust you,” she interrupted, “because — ”

Above them a startled voice cried in Malay, “Captain coming.” The strange sound silenced her. Lingard laid in his sculls and she saw herself gliding under the high side of the brig. A dark, staring face appeared very near her eyes, black fingers caught the gunwale of the boat. She stood up swaying. “Take care,” said Lingard again, but this time, in the light, did not offer to help her. She went up alone and he followed her over the rail.

The quarter-deck was thronged by men of two races. Lingard and Mrs. Travers crossed it rapidly between the groups that moved out of the way on their passage. Lingard threw open the cabin door for her, but remained on deck to inquire about his boats. They had returned while he was on board the yacht, and the two men in charge of them came aft to make their reports. The boat sent north had seen nothing. The boat which had been directed to explore the banks and islets to the south had actually been in sight of Daman’s praus. The man in charge reported that several fires were burning on the shore, the crews of the two praus being encamped on a sandbank. Cooking was going on. They had been near enough to hear the voices. There was a man keeping watch on the ridge; they knew this because they heard him shouting to the people below, by the fires. Lingard wanted to know how they had managed to remain unseen. “The night was our hiding place,” answered the man in his deep growling voice. He knew nothing of any white men being in Daman’s camp. Why should there be? Rajah Hassim and the Lady, his sister, appeared unexpectedly near his boat in their canoe. Rajah Hassim had ordered him then in whispers to go back to

the brig at once, and tell Tuan what he had observed. Rajah Hassim said also that he would return to the brig with more news very soon. He obeyed because the Rajah was to him a person of authority, "having the perfect knowledge of Tuan's mind as we all know." — "Enough," cried Lingard, suddenly.

The man looked up heavily for a moment, and retreated forward without another word. Lingard followed him with irritated eyes. A new power had come into the world, had possessed itself of human speech, had imparted to it a sinister irony of allusion. To be told that someone had "a perfect knowledge of his mind" startled him and made him wince. It made him aware that now he did not know his mind himself — that it seemed impossible for him ever to regain that knowledge. And the new power not only had cast its spell upon the words he had to hear, but also upon the facts that assailed him, upon the people he saw, upon the thoughts he had to guide, upon the feelings he had to bear. They remained what they had ever been — the visible surface of life open in the sun to the conquering tread of an unfettered will. Yesterday they could have been discerned clearly, mastered and despised; but now another power had come into the world, and had cast over them all the wavering gloom of a dark and inscrutable purpose.

## II

Recovering himself with a slight start Lingard gave the order to extinguish all the lights in the brig. Now the transfer of the crew from the yacht had been effected there was every advantage in the darkness. He gave the order from instinct, it being the right thing to do in the circumstances. His thoughts were in the cabin of his brig, where there was a woman waiting. He put his hand over his eyes, collecting himself as if before a great mental effort. He could hear about him the excited murmurs of the white men whom in the morning he had so ardently desired to have safe in his keeping. He had them there now; but accident, ill-luck, a cursed folly, had tricked him out of the success of his plan. He would have to go in and talk to Mrs. Travers. The idea dismayed him. Of necessity he was not one of those men who have the mastery of expression. To liberate his soul was for him a gigantic undertaking, a matter of desperate effort, of doubtful success. "I must have it out with her," he murmured to himself as though at the prospect of a struggle. He was uncertain of himself, of her; he was

uncertain of everything and everybody; but he was very certain he wanted to look at her.

At the moment he turned to the door of the cabin both flares went out together and the black vault of the night upheld above the brig by the fierce flames fell behind him and buried the deck in sudden darkness. The buzz of strange voices instantly hummed louder with a startled note. "Hallo!" — "Can't see a mortal thing" — "Well, what next?" — insisted a voice — "I want to know what next?"

Lingard checked himself ready to open the door and waited absurdly for the answer as though in the hope of some suggestion. "What's up with you? Think yourself lucky," said somebody. — "It's all very well — for to-night," began the voice. — "What are you fashing yourself for?" remonstrated the other, reasonably, "we'll get home right enough." — "I am not so sure; the second mate he says — " "Never mind what he says; that 'ere man who has got this brig will see us through. The owner's wife will talk to him — she will. Money can do a lot." The two voices came nearer, and spoke more distinctly, close behind Lingard. "Suppose them blooming savages set fire to the yacht. What's to prevent them?" — "And suppose they do. This 'ere brig's good enough to get away in. Ain't she? Guns and all. We'll get home yet all right. What do you say, John?"

"I say nothing and care less," said a third voice, peaceful and faint.

"D'you mean to say, John, you would go to the bottom as soon as you would go home? Come now!" — "To the bottom," repeated the wan voice, composedly. "Aye! That's where we all are going to, in one way or another. The way don't matter."

"Ough! You would give the blues to the funny man of a blooming circus. What would my missus say if I wasn't to turn up never at all?" — "She would get another man; there's always plenty of fools about." A quiet and mirthless chuckle was heard in the pause of shocked silence. Lingard, with his hand on the door, remained still. Further off a growl burst out: "I do hate to be chucked in the dark aboard a strange ship. I wonder where they keep their fresh water. Can't get any sense out of them silly niggers. We don't seem to be more account here than a lot of cattle. Likely as not we'll have to berth on this blooming quarter-deck for God knows how long." Then again very near Lingard the first voice said, deadened discreetly — "There's something curious about this here brig turning up sudden-like,

ain't there? And that skipper of her — now? What kind of a man is he — anyhow?"

"Oh, he's one of them skippers going about loose. The brig's his own, I am thinking. He just goes about in her looking for what he may pick up honest or dishonest. My brother-in-law has served two commissions in these seas, and was telling me awful yarns about what's going on in them God-forsaken parts. Likely he lied, though. Them man-of-war's men are a holy terror for yarns. Bless you, what do I care who this skipper is? Let him do his best and don't trouble your head. You won't see him again in your life once we get clear."

"And can he do anything for the owner?" asked the first voice again. — "Can he! We can do nothing — that's one thing certain. The owner may be lying clubbed to death this very minute for all we know. By all accounts these savages here are a crool murdering lot. Mind you, I am sorry for him as much as anybody." — "Aye, aye," muttered the other, approvingly. — "He may not have been ready, poor man," began again the reasonable voice. Lingard heard a deep sigh. — "If there's anything as can be done for him, the owner's wife she's got to fix it up with this 'ere skipper. Under Providence he may serve her turn."

Lingard flung open the cabin door, entered, and, with a slam, shut the darkness out.

"I am, under Providence, to serve your turn," he said after standing very still for a while, with his eyes upon Mrs. Travers. The brig's swing-lamp lighted the cabin with an extraordinary brilliance. Mrs. Travers had thrown back her hood. The radiant brightness of the little place enfolded her so close, clung to her with such force that it might have been part of her very essence. There were no shadows on her face; it was fiercely lighted, hermetically closed, of impenetrable fairness.

Lingard looked in unconscious ecstasy at this vision, so amazing that it seemed to have strayed into his existence from beyond the limits of the conceivable. It was impossible to guess her thoughts, to know her feelings, to understand her grief or her joy. But she knew all that was at the bottom of his heart. He had told her himself, impelled by a sudden thought, going to her in darkness, in desperation, in absurd hope, in incredible trust. He had told her what he had told no one on earth, except perhaps, at times, himself, but without words — less clearly. He had told her and she had listened in silence. She had listened leaning over the rail till at last her breath was on

his forehead. He remembered this and had a moment of soaring pride and of unutterable dismay. He spoke, with an effort.

“You’ve heard what I said just now? Here I am.”

“Do you expect me to say something?” she asked. “Is it necessary? Is it possible?”

“No,” he answered. “It is said already. I know what you expect from me. Everything.”

“Everything,” she repeated, paused, and added much lower, “It is the very least.” He seemed to lose himself in thought.

“It is extraordinary,” he reflected half aloud, “how I dislike that man.” She leaned forward a little.

“Remember those two men are innocent,” she began.

“So am I — innocent. So is everybody in the world. Have you ever met a man or a woman that was not? They’ve got to take their chances all the same.”

“I expect you to be generous,” she said.

“To you?”

“Well — to me. Yes — if you like to me alone.”

“To you alone! And you know everything!” His voice dropped. “You want your happiness.”

She made an impatient movement and he saw her clench the hand that was lying on the table.

“I want my husband back,” she said, sharply.

“Yes. Yes. It’s what I was saying. Same thing,” he muttered with strange placidity. She looked at him searchingly. He had a large simplicity that filled one’s vision. She found herself slowly invaded by this masterful figure. He was not mediocre. Whatever he might have been he was not mediocre. The glamour of a lawless life stretched over him like the sky over the sea down on all sides to an unbroken horizon. Within, he moved very lonely, dangerous and romantic. There was in him crime, sacrifice, tenderness, devotion, and the madness of a fixed idea. She thought with wonder that of all the men in the world he was indeed the one she knew the best and yet she could not foresee the speech or the act of the next minute. She said distinctly:

“You’ve given me your confidence. Now I want you to give me the life of these two men. The life of two men whom you do not know, whom to-

morrow you will forget. It can be done. It must be done. You cannot refuse them to me." She waited.

"Why can't I refuse?" he whispered, gloomily, without looking up.

"You ask!" she exclaimed. He made no sign. He seemed at a loss for words.

"You ask . . . Ah!" she cried. "Don't you see that I have no kingdoms to conquer?"

### III

A slight change of expression which passed away almost directly showed that Lingard heard the passionate cry wrung from her by the distress of her mind. He made no sign. She perceived clearly the extreme difficulty of her position. The situation was dangerous; not so much the facts of it as the feeling of it. At times it appeared no more actual than a tradition; and she thought of herself as of some woman in a ballad, who has to beg for the lives of innocent captives. To save the lives of Mr. Travers and Mr. d'Alcacer was more than a duty. It was a necessity, it was an imperative need, it was an irresistible mission. Yet she had to reflect upon the horrors of a cruel and obscure death before she could feel for them the pity they deserved. It was when she looked at Lingard that her heart was wrung by an extremity of compassion. The others were pitiful, but he, the victim of his own extravagant impulses, appeared tragic, fascinating, and culpable. Lingard lifted his head. Whispers were heard at the door and Hassim followed by Immada entered the cabin.

Mrs. Travers looked at Lingard, because of all the faces in the cabin his was the only one that was intelligible to her. Hassim began to speak at once, and when he ceased Immada's deep sigh was heard in the sudden silence. Then Lingard looked at Mrs. Travers and said:

"The gentlemen are alive. Rajah Hassim here has seen them less than two hours ago, and so has the girl. They are alive and unharmed, so far. And now. . . ."

He paused. Mrs. Travers, leaning on her elbow, shaded her eyes under the glint of suspended thunderbolts.

"You must hate us," she murmured.

"Hate you," he repeated with, as she fancied, a tinge of disdain in his tone. "No. I hate myself."

"Why yourself?" she asked, very low.

“For not knowing my mind,” he answered. “For not knowing my mind. For not knowing what it is that’s got hold of me since — since this morning. I was angry then. . . . Nothing but very angry. . . .”

“And now?” she murmured.

“I am . . . unhappy,” he said. After a moment of silence which gave to Mrs. Travers the time to wonder how it was that this man had succeeded in penetrating into the very depths of her compassion, he hit the table such a blow that all the heavy muskets seemed to jump a little.

Mrs. Travers heard Hassim pronounce a few words earnestly, and a moan of distress from Immada.

“I believed in you before you . . . before you gave me your confidence,” she began. “You could see that. Could you not?”

He looked at her fixedly. “You are not the first that believed in me,” he said.

Hassim, lounging with his back against the closed door, kept his eye on him watchfully and Immada’s dark and sorrowful eyes rested on the face of the white woman. Mrs. Travers felt as though she were engaged in a contest with them; in a struggle for the possession of that man’s strength and of that man’s devotion. When she looked up at Lingard she saw on his face — which should have been impassive or exalted, the face of a stern leader or the face of a pitiless dreamer — an expression of utter forgetfulness. He seemed to be tasting the delight of some profound and amazing sensation. And suddenly in the midst of her appeal to his generosity, in the middle of a phrase, Mrs. Travers faltered, becoming aware that she was the object of his contemplation.

“Do not! Do not look at that woman!” cried Immada. “O! Master — look away. . . .” Hassim threw one arm round the girl’s neck. Her voice sank. “O! Master — look at us.” Hassim, drawing her to himself, covered her lips with his hand. She struggled a little like a snared bird and submitted, hiding her face on his shoulder, very quiet, sobbing without noise.

“What do they say to you?” asked Mrs. Travers with a faint and pained smile. “What can they say? It is intolerable to think that their words which have no meaning for me may go straight to your heart. . . .”

“Look away,” whispered Lingard without making the slightest movement.

Mrs. Travers sighed.



“Yes, it is very hard to think that I who want to touch you cannot make myself understood as well as they. And yet I speak the language of your childhood, the language of the man for whom there is no hope but in your generosity.”

He shook his head. She gazed at him anxiously for a moment. “In your memories then,” she said and was surprised by the expression of profound sadness that over-spread his attentive face.

“Do you know what I remember?” he said. “Do you want to know?” She listened with slightly parted lips. “I will tell you. Poverty, hard work — and death,” he went on, very quietly. “And now I’ve told you, and you don’t know. That’s how it is between us. You talk to me — I talk to you — and we don’t know.”

Her eyelids dropped.

“What can I find to say?” she went on. “What can I do? I mustn’t give in. Think! Amongst your memories there must be some face — some voice — some name, if nothing more. I can not believe that there is nothing but bitterness.”

“There’s no bitterness,” he murmured.

“O! Brother, my heart is faint with fear,” whispered Immada. Lingard turned swiftly to that whisper.

“Then, they are to be saved,” exclaimed Mrs. Travers. “Ah, I knew. . . .”

“Bear thy fear in patience,” said Hassim, rapidly, to his sister.

“They are to be saved. You have said it,” Lingard pronounced aloud, suddenly. He felt like a swimmer who, in the midst of superhuman efforts to reach the shore, perceives that the undertow is taking him to sea. He would go with the mysterious current; he would go swiftly — and see the end, the fulfilment both blissful and terrible.

With this state of exaltation in which he saw himself in some incomprehensible way always victorious, whatever might befall, there was mingled a tenacity of purpose. He could not sacrifice his intention, the intention of years, the intention of his life; he could no more part with it and exist than he could cut out his heart and live. The adventurer held fast to his adventure which made him in his own sight exactly what he was.

He considered the problem with cool audacity, backed by a belief in his own power. It was not these two men he had to save; he had to save himself! And looked upon in this way the situation appeared familiar.

Hassim had told him the two white men had been taken by their captors to Daman's camp. The young Rajah, leaving his sister in the canoe, had landed on the sand and had crept to the very edge of light thrown by the fires by which the Illanuns were cooking. Daman was sitting apart by a larger blaze. Two praus rode in shallow water near the sandbank; on the ridge, a sentry walked watching the lights of the brig; the camp was full of quiet whispers. Hassim returned to his canoe, then he and his sister, paddling cautiously round the anchored praus, in which women's voices could be heard, approached the other end of the camp. The light of the big blaze there fell on the water and the canoe skirted it without a splash, keeping in the night. Hassim, landing for the second time, crept again close to the fires. Each prau had, according to the customs of the Illanun rovers when on a raiding expedition, a smaller war-boat and these being light and manageable were hauled up on the sand not far from the big blaze; they sat high on the shelving shore throwing heavy shadows. Hassim crept up toward the largest of them and then standing on tiptoe could look at the camp across the gunwales. The confused talking of the men was like the buzz of insects in a forest. A child wailed on board one of the praus and a woman hailed the shore shrilly. Hassim unsheathed his kris and held it in his hand.

Very soon — he said — he saw the two white men walking amongst the fires. They waved their arms and talked together, stopping from time to time; they approached Daman; and the short man with the hair on his face addressed him earnestly and at great length. Daman sat cross-legged upon a little carpet with an open Koran on his knees and chanted the versets swaying to and fro with his eyes shut.

The Illanun chiefs reclining wrapped in cloaks on the ground raised themselves on their elbows to look at the whites. When the short white man finished speaking he gazed down at them for a while, then stamped his foot. He looked angry because no one understood him. Then suddenly he looked very sad; he covered his face with his hands; the tall man put his hand on the short man's shoulder and whispered into his ear. The dry wood of the fires crackled, the Illanuns slept, cooked, talked, but with their weapons at hand. An armed man or two came up to stare at the prisoners and then returned to their fire. The two whites sank down in the sand in front of Daman. Their clothes were soiled, there was sand in their hair. The tall man

had lost his hat; the glass in the eye of the short man glittered very much; his back was muddy and one sleeve of his coat torn up to the elbow.

All this Hassim saw and then retreated undetected to that part of the shore where Immada waited for him, keeping the canoe afloat. The Illanuns, trusting to the sea, kept very bad watch on their prisoners, and had he been able to speak with them Hassim thought an escape could have been effected. But they could not have understood his signs and still less his words. He consulted with his sister. Immada murmured sadly; at their feet the ripple broke with a mournful sound no louder than their voices.

Hassim's loyalty was unshaken, but now it led him on not in the bright light of hopes but in the deepened shadow of doubt. He wanted to obtain information for his friend who was so powerful and who perhaps would know how to be constant. When followed by Immada he approached the camp again — this time openly — their appearance did not excite much surprise. It was well known to the Chiefs of the Illanuns that the Rajah for whom they were to fight — if God so willed — was upon the shoals looking out for the coming of the white man who had much wealth and a store of weapons and who was his servant. Daman, who alone understood the exact relation, welcomed them with impenetrable gravity. Hassim took his seat on the carpet at his right hand. A consultation was being held half-aloud in short and apparently careless sentences, with long intervals of silence between. Immada, nestling close to her brother, leaned one arm on his shoulder and listened with serious attention and with outward calm as became a princess of Wajo accustomed to consort with warriors and statesmen in moments of danger and in the hours of deliberation. Her heart was beating rapidly, and facing her the silent white men stared at these two known faces, as if across a gulf. Four Illanun chiefs sat in a row. Their ample cloaks fell from their shoulders, and lay behind them on the sand in which their four long lances were planted upright, each supporting a small oblong shield of wood, carved on the edges and stained a dull purple. Daman stretched out his arm and pointed at the prisoners. The faces of the white men were very quiet. Daman looked at them mutely and ardently, as if consumed by an unspeakable longing.

The Koran, in a silk cover, hung on his breast by a crimson cord. It rested over his heart and, just below, the plain buffalo-horn handle of a kris, stuck into the twist of his sarong, protruded ready to his hand. The clouds thickening over the camp made the darkness press heavily on the glow of

scattered fires. "There is blood between me and the whites," he pronounced, violently. The Illanun chiefs remained impassive. There was blood between them and all mankind. Hassim remarked dispassionately that there was one white man with whom it would be wise to remain friendly; and besides, was not Daman his friend already? Daman smiled with half-closed eyes. He was that white man's friend, not his slave. The Illanuns playing with their sword-handles grunted assent. Why, asked Daman, did these strange whites travel so far from their country? The great white man whom they all knew did not want them. No one wanted them. Evil would follow in their footsteps. They were such men as are sent by rulers to examine the aspects of far-off countries and talk of peace and make treaties. Such is the beginning of great sorrows. The Illanuns were far from their country, where no white man dared to come, and therefore they were free to seek their enemies upon the open waters. They had found these two who had come to see. He asked what they had come to see? Was there nothing to look at in their own country?

He talked in an ironic and subdued tone. The scattered heaps of embers glowed a deeper red; the big blaze of the chief's fire sank low and grew dim before he ceased. Straight-limbed figures rose, sank, moved, whispered on the beach. Here and there a spear-blade caught a red gleam above the black shape of a head.

"The Illanuns seek booty on the sea," cried Daman. "Their fathers and the fathers of their fathers have done the same, being fearless like those who embrace death closely."

A low laugh was heard. "We strike and go," said an exulting voice. "We live and die with our weapons in our hands." The Illanuns leaped to their feet. They stamped on the sand, flourishing naked blades over the heads of their prisoners. A tumult arose.

When it subsided Daman stood up in a cloak that wrapped him to his feet and spoke again giving advice.

The white men sat on the sand and turned their eyes from face to face as if trying to understand. It was agreed to send the prisoners into the lagoon where their fate would be decided by the ruler of the land. The Illanuns only wanted to plunder the ship. They did not care what became of the men. "But Daman cares," remarked Hassim to Lingard, when relating what took place. "He cares, O Tuan!"

Hassim had learned also that the Settlement was in a state of unrest as if on the eve of war. Belarab with his followers was encamped by his father's tomb in the hollow beyond the cultivated fields. His stockade was shut up and no one appeared on the verandahs of the houses within. You could tell there were people inside only by the smoke of the cooking fires. Tengga's followers meantime swaggered about the Settlement behaving tyrannically to those who were peaceable. A great madness had descended upon the people, a madness strong as the madness of love, the madness of battle, the desire to spill blood. A strange fear also had made them wild. The big smoke seen that morning above the forests of the coast was some agreed signal from Tengga to Daman but what it meant Hassim had been unable to find out. He feared for Jorgenson's safety. He said that while one of the war-boats was being made ready to take the captives into the lagoon, he and his sister left the camp quietly and got away in their canoe. The flares of the brig, reflected in a faint loom upon the clouds, enabled them to make straight for the vessel across the banks. Before they had gone half way these flames went out and the darkness seemed denser than any he had known before. But it was no greater than the darkness of his mind — he added. He had looked upon the white men sitting unmoved and silent under the edge of swords; he had looked at Daman, he had heard bitter words spoken; he was looking now at his white friend — and the issue of events he could not see. One can see men's faces but their fate, which is written on their foreheads, one cannot see. He had no more to say, and what he had spoken was true in every word.

#### IV

Lingard repeated it all to Mrs. Travers. Her courage, her intelligence, the quickness of her apprehension, the colour of her eyes and the intrepidity of her glance evoked in him an admiring enthusiasm. She stood by his side! Every moment that fatal illusion clung closer to his soul — like a garment of light — like an armour of fire.

He was unwilling to face the facts. All his life — till that day — had been a wrestle with events in the daylight of this world, but now he could not bring his mind to the consideration of his position. It was Mrs. Travers who, after waiting awhile, forced on him the pain of thought by wanting to know what bearing Hassim's news had upon the situation.

Lingard had not the slightest doubt Daman wanted him to know what had been done with the prisoners. That is why Daman had welcomed Hassim,

and let him hear the decision and had allowed him to leave the camp on the sandbank. There could be only one object in this; to let him, Lingard, know that the prisoners had been put out of his reach as long as he remained in his brig. Now this brig was his strength. To make him leave his brig was like removing his hand from his sword.

“Do you understand what I mean, Mrs. Travers?” he asked. “They are afraid of me because I know how to fight this brig. They fear the brig because when I am on board her, the brig and I are one. An armed man — don’t you see? Without the brig I am disarmed, without me she can’t strike. So Daman thinks. He does not know everything but he is not far off the truth. He says to himself that if I man the boats to go after these whites into the lagoon then his Illanuns will get the yacht for sure — and perhaps the brig as well. If I stop here with my brig he holds the two white men and can talk as big as he pleases. Belarab believes in me no doubt, but Daman trusts no man on earth. He simply does not know how to trust any one, because he is always plotting himself. He came to help me and as soon as he found I was not there he began to plot with Tengga. Now he has made a move — a clever move; a cleverer move than he thinks. Why? I’ll tell you why. Because I, Tom Lingard, haven’t a single white man aboard this brig I can trust. Not one. I only just discovered my mate’s got the notion I am some kind of pirate. And all your yacht people think the same. It is as though you had brought a curse on me in your yacht. Nobody believes me. Good God! What have I come to! Even those two — look at them — I say look at them! By all the stars they doubt me! Me! . . .”

He pointed at Hassim and Immada. The girl seemed frightened. Hassim looked on calm and intelligent with inexhaustible patience. Lingard’s voice fell suddenly.

“And by heavens they may be right. Who knows? You? Do you know? They have waited for years. Look. They are waiting with heavy hearts. Do you think that I don’t care? Ought I to have kept it all in — told no one — no one — not even you? Are they waiting for what will never come now?”

Mrs. Travers rose and moved quickly round the table. “Can we give anything to this — this Daman or these other men? We could give them more than they could think of asking. I — my husband. . . .”

“Don’t talk to me of your husband,” he said, roughly. “You don’t know what you are doing.” She confronted the sombre anger of his eyes — “But I must,” she asserted with heat. — “Must,” he mused, noticing that she was

only half a head less tall than himself. "Must! Oh, yes. Of course, you must. Must! Yes. But I don't want to hear. Give! What can you give? You may have all the treasures of the world for all I know. No! You can't give anything. . . ."

"I was thinking of your difficulty when I spoke," she interrupted. His eyes wandered downward following the line of her shoulder. — "Of me — of me!" he repeated.

All this was said almost in whispers. The sound of slow footsteps was heard on deck above their heads. Lingard turned his face to the open skylight.

"On deck there! Any wind?"

All was still for a moment. Somebody above answered in a leisurely tone:

"A steady little draught from the northward."

Then after a pause added in a mutter:

"Pitch dark."

"Aye, dark enough," murmured Lingard. He must do something. Now. At once. The world was waiting. The world full of hopes and fear. What should he do? Instead of answering that question he traced the ungleaming coils of her twisted hair and became fascinated by a stray lock at her neck. What should he do? No one to leave his brig to. The voice that had answered his question was Carter's voice. "He is hanging about keeping his eye on me," he said to Mrs. Travers. She shook her head and tried to smile. The man above coughed discreetly. "No," said Lingard, "you must understand that you have nothing to give."

The man on deck who seemed to have lingered by the skylight was heard saying quietly, "I am at hand if you want me, Mrs. Travers." Hassim and Immada looked up. "You see," exclaimed Lingard. "What did I tell you? He's keeping his eye on me! On board my own ship. Am I dreaming? Am I in a fever? Tell him to come down," he said after a pause. Mrs. Travers did so and Lingard thought her voice very commanding and very sweet. "There's nothing in the world I love so much as this brig," he went on. "Nothing in the world. If I lost her I would have no standing room on the earth for my feet. You don't understand this. You can't."

Carter came in and shut the cabin door carefully. He looked with serenity at everyone in turn.

"All quiet?" asked Lingard.

“Quiet enough if you like to call it so,” he answered. “But if you only put your head outside the door you’ll hear them all on the quarter-deck snoring against each other, as if there were no wives at home and no pirates at sea.”

“Look here,” said Lingard. “I found out that I can’t trust my mate.”

“Can’t you?” drawled Carter. “I am not exactly surprised. I must say he does not snore but I believe it is because he is too crazy to sleep. He waylaid me on the poop just now and said something about evil communications corrupting good manners. Seems to me I’ve heard that before. Queer thing to say. He tried to make it out somehow that if he wasn’t corrupt it wasn’t your fault. As if this was any concern of mine. He’s as mad as he’s fat — or else he puts it on.” Carter laughed a little and leaned his shoulders against a bulkhead.

Lingard gazed at the woman who expected so much from him and in the light she seemed to shed he saw himself leading a column of armed boats to the attack of the Settlement. He could burn the whole place to the ground and drive every soul of them into the bush. He could! And there was a surprise, a shock, a vague horror at the thought of the destructive power of his will. He could give her ever so many lives. He had seen her yesterday, and it seemed to him he had been all his life waiting for her to make a sign. She was very still. He pondered a plan of attack. He saw smoke and flame — and next moment he saw himself alone amongst shapeless ruins with the whispers, with the sigh and moan of the Shallows in his ears. He shuddered, and shaking his hand:

“No! I cannot give you all those lives!” he cried.

Then, before Mrs. Travers could guess the meaning of this outburst, he declared that as the two captives must be saved he would go alone into the lagoon. He could not think of using force. “You understand why,” he said to Mrs. Travers and she whispered a faint “Yes.” He would run the risk alone. His hope was in Belarab being able to see where his true interest lay. “If I can only get at him I would soon make him see,” he mused aloud. “Haven’t I kept his power up for these two years past? And he knows it, too. He feels it.” Whether he would be allowed to reach Belarab was another matter. Lingard lost himself in deep thought. “He would not dare,” he burst out. Mrs. Travers listened with parted lips. Carter did not move a muscle of his youthful and self-possessed face; only when Lingard, turning suddenly, came up close to him and asked with a red flash of eyes and in a lowered



voice, "Could you fight this brig?" something like a smile made a stir amongst the hairs of his little fair moustache.

"Could I?" he said. "I could try, anyhow." He paused, and added hardly above his breath, "For the lady — of course."

Lingard seemed staggered as though he had been hit in the chest. "I was thinking of the brig," he said, gently.

"Mrs. Travers would be on board," retorted Carter.

"What! on board. Ah yes; on board. Where else?" stammered Lingard.

Carter looked at him in amazement. "Fight! You ask!" he said, slowly. "You just try me."

"I shall," ejaculated Lingard. He left the cabin calling out "serang!" A thin cracked voice was heard immediately answering, "Tuan!" and the door slammed to.

"You trust him, Mrs. Travers?" asked Carter, rapidly.

"You do not — why?" she answered.

"I can't make him out. If he was another kind of man I would say he was drunk," said Carter. "Why is he here at all — he, and this brig of his? Excuse my boldness — but have you promised him anything?"

"I — I promised!" exclaimed Mrs. Travers in a bitter tone which silenced Carter for a moment.

"So much the better," he said at last. "Let him show what he can do first and . . ."

"Here! Take this," said Lingard, who re-entered the cabin fumbling about his neck. Carter mechanically extended his hand.

"What's this for?" he asked, looking at a small brass key attached to a thin chain.

"Powder magazine. Trap door under the table. The man who has this key commands the brig while I am away. The serang understands. You have her very life in your hand there."

Carter looked at the small key lying in his half-open palm.

"I was just telling Mrs. Travers I didn't trust you — not altogether. . . ."

"I know all about it," interrupted Lingard, contemptuously. "You carry a blamed pistol in your pocket to blow my brains out — don't you? What's that to me? I am thinking of the brig. I think I know your sort. You will do."

"Well, perhaps I might," mumbled Carter, modestly.

"Don't be rash," said Lingard, anxiously. "If you've got to fight use your head as well as your hands. If there's a breeze fight under way. If they

should try to board in a calm, trust to the small arms to hold them off. Keep your head and — ” He looked intensely into Carter’s eyes; his lips worked without a sound as though he had been suddenly struck dumb. “Don’t think about me. What’s that to you who I am? Think of the ship,” he burst out. “Don’t let her go! — Don’t let her go!” The passion in his voice impressed his hearers who for a time preserved a profound silence.

“All right,” said Carter at last. “I will stick to your brig as though she were my own; but I would like to see clear through all this. Look here — you are going off somewhere? Alone, you said?”

“Yes. Alone.”

“Very well. Mind, then, that you don’t come back with a crowd of those brown friends of yours — or by the Heavens above us I won’t let you come within hail of your own ship. Am I to keep this key?”

“Captain Lingard,” said Mrs. Travers suddenly. “Would it not be better to tell him everything?”

“Tell him everything?” repeated Lingard. “Everything! Yesterday it might have been done. Only yesterday! Yesterday, did I say? Only six hours ago — only six hours ago I had something to tell. You heard it. And now it’s gone. Tell him! There’s nothing to tell any more.” He remained for a time with bowed head, while before him Mrs. Travers, who had begun a gesture of protest, dropped her arms suddenly. In a moment he looked up again.

“Keep the key,” he said, calmly, “and when the time comes step forward and take charge. I am satisfied.”

“I would like to see clear through all this though,” muttered Carter again. “And for how long are you leaving us, Captain?” Lingard made no answer. Carter waited awhile. “Come, sir,” he urged. “I ought to have some notion. What is it? Two, three days?” Lingard started.

“Days,” he repeated. “Ah, days. What is it you want to know? Two . . . three — what did the old fellow say — perhaps for life.” This was spoken so low that no one but Carter heard the last words. — ”Do you mean it?” he murmured. Lingard nodded. — ”Wait as long as you can — then go,” he said in the same hardly audible voice. “Go where?” — ”Where you like, nearest port, any port.” — ”Very good. That’s something plain at any rate,” commented the young man with imperturbable good humour.

“I go, O Hassim!” began Lingard and the Malay made a slow inclination of the head which he did not raise again till Lingard had ceased speaking.

He betrayed neither surprise nor any other emotion while Lingard in a few concise and sharp sentences made him acquainted with his purpose to bring about singlehanded the release of the prisoners. When Lingard had ended with the words: "And you must find a way to help me in the time of trouble, O Rajah Hassim," he looked up and said:

"Good. You never asked me for anything before."

He smiled at his white friend. There was something subtle in the smile and afterward an added firmness in the repose of the lips. Immada moved a step forward. She looked at Lingard with terror in her black and dilated eyes. She exclaimed in a voice whose vibration startled the hearts of all the hearers with an indefinable sense of alarm, "He will perish, Hassim! He will perish alone!"

"No," said Hassim. "Thy fear is as vain to-night as it was at sunrise. He shall not perish alone."

Her eyelids dropped slowly. From her veiled eyes the tears fell, vanishing in the silence. Lingard's forehead became furrowed by folds that seemed to contain an infinity of sombre thoughts. "Remember, O Hassim, that when I promised you to take you back to your country you promised me to be a friend to all white men. A friend to all whites who are of my people, forever."

"My memory is good, O Tuan," said Hassim; "I am not yet back in my country, but is not everyone the ruler of his own heart? Promises made by a man of noble birth live as long as the speaker endures."

"Good-bye," said Lingard to Mrs. Travers. "You will be safe here." He looked all around the cabin. "I leave you," he began again and stopped short. Mrs. Travers' hand, resting lightly on the edge of the table, began to tremble. "It's for you . . . Yes. For you alone . . . and it seems it can't be. . . ."

It seemed to him that he was saying good-bye to all the world, that he was taking a last leave of his own self. Mrs. Travers did not say a word, but Immada threw herself between them and cried:

"You are a cruel woman! You are driving him away from where his strength is. You put madness into his heart, O! Blind — without pity — without shame! . . ."

"Immada," said Hassim's calm voice. Nobody moved.

"What did she say to me?" faltered Mrs. Travers and again repeated in a voice that sounded hard, "What did she say?"

"Forgive her," said Lingard. "Her fears are for me . . ." — "It's about your going?" Mrs. Travers interrupted, swiftly.

"Yes, it is — and you must forgive her." He had turned away his eyes with something that resembled embarrassment but suddenly he was assailed by an irresistible longing to look again at that woman. At the moment of parting he clung to her with his glance as a man holds with his hands a priceless and disputed possession. The faint blush that overspread gradually Mrs. Travers' features gave her face an air of extraordinary and startling animation.

"The danger you run?" she asked, eagerly. He repelled the suggestion by a slighting gesture of the hand. — "Nothing worth looking at twice. Don't give it a thought," he said. "I've been in tighter places." He clapped his hands and waited till he heard the cabin door open behind his back. "Steward, my pistols." The mulatto in slippers, aproned to the chin, glided through the cabin with unseeing eyes as though for him no one there had existed. . . . — "Is it my heart that aches so?" Mrs. Travers asked herself, contemplating Lingard's motionless figure. "How long will this sensation of dull pain last? Will it last forever. . . ." — "How many changes of clothes shall I put up, sir?" asked the steward, while Lingard took the pistols from him and eased the hammers after putting on fresh caps. — "I will take nothing this time, steward." He received in turn from the mulatto's hands a red silk handkerchief, a pocket book, a cigar-case. He knotted the handkerchief loosely round his throat; it was evident he was going through the routine of every departure for the shore; he even opened the cigar-case to see whether it had been filled. — "Hat, sir," murmured the half-caste. Lingard flung it on his head. — "Take your orders from this lady, steward — till I come back. The cabin is hers — do you hear?" He sighed ready to go and seemed unable to lift a foot. — "I am coming with you," declared Mrs. Travers suddenly in a tone of unalterable decision. He did not look at her; he did not even look up; he said nothing, till after Carter had cried: "You can't, Mrs. Travers!" — when without budging he whispered to himself: — "Of course." Mrs. Travers had pulled already the hood of her cloak over her head and her face within the dark cloth had turned an intense and unearthly white, in which the violet of her eyes appeared unfathomably mysterious. Carter started forward. — "You don't know this man," he almost shouted.

"I do know him," she said, and before the reproachfully unbelieving attitude of the other she added, speaking slowly and with emphasis: "There is not, I verily believe, a single thought or act of his life that I don't know." — "It's true — it's true," muttered Lingard to himself. Carter threw up his arms with a groan. "Stand back," said a voice that sounded to him like a growl of thunder, and he felt a grip on his hand which seemed to crush every bone. He jerked it away. — "Mrs. Travers! stay," he cried. They had vanished through the open door and the sound of their footsteps had already died away. Carter turned about bewildered as if looking for help. — "Who is he, steward? Who in the name of all the mad devils is he?" he asked, wildly. He was confounded by the cold and philosophical tone of the answer: — "'Tain't my place to trouble about that, sir — nor yours I guess." — "Isn't it!" shouted Carter. "Why, he has carried the lady off." The steward was looking critically at the lamp and after a while screwed the light down. — "That's better," he mumbled. — "Good God! What is a fellow to do?" continued Carter, looking at Hassim and Immada who were whispering together and gave him only an absent glance. He rushed on deck and was struck blind instantly by the night that seemed to have been lying in wait for him; he stumbled over something soft, kicked something hard, flung himself on the rail. "Come back," he cried. "Come back. Captain! Mrs. Travers! — or let me come, too."

He listened. The breeze blew cool against his cheek. A black bandage seemed to lie over his eyes. "Gone," he groaned, utterly crushed. And suddenly he heard Mrs. Travers' voice remote in the depths of the night. — "Defend the brig," it said, and these words, pronouncing themselves in the immensity of a lightless universe, thrilled every fibre of his body by the commanding sadness of their tone. "Defend, defend the brig." . . . "I am damned if I do," shouted Carter in despair. "Unless you come back! . . . Mrs. Travers!"

". . . as though — I were — on board — myself," went on the rising cadence of the voice, more distant now, a marvel of faint and imperious clearness.

Carter shouted no more; he tried to make out the boat for a time, and when, giving it up, he leaped down from the rail, the heavy obscurity of the brig's main deck was agitated like a sombre pool by his jump, swayed, eddied, seemed to break up. Blotches of darkness recoiled, drifted away, bare feet shuffled hastily, confused murmurs died out. "Lascars," he

muttered, "The crew is all agog." Afterward he listened for a moment to the faintly tumultuous snores of the white men sleeping in rows, with their heads under the break of the poop. Somewhere about his feet, the yacht's black dog, invisible, and chained to a deck-ringbolt, whined, rattled the thin links, pattered with his claws in his distress at the unfamiliar surroundings, begging for the charity of human notice. Carter stooped impulsively, and was met by a startling lick in the face. — "Hallo, boy!" He thumped the thick curly sides, stroked the smooth head — "Good boy, Rover. Down. Lie down, dog. You don't know what to make of it — do you, boy?" The dog became still as death. "Well, neither do I," muttered Carter. But such natures are helped by a cheerful contempt for the intricate and endless suggestions of thought. He told himself that he would soon see what was to come of it, and dismissed all speculation. Had he been a little older he would have felt that the situation was beyond his grasp; but he was too young to see it whole and in a manner detached from himself. All these inexplicable events filled him with deep concern — but then on the other hand he had the key of the magazine and he could not find it in his heart to dislike Lingard. He was positive about this at last, and to know that much after the discomfort of an inward conflict went a long way toward a solution. When he followed Shaw into the cabin he could not repress a sense of enjoyment or hide a faint and malicious smile.

"Gone away — did you say? And carried off the lady with him?" discoursed Shaw very loud in the doorway. "Did he? Well, I am not surprised. What can you expect from a man like that, who leaves his ship in an open roadstead without — I won't say orders — but without as much as a single word to his next in command? And at night at that! That just shows you the kind of man. Is this the way to treat a chief mate? I apprehend he was riled at the little al-ter-cation we had just before you came on board. I told him a truth or two — but — never mind. There's the law and that's enough for me. I am captain as long as he is out of the ship, and if his address before very long is not in one of Her Majesty's jails or other I authorize you to call me a Dutchman. You mark my words."

He walked in masterfully, sat down and surveyed the cabin in a leisurely and autocratic manner; but suddenly his eyes became stony with amazement and indignation; he pointed a fat and trembling forefinger.

"Niggers," he said, huskily. "In the cuddy! In the cuddy!" He appeared bereft of speech for a time.

Since he entered the cabin Hassim had been watching him in thoughtful and expectant silence. "I can't have it," he continued with genuine feeling in his voice. "Damme! I've too much respect for myself." He rose with heavy deliberation; his eyes bulged out in a severe and dignified stare. "Out you go!" he bellowed; suddenly, making a step forward. — "Great Scott! What are you up to, mister?" asked in a tone of dispassionate surprise the steward whose head appeared in the doorway. "These are the Captain's friends." "Show me a man's friends and . . ." began Shaw, dogmatically, but abruptly passed into the tone of admonition. "You take your mug out of the way, bottle-washer. They ain't friends of mine. I ain't a vagabond. I know what's due to myself. Quit!" he hissed, fiercely. Hassim, with an alert movement, grasped the handle of his kris. Shaw puffed out his cheeks and frowned. — "Look out! He will stick you like a prize pig," murmured Carter without moving a muscle. Shaw looked round helplessly. — "And you would enjoy the fun — wouldn't you?" he said with slow bitterness. Carter's distant non-committal smile quite overwhelmed him by its horrid frigidity. Extreme despondency replaced the proper feeling of racial pride in the primitive soul of the mate. "My God! What luck! What have I done to fall amongst that lot?" he groaned, sat down, and took his big grey head in his hands. Carter drew aside to make room for Immada, who, in obedience to a whisper from her brother, sought to leave the cabin. She passed out after an instant of hesitation, during which she looked up at Carter once. Her brother, motionless in a defensive attitude, protected her retreat. She disappeared; Hassim's grip on his weapon relaxed; he looked in turn at every object in the cabin as if to fix its position in his mind forever, and following his sister, walked out with noiseless footfalls.

They entered the same darkness which had received, enveloped, and hidden the troubled souls of Lingard and Edith, but to these two the light from which they had felt themselves driven away was now like the light of forbidden hopes; it had the awful and tranquil brightness that a light burning on the shore has for an exhausted swimmer about to give himself up to the fateful sea. They looked back; it had disappeared; Carter had shut the cabin door behind them to have it out with Shaw. He wanted to arrive at some kind of working compromise with the nominal commander, but the mate was so demoralized by the novelty of the assaults made upon his respectability that the young defender of the brig could get nothing from him except lamentations mingled with mild blasphemies. The brig slept,

and along her quiet deck the voices raised in her cabin — Shaw's appeals and reproaches directed vociferously to heaven, together with Carter's inflexible drawl mingled into one deadened, modulated, and continuous murmur. The lookouts in the waist, motionless and peering into obscurity, one ear turned to the sea, were aware of that strange resonance like the ghost of a quarrel that seemed to hover at their backs. Wasub, after seeing Hassim and Immada into their canoe, prowled to and fro the whole length of the vessel vigilantly. There was not a star in the sky and no gleam on the water; there was no horizon, no outline, no shape for the eye to rest upon, nothing for the hand to grasp. An obscurity that seemed without limit in space and time had submerged the universe like a destroying flood.

A lull of the breeze kept for a time the small boat in the neighbourhood of the brig. The hoisted sail, invisible, fluttered faintly, mysteriously, and the boat rising and falling bodily to the passage of each invisible undulation of the waters seemed to repose upon a living breast. Lingard, his hand on the tiller, sat up erect, expectant and silent. Mrs. Travers had drawn her cloak close around her body. Their glances plunged infinitely deep into a lightless void, and yet they were still so near the brig that the piteous whine of the dog, mingled with the angry rattling of the chain, reached their ears faintly, evoking obscure images of distress and fury. A sharp bark ending in a plaintive howl that seemed raised by the passage of phantoms invisible to men, rent the black stillness, as though the instinct of the brute inspired by the soul of night had voiced in a lamentable plaint the fear of the future, the anguish of lurking death, the terror of shadows. Not far from the brig's boat Hassim and Immada in their canoe, letting their paddles trail in the water, sat in a silent and invincible torpor as if the fitful puffs of wind had carried to their hearts the breath of a subtle poison that, very soon, would make them die. — "Have you seen the white woman's eyes?" cried the girl. She struck her palms together loudly and remained with her arms extended, with her hands clasped. "O Hassim! Have you seen her eyes shining under her eyebrows like rays of light darting under the arched boughs in a forest? They pierced me. I shuddered at the sound of her voice! I saw her walk behind him — and it seems to me that she does not live on earth — that all this is witchcraft."

She lamented in the night. Hassim kept silent. He had no illusions and in any other man but Lingard he would have thought the proceeding no better than suicidal folly. For him Travers and d'Alcacer were two powerful



Rajahs — probably relatives of the Ruler of the land of the English whom he knew to be a woman; but why they should come and interfere with the recovery of his own kingdom was an obscure problem. He was concerned for Lingard's safety. That the risk was incurred mostly for his sake — so that the prospects of the great enterprise should not be ruined by a quarrel over the lives of these whites — did not strike him so much as may be imagined. There was that in him which made such an action on Lingard's part appear all but unavoidable. Was he not Rajah Hassim and was not the other a man of strong heart, of strong arm, of proud courage, a man great enough to protect highborn princes — a friend? Immada's words called out a smile which, like the words, was lost in the darkness. "Forget your weariness," he said, gently, "lest, O Sister, we should arrive too late." The coming day would throw its light on some decisive event. Hassim thought of his own men who guarded the Emma and he wished to be where they could hear his voice. He regretted Jaffir was not there. Hassim was saddened by the absence from his side of that man who once had carried what he thought would be his last message to his friend. It had not been the last. He had lived to cherish new hopes and to face new troubles and, perchance, to frame another message yet, while death knocked with the hands of armed enemies at the gate. The breeze steadied; the succeeding swells swung the canoe smoothly up the unbroken ridges of water travelling apace along the land. They progressed slowly; but Immada's heart was more weary than her arms, and Hassim, dipping the blade of his paddle without a splash, peered right and left, trying to make out the shadowy forms of islets. A long way ahead of the canoe and holding the same course, the brig's dinghy ran with broad lug extended, making for that narrow and winding passage between the coast and the southern shoals, which led to the mouth of the creek connecting the lagoon with the sea.

Thus on that starless night the Shallows were peopled by uneasy souls. The thick veil of clouds stretched over them, cut them off from the rest of the universe. At times Mrs. Travers had in the darkness the impression of dizzy speed, and again it seemed to her that the boat was standing still, that everything in the world was standing still and only her fancy roamed free from all trammels. Lingard, perfectly motionless by her side, steered, shaping his course by the feel of the wind. Presently he perceived ahead a ghostly flicker of faint, livid light which the earth seemed to throw up against the uniform blackness of the sky. The dinghy was approaching the

expanse of the Shallows. The confused clamour of broken water deepened its note.

“How long are we going to sail like this?” asked Mrs. Travers, gently. She did not recognize the voice that pronounced the word “Always” in answer to her question. It had the impersonal ring of a voice without a master. Her heart beat fast.

“Captain Lingard!” she cried.

“Yes. What?” he said, nervously, as if startled out of a dream.

“I asked you how long we were going to sail like this,” she repeated, distinctly.

“If the breeze holds we shall be in the lagoon soon after daybreak. That will be the right time, too. I shall leave you on board the hulk with Jorgenson.”

“And you? What will you do?” she asked. She had to wait for a while.

“I will do what I can,” she heard him say at last. There was another pause. “All I can,” he added.

The breeze dropped, the sail fluttered.

“I have perfect confidence in you,” she said. “But are you certain of success?”

“No.”

The futility of her question came home to Mrs. Travers. In a few hours of life she had been torn away from all her certitudes, flung into a world of improbabilities. This thought instead of augmenting her distress seemed to soothe her. What she experienced was not doubt and it was not fear. It was something else. It might have been only a great fatigue.

She heard a dull detonation as if in the depth of the sea. It was hardly more than a shock and a vibration. A roller had broken amongst the shoals; the livid clearness Lingard had seen ahead flashed and flickered in expanded white sheets much nearer to the boat now. And all this — the wan burst of light, the faint shock as of something remote and immense falling into ruins, was taking place outside the limits of her life which remained encircled by an impenetrable darkness and by an impenetrable silence. Puffs of wind blew about her head and expired; the sail collapsed, shivered audibly, stood full and still in turn; and again the sensation of vertiginous speed and of absolute immobility succeeding each other with increasing swiftness merged at last into a bizarre state of headlong motion and profound peace. The darkness enfolded her like the enervating caress of a

sombre universe. It was gentle and destructive. Its languor seduced her soul into surrender. Nothing existed and even all her memories vanished into space. She was content that nothing should exist.

Lingard, aware all the time of their contact in the narrow stern sheets of the boat, was startled by the pressure of the woman's head drooping on his shoulder. He stiffened himself still more as though he had tried on the approach of a danger to conceal his life in the breathless rigidity of his body. The boat soared and descended slowly; a region of foam and reefs stretched across her course hissing like a gigantic cauldron; a strong gust of wind drove her straight at it for a moment then passed on and abandoned her to the regular balancing of the swell. The struggle of the rocks forever overwhelmed and emerging, with the sea forever victorious and repulsed, fascinated the man. He watched it as he would have watched something going on within himself while Mrs. Travers slept sustained by his arm, pressed to his side, abandoned to his support. The shoals guarding the Shore of Refuge had given him his first glimpse of success — the solid support he needed for his action. The Shallows were the shelter of his dreams; their voice had the power to soothe and exalt his thoughts with the promise of freedom for his hopes. Never had there been such a generous friendship. . . . A mass of white foam whirling about a centre of intense blackness spun silently past the side of the boat. . . . That woman he held like a captive on his arm had also been given to him by the Shallows.

Suddenly his eyes caught on a distant sandbank the red gleam of Daman's camp fire instantly eclipsed like the wink of a signalling lantern along the level of the waters. It brought to his mind the existence of the two men — those other captives. If the war canoe transporting them into the lagoon had left the sands shortly after Hassim's retreat from Daman's camp, Travers and d'Alcacer were by this time far away up the creek. Every thought of action had become odious to Lingard since all he could do in the world now was to hasten the moment of his separation from that woman to whom he had confessed the whole secret of his life.

And she slept. She could sleep! He looked down at her as he would have looked at the slumbering ignorance of a child, but the life within him had the fierce beat of supreme moments. Near by, the eddies sighed along the reefs, the water souged amongst the stones, clung round the rocks with tragic murmurs that resembled promises, good-byes, or prayers. From the unfathomable distances of the night came the booming of the swell

assaulting the seaward face of the Shallows. He felt the woman's nearness with such intensity that he heard nothing. . . . Then suddenly he thought of death.

"Wake up!" he shouted in her ear, swinging round in his seat. Mrs. Travers gasped; a splash of water flicked her over the eyes and she felt the separate drops run down her cheeks, she tasted them on her lips, tepid and bitter like tears. A swishing undulation tossed the boat on high followed by another and still another; and then the boat with the breeze abeam glided through still water, laying over at a steady angle.

"Clear of the reef now," remarked Lingard in a tone of relief.

"Were we in any danger?" asked Mrs. Travers in a whisper.

"Well, the breeze dropped and we drifted in very close to the rocks," he answered. "I had to rouse you. It wouldn't have done for you to wake up suddenly struggling in the water."

So she had slept! It seemed to her incredible that she should have closed her eyes in this small boat, with the knowledge of their desperate errand, on so disturbed a sea. The man by her side leaned forward, extended his arm, and the boat going off before the wind went on faster on an even keel. A motionless black bank resting on the sea stretched infinitely right in their way in ominous stillness. She called Lingard's attention to it. "Look at this awful cloud."

"This cloud is the coast and in a moment we shall be entering the creek," he said, quietly. Mrs. Travers stared at it. Was it land — land! It seemed to her even less palpable than a cloud, a mere sinister immobility above the unrest of the sea, nursing in its depth the unrest of men who, to her mind, were no more real than fantastic shadows.

## V

What struck Mrs. Travers most, directly she set eyes on him, was the other-world aspect of Jorgenson. He had been buried out of sight so long that his tall, gaunt body, his unhurried, mechanical movements, his set face and his eyes with an empty gaze suggested an invincible indifference to all the possible surprises of the earth. That appearance of a resuscitated man who seemed to be commanded by a conjuring spell strolled along the decks of what was even to Mrs. Travers' eyes the mere corpse of a ship and turned on her a pair of deep-sunk, expressionless eyes with an almost unearthly detachment. Mrs. Travers had never been looked at before with that strange and pregnant abstraction. Yet she didn't dislike Jorgenson. In the early

morning light, white from head to foot in a perfectly clean suit of clothes which seemed hardly to contain any limbs, freshly shaven (Jorgenson's sunken cheeks with their withered colouring always had a sort of gloss as though he had the habit of shaving every two hours or so), he looked as immaculate as though he had been indeed a pure spirit superior to the soiling contacts of the material earth. He was disturbing but he was not repulsive. He gave no sign of greeting.

Lingard addressed him at once.

"You have had a regular staircase built up the side of the hulk, Jorgenson," he said. "It was very convenient for us to come aboard now, but in case of an attack don't you think . . ."

"I did think." There was nothing so dispassionate in the world as the voice of Captain H. C. Jorgenson, ex Barque Wild Rose, since he had recrossed the Waters of Oblivion to step back into the life of men. "I did think, but since I don't want to make trouble. . . ."

"Oh, you don't want to make trouble," interrupted Lingard.

"No. Don't believe in it. Do you, King Tom?"

"I may have to make trouble."

"So you came up here in this small dinghy of yours like this to start making trouble, did you?"

"What's the matter with you? Don't you know me yet, Jorgenson?"

"I thought I knew you. How could I tell that a man like you would come along for a fight bringing a woman with him?"

"This lady is Mrs. Travers," said Lingard. "The wife of one of the luckless gentlemen Daman got hold of last evening. . . . This is Jorgenson, the friend of whom I have been telling you, Mrs. Travers."

Mrs. Travers smiled faintly. Her eyes roamed far and near and the strangeness of her surroundings, the overpowering curiosity, the conflict of interest and doubt gave her the aspect of one still new to life, presenting an innocent and naive attitude before the surprises of experience. She looked very guileless and youthful between those two men. Lingard gazed at her with that unconscious tenderness mingled with wonder, which some men manifest toward girlhood. There was nothing of a conqueror of kingdoms in his bearing. Jorgenson preserved his amazing abstraction which seemed neither to hear nor see anything. But, evidently, he kept a mysterious grip on events in the world of living men because he asked very naturally:

"How did she get away?"

“The lady wasn’t on the sandbank,” explained Lingard, curtly.

“What sandbank?” muttered Jorgenson, perfunctorily. . . . “Is the yacht looted, Tom?”

“Nothing of the kind,” said Lingard.

“Ah, many dead?” inquired Jorgenson.

“I tell you there was nothing of the kind,” said Lingard, impatiently.

“What? No fight!” inquired Jorgenson again without the slightest sign of animation.

“No.”

“And you a fighting man.”

“Listen to me, Jorgenson. Things turned out so that before the time came for a fight it was already too late.” He turned to Mrs. Travers still looking about with anxious eyes and a faint smile on her lips. “While I was talking to you that evening from the boat it was already too late. No. There was never any time for it. I have told you all about myself, Mrs. Travers, and you know that I speak the truth when I say too late. If you had only been alone in that yacht going about the seas!”

“Yes,” she struck in, “but I was not alone.”

Lingard dropped his chin on his breast. Already a foretaste of noonday heat staled the sparkling freshness of the morning. The smile had vanished from Edith Travers’ lips and her eyes rested on Lingard’s bowed head with an expression no longer curious but which might have appeared enigmatic to Jorgenson if he had looked at her. But Jorgenson looked at nothing. He asked from the remoteness of his dead past, “What have you left outside, Tom? What is there now?”

“There’s the yacht on the shoals, my brig at anchor, and about a hundred of the worst kind of Illanun vagabonds under three chiefs and with two war-praus moored to the edge of the bank. Maybe Daman is with them, too, out there.”

“No,” said Jorgenson, positively.

“He has come in,” cried Lingard. “He brought his prisoners in himself then.”

“Landed by torchlight,” uttered precisely the shade of Captain Jorgenson, late of the Barque Wild Rose. He swung his arm pointing across the lagoon and Mrs. Travers turned about in that direction.

All the scene was but a great light and a great solitude. Her gaze travelled over the lustrous, dark sheet of empty water to a shore bordered by a white

beach empty, too, and showing no sign of human life. The human habitations were lost in the shade of the fruit trees, masked by the cultivated patches of Indian corn and the banana plantations. Near the shore the rigid lines of two stockaded forts could be distinguished flanking the beach, and between them with a great open space before it, the brown roof slope of an enormous long building that seemed suspended in the air had a great square flag fluttering above it. Something like a small white flame in the sky was the carved white coral finial on the gable of the mosque which had caught full the rays of the sun. A multitude of gay streamers, white and red, flew over the half-concealed roofs, over the brilliant fields and amongst the sombre palm groves. But it might have been a deserted settlement decorated and abandoned by its departed population. Lingard pointed to the stockade on the right.

"That's where your husband is," he said to Mrs. Travers.

"Who is the other?" uttered Jorgenson's voice at their backs. He also was turned that way with his strange sightless gaze fixed beyond them into the void.

"A Spanish gentleman I believe you said, Mrs Travers," observed Lingard.

"It is extremely difficult to believe that there is anybody there," murmured Mrs. Travers.

"Did you see them both, Jorgenson?" asked Lingard.

"Made out nobody. Too far. Too dark."

As a matter of fact Jorgenson had seen nothing, about an hour before daybreak, but the distant glare of torches while the loud shouts of an excited multitude had reached him across the water only like a faint and tempestuous murmur. Presently the lights went away processionally through the groves of trees into the armed stockades. The distant glare vanished in the fading darkness and the murmurs of the invisible crowd ceased suddenly as if carried off by the retreating shadow of the night. Daylight followed swiftly, disclosing to the sleepless Jorgenson the solitude of the shore and the ghostly outlines of the familiar forms of grouped trees and scattered human habitations. He had watched the varied colours come out in the dawn, the wide cultivated Settlement of many shades of green, framed far away by the fine black lines of the forest-edge that was its limit and its protection.

Mrs. Travers stood against the rail as motionless as a statue. Her face had lost all its mobility and her cheeks were dead white as if all the blood in her body had flowed back into her heart and had remained there. Her very lips had lost their colour. Lingard caught hold of her arm roughly.

“Don’t, Mrs. Travers. Why are you terrifying yourself like this? If you don’t believe what I say listen to me asking Jorgenson. . . .”

“Yes, ask me,” mumbled Jorgenson in his white moustache.

“Speak straight, Jorgenson. What do you think? Are the gentlemen alive?”

“Certainly,” said Jorgenson in a sort of disappointed tone as though he had expected a much more difficult question.

“Is their life in immediate danger?”

“Of course not,” said Jorgenson.

Lingard turned away from the oracle. “You have heard him, Mrs. Travers. You may believe every word he says. There isn’t a thought or a purpose in that Settlement,” he continued, pointing at the dumb solitude of the lagoon, “that this man doesn’t know as if they were his own.”

“I know. Ask me,” muttered Jorgenson, mechanically.

Mrs. Travers said nothing but made a slight movement and her whole rigid figure swayed dangerously. Lingard put his arm firmly round her waist and she did not seem aware of it till after she had turned her head and found Lingard’s face very near her own. But his eyes full of concern looked so close into hers that she was obliged to shut them like a woman about to faint.

The effect this produced upon Lingard was such that she felt the tightening of his arm and as she opened her eyes again some of the colour returned to her face. She met the deepened expression of his solicitude with a look so steady, with a gaze that in spite of herself was so profoundly vivid that its clearness seemed to Lingard to throw all his past life into shade. — “I don’t feel faint. It isn’t that at all,” she declared in a perfectly calm voice. It seemed to Lingard as cold as ice.

“Very well,” he agreed with a resigned smile. “But you just catch hold of that rail, please, before I let you go.” She, too, forced a smile on her lips.

“What incredulity,” she remarked, and for a time made not the slightest movement. At last, as if making a concession, she rested the tips of her fingers on the rail. Lingard gradually removed his arm. “And pray don’t look upon me as a conventional ‘weak woman’ person, the delicate lady of



your own conception," she said, facing Lingard, with her arm extended to the rail. "Make that effort please against your own conception of what a woman like me should be. I am perhaps as strong as you are, Captain Lingard. I mean it literally. In my body." — "Don't you think I have seen that long ago?" she heard his deep voice protesting. — "And as to my courage," Mrs. Travers continued, her expression charmingly undecided between frowns and smiles; "didn't I tell you only a few hours ago, only last evening, that I was not capable of thinking myself into a fright; you remember, when you were begging me to try something of the kind. Don't imagine that I would have been ashamed to try. But I couldn't have done it. No. Not even for the sake of somebody else's kingdom. Do you understand me?"

"God knows," said the attentive Lingard after a time, with an unexpected sigh. "You people seem to be made of another stuff."

"What has put that absurd notion into your head?"

"I didn't mean better or worse. And I wouldn't say it isn't good stuff either. What I meant to say is that it's different. One feels it. And here we are."

"Yes, here we are," repeated Mrs. Travers. "And as to this moment of emotion, what provoked it is not a concern for anybody or anything outside myself. I felt no terror. I cannot even fix my fears upon any distinct image. You think I am shamelessly heartless in telling you this."

Lingard made no sign. It didn't occur to him to make a sign. He simply hung on Mrs. Travers' words as it were only for the sake of the sound. — "I am simply frank with you," she continued. "What do I know of savagery, violence, murder? I have never seen a dead body in my life. The light, the silence, the mysterious emptiness of this place have suddenly affected my imagination, I suppose. What is the meaning of this wonderful peace in which we stand — you and I alone?"

Lingard shook his head. He saw the narrow gleam of the woman's teeth between the parted lips of her smile, as if all the ardour of her conviction had been dissolved at the end of her speech into wistful recognition of their partnership before things outside their knowledge. And he was warmed by something a little helpless in that smile. Within three feet of them the shade of Jorgenson, very gaunt and neat, stared into space.

"Yes. You are strong," said Lingard. "But a whole long night sitting in a small boat! I wonder you are not too stiff to stand."

"I am not stiff in the least," she interrupted, still smiling. "I am really a very strong woman," she added, earnestly. "Whatever happens you may reckon on that fact."

Lingard gave her an admiring glance. But the shade of Jorgenson, perhaps catching in its remoteness the sound of the word woman, was suddenly moved to begin scolding with all the liberty of a ghost, in a flow of passionless indignation.

"Woman! That's what I say. That's just about the last touch — that you, Tom Lingard, red-eyed Tom, King Tom, and all those fine names, that you should leave your weapons twenty miles behind you, your men, your guns, your brig that is your strength, and come along here with your mouth full of fight, bare-handed and with a woman in tow. — Well — well!"

"Don't forget, Jorgenson, that the lady hears you," remonstrated Lingard in a vexed tone. . . . "He doesn't mean to be rude," he remarked to Mrs. Travers quite loud, as if indeed Jorgenson were but an immaterial and feelingless illusion. "He has forgotten."

"The woman is not in the least offended. I ask for nothing better than to be taken on that footing."

"Forgot nothing!" mumbled Jorgenson with a sort of ghostly assertiveness and as it were for his own satisfaction. "What's the world coming to?"

"It was I who insisted on coming with Captain Lingard," said Mrs. Travers, treating Jorgenson to a fascinating sweetness of tone.

"That's what I say! What is the world coming to? Hasn't King Tom a mind of his own? What has come over him? He's mad! Leaving his brig with a hundred and twenty born and bred pirates of the worst kind in two praus on the other side of a sandbank. Did you insist on that, too? Has he put himself in the hands of a strange woman?"

Jorgenson seemed to be asking those questions of himself. Mrs. Travers observed the empty stare, the self-communing voice, his unearthly lack of animation. Somehow it made it very easy to speak the whole truth to him.

"No," she said, "it is I who am altogether in his hands."

Nobody would have guessed that Jorgenson had heard a single word of that emphatic declaration if he had not addressed himself to Lingard with the question neither more nor less abstracted than all his other speeches.

"Why then did you bring her along?"

"You don't understand. It was only right and proper. One of the gentlemen is the lady's husband."

"Oh, yes," muttered Jorgenson. "Who's the other?"

"You have been told. A friend."

"Poor Mr. d'Alcacer," said Mrs. Travers. "What bad luck for him to have accepted our invitation. But he is really a mere acquaintance."

"I hardly noticed him," observed Lingard, gloomily. "He was talking to you over the back of your chair when I came aboard the yacht as if he had been a very good friend."

"We always understood each other very well," said Mrs. Travers, picking up from the rail the long glass that was lying there. "I always liked him, the frankness of his mind, and his great loyalty."

"What did he do?" asked Lingard.

"He loved," said Mrs. Travers, lightly. "But that's an old story." She raised the glass to her eyes, one arm extended fully to sustain the long tube, and Lingard forgot d'Alcacer in admiring the firmness of her pose and the absolute steadiness of the heavy glass. She was as firm as a rock after all those emotions and all that fatigue.

Mrs. Travers directed the glass instinctively toward the entrance of the lagoon. The smooth water there shone like a piece of silver in the dark frame of the forest. A black speck swept across the field of her vision. It was some time before she could find it again and then she saw, apparently so near as to be within reach of the voice, a small canoe with two people in it. She saw the wet paddles rising and dipping with a flash in the sunlight. She made out plainly the face of Immada, who seemed to be looking straight into the big end of the telescope. The chief and his sister, after resting under the bank for a couple of hours in the middle of the night, had entered the lagoon and were making straight for the hulk. They were already near enough to be perfectly distinguishable to the naked eye if there had been anybody on board to glance that way. But nobody was even thinking of them. They might not have existed except perhaps in the memory of old Jorgenson. But that was mostly busy with all the mysterious secrets of his late tomb.

Mrs. Travers lowered the glass suddenly. Lingard came out from a sort of trance and said:

"Mr. d'Alcacer. Loved! Why shouldn't he?"

Mrs. Travers looked frankly into Lingard's gloomy eyes. "It isn't that alone, of course," she said. "First of all he knew how to love and then. . . . You don't know how artificial and barren certain kinds of life can be. But Mr. d'Alcacer's life was not that. His devotion was worth having."

"You seem to know a lot about him," said Lingard, enviously. "Why do you smile?" She continued to smile at him for a little while. The long brass tube over her shoulder shone like gold against the pale fairness of her bare head. — "At a thought," she answered, preserving the low tone of the conversation into which they had fallen as if their words could have disturbed the self-absorption of Captain H. C. Jorgenson. "At the thought that for all my long acquaintance with Mr. d'Alcacer I don't know half as much about him as I know about you."

"Ah, that's impossible," contradicted Lingard. "Spaniard or no Spaniard, he is one of your kind."

"Tarred with the same brush," murmured Mrs. Travers, with only a half-amused irony. But Lingard continued:

"He was trying to make it up between me and your husband, wasn't he? I was too angry to pay much attention, but I liked him well enough. What pleased me most was the way in which he gave it up. That was done like a gentleman. Do you understand what I mean, Mrs. Travers?"

"I quite understand."

"Yes, you would," he commented, simply. "But just then I was too angry to talk to anybody. And so I cleared out on board my own ship and stayed there, not knowing what to do and wishing you all at the bottom of the sea. Don't mistake me, Mrs. Travers; it's you, the people aft, that I wished at the bottom of the sea. I had nothing against the poor devils on board, They would have trusted me quick enough. So I fumed there till — till. . . ."

"Till nine o'clock or a little after," suggested Mrs. Travers, impenetrably.

"No. Till I remembered you," said Lingard with the utmost innocence.

"Do you mean to say that you forgot my existence so completely till then? You had spoken to me on board the yacht, you know."

"Did I? I thought I did. What did I say?"

"You told me not to touch a dusky princess," answered Mrs. Travers with a short laugh. Then with a visible change of mood as if she had suddenly out of a light heart been recalled to the sense of the true situation: "But indeed I meant no harm to this figure of your dream. And, look over there. She is pursuing you." Lingard glanced toward the north shore and

suppressed an exclamation of remorse. For the second time he discovered that he had forgotten the existence of Hassim and Immada. The canoe was now near enough for its occupants to distinguish plainly the heads of three people above the low bulwark of the Emma. Immada let her paddle trail suddenly in the water, with the exclamation, "I see the white woman there." Her brother looked over his shoulder and the canoe floated, arrested as if by the sudden power of a spell. — "They are no dream to me," muttered Lingard, sturdily. Mrs. Travers turned abruptly away to look at the further shore. It was still and empty to the naked eye and seemed to quiver in the sunshine like an immense painted curtain lowered upon the unknown.

"Here's Rajah Hassim coming, Jorgenson. I had an idea he would perhaps stay outside." Mrs. Travers heard Lingard's voice at her back and the answering grunt of Jorgenson. She raised deliberately the long glass to her eye, pointing it at the shore.

She distinguished plainly now the colours in the flutter of the streamers above the brown roofs of the large Settlement, the stir of palm groves, the black shadows inland and the dazzling white beach of coral sand all ablaze in its formidable mystery. She swept the whole range of the view and was going to lower the glass when from behind the massive angle of the stockade there stepped out into the brilliant immobility of the landscape a man in a long white gown and with an enormous black turban surmounting a dark face. Slow and grave he paced the beach ominously in the sunshine, an enigmatical figure in an Oriental tale with something weird and menacing in its sudden emergence and lonely progress.

With an involuntary gasp Mrs. Travers lowered the glass. All at once behind her back she heard a low musical voice beginning to pour out incomprehensible words in a tone of passionate pleading. Hassim and Immada had come on board and had approached Lingard. Yes! It was intolerable to feel that this flow of soft speech which had no meaning for her could make its way straight into that man's heart.

## PART V. THE POINT OF HONOUR AND THE POINT OF PASSION

I

“May I come in?”

“Yes,” said a voice within. “The door is open.” It had a wooden latch. Mr. Travers lifted it while the voice of his wife continued as he entered. “Did you imagine I had locked myself in? Did you ever know me lock myself in?”

Mr. Travers closed the door behind him. “No, it has never come to that,” he said in a tone that was not conciliatory. In that place which was a room in a wooden hut and had a square opening without glass but with a half-closed shutter he could not distinguish his wife very well at once. She was sitting in an armchair and what he could see best was her fair hair all loose over the back of the chair. There was a moment of silence. The measured footsteps of two men pacing athwart the quarter-deck of the dead ship Emma commanded by the derelict shade of Jorgenson could be heard outside.

Jorgenson, on taking up his dead command, had a house of thin boards built on the after deck for his own accommodation and that of Lingard during his flying visits to the Shore of Refuge. A narrow passage divided it in two and Lingard’s side was furnished with a camp bedstead, a rough desk, and a rattan armchair. On one of his visits Lingard had brought with him a black seaman’s chest and left it there. Apart from these objects and a small looking-glass worth about half a crown and nailed to the wall there was nothing else in there whatever. What was on Jorgenson’s side of the deckhouse no one had seen, but from external evidence one could infer the existence of a set of razors.

The erection of that primitive deckhouse was a matter of propriety rather than of necessity. It was proper that the white men should have a place to themselves on board, but Lingard was perfectly accurate when he told Mrs. Travers that he had never slept there once. His practice was to sleep on deck. As to Jorgenson, if he did sleep at all he slept very little. It might have been said that he haunted rather than commanded the Emma. His white form flitted here and there in the night or stood for hours, silent, contemplating the sombre glimmer of the lagoon. Mr. Travers’ eyes

accustomed gradually to the dusk of the place could now distinguish more of his wife's person than the great mass of honey-coloured hair. He saw her face, the dark eyebrows and her eyes that seemed profoundly black in the half light. He said:

"You couldn't have done so here. There is neither lock nor bolt."

"Isn't there? I didn't notice. I would know how to protect myself without locks and bolts."

"I am glad to hear it," said Mr. Travers in a sullen tone and fell silent again surveying the woman in the chair. "Indulging your taste for fancy dress," he went on with faint irony.

Mrs. Travers clasped her hands behind her head. The wide sleeves slipping back bared her arms to her shoulders. She was wearing a Malay thin cotton jacket, cut low in the neck without a collar and fastened with wrought silver clasps from the throat downward. She had replaced her yachting skirt by a blue check sarong embroidered with threads of gold. Mr. Travers' eyes travelling slowly down attached themselves to the gleaming instep of an agitated foot from which hung a light leather sandal.

"I had no clothes with me but what I stood in," said Mrs. Travers. "I found my yachting costume too heavy. It was intolerable. I was soaked in dew when I arrived. So when these things were produced for my inspection. . . ."

"By enchantment," muttered Mr. Travers in a tone too heavy for sarcasm.

"No. Out of that chest. There are very fine stuffs there."

"No doubt," said Mr. Travers. "The man wouldn't be above plundering the natives. . . ." He sat down heavily on the chest. "A most appropriate costume for this farce," he continued. "But do you mean to wear it in open daylight about the decks?"

"Indeed I do," said Mrs. Travers. "D'Alcacer has seen me already and he didn't seem shocked."

"You should," said Mr. Travers, "try to get yourself presented with some bangles for your ankles so that you may jingle as you walk."

"Bangles are not necessities," said Mrs. Travers in a weary tone and with the fixed upward look of a person unwilling to relinquish her dream. Mr. Travers dropped the subject to ask:

"And how long is this farce going to last?"

Mrs. Travers unclasped her hands, lowered her glance, and changed her whole pose in a moment.

“What do you mean by farce? What farce?”

“The one which is being played at my expense.”

“You believe that?”

“Not only believe. I feel deeply that it is so. At my expense. It’s a most sinister thing,” Mr. Travers pursued, still with downcast eyes and in an unforgiving tone. “I must tell you that when I saw you in that courtyard in a crowd of natives and leaning on that man’s arm, it gave me quite a shock.”

“Did I, too, look sinister?” said Mrs. Travers, turning her head slightly toward her husband. “And yet I assure you that I was glad, profoundly glad, to see you safe from danger for a time at least. To gain time is everything. . . .”

“I ask myself,” Mr. Travers meditated aloud, “was I ever in danger? Am I safe now? I don’t know. I can’t tell. No! All this seems an abominable farce.”

There was that in his tone which made his wife continue to look at him with awakened interest. It was obvious that he suffered from a distress which was not the effect of fear; and Mrs. Travers’ face expressed real concern till he added in a freezing manner: “The question, however, is as to your discretion.”

She leaned back again in the chair and let her hands rest quietly in her lap. “Would you have preferred me to remain outside, in the yacht, in the near neighbourhood of these wild men who captured you? Or do you think that they, too, were got up to carry on a farce?”

“Most decidedly.” Mr. Travers raised his head, though of course not his voice. “You ought to have remained in the yacht amongst white men, your servants, the sailing-master, the crew whose duty it was to. . . . Who would have been ready to die for you.”

“I wonder why they should have — and why I should have asked them for that sacrifice. However, I have no doubt they would have died. Or would you have preferred me to take up my quarters on board that man’s brig? We were all fairly safe there. The real reason why I insisted on coming in here was to be nearer to you — to see for myself what could be or was being done. . . . But really if you want me to explain my motives then I may just as well say nothing. I couldn’t remain outside for days without news, in a state of horrible doubt. We couldn’t even tell whether you and d’Alcacer were still alive till we arrived here. You might have been actually murdered on the sandbank, after Rajah Hassim and that girl had



gone away; or killed while going up the river. And I wanted to know at once, as soon as possible. It was a matter of impulse. I went off in what I stood in without delaying a moment."

"Yes," said Mr. Travers. "And without even thinking of having a few things put up for me in a bag. No doubt you were in a state of excitement. Unless you took such a tragic view that it seemed to you hardly worth while to bother about my clothes."

"It was absolutely the impulse of the moment. I could have done nothing else. Won't you give me credit for it?"

Mr. Travers raised his eyes again to his wife's face. He saw it calm, her attitude reposeful. Till then his tone had been resentful, dull, without sarcasm. But now he became slightly pompous.

"No. As a matter of fact, as a matter of experience, I can't credit you with the possession of feelings appropriate to your origin, social position, and the ideas of the class to which you belong. It was the heaviest disappointment of my life. I had made up my mind not to mention it as long as I lived. This, however, seems an occasion which you have provoked yourself. It isn't at all a solemn occasion. I don't look upon it as solemn at all. It's very disagreeable and humiliating. But it has presented itself. You have never taken a serious interest in the activities of my life which of course are its distinction and its value. And why you should be carried away suddenly by a feeling toward the mere man I don't understand."

"Therefore you don't approve," Mrs. Travers commented in an even tone. "But I assure you, you may safely. My feeling was of the most conventional nature, exactly as if the whole world were looking on. After all, we are husband and wife. It's eminently fitting that I should be concerned about your fate. Even the man you distrust and dislike so much (the warmest feeling, let me tell you, that I ever saw you display) even that man found my conduct perfectly proper. His own word. Proper. So eminently proper that it altogether silenced his objections."

Mr. Travers shifted uneasily on his seat.

"It's my belief, Edith, that if you had been a man you would have led a most irregular life. You would have been a frank adventurer. I mean morally. It has been a great grief to me. You have a scorn in you for the serious side of life, for the ideas and the ambitions of the social sphere to which you belong."

He stopped because his wife had clasped again her hands behind her head and was no longer looking at him.

"It's perfectly obvious," he began again. "We have been living amongst most distinguished men and women and your attitude to them has been always so — so negative! You would never recognize the importance of achievements, of acquired positions. I don't remember you ever admiring frankly any political or social success. I ask myself what after all you could possibly have expected from life."

"I could never have expected to hear such a speech from you. As to what I did expect! . . . I must have been very stupid."

"No, you are anything but that," declared Mr. Travers, conscientiously. "It isn't stupidity." He hesitated for a moment. "It's a kind of wilfulness, I think. I preferred not to think about this grievous difference in our points of view, which, you will admit, I could not have possibly foreseen before we. . . ."

A sort of solemn embarrassment had come over Mr. Travers. Mrs. Travers, leaning her chin on the palm of her hand, stared at the bare matchboard side of the hut.

"Do you charge me with profound girlish duplicity?" she asked, very softly.

The inside of the deckhouse was full of stagnant heat perfumed by a slight scent which seemed to emanate from the loose mass of Mrs. Travers' hair. Mr. Travers evaded the direct question which struck him as lacking fineness even to the point of impropriety.

"I must suppose that I was not in the calm possession of my insight and judgment in those days," he said. "I — I was not in a critical state of mind at the time," he admitted further; but even after going so far he did not look up at his wife and therefore missed something like the ghost of a smile on Mrs. Travers' lips. That smile was tinged with scepticism which was too deep-seated for anything but the faintest expression. Therefore she said nothing, and Mr. Travers went on as if thinking aloud:

"Your conduct was, of course, above reproach; but you made for yourself a detestable reputation of mental superiority, expressed ironically. You inspired mistrust in the best people. You were never popular."

"I was bored," murmured Mrs. Travers in a reminiscent tone and with her chin resting in the hollow of her hand.

Mr. Travers got up from the seaman's chest as unexpectedly as if he had been stung by a wasp, but, of course, with a much slower and more solemn motion.

"The matter with you, Edith, is that at heart you are perfectly primitive." Mrs. Travers stood up, too, with a supple, leisurely movement, and raising her hands to her hair turned half away with a pensive remark:

"Imperfectly civilized."

"Imperfectly disciplined," corrected Mr. Travers after a moment of dreary meditation.

She let her arms fall and turned her head.

"No, don't say that," she protested with strange earnestness. "I am the most severely disciplined person in the world. I am tempted to say that my discipline has stopped at nothing short of killing myself. I suppose you can hardly understand what I mean."

Mr. Travers made a slight grimace at the floor.

"I shall not try," he said. "It sounds like something that a barbarian, hating the delicate complexities and the restraints of a nobler life, might have said. From you it strikes me as wilful bad taste. . . . I have often wondered at your tastes. You have always liked extreme opinions, exotic costumes, lawless characters, romantic personalities — like d'Alcacer . . ."

"Poor Mr. d'Alcacer," murmured Mrs. Travers.

"A man without any ideas of duty or usefulness," said Mr. Travers, acidly. "What are you pitying him for?"

"Why! For finding himself in this position out of mere good-nature. He had nothing to expect from joining our voyage, no advantage for his political ambitions or anything of the kind. I suppose you asked him on board to break our tete-a-tete which must have grown wearisome to you."

"I am never bored," declared Mr. Travers. "D'Alcacer seemed glad to come. And, being a Spaniard, the horrible waste of time cannot matter to him in the least."

"Waste of time!" repeated Mrs. Travers, indignantly.

"He may yet have to pay for his good nature with his life."

Mr. Travers could not conceal a movement of anger.

"Ah! I forgot those assumptions," he said between his clenched teeth. "He is a mere Spaniard. He takes this farcical conspiracy with perfect nonchalance. Decayed races have their own philosophy."

“He takes it with a dignity of his own.”

“I don’t know what you call his dignity. I should call it lack of self-respect.”

“Why? Because he is quiet and courteous, and reserves his judgment. And allow me to tell you, Martin, that you are not taking our troubles very well.”

“You can’t expect from me all those foreign affectations. I am not in the habit of compromising with my feelings.”

Mrs. Travers turned completely round and faced her husband. “You sulk,” she said. . . . Mr. Travers jerked his head back a little as if to let the word go past. — “I am outraged,” he declared. Mrs. Travers recognized there something like real suffering. — “I assure you,” she said, seriously (for she was accessible to pity), “I assure you that this strange Lingard has no idea of your importance. He doesn’t know anything of your social and political position and still less of your great ambitions.” Mr. Travers listened with some attention. — “Couldn’t you have enlightened him?” he asked. — “It would have been no use; his mind is fixed upon his own position and upon his own sense of power. He is a man of the lower classes. . . .” — “He is a brute,” said Mr. Travers, obstinately, and for a moment those two looked straight into each other’s eyes. — “Oh,” said Mrs. Travers, slowly, “you are determined not to compromise with your feelings!” An undertone of scorn crept into her voice. “But shall I tell you what I think? I think,” and she advanced her head slightly toward the pale, unshaven face that confronted her dark eyes, “I think that for all your blind scorn you judge the man well enough to feel that you can indulge your indignation with perfect safety. Do you hear? With perfect safety!” Directly she had spoken she regretted these words. Really it was unreasonable to take Mr. Travers’ tricks of character more passionately on this spot of the Eastern Archipelago full of obscure plots and warring motives than in the more artificial atmosphere of the town. After all what she wanted was simply to save his life, not to make him understand anything. Mr. Travers opened his mouth and without uttering a word shut it again. His wife turned toward the looking-glass nailed to the wall. She heard his voice behind her.

“Edith, where’s the truth in all this?”

She detected the anguish of a slow mind with an instinctive dread of obscure places wherein new discoveries can be made. She looked over her shoulder to say:

“It’s on the surface, I assure you. Altogether on the surface.”

She turned again to the looking-glass where her own face met her with dark eyes and a fair mist of hair above the smooth forehead; but her words had produced no soothing effect.

“But what does it mean?” cried Mr. Travers. “Why doesn’t the fellow apologize? Why are we kept here? Are we being kept here? Why don’t we get away? Why doesn’t he take me back on board my yacht? What does he want from me? How did he procure our release from these people on shore who he says intended to cut our throats? Why did they give us up to him instead?”

Mrs. Travers began to twist her hair on her head.

“Matters of high policy and of local politics. Conflict of personal interests, mistrust between the parties, intrigues of individuals — you ought to know how that sort of thing works. His diplomacy made use of all that. The first thing to do was not to liberate you but to get you into his keeping. He is a very great man here and let me tell you that your safety depends on his dexterity in the use of his prestige rather than on his power which he cannot use. If you would let him talk to you I am sure he would tell you as much as it is possible for him to disclose.”

“I don’t want to be told about any of his rascalities. But haven’t you been taken into his confidence?”

“Completely,” admitted Mrs. Travers, peering into the small looking-glass.

“What is the influence you brought to bear upon this man? It looks to me as if our fate were in your hands.”

“Your fate is not in my hands. It is not even in his hands. There is a moral situation here which must be solved.”

“Ethics of blackmail,” commented Mr. Travers with unexpected sarcasm. It flashed through his wife’s mind that perhaps she didn’t know him so well as she had supposed. It was as if the polished and solemn crust of hard proprieties had cracked slightly, here and there, under the strain, disclosing the mere wrongheadedness of a common mortal. But it was only manner that had cracked a little; the marvellous stupidity of his conceit remained the same. She thought that this discussion was perfectly useless, and as she finished putting up her hair she said: “I think we had better go on deck now.”

“You propose to go out on deck like this?” muttered Mr. Travers with downcast eyes.

“Like this? Certainly. It’s no longer a novelty. Who is going to be shocked?”

Mr. Travers made no reply. What she had said of his attitude was very true. He sulked at the enormous offensiveness of men, things, and events; of words and even of glances which he seemed to feel physically resting on his skin like a pain, like a degrading contact. He managed not to wince. But he sulked. His wife continued, “And let me tell you that those clothes are fit for a princess — I mean they are of the quality, material and style custom prescribes for the highest in the land, a far-distant land where I am informed women rule as much as the men. In fact they were meant to be presented to an actual princess in due course. They were selected with the greatest care for that child Immada. Captain Lingard. . . .”

Mr. Travers made an inarticulate noise partaking of a groan and a grunt.

“Well, I must call him by some name and this I thought would be the least offensive for you to hear. After all, the man exists. But he is known also on a certain portion of the earth’s surface as King Tom. D’Alcacer is greatly taken by that name. It seems to him wonderfully well adapted to the man, in its familiarity and deference. And if you prefer. . . .”

“I would prefer to hear nothing,” said Mr. Travers, distinctly. “Not a single word. Not even from you, till I am a free agent again. But words don’t touch me. Nothing can touch me; neither your sinister warnings nor the moods of levity which you think proper to display before a man whose life, according to you, hangs on a thread.”

“I never forget it for a moment,” said Mrs. Travers. “And I not only know that it does but I also know the strength of the thread. It is a wonderful thread. You may say if you like it has been spun by the same fate which made you what you are.”

Mr. Travers felt awfully offended. He had never heard anybody, let alone his own self, addressed in such terms. The tone seemed to question his very quality. He reflected with shocked amazement that he had lived with that woman for eight years! And he said to her gloomily:

“You talk like a pagan.”

It was a very strong condemnation which apparently Mrs. Travers had failed to hear for she pursued with animation:

“But really, you can’t expect me to meditate on it all the time or shut myself up here and mourn the circumstances from morning to night. It would be morbid. Let us go on deck.”

“And you look simply heathenish in this costume,” Mr. Travers went on as though he had not been interrupted, and with an accent of deliberate disgust.

Her heart was heavy but everything he said seemed to force the tone of levity on to her lips. “As long as I don’t look like a guy,” she remarked, negligently, and then caught the direction of his lurid stare which as a matter of fact was fastened on her bare feet. She checked herself, “Oh, yes, if you prefer it I will put on my stockings. But you know I must be very careful of them. It’s the only pair I have here. I have washed them this morning in that bathroom which is built over the stern. They are now drying over the rail just outside. Perhaps you will be good enough to pass them to me when you go on deck.”

Mr. Travers spun round and went on deck without a word. As soon as she was alone Mrs. Travers pressed her hands to her temples, a gesture of distress which relieved her by its sincerity. The measured footsteps of two men came to her plainly from the deck, rhythmic and double with a suggestion of tranquil and friendly intercourse. She distinguished particularly the footfalls of the man whose life’s orbit was most remote from her own. And yet the orbits had cut! A few days ago she could not have even conceived of his existence, and now he was the man whose footsteps, it seemed to her, her ears could single unerringly in the tramp of a crowd. It was, indeed, a fabulous thing. In the half light of her over-heated shelter she let an irresolute, frightened smile pass off her lips before she, too, went on deck.

## II

An ingeniously constructed framework of light posts and thin laths occupied the greater part of the deck amidships of the Emma. The four walls of that airy structure were made of muslin. It was comparatively lofty. A door-like arrangement of light battens filled with calico was further protected by a system of curtains calculated to baffle the pursuit of mosquitoes that haunted the shores of the lagoon in great singing clouds from sunset till sunrise. A lot of fine mats covered the deck space within the transparent shelter devised by Lingard and Jorgenson to make Mrs. Travers’ existence possible during the time when the fate of the two men, and indeed

probably of everybody else on board the Emma, had to hang in the balance. Very soon Lingard's unbidden and fatal guests had learned the trick of stepping in and out of the place quickly. Mr. d'Alcacer performed the feat without apparent haste, almost nonchalantly, yet as well as anybody. It was generally conceded that he had never let a mosquito in together with himself. Mr. Travers dodged in and out without grace and was obviously much irritated at the necessity. Mrs. Travers did it in a manner all her own, with marked cleverness and an unconscious air. There was an improvised table in there and some wicker armchairs which Jorgenson had produced from somewhere in the depths of the ship. It was hard to say what the inside of the Emma did not contain. It was crammed with all sorts of goods like a general store. That old hulk was the arsenal and the war-chest of Lingard's political action; she was stocked with muskets and gunpowder, with bales of longcloth, of cotton prints, of silks; with bags of rice and currency brass guns. She contained everything necessary for dealing death and distributing bribes, to act on the cupidity and upon the fears of men, to march and to organize, to feed the friends and to combat the enemies of the cause. She held wealth and power in her flanks, that grounded ship that would swim no more, without masts and with the best part of her deck cumbered by the two structures of thin boards and of transparent muslin.

Within the latter lived the Europeans, visible in the daytime to the few Malays on board as if through a white haze. In the evening the lighting of the hurricane lamps inside turned them into dark phantoms surrounded by a shining mist, against which the insect world rushing in its millions out of the forest on the bank was baffled mysteriously in its assault. Rigidly enclosed by transparent walls, like captives of an enchanted cobweb, they moved about, sat, gesticulated, conversed publicly during the day; and at night when all the lanterns but one were extinguished, their slumbering shapes covered all over by white cotton sheets on the camp bedsteads, which were brought in every evening, conveyed the gruesome suggestion of dead bodies reposing on stretchers. The food, such as it was, was served within that glorified mosquito net which everybody called the "Cage" without any humorous intention. At meal times the party from the yacht had the company of Lingard who attached to this ordeal a sense of duty performed at the altar of civility and conciliation. He could have no conception how much his presence added to the exasperation of Mr. Travers because Mr. Travers' manner was too intensely consistent to present any



shades. It was determined by an ineradicable conviction that he was a victim held to ransom on some incomprehensible terms by an extraordinary and outrageous bandit. This conviction, strung to the highest pitch, never left him for a moment, being the object of indignant meditation to his mind, and even clinging, as it were, to his very body. It lurked in his eyes, in his gestures, in his ungracious mutters, and in his sinister silences. The shock to his moral being had ended by affecting Mr. Travers' physical machine. He was aware of hepatic pains, suffered from accesses of somnolence and suppressed gusts of fury which frightened him secretly. His complexion had acquired a yellow tinge, while his heavy eyes had become bloodshot because of the smoke of the open wood fires during his three days' detention inside Belarab's stockade. His eyes had been always very sensitive to outward conditions. D'Alcacer's fine black eyes were more enduring and his appearance did not differ very much from his ordinary appearance on board the yacht. He had accepted with smiling thanks the offer of a thin blue flannel tunic from Jorgenson. Those two men were much of the same build, though of course d'Alcacer, quietly alive and spiritually watchful, did not resemble Jorgenson, who, without being exactly macabre, behaved more like an indifferent but restless corpse. Those two could not be said to have ever conversed together. Conversation with Jorgenson was an impossible thing. Even Lingard never attempted the feat. He propounded questions to Jorgenson much as a magician would interrogate an evoked shade, or gave him curt directions as one would make use of some marvellous automaton. And that was apparently the way in which Jorgenson preferred to be treated. Lingard's real company on board the Emma was d'Alcacer. D'Alcacer had met Lingard on the easy terms of a man accustomed all his life to good society in which the very affectations must be carried on without effort. Whether affectation, or nature, or inspired discretion, d'Alcacer never let the slightest curiosity pierce the smoothness of his level, grave courtesy lightened frequently by slight smiles which often had not much connection with the words he uttered, except that somehow they made them sound kindly and as it were tactful. In their character, however, those words were strictly neutral.

The only time when Lingard had detected something of a deeper comprehension in d'Alcacer was the day after the long negotiations inside Belarab's stockade for the temporary surrender of the prisoners. That move had been suggested to him, exactly as Mrs. Travers had told her husband,

by the rivalries of the parties and the state of public opinion in the Settlement deprived of the presence of the man who, theoretically at least, was the greatest power and the visible ruler of the Shore of Refuge. Belarab still lingered at his father's tomb. Whether that man of the embittered and pacific heart had withdrawn there to meditate upon the unruliness of mankind and the thankless nature of his task; or whether he had gone there simply to bathe in a particularly clear pool which was a feature of the place, give himself up to the enjoyment of a certain fruit which grew in profusion there and indulge for a time in a scrupulous performance of religious exercises, his absence from the Settlement was a fact of the utmost gravity. It is true that the prestige of a long-unquestioned rulership and the long-settled mental habits of the people had caused the captives to be taken straight to Belarab's stockade as a matter of course. Belarab, at a distance, could still outweigh the power on the spot of Tengga, whose secret purposes were no better known, who was jovial, talkative, outspoken and pugnacious; but who was not a professed servant of God famed for many charities and a scrupulous performance of pious practices, and who also had no father who had achieved a local saintship. But Belarab, with his glamour of asceticism and melancholy together with a reputation for severity (for a man so pious would be naturally ruthless), was not on the spot. The only favourable point in his absence was the fact that he had taken with him his latest wife, the same lady whom Jorgenson had mentioned in his letter to Lingard as anxious to bring about battle, murder, and the looting of the yacht, not because of inborn wickedness of heart but from a simple desire for silks, jewels and other objects of personal adornment, quite natural in a girl so young and elevated to such a high position. Belarab had selected her to be the companion of his retirement and Lingard was glad of it. He was not afraid of her influence over Belarab. He knew his man. No words, no blandishments, no sulks, scoldings, or whisperings of a favourite could affect either the resolves or the irresolutions of that Arab whose action ever seemed to hang in mystic suspense between the contradictory speculations and judgments disputing the possession of his will. It was not what Belarab would either suddenly do or leisurely determine upon that Lingard was afraid of. The danger was that in his taciturn hesitation, which had something hopelessly godlike in its remote calmness, the man would do nothing and leave his white friend face to face with unruly impulses against which Lingard had no means of action but force which he dared not use

since it would mean the destruction of his plans and the downfall of his hopes; and worse still would wear an aspect of treachery to Hassim and Immada, those fugitives whom he had snatched away from the jaws of death on a night of storm and had promised to lead back in triumph to their own country he had seen but once, sleeping unmoved under the wrath and fire of heaven.

On the afternoon of the very day he had arrived with her on board the Emma — to the infinite disgust of Jorgenson — Lingard held with Mrs. Travers (after she had had a couple of hours' rest) a long, fiery, and perplexed conversation. From the nature of the problem it could not be exhaustive; but toward the end of it they were both feeling thoroughly exhausted. Mrs. Travers had no longer to be instructed as to facts and possibilities. She was aware of them only too well and it was not her part to advise or argue. She was not called upon to decide or to plead. The situation was far beyond that. But she was worn out with watching the passionate conflict within the man who was both so desperately reckless and so rigidly restrained in the very ardour of his heart and the greatness of his soul. It was a spectacle that made her forget the actual questions at issue. This was no stage play; and yet she had caught herself looking at him with bated breath as at a great actor on a darkened stage in some simple and tremendous drama. He extorted from her a response to the forces that seemed to tear at his single-minded brain, at his guileless breast. He shook her with his own struggles, he possessed her with his emotions and imposed his personality as if its tragedy were the only thing worth considering in this matter. And yet what had she to do with all those obscure and barbarous things? Obviously nothing. Unluckily she had been taken into the confidence of that man's passionate perplexity, a confidence provoked apparently by nothing but the power of her personality. She was flattered, and even more, she was touched by it; she was aware of something that resembled gratitude and provoked a sort of emotional return as between equals who had secretly recognized each other's value. Yet at the same time she regretted not having been left in the dark; as much in the dark as Mr. Travers himself or d'Alcacer, though as to the latter it was impossible to say how much precise, unaccountable, intuitive knowledge was buried under his unruffled manner.

D'Alcacer was the sort of man whom it would be much easier to suspect of anything in the world than ignorance — or stupidity. Naturally he

couldn't know anything definite or even guess at the bare outline of the facts but somehow he must have scented the situation in those few days of contact with Lingard. He was an acute and sympathetic observer in all his secret aloofness from the life of men which was so very different from Jorgenson's secret divorce from the passions of this earth. Mrs. Travers would have liked to share with d'Alcacer the burden (for it was a burden) of Lingard's story. After all, she had not provoked those confidences, neither had that unexpected adventurer from the sea laid on her an obligation of secrecy. No, not even by implication. He had never said to her that she was the only person whom he wished to know that story.

No. What he had said was that she was the only person to whom he could tell the tale himself, as if no one else on earth had the power to draw it from him. That was the sense and nothing more. Yes, it would have been a relief to tell d'Alcacer. It would have been a relief to her feeling of being shut off from the world alone with Lingard as if within the four walls of a romantic palace and in an exotic atmosphere. Yes, that relief and also another: that of sharing the responsibility with somebody fit to understand. Yet she shrank from it, with unaccountable reserve, as if by talking of Lingard with d'Alcacer she was bound to give him an insight into herself. It was a vague uneasiness and yet so persistent that she felt it, too, when she had to approach and talk to Lingard under d'Alcacer's eyes. Not that Mr. d'Alcacer would ever dream of staring or even casting glances. But was he averting his eyes on purpose? That would be even more offensive.

"I am stupid," whispered Mrs. Travers to herself, with a complete and reassuring conviction. Yet she waited motionless till the footsteps of the two men stopped outside the deckhouse, then separated and died away, before she went out on deck. She came out on deck some time after her husband. As if in intended contrast to the conflicts of men a great aspect of serenity lay upon all visible things. Mr. Travers had gone inside the Cage in which he really looked like a captive and thoroughly out of place. D'Alcacer had gone in there, too, but he preserved — or was it an illusion? — an air of independence. It was not that he put it on. Like Mr. Travers he sat in a wicker armchair in very much the same attitude as the other gentleman and also silent; but there was somewhere a subtle difference which did away with the notion of captivity. Moreover, d'Alcacer had that peculiar gift of never looking out of place in any surroundings. Mrs. Travers, in order to save her European boots for active service, had been persuaded to use a pair

of leather sandals also extracted from that seaman's chest in the deckhouse. An additional fastening had been put on them but she could not avoid making a delicate clatter as she walked on the deck. No part of her costume made her feel so exotic. It also forced her to alter her usual gait and move with quick, short steps very much like Immada.

"I am robbing the girl of her clothes," she had thought to herself, "besides other things." She knew by this time that a girl of such high rank would never dream of wearing anything that had been worn by somebody else.

At the slight noise of Mrs. Travers' sandals d'Alcacer looked over the back of his chair. But he turned his head away at once and Mrs. Travers, leaning her elbow on the rail and resting her head on the palm of her hand, looked across the calm surface of the lagoon, idly.

She was turning her back on the Cage, the fore-part of the deck and the edge of the nearest forest. That great erection of enormous solid trunks, dark, rugged columns festooned with writhing creepers and steeped in gloom, was so close to the bank that by looking over the side of the ship she could see inverted in the glassy belt of water its massive and black reflection on the reflected sky that gave the impression of a clear blue abyss seen through a transparent film. And when she raised her eyes the same abysmal immobility seemed to reign over the whole sun-bathed enlargement of that lagoon which was one of the secret places of the earth. She felt strongly her isolation. She was so much the only being of her kind moving within this mystery that even to herself she looked like an apparition without rights and without defence and that must end by surrendering to those forces which seemed to her but the expression of the unconscious genius of the place. Hers was the most complete loneliness, charged with a catastrophic tension. It lay about her as though she had been set apart within a magic circle. It cut off — but it did not protect. The footsteps that she knew how to distinguish above all others on that deck were heard suddenly behind her. She did not turn her head.

Since that afternoon when the gentlemen, as Lingard called them, had been brought on board, Mrs. Travers and Lingard had not exchanged one significant word.

When Lingard had decided to proceed by way of negotiation she had asked him on what he based his hope of success; and he had answered her: "On my luck." What he really depended on was his prestige; but even if he

had been aware of such a word he would not have used it, since it would have sounded like a boast. And, besides, he did really believe in his luck. Nobody, either white or brown, had ever doubted his word and that, of course, gave him great assurance in entering upon the negotiation. But the ultimate issue of it would be always a matter of luck. He said so distinctly to Mrs. Travers at the moment of taking leave of her, with Jorgenson already waiting for him in the boat that was to take them across the lagoon to Belarab's stockade.

Startled by his decision (for it had come suddenly clinched by the words "I believe I can do it"), Mrs. Travers had dropped her hand into his strong open palm on which an expert in palmistry could have distinguished other lines than the line of luck. Lingard's hand closed on hers with a gentle pressure. She looked at him, speechless. He waited for a moment, then in an unconsciously tender voice he said: "Well, wish me luck then."

She remained silent. And he still holding her hand looked surprised at her hesitation. It seemed to her that she could not let him go, and she didn't know what to say till it occurred to her to make use of the power she knew she had over him. She would try it again. "I am coming with you," she declared with decision. "You don't suppose I could remain here in suspense for hours, perhaps."

He dropped her hand suddenly as if it had burnt him — "Oh, yes, of course," he mumbled with an air of confusion. One of the men over there was her husband! And nothing less could be expected from such a woman. He had really nothing to say but she thought he hesitated. — "Do you think my presence would spoil everything? I assure you I am a lucky person, too, in a way. . . . As lucky as you, at least," she had added in a murmur and with a smile which provoked his responsive mutter — "Oh, yes, we are a lucky pair of people." — "I count myself lucky in having found a man like you to fight my — our battles," she said, warmly. "Suppose you had not existed? . . . You must let me come with you!" For the second time before her expressed wish to stand by his side he bowed his head. After all, if things came to the worst, she would be as safe between him and Jorgenson as left alone on board the Emma with a few Malay spearmen for all defence. For a moment Lingard thought of picking up the pistols he had taken out of his belt preparatory to joining Jorgenson in the boat, thinking it would be better to go to a big talk completely unarmed. They were lying on the rail but he didn't pick them up. Four shots didn't matter. They could not

matter if the world of his creation were to go to pieces. He said nothing of that to Mrs. Travers but busied himself in giving her the means to alter her personal appearance. It was then that the sea-chest in the deckhouse was opened for the first time before the interested Mrs. Travers who had followed him inside. Lingard handed to her a Malay woman's light cotton coat with jewelled clasps to put over her European dress. It covered half of her yachting skirt. Mrs. Travers obeyed him without comment. He pulled out a long and wide scarf of white silk embroidered heavily on the edges and ends, and begged her to put it over her head and arrange the ends so as to muffle her face, leaving little more than her eyes exposed to view. — "We are going amongst a lot of Mohammedans," he explained. — "I see. You want me to look respectable," she jested. — "I assure you, Mrs. Travers," he protested, earnestly, "that most of the people there and certainly all the great men have never seen a white woman in their lives. But perhaps you would like better one of those other scarves? There are three in there." — "No, I like this one well enough. They are all very gorgeous. I see that the Princess is to be sent back to her land with all possible splendour. What a thoughtful man you are, Captain Lingard. That child will be touched by your generosity. . . . Will I do like this?"

"Yes," said Lingard, averting his eyes. Mrs. Travers followed him into the boat where the Malays stared in silence while Jorgenson, stiff and angular, gave no sign of life, not even so much as a movement of the eyes. Lingard settled her in the stern sheets and sat down by her side. The ardent sunshine devoured all colours. The boat swam forward on the glare heading for the strip of coral beach dazzling like a crescent of metal raised to a white heat. They landed. Gravely, Jorgenson opened above Mrs. Travers' head a big white cotton parasol and she advanced between the two men, dazed, as if in a dream and having no other contact with the earth but through the soles of her feet. Everything was still, empty, incandescent, and fantastic. Then when the gate of the stockade was thrown open she perceived an expectant and still multitude of bronze figures draped in coloured stuffs. They crowded the patches of shade under the three lofty forest trees left within the enclosure between the sun-smitten empty spaces of hard-baked ground. The broad blades of the spears decorated with crimson tufts of horsehair had a cool gleam under the outspread boughs. To the left a group of buildings on piles with long verandahs and immense roofs towered high in the air above the heads of the crowd, and seemed to

float in the glare, looking much less substantial than their heavy shadows. Lingard, pointing to one of the smallest, said in an undertone, "I lived there for a fortnight when I first came to see Belarab"; and Mrs. Travers felt more than ever as if walking in a dream when she perceived beyond the rails of its verandah and visible from head to foot two figures in an armour of chain mail with pointed steel helmets crested with white and black feathers and guarding the closed door. A high bench draped in turkey cloth stood in an open space of the great audience shed. Lingard led her up to it, Jorgenson on her other side closed the parasol calmly, and when she sat down between them the whole throng before her eyes sank to the ground with one accord disclosing in the distance of the courtyard a lonely figure leaning against the smooth trunk of a tree. A white cloth was fastened round his head by a yellow cord. Its pointed ends fell on his shoulders, framing a thin dark face with large eyes, a silk cloak striped black and white fell to his feet, and in the distance he looked aloof and mysterious in his erect and careless attitude suggesting assurance and power.

Lingard, bending slightly, whispered into Mrs. Travers' ear that that man, apart and dominating the scene, was Daman, the supreme leader of the Illanuns, the one who had ordered the capture of those gentlemen in order perhaps to force his hand. The two barbarous, half-naked figures covered with ornaments and charms, squatting at his feet with their heads enfolded in crimson and gold handkerchiefs and with straight swords lying across their knees, were the Pangerans who carried out the order, and had brought the captives into the lagoon. But the two men in chain armour on watch outside the door of the small house were Belarab's two particular bodyguards, who got themselves up in that way only on very great occasions. They were the outward and visible sign that the prisoners were in Belarab's keeping, and this was good, so far. The pity was that the Great Chief himself was not there. Then Lingard assumed a formal pose and Mrs. Travers stared into the great courtyard and with rows and rows of faces ranged on the ground at her feet felt a little giddy for a moment.

Every movement had died in the crowd. Even the eyes were still under the variegated mass of coloured headkerchiefs: while beyond the open gate a noble palm tree looked intensely black against the glitter of the lagoon and the pale incandescence of the sky. Mrs. Travers gazing that way wondered at the absence of Hassim and Immada. But the girl might have been somewhere within one of the houses with the ladies of Belarab's



stockade. Then suddenly Mrs. Travers became aware that another bench had been brought out and was already occupied by five men dressed in gorgeous silks, and embroidered velvets, round-faced and grave. Their hands reposed on their knees; but one amongst them clad in a white robe and with a large nearly black turban on his head leaned forward a little with his chin in his hand. His cheeks were sunken and his eyes remained fixed on the ground as if to avoid looking at the infidel woman.

She became aware suddenly of a soft murmur, and glancing at Lingard she saw him in an attitude of impassive attention. The momentous negotiations had begun, and it went on like this in low undertones with long pauses and in the immobility of all the attendants squatting on the ground, with the distant figure of Daman far off in the shade towering over all the assembly. But in him, too, Mrs. Travers could not detect the slightest movement while the slightly modulated murmurs went on enveloping her in a feeling of peace.

The fact that she couldn't understand anything of what was said soothed her apprehensions. Sometimes a silence fell and Lingard bending toward her would whisper, "It isn't so easy," and the stillness would be so perfect that she would hear the flutter of a pigeon's wing somewhere high up in the great overshadowing trees. And suddenly one of the men before her without moving a limb would begin another speech rendered more mysterious still by the total absence of action or play of feature. Only the watchfulness of the eyes which showed that the speaker was not communing with himself made it clear that this was not a spoken meditation but a flow of argument directed to Lingard who now and then uttered a few words either with a grave or a smiling expression. They were always followed by murmurs which seemed mostly to her to convey assent; and then a reflective silence would reign again and the immobility of the crowd would appear more perfect than before.

When Lingard whispered to her that it was now his turn to make a speech Mrs. Travers expected him to get up and assert himself by some commanding gesture. But he did not. He remained seated, only his voice had a vibrating quality though he obviously tried to restrain it, and it travelled masterfully far into the silence. He spoke for a long time while the sun climbing the unstained sky shifted the diminished shadows of the trees, pouring on the heads of men its heat through the thick and motionless foliage. Whenever murmurs arose he would stop and glancing fearlessly at

the assembly, wait till they subsided. Once or twice, they rose to a loud hum and Mrs. Travers could hear on the other side of her Jorgenson muttering something in his moustache. Beyond the rows of heads Daman under the tree had folded his arms on his breast. The edge of the white cloth concealed his forehead and at his feet the two Illanun chiefs, half naked and bedecked with charms and ornaments of bright feathers, of shells, with necklaces of teeth, claws, and shining beads, remained cross-legged with their swords across their knees like two bronze idols. Even the plumes of their head-dresses stirred not.

“Sudah! It is finished!” A movement passed along all the heads, the seated bodies swayed to and fro. Lingard had ceased speaking. He remained seated for a moment looking his audience all over and when he stood up together with Mrs. Travers and Jorgenson the whole assembly rose from the ground together and lost its ordered formation. Some of Belarab’s retainers, young broad-faced fellows, wearing a sort of uniform of check-patterned sarongs, black silk jackets and crimson skull-caps set at a rakish angle, swaggered through the broken groups and ranged themselves in two rows before the motionless Daman and his Illanun chiefs in martial array. The members of the council who had left their bench approached the white people with gentle smiles and deferential movements of the hands. Their bearing was faintly propitiatory; only the man in the big turban remained fanatically aloof, keeping his eyes fixed on the ground.

“I have done it,” murmured Lingard to Mrs. Travers. — “Was it very difficult?” she asked. — “No,” he said, conscious in his heart that he had strained to the fullest extent the prestige of his good name and that habit of deference to his slightest wish established by the glamour of his wealth and the fear of his personality in this great talk which after all had done nothing except put off the decisive hour. He offered Mrs. Travers his arm ready to lead her away, but at the last moment did not move.

With an authoritative gesture Daman had parted the ranks of Belarab’s young followers with the red skullcaps and was seen advancing toward the whites striking into an astonished silence all the scattered groups in the courtyard. But the broken ranks had closed behind him. The Illanun chiefs, for all their truculent aspect, were much too prudent to attempt to move. They had not needed for that the faint warning murmur from Daman. He advanced alone. The plain hilt of a sword protruded from the open edges of his cloak. The parted edges disclosed also the butts of two flintlock pistols.

The Koran in a velvet case hung on his breast by a red cord of silk. He was pious, magnificent, and warlike, with calm movements and a straight glance from under the hem of the simple piece of linen covering his head. He carried himself rigidly and his bearing had a sort of solemn modesty. Lingard said hurriedly to Mrs. Travers that the man had met white people before and that, should he attempt to shake hands with her, she ought to offer her own covered with the end of her scarf. — "Why?" she asked. "Propriety?" — "Yes, it will be better," said Lingard and the next moment Mrs. Travers felt her enveloped hand pressed gently by slender dark fingers and felt extremely Oriental herself when, with her face muffled to the eyes, she encountered the lustrous black stare of the sea-robbers' leader. It was only for an instant, because Daman turned away at once to shake hands with Lingard. In the straight, ample folds of his robes he looked very slender facing the robust white man.

"Great is your power," he said, in a pleasant voice. "The white men are going to be delivered to you."

"Yes, they pass into my keeping," said Lingard, returning the other's bright smile but otherwise looking grim enough with the frown which had settled on his forehead at Daman's approach. He glanced over his shoulder at a group of spearmen escorting the two captives who had come down the steps from the hut. At the sight of Daman barring as it were Lingard's way they had stopped at some distance and had closed round the two white men. Daman also glanced dispassionately that way.

"They were my guests," he murmured. "Please God I shall come soon to ask you for them . . . as a friend," he added after a slight pause.

"And please God you will not go away empty handed," said Lingard, smoothing his brow. "After all you and I were not meant to meet only to quarrel. Would you have preferred to see them pass into Tengga's keeping?"

"Tengga is fat and full of wiles," said Daman, disdainfully, "a mere shopkeeper smitten by a desire to be a chief. He is nothing. But you and I are men that have real power. Yet there is a truth that you and I can confess to each other. Men's hearts grow quickly discontented. Listen. The leaders of men are carried forward in the hands of their followers; and common men's minds are unsteady, their desires changeable, and their thoughts not to be trusted. You are a great chief they say. Do not forget that I am a chief, too, and a leader of armed men."

"I have heard of you, too," said Lingard in a composed voice.

Daman had cast his eyes down. Suddenly he opened them very wide with an effect that startled Mrs. Travers. — "Yes. But do you see?" Mrs. Travers, her hand resting lightly on Lingard's arm, had the sensation of acting in a gorgeously got up play on the brilliantly lighted stage of an exotic opera whose accompaniment was not music but the varied strains of the all-pervading silence. — "Yes, I see," Lingard replied with a surprisingly confidential intonation. "But power, too, is in the hands of a great leader."

Mrs. Travers watched the faint movements of Daman's nostrils as though the man were suffering from some powerful emotion, while under her fingers Lingard's forearm in its white sleeve was as steady as a limb of marble. Without looking at him she seemed to feel that with one movement he could crush that nervous figure in which lived the breath of the great desert haunted by his nomad, camel-riding ancestors. — "Power is in the hand of God," he said, all animation dying out of his face, and paused to wait for Lingard's "Very true," then continued with a fine smile, "but He apportions it according to His will for His own purposes, even to those that are not of the Faith."

"Such being the will of God you should harbour no bitterness against them in your heart."

The low exclamation, "Against those!" and a slight dismissing gesture of a meagre dark hand out of the folds of the cloak were almost understandable to Mrs. Travers in the perfection of their melancholy contempt, and gave Lingard a further insight into the character of the ally secured to him by the diplomacy of Belarab. He was only half reassured by this assumption of superior detachment. He trusted to the man's self-interest more; for Daman no doubt looked to the reconquered kingdom for the reward of dignity and ease. His father and grandfather (the men of whom Jorgenson had written as having been hanged for an example twelve years before) had been friends of Sultans, advisers of Rulers, wealthy financiers of the great raiding expeditions of the past. It was hatred that had turned Daman into a self-made outcast, till Belarab's diplomacy had drawn him out from some obscure and uneasy retreat.

In a few words Lingard assured Daman of the complete safety of his followers as long as they themselves made no attempt to get possession of the stranded yacht. Lingard understood very well that the capture of Travers and d'Alcacer was the result of a sudden fear, a move directed by Daman to secure his own safety. The sight of the stranded yacht shook his confidence

completely. It was as if the secrets of the place had been betrayed. After all, it was perhaps a great folly to trust any white man, no matter how much he seemed estranged from his own people. Daman felt he might have been the victim of a plot. Lingard's brig appeared to him a formidable engine of war. He did not know what to think and the motive for getting hold of the two white men was really the wish to secure hostages. Distrusting the fierce impulses of his followers he had hastened to put them into Belarab's keeping. But everything in the Settlement seemed to him suspicious: Belarab's absence, Jorgenson's refusal to make over at once the promised supply of arms and ammunition. And now that white man had by the power of his speech got them away from Belarab's people. So much influence filled Daman with wonder and awe. A recluse for many years in the most obscure corner of the Archipelago he felt himself surrounded by intrigues. But the alliance was a great thing, too. He did not want to quarrel. He was quite willing for the time being to accept Lingard's assurance that no harm should befall his people encamped on the sandbanks. Attentive and slight, he seemed to let Lingard's deliberate words sink into him. The force of that unarmed big man seemed overwhelming. He bowed his head slowly.

"Allah is our refuge," he murmured, accepting the inevitable.

He delighted Mrs. Travers not as a living being but like a clever sketch in colours, a vivid rendering of an artist's vision of some soul, delicate and fierce. His bright half-smile was extraordinary, sharp like clear steel, painfully penetrating. Glancing right and left Mrs. Travers saw the whole courtyard smitten by the desolating fury of sunshine and peopled with shadows, their forms and colours fading in the violence of the light. The very brown tones of roof and wall dazzled the eye. Then Daman stepped aside. He was no longer smiling and Mrs. Travers advanced with her hand on Lingard's arm through a heat so potent that it seemed to have a taste, a feel, a smell of its own. She moved on as if floating in it with Lingard's support.

"Where are they?" she asked.

"They are following us all right," he answered. Lingard was so certain that the prisoners would be delivered to him on the beach that he never glanced back till, after reaching the boat, he and Mrs. Travers turned about.

The group of spearmen parted right and left, and Mr. Travers and d'Alcacer walked forward alone looking unreal and odd like their own day-ghosts. Mr. Travers gave no sign of being aware of his wife's presence. It

was certainly a shock to him. But d'Alcacer advanced smiling, as if the beach were a drawing room.

With a very few paddlers the heavy old European-built boat moved slowly over the water that seemed as pale and blazing as the sky above. Jorgenson had perched himself in the bow. The other four white people sat in the stern sheets, the ex-prisoners side by side in the middle. Lingard spoke suddenly.

"I want you both to understand that the trouble is not over yet. Nothing is finished. You are out on my bare word."

While Lingard was speaking Mr. Travers turned his face away but d'Alcacer listened courteously. Not another word was spoken for the rest of the way. The two gentlemen went up the ship's side first. Lingard remained to help Mrs. Travers at the foot of the ladder. She pressed his hand strongly and looking down at his upturned face:

"This was a wonderful success," she said.

For a time the character of his fascinated gaze did not change. It was as if she had said nothing. Then he whispered, admiringly, "You understand everything."

She moved her eyes away and had to disengage her hand to which he clung for a moment, giddy, like a man falling out of the world.

### III

Mrs. Travers, acutely aware of Lingard behind her, remained gazing over the lagoon. After a time he stepped forward and placed himself beside her close to the rail. She went on staring at the sheet of water turned to deep purple under the sunset sky.

"Why have you been avoiding me since we came back from the stockade?" she asked in a deadened voice.

"There is nothing to tell you till Rajah Hassim and his sister Immada return with some news," Lingard answered in the same tone. "Has my friend succeeded? Will Belarab listen to any arguments? Will he consent to come out of his shell? Is he on his way back? I wish I knew! . . . Not a whisper comes from there! He may have started two days ago and he may be now near the outskirts of the Settlement. Or he may have gone into camp half way down, from some whim or other; or he may be already arrived for all I know. We should not have seen him. The road from the hills does not lead along the beach."

He snatched nervously at the long glass and directed it at the dark stockade. The sun had sunk behind the forests leaving the contour of the tree-tops outlined by a thread of gold under a band of delicate green lying across the lower sky. Higher up a faint crimson glow faded into the darkened blue overhead. The shades of the evening deepened over the lagoon, clung to the sides of the Emma and to the forms of the further shore. Lingard laid the glass down.

“Mr. d’Alcacer, too, seems to have been avoiding me,” said Mrs. Travers. “You are on very good terms with him, Captain Lingard.”

“He is a very pleasant man,” murmured Lingard, absently. “But he says funny things sometimes. He inquired the other day if there were any playing cards on board, and when I asked him if he liked card-playing, just for something to say, he told me with that queer smile of his that he had read a story of some people condemned to death who passed the time before execution playing card games with their guards.”

“And what did you say?”

“I told him that there were probably cards on board somewhere — Jorgenson would know. Then I asked him whether he looked on me as a gaoler. He was quite startled and sorry for what he said.”

“It wasn’t very kind of you, Captain Lingard.”

“It slipped out awkwardly and we made it up with a laugh.”

Mrs. Travers leaned her elbows on the rail and put her head into her hands. Every attitude of that woman surprised Lingard by its enchanting effect upon himself. He sighed, and the silence lasted for a long while.

“I wish I had understood every word that was said that morning.”

“That morning,” repeated Lingard. “What morning do you mean?”

“I mean the morning when I walked out of Belarab’s stockade on your arm, Captain Lingard, at the head of the procession. It seemed to me that I was walking on a splendid stage in a scene from an opera, in a gorgeous show fit to make an audience hold its breath. You can’t possibly guess how unreal all this seemed, and how artificial I felt myself. An opera, you know. . . .”

“I know. I was a gold digger at one time. Some of us used to come down to Melbourne with our pockets full of money. I daresay it was poor enough to what you must have seen, but once I went to a show like that. It was a story acted to music. All the people went singing through it right to the very end.”

“How it must have jarred on your sense of reality,” said Mrs. Travers, still not looking at him. “You don’t remember the name of the opera?”

“No. I never troubled my head about it. We — our lot never did.”

“I won’t ask you what the story was like. It must have appeared to you like the very defiance of all truth. Would real people go singing through their life anywhere except in a fairy tale?”

“These people didn’t always sing for joy,” said Lingard, simply. “I don’t know much about fairy tales.”

“They are mostly about princesses,” murmured Mrs. Travers.

Lingard didn’t quite hear. He bent his ear for a moment but she wasn’t looking at him and he didn’t ask her to repeat her remark. “Fairy tales are for children, I believe,” he said. “But that story with music I am telling you of, Mrs. Travers, was not a tale for children. I assure you that of the few shows I have seen that one was the most real to me. More real than anything in life.”

Mrs. Travers, remembering the fatal inanity of most opera librettos, was touched by these words as if there had been something pathetic in this readiness of response; as if she had heard a starved man talking of the delight of a crust of dry bread. “I suppose you forgot yourself in that story, whatever it was,” she remarked in a detached tone.

“Yes, it carried me away. But I suppose you know the feeling.”

“No. I never knew anything of the kind, not even when I was a chit of a girl.” Lingard seemed to accept this statement as an assertion of superiority. He inclined his head slightly. Moreover, she might have said what she liked. What pleased him most was her not looking at him; for it enabled him to contemplate with perfect freedom the curve of her cheek, her small ear half hidden by the clear mesh of fine hair, the fascination of her uncovered neck. And her whole person was an impossible, an amazing and solid marvel which somehow was not so much convincing to the eye as to something within him that was apparently independent of his senses. Not even for a moment did he think of her as remote. Untouchable — possibly! But remote — no. Whether consciously or unconsciously he took her spiritually for granted. It was materially that she was a wonder of the sort that is at the same time familiar and sacred.

“No,” Mrs. Travers began again, abruptly. “I never forgot myself in a story. It was not in me. I have not even been able to forget myself on that morning on shore which was part of my own story.”



“You carried yourself first rate,” said Lingard, smiling at the nape of her neck, her ear, the film of escaped hair, the modelling of the corner of her eye. He could see the flutter of the dark eyelashes: and the delicate flush on her cheek had rather the effect of scent than of colour.

“You approved of my behaviour.”

“Just right, I tell you. My word, weren’t they all struck of a heap when they made out what you were.”

“I ought to feel flattered. I will confess to you that I felt only half disguised and was half angry and wholly uncomfortable. What helped me, I suppose, was that I wanted to please. . . .”

“I don’t mean to say that they were exactly pleased,” broke in Lingard, conscientiously. “They were startled more.”

“I wanted to please you,” dropped Mrs. Travers, negligently. A faint, hoarse, and impatient call of a bird was heard from the woods as if calling to the oncoming night. Lingard’s face grew hot in the deepening dusk. The delicate lemon yellow and ethereal green tints had vanished from the sky and the red glow darkened menacingly. The sun had set behind the black pall of the forest, no longer edged with a line of gold. “Yes, I was absurdly self-conscious,” continued Mrs. Travers in a conversational tone. “And it was the effect of these clothes that you made me put on over some of my European — I almost said disguise; because you know in the present more perfect costume I feel curiously at home; and yet I can’t say that these things really fit me. The sleeves of this silk under-jacket are rather tight. My shoulders feel bound, too, and as to the sarong it is scandalously short. According to rule it should have been long enough to fall over my feet. But I like freedom of movement. I have had very little of what I liked in life.”

“I can hardly believe that,” said Lingard. “If it wasn’t for your saying so. . . .”

“I wouldn’t say so to everybody,” she said, turning her head for a moment to Lingard and turning it away again to the dusk which seemed to come floating over the black lagoon. Far away in its depth a couple of feeble lights twinkled; it was impossible to say whether on the shore or on the edge of the more distant forest. Overhead the stars were beginning to come out, but faint yet, as if too remote to be reflected in the lagoon. Only to the west a setting planet shone through the red fog of the sunset glow. “It was supposed not to be good for me to have much freedom of action. So at

least I was told. But I have a suspicion that it was only unpleasing to other people.”

“I should have thought,” began Lingard, then hesitated and stopped. It seemed to him inconceivable that everybody should not have loved to make that woman happy. And he was impressed by the bitterness of her tone. Mrs. Travers did not seem curious to know what he wanted to say and after a time she added, “I don’t mean only when I was a child. I don’t remember that very well. I daresay I was very objectionable as a child.”

Lingard tried to imagine her as a child. The idea was novel to him. Her perfection seemed to have come into the world complete, mature, and without any hesitation or weakness. He had nothing in his experience that could help him to imagine a child of that class. The children he knew played about the village street and ran on the beach. He had been one of them. He had seen other children, of course, since, but he had not been in touch with them except visually and they had not been English children. Her childhood, like his own, had been passed in England, and that very fact made it almost impossible for him to imagine it. He could not even tell whether it was in town or in the country, or whether as a child she had even seen the sea. And how could a child of that kind be objectionable? But he remembered that a child disapproved of could be very unhappy, and he said:

“I am sorry.”

Mrs. Travers laughed a little. Within the muslin cage forms had turned to blurred shadows. Amongst them the form of d’Alcacer arose and moved. The systematic or else the morbid dumbness of Mr. Travers bored and exasperated him, though, as a matter of fact, that gentleman’s speeches had never had the power either to entertain or to soothe his mind.

“It’s very nice of you. You have a great capacity for sympathy, but after all I am not certain on which side your sympathies lie. With me, or those much-tried people,” said Mrs. Travers.

“With the child,” said Lingard, disregarding the bantering tone. “A child can have a very bad time of it all to itself.”

“What can you know of it?” she asked.

“I have my own feelings,” he answered in some surprise.

Mrs. Travers, with her back to him, was covered with confusion. Neither could she depict to herself his childhood as if he, too, had come into the world in the fullness of his strength and his purpose. She discovered a certain naiveness in herself and laughed a little. He made no sound.

“Don’t be angry,” she said. “I wouldn’t dream of laughing at your feelings. Indeed your feelings are the most serious thing that ever came in my way. I couldn’t help laughing at myself — at a funny discovery I made.”

“In the days of your childhood?” she heard Lingard’s deep voice asking after a pause.

“Oh, no. Ages afterward. No child could have made that discovery. Do you know the greatest difference there is between us? It is this: That I have been living since my childhood in front of a show and that I never have been taken in for a moment by its tinsel and its noise or by anything that went on on the stage. Do you understand what I mean, Captain Lingard?”

There was a moment of silence. “What does it matter? We are no children now.” There was an infinite gentleness in Lingard’s deep tones. “But if you have been unhappy then don’t tell me that it has not been made up to you since. Surely you have only to make a sign. A woman like you.”

“You think I could frighten the whole world on to its knees?”

“No, not frighten.” The suggestion of a laugh in the deadened voice passed off in a catch of the breath. Then he was heard beginning soberly: “Your husband. . . .” He hesitated a little and she took the opportunity to say coldly:

“His name is Mr. Travers.”

Lingard didn’t know how to take it. He imagined himself to have been guilty of some sort of presumption. But how on earth was he to call the man? After all he was her husband. That idea was disagreeable to him because the man was also inimical in a particularly unreasonable and galling manner. At the same time he was aware that he didn’t care a bit for his enmity and had an idea that he would not have cared for his friendship either. And suddenly he felt very much annoyed.

“Yes. That’s the man I mean,” he said in a contemptuous tone. “I don’t particularly like the name and I am sure I don’t want to talk about him more than I can help. If he hadn’t been your husband I wouldn’t have put up with his manners for an hour. Do you know what would have happened to him if he hadn’t been your husband?”

“No,” said Mrs. Travers. “Do you, Captain Lingard?”

“Not exactly,” he admitted. “Something he wouldn’t have liked, you may be sure.”

“While of course he likes this very much,” she observed. Lingard gave an abrupt laugh.

"I don't think it's in my power to do anything that he would like," he said in a serious tone. "Forgive me my frankness, Mrs. Travers, but he makes it very difficult sometimes for me to keep civil. Whatever I have had to put up with in life I have never had to put up with contempt."

"I quite believe that," said Mrs. Travers. "Don't your friends call you King Tom?"

"Nobody that I care for. I have no friends. Oh, yes, they call me that . . ."

"You have no friends?"

"Not I," he said with decision. "A man like me has no chums."

"It's quite possible," murmured Mrs. Travers to herself.

"No, not even Jorgenson. Old crazy Jorgenson. He calls me King Tom, too. You see what that's worth."

"Yes, I see. Or rather I have heard. That poor man has no tone, and so much depends on that. Now suppose I were to call you King Tom now and then between ourselves," Mrs. Travers' voice proposed, distantly tentative in the night that invested her person with a colourless vagueness of form.

She waited in the stillness, her elbows on the rail and her face in her hands as if she had already forgotten what she had said. She heard at her elbow the deep murmur of:

"Let's hear you say it."

She never moved the least bit. The sombre lagoon sparkled faintly with the reflection of the stars.

"Oh, yes, I will let you hear it," she said into the starlit space in a voice of unaccented gentleness which changed subtly as she went on. "I hope you will never regret that you came out of your friendless mystery to speak to me, King Tom. How many days ago it was! And here is another day gone. Tell me how many more of them there must be? Of these blinding days and nights without a sound."

"Be patient," he murmured. "Don't ask me for the impossible."

"How do you or I know what is possible?" she whispered with a strange scorn. "You wouldn't dare guess. But I tell you that every day that passes is more impossible to me than the day before."

The passion of that whisper went like a stab into his breast. "What am I to tell you?" he murmured, as if with despair. "Remember that every sunset makes it a day less. Do you think I want you here?"

A bitter little laugh floated out into the starlight. Mrs. Travers heard Lingard move suddenly away from her side. She didn't change her pose by

a hair's breadth. Presently she heard d'Alcacer coming out of the Cage. His cultivated voice asked half playfully:

"Have you had a satisfactory conversation? May I be told something of it?"

"Mr. d'Alcacer, you are curious."

"Well, in our position, I confess. . . . You are our only refuge, remember."

"You want to know what we were talking about," said Mrs. Travers, altering slowly her position so as to confront d'Alcacer whose face was almost undistinguishable. "Oh, well, then, we talked about opera, the realities and illusions of the stage, of dresses, of people's names, and things of that sort."

"Nothing of importance," he said courteously. Mrs. Travers moved forward and he stepped to one side. Inside the Cage two Malay hands were hanging round lanterns, the light of which fell on Mr. Travers' bowed head as he sat in his chair.

When they were all assembled for the evening meal Jorgenson strolled up from nowhere in particular as his habit was, and speaking through the muslin announced that Captain Lingard begged to be excused from joining the company that evening. Then he strolled away. From that moment till they got up from the table and the camp bedsteads were brought in not twenty words passed between the members of the party within the net. The strangeness of their situation made all attempts to exchange ideas very arduous; and apart from that each had thoughts which it was distinctly useless to communicate to the others. Mr. Travers had abandoned himself to his sense of injury. He did not so much brood as rage inwardly in a dull, dispirited way. The impossibility of asserting himself in any manner galled his very soul. D'Alcacer was extremely puzzled. Detached in a sense from the life of men perhaps as much even as Jorgenson himself, he took yet a reasonable interest in the course of events and had not lost all his sense of self-preservation. Without being able to appreciate the exact values of the situation he was not one of those men who are ever completely in the dark in any given set of circumstances. Without being humorous he was a good-humoured man. His habitual, gentle smile was a true expression. More of a European than of a Spaniard he had that truly aristocratic nature which is inclined to credit every honest man with something of its own nobility and in its judgment is altogether independent of class feeling. He believed Lingard to be an honest man and he never troubled his head to classify him,

except in the sense that he found him an interesting character. He had a sort of esteem for the outward personality and the bearing of that seaman. He found in him also the distinction of being nothing of a type. He was a specimen to be judged only by its own worth. With his natural gift of insight d'Alcacer told himself that many overseas adventurers of history were probably less worthy because obviously they must have been less simple. He didn't, however, impart those thoughts formally to Mrs. Travers. In fact he avoided discussing Lingard with Mrs. Travers who, he thought, was quite intelligent enough to appreciate the exact shade of his attitude. If that shade was fine, Mrs. Travers was fine, too; and there was no need to discuss the colours of this adventure. Moreover, she herself seemed to avoid all direct discussion of the Lingard element in their fate. D'Alcacer was fine enough to be aware that those two seemed to understand each other in a way that was not obvious even to themselves. Whenever he saw them together he was always much tempted to observe them. And he yielded to the temptation. The fact of one's life depending on the phases of an obscure action authorizes a certain latitude of behaviour. He had seen them together repeatedly, communing openly or apart, and there was in their way of joining each other, in their poses and their ways of separating, something special and characteristic and pertaining to themselves only, as if they had been made for each other.

What he couldn't understand was why Mrs. Travers should have put off his natural curiosity as to her latest conference with the Man of Fate by an incredible statement as to the nature of the conversation. Talk about dresses, opera, people's names. He couldn't take this seriously. She might have invented, he thought, something more plausible; or simply have told him that this was not for him to know. She ought to have known that he would not have been offended. Couldn't she have seen already that he accepted the complexion of mystery in her relation to that man completely, unquestionably; as though it had been something preordained from the very beginning of things? But he was not annoyed with Mrs. Travers. After all it might have been true. She would talk exactly as she liked, and even incredibly, if it so pleased her, and make the man hang on her lips. And likewise she was capable of making the man talk about anything by a power of inspiration for reasons simple or perverse. Opera! Dresses! Yes — about Shakespeare and the musical glasses! For a mere whim or for the deepest purpose. Women worthy of the name were like that. They were very

wonderful. They rose to the occasion and sometimes above the occasion when things were bound to occur that would be comic or tragic (as it happened) but generally charged with trouble even to innocent beholders. D'Alcacer thought these thoughts without bitterness and even without irony. With his half-secret social reputation as a man of one great passion in a world of mere intrigues he liked all women. He liked them in their sentiment and in their hardness, in the tragic character of their foolish or clever impulses, at which he looked with a sort of tender seriousness.

He didn't take a favourable view of the position but he considered Mrs. Travers' statement about operas and dresses as a warning to keep off the subject. For this reason he remained silent through the meal.

When the bustle of clearing away the table was over he strolled toward Mrs. Travers and remarked very quietly:

"I think that in keeping away from us this evening the Man of Fate was well inspired. We dined like a lot of Carthusian monks."

"You allude to our silence?"

"It was most scrupulous. If we had taken an eternal vow we couldn't have kept it better."

"Did you feel bored?"

"Pas du tout," d'Alcacer assured her with whimsical gravity. "I felt nothing. I sat in a state of blessed vacuity. I believe I was the happiest of us three. Unless you, too, Mrs. Travers. . . ."

"It's absolutely no use your fishing for my thoughts, Mr. d'Alcacer. If I were to let you see them you would be appalled."

"Thoughts really are but a shape of feelings. Let me congratulate you on the impassive mask you can put on those horrors you say you nurse in your breast. It was impossible to tell anything by your face."

"You will always say flattering things."

"Madame, my flatteries come from the very bottom of my heart. I have given up long ago all desire to please. And I was not trying to get at your thoughts. Whatever else you may expect from me you may count on my absolute respect for your privacy. But I suppose with a mask such as you can make for yourself you really don't care. The Man of Fate, I noticed, is not nearly as good at it as you are."

"What a pretentious name. Do you call him by it to his face, Mr. d'Alcacer?"

“No, I haven’t the cheek,” confessed d’Alcacer, equably. “And, besides, it’s too momentous for daily use. And he is so simple that he might mistake it for a joke and nothing could be further from my thoughts. Mrs. Travers, I will confess to you that I don’t feel jocular in the least. But what can he know about people of our sort? And when I reflect how little people of our sort can know of such a man I am quite content to address him as Captain Lingard. It’s common and soothing and most respectable and satisfactory; for Captain is the most empty of all titles. What is a Captain? Anybody can be a Captain; and for Lingard it’s a name like any other. Whereas what he deserves is something special, significant, and expressive, that would match his person, his simple and romantic person.”

He perceived that Mrs. Travers was looking at him intently. They hastened to turn their eyes away from each other.

“He would like your appreciation,” Mrs. Travers let drop negligently.

“I am afraid he would despise it.”

“Despise it! Why, that sort of thing is the very breath of his nostrils.”

“You seem to understand him, Mrs. Travers. Women have a singular capacity for understanding. I mean subjects that interest them; because when their imagination is stimulated they are not afraid of letting it go. A man is more mistrustful of himself, but women are born much more reckless. They push on and on under the protection of secrecy and silence, and the greater the obscurity of what they wish to explore the greater their courage.”

“Do you mean seriously to tell me that you consider me a creature of darkness?”

“I spoke in general,” remonstrated d’Alcacer. “Anything else would have been an impertinence. Yes, obscurity is women’s best friend. Their daring loves it; but a sudden flash of light disconcerts them. Generally speaking, if they don’t get exactly at the truth they always manage to come pretty near to it.”

Mrs. Travers had listened with silent attention and she allowed the silence to continue for some time after d’Alcacer had ceased. When she spoke it was to say in an unconcerned tone that as to this subject she had had special opportunities. Her self-possessed interlocutor managed to repress a movement of real curiosity under an assumption of conventional interest. “Indeed,” he exclaimed, politely. “A special opportunity. How did you manage to create it?”



This was too much for Mrs. Travers. "I! Create it!" she exclaimed, indignantly, but under her breath. "How on earth do you think I could have done it?"

Mr. d'Alcacer, as if communing with himself, was heard to murmur unrepentantly that indeed women seldom knew how they had "done it," to which Mrs. Travers in a weary tone returned the remark that no two men were dense in the same way. To this Mr. d'Alcacer assented without difficulty. "Yes, our brand presents more varieties. This, from a certain point of view, is obviously to our advantage. We interest. . . . Not that I imagine myself interesting to you, Mrs. Travers. But what about the Man of Fate?"

"Oh, yes," breathed out Mrs. Travers.

"I see! Immensely!" said d'Alcacer in a tone of mysterious understanding. "Was his stupidity so colossal?"

"It was indistinguishable from great visions that were in no sense mean and made up for him a world of his own."

"I guessed that much," muttered d'Alcacer to himself. "But that, you know, Mrs. Travers, that isn't good news at all to me. World of dreams, eh? That's very bad, very dangerous. It's almost fatal, Mrs. Travers."

"Why all this dismay? Why do you object to a world of dreams?"

"Because I dislike the prospect of being made a sacrifice of by those Moors. I am not an optimist like our friend there," he continued in a low tone nodding toward the dismal figure of Mr. Travers huddled up in the chair. "I don't regard all this as a farce and I have discovered in myself a strong objection to having my throat cut by those gorgeous barbarians after a lot of fatuous talk. Don't ask me why, Mrs. Travers. Put it down to an absurd weakness."

Mrs. Travers made a slight movement in her chair, raising her hands to her head, and in the dim light of the lanterns d'Alcacer saw the mass of her clear gleaming hair fall down and spread itself over her shoulders. She seized half of it in her hands which looked very white, and with her head inclined a little on one side she began to make a plait.

"You are terrifying," he said after watching the movement of her fingers for a while.

"Yes . . . ?" she accentuated interrogatively.

"You have the awfulness of the predestined. You, too, are the prey of dreams."

"Not of the Moors, then," she uttered, calmly, beginning the other plait. D'Alcacer followed the operation to the end. Close against her, her diaphanous shadow on the muslin reproduced her slightest movements. D'Alcacer turned his eyes away.

"No! No barbarian shall touch you. Because if it comes to that I believe he would be capable of killing you himself."

A minute elapsed before he stole a glance in her direction. She was leaning back again, her hands had fallen on her lap and her head with a plait of hair on each side of her face, her head incredibly changed in character and suggesting something medieval, ascetic, drooped dreamily on her breast.

D'Alcacer waited, holding his breath. She didn't move. In the dim gleam of jewelled clasps, the faint sheen of gold embroideries and the shimmer of silks, she was like a figure in a faded painting. Only her neck appeared dazzlingly white in the smoky redness of the light. D'Alcacer's wonder approached a feeling of awe. He was on the point of moving away quietly when Mrs. Travers, without stirring in the least, let him hear the words:

"I have told him that every day seemed more difficult to live. Don't you see how impossible this is?"

D'Alcacer glanced rapidly across the Cage where Mr. Travers seemed to be asleep all in a heap and presenting a ruffled appearance like a sick bird. Nothing was distinct of him but the bald patch on the top of his head.

"Yes," he murmured, "it is most unfortunate. . . . I understand your anxiety, Mrs. Travers, but . . ."

"I am frightened," she said.

He reflected a moment. "What answer did you get?" he asked, softly.

"The answer was: 'Patience.'"

D'Alcacer laughed a little. — "You may well laugh," murmured Mrs. Travers in a tone of anguish. — "That's why I did," he whispered. "Patience! Didn't he see the horror of it?" — "I don't know. He walked away," said Mrs. Travers. She looked immovably at her hands clasped in her lap, and then with a burst of distress, "Mr. d'Alcacer, what is going to happen?" — "Ah, you are asking yourself the question at last. That will happen which cannot be avoided; and perhaps you know best what it is." — "No. I am still asking myself what he will do." — "Ah, that is not for me to know," declared d'Alcacer. "I can't tell you what he will do, but I know what will happen to him." — "To him, you say! To him!" she cried. — "He

will break his heart,” said d’Alcacer, distinctly, bending a little over the chair with a slight gasp at his own audacity — and waited.

“Croyez-vous?” came at last from Mrs. Travers in an accent so coldly languid that d’Alcacer felt a shudder run down his spine.

Was it possible that she was that kind of woman, he asked himself. Did she see nothing in the world outside herself? Was she above the commonest kind of compassion? He couldn’t suspect Mrs. Travers of stupidity; but she might have been heartless and, like some women of her class, quite unable to recognize any emotion in the world except her own. D’Alcacer was shocked and at the same time he was relieved because he confessed to himself that he had ventured very far. However, in her humanity she was not vulgar enough to be offended. She was not the slave of small meannesses. This thought pleased d’Alcacer who had schooled himself not to expect too much from people. But he didn’t know what to do next. After what he had ventured to say and after the manner in which she had met his audacity the only thing to do was to change the conversation. Mrs. Travers remained perfectly still. “I will pretend that I think she is asleep,” he thought to himself, meditating a retreat on tip-toe.

He didn’t know that Mrs. Travers was simply trying to recover the full command of her faculties. His words had given her a terrible shock. After managing to utter this defensive “croyez-vous” which came out of her lips cold and faint as if in a last effort of dying strength, she felt herself turn rigid and speechless. She was thinking, stiff all over with emotion: “D’Alcacer has seen it! How much more has he been able to see?” She didn’t ask herself that question in fear or shame but with a reckless resignation. Out of that shock came a sensation of peace. A glowing warmth passed through all her limbs. If d’Alcacer had peered by that smoky light into her face he might have seen on her lips a fatalistic smile come and go. But d’Alcacer would not have dreamed of doing such a thing, and, besides, his attention just then was drawn in another direction. He had heard subdued exclamations, had noticed a stir on the decks of the Emma, and even some sort of noise outside the ship.

“These are strange sounds,” he said.

“Yes, I hear,” Mrs. Travers murmured, uneasily.

Vague shapes glided outside the Cage, barefooted, almost noiseless, whispering Malay words secretly.

"It seems as though a boat had come alongside," observed d'Alcacer, lending an attentive ear. "I wonder what it means. In our position. . . ."

"It may mean anything," interrupted Mrs. Travers.

"Jaffir is here," said a voice in the darkness of the after end of the ship. Then there were some more words in which d'Alcacer's attentive ear caught the word "surat."

"A message of some sort has come," he said. "They will be calling Captain Lingard. I wonder what thoughts or what dreams this call will interrupt." He spoke lightly, looking now at Mrs. Travers who had altered her position in the chair; and by their tones and attitudes these two might have been on board the yacht sailing the sea in perfect safety. "You, of course, are the one who will be told. Don't you feel a sort of excitement, Mrs. Travers?"

"I have been lately exhorted to patience," she said in the same easy tone. "I can wait and I imagine I shall have to wait till the morning."

"It can't be very late yet," he said. "Time with us has been standing still for ever so long. And yet this may be the hour of fate."

"Is this the feeling you have at this particular moment?"

"I have had that feeling for a considerable number of moments already. At first it was exciting. Now I am only moderately anxious. I have employed my time in going over all my past life."

"Can one really do that?"

"Yes. I can't say I have been bored to extinction. I am still alive, as you see; but I have done with that and I feel extremely idle. There is only one thing I would like to do. I want to find a few words that could convey to you my gratitude for all your friendliness in the past, at the time when you let me see so much of you in London. I felt always that you took me on my own terms and that so kindly that often I felt inclined to think better of myself. But I am afraid I am wearying you, Mrs. Travers."

"I assure you you have never done that — in the past. And as to the present moment I beg you not to go away. Stay by me please. We are not going to pretend that we are sleepy at this early hour."

D'Alcacer brought a stool close to the long chair and sat down on it. "Oh, yes, the possible hour of fate," he said. "I have a request to make, Mrs. Travers. I don't ask you to betray anything. What would be the good? The issue when it comes will be plain enough. But I should like to get a warning, just something that would give me time to pull myself together, to

compose myself as it were. I want you to promise me that if the balance tips against us you will give me a sign. You could, for instance, seize the opportunity when I am looking at you to put your left hand to your forehead like this. It is a gesture that I have never seen you make, and so. . . .”

“Jorgenson!” Lingard’s voice was heard forward where the light of a lantern appeared suddenly. Then, after a pause, Lingard was heard again: “Here!”

Then the silent minutes began to go by. Mrs. Travers reclining in her chair and d’Alcacer sitting on the stool waited motionless without a word. Presently through the subdued murmurs and agitation pervading the dark deck of the Emma Mrs. Travers heard a firm footstep, and, lantern in hand, Lingard appeared outside the muslin cage.

“Will you come out and speak to me?” he said, loudly. “Not you. The lady,” he added in an authoritative tone as d’Alcacer rose hastily from the stool. “I want Mrs. Travers.”

“Of course,” muttered d’Alcacer to himself and as he opened the door of the Cage to let Mrs. Travers slip through he whispered to her, “This is the hour of fate.”

She brushed past him swiftly without the slightest sign that she had heard the words. On the after deck between the Cage and the deckhouse Lingard waited, lantern in hand. Nobody else was visible about; but d’Alcacer felt in the air the presence of silent and excited beings hovering outside the circle of light. Lingard raised the lantern as Mrs. Travers approached and d’Alcacer heard him say:

“I have had news which you ought to know. Let us go into the deckhouse.”

D’Alcacer saw their heads lighted up by the raised lantern surrounded by the depths of shadow with an effect of a marvellous and symbolic vision. He heard Mrs. Travers say “I would rather not hear your news,” in a tone that made that sensitive observer purse up his lips in wonder. He thought that she was over-wrought, that the situation had grown too much for her nerves. But this was not the tone of a frightened person. It flashed through his mind that she had become self-conscious, and there he stopped in his speculation. That friend of women remained discreet even in his thoughts. He stepped backward further into the Cage and without surprise saw Mrs. Travers follow Lingard into the deckhouse.

Lingard stood the lantern on the table. Its light was very poor. He dropped on to the sea-chest heavily. He, too, was over-wrought. His flannel shirt was open at the neck. He had a broad belt round his waist and was without his jacket. Before him, Mrs. Travers, straight and tall in the gay silks, cottons, and muslins of her outlandish dress, with the ends of the scarf thrown over her head, hanging down in front of her, looked dimly splendid and with a black glance out of her white face. He said:

“Do you, too, want to throw me over? I tell you you can’t do that now.”

“I wasn’t thinking of throwing you over, but I don’t even know what you mean. There seem to be no end of things I can’t do. Hadn’t you better tell me of something that I could do? Have you any idea yourself what you want from me?”

“You can let me look at you. You can listen to me. You can speak to me.”

“Frankly, I have never shirked doing all those things, whenever you wanted me to. You have led me . . .”

“I led you!” cried Lingard.

“Oh! It was my fault,” she said, without anger. “I must have dreamed then that it was you who came to me in the dark with the tale of your impossible life. Could I have sent you away?”

“I wish you had. Why didn’t you?”

“Do you want me to tell you that you were irresistible? How could I have sent you away? But you! What made you come back to me with your very heart on your lips?”

When Lingard spoke after a time it was in jerky sentences.

“I didn’t stop to think. I had been hurt. I didn’t think of you people as ladies and gentlemen. I thought of you as people whose lives I held in my hand. How was it possible to forget you in my trouble? It is your face that I brought back with me on board my brig. I don’t know why. I didn’t look at you more than at anybody else. It took me all my time to keep my temper down lest it should burn you all up. I didn’t want to be rude to you people, but I found it wasn’t very easy because threats were the only argument I had. Was I very offensive, Mrs. Travers?”

She had listened tense and very attentive, almost stern. And it was without the slightest change of expression that she said:

“I think that you bore yourself appropriately to the state of life to which it has pleased God to call you.”

“What state?” muttered Lingard to himself. “I am what I am. They call me Rajah Laut, King Tom, and such like. I think it amused you to hear it, but I can tell you it is no joke to have such names fastened on one, even in fun. And those very names have in them something which makes all this affair here no small matter to anybody.”

She stood before him with a set, severe face. — “Did you call me out in this alarming manner only to quarrel with me?” — “No, but why do you choose this time to tell me that my coming for help to you was nothing but impudence in your sight? Well, I beg your pardon for intruding on your dignity.” — “You misunderstood me,” said Mrs. Travers, without relaxing for a moment her contemplative severity. “Such a flattering thing had never happened to me before and it will never happen to me again. But believe me, King Tom, you did me too much honour. Jorgenson is perfectly right in being angry with you for having taken a woman in tow.” — “He didn’t mean to be rude,” protested Lingard, earnestly. Mrs. Travers didn’t even smile at this intrusion of a point of manners into the atmosphere of anguish and suspense that seemed always to arise between her and this man who, sitting on the sea-chest, had raised his eyes to her with an air of extreme candour and seemed unable to take them off again. She continued to look at him sternly by a tremendous effort of will.

“How changed you are,” he murmured.

He was lost in the depths of the simplest wonder. She appeared to him vengeful and as if turned forever into stone before his bewildered remorse. Forever. Suddenly Mrs. Travers looked round and sat down in the chair. Her strength failed her but she remained austere with her hands resting on the arms of her seat. Lingard sighed deeply and dropped his eyes. She did not dare relax her muscles for fear of breaking down altogether and betraying a reckless impulse which lurked at the bottom of her dismay, to seize the head of d’Alcacer’s Man of Fate, press it to her breast once, fling it far away, and vanish herself, vanish out of life like a wraith. The Man of Fate sat silent and bowed, yet with a suggestion of strength in his dejection. “If I don’t speak,” Mrs. Travers said to herself, with great inward calmness, “I shall burst into tears.” She said aloud, “What could have happened? What have you dragged me in here for? Why don’t you tell me your news?”

“I thought you didn’t want to hear. I believe you really don’t want to. What is all this to you? I believe that you don’t care anything about what I feel, about what I do and how I end. I verily believe that you don’t care how

you end yourself. I believe you never cared for your own or anybody's feelings. I don't think it is because you are hard, I think it is because you don't know, and don't want to know, and are angry with life."

He flourished an arm recklessly, and Mrs. Travers noticed for the first time that he held a sheet of paper in his hand.

"Is that your news there?" she asked, significantly. "It's difficult to imagine that in this wilderness writing can have any significance. And who on earth here could send you news on paper? Will you let me see it? Could I understand it? Is it in English? Come, King Tom, don't look at me in this awful way."

She got up suddenly, not in indignation, but as if at the end of her endurance. The jewelled clasps, the gold embroideries, gleamed elusively amongst the folds of her draperies which emitted a mysterious rustle.

"I can't stand this," she cried. "I can't stand being looked at like this. No woman could stand it. No woman has ever been looked at like this. What can you see? Hatred I could understand. What is it you think me capable of?"

"You are very extraordinary," murmured Lingard, who had regained his self-possession before that outburst.

"Very well, and you are extraordinary, too. That's understood — here we are both under that curse and having to face together whatever may turn up. But who on earth could have sent you this writing?"

"Who?" repeated Lingard. "Why, that young fellow that blundered on my brig in the dark, bringing a boatload of trouble alongside on that quiet night in Carimata Straits. The darkest night I have ever known. An accursed night."

Mrs. Travers bit her lip, waited a little, then asked quietly:

"What difficulty has he got into now?"

"Difficulty!" cried Lingard. "He is immensely pleased with himself, the young fool. You know, when you sent him to talk to me that evening you left the yacht, he came with a loaded pistol in his pocket. And now he has gone and done it."

"Done it?" repeated Mrs. Travers blankly. "Done what?"

She snatched from Lingard's unresisting palm the sheet of paper. While she was smoothing it Lingard moved round and stood close at her elbow. She ran quickly over the first lines, then her eyes steadied. At the end she drew a quick breath and looked up at Lingard. Their faces had never been



so close together before and Mrs. Travers had a surprising second of a perfectly new sensation. She looked away. — "Do you understand what this news means?" he murmured. Mrs. Travers let her hand fall by her side. "Yes," she said in a low tone. "The compact is broken."

Carter had begun his letter without any preliminaries:

You cleared out in the middle of the night and took the lady away with you. You left me no proper orders. But as a sailorman I looked upon myself as left in charge of two ships while within half a mile on that sandbank there were more than a hundred piratical cut-throats watching me as closely as so many tigers about to leap. Days went by without a word of you or the lady. To leave the ships outside and go inland to look for you was not to be thought of with all those pirates within springing distance. Put yourself in my place. Can't you imagine my anxiety, my sleepless nights? Each night worse than the night before. And still no word from you. I couldn't sit still and worry my head off about things I couldn't understand. I am a sailorman. My first duty was to the ships. I had to put an end to this impossible situation and I hope you will agree that I have done it in a seamanlike way. One misty morning I moved the brig nearer the sandbank and directly the mist cleared I opened fire on the praus of those savages which were anchored in the channel. We aimed wide at first to give those vagabonds that were on board a chance to clear out and join their friends camped on the sands. I didn't want to kill people. Then we got the long gun to bear and in about an hour we had the bottom knocked out of the two praus. The savages on the bank howled and screamed at every shot. They are mighty angry but I don't care for their anger now, for by sinking their praus I have made them as harmless as a flock of lambs. They needn't starve on their sandbank because they have two or three dugouts hauled up on the sand and they may ferry themselves and their women to the mainland whenever they like.

I fancy I have acted as a seaman and as a seaman I intend to go on acting. Now I have made the ships safe I shall set about without loss of time trying to get the yacht off the mud. When that's done I shall arm the boats and proceed inshore to look for you and the yacht's gentry, and shan't rest till I know whether any or all of you are above the earth yet.

I hope these words will reach you. Just as we had done the business of those praus the man you sent off that night in Carimata to stop our chief officer came sailing in from the west with our first gig in tow and the boat's

crew all well. Your serang tells me he is a most trustworthy messenger and that his name is Jaffir. He seems only too anxious to try to get to you as soon as possible. I repeat, ships and men have been made safe and I don't mean to give you up dead or alive.

"You are quick in taking the point," said Lingard in a dull voice, while Mrs. Travers, with the sheet of paper gripped in her hand, looked into his face with anxious eyes. "He has been smart and no mistake."

"He didn't know," murmured Mrs. Travers.

"No, he didn't know. But could I take everybody into my confidence?" protested Lingard in the same low tone. "And yet who else could I trust? It seemed to me that he must have understood without being told. But he is too young. He may well be proud according to his lights. He has done that job outside very smartly — damn his smartness! And here we are with all our lives depending on my word — which is broken now, Mrs. Travers. It is broken."

Mrs. Travers nodded at him slightly.

"They would sooner have expected to see the sun and the moon fall out of the sky," Lingard continued with repressed fire. Next moment it seemed to have gone out of him and Mrs. Travers heard him mutter a disconnected phrase. . . . "The world down about my ears."

"What will you do?" she whispered.

"What will I do?" repeated Lingard, gently. "Oh, yes — do. Mrs. Travers, do you see that I am nothing now? Just nothing."

He had lost himself in the contemplation of her face turned to him with an expression of awed curiosity. The shock of the world coming down about his ears in consequence of Carter's smartness was so terrific that it had dulled his sensibilities in the manner of a great pain or of a great catastrophe. What was there to look at but that woman's face, in a world which had lost its consistency, its shape, and its promises in a moment?

Mrs. Travers looked away. She understood that she had put to Lingard an impossible question. What was presenting itself to her as a problem was to that man a crisis of feeling. Obviously Carter's action had broken the compact entered into with Daman, and she was intelligent enough to understand that it was the sort of thing that could not be explained away. It wasn't horror that she felt, but a sort of consternation, something like the discomfiture of people who have just missed their train. It was only more

intense. The real dismay had yet to make its way into her comprehension. To Lingard it was a blow struck straight at his heart.

He was not angry with Carter. The fellow had acted like a seaman. Carter's concern was for the ships. In this fatality Carter was a mere incident. The real cause of the disaster was somewhere else, was other, and more remote. And at the same time Lingard could not defend himself from a feeling that it was in himself, too, somewhere in the unexplored depths of his nature, something fatal and unavoidable. He muttered to himself:

"No. I am not a lucky man."

This was but a feeble expression of the discovery of the truth that suddenly had come home to him as if driven into his breast by a revealing power which had decided that this was to be the end of his fling. But he was not the man to give himself up to the examination of his own sensations. His natural impulse was to grapple with the circumstances and that was what he was trying to do; but he missed now that sense of mastery which is half the battle. Conflict of some sort was the very essence of his life. But this was something he had never known before. This was a conflict within himself. He had to face unsuspected powers, foes that he could not go out to meet at the gate. They were within, as though he had been betrayed by somebody, by some secret enemy. He was ready to look round for that subtle traitor. A sort of blankness fell on his mind and he suddenly thought: "Why! It's myself."

Immediately afterward he had a clear, merciless recollection of Hassim and Immada. He saw them far off beyond the forests. Oh, yes, they existed — within his breast!

"That was a night!" he muttered, looking straight at Mrs. Travers. He had been looking at her all the time. His glance had held her under a spell, but for a whole interminable minute he had not been aware of her at all. At the murmur of his words she made a slight movement and he saw her again. — "What night?" she whispered, timidly, like an intruder. She was astonished to see him smile. — "Not like this one," he said. "You made me notice how quiet and still it was. Yes. Listen how still it is."

Both moved their heads slightly and seemed to lend an ear. There was not a murmur, sigh, rustle, splash, or footfall. No whispers, no tremors, not a sound of any kind. They might have been alone on board the Emma, abandoned even by the ghost of Captain Jorgenson departed to rejoin the Barque Wild Rose on the shore of the Cimmerian sea. — "It's like the

stillness of the end," said Mrs. Travers in a low, equable voice. — "Yes, but that, too, is false," said Lingard in the same tone. — "I don't understand," Mrs. Travers began, hurriedly, after a short silence. "But don't use that word. Don't use it, King Tom! It frightens me by its mere sound."

Lingard made no sign. His thoughts were back with Hassim and Immada. The young chief and his sister had gone up country on a voluntary mission to persuade Belarab to return to his stockade and to take up again the direction of affairs. They carried urgent messages from Lingard, who for Belarab was the very embodiment of truth and force, that unquestioned force which had permitted Belarab to indulge in all his melancholy hesitations. But those two young people had also some personal prestige. They were Lingard's heart's friends. They were like his children. But beside that, their high birth, their warlike story, their wanderings, adventures, and prospects had given them a glamour of their own.

## V

The very day that Travers and d'Alcacer had come on board the Emma Hassim and Immada had departed on their mission; for Lingard, of course, could not think of leaving the white people alone with Jorgenson. Jorgenson was all right, but his ineradicable habit of muttering in his moustache about "throwing a lighted match amongst the powder barrels" had inspired Lingard with a certain amount of mistrust. And, moreover, he did not want to go away from Mrs. Travers.

It was the only correct inspiration on Carter's part to send Jaffir with his report to Lingard. That stout-hearted fighter, swimmer, and devoted follower of the princely misfortunes of Hassim and Immada, had looked upon his mission to catch the chief officer of the yacht (which he had received from Lingard in Carimata) as a trifling job. It took him a little longer than he expected but he had got back to the brig just in time to be sent on to Lingard with Carter's letter after a couple of hours' rest. He had the story of all the happenings from Wasub before he left and though his face preserved its grave impassivity, in his heart he did not like it at all.

Fearless and wily, Jaffir was the man for difficult missions and a born messenger — as he expressed it himself — "to bear weighty words between great men." With his unfailing memory he was able to reproduce them exactly, whether soft or hard, in council or in private; for he knew no fear. With him there was no need for writing which might fall into the hands of the enemy. If he died on the way the message would die with him. He had

also the gift of getting at the sense of any situation and an observant eye. He was distinctly one of those men from whom trustworthy information can be obtained by the leaders of great enterprises. Lingard did put several questions to him, but in this instance, of course, Jaffir could have only very little to say. Of Carter, whom he called the “young one,” he said that he looked as white men look when they are pleased with themselves; then added without waiting for a definite question — “The ships out there are now safe enough, O, Rajah Laut!” There was no elation in his tone.

Lingard looked at him blankly. When the Greatest of White Men remarked that there was yet a price to be paid for that safety, Jaffir assented by a “Yes, by Allah!” without losing for a moment his grim composure. When told that he would be required to go and find his master and the lady Immada who were somewhere in the back country, in Belarab’s travelling camp, he declared himself ready to proceed at once. He had eaten his fill and had slept three hours on board the brig and he was not tired. When he was young he used to get tired sometimes; but for many years now he had known no such weakness. He did not require the boat with paddlers in which he had come up into the lagoon. He would go alone in a small canoe. This was no time, he remarked, for publicity and ostentation. His pent-up anxiety burst through his lips. “It is in my mind, Tuan, that death has not been so near them since that night when you came sailing in a black cloud and took us all out of the stockade.”

Lingard said nothing but there was in Jaffir a faith in that white man which was not easily shaken.

“How are you going to save them this time, O Rajah Laut?” he asked, simply.

“Belarab is my friend,” murmured Lingard.

In his anxiety Jaffir was very outspoken. “A man of peace!” he exclaimed in a low tone. “Who could be safe with a man like that?” he asked, contemptuously.

“There is no war,” said Lingard

“There is suspicion, dread, and revenge, and the anger of armed men,” retorted Jaffir. “You have taken the white prisoners out of their hands by the force of your words alone. Is that so, Tuan?”

“Yes,” said Lingard.

“And you have them on board here?” asked Jaffir, with a glance over his shoulder at the white and misty structure within which by the light of a

small oil flame d'Alcacer and Mrs. Travers were just then conversing.

"Yes, I have them here."

"Then, Rajah Laut," whispered Jaffir, "you can make all safe by giving them back."

"Can I do that?" were the words breathed out through Lingard's lips to the faithful follower of Hassim and Immada.

"Can you do anything else?" was the whispered retort of Jaffir the messenger accustomed to speak frankly to the great of the earth. "You are a white man and you can have only one word. And now I go."

A small, rough dug-out belonging to the Emma had been brought round to the ladder. A shadowy calash hovering respectfully in the darkness of the deck had already cleared his throat twice in a warning manner.

"Yes, Jaffir, go," said Lingard, "and be my friend."

"I am the friend of a great prince," said the other, sturdily. "But you, Rajah Laut, were even greater. And great you will remain while you are with us, people of this sea and of this land. But what becomes of the strength of your arms before your own white people? Where does it go to, I say? Well, then, we must trust in the strength of your heart."

"I hope that will never fail," said Lingard, and Jaffir emitted a grunt of satisfaction. "But God alone sees into men's hearts."

"Yes. Our refuge is with Allah," assented Jaffir, who had acquired the habit of pious turns of speech in the frequentation of professedly religious men, of whom there were many in Belarab's stockade. As a matter of fact, he reposed all his trust in Lingard who had with him the prestige of a providential man sent at the hour of need by heaven itself. He waited a while, then: "What is the message I am to take?" he asked.

"Tell the whole tale to the Rajah Hassim," said Lingard. "And tell him to make his way here with the lady his sister secretly and with speed. The time of great trouble has come. Let us, at least, be together."

"Right! Right!" Jaffir approved, heartily. "To die alone under the weight of one's enemies is a dreadful fate."

He stepped back out of the sheen of the lamp by which they had been talking and making his way down into the small canoe he took up a paddle and without a splash vanished on the dark lagoon.

It was then that Mrs. Travers and d'Alcacer heard Lingard call aloud for Jorgenson. Instantly the familiar shadow stood at Lingard's elbow and listened in detached silence. Only at the end of the tale it marvelled audibly:

“Here’s a mess for you if you like.” But really nothing in the world could astonish or startle old Jorgenson. He turned away muttering in his moustache. Lingard remained with his chin in his hand and Jaffir’s last words took gradual possession of his mind. Then brusquely he picked up the lamp and went to seek Mrs. Travers. He went to seek her because he actually needed her bodily presence, the sound of her voice, the dark, clear glance of her eyes. She could do nothing for him. On his way he became aware that Jorgenson had turned out the few Malays on board the Emma and was disposing them about the decks to watch the lagoon in all directions. On calling Mrs. Travers out of the Cage Lingard was, in the midst of his mental struggle, conscious of a certain satisfaction in taking her away from d’Alcacer. He couldn’t spare any of her attention to any other man, not the least crumb of her time, not the least particle of her thought! He needed it all. To see it withdrawn from him for the merest instant was irritating — seemed a disaster.

D’Alcacer, left alone, wondered at the imperious tone of Lingard’s call. To this observer of shades the fact seemed considerable. “Sheer nerves,” he concluded, to himself. “The man is overstrung. He must have had some sort of shock.” But what could it be — he wondered to himself. In the tense stagnation of those days of waiting the slightest tremor had an enormous importance. D’Alcacer did not seek his camp bedstead. He didn’t even sit down. With the palms of his hands against the edge of the table he leaned back against it. In that negligent attitude he preserved an alert mind which for a moment wondered whether Mrs. Travers had not spoiled Lingard a little. Yet in the suddenness of the forced association, where, too, d’Alcacer was sure there was some moral problem in the background, he recognized the extreme difficulty of weighing accurately the imperious demands against the necessary reservations, the exact proportions of boldness and caution. And d’Alcacer admired upon the whole Mrs. Travers’ cleverness.

There could be no doubt that she had the situation in her hands. That, of course, did not mean safety. She had it in her hands as one may hold some highly explosive and uncertain compound. D’Alcacer thought of her with profound sympathy and with a quite unselfish interest. Sometimes in a street we cross the path of personalities compelling sympathy and wonder but for all that we don’t follow them home. D’Alcacer refrained from following Mrs. Travers any further. He had become suddenly aware that Mr. Travers was sitting up on his camp bedstead. He must have done it very

suddenly. Only a moment before he had appeared plunged in the deepest slumber, and the stillness for a long time now had been perfectly unbroken. D'Alcacer was startled enough for an exclamation and Mr. Travers turned his head slowly in his direction. D'Alcacer approached the bedstead with a certain reluctance.

"Awake?" he said.

"A sudden chill," said Mr. Travers. "But I don't feel cold now. Strange! I had the impression of an icy blast."

"Ah!" said d'Alcacer.

"Impossible, of course!" went on Mr. Travers. "This stagnating air never moves. It clings odiously to one. What time is it?"

"Really, I don't know."

"The glass of my watch was smashed on that night when we were so treacherously assailed by the savages on the sandbank," grumbled Mr. Travers.

"I must say I was never so surprised in my life," confessed d'Alcacer. "We had stopped and I was lighting a cigar, you may remember."

"No," said Mr. Travers. "I had just then pulled out my watch. Of course it flew out of my hand but it hung by the chain. Somebody trampled on it. The hands are broken off short. It keeps on ticking but I can't tell the time. It's absurd. Most provoking."

"Do you mean to say," asked d'Alcacer, "that you have been winding it up every evening?"

Mr. Travers looked up from his bedstead and he also seemed surprised. "Why! I suppose I have." He kept silent for a while. "It isn't so much blind habit as you may think. My habits are the outcome of strict method. I had to order my life methodically. You know very well, my dear d'Alcacer, that without strict method I would not have been able to get through my work and would have had no time at all for social duties, which, of course, are of very great importance. I may say that, materially, method has been the foundation of my success in public life. There were never any empty moments in my day. And now this! . . ." He looked all round the Cage. . . . "Where's my wife?" he asked.

"I was talking to her only a moment ago," answered d'Alcacer. "I don't know the time. My watch is on board the yacht; but it isn't late, you know."

Mr. Travers flung off with unwonted briskness the light cotton sheet which covered him. He buttoned hastily the tunic which he had unfastened



before lying down, and just as d'Alcacer was expecting him to swing his feet to the deck impetuously, he lay down again on the pillow and remained perfectly still.

D'Alcacer waited awhile and then began to pace the Cage. After a couple of turns he stopped and said, gently:

"I am afraid, Travers, you are not very well."

"I don't know what illness is," answered the voice from the pillow to the great relief of d'Alcacer who really had not expected an answer. "Good health is a great asset in public life. Illness may make you miss a unique opportunity. I was never ill."

All this came out deadened in tone, as if the speaker's face had been buried in the pillow. D'Alcacer resumed his pacing.

"I think I asked you where my wife was," said the muffled voice.

With great presence of mind d'Alcacer kept on pacing the Cage as if he had not heard. — "You know, I think she is mad," went on the muffled voice. "Unless I am."

Again d'Alcacer managed not to interrupt his regular pacing. "Do you know what I think?" he said, abruptly. "I think, Travers, that you don't want to talk about her. I think that you don't want to talk about anything. And to tell you the truth I don't want to, either."

D'Alcacer caught a faint sigh from the pillow and at the same time saw a small, dim flame appear outside the Cage. And still he kept on his pacing. Mrs. Travers and Lingard coming out of the deckhouse stopped just outside the door and Lingard stood the deck-lamp on its roof. They were too far from d'Alcacer to be heard, but he could make them out: Mrs. Travers, as straight as an arrow, and the heavy bulk of the man who faced her with a lowered head. He saw it in profile against the light and as if deferential in its slight droop. They were looking straight at each other. Neither of them made the slightest gesture.

"There is that in me," Lingard murmured, deeply, "which would set my heart harder than a stone. I am King Tom, Rajah Laut, and fit to look any man hereabouts in the face. I have my name to take care of. Everything rests on that."

"Mr. d'Alcacer would express this by saying that everything rested on honour," commented Mrs. Travers with lips that did not tremble, though from time to time she could feel the accelerated beating of her heart.

“Call it what you like. It’s something that a man needs to draw a free breath. And look! — as you see me standing before you here I care for it no longer.”

“But I do care for it,” retorted Mrs. Travers. “As you see me standing here — I do care. This is something that is your very own. You have a right to it. And I repeat I do care for it.”

“Care for something of my own,” murmured Lingard, very close to her face. “Why should you care for my rights?”

“Because,” she said, holding her ground though their foreheads were nearly touching, “because if I ever get back to my life I don’t want to make it more absurd by real remorse.”

Her tone was soft and Lingard received the breath of those words like a caress on his face. D’Alcacer, in the Cage, made still another effort to keep up his pacing. He didn’t want to give Mr. Travers the slightest excuse for sitting up again and looking round.

“That I should live to hear anybody say they cared anything for what was mine!” whispered Lingard. “And that it should be you — you, who have taken all hardness out of me.”

“I don’t want your heart to be made hard. I want it to be made firm.”

“You couldn’t have said anything better than what you have said just now to make it steady,” flowed the murmur of Lingard’s voice with something tender in its depth. “Has anybody ever had a friend like this?” he exclaimed, raising his head as if taking the starry night to witness.

“And I ask myself is it possible that there should be another man on earth that I could trust as I trust you. I say to you: Yes! Go and save what you have a right to and don’t forget to be merciful. I will not remind you of our perfect innocence. The earth must be small indeed that we should have blundered like this into your life. It’s enough to make one believe in fatality. But I can’t find it in me to behave like a fatalist, to sit down with folded hands. Had you been another kind of man I might have been too hopeless or too disdainful. Do you know what Mr. d’Alcacer calls you?”

Inside the Cage d’Alcacer, casting curious glances in their direction, saw Lingard shake his head and thought with slight uneasiness: “He is refusing her something.”

“Mr. d’Alcacer’s name for you is the ‘Man of Fate’,” said Mrs. Travers, a little breathlessly.

“A mouthful. Never mind, he is a gentleman. It’s what you. . . .”

"I call you all but by your Christian name," said Mrs. Travers, hastily. "Believe me, Mr. d'Alcacer understands you."

"He is all right," interjected Lingard.

"And he is innocent. I remember what you have said — that the innocent must take their chance. Well, then, do what is right."

"You think it would be right? You believe it? You feel it?"

"At this time, in this place, from a man like you — Yes, it is right."

Lingard thought that woman wonderfully true to him and wonderfully fearless with herself. The necessity to take back the two captives to the stockade was so clear and unavoidable now, that he believed nothing on earth could have stopped him from doing so, but where was there another woman in the world who would have taken it like this? And he reflected that in truth and courage there is found wisdom. It seemed to him that till Mrs. Travers came to stand by his side he had never known what truth and courage and wisdom were. With his eyes on her face and having been told that in her eyes he appeared worthy of being both commanded and entreated, he felt an instant of complete content, a moment of, as it were, perfect emotional repose.

During the silence Mrs. Travers with a quick side-glance noticed d'Alcacer as one sees a man in a mist, his mere dark shape arrested close to the muslin screen. She had no doubt that he was looking in their direction and that he could see them much more plainly than she could see him. Mrs. Travers thought suddenly how anxious he must be; and she remembered that he had begged her for some sign, for some warning, beforehand, at the moment of crisis. She had understood very well his hinted request for time to get prepared. If he was to get more than a few minutes, this was the moment to make him a sign — the sign he had suggested himself. Mrs. Travers moved back the least bit so as to let the light fall in front of her and with a slow, distinct movement she put her left hand to her forehead.

"Well, then," she heard Lingard's forcible murmur, "well, then, Mrs. Travers, it must be done to-night."

One may be true, fearless, and wise, and yet catch one's breath before the simple finality of action. Mrs. Travers caught her breath: "To-night! To-night!" she whispered. D'Alcacer's dark and misty silhouette became more blurred. He had seen her sign and had retreated deeper within the Cage.

"Yes, to-night," affirmed Lingard. "Now, at once, within the hour, this moment," he murmured, fiercely, following Mrs. Travers in her recoiling

movement. She felt her arm being seized swiftly. "Don't you see that if it is to do any good, that if they are not to be delivered to mere slaughter, it must be done while all is dark ashore, before an armed mob in boats comes clamouring alongside? Yes. Before the night is an hour older, so that I may be hammering at Belarab's gate while all the Settlement is still asleep."

Mrs. Travers didn't dream of protesting. For the moment she was unable to speak. This man was very fierce and just as suddenly as it had been gripped (making her think incongruously in the midst of her agitation that there would be certainly a bruise there in the morning) she felt her arm released and a penitential tone come into Lingard's murmuring voice.

"And even now it's nearly too late! The road was plain, but I saw you on it and my heart failed me. I was there like an empty man and I dared not face you. You must forgive me. No, I had no right to doubt you for a moment. I feel as if I ought to go on my knees and beg your pardon for forgetting what you are, for daring to forget."

"Why, King Tom, what is it?"

"It seems as if I had sinned," she heard him say. He seized her by the shoulders, turned her about, moved her forward a step or two. His hands were heavy, his force irresistible, though he himself imagined he was handling her gently. "Look straight before you," he growled into her ear. "Do you see anything?" Mrs. Travers, passive between the rigid arms, could see nothing but, far off, the massed, featureless shadows of the shore.

"No, I see nothing," she said.

"You can't be looking the right way," she heard him behind her. And now she felt her head between Lingard's hands. He moved it the least bit to the right. "There! See it?"

"No. What am I to look for?"

"A gleam of light," said Lingard, taking away his hands suddenly. "A gleam that will grow into a blaze before our boat can get half way across the lagoon."

Even as Lingard spoke Mrs. Travers caught sight of a red spark far away. She had looked often enough at the Settlement, as on the face of a painting on a curtain, to have its configuration fixed in her mind, to know that it was on the beach at its end furthest from Belarab's stockade.

"The brushwood is catching," murmured Lingard in her ear. "If they had some dry grass the whole pile would be blazing by now."

"And this means. . . ."

“It means that the news has spread. And it is before Tengga’s enclosure on his end of the beach. That’s where all the brains of the Settlement are. It means talk and excitement and plenty of crafty words. Tengga’s fire! I tell you, Mrs. Travers, that before half an hour has passed Daman will be there to make friends with the fat Tengga, who is ready to say to him, ‘I told you so’.”

“I see,” murmured Mrs. Travers. Lingard drew her gently to the rail.

“And now look over there at the other end of the beach where the shadows are heaviest. That is Belarab’s fort, his houses, his treasure, his dependents. That’s where the strength of the Settlement is. I kept it up. I made it last. But what is it now? It’s like a weapon in the hand of a dead man. And yet it’s all we have to look to, if indeed there is still time. I swear to you I wouldn’t dare land them in daylight for fear they should be slaughtered on the beach.”

“There is no time to lose,” whispered Mrs. Travers, and Lingard, too, spoke very low.

“No, not if I, too, am to keep what is my right. It’s you who have said it.”

“Yes, I have said it,” she whispered, without lifting her head. Lingard made a brusque movement at her elbow and bent his head close to her shoulder.

“And I who mistrusted you! Like Arabs do to their great men, I ought to kiss the hem of your robe in repentance for having doubted the greatness of your heart.”

“Oh! my heart!” said Mrs. Travers, lightly, still gazing at the fire, which had suddenly shot up to a tall blaze. “I can assure you it has been of very little account in the world.” She paused for a moment to steady her voice, then said, firmly, “Let’s get this over.”

“To tell you the truth the boat has been ready for some time.”

“Well, then. . . .”

“Mrs. Travers,” said Lingard with an effort, “they are people of your own kind.” And suddenly he burst out: “I cannot take them ashore bound hand and foot.”

“Mr. d’Alcacer knows. You will find him ready. Ever since the beginning he has been prepared for whatever might happen.”

“He is a man,” said Lingard with conviction. “But it’s of the other that I am thinking.”

“Ah, the other,” she repeated. “Then, what about my thoughts? Luckily we have Mr. d’Alcacer. I shall speak to him first.”

She turned away from the rail and moved toward the Cage.

“Jorgenson,” the voice of Lingard resounded all along the deck, “get a light on the gangway.” Then he followed Mrs. Travers slowly.

## VI

D’Alcacer, after receiving his warning, stepped back and leaned against the edge of the table. He could not ignore in himself a certain emotion. And indeed, when he had asked Mrs. Travers for a sign he expected to be moved — but he had not expected the sign to come so soon. He expected this night to pass like other nights, in broken slumbers, bodily discomfort, and the unrest of disconnected thinking. At the same time he was surprised at his own emotion. He had flattered himself on the possession of more philosophy. He thought that this famous sense of self-preservation was a queer thing, a purely animal thing. “For, as a thinking man,” he reflected, “I really ought not to care.” It was probably the unusual that affected him. Clearly. If he had been lying seriously ill in a room in a hotel and had overheard some ominous whispers he would not have cared in the least. Ah, but then he would have been ill — and in illness one grows so indifferent. Illness is a great help to unemotional behaviour, which of course is the correct behaviour for a man of the world. He almost regretted he was not very ill. But, then, Mr. Travers was obviously ill and it did not seem to help him much. D’Alcacer glanced at the bedstead where Mr. Travers preserved an immobility which struck d’Alcacer as obviously affected. He mistrusted it. Generally he mistrusted Mr. Travers. One couldn’t tell what he would do next. Not that he could do much one way or another, but that somehow he threatened to rob the situation of whatever dignity it may have had as a stroke of fate, as a call on courage. Mr. d’Alcacer, acutely observant and alert for the slightest hints, preferred to look upon himself as the victim not of a swindle but of a rough man naively engaged in a contest with heaven’s injustice. D’Alcacer did not examine his heart, but some lines of a French poet came into his mind, to the effect that in all times those who fought with an unjust heaven had possessed the secret admiration and love of men. He didn’t go so far as love but he could not deny to himself that his feeling toward Lingard was secretly friendly and — well, appreciative. Mr. Travers sat up suddenly. What a horrible nuisance, thought d’Alcacer, fixing his

eyes on the tips of his shoes with the hope that perhaps the other would lie down again. Mr. Travers spoke.

“Still up, d’Alcacer?”

“I assure you it isn’t late. It’s dark at six, we dined before seven, that makes the night long and I am not a very good sleeper; that is, I cannot go to sleep till late in the night.”

“I envy you,” said Mr. Travers, speaking with a sort of drowsy apathy. “I am always dropping off and the awakenings are horrible.”

D’Alcacer, raising his eyes, noticed that Mrs. Travers and Lingard had vanished from the light. They had gone to the rail where d’Alcacer could not see them. Some pity mingled with his vexation at Mr. Travers’ snatchy wakefulness. There was something weird about the man, he reflected. “Jorgenson,” he began aloud.

“What’s that?” snapped Mr. Travers.

“It’s the name of that lanky old store-keeper who is always about the decks.”

“I haven’t seen him. I don’t see anybody. I don’t know anybody. I prefer not to notice.”

“I was only going to say that he gave me a pack of cards; would you like a game of piquet?”

“I don’t think I could keep my eyes open,” said Mr. Travers in an unexpectedly confidential tone. “Isn’t it funny, d’Alcacer? And then I wake up. It’s too awful.”

D’Alcacer made no remark and Mr. Travers seemed not to have expected any.

“When I said my wife was mad,” he began, suddenly, causing d’Alcacer to start, “I didn’t mean it literally, of course.” His tone sounded slightly dogmatic and he didn’t seem to be aware of any interval during which he had appeared to sleep. D’Alcacer was convinced more than ever that he had been shamming, and resigned himself wearily to listen, folding his arms across his chest. “What I meant, really,” continued Mr. Travers, “was that she is the victim of a craze. Society is subject to crazes, as you know very well. They are not reprehensible in themselves, but the worst of my wife is that her crazes are never like those of the people with whom she naturally associates. They generally run counter to them. This peculiarity has given me some anxiety, you understand, in the position we occupy. People will begin to say that she is eccentric. Do you see her anywhere, d’Alcacer?”

D'Alcacer was thankful to be able to say that he didn't see Mrs. Travers. He didn't even hear any murmurs, though he had no doubt that everybody on board the Emma was wide awake by now. But Mr. Travers inspired him with invincible mistrust and he thought it prudent to add:

"You forget that your wife has a room in the deckhouse."

This was as far as he would go, for he knew very well that she was not in the deckhouse. Mr. Travers, completely convinced by the statement, made no sound. But neither did he lie down again. D'Alcacer gave himself up to meditation. The night seemed extremely oppressive. At Lingard's shout for Jorgenson, that in the profound silence struck his ears ominously, he raised his eyes and saw Mrs. Travers outside the door of the Cage. He started forward but she was already within. He saw she was moved. She seemed out of breath and as if unable to speak at first.

"Hadn't we better shut the door?" suggested d'Alcacer.

"Captain Lingard's coming in," she whispered to him. "He has made up his mind."

"That's an excellent thing," commented d'Alcacer, quietly. "I conclude from this that we shall hear something."

"You shall hear it all from me," breathed out Mrs. Travers.

"Ah!" exclaimed d'Alcacer very low.

By that time Lingard had entered, too, and the decks of the Emma were all astir with moving figures. Jorgenson's voice was also heard giving directions. For nearly a minute the four persons within the Cage remained motionless. A shadowy Malay in the gangway said suddenly: "Sudah, Tuan," and Lingard murmured, "Ready, Mrs. Travers."

She seized d'Alcacer's arm and led him to the side of the Cage furthest from the corner in which Mr. Travers' bed was placed, while Lingard busied himself in pricking up the wick of the Cage lantern as if it had suddenly occurred to him that this, whatever happened, should not be a deed of darkness. Mr. Travers did nothing but turn his head to look over his shoulder.

"One moment," said d'Alcacer, in a low tone and smiling at Mrs. Travers' agitation. "Before you tell me anything let me ask you: 'Have you made up your mind?'" He saw with much surprise a widening of her eyes. Was it indignation? A pause as of suspicion fell between those two people. Then d'Alcacer said apologetically: "Perhaps I ought not to have asked that



question,” and Lingard caught Mrs. Travers’ words, “Oh, I am not afraid to answer that question.”

Then their voices sank. Lingard hung the lamp up again and stood idle in the revived light; but almost immediately he heard d’Alcacer calling him discreetly.

“Captain Lingard!”

He moved toward them at once. At the same instant Mr. Travers’ head pivoted away from the group to its frontal position.

D’Alcacer, very serious, spoke in a familiar undertone.

“Mrs. Travers tells me that we must be delivered up to those Moors on shore.”

“Yes, there is nothing else for it,” said Lingard.

“I confess I am a bit startled,” said d’Alcacer; but except for a slightly hurried utterance nobody could have guessed at anything resembling emotion.

“I have a right to my good name,” said Lingard, also very calm, while Mrs. Travers near him, with half-veiled eyes, listened impassive like a presiding genius.

“I wouldn’t question that for a moment,” conceded d’Alcacer. “A point of honour is not to be discussed. But there is such a thing as humanity, too. To be delivered up helplessly. . . .”

“Perhaps!” interrupted Lingard. “But you needn’t feel hopeless. I am not at liberty to give up my life for your own. Mrs. Travers knows why. That, too, is engaged.”

“Always on your honour?”

“I don’t know. A promise is a promise.”

“Nobody can be held to the impossible,” remarked d’Alcacer.

“Impossible! What is impossible? I don’t know it. I am not a man to talk of the impossible or dodge behind it. I did not bring you here.”

D’Alcacer lowered his head for a moment. “I have finished,” he said, gravely. “That much I had to say. I hope you don’t think I have appeared unduly anxious.”

“It’s the best policy, too.” Mrs. Travers made herself heard suddenly. Nothing of her moved but her lips, she did not even raise her eyes. “It’s the only possible policy. You believe me, Mr. d’Alcacer? . . .” He made an almost imperceptible movement of the head. . . . “Well, then, I put all my

hope in you, Mr. d'Alcacer, to get this over as easily as possible and save us all from some odious scene. You think perhaps that it is I who ought to. . . ."

"No, no! I don't think so," interrupted d'Alcacer. "It would be impossible."

"I am afraid it would," she admitted, nervously.

D'Alcacer made a gesture as if to beg her to say no more and at once crossed over to Mr. Travers' side of the Cage. He did not want to give himself time to think about his task. Mr. Travers was sitting up on the camp bedstead with a light cotton sheet over his legs. He stared at nothing, and on approaching him d'Alcacer disregarded the slight sinking of his own heart at this aspect which seemed to be that of extreme terror. "This is awful," he thought. The man kept as still as a hare in its form.

The impressed d'Alcacer had to make an effort to bring himself to tap him lightly on the shoulder.

"The moment has come, Travers, to show some fortitude," he said with easy intimacy. Mr. Travers looked up swiftly. "I have just been talking to your wife. She had a communication from Captain Lingard for us both. It remains for us now to preserve as much as possible our dignity. I hope that if necessary we will both know how to die."

In a moment of profound stillness, d'Alcacer had time to wonder whether his face was as stony in expression as the one upturned to him. But suddenly a smile appeared on it, which was certainly the last thing d'Alcacer expected to see. An indubitable smile. A slightly contemptuous smile.

"My wife has been stuffing your head with some more of her nonsense." Mr. Travers spoke in a voice which astonished d'Alcacer as much as the smile, a voice that was not irritable nor peevish, but had a distinct note of indulgence. "My dear d'Alcacer, that craze has got such a hold of her that she would tell you any sort of tale. Social impostors, mediums, fortune-tellers, charlatans of all sorts do obtain a strange influence over women. You have seen that sort of thing yourself. I had a talk with her before dinner. The influence that bandit has got over her is incredible. I really believe the fellow is half crazy himself. They often are, you know. I gave up arguing with her. Now, what is it you have got to tell me? But I warn you that I am not going to take it seriously."

He rejected briskly the cotton sheet, put his feet to the ground and buttoned his jacket. D'Alcacer, as he talked, became aware by the slight

noise behind him that Mrs. Travers and Lingard were leaving the Cage, but he went on to the end and then waited anxiously for the answer.

“See! She has followed him out on deck,” were Mr. Travers’ first words. “I hope you understand that it is a mere craze. You can’t help seeing that. Look at her costume. She simply has lost her head. Luckily the world needn’t know. But suppose that something similar had happened at home. It would have been extremely awkward. Oh! yes, I will come. I will go anywhere. I can’t stand this hulk, those people, this infernal Cage. I believe I should fall ill if I were to remain here.”

The inward detached voice of Jorgenson made itself heard near the gangway saying: “The boat has been waiting for this hour past, King Tom.”

“Let us make a virtue of necessity and go with a good grace,” said d’Alcacer, ready to take Mr. Travers under the arm persuasively, for he did not know what to make of that gentleman.

But Mr. Travers seemed another man. “I am afraid, d’Alcacer, that you, too, are not very strong-minded. I am going to take a blanket off this bedstead. . . .” He flung it hastily over his arm and followed d’Alcacer closely. “What I suffer mostly from, strange to say, is cold.”

Mrs. Travers and Lingard were waiting near the gangway. To everybody’s extreme surprise Mr. Travers addressed his wife first.

“You were always laughing at people’s crazes,” was what he said, “and now you have a craze of your own. But we won’t discuss that.”

D’Alcacer passed on, raising his cap to Mrs. Travers, and went down the ship’s side into the boat. Jorgenson had vanished in his own manner like an exorcised ghost, and Lingard, stepping back, left husband and wife face to face.

“Did you think I was going to make a fuss?” asked Mr. Travers in a very low voice. “I assure you I would rather go than stay here. You didn’t think that? You have lost all sense of reality, of probability. I was just thinking this evening that I would rather be anywhere than here looking on at you. At your folly. . . .”

Mrs. Travers’ loud, “Martin!” made Lingard wince, caused d’Alcacer to lift his head down there in the boat, and even Jorgenson, forward somewhere out of sight, ceased mumbling in his moustache. The only person who seemed not to have heard that exclamation was Mr. Travers himself, who continued smoothly:

“. . . at the aberration of your mind, you who seemed so superior to common credulities. You are not yourself, not at all, and some day you will admit to me that . . . No, the best thing will be to forget it, as you will soon see yourself. We shall never mention that subject in the future. I am certain you will be only too glad to agree with me on that point.”

“How far ahead are you looking?” asked Mrs. Travers, finding her voice and even the very tone in which she would have addressed him had they been about to part in the hall of their town house. She might have been asking him at what time he expected to be home, while a footman held the door open and the brougham waited in the street.

“Not very far. This can’t last much longer.” Mr. Travers made a movement as if to leave her exactly as though he were rather pressed to keep an appointment. “By the by,” he said, checking himself, “I suppose the fellow understands thoroughly that we are wealthy. He could hardly doubt that.”

“It’s the last thought that would enter his head,” said Mrs. Travers.

“Oh, yes, just so,” Mr. Travers allowed a little impatience to pierce under his casual manner. “But I don’t mind telling you that I have had enough of this. I am prepared to make — ah! — to make concessions. A large pecuniary sacrifice. Only the whole position is so absurd! He might conceivably doubt my good faith. Wouldn’t it be just as well if you, with your particular influence, would hint to him that with me he would have nothing to fear? I am a man of my word.”

“That is the first thing he would naturally think of any man,” said Mrs. Travers.

“Will your eyes never be opened?” Mr. Travers began, irritably, then gave it up. “Well, so much the better then. I give you a free hand.”

“What made you change your attitude like this?” asked Mrs. Travers, suspiciously.

“My regard for you,” he answered without hesitation.

“I intended to join you in your captivity. I was just trying to persuade him. . . .”

“I forbid you absolutely,” whispered Mr. Travers, forcibly. “I am glad to get away. I don’t want to see you again till your craze is over.”

She was confounded by his secret vehemence. But instantly succeeding his fierce whisper came a short, inane society laugh and a much louder, “Not that I attach any importance . . .”

He sprang away, as it were, from his wife, and as he went over the gangway waved his hand to her amiably.

Lighted dimly by the lantern on the roof of the deckhouse Mrs. Travers remained very still with lowered head and an aspect of profound meditation. It lasted but an instant before she moved off and brushing against Lingard passed on with downcast eyes to her deck cabin. Lingard heard the door shut. He waited awhile, made a movement toward the gangway but checked himself and followed Mrs. Travers into her cabin.

It was pitch dark in there. He could see absolutely nothing and was oppressed by the profound stillness unstirred even by the sound of breathing.

"I am going on shore," he began, breaking the black and deathlike silence enclosing him and the invisible woman. "I wanted to say good-bye."

"You are going on shore," repeated Mrs. Travers. Her voice was emotionless, blank, unringing.

"Yes, for a few hours, or for life," Lingard said in measured tones. "I may have to die with them or to die maybe for others. For you, if I only knew how to manage it, I would want to live. I am telling you this because it is dark. If there had been a light in here I wouldn't have come in."

"I wish you had not," uttered the same unringing woman's voice. "You are always coming to me with those lives and those deaths in your hand."

"Yes, it's too much for you," was Lingard's undertoned comment. "You could be no other than true. And you are innocent! Don't wish me life, but wish me luck, for you are innocent — and you will have to take your chance."

"All luck to you, King Tom," he heard her say in the darkness in which he seemed now to perceive the gleam of her hair. "I will take my chance. And try not to come near me again for I am weary of you."

"I can well believe it," murmured Lingard, and stepped out of the cabin, shutting the door after him gently. For half a minute, perhaps, the stillness continued, and then suddenly the chair fell over in the darkness. Next moment Mrs. Travers' head appeared in the light of the lamp left on the roof of the deckhouse. Her bare arms grasped the door posts.

"Wait a moment," she said, loudly, into the shadows of the deck. She heard no footsteps, saw nothing moving except the vanishing white shape of the late Captain H. C. Jorgenson, who was indifferent to the life of men.

“Wait, King Tom!” she insisted, raising her voice; then, “I didn’t mean it. Don’t believe me!” she cried, recklessly.

For the second time that night a woman’s voice startled the hearts of men on board the Emma. All except the heart of old Jorgenson. The Malays in the boat looked up from their thwarts. D’Alcacer, sitting in the stern sheets beside Lingard, felt a sinking of his heart.

“What’s this?” he exclaimed. “I heard your name on deck. You are wanted, I think.”

“Shove off,” ordered Lingard, inflexibly, without even looking at d’Alcacer. Mr. Travers was the only one who didn’t seem to be aware of anything. A long time after the boat left the Emma’s side he leaned toward d’Alcacer.

“I have a most extraordinary feeling,” he said in a cautious undertone. “I seem to be in the air — I don’t know. Are we on the water, d’Alcacer? Are you quite sure? But of course, we are on the water.”

“Yes,” said d’Alcacer, in the same tone. “Crossing the Styx — perhaps.” He heard Mr. Travers utter an unmoved “Very likely,” which he did not expect. Lingard, his hand on the tiller, sat like a man of stone.

“Then your point of view has changed,” whispered d’Alcacer.

“I told my wife to make an offer,” went on the earnest whisper of the other man. “A sum of money. But to tell you the truth I don’t believe very much in its success.”

D’Alcacer made no answer and only wondered whether he didn’t like better Mr. Travers’ other, unreasonable mood. There was no denying the fact that Mr. Travers was a troubling person. Now he suddenly gripped d’Alcacer’s fore-arm and added under his breath: “I doubt everything. I doubt whether the offer will ever be made.”

All this was not very impressive. There was something pitiful in it: whisper, grip, shudder, as of a child frightened in the dark. But the emotion was deep. Once more that evening, but this time aroused by the husband’s distress, d’Alcacer’s wonder approached the borders of awe.

## PART VI. THE CLAIM OF LIFE AND THE TOLL OF DEATH

I

“Have you got King Tom’s watch in there?” said a voice that seemed not to attach the slightest importance to the question. Jorgenson, outside the door of Mrs. Travers’ part of the deckhouse, waited for the answer. He heard a low cry very much like a moan, the startled sound of pain that may be sometimes heard in sick rooms. But it moved him not at all. He would never have dreamt of opening the door unless told to do so, in which case he would have beheld, with complete indifference, Mrs. Travers extended on the floor with her head resting on the edge of the camp bedstead (on which Lingard had never slept), as though she had subsided there from a kneeling posture which is the attitude of prayer, supplication, or defeat. The hours of the night had passed Mrs. Travers by. After flinging herself on her knees, she didn’t know why, since she could think of nothing to pray for, had nothing to invoke, and was too far gone for such a futile thing as despair, she had remained there till the sense of exhaustion had grown on her to the point in which she lost her belief in her power to rise. In a half-sitting attitude, her head resting against the edge of the couch and her arms flung above her head, she sank into an indifference, the mere resignation of a worn-out body and a worn-out mind which often is the only sort of rest that comes to people who are desperately ill and is welcome enough in a way. The voice of Jorgenson roused her out of that state. She sat up, aching in every limb and cold all over.

Jorgenson, behind the door, repeated with lifeless obstinacy:

“Do you see King Tom’s watch in there?”

Mrs. Travers got up from the floor. She tottered, snatching at the air, and found the back of the armchair under her hand.

“Who’s there?”

She was also ready to ask: “Where am I?” but she remembered and at once became the prey of that active dread which had been lying dormant for a few hours in her uneasy and prostrate body. “What time is it?” she faltered out.

“Dawn,” pronounced the imperturbable voice at the door. It seemed to her that it was a word that could make any heart sink with apprehension.

Dawn! She stood appalled. And the toneless voice outside the door insisted:

“You must have Tom’s watch there!”

“I haven’t seen it,” she cried as if tormented by a dream.

“Look in that desk thing. If you push open the shutter you will be able to see.”

Mrs. Travers became aware of the profound darkness of the cabin. Jorgenson heard her staggering in there. After a moment a woman’s voice, which struck even him as strange, said in faint tones:

“I have it. It’s stopped.”

“It doesn’t matter. I don’t want to know the time. There should be a key about. See it anywhere?”

“Yes, it’s fastened to the watch,” the dazed voice answered from within. Jorgenson waited before making his request. “Will you pass it out to me? There’s precious little time left now!”

The door flew open, which was certainly something Jorgenson had not expected. He had expected but a hand with the watch protruded through a narrow crack, But he didn’t start back or give any other sign of surprise at seeing Mrs. Travers fully dressed. Against the faint clearness in the frame of the open shutter she presented to him the dark silhouette of her shoulders surmounted by a sleek head, because her hair was still in the two plaits. To Jorgenson Mrs. Travers in her un-European dress had always been displeasing, almost monstrous. Her stature, her gestures, her general carriage struck his eye as absurdly incongruous with a Malay costume, too ample, too free, too bold — offensive. To Mrs. Travers, Jorgenson, in the dusk of the passage, had the aspect of a dim white ghost, and he chilled her by his ghost’s aloofness.

He picked up the watch from her outspread palm without a word of thanks, only mumbling in his moustache, “H’m, yes, that’s it. I haven’t yet forgotten how to count seconds correctly, but it’s better to have a watch.”

She had not the slightest notion what he meant. And she did not care. Her mind remained confused and the sense of bodily discomfort oppressed her. She whispered, shamefacedly, “I believe I’ve slept.”

“I haven’t,” mumbled Jorgenson, growing more and more distinct to her eyes. The brightness of the short dawn increased rapidly as if the sun were impatient to look upon the Settlement. “No fear of that,” he added, boastfully.



It occurred to Mrs. Travers that perhaps she had not slept either. Her state had been more like an imperfect, half-conscious, quivering death. She shuddered at the recollection.

“What an awful night,” she murmured, drearily.

There was nothing to hope for from Jorgenson. She expected him to vanish, indifferent, like a phantom of the dead carrying off the appropriately dead watch in his hand for some unearthly purpose. Jorgenson didn’t move. His was an insensible, almost a senseless presence! Nothing could be extorted from it. But a wave of anguish as confused as all her other sensations swept Mrs. Travers off her feet.

“Can’t you tell me something?” she cried.

For half a minute perhaps Jorgenson made no sound; then: “For years I have been telling anybody who cared to ask,” he mumbled in his moustache. “Telling Tom, too. And Tom knew what he wanted to do. How’s one to know what you are after?”

She had never expected to hear so many words from that rigid shadow. Its monotonous mumble was fascinating, its sudden loquacity was shocking. And in the profound stillness that reigned outside it was as if there had been no one left in the world with her but the phantom of that old adventurer. He was heard again: “What I could tell you would be worse than poison.”

Mrs. Travers was not familiar with Jorgenson’s consecrated phrases. The mechanical voice, the words themselves, his air of abstraction appalled her. And he hadn’t done yet; she caught some more of his unconcerned mumbling: “There is nothing I don’t know,” and the absurdity of the statement was also appalling. Mrs. Travers gasped and with a wild little laugh:

“Then you know why I called after King Tom last night.”

He glanced away along his shoulder through the door of the deckhouse at the growing brightness of the day. She did so, too. It was coming. It had come! Another day! And it seemed to Mrs. Travers a worse calamity than any discovery she had made in her life, than anything she could have imagined to come to her. The very magnitude of horror steadied her, seemed to calm her agitation as some kinds of fatal drugs do before they kill. She laid a steady hand on Jorgenson’s sleeve and spoke quietly, distinctly, urgently.

“You were on deck. What I want to know is whether I was heard?”

“Yes,” said Jorgenson, absently, “I heard you.” Then, as if roused a little, he added less mechanically: “The whole ship heard you.”

Mrs. Travers asked herself whether perchance she had not simply screamed. It had never occurred to her before that perhaps she had. At the time it seemed to her she had no strength for more than a whisper. Had she been really so loud? And the deadly chill, the night that had gone by her had left in her body, vanished from her limbs, passed out of her in a flush. Her face was turned away from the light, and that fact gave her courage to continue. Moreover, the man before her was so detached from the shames and prides and schemes of life that he seemed not to count at all, except that somehow or other he managed at times to catch the mere literal sense of the words addressed to him — and answer them. And answer them! Answer unfailingly, impersonally, without any feeling.

“You saw Tom — King Tom? Was he there? I mean just then, at the moment. There was a light at the gangway. Was he on deck?”

“No. In the boat.”

“Already? Could I have been heard in the boat down there? You say the whole ship heard me — and I don’t care. But could he hear me?”

“Was it Tom you were after?” said Jorgenson in the tone of a negligent remark.

“Can’t you answer me?” she cried, angrily.

“Tom was busy. No child’s play. The boat shoved off,” said Jorgenson, as if he were merely thinking aloud.

“You won’t tell me, then?” Mrs. Travers apostrophized him, fearlessly. She was not afraid of Jorgenson. Just then she was afraid of nothing and nobody. And Jorgenson went on thinking aloud.

“I guess he will be kept busy from now on and so shall I.”

Mrs. Travers seemed ready to take by the shoulders and shake that dead-voiced spectre till it begged for mercy. But suddenly her strong white arms fell down by her side, the arms of an exhausted woman.

“I shall never, never find out,” she whispered to herself.

She cast down her eyes in intolerable humiliation, in intolerable desire, as though she had veiled her face. Not a sound reached the loneliness of her thought. But when she raised her eyes again Jorgenson was no longer standing before her.

For an instant she saw him all black in the brilliant and narrow doorway, and the next moment he had vanished outside, as if devoured by the hot

blaze of light. The sun had risen on the Shore of Refuge.

When Mrs. Travers came out on deck herself it was as it were with a boldly unveiled face, with wide-open and dry, sleepless eyes. Their gaze, undismayed by the sunshine, sought the innermost heart of things each day offered to the passion of her dread and of her impatience. The lagoon, the beach, the colours and the shapes struck her more than ever as a luminous painting on an immense cloth hiding the movements of an inexplicable life. She shaded her eyes with her hand. There were figures on the beach, moving dark dots on the white semicircle bounded by the stockades, backed by roof ridges above the palm groves. Further back the mass of carved white coral on the roof of the mosque shone like a white day-star. Religion and politics — always politics! To the left, before Tengga's enclosure, the loom of fire had changed into a pillar of smoke. But there were some big trees over there and she couldn't tell whether the night council had prolonged its sitting. Some vague forms were still moving there and she could picture them to herself: Daman, the supreme chief of sea-robbers, with a vengeful heart and the eyes of a gazelle; Sentot, the sour fanatic with the big turban, that other saint with a scanty loin cloth and ashes in his hair, and Tengga whom she could imagine from hearsay, fat, good-tempered, crafty, but ready to spill blood on his ambitious way and already bold enough to flaunt a yellow state umbrella at the very gate of Belarab's stockade — so they said.

She saw, she imagined, she even admitted now the reality of those things no longer a mere pageant marshalled for her vision with barbarous splendour and savage emphasis. She questioned it no longer — but she did not feel it in her soul any more than one feels the depth of the sea under its peaceful glitter or the turmoil of its grey fury. Her eyes ranged afar, unbelieving and fearful — and then all at once she became aware of the empty Cage with its interior in disorder, the camp bedsteads not taken away, a pillow lying on the deck, the dying flame like a shred of dull yellow stuff inside the lamp left hanging over the table. The whole struck her as squalid and as if already decayed, a flimsy and idle phantasy. But Jorgenson, seated on the deck with his back to it, was not idle. His occupation, too, seemed fantastic and so truly childish that her heart sank at the man's utter absorption in it. Jorgenson had before him, stretched on the deck, several bits of rather thin and dirty-looking rope of different lengths from a couple of inches to about a foot. He had (an idiot might have amused himself in

that way) set fire to the ends of them. They smouldered with amazing energy, emitting now and then a splutter, and in the calm air within the bulwarks sent up very slender, exactly parallel threads of smoke, each with a vanishing curl at the end; and the absorption with which Jorgenson gave himself up to that pastime was enough to shake all confidence in his sanity.

In one half-opened hand he was holding the watch. He was also provided with a scrap of paper and the stump of a pencil. Mrs. Travers was confident that he did not either hear or see her.

“Captain Jorgenson, you no doubt think. . . .”

He tried to wave her away with the stump of the pencil. He did not want to be interrupted in his strange occupation. He was playing very gravely indeed with those bits of string. “I lighted them all together,” he murmured, keeping one eye on the dial of the watch. Just then the shortest piece of string went out, utterly consumed. Jorgenson made a hasty note and remained still while Mrs. Travers looked at him with stony eyes thinking that nothing in the world was any use. The other threads of smoke went on vanishing in spirals before the attentive Jorgenson.

“What are you doing?” asked Mrs. Travers, drearily.

“Timing match . . . precaution. . . .”

He had never in Mrs. Travers’ experience been less spectral than then. He displayed a weakness of the flesh. He was impatient at her intrusion. He divided his attention between the threads of smoke and the face of the watch with such interest that the sudden reports of several guns breaking for the first time for days the stillness of the lagoon and the illusion of the painted scene failed to make him raise his head. He only jerked it sideways a little. Mrs. Travers stared at the wisps of white vapour floating above Belarab’s stockade. The series of sharp detonations ceased and their combined echoes came back over the lagoon like a long-drawn and rushing sigh.

“What’s this?” cried Mrs. Travers.

“Belarab’s come home,” said Jorgenson.

The last thread of smoke disappeared and Jorgenson got up. He had lost all interest in the watch and thrust it carelessly into his pocket, together with the bit of paper and the stump of pencil. He had resumed his aloofness from the life of men, but approaching the bulwark he condescended to look toward Belarab’s stockade.

“Yes, he is home,” he said very low.

“What’s going to happen?” cried Mrs. Travers. “What’s to be done?” Jorgenson kept up his appearance of communing with himself.

“I know what to do,” he mumbled.

“You are lucky,” said Mrs. Travers, with intense bitterness.

It seemed to her that she was abandoned by all the world. The opposite shore of the lagoon had resumed its aspect of a painted scene that would never roll up to disclose the truth behind its blinding and soulless splendour. It seemed to her that she had said her last words to all of them: to d’Alcacer, to her husband, to Lingard himself — and that they had all gone behind the curtain forever out of her sight. Of all the white men Jorgenson alone was left, that man who had done with life so completely that his mere presence robbed it of all heat and mystery, leaving nothing but its terrible, its revolting insignificance. And Mrs. Travers was ready for revolt. She cried with suppressed passion:

“Are you aware, Captain Jorgenson, that I am alive?”

He turned his eyes on her, and for a moment she was daunted by their cold glassiness. But before they could drive her away, something like the gleam of a spark gave them an instant’s animation.

“I want to go and join them. I want to go ashore,” she said, firmly. “There!”

Her bare and extended arm pointed across the lagoon, and Jorgenson’s resurrected eyes glided along the white limb and wandered off into space.

“No boat,” he muttered.

“There must be a canoe. I know there is a canoe. I want it.”

She stepped forward compelling, commanding, trying to concentrate in her glance all her will power, the sense of her own right to dispose of herself and her claim to be served to the last moment of her life. It was as if she had done nothing. Jorgenson didn’t flinch.

“Which of them are you after?” asked his blank, unringing voice.

She continued to look at him; her face had stiffened into a severe mask; she managed to say distinctly:

“I suppose you have been asking yourself that question for some time, Captain Jorgenson?”

“No. I am asking you now.”

His face disclosed nothing to Mrs. Travers’ bold and weary eyes. “What could you do over there?” Jorgenson added as merciless, as irrepressible, and sincere as though he were the embodiment of that inner voice that

speaks in all of us at times and, like Jorgenson, is offensive and difficult to answer.

“Remember that I am not a shadow but a living woman still, Captain Jorgenson. I can live and I can die. Send me over to share their fate.”

“Sure you would like?” asked the roused Jorgenson in a voice that had an unexpected living quality, a faint vibration which no man had known in it for years. “There may be death in it,” he mumbled, relapsing into indifference.

“Who cares?” she said, recklessly. “All I want is to ask Tom a question and hear his answer. That’s what I would like. That’s what I must have.”

## II

Along the hot and gloomy forest path, neglected, overgrown and strangled in the fierce life of the jungle, there came a faint rustle of leaves. Jaffir, the servant of princes, the messenger of great men, walked, stooping, with a broad chopper in his hand. He was naked from the waist upward, his shoulders and arms were scratched and bleeding. A multitude of biting insects made a cloud about his head. He had lost his costly and ancient head-kerchief, and when in a slightly wider space he stopped in a listening attitude anybody would have taken him for a fugitive.

He waved his arms about, slapping his shoulders, the sides of his head, his heaving flanks; then, motionless, listened again for a while. A sound of firing, not so much made faint by distance as muffled by the masses of foliage, reached his ears, dropping shots which he could have counted if he had cared to. “There is fighting in the forest already,” he thought. Then putting his head low in the tunnel of vegetation he dashed forward out of the horrible cloud of flies, which he actually managed for an instant to leave behind him. But it was not from the cruelty of insects that he was flying, for no man could hope to drop that escort, and Jaffir in his life of a faithful messenger had been accustomed, if such an extravagant phrase may be used, to be eaten alive. Bent nearly double he glided and dodged between the trees, through the undergrowth, his brown body streaming with sweat, his firm limbs gleaming like limbs of imperishable bronze through the mass of green leaves that are forever born and forever dying. For all his desperate haste he was no longer a fugitive; he was simply a man in a tremendous hurry. His flight, which had begun with a bound and a rush and a general display of great presence of mind, was a simple issue from a critical situation. Issues from critical situations are generally simple if one is quick

enough to think of them in time. He became aware very soon that the attempt to pursue him had been given up, but he had taken the forest path and had kept up his pace because he had left his Rajah and the lady Immada beset by enemies on the edge of the forest, as good as captives to a party of Tengga's men.

Belarab's hesitation had proved too much even for Hassim's hereditary patience in such matters. It is but becoming that weighty negotiations should be spread over many days, that the same requests and arguments should be repeated in the same words, at many successive interviews, and receive the same evasive answers. Matters of state demand the dignity of such a procedure as if time itself had to wait on the power and wisdom of rulers. Such are the proceedings of embassies and the dignified patience of envoys. But at this time of crisis Hassim's impatience obtained the upper hand; and though he never departed from the tradition of soft speech and restrained bearing while following with his sister in the train of the pious Belarab, he had his moments of anger, of anxiety, of despondency. His friendships, his future, his country's destinies were at stake, while Belarab's camp wandered deviously over the back country as if influenced by the vacillation of the ruler's thought, the very image of uncertain fate.

Often no more than the single word "Good" was all the answer vouchsafed to Hassim's daily speeches. The lesser men, companions of the Chief, treated him with deference; but Hassim could feel the opposition from the women's side of the camp working against his cause in subservience to the mere caprice of the new wife, a girl quite gentle and kind to her dependents, but whose imagination had run away with her completely and had made her greedy for the loot of the yacht from mere simplicity and innocence. What could Hassim, that stranger, wandering and poor, offer for her acceptance? Nothing. The wealth of his far-off country was but an idle tale, the talk of an exile looking for help.

At night Hassim had to listen to the anguished doubts of Immada, the only companion of his life, child of the same mother, brave as a man, but in her fears a very woman. She whispered them to him far into the night while the camp of the great Belarab was hushed in sleep and the fires had sunk down to mere glowing embers. Hassim soothed her gravely. But he, too, was a native of Wajo where men are more daring and quicker of mind than other Malays. More energetic, too, and energy does not go without an inner fire. Hassim lost patience and one evening he declared to his sister Immada:

“To-morrow we leave this ruler without a mind and go back to our white friend.”

Therefore next morning, letting the camp move on the direct road to the settlement, Hassim and Immada took a course of their own. It was a lonely path between the jungle and the clearings. They had two attendants with them, Hassim’s own men, men of Wajo; and so the lady Immada, when she had a mind to, could be carried, after the manner of the great ladies of Wajo who need not put foot to the ground unless they like. The lady Immada, accustomed to the hardships that are the lot of exiles, preferred to walk, but from time to time she let herself be carried for a short distance out of regard for the feelings of her attendants. The party made good time during the early hours, and Hassim expected confidently to reach before evening the shore of the lagoon at a spot very near the stranded Emma. At noon they rested in the shade near a dark pool within the edge of the forest; and it was there that Jaffir met them, much to his and their surprise. It was the occasion of a long talk. Jaffir, squatting on his heels, discoursed in measured tones. He had entranced listeners. The story of Carter’s exploit amongst the Shoals had not reached Belarab’s camp. It was a great shock to Hassim, but the sort of half smile with which he had been listening to Jaffir never altered its character. It was the Princess Immada who cried out in distress and wrung her hands. A deep silence fell.

Indeed, before the fatal magnitude of the fact it seemed even to those Malays that there was nothing to say and Jaffir, lowering his head, respected his Prince’s consternation. Then, before that feeling could pass away from that small group of people seated round a few smouldering sticks, the noisy approach of a large party of men made them all leap to their feet. Before they could make another movement they perceived themselves discovered. The men were armed as if bound on some warlike expedition. Amongst them Sentot, in his loin cloth and with unbound wild locks, capered and swung his arms about like the lunatic he was. The others’ astonishment made them halt, but their attitude was obviously hostile. In the rear a portly figure flanked by two attendants carrying swords was approaching prudently. Rajah Hassim resumed quietly his seat on the trunk of a fallen tree, Immada rested her hand lightly on her brother’s shoulder, and Jaffir, squatting down again, looked at the ground with all his faculties and every muscle of his body tensely on the alert.

“Tengga’s fighters,” he murmured, scornfully.



In the group somebody shouted, and was answered by shouts from afar. There could be no thought of resistance. Hassim slipped the emerald ring from his finger stealthily and Jaffir got hold of it by an almost imperceptible movement. The Rajah did not even look at the trusty messenger.

“Fail not to give it to the white man,” he murmured. “Thy servant hears, O Rajah. It’s a charm of great power.”

The shadows were growing to the westward. Everybody was silent, and the shifting group of armed men seemed to have drifted closer. Immada, drawing the end of a scarf across her face, confronted the advance with only one eye exposed. On the flank of the armed men Sentot was performing a slow dance but he, too, seemed to have gone dumb.

“Now go,” breathed out Rajah Hassim, his gaze levelled into space immovably.

For a second or more Jaffir did not stir, then with a sudden leap from his squatting posture he flew through the air and struck the jungle in a great commotion of leaves, vanishing instantly like a swimmer diving from on high. A deep murmur of surprise arose in the armed party, a spear was thrown, a shot was fired, three or four men dashed into the forest, but they soon returned crestfallen with apologetic smiles; while Jaffir, striking an old path that seemed to lead in the right direction, ran on in solitude, raising a rustle of leaves, with a naked parang in his hand and a cloud of flies about his head. The sun declining to the westward threw shafts of light across his dark path. He ran at a springy half-trot, his eyes watchful, his broad chest heaving, and carrying the emerald ring on the forefinger of a clenched hand as though he were afraid it should slip off, fly off, be torn from him by an invisible force, or spirited away by some enchantment. Who could tell what might happen? There were evil forces at work in the world, powerful incantations, horrible apparitions. The messenger of princes and of great men, charged with the supreme appeal of his master, was afraid in the deepening shade of the forest. Evil presences might have been lurking in that gloom. Still the sun had not set yet. He could see its face through the leaves as he skirted the shore of the lagoon. But what if Allah’s call should come to him suddenly and he die as he ran!

He drew a long breath on the shore of the lagoon within about a hundred yards from the stranded bows of the Emma. The tide was out and he walked to the end of a submerged log and sent out a hail for a boat. Jorgenson’s voice answered. The sun had sunk behind the forest belt of the coast. All

was still as far as the eye could reach over the black water. A slight breeze came along it and Jaffir on the brink, waiting for a canoe, shivered a little.

At the same moment Carter, exhausted by thirty hours of uninterrupted toil at the head of whites and Malays in getting the yacht afloat, dropped into Mrs. Travers' deck chair, on board the Hermit, said to the devoted Wasub: "Let a good watch be kept to-night, old man," glanced contentedly at the setting sun and fell asleep.

### III

There was in the bows of the Emma an elevated grating over the heel of her bowsprit whence the eye could take in the whole range of her deck and see every movement of her crew. It was a spot safe from eaves-droppers, though, of course, exposed to view. The sun had just set on the supreme content of Carter when Jorgenson and Jaffir sat down side by side between the knightheads of the Emma and, public but unapproachable, impressive and secret, began to converse in low tones.

Every Wajo fugitive who manned the hulk felt the approach of a decisive moment. Their minds were made up and their hearts beat steadily. They were all desperate men determined to fight and to die and troubling not about the manner of living or dying. This was not the case with Mrs. Travers who, having shut herself up in the deckhouse, was profoundly troubled about those very things, though she, too, felt desperate enough to welcome almost any solution.

Of all the people on board she alone did not know anything of that conference. In her deep and aimless thinking she had only become aware of the absence of the slightest sound on board the Emma. Not a rustle, not a footfall. The public view of Jorgenson and Jaffir in deep consultation had the effect of taking all wish to move from every man.

Twilight enveloped the two figures forward while they talked, looking in the stillness of their pose like carved figures of European and Asiatic contrasted in intimate contact. The deepening dusk had nearly effaced them when at last they rose without warning, as it were, and thrilling the heart of the beholders by the sudden movement. But they did not separate at once. They lingered in their high place as if awaiting the fall of complete darkness, a fit ending to their mysterious communion. Jaffir had given Jorgenson the whole story of the ring, the symbol of a friendship matured and confirmed on the night of defeat, on the night of flight from a far-distant land sleeping unmoved under the wrath and fire of heaven.

“Yes, Tuan,” continued Jaffir, “it was first sent out to the white man, on a night of mortal danger, a present to remember a friend by. I was the bearer of it then even as I am now. Then, as now, it was given to me and I was told to save myself and hand the ring over in confirmation of my message. I did so and that white man seemed to still the very storm to save my Rajah. He was not one to depart and forget him whom he had once called his friend. My message was but a message of good-bye, but the charm of the ring was strong enough to draw all the power of that white man to the help of my master. Now I have no words to say. Rajah Hassim asks for nothing. But what of that? By the mercy of Allah all things are the same, the compassion of the Most High, the power of the ring, the heart of the white man. Nothing is changed, only the friendship is a little older and love has grown because of the shared dangers and long companionship. Therefore, Tuan, I have no fear. But how am I to get the ring to the Rajah Laut? Just hand it to him. The last breath would be time enough if they were to spear me at his feet. But alas! the bush is full of Tengga’s men, the beach is open and I could never even hope to reach the gate.”

Jorgenson, with his hands deep in the pockets of his tunic, listened, looking down. Jaffir showed as much consternation as his nature was capable of.

“Our refuge is with God,” he murmured. “But what is to be done? Has your wisdom no stratagem, O Tuan?”

Jorgenson did not answer. It appeared as though he had no stratagem. But God is great and Jaffir waited on the other’s immobility, anxious but patient, perplexed yet hopeful in his grim way, while the night flowing on from the dark forest near by hid their two figures from the sight of observing men. Before the silence of Jorgenson Jaffir began to talk practically. Now that Tengga had thrown off the mask Jaffir did not think that he could land on the beach without being attacked, captured, nay killed, since a man like he, though he could save himself by taking flight at the order of his master, could not be expected to surrender without a fight. He mentioned that in the exercise of his important functions he knew how to glide like a shadow, creep like a snake, and almost burrow his way underground. He was Jaffir who had never been foiled. No bog, morass, great river or jungle could stop him. He would have welcomed them. In many respects they were the friends of a crafty messenger. But that was an open beach, and there was no other way, and as things stood now every

bush around, every tree trunk, every deep shadow of house or fence would conceal Tengga's men or such of Daman's infuriated partisans as had already made their way to the Settlement. How could he hope to traverse the distance between the water's edge and Belarab's gate which now would remain shut night and day? Not only himself but anybody from the Emma would be sure to be rushed upon and speared in twenty places.

He reflected for a moment in silence.

"Even you, Tuan, could not accomplish the feat."

"True," muttered Jorgenson.

When, after a period of meditation, he looked round, Jaffir was no longer by his side. He had descended from the high place and was probably squatting on his heels in some dark nook on the fore deck. Jorgenson knew Jaffir too well to suppose that he would go to sleep. He would sit there thinking himself into a state of fury, then get away from the Emma in some way or other, go ashore and perish fighting. He would, in fact, run amok; for it looked as if there could be no way out of the situation. Then, of course, Lingard would know nothing of Hassim and Immada's captivity for the ring would never reach him — the ring that could tell its own tale. No, Lingard would know nothing. He would know nothing about anybody outside Belarab's stockade till the end came, whatever the end might be, for all those people that lived the life of men. Whether to know or not to know would be good for Lingard Jorgenson could not tell. He admitted to himself that here there was something that he, Jorgenson, could not tell. All the possibilities were wrapped up in doubt, uncertain, like all things pertaining to the life of men. It was only when giving a short thought to himself that Jorgenson had no doubt. He, of course, would know what to do.

On the thin face of that old adventurer hidden in the night not a feature moved, not a muscle twitched, as he descended in his turn and walked aft along the decks of the Emma. His faded eyes, which had seen so much, did not attempt to explore the night, they never gave a glance to the silent watchers against whom he brushed. Had a light been flashed on him suddenly he would have appeared like a man walking in his sleep: the somnambulist of an eternal dream. Mrs. Travers heard his footsteps pass along the side of the deckhouse. She heard them — and let her head fall again on her bare arms thrown over the little desk before which she sat.

Jorgenson, standing by the taffrail, noted the faint reddish glow in the massive blackness of the further shore. Jorgenson noted things quickly,

cursorily, perfunctorily, as phenomena unrelated to his own apparitional existence of a visiting ghost. They were but passages in the game of men who were still playing at life. He knew too well how much that game was worth to be concerned about its course. He had given up the habit of thinking for so long that the sudden resumption of it irked him exceedingly, especially as he had to think on toward a conclusion. In that world of eternal oblivion, of which he had tasted before Lingard made him step back into the life of men, all things were settled once for all. He was irritated by his own perplexity which was like a reminder of that mortality made up of questions and passions from which he had fancied he had freed himself forever. By a natural association his contemptuous annoyance embraced the existence of Mrs. Travers, too, for how could he think of Tom Lingard, of what was good or bad for King Tom, without thinking also of that woman who had managed to put the ghost of a spark even into his own extinguished eyes? She was of no account; but Tom's integrity was. It was of Tom that he had to think, of what was good or bad for Tom in that absurd and deadly game of his life. Finally he reached the conclusion that to be given the ring would be good for Tom Lingard. Just to be given the ring and no more. The ring and no more.

"It will help him to make up his mind," muttered Jorgenson in his moustache, as if compelled by an obscure conviction. It was only then that he stirred slightly and turned away from the loom of the fires on the distant shore. Mrs. Travers heard his footsteps passing again along the side of the deckhouse — and this time never raised her head. That man was sleepless, mad, childish, and inflexible. He was impossible. He haunted the decks of that hulk aimlessly. . . .

It was, however, in pursuance of a very distinct aim that Jorgenson had gone forward again to seek Jaffir.

The first remark he had to offer to Jaffir's consideration was that the only person in the world who had the remotest chance of reaching Belarab's gate on that night was that tall white woman the Rajah Laut had brought on board, the wife of one of the captive white chiefs. Surprise made Jaffir exclaim, but he wasn't prepared to deny that. It was possible that for many reasons, some quite simple and others very subtle, those sons of the Evil One belonging to Tengga and Daman would refrain from killing a white woman walking alone from the water's edge to Belarab's gate. Yes, it was just possible that she might walk unharmed.

“Especially if she carried a blazing torch,” muttered Jorgenson in his moustache. He told Jaffir that she was sitting now in the dark, mourning silently in the manner of white women. She had made a great outcry in the morning to be allowed to join the white men on shore. He, Jorgenson, had refused her the canoe. Ever since she had secluded herself in the deckhouse in great distress.

Jaffir listened to it all without particular sympathy. And when Jorgenson added, “It is in my mind, O Jaffir, to let her have her will now,” he answered by a “Yes, by Allah! let her go. What does it matter?” of the greatest unconcern, till Jorgenson added:

“Yes. And she may carry the ring to the Rajah Laut.”

Jorgenson saw Jaffir, the grim and impassive Jaffir, give a perceptible start. It seemed at first an impossible task to persuade Jaffir to part with the ring. The notion was too monstrous to enter his mind, to move his heart. But at last he surrendered in an awed whisper, “God is great. Perhaps it is her destiny.”

Being a Wajo man he did not regard women as untrustworthy or unequal to a task requiring courage and judgment. Once he got over the personal feeling he handed the ring to Jorgenson with only one reservation, “You know, Tuan, that she must on no account put it on her finger.”

“Let her hang it round her neck,” suggested Jorgenson, readily.

As Jorgenson moved toward the deckhouse it occurred to him that perhaps now that woman Tom Lingard had taken in tow might take it into her head to refuse to leave the Emma. This did not disturb him very much. All those people moved in the dark. He himself at that particular moment was moving in the dark. Beyond the simple wish to guide Lingard’s thought in the direction of Hassim and Immada, to help him to make up his mind at last to a ruthless fidelity to his purpose Jorgenson had no other aim. The existence of those whites had no meaning on earth. They were the sort of people that pass without leaving footprints. That woman would have to act in ignorance. And if she refused to go then in ignorance she would have to stay on board. He would tell her nothing.

As a matter of fact, he discovered that Mrs. Travers would simply have nothing to do with him. She would not listen to what he had to say. She desired him, a mere weary voice confined in the darkness of the deck cabin, to go away and trouble her no more. But the ghost of Jorgenson was not easily exorcised. He, too, was a mere voice in the outer darkness,

inexorable, insisting that she should come out on deck and listen. At last he found the right words to say.

“It is something about Tom that I want to tell you. You wish him well, don’t you?”

After this she could not refuse to come out on deck, and once there she listened patiently to that white ghost muttering and mumbling above her drooping head.

“It seems to me, Captain Jorgenson,” she said after he had ceased, “that you are simply trifling with me. After your behaviour to me this morning, I can have nothing to say to you.”

“I have a canoe for you now,” mumbled Jorgenson.

“You have some new purpose in view now,” retorted Mrs. Travers with spirit. “But you won’t make it clear to me. What is it that you have in your mind?”

“Tom’s interest.”

“Are you really his friend?”

“He brought me here. You know it. He has talked a lot to you.”

“He did. But I ask myself whether you are capable of being anybody’s friend.”

“You ask yourself!” repeated Jorgenson, very quiet and morose. “If I am not his friend I should like to know who is.”

Mrs. Travers asked, quickly: “What’s all this about a ring? What ring?”

“Tom’s property. He has had it for years.”

“And he gave it to you? Doesn’t he care for it?”

“Don’t know. It’s just a thing.”

“But it has a meaning as between you and him. Is that so?”

“Yes. It has. He will know what it means.”

“What does it mean?”

“I am too much his friend not to hold my tongue.”

“What! To me!”

“And who are you?” was Jorgenson’s unexpected remark. “He has told you too much already.”

“Perhaps he has,” whispered Mrs. Travers, as if to herself. “And you want that ring to be taken to him?” she asked, in a louder tone.

“Yes. At once. For his good.”

“Are you certain it is for his good? Why can’t you. . . .”

She checked herself. That man was hopeless. He would never tell anything and there was no means of compelling him. He was invulnerable, unapproachable. . . . He was dead.

"Just give it to him," mumbled Jorgenson as though pursuing a mere fixed idea. "Just slip it quietly into his hand. He will understand."

"What is it? Advice, warning, signal for action?"

"It may be anything," uttered Jorgenson, morosely, but as it were in a mollified tone. "It's meant for his good."

"Oh, if I only could trust that man!" mused Mrs. Travers, half aloud.

Jorgenson's slight noise in the throat might have been taken for an expression of sympathy. But he remained silent.

"Really, this is most extraordinary!" cried Mrs. Travers, suddenly aroused. "Why did you come to me? Why should it be my task? Why should you want me specially to take it to him?"

"I will tell you why," said Jorgenson's blank voice. "It's because there is no one on board this hulk that can hope to get alive inside that stockade. This morning you told me yourself that you were ready to die — for Tom — or with Tom. Well, risk it then. You are the only one that has half a chance to get through — and Tom, maybe, is waiting."

"The only one," repeated Mrs. Travers with an abrupt movement forward and an extended hand before which Jorgenson stepped back a pace. "Risk it! Certainly! Where's that mysterious ring?"

"I have got it in my pocket," said Jorgenson, readily; yet nearly half a minute elapsed before Mrs. Travers felt the characteristic shape being pressed into her half-open palm. "Don't let anybody see it," Jorgenson admonished her in a murmur. "Hide it somewhere about you. Why not hang it round your neck?"

Mrs. Travers' hand remained firmly closed on the ring. "Yes, that will do," she murmured, hastily. "I'll be back in a moment. Get everything ready." With those words she disappeared inside the deckhouse and presently threads of light appeared in the interstices of the boards. Mrs. Travers had lighted a candle in there. She was busy hanging that ring round her neck. She was going. Yes — taking the risk for Tom's sake.

"Nobody can resist that man," Jorgenson muttered to himself with increasing moroseness. "I couldn't."



Jorgenson, after seeing the canoe leave the ship's side, ceased to live intellectually. There was no need for more thinking, for any display of mental ingenuity. He had done with it all. All his notions were perfectly fixed and he could go over them in the same ghostly way in which he haunted the deck of the Emma. At the sight of the ring Lingard would return to Hassim and Immada, now captives, too, though Jorgenson certainly did not think them in any serious danger. What had happened really was that Tengga was now holding hostages, and those Jorgenson looked upon as Lingard's own people. They were his. He had gone in with them deep, very deep. They had a hold and a claim on King Tom just as many years ago people of that very race had had a hold and a claim on him, Jorgenson. Only Tom was a much bigger man. A very big man. Nevertheless, Jorgenson didn't see why he should escape his own fate — Jorgenson's fate — to be absorbed, captured, made their own either in failure or in success. It was an unavoidable fatality and Jorgenson felt certain that the ring would compel Lingard to face it without flinching. What he really wanted Lingard to do was to cease to take the slightest interest in those whites — who were the sort of people that left no footprints.

Perhaps at first sight, sending that woman to Lingard was not the best way toward that end. Jorgenson, however, had a distinct impression in which his morning talk with Mrs. Travers had only confirmed him, that those two had quarrelled for good. As, indeed, was unavoidable. What did Tom Lingard want with any woman? The only woman in Jorgenson's life had come in by way of exchange for a lot of cotton stuffs and several brass guns. This fact could not but affect Jorgenson's judgment since obviously in this case such a transaction was impossible. Therefore the case was not serious. It didn't exist. What did exist was Lingard's relation to the Wajo exiles, a great and warlike adventure such as no rover in those seas had ever attempted.

That Tengga was much more ready to negotiate than to fight, the old adventurer had not the slightest doubt. How Lingard would deal with him was not a concern of Jorgenson's. That would be easy enough. Nothing prevented Lingard from going to see Tengga and talking to him with authority. All that ambitious person really wanted was to have a share in Lingard's wealth, in Lingard's power, in Lingard's friendship. A year before

Tengga had once insinuated to Jorgenson, "In what way am I less worthy of being a friend than Belarab?"

It was a distinct overture, a disclosure of the man's innermost mind. Jorgenson, of course, had met it with a profound silence. His task was not diplomacy but the care of stores.

After the effort of connected mental processes in order to bring about Mrs. Travers' departure he was anxious to dismiss the whole matter from his mind. The last thought he gave to it was severely practical. It occurred to him that it would be advisable to attract in some way or other Lingard's attention to the lagoon. In the language of the sea a single rocket is properly a signal of distress, but, in the circumstances, a group of three sent up simultaneously would convey a warning. He gave his orders and watched the rockets go up finely with a trail of red sparks, a bursting of white stars high up in the air, and three loud reports in quick succession. Then he resumed his pacing of the whole length of the hulk, confident that after this Tom would guess that something was up and set a close watch over the lagoon. No doubt these mysterious rockets would have a disturbing effect on Tengga and his friends and cause a great excitement in the Settlement; but for that Jorgenson did not care. The Settlement was already in such a turmoil that a little more excitement did not matter. What Jorgenson did not expect, however, was the sound of a musket-shot fired from the jungle facing the bows of the Emma. It caused him to stop dead short. He had heard distinctly the bullet strike the curve of the bow forward. "Some hot-headed ass fired that," he said to himself, contemptuously. It simply disclosed to him the fact that he was already besieged on the shore side and set at rest his doubts as to the length Tengga was prepared to go. Any length! Of course there was still time for Tom to put everything right with six words, unless . . . Jorgenson smiled, grimly, in the dark and resumed his tireless pacing.

What amused him was to observe the fire which had been burning night and day before Tengga's residence suddenly extinguished. He pictured to himself the wild rush with bamboo buckets to the lagoon shore, the confusion, the hurry and jostling in a great hissing of water midst clouds of steam. The image of the fat Tengga's consternation appealed to Jorgenson's sense of humour for about five seconds. Then he took up the binoculars from the roof of the deckhouse.

The bursting of the three white stars over the lagoon had given him a momentary glimpse of the black speck of the canoe taking over Mrs. Travers. He couldn't find it again with the glass, it was too dark; but the part of the shore for which it was steered would be somewhere near the angle of Belarab's stockade nearest to the beach. This Jorgenson could make out in the faint rosy glare of fires burning inside. Jorgenson was certain that Lingard was looking toward the Emma through the most convenient loophole he could find.

As obviously Mrs. Travers could not have paddled herself across, two men were taking her over; and for the steersman she had Jaffir. Though he had assented to Jorgenson's plan Jaffir was anxious to accompany the ring as near as possible to its destination. Nothing but dire necessity had induced him to part with the talisman. Crouching in the stern and flourishing his paddle from side to side he glared at the back of the canvas deck-chair which had been placed in the middle for Mrs. Travers. Wrapped up in the darkness she reclined in it with her eyes closed, faintly aware of the ring hung low on her breast. As the canoe was rather large it was moving very slowly. The two men dipped their paddles without a splash; and surrendering herself passively, in a temporary relaxation of all her limbs, to this adventure Mrs. Travers had no sense of motion at all. She, too, like Jorgenson, was tired of thinking. She abandoned herself to the silence of that night full of roused passions and deadly purposes. She abandoned herself to an illusory feeling; to the impression that she was really resting. For the first time in many days she could taste the relief of being alone. The men with her were less than nothing. She could not speak to them; she could not understand them; the canoe might have been moving by enchantment — if it did move at all. Like a half-conscious sleeper she was on the verge of saying to herself, "What a strange dream I am having."

The low tones of Jaffir's voice stole into it quietly telling the men to cease paddling, and the long canoe came to a rest slowly, no more than ten yards from the beach. The party had been provided with a torch which was to be lighted before the canoe touched the shore, thus giving a character of openness to this desperate expedition. "And if it draws fire on us," Jaffir had commented to Jorgenson, "well, then, we shall see whose fate it is to die on this night."

"Yes," had muttered Jorgenson. "We shall see."

Jorgenson saw at last the small light of the torch against the blackness of the stockade. He strained his hearing for a possible volley of musketry fire but no sound came to him over the broad surface of the lagoon. Over there the man with the torch, the other paddler, and Jaffir himself impelling with a gentle motion of his paddle the canoe toward the shore, had the glistening eyeballs and the tense faces of silent excitement. The ruddy glare smote Mrs. Travers' closed eyelids but she didn't open her eyes till she felt the canoe touch the strand. The two men leaped instantly out of it. Mrs. Travers rose, abruptly. Nobody made a sound. She stumbled out of the canoe on to the beach and almost before she had recovered her balance the torch was thrust into her hand. The heat, the nearness of the blaze confused and blinded her till, instinctively, she raised the torch high above her head. For a moment she stood still, holding aloft the fierce flame from which a few sparks were falling slowly.

A naked bronze arm lighted from above pointed out the direction and Mrs. Travers began to walk toward the featureless black mass of the stockade. When after a few steps she looked back over her shoulder, the lagoon, the beach, the canoe, the men she had just left had become already invisible. She was alone bearing up a blazing torch on an earth that was a dumb shadow shifting under her feet. At last she reached firmer ground and the dark length of the palisade untouched as yet by the light of the torch seemed to her immense, intimidating. She felt ready to drop from sheer emotion. But she moved on.

"A little more to the left," shouted a strong voice.

It vibrated through all her fibres, rousing like the call of a trumpet, went far beyond her, filled all the space. Mrs. Travers stood still for a moment, then casting far away from her the burning torch ran forward blindly with her hands extended toward the great sound of Lingard's voice, leaving behind her the light flaring and spluttering on the ground. She stumbled and was only saved from a fall by her hands coming in contact with the rough stakes. The stockade rose high above her head and she clung to it with widely open arms, pressing her whole body against the rugged surface of that enormous and unscalable palisade. She heard through it low voices inside, heavy thuds; and felt at every blow a slight vibration of the ground under her feet. She glanced fearfully over her shoulder and saw nothing in the darkness but the expiring glow of the torch she had thrown away and the sombre shimmer of the lagoon bordering the opaque darkness of the

shore. Her strained eyeballs seemed to detect mysterious movements in the darkness and she gave way to irresistible terror, to a shrinking agony of apprehension. Was she to be transfixed by a broad blade, to the high, immovable wall of wood against which she was flattening herself desperately, as though she could hope to penetrate it by the mere force of her fear? She had no idea where she was, but as a matter of fact she was a little to the left of the principal gate and almost exactly under one of the loopholes of the stockade. Her excessive anguish passed into insensibility. She ceased to hear, to see, and even to feel the contact of the surface to which she clung. Lingard's voice somewhere from the sky above her head was directing her, distinct, very close, full of concern.

"You must stoop low. Lower yet."

The stagnant blood of her body began to pulsate languidly. She stooped low — lower yet — so low that she had to sink on her knees, and then became aware of a faint smell of wood smoke mingled with the confused murmur of agitated voices. This came to her through an opening no higher than her head in her kneeling posture, and no wider than the breadth of two stakes. Lingard was saying in a tone of distress:

"I couldn't get any of them to unbar the gate."

She was unable to make a sound. — "Are you there?" Lingard asked, anxiously, so close to her now that she seemed to feel the very breath of his words on her face. It revived her completely; she understood what she had to do. She put her head and shoulders through the opening, was at once seized under the arms by an eager grip and felt herself pulled through with an irresistible force and with such haste that her scarf was dragged off her head, its fringes having caught in the rough timber. The same eager grip lifted her up, stood her on her feet without her having to make any exertion toward that end. She became aware that Lingard was trying to say something, but she heard only a confused stammering expressive of wonder and delight in which she caught the words "You . . . you . . ." deliriously repeated. He didn't release his hold of her; his helpful and irresistible grip had changed into a close clasp, a crushing embrace, the violent taking possession by an embodied force that had broken loose and was not to be controlled any longer. As his great voice had done a moment before, his great strength, too, seemed able to fill all space in its enveloping and undeniable authority. Every time she tried instinctively to stiffen herself against its might, it reacted, affirming its fierce will, its uplifting power.

Several times she lost the feeling of the ground and had a sensation of helplessness without fear, of triumph without exultation. The inevitable had come to pass. She had foreseen it — and all the time in that dark place and against the red glow of camp fires within the stockade the man in whose arms she struggled remained shadowy to her eyes — to her half-closed eyes. She thought suddenly, “He will crush me to death without knowing it.”

He was like a blind force. She closed her eyes altogether. Her head fell back a little. Not instinctively but with wilful resignation and as it were from a sense of justice she abandoned herself to his arms. The effect was as though she had suddenly stabbed him to the heart. He let her go so suddenly and completely that she would have fallen down in a heap if she had not managed to catch hold of his forearm. He seemed prepared for it and for a moment all her weight hung on it without moving its rigidity by a hair’s breadth. Behind her Mrs. Travers heard the heavy thud of blows on wood, the confused murmurs and movements of men.

A voice said suddenly, “It’s done,” with such emphasis that though, of course, she didn’t understand the words it helped her to regain possession of herself; and when Lingard asked her very little above a whisper: “Why don’t you say something?” she answered readily, “Let me get my breath first.”

Round them all sounds had ceased. The men had secured again the opening through which those arms had snatched her into a moment of self-forgetfulness which had left her out of breath but uncrushed. As if something imperative had been satisfied she had a moment of inward serenity, a period of peace without thought while, holding to that arm that trembled no more than an arm of iron, she felt stealthily over the ground for one of the sandals which she had lost. Oh, yes, there was no doubt of it, she had been carried off the earth, without shame, without regret. But she would not have let him know of that dropped sandal for anything in the world. That lost sandal was as symbolic as a dropped veil. But he did not know of it. He must never know. Where was that thing? She felt sure that they had not moved an inch from that spot. Presently her foot found it and still gripping Lingard’s forearm she stooped to secure it properly. When she stood up, still holding his arm, they confronted each other, he rigid in an effort of self-command but feeling as if the surges of the heaviest sea that he could remember in his life were running through his heart; and the

woman as if emptied of all feeling by her experience, without thought yet, but beginning to regain her sense of the situation and the memory of the immediate past.

"I have been watching at that loophole for an hour, ever since they came running to me with that story of the rockets," said Lingard. "I was shut up with Belarab then. I was looking out when the torch blazed and you stepped ashore. I thought I was dreaming. But what could I do? I felt I must rush to you but I dared not. That clump of palms is full of men. So are the houses you saw that time you came ashore with me. Full of men. Armed men. A trigger is soon pulled and when once shooting begins. . . . And you walking in the open with that light above your head! I didn't dare. You were safer alone. I had the strength to hold myself in and watch you come up from the shore. No! No man that ever lived had seen such a sight. What did you come for?"

"Didn't you expect somebody? I don't mean me, I mean a messenger?"

"No!" said Lingard, wondering at his own self-control. "Why did he let you come?"

"You mean Captain Jorgenson? Oh, he refused at first. He said that he had your orders."

"How on earth did you manage to get round him?" said Lingard in his softest tones.

"I did not try," she began and checked herself. Lingard's question, though he really didn't seem to care much about an answer, had aroused afresh her suspicion of Jorgenson's change of front. "I didn't have to say very much at the last," she continued, gasping yet a little and feeling her personality, crushed to nothing in the hug of those arms, expand again to its full significance before the attentive immobility of that man. "Captain Jorgenson has always looked upon me as a nuisance. Perhaps he had made up his mind to get rid of me even against your orders. Is he quite sane?"

She released her firm hold of that iron forearm which fell slowly by Lingard's side. She had regained fully the possession of her personality. There remained only a fading, slightly breathless impression of a short flight above that earth on which her feet were firmly planted now. "And is that all?" she asked herself, not bitterly, but with a sort of tender contempt.

"He is so sane," sounded Lingard's voice, gloomily, "that if I had listened to him you would not have found me here."

"What do you mean by here? In this stockade?"

“Anywhere,” he said.

“And what would have happened then?”

“God knows,” he answered. “What would have happened if the world had not been made in seven days? I have known you for just about that time. It began by me coming to you at night — like a thief in the night. Where the devil did I hear that? And that man you are married to thinks I am no better than a thief.”

“It ought to be enough for you that I never made a mistake as to what you are, that I come to you in less than twenty-four hours after you left me contemptuously to my distress. Don’t pretend you didn’t hear me call after you. Oh, yes, you heard. The whole ship heard me for I had no shame.”

“Yes, you came,” said Lingard, violently. “But have you really come? I can’t believe my eyes! Are you really here?”

“This is a dark spot, luckily,” said Mrs. Travers. “But can you really have any doubt?” she added, significantly.

He made a sudden movement toward her, betraying so much passion that Mrs. Travers thought, “I shan’t come out alive this time,” and yet he was there, motionless before her, as though he had never stirred. It was more as though the earth had made a sudden movement under his feet without being able to destroy his balance. But the earth under Mrs. Travers’ feet had made no movement and for a second she was overwhelmed by wonder not at this proof of her own self-possession but at the man’s immense power over himself. If it had not been for her strange inward exhaustion she would perhaps have surrendered to that power. But it seemed to her that she had nothing in her worth surrendering, and it was in a perfectly even tone that she said, “Give me your arm, Captain Lingard. We can’t stay all night on this spot.”

As they moved on she thought, “There is real greatness in that man.” He was great even in his behaviour. No apologies, no explanations, no abasement, no violence, and not even the slightest tremor of the frame holding that bold and perplexed soul. She knew that for certain because her fingers were resting lightly on Lingard’s arm while she walked slowly by his side as though he were taking her down to dinner. And yet she couldn’t suppose for a moment, that, like herself, he was emptied of all emotion. She never before was so aware of him as a dangerous force. “He is really ruthless,” she thought. They had just left the shadow of the inner defences about the gate when a slightly hoarse, apologetic voice was heard behind



them repeating insistently, what even Mrs. Travers' ear detected to be a sort of formula. The words were: "There is this thing — there is this thing — there is this thing." They turned round.

"Oh, my scarf," said Mrs. Travers.

A short, squat, broad-faced young fellow having for all costume a pair of white drawers was offering the scarf thrown over both his arms, as if they had been sticks, and holding it respectfully as far as possible from his person. Lingard took it from him and Mrs. Travers claimed it at once. "Don't forget the proprieties," she said. "This is also my face veil."

She was arranging it about her head when Lingard said, "There is no need. I am taking you to those gentlemen." — "I will use it all the same," said Mrs. Travers. "This thing works both ways, as a matter of propriety or as a matter of precaution. Till I have an opportunity of looking into a mirror nothing will persuade me that there isn't some change in my face." Lingard swung half round and gazed down at her. Veiled now she confronted him boldly. "Tell me, Captain Lingard, how many eyes were looking at us a little while ago?"

"Do you care?" he asked.

"Not in the least," she said. "A million stars were looking on, too, and what did it matter? They were not of the world I know. And it's just the same with the eyes. They are not of the world I live in."

Lingard thought: "Nobody is." Never before had she seemed to him more unapproachable, more different and more remote. The glow of a number of small fires lighted the ground only, and brought out the black bulk of men lying down in the thin drift of smoke. Only one of these fires, rather apart and burning in front of the house which was the quarter of the prisoners, might have been called a blaze and even that was not a great one. It didn't penetrate the dark space between the piles and the depth of the verandah above where only a couple of heads and the glint of a spearhead could be seen dimly in the play of the light. But down on the ground outside, the black shape of a man seated on a bench had an intense relief. Another intensely black shadow threw a handful of brushwood on the fire and went away. The man on the bench got up. It was d'Alcacer. He let Lingard and Mrs. Travers come quite close up to him. Extreme surprise seemed to have made him dumb.

"You didn't expect . . ." began Mrs. Travers with some embarrassment before that mute attitude.

"I doubted my eyes," struck in d'Alcacer, who seemed embarrassed, too. Next moment he recovered his tone and confessed simply: "At the moment I wasn't thinking of you, Mrs. Travers." He passed his hand over his forehead. "I hardly know what I was thinking of."

In the light of the shooting-up flame Mrs. Travers could see d'Alcacer's face. There was no smile on it. She could not remember ever seeing him so grave and, as it were, so distant. She abandoned Lingard's arm and moved closer to the fire.

"I fancy you were very far away, Mr. d'Alcacer," she said.

"This is the sort of freedom of which nothing can deprive us," he observed, looking hard at the manner in which the scarf was drawn across Mrs. Travers' face. "It's possible I was far away," he went on, "but I can assure you that I don't know where I was. Less than an hour ago we had a great excitement here about some rockets, but I didn't share in it. There was no one I could ask a question of. The captain here was, I understood, engaged in a most momentous conversation with the king or the governor of this place."

He addressed Lingard, directly. "May I ask whether you have reached any conclusion as yet? That Moor is a very dilatory person, I believe."

"Any direct attack he would, of course, resist," said Lingard. "And, so far, you are protected. But I must admit that he is rather angry with me. He's tired of the whole business. He loves peace above anything in the world. But I haven't finished with him yet."

"As far as I understood from what you told me before," said Mr. d'Alcacer, with a quick side glance at Mrs. Travers' uncovered and attentive eyes, "as far as I can see he may get all the peace he wants at once by driving us two, I mean Mr. Travers and myself, out of the gate on to the spears of those other enraged barbarians. And there are some of his counsellors who advise him to do that very thing no later than the break of day I understand."

Lingard stood for a moment perfectly motionless.

"That's about it," he said in an unemotional tone, and went away with a heavy step without giving another look at d'Alcacer and Mrs. Travers, who after a moment faced each other.

"You have heard?" said d'Alcacer. "Of course that doesn't affect your fate in any way, and as to him he is much too prestigious to be killed light-heartedly. When all this is over you will walk triumphantly on his arm out

of this stockade; for there is nothing in all this to affect his greatness, his absolute value in the eyes of those people — and indeed in any other eyes.” D’Alcacer kept his glance averted from Mrs. Travers and as soon as he had finished speaking busied himself in dragging the bench a little way further from the fire. When they sat down on it he kept his distance from Mrs. Travers. She made no sign of unveiling herself and her eyes without a face seemed to him strangely unknown and disquieting.

“The situation in a nutshell,” she said. “You have arranged it all beautifully, even to my triumphal exit. Well, and what then? No, you needn’t answer, it has no interest. I assure you I came here not with any notion of marching out in triumph, as you call it. I came here, to speak in the most vulgar way, to save your skin — and mine.”

Her voice came muffled to d’Alcacer’s ears with a changed character, even to the very intonation. Above the white and embroidered scarf her eyes in the firelight transfixed him, black and so steady that even the red sparks of the reflected glare did not move in them. He concealed the strong impression she made. He bowed his head a little.

“I believe you know perfectly well what you are doing.”

“No! I don’t know,” she said, more quickly than he had ever heard her speak before. “First of all, I don’t think he is so safe as you imagine. Oh, yes, he has prestige enough, I don’t question that. But you are apportioning life and death with too much assurance. . . .”

“I know my portion,” murmured d’Alcacer, gently. A moment of silence fell in which Mrs. Travers’ eyes ended by intimidating d’Alcacer, who looked away. The flame of the fire had sunk low. In the dark agglomeration of buildings, which might have been called Belarab’s palace, there was a certain animation, a flitting of people, voices calling and answering, the passing to and fro of lights that would illuminate suddenly a heavy pile, the corner of a house, the eaves of a low-pitched roof, while in the open parts of the stockade the armed men slept by the expiring fires.

Mrs. Travers said, suddenly, “That Jorgenson is not friendly to us.”

“Possibly.”

With clasped hands and leaning over his knees d’Alcacer had assented in a very low tone. Mrs. Travers, unobserved, pressed her hands to her breast and felt the shape of the ring, thick, heavy, set with a big stone. It was there, secret, hung against her heart, and enigmatic. What did it mean? What could it mean? What was the feeling it could arouse or the action it could

provoke? And she thought with compunction that she ought to have given it to Lingard at once, without thinking, without hesitating. "There! This is what I came for. To give you this." Yes, but there had come an interval when she had been able to think of nothing, and since then she had had the time to reflect — unfortunately. To remember Jorgenson's hostile, contemptuous glance enveloping her from head to foot at the break of a day after a night of lonely anguish. And now while she sat there veiled from his keen sight there was that other man, that d'Alcacer, prophesying. O yes, triumphant. She knew already what that was. Mrs. Travers became afraid of the ring. She felt ready to pluck it from her neck and cast it away.

"I mistrust him," she said. — "You do!" exclaimed d'Alcacer, very low. — "I mean that Jorgenson. He seems a merciless sort of creature." — "He is indifferent to everything," said d'Alcacer. — "It may be a mask." — "Have you some evidence, Mrs. Travers?"

"No," said Mrs. Travers without hesitation. "I have my instinct."

D'Alcacer remained silent for a while as though he were pursuing another train of thought altogether, then in a gentle, almost playful tone: "If I were a woman," he said, turning to Mrs. Travers, "I would always trust my intuition." — "If you were a woman, Mr. d'Alcacer, I would not be speaking to you in this way because then I would be suspect to you."

The thought that before long perhaps he would be neither man nor woman but a lump of cold clay, crossed d'Alcacer's mind, which was living, alert, and unsubdued by the danger. He had welcomed the arrival of Mrs. Travers simply because he had been very lonely in that stockade, Mr. Travers having fallen into a phase of sulks complicated with shivering fits. Of Lingard d'Alcacer had seen almost nothing since they had landed, for the Man of Fate was extremely busy negotiating in the recesses of Belarab's main hut; and the thought that his life was being a matter of arduous bargaining was not agreeable to Mr. d'Alcacer. The Chief's dependents and the armed men garrisoning the stockade paid very little attention to him apparently, and this gave him the feeling of his captivity being very perfect and hopeless. During the afternoon, while pacing to and fro in the bit of shade thrown by the glorified sort of hut inside which Mr. Travers shivered and sulked misanthropically, he had been aware of the more distant verandahs becoming filled now and then by the muffled forms of women of Belarab's household taking a distant and curious view of the white man. All this was irksome. He found his menaced life extremely difficult to get

through. Yes, he welcomed the arrival of Mrs. Travers who brought with her a tragic note into the empty gloom.

“Suspicion is not in my nature, Mrs. Travers, I assure you, and I hope that you on your side will never suspect either my reserve or my frankness. I respect the mysterious nature of your conviction but hasn’t Jorgenson given you some occasion to. . .”

“He hates me,” said Mrs. Travers, and frowned at d’Alcacer’s incipient smile. “It isn’t a delusion on my part. The worst is that he hates me not for myself. I believe he is completely indifferent to my existence. Jorgenson hates me because as it were I represent you two who are in danger, because it is you two that are the trouble and I . . . Well!”

“Yes, yes, that’s certain,” said d’Alcacer, hastily. “But Jorgenson is wrong in making you the scapegoat. For if you were not here cool reason would step in and would make Lingard pause in his passion to make a king out of an exile. If we were murdered it would certainly make some stir in the world in time and he would fall under the suspicion of complicity with those wild and inhuman Moors. Who would regard the greatness of his day-dreams, his engaged honour, his chivalrous feelings? Nothing could save him from that suspicion. And being what he is, you understand me, Mrs. Travers (but you know him much better than I do), it would morally kill him.”

“Heavens!” whispered Mrs. Travers. “This has never occurred to me.” Those words seemed to lose themselves in the folds of the scarf without reaching d’Alcacer, who continued in his gentle tone:

“However, as it is, he will be safe enough whatever happens. He will have your testimony to clear him.”

Mrs. Travers stood up, suddenly, but still careful to keep her face covered, she threw the end of the scarf over her shoulder.

“I fear that Jorgenson,” she cried with suppressed passion. “One can’t understand what that man means to do. I think him so dangerous that if I were, for instance, entrusted with a message bearing on the situation, I would . . . suppress it.”

D’Alcacer was looking up from the seat, full of wonder. Mrs. Travers appealed to him in a calm voice through the folds of the scarf:

“Tell me, Mr. d’Alcacer, you who can look on it calmly, wouldn’t I be right?”

“Why, has Jorgenson told you anything?”

“Directly — nothing, except a phrase or two which really I could not understand. They seemed to have a hidden sense and he appeared to attach some mysterious importance to them that he dared not explain to me.”

“That was a risk on his part,” exclaimed d’Alcacer. “And he trusted you. Why you, I wonder!”

“Who can tell what notions he has in his head? Mr. d’Alcacer, I believe his only object is to call Captain Lingard away from us. I understood it only a few minutes ago. It has dawned upon me. All he wants is to call him off.”

“Call him off,” repeated d’Alcacer, a little bewildered by the aroused fire of her conviction. “I am sure I don’t want him called off any more than you do; and, frankly, I don’t believe Jorgenson has any such power. But upon the whole, and if you feel that Jorgenson has the power, I would — yes, if I were in your place I think I would suppress anything I could not understand.”

Mrs. Travers listened to the very end. Her eyes — they appeared incredibly sombre to d’Alcacer — seemed to watch the fall of every deliberate word and after he had ceased they remained still for an appreciable time. Then she turned away with a gesture that seemed to say: “So be it.”

D’Alcacer raised his voice suddenly after her. “Stay! Don’t forget that not only your husband’s but my head, too, is being played at that game. My judgment is not . . .”

She stopped for a moment and freed her lips. In the profound stillness of the courtyard her clear voice made the shadows at the nearest fires stir a little with low murmurs of surprise.

“Oh, yes, I remember whose heads I have to save,” she cried. “But in all the world who is there to save that man from himself?”

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D’Alcacer sat down on the bench again. “I wonder what she knows,” he thought, “and I wonder what I have done.” He wondered also how far he had been sincere and how far affected by a very natural aversion from being murdered obscurely by ferocious Moors with all the circumstances of barbarity. It was a very naked death to come upon one suddenly. It was robbed of all helpful illusions, such as the free will of a suicide, the heroism of a warrior, or the exaltation of a martyr. “Hadn’t I better make some sort of fight of it?” he debated with himself. He saw himself rushing at the naked spears without any enthusiasm. Or wouldn’t it be better to go forth to

meet his doom (somewhere outside the stockade on that horrible beach) with calm dignity. "Pah! I shall be probably speared through the back in the beastliest possible fashion," he thought with an inward shudder. It was certainly not a shudder of fear, for Mr. d'Alcacer attached no high value to life. It was a shudder of disgust because Mr. d'Alcacer was a civilized man and though he had no illusions about civilization he could not but admit the superiority of its methods. It offered to one a certain refinement of form, a comeliness of proceedings and definite safeguards against deadly surprises. "How idle all this is," he thought, finally. His next thought was that women were very resourceful. It was true, he went on meditating with unwonted cynicism, that strictly speaking they had only one resource but, generally, it served — it served.

He was surprised by his supremely shameless bitterness at this juncture. It was so uncalled for. This situation was too complicated to be entrusted to a cynical or shameless hope. There was nothing to trust to. At this moment of his meditation he became aware of Lingard's approach. He raised his head eagerly. D'Alcacer was not indifferent to his fate and even to Mr. Travers' fate. He would fain learn. . . . But one look at Lingard's face was enough. "It's no use asking him anything," he said to himself, "for he cares for nothing just now."

Lingard sat down heavily on the other end of the bench, and d'Alcacer, looking at his profile, confessed to himself that this was the most masculinely good-looking face he had ever seen in his life. It was an expressive face, too, but its present expression was also beyond d'Alcacer's past experience. At the same time its quietness set up a barrier against common curiosities and even common fears. No, it was no use asking him anything. Yet something should be said to break the spell, to call down again this man to the earth. But it was Lingard who spoke first. "Where has Mrs. Travers gone?"

"She has gone . . . where naturally she would be anxious to go first of all since she has managed to come to us," answered d'Alcacer, wording his answer with the utmost regard for the delicacy of the situation.

The stillness of Lingard seemed to have grown even more impressive. He spoke again.

"I wonder what those two can have to say to each other."

He might have been asking that of the whole darkened part of the globe, but it was d'Alcacer who answered in his courteous tones.

“Would it surprise you very much, Captain Lingard, if I were to tell you that those two people are quite fit to understand each other thoroughly? Yes? It surprises you! Well, I assure you that seven thousand miles from here nobody would wonder.”

“I think I understand,” said Lingard, “but don’t you know the man is light-headed? A man like that is as good as mad.”

“Yes, he had been slightly delirious since seven o’clock,” said d’Alcacer. “But believe me, Captain Lingard,” he continued, earnestly, and obeying a perfectly disinterested impulse, “that even in his delirium he is far more understandable to her and better able to understand her than . . . anybody within a hundred miles from here.”

“Ah!” said Lingard without any emotion, “so you don’t wonder. You don’t see any reason for wonder.”

“No, for, don’t you see, I do know.”

“What do you know?”

“Men and women, Captain Lingard, which you. . . .”

“I don’t know any woman.”

“You have spoken the strictest truth there,” said d’Alcacer, and for the first time Lingard turned his head slowly and looked at his neighbour on the bench.

“Do you think she is as good as mad, too?” asked Lingard in a startled voice.

D’Alcacer let escape a low exclamation. No, certainly he did not think so. It was an original notion to suppose that lunatics had a sort of common logic which made them understandable to each other. D’Alcacer tried to make his voice as gentle as possible while he pursued: “No, Captain Lingard, I believe the woman of whom we speak is and will always remain in the fullest possession of herself.”

Lingard, leaning back, clasped his hands round his knees. He seemed not to be listening and d’Alcacer, pulling a cigarette case out of his pocket, looked for a long time at the three cigarettes it contained. It was the last of the provision he had on him when captured. D’Alcacer had put himself on the strictest allowance. A cigarette was only to be lighted on special occasions; and now there were only three left and they had to be made to last till the end of life. They calmed, they soothed, they gave an attitude. And only three left! One had to be kept for the morning, to be lighted before going through the gate of doom — the gate of Belarab’s stockade. A



cigarette soothed, it gave an attitude. Was this the fitting occasion for one of the remaining two? D'Alcacer, a true Latin, was not afraid of a little introspection. In the pause he descended into the innermost depths of his being, then glanced up at the night sky. Sportsman, traveller, he had often looked up at the stars before to see how time went. It was going very slowly. He took out a cigarette, snapped-to the case, bent down to the embers. Then he sat up and blew out a thin cloud of smoke. The man by his side looked with his bowed head and clasped knee like a masculine rendering of mournful meditation. Such attitudes are met with sometimes on the sculptures of ancient tombs. D'Alcacer began to speak:

"She is a representative woman and yet one of those of whom there are but very few at any time in the world. Not that they are very rare but that there is but little room on top. They are the iridescent gleams on a hard and dark surface. For the world is hard, Captain Lingard, it is hard, both in what it will remember and in what it will forget. It is for such women that people toil on the ground and underground and artists of all sorts invoke their inspiration."

Lingard seemed not to have heard a word. His chin rested on his breast. D'Alcacer appraised the remaining length of his cigarette and went on in an equable tone through which pierced a certain sadness:

"No, there are not many of them. And yet they are all. They decorate our life for us. They are the gracious figures on the drab wall which lies on this side of our common grave. They lead a sort of ritual dance, that most of us have agreed to take seriously. It is a very binding agreement with which sincerity and good faith and honour have nothing to do. Very binding. Woe to him or her who breaks it. Directly they leave the pageant they get lost."

Lingard turned his head sharply and discovered d'Alcacer looking at him with profound attention.

"They get lost in a maze," continued d'Alcacer, quietly. "They wander in it lamenting over themselves. I would shudder at that fate for anything I loved. Do you know, Captain Lingard, how people lost in a maze end?" he went on holding Lingard by a steadfast stare. "No? . . . I will tell you then. They end by hating their very selves, and they die in disillusion and despair."

As if afraid of the force of his words d'Alcacer laid a soothing hand lightly on Lingard's shoulder. But Lingard continued to look into the embers at his feet and remained insensible to the friendly touch. Yet

d'Alcacer could not imagine that he had not been heard. He folded his arms on his breast.

"I don't know why I have been telling you all this," he said, apologetically. "I hope I have not been intruding on your thoughts."

"I can think of nothing," Lingard declared, unexpectedly. "I only know that your voice was friendly; and for the rest —"

"One must get through a night like this somehow," said d'Alcacer. "The very stars seem to lag on their way. It's a common belief that a drowning man is irresistibly compelled to review his past experience. Just now I feel quite out of my depth, and whatever I have said has come from my experience. I am sure you will forgive me. All that it amounts to is this: that it is natural for us to cry for the moon but it would be very fatal to have our cries heard. For what could any one of us do with the moon if it were given to him? I am speaking now of us — common mortals."

It was not immediately after d'Alcacer had ceased speaking but only after a moment that Lingard unclasped his fingers, got up, and walked away. D'Alcacer followed with a glance of quiet interest the big, shadowy form till it vanished in the direction of an enormous forest tree left in the middle of the stockade. The deepest shade of the night was spread over the ground of Belarab's fortified courtyard. The very embers of the fires had turned black, showing only here and there a mere spark; and the forms of the prone sleepers could hardly be distinguished from the hard ground on which they rested, with their arms lying beside them on the mats. Presently Mrs. Travers appeared quite close to d'Alcacer, who rose instantly.

"Martin is asleep," said Mrs. Travers in a tone that seemed to have borrowed something of the mystery and quietness of the night.

"All the world's asleep," observed d'Alcacer, so low that Mrs. Travers barely caught the words, "Except you and me, and one other who has left me to wander about in the night."

"Was he with you? Where has he gone?"

"Where it's darkest I should think," answered d'Alcacer, secretly. "It's no use going to look for him; but if you keep perfectly still and hold your breath you may presently hear his footsteps."

"What did he tell you?" breathed out Mrs. Travers.

"I didn't ask him anything. I only know that something has happened which has robbed him of his power of thinking . . . Hadn't I better go to the hut? Don Martin ought to have someone with him when he wakes up." Mrs.

Travers remained perfectly still and even now and then held her breath with a vague fear of hearing those footsteps wandering in the dark. D'Alcacer had disappeared. Again Mrs. Travers held her breath. No. Nothing. Not a sound. Only the night to her eyes seemed to have grown darker. Was that a footstep? "Where could I hide myself?" she thought. But she didn't move.

After leaving d'Alcacer, Lingard threading his way between the fires found himself under the big tree, the same tree against which Daman had been leaning on the day of the great talk when the white prisoners had been surrendered to Lingard's keeping on definite conditions. Lingard passed through the deep obscurity made by the outspread boughs of the only witness left there of a past that for endless ages had seen no mankind on this shore defended by the Shallows, around this lagoon overshadowed by the jungle. In the calm night the old giant, without shudders or murmurs in its enormous limbs, saw the restless man drift through the black shade into the starlight.

In that distant part of the courtyard there were only a few sentries who, themselves invisible, saw Lingard's white figure pace to and fro endlessly. They knew well who that was. It was the great white man. A very great man. A very rich man. A possessor of fire-arms, who could dispense valuable gifts and deal deadly blows, the friend of their Ruler, the enemy of his enemies, known to them for years and always mysterious. At their posts, flattened against the stakes near convenient loopholes, they cast backward glances and exchanged faint whispers from time to time.

Lingard might have thought himself alone. He had lost touch with the world. What he had said to d'Alcacer was perfectly true. He had no thought. He was in the state of a man who, having cast his eyes through the open gates of Paradise, is rendered insensible by that moment's vision to all the forms and matters of the earth; and in the extremity of his emotion ceases even to look upon himself but as the subject of a sublime experience which exalts or unfits, sanctifies or damns — he didn't know which. Every shadowy thought, every passing sensation was like a base intrusion on that supreme memory. He couldn't bear it.

When he had tried to resume his conversation with Belarab after Mrs. Travers' arrival he had discovered himself unable to go on. He had just enough self-control to break off the interview in measured terms. He pointed out the lateness of the hour, a most astonishing excuse to people to whom time is nothing and whose life and activities are not ruled by the

clock. Indeed Lingard hardly knew what he was saying or doing when he went out again leaving everybody dumb with astonishment at the change in his aspect and in his behaviour. A suspicious silence reigned for a long time in Belarab's great audience room till the Chief dismissed everybody by two quiet words and a slight gesture.

With her chin in her hand in the pose of a sybil trying to read the future in the glow of dying embers, Mrs. Travers, without holding her breath, heard quite close to her the footsteps which she had been listening for with mingled alarm, remorse, and hope.

She didn't change her attitude. The deep red glow lighted her up dimly, her face, the white hand hanging by her side, her feet in their sandals. The disturbing footsteps stopped close to her.

"Where have you been all this time?" she asked, without looking round.

"I don't know," answered Lingard. He was speaking the exact truth. He didn't know. Ever since he had released that woman from his arms everything but the vaguest notions had departed from him. Events, necessities, things — he had lost his grip on them all. And he didn't care. They were futile and impotent; he had no patience with them. The offended and astonished Belarab, d'Alcacer with his kindly touch and friendly voice, the sleeping men, the men awake, the Settlement full of unrestful life and the restless Shallows of the coast, were removed from him into an immensity of pitying contempt. Perhaps they existed. Perhaps all this waited for him. Well, let all this wait; let everything wait, till to-morrow or to the end of time, which could now come at any moment for all he cared — but certainly till to-morrow.

"I only know," he went on with an emphasis that made Mrs. Travers raise her head, "that wherever I go I shall carry you with me — against my breast."

Mrs. Travers' fine ear caught the mingled tones of suppressed exultation and dawning fear, the ardour and the faltering of those words. She was feeling still the physical truth at the root of them so strongly that she couldn't help saying in a dreamy whisper:

"Did you mean to crush the life out of me?"

He answered in the same tone:

"I could not have done it. You are too strong. Was I rough? I didn't mean to be. I have been often told I didn't know my own strength. You did not seem able to get through that opening and so I caught hold of you. You

came away in my hands quite easily. Suddenly I thought to myself, 'now I will make sure.'"

He paused as if his breath had failed him. Mrs. Travers dared not make the slightest movement. Still in the pose of one in quest of hidden truth she murmured, "Make sure?"

"Yes. And now I am sure. You are here — here! Before I couldn't tell."

"Oh, you couldn't tell before," she said.

"No."

"So it was reality that you were seeking."

He repeated as if speaking to himself: "And now I am sure."

Her sandalled foot, all rosy in the glow, felt the warmth of the embers. The tepid night had enveloped her body; and still under the impression of his strength she gave herself up to a momentary feeling of quietude that came about her heart as soft as the night air penetrated by the feeble clearness of the stars. "This is a limpid soul," she thought.

"You know I always believed in you," he began again. "You know I did. Well. I never believed in you so much as I do now, as you sit there, just as you are, and with hardly enough light to make you out by."

It occurred to her that she had never heard a voice she liked so well — except one. But that had been a great actor's voice; whereas this man was nothing in the world but his very own self. He persuaded, he moved, he disturbed, he soothed by his inherent truth. He had wanted to make sure and he had made sure apparently; and too weary to resist the waywardness of her thoughts Mrs. Travers reflected with a sort of amusement that apparently he had not been disappointed. She thought, "He believes in me. What amazing words. Of all the people that might have believed in me I had to find this one here. He believes in me more than in himself." A gust of sudden remorse tore her out from her quietness, made her cry out to him:

"Captain Lingard, we forget how we have met, we forget what is going on. We mustn't. I won't say that you placed your belief wrongly but I have to confess something to you. I must tell you how I came here to-night. Jorgenson . . ."

He interrupted her forcibly but without raising his voice.

"Jorgenson. Who's Jorgenson? You came to me because you couldn't help yourself."

This took her breath away. "But I must tell you. There is something in my coming which is not clear to me."

“You can tell me nothing that I don’t know already,” he said in a pleading tone. “Say nothing. Sit still. Time enough to-morrow. To-morrow! The night is drawing to an end and I care for nothing in the world but you. Let me be. Give me the rest that is in you.”

She had never heard such accents on his lips and she felt for him a great and tender pity. Why not humour this mood in which he wanted to preserve the moments that would never come to him again on this earth? She hesitated in silence. She saw him stir in the darkness as if he could not make up his mind to sit down on the bench. But suddenly he scattered the embers with his foot and sank on the ground against her feet, and she was not startled in the least to feel the weight of his head on her knee. Mrs. Travers was not startled but she felt profoundly moved. Why should she torment him with all those questions of freedom and captivity, of violence and intrigue, of life and death? He was not in a state to be told anything and it seemed to her that she did not want to speak, that in the greatness of her compassion she simply could not speak. All she could do for him was to rest her hand lightly on his head and respond silently to the slight movement she felt, sigh or sob, but a movement which suddenly immobilized her in an anxious emotion.

About the same time on the other side of the lagoon Jorgenson, raising his eyes, noted the stars and said to himself that the night would not last long now. He wished for daylight. He hoped that Lingard had already done something. The blaze in Tengga’s compound had been re-lighted. Tom’s power was unbounded, practically unbounded. And he was invulnerable.

Jorgenson let his old eyes wander amongst the gleams and shadows of the great sheet of water between him and that hostile shore and fancied he could detect a floating shadow having the characteristic shape of a man in a small canoe.

“O! Ya! Man!” he hailed. “What do you want?” Other eyes, too, had detected that shadow. Low murmurs arose on the deck of the Emma. “If you don’t speak at once I shall fire,” shouted Jorgenson, fiercely.

“No, white man,” returned the floating shape in a solemn drawl. “I am the bearer of friendly words. A chief’s words. I come from Tengga.”

“There was a bullet that came on board not a long time ago — also from Tengga,” said Jorgenson.

“That was an accident,” protested the voice from the lagoon. “What else could it be? Is there war between you and Tengga? No, no, O white man!

All Tengga desires is a long talk. He has sent me to ask you to come ashore."

At these words Jorgenson's heart sank a little. This invitation meant that Lingard had made no move. Was Tom asleep or altogether mad?

"The talk would be of peace," declared impressively the shadow which had drifted much closer to the hulk now.

"It isn't for me to talk with great chiefs," Jorgenson returned, cautiously.

"But Tengga is a friend," argued the nocturnal messenger. "And by that fire there are other friends — your friends, the Rajah Hassim and the lady Immada, who send you their greetings and who expect their eyes to rest on you before sunrise."

"That's a lie," remarked Jorgenson, perfunctorily, and fell into thought, while the shadowy bearer of words preserved a scandalized silence, though, of course, he had not expected to be believed for a moment. But one could never tell what a white man would believe. He had wanted to produce the impression that Hassim and Immada were the honoured guests of Tengga. It occurred to him suddenly that perhaps Jorgenson didn't know anything of the capture. And he persisted.

"My words are all true, Tuan. The Rajah of Wajo and his sister are with my master. I left them sitting by the fire on Tengga's right hand. Will you come ashore to be welcomed amongst friends?"

Jorgenson had been reflecting profoundly. His object was to gain as much time as possible for Lingard's interference which indeed could not fail to be effective. But he had not the slightest wish to entrust himself to Tengga's friendliness. Not that he minded the risk; but he did not see the use of taking it.

"No!" he said, "I can't go ashore. We white men have ways of our own and I am chief of this hulk. And my chief is the Rajah Laut, a white man like myself. All the words that matter are in him and if Tengga is such a great chief let him ask the Rajah Laut for a talk. Yes, that's the proper thing for Tengga to do if he is such a great chief as he says."

"The Rajah Laut has made his choice. He dwells with Belarab, and with the white people who are huddled together like trapped deer in Belarab's stockade. Why shouldn't you meantime go over where everything is lighted up and open and talk in friendship with Tengga's friends, whose hearts have been made sick by many doubts; Rajah Hassim and the lady Immada and

Daman, the chief of the men of the sea, who do not know now whom they can trust unless it be you, Tuan, the keeper of much wealth?"

The diplomatist in the small dugout paused for a moment to give special weight to the final argument:

"Which you have no means to defend. We know how many armed men there are with you."

"They are great fighters," Jorgenson observed, unconcernedly, spreading his elbows on the rail and looking over at the floating black patch of characteristic shape whence proceeded the voice of the wily envoy of Tengga. "Each man of them is worth ten of such as you can find in the Settlement."

"Yes, by Allah. Even worth twenty of these common people. Indeed, you have enough with you to make a great fight but not enough for victory."

"God alone gives victory," said suddenly the voice of Jaffir, who, very still at Jorgenson's elbow, had been listening to the conversation.

"Very true," was the answer in an extremely conventional tone. "Will you come ashore, O white man; and be the leader of chiefs?"

"I have been that before," said Jorgenson, with great dignity, "and now all I want is peace. But I won't come ashore amongst people whose minds are so much troubled, till Rajah Hassim and his sister return on board this ship and tell me the tale of their new friendship with Tengga."

His heart was sinking with every minute, the very air was growing heavier with the sense of oncoming disaster, on that night that was neither war nor peace and whose only voice was the voice of Tengga's envoy, insinuating in tone though menacing in words.

"No, that cannot be," said that voice. "But, Tuan, verily Tengga himself is ready to come on board here to talk with you. He is very ready to come and indeed, Tuan, he means to come on board here before very long."

"Yes, with fifty war-canoes filled with the ferocious rabble of the Shore of Refuge," Jaffir was heard commenting, sarcastically, over the rail; and a sinister muttered "It may be so," ascended alongside from the black water.

Jorgenson kept silent as if waiting for a supreme inspiration and suddenly he spoke in his other-world voice: "Tell Tengga from me that as long as he brings with him Rajah Hassim and the Rajah's sister, he and his chief men will be welcome on deck here, no matter how many boats come along with them. For that I do not care. You may go now."



A profound silence succeeded. It was clear that the envoy was gone, keeping in the shadow of the shore. Jorgenson turned to Jaffir.

“Death amongst friends is but a festival,” he quoted, mumbling in his moustache.

“It is, by Allah,” assented Jaffir with sombre fervour.

## VI

Thirty-six hours later Carter, alone with Lingard in the cabin of the brig, could almost feel during a pause in his talk the oppressive, the breathless peace of the Shallows awaiting another sunset.

“I never expected to see any of you alive,” Carter began in his easy tone, but with much less carelessness in his bearing as though his days of responsibility amongst the Shoals of the Shore of Refuge had matured his view of the external world and of his own place therein.

“Of course not,” muttered Lingard.

The listlessness of that man whom he had always seen acting under the stress of a secret passion seemed perfectly appalling to Carter’s youthful and deliberate energy. Ever since he had found himself again face to face with Lingard he had tried to conceal the shocking impression with a delicacy which owed nothing to training but was as intuitive as a child’s.

While justifying to Lingard his manner of dealing with the situation on the Shore of Refuge, he could not for the life of him help asking himself what was this new mystery. He was also young enough to long for a word of commendation.

“Come, Captain,” he argued; “how would you have liked to come out and find nothing but two half-burnt wrecks stuck on the sands — perhaps?”

He waited for a moment, then in sheer compassion turned away his eyes from that fixed gaze, from that harassed face with sunk cheeks, from that figure of indomitable strength robbed of its fire. He said to himself: “He doesn’t hear me,” and raised his voice without altering its self-contained tone:

“I was below yesterday morning when we felt the shock, but the noise came to us only as a deep rumble. I made one jump for the companion but that precious Shaw was before me yelling, ‘Earthquake! Earthquake!’ and I am hanged if he didn’t miss his footing and land down on his head at the bottom of the stairs. I had to stop to pick him up but I got on deck in time to see a mighty black cloud that seemed almost solid pop up from behind the forest like a balloon. It stayed there for quite a long time. Some of our

Calashes on deck swore to me that they had seen a red flash above the tree-tops. But that's hard to believe. I guessed at once that something had blown up on shore. My first thought was that I would never see you any more and I made up my mind at once to find out all the truth you have been keeping away from me. No, sir! Don't you make a mistake! I wasn't going to give you up, dead or alive."

He looked hard at Lingard while saying these words and saw the first sign of animation pass over that ravaged face. He saw even its lips move slightly; but there was no sound, and Carter looked away again.

"Perhaps you would have done better by telling me everything; but you left me behind on my own to be your man here. I put my hand to the work I could see before me. I am a sailor. There were two ships to look after. And here they are both for you, fit to go or to stay, to fight or to run, as you choose." He watched with bated breath the effort Lingard had to make to utter the two words of the desired commendation:

"Well done!"

"And I am your man still," Carter added, impulsively, and hastened to look away from Lingard, who had tried to smile at him and had failed. Carter didn't know what to do next, remain in the cabin or leave that unsupported strong man to himself. With a shyness completely foreign to his character and which he could not understand himself, he suggested in an engaging murmur and with an embarrassed assumption of his right to give advice:

"Why not lie down for a bit, sir? I can attend to anything that may turn up. You seem done up, sir."

He was facing Lingard, who stood on the other side of the table in a leaning forward attitude propped up on rigid arms and stared fixedly at him — perhaps? Carter felt on the verge of despair. This couldn't last. He was relieved to see Lingard shake his head slightly.

"No, Mr. Carter. I think I will go on deck," said the Captain of the famous brig *Lightning*, while his eyes roamed all over the cabin. Carter stood aside at once, but it was some little time before Lingard made a move.

The sun had sunk already, leaving that evening no trace of its glory on a sky clear as crystal and on the waters without a ripple. All colour seemed to have gone out of the world. The oncoming shadow rose as subtle as a perfume from the black coast lying athwart the eastern semicircle; and such was the silence within the horizon that one might have fancied oneself

come to the end of time. Black and toylike in the clear depths and the final stillness of the evening the brig and the schooner lay anchored in the middle of the main channel with their heads swung the same way. Lingard, with his chin on his breast and his arms folded, moved slowly here and there about the poop. Close and mute like his shadow, Carter, at his elbow, followed his movements. He felt an anxious solicitude. . . .

It was a sentiment perfectly new to him. He had never before felt this sort of solicitude about himself or any other man. His personality was being developed by new experience, and as he was very simple he received the initiation with shyness and self-mistrust. He had noticed with innocent alarm that Lingard had not looked either at the sky or over the sea, neither at his own ship nor the schooner astern; not along the decks, not aloft, not anywhere. He had looked at nothing! And somehow Carter felt himself more lonely and without support than when he had been left alone by that man in charge of two ships entangled amongst the Shallows and environed by some sinister mystery. Since that man had come back, instead of welcome relief Carter felt his responsibility rest on his young shoulders with tenfold weight. His profound conviction was that Lingard should be roused.

“Captain Lingard,” he burst out in desperation; “you can’t say I have worried you very much since this morning when I received you at the side, but I must be told something. What is it going to be with us? Fight or run?”

Lingard stopped short and now there was no doubt in Carter’s mind that the Captain was looking at him. There was no room for any doubt before that stern and enquiring gaze. “Aha!” thought Carter. “This has startled him”; and feeling that his shyness had departed he pursued his advantage. “For the fact of the matter is, sir, that, whatever happens, unless I am to be your man you will have no officer. I had better tell you at once that I have bundled that respectable, crazy, fat Shaw out of the ship. He was upsetting all hands. Yesterday I told him to go and get his dunnage together because I was going to send him aboard the yacht. He couldn’t have made more uproar about it if I had proposed to chuck him overboard. I warned him that if he didn’t go quietly I would have him tied up like a sheep ready for slaughter. However, he went down the ladder on his own feet, shaking his fist at me and promising to have me hanged for a pirate some day. He can do no harm on board the yacht. And now, sir, it’s for you to give orders and not for me — thank God!”

Lingard turned away, abruptly. Carter didn't budge. After a moment he heard himself called from the other side of the deck and obeyed with alacrity.

"What's that story of a man you picked up on the coast last evening?" asked Lingard in his gentlest tone. "Didn't you tell me something about it when I came on board?"

"I tried to," said Carter, frankly. "But I soon gave it up. You didn't seem to pay any attention to what I was saying. I thought you wanted to be left alone for a bit. What can I know of your ways, yet, sir? Are you aware, Captain Lingard, that since this morning I have been down five times at the cabin door to look at you? There you sat. . . ."

He paused and Lingard said: "You have been five times down in the cabin?"

"Yes. And the sixth time I made up my mind to make you take some notice of me. I can't be left without orders. There are two ships to look after, a lot of things to be done. . . ."

"There is nothing to be done," Lingard interrupted with a mere murmur but in a tone which made Carter keep silent for a while.

"Even to know that much would have been something to go by," he ventured at last. "I couldn't let you sit there with the sun getting pretty low and a long night before us."

"I feel stunned yet," said Lingard, looking Carter straight in the face, as if to watch the effect of that confession.

"Were you very near that explosion?" asked the young man with sympathetic curiosity and seeking for some sign on Lingard's person. But there was nothing. Not a single hair of the Captain's head seemed to have been singed.

"Near," muttered Lingard. "It might have been my head." He pressed it with both hands, then let them fall. "What about that man?" he asked, brusquely. "Where did he come from? . . . I suppose he is dead now," he added in an envious tone.

"No, sir. He must have as many lives as a cat," answered Carter. "I will tell you how it was. As I said before I wasn't going to give you up, dead or alive, so yesterday when the sun went down a little in the afternoon I had two of our boats manned and pulled in shore, taking soundings to find a passage if there was one. I meant to go back and look for you with the brig or without the brig — but that doesn't matter now. There were three or four

floating logs in sight. One of the Calashes in my boat made out something red on one of them. I thought it was worth while to go and see what it was. It was that man's sarong. It had got entangled among the branches and prevented him rolling off into the water. I was never so glad, I assure you, as when we found out that he was still breathing. If we could only nurse him back to life, I thought, he could perhaps tell me a lot of things. The log on which he hung had come out of the mouth of the creek and he couldn't have been more than half a day on it by my calculation. I had him taken down the main hatchway and put into a hammock in the 'tween-decks. He only just breathed then, but some time during the night he came to himself and got out of the hammock to lie down on a mat. I suppose he was more comfortable that way. He recovered his speech only this morning and I went down at once and told you of it, but you took no notice. I told you also who he was but I don't know whether you heard me or not."

"I don't remember," said Lingard under his breath.

"They are wonderful, those Malays. This morning he was only half alive, if that much, and now I understand he has been talking to Wasub for an hour. Will you go down to see him, sir, or shall I send a couple of men to carry him on deck?"

Lingard looked bewildered for a moment.

"Who on earth is he?" he asked.

"Why, it's that fellow whom you sent out, that night I met you, to catch our first gig. What do they call him? Jaffir, I think. Hasn't he been with you ashore, sir? Didn't he find you with the letter I gave him for you? A most determined looking chap. I knew him again the moment we got him off the log."

Lingard seized hold of the royal backstay within reach of his hand. Jaffir! Jaffir! Faithful above all others; the messenger of supreme moments; the reckless and devoted servant! Lingard felt a crushing sense of despair. "No, I can't face this," he whispered to himself, looking at the coast black as ink now before his eyes in the world's shadow that was slowly encompassing the grey clearness of the Shallow Waters. "Send Wasub to me. I am going down into the cabin."

He crossed over to the companion, then checking himself suddenly: "Was there a boat from the yacht during the day?" he asked as if struck by a sudden thought. — "No, sir," answered Carter. "We had no communication

with the yacht to-day.” — “Send Wasub to me,” repeated Lingard in a stern voice as he went down the stairs.

The old serang coming in noiselessly saw his Captain as he had seen him many times before, sitting under the gilt thunderbolts, apparently as strong in his body, in his wealth, and in his knowledge of secret words that have a power over men and elements, as ever. The old Malay squatted down within a couple of feet from Lingard, leaned his back against the satinwood panel of the bulkhead, then raising his old eyes with a watchful and benevolent expression to the white man’s face, clasped his hands between his knees.

“Wasub, you have learned now everything. Is there no one left alive but Jaffir? Are they all dead?”

“May you live!” answered Wasub; and Lingard whispered an appalled “All dead!” to which Wasub nodded slightly twice. His cracked voice had a lamenting intonation. “It is all true! It is all true! You are left alone, Tuan; you are left alone!”

“It was their destiny,” said Lingard at last, with forced calmness. “But has Jaffir told you of the manner of this calamity? How is it that he alone came out alive from it to be found by you?”

“He was told by his lord to depart and he obeyed,” began Wasub, fixing his eyes on the deck and speaking just loud enough to be heard by Lingard, who, bending forward in his seat, shrank inwardly from every word and yet would not have missed a single one of them for anything.

For the catastrophe had fallen on his head like a bolt from the blue in the early morning hours of the day before. At the first break of dawn he had been sent for to resume, his talk with Belarab. He had felt suddenly Mrs. Travers remove her hand from his head. Her voice speaking intimately into his ear: “Get up. There are some people coming,” had recalled him to himself. He had got up from the ground. The light was dim, the air full of mist; and it was only gradually that he began to make out forms above his head and about his feet: trees, houses, men sleeping on the ground. He didn’t recognize them. It was but a cruel change of dream. Who could tell what was real in this world? He looked about him, dazedly; he was still drunk with the deep draught of oblivion he had conquered for himself. Yes — but it was she who had let him snatch the cup. He looked down at the woman on the bench. She moved not. She had remained like that, still for hours, giving him a waking dream of rest without end, in an infinity of happiness without sound and movement, without thought, without joy; but

with an infinite ease of content, like a world-embracing reverie breathing the air of sadness and scented with love. For hours she had not moved.

“You are the most generous of women,” he said. He bent over her. Her eyes were wide open. Her lips felt cold. It did not shock him. After he stood up he remained near her. Heat is a consuming thing, but she with her cold lips seemed to him indestructible — and, perhaps, immortal!

Again he stooped, but this time it was only to kiss the fringe of her head scarf. Then he turned away to meet the three men, who, coming round the corner of the hut containing the prisoners, were approaching him with measured steps. They desired his presence in the Council room. Belarab was awake.

They also expressed their satisfaction at finding the white man awake, because Belarab wanted to impart to him information of the greatest importance. It seemed to Lingard that he had been awake ever since he could remember. It was as to being alive that he felt not so sure. He had no doubt of his existence; but was this life — this profound indifference, this strange contempt for what his eyes could see, this distaste for words, this unbelief in the importance of things and men? He tried to regain possession of himself, his old self which had things to do, words to speak as well as to hear. But it was too difficult. He was seduced away by the tense feeling of existence far superior to the mere consciousness of life, and which in its immensity of contradictions, delight, dread, exultation and despair could not be faced and yet was not to be evaded. There was no peace in it. But who wanted peace? Surrender was better, the dreadful ease of slack limbs in the sweep of an enormous tide and in a divine emptiness of mind. If this was existence then he knew that he existed. And he knew that the woman existed, too, in the sweep of the tide, without speech, without movement, without heat! Indestructible — and, perhaps, immortal!

## VII

With the sublime indifference of a man who has had a glimpse through the open doors of Paradise and is no longer careful of mere life, Lingard had followed Belarab's anxious messengers. The stockade was waking up in a subdued resonance of voices. Men were getting up from the ground, fires were being rekindled. Draped figures flitted in the mist amongst the buildings; and through the mat wall of a bamboo house Lingard heard the feeble wailing of a child. A day of mere life was beginning; but in the Chief's great Council room several wax candles and a couple of cheap

European lamps kept the dawn at bay, while the morning mist which could not be kept out made a faint reddish halo round every flame.

Belarab was not only awake, but he even looked like a man who had not slept for a long time. The creator of the Shore of Refuge, the weary Ruler of the Settlement, with his scorn of the unrest and folly of men, was angry with his white friend who was always bringing his desires and his troubles to his very door. Belarab did not want any one to die but neither did he want any one in particular to live. What he was concerned about was to preserve the mystery and the power of his melancholy hesitations. These delicate things were menaced by Lingard's brusque movements, by that passionate white man who believed in more than one God and always seemed to doubt the power of Destiny. Belarab was profoundly annoyed. He was also genuinely concerned, for he liked Lingard. He liked him not only for his strength, which protected his clear-minded scepticism from those dangers that beset all rulers, but he liked him also for himself. That man of infinite hesitations, born from a sort of mystic contempt for Allah's creation, yet believed absolutely both in Lingard's power and in his boldness. Absolutely. And yet, in the marvellous consistency of his temperament, now that the moment had come, he dreaded to put both power and fortitude to the test.

Lingard could not know that some little time before the first break of dawn one of Belarab's spies in the Settlement had found his way inside the stockade at a spot remote from the lagoon, and that a very few moments after Lingard had left the Chief in consequence of Jorgenson's rockets, Belarab was listening to an amazing tale of Hassim and Immada's capture and of Tengga's determination, very much strengthened by that fact, to obtain possession of the Emma, either by force or by negotiation, or by some crafty subterfuge in which the Rajah and his sister could be made to play their part. In his mistrust of the universe, which seemed almost to extend to the will of God himself, Belarab was very much alarmed, for the material power of Daman's piratical crowd was at Tengga's command; and who could tell whether this Wajo Rajah would remain loyal in the circumstances? It was also very characteristic of him whom the original settlers of the Shore of Refuge called the Father of Safety, that he did not say anything of this to Lingard, for he was afraid of rousing Lingard's fierce energy which would even carry away himself and all his people and put the peace of so many years to the sudden hazard of a battle.



Therefore Belarab set himself to persuade Lingard on general considerations to deliver the white men, who really belonged to Daman, to that supreme Chief of the Illanuns and by this simple proceeding detach him completely from Tengga. Why should he, Belarab, go to war against half the Settlement on their account? It was not necessary, it was not reasonable. It would be even in a manner a sin to begin a strife in a community of True Believers. Whereas with an offer like that in his hand he could send an embassy to Tengga who would see there at once the downfall of his purposes and the end of his hopes. At once! That moment! . . . Afterward the question of a ransom could be arranged with Daman in which he, Belarab, would mediate in the fullness of his recovered power, without a rival and in the sincerity of his heart. And then, if need be, he could put forth all his power against the chief of the sea-vagabonds who would, as a matter of fact, be negotiating under the shadow of the sword.

Belarab talked, low-voiced and dignified, with now and then a subtle intonation, a persuasive inflexion or a half-melancholy smile in the course of the argument. What encouraged him most was the changed aspect of his white friend. The fierce power of his personality seemed to have turned into a dream. Lingard listened, growing gradually inscrutable in his continued silence, but remaining gentle in a sort of rapt patience as if lapped in the wings of the Angel of Peace himself. Emboldened by that transformation, Belarab's counsellors seated on the mats murmured loudly their assent to the views of the Chief. Through the thickening white mist of tropical lands, the light of the tropical day filtered into the hall. One of the wise men got up from the floor and with prudent fingers began extinguishing the waxlights one by one. He hesitated to touch the lamps, the flames of which looked yellow and cold. A puff of the morning breeze entered the great room, faint and chill. Lingard, facing Belarab in a wooden armchair, with slack limbs and in the divine emptiness of a mind enchanted by a glimpse of Paradise, shuddered profoundly.

A strong voice shouted in the doorway without any ceremony and with a sort of jeering accent:

"Tengga's boats are out in the mist."

Lingard half rose from his seat, Belarab himself could not repress a start. Lingard's attitude was a listening one, but after a moment of hesitation he ran out of the hall. The inside of the stockade was beginning to buzz like a disturbed hive.

Outside Belarab's house Lingard slowed his pace. The mist still hung. A great sustained murmur pervaded it and the blurred forms of men were all moving outward from the centre toward the palisades. Somewhere amongst the buildings a gong clanged. D'Alcacer's raised voice was heard:

"What is happening?"

Lingard was passing then close to the prisoners' house. There was a group of armed men below the verandah and above their heads he saw Mrs. Travers by the side of d'Alcacer. The fire by which Lingard had spent the night was extinguished, its embers scattered, and the bench itself lay overturned. Mrs. Travers must have run up on the verandah at the first alarm. She and d'Alcacer up there seemed to dominate the tumult which was now subsiding. Lingard noticed the scarf across Mrs. Travers' face. D'Alcacer was bareheaded. He shouted again:

"What's the matter?"

"I am going to see," shouted Lingard back.

He resisted the impulse to join those two, dominate the tumult, let it roll away from under his feet — the mere life of men, vain like a dream and interfering with the tremendous sense of his own existence. He resisted it, he could hardly have told why. Even the sense of self-preservation had abandoned him. There was a throng of people pressing close about him yet careful not to get in his way. Surprise, concern, doubt were depicted on all those faces; but there were some who observed that the great white man making his way to the lagoon side of the stockade wore a fixed smile. He asked at large:

"Can one see any distance over the water?"

One of Belarab's headmen who was nearest to him answered:

"The mist has thickened. If you see anything, Tuan, it will be but a shadow of things."

The four sides of the stockade had been manned by that time. Lingard, ascending the banquette, looked out and saw the lagoon shrouded in white, without as much as a shadow on it, and so still that not even the sound of water lapping the shore reached his ears. He found himself in profound accord with this blind and soundless peace.

"Has anything at all been seen?" he asked incredulously.

Four men were produced at once who had seen a dark mass of boats moving in the light of the dawn. Others were sent for. He hardly listened to them. His thought escaped him and he stood motionless, looking out into

the unstirring mist pervaded by the perfect silence. Presently Belarab joined him, escorted by three grave, swarthy men, himself dark-faced, stroking his short grey beard with impenetrable composure. He said to Lingard, "Your white man doesn't fight," to which Lingard answered, "There is nothing to fight against. What your people have seen, Belarab, were indeed but shadows on the water." Belarab murmured, "You ought to have allowed me to make friends with Daman last night."

A faint uneasiness was stealing into Lingard's breast.

A moment later d'Alcacer came up, inconspicuously watched over by two men with lances, and to his anxious inquiry Lingard said: "I don't think there is anything going on. Listen how still everything is. The only way of bringing the matter to a test would be to persuade Belarab to let his men march out and make an attack on Tengga's stronghold this moment. Then we would learn something. But I couldn't persuade Belarab to march out into this fog. Indeed, an expedition like this might end badly. I myself don't believe that all Tengga's people are on the lagoon. . . . Where is Mrs. Travers?"

The question made d'Alcacer start by its abruptness which revealed the woman's possession of that man's mind. "She is with Don Martin, who is better but feels very weak. If we are to be given up, he will have to be carried out to his fate. I can depict to myself the scene. Don Martin carried shoulder high surrounded by those barbarians with spears, and Mrs. Travers with myself walking on each side of the stretcher. Mrs. Travers has declared to me her intention to go out with us."

"Oh, she has declared her intention," murmured Lingard, absent-mindedly.

D'Alcacer felt himself completely abandoned by that man. And within two paces of him he noticed the group of Belarab and his three swarthy attendants in their white robes, preserving an air of serene detachment. For the first time since the stranding on the coast d'Alcacer's heart sank within him. "But perhaps," he went on, "this Moor may not in the end insist on giving us up to a cruel death, Captain Lingard."

"He wanted to give you up in the middle of the night, a few hours ago," said Lingard, without even looking at d'Alcacer who raised his hands a little and let them fall. Lingard sat down on the breech of a heavy piece mounted on a naval carriage so as to command the lagoon. He folded his arms on his breast. D'Alcacer asked, gently:

“We have been reprieved then?”

“No,” said Lingard. “It’s I who was reprieved.”

A long silence followed. Along the whole line of the manned stockade the whisperings had ceased. The vibrations of the gong had died out, too. Only the watchers perched in the highest boughs of the big tree made a slight rustle amongst the leaves.

“What are you thinking of, Captain Lingard?” d’Alcacer asked in a low voice. Lingard did not change his position.

“I am trying to keep it off,” he said in the same tone.

“What? Trying to keep thought off?”

“Yes.”

“Is this the time for such experiments?” asked d’Alcacer.

“Why not? It’s my reprieve. Don’t grudge it to me, Mr. d’Alcacer.”

“Upon my word I don’t. But isn’t it dangerous?”

“You will have to take your chance.”

D’Alcacer had a moment of internal struggle. He asked himself whether he should tell Lingard that Mrs. Travers had come to the stockade with some sort of message from Jorgenson. He had it on the tip of his tongue to advise Lingard to go and see Mrs. Travers and ask her point blank whether she had anything to tell him; but before he could make up his mind the voices of invisible men high up in the tree were heard reporting the thinning of the fog. This caused a stir to run along the four sides of the stockade.

Lingard felt the draught of air in his face, the motionless mist began to drive over the palisades and, suddenly, the lagoon came into view with a great blinding glitter of its wrinkled surface and the faint sound of its wash rising all along the shore. A multitude of hands went up to shade the eager eyes, and exclamations of wonder burst out from many men at the sight of a crowd of canoes of various sizes and kinds lying close together with the effect as of an enormous raft, a little way off the side of the Emma. The excited voices rose higher and higher. There was no doubt about Tengga’s being on the lagoon. But what was Jorgenson about? The Emma lay as if abandoned by her keeper and her crew, while the mob of mixed boats seemed to be meditating an attack.

For all his determination to keep thought off to the very last possible moment, Lingard could not defend himself from a sense of wonder and fear. What was Jorgenson about? For a moment Lingard expected the side of the

Emma to wreath itself in puffs of smoke, but an age seemed to elapse without the sound of a shot reaching his ears.

The boats were afraid to close. They were hanging off, irresolute; but why did Jorgenson not put an end to their hesitation by a volley or two of musketry if only over their heads? Through the anguish of his perplexity Lingard found himself returning to life, to mere life with its sense of pain and mortality, like a man awakened from a dream by a stab in the breast. What did this silence of the Emma mean? Could she have been already carried in the fog? But that was unthinkable. Some sounds of resistance must have been heard. No, the boats hung off because they knew with what desperate defence they would meet; and perhaps Jorgenson knew very well what he was doing by holding his fire to the very last moment and letting the craven hearts grow cold with the fear of a murderous discharge that would have to be faced. What was certain was that this was the time for Belarab to open the great gate and let his men go out, display his power, sweep through the further end of the Settlement, destroy Tengga's defences, do away once for all with the absurd rivalry of that intriguing amateur boat-builder. Lingard turned eagerly toward Belarab but saw the Chief busy looking across the lagoon through a long glass resting on the shoulder of a stooping slave. He was motionless like a carving. Suddenly he let go the long glass which some ready hands caught as it fell and said to Lingard:

"No fight."

"How do you know?" muttered Lingard, astounded.

"There are three empty sampans alongside the ladder," said Belarab in a just audible voice. "There is bad talk there."

"Talk? I don't understand," said Lingard, slowly.

But Belarab had turned toward his three attendants in white robes, with shaven polls under skull-caps of plaited grass, with prayer beads hanging from their wrists, and an air of superior calm on their dark faces: companions of his desperate days, men of blood once and now imperturbable in their piety and wisdom of trusted counsellors.

"This white man is being betrayed," he murmured to them with the greatest composure.

D'Alcacer, uncomprehending, watched the scene: the Man of Fate puzzled and fierce like a disturbed lion, the white-robed Moors, the multitude of half-naked barbarians, squatting by the guns, standing by the loopholes in the immobility of an arranged display. He saw Mrs. Travers on

the verandah of the prisoners' house, an anxious figure with a white scarf over her head. Mr. Travers was no doubt too weak after his fit of fever to come outside. If it hadn't been for that, all the whites would have been in sight of each other at the very moment of the catastrophe which was to give them back to the claims of their life, at the cost of other lives sent violently out of the world. D'Alcacer heard Lingard asking loudly for the long glass and saw Belarab make a sign with his hand, when he felt the earth receive a violent blow from underneath. While he staggered to it the heavens split over his head with a crash in the lick of a red tongue of flame; and a sudden dreadful gloom fell all round the stunned d'Alcacer, who beheld with terror the morning sun, robbed of its rays, glow dull and brown through the sombre murk which had taken possession of the universe. The Emma had blown up; and when the rain of shattered timbers and mangled corpses falling into the lagoon had ceased, the cloud of smoke hanging motionless under the livid sun cast its shadow afar on the Shore of Refuge where all strife had come to an end.

A great wail of terror ascended from the Settlement and was succeeded by a profound silence. People could be seen bolting in unreasoning panic away from the houses and into the fields. On the lagoon the raft of boats had broken up. Some of them were sinking, others paddling away in all directions. What was left above water of the Emma had burst into a clear flame under the shadow of the cloud, the great smoky cloud that hung solid and unstirring above the tops of the forest, visible for miles up and down the coast and over the Shallows.

The first person to recover inside the stockade was Belarab himself. Mechanically he murmured the exclamation of wonder, "God is great," and looked at Lingard. But Lingard was not looking at him. The shock of the explosion had robbed him of speech and movement. He stared at the Emma blazing in a distant and insignificant flame under the sinister shadow of the cloud created by Jorgenson's mistrust and contempt for the life of men. Belarab turned away. His opinion had changed. He regarded Lingard no longer as a betrayed man but the effect was the same. He was no longer a man of any importance. What Belarab really wanted now was to see all the white people clear out of the lagoon as soon as possible. Presently he ordered the gate to be thrown open and his armed men poured out to take possession of the Settlement. Later Tengga's houses were set on fire and

Belarab, mounting a fiery pony, issued forth to make a triumphal progress surrounded by a great crowd of headmen and guards.

That night the white people left the stockade in a cortege of torch bearers. Mr. Travers had to be carried down to the beach, where two of Belarab's war-boats awaited their distinguished passengers. Mrs. Travers passed through the gate on d'Alcacer's arm. Her face was half veiled. She moved through the throng of spectators displayed in the torchlight looking straight before her. Belarab, standing in front of a group of headmen, pretended not to see the white people as they went by. With Lingard he shook hands, murmuring the usual formulas of friendship; and when he heard the great white man say, "You shall never see me again," he felt immensely relieved. Belarab did not want to see that white man again, but as he responded to the pressure of Lingard's hand he had a grave smile.

"God alone knows the future," he said.

Lingard walked to the beach by himself, feeling a stranger to all men and abandoned by the All-Knowing God. By that time the first boat with Mr. and Mrs. Travers had already got away out of the blood-red light thrown by the torches upon the water. D'Alcacer and Lingard followed in the second. Presently the dark shade of the creek, walled in by the impenetrable forest, closed round them and the splash of the paddles echoed in the still, damp air.

"How do you think this awful accident happened?" asked d'Alcacer, who had been sitting silent by Lingard's side.

"What is an accident?" said Lingard with a great effort. "Where did you hear of such a thing? Accident! Don't disturb me, Mr. d'Alcacer. I have just come back to life and it has closed on me colder and darker than the grave itself. Let me get used . . . I can't bear the sound of a human voice yet."

## VIII

And now, stoical in the cold and darkness of his regained life, Lingard had to listen to the voice of Wasub telling him Jaffir's story. The old serang's face expressed a profound dejection and there was infinite sadness in the flowing murmur of his words.

"Yes, by Allah! They were all there: that tyrannical Tenggara, noisy like a fool; the Rajah Hassim, a ruler without a country; Daman, the wandering chief, and the three Pangerans of the sea-robbers. They came on board boldly, for Tuan Jorgenson had given them permission, and their talk was

that you, Tuan, were a willing captive in Belarab's stockade. They said they had waited all night for a message of peace from you or from Belarab. But there was nothing, and with the first sign of day they put out on the lagoon to make friends with Tuan Jorgenson; for, they said, you, Tuan, were as if you had not been, possessing no more power than a dead man, the mere slave of these strange white people, and Belarab's prisoner. Thus Tengga talked. God had taken from him all wisdom and all fear. And then he must have thought he was safe while Rajah Hassim and the lady Immada were on board. I tell you they sat there in the midst of your enemies, captive! The lady Immada, with her face covered, mourned to herself. The Rajah Hassim made a sign to Jaffir and Jaffir came to stand by his side and talked to his lord. The main hatch was open and many of the Illanuns crowded there to look down at the goods that were inside the ship. They had never seen so much loot in their lives. Jaffir and his lord could hear plainly Tuan Jorgenson and Tengga talking together. Tengga discoursed loudly and his words were the words of a doomed man, for he was asking Tuan Jorgenson to give up the arms and everything that was on board the Emma to himself and to Daman. And then, he said, 'We shall fight Belarab and make friends with these strange white people by behaving generously to them and letting them sail away unharmed to their own country. We don't want them here. You, Tuan Jorgenson, are the only white man I care for.' They heard Tuan Jorgenson say to Tengga: 'Now you have told me everything there is in your mind you had better go ashore with your friends and return to-morrow.' And Tengga asked: 'Why! would you fight me to-morrow rather than live many days in peace with me?' and he laughed and slapped his thigh. And Tuan Jorgenson answered:

"'No, I won't fight you. But even a spider will give the fly time to say its prayers.'

"Tuan Jorgenson's voice sounded very strange and louder than ever anybody had heard it before. O Rajah Laut, Jaffir and the white man had been waiting, too, all night for some sign from you; a shot fired or a signal-fire, lighted to strengthen their hearts. There had been nothing. Rajah Hassim, whispering, ordered Jaffir to take the first opportunity to leap overboard and take to you his message of friendship and good-bye. Did the Rajah and Jaffir know what was coming? Who can tell? But what else could they see than calamity for all Wajo men, whatever Tuan Jorgenson had made up his mind to do? Jaffir prepared to obey his lord, and yet with so



many enemies' boats in the water he did not think he would ever reach the shore; and as to yourself he was not at all sure that you were still alive. But he said nothing of this to his Rajah. Nobody was looking their way. Jaffir pressed his lord's hand to his breast and waited his opportunity. The fog began to blow away and presently everything was disclosed to the sight. Jorgenson was on his feet, he was holding a lighted cigar between his fingers. Tengga was sitting in front of him on one of the chairs the white people had used. His followers were pressing round him, with Daman and Sentot, who were muttering incantations; and even the Pangerans had moved closer to the hatchway. Jaffir's opportunity had come but he lingered by the side of his Rajah. In the clear air the sun shone with great force. Tuan Jorgenson looked once more toward Belarab's stockade, O Rajah Laut! But there was nothing there, not even a flag displayed that had not been there before. Jaffir looked that way, too, and as he turned his head he saw Tuan Jorgenson, in the midst of twenty spear-blades that could in an instant have been driven into his breast, put the cigar in his mouth and jump down the hatchway. At that moment Rajah Hassim gave Jaffir a push toward the side and Jaffir leaped overboard.

"He was still in the water when all the world was darkened round him as if the life of the sun had been blown out of it in a crash. A great wave came along and washed him on shore, while pieces of wood, iron, and the limbs of torn men were splashing round him in the water. He managed to crawl out of the mud. Something had hit him while he was swimming and he thought he would die. But life stirred in him. He had a message for you. For a long time he went on crawling under the big trees on his hands and knees, for there is no rest for a messenger till the message is delivered. At last he found himself on the left bank of the creek. And still he felt life stir in him. So he started to swim across, for if you were in this world you were on the other side. While he swam he felt his strength abandoning him. He managed to scramble on to a drifting log and lay on it like one who is dead, till we pulled him into one of our boats."

Wasub ceased. It seemed to Lingard that it was impossible for mortal man to suffer more than he suffered in the succeeding moment of silence crowded by the mute images as of universal destruction. He felt himself gone to pieces as though the violent expression of Jorgenson's intolerable mistrust of the life of men had shattered his soul, leaving his body robbed of

all power of resistance and of all fortitude, a prey forever to infinite remorse and endless regrets.

“Leave me, Wasub,” he said. “They are all dead — but I would sleep.”

Wasub raised his dumb old eyes to the white man’s face.

“Tuan, it is necessary that you should hear Jaffir,” he said, patiently.

“Is he going to die?” asked Lingard in a low, cautious tone as though he were afraid of the sound of his own voice.

“Who can tell?” Wasub’s voice sounded more patient than ever. “There is no wound on his body but, O Tuan, he does not wish to live.”

“Abandoned by his God,” muttered Lingard to himself.

Wasub waited a little before he went on, “And, Tuan, he has a message for you.”

“Of course. Well, I don’t want to hear it.”

“It is from those who will never speak to you again,” Wasub persevered, sadly. “It is a great trust. A Rajah’s own words. It is difficult for Jaffir to die. He keeps on muttering about a ring that was for you, and that he let pass out of his care. It was a great talisman!”

“Yes. But it did not work this time. And if I go and tell Jaffir why he will be able to tell his Rajah, O Wasub, since you say that he is going to die. . . . I wonder where they will meet,” he muttered to himself.

Once more Wasub raised his eyes to Lingard’s face. “Paradise is the lot of all True Believers,” he whispered, firm in his simple faith.

The man who had been undone by a glimpse of Paradise exchanged a profound look with the old Malay. Then he got up. On his passage to the main hatchway the commander of the brig met no one on the decks, as if all mankind had given him up except the old man who preceded him and that other man dying in the deepening twilight, who was awaiting his coming. Below, in the light of the hatchway, he saw a young Calash with a broad yellow face and his wiry hair sticking up in stiff wisps through the folds of his head-kerchief, holding an earthenware water-jar to the lips of Jaffir extended on his back on a pile of mats.

A languid roll of the already glazed eyeballs, a mere stir of black and white in the gathering dusk showed that the faithful messenger of princes was aware of the presence of the man who had been so long known to him and his people as the King of the Sea. Lingard knelt down close to Jaffir’s head, which rolled a little from side to side and then became still, staring at

a beam of the upper deck. Lingard bent his ear to the dark lips. "Deliver your message" he said in a gentle tone.

"The Rajah wished to hold your hand once more," whispered Jaffir so faintly that Lingard had to guess the words rather than hear them. "I was to tell you," he went on — and stopped suddenly.

"What were you to tell me?"

"To forget everything," said Jaffir with a loud effort as if beginning a long speech. After that he said nothing more till Lingard murmured, "And the lady Immada?"

Jaffir collected all his strength. "She hoped no more," he uttered, distinctly. "The order came to her while she mourned, veiled, apart. I didn't even see her face."

Lingard swayed over the dying man so heavily that Wasub, standing near by, hastened to catch him by the shoulder. Jaffir seemed unaware of anything, and went on staring at the beam.

"Can you hear me, O Jaffir?" asked Lingard.

"I hear."

"I never had the ring. Who could bring it to me?"

"We gave it to the white woman — may Jehannum be her lot!"

"No! It shall be my lot," said Lingard with despairing force, while Wasub raised both his hands in dismay. "For, listen, Jaffir, if she had given the ring to me it would have been to one that was dumb, deaf, and robbed of all courage."

It was impossible to say whether Jaffir had heard. He made no sound, there was no change in his awful stare, but his prone body moved under the cotton sheet as if to get further away from the white man. Lingard got up slowly and making a sign to Wasub to remain where he was, went up on deck without giving another glance to the dying man. Again it seemed to him that he was pacing the quarter-deck of a deserted ship. The mulatto steward, watching through the crack of the pantry door, saw the Captain stagger into the cuddy and fling-to the door behind him with a crash. For more than an hour nobody approached that closed door till Carter coming down the companion stairs spoke without attempting to open it.

"Are you there, sir?" The answer, "You may come in," comforted the young man by its strong resonance. He went in.

"Well?"

"Jaffir is dead. This moment. I thought you would want to know."

Lingard looked persistently at Carter, thinking that now Jaffir was dead there was no one left on the empty earth to speak to him a word of reproach; no one to know the greatness of his intentions, the bond of fidelity between him and Hassim and Immada, the depth of his affection for those people, the earnestness of his visions, and the unbounded trust that was his reward. By the mad scorn of Jorgenson flaming up against the life of men, all this was as if it had never been. It had become a secret locked up in his own breast forever.

“Tell Wasub to open one of the long-cloth bales in the hold, Mr. Carter, and give the crew a cotton sheet to bury him decently according to their faith. Let it be done to-night. They must have the boats, too. I suppose they will want to take him on the sandbank.”

“Yes, sir,” said Carter.

“Let them have what they want, spades, torches. . . . Wasub will chant the right words. Paradise is the lot of all True Believers. Do you understand me, Mr. Carter? Paradise! I wonder what it will be for him! Unless he gets messages to carry through the jungle, avoiding ambushes, swimming in storms and knowing no rest, he won’t like it.”

Carter listened with an unmoved face. It seemed to him that the Captain had forgotten his presence.

“And all the time he will be sleeping on that sandbank,” Lingard began again, sitting in his old place under the gilt thunderbolts suspended over his head with his elbows on the table and his hands to his temples. “If they want a board to set up at the grave let them have a piece of an oak plank. It will stay there — till the next monsoon. Perhaps.”

Carter felt uncomfortable before that tense stare which just missed him and in that confined cabin seemed awful in its piercing and far-off expression. But as he had not been dismissed he did not like to go away.

“Everything will be done as you wish it, sir,” he said. “I suppose the yacht will be leaving the first thing to-morrow morning, sir.”

“If she doesn’t we must give her a solid shot or two to liven her up — eh, Mr. Carter?”

Carter did not know whether to smile or to look horrified. In the end he did both, but as to saying anything he found it impossible. But Lingard did not expect an answer.

“I believe you are going to stay with me, Mr. Carter?”

“I told you, sir, I am your man if you want me.”

“The trouble is, Mr. Carter, that I am no longer the man to whom you spoke that night in Carimata.”

“Neither am I, sir, in a manner of speaking.”

Lingard, relaxing the tenseness of his stare, looked at the young man, thoughtfully.

“After all, it is the brig that will want you. She will never change. The finest craft afloat in these seas. She will carry me about as she did before, but . . .”

He unclasped his hands, made a sweeping gesture.

Carter gave all his naive sympathy to that man who had certainly rescued the white people but seemed to have lost his own soul in the attempt. Carter had heard something from Wasub. He had made out enough of this story from the old serang’s pidgin English to know that the Captain’s native friends, one of them a woman, had perished in a mysterious catastrophe. But the why of it, and how it came about, remained still quite incomprehensible to him. Of course, a man like the Captain would feel terribly cut up. . . .

“You will be soon yourself again, sir,” he said in the kindest possible tone.

With the same simplicity Lingard shook his head. He was thinking of the dead Jaffir with his last message delivered and untroubled now by all these matters of the earth. He had been ordered to tell him to forget everything. Lingard had an inward shudder. In the dismay of his heart he might have believed his brig to lie under the very wing of the Angel of Desolation — so oppressive, so final, and hopeless seemed the silence in which he and Carter looked at each other, wistfully.

Lingard reached for a sheet of paper amongst several lying on the table, took up a pen, hesitated a moment, and then wrote:

“Meet me at day-break on the sandbank.”

He addressed the envelope to Mrs. Travers, Yacht Hermit, and pushed it across the table.

“Send this on board the schooner at once, Mr. Carter. Wait a moment. When our boats shove off for the sandbank have the forecastle gun fired. I want to know when that dead man has left the ship.”

He sat alone, leaning his head on his hand, listening, listening endlessly, for the report of the gun. Would it never come? When it came at last muffled, distant, with a slight shock through the body of the brig he

remained still with his head leaning on his hand but with a distinct conviction, with an almost physical certitude, that under the cotton sheet shrouding the dead man something of himself, too, had left the ship.

## IX

In a roomy cabin, furnished and fitted with austere comfort, Mr. Travers reposed at ease in a low bed-place under a snowy white sheet and a light silk coverlet, his head sunk in a white pillow of extreme purity. A faint scent of lavender hung about the fresh linen. Though lying on his back like a person who is seriously ill Mr. Travers was conscious of nothing worse than a great fatigue. Mr. Travers' restfulness had something faintly triumphant in it. To find himself again on board his yacht had soothed his vanity and had revived his sense of his own importance. He contemplated it in a distant perspective, restored to its proper surroundings and unaffected by an adventure too extraordinary to trouble a superior mind or even to remain in one's memory for any length of time. He was not responsible. Like many men ambitious of directing the affairs of a nation, Mr. Travers disliked the sense of responsibility. He would not have been above evading it in case of need, but with perverse loftiness he really, in his heart, scorned it. That was the reason why he was able to lie at rest and enjoy a sense of returning vigour. But he did not care much to talk as yet, and that was why the silence in the stateroom had lasted for hours. The bulkhead lamp had a green silk shade. It was unnecessary to admit for a moment the existence of impudence or ruffianism. A discreet knocking at the cabin door sounded deferential.

Mrs. Travers got up to see what was wanted, and returned without uttering a single word to the folding armchair by the side of the bed-place, with an envelope in her hand which she tore open in the greenish light. Mr. Travers remained incurious but his wife handed to him an unfolded sheet of paper which he condescended to hold up to his eyes. It contained only one line of writing. He let the paper fall on the coverlet and went on reposing as before. It was a sick man's repose. Mrs. Travers in the armchair, with her hands on the arm-rests, had a great dignity of attitude.

"I intend to go," she declared after a time.

"You intend to go," repeated Mr. Travers in a feeble, deliberate voice. "Really, it doesn't matter what you decide to do. All this is of so little importance. It seems to me that there can be no possible object."

“Perhaps not,” she admitted. “But don’t you think that the uttermost farthing should always be paid?”

Mr. Travers’ head rolled over on the pillow and gave a covertly scared look at that outspoken woman. But it rolled back again at once and the whole man remained passive, the very embodiment of helpless exhaustion. Mrs. Travers noticed this, and had the unexpected impression that Mr. Travers was not so ill as he looked. “He’s making the most of it. It’s a matter of diplomacy,” she thought. She thought this without irony, bitterness, or disgust. Only her heart sank a little lower and she felt that she could not remain in the cabin with that man for the rest of the evening. For all life — yes! But not for that evening.

“It’s simply monstrous,” murmured the man, who was either very diplomatic or very exhausted, in a languid manner. “There is something abnormal in you.”

Mrs. Travers got up swiftly.

“One comes across monstrous things. But I assure you that of all the monsters that wait on what you would call a normal existence the one I dread most is tediousness. A merciless monster without teeth or claws. Impotent. Horrible!”

She left the stateroom, vanishing out of it with noiseless resolution. No power on earth could have kept her in there for another minute. On deck she found a moonless night with a velvety tepid feeling in the air, and in the sky a mass of blurred starlight, like the tarnished tinsel of a worn-out, very old, very tedious firmament. The usual routine of the yacht had been already resumed, the awnings had been stretched aft, a solitary round lamp had been hung as usual under the main boom. Out of the deep gloom behind it d’Alcacer, a long, loose figure, lounged in the dim light across the deck. D’Alcacer had got promptly in touch with the store of cigarettes he owed to the Governor General’s generosity. A large, pulsating spark glowed, illuminating redly the design of his lips under the fine dark moustache, the tip of his nose, his lean chin. D’Alcacer reproached himself for an unwonted light-heartedness which had somehow taken possession of him. He had not experienced that sort of feeling for years. Reprehensible as it was he did not want anything to disturb it. But as he could not run away openly from Mrs. Travers he advanced to meet her.

“I do hope you have nothing to tell me,” he said with whimsical earnestness.

“I? No! Have you?”

He assured her he had not, and proffered a request. “Don’t let us tell each other anything, Mrs. Travers. Don’t let us think of anything. I believe it will be the best way to get over the evening.” There was real anxiety in his jesting tone.

“Very well,” Mrs. Travers assented, seriously. “But in that case we had better not remain together.” She asked, then, d’Alcacer to go below and sit with Mr. Travers who didn’t like to be left alone. “Though he, too, doesn’t seem to want to be told anything,” she added, parenthetically, and went on: “But I must ask you something else, Mr. d’Alcacer. I propose to sit down in this chair and go to sleep — if I can. Will you promise to call me about five o’clock? I prefer not to speak to any one on deck, and, moreover, I can trust you.”

He bowed in silence and went away slowly. Mrs. Travers, turning her head, perceived a steady light at the brig’s yard-arm, very bright among the tarnished stars. She walked aft and looked over the taffrail. It was exactly like that other night. She half expected to hear presently the low, rippling sound of an advancing boat. But the universe remained without a sound. When she at last dropped into the deck chair she was absolutely at the end of her power of thinking. “I suppose that’s how the condemned manage to get some sleep on the night before the execution,” she said to herself a moment before her eyelids closed as if under a leaden hand.

She woke up, with her face wet with tears, out of a vivid dream of Lingard in chain-mail armour and vaguely recalling a Crusader, but bare-headed and walking away from her in the depths of an impossible landscape. She hurried on to catch up with him but a throng of barbarians with enormous turbans came between them at the last moment and she lost sight of him forever in the flurry of a ghastly sand-storm. What frightened her most was that she had not been able to see his face. It was then that she began to cry over her hard fate. When she woke up the tears were still rolling down her cheeks and she perceived in the light of the deck-lamp d’Alcacer arrested a little way off.

“Did you have to speak to me?” she asked.

“No,” said d’Alcacer. “You didn’t give me time. When I came as far as this I fancied I heard you sobbing. It must have been a delusion.”

“Oh, no. My face is wet yet. It was a dream. I suppose it is five o’clock. Thank you for being so punctual. I have something to do before sunrise.”



D'Alcacer moved nearer. "I know. You have decided to keep an appointment on the sandbank. Your husband didn't utter twenty words in all these hours but he managed to tell me that piece of news."

"I shouldn't have thought," she murmured, vaguely.

"He wanted me to understand that it had no importance," stated d'Alcacer in a very serious tone.

"Yes. He knows what he is talking about," said Mrs. Travers in such a bitter tone as to disconcert d'Alcacer for a moment. "I don't see a single soul about the decks," Mrs. Travers continued, almost directly.

"The very watchmen are asleep," said d'Alcacer.

"There is nothing secret in this expedition, but I prefer not to call any one. Perhaps you wouldn't mind pulling me off yourself in our small boat."

It seemed to her that d'Alcacer showed some hesitation. She added: "It has no importance, you know."

He bowed his assent and preceded her down the side in silence. When she entered the boat he had the sculls ready and directly she sat down he shoved off. It was so dark yet that but for the brig's yard-arm light he could not have kept his direction. He pulled a very deliberate stroke, looking over his shoulder frequently. It was Mrs. Travers who saw first the faint gleam of the uncovered sandspit on the black, quiet water.

"A little more to the left," she said. "No, the other way. . . ." D'Alcacer obeyed her directions but his stroke grew even slower than before. She spoke again. "Don't you think that the uttermost farthing should always be paid, Mr. d'Alcacer?"

D'Alcacer glanced over his shoulder, then: "It would be the only honourable way. But it may be hard. Too hard for our common fearful hearts."

"I am prepared for anything."

He ceased pulling for a moment . . . "Anything that may be found on a sandbank," Mrs. Travers went on. "On an arid, insignificant, and deserted sandbank."

D'Alcacer gave two strokes and ceased again.

"There is room for a whole world of suffering on a sandbank, for all the bitterness and resentment a human soul may be made to feel."

"Yes, I suppose you would know," she whispered while he gave a stroke or two and again glanced over his shoulder. She murmured the words:

“Bitterness, resentment,” and a moment afterward became aware of the keel of the boat running up on the sand. But she didn’t move, and d’Alcacer, too, remained seated on the thwart with the blades of his sculls raised as if ready to drop them and back the dinghy out into deep water at the first sign.

Mrs. Travers made no sign, but she asked, abruptly: “Mr. d’Alcacer, do you think I shall ever come back?”

Her tone seemed to him to lack sincerity. But who could tell what this abruptness covered — sincere fear or mere vanity? He asked himself whether she was playing a part for his benefit, or only for herself.

“I don’t think you quite understand the situation, Mrs. Travers. I don’t think you have a clear idea, either of his simplicity or of his visionary’s pride.”

She thought, contemptuously, that there were other things which d’Alcacer didn’t know and surrendered to a sudden temptation to enlighten him a little.

“You forget his capacity for passion and that his simplicity doesn’t know its own strength.”

There was no mistaking the sincerity of that murmur. “She has felt it,” d’Alcacer said to himself with absolute certitude. He wondered when, where, how, on what occasion? Mrs. Travers stood up in the stern sheets suddenly and d’Alcacer leaped on the sand to help her out of the boat.

“Hadn’t I better hang about here to take you back again?” he suggested, as he let go her hand.

“You mustn’t!” she exclaimed, anxiously. “You must return to the yacht. There will be plenty of light in another hour. I will come to this spot and wave my handkerchief when I want to be taken off.”

At their feet the shallow water slept profoundly, the ghostly gleam of the sands baffled the eye by its lack of form. Far off, the growth of bushes in the centre raised a massive black bulk against the stars to the southward. Mrs. Travers lingered for a moment near the boat as if afraid of the strange solitude of this lonely sandbank and of this lone sea that seemed to fill the whole encircling universe of remote stars and limitless shadows. “There is nobody here,” she whispered to herself.

“He is somewhere about waiting for you, or I don’t know the man,” affirmed d’Alcacer in an undertone. He gave a vigorous shove which sent the little boat into the water.

D'Alcacer was perfectly right. Lingard had come up on deck long before Mrs. Travers woke up with her face wet with tears. The burial party had returned hours before and the crew of the brig were plunged in sleep, except for two watchmen, who at Lingard's appearance retreated noiselessly from the poop. Lingard, leaning on the rail, fell into a sombre reverie of his past. Reproachful spectres crowded the air, animated and vocal, not in the articulate language of mortals but assailing him with faint sobs, deep sighs, and fateful gestures. When he came to himself and turned about they vanished, all but one dark shape without sound or movement. Lingard looked at it with secret horror.

"Who's that?" he asked in a troubled voice.

The shadow moved closer: "It's only me, sir," said Carter, who had left orders to be called directly the Captain was seen on deck.

"Oh, yes, I might have known," mumbled Lingard in some confusion. He requested Carter to have a boat manned and when after a time the young man told him that it was ready, he said "All right!" and remained leaning on his elbow.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Carter after a longish silence, "but are you going some distance?"

"No, I only want to be put ashore on the sandbank."

Carter was relieved to hear this, but also surprised. "There is nothing living there, sir," he said.

"I wonder," muttered Lingard.

"But I am certain," Carter insisted. "The last of the women and children belonging to those cut-throats were taken off by the sampans which brought you and the yacht-party out."

He walked at Lingard's elbow to the gangway and listened to his orders.

"Directly there is enough light to see flags by, make a signal to the schooner to heave short on her cable and loose her sails. If there is any hanging back give them a blank gun, Mr. Carter. I will have no shilly-shallying. If she doesn't go at the word, by heavens, I will drive her out. I am still master here — for another day."

The overwhelming sense of immensity, of disturbing emptiness, which affects those who walk on the sands in the midst of the sea, intimidated Mrs. Travers. The world resembled a limitless flat shadow which was motionless and elusive. Then against the southern stars she saw a human form that isolated and lone appeared to her immense: the shape of a giant

outlined amongst the constellations. As it approached her it shrank to common proportions, got clear of the stars, lost its awesomeness, and became menacing in its ominous and silent advance. Mrs. Travers hastened to speak.

“You have asked for me. I am come. I trust you will have no reason to regret my obedience.”

He walked up quite close to her, bent down slightly to peer into her face. The first of the tropical dawn put its characteristic cold sheen into the sky above the Shore of Refuge.

Mrs. Travers did not turn away her head.

“Are you looking for a change in me? No. You won’t see it. Now I know that I couldn’t change even if I wanted to. I am made of clay that is too hard.”

“I am looking at you for the first time,” said Lingard. “I never could see you before. There were too many things, too many thoughts, too many people. No, I never saw you before. But now the world is dead.”

He grasped her shoulders, approaching his face close to hers. She never flinched.

“Yes, the world is dead,” she said. “Look your fill then. It won’t be for long.”

He let her go as suddenly as though she had struck him. The cold white light of the tropical dawn had crept past the zenith now and the expanse of the shallow waters looked cold, too, without stir or ripple within the enormous rim of the horizon where, to the west, a shadow lingered still.

“Take my arm,” he said.

She did so at once, and turning their backs on the two ships they began to walk along the sands, but they had not made many steps when Mrs. Travers perceived an oblong mound with a board planted upright at one end. Mrs. Travers knew that part of the sands. It was here she used to walk with her husband and d’Alcacer every evening after dinner, while the yacht lay stranded and her boats were away in search of assistance — which they had found — which they had found! This was something that she had never seen there before. Lingard had suddenly stopped and looked at it moodily. She pressed his arm to rouse him and asked, “What is this?”

“This is a grave,” said Lingard in a low voice, and still gazing at the heap of sand. “I had him taken out of the ship last night. Strange,” he went on in

a musing tone, "how much a grave big enough for one man only can hold. His message was to forget everything."

"Never, never," murmured Mrs. Travers. "I wish I had been on board the Emma. . . . You had a madman there," she cried out, suddenly. They moved on again, Lingard looking at Mrs. Travers who was leaning on his arm.

"I wonder which of us two was mad," he said.

"I wonder you can bear to look at me," she murmured. Then Lingard spoke again.

"I had to see you once more."

"That abominable Jorgenson," she whispered to herself.

"No, no, he gave me my chance — before he gave me up."

Mrs. Travers disengaged her arm and Lingard stopped, too, facing her in a long silence.

"I could not refuse to meet you," said Mrs. Travers at last. "I could not refuse you anything. You have all the right on your side and I don't care what you do or say. But I wonder at my own courage when I think of the confession I have to make." She advanced, laid her hand on Lingard's shoulder and spoke earnestly. "I shuddered at the thought of meeting you again. And now you must listen to my confession."

"Don't say a word," said Lingard in an untroubled voice and never taking his eyes from her face. "I know already."

"You can't," she cried. Her hand slipped off his shoulder. "Then why don't you throw me into the sea?" she asked, passionately. "Am I to live on hating myself?"

"You mustn't!" he said with an accent of fear. "Haven't you understood long ago that if you had given me that ring it would have been just the same?"

"Am I to believe this? No, no! You are too generous to a mere sham. You are the most magnanimous of men but you are throwing it away on me. Do you think it is remorse that I feel? No. If it is anything it is despair. But you must have known that — and yet you wanted to look at me again."

"I told you I never had a chance before," said Lingard in an unmoved voice. "It was only after I heard they gave you the ring that I felt the hold you have got on me. How could I tell before? What has hate or love to do with you and me? Hate. Love. What can touch you? For me you stand above death itself; for I see now that as long as I live you will never die."

They confronted each other at the southern edge of the sands as if afloat on the open sea. The central ridge heaped up by the winds masked from them the very mastheads of the two ships and the growing brightness of the light only augmented the sense of their invincible solitude in the awful serenity of the world. Mrs. Travers suddenly put her arm across her eyes and averted her face.

Then he added:

“That’s all.”

Mrs. Travers let fall her arm and began to retrace her steps, unsupported and alone. Lingard followed her on the edge of the sand uncovered by the ebbing tide. A belt of orange light appeared in the cold sky above the black forest of the Shore of Refuge and faded quickly to gold that melted soon into a blinding and colourless glare. It was not till after she had passed Jaffir’s grave that Mrs. Travers stole a backward glance and discovered that she was alone. Lingard had left her to herself. She saw him sitting near the mound of sand, his back bowed, his hands clasping his knees, as if he had obeyed the invincible call of his great visions haunting the grave of the faithful messenger. Shading her eyes with her hand Mrs. Travers watched the immobility of that man of infinite illusions. He never moved, he never raised his head. It was all over. He was done with her. She waited a little longer and then went slowly on her way.

Shaw, now acting second mate of the yacht, came off with another hand in a little boat to take Mrs. Travers on board. He stared at her like an offended owl. How the lady could suddenly appear at sunrise waving her handkerchief from the sandbank he could not understand. For, even if she had managed to row herself off secretly in the dark, she could not have sent the empty boat back to the yacht. It was to Shaw a sort of improper miracle.

D’Alcacer hurried to the top of the side ladder and as they met on deck Mrs. Travers astonished him by saying in a strangely provoking tone:

“You were right. I have come back.” Then with a little laugh which impressed d’Alcacer painfully she added with a nod downward, “and Martin, too, was perfectly right. It was absolutely unimportant.”

She walked on straight to the taffrail and d’Alcacer followed her aft, alarmed at her white face, at her brusque movements, at the nervous way in which she was fumbling at her throat. He waited discreetly till she turned round and thrust out toward him her open palm on which he saw a thick gold ring set with a large green stone.

“Look at this, Mr. d’Alcacer. This is the thing which I asked you whether I should give up or conceal — the symbol of the last hour — the call of the supreme minute. And he said it would have made no difference! He is the most magnanimous of men and the uttermost farthing has been paid. He has done with me. The most magnanimous . . . but there is a grave on the sands by which I left him sitting with no glance to spare for me. His last glance on earth! I am left with this thing. Absolutely unimportant. A dead talisman.” With a nervous jerk she flung the ring overboard, then with a hurried entreaty to d’Alcacer, “Stay here a moment. Don’t let anybody come near us,” she burst into tears and turned her back on him.

Lingard returned on board his brig and in the early afternoon the Lightning got under way, running past the schooner to give her a lead through the maze of Shoals. Lingard was on deck but never looked once at the following vessel. Directly both ships were in clear water he went below saying to Carter: “You know what to do.”

“Yes, sir,” said Carter.

Shortly after his Captain had disappeared from the deck Carter laid the main topsail to the mast. The Lightning lost her way while the schooner with all her light kites abroad passed close under her stern holding on her course. Mrs. Travers stood aft very rigid, gripping the rail with both hands. The brim of her white hat was blown upward on one side and her yachting skirt stirred in the breeze. By her side d’Alcacer waved his hand courteously. Carter raised his cap to them.

During the afternoon he paced the poop with measured steps, with a pair of binoculars in his hand. At last he laid the glasses down, glanced at the compass-card and walked to the cabin skylight which was open.

“Just lost her, sir,” he said. All was still down there. He raised his voice a little:

“You told me to let you know directly I lost sight of the yacht.”

The sound of a stifled groan reached the attentive Carter and a weary voice said, “All right, I am coming.”

When Lingard stepped out on the poop of the Lightning the open water had turned purple already in the evening light, while to the east the Shallows made a steely glitter all along the sombre line of the shore. Lingard, with folded arms, looked over the sea. Carter approached him and spoke quietly.

“The tide has turned and the night is coming on. Hadn’t we better get away from these Shoals, sir?”

Lingard did not stir.

“Yes, the night is coming on. You may fill the main topsail, Mr. Carter,” he said and he relapsed into silence with his eyes fixed in the southern board where the shadows were creeping stealthily toward the setting sun. Presently Carter stood at his elbow again.

“The brig is beginning to forge ahead, sir,” he said in a warning tone.

Lingard came out of his absorption with a deep tremor of his powerful frame like the shudder of an uprooted tree.

“How was the yacht heading when you lost sight of her?” he asked.

“South as near as possible,” answered Carter. “Will you give me a course to steer for the night, sir?”

Lingard’s lips trembled before he spoke but his voice was calm.

“Steer north,” he said.



# ***THE NATURE OF A CRIME***



JOSEPH CONRAD AND FORD MADOX HUEFFER

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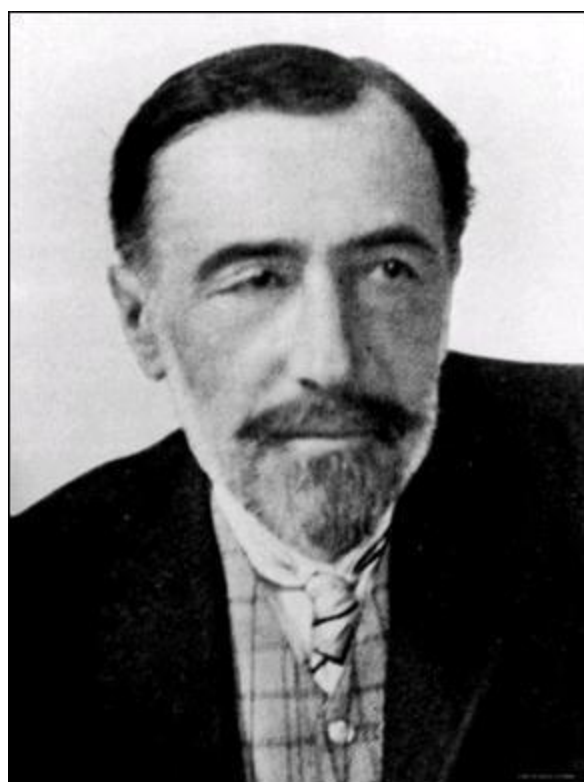
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## PREFACE BY JOSEPH CONRAD

FOR years my consciousness of this small piece of collaboration has been very vague, almost impalpable, like the fleeting visits from a ghost. If I ever thought of it, and I must confess that I can hardly remember ever doing it on purpose till it was brought definitely to my notice by my collaborator, I always regarded it as something in the nature of a fragment. I was surprised and even shocked to discover that it was rounded. But I need not have been. Rounded as it is in form, using the word form in its simplest sense — printed form — it remains yet a fragment from its very nature and also from necessity. It could never have become anything else. And even as a fragment it is but a fragment of something that might have been — of a mere intention.

But as it stands what impresses me most is the amount this fragment contains of the crudely materialistic atmosphere of the time of its origin, the time when the English Review was founded. It emerges from the depth of a past as distant from us now as the square-skirted, long frock-coats in which unscrupulous, cultivated, high-minded jounisseurs like ours here attended to their strange business activities and cultivated the little blue flower of sentiment. No doubt our man was conceived for purposes of irony; but our conception of him, I fear, is too fantastic.

Yet the most fantastic thing of all, as it seems to me, is that we two, who had so often discussed soberly the limits and the methods of literary composition, should have believed, for a moment, that a piece of work in the nature of an analytical confession (produced in articulo mortis as it were) could have been developed and achieved in collaboration !

What optimism ! But it did not last long. I seem to remember a moment when I burst into earnest entreaties that all those people should be thrown overboard without much ado. This, I believe, is the real nature of the crime. Overboard. The neatness and dispatch with which it is done in Chapter VIII were wholly the act of my collaborator's good nature in the face of my panic.

After signing these few prefatory words, I will pass the pen to him in the hope that he may be moved to contradict me on every point of fact, impression and appreciation. I said “ the hope.” Yes. Eager hope. For it

would be delightful to catch the echo of the desperate, earnest, eloquent and funny quarrels which enlivened those old days. The pity of it that there comes a time when all the fun of one's life must be looked for in the past !

J. C.

June 1924

## PREFACE BY FORD MADOX HUEFFER

No, I find nothing to contradict, for, the existence of this story having been recalled to my mind by a friend, the details of its birth and its attendant circumstances remain for me completely forgotten, a dark, blind spot on the brain. I cannot remember the houses in which the writing took place, the view from the windows, the pen, the table cloth. At a given point in my life I forgot, literally, all the books I had ever written; but, if nowadays I reread one of them, though I possess next to none and have reread few, nearly all the phrases come back startlingly to my memory, and I see glimpses of Kent, of Sussex, of Carcassonne — of New York, even; and fragments of furniture, mirrors, who knows what? So that, if I didn't happen to retain, almost by a miracle, for me, of retention, the marked up copy of Romance from which was made the analysis lately published in a certain periodical, I am certain that I could have identified the phrases exactly as they stand. Looking at the book now I can hear our voices as we read one passage or another aloud for purposes of correction. Moreover, I could say: This passage was written in Kent and hammered over in Sussex; this, written in Sussex and worked on in Kent; or this again was written in the downstairs cafe, and hammered in the sitting-room on the first-floor of an hotel that faces the sea on the Belgian coast.

But of the Nature of a Crime no phrase at all suggests either the tones of a voice or the colour of a day. When an old friend, last year, on a Parisian Boulevard, said: "Isn't there a story by yourself and Collaborator buried in the So and So?" I repudiated the idea with a great deal of heat. Eventually I had to admit the, as it were, dead fact. And, having admitted that to myself, and my Collaborator having corroborated it, I was at once possessed by a sort of morbid craving to get the story republished in a definite and acknowledged form. One may care infinitely little for the fate of one's work, and yet be almost hypochondriacally anxious as to the form its publication shall take — if the publication is likely to occur posthumously. I became at once dreadfully afraid that some philologist of that Posterity for which one writes might, in the course of his hyena occupation, disinter these poor bones, and, attributing sentence one to writer A and sentence two to B. maul at least one of our memories. With the nature of those crimes one

is only too well acquainted. Besides, though one may never read comments one desires to get them over. It is, indeed, agreeable to hear a storm rage in the distance, and rumble eventually away.

Let me, however, since my Collaborator wishes it, and in the name of Fun that is to-day hardly an echo, differ from him for a shade as to the nature of those passages of time. I protest against the word quarrels. There were not any. And I should like to make the note that our collaboration was almost purely oral. We wrote and read aloud the one to the other. Possibly in the end we even wrote to read aloud the one to the other: for it strikes me very forcibly that the Nature of a Crime is for the most part prose meant for recitation, or of that type.

Anyhow, as the memory comes back to me overwhelmingly, I would read on and read on. One begins with a fine propulsion. Sometimes that would last to the end. But, as often as not, by a real telepathy, with my eyes on the page and my voice going on, I would grow aware of an exaggerated stillness on the part of my Collaborator in the shadows. It was an extraordinary kind of stillness: not of death: not of an ice age. Yes, it was the stillness of a prisoner on the rack determined to conceal an agony. I would read on, my voice gradually sticking to my jaws. When it became unbearable I would glance up. On the other side of the hearth I would have a glimpse of a terribly sick man, of a convulsed face, of fingers contorted. Guido Fawkes beneath the *peine forte et dure* looked like that. You are to remember that we were very serious about writing. I would read on. After a long time it would come: “ Oh ! ... Oh, Oh ! ... Oh, my God.... My dear Ford.... My dear faller....” (That in those days was the fashionable pronunciation of “ fellow.”)

For myself, I would listen always with admiration. Always with an admiration that I have never since recaptured. And if there were admirablenesses that did not seem to me to fit in with the given scene, I could at least, at the end of the reading, say with perfect sincerity: “ Wonderful ! How you do things ! ... “ before beginning on: “ But don’t you perhaps think....”

And I really do not believe that either my Collaborator or myself ever made an objection, which was not jointly sustained. That is not quarrels. When I last looked through the bound proofs of *Romance* I was struck with the fact that whereas my Collaborator eliminated almost every word of action and 80 per cent. of the conversations by myself, I supplied almost all

the descriptive passages of the really collaborated parts — and such softer sentiment as was called for. And my Collaborator let them get through.

All this took place long ago; most of it in another century, during another reign; whilst an earlier, but not less haughty and proud, generation were passing away.

F.M.H.

June 1924

## THE NATURE OF CRIME

### I

You are, I suppose, by now in Rome. It is very curious how present to me are both Rome and yourself. There is a certain hill — you, and that is the curious part of it, will never go there — yet, yesterday, late in the evening, I stood upon its summit, and you came walking from a place below. It is always midday there: the seven pillars of the Forum stand on high, their capitals linked together, and form one angle

of a square. At their bases there lie some detritus, a broken marble lion, and I think but I am not certain, the bronze she-wolf suckling the two bronze children. Your dress brushed the herbs: it was grey and tenuous: I suppose you do not know how you look when you are unconscious of being looked at ? But I looked at you for a long time — at my You.

I saw your husband yesterday at the club and he said that you would not be returning till the end of April. When I got back to my chambers I found a certain letter. I will tell you about it afterwards — but I forbid you to look at the end of what I am writing now. There is a piece of news coming: I would break it to you if I could — but there is no way of breaking the utterly unexpected. Only, if you read this through you will gather from the tenor, from the tone of my thoughts, a little inkling, a small preparation for my disclosure. Yes: it is a “ disclosure.”

... Briefly, then, it was this letter — a business letter — that set me thinking: that made that hill rise before me. Yes, I stood upon it and there before me lay Rome — beneath a haze, in the immense sea of plains. I have often thought of going to Rome — of going with you, in a leisurely autumn of your life and mine. Now — since I have received that letter — I know that I shall never see any other Rome than that from an imagined hilltop. And when, in the wonderful light and shadelessness of that noon, last evening, you came from a grove of silver poplars, I looked at you — *my* you — for a very long while. You had, I think, a parasol behind your head, you moved slowly, you looked up at the capitals of those seven pillars ...And I thought that I should never — since you will not return before the end of April — never see you again. I shall never see again the you that every other man sees ...



You understand everything so well that already you must understand the nature of my disclosure. It is, of course, no disclosure to tell you that I love you. A very great reverence is due to youth — and a very great latitude is due to the dead. For I am dead: I have only lived through you for how many years now ! And I shall never speak with you again. Some sort of burial will have been given to me before the end of April. I am a spirit. I have ended my relations with the world. I have balanced all my books, my will is made. Only I have nothing to leave — save to you, to whom I leave all that is now mine in the world — my memory.

It is very curious — the world now. I walked slowly down here from Gordon Square. I walked slowly — for all my work is done. On the way I met Graydon Bankes, the K.C. It would have astonished him if he could have known how unreal he looked to me. He is six feet high, and upon his left cheek there is a brown mole. I found it difficult to imagine why he existed. And all sorts of mists hurried past him. It was just

outside the Natural History Museum. He said that his Seaford Railway Bill would come before Committee in June. And I wondered: what is June? ... I laughed and thought: why June will never come !

June will never come. Imagine that for a moment. We have discussed the ethics of suicide. You see why June will never come !

You remember that ring I always wear ? The one with a bulging, greenish stone. Once or twice you have asked me what stone it was. You thought, I know, that it was in bad taste and I told you I wore it for the sake of associations. I know you thought — but no: there has never been any woman but you.

You must have felt a long time ago that there was not, that there could not have been another woman. The associations of the ring are not with the past of a finished affection, or hate, or passion, to all these forms of unrest that have a term in life: they looked forward to where there is no end — whether there is rest in it God alone knows. If it were not bad taste to use big words in extremities I would say there was Eternity in the ring — Eternity which is the negation of all that life may contain of losses and disappointments. Perhaps you have noticed that there was one note in our confidence that never responded to your touch. It was that note of universal negation contained within the glass film of the ring. It is not you who brought the ring into my life: I had it made years ago. It was in my nature always to anticipate a touch on my shoulder, to which the only answer

could be an act of defiance. And the ring is my weapon. I shall raise it to my teeth, bite through the glass: inside there is poison.

I haven't concealed anything from you. Have I ? And, with the great wisdom for which I love you, you have tolerated these other things. You would have tolerated this too, you who have met so many sinners and have never sinned ...

Ah, my dear one — that is why I have so loved you. From our two poles we have met upon one common ground of scepticism — so that I am not certain whether it was you or I who first said: “ Believe nothing: be

harsh to no one.” But at least we have suffered. One does not drag around with one such a cannon-ball as I have done all these years without thinking some wise thoughts. And well I know that in your dreary and terrible life you have gained your great wisdom. You have been envied; you too have thought: Is any prospect fair to those among its trees? And I have been envied for my gifts, for my talents, for my wealth, for my official position, for the letters after my name, for my great and empty house, for my taste in pictures — for my ... for my opportunities.

Great criminals and the very patient learn one common lesson: Believe in nothing, be harsh to no one !

But you cannot understand how immensely leisurely I feel. It is one o'clock at night. I cannot possibly be arrested before eleven to-morrow morning. I have ten hours in which, without the shadow of a doubt, I can write to you: I can put down my thoughts desultorily and lazily. I have half a score hours in which to speak to you.

The stress of every secret emotion makes for sincerity in the end. Silence is like a dam. When the flood is at its highest the dam gives way. I am not conceited enough to think that I can sweep you along, terrified, in the rush of my confidences. I have not the elemental force. Perhaps it is just that form of “ greatness “ that I have lacked all my life — that profound quality which the Italians call *terribilita*. There is nothing overpowering or terrible in the confession of a love too great to be kept within the bounds of the banality which is the safeguard of our daily life. Men have been nerved to crime for the sake of a love that was theirs. The call of every great passion is to unlawfulness. But your love was not mine, and my love for you was vitiated by that conventional reverence which, as to nine parts in ten, is genuine, but as to the last tenth a solemn sham behind which hide all the timidities of a humanity no longer in its youth. I have been of my time —

altogether of my time — lacking courage for a swoop, as a bird respects a ragged and nerveless scarecrow. Altogether a man of my time. Observe, I do not say “our time.” You are of all time — you are the loved Woman of the first cry that broke the silence and of the last song that shall mark the end of this ingenious world to which love and suffering have been given, but which has in the course of ages invented for itself all the virtues and all the crimes. And being of this world and of my time I have set myself to deal ingeniously with my suffering and my love.

Now everything is over — even regrets. Nothing remains of finite things but a few days of life and my confession to make to you — to you alone of all the world.

It is difficult. How am I to begin? Would you believe it every time I left your presence it was with the desire, with the necessity to forget you. Would you believe it?

This is the great secret — the heart of my confession. The distance did not count. No walls could make me safe. No solitude could defend me; and having no faith in the consolations of eternity I suffered too cruelly from your absence.

If there had been kingdoms to conquer, a crusade to preach — but no. I should not have had the courage to go beyond the sound of your voice. You might have called to me any time I You never did. Never. And now it is too late. Moreover, I am a man of my time, the time is not of great deeds but of colossal speculations. The moments when I was not with you had to be got through somehow. I dared not face them empty-handed lest from sheer distress I should go mad and begin to execrate you. Action? What form of action could remove me far enough from you whose every thought was referred to your existence. And as you were to me a soul of truth and serenity I tried to forget you in lies and excitement. My only refuge from the tyranny of my desire was in abasement. Perhaps I was mad. I gambled. I gambled first with my own money and then with money that was not mine. You know my connection with the great Burden fortune. I was trustee under my friend's, Alexander Burden's will. I gambled with a determined recklessness, with closed eyes. You understand now the origin of my houses, of my collections, of my reputation, of my taste for magnificence — which you deigned sometimes to mock indulgently with an exquisite flattery as at something not quite worthy of me. It was like a break-neck ride on a wild horse, and now the fall has come. It was sudden. I am alive

but my back is broken. Edward Burden is going to be married. I must pay back what I have borrowed from the Trust. I cannot. Therefore I am dead. (A mouse has just come out from beneath one of the deed-boxes. It looks up at me. It may have been eating some of the papers in the large cupboard.

To-morrow morning I shall tell Saunders to get a cat. I have never seen a mouse here before. I have never been here so late before. At times of pressure, as you know, I have always taken my papers home. So that these late hours have been, as it were, the prerogative of the mouse. No. I shall not get a cat. To that extent I am still a part of the world: I am master of the fate of mice !) I have, then, ten hours, less the time it has taken me to chronicle the mouse, in which to talk to you. It is strange, when I look back on it, that in all the years we have known each other — seven years, three months and two days — I have never had so long as ten hours in which I might talk to you. The longest time was when we came back from Paris together, when your husband was in such a state that he could neither see nor hear. (I've seen him, by-the-bye, every day since you have been gone. He's really keeping away from it wonderfully well; in fact, I should say that he has not once actually succumbed. I fancy, really, that your absence is good for him in a way: it creates a new set of circumstances, and a change is said to be an excellent aid in the breaking of a habit. He has, I mean, to occupy himself with some of the things, innumerable as they are, that you do for him. I find that he has even had his pass-book from the bank and has compared it with his counterfoils. I haven't, on account of this improvement, yet been round to his chemist's. But I shall certainly tell them that they *must* surreptitiously decrease the strength of it.) That was the longest time we have ever really talked together. And, when I think that in all these years I haven't once so much as held your hand for a moment longer than the strictest of etiquette demanded ! And I loved you within the first month.

I wonder why that is. Fancy, perhaps. Habit perhaps — a kind of idealism, a kind of delicacy, a fastidiousness. As you know very well it is not on account of any moral scruples.

I break off to look through what I have already written to you. There is, first, the question of why I never told you my secret: then, the question of what my secret really is; I have started so many questions and have not followed one of them out to the very end. But all questions resolve themselves into the one question of our dear and inestimable relationship.

I think it has been one of the great charms of our relationship that all our talks have been just talks. We have discussed everything under the sun, but we have never discussed anything *au fond*. We have strayed into all sorts of byways and have never got anywhere. I try to remember how many evenings in the last five years we have not spent together. I think they must be less than a hundred in number. You know how, occasionally, your husband would wake out of his stupors — or walk *in* his stupor and deliver one of his astonishingly brilliant disquisitions. But remember how, always, whether he talked of free love or the improvement in the breed of carriage-horses, how he always thrashed his subject out to the bitter end. It was not living with a man: it was assisting at a performance. And, when he was sunk into his drugs or when he was merely literary, or when he was away, how lazily we talked. I think no two minds were ever so fitted one into another as yours and mine. It is not of course that we agree on all subjects — or perhaps upon any. In the whole matter of conduct we are so absolutely different — you are always for circumspection, for a careful preparation of the ground, for patience; and I am always ready to act, and afterwards draw the moral from my own actions. But somehow, in the end, it has all worked out in our being in perfect agreement. Later I will tell you why that is.

Let me return to my mouse. For you will observe that the whole question revolves, really, around that little allegorical mite. It is an omen: it is a symbol. It is a little herald of the Providence that I do not believe in — of the Providence you so implicitly seek to obey. For instinctively you believe in Providence — in God, if you will. I as instinctively disbelieve. Intellectually of course you disbelieve in a God. You say that it is impossible for Reason to accept an Overlord; I that Reason forces one to accept an Overlord; I that Reason forces one to believe in an Omnipotent Ruler — only I am unable to believe. We, my dear, are in ourselves evidence of a design in creation. For we are the last word of creation. It has taken all the efforts, all the birthpangs of all the ages to evolve — you and me. And, being evolved, we are intellectually so perfectly and so divinely fashioned to dovetail together. And, physically too, are we not divinely meant the one for the other? Do we not react to the same causes: should not we survive the same hardships or succumb to the same stresses? Since you have been away I have gone looking for people — men, women, children, even animals — that could hold my attention for a minute. There has not been one. And what purer evidence of design could you ask for than that?

I have made this pact with the Providence that I argue for, with the Providence in whose existence I cannot believe — that if, from under the castle of black metal boxes, the mouse reappear and challenge death — then there is no future state. And, since I can find no expression save in you, if we are not reunited I shall no longer exist. So my mouse is the sign, the arbitrament, a symbol of an eternal life or the herald of nothingness.

I will make to you the confession that since this fancy, this profound truth, has entered my mind, I have not raised my eyes from the paper. I dread — I suppose it is dread — to look across the ring of light that my lamp casts. But now I will do so. I will let my eyes travel across the bundles of dusty papers on my desk. Do you know I have left them just as they were on the day when you came to ask me to take your railway tickets ? I will let my eyes travel across that rampart of blue and white dockets.... The mouse is not there. |

But that is not an end of it. I am not a man to be ungenerous in my dealings with the Omnipotent: I snatch no verdict.

## II

LAST night it was very late and I grew tired, so I broke off my letter. Perhaps I was really afraid of seeing that mouse again. Those minute superstitions are curious things. I noticed, when I looked at the enumeration of these pages to-night, I began to write upon the thirteenth sheet — and that gives me a vague dissatisfaction. I read, by-the-bye, a paragraph in a newspaper: it dealt with half-mad authors. One of these, the writer said, was Zola; he was stated to be half-mad because he added together the numbers on the backs of cabs passing him in the street. Personally, I do that again and again — and I know very well that I do it in order to dull my mind. It is a sort of narcotic. Johnson, we know, touched his street-posts in a certain order: that, too, was to escape from miserable thoughts. And we all know how, as children, we have obeyed mysterious promptings to step upon the lines between the paving-stones in the street.... But the children have their futures: it is well that they should propitiate the mysterious Omnipotent One. In their day, too, Johnson and Zola had their futures. It was well that Johnson should “ touch “ against the evil chance; that Zola should rest his mind against new problems. In me it is mere imbecility. For I have no future.

Do you find it difficult to believe that? You know the Burdens, of course. But I think you do not know that, for the last nine years, I have administered the Burden estates all by myself. The original trustees were old Lady Burden and I; but nine years ago Lady Burden gave me a power of attorney and since then I have acted alone. It was just before then that I had bought the houses in Gordon Square — the one I live in, the one you live in, and the seven others. Well, rightly speaking, those houses have been bought with Burden money, and all my pictures, all my prints, all my books, my furniture — my reputation as a connoisseur, my governorship of the two charities — all the me that people envy have been bought with the Burden money. I assure you that at times I have found it a pleasurable excitement.... You see, I have wanted you sometimes so terribly — so terribly that the juggling with the Burden accounts has been as engrossing a narcotic as to Zola was the adding up of the numbers upon the backs of cabs. Mere ordinary work would never have held my thoughts.

Under old Burden's will young Edward Burden comes of age when he reaches the age of twenty-five or when he marries with my consent. Well, he will reach the age of twenty-five and he will marry on April 5. On that day the solicitors of his future wife will make their scrutiny of my accounts. It is regarded, you understand, as a mere formality. But it amuses me to think of the faces of Coke and Coke when they come to certain figures ! It was an outlaw of some sort, was it not, who danced and sang beneath the gallows ? I wonder, now, what sort of traitor, outlaw, or stealthy politician I should have made in the Middle Ages. It is certain that, save for this one particular of property, I should be in very truth illustrious. No doubt the state shall come at last in which there shall no more be any property. I was born before my time.

For it is certain that I am illustrious save in that one respect. To-day young Edward Burden came here to the office to introduce me to his *fiancee*. You observe that I have robbed her. The Burden property is really crippled. They came, this bright young couple, to get a cheque from me with which to purchase a motor-car. They are to try several cars in the next three weeks. On the day before the wedding they are to choose one that will suit them best — and on the wedding-day in the evening they are to start for Italy. They will be coming towards you.... Then no doubt, too, a telegram will reach them, to say that in all probability motor-cars will be things not for them for several years to come. What a crumbling of their lives !

It was odd how I felt towards *her*. You know his pompous, high forehead, the shine all over him, the grave, weighty manner. He held his hat — a wonderful shiny, “ good “ hat — before his mouth, for all the world as if he had been in church. He made, even, a speech in introducing Miss Averies to me. You see, in a sense, he was in a temple. My office enshrined a deity, a divinity: the law, property, the rights of man as maintained by an august constitution. I am for him such a wonderfully “ safe “ man. My dear one, you cannot imagine how I feel towards him: a little like a deity, a little like an avenging Providence. I imagine that the real Deity must feel towards some of His worshippers much as I feel towards this phoenix of the divines.

The Deity is after all the supreme Artist — and the supreme quality of Art is surprise.

Imagine then the feeling of the Deity towards some of those who most confidently enter His temple. Just imagine His attitude towards those who deal in the obvious platitudes that “ honesty is the best policy,” or “ genius



the capacity for taking pains.” So for days the world appears to them. Then suddenly: honesty no longer pays; the creature, amassing with his infinite pains, data for his Great Work, is discovered to have produced a work of an Infinite Dulness. That is the all-suffering Deity manifesting Himself to His worshippers. For assuredly a day comes when two added to two no longer results in four.

That day will come on April 5 for Edward Burden.

After all he has done nothing to make two and two become four. He has not even checked his accounts. Well, for some years now I have been doing as much as that. But with his *fiancee* it is different. She is a fair, slight girl with eyes that dilate under all sorts of emotion. In my office she appears not a confident worshipper but a rather frightened fawn led before an Anthropomorphic Deity. And, strangely enough, though young Burden who trusts me inspires me with a sardonic dislike, I felt myself saying to this poor little thing that faced me: “ Why: I have wronged you ! “ And I regretted it.

She, you see, has after all given something towards a right to enjoy the Burden estates and the Burden wealth; she has given her fragile beauty, her amiability, her worship, no doubt, of the intolerable Edward. And all this payment in the proper coin; so she has in a sense a right....

Good-night, dear one, I think you have it in your power — you *might* have it in your power — to atone to this little creature. To-morrow I will tell you why and how.

### III

I WROTE last night that you have something in your power. If you wished it you could make me live on. I am confident that you will not wish it: for you will understand that capriciously or intolerably I am tired of living this life. I desire you so terribly that now, even the excitement of fooling Burden no longer hypnotises me into an acceptance of life without you. Frankly, I am tired out. If I had to go on living any longer I should have to ask you to be mine in one form or other. With that and with my ability — for of course I have great ability — I could go on fooling Burden for ever. I could restore: I could make sounder than ever it was that preposterous “ going concern “ the Burden Estate. Unless I like to let them, I think that the wife’s solicitors will not discover what I have done. For, frankly, I have put myself out in this matter in order to be amusing to myself and ingenious. I have forged whole builder’s estimates for repairs that were never executed: I have invented whole hosts of defaulting tenants. It has not been latterly for money that I have done this: it has been simply for the sheer amusement of looking at Edward Burden and saying to myself:

“ Ah: you trust me, my sleek friend. Well... .”

But indeed I fancy that I am rich enough to be able to restore to them all that I have taken. And, looking at Edward Burden’s little *fiancee*, I was almost tempted to set upon that weary course of juggling. But I am at the end of my tether. I cannot live without you longer. And I do not wish to ask you. Later I will tell you. Or No — I will tell you now.

You see, my dear thing, it is a question of going one better. It would be easy enough to deceive your husband: it would be easier still to go away together. I think that neither you nor I have ever had any conscientious scruples. But, analysing the matter down to its very depths, I think we arrive at this, that without the motives for self-restraint that other people have we are anxious to show more self-restraint than they. We are doing certain work not for payment but for sheer love of work. Do I make myself clear ? For myself I have a great pride in your image. I can say to myself: “ Here is a woman, my complement. She has no respect for the law. She does not value what a respect for the law would bring her. Yet she remains purer than the purest of the makers of law.” And I think it is the converse of that feeling that you have for me.

If you desire me to live on, I will live on: I am so swayed by you that if you desire me to break away from this ideal of you, the breath of a command will send me round to your side.

I am ready to give my life for this Ideal: nay more, I am ready to sacrifice you to it, since I know that life for you will remain a very bitter thing. I know, a little, what renunciation means.

And I am asking you to bear it — for the sake of my ideal of you. For, assuredly, unless I can have you I must die — and I know that you will not ask me to have you. And I love you: and bless you for it.

## IV

I HAVE just come in from *Tristan and Isolde*. I had to hurry and be there for the first notes because you — my you — would, I felt, be sitting beside me as you have so often. That, of course, is passion — the passion that makes us unaccountable in our actions.

I found you naturally: but I found, too, something else. It has always a little puzzled me why we return to Tristan. There are passages in that thing as intolerable as anything in any of the Germanic master's scores. But we are held — simply by the idea of the love-philtre: it's that alone that interests us. We do not care about the initial amenities of Tristan and the prima donna: we do not believe in Mark's psychologising: but, from the moment when those two dismal marionettes have drained unconsideringly the impossible cup, they become suddenly alive, and we see two human beings under the grip of a passion — acting as irrationally as I did when I promised my cabman five shillings to get me to the theatre in time for the opening bars.

It is, you see, the love-philtre that performs this miracle. It interests — it is real to us — because every human being knows what it is to act, irrationally, under the stress of some passion or other. We are drawn along irresistibly: we commit the predestined follies or the predestined heroisms: the other side of our being acts in contravention of all our rules of conduct or of intellect. Here, in Tristan, we see such madness justified with a concrete substance, a herb, a root. We see a vision of a state of mind in which morality no longer exists: we are given a respite, a rest: an interval in which no standard of conduct oppresses us. It is an idea of an appeal more universal than any other in which the tired imagination of humanity takes refuge.

The thought that somewhere in the world there should be something that I could give to you, or you to me, that would leave us free to do what we wish without the drag of the thought of what we owe, to each other, to the world ! And after all, what greater gift could one give to another? It would be the essential freedom. For assuredly, the philtre could do no more than put it in a man's power to do what he would do if he were let loose. He would not bring out more than he had in him: but he would fully and finally express himself.

Something unexpected has changed the current of my thoughts. Nothing can change their complexion, which is governed not by what others do but by the action which I must face presently. And I don't know why I should use the word unexpected, unless because at the moment I was very far from expecting that sort of perplexity. The correct thing to say would be that something natural has happened.

Perfectly natural. Asceticism is the last thing that one could expect from the Burdens. Alexander Burden, the father, was an exuberant millionaire, in no vulgar way, of course; he was exuberant with restraint, not for show, with a magnificence which was for private satisfaction mainly. I am talking here of the ascetic temperament which is based on renunciation, not of mere simplicity of tastes, which is simply scorn for certain orders of sensations. There have been millionaires who have lived simply. There have been millionaires who have lived sordidly — but miserliness is one of the supreme forms of sensualism.

Poor Burden had a magnificent physique. The reserved abilities of generations of impoverished Burdens, starved for want of opportunities, matured in his immense success — and all their starved appetites too. But all the reserve quality of obscure Burdens has been exhausted in him. There was nothing to come to his son — who at most could have been a great match and is to-day looked upon in that light, I suppose, by the relations of his future wife. I don't know in what light that young man looks upon himself. His time of trial is coming.

Yesterday at eight in the evening he came to see me. I thought at first he wanted some money urgently. But very soon I reflected that he need not have looked so embarrassed in that case. And presently I discovered that it was not money that he was in need of. He looked as though he had come, with that characteristic gravity of his — so unlike his father — to seek absolution at my hands. But that intention he judged more decorous, I suppose, to present to me as a case of conscience.

Of course it was the case of a girl — not his *fiancee*. At first I thought he was in an ugly scrape. Nothing of the kind. The excellent creature who had accepted his protection for some two years past — how dull they must have seemed to her — was perhaps for that reason perfectly resigned to forgo that advantage. At the same time, she was not too proud to accept a certain provision, compensation — whatever you like to call it. I had never heard of anything so proper in my life. He need not have explained the matter to

me at all. But evidently he had made up his mind to indulge in the luxury of a conscience.

To indulge that sort of conscience leads one almost as far as indulged passion, only, I cannot help thinking, on a more sordid road. A luxury snatched from the fire is in a way purified, but to find this one he had gone apparently to the bottom of his heart. I don't charge him with a particularly odious degree of corruption, but I perceived clearly that what he wanted really was to project the sinful effect of that irregular connection — let us call it — into his regulated, reformed, I may say lawfully blessed state — for the sake of retrospective enjoyment, I suppose. This rather subtle, if unholy, appetite, he was pleased to call the voice of his conscience. I listened to his dialectic exercises till the great word that was sure to come out sooner or later was pronounced.

“ It seems,” he said, with every appearance of distress, “ that from a strictly moral point of view I ought to make a clean breast of it to Annie.”

I listened to him — and, by Heaven, listening to him I *do* feel like the Godhead of whom I have already written to you. You know, positively he said that at the very moment of his “fall” he had thought of what I should think of him. And I said:

“ My good Edward, you are the most debauched person I have ever met.”

His face fell, his soft lips dropped right down into a horseshoe. He had come to me as one of those bland optimists *would* go to his deity. He expected to be able to say: “ I have sinned,” and to be able to hear the deity say: “ That's all right, your very frank confession does you infinite credit.” His deity was, in fact, to find him some way out of his moral hole. I was to find him some genial excuse; to make him feel good in his excellent digestion once more. That was, absolutely, his point of view, for at my brutal pronouncement he stuttered:

“ But — but surely ... the faults of youth ... and surely there are plenty of others ? ...”

I shook my head at him and panic was dropping out of his eyes: “ Can't I marry Annie honourably? ” he quavered. I took a sinister delight in turning the knife inside him. I was going to let him go anyhow: the sort of cat that I am always lets its mice go. (That mouse, by-the-bye, has never again put in an appearance.)

“ My dear fellow,” I said, “ does not your delicacy let you see the hole you put me into ? It's to my interest that you should not marry Miss Averies

and you ask me to advise you on the point.”

His mouth dropped open: positively he had never considered that when he married I lost the confounded three hundred a year for administering the Burden Trust. I sat and smiled at him to give him plenty of time to let his mind agonise over his position.

. “ Oh, hang it,” he said.... And his silly eyes rolled round my room looking for that Providence that he felt ought to intervene in his behalf. When they rested on me again I said:

“ There, go away. Of course it’s a fault of your youth. Of course every man that’s fit to call himself a man has seduced a clergyman’s daughter.”

He said :

“ Oh, but there was not anything common about it.”

“ No,” I answered, “ you had an uncommonly good time of it with your moral scruples. I envy you the capacity. You’ll have a duller one with Miss Averies, you know.”

That was too much for him to take in, so he smoothed his hat.

“ When you said I was ... debauched ... you were only laughing at me. That was hardly fair. I’m tremendously in earnest.”

“ You’re only play-acting compared with me,” I answered. He had the air of buttoning his coat after putting a cheque into his breast pocket. He had got, you see, the cheque he expected: my applause of his successful seduction, my envy of his good fortune. That was what he had come for — and he got it. He went away with it pretty barefacedly, but he stopped at the threshold to let drop:

“ Of course if I had known you would be offended by my having recourse to Annie’s solicitors for the settlement...”

I told him I was laughing at him about that too.

“ It was the correct thing to do, you know,” were the words he shut the door upon. The ass...

The phrase of his — that he had thought of me at the moment of his fall — gives you at once the measure of his respect for me. But it gave me much more. It gave me my cue: it put it into my head to say he was debauched. And, indeed, that is debauchery. For it is the introduction of one’s morals into the management of one’s appetites that makes an indulgence of them debauchery. Had my friend Edward regarded his seduction as the thing he so much desired me to tell him it was; a thing of youth, high spirits — a thing we all do — had he so regarded it I could not

really have called it debauchery. But — and this is the profound truth — the measure of debauchery is the amount of joy we get from the indulgence of our appetites. And the measure of joy we get is the amount of excitement: if it brings into play not only all our physical but all our moral nature, then we have the crucial point beyond which no man can go. It isn't, in fact, the professional seducer, the artist in seduction that gets pleasure from the pursuit of his avocation, any more than it is the professional musician who gets thrills from the performance of music. You cannot figure to yourself the violinist, as he fiddles the most complicated passage of a concerto, when he really surmounts the difficulty by dint of using all his knowledge and all his skill — you cannot imagine him thinking of his adviser, his mother, his God and all the other things that my young friend says he thought about. And it is the same with the professional seducer. He may do all that he knows to bring his object about — but that is not debauchery. It is, by comparison, a joyless occupation: it is drinking when you are thirsty. Putting it in terms of the most threadbare allegory — you cannot imagine that Adam got out of the fall the pleasure that Edward Burden got out of his bite of the apple.

But Edward Burden, whilst he shilly-shallied with “ Shall I ? “ and “ Shan't I ? “ could deliciously introduce into the matter *all* his human relationships. He could think of me, of his mother, of the fact that potentially he was casting to the winds the very cause for his existence. For assuredly, if Edward Burden have a cause for existence it is that he should not, morally or physically, do anything that would unfit him to make a good marriage. So he had, along with what physical pleasure there might be, the immense excitement of staking his all along with the tremendous elation of the debate within himself that went before. For he was actually staking his all upon the chance that he could both take what he desired and afterwards reconcile it with his conscience to make a good match. Well, he has staked and won. That is the true debauchery. That, in a sense, is the compensating joy that Puritanism gets.



## V

I HAVE just come in. Again you will not guess from where. From choosing a motor car with Burden and his *fiancee*. It seems incredible that I should be called upon to preside at these preparations for my own execution. I looked at hundreds of these shiny engines, with the monstrously inflated white wheels, and gave a half-amused — but I can assure you a half-interested — attention to my own case. For one of these will one day — and soon now — be arrested in a long rush, by my extinction. In it there will be seated the two young people who went with me through the garages. They will sit in some sort of cushioned ease — the cushions will be green, or red, or blue in shiny leather. I think, however, that they will not be green — because Miss Averies let slip to me, in a little flutter of shy confidence, the words: “ Oh, don’t let’s have green, because it’s an unlucky colour.” Edward Burden, of course, suppressed her with a hurried whisper as if, in thus giving herself away to me, she must be committing a sin against the house of Burden.

That, naturally, is the Burden tradition: a Burden’s wife must possess frailties: but she must feign perfection even to a trusted adviser of the family. She must not confess to superstitions. It was amusing, the small incident, because it was the very first attempt that little Miss Averies has ever made to get near me. God knows what Edward may have made me appear to her: but I fancy that, whatever Edward may have said, she had pierced through that particular veil: she realises, with her intuition, that I am dangerous. She is alarmed and possibly fascinated because she feels that I am not “ straight “ — that I might, in fact, be a woman or a poet. Burden, of course, has never got beyond seeing that I dress better than he does and choose a dinner better than his uncle Darlington.

I came, of course, out of the motor-car ordeal with flying colours — on these lines. I lived, in fact, up to my character for being orthodox in the matter of comfort. I even suggested two little mirrors, like those which were so comforting to us all when we sat in hansom cabs. That struck Burden as being the height of ingenuity — and I know it proved to Miss Averies, most finally, that I am dangerous, since no woman ever looks in those little mirrors without some small motive of coquetry. It was just after that that she said to me:

“ Don’t you think that the little measures on the tops of the new canisters are extravagant for China tea ? “

That, of course, admitted me to the peculiar intimacy that women allow to other women, or to poets, or to dangerous men. Edward, I know, dislikes the drinking of China tea because it is against the principle of supporting the British flag. But Miss Averies in her unequal battle with this youth of the classical features slightly vulgarised, called me in to show a sign of sympathy — to give at least the flicker of the other side — of the woman, the poet, or the pessimist among men. She asked me, in fact, not to take up the cudgels to the extent of saying that China tea is the thing to drink — that would have been treason to Edward — but she desired that her instinct should be acknowledged to the extent of saying that the measures of canisters should be contrived to suit the one kind of tea as well as the other. In his blind sort of way Edward caught the challenge in the remark and his straight brows lowered a very little.

“ If you don’t have more than three pounds of China tea in the house in a year it won’t matter about the measures,” he said. “ We never use more at Shackleton.”

“ But it makes the tea too strong, Edward.”

“ Then you need not fill the measure,” he answered.

“ Oh, I wish,” she said to me, “ that you’d tell Edward not to make me make tea at all. I dread it. The servants do it so much better.”

“ So,” I asked, “ Edward has arranged everything down to the last detail?”

Edward looked to me for approval and applause.

“ You see, Annie has had so little experience, and I’ve had to look after my mother’s house for years.” His air said: “Yes ! You’ll see our establishment will be run on the very best lines ! Don’t you admire the way I’m taming her already?”

I gave him, of course, a significant glance. Heaven knows why: for it is absolutely true that I am tired of appearing reliable — to Edward Burden or anyone else in the world. What I want to do is simply to say to Edward Burden: “ No, I don’t at all admire your dragging down a little bundle of ideals and sentiments to your own fatted calf’s level.”

I suppose I have in me something of the poet. I can imagine that if I had to love or to marry this little Averies girl I should try to find out what was her tiny vanity and I should minister to it. In some way I should discover

from her that she considered herself charming, or discreet, or tasteful, or frivolous, beyond all her fellows. And, having discovered it, I should bend all my energies to giving her opportunities for displaying her charm, her discreteness or her coquetry. With a woman of larger and finer mould — with you ! — I should no doubt bring into play my own idealism. I should invest her with the attributes that I consider the most desirable in the world. But in either case I cannot figure myself dragging her down to my own social or material necessities.

That is what Edward Burden is doing for little Miss Averies. I don't mean to say that he does not idealise her — but he sees her transfigured as the dispenser of his special brand of tea or the mother of the sort of child that he was. And that seems to me a very valid reason why women, if they were wise, should trust their fortunes cold-bloodedly and of set reason to the class of dangerous men that now allure them and that they flee from.

They flee from them, I am convinced, because they fear for their worldly material fortunes. They fear, that is to say, that the poet is not a stable man of business: they recognise that he is a gambler — and it seems to them that it is folly to trust to a gambler for life-long protection. In that they are perhaps right. But I think that no woman doubts her power to retain a man's affection — so that it is not to the reputation for matrimonial instability that the poet owes his disfavour. A woman lives, in short, to play with this particular fire, since to herself she says: “ Here is a man who has broken the hearts of many women. I will essay the adventure of taming him.” And, if she considers the adventure a dangerous one, that renders the contest only the more alluring, since at heart every woman, like every poet, is a gambler. In that perhaps she is right.

But it seems to me that women make a great mistake in the value of the stakes they are ready to pay in order to enter this game. They will stake, that is to say, their relatively great coin — their sentimental lives; but they hoard with closed fingers the threepenny bit which is merely the material future.

They prefer, that is to say, to be rendered the mere presiding geniuses of well-loaded boards. It is better to be a lady — which you will remember philologically means a “ loaf-cutter “ — than to be an Ideal.

And in this they are obviously wrong. If a woman can achieve the obvious miracle of making a dangerous man stable in his affections she may well be confident that she can persuade him to turn his serious attention to the task of keeping a roof over her head.

Certainly, I know, if I were a woman, which of the two types of men I would choose. Upon the lowest basis it is better for all purposes of human contracts to be married to a good liar than to a bad one. For a lie is a figurative truth — and it is the poet who is the master of these illusions. Even in the matter of marital relations it is probable that the poet is as faithful as the Edward Burdens of this world — only the Edward Burdens are more skilful at concealing from the rest of the world their pleasant vices. I doubt whether they are as skilful at concealing them from the woman concerned — from the woman, with her intuition, her power to seize fine shades of coolness and her awakened self-interest. Imagine the wife of Edward Burden saying to him, “ You have deceived me ! “ Imagine then the excellent youth, crimsoning, stuttering. He has been taught all his life that truth must prevail though the skies fall — and he stammers: “ Yes: I have betrayed you.” And that is tragedy, though in the psychological sense and that is the important one — Edward Burden may have been as faithful as the ravens, who live for fifteen decades with the same mate. He will, in short, blunder into a tragic, false position. And he will make the tragedy only the more tragic in that all the intellectual powers he may possess will be in the direction of perpetuating the dismal position. He will not be able to argue that he has not been unfaithful — but he will be able to find a hundred arguments for the miserable woman prolonging her life with him. Position, money, the interests of the children, the feelings of her family and of his — all these considerations will make him eloquent to urge her to prolong her misery. And probably she will prolong it.

This, of course, is due to the excellent Edward's lack of an instinctive sympathy. The poet, with a truer vision, will in the same case, be able to face his Miss Averies' saying, “ You have deceived me ! “ with a different assurance. Supposing the deflection to have been of the momentary kind, he will be able to deny with a good conscience since he will be aware of himself and his feelings. He will at least be able to put the case in its just light. Or, if the deflection be really temperamental, really permanent, he will be unable — it being

his business to look at the deeper verities — to lie himself out of the matter. He will break, strictly and sharply. Or, if he do not, it may be taken as a sign that his Miss Averies is still of value to him — that she, in fact, is still the woman that it is his desire to have for his companion. This is true of course, only in the large sense, since obviously there are poets whose

reverence for position, the interest of children or the feelings of their friends and relatives, may outweigh their hatred of a false position. These, however, are poets in the sense that they write verse: I am speaking of those who live the poet's life; to such, a false position is too intolerable to be long maintained.

But this again is only one of innumerable side-issues: let me return to my main contention that a dinner of herbs with a dangerous man is better than having to consume the flesh of stalled oxen with Edward Burden. Perhaps that is only a way of saying that you would have done better to entrust yourself to me than to — (But no, your husband is a better man than Edward Burden. He has at least had the courage to revert to his passion. I went this afternoon to your chemists and formally notified them that if they supplied him with more than the exactly prescribed quantity of that stuff, I, as holding your power of attorney, should do all that the law allows me to do against them).

Even to the dullest of men, marrying is for the most part an imaginative act. I mean marrying as a step in life sanctioned by law, custom and that general consent of mankind which is the hall-mark of every irrational institution. By irrational I do not mean wrong or stupid. Marriage is august by the magnitude of the issues it involves, balancing peace and strife on the fine point of a natural impulse refined by the need of a tangible ideal. I am not speaking here of mere domestic peace or strife which for most people that count are a question of manners and a mode of life. And I am thinking of the peace mostly — the peace of the soul which yearns for some sort of certitude in this earth, the peace of the heart which yearns for conquest, the peace of the senses that dreads deception, the peace of the imaginative faculty which in its restless quest of a high place of rest is spurred on by these great desires and that great fear.

And even Edward Burden's imagination is moved by these very desires and that very fear — or else he would not have dreamt of marrying. I repeat, marriage is an imaginative institution. It's true that his imagination is a poor thing, but it is genuine nevertheless. The faculty of which I speak is of one kind in all of us. Not to every one is given that depth of feeling, that faculty of absolute trust which *will not* be deceived, and the exulting masterfulness of the senses which are the mark of a fearless lover. Fearless lovers are rare, if obstinate, and sensual fools are countless as grains of sand

by the seashore. I can imagine that correct young man perfectly capable of setting himself deliberately to worry a distracted girl into surrender.

## VI

I DON'T know why, to-night in particular, the fact that I am a dead man occurs to me very insistently. I had forgotten this for two whole days. If anyone very dear to you has ever been *in extremis* at a distance and you have journeyed to be at the last bedside, you will know how possible this is — how for hours at a time the mind will go wandering away from the main fact that is drawing you onwards, till suddenly it comes back: some one is dying at a distance. And I suppose one's I is the nearest friend that one has —

and my I is dying at a distance. At the end of a certain number of days is the deathbed towards which I am hurrying — it is a fact which I cannot grasp. But one aspect grows more clear to me every time I return to this subject.

You remember that, when we have discussed suicide, we have agreed that to the man of action death is a solution: to the man of thought it is none. For the man of action expresses himself in action, and death is the negation of action: the man of thought sees the world only in thoughts, and over thought death exercises no solution of continuity. If one dies one's actions cease, one's problem continues. For that reason it is only in so far as I am a man of action that I shall be dying. You understand what I mean — for I do not mean that it is my actions that have killed me. It is simply because I have taken refuge from my thoughts in action, and because after April 5 that refuge will be closed to me, that I take refuge in a final action which, properly speaking, is neither action nor refuge.

And perhaps I am no man of action at all, since the action in which I have taken refuge is properly speaking no action at all, but merely the expression of a frame of mind. I have gambled, that is to say I have not speculated. For the speculator acts for gain: the gambler in order to interest himself. I have gambled — to escape from you: I have tried to escape from my thoughts of you into divining the undividable future. For that is what gambling is. You try for a rise: you try for a fall — and the rise or the fall may depend on the momentary madness of a dozen men who declare a war, or upon the rain from heaven which causes so many more stalks of wheat to arise upon so many million square inches of earth. The point is that you make yourself

dependent upon caprice — upon the caprice of the weather or upon the movement in the minds of men more insane than yourself.

To-day I have entered upon what is the biggest gamble of my whole life. Certain men who believe in me — they are not Edward Burdens, nevertheless they believe in me — have proposed to me to form a corner in a certain article which is indispensable to the daily life of the City. I do not tell you what it is because you will assuredly witness the effects of this inspiration.

You will say that, when this is accomplished, it will be utterly uninteresting. And that is literally true: when it is done it will be uninteresting. But in the multiplicity of things that will have to be done before the whole thing is done — in the waiting for things to take effect, in the failures perhaps more than in the successes, since the failures will imply new devising — in all the meticulous thought-readings that will be necessary, the interest will lie, and in the men with whom one is brought into contact, the men with whom one struggles, the men whom one must bribe or trick.

And you will say: How can I who am to die in fourteen days embark upon an enterprise that will last many months or many years? That, I think, is very simple.

It is my protest against being called a man of action, the misconception that I have had to resent all my life. And this is a thought: not an action: a thought made up of an almost infinite number of erring calculations. You have probably forgotten that I have founded two towns, upon the south coast: originated four railways in tropical climates and one in the West of England: and opened up heaven knows how many mines of one kind or another — and upon my soul I had forgotten these things too until I began to cast about in my mind. And now I go to my death unmindful of these glories in so far as they are concrete. In that sense my death is utter: it is a solution. But, in so far as they are my refuges from you they remain problems to which, if my ghost is to escape you, I must return again and again.

In dying I surrender to you and thus, for the inner self of myself, death is no ending but the commencement of who knows what tortures. It is only in the latent hope that death is the negation of consciousness that I shall take my life. For death, though it can very certainly end no problem, may at least make us unconscious of how, eventually, the problem solves itself. That,



you see, is really the crux of the whole thing — that is why the man of action will take refuge in death: the man of thought, never. But I, I am the man of neither the one nor the other: I am the man of love, which partakes of action and of thought, but which is neither.

The lover is, perhaps, the eternal doubter — simply because there is no certain panacea for love. Travel may cure it — but travel may cause to arise homesickness, which of all forms of love is the most terrible. To mix with many other men may cure it — but again, to the man who really loves, it may be a cause for still more terrible unrest, since seeing other men and women may set one always comparing the beloved object with the same thing. And, indeed, the form that it takes with me — for with me love takes the form of a desire to discuss — the form which it takes with me renders each thing that I see, each man with whom I speak, the more torturing, since always I desire to adjust my thoughts of them by your thoughts. I went down the other day — before I had begun to write these letters to you and before I knew death impended so nearly over me — to the sea at P — I was trying to get rid of you. I sat in the moonlight and saw the smacks come home, visible for a minute in the track of the moon and then no more than their lights in the darkness. The fishermen talked of death by drowning mostly: the passage of the boats across that trail of light suggested reflections, no doubt trite. But, without you to set my thoughts by, I could get no more forward: I went round and round in a ring from the corpses fished up in the nets to the track of the moon. And since walking up and down on the parade brought me no nearer to you, I did not even care to move: I neither meditated nor walked, neither thought nor acted. And that is real torture.

It was the next morning that I heard that young Burden desired that his *fiancee's* solicitors should scrutinise the accounts of the Burden Trust — and Death loomed up before me.

You will ask: why Death ? Why not some alternative? Flight or prison ? Well: prison would be an unendurable travelling through Time, flight an equally unendurable travelling through Time with Space added. Both these things are familiar: Death alone, in spite of all the experience that humanity has had of Death, is the utterly unfamiliar. For a gambler it is a *coup* alluring beyond belief — as we know neither what we stake nor what we stand to win. I, personally, stand to win a great deal, since Life holds nothing for me and I stake only my life — and what I seek is only

forgetfulness of you, or some sort of eventual and incomprehensible union with you. For the union with you that I seek is a queer sort of thing; hardly at all, I think, a union of the body, but a sort of consciousness of our thoughts proceeding onwards together. That we may find in the unending Afterwards. Or we may find the Herb Oblivion.

Either of these things I desire. For, in so far as we can dogmatise about Death we may lay it down that Death is the negation of Action but is powerless against Thought. I do not desire Action: and at the same time I do not fear Thought. For it is not my thoughts of you that I fear: left alone with them I can say: “What is she more than any other material object?” “It is my feelings that wear out my brain — my feelings that make me know that you are more than every material object living or still, and more than every faith dead or surviving. For feeling is neither Thought nor Action: it is the very stuff of Life itself. And, if Death be the negation of Life it may well be the end of consciousness.

The worst that Death can do to me is to deliver me up for ever to unsatisfied longings for you. Well, that is all that Life has done, that is all that Life can do, for me.

But Life can do so much more that is worse. Believe me when I say that I dread imprisonment — and believe me when I say that I do not dread disgrace. For you know very well that it is true when I say that I positively chuckle at the thought of the shock my fall would give to all these unawakened intelligences of this world. You know how I despise Edward Burden for trusting in me; you know how I have always despised other people who trusted in established reputations. I don't mean to say that I should not have liked to keep the game up, certainly I should, since in gambling it is more desirable to win than to lose. And it is more amusing to fool fools than to give them eye-openers. But I think that, in gambling, it is only a shade less desirable, *per se*, to lose than to win. The main point is the sensation of either; and the only valid objection to losing is that, if one loses too often one has at last no longer the wherewithal to gamble. Similarly, to give people eye-openers is, *per se*, nearly as desirable as to fool them. It is not quite so desirable, since the game itself is the fooling. But the great objection in my case is that the eye-opener would once and for all put an end to the chance of my ever fooling them again. That, however, is a very small matter and what I dread is not that. If people no longer trusted in me I could no doubt still find an outlet for my energies with those who sought to

take advantage of my abilities, trusting to themselves to wrest from me a sufficient share of the plunder that they so ardently desire, that I so really have no use for.

No, I seek in Death a refuge from exposure not because exposure would cripple my energies: it would probably help them: and not because exposure would mean disgrace; I should probably find ironical satisfaction in it — but simply because it would mean imprisonment. That I dread beyond belief: I clench my fingers when, in conversation; I hear the words: “ A long sentence.” For that would mean my being delivered up for a long time — for ever — to you. I write “ for ever “ advisedly and after reflection, since a long subjection without relief, to that strain would leave upon my brain a wound that must prove ineffaceable. For to be alone and to think — those are my terrors.

One reads that men who have been condemned for long years to solitary imprisonment go mad. But I think that even that sad gift from Omnipotent Fate would not be mine. As I figure the world to myself, Fate is terrible only to those who surrender to her. If I surrendered, to the extent of living to go to prison, then assuredly the future must be uniformly heavy, uniformly doomed, in my eyes. For I would as soon be mad as anything else I can think of. But I should not go mad. Men go mad because of the opportunities they miss: because the world changes outside the prison walls, or because their children starve. But I have no opportunities to miss or take: the changes of the world to me are nothing, and there is no soul between whom and starvation I could stand.

Whilst I am about making this final disposition of my properties — let me tell you finally what I have done in regard to your husband himself. It is a fact — and this I have been keeping up my sleeve as a final surprise for you — that he is almost cured....

But I have just received an incomprehensible note from Edward Burden. He asks me for some particulars as to his confounded estate and whether I can lend him some thousands of pounds at short notice. Heaven knows what new scrape this is that he's in. Of course this may precipitate *my crash*. But whatever happens, I shall find time to write my final words to you — and nothing else really matters....

## VII

I HAVEN'T yet discovered what Edward Burden is doing. I have found him a good round sum upon mortgage — the irony of the position being

that the money is actually his whilst the mortgage does not actually exist. He says that what he is doing with the money will please me. I suppose that means that he's embarking upon some sort of speculation which he imagines that I would favour. It is odd that he should think that I find gratification in his imitating myself.

But why should I concern myself with this thing at all? Nothing in the world can ever please or displease me any more. For I have taken my resolve: this is my last night upon earth. When I lay down this pen again, I shall never take up any pen more.

For I have said all that I can say to you. I am utterly tired out. To-night I shall make up into a parcel all these letters — I must sit through the night because it is only to-morrow morning that I shall be able to register the parcel to you — and registering it will be my last act upon the habitable globe. For biting through the glass in the ring will be not an action, but the commencement of a new train of thought. Or perhaps only my final action will come to an end when you read these words in Rome. Or will that be only thought — the part of me that lives — pleading to you to give your thoughts for company? I feel too tired to think the matter out !

Let me, then, finish with this earth: I told you, when I finished writing last night, that Robert is almost cured. I would not have told you this for the sake of arrogating to myself the position of a saviour. But I imagine that you would like the cure to go on and, in the case of some accident after my death, it might go all to pieces once more. Quite simply then: I have been doing two things. In the first place I have persuaded your chemists to reduce very gradually the strength of chloral, so that the bottles contain nearly half water. And Robert perceives no difference. Now of course it is very important that he shall not know of the trick that is being so beneficently played on him — so that, in case he should go away or for one reason or another change his chemists, it must be carefully seen to that instead of pure chloral he obtains the exactly diluted mixture. In this way he may be brought gradually to drinking almost pure water.

But that alone would hardly be satisfactory: a comparatively involuntary cure is of little value in comparison with an effort of the will. You may, conceivably, expel nature with a fork, but nothing but a passion will expel a passion. The only point to be proved is whether there exists in your husband any other passion for the sake of which he might abandon his passion for the clearness of vision which he always says his chloral gives him. He has

not, of course, the incentives usual to men: you cannot, in fact, “get” him along ordinary lines....But apart from his physical craving for the drug he *has* that passion for clearness of intellect that he says the drug gives him — and it is through that that, at last, I have managed to hit his pride.

For I have put it to him very strongly that one view of life is just as good as another — no better, no worse, but just the same. And I have put it to him that his use of chloral simply limits for him the number of views of life that he might conceivably have. And, when you come to think of all the rhapsodies of his that we have listened to, I think that that piece of special pleading is sufficiently justified. I do indeed honestly believe that, for what it is worth, he is on the road to salvation. He means to make a struggle — to attempt the great feat of once more seeing life with the eyes that Fate originally gave to him.

This is my legacy to *you*: if you ask me why I have presented you with this man’s new identity — since it *will* mean a new identity — I must answer that I simply don’t know. Why have we kept him alive all these years? I have done it no doubt because I had nothing to give you. But you? If you have loved me you must have wished him — I won’t say dead — but no more there. Yet you have tried too — and I suppose this answer to the riddle is simply the answer to the whole riddle of our life. We have tried to play a supremely difficult game simply because it sanctified our love. For, after all, sanctification arises from difficulties. Well, we have made our way very strait and we have so narrowed the door of entrance that it has vanished altogether. We have never had *any* hope of a solution that could have satisfied us.

If we had cared to break the rules of the game, I suppose we could have done it easily enough — and we could have done it the more easily since neither you nor I ever subscribed to those rules. If we have not it was, I think, simply because we sought the difficulty which sanctifies.... Has it been a very imbecile proceeding? I am most uncertain. For it is not a thing to be very proud of — to be able to say that, for a whole lifetime, one has abstained from that which one most desired. On the other hand, we have won a curious and difficult game. Well — there it is — and there is your legacy. I do not think that there is anything else for me to write about. You will see that, in my will, I have left everything I possess to — Edward Burden. This is not because I wish to make him reparation, and it’s not because I wish to avoid scandal: it is simply because it may show him one

very simple thing. It will show him how very nearly I might have made things come right. I have been balancing my accounts very carefully, and I find that, reckoning things reasonably against myself, Edward Burden will have a five-pound note with which to buy himself a mourning-ring.

The being forced to attend to my accounts will make him gasp a good deal. It will certainly shake his belief in all accepted reputations — for he will look on the faces of many men each “ as solid as the Bank

of England,” and he will think: “ I wonder if you are like — — ? “ His whole world will crumble — not because I have been dishonest, since he is cold-blooded enough to believe that all men may be dishonest. But he will tremble because I have been able to be so wildly dishonest and yet to be so successfully respectable. He won’t even dare to “ expose “ me, since, if he did that, half of the shares which he will inherit from me would suffer an eclipse of disreputability, would tumble to nothingness in value — and would damage his poor pocket. He will have to have my estate set down at a high figure; he will have to be congratulated on his fortunate inheritance, and he will have, sedulously, to compound my felony.

You will wonder how I can be capable of this final cruelty — the most cruel thing that, perhaps, ever one man did to another. I will tell you why it is: it is because I hate all the Edward Burdens of the world — because, being the eternal Haves of the world, they have made their idiotic rules of the game. And you and I suffer: you and I, the eternal Have Nots. And we suffer, not because their rules bind us, but because, being the finer spirits, we are forced to set ourselves rules that are still more strict in order that, in all things, we may be the truly gallant.

But why do I write: “ You will wonder how I can be capable of this “? You will have understood — you who understand everything.

*Eight in the morning.* — Well: now we part. I am going to register the parcel containing all these letters to you. We part: and it is as if you were dropping back — the lost Eurydice of the world — into an utter blackness. For, in a minute, you will be no more than part of my past. Well then: goodnight.

## VIII

You will have got the telegram I sent you long before you got the parcel of letters: you will have got the note I wrote you by the same post as the letters themselves. If I have taken these three days to myself before again writing to you it has been because I have needed to recover my power of

thinking. Now, in a way, I have recovered it — and it is only fair to say that I have devoted all my thoughts to how the new situation affects you — and you in your relations to me.

It places me in your hands — let that be written first and foremost. You have to decree my life or my death. For I take it that now we can never get back again into our old position: I have spoken, you have heard me speak. The singular unity, the silence of our old life is done with for good. There is perhaps no reason why this should not be so: silence is no necessary part of our relationship. But it has seemed to make a rather exquisite bond between us.

It must, if I am to continue to live — it must be replaced by some other bond. In our silence we have seemed to speak in all sorts of strange ways: we have perhaps read each other's thoughts. I have seen words form themselves upon your lips. But now you must — there is no way out of it — you must write to me. You *must* write to me fully: all your thoughts. You must, as I have done, find the means of speech — or I can no longer live...

I am reprieved !

I don't know if, in my note to you, I explained exactly what had happened. It was in this way. I was anxious to be done with my world very early and, as soon as eight o'clock struck, I set out for the post-office at the corner to register that parcel of letters for you. Till the task was accomplished — the last I was to perform on earth — I noticed nothing: I was simply in a hurry. But, having given the little faggot into the hands of a sleepy girl, I said to myself suddenly: " Now I *am* dead ! " I began suddenly as they say of young children, to "notice." A weight that I had never felt before seemed to fall away from me. I noticed, precisely, that the girl clerk was sleepy, that, as she reached up one hand to take the parcel over the brass caging, she placed the other over her mouth to hide a yawn.

And out on the pavement it was most curious what had befallen the world. It had lost all interest: but it had become fascinating, vivid. I had not, you see, any senses left, but my eyesight and hearing. Vivid: that is the word. I watched a news-boy throw his papers down an area, and it appeared wonderfully interesting to discover that *that* was how one's papers got into the house. I watched a milkman go up some doorsteps to put a can of milk beside a boot-scraper and I was wonderfully interested to see a black cat follow him. They were the clearest moments I have ever spent upon the earth — those when I was dead. They were so clear because nothing else

weighed on my attention but just those little things. It was an extraordinary, a luxuriant feeling. That, I imagine, must have been how Adam and Eve felt before they had eaten of the fruit of knowledge.

Supposing I had tacitly arranged with myself that I would die in the street, I think I should still have walked home simply to dally longer with that delightful feeling of sheer curiosity. For it was sheer curiosity to see how this world, which I had never looked at, really performed before utterly unbiassed eyes.

That was why, when I got home, I sent away the messenger that brought to me Edward Burden's letter; there was to be no answer. Whatever Burden's query might be I was not going to commit myself to any other act. My last was that of sending off the parcel to you.

My opening Burden's letter when the messenger had gone was simply a part of my general curiosity. I wanted to see how a Burden letter would look when it no longer had any bearings at all for me. It was as if I were going to read a letter from that dear Edward to a man I did not know upon a subject of which I had never heard.

And then I was relieved !

The good Edward, imagining that I was hurt at his having proposed to allow his wife's solicitors to superintend my stewardship — the good Edward in his concern had positively insisted that all the deeds should be returned to me absolutely unchecked. He said that he had had a hard fight for it and that the few thousands he had borrowed from me had represented his settlement, which he had thus paid in specie....

It chimed in wonderfully with his character, when I come to think of it. Of course he was disciplining Miss Averies' representatives just as he had disciplined her in the matter of China tea of which I have written to you. And he had imagined that I was seriously hurt ! Can you figure to yourself such an imbecile? But, if you permit me to continue to live, you will be saving the poor fool from the great shock I had prepared for him — the avalanche of discovery, the earthquake of uncertainty. For he says in that so kind way of his that, having thus shown his entire confidence in me — in the fact, that is, that Providence is on the side of all Burdens — he will choose a time in the future, convenient for me, when he will go thoroughly with me into his accounts. And inasmuch as his wedding-tour will take him all round the world I have at least a year in which to set things straight. And of course I can put off his scrutiny indefinitely or deceive him for ever.



I did not think all these things at once. In fact, when I had read his letter, so strong within me was the feeling that it was only a mental phenomenon, a thing that had no relation with me — the feeling of finality was so strong upon me that I actually found myself sitting in that chair before I realised what had occurred.

What had occurred was that I had become utterly and for good your property.

In that sense only am I reprieved. As far as Edward Burden is concerned I am entirely saved. I stand before you and ask you to turn your thumb up or down. For, having spoken as I have to you, I have given you a right over me. Now that the pressing necessity for my death is over I have to ask you whether I shall plunge into new adventures that will lead me to death or whether I am to find some medium in which we may lead a life of our own, in some way together. I was about to take my life to avoid prison: now prison is no more a part of my scheme of existence. But I must now have some means of working towards you or I must run some new and wild risk to push you out of my thoughts. I don't, as you know, ask you to be my secret mistress, I don't ask you to elope with me. But I say that you *must* belong to me as much in thought as I have, in this parcel of letters, been revealed and given over to you. Otherwise, I must once more gamble — and having tasted of gambling in the shadow of death, I must gamble for ever in that way. I must, I mean, feel that I am coming towards you or committing crimes that I may forget you.

My dear, I am a very tired man. If you knew what it was to long for you as I have longed for you all these years, you would wonder that I did not, sitting in that chair, put the ring up to my teeth, in spite of Burden's letter, and end it. I have an irresistible longing for rest — or perhaps it is only your support. To think that I must face for ever — or for as long as it lasts — this troublesome excitement of avoiding thoughts of you — that was almost unbearable. I resisted because I had written these letters to you. I love you and I know you love me — yet without them I would have inflicted upon you the wound of my death. Having written them I cannot face the cruelty to you. I mean that, if I had died without your knowing why, it would have been only a death grievous to you — still it is the duty of humanity and of you with humanity to bear and to forget deaths. But now that you must know, I could not face the cruelty of filling you with the pain of unmerited remorse. For I know that you would have felt remorse, and it would have

been unmerited, since I gave you no chance or any time to stretch out your hands to me. Now I give it you and wait for your verdict.

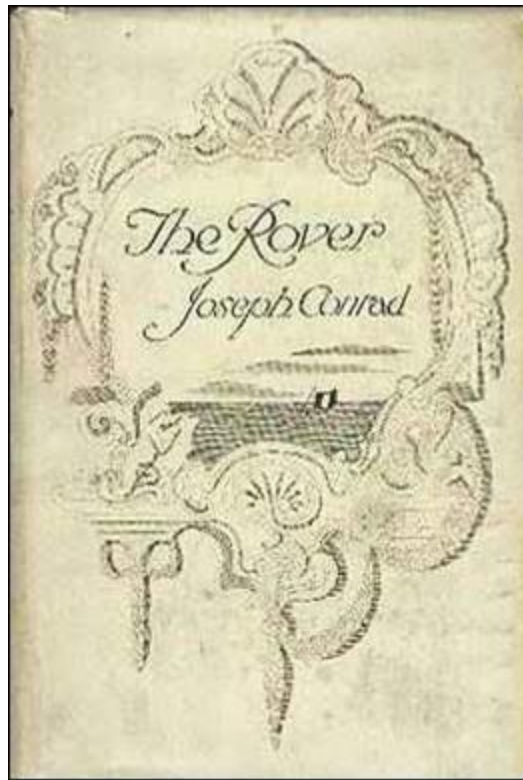
For the definite alternatives are these: I will put Burden's estate absolutely clear within the year and work out, in order to make safe money, the new and comparatively sober scheme of which I have written to you: that I will do if you will consent to be mine to the extent of sharing our thoughts alone. Or, if you will not, I will continue to gamble more wildly than ever with the Burden money. And that in the end means death and a refuge from you.

So then, I stand reprieved — and the final verdict is in your hands.

## ***THE ROVER***



Conrad's last complete novel was written between 1921 and 1922, and first published in 1923. The story takes place in the south of France, against the backdrop of the French Revolution, Napoleon's rise to power, and the French-English rivalry in the Mediterranean. Peyrol, a master-gunner and pirate attempts to find refuge in an isolated farmhouse on the Giens Peninsula near Hyères.



*The first edition*

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`Sleep after toyle, port after stormie seas, Ease after war, death after life,  
does greatly please.' Spenser

TO G. JEAN AUBRY IN FRIENDSHIP THIS TALE OF THE LAST DAYS OF A FRENCH BROTHER OF THE COAST



## CHAPTER I

After entering at break of day the inner roadstead of the Port of Toulon, exchanging several loud hails with one of the guardboats of the Fleet, which directed him where he was to take up his berth, Master-Gunner Peyrol let go the anchor of the sea-worn and battered ship in his charge, between the arsenal and the town, in full view of the principal quay. The course of his life, which in the opinion of any ordinary person might have been regarded as full of marvellous incidents (only he himself had never marvelled at them), had rendered him undemonstrative to such a degree that he did not even let out a sigh of relief at the rumble of the cable. And yet it ended a most anxious six months of knocking about at sea with valuable merchandise in a damaged hull, most of the time on short rations, always on the lookout for English cruisers, once or twice on the verge of shipwreck and more than once on the verge of capture. But as to that, old Peyrol had made up his mind from the first to blow up his valuable charge — unemotionally, for such was his character, formed under the sun of the Indian Seas in lawless contests with his kind for a little loot that vanished as soon as grasped, but mainly for bare life almost as precarious to hold through its ups and downs, and which now had lasted for fifty-eight years.

While his crew of half-starved scarecrows, hard as nails and ravenous as so many wolves for the delights of the shore, swarmed aloft to furl the sails nearly as thin and as patched as the grimy shirts on their backs, Peyrol took a survey of the quay. Groups were forming along its whole stretch to gaze at the new arrival. Peyrol noted particularly a good many men in red caps and said to himself — “Here they are.” Amongst the crews of ships that had brought the tricolour into the seas of the East, there were hundreds professing sans-culotte principles; boastful and declamatory beggars he had thought them. But now he was beholding the shore breed. Those who had made the Revolution safe. The real thing. Peyrol, after taking a good long look, went below into his cabin to make himself ready to go ashore.

He shaved his big cheeks with a real English razor, looted years ago from an officer's cabin in an English East Indiaman captured by a ship he was serving in then. He put on a white shirt, a short blue jacket with metal buttons and a high roll-collar, a pair of white trousers which he fastened with a red bandana handkerchief by way of a belt. With a black, shiny low-crowned hat on his head he made a very creditable prize-master. He beckoned from the poop to a boatman and got himself rowed to the quay.



By that time the crowd had grown to a large size. Peyrol's eyes ranged over it with no great apparent interest, though it was a fact that he had never in all his man's life seen so many idle white people massed together to stare at a sailor. He had been a rover of the outer seas; he had grown into a stranger to his native country. During the few minutes it took the boatman to row him to the step, he felt like a navigator about to land on a newly discovered shore.

On putting his foot on it he was mobbed. The arrival of a prize made by a squadron of the Republic in distant seas was not an everyday occurrence in Toulon. The wildest rumours had been already set flying. Peyrol elbowed himself through the crowd somehow, but it continued to move after him. A voice cried out, "Where do you come from, citizen?" — "From the other side of the world," Peyrol boomed out.

He did not get rid of his followers till the door of the Port Office. There he reported himself to the proper officials as master of a prize taken off the Cape by Citizen Renaud, Commander-in-Chief of the Republican Squadron in the Indian Seas. He had been ordered to make for Dunkerque but, said he, having been chased by the sacs Anglais three times in a fortnight between Cape Verde and Cape Spartel, he had made up his mind to run into the Mediterranean where, he had understood from a Danish brig he had met at sea, there were no English men-of-war just then. And here he was; and there were his ship's papers and his own papers and everything in order. He mentioned also that he was tired of rolling about the seas, and that he longed for a period of repose on shore. But till all the legal business was settled he remained in Toulon roaming about the streets at a deliberate gait, enjoying general consideration as Citizen Peyrol, and looking everybody coldly in the eye.

His reticence about his past was of that kind which starts a lot of mysterious stories about a man. No doubt the maritime authorities of Toulon had a less cloudy idea of Peyrol's past, though it need not necessarily have been more exact. In the various offices connected with the sea where his duties took him, the wretched scribes, and even some of the chiefs, looked very hard at him as he went in and out, dressed very neatly, and always with his cudgel, which he used to leave outside the door of private offices when called in for an interview with one or another of the "gold-laced lot." Having, however, cut off his queue and got in touch with some prominent patriots of the Jacobin type, Peyrol cared little for people's

stares and whispers. The person that came nearest to trying his composure was a certain naval captain with a patch over one eye and a very threadbare uniform coat who was doing some administrative work at the Port Office. That officer, looking up from some papers, remarked brusquely, "As a matter of fact you have been the best part of your life skimming the seas, if the truth were known. You must have been a deserter from the Navy at one time, whatever you may call yourself now."

There was not a quiver on the large cheeks of the gunner Peyrol.

"If there was anything of the sort it was in the time of kings and aristocrats," he said steadily. "And now I have brought in a prize, and a service letter from Citizen Renaud, commanding in the Indian Seas. I can also give you the names of good republicans in this town who know my sentiments. Nobody can say I was ever anti-revolutionary in my life. I knocked about the Eastern seas for forty-five years — - that's true. But let me observe that it was the seamen who stayed at home that let the English into the Port of Toulon." He paused a moment and then added: "When one thinks of that, citizen Commandant, any little slips I and fellows of my kind may have made five thousand leagues from here and twenty years ago cannot have much importance in these times of equality and fraternity."

"As to fraternity," remarked the post-captain in the shabby coat, "the only one you are familiar with is the Brotherhood of the Coast, I should say."

"Everybody in the Indian Ocean except milksops and youngsters had to be," said the untroubled Citizen Peyrol. "And we practised republican principles long before a republic was thought of; for the Brothers of the Coast were all equal and elected their own chiefs."

"They were an abominable lot of lawless ruffians," remarked the officer venomously, leaning back in his chair. "You will not dare to deny that."

Citizen Peyrol refused to take up a defensive attitude. He merely mentioned in a neutral tone that he had delivered his trust to the Port Office all right, and as to his character he had a certificate of civism from his section. He was a patriot and entitled to his discharge. After being dismissed by a nod he took up his cudgel outside the door and walked out of the building with the calmness of rectitude. His large face of the Roman type betrayed nothing to the wretched quill-drivers, who whispered on his passage. As he went along the streets he looked as usual everybody in the eye; but that very same evening he vanished from Toulon. It wasn't that he

was afraid of anything. His mind was as calm as the natural set of his florid face. Nobody could know what his forty years or more of sea-life had been, unless he told them himself. And of that he didn't mean to tell more than what he had told the inquisitive captain with the patch over one eye. But he didn't want any bother for certain other reasons; and more than anything else he didn't want to be sent perhaps to serve in the fleet now fitting out in Toulon. So at dusk he passed through the gate on the road to Frjus in a high two-wheeled cart belonging to a well-known farmer whose habitation lay that way. His personal belongings were brought down and piled up on the tailboard of the cart by some ragamuffin patriots whom he engaged in the street for that purpose. The only indiscretion he committed was to pay them for their trouble with a large handful of assignats. From such a prosperous seaman, however, this generosity was not so very compromising. He himself got into the cart over the wheel, with such slow and ponderous movements, that the friendly farmer felt called upon to remark: "Ah, we are not so young as we used to be — -you and I." — -"I have also an awkward wound," said Citizen Peyrol, sitting down heavily.

And so from farmer's cart to farmer's cart, getting lifts all along, jogging in a cloud of dust between stone walls and through little villages well known to him from his boyhood's days, in a landscape of stony hills, pale rocks, and dusty green of olive trees, Citizen Peyrol went on unmolested till he got down clumsily in the yard of an inn on the outskirts of the town of Hyres. The sun was setting to his right. Near a clump of dark pines with blood-red trunks in the sunset, Peyrol perceived a rutty track branching off in the direction of the sea.

At that spot Citizen Peyrol had made up his mind to leave the high road. Every feature of the country with the darkly wooded rises, the barren flat expanse of stones and sombre bushes to his left, appealed to him with a sort of strange familiarity, because they had remained unchanged since the days of his boyhood. The very cartwheel tracks scored deep into the stony ground had kept their physiognomy; and far away, like a blue thread, there was the sea of the Hyres roadstead with a lumpy indigo swelling still beyond — -which was the island of Porquerolles, but he really did not know. The notion of a father was absent from his mentality. What he remembered of his parents was a tall, lean, brown woman in rags, who was his mother. But then they were working together at a farm which was on the mainland. He had fragmentary memories of her shaking down olives,

picking stones out of a field, or handling a manure fork like a man, tireless and fierce, with wisps of greyish hair flying about her bony face; and of himself running barefooted in connection with a flock of turkeys, with hardly any clothes on his back. At night, by the farmer's favour, they were permitted to sleep in a sort of ruinous byre built of stones and with only half a roof on it, lying side by side on some old straw on the ground. And it was on a bundle of straw that his mother had tossed ill for two days and had died in the night. In the darkness, her silence, her cold face had given him an awful scare. He supposed they had buried her but he didn't know, because he had rushed out terror-struck, and never stopped till he got as far as a little place by the sea called Almanarre, where he hid himself on board a tartane that was lying there with no one on board. He went into the hold because he was afraid of some dogs on shore. He found down there a heap of empty sacks, which made a luxurious couch, and being exhausted went to sleep like a stone. Some time during the night the crew came on board and the tartane sailed for Marseilles. That was another awful scare — - being hauled out by the scruff of the neck on the deck and being asked who the devil he was and what he was doing there. Only from that one he could not run away. There was water all around him and the whole world, including the coast not very far away, wobbled in a most alarming manner. Three bearded men stood about him and he tried to explain to them that he had been working at Peyrol's. Peyrol was the farmer's name. The boy didn't know that he had one of his own. Moreover, he didn't know very well how to talk to people, and they must have misunderstood him. Thus the name of Peyrol stuck to him for life.

There the memories of his native country stopped, overlaid by other memories, with a multitude of impressions of endless oceans, of the Mozambique Channel, of Arabs and negroes, of Madagascar, of the coast of India, of islands and channels and reefs; of fights at sea, rows on shore, desperate slaughter and desperate thirst, of all sorts of ships one after another: merchant ships and frigates and privateers; of reckless men and enormous sprees. In the course of years he had learned to speak intelligibly and think connectedly and even to read and write after a fashion. The name of the farmer Peyrol, attached to his person on account of his inability to give a clear account of himself, acquired a sort of reputation, both openly, in the ports of the East and, secretly, amongst the Brothers of the Coast, that strange fraternity with something masonic and not a little piratical in its

constitution. Round the Cape of Storms, which is also the Cape of Good Hope, the words Republic, Nation, Tyranny, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, and the cult of the Supreme Being came floating on board ships from home, new cries and new ideas which did not upset the slowly developed intelligence of the gunner Peyrol. They seemed the invention of landsmen, of whom the seaman Peyrol knew very little — -nothing, so to speak. Now, after nearly fifty years of lawful and lawless sea-life, Citizen Peyrol, at the yard gate of the roadside inn, looked at the late scene of his childhood. He looked at it without any animosity, but a little puzzled as to his bearings amongst the features of the land. ``Yes, it must be somewhere in that direction,’’ he thought vaguely. Decidedly he would go no further along the high road. . . . A few yards away the woman of the inn stood looking at him, impressed by the good clothes, the great shaven cheeks, the well-to-do air of that seaman; and suddenly Peyrol noticed her. With her anxious brown face, her grey locks, and her rustic appearance she might have been his mother, as he remembered her, only she wasn’t in rags.

``H! La mre,’’ hailed Peyrol. ``Have you got a man to lend a hand with my chest into the house?’’

He looked so prosperous and so authoritative that she piped without hesitation in a thin voice, ``Mais oui, citoyen. He will be here in a moment.’’

In the dusk the clump of pines across the road looked very black against the quiet clear sky; and Citizen Peyrol gazed at the scene of his young misery with the greatest possible placidity. Here he was after nearly fifty years, and to look at things it seemed like yesterday. He felt for all this neither love nor resentment. He felt a little funny as it were, and the funniest thing was the thought which crossed his mind that he could indulge his fancy (if he had a mind to it) to buy up all this land to the furthestmost field, away over there where the track lost itself sinking into the flats bordering the sea where the small rise at the end of the Giens peninsula had assumed the appearance of a black cloud.

``Tell me, my friend,’’ he said in his magisterial way to the farmhand with a tousled head of hair who was awaiting his good pleasure, ``doesn’t this track lead to Almanarre?’’

``Yes,’’ said the labourer, and Peyrol nodded. The man continued, mouthing his words slowly as if unused to speech. ``To Almanarre and

further too, beyond the great pond right out to the end of the land, to Cape Esterel.”

Peyrol was lending his big flat hairy ear. “If I had stayed in this country,” he thought, “I would be talking like this fellow.” And aloud he asked:

“Are there any houses there, at the end of the land?”

“Why, a hamlet, a hole, just a few houses round a church and a farm where at one time they would give you a glass of wine.”

## CHAPTER II

Citizen Peyrol stayed at the inn-yard gate till the night had swallowed up all those features of the land to which his eyes had clung as long as the last gleams of daylight. And even after the last gleams had gone he had remained for some time staring into the darkness in which all he could distinguish was the white road at his feet and the black heads of pines where the cart track dipped towards the coast. He did not go indoors till some carters who had been refreshing themselves had departed with their big two-wheeled carts piled up high with empty wine-casks, in the direction of Frjus. The fact that they did not remain for the night pleased Peyrol. He ate his bit of supper alone, in silence, and with a gravity which intimidated the old woman who had aroused in him the memory of his mother. Having finished his pipe and obtained a bit of candle in a tin candle-stick, Citizen Peyrol went heavily upstairs to rejoin his luggage. The crazy staircase shook and groaned under his feet as though he had been carrying a burden. The first thing he did was to close the shutters most carefully as though he had been afraid of a breath of night air. Next he bolted the door of the room. Then sitting on the floor, with the candlestick standing before him between his widely straddled legs, he began to undress, flinging off his coat and dragging his shirt hastily over his head. The secret of his heavy movements was disclosed then in the fact that he had been wearing next his bare skin — -like a pious penitent his hair-shirt — -a sort of waistcoat made of two thicknesses of old sail-cloth and stitched all over in the manner of a quilt with tarred twine. Three horn buttons closed it in front. He undid them, and after he had slipped off the two shoulder-straps which prevented this strange garment from sagging down on his hips he started rolling it up. Notwithstanding all his care there were during this operation several faint chinks of some metal which could not have been lead.

His bare torso thrown backwards and sustained by his rigid big arms heavily tattooed on the white skin above the elbows, Peyrol drew a long breath into his broad chest with a pepper-and-salt pelt down the breastbone. And not only was the breast of Citizen Peyrol relieved to the fullest of its athletic capacity, but a change had also come over his large physiognomy on which the expression of severe stolidity had been simply the result of physical discomfort. It isn't a trifle to have to carry girt about your ribs and hung from your shoulders a mass of mixed foreign coins equal to sixty or seventy thousand francs in hard cash; while as to the paper money of the

Republic, Peyrol had had already enough experience of it to estimate the equivalent in cartloads. A thousand of them. Perhaps two thousand. Enough in any case to justify his flight of fancy, while looking at the countryside in the light of the sunset, that what he had on him would buy all that soil from which he had sprung: houses, woods, vines, olives, vegetable gardens, rocks and salt lagoons — -in fact, the whole landscape, including the animals in it. But Peyrol did not care for the land at all. He did not want to own any part of the solid earth for which he had no love. All he wanted from it was a quiet nook, an obscure corner out of men's sight where he could dig a hole unobserved.

That would have to be done pretty soon, he thought. One could not live for an indefinite number of days with a treasure strapped round one's chest. Meantime, an utter stranger in his native country the landing on which was perhaps the biggest adventure in his adventurous life, he threw his jacket over the rolled-up waistcoat and laid his head down on it after extinguishing the candle. The night was warm. The floor of the room happened to be of planks, not of tiles. He was no stranger to that sort of couch. With his cudgel laid ready at his hand Peyrol slept soundly till the noises and the voices about the house and on the road woke him up shortly after sunrise. He threw open the shutter, welcoming the morning light and the morning breeze in the full enjoyment of idleness which, to a seaman of his kind, is inseparable from the fact of being on shore. There was nothing to trouble his thoughts; and though his physiognomy was far from being vacant, it did not wear the aspect of profound meditation.

It had been by the merest accident that he had discovered during the passage, in a secret recess within one of the lockers of his prize, two bags of mixed coins: gold mohurs, Dutch ducats, Spanish pieces, English guineas. After making that discovery he had suffered from no doubts whatever. Loot big or little was a natural fact of his freebooter's life. And now when by the force of things he had become a master-gunner of the Navy he was not going to give up his find to confounded landmen, mere sharks, hungry quill-drivers, who would put it in their own pockets. As to imparting the intelligence to his crew (all bad characters), he was much too wise to do anything of the kind. They would not have been above cutting his throat. An old fighting sea-dog, a Brother of the Coast, had more right to such plunder than anybody on earth. So at odd times, while at sea, he had busied himself within the privacy of his cabin in constructing the ingenious canvas



waistcoat in which he could take his treasure ashore secretly. It was bulky, but his garments were of an ample cut, and no wretched customs-guard would dare to lay hands on a successful prize-master going to the Port Admiral's offices to make his report. The scheme had worked perfectly. He found, however, that this secret garment, which was worth precisely its weight in gold, tried his endurance more than he had expected. It wearied his body and even depressed his spirits somewhat. It made him less active and also less communicative. It reminded him all the time that he must not get into trouble of any sort — - keep clear of rows, of intimacies, of promiscuous jollities. This was one of the reasons why he had been anxious to get away from the town. Once, however, his head was laid on his treasure he could sleep the sleep of the just.

Nevertheless in the morning he shrank from putting it on again. With a mixture of sailor's carelessness and of old-standing belief in his own luck he simply stuffed the precious waistcoat up the flue of the empty fireplace. Then he dressed and had his breakfast. An hour later, mounted on a hired mule, he started down the track as calmly as though setting out to explore the mysteries of a desert island.

His aim was the end of the peninsula which, advancing like a colossal jetty into the sea, divides the picturesque roadstead of Hyres from the headlands and curves of the coast forming the approaches of the Port of Toulon. The path along which the sure-footed mule took him (for Peyrol, once he had put its head the right way, made no attempt at steering) descended rapidly to a plain of level aspect, with the white gleams of the Salins in the distance, bounded by bluish hills of no great elevation. Soon all traces of human habitations disappeared from before his roaming eyes. This part of his native country was more foreign to him than the shores of the Mozambique Channel, the coral strands of India, the forests of Madagascar. Before long he found himself on the neck of the Giens peninsula, impregnated with salt and containing a blue lagoon, particularly blue, darker and even more still than the expanses of the sea to the right and left of it from which it was separated by narrow strips of land not a hundred yards wide in places. The track ran indistinct, presenting no wheel-ruts, and with patches of efflorescent salt as white as snow between the tufts of wiry grass and the particularly dead-looking bushes. The whole neck of land was so low that it seemed to have no more thickness than a sheet of paper laid on the sea. Citizen Peyrol saw on the level of his eye, as if from a mere raft,

sails of various craft, some white and some brown, while before him his native island of Porquerolles rose dull and solid beyond a wide strip of water. The mule, which knew rather better than Citizen Peyrol where it was going to, took him presently amongst the gentle rises at the end of the peninsula. The slopes were covered with scanty grass; crooked boundary walls of dry stones ran across the fields, and above them, here and there, peeped a low roof of red tiles shaded by the heads of delicate acacias. At a turn of the ravine appeared a village with its few houses, mostly with their blind walls to the path, and, at first, no living soul in sight. Three tall platanes, very ragged as to their bark and very poor as to foliage, stood in a group in an open space; and Citizen Peyrol was cheered by the sight of a dog sleeping in the shade. The mule swerved with great determination towards a massive stone trough under the village fountain. Peyrol, looking round from the saddle while the mule drank, could see no signs of an inn. Then, examining the ground nearer to him, he perceived a ragged man sitting on a stone. He had a broad leathern belt and his legs were bare to the knee. He was contemplating the stranger on the mule with stony surprise. His dark nut-brown face contrasted strongly with his grey shock of hair. At a sign from Peyrol he showed no reluctance and approached him readily without changing the stony character of his stare.

The thought that if he had remained at home he would have probably looked like that man crossed unbidden the mind of Peyrol. With that gravity from which he seldom departed he inquired if there were any inhabitants besides himself in the village. Then, to Peyrol's surprise, that destitute idler smiled pleasantly and said that the people were out looking after their bits of land.

There was enough of the peasant-born in Peyrol, still, to remark that he had seen no man, woman, or child, or four-footed beast for hours, and that he would hardly have thought that there was any land worth looking after anywhere around. But the other insisted. Well, they were working on it all the same, at least those that had any.

At the sound of the voices the dog got up with a strange air of being all backbone, and, approaching in dismal fidelity, stood with his nose close to his master's calves.

``And you," said Peyrol, ``you have no land then?"

The man took his time to answer. ``I have a boat."

Peyrol became interested when the man explained that his boat was on the salt pond, the large, deserted and opaque sheet of water lying dead between the two great bays of the living sea. Peyrol wondered aloud why any one should want a boat on it.

“There is fish there,” said the man.

“And is the boat all your worldly goods?” asked Peyrol.

The flies buzzed, the mule hung its head, moving its ears and flapping its thin tail languidly.

“I have a sort of hut down by the lagoon and a net or two,” the man confessed, as it were. Peyrol, looking down, completed the list by saying: “And this dog.”

The man again took his time to say:

“He is company.”

Peyrol sat as serious as a judge. “You haven’t much to make a living of,” he delivered himself at last. “However! . . . Is there no inn, caf, or some place where one could put up for a day? I have heard up inland that there was some such place.”

“I will show it to you,” said the man, who then went back to where he had been sitting and picked up a large empty basket before he led the way. His dog followed with his head and tail low, and then came Peyrol dangling his heels against the sides of the intelligent mule, which seemed to know before-hand all that was going to happen. At the corner where the houses ended there stood an old wooden cross stuck into a square block of stone. The lonely boatman of the Lagoon of Pesquiers pointed in the direction of a branching path where the rises terminating the peninsula sank into a shallow pass. There were leaning pines on the skyline, and in the pass itself dull silvery green patches of olive orchards below a long yellow wall backed by dark cypresses, and the red roofs of buildings which seemed to belong to a farm.

“Will they lodge me there” asked Peyrol.

“I don’t know. They will have plenty of room, that’s certain. There are no travellers here. But as for a place of refreshment, it used to be that. You have only got to walk in. If he isn’t there, the mistress is sure to be there to serve you. She belongs to the place. She was born on it. We know all about her.”

“What sort of woman is she?” asked Citizen Peyrol, who was very favourably impressed by the aspect of the place.

“Well, you are going there. You shall soon see. She is young.”

“And the husband?” asked Peyrol, who, looking down into the other’s steady upward stare, detected a flicker in the brown, slightly faded eyes.

“Why are you staring at me like this? I haven’t got a black skin, have I?”

The other smiled, showing in the thick pepper-and-salt growth on his face as sound a set of teeth as Citizen Peyrol himself. There was in his bearing something embarrassed, but not unfriendly, and, he uttered a phrase from which Peyrol discovered that the man before him, the lonely, hirsute, sunburnt and barelegged human being at his stirrup, nourished patriotic suspicions as to his character. And this seemed to him outrageous. He wanted to know in a severe voice whether he looked like a confounded landsman of any kind. He swore also without, however, losing any of the dignity of expression inherent in his type of features and in the very modelling of his flesh.

“For an aristocrat you don’t look like one, but neither do you look like a farmer or a pedlar or a patriot. You don’t look like anything that has been seen here for years and years and years. You look like one, I dare hardly say what. You might be a priest.”

Astonishment kept Peyrol perfectly quiet on his mule. “Do I dream?” he asked himself mentally. “You aren’t mad?” he asked aloud. “Do you know what you are talking about? Aren’t you ashamed of yourself?”

“All the same,” persisted the other innocently, “it is much less than ten years ago since I saw one of them of the sort they call bishops, who had a face exactly like yours.”

Instinctively Peyrol passed his hand over his face. What could there be in it? Peyrol could not remember ever having seen a bishop in his life. The fellow stuck to his point, for he puckered his brow and murmured:

“Others too. . . . I remember perfectly. . . . It isn’t so many years ago. Some of them skulk amongst the villages yet, for all the chasing they got from the patriots.”

The sun blazed on the boulders and stones and bushes in the perfect stillness of the air. The mule, disregarding with republican austerity the neighbourhood of a stable within less than a hundred and twenty yards, dropped its head, and even its ears, and dozed as if in the middle of a desert. The dog, apparently changed into stone at his master’s heels, seemed to be dozing too with his nose near the ground. Peyrol had fallen into a deep meditation, and the boatman of the lagoon awaited the solution of his

doubts without eagerness and with something like a grin within his thick beard. Peyrol's face cleared. He had solved the problem, but there was a shade of vexation in his tone.

“Well, it can't be helped,” he said. “I learned to shave from the English. I suppose that's what's the matter.”

At the name of the English the boatman pricked up his ears.

“One can't tell where they are all gone to,” he murmured. “Only three years ago they swarmed about this coast in their big ships. You saw nothing but them, and they were fighting all round Toulon on land. Then in a week or two, crac! — nobody! Cleared out devil knows where. But perhaps you would know.”

“Oh, yes,” said Peyrol, “I know all about the English, don't you worry your head.”

“I am not troubling my head. It is for you to think about what's best to say when you speak with him up there. I mean the master of the farm.”

“He can't be a better patriot than I am, for all my shaven face,” said Peyrol. “That would only seem strange to a savage like you.”

With an unexpected sigh the man sat down at the foot of the cross, and, immediately, his dog went off a little way and curled himself up amongst the tufts of grass.

“We are all savages here,” said the forlorn fisherman from the lagoon. “But the master up there is a real patriot from the town. If you were ever to go to Toulon and ask people about him they would tell you. He first became busy purveying the guillotine when they were purifying the town from all aristocrats. That was even before the English came in. After the English got driven out there was more of that work than the guillotine could do. They had to kill traitors in the streets, in cellars, in their beds. The corpses of men and women were lying in heaps along the quays. There were a good many of his sort that got the name of drinkers of blood. Well, he was one of the best of them. I am only just telling you.”

Peyrol nodded. “That will do me all right,” he said. And before he could pick up the reins and hit it with his heels the mule, as though it had just waited for his words, started off along the path.

In less than five minutes Peyrol was dismounting in front of a low, long addition to a tall farmhouse with very few windows, and flanked by walls of stones enclosing not only the yard but apparently a field or two also. A gateway stood open to the left, but Peyrol dismounted at the door, through

which he entered a bare room, with rough whitewashed walls and a few wooden chairs and tables, which might have been a rustic caf. He tapped with his knuckles on the table. A young woman with a fichu round her neck and a striped white and red skirt, with black hair and a red mouth, appeared in an inner doorway.

“Bonjour, citoyenne,” said Peyrol. She was so startled by the unusual aspect of this stranger that she answered him only by a murmured “bonjour,” but in a moment she came forward and waited expectantly. The perfect oval of her face, the colour of her smooth cheeks, and the whiteness of her throat forced from the Citizen Peyrol a slight hiss through his clenched teeth.

“I am thirsty, of course,” he said, “but what I really want is to know whether I can stay here.”

The sound of a mule’s hoofs outside caused Peyrol to start, but the woman arrested him.

“She is only going to the shed. She knows the way. As to what you said, the master will be here directly. Nobody ever comes here. And how long would you want to stay?”

The old rover of the seas looked at her searchingly.

“To tell you the truth, citoyenne, it may be in a manner of speaking for ever.”

She smiled in a bright flash of teeth, without gaiety or any change in her restless eyes that roamed about the empty room as though Peyrol had come in attended by a mob of Shades.

“It’s like me,” she said. “I lived as a child here.”

“You are but little more than that now,” said Peyrol, examining her with a feeling that was no longer surprise or curiosity, but seemed to be lodged in his very breast.

“Are you a patriot?” she asked, still surveying the invisible company in the room.

Peyrol, who had thought that he had “done with all that damned nonsense,” felt angry and also at a loss for an answer.

“I am a Frenchman,” he said bluntly.

“Arlette!” called out an aged woman’s voice through the open inner door.

“What do you want?” she answered readily.

“There’s a saddled mule come into the yard.”

“All right. The man is here.” Her eyes, which had steadied, began to wander again all round and about the motionless Peyrol. She moved a step nearer to him and asked in a low confidential tone: “Have you ever carried a woman’s head on a pike?”

Peyrol, who had seen fights, massacres on land and Sea, towns taken by assault by savage warriors, who had killed men in attack and defence, found himself at first bereft of speech by this simple question, and next moved to speak bitterly.

“No. I have heard men boast of having done so. They were mostly braggarts with craven hearts. But what is all this to you?”

She was not listening to him, the edge of her white even teeth pressing her lower lip, her eyes never at rest. Peyrol remembered suddenly the sans-culotte — - the blood-drinker. Her husband. Was it possible? . . . Well, perhaps it was possible. He could not tell. He felt his utter incompetence. As to catching her glance, you might just as well have tried to catch a wild sea-bird with your hands. And altogether she was like a sea-bird — -not to be grasped. But Peyrol knew how to be patient, with that patience that is so often a form of courage. He was known for it. It had served him well in dangerous situations. Once it had positively saved his life. Nothing but patience. He could well wait now. He waited. And suddenly as if tamed by his patience this strange creature dropped her eyelids, advanced quite close to him and began to finger the lapel of his coat-something that a child might have done. Peyrol all but gasped with surprise, but he remained perfectly still. He was disposed to hold his breath. He was touched by a soft indefinite emotion, and as her eyelids remained lowered till her black lashes seemed to lie like a shadow on her pale cheek, there was no need for him to force a smile. After the first moment he was not even surprised. It was merely the sudden movement, not the nature of the act itself, that had startled him.

“Yes. You may stay. I think we shall be friends. I’ll tell you about the Revolution.”

At these words Peyrol, the man of violent deeds, felt something like a chill breath at the back of his head.

“What’s the good of that?” he said.

“It must be,” she said and backed away from him swiftly, and without raising her eyes turned round and was gone in a moment, so lightly that one would have thought her feet had not touched the ground. Peyrol, staring at

the open kitchen door, saw after a moment an elderly woman's head, with brown thin cheeks and tied up in a coloured handkerchief, peeping at him fearfully.

“A bottle of wine, please,” he shouted at it.



### CHAPTER III

The affectation common to seamen of never being surprised at anything that sea or land can produce had become in Peyrol a second nature. Having learned from childhood to suppress every sign of wonder before all extraordinary sights and events, all strange people, all strange customs, and the most alarming phenomena of nature (as manifested, for instance, in the violence of volcanoes or the fury of human beings), he had really become indifferent — -or only perhaps utterly inexpressive. He had seen so much that was bizarre or atrocious, and had heard so many astounding tales, that his usual mental reaction before a new experience was generally formulated in the words, ``J'en ai vu bien d'autres." The last thing which had touched him with the panic of the supernatural had been the death under a heap of rags of that gaunt, fierce woman, his mother; and the last thing that had nearly overwhelmed him at the age of twelve with another kind of terror was the riot of sound and the multitude of mankind on the quays in Marseilles, something perfectly inconceivable from which he had instantly taken refuge behind a stack of wheat sacks after having been chased ashore from the tartane. He had remained there quaking till a man in a cocked hat and with a sabre at his side (the boy had never seen either such a hat or such a sabre in his life) had seized him by the arm close to the armpit and had hauled him out from there; a man who might have been an ogre (only Peyrol had never heard of an ogre) but at any rate in his own way was alarming and wonderful beyond anything he could have imagined — -if the faculty of imagination had been developed in him then. No doubt all this was enough to make one die of fright, but that possibility never occurred to him. Neither did he go mad; but being only a child, he had simply adapted himself, by means of passive acquiescence, to the new and inexplicable conditions of life in something like twenty-four hours. After that initiation the rest of his existence, from flying fishes to whales and on to black men and coral reefs, to decks running with blood, and thirst in open boats, was comparatively plain sailing. By the time he had heard of a Revolution in France and of certain Immortal Principles causing the death of many people, from the mouths of seamen and travellers and year-old gazettes coming out of Europe, he was ready to appreciate contemporary history in his own particular way. Mutiny and throwing officers overboard. He had seen that twice and he was on a different side each time. As to this upset, he took no side. It was too far — -too big — -also not distinct enough. But he

acquired the revolutionary jargon quickly enough and used it on occasion, with secret contempt. What he had gone through, from a spell of crazy love for a yellow girl to the experience of treachery from a bosom friend and shipmate (and both those things Peyrol confessed to himself he could never hope to understand), with all the graduations of varied experience of men and passions between, had put a drop of universal scorn, a wonderful sedative, into the strange mixture which might have been called the soul of the returned Peyrol.

Therefore he not only showed no surprise but did not feel any when he beheld the master, in the right of his wife, of the Escampobar Farm. The homeless Peyrol, sitting in the bare salle with a bottle of wine before him, was in the act of raising the glass to his lips when the man entered, ex-orator in the sections, leader of red-capped mobs, hunter of the ci-devants and priests, purveyor of the guillotine, in short a blood-drinker. And Citizen Peyrol, who had never been nearer than six thousand miles as the crow flies to the realities of the Revolution, put down his glass and in his deep unemotional voice said: ``Salut.”

The other returned a much fainter ``Salut,” staring at the stranger of whom he had heard already. His almond-shaped, soft eyes were noticeably shiny and so was to a certain extent the skin on his high but rounded cheekbones, coloured red like a mask of which all the rest was but a mass of clipped chestnut hair growing so thick and close around the lips as to hide altogether the design of the mouth which, for all Citizen Peyrol knew, might have been of a quite ferocious character. A careworn forehead and a perpendicular nose suggested a certain austerity proper to an ardent patriot. He held in his hand a long bright knife which he laid down on one of the tables at once. He didn't seem more than thirty years old, a well-made man of medium height, with a lack of resolution in his bearing. Something like disillusion was suggested by the set of his shoulders. The effect was subtle, but Peyrol became aware of it while he explained his case and finished the tale by declaring that he was a seaman of the Republic and that he had always done his duty before the enemy.

The blood-drinker had listened profoundly. The high arches of his eyebrows gave him an astonished look. He came close up to the table and spoke in a trembling voice.

``You may have! But you may all the same be corrupt. The seamen of the Republic were eaten up with corruption paid for with the gold of the

tyrants. Who would have guessed it? They all talked like patriots. And yet the English entered the harbour and landed in the town without opposition. The armies of the Republic drove them out, but treachery stalks in the land, it comes up out of the ground, it sits at our hearthstones, lurks in the bosom of the representatives of the people, of our fathers, of our brothers. There was a time when civic virtue flourished, but now it has got to hide its head. And I will tell you why: there has not been enough killing. It seems as if there could never be enough of it. It's discouraging. Look what we have come to."

His voice died in his throat as though he had suddenly lost confidence in himself.

"Bring another glass, citizen," said Peyrol, after a short pause, "and let's drink together. We will drink to the confusion of traitors. I detest treachery as much as any man, but . . ."

He waited till the other had returned, then poured out the wine, and after they had touched glasses and half emptied them, he put down his own and continued:

"But you see I have nothing to do with your politics. I was at the other side of the world, therefore you can't suspect me of being a traitor. You showed no mercy, you other sans-culottes, to the enemies of the Republic at home, and I killed her enemies abroad, far away. You were cutting off heads without much compunction. . . ."

The other most unexpectedly shut his eyes for a moment, then opened them very wide. "Yes, yes," he assented very low. "Pity may be a crime."

"Yes. And I knocked the enemies of the Republic on the head whenever I had them before me without inquiring about the number. It seems to me that you and I ought to get on together."

The master of Escampobar farmhouse murmured, however, that in times like these nothing could be taken as proof positive. It behoved every patriot to nurse suspicion in his breast. No sign of impatience escaped Peyrol. He was rewarded for his self-restraint and the unshaken good-humour with which he had conducted the discussion by, carrying his point. Citizen Scevola Bron (for that appeared to be the name of the master of the farm), an object of fear and dislike to the other inhabitants of the Giens peninsula, might have been influenced by a wish to have some one with whom he could exchange a few words from time to time. No villagers ever came up to the farm, or were likely to, unless perhaps in a body and animated with

hostile intentions. They resented his presence in their part of the world sullenly.

“Where do you come from?” was the last question he asked.

“I left Toulon two days ago.”

Citizen Scevola struck the table with his fist, but this manifestation of energy was very momentary.

“And that was the town of which by a decree not a stone upon another was to be left,” he complained, much depressed.

“Most of it is still standing,” Peyrol assured him calmly. “I don’t know whether it deserved the fate you say was decreed for it. I was there for the last month or so and I know it contains some good patriots. I know because I made friends with them all.” Thereupon Peyrol mentioned a few names which the retired sans-culotte greeted with a bitter smile and an ominous silence, as though the bearers of them had been only good for the scaffold and the guillotine.

“Come along and I will show you the place where you will sleep,” he said with a sigh, and Peyrol was only too ready. They entered the kitchen together. Through the open back door a large square of sunshine fell on the floor of stone flags. Outside one could see quite a mob of expectant chickens, while a yellow hen postured on the very doorstep, darting her head right and left with affectation. All old woman holding a bowl full of broken food put it down suddenly on a table and stared. The vastness and cleanliness of the place impressed Peyrol favourably.

“You will eat with us here,” said his guide, and passed without stopping into a narrow passage giving access to a steep flight of stairs. Above the first landing a narrow spiral staircase led to the upper part of the farmhouse; and when the sans-culotte flung open the solid plank door at which it ended he disclosed to Peyrol a large low room containing a four-poster bedstead piled up high with folded blankets and spare pillows. There were also two wooden chairs and a large oval table.

“We could arrange this place for you,” said the master, “but I don’t know what the mistress will have to say,” he added.

Peyrol, struck by the peculiar expression of his face, turned his head and saw the girl standing in the doorway. It was as though she had floated up after them, for not the slightest sound of rustle or footfall had warned Peyrol of her presence. The pure complexion of her white cheeks was set off brilliantly by her coral lips and the bands of raven-black hair only partly

covered by a muslin cap trimmed with lace. She made no sign, uttered no sound, behaved exactly as if there had been nobody in the room; and Peyrol suddenly averted his eyes from that mute and unconscious face with its roaming eyes.

In some way or other, however, the sans-culotte seemed to have ascertained her mind, for he said in a final tone:

“That’s all right then,” and there was a short silence, during which the woman shot her dark glances all round the room again and again, while on her lips there was a half-smile, not so much absent-minded as totally unmotivated, which Peyrol observed with a side glance, but could not make anything of. She did not seem to know him at all.

“You have a view of salt water on three sides of you,” remarked Peyrol’s future host.

The farmhouse was a tall building, and this large attic with its three windows commanded on one side the view of Hyres roadstead on the first plan, with further blue undulations of the coast as far as Frjus; and on the other the vast semicircle of barren high hills, broken by the entrance to Toulon harbour guarded by forts and batteries, and ending in Cape Cpet, a squat mountain, with sombre folds and a base of brown rocks, with a white spot gleaming on the very summit of it, a ci-devant shrine dedicated to Our Lady, and a ci-devant place of pilgrimage. The noonday glare seemed absorbed by the gemlike surface of the sea perfectly flawless in the invincible depth of its colour.

“It’s like being in a lighthouse,” said Peyrol. “Not a bad place for a seaman to live in.” The sight of the sails dotted about cheered his heart. The people of landsmen with their houses and animals and activities did not count. What made for him the life of any strange shore were the craft that belonged to it: canoes, catamarans, ballahous, praus, lorchas, mere dug-outs, or even rafts of tied logs with a bit of mat for a sail from which naked brown men fished along stretches of white sand crushed under the tropical skyline, sinister in its glare and with a thunder-cloud crouching on the horizon. But here he beheld a perfect serenity, nothing sombre on the shore, nothing ominous in the sunshine. The sky rested lightly on the distant and vaporous outline of the hills; and the immobility of all things seemed poised in the air like a gay mirage. On this tideless sea several tartanes lay becalmed in the Petite Passe between Porquerolles and Cape Esterel, yet theirs was not the stillness of death but of light slumber, the immobility of a

smiling enchantment, of a Mediterranean fair day, breathless sometimes but never without life. Whatever enchantment Peyrol had known in his wanderings it had never been so remote from all thoughts of strife and death, so full of smiling security, making all his past appear to him like a chain of lurid days and sultry nights. He thought he would never want to get away from it, as though he had obscurely felt that his old rover's soul had been always rooted there. Yes, this was the place for him; not because expediency dictated, but simply because his instinct of rest had found its home at last.

He turned away from the window and found himself face to face with the sans-culotte, who had apparently come up to him from behind, perhaps with the intention of tapping him on the shoulder, but who now turned away his head. The young woman had disappeared.

“Tell me, patron,” said Peyrol, “is there anywhere near this house a little dent in the shore with a bit of beach in it perhaps where I could keep a boat?”

“What do you want a boat for?”

“To go fishing when I have a fancy to,” answered Peyrol curtly.

Citizen Bron, suddenly subdued, told him that what he wanted was to be found a couple of hundred yards down the hill from the house. The coast, of course, was full of indentations, but this was a perfect little pool. And the Toulon blood-drinker's almond-shaped eyes became strangely sombre as they gazed at the attentive Peyrol. A perfect little pool, he repeated, opening from a cove that the English knew well. He paused. Peyrol observed without much animosity but in a tone of conviction that it was very difficult to keep off the English whenever there was a bit of salt water anywhere; but what could have brought English seamen to a spot like this he couldn't imagine.

“It was when their fleet first came here,” said the patriot in a gloomy voice, “and hung round the coast before the anti-revolutionary traitors let them into Toulon, sold the sacred soil of their country for a handful of gold. Yes, in the days before the crime was consummated English officers used to land in that cove at night and walk up to this very house.”

“What audacity!” commented Peyrol, who was really surprised. “But that's just like what they are.” Still, it was hard to believe. But wasn't it only a tale?

The patriot flung one arm up in a strained gesture. "I swore to its truth before the tribunal," he said. "It was a dark story," he cried shrilly, and paused. "It cost her father his life," he said in a low voice . . . "her mother too — -but the country was in danger," he added still lower.

Peyrol walked away to the western window and looked towards Toulon. In the middle of the great sheet of water within Cape Cici a tall two-decker lay becalmed and the little dark dots on the water were her boats trying to tow her head round the right way. Peyrol watched them for a moment, and then walked back to the middle of the room.

"Did you actually drag him from this house to the guillotine?" he asked in his unemotional voice.

The patriot shook his head thoughtfully with downcast eyes. "No, he came over to Toulon just before the evacuation, this friend of the English . . . sailed over in a tartane he owned that is still lying here at the Madrague. He had his wife with him. They came over to take home their daughter who was living then with some skulking old nuns. The victorious Republicans were closing in and the slaves of tyranny had to fly."

"Came to fetch their daughter," mused Peyrol. "Strange, that guilty people should . . ."

The patriot looked up fiercely. "It was justice," he said loudly. "They were anti-revolutionists, and if they had never spoken to an Englishman in their life the atrocious crime was on their heads."

"H'm, stayed too long for their daughter," muttered Peyrol. "And so it was you who brought her home."

"I did," said the patron. For a moment his eyes evaded Peyrol's investigating glance, but in a moment he looked straight into his face. "No lessons of base superstition could corrupt her soul," he declared with exaltation. "I brought home a patriot."

Peyrol, very calm, gave him a hardly perceptible nod. "Well," he said, "all this won't prevent me sleeping wery well in this room. I always thought I would like to live in a lighthouse when I got tired of roving about the seas. This is as near a lighthouse lantern as can be. You will see me with all my little affairs to-morrow," he added, moving towards the stairs. "Salut, citizen."

There was in Peyrol a fund of self-command amounting to placidity. There were men living in the East who had no doubt whatever that Peyrol was a calmly terrible man. And they would quote illustrative instances

which from their own point of view were simply admirable. But all Peyrol had ever done was to behave rationally, as it seemed to him in all sorts of dangerous circumstances without ever being led astray by the nature, or the cruelty, or the danger of any given situation. He adapted himself to the character of the event and to the very spirit of it, with a profound responsive feeling of a particularly unsentimental kind. Sentiment in itself was an artificiality of which he had never heard and if he had seen it in action would have appeared to him too puzzling to make anything of. That sort of genuineness in acceptance made him a satisfactory inmate of the Escampobar Farm. He duly turned up with all his cargo, as he called it, and was met at the door of the farmhouse itself by the young woman with the pale face and wandering eyes. Nothing could hold her attention for long amongst her familiar surroundings. Right and left and far away beyond you, she seemed to be looking for something while you were talking to her, so that you doubted whether she could follow what you said. But as a matter of fact she had all her wits about her. In the midst of this strange search for something that was not there she had enough detachment to smile at Peyrol. Then, withdrawing into the kitchen, she watched, as much as her restless eyes could watch anything, Peyrol's cargo and Peyrol himself passing up the stairs.

The most valuable part of Peyrol's cargo being strapped to his person, the first thing he did after being left alone in that attic room which was like the lantern of a lighthouse was to relieve himself of the burden and lay it on the foot of the bed. Then he sat down and leaning his elbow far on the table he contemplated it with a feeling of complete relief. That plunder had never burdened his conscience. It had merely on occasion oppressed his body; and if it had at all affected his spirits it was not by its secrecy but by its mere weight, which was inconvenient, irritating, and towards the end of a day altogether insupportable. It made a free-limbed, deep-breathing sailor-man feel like a mere overloaded animal, thus extending whatever there was of compassion in Peyrol's nature towards the four-footed beasts that carry men's burdens on the earth. The necessities of a lawless life had taught Peyrol to be ruthless, but he had never been cruel.

Sprawling in the chair, stripped to the waist, robust and grey-haired, his head with a Roman profile propped up on a mighty and tattooed forearm, he remained at ease, with his eyes fixed on his treasure with an air of meditation. Yet Peyrol was not meditating (as a superficial observer might



have thought) on the best place of concealment. It was not that he had not had a great experience of that sort of property which had always melted so quickly through his fingers. What made him meditative was its character, not of a share of a hard-won booty in toil, in risk, in danger, in privation, but of a piece of luck personally his own. He knew what plunder was and how soon it went; but this lot had come to stay. He had it with him, away from the haunts of his lifetime, as if in another world altogether. It couldn't be drunk away, gambled away, squandered away in any sort of familiar circumstances, or even given away. In that room, raised a good many feet above his revolutionized native land where he was more of a stranger than anywhere else in the world, in this roomy garret full of light and as it were surrounded by the sea, in a great sense of peace and security, Peyrol didn't see why he should bother his head about it so very much. It came to him that he had never really cared for any plunder that fell into his hands. No, never for any. And to take particular care of this for which no one would seek vengeance or attempt recovery would have been absurd. Peyrol got up and opened his big sandalwood chest secured with an enormous padlock, part, too, of some old plunder gathered in a Chinese town in the Gulf of Tonkin, in company of certain Brothers of the Coast, who having boarded at night a Portuguese schooner and sent her crew adrift in a boat, had taken a cruise on their own account, years and years and years ago. He was young then, very young, and the chest fell to his share because nobody else would have anything to do with the cumbersome thing, and also for the reason that the metal of the curiously wrought thick hoops that strengthened it was not gold but mere brass. He, in his innocence, had been rather pleased with the article. He had carried it about with him into all sorts of places, and also he had left it behind him — -once for a whole year in a dark and noisome cavern on a certain part of the Madagascar coast. He had left it with various native chiefs, with Arabs, with a gambling-hell keeper in Pondicherry, with his various friends in short, and even with his enemies. Once he had lost it altogether.

That was on the occasion when he had received a wound which laid him open and gushing like a slashed wine-skin. A sudden quarrel broke out in a company of Brothers over some matter of policy complicated by personal jealousies, as to which he was as innocent as a babe unborn. He never knew who gave him the slash. Another Brother, a chum of his, an English boy, had rushed in and hauled him out of the fray, and then he had remembered

nothing for days. Even now when he looked at the scar he could not understand why he had not died. That occurrence, with the wound and the painful convalescence, was the first thing that sobered his character somewhat. Many years afterwards, when in consequence of his altered views of mere lawlessness he was serving as quartermaster on board the *Hirondelle*, a comparatively respectable privateer, he caught sight of that chest again in Port Louis, of all places in the world, in a dark little den of a shop kept by a lone Hindoo. The hour was late, the side street was empty, and so Peyrol went in there to claim his property, all fair, a dollar in one hand and a pistol in the other, and was entreated abjectly to take it away. He carried off the empty chest on his shoulder, and that same night the privateer went to sea; then only he found time to ascertain that he had made no mistake, because, soon after he had got it first, he had, in grim wantonness, scratched inside the lid, with the point of his knife, the rude outline of a skull and cross-bones into which he had rubbed afterwards a little Chinese vermilion. And there it was, the whole design, as fresh as ever.

In the garret full of light of the Escampobar farmhouse, the grey-haired Peyrol opened the chest, took all the contents out of it, laying them neatly on the floor, and spread his treasure — -pockets downwards — - over the bottom, which it filled exactly. Busy on his knees he repacked the chest. A jumper or two, a fine cloth jacket, a remnant piece of Madapolam muslin, costly stuff for which he had no use in the world — -a quantity of fine white shirts. Nobody would dare to rummage in his chest, he thought, with the assurance of a man who had been feared in his time. Then he rose, and looking round the room and stretching his powerful arms, he ceased to think of the treasure, of the future and even of to-morrow, in the sudden conviction that he could make himself very comfortable there.

## CHAPTER IV

In a tiny bit of a looking-glass hung on the frame of the east window, Peyrol, handling the unwearable English blade, was shaving himself — -for the day was Sunday. The years of political changes ending with the proclamation of Napoleon as Consul for life had not touched Peyrol except as to his strong thick head of hair, which was nearly all white now. After putting the razor away carefully, Peyrol introduced his stockinged feet into a pair of sabots of the very best quality and clattered downstairs. His brown cloth breeches were untied at the knee and the sleeves of his shirt rolled up to his shoulders. That sea-rover turned rustic was now perfectly at home in that farm which, like a lighthouse, commanded the view of two roadsteads and of the open sea. He passed through the kitchen. It was exactly as he had seen it first, sunlight on the floor, red copper utensils shining on the walls, the table in the middle scrubbed snowy white; and it was only the old woman, Aunt Catherine, who seemed to have acquired a sharper profile. The very hen manuvring her neck pretentiously on the doorstep, might have been standing there for the last eight years. Peyrol shooed her away, and going into the yard washed himself lavishly at the pump. When he returned from the yard he looked so fresh and hale that old Catherine complimented him in a thin voice on his ``bonne mine.” Manners were changing, and she addressed him no longer as citoyen but as Monsieur Peyrol. He answered readily that if her heart was free he was ready to lead her to the altar that very day. This was such an old joke that Catherine took no notice of it whatever, but followed him with her eyes as he crossed the kitchen into the salle, which was cool, with its tables and benches washed clean, and no living soul in it. Peyrol passed through to the front of the house, leaving the outer door open. At the clatter of his clogs a young man sitting outside on a bench turned his head and greeted him by a careless nod. His face was rather long, sunburnt and smooth, with a slightly curved nose and a very well-shaped chin. He wore a dark blue naval jacket open on a white shirt and a black neckerchief tied in a slip-knot with long ends. White breeches and stockings and black shoes with steel buckles completed his costume. A brass-hilted sword in a black scabbard worn on a cross-belt was lying on the ground at his feet. Peyrol, silver-headed and ruddy, sat down on the bench at some little distance. The level piece of rocky ground in front of the house was not very extensive, falling away to the sea in a declivity framed between the rises of two barren hills. The old rover and the young seaman

with their arms folded across their chests gazed into space, exchanging no words, like close intimates or like distant strangers. Neither did they stir when the master of the Escampobar Farm appeared out of the yard gate with a manure fork on his shoulder and started to cross the piece of level ground. His grimy hands, his rolled-up shirt sleeves, the fork over the shoulder, the whole of his working-day aspect had somehow an air of being a manifestation; but the patriot dragged his dirty clogs low-spiritedly in the fresh light of the young morning, in a way no real worker on the land would ever do at the end of a day of toil. Yet there were no signs of debility about his person. His oval face with rounded cheek-bones remained unwrinkled except at the corners of his almond-shaped, shiny, visionary's eyes, which had not changed since the day when old Peyrol's gaze had met them for the first time. A few white hairs on his tousled head and in the thin beard alone had marked the passage of years, and you would have had to look for them closely. Amongst the unchangeable rocks at the extreme end of the Peninsula, time seemed to have stood still and idle while the group of people poised at that southernmost point of France had gone about their ceaseless toil, winning bread and wine from a stony-hearted earth.

The master of the farm, staring straight before him, passed before the two men towards the door of the *salle*, which Peyrol had left open. He leaned his fork against the wall before going in. The sound of a distant bell, the bell of the village where years ago the returned rover had watered his mule and had listened to the talk of the man with the dog, came up faint and abrupt in the great stillness of the upper space. The violent slamming of the *salle* door broke the silence between the two gazers on the sea.

“Does that fellow never rest?” asked the young man in a low indifferent voice which covered the delicate tinkling of the bell, and without moving his head.

“Not on Sunday anyhow,” answered the rover in the same detached manner. “What can you expect? The church bell is like poison to him. That fellow, I verily believe, has been born a *sans-culotte*. Every ‘*dcadi*’ he puts on his best clothes, sticks a red cap on his head and wanders between the buildings like a lost soul in the light of day. A Jacobin, if ever there was one.”

“Yes. There is hardly a hamlet in France where there isn't a *sans-culotte* or two. But some of them have managed to change their skins if nothing else.”

“This one won’t change his skin, and as to his inside he never had anything in him that could be moved. Aren’t there some people that remember him in Toulon? It isn’t such a long time ago. And yet . . .” Peyrol turned slightly towards the young man . . . “And yet to look at him . . .”

The officer nodded, and for a moment his face wore a troubled expression which did not escape the notice of Peyrol who went on speaking easily:

“Some time ago, when the priests began to come back to the parishes, he, that fellow” — -Peyrol jerked his head in the direction of the salle door — -“would you believe it? — -started for the village with a sabre hanging to his side and his red cap on his head. He made for the church door. What he wanted to do there I don’t know. It surely could not have been to say the proper kind of prayers. Well, the people were very much elated about their reopened church, and as he went along some woman spied him out of a window and started the alarm. ‘Eh, there! look! The jacobin, the sans-culotte, the blood-drinker! Look at him.’ Out rushed some of them, and a man or two that were working in their home patches vaulted over the low walls. Pretty soon there was a crowd, mostly women, each with the first thing she could snatch up — -stick, kitchen knife, anything. A few men with spades and cudgels joined them by the water-trough. He didn’t quite like that. What could he do? He turned and bolted up the hill, like a hare. It takes some pluck to face a mob of angry women. He ran along the cart track without looking behind him, and they after him, yelling: ‘A mort! A mort le buveur de sang!’ He had been a horror and an abomination to the people for years, what with one story and another, and now they thought it was their chance. The priest over in the presbytery hears the noise, comes to the door. One look was enough for him. He is a fellow of about forty but a wiry, long-legged beggar, and agile — -what? He just tucked up his skirts and dashed out, taking short cuts over the walls and leaping from boulder to boulder like a blessed goat. I was up in my room when the noise reached me there. I went to the window and saw the chase in full cry after him. I was beginning to think the fool would fetch all those furies along with him up here and that they would carry the house by boarding and do for the lot of us, when the priest cut in just in the nick of time. He could have tripped Scevola as easy as anything, but he lets him pass and stands in front of his parishioners with his arms extended. That did it. He saved the patron all right. What he could say to quieten them I don’t know, but these were early

days and they were very fond of their new priest. He could have turned them round his little finger. I had my head and shoulders out of the window — -it was interesting enough. They would have massacred all the accursed lot, as they used to call us down there — -and when I drew in, behold there was the patronne standing behind me looking on too. You have been here often enough to know how she roams about the grounds and about the house, without a sound. A leaf doesn't pose itself lighter on the ground than her feet do. Well, I suppose she didn't know that I was upstairs, and came into the room just in her way of always looking for something that isn't there, and noticing me with my head stuck out, naturally came up to see what I was looking at. Her face wasn't any paler than usual, but she was clawing the dress over her chest with her ten fingers — -like this. I was confounded. Before I could find my tongue she just turned round and went out with no more sound than a shadow."

When Peyrol ceased, the ringing of the church bell went on faintly and then stopped as abruptly as it had begun.

"Talking about her shadow," said the young officer indolently, "I know her shadow."

Old Peyrol made a really pronounced movement. "What do you mean?" he asked. "Where?"

"I have got only one window in the room where they put me to sleep last night and I stood at it looking out. That's what I am here for — -to look out, am I not? I woke up suddenly, and being awake I went to the window and looked out."

"One doesn't see shadows in the air," growled old Peyrol.

"No, but you see them on the ground, pretty black too when the moon is full. It fell across this open space here from the corner of the house."

"The patronne," exclaimed Peyrol in a low voice, "impossible!"

"Does the old woman that lives in the kitchen roam, do the village women roam as far as this?" asked the officer composedly. "You ought to know the habits of the people. It was a woman's shadow. The moon being to the west, it glided slanting from that corner of the house and glided back again. I know her shadow when I see it."

"Did you hear anything?" asked Peyrol after a moment of visible hesitation.

"The window being open I heard somebody snoring. It couldn't have been you, you are too high. Moreover, from the snoring," he added grimly,

“it must have been somebody with a good conscience. Not like you, old skimmer of the seas, because, you know, that’s what you are, for all your gunner’s warrant.” He glanced out of the corner of his eyes at old Peyrol.

“What makes you look so worried?”

“She roams, that cannot be denied,” murmured Peyrol, with an uneasiness which he did not attempt to conceal.

“Evidently. I know a shadow when I see it, and when I saw it, it did not frighten me, not a quarter as much as the mere tale of it seems to have frightened you. However, that sans-culotte friend of yours must be a hard sleeper. Those purveyors of the guillotine all have a first-class fireproof Republican conscience. I have seen them at work up north when I was a boy running barefoot in the gutters. . . .”

“The fellow always sleeps in that room,” said Peyrol earnestly.

“But that’s neither here nor there,” went on the officer, “except that it may be convenient for roaming shadows to hear his conscience taking its ease.”

Peyrol, excited, lowered his voice forcibly. “Lieutenant,” he said, “if I had not seen from the first what was in your heart I would have contrived to get rid of you a long time ago in some way or other.”

The lieutenant glanced sideways again and Peyrol let his raised fist fall heavily on his thigh. “I am old Peyrol and this place, as lonely as a ship at sea, is like a ship to me and all in it are like shipmates. Never mind the patron. What I want to know is whether you heard anything? Any sound at all? Murmur, footstep?” A bitterly mocking smile touched the lips of the young man.

“Not a fairy footstep. Could you hear the fall of a leaf — -and with that terrorist cur trumpeting right above my head? . . .” Without unfolding his arms he turned towards Peyrol, who was looking at him anxiously. . . .

“You want to know, do you? Well, I will tell you what I heard and you can make the best of it. I heard the sound of a stumble. It wasn’t a fairy either that stubbed its toe. It was something in a heavy shoe. Then a stone went rolling down the ravine in front of us interminably, then a silence as of death. I didn’t see anything moving. The way the moon was then, the ravine was in black shadow. And I didn’t try to see.”

Peyrol, with his elbow on his knee, leaned his head in the palm of his hand. The officer repeated through his clenched teeth: “Make the best of it.”

Peyrol shook his head slightly. After having spoken, the young officer leaned back against the wall, but next moment the report of a piece of ordnance reached them as it were from below, travelling around the rising ground to the left in the form of a dull thud followed by a sighing sound that seemed to seek an issue amongst the stony ridges and rocks near by.

“That’s the English corvette which has been dodging in and out of Hyres Roads for the last week,” said the young officer, picking up his sword hastily. He stood up and buckled the belt on, while Peyrol rose more deliberately from the bench, and said:

“She can’t be where we saw her at anchor last night. That gun was near. She must have crossed over. There has been enough wind for that at various times during the night. But what could she be firing at down there in the Petite Passe? We had better go and see.”

He strode off, followed by Peyrol. There was not a human being in sight about the farm and not a sound of life except for the lowing of a cow coming faintly from behind a wall. Peyrol kept close behind the quickly moving officer who followed the footpath marked faintly on the stony slope of the hill.

“That gun was not shotted,” he observed suddenly in a deep steady voice.

The officer glanced over his shoulder.

“You may be right. You haven’t been a gunner for nothing. Not shotted, eh? Then a signal gun. But who to? We have been observing that corvette now for days and we know she has no companion.”

He moved on, Peyrol following him on the awkward path without losing his wind and arguing in a steady voice: “She has no companion but she may have seen a friend at daylight this morning.”

“Bah!” retorted the officer without checking his pace. “You talk now like a child or else you take me for one. How far could she have seen? What view could she have had at daylight if she was making her way to the Petite Passe where she is now? Why, the islands would have masked for her two-thirds of the sea and just in the direction too where the English inshore squadron is hovering below the horizon. Funny blockade that! You can’t see a single English sail for days and days together, and then when you least expect them they come down all in a crowd as if ready to eat us alive. No, no! There was no wind to bring her up a companion. But tell me, gunner,



you who boast of knowing the bark of every English piece, what sort of gun was it?"

Peyrol growled in answer:

"Why, a twelve. The heaviest she carries. She is only a corvette."

"Well, then, it was fired as a recall for one of her boats somewhere out of sight along the shore. With a coast like this, all points and bights, there would be nothing very extraordinary in that, would there?"

"No," said Peyrol, stepping out steadily. "What is extraordinary is that she should have had a boat away at all."

"You are right there." The officer stopped suddenly. "Yes, it is really remarkable, that she should have sent a boat away. And there is no other way to explain that gun."

Peyrol's face expressed no emotion of any sort.

"There is something there worth investigating," continued the officer with animation.

"If it is a matter of a boat," Peyrol said without the slightest excitement, "there can be nothing very deep in it. What could there be? As likely as not they sent her inshore early in the morning with lines to try to catch some fish for the captain's breakfast. Why do you open your eyes like this? Don't you know the English? They have enough cheek for anything."

After uttering those words with a deliberation made venerable by his white hair, Peyrol made the gesture of wiping his brow, which was barely moist.

"Let us push on," said the lieutenant abruptly.

"Why hurry like this?" argued Peyrol without moving. "Those heavy clogs of mine are not adapted for scrambling on loose stones."

"Aren't they?" burst out the officer. "Well, then, if you are tired you can sit down and fan yourself with your hat. Good-bye." And he strode away before Peyrol could utter a word.

The path following the contour of the hill took a turn towards its sea-face and very soon the lieutenant passed out of sight with startling suddenness. Then his head reappeared for a moment, only his head, and that too vanished suddenly. Peyrol remained perplexed. After gazing in the direction in which the officer had disappeared, he looked down at the farm buildings, now below him but not at a very great distance. He could see distinctly the pigeons walking on the roof ridges. Somebody was drawing water from the well in the middle of the yard. The patron, no doubt; but that man, who at

one time had the power to send so many luckless persons to their death, did not count for old Peyrol. He had even ceased to be an offence to his sight and a disturber of his feelings. By himself he was nothing. He had never been anything but a creature of the universal blood-lust of the time. The very doubts about him had died out by now in old Peyrol's breast. The fellow was so insignificant that had Peyrol in a moment of particular attention discovered that he cast no shadow, he would not have been surprised. Below there he was reduced to the shape of a dwarf lugging a bucket away from the well. But where was she? Peyrol asked himself, shading his eyes with his hand. He knew that the patronne could not be very far away, because he had a sight of her during the morning; but that was before he had learned she had taken to roaming at night. His growing uneasiness came suddenly to an end when, turning his eyes away from the farm buildings, where obviously she was not, he saw her appear, with nothing but the sky full of light at her back, coming down round the very turn of the path which had taken the lieutenant out of sight.

Peyrol moved briskly towards her. He wasn't a man to lose time in idle wonder, and his sabots did not seem to weigh heavy on his feet. The fermiere, whom the villagers down there spoke of as Arlette as though she had been a little girl, but in a strange tone of shocked awe, walked with her head drooping and her feet (as Peyrol used to say) touching the ground as lightly as falling leaves. The clatter of the clogs made her raise her black, clear eyes that had been smitten on the very verge of womanhood by such sights of bloodshed and terror, as to leave in her a fear of looking steadily in any direction for long, lest she should see coming through the empty air some mutilated vision of the dead. Peyrol called it trying not to see something that was not there; and this evasive yet frank mobility was so much a part of her being that the steadiness with which she met his inquisitive glance surprised old Peyrol for a moment. He asked without beating about the bush:

“Did he speak to you?”

She answered with something airy and provoking in her voice, which also struck Peyrol as a novelty: “He never stopped. He passed by as though he had not seen me” — and then they both looked away from each other.

“Now, what is it you took into your head to watch for at night?”

She did not expect that question. She hung her head and took a pleat of her skirt between her fingers, embarrassed like a child.

“Why should I not,” she murmured in a low shy note, as if she had two voices within her.

“What did Catherine say?”

“She was asleep, or perhaps, only lying on her back with her eyes shut.”

“Does she do that?” asked Peyrol with incredulity.

“Yes.” Arlette gave Peyrol a queer, meaningless smile with which her eyes had nothing to do. “Yes, she often does. I have noticed that before. She lies there trembling under her blankets till I come back.”

“What drove you out last night?” Peyrol tried to catch her eyes, but they eluded him in the usual way. And now her face looked as though it couldn’t smile.

“My heart,” she said. For a moment Peyrol lost his tongue and even all power of motion. The fermire having lowered her eyelids, all her life seemed to have gone into her coral lips, vivid and without a quiver in the perfection of their design, and Peyrol, giving up the conversation with an upward fling of his arm, hurried up the path without looking behind him. But once round the turn of the path, he approached the lookout at an easier gait. It was a piece of smooth ground below the summit of the hill. It had quite a pronounced slope, so that a short and robust pine growing true out of the soil yet leaned well over the edge of the sheer drop of some fifty feet or so. The first thing that Peyrol’s eyes took in was the water of the Petite Passe with the enormous shadow of the Porquerolles Island darkening more than half of its width at this still early hour. He could not see the whole of it, but on the part his glance embraced there was no ship of any kind. The lieutenant, leaning with his chest along the inclined pine, addressed him irritably.

“Squat! Do you think there are no glasses on board the Englishman?”

Peyrol obeyed without a word and for the space of a minute or so presented the bizarre sight of a rather bulky peasant with venerable white locks crawling on his hands and knees on a hillside for no visible reason. When he got to the foot of the pine he raised himself on his knees. The lieutenant, flattened against the inclined trunk and with a pocket-glass glued to his eye, growled angrily:

“You can see her now, can’t you?”

Peyrol in his kneeling position could see the ship now. She was less than a quarter of a mile from him up the coast, almost within hailing effort of his powerful voice. His unaided eyes could follow the movements of the men

on board like dark dots about her decks. She had drifted so far within Cape Esterel that the low projecting mass of it seemed to be in actual contact with her stern. Her unexpected nearness made Peyrol draw a sharp breath through his teeth. The lieutenant murmured, still keeping the glass to his eye:

“I can see the very epaulettes of the officers on the quarter-deck.”

## CHAPTER V

As Peyrol and the lieutenant had surmised from the report of the gun, the English ship which the evening before was lying in Hyres Roads had got under way after dark. The light airs had taken her as far as the Petite Passe in the early part of the night, and then had abandoned her to the breathless moonlight in which, bereft of all motion, she looked more like a white monument of stone dwarfed by the darkling masses of land on either hand than a fabric famed for its swiftness in attack or in flight.

Her captain was a man of about forty, with clean-shaven, full cheeks and mobile thin lips which he had a trick of compressing mysteriously before he spoke and sometimes also at the end of his speeches. He was alert in his movements and nocturnal in his habits.

Directly he found that the calm had taken complete possession of the night and was going to last for hours, Captain Vincent assumed his favourite attitude of leaning over the rail. It was then some time after midnight and in the pervading stillness the moon, riding on a speckless sky, seemed to pour her enchantment on an uninhabited planet. Captain Vincent did not mind the moon very much. Of course it made his ship visible from both shores of the Petite Passe. But after nearly a year of constant service in command of the extreme lookout ship of Admiral Nelson's blockading fleet he knew the emplacement of almost every gun of the shore defences. Where the breeze had left him he was safe from the biggest gun of the few that were mounted on Porquerolles. On the Giens side of the pass he knew for certain there was not even a popgun mounted anywhere. His long familiarity with that part of the coast had imbued him with the belief that he knew the habits of its population thoroughly. The gleams of light in their houses went out very early and Captain Vincent felt convinced that they were all in their beds, including the gunners of the batteries who belonged to the local militia. Their interest in the movements of H.M.'s twenty-two gun sloop *Amelia* had grown stale by custom. She never interfered with their private affairs, and allowed the small coasting craft to go to and fro unmolested. They would have wondered if she had been more than two days away. Captain Vincent used to say grimly that the Hyres roadstead had become like a second home to him.

For an hour or so Captain Vincent mused a bit on his real home, on matters of service and other unrelated things, then getting into motion in a very wide-awake manner, he superintended himself the dispatch of that boat

the existence of which had been acutely surmised by Lieutenant Ral and was a matter of no doubt whatever to old Peyrol. As to her mission, it had nothing to do with catching fish for the captain's breakfast. It was the captain's own gig, a very fast-pulling boat. She was already alongside with her crew in her when the officer, who was going in charge, was beckoned to by the captain. He had a cutlass at his side and a brace of pistols in his belt, and there was a businesslike air about him that showed he had been on such service before.

“This calm will last a good many hours,” said the captain. “In this tideless sea you are certain to find the ship very much where she is now, but closer inshore. The attraction of the land — -you know.”

“Yes, sir. The land does attract.”

“Yes. Well, she may be allowed to put her side against any of these rocks. There would be no more danger than alongside a quay with a sea like this. Just look at the water in the pass, Mr. Bolt. Like the floor of a ballroom. Pull close along shore when you return. I'll expect you back at dawn.”

Captain Vincent paused suddenly. A doubt crossed his mind as to the wisdom of this nocturnal expedition. The hammer-head of the peninsula with its sea-face invisible from both sides of the coast was an ideal spot for a secret landing. Its lonely character appealed to his imagination, which in the first instance had been stimulated by a chance remark of Mr. Bolt himself.

The fact was that the week before, when the *Amelia* was cruising off the peninsula, Bolt, looking at the coast, mentioned that he knew that part of it well; he had actually been ashore there a good many years ago, while serving with Lord Howe's fleet. He described the nature of the path, the aspect of a little village on the reverse slope, and had much to say about a certain farmhouse where he had been more than once, and had even stayed for twenty-four hours at a time on more than one occasion.

This had aroused Captain Vincent's curiosity. He sent for Bolt and had a long conversation with him. He listened with great interest to Bolt's story — -how one day a man was seen from the deck of the ship in which Bolt was serving then, waving a white sheet or table-cloth amongst the rocks at the water's edge. It might have been a trap; but, as the man seemed alone and the shore was within range of the ship's guns, a boat was sent to take him off.

“And that, sir,” Bolt pursued impressively, “was, I verily believe, the very first communication that Lord Howe had from the royalists in Toulon.” Afterwards Bolt described to Captain Vincent the meetings of the Toulon royalists with the officers of the fleet. From the back of the farm he, Bolt himself, had often watched for hours the entrance of the Toulon harbour on the lookout for the boat bringing over the royalist emissaries. Then he would make an agreed signal to the advanced squadron and some English officers would land on their side and meet the Frenchmen at the farmhouse. It was as simple as that. The people of the farmhouse, husband and wife, were well-to-do, good class altogether, and staunch royalists. He had got to know them well.

Captain Vincent wondered whether the same people were still living there. Bolt could see no reason why they shouldn't be. It wasn't more than ten years ago, and they were by no means an old couple. As far as he could make out, the farm was their own property. He, Bolt, knew only very few French words at that time. It was much later, after he had been made a prisoner and kept inland in France till the Peace of Amiens, that he had picked up a smattering of the lingo. His captivity had done away with his feeble chance of promotion, he could not help remarking. Bolt was a master's mate still.

Captain Vincent, in common with a good many officers of all ranks in Lord Nelson's fleet, had his misgivings about the system of distant blockade from which the Admiral apparently would not depart. Yet one could not blame Lord Nelson. Everybody in the fleet understood that what was in his mind was the destruction of the enemy; and if the enemy was closely blockaded he would never come out to be destroyed. On the other hand it was clear that as things were conducted the French had too many chances left them to slip out unobserved and vanish from all human knowledge for months. Those possibilities were a constant worry to Captain Vincent, who had thrown himself with the ardour of passion into the special duty with which he was entrusted. Oh, for a pair of eyes fastened night and day on the entrance of the harbour of Toulon! Oh, for the power to look at the very state of French ships and into the very secrets of French minds!

But he said nothing of this to Bolt. He only observed that the character of the French Government was changed and that the minds of the royalist people in the farmhouse might have changed too, since they had got back the exercise of their religion. Bolt's answer was that he had had a lot to do

with royalists, in his time, on board Lord Howe's fleet, both before and after Toulon was evacuated. All sorts, men and women, barbers and noblemen, sailors and tradesmen; almost every kind of royalist one could think of; and his opinion was that a royalist never changed. As to the place itself, he only wished the captain had seen it. It was the sort of spot that nothing could change. He made bold to say that it would be just the same a hundred years hence.

The earnestness of his officer caused Captain Vincent to look hard at him. He was a man of about his own age, but while Vincent was a comparatively young captain, Bolt was an old master's mate. Each understood the other perfectly. Captain Vincent fidgeted for a while and then observed abstractedly that he was not a man to put a noose round a dog's neck, let alone a good seaman's.

This cryptic pronouncement caused no wonder to appear in Bolt's attentive gaze. He only became a little thoughtful before he said in the same abstracted tone that an officer in uniform was not likely to be hanged for a spy. The service was risky, of course. It was necessary, for its success, that, assuming the same people were there, it should be undertaken by a man well known to the inhabitants. Then he added that he was certain of being recognized. And while he enlarged on the extremely good terms he had been on with the owners of the farm, especially the farmer's wife, a comely motherly woman, who had been very kind to him, and had all her wits about her, Captain Vincent, looking at the master's mate's bushy whiskers, thought that these in themselves were enough to insure recognition. This impression was so strong that he asked point-blank: "You haven't altered the growth of the hair on your face, Mr. Bolt, since then?"

There was just a touch of indignation in Bolt's negative reply; for he was proud of his whiskers. He declared he was ready to take the most desperate chances for the service of his king and his country.

Captain Vincent added: "For the sake of Lord Nelson, too." One understood well what his Lordship wished to bring about by that blockade at sixty leagues off. He was talking to a sailor, and there was no need to say any more. Did Bolt think that he could persuade those people to conceal him in their house on that lonely shore end of the peninsula for some considerable time? Bolt thought it was the easiest thing in the world. He would simply go up there and renew the old acquaintance, but he did not mean to do that in a reckless manner. It would have to be done at night,



when of course there would be no one about. He would land just where he used to before, wrapped up in a Mediterranean sailor's cloak — -he had one of his own — -over his uniform, and simply go straight to the door, at which he would knock. Ten to one the farmer himself would come down to open it. He knew enough French by now, he hoped, to persuade those people to conceal him in some room having a view in the right direction; and there he would stick day after day on the watch, taking a little exercise in the middle of the night, ready to live on mere bread and water if necessary, so as not to arouse suspicion amongst the farmhands. And who knows if, with the farmer's help, he could not get some news of what was going on actually within the port. Then from time to time he could go down in the dead of night, signal to the ship and make his report. Bolt expressed the hope that the *Amelia* would remain as much as possible in sight of the coast. It would cheer him up to see her about. Captain Vincent naturally assented. He pointed out to Bolt, however, that his post would become most important exactly when the ship had been chased away or driven by the weather off her station, as could very easily happen. — -“You would be then the eyes of Lord Nelson's fleet, Mr. Bolt — -think of that. The actual eyes of Lord Nelson's fleet!”

After dispatching his officer, Captain Vincent spent the night on deck. The break of day came at last, much paler than the moonlight which it replaced. And still no boat. And again Captain Vincent asked himself if he had not acted indiscreetly. Impenetrable, and looking as fresh as if he had just come up on deck, he argued the point with himself till the rising sun clearing the ridge on Porquerolles Island flashed its level rays upon his ship with her dew-darkened sails and dripping rigging. He roused himself then to tell his first lieutenant to get the boats out to tow the ship away from the shore. The report of the gun he ordered to be fired expressed simply his irritation. The *Amelia*, pointing towards the middle of the *Passe*, was moving at a snail's pace behind her string of boats. Minutes passed. And then suddenly Captain Vincent perceived his boat pulling back in shore according to orders. When nearly abreast of the ship, she darted away, making for her side. Mr. Bolt clambered on board, alone, ordering the gig to go ahead and help with the towing. Captain Vincent, standing apart on the quarter-deck, received him with a grimly questioning look.

Mr. Bolt's first words were to the effect that he believed the confounded spot to be bewitched. Then he glanced at the group of officers on the other

side of the quarter-deck. Captain Vincent led the way to his cabin. There he turned and looked at his officer, who, with an air of distraction, mumbled: "There are night-walkers there."

"Come, Bolt, what the devil have you seen? Did you get near the house at all?"

"I got within twenty yards of the door, sir," said Bolt. And encouraged by the captain's much less ferocious — "Well?" began his tale. He did not pull up to the path which he knew, but to a little bit of beach on which he told his men to haul up the boat and wait for him. The beach was concealed by a thick growth of bushes on the landward side and by some rocks from the sea. Then he went to what he called the ravine, still avoiding the path, so that as a matter of fact he made his way up on his hands and knees mostly, very carefully and slowly amongst the loose stones, till by holding on to a bush he brought his eyes on a level with the piece of flat ground in front of the farmhouse.

The familiar aspect of the buildings, totally unchanged from the time when he had played his part in what appeared as a most successful operation at the beginning of the war, inspired Bolt with great confidence in the success of his present enterprise, vague as it was, but the great charm of which lay, no doubt, in mental associations with his younger years. Nothing seemed easier than to stride across the forty yards of open ground and rouse the farmer whom he remembered so well, the well-to-do man, a grave sagacious royalist in his humble way; certainly, in Bolt's view, no traitor to his country, and preserving so well his dignity in ambiguous circumstances. To Bolt's simple vision neither that, man nor his wife could have changed.

In this view of Arlette's parents Bolt was influenced by the consciousness of there having been no change in himself. He was the same Jack Bolt, and everything around him was the same as if he had left the spot only yesterday. Already he saw himself in the kitchen which he knew so well, seated by the light of a single candle before a glass of wine and talking his best French to that worthy farmer of sound principles. The whole thing was as well as done. He imagined himself a secret inmate of that building, closely confined indeed, but sustained by the possible great results of his watchfulness, in many ways more comfortable than on board the *Amelia* and with the glorious consciousness that he was, in Captain Vincent's phrase, the actual physical eyes of the fleet.

He didn't, of course, talk of his private feelings to Captain Vincent. All those thoughts and emotions were compressed in the space of not much more than a minute or two while, holding on with one hand to his bush and having got a good foothold for one of his feet, he indulged in that pleasant anticipatory sense of success. In the old days the farmer's wife used to be a light sleeper. The farmhands who, he remembered, lived in the village or were distributed in stables and outhouses, did not give him any concern. He wouldn't need to knock heavily. He pictured to himself the farmer's wife sitting up in bed, listening, then rousing her husband, who, as likely as not, would take the gun standing against the dresser downstairs and come to the door.

And then everything would be all right. . . . But perhaps . . . Yes! It was just as likely the farmer would simply open the window and hold a parley. That really was most likely. Naturally. In his place Bolt felt he would do that very thing. Yes, that was what a man in a lonely house, in the middle of the night, would do most naturally. And he imagined himself whispering mysteriously his answers up the wall to the obvious questions — -Ami — - Bolt — -Ouvrez-moi — -vive le roi — -or things of that sort. And in sequence to those vivid images it occurred to Bolt that the best thing he could do would be to throw small stones against the window shutter, the sort of sound most likely to rouse a light sleeper. He wasn't quite sure which window on the floor above the ground floor was that of those people's bedroom, but there were anyhow only three of them. In a moment he would have sprung up from his foothold on to the level if, raising his eyes for another look at the front of the house, he had not perceived that one of the windows was already open. How he could have failed to notice that before he couldn't explain.

He confessed to Captain Vincent in the course of his narrative that ``this open window, sir, checked me dead. In fact, sir, it shook my confidence, for you know, sir, that no native of these parts would dream of sleeping with his window open. It struck me that there was something wrong there; and I remained where I was.''

That fascination of repose, of secretive friendliness, which houses present at night, was gone. By the power of an open window, a black square in the moon-lighted wall, the farmhouse took on the aspect of a man-trap. Bolt assured Captain Vincent that the window would not have stopped him; he would have gone on all the same, though with an uncertain mind. But while

he was thinking it out, there glided without a sound before his irresolute eyes from somewhere a white vision — -a woman. He could see her black hair flowing down her back. A woman whom anybody would have been excused for taking for a ghost. ``I won't say that she froze my blood, sir, but she made me cold all over for a moment. Lots of people have seen ghosts, at least they say so, and I have an open mind about that. She was a weird thing to look at in the moonlight. She did not act like a sleep-walker either. If she had not come out of a grave, then she had jumped out of bed. But when she stole back and hid herself round the corner of the house I knew she was not a ghost. She could not have seen me. There she stood in the black shadow watching for something — -or waiting for somebody," added Bolt in a grim tone. ``She looked crazy," he conceded charitably.

One thing was clear to him: there had been changes in that farmhouse since his time. Bolt resented them, as if that time had been only last week. The woman concealed round the corner remained in his full view, watchful, as if only waiting for him to show himself in the open, to run off screeching and rouse all the countryside. Bolt came quickly to the conclusion that he must withdraw from the slope. On lowering himself from his first position he had the misfortune to dislodge a stone. This circumstance precipitated his retreat. In a very few minutes he found himself by the shore. He paused to listen. Above him, up the ravine and all round amongst the rocks, everything was perfectly still. He walked along in the direction of his boat. There was nothing for it but to get away quietly and perhaps . . .

``Yes, Mr. Bolt, I fear we shall have to give up our plan," interrupted Captain Vincent at that point. Bolt's assent came reluctantly, and then he braced himself to confess that this was not the worst. Before the astonished face of Captain Vincent he hastened to blurt it out. He was very sorry, he could in no way account for it, but — -he had lost a man.

Captain Vincent seemed unable to believe his ears. ``What do you say? Lost a man out of my boat's crew!" He was profoundly shocked. Bolt was correspondingly distressed. He narrated that, shortly after he had left them, the seamen had heard, or imagined they had heard, some faint and peculiar noises somewhere within the cove. The coxswain sent one of the men, the oldest of the boat's crew, along the shore to ascertain whether their boat hauled on the beach could be seen from the other side of the cove. The man — -it was Symons — -departed crawling on his hands and knees to make the circuit and, well — -he had not returned. This was really the reason why

the boat was so late in getting back to the ship. Of course Bolt did not like to give up the man. It was inconceivable that Symons should have deserted. He had left his cutlass behind and was completely unarmed, but had he been suddenly pounced upon he surely would have been able to let out a yell that could have been heard all over the cove. But till daybreak a profound stillness, in which it seemed a whisper could have been heard for miles, had reigned over the coast. It was as if Symons had been spirited away by some supernatural means, without a scuffle, without a cry. For it was inconceivable that he should have ventured inland and got captured there. It was equally inconceivable that there should have been on that particular night men ready to pounce upon Symons and knock him on the head so neatly as not to let him give a groan even.

Captain Vincent said: "All this is very fantastical, Mr. Bolt," and compressed his lips firmly for a moment before he continued: "But not much more than your woman. I suppose you did see something real. . . ."

"I tell you, sir, she stood there in full moonlight for ten minutes within a stone's throw of me," protested Bolt with a sort of desperation. "She seemed to have jumped out of bed only to look at the house. If she had a petticoat over her night-shift, that was all. Her back was to me. When she moved away I could not make out her face properly. Then she went to stand in the shadow of the house."

"On the watch," suggested Captain Vincent.

"Looked like it, sir," confessed Bolt.

"So there must have been somebody about," concluded Captain Vincent with assurance.

Bolt murmured a reluctant, "Must have been." He had expected to get into enormous trouble over this affair and was much relieved by the captain's quiet attitude. "I hope, sir, you approve of my conduct in not attempting to look for Symons at once?"

"Yes. You acted prudently by not advancing inland," said the captain.

"I was afraid of spoiling our chances to carry out your plan, sir, by disclosing our presence on shore. And that could not have been avoided. Moreover, we were only five in all and not properly armed."

"The plan has gone down before your night-walker, Mr. Bolt," Captain Vincent declared dryly. "But we must try to find out what has become of our man if it can be done without risking too much."

“By landing a large party this very next night we could surround the house,” Bolt suggested. “If we find friends there, well and good. If enemies, then we could carry off some of them on board for exchange perhaps. I am almost sorry I did not go back and kidnap that wench — - whoever she was,” he added recklessly. “Ah! If it had only been a man!”

“No doubt there was a man not very far off,” said Captain Vincent equably. “That will do, Mr. Bolt. You had better go and get some rest now.”

Bolt was glad to obey, for he was tired and hungry after his dismal failure. What vexed him most was its absurdity. Captain Vincent, though he too had passed a sleepless night, felt too restless to remain below. He followed his officer on deck.

## CHAPTER VI

By that time the *Amelia* had been towed half a mile or so away from Cape Esterel. This change had brought her nearer to the two watchers on the hillside, who would have been plainly visible to the people on her deck, but for the head of the pine which concealed their movements. Lieutenant Ral, bestriding the rugged trunk as high as he could get, had the whole of the English ship's deck open to the range of his pocket-glass which he used between the branches. He said to Peyrol suddenly:

“Her captain has just come on deck.”

Peyrol, sitting at the foot of the tree, made no answer for a long while. A warm drowsiness lay over the land and seemed to press down his eyelids. But inwardly the old rover was intensely awake. Under the mask of his immobility, with half-shut eyes and idly clasped hands, he heard the lieutenant, perched up there near the head of the tree, mutter counting something: “One, two, three,” and then a loud “Parbleu!” after which the lieutenant in his trunk-bestridding attitude began to jerk himself backwards. Peyrol got up out of his way, but could not restrain himself from asking: “What’s the matter now?”

“I will tell you what’s the matter,” said the other excitedly. As soon as he got his footing he walked up to old Peyrol and when quite close to him folded his arms across his chest.

“The first thing I did was to count the boats in the water. There was not a single one left on board. And now I just counted them again and found one more there. That ship had a boat out last night. How I missed seeing her pull out from under the land I don’t know. I was watching the decks, I suppose, and she seems to have gone straight up to the tow-rope. But I was right. That Englishman had a boat out.”

He seized Peyrol by both shoulders suddenly. “I believe you knew it all the time. You knew it, I tell you.” Peyrol, shaken violently by the shoulders, raised his eyes to look at the angry face within a few inches of his own. In his worn gaze there was no fear or shame, but a troubled perplexity and obvious concern. He remained passive, merely remonstrating softly:

“Doucement. Doucement.”

The lieutenant suddenly desisted with a final jerk which failed to stagger old Peyrol, who, directly he had been released, assumed an explanatory tone.

“For the ground is slippery here. If I had lost my footing I would not have been able to prevent myself from grabbing at you, and we would have gone down that cliff together; which would have told those Englishmen more than twenty boats could have found out in as many nights.”

Secretly Lieutenant Ral was daunted by Peyrol’s mildness. It could not be shaken. Even physically he had an impression of the utter futility of his effort, as though he had tried to shake a rock. He threw himself on the ground carelessly saying:

“As for instance?”

Peyrol lowered himself with a deliberation appropriate to his grey hairs. “You don’t suppose that out of a hundred and twenty or so pairs of eyes on board that ship there wouldn’t be a dozen at least scanning the shore. Two men falling down a cliff would have been a startling sight. The English would have been interested enough to send a boat ashore to go through our pockets, and whether dead or only half dead we wouldn’t have been in a state to prevent them. It wouldn’t matter so much as to me, and I don’t know what papers you may have in your pockets, but there are your shoulder-straps, your uniform coat.”

“I carry no papers in my pocket, and . . .” A sudden thought seemed to strike the lieutenant, a thought so intense and far-fetched as to give his mental effort a momentary aspect of vacancy. He shook it off and went on in a changed tone: “The shoulder-straps would not have been much of a revelation by themselves.”

“No. Not much. But enough to let her captain know that he had been watched. For what else could the dead body of a naval officer with a spyglass in his pocket mean? Hundreds of eyes may glance carelessly at that ship every day from all parts of the coast, though I fancy those landsmen hardly take the trouble to look at her now. But that’s a very different thing from being kept under observation. However I don’t suppose all this matters much.”

The lieutenant was recovering from the spell of that sudden thought. “Papers in my pocket,” he muttered to himself. “That would be a perfect way.” His parted lips came together in a slightly sarcastic smile with which he met Peyrol’s puzzled, sidelong glance provoked by the inexplicable character of these words.

“I bet,” said the lieutenant, “that ever since I came here first you have been more or less worrying your old head about my motives and



intentions.”

Peyrol said simply: “You came here on service at first and afterwards you came again because even in the Toulon fleet an officer may get a few days’ leave. As to your intentions, I won’t say anything about them. Especially as regards myself. About ten minutes ago anybody looking on would have thought they were not friendly to me.”

The lieutenant sat up suddenly. By that time the English sloop, getting away from under the land, had become visible even from the spot on which they sat.

“Look!” exclaimed Ral. “She seems to be forging ahead in this calm.”

Peyrol, startled, raised his eyes and saw the Amelia clear of the edge of the cliff and heading across the Passe. All her boats were already alongside, and yet, as a minute or two of steady gazing was enough to convince Peyrol, she was not stationary.

“She moves! There is no denying that. She moves. Watch the white speck of that house on Porquerolles. There! The end of her jib-boom touches it now. In a moment her head sails will mask it to us.”

“I would never have believed it,” muttered the lieutenant, after a pause of intent gazing. “And look, Peyrol, look, there is not a wrinkle on the water.”

Peyrol, who had been shading his eyes from the sun, let his hand fall. “Yes,” he said, “she would answer to a child’s breath quicker than a feather, and the English very soon found it out when they got her. She was caught in Genoa only a few months after I came home and got my moorings here.”

“I didn’t know,” murmured the young man.

“Aha, lieutenant,” said Peyrol, pressing his finger to his breast, “it hurts here, doesn’t it? There is nobody but good Frenchmen here. Do you think it is a pleasure to me to watch that flag out there at her peak? Look, you can see the whole of her now. Look at her ensign hanging down as if there were not a breath of wind under the heavens. . . .” He stamped his foot suddenly. “And yet she moves! Those in Toulon that may be thinking of catching her dead or alive would have to think hard and make long plans and get good men to carry them out.”

“There was some talk of it at the Toulon Admiralty,” said Ral.

The rover shook his head. “They need not have sent you on the duty,” he said. “I have been watching her now for a month, her and the man who has

got her now. I know all his tricks and all his habits and all his dodges by this time. The man is a seaman, that must be said for him, but I can tell beforehand what he will do in any given case.”

Lieutenant Ral lay down on his back again, his clasped hands under his head. He thought that this old man was not boasting. He knew a lot about the English ship, and if an attempt to capture her was to be made, his ideas would be worth having. Nevertheless, in his relations with old Peyrol Lieutenant Ral suffered from contradictory feelings. Ral was the son of a *civdevant* couple — -small provincial gentry — -who had both lost their heads on the scaffold, within the same week. As to their boy, he was apprenticed by order of the Delegate of the Revolutionary Committee of his town to a poor but pure-minded joiner, who could not provide him with shoes to run his errands in, but treated this aristocrat not unkindly. Nevertheless, at the end of the year the orphan ran away and volunteered as a boy on board one of the ships of the Republic about to sail on a distant expedition. At sea he found another standard of values. In the course of some eight years, suppressing his faculties of love and hatred, he arrived at the rank of an officer by sheer merit, and had accustomed himself to look at men sceptically, without much scorn or much respect. His principles were purely professional and he had never formed a friendship in his life — -more unfortunate in that respect than old Peyrol, who at least had known the bonds of the lawless Brotherhood of the Coast. He was, of course, very self-contained. Peyrol, whom he had found unexpectedly settled on the peninsula, was the first human being to break through that schooled reserve which the precariousness of all things had forced on the orphan of the Revolution. Peyrol’s striking personality had aroused Ral’s interest, a mistrustful liking mixed with some contempt of a purely doctrinaire kind. It was clear that the fellow had been next thing to a pirate at one time or another — -a sort of past which could not commend itself to a naval officer.

Still, Peyrol had broken through: and, presently, the peculiarities of all those people at the farm, each individual one of them, had entered through the breach.

Lieutenant Ral, on his back, closing his eyes to the glare of the sky, meditated on old Peyrol, while Peyrol himself, with his white head bare in the sunshine, seemed to be sitting by the side of a corpse. What in that man impressed Lieutenant Ral was the faculty of shrewd insight. The facts of Ral’s connection with the farmhouse on the peninsula were much as Peyrol

had stated. First on specific duty about establishing a signal station, then, when that project had been given up, voluntary visits. Not belonging to any ship of the fleet but doing shore duty at the Arsenal, Lieutenant Ral had spent several periods of short leave at the farm, where indeed nobody could tell whether he had come on duty or on leave. He personally could not — or perhaps would not — tell even to himself why it was that he came there. He had been growing sick of his work. He had no place in the world to go to, and no one either. Was it Peyrol he was coming to see? A mute, strangely suspicious, defiant understanding had established itself imperceptibly between him and that lawless old man who might have been suspected to have come there only to die, if the whole robust personality of Peyrol with its quiet vitality had not been antagonistic to the notion of death. That rover behaved as though he had all the time in the world at his command.

Peyrol spoke suddenly, with his eyes fixed in front of him as if he were addressing the Island of Porquerolles, eight miles away.

“Yes — -I know all her moves, though I must say that this trick of dodging close to our peninsula is something new.”

“H’m! Fish for the captain’s breakfast,” mumbled Ral without opening his eyes. “Where is she now?”

“In the middle of the Passe, busy hoisting in her boats. And still moving! That ship will keep her way as long as the flame of a candle on her deck will not stand upright.”

“That ship is a marvel.”

“She has been built by French shipwrights,” said old Peyrol bitterly.

This was the last sound for a long time. Then the lieutenant said in an indifferent tone: “You are very positive about that. How do you know?”

“I have been looking at her for a month, whatever name she might have had or whatever name the English call her by now. Did you ever see such a bow on an English-built ship?”

The lieutenant remained silent, as though he had lost all interest and there had been no such thing as an English man-of-war within a mile. But all the time he was thinking hard. He had been told confidentially of a certain piece of service to be performed on instructions received from Paris. Not an operation of war, but service of the greatest importance. The risk of it was not so much deadly as particularly odious. A brave man might well have

shrunk from it; and there are risks (not death) from which a resolute man might shrink without shame.

“Have you ever tasted of prison, Peyrol?” he asked suddenly, in an affectedly sleepy voice.

It roused Peyrol nearly into a shout. “Heavens! No! Prison! What do you mean by prison? . . . I have been a captive to savages,” he added, calming down, “but that’s a very old story. I was young and foolish then. Later, when a grown man, I was a slave to the famous Ali-Kassim. I spent a fortnight with chains on my legs and arms in the yard of a mud fort on the shores of the Persian Gulf. There was nearly a score of us Brothers of the Coast in the same predicament in consequence of a shipwreck.”

“Yes. . . . The lieutenant was very languid indeed. . . . And I daresay you all took service with that bloodthirsty old pirate.”

“There was not a single one of his thousands of blackamoors that could lay a gun properly. But Ali-Kassim made war like a prince. We sailed, a regular fleet, across the gulf, took a town on the coast of Arabia somewhere, and looted it. Then I and the others managed to get hold of an armed dhow, and we fought our way right through the blackamoors’ fleet. Several of us died of thirst later. All the same, it was a great affair. But don’t you talk to me of prisons. A proper man if given a chance to fight can always get himself killed. You understand me?”

“Yes, I understand you,” drawled the lieutenant. “I think I know you pretty well. I suppose an English prison . . .”

“That is a horrible subject of conversation,” interrupted Peyrol in a loud, emotional tone. “Naturally, any death is better than a prison. Any death! What is it you have in your mind, lieutenant?”

“Oh, it isn’t that I want you to die,” drawled Ral in an uninterested manner.

Peyrol, his entwined fingers clasping his legs, gazed fixedly at the English sloop floating idly in the Passe while he gave up all his mind to the consideration of these words that had floated out, idly too, into the peace and silence of the morning. Then he asked in a low tone:

“Do you want to frighten me?”

The lieutenant laughed harshly. Neither by word, gesture nor glance did Peyrol acknowledge the enigmatic and unpleasant sound. But when it ceased the silence grew so oppressive between the two men that they got up by a common impulse. The lieutenant sprang to his feet lightly. The

uprising of Peyrol took more time and had more dignity. They stood side by side unable to detach their longing eyes from the enemy ship below their feet.

“I wonder why he put himself into this curious position,” said the officer.

“I wonder,” growled Peyrol curtly. “If there had been only a couple of eighteen-pounders placed on the rocky ledge to the left of us, we could have unrigged her in about ten minutes.”

“Good old gunner,” commented Ral ironically. “And what afterwards? Swim off, you and I, with our cutlasses in our teeth and take her by boarding, what?”

This sally provoked in Peyrol an austere smile. “No! No!” he protested soberly. “But why not let Toulon know? Bring out a frigate or two and catch him alive. Many a time have I planned his capture just to ease my heart. Often I have stared at night out of my window upstairs across the bay to where I knew he was lying at anchor, and thinking of a little surprise I could arrange for him if I were not only old Peyrol, the gunner.”

“Yes. And keeping out of the way at that, with a bad note against his name in the books of the Admiralty in Toulon.”

“You can’t say I have tried to hide myself from you who are a naval officer,” struck in Peyrol quickly. “I fear no man. I did not run. I simply went away from Toulon. Nobody had given me an order to stay there. And you can’t say I ran very far either.”

“That was the cleverest move of all. You knew what you were doing.”

“Here you go again, hinting at something crooked like that fellow with big epaulettes at the Port Office that seemed to be longing to put me under arrest just because I brought a prize from the Indian Ocean, eight thousand miles, dodging clear of every Englishmen that came in my way, which was more perhaps than he could have done. I have my gunner’s warrant signed by Citizen Renaud, a chef d’escadre. It wasn’t given me for twirling my thumbs or hiding in the cable tier when the enemy was about. There were on board our ships some patriots that weren’t above doing that sort of thing, I can tell you. But republic or no republic, that kind wasn’t likely to get a gunner’s warrant.”

“That’s all right,” said Ral, with his eyes fixed on the English ship, the head of which was swung to the northward now. . . . “Look, she seems to have lost her way at last,” he remarked parenthetically to Peyrol, who also

glanced that way and nodded. . . . ``That's all right. But it's on record that you managed in a very short time to get very thick with a lot of patriots ashore. Section leaders. Terrorists. . . .''

``Why, yes. I wanted to hear what they had to say. They talked like a drunken crew of scallywags that had stolen a ship. But at any rate it wasn't such as they that had sold the Port to the English. They were a lot of bloodthirsty landlubbers. I did get out of town as soon as I could. I remembered I was born around here. I knew no other bit of France, and I didn't care to go any further. Nobody came to look for me.''

``No, not here. I suppose they thought it was too near. They did look for you, a little, but they gave it up. Perhaps if they had persevered and made an admiral of you we would not have been beaten at Aboukir.''

At the mention of that name Peyrol shook his fist at the serene Mediterranean sky. ``And yet we were no worse men than the English,''' he cried, ``and there are no such ships as ours in the world. You see, lieutenant, the republican god of these talkers would never give us seamen a chance of fair play.''

The lieutenant looked round in surprise. ``What do you know about a republican god?'' he asked. ``What on earth do you mean?''

``I have heard of and seen more gods than you could ever dream of in a long night's sleep, in every corner of the earth, in the very heart of forests, which is an inconceivable thing. Figures, stones, sticks. There must be something in the idea. . . . And what I meant,''' he continued in a resentful tone, ``is that their republican god, which is neither stick nor stone, but seems to be some kind of lubber, has never given us seamen a chief like that one the soldiers have got ashore.''

Lieutenant Ral looked at Peyrol with unsmiling attention, then remarked quietly, ``Well, the god of the aristocrats is coming back again and it looks as if he were bringing an emperor along with him. You've heard something of that, you people in the farmhouse? Haven't you?''

``No,''' said Peyrol. ``I have heard no talk of an emperor. But what does it matter? Under one name or another a chief can be no more than a chief, and that general whom they have been calling consul is a good chief — -nobody can deny that.''

After saying those words in a dogmatic tone, Peyrol looked up at the sun and suggested that it was time to go down to the farmhouse ``pour manger la soupe.''' With a suddenly gloomy face Ral moved off, followed by

Peyrol. At the first turn of the path they got the view of the Escampobar buildings with the pigeons still walking on the ridges of the roofs, of the sunny orchards and yards without a living soul in them. Peyrol remarked that everybody no doubt was in the kitchen waiting for his and the lieutenant's return. He himself was properly hungry. ``And you, lieutenant?''

The lieutenant was not hungry. Hearing this declaration made in a peevish tone, Peyrol gave a sagacious movement of his head behind the lieutenant's back. Well, whatever happened, a man had to eat. He, Peyrol, knew what it was to be altogether without food; but even half-rations was a poor show, very poor show for anybody who had to work or to fight. For himself he couldn't imagine any conjuncture that would prevent him having a meal as long as there was something to eat within reach.

His unwonted garrulity provoked no response, but Peyrol continued to talk in that strain as though his thoughts were concentrated on food, while his eyes roved here and there and his ears were open for the slightest sound. When they arrived in front of the house Peyrol stopped to glance anxiously down the path to the coast, letting the lieutenant enter the caf. The Mediterranean, in that part which could be seen from the door of the caf, was as empty of all sail as a yet undiscovered sea. The dull tinkle of a cracked bell on the neck of some wandering cow was the only sound that reached him, accentuating the Sunday peace of the farm. Two goats were lying down on the western slope of the hill. It all had a very reassuring effect and the anxious expression on Peyrol's face was passing away when suddenly one of the goats leaped to its feet. The rover gave a start and became rigid in a pose of tense apprehension. A man who is in such a frame of mind that a leaping goat makes him start cannot be happy. However, the other goat remained lying down. There was really no reason for alarm, and Peyrol, composing his features as near as possible to their usual placid expression, followed the lieutenant into the house.

## CHAPTER VII

A single cover having been laid at the end of a long table in the *salle* for the lieutenant, he had his meal there while the others sat down to theirs in the kitchen, the usual strangely assorted company served by the anxious and silent Catherine. Peyrol, thoughtful and hungry, faced Citizen Scevola in his working clothes and very much withdrawn within himself. Scevola's aspect was more feverish than usual, with the red patches on his cheekbones very marked above the thick beard. From time to time the mistress of the farm would get up from her place by the side of old Peyrol and go out into the *salle* to attend to the lieutenant. The other three people seemed unconscious of her absences. Towards the end of the meal Peyrol leaned back in his wooden chair and let his gaze rest on the ex-terrorist who had not finished yet, and was still busy over his plate with the air of a man who had done a long morning's work. The door leading from the kitchen to the *salle* stood wide open, but no sound of voices ever came from there.

Till lately Peyrol had not concerned himself very much with the mental states of the people with whom he lived. Now, however, he wondered to himself what could be the thoughts of the ex-terrorist patriot, that sanguinary and extremely poor creature occupying the position of master of the Escampobar Farm. But when Citizen Scevola raised his head at last to take a long drink of wine there was nothing new on that face which in its high colour resembled so much a painted mask. Their eyes met.

“Sacrebleu!” exclaimed Peyrol at last. “If you never say anything to anybody like this you will forget how to speak at last.”

The patriot smiled from the depths of his beard, a smile which Peyrol for some reason, mere prejudice perhaps, always thought resembled the defensive grin of some small wild animal afraid of being cornered.

“What is there to talk about?” he retorted. “You live with us; you haven't budged from here; I suppose you have counted the bunches of grapes in the enclosure and the figs on the fig-tree on the west wall many times over. . . .” He paused to lend an ear to the dead silence in the *salle*, and then said with a slight rise of tone, “You and I know everything that is going on here.”

Peyrol wrinkled the corners of his eyes in a keen, searching glance. Catherine clearing the table bore herself as if she had been completely deaf. Her face, of a walnut colour, with sunken cheeks and lips, might have been a carving in the marvellous immobility of its fine wrinkles. Her carriage



was upright and her hands swift in their movements. Peyrol said: "We don't want to talk about the farm. Haven't you heard any news lately?"

The patriot shook his head violently. Of public news he had a horror. Everything was lost. The country was ruled by perjurers and renegades. All the patriotic virtues were dead. He struck the table with his fist and then remained listening as though the blow could have roused an echo in the silent house. Not the faintest sound came from anywhere. Citizen Scevola sighed. It seemed to him that he was the only patriot left, and even in his retirement his life was not safe.

"I know," said Peyrol. "I saw the whole affair out of the window. You can run like a hare, citizen."

"Was I to allow myself to be sacrificed by those superstitious brutes?" argued Citizen Scevola in a high-pitched voice and with genuine indignation which Peyrol watched coldly. He could hardly catch the mutter of "Perhaps it would have been just as well if I had let those reactionary dogs kill me that time."

The old woman washing up at the sink glanced uneasily towards the door of the salle.

"No!" shouted the lonely sans-culotte. "It isn't possible! There must be plenty of patriots left in France. The sacred fire is not burnt out yet."

For a short time he presented the appearance of a man who is sitting with ashes on his head and desolation in his heart. His almond-shaped eyes looked dull, extinguished. But after a moment he gave a sidelong look at Peyrol as if to watch the effect and began declaiming in a low voice and apparently as if rehearsing a speech to himself: "No, it isn't possible. Some day tyranny will stumble and then it will be time to pull it down again. We will come out in our thousands and-a ira!"

Those words, and even the passionate energy of the tone, left Peyrol unmoved. With his head sustained by his thick brown hand he was thinking of something else so obviously as to depress again the feebly struggling spirit of terrorism in the lonely breast of Citizen Scevola. The glow of reflected sunlight in the kitchen became darkened by the body of the fisherman of the lagoon, mumbling a shy greeting to the company from the frame of the doorway. Without altering his position Peyrol turned his eyes on him curiously. Catherine, wiping her hands on her apron, remarked: "You come late for your dinner, Michel." He stepped in then, took from the old woman's hand an earthenware pot and a large hunk of bread and carried

them out at once into the yard. Peyrol and the sans-culotte got up from the table. The latter, after hesitating like somebody who has lost his way, went brusquely into the passage, while Peyrol, avoiding Catherine's anxious stare, made for the back-yard. Through the open door of the *salle* he obtained a glimpse of Arlette sitting upright with her hands in her lap gazing at somebody he could not see, but who could be no other than Lieutenant Ral.

In the blaze and heat of the yard the chickens, broken up into small groups, were having their siesta in patches of shade. But Peyrol cared nothing for the sun. Michel, who was eating his dinner under the pent roof of the cart shed, put the earthenware pot down on the ground and joined his master at the well encircled by a low wall of stones and topped by an arch of wrought iron on which a wild fig-tree had twined a slender offshoot. After his dog's death the fisherman had abandoned the salt lagoon, leaving his rotting punt exposed on the dismal shore and his miserable nets shut up in the dark hut. He did not care for another dog, and besides, who was there to give him a dog? He was the last of men. Somebody must be last. There was no place for him in the life of the village. So one fine morning he had walked up to the farm in order to see Peyrol. More correctly, perhaps, to let himself be seen by Peyrol. That was exactly Michel's only hope. He sat down on a stone outside the gate with a small bundle, consisting mainly of an old blanket, and a crooked stick lying on the ground near him, and looking the most lonely, mild and harmless creature on this earth. Peyrol had listened gravely to his confused tale of the dog's death. He, personally, would not have made a friend of a dog like Michel's dog, but he understood perfectly the sudden breaking up of the establishment on the shore of the lagoon. So when Michel had concluded with the words, "I thought I would come up here," Peyrol, without waiting for a plain request, had said: "Trs bien. You will be my crew," and had pointed down the path leading to the seashore. And as Michel, picking up his bundle and stick, started off, waiting for no further directions, he had shouted after him: "You will find a loaf of bread and a bottle of wine in a locker aft, to break your fast on."

These had been the only formalities of Michel's engagement to serve as "crew" on board Peyrol's boat. The rover indeed had tried without loss of time to carry out his purpose of getting something of his own that would float. It was not so easy to find anything worthy. The miserable population of Madrague, a tiny fishing hamlet facing towards Toulon, had nothing to

sell. Moreover, Peyrol looked with contempt on all their possessions. He would have as soon bought a catamaran of three logs of wood tied together with rattans as one of their boats; but lonely and prominent on the beach, lying on her side in weather-beaten melancholy, there was a two-masted tartane with her sun-whitened cordage hanging in festoons and her dry masts showing long cracks. No man was ever seen dozing under the shade of her hull on which the Mediterranean gulls made themselves very much at home. She looked a wreck thrown high up on the land by a disdainful sea. Peyrol, having surveyed her from a distance, saw that the rudder still hung in its place. He ran his eye along her body and said to himself that a craft with such lines would sail well. She was much bigger than anything he had thought of, but in her size, too, there was a fascination. It seemed to bring all the shores of the Mediterranean within his reach, Baleares and Corsica, Barbary and Spain. Peyrol had sailed over hundreds of leagues of ocean in craft that were no bigger. At his back in silent wonder a knot of fishermen's wives, bareheaded and lean, with a swarm of ragged children clinging to their skirts, watched the first stranger they had seen for years.

Peyrol borrowed a short ladder in the hamlet (he knew better than to trust his weight to any of the ropes hanging over the side) and carried it down to the beach followed at a respectful distance by the staring women and children: a phenomenon and a wonder to the natives, as it had happened to him before on more than one island in distant seas. He clambered on board the neglected tartane and stood on the decked forepart, the centre of all eyes. A gull flew away with an angry scream. The bottom of the open hold contained nothing but a little sand, a few broken pieces of wood, a rusty hook, and some few stalks of straw which the wind must have carried for miles before they found their rest in there. The decked after-part had a small skylight and a companion, and Peyrol's eyes rested fascinated on an enormous padlock which secured its sliding door. It was as if there had been secrets or treasures inside — -and yet most probably it was empty. Peyrol turned his head away and with the whole strength of his lungs shouted in the direction of the fishermen's wives who had been joined by two very old men and a hunchbacked cripple swinging between two crutches:

“Is there anybody looking after this tartane, a caretaker?”

At first the only answer was a movement of recoil. Only the hunchback held his ground and shouted back in an unexpectedly strong voice:

“You are the first man that has been on board her for years.”

The wives of the fishermen admired his boldness, for Peyrol indeed appeared to them a very formidable being.

“I might have guessed that,” thought Peyrol. “She is in a dreadful mess.” The disturbed gull had brought some friends as indignant as itself and they circled at different levels uttering wild cries over Peyrol’s head. He shouted again:

“Who does she belong to?”

The being on crutches lifted a finger towards the circling birds and answered in a deep tone:

“They are the only ones I know.” Then, as Peyrol gazed down at him over the side, he went on: “This craft used to belong to Escampobar. You know Escampobar? It’s a house in the hollow between the hills there.”

“Yes, I know Escampobar,” yelled Peyrol, turning away and leaning against the mast in a pose which he did not change for a long time. His immobility tired out the crowd. They moved slowly in a body towards their hovels, the hunchback bringing up the rear with long swings between his crutches, and Peyrol remained alone with the angry gulls. He lingered on board the tragic craft which had taken Arlette’s parents to their death in the vengeful massacre of Toulon and had brought the youthful Arlette and Citizen Scevola back to Escampobar where old Catherine, left alone at that time, had waited for days for somebody’s return. Days of anguish and prayer, while she listened to the booming of guns about Toulon and with an almost greater but different terror to the dead silence which ensued.

Peyrol, enjoying the sensation of some sort of craft under his feet, indulged in no images of horror connected with that desolate tartane. It was late in the evening before he returned to the farm, so that he had to have his supper alone. The women had retired, only the sans-culotte, smoking a short pipe out of doors, had followed him into the kitchen and asked where he had been and whether he had lost his way. This question gave Peyrol an opening. He had been to Madrague and had seen a very fine tartane lying perishing on the beach.

“They told me down there that she belonged to you, citoyen.”

At this the terrorist only blinked.

“What’s the matter? Isn’t she the craft you came here in? Won’t you sell her to me?” Peyrol waited a little. “What objection can you have?”

It appeared that the patriot had no positive objections. He mumbled something about the tartane being very dirty. This caused Peyrol to look at

him with intense astonishment.

“I am ready to take her off your hands as she stands.”

“I will be frank with you, citizen. You see, when she lay at the quay in Toulon a lot of fugitive traitors, men and women, and children too, swarmed on board of her, and cut the ropes with a view of escaping, but the avengers were not far behind and made short work of them. When we discovered her behind the Arsenal, I and another man, we had to throw a lot of bodies overboard, out of the hold and the cabin. You will find her very dirty all over. We had no time to clear up.” Peyrol felt inclined to laugh. He had seen decks swimming in blood and had himself helped to throw dead bodies overboard after a fight; but he eyed the citizen with an unfriendly eye. He thought to himself: “He had a hand in that massacre, no doubt,” but he made no audible remark. He only thought of the enormous padlock securing that emptied charnel house at the stern. The terrorist insisted. “We really had not a moment to clean her up. The circumstances were such that it was necessary for me to get away quickly lest some of the false patriots should do me some carnagole or other. There had been bitter quarrelling in my section. I was not alone in getting away, you know.”

Peyrol waved his arm to cut short the explanation. But before he and the terrorist had parted for the night Peyrol could regard himself as the owner of the tragic tartane.

Next day he returned to the hamlet and took up his quarters there for a time. The awe he had inspired wore off, though no one cared to come very near the tartane. Peyrol did not want any help. He wrenched off the enormous padlock himself with a bar of iron and let the light of day into the little cabin which did indeed bear the trace’s of the massacre in the stains of blood on its woodwork, but contained nothing else except a wisp of long hair and a woman’s earring, a cheap thing which Peyrol picked up and looked at for a long time. The associations of such finds were not foreign to his past. He could without very strong emotion figure to himself the little place choked with corpses. He sat down and looked about at the stains and splashes which had been untouched by sunlight for years. The cheap little earring lay before him on the rough-hewn table between the lockers, and he shook his head at it weightily. He, at any rate, had never been a butcher.

Peyrol unassisted did all the cleaning. Then he turned con amore to the fitting out of the tartane. The habits of activity still clung to him. He welcomed something to do; this congenial task had all the air of preparation

for a voyage, which was a pleasing dream, and it brought every evening the satisfaction of something achieved to that illusory end. He rove new gear, scraped the masts himself, did all the sweeping, scrubbing and painting single-handed, working steadily and hopefully as though he had been preparing his escape from a desert island; and directly he had cleaned and renovated the dark little hole of a cabin he took to sleeping on board. Once only he went up on a visit to the farm for a couple of days, as if to give himself a holiday. He passed them mostly in observing Arlette. She was perhaps the first problematic human being he had ever been in contact with. Peyrol had no contempt for women. He had seen them love, suffer, endure, riot, and even fight for their own hand, very much like men. Generally with men and women you had to be on your guard, but in some ways women were more to be trusted. As a matter of fact, his country-women were to him less known than any other kind. From his experience of many different races, however, he had a vague idea that women were very much alike everywhere. This one was a lovable creature. She produced on him the effect of a child, aroused a kind of intimate emotion which he had not known before to exist by itself in a man. He was startled by its detached character. "Is it that I am getting old?" he asked himself suddenly one evening, as he sat on the bench against the wall looking straight before him, after she had crossed his line of sight.

He felt himself an object of observation to Catherine, whom he used to detect peeping at him round corners or through half-opened doors. On his part he would stare at her openly — -aware of the impression he produced on her: mingled curiosity and awe. He had the idea she did not disapprove of his presence at the farm, where, it was plain to him, she had a far from easy life. This had no relation to the fact that she did all the household work. She was a woman of about his own age, straight as a dart but with a wrinkled face. One evening as they were sitting alone in the kitchen Peyrol said to her: "You must have been a handsome girl in your day, Catherine. It's strange you never got married."

She turned to him under the high mantel of the fireplace and seemed struck all of a heap, unbelieving, amazed, so that Peyrol was quite provoked. "What's the matter? If the old moke in the yard had spoken you could not look more surprised. You can't deny that you were a handsome girl."

She recovered from her scare to say: "I was born here, grew up here, and early in my life I made up my mind to die here."

"A strange notion," said Peyrol, "for a young girl to take into her head."

"It's not a thing to talk about," said the old woman, stooping to get a pot out of the warm ashes. "I did not think, then," she went on, with her back to Peyrol, "that I would live long. When I was eighteen I fell in love with a priest."

"Ah, bah!" exclaimed Peyrol under his breath.

"That was the time when I prayed for death," she pursued in a quiet voice. "I spent nights on my knees upstairs in that room where you sleep now. I shunned everybody. People began to say I was crazy. We have always been hated by the rabble about here. They have poisonous tongues. I got the nickname of 'la fiance du prtre.' Yes, I was handsome, but who would have looked at me if I had wanted to be looked at? My only luck was to have a fine man for a brother. He understood. No word passed his lips, but sometimes when we were alone and not even his wife was by, he would lay his hand on my shoulder gently. From that time to this I have not been to church and I never will go. But I have no quarrel with God now."

There were no signs of watchfulness and care in her bearing now. She stood straight as an arrow before Peyrol and looked at him with a confident air. The rover was not yet ready to speak. He only nodded twice and Catherine turned away to put the pot to cool in the sink. "Yes, I wished to die. But I did not, and now I have got something to do," she said, sitting down near the fireplace and taking her chin in her hand. "And I daresay you know what that is," she added.

Peyrol got up deliberately.

"Well! bonsoir," he said. "I am off to Madrague. I want to begin work again on the tartane at daylight."

"Don't talk to me about the tartane, She took my brother away for ever. I stood on the shore watching her sails growing smaller and smaller. Then I came up alone to this farmhouse."

Moving calmly her faded lips which no lover or child had ever kissed, old Catherine told Peyrol of the days and nights of waiting, with the distant growl of the big guns in her ears. She used to sit outside on the bench longing for news, watching the flickers in the sky and listening to heavy bursts of gunfire coming over the water. Then came a night as if the world

were coming to an end. All the sky was lighted up, the earth shook to its foundations, and she felt the house rock, so that jumping up from the bench she screamed with fear. That night she never went to bed. Next morning she saw the sea covered with sails, while a black and yellow cloud of smoke hung over Toulon. A man coming up from Madrague told her that he believed that the whole town had been blown up. She gave him a bottle of wine and he helped her to feed the stock that evening. Before going home he expressed the opinion that there could not be a soul left alive in Toulon, because the few that survived would have gone away in the English ships. Nearly a week later she was dozing by the fire when voices outside woke her up, and she beheld standing in the middle of the *salle*, pale like a corpse out of a grave, with a blood-soaked blanket over her shoulders and a red cap on her head, a ghastly looking young girl in whom she suddenly recognized her niece. She screamed in her terror: "Franois, Franois!" This was her brother's name, and she thought he was outside. Her scream scared the girl, who ran out of the door. All was still outside. Once more she screamed "Franois!" and, tottering as far as the door, she saw her niece clinging to a strange man in a red cap and with a sabre by his side who yelled excitedly: "You won't see Franois again. Vive la Rpublique!"

"I recognized the son Bron," went on Catherine. "I knew his parents. When the troubles began he left his home to follow the Revolution. I walked straight up to him and took the girl away from his side. She didn't want much coaxing. The child always loved me," she continued, getting up from the stool and moving a little closer to Peyrol. "She remembered her Aunt Catherine. I tore the horrid blanket off her shoulders. Her hair was clotted with blood and her clothes all stained with it. I took her upstairs. She was as helpless as a little child. I undressed her and examined her all over. She had no hurt anywhere. I was sure of that — -but of what more could I be sure? I couldn't make sense of the things she babbled at me. Her very voice distracted me. She fell asleep directly I had put her into my bed, and I stood there looking down at her, nearly going out of my mind with the thought of what that child may have been dragged through. When I went downstairs I found that good-for-nothing inside the house. He was ranting up and down the *salle*, vapouring and boasting till I thought all this must be an awful dream. My head was in a whirl. He laid claim to her, and God knows what. I seemed to understand things that made my hair stir on my



head. I stood there clasping my hands with all the strength I had, for fear I should go out of my senses."

"He frightened you," said Peyrol, looking at her steadily. Catherine moved a step nearer to him.

"What? The son Bron, frighten me! He was the butt of all the girls, mooning about amongst the people outside the church on feast days in the time of the king. All the countryside knew about him. No. What I said to myself was that I mustn't let him kill me. There upstairs was the child I had just got away from him, and there was I, all alone with that man with the sabre and unable to get hold of a kitchen knife even."

"And so he remained," said Peyrol.

"What would you have had me to do?" asked Catherine steadily. "He had brought the child back out of those shambles. It was a long time before I got an idea of what had happened. I don't know everything even yet and I suppose I will never know. In a very few days my mind was more at ease about Arlette, but it was a long time before she would speak and then it was never anything to the purpose. And what could I have done single-handed? There was nobody I would condescend to call to my help. We of the Escampobar have never been in favour with the peasants here," she said, proudly. "And this is all I can tell you."

Her voice faltered, she sat down on the stool again and took her chin in the palm of her hand. As Peyrol left the house to go to the hamlet he saw Arlette and the patron come round the corner of the yard wall walking side by side but as if unconscious of each other.

That night he slept on board the renovated tartane and the rising sun found him at work about the hull. By that time he had ceased to be the object of awed contemplation to the inhabitants of the hamlet who still, however, kept up a mistrustful attitude. His only intermediary for communicating with them was the miserable cripple. He was Peyrol's only company, in fact, during his period of work on the tartane. He had more activity, audacity, and intelligence, it seemed to Peyrol, than all the rest of the inhabitants put together. Early in the morning he could be seen making his way on his crutches with a pendulum motion towards the hull on which Peyrol would have been already an hour or so at work. Peyrol then would throw him over a sound rope's end and the cripple, leaning his crutches against the side of the tartane, would pull his wretched little carcass, all withered below the waist, up the rope, hand over hand, with extreme ease.

There, sitting on the small foredeck, with his back against the mast and his thin, twisted legs folded in front of him, he would keep Peyrol company, talking to him along the whole length of the tartane in a strained voice and sharing his midday meal, as of right, since it was he generally who brought the provisions slung round his neck in a quaint flat basket. Thus were the hours of labour shortened for Peyrol by shrewd remarks and bits of local gossip. How the cripple got hold of it it was difficult to imagine, and the rover had not enough knowledge of European superstitions to suspect him of flying through the night on a broomstick like a sort of male witch — -for there was a manliness in that twisted scrap of humanity which struck Peyrol from the first. His very voice was manly and the character of his gossip was not feminine. He did indeed mention to Peyrol that people used to take him about the neighbourhood in carts for the purpose of playing a fiddle at weddings and other festive occasions; but this seemed hardly adequate, and even he himself confessed that there was not much of that sort of thing going on during the Revolution when people didn't like to attract attention and everything was done in a hole-and-corner manner. There were no priests to officiate at weddings, and if there were no ceremonies how could there be rejoicings? Of course children were born as before, but there were no christenings — -and people got to look funny somehow or other. Their countenances got changed somehow; the very boys and girls seemed to have something on their minds.

Peyrol, busy about one thing and another, listened without appearing to pay much attention to the story of the Revolution, as if to the tale of an intelligent islander on the other side of the world talking of bloody rites and amazing hopes of some religion unknown to the rest of mankind. But there was something biting in the speech of that cripple which confused his thoughts a little. Sarcasm was a mystery which he could not understand. On one occasion he remarked to his friend the cripple as they sat together on the foredeck munching the bread and figs of their midday meal:

“There must have been something in it. But it doesn't seem to have done much for you people here.”

“To be sure,” retorted the scrap of man vivaciously, “it hasn't straightened my back or given me a pair of legs like yours.”

Peyrol, whose trousers were rolled up above the knee because he had been washing the hold, looked at his calves complacently. “You could hardly have expected that,” he remarked with simplicity.

“Ah, but you don’t know what people with properly made bodies expected or pretended to,” said the cripple. “Everything was going to be changed. Everybody was going to tie up his dog with a string of sausages for the sake of principles.” His long face which, in repose, had an expression of suffering peculiar to cripples, was lighted up by an enormous grin. “They must feel jolly well sold by this time,” he added. “And of course that vexes them, but I am not vexed. I was never vexed with my father and mother. While the poor things were alive I never went hungry — -not very hungry. They couldn’t have been very proud of me.” He paused and seemed to contemplate himself mentally. “I don’t know what I would have done in their place. Something very different. But then, don’t you see, I know what it means to be like I am. Of course they couldn’t know, and I don’t suppose the poor people had very much sense. A priest from Almanarre — -Almanarre is a sort of village up there where there is a church. . . .”

Peyrol interrupted him by remarking that he knew all about Almanarre. This, on his part, was a simple delusion because in reality he knew much less of Almanarre than of Zanzibar or any pirate village from there up to Cape Guardafui. And the cripple contemplated him with his brown eyes which had an upward cast naturally.

“You know . . .! For me,” he went on, in a tone of quiet decision, “you are a man fallen from the sky. Well, a priest from Almanarre came to bury them. A fine man with a stern face. The finest man I have seen from that time till you dropped on us here. There was a story of a girl having fallen in love with him some years before. I was old enough then to have heard something of it, but that’s neither here nor there. Moreover, many people wouldn’t believe the tale.”

Peyrol, without looking at the cripple, tried to imagine what sort of child he might have been — - what sort of youth? The rover had seen staggering deformities, dreadful mutilations which were the cruel work of man; but it was amongst people with dusky skins. And that made a great difference. But what he had heard and seen since he had come back to his native land, the tales, the facts, and also the faces, reached his sensibility with a particular force, because of that feeling that came to him so suddenly after a whole lifetime spent amongst Indians, Malagashes, Arabs, blackamoors of all sorts, that he belonged there, to this land, and had escaped all those things by a mere hair’s breadth. His companion completed his significant

silence, which seemed to have been occupied with thoughts very much like his own, by saying:

“All this was in the king’s time. They didn’t cut off his head till several years afterwards. It didn’t make my life any easier for me, but since those Republicans had deposed God and flung Him out of all the churches I have forgiven Him all my troubles.”

“Spoken like a man,” said Peyrol. Only the misshapen character of the cripple’s back prevented Peyrol from giving him a hearty slap. He got up to begin his afternoon’s work. It was a bit of inside painting and from the foredeck the cripple watched him at it with dreamy eyes and something ironic on his lips.

It was not till the sun had travelled over Cape Cici, which could be seen across the water like dark mist in the glare, that he opened his lips to ask: “And what do you propose to do with this tartane, citoyen?”

Peyrol answered simply that the tartane was fit to go anywhere now, the very moment she took the water.

“You could go as far as Genoa and Naples and even further,” suggested the cripple.

“Much further,” said Peyrol.

“And you have been fitting her out like this for a voyage?”

“Certainly,” said Peyrol, using his brush steadily.

“Somehow I fancy it will not be a long one.”

Peyrol never checked the to-and-fro movement of his brush, but it was with an effort. The fact was that he had discovered in himself a distinct reluctance to go away from the Escampobar Farm. His desire to have something of his own that could float was no longer associated with any desire to wander. The cripple was right. The voyage of the renovated tartane would not take her very far. What was surprising was the fellow being so very positive about it. He seemed able to read people’s thoughts.

The dragging of the renovated tartane into the water was a great affair. Everybody in the hamlet, including the women, did a full day’s work and there was never so much coin passed from hand to hand in the hamlet in all the days of its obscure history. Swinging between his crutches on a low sand-ridge the cripple surveyed the whole of the beach. It was he that had persuaded the villagers to lend a hand and had arranged the terms for their assistance. It was he also who through a very miserable-looking pedlar (the only one who frequented the peninsula) had got in touch with some rich

persons in Frjus who had changed for Peyrol a few of his gold pieces for current money. He had expedited the course of the most exciting and interesting experience of his life, and now planted on the sand on his two sticks in the manner of a beacon he watched the last operation. The rover, as if about to launch himself upon a track of a thousand miles, walked up to shake hands with him and look once more at the soft eyes and the ironic smile.

“There is no denying it — -you are a man.”

“Don’t talk like this to me, citoyen,” said the cripple in a trembling voice. Till then, suspended between his two sticks and with his shoulders as high as his ears, he had not looked towards the approaching Peyrol. “This is too much of a compliment!”

“I tell you,” insisted the rover roughly, and as if the insignificance of mortal envelopes had presented itself to him for the first time at the end of his roving life, “I tell you that there is that in you which would make a chum one would like to have alongside one in a tight place.”

As he went away from the cripple towards the tartane, while the whole population of the hamlet disposed around her waited for his word, some on land and some waist-deep in the water holding ropes in their hands, Peyrol had a slight shudder at the thought: “Suppose I had been born like that.” Ever since he had put his foot on his native land such thoughts had haunted him. They would have been impossible anywhere else. He could not have been like any blackamoor, good, bad, or indifferent, hale or crippled, king or slave; but here, on this Southern shore that had called to him irresistibly as he had approached the Straits of Gibraltar on what he had felt to be his last voyage, any woman, lean and old enough, might have been his mother; he might have been any Frenchman of them all, even one of those he pitied, even one of those he despised. He felt the grip of his origins from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet while he clambered on board the tartane as if for a long and distant voyage. As a matter of fact he knew very well that with a bit of luck it would be over in about an hour. When the tartane took the water the feeling of being afloat plucked at his very heart. Some Madrague fishermen had been persuaded by the cripple to help old Peyrol to sail the tartane round to the cove below the Escampobar Farm. A glorious sun shone upon that short passage and the cove itself was full of sparkling light when they arrived. The few Escampobar goats wandering on

the hillside pretending to feed where no grass was visible to the naked eye never even raised their heads. A gentle breeze drove the tartane, as fresh as paint could make her, opposite a narrow crack in the cliff which gave admittance to a tiny basin, no bigger than a village pond, concealed at the foot of the southern hill. It was there that old Peyrol, aided by the Madrague men, who had their boat with them, towed his ship, the first really that he ever owned.

Once in, the tartane nearly filled the little basin, and the fishermen, getting into their boat, rowed away for home. Peyrol, by spending the afternoon in dragging ropes ashore and fastening them to various boulders and dwarf trees, moored her to his complete satisfaction. She was as safe from the tempests there as a house ashore.

After he had made everything fast on board and had furled the sails neatly, a matter of some time for one man, Peyrol contemplated his arrangements which savoured of rest much more than of wandering, and found them good. Though he never meant to abandon his room at the farmhouse he felt that his true home was in the tartane, and he rejoiced at the idea that it was concealed from all eyes except perhaps the eyes of the goats when their arduous feeding took them on the southern slope. He lingered on board, he even threw open the sliding door of the little cabin, which now smelt of fresh paint, not of stale blood. Before he started for the farm the sun had travelled far beyond Spain and all the sky to the west was yellow, while on the side of Italy it presented a sombre canopy pierced here and there with the light of stars. Catherine put a plate on the table, but nobody asked him any questions.

He spent a lot of his time on board, going down early, coming up at midday "pour manger la soupe," and sleeping on board almost every night. He did not like to leave the tartane alone for so many hours. Often, having climbed a little way up to the house, he would turn round for a last look at her in the gathering dusk, and actually would go back again. After Michel had been enlisted for a crew and had taken his abode on board for good, Peyrol found it a much easier matter to spend his nights in the lantern-like room at the top of the farmhouse.

Often waking up at night he would get up to look at the starry sky out of all his three windows in succession, and think: "Now there is nothing in the world to prevent me getting out to sea in less than an hour." As a matter of fact it was possible for two men to manage the tartane. Thus Peyrol's

thought was comfortingly true in every way, for he loved to feel himself free, and Michel of the lagoon, after the death of his depressed dog, had no tie on earth. It was a fine thought which somehow made it quite easy for Peyrol to go back to his four-poster and resume his slumbers.

## CHAPTER VIII

Perched sideways on the circular wall bordering the well, in the full blaze of the midday sun, the rover of the distant seas and the fisherman of the lagoon, sharing between them a most surprising secret, had the air of two men conferring in the dark. The first word that Peyrol said was, "Well?"

"All quiet," said the other.

"Have you fastened the cabin door properly?"

"You know what the fastenings are like."

Peyrol could not deny that. It was a sufficient answer. It shifted the responsibility on to his shoulders and all his life he had been accustomed to trust to the work of his own hands, in peace and in war. Yet he looked doubtfully at Michel before he remarked:

"Yes, but I know the man too."

There could be no greater contrast than those two faces: Peyrol's clean, like a carving of stone, and only very little softened by time, and that of the owner of the late dog, hirsute, with many silver threads, with something elusive in the features and the vagueness of expression of a baby in arms. "Yes, I know the man," repeated Peyrol. Michel's mouth fell open at this, a small oval set a little crookedly in the innocent face.

"He will never wake," he suggested timidly.

The possession of a common and momentous secret drawing men together, Peyrol condescended to explain.

"You don't know the thickness of his skull. I do."

He spoke as though he had made it himself. Michel, who in the face of that positive statement had forgotten to shut his mouth, had nothing to say.

"He breathes all right?" asked Peyrol.

"Yes. After I got out and locked the door I listened for a bit and I thought I heard him snore."

Peyrol looked interested and also slightly anxious.

"I had to come up and show myself this morning as if nothing had happened," he said. "The officer has been here for two days and he might have taken it into his head to go down to the tartane. I have been on the stretch all the morning. A goat jumping up was enough to give me a turn. Fancy him running up here with his broken head all bandaged up, with you after him."

This seemed to be too much for Michel. He said almost indignantly:

"The man's half killed."



“It takes a lot to even half kill a Brother of the Coast. There are men and men. You, for instance,” Peyrol continued placidly, “you would have been altogether killed if it had been your head that got in the way. And there are animals, beasts twice your size, regular monsters, that may be killed with nothing more than just a tap on the nose. That’s well known. I was really afraid he would overcome you in some way or other. . . .”

“Come, *matre*! One isn’t a little child,” protested Michel against this accumulation of improbabilities. He did it, however, only in a whisper and with childlike shyness. Peyrol folded his arms on his breast:

“Go, finish your soup,” he commanded in a low voice, “and then go down to the *tartane*. You locked the cabin door properly, you said?”

“Yes, I have,” protested Michel, staggered by this display of anxiety. “He could sooner burst the deck above his head, as you know.”

“All the same, take a small spar and shore up that door against the heel of the mast. And then watch outside. Don’t you go in to him on any account. Stay on deck and keep a lookout for me. There is a tangle here that won’t be easily cleared and I must be very careful. I will try to slip away and get down as soon as I get rid of that officer.”

The conference in the sunshine being ended, Peyrol walked leisurely out of the yard gate, and protruding his head beyond the corner of the house, saw Lieutenant Ral sitting on the bench. This he had expected to see. But he had not expected to see him there alone. It was just like this: wherever Arlette happened to be, there were worrying possibilities. But she might have been helping her aunt in the kitchen with her sleeves rolled up on such white arms as Peyrol had never seen on any woman before. The way she had taken to dressing her hair in a plait with a broad black velvet ribbon and an Arlesian cap was very becoming. She was wearing now her mother’s clothes of which there were chestfuls, altered for her of course. The late mistress of the Escampobar Farm had been an Arlesienne. Well-to-do, too. Yes, even for women’s clothes the Escampobar natives could do without intercourse with the outer world. It was quite time that this confounded lieutenant went back to Toulon. This was the third day. His short leave must be up. Peyrol’s attitude towards naval officers had been always guarded and suspicious. His relations with them had been very mixed. They had been his enemies and his superiors. He had been chased by them. He had been trusted by them. The Revolution had made a clean cut across the consistency of his wild life — -Brother of the Coast and gunner in the

national navy — -and yet he was always the same man. It was like that, too, with them. Officers of the King, officers of the Republic, it was only changing the skin. All alike looked askance at a free rover. Even this one could not forget his epaulettes when talking to him. Scorn and mistrust of epaulettes were rooted deeply in old Peyrol. Yet he did not absolutely hate Lieutenant Ral. Only the fellow's coming to the farm was generally a curse and his presence at that particular moment a confounded nuisance and to a certain extent even a danger. "I have no mind to be hauled to Toulon by the scruff of my neck," Peyrol said to himself. There was no trusting those epaulette-wearers. Any one of them was capable of jumping on his best friend on account of some officer-like notion or other.

Peyrol, stepping round the corner, sat down by the side of Lieutenant Ral with the feeling somehow of coming to grips with a slippery customer. The lieutenant, as he sat there, unaware of Peyrol's survey of his person, gave no notion of slipperiness. On the contrary, he looked rather immovably established. Very much at home. Too much at home. Even after Peyrol sat down by his side he continued to look immovable — -or at least difficult to get rid of. In the still noonday heat the faint shrilling of cicadas was the only sound of life heard for quite a long time. Delicate, evanescent, cheerful, careless sort of life, yet not without passion. A sudden gloom seemed to be cast over the joy of the cicadas by the lieutenant's voice though the words were the most perfunctory possible.

"Tiens! Vous voil."

In the stress of the situation Peyrol at once asked himself: "Now why does he say that? Where did he expect me to be?" The lieutenant need not have spoken at all. He had known him now for about two years off and on, and it had happened many times that they had sat side by side on that bench in a sort of "at arm's length" equality without exchanging a single word. And why could he not have kept quiet now? That naval officer never spoke without an object, but what could one make of words like that? Peyrol achieved an insincere yawn and suggested mildly:

"A bit of siesta wouldn't be amiss. What do you think, lieutenant?"

And to himself he thought: "No fear, he won't go to his room." He would stay there and thereby keep him, Peyrol, from going down to the cove. He turned his eyes on that naval officer, and if extreme and concentrated desire and mere force of will could have had any effect Lieutenant Ral would certainly have been removed suddenly from that

bench. But he didn't move. And Peyrol was astonished to see that man smile, but what astonished him still more was to hear him say:

“The trouble is that you have never been frank with me, Peyrol.”

“Frank with you,” repeated the rover. “You want me to be frank with you? Well, I have wished you to the devil many times.”

“That's better,” said Lieutenant Ral. “But why? I never tried to do you any harm.”

“Me harm,” cried Peyrol, “to me?” But he faltered in his indignation as if frightened at it and ended in a very quiet tone: “You have been nosing in a lot of dirty papers to find something against a man who was not doing you any harm and was a seaman before you were born.”

“Quite a mistake. There was no nosing amongst papers. I came on them quite by accident. I won't deny I was intrigu finding a man of your sort living in this place. But don't be uneasy. Nobody would trouble his head about you. It's a long time since you have been forgotten. Have no fear.”

“You! You talk to me of fear . . .? No,” cried the rover, “it's enough to turn a fellow into a sans-culotte if it weren't for the sight of that specimen sneaking around here.”

The lieutenant turned his head sharply, and for a moment the naval officer and the free sea-rover looked at each other gloomily. When Peyrol spoke again he had changed his mood.

“Why should I fear anybody? I owe nothing to anybody. I have given them up the prize ship in order and everything else, except my luck; and for that I account to nobody,” he added darkly.

“I don't know what you are driving at,” the lieutenant said after a moment of thought. “All I know is that you seem to have given up your share of the prize money. There is no record of you ever claiming it.”

Peyrol did not like the sarcastic tone. “You have a nasty tongue,” he said, “with your damned trick of talking as if you were made of different clay.”

“No offence,” said the lieutenant, grave but a little puzzled. “Nobody will drag out that against you. It has been paid years ago to the Invalides fund. All this is buried and forgotten.”

Peyrol was grumbling and swearing to himself with such concentration that the lieutenant stopped and waited till he had finished.

“And there is no record of desertion or anything like that,” he continued then. “You stand there as disparu. I believe that after searching for you a

little they came to the conclusion that you had come by your death somehow or other.”

“Did they? Well, perhaps old Peyrol is dead. At any rate he has buried himself here.” The rover suffered from great instability of feelings for he passed in a flash from melancholy into fierceness. “And he was quiet enough till you came sniffing around this hole. More than once in my life I had occasion to wonder how soon the jackals would have a chance to dig up my carcass; but to have a naval officer come scratching round here was the last thing. . . .” Again a change came over him. “What can you want here?” he whispered, suddenly depressed.

The lieutenant fell into the humour of that discourse. “I don’t want to disturb the dead,” he said, turning full to the rover who after his last words had fixed his eyes on the ground. “I want to talk to the gunner Peyrol.”

Peyrol, without raising his eyes from the ground, growled: “He isn’t here. He is disparu. Go and look at the papers again. Vanished. Nobody here.”

“That,” said Lieutenant Ral, in a conversational tone, “that is a lie. He was talking to me this morning on the hillside as we were looking at the English ship. He knows all about her. He told me he spent nights making plans for her capture. He seemed to be a fellow with his heart in the right place. Un homme de cur. You know him.”

Peyrol raised his big head slowly and looked at the lieutenant.

“Humph,” he grunted. A heavy, non-committal grunt. His old heart was stirred, but the tangle was such that he had to be on his guard with any man who wore epaulettes. His profile preserved the immobility of a head struck on a medal while he listened to the lieutenant assuring him that this time he had come to Escampobar on purpose to speak with the gunner Peyrol. That he had not done so before was because it was a very confidential matter. At this point the lieutenant stopped and Peyrol made no sign. Inwardly he was asking himself what the lieutenant was driving at. But the lieutenant seemed to have shifted his ground. His tone, too, was slightly different. More practical.

“You say you have made a study of that English ship’s movements. Well, for instance, suppose a breeze springs up, as it very likely will towards the evening, could you tell me where she will be to-night? I mean, what her captain is likely to do.”

“No, I couldn’t,” said Peyrol.

“But you said you have been observing him minutely for weeks. There aren’t so many alternatives, and taking the weather and everything into consideration, you can judge almost with certainty.”

“No,” said Peyrol again. “It so happens that I can’t.”

“Can’t you? Then you are worse than any of the old admirals that you think so little of. Why can’t you?”

“I will tell you why,” said Peyrol after a pause and with a face more like a carving than ever. “It’s because the fellow has never come so far this way before. Therefore I don’t know what he has got in his mind, and in consequence I can’t guess what he will do next. I may be able to tell you some other day but not to-day. Next time when you come . . . to see the old gunner.”

“No, it must be this time.”

“Do you mean you are going to stay here tonight?”

“Did you think I was here on leave? I tell you I am on service. Don’t you believe me?”

Peyrol let out a heavy sigh. “Yes, I believe you. And so they are thinking of catching her alive. And you are sent on service. Well, that doesn’t make it any easier for me to see you here.”

“You are a strange man, Peyrol,” said the lieutenant. “I believe you wish me dead.”

“No. Only out of this. But you are right, Peyrol is no friend either to your face or to your voice. They have done harm enough already.”

They had never attained to such intimate terms before. There was no need for them to look at each other. The lieutenant thought: “Ah! He can’t keep his jealousy in.” There was no scorn or malice in that thought. It was much more like despair. He said mildly:

“You snarl like an old dog, Peyrol.”

“I have felt sometimes as if I could fly at your throat,” said Peyrol in a sort of calm whisper. “And it amuses you the more.”

“Amuses me? Do I look light-hearted?”

Again Peyrol turned his head slowly for a long, steady stare. And again the naval officer and the rover gazed at each other with a searching and sombre frankness. This new-born intimacy could go no further.

“Listen to me, Peyrol. . . .”

“No,” said the other. “If you want to talk, talk to the gunner.”

Though he seemed to have adopted the notion of a double personality the rover did not seem to be much easier in one character than in the other. Furrows of perplexity appeared on his brow, and as the lieutenant did not speak at once Peyrol the gunner asked impatiently:

“So they are thinking of catching her alive?” It did not please him to hear the lieutenant say that it was not exactly this that the chiefs in Toulon had in their minds. Peyrol at once expressed the opinion that of all the naval chiefs that ever were, Citizen Renaud was the only one that was worth anything. Lieutenant Ral, disregarding the challenging tone, kept to the point.

“What they want to know is whether that English corvette interferes much with the coast traffic.”

“No, she doesn’t,” said Peyrol: “she leaves poor people alone, unless, I suppose, some craft acts suspiciously. I have seen her give chase to one or two. But even those she did not detain. Michel — - you know Michel — - has heard from the mainland people that she has captured several at various times. Of course, strictly speaking, nobody is safe.”

“Well, no. I wonder now what that Englishman would call ‘acting suspiciously.’ “

“Ah, now you are asking something. Don’t you know what an Englishman is? One day easy and casual, next day ready to pounce on you like a tiger. Hard in the morning, careless in the afternoon, and only reliable in a fight, whether with or against you, but for the rest perfectly fantastic. You might think a little touched in the head, and there again it would not do to trust to that notion either.”

The lieutenant lending an attentive ear, Peyrol smoothed his brow and discoursed with gusto of Englishmen as if they had been a strange, very little-known tribe. “In a manner of speaking,” he concluded, “the oldest bird of them all can be caught with chaff, but not every day.” He shook his head, smiling to himself faintly as if remembering a quaint passage or two.

“You didn’t get all that knowledge of the English while you were a gunner,” observed the lieutenant dryly.

“There you go again,” said Peyrol. “And what’s that to you where I learned it all? Suppose I learned it all from a man who is dead now. Put it down to that.”

“I see. It amounts to this, that one can’t get at the back of their minds very easily.”

“No,” said Peyrol, then added grumpily, “and some Frenchmen are not much better. I wish I could get at the back of your mind.”

“You would find a service matter there, gunner, that’s what you would find there, and a matter that seems nothing much at first sight, but when you look into it, is about as difficult to manage properly as anything you ever undertook in your life. It puzzled all the big-wigs. It must have, since I was called in. Of course I work on shore at the Admiralty and I was in the way. They showed me the order from Paris and I could see at once the difficulty of it. I pointed it out and I was told . . .”

“To come here,” struck in Peyrol.

“No. To make arrangements to carry it out.”

“And you began by coming here. You are always coming here.”

“I began by looking for a man,” said the naval officer with emphasis.

Peyrol looked at him searchingly. “Do you mean to say that in the whole fleet you couldn’t have found a man?”

“I never attempted to look for one there. My chief agreed with me that it isn’t a service for navy men.”

“Well, it must be something nasty for a naval man to admit that much. What is the order? I don’t suppose you came over here without being ready to show it to me.”

The lieutenant plunged his hand into the inside pocket of his naval jacket and then brought it out empty.

“Understand, Peyrol,” he said earnestly, “this is not a service of fighting. Good men are plentiful for that. The object is to play the enemy a trick.”

“Trick?” said Peyrol in a judicial tone, “that’s all right. I have seen in the Indian Seas Monsieur Surcouf play tricks on the English . . . seen them with my own eyes, deceptions, disguises, and such-like. . . . That’s quite sound in war.”

“Certainly. The order for this one comes from the First Consul himself, for it is no small matter. It’s to deceive the English Admiral.”

“What — -that Nelson? Ah! but he is a cunning one.”

After expressing that opinion the old rover pulled out a red bandana handkerchief and after rubbing his face with it repeated his opinion deliberately: “Celui-l est un malin.”

This time the lieutenant really brought out a paper from his pocket and saying, “I have copied the order for you to see,” handed it to the rover,

who took it from him with a doubtful air.

Lieutenant Ral watched old Peyrol handling it at arm's length, then with his arm bent trying to adjust the distance to his eyesight, and wondered whether he had copied it in a hand big enough to be read easily by the gunner Peyrol. The order ran like this: ``You will make up a packet of dispatches and pretended private letters as if from officers, containing a clear statement besides hints calculated to convince the enemy that the destination of the fleet now fitting in Toulon is for Egypt and generally for the East. That packet you will send by sea in some small craft to Naples, taking care that the vessel shall fall into the enemy's hands.'' The Prefet Maritime had called Ral, had shown him the paragraph of the letter from Paris, had turned the page over and laid his finger on the signature, ``Bonaparte.'' Then after giving him a meaning glance, the admiral locked up the paper in a drawer and put the key in his pocket. Lieutenant Ral had written the passage down from memory directly the notion of consulting Peyrol had occurred to him.

The rover, screwing his eyes and pursing his lips, had come to the end of it. The lieutenant extended his hand negligently and took the paper away: ``Well, what do you think?'' he asked. ``You understand that there can be no question of any ship of war being sacrificed to that dodge. What do you think of it?''

``Easier said than done,'' opined Peyrol curtly.

``That's what I told my admiral.''

``Is he a lubber, so that you had to explain it to him?''

``No, gunner, he is not. He listened to me, nodding his head.''

``And what did he say when you finished?''

``He said: `Parfaitement. Have you got any ideas about it?' And I said — -listen to me, gunner — -I said: `Oui, Amiral, I think I've got a man,' and the admiral interrupted me at once: `All right, you don't want to talk to me about him. I put you in charge of that affair and give you a week to arrange it. When it's done report to me. Meantime you may just as well take this packet.' They were already prepared, Peyrol, all those faked letters and dispatches. I carried it out of the admiral's room, a parcel done up in sail-cloth, properly corded and sealed. I have had it in my possession for three days. It's upstairs in my valise.''

``That doesn't advance you very much,'' growled old Peyrol.



“No,” admitted the lieutenant. “I can also dispose of a few thousand francs.”

“Francs,” repeated Peyrol. “Well, you had better get back to Toulon and try to bribe some man to put his head into the jaws of the English lion.”

Ral reflected, then said slowly, “I wouldn’t tell any man that. Of course a service of danger, that would be understood.”

“It would be. And if you could get a fellow with some sense in his caboché, he would naturally try to slip past the English fleet and maybe do it, too. And then where’s your trick?”

“We could give him a course to steer.”

“Yes. And it may happen that your course would just take him clear of all Nelson’s fleet, for you never can tell what the English are doing. They might be watering in Sardinia.”

“Some cruisers are sure to be out and pick him up.”

“Maybe. But that’s not doing the job, that’s taking a chance. Do you think you are talking to a toothless baby — or what?”

“No, my gunner. It will take a strong man’s teeth to undo that knot.” A moment of silence followed. Then Peyrol assumed a dogmatic tone.

“I will tell you what it is, lieutenant. This seems to me just the sort of order that a landlubber would give to good seamen. You daren’t deny that.”

“I don’t deny it,” the lieutenant admitted. “And look at the whole difficulty. For supposing even that the tartane blunders right into the English fleet, as if it had been indeed arranged, they would just look into her hold or perhaps poke their noses here and there but it would never occur to them to search for dispatches, would it? Our man, of course, would have them well hidden, wouldn’t he? He is not to know. And if he were ass enough to leave them lying about the decks the English would at once smell a rat there. But what I think he would do would be to throw the dispatches overboard.”

“Yes — unless he is told the nature of the job,” said Peyrol.

“Evidently. But where’s the bribe big enough to induce a man to taste of the English pontoons?”

“The man will take the bribe all right and then will do his best not to be caught; and if he can’t avoid that, he will take jolly good care that the English should find nothing on board his tartane. Oh no, lieutenant, any damn scallywag that owns a tartane will take a couple of thousand francs from your hand as tame as can be; but as to deceiving the English Admiral,

it's the very devil of an affair. Didn't you think of all that before you spoke to the big epaulettes that gave you the job?"

"I did see it, and I put it all before him," the lieutenant said, lowering his voice still more, for their conversation had been carried on in undertones though the house behind them was silent and solitude reigned round the approaches of Escampobar Farm. It was the hour of siesta — -for those that could sleep. The lieutenant, edging closer towards the old man, almost breathed the words in his ear.

"What I wanted was to hear you say all those things. Do you understand now what I meant this morning on the lookout? Don't you remember what I said?"

Peyrol, gazing into space, spoke in a level murmur.

"I remember a naval officer trying to shake old Peyrol off his feet and not managing to do it. I may be disparu but I am too solid yet for any blancbec that loses his temper, devil only knows why. And it's a good thing that you didn't manage it, else I would have taken you down with me, and we would have made our last somersault together for the amusement of an English ship's company. A pretty end that!"

"Don't you remember me saying, when you mentioned that the English would have sent a boat to go through our pockets, that this would have been the perfect way?" In his stony immobility with the other man leaning towards his car, Peyrol seemed a mere insensible receptacle for whispers, and the lieutenant went on forcibly: "Well, it was in allusion to this affair, for, look here, gunner, what could be more convincing, if they had found the packet of dispatches on me! What would have been their surprise, their wonder! Not the slightest doubt could enter their heads. Could it, gunner? Of course it couldn't. I can imagine the captain of that corvette crowding sail on her to get this packet into the Admiral's hands. The secret of the Toulon fleet's destination found on the body of a dead officer. Wouldn't they have exulted at their enormous piece of luck! But they wouldn't have called it accidental. Oh, no! They would have called it providential. I know the English a little too. They like to have God on their side — - the only ally they never need pay a subsidy to. Come, gunner, would it not have been a perfect way?"

Lieutenant Ral threw himself back and Peyrol, still like a carven image of grim dreaminess, growled softly:

“Time yet. The English ship is still in the Passe.” He waited a little in his uncanny living-statue manner before he added viciously: “You don’t seem in a hurry to go and take that leap.”

“Upon my word, I am almost sick enough of life to do it,” the lieutenant said in a conversational tone.

“Well, don’t forget to run upstairs and take that packet with you before you go,” said Peyrol as before. “But don’t wait for me; I am not sick of life. I am disparu, and that’s good enough. There’s no need for me to die.”

And at last he moved in his seat, swung his head from side to side as if to make sure that his neck had not been turned to stone, emitted a short laugh, and grumbled: “Disparu! Hein! Well, I am damned!” as if the word “vanished” had been a gross insult to enter against a man’s name in a register. It seemed to rankle, as Lieutenant Ral observed with some surprise; or else it was something inarticulate that rankled, manifesting itself in that funny way. The lieutenant, too, had a moment of anger which flamed and went out at once in the deadly cold philosophic reflection: “We are victims of the destiny which has brought us together.” Then again his resentment flamed. Why should he have stumbled against that girl or that woman, he didn’t know how he must think of her, and suffer so horribly for it? He who had endeavoured almost from a boy to destroy all the softer feelings within himself. His changing moods of distaste, of wonder at himself and at the unexpected turns of life, wore the aspect of profound abstraction from which he was recalled by an outburst of Peyrol’s, not loud but fierce enough.

“No,” cried Peyrol, “I am too old to break my bones for the sake of a lubberly soldier in Paris who fancies he has invented something clever.”

“I don’t ask you to,” the lieutenant said, with extreme severity, in what Peyrol would call an epaulette wearer’s voice. “You old sea-bandit. And it wouldn’t be for the sake of a soldier anyhow. You and I are Frenchmen after all.”

“You have discovered that, have you?”

“Yes,” said Ral. “This morning, listening to your talk on the hillside with that English corvette within one might say a stone’s throw.”

“Yes,” groaned Peyrol. “A French-built ship!” He struck his breast a resounding blow. “It hurts one there to see her. It seemed to me I could jump down on her deck single-handed.”

“Yes, there you and I understood each other,” said the lieutenant. “But look here, this affair is a much bigger thing than getting back a captured corvette. In reality it is much more than merely playing a trick on an admiral. It’s a part of a deep plan, Peyrol! It’s another stroke to help us on the way towards a great victory at sea.”

“Us!” said Peyrol. “I am a sea-bandit and you are a sea-officer. What do you mean by us?”

“I mean all Frenchmen,” said the lieutenant. “Or, let us say simply France, which you too have served.”

Peyrol, whose stone-effigy bearing had become humanized almost against his will, gave an appreciative nod, and said: “You’ve got something in your mind. Now what is it? If you will trust a sea-bandit.”

“No, I will trust a gunner of the Republic. It occurred to me that for this great affair we could make use of this corvette that you have been observing so long. For to count on the capture of any old tartane by the fleet in a way that would not arouse suspicion is no use.”

“A lubberly notion,” assented Peyrol, with more heartiness than he had ever displayed towards Lieutenant Ral.

“Yes, but there’s that corvette. Couldn’t something be arranged to make them swallow the whole thing, somehow, some way? You laugh . . . Why?”

“I laugh because it would be a great joke,” said Peyrol, whose hilarity was very short-lived. “That fellow on board, he thinks himself very clever. I never set my eyes on him, but I used to feel that I knew him as if he were my own brother; but now . . .”

He stopped short. Lieutenant Ral, after observing the sudden change on his countenance, said in an impressive manner:

“I think you have just had an idea.”

“Not the slightest,” said Peyrol, turning suddenly into stone as if by enchantment. The lieutenant did not feel discouraged and he was not surprised to hear the effigy of Peyrol pronounce: “All the same one could see.” Then very abruptly: “You meant to stay here to-night?”

“Yes. I will only go down to Madrague and leave word with the sailing barge which was to come to-day from Toulon to go back without me.”

“No, lieutenant. You must return to Toulon to-day. When you get there you must turn out some of those damned quill-drivers at the Port Office if it were midnight and have papers made out for a tartane — -oh, any name you like. Some sort of papers. And then you must come back as soon as you

can. Why not go down to Madrague now and see whether the barge isn't already there? If she is, then by starting at once you may get back here some time about midnight."

He got up impetuously and the lieutenant stood up too. Hesitation was imprinted on his whole attitude. Peyrol's aspect was not animated, but his Roman face with its severe aspect gave him a great air of authority.

"Won't you tell me something more?" asked the lieutenant.

"No," said the rover. "Not till we meet again. If you return during the night don't you try to get into the house. Wait outside. Don't rouse anybody. I will be about, and if there is anything to say I will say it to you then. What are you looking about you for? You don't want to go up for your valise. Your pistols up in your room too? What do you want with pistols, only to go to Toulon and back with a naval boat's crew?" He actually laid his hand on the lieutenant's shoulder and impelled him gently towards the track leading to Madrague. Ral turned his head at the touch and their eyes met with the strained closeness of a wrestler's hug. It was the lieutenant who gave way before the unflinchingly direct stare of the old Brother of the Coast. He gave way under the cover of a sarcastic smile and a very airy, "I see you want me out of the way for some reason or other," which produced not the slightest effect upon Peyrol, who stood with his arm pointing towards Madrague. When the lieutenant turned his back on him Peyrol's pointing arm fell down by his side; but he watched the lieutenant out of sight before he turned too and moved in a contrary direction.

## CHAPTER IX

On losing sight of the perplexed lieutenant, Peyrol discovered that his own mind was a perfect blank. He started to get down to his tartane after one side-long look at the face of the house which contained quite a different problem. Let that wait. His head feeling strangely empty, he felt the pressing necessity of furnishing it with some thought without loss of time. He scrambled down steep places, caught at bushes, stepped from stone to stone, with the assurance of long practice, with mechanical precision and without for a moment relaxing his efforts to capture some definite scheme which he could put into his head. To his right the cove lay full of pale light, while the rest of the Mediterranean extended beyond it in a dark, unruffled blue. Peyrol was making for the little basin where his tartane had been hidden for years, like a jewel in a casket meant only for the secret rejoicing of his eye, of no more practical use than a miser's hoard — -and as precious! Coming upon a hollow in the ground where grew a few bushes and even a few blades of grass, Peyrol sat down to rest. In that position his visible world was limited to a stony slope, a few boulders, the bush against which he leaned and the vista of a piece of empty sea-horizon. He perceived that he detested that lieutenant much more when he didn't see him. There was something in the fellow. Well, at any rate he had got rid of him for say eight or ten hours. An uneasiness came over the old rover, a sense of the endangered stability of things, which was anything but welcome. He wondered at it, and the thought "I am growing old," intruded on him again. And yet he was aware of his sturdy body. He could still creep stealthily like an Indian and with his trusty cudgel knock a man over with a certain aim at the back of his head, and with force enough to fell him like a bullock. He had done that thing no further back than two o'clock the night before, not twelve hours ago, as easy as easy and without an undue sense of exertion. This fact cheered him up. But still he could not find an idea for his head. Not what one could call a real idea. It wouldn't come. It was no use sitting there.

He got up and after a few strides came to a stony ridge from which he could see the two white blunt mastheads of his tartane. Her hull was hidden from him by the formation of the shore, in which the most prominent feature was a big flat piece of rock. That was the spot on which not twelve hours before Peyrol, unable to rest in his bed and coming to seek sleep in his tartane, had seen by moonlight a man standing above his vessel and

looking down at her, a characteristic forked black shape that certainly had no business to be there. Peyrol, by a sudden and logical deduction, had said to himself. ``Landed from an English boat.” Why, how, wherefore, he did not stay to consider. He acted at once like a man accustomed for many years to meet emergencies of the most unexpected kind. The dark figure, lost in a sort of attentive amazement, heard nothing, suspected nothing. The impact of the thick end of the cudgel came down on its head like a thunderbolt from the blue. The sides of the little basin echoed the crash. But he could not have heard it. The force of the blow flung the senseless body over the edge of the flat rock and down headlong into the open hold of the tartane, which received it with the sound of a muffled drum. Peyrol could not have done the job better at the age of twenty. No. Not so well. There was swiftness, mature judgment — -and the sound of the muffled drum was followed by a perfect silence, without a sigh, without a moan. Peyrol ran round a little promontory to where the shore shelved down to the level of the tartanes rail and got on board. And still the silence remained perfect in the cold moonlight and amongst the deep shadows of the rocks. It remained perfect because Michel, who always slept under the half-deck forward, being wakened by the thump which had made the whole tartane tremble, had lost the power of speech. With his head just protruding from under the half-deck, arrested on all fours and shivering violently like a dog that had been washed with hot water, he was kept from advancing further by his terror of this bewitched corpse that had come on board flying through the air. He would not have touched it for anything.

The ``You there, Michel,” pronounced in an undertone, acted like a moral tonic. This then was not the doing of the Evil One; it was no sorcery! And even if it had been, now that Peyrol was there, Michel had lost all fear. He ventured not a single question while he helped Peyrol to turn over the limp body. Its face was covered with blood from the cut on the forehead which it had got by striking the sharp edge of the keelson. What accounted for the head not being completely smashed and for no limbs being broken was the fact that on its way through the air the victim of undue curiosity had come in contact with and had snapped like a carrot one of the foremast shrouds. Raising his eyes casually Peyrol noticed the broken rope, and at once put his hand on the man’s breast.

``His heart beats yet,” he murmured. ``Go and light the cabin lamp, Michel.”

“You going to take that thing into the cabin?”

“Yes,” said Peyrol. “The cabin is used to that kind of thing,” and suddenly he felt very bitter. “It has been a death-trap for better people than this fellow, whoever he is.”

While Michel was away executing that order Peyrol’s eyes roamed all over the shores of the basin, for he could not divest himself of the idea that there must be more Englishmen dodging about. That one of the corvette’s boats was still in the cove he had not the slightest doubt. As to the motive of her coming, it was incomprehensible. Only that senseless form lying at his feet could perhaps have told him: but Peyrol had little hope that it would ever speak again. If his friends started to look for their shipmate there was just a bare chance that they would not discover the existence of the basin. Peyrol stooped and felt the body all over. He found no weapon of any kind on it. There was only a common clasp-knife on a lanyard round its neck.

That soul of obedience, Michel, returning from aft, was directed to throw a couple of bucketfuls of salt water upon the bloody head with its face upturned to the moon. The lowering of the body down into the cabin was a matter of some little difficulty. It was heavy. They laid it full length on a locker and after Michel with a strange tidiness had arranged its arms along its sides it looked incredibly rigid. The dripping head with soaked hair was like the head of a drowned man with a gaping pink gash on the forehead.

“Go on deck to keep a lookout,” said Peyrol. “We may have to fight yet before the night’s out.”

After Michel left him Peyrol began by flinging off his jacket and, without a pause, dragging his shirt off over his head. It was a very fine shirt. The Brothers of the Coast in their hours of ease were by no means a ragged crowd, and Peyrol the gunner had preserved a taste for fine linen. He tore the shirt into long strips, sat down on the locker and took the wet head on his knees. He bandaged it with some skill, working as calmly as though he had been practising on a dummy. Then the experienced Peyrol sought the lifeless hand and felt the pulse. The spirit had not fled yet. The rover, stripped to the waist, his powerful arms folded on the grizzled pelt of his bare breast, sat gazing down at the inert face in his lap with the eyes closed peacefully under the white band covering the forehead. He contemplated the heavy jaw combined oddly with a certain roundness of cheek, the noticeably broad nose with a sharp tip and a faint dent across the bridge, either natural or the result of some old injury. A face of brown clay, roughly



modelled, with a lot of black eyelashes stuck on the closed lids and looking artificially youthful on that physiognomy forty years old or more. And Peyrol thought of his youth. Not his own youth; that he was never anxious to recapture. It was of that man's youth that he thought, of how that face had looked twenty years ago. Suddenly he shifted his position, and putting his lips to the ear of that inanimate head, yelled with all the force of his lungs:

“Hullo! Hullo! Wake up, shipmate!”

It seemed enough to wake up the dead. A faint “Voil! Voil!” was the answer from a distance, and presently Michel put his head into the cabin with an anxious grin and a gleam in the round eyes.

“You called, *matre*?”

“Yes,” said Peyrol. “Come along and help me to shift him.”

“Overboard?” murmured Michel readily.

“No,” said Peyrol, “into that bunk. Steady! Don't bang his head,” he cried with unexpected tenderness. “Throw a blanket over him. Stay in the cabin and keep his bandages wetted with salt water. I don't think anybody will trouble you to-night. I am going to the house.”

“The day is not very far off,” remarked Michel.

This was one reason the more why Peyrol was in a hurry to get back to the house and steal up to his room unseen. He drew on his jacket over his bare skin, picked up his cudgel, recommended Michel not to let that strange bird get out of the cabin on any account. As Michel was convinced that the man would never walk again in his life, he received those instructions without particular emotion.

The dawn had broken some time before Peyrol, on his way up to Escampobar, happened to look round and had the luck to actually see with his own eyes the English man-of-war's boat pulling out of the cove. This confirmed his surmises but did not enlighten him a bit as to the causes. Puzzled and uneasy, he approached the house through the farmyard — Catherine, always the first up, stood at the open kitchen door. She moved aside and would have let him pass without remark, if Peyrol himself had not asked in a whisper: “Anything new?” She answered him in the same tone: “She has taken to roaming at night.” Peyrol stole silently up to his bedroom, from which he descended an hour later as though he had spent all the night in his bed up there.

It was this nocturnal adventure which had affected the character of Peyrol's forenoon talk with the lieutenant. What with one thing and another he found it very trying. Now that he had got rid of Ral for several hours, the rover had to turn his attention to that other invader of the strained, questionable, and ominous in its origins, peace of the Escampobar Farm. As he sat on the flat rock with his eyes fixed idly on the few drops of blood betraying his last night's work to the high heaven, and trying to get hold of something definite that he could think about, Peyrol became aware of a faint thundering noise. Faint as it was it filled the whole basin. He soon guessed its nature, and his face lost its perplexity. He picked up his cudgel, got on his feet briskly, muttering to himself. "He's anything but dead," and hurried on board the tartane.

On the after-deck Michel was keeping a lookout. He had carried out the orders he had received by the well. Besides being secured by the very obvious padlock, the cabin door was shored up by a spar which made it stand as firm as a rock. The thundering noise seemed to issue from its immovable substance magically. It ceased for a moment, and a sort of distracted continuous growling could be heard. Then the thundering began again. Michel reported: "This is the third time he starts this game."

"Not much strength in this," remarked Peyrol gravely.

"That he can do it at all is a miracle," said Michel, showing a certain excitement. "He stands on the ladder and beats the door with his fists. He is getting better. He began about half an hour after I got back on board. He drummed for a bit and then fell off the ladder. I heard him. I had my ear against the scuttle. He lay there and talked to himself for a long time. Then he went at it again." Peyrol approached the scuttle while Michel added his opinion: "He will go on like that for ever. You can't stop him."

"Easy there," said Peyrol in a deep authoritative voice. "Time you finish that noise."

These words brought instantly a death-like silence. Michel ceased to grin. He wondered at the power of these few words of a foreign language.

Peyrol himself smiled faintly. It was ages since he had uttered a sentence of English. He waited complacently until Michel had unbarred and unlocked the door of the cabin. After it was thrown open he boomed out a warning: "Stand clear!" and, turning about, went down with great deliberation, ordering Michel to go forward and keep a lookout.

Down there the man with the bandaged head was hanging on to the table and swearing feebly without intermission. Peyrol, after listening for a time with an air of interested recognition as one would to a tune heard many years ago, stopped it by a deep-voiced:

“That will do.” After a short silence he added: “You look bien malade, hein? What you call sick,” in a tone which if not tender was certainly not hostile. “We will remedy that.”

“Who are you?” asked the prisoner, looking frightened and throwing his arm up quickly to guard his head against the coming blow. But Peyrol’s uplifted hand fell only on his shoulder in a hearty slap which made him sit down suddenly on a locker in a partly collapsed attitude and unable to speak. But though very much dazed he was able to watch Peyrol open a cupboard and produce from there a small demijohn and two tin cups. He took heart to say plaintively: “My throat’s like tinder,” and then suspiciously: “Was it you who broke my head?”

“It was me,” admitted Peyrol, sitting down on the opposite side of the table and leaning back to look at his prisoner comfortably.

“What the devil did you do that for?” inquired the other with a sort of faint fierceness which left Peyrol unmoved.

“Because you put your nose where you no business. Understand? I see you there under the moon, pench, eating my tartane with your eyes. You never hear me, hein?”

“I believe you walked on air. Did you mean to kill me?”

“Yes, in preference to letting you go and make a story of it on board your cursed corvette.”

“Well then, now’s your chance to finish me. I am as weak as a kitten.”

“How did you say that? Kitten? Ha, ha, ha!” laughed Peyrol. “You make a nice petit chat.” He seized the demijohn by the neck and filled the mugs. “There,” he went on, pushing one towards the prisoner — “it’s good drink — -that.”

Symons’ state was as though the blow had robbed him of all power of resistance, of all faculty of surprise and generally of all the means by which a man may assert himself except bitter resentment. His head was aching, it seemed to him enormous, too heavy for his neck and as if full of hot smoke. He took a drink under Peyrol’s fixed gaze and with uncertain movements put down the mug. He looked drowsy for a moment. Presently a little colour

deepened his bronze; he hitched himself up on the locker and said in a strong voice:

“You played a damned dirty trick on me. Call yourself a man, walking on air behind a fellow’s back and felling him like a bullock?”

Peyrol nodded calmly and sipped from his mug.

“If I had met you anywhere else but looking at my tartane I would have done nothing to you. I would have permitted you to go back to your boat. Where was your damned boat?”

“How can I tell you? I can’t tell where I am. I’ve never been here before. How long have I been here?”

“Oh, about fourteen hours,” said Peyrol.

“My head feels as if it would fall off if I moved,” grumbled the other. . . . “You are a damned bungler, that’s what you are.”

“What for — -bungler?”

“For not finishing me off at once.”

He seized the mug and emptied it down his throat. Peyrol drank too, observing him all the time. He put the mug down with extreme gentleness and said slowly:

“How could I know it was you? I hit hard enough to crack the skull of any other man.”

“What do you mean? What do you know about my skull? What are you driving at? I don’t know you, you white-headed villain, going about at night knocking people on the head from behind. Did you do for our officer, too?”

“Oh yes! Your officer. What was he up to? What trouble did you people come to make here, anyhow?”

“Do you think they tell a boat’s crew? Go and ask our officer. He went up the gully and our coxswain got the jumps. He says to me: ‘You are light-footed, Sam, says he; ‘you just creep round the head of the cove and see if our boat can be seen across from the other side. Well, I couldn’t see anything. That was all right. But I thought I would climb a little higher amongst the rocks. . . .’

He paused drowsily.

“That was a silly thing to do,” remarked Peyrol in an encouraging voice.

“I would’ve sooner expected to see an elephant inland than a craft lying in a pool that seemed no bigger than my hand. Could not understand how she got there. Couldn’t help going down to find out — -and the next thing I knew I was lying on my back with my head tied up, in a bunk in this kennel

of a cabin here. Why couldn't you have given me a hail and engaged me properly, yardarm to yardarm? You would have got me all the same, because all I had in the way of weapons was the clasp-knife which you have looted off me."

"Up on the shelf there," said Peyrol, looking round. "No, my friend, I wasn't going to take the risk of seeing you spread your wings and fly."

"You need not have been afraid for your tartane. Our boat was after no tartane. We wouldn't have taken your tartane for a gift. Why, we see them by dozens every day — -those tartanes."

Peyrol filled the two mugs again. "Ah," he said, "I daresay you see many tartanes, but this one is not like the others. You a sailor — -and you couldn't see that she was something extraordinary."

"Hellfire and gunpowder!" cried the other. "How can you expect me to have seen anything? I just noticed that her sails were bent before your club hit me on the head." He raised his hands to his head and groaned. "Oh lord, I feel as though I had been drunk for a month."

Peyrol's prisoner did look somewhat as though he had got his head broken in a drunken brawl. But to Peyrol his appearance was not repulsive. The rover preserved a tender memory of his freebooter's life with its lawless spirit and its spacious scene of action, before the change in the state of affairs in the Indian Ocean, the astounding rumours from the outer world, made him reflect on its precarious character. It was true that he had deserted the French flag when quite a youngster; but at that time that flag was white; and now it was a flag of three colours. He had known the practice of liberty, equality and fraternity as understood in the haunts open or secret of the Brotherhood of the Coast. So the change, if one could believe what people talked about, could not be very great. The rover had also his own positive notions as to what these three words were worth. Liberty — -to hold your own in the world if you could. Equality — -yes! But no body of men ever accomplished anything without a chief. All this was worth what it was worth. He regarded fraternity somewhat differently. Of course brothers would quarrel amongst themselves; it was during a fierce quarrel that flamed up suddenly in a company of Brothers that he had received the most dangerous wound of his life. But for that Peyrol nursed no grudge against anybody. In his view the claim of the Brotherhood was a claim for help against the outside world. And here he was sitting opposite a Brother whose head he had broken on sufficient grounds. There he was across the table

looking dishevelled and dazed, uncomprehending and aggrieved, and that head of his proved as hard as ages ago when the nickname of Testa Dura had been given to him by a Brother of Italian origin on some occasion or other, some butting match no doubt; just as he, Peyrol himself, was known for a time on both sides of the Mozambique Channel as Poigne-de-Fer, after an incident when in the presence of the Brothers he played at arm's length with the windpipe of an obstreperous negro sorcerer with an enormous girth of chest. The villagers brought out food with alacrity, and the sorcerer was never the same man again. It had been a great display.

Yes, no doubt it was Testa Dura; the young neophyte of the order (where and how picked up Peyrol never heard), strange to the camp, simpleminded and much impressed by the swaggering cosmopolitan company in which he found himself. He had attached himself to Peyrol in preference to some of his own countrymen of whom there were several in that band, and used to run after him like a little dog and certainly had acted a good shipmate's part on the occasion of that wound which had neither killed nor cowed Peyrol but merely had given him an opportunity to reflect at leisure on the conduct of his own life.

The first suspicion of that amazing fact had intruded on Peyrol while he was bandaging that head by the light of the smoky lamp. Since the fellow still lived, it was not in Peyrol to finish him off or let him lie unattended like a dog. And then this was a sailor. His being English was no obstacle to the development of Peyrol's mixed feelings in which hatred certainly had no place. Amongst the members of the Brotherhood it was the Englishmen whom he preferred. He had also found amongst them that particular and loyal appreciation, which a Frenchman of character and ability will receive from Englishmen sooner than from any other nation. Peyrol had at times been a leader, without ever trying for it very much, for he was not ambitious. The lead used to fall to him mostly at a time of crisis of some sort; and when he had got the lead it was on the Englishmen that he used to depend most.

And so that youngster had turned into this English man-of-war's man! In the fact itself there was nothing impossible. You found Brothers of the Coast in all sorts of ships and in all sorts of places. Peyrol had found one once in a very ancient and hopeless cripple practising the profession of a beggar on the steps of Manila cathedral; and had left him the richer by two broad gold pieces to add to his secret hoard. There was a tale of a Brother of

the Coast having become a mandarin in China, and Peyrol believed it. One never knew where and in what position one would find a Brother of the Coast. The wonderful thing was that this one should have come to seek him out, to put himself in the way of his cudgel. Peyrol's greatest concern had been all through that Sunday morning to conceal the whole adventure from Lieutenant Ral. As against a wearer of epaulettes, mutual protection was the first duty between Brothers of the Coast. The unexpectedness of that claim coming to him after twenty years invested it with an extraordinary strength. What he would do with the fellow he didn't know. But since that morning the situation had changed. Peyrol had received the lieutenant's confidence and had got on terms with him in a special way. He fell into profound thought.

"Sacre tte dure," he muttered without rousing himself. Peyrol was annoyed a little at not having been recognized. He could not conceive how difficult it would have been for Symons to identify this portly deliberate person with a white head of hair as the object of his youthful admiration, the black-ringleted French Brother in the prime of life of whom everybody thought so much. Peyrol was roused by hearing the other declare suddenly:

"I am an Englishman, I am. I am not going to knuckle under to anybody. What are you going to do with me?"

"I will do what I please," said Peyrol, who had been asking himself exactly the same question.

"Well, then, be quick about it, whatever it is. I don't care a damn what you do, but — -be — -quick — - about it."

He tried to be emphatic; but as a matter of fact the last words came out in a faltering tone. And old Peyrol was touched. He thought that if he were to let him drink the mugful standing there, it would make him dead drunk. But he took the risk. So he said only:

"Allons. Drink." The other did not wait for a second invitation but could not control very well the movements of his arm extended towards the mug. Peyrol raised his on high.

"Trinquons, eh?" he proposed. But in his precarious condition the Englishman remained unforgiving.

"I'm damned if I do," he said indignantly, but so low that Peyrol had to turn his ear to catch the words. "You will have to explain to me first what you meant by knocking me on the head."

He drank, staring all the time at Peyrol in a manner which was meant to give offence but which struck Peyrol as so childlike that he burst into a laugh.

“Sacr imbcile, va! Did I not tell you it was because of the tartane? If it hadn’t been for the tartane I would have hidden from you. I would have crouched behind a bush like a — -what do you call them? — -livre.”

The other, who was feeling the effect of the d stared with frank incredulity.

“You are of no account,” continued Peyrol. “Ah! if you had been an officer I would have gone for you anywhere. Did you say your officer went up the gully?”

Symons sighed deeply and easily. “That’s the way he went. We had heard on board of a house thereabouts.”

“Oh, he went to the house!” said Peyrol. “Well, if he did get there he must be very sorry for himself. There is half a company of infantry billeted in the farm.”

This inspired fib went down easily with the English sailor. Soldiers were stationed in many parts of the coast as any seaman of the blockading fleet knew very well. To the many expressions which had passed over the face of that man recovering from a long period of unconsciousness, there was added the shade of dismay.

“What the devil have they stuck soldiers on this piece of rock for?” he asked.

“Oh, signalling post and things like that. I am not likely to tell you everything. Why! you might escape.”

That phrase reached the soberest spot in the whole of Symons’ individuality. Things were happening, then. Mr. Bolt was a prisoner. But the main idea evoked in his confused mind was that he would be given up to those soldiers before very long. The prospect of captivity made his heart sink and he resolved to give as much trouble as he could.

“You will have to get some of these soldiers to carry me up. I won’t walk. I won’t. Not after having had my brains nearly knocked out from behind. I tell you straight! I won’t walk. Not a step. They will have to carry me ashore.”

Peyrol only shook his head deprecatingly.

“Now you go and get a corporal with a file of men,” insisted Symons obstinately. “I want to be made a proper prisoner of. Who the devil are



you? You had no right to interfere. I believe you are a civilian. A common marinero, whatever you may call yourself. You look to me a pretty fishy marinero at that. Where did you learn English? In prison — -eh? You ain't going to keep me in this damned dog-hole, on board your rubbishy tartane. Go and get that corporal, I tell you."

He looked suddenly very tired and only murmured: "I am an Englishman, I am."

Peyrol's patience was positively angelic.

"Don't you talk about the tartane," he said impressively, making his words as distinct as possible. "I told you she was not like the other tartanes. That is because she is a courier boat. Every time she goes to sea she makes a pied-de-nez, what you call thumb to the nose, to all your English cruisers. I do not mind telling you because you are my prisoner. You will soon learn French now."

"Who are you? The caretaker of this thing or what?" asked the undaunted Symons. But Peyrol's mysterious silence seemed to intimidate him at last. He became dejected and began to curse in a languid tone all boat expeditions, the coxswain of the gig and his own infernal luck.

Peyrol sat alert and attentive like a man interested in an experiment, while after a moment Symons' face began to look as if he had been hit with a club again, but not as hard as before. A film came over his round eyes and the words "fishy mariners" made their way out of his lips in a sort of death-bed voice. Yet such was the hardness of his head that he actually rallied enough to address Peyrol in an ingratiating tone.

"Come, grandfather!" He tried to push the mug across the table and upset it. "Come! Let us finish what's in that tiny bottle of yours."

"No," said Peyrol, drawing the demijohn to his side of the table and putting the cork in.

"No?" repeated Symons in an unbelieving voice and looking at the demijohn fixedly . . . "You must be a tinker" . . . He tried to say something more under Peyrol's watchful eyes, failed once or twice, and suddenly pronounced the word "cochon" so correctly as to make old Peyrol start. After that it was no use looking at him any more. Peyrol busied himself in locking up the demijohn and the mugs. When he turned round most of his prisoner's body was extended over the table and no sound came from it, not even a snore.

When Peyrol got outside, pulling to the door of the cuddy behind him, Michel hastened from forward to receive the master's orders. But Peyrol stood so long on the after-deck meditating profoundly with his hand over his mouth that Michel became fidgety and ventured a cheerful: "It looks as if he were not going to die."

"He is dead," said Peyrol with grim jocularity. "Dead drunk. And you very likely will not see me till to-morrow sometime."

"But what am I to do?" asked Michel timidly.

"Nothing," said Peyrol. "Of course you must not let him set fire to the tartane."

"But suppose," insisted Michel, "he should give signs of escaping."

"If you see him trying to escape," said Peyrol with mock solemnity, "then, Michel, it will be a sign for you to get out of his way as quickly as you can. A man who would try to escape with a head like this on him would just swallow you at one mouthful."

He picked up his cudgel and, stepping ashore, went off without as much as a look at his faithful henchman. Michel listened to him scrambling amongst the stones, and his habitual amiably vacant face acquired a sort of dignity from the utter and absolute blankness that came over it.

## CHAPTER X

It was only after reaching the level ground in front of the farmhouse that Peyrol took time to pause and resume his contact with the exterior world.

While he had been closeted with his prisoner the sky had got covered with a thin layer of cloud, in one of those swift changes of weather that are not unusual in the Mediterranean. This grey vapour, drifting high up, close against the disc of the sun, seemed to enlarge the space behind its veil, add to the vastness of a shadowless world no longer hard and brilliant but all softened in the contours of its masses and in the faint line of the horizon, as if ready to dissolve in the immensity of the Infinite.

Familiar and indifferent to his eyes, material and shadowy, the extent of the changeable sea had gone pale under the pale sun in a mysterious and emotional response. Mysterious too was the great oval patch of dark water to the west; and also a broad blue lane traced on the dull silver of the waters in a parabolic curve described magistrally by an invisible finger for a symbol of endless wandering. The face of the farmhouse might have been the face of a house from which all the inhabitants had fled suddenly. In the high part of the building the window of the lieutenant's room remained open, both glass and shutter. By the door of the *salle* the stable fork leaning against the wall seemed to have been forgotten by the *sans-culotte*. This aspect of abandonment struck Peyrol with more force than usual. He had been thinking so hard of all these people, that to find no one about seemed unnatural and even depressing. He had seen many abandoned places in his life, grass huts, mud forts, kings' palaces — temples from which every white-robed soul had fled. Temples, however, never looked quite empty. The gods clung to their own. Peyrol's eyes rested on the bench against the wall of the *salle*. In the usual course of things it should have been occupied by the lieutenant who had the habit of sitting there with hardly a movement, for hours, like a spider watching for the coming of a fly. This paralyzing comparison held Peyrol motionless with a twisted mouth and a frown on his brow, before the evoked vision, coloured and precise, of the man more troubling than the reality had ever been.

He came to himself with a start. What sort of occupation was this, 'cr nom de nom, staring at a silly bench with no one on it? Was he going wrong in his head? Or was it that he was getting really old? He had noticed old men losing themselves like that. But he had something to do. First of all he had to go and see what the English sloop in the *Passe* was doing.

While he was making his way towards the lookout on the hill where the inclined pine hung peering over the cliff as if an insatiable curiosity were holding it in that precarious position, Peyrol had another view from above of the farmyard and of the buildings and was again affected by their deserted appearance. Not a soul, not even an animal seemed to have been left; only on the roofs the pigeons walked with smart elegance. Peyrol hurried on and presently saw the English ship well over on the Porquerolles side with her yards braced tip and her head to the southward. There was a little wind in the Passe, while the dull silver of the open had a darkling rim of rippled water far away to the east in that quarter where, far or near, but mostly out of sight, the British Fleet kept its endless watch. Not a shadow of a spar or gleam of sail on the horizon betrayed its presence; but Peyrol would not have been surprised to see a crowd of ships surge up, people the horizon with hostile life, come in running, and dot the sea with their ordered groups all about Cape Cici, parading their damned impudence. Then indeed that corvette, the big factor of everyday life on that stretch of coast, would become very small potatoes indeed; and the man in command of her (he had been Peyrol's personal adversary in many imaginary encounters fought to a finish in the room upstairs) then indeed that Englishman would have to mind his steps. He would be ordered to come within hail of the Admiral, be sent here and there, made to run like a little dog and as likely as not get called on board the flagship and get a dressing down for something or other.

Peyrol thought for a moment that the impudence of this Englishman was going to take the form of running along the peninsula and looking into the very cove; for the corvette's head was falling off slowly. A fear for his tartane clutched Peyrol's heart till he remembered that the Englishman did not know of her existence. Of course not. His cudgel had been absolutely effective in stopping that bit of information. The only Englishman who knew of the existence of the tartane was that fellow with the broken head. Peyrol actually laughed at his momentary scare. Moreover, it was evident that the Englishman did not mean to parade in front of the peninsula. He did not mean to be impudent. The sloop's yards were swung right round and she came again to the wind but now heading to the northward back from where she came. Peyrol saw at once that the Englishman meant to pass to windward of Cape Esterel, probably with the intention of anchoring for the night off the long white beach which in a regular curve closes the roadstead of Hyres on that side.

Peyrol pictured her to himself, on the clouded night, not so very dark since the fall moon was but a day old, lying at anchor within hail of the low shore, with her sails furled and looking profoundly asleep, but with the watch on deck lying by the guns. He gnashed his teeth. It had come to this at last, that the captain of the *Amelia* could do nothing with his ship without putting Peyrol into a rage. Oh, for forty Brothers, or sixty, picked ones, he thought, to teach the fellow what it might cost him taking liberties along the French coast! Ships had been carried by surprise before, on nights when there was just light enough to see the whites of each other's eyes in a close tussle. And what would be the crew of that Englishman? Something between ninety and a hundred altogether, boys and landsman included. ... Peyrol shook his fist for a good-bye, just when Cape Esterel shut off the English sloop from his sight. But in his heart of hearts that seaman of cosmopolitan associations knew very well that no forty or sixty, not any given hundred Brothers of the Coast would have been enough to capture that corvette making herself at home within ten miles of where he had first opened his eyes to the world.

He shook his head dismally at the leaning pine, his only companion. The disinherited soul of that rover ranging for so many years a lawless ocean with the coasts of two continents for a raiding ground, had come back to its crag, circling like a sea-bird in the dusk and longing for a great sea victory for its people: that inland multitude of which Peyrol knew nothing except the few individuals on that peninsula cut off from the rest of the land by the dead water of a salt lagoon; and where only a strain of manliness in a miserable cripple and an unaccountable charm of a half-crazed woman had found response in his heart.

This scheme of false dispatches was but a detail in a plan for a great, a destructive victory. just a detail, but not a trifle all the same. Nothing connected with the deception of an admiral could be called trifling. And such an admiral too. It was, Peyrol felt vaguely, a scheme that only a confounded landsman would invent. It behoved the sailors, however, to make a workable thing of it. It would have to be worked through that corvette.

And here Peyrol was brought up by the question that all his life had not been able to settle for him — - and that was whether the English were really very stupid or very acute. That difficulty had presented itself with every fresh case. The old rover had enough genius in him to have arrived at a

general conclusion that if they were to be deceived at all it could not be done very well by words but rather by deeds; not by mere wriggling, but by deep craft concealed under some sort of straightforward action. That conviction, however, did not take him forward in this case, which was one in which much thinking would be necessary.

The Amelia had disappeared behind Cape Esterel, and Peyrol wondered with a certain anxiety whether this meant that the Englishman had given up his man for good. "If he has," said Peyrol to himself, "I am bound to see him pass out again from beyond Cape Esterel before it gets dark." If, however, he did not see the ship again within the next hour or two, then she would be anchored off the beach, to wait for the night before making some attempt to discover what had become of her man. This could be done only by sending out one or two boats to explore the coast, and no doubt to enter the cove — -perhaps even to land a small search party.

After coming to this conclusion Peyrol began deliberately to charge his pipe. Had he spared a moment for a glance inland he might have caught a whisk of a black skirt, the gleam of a white fichu — - Arlette running down the faint track leading from Escampobar to the village in the hollow; the same track in fact up which Citizen Scevola, while indulging in the strange freak to visit the church, had been chased by the incensed faithful. But Peyrol, while charging and lighting his pipe, had kept his eyes fastened on Cape Esterel. Then, throwing his arm affectionately over the trunk of the pine, he had settled himself to watch. Far below him the roadstead, with its play of grey and bright gleams, looked like a plaque of mother-of-pearl in a frame of yellow rocks and dark green ravines set off inland by the masses of the hills displaying the tint of the finest purple; while above his head the sun, behind a cloud-veil, hung like a silver disc.

That afternoon, after waiting in vain for Lieutenant Ral to appear outside in the usual way, Arlette, the mistress of Escampobar, had gone unwillingly into the kitchen where Catherine sat upright in a heavy capacious wooden armchair, the back of which rose above the top of her white muslin cap. Even in her old age, even in her hours of ease, Catherine preserved the upright carriage of the family that had held Escampobar for so many generations. It would have been easy to believe that, like some characters famous in the world, Catherine would have wished to die standing up and with unbowed shoulders.

With her sense of hearing undecayed she detected the light footsteps in the salle long before Arlette entered the kitchen. That woman, who had faced alone and unaided (except for her brother's comprehending silence) the anguish of passion in a forbidden love, and of terrors comparable to those of the judgment Day, neither turned her face, quiet without serenity, nor her eyes, fearless but without fire, in the direction of her niece.

Arlette glanced on all sides, even at the walls, even at the mound of ashes under the big overmantel, nursing in its heart a spark of fire, before she sat down and leaned her elbow on the table.

"You wander about like a soul in pain," said her aunt, sitting by the hearth like an old queen on her throne.

"And you sit here eating your heart out."

"Formerly," remarked Catherine, "old women like me could always go over their prayers, but now . . ."

"I believe you have not been to church for years. I remember Scevola telling me that a long time ago. Was it because you didn't like people's eyes? I have fancied sometimes that most people in the world must have been massacred long ago."

Catherine turned her face away. Arlette rested her head on her half-closed hand, and her eyes, losing their steadiness, began to tremble amongst cruel visions. She got up suddenly and caressed the thin, half-averted, withered cheek with the tips of her fingers, and in a low voice, with that marvellous cadence that plucked at one's heart-strings, she said coaxingly:

"Those were dreams, weren't they?"

In her immobility the old woman called with all the might of her will for the presence of Peyrol. She had never been able to shake off a superstitious fear of that niece restored to her from the terrors of a Judgment Day in which the world had been given over to the devils. She was always afraid that this girl, wandering about with restless eyes and a dim smile on her silent lips, would suddenly say something atrocious, unfit to be heard, calling for vengeance from heaven, unless Peyrol were by. That stranger come from "par delà les mers" was out of it altogether, cared probably for no one in the world but had struck her imagination by his massive aspect, his deliberation suggesting a mighty force like the reposeful attitude of a lion. Arlette desisted from caressing the irresponsive cheek, exclaimed petulantly: "I am awake now!" and went out of the kitchen without having

asked her aunt the question she had meant to ask, which was whether she knew what had become of the lieutenant.

Her heart had failed her. She let herself drop on the bench outside the door of the salle. ``What is the matter with them all?" she thought. ``I can't make them out. What wonder is it that I have not been able to sleep?" Even Peyrol, so different from all mankind, who from the first moment when he stood before her had the power to soothe her aimless unrest, even Peyrol would now sit for hours with the lieutenant on the bench, gazing into the air and keeping him in talk about things without sense, as if on purpose to prevent him from thinking of her. Well, he could not do that. But the enormous change implied in the fact that every day had a to-morrow now, and that all the people around her had ceased to be mere phantoms for her wandering glances to glide over without concern, made her feel the need of support from somebody, from somewhere. She could have cried aloud for it.

She sprang up and walked along the whole front of the farm building. At the end of the wall enclosing the orchard she called out in a modulated undertone: ``Eugne," not because she hoped that the lieutenant was anywhere within earshot, but for the pleasure of hearing the sound of the name uttered for once above a whisper. She turned about and at the end of the wall on the yard side she repeated her call, drinking in the sound that came from her lips, ``Eugne, Eugne," with a sort of half-exulting despair. It was in such dizzy moments that she wanted a steadying support. But all was still. She heard no friendly murmur, not even a sigh. Above her head under the thin grey sky a big mulberry tree stirred no leaf. Step by step, as if unconsciously, she began to move down the track. At the end of fifty yards she opened the inland view, the roofs of the village between the green tops of the platanes overshadowing the fountain, and just beyond the flat blue-grey level of the salt lagoon, smooth and dull like a slab of lead. But what drew her on was the church-tower, where, in a round arch, she could see the black speck of the bell which escaping the requisitions of the Republican wars, and dwelling mute above the locked-up empty church, had only lately recovered its voice. She ran on, but when she had come near enough to make out the figures moving about the village fountain, she checked herself, hesitated a moment and then took the footpath leading to the presbytery.



She pushed open the little gate with the broken latch. The humble building of rough stones, from between which much mortar had crumbled out, looked as though it had been sinking slowly into the ground. The beds of the plot in front were choked with weeds, because the abb had no taste for gardening. When the heiress of Escampobar opened the door, he was walking up and down the largest room which was his bedroom and sitting room and where he also took his meals. He was a gaunt man with a long, as if convulsed, face. In his young days he had been tutor to the sons of a great noble, but he did not emigrate with his employer. Neither did he submit to the Republic. He had lived in his native land like a hunted wild beast, and there had been many tales of his activities, warlike and others. When the hierarchy was re-established he found no favour in the eyes of his superiors. He had remained too much of a Royalist. He had accepted, without a word, the charge of this miserable parish, where he had acquired influence quickly enough. His sacerdotalism lay in him like a cold passion. Though accessible enough, he never walked abroad without his breviary, acknowledging the solemnly bared heads by a curt nod. He was not exactly feared, but some of the oldest inhabitants who remembered the previous incumbent, an old man who died in the garden after having been dragged out of bed by some patriots anxious to take him to prison in Hyres, jerked their heads sideways in a knowing manner when their cur was mentioned.

On seeing this apparition in an Arlesian cap and silk skirt, a white fichu, and otherwise as completely different as any princess could be from the rustics with whom he was in daily contact, his face expressed the blankest astonishment. Then — -for he knew enough of the gossip of his community — -his straight, thick eyebrows came together inimically. This was no doubt the woman of whom he had heard his parishioners talk with bated breath as having given herself and her property up to a Jacobin, a Toulon sans-culotte who had either delivered her parents to execution or had murdered them himself during the first three days of massacres. No one was very sure which it was, but the rest was current knowledge. The abb, though persuaded that any amount of moral turpitude was possible in a godless country, had not accepted all that tale literally. No doubt those people were republican and impious, and the state of affairs up there was scandalous and horrible. He struggled with his feelings of repulsion and managed to smooth his brow and waited. He could not imagine what that woman with mature form and a youthful face could want at the presbytery. Suddenly it occurred

to him that perhaps she wanted to thank him — -it was a very old occurrence — -for interposing between the fury of the villagers and that man. He couldn't call him, even in his thoughts, her husband, for apart from all other circumstances, that connection could not imply any kind of marriage to a priest, even had there been legal form observed. His visitor was apparently disconcerted by the expression of his face, the austere aloofness of his attitude, and only a low murmur escaped her lips. He bent his head and was not very certain what he had heard.

“You come to seek my aid?” he asked in a doubting tone.

She nodded slightly, and the abb went to the door she had left half open and looked out. There was not a soul in sight between the presbytery and the village, or between the presbytery and the church. He went back to face her, saying:

“We are as alone as we can well be. The old woman in the kitchen is as deaf as a post.”

Now that he had been looking at Arlette closer the abb felt a sort of dread. The carmine of those lips, the pellucid, unstained, unfathomable blackness of those eyes, the pallor of her cheeks, suggested to him something provokingly pagan, something distastefully different from the common sinners of this earth. And now she was ready to speak. He arrested her with a raised hand.

“Wait,” he said. “I have never seen you before. I don't even know properly who you are. None of you belong to my flock — -for you are from Escampobar. are you not?” Sombre under their bony arches, his eyes fastened on her face, noticed the delicacy of features, the naive pertinacity of her stare. She said:

“I am the daughter.”

“The daughter! . . . Oh! I see . . . Much evil is spoken of you.”

She said a little impatiently: “By that rabble?” and the priest remained mute for a moment. “What do they say? In my father's time they wouldn't have dared to say anything. The only thing I saw of them for years and years was when they were yelping like curs on the heels of Scevola.”

The absence of scorn in her tone was perfectly annihilating. Gentle sounds flowed from her lips and a disturbing charm from her strange equanimity. The abb frowned heavily at these fascinations, which seemed to have in them something diabolic.

“They are simple souls, neglected, fallen back into darkness. It isn’t their fault. They have natural feelings of humanity which were outraged. I saved him from their indignation. There are things that must be left to divine justice.”

He was exasperated by the unconsciousness of that fair face.

“That man whose name you have just pronounced and which I have heard coupled with the epithet of ‘blood-drinker’ is regarded as the master of Escampobar Farm. He has been living there for years. How is that?”

“Yes, it is a long time ago since he brought me back to the house. Years ago. Catherine let him stay.”

“Who is Catherine?” the abb asked harshly.

“She is my father’s sister who was left at home to wait. She had given up all hope of seeing any of us again, when one morning Scevola came with me to the door. Then she let him stay. He is a poor creature. What else could Catherine have done? And what is it to us up there how the people in the village regard him?” She dropped her eyes and seemed to fall into deep thought, then added, “It was only later that I discovered that he was a poor creature, even quite lately. They call him blood-drinker, do they? What of that? All the time he was afraid of his own shadow.”

She ceased but did not raise her eyes.

“You are no longer a child,” began the abb in a severe voice, frowning at her downcast eyes, and he heard a murmur: “Not very long.” He disregarded it and continued: “I ask you, is this all that you have to tell me about that man? I hope that at least you are no hypocrite.”

“Monsieur l’Abb,” she said, raising her eyes fearlessly, “what more am I to tell you about him? I can tell you things that will make your hair stand on end, but it wouldn’t be about him.”

For all answer the abb made a weary gesture and turned away to walk up and down the room. His face expressed neither curiosity nor pity, but a sort of repugnance which he made an effort to overcome. He dropped into a deep and shabby old armchair, the only object of luxury in the room, and pointed to a wooden straight-backed stool. Arlette sat down on it and began to speak. The abb listened, but looking far away; his big bony hands rested on the arms of the chair. After the first words he interrupted her: “This is your own story you are telling me.”

“Yes,” said Arlette.

“Is it necessary that I should know?”

“Yes, Monsieur l’Abb.”

“But why?”

He bent his head a little, without, however, ceasing to look far away. Her voice now was very low. Suddenly the abb threw himself back.

“You want to tell me your story because you have fallen in love with a man?”

“No, because that has brought me back to myself. Nothing else could have done it.”

He turned his head to look at her grimly, but he said nothing and looked away again. He listened. At the beginning he muttered once or twice, “Yes, I have heard that,” and then kept silent, not looking at her at all. Once he interrupted her by a question: “You were confirmed before the convent was forcibly entered and the nuns dispersed?”

“Yes,” she said, “a year before that or more.”

“And then two of those ladies took you with them towards Toulon.”

“Yes, the other girls had their relations near by. They took me with them thinking to communicate with my parents, but it was difficult. Then the English came and my parents sailed over to try and get some news of me. It was safe for my father to be in Toulon then. Perhaps you think that he was a traitor to his country?” she asked, and waited with parted lips. With an impassible face the abb murmured: “He was a good Royalist,” in a tone of bitter fatalism, which seemed to absolve that man and all the other men of whose actions and errors he had ever heard.

For a long time, Arlette continued, her father could not discover the house where the nuns had taken refuge. He only obtained some information on the very day before the English evacuated Toulon. Late in the day he appeared before her and took her away. The town was full of retreating foreign troops. Her father left her with her mother and went out again to make preparations for sailing home that very night; but the tartane was no longer in the place where he had left her lying. The two Madrague men that he had for a crew had disappeared also. Thus the family was trapped in that town full of tumult and confusion. Ships and houses were bursting into flames. Appalling explosions of gunpowder shook the earth. She spent that night on her knees with her face hidden in her mother’s lap, while her father kept watch by the barricaded door with a pistol in each hand.

In the morning the house was filled with savage yells. People were heard rushing up the stairs, and the door was burst in. She jumped up at the crash

and flung herself down on her knees in a corner with her face to the wall. There was a murderous uproar, she heard two shots fired, then somebody seized her by the arm and pulled her up to her feet. It was Scevola. He dragged her to the door. The bodies of her father and mother were lying across the doorway. The room was full of gunpowder smoke. She wanted to fling herself on the bodies and cling to them, but Scevola took her under the arms and lifted her over them. He seized her hand and made her run with him, or rather dragged her downstairs. Outside on the pavement some dreadful men and many fierce women with knives joined them. They ran along the streets brandishing pikes and sabres, pursuing other groups of unarmed people, who fled round corners with loud shrieks.

“I ran in the midst of them, Monsieur l’Abb,” Arlette went on in a breathless murmur. “Whenever I saw any water I wanted to throw myself into it, but I was surrounded on all sides, I was jostled and pushed and most of the time Scevola held my hand very tight. When they stopped at a wine shop, they would offer me some wine. My tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth and I drank. The wine, the pavements, the arms and faces, everything was red. I had red splashes all over me. I had to run with them all day, and all the time I felt as if I were falling down, and down, and down. The houses were nodding at me. The sun would go out at times. And suddenly I heard myself yelling exactly like the others. Do you understand, Monsieur l’Abb? The very same words!”

The eyes of the priest in their deep orbits glided towards her and then resumed their far-away fixity. Between his fatalism and his faith he was not very far from the belief of Satan taking possession of rebellious mankind, exposing the nakedness of hearts like flint and of the homicidal souls of the Revolution.

“I have heard something of that,” he whispered stealthily.

She affirmed with quiet earnestness: “Yet at that time I resisted with all my might.”

That night Scevola put her under the care of a woman called Perose. She was young and pretty and was a native of Arles, her mother’s country. She kept an inn. That woman locked her up in her own room, which was next to the room where the patriots kept on shouting, singing and making speeches far into the night. Several times the woman would look in for a moment, make a hopeless gesture at her with both arms, and vanish again. Later, on many other nights when all the band lay asleep on benches and on the floor,

Perose would steal into the room, fall on her knees by the bed on which Arlette sat upright, open-eyed, and raving silently to herself, embrace her feet and cry herself to sleep. But in the morning she would jump up briskly and say: ``Come. The great affair is to keep our life in our bodies. Come along to help in the work of justice''; and they would join the band that was making ready for another day of traitor hunting. But after a time the victims, of which the streets were full at first, had to be sought for in backyards, ferreted out of their hiding-places, dragged up out of the cellars, or down from the garrets of the houses, which would be entered by the band with howls of death and vengeance.

``Then, Monsieur l'Abb,' said Arlette, ``I let myself go at last. I could resist no longer. I said to myself. `If it is so then it must be right. But most of the time I was like a person half asleep and dreaming things that it is impossible to believe. About that time, I don't know why, the woman Perose hinted to me that Scevola was a poor creature. Next night while all the band lay fast asleep in the big room Perose and Scevola helped me out of the window into the street and led me to the quay behind the arsenal. Scevola had found our tartane lying at the pontoon and one of the Madrague men with her. The other had disappeared. Perose fell on my neck and cried a little. She gave me a kiss and said: ``My time will come soon. You, Scevola, don't you show yourself in Toulon, because nobody believes in you any more. Adieu, Arlette. Vive la Nation!'' and she vanished in the night. I waited on the pontoon shivering in my torn clothes, listening to Scevola and the man throwing dead bodies overboard out of the tartane. Splash, splash, splash. And suddenly I felt I must run away, but they were after me in a moment, dragged me back and threw me down into that cabin which smelt of blood. But when I got back to the farm all feeling had left me. I did not feel myself exist. I saw things round me here and there, but I couldn't look at anything for long. Something was gone out of me. I know now that it was not my heart, but then I didn't mind what it was. I felt light and empty, and a little cold all the time, but I could smile at people. Nothing could matter. Nothing could mean anything. I cared for no one. I wanted nothing. I wasn't alive at all, Monsieur l'Abb. People seemed to see me and would talk to me, and it seemed funny — -till one day I felt my heart beat.''

``Why precisely did you come to me with this tale?'' asked the abb in a low voice.

“Because you are a priest. Have you forgotten that I have been brought up in a convent? I have not forgotten how to pray. But I am afraid of the world now. What must I do?”

“Repent!” thundered the abb, getting up. He saw her candid gaze uplifted and lowered his voice forcibly. “You must look with fearless sincerity into the darkness of your soul. Remember whence the only true help can come. Those whom God has visited by a trial such as yours can not be held guiltless of their enormities. Withdraw from the world. Descend within yourself and abandon the vain thoughts of what people call happiness. Be an example to yourself of the sinfulness of our nature and of the weakness of our humanity. You may have been possessed. What do I know? Perhaps it was permitted in order to lead your soul to saintliness through a life of seclusion and prayer. To that it would be my duty to help you. Meantime you must pray to be given strength for a complete renunciation.”

Arlette, lowering her eyes slowly, appealed to the abb as a symbolic figure of spiritual mystery. “What can be God’s designs on this creature?” he asked himself.

“Monsieur le Cur,” she said quietly, “I felt the need to pray to-day for the first time in many years. When I left home it was only to go to your church.”

“The church stands open to the worst of sinners,” said the abb.

“I know. But I would have had to pass before all those villagers: and you, abb, know well what they are capable of.”

“Perhaps,” murmured the abb, “it would be better not to put their charity to the test.”

“I must pray before I go back again. I thought you would let me come in through the sacristy.”

“It would be inhuman to refuse your request,” he said, rousing himself and taking down a key that hung on the wall. He put on his broad-brimmed hat and without a word led the way through the wicket gate and along the path which he always used himself and which was out of sight of the village fountain. After they had entered the damp and dilapidated sacristy he locked the door behind them and only then opened another, a smaller one, leading into the church. When he stood aside, Arlette became aware of the chilly odour as of freshly turned-up earth mingled with a faint scent of

incense. In the deep dusk of the nave a single little flame glimmered before an image of the virgin. The abb whispered as she passed on:

“There before the great altar abase yourself and pray for grace and strength and mercy in this world full of crimes against God and men.”

She did not look at him. Through the thin soles of her shoes she could feel the chill of the flagstones. The abb left the door ajar, sat down on a rush-bottomed chair, the only one in the sacristy, folded his arms and let his chin fall on his breast. He seemed to be sleeping profoundly, but at the end of half an hour he got up and, going to the doorway, stood looking at the kneeling figure sunk low on the altar steps. Arlette’s face was buried in her hands in a passion of piety and prayer. The abb waited patiently for a good many minutes more, before he raised his voice in a grave murmur which filled the whole dark place.

“It is time for you to leave. I am going to ring for vespers.”

The view of her complete absorption before the Most High had touched him. He stepped back into the sacristy and after a time heard the faintest possible swish of the black silk skirt of the Escampobar daughter in her Arlesian costume. She entered the sacristy lightly with shining eyes, and the abb looked at her with some emotion.

“You have prayed well, my daughter,” he said. “No forgiveness will be refused to you, for you have suffered much. Put your trust in the grace of God.”

She raised her head and stayed her footsteps for a moment. In the dark little place he could see the gleam of her eyes swimming in tears.

“Yes, Monsieur l’Abb,” she said in her clear seductive voice. “I have prayed and I feel answered. I entreated the merciful God to keep the heart of the man I love always true to me or else to let me die before I set my eyes on him again.”

The abb paled under his tan of a village priest and leaned his shoulders against the wall without a word.



## CHAPTER XI

After leaving the church by the sacristy door Arlette never looked back. The abb saw her flit past the presbytery, and the building hid her from his sight. He did not accuse her of duplicity. He had deceived himself. A heathen. White as her skin was, the blackness of her hair and of her eyes, the dusky red of her lips, suggested a strain of Saracen blood. He gave her up without a sigh.

Arlette walked rapidly towards Escampobar as if she could not get there soon enough; but as she neared the first enclosed field her steps became slower and after hesitating awhile she sat down between two olive trees, near a wall bordered by a growth of thin grass at the foot. ``And if I have been possessed,’’ she argued to herself, ``as the abb said, what is it to me as I am now? That evil spirit cast my true self out of my body and then cast away the body too. For years I have been living empty. There has been no meaning in anything.”

But now her true self had returned matured in its mysterious exile, hopeful and eager for love. She was certain that it had never been far away from that outcast body which Catherine had told her lately was fit for no man’s arms. That was all that old woman knew about it, thought Arlette, not in scorn but rather in pity. She knew better, she had gone to heaven for truth in that long prostration with its ardent prayers and its moment of ecstasy before an unlighted altar.

She knew its meaning well, and also the meaning of another — -of a terrestrial revelation which had come to her that day at noon while she waited on the lieutenant. Everybody else was in the kitchen; she and Ral were as much alone together as had ever happened to them in their lives. That day she could not deny herself the delight to be near him, to watch him covertly, to hear him perhaps utter a few words, to experience that strange satisfying consciousness of her own existence which nothing but Ral’s presence could give her; a sort of unimpassioned but all-absorbing bliss, warmth, courage, confidence! . . . She backed away from Ral’s table, seated herself facing him and cast down her eyes. There was a great stillness in the salle except for the murmur of the voices in the kitchen. She had at first stolen a glance or two and then peeping again through her eyelashes, as it were, she saw his eyes rest on her with a peculiar meaning. This had never happened before. She jumped up, thinking that he wanted something, and while she stood in front of him with her hand resting on the table he stooped

suddenly, pressed it to the table with his lips and began kissing it passionately without a sound, endlessly. . . . More startled than surprised at first, then infinitely happy, she was beginning to breathe quickly, when he left off and threw himself back in the chair. She walked away from the table and sat down again to gaze at him openly, steadily, without a smile. But he was not looking at her. His passionate lips were set hard now and his face had an expression of stern despair. No word passed between them. Brusquely he got up with averted eyes and went outside, leaving the food before him unfinished.

In the usual course of things, on any other day, she would have got up and followed him, for she had always yielded to the fascination that had first roused her faculties. She would have gone out just to pass in front of him once or twice. But this time she had not obeyed what was stronger than fascination, something within herself which at the same time prompted and restrained her. She only raised her arm and looked at her hand. It was true. It had happened. He had kissed it. Formerly she cared not how gloomy he was as long as he remained somewhere where she could look at him — - which she would do at every opportunity with an open and unbridled innocence. But now she knew better than to do that. She had got up, had passed through the kitchen, meeting without embarrassment Catherine's inquisitive glance, and had gone upstairs. When she came down after a time, he was nowhere to be seen, and everybody else too seemed to have gone into hiding; Michel, Peyrol, Scevola . . . But if she had met Scevola she would not have spoken to him. It was now a very long time since she had volunteered a conversation with Scevola. She guessed, however, that Scevola had simply gone to lie down in his lair, a narrow shabby room lighted by one glazed little window high up in the end wall. Catherine had put him in there on the very day he had brought her niece home and he had retained it for his own ever since. She could even picture him to herself in there stretched on his pallet. She was capable of that now. Formerly, for years after her return, people that were out of her sight were out of her mind also. Had they run away and left her she would not have thought of them at all. She would have wandered in and out of the empty house and round the empty fields without giving anybody a thought. Peyrol was the first human being she had noticed for years. Peyrol, since he had come, had always existed for her. And as a matter of fact the rover was generally very much in evidence about the farm. That afternoon, however, even Peyrol was not to

be seen. Her uneasiness began to grow, but she felt a strange reluctance to go into the kitchen where she knew her aunt would be sitting in the armchair like a presiding genius of the house taking its rest, and unreadable in her immobility. And yet she felt she must talk about Ral to somebody. This was how the idea of going down to the church had come to her. She would talk of him to the priest and to God. The force of old associations asserted itself. She had been taught to believe that one could tell everything to a priest, and that the omnipotent God who know everything could be prayed to, asked for grace, for strength, for mercy, for protection, for pity. She had done it and felt she had been heard.

Her heart had quietened down while she rested under the wall. Pulling out a long stalk of grass she twined it round her fingers absently. The veil of cloud had thickened over her head, early dusk had descended upon the earth, and she had not found out what had become of Ral. She jumped to her feet wildly. But directly she had done that she felt the need of self-control. It was with her usual light step that she approached the front of the house and for the first time in her life perceived how barren and sombre it looked when Ral was not about. She slipped in quietly through the door of the main building and ran upstairs. It was dark on the landing. She passed by the door leading into the room occupied by her aunt and herself. It had been her father and mother's bedroom. The other big room was the lieutenant's during his visits to Escampobar. Without even a rustle of her dress, like a shadow, she glided along the passage, turned the handle without noise and went in. After shutting the door behind her she listened. There was no sound in the house. Scevola was either already down in the yard or still lying open-eyed on his tumbled pallet in raging sulks about something. She had once accidentally caught, him at it, down on his face, one eye and cheek of which were buried in the pillow, the other eye glaring savagely, and had been scared away by a thick mutter: ``Keep off. Don't approach me.'' And all this had meant nothing to her then.

Having ascertained that the inside of the house was as still as the grave, Arlette walked across to the window, which when the lieutenant was occupying the room stood always open and with the shutter pushed right back against the wall. It was of course uncurtained, and as she came near to it Arlette caught sight of Peyrol coming down the hill on his return from the lookout. His white head gleamed like silver against the slope of the ground and by and by passed out of her sight, while her ear caught the sound of his

footsteps below the window. They passed into the house, but she did not hear him come upstairs. He had gone into the kitchen. To Catherine. They would talk about her and Eugne. But what would they say? She was so new to life that everything appeared dangerous: talk, attitudes, glances. She felt frightened at the mere idea of silence between those two. It was possible. Suppose they didn't say anything to each other. That would be awful.

Yet she remained calm like a sensible person, who knows that rushing about in excitement is not the way to meet unknown dangers. She swept her eyes over the room and saw the lieutenant's valise in a corner. That was really what she had wanted to see. He wasn't gone then. But it didn't tell her, though she opened it, what had become of him. As to his return, she had no doubt whatever about that. He had always returned. She noticed particularly a large packet sewn up in sail-cloth and with three large red seals on the seam. It didn't, however, arrest her thoughts. Those were still hovering about Catherine and Peyrol downstairs. How changed they were. Had they ever thought that she was mad? She became indignant. "How could I have prevented that?" she asked herself with despair. She sat down on the edge of the bed in her usual attitude, her feet crossed, her hands lying in her lap. She felt on one of them the impress of Ral's lips, soothing, reassuring like every certitude, but she was aware of a still remaining confusion in her mind, an indefinite weariness like the strain of an imperfect vision trying to discern shifting outlines, floating shapes, incomprehensible signs. She could not resist the temptation of resting her tired body, just for a little while.

She lay down on the very edge of the bed, the kissed hand tucked under her cheek. The faculty of thinking abandoned her altogether, but she remained open-eyed, wide awake. In that position, without hearing the slightest sound, she saw the door handle move down as far as it would go, perfectly noiseless, as though the lock had been oiled not long before. Her impulse was to leap right out into the middle of the room, but she restrained herself and only swung herself into a sitting posture. The bed had not creaked. She lowered her feet gently to the ground, and by the time when holding her breath she put her ear against the door, the handle had come back into position. She had detected no sound outside. Not the faintest. Nothing. It never occurred to her to doubt her own eyes, but the whole thing had been so noiseless that it could not have disturbed the lightest sleeper. She was sure that had she been lying on her other side, that is with her back

to the door, she would have known nothing. It was some time before she walked away from the door and sat on a chair which stood near a heavy and much-carved table, an heirloom more appropriate to a chateau than to a farmhouse. The dust of many months covered its smooth oval surface of dark, finely grained wood.

“It must have been Scevola,” thought Arlette. It could have been no one else. What could he have wanted? She gave herself up to thought, but really she did not care. The absent Ral occupied all her mind. With an unconscious slowness her finger traced in the dust on the table the initials E A and achieved a circle round them. Then she jumped up, unlocked the door and went downstairs. In the kitchen, as she fully expected, she found Scevola with the others. Directly she appeared he got up and ran upstairs, but returned almost immediately looking as if he had seen a ghost, and when Peyrol asked him some insignificant question his lips and even his chin trembled before he could command his voice. He avoided looking anybody in the face. The others too seemed shy of meeting each other’s eyes, and the evening meal of the Escampobar seemed haunted by the absent lieutenant. Peyrol, besides, had his prisoner to think of. His existence presented a most interesting problem, and the proceedings of the English ship were another, closely connected with it and full of dangerous possibilities. Catherine’s black and ungleaming eyes seemed to have sunk deeper in their sockets, but her face wore its habitual severe aloofness of expression. Suddenly Scevola spoke as if in answer to some thought of his own.

“What has lost us was moderation.”

Peyrol swallowed the piece of bread and butter which he had been masticating slowly, and asked:

“What are you alluding to, citizen?”

“I am alluding to the republic,” answered Scevola, in a more assured tone than usual. “Moderation I say. We patriots held our hand too soon. All the children of the ci-devants and all the children of traitors should have been killed together with their fathers and mothers. Contempt for civic virtues and love of tyranny were inborn in them all. They grow up and trample on all the sacred principles. . . . The work of the Terror is undone!”

“What do you propose to do about it?” growled Peyrol. “No use declaiming here or anywhere for that matter. You wouldn’t find anybody to listen to you — -you cannibal,” he added in a good-humoured tone. Arlette,

leaning her head on her left hand, was tracing with the forefinger of her right invisible initials on the table-cloth. Catherine, stooping to light a four-beaked oil lamp mounted on a brass pedestal, turned her finely carved face over her shoulder. The sans-culotte jumped up, flinging his arms about. His hair was tousled from his sleepless tumbling on his pallet. The unbuttoned sleeves of his shirt flapped against his thin hairy forearms. He no longer looked as though he had seen a ghost. He opened a wide black mouth, but Peyrol raised his finger at him calmly.

“No, no. The time when your own people up La Boyre way — -don’t they live up there? — -trembled at the idea of you coming to visit them with a lot of patriot scallywags at your back is past. You have nobody at your back; and if you started spouting like this at large, people would rise up and hunt you down like a mad dog.”

Scevola, who had shut his mouth, glanced over his shoulder, and as if impressed by his unsupported state went out of the kitchen, reeling, like a man who had been drinking. He had drunk nothing but water. Peyrol looked thoughtfully at the door which the indignant sans-culotte had slammed after him. During the colloquy between the two men, Arlette had disappeared into the salle. Catherine, straightening her long back, put the oil lamp with its four smoky flames on the table. It lighted her face from below. Peyrol moved it slightly aside before he spoke.

“It was lucky for you,” he said, gazing upwards, “that Scevola hadn’t even one other like himself when he came here.”

“Yes,” she admitted. “I had to face him alone from first to last. But can you see me between him and Arlette? In those days he raved terribly, but he was dazed and tired out. Afterwards I recovered myself and I could argue with him firmly. I used to say to him, ‘Look, she is so young and she has no knowledge of herself. Why, for months the only thing she would say that one could understand was ‘Look how it spurts, look how it splashes!’ He talked to me of his republican virtue. He was not a profligate. He could wait. She was, he said, sacred to him, and things like that. He would walk up and down for hours talking of her and I would sit there listening to him with the key of the room the child was locked in, in my pocket. I temporized, and, as you say yourself, it was perhaps because he had no one at his back that he did not try to kill me, which he might have done any day. I temporized. And after all, why should he want to kill me? He told me more than once he was sure to have Arlette for his own. Many a time he

made me shiver explaining why it must be so. She owed her life to him. Oh! that dreadful crazy life. You know he is one of those men that can be patient as far as women are concerned."

Peyrol nodded understandingly. "Yes, some are like that. That kind is more impatient sometimes to spill blood. Still I think that your life was one long narrow escape, at least till I turned up here."

"Things had settled down, somehow," murmured Catherine. "But all the same I was glad when you appeared here, a grey-headed man, serious."

"Grey hairs will come to any sort of man," observed Peyrol acidly, "and you did not know me. You don't know anything of me even now."

"There have been Peyrols living less than half a day's journey from here," observed Catherine in a reminiscent tone.

"That's all right," said the rover in such a peculiar tone that she asked him sharply: "What's the matter? Aren't you one of them? Isn't Peyrol your name?"

"I have had many names and this was one of them. So this name and my grey hair pleased you, Catherine? They gave you confidence in me, hein?"

"I wasn't sorry to see you come. Scevola too, I believe. He heard that patriots were being hunted down, here and there, and he was growing quieter every day. You roused the child wonderfully."

"And did that please Scevola too?"

"Before you came she never spoke to anybody unless first spoken to. She didn't seem to care where she was. At the same time," added Catherine after a pause, "she didn't care what happened to her either. Oh, I have had some heavy hours thinking it all over, in the daytime doing my work, and at night while I lay awake, listening to her breathing. And I growing older all the time, and, who knows, with my last hour ready to strike. I often thought that when I felt it coming I would speak to you as I am speaking to you now."

"Oh, you did think," said Peyrol in an undertone. "Because of my grey hairs, I suppose."

"Yes. And because you came from beyond the seas," Catherine said with unbending mien and in an unflinching voice. "Don't you know that the first time Arlette saw you she spoke to you and that it was the first time I heard her speak of her own accord since she had been brought back by that man, and I had to wash her from head to foot before I put her into her mother's bed."

“The first time,” repeated Peyrol.

“It was like a miracle happening,” said Catherine, “and it was you that had done it.”

“Then it must be that some Indian witch has given me the power,” muttered Peyrol, so low that Catherine could not hear the words. But she did not seem to care, and presently went on again:

“And the child took to you wonderfully. Some sentiment was aroused in her at last.”

“Yes,” assented Peyrol grimly. “She did take to me. She learned to talk to — -the old man.”

“It’s something in you that seems to have opened her mind and unloosed her tongue,” said Catherine, speaking with a sort of regal composure down at Peyrol, like a chieftainess of a tribe. “I often used to look from afar at you two talking and wonder what she . . .”

“She talked like a child,” struck in Peyrol abruptly. “And so you were going to speak to me before your last hour came. Why, you are not making ready to die yet?”

“Listen, Peyrol. If anybody’s last hour is near it isn’t mine. You just look about you a little. It was time I spoke to you.”

“Why, I am not going to kill anybody,” muttered Peyrol. “You are getting strange ideas into your head.”

“It is as I said,” insisted Catherine without animation. “Death seems to cling to her skirts. She has been running with it madly. Let us keep her feet out of more human blood.”

Peyrol, who had let his head fall on his breast, jerked it up suddenly. “What on earth are you talking about?” he cried angrily. “I don’t understand you at all.”

“You have not seen the state she was in when I got her back into my hands,” remarked Catherine. . . . “I suppose you know where the lieutenant is. What made him go off like that? Where did he go to?”

“I know,” said Peyrol. “And he may be back to-night.”

“You know where he is! And of course you know why he has gone away and why he is coming back,” pronounced Catherine in an ominous voice. “Well, you had better tell him that unless he has a pair of eyes at the back of his head he had better not return here — -not return at all; for if he does, nothing can save him from a treacherous blow.”



“No man was ever safe from treachery,” opined Peyrol after a moment’s silence. “I won’t pretend not to understand what you mean.”

“You heard as well as I what Scevola said just before he went out. The lieutenant is the child of some ci-devant and Arlette of a man they called a traitor to his country. You can see yourself what was in his mind.”

“He is a chicken-hearted spouter,” said Peyrol contemptuously, but it did not affect Catherine’s attitude of an old sibyl risen from the tripod to prophesy calmly atrocious disasters. “It’s all his republicanism,” commented Peyrol with increased scorn. “He has got a fit of it on.”

“No, that’s jealousy,” said Catherine. “Maybe he has ceased to care for her in all these years. It is a long time since he has left off worrying me. With a creature like that I thought that if I let him be master here . . . But no! I know that after the lieutenant started coming here his awful fancies have come back. He is not sleeping at night. His republicanism is always there. But don’t you know, Peyrol, that there may be jealousy without love?”

“You think so,” said the rover profoundly. He pondered full of his own experience. “And he has tasted blood too,” he muttered after a pause. “You may be right.”

“I may be right,” repeated Catherine in a slightly indignant tone. “Every time I see Arlette near him I tremble lest it should come to words and to a bad blow. And when they are both out of my sight it is still worse. At this moment I am wondering where they are. They may be together and I daren’t raise my voice to call her away for fear of rousing his fury.”

“But it’s the lieutenant he is after,” observed Peyrol in a lowered voice. “Well, I can’t stop the lieutenant coming back.”

“Where is she? Where is he?” whispered Catherine in a tone betraying her secret anguish.

Peyrol rose quietly and went into the salle, leaving the door open. Catherine heard the latch of the outer door being lifted cautiously. In a few moments Peyrol returned as quietly as he had gone out.

“I stepped out to look at the weather. The moon is about to rise and the clouds have thinned down. One can see a star here and there.” He lowered his voice considerably. “Arlette is sitting on the bench humming a little song to herself. I really wonder whether she knew I was standing within a few feet of her.”

“She doesn’t want to hear or see anybody except one man,” affirmed Catherine, now in complete control of her voice. “And she was humming a song, did you say? She who would sit for hours without making a sound. And God knows what song it could have been!”

“Yes, there’s a great change in her,” admitted Peyrol with a heavy sigh. “This lieutenant,” he continued after a pause, “has always behaved coldly to her. I noticed him many times turn his face away when he saw her coming towards us. You know what these epaulette-wearers are, Catherine. And then this one has some worm of his own that is gnawing at him. I doubt whether he has ever forgotten that he was a ci-devant boy. Yet I do believe that she does not want to see and hear anybody but him. Is it because she has been deranged in her head for so long?”

“No, Peyrol,” said the old woman. “It isn’t that. You want to know how I can tell? For years nothing could make her either laugh or cry. You know that yourself. You have seen her every day. Would you believe that within the last month she has been both crying and laughing on my breast without knowing why?”

“This I don’t understand,” said Peyrol.

“But I do. That lieutenant has got only to whistle to make her run after him. Yes, Peyrol. That is so. She has no fear, no shame, no pride. I myself have been nearly like that.” Her fine brown face seemed to grow more impassive before she went on much lower and as if arguing with herself: “Only I at least was never blood-mad. I was fit for any man’s arms. . . . But then that man is not a priest.”

The last words made Peyrol start. He had almost forgotten that story. He said to himself: “She knows, she has had the experience.”

“Look here, Catherine,” he said decisively, “the lieutenant is coming back. He will be here probably about midnight. But one thing I can tell you: he is not coming back to whistle her away. Oh, no! It is not for her sake that he will come back.”

“Well, if it isn’t for her that he is coming back then it must be because death has beckoned to him,” she announced in a tone of solemn unemotional conviction. “A man who has received a sign from death — nothing can stop him!”

Peyrol, who had seen death face to face many times, looked at Catherine’s fine brown profile curiously.

“It is a fact,” he murmured, “that men who rush out to seek death do not often find it. So one must have a sign? What sort of sign would it be?”

“How is anybody to know?” asked Catherine, staring across the kitchen at the wall. “Even those to whom it is made do not recognize it for what it is. But they obey all the same. I tell you, Peyrol, nothing can stop them. It may be a glance, or a smile, or a shadow on the water, or a thought that passes through the head. For my poor brother and sister-in-law it was the face of their child.”

Peyrol folded his arms on his breast and dropped his head. Melancholy was a sentiment to which he was a stranger; for what has melancholy to do with the life of a sea-rover, a Brother of the Coast, a simple, venturesome, precarious life, full of risks and leaving no time for introspection or for that momentary self-forgetfulness which is called gaiety. Sombre fury, fierce merriment, he had known in passing gusts, coming from outside; but never this intimate inward sense of the vanity of all things, that doubt of the power within himself.

“I wonder what the sign for me will be,” he thought; and concluded with self-contempt that for him there would be no sign, that he would have to die in his bed like an old yard dog in his kennel. Having reached that depth of despondency, there was nothing more before him but a black gulf into which his consciousness sank like a stone.

The silence which had lasted perhaps a minute after Catherine had finished speaking was traversed suddenly by a clear high voice saying:

“What are you two plotting here?”

Arlette stood in the doorway of the salle. The gleam of light in the whites of her eyes set off her black and penetrating glance. The surprise was complete. The profile of Catherine, who was standing by the table, became if possible harder; a sharp carving of an old prophetess of some desert tribe. Arlette made three steps forward. In Peyrol even extreme astonishment was deliberate. He had been famous for never looking as though he had been caught unprepared. Age had accentuated that trait of a born leader. He only slipped off the edge of the table and said in his deep voice:

“Why, patronne! We haven’t said a word to each other for ever so long.”

Arlette moved nearer still. “I know,” she cried. “It was horrible. I have been watching you two. Scevola came and dumped himself on the bench close to me. He began to talk to me, and so I went away. That man bores me. And here I find you people saying nothing. It’s insupportable. What has

come to you both? Say, you, Papa Peyrol — -don't you like me any more?" Her voice filled the kitchen. Peyrol went to the salle door and shut it. While coming back he was staggered by the brilliance of life within her that seemed to pale the flames of the lamp. He said half in jest:

"I don't know whether I didn't like you better when you were quieter."

"And you would like best to see me still quieter in my grave."

She dazzled him. Vitality streamed out of her eyes, her lips, her whole person, enveloped her like a halo and . . . yes, truly, the faintest possible flush had appeared on her cheeks, played on them faintly rosy like the light of a distant flame on the snow. She raised her arms up in the air and let her hands fall from on high on Peyrol's shoulders, captured his desperately dodging eyes with her black and compelling glance, put out all her instinctive seduction — - while he felt a growing fierceness in the grip of her fingers.

"No! I can't hold it in! Monsieur Peyrol, Papa Peyrol, old gunner, you horrid sea-wolf, be an angel and tell me where he is."

The rover, whom only that morning the powerful grasp of Lieutenant Ral found as unshakable as a rock, felt all his strength vanish under the hands of that woman. He said thickly:

"He has gone to Toulon. He had to go."

"What for? Speak the truth to me!"

"Truth is not for everybody to know," mumbled Peyrol, with a sinking sensation as though the very ground were going soft under his feet. "On service," he added in a growl.

Her hands slipped suddenly from his big shoulders. "On service?" she repeated. "What service?" Her voice sank and the words "Oh, yes! His service" were hardly heard by Peyrol, who as soon as her hands had left his shoulders felt his strength returning to him and the yielding earth grow firm again under his feet. Right in front of him Arlette, silent, with her arms hanging down before her with entwined fingers, seemed stunned because Lieutenant Ral was not free from all earthly connections, like a visiting angel from heaven depending only on God to whom she had prayed. She had to share him with some service that could order him about. She felt in herself a strength, a power, greater than any service.

"Peyrol," she cried low, "don't break my heart, my new heart, that has just begun to beat. Feel how it beats. Who could bear it?" She seized the

rover's thick hairy paw and pressed it hard against her breast. "Tell me when he will be back."

"Listen, patronne, you had better go upstairs," began Peyrol with a great effort and snatching his captured hand away. He staggered backwards a little while Arlette shouted at him:

"You can't order me about as you used to do." In all the changes from entreaty to anger she never struck a false note, so that her emotional outburst had the heart-moving power of inspired art. She turned round with a tempestuous swish to Catherine who had neither stirred nor emitted a sound: "Nothing you two can do will make any difference now." The next moment she was facing Peyrol again. "You frighten me with your white hairs. Come! . . . am I to go on my knees to you? . . . There!"

The rover caught her under the elbows, swung her up clear of the ground, and set her down on her feet as if she had been a child. Directly he had let her go, she stamped her foot at him.

"Are you stupid?" she cried. "Don't you understand that something has happened to-day?"

Through all this scene Peyrol had kept his head as creditably as could have been expected, in the manner of a seaman caught by a white squall in the tropics. But at those words a dozen thoughts tried to rush together through his mind, in chase of that startling declaration. Something had happened! Where? How? Whom to? What thing? It couldn't be anything between her and the lieutenant. He had, it seemed to him, never lost sight of the lieutenant from the first hour when they met in the morning till he had sent him off to Toulon by an actual push on the shoulder; except while he was having his dinner in the next room with the door open, and for the few minutes spent in talking with Michel in the yard. But that was only a very few minutes, and directly afterwards the first sight of the lieutenant sitting gloomily on the bench like a lonely crow did not suggest either elation or excitement or any emotion connected with a woman. In the face of these difficulties Peyrol's mind became suddenly a blank. "Voyons, patronne," he began, unable to think of anything else to say. "What's all this fuss about? I expect him to be back here about midnight."

He was extremely relieved to notice that she believed him. It was the truth. For indeed he did not know what he could have invented on the spur of the moment that would get her out of the way and induce her to go to

bed. She treated him to a sinister frown and a terribly menacing, ``If you have lied . . . Oh!”

He produced an indulgent smile. ``Compose yourself. He will be here soon after midnight. You may go to sleep with an easy mind.”

She turned her back on him contemptuously, and said curtly, ``Come along, aunt,” and went to the door leading to the passage. There she turned for a moment with her hand on the door handle.

``You are changed. I can’t trust either of you. You are not the same people.”

She went out. Only then did Catherine detach her gaze from the wall to meet Peyrol’s eyes. ``Did you hear what she said? We! Changed! It is she herself . . .”

Peyrol nodded twice and there was a long pause, during which even the flames of the lamp did not stir.

``Go after her, Mademoiselle Catherine,” he said at last with a shade of sympathy in his tone. She did not move. ``Allons — -du courage,” he urged her deferentially as it were. ``Try to put her to sleep.”

## CHAPTER XII

Upright and deliberate, Catherine left the kitchen, and in the passage outside found Arlette waiting for her with a lighted candle in her hand. Her heart was filled with sudden desolation by the beauty of that young face enhaloed in the patch of light, with the profound darkness as of a dungeon for a background. At once her niece led the way upstairs muttering savagely through her pretty teeth: "He thinks I could go to sleep. Old imbecile!"

Peyrol did not take his eyes off Catherine's straight back till the door had closed after her. Only then he relieved himself by letting the air escape through his pursed lips and rolling his eyes freely about. He picked up the lamp by the ring on the top of the central rod and went into the salle, closing behind him the door of the dark kitchen. He stood the lamp on the very table on which Lieutenant Ral had had his midday meal. A small white cloth was still spread on it and there was his chair askew as he had pushed it back when he got up. Another of the many chairs in the salle was turned round conspicuously to face the table. These things made Peyrol remark to himself bitterly: "She sat and stared at him as if he had been guilt all over, with three heads and seven arms on his body" — a comparison reminiscent of certain idols he had seen in an Indian temple. Though not an iconoclast, Peyrol felt positively sick at the recollection, and hastened to step outside. The great cloud had broken up and the mighty fragments were moving to the westward in stately flight before the rising moon. Scevola, who had been lying extended full length on the bench, swung himself up suddenly, very upright.

"Had a little nap in the open?" asked Peyrol, letting his eyes roam through the luminous space under the departing rearguard of the clouds jostling each other up there.

"I did not sleep," said the sans-culotte. "I haven't closed my eyes-not for one moment."

"That must be because you weren't sleepy," suggested the deliberate Peyrol, whose thoughts were far away with the English ship. His mental eye contemplated her black image against the white beach of the Salins describing a sparkling curve under the moon, and meantime he went on slowly: "For it could not have been noise that kept you awake." On the level of Escampobar the shadows lay long on the ground while the side of the lookout hill remained yet black but edged with an increasing brightness. And the amenity of the stillness was such that it softened for a moment

Peyrol's hard inward attitude towards all mankind, including even the captain of the English ship. The old rover savoured a moment of serenity in the midst of his cares.

“This is an accursed spot,” declared Scevola suddenly.

Peyrol, without turning his head, looked at him sideways. Though he had sprung up from his reclining posture smartly enough, the citizen had gone slack all over and was sitting all in a heap. His shoulders were hunched up, his hands reposed on his knees. With his staring eyes he resembled a sick child in the moonlight.

“It's the very spot for hatching treacheries. One feels steeped in them up to the neck.”

He shuddered and yawned a long irresistible nervous yawn with the gleam of unexpected long canines in a retracted, gaping mouth giving away the restless panther lurking in the man.

“Oh, yes, there's treachery about right enough. You couldn't conceive that, citizen?”

“Of course I couldn't,” assented Peyrol with serene contempt. “What is this treachery that you are concocting?” he added carelessly, in a social way, while enjoying the charm of a moonlit evening. Scevola, who did not expect that turn, managed, however, to produce a rattling sort of laugh almost at once.

“That's a good one. Ha! ha! ha! . . . Me! . . . concocting! . . . Why me?”

“Well,” said Peyrol carelessly, “there are not many of us to carry out treacheries about here. The women are gone upstairs; Michel is down at the tartane. There's me, and you would not dare suspect me of treachery. Well, there remains only you.”

Scevola roused himself. “This is not much of a jest,” he said. “I have been a treason-hunter. I . . .”

He checked that strain. He was full of purely emotional suspicions. Peyrol was talking like this only to annoy him and to get him out of the way; but in the particular state of his feelings Scevola was acutely aware of every syllable of these offensive remarks. “Aha,” he thought to himself, “he doesn't mention the lieutenant.” This omission seemed to the patriot of immense importance. If Peyrol had not mentioned the lieutenant it was because those two had been plotting some treachery together, all the afternoon on board that tartane. That's why nothing had been seen of them for the best part of the day. As a matter of fact, Scevola too had observed



Peyrol returning to the farm in the evening, only he had observed him from another window than Arlette. This was a few minutes before his attempt to open the lieutenant's door, in order to find out whether Ral was in his room. He had tiptoed away, uncertain, and going into the kitchen had found only Catherine and Peyrol there. Directly Arlette joined them a sudden inspiration made him run upstairs and try the door again. It was open now! A clear proof that it was Arlette who had been locked up in there. The discovery that she made herself at home like this in the lieutenant's room gave Scevola such a sickening shock that he thought he would die of it. It was beyond doubt now that the lieutenant had been conspiring with Peyrol down on board that tartane; for what else could they have been doing there? "But why had not Ral come up in the evening with Peyrol?" Scevola asked himself, sitting on the bench with his hands clasped between his knees. . . . It's their cunning," he concluded suddenly. "Conspirators always avoid being seen together. Ha!"

It was as if somebody had let off a lot of fireworks in his brain. He was illuminated, dazzled, confused, with a hissing in his ears and showers of sparks before him. Peyrol had vanished. Scevola seemed to remember that he had heard somebody pronounce the word "good-night" and the door of the salle slam. And sure enough the door of the salle was shut now. A dim light shone in the window that was next to it. Peyrol had extinguished three of the lamp flames and was now reclining on one of the long tables with that faculty of accommodating himself to a plank an old sea-dog never loses. He had decided to remain below simply to be handy, and he didn't lie down on one of the benches along the wall because they were too narrow. He left one wick burning, so that the lieutenant should know where to look for him, and he was tired enough to think that he would snatch a couple of hours' sleep before Ral could return from Toulon. He settled himself with one arm under his head as if he were on the deck of a privateer, and it never occurred to him that Scevola was looking through the panes; but they were so small and dusty that the patriot could see nothing. His movement had been purely instinctive. He wasn't even aware that he had looked in. He went away from there, walked to the end of the building, spun round and walked back again to the other end; and it was as if he had been afraid of going beyond the wall against which he reeled sometimes. "Conspiracy, conspiracy," he thought. He was now absolutely certain that the lieutenant was still hiding in that tartane, and was only waiting till all was quiet to

sneak back to his room in which Scevola had proof positive that Arlette was in the habit of making herself at home. To rob him of his right to Arlette was part of the conspiracy no doubt.

“Have I been a slave to those two women, have I waited all those years, only to see that corrupt creature go off infamously with a ci-devant, with a conspiring aristocrat?”

He became giddy with virtuous fury. There was enough evidence there for any revolutionary tribunal to cut all their heads off. Tribunal! There was no tribunal! No revolutionary justice! No patriots! He hit his shoulder against the wall in his distress with such force that he rebounded. This world was no place for patriots.

“If I had betrayed myself in the kitchen they would have murdered me in there.”

As it was he thought that he had said too much. Too much. “Prudence! Caution!” he repeated to himself, gesticulating with both arms. Suddenly he stumbled and there was an amazing metallic clatter made by something that fell at his feet.

“They are trying to kill me now,” he thought, shaking with fright. He gave himself up for dead. Profound silence reigned all round. Nothing more happened. He stooped fearfully to look and recognized his own stable fork lying on the ground. He remembered he had left it at noon leaning against the wall. His own foot had made it fall. He threw himself upon it greedily. “Here’s what I need,” he muttered feverishly. “I suppose that by now the lieutenant would think I am gone to bed.”

He flattened himself upright against the wall with the fork held along his body like a grounded musket. The moon clearing the hill-top flooded suddenly the front of the house with its cold light, but he didn’t know it; he imagined himself still to be ambushed in the shadow and remained motionless, glaring at the path leading towards the cove. His teeth chattered with savage impatience.

He was so plainly visible in his death-like rigidity that Michel, coming up out of the ravine, stopped dead short, believing him an apparition not belonging to this earth. Scevola, on his side, noticed the moving shadow cast by a man — -that man! — -and charged forward without reflection, the prongs of the fork lowered like a bayonet. He didn’t shout. He came straight on, growling like a dog, and lunged headlong with his weapon.

Michel, a primitive, untroubled by anything so uncertain as intelligence, executed an instantaneous sideways leap with the precision of a wild animal; but he was enough of a man to become afterwards paralyzed with astonishment. The impetus of the rush carried Scevola several yards down the hill, before he could turn round and assume an offensive attitude. Then the two adversaries recognized each other. The terrorist exclaimed: "Michel?" and Michel hastened to pick up a large stone from the ground.

"Hey, you, Scevola," he cried, not very loud but very threatening. "What are these tricks? . . . Keep away, or I will heave that piece of rock at your head, and I am good at that."

Scevola grounded the fork with a thud. "I didn't recognize you," he said.

"That's a story. Who did you think I was? Not the other! I haven't got a bandaged head, have I?"

Scevola began to scramble up. "What's this?" he asked. "What head, did you say?"

"I say that if you come near I will knock you over with that stone," answered Michel. "You aren't to be trusted when the moon is full. Not recognize! There's a silly excuse for flying at people like this. You haven't got anything against me, have you?"

"No," said the ex-terrorist in a dubious tone and keeping a watchful eye on Michel, who was still holding the stone in his hand.

"People have been saying for years that you are a kind of lunatic," Michel criticized fearlessly, because the other's discomfiture was evident enough to put heart into the timid hare. "If a fellow cannot come up now to get a snooze in the shed without being run at with a fork, well . . ."

"I was only going to put this fork away," Scevola burst out volubly. "I had left it leaning against the wall, and as I was passing along I suddenly saw it, so I thought I would put it in the stable before I went to bed. That's all."

Michel's mouth fell open a bit.

"Now what do you think I would want with a stable fork at this time of night, if it wasn't to put it away?" argued Scevola.

"What indeed!" mumbled Michel, who began to doubt the evidence of his senses.

"You go about mooning like a fool and imagine a lot of silly things, you great, stupid imbecile. All I wanted to do was to ask whether everything

was all right down there, and you, idiot, bound to one side like a goat and pick up a stone. The moon has affected your head, not mine. Now drop it."

Michel, accustomed to do what he was told, opened his fingers slowly, not quite convinced but thinking there might be something in it. Scevola, perceiving his advantage, scolded on:

"You are dangerous. You ought to have your feet and hands tied every full moon. What did you say about a head just now? What head?"

"I said that I didn't have a broken head."

"Was that all?" said Scevola. He was asking himself what on earth could have happened down there during the afternoon to cause a broken head. Clearly, it must have been either a fight or an accident, but in any case he considered that it was for him a favourable circumstance, for obviously a man with a bandaged head is at a disadvantage. He was inclined to think it must have been some silly accident, and he regretted profoundly that the lieutenant had not killed himself outright. He turned sourly to Michel.

"Now you may go into the shed. And don't try any of your tricks with me any more, because next time you pick up a stone I will shoot you like a dog."

He began to move towards the yard gate which stood always open, throwing over his shoulder an order to Michel: "Go into the salle. Somebody has left a light in there. They all seem to have gone crazy to-day. Take the lamp into the kitchen and put it out and see that the door into the yard is shut. I am going to bed." He passed through the gateway, but he did not penetrate into the yard very far. He stopped to watch Michel obeying the order. Scevola, advancing his head cautiously beyond the pillar of the gate, waited till he had seen Michel open the door of the salle and then bounded out again across the level space and down the ravine path. It was a matter of less than a minute. His fork was still on his shoulder. His only desire was not to be interfered with, and for the rest he did not care what they all did, what they would think and how they would behave. The fixed idea had taken complete possession of him. He had no plan, but he had a principle on which to act; and that was to get at the lieutenant unawares, and if the fellow died without knowing what hand had struck him, so much the better. Scevola was going to act in the cause of virtue and justice. It was not to be a matter of personal contest at all. Meantime, Michel, having gone into the salle, had discovered Peyrol fast asleep on a table. Though his reverence for Peyrol was unbounded, his simplicity was such that he shook

his master by the shoulder as he would have done any common mortal. The rover passed from a state of inertia into a sitting posture so quickly that Michel stepped back a pace and waited to be addressed. But as Peyrol only stared at him, Michel took the initiative in a concise phrase:

“He’s at it!”

Peyrol did not seem completely awake: “What is it you mean?” he asked.

“He is making motions to escape.”

Peyrol was wide awake now. He even swung his feet off the table.

“Is he? Haven’t you locked the cabin door?”

Michel, very frightened, explained that he had never been told to do that.

“No?” remarked Peyrol placidly. “I must have forgotten.” But Michel remained agitated and murmured: “He is escaping.”

“That’s all right,” said Peyrol. “What are you fussing about? How far can he escape, do you think?”

A slow grin appeared on Michel’s face. “If he tries to scramble over the top of the rocks, he will get a broken neck in a very short time,” he said. “And he certainly won’t get very far, that’s a fact.”

“Well — -you see,” said Peyrol.

“And he doesn’t seem strong either. He crawled out of the cabin door and got as far as the little water cask and he dipped and dipped into it. It must be half empty by now. After that he got on to his legs. I cleared out ashore directly I heard him move,” he went on in a tone of intense self-approval. “I hid myself behind a rock and watched him.;;

“Quite right,” observed Peyrol. After that word of commendation, Michel’s face wore a constant grin.

“He sat on the after-deck,” he went on as if relating an immense joke, “with his feet dangling down the hold, and may the devil take me if I don’t think he had a nap with his back against the cask. He was nodding and catching himself up, with that big white head of his. Well, I got tired of watching that, and as you told me to keep out of his way, I thought I would come up here and sleep in the shed. That was right, wasn’t it?”

“Quite right,” repeated Peyrol. “Well, you go now into the shed. And so you left him sitting on the after-deck?”

“Yes,” said Michel. “But he was rousing himself. I hadn’t got away more than ten yards when I heard an awful thump on board. I think he tried to get up and fell down the hold.”

“Fell down the hold?” repeated Peyrol sharply.

“Yes, notre matre. I thought at first I would go back and see, but you had warned me against him, hadn’t you? And I really think that nothing can kill him.”

Peyrol got down from the table with an air of concern which would have astonished Michel, if he had not been utterly incapable of observing things.

“This must be seen to,” murmured the rover, buttoning the waistband of his trousers. “My cudgel there, in the corner. Now you go to the shed. What the devil are you doing at the door? Don’t you know the way to the shed?” This last observation was caused by Michel remaining in the doorway of the salle with his head out and looking to right and left along the front of the house. “What’s come to you? You don’t suppose he has been able to follow you so quick as this up here?”

“Oh no, notre matre, quite impossible. I saw that sacr Scevola promenading up and down here. I don’t want to meet him again.”

“Was he promenading outside?” asked Peyrol, with annoyance. “Well, what do you think he can do to you? What notions have you got in your silly head? You are getting worse and worse. Out you go.”

Peyrol extinguished the lamp and, going out, closed the door without the slightest noise. The intelligence about Scevola being on the move did not please him very much, but he reflected that probably the sans-culotte had fallen asleep again and after waking up was on his way to bed when Michel caught sight of him. He had his own view of the patriot’s psychology and did not think the women were in any danger. Nevertheless he went to the shed and heard the rustling of straw as Michel settled himself for the night.

“Debout,” he cried low. “Sh, don’t make any noise. I want you to go into the house and sleep at the bottom of the stairs. If you hear voices, go up, and if you see Scevola about, knock him down. You aren’t afraid of him, are you?”

“No, if you tell me not to be,” said Michel, who, picking up his shoes, a present from Peyrol, walked barefoot towards the house. The rover watched him slipping noiselessly through the salle door. Having thus, so to speak, guarded his base, Peyrol proceeded down the ravine with a very deliberate caution. When he got as far as the little hollow in the ground from which the mastheads of the tartane could be seen, he squatted and waited. He didn’t know what his prisoner had done or was doing and he did not want to blunder into the way of his escape. The day-old moon was high enough to

have shortened the shadows almost to nothing and all the rocks were inundated by a yellow sheen, while the bushes by contrast looked very black. Peyrol reflected that he was not very well concealed. The continued silence impressed him in the end. ``He has got away,” he thought. Yet he was not sure. Nobody could be sure. He reckoned it was about an hour since Michel had left the tartane; time enough for a man, even on all fours, to crawl down to the shore of the cove. Peyrol wished he had not hit so hard. His object could have been attained with half the force. On the other hand all the proceedings of his prisoner, as reported by Michel, seemed quite rational. Naturally the fellow was badly shaken. Peyrol felt as though he wanted to go on board and give him some encouragement, and even active assistance.

The report of a gun from seaward cut his breath short as he lay there meditating. Within a minute there was a second report, sending another wave of deep sound among the crags and hills of the peninsula. The ensuing silence was so profound that it seemed to extend to the very inside of Peyrol’s head, and lull all his thoughts for a moment. But he had understood. He said to himself that after this his prisoner, if he had life enough left in him to stir a limb, would rather die than not try to make his way to the seashore. The ship was calling to her man.

In fact those two guns had proceeded from the *Amelia*. After passing beyond Cape Esterel, Captain Vincent dropped an anchor under foot off the beach just as Peyrol had surmised he would do. From about six o’clock till nine the *Amelia* lay there with her unfurled sails hanging in the gear. Just before the moon rose the captain came up on deck and after a short conference with his first lieutenant, directed the master to get the ship under way and put her head again for the *Petite Passe*. Then he went below, and presently word was passed on deck that the captain wanted Mr. Bolt. When the master’s mate appeared in his cabin, Captain Vincent motioned him to a chair.

``I don’t think I ought to have listened to you,” he said. ``Still, the idea was fascinating, but how it would strike other people it is hard to say. The losing of our man is the worst feature. I have an idea that we might recover him. He may have been captured by the peasants or have met with an accident. It’s unbearable to think of him lying at the foot of some rock with a broken leg. I have ordered the first and second cutters to be manned, and I propose that you should take command of them, enter the cove and, if

necessary, advance a little inland to investigate. As far as we know there have never been any troops on that peninsula. The first thing you will do is to examine the coast.”

He talked for some time, giving more minute instructions, and then went on deck. The Amelia, with the two cutters towing alongside, reached about half-way down the Passe and then the boats were ordered to proceed. just before they shoved off, two guns were fired in quick succession.

“Like this, Bolt,” explained Captain Vincent, “Symons will guess that we are looking for him; and if he is hiding anywhere near the shore he will be sure to come down where he can be seen by you.”



## CHAPTER XIII

The motive force of a fixed idea is very great. In the case of Scevola it was great enough to launch him down the slope and to rob him for the moment of all caution. He bounded amongst the boulders, using the handle of the stable fork for a staff. He paid no regard to the nature of the ground, till he got a fall and found himself sprawling on his face, while the stable fork went clattering down until it was stopped by a bush. It was this circumstance which saved Peyrol's prisoner from being caught unawares. Since he had got out of the little cabin, simply because after coming to himself he had perceived it was open, Symons had been greatly refreshed by long drinks of cold water and by his little nap in the fresh air. Every moment he was feeling in better command of his limbs. As to the command of his thoughts, that was coming to him too rather quickly. The advantage of having a very thick skull became evident in the fact that as soon as he had dragged himself out of that cabin he knew where he was. The next thing he did was to look at the moon, to judge of the passage of time. Then he gave way to an immense surprise at the fact of being alone aboard the tartane. As he sat with his legs dangling into the open hold he tried to guess how it came about that the cabin had been left unlocked and unguarded.

He went on thinking about this unexpected situation. What could have become of that white-headed villain? Was he dodging about somewhere watching for a chance to give him another tap on the head? Symons felt suddenly very unsafe sitting there on the after-deck in the full light of the moon. Instinct rather than reason suggested to him that he ought to get down into the dark hold. It seemed a great undertaking at first, but once he started he accomplished it with the greatest ease, though he could not avoid knocking down a small spar which was leaning up against the deck. It preceded him into the hold with a loud crash which gave poor Symons an attack of palpitation of the heart. He sat on the keelson of the tartane and gasped, but after a while reflected that all this did not matter. His head felt very big, his neck was very painful and one shoulder was certainly very stiff. He could never stand up against that old ruffian. But what had become of him? Why! He had gone to fetch the soldiers! After that conclusion Symons became more composed. He began to try to remember things. When he had last seen that old fellow it was daylight, and now-Symons looked up at the moon again — -it must be near six bells in the first watch. No doubt the old scoundrel was sitting in a wine shop drinking with the

soldiers. They would be here soon enough! The idea of being a prisoner of war made his heart sink a little. His ship appeared to him invested with an extraordinary number of lovable features which included Captain Vincent and the first lieutenant. He would have been glad to shake hands even with the corporal, a surly and malicious marine acting as master-at-arms of the ship. "I wonder where she is now," he thought dismally, feeling his distaste for captivity grow with the increase of his strength.

It was at this moment that he heard the noise of Scevola's fall. It was pretty close; but afterwards he heard no voices and footsteps heralding the approach of a body of men. If this was the old ruffian coming back, then he was coming back alone. At once Symons started on all fours for the fore-end of the tartane. He had an idea that ensconced under the fore-deck he would be in a better position to parley with the enemy and that perhaps he could find there a handspike or some piece of iron to defend himself with. Just as he had settled himself in his hiding-place Scevola stepped from the shore on to the after-deck.

At the very first glance Symons perceived that this one was very unlike the man he expected to see. He felt rather disappointed. As Scevola stood still in full moonlight Symons congratulated himself on having taken up a position under the fore-deck. That fellow, who had a beard, was like a sparrow in body compared with the other; but he was armed dangerously with something that looked to Symons like either a trident or fishgrains on a staff. "A devil of a weapon that," he thought, appalled. And what on earth did that beggar want on board? What could he be after?

The new-comer acted strangely at first. He stood stock-still, craning his neck here and there, peering along the whole length of the tartane, then crossing the deck he repeated all those performances on the other side. "He has noticed that the cabin door is open. He's trying to see where I've got to. He will be coming forward to look for me," said Symons to himself. "If he corners me here with that beastly pronged affair I am done for." For a moment he debated within himself whether it wouldn't be better to make a dash for it and scramble ashore; but in the end he mistrusted his strength. "He would run me down for sure," he concluded. "And he means no good, that's certain. No man would go about at night with a confounded thing like that if he didn't mean to do for somebody."

Scevola, after keeping perfectly still, straining his ears for any sound from below where he supposed Lieutenant Ral to be, stooped down to the

cabin scuttle and called in a low voice: "Are you there, lieutenant?" Symons saw these motions and could not imagine their purport. That excellent able seaman of proved courage in many cutting-out expeditions broke into a slight perspiration. In the light of the moon the prongs of the fork polished by much use shone like silver, and the whole aspect of the stranger was weird and dangerous in the extreme. Whom could that man be after but him, himself?

Scevola, receiving no answer, remained in a stooping position. He could not detect the slightest sound of breathing down there. He remained in this position so long that Symons became quite interested. "He must think I am still down there," he whispered to himself. The next proceeding was quite astonishing. The man, taking up a position on one side of the cuddy scuttle and holding his horrid weapon as one would a boarding pike, uttered a terrific whoop and went on yelling in French with such volubility that he quite frightened Symons. Suddenly he left off, moved away from the scuttle and looked at a loss what to do next. Anybody who could have seen then Symons protruded head with his face turned aft would have seen on it an expression of horror, "The cunning beast," he thought. "If I had been down there, with the row he made I would have surely rushed on deck and then he would have had me." Symons experienced the feeling of a very narrow escape; yet it brought not much relief. It was simply a matter of time. The fellow's homicidal purpose was evident. He was bound before long to come forward. Symons saw him move, and thought, "Now he's coming," and prepared himself for a dash. "If I can dodge past those blamed prongs I might be able to take him by the throat," he reflected, without, however, feeling much confidence in himself.

But to his great relief Scevola's purpose was simply to conceal the fork in the hold in such a manner that the handle of it just reached the edge of the after-deck. In that position it was of course invisible to anybody coming from the shore. Scevola had made up his mind that the lieutenant was out of the tartane. He had wandered away along the shore and would probably be back in a moment. Meantime it had occurred to him to see if he could discover anything compromising in the cabin. He did not take the fork down with him because in that confined space it would have been useless and rather a source of embarrassment than otherwise, should the returning lieutenant find him there. He cast a circular glance around the basin and then prepared to go down.

Every movement of his was watched by Symons. He guessed Scevola's purpose by his movements and said to himself: "Here's my only chance, and not a second to be lost either." Directly Scevola turned his back on the forepart of the tartane in order to go down the little cabin ladder, Symons crawled out from his concealment. He ran along the hold on all fours for fear the other should turn his head round before disappearing below, but directly he judged that the man had touched bottom, he stood on his feet and catching hold of the main rigging swung himself on the after-deck and, as it were in the same movement, flung himself on the doors of the cabin which came together with a crash. How he could secure them he had not thought, but as a matter of fact he saw the padlock hanging on a staple on one side; the key was in it, and it was a matter of a fraction of a second to secure the doors effectually.

Almost simultaneously with the crash of the cabin door there was a shrill exclamation of surprise down there, and just as Symons had turned the key the man he had trapped made an effort to break out. That, however, did not disturb Symons. He knew the strength of that door. His first action was to get possession of the stable fork. At once he felt himself a match for any single man or even two men unless they had fire-arms. He had no hope, however, of being able to resist the soldiers and really had no intention of doing so. He expected to see them appear at any moment led by that confounded mariner. As to what the farmer man had come for on board the tartane he had not the slightest doubt about it. Not being troubled by too much imagination, it seemed to him obvious that it was to kill an Englishman and for nothing else. "Well, I am jiggered," he exclaimed mentally. "The damned savage! I haven't done anything to him. They must be a murderous lot hereabouts." He looked anxiously up the slope. He would have welcomed the arrival of soldiers. He wanted more than ever to be made a proper prisoner, but a profound stillness reigned on the shore and a most absolute silence down below in the cabin. Absolute. No word, no movement. The silence of the grave. "He's scared to death," thought Symons, hitting in his simplicity on the exact truth. "It would serve him jolly well right if I went down there and ran him through with that thing. I would do it for a shilling, too." He was getting angry. It occurred to him also that there was some wine down there too. He discovered he was very thirsty and he felt rather faint. He sat down on the little skylight to think the matter over while awaiting the soldiers. He even gave a friendly thought to

Peyrol himself. He was quite aware that he could have gone ashore and hidden himself for a time, but that meant in the end being hunted among the rocks and, certainly, captured; with the additional risk of getting a musket ball through his body.

The first gun of the *Amelia* lifted him to his feet as though he had been snatched up by the hair of his head. He intended to give a resounding cheer, but produced only a feeble gurgle in his throat. His ship was talking to him. They hadn't given him up. At the second report he scrambled ashore with the agility of a cat — in fact, with so much agility that he had a fit of giddiness. After it passed off he returned deliberately to the tartane to get hold of the stable fork. Then trembling with emotion, he staggered off quietly and resolutely with the only purpose of getting down to the seashore. He knew that as long as he kept downhill he would be all right. The ground in this part being a smooth rocky surface and Symons being barefooted, he passed at no great distance from Peyrol without being heard. When he got on rough ground he used the stable fork for a staff. Slowly as he moved he was not really strong enough to be sure-footed. Ten minutes later or so Peyrol, lying ensconced behind a bush, heard the noise of a rolling stone far away in the direction of the cove. Instantly the patient Peyrol got on his feet and started towards the cove himself. Perhaps he would have smiled if the importance and gravity of the affair in which he was engaged had not given all his thoughts a serious cast. Pursuing a higher path than the one followed by Symons, he had presently the satisfaction of seeing the fugitive, made very noticeable by the white bandages about his head, engaged in the last part of the steep descent. No nurse could have watched with more anxiety the adventure of a little boy than Peyrol the progress of his former prisoner. He was very glad to perceive that he had had the sense to take what looked like the tartane's boathook to help himself with. As Symons' figure sank lower and lower in his descent Peyrol moved on, step by step, till at last he saw him from above sitting down on the seashore, looking very forlorn and lonely, with his bandaged head between his hands. Instantly Peyrol sat down too, protected by a projecting rock. And it is safe to say that with that there came a complete cessation of all sound and movement on the lonely head of the peninsula for a full half hour.

Peyrol was not in doubt as to what was going to happen. He was as certain that the corvette's boat or boats were now on the way to the cove as

though he had seen them leave the side of the Amelia. But he began to get a little impatient. He wanted to see the end of this episode. Most of the time he was watching Symons. ``Sacre tte dure,” he thought. ``He has gone to sleep.’ Indeed Symons immobility was so complete that he might have been dead from his exertions: only Peyrol had a conviction that his once youthful chum was not the sort of person that dies easily. The part of the cove he had reached was all right for Peyrol’s purpose. But it would have been quite easy for a boat or boats to fail to notice Symons, and the consequence of that would be that the English would probably land in several parties for a search, discover the tartane. Peyrol shuddered.

Suddenly he made out a boat just clear of the eastern point of the cove. Mr. Bolt had been hugging the coast and progressing very slowly, according to his instructions, till he had reached the edge of the point’s shadow where it lay ragged and black on the moonlit water. Peyrol could see the oars rise and fall. Then another boat glided into view. Peyrol’s alarm for his tartane grew intolerable. ``Wake up, animal, wake up,” he mumbled through his teeth. Slowly they glided on, and the first cutter was on the point of passing by the man on the shore when Peyrol was relieved by the hail of ``Boat ahoy” reaching him faintly where he knelt leaning forward, an absorbed spectator.

He saw the boat heading for Symons, who was standing up now and making desperate signs with both arms. Then he saw him dragged in over the bows, the boat back out, and then both of them tossed oars and floated side by side on the sparkling water of the cove.

Peyrol got up from his knees. They had their man now. But perhaps they would persist in landing since there must have been some other purpose at first in the mind of the captain of the English corvette. This suspense did not last long. Peyrol saw the oars fall in the water, and in a very few minutes the boats, pulling round, disappeared one after another behind the eastern point of the cove.

``That’s done,” muttered Peyrol to himself. ``I will never see the silly hard-head again.” He had a strange notion that those English boats had carried off something belonging to him, not a man but a part of his own life, the sensation of a regained touch with the far-off days in the Indian Ocean. He walked down quickly as if to examine the spot from which Testa Dura had left the soil of France. He was in a hurry now to get back to the farmhouse and meet Lieutenant Ral, who would be due back from Toulon.

The way by the cove was as short as any other. When he got down he surveyed the empty shore and wondered at a feeling of emptiness within himself. While walking up towards the foot of the ravine he saw an object lying on the ground. It was a stable fork. He stood over it asking himself, ``How on earth did this thing come here?'' as though he had been too surprised to pick it up. Even after he had done so he remained motionless, meditating on it. He connected it with some activity of Scevola, since he was the man to whom it belonged, but that was no sort of explanation of its presence on that spot, unless . . .

``Could he have drowned himself?'' thought Peyrol, looking at the smooth and luminous water of the cove. It could give him no answer. Then at arm's length he contemplated his find. At last he shook his head, shouldered the fork, and with slow steps continued on his way.

## CHAPTER XIV

The midnight meeting of Lieutenant Ral and Peyrol was perfectly silent. Peyrol, sitting on the bench outside the salle, had heard the footsteps coming up the Madrague track long before the lieutenant became visible. But he did not move. He did not even look at him. The lieutenant, unbuckling his sword-belt, sat down without uttering a word. The moon, the only witness of the meeting, seemed to shine on two friends so identical in thought and feeling that they could commune with each other without words. It was Peyrol who spoke first.

“You are up to time.”

“I had the deuce of a job to hunt up the people and get the certificate stamped. Everything was shut up. The Port-Admiral was giving a dinner-party, but he came out to speak to me when I sent in my name. And all the time, do you know, gunner, I was wondering whether I would ever see you again in my life. Even after I had the certificate, such as it is, in my pocket, I wondered whether I would.”

“What the devil did you think was going to happen to me?” growled Peyrol perfunctorily. He had thrown the incomprehensible stable fork under the narrow bench, and with his feet drawn in he could feel it there, lying against the wall.

“No, the question with me was whether I would ever come here again.”

Ral drew a folded paper from his pocket and dropped it on the bench. Peyrol picked it up carelessly. That thing was meant only to throw dust into Englishmen’s eyes. The lieutenant, after a moment’s silence, went on with the sincerity of a man who suffered too much to keep his trouble to himself.

“I had a hard struggle.”

“That was too late,” said Peyrol, very positively. “You had to come back here for very shame; and now you have come, you don’t look very happy.”

“Never mind my looks, gunner. I have made up my mind.”

A ferocious, not unpleasing thought flashed through Peyrol’s mind. It was that this intruder on the Escampobar sinister solitude in which he, Peyrol, kept order was under a delusion. Mind! Pah! His mind had nothing to do with his return. He had returned because in Catherine’s words, “death had made a sign to him.” Meantime, Lieutenant Ral raised his hat to wipe his moist brow.



“I made up my mind to play the part of dispatch-bearer. As you have said yourself, Peyrol, one could not bribe a man — -I mean an honest man — -so you will have to find the vessel and leave the rest to me. In two or three days . . . You are under a moral obligation to let me have your tartane.”

Peyrol did not answer. He was thinking that Ral had got his sign, but whether it meant death from starvation or disease on board an English prison hulk, or in some other way, it was impossible to say. This naval officer was not a man he could trust; to whom he could, for instance, tell the story of his prisoner and what he had done with him. Indeed, the story was altogether incredible. The Englishman commanding that corvette had no visible, conceivable or probable reason for sending a boat ashore to the cove of all places in the world. Peyrol himself could hardly believe that it had happened. And he thought: “If I were to tell that lieutenant he would only think that I was an old scoundrel who had been in treasonable communication with the English for God knows how long. No words of mine could persuade him that this was as unforeseen to me as the moon falling from the sky.”

“I wonder,” he burst out, but not very loud, “what made you keep on coming back here time after time!” Ral leaned his back against the wall and folded his arms in the familiar attitude of their leisurely talks.

“Ennui, Peyrol,” he said in a far-away tone. “Confounded boredom.”

Peyrol also, as if unable to resist the force of example, assumed the same attitude, and said:

“You seem to be a man that makes no friends.”

“True, Peyrol. I think I am that sort of man.”

“What, no friends at all? Not even a little friend of any sort?”

Lieutenant Ral leaned the back of his head against the wall and made no answer. Peyrol got on his legs.

“Oh, then, it wouldn’t matter to anybody if you were to disappear for years in an English hulk. And so if I were to give you my tartane you would go?”

“Yes, I would go this moment.”

Peyrol laughed quite loud, tilting his head back. All at once the laugh stopped short and the lieutenant was amazed to see him reel as though he had been hit in the chest. While giving way to his bitter mirth, the rover had caught sight of Arlette’s face at the, open window of the lieutenant’s room.

He sat heavily on the bench and was unable to make a sound. The lieutenant was startled enough to detach the back of his head from the wall to look at him. Peyrol stooped low suddenly, and began to drag the stable fork from its concealment. Then he got on his feet and stood leaning on it, glaring down at Ral, who gazed upwards with languid surprise. Peyrol was asking himself, "Shall I pick him up on that pair of prongs, carry him down and fling him in the sea?" He felt suddenly overcome by a heaviness of arms and a heaviness of heart that made all movement impossible. His stiffened and powerless limbs refused all service. . . . Let Catherine look after her niece. He was sure that the old woman was not very far away. The lieutenant saw him absorbed in examining the points of the prongs carefully. There was something queer about all this.

"Hallo, Peyrol! What's the matter?" he couldn't help asking.

"I was just looking," said Peyrol. "One prong is chipped a little. I found this thing in a most unlikely place."

The lieutenant still gazed at him curiously.

"I know! It was under the bench."

"H'm," said Peyrol, who had recovered some self-control. "It belongs to Scevola."

"Does it?" said the lieutenant, falling back again.

His interest seemed exhausted, but Peyrol didn't move.

"You go about with a face fit for a funeral," he remarked suddenly in a deep voice. "Hang it all, lieutenant, I have heard you laugh once or twice, but the devil take me if I ever saw you smile. It is as if you had been bewitched in your cradle."

Lieutenant Ral got up as if moved by a spring. "Bewitched," he repeated, standing very stiff: "In my cradle, eh? . . . No, I don't think it was so early as that."

He walked forward with a tense still face straight at Peyrol as though he had been blind. Startled, the rover stepped out of the way and, turning on his heels, followed him with his eyes. The lieutenant paced on, as if drawn by a magnet, in the direction of the door of the house. Peyrol, his eyes fastened on Ral's back, let him nearly reach it before he called out tentatively: "I say, lieutenant!" To his extreme surprise, Ral swung round as if to a touch.

"Oh, yes," he answered, also in an undertone. "We will have to discuss that matter to-morrow."

Peyrol, who had approached him close, said in a whisper which sounded quite fierce: "Discuss? No! We will have to carry it out to-morrow. I have been waiting half the night just to tell you that."

Lieutenant Ral nodded. The expression on his face was so stony that Peyrol doubted whether he had understood. He added:

"It isn't going to be child's play." The lieutenant was about to open the door when Peyrol said: "A moment," and again the lieutenant turned about silently.

"Michel is sleeping somewhere on the stairs. Will you just stir him up and tell him I am waiting outside? We two will have to finish our night on board the tartane, and start work at break of day to get her ready for sea. Yes, lieutenant, by noon. In twelve hours' time you will be saying good-bye to la belle France."

Lieutenant Ral's eyes staring over his shoulder, seemed glazed and motionless in the moonlight like the eyes of a dead man. But he went in. Peyrol heard presently sounds within of somebody staggering in the passage and Michel projected himself outside headlong, but after a stumble or two pulled up, scratching his head and looking on every side in the moonlight without perceiving Peyrol, who was regarding him from a distance of five feet. At last Peyrol said:

"Come, wake up! Michel! Michel!"

"Voil, notre matre."

"Look at what I have picked up," said Peyrol. "Take it and put it away."

Michel didn't offer to touch the stable fork extended to him by Peyrol.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Peyrol.

"Nothing, nothing! Only last time I saw it, it was on Scevola's shoulder." He glanced up at the sky.

"A little better than an hour ago."

"What was he doing?"

"Going into the yard to put it away."

"Well, now you go into the yard to put it away," said Peyrol, "and don't be long about it." He waited with his hand over his chin till his henchman reappeared before him. But Michel had not got over his surprise.

"He was going to bed, you know," he said.

"Eh, what? He was going. . . . He hasn't gone to sleep in the stable, perchance? He does sometimes, you know."

“I know. I looked. He isn’t there,” said Michel, very awake and round-eyed.

Peyrol started towards the cove. After three or four steps he turned round and found Michel motionless where he had left him.

“Come on,” he cried, “we will have to fit the tartane for sea directly the day breaks.”

Standing in the lieutenant’s room just clear of the open window, Arlette listened to their voices and to the sound of their footsteps diminishing down the slope. Before they had quite died out she became aware of a light tread approaching the door of the room.

Lieutenant Ral had spoken the truth. While in Toulon he had more than once said to himself that he could never go back to that fatal farmhouse. His mental state was quite pitiable. Honour, decency, every principle forbade him to trifle with the feelings of a poor creature with her mind darkened by a very terrifying, atrocious and, as it were, guilty experience. And suddenly he had given way to a base impulse and had betrayed himself by kissing her hand! He recognized with despair that this was no trifling, but that the impulse had come from the very depths of his being. It was an awful discovery for a man who on emerging from boyhood had laid for himself a rigidly straight line of conduct amongst the unbridled passions and the clamouring falsehoods of revolution which seemed to have destroyed in him all capacity for the softer emotions. Taciturn and guarded, he had formed no intimacies. Relations he had none. He had kept clear of social connections. It was in his character. At first he visited Escampobar because when he took his leave he had no place in the world to go to, and a few days there were a complete change from the odious town. He enjoyed the sense of remoteness from ordinary mankind. He had developed a liking for old Peyrol, the only man who had nothing to do with the revolution — -who had not even seen it at work. The sincere lawlessness of the ex-Brother of the Coast was refreshing. That one was neither a hypocrite nor a fool. When he robbed or killed it was not in the name of the sacred revolutionary principles or for the love of humanity.

Of course Ral had remarked at once Arlette’s black, profound and unquiet eyes and the persistent dim smile on her lips, her mysterious silences and the rare sound of her voice which made a caress of every word. He heard something of her story from the reluctant Peyrol who did not care to talk about it. It awakened in Ral more bitter indignation than pity. But it

stimulated his imagination, confirmed him in that scorn and angry loathing for the revolution he had felt as a boy and had nursed secretly ever since. She attracted him by her unapproachable aspect. Later he tried not to notice that, in common parlance, she was inclined to hang about him. He used to catch her gazing at him stealthily. But he was free from masculine vanity. It was one day in Toulon that it suddenly dawned on him what her mute interest in his person might mean. He was then sitting outside a caf sipping some drink or other with three or four officers, and not listening to their uninteresting conversation. He marvelled that this sort of illumination should come to him like this, under these circumstances; that he should have thought of her while seated in the street with these men round him, in the midst of more or less professional talk! And then it suddenly dawned on him that he had been thinking of nothing but that woman for days.

He got up brusquely, flung the money for his drink on the table, and without a word left his companions. But he had the reputation of an eccentric man and they did not even comment on his abrupt departure. It was a clear evening. He walked straight out of town, and that night wandered beyond the fortifications, not noticing the direction he took. All the countryside was asleep. There was not a human being stirring, and his progress in that desolate part of the country between the forts could have been traced only by the barking of dogs in the rare hamlets and scattered habitations.

“What has become of my rectitude, of my self-respect, of the firmness of my mind?” he asked himself pedantically. “I have let myself be mastered by an unworthy passion for a mere mortal envelope, stained with crime and without a mind.”

His despair at this awful discovery was so profound that if he had not been in uniform he would have tried to commit suicide with the small pistol he had in his pocket. He shrank from the act, and the thought of the sensation it would produce, from the gossip and comments it would raise, the dishonouring suspicions it would provoke. “No,” he said to himself, “what I will have to do is to unmark my linen, put on civilian old clothes and walk out much farther away, miles beyond the forts, hide myself in some wood or in an overgrown hollow and put an end to my life there. The gendarmes or a garde-champetre discovering my body after a few days, a complete stranger without marks of identity, and being unable to find out

anything about me, will give me an obscure burial in some village churchyard.”

On that resolution he turned back abruptly and at daybreak found himself outside the gate of the town. He had to wait till it was opened, and then the morning was so far advanced that he had to go straight to work at his office at the Toulon Admiralty. Nobody noticed anything peculiar about him that day. He went through his routine tasks with outward composure, but all the same he never ceased arguing with himself. By the time he returned to his quarters he had come to the conclusion that as an officer in war-time he had no right to take his own life. His principles would not permit him to do that. In this reasoning he was perfectly sincere. During a deadly struggle against an irreconcilable enemy his life belonged to his country. But there were moments when his loneliness, haunted by the forbidden vision of Escampobar with the figure of that distracted girl, mysterious, awful, pale, irresistible in her strangeness, passing along the walls, appearing on the hill-paths, looking out of the window, became unbearable. He spent hours of solitary anguish shut up in his quarters, and the opinion amongst his comrades was that Ral’s misanthropy was getting beyond all bounds.

One day it dawned upon him clearly that he could not stand this. It affected his power of thinking. “I shall begin to talk nonsense to people,” he said to himself. “Hasn’t there been once a poor devil who fell in love with a picture or a statue? He used to go and contemplate it. His misfortune cannot be compared with mine! Well, I will go to look at her as at a picture too; a picture as untouchable as if it had been under glass.” And he went on a visit to Escampobar at the very first opportunity. He made up for himself a repellent face, he clung to Peyrol for society, out there on the bench, both with their arms folded and gazing into space. But whenever Arlette crossed his line of sight it was as if something had moved in his breast. Yet these visits made life just bearable; they enabled him to attend to his work without beginning to talk nonsense to people. He said to himself that he was strong enough to rise above temptation, that he would never overstep the line; but it had happened to him upstairs in his room at the farm, to weep tears of sheer tenderness while thinking of his fate. These tears would put out for a while the gnawing fire of his passion. He assumed austerity like an armour and in his prudence he, as a matter of fact, looked very seldom at Arlette for fear of being caught in the act.

The discovery that she had taken to wandering at night had upset him all the same, because that sort of thing was unaccountable. It gave him a shock which unsettled, not his resolution, but his fortitude. That morning he had allowed himself, while she was waiting on him, to be caught looking at her and then, losing his self-control, had given her that kiss on the hand. Directly he had done it he was appalled. He had overstepped the line. Under the circumstances this was an absolute moral disaster. The full consciousness of it came to him slowly. In fact this moment of fatal weakness was one of the reasons why he had let himself be sent off so unceremoniously by Peyrol to Toulon. Even while crossing over he thought the only thing was not to come back any more. Yet while battling with himself he went on with the execution of the plan. A bitter irony presided over his dual state. Before leaving the Admiral who had received him in full uniform in a room lighted by a single candle, he was suddenly moved to say: "I suppose if there is no other way I am authorized to go myself," and the Admiral had answered: "I didn't contemplate that, but if you are willing I don't see any objection. I would only advise you to go in uniform in the character of an officer entrusted with dispatches. No doubt in time the Government would arrange for your exchange. But bear in mind that it would be a long captivity, and you must understand it might affect your promotion."

At the foot of the grand staircase in the lighted hall of the official building Ral suddenly thought: "And now I must go back to Escampobar." Indeed he had to go to Escampobar because the false dispatches were there in the valise he had left behind. He couldn't go back to the Admiral and explain that he had lost them. They would look on him as an unutterable idiot or a man gone mad. While walking to the quay where the naval boat was waiting for him he said to himself. "This, in truth, is my last visit for years — - perhaps for life."

Going back in the boat, notwithstanding that the breeze was very light, he would not let the men take to the oars. He didn't want to return before the women had gone to bed. He said to himself that the proper and honest thing to do was not to see Arlette again. He even managed to persuade himself that his uncontrolled impulse had had no meaning for that witless and unhappy creature. She had neither started nor exclaimed; she had made no sign. She had remained passive and then she had backed away and sat down quietly. He could not even remember that she had coloured at all. As to

himself, he had enough self-control to rise from the table and go out without looking at her again. Neither did she make a sign. What could startle that body without mind? She had made nothing of it, he thought with self-contempt. ``Body without mind! Body without mind!” he repeated with angry derision directed at himself. And all at once he thought: ``No. It isn’t that. All in her is mystery, seduction, enchantment. And then — -what do I care for her mind!”

This thought wrung from him a faint groan so that the coxswain asked respectfully: ``Are you in pain, lieutenant?” ``It’s nothing,” he muttered and set his teeth with the desperation of a man under torture.

While talking with Peyrol outside the house, the words ``I won’t see her again,” and ``body without mind” rang through his head. By the time he had left Peyrol and walked up the stairs his endurance was absolutely at an end. All he wanted was to be alone. Going along the dark, passage he noticed that the door of Catherine’s room was standing ajar. But that did not arrest his attention. He was approaching a state of insensibility. As he put his hand on the door handle of his room he said to himself. ``It will soon be over!”

He was so tired out that he was almost unable to hold up his head, and on going in he didn’t see Arlette, who stood against the wall on one side of the window, out of the moonlight and in the darkest corner of the room. He only became aware of somebody’s presence in the room as she flitted past him with the faintest possible rustle, when he staggered back two paces and heard behind him the key being turned in the lock. If the whole house had fallen into ruins, bringing him to the ground, he could not have been more overwhelmed and, in a manner, more utterly bereft of all his senses. The first that came back to him was the sense of touch when Arlette seized his hand. He regained his hearing next. She was whispering to him: ``At last. At last! But you are careless. If it had been Scevola instead of me in this room you would have been dead now. I have seen him at work.” He felt a significant pressure on his hand, but he couldn’t see her properly yet, though he was aware of her nearness with every fibre of his body. ``It wasn’t yesterday though,” she added in a low tone. Then suddenly: ``Come to the window so that I may look at you.”

A great square of moonlight lay on the floor. He obeyed the tug like a little child. She caught hold of his other hand as it hung by his side. He was rigid all over, without joints, and it did not seem to him that he was



breathing. With her face a little below his she stared at him closely, whispering gently: "Eugne, Eugene," and suddenly the livid immobility of his face frightened her. "You say nothing. You look ill. What is the matter? Are you hurt?" She let go his insensitive hands and began to feel him all over for evidence of some injury. She even snatched off his hat and flung it away in her haste to discover that his head was unharmed; but finding no sign of bodily damage, she calmed down like a sensible, practical person. With her hands clasped round his neck she hung back a little. Her little even teeth gleamed, her black eyes, immensely profound, looked into his, not with a transport of passion or fear but with a sort of reposeful satisfaction, with a searching and appropriating expression. He came back to life with a low and reckless exclamation, felt horribly insecure at once as if he were standing on a lofty pinnacle above a noise as of breaking waves in his ears, in fear lest her fingers should part and she would fall off and be lost to him for ever. He flung his arms round her waist and hugged her close to his breast. In the great silence, in the bright moonlight falling through the window, they stood like that for a long, long time. He looked at her head resting on his shoulder. Her eyes were closed and the expression of her unsmiling face was that of a delightful dream, something infinitely ethereal, peaceful and, as it were, eternal. Its appeal pierced his heart with a pointed sweetness. "She is exquisite. It's a miracle," he thought with a snort of terror. "It's impossible."

She made a movement to disengage herself, and instinctively he resisted, pressing her closer to his breast. She yielded for a moment and then tried again. He let her go. She stood at arm's length, her hands on his shoulders, and her charm struck him suddenly as funny in the seriousness of expression as of a very capable, practical woman.

"All this is very well," she said in a businesslike undertone. "We will have to think how to get away from here. I don't mean now, this moment," she added, feeling his slight start. "Scevola is thirsting for your blood." She detached one hand to point a finger at the inner wall of the room, and lowered her voice. "He's there, you know. Don't trust Peyrol either. I was looking at you two out there. He has changed. I can trust him no longer." Her murmur vibrated. "He and Catherine behave strangely. I don't know what came to them. He doesn't talk to me. When I sit down near him he turns his shoulder to me. . . ."

She felt Ral sway under her hands, paused in concern and said: "You are tired." But as he didn't move, she actually led him to a chair, pushed him into it, and sat on the floor at his feet. She rested her head against his knees and kept possession of one of his hands. A sigh escaped her. "I knew this was going to be," she said very low. "But I was taken by surprise."

"Oh, you knew it was going to be," he repeated faintly.

"Yes! I had prayed for it. Have you ever been prayed for, Eugene?" she asked, lingering on his name.

"Not since I was a child," answered Ral in a sombre tone.

"Oh yes! You have been prayed for to-day. I went down to the church. . . ."

Ral could hardly believe his ears. . . . The abb let me in by the sacristy door. He told me to renounce the world. I was ready to renounce anything for you." Ral, turning his face to the darkest part of the room, seemed to see the spectre of fatality awaiting its time to move forward and crush that calm, confident joy. He shook off the dreadful illusion, raised her hand to his lips for a lingering kiss, and then asked:

"So you knew that it was going to be? Everything? Yes! And of me, what did you think?"

She pressed strongly the hand to which she had been clinging all the time. "I thought this."

"But what did you think of my conduct at times? You see, I did not know what was going to be. I . . . I was afraid," he added under his breath.

"Conduct? What conduct? You came, you went. When you were not here I thought of you, and when you were here I could look my fill at you. I tell you I knew how it was going to be. I was not afraid then."

"You went about with a little smile," he whispered, as one would mention an inconceivable marvel.

"I was warm and quiet," murmured Arlette, as if on the borders of dreamland. Tender murmurs flowed from her lips describing a state of blissful tranquillity in phrases that sounded like the veriest nonsense, incredible, convincing and soothing to Ral's conscience.

"You were perfect," it went on. "Whenever you came near me everything seemed different."

"What do you mean? How different?"

"Altogether. The light, the very stones of the house, the hills, the little flowers amongst the rocks! Even Nanette was different."

Nanette was a white Angora with long silken hair, a pet that lived mostly in the yard.

“Oh, Nanette was different too,” said Ral, whom delight in the modulations of that voice had cut off from all reality, and even from a consciousness of himself, while he sat stooping over that head resting against his knee, the soft grip of her hand being his only contact with the world.

“Yes. Prettier. It’s only the people. . . . She ceased on an uncertain note. The crested wave of enchantment seemed to have passed over his head ebbing out faster than the sea, leaving the dreary expanses of the sand. He felt a chill at the roots of his hair.

“What people?” he asked.

“They are so changed. Listen, to-night while you were away — -why did you go away? — -I caught those two in the kitchen, saying nothing to each other. That Peyrol — -he is terrible.”

He was struck by the tone of awe, by its profound conviction. He could not know that Peyrol, unforeseen, unexpected, inexplicable, had given by his mere appearance at Escampobar a moral and even a physical jolt to all her being, that he was to her an immense figure, like a messenger from the unknown entering the solitude of Escampobar; something immensely strong, with inexhaustible power, unaffected by familiarity and remaining invincible.

“He will say nothing, he will listen to nothing. He can do what he likes.”

“Can he?” muttered Ral.

She sat up on the floor, moved her head up and down several times as if to say that there could be no doubt about that.

“Is he, too, thirsting for my blood?” asked Ral bitterly.

“No, no. It isn’t that. You could defend yourself. I could watch over you. I have been watching over you. Only two nights ago I thought I heard noises outside and I went downstairs, fearing for you; your window was open but I could see nobody, and yet I felt. . . . No, it isn’t that! It’s worse. I don’t know what he wants to do. I can’t help being fond of him, but I begin to fear him now. When he first came here and I saw him he was just the same — -only his hair was not so white — -big, quiet. It seemed to me that something moved in my head. He was gentle, you know. I had to smile at him. It was as if I had recognized him. I said to myself. ‘That’s he, the man himself.’ “

“And when I came?” asked Ral with a feeling of dismay.

“You! You were expected,” she said in a low tone with a slight tinge of surprise at the question, but still evidently thinking of the Peyrol mystery. “Yes, I caught them at it last evening, he and Catherine in the kitchen, looking at each other and as quiet as mice. I told him he couldn’t order me about. Oh, mon chri, mon chri, don’t you listen to Peyrol — - don’t let him . . .”

With only a slight touch on his knee she sprang to her feet. Ral stood up too.

“He can do nothing to me,” he mumbled.

“Don’t tell him anything. Nobody can guess what he thinks, and now even I cannot tell what he means when he speaks. It was as if he knew a secret.” She put an accent into those words which made Ral feel moved almost to tears. He repeated that Peyrol could have no influence over him, and he felt that he was speaking the truth. He was in the power of his own word. Ever since he had left the Admiral in a gold-embroidered uniform, impatient to return to his guests, he was on a service for which he had volunteered. For a moment he had the sensation of an iron hoop very tight round his chest. She peered at his face closely, and it was more than he could bear.

“All right. I’ll be careful,” he said. “And Catherine, is she also dangerous?”

In the sheen of the moonlight Arlette, her neck and head above the gleams of the fichu, visible and elusive, smiled at him and moved a step closer.

“Poor Aunt Catherine,” she said. . . . “Put your arm round me, Eugne. . . . She can do nothing. She used to follow me with her eyes always. She thought I didn’t notice, but I did. And now she seems unable to look me in the face. Peyrol too, for that matter. He used to follow me with his eyes. Often I wondered what made them look at me like that. Can you tell, Eugne? But it’s all changed now.”

“Yes, it is all changed,” said Ral in a tone which he tried to make as light as possible. “Does Catherine know you are here?”

“When we went upstairs this evening I lay down all dressed on my bed and she sat on hers. The candle was out, but in the moonlight I could see her quite plainly with her hands on her lap. When I could lie still no longer I simply got up and went out of the room. She was still sitting at the foot of

her bed. All I did was to put my finger on my lips and then she dropped her head. I don't think I quite closed the door. . . . Hold me tighter, Eugne, I am tired. . . . Strange, you know! Formerly, a long time ago, before I ever saw you, I never rested and never felt tired." She stopped her murmur suddenly and lifted a finger recommending silence. She listened and Ral listened too, he did not know for what; and in this sudden concentration on a point, all that had happened since he had entered the room seemed to him a dream in its improbability and in the more than life-like force dreams have in their inconsequence. Even the woman letting herself go on his arm seemed to have no weight as it might have happened in a dream.

"She is there," breathed Arlette suddenly, rising on tiptoe to reach up to his ear. "She must have heard you go past."

"Where is she?" asked Ral with the same intense secrecy.

"Outside the door. She must have been listening to the murmur of our voices. . . ." Arlette breathed into his ear as if relating an enormity. "She told me one day that I was one of those who are fit for no man's arms."

At this he flung his other arm round her and looked into her enlarged as if frightened eyes, while she clasped him with all her strength and they stood like that a long time, lips pressed on lips without a kiss, and breathless in the closeness of their contact. To him the stillness seemed to extend to the limits of the universe. The thought "Am I going to die?" flashed through that stillness and lost itself in it like a spark flying in an everlasting night. The only result of it was the tightening of his hold on Arlette.

An aged and uncertain voice was heard uttering the word "Arlette." Catherine, who had been listening to their murmurs, could not bear the long silence. They heard her trembling tones as distinctly as though she had been in the room. Ral felt as if it had saved his life. They separated silently.

"Go away," called out Arlette.

"Arl — — — . . ."

"Be quiet," she cried louder. "You can do nothing."

"Arlette," came through the door, tremulous and commanding.

"She will wake up Scevola," remarked Arlette to Ral in a conversational tone. And they both waited for sounds that did not come. Arlette pointed her finger at the wall. "He is there, you know."

"He is asleep," muttered Ral. But the thought "I am lost" which he formulated in his mind had no reference to Scevola.

“He is afraid,” said Arlette contemptuously in an undertone. “But that means little. He would quake with fright one moment and rush out to do murder the next.”

Slowly, as if drawn by the irresistible authority of the old woman, they had been moving towards the door. Ral thought with the sudden enlightenment of passion: “If she does not go now I won’t have the strength to part from her in the morning.” He had no image of death before his eyes but of a long and intolerable separation. A sigh verging upon a moan reached them from the other side of the door and made the air around them heavy with sorrow against which locks and keys will not avail.

“You had better go to her,” he whispered in a penetrating tone.

“Of course I will,” said Arlette with some feeling. “Poor old thing. She and I have only each other in the world, but I am the daughter here, she must do what I tell her.” With one of her hands on Ral’s shoulder she put her mouth close to the door and said distinctly:

“I am coming directly. Go back to your room and wait for me,” as if she had no doubt of being obeyed.

A profound silence ensued. Perhaps Catherine had gone already. Ral and Arlette stood still for a whole minute as if both had been changed into stone.

“Go now,” said Ral in a hoarse, hardly audible voice.

She gave him a quick kiss on the lips and again they stood like a pair of enchanted lovers bewitched into immobility.

“If she stays on,” thought Ral, “I shall never have the courage to tear myself away, and then I shall have to blow my brains out.” But when at last she moved he seized her again and held her as if she had been his very life. When he let her go he was appalled by hearing a very faint laugh of her secret joy.

“Why do you laugh?” he asked in a scared tone.

She stopped to answer him over her shoulder.

“I laughed because I thought of all the days to come. Days and days and days. Have you thought of them?”

“Yes,” Ral faltered, like a man stabbed to the heart, holding the door half open. And he was glad to have something to hold on to.

She slipped out with a soft rustle of her silk skirt, but before he had time to close the door behind her she put back her arm for an instant. He had just time to press the palm of her hand to his lips. It was cool. She snatched it

away and he had the strength of mind to shut the door after her. He felt like a man chained to the wall and dying of thirst, from whom a cold drink is snatched away. The room became dark suddenly. He thought, "A cloud over the moon, a cloud over the moon, an enormous cloud," while he walked rigidly to the window, insecure and swaying as if on a tight rope. After a moment he perceived the moon in a sky on which there was no sign of the smallest cloud anywhere. He said to himself, "I suppose I nearly died just now. But no," he went on thinking with deliberate cruelty, "Oh, no, I shall not die. I shall only suffer, suffer, suffer. . . ."

"Suffer, suffer." Only by stumbling against the side of the bed did he discover that he had gone away from the window. At once he flung himself violently on the bed with his face buried in the pillow, which he bit to restrain the cry of distress about to burst through his lips. Natures schooled into insensibility when once overcome by a mastering passion are like vanquished giants ready for despair. He, a man on service, felt himself shrinking from death and that doubt contained in itself all possible doubts of his own fortitude. The only thing he knew was that he would be gone to-morrow morning. He shuddered along his whole extended length, then lay still gripping a handful of bedclothes in each hand to prevent himself from leaping up in panicky restlessness. He was saying to himself pedantically, "I must lie down and rest, I must rest to have strength for to-morrow, I must rest," while the tremendous struggle to keep still broke out in waves of perspiration on his forehead. At last sudden oblivion must have descended on him because he turned over and sat up suddenly with the sound of the word "Ecoutez" in his ears.

A strange, dim, cold light filled the room; a light he did not recognize for anything he had known before, and at the foot of his bed stood a figure in dark garments with a dark shawl over its head, with a fleshless predatory face and dark hollows for its eyes, silent, expectant, implacable. . . . Is this death?" he asked himself, staring at it terrified. It resembled Catherine. It said again: "Ecoutez." He took away his eyes from it and glancing down noticed that his clothes were torn open on his chest. He would not look up at that thing, whatever it was, spectre or old woman, and said:

"Yes, I hear you."

"You are an honest man." It was Catherine's unemotional voice. "The day has broken. You will go away."

"Yes," he said without raising his head.

“She is asleep,” went on Catherine or whoever it was, “exhausted, and you would have to shake her hard before she would wake. You will go. You know,” the voice continued inflexibly, “she is my niece, and you know that there is death in the folds of her skirt and blood about her feet. She is for no man.”

Ral felt all the anguish of an unearthly experience. This thing that looked like Catherine and spoke like a cruel fate had to be faced. He raised his head in this light that seemed to him appalling and not of this world.

“Listen well to me, you too,” he said. “If she had all the madness of the world and the sin of all the murders of the Revolution on her shoulders, I would still hug her to my breast. Do you understand?”

The apparition which resembled Catherine lowered and raised its hooded head slowly. “There was a time when I could have hugged l’enfer mme to my breast. He went away. He had his vow. You have only your honesty. You will go.”

“I have my duty,” said Lieutenant Ral in measured tones, as if calmed by the excess of horror that old woman inspired him with.

“Go without disturbing her, without looking at her.”

“I will carry my shoes in my hand,” he said. He sighed deeply and felt as if sleepy. “It is very early,” he muttered.

“Peyrol is already down at the well,” announced Catherine. “What can he be doing there all this time?” she added in a troubled voice. Ral, with his feet now on the ground, gave her a side glance; but she was already gliding away, and when he looked again she had vanished from the room and the door was shut.



## CHAPTER XV

Catherine, going downstairs, found Peyrol still at the well. He seemed to be looking into it with extreme interest.

“Your coffee is ready, Peyrol,” she shouted to him from the doorway.

He turned very sharply like a man surprised and came along smiling.

“That’s pleasant news, Mademoiselle Catherine,” he said. “You are down early.”

“Yes,” she admitted, “but you too, Peyrol. Is Michel about? Let him come and have some coffee too.”

“Michel’s at the tartane. Perhaps you don’t know that she is going to make a little voyage.” He drank a mouthful of coffee and took a bite out of a slice of bread. He was hungry. He had been up all night and had even had a conversation with Citizen Scevola. He had also done some work with Michel after daylight; however, there had not been much to do because the tartane was always kept ready for sea. Then after having again locked up Citizen Scevola, who was extremely concerned as to what was going to happen to him but was left in a state of uncertainty, he had come up to the farm, had gone upstairs where he was busy with various things for a time, and then had stolen down very cautiously to the well, where Catherine, whom he had not expected downstairs so early, had seen him before she went into Lieutenant Ral’s room. While he enjoyed his coffee he listened without any signs of surprise to Catherine’s comments upon the disappearance of Scevola. She had looked into his den. He had not slept on his pallet last night, of that she was certain, and he was nowhere to be seen, not even in the most distant field, from the points of vantage around the farm. It was inconceivable that he should have slipped away to Madrague, where he disliked to go, or to the village, where he was afraid to go. Peyrol remarked that whatever happened to him he was no great loss, but Catherine was not to be soothed.

“It frightens a body,” she said. “He may be hiding somewhere to jump on one treacherously. You know what I mean, Peyrol.”

“Well, the lieutenant will have nothing to fear, as he’s going away. As to myself, Scevola and I are good friends. I had a long talk with him quite recently. You two women can manage him perfectly; and then, who knows, perhaps he has gone away for good.”

Catherine stared at him, if such a word as stare can be applied to a profound contemplative gaze. “The lieutenant has nothing to fear from

him," she repeated cautiously.

"No, he is going away. Didn't you know it?" The old woman continued to look at him profoundly. "Yes, he is on service."

For another minute or so Catherine continued silent in her contemplative attitude. Then her hesitation came to an end. She could not resist the desire to inform Peyrol of the events of the night. As she went on Peyrol forgot the half-full bowl of coffee and his half-eaten piece of bread. Catherine's voice flowed with austerity. She stood there, imposing and solemn like a peasant-priestess. The relation of what had been to her a soul-shaking experience did not take much time, and she finished with the words, "The lieutenant is an honest man." And after a pause she insisted further: "There is no denying it. He has acted like an honest man."

For a moment longer Peyrol continued to look at the coffee in the bowl, then without warning got up with such violence that the chair behind him was thrown back upon the flagstones.

"Where is he, that honest man?" he shouted suddenly in stentorian tones which not only caused Catherine to raise her hands, but frightened himself, and he dropped at once to a mere forcible utterance. "Where is that man? Let me see him."

Even Catherine's hieratic composure was disturbed. "Why," she said, looking really disconcerted, "he will be down here directly. This bowl of coffee is for him."

Peyrol made as if to leave the kitchen, but Catherine stopped him. "For God's sake, Monsieur Peyrol," she said, half in entreaty and half in command, "don't wake up the child. Let her sleep. Oh, let her sleep! Don't wake her up. God only knows how long it is since she has slept properly. I could not tell you. I daren't think of it." She was shocked by hearing Peyrol declare: "All this is confounded nonsense." But he sat down again, seemed to catch sight of the coffee bowl and emptied what was left in it down his throat.

"I don't want her on my hands more crazy than she has been before," said Catherine, in a sort of exasperation but in a very low tone. This phrase in its selfish form expressed a real and profound compassion for her niece. She dreaded the moment when that fatal Arlette would wake up and the dreadful complications of life which her slumbers had suspended would have to be picked up again. Peyrol fidgeted on his seat.

“And so he told you he was going? He actually did tell you that?” he asked.

“He promised to go before the child wakes up. . . . At once.”

“But, *sacr nom d’un chien*, there is never any wind before eleven o’clock,” Peyrol exclaimed in a tone of profound annoyance, yet trying to moderate his voice, while Catherine, indulgent to his changing moods, only compressed her lips and nodded at him soothingly. “It is impossible to work with people like that,” he mumbled.

“Do you know, Monsieur Peyrol, that she has been to see the priest?” Catherine was heard suddenly, towering above her end of the table. The two women had had a talk before Arlette had been induced by her aunt to lie down. Peyrol gave a start.

“What? Priest? . . . Now look here, Catherine,” he went on with repressed ferocity, “do you imagine that all this interests me in the least?”

“I can think of nothing but that niece of mine. We two have nobody but each other in the world,” she went on, reproducing the very phrase Arlette had used to Ral. She seemed to be thinking aloud, but noticed that Peyrol was listening with attention. “He wanted to shut her up from everybody,” and the old woman clasped her meagre hands with a sudden gesture. “I suppose there are still some convents about the world.”

“You and the patronne are mad together,” declared Peyrol. “All this only shows what an ass the cur is. I don’t know much about these things, though I have seen some nuns in my time, and some very queer ones too, but it seems to me that they don’t take crazy people into convents. Don’t you be afraid. I tell you that.” He stopped because the inner door of the kitchen came open and Lieutenant Ral stepped in. His sword hung on his forearm by the belt, his hat was on his head. He dropped his little valise on the floor and sat down in the nearest chair to put on his shoes which he had brought down in his other hand. Then he came up to the table. Peyrol, who had kept his eyes on him, thought: “Here is one who looks like a moth scorched in the fire.” Ral’s eyes were sunk, his cheeks seemed hollowed and the whole face had an arid and dry aspect.

“Well, you are in a fine state for the work of deceiving the enemy,” Peyrol observed. “Why, to look at you, nobody would believe a word you said. You are not going to be ill, I hope. You are on service. You haven’t got the right to be ill. I say, Mademoiselle Catherine, produce the bottle — -you know, my private bottle. . . .” He snatched it from Catherine’s hand, poured

some brandy into the lieutenant's coffee, pushed the bowl towards him and waited. "Nom de nom!" he said forcibly, "don't you know what this is for? It's for you to drink." Ral obeyed with a strange, automatic docility. "And now," said Peyrol, getting up, "I will go to my room and shave. This is a great day — -the day we are going to see the lieutenant off."

Till then Ral had not uttered a word, but directly the door closed behind Peyrol he raised his head.

"Catherine!" His voice was like a rustle in his throat. She was looking at him steadily and he continued: "Listen, when she finds I am gone you tell her I will return soon. To-morrow. Always to-morrow."

"Yes, my good Monsieur," said Catherine in an unmoved voice but clasping her hands convulsively. "There is nothing else I would dare tell her!"

"She will believe you," whispered Ral wildly.

"Yes! She will believe me," repeated Catherine in a mournful tone.

Ral got up, put the sword-belt over his head, picked up the valise. There was a little flush on his cheeks.

"Adieu," he said to the silent old woman. She made no answer, but as he turned away she raised her hand a little, hesitated, and let it fall again. It seemed to her that the women of Escampobar had been singled out for divine wrath. Her niece appeared to her like the scapegoat charged with all the murders and blasphemies of the Revolution. She herself too had been cast out from the grace of God. But that had been a long time ago. She had made her peace with Heaven since. Again she raised her hand and, this time, made in the air the sign of the cross at the back of Lieutenant Ral.

Meanwhile upstairs Peyrol, scraping his big flat cheek with an English razor-blade at the window, saw Lieutenant Ral on the path to the shore; and high above there, commanding a vast view of sea and land, he shrugged his shoulders impatiently with no visible provocation. One could not trust those epaulette-wearers. They would cram a fellow's head with notions either for their own sake or for the sake of the service. Still, he was too old a bird to be caught with chaff; and besides, that long-legged stiff beggar going down the path with all his officer airs, was honest enough. At any rate he knew a seaman when he saw one, though he was as cold-blooded as a fish. Peyrol had a smile which was a little awry.

Cleaning the razor-blade (one of a set of twelve in a case) he had a vision of a brilliantly hazy ocean and an English Indiaman with her yards braced

all ways, her canvas blowing loose above her bloodstained decks overrun by a lot of privateersmen and with the island of Ceylon swelling like a thin blue cloud on the far horizon. He had always wished to own a set of English blades and there he had got it, fell over it as it were, lying on the floor of a cabin which had been already ransacked. ``For good steel — -it was good steel,” he thought looking at the blade fixedly. And there it was, nearly worn out. The others too. That steel! And here he was holding the case in his hand as though he had just picked it up from the floor. Same case. Same man. And the steel worn out.

He shut the case brusquely, flung it into his sea-chest which was standing open, and slammed the lid down. The feeling which was in his breast and had been known to more articulate men than himself, was that life was a dream less substantial than the vision of Ceylon lying like a cloud on the sea. Dream left astern. Dream straight ahead. This disenchanted philosophy took the shape of fierce swearing. ``Sacr nom de nom de nom. . . . Tonnerre de bon Dieu!”

While tying his neckcloth he handled it with fury as though he meant to strangle himself with it. He rammed a soft cap on to his venerable locks recklessly, seized his cudgel — -but before leaving the room walked up to the window giving on the east. He could not see the Petite Passe on account of the lookout hill, but to the left a great portion of the Hyres roadstead lay spread out before him, pale grey in the morning light, with the land about Cape Blanc swelling in the distance with all its details blurred as yet and only one conspicuous object presenting to his sight something that might have been a lighthouse by its shape, but which Peyrol knew very well was the English corvette already under way and with all her canvas set.

This sight pleased Peyrol mainly because he had expected it. The Englishman was doing exactly what he had expected he would do, and Peyrol looked towards the English cruiser with a smile of malicious triumph as if he were confronting her captain. For some reason or other he imagined Captain Vincent as long-faced, with yellow teeth and a wig, whereas that officer wore his own hair and had a set of teeth which would have done honour to a London belle and was really the hidden cause of Captain Vincent appearing so often wreathed in smiles.

That ship at this great distance and steering in his direction held Peyrol at the window long enough for the increasing light of the morning to burst into sunshine, colouring and filling-in the flat outline of the land with tints of

wood and rock and field, with clear dots of buildings enlivening the view. The sun threw a sort of halo around the ship. Recollecting himself, Peyrol left the room and shut the door quietly. Quietly too he descended the stairs from his garret. On the landing he underwent a short inward struggle, at the end of which he approached the door of Catherine's room and opening it a little, put his head in. Across the whole width of it he saw Arlette fast asleep. Her aunt had thrown a light coverlet over her. Her low shoes stood at the foot of the bed. Her black hair lay loose on the pillow; and Peyrol's gaze became arrested by the long eyelashes on her pale cheek. Suddenly he fancied she moved, and he withdrew his head sharply, pulling the door to. He listened for a moment as if tempted to open it again, but judging it too risky, continued on his way downstairs. At his reappearance in the kitchen Catherine turned sharply. She was dressed for the day, with a big white cap on her head, a black bodice and a brown skirt with ample folds. She had a pair of varnished sabots on her feet over her shoes.

“No signs of Scevola,” she said, advancing towards Peyrol. “And Michel too has not been here yet.”

Peyrol thought that if she had been only shorter, what with her black eyes and slightly curved nose she would have looked like a witch. But witches can read people's thoughts, and he looked openly at Catherine with the pleasant conviction that she could not read his thoughts. He said:

“I took good care not to make any noise upstairs, Mademoiselle Catherine. When I am gone the house will be empty and quiet enough.”

She had a curious expression. She struck Peyrol suddenly as if she were lost in that kitchen in which A she had reigned for many years. He continued:

“You will be alone all the morning.”

She seemed to be listening to some distant sound, and after Peyrol had added, “Everything is all right now,” she nodded and after a moment said in a manner that for her was unexpectedly impulsive:

“Monsieur Peyrol, I am tired of life.”

He shrugged his shoulders and with somewhat sinister jocosity remarked:

“I will tell you what it is; you ought to have been married.”

She turned her back on him abruptly.

“No offence,” Peyrol excused himself in a tone of gloom rather than of apology. “It is no use to attach any importance to things. What is this life? Phew! Nobody can remember one-tenth of it. Here I am; and, you know, I

would bet that if one of my old-time chums came along and saw me like this, here with you — -I mean one of those chums that stand up for a fellow in a scrimmage and look after him should he be hurt — -well, I bet,” he repeated, “he wouldn’t know me. He would say to himself perhaps, ‘Hullo! here’s a comfortable married couple.’ “

He paused. Catherine, with her back to him and calling him, not “Monsieur,” but “Peyrol,” tout court, remarked, not exactly with displeasure, but rather with an ominous accent that this was no time for idle talk. Peyrol, however, continued, though his tone was very far from being that of idle talk:

“But you see, Mademoiselle Catherine, you were not like the others. You allowed yourself to be struck all of a heap, and at the same time you were too hard on yourself.”

Her long thin frame, bent low to work the bellows under the enormous overmantel, she assented: “Perhaps! We Escampobar women were always hard on ourselves.”

“That’s what I say. If you had had things happen to you which happened to me. . . .”

“But you men, you are different. It doesn’t matter what you do. You have got your own strength. You need not be hard on yourselves. You go from one thing to another thoughtlessly.”

He remained looking at her searchingly with something like a hint of a smile on his shaven lips, but she turned away to the sink where one of the women working about the farm had deposited a great pile of vegetables. She started on them with a broken-bladed knife, preserving her sibylline air even in that homely occupation.

“It will be a good soup, I see, at noon to-day,” said the rover suddenly. He turned on his heels and went out through the salle. The whole world lay open to him, or at any rate the whole of the Mediterranean, viewed down the ravine between the two hills. The bell of the farm’s milch-cow, which had a talent for keeping herself invisible, reached him from the right, but he could not see as much as the tips of her horns, though he looked for them. He stepped out sturdily. He had not gone twenty yards down the ravine when another sound made him stand still as if changed into stone. It was a faint noise resembling very much the hollow rumble an empty farm-cart would make on a stony road, but Peyrol looked up at the sky, and though it was perfectly clear, he did not seem pleased with its aspect. He had a hill on

each side of him and the placid cove below his feet. He muttered ``H'm! Thunder at sunrise. It must be in the west. It only wanted that!" He feared it would first kill the little breeze there was and then knock the weather up altogether. For a moment all his faculties seemed paralyzed by that faint sound. On that sea ruled by the gods of Olympus he might have been a pagan mariner subject to Jupiter's caprices; but like a defiant pagan he shook his fist vaguely at space which answered him by a short and threatening mutter. Then he swung on his way till he caught sight of the two mastheads of the tartane, when he stopped to listen. No sound of any sort reached him from there, and he went on his way thinking, ``Go from one thing to another thoughtlessly! Indeed! . . . That's all old Catherine knows about it." He had so many things to think of that he did not know which to lay hold of first. He just let them lie jumbled up in his head. His feelings too were in a state of confusion, and vaguely he felt that his conduct was at the mercy of an internal conflict. The consciousness of that fact accounted perhaps for his sardonic attitude towards himself and outwardly towards those whom he perceived on board the tartane; and especially towards the lieutenant whom he saw sitting on the deck leaning against the head of the rudder, characteristically aloof from the two other persons on board. Michel, also characteristically, was standing on the top of the little cabin scuttle, obviously looking out for his ``matre." Citizen Scevola, sitting on deck, seemed at first sight to be at liberty, but as a matter of fact he was not. He was loosely tied up to a stanchion by three turns of the mainsheet with the knot in such a position that he could not get at it without attracting attention; and that situation seemed also somewhat characteristic of Citizen Scevola with its air of half liberty, half suspicion and, as it were, contemptuous restraint. The sans-culotte, whose late experiences had nearly unsettled his reason, first by their utter incomprehensibility and afterwards by the enigmatical attitude of Peyrol, had dropped his head and folded his arms on his breast. And that attitude was dubious too. It might have been resignation or it might have been profound sleep. The rover addressed himself first to the lieutenant.

``Le moment approche," said Peyrol with a queer twitch at a corner of his lip, while under his soft woollen cap his venerable locks stirred in the breath of a suddenly warm air. ``The great moment — -eh?"

He leaned over the big tiller, and seemed to be hovering above the lieutenant's shoulder.



“What’s this infernal company?” murmured the latter without even looking at Peyrol.

“All old friends — -quoi?” said Peyrol in a homely tone. “We will keep that little affair amongst ourselves. The fewer the men the greater the glory. Catherine is getting the vegetables ready for the noonday soup and the Englishman is coming down towards the Passe where he will arrive about noon too, ready to have his eye put out. You know, lieutenant, that will be your job. You may depend on me for sending you off when the moment comes. For what is it to you? You have no friends, you have not even a petite amie. As to expecting an old rover like me — -oh no, lieutenant! Of course liberty is sweet, but what do you know of it, you epaulette-wearers? Moreover, I am no good for quarter-deck talks and all that politeness.”

“I wish, Peyrol, you would not talk so much,” said Lieutenant Ral, turning his head slightly. He was struck by the strange expression on the old rover’s face. “And I don’t see what the actual moment matters. I am going to look for the fleet. All you have to do is to hoist the sails for me and then scramble ashore.”

“Very simple,” observed Peyrol through his teeth, and then began to sing:

“Quoique leurs chapeaux sont bien laids God-dam! Moi, j’aime les Anglais Ils ont un si bon caractre!”

“H! Citoyen!” and then remarked confidentially to Ral: “He isn’t asleep, you know, but he isn’t like the English, he has a sacr mauvais caractre. He got into his head,” continued Peyrol, in a loud and innocent tone, “that you locked him up in this cabin last night. Did you notice the venomous glance he gave you just now?”

Both Lieutenant Ral and the innocent Michel appeared surprised at his boisterousness; but all the time Peyrol was thinking: “I wish to goodness I knew how that thunderstorm is getting on and what course it is shaping. I can’t find that out unless I go up to the farm and get a view to the westward. It may be as far as the Rhne Valley; no doubt it is and it will come out of it too, curses on it. One won’t be able to reckon on half an hour of steady wind from any quarter.” He directed a look of ironic gaiety at all the faces in turn. Michel met it with a faithful-dog gaze and innocently open mouth. Scevola kept his chin buried on his chest. Lieutenant Ral was insensible to outward impressions and his absent stare made nothing of Peyrol. The rover himself presently fell into thought. The last stir of air died out in the little

basin, and the sun clearing Porquerolles inundated it with a sudden light in which Michel blinked like an owl.

“It’s hot early,” he announced aloud but only because he had formed the habit of talking to himself. He would not have presumed to offer an opinion unless asked by Peyrol.

His voice having recalled Peyrol to himself, he proposed to masthead the yards and even asked Lieutenant Ral to help in that operation which was accomplished in silence except for the faint squeaking of the blocks. The sails, however, were kept hauled up in the gear.

“Like this,” said Peyrol, “you have only to let go the ropes and you will be under canvas at once.”

Without answering Ral returned to his position by the rudder-head. He was saying to himself — -“I am sneaking off. No, there is honour, duty. And of course I will return. But when? They will forget all about me and I shall never be exchanged. This war may last for years, — -” and illogically he wished he could have had a God to whom he could pray for relief in his anguish. “She will be in despair,” he thought, writhing inwardly at the mental picture of a distracted Arlette. Life, however, had embittered his spirit early, and he said to himself: “But in a month’s time will she even give me a thought?” Instantly he felt remorseful with a remorse strong enough to lift him to his feet as if he were morally obliged to go up again and confess to Arlette this sacrilegious cynicism of thought. “I am mad,” he muttered, perching himself on the low rail. His lapse from faith plunged him into such a depth of unhappiness that he felt all his strength of will go out of him. He sat there apathetic and suffering. He meditated dully: “Young men have been known to die suddenly; why should not I? I am, as a matter of fact, at the end of my endurance. I am half dead already. Yes! but what is left of that life does not belong to me now.”

“Peyrol,” he said in such a piercing tone that even Scevola jerked his head up; but he made an effort to reduce his shrillness and went on speaking very carefully: “I have left a letter for the Secretary General at the Majorit to pay twenty-five hundred francs to Jean — -you are Jean, are you not? — -Peyrol, price of the tartane in which I sail. Is that right?”

“What did you do that for?” asked Peyrol with an extremely stony face. “To get me into trouble?”

“Don’t be a fool, gunner, nobody remembers your, name. It is buried under a stack of blackened paper. I must ask you to go there and tell them

that you have seen with your own eyes Lieutenant Ral sail away on his mission.”

The stoniness of Peyrol persisted but his eyes were full of fury. “Oh, yes, I see myself going there. Twenty-five hundred francs! Twenty-five hundred fiddlesticks.” His tone changed suddenly. “I heard some one say that you were an honest man, and I suppose this is a proof of it. Well, to the devil with your honesty.” He glared at the lieutenant and then thought: “He doesn’t even pretend to listen to what I say” — -and another sort of anger, partly contemptuous and with something of dim sympathy in it, replaced his downright fury. “Pah!” he said, spat over the side, and walking up to Ral with great deliberation, slapped him on the shoulder. The only effect of this proceeding was to make Ral look up at him without any expression whatever.

Peyrol then picked up the lieutenant’s valise and carried it down into the cuddy. As he passed by, Citizen Scevola uttered the word “Citoyen” but it was only when he came back again that Peyrol condescended to say, “Well?”

“What are you going to do with me?” asked Scevola.

“You would not give me an account of how you came on board this tartane,” said Peyrol in a tone that sounded almost friendly, “therefore I need not tell you what I will do with you.”

A low muttering of thunder followed so close upon his words that it might have come out of Peyrol’s own lips. The rover gazed uneasily at the sky. It was still clear overhead, and at the bottom of that little basin surrounded by rocks there was no view in any other direction; but even as he gazed there was a sort of flicker in the sunshine succeeded by a mighty but distant clap of thunder. For the next half hour Peyrol and Michel were busy ashore taking a long line from the tartane to the entrance of the little basin where they fastened the end of it to a bush. This was for the purpose of hauling the tartane out into the cove. Then they came aboard again. The bit of sky above their heads was still clear, but while walking with the hauling line near the cove Peyrol had got a glimpse of the edge of the cloud. The sun grew scorching all of a sudden, and in the stagnating air a mysterious change seemed to come over the quality and the colour of the light. Peyrol flung his cap on the deck, baring his head to the subtle menace of the breathless stillness of the air.

“Phew! a chauffe,” he muttered, rolling up the sleeves of his jacket. He wiped his forehead with his mighty forearm upon which a mermaid with an immensely long fishtail was tattooed. Perceiving the lieutenant’s belted sword lying on the deck, he picked it up and without any ceremony threw it down the cabin stairs. As he was passing again near Scevola, the sans-culotte raised his voice.

“I believe you are one of those wretches corrupted by English gold,” he cried like one inspired. His shining eyes, his red cheeks, testified to the fire of patriotism burning in his breast, and he used that conventional phrase of revolutionary time, a time when, intoxicated with oratory, he used to run about dealing death to traitors of both sexes and all ages. But his denunciation was received in such profound silence that his own belief in it wavered. His words had sunk into an abysmal stillness and the next sound was Peyrol speaking to Ral.

“I am afraid you will get very wet, lieutenant, before long,” and then, looking at Ral, he thought with great conviction: “Wet! He wouldn’t mind getting drowned.” Standing stock-still he fretted and fumed inwardly, wondering where precisely the English ship was by this time and where the devil that thunderstorm had got to: for the sky had become as mute as the oppressed earth. Ral asked:

“Is it not time to haul out, gunner?” And Peyrol said:

“There is not a breath of wind anywhere for miles.” He was gratified by the fairly loud mutter rolling apparently along the inland hills. Over the pool a little ragged cloud torn from the purple robe of the storm floated, arrested and thin like a bit of dark gauze.

Above at the farm Catherine had heard too the ominous mutter and came to the door of the salle. From there she could see the purple cloud itself, convoluted and solid, and its sinister shadow lying over the hills. The oncoming of the storm added to her sense of uneasiness at finding herself all alone in the house. Michel had not come up. She would have welcomed Michel, to whom she hardly ever spoke, simply as a person belonging to the usual order of things. She was not talkative, but somehow she would have liked somebody to speak to just for a moment. This cessation of all sound, voices or footsteps, around the buildings was not welcome; but looking at the cloud, she thought that there would be noise enough presently. However, stepping back into the kitchen, she was met by a sound that made her regret the oppressive silence, by its piercing and terrifying character; it

was a shriek in the upper part of the house where, as far as she knew, there was only Arlette asleep. In her attempt to cross the kitchen to the foot of the stairs the weight of her accumulated years fell upon the old woman. She felt suddenly very feeble and hardly able to breathe. And all at once the thought, ``Scevola! Was he murdering her up there?'' paralyzed the last remnant of her physical powers. What else could it be? She fell, as if shot, into a chair under the first shock and found herself unable to move. Only her brain remained active, and she raised her hands to her eyes as if to shut out the image of the horrors upstairs. She heard nothing more from above. Arlette was dead. She thought that now it was her turn. While her body quailed before the brutal violence, her weary spirit longed ardently for the end. Let him come! Let all this be over at last, with a blow on the head or a stab in the breast. She had not the courage to uncover her eyes. She waited. But after about a minute — -it seemed to her interminable — -she heard rapid footsteps overhead. Arlette was running here and there. Catherine uncovered her eyes and was about to rise when she heard at the top of the stairs the name of Peyrol shouted with a desperate accent. Then, again, after the shortest of pauses, the cry of: ``Peyrol, Peyrol!'' and then the sound of feet running downstairs. There was another shriek, ``Peyrol!'' just outside the door before it flew open. Who was pursuing her? Catherine managed to stand up. Steadying herself with one hand on the table she presented an undaunted front to her niece who ran into the kitchen with loose hair flying and the appearance of wildest distraction in her eyes.

The staircase door had slammed to behind her. Nobody was pursuing her; and Catherine, putting forth her lean brown arm, arrested Arlette's flight with such a jerk that the two women swung against each other. She seized her niece by the shoulders.

``What is this, in Heaven's name? Where are you rushing to?'' she cried, and the other, as if suddenly exhausted, whispered:

``I woke up from an awful dream.''

The kitchen grew dark under the cloud that hung over the house now. There was a feeble flicker of lightning and a faint crash, far away.

The old woman gave her niece a little shake.

``Dreams are nothing,'' she said. ``You are awake now. . . .'' And indeed Catherine thought that no dream could be so bad as the realities which kept hold of one through the long waking hours.

“They were killing him,” moaned Arlette, beginning to tremble and struggle in her aunt’s arms. “I tell you they were killing him.”

“Be quiet. Were you dreaming of Peyrol?”

She became still in a moment and then whispered: “No. Eugene.”

She had seen Ral set upon by a mob of men and women, all dripping with blood, in a livid cold light, in front of a stretch of mere shells of houses with cracked walls and broken windows, and going down in the midst of a forest of raised arms brandishing sabres, clubs, knives, axes. There was also a man flourishing a red rag on a stick, while another was beating a drum which boomed above the sickening sound of broken glass falling like rain on the pavement. And away round the corner of an empty street came Peyrol whom she recognized by his white head, walking without haste, swinging his cudgel regularly. The terrible thing was that Peyrol looked straight at her, not noticing anything, composed, without a frown or a smile, unseeing and deaf, while she waved her arms and shrieked desperately to him for help. She woke up with the piercing sound of his name in her ears and with the impression of the dream so powerful that even now, looking distractedly into her aunt’s face, she could see the bare arms of that murderous crowd raised above Ral’s sinking head. Yet the name that had sprung to her lips on waking was the name of Peyrol. She pushed her aunt away with such force that the old woman staggered backwards and to save herself had to catch hold of the overmantel above her head. Arlette ran to the door of the salle, looked in, came back to her aunt and shouted: “Where is he?”

Catherine really did not know which path the lieutenant had taken. She understood very well that “he” meant Ral.

She said: “He went away a long time ago” grasped her niece’s arm and added with an effort to steady her voice: “He is coming back, Arlette — - for nothing will keep him away from you.”

Arlette, as if mechanically, was whispering to herself the magic name, “Peyrol, Peyrol!” then cried: “I want Eugene now. This moment.”

Catherine’s face wore a look of unflinching patience. “He has departed on service,” she said. Her niece looked at her with enormous eyes, coal-black, profound, and immovable, while in a forcible and distracted tone she said: “You and Peyrol have been plotting to rob me of my reason. But I will know how to make that old man give him up. He is mine!” She spun round

wildly like a person looking for a way of escape from a deadly peril, and rushed out blindly.

About Escampobar the air was murky but calm, and the silence was so profound that it was possible to hear the first heavy drops of rain striking the ground. In the intimidating shadow of the storm-cloud, Arlette stood irresolute for a moment, but it was to Peyrol, the man of mystery and power, that her thoughts turned. She was ready to embrace his knees, to entreat and to scold. "Peyrol, Peyrol!" she cried twice, and lent her ear as if expecting an answer. Then she shouted: "I want him back."

Catherine, alone in the kitchen, moving with dignity, sat down in the armchair with the tall back, like a senator in his curule chair awaiting the blow of a barbarous fate.

Arlette flew down the slope. The first sign of her coming was a faint thin scream which really the rover alone heard and understood. He pressed his lips in a particular way, showing his appreciation of the coming difficulty. The next moment he saw, poised on a detached boulder and thinly veiled by the first perpendicular shower, Arlette, who, catching sight of the tartane with the men on board of her, let out a prolonged shriek of mingled triumph and despair: "Peyrol! Help! Pey — — — rol!"

Ral jumped to his feet with an extremely scared face, but Peyrol extended an arresting arm. "She is calling to me," he said, gazing at the figure poised on the rock. "Well leaped! Sacr nom! . . . Well leaped!" And he muttered to himself soberly: "She will break her legs or her neck."

"I see you, Peyrol," screamed Arlette, who seemed to be flying through the air. "Don't you dare."

"Yes, here I am," shouted the rover, striking his breast with his fist.

Lieutenant Ral put both his hands over his face. Michel looked on open-mouthed, very much as if watching a performance in a circus; but Scevola cast his eyes down. Arlette came on board with such an impetus that Peyrol had to step forward and save her from a fall which would have stunned her. She struggled in his arms with extreme violence. The heiress of Escampobar with her loose black hair seemed the incarnation of pale fury. "Misérable! Don't you dare!" A roll of thunder covered her voice, but when it had passed away she was heard again in suppliant tones. "Peyrol, my friend, my dear old friend. Give him back to me," and all the time her body writhed in the arms of the old seaman. "You used to love me, Peyrol," she cried without ceasing to struggle, and suddenly struck the rover twice in the

face with her clenched fist. Peyrol's head received the two blows as if it had been made of marble, but he felt with fear her body become still, grow rigid in his arms. A heavy squall enveloped the group of people on board the tartane. Peyrol laid Arlette gently on the deck. Her eyes were closed, her hands remained clenched; every sign of life had left her white face. Peyrol stood up and looked at the tall rocks streaming with water. The rain swept over the tartane with an angry swishing roar to which was added the sound of water rushing violently down the folds and seams of the precipitous shore vanishing gradually from his sight, as if this had been the beginning of a destroying and universal deluge — -the end of all things.

Lieutenant Ral, kneeling on one knee, contemplated the pale face of Arlette. Distinct, yet mingling with the faint growl of distant thunder, Peyrol's voice was heard saying:

“We can't put her ashore and leave her lying in the rain. She must be taken up to the house.” Arlette's soaked clothes clung to her limbs while the lieutenant, his bare head dripping with rain water, looked as if he had just saved her from drowning. Peyrol gazed down inscrutably at the woman stretched on the deck and at the kneeling man. “She has fainted from rage at her old Peyrol,” he went on rather dreamily. “Strange things do happen. However, lieutenant, you had better take her under the arms and step ashore first. I will help you. Ready? Lift.”

The movements of the two men had to be careful and their progress was slow on the lower, steep part of the slope. After going up more than two-thirds of the way, they rested their insensible burden on a flat stone. Ral continued to sustain the shoulders but Peyrol lowered the feet gently.

“Ha!” he said. “You will be able to carry her yourself the rest of the way and give her up to old Catherine. Get a firm footing and I will lift her and place her in your arms. You can walk the distance quite easily. There. . . . Hold her a little higher, or her feet will be catching on the stones.”

Arlette's hair was hanging far below the lieutenant's arm in an inert and heavy mass. The thunderstorm was passing away, leaving a cloudy sky. And Peyrol thought with a profound sigh: “I am tired.”

“She is light,” said Ral.

“Parbleu, she is light. If she were dead, you would find her heavy enough. Allons, lieutenant. No! I am not coming. What's the good? I'll stay down here. I have no mind to listen to Catherine's scolding.”



The lieutenant, looking absorbed into the face resting in the hollow of his arm, never averted his gaze — not even when Peyrol, stooping over Arlette, kissed the white forehead near the roots of the hair, black as a raven's wing.

“What am I to do?” muttered Ral.

“Do? Why, give her up to old Catherine. And you may just as well tell her that I will be coming along directly. That will cheer her up. I used to count for something in that house. Allez. For our time is very short.”

With these words he turned away and walked slowly down to the tartane. A breeze had sprung up. He felt it on his wet neck and was grateful for the cool touch which recalled him to himself, to his old wandering self which had known no softness and no hesitation in the face of any risk offered by life.

As he stepped on board, the shower passed away. Michel, wet to the skin, was still in the very same attitude gazing up the slope. Citizen Scevola had drawn his knees up and was holding his head in his hands; whether because of rain or cold or for some other reason, his teeth were chattering audibly with a continuous and distressing rattle. Peyrol flung off his jacket, heavy with water, with a strange air as if it was of no more use to his mortal envelope, squared his broad shoulders and directed Michel in a deep, quiet voice to let go the lines holding the tartane to the shore. The faithful henchman was taken aback and required one of Peyrol's authoritative “Allez” to put him in motion. Meantime the rover cast off the tiller lines and laid his hand with an air of mastery on the stout piece of wood projecting horizontally from the rudder-head about the level of his hip. The voices and the movements of his companions caused Citizen Scevola to master the desperate trembling of his jaw. He wriggled a little in his bonds and the question that had been on his lips for a good many hours was uttered again.

“What are you going to do with me?”

“What do you think of a little promenade at sea?” Peyrol asked in a tone that was not unkindly.

Citizen Scevola, who had seemed totally and completely cast down and subdued, let out a most unexpected screech.

“Unbind me. Put me ashore.”

Michel, busy forward, was moved to smile as though he had possessed a cultivated sense of incongruity. Peyrol remained serious.

“You shall be untied presently,” he assured the blood-drinking patriot, who had been for so many years the reputed possessor not only of Escampobar, but of the Escampobar heiress that, living on appearances, he had almost come to believe in that ownership himself. No wonder he screeched at this rude awakening. Peyrol raised his voice: “Haul on the line, Michel.”

As, directly the ropes had been let go, the tartane had swung clear of the shore, the movement given her by Michel carried her towards the entrance by which the basin communicated with the cove. Peyrol attended to the helm, and in a moment, gliding through the narrow gap, the tartane carrying her way, shot out almost into the middle of the cove.

A little wind could be felt, running light wrinkles over the water, but outside the overshadowed sea was already speckled with white caps. Peyrol helped Michel to haul aft the sheets and then went back to the tiller. The pretty spick-and-span craft that had been lying idle for so long began to glide into the wide world. Michel gazed at the shore as if lost in admiration. Citizen Scevola’s head had fallen on his knees while his nerveless hands clasped his legs loosely. He was the very image of dejection.

“H, Michel! Come here and cast loose the citizen. It is only fair that he should be untied for a little excursion at sea.”

When his order had been executed, Peyrol addressed himself to the desolate figure on the deck.

“Like this, should the tartane get capsized in a squall, you will have an equal chance with us to swim for your life.”

Scevola disdained to answer. He was engaged in biting his knee with rage in a stealthy fashion.

“You came on board for some murderous purpose. Who you were after unless it was myself, God only knows. I feel quite justified in giving you a little outing at sea. I won’t conceal from you, citizen, that it may not be without risk to life or limb. But you have only yourself to thank for being here.”

As the tartane drew clear of the cove, she felt more the weight of the breeze and darted forward with a lively motion. A vaguely contented smile lighted up Michel’s hairy countenance.

“She feels the sea,” said Peyrol, who enjoyed the swift movement of his vessel. “This is different from your lagoon, Michel.”

“To be sure,” said Michel with becoming gravity.

“Doesn’t it seem funny to you, as you look back at the shore, to think that you have left nothing and nobody behind?”

Michel assumed the aspect of a man confronted by an intellectual problem. Since he had become Peyrol’s henchman he had lost the habit of thinking altogether. Directions and orders were easy things to apprehend; but a conversation with him whom he called “notre matre” was a serious matter demanding great and concentrated attention.

“Possibly,” he murmured, looking strangely self-conscious.

“Well, you are lucky, take my word for it,” said the rover, watching the course of his little vessel along the head of the peninsula. “You have not even a dog to miss you.”

“I have only you, Matre Peyrol.”

“That’s what I was thinking,” said Peyrol half to himself, while Michel, who had good sea-legs, kept his balance to the movements of the craft without taking his eyes from the rover’s face.

“No,” Peyrol exclaimed suddenly, after a moment of meditation, “I could not leave you behind.” He extended his open palm towards Michel.

“Put your hand in there,” he said.

Michel hesitated for a moment before this extraordinary proposal. At last he did so, and Peyrol, holding the bereaved fisherman’s hand in a powerful grip, said:

“If I had gone away by myself, I would have left you marooned on this earth like a man thrown out to die on a desert island.” Some dim perception of the solemnity of the occasion seemed to enter Michel’s primitive brain. He connected Peyrol’s words with the sense of his own insignificant position at the tail of all mankind; and, timidly, he murmured with his clear, innocent glance unclouded, the fundamental axiom of his philosophy:

“Somebody must be last in this world.”

“Well, then, you will have to forgive me all that may happen between this and the hour of sunset.”

The tartane, obeying the helm, fell off before the wind, with her head to the eastward.

Peyrol murmured: “She has not forgotten how to walk the seas.” His unsubdued heart, heavy for so many days, had a moment of buoyancy — the illusion of immense freedom.

At that moment Ral, amazed at finding no tartane in the basin, was running madly towards the cove, where he was sure Peyrol must be waiting

to give her up to him. He ran out on to the very rock on which Peyrol's late prisoner had sat after his escape, too tired to care, yet cheered by the hope of liberty. But Ral was in a worse plight. He could see no shadowy form through the thin veil of rain which pitted the sheltered piece of water framed in the rocks. The little craft had been spirited away. Impossible! There must be something wrong with his eyes! Again the barren hillsides echoed the name of ``Peyrol," shouted with all the force of Ral's lungs. He shouted it only once, and about five minutes afterwards appeared at the kitchen-door, panting, streaming with water as if he had fought his way up from the bottom of the sea. In the tall-backed armchair Arlette lay, with her limbs relaxed, her head on Catherine's arm, her face white as death. He saw her open her black eyes, enormous and as if not of this world; he saw old Catherine turn her head, heard a cry of surprise, and saw a sort of struggle beginning between the two women. He screamed at them like a madman: ``Peyrol has betrayed me!" and in an instant, with a bang of the door, he was gone.

The rain had ceased. Above his head the unbroken mass of clouds moved to the eastward, and he moved in the same direction as if he too were driven by the wind up the hillside, towards the lookout. When he reached the spot and, gasping, flung one arm round the trunk of the leaning tree, the only thing he was aware of during the sombre pause in the unrest of the elements was the distracting turmoil of his thoughts. After a moment he perceived through the rain the English ship with her topsails lowered on the caps, forging ahead slowly across the northern entrance of the Petite Passe. His distress fastened insanely on the notion of there being a connection between that enemy ship and Peyrol's inexplicable conduct. That old man had always meant to go himself! And when a moment after, looking to the southward, he made out the shadow of the tartane coming round the land in the midst of another squall, he muttered to himself a bitter: ``Of course!" She had both her sails set. Peyrol was indeed pressing her to the utmost in his shameful haste to traffic with the enemy. The truth was that from the position in which Ral first saw him, Peyrol could not yet see the English ship, and held confidently on his course up the middle of the strait. The man-of-war and the little tartane saw each other quite unexpectedly at a distance that was very little over a mile. Peyrol's heart flew into his mouth at finding himself so close to the enemy. On board the *Amelia* at first no notice was taken. It was simply a tartane making for shelter on the north

side of Porquerolles. But when Peyrol suddenly altered his course, the master of the man-of-war, noticing the manuvre, took up the long glass for a look. Captain Vincent was on deck and agreed with the master's remark that "there was a craft acting suspiciously." Before the Amelia could come round in the heavy squall, Peyrol was already under the battery of Porquerolles and, so far, safe from capture. Captain Vincent had no mind to bring his ship within reach of the battery and risk damage in his rigging or hull for the sake of a small coaster. However, the tale brought on board by Symons of his discovery of a hidden craft, of his capture, and his wonderful escape, had made every tartane an object of interest to the whole ship's company. The Amelia remained hove to in the strait while her officers watched the lateen sails gliding to and fro under the protecting muzzles of the guns. Captain Vincent himself had been impressed by Peyrol's manuvre. Coasting craft as a rule were not afraid of the Amelia. After taking a few turns on the quarter-deck he ordered Symons to be called aft.

The hero of a unique and mysterious adventure, which had been the only subject of talk on board the corvette for the last twenty-four hours, came along rolling, hat in hand, and enjoying a secret sense of his importance.

"Take the glass," said the captain, "and have a look at that vessel under the land. Is she anything like the tartane that you say you have been aboard of?"

Symons was very positive. "I think I can swear to those painted mastheads, your honour. It is the last thing I remember before that murderous ruffian knocked me senseless. The moon shone on them. I can make them out now with the glass." As to the fellow boasting to him that the tartane was a dispatch-boat and had already made some trips, well, Symons begged his honour to believe that the beggar was not sober at the time. He did not care what he blurted out. The best proof of his condition was that he went away to fetch the soldiers and forgot to come back. The murderous old ruffian! "You see, your honour," continued Symons, "he thought I was not likely to escape after getting a blow that would have killed nine out of any ten men. So he went away to boast of what he had done before the people ashore; because one of his chums, worse than himself, came down thinking he would kill me with a dam big manure fork, saving your honour's presence. A regular savage he was."

Symons paused, staring, as if astonished at the marvels of his own tale. The old master, standing at his captain's elbow, observed in a dispassionate

tone that, anyway, that peninsula was not a bad jumping-off place for a craft intending to slip through the blockade. Symons, not being dismissed, waited hat in hand while Captain Vincent directed the master to fill on the ship and stand a little nearer to the battery. It was done, and presently there was a flash of a gun low down on the water's edge and a shot came skipping in the direction of the Amelia. It fell very short, but Captain Vincent judged the ship was close enough and ordered her to be hove to again. Then Symons was told to take a look through the glass once more. After a long interval he lowered it and spoke impressively to his captain:

“I can make out three heads aboard, your honour, and one is white. I would swear to that white head anywhere.”

Captain Vincent made no answer. All this seemed very odd to him; but after all it was possible. The craft had certainly acted suspiciously. He spoke to the first lieutenant in a half-vexed tone.

“He has done a rather smart thing. He will dodge here till dark and then get away. It is perfectly absurd. I don't want to send the boats too close to the battery. And if I do he may simply sail away from them and be round the land long before we are ready to give him chase. Darkness will be his best friend. However, we will keep a watch on him in case he is tempted to give us the slip late in the afternoon. In that case we will have a good try to catch him. If he has anything aboard I should like to get hold of it. It may be of some importance, after all.”

On board the tartane Peyrol put his own interpretation on the ship's movements. His object had been attained. The corvette had marked him for her prey. Satisfied as to that, Peyrol watched his opportunity and taking advantage of a long squall, with rain thick enough to blur the form of the English ship, he left the shelter of the battery to lead the Englishman a dance and keep up his character of a man anxious to avoid capture.

Ral, from his position on the lookout, saw in the thinning downpour the pointed lateen sails glide round the north end of Porquerolles and vanish behind the land. Some time afterwards the Amelia made sail in a manner that put it beyond doubt that she meant to chase. Her lofty canvas was shut off too presently by the land of Porquerolles. When she had disappeared Ral turned to Arlette.

“Let us go,” he said.

Arlette, stimulated by the short glimpse of Ral at the kitchen door, whom she had taken for a vision of a lost man calling her to follow him to the end

of the world, had torn herself out of the old woman's thin, bony arms which could not cope with the struggles of her body and the fierceness of her spirit. She had run straight to the lookout, though there was nothing to guide her there except a blind impulse to seek Ral wherever he might be. He was not aware of her having found him until she seized hold of his arm with a suddenness, energy and determination of which no one with a clouded mind could have been capable. He felt himself being taken possession of in a way that tore all his scruples out of his breast. Holding on to the trunk of the tree, he threw his other arm round her waist, and when she confessed to him that she did not know why she had run up there, but that if she had not found him she would have thrown herself over the cliff, he tightened his clasp with sudden exultation, as though she had been a gift prayed for instead of a stumbling block for his pedantic conscience. Together they walked back. In the failing light the buildings awaited them, lifeless, the walls darkened by rain and the big slopes of the roofs glistening and sinister under the flying desolation of the clouds. In the kitchen Catherine heard their mingled footsteps, and rigid in the tall armchair awaited their coming. Arlette threw her arms round the old woman's neck while Ral stood on one side, looking on. Thought after thought flew through his mind and vanished in the strong feeling of the irrevocable nature of the event handing him to the woman whom, in the revulsion of his feelings, he was inclined to think more sane than himself. Arlette, with one arm over the old woman's shoulders, kissed the wrinkled forehead under the white band of linen that, on the erect head, had the effect of a rustic diadem.

``To-morrow you and I will have to walk down to the church.''

The austere dignity of Catherine's pose seemed to be shaken by this proposal to lead before the God, with whom she had made her peace long ago, that unhappy girl chosen to share in the guilt of impious and unspeakable horrors which had darkened her mind.

Arlette, still stooping over her aunt's face, extended a hand towards Ral, who, making a step forward, took it silently into his grasp.

``Oh, yes, you will, Aunt,''' insisted Arlette. ``You will have to come with me to pray for Peyrol, whom you and I shall never see any more.''

Catherine's head dropped, whether in assent or grief; and Ral felt an unexpected and profound emotion, for he, too, was convinced that none of the three persons in the farm would ever see Peyrol again. It was as though the rover of the wide seas had left them to themselves on a sudden impulse

of scorn, of magnanimity, of a passion weary of itself. However come by, Ral was ready to clasp for ever to his breast that woman touched by the red hand of the Revolution; for she, whose little feet had run ankle-deep through the terrors of death, had brought to him the sense of triumphant life.



## CHAPTER XVI

Astern of the tartane, the sun, about to set, kindled a streak of dull crimson glow between the darkening sea and the overcast sky. The peninsula of Giens and the islands of Hyres formed one mass of land detaching itself very black against the fiery girdle of the horizon; but to the north the long stretch of the Alpine coast continued beyond sight its endless sinuosities under the stooping clouds.

The tartane seemed to be rushing together with the run of the waves into the arms of the oncoming night. A little more than a mile away on her lee quarter, the Amelia, under all plain sail, pressed to the end of the chase. It had lasted now for a good many hours, for Peyrol, when slipping away, had managed to get the advantage of the Amelia from the very start. While still within the large sheet of smooth water which is called the Hyres roadstead, the tartane, which was really a craft of extraordinary speed, managed to gain positively on the sloop. Afterwards, by suddenly darting down the eastern passage between the two last islands of the group, Peyrol actually got out of sight of the chasing ship, being hidden by the Ile du Levant for a time. The Amelia having to tack twice in order to follow, lost ground once more. Emerging into the open sea, she had to tack again, and then the position became that of a stern chase, which proverbially is known as a long chase. Peyrol's skilful seamanship had twice extracted from Captain Vincent a low murmur accompanied by a significant compression of lips. At one time the Amelia had been near enough the tartane to send a shot ahead of her. That one was followed by another which whizzed extraordinarily close to the mastheads, but then Captain Vincent ordered the gun to be secured again. He said to his first lieutenant, who, his speaking trumpet in hand, kept at his elbow: "We must not sink that craft on any account. If we could get only an hour's calm, we would carry her with the boats."

The lieutenant remarked that there was no hope of a calm for the next twenty-four hours at least.

"No," said Captain Vincent, "and in about an hour it will be dark, and then he may very well give us the slip. The coast is not very far off and there are batteries on both sides of Frjus, under any of which he will be as safe from capture as though he were hove up on the beach. And look," he exclaimed after a moment's pause, "this is what the fellow means to do."

“Yes, sir,” said the lieutenant, keeping his eyes on the white speck ahead, dancing lightly on the short Mediterranean waves, “he is keeping off the wind.”

“We will have him in less than an hour,” said Captain Vincent, and made as if he meant to rub his hands, but suddenly leaned his elbow on the rail. “After all,” he went on, “properly speaking, it is a race between the Amelia and the night.”

“And it will be dark early to-day,” said the first lieutenant, swinging the speaking trumpet by its lanyard. “Shall we take the yards off the back-stays, sir?”

“No,” said Captain Vincent. “There is a clever seaman aboard that tartane. He is running off now, but at any time he may haul up again. We must not follow him too closely, or we shall lose the advantage which we have now. That man is determined on making his escape.”

If those words by some miracle could have been carried to the ears of Peyrol, they would have brought to his lips a smile of malicious and triumphant exultation. Ever since he had laid his hand on the tiller of the tartane every faculty of his resourcefulness and seamanship had been bent on deceiving the English captain, that enemy whom he had never seen, the man whose mind he had constructed for himself from the evolutions of his ship. Leaning against the heavy tiller he addressed Michel, breaking the silence of the strenuous afternoon.

“This is the moment,” his deep voice uttered quietly. “Ease off the mainsheet, Michel. A little now, only.”

When Michel returned to the place where he had been sitting to windward, the rover noticed his eyes fixed on his face wonderingly. Some vague thoughts had been forming themselves slowly, incompletely, in Michel’s brain. Peyrol met the utter innocence of the unspoken inquiry with a smile that, beginning sardonically on his manly and sensitive mouth, ended in something resembling tenderness.

“That’s so, camarade,” he said with particular stress and intonation, as if those words contained a full and sufficient answer. Most unexpectedly Michel’s round and generally staring eyes blinked as if dazzled. He too produced from somewhere in the depths of his being a queer, misty smile from which Peyrol averted his gaze.

“Where is the citizen?” he asked, bearing hard against the tiller and staring straight ahead. “He isn’t gone overboard, is he? I don’t seem to

have seen him since we rounded the land near Porquerolles Castle.”

Michel, after craning his head forward to look over the edge of the deck, announced that Scevola was sitting on the keelson.

“Go forward,” said Peyrol, “and ease off the fore-sheet now a little. This tartane has wings,” he added to himself.

Alone on the after-deck Peyrol turned his head to look at the Amelia. That ship, in consequence of holding her wind, was now crossing obliquely the wake of the tartane. At the same time she had diminished the distance. Nevertheless, Peyrol considered that had he really meant to escape, his chances were as eight to ten — -practically an assured success. For a long time he had been contemplating the lofty pyramid of canvas towering against the fading red belt on the sky, when a lamentable groan made him look round. It was Scevola. The citizen had adopted the mode of progression on all fours, and while Peyrol looked at him he rolled to leeward, saving himself rather cleverly from going overboard, and holding on desperately to a cleat, shouted in a hollow voice, pointing with the other hand as if he had made a tremendous discovery: “La terre! La terre!”

“Certainly,” said Peyrol, steering with extreme nicety. “What of that?”

“I don’t want to be drowned!” cried the citizen in his new hollow voice. Peyrol reflected a bit before he spoke in a serious tone:

“If you stay where you are, I assure you that you will . . .” he glanced rapidly over his shoulder at the Amelia. . . . “not die by drowning.” He jerked his head sideways. “I know that man’s mind.”

“What man? Whose mind?” yelled Scevola with intense eagerness and bewilderment. “We are only three on board.”

But Peyrol’s mind was contemplating maliciously the figure of a man with long teeth, in a wig and with large buckles to his shoes. Such was his ideal conception of what the captain of the Amelia ought to look like. That officer, whose naturally good-humoured face wore then a look of severe resolution, had beckoned his first lieutenant to his side again.

“We are gaining,” he said quietly. “I intend to close with him to windward. We won’t risk any of his tricks. It is very difficult to outmanuvre a Frenchman, as you know. Send a few armed marines on the fore-castle-head. I am afraid the only way to get hold of this tartane is to disable the men on board of her. I wish to goodness I could think of some other. When we close with her, let the marines fire a well-aimed volley. You must get some marines to stand by aft as well. I hope we may shoot away his

haliards; once his sails are down on his deck he is ours for the trouble of putting a boat over the side."

For more than half an hour Captain Vincent stood silent, elbow on rail, keeping his eye on the tartane, while on board the latter Peyrol steered silent and watchful but intensely conscious of the enemy ship holding on in her relentless pursuit. The narrow red band was dying out of the sky. The French coast, black against the fading light, merged into the shadows gathering in the eastern board. Citizen Scevola, somewhat soothed by the assurance that he would not die by drowning, had elected to remain quiet where he had fallen, not daring to trust himself to move on the lively deck. Michel, squatting to windward, gazed intently at Peyrol in expectation of some order at any minute. But Peyrol uttered no word and made no sign. From time to time a burst of foam flew over the tartane, or a splash of water would come aboard with a scurrying noise.

It was not till the corvette had got within a long gunshot from the tartane that Peyrol opened his mouth.

"No!" he burst out, loud in the wind, as if giving vent to long anxious thinking, "No! I could not have left you behind with not even a dog for company. Devil take me if I don't think you would not have thanked me for it either. What do you say to that, Michel?"

A half-puzzled smile dwelt persistently on the guileless countenance of the ex-fisherman. He stated what he had always thought in respect of Peyrol's every remark: "I think you are right, matre."

"Listen then, Michel. That ship will be alongside of us in less than half an hour. As she comes up they will open on us with musketry."

"They will open on us . . ." repeated Michel, looking quite interested. "But how do you know they will do that, matre?"

"Because her captain has got to obey what is in my mind," said Peyrol, in a tone of positive and solemn conviction. "He will do it as sure as if I were at his car telling him what to do. He will do it because he is a first-rate seaman, but I, Michel, I am just a little bit cleverer than he." He glanced over his shoulder at the Amelia rushing after the tartane with swelling sails, and raised his voice suddenly. "He will do it because no more than half a mile ahead of us is the spot where Peyrol will die!"

Michel did not start. He only shut his eyes for a time, and the rover continued in a lower tone:

“I may be shot through the heart at once,” he said: “and in that case you have my permission to let go the halliards if you are alive yourself. But if I live I mean to put the helm down. When I do that you will let go the foresheet to help the tartane to fly into the wind’s eye. This is my last order to you. Now go forward and fear nothing. Adieu.” Michel obeyed without a word.

Half a dozen of the *Amelia*’s marines stood ranged on the forecastle-head ready with their muskets. Captain Vincent walked into the lee waist to watch his chase. When he thought that the jibboom of the *Amelia* had drawn level with the stern of the tartane he waved his hat and the marines discharged their muskets. Apparently no gear was cut. Captain Vincent observed the white-headed man, who was steering, clap his hand to his left side, while he hove the tiller to leeward and brought the tartane sharply into the wind. The marines on the poop fired in their turn, all the reports merging into one. Voices were heard on the decks crying that they “had hit the white-haired chap.” Captain Vincent shouted to the master:

“Get the ship round on the other tack.”

The elderly seaman who was the master of the *Amelia* took a critical look before he gave the necessary orders; and the *Amelia* closed on her chase with her decks resounding to the piping of boatswain’s mates and the hoarse shout: “Hands shorten sail. About ship.”

Peyrol, lying on his back under the swinging tiller, heard the calls shrilling and dying away; he heard the ominous rush of *Amelia*’s bow wave as the sloop foamed within ten yards of the tartane’s stern; he even saw her upper yards coming down, and then everything vanished out of the clouded sky. There was nothing in his ears but the sound of the wind, the wash of the waves buffeting the little craft left without guidance, and the continuous thrashing of its foresail the sheet of which Michel had let go according to orders. The tartane began to roll heavily, but Peyrol’s right arm was sound and he managed to put it round a bollard to prevent himself from being flung about. A feeling of peace sank into him, not unmingled with pride. Everything he had planned had come to pass. He had meant to play that man a trick, and now the trick had been played. Played by him better than by any other old man on whom age had stolen, unnoticed, till the veil of peace was torn down by the touch of a sentiment unexpected like an intruder and cruel like an enemy.

Peyrol rolled his head to the left. All he could see were the legs of Citizen Scevola sliding nervelessly to and fro to the rolling of the vessel as if his body had been jammed somewhere. Dead, or only scared to death? And Michel? Was he dead or dying, that man without friends whom his pity had refused to leave behind marooned on the earth without even a dog for company? As to that, Peyrol felt no compunction; but he thought he would have liked to see Michel once more. He tried to utter his name, but his throat refused him even a whisper. He felt himself removed far away from that world of human sounds, in which Arlette had screamed at him: ``Peyrol, don't you dare!" He would never hear anybody's voice again! Under that grey sky there was nothing for him but the swish of breaking seas and the ceaseless furious beating of the tartane's foresail. His plaything was knocking about terribly under him, with her tiller flying madly to and fro just clear of his head, and solid lumps of water coming on board over his prostrate body. Suddenly, in a desperate lurch which brought the whole Mediterranean with a ferocious snarl level with the slope of the little deck, Peyrol saw the *Amelia* bearing right down upon the tartane. The fear, not of death but of failure, gripped his slowing-down heart. Was this blind Englishman going to run him down and sink the dispatches together with the craft? With a mighty effort of his ebbing strength Peyrol sat up and flung his arm round the shroud of the mainmast.

The *Ameleia*, whose way had carried her past the tartane for a quarter of a mile, before sail could be shortened and her yards swung on the other tack, was coming back to take possession of her chase. In the deepening dusk and amongst the foaming seas it was a matter of difficulty to make out the little craft. At the very moment when the master of the man-of-war, looking out anxiously from the forecastle-head, thought that she might perhaps have filled and gone down, he caught sight of her rolling in the trough of the sea, and so close that she seemed to be at the end of the *Amelia*'s jibboom. His heart flew in his mouth. ``Hard a starboard!" he yelled, his order being passed along the decks.

Peyrol, sinking back on the deck in another heavy lurch of his craft, saw for an instant the whole of the English corvette swing up into the clouds as if she meant to fling herself upon his very breast. A blown seatop flicked his face noisily, followed by a smooth interval, a silence of the waters. He beheld in a flash the days of his manhood, of strength and adventure. Suddenly an enormous voice like the roar of an angry sea-lion seemed to

fill the whole of the empty sky in a mighty and commanding shout: ``Steady!’’“... And with the sound of that familiar English word ringing in his ears Peyrol smiled to his visions and died.

The Amelia, stripped down to her topsails and hove to, rose and fell easily while on her quarter about a cable's length away Peyrol's tartane tumbled like a lifeless corpse amongst the seas. Captain Vincent, in his favourite attitude of leaning over the rail, kept his eyes fastened on his prize. Mr. Bolt, who had been sent for, waited patiently till his commander turned round.

“Oh, here you are, Mr. Bolt. I have sent for you to go and take possession. You speak French, and there may still be somebody alive in her. If so, of course you will send him on board at once. I am sure there can be nobody unwounded there. It will anyhow be too dark to see much, but just have a good look round and secure everything in the way of papers you can lay your hands on. Haul aft the foresheet and sail her up to receive a tow line. I intend to take her along and ransack her thoroughly in the morning; tear down the cuddy linings and so on, should you not find at once what I expect. . . .” Captain Vincent, his white teeth gleaming in the dusk, gave some further orders in a lower tone, and Mr. Bolt departed in a hurry. Half an hour afterwards he was back on board, and the Amelia, with the tartane in tow, made sail to the eastward in search of the blockading fleet.

Mr. Bolt, introduced into a cabin strongly lighted by a swinging lamp, tendered to his captain across the table a sail-cloth package corded and scaled, and a piece of paper folded in four, which, he explained, seemed to be a certificate of registry, strangely enough mentioning no name. Captain Vincent seized the grey canvas package eagerly.

“This looks like the very thing, Bolt,” he said, turning it over in his hands. “What else did you find on board?”

Bolt said that he had found three dead men, two on the after-deck and one lying at the bottom of the open hold with the bare end of the foresheet in his hand — “shot down, I suppose, just as he had let it go,” he commented. He described the appearance of the bodies and reported that he had disposed of them according to orders. In the tartane's cabin there was half a demijohn of wine and a loaf of bread in a locker; also, on the floor, a leather valise containing an officer's uniform coat and a change of clothing. He had lighted the lamp and saw that the linen was marked “E. Ral.” An officer's sword on a broad shoulder-belt was also lying on the floor. These

things could not have belonged to the old chap with the white hair, who was a big man. ``Looks as if somebody had tumbled overboard,’’ commented Bolt. Two of the bodies looked nondescript, but there was no doubt about that fine old fellow being a seaman.

``By Heavens!’’ said Captain Vincent, ``he was that! Do you know, Bolt, that he nearly managed to escape us? Another twenty minutes would have done it. How many wounds had he?’’

``Three I think, sir. I did not look closely,’’ said Bolt.

``I hated the necessity of shooting brave men like dogs,’’ said Captain Vincent. ``Still, it was the only way; and there may be something here,’’ he went on, slapping the package with his open palm, ``that will justify me in my own eyes. You may go now.’’

Captain Vincent did not turn in but only lay down fully dressed on the couch till the officer of the watch, appearing at the door, told him that a ship of the fleet was in sight away to windward. Captain Vincent ordered the private night signal to be made. When he came on deck the towering shadow of a line-of-battle ship that seemed to reach to the very clouds was well within hail and a voice bellowed from her through a speaking trumpet:

``What ship is that?’’

``His Majesty’s sloop Amelia,’’ hailed back Captain Vincent. ``What ship is that, pray?’’

Instead of the usual answer there was a short pause and another voice spoke boisterously through the trumpet:

``Is that you, Vincent? Don’t you know the Superb when you see her?’’

``Not in the dark, Keats. How are you? I am in a hurry to speak the Admiral.’’

``The fleet is lying by,’’ came the voice now with painstaking distinctness across the murmurs, whispers and splashes of the black lane of water dividing the two ships. ``The Admiral bears S.S.E. If you stretch on till daylight as you are, you will fetch him on the other tack in time for breakfast on board the Victory. Is anything up?’’

At every slight roll the sails of the Amelia, becalmed by the bulk of the seventy-four, flapped gently against the masts.

``Not much,’’ hailed Captain Vincent. ``I made a prize.’’

``Have you been in action?’’ came the swift inquiry.

``No, no. Piece of luck.’’



“Where’s your prize?” roared the speaking trumpet with interest.

“In my desk,” roared Captain Vincent in reply. . . . “Enemy dispatches. . . I say, Keats, fill on your ship. Fill on her, I say, or you will be falling on board of me.” He stamped his foot impatiently. “Clap some hands at once on the tow-line and run that tartane close under our stern,” he called to the officer of the watch, “or else the old Superb will walk over her without ever knowing anything about it.”

When Captain Vincent presented himself on board the Victory it was too late for him to be invited to share the Admiral’s breakfast. He was told that Lord Nelson had not been seen on deck yet, that morning; and presently word came that he wished to see Captain Vincent at once in his cabin. Being introduced, the captain of the Amelia, in undress uniform, with a sword by his side and his hat under his arm, was received kindly, made his bow and with a few words of explanation laid the packet on the big round table at which sat a silent secretary in black clothes, who had been obviously writing a letter from his lordship’s dictation. The Admiral had been walking up and down, and after he had greeted Captain Vincent he resumed his pacing of a nervous man. His empty sleeve had not yet been pinned on his breast and swung slightly every time he turned in his walk. His thin locks fell lank against the pale cheeks, and the whole face in repose had an expression of suffering with which the fire of his one eye presented a startling contrast. He stopped short and exclaimed while Captain Vincent towered over him in a respectful attitude:

“A tartane! Captured on board a tartane! How on earth did you pitch upon that one out of the hundreds you must see every month?”

“I must confess that I got hold accidentally of some curious information,” said Captain Vincent. “It was all a piece of luck.”

While the secretary was ripping open with a pen-knife the cover of the dispatches Lord Nelson took Captain Vincent out into the stern gallery. The quiet and sunshiny morning had the added charm of a cool, light breeze; and the Victory, under her three topsails and lower staysails, was moving slowly to the southward in the midst of the scattered fleet carrying for the most part the same sail as the Admiral. Only far away two or three ships could be seen covered with canvas trying to close with the flag. Captain Vincent noted with satisfaction that the first lieutenant of the Amelia had been obliged to brace by his afteryards in order not to overrun the Admiral’s quarter.

“Why!” exclaimed Lord Nelson suddenly, after looking at the sloop for a moment, “you have that tartane in tow!”

“I thought that your lordship would perhaps like to see a 40-ton lateen craft which has led such a chase to, I daresay, the fastest sloop in his Majesty’s service.”

“How did it all begin?” asked the Admiral, continuing to look at the Amelia.

“As I have already hinted to your lordship, certain information came in my way,” began Captain Vincent, who did not think it necessary to enlarge upon that part of the story. “This tartane, which is not very different to look at from the other tartanes along the coast between Cete and Genoa, had started from a cove on the Giens Peninsula. An old man with a white head of hair was entrusted with the service and really they could have found nobody better. He came round Cape Esterel intending to pass through the Hyeres roadstead. Apparently he did not expect to find the Amelia in his way. And it was there that he made his only mistake. If he had kept on his course I would probably have taken no more notice of him than of two other craft that were in sight then. But he acted suspiciously by hauling up for the battery on Porquerolles. This manuvre in connection with the information of which I spoke decided me to overhaul him and see what he had on board.” Captain Vincent then related concisely the episodes of the chase. “I assure your lordship that I never gave an order with greater reluctance than to open musketry fire on that craft; but the old man had given such proofs of his seamanship and determination that there was nothing else for it. Why! at the very moment he had the Amelia alongside of him he still made a most clever attempt to prolong the chase. There were only a few minutes of daylight left, and in the darkness we might very well have lost him. Considering that they all could have saved their lives simply by striking their sails on deck, I can not refuse them my admiration and especially to the white-haired man.”

The Admiral, who had been all the time looking absently at the Amelia keeping her station with the tartane in tow, said:

“You have a very smart little ship, Vincent. Very fit for the work I have given you to do. French built, isn’t she?”

“Yes, my lord. They are great shipbuilders.”

“You don’t seem to hate the French, Vincent,” said the Admiral, smiling faintly.

“Not that kind, my lord,” said Captain Vincent with a bow. “I detest their political principles and the characters of their public men, but your lordship will admit that for courage and determination we could not have found worthier adversaries anywhere on this globe.”

“I never said that they were to be despised,” said Lord Nelson. “Resource, courage, yes. . . . If that Toulon fleet gives me the slip, all our squadrons from Gibraltar to Brest will be in jeopardy. Why don’t they come out and be done with it? Don’t I keep far enough out of their way?” he cried.

Vincent remarked the nervous agitation of the frail figure with a concern augmented by a fit of coughing which came on the Admiral. He was quite alarmed by its violence. He watched the Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean choking and gasping so helplessly that he felt compelled to turn his eyes away from the painful spectacle; but he noticed also how quickly Lord Nelson recovered from the subsequent exhaustion.

“This is anxious work, Vincent,” he said. “It is killing me. I aspire to repose somewhere in the country, in the midst of fields, out of reach of the sea and the Admiralty and dispatches and orders, and responsibility too. I have been just finishing a letter to tell them at home I have hardly enough breath in my body to carry me on from day to day. . . . But I am like that white-headed man you admire so much, Vincent,” he pursued, with a weary smile, “I will stick to my task till perhaps some shot from the enemy puts an end to everything. . . . Let us see what there may be in those papers you have brought on board.”

The secretary in the cabin had arranged them in separate piles.

“What is it all about?” asked the Admiral, beginning again to pace restlessly up and down the cabin.

“At the first glance the most important, my lord, are the orders for marine authorities in Corsica and Naples to make certain dispositions in view of an expedition to Egypt.”

“I always thought so,” said the Admiral, his eye gleaming at the attentive countenance of Captain Vincent. “This is a smart piece of work on your part, Vincent. I can do no better than send you back to your station. Yes . . . Egypt . . . the Easts. . . . Everything points that way,” he soliloquized under Vincent’s eyes while the secretary, picking up the papers with care, rose quietly and went out to have them translated and to make an abstract for the Admiral.

“And, yet who knows!” exclaimed Lord Nelson, standing still for a moment. “But the blame or the glory must be mine alone. I will seek counsel from no man.” Captain Vincent felt himself forgotten, invisible, less than a shadow in the presence of a nature capable of such vehement feelings. “How long can he last?” he asked himself with sincere concern.

The Admiral, however, soon remembered his presence, and at the end of another ten minutes Captain Vincent left the Victory, feeling, like all officers who approached Lord Nelson, that he had been speaking with a personal friend; and with a renewed devotion for the great sea-officer’s soul dwelling in the frail body of the Commander-in-Chief of his Majesty’s ships in the Mediterranean. While he was being pulled back to his ship a general signal went up in the Victory for the fleet to form line, as convenient, ahead and astern of the Admiral; followed by another to the Amelia to part company. Vincent accordingly gave his orders to make sail, and, directing the master to shape a course for Cape Cici, went down into his cabin. He had been up nearly the whole of the last three nights and he wanted to get a little sleep. His slumbers, however, were short and disturbed. Early in the afternoon he found himself broad awake and reviewing in his mind the events of the day before. The order to shoot three brave men in cold blood, terribly distasteful at the time, was lying heavily on him. Perhaps he had been impressed by Peyrol’s white head, his obstinacy to escape him, the determination shown to the very last minute, by something in the whole episode that suggested a more than common devotion to duty and a spirit of daring defiance. With his robust health, simple good nature, and sanguine temperament touched with a little irony, Captain Vincent was a man of generous feelings and of easily moved sympathies.

“Yet,” he reflected, “they have been asking for it. There could be only one end to that affair. But the fact remains that they were defenceless and unarmed and particularly harmless-looking, and at the same time as brave as any. That old chap now. . . .” He wondered how much of exact truth there was in Symons tale of adventure. He concluded that the facts must have been true but that Symons’ interpretation of them made it extraordinarily difficult to discover what really there was under all that. That craft certainly was fit for blockade running. Lord Nelson had been pleased. Captain Vincent went on deck with the kindest feelings towards all men, alive and dead.

The afternoon had turned out very fine. The British Fleet was just out of sight with the exception of one or two stragglers, under a press of canvas. A light breeze in which only the Amelia could travel at five knots, hardly ruffled the profundity of the blue waters basking in the warm tenderness of the cloudless sky. To south and west the horizon was empty except for two specks very far apart, of which one shone white like a bit of silver and the other appeared black like a drop of ink. Captain Vincent, with his purpose firm in his mind, felt at peace with himself. As he was easily accessible to his officers his first lieutenant ventured a question to which Captain Vincent replied:

“He looks very thin and worn out, but I don’t think he is as ill as he thinks he is. I am sure you all would like to know that his lordship is pleased with our yesterday’s work — -those papers were of some importance you know — -and generally with the Amelia. It was a queer chase, wasn’t it?” he went on. “That tartane was clearly and unmistakably running away from us. But she never had a chance against the Amelia.”

During the latter part of that speech the first lieutenant glanced astern as if asking himself how long Captain Vincent proposed to drag that tartane behind the Amelia. The two keepers in her wondered also as to when they would be permitted to get back on board their ship. Symons, who was one of them, declared that he was sick and tired of steering the blamed thing. Moreover, the company on board made him uncomfortable; for Symons was aware that in pursuance of Captain Vincent’s orders, Mr. Bolt had had the three dead Frenchmen carried into the cuddy which he afterwards secured with an enormous padlock that, apparently, belonged to it, and had taken the key on board the Amelia. As to one of them, Symons’ unforgiving verdict was that it would have served him right to be thrown ashore for crows to peck his eyes out. And anyhow, he could not understand why he should have been turned into the coxswain of a floating hearse, and be damned to it. . . . He grumbled interminably.

Just about sunset, which is the time of burials at sea, the Amelia was hove to and, the rope being manned, the tartane was brought alongside and her two keepers ordered on board their ship. Captain Vincent, leaning over with his elbows on the rail, seemed lost in thought. At last the first lieutenant spoke.

“What are we going to do with that tartane, sir? Our men are on board.”

“We are going to sink her by gunfire,” declared Captain Vincent suddenly. “His ship makes a very good coffin for a seaman, and those men deserve better than to be thrown overboard to roll on the waves. Let them rest quietly at the bottom of the sea in the craft to which they had stuck so well.”

The lieutenant, making no reply, waited for some more positive order. Every eye on the ship was turned on the captain. But Captain Vincent said nothing and seemed unable or unwilling to give it yet. He was feeling vaguely, that in all his good intentions there was something wanting.

“Ah! Mr. Bolt,” he said, catching sight of the master’s-mate in the waist. “Did they have a flag on board that craft?”

“I think she had a tiny bit of ensign when the chase began, sir, but it must have blown away. It is not at the end of her mainyard now.” He looked over the side. “The halliards are rove, though,” he added.

“We must have a French ensign somewhere on board,” said Captain Vincent.

“Certainly, sir,” struck in the master, who was listening.

“Well, Mr. Bolt,” said Captain Vincent, “you have had most to do with all this. Take a few men with you, bend the French ensign on the halliards and sway his mainyard to the masthead.” He smiled at all the faces turned towards him. “After all they never surrendered and, by heavens, gentlemen, we will let them go down with their colours flying.”

A profound but not disapproving silence reigned over the decks of the ship while Mr. Bolt with three or four hands was busy executing the order. Then suddenly above the topgallant rail of the *Amelia* appeared the upper curve of a lateen yard with the tricolour drooping from the point. A subdued murmur from all hands greeted this apparition. At the same time Captain Vincent ordered the line holding the tartane alongside to be cast off and the mainyard of the *Amelia* to be swung round. The sloop shooting ahead of her prize left her stationary on the sea, then putting the helm up, ran back abreast of her on the other side. The port bow-gun was ordered to fire a round, aiming well forward. That shot, however, went just over, taking the foremast out of the tartane. The next was more successful, striking the little hull between wind and water, and going out well under water on the other side. A third was fired, as the men said, just for luck, and that too took effect, a splintered hole appearing at the bow. After that the guns were secured and the *Amelia*, with no brace being touched, was brought to her

course towards Cape Cici. All hands on board of her with their backs to the sunset sky, clear like a pale topaz above the hard blue gem of the sea, watched the tartane give a sudden dip, followed by a slow, unchecked dive. At last the tricolour flag alone remained visible for a tense and interminable moment, pathetic and lonely, in the centre of a brimful horizon. All at once it vanished, like a flame blown upon, bringing to the beholders the sense of having been left face to face with an immense, suddenly created solitude. On the decks of the Amelia a low murmur died out.

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When Lieutenant Ral sailed away with the Toulon fleet on the great strategical cruise which was to end in the battle of Trafalgar, Madame Ral returned with her aunt to her hereditary house at Escampobar. She had only spent a few weeks in town where she was not much seen in public. The lieutenant and his wife lived in a little house near the western gate, and the lieutenant's official position, though he was employed on the staff to the last, was not sufficiently prominent to make her absence from official ceremonies at all remarkable. But this marriage was an object of mild interest in naval circles. Those — -mostly men — -who had seen Madame Ral at home, told stories of her dazzling complexion, of her magnificent black eyes, of her personal and attractive strangeness, and of the Arlesian costume she insisted on wearing, even after her marriage to an officer of the navy, being herself sprung from farmer stock. It was also said that her father and mother had fallen victims in the massacres of Toulon after the evacuation of the town; but all those stories varied in detail and were on the whole very vague. Whenever she went abroad Madame Ral was attended by her aunt who aroused almost as much curiosity as herself: a magnificent old woman with upright carriage and an austere, brown, wrinkled face showing signs of past beauty. Catherine was also seen alone in the streets where, as a matter of fact, people turned round to look after the thin and dignified figure, remarkable amongst the passers-by, whom she, herself, did not seem to see. About her escape from the massacres most wonderful tales were told, and she acquired the reputation of a heroine. Arlette's aunt was known to frequent the churches, which were all open to the faithful now, carrying even into the house of God her sibylline aspect of a prophetess and her austere manner. It was not at the services that she was seen most. People would see her oftener in an empty nave, standing slim and as straight as an

arrow in the shade of a mighty pillar as if making a call on the Creator of all things with whom she had made her peace generously, and now would petition only for pardon and reconciliation with her niece Arlette. For Catherine for a long time remained uncertain of the future. She did not get rid of her involuntary awe of her niece as a selected object of God's wrath, until towards the end of her life. There was also another soul for which she was concerned. The pursuit of the tartane by the Amelia had been observed from various points of the islands that close the roadstead of Hyres, and the English ship had been seen from the Fort de la Vigie opening fire on her chase. The result, though the two vessels soon ran out of sight, could not be a matter of doubt. There was also the story told by a coaster that got into Frjus, of a tartane being fired on by a square-rigged man-of-war; but that apparently was the next day. All these rumours pointed one way and were the foundation of the report made by Lieutenant Ral to the Toulon Admiralty. That Peyrol went out to sea in his tartane and was never seen again, was of course an incontrovertible fact.

The day before the two women were to go back to Escampobar, Catherine approached a priest in the church of Ste Marie Majeure, a little unshaven fat man with a watery eye, in order to arrange for some masses to be said for the dead.

“But for whose soul are we to pray?” mumbled the priest in a wheezy low tone.

“Pray for the soul of Jean,” said Catherine. “Yes, Jean. There is no other name.”

Lieutenant Ral, wounded at Trafalgar, but escaping capture, retired with the rank of Capitaine de Frigate and vanished from the eyes of the naval world in Toulon and indeed from the world altogether. Whatever sign brought him back to Escampobar on that momentous night, was not meant to call him to his death but to a quiet and retired life, obscure in a sense but not devoid of dignity. In the course of years he became the Mayor of the Commune in that very same little village which had looked on Escampobar as the abode of iniquity, the sojourn of blood-drinkers and of wicked women.

One of the earliest excitements breaking the monotony of the Escampobar life was the discovery at the bottom of the well, one dry year when the water got very low, of some considerable obstruction. After a lot of trouble in getting it up, this obstruction turned out to be a garment made



of sail-cloth, which had armholes and three horn buttons in front, and looked like a waistcoat; but it was lined, positively quilted, with a surprising quantity of gold pieces of various ages, coinages and nationalities. Nobody but Peyrol could have put it there. Catherine was able to give the exact date; because she remembered seeing him doing something at the well on the very morning before he went out to sea with Michel, carrying off Scevola. Captain Ral could guess easily the origin of that treasure, and he decided with his wife's approval to give it up to the Government as the hoard of a man who had died intestate with no discoverable relations, and whose very name had been a matter of uncertainty, even to himself. After that event the uncertain name of Peyrol found itself oftener and oftener on Monsieur and Madame Ral's lips, on which before it was but seldom heard; though the recollection of his white-headed, quiet, irresistible personality haunted every corner of the Escampobar fields. From that time they talked of him openly, as though he had come back to live again amongst them.

Many years afterwards, one fine evening, Monsieur and Madame Ral sitting on the bench outside the *salle* (the house had not been altered at all outside except that it was now kept whitewashed), began to talk of that episode and of the man who, coming from the seas, had crossed their lives to disappear at sea again.

“How did he get all that lot of gold?” wondered Madame Ral innocently. “He could not possibly want it; and, Eugne, why should he have put it down there?”

“That, *ma chre amie*,” said Ral, “is not an easy question to answer. Men and women are not so simple as they seem. Even you, *fermire* (he used to give his wife that name jocularly, sometimes), are not so simple as some people would take you to be. I think that if Peyrol were here he could not perhaps answer your question himself.”

And they went on, reminding each other in short phrases separated by long silences, of his peculiarities of person and behaviour, when above the slope leading down to *Madrague*, there appeared first, the pointed ears, and then the whole body of a very diminutive donkey of a light grey colour with dark points. Two pieces of wood, strangely shaped, projected on each side of his body as far as his head, like very long shafts of a cart. But the donkey dragged no cart after him. He was carrying on his back on a small pack saddle the torso of a man who did not seem to have any legs. The little

animal, beautifully groomed and with an intelligent and even impudent physiognomy, stopped in front of Monsieur and Madame Ral. The man, balancing himself cleverly on the pack saddle with his withered legs crossed in front of him, slipped off, disengaged his crutches from each side of the donkey smartly, propped himself on them, and with his open palm gave the animal a resounding thwack which sent it trotting into the yard. The cripple of the Madrague in his quality of Peyrol's friend (for the rover had often talked of him both to the women and to Lieutenant Ral with great appreciation — -"C'est un homme, a") had become a member of the Escampobar community. His employment was to run about the country on errands, most unfit, one would think, for a man without legs. But the donkey did all the walking while the cripple supplied the sharp wits and an unfailing memory. The poor fellow, snatching off his hat and holding it with one hand alongside his right crutch, approached to render his account of the day in the simple words: "Everything has been done as you ordered, madame"; then lingered, a privileged servant, familiar but respectful, attractive with his soft eyes, long face, and his pained smile.

"We were just talking of Peyrol," remarked Captain Ral.

"Ah, one could talk a long time of him," said the cripple. "He told me once that if I had been complete — -with legs like everybody else, I suppose he meant — - I would have made a good comrade away there in the distant seas. He had a great heart."

"Yes," murmured Madame Ral thoughtfully. Then turning to her husband, she asked: "What sort of man was he really, Eugene?" Captain Ral remained silent. "Did you ever ask yourself that question?" she insisted.

"Yes," said Ral. "But the only certain thing we can say of him is that he was not a bad Frenchman."

"Everything's in that," murmured the cripple, with fervent conviction in the silence that fell upon Ral's words and Arlette's faint sigh of memory.

The blue level of the Mediterranean, the charmer and the deceiver of audacious men, kept the secret of its fascination — -hugged to its calm breast the victims of all the wars, calamities and tempests of its history, under the marvellous purity of the sunset sky. A few rosy clouds floated high up over the Esterel range. The breath of the evening breeze came to cool the heated rocks of Escampobar; and the mulberry tree, the only big tree on the head of the peninsula, standing like a sentinel at the gate of the yard, sighed faintly in a shudder of all its leaves, as if regretting the Brother

of the Coast, the man of dark deeds, but of large heart, who often at noonday would lie down to sleep under its shade.

# ***SUSPENSE***



A NAPOLEONIC NOVEL  
*Conrad's unfinished novel*

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# PART I

## I

A deep red glow flushed the fronts of marble palaces piled up on the slope of an arid mountain whose barren ridge traced high on the darkening sky a ghostly and glimmering outline. The winter sun was setting over the Gulf of Genoa. Behind the massive shore the sky to the east was like darkening glass. The open water too had a glassy look with a purple sheen in which the evening light lingered as if clinging to the water. The sails of a few becalmed feluccas looked rosy and cheerful, motionless in the gathering gloom. Their heads were all pointing towards the superb city. Within the long jetty with the squat round tower at the end, the water of the harbour had turned black. A bigger vessel with square sails, issuing from it and arrested by the sudden descent of the calm, faced the red disc of the sun. Her ensign hung down and its colours were not to be made out; but a lank man in a shabby sailor's jacket and wearing a strange cap with a tassel, who lounged with both his arms thrown over the black breech of an enormous piece of ordnance that with three of its monstrous fellows squatted on the platform of the tower, seemed to have no doubt of her nationality; for to the question of a young civilian in a long coat and Hessian boots and with an ingenuous young countenance above the folds of a white neckcloth he answered curtly, taking a short pipe out of his mouth but not turning his head.

“She's Elban.”

He replaced his pipe and preserved an unsociable air. The elegant young man with the pleasant countenance, (who was Cosmo, the son of Sir Charles Latham of Latham Hall, Yorkshire), repeated under his breath, “Elban,” and remained wrapped up in still contemplation of the becalmed ship with her undistinguishable flag.

It was not till the sun had sunk beneath the waters of the Mediterranean and the undistinguishable flag had been hauled down on board the motionless ship that he stirred and turned his eyes towards the harbour. The nearest prominent object in it was the imposing shape of an English line-of-battle ship moored on the west side not far from the quay. Her tall spars overtopped the roofs of the houses and the English ensign at her flagstaff

had been just hauled down and replaced by a lantern that looked strange in the clear twilight. The forms of shipping crowded towards the head of the harbour were merging into one another. Cosmo let his eyes wander over the circular platform of the tower. The man leaning over the gun went on smoking with indifference.

“Are you the guardian of this tower?” asked the young man.

The other gave him a sidelong glance and made answer without changing his attitude and more as if speaking to himself:

“This is now an unguarded spot. The wars are over.”

“Do they close the door at the bottom of this tower at night?” enquired Cosmo.

“That is a matter worth consideration especially for those like you, for instance, who have a soft bed to go to for the night.”

The young man put his head on one side and looked at his interlocutor with a faint smile.

“You don’t seem to care,” he said. “So I conclude I need not. As long as you are content to stay here I am safe enough. I followed you up the stairs, you know.”

The man with the pipe stood up abruptly. “You followed me here? Why did you do that, in the name of all the saints?”

The young man laughed as if at a good joke. “Because you were walking in front of me. There was nobody else in view near the Mole. Suddenly you disappeared. Then I saw that the door at the bottom of the tower was open and I walked up the stairs on to this platform. And I would have been very surprised if I hadn’t found you here.”

The man in the strange cap ornamented with a tassel had taken his pipe out of his mouth to listen. “That was all?”

“Yes, that was all.”

“Nobody but an Englishman would behave like that,” commented the other to himself, a slight appearance of apprehension passing over his features. “You are an eccentric people.”

“I don’t see anything eccentric in what I’ve done. I simply wanted to walk out of the town. The Mole was as good as any other part. It is very pleasant here.”

A slight breeze touched the two men’s faces, while they stood silent, looking at each other. “I am but an idle traveller,” said Cosmo easily. “I arrived this morning by land. I am glad I had the idea to come out here to

behold your town glowing in the sunset and to get a sight of a vessel belonging to Elba. There can't be very many of them. But you, my friend . . . “

“I have as much right to idle away my time here as any English traveller,” interrupted the man hastily.

“It is very pleasant here,” repeated the young traveller, staring into the dusk which had invaded the platform of the tower.

“Pleasant?” repeated the other. “Yes, perhaps. The last time I was on this platform I was only ten years old. A solid round shot was spinning and rattling all over the stone floor. It made a wondrous disturbance and seemed a living thing full of fury.”

“A solid shot!” exclaimed Cosmo, looking all over the smooth flagstones as if expecting to see the traces of that visitation. “Where did it come from?”

“It came from an English brig belonging to Milord Keith’s Squadron. She stood in quite close and opened fire on us. . . . Heaven only knows why. The audacity of your people! A single shot from one of those big fellows,” he continued, slapping the enormous bulging breech of the gun by his side, “would have been enough to sink her like a stone.”

“I can well believe it. But the fearlessness of our seamen has ceased to astonish the world long ago,” murmured the young traveller.

“There are plenty of fearless people in the world, but luck is even better than courage. The brig sailed away unscathed. Yes, luck is even better than courage. Surer than wisdom and stronger than justice. Luck is a great thing. It is the only thing worth having on one’s side. And you people have always had it. Yes, signore, you belong to a lucky nation or else you would not be standing here on this platform looking across the water in the direction of that crumb of land that is the last refuge of your greatest enemy.”

Cosmo leaned over the stone parapet near the embrasure of the gun on the other side of which the man with the short pipe in his hand made a vaguely emphatic gesture: “I wonder what thoughts pass through your head,” he went on in a quiet detached tone. “Or perhaps you are too young yet to have many thoughts in your head. Excuse my liberty, but I have always heard that one may be frank in speech with an Englishman; and by your speech there can be no doubt of your being of that nation.”

“I can assure you I have no thoughts of hatred. . . . Look, the Elban ship is getting farther away. Or is it only the darkness that makes her seem so?”

“The night air is heavy. There is more wind on the water than up here, where we stand; but I don’t think she has moved away. You are interested in that Elban ship, signore.”

“There is a fascination now about everything connected with that island,” confessed the ingenuous traveller. “You have just said that I was too young to think. You don’t seem so very much older than myself. I wonder what thoughts you may have.”

“The thoughts of a common man, thoughts that could be of no interest to an English milord,” answered the other, in a grimly deprecatory tone.

“Do you think that all Englishmen are lords?” asked Cosmo, with a laugh.

“I didn’t think. I went by your appearance. I remember hearing an old man once say that you were a lordly nation.”

“Really!” exclaimed the young man and laughed again in a low, pleasant note. “I remember hearing of an old man who called us a nation of traders.”

“Nazione di mercante,” repeated the man slowly. “Well, that may be true too. Different men, different wisdoms.”

“This didn’t occur to me,” said Cosmo, seating himself with a little spring on the stone parapet of the tower. He rested one foot on the massive gun-carriage and fixed his clear eyes on the dark red streak on the western sky left by the retreating sun like a long gash inflicted on the suffering body of the universe. . . . “Different men, different wisdoms,” he repeated, musingly. “I suppose it must be. People’s lives are so very different. . . . And of what kind was the wisdom of your old man?”

“The wisdom of a great plain as level almost as the sea,” said the other gravely. “His voice was as unexpected when I heard it as your own, signore. The evening shadows had closed about me just after I had seen to the west, on the edge of the world as it were, a lion miss his spring on a bounding deer. They went away right into the glow and vanished. It was as though I had dreamed. When I turned round there was the old man behind me no farther away than half the width of this platform. He only smiled at my startled looks. His long silver locks stirred in the breeze. He had been watching me, it seems, from folds of ground and from amongst reed beds for nearly half a day, wondering what I might be at. I had come ashore to wander on the plain. I like to be alone sometimes. My ship was anchored in a bight of this deserted coast a good many miles away, too many to walk back in the dark for a stranger like me. So I spent the night in that old man’s



ranch, a hut of grass and reeds, near a little piece of water peopled by a multitude of birds. He treated me as if I had been his son. We talked till dawn and when the sun rose I did not go back to my ship. What I had on board of my own was not of much value, and there was certainly no one there to address me as “My son” in that particular tone — you know what I mean, signore.”

“I don’t know — but I think I can guess,” was the answer whose light-hearted yet earnest frankness was particularly boyish and provoked a smile on the part of the older man. In repose his face was grave. His English interlocutor went on after a pause. “You deserted from your ship to join a hermit in a wilderness simply because the tone of his voice appealed to your heart. Is that your meaning?”

“You have guessed it, signorino. Perhaps there was more in it than that. There is no doubt about it that I did desert from my ship.”

“And where was that?”

“On the coast of South America,” answered the man from the other side of the big gun, with sudden curtness. “And now it is time for us to part.”

But neither of them stirred and for some time they remained silent, growing shadowy to each other on the massive tower, which itself, in the advancing night, was but a gray shadow above the dark and motionless sea.

“How long did you stay with that hermit in the desert?” asked Cosmo. “And how did you leave him?”

“Signore, it was he who left me. After I had buried his body I had nothing more to do there. I had learned much during that year.”

“What is it you learned, my friend? I should like to know.”

“Signore, his wisdom was not like that of other men and it would be too long to explain to you here on this tower and at this late hour of the day. I learned many things. How to be patient, for instance. . . . Don’t you think, signore, that your friends or the servants at the inn may become uneasy at your long absence?”

“I tell you I haven’t been much more than two hours in this town and I have spoken to nobody in it till I came upon you, except of course to the people at the inn.”

“They may start looking for you.”

“Why should they trouble their heads? It isn’t late yet. Why should they notice my absence?”

“Why? . . . Simply because your supper may be ready by this time,” retorted the man impatiently.

“It may be, but I am not hungry yet,” said the young man casually. “Let them search for me all over the town if they like.” Then in a tone of interest, “Do you think they would think of looking for me here?” he asked.

“No. This is the last spot anybody would think of,” muttered the other as if to himself. He raised his voice markedly, “We must part indeed. Good-night, signore.”

“Good-night.”

The man in the seaman’s jacket stared for a moment, then with a brusque movement cocked his cap with the strange tassel more on the side of his head. “I am not going away from this spot,” he said.

“I thought you were. Why did you wish me goodnight then?”

“Because we must part.”

“I suppose we must some time or other,” agreed Cosmo in a friendly voice. “I should like to meet you again.”

“We must part at once, this moment, on this tower.”

“Why?”

“Because I want to be left alone,” answered the other after the slightest of pauses.

“Oh, come! Why on earth do you want to be left alone? What is it you could do here?” protested the other with great good humour. Then as if struck by an amusing notion, “Unless indeed you want to practise incantations,” he continued lightly, “and perhaps call the Evil One to your side.” He paused. “There are people, you know, that think it can be done,” he added in a mocking tone.

“They are not far wrong,” was the other’s ominous reply. “Each man has a devil not very far from his elbow. Don’t argue, signore, don’t call him up in me! You had better say no more and go in peace from here.”

The young traveller did not change his careless attitude. The man in the cap heard him say quietly, almost in a tone of self-communion:

“I prefer to stay in peace here.”

It was indeed a wonderful peace. The sound of their quiet voices did not seem to affect it in the least. It had an enormous and overpowering amplitude which seemed rather to the man in the cap to take the part of the Englishman’s calm obstinacy against his growing anger. He couldn’t repress an impulsively threatening movement in the direction of his inconvenient

companion but it died out in perplexity. He pushed his cap still more on one side and simply scratched his head.

“You are one of those people that are accustomed to have their own way. Well, you can’t have your way this time. I have asked you quietly to leave me alone on this tower. I asked you as man to man. But if you won’t listen to reason I . . . “

Cosmo, putting the palms of his hands against the edge of the parapet, sprang lightly nearly to the middle of the platform and landed without a stagger. His voice was perfectly even.

“Reason is my only guide,” he declared. “But your request looks like mere caprice. For what can you possibly have to do here? The sea birds are gone to sleep and I have as much right to the air up here as you. Therefore ...”

A thought seemed to strike him. “Surely this can’t be your trysting place,” he commented in a changed tone through which pierced a certain sympathy.

A short scornful laugh from the other checked him and he muttered to himself soberly, “No. Altogether unfit . . . amongst those grim old guns.” He raised his voice. “All I can do is to give you all the room.” He backed away from the centre of the platform and perched himself this time on the massive breech of a sixty-pounder. “Go on with your incantations,” he said then to the tall and dim figure whose immobility appeared helpless for a moment. It broke the short period of silence, saying deliberately:

“I suppose you are aware that at any time since we have begun to talk together it was open to me to fling myself upon you unawares as you sat on the parapet and knock you over to the bottom of this tower?” He waited a moment, then in a deeper tone, “Will you deny it?” he said.

“No, I won’t deny it,” was the careless answer. “I hadn’t thought to be on my guard. But I can swim.”

“Don’t you know there is a border of big blocks of stone there? It would have been a terrible death. . . . And now, will the signore do what I ask him and return to his inn which is a much safer place than this platform?”

“Safety is not a great inducement; and I don’t believe for a moment you ever thought of attacking me in a treacherous manner.”

“Well,” the tall shadowy figure crowned by the shape of the strange cap admitted reluctantly. “Well, since you put it in those words, signore, I did not.”

“You see! I believe you are a fine fellow. But as it is I am under no sort of obligation to listen to you.”

“You are crafty,” burst out the other violently.

“It’s in the blood. How is one to deal with people like you?”

“You could try to drive me off,” suggested the other.

There was no answer for a time, then the tall figure muttered reflectively to itself.

“After all — he’s an Englishman.”

“I don’t think myself invincible on that account,” observed Cosmo calmly.

“I know. I have fought against English soldiers in Buenos Ayres. I was only thinking that, to give the devil his due, men of your nation don’t consort with spies or love tyranny either. . . . Tell me, is it true that you have only been two hours in this town?”

“Perfectly true.”

“And yet all the tyrants of the world are your allies,” the shadowy man pursued his train of thought half aloud.

The no less shadowy traveller remarked quietly into the gathering night:

“You don’t know who my friends are.”

“I don’t, but I think you are not likely to go with a tale to the Austrian spies or consort with the Piedmont-ese sbirri. As to the priests who are poking their noses everywhere, I . . . “

“I don’t know a single soul in Italy,” interrupted the other.

“But you will soon. People like you make acquaintances everywhere. But it’s idle talk with strangers that I fear. Can I trust you as an Englishman not to talk of what you may see?”

“You may. I can’t imagine what unlawful thing you are about to commit here. I am dying from curiosity. Can it be that you are really some sort of sorcerer? Go on! Trace your magic circle if that is your business, and call up the spirits of the dead.”

A low grunt was the only answer to this speech uttered in a tone between jest and earnest. Cosmo watched from the breech of his gun with intense interest the movements of the man who objected so strongly to his presence but who now seemed to pay no attention to him at all. They were not the movements of a magician in so far that they certainly had nothing to do with the tracing of circles. The figure had stepped over to the seaward face of the tower and seemed to be pulling endless things out of the breast

pocket of his jacket. The young Englishman got down from the breech of the gun, without ceasing to peer in a fascinated way, and moved closer step by step till he threw himself back with an exclamation of astonishment. "By heavens! The fellow is going to fish." . . . Cosmo remained mute with surprise for a good many seconds and then burst out loudly:

"Is this what you displayed all this secrecy for? This is the worst hoax I ever ..."

"Come nearer, signore, but take care not to tangle all my twine with your feet. . . . Do you see this box?"

The heads of the two men had come together confidentially and the young traveller made out a cylindrical object which was in fact a round tin box. His companion thrust it into his hand with the request, "Hold it for me a moment, signore," and then Cosmo had the opportunity to ascertain that the lid of it was hermetically sealed. The man in the strange cap dived into the pocket of his breeches for flint and steel. The Englishman beheld with surprise his lately inimical companion squeeze himself between the massive tube of the piece of ordnance and the wall of stone and wriggle outwards into the depth of the thick embrasure till nothing of him remained visible but his black stockings and the soles of his heavy shoes. After a time his voice came deadened along the thickness of the wall:

"Will you hand me the box now, signore?" Cosmo, enlisted in these mysterious proceedings, the nature of which was becoming clear enough to him, obeyed at once, and approaching the embrasure thrust the box in at the full length of his arm till it came in contact with the ready hand of the man who was lying flat on his stomach with his head projecting beyond the wall of the tower. His groping hand found and snatched away the box. The twine was attached to the box and at once its length laid on the platform began to run out till the very end disappeared. Then the man lying prone within the thickness of the gun embrasure lay still as death and the young traveller strained his ears in the absolute silence to catch the slightest sound at the foot of the tower. But all he could hear was the faint sound of some distant clock striking somewhere in the town. He waited a little longer, then in the cautious tone of a willing accomplice murmured within the opening:

"Got a bite yet?" The answer came hardly audible: "No. But this is the very hour." Cosmo felt his interest growing. And yet the facts in themselves were not very exciting, but all this had the complexion and the charm of an unexpected adventure, heightened by its mystery, playing itself out before

that old town towering like a carved hill decorated with lights that began to appear quickly on the sombre and colossal mass of that lofty shore. The last gleam had died out in the west. The harbour was dark except for the lantern at the stern of the British ship of the line. The man in the embrasure made a slight movement. Cosmo became more alert but apparently nothing happened. There was no murmur of voices, splash of water, or sign of the slightest stir all round the tower. Suddenly the man in the embrasure began to wriggle back on to the platform and in a very few minutes stood up to his full height facing the unexpected helper.

“She has come and gone,” he said. “Did you hear anything, signore?”

“Not a sound. She might have been the ghost of a boat — for you are alluding to a boat, are you not?”

“Si. And I hope that if any eye on shore had made her out it had taken her for only a ghost. Of course that English vessel of war rows guard at night. But it isn’t to look out for ghosts.”

“I should think not. Ghosts are of no account. Could there be anything more futile than the ghost of a boat?”

“You are one of the strong-minded, signore. Ghosts are the concern of the ignorant — yet who knows? But it does sound funny to talk of the ghost of a boat, a thing of brute matter. For wouldn’t a ghost be a thing of spirit, a man’s soul itself made restless by grief or love, or remorse or anger? Such are the stories that one hears. But the old hermit of the plain, of whom I spoke, assured me that the dead are too glad to be done with life to make trouble on earth.”

“You and your hermit!” exclaimed Cosmo in a boyish and marvelling tone. “I suppose it is no use me asking you what I have been just helping you in.”

“A, little smuggling operation, signore. Surely, signore, England has custom houses and therefore must have smugglers too.”

“One has heard of them of course. But I wouldn’t mind a bet that there is not one of them that resembles you. Neither do I believe that they deal with packages as small as the one you lowered into that ghostly boat. You saw her of course. There was a boat.”

“There was somebody to cut the string, as you see, signore. Look, here is all that twine, all of it but a little piece. It may have been a man swimming in the dark water. A man with a soul, fit to make a ghost of . . . let us call him a ghost, signore.”

“Oh yes, let us,” the other said lightly. “I am sure that when I wake up tomorrow all this will seem to me a dream. Even now I feel inclined to pinch myself.”

“What’s that for, in Heaven’s name?”

“It’s a saying we have in our country. Yes, you, your hermit, our talk, and this very tower, all this will be like a dream.”

“I would say ‘nothing better’ if it was not that most people are only too ready to talk about their dreams. No, signore, let all this be to you of less consequence than if it were a tale of ghosts, of mere ghosts in which you do not believe. You forced yourself on me as if you were the lord of this place, but I feel friendly enough to you.”

“I didn’t ask for your friendship,” retorted the young traveller in a clear voice so void of all offence that the other man accepted it for a mere statement of a fact.

“Certainly not. I spoke of my own feelings, and though I am, you may say, a newcomer and a stranger in my own native city, I assure you it is better to have me for a friend than for an enemy. And the best thing of all would be to forget all about me. It would be also the kindest thing you could do.”

“Really?” said Cosmo in a tone of sympathy. “How can you expect me to forget the most extraordinary thing that ever happened to me in all my life?”

“In all your life! H’m! You have a long life before you yet, signorino.”

“Oh, but this is an adventure.”

“That’s what I mean. You have so many marvellous adventures before you, signorino, that this one is sure to be forgotten very soon. Then why not at once?”

“No, my friend, you don’t seem somehow a person one could easily forget.”

“I-God forbid. . . . Good-night, signore.”

No sooner were the words out of his mouth than the man in the cap bounded across the platform, dived into the black square opening on its landward side, and ran down the steps so lightly that not a sound reached the ears of the other. Cosmo went down the winding stair, but cautiously in the profound darkness. The door at the bottom stood open and he stepped out on to the deserted jetty. He could see on it nothing in the shape of a fleeting shadow.

On the very edge of the shore a low little building with three arcades sent a dim gleam of light through its open door. It seemed to be a sort of guardroom, for there was a sentry, an Austrian soldier apparently, in a white coat. His duty, however, seemed to be concerned with the landing-steps in front of the guardhouse, and he let the young traveller pass on as though he had not seen him at all. Dark night had settled upon the long quay. Here and there a dim street lamp threw a feeble light on the uneven stones which the feet of the young traveller with his springy walk seemed hardly to touch. The pleasurable sensation of something extraordinary having happened to him accelerated his movements. He was also feeling very hungry and he was making haste towards his inn to dine first and then to think his adventure over, for there was a strong conviction within him that he certainly had had an adventure of a nature at the same time stimulating and obscure.



## II

Cosmo Latham had an inborn faculty of orientation in strange surroundings, most invaluable in a cavalry officer, but of which he had never made much use, not even during the few months when he served as a cornet of horse in the Duke of Wellington's army in the last year of the peninsular campaign. There had been but few occasions to make use of it for a freshly joined subaltern. It stood him in good stead that night, however, while making his way to his inn in a town in which he was a complete stranger, for it allowed him, with but little concern for the direction he took, to think of his home which he loved for itself, every stone and every tree of it — and of the two people he left there, whom he loved too, each in a different way: his father, Sir Charles, and his sister Henrietta.

Latham Hall, a large straggling building showing traces of many styles, flanked by a romantic park and commanding a vast view of the Yorkshire hills, had been the hereditary home of Lathams from the times before the Great Rebellion. That it escaped confiscation then might have been the effect of the worldly prudence of the Latham of the time. He probably took good care not to shock persons of position and influence. That, however, was not the characteristic of the later Lathams down to Sir Charles, Cosmo's father.

Sir Charles's unconventional individuality had never been understood by his country neighbours. Born endowed with a good intellect, a lively imagination, and a capacity for social intercourse, it had been his fate, owing to the idiosyncrasies of his own father, to spend his early youth in the depths of Yorkshire in surroundings not at all congenial to his tastes. Later he served for a time in the Guards; but he very soon left the army to make an extended tour in France and Italy. In those last days before the Revolution le chevalier Latham obtained a great social recognition in Paris and Versailles amongst the very best people, not so much by his brilliance as by the depth of his character and the largeness of his ideas. But suddenly he tore himself away from his friendships and successes and proceeded to Italy. There, amongst the members of the English colony in Florence, he met the two Aston girls and, for some reason or other, became a great favourite with their widowed mother. But at the end of some months he suddenly made up his mind to return home. During a long, sleepless night,

which he spent pacing up and down in the agony of an internal struggle with himself in the magnificent rooms of his lodgings in Florence, he concluded that he would go home by sea. It was the easiest way of avoiding coming near Paris. He had heard not long before that the best friends he had made in the brilliant society he had frequented in France, the Marquis and the Marquise d'Armand, had a daughter born to them. At Leghorn on the very eve of embarking he had another struggle with himself — but he went by sea. By the time when, after a long sea passage, he put his foot on native soil he had renounced the idea of hurrying on north to shut himself up in his country home. He lingered in London, disdainful and idle, and began reluctantly to fall into the ways of a man about town, when a friend returning from Italy brought him news that Miss Aston was going to marry a Tuscan nobleman of mature years, and, as a piece of queer Florentine gossip, that if the younger sister, Miss Molly

Aston, had refused two suitors in quick succession it was because she regarded herself in some way as being engaged to him, Charles Latham.

Whether stung by his conscience or urged by indignation Sir Charles started impulsively for Italy, travelling across the south of France. It was a long road. At first he had been amazed, confounded, and angry; but before he came to the end of his journey he had time to reflect upon what might have easily become an absurd and odious situation. He said to himself that a lot of bother of one sort and another would be saved by his marrying Molly Aston. He did so, to the applause of all right-minded people, and at the end of two years spent abroad came home with his wife to shut himself up in his ancestral hall commanding the view of a wide and romantic landscape, which he thought one of the finest in the world.

Molly Aston had been beautiful enough in her time to inspire several vagrant poets and at least one Italian sculptor; but as Cosmo grew older he began to understand that his mother had been a nonentity in the family life. The greatest piece of self-assertion on her part was his name. She had insisted on calling him Cosmo because the Astons counted, far back in the past, an ancestress of Florentine origin, supposed to have been a connection of the Medici family. Cosmo was fair, and the name was all about him that he had received from his mother. Henrietta was a type of dark beauty. Lady Latham died when both her children were still young. In her life she adorned Latham Hall in the same way as a statue might have adorned it. Her household power was limited to the ordering of the dinner. With habits

of meticulous order and a marvellously commonplace mind she had a temperament which, if she had not fallen violently in love at the age of eighteen with the same man whom she married, would have made her fond of society, of amusement, and perhaps even of dissipation. But her only amusement and dissipation consisted of writing long letters to innumerable relations and friends all over the world, of whom after her marriage she saw but very little. She never complained. Her hidden fear of all initiative and the secret ardour of her temperament found their fulfilment in an absolute submission to Sir Charles's will. She would never have dreamed of asking for horses for a visit in the neighbourhood, but when her husband remarked, "I think it would be advisable for you, my lady, to call at such and such a house," her face would light up, she would answer with alacrity, "Certainly, Sir Charles," and go off to array herself magnificently indeed (perhaps because of that drop of Medici blood), but also with great taste.

As the years went on Sir Charles aged more than he ought to have done, and even began to grow a little stout, but no one could fail to see that he had been a very handsome man in his time and that his wife's early infatuation for him was justified in a way. In politics he was a partisan of Mr. Pitt rather than a downright Tory. He loved his country, believed in its greatness, in its superior virtue, in its irresistible power. Nothing could shake his fidelity to national prejudices of every sort. He had no great liking for grandees and mere aristocrats, despised the fashionable world, and would have nothing whatever to do with any kind of "upstart." Without being gentle he was naturally kind and hospitable. His native generosity was so well known that no one was surprised when he offered the shelter of his Yorkshire house to a family of French refugees, the Marquis and the Marquise d'Armand and their little daughter Adèle. They had arrived in

England in a state of almost complete destitution but with two servants who had shared the dangers and the miseries of their flight from the excesses of the Revolution.

The presence of all these people at Latham Hall which, considered at first as a temporary arrangement, was to last for some years, did not affect in the least Lady Latham's beautifully dressed, idle equanimity. Had not the D'Armands been Sir Charles's intimate friends years ago, in France? But she had no curiosity. She was vaguely impressed by the fact that the Marquise was a god-daughter of the Queen of Naples. For the rest it was

only so many people more in the servants' hall, at the dinner table, and in the drawing room where the evenings were spent.

High up on one of the walls a lamp with a shaded reflector concentrated its light on the yellow satin coat on the half-length portrait of a rubicund Latham in a white coburg, which but for the manly and sensitive mouth might have been the portrait of his own coachman. Apart from that spot of beautiful colour the vast room with its windows giving on a terrace (from which Sir Charles was in the habit of viewing sunsets) remained dim with an effect of immensity in which the occupants, and even Sir Charles himself, acquired the appearance of unsubstantial shadows uttering words that had to travel across long, almost unlighted distances.

On one side of the mantelpiece of Italian marbles (a late addition designed by Sir Charles himself) Lady Latham's profuse jewellery sparkled about her splendid and restful person posed placidly on a sofa. Opposite her, the Marquise would be lying down on a deep couch with one of Lady Latham's shawls spread over her feet. The D'Armands in their flight from the Terror had saved very little besides their lives, and the Marquise d'Armand's life had by this time become a very precarious possession.

Sir Charles was perhaps more acutely aware of this than the Marquis her husband. Sir Charles remembered her gentle in her changing moods of gaiety and thought, charming, active, fascinating, and certainly the most intelligent as she was the most beautiful of the women of the French court. Her voice reaching him clear but feeble across the drawing room had a pathetic appeal; and the tone of his answers was tinged with the memory of a great sentiment and with the deference due to great misfortunes. From time to time Lady Latham would make a remark in a matter-of-fact tone which would provoke something resembling curtness in Sir Charles's elaborately polite reply, and the thought that that woman would have made the very Lord's Prayer sound prosaic. And then in the long pauses they would pursue their own thoughts as perplexed and full of unrest as the world of seas and continents that began at the edge of the long terrace graced by gorgeous sunsets; the wide world filled with the strife of ideas and the struggle of nations in perhaps the most troubled time of its history.

From the depths of the Italian chimneypiece the firelight of blazing English logs would fall on Adele d'Armand sitting quietly on a low stool near her mother's couch. Her fair hair, white complexion, and dark blue eyes contrasted strongly with the deeper colour scheme of Henrietta

Latham, whose locks were rich chestnut brown and whose eyes had a dark lustre full of intelligence rather than sentiment. Now and then the French child would turn her head to look at Sir Charles, for whom in her silent existence she had developed a filial affection.

In those days Adele d'Armand did not see much of her own father. Most of the time the Marquis was away. Each of his frequent absences was an act of devotion to his exiled Princes, who appreciated it no doubt but found devotion only natural in a man of that family. The evidence of their regard for the Marquis took the shape mainly of distant and dangerous missions to the courts of north Germany, and northern Italy. In the general disruption of the old order those missions were all futile, because no one ever stopped an avalanche by means of plots and negotiations. But in the Marquis the perfect comprehension of that profound truth was mingled with the sort of enthusiasm that fabricates the very hopes on which it feeds. He would receive his instructions for those desperate journeys with extreme gravity and depart on them without delay, after a flying visit to the Hall to embrace his ailing wife and his silent child and hold a grave conference with his stately English friend from whom he never concealed a single one of his thoughts or his hopes. And Sir Charles approved of them both; because the thoughts were sober and absolutely free from absurd illusions common to all exiles, thus appealing to Sir Charles's reason and also to his secret disdain of all great aristocracies — and the second, being based on the Marquis's conviction of England's unbroken might and consistency, seemed to Sir Charles the most natural thing in the world.

They paced a damp laurel-bordered walk together for an hour or so: Sir Charles lame and stately like a disabled child of Jupiter himself, the Marquis restraining his stride and stooping with a furrowed brow to talk in measured, level tones. The wisdom of Sir Charles expressed itself in curt sentences in which scorn for men's haphazard activities and shortsighted views was combined with a calm belief in the future.

After the peace of Amiens the Comte d'Artois, the representative of the exiled dynasty in England, having expressed the desire to have the Marquis always by his side, the Marquise and Adele left Latham Hall for the poverty and the makeshifts of the life of well-nigh penniless exiles in London. It was as great a proof of devotion to his royal cause as any that could be given. They settled down in a grimy house of yellow brick in four rooms up a very narrow and steep staircase. For attendants they had a dark mulatto

maid, brought as a child from the West Indies before the Revolution by an aunt of the Marquise, and a man of rather nondescript nationality called Bernard, who had been at one time a hanger-on in the country house of the D'Armands, but following the family in its flight and its wanderings before they had found refuge in England, had displayed unexpected talents as a general factotum. Life at Latham Hall had bored him exceedingly. The sense of complete security was almost too much for his patience. The regularity of the hours and the certitude of abundant meals depressed his spirits at times. The change to London revived him greatly, for there he had something to do and found daily occasion to display his varied gifts. He went marketing in the early morning, dusted the room he called the salon, cooked the meals, inspired and made happy by the large white smile of Miss Aglae, the Negress, with whom he was very much in love. At twelve o'clock, after tidying himself a bit, he would go in on the tips of his heavy square shoes and carry the Marquise from her room to the sofa in the salon with elaborate sureness and infinite respect, while Aglae followed with pillow, shawl, and smelling bottle, wearing a forced air of gravity. Bernard was acutely aware of her presence and would be certain — the Marquise once settled on her sofa — to get a flash of a white grin all to himself. Later Mile. Ad&le, white and fair, would go out visiting, followed by Aglae as closely as night follows day; and Bernard would watch them down the depths of the staircase in the hope of catching a sight of a quickly upturned dark brown face with fine rolling eyes. This would leave him happy for the rest of the afternoon. In the evening his function was to announce visitors who had toiled up the stairs: some of the first names in France that had come trudging on foot through the mud or dust of the squalid streets to fill the dimly lighted room which was the salon of the Marquise d'Arm and. For those duties Bernard would put on a pair of white stockings, which Miss Aglae washed for him every second day, and encase his wide shoulders in a very tight green shabby jacket with large metal buttons. Miss Aglae always found a minute or two to give him a hasty inspection and a brush-down. Those were delightful instants. Holding his breath and in a state of rigid beatitude he turned about as ordered in gay whispers by his exotic lady-love. Later he would sit on a stool outside the closed door listening to the well-bred soft uproar of conversation; and when the guests began to depart he lighted them downstairs, holding a tallow dip in a small candlestick over the banister of the landing. When his duties for the day

were over he made up for himself a bed on the floor of a narrow passage which separated the living rooms from a sort of large cupboard in which Miss Aglae reposed from her daily labours. Bernard, lying under a pair of thin blankets and with the tallow candle burning on the floor, kept slumber off till Miss Aglae stuck out her head tied up in an old red foulard — nothing but her head through the crack of the door — in order to have a little whispered conversation. That was the time when the servants exchanged their views and communicated to each other their ideas and observations. The black maid's were shrewder than the white factotum's. Being a personal attendant of the two ladies she had occasion to see and hear more than her admirer. They commented on the evident decline of the Marquise's health, not dolefully but simply as a significant fact of the situation; on the Marquis's manner of daily life which had become domestic and almost sedentary. He went out every day but now he never went away for weeks and months as he used to before. Those sudden and mysterious missions for which a misanthropic Yorkshire baronet had paid out of his own pocket had come to an end. A Marquis d'Armand could not be sent out as a common spy and there was now no court in Christendom that would dare to receive an emissary, secret or open, of the royal exiles. Bernard, who could read, explained these things shortly to Miss Aglae. All great folk were terrified at that Bonaparte. He made all the generals tremble. On those facts Miss Aglae would have it that he must be a sorcerer. Bernard had another view of Napoleonic greatness. It was nothing but the power of lies. And on one occasion after a slight hesitation he burst out: "Shall I tell you the truth about him, Miss Aglae?" The tied-up black head protruding through the crack of the door nodded assent many times in the dim light of the tallow dip. "Well then," continued Bernard with another desperate effort, "he is of no account."

Miss Aglae repressed with difficulty the loud burst of laughter which was the usual expression of her unsophisticated emotions. She had heard ladies and gentlemen in the salon express a very similar opinion of Bonaparte, but she thought suddenly of Miss Adele and emitted a sigh.

"He seems to get his paw on the whole world, any- how. What sort of a fellow is he, Bernard? You have seen him."

Bernard had seen the fellow. He assured Miss Aglae that he was a miserable shrimp of a man in big boots and with lank hair hanging down his

yellow cheeks. "I could break him in two like a straw if I could only get him into my hands."

Believing it implicitly, the black maid suggested that Bernard should go and do it.

"I would go at once," said the faithful follower. "But if I went I would never see you again. He has always a hundred thousand men around him."

At this Miss Aglae, who had begun to smile, ended with a sigh of such a deeply sorrowful nature that Bernard assured her that the time would come, yes, some day the time would come when everybody would get back his own. Aglae was ready to believe this prophecy. But meantime there was Miss Adele. That sweet child was now ready to get married, but everybody was so very poor. Bernard put on a sentimental expression in the dim light of the tallow dip, the flame of which swayed by the side of his straw mattress and made the shadow of his head, protected by a nightcap, dance too, high up the wall of the drafty passage. Timidly he muttered of love. That would get over all the difficulties.

"You very stupid man, Mr. Bernard. Love! What sort of trash you talk? Love don't buy fish for dinner." Then with sudden anxiety she inquired: "Have you got money for marketing to-morrow?" Bernard had the money. Not much, but he had the money. "Then you go out early and buy fish for dinner. This Madame la Marquise orders. Easier than killing an emperor," she continued sarcastically. "And take care fat woman in Billingsgate don't cheat you too much." she added with dignity before drawing her head in and shutting the door of her dark cupboard.

A month later, sitting upon his straw bed and with his eyes fixed on the door of Miss Aglae's cupboard, Bernard had just begun to think that he had done something to offend, and that he would be deprived of his whispered midnight chat, when the door opened, the head of the girl appeared in its usual position. It drooped. Its white eyeballs glistened full of tears. It said nothing for a long time. Bernard was extremely alarmed. He wanted to know in an anxious whisper what was wrong. The maid let him cudgel his brains for a whole minute before she made the statement that oh! she did not like the looks of a certain gentleman visitor in a "too-much-laced coat."

Bernard, relieved but uncomprehending, snatched the candlestick off the floor and raised it to the protruded head of the maid.

"What is there to cry about?" he asked. The tears glistening on the dusky cheek astonished him beyond measure; and as an African face lends itself to



the expression of sorrow more than any other type of human countenance, he was profoundly moved, and without knowing the cause, by mere sympathy felt ready to cry himself.

“You don’t see! You don’t understand anything, Bernard. You stand there at the door like a stick. What is the use of you I can’t tell.”

Bernard would have felt the injustice to be unbearable if he had not had a strong sense of his own merits. Moreover, it was obvious that Aglae was thoroughly upset. As to the man in the too-much-laced coat, Bernard remembered that he was dressed very splendidly indeed. He had called first in company of a very fine English gentleman, a friend of the family, and he had repeated the call always with that same friend. It was a fact he had never called by himself yet. The family had dined with him only the day before, as Bernard knew very well because he had had to call the hackney coach and had given the address, not to mention the confidential task of carrying the Marquise down the stairs and then up again on their return from that entertainment. There could be nothing wrong with a man with whom the family dined. And the Marquise herself too, she who, so to speak, never went out anywhere!

“What has he done?” he asked without marked excitement. “I have never seen you so distressed, Miss Aglae.”

“Me upset? I should think me upset. I fear him wants carry off Mile. Adele — poor child.”

This staggered the faithful Bernard. “I should like him to try,” he said pugnaciously. “I keep a cudgel there in this passage.” A scornful exclamation from the maid made him pause. “Oh!” he said in a changed tone, “carry her off for a wife? Well, what’s wrong in that?”

“Oh! you silly!” whimpered Aglae. “Can’t you see him twice, twice and a half, the age of Mile. Adele?”

Bernard remained silent a minute. “Fine-looking man,” he remarked at last. “Do you know anything else about him?”

“Him got plenty of money,” sobbed out Aglae.

“I suppose the parents will have something to say about that,” said Bernard, after a short meditation. “And if Mile. Adele herself ...”

But Aglae wailed under her breath, as it were. “It’s done, Bernard, it’s done!”

Bernard, fascinated, stared upwards at the maid. A mental reference to abundance of money for marketing flashed through his mind.

“I suppose Mile. Ad&le can love a man like that. Why not?”

“Him got very fine clothes certainly,” hissed Aglae furiously. Then she broke down and became full of desolation. “Oh, Bernard, them poor people, you should have seen their faces this morning when I served the breakfast. I feel as if I must make a big howl while I give plate to M. le Marquis. I hardly dare to look at anybody.”

“And Mademoiselle?” asked Bernard in an anxious whisper.

“I don’t like to look at her either,” went on Aglae in a tone of anguish. “She got quite a flush on her face. She think it very great and fine, make everybody rich. I ready to die with sorrow, Bernard. She don’t know. She too young. Why don’t you cry with me? — you great stupid man.”

### III

The marriage, the prospect of which failed to commend itself to the coloured maid, took place in due course. The contract which expressed the business side of that alliance was graced by the signature of a Prince of the blood and by two other signatures of a most aristocratic complexion. The French colony in London refrained from audible comments. The gracious behaviour of H. R. H. the Due de Berry to the bridegroom killed all criticism in the very highest circles of the emigration. In less exalted circles there were slight shrugs and meaning glances, but very little else besides, except now and then a veiled sarcasm which could be ascribed to envy as much as to any other sentiment. Amongst the daughters of the emigration there must have been more than one who in her heart of hearts thought Adele d'Armand a very lucky girl. The splendour of the entertainments which were given to the London society by the newly wedded couple after their return from the honeymoon put it beyond all doubt that the man whom Aglae described as wearing a "too-much-laced coat" was very rich. It began also to be whispered that he was a man of fantastic humours and of eccentric whims of the sort that do not pass current in the best society; especially in the case of a man whose rank was dubious and whose wealth was but recently acquired. But the embittered and irreconcilable remnant of the exiled aristocracy gave but little of its sympathy to Adele d'Armand. She ought to have waited till the King was restored, and either married suitably — si or else entered a convent for ladies of rank. For these too would soon be restored.

The Marquis, before the engagement of his daughter had become public, had written to his friend Sir Charles of the impending marriage in carefully selected terms which demanded nothing but a few words of formal congratulation. Of his son-in-law he mentioned little more than the name. It was, he said, that of a long-impooverished Piedmontese family with good French connections formed in the days before it had fallen into comparative obscurity but, the Marquis insisted, fully recognized by the parties concerned. It was the family De Monteverso. The world had heard nothing of it for more than a century, the Marquis admitted parenthetically. His daughter's intended husband's name was Helion — Count Helion de Monteverso. The title had been given to him by the King of Sardinia just

before that unfortunate monarch was driven out of his dominions by the armies of republican France. It was the reward of services rendered at a critical time and none the less meritorious because, the Marquis admitted, they were of a financial nature. Count Helion, who went away very young from his native country and wandered in many lands, had amassed a large personal fortune, the Marquis went on to say, which luckily was invested in a manner that made it safe from political revolutions and social disasters overwhelming both France and Italy. That fortune, as a matter of fact, had not been made in Europe, but somewhere beyond the seas. The Marquis's letter reached Latham Hall in the evening of an autumn day.

The very young Miss Latham, seated before an embroidery frame, watched across the drawing room her father reading the letter under the glare of the reflector lamp and at the feet, as it were, of the Latham in the yellow satin coat. Sir Charles raised his eyebrows, which with passing years had become bushy and spoiled a little the expression of his handsome face. Miss Latham was made very anxious by his play of physiognomy. She had already been told after the first rustle of unfolded paper that her big friend Adele d'Armand (Miss Latham was four years younger) was going to be married, and had become suddenly, but inwardly, excited. Every moment she expected her father to tell her something more. She was dying from impatience; but there was nothing further except the rustle of paper — and now this movement of the eyebrows. Then Sir Charles lowered his hands slowly. She could contain herself no longer.

“Who is it, Papa?” she asked with animation.

Henrietta Latham was fifteen then. Her dark eyes had remained as large as ever. The purity of her complexion, which was not of the milk-white kind, was admirable and the rich shade of the brown curls clustering on each side of her faintly glowing cheeks made a rich and harmonious combination. Sir Charles gazed at his daughter's loveliness with an air of shocked abstraction. But he too could not contain himself. He departed from his stateliness so far as to growl out scathingly:

“An upstart of some kind.”

Miss Latham was, for all her lively manner, not given to outward manifestations of emotions. This intelligence was too shocking for a gasp or an exclamation. She only flushed slowly to the roots of her pretty hair. An upstart simply meant to her everything that was bad in the way of a human being, but the scathing tone of Sir Charles's outburst also augmented her

profound emotion, for it seemed to extend to Adele d'Armand herself. It shocked her tender loyalty towards the French girl, which had not been diminished by a separation of more than three years. She said quietly:

“Adele . . . Impossible!”

The flush ebbed out of her healthy cheeks and left them pale, with the eyes darker than Sir Charles had ever seen them before. Those evidences of his daughter's emotion recalled Sir Charles to himself. After looking at his daughter fixedly for a moment he murmured the word “impossible” without any particular accent and again raised the letter to his eyes.

He did not find it in anything to modify his first impression of the man whom Adele d'Armand was about to marry. Once more in his vaguely explanatory message the Marquis alluded to the wealth of his prospective son-in-law. It gave him a standing in the best society which his personal merits could not perhaps have secured for him so completely. Then the Marquis talked about his wife's health. The Marquise required many comforts, constant care, and cheerful surroundings. He had been enabled to leave the disagreeable lodgings in a squalid street for a little house in Chiswick very near London. He complained to his old friend that the uncompromising royalists reproached him bitterly for having signed a three-years' lease. It seemed to them an abominable apostasy from the faith in a triumphal return of the old order of things in a month or two. “I have caused quite a scandal by acting in this sensible manner,” he wrote. “I am very much abused, but I have no doubt that even those who judge me most severely will be glad enough to come to Adele's wedding.”

Then, as if unable to resist the need to open his heart, he began the next line with the words:

I need not tell you that all this is my daughter's own doing. The demand for her hand was made to us regularly through

Lord G , who is a good friend of mine, though he belongs to the faction of Mr. Fox in which the Count of Monteverso numbers most of his English friends. But directly we had imparted the proposal to Adele she took a step you may think incredible, and which from a certain point of view might even be called undutiful, if such a word could ever be applied to the sweet and devoted child our Adele has always been to us. At her personal request, made without consulting either her mother or myself, Lord G. had the weakness to arrange a meeting between her and the Count at his own house. What those two could have said to each other I really cannot imagine.

When we heard of it, the matter was so far settled that there was nothing left for us but to accept the inevitable . . .

Again Sir Charles let his big white aristocratic hands descend on his knees. His daughter's dark head drooped over the frame, and he had a vision of another head, very different and very fair, by its side. It had been a part of his retired life and had had a large share of his affection. How large it was he discovered only now, at this moment, when he felt that it was in a sense lost to him for ever. "Inevitable," he muttered to himself with a half-scornful, half-pained intonation. Sir Charles could understand the sufferings, the difficulties, the humiliations of poverty. But the Marquis might have known that, far or near, he could have counted on the assistance of his friend. For some years past he had never hesitated to dip into his purse. But that was for those mysterious journeys and those secret and important missions his Princes had never hesitated to entrust him with without ever troubling their heads about the means. Such was the nature of Princes, Sir Charles reflected with complete bitterness. And now came this ... A whole young life thrown away perhaps, in its innocence, in its ignorance. . . .

How old could Adele be now? Eighteen or nineteen. Not so very much younger than her mother was when he used to see so much of her in Paris and Versailles, when she had managed to put such an impress on his heart that later he did not care whom he married or where he lived. . . . Inevitable! ... Sir Charles could not be angry with the Marquise, now a mere languid shadow of that invincible charm that his heart had not been able to resist. She and her husband must have given up all their hopes, all their loyal royalist hopes before they could bow like this to the Inevitable. It had not been difficult for him to learn to love that fascinating French child as though she had been another daughter of his own. For a moment he experienced an anguish so acute that it made him move slightly in his chair. Half aloud he muttered the thought that came into his mind:

"Austerlitz has done it."

Miss Latham raised her lustrous dark eyes with an enquiring expression and murmured, "Papa?"

Sir Charles got up and seized his stick. "Nothing, my dear, nothing." He wanted to be alone. But on going out of the room he stopped by the embroidery frame and, bending down, kissed the forehead of his daughter — his English daughter. No issue of a great battle could affect her future.

As to the other girl, she was lost to him and it couldn't be helped. A battle had destroyed the fairness of her life. This was the disadvantage of having been born French or indeed belonging to any other nation of the continent. There were forces there that pushed people to rash or unseemly actions; actions that seemed dictated by despair and therefore wore an immoral aspect. Sir Charles understood Adele d'Armand even better than he understood his own daughter, or at least he understood her with greater sympathy. She had a generous nature. She was too young, too inexperienced to know what she was doing when she took in hand the disposal of her own person in favour of that apparently Piedmontese upstart with his obscure name and his mysteriously acquired fortune. "I only hope the fortune is there," thought Sir Charles with grim scepticism. But as to that there could be no doubt, judging from the further letters he received from his old friend. After a short but brilliant period of London life the upstart had carried Adele off to France. He had bought an estate in Piedmont, which was his native country, and another with a splendid house, near Paris. Sir Charles was not surprised to hear a little later that the Marquise and the Marquis had also returned to France. The time of persecution was over; most of the great royalist families were returning, unreconciled in sentiment if wavering in their purposes. That his old friend should ever be dazzled by imperial grandeurs Sir Charles could not believe. Though he had abandoned his daughter to an upstart, he was too good a royalist to abandon his principles, for which certainly he would have died if that had been of any use. But he had returned to France. Most of his exiled friends had returned too, and Sir Charles understood very well that the Marquis and his wife wanted to be somewhere near their daughter. This departure closed a long chapter in his life, and afterwards Sir Charles hardly ever mentioned his French friends. The only positive thing which Henrietta knew was that Adele d'Armand had married an upstart and had returned to France. She had communicated that knowledge to her brother, who had stared with evident surprise but had made no comment. Living away from home at school and afterwards in Cambridge, his father's French friends had remained for him as shadowy figures on the shifting background of a very poignant, very real, and intense drama of contemporary history, dominated by one enormously vital and in its greatness immensely mysterious individuality — the only man of his time.

Cosmo Latham at the threshold of life had adopted neither of the contrasted views of Napoleon Emperor entertained by his contemporaries. For him as for his father before him, the world offered a scene of conflicting emotions in which facts appraised by reason preserved a mysterious complexity and a dual character. One evening during an artless discussion with young men of his own age, it had occurred to him to say that Bonaparte seemed to be the only man amongst a lot of old scarecrows. "Look how he knocks them over," he had explained. A moment of silence followed. Then a voice objected:

"Then perhaps he is not so great as some of you try to make him out."

"I didn't mean that exactly," said Cosmo in a sobered tone. "Nobody can admire that man more than I do. Perhaps the world may be none the worse for a scarecrow here and there left on the borders of what is right or just. I only wished to express my sense of the moving force in his genius."

"What does he stand for?" asked the same voice.

Cosmo shook his head. "Many things, and some of them too obvious to mention. But I can't help thinking that there are some which we cannot see yet."

"And some of them that are dead already," retorted his interlocutor. "They died in his very hands. But there is one thing for which he stands and that will never die. You seem to have forgotten it. It is the spirit of hostility to this nation; to what we in this room, with our different views and opinions, stand for in the last instance."

"Oh, that!" said Cosmo confidently. "What we stand for isn't an old scarecrow. Great as he is he will never knock that over. His arm is not long enough, however far his thoughts may go. He has got to work with common men."

"I don't know what you mean. What else are we? I believe you admire him."

"I do," confessed Cosmo sturdily.

This did not prevent him from joining the army in Spain before the year was out, and that without asking for Sir Charles's approval. Sir Charles condemned severely the policy of using the forces of the Crown in the Peninsula. He did not like the ministry of the day, and he had a strong prejudice against all the Wellesleys to whose aggrandizement this whole policy seemed effected. But when at the end of a year and a half, after the final victory of Toulouse, his son appeared in Yorkshire, the two made up



for the past coolness by shaking hands warmly for nearly a whole minute. Cosmo really had done very little campaigning and soon declared to his father the wish to leave the army. There would be no more fighting for years and years, he argued, and though he did not dislike fighting in a good cause, he had no taste for mere soldiering. He wanted to see something of the world which had been closed to us for so long. Sir Charles, ageing and dignified, leaned on his stick on the long terrace.

“All the world was never closed to us,” he said.

“I wasn’t thinking of the East, sir,” explained Cosmo. “I heard some people talk about its mystery, but I think Europe is mysterious enough just now, and even more interesting.”

Sir Charles nodded his bare gray head in the chill evening breeze.

“France, Germany,” he murmured.

Cosmo thought that he would prefer to see something of Italy first. He would go north afterwards.

“Through Vienna, I suppose,” suggested Sir Charles with an impassive face.

“I don’t think so, sir,” said Cosmo frankly. “I don’t care much for the work which is going on there and perhaps still less for the men who are putting their hands to it.”

This time Sir Charles’s slow nod expressed complete agreement. He too had no liking for the work that was about to begin there. But no objection could be raised against Italy. He had known Italy well thirty or more years ago, but it must have been changed out of his knowledge. He remained silent, gazing at the wide landscape of blue wooded rises and dark hollows under the gorgeous colours of the sunset. They began to die out.

“You may travel far before you see anything like this,” he observed to his son. “And don’t be in a hurry to leave us. You have only just come home. Remember I am well over sixty.”

Cosmo was quite ready to surrender himself to the peace of his Yorkshire home, so different from the strenuous atmosphere of the last campaign in the South of France. Autumn was well advanced before he fixed the day for his departure. On his last day at home Sir Charles addressed him with perfect calmness.

“When you pass into Italy you must not fail to see my old friend the Marquis d’Armand. The French King has appointed him as ambassador in Turin. It’s a sign of high favour, I believe. He will be either in Turin or

Genoa. . . .” Sir Charles paused, then after a perfectly audible sigh added with an effort: “The Marquise is dead. I knew her in her youth. She was a marvellous woman. . . .” Sir Charles checked himself, and then with another effort, “But the daughter of my old friend is I believe with her father now, a married daughter, the Countess of Monteverso.”

“You mean little Adele, sir,” said Cosmo, with interest, but on Sir Charles’s face there passed a distinct shade of distress.

“Oh, you remember the child,” he said, and his tone was tender but it changed to contempt as he went on. “I don’t know whether the fellow, I mean the man she married, is staying with them or whether they are living with him, or whether ... I know nothing!”

The word “upstart,” heard many years ago from his sister Henrietta, crossed Cosmo’s mind. He thought to himself, “There is something wrong there,” and to his father he said, “I will be able to tell you all about it.”

“I don’t want to know,” Sir Charles replied with a surprising solemnity of tone and manner which hid some deeper feeling. “But give the Marquis my love and tell him that when he gets tired of all his grandeurs he may remember that there is a large place for him in this house as long as I live.”

Late that evening Cosmo, saying good-bye to his sister, took her in his arms, kissed her forehead, and holding her out at arm’s length said:

“You have grown into a charming girl, Henrietta.”

“I am glad you think so,” she said. “Alas, I am too dark. I can never be as charming as Adele must have been at my age. You seem to have forgotten her.”

“Oh no,” protested Cosmo carelessly. “A marvel of fairness, wasn’t she? I remember you telling me years ago that she married an upstart.”

“That was Father’s expression. You know what that means, Cosmo.”

“I do know what it means, exactly,” he said, laughing. “But from what Father said this afternoon it seems as if he were a rather nasty upstart. What made Adele do it?”

“I am awed,” confessed Henrietta. “I don’t know what made her do it. I was never told. Father never talked much about the D’Armands afterwards. I was with him in the yellow drawing room the evening he got the letter from the Marquis. After he read it he said something very extraordinary. You know it’s full nine years ago and I was yet a child, yet I could not have dreamed it. I heard it distinctly. He dropped his hands and said, ‘Austerlitz has done it/ What could he have meant?’”

“It would be hard to guess the connection,” said Cosmo, smiling at his sister’s puzzled face. “Father must have been thinking of something else.”

“Father was thinking of nothing else for days,” affirmed Henrietta positively.

“You must have been a very observant child,” remarked her brother. “But I believe you were always a clever girl, Henrietta. Well, I am going to see Adele.”

“Oh yes, you start in the morning to travel ever so far and for ever so long,” said Miss Latham enviously. “Oh Cosmo, you are going to write to me — lots?”

He looked at her appreciatively and gave her another brotherly hug.

“Certainly I will write, whole reams,” he said.

## IV

On his way from the harbour to the upper part of the town where his inn was situated Cosmo Latham met very few people. He had to pass through a sort of covered way; its arch yawned in front of him very black with only a feeble glimmer of a light in its depths. It did not occur to him that it was a place where one could very well be knocked on the head by evil-intentioned men if there were any prowling about in that early part of the evening, for it was early yet, though the last gleams of sunset had gone out completely off the earth and out of the sky. On issuing from the dark passage a maze of narrow streets presented itself to his choice, but he knew that as long as he kept walking uphill he could not fail to reach the middle of the town. Projecting at long intervals from the continuous mass of thick walls, wrought-iron arms held lanterns containing dim gleams of light. The enormous doors of the lofty gateways he passed were closed, and the only sound he could hear was that of his own deliberate footsteps. At a wider spot where several of those lanes met he stopped, and looking about him asked himself whether all those enormous and palatial houses were empty, or whether it was the thickness of walls that killed all the signs of life within; for as to the population being already asleep he could not believe it for a moment. All at once he caught sight of a muffled feminine form. In the heavy shadow she seemed to emerge out of one wall and gliding on seemed to disappear into another. It was undoubtedly a woman. Cosmo was startled by this noiseless apparition and had a momentary feeling of being lost in an enchanted city. Presently the enchanted silence was broken by the increasing sound of an iron-shod stick tapping the flagstones, till there walked out of one of the dark and tortuous lanes a man who by his rolling gait, general outline, and the characteristic shape of the hat, Cosmo could not doubt, was a seaman belonging to the English man-of-war in the harbour. The tapping of his stick ceased suddenly and Cosmo hailed him in English, asking for the way.

The sturdy figure in the tarpaulin hat put its cudgel under its arm and answered him in a deep pleasant voice. Yes, he knew the inn. He was just coming from there. If His Honour followed the street before him he would come to a large open space and His Honour's inn would be across the square. In the deep shadows Cosmo could make out of the seaman's face nothing but the bushy whiskers and the gleam of the eyes. He was pleased

at meeting the very day he had reached the Mediterranean shore (he had come down to Genoa from Turin) such a fine specimen of a man-of-war's man. He thanked him for the direction and the sailor, touching his hat, went off at his slightly rolling gait. Cosmo observed that he took a turning very near the spot where the muffled woman had a moment before vanished from his sight. It was a very dark and a very narrow passage between two towering buildings. Cosmo, continuing on his way, arrived at a broad thoroughfare badly lighted but full of people. He knew where he was then. In a very few moments he found himself at the door of his inn in a great square which in comparison with the rest of the town might have been said to blaze with lights.

Under an iron lantern swung above a flight of three broad steps, Cosmo recognized his servant gazing into the square with a worried expression which changed at once into one of relief on perceiving his master. He touched his cap and followed Cosmo into a large hall with several doors opening into it and furnished with many wooden chairs and tables. At one of them bearing four candlesticks several British naval officers sat talking and laughing in subdued tones. A compactly built clean-shaven person with slightly sunken cheeks, wearing black breeches and a maroon waistcoat with sleeves, but displaying a very elaborate frill to his white shirt, stood in the middle of the floor, glancing about with vigilance, and bowed hurriedly to his latest client. Cosmo returned the greeting of Signor Cantelucci, who, snatching up the nearest candlestick, began to ascend a broad stone staircase with an air of performing a solemn duty. Cosmo followed him, and Cosmo's servant followed his master. They went up and up. At every flight broad archways gave a view of dark perspective in which nothing but a few drops of dim fire were forlornly visible. At last Signor Cantelucci threw open a door on a landing and bowing again:

"See, milord! There is a fire. I know the customs and habits of the English."

Cosmo stepped into a large and lofty room where in the play of bright flames under a heavy and tall mantelpiece the shadows seemed very much disturbed by his entrance. Cosmo approached the blaze with satisfaction.

"I had enough trouble to get them to light it," remarked the valet in a resentful tone. "If it hadn't been for a jack-tar with big whiskers I found down in the hall it wouldn't be done yet. He came up from the ship with one of these sea officers downstairs. He drove the fellows with the wood in

fine style up here for me. He knows the people here. He cursed them each separately by their Christian names, and then had a glass of wine in the kitchen with me.”

Meantime Signor Cantelucci, wearing the aspect of a deaf man, had lighted, on two separate tables, two clusters of candles which drove the restless gloom of the large apartment half way up to the ceiling, and retired with noiseless footsteps. He stopped in the doorway to cast a keen glance at the master and the man standing by the fire. Those two turned their heads only at the sound of the closing door.

“I couldn’t think what became of you, sir. I was getting quite worried about you. You disappeared without saying anything to me.”

“I went for a walk down to the sea,” said Cosmo while the man moved off to where several cowhide trunks were ranged against the wall. “I like to take a look round on arriving at a new place.”

“Yes, sir; but when it got dark I wondered.”

“I tarried on a tower to watch the sunset,” murmured Cosmo.

“I have been doing some unpacking,” said the servant, “but not knowing how long you mean to stay »

“It may be a long stay.”

“Then I will go on, sir; that is if you are going to keep this room.”

“Yes. The room will do, Spire. It’s big enough.”

Spire took up one of the two candelabras and retired into the neighbourhood of a sort of state bed heavily draped at the other end of the room. There, throwing open the trunks and the doors of closets, he busied himself systematically, without noise, till he heard the quiet voice of his young master.

“Spire.”

“Yes, sir,” he answered, standing still with a pile of shirts on his arm.

“Is this inn very full?”

“Yes, very,” said Spire. “The whole town is full of travellers and people from the country. A lot of our nobility and gentry are passing this way.”

He deposited the shirts on a shelf in the depths of the wall and turned round again.

“Have you heard any names, Spire?”

Spire stooped over a trunk and lifted up from it carefully a lot of white neckcloths folded neatly one within the other.

“I haven’t had much time yet, sir. I heard a few.”

He laid down the neckcloths by the side of the shirts while Cosmo, with his elbow on the mantelpiece, asked down the whole length of the room:

“Anybody I know?”

“Not in this place, sir. There is generally a party of officers from the man-of-war staying here. They come and go. I have seen some Italian gentlemen in square-cut coats and powdered hair. Very old-fashioned, sir. There are some Austrians too, I think; but I haven’t seen any ladies. ... I am afraid, sir, this isn’t the right sort of inn. There is another about a hundred yards from here on the other side of the square.”

“I don’t want to meet anybody I know,” said Cosmo Latham in a low voice.

Spire thought that this would make his stay in Genoa very dull. At the same time he was convinced that his young master would alter his mind before very long and change to that other inn patronized by travellers of fashion. For himself he was not averse from a little quiet time. Spire was no longer young. Thirty years ago, before the War and before the Revolution, he had travelled with Sir Charles in France and Italy. He was then only eighteen, but being a steady and trustworthy lad was taken abroad to look after the horses. Sir Charles kept four horses in Florence, and Spire had often ridden on Tuscan roads behind Sir Charles and the two Misses Aston, of whom one later became Lady Latham. After the family settled in Yorkshire he passed from the stables to the house, acquired a confidential position, and whenever Lady Latham took a journey he sat in the rumble with a pair of double-barrelled pistols in the pockets of his greatcoat and ordered all things on the road. Later he became intermediary between Sir Charles and the stables, the gardens, and in all out-of-door things about the house. He attended Lady Latham on her very last drive, all the details for that lady’s funeral having been left to his management. He was also a very good valet. He had been called one evening into the library where Sir Charles, very gouty that day, leaning with one hand on a thick stick and with the other on the edge of a table, had said to him: “I am lending you to Mr. Cosmo for his travels in France and Italy. You will know your way about. And mind you draw the charges of the pistols in the carriage every morning and load them afresh.”

Spire was then requested to help Sir Charles up the stairs and had a few more words said to him when Sir Charles stopped at the door of his bedroom.

“Mr. Cosmo has plenty of sense. You are not to make yourself a nuisance to him.”

“No, Sir Charles,” said the imperturbable Spire. “I will know how to look after Mr. Cosmo.”

And if he had been asked, Spire would have been able to say that during the stay in Paris and all through France and Switzerland on the way to Genoa Mr. Cosmo had given him no trouble at all.

Spire, still busy unpacking, glanced at his young master. He certainly looked very quiet now, leaning on his elbow with the firelight playing from below on his young thoughtful face with its smooth and pale complexion. “Very good-looking indeed,” thought Spire.-In that thoughtful mood he recalled very much the Sir Charles of thirty or thirty-five years ago. Would he too find his wife abroad? There had been women enough in Paris of every kind and degree, English and French and all sorts. But it was a fact that Mr. Cosmo sought most of his company amongst men, of whom also there had been no lack and of every degree. In that, too, the young man resembled very much his father. Men’s company. But were he to get caught he would get caught properly; at any rate for a time, reflected Spire, remembering Sir Charles Latham’s rush back to Italy, the inwardness of which had been no more revealed to him than to the rest of the world.

Spire, approaching the candelabra, unfolded partly a very fine coat, then refolded it before putting it away on a convenient shelf. He had a moment of regret for his own young days. He had never married, not because there had been any lack of women to set their caps at him, but from a sort of half-conscious prudence. Moreover, he had a notion somehow or other that Sir Charles would not have liked it. Perhaps it was just as well. Now he was carefree, attending on Mr. Cosmo without troubling his head about who had remained at home.

Spire, arranging the contents of a dressing case on the table, cast another sidelong look at the figure by the fire. Very handsome. Something like Sir Charles and yet not like. There was a touch of something unusual, perhaps foreign, and yet no one with a pair of eyes in his head could mistake Mr. Cosmo for anything but an English gentleman.

Spire’s memories of his tour with Sir Charles had been growing dim. But he remembered enough of the old-time atmosphere to have become aware of a feeling of tension, of a suggestion of restlessness which certainly was new to him.



The silence had lasted very long. Cosmo before the fire had not moved. Spire ventured on a remark.

“I notice people are excited about one thing and another hereabouts, sir.”

“Excited. I don’t wonder at it. In what way?”

“Sort of discontented, sir. They don’t like the Austrians, sir. You may have noticed as we came along ...”

“Did they like us when we held the town?”

“I can hardly say that, sir. I have been sitting for an hour or more in the couriers’ room, with all sorts of people coming in and out, and heard very wild sort of talk.”

“What can you know about its wildness?”

“To look at their faces was enough. It’s a funny place, that room downstairs,” went on Spire, rubbing with a piece of silk a travelling looking-glass mounted cunningly in a silver case which when opened made a stand for it. He placed it exactly in the middle of a little table and turned round to look at his master. Seeing that Cosmo seemed disposed to listen he continued : “It is vaulted like a cellar and has a little door giving into a side street. People come in and out as they like. All sorts of low people, sir, facchini and carters and boatmen and suchlike. There was an old fellow came in, a gray-headed man, a cobbler, I suppose, as he brought a bagful of mended shoes for the servants of the house. He emptied the lot on the stone floor, sir, and instead of trying to collect his money from the people that were scrambling for them he made them a speech. He spouted, sir, without drawing a breath. The courier-valet of an English doctor staying here, a Swiss I think he is, says to me in his broken English: ‘He would cut every Austrian throat in this town.’ We were having a glass of wine together and I asked him, ‘And what do you think of that?’ And he says to me, after thinking a bit, ‘I agree with him. . . / Very dreadful, sir,” concluded Spire with a perfectly unmoved face.

Cosmo looked at him in silence for a time. “It was very bold talk if that is what the man really said,” he remarked. “Especially as the place is so public as you say it is.”

“Absolutely open to the street, sir; and that same Swiss fellow had told me just before that the town was full of spies and what they call sbirri that came from Turin with the King. The King is staying at the Palace, sir. They are expecting the Queen of Sardinia to arrive any day. You didn’t know, sir? They say she will come in an English man-of-war. That old cobbler was

very abusive about the King of Piedmont too. Surely talk like that can't be safe anywhere."

Spire paused suddenly and Cosmo Latham turned his back to the fire.

"Well, and what happened?" he asked with a smile.

"You could have heard a pin drop," said Spire in equable tones, "till that Signor Cantelucci — that's the padrone of this inn, sir ... "

"The man who lighted me up?" said Cosmo.

"Yes, sir. ... I didn't know he was in the room till suddenly he spoke behind my back telling one of the scullions that was there to give the man a glass of wine. And what the old fellow must do but raise it above his head and shout a toast to the Destructor of the Austrians before he tossed it down his throat. I was quite astonished, but Signor Cantelucci never turned a hair. He offered his snuffbox to that doctor's courier and myself and shrugged his shoulders. 'It was only Pietro,' he said, 'a little mad' — he tapped his forehead, you know, sir. The doctor's courier sat there grinning. I got suddenly uneasy about you, sir, and went out to the front door to see whether you were coming. It's very different from what it was thirty years ago. There was no talk in Italy of cutting foreigners' throats when Sir Charles and I were here. It was quite a startling experience."

Cosmo nodded. "You seem impressed, Spire. Well, I too had an experience, just as the sun was setting."

"I am sorry to hear that, sir."

"What do you mean? Why should you be sorry?"

"I beg your pardon, sir, I thought it was something unpleasant."

Cosmo had a little laugh. "Unpleasant? No! Not exactly, though I think it was more dangerous than yours, but if there was any madness connected with it, it had a very visible method. It was not all talk either. Yes, Spire, it was exciting."

"I don't know what's come to them all. Everybody seems excited. There was not excitement in Italy thirty years ago when I was with Sir Charles and took four horses with only one helper from this very town to Florence, sir."

Cosmo with fixed eyes did not seem to hear Spire's complaining remark. He exclaimed: "Really it was very extraordinary," so suddenly that Spire gave a perceptible start. He pulled himself together and asked in a purely business tone:

"Are you going to dine in your room, sir? Time is getting on."

Cosmo's mood too seemed to have changed completely.

"I don't know. I am not hungry. I want you to move one of those screens here near the fire and place a table and chair there. I will do some correspondence to-night. Yes, I will have my dinner here, I think."

"I will go down and order it, sir," said Spire. "The cook here is a Frenchman who married a native and..."

"Who on earth is swearing like this outside?" exclaimed Cosmo, while Spire's face also expressed astonishment at the loud burst of voices coming along the corridor, one angry, the other argumentative, in a crescendo of scolding and expostulation which, passing the door at its highest, died away into a confused murmur in the distance of the long corridor.

"That was an English voice," said Cosmo. "I mean the angry one."

"I should think it's that English doctor from Tuscany that has been three or four days here already. He has been put on this floor."

"From what I have been able to catch," said Cosmo, "he seems very angry at having a neighbour on it. That must be me. Have you heard his name?"

"It's Marvel or some such name. He seems to be known here; he orders people about as if he were at home. The other was Cantelucci, sir."

"Very likely. Look here, Spire. I will dine in the public room downstairs. I want to see that angry gentleman. Did you see him, Spire?"

"Only his back, sir. Very broad, sir. Tall man. In boots and a riding coat. Are you going down now, sir? The dinner must be on already."

"Yes," said Cosmo, preparing to go out. "And by the by, Spire, if you ever see in the street or in that room downstairs, where everyone comes in and out as you say, a long fellow wearing a peculiar cap with a tassel, just try to find out something about him; or at any rate let me know when you have seen him. . . . You could perhaps follow him for a bit and try to see where he goes."

After saying those words Cosmo left the room before Spire could make any answer. Spire's astonishment expressed itself by a low exclamation, "Well, I never!"

## PART II

### I

Cosmo descended into a hall now empty and with most of its lights extinguished. A loud murmur of voices guided him to the door of the dining room. He discovered it to be a long apartment with flat pilasters dividing its whitewashed walls, and resembling somewhat a convent's refectory. The resemblance was accentuated by the two narrow tables occupying its middle. One of them had been appropriated by the British naval officers, had lights on it, and bristled with the necks of wine bottles along its whole length. The talk round it was confused and noisy. The other, shorter, table accommodated two rows of people in sombre garments who at first glance struck Cosmo as natives of the town and belonging to a lower station in life. They had less lights, less wine, and almost no animation. Several smaller tables were ranged against the walls at equal intervals, and Cosmo's eye was caught by one of them because of the candles in the sconce on the wall above it having been lighted. Its cloth was dazzlingly white, and Signor Cantelucci with a napkin in his hand stood respectfully at the elbow of its sole occupant, who was seated with his back to the door.

Cosmo was under the impression that his entrance had been unobserved. But before he had walked half the length of the room Signor Cantelucci, whose eyes had never ceased darting here and there while his body preserved its deferential attitude at the elbow of the exclusive client, advanced to meet him with his serious and attentive air. He bowed. Perhaps the signore would not mind sharing the table of his illustrious countryman.

"Yes, if my countryman doesn't object," assented Cosmo readily. He was absolutely certain that this must be the doctor of whom Spire had spoken.

Cantelucci had no doubt that His Excellency's company would be most welcome to his illustrious countryman. Then stepping aside, he added under his breath: "He is a person of great distinction. A most valued patron of mine. . . ." The person thus commended, turning his head ensconced in the high collar of his coat, disclosed to Cosmo a round face with a shaved chin, strongly marked eyebrows, round eyes, and thin lips compressed into a

slightly peevish droop which, however, was at once corrected by an attempt at a faint smile. Cosmo, too, produced a faint smile. For an appreciable moment they looked at each other without saying a word while Cantelucci, silent too, executed a profound bow.

“Sit down, sir, sit down,” said the elder man (Cosmo judged him to be well over forty), raising his voice above the uproar made by the occupants of the naval table and waving his hand at the empty chair facing his own. It had a high carved back showing some traces of gilding, and the silk which covered it was worn to rags. Cosmo sat down while Cantelucci disappeared and the man across the table positively shouted, “I am glad,” and immediately followed that declaration by an energetic “Oh damn!” He bent over the table: “One can’t hear oneself speak with that noisy lot. All heroes, no doubt, but not a single gentleman.”

He leaned back and waited till the outburst of noisy mirth had died out at the officers’ table. The corners of his mouth drooped again and Cosmo came to the conclusion that that face in repose was decidedly peevish.

“I don’t know what they have got to be so merry about,” the other began, with a slight glance at the naval table and leaning forward again towards Cosmo. “Their occupation is gone. Heroes are a thoughtless lot. Yet just look at that elderly lieutenant at the head of the table. Shabby coat. Old epaulette. He doesn’t laugh. He will die a lieutenant — on half pay. That’s how heroic people end when the heroic times are over.”

“I am glad,” said Cosmo steadily, “that you recognize at least their heroism.”

The other opened his mouth for some time before he laughed, and that gave his face an expression of somewhat hard jollity. But the laugh when it came was by no means loud and had a sort of ingratiating softness.

“No, no. Don’t think I am disparaging our sea service. I had the privilege to know the greatest hero of them all. Yes, I had two talks with Lord Nelson. Well, he was certainly not ...”

He interrupted himself and raising his eyes saw the perfectly still gaze of Cosmo fastened on his face. Then peevishly:

“What I meant to say was that he at least was indubitably a hero. I remember that I was very careful about what I said to him. I had to be mighty careful then about what I said to anybody. Someone might have put it into his head to hang me at some yard-arm or other.”

“I envy you your experience all the same,” said Cosmo amiably. “I suppose your conscience was clear?”

“I have always been most careful not to give my conscience any license to trouble me,” retorted the other with a certain curtness of tone which was not offensive;

“and I have lived now for some considerable time. I am really much older than I look,” he concluded, giving Cosmo such a keen glance that the young man could not help a smile.

The other went on looking at him steadily for a while, then let his eyes wander to a door in a distant part of the long room as if impatient for the coming of the dinner. Then giving it up:

“A man who has lived actively, actively I say, the last twenty years may well feel as old as Methuselah. Lord Nelson was but a circumstance in my life. I wonder, had he lived, how he would have taken all this.”

A slight movement of his hand seemed to carry this allusion outside the confines of the vaulted noisy room, to indicate all the out-of-doors of the world. Cosmo remarked that the hand was muscular, shapely, and extremely well cared for.

“I think there can be no doubt about the nature of his feelings if he were living.” Cosmo’s voice was exactly non-committal. His interlocutor grunted slightly.

“H’m. He would have done nothing but groan and complain about anything and everything. No, he wouldn’t have taken it laughing. Very poor physique. Very. Frightful hypochondriac. ... I am a doctor, you know.”

Cantelucci was going to attend himself on his two guests. He presented to the doctor a smoking soup tureen enveloped in a napkin. The doctor assumed at once a business-like air, and at his invitation Cosmo held out his plate. The doctor helped him carefully.

“Don’t forget the wine, my wine, Anzelmo,” he said to Cantelucci, who answered by a profound bow. “I saved his life once,” he continued after the innkeeper had gone away.

The tone was particularly significant. Cosmo, partly repelled and partly amused by the man, enquired whether the worthy host had been very ill. The doctor swallowed the last spoonful of soup.

“Ill,” he said. “He had a gash that long in his side and a set of forty-pound fetters in his legs. I cured both complaints. Not without some risk to

myself, as you may imagine. There was an epidemic of hanging and shooting in the South of Italy then.”

He noticed Cosmo’s steady stare and raised the corners of his mouth with an effect of geniality on his broad rosy face.

“In ‘99, you know. I wonder I didn’t die of it too. I was considerably younger then and my humane instincts, early enthusiasms, and so on had led me into pretty bad company. However, I had also pretty good friends. What with one thing and another I am pretty well known all over Italy. My name is Martel — Doctor Martel. You probably may have heard. . . .”

He threw a searching glance at Cosmo, who bowed non-committally, and went on without a pause: “I am the man who brought vaccine to Italy, first. Cantelucci was trying to tell me your name but really I couldn’t make it out.”

“Latham is my name,” said Cosmo, “and I only set foot in Italy for the first time in my life two days ago.”

The doctor jerked his head sideways.

“Latham, eh? Yorkshire?”

“Yes,” said Cosmo, smiling.

“To be sure. Sir Charles ...”

“That’s my father.”

“Yes, yes. Served in the Guards. I used to know the doctor of his regiment. Married in Italy. I don’t remember the lady’s name. Oh, those are old times. Might have been a hundred years ago.”

“You mean that so much history has been made since.”

“Yes, no end of history,” assented the doctor, but checked himself. “And yet, tell me, what does it all amount to?”

Cosmo made no answer. Cantelucci having brought the wine while they talked, the doctor filled two glasses, waited a moment as if to hear Cosmo speak, but as the young man remained silent he said:

“Well, let us drink then to Peace.”

He tossed the wine down his throat while Cosmo drank his much more leisurely. As they set down their empty glasses they were startled by a roar of a tremendous voice filling the vaulted room from end to end in order to “let Their Honours know that the boat was at the steps.” The doctor made a faint grimace.

“Do you hear the voice of the British lion, Mr. Latham?” he asked peevishly. “Ah, well, we will have some little peace now here.”

Those officers at the naval table who had to go on board rose in a body and left the room hastily. Three or four who had a longer leave drew close together and began to talk low with their heads in a bunch. Cosmo glancing down the room seemed to recognize at the door the form of the seaman whom he had met earlier in the evening. He followed the officers out. The other diners, the sombre ones, and a good many of them with powdered heads, were also leaving the room. Cantelucci put another dish on the table, stepped back a pace with a bow, and stood still. A moment of profound silence succeeded the noise.

“First rate,” said Doctor Martel to Cosmo, after tasting the dish, and then gave a nod to Cantelucci, who made another bow and retreated backwards, always with a solemn expression on his face.

“Italian cooking, of course, but then I am an old Italian myself. Not that I love them, but I have acquired many of their tastes. Before we have done dining you will have tasted the perfection of their cookery, north and south, but I assure you you are sharing my dinner. You don’t suppose that the dishes that come to this table are the same the common customers get.”

Cosmo made a slight bow. “I am very sensible of the privilege,” he said.

“The honour and the pleasure are mine, I assure you,” the doctor said in a half-careless tone and looking with distaste towards the small knot of officers with a twenty-four hours’ leave who had finished their confabulation and had risen in a body like men who had agreed on some pleasant course of action. Only the elderly lieutenant lagging a little behind cast a glance at his two countrymen at the little table and followed his comrades with less eager movements.

“A quarter of a tough bullock or half a roast sheep are more in their way, and Cantelucci knows it. As to that company that was sitting at the other table, well, I daresay you can tell yourself what they were, small officials or tradesmen of some sort. I should think that emptying all their pockets — and they were how many, say twenty — you couldn’t collect the value of one English pound at any given time. And Cantelucci knows that too. Well, of course. Still he does well here, but it’s a poor place. I wonder, Mr. Latham, what are you doing here?”

“Well,” said Cosmo with a good-humoured smile, “I am just staying here. Just as you yourself are staying here.”

“Ah, but you never saved Cantelucci’s life, whereas I did and that’s the reason why I am staying here: out of mere kindness and to give him an



opportunity to show his gratitude. . . . Let me fill your glass. Not bad, this wine."

"Excellent. What is it?"

"God knows. Let us call it Cantelucci's gratitude. Generous stuff, this, to wash down those dishes with. Gluttony is an odious vice, but an ambition to dine well is about the only one which can be indulged at no cost to one's fellow men."

"It didn't strike me," murmured Cosmo absently, for he was just then asking himself why he didn't like this pleasant companion, and had just come to the conclusion that it was because of his indecisive expression wavering between peevishness and jocularly with something else in addition, as it were, in the background of his handsome, neat, and comfortable person. Something that was not aggressive nor yet exactly impudent. He wondered at his mistrust of the personality which certainly was very communicative but apparently not inquisitive. At that moment he heard himself addressed with a direct inquiry.

"You passed, of course, through Paris?"

"Yes, and Switerzland."

"Oh, Paris. I wonder what it looks like now. Full of English people, of course. Let's see, how many years is it since I was last there? Ha, lots of heads rolled off very noble shoulders since. Well, I am trying to make my way there. Curious times. I have found some letters here. Duke of Wellington very much disliked, what? His nod is insupportable, eh?"

"I have just had a sight of the Duke two or three times," said Cosmo. "I can assure you that everybody is treating him with the greatest respect."

"Of course, of course. All the same I bet that all these foreigners are chuckling to themselves at having finished the job without him."

"They needn't be so pleased with themselves," said Cosmo scornfully. "The mere weight of their numbers ..."

"Yes. It was more like a migration of armed tribes than an army. They will boast of their success all the same. There is no saying what the Duke himself thinks. ... I wonder if he could have beaten the other in a fair fight. Well, that will never be known now."

Cosmo had a sudden sense of an epical tale with a doubtful conclusion. He made no answer. Cantelucci had come and gone solemnly, self-contained, with the usual two ceremonial bows. As he retreated he put out all the candles on the central table and became lost to view. From the

illuminated spot at which he sat, Cosmo's eyes met only the shadows of the long refectory-like room with its lofty windows closely shuttered so that they looked like a row of niches for statues. Yet the murmur of the piazza full of people stole faintly into his ear. Cosmo had the recollection of the vast expanse of flagstones enclosed by the shadowy and palatial masses gleaming with lights here and there under the night sky thick with stars and perfectly cloudless.

"This is a very quiet inn," he observed.

"It has that advantage certainly. The walls are fairly thick, as you can see. It's an unfinished palace, I mean as to its internal decorations, which were going to be very splendid and even more costly than splendid. The owner of it, I mean the man who had it built, died of hunger in that hall out there."

"Died of hunger?" repeated Cosmo.

"No doubt about it. It was during the siege of Genoa. You know the siege, surely?"

Cosmo recollected himself. "I was quite a child at the time," he said.

The venerated client of Cantelucci cracked a walnut and then looked at Cosmo's face.

"I should think you weren't seven years old at the time," he said in a judicial tone. "When I first came into Italy with the vaccine, you know, Sir Charles's marriage was still being talked about in Florence. I remember it perfectly though it seems as if it had all happened in another world. Yes, indubitably he died of hunger like ten thousand other Genoese. He couldn't go out to hunt for garbage with the populace or crawl out at night trying to gather nettles in the ditches outside the forts, and nobody would have known that he was dead for a month if one of the bombs out of a bomb-vessel with Admiral Keith's blockading squadron hadn't burst the door in. They found him at the foot of the stairs, and, they say, with a lot of gold pieces in his pockets. But nobody cared much for that. If it had been a lot of half-gnawed bones there would have been blood spilt, no doubt. For all I know there were or may be even now secret places full of gold in the thickness of these walls. However, the body was thrown into a corpse-cart and the authorities boarded the doorway. It remained boarded for years because the heirs didn't care to have anything to do with that shell of a palace. I fancy that the last of them died in the snows of Russia. Cantelucci came along, and owing to a friendship with some sort of scribe in the Municipality he got permission to use the place for his hostelry. He told me

that he found several half ducats in the corners of the hall when he took possession. I suppose they paid for the whitewash, for I can't believe that Cantelucci had much money in his pockets."

"Perhaps he found one of those secret hiding-places of which you spoke," suggested Cosmo.

"What? Cantelucci? He never looked for any gold. He is too much in the clouds; but he has made us dine well in the palace of the starved man, hasn't he? Sixteen years ago in Naples he was a Jacobin and a friend of the French, a rebel, a traitor to his king if you like — but he has a good memory, there is no denying that."

"Is he a Neapolitan, then?" asked Cosmo. "I imagined they were of a different type."

"God only knows. He was there and I didn't ask him. He was a prisoner of the royalists, of the reactionaries. I was much younger then and perhaps more humane. Flesh and blood couldn't stand in the sight of the way in which they were being treated, men of position, of attainments, of intelligence. The Neapolitan Jacobins were no populace. They were men of character and ideas, the pick of all classes. They were properly liberals. Still they were called Jacobins and you may be surprised that I, a professional man and an Englishman ..."

Cosmo, looking up at the sudden pause, saw the doctor sitting with the dull eyes and the expression of a man suddenly dissatisfied with himself. Cosmo hastened to say that he himself was no friend of reactionaries and in any case not conceited enough to judge the conduct of men older than himself. Without a sign that he had heard a word of that speech the doctor had a faint and peevish smile. He never moved at all till, after a longish interval, Cosmo spoke again.

"Were you expecting somebody that would want to see you this evening?" he asked.

The doctor started.

"See me? No. Why do you ask?"

"Because within the last five minutes somebody has put his head twice through the door; and as I don't expect either a visitor or a messenger, I thought he was looking for you. I don't know a single soul here."

The doctor remained perfectly unmoved. Cosmo, who was looking towards the distant door, saw the head again and this time shouted at it an inquiry. Thereupon the owner of the head entered and had not advanced half

the length of the room before Cosmo recognized in him the portly figure of Spire. To his great surprise, however, Spire instead of coming up to the table made a vague gesture and stopped short.

This was strange conduct. The doctor sat completely unconscious, and Cosmo took the course of excusing himself and following Spire, who, directly he had seen his master rise, had retreated rapidly to the door. The doctor did not rouse himself to answer, and Cosmo left him leaning on his elbow in a thoughtful attitude. In the badly lighted hall he found Spire waiting for him between the foot of the stairs and the door which Cosmo presumed was leading to the offices of the hotel. Again Spire made a vague gesture which seemed to convey a warning, and approached his master on tiptoe.

“Well, what is it? What do you mean by flourishing your arm at me like this?” asked Cosmo sharply, and Spire ventured on a warning “Ssh!”

“Why, there is nobody here,” said Cosmo, lowering his voice nevertheless.

“I wanted to tell you, sir, I have seen that fellow.”

“What fellow? Oh yes. The fellow with the cap. Where did you see him?”

“He is here,” said Spire, pointing to the closed door.

“Here? What could a man like that want here? Did you speak to him?”

“No, sir, he has just come in and for all I know he may be already gone away — though I don’t think so.”

“Oh, you don’t think so. Do you know what he has come for?”

Spire made no answer to the question, but after a short silence: “I will go and see, and if you stand where you are, sir, you will be able to look right into the room. He may not be the man.”

Without waiting for an answer he moved towards the closed door and threw it wide open. The room, very much like the dining room but smaller, was lighted gloomily by two smoky oil lamps hanging from the ceiling, over a trestle table having a wooden bench on each side. Bad as the light was Cosmo made out at once the peculiar cap. The wearer, sitting on one of the benches, was leaning with both elbows across the table towards the fair head of a girl half-hidden by a lace scarf. They were engaged in earnest conversation so that they never turned their heads at Spire’s entrance. Cosmo had just time to discern the fine line of the girl’s shoulders, which were half-turned from him when Spire shut the door.



## II

Returning to his bedroom, Cosmo found the fire of logs still playing fitfully upon the drawn curtains, upon the dim shape of the canopied bed of state, and perceived that Spire as directed had prepared the writing table and had placed a screen round the inviting-looking armchair.

He did not sit down to write. He felt more than ever that in a moment of amused expansion he had made a rash promise to his sister. The difficulty in keeping it had confronted him for the first time in Paris. Henrietta would have liked to hear of people he met, of the great world indulging in the new-found freedom of travel, the English, the French, the Poles, the Germans. Certainly he had seen quite a lot of people; but the problem was as to what could be said about them to a young girl, ignorant of the world, brought up in the country, and having really no notion of what mankind was like. He admitted to himself with introspective sincerity that even he did not exactly know what mankind was really like. He was too much of a novice, and she, obviously, was too innocent to be told of his suspicions and of what it was like. Even to describe the world outwardly was not an easy task — to Henrietta. The world was certainly amusing. Oh yes, it was amusing; but even as he thought that, he felt within him a certain distaste. Just before he had left Paris he had been at a rout given by a great lady. There was a fellow there who somehow became suspected of picking pockets. He was extremely ugly and therefore attracted notice. The great lady, asked if she had invited him, denied ever having seen him before, but he assured her that he had spoken to her already that evening. Her Ladyship then declared that if he was really the man he gave himself out to be, she was not aware that he was in Paris. She imagined him to be in Ireland. Altogether a peculiar story. Cosmo never knew how it had ended because his friend Hollis led him away to introduce him to Mrs. R., who was most affable and entertained him with a complete inventory of her daughter's accomplishments, the daughter herself being then in the room, obviously quite lovely and clever, but certainly a little odd; for a little later, on his being introduced, she had discoursed to him for half an hour on things of the heart, charmingly, but in a perfectly cool and detached manner. There was also Lady Jane, very much in evidence, very much run after, with a voice of engaging sweetness, but very free, not to say licentious, in her talk.

How could he confide his impressions of her to Henrietta? As a matter of fact his head had been rather full of Lady Jane for some time. She had, so to speak, attended him all the way from Paris up to the morning of his arrival at Cante-lucci's inn. But she had now deserted him. Or was it his mind that had dropped her out of a haunting actuality into that region where the jumble of one's experiences is allowed to rest? But was it possible that a shabby fellow in tight breeches and bad boots, with a peculiarly shaped cap on his head, could have got between him and Lady Jane about the time of sunset?

Cosmo thought suddenly that one's personal life was a very bizarre thing. He could write to his sister that before he had been three hours in Genoa he had been involved in passing secret correspondence from Italy to the Island of Elba. Henrietta had solemnly charged him to write everything he could find out, hear, or even guess about Napoleon. He had heard certainly a lot of most extraordinary stories; and if he had not made any guesses he had been associating with persons who actually had been doing nothing else; frightened persons, exulting people, cast-down people, frivolous people, people with airs of mystery or with airs of contempt. But by Jove, now he had been in personal touch and had actually helped a man of the people who was mysteriously corresponding with Elba. He could write something about that but, after all, was it worth while? Finally he concluded he wouldn't write home at all that evening; pushed the table away, and throwing himself into the armchair extended his legs towards the fire. A moody expression settled on his face. His immobility resembled open-eyed sleep with the red spark of the fire in his unwinking eyes, and a perfect insensibility to outward impressions. But he heard distinctly Spire knocking discreetly at the door. Cosmo's first impulse was to shout that he wasn't wanted, but he changed his mind. "Come in."

Spire shut the door carefully, and crossing the room at once put a log on the fire. Then he said:

"Can't get any hot water this evening, sir. Very sorry, sir. I will see that it won't happen again."

At the same time he thought, "Served him right for picking out such an inn to stay at." Cosmo, still silent, stared at the fire, and when he roused himself at last he perceived Spire in the act of putting down in front of his chair a pair of slippers of shiny leather and red heels.

"Take your boots off, sir?" suggested Spire under his breath.

Cosmo let him do it. "Going to bed now, sir?" asked Spire in the same subdued tone.

"No, but you needn't wait. I won't need you any more to-night."

"Thank you, sir." Spire lingered, boots in hand. "The two small pistols are on the bedside table, sir. I have looked to the primings. This town is full of rabble from all parts just now, so I hear. The lock of your door is fairly poor. I shall be sleeping just outside in the corridor, sir. They are going to put me a pallet there."

"You will be very cold," protested Cosmo.

"It will be all right, sir. I have got the fur rug out of the carriage. I had everything taken out of the carriage. The yard isn't safe, sir. Nothing is properly safe in this house, so far as I can see."

Cosmo nodded absent-mindedly. "Oh, wait a moment, Spire. That man, that fellow in the cap, is he still downstairs?"

Spire thought rapidly that he wouldn't be a party to bringing any of those ragamuffins up to the bedroom. "Gone a long time ago, sir," he said stolidly.

Cosmo had a vivid recollection of the man's pose of being settled for an earnest and absorbing conversation to last half the night.

"He doesn't belong to this house?" he asked.

"No, sir, he only came to talk to a young woman. I left him taking leave of her to come up to you, sir. I suppose he was the man you meant, sir."

"Yes," said Cosmo, "I have no doubt about it. He will probably turn up again."

Spire admitted reluctantly that it was likely. He had been telling a long tale to that young woman. "She is very good-looking, sir."

"Is she a servant here?"

"Ob no, sir. She came in with that old cut-throat cobbler. They seem to be friendly. I don't like the looks of the people in this house."

"I wonder," said Cosmo, "whether you could manage to obtain for me a quiet talk with that man on the next occasion he comes here."

Spire received this overture in profound silence.

"Do you think you could?" insisted Cosmo.

A dispassionate raising of the eyebrows preceded the apparently irrelevant remark. "The worst of this house, sir, is that it seems open to all sorts of rabble."

"I see. Well, try to think of some way, Spire. You may go now."



Spire, carrying the boots, walked as far as the door, where he turned for a moment. "The only way I can think of, sir," he said, "would be to make friends with that young woman." Before Cosmo could recover from the surprise at the positive statement Spire had gone out and had shut the door.

Cosmo slept heavily but fitfully, with moments of complete oblivion interrupted by sudden starts, when he would lie on his back with open eyes, wondering for a moment where he was, and then fall asleep again before he had time to make a movement. In the morning the first thing he did was to scribble a note to the Countess de Monteverso to ask her permission to call that very morning. While writing the address he smiled to himself at the idea that it was after all the little Adele whom he remembered but dimly, mostly as a fair head hovering near his father's armchair in the big drawing room, the windows of which opened on the western terrace. As a schoolboy during his holidays he saw the two girls, Adele and his sister, mostly in the evening. He had his own out-of-door pursuits while those girls stayed upstairs with their governess. Remembering how he used to catch glimpses of them, the fair and the dark, walking in the Park, he felt a greater curiosity to see the Countess de Monteverso than if he had never seen her before. He found it impossible to represent her to himself grown up, married for years, the daughter of an ambassador.

When the family of D'Armand departed from Latham Hall, it was as if a picture had faded, a picture of faces, attitudes, and colours, leaving untouched the familiar background of his Yorkshire home, on to which he could never recall them distinctly. He would be meeting a complete stranger and he wondered whether that lady, who, young as she still was, had lived through tragic-times and had seen so many people, would remember him at all. Him personally. For as to his home he had no doubt she had not forgotten; neither the stones, nor the woods, nor the streams. And as to the people Cosmo had a distinct notion that she was more familiar with his father than he and Henrietta ever had been. His father was not a man whom anybody could forget. And that Countess de Monteverso, more difficult for him to imagine than a complete stranger, would remember his mother better than he could himself. She had seen so much more of her day after day for something like three years; whereas he was at home only at intervals and while there took Lady Latham for granted, a kind, serene presence, beautifully dressed.

He handed the note to Spire with orders to send it off by one of the ragged idlers about the hotel door. There would be an answer. Then, approaching the window, he perceived that he could not see very much out of it. It was too high above the piazza, which furthermore was masked by the jutting balconies. But the sky was blue with a peculiar deep brilliance and the sunlight slanted over the roofs of the houses on the other side of the piazza. When he opened the window the keen pure air roused his vitality. The faint murmur of voices from below reached him very much as it had reached him downstairs the night before through the closed shutters of the dining room, as if the population of the town had never gone to bed.

While Spire was serving his breakfast in his room he wondered what the Countess de Monteverso would look like. The same fair head but higher above the ground and with the hair no longer flowing over the shoulders, but done up no doubt most becomingly and perhaps turned darker with age. It would be the hair of the daughter of an ambassador, able to judge of men and affairs, a woman of position, a very fine lady. Perhaps just a fine lady; but the memory of the child came to him with renewed force, gracious, quiet, with something timid and yet friendly in all its gestures, with his father's hand smoothing the fair hair. . . . No. Not merely a fine lady.

Cosmo had no inborn aptitude for mere society life. Though not exactly shy, he lacked that assurance of manner which his good looks and his social status ought to have given him. He suspected there was too much mockery in the world, and the undoubted friendliness he had met with, especially from women, seemed to him always a little suspect, the effect not of his own merit, of which he had no idea, but of a shallow, good-natured compassion. He imagined himself awkward in company. The very brilliance of the entertainments, of which he had seen already a good many, was apt to depress his spirits. Often during talk with some pretty woman he would feel that he was not meant for that sort of life, and then suddenly he would withdraw into his shell. In that way he had earned for himself the reputation of being a little strange. He was to a certain extent aware of it, but he was not aware that this very thing made him interesting.

A gust of diffidence came over him while he was trying to eat some breakfast. "I really don't want to see that Countess," he thought. Then remembering the intonation in his father's voice when talking of Adele, he wondered whether perchance he would find an uncommon personality. Cosmo had a profound belief in his father, though he was well aware that he

had never understood him thoroughly. . . . But if she is a woman out of the common, he reflected further, then she can't possibly be interested in a rough schoolboy grown into a young man of no particular importance. No doubt she would be amiable enough. . . .

"Clear away all these things, Spire," he said, "and go downstairs to see if the messenger is back."

The messenger was not back yet; and assisted by Spire, Cosmo began to dress himself with extreme care. The tying of his neckcloth was an irritating affair, and so was Spire's perfectly wooden face while he was holding up the glass to him for that operation. Cosmo spoiled two neckcloths and became extremely dissatisfied with the cut and colour of various articles of attire which Spire presented to him one after another. The fashions for men were perfectly absurd. By an effort of mind Cosmo overcame this capricious discontent with familiar things and finished his dressing. Then he sent Spire once more downstairs to inquire if the messenger was back. Obediently, Spire disappeared, but once gone it did not seem as though he meant to return at all. There was no Spire. There was no bell-pull in the room either.

Cosmo stuck his head out through the door. Absolute silence reigned in the well of the stairs. A woman in black, on her knees beside a pail of water and scrubbing the floor of the corridor, looked up at him. Cosmo drew his head in. She was a pitiful hag. ... He was sure of a gracious reception, of course. He was also sure of meeting a lot of people of all sorts. He wondered what sort of society she received. Everybody, no doubt; Austrians, Italians, French; all the triumphant reactionaries, all the depressed heads bobbing up again after the storm, venomous, revengeful, oppressive, odious. What the devil had become of Spire?

The long window right down to the floor had remained open. Suddenly the sound of a drum reached Cosmo's ears. Stepping out on a balcony, he saw a company of infantry in white coats marching across a distant corner of the piazza. Austrians! Yes, their time had come. A voice behind him said: "The messenger is back, sir." Cosmo stepped in and saw Spire empty-handed. "There's a verbal answer, sir."

"What is it? You haven't spoken with the messenger, have you?"

"I have seen him, sir, but I got the message through the innkeeper. He speaks a little English. The lady would be glad to see you as soon after the fourth hour as possible. They have their own way of reckoning time, but as

far as I can understand it, sir, it means something between ten and eleven. At any rate, it's what Cantelucci says, and he can tell the time by an English watch all right."

I "Shut the window, Spire. I don't want to hear that drum. Yes, it would mean as soon after ten as possible, but why has the fellow been so long? Is it very far?"

"No, sir, I think it's quite close, really. He was so long because he has been trying to give your note to the lady herself and there was some difficulty about it. That innkeeper tells me that instead of handing it to the porter the fellow got in through the kitchen door and was dodging about a passage for some time."

Cosmo looked fixedly at Spire, whose face expressed no opinion whatever on those proceedings.

"Dodging in a passage," repeated Cosmo. "But did he see the lady herself?"

"Apparently not, sir. Cantelucci slanged him for being so long, but he said he thought he was acting for the best. He would have been there yet if a black woman hadn't come along and snatched the letter out of his hand. It was she too who brought down the message from the lady."

"Oh, yes," said Cosmo. "Don't you remember there was a black maid?"

"Yes, sir, I remember perfectly well, in the housekeeper's room. She learned to talk English very quickly, but she was a little spitfire."

"Was she?"

Spire busied himself in brushing Cosmo's hat while he remarked in an explanatory tone: "She could never understand a joke, sir."

He attended Cosmo into the hall, where Cantelucci with his usual intense gravity and a deep bow asked whether the signore would want a carriage. Cosmo, however, preferred walking; therefore the youth who had taken Cosmo's note was directed to guide the English milord to the Palazzo Brignoli. He had a tousled head of hair and wore a jacket that might have belonged at one time to a hussar's uniform, with all its trimmings and buttons cut off and a ragged hole in each elbow. His cheeks were sunken, his eyes rolled expressively, and his smile discovered a set of very sound teeth.

"Si, si, Palazzo Rosso," he said.

Cantelucci explained in his imperturbable and solemn manner that the populace gave that name to the Palace on account of the red granite of

which it was built, and the thin-faced lad, bounding forward, preceded Cosmo across the piazza, looking over his shoulder from time to time. Cosmo's doubts and apprehensions disappeared before the inevitable charm and splendour of the town. At the corner of a narrow lane and a small open space with some trees growing in the centre of it the ragged guide stopped and, pointing at a dark and magnificent building, left him alone. Massive and sombre, ornate and heavy, with a dark aspect and enormous carvings, the Palace where little Adele was living had to Cosmo's eye the air of a sumptuous prison. The portal with its heavy iron-studded doors was reached by a flight of shallow steps, a segment of a wide circle, guarded on each side by an enormous griffin seated, tensely alert with wing and claw, on a high and narrow pedestal. On ascending the steps Cosmo discovered that the heavy door was ajar, just enough to let him slip in; and, at once, from the gloom of the arched passage he saw the inner sunshine on the oleanders of the inner court, flagged with marble, from whence a broad staircase ascended to the colonnaded gallery of the first floor.

Cosmo had seen no porter or other living soul, and there was no sound of any sort, no appearance of movement anywhere. Even the leaves of the oleanders kept perfectly still. In the light of the morning a slanting shadow cut the western wall into two triangles, one dark, the other glowing as with a red fire; and Cosmo remained for a moment spellbound by a strong impression of empty grandeur, magnificence, and solitude.

A voice behind him, issuing from somewhere in the big gateway through which he had passed, cried: "Ascend, signore!" Cosmo began to mount the open staircase, embarrassed as though he had been watched by thousands of eyes. In the gallery he hesitated, for the several doors he could see remained closed, and the only sound that reached his ears was the gentle plashing of the fountain in the court below him.

Before he had made up his mind the door in front of him opened fairly wide, but he could not see the person till he had entered an anteroom with narrow red and gilt settees ranged along its white walls. The door shut behind him and, turning round, he confronted a dark, plump mulatto woman who was staring at him with an expression of intense admiration. She clapped her hands in ecstasy and, opening her mouth, exhibited her white teeth in a low cackling laugh.

"Bonjour, Aglae," said Cosmo readily.

The woman laughed again in sheer delight. "You remember my name, Mr. Cosmo! You quite frighten me, you grow so big. I remember you climb tree and throw nice ripe apple to the black girl. . . ." Her eyes gleamed and rolled absurdly.

Cosmo was so strangely touched by this extremely slight reminiscence of his tree-climbing boyhood, that when she added, "That was a good time," he was quite ready to agree, thereby provoking another burst of delightful laughter. But Aglae was controlling herself obviously. Her laughter was subdued. It had not the unbounded freedom of sound that used to reverberate exotically in the dark passages at the back of Latham Hall; though there, too, Aglae tried to subdue it in view of rebukes or sarcastic comments in the servants' hall. It stopped suddenly and Aglae in a tone of sober respect wanted to know how the Seignior was. Cosmo said that his father was very well.

"He a very great gentleman," commented Aglae. "I always tremble when I see him. You very fine gentleman too, Mr. Cosmo."

She moved to one of the inner doors, but as Cosmo was following her she raised her hand to prevent him and opened the door only a little way, then came back and said in a lower tone, "It's to hear the bell better when it rings. . . . Will you wait a little bit here?" she asked anxiously.

"I will," said Cosmo, "but surely you don't want to tremble before me. What is the matter?"

"Nothing at all is the matter." Aglae tossed her head, tied up in a bandana handkerchief, with something of the spirit of the old days.

Cosmo was amused. "I no tremble before you," she continued. "I always like you very much. I am glad with all my heart to see you here."

All the time she turned her ear to the door she had left the least bit ajar. She had on a high-waisted white calico dress, white stockings, and Genoese slippers on her feet. Her dark brown hands moved uneasily.

"And how is Madame la Comtesse?" asked Cosmo.

"Miss Ad&le very well. Anyway she never says anything else. She very great lady now. All the town come here, but she wants to see you alone after all these years."

"It's very kind of her," said Cosmo. "I was wondering whether she remembered me at all."

Now the excitement of seeing him had worn off, he was surprised at the careworn expression of the mulatto's face. For a moment it seemed to him

like a tragic mask, then came the flash of white teeth, strangely unlike a smile.

“She remember everything,” said Aglae. “She . . . she . . . Mr. Cosmo, you no boy now. I tell you that Miss Adele had not a moment’s peace since she drive away from your big home in the country one very cold day. I remember very well. little birds fall dead off the tree. I feel ready to fall dead myself.”

“I was away at school,” said Cosmo. He remembered that on his return the disappearance of those people had not produced a very strong impression on him. In fact, the only thing he had missed was, in the evening, the fair head of the stranger Adele near the dark head of his sister Henrietta. And the next evening he had not even missed that!

While these thoughts were passing through his head he waited, looking at Aglae with a faint smile of which he was not aware. The mulatto girl seemed to have concentrated all her faculties on listening for the sound of a bell. It came at last. Cosmo heard it, too, very distant, faint and prolonged. A handbell.

“ Now,” said Aglae under her breath, and Cosmo followed her through a suite of rooms, magnificent but under-furnished, with the full light excluded by half-closed jalousies. The vista was terminated by a white and gold door at which Aglae stopped and looked back at him over her shoulder with an air of curiosity, anxiety, or was it hesitation? But certainly without a smile. As to his own it had stiffened permanently on his lips. Before turning the handle of the door the mulatto listened for a moment. Then she threw it open, disclosing a room full of light indeed but which Cosmo could not see in its full extent because of a screen cutting off the view. His last thought as he crossed the threshold was, “It will be interesting,” and then he heard the door shut behind him, leaving him as it were alone with the heavy screen of figured velvet and three windows through which sunshine poured in a way that almost blinded him after his long experience of half lights.

He walked clear of the screen, and he was surprised at the vast size of the room. Here and there were other screens and a quite unexpected quantity of elegant furniture amongst which he felt for a moment as if lost. All this shone and gleamed and glowed with colour in the freshness and brilliance of the sunny morning. “Why, there’s nobody here,” he thought with a mingled sense of disappointment and relief. To his left above a square of carpet that was like a flower-bed rose a white mantelpiece which in its

proportion and sumptu-osity was like a low but much carved portal surmounted by an enormous sheet of glass reaching up to the cornice of the ceiling. He stepped on to the flowers, feeling now somewhat vexed, and only then perceived away at the other end of the room, in a corner beyond a fourth window, a lady seated at a writing table with her back to him. Barred by the gilt openwork of the chair-back he saw her dress, the only bit of blue in the room. There was some white lace about her shoulders, her fair head was bent, she was writing rapidly.

Whoever she was she seemed not to be aware of his presence. Cosmo did not know whether to wait in silence or say something, or merely warn her by a slight cough. What a stupid position, he thought. At that moment the lady put the pen down and rose from her chair brusquely, yet there was a perceptible moment before she turned round and advanced towards him. She was tall. But for the manner of his introduction, which could leave no room for doubt, the impression that this could not be the lady he had come to see would have been irresistible. As it was Cosmo felt apologetic, as though he had come to the wrong house. It occurred to him also that the lady had been from the very first aware of his presence. He was struck by the profundity of her eyes, which were fixed on him. The train of her blue robe followed on the floor. Her well-shaped head was a mass of short fair curls, and while she approached him Cosmo saw the colour leave her cheeks, the passing away of an unmistakable blush. She stopped and said in an even voice:

“Don’t you recognize me?”

He recovered his power of speech but not exactly the command of his thoughts, which were overwhelmed by a variety of strong and fugitive impulses.

“I have never known you,” he said with a tone of the profoundest conviction.

She smiled (Cosmo was perfectly sure that he had never seen that sort of smile or the promise even of anything so enchanting), and sank slowly on to a sofa whose brocaded silk, gray like pure ashes, and the carved frame painted with flowers and picked with gold, acquired an extraordinary value from the colour of her dress and the grace of her attitude. She pointed to an armchair, close by. Cosmo sat down. A very small table of ebony inlaid with silver stood between them, her hand rested on it; and Cosmo looked at



it with appreciation, as if it had been an object of art, before he raised his eyes to the expectant face.

“Frankly,” he said, “didn’t you think that a complete stranger had been brought into the room?”

He said this very seriously, and she answered him in a light tone. “For a moment I was afraid to look round. I sat there with my back to you. It was absurd after having been imprudent enough to let you come in the morning. You kept so still that you might have been already gone. I took fright, I jumped up, but I need not have hesitated. You are still the same boy.”

Cosmo paid very little attention to what she said. Without restraint and disguise, in open admiration he was observing her with all his might, saying to himself,

“Is it possible — this — Adele!” He recollected himself, however, sufficiently to murmur that men changed more slowly and perhaps less completely than women. The Countess de Monteverso was not of that opinion, or, at any rate, not in this case.

“It isn’t that at all. I know because I used to look at you with that attention worthy of the heir of the Latham name, whereas you never honoured the French girl by anything more than a casual glance. Why should you have done more? You had the dogs, the horses, your first gun. I remember the gun. You showed it to both of us, to your sister and myself, while we were walking in the park. You shouted to us and came across the grass, brandishing your gun, while the governess — I don’t remember her name — screamed at you, *Oh mon dieu! N’approchez pas!* You paid not the slightest attention to her. You had a flushed face. Of course her screaming frightened us at first, and just as we were preparing to get very interested in your gun you walked off with a look of contempt.”

“Did I behave so badly as that?” said Cosmo, feeling suddenly very much at ease with that lady with whom he had never even exchanged a formal greeting. She had grown more animated. As he was very fond of his sister he answered her numerous questions about Henrietta with interest and pleasure. From that subject the lady on the sofa, who may or may not have been Adele d’Armand at one time, went on putting a series of questions about the house and all the people in it in a manner that proved a precise and affectionate recollection of those days. The memory of the countryside seemed to have been cherished by her too, and Cosmo’s heart warmed to the subject. She remembered certain spots in the park and certain points of

view in the neighbourhood as though she had left them but a year before. She seemed not to have forgotten a single servant in the house. She asked after Spire.

“I have got him with me,” said Cosmo. “Of course he has grown elderly.”

He almost forgot to whom he was speaking. Without associating her very distinctly with the child Adele, he was taking the Countess de Monteverso for granted. He delighted in seeing her so quiet and so perfectly natural. The first effect of her appearance persisted, with only the added sense of the deep dark blue of her eyes, an impression of living profundity that made his thoughts about her pause. But he was unconsciously grateful to her for the fact that she had never given him a moment of that acute social awkwardness from which he used to suffer so much; though there could not be the slightest doubt that the little Adele (if there had ever been a little Adele) was now a very fine lady indeed. But she loved the old place and everything and everybody in it. Of that too there could be no doubt. The few references she made to his mother touched and surprised Cosmo. They seemed to imply some depth in her which he, the son, and Henrietta, the daughter, had failed to penetrate. In contrast with that, Cosmo remarked that after the inquiry after Sir Charles’s health, which was one of her first questions, his father was not mentioned again.

“Are you going to make a stay in Genoa?” she asked after a pause.

“A few days,” said Cosmo, in an irresolute tone, because he did not know what answer was expected to this inquiry, the first which had nothing to do with Yorkshire. His interest in the rest of Italy was, he perceived, very small. But by the association of ideas he thought suddenly of the passing hours. He raised his eyes to a faintly engraved brass disc with black hands hung on the wall above one of the two doors at that end of the room which he was facing. The black hands pointed to eleven, but what prevented his eyes from returning at once to the delighted contemplation of the Countess de Monteverso was the fact that the door below the clock seemed to have moved slightly.

“I intend to see something of Italy,” he said. “My time really is my own, I have nothing special to do. It seems to me that the principal object of my journey has been attained now. I don’t think my father would be surprised to hear that I had turned back after leaving Genoa.”

The Countess looking up at this, their eyes remained fastened together for a time and Cosmo thoughtt “What on earth am I saying?” He watched

her lips move to form the words which quite frightened him.

“Did Sir Charles give you a message for me?”

He thought he had brought this on himself. It was a painful moment. It lasted long enough to give the Countess time to assume an expression of indifference, startling after the low tone of her question.

“No,” said Cosmo truthfully. “I have only a message for your father.” He waited a moment. “But I will tell you one of the last things Henrietta told me. She told me that when you were married my father could think of nothing for days but you.”

He did not venture to look at her; then added impulsively, “My father loved you dearly. We children could see it very well, Ad-”

“Why don’t you finish my name?” her seductive voice asked.

Cosmo coloured. “Well, you know, I never heard you really called by any other name. It came naturally since I suppose you must be — Adele.”

Madame de Monteverso, who had been hanging on his lips, was surprised by Cosmo raising his eyes to stare intensely into the part of the room behind her back. Just as he was making his apology he had noticed the door under the clock swing open without any sound at all; and there entered quite noiselessly, too, and with something ambiguous in the very motion, a young girl (nothing could have been more unexpected) in a sort of dishabille of a white skirt and a long pink jacket of some very thin stuff which had a silky shimmer. She made a few steps and stopped. She was rather short, her hair was intensely black and drawn tightly away from her forehead. Cosmo felt sure (though he couldn’t see) that it was done in one long plait at the back. Her face was a short oval, her chin blunt, her nose a little too big and her black eyes perfectly round. Cosmo had the time to notice all this because astonishment prevented him from looking away. The girl advanced slowly if with perfect assurance, and stared unwinkingly at Cosmo, who in the extremity of his embarrassment got up from his chair. The young girl then stopped short and for a moment the three persons in the room preserved an absolute immobility. Then the Countess glanced over her shoulder leisurely and addressed Cosmo.

“This is Clelia, a niece of my husband.” Cosmo made a deep bow to the possessor of the round black eyes. “I didn’t know of her existence till about a fortnight ago,” added Madame de Monteverso carelessly. The round-eyed girl still staring hard made a curtsy to Cosmo. “My husband,” went on

Adele, "has also two old aunts living here. I have never seen them. This house is very big."

Cosmo resumed his seat and there was a moment of silence. The girl sat down in the chair before the writing table sideways, folded her arms on its back, and rested her chin on her hands. Her round eyes examined Cosmo with a sort of animal frankness. He thought suddenly that it was time to bring his visit to an end. He would have risen at once but for the Countess de Monteverso beginning to speak to him, still in English. She seemed to have guessed what was passing through his mind.

"Don't go yet for a moment," she said, in a perfectly unconcerned voice, then paused. "We were talking about your father."

"As to him," said Cosmo, "I have nothing more to say. I have told you all the truth as far as I am certain of it."

She inclined her head slowly and in the same level voice:

"The Court is here and most of the foreign ambassadors. We are waiting here for the arrival of the Queen of Sardinia, who may or may not come within the next month or so. This is considered a good post of observation, but there is very little to observe just now from the diplomatic point of view. Most of us have exhausted almost all emotions. Life has grown suddenly very dull. We gossip a little about each other; we wait for the end of the Vienna Congress and discuss the latest rumour that floats about. Yes. The play is over, the stage seems empty. If I were you I would stay a little longer here."

"I certainly mean to stay here for some time," declared Cosmo with sudden resolution.

"That's right," she continued in the same indifferent tone. "But wait a few days before you write home. You have awakened old memories in me. Inconceivably distant," she went on in a voice more expressionless than ever, "and the dormant feelings of what seems quite another age."

Cosmo smiled at this. The girl with round eyes was keeping perfectly still with her watchful stare. Madame de Monteverso seemed to read Cosmo's thoughts.

"Yes," she insisted. "I feel very old and everything is very far. I am twenty-six and I have been married very nearly ten years now."

Cosmo, looking at her face, thought that those had been the most agitated ten years of European history. He said, "I have no doubt that Yorkshire must seem very far away to you."

“I suppose you write very often home?” she said.

Cosmo defended himself from being one of those people who write letters about their travels. He had no talent for that; and then what could one write to a young girl like Henrietta and to a man as austere as his father, who had so long retired from the world? Cosmo had found it very difficult. Of course he took care to let them know pretty often that he was safe and sound.

Adele could see this point of view. She seemed amused by the innocent difficulties of a young man having no one but a father and a sister to write to. She ascertained that he had no intimate friend left behind to whom he could confide his impressions. Cosmo said he had formed none of those intimacies that induce a man to share his innermost thoughts and feelings with somebody else.

“Probably your father was like that too,” said Madame de Monteverso. “I fancy he must have been very difficult to please, and still more difficult to conquer.”

“Oh, as to that,” said Cosmo, “I can safely say I’ve never been conquered,” and he laughed boyishly. He confessed further that he had the habit of thinking contradictorily about most things. “My father was never like that,” he concluded.

The gravity with which she listened to him now disconcerted him secretly. At last she nodded and opined that his difficulties had their source in the liveliness of his sympathies. He declared that he suffered most at times from the difficulty of making himself understood by men of his own age.

“And the women?” she asked quietly.

“Oh, the women!” he said, without the slightest levity. “One would not even try.” He raised his eyes and, obeying a sudden impulse, added: “I think that perhaps you could understand me.”

“That would be because I am so much older,” she said. Cosmo discovered in her delicately modelled face, with all its grace and freshness of youth, an interrogative profundity of expression, the impress of the problems of life and the conflicts of the soul. The great light of day had treated her kindly. Bathed in the sunshine entering through the four windows, she appeared to him wonderful in the glow of her complexion, in the harmony of her form and the composed nobility of her attitude. He felt this wonderfulness of her whole person in some sort physically, and thought

that he had looked at her too long. He glanced aside and met the dark girl's round unwinking stare of a cat ready to fly at one. She had not moved a hair's breadth, and Cosmo felt reluctant to take his eyes off her exactly as though she had been a fierce cat. He heard the voice of the Countess de Monteverso and had to turn to her.

"Well, wait a few days before you write home about . . . Genoa."

"I had a mind to begin a letter yesterday," he said.

"What? Already! Only a few hours after your arrival!"

"Yes. Henrietta is very anxious to hear everything relating to the Emperor Napoleon."

Madame de Monteverso was genuinely surprised. Her voice lost its equable charm while she asked what on earth could he have had to tell of Napoleon that he could not have written to her from Paris.

"Yes. He is in everybody's thoughts and on everybody's lips there," he said. "Whenever three people come together he is the presence that is with them. But last night ..."

He was on the point of telling her of his adventure on the tower when she struck in:

"The Congress will put an end to all that presently." It checked Cosmo's expansiveness and he said instead: "It's very possible. But last night on arriving here I experienced a curious sensation of his nearness. I went down in the evening to look at the Fort."

"He isn't certainly very far from here. And what are your feelings about him?"

"Oh," he rejoined lightly, "as about everything else in the world — contradictory."

Madame de Monteverso rose suddenly, saying: "I won't ask you, then, as to your feelings about myself." Cosmo stood up hastily. He was a little the taller of the two but their faces were nearly on a level. "I should like you to make up your mind about me before you take up your traveller's pen," continued Adele. "Come again this evening. There will be a few people here; and, as you have said, when a few people come together just now Napoleon is always with them, an unseen presence. But you will see my father. Do you remember him at all?"

Cosmo assured her that he remembered the Marquis d'Armand perfectly. He was on the point of making his parting bow when Madame de Monteverso, with the two words "à l'Anglaise," put out her hand. He took

it and forgot himself in the unexpected sensation of this contact. He was in no haste to release it when to his extreme surprise, with a slight movement of her eyes towards the girl at the writing table, Madame de Monteverso said:

“Did you ever see anything like that?”

Cosmo was taken completely aback. He dropped her hand. He did not know what to say, and even if it was proper for him to smile. Madame de Monteverso continued in a voice betraying no sentiment of any kind: “I can never be sure of my privacy now. Do you understand that I am her aunt? She wanders all over this palazzo very much like a domestic animal, only more observant, and she is by no means an idiot. Luckily she knows no language but Italian.”

They had been moving slowly towards the other end of the room, but now Madame de Monteverso stopped and returned Cosmo’s parting bow with a slight inclination of her head. Before passing round the screen between him and the door Cosmo glanced back. The girl on the chair had not stirred.

He had half a hope that the mulatto maid would be waiting for him. But he saw no one. As he crossed the courtyard he might have thought himself leaving an uninhabited house. But the streets through which he made his way to his inn were thronged with people. The day was quite warm. Already on the edge of the pavements, here and there, there was a display of flowers for sale; and at every turn he saw more people who seemed carefree, and the women with their silken shoes and the lace scarves on their heads appeared to him quite charming. The plaza was a scene of constant movement. Here and there a group stood still, conversing in low voices but with expressive gestures. As he approached his hotel he caught an evanescent sight of the man he had met on the tower. His cap was unmistakable. Cosmo mended his pace but the man had disappeared; and after looking in all directions Cosmo went up the steps of the inn. In his room he found Spire folding methodically some clothes.

“I saw that man/” said Cosmo, handing him his hat.

“Was he following you, sir?” asked Spire.

“No, I saw his back quite near this house.”

“I shouldn’t wonder if he were coming here,” opined Spire.

“In any case I wouldn’t have spoken to him in the piazza,” said Cosmo.

“Much better not, sir,” said the servant.

“After all,” said Cosmo, “I don’t know that I have anything to say to him.”

From these words Spire concluded that his master had found something more interesting to occupy his mind. While he went on with his work he talked to Cosmo, who had thrown himself into an armchair, of some repairs needed to the carriage, and also informed him that the English doctor had left a message asking whether Mr. Latham would do him the honour to take his midday meal with him at the same table as last night. After a slight hesitation Cosmo assented, and Spire, saying that he would go and tell them downstairs, left the room.

In the solitude favourable to concentration of thought Cosmo discovered that he could not think connectedly, either of the fair curls of the Countess de Monteverso or of the vague story of her marriage. Strictly speaking he knew nothing of it; and this ignorance interfered with the process of consecutive thinking; but he formed some images and even came to the verge of that state which one sees visions. The obscurity of her past helped the freedom of his fancies. He had an intuitive conviction that he had seen her in the fullest brilliance of her beauty and of the charm of her mind. A woman like that was a great power, he reflected, and then it occurred to him that, marvellous as she was, she was not her own mistress.

Some church clock striking loudly the hour roused him up, but before he went downstairs he paced the floor to and fro several times. And when he forced himself out of that empty room it was with a profound disgust of all he was going to see and hear, a momentary repulsion towards the claims of the world, like a man tearing himself away from the side of a beloved mistress.



### III

Returning that evening to the Palazzo Brignoli, Cosmo found the lantern under the vaulted roof lighted. There was also a porter in gold-laced livery and a cocked hat who saluted him, and in the white anteroom with red benches along the walls two lackeys made ready to divesthim of his cloak. But a man in sombre garments detained Cosmo, saying that he was the ambassador's valet, and led him away along a very badly lighted inner corridor. He explained that His Excellency the Ambassador wished to see Monsieur Latham for a few moments in private before Monsieur Latham joined the general company. The ambassador's cabinet into which he introduced Cosmo was lighted by a pair of candelabra. Cosmo was told that His Excellency was finishing dressing, and then the man disappeared. Cosmo noticed that there were several doors besides the one by which he had entered, which was the least conspicuous of them all, and in fact so inconspicuous, corresponding exactly to a painted panel, that it might have been called a secret door. Other doors were framed in costly woods, lining the considerable thicknesses of the walls. One of them opened without noise and Cosmo saw enter a man somewhat taller than he had expected to see, with a white head, in a coat with softly gleaming embroideries and a broad ribbon across his breast. He advanced, opening his arms wide, and Cosmo, who noticed that one of the hands was holding a snuffbox, submitted with good grace to the embrace of the Marquis d'Armand, whose lips touched his cheeks one after another and whose hands then rested at arm's length on his shoulder for a moment.

"Sit down, mon enfant," were the first words spoken, and Cosmo obeyed, facing the armchair into which the Marquis had dropped. A white meagre hand set in fine lace moved the candelabra on the table, and Cosmo good-humouredly submitted to being contemplated in silence. This man in a splendid coat, white-headed and with a broad ribbon across his breast, seemed to have no connection whatever with his father's guest, whom as a boy he remembered walking with Sir Charles amongst deep shrubberies or writing busily at one end of the long table in the library of Latham Hall, always with the slightly subdued mien of an exile and an air of being worried by the possession of unspeakable secrets which he preserved even when playing at backgammon with Sir Charles in the great drawing room.

Cosmo, returning the gaze of the tired eyes, remarked that the ambassador looked old but not at all senile.

At last the Marquis declared that he could detect the lineaments of his old friend in the son's face, and in a voice that was low and kindly put a series of questions about Sir Charles, about London and his old friends there; questions which Cosmo, especially as to the latter, was not always able to answer fully.

"I forget! You are still so young," said the ambassador, recollecting himself. This young man sitting here before him with a friendly smile had his friends amongst his own contemporaries, shared the ideas and the views of his own generation which had grown up since the Revolution, to whom the Revolution was only a historical fact and whose enthusiasms had a strange complexion, for the undisciplined hopes of the young make them reckless in words and sometimes in actions. The Marquis's own generation had been different. It had had no inducement to be reckless. It had been born to a settled order of things. Certainly a few philosophers had been indulging for years in subversive sentimentalism, but the foundations of Europe seemed unshakable. He noticed Cosmo's expectant attitude and said:

"I wonder what my dear old friend is thinking of all this." ^

"It is not very easy to get at my father's thoughts," confessed Cosmo. "After all, you must know my father much better than I do, Monsieur le Marquis."

"In the austerity of his convictions your father was more like a republican of ancient times," said the Marquis seriously. "Does that surprise you, my young friend? ..." Cosmo shook his head slightly. . . . "Yet we always agreed very well. Your father understood every kind of fidelity. The world had never known him and it will never know him now. But I, who approached him closely, could have nothing but the greatest respect for his character and for his far-seeing wisdom."

"I am very glad to hear you say this," interjected Cosmo.

"He was a scornful man," said the Marquis, then paused and repeated once more: "Yes. Un grand dedaigneux. He was that. But one accepted it from him as one would not from another man, because one felt that it was not the result of mean grievances or disappointed hopes. Now the old order is coming back and, whatever my old friend may think of it, he had his share in that work."

Cosmo raised his head. "I had no idea," he murmured.

"Yes," said the Marquis. "Indirectly if you like. AH I could offer to my Princes was my life, my toil, the sacrifice of my deepest feelings as husband and father. I don't say this to boast. I could not have acted otherwise. But for my share of the work, risky, often desperate, and continuously hopeless as it seemed to be, I have to thank your father's help, *mon jeune ami*. It came out of that fortune which some day will be yours. The only thing in all the activities the penetrating mind of your father was not scornful of was my fidelity. He understood that it was above the intrigues, the lies, the selfish stupidities of that exiles' life which we all shared with our Princes. They will never know how much they owe to that English gentleman. When parting with my wife and child I was sustained by the thought that his friendship and care were extended over them and would not fail."

"I have heard nothing of all this," said Cosmo. "Of course I was not ignorant of the great friendship that united you to him. This is one of the things that the world does know about my father."

"Have you brought a letter for me?" asked the Marquis. "I haven't heard from him for a long time. After we returned to France, through the influence of my son-in-law, communications were very difficult. Ten years of war, my dear friend, ten years."

"Father very seldom takes a pen in hand now," said Cosmo, "but ..."

The Marquis interrupted him. "When you write home, my dear friend, tell him that I never gave way to promptings of mean ambition or an unworthy vanity. Tell him that I twice declined the Embassy of Madrid which was pressed on me, and that if I accepted the nomination as a Commissioner for settling the frontiers with the representatives of the Allied Powers it was at the cost of my deepest feelings and only to serve my vanquished country. My secret missions had made me known to many European statesmen. I knew I was liked. I thought I could do some good. The Russians, I must say, were quite charming, and you may tell your father that Sir Charles Stewart clothed his demands in the form of the most perfect politeness; but all those transactions were based after all on the right of the strongest. I had black moments and I suffered as a Frenchman. I suffered ..."

The Marquis got up, walked away to the other end of the room, then coming back dropped into the armchair again. Cosmo was too startled by this display of feeling to rise. The ambassadorial figure in the laced coat

exhaled a deep sigh. "Your father knows that, unlike so many of the other refugees, I have always remained a Frenchman. One would have paid any price almost to avoid this humiliation."

Cosmo was gratified by the anxiety of a king's friend to, as it were, justify himself before his father. He discovered that even this old royalist had been forced, if only for a moment, to regret the days of imperial victories. The Marquis tapped his snuffbox, took a pinch of snuff, and composed himself.

"Of course when this Turin mission was unexpectedly pressed on me I went to the King himself and explained that, having refused a much higher post, I could not think of accepting this one. But the King pointed out that this was an altogether different position. The King of Sardinia was his brother-in-law. There was nothing to say against such an argument. His Majesty was also good enough to say that he was anxious to grant me any favour I might ask. I didn't want any favours but I had to think of something on the spur of the moment and I begged for a special right of entree on days on which there are no receptions. I couldn't resist so much graciousness," continued the Marquis. "I have managed to keep clear of prejudices that poison and endanger the hopes of this restoration, but I am a royalist, a man of my own time. Remember to tell your father all this, my dear young friend."

"I shall not fail," said Cosmo, wondering within himself at the power of such a strange argument, yet feeling a liking and respect for that old man torn between rejoicing and sorrow at the end of his troubled life.

"I should like him to know, too," the Marquis said in his bland and friendly voice, "that M. de Talleyrand just before he left for Vienna held out to me the prospect of the London Embassy later. That, certainly, I would not refuse, if only to be nearer a man to whom my obligations are immense and only equalled by the affection I had borne towards him through all those unhappy years."

"My father — " began Cosmo — "I ought to have given you his message before — told me to give you his love and to tell you that when you are tired of your grandeurs there is always a large place for you in his house."

Cosmo was surprised at the sudden movement of the Marquis, who leaned over the arm of his chair and put his hand over his eyes. For a time complete silence reigned in the room. Then Cosmo said:

"I think somebody is scratching at the door."

The Marquis sat up and listened, then raising his voice: "You may come in."

The man in black clothes, entering through the hidden door, stopped at some distance in a respectful attitude. The Marquis beckoned him to approach, and the man, bending to his ear, said in a low voice which was, however, audible to Cosmo: "He is here." The Marquis answered in an undertone, "He came rather early. He must wait," at which the man murmured something which Cosmo couldn't hear. He became aware that the Marquis looked at him irresolutely before he said:

"My dear boy, you will have to make your entrance into my daughter's salon together with me. I thought of sending you back the way you came, but as a matter of fact the passage is blocked. . . . Bring him in and let him sit here after we are gone," he directed the man in black, and Cosmo only then recognized Bernard, the servant of proved fidelity in all the misfortunes of the D'Armand family. Bernard withdrew without responding in any way to Cosmo's smile of recognition. "In my position," continued the Marquis, "I have to make use of agents more or less shady. Those men often object to being seen. Their occupation is risky. There is a man of that sort waiting in the corridor."

Cosmo said he was at the Marquis's orders, but the ambassador remained in the armchair, tapping the lid of his snuffbox slightly.

"You saw my daughter this morning, I understand." Cosmo made an assenting bow. Madame de Monteverso had done him the honour to receive him in the morning.

"You speak French very well," said the Marquis. "I don't really know why the English are supposed to be bad linguists. We French are much worse. Did you two speak French together?"

"No," said Cosmo, "we spoke in English. It was Madame de Monteverso's own choice."

"She hasn't quite forgotten it, has she?"

"It struck me," said Cosmo, "that your daughter has forgotten neither the language nor the people, nor the sights of her early life. I was touched by the fidelity of her memory and the warmth of her feelings."

His own tone had warmth enough in it to make the Marquis look up at him. There was a short pause. "None of us are likely to forget those days of noble and infinite kindness. We were but vagrants on a hostile earth. My

daughter could not have forgotten! As long as there is anybody of our name left ... “

The Marquis checked himself abruptly, but almost at once went on in a slightly changed tone: “But I am alone of my name now. I wish I had had a son so that gratitude could have been perpetuated from generation to generation and become a traditional thing between our two families. But this is not to be. Perhaps you didn’t know I had a brother. He was much younger than myself and I loved him as though he had been my son. Directly I had placed my wife and child in safety, your father insisted on giving me the means to return to France secretly in order to try and save that young head. But all my attempts failed. It fell on the scaffold. He was one of the last victims of the sanguinary madness of that time. . . . But let us talk of something else. What are your plans, my young friend?”

Cosmo confessed that he had no plans. He intended to stay in Genoa for some time. Madame de Monteverso had been good enough to encourage him in that idea, and really there was such a feeling of leisure in the European atmosphere that he didn’t see why he should make any plans. The world was enjoying its first breathing time. Cosmo corrected himself — well no, perhaps not exactly enjoying. To be strictly truthful he had not noticed much feeling of joy. ... He hesitated a moment but the whole attitude of the Marquis was so benevolent and encouraging that he continued to take stock of his own sensations and continued in the same strain. There was activity, lots of activity, agitation perhaps, but no real joy. Or at any rate, no enjoyment. Not even now, after the foreign troops had withdrawn from France and all the sovereigns of the world had gone to Vienna.

The Marquis listened with profound attention. “Are those your impressions, mon cher enfant? Somehow they don’t seem very favourable. But you English are very apt to judge us with severity. I hear very little of what is going on in France.”

The train of his own thoughts had mastered Cosmo, who added, “What struck me most was the sense of security ... “he paused for an instant and the ambassador, bending forward in the chair with the air of a man attempting an experiment, insinuated gently:

“Not such a bad thing, that sentiment.”

In the ardour of his honesty Cosmo did not notice either the attitude or the tone, though he caught the sense of the words.

“Was it of the right kind,” he went on, as if communing with himself, “or was it the absence of sound thought, and almost of all feeling? M. le Marquis, I am too young to judge, but one would have thought, listening to the talk one heard on all sides, that such a man as Bonaparte had never existed.”

“You have been in the society of returned exiles,” said the Marquis after a moment of meditation. “You must judge them charitably. A class that has been under the ban for years lives on its passions and on prejudices whose growth stifles not only its sagacity but its visions of the reality.” He changed his tone. “Our present Minister of Foreign Affairs never communicates with me personally. The only personal letter I had from him in the last four months was on the subject of procuring some truffles that grow in this country for the King, and there were four pages of most minute directions as to where they were to be found and how they were to be packed and transmitted to Paris. As to my dispatches, I get merely formal acknowledgments. I really don’t know what is going on except through travellers who naturally colour their information with their own desires. M. de Talleyrand writes me short notes now and then, but as he has been himself for months in Vienna he can’t possibly know what is going on in France. His acute mind, his extraordinary talents are fit to cope with the international situation, but I suppose he too is uneasy. In fact, my dear young friend, as far as I can judge, uneasy suspense is the prevailing sentiment all round the basin of the Mediterranean. The fate of nations still hangs in the balance.”

Cosmo waited a moment before he whispered, “And the fate of some individual souls perhaps.”

The ambassador made no sound till after a whole minute had elapsed, and then it was only to say:

“I suppose that like many of your young and even old countrymen, you have formed a project of visiting Elba.”

Cosmo at once adopted a conversational tone. “Half-formed at most,” he said. “I was never one of those who like to visit prisons and gaze at their fellow beings in captivity. A strange taste indeed! I will own to you, M. le Marquis,” he went on boyishly, “that the notion of captivity is very odious to me, for men, and for animals too. I would sooner look at a dead lion than a lion in a cage. Yet I remember a young French friend of mine telling me

that we English were the most curious nation in the world. But as you said, everybody seems to be doing Elba. I suppose there are no difficulties.”

“Not enough difficulties,” said the ambassador blandly. “I mean for the good of all concerned.”

“Ah,” said Cosmo, and repeated thoughtfully, “All concerned! The other day in Paris I met Mr. Wycherley on his way home. He seemed to have had no difficulty at all, not even in Elba. We had quite a long-audience. Mr. Wycherley struck me as a man of blunt feelings. Apparently the Emperor — after all, the imperial title is not taken away from him yet-”

The Marquis lowered his head slowly. “No, not yet.”

“Well, the Emperor said to him: ‘You have come here to look at a wild beast,’ and Mr. Wycherley, who doesn’t seem to be at a loss for words, answered at once: ‘I have come here to look at a great man.’ What a crude answer! He is telling this story to everybody. He told me he is going to publish a pamphlet about his visit.”

“Mr. Wycherley is a man of good company. His answer was polite. What would have been yours, my young friend?”

“I don’t think I will ever be called to make any sort of answer to the great man,” said Cosmo.

The Marquis got up with the words: “I think that on the whole you will be wise not to waste your time. I have here a letter from the French Consul in Leghorn quoting the latest report he had from Elba. It states that Bonaparte remains shut up for days together in his private apartments. The reason given is that he fears attempts on his life being made by emissaries sent from France and Italy. He is not visible. Another report states that lately he has expressed great uneasiness at the movements of the French and English frigates.”

The Marquis laid a friendly hand on Cosmo’s shoulder. “You cannot complain of me; I have given you the very latest intelligence. And now let us join whatever company my daughter is receiving. I think very few people.” He crossed the room, followed by Cosmo, and Cosmo noticed a distinct lameness in his gait. At the moment of opening the door the Marquis d’Armand said:

“Your arm, my young friend. I am suffering from rheumatism considerably this evening.”

Cosmo hastened to offer his arm, and the Marquis with his hand on the door said:



“I can hardly walk. I hope I shall be able to go to the audience I have tomorrow with the King of Sardinia. He is an excellent man but all his ideas and feelings came to a standstill in ‘98. It makes all conversation with him extremely difficult even for me. His ministers are more reasonable, but that is only because they are afraid.”

A low groan escaped the ambassador. He remained leaning with one hand on Cosmo’s shoulder and with the other clinging to the door-handle.

“Afraid of the people?” asked Cosmo.

“The people are being corrupted by secret societies,” the Marquis said in his bland tone. “All Italy is seething with conspiracies. What, however, they are most afraid of is the Man of Elba.”

Cosmo for an instant wondered at those confidences, but a swift reflection that probably those things were known to everybody who was anybody in Europe made him think that this familiar talk was merely the effect of the Marquis’s kindness to the son of his old friend. “I think I can proceed now,” said the Marquis, pushing the door open. Cosmo recognized one of the rooms which he had passed in the morning. It was the only one of the suite which was fully lighted by a great central glass chandelier, but even in that only two rows of candles were lighted. It was a small reception. The rest of the suite presented but a dim perspective. A semi-circle of heavy armchairs was sparsely occupied by less than a dozen ladies. There was only one card table in use. All the faces were turned to the opening door, and Cosmo was struck by the expression of profound surprise on them all. In one or two it resembled thunderstruck imbecility. It didn’t occur to him that the entrance of the French King’s personal representative leaning on the shoulder of a completely unknown young man was enough to cause a sensation. A group of elderly personages, conversing in a remote part of the room, became silent. The Marquis gave a general greeting by an inclination of his head, and Cosmo felt himself impelled towards a console between two windows against which the Marquis leaned, whispering to him, “If I were to sit down it would be such an affair to get up.” The Countess de Montevesso advanced quickly across the room. Cosmo noticed that her dress had a long train. She smiled at Cosmo and said to the Marquis anxiously:

“You are in pain, Papa?”

“A little. . . . Take him away, my dear, now. He was good enough to lend me his shoulder as far as this.”

“ Venez, M. Latham,” said Adele, “I must introduce you at once to Lady William Bentick in order to check wild speculation about the appearance of a mysterious stranger. As it is, all the town will be full of rumours. People will be talking about you this very night.”

Cosmo followed Adele across the room. She moved slowly and talked easily with a flattering air of intimacy. She even stopped for a moment under the great chandelier. “Lady William is talking now with Count Bubna,” she explained to Cosmo, who took a rapid survey of a tall, stout man in an Austrian general’s uniform, with his hair tied up in a queue, with black mous- taches and something cynical though not ill-natured in his expression. That personage interrupted suddenly his conversation with a lady, no longer very young, who was dressed very simply, and made his way to the ambassador, giving in passing a faintly caustic smile and a keen glance to Cosmo.

“Let me introduce to you Mr. Cosmo Latham,” said Adele. “He is the son of my father’s very old friend. He and I haven’t met since we were children together in Yorkshire. He has just arrived here.”

Cosmo bowed, and in response to a slight gesture took a seat close to the lady, whose preoccupied air struck him with a sort of wonder. She seemed to have something on her mind. Cosmo could know nothing of the prevalent gossip that it was only the black eyes of Louise Durazzo that were detaining Lord William in Italy. He explained in answer to a careless inquiry as to the latest news from Paris that he had been travelling very leisurely and that he could not possibly have brought any fresh news. Lady William looked at him as if she had not seen him before.

“Oh, I am not very much interested in the news, except in so far that they may make a longer stay here unnecessary for us.”

“I suppose everybody wants to see the shape of the civilized world settled at last,” said Cosmo politely.

“All I want is to go home,” declared Lady William. She was no longer looking at him and had the appearance of a person not anxious to listen to anybody’s conversation. Cosmo glanced about the room. The card game had been resumed. The Austrian general was talking to the Marquis with Madame de Monteverso standing close to them, while other persons kept at a respectful distance. Lady William seemed to be following her own thoughts with a sort of impassive abstraction. Cosmo felt himself at liberty to go on with his observations, and sweeping his glance round noticed,

sitting half hidden by the back of the armchair Adele had vacated, the dark girl with round black eyes, whom he had seen that morning. To his extreme surprise she smiled at him and, not content with that, gave other plain signs of recognition. He thought he could do no less than get up and make her a bow. By the time he sat down again he became aware that he had attracted the notice of all the ladies seated before the fire. One of them put up her eyeglasses to look at him, two others started talking low together with side glances in his direction, and there was not one that did not look interested. This disturbed him much less than the fixed stare of the young creature, which became fastened on him unwinkingly. Even Lady William gave him a short look of curiosity.

“I understand that you have just arrived in Genoa.”

“Yes. Yesterday afternoon late. This is my first appearance.”

He meant that it was his first appearance in society and he continued:

“And I don’t know a single person in this room even by name. Of course I know that it is Count Bubna who is talking to the Marquis, but that is all.”

“Ah,” said Lady William with a particular intonation which made Cosmo wonder what he could have said to provoke scepticism. But Lady William was asking herself how it was that this young Englishman seemed to be familiar with the freakish girl who was an object of many surmises in Genoa, and whose company, it was understood, Count Helion of Monteverso had imposed upon his wife. Meantime Cosmo, with the eyes of all the women concentrated upon him with complete frankness, began to feel uncomfortable. Lady William noticed it and out of pure kindness spoke to him again.

“If I understood rightly you have known Madame de Monteverso from childhood.”

“I can’t call myself really a childhood’s friend. I was so much away from home,” explained Cosmo. “But she lived for some years in my parents’ house and everybody loved her there; my mother, my father, my sister — and it seems to me, looking back now, that I too must have loved her at that time; though we very seldom exchanged more than a few words in the course of the day.”

He spoke with feeling and glanced in the direction of the group near the console where the head of Adele appeared radiant under the sparkling crystals of the lustre. Lady William, bending sideways a little, leaned her cheek against her hand in a listening attitude. Cosmo felt that he was

expected to go on speaking, but it seemed to him that he had nothing more to say. He fell back upon a general remark.

“I think boys are very stupid creatures. However, I wasn’t so stupid as not to feel that Adele d’Armand was very intelligent and quite different from us all. Her very gentleness set her apart. Moreover, Henrietta and I were younger. To my sister and myself she seemed almost grown up. A couple of years makes a very great difference at that age. Soon after she went away we children heard that she was married. She seemed lost to us then. Presently she went back to France, and once there she was lost indeed. When one looked towards France in those days it seems to me there was nothing to be seen but Napoleon. And then her marriage, too. A Countess de Monteverso didn’t mean anything to us. I came here expecting to see a stranger.”

Cosmo checked himself. It was impossible to say whether Lady William had heard him, or even whether she had been listening at all, but she asked:

“You never met Count Helion?”

“I haven’t the slightest idea of the man. He is not in this room, is he? What is he like?”

Lady William looked amused for a moment at the artless curiosity of the Countess de Monteverso’s young friend; but it was in an indifferent tone that she said:

“Count Helion is a man of immense wealth which he amassed in India somewhere. He is much older than his wife. More than twice her age.” Cosmo showed his surprise, and Lady William continued smoothly: “Of course all the world knows that Adele has been a model wife.”

Cosmo noted the faintest possible shade of emphasis on those last words and thought to himself: “That means she is not happy and that the world knows it.” But, several men having approached the circle, the conversation became general. He vacated his seat by the side of Lady William and got introduced by Adele to several people, amongst whom was a delicate young woman splendidly dressed and of a slightly Jewish type who, though she was the wife of General Count Bubna, commander-in-chief of the Austrian troops and the representative of Austria at the Court of Turin, behaved with a strange timidity and appeared almost too shy to speak. A simple Madame Ferrati, or so at least Cosmo heard her name, a lady with white tousled hair, had an aggressive manner. Cosmo remarked in the course of the evening that she seemed rather to be persecuting Lady William, who, however,

remained amiably abstracted and did not seem to mind anything. The Marquis, getting away from the console, had seated himself near the little Madame Bubna. This, Cosmo thought, was an unavoidable sort of thing for him to do.

A young man with a grave manner and something malicious in his eye, apparently a First Secretary of the Embassy, informed Cosmo shortly after they had been made known to each other that "the wife of the general would not naturally be received in Vienna society," and that this was the secret of Bubna sticking to his Italian command so long, even now when really all the excitement was over. Of course he was very much in love with his wife. He used to give her balls twice a week at the expense of the Turin Municipality. Old Bubna understood the art of pillaging to perfection, but apart from that he was a parfait galant homme and an able soldier. Bonaparte had a very great liking for him. Bubna was the only friend Bonaparte had in this room. He meant sympathy as man for man. Years ago when Bubna was in Paris he got on very well with the Emperor. Bonaparte knew how to flatter a man. It was worth while to sit up half the night to hear Bubna talking about Bonaparte "I am posting you up like this," concluded the secretary, "because I see you are in the intimacy of the Marquis and of Madame de Monteverso here."

He went away then to talk to somebody else, and presently Madame de Monteverso, passing close to Cosmo, whispered to him, "Stay to the last," and went on without waiting for his answer. Cosmo amongst all the groups engaged in animated conversation felt rather lonely, totally estranged from the ideas those people were expressing to each other. He could not possibly be in sympathy with the fears and the hopes, strictly personal, and with the royalist-legitimist enthusiasms of these advocates of an order of things that had been buried for a quarter of a century and now was paraded like a rouged and powdered corpse putting on a swagger of life and revenge. Then he reflected that in this room, at any rate, it was probably nothing but scandalous gossip and trivial talk of futile intrigues. There was no need for him to be indignant. He was even amused at himself, and looking about him in a kindlier frame of mind he perceived that the person nearest to him was that strange girl with the round eyes. She had kept perfectly still on her uncomfortable stool like a captured savage. Her green flounced skirt was spread on each side of the seat. The bodice of her dress, which was black, was cut low, her bare arms were youthfully red and immature. Her hair was

done up smoothly and pulled up from her forehead in the manner of the portraits of the 15th Century.

“Why do they dress her in this bizarre manner?” thought Cosmo. It couldn’t be Adele’s conception. Perhaps of the Count himself. Yet that didn’t seem likely. Perhaps it was her own atrocious taste. But if so it ought to have been repressed. He reflected that there could be nothing improper in him talking to the niece of the house. He would try his conversational Italian. With the feeling of venturing on a doubtful experiment he approached her from the back, sat down at her elbow, and waited. She could not possibly remain unaware of him being there.

At last she turned her head for a point-blank stare, and once she had her eyes on him she never attempted to take them away. Cosmo uttered carefully a complimentary phrase about her dress, which was received in perfect silence. Her carmine lips remained as still as her round black eyes for quite a long time. Suddenly in a low tone, with an accent which surprised Cosmo but which he supposed to be Piedmontese, and with a sort of spiteful triumph, she said:

“I knew very well it would suit me. You think it does?”

Her whole personality had such an aggressive mien that Cosmo, startled and amused, hastened to say, “Undoubtedly,” lest she should fly at his eyes.

She showed him her teeth in a grin of savage complacency, and the subject seemed exhausted. Cosmo set himself the task to daunt her by a steady gaze. In less than two seconds he regretted his venture. He felt certain that she would not be the one to look away first. There was not the slightest doubt about that. In order to cover his retreat he let his eyes wander vaguely about the room, smiled agreeably, and said:

“Your uncle is not here. Shall I have the pleasure of seeing him this evening?”

“No,” she said. “You won’t see him this evening. But he knows you have been here this morning.”

This was, strictly speaking, news to Cosmo, but he said at once and with great indifference:

“Why shouldn’t he? Probably Madame de Monteverso has told him. I used to know your aunt when she was younger than you are, signorina.” “How do you know how old I am?” Cosmo asked himself if she would ever wink those black eyes of hers.

"I know that you are not a hundred years old." This struck her as humorous, because there was a sound as of a faint giggle which, generally speaking, is a silly kind of sound but in her case had a disturbing quality. It was followed by the hoarse declaration:

"Aunt didn't. I told Uncle. I looked a lot at you in the morning. Why didn't you look at me?"

"I was afraid of being indiscreet," said Cosmo readily, concealing his astonishment.

"What silliness," she commented scornfully. "And this evening too! I was looking at you all the time and you did nothing but look at all those witches here, one after another."

"I find all the ladies in the room perfectly charming," said Cosmo.

"You lie. I suppose you do nothing else from morning till night."

"I am sorry you have such a bad opinion of me, but it being what it is, hadn't I better go away?"

"Directly I set eyes on you I knew you were one of that sort."

"And did you impart your opinion of me to your uncle?" asked Cosmo. He could be no more offended with that girl than if she had been an unmannerly animal. Her peculiar stare remained unchanged but her general expression softened for a moment.

"No. But I took care to tell him that you were a very handsome gentleman. . . . You are a very handsome gentleman."

What surprised Cosmo was not the downright statement but the thought that flashed through his mind that it was as dreadful as being told that one was good to eat. For a time he stared without any thought of unwinking competition. He was not amused. Distinctly not. He asked:

"Where were you born?"

"How can I tell? In the mountains, I suppose. Somewhere where you will never go. How can it possibly concern you?"

Cosmo offered his apology for his indiscretion, and she received it with a sort of uncomprehending scorn. She said after a pause: "None of those witches, young or old, ever speak to me. And even you didn't want to speak to me. You only spoke to me . . . Oh, no! I know why you spoke to me."

"Why did I speak to you?" asked Cosmo thoughtfully. "Won't you tell me?"

Upon the firm roundness of that high-coloured face came a subtle change which suggested something in the nature of cunning, and the rough,

somewhat veiled voice came from between the red lips which had no more charm or life than the painted lips carved in a piece of wood.

“If I were to tell you you would be as wise as myself.”

“Where would be the harm of me being as wise as yourself?” said Cosmo, trying to be playful but somehow missing the tone of playfulness so completely that he was struck by his failure himself.

“If you were as wise as myself you would never come to this house again and I don’t want, you to stay away,” was the answer, delivered in a hostile tone.

Cosmo said, “You don’t! Well, at any rate it can’t be because of kindness, so I don’t thank you for it.” He said this with extreme amiability. Becoming aware that people were beginning to leave, he observed, out of the corner of his eye, that nobody went away without glancing in their direction. Then the departure of Lady William caused a general stir and gave Cosmo the occasion to get up and move away. Lady William gave him a gracious nod, and the Marquis, coming up to him, introduced him at the last moment to General Count Bubna just as that distinguished person was making ready to take his wife away. Everybody was standing up and for the first time Cosmo felt himself completely unobserved. Obeying a discreet sign of the Countess de Monteverso, he moved unaffectedly in the direction of a closed door, the white and gold door he remembered well from his morning visit. When he had got near to it and within reach of the handle he turned about. He had the view of the guests’ backs as they moved slowly out. Adèle looked over her shoulder for a moment with an affirmative nod. He understood it, hesitated no longer, opened the door, and slipped through without, so far as he could judge, being seen by anybody.

It was as he had thought. He found himself in Madame de Monteverso’s boudoir in which he had been received that morning.



## IV

He shut the door behind him gently and remained between it and the screen. He had expected to be followed at once by Adele. What could be detaining her? But he remembered the remarkable proportions of that suite of reception rooms. He had seen some apartments in Paris, but nothing quite so long as that. The old Marquis would no doubt conduct the little Madame Bubna to the very door of the anteroom. The ambassador of The Most Christian King owed that attention to the representative of His Apostolic Majesty and Commander-in-Chief of the Austrian troops. This was the exact form which his thought took. The Christian King, the Apostolic Majesty — all those submerged heads were bobbing up out of the subsiding flood.

He pictured them to himself in their mental simplicity and with their grand air; the Marquis magnificent and ageing, and the dutiful daughter by his side with her radiant head and her divine form. It was impossible to believe that these two had also been submerged at one time.

All those people were mere playthings, reflected Cosmo without a pang. But who or what was playing with them? he thought further, boldly, and remained for a moment as if amused by the marvellousness of it, in the manner of people watching the changes on the stage. But what could have become of them?

She might next moment be opening the door. Could she have made him stay behind because she wanted to talk to him alone? Why, yes, obviously. Cosmo did not ask himself what she wanted to talk to him about. It was no wonder that he felt, it was a subtle emotion resembling impatience for the arrival of a promised felicity of an indefinite kind. All this was by no means poignant. It was merely delightfully disturbing.

"I shall have a tête-a-tête; that's clear," he thought, as he advanced into the room. The air all around him was delightfully warm. Whatever she would have to say would be wonderful because of her voice. He would look her in the face. She did not intimidate him and it was impossible to have too much of that. After all, he thought, immensely amused, it was only Adele, Ad —

His mental monologue was cut short by the shock of perceiving, seated on the painted sofa, a man who was looking at him in perfect silence and

immobility. The fact was that Count Helion, having come into the boudoir sooner than his wife had expected him to do, had directed his eyes to the screen ever since he had heard the opening and the shutting of the door. One of his hands was resting on his thigh, the other hung down holding negligently a number of some gazette which was partly resting on the floor. Though not very big, that piece of paper attracted Cosmo's eyes; and it was in this way that he became aware of the brown fingers covered with rings, of the gaunt legs encased in silk stockings, and of the crossed feet in dress shoes with gold buckles, almost before he took in the impression of the broad but lean face which seemed to have been stained with walnut juice long enough for the stain to have worn down thin, letting the native pallor come through. The same tint extended to the bald top of the head. But what was really extraordinary was the hair: two patches of black behind each temple, obviously dyed. The man, as to whose identity Cosmo could have no doubt, got up, displaying the full length of his bony frame, in a tense and soldierly stiffness associated with cross-belts and a cowhide knapsack on the back. "A grenadier," thought Cosmo, startled by this unexpected meeting, which also caused him profound annoyance, as though he had been induced to walk into a trap. What he could not understand was why the man should make that grimace at him. It convulsed his whole physiognomy, involving his lips, his cheeks, and his very eyes in a sort of spasm. The most awful thing was that it stayed there. . . . "Why, it's a smile," thought Cosmo, with sudden relief. It was so sudden that it broke into a smile without any particular volition of his own. Thereupon the face of Count Helion recovered its normal aspect and Cosmo heard his voice for the first time. It proceeded from the depths of his chest. It was resonant and blurred and portentous with an effect of stiffness somehow in accord with the man's bearing. It informed Cosmo that Count Helion had been waiting in the Countess's boudoir on purpose to make his acquaintance, while in the man's eyes there was a watchfulness as though he had been uttering a momentous disclosure and was anxious as to its effect. A perfectly horizontal, jet-black moustache underlining the nose of Count Helion, which was broad at the base and thin at the end, suggested comic possibilities in that head, which had too much individuality to be looked upon by Cosmo simply as the head of Adele's husband; and Cosmo hardly looked at it in that light. His hold on that fact was slippery. He preserved his equanimity perfectly and said that he himself had wondered whether he

would have the pleasure of making the Count's acquaintance that evening. Both men sat down.

"My occupations kept me late to-night," said the Count. "The courier came in."

He pointed with his fingers to the gazette lying on the floor, and Cosmo asked if there were any news.

"In the gazette, no. At least nothing interesting. The world is full of vanities and scandals, rumours of conspiracies. Very poor stuff. I don't know any of those people the papers mention every day. That's more my wife's affair. For years now she has spent about ten months of every year in Paris or near Paris. I am a provincial. My interests are in the orphanage I have founded in my native country. I am also building an asylum for . . . "

He got up suddenly, approached the mantelpiece in three strides, and turned round exactly like a soldier in the ranks of a company changing front. He was wearing a blue coat cut away in front and having a long skirt, something recalling the cut of a uniform, though the material was fine and there was a good deal of gold lace about it, as also on his white satin waistcoat. Cosmo recalled the vague story he had heard about Count de Monteverso having served in more than one army before being given the rank of general by the King of Piedmont. The man had been drilled. Cosmo wondered whether he had ever been caned. He was a military adventurer of the commonest type. Some of them have been known to return with a fortune got by pillage and intrigue and possibly even by real talents of a sort in the service of oriental courts full of splendours and crimes, tyrannies and treacheries and dark dramas of ambition, or love.

"He is the very thing," Cosmo exclaimed mentally, gazing at the stiff figure leaning against the mantelpiece. Of course he got his fortune in India. What was remarkable about him was that he had managed to get away with his plunder, or at any rate a part of it, considerable enough to enable him to make a figure in the world and marry Adele d'Armand in England. That was only because of the Revolution. In royal France he would not have had the ghost of a chance; and even as it was, only the odious laxity of London society in accepting rich strangers had given him his opportunity. Cosmo, forcing himself to envisage this dubious person as the husband of Adele, felt very angry with the light-minded tolerance extended to foreigners characteristic of a certain part of London society. It was perfectly outrageous.

“Where the devil can my wife be?”

Those words made Cosmo start, though they had not been uttered very loudly. Almost mechanically he answered: “I don’t know,” and noticed that Count Helion was staring at him in a curiously unintelligent manner.

“I was really asking myself,” muttered the latter and stirred uneasily, without however taking his elbow off the mantelpiece. “It’s a natural thought since we are, God knows why, kept waiting for her here. I wasn’t aware I had spoken. Living for many years amongst people who didn’t understand any European language — I had hundreds of them in my palace in Sindh — I got into the habit of talking aloud, strange as it may appear to you.”

“Yes,” said Cosmo, with an air of innocence. “I suppose one acquires all sorts of strange habits in those distant countries. We in England have a class of men who return from India enriched. They are called nabobs. Some of them have most objectionable habits. Unluckily their mere wealth ... “

“There is nothing to compare with wealth,” interrupted the other in a soldierly voice and paused, then continued in the same tone of making a verbal report: “When I was in England I had the privilege to know many people of position. They were very kind to me. They didn’t seem to think lightly of wealth.”

Each phrase came curt, detached, but it was evident that the man did not mean to be offensive. Those statements originated obviously in sincere conviction; and after the Count had uttered them there appeared on his forehead the horizontal wrinkles of unintelligent worry. Cosmo asked himself whether the man before him was not really very stupid. Under the elevated eyebrows his eyes looked worn and empty of all thought.

“Lots of money, I mean,” M. de Monteverso began again. “Not your savings and scrapings. Money that one acquires boldly and enough of it to be profuse with.”

“Is he going to treat me to vulgar boasting?” thought Cosmo. He wished that Adele would come in and interrupt this tete-a-tete which was so very different from the one he had been expecting.

“I daresay money is very useful,” he assented, with airy scorn which he thought might put an end to the subject. But his interlocutor persisted.

“You can’t know anything about it,” he affirmed, then added unexpectedly: “Money will give you even ideas. Lots of ideas. The worst of

it is that any one of them may turn out damnable. Well, yes. There is of course danger in money, but what of that?"

"It can scarcely be if it is used for good works, as you seem to use it," said Cosmo with polite indifference. He meant it to be final, but Count de Montevezzo was not to be suppressed.

"It leads one into worries," he said. "For instance, that orphanage of mine, it is really a very large place. I am trying to be a benefactor to my native province, but

I want it to be in my own way. Well, since the Restoration, the priests are trying to get hold of it. They want to turn it to the glory of God and to the service of religion. I have seen enough of all sorts of religions not to know what that means. No sooner had the King entered Paris than the Bishop wrote to me pointing out that there was no chapel and suggesting that I should build one and appoint a chaplain. That Bishop is ... "

He threw up his head suddenly and Cosmo became aware of the presence of Adele without having heard even the rustle of her dress. He stood up hastily. There was a short silence.

"I see the acquaintance is made," said Adele, looking from one to the other. Her eyes lingered on Cosmo and then turned to her husband. "I didn't know you would be already here. I had to help my father to his room. I would have come at once here but he detained me." Again she turned to Cosmo. "You will pardon me."

"I found Count Helion here. I have not been alone for a minute," said Cosmo. "You owe me no apologies. I was delighted to make your husband's acquaintance, even if you were not here to introduce us to each other."

This was said in English and Count Helion by the mantelpiece waited till Cosmo had finished before he asked, "Where's Clelia?"

"I have sent her to bed," said Countess de Montevezzo. "Helion, my father would like to see you this evening."

"I am at the orders of M. le Marquis."

The grenadier-like figure at the mantelpiece did not stir, and those words were followed only by a slight twitch in the muscles of the face which might have had a sardonic intention. "To-night, at once," he repeated. "But with Mr. Latham here?"

"Pray don't mind me, I am going away directly," said Cosmo. "It is getting late."

“In Italy it is never late. I hope to find you here when I return. As the husband of a daughter of the house of D’Armand I know what is due to the name of Latham. Am I really expected at once?”

Adele moved forward a step or two, speaking rapidly. “There has been some news from Elba, or about Elba, which gives a certain concern to my father. As you have been to the public knowledge in direct touch with people from Elba my father would like to have your opinion.”

Count Helion changed his attitude, and leaning his shoulders against the mantelpiece addressed himself to Cosmo.

“It was the most innocent thing in the world. It was something about the project for the exploitation of the Island of Pianosa. Napoleon sent his treasurer here to get in touch with a banker. I am a man of affairs. The banker consulted me — as a man who knew the spot. It’s true I know the spot, but if you hear it said that it is because of my relations with the Dey of Algiers, pray don’t believe it. I am in no way in touch with the Barbary States.”

He made a step forward, and then another, and stood still. “You two had better sit down and talk. Yes, sit down and talk. Renew the acquaintance of your early youth . . . your early youth,” he repeated in a faint voice. “Those youthful friendships . . . “ he made a convulsive grimace which Cosmo had discovered to be the effect of a smile. “ There is something so charming in those youthful friendships. As to myself I don’t remember ever being youthful.” He stepped out towards the door through which Cosmo had seen Clelia enter that morning. “ Let me find you when

I return, enjoying yourselves most sentimentally. Most delightful.”

His long stiff back swayed in the doorway and the door came to with a crash.

Cosmo and Adele looked at each other with a smile. Cosmo, hat in hand, asked just audibly, “I suppose I had better stay? “ She made an affirmative sign and, moving away from him, put her foot on the marble Cender of the fireplace where nothing was left but hot ashes hiding a reddish glow.

## V

Cosmo, ill at ease, remained looking at her. He was in doubt what the sign she had made meant, a nervous and imperious gesture, which might have been a command for him to go or to stay. In his irresolution he gazed at her, thinking that she was lovely to an incredible degree and that the word "radiant" applied to her extraordinary aptness. Light entered into her composition. And it was not the cold light of marble. "She actually glows," he said to himself, amazed, "like ripe fruit in the foliage, like a big flower in the shade."

"Don't gaze at my blushes," said Madame de Monteverso in an even tone tinged with a little mockery and a little bitterness. "Would you believe that when I was a girl I was so shy that I used to blush crimson whenever anybody looked at me or spoke to me? It's a failing which does not meet with much sympathy. And yet my suffering was very real. It would reach such a pitch at times that I was ready to cry."

"Shall I go away?" asked Cosmo in a deadened voice. He waited for a moment while she seemed to debate in her mind the answer to the question. In his fear of being sent away he went on: "God knows I don't want to leave you. And after all the Count is coming back and ..."

"Oh, yes, he is coming back. Sit down. Yes. It would be better. Sit down. . . ." Cosmo sat down where he could see her admirable shoulders, the roundness of her averted head, coiffe en boucles and girt with a gold circlet, the shadowy retreating view of her profile. The long drapery of her train flowed to the ground in a dark blue shimmer. . . . "He is inevitable. He has always been inevitable," came further from her lips which he couldn't see, for the mirror above the mantelpiece reflected nothing but her forehead with the gold mist of her hair above.

Cosmo remained silent. For nothing in the world would he have made a sound. He held his breath with expectation; and in the extreme tension of his whole being the lights grew dim around him, while her white shoulders, the thick clustering curls, the arm on which she leaned, and the other bare arm hanging inert by her side, seemed the only source of light in the room.

"You don't know me at all," began the Countess de Monteverso. "I don't charge you with forgetting; but the little you may remember of me cannot be of any use. It is only natural that I should be a stranger to you. But you

cannot be a stranger to me. For one thing you were a boy and then you were not a child of outcasts without a country, of refugees with a ruined past and with no future. You were a young Latham, as rooted in your native soil as the old trees of your park. Even then there seemed to me something enviable about you.”

She turned her head a little to glance at him. “You had no idea what it was like after we had gone to London. My ignorance of the world was so profound that I felt ill at ease in it. I hoped I had an attractive face, but I only discovered that I was pretty from the remarks of the people in the street I overheard. I spent my life by the side of my mother’s couch. I never went out except attended by my father or by Aglae. My only amusement was to play a game of chess now and then with an old doctor, also a refugee, who looked after my mother, or listen to the conversation of the people who came to see us. Amongst them there were all the prominent men and women of the old regime. Refugees. They seldom spoke the truth to each other, and yet they were no more stupid than the rest of the world. Nobody could be more good-natured and better company, more frivolous or more inconsiderate. I have seen women of the highest rank work ten hours a day to get bread for their children, but they also slandered one another, told falsehoods about their conduct and their work, and quarrelled among themselves in the style of washerwomen. Morals were even looser than in the times before the Revolution. Manners were forgotten. Every transgression was excused in those who were regarded as good royalists. I don’t mean this to apply to the great body of the refugees. Some of them led irreproachable lives. Round our Princes there were some most absurd intrigues. I didn’t know much of all this, but I remember my poor father’s helpless indignations and my own appalled disgust at the things I could not help hearing and seeing.”

She turned her head to look at Cosmo. “I am telling you all this to give you some idea of the air I had to breathe,” she said in a changed tone. “I don’t think it contaminated me. I felt its odiousness; but all this seemed without remedy. I didn’t even suffer much from it. What I suffered most from was our domestic anxieties; my mother’s fears lest the small resources we had to live on should fail us altogether. Our daily crust of bread seemed to depend on political events in Europe, and they were going against us. Battles, negotiations, everything. A blight seemed to have fallen on the



royalist cause. My mother didn't conceal her distress. What touched me more still was the careworn, silent anxiety of my poor father."

She paused, looking at Cosmo intently, meeting his eyes fixed on her face. "I was getting on for sixteen," she continued. "No one ever paid the slightest attention to me. The only genuine passion in my heart was filial love. . . . But is it any good in going on? And then I can't tell what you may have heard already."

"All I have heard," said Cosmo in a tone of profound respect, "is that Adele de Monteverso's life has been irreproachable."

"I remember the time when all the world was doing its best to make it impossible. Would it shock you very much if I told you that I don't care at all about its good opinion now? There was a time when it would put the worst construction possible on my distress, on my bewilderment, on my very innocence."

"Why should the world do that to you?" asked Cosmo.

"Why? But I see you know nothing. I met my husband first at a select concert that was given by the music-master of the late Queen of France. My mother was feeling a little better and insisted on my going out a little. Those were small fashionable affairs. I had a good voice myself, and that evening I sang with Madame Seppio. An English gentleman — his name doesn't matter — presented M. de Monteverso to me as a friend of his just returned from India and anxious to be introduced to the best society. What with my usual shyness and the unattractive appearance of the man, I don't think I received his attentions very well. There was really no reason I should notice him particularly. It wasn't difficult to see that he had not the manners of a man of the world. Where could he have acquired them? He had left his village at seventeen, he enlisted in the Irish Regiment which served in France, then he deserted, perhaps. I only know that some years afterwards he was a captain in the service of Russia. From there he made his way to India. I believe the governor-general used him as a sort of unofficial agent amongst the native princes, but he got into some scrape with the company. By what steps he managed to get on to the back of an elephant and command the army of a native prince I really don't know. And even if I had known then it would not have made him more interesting in my eyes. I was relieved when he made me a deep bow with his hand on his heart and went away. He left a most fugitive impression, but the very next morning he sent his English friend to ask my parents for my hand. That friend was a

nobleman, a mail of honour, and the offers he was empowered to make were so generous that my parents thought they must tell me of them. I was so astonished that at first I couldn't speak. I simply went away and shut myself up in my room. They were not people to press me for an answer. The poor worried dears thought that I wouldn't even consent to contemplate this marriage; while I, shut up in my room — I was afraid, remembering the way they had spoken to me of that offer, that they would reject it without consulting me any further. I sent word by Aglae that I would give my answer next day and that I begged to be left to myself. Then I escaped from the house, followed by Aglae, who was never so frightened in her life, and went to see the wife of that friend of my present husband. I begged her to send at once for General de Monteverso — at that time he called himself General. The King of Sardinia had given him this rank in acknowledgment of some service that his great wealth had enabled him to render to the Court of Turin. That lady of course had many scruples about doing something so highly unconventional, but at last, overcome by the exaltation of my feelings, she consented."

"She did that?" murmured Cosmo. "What an extraordinary thing!"

"Yes. She did that, instead of taking me home. People will do extraordinary things to please a man of fabulous wealth. She sent out two or three messengers to look for him all over the town. They were some time in finding him. I waited. I was perfectly calm. I was calmer than I am now, telling you my story. I was possessed by the spirit of self-sacrifice. I had no misgivings. I remember even how cold I was in that small drawing room with a big coal fire. He arrived out of breath. He was splendidly dressed and behaved very ceremoniously. I felt his emotion without sharing it. I, who used to blush violently at the smallest provocation, didn't feel the slightest embarrassment in addressing that big stiff man so much older than myself. I could not appreciate what a fatal mistake I was committing by telling him that I didn't care for him in the least and probably never should; but that if he would secure my parents' future comfort my gratitude would be so great that I could marry him, without reluctance and be his loyal friend and wife for life. He stood there stiff and ominous and told me that he didn't flatter himself with the possibility of inspiring any deeper feeling.

"We stood there facing each other for a bit. I felt nothing but an inward glow of satisfaction at having, as I thought, acted honourably. As to him I think he was simply made dumb with rage. At last he bowed with his hands

on his heart and said that he would not even ask now for the favour of kissing my hand. I appreciated his delicacy at that moment. It would have been an immense trial to my shyness. I think now that he was simply afraid of putting my hand to his lips lest he should lose his self-control and bite it. He told me later, in one of those moments when people don't care what they say, that at that moment he positively hated me, not the sight of me, you understand, but my aristocratic insolence."

She paused, and in the youthful sincerity of his sympathy Cosmo uttered a subdued exclamation of distress. Madame de Monteverso looked at him again and then averted her face.

"I heard afterwards some gossip to the effect that he had been jilted by a girl to whom he was engaged, the daughter of some captain on half-pay, and that he proposed to me simply to show her that he could find a girl prettier, of higher rank, and in every way more distinguished that would consent to be his wife. I believe that it was this that prevented him from drawing back before my frankness. As to me, I went home, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, caring for nothing, as though I had done with the world, as though I had taken the veil. I can find no other comparison for the peace that was in me. I faced my mother's reproaches calmly. She was of course very much hurt at my not confiding in her at this crisis of my life. My father, too. But how could I have confided in them in this matter on which their security and welfare depended? How could I have confided in any of the men and women around me who seemed to me as if mad, whose conduct and opinions I despised with youthful severity as foolish and immoral? There was one human being in the world in whom I might perhaps have confided, that perhaps would have understood me. That was your father, Cosmo. But he was three hundred miles away. There was no time. Tell me, did he understand? Has he cast me out of his thoughts for ever?"

"My father," said Cosmo, "has lived like a hermit for years. There was nothing to make him forget you. Yes, he was a man in whom you could have confided.

He would have understood you. That doesn't mean to say that he would have approved. I wish he had been by your side. He would have brought pressure on your parents with the authority of an old and tried friend."

"And benefactor," struck in the Countess de Monteverso. "My father, I believe, had an inkling of the truth. He begged me again and again to think well of what I was doing. I told him that I was perfectly satisfied with what

I had done. It was perfectly true then. I had satisfied my conscience by telling my suitor that I could never love him. I felt strangely confident that I could fulfil the duties of my new position, and I was absorbed by the happiness of having saved my parents from all anxiety for the future. I was not aware of having made any sacrifice. Probably if I had been twenty or more I would have been less confident; perhaps I wouldn't have had the courage! But at that age I didn't know that my whole life was at stake. Three weeks afterwards I was married.

“As you see, there was no time lost. During that period our intercourse was of the most formal kind only I never even attempted to observe him with any attention. He was very stiff and ceremonious, but he was in a hurry, because I believe he was afraid from his previous experience that I would change my mind. His usual answer to the expression of all my wishes and to most of my speeches was a profound bow — and, sometimes, I was amused. In the lightness of my heart a thought would come to me that a lifetime on such terms would be a funny affair. I don't say he deceived me in anything. He had brought an immense fortune out of India and the world took him at its face value. With no more falsehood than holding his tongue and watching his behaviour he kept me in the dark about his character, his family, his antecedents, his very name. When we first were married he was ostentatious and rather mean at the same time. His long life in India added the force of oriental jealousy to that which would be in a sense natural to a man of his age. Moreover, his character was naturally disagreeable. The only way he could make the power of his great fortune felt was by hurting the feelings of other people, of his servants, of his dependents, of his friends. His wife came in for her share. An older and cleverer woman with a certain power of deception and caring for the material pleasures of life could have done better for herself and for him in the situation in which I was placed, but I, almost a child, with an honest and proud character and caring nothing for what wealth could give, I was perfectly helpless. I was being constantly surprised and shocked by the displays of evil passions and his fits of ridiculous jealousy which were expressed in such a coarse manner that they could only arouse my resentment and contempt.

“Meantime we lived in great style — dinner parties, concerts. I had a very good voice. I daresay he was anxious enough to show off his latest acquisition, but at the same time he could not bear me being looked at or even spoken to. A fit of oriental jealousy would come over him, especially

when I had been much applauded. He would express his feelings to me in barrack-room language. At last, one evening he made a most scandalous scene before about two hundred guests, and then went out of the house, leaving me to make the best of it before all those people. It caused the greatest possible scandal. The party of course broke up. I spent the rest of the night sitting in my bedroom, too overcome to take off my splendid dress and those jewels with which he always insisted I should bedeck myself. With the first signs of dawn he returned, and coming up into my room found me sitting there. He told me then that living with me was too much of a torture for him and proposed I should go back to my parents for a time.

“We had been married for a little over a year then. For the first time since the wedding I felt really happy. They, poor dears, were delighted. We were all so innocent together that we thought this would be the end of all our troubles, that the man was chivalrous enough to have seen his mistake in the proper light, and to bear the consequences nobly. Hadn’t I told him I could never love him, exactly in so many words?

“I ought to have known that he was incapable of any generosity. As a matter of fact I didn’t think much about it. I, who had overcome my shyness enough to become, young as I was, a perfect hostess in a world which I knew so little — because after all that sort of thing was in my tradition — I was really too stupid, too unsophisticated for those ten months to have been a lesson to me. I had learned nothing, any more than one learns from a nightmare or from a period of painful illness. I simply breathed freely. I became again the old Adele. I dismissed M. de Monteverso from my thoughts as though he had never lived. Can you believe this, Cosmo? It is astonishing how facts can fail to impress one; brutalities, abuse, scenes of passion, and exhibitions of jealousy, as long as they do not attack your conception of your moral personality. All this fell off me like a poisoned robe, leaving hardly a smart behind. I raised my head like a flower after a thunderstorm. Don’t think my character is shallow, Cosmo. There were depths in me that could be reached, but till then I had been only tormented, shocked, surprised, but hardly even frightened. It was he who had suffered. But my turn was to come.”

“I don’t think you were ever a person of shallow feelings.”

“One’s feelings must mature like everything else, and I assure you I had not yet stopped growing. The next six months were to finish my education. For by that time I had lost all my illusions. While I was breathing freely

between my father and mother, forgetting the world around us, Monteverso was going about the town with his complaints and his suspicions; regretting he had let me go and enraged that I should have gone from him so easily. And you may be sure he found sympathizers. A rich man, you understand! Who could refuse sympathy to so much wealth? He was obviously a much ill-used man, all the faults of course were on my side; in less than a month I found myself the centre of underhand intrigues and the victim of a hateful persecution. Friends, relatives, mere acquaintances in the world of emigration entered M. de Monteverso's service. They spied on my conduct and tampered with the servants. There were assemblies in his house where my character was torn to shreds. Some of those good friends offered him their influence in Rome for the annulment of the marriage, for a consideration of course. Others discovered flaws in the marriage contract. They invented atrocious tales. There were even horrors made about that scandal; till at last he himself became disgusted with the wretches and closed his house and his purse to them. Years later he showed me a note of their names and the amounts paid for all those manifestations of sympathy. He must have been impressed and disgusted by the retrospect, because it was a big lot of money. As to the names, they were aristocratic enough to flatter his plebeian pride. He showed the list to me just to hurt my feelings.

"Some sinners have been stoned, but I, an innocent girl of seventeen, had been pelted with mud beyond endurance. It was impossible to induce him to come to any sort of arrangement that would leave me in peace. All the world, influenced by his paid friends, was against me. What could I do? Calumnies are hard to bear. Harder than truth. Even my parents weakened. He promised to make amends. Of course I went back to him, as one would crawl out of the mud amongst clean thorns that can but tear one's flesh. He received me back with apologies that were as nearly public as such things can be. It was a vindication of my character. But directly he had me with him again he gave way to his fits of hatred as before, such hatred as only black jealousy can inspire. It was terrible. For even jealousy has its gradations, coloured by doubts and hopes, and his was the worst, the hopeless kind, since he could never forget my honest declaration."

The Countess de Monteverso's voice died out and then Cosmo looked up. She was a little pale, which made her eyes appear darker than ever he had seen them before. Cosmo was too young yet to understand the full meaning of this confession, but his very youth invested the facts with a sort

of romantic grandeur, while the woman before him felt crushed by the feelings of their squalid littleness. Without looking at him she said:

“We went travelling for a year and a half, stayed for a time in Paris, where he began to make me scenes again, and then we went on to Italy. The pretext was to make me known to some of his relations. I don’t believe he could remember his mother, and his father, an old dealer in rabbit skins, I believe, had died some time before.

As to the rest, I think his heart failed him notwithstanding the brutal pride he used at times to display to me. He took me to see some decayed people living in old ruined houses whom I verily believe he bribed to pass for his more distant connections. It was a strange pilgrimage amongst the most squalid shams, something that you cannot conceive, yet I didn’t rebel against the horrible humiliation of it. It was part of the bargain. Sometimes I thought that he would kill me in one of those wild places in some lost valley where the people, only a degree removed from peasants in their dress and speech, fawned upon him as the wealthy cousin and benefactor. I am certain that during those wanderings he was half distracted. It was I who went through all this unmoved. But I don’t suppose my life was ever in any danger. At that time none of his moods lasted long enough to let him carry out any definite purpose. And then he is not a man of criminal instincts. After all, he is perhaps a great adventurer. He has commanded armies of a hundred thousand men. He has in a sense faced the power of England in India. The very fact that he had managed to get out of it with so much wealth and with quite a genuine reputation shows that there is something in him. I don’t know whether it’s that that obtained for him a very gracious reception from Bonaparte when he dragged me back to Paris.”

## VI

Madame de Monteverso paused, looking at the white ashes in which the sparks had not died out yet. "Yes," she went on, "I lived near Paris through the whole time of the Empire. I had a charming house in the country. Monsieur de Monteverso had established me in a style which he considered worthy of himself if not of me. He could never forgive me for being what I am. He was tolerated by the returned emigration for my sake, but he grew weary of his own unhappiness and resolved to live by himself in his own province where he could be a great personage. Perhaps he is not altogether a bad man. He consented eagerly to my parents, who had obtained permission to return to France, joining me in the country. I tasted again some happiness in the peace of our semi-retired life and in their affection. Our world was that of old society, the world of returned nobles. They hated and despised the imperial power, but most of them were ready to cringe before it. Yes, even the best were overawed by the real might under the tinsel of that greatness. Our circle was very small and composed of convinced royalists, but I could not share their hatreds and their contempts. I felt myself a Frenchwoman. I had liberal ideas. . . ."

She noticed Cosmo's eyes fixed on her with eager and friendly curiosity, and paused with a faint smile.

"You understand me, Cosmo?" she asked. The latter gave a little nod without detaching his eyes from the face which seemed to him to glow with the light of generous feelings, but already Madame de Monteverso was going on.

"I did not want to be patronized by all those returned duchesses who wanted to teach me how to feel and how to behave. Their own behaviour was a mixture of insolence and self-seeking before that government which they feared and despised. I didn't fear it but neither could I despise it. My heart was heavy during all those years but it was not downcast. All Europe was aflame and the blaze scorched and dazzled and filled one with awe and with forebodings; but then one always heard that fire purifies all which it cannot destroy. The world would perhaps come out better from it."

"Well, it's all over," said Cosmo, "and what has it done? The smoke hangs about yet and I cannot see, but how do you feel?"



Madame de Monteverso, leaning on her elbow on the mantelpiece, with one foot on the fender, looked down at the ashes in which a spark gleamed here and there.

"I feel a little cold," she said, "and dazed perhaps. One doesn't know where to look."

Cosmo got up and made a step forward. His voice, however, was subdued. "Formerly there was a man."

"A man, yes. One couldn't help looking towards him. There was something unnatural in that uniqueness, but do you know, Cosmo, the man was nothing. You smile, you think you hear a royalist speaking, a woman full of silly aristocratic prejudice; a woman who sees only a small Corsican squire who hadn't even the sense to catch the opportunity by the hair as it flew by and be the restorer of the Bourbon dynasty. You imagine all that of me! ... Of me!"

She kept her pose, desolate, as if looking down at the ashes of a burnt-up world.

"I don't think you could be stupid if you tried," he said. "But if the man was nothing, then what has done it?"

Madame de Monteverso remained silent for a while before murmuring the word "Destiny," and only then turned her head slightly towards Cosmo. "What are you staring at in that corner?" she asked, after another period of silence.

"Was I staring?" he said with a little start. "I didn't know. Your words evoked a draped figure with an averted head."

"Then it wasn't that," she said, looking at him with friendly eyes. "Whatever your fancy might have seen it was not Destiny. One must live a very long time to see even the hem of her robe. Live a very, very long time," she repeated in a tone of such weariness, tinged by fear, that Cosmo felt impelled to step forward, take up the hand that hung by her side, and press it to his lips. When released, it fell slowly to its previous position. But Madame de Monteverso did not move.

"That's very nice," she said. "It was a movement of sympathy. I have had very little of that in my life. There is something in me that does not appeal to the people with whom I live. My father, of course, loves me; but that is not quite the same thing. Your father, I believe, sympathized with the child and I am touched to see that the son seems to understand something of the woman; of an almost old woman."

Cosmo would have been amused at the tone of unaffected conviction in which she called herself an old woman had it not been for the profound trouble on that young face bent downwards, and at the melancholy grace of the whole attitude of that woman who had once been the child Adele; a foreign, homeless child, sheltered for a moment by the old walls of his ancestral home, and the sharer of its life's stately intimacies.

"No," he said, marvelling that so much bitter experience should have been the lot of such a resplendent figure. "No. Destiny works quickly enough. We are both still young, and yet think of what we have already seen."

He fancied she had shuddered a little. He felt ashamed at the thought of what she had lived through, how she had been affected in her daily life by what to him had been only a spectacle after all, though his country had played its part, the impressive part of a rock upraising its head above the flood. But he continued: "Why, the Man of Destiny himself is young yet. You must have seen him many times."

"No. Once or twice a year I went to the Tuileries in the company of some reconciled royalist ladies and very much against my wish. It was expected from Madame de Montevesso and I always came away thankful to think that it was over for a time. You could hardly imagine how dull that Empire time was. All hopes were crushed. It was like a dreadful overdressed masquerade with the everlasting sound of the guns in the distance. Every year I spent a month with my husband to save appearances. That was in the bond. He used then to invite all the provincial grandees for a series of dinners. But even in the provinces one felt the sinister moral constraint of that imperial glory. No doubt all my movements were noticed and recorded by the proper people. Naturally I saw the Emperor several times. I saw him also in theatres, in his carriage driving about, but he spoke to me only once."

"Only once!" exclaimed Cosmo under his breath.

"You may imagine I tried to make myself as inconspicuous as possible, and I did not belong to the Court. It was on the occasion of a ball given to the Princess of Baden. There was an enormous crowd. Early in the evening I found myself standing in the front row in the Gaierie de Diane between two women who were perfect strangers to me. By and by the Court came in, the Empress, the Princess, the Chamberlains in full dress, and took their place on a platform at the end. In the intervals of dancing the Emperor came

down alone, speaking only to the women. He wore his imperial dress of red velvet, laced in all the seams, with white satin breeches, with diamonds on the hilt of his sword and the buckles of his shoes and on his cap with white plumes. It was a well-designed costume but with his short thick figure and the clumsiness of his movements he looked to me frightful and like a mock king. When he came opposite me he stopped. I am certain he knew who I was, but he asked me my name. I told him.

““Your husband lives in his province?”

““Yes, sire.’

““Your husband employs much labour, I hear. I am grateful to him for giving work to the people. This is the proper use of wealth. Hasn’t he served in the English army in India?”

“His tone was friendly. I said I didn’t know that-but I did know that he had fought against them there.

“He smiled in a fascinating manner and said, ‘That’s very possible. A soldier of fortune. He is a native of Piedmont, is he not?’

““Yes, sire.’

““But you are French, entirely French. We have a claim on you. How old are you?”

“I told him. He said, ‘You look younger.’ Then he came nearer to me and, speaking in a confidential tone, said, ‘You have no children. I know. I know. It isn’t your fault, but you should try to make some other arrangement. Believe me, I am giving you good advice.’

“I was dumb with astonishment. He gave me again a very gracious smile and went on. That is the only conversation I ever had with the Emperor.”

She fell silent with downcast eyes, then she added: “It was very characteristic of him.” Cosmo was mainly struck by the fact that he knew so little of her, that this was the first intimation he had of the Monte-vessos being childless. He had never asked himself the question before, but this positive if indirect statement was agreeable to him.

“I did not make any other arrangements,” began Madame de Monteverso with a slightly ironic intonation. “I was only too thankful to be left alone. At the time the Russian campaign began I paid my annual visit to Monsieur de Monteverso. Except for the usual entertainments to local people I was alone with Count Helion, and as usual when we were quite alone he behaved in a tolerable way. There was nobody and nothing that could arouse his jealousy and the dormant hatred he nurses for me deep down in

his heart. We had only the slight discussion, at the end of which he admitted, gnashing his teeth, that he had nothing to reproach me with except that I was what I was. I told him I could not help it and that as things were he ought rather to congratulate himself on that fact. He gave me only a black look. He can restrain himself wonderfully when he likes. Upon the whole I had a quiet time. I played and sang to myself, I read a little, I took long walks, I rode almost every day, attended by Bernard. That wasn't so agreeable. You remember Bernard?"

Cosmo nodded.

"For years he had been a very devoted and faithful servant to us but I suppose he, too, like so many of his betters, fell under the spell of Monsieur de Monteverso's wealth. When my parents rejoined me in France he had his wish at last and married Aglae, my mulatto maid. He was quite infatuated with her and now he makes her terribly wretched. She is really devoted to me, and there cannot be any doubt that Bernard has been bribed by my husband to play the part of a spy. It seems incredible but I have had it from the Count in so many words. Bernard let himself be corrupted years ago, when M. de Monteverso first sent me back to my parents in a rage and next day was nearly out of his mind with agony at having done so. Yes, it dates as far back as that. That man so faithful to us in our misfortunes allowed himself to be bought with the greatest ease. Everybody, from the highest to the lowest, was in a conspiracy against a poor girl whose only sin was her perfect frankness. When Bernard came over to France with my parents I was already aware of this, but Aglae wanted to marry him and so I said nothing. She probably would not have believed me then."

"And could you bear that wretch near you all those years?" exclaimed Cosmo, full of indignation. She smiled sadly. She had borne the disclosure and had kept the secret of greater infamies. She had all her illusions about rectitude destroyed so early that it did not matter to her now what she knew of the people about her.

"Oh, Cosmo," she exclaimed suddenly, "I am a hardened woman now, but I assure you that sometimes when I remember the girl of sixteen I was, without an evil thought in her head and in her ignorance surrounded by the basest slanderers and intrigues, tears come into my eyes. And since the baseness of selfish passions I have seen seething round the detestable glory of that man in Elba, it seems to me that there is nowhere any honesty on

earth — nowhere!” The energy of that outburst, contrasted with the immobility of the pose, gave to Cosmo the sensation of a chill.

“I will not mention us two,” said Cosmo, “herein this room. But I know of at least two honest men on earth. They are your father and mine. Why didn’t you write to Father, Adele?”

“I tell you I was a child. What could I write to him? Hasn’t he retired out of the world for so many years only not to see and not to hear? That’s one of your honest men. And as to my poor father, who is the soul of honour, such is the effect of long misfortune on the best characters and of temptations associated with his restored rank, that there have been moments when I watched his conduct with dread. Caste prejudices are an awful thing, but thank God he had never a thought of vengeance in his mind. He is not a courtier.”

“I have heard about it,” interrupted Cosmo, “from the Marquis himself. He is a dear old man.”

The two by the mantelpiece exchanged dim smiles.

“I had to come here with him,” said Adele. “He cannot do without me. I too was glad to get away from the evil passions and the hopeless stupidities of all the people that had come back without a single patriotic feeling, without a single new idea in their heads, like merciless spectres out of a grave, hating the world to which they had returned. They had forgotten nothing and learned nothing.”

“I have seen something of that myself,” murmured Cosmo. “But the world can’t be put back where it was before you and I were born.”

“No! But to see them trying to do it was intolerable. Then my husband appeared on the scene, hired this Palazzo, and insisted on us all living here. It was impossible to raise a rational objection to that. Father was never aware of half I went through in my life. I learned early to suppress every expression of feeling. But in the main we understand each other without talking. When he received Count Helion’s letter offering us this house he just looked at me and said, ‘I suppose we must.’ For my part, I go through life without raising any objections to anything. One has to preserve one’s dignity in some way; and is there another way open to me? Yes, I have made up my mind; but I must tell you, Cosmo, that notwithstanding that amazing tour we made ten years ago amongst M. de Monteverso’s problematic relations, those two sisters and that niece have been a perfect novelty to me. I only hope I never betrayed my surprise or any feeling at all

about it.” The Countess raised her eyes to Cosmo’s face. “I have spoken of it to you as I have never spoken to anybody in my life, because of old memories which are so much to me and because I could not mistrust anybody of your name. Have you been wearied by this long tale?”

“No,” said Cosmo. “But have you thought how it is going to end?”

“To end?” she said in a startled tone which affected Cosmo profoundly. “To end? What do you mean? Everything is ended already.”

“I was thinking of your endurance,” said Cosmo.

“Do I look worn out?” she asked.

Cosmo raised his head and looked at her steadily. The impression of her grace and her strength filled his breast with an admiring and almost oppressive emotion. He could find nothing to say, not knowing what was uppermost in his mind, pity or admiration, mingled with a vague anger.

“Well, what do you see in my face?”

“I never have seen such serenity on any face,” said Cosmo. “How sure of itself your soul must be!”

Her colour became heightened for a moment, her eyes darkened as she said in a grateful tone, “You are right, Cosmo. My face is not a mask.”

But he hardly heard her. He was lost in wonder at the sudden disorder of his thoughts. When he regained his mental composure he noticed that Madame de Monteverso seemed to be listening.

“I wonder whether the Count is still with my father,” she said. “Ring that bell on the table at your hand\* Cosmo.”

Cosmo did so and they waited, looking at each other. Presently the door swung open, and at the same time the cartel above it began to strike the hour. Cosmo counted eleven and then Madame de Monteverso spoke to Bernard, who waited in silence.

“Is M. le Comte still with my father?”

“I haven’t seen him come out yet, Madame la Comtesse.”

“Tell your wife not to wait for me, Bernard.”

“Yes, Madame la Comtesse.” Bernard backed out respectfully through the door.

“How fat he is, and what sleek hair,” marvelled Cosmo. “And what a solemn manner. No wonder I did not recognize him at once. He showed me into your father’s room, you know. He looks a Special Envoy’s confidential man all over. And to think that he is your household spy! I wonder at your patience.”

“Perhaps if I had anything to conceal I would have had less patience with the spy,” she said, equably. “I believe that when we lived in Paris he wrote every week to M. de Monteverso, because, you know, he can write quite well. I wonder what he found to write about.

Lists of names, I suppose. Or perhaps his own views of the people who called with bits of overheard conversations.”

“It’s incredible,” murmured Cosmo. “It’s fantastic. What contempt he must have for your husband.”

“The most remarkable thing,” said Madame de Monteverso, “is that I am convinced that he doesn’t write any lies.”

“Yes,” said Cosmo, “I assume that. And do you mean that the Count is paying him every week for that sort of thing. It’s an ugly farce.”

“Don’t you think,” said the Countess, “that something serious may come of it some day?” Cosmo made a hopeless gesture.

“The man you married is mad,” he said with intense conviction.

“There have been times when I felt as if I were mad myself,” murmured Madame de Monteverso. “Take up your hat,” she added quickly.

She had heard footsteps outside the door. A moment after, Count Helion came in and fixed his black glance on his wife and Cosmo. He did not open his lips and remained ominously by the door for a time. The strain of the silence was made sinister by the stiff bearing of the man, the immobility of the carved brown face, crossed by the inky-black moustache in harsh contrast with the powdered head. He might have been a sergeant come at the stroke of the hour to tell those two people that the firing squad was waiting for them outside the door. Madame de Monteverso broke the dumb spell.

“I did my best to entertain Mr. Latham, but we had given you up. He was just going.”

She glanced serenely at Cosmo, whom the sweetness of her tone, her easy self-possession before that barrack-room figure, stung to the heart. At that moment no words could have expressed the intensity of his hatred for the Count de Monteverso, at whom he was looking with a smile of the utmost banality. The latter moved forward stiffly.

“Your father hopes you will see him for a moment presently,” he said to his wife. “He has not gone to bed yet.”

“Then I will go to him at once.”

Madame de Monteverso extended her hand to Cosmo, who raised the tips of her fingers to his lips ceremoniously.

"I will see Mr. Latham out," said the Count, bowing to his wife, who went out of the room without looking at him. Cosmo, following her with his eyes, forgot Count Helion's existence. He forgot it so thoroughly that it was with a perceptible start that he perceived the Count's eyes fixed on him in an odd way. "He will never look at ease anywhere," thought Cosmo scornfully. A great part of his hatred had evaporated. "I suppose he means to be pilot. I wonder how he looked on the back of an elephant."

"It was very good of you to wait so long for my return," said Count Helion. "I have been detained by an absurd discussion arising out of probably false reports."

"The time passed quickly," said truthful Cosmo; but, before the black weary glance of the other, hastened to add with assumed care, "We talked of old times."

"Old times," repeated Count Helion without any particular accent. "My wife is very young yet, though she must be older than you are. Isn't she older?"

Cosmo said curtly that he really did not know. When they were running about as children together she was the tallest of the three.

"And now," took up the inexpressive voice of Count de Monteverso, "without her high heels she would be a little shorter than you. As you stood together you looked to me exactly the same height. And so you renewed the memories of your youth. They must have been delightful."

"They were no doubt more delightful for me than they could have been for Mme. la Comtesse," said Cosmo, making a motion towards taking leave.

"A moment. Let me have the honour to see you out." Count Helion walked round the room blowing out the candles in three candelabras in succession and taking up the fourth in his hand.

"Why take this trouble?" protested Cosmo. "I know my way."

"Every light has been extinguished in the reception rooms; or at least ought to have been. I detest waste of all kinds. It is perhaps because I have made my own fortune, and by God's favour it is so considerable in its power for good that it requires the most careful management. It is perhaps a peculiar point of view, but I have explained it to Mme. de Monteverso."



“She must have been interested,” muttered Cosmo between his teeth, following across the room and round the screen the possessor of these immensely important riches, who, candelabra in hand, preceded him by a pace or two and threw open the door behind the screen. Cosmo, crossing in the wake of Count Helion the room of the evening reception, saw dimly the disarranged furniture about the mantelpiece, the armchair in which Lady William had sat, the great sofa in which little Countess Bubna had been shyly ensconced, the card table with the chairs pushed back and all the cards in a heap in the middle. The swaying flames of the candles, leaping from one long strip of mirror to another, preceded him into the next salon where all the furniture stood ranged expectantly against the walls. The next two salons were exactly alike except for the colour of the hangings and the size of the pictures on the walls. As to their subjects, Cosmo could not make them out.

Not a single lackey was to be seen in the anteroom of white walls and red benches; but Cosmo was surprised at the presence of a peasant-like woman, who must have been sitting there in the dark for some time. The light of the candelabra fell on the gnarled hands lying in her lap. The edge of a dark shawl shaded her features with the exception of her ancient chin. She never stirred. Count Helion, disregarding her as though she had been invisible, put down the candelabra on a little table and wished Cosmo good-night with a formal bow. At the same time he expressed harshly the hope of seeing Cosmo often during his stay in Genoa. Then with an unexpected attempt to soften his tone he muttered something about his wife — “the friend of your childhood.”

The allusions exasperated Cosmo. The more he saw of the grown woman, the less connection she seemed to have with the early Adele. The contrast was too strong. He felt tempted to tell M. de Monteverso that he by no means cherished that old memory. The nearest he came to it was the statement that he had the privilege to hear much of Madame de Monteverso in Paris. M. de Monteverso, contemplating now the dark peasantlike figure huddled up on the crimson seat against a white wall, hastened to turn towards Cosmo the black weariness of his eyes.

“Mme. de Monteverso has led a very retired life during the Empire. Her conduct was marked by the greatest circumspection. But she is a person of rank.

God knows what gossip you may have heard. The world is censorious.”

Brusquely Cosmo stepped out into the outer gallery. Listening to M. de Monteverso was no pleasure. The Count accompanied him as far as the head of the great staircase and stayed to watch his descent with a face that expressed no more than the face of a soldier on parade, till, all at once, his eyes started to roll about wildly as if looking for some object he could snatch up and throw down the stairs at Cosmo's head. But this lasted only for a moment. He reentered the anteroom quietly and busied himself in closing and locking the door with care. After doing this he approached the figure on the bench and stood over it silently. vn

The old woman pushed back her shawl and raised her wrinkled soft face without much expression to say:

"The child has been calling for you for the last hour or more."

Helion de Monteverso walked all the length of the anteroom and back again; then stood over the old woman as before.

"You know what she is," she began directly the Count had stopped. "She won't give us any rest. When she was little one could always give her a beating but now there is no doing anything with her. You had better come and see for yourself."

"Very unruly?" asked the Count de Monteverso.

"She is sixteen," said the old woman crisply, getting up and moving towards the stairs leading to the upper floor. A stick that had been lying concealed in the folds of her dress was now in her hand. She ascended the stairs more nimbly than her appearance would have led one to expect, and the Count de Monteverso followed her down a long corridor, where at last the shuffle of her slippers and the tapping of her stick ceased in front of a closed door. A profound silence reigned in this remote part of the old palace which the enormous vanity of the upstart had hired for the entertainment of his wife and his father-in-law in the face of the restored monarchies of Europe. The old peasant woman turned to the stiff figure which, holding the candelabra and in its laced coat, recalled a gorgeous lackey.

"We have put her to bed," she said, "but as to holding her down in it, that was another matter. Maria is strong but she got weary of it at last. We had to send for Father Paul. Shameless as she is she would not attempt to get out of her bed in her nightdress before a priest. The Father promised to stay till we could fetch you to her, so I came down, but I dared not go further than the anteroom. A valet told me you had still a guest with you, so I sent him

away and sat down to wait. The wretch to revenge himself on me put out the lights before he went.”

“He shall be flung out to-morrow,” said M. de Monteverso in a low tone.

“I hope I have done nothing wrong, Helion.”

“No,” said M. de Monteverso in the same subdued tone. He lent his ear to catch some slight sound on the other side of the door. But the stillness behind it was like the stillness of a sick room to which people listen with apprehension. The old woman laid her hand lightly on the sleeve of the gorgeous coat. “You are a great man ...”

“I am,” said Count Helion without exultation.

The old woman, dragged out at the age of seventy from the depths of her native valley by the irresistible will of the great man, tried to find utterance for a few simple thoughts. Old age with its blunted feelings had alone preserved her from utter bewilderment at the sudden change; but she was overpowered by its greatness. She lived inside that palace as if enchanted into a state of resignation. Ever since she had arrived in Genoa, which was just five weeks ago, she had kept to the upper floor. Only the extreme necessity of the case had induced her to come so far downstairs as the white anteroom. She was conscious of not having neglected her duty.

“I did beat her faithfully/” she declared with the calmness of old age and conscious rectitude. The lips of M. de Monteverso twitched slightly. “I did really, though often feeling too weary to raise my arm. Then I would throw a shawl over my head and go in the rain to speak to Father Paul. He had taught her to read and write. He is full of charity. He would shrug his shoulders and tell me to put my trust in God. It was all very well for him to talk like that. True that on your account I was the greatest person for miles around. I had the first place everywhere. But now that you made us come out here just because of your fancy to turn the child into a Contessa, all my poor senses leave my old body. For, you know, if I did beat her, being entrusted with your authority, everybody else in the village waited on a turn of her finger. She was full of pride and wilfulness then. Now since you have introduced her amongst all these grandissimi signori of whom she had only heard as one hears of angels in heaven, she seems to have lost her head with the excess of pride and obstinacy. What is one to do? The other day on account of something I said she fastened her ten fingers into my gray hair. . . .” She threw her shawl off and raised her creased eyelids. . . . “This gray hair, on the oldest head of your family, Helion. If it hadn’t been for Maria

she would have left me a corpse on the floor.” The mild bearing of the old woman had a dignity of its own, but at this point it broke down and she became agitated.

“Many a time I sat up in my bed thinking half the night. I am an old woman. I can read the signs. This is a matter for priests. When I was a big girl in our village they had to exorcise a comely youth, a herdsman. I am not fit to talk of such matters. But you, Helion, could say a word or two to Father Paul.

He would know what to do ... or get the Bishop . . .”

“Amazing superstition,” Count Helion exclaimed in a rasping growl. “The days of priests and devils are gone,” he went on angrily, but paused as if struck with a sudden doubt or a new idea. The old woman shook her head slightly. In the depths of her native valley all the days were alike in their hopes and fears as far back as she could remember. She did not know how she had offended her brother and emitted a sigh of resignation.

“What’s the trouble now?” Count Helion asked brusquely.

The old woman shrugged her shoulders expressively. Count Helion insisted. “There must be some cause.”

“The cause, as I am a sinner, can be no other but that young signore that came out with you and to whom you bowed so low. I didn’t know you had to bow to anybody unless perhaps to the King who has come back lately. But then a king is anointed with holy oils! I couldn’t believe my eyes. What kind of prince was that? “ She waited, screwing her eyes up at Count Helion, who looked down at her inscrutably and at last condescended to say:

“That was an Englishman.”

She moaned with astonishment and alarm. A heretic! She thought no heretic could be good-looking. Didn’t they have their wickedness written on their faces?

“No,” said Count Helion. “No man has that, and no woman, either.”

Again he paused to think. “Let us go in now,” he added.

The big room (all the rooms in that Palazzo were big unless they happened to be mere dark and airless cupboards), which they entered as quietly as if a sick person had been lying in there at the point of death, contained amongst its gilt furniture also a few wooden stools and a dark walnut table brought down from the farmhouse for the convenience of its rustic occupants. A priest sitting in a gorgeous armchair held to the light of

a common brass oil lamp an open book, the shadow of which darkened a whole corner of the vast space between the high walls decorated with rare marbles, long mirrors, and heavy hangings. A few small pieces of washing were hung out to dry on a string stretched from a window latch to the back of a chair. A common brazier stood in the fireplace and, near it, a gaunt, bony woman dressed in black with a white handkerchief on her head was stirring something in a little earthen pot. Ranged at the foot of a dais bearing a magnificent but dismantled couch of state were two small wooden bedsteads, on one of which lay the girl whom Cosmo knew only as "Clelia, my husband's niece," with a hand under her cheek. The other cheek was much flushed; a tangle of loose black hair covered the pillow. Whether from respect for the priest or from mere exhaustion she was keeping perfectly still under her bedclothes pulled up to her very neck so that only her head remained uncovered.

At the entrance of the Count the priest closed his book and stood up, but the woman by the mantelpiece went on stirring her pot. Count Helion returned a "Bonsoir, AbbS" to the priest's silent bow, put down the candelabra on a console, and walked straight to the bedstead. The other three people, the gaunt woman still with her pot in her hand, approached it too but kept their distance.

The girl Clelia remained perfectly still under the downward thoughtful gaze of Count Helion. In that face half buried in the pillow one eye glittered full of tears. She refused to make the slightest sound in reply to Count Helion's questions, orders, and remonstrances. Even his coaxings, addressed to her in the same low, harsh tone, were received in obstinate silence. Whenever he paused he could hear at his back the old woman whispering to the priest. At last even that stopped. Count Helion resisted the temptation to grab all that hair on the pillow and pull the child out of bed by it. He waited a little longer and then said in his harsh tone:

"I thought you loved\*me."

For the first time there was a movement under the blanket. But that was all. Count Helion turned his back on the bed and met three pairs of eyes fixed on him with different expressions. He avoided meeting any of them. "Perhaps if you were to leave us alone," he said.

They obeyed in silence, but at the last moment he called the priest back and took him aside to a distant part of the room where the brass oil lamp stood on the walnut-wood table. The full physiognomy of Father Paul Carpi

with its thin eyebrows and pouting mouth was overspread by a self-conscious professional placidity that seemed ready to see or hear anything without surprise. Count de Monteverso was always impressed by it. "Abbe," he said brusquely, "you know that my sister thinks that the child is possessed. I suppose she means by a devil."

He looked with impatience at the priest, who remained silent, and burst out in a subdued voice:

"I believe you people are hoping now to bring him back into the world again, that old friend of yours." He waited for a moment. "Sit down, Abbe."

Father Carpi sank into the armchair with some dignity while Count Helion snatched a three-legged stool and planted himself on it on the other side of the table. "Now, wouldn't you?"

Something not bitter, not mocking, but as if disillusioned seemed to touch the lips of Father Carpi at the very moment he opened them to say quietly:

"Only as a witness to the reign of God."

"Which of course would be your reign. Never mind, a man like me can be master under any reign." He jerked his head slightly towards the bed. "Now what sort of devil would it be in that child?"

The deprecatory gesture of Father Carpi did not detract from his dignity. "I should call it dumb myself," continued Count Helion. "We will leave it alone for a time. What hurts me often is the difficulty of getting at your thoughts, Abbe. Haven't I been a good enough friend to you?" To this, too, Father Carpi answered by a deferential gesture and deprecatory murmur. Count Helion had restored the church, rebuilt the presbytery, and had behaved generally with great munificence. Father Carpi, sprung from shop-keeping stock in the town of Novi, had lived through times difficult for the clergy. He had been contented to exist. Now, at the age of forty or more, the downfall of the Empire, which seemed to carry with it the ruin of the impious forces of the Revolution, had awakened in him the first stirrings of ambition. Its immediate object was the chaplaincy to the Count de Monteverso's various charitable foundations.

There was a man, one of the great of this world, whom, without understanding him in any deeper sense or ever trying to judge his nature, he could see plainly enough to be unhappy. And that was a great point. For the unhappy are more amenable to obscure influences, religious and others. But Father Carpi was too intelligent to intrude upon the griefs of that man with

the mysterious past either religious consolation or secular advice. For a long time now he had watched and waited, keeping his thoughts so secret that they seemed even hidden from himself. To the outbreaks of that rough, arrogant, contemptuous, and oppressive temper he could oppose only the gravity of his sacerdotal character as Adele did her lofty serenity, that detachment, both scornful and inaccessible, which seemed to place her on another plane.

Father Carpi had never been before confronted so directly by the difficulties of his position as at that very moment and on the occasion of that intolerable and hopeless girl. To gain time he smiled, a slight, noncommittal smile.

"We priests, M. le Comte, are recommended not to enter into discussion of theological matters with people who, whatever their accomplishments and wisdom, are not properly instructed in them. As to anything else I am always at Monseigneur's service."

He gave this qualification to Count Helion because it was not beyond the bounds of respect due from a poor parish priest to a titled great man of his province.

"Have you been much about amongst the town people?" asked Count Helion.

"I go out every morning about seven to say mass in that church you may have noticed near by. I have visited also once or twice an old friend from my seminary days, a priest of a poor parish here. We rejoice together at the return of the Holy Father to Rome. For the rest I had an idea, Monseigneur, that you did not wish me to make myself prominent in any way in this town."

"Perhaps I didn't. It may be convenient, though, to know what are the rumours current amongst the populace. That class has its own thoughts. I suppose your friend would know something of that."

"No doubt. But I can tell you, Monseigneur, what the people think. They think that if they can't be

Genoese as before, they would rather be French than Piedmontese. That, Monseigneur, is a general feeling even amongst the better class of citizens."

"Much would they gain by it," mumbled Count de Monteverso. "Unless the Other were to come back. Abbe," he added sharply, "is there any talk of him coming back?"

“That indeed would be a misfortune.” Father Carpi’s tone betrayed a certain emotion which Count Helion noticed, faint as it was.

“ Whatever happens you will have always a friend in me,” he said, and Father Carpi acknowledged the assurance by a slight inclination of his body.

“Surely God would not allow it,” he murmured uneasily. But the stare of his interlocutor augmented his alarm. He was still more startled when he heard Count de Monteverso make the remark that the only thing which seemed to put a limit to the power of God was the folly of men. He had too poor an opinion of Count de Monteverso to be shocked by the blasphemy. To him it was only the proof that the Count had been very much upset by something, some fact or some news.

“And people are very foolish just now both in Paris and in Vienna,” added Count de Monteverso after a long pause.

It was news then. Father Carpi betrayed nothing of his anxious curiosity. The inward unrest which pervaded the whole basin of the Western Mediterranean was strongest in Italy perhaps and was very strong in the heart of Father Carpi, who was both an Italian and a priest. Perhaps he would be told something! He almost held his breath, but Count de Monteverso took his head between his hands and said only:

“One is pestered by folly of all sorts. Abbe, see whether you can bring that child to reason.”

However low in the scale of humanity Father Carpi placed the Count de Monteverso, he never questioned his social position. Father Carpi was made furious by the request, but he obeyed. He approached the rustic bedstead and looked at the occupant with sombre disgust. Nothing was obscure to him in the situation. If he couldn’t tell exactly what devil possessed that creature he remembered perfectly her mother, a rash sort of girl who was found drowned years ago in a remarkably shallow pond amongst some rocks not quite a mile away from the presbytery. It might have been an accident. He had consented to bury her in consecrated ground not from any compassion, but because of the revolutionary spirit which had penetrated even the thick skulls of his parishioners and probably would have caused a riot and shaken the precarious power of the Church in his obscure valley. He stood erect by the head of the couch, looking down at the girl’s uncovered eye whose sombre iris swam on the glistening white. He could have laughed with contempt and fury. He regulated his deep voice



so that it reached Count de Monteverso at the other side of the room only as a solemn admonishing murmur.

“You miserable little wretch,” he said, “can’t you behave yourself? You have been a torment to me for years.”

The sense of his own powerlessness overcame him so completely that he felt tempted for a moment to throw everything up, walk out of the room, seek refuge amongst sinners that would believe either in God or in the devil.

“You are a scourge to us all,” he continued in the same equable murmur. “If you don’t speak out, you little beast, and put an end to this scene soon I will exorcise you.”

The only effect of that threat was the sudden immobility of the rolling eye. Father Carpi turned towards the Count.

“It is probably some sort of malady,” he said coldly. “Perhaps a doctor could prescribe some remedy.”

Count Helion came out of his listless attitude. A moment ago a doctor was in the house in conference with M. le Marquis. Perhaps he was still there. Count Helion got up impetuously and asked the Abbe to go along to the other side and find out.

“Take a light with you. All the lights are out down there. Knock at the Marquis’s door and inquire from Bernard, and if the doctor is still there bring him along.”

Father Carpi went out hastily and Count de Monteverso, keeping the women outside, paced the whole length of the room. The fellow called himself a doctor whatever else he might have been. Whether he did any good to the child or not — Count de Monteverso stopped and looked fixedly at the bed — this was an extremely favourable opportunity to get in touch with him personally. What could tell what use could be made of him in his other capacities, apart from the fact that he probably could really prescribe some remedy? Count de Monte-verso’s heart was softened paternally. His progress from European barrack-rooms to an Eastern palace left on his mind a sort of bewilderment. He even thought the girl attractive. There she was, a prey of some sort of illness. He bent over her face and instantly a pair of thin bare arms darted from under the blankets and clasped him round the neck with a force that really surprised him. “I hat one loves me,” he thought. He did not know that she would have hung round anybody’s neck in the passion of obtaining what she wanted. He thought

with a sort of dull insight that everybody was a little bit against her. He abandoned his neck to the passionate clasp for a little time, then disengaged himself gently.

“What makes you behave like this?” he asked. “Do you feel a pain anywhere?”

No emotion could change the harshness of his voice, but it was very low and there was an accent in it which the girl could not mistake. She sat up suddenly with her long wild hair covering her shoulders. With her round eyes, the predatory character of her face, the ruffled fury of her aspect, she looked like an angry bird; and there was something bird-like in the screech of her voice.

“Pain? No. But if I didn’t hate them so I would like to die. I would ...”

Count de Monteverso put one hand at the back of her head and clapped the other broad palm over her mouth. This action surprised her so much that she didn’t even struggle. When the Count took his hands away she remained silent without looking at him.

“Don’t scream like this,” he murmured harshly but with obvious indulgence. “Your aunts are outside and they will tell the priest all about it.”

Clelia drew up her knees, clasped her hands round them outside the blanket, and stared.

“It is just your temper!” suggested Count Helion reproachfully.

“All those dressed-up witches despise me. I am not frightened. And the worst of them is that yellow-haired witch, your wife. If I had gone in there in my bare feet they could not have stared more down on me. ... I shall fly at their faces. I can read their thoughts as they put their glasses to their eyes. ‘What animal is this?’ they seem to ask themselves. I am a brute beast to them.”

A shadow seemed to fall on Count de Monteverso’s face for the moment. Clelia unclasped her fingers, shook her fists at the empty space, then clasped her legs again. These movements, full of sombre energy, were observed silently by the Count de Monteverso. He uttered the word “*Patienza*,” which in its humility is the word of the ambitious, of the unforgiving who keep a strict account with the world; a word of indomitable hope. “You wait till you are a little older. You will have plenty of people at your feet; and then you will be able to spurn anybody you like.”

“You mean when I am married,” said Clelia in a faraway voice and staring straight over her knees.

“Yes,” said the Count de Monteverso, “but you will first have to learn to be gentle.”

This recommendation apparently missed the ear for which it was destined. For a whole minute Clelia seemed to contemplate some sort of vision with her predatory and pathetic stare. One side of her nightgown had slipped off her shoulder. Suddenly she pushed her scattered hair back, and extending her arm towards Count Helion patted him caressingly on the cheek.

When she had done patting him he asked, unmoved: “Now, what is it you want?”

She was careful not to turn her face his way while she whispered: “I want that young signor that came today to make eyes at my aunt.”

“Impossible.”

“Why impossible? I was with them in the morning. They did nothing but look at each other. But I went for him myself.”

“That Englishman! You can’t have an Englishman like this. I am thinking of something better for you, a marquis or a count.”

This was the exact truth, not a sudden idea to meet a hopeless case.

“You have hardly had time to have a good look at him,” added Count Helion.

“I looked at him this evening with all my eyes, with all my soul. I would have sat up all night to look at him. But he got up and turned his back on me. He has no eyes for anybody but my aunt.”

“Did you speak together, you two?”

“Yes,” she said, “he sat down by me and all those witches stared as if he had been making up to a monster. Am I a monster? He too looked at me as if I had been one.”

“Was he rude to you?” asked the Count de Monteverso.

“He was as insolent as all the people I have seen since we came to this town. His heart was black as of all the rest of them. He was gentle to me as one is gentle to an old beggar for the sake of charity. Oh, how I hated him.”

“Well, then,” said Count de Monteverso in a harsh unsympathetic tone, “you may safely despise him.”

Clelia threw herself half out of bed on the neck of Count Helion, who preserved an unsympathetic rigidity though he did not actually repulse her

wild and vehement caress.

“Oh, dearest uncle of mine,” she whispered ardently into his ear, “he is handsome! I must have him for myself.”

There was a knocking at the door. Count Helion tore the bare arms from his neck and pushed the girl back into bed.

“Cover yourself up,” he commanded hurriedly. He arranged the blanket at her back. “Lie still and say nothing of all this, and then you need have no fear.

But il you breathe a word of this to anybody, then . . . Come in,” he shouted to the renewed knocking and had just time to shake his finger at Clelia menacingly before the Abbe and the doctor entered the room.

## PART III

### I

Cosmo walked away with no more than one look back, just before turning the corner, at the tensely alert griffins guarding the portals of the Palazzo. At the entrance of his inn a small knot of men on the pavement paused in their low conversation to look at him. After he had passed he heard a voice say, "This is the English milord." He found the dimly lit hall empty and he went up the empty staircase into the upper regions of silence. His face, which to the men on the pavement had appeared passionless and pale as marble, looked at him suddenly out of the mirror over the fireplace, and he was startled as though he had seen a ghost.

Spire had been told not to wait for his return. His empty room had welcomed him with a bright flame on the hearth and with lighted candles. He turned away from his own image and stood with his back to the fire looking downwards and vaguely oppressed by the profound as if expectant silence around him. The strength and novelty of the impressions received during that day, the intimacy of their appeal, had affected his fortitude. He felt mortally weary and began to undress; but after he got into bed he remained for a time in a sitting posture. For the first time in his life he tasted of loneliness. His father was at least thirty-five years his senior. An age! His sister was just a young girl. Clever, of course. He was very fond of her, but the mere fact of her being a girl raised a wall between them. He had never made any real friends. He had nothing to do; and he did not seem to know what to think of anything in the world. Now, for instance there was that vanquished fat figure in a little cocked hat. . . . Still an emperor.

Cosmo came with a start out of a deep sleep that seemed to have lasted only a moment. But he knew at once where he was, though at first he had to argue himself out of the conviction of having parted from Count Helion at the top of a staircase less than five minutes ago. Meantime he watched Spire flooding the room with brilliant sunshine, for the three windows of the room faced east.

"Very fine morning, sir," said Spire over his shoulder. "Quite a spring day."

A delicious freshness flowed over Cosmo. It did not bring joy to him, but dismay. Daylight already! It had come too soon. He had had no time yet to decide what to do. He had gone to sleep. A most extraordinary thing! His distress was appeased by the simple thought that there was no need for him to do anything. After drinking his chocolate, which Spire received on a tray from some woman on the other side of the door, he informed him that he intended to devote the whole day to his correspondence. A table having been arranged to that end close to an open window, he started writing at once. On retiring without a sound Spire left the goose-quill flying over the paper. It was past noon before Cosmo, hearing him come in again on some pretence or other, raised his head for the first time and dropped the pen to say: "Give me my coat, I will go down to the dining room."

By that time the murmur of voices in the piazza had died out. The good Genoese had gone indoors to eat. Coming out of his light-filled room Cosmo found the corridors cold and dark like subterranean passages cut in rock, and the hall downstairs gloomy like a burial vault. In contrast with it the long dining room had a festive air, a brilliancy that was almost crude. In a corner where the man who called himself Doctor Martel had his table this glare was toned down by half-closed shutters and Cosmo made his way there. Cantelucci's benefactor, seated sideways with one arm thrown over the chair's back, took Cosmo's arrival as a matter of course, greeted him with an amiable growl, and declared himself very sharp set. Presently laying down his knife and fork he enquired what Cosmo had been doing that morning. Writing? Really? Thought that perhaps Cosmo had been doing the churches. One could see very pretty girls in the morning, waiting for their turn at the confessional.

Cosmo, raising suddenly his eyes from his plate, caught his companion examining him keenly. The doctor burst into a loud laugh till Cosmo's grave face recalled him to himself.

"I beg your pardon. I remembered suddenly a very funny thing that happened to me last night. I am afraid you think me very impolite. It was extremely funny."

"Won't you tell me of it?" asked Cosmo coldly.

"No, my dear sir. You are not in the mood. I prefer to apologize. There is a secret in it which is not mine. But as to the girls I was perfectly serious. If you seek female beauty you must look to the people for it and in Genoa you

will not look in vain. The women of the upper classes are alike everywhere. You must have remarked that."

"I have hardly had time to look about me as yet," said Cosmo. He was no longer annoyed with the doctor, not even after he heard him say:

"Surely yesterday evening you must have had an opportunity. You came home late."

"I wonder who takes the trouble to watch my move\* ments?" remarked Cosmo carelessly.

"Town-police spies, of course," said the doctor grimly; "and perhaps one or two of the most enterprising thieves. You must make up your mind to that. After all, why should you care?"

"Yes, why should I?" repeated Cosmo nonchalantly. "Do they report to you?"

The doctor laughed again. "I see you haven't forgiven me my untimely merriment; but I will answer your question. No doubt I could hear a lot if I wanted to, both from the police and the thieves. But as a matter of fact it was my courier who told me. He was talking with some friends outside this inn when you came home. You know, you are a noticeable figure."

"Oh, your courier. I suppose he hasn't got much else to do!"

"I see you are bent on quarrelling, Mr. Latham," said the other, while two unexpected dimples appeared on his round cheeks. "All right. Only hadn't we better wait for some other opportunity? Don't you allow your man to talk while he is assisting you to dress? I must confess I let my fellow run on while he is shaving me in the morning. But then I am an easy-going sort of tramp. For I am just a tramp. I have no Latham Hall to go back to."

He pushed his chair away from the table, stretched his legs, plunged his hands in his pockets complacently. How long was it he had been a tramp? he mused aloud. Twenty years? Or a little more. From one end of Europe to the other. From Madrid to Moscow, as one might say. Exactly like that Corsican fellow. Only he hadn't dragged a tail of two hundred thousand men behind him, and had done no more blood-letting than his lancet was equal to.

He looked up at Cosmo suddenly.

"The lancet's my weapon, you know. Not bayonet or sabre. Cold steel anyhow. Of course I found occasion to fire off my pistols more than once, in the course of my travels, and I must say for myself that whenever I fired them it settled the business. One evening, I remember, in Transylvania,

stepping out of a wretched inn to take a look round, I ran against a coalition of three powerful Haiduks in tarry breeches, with moustaches a foot long. The moonlight was bright as day. I took in the situation at a glance and I assure you two of them never made a sound as they fell, while the third just grunted once. I fancy they had designs on my poor horse. He was inside the inn, you know. A custom of the country. Men and animals under the same roof. I used to be sorry for the animals. When I came in again the Jew had just finished frying the eggs. He had been very surly before but when he served me I noticed that he was shaking like a leaf. He tried to propitiate me by the offer of a sausage. I was simply ravenous. It made me ill for two days. That's why I haven't forgotten the occurrence. He nearly managed to avenge those bandits. Luckily I had the right kind of drugs in my valise, and my iron constitution helped me to pull through. But I should like to have seen Bonaparte in that predicament. He wouldn't have known what to do. And, anyhow, the sausage would have finished him. His constitution is not like mine. He's unhealthy, sir, unhealthy."

"You had occasion to observe him often?" asked Cosmo, simply because he was reluctant to go back to his writing.

"Our paths seldom crossed," stated the other simply. "But some time after the abdication I was passing through Valence — it's a tramp's business, you know, to keep moving — and I just had a good look at him outside the post-house. You may take it from me, he won't reach the term of the Psalmist. Well, Mr. Latham, when I take a survey of the past, here we are, the Corsi-can and I, within, say, a hundred miles of each other, at the end of twenty years of tramping, and, frankly, which of us is the better off when all's said and done?"

"That's a point of view," murmured Cosmo wearily. He added, however, that there were various ways of appreciating the careers of the world's great men.

"There are," assented the other. "For instance, you would say that nothing short of the whole of Europe was needed to crush that fellow. But Pozzo di Borgo thinks that he has done it all by himself."

At the name of the Emperor's Corsican enemy Cosmo raised his head. He had caught sight in Paris of that personage at one or other of those great receptions from which he used to come away disgusted with the world and dissatisfied with himself. The doctor seemed inwardly amused by his recollection of Pozzo di Borgo.



“He said to me,” he continued, “cAh! If Bonaparte had had the sense not to quarrel with me he wouldn’t be in Elba now.’ What do you think of that, Mr. Latham? Is that a point of view?”

“I should call it mad egotism.”

“Yes. But the most amusing thing is that there is some truth in it. The private enmity of one man may be more dangerous and more effective than the hatred of millions on public grounds. Pozzo has the ear of the Russian Emperor. The fate of the Bourbons hung on a hair. Alexander’s word was law — and who knows!”

Cosmo, plunged in abstraction, was repeating to himself mechanically, “The fate of the Bourbons hung on a hair — the fate of the Bourbons.” . . . Those words seemed meaningless. He tried to rouse himself. “Yes, Alexander,” he murmured vaguely. The doctor raised his voice suddenly in a peevish tone.

“I am not talking of Alexander of Macedon, Mr. Latham.” His vanity had been hurt by Cosmo’s attitude. The young man’s faint smile placated him, and the incongruous dimples reappeared on the doctor’s cheeks while he continued: “Here you are. For Pozzo, Napoleon has always been a starveling squireen. For the Prince, he has been principally the born enemy of good taste. . . .”

“The Prince?” repeated Cosmo, struggling to keep his head above the black waters of melancholia which seemed to lap about his very lips. “You have said the Prince, haven’t you? What Prince?”

“Why, ‘lalleyrand, of course. He did once tell him so, too. Pretty audacious! What? . . . Well, I don’t know. Suppose you were master of the world, and somebody were to tell you something of the sort to your face — what could you do? Nothing. You would have to gulp it, feeling pretty small. A private gentleman of good position could resent such a remark from an equal, but a master of the world couldn’t. A master of the world, Mr. Latham, is very small potatoes; and I will tell you why: it’s because he is alone of his kind, stuck up like a thief in the pillory, for dead cats and cabbage stalks to be thrown at him. A devil of a position to be in unless for a moment. But no man born of woman is a monster. There never was such a thing. A man who would really be a monster would arouse nothing but loathing and hatred. But this man has been loved by an army, by a people. For years his soldiers died for him with joy. Now, didn’t they?”

Cosmo perceived that he had managed to forget himself. "Yes," he said, "that cannot be denied."

"No," continued the doctor. "And now, within twenty yards of us, on the other side of the wall there are millions of people who still love him. Hey! Cantelucci!" he called across the now empty length of the room. "Come here."

The innkeeper, who had been noiselessly busy about a distant sideboard, approached with deference, in his shirt-sleeves, girt with a long apron of which one corner was turned up, and with a white cap on his head. Being asked whether it was true that Italians loved Napoleon, he answered by a bow and "Excellency."

"You think yourself that he is a great man, don't you?" pursued the doctor, and obtained another bow and another murmured "Excellency."

The doctor turned to Cosmo triumphantly. "You see! And Bonaparte has been stealing from them all he could lay his hands on for years. All their works of art. I am surprised he didn't take away the wall on which The Last Supper is painted. It makes my blood boil. I love Italy, you know." He addressed again the motionless Cantelucci.

"But what is it that makes you people love this man?"

This time Cantelucci did not bow. He seemed to make an effort: "Signore, it is the idea."

The doctor directed his eyes again to Cosmo in silence. At last the innkeeper stepped back three paces before turning away from his English clients. The dimples had vanished from the doctor's full cheeks. There was something contemptuous in the peevishness of his thin lips and the extreme hardness of his eyes. They softened somewhat before he addressed Cosmo.

"Here is another point of view for you. Devil only knows what that idea is, but I suspect it's vague enough to include every illusion that ever fooled mankind.

There must be some charm in that gray coat and that old three-cornered hat of his, for the man himself has betrayed every hatred and every hope that have helped him on his way."

"What I am wondering at," Cosmo said at last, "is whether you have ever talked like this to anybody before."

The doctor seemed taken aback a little.

"Oh. You mean about Bonaparte," he said. "If you had gone to that other inn, Pollegrini's, more suitable to your nationality and social position, you

would have heard nothing of that kind. I am not very communicative really, but to sit at meals like two mutes would have been impossible. What could we have conversed about? One must have some subject other than the weather and, frankly, what other subject would we have had here in Genoa, or for that matter in any other spot of the civilized world? I know there are amongst us in England a good many young men who call themselves revolutionists and even republicans. Charming young men, generous and all that. Friends of Boney. You might be one of them.”

As he paused markedly Cosmo murmured that he was hardly prepared to state what he was. That other inn, the Pollegrini, was full when he arrived.

“Well, there had been three departures this morning,” the doctor informed him. “You can have your things packed up this afternoon and carried across the Place. You know, by staying here you make yourself conspicuous to the spies, not to speak of the thieves; they ask themselves: ‘What sort of inferior Englishman is that?’ With me it is different. I am known for a man who has his own work to do. People are curious. And as my work is confidential I prefer to keep out of the way rather than have to be rude. But for you it would be more amusing to live over there. New faces all the time; endless gossip about all sorts of people.”

“I do not think it is worth while to change now,” said Cosmo coldly.

“Of course not, if you are not going to prolong your stay. If you project a visit to Elba, Livorno is the port for that. And if you are anxious to hear about Napoleon you will hear plenty of gossip about him there. Here you have nothing but my talk.”

“I have found it very interesting,” said Cosmo, rising to go away. The doctor smiled without amiability. He was determined never to let Cosmo guess that he knew of his acquaintance with the people occupying the palace guarded by the symbolic griffins. Of that fact he had been made aware by the Count de Monteverso who, once he had got the doctor into Clelia’s room, decided to take him into his confidence — on the ground that one must be frank with a medical man. The real reason was, however, that knowing Doctor Martel to be employed on secret political work by the statesmen of the Alliance, and having a very great idea of his occult influences in all sorts of spheres, he hoped to get from him another sort of assistance. His last words were, “You see yourself the state the child is in. I want that popinjay moved out of Genoa.”

The only answer of the doctor to this, and the last sound during that professional visit that Count de Monteverso heard from him, was a short wooden laugh. That man of political intrigues, confidential missions (often he had more than one at a time on his hands), inordinately vain of his backstairs importance, was not mercenary. He had always preserved a most independent attitude towards his employers. To him the Count de Monteverso was but a common stupid soldier of fortune of no importance and of no position except as the son-in-law of the Marquis d'Armand. He had never seen him before, but his marital life was known to him as it was known to the rest of the world. To be waylaid by a strange priest just as he was leaving the Marquis's room was annoying enough, but he could not very well refuse the request since it seemed to be a case of sudden illness. He was soon enlightened as to its nature by Clelia, who had treated him and the Count to another of her indescribable performances. Characteristically enough the doctor had never been for a moment irritated with the girl. He behaved by her tempestuous bedside like a man of science, calm, attentive, impenetrable. But it was afterwards, when he had been drawn aside by the Count for a confidential talk, that he had asked himself whether he were dreaming or awake. His scorn for the man helped him to preserve his self-command, and to the end the Count was not intelligent enough to perceive its character.

The doctor left the Palazzo about an hour after Cosmo (but not by the same staircase) and on his way to his inn gave rein to his indignation. Did the stupid brute imagine that he had any sort of claim on his services? Ah, he wanted that popinjay removed from Genoa! Indeed! And what the devil did he care for it? Was he expected to arrange a neat little assassination to please that solemn wooden imbecile? The doctor's sense of self-importance was grievously hurt. Even in the morning after a good night's rest he had not shaken off the impression. However, he was reasonable enough not to make Cosmo in any way responsible for what he defined to himself as the most incredibly offensive experience of his life. He only looked at him when he came to lunch with a sort of acid amusement as the being who had had the power to arouse a passion of love in the primitive soul of that curious little savage.

As the meal proceeded, the doctor seemed to notice that his young countryman was somehow changed. He watched him covertly. What had happened to him since last evening? Surely he hadn't been smitten himself

by the little savage that under no circumstances could have been made fit to be a housemaid in an English family.

After he had been left by Cosmo alone in the dining room, the doctor's body continued to loll in the chair while his thoughts continued to circle around that funny affair, of which you couldn't say whether it was love at first sight or a manifestation of some inherited lunacy. Quite a good-looking young man. Out of the common too, in a distinguished way. Altogether a specimen of one's countrymen one could well be proud of, mused further the doctor, whose tastes had been formed by much intercourse with all kinds of people. Characteristically enough, too, he felt for a moment sorry in his grumpy contemptuous way for the little dishevelled savage with a hooked nose and burning cheeks and her thin sticks of bare arms. The doctor was humane. The origin of his reputation sprang from his humanity. But his thought, as soon as it left Clelia, stopped short as it were before another image that replaced it in his mind. He had remembered the Countess de Monteverso. He knew her of old, by sight and reputation. He had seen her no further back than last night by the side of the old Marquis's chair. Now he had seen the Count de Monteverso himself, he could well believe all the stories of a lifelong jealousy. The doctor's hard, active eyes stared fixedly at the truth. It was not because of that little savage that that gloomy self-tormenting ass of a drill sergeant to an Indian prince wanted young Latham removed from Genoa.

Oh, dear no. That wasn't it at all. It was much more serious.

Before he walked out of the empty dining room Doctor Martel concluded that it would be perhaps just as well for young Latham not to linger too long in Genoa.

## II

Cosmo, having returned to his room, sat down again at the writing table: for was not this day to be devoted to correspondence? Long after the shade had invaded the greater part of the square below he went on, while the faint shuffle of footsteps and the faint murmur of voices reached him from the pavement like the composite sound of agitated insect life that can be heard in the depths of a forest. It required all his courage to keep on, piling up words which dealt exclusively with towns, roads, rivers, mountains, the colours of the sky. It was like labouring the description of the scenery of a stage after a great play had come to an end. A vain thing. And still he travelled on. Having at last descended into the Italian plain (for the benefit of Henrietta), he dropped his pen and thought: "At this rate I will never arrive in Genoa." He fell back in his chair like a weary traveller. He was suddenly overcome by that weary distaste a frank nature feels after an effort at concealing an overpowering sentiment.

But had he really anything to conceal? he asked himself.

Suddenly the door flew open and Spire marched in with four lighted candles on a tray. It was only then that Cosmo became aware how late it was. "Had I not better tear all this up?" he thought, looking down at the sheets before him.

Spire put two candlesticks on the table, disposed the two others, one each side of the mantelpiece, and was going out.

"Wait!" cried Cosmo.

It was like a cry of distress. Spire shut the door quietly and turned about, betraying no emotion. Cosmo seized the pen again and concluded hastily:

I have been in Genoa for the last two days. I have seen Adele and the Marquis. They send their love. You shall have lots about them in my next. I have no time now to tell you what a wonderful person she has become. But perhaps you would not think so.

After he had signed it the thought struck him that there was nothing about Napoleon in his letter. He must put in something about Napoleon. He added a P.S.:

You can form no idea of the state of suspense in which all classes live here from the highest to the lowest, as to what may happen next. All their thoughts are concentrated on Bonaparte. Rumours are flying about of some

sort of violence that may be offered to him, assassination, kidnapping. It's difficult to credit it all, though I do believe that the Congress in Vienna is capable of any atrocity. A person I met here suggested that I should go to Livorno. Perhaps I will. But I have lost, I don't know why, all desire to travel. Should I find a ship ready to sail for England in Livorno, I may take passage in her and come home at once by sea.

Cosmo collected the pages, and while closing the packet asked himself whether he ought to tell her that. Was it the fact that he had lost all wish to travel? However, he let Spire take the packet to the post and during the man's absence took a turn or two in the room. He had got through the day. Now there was the evening to get through somehow. But when it occurred to him that the evening would be followed by the hours of an endless night, filled by the conflict of shadowy thoughts that haunt the birth of a passion, the desolation of the prospect was so overpowering that he could only meet it with a bitter laugh. Spire, returning, stood thunderstruck at the door.

"What's the matter with you? Have you seen a ghost?" asked Cosmo, who ceased laughing suddenly and fixed the valet with distracted eyes.

"No, sir, certainly not. I was wondering whether you hadn't better dine in your room."

"What do you mean? Am I not fit to be seen?" asked Cosmo captiously, glancing at himself in the mirror as though the crisis through which he had passed in the last three or four minutes could have distorted his face. Spire made no answer. The sound of that laugh had made him lose his conventional bearing; while Cosmo wondered what had happened to that imbecile and glared at him suspiciously.

"Give me my coat," he said at last. "I am going downstairs."

This broke the spell and Spire, getting into motion, regained his composure.

"Noisy company down there, sir. I thought you might not like it."

Cosmo felt a sudden longing to hear noise, lots of it, senseless, loud, common, absurd noise; noise loud enough to prevent one from thinking, the sort of noise that would cause one to become, as it were, insensible.

"What do you want?" he asked savagely of Spire, who was hovering at his back.

"I am ready to help you with your coat, sir," said Spire, in an apathetic voice. He had been profoundly shocked. After his master had gone out, slamming the door behind him, he busied himself with a stony face in

putting the room to rights, before he blew out the candles and left it to get his supper.

“Didn’t you advise me this morning to go to Livorno?” asked Cosmo, falling heavily into the chair.

Doctor Martel was already at table, and, except that he had changed his boots for silk stockings and shoes, he might not have moved from there all the afternoon.

“Livorno,” repeated that strange man. “Did I? Yes. The road along the Riviera di Levante is delightful for any person sensible to the beauties of Italian landscapes.” He paused with a sour expression in the noise of voices filling the room, and muttered that no doubt Cantelucci found that sort of thing pay but that the place was becoming impossible.

Cosmo was just thinking that there was not half enough uproar there. The naval officers seemed strangely subdued that evening. The same old lieutenant with sunken cheeks and a sharp nose, in the same shabby uniform, was at the head of the table. Cantelucci, wearing a long-skirted maroon coat, now glided about the room, unobtrusive and vigilant. His benefactor beckoned to him.

“You would know where to find a man with four good horses for the signore’s carriage? “ he asked; and accepting Cantelucci’s low bow as an affirmative, addressed himself to Cosmo. “The road’s perfectly safe. The country’s full of Austrian troops.”

“I think I would prefer to go by sea,” said Cosmo, who had not thought of making any arrangements for the journey. Instantly Cantelucci glided away, while the doctor emitted a grunt and applied himself to his dinner. Cosmo thought desperately, “Oh, yes, the sea, why not by sea, away from everybody? “ He had been rolling and bumping on the roads, good, bad, and indifferent, in dust or mud, meeting in inns ladies and gentlemen for days and days between Paris and Genoa, and for a moment he was fascinated by the notion of a steady gliding progress in company of three or four bronzed sailors over a blue sea in sight of a picturesque coast of rocks and hills crowded with pines, with opening valleys, with white villages, and purple promontories of lovely shape. It was like a dream which lasted till the doctor was heard suddenly saying, “I think I could find somebody that would take your travelling carriage off your hands” — and the awakening came with an inward recoil of all Cosmo’s being, as if before a vision of irrevocable consequences.



The doctor lowered his eyelids. "He is changed," he said to himself. "Oh yes, he is changed." This, however, did not prevent him from feeling irritated by Cosmo's lack of response to the offer to dispose of his travelling carriage.

"There are many people that would consider themselves lucky to have such an offer made to them," he remarked, after a period of silence. "It is not so easy at this time to get rid of a travelling carriage. Nor yet to have an opportunity to hire a dependable man with four good horses if you want to go by land. I mean at a time like this when anything may happen any day."

"I am sure I am very much obliged to you," said Cosmo, "but I am really in no hurry."

The doctor took notice of Cosmo's languid attitude and the untouched plate before him.

"The trouble is that you don't seem to have any aim at all. Isn't that it?"

"Yes. I confess," said Cosmo carelessly. "I think I want a rest."

"Well, Mr. Latham, you had better see that you get it, then. This place isn't restful, it is merely dull. And then suppose you were suddenly to perceive an aim, such for instance as a visit to Elba — you may be too late if you linger unduly. You know, you are not likely to see a specimen like that one over there again in your lifetime. And even he may not be with us very long."

"You seem very positive about that," said Cosmo, looking at his interlocutor searchingly. "This is the third or fourth time that I hear that sort of allusion from you. Have you any special information?"

"Yes, of a sort. It has been my lot to hear much of what is said in high places, and the nature of my occupation has given me much practice in appreciating what is said."

"In high places!" interjected Cosmo.

"And in low, too," retorted the doctor a little impatiently, "if that is the distinction you have in your mind, Mr. Latham. However, I told you I have been in Vienna quite recently, and I have heard something there."

"From Prince Talleyrand?" was Cosmo's stolid suggestion.

The doctor smiled acidly. "Not a bad guess. I did hear something at Prince Talleyrand's. I heard it from Montrond. You know whom I mean?"

"Never heard of him. Who is he?"

"Never heard of Montrond? Oh, I forgot, you have been shut up in that tight island of oars. Monsieur Montrond has the advantage to live near the

rose. You understand me? He is the intimate companion to the Prince. Has been for many years. The Prince told somebody once that he liked Montrond because he was not 'excessively' scrupulous, that just paints the man for you. I was talking with Monsieur Montrond about Bonaparte's future — and I was not trying to be unkind, either. I pointed out that one could hardly expect him to settle down if the French Government were not made to pay him the money guaranteed under the Treaty. He could see the moment when he would find himself without a penny. That's enough to make any human being restive. He was bound to try and do something. A man must live, I said. And Montrond looks at me, sideways, and says deliberately: 'Oh, here we don't see the necessity.' You understand that after a hint like this I dropped the subject. It's a point of view like another, eh, Mr. Latham?"

Cosmo was impressed. "I heard last night," he said, "that he is taking precautions for his personal safety."

"He remembered perhaps what happened to a certain Due d'Enghien, a young man who obviously didn't take precautions. So you heard that story? Well, in Livorno you will hear many sorts of stories. Livorno is an exciting place, and an excellent point to start from for a visit to Elba, which would be a great memory for your old age. And if you happen to observe anything remarkable there I would thank you to drop me a line, care of Cantelucci. You see, I have put some money into a deal of oil, and I don't know how it is, everything in the world, even a little twopenny affair like that, is affected by this feeling of suspense that man's presence gives rise to: hopes, plans, affections, love affairs. If I were you, Mr. Latham, I would certainly go to Livorno." He waited a little before he got up, muttering something about having a lot of pen work to do, and went out, Cantelucci hastening to open the door for him.

Cosmo remained passive in his chair. The room emptied itself gradually, and there was not even a servant left in it when Cosmo rose in his turn. He went back to his room, threw a few pieces of wood on the fire, and sat down. He felt as if lost in a strange world.

He doubted whether he ought not to have called that day at the Palace, if only to say good-bye. And suddenly all the occurrences and even words of the day before assailed his memory. The morning call, the mulatto girl, the sunshine in Madame de Montevesso's boudoir, the seduction of her voice, the emotional appeal of her story, had stirred him to the depths of his soul.

Where was the man who could have imagined the existence of a being of such splendid humanity, with such a voice, with such amazing harmony of aspect, expression, gesture — with such a face in this gross world of mortals in which Lady Jane and Mrs. R.'s daughters counted for the most exquisite products offered to the love of men? And yet Cosmo remembered now that even while all his senses had been thrown into confusion by the first sight of Madame de Monteverso he had felt dimly that she was no stranger, that he had seen her glory before: the presence, the glance, the lips. He did not connect that dim recognition with the child Adele. No child could have promised a woman like this. It was rather like the awed recollection of a prophetic vision. And it had been in Latham Hall — but not in a dream; he was certain no man ever found the premonition of such a marvel in the obscure promptings of slumbering flesh. And it was not in a vision of his own; such visions were for artists, for inspired seers. She must have been foretold to him in some picture he had seen in Latham Hall, where one came on pictures (mostly of the Italian school) in unexpected places, on landings, at the end of dark corridors, in spare bedrooms. A luminous oval face on the dark background — the noble full-length woman, stepping out of the narrow frame with long draperies held by jewelled clasps and girdle, with pearls on head and bosom, carrying a book and a pen (or was it a palm?) and — yes! he saw it plainly with terror — with her left breast pierced by a dagger. He saw it there plainly as if the blow had been struck before his eyes. The released hilt seemed to vibrate yet, while the eyes looked straight at him, profound, unconscious in miraculous tranquillity.

Terror-struck as if at the discovery of a crime, he jumped up, trembling in every limb. He had a horror of the room, of being alone within its four bare walls on which there were no pictures except that awful one which seemed to hang in the air before his eyes. Cosmo felt that he must get away from it. He snatched up his cloak and hat and fled into the corridor. The hour was late and everything was very still. He did not see as much as a flitting shadow on the bare rough walls of the unfinished palace awaiting the decoration of marbles and bronzes that would never cover its nakedness now. The dwelling of the Grazianis stood as dumb and cold in all its lofty depths as at that desolate hour of the dreadful siege, when its owner lay dead of hunger at the foot of the great flight of stairs. It was only in the hall below that Cosmo caught from behind one of the closed doors faint, almost

ghostly, murmurs of disputing voices. The two hanging lanterns could not light up that grandly planned cavern in all its extent, but Cosmo made out a dim shape of the elderly lieutenant sitting all alone and perfectly still against the wall, with a bottle of wine before him. By the time he had reached the pavement Cosmo had mastered his trembling and had steadied his thoughts. He wanted to keep away from that house for hours, for hours. He glanced right and left, hesitating. In the whole town he knew only the way to the Palazzo and the way to the port. He took the latter direction. He walked by the faint starlight falling into the narrow streets resembling lofty unroofed corridors as if the whole town had been one palace, recognizing on his way the massive shape of one or two jutting balconies he remembered seeing before, and also a remarkable doorway, the arch of which was held up by bowed giants with flowing beards, like two captive sons of the god of the sea.

### III

At the moment when Cosmo was leaving his room to escape the haunting vision of an old picture representing a beautiful martyr with a dagger in her breast, Doctor Martel was at work finishing what he called a confidential memorandum which he proposed to hand over to the Marquis d'Armand. The doctor applied very high standards of honour and fidelity to his appreciation of men's character. He had a very great respect for the old Marquis. He was anxious to make him the recipient of that crop of valuable out-of-the-way information interesting to the French Bourbons which he had gathered lately.

Having sat up half the night, he slept late and was just finishing shaving when, a little before eleven o'clock, there was a knock at his door and Cantelucci entered. The innkeeper offered no apology for this intrusion, but announced without preliminaries that the young English gentleman had vanished during the night from the inn. The woman who took the chocolate in the morning upstairs found no servant ready to receive it as usual. The bedroom door was ajar. After much hesitation she had ventured to put her head through. The shutters being open, she had seen that the bed had not been slept in. . . . The doctor left off dabbing his cheeks with eau de cologne and turned to stare at the innkeeper. At last he shrugged his shoulders slightly.

Cantelucci took the point immediately. Yes. But in this case it was impossible to dismiss the affair lightly.

The young English signore had not been much more than forty-eight hours in Genoa. He had no time to make many acquaintances. And in any case, Cantelucci thought, he ought to have been back by this time.

The doctor picked up his wig and adjusted it on his head thoughtfully, like a considering cap. That simple action altered his physiognomy so completely that Cantelucci was secretly affected. He made one of his austere deferential bows, which seemed to put the whole matter into the doctor's hands at once.

"You seem very much upset," said the doctor. "Have you seen his servant? He must know something."

"I doubt it, Excellency. He has been upstairs to open the shutters, of course. He is now at the front door, looking out. I did speak to him. He had

too much wine last evening and fell asleep with his head on the table. I saw him myself before I retired.”

The doctor preserving a sort of watchful silence, Cantelucci added that he, himself, had retired early on account of one of those periodical headaches he had suffered from since the days of his youth when he had been chained up in the dungeons of St. Elmo for months.

The doctor thought the fellow did look as though he had had a bad night. “Why didn’t you come to see me? You know I can cure worse ailments.”

The innkeeper raised his hands in horror at the mere idea. He would never have dared to disturb His Excellency for such a trifle as a headache. But the cause of his trouble was quite other. A partisan of the revolutionary French from his early youth, Cantelucci had been an active conspirator against the old order of things. Now that kings and priests were raising their heads out of the dust he had again become very busy. The latest matter in hand had been the sending of some important documents to the conspirators in the South. He had found the messenger, had taken steps for getting him away secretly, had given him full instructions the last thing before going to bed. The young fellow was brave, intelligent, and resourceful, beyond the common. But somehow the very perfection of his arrangements kept the old conspirator awake. He reviewed them again and again. He could not have done better. At last he fell asleep, but almost immediately, it seemed to him, he was roused by the old crone whose task it was to light the fires in the morning. Sordid and witchlike, she conveyed to him in a toothless mumble the intelligence that Checca was in the kitchen, all in tears and demanding to see him at once.

This Checca was primarily and principally a pretty girl, an orphan left to his care by his late sister. She was not consulted when her uncle, of whom she stood in awe, married her to the middle-aged owner of a wineshop in the low quarter of the town extending along the shore near the harbour. He was good-natured, slow-witted, and heavy-handed at times. But Checca was much less afraid of him than of her austere uncle. It amused her to be the padrona of an osteria which in the days of Empire was a notable resort for the officers of French privateers. But on the peace that clientele had disappeared and Checca’s husband, leaving the wine-casks to her management, employed his leisure in petty smuggling operations which kept him away from home.

Cantelucci connected his niece's irruption with some trouble that men might have got into. He was vexed. He had other matters to think of. He was astonished by the violence of her grief. "When she could speak at last her tale turned out to be more in the nature of a confession. The old conspirator could hardly believe his ears when he heard that the man whom he had trusted had committed the crime of betraying the secrecy of his mission by going to the osteria late at night to say good-bye to Checca. She assured him that he had been there only a very few moments.

"What, in a wine-shop! Before all the people! With spies swarming everywhere!"

"No," she said. It was much later. Everybody was gone. He had scratched at the barred door.

"And you were on the other side waiting to let him in — miserable girl," Cantelucci hissed ferociously.

She stared at her terrible uncle with streaming eyes. "Yes, I was." She had not the heart to refuse him. He stayed only a little moment. . . . (Cantelucci ground his teeth with rage. It was the first he had heard of this affair. Here was a most promising plot endangered by this bestialita.) . . . Only one little hug, and then she pushed him out herself. Before she had finished putting up the bar she heard a tumult in the street. Shots, too. Perhaps she would have rushed out but her husband was home for a few days. He came down to the wine-shop very cross and boxed her ears, she did not know why. Perhaps for being in the shop at that late hour. That did not matter; but he drove her before him up the stairs and she had to sham sleep for hours till he began to snore regularly. She had grown so desperate that she took the risk of running out and telling her uncle all about it. She thought he ought to know. What brought her to the inn really was a faint hope that Attilio, having eluded the assassins (she was sure they were assassins), had taken refuge there unscathed — or wounded perhaps. She said nothing of this, however. Before Cantelucci's stony bearing she broke down. "He is dead — poverino. My own hands pushed him to his death," she moaned to herself crazily, standing in front of her silent uncle before the blazing kitchen fire in the yet slumbering house.

Rage kept Cantelucci dumb. He was as shocked by what he had heard as the most rigid moralist could desire. But he was a conspirator, and all he could see in this was the criminal conduct of those young people who ought to have thought of nothing but the liberation of Italy. For Attilio had taken

the oath of the Carbonari; and Checca belonged to the women's organization of that secret society. She was an ortolana, as they called themselves. He had initiated her and was responsible for her conduct. The baseness — the stupidity — the frivolity — the selfishness!

By severe exercise of self-restraint he refrained from throwing her out into the street all in tears as she was. He only muttered awfully at her, "Get out of my sight, you little fool," with a menacing gesture; but she stood her ground; she never flinched before his raised hand. And as it fell harmless by his side she seized it in both her own, pressing it to her lips and breast in turn, whispering the while all sorts of endearing names at the infuriated Cantelucci. He heard the sounds of his staff beginning the work of the day, their voices, their footsteps. They would wonder — but his niece did not care. She clung to his hand, and he did not get rid of her till he had actually promised to send her news directly he had heard something himself. And she even thought of the means. There was that fine sailor with black whiskers in attendance on the English officers frequenting the hotel. He was a good-natured man. He knew the way to the wine-shop.

This reminded her of her husband. What if he should wake in her absence? And still distracted, she ran off at last, leaving Cantelucci to face the situation.

He was dismayed. He did not really know what had happened — not to his messenger but to the documents. The old conspirator, battling with his thoughts, moved so silent and stern amongst his people that nobody dared approach him for a couple of hours. And when they did at last come to him with the news of the young "milord's" disappearance he simply swore at them. But as the morning advanced he came to the conclusion that for various reasons it would be best for him to seek his old benefactor. He did so with a harassed face which caused the doctor to believe in the story of a sleepless night. Of course he spoke only of Cosmo's absence.

The doctor, leaning back against the edge of his dressing table, gazed silently at the innkeeper. He was profoundly disturbed by the intelligence. "Got your snuffbox on you?" he asked.

The alacrity of Cantelucci in producing his snuffbox was equalled by the deferential flourish with which he held it out to his benefactor.

"The young English signore," he remarked, "visited the Palazzo of the Griffins the evening before."



The doctor helped himself to a pinch. "He didn't spend the night there, though," he observed. "You know who lives in the Palazzo, don't you, Cantelucci?"

"Some Piedmontese general, I understand, Your Excellency," said Cantelucci, who had been in touch with Count Helion ever since the Austrian occupation, and had even forwarded secretly one or two letters for the Count to Elba. But these were addressed to a grain merchant in Porto Ferraio. "I will open all my mind to Your Excellency," continued Cantelucci. "An English milord is a person of consequence. If I were to report his disappearance the police would be coming here to make investigation. I don't want any police in my house."

The doctor lost his meditative air. "I daresay you don't," he said grimly.

"I recommend myself to Your Excellency's protective influence," murmured Cantelucci insinuatingly.

The doctor let drop the pinch of snuff between his thumb and finger. "And he may have come back while we are talking here," he said hopefully. "Go down, Cantelucci, and send me my courier."

But the doctor's man was already at the door, bringing the brushed clothes over his arm. While dressing, the doctor speculated on the mystery. It baffled all his conjectures. A man may go out in the evening for a breath of fresh air and get knocked on the head. But how unlikely! He spoke casually to his man who was ministering to him in gloomy silence.

"You will have to step over to the police presently and find out whether anything has happened last night. Do it quietly."

"I understand," said the courier surlily. The thought that the fellow had been drunk recently crossed the doctor's mind.

"Whom were you drinking with last night?" he asked sharply.

"The English servant," confessed the courier-valet grumpily. "His master let him off his services last night."

"Yes. And you made him pay the shot." With these words the doctor left the room. While crossing the great hall downstairs he had the view of Spire's back framed in the entrance doorway. The valet had not apparently budged from there since seven. So Mr. Latham had not returned. In the dining room there were only two naval officers at the table reserved for them: the elderly gentleman in his usual place at the head, and a round-faced florid person in a bobbed wig, who might have been the ship's surgeon. During their meal the doctor did not hear them exchange a single

remark. They went away together, and after the last of the town customers had left the room, too, the doctor sat alone before his table, toying with a half-empty glass thoughtfully. His grave face was start-lingly at variance with the short abrupt laugh which he emitted as he rose, pushing his chair back. It was provoked by the thought that only last evening he had been urging half jestingly his young countryman to leave Genoa in one of the conventional ways, by road or sea, and now he was gone with a vengeance — spirited away, by Jove! The doctor was startled at the profound change of his own feelings. Count Helion's venomous, "I don't want that popinjay here" did not sound so funny in his recollection now. Very extraordinary things could and did happen under the run of everyday life. Was it possible that the word of the riddle could be found there? he asked himself.

This investigator of the secret discontents and aspirations of his time had never shut his ears to the mere social gossip that came in his way. He had lived long, he remembered much. For instance, he could remember things that were said about Sir Charles Latham long before Cosmo was born. As to the story of the Monteverso marriage, that had made noise enough in its time in society and also amongst the French Emigres. Its celebration, the subsequent differences, reconciliations, recriminations, and final arrangement had kept idle tongues wagging for years. Of course it was that match which had given that dubious Monteverso his social standing; and what followed had invested that absurd individual with the celebrity of a character out of a Moliere comedy: "Le Jaloux." The elderly jealous husband. Comic enough.

But that was the sort of comedy that soon takes a tragic turn. A special provocation, a sudden opportunity are enough. What puzzled the doctor was the suddenness of the problem. Yet one could not tell what an orientalized brute, no stranger probably to palace murders, had not the means of doing. He might have been harbouring in that barn of a palace some retainers of a deadly kind. A Corsican desperado, or a couple of rascals from his own native mountains. Had le not two unattractive old peasant women concealed there?

The doctor believed that unlikely things happened every day. This view was not the result of inborn credulity but of much acquired knowledge of a secret sort. A serious, fastidious, and obviously earnest-minded young man, like Latham, was particularly liable to get into trouble of a grave kind. A manifestation of perfectly innocent sympathy could do it, and even less. An

unguarded glance. An unconscious warmth of tone. Confound it! Yet he could not let a young countryman of his, a nice, likable young gentleman, vanish from under his nose without taking some steps.

The doctor stepped out into the hall, attractively dim and cool in the middle of the day. Spire had disappeared, but the doctor had given up the hope of Cosmo's return. In a dark corner he perceived the shadowy shape of a cocked hat, and made out the old lieutenant leaning back against the wall with his arms crossed and his chin on his breast. He had a bottle of wine and a glass standing in front of him.

"I suppose," thought the doctor, "this is what he comes ashore for."

The product of twenty years of war. The reeking loom that converted such as he into food for guns had stopped suddenly. There would be no demand for heroes for a long, long time, and somehow the fact that the fellow had all his limbs about him made him even more pathetic. The doctor had almost forgotten Cosmo. He did not notice Spire coming down the stairs, and he started at the sound of the words, "I beg your pardon, sir," uttered almost in his ears. The elderly valet was very much shaken. He said in a low murmur, "I am nearly out of my mind, sir. My master ..."

"I know," interrupted the doctor. He pounced upon Spire like a bird of prey. "Come, what do you know about it?"

This reception roused Spire's dislike of that sour and off-hand person like no medical man he had ever seen and certainly no gentleman. On the principle, "like master like man," Spire was more sensitive to manner than to any trait of personality. He pulled himself together and steadied his voice. "I know nothing, sir, except that you were the last person seen speaking to Mr. Latham."

"You don't think I have got him in my pocket, do you?" asked Doctor Martel, noting the hostile stare. "Don't you attend your master when he retires for the night?"

"I got dismissed early last night. I am sorry to say I sat downstairs after supper very late, listening to tales about one thing and another. I ... I went to sleep there," added Spire with a sort of desperation.

"Listening to tales," repeated the doctor jeeringly. "Pretty tales they must have been, too. Zillers is no company for a respectable English servant. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Well, and then?"

"I went up, sir, and ..."

"In the middle of the night," suggested the doctor.

“It was pretty late. I . . . “

He faltered at the remembrance. The waking up in the cold dark kitchen, the cold dark staircase, the light shining through the keyhole of Mr. Cosmo’s bedroom, the first vague feeling that there was something wrong, the empty room. And most awful of all, the bed not slept in, and the candles in the candelabras burning low. He remembered his horror, incredulity, his collapse into an armchair where he sat till broad daylight in a pitiable state of mental agitation.

A slight tremor passed through his portly frame before he forced himself to speak.

“Mr. Latham had emptied his pockets, sir, as if he were making ready to go to bed. All the change and the keys were lying on the mantelpiece. One would think he had been kidnapped. Of course it can’t be,” he added in a low, intense tone.

“Do you mean to say he disappeared without his hat? “ asked the doctor.

“No, sir, hat and cloak aren’t there.” And to the doctor’s further questions Spire confessed that he had spoken to no one in the house that morning. He would only have been told lies. He did not think much of the people in the inn.

“So I took the liberty of speaking to you, sir. Mr. Latham may turn up any moment and I don’t know that he would like to find that I have been to the police already.”

“No, perhaps he wouldn’t,” assented the doctor reflectively.

“That’s just it, sir,” murmured Spire. “Mr. Cosmo is a very peculiar young gentleman. He doesn’t like notice to be taken.”

“Doesn’t he? Well then, you had better wait before you go to the police. We had better give him till four o’clock.”

“Very well, sir,” said Spire, fighting down his feeling that nothing in the world would be worse than this waiting. The doctor nodded dismissal, then at the last moment:

“By the by, hadn’t you better look up all the papers that may be lying about? “

Spire was favourably impressed by the suggestion. “Yes, sir, we have a small strong box with us. I will go and do it at once.”

During that colloquy, conducted in low tones at the foot of the grand staircase, nobody had appeared in the hall. Not even the vigilant Cantelucci. But the elderly lieutenant had raised his head, and his dull uninterested eyes

followed the doctor across the hall and out through the door into the sunshine of the square. In all its vast and paved extent only very few figures were moving. The doctor's tastes and even his destiny had made of him a nocturnal visitor to the abodes of the great. At this time of the day, however, there was almost as little risk of being seen entering the Palace of the Griffins as in the middle of the night. The populace, the shopkeepers, the Austrian garrison, the gendarmes, the sbirri, the spies, and even the conspirators were indulging in midday repose. The very team of dapple-gray horses, harnessed to an enormous two-wheeled cart drawn up in the shade, dozed over their empty nosebags. Dogs slumbered in the doorways in utter abandonment; and only the bronze griffins seated on their narrow pedestals of granite before the doorway of the Palace preserved their alert wide-awake pose of everlasting watchfulness. They were really very fine. And the doctor gave them an appreciative glance before crossing the empty quadrangle. He felt the only wide-awake person in a slumbering world. He wondered if he would succeed in getting admitted to the Palace. If not, he confessed to himself, he would be at a loss what to do next. Very disagreeable. He had, however, the memorandum for the Marquis in his pocket as a pretext for his visit.

All was still without and within; but in the noble anteroom at the foot of the marble staircase he was met by a sight characteristic of the easy Italian ways. Extended face downward on one of the red and gold benches, one of the footmen in shirt-sleeves and with his breeches untied at the knees was sleeping profoundly. His dishevelled head rested on his forearm. At an unceremonious poke in the ribs he jumped up to his feet, looking scared and wild. But Doctor Martel was ready for him.

"What's the matter, my friend?" he asked softly. "Is there a price set on your head?"

The man remained open-mouthed as if paralysed by the caustic enquiry.

"Fetch the major-domo here," commanded the doctor, thinking that he had seldom seen a more banditlike figure. While waiting, the doctor reflected that a livery coat was a good disguise. It occurred to him also that in the house of a man having such retainers all sorts of things might happen. This was Italy. The silence as of a tomb, which pervaded the whole house, though nothing extraordinary in the hour of siesta, produced the effect of sinister mystery. The arrival of the sleek Bernard did not destroy that bad impression. The doctor, who had never seen him before by daylight, said to

himself that this was no doubt only another kind of villain. On learning that the Marquis had been very ill during the night and that Bernard could not think of taking in his name, the doctor inquired whether Madame de Monteverso would see him on most important business. To his great relief (because he had been asking himself all along how he could contrive to get private speech with the Countess) Bernard raised no objections. He simply went away. And again the dumbness around him grew oppressive to Doctor Martel. He fell into a brown study. This palace, famed for the treasures of art, for the splendours of its marbles and paintings and gildings, was no better than a gorgeous tomb. Men's vanity erected these magnificent abodes only to receive in them the unavoidable guest, Death, with all the ceremonies of superstitious fear. The sense of human mortality evoked by this dumb palazzo was very disagreeable. He was relieved by the return of the noiseless Bernard, all in black and grave like a sleek caretaker of that particular tomb, who stood before him saying in a low voice: "Follow me, please."

Bernard introduced the doctor into a comparatively small, well-lighted boudoir. At the same moment Madame de Monteverso entered it from her bedroom by another door. The doctor had an impression of a gown with a train, trimmed with ribbons and lace, surmounted by a radiant fair head. The face was pale. Madame de Monteverso had been up most of the night with her father. The Marquis was too ill to see anybody.

The doctor expressed his regret in a formal tone. Meantime he took out of his pocket the memoir and begged Madame la Comtesse to keep it under lock and key till she could hand it over to her father. He was also in possession of information which, he said, would be of the greatest interest to the French court; but he could disclose it only to the French King or to Monsieur de Jaucourt. He was ready to proceed to Paris should the Marquis be impressed sufficiently by the memoir to procure for him a private audience from the King or the minister.

This curt, businesslike declaration called out a smile on that charming face — just a flicker — a suspicion of it. He could not be offended with that glorious being. He felt only that he "must assert himself.

"I cannot deal with lesser people," he said simply. "This must be Understood in Paris. I make my own conditions. I am not a hireling. Your father has known me for years. Monsieur le Marquis and I met in other,

dangerous times, in various parts of Europe. Each of us was risking his life.”

The Marquis had often talked with his daughter of his past. She had heard from him of a certain agent Martel, a singular personage. Her curiosity was aroused. She said:

“I know. I believe he was indebted to you for his safety on one occasion. I can understand my father’s motives. But you will forgive me for saying that as to yours ...”

“Oh! It was not the love of absolutism. The fact is, I discovered early in life that I was not made for a country practice. I started on my travels with no definite purpose, except to do a little good — here and there. I arrived in Italy while it was being revolutionized by Jacobins. I was not in love with them either. Humane impulses, circumstances, and so on, did the rest.”

He looked straight at her. This tête-à-tête was a unique experience. She was a marvellous being somehow and a very great lady. And yet she was as simple as a village maid — a glorified village maid. The trials of a life of exile and poverty had stripped her of the faintest trace of affectation or artificiality of any kind. The doctor was lost in wonder. What humanizing force there was in the beauty of that face to make him talk like that the first time he saw her! And suddenly the thought, “her face has been her fortune,” came to him with great force, evoking by the side of her noble unconscious grace the stiff wooden figure of Count de Monteverso. The effect was horrible, but the doctor’s hard gray eyes betrayed neither his horror nor his indignation. He only asked Madame de Monteverso, who was locking up his memoir in the drawer of a little writing table, if it would be safe there, and was told that nobody ever came into the room but a confidential mulatto maid who had been with the Countess for years.

“Yes, as far as you know,” the doctor ventured significantly. With this beginning he found no difficulty in discovering that Madame de Monteverso knew nothing of the composition of the household. She did not know how many servants there were. She had not been interested enough to look over the Palazzo. Apart from the private apartments and the suite of rooms for small receptions she had seen nothing of it, she confessed, looking a little surprised. It was clear that she knew nothing, suspected nothing, had lived in that enormous and magnificent building like a lost child in a forest. The doctor felt himself at the end of his resources, till it occurred to him to say that he hoped that she was not specially anxious

about her father. No, Madame de Monteverso was not specially anxious. He seemed better this morning. Doctor Martel was very much gratified; and then, by a sudden inspiration, added that it would be a pleasure to give the good news to Mr. Latham whom he hoped to see this evening.

Madame de Monteverso turned rigid with surprise for a moment at the sound of that name. "You have met Mr. Latham ..." she faltered out.

"Oh! By the merest chance. We are staying at the same inn. He shares my table. He is very attractive."

Madame de Monteverso looked no longer as though she expected her visitor to go away. The doctor had just time to note the change before he was asked point-blank:

"Did Mr. Latham tell you that he was a friend of ours?"

He answered evasively that he knew very little about Mr. Latham, except what he could see for himself — that Mr. Latham was very superior to the young men of fashion coming over in such numbers from England since the end of the war. That generation struck him as very crude and utterly uninteresting. It was different, as far as Mr. Latham was concerned. A situation had arisen which would make a little information as to his affairs very desirable.

"Desirable?" repeated Madame de Monteverso in a whisper.

"Yes, helpful. . . ."

The deliberate stress which he put on that word augmented Madame de Monteverso's bewilderment.

"I don't quite understand. In what way? Helpful for you — or helpful for Mr. Latham?"

"You see," said the doctor slowly, "though our acquaintance was short my interest was aroused. I am a useful person to know for those who travel in Italy."

Madame de Monteverso sank into a bergere, pointing at the same time to a chair which faced it. But the doctor, after a slight bow, only rested his hand on its high back. At the end of five minutes Adble was in possession of all the doctor knew about Cosmo's disappearance. She sat silent, her head drooped, her eyes cast down. The doctor was beginning to feel restive when she spoke, without looking up.

"And this is the real motive for your visit here."

The doctor was moved by the hopeless tone. It might have been an attempt to appear indifferent, but, only in a moment, she seemed to have



become lifeless.

“Well,” he said, “on the spin: of the moment it seemed the only thing to do. . . . There is somebody in the next room. May I shut the door?”

“It’s only my maid,” said Madame de Monteverso. “She couldn’t hear us from there.”

“Well, then perhaps we had better leave the door as it is. It’s best to avoid all appearance of secrecy.” The doctor was thinking of Count Helion, but Madame de Monteverso made no sign. The doctor lowered his voice still more.

“I wanted to ask you if you had seen him yesterday — • last night. No? But he may have called without your knowledge.”

She admitted that it was possible. People had been sent away from the door on account of her father’s illness. There had been no reception in the evening. But Mr. Latham would have asked for her. She thought she would have been told. The doctor suggested that Mr. Latham might have asked for the Count. Madame de Monteverso had only seen her husband for a moment in her father’s bedroom the day before, and not at all yet this day. For all she knew he may have been away for the day on a visit in the country. “But I know nothing of his interests, really,” she said in a little less deadened voice.

She could not explain to the doctor that she was a stranger in that house; an unwilling visitor with an unsympathetic host whose motives one cannot help suspecting. Beyond the time she spent by arrangement every year at Count de Monteverso’s country-house she knew nothing of his life. What could have been the motives which brought him to Genoa, she had and could have not the slightest idea. She only felt that she ought not to have accepted his pressing invitation to this hired palazzo. But then she could not have come with her father to Genoa. And yet he could not have done without her. And indeed it seemed but a small thing. The alarming thought crossed her mind that, all unwittingly, she had taken a fatal step.

The doctor, who had quite an accurate notion of the state of affairs, hastened to say:

“After all, I don’t know that this is of any importance. I have heard that Mr. Latham was busy writing all yesterday. If he had come to Italy with some sort of purpose,” he continued as if arguing with himself, “one could ...” Then sharply: “You couldn’t tell me anything, could you?” he asked Adèle.

"This is the first time I have seen him for ten years." Madame de Monteverso raised her eyes, full of trouble, to the doctor's face. "Since we were children together in Yorkshire. We talked of old times. Only of old times," she repeated.

"Of course — very natural," mumbled the doctor. He made the mental remark that one did not disappear like this after talking of old times. And aloud he said, "I suppose Mr. Latham made the acquaintance of Count de Monteverso."

"Certainly."

"I presume that they had an opportunity to have a conversation together."

"I don't think that Cosmo — that Mr. Latham made any confidences to Count de Monteverso." While saying those words Adele looked the doctor straight in the face.

He was asking himself whether she could read his thoughts, when she got up suddenly and walked away to the window, without haste and with a grace of movement which aroused the doctor's admiration. He could not tell her what he had in his mind. He looked irresolutely at the figure in the window. It was growing enigmatic in its immobility. He began to feel some little awe, when he heard unexpectedly the words:

"You suspect a crime?"

The doctor could not guess the effort which went to the uttering of those few words. It was the stunning force of the shock which enabled Adele de Monteverso to appear so calm. It was the general humanity of Doctor Martel's disposition which dictated his answer.

"I suspect some imprudence," he admitted in an easy tone. At that moment he drew the gloomiest view of Cosmo's disappearance, from the sinister conviction that twenty-four hours was enough to arrange an assassination. "The difficulty is to imagine a cause for it. To find the motive. . . ."

Madame de Monteverso continued to face the window as if lost in the contemplation of a vast landscape. "And you came to look for it here," she said.

"I don't think I need to apologize," he said, with a movement of annoyance like a man who has received a home thrust. "Of course I might have simply gone about my own affairs, which are of some importance to a good many people. My advice to Mr. Latham was to leave Genoa, since he did not seem to have any object in remaining and seemed to have a half-

formed wish to visit Elba. I suggested Leghorn as the best port for crossing over."

It was impossible to say whether the woman at the window was listening to him at all. She did not stir, she seemed to have forgotten his existence. But that immobility might have been also the effect of concentrated attention. He made up his mind to go on speak-ing.

"His mind, his imagination seemed very busy with Napoleon. It seemed to me the only reason for his travels." He paused.

"I believe the only reason for Mr. Latham coming to Genoa was to see us." Madame de Monteverso turned round and moved back towards the bergere. She was extremely pale. "I mean Father and myself," she explained. "He came to see me the day before yesterday in the morning. I invited him to our usual evening reception. He stayed after everybody else was gone. I asked him to. But my father needed me and I had to leave Mr. Latham with Monsieur de Monteverso."

The doctor interrupted her gently. "I know, Madame. I was in the Palazzo with the Marquis, in the very room, when he sent for your husband."

"I forgot," confessed Madame de Monteverso simply. "But Mr. Latham got back to his inn safely."

"Yes. He was writing letters next day till late in the evening, and seems to have been spirited away in the middle of that occupation. But people like Mr. Latham are not spirited out of their bedrooms by main force. I advised the servant to wait till four o'clock, then I came straight here."

"Till four o'clock," repeated Madame de Monteverso under her breath.

The doctor, a man of special capacity in confronting enigmatical situations, showed himself as perplexed before this one as the most innocent of mortals.

"I don't know. It seems to me that a man who puts on his hat and cloak before vanishing like this must turn up again. He ought to be given a chance to do so at any rate. He left all his money behind, too. I mean even to the small change."

The glimpse of helpless concern in that man affected Adele with a feeling of actual bodily anguish. She got brusquely out of the bergere and moved into the middle of the room. The doctor, letting go the back of the chair, turned to face her.

"I am appalled," she murmured.

This came out as if extracted from her by torture. It moved the doctor more than anything he had heard for years. His voice sank into a soothing murmur.

“I do believe, Madame, that if there had been a murder committed last night anywhere in this town I would have heard something about it this morning. My inn is just the place for such news. I will go back there now. I shall question his servant again. He may give us a gleam of light.”

Her intent, distressed gaze was unbearable, yet held him bound to the spot. It was difficult to abandon a woman in that state! He became aware of the sound of voices outside the door. Some sort of dispute. He hastened to make his bow, and Madame de Monteverso, moving after him, whispered eagerly: “Yes! A gleam of light! Do let me know. I won’t draw a free breath till I hear something.”

Her extended arms dropped by her side a moment before the door flew open and Bernard was heard announcing with calm formality:

“Signorina Clelia.”

The doctor, turning away from Madame de Monteverso, saw “that little wretch” standing just within the room, evidently very much taken aback by the unexpected meeting. He guessed that she had snatched at some opportunity to escape from the old women. It had given her no time to pull on her stockings, a fact made evident by the shortness of the dark petticoat which, with a white jacket, comprised all her costume. She had managed to thrust her bare feet into a pair of old slippers, and her loose hair, tied with a blue ribbon at the back of her head, produced a most incongruous effect of neatness. Her invasion was alarming and inexplicable. The doctor, as he passed out, compressed his lips and stared fiercely with some idea of scaring her into good behaviour. She met this demonstration with a round stupid stare of astonishment. The next moment he found himself outside in the corridor alone with Bernard, who had shut the door quietly and remained with his back to it. The exasperated doctor looked him up and down coolly.

“How long have you been in the habit of hanging about your lady’s door, my friend?” he asked with ominous familiarity.

The simple-minded factotum of the London days, the love-lorn naive swain of the mulatto maid, was a figure of the past now. The doctor was confronted by a calm unmoved servant of much experience, somewhat inclining to stoutness, made respectable by the black well-fitting clothes.

He did not flinch at the question, but he took his time. At last he said with the utmost placidity:

“Many years now. Pretty near all my life.”

The tone was well calculated to surprise the doctor. Taking advantage of the latter’s silence, Bernard paused before he continued reasonably: “Was I to let her rush in unannounced on Madame la Comtesse while you were there? I tried to send her away but she would think nothing of filling the air with her screams. I kept her back as long as it was prudent. . . .” He raised his open hand, palm outwards, warning the doctor to remain silent, while with conscientious gravity he applied his big ear to the door. When he came away he did not apparently intend to take any further notice of the doctor, but stood there with an air of perfect rectitude.

“Is that your constant practice?” asked the astonished doctor, with curiosity rather than indignation. “Suppose I told on you,” he added with a glance at the door. “Suppose somebody else gave you away. . . .”

“You would not be thanked,” was the unexpected answer.

“I wouldn’t be believed — is that it? Well, I confess that I can hardly believe my own eyes.”

“Oh, you would be believed,” was the ready but dispassionate admission. Bernard’s trust in his interlocutor’s acuteness was not deceived.

“Do you mean that you have been found out already?” said the doctor in a changed tone. “Whew! You don’t say! Well, stranger things have happened. Whose old retainer are you?”

“I have always belonged to Madame la Comtesse,” said the old retainer without looking at the doctor, who, after some meditation, accepted the statement at its face value.

“I am staying at Cantelucci’s inn,” he said in an ordinary conversational tone. “And I would be glad to see you there any time you like to call. Especially if you had anything to tell me of Mr. Latham.” Bernard not responding in any way to that invitation, the doctor added, “You know what I mean?”

“Oh, yes, I know what you mean.” That answer came coldly from the lips of the respectable servant, who said nothing more while conscientiously escorting the doctor to the anteroom at the foot of the grand staircase. A little bowed old woman in black clothes clung to the balustrade half way down the marble steps, in the act of descending, while another, taller and upright, hovered anxiously on the landing above. Bernard’s scandalized,

“Go away! Go back!” sounded irresistibly authoritative. The doctor had no doubt that it would send the two crones back to their lair, but he did not stop to see.

Bernard went up the staircase slowly to the first landing, where he watched the retreat of the two weird apparitions down a long and dim corridor. They were very much intimidated by this man in black and with a priestly aspect. One of them, however, made a stand, and screamed in an angry cracked voice, “Where’s the child? The child! We are looking for her.”

“Why don’t you take her back to your village and keep her there?” he cried out sternly. “I have seen her. She won’t get lost.”

A distant door slammed. They had vanished as if blown away by his voice; and Bernard with a muttered afterthought, “More’s the pity,” continued up one flight of stairs after another till he reached the wilderness of the garrets that once upon a time had been inhabited by a multitude of servants and retainers. The room he entered was low and sombre, with rough walls and a vast bare floor. His wife Aglae sat on the edge of the bed, with her hands in her lap and downcast eyes which she did not raise at his entrance. He looked at her with a serious and friendly expression before he sat down by her side. And even then she did not move. He took her tragic immobility in silence as a matter of course. His face, which had never been very mobile, had acquired with years a sort of blank dignity. It had been the work of years, of those married years which had crushed the last vestiges of pertness out of the more emotional Aglae. When she whispered to him, “Bernard, this thing kill me a little every day,” he felt moved to put his arm round his wife’s waist and made a mental remark which always occurred to him poignantly on such occasions, that she had grown very thin. In the trials of a life which had not kept its promise of contented bliss, he had been most impressed by the loss of that plumpness which years ago was so much appreciated by him. It seemed to give to that plaint which he had heard before more than once an awful sort of reality, a dreadful precision. ... A little. . . . Every day.

He took his arm away brusquely and got up.

“I thought I would find you here,” he remarked in an indifferent marital tone. “That man has gone now,” he added.

With a deep sigh the maid of Madame de Monteverso struggled out of the depths of despondency, only to fall a prey to anxiety.

“Oh, Bernard, what did that man want with Miss Ad&le?”

Bernard knew enough to have formed a conjecture that that English fellow must have either left some papers or a message for the Marquis with Madame de Monteverso.

## PART IV

### I

In what seemed to him a very short time Cosmo found himself under the colonnade separating the town piled upon the hills from the flat ground of the waterside. A profound quietness reigned on the darkly polished surface of the harbour and the long, incurved range of the quays. This quietness that surrounded him on all sides through which, beyond the spars of clustered coasters, he could look at the night-horizon of the open sea, relieved that fantastic feeling of confinement within his own body with its intolerable tremors and shrinkings and imperious suggestions. Mere weaknesses all. His desire, however, to climb to the top of the tower, as if only there complete relief could be found for his captive spirit, was as strong as ever.

The only light on shore he could see issued in a dim streak from the door of the guardhouse which he had passed on his return from the tower on his first evening in Genoa. As he did not wish to pass near the Austrian sentry at the head of the landing-steps, Cosmo, instead of following the quay, kept under the portico at the back of the guardhouse. When he came to its end he had a view of the squat bulk of the tower across a considerable space of flat waste ground extending to the low rocks of the seashore. He made for it with the directness of a man possessed by a fixed idea. When he reached the iron-studded low door within the deep dark archway at the foot of the tower he found it immovable. Locked! How stupid! As if those heavy ship guns up there could be stolen! Disappointed, he leaned his shoulders against the side of the deep arch, lingering as people will before the finality of a closed door or of a situation without issue.

His superstitious mood had left him. An old picture was an old picture; and probably the face of that noble saint copied from an old triptych and of Madame de Montevesso were not at all alike. At most, a suggestion which may have been the doing of the copyist and so without meaning. A copyist is not an inspired person; not a seer of visions. He felt critical, almost ironic, towards the Cosmo of the morning, the Cosmo of the day, the



Cosmo rushing away like a scared child from a fanciful resemblance, that probably did not even exist. What was he doing there? He might have asked the way to the public gardens. Lurking within the dark archway, muffled up in his blue cloak, he was a suspect figure like an ambushed spadassin waiting for his victim, or a conspirator hiding from the minions of a tyrant. "I am perfectly ridiculous," he thought. "I had better go back as soon as I can." This was his sudden conclusion, but he did not move. It struck him that he was not anxious to face his empty room. Was he ready to get into another panic? he asked himself scornfully. ... At that moment he heard distinctly the sound of whispering as if through the wall, or from above or from the ground. He held his breath. The whispering went on, loquacious. WTien it stopped, another voice, as low but deeper and more distinct, muttered the words: "The hour is past."

Ha! Whispers in the air, sounds wandering without bodies, as mysterious as though they had come across a hundred miles, for he had heard no footsteps, no rustle, no sound of any sort. Nothing but the two voices. They were so weirdly disembodied and unbelievable that he had to clothe them in attributes: the excitable — the morose. They were quite near. But he did not know on which side of the arch within which he was hiding. For he was frankly hiding now — no doubt about it. He had remembered that he had left his pistols by his bedside. And he was certain he would hear the voices again. The wait seemed long before the fluent-loquacious came back through space and was punctually followed by the deep voice which this time emitted only an unintelligible grunt.

The disagreeable sense of having no means of defence in case of necessity prevented Cosmo from leaving the shelter of the deep arch. Two men, the excitable and the morose, were within a foot of him. Remembering that the tower was accessible on its seaward face, Cosmo surmised that they had just landed from a boat and had crept round barefooted, secret and, no doubt, ready to use their knives. Smugglers probably. That they should ply their trade within three hundred yards of the guardroom with a sentry outside did not surprise him very much. These were Austrian soldiers, ignorant of local conditions and certainly not concerned with the prevention of smuggling. Why didn't these men go about their business, then? The road was clear. But perhaps they had gone? It seemed to him he had been there glued to that door for an hour. As a matter of fact it was not ten minutes. Cosmo, who had no mind to be stabbed through a mere mistake as

to his character, was just thinking of making a dash in the direction of the guardhouse when the morose but cautiously lowered voice began, close to the arch, abruptly: "Where did the beast get to? I thought a moment ago he was coming. Didn't you think too that there were footsteps — just as we landed?"

Cosmo's uplifted foot came down to the ground. Of the excitable whisperer's long rigmarole not a word could be made out. Cosmo imagined him short and thick. The other, whom Cosmo pictured to himself as lean and tall, uttered the word, "Why?" The excitable man hissed fiercely: "To say good-bye." — "Devil take all these women," commented the morose voice dispassionately. The whisper, now raised to the pitch of a strangled wheeze, remarked with some feeling: "He may never see her again."

It was clear they had never even dreamt of any human being besides themselves having anything to do on this part of the shore at this hour of the night. "Won't they be frightened when I rush out," thought Cosmo taking off his cloak and throwing it over his left forearm. If it came to an encounter he could always drop it. But he did not seriously think that he would be reduced to using his fists.

He judged it prudent to leave the archway with a bound which would get him well clear of the tower, and on alighting faced about quickly. He heard an exclamation but he saw no one. They had bolted! He would have laughed had he not been startled himself by a shot fired somewhere in the distance behind his back — the most brutally impressive sound that can break the silence of the night. Instantly, as if it had been a signal, a lot of shouting broke on his ear, yells of warning and encouragement, a savage clamour which made him think of a lot of people pursuing a mad dog. He advanced, however, in the direction of the portico, wishing himself out of the way of this odious commotion, when the flash of a musket shot showed him for a moment the tilted head in a shako and the white cross-belts of an Austrian soldier standing erect in the middle of the open ground. Cosmo stopped short, then inclined to the left, moving cautiously and staring into the darkness. The yelling had died out gradually away from the seashore, where he remembered a cluster of the poorer sort of houses nestled under the cliffs. He could not believe that the shot could have been fired at him, till another flash and report of a musket followed by the whizz of the bullet very near his hand persuaded him to the contrary. Thinking of nothing but getting out of the line of fire, he stooped low and ran on blindly till his

shoulder came in contact with some obstacle extremely hard and perfectly immovable.

He put his hand on it, felt it rough and cold, and discovered it was a stone, an enormous square block such as are used in building breakwaters. Several others were lying about in a cluster like a miniature village on a miniature plain. He crept amongst them, spread his cloak on the ground, and sat down with his back against one of the blocks. He wondered at the marvellous eyesight of that confounded soldier. He was not aware that his dark figure had the starry sky for a background. "He nearly had me," he thought. His whole being recoiled with disgust from the risk of getting a musket ball through his body. He resolved to remain where he was till all that incomprehensible excitement had quietened down and that brute with wonderful powers of vision had gone away. Then his road would be clear. He would give him plenty of time.

The stillness all around continued, becoming more convincing, as the time passed, in its suggestion of everything being over, convincing enough to shame itself. Why this reluctance to go back to his room? What was a room in an inn, in any house? A small portion of space fenced off with bricks or stones in which innumerable individuals had been alone with their good and evil thoughts, temptations, fears, troubles of all sorts, and had gone out without leaving a trace. This train of thought led him to the reflection that no man could leave his troubles behind . . . never . . . never. . . "It's no use trying," he thought with despair. Why should he go to Livorno? What would be the good of going home? Lengthening the distance would be like lengthening a chain. What use would it be to get out of sight? . . . "If I were to be struck blind to-morrow it wouldn't help me." He forgot where he was till the convincing silence round him crumbled to pieces before a faint and distant shout which recalled him to the sense of his position. Presently he heard more shouting, still distant but much nearer. This took his mind from himself and started his imagination on another track. The man hunt was not over, then! The fellow had broken cover again and had been headed towards the tower. He depicted the hunted man to himself as long-legged, spare, agile, for no other reason than because he wished him to escape. He wondered whether the soldier with the sharp eyes would give him a shot. But no shot broke the silence which had succeeded the distant shouts. Got away perhaps? At least for a time. Very possibly he had stabbed somebody and ... by heaven! here he was!

Cosmo had caught the faint sound of running feet on the hard ground. And even before he had decided that it was no illusion it stopped short and a bulky object fell hurtling from the sky so near to him that Cosmo instinctively drew in his legs with a general start of his body which caused him to knock his hat off against the stone. He became aware of a man's back almost within reach of his arm. There could be no doubt he had taken a leap over the stone and had landed squatting on his heels. Cosmo expected him to rebound and vanish, but he only extended his arm to seize the hat as it rolled past him and at the same moment pivoted on his toes, preserving his squatting posture.

"If lie happens to have a knife in his hand he will plunge it into me," thought Cosmo. So without moving a limb he hastened to say in a loud whisper: "Run to the tower. Your friends are waiting for you." It was a sudden inspiration. The man without rising flung himself forward full length and, propped on his arms, brought his face close to Cosmo. His white eyeballs seemed to be starting out of his head. In this position the silence between them lasted for several seconds.

"My friends, but who are you?" muttered the man.

And then the recognition came, instantaneous and mutual. Cosmo simply said, "Hallo!" while the man, letting himself fall to the ground, uttered in a voice faint with emotion, "My Englishman!"

"There were two of them," said Cosmo.

"Two? Did they see you?"

Cosmo assured him that they had not. The other, still agitated by the unexpectedness of that meeting, asked, incredulous and even a little suspicious: "What am I to think, then? How could you know that they were my friends?"

Cosmo disregarded the question. "You will be caught if you linger here," he whispered.

The other, as though he had not heard the warning, insisted: "How could they have mentioned my name to you?"

"They mentioned no names. . . . Run."

"I don't think they are there now," said the fugitive.

"Yes. There was noise enough to scare anybody away," commented Cosmo. "What have you done?"

The other made no answer, and in the pause both men listened intently. The night remained dark. Cosmo thought: "Some smuggling affair," and the

other muttered to himself, "I have misled them." He sat up by the side of Cosmo and put Cosmo's hat, which he had been apparently holding all the time, on the ground between them.

"You are a cool hand," said Cosmo. "The soldiers ..."

"Who cares for the soldiers? They can't run."

"They have muskets, though."

"Oh, yes. I heard the shots and wondered at whom they were fired."

"At me. That's why I have got in here. There is one of them who can see in the dark," explained Cosmo, who had been very much impressed. His friend of the tower emitted a little chuckle.

"And so you have hidden yourself in here. Soldiers, water, and fire soon make room for themselves. But they did not know who they were after. They got the alarm from that beast."

He paused suddenly, and Cosmo asked: "Who was after you?"

"One traitor and God knows how many sbirri. If they had been only ten minutes later they would have never set eyes on me."

"I wonder they didn't manage to cut you off, if they were so many," said Cosmo.

"They didn't know. Look! Even now I have deceived them by doubling back. You see I was in a house." He seemed to hesitate.

"Oh, yes," said Cosmo. "Saying good-bye."

The man by his side made a slight movement and preserved a profound silence for a time.

"As I have no demon," he began slowly, "to keep me informed about other people's affairs, I must ask you what you were doing here?"

"Why, taking the air like that other evening. But why don't you try to get away while there is time?"

"Yes, but where?"

"You were going to leave Genoa," said Cosmo. "Either on a very long or a very deadly journey."

Again the man by his side made a movement of surprise and remained silent for a while. This was very extraordinary, as though some devil having his own means to obtain knowledge had taken on himself for a disguise the body of an Englishman of the kind that travels and stays in inns. The acquaintance of Cosmo's almost first hour in Genoa was very much puzzled and a little suspicious, not as before something dangerous but as before

something inexplicable, obscure to his mind like the instruments that fate makes use of sometimes in the affairs of men.

“So you did see two men a little while ago waiting for me?”

“I did not see them. They seemed to think you were late,” was the surprising answer.

“And how do you know they were waiting for me?”

“I didn’t,” said Cosmo naturally. And the other muttered a remark that he was glad to hear of something that Cosmo did not know. But Cosmo continued: “Of course I didn’t, not till you jumped in here.”

The other made a gesture requesting silence and lent his ear to the unbroken stillness of the surroundings.

“Signore,” he said suddenly in a very quiet and distinct whisper, “it may be true that I was about to leave this town, but I never thought of leaving it by swimming. No doubt the noise was enough to frighten anybody away, but it has been quiet enough now for a long time and I think that I will crawl on as far as the tower to see whether perchance they didn’t think it worth while to bring their boat back to the foot of the tower. I have put my enemies off the track and I fancy they are looking for me in very distant places from here.

The treachery, signore, was not in the telling them where I was. Anybody with eyes could have seen me walking about Genoa. No, it was in the telling them who I was.”

He paused again to listen and suddenly changed his position, drawing in his legs.

“Well,” said Cosmo, “I myself wonder who you are.” He noticed the other’s eyes rolling, and the whisper came out of his lips much faster and, as it were, more confidential.

“Attilio, at your service,” the mocking whisper fell into Cosmo’s ear. “I see the signore is not so much of a wizard as I thought.” Then with great rapidity: “Should the signore find something, one never knows, Cantelucci would be the man to give it to.”

And suddenly with a half turn he ran off on all fours, looking for an instant monstrous and vanishing so suddenly that Cosmo remained confounded. He was trying to think what all this might mean, when his ears were invaded by the sound of many footsteps and before he could make a move to get up he found himself surrounded by quite a number of men. As a matter of fact there were only four; but they stood close over him as he sat

on the ground, their dark figures blotting all view, with an overpowering effect. Very prudently Cosmo did not attempt to rise; he only picked up his hat, and as he did so it seemed to him that there was something strange about the feel of it. When he put it on his head some object neither very hard nor very heavy fell on the top of his head. He repressed the impulse to have a look at once. "What on earth can it be?" he thought. It felt like a parcel of papers. It was certainly flat. An awestruck voice said, "That's a foreigner." Another muttered, "What's this deviltry?" As Cosmo made an attempt to rise with what dignity he might, the nearest of the band stooped with alacrity and caught hold of his arm above the elbow as if to help him up, with a muttered, "Permesso, signore ." And as soon as he regained his feet his other arm was seized from behind by someone else without any ceremony. A slight attempt to shake himself free convinced Cosmo that they meant to stick on.

"Would it be an accomplice?" wondered a voice.

"No. Look at his hat. That's an Englishman."

"So much the worse. They are very troublesome. Authority is nothing to them."

All this time one or another would take a turn to peer closely into Cosmo's face, in a way which struck him as offensive. Cosmo had not the slightest doubt that he was in the hands of the municipal sbirri. That strange Attilio had detected their approach from afar. "He might have given me a warning," he thought. His annoyance with the fugitive did not last long; but he began to be angry with his captors, of which every one, he noticed, carried a cudgel.

"What authority have you to interfere with me?" he asked haughtily. The wretch who was holding his right arm murmured judicially: "An Inglese, without a doubt." A stout man in a wide-brimmed hat, who was standing in front of him, grunted: "The authority oi four against one," then addressed his companions to the general effect that he didn't know what the world was coming to if foreigners were allowed to mix themselves up with conspirators. It looked as if they had been a1 a loss what to do with their captive. One of them in sinuated: " I don't know. Those foreigners have plenty of money and are impatient of restraint. A poor mar may get a chance."

Cosmo thought that probably each of them was pro vided with a stiletto. Nothing prevented them fron stabbing him in several places, weighting his

body with some stones from the seashore, and throwing it into the water. What an unlucky reputation to have! He remembered that he had no money with him. The few coins he used to carry in his pocket were lying on his mantelpiece in the bedroom at the inn. This would have made no difference if those men had been bandits, since they would not be aware of the emptiness of his pockets. "I could have probably bribed them to let me go," he thought, after he had heard the same man add with a little laugh, "I mean obliging poor men. Those English signori are rich and harmless."

Cosmo regretted more than ever not being able to make them an offer. It would have been probably successful, as they seemed to be in doubt what to do next. He mentioned he was living at the Casa Graziani. "If one of you will go with me there you shall be recompensed for your trouble." No answer was made to that proposal except that one of the men coughed slightly. Their chief in a hat with an enormous brim seemed lost in deep thought, and his immobility in front of Cosmo appeared to the latter amusingly mysterious and sinister. A sort of nervous impatience came over Cosmo, an absurd longing to tear himself away and make a dash for liberty, and then an absurd discouragement as though he were a criminal with no hiding-place to make for. The man in the big hat jerked up his head suddenly and disclosed the irritable state of his feelings at the failure of getting hold of that *furfante*. "As to that Englishman," he continued in his rasping voice not corresponding to his physical bulk, "let him be taken to the guardroom. He will have to show his papers."

Cosmo was provoked to say: "Do you expect a gentleman to carry his papers with him when he goes out for a walk?"

He was disconcerted by an outburst of laughter on three sides of him. The leader in the hat did not laugh; he only said bitterly: "We expect papers from a man we find hiding."

"Well, I have no papers on me," said Cosmo, and immediately in a sort of mental illumination thought, "Except in my hat." Of course that object reposing on the top of his head was a bundle of papers, dangerous documents. Attilio was a conspirator. Obviously! The mysterious allusion to something he was to find and hand over to Cantelucci became clear to Cosmo. He felt very indignant with his mysterious acquaintance. "Of course he couldn't foresee I was going to get into this predicament," he thought, as if trying to find an excuse for him already.

"Avanti," commanded the man in front of him.



The grip on his arm of the two others tightened, resistance was no use though he felt sorely tempted again to engage in a struggle. If only he could free himself for a moment, dash off into the darkness, and throw that absurd packet away somewhere before they caught him again. It was a sort of solution; but he discovered in himself an unsuspected and unreasoning loyalty. "No! Somebody would find it and take it to the police," he thought. "If we come near the quay I may manage to fling it on the water."

He said with lofty negligence: "You needn't hold my arms."

This suggestion was met by a profound silence. Neither of the men holding him relaxed his grasp. Another was treading close on his heels, while the police-hound in the big hat marched a couple of paces in front of him, importantly.

Before long they approached the guardhouse close enough for Cosmo to see the sentry at the foot of the steps, who challenged them militarily. The sbirro in the hat advanced alone and made himself known in the light streaming through the door. It was too late to attempt anything. As he was impelled by his two captors inside the guardroom, which was lighted by a smoky lamp and also full of tobacco smoke, Cosmo thought, "I am in for it. What a horrible nuisance! I wonder whether they will search me?"

At Cosmo's entrance with his escort several soldiers reclining on the floor raised their heads. It was a small place which may have been used as a store for sails or cordage. The furniture consisted of one long bench, a rack of muskets, a table, and one chair. A sergeant sitting on that chair rose and talked with the head sbirro for a time in a familiar and interested manner about the incidents of the chase, before he even looked at Cosmo. Cosmo could not hear the words. The sergeant was a fine man with long black moustaches and a great scar on his cheek. He nodded from time to time in an understanding manner to the man in the hat, whom the light of the guardroom disclosed as the possessor of very small eyes, a short thick beard, and a pear-shaped yellow physiognomy which had a pained expression. At the suggestion of the sbirri (they had let him go) Cosmo sat down on a bench running along the wall. Part of it was occupied by a soldier stretched at full length with his head on his knapsack and with his shako hung above him on the wall. He was profoundly asleep. "Perhaps that's the fellow who took those shots at me," thought Cosmo. Another of the sbirri approached Cosmo and with a propitiatory smile handed him his cloak. Cosmo had forgotten all about it.

"I carried it behind the signore all the way," he murmured with an air of secrecy; and Cosmo was moved to say: "You ought to have brought it to me at Canteluc-ci's inn," in a significant tone. The man made a deprecatory gesture and said in a low voice: "The signore may want it to-night."

He was young. His eyes met Cosmo's without flinch-ing.

"I see," whispered Cosmo. "What is going to be done with me?" The man looked away indifferently and said: "I am new at this work; but there is a post of royal gendarmerie on the other side of the harbour."

He threw himself on the bench by Cosmo's side, stretched his legs out, folded his arms across his breast, and yawned unconcernedly.

"Can I trust him?" Cosmo asked himself. Nobody seemed to pay any attention to him. The sbirro in the hat bustled out of the guardroom in great haste; the other two remained on guard; the sergeant sitting astride the chair folded his arms on the back of it and stared at the night through the open door. The sbirro by Cosmo's side muttered, looking up at the ceiling: "I think Barbone is gone to find a boatman." From this Cosmo understood that he was going to be taken across the harbour and given up to the gendarmes. He thought, "If they insist upon searching me I would have to submit and in any case a hat is not a hiding-place. I may just as well hand the packet over without a struggle." A bright idea struck him. "If those fellows take me over there in a boat to save themselves the trouble of walking round the harbour I will simply contrive to drop my hat overboard — even if they do hold my arms during the passage." He was now convinced that Attilio belonged to some secret society. He certainly was no common fellow. He wondered what had happened to him. Was he slinking and dodging about the low parts of the town on his way to some refuge; or had he really found the excitable man and the grumpy man still waiting under the tower with a boat? Most unlikely after such an alarming commotion of yells and shots. He feared that Attilio, unable to get away, could hardly avoid being caught to-morrow, or at the furthest next day. He himself obviously did not expect anything better; or else he would not have been so anxious to get rid of those papers. Cosmo concluded that conspirators were perfectly absurd with their passion for documents, which were invariably found at a critical time and sent them all to the gallows.

He noticed the eyes of the sergeant, a Croat, with pendent black moustaches, fixed on his hat, and at once felt uneasy as if he had belonged to a secret society himself. His hat was the latest thing in men's round hats

which he had bought in Paris. But, almost directly, the sergeant's eyes wandered off to the doorway and resumed their stare. Cosmo was relieved. He decided, however, to attempt no communication with the young police fellow whose lounging attitude, abandoned and drowsy, and almost touching elbows with him, seemed to Cosmo too suggestive to be trustworthy. And indeed, he reflected, what could he do for him?

His excitement about this adventure was combined in a strange way with a state of inward peace which he had not known for hours. He wondered at his loyalty to the astute Attilio. He would have been justified in regarding the transaction as a scurvy trick; whereas he found that he could not help contemplating it as a matter of trust. He went on exercising his wits upon the problem of those documents (he was sure those were papers of some kind) which he had been asked to give to Cantelucci (how surprised he would be), since apparently the innkeeper was a conspirator too. Yet, he thought, it would be better to destroy them than to let them fall into the hands of the Piedmontese justice, or the Austrian military command. "I must contrive," he thought, "to get rid of them in the boat. I can always shake my hat overboard accidentally." But the packet would float and some boatman would be sure to find it during the day. On the other hand, by the time daylight came the handwriting would probably have become illegible. Or perhaps not? Fire, not water, was what he needed. If there had been a fire in that inexpressibly dirty guardroom he would have made use of it at once under the very noses of those wild-looking Croats. But would that have been the proper thing to do in such a hurry?

He had not come to any conclusion before Barbone returned, accompanied by a silver-haired, meek old fellow, with a nut-brown face, bare-footed and bare-armed, and carrying a pair of sculls over his shoulder, whom Barbone pushed in front of the sergeant. The latter took his short pipe out of his mouth, spat on one side, looked at the old man with a fixed savage stare, and finally nodded. At Cosmo he did not look at all, but to Barbone he handed a key with the words, "Bring it back." The sbirri closed round Cosmo and Barbone uttered a growl with a gesture towards the door. Why Barbone should require a key to take him out of doors Cosmo could not understand. Unless it were the key of liberty. But it was not likely that the fierce Croat and the gloomy Barbone should have indulged in symbolic actions. The mariner with the sculls on his shoulder followed the group patiently to where, on the very edge of the quay, the Austrian soldier with

his musket shouldered paced to and fro across the streak of reddish light from the garrison door. He swung round and stood, very martial, in front of the group, but at the sight of the key exhibited to him by Barbone moved out of the way. The air was calm but chilly. Below the level of the quay there was the clinking of metal and the rattling of small chains, and Cosmo then discovered that the key belonged to a padlock securing the chain to which quite a lot of small rowing boats were moored. The young policeman said from behind into Cosmo's ear, "The signore is always forgetting his cloak," and threw it lightly on Cosmo's shoulders. He explained also that every night all the small boats in the port were collected and secured like this on both sides of the port and the Austrians furnished the sentry to look after them on this side. The object was that there should be no boats moving after ten o'clock, except the galley of the dogana and of course the boat of the English man-of-war.

"Come and see me at noon at Cantelucci's inn," whispered Cosmo, to which the other breathed out a, "Certainly, Excellency," feelingly before going up the steps.

Cosmo found himself presently sitting in a boat between two sbirri. The ancient fellow shoved off and shipped his oars. From the quay, high above, Bar-bone's voice shouted to him, "The gendarmes will take charge of your boat for the rest of the night." The old boatman's only answer was a deep sigh, and in a very few strokes the quay with the sentry receded into the darkness. One of the sbirri remarked in a tone of satisfaction, "Our service will be over after we have given up the signore there." The other said, "I hope the signore will consider we have been kept late on his account." Cosmo, who was contemplating with immense distaste the prospect of being delivered up to the gendarmes, emitted a mirthless laugh, and after a while said in a cold tone: "Why waste your time in pulling to the other side of the harbour? Put me on board the nearest vessel. I'll soon find my way to the quay from one tartane to another, and your service would be over at once."

The fellow on his left assumed an astonishing seriousness: "Most of those tartanes have a dog on board. We could not expose an illustrious stranger to get bitten by one of these ugly brutes."

But the other had no mind for grave mockery. In a harsh and overbearing tone he ordered the boatman to pull well into the middle of the harbour away from the moored craft.

It was like crossing a lake overshadowed by the hills with the breakwaters prolonging the shore to seaward. The old man raised and dipped his oars slowly, without a sound, and the long trails of starlight trembled on the ripples on each side of the boat. When they had progressed far enough to open the harbour entrance Cosmo detected between the end of the jetties far away — he was glancing casually about — a dark speck about the size of a man's head, which ought not to have been there. The air was perfectly still and the stars thick on the horizon. It struck him at once that it could be nothing than either the English man-of-war's boat or the boat of the dogana, since no others were allowed to move at night. His thoughts were, however, so busy with speculating as to what he had better do that he paid no more attention to that remarkable speck. He looked absently at the silver-haired boatman pulling an easy stroke and asked himself: Was it or was it not time to lose his hat overboard? How could he contrive to make it look plausible in this absurd calm? Then he reproached himself for reasoning as if those two low fellows (whose proximity had grown extremely irksome to him) had wits of preternatural sharpness. If he were to snatch it and fling it away they would probably conclude that he was trying to make himself troublesome, or simply mad, or anything in the world rather than guess that he had in his hat something which he wanted to destroy. He undid quietly the clasp of his cloak and rested his hands on his knees. His guardians did not think it necessary now to hold his arms. In fact they did not seem to pay much attention to him. Cosmo asked himself for a moment whether he would stand up suddenly and jump into the water. Of course he knew that fully clothed and in his boots they would very soon get hold of him, but the object would have been attained. However, the prospect of being towed behind a boat to the custom-house quay by the collar of his coat and being led into the presence of the gendarmes looking like a drowned rat was so disagreeable that he rejected that plan.

By that time the boat had reached little more than half way across the harbour. The great body of the shipping was merged with the shore. The nearest vessels were a polacca brig and xebec lying at anchor. Both were shadowy, and the last, with her low spars, a mere low smudge on the dim sheen of the water. From time to time the aged boatman emitted a moan. The boat seemed hardly to move. Everything afloat was silent and dark. The crews of the coasters were ashore or asleep; and if there were any dogs on board any of them they too seemed plunged in the same slumber that lay

over all things of the earth, and by contrast with which the stars of heaven looked intensely wakeful. In the midst of his perplexities Cosmo enjoyed the feeling of peace that had come to him directly his trouble had begun.

“We will be all night getting across,” growled suddenly the man on his left. . . I don’t know what

Barbone was thinking of to get this antiquity out of his bed.”

“I told him there was hardly any breath in my old body,” declared the boatman’s tranquil voice.

Apparently in order to speak he had to cease rowing, for he rested on his oars while he went on in the gravelike silence. “But he raged like a devil; and rather than let him wake up all the neighbours I came out. I may just as well die in the boat as in bed.”

Both sbirri exclaimed indignantly against Barbone, but neither offered to take the sculls. With a painful groan the old man began to pull again. Cosmo asked: “What’s that dark thing between the heads of the jetties?” One of his captors, turning his head to look, said, “That must be the galley. I wish she would come this way. We would ask her for a tow.” The other man remarked sarcastically, “No fear, they are all snoozing in her except one perhaps to keep a lookout. It’s an easy life. . . . Voga, vecchio, voga.”

Cosmo thought suddenly that if by any chance the man-of-war boat happened to be pulling that way he would hail her without hesitation, and, surely, the officer in charge would not leave him in the hands of those villains without at least listening to his tale. Unluckily their way across the harbour did not take them near the man-of-war. The light at her mizzen peak seemed to Cosmo very far away; so that if it had not burned against the dark background of the land it would have seemed more distant than any star, and not half as brightly vigilant. He took his eyes from it and let them rest idly on the water ahead. The sbirro on his right hand emitted an immense yawn. This provided the other to mutter curses on the tediousness of all this affair. Cosmo had been too perplexed to feel bored.

Just then as if in antagonism to those offensive manifestations he felt very alert. Moreover, the moment when something would have to be done was approaching, a tension of all his senses accumulating in a sort of all-over impatience. While in that state, staring into the night, he caught sight of the man-of-war’s boat.

But was it? — well, it was something dark on the water, and as there was no other boat about ... It was small — well, far off and probably end on. . . .

He had heard no sound of rowing . . . lying on her oars ... He could see nothing now . . well, here goes, on the chance.

Without stirring a limb he took a long breath and let out the shout of “Boat ahoy” with all the force of his lungs. The volume of tone astonished himself. It seemed to fill the whole of the harbour so effectually that he felt he needn’t shout again and he remained as still as a statue. The effect on his neighbours was that both gave a violent start, which set the boat rolling slightly, and in their bewilderment they bent forward to peer into his face with immense eyes. After a time one of them asked in an awestruck murmur, “What’s the matter, signore?” and seized his cloak. The other, Cosmo heard distinctly whisper to himself, “ That was a war cry,” while he also grabbed the cloak. The clasp being undone, it slipped off Cosmo’s shoulders and then they clung to his arms. It struck Cosmo as remarkable that the old boatman had not ceased his feeble rowing for a moment.

The shout had done Cosmo good. It reestablished his self-respect somehow and it sent the blood moving through his veins as if indeed it had been a war cry. He had shaken their nerves. If they had not remained perfectly motionless holding his arms there would have started a scrimmage in that boat which would certainly have ended in the water. But their grip was feeble. They did nothing, but, bending towards each other in front of Cosmo till their heads almost touched, watched his lips from which such an extraordinary shout had come. Cosmo stared stonily ahead as if unconscious of their existence, and again he had that strange illusion of a dark spot ahead of the boat. He thought, “That’s no illusion. What a fool I was. It must be a mooring buoy.” A couple of minutes elapsed before he thought again, “That old fellow will be right into it, presently.”

He didn’t consider it his business to utter a warning because the bump he expected happened almost immediately. He had misjudged the distance. Owing to the slow pace the impact was very slight, slighter even than Cosmo expected against such a heavy body as a mooring buoy would be. It was really more like a feeble hollow sound than a shock. Cosmo, who was prepared for it, was really the one that felt it at once, and the ancient boatman looked sharply over his shoulder. He uttered no sound and did not even attempt to rise from the thwart. He simply, as it seemed to Cosmo, let go the oars. The sbirri only became aware of something having happened after the hollow bump was repeated, and Cosmo had become aware that the object on the water was not a buoy but another boat not much bigger than

theirs. Then they both exclaimed and in their surprise their grip relaxed. One of them cried in astonishment, "An empty boat." It was indeed a surprising occurrence. With no particular purpose in his mind Cosmo stood up while one of the sbirri stood up either to catch hold of the boat or push it away, for the two boats were alongside each other by that time. A strange voice in the dark said very loud: "The man in the hat," and as if by enchantment three figures appeared standing in a row. Cosmo had not even time to feel surprised. The two boats started knocking about considerably, and he felt himself seized by the collar and one arm and dragged away violently from between the two sbirri by the power of irresistible arms which as suddenly let him go as if he were an inanimate object, and he fell heavily in the bottom of the second boat almost before his legs were altogether clear of the other. During this violent translation his hat fell off his head without any scheming on his part.

He was not exactly frightened but he was excusably flustered. One is not kidnapped like this without any preliminaries every day. He was painfully aware of being in the way of his new captors. He was kicked in the ribs and his legs were trodden upon. He heard blows being struck against hard substances which he knew were human skulls because of the abortive yells ending in groans. There was a determination and ferocity in this attack combined with the least possible amount of noise. All he could hear were the heavy blows and the hard breathing of the assailants. Then came a sort of helpless splash. "Somebody will get drowned," he thought.

He made haste to pull himself forward from under the feet of the combatants. Luckily for his ribs they were bare, which also added to the quietness of that astonishing development. Once in the bows he sat up, and by that time everything was over. Three shadowy forms were standing in a row in the boat, motionless, like labourers who had accomplished a notable task. The boat out of which he had been dragged was floating within a yard or two, apparently empty. The whole affair, which could not have lasted more than a minute, seemed to Cosmo to have been absolutely instantaneous. Not a sound came from the shipping along the quays, not even from the brig and the xebec which were the nearest. A sense of final stillness such as follows, for instance, the explosion of a mine and resembles the annihilation of all one's perceptive faculties took possession of Cosmo for a moment. Presently he heard a very earnest but low voice cautioning the silent world: "If you dare make a noise I will come back and



kill you.” It was perfectly impersonal; it had no direction, no particular destination. Cosmo, who heard the words distinctly, could connect no image of a human being with them. He was roused at last when, dropping his hand on the gunwale, he felt human fingers under it. He snatched his hand away as if burnt and only then looked over. The white hair of the old boatman seemed to rest on the water right against the boat’s side. He was holding on silently, even in this position displaying the meek patience of his venerable age — and Cosmo contemplated him in silence. A voice, not at all impersonal this time, said from the stern sheets, “Get out your oars.”

“There is a man in the water here,” said Cosmo, wondering at his own voice being heard in those fantastic conditions. It produced, however, the desired effect, and almost as soon as he had spoken Cosmo had to help a bearded sailor, who was a complete stranger to him, to haul the old man inside the boat. He was no great weight to get over the gunwale, but they had to handle him as if he had been drowned. He never attempted to help himself. The other men in the boat took an interest in the proceedings.

“Is he dead?” came a subdued inquiry from aft.

“He is very old and feeble,” explained Cosmo in an undertone. Somebody swore long but softly, ending with the remark: “Here’s a complication.”

“That scoundrel Barbone dragged out a dying man,” began Cosmo impulsively.

“Va bene, va bene . • . Bundle him in and come aft, signore.”

Cosmo, obeying this injunction, found himself sitting in the stern sheets by the side of a man whose first act was to put his hand lightly upon his shoulder in a way that conveyed a sort of gentle exultation. The discovery that the man was Attilio was too startling for comment at the first moment. The next it seemed the most natural thing in the world.

“It seems as if nothing could keep us apart,” said that extraordinary man in a low voice. He took his hand off Cosmo’s shoulder and directed the two rowers — who, Cosmo surmised, were the whisperers of the tower — to pull under the bows of the brig. “We must hide from those custom-house fellows,” he said. “I fancy the galley is coming along.”

No other word was uttered till one of the men got hold of the brig’s cable and the boat came to a rest with her side against the stem of that vessel, when Cosmo, who now could himself hear the faint noise of rowing\* asked Attilio in a whisper: “Are they after you?”

“If they are after anything,” answered the other coolly, “they are after a very fine voice. What made you give that shout? “

“I had to behave like a frightened mouse before those sbirri on account of those papers you left with me, and I felt that I must assert myself.” Cosmo gave this psychological explanation grimly. He changed his tone to add that, fancying he had seen the shape of the English man-of-war’s boat, the temptation to hail her had been irresistible.

“Possibly that’s what started them. They know nothing of us. Luck was on our side. We slipped in unseen.” The sound of rowing meantime had grown loud enough to take away from them all desire for further conversation, for the noise of heavy oars working in their rowlocks has a purposeful relentless character on a still night, and the big twelve-oared galley, pulled with a short quick stroke, seemed to hold an unerring way in its hollow thundering progress. For those in the boat concealed under the bows of the brig the strain of having to listen without being able to see was growing intolerable. Cosmo asked himself anxiously whether he was going to be captured once more before this night of surprises was out, but at the last moment the galley swerved and passed under the stern of the polacca as if bent on taking merely a sweep round the harbour. Everybody in the boat drew a long breath. But almost immediately afterwards the sound of rowing stopped short and everyone in the boat seemed turned again into stone.

At last Attilio breathed into Cosmo’s ear, “Per Dio I They have found the other boat.”

Cosmo was almost ashamed at the swift eagerness of his fearfully whispered inquiry:

“Are the men in her dead?”

“All I know is that if either of them is able to talk we are lost,” Attilio whispered back.

“These sbirri were going to deliver me to the gendarmes,” Cosmo began under his breath, when all at once the noise of the oars burst again on their ears abruptly; but soon all apprehension was at an end, because it became clear that the sound was receding towards the east side of the harbour. In fact the custom-house people who had started to row round because of a vague impression that there had been some shouting in the harbour had to their immense surprise come upon a boat which at first seemed empty but which, they soon discovered, contained two human forms huddled up on the bottom boards, apparently dead, but at any rate insensible if they were still

breathing, Attilio's surmise that as the quickest way of dealing with this mystery the custom-house officer had decided to tow the boat at once to the police station on the east side was perfectly right; and also his conviction that now or never was his chance to slip out of that harbour where he and his companions felt themselves in a trap the door of which might snap to at any time. At the best it was a desperate situation, he felt. Cosmo felt it, too, if in a more detached way — like a rather unwilling spectator. Yet his anxiety for the safety of his companions was as great as though he had known them all his life. Though he had in a way lost sight of his personal connection he could not help forming his own view, which he poured into Attilio's ear while the two rowers put all their strength into their work.

Tensely rigid at the tiller, Attilio had listened, keeping his eyes fixed on the gap of dark gleaming water between the black heads of the two breakwaters.

"The signore is right," he assented. "We could not hope to escape from that galley once she caught sight of us. Our only chance is to slip out of the port before she gets back to her station outside the jetties. This affair will be a great puzzle to them. They will lose some time talking it over with the gendarmes. Unless one or another of those sbirri comes to himself."

"Yes. Those sbirri . . ." murmured Cosmo.

"What would you have? We did our best with the boat-stretchers, I can assure you."

Cosmo had no doubt of that. The sound of crashing blows rained on those wretches' heads had been sickening, but the memory comforted him now. So did the return of the profound stillness after the noise of the galley's oars had died out in the distance. Cosmo took heart till it came upon him suddenly that there never had been a starry sky that gave so much light, no night so amazingly clear, no harbour of such an enormous extent. He felt he must not lose a minute. He jumped up and began to tear off his coat madly. Attilio exclaimed in dismay, "Stay! Don't!" It looked as though his Englishman had made up his mind to swim for it. But Cosmo with a muttered, "I must lend a hand," stepped lightly forward past the rowers, and began to feel under thwarts for a spare oar. Before he found it his hand came in contact with a naked foot. This recalled to him the existence of the ancient boatman. The poor old fellow who had taken no part in the fray had fallen overboard from mere weakness and had had a long soaking in chilly water. He lay curled up in the bows, shivering violently like a dog. For the

moment Cosmo was simply vexed at this additional dead weight in the boat. He could think of nothing but of the custom-house galley. He imagined her long, slim, cleaving the glassy water, as if endowed with life, while the clumsy tub in which he sat felt to him a dead thing which had to be tugged along by main force every inch of the way. He set his teeth hard and pulled doggedly as if rowing in a losing race, without turning his head once. Suddenly he became aware of the end of the old Mole gliding past the boat, and that Attilio instead of holding on this way had taken a sweep and was following the outer side of the breakwater towards the shore. Presently, at his word, the oars were taken in, and the boat floated arrested in shallow water amongst the boulders strewn along the base of the Mole. The men panted after their exertions. Not a breath of wind stirred the chilly air. Cosmo returned aft and sat down by Attilio after putting on his coat.

It seemed as though Attilio, while steering with one hand, had managed with the other to go through the pockets of Cosmo's coat, for his first words murmured in an anxious tone were "Signore, where are those papers?"

Cosmo had forgotten all about them. The shock was severe. "The papers," he exclaimed faintly. "In my hat."

"Yes, I put them there. You had it on your head in the boat. I recognized you by it."

"Of course I had it on. Where is it?"

"God knows," said Attilio bitterly. "I was asking you for the papers."

"I only discovered that the packet was in my hat after I put it on," protested Cosmo. "Four sbirri were standing over me already."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Attilio, very low.

"Afterwards I was watched all the time."

While they were exchanging those words in the extremity of their consternation, the man nearest to them went down suddenly on his knees and began to grope under the thwarts industriously. Having heard the word "hat" he had remembered that while battling with the sbirri he had trodden on some round object which had given way under his foot. He assured the signore that it was a thing that could not be helped while he tendered to him apologetically the rim with one hand and the crown with the other. It was crushed flat like an empty bag, but it was seized with avidity and presently Cosmo's feelings were relieved by the discovery that it still contained the parcel of papers. Attilio took possession of it with a low nervous laugh. It was an emotional sound which, coming from that man, gave Cosmo food

for wonder during the few moments the silence lasted before Attilio announced in a whisper, "Here she is."

Cosmo, looking seaward, saw on the black and gleaming water, polished like a mirror for the stars, an opaque hummock resembling the head of a rock; and he thought that the race had been won by a very narrow margin. The galley in fact had reached the heads of the jetties a very few minutes only after the boat. On getting back to his station the officer in the galley pulled about fifty yards clear of the end of the old Mole and ordered his men to lay oars in. He had left the solution of the mystery to the police. It was not his concern; and as he knew nothing of the existence of an outside boat, it never occurred to him to investigate along the coast. Attilio's boat lurking close inshore was invisible from seaward. The distance between the two was great enough to cause the considerable clatter which is made when several oars are laid in together at the word of command to reach Cosmo only as a very faint, almost mysterious, sound. It was the last he was to hear for a very long time. He surrendered to the soft and invincible stillness of air and sea and stars enveloping the active desires and the secret fears of men who have the sombre earth for their stage. At every momentary pause in his long and fantastic adventure it returned with its splendid charm and glorious serenity, resembling the power of a great and unfathomable love whose tenderness like a sacred spell lays to rest all the vividities and all the violences of passionate desire.

Dreamily Cosmo had lost control of the trend of his thoughts, as one does on the verge of sleep. He regained it with a slight start and looked up at the round tower looming up, bulky, at the water's edge. He was back again, having completed the cycle of his adventures and not knowing what would happen next. Everybody was silent. The two men at the thwarts had folded their arms and had let their chins sink on their breasts; while Attilio, sitting in the stern sheets, held his head up in an immobility to which his open eyes lent an air of extreme vigilance. The waste of waters seemed to extend from the shores of Italy to the very confines of the universe, with nothing on it but the black spot of the galley which moved no more than the head of a rock. "We can't stay here till daylight," thought Cosmo.

That same thought was in Attilio's mind. The race between his boat and the galley had been very close. It was very probable that had it not been for Cosmo volunteering to pull the third oar it would have resulted in a dead heat, which of course would have meant capture. As it was, Attilio had just

escaped being seen by pulling short round the jetty instead of holding on into the open sea. It was a risky thing to do, but then, since he had jeopardized the success of his escape through his desire to get hold of Cosmo again, there was nothing before him but a choice of risks.

Attilio was a native of a tiny white townlet on the eastern shore of the Gulf of Genoa. His people were all small cultivators and fishermen. Their name was Pieschi, from whose blood came the well-known conspirator against the power of the Dorias and in the days of the Republic. Of this fact Attilio had heard only lately (Cantelucci had told him) with a certain satisfaction. In his early youth, spent on the coast of the South American continent, he had heard much talk of a subversive kind and had become familiar with the idea of revolt looked upon as an assertion of manly dignity and the spiritual aim of life. He had come back to his country about six months before and, beholding the aged faces of some of his people in the unchanged surroundings, it seemed to him that it was his own life that had been very long, though he was only about thirty. Being a relation of Cantelucci he found himself very soon in touch with the humbler members of secret societies, survivals of the revolutionary epoch, stirred up by the downfall of the Empire and inspired by grandiose ideas, by the hatred of the Austrian invaders bringing back with them the old tyrannical superstitions of religion and the oppression of privileged classes. Like the polite innkeeper he believed in the absolute equality of all men. He respected all religions but despised the priests who preached submission and perceived nothing extravagant in the formation of an Italian empire (of which he had the first hint from the irritable old cobbler, the uncle of Cecchina) since there was a great man — a great Emperor — to put at its head, very close at hand. The great thing was to keep him safe from the attempts of all these kings and princes now engaged in plotting against his life in Vienna — till the hour of action came. No small task, for the world outside the ranks of the people was full of his enemies.

Attilio, still and silent by Cosmo's side, was not reproaching himself for having gone in the evening to say good-bye to Cecchina. The girl herself had been surprised to see him, for they had said good-bye already in the afternoon. But this love affair was not quite two months old and he could not have been satisfied with a hurried wordless good-bye, snatched behind a half-closed door, with several people drinking at the long table in Cantelucci's kitchen on one side and a crabbed old woman rummaging

noisily in a storeroom at the end of the dark passage. Cecchina had, of course, reproached him for coming, but not very much. Neither of them dreamed of there being any danger in it. Then, straight out of her arms, as it were, he had stepped into that ambush! His presence of mind and his agility proved too much for the party of the stupid Barbone. It was only after he had given them the slip in the maze of small garden plots at the back of the houses that he had time, while lying behind a low wall, to think over

this unexpected trouble. He knew that the fellows who were after him belonged to the police, because they had called on the soldiers for assistance; but he concluded that he owed this surprise to some jealous admirer of Cecchina. It was easy enough for any base scoundrel to set the police after a man in these troubled times. It may even have been one of Cantelucci's affiliated friends. His suspicions rested on the small employees who took their meals at the inn, and especially on a lanky scribe with a pointed nose like a rat who had the habit of going in and out through the courier's room, only, Attilio believed, in order to make eyes at Cecchina. That the ambush had been laid on the eve-ning fixed for his departure was a mere coincidence.

The real danger of the position was in having the papers on him, but, anxious that his friends at the tower should not give him up, he came out of his hiding-place too soon. The soldiers had gone away, but the sbirri were still half-heartedly poking about in dark corners and caught sight of him. Another rush saved him for the moment. The position he felt was growing desperate. He dared not throw away the papers. The discovery of Cosmo sitting amongst the stones was an event so extraordinary in itself that it revolutionized his rational view of life as a whole in the way a miracle might have done. He felt suddenly an awed and confiding love for that marvellous person fate had thrown in his way. The pursuit was close. There was no time to explain. There was no need.

But directly he found himself safe in the boat Attilio began to regret having parted with the papers. It was not much use proceeding on his mission without these documents entrusted to him by Cantelucci, acting on behalf of superior powers.

He asked himself what could have happened to Cosmo? Did the fellows arrest him on suspicion? That was not very likely, and at worst it would not mean more than a short detention. They would not dare to search him, surely. But even if they found the packet Cosmo would declare it his own

property and object to its being opened. He had a complete confidence in Cosmo's loyalty and, what was more, in that young Englishman's power to have his own way. He had the manner for that and the face for that. The face and bearing of a man with whom it was lucky to be associated in anything.

The galley being just then at the other end of her beat, Attilio saw his way clear to slip into the harbour. The state of perfect quietness over the whole extent of the harbour encouraged his native audacity. He began by pulling to the east side where the gendarmerie office was near the quay. Everything was quiet there. He made his men lay their oars amongst the shadows of the anchored shipping and waited. Sleep, breathless sleep, reigned on shore and afloat. Attilio began to think that Cosmo could not have been discovered. If so, then he must be nearing Cantelucci's inn by this time. He resolved then to board one of the empty coasters moored to the quay, wait for the morning there, and then go himself to the inn, where he could remain concealed till another departure could be arranged. He told his men to pull gently to the darkest part of the quay. And then he heard Cosmo's mighty shout. He was nearly as confounded by it as the sbirri in the boat. That voice bursting out on the profound stillness seemed loud enough to wake up every sleeper in the town, to bring the stones rolling down the hillsides. And almost at once he thought, "What luck!" The luck of the Englishman's amazing impudence; for what other man would have thought of doing that thing? He told his rowers to lay their oars in quietly and get hold of the boat-stretchers. The extremely feeble pulling of the old boatman gave the time for these preparations. He whispered his instructions: "We've got to get a foreign signore out of that boat. The others in her will be sbirri. Hit them hard." Just before the boats came into contact he recognized Cosmo's form standing up. It was then that he pronounced the words, "the man in the hat," which were heard by Cosmo. Attilio ascribed it all to luck that attended those who had anything to do with that Englishman. Even the very escape unseen from the harbour he ascribed, not to Cosmo's extra oar, but to Cosmo's peculiar personality.

Without departing from his immobility he broke silence by a "signore," pronounced in a distinct but restrained voice. Cosmo was glad to learn the story before the moment came for them to part. But the theory of luck which Attilio tacked on to the facts did not seem to him convincing. He remarked that if Attilio had not come for him at all he would have been far



on the way in his mysterious affairs, whereas now he was only in another trap.

For all answer the other murmured, "Si, but I wonder if it would have been the same. Signore, isn't it strange that we should have been drawn together from the first moment you put foot in Genoa?"

"It is," said Cosmo, with an emphasis that encouraged the other to continue, but with a less assured voice.

"Some people of old believed that stars have something to do with meetings and partings by their disposition and that some if not all men have each a star allotted to them."

"Perhaps," said Cosmo in the same subdued voice.

"But I believe there is a man greater than you or I who believes he has a star of his own."

"Napoleon, perhaps."

"So I have heard," said Cosmo, and thought, "Here he is, whenever two men meet he is a third, one can't get rid of him."

"I wonder where it is," said Attilio, as if to himself, looking up at the sky. "Or yours, or mine," he added in a still lower tone. "They must be pretty close together."

Cosmo humoured the superstitious strain absently, for he felt a secret sympathy for that man. "Yes, it looks as if yours and mine had been fated to draw together."

"No, I mean all three together."

"Do you? Then you must know more than I do. Though indeed as a matter of fact he is not very far from us where we sit. But don't you think, my friend, that there are men and women, too, whose stars mark them for loneliness no man can approach?"

"You mean because they are great."

"Because they are incomparable," said Cosmo after a short pause, in which Attilio seemed to ponder.

"I like that what you said," Attilio was heard at last. "Their stars may be lonely. Look how still they are. But men are more like ships that come suddenly upon each other without a warning. And yet they, too, are guided by the stars. I can't get over the wonder of our meeting to-night."

"If you hadn't been so long in saying good-bye we wouldn't have met," said Cosmo, looking at the two men dozing on the thwarts, the whisperers of the tower. They were not at all like what he had imagined them to be.

Attilio gazed at his Englishman for a time closely. He seemed to see a smile on Cosmo's lips. Wonder at his omniscience prevented him from making a reply. He preferred not to ask, and yet he was incapable of forming a guess, for there are certain kinds of obviousness that escape speculation.

"You may be right," he said. "It's the first time in my life that I found it hard to say good-bye. I begin to believe," he went on murmuring, "that there are people it would be better for one not to know. There are women ..."

"Yes," said Cosmo, very low and as if unconscious of what he was saying. "I have seen your faces very close together."

The other made a slight movement away from Cosmo and then bent towards him. "You have seen," he said slowly and stopped short. He was thinking of something that had happened only two hours before. "Oh well," he said with composure, "you know everything, you see everything that happens. Do you know what will happen to us two?"

"It's very likely that when we part we will never see each other again," Cosmo said, resting his elbows on his knees and taking his head between his hands. He did not look like a man preparing to go ashore.

There were no material difficulties absolutely to prevent him from landing. The foot of the tower with the narrow strip of ground which a boat could approach was not sixty yards off, and all this was in the shadow of its own reflection, the high side of the breakwater, the bulk of the tower, making the glassy water dark in that corner of the shore. And besides, the water in which the boat floated was so shallow that Cosmo could have got to land by wading from where the boat lay without wetting himself much above the knees, should

Attilio refuse to come out from under the shelter of the rock. But probably Attilio would not have objected. The difficulty was not there.

Attilio must have been thinking on the same subject, as became evident when he asked Cosmo whether those sbirri knew where he lived. After some reflection Cosmo said that he was quite certain they knew nothing about it. The sbirri had put no questions to him. They had not, he said, displayed any particular curiosity about what he was. "But why do you ask?"

"Don't you know?" said Attilio, with only half-affected surprise. "There might have been a dozen of them waiting for you in the neighbourhood on

the chance of your returning, and you have no other place to go to.”

“No, I haven’t,” said Cosmo in a tone as though he regretted that circumstance. He thought, however, that there might have been some of them out between the port and the town, and he knew only one way and that not very well, he added.

As a matter of fact that danger was altogether imaginary, because Barbone, who certainly was in the pay of the police for work of that sort, was not imaginative enough to do things without orders, and after sending his prisoner off left the rest of the gendarmes and went home to bed, while his young acolyte went about his own affairs. The other two sbirri were being medically attended to, one of them especially being very nearly half killed by an unlucky blow on the temple. All the other sbirro could say in a feeble voice was that there were four in the boat, that they were attacked by an inexplicable murderous gang, and that he imagined that the other two, the prisoner and the boatman, were now dead and very likely at the bottom of the harbour. The brigadier of the gendarmerie could not get any more out of him, and, knowing absolutely nothing of the affair, thought it would be time to make his report to the superior authorities in the morning. All he did was to go round to the places where the boats were chained, which were under his particular charge, and count the boats. Not one was wanting. His responsibility was not engaged.

Thus there was nothing between Cosmo and Cante-lucci’s inn except his own distaste. There was a strange tameness in that proceeding, a lack of finality, something almost degrading. He imagined himself slinking like a criminal at the back of the beastly guardhouse, starting at shadows, creeping under the colonnade, getting lost in those dreadful deep lanes between palaces, with the constant dread of having suddenly the paws of those vile fellows laid on him and being dragged to some police post with an absurd tale on his lips and without a hat on his head and what for? Simply to get back to that abominable bedroom. However, he would have to go through it.

“Pity you don’t know the town,” Attilio’s cautious voice was heard again, “or else I could tell you of a place where you could spend the remainder of the night and send word to your servant to-morrow. But you could not find it by yourself. And that’s a pity. I assure Your Excellency that she is a real good woman. To have a secret place is not such a bad thing. One never

knows what one may need, and she is a creature to be trusted. She has an Italian heart and she is a giardiniera too. What more could I tell you?"

Cosmo thought to himself vaguely that the girl he had seen in Cantelucci's kitchen did not look like a woman gardener, though of course if Attilio had a love affair it would be naturally amongst people of that sort. But it occurred to him that perhaps it was some other woman Attilio was talking about. He made no movement. Attilio's murmurs took on a tone of resignation. "Your luck, signore, will depart with you, and perhaps ours will follow after." Cosmo protested against that unreasonable assumption, which was of course an absurdity but nevertheless touched him in one of those sensitive spots which are like a *dSfaut d'armure* in the battle-harness of various conceits which one wears against one's kind. He considered luck less in a sudden overwhelming conviction of it, in the manner of a man who had crossed the path of a radiating influence, or who had awakened a sleeping and destructive power which would now pursue him to the end of his life. He was young, farouche, mistrustful and austere, not like a stoic, but in the more human way like a man who has been born fastidious. In a sense altogether unworldly. Attilio emitted an audible sigh.

"You won't call it your luck," he pursued. "Well, let us leave it without a name. It is something in you. Your carelessness in following your fantasy, signore, as when you forced your presence on me only two days ago," he insisted, as if carelessness and fantasy were the compelling instruments of success. His voice was at its lowest as he added: "Your genius makes you true to your will."

No human being could have been insensible to such words uttered unexpectedly in a tone of secret earnestness. But Cosmo's inward response was a feeling of profound despondency. He was crushed by their appalling unfitness. For the last twenty-four hours he had been asking himself whether he had a will of his own, and it had seemed to him that he had lost the notion of the real nature of courage. At that very moment while listening to the mysteriously low pitch of Attilio's voice the thought flashed through his mind that there was something within him that made of him a predestined victim of remorse.

"You can't possibly know anything about me, Attilio," he said, "and whatever you like to imagine about me, you will have to put me on shore presently. I can't stay here till the morning, and neither can you," he added. "What are you thinking of doing? What can you do?"

“Is it possible that it is of any interest to the signore? Only the other evening I could not induce you to leave me to myself, and now you are impatient to leave me to my fate. What can I do? I can always take a desperate chance,” he paused, and added through his clenched teeth, “and when I think what little I need to make it almost safe ...” The piously uttered exclamation, “Ah, Dio/” was accompanied by a shake of a clenched fist apparently addressed to the universe, but made as it were discreetly, in keeping with the low and forcible tones.

“And what is that?” asked Cosmo, raising his head.

“Two pairs of stout arms, nothing more. With four oars and this boat and using a little judgment in getting away I would defy that fellow there.” He jerked his head towards the galley which in this tideless sea had not shifted her position a yard. “Yes,” he went on, “I could even hope to remain unseen on account of a quick dash.”

And he explained to Cosmo further that in an hour or so a little nearer the break of day, when men get heavy and sleepy, the watchfulness of those customhouse people would be relaxed and give him a better chance. But if he was seen then he could still hope to out-row them, though he would have preferred it the other way because with a boat making for the open sea they would very soon guess that there must be some vessel waiting for her, and by telling the tale on shore, that government xebec lying in the harbour would soon be out in chase. She was fast, and in twenty-four hours she would soon manage to overhaul all the craft she would sight between this and the place he was going to.

“And where is that?” asked Cosmo, letting his head rest on his hands again.

“In the direction of Livorno,” said the other, and checked himself. “But perhaps I had better not tell you, for should you happen to be interrogated by all those magistrates, or perhaps by the Austrians, you would of course want to speak the truth as becomes a gentleman — a nobilissimo signore — unless you manage to forget what I have already told you or perchance elect to come with us.”

“Come with you,” repeated Cosmo, before something peculiar in the tone made him sit up and face Attilio. “I believe you are capable of carrying me off.”

“Dio ne voglio,” was Attilio’s answer, “God forbid. The noise you would make would bring no end of trouble. But for that perhaps it would have

been better for me,” he added reflectively. “Whereas I have made up my mind that there should be nothing but good from our association. Yet, signore, you very nearly went away with us without any question at all, for our head pointed to seaward and you could have had no idea that I was coming in here. Confess, signore, you didn’t think of return then. I had only to hold the tiller straight another five minutes and I would have had you in my power.”

“You were afraid of the dogana galley, my friend,” said Cosmo as if arguing a point.

“Signore, this minute,” said Attilio with the utmost seriousness. “Wake up there,” he said in a raised undertone to his two men. “Take an oar, Pietro, and pull the boat to the foot of the tower.”

“There is also that old boatman,” said Cosmo.

“Hold,” said Attilio. “Him I will not land. They will be at his place in the morning, and then he tells his tale . . . unless he is dead. See forward there.”

A very subdued murmur arose in the bows and Attilio muttered, “Pietro would not talk to a dead man.”

“He is extremely feeble,” said Cosmo.

It appeared on Attilio’s enquiry that this encumbrance as he called him was just strong enough to be helped over the thwarts. Presently, sustained under the elbows, he joined Cosmo in the stern sheets, where they made him sit between them. He let his big hands lie in his lap. From time to time he shivered patiently.

“That wretch Barbone knows no pity,” observed Cosmo.

“I suppose he was the nearest he could get. What tyranny! The helpless are at the mercy of those fellows. He saved himself the trouble of going three doors farther.”

They both looked at the ancient frame that age had not shrivelled.

“A fine man once,” said Attilio in a low voice. “Can you hear me, vecchio?”

“Si, and see you too, but I don’t know your voice,” was the answer in a voice stronger than either of them expected, but betraying no sort of interest.

“They will certainly throw him into prison.” And to Cosmo’s indignant exclamation Attilio pointed out that the old man would be the only person they would be able to get hold of and he would have to pay for all the rest.

Cosmo expressed the opinion that he would not stay there long.

“Better for him to die under the open sky than in prison,” murmured Attilio in a gloomy voice. “Listen, old man, could you keep the boat straight at a star if I were to point you one?”

“I was at home in a boat before I could speak plainly,” was the answer, while the boatman raised his arm and let it rest on the tiller as if to prove that he had strength enough for that at least.

“I have my boat’s crew, signore. Let him do something for all Italy if it is with his last breath, that old Genoese. And now if you were only to take that bow oar you have been using so well only a few moments ago, I will pull stroke and we will make this boat fly.”

Cosmo felt the subdued vibration of this appeal without having paid any attention to the words. They required no answer. Attilio pressed him as though he had been arguing against objections. Surely he was no friend of tyranny or of Austrian oppressors and he wouldn’t refuse to serve a man whom some hidden power had thrown in his way. He, Attilio, had not sought him. He would have been content never to have seen him. He surely had nothing that could call him back on shore this very night, since he had not been more than three days in Genoa. No time for him to have affairs. The words poured out of his lips into Cosmo’s ear while the white-headed boatman sat still above the torrent of whispered speech, appearing to listen like a venerable judge. What could stand in the way of him lending his luck and the strength of his arm? Surely it couldn’t be love, since he was travelling alone.

“Enough,” said Cosmo, as if the word had been extorted from him by pain, but Attilio felt that his cause had been gained, though he hastened to apologize for the impropriety of the argument, and assure the milord

Inglese that nothing would be easier than to put him ashore in the course of the next day.

“What do you think, Excellency, there is my own native village not very far from Genoa on the Riviera di Ponente, and you will be amongst friends to carry out such orders as you may give, or pass you from one to another back to Genoa as fast as mules can climb or horses trot. And it would be the same from any point in Italy. They would get you into Genoa in disguise, or without disguise, and into the very house of Cantelucci, so that you could appear there without a soul knowing how you entered or how you came back.”

Cosmo, feeling a sudden relief, wondered that he should have found it in the mere resolution to go off secretly with only the clothes he stood up in, absolutely without money or anything of value on him, not even a watch, and without a hat, at the mere bidding of a man bound on some secret work, God knows where and for what object, and who had volunteered to him no statement except that he had cousins in every spot in Italy and a love affair with an ortolana. The enormous absurdity of it made him impatient to be doing, and upon his expressed desire to make a start Attilio, with the words, "You command here, signore," told his men it was time to be moving.

In less than half an hour the boat, with all her crew crouching at the bottom and using the oars for poling in the shallow water along the coast with infinite precaution to avoid knocks and bangs as though the boat, the oars, and everything in her were made of glass, had been moved far enough from the tower to have her nose put to the open sea. After the first few strokes Cosmo felt himself draw back again to the receding shore. But it was too late. He seemed to feel profoundly that he was not — perhaps no man was — a free agent. He felt a sort of fear, a faltering of all his limbs, as he swung back to his oar. Then his eyes caught the galley, indeed everybody's eyes in the boat were turned that way except the eyes of the ancient steersman, the white-headed figure in an unexpectedly erect attitude who, with hardly any breath left in his body and a mere helpless victim of other men's will, had a strange appearance of the man in command.

In less than ten minutes the galley became invisible, and even the long shadows of the jetties had sunk to the level of the sea. There was a moment when one of the men observed without excitement, "She's after us," but this remark provoked no answer and turned out to be mistaken, and for an hour longer Attilio, pulling stroke, watched the faint phosphorescent wake, the evanescent fire under the black smoothness of the sea, elusive like the tail of a comet amongst the dim reflections of the stars. Its straightness was the only proof of the silent helmsman with his arm resting along the tiller being still alive. Then he began to look about him, and presently, laying in his oar, relieved the old man at the tiller. He had to take his arm off it. The other never said a word.

The boat moved slowly now. The problem was to discover the awaiting felucca without lights and with her sails lowered. Several times Attilio stood up to have a look without being able to make out anything. He was growing uneasy. He spoke to Cosmo.



“I hope we haven’t passed her by. If we once get her between us and the land it will be hopeless to catch sight of her till the day breaks. Better rest on your oars.”

He remained standing himself. His eyes roamed to and fro patiently and suddenly he emitted a short laugh. “Why, there she is.”

He steered, still standing, while the others pulled gently. The old man, who had not emitted a sound, had slipped off the seat on to the stern sheets. Attilio said quietly, “Take your oars in,” and suddenly Cosmo felt the boat bump against the low side of the felucca, which he had never turned his head to see. No hail or even murmur came from her. She had no lights. Attilio’s voice said, “You first, signore,” and Cosmo, looking up, saw three motionless heads above the bulwarks. No word was spoken to him. He was not even looked at by those silent and shadowy men. The first sound he heard were the words, “Take care,” pronounced by Attilio in connection with getting the old boatman on board. Cosmo, standing aside, saw a group carry him over to the other side of the deck. While the sails were being hoisted he sat on the hatch and came to the very verge of believing himself invisible till suddenly Attilio stood by his side.

“Like this we will catch the very first breath of daybreak, and may a breeze follow it to take us out of sight of that town defiled by the Austrians and soon to be the prey of the nobles and the priests.” He paused. “So at least Cantelucci says. There are bed places below, if you want to take some rest, signore.”

“I am not sleepy,” said Cosmo. If no longer invisible, he could still feel disembodied, as it were. He was neither sleepy nor tired, nor hungry, nor even curious, as if altogether freed from the weaknesses of the body, and not indifferent but without apprehensions or speculations of any sort to disturb his composure as if of a fully informed wisdom. He did not seem to himself to weigh more than a feather. He was suffering the reaction of the upheaval of all his feelings and the endless contest of his thoughts and that sort of mental agony which had taken possession of him while he was descending the great staircase of the Palazzo under the eye of the Count de Montevesso. It was as though one of those fevers in which the victim watches his own delirium had left him irresponsible, like a sick man in his bed. Attilio went on:

“Cantelucci’s an experienced conspirator. He thinks that the force of the people is such that it would be like an uprising of the ground itself. May be,

but where is the man that would know how to use it?"

Cosmo let it go by like a problem that could await solution or as a matter of mere vain words. The night air did not stir, and Attilio changed his tone.

"They had their lines out ever since the calm began. We will have fish to eat in the morning. You will have to be one of ourselves for a time and observe the customs of the common people."

"Tell me, Attilio," Cosmo questioned, not widely but in a quiet, almost confidential tone, and laying his hand for the first time on the shoulder of that man only a little older than himself. "Tell me, what am I doing here?"

Attilio, the wanderer of the seas along the southern shores of the earth and the pupil of the hermit of the plains that lie under the constellation of the southern sky, smiled in the dark, a faint friendly gleam of white teeth in an over-shadowed face. But all the answer he made was:

"Who would dare say now that our stars have not come together? Come to sit at the stern, signore. I can find a rug to throw over a coil of rope for a seat. I am now the padrone of that felucca, but of course barring her appointed work you are entirely the master of her."

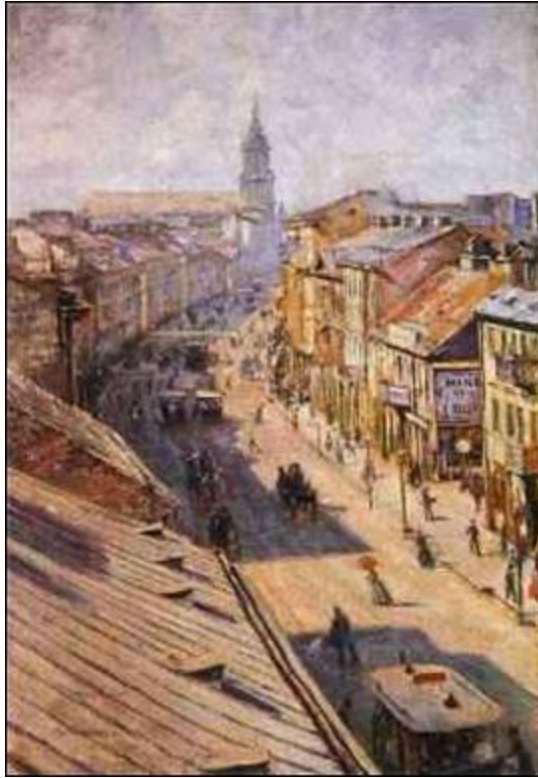
These words were said with a marked accent of politeness such as one uses for a courtesy formula. But he stopped for a moment on his way aft to point his finger on the deck.

"We have thrown a bit of canvas over him. Yes, that is the old man whose last bit of work was to steer a boat, and strange to think perhaps it had been done for Italy."

"Where is his star now?" said Cosmo, after looking down in silence for a time.

"Signore, it should be out," said Attilio with studied intonation. "But who will miss it out of the sky?"

# The Short Stories



*Nowy Zwiat, Warsaw, where Conrad lived with his parents in his earliest years*

## THE BLACK MATE



A good many years ago there were several ships loading at the Jetty, London Dock. I am speaking here of the 'eighties of the last century, of the time when London had plenty of fine ships in the docks, though not so many fine buildings in its streets.

The ships at the Jetty were fine enough; they lay one behind the other; and the *Sapphire*, third from the end, was as good as the rest of them, and nothing more. Each ship at the Jetty had, of course, her chief officer on board. So had every other ship in dock.

The policeman at the gates knew them all by sight, without being able to say at once, without thinking, to what ship any particular man belonged. As a matter of fact, the mates of the ships then lying in the London Dock were like the majority of officers in the Merchant Service — a steady, hard-working, staunch, un-romantic-looking set of men, belonging to various classes of society, but with the professional stamp obliterating the personal characteristics, which were not very marked anyhow.

This last was true of them all, with the exception of the mate of the *Sapphire*. Of him the policemen could not be in doubt. This one had a presence.

He was noticeable to them in the street from a great distance; and when in the morning he strode down the Jetty to his ship, the lumpers and the dock labourers rolling the bales and trundling the cases of cargo on their hand-trucks would remark to each other:

“Here’s the black mate coming along.”

That was the name they gave him, being a gross lot, who could have no appreciation of the man’s dignified bearing. And to call him black was the superficial impressionism of the ignorant.

Of course, Mr. Bunter, the mate of the *Sapphire*, was not black. He was no more black than you or I, and certainly as white as any chief mate of a ship in the whole of the Port of London. His complexion was of the sort that did not take the tan easily; and I happen to know that the poor fellow had had a month’s illness just before he joined the *Sapphire*.

From this you will perceive that I knew Bunter. Of course I knew him. And, what’s more, I knew his secret at the time, this secret which — never

mind just now. Returning to Bunter's personal appearance, it was nothing but ignorant prejudice on the part of the foreman stevedore to say, as he did in my hearing: "I bet he's a furriner of some sort." A man may have black hair without being set down for a Dago. I have known a West-country sailor, boatswain of a fine ship, who looked more Spanish than any Spaniard afloat I've ever met. He looked like a Spaniard in a picture.

Competent authorities tell us that this earth is to be finally the inheritance of men with dark hair and brown eyes. It seems that already the great majority of mankind is dark-haired in various shades. But it is only when you meet one that you notice how men with really black hair, black as ebony, are rare. Bunter's hair was absolutely black, black as a raven's wing. He wore, too, all his beard (clipped, but a good length all the same), and his eyebrows were thick and bushy. Add to this steely blue eyes, which in a fair-haired man would have been nothing so extraordinary, but in that sombre framing made a startling contrast, and you will easily understand that Bunter was noticeable enough.

If it had not been for the quietness of his movements, for the general soberness of his demeanour, one would have given him credit for a fiercely passionate nature.

Of course, he was not in his first youth; but if the expression "in the force of his age" has any meaning, he realized it completely. He was a tall man, too, though rather spare. Seeing him from his poop indefatigably busy with his duties, Captain Ashton, of the clipper ship *Elsinore*, lying just ahead of the *Sapphire*, remarked once to a friend that "Johns has got somebody there to hustle his ship along for him."

Captain Johns, master of the *Sapphire*, having commanded ships for many years, was well known without being much respected or liked. In the company of his fellows he was either neglected or chaffed. The chaffing was generally undertaken by Captain Ashton, a cynical and teasing sort of man. It was Captain Ashton who permitted himself the unpleasant joke of proclaiming once in company that "Johns is of the opinion that every sailor above forty years of age ought to be poisoned — shipmasters in actual command excepted."

It was in a City restaurant, where several well-known shipmasters were having lunch together. There was Captain Ashton, florid and jovial, in a large white waistcoat and with a yellow rose in his buttonhole; Captain Sellers in a sack-coat, thin and pale-faced, with his iron-gray hair tucked

behind his ears, and, but for the absence of spectacles, looking like an ascetical mild man of books; Captain Hell, a bluff sea-dog with hairy fingers, in blue serge and a black felt hat pushed far back off his crimson forehead. There was also a very young shipmaster, with a little fair moustache and serious eyes, who said nothing, and only smiled faintly from time to time.

Captain Johns, very much startled, raised his perplexed and credulous glance, which, together with a low and horizontally wrinkled brow, did not make a very intellectual *ensemble*. This impression was by no means mended by the slightly pointed form of his bald head.

Everybody laughed outright, and, thus guided, Captain Johns ended by smiling rather sourly, and attempted to defend himself. It was all very well to joke, but nowadays, when ships, to pay anything at all, had to be driven hard on the passage and in harbour, the sea was no place for elderly men. Only young men and men in their prime were equal to modern conditions of push and hurry. Look at the great firms: almost every single one of them was getting rid of men showing any signs of age. He, for one, didn't want any oldsters on board his ship.

And, indeed, in this opinion Captain Johns was not singular. There was at that time a lot of seamen, with nothing against them but that they were grizzled, wearing out the soles of their last pair of boots on the pavements of the City in the heart-breaking search for a berth.

Captain Johns added with a sort of ill-humoured innocence that from holding that opinion to thinking of poisoning people was a very long step.

This seemed final but Captain Ashton would not let go his joke.

"Oh, yes. I am sure you would. You said distinctly 'of no use.' What's to be done with men who are 'of no use?' You are a kind-hearted fellow, Johns. I am sure that if only you thought it over carefully you would consent to have them poisoned in some painless manner."

Captain Sellers twitched his thin, sinuous lips.

"Make ghosts of them," he suggested, pointedly.

At the mention of ghosts Captain Johns became shy, in his perplexed, sly, and unlovely manner.

Captain Ashton winked.

"Yes. And then perhaps you would get a chance to have a communication with the world of spirits. Surely the ghosts of seamen should haunt ships. Some of them would be sure to call on an old shipmate."

Captain Sellers remarked drily:

“Don’t raise his hopes like this. It’s cruel. He won’t see anything. You know, Johns, that nobody has ever seen a ghost.”

At this intolerable provocation Captain Johns came out of his reserve. With no perplexity whatever, but with a positive passion of credulity giving momentary lustre to his dull little eyes, he brought up a lot of authenticated instances. There were books and books full of instances. It was merest ignorance to deny supernatural apparitions. Cases were published every month in a special newspaper. Professor Cranks saw ghosts daily. And Professor Cranks was no small potatoes either. One of the biggest scientific men living. And there was that newspaper fellow — what’s his name? — who had a girl-ghost visitor. He printed in his paper things she said to him. And to say there were no ghosts after that!

“Why, they have been photographed! What more proof do you want?”

Captain Johns was indignant. Captain Bell’s lips twitched, but Captain Ashton protested now.

“For goodness’ sake don’t keep him going with that. And by the by, Johns, who’s that hairy pirate you’ve got for your new mate? Nobody in the Dock seems to have seen him before.”

Captain Johns, pacified by the change of subjects, answered simply that Willy, the tobacconist at the corner of Fenchurch Street, had sent him along.

Willy, his shop, and the very house in Fenchurch Street, I believe, are gone now. In his time, wearing a careworn, absent-minded look on his pasty face, Willy served with tobacco many southern-going ships out of the Port of London. At certain times of the day the shop would be full of shipmasters. They sat on casks, they lounged against the counter.

Many a youngster found his first lift in life there; many a man got a sorely needed berth by simply dropping in for four pennyworth of birds’-eye at an auspicious moment. Even Willy’s assistant, a redheaded, uninterested, delicate-looking young fellow, would hand you across the counter sometimes a bit of valuable intelligence with your box of cigarettes, in a whisper, lips hardly moving, thus: “The *Bellona*, South Dock. Second officer wanted. You may be in time for it if you hurry up.”

And didn’t one just fly!

“Oh, Willy sent him,” said Captain Ashton. “He’s a very striking man. If you were to put a red sash round his waist and a red handkerchief round his head he would look exactly like one of them buccaneering chaps that made

men walk the plank and carried women off into captivity. Look out, Johns, he don't cut your throat for you and run off with the *Sapphire*. What ship has he come out of last?"

Captain Johns, after looking up credulously as usual, wrinkled his brow, and said placidly that the man had seen better days. His name was Bunter.

"He's had command of a Liverpool ship, the *Samaria*, some years ago. He lost her in the Indian Ocean, and had his certificate suspended for a year. Ever since then he has not been able to get another command. He's been knocking about in the Western Ocean trade lately."

"That accounts for him being a stranger to everybody about the Docks," Captain Ashton concluded as they rose from table.

Captain Johns walked down to the Dock after lunch. He was short of stature and slightly bandy. His appearance did not inspire the generality of mankind with esteem; but it must have been otherwise with his employers. He had the reputation of being an uncomfortable commander, meticulous in trifles, always nursing a grievance of some sort and incessantly nagging. He was not a man to kick up a row with you and be done with it, but to say nasty things in a whining voice; a man capable of making one's life a perfect misery if he took a dislike to an officer.

That very evening I went to see Bunter on board, and sympathized with him on his prospects for the voyage. He was subdued. I suppose a man with a secret locked up in his breast loses his buoyancy. And there was another reason why I could not expect Bunter to show a great elasticity of spirits. For one thing he had been very seedy lately, and besides — but of that later.

Captain Johns had been on board that afternoon and had loitered and dodged about his chief mate in a manner which had annoyed Bunter exceedingly.

"What could he mean?" he asked with calm exasperation. "One would think he suspected I had stolen something and tried to see in what pocket I had stowed it away; or that somebody told him I had a tail and he wanted to find out how I managed to conceal it. I don't like to be approached from behind several times in one afternoon in that creepy way and then to be looked up at suddenly in front from under my elbow. Is it a new sort of peep-bo game? It doesn't amuse me. I am no longer a baby."

I assured him that if anyone were to tell Captain Johns that he — Bunter — had a tail, Johns would manage to get himself to believe the story in some mysterious manner. He would. He was suspicious and credulous to an



inconceivable degree. He would believe any silly tale, suspect any man of anything, and crawl about with it and ruminate the stuff, and turn it over and over in his mind in the most miserable, inwardly whining perplexity. He would take the meanest possible view in the end, and discover the meanest possible course of action by a sort of natural genius for that sort of thing.

Bunter also told me that the mean creature had crept all over the ship on his little, bandy legs, taking him along to grumble and whine to about a lot of trifles. Crept about the decks like a wretched insect — like a cockroach, only not so lively.

Thus did the self-possessed Bunter express himself with great disgust. Then, going on with his usual stately deliberation, made sinister by the frown of his jet-black eyebrows:

“And the fellow is mad, too. He tried to be sociable for a bit, and could find nothing else but to make big eyes at me, and ask me if I believed ‘in communication beyond the grave.’ Communication beyond — I didn’t know what he meant at first. I didn’t know what to say. ‘A very solemn subject, Mr. Bunter,’ says he. I’ve given a great deal of study to it.”

Had Johns lived on shore he would have been the predestined prey of fraudulent mediums; or even if he had had any decent opportunities between the voyages. Luckily for him, when in England, he lived somewhere far away in Leytonstone, with a maiden sister ten years older than himself, a fearsome virago twice his size, before whom he trembled. It was said she bullied him terribly in general; and in the particular instance of his spiritualistic leanings she had her own views.

These leanings were to her simply satanic. She was reported as having declared that, “With God’s help, she would prevent that fool from giving himself up to the Devils.” It was beyond doubt that Johns’ secret ambition was to get into personal communication with the spirits of the dead — if only his sister would let him. But she was adamant. I was told that while in London he had to account to her for every penny of the money he took with him in the morning, and for every hour of his time. And she kept the bankbook, too.

Bunter (he had been a wild youngster, but he was well connected; had ancestors; there was a family tomb somewhere in the home counties) — Bunter was indignant, perhaps on account of his own dead. Those steely-blue eyes of his flashed with positive ferocity out of that black-bearded

face. He impressed me — there was so much dark passion in his leisurely contempt.

“The cheek of the fellow! Enter into relations with... A mean little cad like this! It would be an impudent intrusion. He wants to enter!... What is it? A new sort of snobbishness or what?”

I laughed outright at this original view of spiritism — or whatever the ghost craze is called. Even Bunter himself condescended to smile. But it was an austere, quickly vanished smile. A man in his almost, I may say, tragic position couldn't be expected — you understand. He was really worried. He was ready eventually to put up with any dirty trick in the course of the voyage. A man could not expect much consideration should he find himself at the mercy of a fellow like Johns. A misfortune is a misfortune, and there's an end of it. But to be bored by mean, low-spirited, inane ghost stories in the Johns style, all the way out to Calcutta and back again, was an intolerable apprehension to be under. Spiritism was indeed a solemn subject to think about in that light. Dreadful, even!

Poor fellow! Little we both thought that before very long he himself... However, I could give him no comfort. I was rather appalled myself.

Bunter had also another annoyance that day. A confounded berthing master came on board on some pretence or other, but in reality, Bunter thought, simply impelled by an inconvenient curiosity — inconvenient to Bunter, that is. After some beating about the bush, that man suddenly said:

“I can't help thinking. I've seen you before somewhere, Mr. Mate. If I heard your name, perhaps Bunter — ”

That's the worst of a life with a mystery in it — he was much alarmed. It was very likely that the man had seen him before — worse luck to his excellent memory. Bunter himself could not be expected to remember every casual dock walloper he might have had to do with. Bunter brazened it out by turning upon the man, making use of that impressive, black-as-night sternness of expression his unusual hair furnished him with:

“My name's Bunter, sir. Does that enlighten your inquisitive intellect? And I don't ask what your name may be. I don't want to know. I've no use for it, sir. An individual who calmly tells me to my face that he is *not sure* if he has seen me before, either means to be impudent or is no better than a worm, sir. Yes, I said a worm — a blind worm!”

Brave Bunter. That was the line to take. He fairly drove the beggar out of the ship, as if every word had been a blow. But the pertinacity of that brass-

bound Paul Pry was astonishing. He cleared out of the ship, of course, before Bunter's ire, not saying anything, and only trying to cover up his retreat by a sickly smile. But once on the Jetty he turned deliberately round, and set himself to stare in dead earnest at the ship. He remained planted there like a mooring-post, absolutely motionless, and with his stupid eyes winking no more than a pair of cabin portholes.

What could Bunter do? It was awkward for him, you know. He could not go and put his head into the bread-locker. What he did was to take up a position abaft the mizzen-rigging, and stare back as unwinking as the other. So they remained, and I don't know which of them grew giddy first; but the man on the Jetty, not having the advantage of something to hold on to, got tired the soonest, flung his arm, giving the contest up, as it were, and went away at last.

Bunter told me he was glad the *Sapphire*, "that gem amongst ships" as he alluded to her sarcastically, was going to sea next day. He had had enough of the Dock. I understood his impatience. He had steeled himself against any possible worry the voyage might bring, though it is clear enough now that he was not prepared for the extraordinary experience that was awaiting him already, and in no other part of the world than the Indian Ocean itself; the very part of the world where the poor fellow had lost his ship and had broken his luck, as it seemed for good and all, at the same time.

As to his remorse in regard to a certain secret action of his life, well, I understand that a man of Bunter's fine character would suffer not a little. Still, between ourselves, and without the slightest wish to be cynical, it cannot be denied that with the noblest of us the fear of being found out enters for some considerable part into the composition of remorse. I didn't say this in so many words to Bunter, but, as the poor fellow harped a bit on it, I told him that there were skeletons in a good many honest cupboards, and that, as to his own particular guilt, it wasn't writ large on his face for everybody to see — so he needn't worry as to that. And besides, he would be gone to sea in about twelve hours from now.

He said there was some comfort in that thought, and went off then to spend his last evening for many months with his wife. For all his wildness, Bunter had made no mistake in his marrying. He had married a lady. A perfect lady. She was a dear little woman, too. As to her pluck, I, who know what times they had to go through, I cannot admire her enough for it. Real, hard-wearing every day and day after day pluck that only a woman is

capable of when she is of the right sort — the undismayed sort I would call it.

The black mate felt this parting with his wife more than any of the previous ones in all the years of bad luck. But she was of the undismayed kind, and showed less trouble in her gentle face than the black-haired, buccaneer-like, but dignified mate of the *Sapphire*. It may be that her conscience was less disturbed than her husband's. Of course, his life had no secret places for her; but a woman's conscience is somewhat more resourceful in finding good and valid excuses. It depends greatly on the person that needs them, too.

They had agreed that she should not come down to the Dock to see him off. "I wonder you care to look at me at all," said the sensitive man. And she did not laugh.

Bunter was very sensitive; he left her rather brusquely at the last. He got on board in good time, and produced the usual impression on the mud-pilot in the broken-down straw hat who took the *Sapphire* out of dock. The river-man was very polite to the dignified, striking-looking chief mate. "The five-inch manilla for the check-rope, Mr. — Bunter, thank you — Mr. Bunter, please." The sea-pilot who left the "gem of ships" heading comfortably down Channel off Dover told some of his friends that, this voyage, the *Sapphire* had for chief mate a man who seemed a jolly sight too good for old Johns. "Bunter's his name. I wonder where he's sprung from? Never seen him before in any ship I piloted in or out all these years. He's the sort of man you don't forget. You couldn't. A thorough good sailor, too. And won't old Johns just worry his head off! Unless the old fool should take fright at him — for he does not seem the sort of man that would let himself be put upon without letting you know what he thinks of you. And that's exactly what old Johns would be more afraid of than of anything else."

As this is really meant to be the record of a spiritualistic experience which came, if not precisely to Captain Johns himself, at any rate to his ship, there is no use in recording the other events of the passage out. It was an ordinary passage, the crew was an ordinary crew, the weather was of the usual kind. The black mate's quiet, sedate method of going to work had given a sober tone to the life of the ship. Even in gales of wind everything went on quietly somehow.

There was only one severe blow which made things fairly lively for all hands for full four-and-twenty hours. That was off the coast of Africa, after

passing the Cape of Good Hope. At the very height of it several heavy seas were shipped with no serious results, but there was a considerable smashing of breakable objects in the pantry and in the staterooms. Mr. Bunter, who was so greatly respected on board, found himself treated scurvily by the Southern Ocean, which, bursting open the door of his room like a ruffianly burglar, carried off several useful things, and made all the others extremely wet.

Later, on the same day, the Southern Ocean caused the *Sapphire* to lurch over in such an unrestrained fashion that the two drawers fitted under Mr. Bunter's sleeping-berth flew out altogether, spilling all their contents. They ought, of course, to have been locked, and Mr. Bunter had only to thank himself for what had happened. He ought to have turned the key on each before going out on deck.

His consternation was very great. The steward, who was paddling about all the time with swabs, trying to dry out the flooded cuddy, heard him exclaim "Hallo!" in a startled and dismayed tone. In the midst of his work the steward felt a sympathetic concern for the mate's distress.

Captain Johns was secretly glad when he heard of the damage. He was indeed afraid of his chief mate, as the sea-pilot had ventured to foretell, and afraid of him for the very reason the sea-pilot had put forward as likely.

Captain Johns, therefore, would have liked very much to hold that black mate of his at his mercy in some way or other. But the man was irreproachable, as near absolute perfection as could be. And Captain Johns was much annoyed, and at the same time congratulated himself on his chief officer's efficiency.

He made a great show of living sociably with him, on the principle that the more friendly you are with a man the more easily you may catch him tripping; and also for the reason that he wanted to have somebody who would listen to his stories of manifestations, apparitions, ghosts, and all the rest of the imbecile spook-lore. He had it all at his fingers' ends; and he spun those ghostly yarns in a persistent, colourless voice, giving them a futile turn peculiarly his own.

"I like to converse with my officers," he used to say. "There are masters that hardly ever open their mouths from beginning to end of a passage for fear of losing their dignity. What's that, after all — this bit of position a man holds!"

His sociability was most to be dreaded in the second dog-watch, because he was one of those men who grow lively towards the evening, and the officer on duty was unable then to find excuses for leaving the poop. Captain Johns would pop up the companion suddenly, and, sidling up in his creeping way to poor Bunter, as he walked up and down, would fire into him some spiritualistic proposition, such as:

“Spirits, male and female, show a good deal of refinement in a general way, don’t they?”

To which Bunter, holding his black-whiskered head high, would mutter:

“I don’t know.”

“Ah! that’s because you don’t want to. You are the most obstinate, prejudiced man I’ve ever met, Mr. Bunter. I told you you may have any book out of my bookcase. You may just go into my stateroom and help yourself to any volume.”

And if Bunter protested that he was too tired in his watches below to spare any time for reading, Captain Johns would smile nastily behind his back, and remark that of course some people needed more sleep than others to keep themselves fit for their work. If Mr. Bunter was afraid of not keeping properly awake when on duty at night, that was another matter.

“But I think you borrowed a novel to read from the second mate the other day — a trashy pack of lies,” Captain Johns sighed. “I am afraid you are not a spiritually minded man, Mr. Bunter. That’s what’s the matter.”

Sometimes he would appear on deck in the middle of the night, looking very grotesque and bandy-legged in his sleeping suit. At that sight the persecuted Bunter would wring his hands stealthily, and break out into moisture all over his forehead. After standing sleepily by the binnacle, scratching himself in an unpleasant manner, Captain Johns was sure to start on some aspect or other of his only topic.

He would, for instance, discourse on the improvement of morality to be expected from the establishment of general and close intercourse with the spirits of the departed. The spirits, Captain Johns thought, would consent to associate familiarly with the living if it were not for the unbelief of the great mass of mankind. He himself would not care to have anything to do with a crowd that would not believe in his — Captain Johns’ — existence. Then why should a spirit? This was asking too much.

He went on breathing hard by the binnacle and trying to reach round his shoulder-blades; then, with a thick, drowsy severity, declared:

“Incredulity, sir, is the evil of the age!”

It rejected the evidence of Professor Cranks and of the journalist chap. It resisted the production of photographs.

For Captain Johns believed firmly that certain spirits had been photographed. He had read something of it in the papers. And the idea of it having been done had got a tremendous hold on him, because his mind was not critical. Bunter said afterwards that nothing could be more weird than this little man, swathed in a sleeping suit three sizes too large for him, shuffling with excitement in the moonlight near the wheel, and shaking his fist at the serene sea.

“Photographs! photographs!” he would repeat, in a voice as creaky as a rusty hinge.

The very helmsman just behind him got uneasy at that performance, not being capable of understanding exactly what the “old man was kicking up a row with the mate about.”

Then Johns, after calming down a bit, would begin again.

“The sensitised plate can’t lie. No, sir.”

Nothing could be more funny than this ridiculous little man’s conviction — his dogmatic tone. Bunter would go on swinging up and down the poop like a deliberate, dignified pendulum. He said not a word. But the poor fellow had not a trifle on his conscience, as you know; and to have imbecile ghosts rammed down his throat like this on top of his own worry nearly drove him crazy. He knew that on many occasions he was on the verge of lunacy, because he could not help indulging in half-delirious visions of Captain Johns being picked up by the scruff of the neck and dropped over the taffrail into the ship’s wake — the sort of thing no sane sailorman would think of doing to a cat or any other animal, anyhow. He imagined him bobbing up — a tiny black speck left far astern on the moonlit ocean.

I don’t think that even at the worst moments Bunter really desired to drown Captain Johns. I fancy that all his disordered imagination longed for was merely to stop the ghostly inanity of the skipper’s talk.

But, all the same, it was a dangerous form of self-indulgence. Just picture to yourself that ship in the Indian Ocean, on a clear, tropical night, with her sails full and still, the watch on deck stowed away out of sight; and on her poop, flooded with moonlight, the stately black mate walking up and down with measured, dignified steps, preserving an awful silence, and that

grotesquely mean little figure in striped flannelette alternately creaking and droning of “personal intercourse beyond the grave.”

It makes me creepy all over to think of. And sometimes the folly of Captain Johns would appear clothed in a sort of weird utilitarianism. How useful it would be if the spirits of the departed could be induced to take a practical interest in the affairs of the living! What a help, say, to the police, for instance, in the detection of crime! The number of murders, at any rate, would be considerably reduced, he guessed with an air of great sagacity. Then he would give way to grotesque discouragement.

Where was the use of trying to communicate with people that had no faith, and more likely than not would scorn the offered information? Spirits had their feelings. They were *all* feelings in a way. But he was surprised at the forbearance shown towards murderers by their victims. That was the sort of apparition that no guilty man would dare to pooh-pooh. And perhaps the undiscovered murderers — whether believing or not — were haunted. They wouldn't be likely to boast about it, would they?

“For myself,” he pursued, in a sort of vindictive, malevolent whine, “if anybody murdered me I would not let him forget it. I would wither him up — I would terrify him to death.”

The idea of his skipper's ghost terrifying anyone was so ludicrous that the black mate, little disposed to mirth as he was, could not help giving vent to a weary laugh.

And this laugh, the only acknowledgment of a long and earnest discourse, offended Captain Johns.

“What's there to laugh at in this conceited manner, Mr. Bunter?” he snarled. “Supernatural visitations have terrified better men than you. Don't you allow me enough soul to make a ghost of?”

I think it was the nasty tone that caused Bunter to stop short and turn about.

“I shouldn't wonder,” went on the angry fanatic of spiritism, “if you weren't one of them people that take no more account of a man than if he were a beast. You would be capable, I don't doubt, to deny the possession of an immortal soul to your own father.”

And then Bunter, being bored beyond endurance, and also exasperated by the private worry, lost his self-possession.

He walked up suddenly to Captain Johns, and, stooping a little to look close into his face, said, in a low, even tone:



“You don’t know what a man like me is capable of.”

Captain Johns threw his head back, but was too astonished to budge. Bunter resumed his walk; and for a long time his measured footsteps and the low wash of the water alongside were the only sounds which troubled the silence brooding over the great waters. Then Captain Johns cleared his throat uneasily, and, after sidling away towards the companion for greater safety, plucked up enough courage to retreat under an act of authority:

“Raise the starboard clew of the mainsail, and lay the yards dead square, Mr. Bunter. Don’t you see the wind is nearly right aft?”

Bunter at once answered “Ay, ay, sir,” though there was not the slightest necessity to touch the yards, and the wind was well out on the quarter. While he was executing the order Captain Johns hung on the companion-steps, growling to himself: “Walk this poop like an admiral and don’t even notice when the yards want trimming!” — loud enough for the helmsman to overhear. Then he sank slowly backwards out of the man’s sight; and when he reached the bottom of the stairs he stood still and thought.

“He’s an awful ruffian, with all his gentlemanly airs. No more gentleman mates for me.”

Two nights afterwards he was slumbering peacefully in his berth, when a heavy thumping just above his head (a well-understood signal that he was wanted on deck) made him leap out of bed, broad awake in a moment.

“What’s up?” he muttered, running out barefooted. On passing through the cabin he glanced at the clock. It was the middle watch. “What on earth can the mate want me for?” he thought.

Bolting out of the companion, he found a clear, dewy moonlit night and a strong, steady breeze. He looked around wildly. There was no one on the poop except the helmsman, who addressed him at once.

“It was me, sir. I let go the wheel for a second to stamp over your head. I am afraid there’s something wrong with the mate.”

“Where’s he got to?” asked the captain sharply.

The man, who was obviously nervous, said:

“The last I saw of him was as he-fell down the port poop-ladder.”

“Fell down the poop-ladder! What did he do that for? What made him?”

“I don’t know, sir. He was walking the port side. Then just as he turned towards me to come aft...”

“You saw him?” interrupted the captain.

“I did. I was looking at him. And I heard the crash, too — something awful. Like the mainmast going overboard. It was as if something had struck him.”

Captain Johns became very uneasy and alarmed. “Come,” he said sharply. “Did anybody strike him? What did you see?”

“Nothing, sir, so help me! There was nothing to see. He just gave a little sort of hallo! threw his hands before him, and over he went — crash. I couldn’t hear anything more, so I just let go the wheel for a second to call you up.”

“You’re scared!” said Captain Johns. “I am, sir, straight!”

Captain Johns stared at him. The silence of his ship driving on her way seemed to contain a danger — a mystery. He was reluctant to go and look for his mate himself, in the shadows of the main-deck, so quiet, so still.

All he did was to advance to the break of the poop, and call for the watch. As the sleepy men came trooping aft, he shouted to them fiercely:

“Look at the foot of the port poop-ladder, some of you! See the mate lying there?”

Their startled exclamations told him immediately that they did see him. Somebody even screeched out emotionally: “He’s dead!”

Mr. Bunter was laid in his bunk and when the lamp in his room was lit he looked indeed as if he were dead, but it was obvious also that he was breathing yet. The steward had been roused out, the second mate called and sent on deck to look after the ship, and for an hour or so Captain Johns devoted himself silently to the restoring of consciousness. Mr. Bunter at last opened his eyes, but he could not speak. He was dazed and inert. The steward bandaged a nasty scalp-wound while Captain Johns held an additional light. They had to cut away a lot of Mr. Bunter’s jet-black hair to make a good dressing. This done, and after gazing for a while at their patient, the two left the cabin.

“A rum go, this, steward,” said Captain Johns in the passage.

“Yessir.”

“A sober man that’s right in his head does not fall down a poop-ladder like a sack of potatoes. The ship’s as steady as a church.”

“Yessir. Fit of some kind, I shouldn’t wonder.”

“Well, I should. He doesn’t look as if he were subject to fits and giddiness. Why, the man’s in the prime of life. I wouldn’t have another kind of mate — not if I knew it. You don’t think he has a private store of liquor,

do you, eh? He seemed to me a bit strange in his manner several times lately. Off his feed, too, a bit, I noticed.”

“Well, sir, if he ever had a bottle or two of grog in his cabin, that must have gone a long time ago. I saw him throw some broken glass overboard after the last gale we had; but that didn’t amount to anything. Anyway, sir, you couldn’t call Mr. Bunter a drinking man.”

“No,” conceded the captain, reflectively. And the steward, locking the pantry door, tried to escape out of the passage, thinking he could manage to snatch another hour of sleep before it was time for him to turn out for the day.

Captain Johns shook his head.

“There’s some mystery there.”

“There’s special Providence that he didn’t crack his head like an eggshell on the quarter-deck mooring-bits, sir. The men tell me he couldn’t have missed them by more than an inch.”

And the steward vanished skilfully.

Captain Johns spent the rest of the night and the whole of the ensuing day between his own room and that of the mate.

In his own room he sat with his open hands reposing on his knees, his lips pursed up, and the horizontal furrows on his forehead marked very heavily. Now and then raising his arm by a slow, as if cautious movement, he scratched lightly the top of his bald head. In the mate’s room he stood for long periods of time with his hand to his lips, gazing at the half-conscious man.

For three days Mr. Bunter did not say a single word. He looked at people sensibly enough but did not seem to be able to hear any questions put to him. They cut off some more of his hair and swathed his head in wet cloths. He took some nourishment, and was made as comfortable as possible. At dinner on the third day the second mate remarked to the captain, in connection with the affair:

“These half-round brass plates on the steps of the poop-ladders are beastly dangerous things!”

“Are they?” retorted Captain Johns, sourly. “It takes more than a brass plate to account for an able-bodied man crashing down in this fashion like a felled ox.”

The second mate was impressed by that view. There was something in that, he thought.

“And the weather fine, everything dry, and the ship going along as steady as a church!” pursued Captain Johns, gruffly.

As Captain Johns continued to look extremely sour, the second mate did not open his lips any more during the dinner. Captain Johns was annoyed and hurt by an innocent remark, because the fitting of the aforesaid brass plates had been done at his suggestion only the voyage before, in order to smarten up the appearance of the poop-ladders.

On the fourth day Mr. Bunter looked decidedly better; very languid yet, of course, but he heard and understood what was said to him, and even could say a few words in a feeble voice.

Captain Johns, coming in, contemplated him attentively, without much visible sympathy.

“Well, can you give us your account of this accident, Mr. Bunter?”

Bunter moved slightly his bandaged head, and fixed his cold blue stare on Captain Johns’ face, as if taking stock and appraising the value of every feature; the perplexed forehead, the credulous eyes, the inane droop of the mouth. And he gazed so long that Captain Johns grew restive, and looked over his shoulder at the door.

“No accident,” breathed out Bunter, in a peculiar tone.

“You don’t mean to say you’ve got the falling sickness,” said Captain Johns. “How would you call it signing as chief mate of a clipper ship with a thing like that on you?”

Bunter answered him only by a sinister look. The skipper shuffled his feet a little.

“Well, what made you have that tumble, then?”

Bunter raised himself a little, and, looking straight into Captain Johns’ eyes said, in a very distinct whisper:

“You — were — right!”

He fell back and closed his eyes. Not a word more could Captain Johns get out of him; and, the steward coming into the cabin, the skipper withdrew.

But that very night, unobserved, Captain Johns, opening the door cautiously, entered again the mate’s cabin. He could wait no longer. The suppressed eagerness, the excitement expressed in all his mean, creeping little person, did not escape the chief mate, who was lying awake, looking frightfully pulled down and perfectly impassive.

“You are coming to gloat over me, I suppose,” said Bunter without moving, and yet making a palpable hit.

“Bless my soul!” exclaimed Captain Johns with a start, and assuming a sobered demeanour. “There’s a thing to say!”

“Well, gloat, then! You and your ghosts, you’ve managed to get over a live man.”

This was said by Bunter without stirring, in a low voice, and with not much expression.

“Do you mean to say,” inquired Captain Johns, in awe-struck whisper, “that you had a supernatural experience that night? You saw an apparition, then, on board my ship?”

Reluctance, shame, disgust, would have been visible on poor Bunter’s countenance if the great part of it had not been swathed up in cotton-wool and bandages. His ebony eyebrows, more sinister than ever amongst all that lot of white linen, came together in a frown as he made a mighty effort to say:

“Yes, I have seen.”

The wretchedness in his eyes would have awakened the compassion of any other man than Captain Johns. But Captain Johns was all agog with triumphant excitement. He was just a little bit frightened, too. He looked at that unbelieving scoffer laid low, and did not even dimly guess at his profound, humiliating distress. He was not generally capable of taking much part in the anguish of his fellow-creatures. This time, moreover, he was excessively anxious to know what had happened. Fixing his credulous eyes on the bandaged head, he asked, trembling slightly:

“And did it — did it knock you down?”

“Come! am I the sort of man to be knocked down by a ghost?” protested Bunter in a little stronger tone. “Don’t you remember what you said yourself the other night? Better men than me — — — Ha! you’ll have to look a long time before you find a better man for a mate of your ship.”

Captain Johns pointed a solemn finger at Bunter’s bedplace.

“You’ve been terrified,” he said. “That’s what’s the matter. You’ve been terrified. Why, even the man at the wheel was scared, though he couldn’t see anything. He *felt* the supernatural. You are punished for your incredulity, Mr. Bunter. You were terrified.”

“And suppose I was,” said Bunter. “Do you know what I had seen? Can you conceive the sort of ghost that would haunt a man like me? Do you

think it was a ladyish, afternoon call, another-cup-of-tea-please apparition that visits your Professor Cranks and that journalist chap you are always talking about? No; I can't tell you what it was like. Every man has his own ghosts. You couldn't conceive..."

Bunter stopped, out of breath; and Captain Johns remarked, with the glow of inward satisfaction reflected in his tone:

"I've always thought you were the sort of man that was ready for anything; from pitch-and-toss to wilful murder, as the saying goes. Well, well! So you were terrified."

"I stepped back," said Bunter, curtly. "I don't remember anything else."

"The man at the wheel told me you went backwards as if something had hit you."

"It was a sort of inward blow," explained Bunter. "Something too deep for you, Captain Johns, to understand. Your life and mine haven't been the same. Aren't you satisfied to see me converted?"

"And you can't tell me any more?" asked Captain Johns, anxiously.

"No, I can't. I wouldn't. It would be no use if I did. That sort of experience must be gone through. Say I am being punished. Well, I take my punishment, but talk of it I won't."

"Very well," said Captain Johns; "you won't. But, mind, I can draw my own conclusions from that."

"Draw what you like; but be careful what you say, sir. You don't terrify me. *You* aren't a ghost."

"One word. Has it any connection with what you said to me on that last night, when we had a talk together on spiritualism?"

Bunter looked weary and puzzled.

"What did I say?"

"You told me that I couldn't know what a man like you was capable of."

"Yes, yes. Enough!"

"Very good. I am fixed, then," remarked Captain Johns. "All I say is that I am jolly glad not to be you, though I would have given almost anything for the privilege of personal communication with the world of spirits. Yes, sir, but not in that way."

Poor Bunter moaned pitifully.

"It has made me feel twenty years older."

Captain Johns retired quietly. He was delighted to observe this overbearing ruffian humbled to the dust by the moralizing agency of the

spirits. The whole occurrence was a source of pride and gratification; and he began to feel a sort of regard for his chief mate.

It is true that in further interviews Bunter showed himself very mild and deferential. He seemed to cling to his captain for spiritual protection. He used to send for him, and say, "I feel so nervous," and Captain Johns would stay patiently for hours in the hot little cabin, and feel proud of the call.

For Mr. Bunter was ill, and could not leave his berth for a good many days. He became a convinced spiritualist, not enthusiastically — that could hardly have been expected from him — but in a grim, unshakable way. He could not be called exactly friendly to the disembodied inhabitants of our globe, as Captain Johns was. But he was now a firm, if gloomy, recruit of spiritualism.

One afternoon, as the ship was already well to the north in the Gulf of Bengal, the steward knocked at the door of the captain's cabin, and said, without opening it:

"The mate asks if you could spare him a moment, sir. He seems to be in a state in there."

Captain Johns jumped up from the couch at once.

"Yes. Tell him I am coming."

He thought: Could it be possible there had been another spiritual manifestation — in the daytime, too!

He revelled in the hope. It was not exactly that, however. Still, Bunter, whom he saw sitting collapsed in a chair — he had been up for several days, but not on deck as yet — poor Bunter had something startling enough to communicate. His hands covered his face. His legs were stretched straight out, dismally.

"What's the news now?" croaked Captain Johns, not unkindly, because in truth it always pleased him to see Bunter — as he expressed it — tamed.

"News!" exclaimed the crushed sceptic through his iands. "Ay, news enough, Captain Johns. Who will be able to deny the awfulness, the genuineness? Another man would have dropped dead. You want to know what I had seen. All I can tell you is that since I've seen it my hair is turning white."

Bunter detached his hands from his face, and they hung on each side of his chair as if dead. He looked broken in the dusky cabin.

"You don't say!" stammered out Captain Johns. "Turned white! Hold on a bit! I'll light the lamp!"

When the lamp was lit, the startling phenomenon could be seen plainly enough. As if the dread, the horror, the anguish of the supernatural were being exhaled through the pores of his skin, a sort of silvery mist seemed to cling to the cheeks and the head of the mate. His short beard, his cropped hair, were growing, not black, but gray — almost white.

When Mr. Bunter, thin-faced and shaky, came on deck for duty, he was clean-shaven, and his head was white. The hands were awe-struck. “Another man,” they whispered to each other. It was generally and mysteriously agreed that the mate had “seen something,” with the exception of the man at the wheel at the time, who maintained that the mate was “struck by something.”

This distinction hardly amounted to a difference. On the other hand, everybody admitted that, after he picked up his strength a bit, he seemed even smarter in his movements than before.

One day in Calcutta, Captain Johns, pointing out to a visitor his white-headed chief mate standing by the main-hatch, was heard to say oracularly:

“That man’s in the prime of life.”

Of course, while Bunter was away, I called regularly on Mrs. Bunter every Saturday, just to see whether she had any use for my services. It was understood I would do that. She had just his half-pay to live on — it amounted to about a pound a week. She had taken one room in a quiet little square in the East End.

And this was affluence to what I had heard that the couple were reduced to for a time after Bunter had to give up the Western Ocean trade — he used to go as mate of all sorts of hard packets after he lost his ship and his luck together — it was affluence to that time when Bunter would start at seven o’clock in the morning with but a glass of hot water and a crust of dry bread. It won’t stand thinking about, especially for those who know Mrs. Bunter. I had seen something of them, too, at that time; and it just makes me shudder to remember what that born lady had to put up with. Enough!

Dear Mrs. Bunter used to worry a good deal after the *Sapphire* left for Calcutta. She would say to me: “It must be so awful for poor Winston” — Winston is Bunter’s name — and I tried to comfort her the best I could. Afterwards, she got some small children to teach in a family, and was half the day with them, and the occupation was good for her.

In the very first letter she had from Calcutta, Bunter told her he had had a fall down the poop-ladder, and cut his head, but no bones broken, thank



God. That was all. Of course, she had other letters from him, but that vagabond Bunter never gave me a scratch of the pen the solid eleven months. I supposed, naturally, that everything was going on all right. Who could imagine what was happening?

Then one day dear Mrs. Bunter got a letter from a legal firm in the City, advising her that her uncle was dead — her old curmudgeon of an uncle — a retired stockbroker, a heartless, petrified antiquity that had lasted on and on. He was nearly ninety, I believe; and if I were to meet his venerable ghost this minute, I would try to take him by the throat and strangle him.

The old beast would never forgive his niece for marrying Bunter; and years afterwards, when people made a point of letting him know that she was in London, pretty nearly starving at forty years of age, he only said: “Serve the little fool right!” I believe he meant her to starve. And, lo and behold, the old cannibal died intestate, with no other relatives but that very identical little fool. The Bunters were wealthy people now.

Of course, Mrs. Bunter wept as if her heart would break. In any other woman it would have been mere hypocrisy. Naturally, too, she wanted to cable the news to her Winston in Calcutta, but I showed her, *Gazette* in hand, that the ship was on the homeward-bound list for more than a week already. So we sat down to wait, and talked meantime of dear old Winston every day. There were just one hundred such days before the *Sapphire* got reported “All well” in the chops of the Channel by an incoming mailboat.

“I am going to Dunkirk to meet him,” says she. The *Sapphire* had a cargo of jute for Dunkirk. Of course, I had to escort the dear lady in the quality of her “ingenious friend.” She calls me “our ingenious friend” to this day; and I’ve observed some people — strangers — looking hard at me, for the signs of the ingenuity, I suppose.

After settling Mrs. Bunter in a good hotel in Dunkirk, I walked down to the docks — late afternoon it was — and what was my surprise to see the ship actually fast alongside. Either Johns or Bunter, or both, must have been driving her hard up Channel. Anyway, she had been in since the day before last, and her crew was already paid off. I met two of her apprenticed boys going off home on leave with their dunnage on a Frenchman’s barrow, as happy as larks, and I asked them if the mate was on board.

“There he is, on the quay, looking at the moorings,” says one of the youngsters as he skipped past me.

You may imagine the shock to my feelings when I beheld his white head. I could only manage to tell him that his wife was at an hotel in town. He left me at once, to go and get his hat on board. I was mightily surprised by the smartness of his movements as he hurried up the gangway.

Whereas the black mate struck people as deliberate, and strangely stately in his gait for a man in the prime of life, this white-headed chap seemed the most wonderfully alert of old men. I don't suppose Bunter was any quicker on his pins than before. It was the colour of the hair that made all the difference in one's judgment.

The same with his eyes. Those eyes, that looked at you so steely, so fierce, and so fascinating out of a bush of a buccaneer's black hair, now had an innocent almost boyish expression in their good-humoured brightness under those white eyebrows.

I led him without any delay into Mrs. Bunter's private sitting-room. After she had dropped a tear over the late cannibal, given a hug to her Winston, and told him that he must grow his moustache again, the dear lady tucked her feet upon the sofa, and I got out of Bunter's way.

He started at once to pace the room, waving his long arms. He worked himself into a regular frenzy, and tore Johns limb from limb many times over that evening.

"Fell down? Of course I fell down, by slipping backwards on that fool's patent brass plates. 'Pon my word, I had been walking that poop in charge of the ship, and I didn't know whether I was in the Indian Ocean or in the moon. I was crazy. My head spun round and round with sheer worry. I had made my last application of your chemist's wonderful stuff." (This to me.) "All the store of bottles you gave me got smashed when those drawers fell out in the last gale. I had been getting some dry things to change, when I heard the cry: 'All hands on deck!' and made one jump of it, without even pushing them in properly. Ass! When I came back and saw the broken glass and the mess, I felt ready to faint.

"No; look here — deception is bad; but not to be able to keep it up after one has been forced into it. You know that since I've been squeezed out of the Western Ocean packets by younger men, just on account of my grizzled muzzle — you know how much chance I had to ever get a ship. And not a soul to turn to. We have been a lonely couple, we two — she threw away everything for me — and to see her want a piece of dry bread — — —"

He banged with his fist fit to split the Frenchman's table in two.

“I would have turned a sanguinary pirate for her, let alone cheating my way into a berth by dyeing my hair. So when you came to me with your chemist’s wonderful stuff — — —”

He checked himself.

“By the way, that fellow’s got a fortune when he likes to pick it up. It is a wonderful stuff — you tell him salt water can do nothing to it. It stays on as long as your hair will.”

“All right,” I said. “Go on.”

Thereupon he went for Johns again with a fury that frightened his wife, and made me laugh till I cried.

“Just you try to think what it would have meant to be at the mercy of the meanest creature that ever commanded a ship! Just fancy what a life that crawling Johns would have led me! And I knew that in a week or so the white hair would begin to show. And the crew. Did you ever think of that? To be shown up as a low fraud before all hands. What a life for me till we got to Calcutta! And once there — kicked out, of course. Half-pay stopped. Annie here alone without a penny — starving; and I on the other side of the earth, ditto. You see?

“I thought of shaving twice a day. But could I shave my head, too? No way — no way at all. Unless I dropped Johns overboard; and even then — — —

“Do you wonder now that with all these things boiling in my head I didn’t know where I was putting down my foot that night? I just felt myself falling — then crash, and all dark.

“When I came to myself that bang on the head seemed to have steadied my wits somehow. I was so sick of everything that for two days I wouldn’t speak to anyone. They thought it was a slight concussion of the brain. Then the idea dawned upon me as I was looking at that ghost-ridden, wretched fool. ‘Ah, you love ghosts,’ I thought. ‘Well, you shall have something from beyond the grave.’

“I didn’t even trouble to invent a story. I couldn’t imagine a ghost if I wanted to. I wasn’t fit to lie connectedly if I had tried. I just bulled him on to it. Do you know, he got, quite by himself, a notion that at some time or other I had done somebody to death in some way, and that — — —”

“Oh, the horrible man!” cried Mrs. Bunter from the sofa. There was a silence.

“And didn’t he bore my head off on the home passage!” began Bunter again in a weary voice. “He loved me. He was proud of me. I was converted. I had had a manifestation. Do you know what he was after? He wanted me and him ‘to make a *seance*,’ in his own words, and to try to call up that ghost (the one that had turned my hair white — the ghost of my supposed victim), and, as he said, talk it over with him — the ghost — in a friendly way.

“‘Or else, Bunter,’ he says, ‘you may get another manifestation when you least expect it, and tumble overboard perhaps, or something. You ain’t really safe till we pacify the spirit-world in some way.’

“Can you conceive a lunatic like that? No — say?”

I said nothing. But Mrs. Bunter did, in a very decided tone.

“Winston, I don’t want you to go on board that ship again any more.”

“My dear,” says he, “I have all my things on board yet.”

“You don’t want the things. Don’t go near that ship at all.”

He stood still; then, dropping his eyes with a faint smile, said slowly, in a dreamy voice:

“The haunted ship.”

“And your last,” I added.

We carried him off, as he stood, by the night train. He was very quiet; but crossing the Channel, as we two had a smoke on deck, he turned to me suddenly, and, grinding his teeth, whispered:

“He’ll never know how near he was being dropped overboard!”

He meant Captain Johns. I said nothing.

But Captain Johns, I understand, made a great to-do about the disappearance of his chief mate. He set the French police scouring the country for the body. In the end, I fancy he got word from his owners’ office to drop all this fuss — that it was all right. I don’t suppose he ever understood anything of that mysterious occurrence.

To this day he tries at times (he’s retired now, and his conversation is not very coherent) — he tries to tell the story of a black mate he once had, “a murderous, gentlemanly ruffian, with raven-black hair which turned white all at once in consequence of a manifestation from beyond the grave.” An avenging apparition. What with reference to black and white hair, to poop-ladders, and to his own feelings and views, it is difficult to make head or tail of it. If his sister (she’s very vigorous still) should be present she cuts all this short — peremptorily:

“Don’t you mind what he says. He’s got devils on the brain.”



## *THE IDIOTS*



We were driving along the road from Treguier to Kervanda. We passed at a smart trot between the hedges topping an earth wall on each side of the road; then at the foot of the steep ascent before Ploumar the horse dropped into a walk, and the driver jumped down heavily from the box. He flicked his whip and climbed the incline, stepping clumsily uphill by the side of the carriage, one hand on the footboard, his eyes on the ground. After a while he lifted his head, pointed up the road with the end of the whip, and said —

“The idiot!”

The sun was shining violently upon the undulating surface of the land. The rises were topped by clumps of meagre trees, with their branches showing high on the sky as if they had been perched upon stilts. The small fields, cut up by hedges and stone walls that zig-zagged over the slopes, lay in rectangular patches of vivid greens and yellows, resembling the unskilful daubs of a naive picture. And the landscape was divided in two by the white streak of a road stretching in long loops far away, like a river of dust crawling out of the hills on its way to the sea.

“Here he is,” said the driver, again.

In the long grass bordering the road a face glided past the carriage at the level of the wheels as we drove slowly by. The imbecile face was red, and the bullet head with close-cropped hair seemed to lie alone, its chin in the dust. The body was lost in the bushes growing thick along the bottom of the deep ditch.

It was a boy’s face. He might have been sixteen, judging from the size — perhaps less, perhaps more. Such creatures are forgotten by time, and live untouched by years till death gathers them up into its compassionate bosom; the faithful death that never forgets in the press of work the most insignificant of its children.

“Ah! there’s another,” said the man, with a certain satisfaction in his tone, as if he had caught sight of something expected.

There was another. That one stood nearly in the middle of the road in the blaze of sunshine at the end of his own short shadow. And he stood with hands pushed into the opposite sleeves of his long coat, his head sunk

between the shoulders, all hunched up in the flood of heat. From a distance he had the aspect of one suffering from intense cold.

“Those are twins,” explained the driver.

The idiot shuffled two paces out of the way and looked at us over his shoulder when we brushed past him. The glance was unseeing and staring, a fascinated glance; but he did not turn to look after us. Probably the image passed before the eyes without leaving any trace on the misshapen brain of the creature. When we had topped the ascent I looked over the hood. He stood in the road just where we had left him.

The driver clambered into his seat, clicked his tongue, and we went downhill. The brake squeaked horribly from time to time. At the foot he eased off the noisy mechanism and said, turning half round on his box —

“We shall see some more of them by-and-by.”

“More idiots? How many of them are there, then?” I asked.

“There’s four of them — children of a farmer near Ploumar here. . . . The parents are dead now,” he added, after a while. “The grandmother lives on the farm. In the daytime they knock about on this road, and they come home at dusk along with the cattle. . . . It’s a good farm.”

We saw the other two: a boy and a girl, as the driver said. They were dressed exactly alike, in shapeless garments with petticoat-like skirts. The imperfect thing that lived within them moved those beings to howl at us from the top of the bank, where they sprawled amongst the tough stalks of furze. Their cropped black heads stuck out from the bright yellow wall of countless small blossoms. The faces were purple with the strain of yelling; the voices sounded blank and cracked like a mechanical imitation of old people’s voices; and suddenly ceased when we turned into a lane.

I saw them many times in my wandering about the country. They lived on that road, drifting along its length here and there, according to the inexplicable impulses of their monstrous darkness. They were an offence to the sunshine, a reproach to empty heaven, a blight on the concentrated and purposeful vigour of the wild landscape. In time the story of their parents shaped itself before me out of the listless answers to my questions, out of the indifferent words heard in wayside inns or on the very road those idiots haunted. Some of it was told by an emaciated and sceptical old fellow with a tremendous whip, while we trudged together over the sands by the side of a two-wheeled cart loaded with dripping seaweed. Then at other times other people confirmed and completed the story: till it stood at last before me, a

tale formidable and simple, as they always are, those disclosures of obscure trials endured by ignorant hearts.

When he returned from his military service Jean-Pierre Bacadou found the old people very much aged. He remarked with pain that the work of the farm was not satisfactorily done. The father had not the energy of old days. The hands did not feel over them the eye of the master. Jean-Pierre noted with sorrow that the heap of manure in the courtyard before the only entrance to the house was not so large as it should have been. The fences were out of repair, and the cattle suffered from neglect. At home the mother was practically bedridden, and the girls chattered loudly in the big kitchen, unrebuked, from morning to night. He said to himself: "We must change all this." He talked the matter over with his father one evening when the rays of the setting sun entering the yard between the outhouses ruled the heavy shadows with luminous streaks. Over the manure heap floated a mist, opal-tinted and odorous, and the marauding hens would stop in their scratching to examine with a sudden glance of their round eye the two men, both lean and tall, talking in hoarse tones. The old man, all twisted with rheumatism and bowed with years of work, the younger bony and straight, spoke without gestures in the indifferent manner of peasants, grave and slow. But before the sun had set the father had submitted to the sensible arguments of the son. "It is not for me that I am speaking," insisted Jean-Pierre. "It is for the land. It's a pity to see it badly used. I am not impatient for myself." The old fellow nodded over his stick. "I dare say; I dare say," he muttered. "You may be right. Do what you like. It's the mother that will be pleased."

The mother was pleased with her daughter-in-law. Jean-Pierre brought the two-wheeled spring-cart with a rush into the yard. The gray horse galloped clumsily, and the bride and bridegroom, sitting side by side, were jerked backwards and forwards by the up and down motion of the shafts, in a manner regular and brusque. On the road the distanced wedding guests straggled in pairs and groups. The men advanced with heavy steps, swinging their idle arms. They were clad in town clothes; jackets cut with clumsy smartness, hard black hats, immense boots, polished highly. Their women all in simple black, with white caps and shawls of faded tints folded triangularly on the back, strolled lightly by their side. In front the violin sang a strident tune, and the biniou snored and hummed, while the player capered solemnly, lifting high his heavy clogs. The sombre procession drifted in and out of the narrow lanes, through sunshine and through shade,



between fields and hedgerows, scaring the little birds that darted away in troops right and left. In the yard of Bacadou's farm the dark ribbon wound itself up into a mass of men and women pushing at the door with cries and greetings. The wedding dinner was remembered for months. It was a splendid feast in the orchard. Farmers of considerable means and excellent repute were to be found sleeping in ditches, all along the road to Treguier, even as late as the afternoon of the next day. All the countryside participated in the happiness of Jean-Pierre. He remained sober, and, together with his quiet wife, kept out of the way, letting father and mother reap their due of honour and thanks. But the next day he took hold strongly, and the old folks felt a shadow — precursor of the grave — fall upon them finally. The world is to the young.

When the twins were born there was plenty of room in the house, for the mother of Jean-Pierre had gone away to dwell under a heavy stone in the cemetery of Ploumar. On that day, for the first time since his son's marriage, the elder Bacadou, neglected by the cackling lot of strange women who thronged the kitchen, left in the morning his seat under the mantel of the fireplace, and went into the empty cow-house, shaking his white locks dismally. Grandsons were all very well, but he wanted his soup at midday. When shown the babies, he stared at them with a fixed gaze, and muttered something like: "It's too much." Whether he meant too much happiness, or simply commented upon the number of his descendants, it is impossible to say. He looked offended — as far as his old wooden face could express anything; and for days afterwards could be seen, almost any time of the day, sitting at the gate, with his nose over his knees, a pipe between his gums, and gathered up into a kind of raging concentrated sulkiness. Once he spoke to his son, alluding to the newcomers with a groan: "They will quarrel over the land." "Don't bother about that, father," answered Jean-Pierre, stolidly, and passed, bent double, towing a recalcitrant cow over his shoulder.

He was happy, and so was Susan, his wife. It was not an ethereal joy welcoming new souls to struggle, perchance to victory. In fourteen years both boys would be a help; and, later on, Jean-Pierre pictured two big sons striding over the land from patch to patch, wringing tribute from the earth beloved and fruitful. Susan was happy too, for she did not want to be spoken of as the unfortunate woman, and now she had children no one could call her that. Both herself and her husband had seen something of the

larger world — he during the time of his service; while she had spent a year or so in Paris with a Breton family; but had been too home-sick to remain longer away from the hilly and green country, set in a barren circle of rocks and sands, where she had been born. She thought that one of the boys ought perhaps to be a priest, but said nothing to her husband, who was a republican, and hated the “crows,” as he called the ministers of religion. The christening was a splendid affair. All the commune came to it, for the Bacadous were rich and influential, and, now and then, did not mind the expense. The grandfather had a new coat.

Some months afterwards, one evening when the kitchen had been swept, and the door locked, Jean-Pierre, looking at the cot, asked his wife: “What’s the matter with those children?” And, as if these words, spoken calmly, had been the portent of misfortune, she answered with a loud wail that must have been heard across the yard in the pig-sty; for the pigs (the Bacadous had the finest pigs in the country) stirred and grunted complainingly in the night. The husband went on grinding his bread and butter slowly, gazing at the wall, the soup-plate smoking under his chin. He had returned late from the market, where he had overheard (not for the first time) whispers behind his back. He revolved the words in his mind as he drove back. “Simple! Both of them. . . . Never any use! . . . Well! May be, may be. One must see. Would ask his wife.” This was her answer. He felt like a blow on his chest, but said only: “Go, draw me some cider. I am thirsty!”

She went out moaning, an empty jug in her hand. Then he arose, took up the light, and moved slowly towards the cradle. They slept. He looked at them sideways, finished his mouthful there, went back heavily, and sat down before his plate. When his wife returned he never looked up, but swallowed a couple of spoonfuls noisily, and remarked, in a dull manner —

“When they sleep they are like other people’s children.”

She sat down suddenly on a stool near by, and shook with a silent tempest of sobs, unable to speak. He finished his meal, and remained idly thrown back in his chair, his eyes lost amongst the black rafters of the ceiling. Before him the tallow candle flared red and straight, sending up a slender thread of smoke. The light lay on the rough, sunburnt skin of his throat; the sunk cheeks were like patches of darkness, and his aspect was mournfully stolid, as if he had ruminated with difficulty endless ideas. Then he said, deliberately —

“We must see . . . consult people. Don’t cry. . . . They won’t all be like that . . . surely! We must sleep now.”

After the third child, also a boy, was born, Jean-Pierre went about his work with tense hopefulness. His lips seemed more narrow, more tightly compressed than before; as if for fear of letting the earth he tilled hear the voice of hope that murmured within his breast. He watched the child, stepping up to the cot with a heavy clang of sabots on the stone floor, and glanced in, along his shoulder, with that indifference which is like a deformity of peasant humanity. Like the earth they master and serve, those men, slow of eye and speech, do not show the inner fire; so that, at last, it becomes a question with them as with the earth, what there is in the core: heat, violence, a force mysterious and terrible — or nothing but a clod, a mass fertile and inert, cold and unfeeling, ready to bear a crop of plants that sustain life or give death.

The mother watched with other eyes; listened with otherwise expectant ears. Under the high hanging shelves supporting great sides of bacon overhead, her body was busy by the great fireplace, attentive to the pot swinging on iron gallows, scrubbing the long table where the field hands would sit down directly to their evening meal. Her mind remained by the cradle, night and day on the watch, to hope and suffer. That child, like the other two, never smiled, never stretched its hands to her, never spoke; never had a glance of recognition for her in its big black eyes, which could only stare fixedly at any glitter, but failed hopelessly to follow the brilliance of a sun-ray slipping slowly along the floor. When the men were at work she spent long days between her three idiot children and the childish grandfather, who sat grim, angular, and immovable, with his feet near the warm ashes of the fire. The feeble old fellow seemed to suspect that there was something wrong with his grandsons. Only once, moved either by affection or by the sense of proprieties, he attempted to nurse the youngest. He took the boy up from the floor, clicked his tongue at him, and essayed a shaky gallop of his bony knees. Then he looked closely with his misty eyes at the child’s face and deposited him down gently on the floor again. And he sat, his lean shanks crossed, nodding at the steam escaping from the cooking-pot with a gaze senile and worried.

Then mute affliction dwelt in Bacadou’s farmhouse, sharing the breath and the bread of its inhabitants; and the priest of the Ploumar parish had great cause for congratulation. He called upon the rich landowner, the

Marquis de Chavanes, on purpose to deliver himself with joyful unction of solemn platitudes about the inscrutable ways of Providence. In the vast dimness of the curtained drawing-room, the little man, resembling a black bolster, leaned towards a couch, his hat on his knees, and gesticulated with a fat hand at the elongated, gracefully-flowing lines of the clear Parisian toilette from which the half-amused, half-bored marquise listened with gracious languor. He was exulting and humble, proud and awed. The impossible had come to pass. Jean-Pierre Bacadou, the enraged republican farmer, had been to mass last Sunday — had proposed to entertain the visiting priests at the next festival of Ploumar! It was a triumph for the Church and for the good cause. “I thought I would come at once to tell Monsieur le Marquis. I know how anxious he is for the welfare of our country,” declared the priest, wiping his face. He was asked to stay to dinner.

The Chavanes returning that evening, after seeing their guest to the main gate of the park, discussed the matter while they strolled in the moonlight, trailing their long shadows up the straight avenue of chestnuts. The marquise, a royalist of course, had been mayor of the commune which includes Ploumar, the scattered hamlets of the coast, and the stony islands that fringe the yellow flatness of the sands. He had felt his position insecure, for there was a strong republican element in that part of the country; but now the conversion of Jean-Pierre made him safe. He was very pleased. “You have no idea how influential those people are,” he explained to his wife. “Now, I am sure, the next communal election will go all right. I shall be re-elected.” “Your ambition is perfectly insatiable, Charles,” exclaimed the marquise, gaily. “But, *ma chere amie*,” argued the husband, seriously, “it’s most important that the right man should be mayor this year, because of the elections to the Chamber. If you think it amuses me . . .”

Jean-Pierre had surrendered to his wife’s mother. Madame Levaille was a woman of business, known and respected within a radius of at least fifteen miles. Thick-set and stout, she was seen about the country, on foot or in an acquaintance’s cart, perpetually moving, in spite of her fifty-eight years, in steady pursuit of business. She had houses in all the hamlets, she worked quarries of granite, she freighted coasters with stone — even traded with the Channel Islands. She was broad-cheeked, wide-eyed, persuasive in speech: carrying her point with the placid and invincible obstinacy of an old woman who knows her own mind. She very seldom slept for two nights together in

the same house; and the wayside inns were the best places to inquire in as to her whereabouts. She had either passed, or was expected to pass there at six; or somebody, coming in, had seen her in the morning, or expected to meet her that evening. After the inns that command the roads, the churches were the buildings she frequented most. Men of liberal opinions would induce small children to run into sacred edifices to see whether Madame Levaille was there, and to tell her that so-and-so was in the road waiting to speak to her about potatoes, or flour, or stones, or houses; and she would curtail her devotions, come out blinking and crossing herself into the sunshine; ready to discuss business matters in a calm, sensible way across a table in the kitchen of the inn opposite. Latterly she had stayed for a few days several times with her son-in-law, arguing against sorrow and misfortune with composed face and gentle tones. Jean-Pierre felt the convictions imbibed in the regiment torn out of his breast — not by arguments but by facts. Striding over his fields he thought it over. There were three of them. Three! All alike! Why? Such things did not happen to everybody — to nobody he ever heard of. One — might pass. But three! All three. Forever useless, to be fed while he lived and . . . What would become of the land when he died? This must be seen to. He would sacrifice his convictions. One day he told his wife —

“See what your God will do for us. Pay for some masses.”

Susan embraced her man. He stood unbending, then turned on his heels and went out. But afterwards, when a black soutane darkened his doorway, he did not object; even offered some cider himself to the priest. He listened to the talk meekly; went to mass between the two women; accomplished what the priest called “his religious duties” at Easter. That morning he felt like a man who had sold his soul. In the afternoon he fought ferociously with an old friend and neighbour who had remarked that the priests had the best of it and were now going to eat the priest-eater. He came home dishevelled and bleeding, and happening to catch sight of his children (they were kept generally out of the way), cursed and swore incoherently, banging the table. Susan wept. Madame Levaille sat serenely unmoved. She assured her daughter that “It will pass;” and taking up her thick umbrella, departed in haste to see after a schooner she was going to load with granite from her quarry.

A year or so afterwards the girl was born. A girl. Jean-Pierre heard of it in the fields, and was so upset by the news that he sat down on the boundary

wall and remained there till the evening, instead of going home as he was urged to do. A girl! He felt half cheated. However, when he got home he was partly reconciled to his fate. One could marry her to a good fellow — not to a good for nothing, but to a fellow with some understanding and a good pair of arms. Besides, the next may be a boy, he thought. Of course they would be all right. His new credulity knew of no doubt. The ill luck was broken. He spoke cheerily to his wife. She was also hopeful. Three priests came to that christening, and Madame Levaille was godmother. The child turned out an idiot too.

Then on market days Jean-Pierre was seen bargaining bitterly, quarrelsome and greedy; then getting drunk with taciturn earnestness; then driving home in the dusk at a rate fit for a wedding, but with a face gloomy enough for a funeral. Sometimes he would insist on his wife coming with him; and they would drive in the early morning, shaking side by side on the narrow seat above the helpless pig, that, with tied legs, grunted a melancholy sigh at every rut. The morning drives were silent; but in the evening, coming home, Jean-Pierre, tipsy, was viciously muttering, and growled at the confounded woman who could not rear children that were like anybody else's. Susan, holding on against the erratic swayings of the cart, pretended not to hear. Once, as they were driving through Ploumar, some obscure and drunken impulse caused him to pull up sharply opposite the church. The moon swam amongst light white clouds. The tombstones gleamed pale under the fretted shadows of the trees in the churchyard. Even the village dogs slept. Only the nightingales, awake, spun out the thrill of their song above the silence of graves. Jean-Pierre said thickly to his wife —

“What do you think is there?”

He pointed his whip at the tower — in which the big dial of the clock appeared high in the moonlight like a pallid face without eyes — and getting out carefully, fell down at once by the wheel. He picked himself up and climbed one by one the few steps to the iron gate of the churchyard. He put his face to the bars and called out indistinctly —

“Hey there! Come out!”

“Jean! Return! Return!” entreated his wife in low tones.

He took no notice, and seemed to wait there. The song of nightingales beat on all sides against the high walls of the church, and flowed back

between stone crosses and flat gray slabs, engraved with words of hope and sorrow.

“Hey! Come out!” shouted Jean-Pierre, loudly.

The nightingales ceased to sing.

“Nobody?” went on Jean-Pierre. “Nobody there. A swindle of the crows. That’s what this is. Nobody anywhere. I despise it. Allez! Houp!”

He shook the gate with all his strength, and the iron bars rattled with a frightful clanging, like a chain dragged over stone steps. A dog near by barked hurriedly. Jean-Pierre staggered back, and after three successive dashes got into his cart. Susan sat very quiet and still. He said to her with drunken severity —

“See? Nobody. I’ve been made a fool! Malheur! Somebody will pay for it. The next one I see near the house I will lay my whip on . . . on the black spine . . . I will. I don’t want him in there . . . he only helps the carrion crows to rob poor folk. I am a man. . . . We will see if I can’t have children like anybody else . . . now you mind. . . . They won’t be all . . . all . . . we see. . . .”

She burst out through the fingers that hid her face —

“Don’t say that, Jean; don’t say that, my man!”

He struck her a swinging blow on the head with the back of his hand and knocked her into the bottom of the cart, where she crouched, thrown about lamentably by every jolt. He drove furiously, standing up, brandishing his whip, shaking the reins over the gray horse that galloped ponderously, making the heavy harness leap upon his broad quarters. The country rang clamorous in the night with the irritated barking of farm dogs, that followed the rattle of wheels all along the road. A couple of belated wayfarers had only just time to step into the ditch. At his own gate he caught the post and was shot out of the cart head first. The horse went on slowly to the door. At Susan’s piercing cries the farm hands rushed out. She thought him dead, but he was only sleeping where he fell, and cursed his men, who hastened to him, for disturbing his slumbers.

Autumn came. The clouded sky descended low upon the black contours of the hills; and the dead leaves danced in spiral whirls under naked trees, till the wind, sighing profoundly, laid them to rest in the hollows of bare valleys. And from morning till night one could see all over the land black denuded boughs, the boughs gnarled and twisted, as if contorted with pain, swaying sadly between the wet clouds and the soaked earth. The clear and

gentle streams of summer days rushed discoloured and raging at the stones that barred the way to the sea, with the fury of madness bent upon suicide. From horizon to horizon the great road to the sands lay between the hills in a dull glitter of empty curves, resembling an unnavigable river of mud.

Jean-Pierre went from field to field, moving blurred and tall in the drizzle, or striding on the crests of rises, lonely and high upon the gray curtain of drifting clouds, as if he had been pacing along the very edge of the universe. He looked at the black earth, at the earth mute and promising, at the mysterious earth doing its work of life in death-like stillness under the veiled sorrow of the sky. And it seemed to him that to a man worse than childless there was no promise in the fertility of fields, that from him the earth escaped, defied him, frowned at him like the clouds, sombre and hurried above his head. Having to face alone his own fields, he felt the inferiority of man who passes away before the clod that remains. Must he give up the hope of having by his side a son who would look at the turned-up sods with a master's eye? A man that would think as he thought, that would feel as he felt; a man who would be part of himself, and yet remain to trample masterfully on that earth when he was gone? He thought of some distant relations, and felt savage enough to curse them aloud. They! Never! He turned homewards, going straight at the roof of his dwelling, visible between the enlaced skeletons of trees. As he swung his legs over the stile a cawing flock of birds settled slowly on the field; dropped down behind his back, noiseless and fluttering, like flakes of soot.

That day Madame Levaille had gone early in the afternoon to the house she had near Kervanion. She had to pay some of the men who worked in her granite quarry there, and she went in good time because her little house contained a shop where the workmen could spend their wages without the trouble of going to town. The house stood alone amongst rocks. A lane of mud and stones ended at the door. The sea-winds coming ashore on Stonecutter's point, fresh from the fierce turmoil of the waves, howled violently at the unmoved heaps of black boulders holding up steadily short-armed, high crosses against the tremendous rush of the invisible. In the sweep of gales the sheltered dwelling stood in a calm resonant and disquieting, like the calm in the centre of a hurricane. On stormy nights, when the tide was out, the bay of Fougere, fifty feet below the house, resembled an immense black pit, from which ascended mutterings and sighs as if the sands down there had been alive and complaining. At high tide the



returning water assaulted the ledges of rock in short rushes, ending in bursts of livid light and columns of spray, that flew inland, stinging to death the grass of pastures.

The darkness came from the hills, flowed over the coast, put out the red fires of sunset, and went on to seaward pursuing the retiring tide. The wind dropped with the sun, leaving a maddened sea and a devastated sky. The heavens above the house seemed to be draped in black rags, held up here and there by pins of fire. Madame Levaille, for this evening the servant of her own workmen, tried to induce them to depart. "An old woman like me ought to be in bed at this late hour," she good-humouredly repeated. The quarrymen drank, asked for more. They shouted over the table as if they had been talking across a field. At one end four of them played cards, banging the wood with their hard knuckles, and swearing at every lead. One sat with a lost gaze, humming a bar of some song, which he repeated endlessly. Two others, in a corner, were quarrelling confidentially and fiercely over some woman, looking close into one another's eyes as if they had wanted to tear them out, but speaking in whispers that promised violence and murder discreetly, in a venomous sibillation of subdued words. The atmosphere in there was thick enough to slice with a knife. Three candles burning about the long room glowed red and dull like sparks expiring in ashes.

The slight click of the iron latch was at that late hour as unexpected and startling as a thunder-clap. Madame Levaille put down a bottle she held above a liqueur glass; the players turned their heads; the whispered quarrel ceased; only the singer, after darting a glance at the door, went on humming with a stolid face. Susan appeared in the doorway, stepped in, flung the door to, and put her back against it, saying, half aloud —

"Mother!"

Madame Levaille, taking up the bottle again, said calmly: "Here you are, my girl. What a state you are in!" The neck of the bottle rang on the rim of the glass, for the old woman was startled, and the idea that the farm had caught fire had entered her head. She could think of no other cause for her daughter's appearance.

Susan, soaked and muddy, stared the whole length of the room towards the men at the far end. Her mother asked —

"What has happened? God guard us from misfortune!"

Susan moved her lips. No sound came. Madame Levaille stepped up to her daughter, took her by the arm, looked into her face.

“In God’s name,” she said, shakily, “what’s the matter? You have been rolling in mud. . . . Why did you come? . . . Where’s Jean?”

The men had all got up and approached slowly, staring with dull surprise. Madame Levaille jerked her daughter away from the door, swung her round upon a seat close to the wall. Then she turned fiercely to the men —

“Enough of this! Out you go — you others! I close.”

One of them observed, looking down at Susan collapsed on the seat: “She is — one may say — half dead.”

Madame Levaille flung the door open.

“Get out! March!” she cried, shaking nervously.

They dropped out into the night, laughing stupidly. Outside, the two Lotharios broke out into loud shouts. The others tried to soothe them, all talking at once. The noise went away up the lane with the men, who staggered together in a tight knot, remonstrating with one another foolishly.

“Speak, Susan. What is it? Speak!” entreated Madame Levaille, as soon as the door was shut.

Susan pronounced some incomprehensible words, glaring at the table. The old woman clapped her hands above her head, let them drop, and stood looking at her daughter with disconsolate eyes. Her husband had been “deranged in his head” for a few years before he died, and now she began to suspect her daughter was going mad. She asked, pressingly —

“Does Jean know where you are? Where is Jean?”

“He knows . . . he is dead.”

“What!” cried the old woman. She came up near, and peering at her daughter, repeated three times: “What do you say? What do you say? What do you say?”

Susan sat dry-eyed and stony before Madame Levaille, who contemplated her, feeling a strange sense of inexplicable horror creep into the silence of the house. She had hardly realised the news, further than to understand that she had been brought in one short moment face to face with something unexpected and final. It did not even occur to her to ask for any explanation. She thought: accident — terrible accident — blood to the head — fell down a trap door in the loft. . . . She remained there, distracted and mute, blinking her old eyes.

Suddenly, Susan said —

“I have killed him.”

For a moment the mother stood still, almost unbreathing, but with composed face. The next second she burst out into a shout —

“You miserable madwoman . . . they will cut your neck. . . .”

She fancied the gendarmes entering the house, saying to her: “We want your daughter; give her up:” the gendarmes with the severe, hard faces of men on duty. She knew the brigadier well — an old friend, familiar and respectful, saying heartily, “To your good health, Madame!” before lifting to his lips the small glass of cognac — out of the special bottle she kept for friends. And now! . . . She was losing her head. She rushed here and there, as if looking for something urgently needed — gave that up, stood stock still in the middle of the room, and screamed at her daughter —

“Why? Say! Say! Why?”

The other seemed to leap out of her strange apathy.

“Do you think I am made of stone?” she shouted back, striding towards her mother.

“No! It’s impossible. . . .” said Madame Levaille, in a convinced tone.

“You go and see, mother,” retorted Susan, looking at her with blazing eyes. “There’s no money in heaven — no justice. No! . . . I did not know. . . . Do you think I have no heart? Do you think I have never heard people jeering at me, pitying me, wondering at me? Do you know how some of them were calling me? The mother of idiots — that was my nickname! And my children never would know me, never speak to me. They would know nothing; neither men — nor God. Haven’t I prayed! But the Mother of God herself would not hear me. A mother! . . . Who is accursed — I, or the man who is dead? Eh? Tell me. I took care of myself. Do you think I would defy the anger of God and have my house full of those things — that are worse than animals who know the hand that feeds them? Who blasphemed in the night at the very church door? Was it I? . . . I only wept and prayed for mercy . . . and I feel the curse at every moment of the day — I see it round me from morning to night . . . I’ve got to keep them alive — to take care of my misfortune and shame. And he would come. I begged him and Heaven for mercy. . . . No! . . . Then we shall see. . . . He came this evening. I thought to myself: ‘Ah! again!’ . . . I had my long scissors. I heard him shouting . . . I saw him near. . . . I must — must I? . . . Then take! . . . And I struck him in the throat above the breastbone. . . . I never heard him even

sigh. . . . I left him standing. . . . It was a minute ago. How did I come here?"

Madame Levaille shivered. A wave of cold ran down her back, down her fat arms under her tight sleeves, made her stamp gently where she stood. Quivers ran over the broad cheeks, across the thin lips, ran amongst the wrinkles at the corners of her steady old eyes. She stammered —

"You wicked woman — you disgrace me. But there! You always resembled your father. What do you think will become of you . . . in the other world? In this . . . Oh misery!"

She was very hot now. She felt burning inside. She wrung her perspiring hands — and suddenly, starting in great haste, began to look for her big shawl and umbrella, feverishly, never once glancing at her daughter, who stood in the middle of the room following her with a gaze distracted and cold.

"Nothing worse than in this," said Susan.

Her mother, umbrella in hand and trailing the shawl over the floor, groaned profoundly.

"I must go to the priest," she burst out passionately. "I do not know whether you even speak the truth! You are a horrible woman. They will find you anywhere. You may stay here — or go. There is no room for you in this world."

Ready now to depart, she yet wandered aimlessly about the room, putting the bottles on the shelf, trying to fit with trembling hands the covers on cardboard boxes. Whenever the real sense of what she had heard emerged for a second from the haze of her thoughts she would fancy that something had exploded in her brain without, unfortunately, bursting her head to pieces — which would have been a relief. She blew the candles out one by one without knowing it, and was horribly startled by the darkness. She fell on a bench and began to whimper. After a while she ceased, and sat listening to the breathing of her daughter, whom she could hardly see, still and upright, giving no other sign of life. She was becoming old rapidly at last, during those minutes. She spoke in tones unsteady, cut about by the rattle of teeth, like one shaken by a deadly cold fit of ague.

"I wish you had died little. I will never dare to show my old head in the sunshine again. There are worse misfortunes than idiot children. I wish you had been born to me simple — like your own. . . ."

She saw the figure of her daughter pass before the faint and livid clearness of a window. Then it appeared in the doorway for a second, and the door swung to with a clang. Madame Levaille, as if awakened by the noise from a long nightmare, rushed out.

“Susan!” she shouted from the doorstep.

She heard a stone roll a long time down the declivity of the rocky beach above the sands. She stepped forward cautiously, one hand on the wall of the house, and peered down into the smooth darkness of the empty bay. Once again she cried —

“Susan! You will kill yourself there.”

The stone had taken its last leap in the dark, and she heard nothing now. A sudden thought seemed to strangle her, and she called no more. She turned her back upon the black silence of the pit and went up the lane towards Ploumar, stumbling along with sombre determination, as if she had started on a desperate journey that would last, perhaps, to the end of her life. A sullen and periodic clamour of waves rolling over reefs followed her far inland between the high hedges sheltering the gloomy solitude of the fields.

Susan had run out, swerving sharp to the left at the door, and on the edge of the slope crouched down behind a boulder. A dislodged stone went on downwards, rattling as it leaped. When Madame Levaille called out, Susan could have, by stretching her hand, touched her mother’s skirt, had she had the courage to move a limb. She saw the old woman go away, and she remained still, closing her eyes and pressing her side to the hard and rugged surface of the rock. After a while a familiar face with fixed eyes and an open mouth became visible in the intense obscurity amongst the boulders. She uttered a low cry and stood up. The face vanished, leaving her to gasp and shiver alone in the wilderness of stone heaps. But as soon as she had crouched down again to rest, with her head against the rock, the face returned, came very near, appeared eager to finish the speech that had been cut short by death, only a moment ago. She scrambled quickly to her feet and said: “Go away, or I will do it again.” The thing wavered, swung to the right, to the left. She moved this way and that, stepped back, fancied herself screaming at it, and was appalled by the unbroken stillness of the night. She tottered on the brink, felt the steep declivity under her feet, and rushed down blindly to save herself from a headlong fall. The shingle seemed to wake up; the pebbles began to roll before her, pursued her from above,

raced down with her on both sides, rolling past with an increasing clatter. In the peace of the night the noise grew, deepening to a rumour, continuous and violent, as if the whole semicircle of the stony beach had started to tumble down into the bay. Susan's feet hardly touched the slope that seemed to run down with her. At the bottom she stumbled, shot forward, throwing her arms out, and fell heavily. She jumped up at once and turned swiftly to look back, her clenched hands full of sand she had clutched in her fall. The face was there, keeping its distance, visible in its own sheen that made a pale stain in the night. She shouted, "Go away!" — she shouted at it with pain, with fear, with all the rage of that useless stab that could not keep him quiet, keep him out of her sight. What did he want now? He was dead. Dead men have no children. Would he never leave her alone? She shrieked at it — waved her outstretched hands. She seemed to feel the breath of parted lips, and, with a long cry of discouragement, fled across the level bottom of the bay.

She ran lightly, unaware of any effort of her body. High sharp rocks that, when the bay is full, show above the glittering plain of blue water like pointed towers of submerged churches, glided past her, rushing to the land at a tremendous pace. To the left, in the distance, she could see something shining: a broad disc of light in which narrow shadows pivoted round the centre like the spokes of a wheel. She heard a voice calling, "Hey! There!" and answered with a wild scream. So, he could call yet! He was calling after her to stop. Never! . . . She tore through the night, past the startled group of seaweed-gatherers who stood round their lantern paralysed with fear at the unearthly screech coming from that fleeing shadow. The men leaned on their pitchforks staring fearfully. A woman fell on her knees, and, crossing herself, began to pray aloud. A little girl with her ragged skirt full of slimy seaweed began to sob despairingly, lugging her soaked burden close to the man who carried the light. Somebody said: "The thing ran out towards the sea." Another voice exclaimed: "And the sea is coming back! Look at the spreading puddles. Do you hear — you woman — there! Get up!" Several voices cried together. "Yes, let us be off! Let the accursed thing go to the sea!" They moved on, keeping close round the light. Suddenly a man swore loudly. He would go and see what was the matter. It had been a woman's voice. He would go. There were shrill protests from women — but his high form detached itself from the group and went off running. They sent an unanimous call of scared voices after him. A word,

insulting and mocking, came back, thrown at them through the darkness. A woman moaned. An old man said gravely: "Such things ought to be left alone." They went on slower, shuffling in the yielding sand and whispering to one another that Millot feared nothing, having no religion, but that it would end badly some day.

Susan met the incoming tide by the Raven islet and stopped, panting, with her feet in the water. She heard the murmur and felt the cold caress of the sea, and, calmer now, could see the sombre and confused mass of the Raven on one side and on the other the long white streak of Molene sands that are left high above the dry bottom of Fougere Bay at every ebb. She turned round and saw far away, along the starred background of the sky, the ragged outline of the coast. Above it, nearly facing her, appeared the tower of Ploumar Church; a slender and tall pyramid shooting up dark and pointed into the clustered glitter of the stars. She felt strangely calm. She knew where she was, and began to remember how she came there — and why. She peered into the smooth obscurity near her. She was alone. There was nothing there; nothing near her, either living or dead.

The tide was creeping in quietly, putting out long impatient arms of strange rivulets that ran towards the land between ridges of sand. Under the night the pools grew bigger with mysterious rapidity, while the great sea, yet far off, thundered in a regular rhythm along the indistinct line of the horizon. Susan splashed her way back for a few yards without being able to get clear of the water that murmured tenderly all around and, suddenly, with a spiteful gurgle, nearly took her off her feet. Her heart thumped with fear. This place was too big and too empty to die in. To-morrow they would do with her what they liked. But before she died she must tell them — tell the gentlemen in black clothes that there are things no woman can bear. She must explain how it happened. . . . She splashed through a pool, getting wet to the waist, too preoccupied to care. . . . She must explain. "He came in the same way as ever and said, just so: 'Do you think I am going to leave the land to those people from Morbihan that I do not know? Do you? We shall see! Come along, you creature of mischance!' And he put his arms out. Then, Messieurs, I said: 'Before God — never!' And he said, striding at me with open palms: 'There is no God to hold me! Do you understand, you useless carcase. I will do what I like.' And he took me by the shoulders. Then I, Messieurs, called to God for help, and next minute, while he was shaking me, I felt my long scissors in my hand. His shirt was unbuttoned,

and, by the candle- light, I saw the hollow of his throat. I cried: 'Let go!' He was crushing my shoulders. He was strong, my man was! Then I thought: No! . . . Must I? . . . Then take! — and I struck in the hollow place. I never saw him fall. . . . The old father never turned his head. He is deaf and childish, gentlemen. . . . Nobody saw him fall. I ran out . . . Nobody saw. . . .

She had been scrambling amongst the boulders of the Raven and now found herself, all out of breath, standing amongst the heavy shadows of the rocky islet. The Raven is connected with the main land by a natural pier of immense and slippery stones. She intended to return home that way. Was he still standing there? At home. Home! Four idiots and a corpse. She must go back and explain. Anybody would understand. . . .

Below her the night or the sea seemed to pronounce distinctly —

“Aha! I see you at last!”

She started, slipped, fell; and without attempting to rise, listened, terrified. She heard heavy breathing, a clatter of wooden clogs. It stopped.

“Where the devil did you pass?” said an invisible man, hoarsely.

She held her breath. She recognized the voice. She had not seen him fall. Was he pursuing her there dead, or perhaps . . . alive?

She lost her head. She cried from the crevice where she lay huddled, “Never, never!”

“Ah! You are still there. You led me a fine dance. Wait, my beauty, I must see how you look after all this. You wait. . . .”

Millot was stumbling, laughing, swearing meaninglessly out of pure satisfaction, pleased with himself for having run down that fly-by-night. “As if there were such things as ghosts! Bah! It took an old African soldier to show those clodhoppers. . . . But it was curious. Who the devil was she?”

Susan listened, crouching. He was coming for her, this dead man. There was no escape. What a noise he made amongst the stones. . . . She saw his head rise up, then the shoulders. He was tall — her own man! His long arms waved about, and it was his own voice sounding a little strange . . . because of the scissors. She scrambled out quickly, rushed to the edge of the causeway, and turned round. The man stood still on a high stone, detaching himself in dead black on the glitter of the sky.

“Where are you going to?” he called, roughly.

She answered, “Home!” and watched him intensely. He made a striding, clumsy leap on to another boulder, and stopped again, balancing himself,



then said —

“Ha! ha! Well, I am going with you. It’s the least I can do. Ha! ha! ha!”

She stared at him till her eyes seemed to become glowing coals that burned deep into her brain, and yet she was in mortal fear of making out the well-known features. Below her the sea lapped softly against the rock with a splash continuous and gentle.

The man said, advancing another step —

“I am coming for you. What do you think?”

She trembled. Coming for her! There was no escape, no peace, no hope. She looked round despairingly. Suddenly the whole shadowy coast, the blurred islets, the heaven itself, swayed about twice, then came to a rest. She closed her eyes and shouted —

“Can’t you wait till I am dead!”

She was shaken by a furious hate for that shade that pursued her in this world, unappeased even by death in its longing for an heir that would be like other people’s children.

“Hey! What?” said Millot, keeping his distance prudently. He was saying to himself: “Look out! Some lunatic. An accident happens soon.”

She went on, wildly —

“I want to live. To live alone — for a week — for a day. I must explain to them. . . . I would tear you to pieces, I would kill you twenty times over rather than let you touch me while I live. How many times must I kill you — you blasphemer! Satan sends you here. I am damned too!”

“Come,” said Millot, alarmed and conciliating. “I am perfectly alive! . . . Oh, my God!”

She had screamed, “Alive!” and at once vanished before his eyes, as if the islet itself had swerved aside from under her feet. Millot rushed forward, and fell flat with his chin over the edge. Far below he saw the water whitened by her struggles, and heard one shrill cry for help that seemed to dart upwards along the perpendicular face of the rock, and soar past, straight into the high and impassive heaven.

Madame Levaille sat, dry-eyed, on the short grass of the hill side, with her thick legs stretched out, and her old feet turned up in their black cloth shoes. Her clogs stood near by, and further off the umbrella lay on the withered sward like a weapon dropped from the grasp of a vanquished warrior. The Marquis of Chavanes, on horseback, one gloved hand on thigh, looked down at her as she got up laboriously, with groans. On the narrow

track of the seaweed-carts four men were carrying inland Susan's body on a hand-barrow, while several others straggled listlessly behind. Madame Levaille looked after the procession. "Yes, Monsieur le Marquis," she said dispassionately, in her usual calm tone of a reasonable old woman. "There are unfortunate people on this earth. I had only one child. Only one! And they won't bury her in consecrated ground!"

Her eyes filled suddenly, and a short shower of tears rolled down the broad cheeks. She pulled the shawl close about her. The Marquis leaned slightly over in his saddle, and said —

"It is very sad. You have all my sympathy. I shall speak to the Cure. She was unquestionably insane, and the fall was accidental. Millot says so distinctly. Good-day, Madame."

And he trotted off, thinking to himself: "I must get this old woman appointed guardian of those idiots, and administrator of the farm. It would be much better than having here one of those other Bacadous, probably a red republican, corrupting my commune."

## THE LAGOON



The white man, leaning with both arms over the roof of the little house in the stern of the boat, said to the steersman —

“We will pass the night in Arsat’s clearing. It is late.”

The Malay only grunted, and went on looking fixedly at the river. The white man rested his chin on his crossed arms and gazed at the wake of the boat. At the end of the straight avenue of forests cut by the intense glitter of the river, the sun appeared unclouded and dazzling, poised low over the water that shone smoothly like a band of metal. The forests, sombre and dull, stood motionless and silent on each side of the broad stream. At the foot of big, towering trees, trunkless nipa palms rose from the mud of the bank, in bunches of leaves enormous and heavy, that hung unstirring over the brown swirl of eddies. In the stillness of the air every tree, every leaf, every bough, every tendril of creeper and every petal of minute blossoms seemed to have been bewitched into an immobility perfect and final. Nothing moved on the river but the eight paddles that rose flashing regularly, dipped together with a single splash; while the steersman swept right and left with a periodic and sudden flourish of his blade describing a glinting semicircle above his head. The churned-up water frothed alongside with a confused murmur. And the white man’s canoe, advancing upstream in the short-lived disturbance of its own making, seemed to enter the portals of a land from which the very memory of motion had forever departed.

The white man, turning his back upon the setting sun, looked along the empty and broad expanse of the sea-reach. For the last three miles of its course the wandering, hesitating river, as if enticed irresistibly by the freedom of an open horizon, flows straight into the sea, flows straight to the east — to the east that harbours both light and darkness. Astern of the boat the repeated call of some bird, a cry discordant and feeble, skipped along over the smooth water and lost itself, before it could reach the other shore, in the breathless silence of the world.

The steersman dug his paddle into the stream, and held hard with stiffened arms, his body thrown forward. The water gurgled aloud; and suddenly the long straight reach seemed to pivot on its centre, the forests swung in a semicircle, and the slanting beams of sunset touched the

broadside of the canoe with a fiery glow, throwing the slender and distorted shadows of its crew upon the streaked glitter of the river. The white man turned to look ahead. The course of the boat had been altered at right-angles to the stream, and the carved dragon-head of its prow was pointing now at a gap in the fringing bushes of the bank. It glided through, brushing the overhanging twigs, and disappeared from the river like some slim and amphibious creature leaving the water for its lair in the forests.

The narrow creek was like a ditch: tortuous, fabulously deep; filled with gloom under the thin strip of pure and shining blue of the heaven. Immense trees soared up, invisible behind the festooned draperies of creepers. Here and there, near the glistening blackness of the water, a twisted root of some tall tree showed amongst the tracery of small ferns, black and dull, writhing and motionless, like an arrested snake. The short words of the paddlers reverberated loudly between the thick and sombre walls of vegetation. Darkness oozed out from between the trees, through the tangled maze of the creepers, from behind the great fantastic and unstirring leaves; the darkness, mysterious and invincible; the darkness scented and poisonous of impenetrable forests.

The men poled in the shoaling water. The creek broadened, opening out into a wide sweep of a stagnant lagoon. The forests receded from the marshy bank, leaving a level strip of bright green, reedy grass to frame the reflected blueness of the sky. A fleecy pink cloud drifted high above, trailing the delicate colouring of its image under the floating leaves and the silvery blossoms of the lotus. A little house, perched on high piles, appeared black in the distance. Near it, two tall nibong palms, that seemed to have come out of the forests in the background, leaned slightly over the ragged roof, with a suggestion of sad tenderness and care in the droop of their leafy and soaring heads.

The steersman, pointing with his paddle, said, "Arsat is there. I see his canoe fast between the piles."

The polers ran along the sides of the boat glancing over their shoulders at the end of the day's journey. They would have preferred to spend the night somewhere else than on this lagoon of weird aspect and ghostly reputation. Moreover, they disliked Arsat, first as a stranger, and also because he who repairs a ruined house, and dwells in it, proclaims that he is not afraid to live amongst the spirits that haunt the places abandoned by mankind. Such a man can disturb the course of fate by glances or words; while his familiar

ghosts are not easy to propitiate by casual wayfarers upon whom they long to wreak the malice of their human master. White men care not for such things, being unbelievers and in league with the Father of Evil, who leads them unharmed through the invisible dangers of this world. To the warnings of the righteous they oppose an offensive pretence of disbelief. What is there to be done?

So they thought, throwing their weight on the end of their long poles. The big canoe glided on swiftly, noiselessly, and smoothly, towards Arsat's clearing, till, in a great rattling of poles thrown down, and the loud murmurs of "Allah be praised!" it came with a gentle knock against the crooked piles below the house.

The boatmen with uplifted faces shouted discordantly, "Arsat! O Arsat!" Nobody came. The white man began to climb the rude ladder giving access to the bamboo platform before the house. The juragan of the boat said sulkily, "We will cook in the sampan, and sleep on the water."

"Pass my blankets and the basket," said the white man, curtly.

He knelt on the edge of the platform to receive the bundle. Then the boat shoved off, and the white man, standing up, confronted Arsat, who had come out through the low door of his hut. He was a man young, powerful, with broad chest and muscular arms. He had nothing on but his sarong. His head was bare. His big, soft eyes stared eagerly at the white man, but his voice and demeanour were composed as he asked, without any words of greeting —

"Have you medicine, Tuan?"

"No," said the visitor in a startled tone. "No. Why? Is there sickness in the house?"

"Enter and see," replied Arsat, in the same calm manner, and turning short round, passed again through the small doorway. The white man, dropping his bundles, followed.

In the dim light of the dwelling he made out on a couch of bamboos a woman stretched on her back under a broad sheet of red cotton cloth. She lay still, as if dead; but her big eyes, wide open, glittered in the gloom, staring upwards at the slender rafters, motionless and unseeing. She was in a high fever, and evidently unconscious. Her cheeks were sunk slightly, her lips were partly open, and on the young face there was the ominous and fixed expression — the absorbed, contemplating expression of the

unconscious who are going to die. The two men stood looking down at her in silence.

“Has she been long ill?” asked the traveller.

“I have not slept for five nights,” answered the Malay, in a deliberate tone. “At first she heard voices calling her from the water and struggled against me who held her. But since the sun of to-day rose she hears nothing — she hears not me. She sees nothing. She sees not me — me!”

He remained silent for a minute, then asked softly —

“Tuan, will she die?”

“I fear so,” said the white man, sorrowfully. He had known Arsath years ago, in a far country in times of trouble and danger, when no friendship is to be despised. And since his Malay friend had come unexpectedly to dwell in the hut on the lagoon with a strange woman, he had slept many times there, in his journeys up and down the river. He liked the man who knew how to keep faith in council and how to fight without fear by the side of his white friend. He liked him — not so much perhaps as a man likes his favourite dog — but still he liked him well enough to help and ask no questions, to think sometimes vaguely and hazily in the midst of his own pursuits, about the lonely man and the long-haired woman with audacious face and triumphant eyes, who lived together hidden by the forests — alone and feared.

The white man came out of the hut in time to see the enormous conflagration of sunset put out by the swift and stealthy shadows that, rising like a black and impalpable vapour above the tree-tops, spread over the heaven, extinguishing the crimson glow of floating clouds and the red brilliance of departing daylight. In a few moments all the stars came out above the intense blackness of the earth and the great lagoon gleaming suddenly with reflected lights resembled an oval patch of night sky flung down into the hopeless and abysmal night of the wilderness. The white man had some supper out of the basket, then collecting a few sticks that lay about the platform, made up a small fire, not for warmth, but for the sake of the smoke, which would keep off the mosquitos. He wrapped himself in the blankets and sat with his back against the reed wall of the house, smoking thoughtfully.

Arsath came through the doorway with noiseless steps and squatted down by the fire. The white man moved his outstretched legs a little.

“She breathes,” said Arsat in a low voice, anticipating the expected question. “She breathes and burns as if with a great fire. She speaks not; she hears not — and burns!”

He paused for a moment, then asked in a quiet, incurious tone —

“Tuan . . . will she die?”

The white man moved his shoulders uneasily and muttered in a hesitating manner —

“If such is her fate.”

“No, Tuan,” said Arsat, calmly. “If such is my fate. I hear, I see, I wait. I remember . . . Tuan, do you remember the old days? Do you remember my brother?”

“Yes,” said the white man. The Malay rose suddenly and went in. The other, sitting still outside, could hear the voice in the hut. Arsat said: “Hear me! Speak!” His words were succeeded by a complete silence. “O Diamelen!” he cried, suddenly. After that cry there was a deep sigh. Arsat came out and sank down again in his old place.

They sat in silence before the fire. There was no sound within the house, there was no sound near them; but far away on the lagoon they could hear the voices of the boatmen ringing fitful and distinct on the calm water. The fire in the bows of the sampan shone faintly in the distance with a hazy red glow. Then it died out. The voices ceased. The land and the water slept invisible, unstirring and mute. It was as though there had been nothing left in the world but the glitter of stars streaming, ceaseless and vain, through the black stillness of the night.

The white man gazed straight before him into the darkness with wide-open eyes. The fear and fascination, the inspiration and the wonder of death — of death near, unavoidable, and unseen, soothed the unrest of his race and stirred the most indistinct, the most intimate of his thoughts. The ever-ready suspicion of evil, the gnawing suspicion that lurks in our hearts, flowed out into the stillness round him — into the stillness profound and dumb, and made it appear untrustworthy and infamous, like the placid and impenetrable mask of an unjustifiable violence. In that fleeting and powerful disturbance of his being the earth enfolded in the starlight peace became a shadowy country of inhuman strife, a battle-field of phantoms terrible and charming, august or ignoble, struggling ardently for the possession of our helpless hearts. An unquiet and mysterious country of inextinguishable desires and fears.

A plaintive murmur rose in the night; a murmur saddening and startling, as if the great solitudes of surrounding woods had tried to whisper into his ear the wisdom of their immense and lofty indifference. Sounds hesitating and vague floated in the air round him, shaped themselves slowly into words; and at last flowed on gently in a murmuring stream of soft and monotonous sentences. He stirred like a man waking up and changed his position slightly. Arsat, motionless and shadowy, sitting with bowed head under the stars, was speaking in a low and dreamy tone —

“. . . for where can we lay down the heaviness of our trouble but in a friend's heart? A man must speak of war and of love. You, Tuan, know what war is, and you have seen me in time of danger seek death as other men seek life! A writing may be lost; a lie may be written; but what the eye has seen is truth and remains in the mind!”

“I remember,” said the white man, quietly. Arsat went on with mournful composure —

“Therefore I shall speak to you of love. Speak in the night. Speak before both night and love are gone — and the eye of day looks upon my sorrow and my shame; upon my blackened face; upon my burnt-up heart.”

A sigh, short and faint, marked an almost imperceptible pause, and then his words flowed on, without a stir, without a gesture.

“After the time of trouble and war was over and you went away from my country in the pursuit of your desires, which we, men of the islands, cannot understand, I and my brother became again, as we had been before, the sword-bearers of the Ruler. You know we were men of family, belonging to a ruling race, and more fit than any to carry on our right shoulder the emblem of power. And in the time of prosperity Si Dendring showed us favour, as we, in time of sorrow, had showed to him the faithfulness of our courage. It was a time of peace. A time of deer-hunts and cock-fights; of idle talks and foolish squabbles between men whose bellies are full and weapons are rusty. But the sower watched the young rice-shoots grow up without fear, and the traders came and went, departed lean and returned fat into the river of peace. They brought news, too. Brought lies and truth mixed together, so that no man knew when to rejoice and when to be sorry. We heard from them about you also. They had seen you here and had seen you there. And I was glad to hear, for I remembered the stirring times, and I always remembered you, Tuan, till the time came when my eyes could see



nothing in the past, because they had looked upon the one who is dying there — in the house.”

He stopped to exclaim in an intense whisper, “O Mara bahia! O Calamity!” then went on speaking a little louder:

“There’s no worse enemy and no better friend than a brother, Tuan, for one brother knows another, and in perfect knowledge is strength for good or evil. I loved my brother. I went to him and told him that I could see nothing but one face, hear nothing but one voice. He told me: ‘Open your heart so that she can see what is in it — and wait. Patience is wisdom. Inchi Midah may die or our Ruler may throw off his fear of a woman!’ . . . I waited! . . . You remember the lady with the veiled face, Tuan, and the fear of our Ruler before her cunning and temper. And if she wanted her servant, what could I do? But I fed the hunger of my heart on short glances and stealthy words. I loitered on the path to the bath-houses in the daytime, and when the sun had fallen behind the forest I crept along the jasmine hedges of the women’s courtyard. Unseeing, we spoke to one another through the scent of flowers, through the veil of leaves, through the blades of long grass that stood still before our lips; so great was our prudence, so faint was the murmur of our great longing. The time passed swiftly . . . and there were whispers amongst women — and our enemies watched — my brother was gloomy, and I began to think of killing and of a fierce death. . . . We are of a people who take what they want — like you whites. There is a time when a man should forget loyalty and respect. Might and authority are given to rulers, but to all men is given love and strength and courage. My brother said, ‘You shall take her from their midst. We are two who are like one.’ And I answered, ‘Let it be soon, for I find no warmth in sunlight that does not shine upon her.’ Our time came when the Ruler and all the great people went to the mouth of the river to fish by torchlight. There were hundreds of boats, and on the white sand, between the water and the forests, dwellings of leaves were built for the households of the Rajahs. The smoke of cooking-fires was like a blue mist of the evening, and many voices rang in it joyfully. While they were making the boats ready to beat up the fish, my brother came to me and said, ‘To-night!’ I looked to my weapons, and when the time came our canoe took its place in the circle of boats carrying the torches. The lights blazed on the water, but behind the boats there was darkness. When the shouting began and the excitement made them like mad we dropped out. The water swallowed our fire, and we floated back to the

shore that was dark with only here and there the glimmer of embers. We could hear the talk of slave-girls amongst the sheds. Then we found a place deserted and silent. We waited there. She came. She came running along the shore, rapid and leaving no trace, like a leaf driven by the wind into the sea. My brother said gloomily, 'Go and take her; carry her into our boat.' I lifted her in my arms. She panted. Her heart was beating against my breast. I said, 'I take you from those people. You came to the cry of my heart, but my arms take you into my boat against the will of the great!' 'It is right,' said my brother. 'We are men who take what we want and can hold it against many. We should have taken her in daylight.' I said, 'Let us be off'; for since she was in my boat I began to think of our Ruler's many men. 'Yes. Let us be off,' said my brother. 'We are cast out and this boat is our country now — and the sea is our refuge.' He lingered with his foot on the shore, and I entreated him to hasten, for I remembered the strokes of her heart against my breast and thought that two men cannot withstand a hundred. We left, paddling downstream close to the bank; and as we passed by the creek where they were fishing, the great shouting had ceased, but the murmur of voices was loud like the humming of insects flying at noonday. The boats floated, clustered together, in the red light of torches, under a black roof of smoke; and men talked of their sport. Men that boasted, and praised, and jeered — men that would have been our friends in the morning, but on that night were already our enemies. We paddled swiftly past. We had no more friends in the country of our birth. She sat in the middle of the canoe with covered face; silent as she is now; unseeing as she is now — and I had no regret at what I was leaving because I could hear her breathing close to me — as I can hear her now."

He paused, listened with his ear turned to the doorway, then shook his head and went on:

"My brother wanted to shout the cry of challenge — one cry only — to let the people know we were freeborn robbers who trusted our arms and the great sea. And again I begged him in the name of our love to be silent. Could I not hear her breathing close to me? I knew the pursuit would come quick enough. My brother loved me. He dipped his paddle without a splash. He only said, 'There is half a man in you now — the other half is in that woman. I can wait. When you are a whole man again, you will come back with me here to shout defiance. We are sons of the same mother.' I made no answer. All my strength and all my spirit were in my hands that held the

paddle — for I longed to be with her in a safe place beyond the reach of men's anger and of women's spite. My love was so great, that I thought it could guide me to a country where death was unknown, if I could only escape from Inchi Midah's fury and from our Ruler's sword. We paddled with haste, breathing through our teeth. The blades bit deep into the smooth water. We passed out of the river; we flew in clear channels amongst the shallows. We skirted the black coast; we skirted the sand beaches where the sea speaks in whispers to the land; and the gleam of white sand flashed back past our boat, so swiftly she ran upon the water. We spoke not. Only once I said, 'Sleep, Diamelen, for soon you may want all your strength.' I heard the sweetness of her voice, but I never turned my head. The sun rose and still we went on. Water fell from my face like rain from a cloud. We flew in the light and heat. I never looked back, but I knew that my brother's eyes, behind me, were looking steadily ahead, for the boat went as straight as a bushman's dart, when it leaves the end of the sumpitan. There was no better paddler, no better steersman than my brother. Many times, together, we had won races in that canoe. But we never had put out our strength as we did then — then, when for the last time we paddled together! There was no braver or stronger man in our country than my brother. I could not spare the strength to turn my head and look at him, but every moment I heard the hiss of his breath getting louder behind me. Still he did not speak. The sun was high. The heat clung to my back like a flame of fire. My ribs were ready to burst, but I could no longer get enough air into my chest. And then I felt I must cry out with my last breath, 'Let us rest!' . . . 'Good!' he answered; and his voice was firm. He was strong. He was brave. He knew not fear and no fatigue . . . My brother!"

A murmur powerful and gentle, a murmur vast and faint; the murmur of trembling leaves, of stirring boughs, ran through the tangled depths of the forests, ran over the starry smoothness of the lagoon, and the water between the piles lapped the slimy timber once with a sudden splash. A breath of warm air touched the two men's faces and passed on with a mournful sound — a breath loud and short like an uneasy sigh of the dreaming earth.

Arsat went on in an even, low voice.

"We ran our canoe on the white beach of a little bay close to a long tongue of land that seemed to bar our road; a long wooded cape going far into the sea. My brother knew that place. Beyond the cape a river has its entrance, and through the jungle of that land there is a narrow path. We

made a fire and cooked rice. Then we lay down to sleep on the soft sand in the shade of our canoe, while she watched. No sooner had I closed my eyes than I heard her cry of alarm. We leaped up. The sun was halfway down the sky already, and coming in sight in the opening of the bay we saw a prau manned by many paddlers. We knew it at once; it was one of our Rajah's praus. They were watching the shore, and saw us. They beat the gong, and turned the head of the prau into the bay. I felt my heart become weak within my breast. Diamelen sat on the sand and covered her face. There was no escape by sea. My brother laughed. He had the gun you had given him, Tuan, before you went away, but there was only a handful of powder. He spoke to me quickly: 'Run with her along the path. I shall keep them back, for they have no firearms, and landing in the face of a man with a gun is certain death for some. Run with her. On the other side of that wood there is a fisherman's house — and a canoe. When I have fired all the shots I will follow. I am a great runner, and before they can come up we shall be gone. I will hold out as long as I can, for she is but a woman — that can neither run nor fight, but she has your heart in her weak hands.' He dropped behind the canoe. The prau was coming. She and I ran, and as we rushed along the path I heard shots. My brother fired — once — twice — and the booming of the gong ceased. There was silence behind us. That neck of land is narrow. Before I heard my brother fire the third shot I saw the shelving shore, and I saw the water again; the mouth of a broad river. We crossed a grassy glade. We ran down to the water. I saw a low hut above the black mud, and a small canoe hauled up. I heard another shot behind me. I thought, 'That is his last charge.' We rushed down to the canoe; a man came running from the hut, but I leaped on him, and we rolled together in the mud. Then I got up, and he lay still at my feet. I don't know whether I had killed him or not. I and Diamelen pushed the canoe afloat. I heard yells behind me, and I saw my brother run across the glade. Many men were bounding after him, I took her in my arms and threw her into the boat, then leaped in myself. When I looked back I saw that my brother had fallen. He fell and was up again, but the men were closing round him. He shouted, 'I am coming!' The men were close to him. I looked. Many men. Then I looked at her. Tuan, I pushed the canoe! I pushed it into deep water. She was kneeling forward looking at me, and I said, 'Take your paddle,' while I struck the water with mine. Tuan, I heard him cry. I heard him cry my name twice; and I heard voices shouting, 'Kill! Strike!' I never turned back. I

heard him calling my name again with a great shriek, as when life is going out together with the voice — and I never turned my head. My own name! . . . My brother! Three times he called — but I was not afraid of life. Was she not there in that canoe? And could I not with her find a country where death is forgotten — where death is unknown!”

The white man sat up. Arsat rose and stood, an indistinct and silent figure above the dying embers of the fire. Over the lagoon a mist drifting and low had crept, erasing slowly the glittering images of the stars. And now a great expanse of white vapour covered the land: it flowed cold and gray in the darkness, eddied in noiseless whirls round the tree-trunks and about the platform of the house, which seemed to float upon a restless and impalpable illusion of a sea. Only far away the tops of the trees stood outlined on the twinkle of heaven, like a sombre and forbidding shore — a coast deceptive, pitiless and black.

Arsat’s voice vibrated loudly in the profound peace.

“I had her there! I had her! To get her I would have faced all mankind. But I had her — and — ”

His words went out ringing into the empty distances. He paused, and seemed to listen to them dying away very far — beyond help and beyond recall. Then he said quietly —

“Tuan, I loved my brother.”

A breath of wind made him shiver. High above his head, high above the silent sea of mist the drooping leaves of the palms rattled together with a mournful and expiring sound. The white man stretched his legs. His chin rested on his chest, and he murmured sadly without lifting his head —

“We all love our brothers.”

Arsat burst out with an intense whispering violence —

“What did I care who died? I wanted peace in my own heart.”

He seemed to hear a stir in the house — listened — then stepped in noiselessly. The white man stood up. A breeze was coming in fitful puffs. The stars shone paler as if they had retreated into the frozen depths of immense space. After a chill gust of wind there were a few seconds of perfect calm and absolute silence. Then from behind the black and wavy line of the forests a column of golden light shot up into the heavens and spread over the semicircle of the eastern horizon. The sun had risen. The mist lifted, broke into drifting patches, vanished into thin flying wreaths; and the unveiled lagoon lay, polished and black, in the heavy shadows at the

foot of the wall of trees. A white eagle rose over it with a slanting and ponderous flight, reached the clear sunshine and appeared dazzlingly brilliant for a moment, then soaring higher, became a dark and motionless speck before it vanished into the blue as if it had left the earth forever. The white man, standing gazing upwards before the doorway, heard in the hut a confused and broken murmur of distracted words ending with a loud groan. Suddenly Arsat stumbled out with outstretched hands, shivered, and stood still for some time with fixed eyes. Then he said —

“She burns no more.”

Before his face the sun showed its edge above the tree-tops rising steadily. The breeze freshened; a great brilliance burst upon the lagoon, sparkled on the rippling water. The forests came out of the clear shadows of the morning, became distinct, as if they had rushed nearer — to stop short in a great stir of leaves, of nodding boughs, of swaying branches. In the merciless sunshine the whisper of unconscious life grew louder, speaking in an incomprehensible voice round the dumb darkness of that human sorrow. Arsat’s eyes wandered slowly, then stared at the rising sun.

“I can see nothing,” he said half aloud to himself.

“There is nothing,” said the white man, moving to the edge of the platform and waving his hand to his boat. A shout came faintly over the lagoon and the sampan began to glide towards the abode of the friend of ghosts.

“If you want to come with me, I will wait all the morning,” said the white man, looking away upon the water.

“No, Tuan,” said Arsat, softly. “I shall not eat or sleep in this house, but I must first see my road. Now I can see nothing — see nothing! There is no light and no peace in the world; but there is death — death for many. We are sons of the same mother — and I left him in the midst of enemies; but I am going back now.”

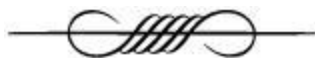
He drew a long breath and went on in a dreamy tone:

“In a little while I shall see clear enough to strike — to strike. But she has died, and . . . now . . . darkness.”

He flung his arms wide open, let them fall along his body, then stood still with unmoved face and stony eyes, staring at the sun. The white man got down into his canoe. The polers ran smartly along the sides of the boat, looking over their shoulders at the beginning of a weary journey. High in the stern, his head muffled up in white rags, the juragan sat moody, letting

his paddle trail in the water. The white man, leaning with both arms over the grass roof of the little cabin, looked back at the shining ripple of the boat's wake. Before the sampan passed out of the lagoon into the creek he lifted his eyes. Arsat had not moved. He stood lonely in the searching sunshine; and he looked beyond the great light of a cloudless day into the darkness of a world of illusions.

## *AN OUTPOST OF PROGRESS*



### I

There were two white men in charge of the trading station. Kayerts, the chief, was short and fat; Carlier, the assistant, was tall, with a large head and a very broad trunk perched upon a long pair of thin legs. The third man on the staff was a Sierra Leone nigger, who maintained that his name was Henry Price. However, for some reason or other, the natives down the river had given him the name of Makola, and it stuck to him through all his wanderings about the country. He spoke English and French with a warbling accent, wrote a beautiful hand, understood bookkeeping, and cherished in his innermost heart the worship of evil spirits. His wife was a negress from Loanda, very large and very noisy. Three children rolled about in sunshine before the door of his low, shed-like dwelling. Makola, taciturn and impenetrable, despised the two white men. He had charge of a small clay storehouse with a dried-grass roof, and pretended to keep a correct account of beads, cotton cloth, red kerchiefs, brass wire, and other trade goods it contained. Besides the storehouse and Makola's hut, there was only one large building in the cleared ground of the station. It was built neatly of reeds, with a verandah on all the four sides. There were three rooms in it. The one in the middle was the living-room, and had two rough tables and a few stools in it. The other two were the bedrooms for the white men. Each had a bedstead and a mosquito net for all furniture. The plank floor was littered with the belongings of the white men; open half-empty boxes, torn wearing apparel, old boots; all the things dirty, and all the things broken, that accumulate mysteriously round untidy men. There was also another dwelling-place some distance away from the buildings. In it, under a tall cross much out of the perpendicular, slept the man who had seen the beginning of all this; who had planned and had watched the construction of this outpost of progress. He had been, at home, an unsuccessful painter who, weary of pursuing fame on an empty stomach, had gone out there through high protections. He had been the first chief of that station. Makola had watched the energetic artist die of fever in the just finished house with his usual kind of "I told you so" indifference. Then, for a time, he dwelt alone with his family, his account books, and the Evil Spirit that rules the



lands under the equator. He got on very well with his god. Perhaps he had propitiated him by a promise of more white men to play with, by and by. At any rate the director of the Great Trading Company, coming up in a steamer that resembled an enormous sardine box with a flat-roofed shed erected on it, found the station in good order, and Makola as usual quietly diligent. The director had the cross put up over the first agent's grave, and appointed Kayerts to the post. Carlier was told off as second in charge. The director was a man ruthless and efficient, who at times, but very imperceptibly, indulged in grim humour. He made a speech to Kayerts and Carlier, pointing out to them the promising aspect of their station. The nearest trading-post was about three hundred miles away. It was an exceptional opportunity for them to distinguish themselves and to earn percentages on the trade. This appointment was a favour done to beginners. Kayerts was moved almost to tears by his director's kindness. He would, he said, by doing his best, try to justify the flattering confidence, &c., &c. Kayerts had been in the Administration of the Telegraphs, and knew how to express himself correctly. Carlier, an ex-non-commissioned officer of cavalry in an army guaranteed from harm by several European Powers, was less impressed. If there were commissions to get, so much the better; and, trailing a sulky glance over the river, the forests, the impenetrable bush that seemed to cut off the station from the rest of the world, he muttered between his teeth, "We shall see, very soon."

Next day, some bales of cotton goods and a few cases of provisions having been thrown on shore, the sardine-box steamer went off, not to return for another six months. On the deck the director touched his cap to the two agents, who stood on the bank waving their hats, and turning to an old servant of the Company on his passage to headquarters, said, "Look at those two imbeciles. They must be mad at home to send me such specimens. I told those fellows to plant a vegetable garden, build new storehouses and fences, and construct a landing-stage. I bet nothing will be done! They won't know how to begin. I always thought the station on this river useless, and they just fit the station!"

"They will form themselves there," said the old stager with a quiet smile.

"At any rate, I am rid of them for six months," retorted the director.

The two men watched the steamer round the bend, then, ascending arm in arm the slope of the bank, returned to the station. They had been in this vast and dark country only a very short time, and as yet always in the midst of

other white men, under the eye and guidance of their superiors. And now, dull as they were to the subtle influences of surroundings, they felt themselves very much alone, when suddenly left unassisted to face the wilderness; a wilderness rendered more strange, more incomprehensible by the mysterious glimpses of the vigorous life it contained. They were two perfectly insignificant and incapable individuals, whose existence is only rendered possible through the high organization of civilized crowds. Few men realize that their life, the very essence of their character, their capabilities and their audacities, are only the expression of their belief in the safety of their surroundings. The courage, the composure, the confidence; the emotions and principles; every great and every insignificant thought belongs not to the individual but to the crowd: to the crowd that believes blindly in the irresistible force of its institutions and of its morals, in the power of its police and of its opinion. But the contact with pure unmitigated savagery, with primitive nature and primitive man, brings sudden and profound trouble into the heart. To the sentiment of being alone of one's kind, to the clear perception of the loneliness of one's thoughts, of one's sensations — to the negation of the habitual, which is safe, there is added the affirmation of the unusual, which is dangerous; a suggestion of things vague, uncontrollable, and repulsive, whose discomposing intrusion excites the imagination and tries the civilized nerves of the foolish and the wise alike.

Kayerts and Carlier walked arm in arm, drawing close to one another as children do in the dark; and they had the same, not altogether unpleasant, sense of danger which one half suspects to be imaginary. They chatted persistently in familiar tones. "Our station is prettily situated," said one. The other assented with enthusiasm, enlarging volubly on the beauties of the situation. Then they passed near the grave. "Poor devil!" said Kayerts. "He died of fever, didn't he?" muttered Carlier, stopping short. "Why," retorted Kayerts, with indignation, "I've been told that the fellow exposed himself recklessly to the sun. The climate here, everybody says, is not at all worse than at home, as long as you keep out of the sun. Do you hear that, Carlier? I am chief here, and my orders are that you should not expose yourself to the sun!" He assumed his superiority jocularly, but his meaning was serious. The idea that he would, perhaps, have to bury Carlier and remain alone, gave him an inward shiver. He felt suddenly that this Carlier was more precious to him here, in the centre of Africa, than a brother could

be anywhere else. Carlier, entering into the spirit of the thing, made a military salute and answered in a brisk tone, "Your orders shall be attended to, chief!" Then he burst out laughing, slapped Kayerts on the back and shouted, "We shall let life run easily here! Just sit still and gather in the ivory those savages will bring. This country has its good points, after all!" They both laughed loudly while Carlier thought: "That poor Kayerts; he is so fat and unhealthy. It would be awful if I had to bury him here. He is a man I respect." . . . Before they reached the verandah of their house they called one another "my dear fellow."

The first day they were very active, pottering about with hammers and nails and red calico, to put up curtains, make their house habitable and pretty; resolved to settle down comfortably to their new life. For them an impossible task. To grapple effectually with even purely material problems requires more serenity of mind and more lofty courage than people generally imagine. No two beings could have been more unfitted for such a struggle. Society, not from any tenderness, but because of its strange needs, had taken care of those two men, forbidding them all independent thought, all initiative, all departure from routine; and forbidding it under pain of death. They could only live on condition of being machines. And now, released from the fostering care of men with pens behind the ears, or of men with gold lace on the sleeves, they were like those lifelong prisoners who, liberated after many years, do not know what use to make of their freedom. They did not know what use to make of their faculties, being both, through want of practice, incapable of independent thought.

At the end of two months Kayerts often would say, "If it was not for my Melie, you wouldn't catch me here." Melie was his daughter. He had thrown up his post in the Administration of the Telegraphs, though he had been for seventeen years perfectly happy there, to earn a dowry for his girl. His wife was dead, and the child was being brought up by his sisters. He regretted the streets, the pavements, the cafes, his friends of many years; all the things he used to see, day after day; all the thoughts suggested by familiar things — the thoughts effortless, monotonous, and soothing of a Government clerk; he regretted all the gossip, the small enmities, the mild venom, and the little jokes of Government offices. "If I had had a decent brother-in-law," Carlier would remark, "a fellow with a heart, I would not be here." He had left the army and had made himself so obnoxious to his family by his laziness and impudence, that an exasperated brother-in-law

had made superhuman efforts to procure him an appointment in the Company as a second-class agent. Having not a penny in the world he was compelled to accept this means of livelihood as soon as it became quite clear to him that there was nothing more to squeeze out of his relations. He, like Kayerts, regretted his old life. He regretted the clink of sabre and spurs on a fine afternoon, the barrack-room witticisms, the girls of garrison towns; but, besides, he had also a sense of grievance. He was evidently a much ill-used man. This made him moody, at times. But the two men got on well together in the fellowship of their stupidity and laziness. Together they did nothing, absolutely nothing, and enjoyed the sense of the idleness for which they were paid. And in time they came to feel something resembling affection for one another.

They lived like blind men in a large room, aware only of what came in contact with them (and of that only imperfectly), but unable to see the general aspect of things. The river, the forest, all the great land throbbing with life, were like a great emptiness. Even the brilliant sunshine disclosed nothing intelligible. Things appeared and disappeared before their eyes in an unconnected and aimless kind of way. The river seemed to come from nowhere and flow nowhither. It flowed through a void. Out of that void, at times, came canoes, and men with spears in their hands would suddenly crowd the yard of the station. They were naked, glossy black, ornamented with snowy shells and glistening brass wire, perfect of limb. They made an uncouth babbling noise when they spoke, moved in a stately manner, and sent quick, wild glances out of their startled, never-resting eyes. Those warriors would squat in long rows, four or more deep, before the verandah, while their chiefs bargained for hours with Makola over an elephant tusk. Kayerts sat on his chair and looked down on the proceedings, understanding nothing. He stared at them with his round blue eyes, called out to Carlier, "Here, look! look at that fellow there — and that other one, to the left. Did you ever such a face? Oh, the funny brute!"

Carlier, smoking native tobacco in a short wooden pipe, would swagger up twirling his moustaches, and surveying the warriors with haughty indulgence, would say —

"Fine animals. Brought any bone? Yes? It's not any too soon. Look at the muscles of that fellow third from the end. I wouldn't care to get a punch on the nose from him. Fine arms, but legs no good below the knee. Couldn't make cavalry men of them." And after glancing down complacently at his

own shanks, he always concluded: "Pah! Don't they stink! You, Makola! Take that herd over to the fetish" (the storehouse was in every station called the fetish, perhaps because of the spirit of civilization it contained) "and give them up some of the rubbish you keep there. I'd rather see it full of bone than full of rags."

Kayerts approved.

"Yes, yes! Go and finish that palaver over there, Mr. Makola. I will come round when you are ready, to weigh the tusk. We must be careful." Then turning to his companion: "This is the tribe that lives down the river; they are rather aromatic. I remember, they had been once before here. D'ye hear that row? What a fellow has got to put up with in this dog of a country! My head is split."

Such profitable visits were rare. For days the two pioneers of trade and progress would look on their empty courtyard in the vibrating brilliance of vertical sunshine. Below the high bank, the silent river flowed on glittering and steady. On the sands in the middle of the stream, hippos and alligators sunned themselves side by side. And stretching away in all directions, surrounding the insignificant cleared spot of the trading post, immense forests, hiding fateful complications of fantastic life, lay in the eloquent silence of mute greatness. The two men understood nothing, cared for nothing but for the passage of days that separated them from the steamer's return. Their predecessor had left some torn books. They took up these wrecks of novels, and, as they had never read anything of the kind before, they were surprised and amused. Then during long days there were interminable and silly discussions about plots and personages. In the centre of Africa they made acquaintance of Richelieu and of d'Artagnan, of Hawk's Eye and of Father Goriot, and of many other people. All these imaginary personages became subjects for gossip as if they had been living friends. They discounted their virtues, suspected their motives, decried their successes; were scandalized at their duplicity or were doubtful about their courage. The accounts of crimes filled them with indignation, while tender or pathetic passages moved them deeply. Carlier cleared his throat and said in a soldierly voice, "What nonsense!" Kayerts, his round eyes suffused with tears, his fat cheeks quivering, rubbed his bald head, and declared. "This is a splendid book. I had no idea there were such clever fellows in the world." They also found some old copies of a home paper. That print discussed what it was pleased to call "Our Colonial Expansion" in high-

flown language. It spoke much of the rights and duties of civilization, of the sacredness of the civilizing work, and extolled the merits of those who went about bringing light, and faith and commerce to the dark places of the earth. Carlier and Kayerts read, wondered, and began to think better of themselves. Carlier said one evening, waving his hand about, "In a hundred years, there will be perhaps a town here. Quays, and warehouses, and barracks, and — and — billiard-rooms. Civilization, my boy, and virtue — and all. And then, chaps will read that two good fellows, Kayerts and Carlier, were the first civilized men to live in this very spot!" Kayerts nodded, "Yes, it is a consolation to think of that." They seemed to forget their dead predecessor; but, early one day, Carlier went out and replanted the cross firmly. "It used to make me squint whenever I walked that way," he explained to Kayerts over the morning coffee. "It made me squint, leaning over so much. So I just planted it upright. And solid, I promise you! I suspended myself with both hands to the cross-piece. Not a move. Oh, I did that properly."

At times Gobila came to see them. Gobila was the chief of the neighbouring villages. He was a gray-headed savage, thin and black, with a white cloth round his loins and a mangy panther skin hanging over his back. He came up with long strides of his skeleton legs, swinging a staff as tall as himself, and, entering the common room of the station, would squat on his heels to the left of the door. There he sat, watching Kayerts, and now and then making a speech which the other did not understand. Kayerts, without interrupting his occupation, would from time to time say in a friendly manner: "How goes it, you old image?" and they would smile at one another. The two whites had a liking for that old and incomprehensible creature, and called him Father Gobila. Gobila's manner was paternal, and he seemed really to love all white men. They all appeared to him very young, indistinguishably alike (except for stature), and he knew that they were all brothers, and also immortal. The death of the artist, who was the first white man whom he knew intimately, did not disturb this belief, because he was firmly convinced that the white stranger had pretended to die and got himself buried for some mysterious purpose of his own, into which it was useless to inquire. Perhaps it was his way of going home to his own country? At any rate, these were his brothers, and he transferred his absurd affection to them. They returned it in a way. Carlier slapped him on the back, and recklessly struck off matches for his amusement. Kayerts was

always ready to let him have a sniff at the ammonia bottle. In short, they behaved just like that other white creature that had hidden itself in a hole in the ground. Gobila considered them attentively. Perhaps they were the same being with the other — or one of them was. He couldn't decide — clear up that mystery; but he remained always very friendly. In consequence of that friendship the women of Gobila's village walked in single file through the reedy grass, bringing every morning to the station, fowls, and sweet potatoes, and palm wine, and sometimes a goat. The Company never provisions the stations fully, and the agents required those local supplies to live. They had them through the good-will of Gobila, and lived well. Now and then one of them had a bout of fever, and the other nursed him with gentle devotion. They did not think much of it. It left them weaker, and their appearance changed for the worse. Carlier was hollow-eyed and irritable. Kayerts showed a drawn, flabby face above the rotundity of his stomach, which gave him a weird aspect. But being constantly together, they did not notice the change that took place gradually in their appearance, and also in their dispositions.

Five months passed in that way.

Then, one morning, as Kayerts and Carlier, lounging in their chairs under the verandah, talked about the approaching visit of the steamer, a knot of armed men came out of the forest and advanced towards the station. They were strangers to that part of the country. They were tall, slight, draped classically from neck to heel in blue fringed cloths, and carried percussion muskets over their bare right shoulders. Makola showed signs of excitement, and ran out of the storehouse (where he spent all his days) to meet these visitors. They came into the courtyard and looked about them with steady, scornful glances. Their leader, a powerful and determined-looking negro with bloodshot eyes, stood in front of the verandah and made a long speech. He gesticulated much, and ceased very suddenly.

There was something in his intonation, in the sounds of the long sentences he used, that startled the two whites. It was like a reminiscence of something not exactly familiar, and yet resembling the speech of civilized men. It sounded like one of those impossible languages which sometimes we hear in our dreams.

“What lingo is that?” said the amazed Carlier. “In the first moment I fancied the fellow was going to speak French. Anyway, it is a different kind of gibberish to what we ever heard.”

“Yes,” replied Kayerts. “Hey, Makola, what does he say? Where do they come from? Who are they?”

But Makola, who seemed to be standing on hot bricks, answered hurriedly, “I don’t know. They come from very far. Perhaps Mrs. Price will understand. They are perhaps bad men.”

The leader, after waiting for a while, said something sharply to Makola, who shook his head. Then the man, after looking round, noticed Makola’s hut and walked over there. The next moment Mrs. Makola was heard speaking with great volubility. The other strangers — they were six in all — strolled about with an air of ease, put their heads through the door of the storeroom, congregated round the grave, pointed understandingly at the cross, and generally made themselves at home.

“I don’t like those chaps — and, I say, Kayerts, they must be from the coast; they’ve got firearms,” observed the sagacious Carlier.

Kayerts also did not like those chaps. They both, for the first time, became aware that they lived in conditions where the unusual may be dangerous, and that there was no power on earth outside of themselves to stand between them and the unusual. They became uneasy, went in and loaded their revolvers. Kayerts said, “We must order Makola to tell them to go away before dark.”

The strangers left in the afternoon, after eating a meal prepared for them by Mrs. Makola. The immense woman was excited, and talked much with the visitors. She rattled away shrilly, pointing here and there at the forests and at the river. Makola sat apart and watched. At times he got up and whispered to his wife. He accompanied the strangers across the ravine at the back of the station-ground, and returned slowly looking very thoughtful. When questioned by the white men he was very strange, seemed not to understand, seemed to have forgotten French — seemed to have forgotten how to speak altogether. Kayerts and Carlier agreed that the nigger had had too much palm wine.

There was some talk about keeping a watch in turn, but in the evening everything seemed so quiet and peaceful that they retired as usual. All night they were disturbed by a lot of drumming in the villages. A deep, rapid roll near by would be followed by another far off — then all ceased. Soon short appeals would rattle out here and there, then all mingle together, increase, become vigorous and sustained, would spread out over the forest, roll through the night, unbroken and ceaseless, near and far, as if the whole land



had been one immense drum booming out steadily an appeal to heaven. And through the deep and tremendous noise sudden yells that resembled snatches of songs from a madhouse darted shrill and high in discordant jets of sound which seemed to rush far above the earth and drive all peace from under the stars.

Carlier and Kayerts slept badly. They both thought they had heard shots fired during the night — but they could not agree as to the direction. In the morning Makola was gone somewhere. He returned about noon with one of yesterday's strangers, and eluded all Kayerts' attempts to close with him: had become deaf apparently. Kayerts wondered. Carlier, who had been fishing off the bank, came back and remarked while he showed his catch, "The niggers seem to be in a deuce of a stir; I wonder what's up. I saw about fifteen canoes cross the river during the two hours I was there fishing." Kayerts, worried, said, "Isn't this Makola very queer to-day?" Carlier advised, "Keep all our men together in case of some trouble."

## II

There were ten station men who had been left by the Director. Those fellows, having engaged themselves to the Company for six months (without having any idea of a month in particular and only a very faint notion of time in general), had been serving the cause of progress for upwards of two years. Belonging to a tribe from a very distant part of the land of darkness and sorrow, they did not run away, naturally supposing that as wandering strangers they would be killed by the inhabitants of the country; in which they were right. They lived in straw huts on the slope of a ravine overgrown with reedy grass, just behind the station buildings. They were not happy, regretting the festive incantations, the sorceries, the human sacrifices of their own land; where they also had parents, brothers, sisters, admired chiefs, respected magicians, loved friends, and other ties supposed generally to be human. Besides, the rice rations served out by the Company did not agree with them, being a food unknown to their land, and to which they could not get used. Consequently they were unhealthy and miserable. Had they been of any other tribe they would have made up their minds to die — for nothing is easier to certain savages than suicide — and so have escaped from the puzzling difficulties of existence. But belonging, as they did, to a warlike tribe with filed teeth, they had more grit, and went on stupidly living through disease and sorrow. They did very little work, and had lost their splendid physique. Carlier and Kayerts doctored them

assiduously without being able to bring them back into condition again. They were mustered every morning and told off to different tasks — grass-cutting, fence-building, tree-felling, &c., &c., which no power on earth could induce them to execute efficiently. The two whites had practically very little control over them.

In the afternoon Makola came over to the big house and found Kayerts watching three heavy columns of smoke rising above the forests. “What is that?” asked Kayerts. “Some villages burn,” answered Makola, who seemed to have regained his wits. Then he said abruptly: “We have got very little ivory; bad six months’ trading. Do you like get a little more ivory?”

“Yes,” said Kayerts, eagerly. He thought of percentages which were low.

“Those men who came yesterday are traders from Loanda who have got more ivory than they can carry home. Shall I buy? I know their camp.”

“Certainly,” said Kayerts. “What are those traders?”

“Bad fellows,” said Makola, indifferently. “They fight with people, and catch women and children. They are bad men, and got guns. There is a great disturbance in the country. Do you want ivory?”

“Yes,” said Kayerts. Makola said nothing for a while. Then: “Those workmen of ours are no good at all,” he muttered, looking round. “Station in very bad order, sir. Director will growl. Better get a fine lot of ivory, then he say nothing.”

“I can’t help it; the men won’t work,” said Kayerts. “When will you get that ivory?”

“Very soon,” said Makola. “Perhaps to-night. You leave it to me, and keep indoors, sir. I think you had better give some palm wine to our men to make a dance this evening. Enjoy themselves. Work better to-morrow. There’s plenty palm wine — gone a little sour.”

Kayerts said “yes,” and Makola, with his own hands carried big calabashes to the door of his hut. They stood there till the evening, and Mrs. Makola looked into every one. The men got them at sunset. When Kayerts and Carlier retired, a big bonfire was flaring before the men’s huts. They could hear their shouts and drumming. Some men from Gobila’s village had joined the station hands, and the entertainment was a great success.

In the middle of the night, Carlier waking suddenly, heard a man shout loudly; then a shot was fired. Only one. Carlier ran out and met Kayerts on the verandah. They were both startled. As they went across the yard to call Makola, they saw shadows moving in the night. One of them cried, “Don’t

shoot! It's me, Price." Then Makola appeared close to them. "Go back, go back, please," he urged, "you spoil all." "There are strange men about," said Carlier. "Never mind; I know," said Makola. Then he whispered, "All right. Bring ivory. Say nothing! I know my business." The two white men reluctantly went back to the house, but did not sleep. They heard footsteps, whispers, some groans. It seemed as if a lot of men came in, dumped heavy things on the ground, squabbled a long time, then went away. They lay on their hard beds and thought: "This Makola is invaluable." In the morning Carlier came out, very sleepy, and pulled at the cord of the big bell. The station hands mustered every morning to the sound of the bell. That morning nobody came. Kayerts turned out also, yawning. Across the yard they saw Makola come out of his hut, a tin basin of soapy water in his hand. Makola, a civilized nigger, was very neat in his person. He threw the soapsuds skilfully over a wretched little yellow cur he had, then turning his face to the agent's house, he shouted from the distance, "All the men gone last night!"

They heard him plainly, but in their surprise they both yelled out together: "What!" Then they stared at one another. "We are in a proper fix now," growled Carlier. "It's incredible!" muttered Kayerts. "I will go to the huts and see," said Carlier, striding off. Makola coming up found Kayerts standing alone.

"I can hardly believe it," said Kayerts, tearfully. "We took care of them as if they had been our children."

"They went with the coast people," said Makola after a moment of hesitation.

"What do I care with whom they went — the ungrateful brutes!" exclaimed the other. Then with sudden suspicion, and looking hard at Makola, he added: "What do you know about it?"

Makola moved his shoulders, looking down on the ground. "What do I know? I think only. Will you come and look at the ivory I've got there? It is a fine lot. You never saw such."

He moved towards the store. Kayerts followed him mechanically, thinking about the incredible desertion of the men. On the ground before the door of the fetish lay six splendid tusks.

"What did you give for it?" asked Kayerts, after surveying the lot with satisfaction.

“No regular trade,” said Makola. “They brought the ivory and gave it to me. I told them to take what they most wanted in the station. It is a beautiful lot. No station can show such tusks. Those traders wanted carriers badly, and our men were no good here. No trade, no entry in books: all correct.”

Kayerts nearly burst with indignation. “Why!” he shouted, “I believe you have sold our men for these tusks!” Makola stood impassive and silent. “I — I — will — I,” stuttered Kayerts. “You fiend!” he yelled out.

“I did the best for you and the Company,” said Makola, imperturbably. “Why you shout so much? Look at this tusk.”

“I dismiss you! I will report you — I won’t look at the tusk. I forbid you to touch them. I order you to throw them into the river. You — you!”

“You very red, Mr. Kayerts. If you are so irritable in the sun, you will get fever and die — like the first chief!” pronounced Makola impressively.

They stood still, contemplating one another with intense eyes, as if they had been looking with effort across immense distances. Kayerts shivered. Makola had meant no more than he said, but his words seemed to Kayerts full of ominous menace! He turned sharply and went away to the house. Makola retired into the bosom of his family; and the tusks, left lying before the store, looked very large and valuable in the sunshine.

Carlier came back on the verandah. “They’re all gone, hey?” asked Kayerts from the far end of the common room in a muffled voice. “You did not find anybody?”

“Oh, yes,” said Carlier, “I found one of Gobila’s people lying dead before the huts — shot through the body. We heard that shot last night.”

Kayerts came out quickly. He found his companion staring grimly over the yard at the tusks, away by the store. They both sat in silence for a while. Then Kayerts related his conversation with Makola. Carlier said nothing. At the midday meal they ate very little. They hardly exchanged a word that day. A great silence seemed to lie heavily over the station and press on their lips. Makola did not open the store; he spent the day playing with his children. He lay full-length on a mat outside his door, and the youngsters sat on his chest and clambered all over him. It was a touching picture. Mrs. Makola was busy cooking all day, as usual. The white men made a somewhat better meal in the evening. Afterwards, Carlier smoking his pipe strolled over to the store; he stood for a long time over the tusks, touched one or two with his foot, even tried to lift the largest one by its small end.

He came back to his chief, who had not stirred from the verandah, threw himself in the chair and said —

“I can see it! They were pounced upon while they slept heavily after drinking all that palm wine you’ve allowed Makola to give them. A put-up job! See? The worst is, some of Gobila’s people were there, and got carried off too, no doubt. The least drunk woke up, and got shot for his sobriety. This is a funny country. What will you do now?”

“We can’t touch it, of course,” said Kayerts.

“Of course not,” assented Carlier.

“Slavery is an awful thing,” stammered out Kayerts in an unsteady voice.

“Frightful — the sufferings,” grunted Carlier with conviction.

They believed their words. Everybody shows a respectful deference to certain sounds that he and his fellows can make. But about feelings people really know nothing. We talk with indignation or enthusiasm; we talk about oppression, cruelty, crime, devotion, self-sacrifice, virtue, and we know nothing real beyond the words. Nobody knows what suffering or sacrifice mean — except, perhaps the victims of the mysterious purpose of these illusions.

Next morning they saw Makola very busy setting up in the yard the big scales used for weighing ivory. By and by Carlier said: “What’s that filthy scoundrel up to?” and lounged out into the yard. Kayerts followed. They stood watching. Makola took no notice. When the balance was swung true, he tried to lift a tusk into the scale. It was too heavy. He looked up helplessly without a word, and for a minute they stood round that balance as mute and still as three statues. Suddenly Carlier said: “Catch hold of the other end, Makola — you beast!” and together they swung the tusk up. Kayerts trembled in every limb. He muttered, “I say! O! I say!” and putting his hand in his pocket found there a dirty bit of paper and the stump of a pencil. He turned his back on the others, as if about to do something tricky, and noted stealthily the weights which Carlier shouted out to him with unnecessary loudness. When all was over Makola whispered to himself: “The sun’s very strong here for the tusks.” Carlier said to Kayerts in a careless tone: “I say, chief, I might just as well give him a lift with this lot into the store.”

As they were going back to the house Kayerts observed with a sigh: “It had to be done.” And Carlier said: “It’s deplorable, but, the men being Company’s men the ivory is Company’s ivory. We must look after it.” “I

will report to the Director, of course,” said Kayerts. “Of course; let him decide,” approved Carlier.

At midday they made a hearty meal. Kayerts sighed from time to time. Whenever they mentioned Makola's name they always added to it an opprobrious epithet. It eased their conscience. Makola gave himself a half-holiday, and bathed his children in the river. No one from Gobila's villages came near the station that day. No one came the next day, and the next, nor for a whole week. Gobila's people might have been dead and buried for any sign of life they gave. But they were only mourning for those they had lost by the witchcraft of white men, who had brought wicked people into their country. The wicked people were gone, but fear remained. Fear always remains. A man may destroy everything within himself, love and hate and belief, and even doubt; but as long as he clings to life he cannot destroy fear: the fear, subtle, indestructible, and terrible, that pervades his being; that tinges his thoughts; that lurks in his heart; that watches on his lips the struggle of his last breath. In his fear, the mild old Gobila offered extra human sacrifices to all the Evil Spirits that had taken possession of his white friends. His heart was heavy. Some warriors spoke about burning and killing, but the cautious old savage dissuaded them. Who could foresee the woe those mysterious creatures, if irritated, might bring? They should be left alone. Perhaps in time they would disappear into the earth as the first one had disappeared. His people must keep away from them, and hope for the best.

Kayerts and Carlier did not disappear, but remained above on this earth, that, somehow, they fancied had become bigger and very empty. It was not the absolute and dumb solitude of the post that impressed them so much as an inarticulate feeling that something from within them was gone, something that worked for their safety, and had kept the wilderness from interfering with their hearts. The images of home; the memory of people like them, of men that thought and felt as they used to think and feel, receded into distances made indistinct by the glare of unclouded sunshine. And out of the great silence of the surrounding wilderness, its very hopelessness and savagery seemed to approach them nearer, to draw them gently, to look upon them, to envelop them with a solicitude irresistible, familiar, and disgusting.

Days lengthened into weeks, then into months. Gobila's people drummed and yelled to every new moon, as of yore, but kept away from the station.

Makola and Carlier tried once in a canoe to open communications, but were received with a shower of arrows, and had to fly back to the station for dear life. That attempt set the country up and down the river into an uproar that could be very distinctly heard for days. The steamer was late. At first they spoke of delay jauntily, then anxiously, then gloomily. The matter was becoming serious. Stores were running short. Carlier cast his lines off the bank, but the river was low, and the fish kept out in the stream. They dared not stroll far away from the station to shoot. Moreover, there was no game in the impenetrable forest. Once Carlier shot a hippo in the river. They had no boat to secure it, and it sank. When it floated up it drifted away, and Gobila's people secured the carcass. It was the occasion for a national holiday, but Carlier had a fit of rage over it and talked about the necessity of exterminating all the niggers before the country could be made habitable. Kayerts mooned about silently; spent hours looking at the portrait of his Melie. It represented a little girl with long bleached tresses and a rather sour face. His legs were much swollen, and he could hardly walk. Carlier, undermined by fever, could not swagger any more, but kept tottering about, still with a devil-may-care air, as became a man who remembered his crack regiment. He had become hoarse, sarcastic, and inclined to say unpleasant things. He called it "being frank with you." They had long ago reckoned their percentages on trade, including in them that last deal of "this infamous Makola." They had also concluded not to say anything about it. Kayerts hesitated at first — was afraid of the Director.

"He has seen worse things done on the quiet," maintained Carlier, with a hoarse laugh. "Trust him! He won't thank you if you blab. He is no better than you or me. Who will talk if we hold our tongues? There is nobody here."

That was the root of the trouble! There was nobody there; and being left there alone with their weakness, they became daily more like a pair of accomplices than like a couple of devoted friends. They had heard nothing from home for eight months. Every evening they said, "To-morrow we shall see the steamer." But one of the Company's steamers had been wrecked, and the Director was busy with the other, relieving very distant and important stations on the main river. He thought that the useless station, and the useless men, could wait. Meantime Kayerts and Carlier lived on rice boiled without salt, and cursed the Company, all Africa, and the day they were born. One must have lived on such diet to discover what ghastly

trouble the necessity of swallowing one's food may become. There was literally nothing else in the station but rice and coffee; they drank the coffee without sugar. The last fifteen lumps Kayerts had solemnly locked away in his box, together with a half-bottle of Cognac, "in case of sickness," he explained. Carlier approved. "When one is sick," he said, "any little extra like that is cheering."

They waited. Rank grass began to sprout over the courtyard. The bell never rang now. Days passed, silent, exasperating, and slow. When the two men spoke, they snarled; and their silences were bitter, as if tinged by the bitterness of their thoughts.

One day after a lunch of boiled rice, Carlier put down his cup untasted, and said: "Hang it all! Let's have a decent cup of coffee for once. Bring out that sugar, Kayerts!"

"For the sick," muttered Kayerts, without looking up.

"For the sick," mocked Carlier. "Bosh! . . . Well! I am sick."

"You are no more sick than I am, and I go without," said Kayerts in a peaceful tone.

"Come! out with that sugar, you stingy old slave-dealer."

Kayerts looked up quickly. Carlier was smiling with marked insolence. And suddenly it seemed to Kayerts that he had never seen that man before. Who was he? He knew nothing about him. What was he capable of? There was a surprising flash of violent emotion within him, as if in the presence of something undreamt-of, dangerous, and final. But he managed to pronounce with composure —

"That joke is in very bad taste. Don't repeat it."

"Joke!" said Carlier, hitching himself forward on his seat. "I am hungry — I am sick — I don't joke! I hate hypocrites. You are a hypocrite. You are a slave-dealer. I am a slave-dealer. There's nothing but slave-dealers in this cursed country. I mean to have sugar in my coffee to-day, anyhow!"

"I forbid you to speak to me in that way," said Kayerts with a fair show of resolution.

"You! — What?" shouted Carlier, jumping up.

Kayerts stood up also. "I am your chief," he began, trying to master the shakiness of his voice.

"What?" yelled the other. "Who's chief? There's no chief here. There's nothing here: there's nothing but you and I. Fetch the sugar — you pot-bellied ass."



“Hold your tongue. Go out of this room,” screamed Kayerts. “I dismiss you — you scoundrel!”

Carlier swung a stool. All at once he looked dangerously in earnest. “You flabby, good-for-nothing civilian — take that!” he howled.

Kayerts dropped under the table, and the stool struck the grass inner wall of the room. Then, as Carlier was trying to upset the table, Kayerts in desperation made a blind rush, head low, like a cornered pig would do, and over-turning his friend, bolted along the verandah, and into his room. He locked the door, snatched his revolver, and stood panting. In less than a minute Carlier was kicking at the door furiously, howling, “If you don’t bring out that sugar, I will shoot you at sight, like a dog. Now then — one — two — three. You won’t? I will show you who’s the master.”

Kayerts thought the door would fall in, and scrambled through the square hole that served for a window in his room. There was then the whole breadth of the house between them. But the other was apparently not strong enough to break in the door, and Kayerts heard him running round. Then he also began to run laboriously on his swollen legs. He ran as quickly as he could, grasping the revolver, and unable yet to understand what was happening to him. He saw in succession Makola’s house, the store, the river, the ravine, and the low bushes; and he saw all those things again as he ran for the second time round the house. Then again they flashed past him. That morning he could not have walked a yard without a groan.

And now he ran. He ran fast enough to keep out of sight of the other man.

Then as, weak and desperate, he thought, “Before I finish the next round I shall die,” he heard the other man stumble heavily, then stop. He stopped also. He had the back and Carlier the front of the house, as before. He heard him drop into a chair cursing, and suddenly his own legs gave way, and he slid down into a sitting posture with his back to the wall. His mouth was as dry as a cinder, and his face was wet with perspiration — and tears. What was it all about? He thought it must be a horrible illusion; he thought he was dreaming; he thought he was going mad! After a while he collected his senses. What did they quarrel about? That sugar! How absurd! He would give it to him — didn’t want it himself. And he began scrambling to his feet with a sudden feeling of security. But before he had fairly stood upright, a commonsense reflection occurred to him and drove him back into despair. He thought: “If I give way now to that brute of a soldier, he will begin this

horror again to-morrow — and the day after — every day — raise other pretensions, trample on me, torture me, make me his slave — and I will be lost! Lost! The steamer may not come for days — may never come.” He shook so that he had to sit down on the floor again. He shivered forlornly. He felt he could not, would not move any more. He was completely distracted by the sudden perception that the position was without issue — that death and life had in a moment become equally difficult and terrible.

All at once he heard the other push his chair back; and he leaped to his feet with extreme facility. He listened and got confused. Must run again! Right or left? He heard footsteps. He darted to the left, grasping his revolver, and at the very same instant, as it seemed to him, they came into violent collision. Both shouted with surprise. A loud explosion took place between them; a roar of red fire, thick smoke; and Kayerts, deafened and blinded, rushed back thinking: “I am hit — it’s all over.” He expected the other to come round — to gloat over his agony. He caught hold of an upright of the roof — ”All over!” Then he heard a crashing fall on the other side of the house, as if somebody had tumbled headlong over a chair — then silence. Nothing more happened. He did not die. Only his shoulder felt as if it had been badly wrenched, and he had lost his revolver. He was disarmed and helpless! He waited for his fate. The other man made no sound. It was a stratagem. He was stalking him now! Along what side? Perhaps he was taking aim this very minute!

After a few moments of an agony frightful and absurd, he decided to go and meet his doom. He was prepared for every surrender. He turned the corner, steadying himself with one hand on the wall; made a few paces, and nearly swooned. He had seen on the floor, protruding past the other corner, a pair of turned-up feet. A pair of white naked feet in red slippers. He felt deadly sick, and stood for a time in profound darkness. Then Makola appeared before him, saying quietly: “Come along, Mr. Kayerts. He is dead.” He burst into tears of gratitude; a loud, sobbing fit of crying. After a time he found himself sitting in a chair and looking at Carlier, who lay stretched on his back. Makola was kneeling over the body.

“Is this your revolver?” asked Makola, getting up.

“Yes,” said Kayerts; then he added very quickly, “He ran after me to shoot me — you saw!”

“Yes, I saw,” said Makola. “There is only one revolver; where’s his?”

“Don’t know,” whispered Kayerts in a voice that had become suddenly very faint.

“I will go and look for it,” said the other, gently. He made the round along the verandah, while Kayerts sat still and looked at the corpse. Makola came back empty-handed, stood in deep thought, then stepped quietly into the dead man’s room, and came out directly with a revolver, which he held up before Kayerts. Kayerts shut his eyes. Everything was going round. He found life more terrible and difficult than death. He had shot an unarmed man.

After meditating for a while, Makola said softly, pointing at the dead man who lay there with his right eye blown out —

“He died of fever.” Kayerts looked at him with a stony stare. “Yes,” repeated Makola, thoughtfully, stepping over the corpse, “I think he died of fever. Bury him to-morrow.”

And he went away slowly to his expectant wife, leaving the two white men alone on the verandah.

Night came, and Kayerts sat unmoving on his chair. He sat quiet as if he had taken a dose of opium. The violence of the emotions he had passed through produced a feeling of exhausted serenity. He had plumbed in one short afternoon the depths of horror and despair, and now found repose in the conviction that life had no more secrets for him: neither had death! He sat by the corpse thinking; thinking very actively, thinking very new thoughts. He seemed to have broken loose from himself altogether. His old thoughts, convictions, likes and dislikes, things he respected and things he abhorred, appeared in their true light at last! Appeared contemptible and childish, false and ridiculous. He revelled in his new wisdom while he sat by the man he had killed. He argued with himself about all things under heaven with that kind of wrong-headed lucidity which may be observed in some lunatics. Incidentally he reflected that the fellow dead there had been a noxious beast anyway; that men died every day in thousands; perhaps in hundreds of thousands — who could tell? — and that in the number, that one death could not possibly make any difference; couldn’t have any importance, at least to a thinking creature. He, Kayerts, was a thinking creature. He had been all his life, till that moment, a believer in a lot of nonsense like the rest of mankind — who are fools; but now he thought! He knew! He was at peace; he was familiar with the highest wisdom! Then he tried to imagine himself dead, and Carlier sitting in his chair watching him;

and his attempt met with such unexpected success, that in a very few moments he became not at all sure who was dead and who was alive. This extraordinary achievement of his fancy startled him, however, and by a clever and timely effort of mind he saved himself just in time from becoming Carlier. His heart thumped, and he felt hot all over at the thought of that danger. Carlier! What a beastly thing! To compose his now disturbed nerves — and no wonder! — he tried to whistle a little. Then, suddenly, he fell asleep, or thought he had slept; but at any rate there was a fog, and somebody had whistled in the fog.

He stood up. The day had come, and a heavy mist had descended upon the land: the mist penetrating, enveloping, and silent; the morning mist of tropical lands; the mist that clings and kills; the mist white and deadly, immaculate and poisonous. He stood up, saw the body, and threw his arms above his head with a cry like that of a man who, waking from a trance, finds himself immured forever in a tomb. "Help! . . . My God!"

A shriek inhuman, vibrating and sudden, pierced like a sharp dart the white shroud of that land of sorrow. Three short, impatient screeches followed, and then, for a time, the fog-wreaths rolled on, undisturbed, through a formidable silence. Then many more shrieks, rapid and piercing, like the yells of some exasperated and ruthless creature, rent the air. Progress was calling to Kayerts from the river. Progress and civilization and all the virtues. Society was calling to its accomplished child to come, to be taken care of, to be instructed, to be judged, to be condemned; it called him to return to that rubbish heap from which he had wandered away, so that justice could be done.

Kayerts heard and understood. He stumbled out of the verandah, leaving the other man quite alone for the first time since they had been thrown there together. He groped his way through the fog, calling in his ignorance upon the invisible heaven to undo its work. Makola flitted by in the mist, shouting as he ran —

"Steamer! Steamer! They can't see. They whistle for the station. I go ring the bell. Go down to the landing, sir. I ring."

He disappeared. Kayerts stood still. He looked upwards; the fog rolled low over his head. He looked round like a man who has lost his way; and he saw a dark smudge, a cross-shaped stain, upon the shifting purity of the mist. As he began to stumble towards it, the station bell rang in a tumultuous peal its answer to the impatient clamour of the steamer.

The Managing Director of the Great Civilizing Company (since we know that civilization follows trade) landed first, and incontinently lost sight of the steamer. The fog down by the river was exceedingly dense; above, at the station, the bell rang unceasing and brazen.

The Director shouted loudly to the steamer:

“There is nobody down to meet us; there may be something wrong, though they are ringing. You had better come, too!”

And he began to toil up the steep bank. The captain and the engine-driver of the boat followed behind. As they scrambled up the fog thinned, and they could see their Director a good way ahead. Suddenly they saw him start forward, calling to them over his shoulder: — ”Run! Run to the house! I’ve found one of them. Run, look for the other!”

He had found one of them! And even he, the man of varied and startling experience, was somewhat discomposed by the manner of this finding. He stood and fumbled in his pockets (for a knife) while he faced Kayerts, who was hanging by a leather strap from the cross. He had evidently climbed the grave, which was high and narrow, and after tying the end of the strap to the arm, had swung himself off. His toes were only a couple of inches above the ground; his arms hung stiffly down; he seemed to be standing rigidly at attention, but with one purple cheek playfully posed on the shoulder. And, irreverently, he was putting out a swollen tongue at his Managing Director.

## *THE RETURN*



The inner circle train from the City rushed impetuously out of a black hole and pulled up with a discordant, grinding racket in the smirched twilight of a West-End station. A line of doors flew open and a lot of men stepped out headlong. They had high hats, healthy pale faces, dark overcoats and shiny boots; they held in their gloved hands thin umbrellas and hastily folded evening papers that resembled stiff, dirty rags of greenish, pinkish, or whitish colour. Alvan Hervey stepped out with the rest, a smouldering cigar between his teeth. A disregarded little woman in rusty black, with both arms full of parcels, ran along in distress, bolted suddenly into a third-class compartment and the train went on. The slamming of carriage doors burst out sharp and spiteful like a fusillade; an icy draught mingled with acrid fumes swept the whole length of the platform and made a tottering old man, wrapped up to his ears in a woollen comforter, stop short in the moving throng to cough violently over his stick. No one spared him a glance.

Alvan Hervey passed through the ticket gate. Between the bare walls of a sordid staircase men clambered rapidly; their backs appeared alike — almost as if they had been wearing a uniform; their indifferent faces were varied but somehow suggested kinship, like the faces of a band of brothers who through prudence, dignity, disgust, or foresight would resolutely ignore each other; and their eyes, quick or slow; their eyes gazing up the dusty steps; their eyes brown, black, gray, blue, had all the same stare, concentrated and empty, satisfied and unthinking.

Outside the big doorway of the street they scattered in all directions, walking away fast from one another with the hurried air of men fleeing from something compromising; from familiarity or confidences; from something suspected and concealed — like truth or pestilence. Alvan Hervey hesitated, standing alone in the doorway for a moment; then decided to walk home.

He strode firmly. A misty rain settled like silvery dust on clothes, on moustaches; wetted the faces, varnished the flagstones, darkened the walls, dripped from umbrellas. And he moved on in the rain with careless serenity, with the tranquil ease of someone successful and disdainful, very sure of himself — a man with lots of money and friends. He was tall, well set-up,

good-looking and healthy; and his clear pale face had under its commonplace refinement that slight tinge of overbearing brutality which is given by the possession of only partly difficult accomplishments; by excelling in games, or in the art of making money; by the easy mastery over animals and over needy men.

He was going home much earlier than usual, straight from the City and without calling at his club. He considered himself well connected, well educated and intelligent. Who doesn't? But his connections, education and intelligence were strictly on a par with those of the men with whom he did business or amused himself. He had married five years ago. At the time all his acquaintances had said he was very much in love; and he had said so himself, frankly, because it is very well understood that every man falls in love once in his life — unless his wife dies, when it may be quite praiseworthy to fall in love again. The girl was healthy, tall, fair, and in his opinion was well connected, well educated and intelligent. She was also intensely bored with her home where, as if packed in a tight box, her individuality — of which she was very conscious — had no play. She strode like a grenadier, was strong and upright like an obelisk, had a beautiful face, a candid brow, pure eyes, and not a thought of her own in her head. He surrendered quickly to all those charms, and she appeared to him so unquestionably of the right sort that he did not hesitate for a moment to declare himself in love. Under the cover of that sacred and poetical fiction he desired her masterfully, for various reasons; but principally for the satisfaction of having his own way. He was very dull and solemn about it — for no earthly reason, unless to conceal his feelings — which is an eminently proper thing to do. Nobody, however, would have been shocked had he neglected that duty, for the feeling he experienced really was a longing — a longing stronger and a little more complex no doubt, but no more reprehensible in its nature than a hungry man's appetite for his dinner.

After their marriage they busied themselves, with marked success, in enlarging the circle of their acquaintance. Thirty people knew them by sight; twenty more with smiling demonstrations tolerated their occasional presence within hospitable thresholds; at least fifty others became aware of their existence. They moved in their enlarged world amongst perfectly delightful men and women who feared emotion, enthusiasm, or failure, more than fire, war, or mortal disease; who tolerated only the commonest formulas of commonest thoughts, and recognized only profitable facts. It

was an extremely charming sphere, the abode of all the virtues, where nothing is realized and where all joys and sorrows are cautiously toned down into pleasures and annoyances. In that serene region, then, where noble sentiments are cultivated in sufficient profusion to conceal the pitiless materialism of thoughts and aspirations Alvan Hervey and his wife spent five years of prudent bliss unclouded by any doubt as to the moral propriety of their existence. She, to give her individuality fair play, took up all manner of philanthropic work and became a member of various rescuing and reforming societies patronized or presided over by ladies of title. He took an active interest in politics; and having met quite by chance a literary man — who nevertheless was related to an earl — he was induced to finance a moribund society paper. It was a semi-political, and wholly scandalous publication, redeemed by excessive dulness; and as it was utterly faithless, as it contained no new thought, as it never by any chance had a flash of wit, satire, or indignation in its pages, he judged it respectable enough, at first sight. Afterwards, when it paid, he promptly perceived that upon the whole it was a virtuous undertaking. It paved the way of his ambition; and he enjoyed also the special kind of importance he derived from this connection with what he imagined to be literature.

This connection still further enlarged their world. Men who wrote or drew prettily for the public came at times to their house, and his editor came very often. He thought him rather an ass because he had such big front teeth (the proper thing is to have small, even teeth) and wore his hair a trifle longer than most men do. However, some dukes wear their hair long, and the fellow indubitably knew his business. The worst was that his gravity, though perfectly portentous, could not be trusted. He sat, elegant and bulky, in the drawing-room, the head of his stick hovering in front of his big teeth, and talked for hours with a thick-lipped smile (he said nothing that could be considered objectionable and not quite the thing) talked in an unusual manner — not obviously irritatingly. His forehead was too lofty — unusually so — and under it there was a straight nose, lost between the hairless cheeks, that in a smooth curve ran into a chin shaped like the end of a snow-shoe. And in this face that resembled the face of a fat and fiendishly knowing baby there glittered a pair of clever, peering, unbelieving black eyes. He wrote verses too. Rather an ass. But the band of men who trailed at the skirts of his monumental frock-coat seemed to perceive wonderful things in what he said. Alvan Hervey put it down to affectation. Those artist



chaps, upon the whole, were so affected. Still, all this was highly proper — very useful to him — and his wife seemed to like it — as if she also had derived some distinct and secret advantage from this intellectual connection. She received her mixed and decorous guests with a kind of tall, ponderous grace, peculiarly her own and which awakened in the mind of intimidated strangers incongruous and improper reminiscences of an elephant, a giraffe, a gazelle; of a gothic tower — of an overgrown angel. Her Thursdays were becoming famous in their world; and their world grew steadily, annexing street after street. It included also Somebody's Gardens, a Crescent — a couple of Squares.

Thus Alvan Hervey and his wife for five prosperous years lived by the side of one another. In time they came to know each other sufficiently well for all the practical purposes of such an existence, but they were no more capable of real intimacy than two animals feeding at the same manger, under the same roof, in a luxurious stable. His longing was appeased and became a habit; and she had her desire — the desire to get away from under the paternal roof, to assert her individuality, to move in her own set (so much smarter than the parental one); to have a home of her own, and her own share of the world's respect, envy, and applause. They understood each other warily, tacitly, like a pair of cautious conspirators in a profitable plot; because they were both unable to look at a fact, a sentiment, a principle, or a belief otherwise than in the light of their own dignity, of their own glorification, of their own advantage. They skimmed over the surface of life hand in hand, in a pure and frosty atmosphere — like two skilful skaters cutting figures on thick ice for the admiration of the beholders, and disdainfully ignoring the hidden stream, the stream restless and dark; the stream of life, profound and unfrozen.

Alvan Hervey turned twice to the left, once to the right, walked along two sides of a square, in the middle of which groups of tame-looking trees stood in respectable captivity behind iron railings, and rang at his door. A parlourmaid opened. A fad of his wife's, this, to have only women servants. That girl, while she took his hat and overcoat, said something which made him look at his watch. It was five o'clock, and his wife not at home. There was nothing unusual in that. He said, "No; no tea," and went upstairs.

He ascended without footfalls. Brass rods glimmered all up the red carpet. On the first-floor landing a marble woman, decently covered from neck to instep with stone draperies, advanced a row of lifeless toes to the

edge of the pedestal, and thrust out blindly a rigid white arm holding a cluster of lights. He had artistic tastes — at home. Heavy curtains caught back, half concealed dark corners. On the rich, stamped paper of the walls hung sketches, water-colours, engravings. His tastes were distinctly artistic. Old church towers peeped above green masses of foliage; the hills were purple, the sands yellow, the seas sunny, the skies blue. A young lady sprawled with dreamy eyes in a moored boat, in company of a lunch basket, a champagne bottle, and an enamoured man in a blazer. Bare-legged boys flirted sweetly with ragged maidens, slept on stone steps, gambolled with dogs. A pathetically lean girl flattened against a blank wall, turned up expiring eyes and tendered a flower for sale; while, near by, the large photographs of some famous and mutilated bas-reliefs seemed to represent a massacre turned into stone.

He looked, of course, at nothing, ascended another flight of stairs and went straight into the dressing room. A bronze dragon nailed by the tail to a bracket writhed away from the wall in calm convolutions, and held, between the conventional fury of its jaws, a crude gas flame that resembled a butterfly. The room was empty, of course; but, as he stepped in, it became filled all at once with a stir of many people; because the strips of glass on the doors of wardrobes and his wife's large pier-glass reflected him from head to foot, and multiplied his image into a crowd of gentlemanly and slavish imitators, who were dressed exactly like himself; had the same restrained and rare gestures; who moved when he moved, stood still with him in an obsequious immobility, and had just such appearances of life and feeling as he thought it dignified and safe for any man to manifest. And like real people who are slaves of common thoughts, that are not even their own, they affected a shadowy independence by the superficial variety of their movements. They moved together with him; but they either advanced to meet him, or walked away from him; they appeared, disappeared; they seemed to dodge behind walnut furniture, to be seen again, far within the polished panes, stepping about distinct and unreal in the convincing illusion of a room. And like the men he respected they could be trusted to do nothing individual, original, or startling — nothing unforeseen and nothing improper.

He moved for a time aimlessly in that good company, humming a popular but refined tune, and thinking vaguely of a business letter from abroad, which had to be answered on the morrow with cautious prevarication. Then,

as he walked towards a wardrobe, he saw appearing at his back, in the high mirror, the corner of his wife's dressing-table, and amongst the glitter of silver-mounted objects on it, the square white patch of an envelope. It was such an unusual thing to be seen there that he spun round almost before he realized his surprise; and all the sham men about him pivoted on their heels; all appeared surprised; and all moved rapidly towards envelopes on dressing-tables.

He recognized his wife's handwriting and saw that the envelope was addressed to himself. He muttered, "How very odd," and felt annoyed. Apart from any odd action being essentially an indecent thing in itself, the fact of his wife indulging in it made it doubly offensive. That she should write to him at all, when she knew he would be home for dinner, was perfectly ridiculous; but that she should leave it like this — in evidence for chance discovery — struck him as so outrageous that, thinking of it, he experienced suddenly a staggering sense of insecurity, an absurd and bizarre flash of a notion that the house had moved a little under his feet. He tore the envelope open, glanced at the letter, and sat down in a chair near by.

He held the paper before his eyes and looked at half a dozen lines scrawled on the page, while he was stunned by a noise meaningless and violent, like the clash of gongs or the beating of drums; a great aimless uproar that, in a manner, prevented him from hearing himself think and made his mind an absolute blank. This absurd and distracting tumult seemed to ooze out of the written words, to issue from between his very fingers that trembled, holding the paper. And suddenly he dropped the letter as though it had been something hot, or venomous, or filthy; and rushing to the window with the unreflecting precipitation of a man anxious to raise an alarm of fire or murder, he threw it up and put his head out.

A chill gust of wind, wandering through the damp and sooty obscurity over the waste of roofs and chimney-pots, touched his face with a clammy flick. He saw an illimitable darkness, in which stood a black jumble of walls, and, between them, the many rows of gaslights stretched far away in long lines, like strung-up beads of fire. A sinister loom as of a hidden conflagration lit up faintly from below the mist, falling upon a billowy and motionless sea of tiles and bricks. At the rattle of the opened window the world seemed to leap out of the night and confront him, while floating up to his ears there came a sound vast and faint; the deep mutter of something immense and alive. It penetrated him with a feeling of dismay and he

gasped silently. From the cab-stand in the square came distinct hoarse voices and a jeering laugh which sounded ominously harsh and cruel. It sounded threatening. He drew his head in, as if before an aimed blow, and flung the window down quickly. He made a few steps, stumbled against a chair, and with a great effort, pulled himself together to lay hold of a certain thought that was whizzing about loose in his head.

He got it at last, after more exertion than he expected; he was flushed and puffed a little as though he had been catching it with his hands, but his mental hold on it was weak, so weak that he judged it necessary to repeat it aloud — to hear it spoken firmly — in order to insure a perfect measure of possession. But he was unwilling to hear his own voice — to hear any sound whatever — owing to a vague belief, shaping itself slowly within him, that solitude and silence are the greatest felicities of mankind. The next moment it dawned upon him that they are perfectly unattainable — that faces must be seen, words spoken, thoughts heard. All the words — all the thoughts!

He said very distinctly, and looking at the carpet, “She’s gone.”

It was terrible — not the fact but the words; the words charged with the shadowy might of a meaning, that seemed to possess the tremendous power to call Fate down upon the earth, like those strange and appalling words that sometimes are heard in sleep. They vibrated round him in a metallic atmosphere, in a space that had the hardness of iron and the resonance of a bell of bronze. Looking down between the toes of his boots he seemed to listen thoughtfully to the receding wave of sound; to the wave spreading out in a widening circle, embracing streets, roofs, church-steeple, fields — and travelling away, widening endlessly, far, very far, where he could not hear — where he could not imagine anything — where . . .

“And — with that . . . ass,” he said again without stirring in the least. And there was nothing but humiliation. Nothing else. He could derive no moral solace from any aspect of the situation, which radiated pain only on every side. Pain. What kind of pain? It occurred to him that he ought to be heart-broken; but in an exceedingly short moment he perceived that his suffering was nothing of so trifling and dignified a kind. It was altogether a more serious matter, and partook rather of the nature of those subtle and cruel feelings which are awakened by a kick or a horse-whipping.

He felt very sick — physically sick — as though he had bitten through something nauseous. Life, that to a well-ordered mind should be a matter of

congratulation, appeared to him, for a second or so, perfectly intolerable. He picked up the paper at his feet, and sat down with the wish to think it out, to understand why his wife — his wife! — should leave him, should throw away respect, comfort, peace, decency, position throw away everything for nothing! He set himself to think out the hidden logic of her action — a mental undertaking fit for the leisure hours of a madhouse, though he couldn't see it. And he thought of his wife in every relation except the only fundamental one. He thought of her as a well-bred girl, as a wife, as a cultured person, as the mistress of a house, as a lady; but he never for a moment thought of her simply as a woman.

Then a fresh wave, a raging wave of humiliation, swept through his mind, and left nothing there but a personal sense of undeserved abasement. Why should he be mixed up with such a horrid exposure! It annihilated all the advantages of his well-ordered past, by a truth effective and unjust like a calumny — and the past was wasted. Its failure was disclosed — a distinct failure, on his part, to see, to guard, to understand. It could not be denied; it could not be explained away, hustled out of sight. He could not sit on it and look solemn. Now — if she had only died!

If she had only died! He was driven to envy such a respectable bereavement, and one so perfectly free from any taint of misfortune that even his best friend or his best enemy would not have felt the slightest thrill of exultation. No one would have cared. He sought comfort in clinging to the contemplation of the only fact of life that the resolute efforts of mankind had never failed to disguise in the clatter and glamour of phrases. And nothing lends itself more to lies than death. If she had only died! Certain words would have been said to him in a sad tone, and he, with proper fortitude, would have made appropriate answers. There were precedents for such an occasion. And no one would have cared. If she had only died! The promises, the terrors, the hopes of eternity, are the concern of the corrupt dead; but the obvious sweetness of life belongs to living, healthy men. And life was his concern: that sane and gratifying existence untroubled by too much love or by too much regret. She had interfered with it; she had defaced it. And suddenly it occurred to him he must have been mad to marry. It was too much in the nature of giving yourself away, of wearing — if for a moment — your heart on your sleeve. But every one married. Was all mankind mad!

In the shock of that startling thought he looked up, and saw to the left, to the right, in front, men sitting far off in chairs and looking at him with wild eyes — emissaries of a distracted mankind intruding to spy upon his pain and his humiliation. It was not to be borne. He rose quickly, and the others jumped up, too, on all sides. He stood still in the middle of the room as if discouraged by their vigilance. No escape! He felt something akin to despair. Everybody must know. The servants must know to-night. He ground his teeth . . . And he had never noticed, never guessed anything. Every one will know. He thought: “The woman’s a monster, but everybody will think me a fool”; and standing still in the midst of severe walnut-wood furniture, he felt such a tempest of anguish within him that he seemed to see himself rolling on the carpet, beating his head against the wall. He was disgusted with himself, with the loathsome rush of emotion breaking through all the reserves that guarded his manhood. Something unknown, withering and poisonous, had entered his life, passed near him, touched him, and he was deteriorating. He was appalled. What was it? She was gone. Why? His head was ready to burst with the endeavour to understand her act and his subtle horror of it. Everything was changed. Why? Only a woman gone, after all; and yet he had a vision, a vision quick and distinct as a dream: the vision of everything he had thought indestructible and safe in the world crashing down about him, like solid walls do before the fierce breath of a hurricane. He stared, shaking in every limb, while he felt the destructive breath, the mysterious breath, the breath of passion, stir the profound peace of the house. He looked round in fear. Yes. Crime may be forgiven; uncalculating sacrifice, blind trust, burning faith, other follies, may be turned to account; suffering, death itself, may with a grin or a frown be explained away; but passion is the unpardonable and secret infamy of our hearts, a thing to curse, to hide and to deny; a shameless and forlorn thing that tramples upon the smiling promises, that tears off the placid mask, that strips the body of life. And it had come to him! It had laid its unclean hand upon the spotless draperies of his existence, and he had to face it alone with all the world looking on. All the world! And he thought that even the bare suspicion of such an adversary within his house carried with it a taint and a condemnation. He put both his hands out as if to ward off the reproach of a defiling truth; and, instantly, the appalled conclave of unreal men, standing about mutely beyond the clear lustre of mirrors, made at him the same gesture of rejection and horror.

He glanced vainly here and there, like a man looking in desperation for a weapon or for a hiding place, and understood at last that he was disarmed and cornered by the enemy that, without any squeamishness, would strike so as to lay open his heart. He could get help nowhere, or even take counsel with himself, because in the sudden shock of her desertion the sentiments which he knew that in fidelity to his bringing up, to his prejudices and his surroundings, he ought to experience, were so mixed up with the novelty of real feelings, of fundamental feelings that know nothing of creed, class, or education, that he was unable to distinguish clearly between what is and what ought to be; between the inexcusable truth and the valid pretences. And he knew instinctively that truth would be of no use to him. Some kind of concealment seemed a necessity because one cannot explain. Of course not! Who would listen? One had simply to be without stain and without reproach to keep one's place in the forefront of life.

He said to himself, "I must get over it the best I can," and began to walk up and down the room. What next? What ought to be done? He thought: "I will travel — no I won't. I shall face it out." And after that resolve he was greatly cheered by the reflection that it would be a mute and an easy part to play, for no one would be likely to converse with him about the abominable conduct of — that woman. He argued to himself that decent people — and he knew no others — did not care to talk about such indelicate affairs. She had gone off — with that unhealthy, fat ass of a journalist. Why? He had been all a husband ought to be. He had given her a good position — she shared his prospects — he had treated her invariably with great consideration. He reviewed his conduct with a kind of dismal pride. It had been irreproachable. Then, why? For love? Profanation! There could be no love there. A shameful impulse of passion. Yes, passion. His own wife! Good God! . . . And the indelicate aspect of his domestic misfortune struck him with such shame that, next moment, he caught himself in the act of pondering absurdly over the notion whether it would not be more dignified for him to induce a general belief that he had been in the habit of beating his wife. Some fellows do . . . and anything would be better than the filthy fact; for it was clear he had lived with the root of it for five years — and it was too shameful. Anything! Anything! Brutality . . . But he gave it up directly, and began to think of the Divorce Court. It did not present itself to him, notwithstanding his respect for law and usage, as a proper refuge for dignified grief. It appeared rather as an unclean and sinister cavern where

men and women are haled by adverse fate to writhe ridiculously in the presence of uncompromising truth. It should not be allowed. That woman! Five . . . years . . . married five years . . . and never to see anything. Not to the very last day . . . not till she coolly went off. And he pictured to himself all the people he knew engaged in speculating as to whether all that time he had been blind, foolish, or infatuated. What a woman! Blind! . . . Not at all. Could a clean-minded man imagine such depravity? Evidently not. He drew a free breath. That was the attitude to take; it was dignified enough; it gave him the advantage, and he could not help perceiving that it was moral. He yearned unaffectedly to see morality (in his person) triumphant before the world. As to her she would be forgotten. Let her be forgotten — buried in oblivion — lost! No one would allude . . . Refined people — and every man and woman he knew could be so described — had, of course, a horror of such topics. Had they? Oh, yes. No one would allude to her . . . in his hearing. He stamped his foot, tore the letter across, then again and again. The thought of sympathizing friends excited in him a fury of mistrust. He flung down the small bits of paper. They settled, fluttering at his feet, and looked very white on the dark carpet, like a scattered handful of snowflakes.

This fit of hot anger was succeeded by a sudden sadness, by the darkening passage of a thought that ran over the scorched surface of his heart, like upon a barren plain, and after a fiercer assault of sunrays, the melancholy and cooling shadow of a cloud. He realized that he had had a shock — not a violent or rending blow, that can be seen, resisted, returned, forgotten, but a thrust, insidious and penetrating, that had stirred all those feelings, concealed and cruel, which the arts of the devil, the fears of mankind — God's infinite compassion, perhaps — keep chained deep down in the inscrutable twilight of our breasts. A dark curtain seemed to rise before him, and for less than a second he looked upon the mysterious universe of moral suffering. As a landscape is seen complete, and vast, and vivid, under a flash of lightning, so he could see disclosed in a moment all the immensity of pain that can be contained in one short moment of human thought. Then the curtain fell again, but his rapid vision left in Alvan Hervey's mind a trail of invincible sadness, a sense of loss and bitter solitude, as though he had been robbed and exiled. For a moment he ceased to be a member of society with a position, a career, and a name attached to all this, like a descriptive label of some complicated compound. He was a



simple human being removed from the delightful world of crescents and squares. He stood alone, naked and afraid, like the first man on the first day of evil. There are in life events, contacts, glimpses, that seem brutally to bring all the past to a close. There is a shock and a crash, as of a gate flung to behind one by the perfidious hand of fate. Go and seek another paradise, fool or sage. There is a moment of dumb dismay, and the wanderings must begin again; the painful explaining away of facts, the feverish raking up of illusions, the cultivation of a fresh crop of lies in the sweat of one's brow, to sustain life, to make it supportable, to make it fair, so as to hand intact to another generation of blind wanderers the charming legend of a heartless country, of a promised land, all flowers and blessings . . .

He came to himself with a slight start, and became aware of an oppressive, crushing desolation. It was only a feeling, it is true, but it produced on him a physical effect, as though his chest had been squeezed in a vice. He perceived himself so extremely forlorn and lamentable, and was moved so deeply by the oppressive sorrow, that another turn of the screw, he felt, would bring tears out of his eyes. He was deteriorating. Five years of life in common had appeased his longing. Yes, long-time ago. The first five months did that — but . . . There was the habit — the habit of her person, of her smile, of her gestures, of her voice, of her silence. She had a pure brow and good hair. How utterly wretched all this was. Good hair and fine eyes — remarkably fine. He was surprised by the number of details that intruded upon his unwilling memory. He could not help remembering her footsteps, the rustle of her dress, her way of holding her head, her decisive manner of saying "Alvan," the quiver of her nostrils when she was annoyed. All that had been so much his property, so intimately and specially his! He raged in a mournful, silent way, as he took stock of his losses. He was like a man counting the cost of an unlucky speculation — irritated, depressed — exasperated with himself and with others, with the fortunate, with the indifferent, with the callous; yet the wrong done him appeared so cruel that he would perhaps have dropped a tear over that spoliation if it had not been for his conviction that men do not weep. Foreigners do; they also kill sometimes in such circumstances. And to his horror he felt himself driven to regret almost that the usages of a society ready to forgive the shooting of a burglar forbade him, under the circumstances, even as much as a thought of murder. Nevertheless, he clenched his fists and set his teeth hard. And he was afraid at the same time.

He was afraid with that penetrating faltering fear that seems, in the very middle of a beat, to turn one's heart into a handful of dust. The contamination of her crime spread out, tainted the universe, tainted himself; woke up all the dormant infamies of the world; caused a ghastly kind of clairvoyance in which he could see the towns and fields of the earth, its sacred places, its temples and its houses, peopled by monsters — by monsters of duplicity, lust, and murder. She was a monster — he himself was thinking monstrous thoughts . . . and yet he was like other people. How many men and women at this very moment were plunged in abominations — meditated crimes. It was frightful to think of. He remembered all the streets — the well-to-do streets he had passed on his way home; all the innumerable houses with closed doors and curtained windows. Each seemed now an abode of anguish and folly. And his thought, as if appalled, stood still, recalling with dismay the decorous and frightful silence that was like a conspiracy; the grim, impenetrable silence of miles of walls concealing passions, misery, thoughts of crime. Surely he was not the only man; his was not the only house . . . and yet no one knew — no one guessed. But he knew. He knew with unerring certitude that could not be deceived by the correct silence of walls, of closed doors, of curtained windows. He was beside himself with a despairing agitation, like a man informed of a deadly secret — the secret of a calamity threatening the safety of mankind — the sacredness, the peace of life.

He caught sight of himself in one of the looking-glasses. It was a relief. The anguish of his feeling had been so powerful that he more than half expected to see some distorted wild face there, and he was pleasantly surprised to see nothing of the kind. His aspect, at any rate, would let no one into the secret of his pain. He examined himself with attention. His trousers were turned up, and his boots a little muddy, but he looked very much as usual. Only his hair was slightly ruffled, and that disorder, somehow, was so suggestive of trouble that he went quickly to the table, and began to use the brushes, in an anxious desire to obliterate the compromising trace, that only vestige of his emotion. He brushed with care, watching the effect of his smoothing; and another face, slightly pale and more tense than was perhaps desirable, peered back at him from the toilet glass. He laid the brushes down, and was not satisfied. He took them up again and brushed, brushed mechanically — forgot himself in that occupation. The tumult of his thoughts ended in a sluggish flow of

reflection, such as, after the outburst of a volcano, the almost imperceptible progress of a stream of lava, creeping languidly over a convulsed land and pitilessly obliterating any landmark left by the shock of the earthquake. It is a destructive but, by comparison, it is a peaceful phenomenon. Alvan Hervey was almost soothed by the deliberate pace of his thoughts. His moral landmarks were going one by one, consumed in the fire of his experience, buried in hot mud, in ashes. He was cooling — on the surface; but there was enough heat left somewhere to make him slap the brushes on the table, and turning away, say in a fierce whisper: “I wish him joy . . . Damn the woman.”

He felt himself utterly corrupted by her wickedness, and the most significant symptom of his moral downfall was the bitter, acrid satisfaction with which he recognized it. He, deliberately, swore in his thoughts; he meditated sneers; he shaped in profound silence words of cynical unbelief, and his most cherished convictions stood revealed finally as the narrow prejudices of fools. A crowd of shapeless, unclean thoughts crossed his mind in a stealthy rush, like a band of veiled malefactors hastening to a crime. He put his hands deep into his pockets. He heard a faint ringing somewhere, and muttered to himself: “I am not the only one . . . not the only one.” There was another ring. Front door!

His heart leaped up into his throat, and forthwith descended as low as his boots. A call! Who? Why? He wanted to rush out on the landing and shout to the servant: “Not at home! Gone away abroad!” . . . Any excuse. He could not face a visitor. Not this evening. No. To-morrow. . . . Before he could break out of the numbness that enveloped him like a sheet of lead, he heard far below, as if in the entrails of the earth, a door close heavily. The house vibrated to it more than to a clap of thunder. He stood still, wishing himself invisible. The room was very chilly. He did not think he would ever feel like that. But people must be met — they must be faced — talked to — smiled at. He heard another door, much nearer — the door of the drawing-room — being opened and flung to again. He imagined for a moment he would faint. How absurd! That kind of thing had to be gone through. A voice spoke. He could not catch the words. Then the voice spoke again, and footsteps were heard on the first floor landing. Hang it all! Was he to hear that voice and those footsteps whenever any one spoke or moved? He thought: “This is like being haunted — I suppose it will last for a week or so, at least. Till I forget. Forget! Forget!” Someone was coming up the

second flight of stairs. Servant? He listened, then, suddenly, as though an incredible, frightful revelation had been shouted to him from a distance, he bellowed out in the empty room: "What! What!" in such a fiendish tone as to astonish himself. The footsteps stopped outside the door. He stood openmouthed, maddened and still, as if in the midst of a catastrophe. The door-handle rattled lightly. It seemed to him that the walls were coming apart, that the furniture swayed at him; the ceiling slanted queerly for a moment, a tall wardrobe tried to topple over. He caught hold of something and it was the back of a chair. So he had reeled against a chair! Oh! Confound it! He gripped hard.

The flaming butterfly poised between the jaws of the bronze dragon radiated a glare, a glare that seemed to leap up all at once into a crude, blinding fierceness, and made it difficult for him to distinguish plainly the figure of his wife standing upright with her back to the closed door. He looked at her and could not detect her breathing. The harsh and violent light was beating on her, and he was amazed to see her preserve so well the composure of her upright attitude in that scorching brilliance which, to his eyes, enveloped her like a hot and consuming mist. He would not have been surprised if she had vanished in it as suddenly as she had appeared. He stared and listened; listened for some sound, but the silence round him was absolute — as though he had in a moment grown completely deaf as well as dim-eyed. Then his hearing returned, preternaturally sharp. He heard the patter of a rain-shower on the window panes behind the lowered blinds, and below, far below, in the artificial abyss of the square, the deadened roll of wheels and the splashy trotting of a horse. He heard a groan also — very distinct — in the room — close to his ear.

He thought with alarm: "I must have made that noise myself;" and at the same instant the woman left the door, stepped firmly across the floor before him, and sat down in a chair. He knew that step. There was no doubt about it. She had come back! And he very nearly said aloud "Of course!" — such was his sudden and masterful perception of the indestructible character of her being. Nothing could destroy her — and nothing but his own destruction could keep her away. She was the incarnation of all the short moments which every man spares out of his life for dreams, for precious dreams that concrete the most cherished, the most profitable of his illusions. He peered at her with inward trepidation. She was mysterious, significant, full of obscure meaning — like a symbol. He peered, bending forward, as

though he had been discovering about her things he had never seen before. Unconsciously he made a step towards her — then another. He saw her arm make an ample, decided movement and he stopped. She had lifted her veil. It was like the lifting of a vizor.

The spell was broken. He experienced a shock as though he had been called out of a trance by the sudden noise of an explosion. It was even more startling and more distinct; it was an infinitely more intimate change, for he had the sensation of having come into this room only that very moment; of having returned from very far; he was made aware that some essential part of himself had in a flash returned into his body, returned finally from a fierce and lamentable region, from the dwelling-place of unveiled hearts. He woke up to an amazing infinity of contempt, to a droll bitterness of wonder, to a disenchanting conviction of safety. He had a glimpse of the irresistible force, and he saw also the barrenness of his convictions — of her convictions. It seemed to him that he could never make a mistake as long as he lived. It was morally impossible to go wrong. He was not elated by that certitude; he was dimly uneasy about its price; there was a chill as of death in this triumph of sound principles, in this victory snatched under the very shadow of disaster.

The last trace of his previous state of mind vanished, as the instantaneous and elusive trail of a bursting meteor vanishes on the profound blackness of the sky; it was the faint flicker of a painful thought, gone as soon as perceived, that nothing but her presence — after all — had the power to recall him to himself. He stared at her. She sat with her hands on her lap, looking down; and he noticed that her boots were dirty, her skirts wet and splashed, as though she had been driven back there by a blind fear through a waste of mud. He was indignant, amazed and shocked, but in a natural, healthy way now; so that he could control those unprofitable sentiments by the dictates of cautious self-restraint. The light in the room had no unusual brilliance now; it was a good light in which he could easily observe the expression of her face. It was that of dull fatigue. And the silence that surrounded them was the normal silence of any quiet house, hardly disturbed by the faint noises of a respectable quarter of the town. He was very cool — and it was quite coolly that he thought how much better it would be if neither of them ever spoke again. She sat with closed lips, with an air of lassitude in the stony forgetfulness of her pose, but after a moment she lifted her drooping eyelids and met his tense and inquisitive stare by a

look that had all the formless eloquence of a cry. It penetrated, it stirred without informing; it was the very essence of anguish stripped of words that can be smiled at, argued away, shouted down, disdained. It was anguish naked and unashamed, the bare pain of existence let loose upon the world in the fleeting unreserve of a look that had in it an immensity of fatigue, the scornful sincerity, the black impudence of an extorted confession. Alvan Hervey was seized with wonder, as though he had seen something inconceivable; and some obscure part of his being was ready to exclaim with him: "I would never have believed it!" but an instantaneous revulsion of wounded susceptibilities checked the unfinished thought.

He felt full of rancorous indignation against the woman who could look like this at one. This look probed him; it tampered with him. It was dangerous to one as would be a hint of unbelief whispered by a priest in the august decorum of a temple; and at the same time it was impure, it was disturbing, like a cynical consolation muttered in the dark, tainting the sorrow, corroding the thought, poisoning the heart. He wanted to ask her furiously: "Who do you take me for? How dare you look at me like this?" He felt himself helpless before the hidden meaning of that look; he resented it with pained and futile violence as an injury so secret that it could never, never be redressed. His wish was to crush her by a single sentence. He was stainless. Opinion was on his side; morality, men and gods were on his side; law, conscience — all the world! She had nothing but that look. And he could only say:

"How long do you intend to stay here?"

Her eyes did not waver, her lips remained closed; and for any effect of his words he might have spoken to a dead woman, only that this one breathed quickly. He was profoundly disappointed by what he had said. It was a great deception, something in the nature of treason. He had deceived himself. It should have been altogether different — other words — another sensation. And before his eyes, so fixed that at times they saw nothing, she sat apparently as unconscious as though she had been alone, sending that look of brazen confession straight at him — with an air of staring into empty space. He said significantly:

"Must I go then?" And he knew he meant nothing of what he implied.

One of her hands on her lap moved slightly as though his words had fallen there and she had thrown them off on the floor. But her silence encouraged him. Possibly it meant remorse — perhaps fear. Was she

thunderstruck by his attitude? . . . Her eyelids dropped. He seemed to understand ever so much — everything! Very well — but she must be made to suffer. It was due to him. He understood everything, yet he judged it indispensable to say with an obvious affectation of civility:

“I don’t understand — be so good as to . . .”

She stood up. For a second he believed she intended to go away, and it was as though someone had jerked a string attached to his heart. It hurt. He remained open-mouthed and silent. But she made an irresolute step towards him, and instinctively he moved aside. They stood before one another, and the fragments of the torn letter lay between them — at their feet — like an insurmountable obstacle, like a sign of eternal separation! Around them three other couples stood still and face to face, as if waiting for a signal to begin some action — a struggle, a dispute, or a dance.

She said: “Don’t — Alvan!” and there was something that resembled a warning in the pain of her tone. He narrowed his eyes as if trying to pierce her with his gaze. Her voice touched him. He had aspirations after magnanimity, generosity, superiority — interrupted, however, by flashes of indignation and anxiety — frightful anxiety to know how far she had gone. She looked down at the torn paper. Then she looked up, and their eyes met again, remained fastened together, like an unbreakable bond, like a clasp of eternal complicity; and the decorous silence, the pervading quietude of the house which enveloped this meeting of their glances became for a moment inexpressibly vile, for he was afraid she would say too much and make magnanimity impossible, while behind the profound mournfulness of her face there was a regret — a regret of things done — the regret of delay — the thought that if she had only turned back a week sooner — a day sooner — only an hour sooner. . . . They were afraid to hear again the sound of their voices; they did not know what they might say — perhaps something that could not be recalled; and words are more terrible than facts. But the tricky fatality that lurks in obscure impulses spoke through Alvan Hervey’s lips suddenly; and he heard his own voice with the excited and sceptical curiosity with which one listens to actors’ voices speaking on the stage in the strain of a poignant situation.

“If you have forgotten anything . . . of course . . . I . . .”

Her eyes blazed at him for an instant; her lips trembled — and then she also became the mouth-piece of the mysterious force forever hovering near

us; of that perverse inspiration, wandering capricious and uncontrollable, like a gust of wind.

“What is the good of this, Alvan? . . . You know why I came back. . . . You know that I could not . . . “

He interrupted her with irritation.

“Then! what’s this?” he asked, pointing downwards at the torn letter.

“That’s a mistake,” she said hurriedly, in a muffled voice.

This answer amazed him. He remained speechless, staring at her. He had half a mind to burst into a laugh. It ended in a smile as involuntary as a grimace of pain.

“A mistake . . .” he began, slowly, and then found himself unable to say another word.

“Yes . . . it was honest,” she said very low, as if speaking to the memory of a feeling in a remote past.

He exploded.

“Curse your honesty! . . . Is there any honesty in all this! . . . When did you begin to be honest? Why are you here? What are you now? . . . Still honest? . . . “

He walked at her, raging, as if blind; during these three quick strides he lost touch of the material world and was whirled interminably through a kind of empty universe made up of nothing but fury and anguish, till he came suddenly upon her face — very close to his. He stopped short, and all at once seemed to remember something heard ages ago.

“You don’t know the meaning of the word,” he shouted.

She did not flinch. He perceived with fear that everything around him was still. She did not move a hair’s breadth; his own body did not stir. An imperturbable calm enveloped their two motionless figures, the house, the town, all the world — and the trifling tempest of his feelings. The violence of the short tumult within him had been such as could well have shattered all creation; and yet nothing was changed. He faced his wife in the familiar room in his own house. It had not fallen. And right and left all the innumerable dwellings, standing shoulder to shoulder, had resisted the shock of his passion, had presented, unmoved, to the loneliness of his trouble, the grim silence of walls, the impenetrable and polished discretion of closed doors and curtained windows. Immobility and silence pressed on him, assailed him, like two accomplices of the immovable and mute woman before his eyes. He was suddenly vanquished. He was shown his



impotence. He was soothed by the breath of a corrupt resignation coming to him through the subtle irony of the surrounding peace.

He said with villainous composure:

“At any rate it isn’t enough for me. I want to know more — if you’re going to stay.”

“There is nothing more to tell,” she answered, sadly.

It struck him as so very true that he did not say anything. She went on:

“You wouldn’t understand. . . .”

“No?” he said, quietly. He held himself tight not to burst into howls and imprecations.

“I tried to be faithful . . .” she began again.

“And this?” he exclaimed, pointing at the fragments of her letter.

“This — this is a failure,” she said.

“I should think so,” he muttered, bitterly.

“I tried to be faithful to myself — Alvan — and . . . and honest to you. . . .”

“If you had tried to be faithful to me it would have been more to the purpose,” he interrupted, angrily. “I’ve been faithful to you and you have spoiled my life — both our lives . . .” Then after a pause the unconquerable preoccupation of self came out, and he raised his voice to ask resentfully, “And, pray, for how long have you been making a fool of me?”

She seemed horribly shocked by that question. He did not wait for an answer, but went on moving about all the time; now and then coming up to her, then wandering off restlessly to the other end of the room.

“I want to know. Everybody knows, I suppose, but myself — and that’s your honesty!”

“I have told you there is nothing to know,” she said, speaking unsteadily as if in pain. “Nothing of what you suppose. You don’t understand me. This letter is the beginning — and the end.”

“The end — this thing has no end,” he clamoured, unexpectedly. “Can’t you understand that? I can . . . The beginning . . .”

He stopped and looked into her eyes with concentrated intensity, with a desire to see, to penetrate, to understand, that made him positively hold his breath till he gasped.

“By Heavens!” he said, standing perfectly still in a peering attitude and within less than a foot from her.

“By Heavens!” he repeated, slowly, and in a tone whose involuntary strangeness was a complete mystery to himself. “By Heavens — I could believe you — I could believe anything — now!”

He turned short on his heel and began to walk up and down the room with an air of having disburdened himself of the final pronouncement of his life — of having said something on which he would not go back, even if he could. She remained as if rooted to the carpet. Her eyes followed the restless movements of the man, who avoided looking at her. Her wide stare clung to him, inquiring, wondering and doubtful.

“But the fellow was forever sticking in here,” he burst out, distractedly. “He made love to you, I suppose — and, and . . .” He lowered his voice. “And — you let him.”

“And I let him,” she murmured, catching his intonation, so that her voice sounded unconscious, sounded far off and slavish, like an echo.

He said twice, “You! You!” violently, then calmed down. “What could you see in the fellow?” he asked, with unaffected wonder. “An effeminate, fat ass. What could you . . . Weren’t you happy? Didn’t you have all you wanted? Now — frankly; did I deceive your expectations in any way? Were you disappointed with our position — or with our prospects — perhaps? You know you couldn’t be — they are much better than you could hope for when you married me. . . .”

He forgot himself so far as to gesticulate a little while he went on with animation:

“What could you expect from such a fellow? He’s an outsider — a rank outsider. . . . If it hadn’t been for my money . . . do you hear? . . . for my money, he wouldn’t know where to turn. His people won’t have anything to do with him. The fellow’s no class — no class at all. He’s useful, certainly, that’s why I . . . I thought you had enough intelligence to see it. . . . And you . . . No! It’s incredible! What did he tell you? Do you care for no one’s opinion — is there no restraining influence in the world for you — women? Did you ever give me a thought? I tried to be a good husband. Did I fail? Tell me — what have I done?”

Carried away by his feelings he took his head in both his hands and repeated wildly:

“What have I done? . . . Tell me! What? . . .”

“Nothing,” she said.

“Ah! You see . . . you can’t . . .” he began, triumphantly, walking away; then suddenly, as though he had been flung back at her by something invisible he had met, he spun round and shouted with exasperation:

“What on earth did you expect me to do?”

Without a word she moved slowly towards the table, and, sitting down, leaned on her elbow, shading her eyes with her hand. All that time he glared at her watchfully as if expecting every moment to find in her deliberate movements an answer to his question. But he could not read anything, he could gather no hint of her thought. He tried to suppress his desire to shout, and after waiting awhile, said with incisive scorn:

“Did you want me to write absurd verses; to sit and look at you for hours — to talk to you about your soul? You ought to have known I wasn’t that sort. . . . I had something better to do. But if you think I was totally blind . . .”

He perceived in a flash that he could remember an infinity of enlightening occurrences. He could recall ever so many distinct occasions when he came upon them; he remembered the absurdly interrupted gesture of his fat, white hand, the rapt expression of her face, the glitter of unbelieving eyes; snatches of incomprehensible conversations not worth listening to, silences that had meant nothing at the time and seemed now illuminating like a burst of sunshine. He remembered all that. He had not been blind. Oh! No! And to know this was an exquisite relief: it brought back all his composure.

“I thought it beneath me to suspect you,” he said, loftily.

The sound of that sentence evidently possessed some magical power, because, as soon as he had spoken, he felt wonderfully at ease; and directly afterwards he experienced a flash of joyful amazement at the discovery that he could be inspired to such noble and truthful utterance. He watched the effect of his words. They caused her to glance to him quickly over her shoulder. He caught a glimpse of wet eyelashes, of a red cheek with a tear running down swiftly; and then she turned away again and sat as before, covering her face with her hands.

“You ought to be perfectly frank with me,” he said, slowly.

“You know everything,” she answered, indistinctly, through her fingers.

“This letter. . . . Yes . . . but . . .”

“And I came back,” she exclaimed in a stifled voice; “you know everything.”

“I am glad of it — for your sake,” he said with impressive gravity. He listened to himself with solemn emotion. It seemed to him that something inexpressibly momentous was in progress within the room, that every word and every gesture had the importance of events preordained from the beginning of all things, and summing up in their finality the whole purpose of creation.

“For your sake,” he repeated.

Her shoulders shook as though she had been sobbing, and he forgot himself in the contemplation of her hair. Suddenly he gave a start, as if waking up, and asked very gently and not much above a whisper —

“Have you been meeting him often?”

“Never!” she cried into the palms of her hands.

This answer seemed for a moment to take from him the power of speech. His lips moved for some time before any sound came.

“You preferred to make love here — under my very nose,” he said, furiously. He calmed down instantly, and felt regretfully uneasy, as though he had let himself down in her estimation by that outburst. She rose, and with her hand on the back of the chair confronted him with eyes that were perfectly dry now. There was a red spot on each of her cheeks.

“When I made up my mind to go to him — I wrote,” she said.

“But you didn’t go to him,” he took up in the same tone. “How far did you go? What made you come back?”

“I didn’t know myself,” she murmured. Nothing of her moved but her lips. He fixed her sternly.

“Did he expect this? Was he waiting for you?” he asked.

She answered him by an almost imperceptible nod, and he continued to look at her for a good while without making a sound. Then, at last —

“And I suppose he is waiting yet?” he asked, quickly.

Again she seemed to nod at him. For some reason he felt he must know the time. He consulted his watch gloomily. Half-past seven.

“Is he?” he muttered, putting the watch in his pocket. He looked up at her, and, as if suddenly overcome by a sense of sinister fun, gave a short, harsh laugh, directly repressed.

“No! It’s the most unheard! . . .” he mumbled while she stood before him biting her lower lip, as if plunged in deep thought. He laughed again in one low burst that was as spiteful as an imprecation. He did not know why he felt such an overpowering and sudden distaste for the facts of existence —

for facts in general — such an immense disgust at the thought of all the many days already lived through. He was wearied. Thinking seemed a labour beyond his strength. He said —

“You deceived me — now you make a fool of him . . . It’s awful! Why?”

“I deceived myself!” she exclaimed.

“Oh! Nonsense!” he said, impatiently.

“I am ready to go if you wish it,” she went on, quickly. “It was due to you — to be told — to know. No! I could not!” she cried, and stood still wringing her hands stealthily.

“I am glad you repented before it was too late,” he said in a dull tone and looking at his boots. “I am glad . . . some spark of better feeling,” he muttered, as if to himself. He lifted up his head after a moment of brooding silence. “I am glad to see that there is some sense of decency left in you,” he added a little louder. Looking at her he appeared to hesitate, as if estimating the possible consequences of what he wished to say, and at last blurted out —

“After all, I loved you. . . .”

“I did not know,” she whispered.

“Good God!” he cried. “Why do you imagine I married you?”

The indelicacy of his obtuseness angered her.

“Ah — why?” she said through her teeth.

He appeared overcome with horror, and watched her lips intently as though in fear.

“I imagined many things,” she said, slowly, and paused. He watched, holding his breath. At last she went on musingly, as if thinking aloud, “I tried to understand. I tried honestly. . . . Why? . . . To do the usual thing — I suppose. . . . To please yourself.”

He walked away smartly, and when he came back, close to her, he had a flushed face.

“You seemed pretty well pleased, too — at the time,” he hissed, with scathing fury. “I needn’t ask whether you loved me.”

“I know now I was perfectly incapable of such a thing,” she said, calmly, “If I had, perhaps you would not have married me.”

“It’s very clear I would not have done it if I had known you — as I know you now.”

He seemed to see himself proposing to her — ages ago. They were strolling up the slope of a lawn. Groups of people were scattered in

sunshine. The shadows of leafy boughs lay still on the short grass. The coloured sunshades far off, passing between trees, resembled deliberate and brilliant butterflies moving without a flutter. Men smiling amiably, or else very grave, within the impeccable shelter of their black coats, stood by the side of women who, clustered in clear summer toilettes, recalled all the fabulous tales of enchanted gardens where animated flowers smile at bewitched knights. There was a sumptuous serenity in it all, a thin, vibrating excitement, the perfect security, as of an invincible ignorance, that evoked within him a transcendent belief in felicity as the lot of all mankind, a recklessly picturesque desire to get promptly something for himself only, out of that splendour unmarred by any shadow of a thought. The girl walked by his side across an open space; no one was near, and suddenly he stood still, as if inspired, and spoke. He remembered looking at her pure eyes, at her candid brow; he remembered glancing about quickly to see if they were being observed, and thinking that nothing could go wrong in a world of so much charm, purity, and distinction. He was proud of it. He was one of its makers, of its possessors, of its guardians, of its extollers. He wanted to grasp it solidly, to get as much gratification as he could out of it; and in view of its incomparable quality, of its unstained atmosphere, of its nearness to the heaven of its choice, this gust of brutal desire seemed the most noble of aspirations. In a second he lived again through all these moments, and then all the pathos of his failure presented itself to him with such vividness that there was a suspicion of tears in his tone when he said almost unthinkingly, "My God! I did love you!"

She seemed touched by the emotion of his voice. Her lips quivered a little, and she made one faltering step towards him, putting out her hands in a beseeching gesture, when she perceived, just in time, that being absorbed by the tragedy of his life he had absolutely forgotten her very existence. She stopped, and her outstretched arms fell slowly. He, with his features distorted by the bitterness of his thought, saw neither her movement nor her gesture. He stamped his foot in vexation, rubbed his head — then exploded.

"What the devil am I to do now?"

He was still again. She seemed to understand, and moved to the door firmly.

"It's very simple — I'm going," she said aloud.

At the sound of her voice he gave a start of surprise, looked at her wildly, and asked in a piercing tone —

“You. . . Where? To him?”

“No — alone — good-bye.”

The door-handle rattled under her groping hand as though she had been trying to get out of some dark place.

“No — stay!” he cried.

She heard him faintly. He saw her shoulder touch the lintel of the door. She swayed as if dazed. There was less than a second of suspense while they both felt as if poised on the very edge of moral annihilation, ready to fall into some devouring nowhere. Then, almost simultaneously, he shouted, “Come back!” and she let go the handle of the door. She turned round in peaceful desperation like one who deliberately has thrown away the last chance of life; and, for a moment, the room she faced appeared terrible, and dark, and safe — like a grave.

He said, very hoarse and abrupt: “It can’t end like this. . . . Sit down;” and while she crossed the room again to the low-backed chair before the dressing-table, he opened the door and put his head out to look and listen. The house was quiet. He came back pacified, and asked —

“Do you speak the truth?”

She nodded.

“You have lived a lie, though,” he said, suspiciously.

“Ah! You made it so easy,” she answered.

“You reproach me — me!”

“How could I?” she said; “I would have you no other — now.”

“What do you mean by . . .” he began, then checked himself, and without waiting for an answer went on, “I won’t ask any questions. Is this letter the worst of it?”

She had a nervous movement of her hands.

“I must have a plain answer,” he said, hotly.

“Then, no! The worst is my coming back.”

There followed a period of dead silence, during which they exchanged searching glances.

He said authoritatively —

“You don’t know what you are saying. Your mind is unhinged. You are beside yourself, or you would not say such things. You can’t control yourself. Even in your remorse . . .” He paused a moment, then said with a doctoral air: “Self-restraint is everything in life, you know. It’s happiness, it’s dignity . . . it’s everything.”

She was pulling nervously at her handkerchief while he went on watching anxiously to see the effect of his words. Nothing satisfactory happened. Only, as he began to speak again, she covered her face with both her hands.

“You see where the want of self-restraint leads to. Pain — humiliation — loss of respect — of friends, of everything that ennobles life, that . . . All kinds of horrors,” he concluded, abruptly.

She made no stir. He looked at her pensively for some time as though he had been concentrating the melancholy thoughts evoked by the sight of that abased woman. His eyes became fixed and dull. He was profoundly penetrated by the solemnity of the moment; he felt deeply the greatness of the occasion. And more than ever the walls of his house seemed to enclose the sacredness of ideals to which he was about to offer a magnificent sacrifice. He was the high priest of that temple, the severe guardian of formulas, of rites, of the pure ceremonial concealing the black doubts of life. And he was not alone. Other men, too — the best of them — kept watch and ward by the hearthstones that were the altars of that profitable persuasion. He understood confusedly that he was part of an immense and beneficent power, which had a reward ready for every discretion. He dwelt within the invincible wisdom of silence; he was protected by an indestructible faith that would last forever, that would withstand unshaken all the assaults — the loud execrations of apostates, and the secret weariness of its confessors! He was in league with a universe of untold advantages. He represented the moral strength of a beautiful reticence that could vanquish all the deplorable crudities of life — fear, disaster, sin — even death itself. It seemed to him he was on the point of sweeping triumphantly away all the illusory mysteries of existence. It was simplicity itself.

“I hope you see now the folly — the utter folly of wickedness,” he began in a dull, solemn manner. “You must respect the conditions of your life or lose all it can give you. All! Everything!”

He waved his arm once, and three exact replicas of his face, of his clothes, of his dull severity, of his solemn grief, repeated the wide gesture that in its comprehensive sweep indicated an infinity of moral sweetness, embraced the walls, the hangings, the whole house, all the crowd of houses outside, all the flimsy and inscrutable graves of the living, with their doors



numbered like the doors of prison-cells, and as impenetrable as the granite of tombstones.

“Yes! Restraint, duty, fidelity — unswerving fidelity to what is expected of you. This — only this — secures the reward, the peace. Everything else we should labour to subdue — to destroy. It’s misfortune; it’s disease. It is terrible — terrible. We must not know anything about it — we needn’t. It is our duty to ourselves — to others. You do not live all alone in the world — and if you have no respect for the dignity of life, others have. Life is a serious matter. If you don’t conform to the highest standards you are no one — it’s a kind of death. Didn’t this occur to you? You’ve only to look round you to see the truth of what I am saying. Did you live without noticing anything, without understanding anything? From a child you had examples before your eyes — you could see daily the beauty, the blessings of morality, of principles. . . .”

His voice rose and fell pompously in a strange chant. His eyes were still, his stare exalted and sullen; his face was set, was hard, was woodenly exulting over the grim inspiration that secretly possessed him, seethed within him, lifted him up into a stealthy frenzy of belief. Now and then he would stretch out his right arm over her head, as it were, and he spoke down at that sinner from a height, and with a sense of avenging virtue, with a profound and pure joy as though he could from his steep pinnacle see every weighty word strike and hurt like a punishing stone.

“Rigid principles — adherence to what is right,” he finished after a pause.

“What is right?” she said, distinctly, without uncovering her face.

“Your mind is diseased!” he cried, upright and austere. “Such a question is rot — utter rot. Look round you — there’s your answer, if you only care to see. Nothing that outrages the received beliefs can be right. Your conscience tells you that. They are the received beliefs because they are the best, the noblest, the only possible. They survive. . . .”

He could not help noticing with pleasure the philosophic breadth of his view, but he could not pause to enjoy it, for his inspiration, the call of august truth, carried him on.

“You must respect the moral foundations of a society that has made you what you are. Be true to it. That’s duty — that’s honour — that’s honesty.”

He felt a great glow within him, as though he had swallowed something hot. He made a step nearer. She sat up and looked at him with an ardour of

expectation that stimulated his sense of the supreme importance of that moment. And as if forgetting himself he raised his voice very much.

“‘What’s right?’ you ask me. Think only. What would you have been if you had gone off with that infernal vagabond? . . . What would you have been? . . . You! My wife! . . .”

He caught sight of himself in the pier glass, drawn up to his full height, and with a face so white that his eyes, at the distance, resembled the black cavities in a skull. He saw himself as if about to launch imprecations, with arms uplifted above her bowed head. He was ashamed of that unseemly posture, and put his hands in his pockets hurriedly. She murmured faintly, as if to herself —

“Ah! What am I now?”

“As it happens you are still Mrs. Alvan Hervey — uncommonly lucky for you, let me tell you,” he said in a conversational tone. He walked up to the furthest corner of the room, and, turning back, saw her sitting very upright, her hands clasped on her lap, and with a lost, unswerving gaze of her eyes which stared unwinking like the eyes of the blind, at the crude gas flame, blazing and still, between the jaws of the bronze dragon.

He came up quite close to her, and straddling his legs a little, stood looking down at her face for some time without taking his hands out of his pockets. He seemed to be turning over in his mind a heap of words, piecing his next speech out of an overpowering abundance of thoughts.

“You’ve tried me to the utmost,” he said at last; and as soon as he said these words he lost his moral footing, and felt himself swept away from his pinnacle by a flood of passionate resentment against the bungling creature that had come so near to spoiling his life. “Yes; I’ve been tried more than any man ought to be,” he went on with righteous bitterness. “It was unfair. What possessed you to? . . . What possessed you? . . . Write such a . . . After five years of perfect happiness! ‘Pon my word, no one would believe. . . . Didn’t you feel you couldn’t? Because you couldn’t . . . it was impossible — you know. Wasn’t it? Think. Wasn’t it?”

“It was impossible,” she whispered, obediently.

This submissive assent given with such readiness did not soothe him, did not elate him; it gave him, inexplicably, that sense of terror we experience when in the midst of conditions we had learned to think absolutely safe we discover all at once the presence of a near and unsuspected danger. It was impossible, of course! He knew it. She knew it. She confessed it. It was

impossible! That man knew it, too — as well as any one; couldn't help knowing it. And yet those two had been engaged in a conspiracy against his peace — in a criminal enterprise for which there could be no sanction of belief within themselves. There could not be! There could not be! And yet how near to . . . With a short thrill he saw himself an exiled forlorn figure in a realm of ungovernable, of unrestrained folly. Nothing could be foreseen, foretold — guarded against. And the sensation was intolerable, had something of the withering horror that may be conceived as following upon the utter extinction of all hope. In the flash of thought the dishonouring episode seemed to disengage itself from everything actual, from earthly conditions, and even from earthly suffering; it became purely a terrifying knowledge, an annihilating knowledge of a blind and infernal force. Something desperate and vague, a flicker of an insane desire to abase himself before the mysterious impulses of evil, to ask for mercy in some way, passed through his mind; and then came the idea, the persuasion, the certitude, that the evil must be forgotten — must be resolutely ignored to make life possible; that the knowledge must be kept out of mind, out of sight, like the knowledge of certain death is kept out of the daily existence of men. He stiffened himself inwardly for the effort, and next moment it appeared very easy, amazingly feasible, if one only kept strictly to facts, gave one's mind to their perplexities and not to their meaning. Becoming conscious of a long silence, he cleared his throat warningly, and said in a steady voice —

"I am glad you feel this . . . uncommonly glad . . . you felt this in time. For, don't you see . . ." Unexpectedly he hesitated.

"Yes . . . I see," she murmured.

"Of course you would," he said, looking at the carpet and speaking like one who thinks of something else. He lifted his head. "I cannot believe — even after this — even after this — that you are altogether — altogether . . . other than what I thought you. It seems impossible — to me."

"And to me," she breathed out.

"Now — yes," he said, "but this morning? And to-morrow? . . . This is what . . ."

He started at the drift of his words and broke off abruptly. Every train of thought seemed to lead into the hopeless realm of ungovernable folly, to recall the knowledge and the terror of forces that must be ignored. He said rapidly —

“My position is very painful — difficult . . . I feel . . .”

He looked at her fixedly with a pained air, as though frightfully oppressed by a sudden inability to express his pent-up ideas.

“I am ready to go,” she said very low. “I have forfeited everything . . . to learn . . . to learn . . .”

Her chin fell on her breast; her voice died out in a sigh. He made a slight gesture of impatient assent.

“Yes! Yes! It’s all very well . . . of course. Forfeited — ah! Morally forfeited — only morally forfeited . . . if I am to believe you . . .”

She startled him by jumping up.

“Oh! I believe, I believe,” he said, hastily, and she sat down as suddenly as she had got up. He went on gloomily —

“I’ve suffered — I suffer now. You can’t understand how much. So much that when you propose a parting I almost think. . . . But no. There is duty. You’ve forgotten it; I never did. Before heaven, I never did. But in a horrid exposure like this the judgment of mankind goes astray — at least for a time. You see, you and I — at least I feel that — you and I are one before the world. It is as it should be. The world is right — in the main — or else it couldn’t be — couldn’t be — what it is. And we are part of it. We have our duty to — to our fellow beings who don’t want to . . . to. . . er.”

He stammered. She looked up at him with wide eyes, and her lips were slightly parted. He went on mumbling —

“. . . Pain. . . . Indignation. . . . Sure to misunderstand. I’ve suffered enough. And if there has been nothing irreparable — as you assure me . . . then . . .”

“Alvan!” she cried.

“What?” he said, morosely. He gazed down at her for a moment with a sombre stare, as one looks at ruins, at the devastation of some natural disaster.

“Then,” he continued after a short pause, “the best thing is . . . the best for us . . . for every one. . . . Yes . . . least pain — most unselfish. . . .” His voice faltered, and she heard only detached words. “. . . Duty. . . . Burden. . . . Ourselves. . . . Silence.”

A moment of perfect stillness ensued.

“This is an appeal I am making to your conscience,” he said, suddenly, in an explanatory tone, “not to add to the wretchedness of all this: to try loyally and help me to live it down somehow. Without any reservations —

you know. Loyally! You can't deny I've been cruelly wronged and — after all — my affection deserves . . .” He paused with evident anxiety to hear her speak.

“I make no reservations,” she said, mournfully. “How could I? I found myself out and came back to . . .” her eyes flashed scornfully for an instant “. . . to what — to what you propose. You see . . . I . . . I can be trusted . . . now.”

He listened to every word with profound attention, and when she ceased seemed to wait for more.

“Is that all you've got to say?” he asked.

She was startled by his tone, and said faintly —

“I spoke the truth. What more can I say?”

“Confound it! You might say something human,” he burst out. “It isn't being truthful; it's being brazen — if you want to know. Not a word to show you feel your position, and — and mine. Not a single word of acknowledgment, or regret — or remorse . . . or . . . something.”

“Words!” she whispered in a tone that irritated him. He stamped his foot.

“This is awful!” he exclaimed. “Words? Yes, words. Words mean something — yes — they do — for all this infernal affectation. They mean something to me — to everybody — to you. What the devil did you use to express those sentiments — sentiments — pah! — which made you forget me, duty, shame!” . . . He foamed at the mouth while she stared at him, appalled by this sudden fury. “Did you two talk only with your eyes?” he spluttered savagely. She rose.

“I can't bear this,” she said, trembling from head to foot. “I am going.”

They stood facing one another for a moment.

“Not you,” he said, with conscious roughness, and began to walk up and down the room. She remained very still with an air of listening anxiously to her own heart-beats, then sank down on the chair slowly, and sighed, as if giving up a task beyond her strength.

“You misunderstand everything I say,” he began quietly, “but I prefer to think that — just now — you are not accountable for your actions.” He stopped again before her. “Your mind is unhinged,” he said, with unction. “To go now would be adding crime — yes, crime — to folly. I'll have no scandal in my life, no matter what's the cost. And why? You are sure to misunderstand me — but I'll tell you. As a matter of duty. Yes. But you're

sure to misunderstand me — recklessly. Women always do — they are too — too narrow-minded.”

He waited for a while, but she made no sound, didn’t even look at him; he felt uneasy, painfully uneasy, like a man who suspects he is unreasonably mistrusted. To combat that exasperating sensation he recommenced talking very fast. The sound of his words excited his thoughts, and in the play of darting thoughts he had glimpses now and then of the inexpugnable rock of his convictions, towering in solitary grandeur above the unprofitable waste of errors and passions.

“For it is self-evident,” he went on with anxious vivacity, “it is self-evident that, on the highest ground we haven’t the right — no, we haven’t the right to intrude our miseries upon those who — who naturally expect better things from us. Every one wishes his own life and the life around him to be beautiful and pure. Now, a scandal amongst people of our position is disastrous for the morality — a fatal influence — don’t you see — upon the general tone of the class — very important — the most important, I verily believe, in — in the community. I feel this — profoundly. This is the broad view. In time you’ll give me . . . when you become again the woman I loved — and trusted. . . .”

He stopped short, as though unexpectedly suffocated, then in a completely changed voice said, “For I did love and trust you” — and again was silent for a moment. She put her handkerchief to her eyes.

“You’ll give me credit for — for — my motives. It’s mainly loyalty to — to the larger conditions of our life — where you — you! of all women — failed. One doesn’t usually talk like this — of course — but in this case you’ll admit . . . And consider — the innocent suffer with the guilty. The world is pitiless in its judgments. Unfortunately there are always those in it who are only too eager to misunderstand. Before you and before my conscience I am guiltless, but any — any disclosure would impair my usefulness in the sphere — in the larger sphere in which I hope soon to . . . I believe you fully shared my views in that matter — I don’t want to say any more . . . on — on that point — but, believe me, true unselfishness is to bear one’s burdens in — in silence. The ideal must — must be preserved — for others, at least. It’s clear as daylight. If I’ve a — a loathsome sore, to gratuitously display it would be abominable — abominable! And often in life — in the highest conception of life — outspokenness in certain circumstances is nothing less than criminal. Temptation, you know, excuses

no one. There is no such thing really if one looks steadily to one's welfare — which is grounded in duty. But there are the weak." . . . His tone became ferocious for an instant . . . "And there are the fools and the envious — especially for people in our position. I am guiltless of this terrible — terrible . . . estrangement; but if there has been nothing irreparable." . . . Something gloomy, like a deep shadow passed over his face. . . . "Nothing irreparable — you see even now I am ready to trust you implicitly — then our duty is clear."

He looked down. A change came over his expression and straightway from the outward impetus of his loquacity he passed into the dull contemplation of all the appeasing truths that, not without some wonder, he had so recently been able to discover within himself. During this profound and soothing communion with his innermost beliefs he remained staring at the carpet, with a portentously solemn face and with a dull vacuity of eyes that seemed to gaze into the blankness of an empty hole. Then, without stirring in the least, he continued:

"Yes. Perfectly clear. I've been tried to the utmost, and I can't pretend that, for a time, the old feelings — the old feelings are not. . . ." He sighed. . . . "But I forgive you. . . ."

She made a slight movement without uncovering her eyes. In his profound scrutiny of the carpet he noticed nothing. And there was silence, silence within and silence without, as though his words had stilled the beat and tremor of all the surrounding life, and the house had stood alone — the only dwelling upon a deserted earth.

He lifted his head and repeated solemnly:

"I forgive you . . . from a sense of duty — and in the hope . . ."

He heard a laugh, and it not only interrupted his words but also destroyed the peace of his self-absorption with the vile pain of a reality intruding upon the beauty of a dream. He couldn't understand whence the sound came. He could see, foreshortened, the tear-stained, dolorous face of the woman stretched out, and with her head thrown over the back of the seat. He thought the piercing noise was a delusion. But another shrill peal followed by a deep sob and succeeded by another shriek of mirth positively seemed to tear him out from where he stood. He bounded to the door. It was closed. He turned the key and thought: that's no good. . . . "Stop this!" he cried, and perceived with alarm that he could hardly hear his own voice in the midst of her screaming. He darted back with the idea of stifling that unbearable noise

with his hands, but stood still distracted, finding himself as unable to touch her as though she had been on fire. He shouted, "Enough of this!" like men shout in the tumult of a riot, with a red face and starting eyes; then, as if swept away before another burst of laughter, he disappeared in a flash out of three looking-glasses, vanished suddenly from before her. For a time the woman gasped and laughed at no one in the luminous stillness of the empty room.

He reappeared, striding at her, and with a tumbler of water in his hand. He stammered: "Hysterics — Stop — They will hear — Drink this." She laughed at the ceiling. "Stop this!" he cried. "Ah!"

He flung the water in her face, putting into the action all the secret brutality of his spite, yet still felt that it would have been perfectly excusable — in any one — to send the tumbler after the water. He restrained himself, but at the same time was so convinced nothing could stop the horror of those mad shrieks that, when the first sensation of relief came, it did not even occur to him to doubt the impression of having become suddenly deaf. When, next moment, he became sure that she was sitting up, and really very quiet, it was as though everything — men, things, sensations, had come to a rest. He was prepared to be grateful. He could not take his eyes off her, fearing, yet unwilling to admit, the possibility of her beginning again; for, the experience, however contemptuously he tried to think of it, had left the bewilderment of a mysterious terror. Her face was streaming with water and tears; there was a wisp of hair on her forehead, another stuck to her cheek; her hat was on one side, undecorously tilted; her soaked veil resembled a sordid rag festooning her forehead. There was an utter unreserve in her aspect, an abandonment of safeguards, that ugliness of truth which can only be kept out of daily life by unremitting care for appearances. He did not know why, looking at her, he thought suddenly of to-morrow, and why the thought called out a deep feeling of unutterable, discouraged weariness — a fear of facing the succession of days. To-morrow! It was as far as yesterday. Ages elapsed between sunrises — sometimes. He scanned her features like one looks at a forgotten country. They were not distorted — he recognized landmarks, so to speak; but it was only a resemblance that he could see, not the woman of yesterday — or was it, perhaps, more than the woman of yesterday? Who could tell? Was it something new? A new expression — or a new shade of expression? or something deep — an old truth unveiled, a fundamental and hidden truth —



some unnecessary, accursed certitude? He became aware that he was trembling very much, that he had an empty tumbler in his hand — that time was passing. Still looking at her with lingering mistrust he reached towards the table to put the glass down and was startled to feel it apparently go through the wood. He had missed the edge. The surprise, the slight jingling noise of the accident annoyed him beyond expression. He turned to her irritated.

“What’s the meaning of this?” he asked, grimly.

She passed her hand over her face and made an attempt to get up.

“You’re not going to be absurd again,” he said. “Pon my soul, I did not know you could forget yourself to that extent.” He didn’t try to conceal his physical disgust, because he believed it to be a purely moral reprobation of every unreserve, of anything in the nature of a scene. “I assure you — it was revolting,” he went on. He stared for a moment at her. “Positively degrading,” he added with insistence.

She stood up quickly as if moved by a spring and tottered. He started forward instinctively. She caught hold of the back of the chair and steadied herself. This arrested him, and they faced each other wide-eyed, uncertain, and yet coming back slowly to the reality of things with relief and wonder, as though just awakened after tossing through a long night of fevered dreams.

“Pray, don’t begin again,” he said, hurriedly, seeing her open her lips. “I deserve some little consideration — and such unaccountable behaviour is painful to me. I expect better things. . . . I have the right. . . .”

She pressed both her hands to her temples.

“Oh, nonsense!” he said, sharply. “You are perfectly capable of coming down to dinner. No one should even suspect; not even the servants. No one! No one! . . . I am sure you can.”

She dropped her arms; her face twitched. She looked straight into his eyes and seemed incapable of pronouncing a word. He frowned at her.

“I — wish — it,” he said, tyrannically. “For your own sake also. . . .” He meant to carry that point without any pity. Why didn’t she speak? He feared passive resistance. She must. . . . Make her come. His frown deepened, and he began to think of some effectual violence, when most unexpectedly she said in a firm voice, “Yes, I can,” and clutched the chair-back again. He was relieved, and all at once her attitude ceased to interest him. The important thing was that their life would begin again with an every-day act — with

something that could not be misunderstood, that, thank God, had no moral meaning, no perplexity — and yet was symbolic of their uninterrupted communion in the past — in all the future. That morning, at that table, they had breakfast together; and now they would dine. It was all over! What had happened between could be forgotten — must be forgotten, like things that can only happen once — death for instance.

“I will wait for you,” he said, going to the door. He had some difficulty with it, for he did not remember he had turned the key. He hated that delay, and his checked impatience to be gone out of the room made him feel quite ill as, with the consciousness of her presence behind his back, he fumbled at the lock. He managed it at last; then in the doorway he glanced over his shoulder to say, “It’s rather late — you know — ” and saw her standing where he had left her, with a face white as alabaster and perfectly still, like a woman in a trance.

He was afraid she would keep him waiting, but without any breathing time, he hardly knew how, he found himself sitting at table with her. He had made up his mind to eat, to talk, to be natural. It seemed to him necessary that deception should begin at home. The servants must not know — must not suspect. This intense desire of secrecy; of secrecy dark, destroying, profound, discreet like a grave, possessed him with the strength of a hallucination — seemed to spread itself to inanimate objects that had been the daily companions of his life, affected with a taint of enmity every single thing within the faithful walls that would stand forever between the shamelessness of facts and the indignation of mankind. Even when — as it happened once or twice — both the servants left the room together he remained carefully natural, industriously hungry, laboriously at his ease, as though he had wanted to cheat the black oak sideboard, the heavy curtains, the stiff-backed chairs, into the belief of an unstained happiness. He was mistrustful of his wife’s self-control, unwilling to look at her and reluctant to speak, for it seemed to him inconceivable that she should not betray herself by the slightest movement, by the very first word spoken. Then he thought the silence in the room was becoming dangerous, and so excessive as to produce the effect of an intolerable uproar. He wanted to end it, as one is anxious to interrupt an indiscreet confession; but with the memory of that laugh upstairs he dared not give her an occasion to open her lips. Presently he heard her voice pronouncing in a calm tone some unimportant remark. He detached his eyes from the centre of his plate and felt excited as if on

the point of looking at a wonder. And nothing could be more wonderful than her composure. He was looking at the candid eyes, at the pure brow, at what he had seen every evening for years in that place; he listened to the voice that for five years he had heard every day. Perhaps she was a little pale — but a healthy pallor had always been for him one of her chief attractions. Perhaps her face was rigidly set — but that marmoreal impassiveness, that magnificent stolidity, as of a wonderful statue by some great sculptor working under the curse of the gods; that imposing, unthinking stillness of her features, had till then mirrored for him the tranquil dignity of a soul of which he had thought himself — as a matter of course — the inexpugnable possessor. Those were the outward signs of her difference from the ignoble herd that feels, suffers, fails, errs — but has no distinct value in the world except as a moral contrast to the prosperity of the elect. He had been proud of her appearance. It had the perfectly proper frankness of perfection — and now he was shocked to see it unchanged. She looked like this, spoke like this, exactly like this, a year ago, a month ago — only yesterday when she. . . . What went on within made no difference. What did she think? What meant the pallor, the placid face, the candid brow, the pure eyes? What did she think during all these years? What did she think yesterday — to-day; what would she think to-morrow? He must find out. . . . And yet how could he get to know? She had been false to him, to that man, to herself; she was ready to be false — for him. Always false. She looked lies, breathed lies, lived lies — would tell lies — always — to the end of life! And he would never know what she meant. Never! Never! No one could. Impossible to know.

He dropped his knife and fork, brusquely, as though by the virtue of a sudden illumination he had been made aware of poison in his plate, and became positive in his mind that he could never swallow another morsel of food as long as he lived. The dinner went on in a room that had been steadily growing, from some cause, hotter than a furnace. He had to drink. He drank time after time, and, at last, recollecting himself, was frightened at the quantity, till he perceived that what he had been drinking was water — out of two different wine glasses; and the discovered unconsciousness of his actions affected him painfully. He was disturbed to find himself in such an unhealthy state of mind. Excess of feeling — excess of feeling; and it was part of his creed that any excess of feeling was unhealthy — morally unprofitable; a taint on practical manhood. Her fault. Entirely her fault. Her

sinful self-forgetfulness was contagious. It made him think thoughts he had never had before; thoughts disintegrating, tormenting, sapping to the very core of life — like mortal disease; thoughts that bred the fear of air, of sunshine, of men — like the whispered news of a pestilence.

The maids served without noise; and to avoid looking at his wife and looking within himself, he followed with his eyes first one and then the other without being able to distinguish between them. They moved silently about, without one being able to see by what means, for their skirts touched the carpet all round; they glided here and there, receded, approached, rigid in black and white, with precise gestures, and no life in their faces, like a pair of marionettes in mourning; and their air of wooden unconcern struck him as unnatural, suspicious, irremediably hostile. That such people's feelings or judgment could affect one in any way, had never occurred to him before. He understood they had no prospects, no principles — no refinement and no power. But now he had become so debased that he could not even attempt to disguise from himself his yearning to know the secret thoughts of his servants. Several times he looked up covertly at the faces of those girls. Impossible to know. They changed his plates and utterly ignored his existence. What impenetrable duplicity. Women — nothing but women round him. Impossible to know. He experienced that heart-probing, fiery sense of dangerous loneliness, which sometimes assails the courage of a solitary adventurer in an unexplored country. The sight of a man's face — he felt — of any man's face, would have been a profound relief. One would know then — something — could understand. . . . He would engage a butler as soon as possible. And then the end of that dinner — which had seemed to have been going on for hours — the end came, taking him violently by surprise, as though he had expected in the natural course of events to sit at that table for ever and ever.

But upstairs in the drawing-room he became the victim of a restless fate, that would, on no account, permit him to sit down. She had sunk on a low easy-chair, and taking up from a small table at her elbow a fan with ivory leaves, shaded her face from the fire. The coals glowed without a flame; and upon the red glow the vertical bars of the grate stood out at her feet, black and curved, like the charred ribs of a consumed sacrifice. Far off, a lamp perched on a slim brass rod, burned under a wide shade of crimson silk: the centre, within the shadows of the large room, of a fiery twilight that had in the warm quality of its tint something delicate, refined and infernal.

His soft footfalls and the subdued beat of the clock on the high mantel-piece answered each other regularly — as if time and himself, engaged in a measured contest, had been pacing together through the infernal delicacy of twilight towards a mysterious goal.

He walked from one end of the room to the other without a pause, like a traveller who, at night, hastens doggedly upon an interminable journey. Now and then he glanced at her. Impossible to know. The gross precision of that thought expressed to his practical mind something illimitable and infinitely profound, the all-embracing subtlety of a feeling, the eternal origin of his pain. This woman had accepted him, had abandoned him — had returned to him. And of all this he would never know the truth. Never. Not till death — not after — not on judgment day when all shall be disclosed, thoughts and deeds, rewards and punishments, but the secret of hearts alone shall return, forever unknown, to the Inscrutable Creator of good and evil, to the Master of doubts and impulses.

He stood still to look at her. Thrown back and with her face turned away from him, she did not stir — as if asleep. What did she think? What did she feel? And in the presence of her perfect stillness, in the breathless silence, he felt himself insignificant and powerless before her, like a prisoner in chains. The fury of his impotence called out sinister images, that faculty of tormenting vision, which in a moment of anguishing sense of wrong induces a man to mutter threats or make a menacing gesture in the solitude of an empty room. But the gust of passion passed at once, left him trembling a little, with the wondering, reflective fear of a man who has paused on the very verge of suicide. The serenity of truth and the peace of death can be only secured through a largeness of contempt embracing all the profitable servitudes of life. He found he did not want to know. Better not. It was all over. It was as if it hadn't been. And it was very necessary for both of them, it was morally right, that nobody should know.

He spoke suddenly, as if concluding a discussion.

“The best thing for us is to forget all this.”

She started a little and shut the fan with a click.

“Yes, forgive — and forget,” he repeated, as if to himself.

“I'll never forget,” she said in a vibrating voice. “And I'll never forgive myself. . . .”

“But I, who have nothing to reproach myself . . .” He began, making a step towards her. She jumped up.

“I did not come back for your forgiveness,” she exclaimed, passionately, as if clamouring against an unjust aspersion.

He only said “oh!” and became silent. He could not understand this unprovoked aggressiveness of her attitude, and certainly was very far from thinking that an unpremeditated hint of something resembling emotion in the tone of his last words had caused that uncontrollable burst of sincerity. It completed his bewilderment, but he was not at all angry now. He was as if benumbed by the fascination of the incomprehensible. She stood before him, tall and indistinct, like a black phantom in the red twilight. At last poignantly uncertain as to what would happen if he opened his lips, he muttered:

“But if my love is strong enough . . .” and hesitated.

He heard something snap loudly in the fiery stillness. She had broken her fan. Two thin pieces of ivory fell, one after another, without a sound, on the thick carpet, and instinctively he stooped to pick them up. While he groped at her feet it occurred to him that the woman there had in her hands an indispensable gift which nothing else on earth could give; and when he stood up he was penetrated by an irresistible belief in an enigma, by the conviction that within his reach and passing away from him was the very secret of existence — its certitude, immaterial and precious! She moved to the door, and he followed at her elbow, casting about for a magic word that would make the enigma clear, that would compel the surrender of the gift. And there is no such word! The enigma is only made clear by sacrifice, and the gift of heaven is in the hands of every man. But they had lived in a world that abhors enigmas, and cares for no gifts but such as can be obtained in the street. She was nearing the door. He said hurriedly:

“Pon my word, I loved you — I love you now.”

She stopped for an almost imperceptible moment to give him an indignant glance, and then moved on. That feminine penetration — so clever and so tainted by the eternal instinct of self-defence, so ready to see an obvious evil in everything it cannot understand — filled her with bitter resentment against both the men who could offer to the spiritual and tragic strife of her feelings nothing but the coarseness of their abominable materialism. In her anger against her own ineffectual self-deception she found hate enough for them both. What did they want? What more did this one want? And as her husband faced her again, with his hand on the door-

handle, she asked herself whether he was unpardonably stupid, or simply ignoble.

She said nervously, and very fast:

“You are deceiving yourself. You never loved me. You wanted a wife — some woman — any woman that would think, speak, and behave in a certain way — in a way you approved. You loved yourself.”

“You won’t believe me?” he asked, slowly.

“If I had believed you loved me,” she began, passionately, then drew in a long breath; and during that pause he heard the steady beat of blood in his ears. “If I had believed it . . . I would never have come back,” she finished, recklessly.

He stood looking down as though he had not heard. She waited. After a moment he opened the door, and, on the landing, the sightless woman of marble appeared, draped to the chin, thrusting blindly at them a cluster of lights.

He seemed to have forgotten himself in a meditation so deep that on the point of going out she stopped to look at him in surprise. While she had been speaking he had wandered on the track of the enigma, out of the world of senses into the region of feeling. What did it matter what she had done, what she had said, if through the pain of her acts and words he had obtained the word of the enigma! There can be no life without faith and love — faith in a human heart, love of a human being! That touch of grace, whose help once in life is the privilege of the most undeserving, flung open for him the portals of beyond, and in contemplating there the certitude immaterial and precious he forgot all the meaningless accidents of existence: the bliss of getting, the delight of enjoying; all the protean and enticing forms of the cupidity that rules a material world of foolish joys, of contemptible sorrows. Faith! — Love! — the undoubting, clear faith in the truth of a soul — the great tenderness, deep as the ocean, serene and eternal, like the infinite peace of space above the short tempests of the earth. It was what he had wanted all his life — but he understood it only then for the first time. It was through the pain of losing her that the knowledge had come. She had the gift! She had the gift! And in all the world she was the only human being that could surrender it to his immense desire. He made a step forward, putting his arms out, as if to take her to his breast, and, lifting his head, was met by such a look of blank consternation that his arms fell as though they had been struck down by a blow. She started away from him, stumbled over

the threshold, and once on the landing turned, swift and crouching. The train of her gown swished as it flew round her feet. It was an undisguised panic. She panted, showing her teeth, and the hate of strength, the disdain of weakness, the eternal preoccupation of sex came out like a toy demon out of a box.

“This is odious,” she screamed.

He did not stir; but her look, her agitated movements, the sound of her voice were like a mist of facts thickening between him and the vision of love and faith. It vanished; and looking at that face triumphant and scornful, at that white face, stealthy and unexpected, as if discovered staring from an ambush, he was coming back slowly to the world of senses. His first clear thought was: I am married to that woman; and the next: she will give nothing but what I see. He felt the need not to see. But the memory of the vision, the memory that abides forever within the seer made him say to her with the naive austerity of a convert awed by the touch of a new creed, “You haven’t the gift.” He turned his back on her, leaving her completely mystified. And she went upstairs slowly, struggling with a distasteful suspicion of having been confronted by something more subtle than herself — more profound than the misunderstood and tragic contest of her feelings.

He shut the door of the drawing-room and moved at hazard, alone amongst the heavy shadows and in the fiery twilight as of an elegant place of perdition. She hadn’t the gift — no one had. . . . He stepped on a book that had fallen off one of the crowded little tables. He picked up the slender volume, and holding it, approached the crimson-shaded lamp. The fiery tint deepened on the cover, and contorted gold letters sprawling all over it in an intricate maze, came out, gleaming redly. “Thorns and Arabesques.” He read it twice, “Thorns and Ar . . . . .” The other’s book of verses. He dropped it at his feet, but did not feel the slightest pang of jealousy or indignation. What did he know? . . . What? . . . The mass of hot coals tumbled down in the grate, and he turned to look at them . . . Ah! That one was ready to give up everything he had for that woman — who did not come — who had not the faith, the love, the courage to come. What did that man expect, what did he hope, what did he want? The woman — or the certitude immaterial and precious! The first unselfish thought he had ever given to any human being was for that man who had tried to do him a terrible wrong. He was not angry. He was saddened by an impersonal sorrow, by a vast melancholy as of all mankind longing for what cannot be



attained. He felt his fellowship with every man — even with that man — especially with that man. What did he think now? Had he ceased to wait — and hope? Would he ever cease to wait and hope? Would he understand that the woman, who had no courage, had not the gift — had not the gift!

The clock began to strike, and the deep-toned vibration filled the room as though with the sound of an enormous bell tolling far away. He counted the strokes. Twelve. Another day had begun. To-morrow had come; the mysterious and lying to-morrow that lures men, disdainful of love and faith, on and on through the poignant futilities of life to the fitting reward of a grave. He counted the strokes, and gazing at the grate seemed to wait for more. Then, as if called out, left the room, walking firmly.

When outside he heard footsteps in the hall and stood still. A bolt was shot — then another. They were locking up — shutting out his desire and his deception from the indignant criticism of a world full of noble gifts for those who proclaim themselves without stain and without reproach. He was safe; and on all sides of his dwelling servile fears and servile hopes slept, dreaming of success, behind the severe discretion of doors as impenetrable to the truth within as the granite of tombstones. A lock snapped — a short chain rattled. Nobody shall know!

Why was this assurance of safety heavier than a burden of fear, and why the day that began presented itself obstinately like the last day of all — like a to-day without a to-morrow? Yet nothing was changed, for nobody would know; and all would go on as before — the getting, the enjoying, the blessing of hunger that is appeased every day; the noble incentives of unappeasable ambitions. All — all the blessings of life. All — but the certitude immaterial and precious — the certitude of love and faith. He believed the shadow of it had been with him as long as he could remember; that invisible presence had ruled his life. And now the shadow had appeared and faded he could not extinguish his longing for the truth of its substance. His desire of it was naive; it was masterful like the material aspirations that are the groundwork of existence, but, unlike these, it was unconquerable. It was the subtle despotism of an idea that suffers no rivals, that is lonely, inconsolable, and dangerous. He went slowly up the stairs. Nobody shall know. The days would go on and he would go far — very far. If the idea could not be mastered, fortune could be, man could be — the whole world. He was dazzled by the greatness of the prospect; the brutality of a practical instinct shouted to him that only that which could be had was worth having.

He lingered on the steps. The lights were out in the hall, and a small yellow flame flitted about down there. He felt a sudden contempt for himself which braced him up. He went on, but at the door of their room and with his arm advanced to open it, he faltered. On the flight of stairs below the head of the girl who had been locking up appeared. His arm fell. He thought, "I'll wait till she is gone" — and stepped back within the perpendicular folds of a portiere.

He saw her come up gradually, as if ascending from a well. At every step the feeble flame of the candle swayed before her tired, young face, and the darkness of the hall seemed to cling to her black skirt, followed her, rising like a silent flood, as though the great night of the world had broken through the discreet reserve of walls, of closed doors, of curtained windows. It rose over the steps, it leaped up the walls like an angry wave, it flowed over the blue skies, over the yellow sands, over the sunshine of landscapes, and over the pretty pathos of ragged innocence and of meek starvation. It swallowed up the delicious idyll in a boat and the mutilated immortality of famous bas-reliefs. It flowed from outside — it rose higher, in a destructive silence. And, above it, the woman of marble, composed and blind on the high pedestal, seemed to ward off the devouring night with a cluster of lights.

He watched the rising tide of impenetrable gloom with impatience, as if anxious for the coming of a darkness black enough to conceal a shameful surrender. It came nearer. The cluster of lights went out. The girl ascended facing him. Behind her the shadow of a colossal woman danced lightly on the wall. He held his breath while she passed by, noiseless and with heavy eyelids. And on her track the flowing tide of a tenebrous sea filled the house, seemed to swirl about his feet, and rising unchecked, closed silently above his head.

The time had come but he did not open the door. All was still; and instead of surrendering to the reasonable exigencies of life he stepped out, with a rebelling heart, into the darkness of the house. It was the abode of an impenetrable night; as though indeed the last day had come and gone, leaving him alone in a darkness that has no to-morrow. And looming vaguely below the woman of marble, livid and still like a patient phantom, held out in the night a cluster of extinguished lights.

His obedient thought traced for him the image of an uninterrupted life, the dignity and the advantages of an uninterrupted success; while his

rebellious heart beat violently within his breast, as if maddened by the desire of a certitude immaterial and precious — the certitude of love and faith. What of the night within his dwelling if outside he could find the sunshine in which men sow, in which men reap! Nobody would know. The days, the years would pass, and . . . He remembered that he had loved her. The years would pass . . . And then he thought of her as we think of the dead — in a tender immensity of regret, in a passionate longing for the return of idealized perfections. He had loved her — he had loved her — and he never knew the truth . . . The years would pass in the anguish of doubt . . . He remembered her smile, her eyes, her voice, her silence, as though he had lost her forever. The years would pass and he would always mistrust her smile, suspect her eyes; he would always misbelieve her voice, he would never have faith in her silence. She had no gift — she had no gift! What was she? Who was she? . . . The years would pass; the memory of this hour would grow faint — and she would share the material serenity of an unblemished life. She had no love and no faith for any one. To give her your thought, your belief, was like whispering your confession over the edge of the world. Nothing came back — not even an echo.

In the pain of that thought was born his conscience; not that fear of remorse which grows slowly, and slowly decays amongst the complicated facts of life, but a Divine wisdom springing full-grown, armed and severe out of a tried heart, to combat the secret baseness of motives. It came to him in a flash that morality is not a method of happiness. The revelation was terrible. He saw at once that nothing of what he knew mattered in the least. The acts of men and women, success, humiliation, dignity, failure — nothing mattered. It was not a question of more or less pain, of this joy, of that sorrow. It was a question of truth or falsehood — it was a question of life or death.

He stood in the revealing night — in the darkness that tries the hearts, in the night useless for the work of men, but in which their gaze, undazzled by the sunshine of covetous days, wanders sometimes as far as the stars. The perfect stillness around him had something solemn in it, but he felt it was the lying solemnity of a temple devoted to the rites of a debasing persuasion. The silence within the discreet walls was eloquent of safety but it appeared to him exciting and sinister, like the discretion of a profitable infamy; it was the prudent peace of a den of coiners — of a house of ill-

fame! The years would pass — and nobody would know. Never! Not till death — not after . . .

“Never!” he said aloud to the revealing night.

And he hesitated. The secret of hearts, too terrible for the timid eyes of men, shall return, veiled forever, to the Inscrutable Creator of good and evil, to the Master of doubts and impulses. His conscience was born — he heard its voice, and he hesitated, ignoring the strength within, the fateful power, the secret of his heart! It was an awful sacrifice to cast all one’s life into the flame of a new belief. He wanted help against himself, against the cruel decree of salvation. The need of tacit complicity, where it had never failed him, the habit of years affirmed itself. Perhaps she would help . . . He flung the door open and rushed in like a fugitive.

He was in the middle of the room before he could see anything but the dazzling brilliance of the light; and then, as if detached and floating in it on the level of his eyes, appeared the head of a woman. She had jumped up when he burst into the room.

For a moment they contemplated each other as if struck dumb with amazement. Her hair streaming on her shoulders glinted like burnished gold. He looked into the unfathomable candour of her eyes. Nothing within — nothing — nothing.

He stammered distractedly.

“I want . . . I want . . . to . . . to . . . know . . .”

On the candid light of the eyes flitted shadows; shadows of doubt, of suspicion, the ready suspicion of an unquenchable antagonism, the pitiless mistrust of an eternal instinct of defence; the hate, the profound, frightened hate of an incomprehensible — of an abominable emotion intruding its coarse materialism upon the spiritual and tragic contest of her feelings.

“Alvan . . . I won’t bear this . . .” She began to pant suddenly, “I’ve a right — a right to — to — myself . . .”

He lifted one arm, and appeared so menacing that she stopped in a fright and shrank back a little.

He stood with uplifted hand . . . The years would pass — and he would have to live with that unfathomable candour where flit shadows of suspicions and hate . . . The years would pass — and he would never know — never trust . . . The years would pass without faith and love. . . .

“Can you stand it?” he shouted, as though she could have heard all his thoughts.

He looked menacing. She thought of violence, of danger — and, just for an instant, she doubted whether there were splendours enough on earth to pay the price of such a brutal experience. He cried again:

“Can you stand it?” and glared as if insane. Her eyes blazed, too. She could not hear the appalling clamour of his thoughts. She suspected in him a sudden regret, a fresh fit of jealousy, a dishonest desire of evasion. She shouted back angrily —

“Yes!”

He was shaken where he stood as if by a struggle to break out of invisible bonds. She trembled from head to foot.

“Well, I can’t!” He flung both his arms out, as if to push her away, and strode from the room. The door swung to with a click. She made three quick steps towards it and stood still, looking at the white and gold panels. No sound came from beyond, not a whisper, not a sigh; not even a footstep was heard outside on the thick carpet. It was as though no sooner gone he had suddenly expired — as though he had died there and his body had vanished on the instant together with his soul. She listened, with parted lips and irresolute eyes. Then below, far below her, as if in the entrails of the earth, a door slammed heavily; and the quiet house vibrated to it from roof to foundations, more than to a clap of thunder.

He never returned.

## ***KARAIN: A MEMORY***



### **I**

We knew him in those unprotected days when we were content to hold in our hands our lives and our property. None of us, I believe, has any property now, and I hear that many, negligently, have lost their lives; but I am sure that the few who survive are not yet so dim-eyed as to miss in the befogged respectability of their newspapers the intelligence of various native risings in the Eastern Archipelago. Sunshine gleams between the lines of those short paragraphs — sunshine and the glitter of the sea. A strange name wakes up memories; the printed words scent the smoky atmosphere of to-day faintly, with the subtle and penetrating perfume as of land breezes breathing through the starlight of bygone nights; a signal fire gleams like a jewel on the high brow of a sombre cliff; great trees, the advanced sentries of immense forests, stand watchful and still over sleeping stretches of open water; a line of white surf thunders on an empty beach, the shallow water foams on the reefs; and green islets scattered through the calm of noonday lie upon the level of a polished sea, like a handful of emeralds on a buckler of steel.

There are faces too — faces dark, truculent, and smiling; the frank audacious faces of men barefooted, well armed and noiseless. They thronged the narrow length of our schooner's decks with their ornamented and barbarous crowd, with the variegated colours of checkered sarongs, red turbans, white jackets, embroideries; with the gleam of scabbards, gold rings, charms, armlets, lance blades, and jewelled handles of their weapons. They had an independent bearing, resolute eyes, a restrained manner; and we seem yet to hear their soft voices speaking of battles, travels, and escapes; boasting with composure, joking quietly; sometimes in well-bred murmurs extolling their own valour, our generosity; or celebrating with loyal enthusiasm the virtues of their ruler. We remember the faces, the eyes, the voices, we see again the gleam of silk and metal; the murmuring stir of that crowd, brilliant, festive, and martial; and we seem to feel the touch of friendly brown hands that, after one short grasp, return to rest on a chased hilt. They were Karain's people — a devoted following. Their movements hung on his lips; they read their thoughts in his eyes; he murmured to them

nonchalantly of life and death, and they accepted his words humbly, like gifts of fate. They were all free men, and when speaking to him said, "Your slave." On his passage voices died out as though he had walked guarded by silence; awed whispers followed him. They called him their war-chief. He was the ruler of three villages on a narrow plain; the master of an insignificant foothold on the earth — of a conquered foothold that, shaped like a young moon, lay ignored between the hills and the sea.

From the deck of our schooner, anchored in the middle of the bay, he indicated by a theatrical sweep of his arm along the jagged outline of the hills the whole of his domain; and the ample movement seemed to drive back its limits, augmenting it suddenly into something so immense and vague that for a moment it appeared to be bounded only by the sky. And really, looking at that place, landlocked from the sea and shut off from the land by the precipitous slopes of mountains, it was difficult to believe in the existence of any neighbourhood. It was still, complete, unknown, and full of a life that went on stealthily with a troubling effect of solitude; of a life that seemed unaccountably empty of anything that would stir the thought, touch the heart, give a hint of the ominous sequence of days. It appeared to us a land without memories, regrets, and hopes; a land where nothing could survive the coming of the night, and where each sunrise, like a dazzling act of special creation, was disconnected from the eve and the morrow.

Karain swept his hand over it. "All mine!" He struck the deck with his long staff; the gold head flashed like a falling star; very close behind him a silent old fellow in a richly embroidered black jacket alone of all the Malays around did not follow the masterful gesture with a look. He did not even lift his eyelids. He bowed his head behind his master, and without stirring held hilt up over his right shoulder a long blade in a silver scabbard. He was there on duty, but without curiosity, and seemed weary, not with age, but with the possession of a burdensome secret of existence. Karain, heavy and proud, had a lofty pose and breathed calmly. It was our first visit, and we looked about curiously.

The bay was like a bottomless pit of intense light. The circular sheet of water reflected a luminous sky, and the shores enclosing it made an opaque ring of earth floating in an emptiness of transparent blue. The hills, purple and arid, stood out heavily on the sky: their summits seemed to fade into a coloured tremble as of ascending vapour; their steep sides were streaked with the green of narrow ravines; at their foot lay rice-fields, plantain-

patches, yellow sands. A torrent wound about like a dropped thread. Clumps of fruit-trees marked the villages; slim palms put their nodding heads together above the low houses; dried palm-leaf roofs shone afar, like roofs of gold, behind the dark colonnades of tree-trunks; figures passed vivid and vanishing; the smoke of fires stood upright above the masses of flowering bushes; bamboo fences glittered, running away in broken lines between the fields. A sudden cry on the shore sounded plaintive in the distance, and ceased abruptly, as if stifled in the downpour of sunshine. A puff of breeze made a flash of darkness on the smooth water, touched our faces, and became forgotten. Nothing moved. The sun blazed down into a shadowless hollow of colours and stillness.

It was the stage where, dressed splendidly for his part, he strutted, incomparably dignified, made important by the power he had to awaken an absurd expectation of something heroic going to take place — a burst of action or song — upon the vibrating tone of a wonderful sunshine. He was ornate and disturbing, for one could not imagine what depth of horrible void such an elaborate front could be worthy to hide. He was not masked — there was too much life in him, and a mask is only a lifeless thing; but he presented himself essentially as an actor, as a human being aggressively disguised. His smallest acts were prepared and unexpected, his speeches grave, his sentences ominous like hints and complicated like arabesques. He was treated with a solemn respect accorded in the irreverent West only to the monarchs of the stage, and he accepted the profound homage with a sustained dignity seen nowhere else but behind the footlights and in the condensed falseness of some grossly tragic situation. It was almost impossible to remember who he was — only a petty chief of a conveniently isolated corner of Mindanao, where we could in comparative safety break the law against the traffic in firearms and ammunition with the natives. What would happen should one of the moribund Spanish gun-boats be suddenly galvanized into a flicker of active life did not trouble us, once we were inside the bay — so completely did it appear out of the reach of a meddling world; and besides, in those days we were imaginative enough to look with a kind of joyous equanimity on any chance there was of being quietly hanged somewhere out of the way of diplomatic remonstrance. As to Karain, nothing could happen to him unless what happens to all — failure and death; but his quality was to appear clothed in the illusion of unavoidable success. He seemed too effective, too necessary there, too



much of an essential condition for the existence of his land and his people, to be destroyed by anything short of an earthquake. He summed up his race, his country, the elemental force of ardent life, of tropical nature. He had its luxuriant strength, its fascination; and, like it, he carried the seed of peril within.

In many successive visits we came to know his stage well — the purple semicircle of hills, the slim trees leaning over houses, the yellow sands, the streaming green of ravines. All that had the crude and blended colouring, the appropriateness almost excessive, the suspicious immobility of a painted scene; and it enclosed so perfectly the accomplished acting of his amazing pretences that the rest of the world seemed shut out forever from the gorgeous spectacle. There could be nothing outside. It was as if the earth had gone on spinning, and had left that crumb of its surface alone in space. He appeared utterly cut off from everything but the sunshine, and that even seemed to be made for him alone. Once when asked what was on the other side of the hills, he said, with a meaning smile, “Friends and enemies — many enemies; else why should I buy your rifles and powder?” He was always like this — word-perfect in his part, playing up faithfully to the mysteries and certitudes of his surroundings. “Friends and enemies” — nothing else. It was impalpable and vast. The earth had indeed rolled away from under his land, and he, with his handful of people, stood surrounded by a silent tumult as of contending shades. Certainly no sound came from outside. “Friends and enemies!” He might have added, “and memories,” at least as far as he himself was concerned; but he neglected to make that point then. It made itself later on, though; but it was after the daily performance — in the wings, so to speak, and with the lights out. Meantime he filled the stage with barbarous dignity. Some ten years ago he had led his people — a scratch lot of wandering Bugis — to the conquest of the bay, and now in his august care they had forgotten all the past, and had lost all concern for the future. He gave them wisdom, advice, reward, punishment, life or death, with the same serenity of attitude and voice. He understood irrigation and the art of war — the qualities of weapons and the craft of boat-building. He could conceal his heart; had more endurance; he could swim longer, and steer a canoe better than any of his people; he could shoot straighter, and negotiate more tortuously than any man of his race I knew. He was an adventurer of the sea, an outcast, a ruler — and my very good friend. I wish him a quick death in a stand-up fight, a death in sunshine; for

he had known remorse and power, and no man can demand more from life. Day after day he appeared before us, incomparably faithful to the illusions of the stage, and at sunset the night descended upon him quickly, like a falling curtain. The seamed hills became black shadows towering high upon a clear sky; above them the glittering confusion of stars resembled a mad turmoil stilled by a gesture; sounds ceased, men slept, forms vanished — and the reality of the universe alone remained — a marvellous thing of darkness and glimmers.

## II

But it was at night that he talked openly, forgetting the exactions of his stage. In the daytime there were affairs to be discussed in state. There were at first between him and me his own splendour, my shabby suspicions, and the scenic landscape that intruded upon the reality of our lives by its motionless fantasy of outline and colour. His followers thronged round him; above his head the broad blades of their spears made a spiked halo of iron points, and they hedged him from humanity by the shimmer of silks, the gleam of weapons, the excited and respectful hum of eager voices. Before sunset he would take leave with ceremony, and go off sitting under a red umbrella, and escorted by a score of boats. All the paddles flashed and struck together with a mighty splash that reverberated loudly in the monumental amphitheatre of hills. A broad stream of dazzling foam trailed behind the flotilla. The canoes appeared very black on the white hiss of water; turbaned heads swayed back and forth; a multitude of arms in crimson and yellow rose and fell with one movement; the spearmen upright in the bows of canoes had variegated sarongs and gleaming shoulders like bronze statues; the muttered strophes of the paddlers' song ended periodically in a plaintive shout. They diminished in the distance; the song ceased; they swarmed on the beach in the long shadows of the western hills. The sunlight lingered on the purple crests, and we could see him leading the way to his stockade, a burly bareheaded figure walking far in advance of a straggling cortege, and swinging regularly an ebony staff taller than himself. The darkness deepened fast; torches gleamed fitfully, passing behind bushes; a long hail or two trailed in the silence of the evening; and at last the night stretched its smooth veil over the shore, the lights, and the voices.

Then, just as we were thinking of repose, the watchmen of the schooner would hail a splash of paddles away in the starlit gloom of the bay; a voice

would respond in cautious tones, and our serang, putting his head down the open skylight, would inform us without surprise, "That Rajah, he coming. He here now." Karain appeared noiselessly in the doorway of the little cabin. He was simplicity itself then; all in white; muffled about his head; for arms only a kriss with a plain buffalo-horn handle, which he would politely conceal within a fold of his sarong before stepping over the threshold. The old sword-bearer's face, the worn-out and mournful face so covered with wrinkles that it seemed to look out through the meshes of a fine dark net, could be seen close above his shoulders. Karain never moved without that attendant, who stood or squatted close at his back. He had a dislike of an open space behind him. It was more than a dislike — it resembled fear, a nervous preoccupation of what went on where he could not see. This, in view of the evident and fierce loyalty that surrounded him, was inexplicable. He was there alone in the midst of devoted men; he was safe from neighbourly ambushes, from fraternal ambitions; and yet more than one of our visitors had assured us that their ruler could not bear to be alone. They said, "Even when he eats and sleeps there is always one on the watch near him who has strength and weapons." There was indeed always one near him, though our informants had no conception of that watcher's strength and weapons, which were both shadowy and terrible. We knew, but only later on, when we had heard the story. Meantime we noticed that, even during the most important interviews, Karain would often give a start, and interrupting his discourse, would sweep his arm back with a sudden movement, to feel whether the old fellow was there. The old fellow, impenetrable and weary, was always there. He shared his food, his repose, and his thoughts; he knew his plans, guarded his secrets; and, impassive behind his master's agitation, without stirring the least bit, murmured above his head in a soothing tone some words difficult to catch.

It was only on board the schooner, when surrounded by white faces, by unfamiliar sights and sounds, that Karain seemed to forget the strange obsession that wound like a black thread through the gorgeous pomp of his public life. At night we treated him in a free and easy manner, which just stopped short of slapping him on the back, for there are liberties one must not take with a Malay. He said himself that on such occasions he was only a private gentleman coming to see other gentlemen whom he supposed as well born as himself. I fancy that to the last he believed us to be emissaries of Government, darkly official persons furthering by our illegal traffic some

dark scheme of high statecraft. Our denials and protestations were unavailing. He only smiled with discreet politeness and inquired about the Queen. Every visit began with that inquiry; he was insatiable of details; he was fascinated by the holder of a sceptre the shadow of which, stretching from the westward over the earth and over the seas, passed far beyond his own hand's-breadth of conquered land. He multiplied questions; he could never know enough of the Monarch of whom he spoke with wonder and chivalrous respect — with a kind of affectionate awe! Afterwards, when we had learned that he was the son of a woman who had many years ago ruled a small Bugis state, we came to suspect that the memory of his mother (of whom he spoke with enthusiasm) mingled somehow in his mind with the image he tried to form for himself of the far-off Queen whom he called Great, Invincible, Pious, and Fortunate. We had to invent details at last to satisfy his craving curiosity; and our loyalty must be pardoned, for we tried to make them fit for his august and resplendent ideal. We talked. The night slipped over us, over the still schooner, over the sleeping land, and over the sleepless sea that thundered amongst the reefs outside the bay. His paddlers, two trustworthy men, slept in the canoe at the foot of our side-ladder. The old confidant, relieved from duty, dozed on his heels, with his back against the companion-doorway; and Karain sat squarely in the ship's wooden armchair, under the slight sway of the cabin lamp, a cheroot between his dark fingers, and a glass of lemonade before him. He was amused by the fizz of the thing, but after a sip or two would let it get flat, and with a courteous wave of his hand ask for a fresh bottle. He decimated our slender stock; but we did not begrudge it to him, for, when he began, he talked well. He must have been a great Bugis dandy in his time, for even then (and when we knew him he was no longer young) his splendour was spotlessly neat, and he dyed his hair a light shade of brown. The quiet dignity of his bearing transformed the dim-lit cuddy of the schooner into an audience-hall. He talked of inter-island politics with an ironic and melancholy shrewdness. He had travelled much, suffered not a little, intrigued, fought. He knew native Courts, European Settlements, the forests, the sea, and, as he said himself, had spoken in his time to many great men. He liked to talk with me because I had known some of these men: he seemed to think that I could understand him, and, with a fine confidence, assumed that I, at least, could appreciate how much greater he was himself. But he preferred to talk of his native country — a small Bugis state on the island of Celebes. I had visited

it some time before, and he asked eagerly for news. As men's names came up in conversation he would say, "We swam against one another when we were boys"; or, "We hunted the deer together — he could use the noose and the spear as well as I." Now and then his big dreamy eyes would roll restlessly; he frowned or smiled, or he would become pensive, and, staring in silence, would nod slightly for a time at some regretted vision of the past.

His mother had been the ruler of a small semi-independent state on the sea-coast at the head of the Gulf of Boni. He spoke of her with pride. She had been a woman resolute in affairs of state and of her own heart. After the death of her first husband, undismayed by the turbulent opposition of the chiefs, she married a rich trader, a Korinchi man of no family. Karain was her son by that second marriage, but his unfortunate descent had apparently nothing to do with his exile. He said nothing as to its cause, though once he let slip with a sigh, "Ha! my land will not feel any more the weight of my body." But he related willingly the story of his wanderings, and told us all about the conquest of the bay. Alluding to the people beyond the hills, he would murmur gently, with a careless wave of the hand, "They came over the hills once to fight us, but those who got away never came again." He thought for a while, smiling to himself. "Very few got away," he added, with proud serenity. He cherished the recollections of his successes; he had an exulting eagerness for endeavour; when he talked, his aspect was warlike, chivalrous, and uplifting. No wonder his people admired him. We saw him once walking in daylight amongst the houses of the settlement. At the doors of huts groups of women turned to look after him, warbling softly, and with gleaming eyes; armed men stood out of the way, submissive and erect; others approached from the side, bending their backs to address him humbly; an old woman stretched out a draped lean arm — "Blessings on thy head!" she cried from a dark doorway; a fiery-eyed man showed above the low fence of a plantain-patch a streaming face, a bare breast scarred in two places, and bellowed out pantingly after him, "God give victory to our master!" Karain walked fast, and with firm long strides; he answered greetings right and left by quick piercing glances. Children ran forward between the houses, peeped fearfully round corners; young boys kept up with him, gliding between bushes: their eyes gleamed through the dark leaves. The old sword-bearer, shouldering the silver scabbard, shuffled hastily at his heels with bowed head, and his eyes on the ground. And in the

midst of a great stir they passed swift and absorbed, like two men hurrying through a great solitude.

In his council hall he was surrounded by the gravity of armed chiefs, while two long rows of old headmen dressed in cotton stuffs squatted on their heels, with idle arms hanging over their knees. Under the thatch roof supported by smooth columns, of which each one had cost the life of a straight-stemmed young palm, the scent of flowering hedges drifted in warm waves. The sun was sinking. In the open courtyard suppliants walked through the gate, raising, when yet far off, their joined hands above bowed heads, and bending low in the bright stream of sunlight. Young girls, with flowers in their laps, sat under the wide-spreading boughs of a big tree. The blue smoke of wood fires spread in a thin mist above the high-pitched roofs of houses that had glistening walls of woven reeds, and all round them rough wooden pillars under the sloping eaves. He dispensed justice in the shade; from a high seat he gave orders, advice, reproof. Now and then the hum of approbation rose louder, and idle spearmen that lounged listlessly against the posts, looking at the girls, would turn their heads slowly. To no man had been given the shelter of so much respect, confidence, and awe. Yet at times he would lean forward and appear to listen as for a far-off note of discord, as if expecting to hear some faint voice, the sound of light footsteps; or he would start half up in his seat, as though he had been familiarly touched on the shoulder. He glanced back with apprehension; his aged follower whispered inaudibly at his ear; the chiefs turned their eyes away in silence, for the old wizard, the man who could command ghosts and send evil spirits against enemies, was speaking low to their ruler. Around the short stillness of the open place the trees rustled faintly, the soft laughter of girls playing with the flowers rose in clear bursts of joyous sound. At the end of upright spear-shafts the long tufts of dyed horse-hair waved crimson and filmy in the gust of wind; and beyond the blaze of hedges the brook of limpid quick water ran invisible and loud under the drooping grass of the bank, with a great murmur, passionate and gentle.

After sunset, far across the fields and over the bay, clusters of torches could be seen burning under the high roofs of the council shed. Smoky red flames swayed on high poles, and the fiery blaze flickered over faces, clung to the smooth trunks of palm-trees, kindled bright sparks on the rims of metal dishes standing on fine floor-mats. That obscure adventurer feasted like a king. Small groups of men crouched in tight circles round the wooden

platters; brown hands hovered over snowy heaps of rice. Sitting upon a rough couch apart from the others, he leaned on his elbow with inclined head; and near him a youth improvised in a high tone a song that celebrated his valour and wisdom. The singer rocked himself to and fro, rolling frenzied eyes; old women hobbled about with dishes, and men, squatting low, lifted their heads to listen gravely without ceasing to eat. The song of triumph vibrated in the night, and the stanzas rolled out mournful and fiery like the thoughts of a hermit. He silenced it with a sign, "Enough!" An owl hooted far away, exulting in the delight of deep gloom in dense foliage; overhead lizards ran in the attap thatch, calling softly; the dry leaves of the roof rustled; the rumour of mingled voices grew louder suddenly. After a circular and startled glance, as of a man waking up abruptly to the sense of danger, he would throw himself back, and under the downward gaze of the old sorcerer take up, wide-eyed, the slender thread of his dream. They watched his moods; the swelling rumour of animated talk subsided like a wave on a sloping beach. The chief is pensive. And above the spreading whisper of lowered voices only a little rattle of weapons would be heard, a single louder word distinct and alone, or the grave ring of a big brass tray.

### III

For two years at short intervals we visited him. We came to like him, to trust him, almost to admire him. He was plotting and preparing a war with patience, with foresight — with a fidelity to his purpose and with a steadfastness of which I would have thought him racially incapable. He seemed fearless of the future, and in his plans displayed a sagacity that was only limited by his profound ignorance of the rest of the world. We tried to enlighten him, but our attempts to make clear the irresistible nature of the forces which he desired to arrest failed to discourage his eagerness to strike a blow for his own primitive ideas. He did not understand us, and replied by arguments that almost drove one to desperation by their childish shrewdness. He was absurd and unanswerable. Sometimes we caught glimpses of a sombre, glowing fury within him — a brooding and vague sense of wrong, and a concentrated lust of violence which is dangerous in a native. He raved like one inspired. On one occasion, after we had been talking to him late in his campong, he jumped up. A great, clear fire blazed in the grove; lights and shadows danced together between the trees; in the still night bats flitted in and out of the boughs like fluttering flakes of denser darkness. He snatched the sword from the old man, whizzed it out of

the scabbard, and thrust the point into the earth. Upon the thin, upright blade the silver hilt, released, swayed before him like something alive. He stepped back a pace, and in a deadened tone spoke fiercely to the vibrating steel: "If there is virtue in the fire, in the iron, in the hand that forged thee, in the words spoken over thee, in the desire of my heart, and in the wisdom of thy makers, — then we shall be victorious together!" He drew it out, looked along the edge. "Take," he said over his shoulder to the old sword-bearer. The other, unmoved on his hams, wiped the point with a corner of his sarong, and returning the weapon to its scabbard, sat nursing it on his knees without a single look upwards. Karain, suddenly very calm, reseated himself with dignity. We gave up remonstrating after this, and let him go his way to an honourable disaster. All we could do for him was to see to it that the powder was good for the money and the rifles serviceable, if old.

But the game was becoming at last too dangerous; and if we, who had faced it pretty often, thought little of the danger, it was decided for us by some very respectable people sitting safely in counting-houses that the risks were too great, and that only one more trip could be made. After giving in the usual way many misleading hints as to our destination, we slipped away quietly, and after a very quick passage entered the bay. It was early morning, and even before the anchor went to the bottom the schooner was surrounded by boats.

The first thing we heard was that Karain's mysterious sword-bearer had died a few days ago. We did not attach much importance to the news. It was certainly difficult to imagine Karain without his inseparable follower; but the fellow was old, he had never spoken to one of us, we hardly ever had heard the sound of his voice; and we had come to look upon him as upon something inanimate, as a part of our friend's trappings of state — like that sword he had carried, or the fringed red umbrella displayed during an official progress. Karain did not visit us in the afternoon as usual. A message of greeting and a present of fruit and vegetables came off for us before sunset. Our friend paid us like a banker, but treated us like a prince. We sat up for him till midnight. Under the stern awning bearded Jackson jingled an old guitar and sang, with an execrable accent, Spanish love-songs; while young Hollis and I, sprawling on the deck, had a game of chess by the light of a cargo lantern. Karain did not appear. Next day we were busy unloading, and heard that the Rajah was unwell. The expected invitation to visit him ashore did not come. We sent friendly messages, but,



fearing to intrude upon some secret council, remained on board. Early on the third day we had landed all the powder and rifles, and also a six-pounder brass gun with its carriage which we had subscribed together for a present for our friend. The afternoon was sultry. Ragged edges of black clouds peeped over the hills, and invisible thunderstorms circled outside, growling like wild beasts. We got the schooner ready for sea, intending to leave next morning at daylight. All day a merciless sun blazed down into the bay, fierce and pale, as if at white heat. Nothing moved on the land. The beach was empty, the villages seemed deserted; the trees far off stood in unstirring clumps, as if painted; the white smoke of some invisible bush-fire spread itself low over the shores of the bay like a settling fog. Late in the day three of Karain's chief men, dressed in their best and armed to the teeth, came off in a canoe, bringing a case of dollars. They were gloomy and languid, and told us they had not seen their Rajah for five days. No one had seen him! We settled all accounts, and after shaking hands in turn and in profound silence, they descended one after another into their boat, and were paddled to the shore, sitting close together, clad in vivid colours, with hanging heads: the gold embroideries of their jackets flashed dazzlingly as they went away gliding on the smooth water, and not one of them looked back once. Before sunset the growling clouds carried with a rush the ridge of hills, and came tumbling down the inner slopes. Everything disappeared; black whirling vapours filled the bay, and in the midst of them the schooner swung here and there in the shifting gusts of wind. A single clap of thunder detonated in the hollow with a violence that seemed capable of bursting into small pieces the ring of high land, and a warm deluge descended. The wind died out. We panted in the close cabin; our faces streamed; the bay outside hissed as if boiling; the water fell in perpendicular shafts as heavy as lead; it swished about the deck, poured off the spars, gurgled, sobbed, splashed, murmured in the blind night. Our lamp burned low. Hollis, stripped to the waist, lay stretched out on the lockers, with closed eyes and motionless like a despoiled corpse; at his head Jackson twanged the guitar, and gasped out in sighs a mournful dirge about hopeless love and eyes like stars. Then we heard startled voices on deck crying in the rain, hurried footsteps overhead, and suddenly Karain appeared in the doorway of the cabin. His bare breast and his face glistened in the light; his sarong, soaked, clung about his legs; he had his sheathed kriss in his left hand; and wisps of wet hair, escaping from under his red kerchief, stuck over his eyes and down his cheeks. He

stepped in with a headlong stride and looking over his shoulder like a man pursued. Hollis turned on his side quickly and opened his eyes. Jackson clapped his big hand over the strings and the jingling vibration died suddenly. I stood up.

“We did not hear your boat’s hail!” I exclaimed.

“Boat! The man’s swum off,” drawled out Hollis from the locker. “Look at him!”

He breathed heavily, wild-eyed, while we looked at him in silence. Water dripped from him, made a dark pool, and ran crookedly across the cabin floor. We could hear Jackson, who had gone out to drive away our Malay seamen from the doorway of the companion; he swore menacingly in the patter of a heavy shower, and there was a great commotion on deck. The watchmen, scared out of their wits by the glimpse of a shadowy figure leaping over the rail, straight out of the night as it were, had alarmed all hands.

Then Jackson, with glittering drops of water on his hair and beard, came back looking angry, and Hollis, who, being the youngest of us, assumed an indolent superiority, said without stirring, “Give him a dry sarong — give him mine; it’s hanging up in the bathroom.” Karain laid the kriss on the table, hilt inwards, and murmured a few words in a strangled voice.

“What’s that?” asked Hollis, who had not heard.

“He apologizes for coming in with a weapon in his hand,” I said, dazedly.

“Ceremonious beggar. Tell him we forgive a friend . . . on such a night,” drawled out Hollis. “What’s wrong?”

Karain slipped the dry sarong over his head, dropped the wet one at his feet, and stepped out of it. I pointed to the wooden armchair — his armchair. He sat down very straight, said “Ha!” in a strong voice; a short shiver shook his broad frame. He looked over his shoulder uneasily, turned as if to speak to us, but only stared in a curious blind manner, and again looked back. Jackson bellowed out, “Watch well on deck there!” heard a faint answer from above, and reaching out with his foot slammed-to the cabin door.

“All right now,” he said.

Karain’s lips moved slightly. A vivid flash of lightning made the two round sternports facing him glimmer like a pair of cruel and phosphorescent eyes. The flame of the lamp seemed to wither into brown dust for an instant, and the looking-glass over the little sideboard leaped out behind his

back in a smooth sheet of livid light. The roll of thunder came near, crashed over us; the schooner trembled, and the great voice went on, threatening terribly, into the distance. For less than a minute a furious shower rattled on the decks. Karain looked slowly from face to face, and then the silence became so profound that we all could hear distinctly the two chronometers in my cabin ticking along with unflagging speed against one another.

And we three, strangely moved, could not take our eyes from him. He had become enigmatical and touching, in virtue of that mysterious cause that had driven him through the night and through the thunderstorm to the shelter of the schooner's cuddy. Not one of us doubted that we were looking at a fugitive, incredible as it appeared to us. He was haggard, as though he had not slept for weeks; he had become lean, as though he had not eaten for days. His cheeks were hollow, his eyes sunk, the muscles of his chest and arms twitched slightly as if after an exhausting contest. Of course it had been a long swim off to the schooner; but his face showed another kind of fatigue, the tormented weariness, the anger and the fear of a struggle against a thought, an idea — against something that cannot be grappled, that never rests — a shadow, a nothing, unconquerable and immortal, that preys upon life. We knew it as though he had shouted it at us. His chest expanded time after time, as if it could not contain the beating of his heart. For a moment he had the power of the possessed — the power to awaken in the beholders wonder, pain, pity, and a fearful near sense of things invisible, of things dark and mute, that surround the loneliness of mankind. His eyes roamed about aimlessly for a moment, then became still. He said with effort —

“I came here . . . I leaped out of my stockade as after a defeat. I ran in the night. The water was black. I left him calling on the edge of black water. . . . I left him standing alone on the beach. I swam . . . he called out after me . . . I swam . . .”

He trembled from head to foot, sitting very upright and gazing straight before him. Left whom? Who called? We did not know. We could not understand. I said at all hazards —

“Be firm.”

The sound of my voice seemed to steady him into a sudden rigidity, but otherwise he took no notice. He seemed to listen, to expect something for a moment, then went on —

“He cannot come here — therefore I sought you. You men with white faces who despise the invisible voices. He cannot abide your unbelief and your strength.”

He was silent for a while, then exclaimed softly —

“Oh! the strength of unbelievers!”

“There’s no one here but you — and we three,” said Hollis, quietly. He reclined with his head supported on elbow and did not budge.

“I know,” said Karain. “He has never followed me here. Was not the wise man ever by my side? But since the old wise man, who knew of my trouble, has died, I have heard the voice every night. I shut myself up — for many days — in the dark. I can hear the sorrowful murmurs of women, the whisper of the wind, of the running waters; the clash of weapons in the hands of faithful men, their footsteps — and his voice! . . . Near . . . So! In my ear! I felt him near . . . His breath passed over my neck. I leaped out without a cry. All about me men slept quietly. I ran to the sea. He ran by my side without footsteps, whispering, whispering old words — whispering into my ear in his old voice. I ran into the sea; I swam off to you, with my kriss between my teeth. I, armed, I fled before a breath — to you. Take me away to your land. The wise old man has died, and with him is gone the power of his words and charms. And I can tell no one. No one. There is no one here faithful enough and wise enough to know. It is only near you, unbelievers, that my trouble fades like a mist under the eye of day.”

He turned to me.

“With you I go!” he cried in a contained voice. “With you, who know so many of us. I want to leave this land — my people . . . and him — there!”

He pointed a shaking finger at random over his shoulder. It was hard for us to bear the intensity of that undisclosed distress. Hollis stared at him hard. I asked gently —

“Where is the danger?”

“Everywhere outside this place,” he answered, mournfully. “In every place where I am. He waits for me on the paths, under the trees, in the place where I sleep — everywhere but here.”

He looked round the little cabin, at the painted beams, at the tarnished varnish of bulkheads; he looked round as if appealing to all its shabby strangeness, to the disorderly jumble of unfamiliar things that belong to an inconceivable life of stress, of power, of endeavour, of unbelief — to the strong life of white men, which rolls on irresistible and hard on the edge of

outer darkness. He stretched out his arms as if to embrace it and us. We waited. The wind and rain had ceased, and the stillness of the night round the schooner was as dumb and complete as if a dead world had been laid to rest in a grave of clouds. We expected him to speak. The necessity within him tore at his lips. There are those who say that a native will not speak to a white man. Error. No man will speak to his master; but to a wanderer and a friend, to him who does not come to teach or to rule, to him who asks for nothing and accepts all things, words are spoken by the camp-fires, in the shared solitude of the sea, in riverside villages, in resting-places surrounded by forests — words are spoken that take no account of race or colour. One heart speaks — another one listens; and the earth, the sea, the sky, the passing wind and the stirring leaf, hear also the futile tale of the burden of life.

He spoke at last. It is impossible to convey the effect of his story. It is undying, it is but a memory, and its vividness cannot be made clear to another mind, any more than the vivid emotions of a dream. One must have seen his innate splendour, one must have known him before — looked at him then. The wavering gloom of the little cabin; the breathless stillness outside, through which only the lapping of water against the schooner's sides could be heard; Hollis's pale face, with steady dark eyes; the energetic head of Jackson held up between two big palms, and with the long yellow hair of his beard flowing over the strings of the guitar lying on the table; Karain's upright and motionless pose, his tone — all this made an impression that cannot be forgotten. He faced us across the table. His dark head and bronze torso appeared above the tarnished slab of wood, gleaming and still as if cast in metal. Only his lips moved, and his eyes glowed, went out, blazed again, or stared mournfully. His expressions came straight from his tormented heart. His words sounded low, in a sad murmur as of running water; at times they rang loud like the clash of a war-gong — or trailed slowly like weary travellers — or rushed forward with the speed of fear.

#### IV

This is, imperfectly, what he said —

“It was after the great trouble that broke the alliance of the four states of Wajo. We fought amongst ourselves, and the Dutch watched from afar till we were weary. Then the smoke of their fire-ships was seen at the mouth of our rivers, and their great men came in boats full of soldiers to talk to us of protection and peace. We answered with caution and wisdom, for our

villages were burnt, our stockades weak, the people weary, and the weapons blunt. They came and went; there had been much talk, but after they went away everything seemed to be as before, only their ships remained in sight from our coast, and very soon their traders came amongst us under a promise of safety. My brother was a Ruler, and one of those who had given the promise. I was young then, and had fought in the war, and Pata Matara had fought by my side. We had shared hunger, danger, fatigue, and victory. His eyes saw my danger quickly, and twice my arm had preserved his life. It was his destiny. He was my friend. And he was great amongst us — one of those who were near my brother, the Ruler. He spoke in council, his courage was great, he was the chief of many villages round the great lake that is in the middle of our country as the heart is in the middle of a man's body. When his sword was carried into a campong in advance of his coming, the maidens whispered wonderingly under the fruit-trees, the rich men consulted together in the shade, and a feast was made ready with rejoicing and songs. He had the favour of the Ruler and the affection of the poor. He loved war, deer hunts, and the charms of women. He was the possessor of jewels, of lucky weapons, and of men's devotion. He was a fierce man; and I had no other friend.

“I was the chief of a stockade at the mouth of the river, and collected tolls for my brother from the passing boats. One day I saw a Dutch trader go up the river. He went up with three boats, and no toll was demanded from him, because the smoke of Dutch war-ships stood out from the open sea, and we were too weak to forget treaties. He went up under the promise of safety, and my brother gave him protection. He said he came to trade. He listened to our voices, for we are men who speak openly and without fear; he counted the number of our spears, he examined the trees, the running waters, the grasses of the bank, the slopes of our hills. He went up to Matara's country and obtained permission to build a house. He traded and planted. He despised our joys, our thoughts, and our sorrows. His face was red, his hair like flame, and his eyes pale, like a river mist; he moved heavily, and spoke with a deep voice; he laughed aloud like a fool, and knew no courtesy in his speech. He was a big, scornful man, who looked into women's faces and put his hand on the shoulders of free men as though he had been a noble-born chief. We bore with him. Time passed.

“Then Pata Matara's sister fled from the campong and went to live in the Dutchman's house. She was a great and wilful lady: I had seen her once

carried high on slaves' shoulders amongst the people, with uncovered face, and I had heard all men say that her beauty was extreme, silencing the reason and ravishing the heart of the beholders. The people were dismayed; Matara's face was blackened with that disgrace, for she knew she had been promised to another man. Matara went to the Dutchman's house, and said, 'Give her up to die — she is the daughter of chiefs.' The white man refused and shut himself up, while his servants kept guard night and day with loaded guns. Matara raged. My brother called a council. But the Dutch ships were near, and watched our coast greedily. My brother said, 'If he dies now our land will pay for his blood. Leave him alone till we grow stronger and the ships are gone.' Matara was wise; he waited and watched. But the white man feared for her life and went away.

"He left his house, his plantations, and his goods! He departed, armed and menacing, and left all — for her! She had ravished his heart! From my stockade I saw him put out to sea in a big boat. Matara and I watched him from the fighting platform behind the pointed stakes. He sat cross-legged, with his gun in his hands, on the roof at the stern of his prau. The barrel of his rifle glinted aslant before his big red face. The broad river was stretched under him — level, smooth, shining, like a plain of silver; and his prau, looking very short and black from the shore, glided along the silver plain and over into the blue of the sea.

"Thrice Matara, standing by my side, called aloud her name with grief and imprecations. He stirred my heart. It leaped three times; and three times with the eyes of my mind I saw in the gloom within the enclosed space of the prau a woman with streaming hair going away from her land and her people. I was angry — and sorry. Why? And then I also cried out insults and threats. Matara said, 'Now they have left our land their lives are mind. I shall follow and strike — and, alone, pay the price of blood.' A great wind was sweeping towards the setting sun over the empty river. I cried, 'By your side I will go!' He lowered his head in sign of assent. It was his destiny. The sun had set, and the trees swayed their boughs with a great noise above our heads.

"On the third night we two left our land together in a trading prau.

"The sea met us — the sea, wide, pathless, and without voice. A sailing prau leaves no track. We went south. The moon was full; and, looking up, we said to one another, 'When the next moon shines as this one, we shall return and they will be dead.' It was fifteen years ago. Many moons have

grown full and withered and I have not seen my land since. We sailed south; we overtook many praus; we examined the creeks and the bays; we saw the end of our coast, of our island — a steep cape over a disturbed strait, where drift the shadows of shipwrecked praus and drowned men clamour in the night. The wide sea was all round us now. We saw a great mountain burning in the midst of water; we saw thousands of islets scattered like bits of iron fired from a big gun; we saw a long coast of mountain and lowlands stretching away in sunshine from west to east. It was Java. We said, ‘They are there; their time is near, and we shall return or die cleansed from dishonour.’

“We landed. Is there anything good in that country? The paths run straight and hard and dusty. Stone campongs, full of white faces, are surrounded by fertile fields, but every man you meet is a slave. The rulers live under the edge of a foreign sword. We ascended mountains, we traversed valleys; at sunset we entered villages. We asked everyone, ‘Have you seen such a white man?’ Some stared; others laughed; women gave us food, sometimes, with fear and respect, as though we had been distracted by the visitation of God; but some did not understand our language, and some cursed us, or, yawning, asked with contempt the reason of our quest. Once, as we were going away, an old man called after us, ‘Desist!’

“We went on. Concealing our weapons, we stood humbly aside before the horsemen on the road; we bowed low in the courtyards of chiefs who were no better than slaves. We lost ourselves in the fields, in the jungle; and one night, in a tangled forest, we came upon a place where crumbling old walls had fallen amongst the trees, and where strange stone idols — carved images of devils with many arms and legs, with snakes twined round their bodies, with twenty heads and holding a hundred swords — seemed to live and threaten in the light of our camp fire. Nothing dismayed us. And on the road, by every fire, in resting-places, we always talked of her and of him. Their time was near. We spoke of nothing else. No! not of hunger, thirst, weariness, and faltering hearts. No! we spoke of him and her! Of her! And we thought of them — of her! Matara brooded by the fire. I sat and thought and thought, till suddenly I could see again the image of a woman, beautiful, and young, and great and proud, and tender, going away from her land and her people. Matara said, ‘When we find them we shall kill her first to cleanse the dishonour — then the man must die.’ I would say, ‘It shall be so; it is your vengeance.’ He stared long at me with his big sunken eyes.



“We came back to the coast. Our feet were bleeding, our bodies thin. We slept in rags under the shadow of stone enclosures; we prowled, soiled and lean, about the gateways of white men’s courtyards. Their hairy dogs barked at us, and their servants shouted from afar, ‘Begone!’ Low-born wretches, that keep watch over the streets of stone campongs, asked us who we were. We lied, we cringed, we smiled with hate in our hearts, and we kept looking here, looking there for them — for the white man with hair like flame, and for her, for the woman who had broken faith, and therefore must die. We looked. At last in every woman’s face I thought I could see hers. We ran swiftly. No! Sometimes Matara would whisper, ‘Here is the man,’ and we waited, crouching. He came near. It was not the man — those Dutchmen are all alike. We suffered the anguish of deception. In my sleep I saw her face, and was both joyful and sorry. . . . Why? . . . I seemed to hear a whisper near me. I turned swiftly. She was not there! And as we trudged wearily from stone city to stone city I seemed to hear a light footstep near me. A time came when I heard it always, and I was glad. I thought, walking dizzy and weary in sunshine on the hard paths of white men I thought, She is there — with us! . . . Matara was sombre. We were often hungry.

“We sold the carved sheaths of our krisses — the ivory sheaths with golden ferules. We sold the jewelled hilts. But we kept the blades — for them. The blades that never touch but kill — we kept the blades for her. . . . Why? She was always by our side. . . . We starved. We begged. We left Java at last.

“We went West, we went East. We saw many lands, crowds of strange faces, men that live in trees and men who eat their old people. We cut rattans in the forest for a handful of rice, and for a living swept the decks of big ships and heard curses heaped upon our heads. We toiled in villages; we wandered upon the seas with the Bajow people, who have no country. We fought for pay; we hired ourselves to work for Goram men, and were cheated; and under the orders of rough white faces we dived for pearls in barren bays, dotted with black rocks, upon a coast of sand and desolation. And everywhere we watched, we listened, we asked. We asked traders, robbers, white men. We heard jeers, mockery, threats — words of wonder and words of contempt. We never knew rest; we never thought of home, for our work was not done. A year passed, then another. I ceased to count the number of nights, of moons, of years. I watched over Matara. He had my last handful of rice; if there was water enough for one he drank it; I covered

him up when he shivered with cold; and when the hot sickness came upon him I sat sleepless through many nights and fanned his face. He was a fierce man, and my friend. He spoke of her with fury in the daytime, with sorrow in the dark; he remembered her in health, in sickness. I said nothing; but I saw her every day — always! At first I saw only her head, as of a woman walking in the low mist on a river bank. Then she sat by our fire. I saw her! I looked at her! She had tender eyes and a ravishing face. I murmured to her in the night. Matara said sleepily sometimes, ‘To whom are you talking? Who is there?’ I answered quickly, ‘No one’ . . . It was a lie! She never left me. She shared the warmth of our fire, she sat on my couch of leaves, she swam on the sea to follow me. . . . I saw her! . . . I tell you I saw her long black hair spread behind her upon the moonlit water as she struck out with bare arms by the side of a swift prau. She was beautiful, she was faithful, and in the silence of foreign countries she spoke to me very low in the language of my people. No one saw her; no one heard her; she was mine only! In daylight she moved with a swaying walk before me upon the weary paths; her figure was straight and flexible like the stem of a slender tree; the heels of her feet were round and polished like shells of eggs; with her round arm she made signs. At night she looked into my face. And she was sad! Her eyes were tender and frightened; her voice soft and pleading. Once I murmured to her, ‘You shall not die,’ and she smiled . . . ever after she smiled! . . . She gave me courage to bear weariness and hardships. Those were times of pain, and she soothed me. We wandered patient in our search. We knew deception, false hopes; we knew captivity, sickness, thirst, misery, despair . . . Enough! We found them! . . .”

He cried out the last words and paused. His face was impassive, and he kept still like a man in a trance. Hollis sat up quickly, and spread his elbows on the table. Jackson made a brusque movement, and accidentally touched the guitar. A plaintive resonance filled the cabin with confused vibrations and died out slowly. Then Karain began to speak again. The restrained fierceness of his tone seemed to rise like a voice from outside, like a thing unspoken but heard; it filled the cabin and enveloped in its intense and deadened murmur the motionless figure in the chair.

“We were on our way to Atjeh, where there was war; but the vessel ran on a sandbank, and we had to land in Delli. We had earned a little money, and had bought a gun from some Selangore traders; only one gun, which was fired by the spark of a stone; Matara carried it. We landed. Many white

men lived there, planting tobacco on conquered plains, and Matara . . . But no matter. He saw him! . . . The Dutchman! . . . At last! . . . We crept and watched. Two nights and a day we watched. He had a house — a big house in a clearing in the midst of his fields; flowers and bushes grew around; there were narrow paths of yellow earth between the cut grass, and thick hedges to keep people out. The third night we came armed, and lay behind a hedge.

“A heavy dew seemed to soak through our flesh and made our very entrails cold. The grass, the twigs, the leaves, covered with drops of water, were gray in the moonlight. Matara, curled up in the grass, shivered in his sleep. My teeth rattled in my head so loud that I was afraid the noise would wake up all the land. Afar, the watchmen of white men’s houses struck wooden clappers and hooted in the darkness. And, as every night, I saw her by my side. She smiled no more! . . . The fire of anguish burned in my breast, and she whispered to me with compassion, with pity, softly — as women will; she soothed the pain of my mind; she bent her face over me — the face of a woman who ravishes the hearts and silences the reason of men. She was all mine, and no one could see her — no one of living mankind! Stars shone through her bosom, through her floating hair. I was overcome with regret, with tenderness, with sorrow. Matara slept . . . Had I slept? Matara was shaking me by the shoulder, and the fire of the sun was drying the grass, the bushes, the leaves. It was day. Shreds of white mist hung between the branches of trees.

“Was it night or day? I saw nothing again till I heard Matara breathe quickly where he lay, and then outside the house I saw her. I saw them both. They had come out. She sat on a bench under the wall, and twigs laden with flowers crept high above her head, hung over her hair. She had a box on her lap, and gazed into it, counting the increase of her pearls. The Dutchman stood by looking on; he smiled down at her; his white teeth flashed; the hair on his lip was like two twisted flames. He was big and fat, and joyous, and without fear. Matara tipped fresh priming from the hollow of his palm, scraped the flint with his thumb-nail, and gave the gun to me. To me! I took it . . . O fate!

“He whispered into my ear, lying on his stomach, ‘I shall creep close and then amok . . . let her die by my hand. You take aim at the fat swine there. Let him see me strike my shame off the face of the earth — and then . . . you are my friend — kill with a sure shot.’ I said nothing; there was no air

in my chest — there was no air in the world. Matara had gone suddenly from my side. The grass nodded. Then a bush rustled. She lifted her head.

“I saw her! The consoler of sleepless nights, of weary days; the companion of troubled years! I saw her! She looked straight at the place where I crouched. She was there as I had seen her for years — a faithful wanderer by my side. She looked with sad eyes and had smiling lips; she looked at me . . . Smiling lips! Had I not promised that she should not die!

“She was far off and I felt her near. Her touch caressed me, and her voice murmured, whispered above me, around me. ‘Who shall be thy companion, who shall console thee if I die?’ I saw a flowering thicket to the left of her stir a little . . . Matara was ready . . . I cried aloud — ‘Return!’

“She leaped up; the box fell; the pearls streamed at her feet. The big Dutchman by her side rolled menacing eyes through the still sunshine. The gun went up to my shoulder. I was kneeling and I was firm — firmer than the trees, the rocks, the mountains. But in front of the steady long barrel the fields, the house, the earth, the sky swayed to and fro like shadows in a forest on a windy day. Matara burst out of the thicket; before him the petals of torn flowers whirled high as if driven by a tempest. I heard her cry; I saw her spring with open arms in front of the white man. She was a woman of my country and of noble blood. They are so! I heard her shriek of anguish and fear — and all stood still! The fields, the house, the earth, the sky stood still — while Matara leaped at her with uplifted arm. I pulled the trigger, saw a spark, heard nothing; the smoke drove back into my face, and then I could see Matara roll over head first and lie with stretched arms at her feet. Ha! A sure shot! The sunshine fell on my back colder than the running water. A sure shot! I flung the gun after the shot. Those two stood over the dead man as though they had been bewitched by a charm. I shouted at her, ‘Live and remember!’ Then for a time I stumbled about in a cold darkness.

“Behind me there were great shouts, the running of many feet; strange men surrounded me, cried meaningless words into my face, pushed me, dragged me, supported me . . . I stood before the big Dutchman: he stared as if bereft of his reason. He wanted to know, he talked fast, he spoke of gratitude, he offered me food, shelter, gold — he asked many questions. I laughed in his face. I said, ‘I am a Korinchi traveller from Perak over there, and know nothing of that dead man. I was passing along the path when I heard a shot, and your senseless people rushed out and dragged me here.’ He lifted his arms, he wondered, he could not believe, he could not

understand, he clamoured in his own tongue! She had her arms clasped round his neck, and over her shoulder stared back at me with wide eyes. I smiled and looked at her; I smiled and waited to hear the sound of her voice. The white man asked her suddenly. 'Do you know him?' I listened — my life was in my ears! She looked at me long, she looked at me with unflinching eyes, and said aloud, 'No! I never saw him before.' . . . What! Never before? Had she forgotten already? Was it possible? Forgotten already — after so many years — so many years of wandering, of companionship, of trouble, of tender words! Forgotten already! . . . I tore myself out from the hands that held me and went away without a word . . . They let me go.

"I was weary. Did I sleep? I do not know. I remember walking upon a broad path under a clear starlight; and that strange country seemed so big, the rice-fields so vast, that, as I looked around, my head swam with the fear of space. Then I saw a forest. The joyous starlight was heavy upon me. I turned off the path and entered the forest, which was very sombre and very sad."

## V

Karain's tone had been getting lower and lower, as though he had been going away from us, till the last words sounded faint but clear, as if shouted on a calm day from a very great distance. He moved not. He stared fixedly past the motionless head of Hollis, who faced him, as still as himself. Jackson had turned sideways, and with elbow on the table shaded his eyes with the palm of his hand. And I looked on, surprised and moved; I looked at that man, loyal to a vision, betrayed by his dream, spurned by his illusion, and coming to us unbelievers for help — against a thought. The silence was profound; but it seemed full of noiseless phantoms, of things sorrowful, shadowy, and mute, in whose invisible presence the firm, pulsating beat of the two ship's chronometers ticking off steadily the seconds of Greenwich Time seemed to me a protection and a relief. Karain stared stonily; and looking at his rigid figure, I thought of his wanderings, of that obscure Odyssey of revenge, of all the men that wander amongst illusions faithful, faithless; of the illusions that give joy, that give sorrow, that give pain, that give peace; of the invincible illusions that can make life and death appear serene, inspiring, tormented, or ignoble.

A murmur was heard; that voice from outside seemed to flow out of a dreaming world into the lamp-light of the cabin. Karain was speaking.

“I lived in the forest.

“She came no more. Never! Never once! I lived alone. She had forgotten. It was well. I did not want her; I wanted no one. I found an abandoned house in an old clearing. Nobody came near. Sometimes I heard in the distance the voices of people going along a path. I slept; I rested; there was wild rice, water from a running stream — and peace! Every night I sat alone by my small fire before the hut. Many nights passed over my head.

“Then, one evening, as I sat by my fire after having eaten, I looked down on the ground and began to remember my wanderings. I lifted my head. I had heard no sound, no rustle, no footsteps — but I lifted my head. A man was coming towards me across the small clearing. I waited. He came up without a greeting and squatted down into the firelight. Then he turned his face to me. It was Matara. He stared at me fiercely with his big sunken eyes. The night was cold; the heat died suddenly out of the fire, and he stared at me. I rose and went away from there, leaving him by the fire that had no heat.

“I walked all that night, all next day, and in the evening made up a big blaze and sat down — to wait for him. He had not come into the light. I heard him in the bushes here and there, whispering, whispering. I understood at last — I had heard the words before, ‘You are my friend — kill with a sure shot.’

“I bore it as long as I could — then leaped away, as on this very night I leaped from my stockade and swam to you. I ran — I ran crying like a child left alone and far from the houses. He ran by my side, without footsteps, whispering, whispering — invisible and heard. I sought people — I wanted men around me! Men who had not died! And again we two wandered. I sought danger, violence, and death. I fought in the Atjeh war, and a brave people wondered at the valiance of a stranger. But we were two; he warded off the blows . . . Why? I wanted peace, not life. And no one could see him; no one knew — I dared tell no one. At times he would leave me, but not for long; then he would return and whisper or stare. My heart was torn with a strange fear, but could not die. Then I met an old man.

“You all knew him. People here called him my sorcerer, my servant and sword-bearer; but to me he was father, mother, protection, refuge and peace. When I met him he was returning from a pilgrimage, and I heard him intoning the prayer of sunset. He had gone to the holy place with his son, his son’s wife, and a little child; and on their return, by the favour of the

Most High, they all died: the strong man, the young mother, the little child — they died; and the old man reached his country alone. He was a pilgrim serene and pious, very wise and very lonely. I told him all. For a time we lived together. He said over me words of compassion, of wisdom, of prayer. He warded from me the shade of the dead. I begged him for a charm that would make me safe. For a long time he refused; but at last, with a sigh and a smile, he gave me one. Doubtless he could command a spirit stronger than the unrest of my dead friend, and again I had peace; but I had become restless, and a lover of turmoil and danger. The old man never left me. We travelled together. We were welcomed by the great; his wisdom and my courage are remembered where your strength, O white men, is forgotten! We served the Sultan of Sula. We fought the Spaniards. There were victories, hopes, defeats, sorrow, blood, women's tears . . . What for? . . . We fled. We collected wanderers of a warlike race and came here to fight again. The rest you know. I am the ruler of a conquered land, a lover of war and danger, a fighter and a plotter. But the old man has died, and I am again the slave of the dead. He is not here now to drive away the reproachful shade — to silence the lifeless voice! The power of his charm has died with him. And I know fear; and I hear the whisper, 'Kill! kill! kill!' . . . Have I not killed enough? . . ."

For the first time that night a sudden convulsion of madness and rage passed over his face. His wavering glances darted here and there like scared birds in a thunderstorm. He jumped up, shouting —

"By the spirits that drink blood: by the spirits that cry in the night: by all the spirits of fury, misfortune, and death, I swear — some day I will strike into every heart I meet — I . . ."

He looked so dangerous that we all three leaped to our feet, and Hollis, with the back of his hand, sent the kriss flying off the table. I believe we shouted together. It was a short scare, and the next moment he was again composed in his chair, with three white men standing over him in rather foolish attitudes. We felt a little ashamed of ourselves. Jackson picked up the kriss, and, after an inquiring glance at me, gave it to him. He received it with a stately inclination of the head and stuck it in the twist of his sarong, with punctilious care to give his weapon a pacific position. Then he looked up at us with an austere smile. We were abashed and reprov'd. Hollis sat sideways on the table and, holding his chin in his hand, scrutinized him in pensive silence. I said —

“You must abide with your people. They need you. And there is forgetfulness in life. Even the dead cease to speak in time.”

“Am I a woman, to forget long years before an eyelid has had the time to beat twice?” he exclaimed, with bitter resentment. He startled me. It was amazing. To him his life — that cruel mirage of love and peace — seemed as real, as undeniable, as theirs would be to any saint, philosopher, or fool of us all. Hollis muttered —

“You won’t soothe him with your platitudes.”

Karain spoke to me.

“You know us. You have lived with us. Why? — we cannot know; but you understand our sorrows and our thoughts. You have lived with my people, and you understand our desires and our fears. With you I will go. To your land — to your people. To your people, who live in unbelief; to whom day is day, and night is night — nothing more, because you understand all things seen, and despise all else! To your land of unbelief, where the dead do not speak, where every man is wise, and alone — and at peace!”

“Capital description,” murmured Hollis, with the flicker of a smile.

Karain hung his head.

“I can toil, and fight — and be faithful,” he whispered, in a weary tone, “but I cannot go back to him who waits for me on the shore. No! Take me with you . . . Or else give me some of your strength — of your unbelief . . . A charm! . . .”

He seemed utterly exhausted.

“Yes, take him home,” said Hollis, very low, as if debating with himself. “That would be one way. The ghosts there are in society, and talk affably to ladies and gentlemen, but would scorn a naked human being — like our princely friend. . . . Naked . . . Flayed! I should say. I am sorry for him. Impossible — of course. The end of all this shall be,” he went on, looking up at us — “the end of this shall be, that some day he will run amuck amongst his faithful subjects and send ‘ad patres’ ever so many of them before they make up their minds to the disloyalty of knocking him on the head.”

I nodded. I thought it more than probable that such would be the end of Karain. It was evident that he had been hunted by his thought along the very limit of human endurance, and very little more pressing was needed to make him swerve over into the form of madness peculiar to his race. The



respite he had during the old man's life made the return of the torment unbearable. That much was clear.

He lifted his head suddenly; we had imagined for a moment that he had been dozing.

"Give me your protection — or your strength!" he cried. "A charm . . . a weapon!"

Again his chin fell on his breast. We looked at him, then looked at one another with suspicious awe in our eyes, like men who come unexpectedly upon the scene of some mysterious disaster. He had given himself up to us; he had thrust into our hands his errors and his torment, his life and his peace; and we did not know what to do with that problem from the outer darkness. We three white men, looking at the Malay, could not find one word to the purpose amongst us — if indeed there existed a word that could solve that problem. We pondered, and our hearts sank. We felt as though we three had been called to the very gate of Infernal Regions to judge, to decide the fate of a wanderer coming suddenly from a world of sunshine and illusions.

"By Jove, he seems to have a great idea of our power," whispered Hollis, hopelessly. And then again there was a silence, the feeble splash of water, the steady tick of chronometers. Jackson, with bare arms crossed, leaned his shoulders against the bulkhead of the cabin. He was bending his head under the deck beam; his fair beard spread out magnificently over his chest; he looked colossal, ineffectual, and mild. There was something lugubrious in the aspect of the cabin; the air in it seemed to become slowly charged with the cruel chill of helplessness, with the pitiless anger of egoism against the incomprehensible form of an intruding pain. We had no idea what to do; we began to resent bitterly the hard necessity to get rid of him.

Hollis mused, muttered suddenly with a short laugh, "Strength . . . Protection . . . Charm." He slipped off the table and left the cuddy without a look at us. It seemed a base desertion. Jackson and I exchanged indignant glances. We could hear him rummaging in his pigeon-hole of a cabin. Was the fellow actually going to bed? Karain sighed. It was intolerable!

Then Hollis reappeared, holding in both hands a small leather box. He put it down gently on the table and looked at us with a queer gasp, we thought, as though he had from some cause become speechless for a moment, or were ethically uncertain about producing that box. But in an instant the insolent and unerring wisdom of his youth gave him the needed

courage. He said, as he unlocked the box with a very small key, "Look as solemn as you can, you fellows."

Probably we looked only surprised and stupid, for he glanced over his shoulder, and said angrily —

"This is no play; I am going to do something for him. Look serious. Confound it! . . . Can't you lie a little . . . for a friend!"

Karain seemed to take no notice of us, but when Hollis threw open the lid of the box his eyes flew to it — and so did ours. The quilted crimson satin of the inside put a violent patch of colour into the sombre atmosphere; it was something positive to look at — it was fascinating.

## VI

Hollis looked smiling into the box. He had lately made a dash home through the Canal. He had been away six months, and only joined us again just in time for this last trip. We had never seen the box before. His hands hovered above it; and he talked to us ironically, but his face became as grave as though he were pronouncing a powerful incantation over the things inside.

"Every one of us," he said, with pauses that somehow were more offensive than his words — "every one of us, you'll admit, has been haunted by some woman . . . And . . . as to friends . . . dropped by the way . . . Well! . . . ask yourselves . . ."

He paused. Karain stared. A deep rumble was heard high up under the deck. Jackson spoke seriously —

"Don't be so beastly cynical."

"Ah! You are without guile," said Hollis, sadly. "You will learn . . . Meantime this Malay has been our friend . . ."

He repeated several times thoughtfully, "Friend . . . Malay. Friend, Malay," as though weighing the words against one another, then went on more briskly —

"A good fellow — a gentleman in his way. We can't, so to speak, turn our backs on his confidence and belief in us. Those Malays are easily impressed — all nerves, you know — therefore . . ."

He turned to me sharply.

"You know him best," he said, in a practical tone. "Do you think he is fanatical — I mean very strict in his faith?"

I stammered in profound amazement that "I did not think so."

“It’s on account of its being a likeness — an engraved image,” muttered Hollis, enigmatically, turning to the box. He plunged his fingers into it. Karain’s lips were parted and his eyes shone. We looked into the box.

There were there a couple of reels of cotton, a packet of needles, a bit of silk ribbon, dark blue; a cabinet photograph, at which Hollis stole a glance before laying it on the table face downwards. A girl’s portrait, I could see. There were, amongst a lot of various small objects, a bunch of flowers, a narrow white glove with many buttons, a slim packet of letters carefully tied up. Amulets of white men! Charms and talismans! Charms that keep them straight, that drive them crooked, that have the power to make a young man sigh, an old man smile. Potent things that procure dreams of joy, thoughts of regret; that soften hard hearts, and can temper a soft one to the hardness of steel. Gifts of heaven — things of earth . . .

Hollis rummaged in the box.

And it seemed to me, during that moment of waiting, that the cabin of the schooner was becoming filled with a stir invisible and living as of subtle breaths. All the ghosts driven out of the unbelieving West by men who pretend to be wise and alone and at peace — all the homeless ghosts of an unbelieving world — appeared suddenly round the figure of Hollis bending over the box; all the exiled and charming shades of loved women; all the beautiful and tender ghosts of ideals, remembered, forgotten, cherished, execrated; all the cast-out and reproachful ghosts of friends admired, trusted, traduced, betrayed, left dead by the way — they all seemed to come from the inhospitable regions of the earth to crowd into the gloomy cabin, as though it had been a refuge and, in all the unbelieving world, the only place of avenging belief. . . . It lasted a second — all disappeared. Hollis was facing us alone with something small that glittered between his fingers. It looked like a coin.

“Ah! here it is,” he said.

He held it up. It was a sixpence — a Jubilee sixpence. It was gilt; it had a hole punched near the rim. Hollis looked towards Karain.

“A charm for our friend,” he said to us. “The thing itself is of great power — money, you know — and his imagination is struck. A loyal vagabond; if only his puritanism doesn’t shy at a likeness . . .”

We said nothing. We did not know whether to be scandalized, amused, or relieved. Hollis advanced towards Karain, who stood up as if startled, and then, holding the coin up, spoke in Malay.

“This is the image of the Great Queen, and the most powerful thing the white men know,” he said, solemnly.

Karain covered the handle of his kriss in sign of respect, and stared at the crowned head.

“The Invincible, the Pious,” he muttered.

“She is more powerful than Suleiman the Wise, who commanded the genii, as you know,” said Hollis, gravely. “I shall give this to you.”

He held the sixpence in the palm of his hand, and looking at it thoughtfully, spoke to us in English.

“She commands a spirit, too — the spirit of her nation; a masterful, conscientious, unscrupulous, unconquerable devil . . . that does a lot of good — incidentally . . . a lot of good . . . at times — and wouldn’t stand any fuss from the best ghost out for such a little thing as our friend’s shot. Don’t look thunderstruck, you fellows. Help me to make him believe — everything’s in that.”

“His people will be shocked,” I murmured.

Hollis looked fixedly at Karain, who was the incarnation of the very essence of still excitement. He stood rigid, with head thrown back; his eyes rolled wildly, flashing; the dilated nostrils quivered.

“Hang it all!” said Hollis at last, “he is a good fellow. I’ll give him something that I shall really miss.”

He took the ribbon out of the box, smiled at it scornfully, then with a pair of scissors cut out a piece from the palm of the glove.

“I shall make him a thing like those Italian peasants wear, you know.”

He sewed the coin in the delicate leather, sewed the leather to the ribbon, tied the ends together. He worked with haste. Karain watched his fingers all the time.

“Now then,” he said — then stepped up to Karain. They looked close into one another’s eyes. Those of Karain stared in a lost glance, but Hollis’s seemed to grow darker and looked out masterful and compelling. They were in violent contrast together — one motionless and the colour of bronze, the other dazzling white and lifting his arms, where the powerful muscles rolled slightly under a skin that gleamed like satin. Jackson moved near with the air of a man closing up to a chum in a tight place. I said impressively, pointing to Hollis —

“He is young, but he is wise. Believe him!”

Karain bent his head: Hollis threw lightly over it the dark-blue ribbon and stepped back.

“Forget, and be at peace!” I cried.

Karain seemed to wake up from a dream. He said, “Ha!” shook himself as if throwing off a burden. He looked round with assurance. Someone on deck dragged off the skylight cover, and a flood of light fell into the cabin. It was morning already.

“Time to go on deck,” said Jackson.

Hollis put on a coat, and we went up, Karain leading.

The sun had risen beyond the hills, and their long shadows stretched far over the bay in the pearly light. The air was clear, stainless, and cool. I pointed at the curved line of yellow sands.

“He is not there,” I said, emphatically, to Karain. “He waits no more. He has departed forever.”

A shaft of bright hot rays darted into the bay between the summits of two hills, and the water all round broke out as if by magic into a dazzling sparkle.

“No! He is not there waiting,” said Karain, after a long look over the beach. “I do not hear him,” he went on, slowly. “No!”

He turned to us.

“He has departed again — forever!” he cried.

We assented vigorously, repeatedly, and without compunction. The great thing was to impress him powerfully; to suggest absolute safety — the end of all trouble. We did our best; and I hope we affirmed our faith in the power of Hollis’s charm efficiently enough to put the matter beyond the shadow of a doubt. Our voices rang around him joyously in the still air, and above his head the sky, pellucid, pure, stainless, arched its tender blue from shore to shore and over the bay, as if to envelop the water, the earth, and the man in the caress of its light.

The anchor was up, the sails hung still, and half-a-dozen big boats were seen sweeping over the bay to give us a tow out. The paddlers in the first one that came alongside lifted their heads and saw their ruler standing amongst us. A low murmur of surprise arose — then a shout of greeting.

He left us, and seemed straightway to step into the glorious splendour of his stage, to wrap himself in the illusion of unavoidable success. For a moment he stood erect, one foot over the gangway, one hand on the hilt of his kriss, in a martial pose; and, relieved from the fear of outer darkness, he

held his head high, he swept a serene look over his conquered foothold on the earth. The boats far off took up the cry of greeting; a great clamour rolled on the water; the hills echoed it, and seemed to toss back at him the words invoking long life and victories.

He descended into a canoe, and as soon as he was clear of the side we gave him three cheers. They sounded faint and orderly after the wild tumult of his loyal subjects, but it was the best we could do. He stood up in the boat, lifted up both his arms, then pointed to the infallible charm. We cheered again; and the Malays in the boats stared — very much puzzled and impressed. I wondered what they thought; what he thought; . . . what the reader thinks?

We towed out slowly. We saw him land and watch us from the beach. A figure approached him humbly but openly — not at all like a ghost with a grievance. We could see other men running towards him. Perhaps he had been missed? At any rate there was a great stir. A group formed itself rapidly near him, and he walked along the sands, followed by a growing cortege and kept nearly abreast of the schooner. With our glasses we could see the blue ribbon on his neck and a patch of white on his brown chest. The bay was waking up. The smokes of morning fires stood in faint spirals higher than the heads of palms; people moved between the houses; a herd of buffaloes galloped clumsily across a green slope; the slender figures of boys brandishing sticks appeared black and leaping in the long grass; a coloured line of women, with water bamboos on their heads, moved swaying through a thin grove of fruit-trees. Karain stopped in the midst of his men and waved his hand; then, detaching himself from the splendid group, walked alone to the water's edge and waved his hand again. The schooner passed out to sea between the steep headlands that shut in the bay, and at the same instant Karain passed out of our life forever.

But the memory remains. Some years afterwards I met Jackson, in the Strand. He was magnificent as ever. His head was high above the crowd. His beard was gold, his face red, his eyes blue; he had a wide-brimmed gray hat and no collar or waistcoat; he was inspiring; he had just come home — had landed that very day! Our meeting caused an eddy in the current of humanity. Hurried people would run against us, then walk round us, and turn back to look at that giant. We tried to compress seven years of life into seven exclamations; then, suddenly appeased, walked sedately along, giving one another the news of yesterday. Jackson gazed about him, like a man

who looks for landmarks, then stopped before Bland's window. He always had a passion for firearms; so he stopped short and contemplated the row of weapons, perfect and severe, drawn up in a line behind the black-framed panes. I stood by his side. Suddenly he said —

“Do you remember Karain?”

I nodded.

“The sight of all this made me think of him,” he went on, with his face near the glass . . . and I could see another man, powerful and bearded, peering at him intently from amongst the dark and polished tubes that can cure so many illusions. “Yes; it made me think of him,” he continued, slowly. “I saw a paper this morning; they are fighting over there again. He's sure to be in it. He will make it hot for the caballeros. Well, good luck to him, poor devil! He was perfectly stunning.”

We walked on.

“I wonder whether the charm worked — you remember Hollis's charm, of course. If it did . . . Never was a sixpence wasted to better advantage! Poor devil! I wonder whether he got rid of that friend of his. Hope so. . . . Do you know, I sometimes think that — ”

I stood still and looked at him.

“Yes . . . I mean, whether the thing was so, you know . . . whether it really happened to him. . . . What do you think?”

“My dear chap,” I cried, “you have been too long away from home. What a question to ask! Only look at all this.”

A watery gleam of sunshine flashed from the west and went out between two long lines of walls; and then the broken confusion of roofs, the chimney-stacks, the gold letters sprawling over the fronts of houses, the sombre polish of windows, stood resigned and sullen under the falling gloom. The whole length of the street, deep as a well and narrow like a corridor, was full of a sombre and ceaseless stir. Our ears were filled by a headlong shuffle and beat of rapid footsteps and by an underlying rumour — a rumour vast, faint, pulsating, as of panting breaths, of beating hearts, of gasping voices. Innumerable eyes stared straight in front, feet moved hurriedly, blank faces flowed, arms swung. Over all, a narrow ragged strip of smoky sky wound about between the high roofs, extended and motionless, like a soiled streamer flying above the rout of a mob.

“Ye-e-e-s,” said Jackson, meditatively.

The big wheels of hansoms turned slowly along the edge of side-walks; a pale-faced youth strolled, overcome by weariness, by the side of his stick and with the tails of his overcoat flapping gently near his heels; horses stepped gingerly on the greasy pavement, tossing their heads; two young girls passed by, talking vivaciously and with shining eyes; a fine old fellow strutted, red-faced, stroking a white moustache; and a line of yellow boards with blue letters on them approached us slowly, tossing on high behind one another like some queer wreckage adrift upon a river of hats.

“Ye-e-es,” repeated Jackson. His clear blue eyes looked about, contemptuous, amused and hard, like the eyes of a boy. A clumsy string of red, yellow, and green omnibuses rolled swaying, monstrous and gaudy; two shabby children ran across the road; a knot of dirty men with red neckerchiefs round their bare throats lurched along, discussing filthily; a ragged old man with a face of despair yelled horribly in the mud the name of a paper; while far off, amongst the tossing heads of horses, the dull flash of harnesses, the jumble of lustrous panels and roofs of carriages, we could see a policeman, helmeted and dark, stretching out a rigid arm at the crossing of the streets.

“Yes; I see it,” said Jackson, slowly. “It is there; it pants, it runs, it rolls; it is strong and alive; it would smash you if you didn’t look out; but I’ll be hanged if it is yet as real to me as . . . as the other thing . . . say, Karain’s story.”

I think that, decidedly, he had been too long away from home.



# **YOUTH**



A NARRATIVE

*“... But the Dwarf answered: No; something human is dearer to me than the wealth of all the world.” GRIMM’S TALES.*

TO MY WIFE

## YOUTH

This could have occurred nowhere but in England, where men and sea interpenetrate, so to speak — the sea entering into the life of most men, and the men knowing something or everything about the sea, in the way of amusement, of travel, or of bread-winning.

We were sitting round a mahogany table that reflected the bottle, the claret-glasses, and our faces as we leaned on our elbows. There was a director of companies, an accountant, a lawyer, Marlow, and myself. The director had been a Conway boy, the accountant had served four years at sea, the lawyer — a fine crusted Tory, High Churchman, the best of old fellows, the soul of honour — had been chief officer in the P. & O. service in the good old days when mail-boats were square-rigged at least on two masts, and used to come down the China Sea before a fair monsoon with stunsails set aloft and aloft. We all began life in the merchant service. Between the five of us there was the strong bond of the sea, and also the fellowship of the craft, which no amount of enthusiasm for yachting, cruising, and so on can give, since one is only the amusement of life and the other is life itself.

Marlow (at least I think that is how he spelt his name) told the story, or rather the chronicle, of a voyage:

“Yes, I have seen a little of the Eastern seas; but what I remember best is my first voyage there. You fellows know there are those voyages that seem ordered for the illustration of life, that might stand for a symbol of existence. You fight, work, sweat, nearly kill yourself, sometimes do kill yourself, trying to accomplish something — and you can’t. Not from any fault of yours. You simply can do nothing, neither great nor little — not a thing in the world — not even marry an old maid, or get a wretched 600-ton cargo of coal to its port of destination.

“It was altogether a memorable affair. It was my first voyage to the East, and my first voyage as second mate; it was also my skipper’s first command. You’ll admit it was time. He was sixty if a day; a little man, with a broad, not very straight back, with bowed shoulders and one leg more bandy than the other, he had that queer twisted-about appearance you see so often in men who work in the fields. He had a nut-cracker face — chin and nose trying to come together over a sunken mouth — and it was framed in iron-grey fluffy hair, that looked like a chin strap of cotton-wool sprinkled

with coal-dust. And he had blue eyes in that old face of his, which were amazingly like a boy's, with that candid expression some quite common men preserve to the end of their days by a rare internal gift of simplicity of heart and rectitude of soul. What induced him to accept me was a wonder. I had come out of a crack Australian clipper, where I had been third officer, and he seemed to have a prejudice against crack clippers as aristocratic and high-toned. He said to me, 'You know, in this ship you will have to work.' I said I had to work in every ship I had ever been in. 'Ah, but this is different, and you gentlemen out of them big ships;... but there! I dare say you will do. Join to-morrow.'

"I joined to-morrow. It was twenty-two years ago; and I was just twenty. How time passes! It was one of the happiest days of my life. Fancy! Second mate for the first time — a really responsible officer! I wouldn't have thrown up my new billet for a fortune. The mate looked me over carefully. He was also an old chap, but of another stamp. He had a Roman nose, a snow-white, long beard, and his name was Mahon, but he insisted that it should be pronounced Mann. He was well connected; yet there was something wrong with his luck, and he had never got on.

"As to the captain, he had been for years in coasters, then in the Mediterranean, and last in the West Indian trade. He had never been round the Capes. He could just write a kind of sketchy hand, and didn't care for writing at all. Both were thorough good seamen of course, and between those two old chaps I felt like a small boy between two grandfathers.

"The ship also was old. Her name was the Judea. Queer name, isn't it? She belonged to a man Wilmer, Wilcox — some name like that; but he has been bankrupt and dead these twenty years or more, and his name don't matter. She had been laid up in Shadwell basin for ever so long. You may imagine her state. She was all rust, dust, grime — soot aloft, dirt on deck. To me it was like coming out of a palace into a ruined cottage. She was about 400 tons, had a primitive windlass, wooden latches to the doors, not a bit of brass about her, and a big square stern. There was on it, below her name in big letters, a lot of scroll work, with the gilt off, and some sort of a coat of arms, with the motto 'Do or Die' underneath. I remember it took my fancy immensely. There was a touch of romance in it, something that made me love the old thing — something that appealed to my youth!

"We left London in ballast — sand ballast — to load a cargo of coal in a northern port for Bangkok. Bangkok! I thrilled. I had been six years at sea, but

had only seen Melbourne and Sydney, very good places, charming places in their way — but Bangkok!

“We worked out of the Thames under canvas, with a North Sea pilot on board. His name was Jermyn, and he dodged all day long about the galley drying his handkerchief before the stove. Apparently he never slept. He was a dismal man, with a perpetual tear sparkling at the end of his nose, who either had been in trouble, or was in trouble, or expected to be in trouble — couldn’t be happy unless something went wrong. He mistrusted my youth, my common-sense, and my seamanship, and made a point of showing it in a hundred little ways. I dare say he was right. It seems to me I knew very little then, and I know not much more now; but I cherish a hate for that Jermyn to this day.

“We were a week working up as far as Yarmouth Roads, and then we got into a gale — the famous October gale of twenty-two years ago. It was wind, lightning, sleet, snow, and a terrific sea. We were flying light, and you may imagine how bad it was when I tell you we had smashed bulwarks and a flooded deck. On the second night she shifted her ballast into the lee bow, and by that time we had been blown off somewhere on the Dogger Bank. There was nothing for it but go below with shovels and try to right her, and there we were in that vast hold, gloomy like a cavern, the tallow dips stuck and flickering on the beams, the gale howling above, the ship tossing about like mad on her side; there we all were, Jermyn, the captain, everyone, hardly able to keep our feet, engaged on that gravedigger’s work, and trying to toss shovelfuls of wet sand up to windward. At every tumble of the ship you could see vaguely in the dim light men falling down with a great flourish of shovels. One of the ship’s boys (we had two), impressed by the weirdness of the scene, wept as if his heart would break. We could hear him blubbering somewhere in the shadows.

“On the third day the gale died out, and by-and-by a north-country tug picked us up. We took sixteen days in all to get from London to the Tyne! When we got into dock we had lost our turn for loading, and they hauled us off to a tier where we remained for a month. Mrs. Beard (the captain’s name was Beard) came from Colchester to see the old man. She lived on board. The crew of runners had left, and there remained only the officers, one boy, and the steward, a mulatto who answered to the name of Abraham. Mrs. Beard was an old woman, with a face all wrinkled and ruddy like a winter apple, and the figure of a young girl. She caught sight of me once, sewing

on a button, and insisted on having my shirts to repair. This was something different from the captains' wives I had known on board crack clippers. When I brought her the shirts, she said: 'And the socks? They want mending, I am sure, and John's — Captain Beard's — things are all in order now. I would be glad of something to do.' Bless the old woman! She overhauled my outfit for me, and meantime I read for the first time Sartor Resartus and Burnaby's Ride to Khiva. I didn't understand much of the first then; but I remember I preferred the soldier to the philosopher at the time; a preference which life has only confirmed. One was a man, and the other was either more — or less. However, they are both dead, and Mrs. Beard is dead, and youth, strength, genius, thoughts, achievements, simple hearts — all dies .... No matter.

"They loaded us at last. We shipped a crew. Eight able seamen and two boys. We hauled off one evening to the buoys at the dock-gates, ready to go out, and with a fair prospect of beginning the voyage next day. Mrs. Beard was to start for home by a late train. When the ship was fast we went to tea. We sat rather silent through the meal — Mahon, the old couple, and I. I finished first, and slipped away for a smoke, my cabin being in a deck-house just against the poop. It was high water, blowing fresh with a drizzle; the double dock-gates were opened, and the steam colliers were going in and out in the darkness with their lights burning bright, a great plashing of propellers, rattling of winches, and a lot of hailing on the pier-heads. I watched the procession of head-lights gliding high and of green lights gliding low in the night, when suddenly a red gleam flashed at me, vanished, came into view again, and remained. The fore-end of a steamer loomed up close. I shouted down the cabin, 'Come up, quick!' and then heard a startled voice saying afar in the dark, 'Stop her, sir.' A bell jingled. Another voice cried warningly, 'We are going right into that barque, sir.' The answer to this was a gruff 'All right,' and the next thing was a heavy crash as the steamer struck a glancing blow with the bluff of her bow about our fore-rigging. There was a moment of confusion, yelling, and running about. Steam roared. Then somebody was heard saying, 'All clear, sir.'... 'Are you all right?' asked the gruff voice. I had jumped forward to see the damage, and hailed back, 'I think so.' 'Easy astern,' said the gruff voice. A bell jingled. 'What steamer is that?' screamed Mahon. By that time she was no more to us than a bulky shadow maneuvering a little way off. They shouted at us some name — a woman's name, Miranda or Melissa — or

some such thing. 'This means another month in this beastly hole,' said Mahon to me, as we peered with lamps about the splintered bulwarks and broken braces. 'But where's the captain?'

"We had not heard or seen anything of him all that time. We went aft to look. A doleful voice arose hailing somewhere in the middle of the dock, 'Judea ahoy!'... How the devil did he get there?... 'Hallo!' we shouted. 'I am adrift in our boat without oars,' he cried. A belated waterman offered his services, and Mahon struck a bargain with him for half-a-crown to tow our skipper alongside; but it was Mrs. Beard that came up the ladder first. They had been floating about the dock in that mizzly cold rain for nearly an hour. I was never so surprised in my life.

"It appears that when he heard my shout 'Come up,' he understood at once what was the matter, caught up his wife, ran on deck, and across, and down into our boat, which was fast to the ladder. Not bad for a sixty-year-old. Just imagine that old fellow saving heroically in his arms that old woman — the woman of his life. He set her down on a thwart, and was ready to climb back on board when the painter came adrift somehow, and away they went together. Of course in the confusion we did not hear him shouting. He looked abashed. She said cheerfully, 'I suppose it does not matter my losing the train now?' 'No, Jenny — you go below and get warm,' he growled. Then to us: 'A sailor has no business with a wife — I say. There I was, out of the ship. Well, no harm done this time. Let's go and look at what that fool of a steamer smashed.'

"It wasn't much, but it delayed us three weeks. At the end of that time, the captain being engaged with his agents, I carried Mrs. Beard's bag to the railway-station and put her all comfy into a third-class carriage. She lowered the window to say, 'You are a good young man. If you see John — Captain Beard — without his muffler at night, just remind him from me to keep his throat well wrapped up.' 'Certainly, Mrs. Beard,' I said. 'You are a good young man; I noticed how attentive you are to John — to Captain — ' The train pulled out suddenly; I took my cap off to the old woman: I never saw her again... Pass the bottle.

"We went to sea next day. When we made that start for Bangkok we had been already three months out of London. We had expected to be a fortnight or so — at the outside.

"It was January, and the weather was beautiful — the beautiful sunny winter weather that has more charm than in the summer-time, because it is

unexpected, and crisp, and you know it won't, it can't, last long. It's like a windfall, like a godsend, like an unexpected piece of luck.

"It lasted all down the North Sea, all down Channel; and it lasted till we were three hundred miles or so to the westward of the Lizards: then the wind went round to the sou'west and began to pipe up. In two days it blew a gale. The Judea, hove to, wallowed on the Atlantic like an old candlebox. It blew day after day: it blew with spite, without interval, without mercy, without rest. The world was nothing but an immensity of great foaming waves rushing at us, under a sky low enough to touch with the hand and dirty like a smoked ceiling. In the stormy space surrounding us there was as much flying spray as air. Day after day and night after night there was nothing round the ship but the howl of the wind, the tumult of the sea, the noise of water pouring over her deck. There was no rest for her and no rest for us. She tossed, she pitched, she stood on her head, she sat on her tail, she rolled, she groaned, and we had to hold on while on deck and cling to our bunks when below, in a constant effort of body and worry of mind.

"One night Mahon spoke through the small window of my berth. It opened right into my very bed, and I was lying there sleepless, in my boots, feeling as though I had not slept for years, and could not if I tried. He said excitedly —

"'You got the sounding-rod in here, Marlow? I can't get the pumps to suck. By God! it's no child's play.'

"I gave him the sounding-rod and lay down again, trying to think of various things — but I thought only of the pumps. When I came on deck they were still at it, and my watch relieved at the pumps. By the light of the lantern brought on deck to examine the sounding-rod I caught a glimpse of their weary, serious faces. We pumped all the four hours. We pumped all night, all day, all the week, — watch and watch. She was working herself loose, and leaked badly — not enough to drown us at once, but enough to kill us with the work at the pumps. And while we pumped the ship was going from us piecemeal: the bulwarks went, the stanchions were torn out, the ventilators smashed, the cabin-door burst in. There was not a dry spot in the ship. She was being gutted bit by bit. The long-boat changed, as if by magic, into matchwood where she stood in her gripes. I had lashed her myself, and was rather proud of my handiwork, which had withstood so long the malice of the sea. And we pumped. And there was no break in the weather. The sea was white like a sheet of foam, like a caldron of boiling

milk; there was not a break in the clouds, no — not the size of a man's hand — no, not for so much as ten seconds. There was for us no sky, there were for us no stars, no sun, no universe — nothing but angry clouds and an infuriated sea. We pumped watch and watch, for dear life; and it seemed to last for months, for years, for all eternity, as though we had been dead and gone to a hell for sailors. We forgot the day of the week, the name of the month, what year it was, and whether we had ever been ashore. The sails blew away, she lay broadside on under a weather-cloth, the ocean poured over her, and we did not care. We turned those handles, and had the eyes of idiots. As soon as we had crawled on deck I used to take a round turn with a rope about the men, the pumps, and the mainmast, and we turned, we turned incessantly, with the water to our waists, to our necks, over our heads. It was all one. We had forgotten how it felt to be dry.

“And there was somewhere in me the thought: By Jove! this is the deuce of an adventure — something you read about; and it is my first voyage as second mate — and I am only twenty — and here I am lasting it out as well as any of these men, and keeping my chaps up to the mark. I was pleased. I would not have given up the experience for worlds. I had moments of exultation. Whenever the old dismantled craft pitched heavily with her counter high in the air, she seemed to me to throw up, like an appeal, like a defiance, like a cry to the clouds without mercy, the words written on her stern: ‘Judea, London. Do or Die.’

“O youth! The strength of it, the faith of it, the imagination of it! To me she was not an old rattle-trap carting about the world a lot of coal for a freight — to me she was the endeavour, the test, the trial of life. I think of her with pleasure, with affection, with regret — as you would think of someone dead you have loved. I shall never forget her.... Pass the bottle.

“One night when tied to the mast, as I explained, we were pumping on, deafened with the wind, and without spirit enough in us to wish ourselves dead, a heavy sea crashed aboard and swept clean over us. As soon as I got my breath I shouted, as in duty bound, ‘Keep on, boys!’ when suddenly I felt something hard floating on deck strike the calf of my leg. I made a grab at it and missed. It was so dark we could not see each other's faces within a foot — you understand.

“After that thump the ship kept quiet for a while, and the thing, whatever it was, struck my leg again. This time I caught it — and it was a saucepan. At first, being stupid with fatigue and thinking of nothing but the pumps, I



did not understand what I had in my hand. Suddenly it dawned upon me, and I shouted, 'Boys, the house on deck is gone. Leave this, and let's look for the cook.'

"There was a deck-house forward, which contained the galley, the cook's berth, and the quarters of the crew. As we had expected for days to see it swept away, the hands had been ordered to sleep in the cabin — the only safe place in the ship. The steward, Abraham, however, persisted in clinging to his berth, stupidly, like a mule — from sheer fright I believe, like an animal that won't leave a stable falling in an earthquake. So we went to look for him. It was chancing death, since once out of our lashings we were as exposed as if on a raft. But we went. The house was shattered as if a shell had exploded inside. Most of it had gone overboard — stove, men's quarters, and their property, all was gone; but two posts, holding a portion of the bulkhead to which Abraham's bunk was attached, remained as if by a miracle. We groped in the ruins and came upon this, and there he was, sitting in his bunk, surrounded by foam and wreckage, jabbering cheerfully to himself. He was out of his mind; completely and for ever mad, with this sudden shock coming upon the fag-end of his endurance. We snatched him up, lugged him aft, and pitched him head-first down the cabin companion. You understand there was no time to carry him down with infinite precautions and wait to see how he got on. Those below would pick him up at the bottom of the stairs all right. We were in a hurry to go back to the pumps. That business could not wait. A bad leak is an inhuman thing.

"One would think that the sole purpose of that fiendish gale had been to make a lunatic of that poor devil of a mulatto. It eased before morning, and next day the sky cleared, and as the sea went down the leak took up. When it came to bending a fresh set of sails the crew demanded to put back — and really there was nothing else to do. Boats gone, decks swept clean, cabin gutted, men without a stitch but what they stood in, stores spoiled, ship strained. We put her head for home, and — would you believe it? The wind came east right in our teeth. It blew fresh, it blew continuously. We had to beat up every inch of the way, but she did not leak so badly, the water keeping comparatively smooth. Two hours' pumping in every four is no joke — but it kept her afloat as far as Falmouth.

"The good people there live on casualties of the sea, and no doubt were glad to see us. A hungry crowd of shipwrights sharpened their chisels at the sight of that carcass of a ship. And, by Jove! they had pretty pickings off us

before they were done. I fancy the owner was already in a tight place. There were delays. Then it was decided to take part of the cargo out and calk her topsides. This was done, the repairs finished, cargo re-shipped; a new crew came on board, and we went out — for Bangkok. At the end of a week we were back again. The crew said they weren't going to Bangkok — a hundred and fifty days' passage — in a something hooker that wanted pumping eight hours out of the twenty-four; and the nautical papers inserted again the little paragraph: 'Judea. Barque. Tyne to Bangkok; coals; put back to Falmouth leaky and with crew refusing duty.'

"There were more delays — more tinkering. The owner came down for a day, and said she was as right as a little fiddle. Poor old Captain Beard looked like the ghost of a Geordie skipper — through the worry and humiliation of it. Remember he was sixty, and it was his first command. Mahon said it was a foolish business, and would end badly. I loved the ship more than ever, and wanted awfully to get to Bangkok. To Bangkok! Magic name, blessed name. Mesopotamia wasn't a patch on it. Remember I was twenty, and it was my first second mate's billet, and the East was waiting for me.

"We went out and anchored in the outer roads with a fresh crew — the third. She leaked worse than ever. It was as if those confounded shipwrights had actually made a hole in her. This time we did not even go outside. The crew simply refused to man the windlass.

"They towed us back to the inner harbour, and we became a fixture, a feature, an institution of the place. People pointed us out to visitors as 'That 'ere bark that's going to Bangkok — has been here six months — put back three times.' On holidays the small boys pulling about in boats would hail, 'Judea, ahoy!' and if a head showed above the rail shouted, 'Where you bound to? — Bangkok?' and jeered. We were only three on board. The poor old skipper mooned in the cabin. Mahon undertook the cooking, and unexpectedly developed all a Frenchman's genius for preparing nice little messes. I looked languidly after the rigging. We became citizens of Falmouth. Every shopkeeper knew us. At the barber's or tobacconist's they asked familiarly, 'Do you think you will ever get to Bangkok?' Meantime the owner, the underwriters, and the charterers squabbled amongst themselves in London, and our pay went on.... Pass the bottle.

"It was horrid. Morally it was worse than pumping for life. It seemed as though we had been forgotten by the world, belonged to nobody, would get

nowhere; it seemed that, as if bewitched, we would have to live for ever and ever in that inner harbour, a derision and a by-word to generations of long-shore loafers and dishonest boatmen. I obtained three months' pay and a five days' leave, and made a rush for London. It took me a day to get there and pretty well another to come back — but three months' pay went all the same. I don't know what I did with it. I went to a music-hall, I believe, lunched, dined, and supped in a swell place in Regent Street, and was back to time, with nothing but a complete set of Byron's works and a new railway rug to show for three months' work. The boatman who pulled me off to the ship said: 'Hallo! I thought you had left the old thing. She will never get to Bangkok.' 'That's all you know about it,' I said scornfully — but I didn't like that prophecy at all.

"Suddenly a man, some kind of agent to somebody, appeared with full powers. He had grog-blossoms all over his face, an indomitable energy, and was a jolly soul. We leaped into life again. A hulk came alongside, took our cargo, and then we went into dry dock to get our copper stripped. No wonder she leaked. The poor thing, strained beyond endurance by the gale, had, as if in disgust, spat out all the oakum of her lower seams. She was recalked, new coppered, and made as tight as a bottle. We went back to the hulk and re-shipped our cargo.

"Then on a fine moonlight night, all the rats left the ship.

"We had been infested with them. They had destroyed our sails, consumed more stores than the crew, affably shared our beds and our dangers, and now, when the ship was made seaworthy, concluded to clear out. I called Mahon to enjoy the spectacle. Rat after rat appeared on our rail, took a last look over his shoulder, and leaped with a hollow thud into the empty hulk. We tried to count them, but soon lost the tale. Mahon said: 'Well, well! don't talk to me about the intelligence of rats. They ought to have left before, when we had that narrow squeak from foundering. There you have the proof how silly is the superstition about them. They leave a good ship for an old rotten hulk, where there is nothing to eat, too, the fools!... I don't believe they know what is safe or what is good for them, any more than you or I.'

"And after some more talk we agreed that the wisdom of rats had been grossly overrated, being in fact no greater than that of men.

"The story of the ship was known, by this, all up the Channel from Land's End to the Forelands, and we could get no crew on the south coast.

They sent us one all complete from Liverpool, and we left once more — for Bankok.

“We had fair breezes, smooth water right into the tropics, and the old Judea lumbered along in the sunshine. When she went eight knots everything cracked aloft, and we tied our caps to our heads; but mostly she strolled on at the rate of three miles an hour. What could you expect? She was tired — that old ship. Her youth was where mine is — where yours is — you fellows who listen to this yarn; and what friend would throw your years and your weariness in your face? We didn’t grumble at her. To us aft, at least, it seemed as though we had been born in her, reared in her, had lived in her for ages, had never known any other ship. I would just as soon have abused the old village church at home for not being a cathedral.

“And for me there was also my youth to make me patient. There was all the East before me, and all life, and the thought that I had been tried in that ship and had come out pretty well. And I thought of men of old who, centuries ago, went that road in ships that sailed no better, to the land of palms, and spices, and yellow sands, and of brown nations ruled by kings more cruel than Nero the Roman and more splendid than Solomon the Jew. The old bark lumbered on, heavy with her age and the burden of her cargo, while I lived the life of youth in ignorance and hope. She lumbered on through an interminable procession of days; and the fresh gilding flashed back at the setting sun, seemed to cry out over the darkening sea the words painted on her stern, ‘Judea, London. Do or Die.’

“Then we entered the Indian Ocean and steered northerly for Java Head. The winds were light. Weeks slipped by. She crawled on, do or die, and people at home began to think of posting us as overdue.

“One Saturday evening, I being off duty, the men asked me to give them an extra bucket of water or so — for washing clothes. As I did not wish to screw on the fresh-water pump so late, I went forward whistling, and with a key in my hand to unlock the forepeak scuttle, intending to serve the water out of a spare tank we kept there.

“The smell down below was as unexpected as it was frightful. One would have thought hundreds of paraffin-lamps had been flaring and smoking in that hole for days. I was glad to get out. The man with me coughed and said, ‘Funny smell, sir.’ I answered negligently, ‘It’s good for the health, they say,’ and walked aft.

“The first thing I did was to put my head down the square of the midship ventilator. As I lifted the lid a visible breath, something like a thin fog, a puff of faint haze, rose from the opening. The ascending air was hot, and had a heavy, sooty, paraffiny smell. I gave one sniff, and put down the lid gently. It was no use choking myself. The cargo was on fire.

“Next day she began to smoke in earnest. You see it was to be expected, for though the coal was of a safe kind, that cargo had been so handled, so broken up with handling, that it looked more like smithy coal than anything else. Then it had been wetted — more than once. It rained all the time we were taking it back from the hulk, and now with this long passage it got heated, and there was another case of spontaneous combustion.

“The captain called us into the cabin. He had a chart spread on the table, and looked unhappy. He said, ‘The coast of West Australia is near, but I mean to proceed to our destination. It is the hurricane month too; but we will just keep her head for Bangkok, and fight the fire. No more putting back anywhere, if we all get roasted. We will try first to stifle this ‘ere damned combustion by want of air.’

“We tried. We battened down everything, and still she smoked. The smoke kept coming out through imperceptible crevices; it forced itself through bulkheads and covers; it oozed here and there and everywhere in slender threads, in an invisible film, in an incomprehensible manner. It made its way into the cabin, into the forecabin; it poisoned the sheltered places on the deck, it could be sniffed as high as the main-yard. It was clear that if the smoke came out the air came in. This was disheartening. This combustion refused to be stifled.

“We resolved to try water, and took the hatches off. Enormous volumes of smoke, whitish, yellowish, thick, greasy, misty, choking, ascended as high as the trucks. All hands cleared out aft. Then the poisonous cloud blew away, and we went back to work in a smoke that was no thicker now than that of an ordinary factory chimney.

“We rigged the force pump, got the hose along, and by-and-by it burst. Well, it was as old as the ship — a prehistoric hose, and past repair. Then we pumped with the feeble head-pump, drew water with buckets, and in this way managed in time to pour lots of Indian Ocean into the main hatch. The bright stream flashed in sunshine, fell into a layer of white crawling smoke, and vanished on the black surface of coal. Steam ascended mingling with the smoke. We poured salt water as into a barrel without a bottom. It

was our fate to pump in that ship, to pump out of her, to pump into her; and after keeping water out of her to save ourselves from being drowned, we frantically poured water into her to save ourselves from being burnt.

“And she crawled on, do or die, in the serene weather. The sky was a miracle of purity, a miracle of azure. The sea was polished, was blue, was pellucid, was sparkling like a precious stone, extending on all sides, all round to the horizon — as if the whole terrestrial globe had been one jewel, one colossal sapphire, a single gem fashioned into a planet. And on the luster of the great calm waters the Judea glided imperceptibly, enveloped in languid and unclean vapours, in a lazy cloud that drifted to leeward, light and slow: a pestiferous cloud defiling the splendour of sea and sky.

“All this time of course we saw no fire. The cargo smoldered at the bottom somewhere. Once Mahon, as we were working side by side, said to me with a queer smile: ‘Now, if she only would spring a tidy leak — like that time when we first left the Channel — it would put a stopper on this fire. Wouldn’t it?’ I remarked irrelevantly, ‘Do you remember the rats?’

“We fought the fire and sailed the ship too as carefully as though nothing had been the matter. The steward cooked and attended on us. Of the other twelve men, eight worked while four rested. Everyone took his turn, captain included. There was equality, and if not exactly fraternity, then a deal of good feeling. Sometimes a man, as he dashed a bucketful of water down the hatchway, would yell out, ‘Hurrah for Bangkok!’ and the rest laughed. But generally we were taciturn and serious — and thirsty. Oh! how thirsty! And we had to be careful with the water. Strict allowance. The ship smoked, the sun blazed.... Pass the bottle.

“We tried everything. We even made an attempt to dig down to the fire. No good, of course. No man could remain more than a minute below. Mahon, who went first, fainted there, and the man who went to fetch him out did likewise. We lugged them out on deck. Then I leaped down to show how easily it could be done. They had learned wisdom by that time, and contented themselves by fishing for me with a chain-hook tied to a broom-handle, I believe. I did not offer to go and fetch up my shovel, which was left down below.

“Things began to look bad. We put the long-boat into the water. The second boat was ready to swing out. We had also another, a fourteen-foot thing, on davits aft, where it was quite safe.

“Then behold, the smoke suddenly decreased. We re-doubled our efforts to flood the bottom of the ship. In two days there was no smoke at all. Everybody was on the broad grin. This was on a Friday. On Saturday no work, but sailing the ship of course was done. The men washed their clothes and their faces for the first time in a fortnight, and had a special dinner given them. They spoke of spontaneous combustion with contempt, and implied they were the boys to put out combustions. Somehow we all felt as though we each had inherited a large fortune. But a beastly smell of burning hung about the ship. Captain Beard had hollow eyes and sunken cheeks. I had never noticed so much before how twisted and bowed he was. He and Mahon prowled soberly about hatches and ventilators, sniffing. It struck me suddenly poor Mahon was a very, very old chap. As to me, I was as pleased and proud as though I had helped to win a great naval battle. O! Youth!

“The night was fine. In the morning a homeward-bound ship passed us hull down, — the first we had seen for months; but we were nearing the land at last, Java Head being about 190 miles off, and nearly due north.

“Next day it was my watch on deck from eight to twelve. At breakfast the captain observed, ‘It’s wonderful how that smell hangs about the cabin.’ About ten, the mate being on the poop, I stepped down on the main-deck for a moment. The carpenter’s bench stood abaft the mainmast: I leaned against it sucking at my pipe, and the carpenter, a young chap, came to talk to me. He remarked, ‘I think we have done very well, haven’t we?’ and then I perceived with annoyance the fool was trying to tilt the bench. I said curtly, ‘Don’t, Chips,’ and immediately became aware of a queer sensation, of an absurd delusion, — I seemed somehow to be in the air. I heard all round me like a pent-up breath released — as if a thousand giants simultaneously had said Phoo! — and felt a dull concussion which made my ribs ache suddenly. No doubt about it — I was in the air, and my body was describing a short parabola. But short as it was, I had the time to think several thoughts in, as far as I can remember, the following order: ‘This can’t be the carpenter — What is it? — Some accident — Submarine volcano? — Coals, gas! — By Jove! we are being blown up — Everybody’s dead — I am falling into the after-hatch — I see fire in it.’

“The coal-dust suspended in the air of the hold had glowed dull-red at the moment of the explosion. In the twinkling of an eye, in an infinitesimal fraction of a second since the first tilt of the bench, I was sprawling full length on the cargo. I picked myself up and scrambled out. It was quick like

a rebound. The deck was a wilderness of smashed timber, lying crosswise like trees in a wood after a hurricane; an immense curtain of soiled rags waved gently before me — it was the mainsail blown to strips. I thought, The masts will be toppling over directly; and to get out of the way bolted on all-fours towards the poop-ladder. The first person I saw was Mahon, with eyes like saucers, his mouth open, and the long white hair standing straight on end round his head like a silver halo. He was just about to go down when the sight of the main-deck stirring, heaving up, and changing into splinters before his eyes, petrified him on the top step. I stared at him in unbelief, and he stared at me with a queer kind of shocked curiosity. I did not know that I had no hair, no eyebrows, no eyelashes, that my young moustache was burnt off, that my face was black, one cheek laid open, my nose cut, and my chin bleeding. I had lost my cap, one of my slippers, and my shirt was torn to rags. Of all this I was not aware. I was amazed to see the ship still afloat, the poop-deck whole — and, most of all, to see anybody alive. Also the peace of the sky and the serenity of the sea were distinctly surprising. I suppose I expected to see them convulsed with horror.... Pass the bottle.

“There was a voice hailing the ship from somewhere — in the air, in the sky — I couldn’t tell. Presently I saw the captain — and he was mad. He asked me eagerly, ‘Where’s the cabin-table?’ and to hear such a question was a frightful shock. I had just been blown up, you understand, and vibrated with that experience, — I wasn’t quite sure whether I was alive. Mahon began to stamp with both feet and yelled at him, ‘Good God! don’t you see the deck’s blown out of her?’ I found my voice, and stammered out as if conscious of some gross neglect of duty, ‘I don’t know where the cabin-table is.’ It was like an absurd dream.

“Do you know what he wanted next? Well, he wanted to trim the yards. Very placidly, and as if lost in thought, he insisted on having the foreyard squared. ‘I don’t know if there’s anybody alive,’ said Mahon, almost tearfully. ‘Surely,’ he said gently, ‘there will be enough left to square the foreyard.’

“The old chap, it seems, was in his own berth, winding up the chronometers, when the shock sent him spinning. Immediately it occurred to him — as he said afterwards — that the ship had struck something, and he ran out into the cabin. There, he saw, the cabin-table had vanished somewhere. The deck being blown up, it had fallen down into the lazarette



of course. Where we had our breakfast that morning he saw only a great hole in the floor. This appeared to him so awfully mysterious, and impressed him so immensely, that what he saw and heard after he got on deck were mere trifles in comparison. And, mark, he noticed directly the wheel deserted and his barque off her course — and his only thought was to get that miserable, stripped, undecked, smouldering shell of a ship back again with her head pointing at her port of destination. Bangkok! That's what he was after. I tell you this quiet, bowed, bandy-legged, almost deformed little man was immense in the singleness of his idea and in his placid ignorance of our agitation. He motioned us forward with a commanding gesture, and went to take the wheel himself.

“Yes; that was the first thing we did — trim the yards of that wreck! No one was killed, or even disabled, but everyone was more or less hurt. You should have seen them! Some were in rags, with black faces, like coal-heavers, like sweeps, and had bullet heads that seemed closely cropped, but were in fact singed to the skin. Others, of the watch below, awakened by being shot out from their collapsing bunks, shivered incessantly, and kept on groaning even as we went about our work. But they all worked. That crew of Liverpool hard cases had in them the right stuff. It's my experience they always have. It is the sea that gives it — the vastness, the loneliness surrounding their dark stolid souls. Ah! Well! we stumbled, we crept, we fell, we barked our shins on the wreckage, we hauled. The masts stood, but we did not know how much they might be charred down below. It was nearly calm, but a long swell ran from the west and made her roll. They might go at any moment. We looked at them with apprehension. One could not foresee which way they would fall.

“Then we retreated aft and looked about us. The deck was a tangle of planks on edge, of planks on end, of splinters, of ruined woodwork. The masts rose from that chaos like big trees above a matted undergrowth. The interstices of that mass of wreckage were full of something whitish, sluggish, stirring — of something that was like a greasy fog. The smoke of the invisible fire was coming up again, was trailing, like a poisonous thick mist in some valley choked with dead wood. Already lazy wisps were beginning to curl upwards amongst the mass of splinters. Here and there a piece of timber, stuck upright, resembled a post. Half of a fife-rail had been shot through the foresail, and the sky made a patch of glorious blue in the ignobly soiled canvas. A portion of several boards holding together had

fallen across the rail, and one end protruded overboard, like a gangway leading upon nothing, like a gangway leading over the deep sea, leading to death — as if inviting us to walk the plank at once and be done with our ridiculous troubles. And still the air, the sky — a ghost, something invisible was hailing the ship.

“Someone had the sense to look over, and there was the helmsman, who had impulsively jumped overboard, anxious to come back. He yelled and swam lustily like a merman, keeping up with the ship. We threw him a rope, and presently he stood amongst us streaming with water and very crestfallen. The captain had surrendered the wheel, and apart, elbow on rail and chin in hand, gazed at the sea wistfully. We asked ourselves, What next? I thought, Now, this is something like. This is great. I wonder what will happen. O youth!

“Suddenly Mahon sighted a steamer far astern. Captain Beard said, ‘We may do something with her yet.’ We hoisted two flags, which said in the international language of the sea, ‘On fire. Want immediate assistance.’ The steamer grew bigger rapidly, and by-and-by spoke with two flags on her foremast, ‘I am coming to your assistance.’

“In half an hour she was abreast, to windward, within hail, and rolling slightly, with her engines stopped. We lost our composure, and yelled all together with excitement, ‘We’ve been blown up.’ A man in a white helmet, on the bridge, cried, ‘Yes! All right! all right!’ and he nodded his head, and smiled, and made soothing motions with his hand as though at a lot of frightened children. One of the boats dropped in the water, and walked towards us upon the sea with her long oars. Four Calashes pulled a swinging stroke. This was my first sight of Malay seamen. I’ve known them since, but what struck me then was their unconcern: they came alongside, and even the bowman standing up and holding to our main-chains with the boat-hook did not deign to lift his head for a glance. I thought people who had been blown up deserved more attention.

“A little man, dry like a chip and agile like a monkey, clambered up. It was the mate of the steamer. He gave one look, and cried, ‘O boys — you had better quit.’

“We were silent. He talked apart with the captain for a time, — seemed to argue with him. Then they went away together to the steamer.

“When our skipper came back we learned that the steamer was the *Sommerville*, Captain Nash, from West Australia to Singapore via Batavia

with mails, and that the agreement was she should tow us to Anjer or Batavia, if possible, where we could extinguish the fire by scuttling, and then proceed on our voyage — to Bangkok! The old man seemed excited. ‘We will do it yet,’ he said to Mahon, fiercely. He shook his fist at the sky. Nobody else said a word.

“At noon the steamer began to tow. She went ahead slim and high, and what was left of the Judea followed at the end of seventy fathom of tow-rope, — followed her swiftly like a cloud of smoke with mastheads protruding above. We went aloft to furl the sails. We coughed on the yards, and were careful about the bunts. Do you see the lot of us there, putting a neat furl on the sails of that ship doomed to arrive nowhere? There was not a man who didn’t think that at any moment the masts would topple over. From aloft we could not see the ship for smoke, and they worked carefully, passing the gaskets with even turns. ‘Harbour furl — aloft there!’ cried Mahon from below.

“You understand this? I don’t think one of those chaps expected to get down in the usual way. When we did I heard them saying to each other, ‘Well, I thought we would come down overboard, in a lump — sticks and all — blame me if I didn’t.’ ‘That’s what I was thinking to myself,’ would answer wearily another battered and bandaged scarecrow. And, mind, these were men without the drilled-in habit of obedience. To an onlooker they would be a lot of profane scallywags without a redeeming point. What made them do it — what made them obey me when I, thinking consciously how fine it was, made them drop the bunt of the foresail twice to try and do it better? What? They had no professional reputation — no examples, no praise. It wasn’t a sense of duty; they all knew well enough how to shirk, and laze, and dodge — when they had a mind to it — and mostly they had. Was it the two pounds ten a month that sent them there? They didn’t think their pay half good enough. No; it was something in them, something inborn and subtle and everlasting. I don’t say positively that the crew of a French or German merchantman wouldn’t have done it, but I doubt whether it would have been done in the same way. There was a completeness in it, something solid like a principle, and masterful like an instinct — a disclosure of something secret — of that hidden something, that gift, of good or evil that makes racial difference, that shapes the fate of nations.

“It was that night at ten that, for the first time since we had been fighting it, we saw the fire. The speed of the towing had fanned the smoldering

destruction. A blue gleam appeared forward, shining below the wreck of the deck. It wavered in patches, it seemed to stir and creep like the light of a glowworm. I saw it first, and told Mahon. 'Then the game's up,' he said. 'We had better stop this towing, or she will burst out suddenly fore and aft before we can clear out.' We set up a yell; rang bells to attract their attention; they towed on. At last Mahon and I had to crawl forward and cut the rope with an ax. There was no time to cast off the lashings. Red tongues could be seen licking the wilderness of splinters under our feet as we made our way back to the poop.

"Of course they very soon found out in the steamer that the rope was gone. She gave a loud blast of her whistle, her lights were seen sweeping in a wide circle, she came up ranging close alongside, and stopped. We were all in a tight group on the poop looking at her. Every man had saved a little bundle or a bag. Suddenly a conical flame with a twisted top shot up forward and threw upon the black sea a circle of light, with the two vessels side by side and heaving gently in its center. Captain Beard had been sitting on the gratings still and mute for hours, but now he rose slowly and advanced in front of us, to the mizzen-shrouds. Captain Nash hailed: 'Come along! Look sharp. I have mail-bags on board. I will take you and your boats to Singapore.'

"'Thank you! No!' said our skipper. 'We must see the last of the ship.'

"'I can't stand by any longer,' shouted the other. 'Mails — you know.'

"'Ay! ay! We are all right.'

"'Very well! I'll report you in Singapore.... Good-bye!'

"He waved his hand. Our men dropped their bundles quietly. The steamer moved ahead, and passing out of the circle of light, vanished at once from our sight, dazzled by the fire which burned fiercely. And then I knew that I would see the East first as commander of a small boat. I thought it fine; and the fidelity to the old ship was fine. We should see the last of her. Oh the glamour of youth! Oh the fire of it, more dazzling than the flames of the burning ship, throwing a magic light on the wide earth, leaping audaciously to the sky, presently to be quenched by time, more cruel, more pitiless, more bitter than the sea — and like the flames of the burning ship surrounded by an impenetrable night."

"The old man warned us in his gentle and inflexible way that it was part of our duty to save for the under-writers as much as we could of the ship's gear. According we went to work aft, while she blazed forward to give us

plenty of light. We lugged out a lot of rubbish. What didn't we save? An old barometer fixed with an absurd quantity of screws nearly cost me my life: a sudden rush of smoke came upon me, and I just got away in time. There were various stores, bolts of canvas, coils of rope; the poop looked like a marine bazaar, and the boats were lumbered to the gunwales. One would have thought the old man wanted to take as much as he could of his first command with him. He was very very quiet, but off his balance evidently. Would you believe it? He wanted to take a length of old stream-cable and a kedge-anchor with him in the long-boat. We said, 'Ay, ay, sir,' deferentially, and on the quiet let the thing slip overboard. The heavy medicine-chest went that way, two bags of green coffee, tins of paint — fancy, paint! — a whole lot of things. Then I was ordered with two hands into the boats to make a stowage and get them ready against the time it would be proper for us to leave the ship.

"We put everything straight, stepped the long-boat's mast for our skipper, who was in charge of her, and I was not sorry to sit down for a moment. My face felt raw, every limb ached as if broken, I was aware of all my ribs, and would have sworn to a twist in the back-bone. The boats, fast astern, lay in a deep shadow, and all around I could see the circle of the sea lighted by the fire. A gigantic flame arose forward straight and clear. It flared there, with noises like the whirl of wings, with rumbles as of thunder. There were cracks, detonations, and from the cone of flame the sparks flew upwards, as man is born to trouble, to leaky ships, and to ships that burn.

"What bothered me was that the ship, lying broadside to the swell and to such wind as there was — a mere breath — the boats would not keep astern where they were safe, but persisted, in a pig-headed way boats have, in getting under the counter and then swinging alongside. They were knocking about dangerously and coming near the flame, while the ship rolled on them, and, of course, there was always the danger of the masts going over the side at any moment. I and my two boat-keepers kept them off as best we could with oars and boat-hooks; but to be constantly at it became exasperating, since there was no reason why we should not leave at once. We could not see those on board, nor could we imagine what caused the delay. The boat-keepers were swearing feebly, and I had not only my share of the work, but also had to keep at it two men who showed a constant inclination to lay themselves down and let things slide.

“At last I hailed ‘On deck there,’ and someone looked over. ‘We’re ready here,’ I said. The head disappeared, and very soon popped up again. ‘The captain says, All right, sir, and to keep the boats well clear of the ship.’

“Half an hour passed. Suddenly there was a frightful racket, rattle, clanking of chain, hiss of water, and millions of sparks flew up into the shivering column of smoke that stood leaning slightly above the ship. The cat-heads had burned away, and the two red-hot anchors had gone to the bottom, tearing out after them two hundred fathom of red-hot chain. The ship trembled, the mass of flame swayed as if ready to collapse, and the fore top-gallant-mast fell. It darted down like an arrow of fire, shot under, and instantly leaping up within an oar’s-length of the boats, floated quietly, very black on the luminous sea. I hailed the deck again. After some time a man in an unexpectedly cheerful but also muffled tone, as though he had been trying to speak with his mouth shut, informed me, ‘Coming directly, sir,’ and vanished. For a long time I heard nothing but the whir and roar of the fire. There were also whistling sounds. The boats jumped, tugged at the painters, ran at each other playfully, knocked their sides together, or, do what we would, swung in a bunch against the ship’s side. I couldn’t stand it any longer, and swarming up a rope, clambered aboard over the stern.

“It was as bright as day. Coming up like this, the sheet of fire facing me, was a terrifying sight, and the heat seemed hardly bearable at first. On a settee cushion dragged out of the cabin, Captain Beard, with his legs drawn up and one arm under his head, slept with the light playing on him. Do you know what the rest were busy about? They were sitting on deck right aft, round an open case, eating bread and cheese and drinking bottled stout.

“On the background of flames twisting in fierce tongues above their heads they seemed at home like salamanders, and looked like a band of desperate pirates. The fire sparkled in the whites of their eyes, gleamed on patches of white skin seen through the torn shirts. Each had the marks as of a battle about him — bandaged heads, tied-up arms, a strip of dirty rag round a knee — and each man had a bottle between his legs and a chunk of cheese in his hand. Mahon got up. With his handsome and disreputable head, his hooked profile, his long white beard, and with an uncorked bottle in his hand, he resembled one of those reckless sea-robbers of old making merry amidst violence and disaster. ‘The last meal on board,’ he explained solemnly. ‘We had nothing to eat all day, and it was no use leaving all this.’ He flourished the bottle and indicated the sleeping skipper. ‘He said he

couldn't swallow anything, so I got him to lie down,' he went on; and as I stared, 'I don't know whether you are aware, young fellow, the man had no sleep to speak of for days — and there will be dam' little sleep in the boats.' 'There will be no boats by-and-by if you fool about much longer,' I said, indignantly. I walked up to the skipper and shook him by the shoulder. At last he opened his eyes, but did not move. 'Time to leave her, sir,' I said, quietly.

"He got up painfully, looked at the flames, at the sea sparkling round the ship, and black, black as ink farther away; he looked at the stars shining dim through a thin veil of smoke in a sky black, black as Erebus.

"'Youngest first,' he said.

"And the ordinary seaman, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, got up, clambered over the taffrail, and vanished. Others followed. One, on the point of going over, stopped short to drain his bottle, and with a great swing of his arm flung it at the fire. 'Take this!' he cried.

"The skipper lingered disconsolately, and we left him to commune alone for awhile with his first command. Then I went up again and brought him away at last. It was time. The ironwork on the poop was hot to the touch.

"Then the painter of the long-boat was cut, and the three boats, tied together, drifted clear of the ship. It was just sixteen hours after the explosion when we abandoned her. Mahon had charge of the second boat, and I had the smallest — the 14-foot thing. The long-boat would have taken the lot of us; but the skipper said we must save as much property as we could — for the under-writers — and so I got my first command. I had two men with me, a bag of biscuits, a few tins of meat, and a breaker of water. I was ordered to keep close to the long-boat, that in case of bad weather we might be taken into her.

"And do you know what I thought? I thought I would part company as soon as I could. I wanted to have my first command all to myself. I wasn't going to sail in a squadron if there were a chance for independent cruising. I would make land by myself. I would beat the other boats. Youth! All youth! The silly, charming, beautiful youth.

"But we did not make a start at once. We must see the last of the ship. And so the boats drifted about that night, heaving and setting on the swell. The men dozed, waked, sighed, groaned. I looked at the burning ship.

"Between the darkness of earth and heaven she was burning fiercely upon a disc of purple sea shot by the blood-red play of gleams; upon a disc

of water glittering and sinister. A high, clear flame, an immense and lonely flame, ascended from the ocean, and from its summit the black smoke poured continuously at the sky. She burned furiously, mournful and imposing like a funeral pile kindled in the night, surrounded by the sea, watched over by the stars. A magnificent death had come like a grace, like a gift, like a reward to that old ship at the end of her laborious days. The surrender of her weary ghost to the keeping of stars and sea was stirring like the sight of a glorious triumph. The masts fell just before daybreak, and for a moment there was a burst and turmoil of sparks that seemed to fill with flying fire the night patient and watchful, the vast night lying silent upon the sea. At daylight she was only a charred shell, floating still under a cloud of smoke and bearing a glowing mass of coal within.

“Then the oars were got out, and the boats forming in a line moved round her remains as if in procession — the long-boat leading. As we pulled across her stern a slim dart of fire shot out viciously at us, and suddenly she went down, head first, in a great hiss of steam. The unconsumed stern was the last to sink; but the paint had gone, had cracked, had peeled off, and there were no letters, there was no word, no stubborn device that was like her soul, to flash at the rising sun her creed and her name.

“We made our way north. A breeze sprang up, and about noon all the boats came together for the last time. I had no mast or sail in mine, but I made a mast out of a spare oar and hoisted a boat-awning for a sail, with a boat-hook for a yard. She was certainly over-masted, but I had the satisfaction of knowing that with the wind aft I could beat the other two. I had to wait for them. Then we all had a look at the captain’s chart, and, after a sociable meal of hard bread and water, got our last instructions. These were simple: steer north, and keep together as much as possible. ‘Be careful with that jury rig, Marlow,’ said the captain; and Mahon, as I sailed proudly past his boat, wrinkled his curved nose and hailed, ‘You will sail that ship of yours under water, if you don’t look out, young fellow.’ He was a malicious old man — and may the deep sea where he sleeps now rock him gently, rock him tenderly to the end of time!

“Before sunset a thick rain-squall passed over the two boats, which were far astern, and that was the last I saw of them for a time. Next day I sat steering my cockle-shell — my first command — with nothing but water and sky around me. I did sight in the afternoon the upper sails of a ship far away, but said nothing, and my men did not notice her. You see I was afraid



she might be homeward bound, and I had no mind to turn back from the portals of the East. I was steering for Java — another blessed name — like Bangkok, you know. I steered many days.

“I need not tell you what it is to be knocking about in an open boat. I remember nights and days of calm when we pulled, we pulled, and the boat seemed to stand still, as if bewitched within the circle of the sea horizon. I remember the heat, the deluge of rain-squalls that kept us baling for dear life (but filled our water-cask), and I remember sixteen hours on end with a mouth dry as a cinder and a steering-oar over the stern to keep my first command head on to a breaking sea. I did not know how good a man I was till then. I remember the drawn faces, the dejected figures of my two men, and I remember my youth and the feeling that will never come back any more — the feeling that I could last for ever, outlast the sea, the earth, and all men; the deceitful feeling that lures us on to joys, to perils, to love, to vain effort — to death; the triumphant conviction of strength, the heat of life in the handful of dust, the glow in the heart that with every year grows dim, grows cold, grows small, and expires — and expires, too soon — before life itself.

“And this is how I see the East. I have seen its secret places and have looked into its very soul; but now I see it always from a small boat, a high outline of mountains, blue and afar in the morning; like faint mist at noon; a jagged wall of purple at sunset. I have the feel of the oar in my hand, the vision of a scorching blue sea in my eyes. And I see a bay, a wide bay, smooth as glass and polished like ice, shimmering in the dark. A red light burns far off upon the gloom of the land, and the night is soft and warm. We drag at the oars with aching arms, and suddenly a puff of wind, a puff faint and tepid and laden with strange odors of blossoms, of aromatic wood, comes out of the still night — the first sigh of the East on my face. That I can never forget. It was impalpable and enslaving, like a charm, like a whispered promise of mysterious delight.

“We had been pulling this finishing spell for eleven hours. Two pulled, and he whose turn it was to rest sat at the tiller. We had made out the red light in that bay and steered for it, guessing it must mark some small coasting port. We passed two vessels, outlandish and high-sterned, sleeping at anchor, and, approaching the light, now very dim, ran the boat’s nose against the end of a jutting wharf. We were blind with fatigue. My men dropped the oars and fell off the thwarts as if dead. I made fast to a pile. A

current rippled softly. The scented obscurity of the shore was grouped into vast masses, a density of colossal clumps of vegetation, probably — mute and fantastic shapes. And at their foot the semicircle of a beach gleamed faintly, like an illusion. There was not a light, not a stir, not a sound. The mysterious East faced me, perfumed like a flower, silent like death, dark like a grave.

“And I sat weary beyond expression, exulting like a conqueror, sleepless and entranced as if before a profound, a fateful enigma.

“A splashing of oars, a measured dip reverberating on the level of water, intensified by the silence of the shore into loud claps, made me jump up. A boat, a European boat, was coming in. I invoked the name of the dead; I hailed: Judea ahoy! A thin shout answered.

“It was the captain. I had beaten the flagship by three hours, and I was glad to hear the old man’s voice, tremulous and tired. ‘Is it you, Marlow?’ ‘Mind the end of that jetty, sir,’ I cried.

“He approached cautiously, and brought up with the deep-sea lead-line which we had saved — for the under-writers. I eased my painter and fell alongside. He sat, a broken figure at the stern, wet with dew, his hands clasped in his lap. His men were asleep already. ‘I had a terrible time of it,’ he murmured. ‘Mahon is behind — not very far.’ We conversed in whispers, in low whispers, as if afraid to wake up the land. Guns, thunder, earthquakes would not have awakened the men just then.

“Looking around as we talked, I saw away at sea a bright light traveling in the night. ‘There’s a steamer passing the bay,’ I said. She was not passing, she was entering, and she even came close and anchored. ‘I wish,’ said the old man, ‘you would find out whether she is English. Perhaps they could give us a passage somewhere.’ He seemed nervously anxious. So by dint of punching and kicking I started one of my men into a state of somnambulism, and giving him an oar, took another and pulled towards the lights of the steamer.

“There was a murmur of voices in her, metallic hollow clangs of the engine-room, footsteps on the deck. Her ports shone, round like dilated eyes. Shapes moved about, and there was a shadowy man high up on the bridge. He heard my oars.

“And then, before I could open my lips, the East spoke to me, but it was in a Western voice. A torrent of words was poured into the enigmatical, the fateful silence; outlandish, angry words, mixed with words and even whole

sentences of good English, less strange but even more surprising. The voice swore and cursed violently; it riddled the solemn peace of the bay by a volley of abuse. It began by calling me Pig, and from that went crescendo into unmentionable adjectives — in English. The man up there raged aloud in two languages, and with a sincerity in his fury that almost convinced me I had, in some way, sinned against the harmony of the universe. I could hardly see him, but began to think he would work himself into a fit.

“Suddenly he ceased, and I could hear him snorting and blowing like a porpoise. I said —

“‘What steamer is this, pray?’

“‘Eh? What’s this? And who are you?’

“‘Castaway crew of an English barque burnt at sea. We came here to-night. I am the second mate. The captain is in the long-boat, and wishes to know if you would give us a passage somewhere.’

“‘Oh, my goodness! I say... This is the Celestial from Singapore on her return trip. I’ll arrange with your captain in the morning... and,... I say... did you hear me just now?’

“‘I should think the whole bay heard you.’

“‘I thought you were a shore-boat. Now, look here — this infernal lazy scoundrel of a caretaker has gone to sleep again — curse him. The light is out, and I nearly ran foul of the end of this damned jetty. This is the third time he plays me this trick. Now, I ask you, can anybody stand this kind of thing? It’s enough to drive a man out of his mind. I’ll report him.... I’ll get the Assistant Resident to give him the sack, by... See — there’s no light. It’s out, isn’t it? I take you to witness the light’s out. There should be a light, you know. A red light on the — ’

“‘There was a light,’ I said, mildly.

“‘But it’s out, man! What’s the use of talking like this? You can see for yourself it’s out — don’t you? If you had to take a valuable steamer along this God-forsaken coast you would want a light too. I’ll kick him from end to end of his miserable wharf. You’ll see if I don’t. I will — ’

“‘So I may tell my captain you’ll take us?’ I broke in.

“‘Yes, I’ll take you. Good night,’ he said, brusquely.

“I pulled back, made fast again to the jetty, and then went to sleep at last. I had faced the silence of the East. I had heard some of its languages. But when I opened my eyes again the silence was as complete as though it had

never been broken. I was lying in a flood of light, and the sky had never looked so far, so high, before. I opened my eyes and lay without moving.

“And then I saw the men of the East — they were looking at me. The whole length of the jetty was full of people. I saw brown, bronze, yellow faces, the black eyes, the glitter, the colour of an Eastern crowd. And all these beings stared without a murmur, without a sigh, without a movement. They stared down at the boats, at the sleeping men who at night had come to them from the sea. Nothing moved. The fronds of palms stood still against the sky. Not a branch stirred along the shore, and the brown roofs of hidden houses peeped through the green foliage, through the big leaves that hung shining and still like leaves forged of heavy metal. This was the East of the ancient navigators, so old, so mysterious, resplendent and somber, living and unchanged, full of danger and promise. And these were the men. I sat up suddenly. A wave of movement passed through the crowd from end to end, passed along the heads, swayed the bodies, ran along the jetty like a ripple on the water, like a breath of wind on a field — and all was still again. I see it now — the wide sweep of the bay, the glittering sands, the wealth of green infinite and varied, the sea blue like the sea of a dream, the crowd of attentive faces, the blaze of vivid colour — the water reflecting it all, the curve of the shore, the jetty, the high-sterned outlandish craft floating still, and the three boats with tired men from the West sleeping unconscious of the land and the people and of the violence of sunshine. They slept thrown across the thwarts, curled on bottom-boards, in the careless attitudes of death. The head of the old skipper, leaning back in the stern of the long-boat, had fallen on his breast, and he looked as though he would never wake. Farther out old Mahon’s face was upturned to the sky, with the long white beard spread out on his breast, as though he had been shot where he sat at the tiller; and a man, all in a heap in the bows of the boat, slept with both arms embracing the stem-head and with his cheek laid on the gunwale. The East looked at them without a sound.

“I have known its fascination since: I have seen the mysterious shores, the still water, the lands of brown nations, where a stealthy Nemesis lies in wait, pursues, overtakes so many of the conquering race, who are proud of their wisdom, of their knowledge, of their strength. But for me all the East is contained in that vision of my youth. It is all in that moment when I opened my young eyes on it. I came upon it from a tussle with the sea — and I was young — and I saw it looking at me. And this is all that is left of

it! Only a moment; a moment of strength, of romance, of glamour — of youth!... A flick of sunshine upon a strange shore, the time to remember, the time for a sigh, and — good-bye! — Night — Good-bye...!”

He drank.

“Ah! The good old time — the good old time. Youth and the sea. Glamour and the sea! The good, strong sea, the salt, bitter sea, that could whisper to you and roar at you and knock your breath out of you.”

He drank again.

“By all that’s wonderful, it is the sea, I believe, the sea itself — or is it youth alone? Who can tell? But you here — you all had something out of life: money, love — whatever one gets on shore — and, tell me, wasn’t that the best time, that time when we were young at sea; young and had nothing, on the sea that gives nothing, except hard knocks — and sometimes a chance to feel your strength — that only — what you all regret?”

And we all nodded at him: the man of finance, the man of accounts, the man of law, we all nodded at him over the polished table that like a still sheet of brown water reflected our faces, lined, wrinkled; our faces marked by toil, by deceptions, by success, by love; our weary eyes looking still, looking always, looking anxiously for something out of life, that while it is expected is already gone — has passed unseen, in a sigh, in a flash — together with the youth, with the strength, with the romance of illusions.

## *FALK*



### A REMINISCENCE

Several of us, all more or less connected with the sea, were dining in a small river-hostelry not more than thirty miles from London, and less than twenty from that shallow and dangerous puddle to which our coasting men give the grandiose name of "German Ocean." And through the wide windows we had a view of the Thames; an enfiling view down the Lower Hope Reach. But the dinner was execrable, and all the feast was for the eyes.

That flavour of salt-water which for so many of us had been the very water of life permeated our talk. He who hath known the bitterness of the Ocean shall have its taste forever in his mouth. But one or two of us, pampered by the life of the land, complained of hunger. It was impossible to swallow any of that stuff. And indeed there was a strange mustiness in everything. The wooden dining-room stuck out over the mud of the shore like a lacustrine dwelling; the planks of the floor seemed rotten; a decrepit old waiter tottered pathetically to and fro before an antediluvian and worm-eaten sideboard; the chipped plates might have been disinterred from some kitchen midden near an inhabited lake; and the chops recalled times more ancient still. They brought forcibly to one's mind the night of ages when the primeval man, evolving the first rudiments of cookery from his dim consciousness, scorched lumps of flesh at a fire of sticks in the company of other good fellows; then, gorged and happy, sat him back among the gnawed bones to tell his artless tales of experience — the tales of hunger and hunt — and of women, perhaps!

But luckily the wine happened to be as old as the waiter. So, comparatively empty, but upon the whole fairly happy, we sat back and told our artless tales. We talked of the sea and all its works. The sea never changes, and its works for all the talk of men are wrapped in mystery. But we agreed that the times were changed. And we talked of old ships, of sea-accidents, of break-downs, dismastings; and of a man who brought his ship safe to Liverpool all the way from the River Platte under a jury rudder. We talked of wrecks, of short rations and of heroism — or at least of what the newspapers would have called heroism at sea — a manifestation of virtues

quite different from the heroism of primitive times. And now and then falling silent all together we gazed at the sights of the river.

A P. & O. boat passed bound down. "One gets jolly good dinners on board these ships," remarked one of our band. A man with sharp eyes read out the name on her bows: Arcadia. "What a beautiful model of a ship!" murmured some of us. She was followed by a small cargo steamer, and the flag they hauled down aboard while we were looking showed her to be a Norwegian. She made an awful lot of smoke; and before it had quite blown away, a high-sided, short, wooden barque, in ballast and towed by a paddle-tug, appeared in front of the windows. All her hands were forward busy setting up the headgear; and aft a woman in a red hood, quite alone with the man at the wheel, paced the length of the poop back and forth, with the grey wool of some knitting work in her hands.

"German I should think," muttered one. "The skipper has his wife on board," remarked another; and the light of the crimson sunset all ablaze behind the London smoke, throwing a glow of Bengal light upon the barque's spars, faded away from the Hope Reach.

Then one of us, who had not spoken before, a man of over fifty, that had commanded ships for a quarter of a century, looking after the barque now gliding far away, all black on the lustre of the river, said:

This reminds me of an absurd episode in my life, now many years ago, when I got first the command of an iron barque, loading then in a certain Eastern seaport. It was also the capital of an Eastern kingdom, lying up a river as might be London lies up this old Thames of ours. No more need be said of the place; for this sort of thing might have happened anywhere where there are ships, skippers, tugboats, and orphan nieces of indescribable splendour. And the absurdity of the episode concerns only me, my enemy Falk, and my friend Hermann.

There seemed to be something like peculiar emphasis on the words "My friend Hermann," which caused one of us (for we had just been speaking of heroism at sea) to say idly and nonchalantly:

"And was this Hermann a hero?"

Not at all, said our grizzled friend. No hero at all. He was a Schiff-fuhrer: Ship-conductor. That's how they call a Master Mariner in Germany. I prefer our way. The alliteration is good, and there is something in the nomenclature that gives to us as a body the sense of corporate existence: Apprentice, Mate, Master, in the ancient and honourable craft of the sea. As

to my friend Hermann, he might have been a consummate master of the honourable craft, but he was called officially Schiff-fuhrer, and had the simple, heavy appearance of a well-to-do farmer, combined with the good-natured shrewdness of a small shopkeeper. With his shaven chin, round limbs, and heavy eyelids he did not look like a toiler, and even less like an adventurer of the sea. Still, he toiled upon the seas, in his own way, much as a shopkeeper works behind his counter. And his ship was the means by which he maintained his growing family.

She was a heavy, strong, blunt-bowed affair, awakening the ideas of primitive solidity, like the wooden plough of our forefathers. And there were, about her, other suggestions of a rustic and homely nature. The extraordinary timber projections which I have seen in no other vessel made her square stern resemble the tail end of a miller's waggon. But the four stern ports of her cabin, glazed with six little greenish panes each, and framed in wooden sashes painted brown, might have been the windows of a cottage in the country. The tiny white curtains and the greenery of flower pots behind the glass completed the resemblance. On one or two occasions when passing under stern I had detected from my boat a round arm in the act of tilting a watering pot, and the bowed sleek head of a maiden whom I shall always call Hermann's niece, because as a matter of fact I've never heard her name, for all my intimacy with the family.

This, however, sprang up later on. Meantime in common with the rest of the shipping in that Eastern port, I was left in no doubt as to Hermann's notions of hygienic clothing. Evidently he believed in wearing good stout flannel next his skin. On most days little frocks and pinafores could be seen drying in the mizzen rigging of his ship, or a tiny row of socks fluttering on the signal halyards; but once a fortnight the family washing was exhibited in force. It covered the poop entirely. The afternoon breeze would incite to a weird and flabby activity all that crowded mass of clothing, with its vague suggestions of drowned, mutilated and flattened humanity. Trunks without heads waved at you arms without hands; legs without feet kicked fantastically with collapsible flourishes; and there were long white garments that, taking the wind fairly through their neck openings edged with lace, became for a moment violently distended as by the passage of obese and invisible bodies. On these days you could make out that ship at a great distance by the multi-coloured grotesque riot going on abaft her mizzen mast.



She had her berth just ahead of me, and her name was Diana, — Diana not of Ephesus but of Bremen. This was proclaimed in white letters a foot long spaced widely across the stern (somewhat like the lettering of a shop-sign) under the cottage windows. This ridiculously unsuitable name struck one as an impertinence towards the memory of the most charming of goddesses; for, apart from the fact that the old craft was physically incapable of engaging in any sort of chase, there was a gang of four children belonging to her. They peeped over the rail at passing boats and occasionally dropped various objects into them. Thus, sometime before I knew Hermann to speak to, I received on my hat a horrid rag-doll belonging to Hermann's eldest daughter. However, these youngsters were upon the whole well behaved. They had fair heads, round eyes, round little knobby noses, and they resembled their father a good deal.

This Diana of Bremen was a most innocent old ship, and seemed to know nothing of the wicked sea, as there are on shore households that know nothing of the corrupt world. And the sentiments she suggested were unexceptionable and mainly of a domestic order. She was a home. All these dear children had learned to walk on her roomy quarter-deck. In such thoughts there is something pretty, even touching. Their teeth, I should judge, they had cut on the ends of her running gear. I have many times observed the baby Hermann (Nicholas) engaged in gnawing the whipping of the fore-royal brace. Nicholas' favourite place of residence was under the main fife-rail. Directly he was let loose he would crawl off there, and the first seaman who came along would bring him, carefully held aloft in tarry hands, back to the cabin door. I fancy there must have been a standing order to that effect. In the course of these transportations the baby, who was the only peppery person in the ship, tried to smite these stalwart young German sailors on the face.

Mrs. Hermann, an engaging, stout housewife, wore on board baggy blue dresses with white dots. When, as happened once or twice I caught her at an elegant little wash-tub rubbing hard on white collars, baby's socks, and Hermann's summer neckties, she would blush in girlish confusion, and raising her wet hands greet me from afar with many friendly nods. Her sleeves would be rolled up to the elbows, and the gold hoop of her wedding ring glittered among the soapsuds. Her voice was pleasant, she had a serene brow, smooth bands of very fair hair, and a good-humoured expression of the eyes. She was motherly and moderately talkative. When this simple

matron smiled, youthful dimples broke out on her fresh broad cheeks. Hermann's niece on the other hand, an orphan and very silent, I never saw attempt a smile. This, however, was not gloom on her part but the restraint of youthful gravity.

They had carried her about with them for the last three years, to help with the children and be company for Mrs. Hermann, as Hermann mentioned once to me. It had been very necessary while they were all little, he had added in a vexed manner. It was her arm and her sleek head that I had glimpsed one morning, through the stern-windows of the cabin, hovering over the pots of fuchsias and mignonette; but the first time I beheld her full length I surrendered to her proportions. They fix her in my mind, as great beauty, great intelligence, quickness of wit or kindness of heart might have made some her other woman equally memorable.

With her it was form and size. It was her physical personality that had this imposing charm. She might have been witty, intelligent, and kind to an exceptional degree. I don't know, and this is not to the point. All I know is that she was built on a magnificent scale. Built is the only word. She was constructed, she was erected, as it were, with a regal lavishness. It staggered you to see this reckless expenditure of material upon a chit of a girl. She was youthful and also perfectly mature, as though she had been some fortunate immortal. She was heavy too, perhaps, but that's nothing. It only added to that notion of permanence. She was barely nineteen. But such shoulders! Such round arms! Such a shadowing forth of mighty limbs when with three long strides she pounced across the deck upon the overturned Nicholas — it's perfectly indescribable! She seemed a good, quiet girl, vigilant as to Lena's needs, Gustav's tumbles, the state of Carl's dear little nose — conscientious, hardworking, and all that. But what magnificent hair she had! Abundant, long, thick, of a tawny colour. It had the sheen of precious metals. She wore it plaited tightly into one single tress hanging girlishly down her back and its end reached down to her waist. The massiveness of it surprised you. On my word it reminded one of a club. Her face was big, comely, of an unruffled expression. She had a good complexion, and her blue eyes were so pale that she appeared to look at the world with the empty white candour of a statue. You could not call her good-looking. It was something much more impressive. The simplicity of her apparel, the opulence of her form, her imposing stature, and the extraordinary sense of vigorous life that seemed to emanate from her like a

perfume exhaled by a flower, made her beautiful with a beauty of a rustic and olympian order. To watch her reaching up to the clothes-line with both arms raised high above her head, caused you to fall a musing in a strain of pagan piety. Excellent Mrs. Hermann's baggy cotton gowns had some sort of rudimentary frills at neck and bottom, but this girl's print frocks hadn't even a wrinkle; nothing but a few straight folds in the skirt falling to her feet, and these, when she stood still, had a severe and statuesque quality. She was inclined naturally to be still whether sitting or standing. However, I don't mean to say she was statuesque. She was too generously alive; but she could have stood for an allegoric statue of the Earth. I don't mean the worn-out earth of our possession, but a young Earth, a virginal planet undisturbed by the vision of a future teeming with the monstrous forms of life and death, clamorous with the cruel battles of hunger and thought.

The worthy Hermann himself was not very entertaining, though his English was fairly comprehensible. Mrs. Hermann, who always let off one speech at least at me in an hospitable, cordial tone (and in Platt-Deutsch I suppose) I could not understand. As to their niece, however satisfactory to look upon (and she inspired you somehow with a hopeful view as to the prospects of mankind) she was a modest and silent presence, mostly engaged in sewing, only now and then, as I observed, falling over that work into a state of maidenly meditation. Her aunt sat opposite her, sewing also, with her feet propped on a wooden footstool. On the other side of the deck Hermann and I would get a couple of chairs out of the cabin and settle down to a smoking match, accompanied at long intervals by the pacific exchange of a few words. I came nearly every evening. Hermann I would find in his shirt sleeves. As soon as he returned from the shore on board his ship he commenced operations by taking off his coat; then he put on his head an embroidered round cap with a tassel, and changed his boots for a pair of cloth slippers. Afterwards he smoked at the cabin-door, looking at his children with an air of civic virtue, till they got caught one after another and put to bed in various staterooms. Lastly, we would drink some beer in the cabin, which was furnished with a wooden table on cross legs, and with black straight-backed chairs — more like a farm kitchen than a ship's cuddy. The sea and all nautical affairs seemed very far removed from the hospitality of this exemplary family.

And I liked this because I had a rather worrying time on board my own ship. I had been appointed ex-officio by the British Consul to take charge of

her after a man who had died suddenly, leaving for the guidance of his successor some suspiciously unreceipted bills, a few dry-dock estimates hinting at bribery, and a quantity of vouchers for three years' extravagant expenditure; all these mixed up together in a dusty old violin-case lined with ruby velvet. I found besides a large account-book, which, when opened, hopefully turned out to my infinite consternation to be filled with verses — page after page of rhymed doggerel of a jovial and improper character, written in the neatest minute hand I ever did see. In the same fiddle-case a photograph of my predecessor, taken lately in Saigon, represented in front of a garden view, and in company of a female in strange draperies, an elderly, squat, rugged man of stern aspect in a clumsy suit of black broadcloth, and with the hair brushed forward above the temples in a manner reminding one of a boar's tusks. Of a fiddle, however, the only trace on board was the case, its empty husk as it were; but of the two last freights the ship had indubitably earned of late, there were not even the husks left. It was impossible to say where all that money had gone to. It wasn't on board. It had not been remitted home; for a letter from the owners, preserved in a desk evidently by the merest accident, complained mildly enough that they had not been favoured by a scratch of the pen for the last eighteen months. There were next to no stores on board, not an inch of spare rope or a yard of canvas. The ship had been run bare, and I foresaw no end of difficulties before I could get her ready for sea.

As I was young then — not thirty yet — I took myself and my troubles very seriously. The old mate, who had acted as chief mourner at the captain's funeral, was not particularly pleased at my coming. But the fact is the fellow was not legally qualified for command, and the Consul was bound, if at all possible, to put a properly certificated man on board. As to the second mate, all I can say his name was Tottersen, or something like that. His practice was to wear on his head, in that tropical climate, a mangy fur cap. He was, without exception, the stupidest man I had ever seen on board ship. And he looked it too. He looked so confoundedly stupid that it was a matter of surprise for me when he answered to his name.

I drew no great comfort from their company, to say the least of it; while the prospect of making a long sea passage with those two fellows was depressing. And my other thoughts in solitude could not be of a gay complexion. The crew was sickly, the cargo was coming very slow; I foresaw I would have lots of trouble with the charterers, and doubted

whether they would advance me enough money for the ship's expenses. Their attitude towards me was unfriendly. Altogether I was not getting on. I would discover at odd times (generally about midnight) that I was totally inexperienced, greatly ignorant of business, and hopelessly unfit for any sort of command; and when the steward had to be taken to the hospital ill with choleraic symptoms I felt bereaved of the only decent person at the after end of the ship. He was fully expected to recover, but in the meantime had to be replaced by some sort of servant. And on the recommendation of a certain Schomberg, the proprietor of the smaller of the two hotels in the place, I engaged a Chinaman. Schomberg, a brawny, hairy Alsatian, and an awful gossip, assured me that it was all right. "First-class boy that. Came in the suite of his Excellency Tseng the Commissioner — you know. His Excellency Tseng lodged with me here for three weeks."

He mouthed the Chinese Excellency at me with great unction, though the specimen of the "suite" did not seem very promising. At the time, however, I did not know what an untrustworthy humbug Schomberg was. The "boy" might have been forty or a hundred and forty for all you could tell — one of those Chinamen of the death's-head type of face and completely inscrutable. Before the end of the third day he had revealed himself as a confirmed opium-smoker, a gambler, a most audacious thief, and a first-class sprinter. When he departed at the top of his speed with thirty-two golden sovereigns of my own hard-earned savings it was the last straw. I had reserved that money in case my difficulties came to the worst. Now it was gone I felt as poor and naked as a fakir. I clung to my ship, for all the bother she caused me, but what I could not bear were the long lonely evenings in her cuddy, where the atmosphere, made smelly by a leaky lamp, was agitated by the snoring of the mate. That fellow shut himself up in his stuffy cabin punctually at eight, and made gross and revolting noises like a water-logged trump. It was odious not to be able to worry oneself in comfort on board one's own ship. Everything in this world, I reflected, even the command of a nice little barque, may be made a delusion and a snare for the unwary spirit of pride in man.

From such reflections I was glad to make any escape on board that Bremen Diana. There apparently no whisper of the world's iniquities had ever penetrated. And yet she lived upon the wide sea: and the sea tragic and comic, the sea with its horrors and its peculiar scandals, the sea peopled by men and ruled by iron necessity is indubitably a part of the world. But that

patriarchal old tub, like some saintly retreat, echoed nothing of it. She was world proof. Her venerable innocence apparently had put a restraint on the roaring lusts of the sea. And yet I have known the sea too long to believe in its respect for decency. An elemental force is ruthlessly frank. It may, of course, have been Hermann's skilful seamanship, but to me it looked as if the allied oceans had refrained from smashing these high bulwarks, unshipping the lumpy rudder, frightening the children, and generally opening this family's eyes out of sheer reticence. It looked like reticence. The ruthless disclosure was in the end left for a man to make; a man strong and elemental enough and driven to unveil some secrets of the sea by the power of a simple and elemental desire.

This, however, occurred much later, and meantime I took sanctuary in that serene old ship early every evening. The only person on board that seemed to be in trouble was little Lena, and in due course I perceived that the health of the rag-doll was more than delicate. This object led a sort of "in extremis" existence in a wooden box placed against the starboard mooring-bitts, tended and nursed with the greatest sympathy and care by all the children, who greatly enjoyed pulling long faces and moving with hushed footsteps. Only the baby — Nicholas — looked on with a cold, ruffianly leer, as if he had belonged to another tribe altogether. Lena perpetually sorrowed over the box, and all of them were in deadly earnest. It was wonderful the way these children would work up their compassion for that bedraggled thing I wouldn't have touched with a pair of tongs. I suppose they were exercising and developing their racial sentimentalism by the means of that dummy. I was only surprised that Mrs. Hermann let Lena cherish and hug that bundle of rags to that extent, it was so disreputably and completely unclean. But Mrs. Hermann would raise her fine womanly eyes from her needlework to look on with amused sympathy, and did not seem to see it, somehow, that this object of affection was a disgrace to the ship's purity. Purity, not cleanliness, is the word. It was pushed so far that I seemed to detect in this too a sentimental excess, as if dirt had been removed in very love. It is impossible to give you an idea of such a meticulous neatness. It was as if every morning that ship had been arduously explored with — with toothbrushes. Her very bowsprit three times a week had its toilette made with a cake of soap and a piece of soft flannel. Arrayed — I must say arrayed — arrayed artlessly in dazzling white paint as to wood and dark green as to ironwork the simple-minded

distribution of these colours evoked the images of simple-minded peace, of arcadian felicity; and the childish comedy of disease and sorrow struck me sometimes as an abominably real blot upon that ideal state.

I enjoyed it greatly, and on my part I brought a little mild excitement into it. Our intimacy arose from the pursuit of that thief. It was in the evening, and Hermann, who, contrary to his habits, had stayed on shore late that day, was extricating himself backwards out of a little gharry on the river bank, opposite his ship, when the hunt passed. Realising the situation as though he had eyes in his shoulder-blades, he joined us with a leap and took the lead. The Chinaman fled silent like a rapid shadow on the dust of an extremely oriental road. I followed. A long way in the rear my mate whooped like a savage. A young moon threw a bashful light on a plain like a monstrous waste ground: the architectural mass of a Buddhist temple far away projected itself in dead black on the sky. We lost the thief of course; but in my disappointment I had to admire Hermann's presence of mind. The velocity that stodgy man developed in the interests of a complete stranger earned my warm gratitude — there was something truly cordial in his exertions.

He seemed as vexed as myself at our failure, and would hardly listen to my thanks. He said it was "nothings," and invited me on the spot to come on board his ship and drink a glass of beer with him. We poked sceptically for a while amongst the bushes, peered without conviction into a ditch or two. There was not a sound: patches of slime glimmered feebly amongst the reeds. Slowly we trudged back, drooping under the thin sickle of the moon, and I heard him mutter to himself, "Himmel! Zwei und dreissig Pfund!" He was impressed by the figure of my loss. For a long time we had ceased to hear the mate's whoops and yells.

Then he said to me, "Everybody has his troubles," and as we went on remarked that he would never have known anything of mine hadn't he by an extraordinary chance been detained on shore by Captain Falk. He didn't like to stay late ashore — he added with a sigh. The something doleful in his tone I put to his sympathy with my misfortune, of course.

On board the *Diana* Mrs. Hermann's fine eyes expressed much interest and commiseration. We had found the two women sewing face to face under the open skylight in the strong glare of the lamp. Hermann walked in first, starting in the very doorway to pull off his coat, and encouraging me with loud, hospitable ejaculations: "Come in! This way! Come in, captain!"

At once, coat in hand, he began to tell his wife all about it. Mrs. Hermann put the palms of her plump hands together; I smiled and bowed with a heavy heart: the niece got up from her sewing to bring Hermann's slippers and his embroidered calotte, which he assumed pontifically, talking (about me) all the time. Billows of white stuff lay between the chairs on the cabin floor; I caught the words "Zwei und dreissig Pfund" repeated several times, and presently came the beer, which seemed delicious to my throat, parched with running and the emotions of the chase.

I didn't get away till well past midnight, long after the women had retired. Hermann had been trading in the East for three years or more, carrying freights of rice and timber mostly. His ship was well known in all the ports from Vladivostok to Singapore. She was his own property. The profits had been moderate, but the trade answered well enough while the children were small yet. In another year or so he hoped he would be able to sell the old Diana to a firm in Japan for a fair price. He intended to return home, to Bremen, by mail boat, second class, with Mrs. Hermann and the children. He told me all this stolidly, with slow puffs at his pipe. I was sorry when knocking the ashes out he began to rub his eyes. I would have sat with him till morning. What had I to hurry on board my own ship for? To face the broken rifled drawer in my state-room. Ugh! The very thought made me feel unwell.

I became their daily guest, as you know. I think that Mrs. Hermann from the first looked upon me as a romantic person. I did not, of course, tear my hair coram populo over my loss, and she took it for lordly indifference. Afterwards, I daresay, I did tell them some of my adventures — such as they were — and they marvelled greatly at the extent of my experience. Hermann would translate what he thought the most striking passages. Getting up on his legs, and as if delivering a lecture on a phenomenon, he addressed himself, with gestures, to the two women, who would let their sewing sink slowly on their laps. Meantime I sat before a glass of Hermann's beer, trying to look modest. Mrs. Hermann would glance at me quickly, emit slight "Ach's!" The girl never made a sound. Never. But she too would sometimes raise her pale eyes to look at me in her unseeing gentle way. Her glance was by no means stupid; it beamed out soft and diffuse as the moon beams upon a landscape — quite differently from the scrutinising inspection of the stars. You were drowned in it, and imagined



yourself to appear blurred. And yet this same glance when turned upon Christian Falk must have been as efficient as the searchlight of a battle-ship.

Falk was the other assiduous visitor on board, but from his behaviour he might have been coming to see the quarter-deck capstan. He certainly used to stare at it a good deal when keeping us company outside the cabin door, with one muscular arm thrown over the back of the chair, and his big shapely legs, in very tight white trousers, extended far out and ending in a pair of black shoes as roomy as punts. On arrival he would shake Hermann's hand with a mutter, bow to the women, and take up his careless and misanthropic attitude by our side. He departed abruptly, with a jump, going through the performance of grunts, handshakes, bow, as if in a panic. Sometimes, with a sort of discreet and convulsive effort, he approached the women and exchanged a few low words with them, half a dozen at most. On these occasions Hermann's usual stare became positively glassy and Mrs. Hermann's kind countenance would colour up. The girl herself never turned a hair.

Falk was a Dane or perhaps a Norwegian, I can't tell now. At all events he was a Scandinavian of some sort, and a bloated monopolist to boot. It is possible he was unacquainted with the word, but he had a clear perception of the thing itself. His tariff of charges for towing ships in and out was the most brutally inconsiderate document of the sort I had ever seen. He was the commander and owner of the only tug-boat on the river, a very trim white craft of 150 tons or more, as elegantly neat as a yacht, with a round wheel-house rising like a glazed turret high above her sharp bows, and with one slender varnished pole mast forward. I daresay there are yet a few shipmasters afloat who remember Falk and his tug very well. He extracted his pound and a half of flesh from each of us merchant-skipper with an inflexible sort of indifference which made him detested and even feared. Schomberg used to remark: "I won't talk about the fellow. I don't think he has six drinks from year's end to year's end in my place. But my advice is, gentlemen, don't you have anything to do with him, if you can help it."

This advice, apart from unavoidable business relations, was easy to follow because Falk intruded upon no one. It seems absurd to compare a tugboat skipper to a centaur: but he reminded me somehow of an engraving in a little book I had as a boy, which represented centaurs at a stream, and there was one, especially in the foreground, prancing bow and arrows in hand, with regular severe features and an immense curled wavy beard,

flowing down his breast. Falk's face reminded me of that centaur. Besides, he was a composite creature. Not a man-horse, it is true, but a man-boat. He lived on board his tug, which was always dashing up and down the river from early morn till dewy eve.

In the last rays of the setting sun, you could pick out far away down the reach his beard borne high up on the white structure, foaming up stream to anchor for the night. There was the white-clad man's body, and the rich brown patch of the hair, and nothing below the waist but the 'thwart-ship white lines of the bridge-screens, that lead the eye to the sharp white lines of the bows cleaving the muddy water of the river.

Separated from his boat to me at least he seemed incomplete. The tug herself without his head and torso on the bridge looked mutilated as it were. But he left her very seldom. All the time I remained in harbour I saw him only twice on shore. On the first occasion it was at my charterers, where he came in misanthropically to get paid for towing out a French barque the day before. The second time I could hardly believe my eyes, for I beheld him reclining under his beard in a cane-bottomed chair in the billiard-room of Schomberg's hotel.

It was very funny to see Schomberg ignoring him pointedly. The artificiality of it contrasted strongly with Falk's natural unconcern. The big Alsatian talked loudly with his other customers, going from one little table to the other, and passing Falk's place of repose with his eyes fixed straight ahead. Falk sat there with an untouched glass at his elbow. He must have known by sight and name every white man in the room, but he never addressed a word to anybody. He acknowledged my presence by a drop of his eyelids, and that was all. Sprawling there in the chair, he would, now and again, draw the palms of both his hands down his face, giving at the same time a slight, almost imperceptible, shudder.

It was a habit he had, and of course I was perfectly familiar with it, since you could not remain an hour in his company without being made to wonder at such a movement breaking some long period of stillness. It was a passionate and inexplicable gesture. He used to make it at all sorts of times; as likely as not after he had been listening to little Lena's chatter about the suffering doll, for instance. The Hermann children always besieged him about his legs closely, though, in a gentle way, he shrank from them a little. He seemed, however, to feel a great affection for the whole family. For Hermann himself especially. He sought his company. In this case, for

instance, he must have been waiting for him, because as soon as he appeared Falk rose hastily, and they went out together. Then Schomberg expounded in my hearing to three or four people his theory that Falk was after Captain Hermann's niece, and asserted confidently that nothing would come of it. It was the same last year when Captain Hermann was loading here, he said.

Naturally, I did not believe Schomberg, but I own that for a time I observed closely what went on. All I discovered was some impatience on Hermann's part. At the sight of Falk, stepping over the gangway, the excellent man would begin to mumble and chew between his teeth something that sounded like German swear-words. However, as I've said, I'm not familiar with the language, and Hermann's soft, round-eyed countenance remained unchanged. Staring stolidly ahead he greeted him with, "Wie gehts," or in English, "How are you?" with a throaty enunciation. The girl would look up for an instant and move her lips slightly: Mrs. Hermann let her hands rest on her lap to talk volubly to him for a minute or so in her pleasant voice before she went on with her sewing again. Falk would throw himself into a chair, stretch his big legs, as like as not draw his hands down his face passionately. As to myself, he was not pointedly impertinent: it was rather as though he could not be bothered with such trifles as my existence; and the truth is that being a monopolist he was under no necessity to be amiable. He was sure to get his own extortionate terms out of me for towage whether he frowned or smiled. As a matter of fact, he did neither: but before many days elapsed he managed to astonish me not a little and to set Schomberg's tongue clacking more than ever.

It came about in this way. There was a shallow bar at the mouth of the river which ought to have been kept down, but the authorities of the State were piously busy gilding afresh the great Buddhist Pagoda just then, and I suppose had no money to spare for dredging operations. I don't know how it may be now, but at the time I speak of that sandbank was a great nuisance to the shipping. One of its consequences was that vessels of a certain draught of water, like Hermann's or mine, could not complete their loading in the river. After taking in as much as possible of their cargo, they had to go outside to fill up. The whole procedure was an unmitigated bore. When you thought you had as much on board as your ship could carry safely over the bar, you went and gave notice to your agents. They, in their turn, notified Falk that so-and-so was ready to go out. Then Falk (ostensibly

when it fitted in with his other work, but, if the truth were known, simply when his arbitrary spirit moved him), after ascertaining carefully in the office that there was enough money to meet his bill, would come along unsympathetically, glaring at you with his yellow eyes from the bridge, and would drag you out dishevelled as to rigging, lumbered as to the decks, with unfeeling haste, as if to execution. And he would force you too to take the end of his own wire hawser, for the use of which there was of course an extra charge. To your shouted remonstrances against that extortion this towering trunk with one hand on the engine-room telegraph only shook its bearded head above the splash, the racket, and the clouds of smoke in which the tug, backing and filling in the smother of churning paddle-wheels behaved like a ferocious and impatient creature. He had her manned by the cheekiest gang of lascars I ever did see, whom he allowed to bawl at you insolently, and, once fast, he plucked you out of your berth as if he did not care what he smashed. Eighteen miles down the river you had to go behind him, and then three more along the coast to where a group of uninhabited rocky islets enclosed a sheltered anchorage. There you would have to lie at single anchor with your naked spars showing to seaward over these barren fragments of land scattered upon a very intensely blue sea. There was nothing to look at besides but a bare coast, the muddy edge of the brown plain with the sinuosities of the river you had left, traced in dull green, and the Great Pagoda uprising lonely and massive with shining curves and pinnacles like the gorgeous and stony efflorescence of tropical rocks. You had nothing to do but to wait fretfully for the balance of your cargo, which was sent out of the river with the greatest irregularity. And it was open to you to console yourself with the thought that, after all, this stage of bother meant that your departure from these shores was indeed approaching at last.

We both had to go through that stage, Hermann and I, and there was a sort of tacit emulation between the ships as to which should be ready first. We kept on neck and neck almost to the finish, when I won the race by going personally to give notice in the forenoon; whereas Hermann, who was very slow in making up his mind to go ashore, did not get to the agents' office till late in the day. They told him there that my ship was first on turn for next morning, and I believe he told them he was in no hurry. It suited him better to go the day after.

That evening, on board the *Diana*, he sat with his plump knees well apart, staring and puffing at the curved mouthpiece of his pipe. Presently he spoke

with some impatience to his niece about putting the children to bed. Mrs. Hermann, who was talking to Falk, stopped short and looked at her husband uneasily, but the girl got up at once and drove the children before her into the cabin. In a little while Mrs. Hermann had to leave us to quell what, from the sounds inside, must have been a dangerous mutiny. At this Hermann grumbled to himself. For half an hour longer Falk left alone with us fidgeted on his chair, sighed lightly, then at last, after drawing his hands down his face, got up, and as if renouncing the hope of making himself understood (he hadn't opened his mouth once) he said in English: "Well.... Good night, Captain Hermann." He stopped for a moment before my chair and looked down fixedly; I may even say he glared: and he went so far as to make a deep noise in his throat. There was in all this something so marked that for the first time in our limited intercourse of nods and grunts he excited in me something like interest. But next moment he disappointed me — for he strode away hastily without a nod even.

His manner was usually odd it is true, and I certainly did not pay much attention to it; but that sort of obscure intention, which seemed to lurk in his nonchalance like a wary old carp in a pond, had never before come so near the surface. He had distinctly aroused my expectations. I would have been unable to say what it was I expected, but at all events I did not expect the absurd developments he sprung upon me no later than the break of the very next day.

I remember only that there was, on that evening, enough point in his behaviour to make me, after he had fled, wonder audibly what he might mean. To this Hermann, crossing his legs with a swing and settling himself viciously away from me in his chair, said: "That fellow don't know himself what he means."

There might have been some insight in such a remark. I said nothing, and, still averted, he added: "When I was here last year he was just the same." An eruption of tobacco smoke enveloped his head as if his temper had exploded like gunpowder.

I had half a mind to ask him point blank whether he, at least, didn't know why Falk, a notoriously unsociable man, had taken to visiting his ship with such assiduity. After all, I reflected suddenly, it was a most remarkable thing. I wonder now what Hermann would have said. As it turned out he didn't let me ask. Forgetting all about Falk apparently, he started a monologue on his plans for the future: the selling of the ship, the going

home; and falling into a reflective and calculating mood he mumbled between regular jets of smoke about the expense. The necessity of disbursing passage money for all his tribe seemed to disturb him in a manner that was the more striking because otherwise he gave no signs of a miserly disposition. And yet he fussed over the prospect of that voyage home in a mail boat like a sedentary grocer who has made up his mind to see the world. He was racially thrifty I suppose, and for him there must have been a great novelty in finding himself obliged to pay for travelling — for sea travelling which was the normal state of life for the family — from the very cradle for most of them. I could see he grudged prospectively every single shilling which must be spent so absurdly. It was rather funny. He would become doleful over it, and then again, with a fretful sigh, he would suppose there was nothing for it now but to take three second-class tickets — and there were the four children to pay for besides. A lot of money that to spend at once. A big lot of money.

I sat with him listening (not for the first time) to these heart-searchings till I grew thoroughly sleepy, and then I left him and turned in on board my ship. At daylight I was awakened by a yelping of shrill voices, accompanied by a great commotion in the water, and the short, bullying blasts of a steam-whistle. Falk with his tug had come for me.

I began to dress. It was remarkable that the answering noise on board my ship together with the patter of feet above my head ceased suddenly. But I heard more remote guttural cries which seemed to express surprise and annoyance. Then the voice of my mate reached me howling expostulations to somebody at a distance. Other voices joined, apparently indignant; a chorus of something that sounded like abuse replied. Now and then the steam-whistle screeched.

Altogether that unnecessary uproar was distracting, but down there in my cabin I took it calmly. In another moment, I thought, I should be going down that wretched river, and in another week at the most I should be totally quit of the odious place and all the odious people in it.

Greatly cheered by the idea, I seized the hair-brushes and looking at myself in the glass began to use them. Suddenly a hush fell upon the noise outside, and I heard (the ports of my cabin were thrown open) — I heard a deep calm voice, not on board my ship, however, hailing resolutely in English, but with a strong foreign twang, “Go ahead!”

There may be tides in the affairs of men which taken at the flood... and so on. Personally I am still on the look out for that important turn. I am, however, afraid that most of us are fated to flounder for ever in the dead water of a pool whose shores are arid indeed. But I know that there are often in men's affairs unexpectedly — even irrationally — illuminating moments when an otherwise insignificant sound, perhaps only some perfectly commonplace gesture, suffices to reveal to us all the unreason, all the fatuous unreason, of our complacency. “Go ahead” are not particularly striking words even when pronounced with a foreign accent; yet they petrified me in the very act of smiling at myself in the glass. And then, refusing to believe my ears, but already boiling with indignation, I ran out of the cabin and up on deck.

It was incredibly true. It was perfectly true. I had no eyes for anything but the Diana. It was she, then, was being taken away. She was already out of her berth and shooting athwart the river. “The way this loonatic plucked that ship out is a caution,” said the awed voice of my mate close to my ear. “Hey! Hallo! Falk! Hermann! What’s this infernal trick?” I yelled in a fury.

Nobody heard me. Falk certainly could not hear me. His tug was turning at full speed away under the other bank. The wire hawser between her and the Diana, stretched as taut as a harp-string, vibrated alarmingly.

The high black craft careened over to the awful strain. A loud crack came out of her, followed by the tearing and splintering of wood. “There!” said the awed voice in my ear. “He’s carried away their towing chock.” And then, with enthusiasm, “Oh! Look! Look! sir, Look! at them Dutchmen skipping out of the way on the forecastle. I hope to goodness he’ll break a few of their shins before he’s done with ‘em.”

I yelled my vain protests. The rays of the rising sun coursing level along the plain warmed my back, but I was hot enough with rage. I could not have believed that a simple towing operation could suggest so plainly the idea of abduction, of rape. Falk was simply running off with the Diana.

The white tug careered out into the middle of the river. The red floats of her paddle-wheels revolving with mad rapidity tore up the whole reach into foam. The Diana in mid-stream waltzed round with as much grace as an old barn, and flew after her ravisher. Through the ragged fog of smoke driving headlong upon the water I had a glimpse of Falk’s square motionless shoulders under a white hat as big as a cart-wheel, of his red face, his yellow staring eyes, his great beard. Instead of keeping a lookout ahead, he

was deliberately turning his back on the river to glare at his tow. The tall heavy craft, never so used before in her life, seemed to have lost her senses; she took a wild sheer against her helm, and for a moment came straight at us, menacing and clumsy, like a runaway mountain. She piled up a streaming, hissing, boiling wave half-way up her blunt stem, my crew let out one great howl, — and then we held our breaths. It was a near thing. But Falk had her! He had her in his clutch. I fancied I could hear the steel hawser ping as it surged across the Diana's forecastle, with the hands on board of her bolting away from it in all directions. It was a near thing. Hermann, with his hair rumpled, in a snuffy flannel shirt and a pair of mustard-coloured trousers, had rushed to help with the wheel. I saw his terrified round face; I saw his very teeth uncovered by a sort of ghastly fixed grin; and in a great leaping tumult of water between the two ships the Diana whisked past so close that I could have flung a hair-brush at his head, for, it seems, I had kept them in my hands all the time. Meanwhile Mrs. Hermann sat placidly on the skylight, with a woollen shawl on her shoulders. The excellent woman in response to my indignant gesticulations fluttered a handkerchief, nodding and smiling in the kindest way imaginable. The boys, only half-dressed, were jumping about the poop in great glee, displaying their gaudy braces; and Lena in a short scarlet petticoat, with peaked elbows and thin bare arms, nursed the rag-doll with devotion. The whole family passed before my sight as if dragged across a scene of unparalleled violence. The last I saw was Hermann's niece with the baby Hermann in her arms standing apart from the others. Magnificent in her close-fitting print frock she displayed something so commanding in the manifest perfection of her figure that the sun seemed to be rising for her alone. The flood of light brought out the opulence of her form and the vigour of her youth in a glorifying way. She went by perfectly motionless and as if lost in meditation; only the hem of her skirt stirred in the draught; the sun rays broke on her sleek tawny hair; that bald-headed ruffian, Nicholas, was whacking her on the shoulder. I saw his tiny fat arm rise and fall in a workmanlike manner. And then the four cottage windows of the Diana came into view retreating swiftly down the river. The sashes were up, and one of the white calico curtains was fluttered straight out like a streamer above the agitated water of the wake.

To be thus tricked out of one's turn was an unheard of occurrence. In my agent's office, where I went to complain at once, they protested with



apologies they couldn't understand how the mistake arose: but Schomberg when I dropped in later to get some tiffin, though surprised to see me, was perfectly ready with an explanation. I found him seated at the end of a long narrow table, facing his wife — a scraggy little woman, with long ringlets and a blue tooth, who smiled abroad stupidly and looked frightened when you spoke to her. Between them a waggling punkah fanned twenty cane-bottomed chairs and two rows of shiny plates. Three Chinamen in white jackets loafed with napkins in their hands around that desolation. Schomberg's pet table d'hote was not much of a success that day. He was feeding himself ferociously and seemed to overflow with bitterness.

He began by ordering in a brutal voice the chops to be brought back for me, and turning in his chair: "Mistake they told you? Not a bit of it! Don't you believe it for a moment, captain! Falk isn't a man to make mistakes unless on purpose." His firm conviction was that Falk had been trying all along to curry favour on the cheap with Hermann. "On the cheap — mind you! It doesn't cost him a cent to put that insult upon you, and Captain Hermann gets in a day ahead of your ship. Time's money! Eh? You are very friendly with Captain Hermann I believe, but a man is bound to be pleased at any little advantage he may get. Captain Hermann is a good business man, and there's no such thing as a friend in business. Is there?" He leaned forward and began to cast stealthy glances as usual. "But Falk is, and always was, a miserable fellow. I would despise him."

I muttered, grumpily, that I had no particular respect for Falk.

"I would despise him," he insisted, with an appearance of anxiety which would have amused me if I had not been fathoms deep in discontent. To a young man fairly conscientious and as well-meaning as only the young man can be, the current ill-usage of life comes with a peculiar cruelty. Youth that is fresh enough to believe in guilt, in innocence, and in itself, will always doubt whether it have not perchance deserved its fate. Sombre of mind and without appetite, I struggled with the chop while Mrs. Schomberg sat with her everlasting stupid grin and Schomberg's talk gathered way like a slide of rubbish.

"Let me tell you. It's all about that girl. I don't know what Captain Hermann expects, but if he asked me I could tell him something about Falk. He's a miserable fellow. That man is a perfect slave. That's what I call him. A slave. Last year I started this table d'hote, and sent cards out — you know. You think he had one meal in the house? Give the thing a trial? Not

once. He has got hold now of a Madras cook — a blamed fraud that I hunted out of my cookhouse with a rattan. He was not fit to cook for white men. No, not for the white men's dogs either; but, see, any damned native that can boil a pot of rice is good enough for Mr. Falk. Rice and a little fish he buys for a few cents from the fishing boats outside is what he lives on. You would hardly credit it — eh? A white man, too....”

He wiped his lips, using the napkin with indignation, and looking at me. It flashed through my mind in the midst of my depression that if all the meat in the town was like these table d'hôte chops, Falk wasn't so far wrong. I was on the point of saying this, but Schomberg's stare was intimidating. “He's a vegetarian, perhaps,” I murmured instead.

“He's a miser. A miserable miser,” affirmed the hotel-keeper with great force. “The meat here is not so good as at home — of course. And dear too. But look at me. I only charge a dollar for the tiffin, and one dollar and fifty cents for the dinner. Show me anything cheaper. Why am I doing it? There's little profit in this game. Falk wouldn't look at it. I do it for the sake of a lot of young white fellows here that hadn't a place where they could get a decent meal and eat it decently in good company. There's first-rate company always at my table.”

The convinced way he surveyed the empty chairs made me feel as if I had intruded upon a tiffin of ghostly Presences.

“A white man should eat like a white man, dash it all,” he burst out impetuously. “Ought to eat meat, must eat meat. I manage to get meat for my patrons all the year round. Don't I? I am not catering for a dam' lot of coolies: Have another chop captain.... No? You, boy — take away!”

He threw himself back and waited grimly for the curry. The half-closed jalousies darkened the room pervaded by the smell of fresh whitewash: a swarm of flies buzzed and settled in turns, and poor Mrs. Schomberg's smile seemed to express the quintessence of all the imbecility that had ever spoken, had ever breathed, had ever been fed on infamous buffalo meat within these bare walls. Schomberg did not open his lips till he was ready to thrust therein a spoonful of greasy rice. He rolled his eyes ridiculously before he swallowed the hot stuff, and only then broke out afresh.

“It is the most degrading thing. They take the dish up to the wheelhouse for him with a cover on it, and he shuts both the doors before he begins to eat. Fact! Must be ashamed of himself. Ask the engineer. He can't do without an engineer — don't you see — and as no respectable man can be

expected to put up with such a table, he allows them fifteen dollars a month extra mess money. I assure you it is so! You just ask Mr. Ferdinand da Costa. That's the engineer he has now. You may have seen him about my place, a delicate dark young man, with very fine eyes and a little moustache. He arrived here a year ago from Calcutta. Between you and me, I guess the money-lenders there must have been after him. He rushes here for a meal every chance he can get, for just please tell me what satisfaction is that for a well-educated young fellow to feed all alone in his cabin — like a wild beast? That's what Falk expects his engineers to put up with for fifteen dollars extra. And the rows on board every time a little smell of cooking gets about the deck! You wouldn't believe! The other day da Costa got the cook to fry a steak for him — a turtle steak it was too, not beef at all — and the fat caught or something. Young da Costa himself was telling me of it here in this room. 'Mr. Schomberg' — says he-'if I had let a cylinder cover blow off through the skylight by my negligence Captain Falk couldn't have been more savage. He frightened the cook so that he won't put anything on the fire for me now.' Poor da Costa had tears in his eyes. Only try to put yourself in his place, captain: a sensitive, gentlemanly young fellow. Is he expected to eat his food raw? But that's your Falk all over. Ask any one you like. I suppose the fifteen dollars extra he has to give keep on rankling — in there."

And Schomberg tapped his manly breast. I sat half stunned by his irrelevant babble. Suddenly he gripped my forearm in an impressive and cautious manner, as if to lead me into a very cavern of confidence.

"It's nothing but enviousness," he said in a lowered tone, which had a stimulating effect upon my wearied hearing. "I don't suppose there is one person in this town that he isn't envious of. I tell you he's dangerous. Even I myself am not safe from him. I know for certain he tried to poison...."

"Oh, come now," I cried, revolted.

"But I know for certain. The people themselves came and told me of it. He went about saying everywhere I was a worse pest to this town than the cholera. He had been talking against me ever since I opened this hotel. And he poisoned Captain Hermann's mind too. Last time the Diana was loading here Captain Hermann used to come in every day for a drink or a cigar. This time he hasn't been here twice in a week. How do you account for that?"

He squeezed my arm till he extorted from me some sort of mumble.

“He makes ten times the money I do. I’ve another hotel to fight against, and there is no other tug on the river. I am not in his way, am I? He wouldn’t be fit to run an hotel if he tried. But that’s just his nature. He can’t bear to think I am making a living. I only hope it makes him properly wretched. He’s like that in everything. He would like to keep a decent table well enough. But no — for the sake of a few cents. Can’t do it. It’s too much for him. That’s what I call being a slave to it. But he’s mean enough to kick up a row when his nose gets tickled a bit. See that? That just paints him. Miserly and envious. You can’t account for it any other way. Can you? I have been studying him these three years.”

He was anxious I should assent to his theory. And indeed on thinking it over it would have been plausible enough if there hadn’t been always the essential falseness of irresponsibility in Schomberg’s chatter. However, I was not disposed to investigate the psychology of Falk. I was engaged just then in eating despondently a piece of stale Dutch cheese, being too much crushed to care what I swallowed myself, let alone bothering my head about Falk’s ideas of gastronomy. I could expect from their study no clue to his conduct in matters of business, which seemed to me totally unrestrained by morality or even by the commonest sort of decency. How insignificant and contemptible I must appear, for the fellow to dare treat me like this — I reflected suddenly, writhing in silent agony. And I consigned Falk and all his peculiarities to the devil with so much mental fervour as to forget Schomberg’s existence, till he grabbed my arm urgently. “Well, you may think and think till every hair of your head falls off, captain; but you can’t explain it in any other way.”

For the sake of peace and quietness I admitted hurriedly that I couldn’t: persuaded that now he would leave off. But the only result was to make his moist face shine with the pride of cunning. He removed his hand for a moment to scare a black mass of flies off the sugar-basin and caught hold of my arm again.

“To be sure. And in the same way everybody is aware he would like to get married. Only he can’t. Let me quote you an instance. Well, two years ago a Miss Vanlo, a very ladylike girl, came from home to keep house for her brother, Fred, who had an engineering shop for small repairs by the water side. Suddenly Falk takes to going up to their bungalow after dinner, and sitting for hours in the verandah saying nothing. The poor girl couldn’t tell for the life of her what to do with such a man, so she would keep on

playing the piano and singing to him evening after evening till she was ready to drop. And it wasn't as if she had been a strong young woman either. She was thirty, and the climate had been playing the deuce with her. Then — don't you know — Fred had to sit up with them for propriety, and during whole weeks on end never got a single chance to get to bed before midnight. That was not pleasant for a tired man — was it? And besides Fred had worries then because his shop didn't pay and he was dropping money fast. He just longed to get away from here and try his luck somewhere else, but for the sake of his sister he hung on and on till he ran himself into debt over his ears — I can tell you. I, myself, could show a handful of his chits for meals and drinks in my drawer. I could never find out tho' where he found all the money at last. Can't be but he must have got something out of that brother of his, a coal merchant in Port Said. Anyhow he paid everybody before he left, but the girl nearly broke her heart. Disappointment, of course, and at her age, don't you know.... Mrs. Schomberg here was very friendly with her, and she could tell you. Awful despair. Fainting fits. It was a scandal. A notorious scandal. To that extent that old Mr. Siegers — not your present charterer, but Mr. Siegers the father, the old gentleman who retired from business on a fortune and got buried at sea going home, he had to interview Falk in his private office. He was a man who could speak like a Dutch Uncle, and, besides, Messrs. Siegers had been helping Falk with a good bit of money from the start. In fact you may say they made him as far as that goes. It so happened that just at the time he turned up here, their firm was chartering a lot of sailing ships every year, and it suited their business that there should be good towing facilities on the river. See?... Well — there's always an ear at the keyhole — isn't there? In fact," he lowered his tone confidentially, "in this case a good friend of mine; a man you can see here any evening; only they conversed rather low. Anyhow my friend's certain that Falk was trying to make all sorts of excuses, and old Mr. Siegers was coughing a lot. And yet Falk wanted all the time to be married too. Why! It's notorious the man has been longing for years to make a home for himself. Only he can't face the expense. When it comes to putting his hand in his pocket — it chokes him off. That's the truth and no other. I've always said so, and everybody agrees with me by this time. What do you think of that — eh?"

He appealed confidently to my indignation, but having a mind to annoy him I remarked, "that it seemed to me very pitiful — if true."

He bounced in his chair as if I had run a pin into him. I don't know what he might have said, only at that moment we heard through the half open door of the billiard-room the footsteps of two men entering from the verandah, a murmur of two voices; at the sharp tapping of a coin on a table Mrs. Schomberg half rose irresolutely. "Sit still," he hissed at her, and then, in an hospitable, jovial tone, contrasting amazingly with the angry glance that had made his wife sink in her chair, he cried very loud: "Tiffin still going on in here, gentlemen."

There was no answer, but the voices dropped suddenly. The head Chinaman went out. We heard the clink of ice in the glasses, pouring sounds, the shuffling of feet, the scraping of chairs. Schomberg, after wondering in a low mutter who the devil could be there at this time of the day, got up napkin in hand to peep through the doorway cautiously. He retreated rapidly on tip-toe, and whispering behind his hand informed me that it was Falk, Falk himself who was in there, and, what's more, he had Captain Hermann with him.

The return of the tug from the outer Roads was unexpected but possible, for Falk had taken away the Diana at half-past five, and it was now two o'clock. Schomberg wished me to observe that neither of these men would spend a dollar on a tiffin, which they must have wanted. But by the time I was ready to leave the dining-room Falk had gone. I heard the last of his big boots on the planks of the verandah. Hermann was sitting quite alone in the large, wooden room with the two lifeless billiard tables shrouded in striped covers, mopping his face diligently. He wore his best go-ashore clothes, a stiff collar, black coat, large white waistcoat, grey trousers. A white cotton sunshade with a cane handle reposed between his legs, his side whiskers were neatly brushed, his chin had been freshly shaved; and he only distantly resembled the dishevelled and terrified man in a snuffy night shirt and ignoble old trousers I had seen in the morning hanging on to the wheel of the Diana.

He gave a start at my entrance, and addressed me at once in some confusion, but with genuine eagerness. He was anxious to make it clear he had nothing to do with what he called the "tam pizness" of the morning. It was most inconvenient. He had reckoned upon another day up in town to settle his bills and sign certain papers. There were also some few stores to come, and sundry pieces of "my ironwork," as he called it quaintly, landed for repairs, had been left behind. Now he would have to hire a native boat to

take all this out to the ship. It would cost five or six dollars perhaps. He had had no warning from Falk. Nothing.... He hit the table with his dumpy fist.... Der verfluchte Kerl came in the morning like a “tam’ ropper,” making a great noise, and took him away. His mate was not prepared, his ship was moored fast — he protested it was shameful to come upon a man in that way. Shameful! Yet such was the power Falk had on the river that when I suggested in a chilling tone that he might have simply refused to have his ship moved, Hermann was quite startled at the idea. I never realised so well before that this is an age of steam. The exclusive possession of a marine boiler had given Falk the whip-hand of us all. Hermann, recovering, put it to me appealingly that I knew very well how unsafe it was to contradict that fellow. At this I only smiled distantly.

“Der Kerl!” he cried. He was sorry he had not refused. He was indeed. The damage! The damage! What for all that damage! There was no occasion for damage. Did I know how much damage he had done? It gave me a certain satisfaction to tell him that I had heard his old waggon of a ship crack fore and aft as she went by. “You passed close enough to me,” I added significantly.

He threw both his hands up to heaven at the recollection. One of them grasped by the middle the white parasol, and he resembled curiously a caricature of a shop-keeping citizen in one of his own German comic papers. “Ach! That was dangerous,” he cried. I was amused. But directly he added with an appearance of simplicity, “The side of your iron ship would have been crushed in like — like this matchbox.”

“Would it?” I growled, much less amused now; but by the time I had decided that this remark was not meant for a dig at me he had worked himself into a high state of resentment against Falk. The inconvenience, the damage, the expense! Gottferdam! Devil take the fellow. Behind the bar Schomberg with a cigar in his teeth, pretended to be writing with a pencil on a large sheet of paper; and as Hermann’s excitement increased it made me comfortingly aware of my own calmness and superiority. But it occurred to me while I listened to his revilings, that after all the good man had come up in the tug. There perhaps — since he must come to town — he had no option. But evidently he had had a drink with Falk, either accepted or offered. How was that? So I checked him by saying loftily that I hoped he would make Falk pay for every penny of the damage.

“That’s it! That’s it! Go for him,” called out Schomberg from the bar, flinging his pencil down and rubbing his hands.

We ignored his noise. But Hermann’s excitement suddenly went off the boil as when you remove a saucepan from the fire. I urged on his consideration that he had done now with Falk and Falk’s confounded tug. He, Hermann, would not, perhaps, turn up again in this part of the world for years to come, since he was going to sell the Diana at the end of this very trip (“Go home passenger in a mail boat,” he murmured mechanically). He was therefore safe from Falk’s malice. All he had to do was to race off to his consignees and stop payment of the towage bill before Falk had the time to get in and lift the money.

Nothing could have been less in the spirit of my advice than the thoughtful way in which he set about to make his parasol stay propped against the edge of the table.

While I watched his concentrated efforts with astonishment he threw at me one or two perplexed, half-shy glances. Then he sat down. “That’s all very well,” he said reflectively.

It cannot be doubted that the man had been thrown off his balance by being hauled out of the harbour against his wish. His stolidity had been profoundly stirred, else he would never have made up his mind to ask me unexpectedly whether I had not remarked that Falk had been casting eyes upon his niece. “No more than myself,” I answered with literal truth. The girl was of the sort one necessarily casts eyes at in a sense. She made no noise, but she filled most satisfactorily a good bit of space.

“But you, captain, are not the same kind of man,” observed Hermann.

I was not, I am happy to say, in a position to deny this. “What about the lady?” I could not help asking. At this he gazed for a time into my face, earnestly, and made as if to change the subject. I heard him beginning to mutter something unexpected, about his children growing old enough to require schooling. He would have to leave them ashore with their grandmother when he took up that new command he expected to get in Germany.

This constant harping on his domestic arrangements was funny. I suppose it must have been like the prospect of a complete alteration in his life. An epoch. He was going, too, to part with the Diana! He had served in her for years. He had inherited her. From an uncle, if I remember rightly. And the future loomed big before him, occupying his thought exclusively with all its



aspects as on the eve of a venturesome enterprise. He sat there frowning and biting his lip, and suddenly he began to fume and fret.

I discovered to my momentary amusement that he seemed to imagine I could, should or ought, have caused Falk in some way to pronounce himself. Such a hope was incomprehensible, but funny. Then the contact with all this foolishness irritated me. I said crossly that I had seen no symptoms, but if there were any — since he, Hermann, was so sure — then it was still worse. What pleasure Falk found in humbugging people in just that way I couldn't say. It was, however, my solemn duty to warn him. It had lately, I said, come to my knowledge that there was a man (not a very long time ago either) who had been taken in just like this.

All this passed in undertones, and at this point Schomberg, exasperated at our secrecy, went out of the room slamming the door with a crash that positively lifted us in our chairs. This, or else what I had said, huffed my Hermann. He supposed, with a contemptuous toss of his head towards the door which trembled yet, that I had got hold of some of that man's silly tales. It looked, indeed, as though his mind had been thoroughly poisoned against Schomberg. "His tales were — they were," he repeated, seeking for the word — "trash." They were trash, he reiterated, and moreover I was young yet...

This horrid aspersion (I regret I am no longer exposed to that sort of insult) made me huffy too. I felt ready in my own mind to back up every assertion of Schomberg's and on any subject. In a moment, devil only knows why, Hermann and I were looking at each other most inimically. He caught up his hat without more ado and I gave myself the pleasure of calling after him:

"Take my advice and make Falk pay for breaking up your ship. You aren't likely to get anything else out of him."

When I got on board my ship later on, the old mate, who was very full of the events of the morning, remarked:

"I saw the tug coming back from the outer Roads just before two P.M." (He never by any chance used the words morning or afternoon. Always P.M. or A.M., log-book style.) "Smart work that. Man's always in a state of hurry. He's a regular chucker-out, ain't he, sir? There's a few pubs I know of in the East-end of London that would be all the better for one of his sort around the bar." He chuckled at his joke. "A regular chucker-out. Now he

has fired out that Dutchman head over heels, I suppose our turn's coming to-morrow morning."

We were all on deck at break of day (even the sick — poor devils — had crawled out) ready to cast off in the twinkling of an eye. Nothing came. Falk did not come. At last, when I began to think that probably something had gone wrong in his engine-room, we perceived the tug going by, full pelt, down the river, as if we hadn't existed. For a moment I entertained the wild notion that he was going to turn round in the next reach. Afterwards I watched his smoke appear above the plain, now here, now there, according to the windings of the river. It disappeared. Then without a word I went down to breakfast. I just simply went down to breakfast.

Not one of us uttered a sound till the mate, after imbibing — by means of suction out of a saucer — his second cup of tea, exclaimed: "Where the devil is the man gone to?"

"Courting!" I shouted, with such a fiendish laugh that the old chap didn't venture to open his lips any more.

I started to the office perfectly calm. Calm with excessive rage. Evidently they knew all about it already, and they treated me to a show of consternation. The manager, a soft-footed, immensely obese man, breathing short, got up to meet me, while all round the room the young clerks, bending over the papers on their desks, cast upward glances in my direction. The fat man, without waiting for my complaint, wheezing heavily and in a tone as if he himself were incredulous, conveyed to me the news that Falk — Captain Falk — had declined — had absolutely declined — to tow my ship — to have anything to do with my ship — this day or any other day. Never!

I did my best to preserve a cool appearance, but, all the same, I must have shown how much taken aback I was. We were talking in the middle of the room. Suddenly behind my back some ass blew his nose with great force, and at the same time another quill-driver jumped up and went out on the landing hastily. It occurred to me I was cutting a foolish figure there. I demanded angrily to see the principal in his private room.

The skin of Mr. Siegers' head showed dead white between the iron grey streaks of hair lying plastered cross-wise from ear to ear over the top of his skull in the manner of a bandage. His narrow sunken face was of an uniform and permanent terra-cotta colour, like a piece of pottery. He was sickly, thin, and short, with wrists like a boy of ten. But from that debile

body there issued a bullying voice, tremendously loud, harsh and resonant, as if produced by some powerful mechanical contrivance in the nature of a fog-horn. I do not know what he did with it in the private life of his home, but in the larger sphere of business it presented the advantage of overcoming arguments without the slightest mental effort, by the mere volume of sound. We had had several passages of arms. It took me all I knew to guard the interests of my owners — whom, nota bene, I had never seen — while Siegers (who had made their acquaintance some years before, during a business tour in Australia) pretended to the knowledge of their innermost minds, and, in the character of “our very good friends,” threw them perpetually at my head.

He looked at me with a jaundiced eye (there was no love lost between us), and declared at once that it was strange, very strange. His pronunciation of English was so extravagant that I can’t even attempt to reproduce it. For instance, he said “Fferie strantch.” Combined with the bellowing intonation it made the language of one’s childhood sound weirdly startling, and even if considered purely as a kind of unmeaning noise it filled you with astonishment at first. “They had,” he continued, “been acquainted with Captain Falk for very many years, and never had any reason....”

“That’s why I come to you, of course,” I interrupted. “I’ve the right to know the meaning of this infernal nonsense.” In the half light of the room, which was greenish, because of the tree-tops screening the window, I saw him writhe his meagre shoulders. It came into my head, as disconnected ideas will come at all sorts of times into one’s head, that this, most likely, was the very room where, if the tale were true, Falk had been lectured by Mr. Siegers, the father. Mr. Siegers’ (the son’s) overwhelming voice, in brassy blasts, as though he had been trying to articulate his words through a trombone, was expressing his great regret at a conduct characterised by a very marked want of discretion... As I lived I was being lectured too! His deafening gibberish was difficult to follow, but it was my conduct — mine! — that... Damn! I wasn’t going to stand this.

“What on earth are you driving at?” I asked in a passion. I put my hat on my head (he never offered a seat to anybody), and as he seemed for the moment struck dumb by my irreverence, I turned my back on him and marched out. His vocal arrangements blared after me a few threats of coming down on the ship for the demurrage of the lighters, and all the other expenses consequent upon the delays arising from my frivolity.

Once outside in the sunshine my head swam. It was no longer a question of mere delay. I perceived myself involved in hopeless and humiliating absurdities that were leading me to something very like a disaster. "Let us be calm," I muttered to myself, and ran into the shade of a leprous wall. From that short side-street I could see the broad main thoroughfare ruinous and gay, running away, away between stretches of decaying masonry, bamboo fences, ranges of arcades of brick and plaster, hovels of lath and mud, lofty temple gates of carved timber, huts of rotten mats — an immensely wide thoroughfare, loosely packed as far as the eye could reach with a barefooted and brown multitude paddling ankle deep in the dust. For a moment I felt myself about to go out of my mind with worry and desperation.

Some allowance must be made for the feelings of a young man new to responsibility. I thought of my crew. Half of them were ill, and I really began to think that some of them would end by dying on board if I couldn't get them out to sea soon. Obviously I should have to take my ship down the river, either working under canvas or dredging with the anchor down; operations which, in common with many modern sailors, I only knew theoretically. And I almost shrank from undertaking them shorthanded and without local knowledge of the river bed, which is so necessary for the confident handling of the ship. There were no pilots, no beacons, no buoys of any sort; but there was a very devil of a current for anybody to see, no end of shoal places, and at least two obviously awkward turns of the channel between me and the sea. But how dangerous these turns were I would not tell. I didn't even know what my ship was capable of! I had never handled her in my life. A misunderstanding between a man and his ship in a difficult river with no room to make it up, is bound to end in trouble for the man. On the other hand, it must be owned I had not much reason to count upon a general run of good luck. And suppose I had the misfortune to pile her up high and dry on some beastly shoal? That would have been the final undoing of that voyage. It was plain that if Falk refused to tow me out he would also refuse to pull me off. This meant — what? A day lost at the very best; but more likely a whole fortnight of frizzling on some pestilential mud-flat, of desperate work, of discharging cargo; more than likely it meant borrowing money at an exorbitant rate of interest — from the Siegers' gang too at that. They were a power in the port. And that elderly seaman of mine, Gambril, had looked pretty ghastly when I went forward to dose him with

quinine that morning. He would certainly die — not to speak of two or three others that seemed nearly as bad, and of the rest of them just ready to catch any tropical disease going. Horror, ruin and everlasting remorse. And no help. None. I had fallen amongst a lot of unfriendly lunatics!

At any rate, if I must take my ship down myself it was my duty to procure if possible some local knowledge. But that was not easy. The only person I could think of for that service was a certain Johnson, formerly captain of a country ship, but now spliced to a country wife and gone utterly to the bad. I had only heard of him in the vaguest way, as living concealed in the thick of two hundred thousand natives, and only emerging into the light of day for the purpose of hunting up some brandy. I had a notion that if I could lay my hands on him I would sober him on board my ship and use him for a pilot. Better than nothing. Once a sailor always a sailor — and he had known the river for years. But in our Consulate (where I arrived dripping after a sharp walk) they could tell me nothing. The excellent young men on the staff, though willing to help me, belonged to a sphere of the white colony for which that sort of Johnson does not exist. Their suggestion was that I should hunt the man up myself with the help of the Consulate's constable — an ex-sergeant-major of a regiment of Hussars.

This man, whose usual duty apparently consisted in sitting behind a little table in an outer room of Consular offices, when ordered to assist me in my search for Johnson displayed lots of energy and a marvellous amount of local knowledge of a sort. But he did not conceal an immense and sceptical contempt for the whole business. We explored together on that afternoon an infinity of infamous grog shops, gambling dens, opium dens. We walked up narrow lanes where our gharry — a tiny box of a thing on wheels, attached to a jibbing Burmah pony — could by no means have passed. The constable seemed to be on terms of scornful intimacy with Maltese, with Eurasians, with Chinamen, with Klings, and with the sweepers attached to a temple, with whom he talked at the gate. We interviewed also through a grating in a mud wall closing a blind alley an immensely corpulent Italian, who, the ex-sergeant-major remarked to me perfunctorily, had “killed another man last year.” Thereupon he addressed him as “Antonio” and “Old Buck,” though that bloated carcase, apparently more than half filling the sort of cell wherein it sat, recalled rather a fat pig in a sty. Familiar and never unbending, the sergeant chuckled — absolutely chuckled — under the chin a horribly wrinkled and shrivelled old hag propped on a stick, who had

volunteered some sort of information: and with the same stolid face he kept up an animated conversation with the groups of swathed brown women, who sat smoking cheroots on the door-steps of a long range of clay hovels. We got out of the gharry and clambered into dwellings airy like packing crates, or descended into places sinister like cellars. We got in, we drove on, we got out again for the sole purpose, as it seemed, of looking behind a heap of rubble. The sun declined; my companion was curt and sardonic in his answers, but it appears we were just missing Johnson all along. At last our conveyance stopped once more with a jerk, and the driver jumping down opened the door.

A black mudhole blocked the lane. A mound of garbage crowned with the dead body of a dog arrested us not. An empty Australian beef tin bounded cheerily before the toe of my boot. Suddenly we clambered through a gap in a prickly fence....

It was a very clean native compound: and the big native woman, with bare brown legs as thick as bedposts, pursuing on all fours a silver dollar that came rolling out from somewhere, was Mrs. Johnson herself. "Your man's at home," said the ex-sergeant, and stepped aside in complete and marked indifference to anything that might follow. Johnson — at home — stood with his back to a native house built on posts and with its walls made of mats. In his left hand he held a banana. Out of the right he dealt another dollar into space. The woman captured this one on the wing, and there and then plumped down on the ground to look at us with greater comfort.

My man was sallow of face, grizzled, unshaven, muddy on elbows and back; where the seams of his serge coat yawned you could see his white nakedness. The vestiges of a paper collar encircled his neck. He looked at us with a grave, swaying surprise. "Where do you come from?" he asked. My heart sank. How could I have been stupid enough to waste energy and time for this?

But having already gone so far I approached a little nearer and declared the purpose of my visit. He would have to come at once with me, sleep on board my ship, and to-morrow, with the first of the ebb, he would give me his assistance in getting my ship down to the sea, without steam. A six-hundred-ton barque, drawing nine feet aft. I proposed to give him eighteen dollars for his local knowledge; and all the time I was speaking he kept on considering attentively the various aspects of the banana, holding first one side up to his eye, then the other.

“You’ve forgotten to apologise,” he said at last with extreme precision. “Not being a gentleman yourself, you don’t know apparently when you intrude upon a gentleman. I am one. I wish you to understand that when I am in funds I don’t work, and now...”

I would have pronounced him perfectly sober hadn’t he paused in great concern to try and brush a hole off the knee of his trousers.

“I have money — and friends. Every gentleman has. Perhaps you would like to know my friend? His name is Falk. You could borrow some money. Try to remember. F-A-L-K, Falk.” Abruptly his tone changed. “A noble heart,” he said muzzily.

“Has Falk been giving you some money?” I asked, appalled by the detailed finish of the dark plot.

“Lent me, my good man, not given me. Lent,” he corrected suavely. “Met me taking the air last evening, and being as usual anxious to oblige — Hadn’t you better go to the devil out of my compound?”

And upon this, without other warning, he let fly with the banana which missed my head, and took the constable just under the left eye. He rushed at the miserable Johnson, stammering with fury. They fell.... But why dwell on the wretchedness, the breathlessness, the degradation, the senselessness, the weariness, the ridicule and humiliation and — and — the perspiration, of these moments? I dragged the ex-hussar off. He was like a wild beast. It seems he had been greatly annoyed at losing his free afternoon on my account. The garden of his bungalow required his personal attention, and at the slight blow of the banana the brute in him had broken loose. We left Johnson on his back, still black in the face, but beginning to kick feebly. Meantime, the big woman had remained sitting on the ground, apparently paralysed with extreme terror.

For half an hour we jolted inside our rolling box, side by side, in profound silence. The ex-sergeant was busy staunching the blood of a long scratch on his cheek. “I hope you’re satisfied,” he said suddenly. “That’s what comes of all that tomfool business. If you hadn’t quarrelled with that tugboat skipper over some girl or other, all this wouldn’t have happened.”

“You heard that story?” I said.

“Of course I heard. And I shouldn’t wonder if the Consul-General himself doesn’t come to hear of it. How am I to go before him to-morrow with that thing on my cheek — I want to know. Its you who ought to have got this!”

After that, till the gharry stopped and he jumped out without leave-taking, he swore to himself steadily, horribly; muttering great, purposeful, trooper oaths, to which the worst a sailor can do is like the prattle of a child. For my part I had just the strength to crawl into Schomberg's coffee-room, where I wrote at a little table a note to the mate instructing him to get everything ready for dropping down the river next day. I couldn't face my ship. Well! she had a clever sort of skipper and no mistake — poor thing! What a horrid mess! I took my head between my hands. At times the obviousness of my innocence would reduce me to despair. What had I done? If I had done something to bring about the situation I should at least have learned not to do it again. But I felt guiltless to the point of imbecility. The room was empty yet; only Schomberg prowled round me goggle-eyed and with a sort of awed respectful curiosity. No doubt he had set the story going himself; but he was a good-hearted chap, and I am really persuaded he participated in all my troubles. He did what he could for me. He ranged aside the heavy match-stand, set a chair straight, pushed a spittoon slightly with his foot — as you show small attentions to a friend under a great sorrow — sighed, and at last, unable to hold his tongue:

“Well! I warned you, captain. That's what comes of running your head against Mr. Falk. Man'll stick at nothing.”

I sat without stirring, and after surveying me with a sort of commiseration in his eyes he burst out in a hoarse whisper: “But for a fine lump of a girl, she's a fine lump of a girl.” He made a loud smacking noise with his thick lips. “The finest lump of a girl that I ever...” he was going on with great unction, but for some reason or other broke off. I fancied myself throwing something at his head. “I don't blame you, captain. Hang me if I do,” he said with a patronising air.

“Thank you,” I said resignedly. It was no use fighting against this false fate. I don't know even if I was sure myself where the truth of the matter began. The conviction that it would end disastrously had been driven into me by all the successive shocks my sense of security had received. I began to ascribe an extraordinary potency to agents in themselves powerless. It was as if Schomberg's baseless gossip had the power to bring about the thing itself or the abstract enmity of Falk could put my ship ashore.

I have already explained how fatal this last would have been. For my further action, my youth, my inexperience, my very real concern for the health of my crew must be my excuse. The action itself, when it came, was



purely impulsive. It was set in movement quite undiplomatically and simply by Falk's appearance in the doorway.

The room was full by then and buzzing with voices. I had been looked at with curiosity by every one, but how am I to describe the sensation produced by the appearance of Falk himself blocking the doorway? The tension of expectation could be measured by the profundity of the silence that fell upon the very click of the billiard balls. As to Schomberg, he looked extremely frightened; he hated mortally any sort of row (fracas he called it) in his establishment. Fracas was bad for business, he affirmed; but, in truth, this specimen of portly, middle-aged manhood was of a timid disposition. I don't know what, considering my presence in the place, they all hoped would come of it. A sort of stag fight, perhaps. Or they may have supposed Falk had come in only to annihilate me completely. As a matter of fact, Falk had come in because Hermann had asked him to inquire after the precious white cotton parasol which, in the worry and excitement of the previous day, he had forgotten at the table where we had held our little discussion.

It was this that gave me my opportunity. I don't think I would have gone to seek Falk out. No. I don't think so. There are limits. But there was an opportunity and I seized it — I have already tried to explain why. Now I will merely state that, in my opinion, to get his sickly crew into the sea air and secure a quick despatch for his ship a skipper would be justified in going to any length, short of absolute crime. He should put his pride in his pocket; he may accept confidences; explain his innocence as if it were a sin; he may take advantage of misconceptions, of desires and of weaknesses; he ought to conceal his horror and other emotions, and, if the fate of a human being, and that human being a magnificent young girl, is strangely involved — why, he should contemplate that fate (whatever it might seem to be) without turning a hair. And all these things I have done; the explaining, the listening, the pretending — even to the discretion — and nobody, not even Hermann's niece, I believe, need throw stones at me now. Schomberg at all events needn't, since from first to last, I am happy to say, there was not the slightest "fracas."

Overcoming a nervous contraction of the windpipe, I had managed to exclaim "Captain Falk!" His start of surprise was perfectly genuine, but afterwards he neither smiled nor scowled. He simply waited. Then, when I had said, "I must have a talk with you," and had pointed to a chair at my

table, he moved up to me, though he didn't sit down. Schomberg, however, with a long tumbler in his hand, was making towards us prudently, and I discovered then the only sign of weakness in Falk. He had for Schomberg a repulsion resembling that sort of physical fear some people experience at the sight of a toad. Perhaps to a man so essentially and silently concentrated upon himself (though he could talk well enough, as I was to find out presently) the other's irrepressible loquacity, embracing every human being within range of the tongue, might have appeared unnatural, disgusting, and monstrous. He suddenly gave signs of restiveness — positively like a horse about to rear, and, muttering hurriedly as if in great pain, "No. I can't stand that fellow," seemed ready to bolt. This weakness of his gave me the advantage at the very start. "Verandah," I suggested, as if rendering him a service, and walked him out by the arm. We stumbled over a few chairs; we had the feeling of open space before us, and felt the fresh breath of the river — fresh, but tainted. The Chinese theatres across the water made, in the sparsely twinkling masses of gloom an Eastern town presents at night, blazing centres of light, and of a distant and howling uproar. I felt him become suddenly tractable again like an animal, like a good-tempered horse when the object that scares him is removed. Yes. I felt in the darkness there how tractable he was, without my conviction of his inflexibility — tenacity, rather, perhaps — being in the least weakened. His very arm abandoning itself to my grasp was as hard as marble — like a limb of iron. But I heard a tumultuous scuffling of boot-soles within. The unspeakable idiots inside were crowding to the windows, climbing over each other's backs behind the blinds, billiard cues and all. Somebody broke a window pane, and with the sound of falling glass, so suggestive of riot and devastation, Schomberg reeled out after us in a state of funk which had prevented his parting with his brandy and soda. He must have trembled like an aspen leaf. The piece of ice in the long tumbler he held in his hand tinkled with an effect of chattering teeth. "I beg you, gentlemen," he expostulated thickly. "Come! Really, now, I must insist..."

How proud I am of my presence of mind! "Hallo," I said instantly in a loud and naive tone, "somebody's breaking your windows, Schomberg. Would you please tell one of your boys to bring out here a pack of cards and a couple of lights? And two long drinks. Will you?"

To receive an order soothed him at once. It was business. "Certainly," he said in an immensely relieved tone. The night was rainy, with wandering

gusts of wind, and while we waited for the candles Falk said, as if to justify his panic, "I don't interfere in anybody's business. I don't give any occasion for talk. I am a respectable man. But this fellow is always making out something wrong, and can never rest till he gets somebody to believe him."

This was the first of my knowledge of Falk. This desire of respectability, of being like everybody else, was the only recognition he vouchsafed to the organisation of mankind. For the rest he might have been the member of a herd, not of a society. Self-preservation was his only concern. Not selfishness, but mere self-preservation. Selfishness presupposes consciousness, choice, the presence of other men; but his instinct acted as though he were the last of mankind nursing that law like the only spark of a sacred fire. I don't mean to say that living naked in a cavern would have satisfied him. Obviously he was the creature of the conditions to which he was born. No doubt self-preservation meant also the preservation of these conditions. But essentially it meant something much more simple, natural, and powerful. How shall I express it? It meant the preservation of the five senses of his body — let us say — taking it in its narrowest as well as in its widest meaning. I think you will admit before long the justice of this judgment. However, as we stood there together in the dark verandah I had judged nothing as yet — and I had no desire to judge — which is an idle practice anyhow. The light was long in coming.

"Of course," I said in a tone of mutual understanding, "it isn't exactly a game of cards I want with you."

I saw him draw his hands down his face — the vague stir of the passionate and meaningless gesture; but he waited in silent patience. It was only when the lights had been brought out that he opened his lips. I understood his mumble to mean that "he didn't know any game."

"Like this Schomberg and all the other fools will have to keep off," I said tearing open the pack. "Have you heard that we are universally supposed to be quarrelling about a girl? You know who — of course. I am really ashamed to ask, but is it possible that you do me the honour to think me dangerous?"

As I said these words I felt how absurd it was and also I felt flattered — for, really, what else could it be? His answer, spoken in his usual dispassionate undertone, made it clear that it was so, but not precisely as flattering as I supposed. He thought me dangerous with Hermann, more than with the girl herself; but, as to quarrelling, I saw at once how

inappropriate the word was. We had no quarrel. Natural forces are not quarrelsome. You can't quarrel with the wind that inconveniences and humiliates you by blowing off your hat in a street full of people. He had no quarrel with me. Neither would a boulder, falling on my head, have had. He fell upon me in accordance with the law by which he was moved — not of gravitation, like a detached stone, but of self-preservation. Of course this is giving it a rather wide interpretation. Strictly speaking, he had existed and could have existed without being married. Yet he told me that he had found it more and more difficult to live alone. Yes. He told me this in his low, careless voice, to such a pitch of confidence had we arrived at the end of half an hour.

It took me just about that time to convince him that I had never dreamed of marrying Hermann's niece. Could any necessity have been more extravagant? And the difficulty was the greater because he was so hard hit that he couldn't imagine anybody being able to remain in a state of indifference. Any man with eyes in his head, he seemed to think, could not help coveting so much bodily magnificence. This profound belief was conveyed by the manner he listened sitting sideways to the table and playing absently with a few cards I had dealt to him at random. And the more I saw into him the more I saw of him. The wind swayed the lights so that his sunburnt face, whiskered to the eyes, seemed to successively flicker crimson at me and to go out. I saw the extraordinary breadth of the high cheek-bones, the perpendicular style of the features, the massive forehead, steep like a cliff, denuded at the top, largely uncovered at the temples. The fact is I had never before seen him without his hat; but now, as if my fervour had made him hot, he had taken it off and laid it gently on the floor. Something peculiar in the shape and setting of his yellow eyes gave them the provoking silent intensity which characterised his glance. But the face was thin, furrowed, worn; I discovered that through the bush of his hair, as you may detect the gnarled shape of a tree trunk lost in a dense undergrowth. These overgrown cheeks were sunken. It was an anchorite's bony head fitted with a Capuchin's beard and adjusted to a herculean body. I don't mean athletic. Hercules, I take it, was not an athlete. He was a strong man, susceptible to female charms, and not afraid of dirt. And thus with Falk, who was a strong man. He was extremely strong, just as the girl (since I must think of them together) was magnificently attractive by the masterful power of flesh and blood, expressed in shape, in size, in attitude — that is

by a straight appeal to the senses. His mind meantime, preoccupied with respectability, quailed before Schomberg's tongue and seemed absolutely impervious to my protestations; and I went so far as to protest that I would just as soon think of marrying my mother's (dear old lady!) faithful female cook as Hermann's niece. Sooner, I protested, in my desperation, much sooner; but it did not appear that he saw anything outrageous in the proposition, and in his sceptical immobility he seemed to nurse the argument that at all events the cook was very, very far away. It must be said that, just before, I had gone wrong by appealing to the evidence of my manner whenever I called on board the *Diana*. I had never attempted to approach the girl, or to speak to her, or even to look at her in any marked way. Nothing could be clearer. But, as his own idea of — let us say — courting, seemed to consist precisely in sitting silently for hours in the vicinity of the beloved object, that line of argument inspired him with distrust. Staring down his extended legs he let out a grunt — as much as to say, “That's all very fine, but you can't throw dust in my eyes.”

At last I was exasperated into saying, “Why don't you put the matter at rest by talking to Hermann?” and I added sneeringly: “You don't expect me perhaps to speak for you?”

To this he said, very loud for him, “Would you?”

And for the first time he lifted his head to look at me with wonder and incredulity. He lifted his head so sharply that there could be no mistake. I had touched a spring. I saw the whole extent of my opportunity, and could hardly believe in it.

“Why. Speak to... Well, of course,” I proceeded very slowly, watching him with great attention, for, on my word, I feared a joke. “Not, perhaps, to the young lady herself. I can't speak German, you know. But...”

He interrupted me with the earnest assurance that Hermann had the highest opinion of me; and at once I felt the need for the greatest possible diplomacy at this juncture. So I demurred just enough to draw him on. Falk sat up, but except for a very noticeable enlargement of the pupils, till the irises of his eyes were reduced to two narrow yellow rings, his face, I should judge, was incapable of expressing excitement. “Oh, yes! Hermann did have the greatest...”

“Take up your cards. Here's Schomberg peeping at us through the blind!” I said.

We went through the motions of what might have been a game of e'carte'. Presently the intolerable scandalmonger withdrew, probably to inform the people in the billiard-room that we two were gambling on the verandah like mad.

We were not gambling, but it was a game; a game in which I felt I held the winning cards. The stake, roughly speaking, was the success of the voyage — for me; and he, I apprehended, had nothing to lose. Our intimacy matured rapidly, and before many words had been exchanged I perceived that the excellent Hermann had been making use of me. That simple and astute Teuton had been, it seems, holding me up to Falk in the light of a rival. I was young enough to be shocked at so much duplicity. "Did he tell you that in so many words?" I asked with indignation.

Hermann had not. He had given hints only; and of course it had not taken very much to alarm Falk; but, instead of declaring himself, he had taken steps to remove the family from under my influence. He was perfectly straightforward about it — as straightforward as a tile falling on your head. There was no duplicity in that man; and when I congratulated him on the perfection of his arrangements — even to the bribing of the wretched Johnson against me — he had a genuine movement of protest. Never bribed. He knew the man wouldn't work as long as he had a few cents in his pocket to get drunk on, and, naturally (he said—"naturally") he let him have a dollar or two. He was himself a sailor, he said, and anticipated the view another sailor, like myself, was bound to take. On the other hand, he was sure that I should have to come to grief. He hadn't been knocking about for the last seven years up and down that river for nothing. It would have been no disgrace to me — but he asserted confidently I would have had my ship very awkwardly ashore at a spot two miles below the Great Pagoda....

And with all that he had no ill-will. That was evident. This was a crisis in which his only object had been to gain time — I fancy. And presently he mentioned that he had written for some jewellery, real good jewellery — had written to Hong-Kong for it. It would arrive in a day or two.

"Well, then," I said cheerily, "everything is all right. All you've got to do is to present it to the lady together with your heart, and live happy ever after."

Upon the whole he seemed to accept that view as far as the girl was concerned, but his eyelids drooped. There was still something in the way. For one thing Hermann disliked him so much. As to me, on the contrary, it

seemed as though he could not praise me enough. Mrs. Hermann too. He didn't know why they disliked him so. It made everything most difficult.

I listened impassive, feeling more and more diplomatic. His speech was not transparently clear. He was one of those men who seem to live, feel, suffer in a sort of mental twilight. But as to being fascinated by the girl and possessed by the desire of home life with her — it was as clear as daylight. So much being at stake, he was afraid of putting it to the hazard of declaration. Besides, there was something else. And with Hermann being so set against him...

"I see," I said thoughtfully, while my heart beat fast with the excitement of my diplomacy. "I don't mind sounding Hermann. In fact, to show you how mistaken you were, I am ready to do all I can for you in that way."

A light sigh escaped him. He drew his hands down his face, and it emerged, bony, unchanged of expression, as if all the tissues had been ossified. All the passion was in those big brown hands. He was satisfied. Then there was that other matter. If there were anybody on earth it was I who could persuade Hermann to take a reasonable view! I had a knowledge of the world and lots of experience. Hermann admitted this himself. And then I was a sailor too. Falk thought that a sailor would be able to understand certain things best....

He talked as if the Hermanns had been living all their life in a rural hamlet, and I alone had been capable, with my practice in life, of a large and indulgent view of certain occurrences. That was what my diplomacy was leading me to. I began suddenly to dislike it.

"I say, Falk," I asked quite brusquely, "you haven't already a wife put away somewhere?"

The pain and disgust of his denial were very striking. Couldn't I understand that he was as respectable as any white man hereabouts; earning his living honestly. He was suffering from my suspicion, and the low undertone of his voice made his protestations sound very pathetic. For a moment he shamed me, but, my diplomacy notwithstanding, I seemed to develop a conscience, as if in very truth it were in my power to decide the success of this matrimonial enterprise. By pretending hard enough we come to believe anything — anything to our advantage. And I had been pretending very hard, because I meant yet to be towed safely down the river. But through conscience or stupidity, I couldn't help alluding to the Vanlo affair. "You acted rather badly there. Didn't you?" was what I

ventured actually to say — for the logic of our conduct is always at the mercy of obscure and unforeseen impulses.

His dilated pupils swerved from my face, glancing at the window with a sort of scared fury. We heard behind the blinds the continuous and sudden clicking of ivory, a jovial murmur of many voices, and Schomberg's deep manly laugh.

"That confounded old woman of a hotel-keeper then would never, never let it rest!" Falk exclaimed. "Well, yes! It had happened two years ago." When it came to the point he owned he couldn't make up his mind to trust Fred Vanlo — no sailor, a bit of a fool too. He could not trust him, but, to stop his row, he had lent him enough money to pay all his debts before he left. I was greatly surprised to hear this. Then Falk could not be such a miser after all. So much the better for the girl. For a time he sat silent; then he picked up a card, and while looking at it he said:

"You need not think of anything bad. It was an accident. I've been unfortunate once."

"Then in heaven's name say nothing about it."

As soon as these words were out of my mouth I fancied I had said something immoral. He shook his head negatively. It had to be told. He considered it proper that the relations of the lady should know. No doubt — I thought to myself — had Miss Vanlo not been thirty and damaged by the climate he would have found it possible to entrust Fred Vanlo with this confidence. And then the figure of Hermann's niece appeared before my mind's eye, with the wealth of her opulent form, her rich youth, her lavish strength. With that powerful and immaculate vitality, her girlish form must have shouted aloud of life to that man, whereas poor Miss Vanlo could only sing sentimental songs to the strumming of a piano.

"And that Hermann hates me, I know it!" he cried in his undertone, with a sudden recrudescence of anxiety. "I must tell them. It is proper that they should know. You would say so yourself."

He then murmured an utterly mysterious allusion to the necessity for peculiar domestic arrangements. Though my curiosity was excited I did not want to hear any of his confidences. I feared he might give me a piece of information that would make my assumed role of match-maker odious — however unreal it was. I was aware that he could have the girl for the asking; and keeping down a desire to laugh in his face, I expressed a



confident belief in my ability to argue away Hermann's dislike for him. "I am sure I can make it all right," I said. He looked very pleased.

And when we rose not a word had been said about towage! Not a word! The game was won and the honour was safe. Oh! blessed white cotton umbrella! We shook hands, and I was holding myself with difficulty from breaking into a step dance of joy when he came back, striding all the length of the verandah, and said doubtfully:

"I say, captain, I have your word? You — you — won't turn round?"

Heavens! The fright he gave me. Behind his tone of doubt there was something desperate and menacing. The infatuated ass. But I was equal to the situation.

"My dear Falk," I said, beginning to lie with a glibness and effrontery that amazed me even at the time — "confidence for confidence." (He had made no confidences.) "I will tell you that I am already engaged to an extremely charming girl at home, and so you understand...."

He caught my hand and wrung it in a crushing grip.

"Pardon me. I feel it every day more difficult to live alone..."

"On rice and fish," I interrupted smartly, giggling with the sheer nervousness of a danger escaped.

He dropped my hand as if it had become suddenly red hot. A moment of profound silence ensued, as though something extraordinary had happened.

"I promise you to obtain Hermann's consent," I faltered out at last, and it seemed to me that he could not help seeing through that humbugging promise. "If there's anything else to get over I shall endeavour to stand by you," I conceded further, feeling somehow defeated and over-borne; "but you must do your best yourself."

"I have been unfortunate once," he muttered unemotionally, and turning his back on me he went away, thumping slowly the plank floor as if his feet had been shod with iron.

Next morning, however, he was lively enough as man-boat, a combination of splashing and shouting; of the insolent commotion below with the steady overbearing glare of the silent head-piece above. He turned us out most unnecessarily at an ungodly hour, but it was nearly eleven in the morning before he brought me up a cable's length from Hermann's ship. And he did it very badly too, in a hurry, and nearly contriving to miss altogether the patch of good holding ground, because, forsooth, he had caught sight of Hermann's niece on the poop. And so did I; and probably as

soon as he had seen her himself. I saw the modest, sleek glory of the tawny head, and the full, grey shape of the girlish print frock she filled so perfectly, so satisfactorily, with the seduction of unfaltering curves — a very nymph of Diana the Huntress. And Diana the ship sat, high-walled and as solid as an institution, on the smooth level of the water, the most uninspiring and respectable craft upon the seas, useful and ugly, devoted to the support of domestic virtues like any grocer's shop on shore. At once Falk steamed away; for there was some work for him to do. He would return in the evening.

He ranged close by us, passing out dead slow, without a hail. The beat of the paddle-wheels reverberating amongst the stony islets, as if from the ruined walls of a vast arena, filled the anchorage confusedly with the clapping sounds of a mighty and leisurely applause. Abreast of Hermann's ship he stopped the engines; and a profound silence reigned over the rocks, the shore and the sea, for the time it took him to raise his hat aloft before the nymph of the grey print frock. I had snatched up my binoculars, and I can answer for it she didn't stir a limb, standing by the rail shapely and erect, with one of her hands grasping a rope at the height of her head, while the way of the tug carried slowly past her the lingering and profound homage of the man. There was for me an enormous significance in the scene, the sense of having witnessed a solemn declaration. The die was cast. After such a manifestation he couldn't back out. And I reflected that it was nothing whatever to me now. With a rush of black smoke belching suddenly out of the funnel, and a mad swirl of paddle-wheels provoking a burst of weird and precipitated clapping, the tug shot out of the desolate arena. The rocky islets lay on the sea like the heaps of a cyclopean ruin on a plain; the centipedes and scorpions lurked under the stones; there was not a single blade of grass in sight anywhere, not a single lizard sunning himself on a boulder by the shore. When I looked again at Hermann's ship the girl had disappeared. I could not detect the smallest dot of a bird on the immense sky, and the flatness of the land continued the flatness of the sea to the naked line of the horizon.

This is the setting now inseparably connected with my knowledge of Falk's misfortune. My diplomacy had brought me there, and now I had only to wait the time for taking up the role of an ambassador. My diplomacy was a success; my ship was safe; old Gambрил would probably live; a feeble sound of a tapping hammer came intermittently from the Diana. During the

afternoon I looked at times at the old homely ship, the faithful nurse of Hermann's progeny, or yawned towards the distant temple of Buddha, like a lonely hillock on the plain, where shaven priests cherish the thoughts of that Annihilation which is the worthy reward of us all. Unfortunate! He had been unfortunate once. Well, that was not so bad as life goes. And what the devil could be the nature of that misfortune? I remembered that I had known a man before who had declared himself to have fallen, years ago, a victim to misfortune; but this misfortune, whose effects appeared permanent (he looked desperately hard up) when considered dispassionately, seemed indistinguishable from a breach of trust. Could it be something of that nature? Apart, however, from the utter improbability that he would offer to talk of it even to his future uncle-in-law, I had a strange feeling that Falk's physique unfitted him for that sort of delinquency. As the person of Hermann's niece exhaled the profound physical charm of feminine form, so her adorer's big frame embodied to my senses the hard, straight masculinity that would conceivably kill but would not condescend to cheat. The thing was obvious. I might just as well have suspected the girl of a curvature of the spine. And I perceived that the sun was about to set.

The smoke of Falk's tug hove in sight, far away at the mouth of the river. It was time for me to assume the character of an ambassador, and the negotiation would not be difficult except in the matter of keeping my countenance. It was all too extravagantly nonsensical, and I conceived that it would be best to compose for myself a grave demeanour. I practised this in my boat as I went along, but the bashfulness that came secretly upon me the moment I stepped on the deck of the *Diana* is inexplicable. As soon as we had exchanged greetings Hermann asked me eagerly if I knew whether Falk had found his white parasol.

"He's going to bring it to you himself directly," I said with great solemnity. "Meantime I am charged with an important message for which he begs your favourable consideration. He is in love with your niece...."

"Ach So!" he hissed with an animosity that made my assumed gravity change into the most genuine concern. What meant this tone? And I hurried on.

"He wishes, with your consent of course, to ask her to marry him at once — before you leave here, that is. He would speak to the Consul."

Hermann sat down and smoked violently. Five minutes passed in that furious meditation, and then, taking the long pipe out of his mouth, he burst

into a hot diatribe against Falk — against his cupidity, his stupidity (a fellow that can hardly be got to say “yes” or “no” to the simplest question) — against his outrageous treatment of the shipping in port (because he saw they were at his mercy) — and against his manner of walking, which to his (Hermann’s) mind showed a conceit positively unbearable. The damage to the old Diana was not forgotten, of course, and there was nothing of any nature said or done by Falk (even to the last offer of refreshment in the hotel) that did not seem to have been a cause of offence. “Had the cheek” to drag him (Hermann) into that coffee-room; as though a drink from him could make up for forty-seven dollars and fifty cents of damage in the cost of wood alone — not counting two days’ work for the carpenter. Of course he would not stand in the girl’s way. He was going home to Germany. There were plenty of poor girls walking about in Germany.

“He’s very much in love,” was all I found to say.

“Yes,” he cried. “And it is time too after making himself and me talked about ashore the last voyage I was here, and then now again; coming on board every evening unsettling the girl’s mind, and saying nothing. What sort of conduct is that?”

The seven thousand dollars the fellow was always talking about did not, in his opinion, justify such behaviour. Moreover, nobody had seen them. He (Hermann) seriously doubted if there were seven thousand cents, and the tug, no doubt, was mortgaged up to the top of the funnel to the firm of Siegers. But let that pass. He wouldn’t stand in the girl’s way. Her head was so turned that she had become no good to them of late. Quite unable even to put the children to bed without her aunt. It was bad for the children; they got unruly; and yesterday he actually had to give Gustav a thrashing.

For that, too, Falk was made responsible apparently. And looking at my Hermann’s heavy, puffy, good-natured face, I knew he would not exert himself till greatly exasperated, and, therefore, would thrash very hard, and being fat would resent the necessity. How Falk had managed to turn the girl’s head was more difficult to understand. I supposed Hermann would know. And then hadn’t there been Miss Vanlo? It could not be his silvery tongue, or the subtle seduction of his manner; he had no more of what is called “manner” than an animal — which, however, on the other hand, is never, and can never be called vulgar. Therefore it must have been his bodily appearance, exhibiting a virility of nature as exaggerated as his beard, and resembling a sort of constant ruthlessness. It was seen in the very

manner he lolled in the chair. He meant no offence, but his intercourse was characterised by that sort of frank disregard of susceptibilities a man of seven foot six, living in a world of dwarfs, would naturally assume, without in the least wishing to be unkind. But amongst men of his own stature, or nearly, this frank use of his advantages, in such matters as the awful towage bills for instance, caused much impotent gnashing of teeth. When attentively considered it seemed appalling at times. He was a strange beast. But maybe women liked it. Seen in that light he was well worth taming, and I suppose every woman at the bottom of her heart considers herself as a tamer of strange beasts. But Hermann arose with precipitation to carry the news to his wife. I had barely the time, as he made for the cabin door, to grab him by the seat of his inexpressibles. I begged him to wait till Falk in person had spoken with him. There remained some small matter to talk over, as I understood.

He sat down again at once, full of suspicion.

“What matter?” he said surlily. “I have had enough of his nonsense. There’s no matter at all, as he knows very well; the girl has nothing in the world. She came to us in one thin dress when my brother died, and I have a growing family.”

“It can’t be anything of that kind,” I opined. “He’s desperately enamoured of your niece. I don’t know why he did not say so before. Upon my word, I believe it is because he was afraid to lose, perhaps, the felicity of sitting near her on your quarter deck.”

I intimated my conviction that his love was so great as to be in a sense cowardly. The effects of a great passion are unaccountable. It has been known to make a man timid. But Hermann looked at me as if I had foolishly raved; and the twilight was dying out rapidly.

“You don’t believe in passion, do you, Hermann?” I said cheerily. “The passion of fear will make a cornered rat courageous. Falk’s in a corner. He will take her off your hands in one thin frock just as she came to you. And after ten years’ service it isn’t a bad bargain,” I added.

Far from taking offence, he resumed his air of civic virtue. The sudden night came upon him while he stared placidly along the deck, bringing in contact with his thick lips, and taking away again after a jet of smoke, the curved mouthpiece fitted to the stem of his pipe. The night came upon him and buried in haste his whiskers, his globular eyes, his puffy pale face, his fat knees and the vast flat slippers on his fatherly feet. Only his short arms

in respectable white shirt-sleeves remained very visible, propped up like the flippers of a seal reposing on the strand.

“Falk wouldn’t settle anything about repairs. Told me to find out first how much wood I should require and he would see,” he remarked; and after he had spat peacefully in the dusk we heard over the water the beat of the tug’s floats. There is, on a calm night, nothing more suggestive of fierce and headlong haste than the rapid sound made by the paddle-wheels of a boat threshing her way through a quiet sea; and the approach of Falk towards his fate seemed to be urged by an impatient and passionate desire. The engines must have been driven to the very utmost of their revolutions. We heard them slow down at last, and, vaguely, the white hull of the tug appeared moving against the black islets, whilst a slow and rhythmical clapping as of thousands of hands rose on all sides. It ceased all at once, just before Falk brought her up. A single brusque splash was followed by the long drawn rumbling of iron links running through the hawse pipe. Then a solemn silence fell upon the Roadstead.

“He will soon be here,” I murmured, and after that we waited for him without a word. Meantime, raising my eyes, I beheld the glitter of a lofty sky above the Diana’s mastheads. The multitude of stars gathered into clusters, in rows, in lines, in masses, in groups, shone all together, unanimously — and the few isolated ones, blazing by themselves in the midst of dark patches, seemed to be of a superior kind and of an inextinguishable nature. But long striding footsteps were heard hastening along the deck; the high bulwarks of the Diana made a deeper darkness. We rose from our chairs quickly, and Falk, appearing before us, all in white, stood still.

Nobody spoke at first, as though we had been covered with confusion. His arrival was fiery, but his white bulk, of indefinite shape and without features, made him loom up like a man of snow.

“The captain here has been telling me...” Hermann began in a homely and amicable voice; and Falk had a low, nervous laugh. His cool, negligent undertone had no inflexions, but the strength of a powerful emotion made him ramble in his speech. He had always desired a home. It was difficult to live alone, though he was not answerable. He was domestic; there had been difficulties; but since he had seen Hermann’s niece he found that it had become at last impossible to live by himself. “I mean — impossible,” he

repeated with no sort of emphasis and only with the slightest of pauses, but the word fell into my mind with the force of a new idea.

“I have not said anything to her yet,” Hermann observed quietly. And Falk dismissed this by a “That’s all right. Certainly. Very proper.” There was a necessity for perfect frankness — in marrying, especially. Hermann seemed attentive, but he seized the first opportunity to ask us into the cabin. “And by-the-by, Falk,” he said innocently, as we passed in, “the timber came to no less than forty-seven dollars and fifty cents.”

Falk, uncovering his head, lingered in the passage. “Some other time,” he said; and Hermann nudged me angrily — I don’t know why. The girl alone in the cabin sat sewing at some distance from the table. Falk stopped short in the doorway. Without a word, without a sign, without the slightest inclination of his bony head, by the silent intensity of his look alone, he seemed to lay his herculean frame at her feet. Her hands sank slowly on her lap, and raising her clear eyes, she let her soft, beaming glance enfold him from head to foot like a slow and pale caress. He was very hot when he sat down; she, with bowed head, went on with her sewing; her neck was very white under the light of the lamp; but Falk, hiding his face in the palms of his hands, shuddered faintly. He drew them down, even to his beard, and his uncovered eyes astonished me by their tense and irrational expression — as though he had just swallowed a heavy gulp of alcohol. It passed away while he was binding us to secrecy. Not that he cared, but he did not like to be spoken about; and I looked at the girl’s marvellous, at her wonderful, at her regal hair, plaited tight into that one astonishing and maidenly tress. Whenever she moved her well-shaped head it would stir stiffly to and fro on her back. The thin cotton sleeve fitted the irreproachable roundness of her arm like a skin; and her very dress, stretched on her bust, seemed to palpitate like a living tissue with the strength of vitality animating her body. How good her complexion was, the outline of her soft cheek and the small convoluted conch of her rosy ear! To pull her needle she kept the little finger apart from the others; it seemed a waste of power to see her sewing — eternally sewing — with that industrious and precise movement of her arm, going on eternally upon all the oceans, under all the skies, in innumerable harbours. And suddenly I heard Falk’s voice declare that he could not marry a woman unless she knew of something in his life that had happened ten years ago. It was an accident. An unfortunate accident. It would affect the domestic arrangements of their home, but, once told, it

need not be alluded to again for the rest of their lives. "I should want my wife to feel for me," he said. "It has made me unhappy." And how could he keep the knowledge of it to himself — he asked us — perhaps through years and years of companionship? What sort of companionship would that be? He had thought it over. A wife must know. Then why not at once? He counted on Hermann's kindness for presenting the affair in the best possible light. And Hermann's countenance, mystified before, became very sour. He stole an inquisitive glance at me. I shook my head blankly. Some people thought, Falk went on, that such an experience changed a man for the rest of his life. He couldn't say. It was hard, awful, and not to be forgotten, but he did not think himself a worse man than before. Only he talked in his sleep now, he believed.... At last I began to think he had accidentally killed some one; perhaps a friend — his own father maybe; when he went on to say that probably we were aware he never touched meat. Throughout he spoke English, of course of my account.

He swayed forward heavily.

The girl, with her hands raised before her pale eyes, was threading her needle. He glanced at her, and his mighty trunk overshadowed the table, bringing nearer to us the breadth of his shoulders, the thickness of his neck, and that incongruous, anchorite head, burnt in the desert, hollowed and lean as if by excesses of vigils and fasting. His beard flowed imposingly downwards, out of sight, between the two brown hands gripping the edge of the table, and his persistent glance made sombre by the wide dilations of the pupils, fascinated.

"Imagine to yourselves," he said in his ordinary voice, "that I have eaten man."

I could only ejaculate a faint "Ah!" of complete enlightenment. But Hermann, dazed by the excessive shock, actually murmured, "Himmel! What for?"

"It was my terrible misfortune to do so," said Falk in a measured undertone. The girl, unconscious, sewed on. Mrs. Hermann was absent in one of the state-rooms, sitting up with Lena, who was feverish; but Hermann suddenly put both his hands up with a jerk. The embroidered calotte fell, and, in the twinkling of an eye, he had rumpled his hair all ends up in a most extravagant manner. In this state he strove to speak; with every effort his eyes seemed to start further out of their sockets; his head looked



like a mop. He choked, gasped, swallowed, and managed to shriek out the one word, "Beast!"

From that moment till Falk went out of the cabin the girl, with her hands folded on the work lying in her lap, never took her eyes off him. His own, in the blindness of his heart, darted all over the cabin, only seeking to avoid the sight of Hermann's raving. It was ridiculous, and was made almost terrible by the stillness of every other person present. It was contemptible, and was made appalling by the man's over-mastering horror of this awful sincerity, coming to him suddenly, with the confession of such a fact. He walked with great strides; he gasped. He wanted to know from Falk how dared he to come and tell him this? Did he think himself a proper person to be sitting in this cabin where his wife and children lived? Tell his niece! Expected him to tell his niece! His own brother's daughter! Shameless! Did I ever hear tell of such impudence? — he appealed to me. "This man here ought to have gone and hidden himself out of sight instead of..."

"But it's a great misfortune for me. But it's a great misfortune for me," Falk would ejaculate from time to time.

However, Hermann kept on running frequently against the corners of the table. At last he lost a slipper, and crossing his arms on his breast, walked up with one stocking foot very close to Falk, in order to ask him whether he did think there was anywhere on earth a woman abandoned enough to mate with such a monster. "Did he? Did he? Did he?" I tried to restrain him. He tore himself out of my hands; he found his slipper, and, endeavouring to put it on, stormed standing on one leg — and Falk, with a face unmoved and averted eyes, grasped all his mighty beard in one vast palm.

"Was it right then for me to die myself?" he asked thoughtfully. I laid my hand on his shoulder.

"Go away," I whispered imperiously, without any clear reason for this advice, except that I wished to put an end to Hermann's odious noise. "Go away."

He looked searchingly for a moment at Hermann before he made a move. I left the cabin too to see him out of the ship. But he hung about the quarter-deck.

"It is my misfortune," he said in a steady voice.

"You were stupid to blurt it out in such a manner. After all, we don't hear such confidences every day."

“What does the man mean?” he mused in deep undertones. “Somebody had to die — but why me?”

He remained still for a time in the dark — silent; almost invisible. All at once he pinned my elbows to my sides. I felt utterly powerless in his grip, and his voice, whispering in my ear, vibrated.

“It’s worse than hunger. Captain, do you know what that means? And I could kill then — or be killed. I wish the crowbar had smashed my skull ten years ago. And I’ve got to live now. Without her. Do you understand? Perhaps many years. But how? What can be done? If I had allowed myself to look at her once I would have carried her off before that man in my hands — like this.”

I felt myself snatched off the deck, then suddenly dropped — and I staggered backwards, feeling bewildered and bruised. What a man! All was still; he was gone. I heard Hermann’s voice declaiming in the cabin, and I went in.

I could not at first make out a single word, but Mrs. Hermann, who, attracted by the noise, had come in some time before, with an expression of surprise and mild disapproval, depicted broadly on her face, was giving now all the signs of profound, helpless agitation. Her husband shot a string of guttural words at her, and instantly putting out one hand to the bulkhead as if to save herself from falling, she clutched the loose bosom of her dress with the other. He harangued the two women extraordinarily, with much of his shirt hanging out of his waist-belt, stamping his foot, turning from one to the other, sometimes throwing both his arms together, straight up above his rumpled hair, and keeping them in that position while he uttered a passage of loud denunciation; at others folding them tight across his breast — and then he hissed with indignation, elevating his shoulders and protruding his head. The girl was crying.

She had not changed her attitude. From her steady eyes that, following Falk in his retreat, had remained fixed wistfully on the cabin door, the tears fell rapid, thick, on her hands, on the work in her lap, warm and gentle like a shower in spring. She wept without grimacing, without noise — very touching, very quiet, with something more of pity than of pain in her face, as one weeps in compassion rather than in grief — and Hermann, before her, declaimed. I caught several times the word “Mensch,” man; and also “Fressen,” which last I looked up afterwards in my dictionary. It means “Devour.” Hermann seemed to be requesting an answer of some sort from

her; his whole body swayed. She remained mute and perfectly still; at last his agitation gained her; she put the palms of her hands together, her full lips parted, no sound came. His voice scolded shrilly, his arms went like a windmill — suddenly he shook a thick fist at her. She burst out into loud sobs. He seemed stupefied.

Mrs. Hermann rushed forward babbling rapidly. The two women fell on each other's necks, and, with an arm round her niece's waist, she led her away. Her own eyes were simply streaming, her face was flooded. She shook her head back at me negatively, I wonder why to this day. The girl's head dropped heavily on her shoulder. They disappeared.

Then Hermann sat down and stared at the cabin floor.

"We don't know all the circumstances," I ventured to break the silence. He retorted tartly that he didn't want to know of any. According to his ideas no circumstances could excuse a crime — and certainly not such a crime. This was the opinion generally received. The duty of a human being was to starve. Falk therefore was a beast, an animal; base, low, vile, despicable, shameless, and deceitful. He had been deceiving him since last year. He was, however, inclined to think that Falk must have gone mad quite recently; for no sane person, without necessity, uselessly, for no earthly reason, and regardless of another's self-respect and peace of mind, would own to having devoured human flesh. "Why tell?" he cried. "Who was asking him?" It showed Falk's brutality because after all he had selfishly caused him (Hermann) much pain. He would have preferred not to know that such an unclean creature had been in the habit of caressing his children. He hoped I would say nothing of all this ashore, though. He wouldn't like it to get about that he had been intimate with an eater of men — a common cannibal. As to the scene he had made (which I judged quite unnecessary) he was not going to inconvenience and restrain himself for a fellow that went about courting and upsetting girls' heads, while he knew all the time that no decent housewifely girl could think of marrying him. At least he (Hermann) could not conceive how any girl could. Fancy Lena!... No, it was impossible. The thoughts that would come into their heads every time they sat down to a meal. Horrible! Horrible!

"You are too squeamish, Hermann," I said.

He seemed to think it was eminently proper to be squeamish if the word meant disgust at Falk's conduct; and turning up his eyes sentimentally he drew my attention to the horrible fate of the victims — the victims of that

Falk. I said that I knew nothing about them. He seemed surprised. Could not anybody imagine without knowing? He — for instance — felt he would like to avenge them. But what if — said I — there had not been any? They might have died as it were, naturally — of starvation. He shuddered. But to be eaten — after death! To be devoured! He gave another deep shudder, and asked suddenly, “Do you think it is true?”

His indignation and his personality together would have been enough to spoil the reality of the most authentic thing. When I looked at him I doubted the story — but the remembrance of Falk’s words, looks, gestures, invested it not only with an air of reality but with the absolute truth of primitive passion.

“It is true just as much as you are able to make it; and exactly in the way you like to make it. For my part, when I hear you clamouring about it, I don’t believe it is true at all.”

And I left him pondering. The men in my boat lying at the foot of Diana’s side ladder told me that the captain of the tug had gone away in his gig some time ago.

I let my fellows pull an easy stroke; because of the heavy dew the clear sparkle of the stars seemed to fall on me cold and wetting. There was a sense of lurking gruesome horror somewhere in my mind, and it was mingled with clear and grotesque images. Schomberg’s gastronomic tittle-tattle was responsible for these; and I half hoped I should never see Falk again. But the first thing my anchor-watchman told me was that the captain of the tug was on board. He had sent his boat away and was now waiting for me in the cuddy.

He was lying full length on the stern settee, his face buried in the cushions. I had expected to see it discomposed, contorted, despairing. It was nothing of the kind; it was just as I had seen it twenty times, steady and glaring from the bridge of the tug. It was immovably set and hungry, dominated like the whole man by the singleness of one instinct.

He wanted to live. He had always wanted to live. So we all do — but in us the instinct serves a complex conception, and in him this instinct existed alone. There is in such simple development a gigantic force, and like the pathos of a child’s naive and uncontrolled desire. He wanted that girl, and the utmost that can be said for him was that he wanted that particular girl alone. I think I saw then the obscure beginning, the seed germinating in the soil of an unconscious need, the first shoot of that tree bearing now for a

mature mankind the flower and the fruit, the infinite gradation in shades and in flavour of our discriminating love. He was a child. He was as frank as a child too. He was hungry for the girl, terribly hungry, as he had been terribly hungry for food.

Don't be shocked if I declare that in my belief it was the same need, the same pain, the same torture. We are in his case allowed to contemplate the foundation of all the emotions — that one joy which is to live, and the one sadness at the root of the innumerable torments. It was made plain by the way he talked. He had never suffered so. It was gnawing, it was fire; it was there, like this! And after pointing below his breastbone, he made a hard wringing motion with his hands. And I assure you that, seen as I saw it with my bodily eyes, it was anything but laughable. And again, as he was presently to tell me (alluding to an early incident of the disastrous voyage when some damaged meat had been flung overboard), he said that a time soon came when his heart ached (that was the expression he used), and he was ready to tear his hair out at the thought of all that rotten beef thrown away.

I had heard all this; I witnessed his physical struggles, seeing the working of the rack and hearing the true voice of pain. I witnessed it all patiently, because the moment I came into the cuddy he had called upon me to stand by him — and this, it seems, I had diplomatically promised.

His agitation was impressive and alarming in the little cabin, like the floundering of a great whale driven into a shallow cove in a coast. He stood up; he flung himself down headlong; he tried to tear the cushion with his teeth; and again hugging it fiercely to his face he let himself fall on the couch. The whole ship seemed to feel the shock of his despair; and I contemplated with wonder the lofty forehead, the noble touch of time on the uncovered temples, the unchanged hungry character of the face — so strangely ascetic and so incapable of portraying emotion.

What should he do? He had lived by being near her. He had sat — in the evening — I knew?-all his life! She sewed. Her head was bent — so. Her head — like this — and her arms. Ah! Had I seen? Like this.

He dropped on a stool, bowed his powerful neck whose nape was red, and with his hands stitched the air, ludicrous, sublimely imbecile and comprehensible.

And now he couldn't have her? No! That was too much. After thinking too that... What had he done? What was my advice? Take her by force? No?

Mustn't he? Who was there then to kill him? For the first time I saw one of his features move; a fighting teeth-baring curl of the lip.... "Not Hermann, perhaps." He lost himself in thought as though he had fallen out of the world.

I may note that the idea of suicide apparently did not enter his head for a single moment. It occurred to me to ask:

"Where was it that this shipwreck of yours took place?"

"Down south," he said vaguely with a start.

"You are not down south now," I said. "Violence won't do. They would take her away from you in no time. And what was the name of the ship?"

"Borgmester Dahl," he said. "It was no shipwreck."

He seemed to be waking up by degrees from that trance, and waking up calmed.

"Not a shipwreck? What was it?"

"Break down," he answered, looking more like himself every moment. By this only I learned that it was a steamer. I had till then supposed they had been starving in boats or on a raft — or perhaps on a barren rock.

"She did not sink then?" I asked in surprise. He nodded. "We sighted the southern ice," he pronounced dreamily.

"And you alone survived?"

He sat down. "Yes. It was a terrible misfortune for me. Everything went wrong. All the men went wrong. I survived."

Remembering the things one reads of it was difficult to realise the true meaning of his answers. I ought to have seen at once — but I did not; so difficult is it for our minds, remembering so much, instructed so much, informed of so much, to get in touch with the real actuality at our elbow. And with my head full of preconceived notions as to how a case of "cannibalism and suffering at sea" should be managed I said — "You were then so lucky in the drawing of lots?"

"Drawing of lots?" he said. "What lots? Do you think I would have allowed my life to go for the drawing of lots?"

Not if he could help if, I perceived, no matter what other life went.

"It was a great misfortune. Terrible. Awful," he said. "Many heads went wrong, but the best men would live."

"The toughest, you mean," I said. He considered the word. Perhaps it was strange to him, though his English was so good.

“Yes,” he asserted at last. “The best. It was everybody for himself at last and the ship open to all.”

Thus from question to question I got the whole story. I fancy it was the only way I could that night have stood by him. Outwardly at least he was himself again; the first sign of it was the return of that incongruous trick he had of drawing both his hands down his face — and it had its meaning now, with that slight shudder of the frame and the passionate anguish of these hands uncovering a hungry immovable face, the wide pupils of the intent, silent, fascinating eyes.

It was an iron steamer of a most respectable origin. The burgomaster of Falk’s native town had built her. She was the first steamer ever launched there. The burgomaster’s daughter had christened her. Country people drove in carts from miles around to see her. He told me all this. He got the berth as what we should call a chief mate. He seemed to think it had been a feather in his cap; and, in his own corner of the world, this lover of life was of good parentage.

The burgomaster had advanced ideas in the ship-owning line. At that time not every one would have known enough to think of despatching a cargo steamer to the Pacific. But he loaded her with pitch-pine deals and sent her off to hunt for her luck. Wellington was to be the first port, I fancy. It doesn’t matter, because in latitude 44 d south and somewhere halfway between Good Hope and New Zealand the tail shaft broke and the propeller dropped off.

They were steaming then with a fresh gale on the quarter and all their canvas set, to help the engines. But by itself the sail power was not enough to keep way on her. When the propeller went the ship broached-to at once, and the masts got whipped overboard.

The disadvantage of being dismasted consisted in this, that they had nothing to hoist flags on to make themselves visible at a distance. In the course of the first few days several ships failed to sight them; and the gale was drifting them out of the usual track. The voyage had been, from the first, neither very successful nor very harmonious. There had been quarrels on board. The captain was a clever, melancholic man, who had no unusual grip on his crew. The ship had been amply provisioned for the passage, but, somehow or other, several barrels of meat were found spoiled on opening, and had been thrown overboard soon after leaving home, as a sanitary

measure. Afterwards the crew of the Borgmester Dahl thought of that rotten carrion with tears of regret, covetousness and despair.

She drove south. To begin with, there had been an appearance of organisation, but soon the bonds of discipline became relaxed. A sombre idleness succeeded. They looked with sullen eyes at the horizon. The gales increased: she lay in the trough, the seas made a clean breach over her. On one frightful night, when they expected their hulk to turn over with them every moment, a heavy sea broke on board, deluged the store-rooms and spoiled the best part of the remaining provisions. It seems the hatch had not been properly secured. This instance of neglect is characteristic of utter discouragement. Falk tried to inspire some energy into his captain, but failed. From that time he retired more into himself, always trying to do his utmost in the situation. It grew worse. Gale succeeded gale, with black mountains of water hurling themselves on the Borgmester Dahl. Some of the men never left their bunks; many became quarrelsome. The chief engineer, an old man, refused to speak at all to anybody. Others shut themselves up in their berths to cry. On calm days the inert steamer rolled on a leaden sea under a murky sky, or showed, in sunshine, the squalor of sea waifs, the dried white salt, the rust, the jagged broken places. Then the gales came again. They kept body and soul together on short rations. Once, an English ship, scudding in a storm, tried to stand by them, heaving-to pluckily under their lee. The seas swept her decks; the men in oilskins clinging to her rigging looked at them, and they made desperate signs over their shattered bulwarks. Suddenly her main-topsail went, yard and all, in a terrific squall; she had to bear up under bare poles, and disappeared.

Other ships had spoken them before, but at first they had refused to be taken off, expecting the assistance of some steamer. There were very few steamers in those latitudes then; and when they desired to leave this dead and drifting carcase, no ship came in sight. They had drifted south out of men's knowledge. They failed to attract the attention of a lonely whaler, and very soon the edge of the polar ice-cap rose from the sea and closed the southern horizon like a wall. One morning they were alarmed by finding themselves floating amongst detached pieces of ice. But the fear of sinking passed away like their vigour, like their hopes; the shocks of the floes knocking against the ship's side could not rouse them from their apathy: and the Borgmester Dahl drifted out again unharmed into open water. They hardly noticed the change.



The funnel had gone overboard in one of the heavy rolls; two of their three boats had disappeared, washed away in bad weather, and the davits swung to and fro, unsecured, with chafed rope's ends wagging to the roll. Nothing was done on board, and Falk told me how he had often listened to the water washing about the dark engine-room where the engines, stilled for ever, were decaying slowly into a mass of rust, as the stilled heart decays within the lifeless body. At first, after the loss of the motive power, the tiller had been thoroughly secured by lashings. But in course of time these had rotted, chafed, rusted, parting one by one: and the rudder, freed, banged heavily to and fro night and day, sending dull shocks through the whole frame of the vessel. This was dangerous. Nobody cared enough to lift a little finger. He told me that even now sometimes waking up at night, he fancied he could hear the dull vibrating thuds. The pintles carried away, and it dropped off at last.

The final catastrophe came with the sending off of their one remaining boat. It was Falk who had managed to preserve her intact, and now it was agreed that some of the hands should sail away into the track of the shipping to procure assistance. She was provisioned with all the food they could spare for the six who were to go. They waited for a fine day. It was long in coming. At last one morning they lowered her into the water.

Directly, in that demoralised crowd, trouble broke out. Two men who had no business there had jumped into the boat under the pretence of unhooking the tackles, while some sort of squabble arose on the deck amongst these weak, tottering spectres of a ship's company. The captain, who had been for days living secluded and unapproachable in the chart-room, came to the rail. He ordered the two men to come up on board and menaced them with his revolver. They pretended to obey, but suddenly cutting the boat's painter, gave a shove against the ship's side and made ready to hoist the sail.

"Shoot, sir! Shoot them down!" cried Falk—"and I will jump overboard to regain the boat." But the captain, after taking aim with an irresolute arm, turned suddenly away.

A howl of rage arose. Falk dashed into his cabin for his own pistol. When he returned it was too late. Two more men had leaped into the water, but the fellows in the boat beat them off with the oars, hoisted the boat's lug and sailed away. They were never heard of again.

Consternation and despair possessed the remaining ship's company, till the apathy of utter hopelessness re-asserted its sway. That day a fireman committed suicide, running up on deck with his throat cut from ear to ear, to the horror of all hands. He was thrown overboard. The captain had locked himself in the chart-room, and Falk, knocking vainly for admittance, heard him reciting over and over again the names of his wife and children, not as if calling upon them or commending them to God, but in a mechanical voice like an exercise of memory. Next day the doors of the chart-room were swinging open to the roll of the ship, and the captain had disappeared. He must during the night have jumped into the sea. Falk locked both the doors and kept the keys.

The organised life of the ship had come to an end. The solidarity of the men had gone. They became indifferent to each other. It was Falk who took in hand the distribution of such food as remained. They boiled their boots for soup to eke out the rations, which only made their hunger more intolerable. Sometimes whispers of hate were heard passing between the languid skeletons that drifted endlessly to and fro, north and south, east and west, upon that carcase of a ship.

And in this lies the grotesque horror of this sombre story. The last extremity of sailors, overtaking a small boat or a frail craft, seems easier to bear, because of the direct danger of the seas. The confined space, the close contact, the imminent menace of the waves, seem to draw men together, in spite of madness, suffering and despair. But there was a ship — safe, convenient, roomy: a ship with beds, bedding, knives, forks, comfortable cabins, glass and china, and a complete cook's galley, pervaded, ruled and possessed by the pitiless spectre of starvation. The lamp oil had been drunk, the wicks cut up for food, the candles eaten. At night she floated dark in all her recesses, and full of fears. One day Falk came upon a man gnawing a splinter of pine wood. Suddenly he threw the piece of wood away, tottered to the rail, and fell over. Falk, too late to prevent the act, saw him claw the ship's side desperately before he went down. Next day another man did the same thing, after uttering horrible imprecations. But this one somehow managed to get hold of the broken rudder chains and hung on there, silently. Falk set about trying to save him, and all the time the man, holding with both hands, looked at him anxiously with his sunken eyes. Then, just as Falk was ready to put his hand on him, the man let go his hold and sank like a stone. Falk reflected on these sights. His heart revolted against the horror

of death, and he said to himself that he would struggle for every precious minute of his life.

One afternoon — as the survivors lay about on the after deck — the carpenter, a tall man with a black beard, spoke of the last sacrifice. There was nothing eatable left on board. Nobody said a word to this; but that company separated quickly, these listless feeble spectres slunk off one by one to hide in fear of each other. Falk and the carpenter remained on deck together. Falk liked the big carpenter. He had been the best man of the lot, helpful and ready as long as there was anything to do, the longest hopeful, and had preserved to the last some vigour and decision of mind.

They did not speak to each other. Henceforth no voices were to be heard conversing sadly on board that ship. After a time the carpenter tottered away forward; but later on, Falk going to drink at the fresh-water pump, had the inspiration to turn his head. The carpenter had stolen upon him from behind, and, summoning all his strength, was aiming with a crowbar a blow at the back of his skull.

Dodging just in time, Falk made his escape and ran into his cabin. While he was loading his revolver there, he heard the sound of heavy blows struck upon the bridge. The locks of the chartroom doors were slight, they flew open, and the carpenter, possessing himself of the captain's revolver, fired a shot of defiance.

Falk was about to go on deck and have it out at once, when he remarked that one of the ports of his cabin commanded the approaches to the freshwater pump. Instead of going out he remained in and secured the door. "The best man shall survive," he said to himself — and the other, he reasoned, must at some time or other come there to drink. These starving men would drink often to cheat the pangs of their hunger. But the carpenter too must have noticed the position of the port. They were the two best men in the ship, and the game was with them. All the rest of the day Falk saw no one and heard no sound. At night he strained his eyes. It was dark — he heard a rustling noise once, but he was certain that no one could have come near the pump. It was to the left of his deck port, and he could not have failed to see a man, for the night was clear and starry. He saw nothing; towards morning another faint noise made him suspicious. Deliberately and quietly he unlocked his door. He had not slept, and had not given way to the horror of the situation. He wanted to live.

But during the night the carpenter, without at all trying to approach the pump, had managed to creep quietly along the starboard bulwark, and, unseen, had crouched down right under Falk's deck port. When daylight came he rose up suddenly, looked in, and putting his arm through the round brass framed opening, fired at Falk within a foot. He missed — and Falk, instead of attempting to seize the arm holding the weapon, opened his door unexpectedly, and with the muzzle of his long revolver nearly touching the other's side, shot him dead.

The best man had survived. Both of them had at the beginning just strength enough to stand on their feet, and both had displayed pitiless resolution, endurance, cunning and courage — all the qualities of classic heroism. At once Falk threw overboard the captain's revolver. He was a born monopolist. Then after the report of the two shots, followed by a profound silence, there crept out into the cold, cruel dawn of Antarctic regions, from various hiding-places, over the deck of that dismantled corpse of a ship floating on a grey sea ruled by iron necessity and with a heart of ice — there crept into view one by one, cautious, slow, eager, glaring, and unclean, a band of hungry and livid skeletons. Falk faced them, the possessor of the only fire-arm on board, and the second best man — the carpenter — was lying dead between him and them.

“He was eaten, of course,” I said.

He bent his head slowly, shuddered a little, drawing his hands over his face, and said, “I had never any quarrel with that man. But there were our lives between him and me.”

Why continue the story of that ship, that story before which, with its fresh-water pump like a spring of death, its man with the weapon, the sea ruled by iron necessity, its spectral band swayed by terror and hope, its mute and unhearing heaven?—the fable of the Flying Dutchman with its convention of crime and its sentimental retribution fades like a graceful wreath, like a wisp of white mist. What is there to say that every one of us cannot guess for himself? I believe Falk began by going through the ship, revolver in hand, to annex all the matches. Those starving wretches had plenty of matches! He had no mind to have the ship set on fire under his feet, either from hate or from despair. He lived in the open, camping on the bridge, commanding all the after deck and the only approach to the pump. He lived! Some of the others lived too — concealed, anxious, coming out one by one from their hiding-places at the seductive sound of a shot. And he

was not selfish. They shared, but only three of them all were alive when a whaler, returning from her cruising ground, nearly ran over the water-logged hull of the Borgmester Dahl, which, it seems, in the end had in some way sprung a leak in both her holds, but being loaded with deals could not sink.

“They all died,” Falk said. “These three too, afterwards. But I would not die. All died, all! under this terrible misfortune. But was I too to throw away my life? Could I? Tell me, captain? I was alone there, quite alone, just like the others. Each man was alone. Was I to give up my revolver? Who to? Or was I to throw it into the sea? What would have been the good? Only the best man would survive. It was a great, terrible, and cruel misfortune.”

He had survived! I saw him before me as though preserved for a witness to the mighty truth of an unerring and eternal principle. Great beads of perspiration stood on his forehead. And suddenly it struck the table with a heavy blow, as he fell forward throwing his hands out.

“And this is worse,” he cried. “This is a worse pain! This is more terrible.”

He made my heart thump with the profound conviction of his cries. And after he had left me alone I called up before my mental eye the image of the girl weeping silently, abundantly, patiently, and as if irresistibly. I thought of her tawny hair. I thought how, if unplaited, it would have covered her all round as low as the hips, like the hair of a siren. And she had bewitched him. Fancy a man who would guard his own life with the inflexibility of a pitiless and immovable fate, being brought to lament that once a crowbar had missed his skull! The sirens sing and lure to death, but this one had been weeping silently as if for the pity of his life. She was the tender and voiceless siren of this appalling navigator. He evidently wanted to live his whole conception of life. Nothing else would do. And she too was a servant of that life that, in the midst of death, cries aloud to our senses. She was eminently fitted to interpret for him its feminine side. And in her own way, and with her own profusion of sensuous charms, she also seemed to illustrate the eternal truth of an unerring principle. I don't know though what sort of principle Hermann illustrated when he turned up early on board my ship with a most perplexed air. It struck me, however, that he too would do his best to survive. He seemed greatly calmed on the subject of Falk, but still very full of it.

“What is it you said I was last night? You know,” he asked after some preliminary talk. “Too — too — I don’t know. A very funny word.”

“Squeamish?” I suggested.

“Yes. What does it mean?”

“That you exaggerate things — to yourself. Without inquiry, and so on.”

He seemed to turn it over in his mind. We went on talking. This Falk was the plague of his life. Upsetting everybody like this! Mrs. Hermann was unwell rather this morning. His niece was crying still. There was nobody to look after the children. He struck his umbrella on the deck. She would be like that for months. Fancy carrying all the way home, second class, a perfectly useless girl who is crying all the time. It was bad for Lena too, he observed; but on what grounds I could not guess. Perhaps of the bad example. That child was already sorrowing and crying enough over the rag doll. Nicholas was really the least sentimental person of the family.

“Why does she weep?” I asked.

“From pity,” cried Hermann.

It was impossible to make out women. Mrs. Hermann was the only one he pretended to understand. She was very, very upset and doubtful.

“Doubtful about what?” I asked.

He averted his eyes and did not answer this. It was impossible to make them out. For instance, his niece was weeping for Falk. Now he (Hermann) would like to wring his neck — but then... He supposed he had too tender a heart. “Frankly,” he asked at last, “what do you think of what we heard last night, captain?”

“In all these tales,” I observed, “there is always a good deal of exaggeration.”

And not letting him recover from his surprise I assured him that I knew all the details. He begged me not to repeat them. His heart was too tender. They made him feel unwell. Then, looking at his feet and speaking very slowly, he supposed that he need not see much of them after they were married. For, indeed, he could not bear the sight of Falk. On the other hand it was ridiculous to take home a girl with her head turned. A girl that weeps all the time and is of no help to her aunt.

“Now you will be able to do with one cabin only on your passage home,” I said.

“Yes, I had thought of that,” he said brightly, almost. “Yes! Himself, his wife, four children — one cabin might do. Whereas if his niece went...”

“And what does Mrs. Hermann say to it?” I inquired.

Mrs. Hermann did not know whether a man of that sort could make a girl happy — she had been greatly deceived in Captain Falk. She had been very upset last night.

Those good people did not seem to be able to retain an impression for a whole twelve hours. I assured him on my own personal knowledge that Falk possessed in himself all the qualities to make his niece’s future prosperous. He said he was glad to hear this, and that he would tell his wife. Then the object of the visit came out. He wished me to help him to resume relations with Falk. His niece, he said, had expressed the hope I would do so in my kindness. He was evidently anxious that I should, for though he seemed to have forgotten nine-tenths of his last night’s opinions and the whole of his indignation, yet he evidently feared to be sent to the right-about. “You told me he was very much in love,” he concluded slyly, and leered in a sort of bucolic way.

As soon as he had left my ship I called Falk on board by signal — the tug still lying at the anchorage. He took the news with calm gravity, as though he had all along expected the stars to fight for him in their courses.

I saw them once more together, and only once — on the quarter-deck of the Diana. Hermann sat smoking with a shirt-sleeved elbow hooked over the back of his chair. Mrs. Hermann was sewing alone. As Falk stepped over the gangway, Hermann’s niece, with a slight swish of the skirt and a swift friendly nod to me, glided past my chair.

They met in sunshine abreast of the mainmast. He held her hands and looked down at them, and she looked up at him with her candid and unseeing glance. It seemed to me they had come together as if attracted, drawn and guided to each other by a mysterious influence. They were a complete couple. In her grey frock, palpitating with life, generous of form, olympian and simple, she was indeed the siren to fascinate that dark navigator, this ruthless lover of the five senses. From afar I seemed to feel the masculine strength with which he grasped those hands she had extended to him with a womanly swiftness. Lena, a little pale, nursing her beloved lump of dirty rags, ran towards her big friend; and then in the drowsy silence of the good old ship Mrs. Hermann’s voice rang out so changed that it made me spin round in my chair to see what was the matter.

“Lena, come here!” she screamed. And this good-natured matron gave me a wavering glance, dark and full of fearsome distrust. The child ran

back, surprised to her knee. But the two, standing before each other in sunlight with clasped hands, had heard nothing, had seen nothing and no one. Three feet away from them in the shade a seaman sat on a spar, very busy splicing a strop, and dipping his fingers into a tar-pot, as if utterly unaware of their existence.

When I returned in command of another ship, some five years afterwards, Mr. and Mrs. Falk had left the place. I should not wonder if Schomberg's tongue had succeeded at last in scaring Falk away for good; and, indubitably, there was a tale still going about the town of a certain Falk, owner of a tug, who had won his wife at cards from the captain of an English ship.

THE END



## AMY FOSTER



Kennedy is a country doctor, and lives in Colebrook, on the shores of Eastbay. The high ground rising abruptly behind the red roofs of the little town crowds the quaint High Street against the wall which defends it from the sea. Beyond the sea-wall there curves for miles in a vast and regular sweep the barren beach of shingle, with the village of Brenzett standing out darkly across the water, a spire in a clump of trees; and still further out the perpendicular column of a lighthouse, looking in the distance no bigger than a lead pencil, marks the vanishing-point of the land. The country at the back of Brenzett is low and flat, but the bay is fairly well sheltered from the seas, and occasionally a big ship, windbound or through stress of weather, makes use of the anchoring ground a mile and a half due north from you as you stand at the back door of the "Ship Inn" in Brenzett. A dilapidated windmill near by lifting its shattered arms from a mound no loftier than a rubbish heap, and a Martello tower squatting at the water's edge half a mile to the south of the Coastguard cottages, are familiar to the skippers of small craft. These are the official seamarks for the patch of trustworthy bottom represented on the Admiralty charts by an irregular oval of dots enclosing several figures six, with a tiny anchor engraved among them, and the legend "mud and shells" over all.

The brow of the upland overtops the square tower of the Colebrook Church. The slope is green and looped by a white road. Ascending along this road, you open a valley broad and shallow, a wide green trough of pastures and hedges merging inland into a vista of purple tints and flowing lines closing the view.

In this valley down to Brenzett and Colebrook and up to Darnford, the market town fourteen miles away, lies the practice of my friend Kennedy. He had begun life as surgeon in the Navy, and afterwards had been the companion of a famous traveller, in the days when there were continents with unexplored interiors. His papers on the fauna and flora made him known to scientific societies. And now he had come to a country practice — from choice. The penetrating power of his mind, acting like a corrosive fluid, had destroyed his ambition, I fancy. His intelligence is of a scientific

order, of an investigating habit, and of that unappeasable curiosity which believes that there is a particle of a general truth in every mystery.

A good many years ago now, on my return from abroad, he invited me to stay with him. I came readily enough, and as he could not neglect his patients to keep me company, he took me on his rounds — thirty miles or so of an afternoon, sometimes. I waited for him on the roads; the horse reached after the leafy twigs, and, sitting in the dogcart, I could hear Kennedy's laugh through the half-open door left open of some cottage. He had a big, hearty laugh that would have fitted a man twice his size, a brisk manner, a bronzed face, and a pair of grey, profoundly attentive eyes. He had the talent of making people talk to him freely, and an inexhaustible patience in listening to their tales.

One day, as we trotted out of a large village into a shady bit of road, I saw on our left hand a low, black cottage, with diamond panes in the windows, a creeper on the end wall, a roof of shingle, and some roses climbing on the rickety trellis-work of the tiny porch. Kennedy pulled up to a walk. A woman, in full sunlight, was throwing a dripping blanket over a line stretched between two old apple-trees. And as the bobtailed, long-necked chestnut, trying to get his head, jerked the left hand, covered by a thick dog-skin glove, the doctor raised his voice over the hedge: "How's your child, Amy?"

I had the time to see her dull face, red, not with a mantling blush, but as if her flat cheeks had been vigorously slapped, and to take in the squat figure, the scanty, dusty brown hair drawn into a tight knot at the back of the head. She looked quite young. With a distinct catch in her breath, her voice sounded low and timid.

"He's well, thank you."

We trotted again. "A young patient of yours," I said; and the doctor, flicking the chestnut absently, muttered, "Her husband used to be."

"She seems a dull creature," I remarked listlessly.

"Precisely," said Kennedy. "She is very passive. It's enough to look at the red hands hanging at the end of those short arms, at those slow, prominent brown eyes, to know the inertness of her mind — an inertness that one would think made it everlastingly safe from all the surprises of imagination. And yet which of us is safe? At any rate, such as you see her, she had enough imagination to fall in love. She's the daughter of one Isaac Foster, who from a small farmer has sunk into a shepherd; the beginning of his

misfortunes dating from his runaway marriage with the cook of his widowed father — a well-to-do, apoplectic grazier, who passionately struck his name off his will, and had been heard to utter threats against his life. But this old affair, scandalous enough to serve as a motive for a Greek tragedy, arose from the similarity of their characters. There are other tragedies, less scandalous and of a subtler poignancy, arising from irreconcilable differences and from that fear of the Incomprehensible that hangs over all our heads — over all our heads....”

The tired chestnut dropped into a walk; and the rim of the sun, all red in a speckless sky, touched familiarly the smooth top of a ploughed rise near the road as I had seen it times innumerable touch the distant horizon of the sea. The uniform brownness of the harrowed field glowed with a rosy tinge, as though the powdered clods had sweated out in minute pearls of blood the toil of uncounted ploughmen. From the edge of a copse a waggon with two horses was rolling gently along the ridge. Raised above our heads upon the sky-line, it loomed up against the red sun, triumphantly big, enormous, like a chariot of giants drawn by two slow-stepping steeds of legendary proportions. And the clumsy figure of the man plodding at the head of the leading horse projected itself on the background of the Infinite with a heroic uncouthness. The end of his carter’s whip quivered high up in the blue. Kennedy discoursed.

“She’s the eldest of a large family. At the age of fifteen they put her out to service at the New Barns Farm. I attended Mrs. Smith, the tenant’s wife, and saw that girl there for the first time. Mrs. Smith, a genteel person with a sharp nose, made her put on a black dress every afternoon. I don’t know what induced me to notice her at all. There are faces that call your attention by a curious want of definiteness in their whole aspect, as, walking in a mist, you peer attentively at a vague shape which, after all, may be nothing more curious or strange than a signpost. The only peculiarity I perceived in her was a slight hesitation in her utterance, a sort of preliminary stammer which passes away with the first word. When sharply spoken to, she was apt to lose her head at once; but her heart was of the kindest. She had never been heard to express a dislike for a single human being, and she was tender to every living creature. She was devoted to Mrs. Smith, to Mr. Smith, to their dogs, cats, canaries; and as to Mrs. Smith’s grey parrot, its peculiarities exercised upon her a positive fascination. Nevertheless, when that outlandish bird, attacked by the cat, shrieked for help in human accents,

she ran out into the yard stopping her ears, and did not prevent the crime. For Mrs. Smith this was another evidence of her stupidity; on the other hand, her want of charm, in view of Smith's well-known frivolousness, was a great recommendation. Her short-sighted eyes would swim with pity for a poor mouse in a trap, and she had been seen once by some boys on her knees in the wet grass helping a toad in difficulties. If it's true, as some German fellow has said, that without phosphorus there is no thought, it is still more true that there is no kindness of heart without a certain amount of imagination. She had some. She had even more than is necessary to understand suffering and to be moved by pity. She fell in love under circumstances that leave no room for doubt in the matter; for you need imagination to form a notion of beauty at all, and still more to discover your ideal in an unfamiliar shape.

"How this aptitude came to her, what it did feed upon, is an inscrutable mystery. She was born in the village, and had never been further away from it than Colebrook or perhaps Darnford. She lived for four years with the Smiths. New Barns is an isolated farmhouse a mile away from the road, and she was content to look day after day at the same fields, hollows, rises; at the trees and the hedgerows; at the faces of the four men about the farm, always the same — day after day, month after month, year after year. She never showed a desire for conversation, and, as it seemed to me, she did not know how to smile. Sometimes of a fine Sunday afternoon she would put on her best dress, a pair of stout boots, a large grey hat trimmed with a black feather (I've seen her in that finery), seize an absurdly slender parasol, climb over two stiles, tramp over three fields and along two hundred yards of road — never further. There stood Foster's cottage. She would help her mother to give their tea to the younger children, wash up the crockery, kiss the little ones, and go back to the farm. That was all. All the rest, all the change, all the relaxation. She never seemed to wish for anything more. And then she fell in love. She fell in love silently, obstinately — perhaps helplessly. It came slowly, but when it came it worked like a powerful spell; it was love as the Ancients understood it: an irresistible and fateful impulse — a possession! Yes, it was in her to become haunted and possessed by a face, by a presence, fatally, as though she had been a pagan worshipper of form under a joyous sky — and to be awakened at last from that mysterious forgetfulness of self, from that enchantment,

from that transport, by a fear resembling the unaccountable terror of a brute....”

With the sun hanging low on its western limit, the expanse of the grasslands framed in the counter-scarps of the rising ground took on a gorgeous and sombre aspect. A sense of penetrating sadness, like that inspired by a grave strain of music, disengaged itself from the silence of the fields. The men we met walked past slow, unsmiling, with downcast eyes, as if the melancholy of an over-burdened earth had weighted their feet, bowed their shoulders, borne down their glances.

“Yes,” said the doctor to my remark, “one would think the earth is under a curse, since of all her children these that cling to her the closest are uncouth in body and as leaden of gait as if their very hearts were loaded with chains. But here on this same road you might have seen amongst these heavy men a being lithe, supple, and long-limbed, straight like a pine with something striving upwards in his appearance as though the heart within him had been buoyant. Perhaps it was only the force of the contrast, but when he was passing one of these villagers here, the soles of his feet did not seem to me to touch the dust of the road. He vaulted over the stiles, paced these slopes with a long elastic stride that made him noticeable at a great distance, and had lustrous black eyes. He was so different from the mankind around that, with his freedom of movement, his soft — a little startled, glance, his olive complexion and graceful bearing, his humanity suggested to me the nature of a woodland creature. He came from there.”

The doctor pointed with his whip, and from the summit of the descent seen over the rolling tops of the trees in a park by the side of the road, appeared the level sea far below us, like the floor of an immense edifice inlaid with bands of dark ripple, with still trails of glitter, ending in a belt of glassy water at the foot of the sky. The light blur of smoke, from an invisible steamer, faded on the great clearness of the horizon like the mist of a breath on a mirror; and, inshore, the white sails of a coaster, with the appearance of disentangling themselves slowly from under the branches, floated clear of the foliage of the trees.

“Shipwrecked in the bay?” I said.

“Yes; he was a castaway. A poor emigrant from Central Europe bound to America and washed ashore here in a storm. And for him, who knew nothing of the earth, England was an undiscovered country. It was some time before he learned its name; and for all I know he might have expected

to find wild beasts or wild men here, when, crawling in the dark over the sea-wall, he rolled down the other side into a dyke, where it was another miracle he didn't get drowned. But he struggled instinctively like an animal under a net, and this blind struggle threw him out into a field. He must have been, indeed, of a tougher fibre than he looked to withstand without expiring such buffetings, the violence of his exertions, and so much fear. Later on, in his broken English that resembled curiously the speech of a young child, he told me himself that he put his trust in God, believing he was no longer in this world. And truly — he would add — how was he to know? He fought his way against the rain and the gale on all fours, and crawled at last among some sheep huddled close under the lee of a hedge. They ran off in all directions, bleating in the darkness, and he welcomed the first familiar sound he heard on these shores. It must have been two in the morning then. And this is all we know of the manner of his landing, though he did not arrive unattended by any means. Only his grisly company did not begin to come ashore till much later in the day....”

The doctor gathered the reins, clicked his tongue; we trotted down the hill. Then turning, almost directly, a sharp corner into the High Street, we rattled over the stones and were home.

Late in the evening Kennedy, breaking a spell of moodiness that had come over him, returned to the story. Smoking his pipe, he paced the long room from end to end. A reading-lamp concentrated all its light upon the papers on his desk; and, sitting by the open window, I saw, after the windless, scorching day, the frigid splendour of a hazy sea lying motionless under the moon. Not a whisper, not a splash, not a stir of the shingle, not a footstep, not a sigh came up from the earth below — never a sign of life but the scent of climbing jasmine; and Kennedy's voice, speaking behind me, passed through the wide casement, to vanish outside in a chill and sumptuous stillness.

“... The relations of shipwrecks in the olden time tell us of much suffering. Often the castaways were only saved from drowning to die miserably from starvation on a barren coast; others suffered violent death or else slavery, passing through years of precarious existence with people to whom their strangeness was an object of suspicion, dislike or fear. We read about these things, and they are very pitiful. It is indeed hard upon a man to find himself a lost stranger, helpless, incomprehensible, and of a mysterious origin, in some obscure corner of the earth. Yet amongst all the adventurers

shipwrecked in all the wild parts of the world there is not one, it seems to me, that ever had to suffer a fate so simply tragic as the man I am speaking of, the most innocent of adventurers cast out by the sea in the bight of this bay, almost within sight from this very window.

“He did not know the name of his ship. Indeed, in the course of time we discovered he did not even know that ships had names — ‘like Christian people’; and when, one day, from the top of the Talfourd Hill, he beheld the sea lying open to his view, his eyes roamed afar, lost in an air of wild surprise, as though he had never seen such a sight before. And probably he had not. As far as I could make out, he had been hustled together with many others on board an emigrant-ship lying at the mouth of the Elbe, too bewildered to take note of his surroundings, too weary to see anything, too anxious to care. They were driven below into the ‘tweendeck and battened down from the very start. It was a low timber dwelling — he would say — with wooden beams overhead, like the houses in his country, but you went into it down a ladder. It was very large, very cold, damp and sombre, with places in the manner of wooden boxes where people had to sleep, one above another, and it kept on rocking all ways at once all the time. He crept into one of these boxes and laid down there in the clothes in which he had left his home many days before, keeping his bundle and his stick by his side. People groaned, children cried, water dripped, the lights went out, the walls of the place creaked, and everything was being shaken so that in one’s little box one dared not lift one’s head. He had lost touch with his only companion (a young man from the same valley, he said), and all the time a great noise of wind went on outside and heavy blows fell — boom! boom! An awful sickness overcame him, even to the point of making him neglect his prayers. Besides, one could not tell whether it was morning or evening. It seemed always to be night in that place.

“Before that he had been travelling a long, long time on the iron track. He looked out of the window, which had a wonderfully clear glass in it, and the trees, the houses, the fields, and the long roads seemed to fly round and round about him till his head swam. He gave me to understand that he had on his passage beheld uncounted multitudes of people — whole nations — all dressed in such clothes as the rich wear. Once he was made to get out of the carriage, and slept through a night on a bench in a house of bricks with his bundle under his head; and once for many hours he had to sit on a floor of flat stones dozing, with his knees up and with his bundle between his

feet. There was a roof over him, which seemed made of glass, and was so high that the tallest mountain-pine he had ever seen would have had room to grow under it. Steam-machines rolled in at one end and out at the other. People swarmed more than you can see on a feast-day round the miraculous Holy Image in the yard of the Carmelite Convent down in the plains where, before he left his home, he drove his mother in a wooden cart — a pious old woman who wanted to offer prayers and make a vow for his safety. He could not give me an idea of how large and lofty and full of noise and smoke and gloom, and clang of iron, the place was, but some one had told him it was called Berlin. Then they rang a bell, and another steam-machine came in, and again he was taken on and on through a land that wearied his eyes by its flatness without a single bit of a hill to be seen anywhere. One more night he spent shut up in a building like a good stable with a litter of straw on the floor, guarding his bundle amongst a lot of men, of whom not one could understand a single word he said. In the morning they were all led down to the stony shores of an extremely broad muddy river, flowing not between hills but between houses that seemed immense. There was a steam-machine that went on the water, and they all stood upon it packed tight, only now there were with them many women and children who made much noise. A cold rain fell, the wind blew in his face; he was wet through, and his teeth chattered. He and the young man from the same valley took each other by the hand.

“They thought they were being taken to America straight away, but suddenly the steam-machine bumped against the side of a thing like a house on the water. The walls were smooth and black, and there uprose, growing from the roof as it were, bare trees in the shape of crosses, extremely high. That’s how it appeared to him then, for he had never seen a ship before. This was the ship that was going to swim all the way to America. Voices shouted, everything swayed; there was a ladder dipping up and down. He went up on his hands and knees in mortal fear of falling into the water below, which made a great splashing. He got separated from his companion, and when he descended into the bottom of that ship his heart seemed to melt suddenly within him.

“It was then also, as he told me, that he lost contact for good and all with one of those three men who the summer before had been going about through all the little towns in the foothills of his country. They would arrive on market days driving in a peasant’s cart, and would set up an office in an



inn or some other Jew's house. There were three of them, of whom one with a long beard looked venerable; and they had red cloth collars round their necks and gold lace on their sleeves like Government officials. They sat proudly behind a long table; and in the next room, so that the common people shouldn't hear, they kept a cunning telegraph machine, through which they could talk to the Emperor of America. The fathers hung about the door, but the young men of the mountains would crowd up to the table asking many questions, for there was work to be got all the year round at three dollars a day in America, and no military service to do.

"But the American Kaiser would not take everybody. Oh, no! He himself had a great difficulty in getting accepted, and the venerable man in uniform had to go out of the room several times to work the telegraph on his behalf. The American Kaiser engaged him at last at three dollars, he being young and strong. However, many able young men backed out, afraid of the great distance; besides, those only who had some money could be taken. There were some who sold their huts and their land because it cost a lot of money to get to America; but then, once there, you had three dollars a day, and if you were clever you could find places where true gold could be picked up on the ground. His father's house was getting over full. Two of his brothers were married and had children. He promised to send money home from America by post twice a year. His father sold an old cow, a pair of piebald mountain ponies of his own raising, and a cleared plot of fair pasture land on the sunny slope of a pine-clad pass to a Jew inn-keeper in order to pay the people of the ship that took men to America to get rich in a short time.

"He must have been a real adventurer at heart, for how many of the greatest enterprises in the conquest of the earth had for their beginning just such a bargaining away of the paternal cow for the mirage or true gold far away! I have been telling you more or less in my own words what I learned fragmentarily in the course of two or three years, during which I seldom missed an opportunity of a friendly chat with him. He told me this story of his adventure with many flashes of white teeth and lively glances of black eyes, at first in a sort of anxious baby-talk, then, as he acquired the language, with great fluency, but always with that singing, soft, and at the same time vibrating intonation that instilled a strangely penetrating power into the sound of the most familiar English words, as if they had been the words of an unearthly language. And he always would come to an end, with many emphatic shakes of his head, upon that awful sensation of his heart

melting within him directly he set foot on board that ship. Afterwards there seemed to come for him a period of blank ignorance, at any rate as to facts. No doubt he must have been abominably sea-sick and abominably unhappy — this soft and passionate adventurer, taken thus out of his knowledge, and feeling bitterly as he lay in his emigrant bunk his utter loneliness; for his was a highly sensitive nature. The next thing we know of him for certain is that he had been hiding in Hammond's pig-pound by the side of the road to Norton six miles, as the crow flies, from the sea. Of these experiences he was unwilling to speak: they seemed to have seared into his soul a sombre sort of wonder and indignation. Through the rumours of the country-side, which lasted for a good many days after his arrival, we know that the fishermen of West Colebrook had been disturbed and startled by heavy knocks against the walls of weatherboard cottages, and by a voice crying piercingly strange words in the night. Several of them turned out even, but, no doubt, he had fled in sudden alarm at their rough angry tones hailing each other in the darkness. A sort of frenzy must have helped him up the steep Norton hill. It was he, no doubt, who early the following morning had been seen lying (in a swoon, I should say) on the roadside grass by the Brenzett carrier, who actually got down to have a nearer look, but drew back, intimidated by the perfect immobility, and by something queer in the aspect of that tramp, sleeping so still under the showers. As the day advanced, some children came dashing into school at Norton in such a fright that the schoolmistress went out and spoke indignantly to a 'horrid-looking man' on the road. He edged away, hanging his head, for a few steps, and then suddenly ran off with extraordinary fleetness. The driver of Mr. Bradley's milk-cart made no secret of it that he had lashed with his whip at a hairy sort of gipsy fellow who, jumping up at a turn of the road by the Vents, made a snatch at the pony's bridle. And he caught him a good one too, right over the face, he said, that made him drop down in the mud a jolly sight quicker than he had jumped up; but it was a good half-a-mile before he could stop the pony. Maybe that in his desperate endeavours to get help, and in his need to get in touch with some one, the poor devil had tried to stop the cart. Also three boys confessed afterwards to throwing stones at a funny tramp, knocking about all wet and muddy, and, it seemed, very drunk, in the narrow deep lane by the limekilns. All this was the talk of three villages for days; but we have Mrs. Finn's (the wife of Smith's waggoner) unimpeachable testimony that she saw him get over the low wall

of Hammond's pig-pound and lurch straight at her, babbling aloud in a voice that was enough to make one die of fright. Having the baby with her in a perambulator, Mrs. Finn called out to him to go away, and as he persisted in coming nearer, she hit him courageously with her umbrella over the head and, without once looking back, ran like the wind with the perambulator as far as the first house in the village. She stopped then, out of breath, and spoke to old Lewis, hammering there at a heap of stones; and the old chap, taking off his immense black wire goggles, got up on his shaky legs to look where she pointed. Together they followed with their eyes the figure of the man running over a field; they saw him fall down, pick himself up, and run on again, staggering and waving his long arms above his head, in the direction of the New Barns Farm. From that moment he is plainly in the toils of his obscure and touching destiny. There is no doubt after this of what happened to him. All is certain now: Mrs. Smith's intense terror; Amy Foster's stolid conviction held against the other's nervous attack, that the man 'meant no harm'; Smith's exasperation (on his return from Darnford Market) at finding the dog barking himself into a fit, the back-door locked, his wife in hysterics; and all for an unfortunate dirty tramp, supposed to be even then lurking in his stackyard. Was he? He would teach him to frighten women.

"Smith is notoriously hot-tempered, but the sight of some nondescript and miry creature sitting cross-legged amongst a lot of loose straw, and swinging itself to and fro like a bear in a cage, made him pause. Then this tramp stood up silently before him, one mass of mud and filth from head to foot. Smith, alone amongst his stacks with this apparition, in the stormy twilight ringing with the infuriated barking of the dog, felt the dread of an inexplicable strangeness. But when that being, parting with his black hands the long matted locks that hung before his face, as you part the two halves of a curtain, looked out at him with glistening, wild, black-and-white eyes, the weirdness of this silent encounter fairly staggered him. He had admitted since (for the story has been a legitimate subject of conversation about here for years) that he made more than one step backwards. Then a sudden burst of rapid, senseless speech persuaded him at once that he had to do with an escaped lunatic. In fact, that impression never wore off completely. Smith has not in his heart given up his secret conviction of the man's essential insanity to this very day.

“As the creature approached him, jabbering in a most discomposing manner, Smith (unaware that he was being addressed as ‘gracious lord,’ and adjured in God’s name to afford food and shelter) kept on speaking firmly but gently to it, and retreating all the time into the other yard. At last, watching his chance, by a sudden charge he bundled him headlong into the wood-lodge, and instantly shot the bolt. Thereupon he wiped his brow, though the day was cold. He had done his duty to the community by shutting up a wandering and probably dangerous maniac. Smith isn’t a hard man at all, but he had room in his brain only for that one idea of lunacy. He was not imaginative enough to ask himself whether the man might not be perishing with cold and hunger. Meantime, at first, the maniac made a great deal of noise in the lodge. Mrs. Smith was screaming upstairs, where she had locked herself in her bedroom; but Amy Foster sobbed piteously at the kitchen door, wringing her hands and muttering, ‘Don’t! don’t!’ I daresay Smith had a rough time of it that evening with one noise and another, and this insane, disturbing voice crying obstinately through the door only added to his irritation. He couldn’t possibly have connected this troublesome lunatic with the sinking of a ship in Eastbay, of which there had been a rumour in the Darnford marketplace. And I daresay the man inside had been very near to insanity on that night. Before his excitement collapsed and he became unconscious he was throwing himself violently about in the dark, rolling on some dirty sacks, and biting his fists with rage, cold, hunger, amazement, and despair.

“He was a mountaineer of the eastern range of the Carpathians, and the vessel sunk the night before in Eastbay was the Hamburg emigrant-ship Herzogin Sophia-Dorothea, of appalling memory.

“A few months later we could read in the papers the accounts of the bogus ‘Emigration Agencies’ among the Sclavonian peasantry in the more remote provinces of Austria. The object of these scoundrels was to get hold of the poor ignorant people’s homesteads, and they were in league with the local usurers. They exported their victims through Hamburg mostly. As to the ship, I had watched her out of this very window, reaching close-hauled under short canvas into the bay on a dark, threatening afternoon. She came to an anchor, correctly by the chart, off the Brenzett Coastguard station. I remember before the night fell looking out again at the outlines of her spars and rigging that stood out dark and pointed on a background of ragged, slaty clouds like another and a slighter spire to the left of the Brenzett

church-tower. In the evening the wind rose. At midnight I could hear in my bed the terrific gusts and the sounds of a driving deluge.

“About that time the Coastguardmen thought they saw the lights of a steamer over the anchoring-ground. In a moment they vanished; but it is clear that another vessel of some sort had tried for shelter in the bay on that awful, blind night, had rammed the German ship amidships (a breach — as one of the divers told me afterwards — ’that you could sail a Thames barge through’), and then had gone out either scathless or damaged, who shall say; but had gone out, unknown, unseen, and fatal, to perish mysteriously at sea. Of her nothing ever came to light, and yet the hue and cry that was raised all over the world would have found her out if she had been in existence anywhere on the face of the waters.

“A completeness without a clue, and a stealthy silence as of a neatly executed crime, characterise this murderous disaster, which, as you may remember, had its gruesome celebrity. The wind would have prevented the loudest outcries from reaching the shore; there had been evidently no time for signals of distress. It was death without any sort of fuss. The Hamburg ship, filling all at once, capsized as she sank, and at daylight there was not even the end of a spar to be seen above water. She was missed, of course, and at first the Coastguardmen surmised that she had either dragged her anchor or parted her cable some time during the night, and had been blown out to sea. Then, after the tide turned, the wreck must have shifted a little and released some of the bodies, because a child — a little fair-haired child in a red frock — came ashore abreast of the Martello tower. By the afternoon you could see along three miles of beach dark figures with bare legs dashing in and out of the tumbling foam, and rough-looking men, women with hard faces, children, mostly fair-haired, were being carried, stiff and dripping, on stretchers, on wattles, on ladders, in a long procession past the door of the ‘Ship Inn,’ to be laid out in a row under the north wall of the Brenzett Church.

“Officially, the body of the little girl in the red frock is the first thing that came ashore from that ship. But I have patients amongst the seafaring population of West Colebrook, and, unofficially, I am informed that very early that morning two brothers, who went down to look after their cobble hauled up on the beach, found, a good way from Brenzett, an ordinary ship’s hencoop lying high and dry on the shore, with eleven drowned ducks inside. Their families ate the birds, and the hencoop was split into firewood

with a hatchet. It is possible that a man (supposing he happened to be on deck at the time of the accident) might have floated ashore on that hencoop. He might. I admit it is improbable, but there was the man — and for days, nay, for weeks — it didn't enter our heads that we had amongst us the only living soul that had escaped from that disaster. The man himself, even when he learned to speak intelligibly, could tell us very little. He remembered he had felt better (after the ship had anchored, I suppose), and that the darkness, the wind, and the rain took his breath away. This looks as if he had been on deck some time during that night. But we mustn't forget he had been taken out of his knowledge, that he had been sea-sick and battened down below for four days, that he had no general notion of a ship or of the sea, and therefore could have no definite idea of what was happening to him. The rain, the wind, the darkness he knew; he understood the bleating of the sheep, and he remembered the pain of his wretchedness and misery, his heartbroken astonishment that it was neither seen nor understood, his dismay at finding all the men angry and all the women fierce. He had approached them as a beggar, it is true, he said; but in his country, even if they gave nothing, they spoke gently to beggars. The children in his country were not taught to throw stones at those who asked for compassion. Smith's strategy overcame him completely. The wood-lodge presented the horrible aspect of a dungeon. What would be done to him next?... No wonder that Amy Foster appeared to his eyes with the aureole of an angel of light. The girl had not been able to sleep for thinking of the poor man, and in the morning, before the Smiths were up, she slipped out across the back yard. Holding the door of the wood-lodge ajar, she looked in and extended to him half a loaf of white bread — 'such bread as the rich eat in my country,' he used to say.

“At this he got up slowly from amongst all sorts of rubbish, stiff, hungry, trembling, miserable, and doubtful. ‘Can you eat this?’ she asked in her soft and timid voice. He must have taken her for a ‘gracious lady.’ He devoured ferociously, and tears were falling on the crust. Suddenly he dropped the bread, seized her wrist, and imprinted a kiss on her hand. She was not frightened. Through his forlorn condition she had observed that he was good-looking. She shut the door and walked back slowly to the kitchen. Much later on, she told Mrs. Smith, who shuddered at the bare idea of being touched by that creature.

“Through this act of impulsive pity he was brought back again within the pale of human relations with his new surroundings. He never forgot it — never.

“That very same morning old Mr. Swaffer (Smith’s nearest neighbour) came over to give his advice, and ended by carrying him off. He stood, unsteady on his legs, meek, and caked over in half-dried mud, while the two men talked around him in an incomprehensible tongue. Mrs. Smith had refused to come downstairs till the madman was off the premises; Amy Foster, far from within the dark kitchen, watched through the open back door; and he obeyed the signs that were made to him to the best of his ability. But Smith was full of mistrust. ‘Mind, sir! It may be all his cunning,’ he cried repeatedly in a tone of warning. When Mr. Swaffer started the mare, the deplorable being sitting humbly by his side, through weakness, nearly fell out over the back of the high two-wheeled cart. Swaffer took him straight home. And it is then that I come upon the scene.

“I was called in by the simple process of the old man beckoning to me with his forefinger over the gate of his house as I happened to be driving past. I got down, of course.

“‘I’ve got something here,’ he mumbled, leading the way to an outhouse at a little distance from his other farm-buildings.

“It was there that I saw him first, in a long low room taken upon the space of that sort of coach-house. It was bare and whitewashed, with a small square aperture glazed with one cracked, dusty pane at its further end. He was lying on his back upon a straw pallet; they had given him a couple of horse-blankets, and he seemed to have spent the remainder of his strength in the exertion of cleaning himself. He was almost speechless; his quick breathing under the blankets pulled up to his chin, his glittering, restless black eyes reminded me of a wild bird caught in a snare. While I was examining him, old Swaffer stood silently by the door, passing the tips of his fingers along his shaven upper lip. I gave some directions, promised to send a bottle of medicine, and naturally made some inquiries.

“‘Smith caught him in the stackyard at New Barns,’ said the old chap in his deliberate, unmoved manner, and as if the other had been indeed a sort of wild animal. ‘That’s how I came by him. Quite a curiosity, isn’t he? Now tell me, doctor — you’ve been all over the world — don’t you think that’s a bit of a Hindoo we’ve got hold of here.’

“I was greatly surprised. His long black hair scattered over the straw bolster contrasted with the olive pallor of his face. It occurred to me he might be a Basque. It didn’t necessarily follow that he should understand Spanish; but I tried him with the few words I know, and also with some French. The whispered sounds I caught by bending my ear to his lips puzzled me utterly. That afternoon the young ladies from the Rectory (one of them read Goethe with a dictionary, and the other had struggled with Dante for years), coming to see Miss Swaffer, tried their German and Italian on him from the doorway. They retreated, just the least bit scared by the flood of passionate speech which, turning on his pallet, he let out at them. They admitted that the sound was pleasant, soft, musical — but, in conjunction with his looks perhaps, it was startling — so excitable, so utterly unlike anything one had ever heard. The village boys climbed up the bank to have a peep through the little square aperture. Everybody was wondering what Mr. Swaffer would do with him.

“He simply kept him.

“Swaffer would be called eccentric were he not so much respected. They will tell you that Mr. Swaffer sits up as late as ten o’clock at night to read books, and they will tell you also that he can write a cheque for two hundred pounds without thinking twice about it. He himself would tell you that the Swaffers had owned land between this and Darnford for these three hundred years. He must be eighty-five to-day, but he does not look a bit older than when I first came here. He is a great breeder of sheep, and deals extensively in cattle. He attends market days for miles around in every sort of weather, and drives sitting bowed low over the reins, his lank grey hair curling over the collar of his warm coat, and with a green plaid rug round his legs. The calmness of advanced age gives a solemnity to his manner. He is clean-shaved; his lips are thin and sensitive; something rigid and monarchical in the set of his features lends a certain elevation to the character of his face. He has been known to drive miles in the rain to see a new kind of rose in somebody’s garden, or a monstrous cabbage grown by a cottager. He loves to hear tell of or to be shown something that he calls ‘outlandish.’ Perhaps it was just that outlandishness of the man which influenced old Swaffer. Perhaps it was only an inexplicable caprice. All I know is that at the end of three weeks I caught sight of Smith’s lunatic digging in Swaffer’s kitchen garden. They had found out he could use a spade. He dug barefooted.



“His black hair flowed over his shoulders. I suppose it was Swaffer who had given him the striped old cotton shirt; but he wore still the national brown cloth trousers (in which he had been washed ashore) fitting to the leg almost like tights; was belted with a broad leathern belt studded with little brass discs; and had never yet ventured into the village. The land he looked upon seemed to him kept neatly, like the grounds round a landowner’s house; the size of the cart-horses struck him with astonishment; the roads resembled garden walks, and the aspect of the people, especially on Sundays, spoke of opulence. He wondered what made them so hardhearted and their children so bold. He got his food at the back door, carried it in both hands carefully to his outhouse, and, sitting alone on his pallet, would make the sign of the cross before he began. Beside the same pallet, kneeling in the early darkness of the short days, he recited aloud the Lord’s Prayer before he slept. Whenever he saw old Swaffer he would bow with veneration from the waist, and stand erect while the old man, with his fingers over his upper lip, surveyed him silently. He bowed also to Miss Swaffer, who kept house frugally for her father — a broad-shouldered, big-boned woman of forty-five, with the pocket of her dress full of keys, and a grey, steady eye. She was Church — as people said (while her father was one of the trustees of the Baptist Chapel) — and wore a little steel cross at her waist. She dressed severely in black, in memory of one of the innumerable Bradleys of the neighbourhood, to whom she had been engaged some twenty-five years ago — a young farmer who broke his neck out hunting on the eve of the wedding day. She had the unmoved countenance of the deaf, spoke very seldom, and her lips, thin like her father’s, astonished one sometimes by a mysteriously ironic curl.

“These were the people to whom he owed allegiance, and an overwhelming loneliness seemed to fall from the leaden sky of that winter without sunshine. All the faces were sad. He could talk to no one, and had no hope of ever understanding anybody. It was as if these had been the faces of people from the other world — dead people — he used to tell me years afterwards. Upon my word, I wonder he did not go mad. He didn’t know where he was. Somewhere very far from his mountains — somewhere over the water. Was this America, he wondered?

“If it hadn’t been for the steel cross at Miss Swaffer’s belt he would not, he confessed, have known whether he was in a Christian country at all. He used to cast stealthy glances at it, and feel comforted. There was nothing

here the same as in his country! The earth and the water were different; there were no images of the Redeemer by the roadside. The very grass was different, and the trees. All the trees but the three old Norway pines on the bit of lawn before Swaffer's house, and these reminded him of his country. He had been detected once, after dusk, with his forehead against the trunk of one of them, sobbing, and talking to himself. They had been like brothers to him at that time, he affirmed. Everything else was strange. Conceive you the kind of an existence overshadowed, oppressed, by the everyday material appearances, as if by the visions of a nightmare. At night, when he could not sleep, he kept on thinking of the girl who gave him the first piece of bread he had eaten in this foreign land. She had been neither fierce nor angry, nor frightened. Her face he remembered as the only comprehensible face amongst all these faces that were as closed, as mysterious, and as mute as the faces of the dead who are possessed of a knowledge beyond the comprehension of the living. I wonder whether the memory of her compassion prevented him from cutting his throat. But there! I suppose I am an old sentimentalist, and forget the instinctive love of life which it takes all the strength of an uncommon despair to overcome.

"He did the work which was given him with an intelligence which surprised old Swaffer. By-and-by it was discovered that he could help at the ploughing, could milk the cows, feed the bullocks in the cattle-yard, and was of some use with the sheep. He began to pick up words, too, very fast; and suddenly, one fine morning in spring, he rescued from an untimely death a grand-child of old Swaffer.

"Swaffer's younger daughter is married to Willcox, a solicitor and the Town Clerk of Colebrook. Regularly twice a year they come to stay with the old man for a few days. Their only child, a little girl not three years old at the time, ran out of the house alone in her little white pinafore, and, toddling across the grass of a terraced garden, pitched herself over a low wall head first into the horse-pond in the yard below.

"Our man was out with the waggoner and the plough in the field nearest to the house, and as he was leading the team round to begin a fresh furrow, he saw, through the gap of the gate, what for anybody else would have been a mere flutter of something white. But he had straight-glancing, quick, far-reaching eyes, that only seemed to flinch and lose their amazing power before the immensity of the sea. He was barefooted, and looking as outlandish as the heart of Swaffer could desire. Leaving the horses on the

turn, to the inexpressible disgust of the waggoner he bounded off, going over the ploughed ground in long leaps, and suddenly appeared before the mother, thrust the child into her arms, and strode away.

“The pond was not very deep; but still, if he had not had such good eyes, the child would have perished — miserably suffocated in the foot or so of sticky mud at the bottom. Old Swaffer walked out slowly into the field, waited till the plough came over to his side, had a good look at him, and without saying a word went back to the house. But from that time they laid out his meals on the kitchen table; and at first, Miss Swaffer, all in black and with an inscrutable face, would come and stand in the doorway of the living-room to see him make a big sign of the cross before he fell to. I believe that from that day, too, Swaffer began to pay him regular wages.

“I can’t follow step by step his development. He cut his hair short, was seen in the village and along the road going to and fro to his work like any other man. Children ceased to shout after him. He became aware of social differences, but remained for a long time surprised at the bare poverty of the churches among so much wealth. He couldn’t understand either why they were kept shut up on week days. There was nothing to steal in them. Was it to keep people from praying too often? The rectory took much notice of him about that time, and I believe the young ladies attempted to prepare the ground for his conversion. They could not, however, break him of his habit of crossing himself, but he went so far as to take off the string with a couple of brass medals the size of a sixpence, a tiny metal cross, and a square sort of scapulary which he wore round his neck. He hung them on the wall by the side of his bed, and he was still to be heard every evening reciting the Lord’s Prayer, in incomprehensible words and in a slow, fervent tone, as he had heard his old father do at the head of all the kneeling family, big and little, on every evening of his life. And though he wore corduroys at work, and a slop-made pepper-and-salt suit on Sundays, strangers would turn round to look after him on the road. His foreignness had a peculiar and indelible stamp. At last people became used to see him. But they never became used to him. His rapid, skimming walk; his swarthy complexion; his hat cocked on the left ear; his habit, on warm evenings, of wearing his coat over one shoulder, like a hussar’s dolman; his manner of leaping over the stiles, not as a feat of agility, but in the ordinary course of progression — all these peculiarities were, as one may say, so many causes of scorn and offence to the inhabitants of the village. They wouldn’t in their dinner hour

lie flat on their backs on the grass to stare at the sky. Neither did they go about the fields screaming dismal tunes. Many times have I heard his high-pitched voice from behind the ridge of some sloping sheep-walk, a voice light and soaring, like a lark's, but with a melancholy human note, over our fields that hear only the song of birds. And I should be startled myself. Ah! He was different: innocent of heart, and full of good will, which nobody wanted, this castaway, that, like a man transplanted into another planet, was separated by an immense space from his past and by an immense ignorance from his future. His quick, fervent utterance positively shocked everybody. 'An excitable devil,' they called him. One evening, in the tap-room of the Coach and Horses (having drunk some whisky), he upset them all by singing a love song of his country. They hooted him down, and he was pained; but Preble, the lame wheelwright, and Vincent, the fat blacksmith, and the other notables too, wanted to drink their evening beer in peace. On another occasion he tried to show them how to dance. The dust rose in clouds from the sanded floor; he leaped straight up amongst the deal tables, struck his heels together, squatted on one heel in front of old Preble, shooting out the other leg, uttered wild and exulting cries, jumped up to whirl on one foot, snapping his fingers above his head — and a strange carter who was having a drink in there began to swear, and cleared out with his half-pint in his hand into the bar. But when suddenly he sprang upon a table and continued to dance among the glasses, the landlord interfered. He didn't want any 'acrobat tricks in the taproom.' They laid their hands on him. Having had a glass or two, Mr. Swaffer's foreigner tried to expostulate: was ejected forcibly: got a black eye.

"I believe he felt the hostility of his human surroundings. But he was tough — tough in spirit, too, as well as in body. Only the memory of the sea frightened him, with that vague terror that is left by a bad dream. His home was far away; and he did not want now to go to America. I had often explained to him that there is no place on earth where true gold can be found lying ready and to be got for the trouble of the picking up. How then, he asked, could he ever return home with empty hands when there had been sold a cow, two ponies, and a bit of land to pay for his going? His eyes would fill with tears, and, averting them from the immense shimmer of the sea, he would throw himself face down on the grass. But sometimes, cocking his hat with a little conquering air, he would defy my wisdom. He had found his bit of true gold. That was Amy Foster's heart; which was 'a

golden heart, and soft to people's misery,' he would say in the accents of overwhelming conviction.

"He was called Yanko. He had explained that this meant little John; but as he would also repeat very often that he was a mountaineer (some word sounding in the dialect of his country like Goorall) he got it for his surname. And this is the only trace of him that the succeeding ages may find in the marriage register of the parish. There it stands — Yanko Goorall — in the rector's handwriting. The crooked cross made by the castaway, a cross whose tracing no doubt seemed to him the most solemn part of the whole ceremony, is all that remains now to perpetuate the memory of his name.

"His courtship had lasted some time — ever since he got his precarious footing in the community. It began by his buying for Amy Foster a green satin ribbon in Darnford. This was what you did in his country. You bought a ribbon at a Jew's stall on a fair-day. I don't suppose the girl knew what to do with it, but he seemed to think that his honourable intentions could not be mistaken.

"It was only when he declared his purpose to get married that I fully understood how, for a hundred futile and inappreciable reasons, how — shall I say odious? — he was to all the countryside. Every old woman in the village was up in arms. Smith, coming upon him near the farm, promised to break his head for him if he found him about again. But he twisted his little black moustache with such a bellicose air and rolled such big, black fierce eyes at Smith that this promise came to nothing. Smith, however, told the girl that she must be mad to take up with a man who was surely wrong in his head. All the same, when she heard him in the gloaming whistle from beyond the orchard a couple of bars of a weird and mournful tune, she would drop whatever she had in her hand — she would leave Mrs. Smith in the middle of a sentence — and she would run out to his call. Mrs. Smith called her a shameless hussy. She answered nothing. She said nothing at all to anybody, and went on her way as if she had been deaf. She and I alone all in the land, I fancy, could see his very real beauty. He was very good-looking, and most graceful in his bearing, with that something wild as of a woodland creature in his aspect. Her mother moaned over her dismally whenever the girl came to see her on her day out. The father was surly, but pretended not to know; and Mrs. Finn once told her plainly that 'this man, my dear, will do you some harm some day yet.' And so it went on. They could be seen on the roads, she tramping stolidly in her finery — grey

dress, black feather, stout boots, prominent white cotton gloves that caught your eye a hundred yards away; and he, his coat slung picturesquely over one shoulder, pacing by her side, gallant of bearing and casting tender glances upon the girl with the golden heart. I wonder whether he saw how plain she was. Perhaps among types so different from what he had ever seen, he had not the power to judge; or perhaps he was seduced by the divine quality of her pity.

“Yanko was in great trouble meantime. In his country you get an old man for an ambassador in marriage affairs. He did not know how to proceed. However, one day in the midst of sheep in a field (he was now Swaffer’s under-shepherd with Foster) he took off his hat to the father and declared himself humbly. ‘I daresay she’s fool enough to marry you,’ was all Foster said. ‘And then,’ he used to relate, ‘he puts his hat on his head, looks black at me as if he wanted to cut my throat, whistles the dog, and off he goes, leaving me to do the work.’ The Fosters, of course, didn’t like to lose the wages the girl earned: Amy used to give all her money to her mother. But there was in Foster a very genuine aversion to that match. He contended that the fellow was very good with sheep, but was not fit for any girl to marry. For one thing, he used to go along the hedges muttering to himself like a dam’ fool; and then, these foreigners behave very queerly to women sometimes. And perhaps he would want to carry her off somewhere — or run off himself. It was not safe. He preached it to his daughter that the fellow might ill-use her in some way. She made no answer. It was, they said in the village, as if the man had done something to her. People discussed the matter. It was quite an excitement, and the two went on ‘walking out’ together in the face of opposition. Then something unexpected happened.

“I don’t know whether old Swaffer ever understood how much he was regarded in the light of a father by his foreign retainer. Anyway the relation was curiously feudal. So when Yanko asked formally for an interview — ‘and the Miss too’ (he called the severe, deaf Miss Swaffer simply Miss) — it was to obtain their permission to marry. Swaffer heard him unmoved, dismissed him by a nod, and then shouted the intelligence into Miss Swaffer’s best ear. She showed no surprise, and only remarked grimly, in a veiled blank voice, ‘He certainly won’t get any other girl to marry him.’

“It is Miss Swaffer who has all the credit of the munificence: but in a very few days it came out that Mr. Swaffer had presented Yanko with a cottage (the cottage you’ve seen this morning) and something like an acre

of ground — had made it over to him in absolute property. Willcox expedited the deed, and I remember him telling me he had a great pleasure in making it ready. It recited: ‘In consideration of saving the life of my beloved grandchild, Bertha Willcox.’

“Of course, after that no power on earth could prevent them from getting married.

“Her infatuation endured. People saw her going out to meet him in the evening. She stared with unblinking, fascinated eyes up the road where he was expected to appear, walking freely, with a swing from the hip, and humming one of the love-tunes of his country. When the boy was born, he got elevated at the ‘Coach and Horses,’ essayed again a song and a dance, and was again ejected. People expressed their commiseration for a woman married to that Jack-in-the-box. He didn’t care. There was a man now (he told me boastfully) to whom he could sing and talk in the language of his country, and show how to dance by-and-by.

“But I don’t know. To me he appeared to have grown less springy of step, heavier in body, less keen of eye. Imagination, no doubt; but it seems to me now as if the net of fate had been drawn closer round him already.

“One day I met him on the footpath over the Talfourd Hill. He told me that ‘women were funny.’ I had heard already of domestic differences. People were saying that Amy Foster was beginning to find out what sort of man she had married. He looked upon the sea with indifferent, unseeing eyes. His wife had snatched the child out of his arms one day as he sat on the doorstep crooning to it a song such as the mothers sing to babies in his mountains. She seemed to think he was doing it some harm. Women are funny. And she had objected to him praying aloud in the evening. Why? He expected the boy to repeat the prayer aloud after him by-and-by, as he used to do after his old father when he was a child — in his own country. And I discovered he longed for their boy to grow up so that he could have a man to talk with in that language that to our ears sounded so disturbing, so passionate, and so bizarre. Why his wife should dislike the idea he couldn’t tell. But that would pass, he said. And tilting his head knowingly, he tapped his breastbone to indicate that she had a good heart: not hard, not fierce, open to compassion, charitable to the poor!

“I walked away thoughtfully; I wondered whether his difference, his strangeness, were not penetrating with repulsion that dull nature they had begun by irresistibly attracting. I wondered....”

The Doctor came to the window and looked out at the frigid splendour of the sea, immense in the haze, as if enclosing all the earth with all the hearts lost among the passions of love and fear.

“Physiologically, now,” he said, turning away abruptly, “it was possible. It was possible.”

He remained silent. Then went on — “At all events, the next time I saw him he was ill — lung trouble. He was tough, but I daresay he was not acclimatised as well as I had supposed. It was a bad winter; and, of course, these mountaineers do get fits of home sickness; and a state of depression would make him vulnerable. He was lying half dressed on a couch downstairs.

“A table covered with a dark oilcloth took up all the middle of the little room. There was a wicker cradle on the floor, a kettle spouting steam on the hob, and some child’s linen lay drying on the fender. The room was warm, but the door opens right into the garden, as you noticed perhaps.

“He was very feverish, and kept on muttering to himself. She sat on a chair and looked at him fixedly across the table with her brown, blurred eyes. ‘Why don’t you have him upstairs?’ I asked. With a start and a confused stammer she said, ‘Oh! ah! I couldn’t sit with him upstairs, Sir.’

“I gave her certain directions; and going outside, I said again that he ought to be in bed upstairs. She wrung her hands. ‘I couldn’t. I couldn’t. He keeps on saying something — I don’t know what.’ With the memory of all the talk against the man that had been dinned into her ears, I looked at her narrowly. I looked into her shortsighted eyes, at her dumb eyes that once in her life had seen an enticing shape, but seemed, staring at me, to see nothing at all now. But I saw she was uneasy.

“‘What’s the matter with him?’ she asked in a sort of vacant trepidation. ‘He doesn’t look very ill. I never did see anybody look like this before....’

“‘Do you think,’ I asked indignantly, ‘he is shamming?’

“‘I can’t help it, sir,’ she said stolidly. And suddenly she clapped her hands and looked right and left. ‘And there’s the baby. I am so frightened. He wanted me just now to give him the baby. I can’t understand what he says to it.’

“‘Can’t you ask a neighbour to come in tonight?’ I asked.

“‘Please, sir, nobody seems to care to come,’ she muttered, dully resigned all at once.



“I impressed upon her the necessity of the greatest care, and then had to go. There was a good deal of sickness that winter. ‘Oh, I hope he won’t talk!’ she exclaimed softly just as I was going away.

“I don’t know how it is I did not see — but I didn’t. And yet, turning in my trap, I saw her lingering before the door, very still, and as if meditating a flight up the miry road.

“Towards the night his fever increased.

“He tossed, moaned, and now and then muttered a complaint. And she sat with the table between her and the couch, watching every movement and every sound, with the terror, the unreasonable terror, of that man she could not understand creeping over her. She had drawn the wicker cradle close to her feet. There was nothing in her now but the maternal instinct and that unaccountable fear.

“Suddenly coming to himself, parched, he demanded a drink of water. She did not move. She had not understood, though he may have thought he was speaking in English. He waited, looking at her, burning with fever, amazed at her silence and immobility, and then he shouted impatiently, ‘Water! Give me water!’

“She jumped to her feet, snatched up the child, and stood still. He spoke to her, and his passionate remonstrances only increased her fear of that strange man. I believe he spoke to her for a long time, entreating, wondering, pleading, ordering, I suppose. She says she bore it as long as she could. And then a gust of rage came over him.

“He sat up and called out terribly one word — some word. Then he got up as though he hadn’t been ill at all, she says. And as in fevered dismay, indignation, and wonder he tried to get to her round the table, she simply opened the door and ran out with the child in her arms. She heard him call twice after her down the road in a terrible voice — and fled.... Ah! but you should have seen stirring behind the dull, blurred glance of these eyes the spectre of the fear which had hunted her on that night three miles and a half to the door of Foster’s cottage! I did the next day.

“And it was I who found him lying face down and his body in a puddle, just outside the little wicket-gate.

“I had been called out that night to an urgent case in the village, and on my way home at daybreak passed by the cottage. The door stood open. My man helped me to carry him in. We laid him on the couch. The lamp smoked, the fire was out, the chill of the stormy night oozed from the

cheerless yellow paper on the wall. ‘Amy!’ I called aloud, and my voice seemed to lose itself in the emptiness of this tiny house as if I had cried in a desert. He opened his eyes. ‘Gone!’ he said distinctly. ‘I had only asked for water — only for a little water....’

“He was muddy. I covered him up and stood waiting in silence, catching a painfully gasped word now and then. They were no longer in his own language. The fever had left him, taking with it the heat of life. And with his panting breast and lustrous eyes he reminded me again of a wild creature under the net; of a bird caught in a snare. She had left him. She had left him — sick — helpless — thirsty. The spear of the hunter had entered his very soul. ‘Why?’ he cried in the penetrating and indignant voice of a man calling to a responsible Maker. A gust of wind and a swish of rain answered.

“And as I turned away to shut the door he pronounced the word ‘Merciful!’ and expired.

“Eventually I certified heart-failure as the immediate cause of death. His heart must have indeed failed him, or else he might have stood this night of storm and exposure, too. I closed his eyes and drove away. Not very far from the cottage I met Foster walking sturdily between the dripping hedges with his collie at his heels.

““Do you know where your daughter is?’ I asked.

““Don’t I!’ he cried. ‘I am going to talk to him a bit. Frightening a poor woman like this.’

““He won’t frighten her any more,’ I said. ‘He is dead.’

“He struck with his stick at the mud.

““And there’s the child.’

“Then, after thinking deeply for a while — ”“I don’t know that it isn’t for the best.’

“That’s what he said. And she says nothing at all now. Not a word of him. Never. Is his image as utterly gone from her mind as his lithe and striding figure, his carolling voice are gone from our fields? He is no longer before her eyes to excite her imagination into a passion of love or fear; and his memory seems to have vanished from her dull brain as a shadow passes away upon a white screen. She lives in the cottage and works for Miss Swaffer. She is Amy Foster for everybody, and the child is ‘Amy Foster’s boy.’ She calls him Johnny — which means Little John.

“It is impossible to say whether this name recalls anything to her. Does she ever think of the past? I have seen her hanging over the boy’s cot in a very passion of maternal tenderness. The little fellow was lying on his back, a little frightened at me, but very still, with his big black eyes, with his fluttered air of a bird in a snare. And looking at him I seemed to see again the other one — the father, cast out mysteriously by the sea to perish in the supreme disaster of loneliness and despair.”

## TO-MORROW



What was known of Captain Hagberd in the little seaport of Colebrook was not exactly in his favour. He did not belong to the place. He had come to settle there under circumstances not at all mysterious — he used to be very communicative about them at the time — but extremely morbid and unreasonable. He was possessed of some little money evidently, because he bought a plot of ground, and had a pair of ugly yellow brick cottages run up very cheaply. He occupied one of them himself and let the other to Josiah Carvil — blind Carvil, the retired boat-builder — a man of evil repute as a domestic tyrant.

These cottages had one wall in common, shared in a line of iron railing dividing their front gardens; a wooden fence separated their back gardens. Miss Bessie Carvil was allowed, as it were of right, to throw over it the tea-cloths, blue rags, or an apron that wanted drying.

“It rots the wood, Bessie my girl,” the captain would remark mildly, from his side of the fence, each time he saw her exercising that privilege.

She was a tall girl; the fence was low, and she could spread her elbows on the top. Her hands would be red with the bit of washing she had done, but her forearms were white and shapely, and she would look at her father’s landlord in silence — in an informed silence which had an air of knowledge, expectation and desire.

“It rots the wood,” repeated Captain Hagberd. “It is the only unthrifty, careless habit I know in you. Why don’t you have a clothes line out in your back yard?”

Miss Carvil would say nothing to this — she only shook her head negatively. The tiny back yard on her side had a few stone-bordered little beds of black earth, in which the simple flowers she found time to cultivate appeared somehow extravagantly overgrown, as if belonging to an exotic clime; and Captain Hagberd’s upright, hale person, clad in No. 1 sail-cloth from head to foot, would be emerging knee-deep out of rank grass and the tall weeds on his side of the fence. He appeared, with the colour and uncouth stiffness of the extraordinary material in which he chose to clothe himself — “for the time being,” would be his mumbled remark to any observation on the subject — like a man roughened out of granite, standing

in a wilderness not big enough for a decent billiard-room. A heavy figure of a man of stone, with a red handsome face, a blue wandering eye, and a great white beard flowing to his waist and never trimmed as far as Colebrook knew.

Seven years before, he had seriously answered, "Next month, I think," to the chaffing attempt to secure his custom made by that distinguished local wit, the Colebrook barber, who happened to be sitting insolently in the tap-room of the New Inn near the harbour, where the captain had entered to buy an ounce of tobacco. After paying for his purchase with three half-pence extracted from the corner of a handkerchief which he carried in the cuff of his sleeve, Captain Hagberd went out. As soon as the door was shut the barber laughed. "The old one and the young one will be strolling arm in arm to get shaved in my place presently. The tailor shall be set to work, and the barber, and the candlestick maker; high old times are coming for Colebrook, they are coming, to be sure. It used to be 'next week,' now it has come to 'next month,' and so on — soon it will be next spring, for all I know."

Noticing a stranger listening to him with a vacant grin, he explained, stretching out his legs cynically, that this queer old Hagberd, a retired coasting-skipper, was waiting for the return of a son of his. The boy had been driven away from home, he shouldn't wonder; had run away to sea and had never been heard of since. Put to rest in Davy Jones's locker this many a day, as likely as not. That old man came flying to Colebrook three years ago all in black broadcloth (had lost his wife lately then), getting out of a third-class smoker as if the devil had been at his heels; and the only thing that brought him down was a letter — a hoax probably. Some joker had written to him about a seafaring man with some such name who was supposed to be hanging about some girl or other, either in Colebrook or in the neighbourhood. "Funny, ain't it?" The old chap had been advertising in the London papers for Harry Hagberd, and offering rewards for any sort of likely information. And the barber would go on to describe with sardonic gusto, how that stranger in mourning had been seen exploring the country, in carts, on foot, taking everybody into his confidence, visiting all the inns and alehouses for miles around, stopping people on the road with his questions, looking into the very ditches almost; first in the greatest excitement, then with a plodding sort of perseverance, growing slower and slower; and he could not even tell you plainly how his son looked. The sailor was supposed to be one of two that had left a timber ship, and to have

been seen dangling after some girl; but the old man described a boy of fourteen or so — "a clever-looking, high-spirited boy." And when people only smiled at this he would rub his forehead in a confused sort of way before he slunk off, looking offended. He found nobody, of course; not a trace of anybody — never heard of anything worth belief, at any rate; but he had not been able somehow to tear himself away from Colebrook.

"It was the shock of this disappointment, perhaps, coming soon after the loss of his wife, that had driven him crazy on that point," the barber suggested, with an air of great psychological insight. After a time the old man abandoned the active search. His son had evidently gone away; but he settled himself to wait. His son had been once at least in Colebrook in preference to his native place. There must have been some reason for it, he seemed to think, some very powerful inducement, that would bring him back to Colebrook again.

"Ha, ha, ha! Why, of course, Colebrook. Where else? That's the only place in the United Kingdom for your long-lost sons. So he sold up his old home in Colchester, and down he comes here. Well, it's a craze, like any other. Wouldn't catch me going crazy over any of my youngsters clearing out. I've got eight of them at home." The barber was showing off his strength of mind in the midst of a laughter that shook the tap-room.

Strange, though, that sort of thing, he would confess, with the frankness of a superior intelligence, seemed to be catching. His establishment, for instance, was near the harbour, and whenever a sailor-man came in for a hair-cut or a shave — if it was a strange face he couldn't help thinking directly, "Suppose he's the son of old Hagberd!" He laughed at himself for it. It was a strong craze. He could remember the time when the whole town was full of it. But he had his hopes of the old chap yet. He would cure him by a course of judicious chaffing. He was watching the progress of the treatment. Next week — next month — next year! When the old skipper had put off the date of that return till next year, he would be well on his way to not saying any more about it. In other matters he was quite rational, so this, too, was bound to come. Such was the barber's firm opinion.

Nobody had ever contradicted him; his own hair had gone grey since that time, and Captain Hagberd's beard had turned quite white, and had acquired a majestic flow over the No. 1 canvas suit, which he had made for himself secretly with tarred twine, and had assumed suddenly, coming out in it one fine morning, whereas the evening before he had been seen going home in

his mourning of broadcloth. It caused a sensation in the High Street — shopkeepers coming to their doors, people in the houses snatching up their hats to run out — a stir at which he seemed strangely surprised at first, and then scared; but his only answer to the wondering questions was that startled and evasive, “For the present.”

That sensation had been forgotten, long ago; and Captain Hagberd himself, if not forgotten, had come to be disregarded — the penalty of dailiness — as the sun itself is disregarded unless it makes its power felt heavily. Captain Hagberd’s movements showed no infirmity: he walked stiffly in his suit of canvas, a quaint and remarkable figure; only his eyes wandered more furtively perhaps than of yore. His manner abroad had lost its excitable watchfulness; it had become puzzled and diffident, as though he had suspected that there was somewhere about him something slightly compromising, some embarrassing oddity; and yet had remained unable to discover what on earth this something wrong could be.

He was unwilling now to talk with the townsfolk. He had earned for himself the reputation of an awful skinflint, of a miser in the matter of living. He mumbled regretfully in the shops, bought inferior scraps of meat after long hesitations; and discouraged all allusions to his costume. It was as the barber had foretold. For all one could tell, he had recovered already from the disease of hope; and only Miss Bessie Carvil knew that he said nothing about his son’s return because with him it was no longer “next week,” “next month,” or even “next year.” It was “to-morrow.”

In their intimacy of back yard and front garden he talked with her paternally, reasonably, and dogmatically, with a touch of arbitrariness. They met on the ground of unreserved confidence, which was authenticated by an affectionate wink now and then. Miss Carvil had come to look forward rather to these winks. At first they had discomposed her: the poor fellow was mad. Afterwards she had learned to laugh at them: there was no harm in him. Now she was aware of an unacknowledged, pleasurable, incredulous emotion, expressed by a faint blush. He winked not in the least vulgarly; his thin red face with a well-modelled curved nose, had a sort of distinction — the more so that when he talked to her he looked with a steadier and more intelligent glance. A handsome, hale, upright, capable man, with a white beard. You did not think of his age. His son, he affirmed, had resembled him amazingly from his earliest babyhood.

Harry would be one-and-thirty next July, he declared. Proper age to get married with a nice, sensible girl that could appreciate a good home. He was a very high-spirited boy. High-spirited husbands were the easiest to manage. These mean, soft chaps, that you would think butter wouldn't melt in their mouths, were the ones to make a woman thoroughly miserable. And there was nothing like a home — a fireside — a good roof: no turning out of your warm bed in all sorts of weather. "Eh, my dear?"

Captain Hagberd had been one of those sailors that pursue their calling within sight of land. One of the many children of a bankrupt farmer, he had been apprenticed hurriedly to a coasting skipper, and had remained on the coast all his sea life. It must have been a hard one at first: he had never taken to it; his affection turned to the land, with its innumerable houses, with its quiet lives gathered round its firesides. Many sailors feel and profess a rational dislike for the sea, but his was a profound and emotional animosity — as if the love of the stabler element had been bred into him through many generations.

"People did not know what they let their boys in for when they let them go to sea," he expounded to Bessie. "As soon make convicts of them at once." He did not believe you ever got used to it. The weariness of such a life got worse as you got older. What sort of trade was it in which more than half your time you did not put your foot inside your house? Directly you got out to sea you had no means of knowing what went on at home. One might have thought him weary of distant voyages; and the longest he had ever made had lasted a fortnight, of which the most part had been spent at anchor, sheltering from the weather. As soon as his wife had inherited a house and enough to live on (from a bachelor uncle who had made some money in the coal business) he threw up his command of an East-coast collier with a feeling as though he had escaped from the galleys. After all these years he might have counted on the fingers of his two hands all the days he had been out of sight of England. He had never known what it was to be out of soundings. "I have never been further than eighty fathoms from the land," was one of his boasts.

Bessie Carvil heard all these things. In front of their cottage grew an under-sized ash; and on summer afternoons she would bring out a chair on the grass-plot and sit down with her sewing. Captain Hagberd, in his canvas suit, leaned on a spade. He dug every day in his front plot. He turned it over



and over several times every year, but was not going to plant anything “just at present.”

To Bessie Carvil he would state more explicitly: “Not till our Harry comes home to-morrow.” And she had heard this formula of hope so often that it only awakened the vaguest pity in her heart for that hopeful old man.

Everything was put off in that way, and everything was being prepared likewise for to-morrow. There was a boxful of packets of various flower-seeds to choose from, for the front garden. “He will doubtless let you have your say about that, my dear,” Captain Hagberd intimated to her across the railing.

Miss Bessie’s head remained bowed over her work. She had heard all this so many times. But now and then she would rise, lay down her sewing, and come slowly to the fence. There was a charm in these gentle ravings. He was determined that his son should not go away again for the want of a home all ready for him. He had been filling the other cottage with all sorts of furniture. She imagined it all new, fresh with varnish, piled up as in a warehouse. There would be tables wrapped up in sacking; rolls of carpets thick and vertical like fragments of columns, the gleam of white marble tops in the dimness of the drawn blinds. Captain Hagberd always described his purchases to her, carefully, as to a person having a legitimate interest in them. The overgrown yard of his cottage could be laid over with concrete... after to-morrow.

“We may just as well do away with the fence. You could have your drying-line out, quite clear of your flowers.” He winked, and she would blush faintly.

This madness that had entered her life through the kind impulses of her heart had reasonable details. What if some day his son returned? But she could not even be quite sure that he ever had a son; and if he existed anywhere he had been too long away. When Captain Hagberd got excited in his talk she would steady him by a pretence of belief, laughing a little to salve her conscience.

Only once she had tried pityingly to throw some doubt on that hope doomed to disappointment, but the effect of her attempt had scared her very much. All at once over that man’s face there came an expression of horror and incredulity, as though he had seen a crack open out in the firmament.

“You — you — you don’t think he’s drowned!”

For a moment he seemed to her ready to go out of his mind, for in his ordinary state she thought him more sane than people gave him credit for. On that occasion the violence of the emotion was followed by a most paternal and complacent recovery.

“Don’t alarm yourself, my dear,” he said a little cunningly: “the sea can’t keep him. He does not belong to it. None of us Hagberds ever did belong to it. Look at me; I didn’t get drowned. Moreover, he isn’t a sailor at all; and if he is not a sailor he’s bound to come back. There’s nothing to prevent him coming back....”

His eyes began to wander.

“To-morrow.”

She never tried again, for fear the man should go out of his mind on the spot. He depended on her. She seemed the only sensible person in the town; and he would congratulate himself frankly before her face on having secured such a levelheaded wife for his son. The rest of the town, he confided to her once, in a fit of temper, was certainly queer. The way they looked at you — the way they talked to you! He had never got on with any one in the place. Didn’t like the people. He would not have left his own country if it had not been clear that his son had taken a fancy to Colebrook.

She humoured him in silence, listening patiently by the fence; crocheting with downcast eyes. Blushes came with difficulty on her dead-white complexion, under the negligently twisted opulence of mahogany-coloured hair. Her father was frankly carroty.

She had a full figure; a tired, unrefreshed face. When Captain Hagberd vaunted the necessity and propriety of a home and the delights of one’s own fireside, she smiled a little, with her lips only. Her home delights had been confined to the nursing of her father during the ten best years of her life.

A bestial roaring coming out of an upstairs window would interrupt their talk. She would begin at once to roll up her crochet-work or fold her sewing, without the slightest sign of haste. Meanwhile the howls and roars of her name would go on, making the fishermen strolling upon the sea-wall on the other side of the road turn their heads towards the cottages. She would go in slowly at the front door, and a moment afterwards there would fall a profound silence. Presently she would reappear, leading by the hand a man, gross and unwieldy like a hippopotamus, with a bad-tempered, surly face.

He was a widowed boat-builder, whom blindness had overtaken years before in the full flush of business. He behaved to his daughter as if she had been responsible for its incurable character. He had been heard to bellow at the top of his voice, as if to defy Heaven, that he did not care: he had made enough money to have ham and eggs for his breakfast every morning. He thanked God for it, in a fiendish tone as though he were cursing.

Captain Hagberd had been so unfavourably impressed by his tenant, that once he told Miss Bessie, "He is a very extravagant fellow, my dear."

She was knitting that day, finishing a pair of socks for her father, who expected her to keep up the supply dutifully. She hated knitting, and, as she was just at the heel part, she had to keep her eyes on her needles.

"Of course it isn't as if he had a son to provide for," Captain Hagberd went on a little vacantly. "Girls, of course, don't require so much — h'm-h'm. They don't run away from home, my dear."

"No," said Miss Bessie, quietly.

Captain Hagberd, amongst the mounds of turned-up earth, chuckled. With his maritime rig, his weather-beaten face, his beard of Father Neptune, he resembled a deposed sea-god who had exchanged the trident for the spade.

"And he must look upon you as already provided for, in a manner. That's the best of it with the girls. The husbands..." He winked. Miss Bessie, absorbed in her knitting, coloured faintly.

"Bessie! my hat!" old Carvil bellowed out suddenly. He had been sitting under the tree mute and motionless, like an idol of some remarkably monstrous superstition. He never opened his mouth but to howl for her, at her, sometimes about her; and then he did not moderate the terms of his abuse. Her system was never to answer him at all; and he kept up his shouting till he got attended to — till she shook him by the arm, or thrust the mouthpiece of his pipe between his teeth. He was one of the few blind people who smoke. When he felt the hat being put on his head he stopped his noise at once. Then he rose, and they passed together through the gate.

He weighed heavily on her arm. During their slow, toilsome walks she appeared to be dragging with her for a penance the burden of that infirm bulk. Usually they crossed the road at once (the cottages stood in the fields near the harbour, two hundred yards away from the end of the street), and for a long, long time they would remain in view, ascending imperceptibly the flight of wooden steps that led to the top of the sea-wall. It ran on from

east to west, shutting out the Channel like a neglected railway embankment, on which no train had ever rolled within memory of man. Groups of sturdy fishermen would emerge upon the sky, walk along for a bit, and sink without haste. Their brown nets, like the cobwebs of gigantic spiders, lay on the shabby grass of the slope; and, looking up from the end of the street, the people of the town would recognise the two Carvils by the creeping slowness of their gait. Captain Hagberd, pottering aimlessly about his cottages, would raise his head to see how they got on in their promenade.

He advertised still in the Sunday papers for Harry Hagberd. These sheets were read in foreign parts to the end of the world, he informed Bessie. At the same time he seemed to think that his son was in England — so near to Colebrook that he would of course turn up “to-morrow.” Bessie, without committing herself to that opinion in so many words, argued that in that case the expense of advertising was unnecessary; Captain Hagberd had better spend that weekly half-crown on himself. She declared she did not know what he lived on. Her argumentation would puzzle him and cast him down for a time. “They all do it,” he pointed out. There was a whole column devoted to appeals after missing relatives. He would bring the newspaper to show her. He and his wife had advertised for years; only she was an impatient woman. The news from Colebrook had arrived the very day after her funeral; if she had not been so impatient she might have been here now, with no more than one day more to wait. “You are not an impatient woman, my dear.”

“I’ve no patience with you sometimes,” she would say.

If he still advertised for his son he did not offer rewards for information any more; for, with the muddled lucidity of a mental derangement he had reasoned himself into a conviction as clear as daylight that he had already attained all that could be expected in that way. What more could he want? Colebrook was the place, and there was no need to ask for more. Miss Carvil praised him for his good sense, and he was soothed by the part she took in his hope, which had become his delusion; in that idea which blinded his mind to truth and probability, just as the other old man in the other cottage had been made blind, by another disease, to the light and beauty of the world.

But anything he could interpret as a doubt — any coldness of assent, or even a simple inattention to the development of his projects of a home with his returned son and his son’s wife — would irritate him into flings and

jerks and wicked side glances. He would dash his spade into the ground and walk to and fro before it. Miss Bessie called it his tantrums. She shook her finger at him. Then, when she came out again, after he had parted with her in anger, he would watch out of the corner of his eyes for the least sign of encouragement to approach the iron railings and resume his fatherly and patronising relations.

For all their intimacy, which had lasted some years now, they had never talked without a fence or a railing between them. He described to her all the splendours accumulated for the setting-up of their housekeeping, but had never invited her to an inspection. No human eye was to behold them till Harry had his first look. In fact, nobody had ever been inside his cottage; he did his own housework, and he guarded his son's privilege so jealously that the small objects of domestic use he bought sometimes in the town were smuggled rapidly across the front garden under his canvas coat. Then, coming out, he would remark apologetically, "It was only a small kettle, my dear."

And, if not too tired with her drudgery, or worried beyond endurance by her father, she would laugh at him with a blush, and say: "That's all right, Captain Hagberd; I am not impatient."

"Well, my dear, you haven't long to wait now," he would answer with a sudden bashfulness, and looking uneasily, as though he had suspected that there was something wrong somewhere.

Every Monday she paid him his rent over the railings. He clutched the shillings greedily. He grudged every penny he had to spend on his maintenance, and when he left her to make his purchases his bearing changed as soon as he got into the street. Away from the sanction of her pity, he felt himself exposed without defence. He brushed the walls with his shoulder. He mistrusted the queerness of the people; yet, by then, even the town children had left off calling after him, and the tradesmen served him without a word. The slightest allusion to his clothing had the power to puzzle and frighten especially, as if it were something utterly unwarranted and incomprehensible.

In the autumn, the driving rain drummed on his sailcloth suit saturated almost to the stiffness of sheet-iron, with its surface flowing with water. When the weather was too bad, he retreated under the tiny porch, and, standing close against the door, looked at his spade left planted in the middle of the yard. The ground was so much dug up all over, that as the

season advanced it turned to a quagmire. When it froze hard, he was disconsolate. What would Harry say? And as he could not have so much of Bessie's company at that time of the year, the roars of old Carvil, that came muffled through the closed windows, calling her indoors, exasperated him greatly.

"Why don't that extravagant fellow get you a servant?" he asked impatiently one mild afternoon. She had thrown something over her head to run out for a while.

"I don't know," said the pale Bessie, wearily, staring away with her heavy-lidded, grey, and unexpectant glance. There were always smudgy shadows under her eyes, and she did not seem able to see any change or any end to her life.

"You wait till you get married, my dear," said her only friend, drawing closer to the fence. "Harry will get you one."

His hopeful craze seemed to mock her own want of hope with so bitter an aptness that in her nervous irritation she could have screamed at him outright. But she only said in self-mockery, and speaking to him as though he had been sane, "Why, Captain Hagberd, your son may not even want to look at me."

He flung his head back and laughed his throaty affected cackle of anger.

"What! That boy? Not want to look at the only sensible girl for miles around? What do you think I am here for, my dear — my dear — my dear?... What? You wait. You just wait. You'll see to-morrow. I'll soon — "

"Bessie! Bessie! Bessie!" howled old Carvil inside. "Bessie! — my pipe!" That fat blind man had given himself up to a very lust of laziness. He would not lift his hand to reach for the things she took care to leave at his very elbow. He would not move a limb; he would not rise from his chair, he would not put one foot before another, in that parlour (where he knew his way as well as if he had his sight), without calling her to his side and hanging all his atrocious weight on her shoulder. He would not eat one single mouthful of food without her close attendance. He had made himself helpless beyond his affliction, to enslave her better. She stood still for a moment, setting her teeth in the dusk, then turned and walked slowly indoors.

Captain Hagberd went back to his spade. The shouting in Carvil's cottage stopped, and after a while the window of the parlour downstairs was lit up. A man coming from the end of the street with a firm leisurely step passed

on, but seemed to have caught sight of Captain Hagberd, because he turned back a pace or two. A cold white light lingered in the western sky. The man leaned over the gate in an interested manner.

“You must be Captain Hagberd,” he said, with easy assurance.

The old man spun round, pulling out his spade, startled by the strange voice.

“Yes, I am,” he answered nervously.

The other, smiling straight at him, uttered very slowly: “You’ve been advertising for your son, I believe?”

“My son Harry,” mumbled Captain Hagberd, off his guard for once. “He’s coming home tomorrow.”

“The devil he is!” The stranger marvelled greatly, and then went on, with only a slight change of tone: “You’ve grown a beard like Father Christmas himself.”

Captain Hagberd drew a little nearer, and leaned forward over his spade. “Go your way,” he said, resentfully and timidly at the same time, because he was always afraid of being laughed at. Every mental state, even madness, has its equilibrium based upon self-esteem. Its disturbance causes unhappiness; and Captain Hagberd lived amongst a scheme of settled notions which it pained him to feel disturbed by people’s grins. Yes, people’s grins were awful. They hinted at something wrong: but what? He could not tell; and that stranger was obviously grinning — had come on purpose to grin. It was bad enough on the streets, but he had never before been outraged like this.

The stranger, unaware how near he was of having his head laid open with a spade, said seriously: “I am not trespassing where I stand, am I? I fancy there’s something wrong about your news. Suppose you let me come in.”

“You come in!” murmured old Hagberd, with inexpressible horror.

“I could give you some real information about your son — the very latest tip, if you care to hear.”

“No,” shouted Hagberd. He began to pace wildly to and fro, he shouldered his spade, he gesticulated with his other arm. “Here’s a fellow — a grinning fellow, who says there’s something wrong. I’ve got more information than you’re aware of. I’ve all the information I want. I’ve had it for years — for years — for years — enough to last me till to-morrow. Let you come in, indeed! What would Harry say?”

Bessie Carvil's figure appeared in black silhouette on the parlour window; then, with the sound of an opening door, flitted out before the other cottage, all black, but with something white over her head. These two voices beginning to talk suddenly outside (she had heard them indoors) had given her such an emotion that she could not utter a sound.

Captain Hagberd seemed to be trying to find his way out of a cage. His feet squelched in the puddles left by his industry. He stumbled in the holes of the ruined grass-plot. He ran blindly against the fence.

"Here, steady a bit!" said the man at the gate, gravely stretching his arm over and catching him by the sleeve. "Somebody's been trying to get at you. Hallo! what's this rig you've got on? Storm canvas, by George!" He had a big laugh. "Well, you are a character!"

Captain Hagberd jerked himself free, and began to back away shrinkingly. "For the present," he muttered, in a crestfallen tone.

"What's the matter with him?" The stranger addressed Bessie with the utmost familiarity, in a deliberate, explanatory tone. "I didn't want to startle the old man." He lowered his voice as though he had known her for years. "I dropped into a barber's on my way, to get a twopenny shave, and they told me there he was something of a character. The old man has been a character all his life."

Captain Hagberd, daunted by the allusion to his clothing, had retreated inside, taking his spade with him; and the two at the gate, startled by the unexpected slamming of the door, heard the bolts being shot, the snapping of the lock, and the echo of an affected gurgling laugh within.

"I didn't want to upset him," the man said, after a short silence. "What's the meaning of all this? He isn't quite crazy."

"He has been worrying a long time about his lost son," said Bessie, in a low, apologetic tone.

"Well, I am his son."

"Harry!" she cried — and was profoundly silent.

"Know my name? Friends with the old man, eh?"

"He's our landlord," Bessie faltered out, catching hold of the iron railing.

"Owns both them rabbit-hutches, does he?" commented young Hagberd, scornfully; "just the thing he would be proud of. Can you tell me who's that chap coming to-morrow? You must know something of it. I tell you, it's a swindle on the old man — nothing else."



She did not answer, helpless before an insurmountable difficulty, appalled before the necessity, the impossibility and the dread of an explanation in which she and madness seemed involved together.

“Oh — I am so sorry,” she murmured.

“What’s the matter?” he said, with serenity. “You needn’t be afraid of upsetting me. It’s the other fellow that’ll be upset when he least expects it. I don’t care a hang; but there will be some fun when he shows his mug to-morrow. I don’t care that for the old man’s pieces, but right is right. You shall see me put a head on that coon — whoever he is!”

He had come nearer, and towered above her on the other side of the railings. He glanced at her hands. He fancied she was trembling, and it occurred to him that she had her part perhaps in that little game that was to be sprung on his old man to-morrow. He had come just in time to spoil their sport. He was entertained by the idea — scornful of the baffled plot. But all his life he had been full of indulgence for all sorts of women’s tricks. She really was trembling very much; her wrap had slipped off her head. “Poor devil!” he thought. “Never mind about that chap. I daresay he’ll change his mind before to-morrow. But what about me? I can’t loaf about the gate til the morning.”

She burst out: “It is you — you yourself that he’s waiting for. It is you who come to-morrow.”

He murmured. “Oh! It’s me!” blankly, and they seemed to become breathless together. Apparently he was pondering over what he had heard; then, without irritation, but evidently perplexed, he said: “I don’t understand. I hadn’t written or anything. It’s my chum who saw the paper and told me — this very morning.... Eh? what?”

He bent his ear; she whispered rapidly, and he listened for a while, muttering the words “yes” and “I see” at times. Then, “But why won’t today do?” he queried at last.

“You didn’t understand me!” she exclaimed, impatiently. The clear streak of light under the clouds died out in the west. Again he stooped slightly to hear better; and the deep night buried everything of the whispering woman and the attentive man, except the familiar contiguity of their faces, with its air of secrecy and caress.

He squared his shoulders; the broad-brimmed shadow of a hat sat cavalierly on his head. “Awkward this, eh?” he appealed to her. “To-

morrow? Well, well! Never heard tell of anything like this. It's all to-morrow, then, without any sort of to-day, as far as I can see."

She remained still and mute.

"And you have been encouraging this funny notion," he said.

"I never contradicted him."

"Why didn't you?"

"What for should I?" she defended herself. "It would only have made him miserable. He would have gone out of his mind."

"His mind!" he muttered, and heard a short nervous laugh from her.

"Where was the harm? Was I to quarrel with the poor old man? It was easier to half believe it myself."

"Aye, aye," he meditated, intelligently. "I suppose the old chap got around you somehow with his soft talk. You are good-hearted."

Her hands moved up in the dark nervously. "And it might have been true. It was true. It has come. Here it is. This is the to-morrow we have been waiting for."

She drew a breath, and he said, good-humouredly: "Aye, with the door shut. I wouldn't care if... And you think he could be brought round to recognise me... Eh? What?... You could do it? In a week you say? H'm, I daresay you could — but do you think I could hold out a week in this dead-alive place? Not me! I want either hard work, or an all-fired racket, or more space than there is in the whole of England. I have been in this place, though, once before, and for more than a week. The old man was advertising for me then, and a chum I had with me had a notion of getting a couple quid out of him by writing a lot of silly nonsense in a letter. That lark did not come off, though. We had to clear out — and none too soon. But this time I've a chum waiting for me in London, and besides..."

Bessie Carvil was breathing quickly.

"What if I tried a knock at the door?" he suggested.

"Try," she said.

Captain Hagberd's gate squeaked, and the shadow of the son moved on, then stopped with another deep laugh in the throat, like the father's, only soft and gentle, thrilling to the woman's heart, awakening to her ears.

"He isn't frisky — is he? I would be afraid to lay hold of him. The chaps are always telling me I don't know my own strength."

"He's the most harmless creature that ever lived," she interrupted.

“You wouldn’t say so if you had seen him chasing me upstairs with a hard leather strap,” he said; “I haven’t forgotten it in sixteen years.”

She got warm from head to foot under another soft, subdued laugh. At the rat-tat-tat of the knocker her heart flew into her mouth.

“Hey, dad! Let me in. I am Harry, I am. Straight! Come back home a day too soon.”

One of the windows upstairs ran up.

“A grinning, information fellow,” said the voice of old Hagberd, up in the darkness. “Don’t you have anything to do with him. It will spoil everything.”

She heard Harry Hagberd say, “Hallo, dad,” then a clanging clatter. The window rumbled down, and he stood before her again.

“It’s just like old times. Nearly walloped the life out of me to stop me going away, and now I come back he throws a confounded shovel at my head to keep me out. It grazed my shoulder.”

She shuddered.

“I wouldn’t care,” he began, “only I spent my last shillings on the railway fare and my last twopence on a shave — out of respect for the old man.”

“Are you really Harry Hagberd?” she asked. “Can you prove it?”

“Can I prove it? Can any one else prove it?” he said jovially. “Prove with what? What do I want to prove? There isn’t a single corner in the world, barring England, perhaps, where you could not find some man, or more likely woman, that would remember me for Harry Hagberd. I am more like Harry Hagberd than any man alive; and I can prove it to you in a minute, if you will let me step inside your gate.”

“Come in,” she said.

He entered then the front garden of the Carvils. His tall shadow strode with a swagger; she turned her back on the window and waited, watching the shape, of which the footfalls seemed the most material part. The light fell on a tilted hat; a powerful shoulder, that seemed to cleave the darkness; on a leg stepping out. He swung about and stood still, facing the illuminated parlour window at her back, turning his head from side to side, laughing softly to himself.

“Just fancy, for a minute, the old man’s beard stuck on to my chin. Hey? Now say. I was the very spit of him from a boy.”

“It’s true,” she murmured to herself.

“And that’s about as far as it goes. He was always one of your domestic characters. Why, I remember how he used to go about looking very sick for three days before he had to leave home on one of his trips to South Shields for coal. He had a standing charter from the gas-works. You would think he was off on a whaling cruise — three years and a tail. Ha, ha! Not a bit of it. Ten days on the outside. The Skimmer of the Seas was a smart craft. Fine name, wasn’t it? Mother’s uncle owned her...”

He interrupted himself, and in a lowered voice, “Did he ever tell you what mother died of?” he asked.

“Yes,” said Miss Bessie, bitterly; “from impatience.”

He made no sound for a while; then brusquely: “They were so afraid I would turn out badly that they fairly drove me away. Mother nagged at me for being idle, and the old man said he would cut my soul out of my body rather than let me go to sea. Well, it looked as if he would do it too — so I went. It looks to me sometimes as if I had been born to them by a mistake — in that other hutch of a house.”

“Where ought you to have been born by rights?” Bessie Carvil interrupted him, defiantly.

“In the open, upon a beach, on a windy night,” he said, quick as lightning. Then he mused slowly. “They were characters, both of them, by George; and the old man keeps it up well — don’t he? A damned shovel on the — Hark! who’s that making that row? ‘Bessie, Bessie.’ It’s in your house.”

“It’s for me,” she said, with indifference.

He stepped aside, out of the streak of light. “Your husband?” he inquired, with the tone of a man accustomed to unlawful trysts. “Fine voice for a ship’s deck in a thundering squall.”

“No; my father. I am not married.”

“You seem a fine girl, Miss Bessie, dear,” he said at once.

She turned her face away.

“Oh, I say, — what’s up? Who’s murdering him?”

“He wants his tea.” She faced him, still and tall, with averted head, with her hands hanging clasped before her.

“Hadn’t you better go in?” he suggested, after watching for a while the nape of her neck, a patch of dazzling white skin and soft shadow above the sombre line of her shoulders. Her wrap had slipped down to her elbows. “You’ll have all the town coming out presently. I’ll wait here a bit.”

Her wrap fell to the ground, and he stooped to pick it up; she had vanished. He threw it over his arm, and approaching the window squarely he saw a monstrous form of a fat man in an armchair, an unshaded lamp, the yawning of an enormous mouth in a big flat face encircled by a ragged halo of hair — Miss Bessie's head and bust. The shouting stopped; the blind ran down. He lost himself in thinking how awkward it was. Father mad; no getting into the house. No money to get back; a hungry chum in London who would begin to think he had been given the go-by. "Damn!" he muttered. He could break the door in, certainly; but they would perhaps bundle him into chokey for that without asking questions — no great matter, only he was confoundedly afraid of being locked up, even in mistake. He turned cold at the thought. He stamped his feet on the sodden grass.

"What are you? — a sailor?" said an agitated voice.

She had flitted out, a shadow herself, attracted by the reckless shadow waiting under the wall of her home.

"Anything. Enough of a sailor to be worth my salt before the mast. Came home that way this time."

"Where do you come from?" she asked.

"Right away from a jolly good spree," he said, "by the London train — see? Ough! I hate being shut up in a train. I don't mind a house so much."

"Ah," she said; "that's lucky."

"Because in a house you can at any time open the blamed door and walk away straight before you."

"And never come back?"

"Not for sixteen years at least," he laughed. "To a rabbit hutch, and get a confounded old shovel..."

"A ship is not so very big," she taunted.

"No, but the sea is great."

She dropped her head, and as if her ears had been opened to the voices of the world, she heard, beyond the rampart of sea-wall, the swell of yesterday's gale breaking on the beach with monotonous and solemn vibrations, as if all the earth had been a tolling bell.

"And then, why, a ship's a ship. You love her and leave her; and a voyage isn't a marriage." He quoted the sailor's saying lightly.

"It is not a marriage," she whispered.

“I never took a false name, and I’ve never yet told a lie to a woman. What lie? Why, the lie — . Take me or leave me, I say: and if you take me, then it is...” He hummed a snatch very low, leaning against the wall.

“Oh, ho, ho Rio!  
And fare thee well,  
My bonnie young girl,  
We’re bound to Rio Grande.”

“Capstan song,” he explained. Her teeth chattered.

“You are cold,” he said. “Here’s that affair of yours I picked up.” She felt his hands about her, wrapping her closely. “Hold the ends together in front,” he commanded.

“What did you come here for?” she asked, repressing a shudder.

“Five quid,” he answered, promptly. “We let our spree go on a little too long and got hard up.”

“You’ve been drinking?” she said.

“Blind three days; on purpose. I am not given that way — don’t you think. There’s nothing and nobody that can get over me unless I like. I can be as steady as a rock. My chum sees the paper this morning, and says he to me: ‘Go on, Harry: loving parent. That’s five quid sure.’ So we scraped all our pockets for the fare. Devil of a lark!”

“You have a hard heart, I am afraid,” she sighed.

“What for? For running away? Why! he wanted to make a lawyer’s clerk of me — just to please himself. Master in his own house; and my poor mother egged him on — for my good, I suppose. Well, then — so long; and I went. No, I tell you: the day I cleared out, I was all black and blue from his great fondness for me. Ah! he was always a bit of a character. Look at that shovel now. Off his chump? Not much. That’s just exactly like my dad. He wants me here just to have somebody to order about. However, we two were hard up; and what’s five quid to him — once in sixteen hard years?”

“Oh, but I am sorry for you. Did you never want to come back home?”

“Be a lawyer’s clerk and rot here — in some such place as this?” he cried in contempt. “What! if the old man set me up in a home to-day, I would kick it down about my ears — or else die there before the third day was out.”

“And where else is it that you hope to die?”

“In the bush somewhere; in the sea; on a blamed mountain-top for choice. At home? Yes! the world’s my home; but I expect I’ll die in a

hospital some day. What of that? Any place is good enough, as long as I've lived; and I've been everything you can think of almost but a tailor or a soldier. I've been a boundary rider; I've sheared sheep; and humped my swag; and harpooned a whale. I've rigged ships, and prospected for gold, and skinned dead bullocks, — and turned my back on more money than the old man would have scraped in his whole life. Ha, ha!”

He overwhelmed her. She pulled herself together and managed to utter, “Time to rest now.”

He straightened himself up, away from the wall, and in a severe voice said, “Time to go.”

But he did not move. He leaned back again, and hummed thoughtfully a bar or two of an outlandish tune.

She felt as if she were about to cry. “That’s another of your cruel songs,” she said.

“Learned it in Mexico — in Sonora.” He talked easily. “It is the song of the Gambucinos. You don’t know? The song of restless men. Nothing could hold them in one place — not even a woman. You used to meet one of them now and again, in the old days, on the edge of the gold country, away north there beyond the Rio Gila. I’ve seen it. A prospecting engineer in Mazatlan took me along with him to help look after the waggon. A sailor’s a handy chap to have about you anyhow. It’s all a desert: cracks in the earth that you can’t see the bottom of; and mountains — sheer rocks standing up high like walls and church spires, only a hundred times bigger. The valleys are full of boulders and black stones. There’s not a blade of grass to see; and the sun sets more red over that country than I have seen it anywhere — blood-red and angry. It is fine.”

“You do not want to go back there again?” she stammered out.

He laughed a little. “No. That’s the blamed gold country. It gave me the shivers sometimes to look at it — and we were a big lot of men together, mind; but these Gambucinos wandered alone. They knew that country before anybody had ever heard of it. They had a sort of gift for prospecting, and the fever of it was on them too; and they did not seem to want the gold very much. They would find some rich spot, and then turn their backs on it; pick up perhaps a little — enough for a spree — and then be off again, looking for more. They never stopped long where there were houses; they had no wife, no chick, no home, never a chum. You couldn’t be friends with a Gambucino; they were too restless — here to-day, and gone, God knows

where, to-morrow. They told no one of their finds, and there has never been a Gambucino well off. It was not for the gold they cared; it was the wandering about looking for it in the stony country that got into them and wouldn't let them rest; so that no woman yet born could hold a Gambucino for more than a week. That's what the song says. It's all about a pretty girl that tried hard to keep hold of a Gambucino lover, so that he should bring her lots of gold. No fear! Off he went, and she never saw him again."

"What became of her?" she breathed out.

"The song don't tell. Cried a bit, I daresay. They were the fellows: kiss and go. But it's the looking for a thing — a something... Sometimes I think I am a sort of Gambucino myself."

"No woman can hold you, then," she began in a brazen voice, which quavered suddenly before the end.

"No longer than a week," he joked, playing upon her very heartstrings with the gay, tender note of his laugh; "and yet I am fond of them all. Anything for a woman of the right sort. The scrapes they got me into, and the scrapes they got me out of! I love them at first sight. I've fallen in love with you already, Miss — Bessie's your name — eh?"

She backed away a little, and with a trembling laugh:

"You haven't seen my face yet."

He bent forward gallantly. "A little pale: it suits some. But you are a fine figure of a girl, Miss Bessie."

She was all in a flutter. Nobody had ever said so much to her before.

His tone changed. "I am getting middling hungry, though. Had no breakfast to-day. Couldn't you scare up some bread from that tea for me, or —"

She was gone already. He had been on the point of asking her to let him come inside. No matter. Anywhere would do. Devil of a fix! What would his chum think?

"I didn't ask you as a beggar," he said, jestingly, taking a piece of bread-and-butter from the plate she held before him. "I asked as a friend. My dad is rich, you know."

"He starves himself for your sake."

"And I have starved for his whim," he said, taking up another piece.

"All he has in the world is for you," she pleaded.

"Yes, if I come here to sit on it like a dam' toad in a hole. Thank you; and what about the shovel, eh? He always had a queer way of showing his



love.”

“I could bring him round in a week,” she suggested, timidly.

He was too hungry to answer her; and, holding the plate submissively to his hand, she began to whisper up to him in a quick, panting voice. He listened, amazed, eating slower and slower, till at last his jaws stopped altogether. “That’s his game, is it?” he said, in a rising tone of scathing contempt. An ungovernable movement of his arm sent the plate flying out of her fingers. He shot out a violent curse.

She shrank from him, putting her hand against the wall.

“No!” he raged. “He expects! Expects me — for his rotten money!... Who wants his home? Mad — not he! Don’t you think. He wants his own way. He wanted to turn me into a miserable lawyer’s clerk, and now he wants to make of me a blamed tame rabbit in a cage. Of me! Of me!” His subdued angry laugh frightened her now.

“The whole world ain’t a bit too big for me to spread my elbows in, I can tell you — what’s your name — Bessie — let alone a dam’ parlour in a hutch. Marry! He wants me to marry and settle! And as likely as not he has looked out the girl too — dash my soul! And do you know the Judy, may I ask?”

She shook all over with noiseless dry sobs; but he was fuming and fretting too much to notice her distress. He bit his thumb with rage at the mere idea. A window rattled up.

“A grinning, information fellow,” pronounced old Hagberd dogmatically, in measured tones. And the sound of his voice seemed to Bessie to make the night itself mad — to pour insanity and disaster on the earth. “Now I know what’s wrong with the people here, my dear. Why, of course! With this mad chap going about. Don’t you have anything to do with him, Bessie. Bessie, I say!”

They stood as if dumb. The old man fidgeted and mumbled to himself at the window. Suddenly he cried, piercingly: “Bessie — I see you. I’ll tell Harry.”

She made a movement as if to run away, but stopped and raised her hands to her temples. Young Hagberd, shadowy and big, stirred no more than a man of bronze. Over their heads the crazy night whimpered and scolded in an old man’s voice.

“Send him away, my dear. He’s only a vagabond. What you want is a good home of your own. That chap has no home — he’s not like Harry. He

can't be Harry. Harry is coming to-morrow. Do you hear? One day more," he babbled more excitedly; "never you fear — Harry shall marry you."

His voice rose very shrill and mad against the regular deep soughing of the swell coiling heavily about the outer face of the sea-wall.

"He will have to. I shall make him, or if not" — he swore a great oath — "I'll cut him off with a shilling to-morrow, and leave everything to you. I shall. To you. Let him starve."

The window rattled down.

Harry drew a deep breath, and took one step toward Bessie. "So it's you — the girl," he said, in a lowered voice. She had not moved, and she remained half turned away from him, pressing her head in the palms of her hands. "My word!" he continued, with an invisible half-smile on his lips. "I have a great mind to stop...."

Her elbows were trembling violently.

"For a week," he finished without a pause.

She clapped her hands to her face.

He came up quite close, and took hold of her wrists gently. She felt his breath on her ear.

"It's a scrape I am in — this, and it is you that must see me through." He was trying to uncover her face. She resisted. He let her go then, and stepping back a little, "Have you got any money?" he asked. "I must be off now."

She nodded quickly her shamefaced head, and he waited, looking away from her, while, trembling all over and bowing her neck, she tried to find the pocket of her dress.

"Here it is!" she whispered. "Oh, go away! go away for God's sake! If I had more — more — I would give it all to forget — to make you forget."

He extended his hand. "No fear! I haven't forgotten a single one of you in the world. Some gave me more than money — but I am a beggar now — and you women always had to get me out of my scrapes."

He swaggered up to the parlour window, and in the dim light filtering through the blind, looked at the coin lying in his palm. It was a half-sovereign. He slipped it into his pocket. She stood a little on one side, with her head drooping, as if wounded; with her arms hanging passive by her side, as if dead.

"You can't buy me in," he said, "and you can't buy yourself out."

He set his hat firmly with a little tap, and next moment she felt herself lifted up in the powerful embrace of his arms. Her feet lost the ground; her head hung back; he showered kisses on her face with a silent and overmastering ardour, as if in haste to get at her very soul. He kissed her pale cheeks, her hard forehead, her heavy eyelids, her faded lips; and the measured blows and sighs of the rising tide accompanied the enfolding power of his arms, the overwhelming might of his caresses. It was as if the sea, breaking down the wall protecting all the homes of the town, had sent a wave over her head. It passed on; she staggered backwards, with her shoulders against the wall, exhausted, as if she had been stranded there after a storm and a shipwreck.

She opened her eyes after awhile; and listening to the firm, leisurely footsteps going away with their conquest, began to gather her skirts, staring all the time before her. Suddenly she darted through the open gate into the dark and deserted street.

“Stop!” she shouted. “Don’t go!”

And listening with an attentive poise of the head, she could not tell whether it was the beat of the swell or his fateful tread that seemed to fall cruelly upon her heart. Presently every sound grew fainter, as though she were slowly turning into stone. A fear of this awful silence came to her — worse than the fear of death. She called upon her ebbing strength for the final appeal:

“Harry!”

Not even the dying echo of a footstep. Nothing. The thundering of the surf, the voice of the restless sea itself, seemed stopped. There was not a sound — no whisper of life, as though she were alone and lost in that stony country of which she had heard, where madmen go looking for gold and spurn the find.

Captain Hagberd, inside his dark house, had kept on the alert. A window ran up; and in the silence of the stony country a voice spoke above her head, high up in the black air — the voice of madness, lies and despair — the voice of inextinguishable hope. “Is he gone yet — that information fellow? Do you hear him about, my dear?”

She burst into tears. “No! no! no! I don’t hear him any more,” she sobbed.

He began to chuckle up there triumphantly. “You frightened him away. Good girl. Now we shall be all right. Don’t you be impatient, my dear. One

day more.”

In the other house old Carvil, wallowing regally in his arm-chair, with a globe lamp burning by his side on the table, yelled for her, in a fiendish voice: “Bessie! Bessie! you Bessie!”

She heard him at last, and, as if overcome by fate, began to totter silently back toward her stuffy little inferno of a cottage. It had no lofty portal, no terrific inscription of forfeited hopes — she did not understand wherein she had sinned.

Captain Hagberd had gradually worked himself into a state of noisy happiness up there.

“Go in! Keep quiet!” she turned upon him tearfully, from the doorstep below.

He rebelled against her authority in his great joy at having got rid at last of that “something wrong.” It was as if all the hopeful madness of the world had broken out to bring terror upon her heart, with the voice of that old man shouting of his trust in an everlasting to-morrow.

## ***THE END OF THE TETHER***



### **I**

For a long time after the course of the steamer *Sofala* had been altered for the land, the low swampy coast had retained its appearance of a mere smudge of darkness beyond a belt of glitter. The sunrays seemed to fall violently upon the calm sea — seemed to shatter themselves upon an adamant surface into sparkling dust, into a dazzling vapor of light that blinded the eye and wearied the brain with its unsteady brightness.

Captain Whalley did not look at it. When his *Serang*, approaching the roomy cane arm-chair which he filled capably, had informed him in a low voice that the course was to be altered, he had risen at once and had remained on his feet, face forward, while the head of his ship swung through a quarter of a circle. He had not uttered a single word, not even the word to steady the helm. It was the *Serang*, an elderly, alert, little Malay, with a very dark skin, who murmured the order to the helmsman. And then slowly Captain Whalley sat down again in the arm-chair on the bridge and fixed his eyes on the deck between his feet.

He could not hope to see anything new upon this lane of the sea. He had been on these coasts for the last three years. From Low Cape to Malantan the distance was fifty miles, six hours' steaming for the old ship with the tide, or seven against. Then you steered straight for the land, and by-and-by three palms would appear on the sky, tall and slim, and with their disheveled heads in a bunch, as if in confidential criticism of the dark mangroves. The *Sofala* would be headed towards the somber strip of the coast, which at a given moment, as the ship closed with it obliquely, would show several clean shining fractures — the brimful estuary of a river. Then on through a brown liquid, three parts water and one part black earth, on and on between the low shores, three parts black earth and one part brackish water, the *Sofala* would plow her way up-stream, as she had done once every month for these seven years or more, long before he was aware of her existence, long before he had ever thought of having anything to do with her and her invariable voyages. The old ship ought to have known the road better than her men, who had not been kept so long at it without a change; better than the faithful *Serang*, whom he had brought over from his last ship

to keep the captain's watch; better than he himself, who had been her captain for the last three years only. She could always be depended upon to make her courses. Her compasses were never out. She was no trouble at all to take about, as if her great age had given her knowledge, wisdom, and steadiness. She made her landfalls to a degree of the bearing, and almost to a minute of her allowed time. At any moment, as he sat on the bridge without looking up, or lay sleepless in his bed, simply by reckoning the days and the hours he could tell where he was — the precise spot of the beat. He knew it well too, this monotonous huckster's round, up and down the Straits; he knew its order and its sights and its people. Malacca to begin with, in at daylight and out at dusk, to cross over with a rigid phosphorescent wake this highway of the Far East. Darkness and gleams on the water, clear stars on a black sky, perhaps the lights of a home steamer keeping her unswerving course in the middle, or maybe the elusive shadow of a native craft with her mat sails flitting by silently — and the low land on the other side in sight at daylight. At noon the three palms of the next place of call, up a sluggish river. The only white man residing there was a retired young sailor, with whom he had become friendly in the course of many voyages. Sixty miles farther on there was another place of call, a deep bay with only a couple of houses on the beach. And so on, in and out, picking up coastwise cargo here and there, and finishing with a hundred miles' steady steaming through the maze of an archipelago of small islands up to a large native town at the end of the beat. There was a three days' rest for the old ship before he started her again in inverse order, seeing the same shores from another bearing, hearing the same voices in the same places, back again to the Sofala's port of registry on the great highway to the East, where he would take up a berth nearly opposite the big stone pile of the harbor office till it was time to start again on the old round of 1600 miles and thirty days. Not a very enterprising life, this, for Captain Whalley, Henry Whalley, otherwise Dare-devil Harry — Whalley of the Condor, a famous clipper in her day. No. Not a very enterprising life for a man who had served famous firms, who had sailed famous ships (more than one or two of them his own); who had made famous passages, had been the pioneer of new routes and new trades; who had steered across the unsurveyed tracts of the South Seas, and had seen the sun rise on uncharted islands. Fifty years at sea, and forty out in the East ("a pretty thorough apprenticeship," he used to remark smilingly), had made him honorably known to a generation of shipowners

and merchants in all the ports from Bombay clear over to where the East merges into the West upon the coast of the two Americas. His fame remained writ, not very large but plain enough, on the Admiralty charts. Was there not somewhere between Australia and China a Whalley Island and a Condor Reef? On that dangerous coral formation the celebrated clipper had hung stranded for three days, her captain and crew throwing her cargo overboard with one hand and with the other, as it were, keeping off her a flotilla of savage war-canoes. At that time neither the island nor the reef had any official existence. Later the officers of her Majesty's steam vessel Fusilier, dispatched to make a survey of the route, recognized in the adoption of these two names the enterprise of the man and the solidity of the ship. Besides, as anyone who cares may see, the "General Directory," vol. ii. p. 410, begins the description of the "Malotu or Whalley Passage" with the words: "This advantageous route, first discovered in 1850 by Captain Whalley in the ship Condor," &c., and ends by recommending it warmly to sailing vessels leaving the China ports for the south in the months from December to April inclusive.

This was the clearest gain he had out of life. Nothing could rob him of this kind of fame. The piercing of the Isthmus of Suez, like the breaking of a dam, had let in upon the East a flood of new ships, new men, new methods of trade. It had changed the face of the Eastern seas and the very spirit of their life; so that his early experiences meant nothing whatever to the new generation of seamen.

In those bygone days he had handled many thousands of pounds of his employers' money and of his own; he had attended faithfully, as by law a shipmaster is expected to do, to the conflicting interests of owners, charterers, and underwriters. He had never lost a ship or consented to a shady transaction; and he had lasted well, outlasting in the end the conditions that had gone to the making of his name. He had buried his wife (in the Gulf of Petchili), had married off his daughter to the man of her unlucky choice, and had lost more than an ample competence in the crash of the notorious Travancore and Deccan Banking Corporation, whose downfall had shaken the East like an earthquake. And he was sixty-five years old.

His age sat lightly enough on him; and of his ruin he was not ashamed. He had not been alone to believe in the stability of the Banking Corporation. Men whose judgment in matters of finance was as expert as his seamanship had commended the prudence of his investments, and had themselves lost much money in the great failure. The only difference between him and them was that he had lost his all. And yet not his all. There had remained to him from his lost fortune a very pretty little bark, Fair Maid, which he had bought to occupy his leisure of a retired sailor — "to play with," as he expressed it himself.

He had formally declared himself tired of the sea the year preceding his daughter's marriage. But after the young couple had gone to settle in Melbourne he found out that he could not make himself happy on shore. He was too much of a merchant sea-captain for mere yachting to satisfy him. He wanted the illusion of affairs; and his acquisition of the Fair Maid preserved the continuity of his life. He introduced her to his acquaintances in various ports as "my last command." When he grew too old to be trusted with a ship, he would lay her up and go ashore to be buried, leaving directions in his will to have the bark towed out and scuttled decently in deep water on the day of the funeral. His daughter would not grudge him the satisfaction of knowing that no stranger would handle his last command after him. With the fortune he was able to leave her, the value of a 500-ton bark was neither here nor there. All this would be said with a jocular twinkle in his eye: the vigorous old man had too much vitality for the sentimentalism of regret; and a little wistfully withal, because he was at home in life, taking a genuine pleasure in its feelings and its possessions; in the dignity of his reputation and his wealth, in his love for his daughter, and in his satisfaction with the ship — the plaything of his lonely leisure.

He had the cabin arranged in accordance with his simple ideal of comfort at sea. A big bookcase (he was a great reader) occupied one side of his stateroom; the portrait of his late wife, a flat bituminous oil-painting representing the profile and one long black ringlet of a young woman, faced his bed-place. Three chronometers ticked him to sleep and greeted him on waking with the tiny competition of their beats. He rose at five every day. The officer of the morning watch, drinking his early cup of coffee aft by the wheel, would hear through the wide orifice of the copper ventilators all the splashings, blowings, and splutterings of his captain's toilet. These noises would be followed by a sustained deep murmur of the Lord's Prayer recited



in a loud earnest voice. Five minutes afterwards the head and shoulders of Captain Whalley emerged out of the companion-hatchway. Invariably he paused for a while on the stairs, looking all round at the horizon; upwards at the trim of the sails; inhaling deep draughts of the fresh air. Only then he would step out on the poop, acknowledging the hand raised to the peak of the cap with a majestic and benign "Good morning to you." He walked the deck till eight scrupulously. Sometimes, not above twice a year, he had to use a thick cudgel-like stick on account of a stiffness in the hip — a slight touch of rheumatism, he supposed. Otherwise he knew nothing of the ills of the flesh. At the ringing of the breakfast bell he went below to feed his canaries, wind up the chronometers, and take the head of the table. From there he had before his eyes the big carbon photographs of his daughter, her husband, and two fat-legged babies — his grandchildren — set in black frames into the maplewood bulkheads of the cuddy. After breakfast he dusted the glass over these portraits himself with a cloth, and brushed the oil painting of his wife with a plumate kept suspended from a small brass hook by the side of the heavy gold frame. Then with the door of his stateroom shut, he would sit down on the couch under the portrait to read a chapter out of a thick pocket Bible — her Bible. But on some days he only sat there for half an hour with his finger between the leaves and the closed book resting on his knees. Perhaps he had remembered suddenly how fond of boat-sailing she used to be.

She had been a real shipmate and a true woman too. It was like an article of faith with him that there never had been, and never could be, a brighter, cheerier home anywhere afloat or ashore than his home under the poop-deck of the Condor, with the big main cabin all white and gold, garlanded as if for a perpetual festival with an unfading wreath. She had decorated the center of every panel with a cluster of home flowers. It took her a twelvemonth to go round the cuddy with this labor of love. To him it had remained a marvel of painting, the highest achievement of taste and skill; and as to old Swinburne, his mate, every time he came down to his meals he stood transfixed with admiration before the progress of the work. You could almost smell these roses, he declared, sniffing the faint flavor of turpentine which at that time pervaded the saloon, and (as he confessed afterwards) made him somewhat less hearty than usual in tackling his food. But there was nothing of the sort to interfere with his enjoyment of her singing. "Mrs. Whalley is a regular out-and-out nightingale, sir," he would pronounce with

a judicial air after listening profoundly over the skylight to the very end of the piece. In fine weather, in the second dog-watch, the two men could hear her trills and roulades going on to the accompaniment of the piano in the cabin. On the very day they got engaged he had written to London for the instrument; but they had been married for over a year before it reached them, coming out round the Cape. The big case made part of the first direct general cargo landed in Hong-kong harbor — an event that to the men who walked the busy quays of to-day seemed as hazily remote as the dark ages of history. But Captain Whalley could in a half hour of solitude live again all his life, with its romance, its idyl, and its sorrow. He had to close her eyes himself. She went away from under the ensign like a sailor's wife, a sailor herself at heart. He had read the service over her, out of her own prayer-book, without a break in his voice. When he raised his eyes he could see old Swinburne facing him with his cap pressed to his breast, and his rugged, weather-beaten, impassive face streaming with drops of water like a lump of chipped red granite in a shower. It was all very well for that old sea-dog to cry. He had to read on to the end; but after the splash he did not remember much of what happened for the next few days. An elderly sailor of the crew, deft at needlework, put together a mourning frock for the child out of one of her black skirts.

He was not likely to forget; but you cannot dam up life like a sluggish stream. It will break out and flow over a man's troubles, it will close upon a sorrow like the sea upon a dead body, no matter how much love has gone to the bottom. And the world is not bad. People had been very kind to him; especially Mrs. Gardner, the wife of the senior partner in Gardner, Patteson, & Co., the owners of the Condor. It was she who volunteered to look after the little one, and in due course took her to England (something of a journey in those days, even by the overland mail route) with her own girls to finish her education. It was ten years before he saw her again.

As a little child she had never been frightened of bad weather; she would beg to be taken up on deck in the bosom of his oilskin coat to watch the big seas hurling themselves upon the Condor. The swirl and crash of the waves seemed to fill her small soul with a breathless delight. "A good boy spoiled," he used to say of her in joke. He had named her Ivy because of the sound of the word, and obscurely fascinated by a vague association of ideas. She had twined herself tightly round his heart, and he intended her to cling close to her father as to a tower of strength; forgetting, while she was

little, that in the nature of things she would probably elect to cling to someone else. But he loved life well enough for even that event to give him a certain satisfaction, apart from his more intimate feeling of loss.

After he had purchased the Fair Maid to occupy his loneliness, he hastened to accept a rather unprofitable freight to Australia simply for the opportunity of seeing his daughter in her own home. What made him dissatisfied there was not to see that she clung now to somebody else, but that the prop she had selected seemed on closer examination “a rather poor stick” — even in the matter of health. He disliked his son-in-law’s studied civility perhaps more than his method of handling the sum of money he had given Ivy at her marriage. But of his apprehensions he said nothing. Only on the day of his departure, with the hall-door open already, holding her hands and looking steadily into her eyes, he had said, “You know, my dear, all I have is for you and the chicks. Mind you write to me openly.” She had answered him by an almost imperceptible movement of her head. She resembled her mother in the color of her eyes, and in character — and also in this, that she understood him without many words.

Sure enough she had to write; and some of these letters made Captain Whalley lift his white eye-brows. For the rest he considered he was reaping the true reward of his life by being thus able to produce on demand whatever was needed. He had not enjoyed himself so much in a way since his wife had died. Characteristically enough his son-in-law’s punctuality in failure caused him at a distance to feel a sort of kindness towards the man. The fellow was so perpetually being jammed on a lee shore that to charge it all to his reckless navigation would be manifestly unfair. No, no! He knew well what that meant. It was bad luck. His own had been simply marvelous, but he had seen in his life too many good men — seamen and others — go under with the sheer weight of bad luck not to recognize the fatal signs. For all that, he was cogitating on the best way of tying up very strictly every penny he had to leave, when, with a preliminary rumble of rumors (whose first sound reached him in Shanghai as it happened), the shock of the big failure came; and, after passing through the phases of stupor, of incredulity, of indignation, he had to accept the fact that he had nothing to speak of to leave.

Upon that, as if he had only waited for this catastrophe, the unlucky man, away there in Melbourne, gave up his unprofitable game, and sat down —

in an invalid's bath-chair at that too. "He will never walk again," wrote the wife. For the first time in his life Captain Whalley was a bit staggered.

The Fair Maid had to go to work in bitter earnest now. It was no longer a matter of preserving alive the memory of Dare-devil Harry Whalley in the Eastern Seas, or of keeping an old man in pocket-money and clothes, with, perhaps, a bill for a few hundred first-class cigars thrown in at the end of the year. He would have to buckle-to, and keep her going hard on a scant allowance of gilt for the ginger-bread scrolls at her stem and stern.

This necessity opened his eyes to the fundamental changes of the world. Of his past only the familiar names remained, here and there, but the things and the men, as he had known them, were gone. The name of Gardner, Patteson, & Co. was still displayed on the walls of warehouses by the waterside, on the brass plates and window-panes in the business quarters of more than one Eastern port, but there was no longer a Gardner or a Patteson in the firm. There was no longer for Captain Whalley an arm-chair and a welcome in the private office, with a bit of business ready to be put in the way of an old friend, for the sake of bygone services. The husbands of the Gardner girls sat behind the desks in that room where, long after he had left the employ, he had kept his right of entrance in the old man's time. Their ships now had yellow funnels with black tops, and a time-table of appointed routes like a confounded service of tramways. The winds of December and June were all one to them; their captains (excellent young men he doubted not) were, to be sure, familiar with Whalley Island, because of late years the Government had established a white fixed light on the north end (with a red danger sector over the Condor Reef), but most of them would have been extremely surprised to hear that a flesh-and-blood Whalley still existed — an old man going about the world trying to pick up a cargo here and there for his little bark.

And everywhere it was the same. Departed the men who would have nodded appreciatively at the mention of his name, and would have thought themselves bound in honor to do something for Dare-devil Harry Whalley. Departed the opportunities which he would have known how to seize; and gone with them the white-winged flock of clippers that lived in the boisterous uncertain life of the winds, skimming big fortunes out of the foam of the sea. In a world that pared down the profits to an irreducible minimum, in a world that was able to count its disengaged tonnage twice over every day, and in which lean charters were snapped up by cable three

months in advance, there were no chances of fortune for an individual wandering haphazard with a little bark — hardly indeed any room to exist.

He found it more difficult from year to year. He suffered greatly from the smallness of remittances he was able to send his daughter. Meantime he had given up good cigars, and even in the matter of inferior cheroots limited himself to six a day. He never told her of his difficulties, and she never enlarged upon her struggle to live. Their confidence in each other needed no explanations, and their perfect understanding endured without protestations of gratitude or regret. He would have been shocked if she had taken it into her head to thank him in so many words, but he found it perfectly natural that she should tell him she needed two hundred pounds.

He had come in with the Fair Maid in ballast to look for a freight in the Sofala's port of registry, and her letter met him there. Its tenor was that it was no use mincing matters. Her only resource was in opening a boarding-house, for which the prospects, she judged, were good. Good enough, at any rate, to make her tell him frankly that with two hundred pounds she could make a start. He had torn the envelope open, hastily, on deck, where it was handed to him by the ship-chandler's runner, who had brought his mail at the moment of anchoring. For the second time in his life he was appalled, and remained stock-still at the cabin door with the paper trembling between his fingers. Open a boarding-house! Two hundred pounds for a start! The only resource! And he did not know where to lay his hands on two hundred pence.

All that night Captain Whalley walked the poop of his anchored ship, as though he had been about to close with the land in thick weather, and uncertain of his position after a run of many gray days without a sight of sun, moon, or stars. The black night twinkled with the guiding lights of seamen and the steady straight lines of lights on shore; and all around the Fair Maid the riding lights of ships cast trembling trails upon the water of the roadstead. Captain Whalley saw not a gleam anywhere till the dawn broke and he found out that his clothing was soaked through with the heavy dew.

His ship was awake. He stopped short, stroked his wet beard, and descended the poop ladder backwards, with tired feet. At the sight of him the chief officer, lounging about sleepily on the quarterdeck, remained open-mouthed in the middle of a great early-morning yawn.

“Good morning to you,” pronounced Captain Whalley solemnly, passing into the cabin. But he checked himself in the doorway, and without looking back, “By the bye,” he said, “there should be an empty wooden case put away in the lazarette. It has not been broken up — has it?”

The mate shut his mouth, and then asked as if dazed, “What empty case, sir?”

“A big flat packing-case belonging to that painting in my room. Let it be taken up on deck and tell the carpenter to look it over. I may want to use it before long.”

The chief officer did not stir a limb till he had heard the door of the captain’s state-room slam within the cuddy. Then he beckoned aft the second mate with his forefinger to tell him that there was something “in the wind.”

When the bell rang Captain Whalley’s authoritative voice boomed out through a closed door, “Sit down and don’t wait for me.” And his impressed officers took their places, exchanging looks and whispers across the table. What! No breakfast? And after apparently knocking about all night on deck, too! Clearly, there was something in the wind. In the skylight above their heads, bowed earnestly over the plates, three wire cages rocked and rattled to the restless jumping of the hungry canaries; and they could detect the sounds of their “old man’s” deliberate movements within his state-room. Captain Whalley was methodically winding up the chronometers, dusting the portrait of his late wife, getting a clean white shirt out of the drawers, making himself ready in his punctilious unhurried manner to go ashore. He could not have swallowed a single mouthful of food that morning. He had made up his mind to sell the Fair Maid.

### III

Just at that time the Japanese were casting far and wide for ships of European build, and he had no difficulty in finding a purchaser, a speculator who drove a hard bargain, but paid cash down for the Fair Maid, with a view to a profitable resale. Thus it came about that Captain Whalley found himself on a certain afternoon descending the steps of one of the most important post-offices of the East with a slip of bluish paper in his hand. This was the receipt of a registered letter enclosing a draft for two hundred pounds, and addressed to Melbourne. Captain Whalley pushed the paper

into his waistcoat-pocket, took his stick from under his arm, and walked down the street.

It was a recently opened and untidy thoroughfare with rudimentary sidewalks and a soft layer of dust cushioning the whole width of the road. One end touched the slummy street of Chinese shops near the harbor, the other drove straight on, without houses, for a couple of miles, through patches of jungle-like vegetation, to the yard gates of the new Consolidated Docks Company. The crude frontages of the new Government buildings alternated with the blank fencing of vacant plots, and the view of the sky seemed to give an added spaciousness to the broad vista. It was empty and shunned by natives after business hours, as though they had expected to see one of the tigers from the neighborhood of the New Waterworks on the hill coming at a loping canter down the middle to get a Chinese shopkeeper for supper. Captain Whalley was not dwarfed by the solitude of the grandly planned street. He had too fine a presence for that. He was only a lonely figure walking purposefully, with a great white beard like a pilgrim, and with a thick stick that resembled a weapon. On one side the new Courts of Justice had a low and unadorned portico of squat columns half concealed by a few old trees left in the approach. On the other the pavilion wings of the new Colonial Treasury came out to the line of the street. But Captain Whalley, who had now no ship and no home, remembered in passing that on that very site when he first came out from England there had stood a fishing village, a few mat huts erected on piles between a muddy tidal creek and a miry pathway that went writhing into a tangled wilderness without any docks or waterworks.

No ship — no home. And his poor Ivy away there had no home either. A boarding-house is no sort of home though it may get you a living. His feelings were horribly rasped by the idea of the boarding-house. In his rank of life he had that truly aristocratic temperament characterized by a scorn of vulgar gentility and by prejudiced views as to the derogatory nature of certain occupations. For his own part he had always preferred sailing merchant ships (which is a straightforward occupation) to buying and selling merchandise, of which the essence is to get the better of somebody in a bargain — an undignified trial of wits at best. His father had been Colonel Whalley (retired) of the H. E. I. Company's service, with very slender means besides his pension, but with distinguished connections. He could remember as a boy how frequently waiters at the inns, country

tradesmen and small people of that sort, used to "My lord" the old warrior on the strength of his appearance.

Captain Whalley himself (he would have entered the Navy if his father had not died before he was fourteen) had something of a grand air which would have suited an old and glorious admiral; but he became lost like a straw in the eddy of a brook amongst the swarm of brown and yellow humanity filling a thoroughfare, that by contrast with the vast and empty avenue he had left seemed as narrow as a lane and absolutely riotous with life. The walls of the houses were blue; the shops of the Chinamen yawned like cavernous lairs; heaps of nondescript merchandise overflowed the gloom of the long range of arcades, and the fiery serenity of sunset took the middle of the street from end to end with a glow like the reflection of a fire. It fell on the bright colors and the dark faces of the bare-footed crowd, on the pallid yellow backs of the half-naked jostling coolies, on the accouterments of a tall Sikh trooper with a parted beard and fierce mustaches on sentry before the gate of the police compound. Looming very big above the heads in a red haze of dust, the tightly packed car of the cable tramway navigated cautiously up the human stream, with the incessant blare of its horn, in the manner of a steamer groping in a fog.

Captain Whalley emerged like a diver on the other side, and in the desert shade between the walls of closed warehouses removed his hat to cool his brow. A certain disrepute attached to the calling of a landlady of a boarding-house. These women were said to be rapacious, unscrupulous, untruthful; and though he contemned no class of his fellow-creatures — God forbid! — these were suspicions to which it was unseemly that a Whalley should lay herself open. He had not expostulated with her, however. He was confident she shared his feelings; he was sorry for her; he trusted her judgment; he considered it a merciful dispensation that he could help her once more, — but in his aristocratic heart of hearts he would have found it more easy to reconcile himself to the idea of her turning seamstress. Vaguely he remembered reading years ago a touching piece called the "Song of the Shirt." It was all very well making songs about poor women. The granddaughter of Colonel Whalley, the landlady of a boarding-house! Pooh! He replaced his hat, dived into two pockets, and stopping a moment to apply a flaring match to the end of a cheap cheroot, blew an embittered cloud of smoke at a world that could hold such surprises.



Of one thing he was certain — that she was the own child of a clever mother. Now he had got over the wrench of parting with his ship, he perceived clearly that such a step had been unavoidable. Perhaps he had been growing aware of it all along with an unconfessed knowledge. But she, far away there, must have had an intuitive perception of it, with the pluck to face that truth and the courage to speak out — all the qualities which had made her mother a woman of such excellent counsel.

It would have had to come to that in the end! It was fortunate she had forced his hand. In another year or two it would have been an utterly barren sale. To keep the ship going he had been involving himself deeper every year. He was defenseless before the insidious work of adversity, to whose more open assaults he could present a firm front; like a cliff that stands unmoved the open battering of the sea, with a lofty ignorance of the treacherous backwash undermining its base. As it was, every liability satisfied, her request answered, and owing no man a penny, there remained to him from the proceeds a sum of five hundred pounds put away safely. In addition he had upon his person some forty odd dollars — enough to pay his hotel bill, providing he did not linger too long in the modest bedroom where he had taken refuge.

Scantily furnished, and with a waxed floor, it opened into one of the side-verandas. The straggling building of bricks, as airy as a bird-cage, resounded with the incessant flapping of rattan screens worried by the wind between the white-washed square pillars of the sea-front. The rooms were lofty, a ripple of sunshine flowed over the ceilings; and the periodical invasions of tourists from some passenger steamer in the harbor flitted through the wind-swept dusk of the apartments with the tumult of their unfamiliar voices and impermanent presences, like relays of migratory shades condemned to speed headlong round the earth without leaving a trace. The babble of their irruptions ebbed out as suddenly as it had arisen; the draughty corridors and the long chairs of the verandas knew their sight-seeing hurry or their prostrate repose no more; and Captain Whalley, substantial and dignified, left well-nigh alone in the vast hotel by each light-hearted skurry, felt more and more like a stranded tourist with no aim in view, like a forlorn traveler without a home. In the solitude of his room he smoked thoughtfully, gazing at the two sea-chests which held all that he could call his own in this world. A thick roll of charts in a sheath of sailcloth leaned in a corner; the flat packing-case containing the portrait in

oils and the three carbon photographs had been pushed under the bed. He was tired of discussing terms, of assisting at surveys, of all the routine of the business. What to the other parties was merely the sale of a ship was to him a momentous event involving a radically new view of existence. He knew that after this ship there would be no other; and the hopes of his youth, the exercise of his abilities, every feeling and achievement of his manhood, had been indissolubly connected with ships. He had served ships; he had owned ships; and even the years of his actual retirement from the sea had been made bearable by the idea that he had only to stretch out his hand full of money to get a ship. He had been at liberty to feel as though he were the owner of all the ships in the world. The selling of this one was weary work; but when she passed from him at last, when he signed the last receipt, it was as though all the ships had gone out of the world together, leaving him on the shore of inaccessible oceans with seven hundred pounds in his hands.

Striding firmly, without haste, along the quay, Captain Whalley averted his glances from the familiar roadstead. Two generations of seamen born since his first day at sea stood between him and all these ships at the anchorage. His own was sold, and he had been asking himself, What next?

From the feeling of loneliness, of inward emptiness, — and of loss too, as if his very soul had been taken out of him forcibly, — there had sprung at first a desire to start right off and join his daughter. “Here are the last pence,” he would say to her; “take them, my dear. And here’s your old father: you must take him too.”

His soul recoiled, as if afraid of what lay hidden at the bottom of this impulse. Give up! Never! When one is thoroughly weary all sorts of nonsense come into one’s head. A pretty gift it would have been for a poor woman — this seven hundred pounds with the incumbrance of a hale old fellow more than likely to last for years and years to come. Was he not as fit to die in harness as any of the youngsters in charge of these anchored ships out yonder? He was as solid now as ever he had been. But as to who would give him work to do, that was another matter. Were he, with his appearance and antecedents, to go about looking for a junior’s berth, people, he was afraid, would not take him seriously; or else if he succeeded in impressing them, he would maybe obtain their pity, which would be like stripping yourself naked to be kicked. He was not anxious to give himself away for less than nothing. He had no use for anybody’s pity. On the other hand, a

command — the only thing he could try for with due regard for common decency — was not likely to be lying in wait for him at the corner of the next street. Commands don't go a-begging nowadays. Ever since he had come ashore to carry out the business of the sale he had kept his ears open, but had heard no hint of one being vacant in the port. And even if there had been one, his successful past itself stood in his way. He had been his own employer too long. The only credential he could produce was the testimony of his whole life. What better recommendation could anyone require? But vaguely he felt that the unique document would be looked upon as an archaic curiosity of the Eastern waters, a screed traced in obsolete words — in a half-forgotten language.

#### IV

Revolving these thoughts, he strolled on near the railings of the quay, broad-chested, without a stoop, as though his big shoulders had never felt the burden of the loads that must be carried between the cradle and the grave. No single betraying fold or line of care disfigured the reposeful modeling of his face. It was full and untanned; and the upper part emerged, massively quiet, out of the downward flow of silvery hair, with the striking delicacy of its clear complexion and the powerful width of the forehead. The first cast of his glance fell on you candid and swift, like a boy's; but because of the ragged snowy thatch of the eyebrows the affability of his attention acquired the character of a dark and searching scrutiny. With age he had put on flesh a little, had increased his girth like an old tree presenting no symptoms of decay; and even the opulent, lustrous ripple of white hairs upon his chest seemed an attribute of unquenchable vitality and vigor.

Once rather proud of his great bodily strength, and even of his personal appearance, conscious of his worth, and firm in his rectitude, there had remained to him, like the heritage of departed prosperity, the tranquil bearing of a man who had proved himself fit in every sort of way for the life of his choice. He strode on squarely under the projecting brim of an ancient Panama hat. It had a low crown, a crease through its whole diameter, a narrow black ribbon. Imperishable and a little discolored, this headgear made it easy to pick him out from afar on thronged wharves and in the busy streets. He had never adopted the comparatively modern fashion

of pipeclayed cork helmets. He disliked the form; and he hoped he could manage to keep a cool head to the end of his life without all these contrivances for hygienic ventilation. His hair was cropped close, his linen always of immaculate whiteness; a suit of thin gray flannel, worn threadbare but scrupulously brushed, floated about his burly limbs, adding to his bulk by the looseness of its cut. The years had mellowed the good-humored, imperturbable audacity of his prime into a temper carelessly serene; and the leisurely tapping of his iron-shod stick accompanied his footfalls with a self-confident sound on the flagstones. It was impossible to connect such a fine presence and this unruffled aspect with the belittling troubles of poverty; the man's whole existence appeared to pass before you, facile and large, in the freedom of means as ample as the clothing of his body.

The irrational dread of having to break into his five hundred pounds for personal expenses in the hotel disturbed the steady poise of his mind. There was no time to lose. The bill was running up. He nourished the hope that this five hundred would perhaps be the means, if everything else failed, of obtaining some work which, keeping his body and soul together (not a matter of great outlay), would enable him to be of use to his daughter. To his mind it was her own money which he employed, as it were, in backing her father and solely for her benefit. Once at work, he would help her with the greater part of his earnings; he was good for many years yet, and this boarding-house business, he argued to himself, whatever the prospects, could not be much of a gold-mine from the first start. But what work? He was ready to lay hold of anything in an honest way so that it came quickly to his hand; because the five hundred pounds must be preserved intact for eventual use. That was the great point. With the entire five hundred one felt a substance at one's back; but it seemed to him that should he let it dwindle to four-fifty or even four-eighty, all the efficiency would be gone out of the money, as though there were some magic power in the round figure. But what sort of work?

Confronted by that haunting question as by an uneasy ghost, for whom he had no exorcising formula, Captain Whalley stopped short on the apex of a small bridge spanning steeply the bed of a canalized creek with granite shores. Moored between the square blocks a seagoing Malay prau floated half hidden under the arch of masonry, with her spars lowered down, without a sound of life on board, and covered from stem to stern with a

ridge of palm-leaf mats. He had left behind him the overheated pavements bordered by the stone frontages that, like the sheer face of cliffs, followed the sweep of the quays; and an unconfined spaciousness of orderly and sylvan aspect opened before him its wide plots of rolled grass, like pieces of green carpet smoothly pegged out, its long ranges of trees lined up in colossal porticos of dark shafts roofed with a vault of branches.

Some of these avenues ended at the sea. It was a terraced shore; and beyond, upon the level expanse, profound and glistening like the gaze of a dark-blue eye, an oblique band of stippled purple lengthened itself indefinitely through the gap between a couple of verdant twin islets. The masts and spars of a few ships far away, hull down in the outer roads, sprang straight from the water in a fine maze of rosy lines penciled on the clear shadow of the eastern board. Captain Whalley gave them a long glance. The ship, once his own, was anchored out there. It was staggering to think that it was open to him no longer to take a boat at the jetty and get himself pulled off to her when the evening came. To no ship. Perhaps never more. Before the sale was concluded, and till the purchase-money had been paid, he had spent daily some time on board the Fair Maid. The money had been paid this very morning, and now, all at once, there was positively no ship that he could go on board of when he liked; no ship that would need his presence in order to do her work — to live. It seemed an incredible state of affairs, something too bizarre to last. And the sea was full of craft of all sorts. There was that prau lying so still swathed in her shroud of sewn palm-leaves — she too had her indispensable man. They lived through each other, this Malay he had never seen, and this high-sterned thing of no size that seemed to be resting after a long journey. And of all the ships in sight, near and far, each was provided with a man, the man without whom the finest ship is a dead thing, a floating and purposeless log.

After his one glance at the roadstead he went on, since there was nothing to turn back for, and the time must be got through somehow. The avenues of big trees ran straight over the Esplanade, cutting each other at diverse angles, columnar below and luxuriant above. The interlaced boughs high up there seemed to slumber; not a leaf stirred overhead: and the reedy cast-iron lampposts in the middle of the road, gilt like scepters, diminished in a long perspective, with their globes of white porcelain atop, resembling a barbarous decoration of ostriches' eggs displayed in a row. The flaming sky

kindled a tiny crimson spark upon the glistening surface of each glassy shell.

With his chin sunk a little, his hands behind his back, and the end of his stick marking the gravel with a faint wavering line at his heels, Captain Whalley reflected that if a ship without a man was like a body without a soul, a sailor without a ship was of not much more account in this world than an aimless log adrift upon the sea. The log might be sound enough by itself, tough of fiber, and hard to destroy — but what of that! And a sudden sense of irremediable idleness weighted his feet like a great fatigue.

A succession of open carriages came bowling along the newly opened sea-road. You could see across the wide grass-plots the discs of vibration made by the spokes. The bright domes of the parasols swayed lightly outwards like full-blown blossoms on the rim of a vase; and the quiet sheet of dark-blue water, crossed by a bar of purple, made a background for the spinning wheels and the high action of the horses, whilst the turbaned heads of the Indian servants elevated above the line of the sea horizon glided rapidly on the paler blue of the sky. In an open space near the little bridge each turn-out trotted smartly in a wide curve away from the sunset; then pulling up sharp, entered the main alley in a long slow-moving file with the great red stillness of the sky at the back. The trunks of mighty trees stood all touched with red on the same side, the air seemed aflame under the high foliage, the very ground under the hoofs of the horses was red. The wheels turned solemnly; one after another the sunshades drooped, folding their colors like gorgeous flowers shutting their petals at the end of the day. In the whole half-mile of human beings no voice uttered a distinct word, only a faint thudding noise went on mingled with slight jingling sounds, and the motionless heads and shoulders of men and women sitting in couples emerged stolidly above the lowered hoods — as if wooden. But one carriage and pair coming late did not join the line.

It fled along in a noiseless roll; but on entering the avenue one of the dark bays snorted, arching his neck and shying against the steel-tipped pole; a flake of foam fell from the bit upon the point of a satiny shoulder, and the dusky face of the coachman leaned forward at once over the hands taking a fresh grip of the reins. It was a long dark-green landau, having a dignified and buoyant motion between the sharply curved C-springs, and a sort of strictly official majesty in its supreme elegance. It seemed more roomy than is usual, its horses seemed slightly bigger, the appointments a shade more

perfect, the servants perched somewhat higher on the box. The dresses of three women — two young and pretty, and one, handsome, large, of mature age — seemed to fill completely the shallow body of the carriage. The fourth face was that of a man, heavy lidded, distinguished and sallow, with a somber, thick, iron-gray imperial and mustaches, which somehow had the air of solid appendages. His Excellency —

The rapid motion of that one equipage made all the others appear utterly inferior, blighted, and reduced to crawl painfully at a snail's pace. The landau distanced the whole file in a sort of sustained rush; the features of the occupant whirling out of sight left behind an impression of fixed stares and impassive vacancy; and after it had vanished in full flight as it were, notwithstanding the long line of vehicles hugging the curb at a walk, the whole lofty vista of the avenue seemed to lie open and emptied of life in the enlarged impression of an august solitude.

Captain Whalley had lifted his head to look, and his mind, disturbed in its meditation, turned with wonder (as men's minds will do) to matters of no importance. It struck him that it was to this port, where he had just sold his last ship, that he had come with the very first he had ever owned, and with his head full of a plan for opening a new trade with a distant part of the Archipelago. The then governor had given him no end of encouragement. No Excellency he — this Mr. Denham — this governor with his jacket off; a man who tended night and day, so to speak, the growing prosperity of the settlement with the self-forgetful devotion of a nurse for a child she loves; a lone bachelor who lived as in a camp with the few servants and his three dogs in what was called then the Government Bungalow: a low-roofed structure on the half-cleared slope of a hill, with a new flagstaff in front and a police orderly on the veranda. He remembered toiling up that hill under a heavy sun for his audience; the unfurnished aspect of the cool shaded room; the long table covered at one end with piles of papers, and with two guns, a brass telescope, a small bottle of oil with a feather stuck in the neck at the other — and the flattering attention given to him by the man in power. It was an undertaking full of risk he had come to expound, but a twenty minutes' talk in the Government Bungalow on the hill had made it go smoothly from the start. And as he was retiring Mr. Denham, already seated before the papers, called out after him, "Next month the Dido starts for a cruise that way, and I shall request her captain officially to give you a look in and see how you get on." The Dido was one of the smart frigates on the

China station — and five-and-thirty years make a big slice of time. Five-and-thirty years ago an enterprise like his had for the colony enough importance to be looked after by a Queen's ship. A big slice of time. Individuals were of some account then. Men like himself; men, too, like poor Evans, for instance, with his red face, his coal-black whiskers, and his restless eyes, who had set up the first patent slip for repairing small ships, on the edge of the forest, in a lonely bay three miles up the coast. Mr. Denham had encouraged that enterprise too, and yet somehow poor Evans had ended by dying at home deucedly hard up. His son, they said, was squeezing oil out of cocoa-nuts for a living on some God-forsaken islet of the Indian Ocean; but it was from that patent slip in a lonely wooded bay that had sprung the workshops of the Consolidated Docks Company, with its three graving basins carved out of solid rock, its wharves, its jetties, its electric-light plant, its steam-power houses — with its gigantic sheer-legs, fit to lift the heaviest weight ever carried afloat, and whose head could be seen like the top of a queer white monument peeping over bushy points of land and sandy promontories, as you approached the New Harbor from the west.

There had been a time when men counted: there were not so many carriages in the colony then, though Mr. Denham, he fancied, had a buggy. And Captain Whalley seemed to be swept out of the great avenue by the swirl of a mental backwash. He remembered muddy shores, a harbor without quays, the one solitary wooden pier (but that was a public work) jutting out crookedly, the first coal-sheds erected on Monkey Point, that caught fire mysteriously and smoldered for days, so that amazed ships came into a roadstead full of sulphurous smoke, and the sun hung blood-red at midday. He remembered the things, the faces, and something more besides — like the faint flavor of a cup quaffed to the bottom, like a subtle sparkle of the air that was not to be found in the atmosphere of to-day.

In this evocation, swift and full of detail like a flash of magnesium light into the niches of a dark memorial hall, Captain Whalley contemplated things once important, the efforts of small men, the growth of a great place, but now robbed of all consequence by the greatness of accomplished facts, by hopes greater still; and they gave him for a moment such an almost physical grip upon time, such a comprehension of our unchangeable feelings, that he stopped short, struck the ground with his stick, and ejaculated mentally, "What the devil am I doing here!" He seemed lost in a



sort of surprise; but he heard his name called out in wheezy tones once, twice — and turned on his heels slowly.

He beheld then, waddling towards him autocratically, a man of an old-fashioned and gouty aspect, with hair as white as his own, but with shaved, florid cheeks, wearing a necktie — almost a neckcloth — whose stiff ends projected far beyond his chin; with round legs, round arms, a round body, a round face — generally producing the effect of his short figure having been distended by means of an air-pump as much as the seams of his clothing would stand. This was the Master-Attendant of the port. A master-attendant is a superior sort of harbor-master; a person, out in the East, of some consequence in his sphere; a Government official, a magistrate for the waters of the port, and possessed of vast but ill-defined disciplinary authority over seamen of all classes. This particular Master-Attendant was reported to consider it miserably inadequate, on the ground that it did not include the power of life and death. This was a jocular exaggeration. Captain Elliott was fairly satisfied with his position, and nursed no inconsiderable sense of such power as he had. His conceited and tyrannical disposition did not allow him to let it dwindle in his hands for want of use. The uproarious, choleric frankness of his comments on people's character and conduct caused him to be feared at bottom; though in conversation many pretended not to mind him in the least, others would only smile sourly at the mention of his name, and there were even some who dared to pronounce him "a meddlesome old ruffian." But for almost all of them one of Captain Elliott's outbreaks was nearly as distasteful to face as a chance of annihilation.

## V

As soon as he had come up quite close he said, mouthing in a growl —  
"What's this I hear, Whalley? Is it true you're selling the Fair Maid?"

Captain Whalley, looking away, said the thing was done — money had been paid that morning; and the other expressed at once his approbation of such an extremely sensible proceeding. He had got out of his trap to stretch his legs, he explained, on his way home to dinner. Sir Frederick looked well at the end of his time. Didn't he?

Captain Whalley could not say; had only noticed the carriage going past.

The Master-Attendant, plunging his hands into the pockets of an alpaca jacket inappropriately short and tight for a man of his age and appearance, strutted with a slight limp, and with his head reaching only to the shoulder of Captain Whalley, who walked easily, staring straight before him. They had been good comrades years ago, almost intimates. At the time when Whalley commanded the renowned Condor, Elliott had charge of the nearly as famous Ringdove for the same owners; and when the appointment of Master-Attendant was created, Whalley would have been the only other serious candidate. But Captain Whalley, then in the prime of life, was resolved to serve no one but his own auspicious Fortune. Far away, tending his hot irons, he was glad to hear the other had been successful. There was a worldly suppleness in bluff Ned Elliott that would serve him well in that sort of official appointment. And they were so dissimilar at bottom that as they came slowly to the end of the avenue before the Cathedral, it had never come into Whalley's head that he might have been in that man's place — provided for to the end of his days.

The sacred edifice, standing in solemn isolation amongst the converging avenues of enormous trees, as if to put grave thoughts of heaven into the hours of ease, presented a closed Gothic portal to the light and glory of the west. The glass of the rosace above the ogive glowed like fiery coal in the deep carvings of a wheel of stone. The two men faced about.

"I'll tell you what they ought to do next, Whalley," growled Captain Elliott suddenly.

"Well?"

"They ought to send a real live lord out here when Sir Frederick's time is up. Eh?"

Captain Whalley perfunctorily did not see why a lord of the right sort should not do as well as anyone else. But this was not the other's point of view.

"No, no. Place runs itself. Nothing can stop it now. Good enough for a lord," he growled in short sentences. "Look at the changes in our time. We need a lord here now. They have got a lord in Bombay."

He dined once or twice every year at the Government House — a many-windowed, arcaded palace upon a hill laid out in roads and gardens. And lately he had been taking about a duke in his Master-Attendant's steam-launch to visit the harbor improvements. Before that he had "most obligingly" gone out in person to pick out a good berth for the ducal yacht.

Afterwards he had an invitation to lunch on board. The duchess herself lunched with them. A big woman with a red face. Complexion quite sunburnt. He should think ruined. Very gracious manners. They were going on to Japan. . . .

He ejaculated these details for Captain Whalley's edification, pausing to blow out his cheeks as if with a pent-up sense of importance, and repeatedly protruding his thick lips till the blunt crimson end of his nose seemed to dip into the milk of his mustache. The place ran itself; it was fit for any lord; it gave no trouble except in its Marine department — in its Marine department he repeated twice, and after a heavy snort began to relate how the other day her Majesty's Consul-General in French Cochinchina had cabled to him — in his official capacity — asking for a qualified man to be sent over to take charge of a Glasgow ship whose master had died in Saigon.

"I sent word of it to the officers' quarters in the Sailors' Home," he continued, while the limp in his gait seemed to grow more accentuated with the increasing irritation of his voice. "Place's full of them. Twice as many men as there are berths going in the local trade. All hungry for an easy job. Twice as many — and — What d'you think, Whalley? . . ."

He stopped short; his hands clenched and thrust deeply downwards, seemed ready to burst the pockets of his jacket. A slight sigh escaped Captain Whalley.

"Hey? You would think they would be falling over each other. Not a bit of it. Frightened to go home. Nice and warm out here to lie about a veranda waiting for a job. I sit and wait in my office. Nobody. What did they suppose? That I was going to sit there like a dummy with the Consul-General's cable before me? Not likely. So I looked up a list of them I keep by me and sent word for Hamilton — the worst loafer of them all — and just made him go. Threatened to instruct the steward of the Sailors' Home to have him turned out neck and crop. He did not think the berth was good enough — if — you — please. 'I've your little records by me,' said I. 'You came ashore here eighteen months ago, and you haven't done six months' work since. You are in debt for your board now at the Home, and I suppose you reckon the Marine Office will pay in the end. Eh? So it shall; but if you don't take this chance, away you go to England, assisted passage, by the first homeward steamer that comes along. You are no better than a pauper.

We don't want any white paupers here.' I scared him. But look at the trouble all this gave me."

"You would not have had any trouble," Captain Whalley said almost involuntarily, "if you had sent for me."

Captain Eliott was immensely amused; he shook with laughter as he walked. But suddenly he stopped laughing. A vague recollection had crossed his mind. Hadn't he heard it said at the time of the Travancore and Deccan smash that poor Whalley had been cleaned out completely. "Fellow's hard up, by heavens!" he thought; and at once he cast a sidelong upward glance at his companion. But Captain Whalley was smiling austere straight before him, with a carriage of the head inconceivable in a penniless man — and he became reassured. Impossible. Could not have lost everything. That ship had been only a hobby of his. And the reflection that a man who had confessed to receiving that very morning a presumably large sum of money was not likely to spring upon him a demand for a small loan put him entirely at his ease again. There had come a long pause in their talk, however, and not knowing how to begin again, he growled out soberly, "We old fellows ought to take a rest now."

"The best thing for some of us would be to die at the oar," Captain Whalley said negligently.

"Come, now. Aren't you a bit tired by this time of the whole show?" muttered the other sullenly.

"Are you?"

Captain Eliott was. Infernally tired. He only hung on to his berth so long in order to get his pension on the highest scale before he went home. It would be no better than poverty, anyhow; still, it was the only thing between him and the workhouse. And he had a family. Three girls, as Whalley knew. He gave "Harry, old boy," to understand that these three girls were a source of the greatest anxiety and worry to him. Enough to drive a man distracted.

"Why? What have they been doing now?" asked Captain Whalley with a sort of amused absent-mindedness.

"Doing! Doing nothing. That's just it. Lawn-tennis and silly novels from morning to night. . . ."

If one of them at least had been a boy. But all three! And, as ill-luck would have it, there did not seem to be any decent young fellows left in the world. When he looked around in the club he saw only a lot of conceited

popinjays too selfish to think of making a good woman happy. Extreme indigence stared him in the face with all that crowd to keep at home. He had cherished the idea of building himself a little house in the country — in Surrey — to end his days in, but he was afraid it was out of the question, . . . and his staring eyes rolled upwards with such a pathetic anxiety that Captain Whalley charitably nodded down at him, restraining a sort of sickening desire to laugh.

“You must know what it is yourself, Harry. Girls are the very devil for worry and anxiety.”

“Ay! But mine is doing well,” Captain Whalley pronounced slowly, staring to the end of the avenue.

The Master-Attendant was glad to hear this. Uncommonly glad. He remembered her well. A pretty girl she was.

Captain Whalley, stepping out carelessly, assented as if in a dream.

“She was pretty.”

The procession of carriages was breaking up.

One after another they left the file to go off at a trot, animating the vast avenue with their scattered life and movement; but soon the aspect of dignified solitude returned and took possession of the straight wide road. A syce in white stood at the head of a Burmah pony harnessed to a varnished two-wheel cart; and the whole thing waiting by the curb seemed no bigger than a child’s toy forgotten under the soaring trees. Captain Elliott waddled up to it and made as if to clamber in, but refrained; and keeping one hand resting easily on the shaft, he changed the conversation from his pension, his daughters, and his poverty back again to the only other topic in the world — the Marine Office, the men and the ships of the port.

He proceeded to give instances of what was expected of him; and his thick voice drowed in the still air like the obstinate droning of an enormous bumble-bee. Captain Whalley did not know what was the force or the weakness that prevented him from saying good-night and walking away. It was as though he had been too tired to make the effort. How queer. More queer than any of Ned’s instances. Or was it that overpowering sense of idleness alone that made him stand there and listen to these stories. Nothing very real had ever troubled Ned Elliott; and gradually he seemed to detect deep in, as if wrapped up in the gross wheezy rumble, something of the clear hearty voice of the young captain of the Ringdove. He wondered if he too had changed to the same extent; and it seemed to him that the voice of

his old chum had not changed so very much — that the man was the same. Not a bad fellow the pleasant, jolly Ned Eliott, friendly, well up to his business — and always a bit of a humbug. He remembered how he used to amuse his poor wife. She could read him like an open book. When the Condor and the Ringdove happened to be in port together, she would frequently ask him to bring Captain Eliott to dinner. They had not met often since those old days. Not once in five years, perhaps. He regarded from under his white eyebrows this man he could not bring himself to take into his confidence at this juncture; and the other went on with his intimate outpourings, and as remote from his hearer as though he had been talking on a hill-top a mile away.

He was in a bit of a quandary now as to the steamer Sofala. Ultimately every hitch in the port came into his hands to undo. They would miss him when he was gone in another eighteen months, and most likely some retired naval officer had been pitchforked into the appointment — a man that would understand nothing and care less. That steamer was a coasting craft having a steady trade connection as far north as Tenasserim; but the trouble was she could get no captain to take her on her regular trip. Nobody would go in her. He really had no power, of course, to order a man to take a job. It was all very well to stretch a point on the demand of a consul-general, but .

..

“What’s the matter with the ship?” Captain Whalley interrupted in measured tones.

“Nothing’s the matter. Sound old steamer. Her owner has been in my office this afternoon tearing his hair.”

“Is he a white man?” asked Whalley in an interested voice.

“He calls himself a white man,” answered the Master-Attendant scornfully; “but if so, it’s just skin-deep and no more. I told him that to his face too.”

“But who is he, then?”

“He’s the chief engineer of her. See that, Harry?”

“I see,” Captain Whalley said thoughtfully. “The engineer. I see.”

How the fellow came to be a shipowner at the same time was quite a tale. He came out third in a home ship nearly fifteen years ago, Captain Eliott remembered, and got paid off after a bad sort of row both with his skipper and his chief. Anyway, they seemed jolly glad to get rid of him at all costs. Clearly a mutinous sort of chap. Well, he remained out here, a perfect

nuisance, everlastingly shipped and unshipped, unable to keep a berth very long; pretty nigh went through every engine-room afloat belonging to the colony. Then suddenly, "What do you think happened, Harry?"

Captain Whalley, who seemed lost in a mental effort as of doing a sum in his head, gave a slight start. He really couldn't imagine. The Master-Attendant's voice vibrated dully with hoarse emphasis. The man actually had the luck to win the second prize in the Manilla lottery. All these engineers and officers of ships took tickets in that gamble. It seemed to be a perfect mania with them all.

Everybody expected now that he would take himself off home with his money, and go to the devil in his own way. Not at all. The Sofala, judged too small and not quite modern enough for the sort of trade she was in, could be got for a moderate price from her owners, who had ordered a new steamer from Europe. He rushed in and bought her. This man had never given any signs of that sort of mental intoxication the mere fact of getting hold of a large sum of money may produce — not till he got a ship of his own; but then he went off his balance all at once: came bouncing into the Marine Office on some transfer business, with his hat hanging over his left eye and switching a little cane in his hand, and told each one of the clerks separately that "Nobody could put him out now. It was his turn. There was no one over him on earth, and there never would be either." He swaggered and strutted between the desks, talking at the top of his voice, and trembling like a leaf all the while, so that the current business of the office was suspended for the time he was in there, and everybody in the big room stood open-mouthed looking at his antics. Afterwards he could be seen during the hottest hours of the day with his face as red as fire rushing along up and down the quays to look at his ship from different points of view: he seemed inclined to stop every stranger he came across just to let them know "that there would be no longer anyone over him; he had bought a ship; nobody on earth could put him out of his engine-room now."

Good bargain as she was, the price of the Sofala took up pretty near all the lottery-money. He had left himself no capital to work with. That did not matter so much, for these were the halcyon days of steam coasting trade, before some of the home shipping firms had thought of establishing local fleets to feed their main lines. These, when once organized, took the biggest slices out of that cake, of course; and by-and-by a squad of confounded German tramps turned up east of Suez Canal and swept up all the crumbs.

They prowled on the cheap to and fro along the coast and between the islands, like a lot of sharks in the water ready to snap up anything you let drop. And then the high old times were over for good; for years the Sofala had made no more, he judged, than a fair living. Captain Eliott looked upon it as his duty in every way to assist an English ship to hold her own; and it stood to reason that if for want of a captain the Sofala began to miss her trips she would very soon lose her trade. There was the quandary. The man was too impracticable. "Too much of a beggar on horseback from the first," he explained. "Seemed to grow worse as the time went on. In the last three years he's run through eleven skippers; he had tried every single man here, outside of the regular lines. I had warned him before that this would not do. And now, of course, no one will look at the Sofala. I had one or two men up at my office and talked to them; but, as they said to me, what was the good of taking the berth to lead a regular dog's life for a month and then get the sack at the end of the first trip? The fellow, of course, told me it was all nonsense; there has been a plot hatching for years against him. And now it had come. All the horrid sailors in the port had conspired to bring him to his knees, because he was an engineer."

Captain Eliott emitted a throaty chuckle.

"And the fact is, that if he misses a couple more trips he need never trouble himself to start again. He won't find any cargo in his old trade. There's too much competition nowadays for people to keep their stuff lying about for a ship that does not turn up when she's expected. It's a bad lookout for him. He swears he will shut himself on board and starve to death in his cabin rather than sell her — even if he could find a buyer. And that's not likely in the least. Not even the Japs would give her insured value for her. It isn't like selling sailing-ships. Steamers do get out of date, besides getting old."

"He must have laid by a good bit of money though," observed Captain Whalley quietly.

The Harbor-master puffed out his purple cheeks to an amazing size.

"Not a stiver, Harry. Not — a — single — sti-ver."

He waited; but as Captain Whalley, stroking his beard slowly, looked down on the ground without a word, he tapped him on the forearm, tiptoed, and said in a hoarse whisper —

"The Manilla lottery has been eating him up."



He frowned a little, nodding in tiny affirmative jerks. They all were going in for it; a third of the wages paid to ships' officers ("in my port," he snorted) went to Manilla. It was a mania. That fellow Massy had been bitten by it like the rest of them from the first; but after winning once he seemed to have persuaded himself he had only to try again to get another big prize. He had taken dozens and scores of tickets for every drawing since. What with this vice and his ignorance of affairs, ever since he had improvidently bought that steamer he had been more or less short of money.

This, in Captain Elliott's opinion, gave an opening for a sensible sailor-man with a few pounds to step in and save that fool from the consequences of his folly. It was his craze to quarrel with his captains. He had had some really good men too, who would have been too glad to stay if he would only let them. But no. He seemed to think he was no owner unless he was kicking somebody out in the morning and having a row with the new man in the evening. What was wanted for him was a master with a couple of hundred or so to take an interest in the ship on proper conditions. You don't discharge a man for no fault, only because of the fun of telling him to pack up his traps and go ashore, when you know that in that case you are bound to buy back his share. On the other hand, a fellow with an interest in the ship is not likely to throw up his job in a huff about a trifle. He had told Massy that. He had said: "This won't do, Mr. Massy. We are getting very sick of you here in the Marine Office. What you must do now is to try whether you could get a sailor to join you as partner. That seems to be the only way.' And that was sound advice, Harry."

Captain Whalley, leaning on his stick, was perfectly still all over, and his hand, arrested in the act of stroking, grasped his whole beard. And what did the fellow say to that?

The fellow had the audacity to fly out at the Master-Attendant. He had received the advice in a most impudent manner. "I didn't come here to be laughed at," he had shrieked. "I appeal to you as an Englishman and a shipowner brought to the verge of ruin by an illegal conspiracy of your beggarly sailors, and all you condescend to do for me is to tell me to go and get a partner!" . . . The fellow had presumed to stamp with rage on the floor of the private office. Where was he going to get a partner? Was he being taken for a fool? Not a single one of that contemptible lot ashore at the "Home" had twopence in his pocket to bless himself with. The very native curs in the bazaar knew that much. . . . "And it's true enough, Harry,"

rumbled Captain Elliott judicially. "They are much more likely one and all to owe money to the Chinamen in Denham Road for the clothes on their backs. 'Well,' said I, 'you make too much noise over it for my taste, Mr. Massy. Good morning.' He banged the door after him; he dared to bang my door, confound his cheek!"

The head of the Marine department was out of breath with indignation; then recollecting himself as it were, "I'll end by being late to dinner — yarning with you here . . . wife doesn't like it."

He clambered ponderously into the trap; leaned out sideways, and only then wondered wheezily what on earth Captain Whalley could have been doing with himself of late. They had had no sight of each other for years and years till the other day when he had seen him unexpectedly in the office.

What on earth . . .

Captain Whalley seemed to be smiling to himself in his white beard.

"The earth is big," he said vaguely.

The other, as if to test the statement, stared all round from his driving-seat. The Esplanade was very quiet; only from afar, from very far, a long way from the seashore, across the stretches of grass, through the long ranges of trees, came faintly the toot — toot — toot of the cable car beginning to roll before the empty peristyle of the Public Library on its three-mile journey to the New Harbor Docks.

"Doesn't seem to be so much room on it," growled the Master-Attendant, "since these Germans came along shouldering us at every turn. It was not so in our time."

He fell into deep thought, breathing stertorously, as though he had been taking a nap open-eyed. Perhaps he too, on his side, had detected in the silent pilgrim-like figure, standing there by the wheel, like an arrested wayfarer, the buried lineaments of the features belonging to the young captain of the Condor. Good fellow — Harry Whalley — never very talkative. You never knew what he was up to — a bit too off-hand with people of consequence, and apt to take a wrong view of a fellow's actions. Fact was he had a too good opinion of himself. He would have liked to tell him to get in and drive him home to dinner. But one never knew. Wife would not like it.

"And it's funny to think, Harry," he went on in a big, subdued drone, "that of all the people on it there seems only you and I left to remember this

part of the world as it used to be . . .”

He was ready to indulge in the sweetness of a sentimental mood had it not struck him suddenly that Captain Whalley, unstirring and without a word, seemed to be awaiting something — perhaps expecting . . . He gathered the reins at once and burst out in bluff, hearty growls —

“Ha! My dear boy. The men we have known — the ships we’ve sailed — ay! and the things we’ve done . . .”

The pony plunged — the syce skipped out of the way. Captain Whalley raised his arm.

“Good-by.”

## VI

The sun had set. And when, after drilling a deep hole with his stick, he moved from that spot the night had massed its army of shadows under the trees. They filled the eastern ends of the avenues as if only waiting the signal for a general advance upon the open spaces of the world; they were gathering low between the deep stone-faced banks of the canal. The Malay prau, half-concealed under the arch of the bridge, had not altered its position a quarter of an inch. For a long time Captain Whalley stared down over the parapet, till at last the floating immobility of that beshrouded thing seemed to grow upon him into something inexplicable and alarming. The twilight abandoned the zenith; its reflected gleams left the world below, and the water of the canal seemed to turn into pitch. Captain Whalley crossed it.

The turning to the right, which was his way to his hotel, was only a very few steps farther. He stopped again (all the houses of the sea-front were shut up, the quayside was deserted, but for one or two figures of natives walking in the distance) and began to reckon the amount of his bill. So many days in the hotel at so many dollars a day. To count the days he used his fingers: plunging one hand into his pocket, he jingled a few silver coins. All right for three days more; and then, unless something turned up, he must break into the five hundred — Ivy’s money — invested in her father. It seemed to him that the first meal coming out of that reserve would choke him — for certain. Reason was of no use. It was a matter of feeling. His feelings had never played him false.

He did not turn to the right. He walked on, as if there still had been a ship in the roadstead to which he could get himself pulled off in the evening. Far

away, beyond the houses, on the slope of an indigo promontory closing the view of the quays, the slim column of a factory-chimney smoked quietly straight up into the clear air. A Chinaman, curled down in the stern of one of the half-dozen sampans floating off the end of the jetty, caught sight of a beckoning hand. He jumped up, rolled his pigtail round his head swiftly, tucked in two rapid movements his wide dark trousers high up his yellow thighs, and by a single, noiseless, finlike stir of the oars, sheered the sampan alongside the steps with the ease and precision of a swimming fish.

“Sofala,” articulated Captain Whalley from above; and the Chinaman, a new emigrant probably, stared upwards with a tense attention as if waiting to see the queer word fall visibly from the white man’s lips. “Sofala,” Captain Whalley repeated; and suddenly his heart failed him. He paused. The shores, the islets, the high ground, the low points, were dark: the horizon had grown somber; and across the eastern sweep of the shore the white obelisk, marking the landing-place of the telegraph-cable, stood like a pale ghost on the beach before the dark spread of uneven roofs, intermingled with palms, of the native town. Captain Whalley began again.

“Sofala. Savee So-fa-la, John?”

This time the Chinaman made out that bizarre sound, and grunted his assent uncouthly, low down in his bare throat. With the first yellow twinkle of a star that appeared like the head of a pin stabbed deep into the smooth, pale, shimmering fabric of the sky, the edge of a keen chill seemed to cleave through the warm air of the earth. At the moment of stepping into the sampan to go and try for the command of the Sofala Captain Whalley shivered a little.

When on his return he landed on the quay again Venus, like a choice jewel set low on the hem of the sky, cast a faint gold trail behind him upon the roadstead, as level as a floor made of one dark and polished stone. The lofty vaults of the avenues were black — all black overhead — and the porcelain globes on the lamp-posts resembled egg-shaped pearls, gigantic and luminous, displayed in a row whose farther end seemed to sink in the distance, down to the level of his knees. He put his hands behind his back. He would now consider calmly the discretion of it before saying the final word to-morrow. His feet scrunched the gravel loudly — the discretion of it. It would have been easier to appraise had there been a workable alternative. The honesty of it was indubitable: he meant well by the fellow; and periodically his shadow leaped up intense by his side on the trunks of

the trees, to lengthen itself, oblique and dim, far over the grass — repeating his stride.

The discretion of it. Was there a choice? He seemed already to have lost something of himself; to have given up to a hungry specter something of his truth and dignity in order to live. But his life was necessary. Let poverty do its worst in exacting its toll of humiliation. It was certain that Ned Eliott had rendered him, without knowing it, a service for which it would have been impossible to ask. He hoped Ned would not think there had been something underhand in his action. He supposed that now when he heard of it he would understand — or perhaps he would only think Whalley an eccentric old fool. What would have been the good of telling him — any more than of blurting the whole tale to that man Massy? Five hundred pounds ready to invest. Let him make the best of that. Let him wonder. You want a captain — I want a ship. That's enough. B-r-r-r-r. What a disagreeable impression that empty, dark, echoing steamer had made upon him. . . .

A laid-up steamer was a dead thing and no mistake; a sailing-ship somehow seems always ready to spring into life with the breath of the incorruptible heaven; but a teamer, thought Captain Whalley, with her fires out, without the warm whiffs from below meeting you on her decks, without the hiss of steam, the clangs of iron in her breast — lies there as cold and still and pulseless as a corpse.

In the solitude of the avenue, all black above and lighted below, Captain Whalley, considering the discretion of his course, met, as it were incidentally, the thought of death. He pushed it aside with dislike and contempt. He almost laughed at it; and in the unquenchable vitality of his age only thought with a kind of exultation how little he needed to keep body and soul together. Not a bad investment for the poor woman this solid carcass of her father. And for the rest — in case of anything — the agreement should be clear: the whole five hundred to be paid back to her integrally within three months. Integrally. Every penny. He was not to lose any of her money whatever else had to go — a little dignity — some of his self-respect. He had never before allowed anybody to remain under any sort of false impression as to himself. Well, let that go — for her sake. After all, he had never said anything misleading — and Captain Whalley felt himself corrupt to the marrow of his bones. He laughed a little with the intimate scorn of his worldly prudence. Clearly, with a fellow of that sort, and in the peculiar relation they were to stand to each other, it would not have done to

blurt out everything. He did not like the fellow. He did not like his spells of fawning loquacity and bursts of resentfulness. In the end — a poor devil. He would not have liked to stand in his shoes. Men were not evil, after all. He did not like his sleek hair, his queer way of standing at right angles, with his nose in the air, and glancing along his shoulder at you. No. On the whole, men were not bad — they were only silly or unhappy.

Captain Whalley had finished considering the discretion of that step — and there was the whole long night before him. In the full light his long beard would glisten like a silver breastplate covering his heart; in the spaces between the lamps his burly figure passed less distinct, loomed very big, wandering, and mysterious. No; there was not much real harm in men: and all the time a shadow marched with him, slanting on his left hand — which in the East is a presage of evil.

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“Can you make out the clump of palms yet, Serang?” asked Captain Whalley from his chair on the bridge of the *Sofala* approaching the bar of Batu Beru.

“No, Tuan. By-and-by see.” The old Malay, in a blue dungaree suit, planted on his bony dark feet under the bridge awning, put his hands behind his back and stared ahead out of the innumerable wrinkles at the corners of his eyes.

Captain Whalley sat still, without lifting his head to look for himself. Three years — thirty-six times. He had made these palms thirty-six times from the southward. They would come into view at the proper time. Thank God, the old ship made her courses and distances trip after trip, as correct as clockwork. At last he murmured again —

“In sight yet?”

“The sun makes a very great glare, Tuan.”

“Watch well, Serang.”

“Ya, Tuan.”

A white man had ascended the ladder from the deck noiselessly, and had listened quietly to this short colloquy. Then he stepped out on the bridge and began to walk from end to end, holding up the long cherrywood stem of a pipe. His black hair lay plastered in long lanky wisps across the bald summit of his head; he had a furrowed brow, a yellow complexion, and a thick shapeless nose. A scanty growth of whisker did not conceal the contour of his jaw. His aspect was of brooding care; and sucking at a curved

black mouthpiece, he presented such a heavy overhanging profile that even the Serang could not help reflecting sometimes upon the extreme unloveliness of some white men.

Captain Whalley seemed to brace himself up in his chair, but gave no recognition whatever to his presence. The other puffed jets of smoke; then suddenly —

“I could never understand that new mania of yours of having this Malay here for your shadow, partner.”

Captain Whalley got up from the chair in all his imposing stature and walked across to the binnacle, holding such an unswerving course that the other had to back away hurriedly, and remained as if intimidated, with the pipe trembling in his hand. “Walk over me now,” he muttered in a sort of astounded and discomfited whisper. Then slowly and distinctly he said —

“I — am — not — dirt.” And then added defiantly, “As you seem to think.”

The Serang jerked out —

“See the palms now, Tuan.”

Captain Whalley strode forward to the rail; but his eyes, instead of going straight to the point, with the assured keen glance of a sailor, wandered irresolutely in space, as though he, the discoverer of new routes, had lost his way upon this narrow sea.

Another white man, the mate, came up on the bridge. He was tall, young, lean, with a mustache like a trooper, and something malicious in the eye. He took up a position beside the engineer. Captain Whalley, with his back to them, inquired —

“What’s on the log?”

“Eighty-five,” answered the mate quickly, and nudged the engineer with his elbow.

Captain Whalley’s muscular hands squeezed the iron rail with an extraordinary force; his eyes glared with an enormous effort; he knitted his eyebrows, the perspiration fell from under his hat, — and in a faint voice he murmured, “Steady her, Serang — when she is on the proper bearing.”

The silent Malay stepped back, waited a little, and lifted his arm warningly to the helmsman. The wheel revolved rapidly to meet the swing of the ship. Again the mate nudged the engineer. But Massy turned upon him.

“Mr. Sterne,” he said violently, “let me tell you — as a shipowner — that you are no better than a confounded fool.”

## VII

Sterne went down smirking and apparently not at all disconcerted, but the engineer Massy remained on the bridge, moving about with uneasy self-assertion. Everybody on board was his inferior — everyone without exception. He paid their wages and found them in their food. They ate more of his bread and pocketed more of his money than they were worth; and they had no care in the world, while he alone had to meet all the difficulties of shipowning. When he contemplated his position in all its menacing entirety, it seemed to him that he had been for years the prey of a band of parasites: and for years he had scowled at everybody connected with the *Sofala* except, perhaps, at the Chinese firemen who served to get her along. Their use was manifest: they were an indispensable part of the machinery of which he was the master.

When he passed along his decks he shouldered those he came across brutally; but the Malay deck hands had learned to dodge out of his way. He had to bring himself to tolerate them because of the necessary manual labor of the ship which must be done. He had to struggle and plan and scheme to keep the *Sofala* afloat — and what did he get for it? Not even enough respect. They could not have given him enough of that if all their thoughts and all their actions had been directed to that end. The vanity of possession, the vainglory of power, had passed away by this time, and there remained only the material embarrassments, the fear of losing that position which had turned out not worth having, and an anxiety of thought which no abject subservience of men could repay.

He walked up and down. The bridge was his own after all. He had paid for it; and with the stem of the pipe in his hand he would stop short at times as if to listen with a profound and concentrated attention to the deadened beat of the engines (his own engines) and the slight grinding of the steering chains upon the continuous low wash of water alongside. But for these sounds, the ship might have been lying as still as if moored to a bank, and as silent as if abandoned by every living soul; only the coast, the low coast of mud and mangroves with the three palms in a bunch at the back, grew slowly more distinct in its long straight line, without a single feature to



arrest attention. The native passengers of the Sofala lay about on mats under the awnings; the smoke of her funnel seemed the only sign of her life and connected with her gliding motion in a mysterious manner.

Captain Whalley on his feet, with a pair of binoculars in his hand and the little Malay Serang at his elbow, like an old giant attended by a wizened pigmy, was taking her over the shallow water of the bar.

This submarine ridge of mud, scoured by the stream out of the soft bottom of the river and heaped up far out on the hard bottom of the sea, was difficult to get over. The alluvial coast having no distinguishing marks, the bearings of the crossing-place had to be taken from the shape of the mountains inland. The guidance of a form flattened and uneven at the top like a grinder tooth, and of another smooth, saddle-backed summit, had to be searched for within the great unclouded glare that seemed to shift and float like a dry fiery mist, filling the air, ascending from the water, shrouding the distances, scorching to the eye. In this veil of light the near edge of the shore alone stood out almost coal-black with an opaque and motionless solidity. Thirty miles away the serrated range of the interior stretched across the horizon, its outlines and shades of blue, faint and tremulous like a background painted on airy gossamer on the quivering fabric of an impalpable curtain let down to the plain of alluvial soil; and the openings of the estuary appeared, shining white, like bits of silver let into the square pieces snipped clean and sharp out of the body of the land bordered with mangroves.

On the forepart of the bridge the giant and the pigmy muttered to each other frequently in quiet tones. Behind them Massy stood sideways with an expression of disdain and suspense on his face. His globular eyes were perfectly motionless, and he seemed to have forgotten the long pipe he held in his hand.

On the fore-deck below the bridge, steeply roofed with the white slopes of the awnings, a young lascar seaman had clambered outside the rail. He adjusted quickly a broad band of sail canvas under his armpits, and throwing his chest against it, leaned out far over the water. The sleeves of his thin cotton shirt, cut off close to the shoulder, bared his brown arm of full rounded form and with a satiny skin like a woman's. He swung it rigidly with the rotary and menacing action of a slinger: the 14-lb. weight hurtled circling in the air, then suddenly flew ahead as far as the curve of the bow. The wet thin line swished like scratched silk running through the

dark fingers of the man, and the plunge of the lead close to the ship's side made a vanishing silvery scar upon the golden glitter; then after an interval the voice of the young Malay uplifted and long-drawn declared the depth of the water in his own language.

"Tiga stengah," he cried after each splash and pause, gathering the line busily for another cast. "Tiga stengah," which means three fathom and a half. For a mile or so from seaward there was a uniform depth of water right up to the bar. "Half-three. Half-three. Half-three," — and his modulated cry, returned leisurely and monotonous, like the repeated call of a bird, seemed to float away in sunshine and disappear in the spacious silence of the empty sea and of a lifeless shore lying open, north and south, east and west, without the stir of a single cloud-shadow or the whisper of any other voice.

The owner-engineer of the *Sofala* remained very still behind the two seamen of different race, creed, and color; the European with the time-defying vigor of his old frame, the little Malay, old, too, but slight and shrunk like a withered brown leaf blown by a chance wind under the mighty shadow of the other. Very busy looking forward at the land, they had not a glance to spare; and Massy, glaring at them from behind, seemed to resent their attention to their duty like a personal slight upon himself.

This was unreasonable; but he had lived in his own world of unreasonable resentments for many years. At last, passing his moist palm over the rare lanky wisps of coarse hair on the top of his yellow head, he began to talk slowly.

"A leadsman, you want! I suppose that's your correct mail-boat style. Haven't you enough judgment to tell where you are by looking at the land? Why, before I had been a twelvemonth in the trade I was up to that trick — and I am only an engineer. I can point to you from here where the bar is, and I could tell you besides that you are as likely as not to stick her in the mud in about five minutes from now; only you would call it interfering, I suppose. And there's that written agreement of ours, that says I mustn't interfere."

His voice stopped. Captain Whalley, without relaxing the set severity of his features, moved his lips to ask in a quick mumble —

"How near, Serang?"

"Very near now, Tuan," the Malay muttered rapidly.

"Dead slow," said the Captain aloud in a firm tone.

The Serang snatched at the handle of the telegraph. A gong clanged down below. Massy with a scornful snigger walked off and put his head down the engineroom skylight.

“You may expect some rare fooling with the engines, Jack,” he bellowed. The space into which he stared was deep and full of gloom; and the gray gleams of steel down there seemed cool after the intense glare of the sea around the ship. The air, however, came up clammy and hot on his face. A short hoot on which it would have been impossible to put any sort of interpretation came from the bottom cavernously. This was the way in which the second engineer answered his chief.

He was a middle-aged man with an inattentive manner, and apparently wrapped up in such a taciturn concern for his engines that he seemed to have lost the use of speech. When addressed directly his only answer would be a grunt or a hoot, according to the distance. For all the years he had been in the Sofala he had never been known to exchange as much as a frank Good-morning with any of his shipmates. He did not seem aware that men came and went in the world; he did not seem to see them at all. Indeed he never recognized his ship mates on shore. At table (the four white men of the Sofala messed together) he sat looking into his plate dispassionately, but at the end of the meal would jump up and bolt down below as if a sudden thought had impelled him to rush and see whether somebody had not stolen the engines while he dined. In port at the end of the trip he went ashore regularly, but no one knew where he spent his evenings or in what manner. The local coasting fleet had preserved a wild and incoherent tale of his infatuation for the wife of a sergeant in an Irish infantry regiment. The regiment, however, had done its turn of garrison duty there ages before, and was gone somewhere to the other side of the earth, out of men’s knowledge. Twice or perhaps three times in the course of the year he would take too much to drink. On these occasions he returned on board at an earlier hour than usual; ran across the deck balancing himself with his spread arms like a tight-rope walker; and locking the door of his cabin, he would converse and argue with himself the livelong night in an amazing variety of tones; storm, sneer, and whine with an inexhaustible persistence. Massy in his berth next door, raising himself on his elbow, would discover that his second had remembered the name of every white man that had passed through the Sofala for years and years back. He remembered the names of men that had died, that had gone home, that had gone to America: he

remembered in his cups the names of men whose connection with the ship had been so short that Massy had almost forgotten its circumstances and could barely recall their faces. The inebriated voice on the other side of the bulkhead commented upon them all with an extraordinary and ingenious venom of scandalous inventions. It seems they had all offended him in some way, and in return he had found them all out. He muttered darkly; he laughed sardonically; he crushed them one after another; but of his chief, Massy, he babbled with an envious and naive admiration. Clever scoundrel! Don't meet the likes of him every day. Just look at him. Ha! Great! Ship of his own. Wouldn't catch him going wrong. No fear — the beast! And Massy, after listening with a gratified smile to these artless tributes to his greatness, would begin to shout, thumping at the bulkhead with both fists —

“Shut up, you lunatic! Won't you let me go to sleep, you fool!”

But a half smile of pride lingered on his lips; outside the solitary lascar told off for night duty in harbor, perhaps a youth fresh from a forest village, would stand motionless in the shadows of the deck listening to the endless drunken gabble. His heart would be thumping with breathless awe of white men: the arbitrary and obstinate men who pursue inflexibly their incomprehensible purposes, — beings with weird intonations in the voice, moved by unaccountable feelings, actuated by inscrutable motives.

## VIII

For a while after his second's answering hoot Massy hung over the engine-room gloomily. Captain Whalley, who, by the power of five hundred pounds, had kept his command for three years, might have been suspected of never having seen that coast before. He seemed unable to put down his glasses, as though they had been glued under his contracted eyebrows. This settled frown gave to his face an air of invincible and just severity; but his raised elbow trembled slightly, and the perspiration poured from under his hat as if a second sun had suddenly blazed up at the zenith by the side of the ardent still globe already there, in whose blinding white heat the earth whirled and shone like a mote of dust.

From time to time, still holding up his glasses, he raised his other hand to wipe his streaming face. The drops rolled down his cheeks, fell like rain upon the white hairs of his beard, and brusquely, as if guided by an

uncontrollable and anxious impulse, his arm reached out to the stand of the engine-room telegraph.

The gong clanged down below. The balanced vibration of the dead-slow speed ceased together with every sound and tremor in the ship, as if the great stillness that reigned upon the coast had stolen in through her sides of iron and taken possession of her innermost recesses. The illusion of perfect immobility seemed to fall upon her from the luminous blue dome without a stain arching over a flat sea without a stir. The faint breeze she had made for herself expired, as if all at once the air had become too thick to budge; even the slight hiss of the water on her stem died out. The narrow, long hull, carrying its way without a ripple, seemed to approach the shoal water of the bar by stealth. The plunge of the lead with the mournful, mechanical cry of the lascar came at longer and longer intervals; and the men on her bridge seemed to hold their breath. The Malay at the helm looked fixedly at the compass card, the Captain and the Serang stared at the coast.

Massy had left the skylight, and, walking flat-footed, had returned softly to the very spot on the bridge he had occupied before. A slow, lingering grin exposed his set of big white teeth: they gleamed evenly in the shade of the awning like the keyboard of a piano in a dusky room.

At last, pretending to talk to himself in excessive astonishment, he said not very loud —

“Stop the engines now. What next, I wonder?”

He waited, stooping from the shoulders, his head bowed, his glance oblique. Then raising his voice a shade —

“If I dared make an absurd remark I would say that you haven’t the stomach to . . .”

But a yelling spirit of excitement, like some frantic soul wandering unsuspected in the vast stillness of the coast, had seized upon the body of the lascar at the lead. The languid monotony of his sing-song changed to a swift, sharp clamor. The weight flew after a single whirl, the line whistled, splash followed splash in haste. The water had shoaled, and the man, instead of the drowsy tale of fathoms, was calling out the soundings in feet.

“Fifteen feet. Fifteen, fifteen! Fourteen, fourteen . . .”

Captain Whalley lowered the arm holding the glasses. It descended slowly as if by its own weight; no other part of his towering body stirred; and the swift cries with their eager warning note passed him by as though he had been deaf.

Massy, very still, and turning an attentive ear, had fastened his eyes upon the silvery, close-cropped back of the steady old head. The ship herself seemed to be arrested but for the gradual decrease of depth under her keel.

“Thirteen feet . . . Thirteen! Twelve!” cried the leadsman anxiously below the bridge. And suddenly the barefooted Serang stepped away noiselessly to steal a glance over the side.

Narrow of shoulder, in a suit of faded blue cotton, an old gray felt hat rammed down on his head, with a hollow in the nape of his dark neck, and with his slender limbs, he appeared from the back no bigger than a boy of fourteen. There was a childlike impulsiveness in the curiosity with which he watched the spread of the voluminous, yellowish convolutions rolling up from below to the surface of the blue water like massive clouds driving slowly upwards on the unfathomable sky. He was not startled at the sight in the least. It was not doubt, but the certitude that the keel of the Sofala must be stirring the mud now, which made him peep over the side.

His peering eyes, set aslant in a face of the Chinese type, a little old face, immovable, as if carved in old brown oak, had informed him long before that the ship was not headed at the bar properly. Paid off from the Fair Maid, together with the rest of the crew, after the completion of the sale, he had hung, in his faded blue suit and floppy gray hat, about the doors of the Harbor Office, till one day, seeing Captain Whalley coming along to get a crew for the Sofala, he had put himself quietly in the way, with his bare feet in the dust and an upward mute glance. The eyes of his old commander had fallen on him favorably — it must have been an auspicious day — and in less than half an hour the white men in the “Ofiss” had written his name on a document as Serang of the fire-ship Sofala. Since that time he had repeatedly looked at that estuary, upon that coast, from this bridge and from this side of the bar. The record of the visual world fell through his eyes upon his unspeculating mind as on a sensitized plate through the lens of a camera. His knowledge was absolute and precise; nevertheless, had he been asked his opinion, and especially if questioned in the downright, alarming manner of white men, he would have displayed the hesitation of ignorance. He was certain of his facts — but such a certitude counted for little against the doubt what answer would be pleasing. Fifty years ago, in a jungle village, and before he was a day old, his father (who died without ever seeing a white face) had had his nativity cast by a man of skill and wisdom in astrology, because in the arrangement of the stars may be read the last

word of human destiny. His destiny had been to thrive by the favor of various white men on the sea. He had swept the decks of ships, had tended their helms, had minded their stores, had risen at last to be a Serang; and his placid mind had remained as incapable of penetrating the simplest motives of those he served as they themselves were incapable of detecting through the crust of the earth the secret nature of its heart, which may be fire or may be stone. But he had no doubt whatever that the Sofala was out of the proper track for crossing the bar at Batu Beru.

It was a slight error. The ship could not have been more than twice her own length too far to the northward; and a white man at a loss for a cause (since it was impossible to suspect Captain Whalley of blundering ignorance, of want of skill, or of neglect) would have been inclined to doubt the testimony of his senses. It was some such feeling that kept Massy motionless, with his teeth laid bare by an anxious grin. Not so the Serang. He was not troubled by any intellectual mistrust of his senses. If his captain chose to stir the mud it was well. He had known in his life white men indulge in outbreaks equally strange. He was only genuinely interested to see what would come of it. At last, apparently satisfied, he stepped back from the rail.

He had made no sound: Captain Whalley, however, seemed to have observed the movements of his Serang. Holding his head rigidly, he asked with a mere stir of his lips —

“Going ahead still, Serang?”

“Still going a little, Tuan,” answered the Malay. Then added casually, “She is over.”

The lead confirmed his words; the depth of water increased at every cast, and the soul of excitement departed suddenly from the lascar swung in the canvas belt over the Sofala’s side. Captain Whalley ordered the lead in, set the engines ahead without haste, and averting his eyes from the coast directed the Serang to keep a course for the middle of the entrance.

Massy brought the palm of his hand with a loud smack against his thigh.

“You grazed on the bar. Just look astern and see if you didn’t. Look at the track she left. You can see it plainly. Upon my soul, I thought you would! What made you do that? What on earth made you do that? I believe you are trying to scare me.”

He talked slowly, as it were circumspectly, keeping his prominent black eyes on his captain. There was also a slight plaintive note in his rising

choler, for, primarily, it was the clear sense of a wrong suffered undeservedly that made him hate the man who, for a beggarly five hundred pounds, claimed a sixth part of the profits under the three years' agreement. Whenever his resentment got the better of the awe the person of Captain Whalley inspired he would positively whimper with fury.

"You don't know what to invent to plague my life out of me. I would not have thought that a man of your sort would condescend . . ."

He paused, half hopefully, half timidly, whenever Captain Whalley made the slightest movement in the deck-chair, as though expecting to be conciliated by a soft speech or else rushed upon and hunted off the bridge.

"I am puzzled," he went on again, with the watchful unsmiling baring of his big teeth. "I don't know what to think. I do believe you are trying to frighten me. You very nearly planted her on the bar for at least twelve hours, besides getting the engines choked with mud. Ships can't afford to lose twelve hours on a trip nowadays — as you ought to know very well, and do know very well to be sure, only . . ."

His slow volubility, the sideways cranings of his neck, the black glances out of the very corners of his eyes, left Captain Whalley unmoved. He looked at the deck with a severe frown. Massy waited for some little time, then began to threaten plaintively.

"You think you've got me bound hand and foot in that agreement. You think you can torment me in any way you please. Ah! But remember it has another six weeks to run yet. There's time for me to dismiss you before the three years are out. You will do yet something that will give me the chance to dismiss you, and make you wait a twelvemonth for your money before you can take yourself off and pull out your five hundred, and leave me without a penny to get the new boilers for her. You gloat over that idea — don't you? I do believe you sit here gloating. It's as if I had sold my soul for five hundred pounds to be everlastingly damned in the end. . . ."

He paused, without apparent exasperation, then continued evenly —

". . . With the boilers worn out and the survey hanging over my head, Captain Whalley — Captain Whalley, I say, what do you do with your money? You must have stacks of money somewhere — a man like you must. It stands to reason. I am not a fool, you know, Captain Whalley — partner."

Again he paused, as though he had done for good. He passed his tongue over his lips, gave a backward glance at the Serang conning the ship with



quiet whispers and slight signs of the hand. The wash of the propeller sent a swift ripple, crested with dark froth, upon a long flat spit of black slime. The Sofala had entered the river; the trail she had stirred up over the bar was a mile astern of her now, out of sight, had disappeared utterly; and the smooth, empty sea along the coast was left behind in the glittering desolation of sunshine. On each side of her, low down, the growth of somber twisted mangroves covered the semi-liquid banks; and Massy continued in his old tone, with an abrupt start, as if his speech had been ground out of him, like the tune of a music-box, by turning a handle.

“Though if anybody ever got the best of me, it is you. I don’t mind saying this. I’ve said it — there! What more can you want? Isn’t that enough for your pride, Captain Whalley. You got over me from the first. It’s all of a piece, when I look back at it. You allowed me to insert that clause about intemperance without saying anything, only looking very sick when I made a point of it going in black on white. How could I tell what was wrong about you. There’s generally something wrong somewhere. And, lo and behold! when you come on board it turns out that you’ve been in the habit of drinking nothing but water for years and years.”

His dogmatic reproachful whine stopped. He brooded profoundly, after the manner of crafty and unintelligent men. It seemed inconceivable that Captain Whalley should not laugh at the expression of disgust that overspread the heavy, yellow countenance. But Captain Whalley never raised his eyes — sitting in his arm-chair, outraged, dignified, and motionless.

“Much good it was to me,” Massy remonstrated monotonously, “to insert a clause for dismissal for intemperance against a man who drinks nothing but water. And you looked so upset, too, when I read my draft in the lawyer’s office that morning, Captain Whalley, — you looked so crestfallen, that I made sure I had gone home on your weak spot. A shipowner can’t be too careful as to the sort of skipper he gets. You must have been laughing at me in your sleeve all the blessed time. . . . Eh? What are you going to say?”

Captain Whalley had only shuffled his feet slightly. A dull animosity became apparent in Massy’s sideways stare.

“But recollect that there are other grounds of dismissal. There’s habitual carelessness, amounting to incompetence — there’s gross and persistent neglect of duty. I am not quite as big a fool as you try to make me out to be.

You have been careless of late — leaving everything to that Serang. Why! I've seen you letting that old fool of a Malay take bearings for you, as if you were too big to attend to your work yourself. And what do you call that silly touch-and-go manner in which you took the ship over the bar just now? You expect me to put up with that?"

Leaning on his elbow against the ladder abaft the bridge, Sterne, the mate, tried to hear, blinking the while from the distance at the second engineer, who had come up for a moment, and stood in the engine-room companion. Wiping his hands on a bunch of cotton waste, he looked about with indifference to the right and left at the river banks slipping astern of the Sofala steadily.

Massy turned full at the chair. The character of his whine became again threatening.

"Take care. I may yet dismiss you and freeze to your money for a year. I may . . ."

But before the silent, rigid immobility of the man whose money had come in the nick of time to save him from utter ruin, his voice died out in his throat.

"Not that I want you to go," he resumed after a silence, and in an absurdly insinuating tone. "I want nothing better than to be friends and renew the agreement, if you will consent to find another couple of hundred to help with the new boilers, Captain Whalley. I've told you before. She must have new boilers; you know it as well as I do. Have you thought this over?"

He waited. The slender stem of the pipe with its bulky lump of a bowl at the end hung down from his thick lips. It had gone out. Suddenly he took it from between his teeth and wrung his hands slightly.

"Don't you believe me?" He thrust the pipe bowl into the pocket of his shiny black jacket.

"It's like dealing with the devil," he said. "Why don't you speak? At first you were so high and mighty with me I hardly dared to creep about my own deck. Now I can't get a word from you. You don't seem to see me at all. What does it mean? Upon my soul, you terrify me with this deaf and dumb trick. What's going on in that head of yours? What are you plotting against me there so hard that you can't say a word? You will never make me believe that you — you — don't know where to lay your hands on a couple of hundred. You have made me curse the day I was born. . . ."

“Mr. Massy,” said Captain Whalley suddenly, without stirring.

The engineer started violently.

“If that is so I can only beg you to forgive me.”

“Starboard,” muttered the Serang to the helmsman; and the Sofala began to swing round the bend into the second reach.

“Ough!” Massy shuddered. “You make my blood run cold. What made you come here? What made you come aboard that evening all of a sudden, with your high talk and your money — tempting me? I always wondered what was your motive? You fastened yourself on me to have easy times and grow fat on my life blood, I tell you. Was that it? I believe you are the greatest miser in the world, or else why . . .”

“No. I am only poor,” interrupted Captain Whalley, stonily.

“Steady,” murmured the Serang. Massy turned away with his chin on his shoulder.

“I don’t believe it,” he said in his dogmatic tone. Captain Whalley made no movement. “There you sit like a gorged vulture — exactly like a vulture.”

He embraced the middle of the reach and both the banks in one blank unseeing circular glance, and left the bridge slowly.

## IX

On turning to descend Massy perceived the head of Sterne the mate loitering, with his sly confident smile, his red mustaches and blinking eyes, at the foot of the ladder.

Sterne had been a junior in one of the larger shipping concerns before joining the Sofala. He had thrown up his berth, he said, “on general principles.” The promotion in the employ was very slow, he complained, and he thought it was time for him to try and get on a bit in the world. It seemed as though nobody would ever die or leave the firm; they all stuck fast in their berths till they got mildewed; he was tired of waiting; and he feared that when a vacancy did occur the best servants were by no means sure of being treated fairly. Besides, the captain he had to serve under — Captain Provost — was an unaccountable sort of man, and, he fancied, had taken a dislike to him for some reason or other. For doing rather more than his bare duty as likely as not. When he had done anything wrong he could take a talking to, like a man; but he expected to be treated like a man too,

and not to be addressed invariably as though he were a dog. He had asked Captain Provost plump and plain to tell him where he was at fault, and Captain Provost, in a most scornful way, had told him that he was a perfect officer, and that if he disliked the way he was being spoken to there was the gangway — he could take himself off ashore at once. But everybody knew what sort of man Captain Provost was. It was no use appealing to the office. Captain Provost had too much influence in the employ. All the same, they had to give him a good character. He made bold to say there was nothing in the world against him, and, as he had happened to hear that the mate of the *Sofala* had been taken to the hospital that morning with a sunstroke, he thought there would be no harm in seeing whether he would not do. . . .

He had come to Captain Whalley freshly shaved, red-faced, thin-flanked, throwing out his lean chest; and had recited his little tale with an open and manly assurance. Now and then his eyelids quivered slightly, his hand would steal up to the end of the flaming mustache; his eyebrows were straight, furry, of a chestnut color, and the directness of his frank gaze seemed to tremble on the verge of impudence. Captain Whalley had engaged him temporarily; then, the other man having been ordered home by the doctors, he had remained for the next trip, and then the next. He had now attained permanency, and the performance of his duties was marked by an air of serious, single-minded application. Directly he was spoken to, he began to smile attentively, with a great deference expressed in his whole attitude; but there was in the rapid winking which went on all the time something quizzical, as though he had possessed the secret of some universal joke cheating all creation and impenetrable to other mortals.

Grave and smiling he watched Massy come down step by step; when the chief engineer had reached the deck he swung about, and they found themselves face to face. Matched as to height and utterly dissimilar, they confronted each other as if there had been something between them — something else than the bright strip of sunlight that, falling through the wide lacing of two awnings, cut crosswise the narrow planking of the deck and separated their feet as it were a stream; something profound and subtle and incalculable, like an unexpressed understanding, a secret mistrust, or some sort of fear.

At last Sterne, blinking his deep-set eyes and sticking forward his scraped, clean-cut chin, as crimson as the rest of his face, murmured —

“You’ve seen? He grazed! You’ve seen?”

Massy, contemptuous, and without raising his yellow, fleshy countenance, replied in the same pitch —

“Maybe. But if it had been you we would have been stuck fast in the mud.”

“Pardon me, Mr. Massy. I beg to deny it. Of course a shipowner may say what he jolly well pleases on his own deck. That’s all right; but I beg to . . .”

“Get out of my way!”

The other had a slight start, the impulse of suppressed indignation perhaps, but held his ground. Massy’s downward glance wandered right and left, as though the deck all round Sterne had been bestrewn with eggs that must not be broken, and he had looked irritably for places where he could set his feet in flight. In the end he too did not move, though there was plenty of room to pass on.

“I heard you say up there,” went on the mate — “and a very just remark it was too — that there’s always something wrong. . . .”

“Eavesdropping is what’s wrong with you, Mr. Sterne.”

“Now, if you would only listen to me for a moment, Mr. Massy, sir, I could . . .”

“You are a sneak,” interrupted Massy in a great hurry, and even managed to get so far as to repeat, “a common sneak,” before the mate had broken in argumentatively —

“Now, sir, what is it you want? You want . . .”

“I want — I want,” stammered Massy, infuriated and astonished — “I want. How do you know that I want anything? How dare you? . . . What do you mean? . . . What are you after — you . . .”

“Promotion.” Sterne silenced him with a sort of candid bravado. The engineer’s round soft cheeks quivered still, but he said quietly enough —

“You are only worrying my head off,” and Sterne met him with a confident little smile.

“A chap in business I know (well up in the world he is now) used to tell me that this was the proper way. ‘Always push on to the front,’ he would say. ‘Keep yourself well before your boss. Interfere whenever you get a chance. Show him what you know. Worry him into seeing you.’ That was his advice. Now I know no other boss than you here. You are the owner, and no one else counts for that much in my eyes. See, Mr. Massy? I want to get on. I make no secret of it that I am one of the sort that means to get on.

These are the men to make use of, sir. You haven't arrived at the top of the tree, sir, without finding that out — I dare say."

"Worry your boss in order to get on," mumbled Massy, as if awestruck by the irreverent originality of the idea. "I shouldn't wonder if this was just what the Blue Anchor people kicked you out of the employ for. Is that what you call getting on? You shall get on in the same way here if you aren't careful — I can promise you."

At this Sterne hung his head, thoughtful, perplexed, winking hard at the deck. All his attempts to enter into confidential relations with his owner had led of late to nothing better than these dark threats of dismissal; and a threat of dismissal would check him at once into a hesitating silence as though he were not sure that the proper time for defying it had come. On this occasion he seemed to have lost his tongue for a moment, and Massy, getting in motion, heavily passed him by with an abortive attempt at shouldering. Sterne defeated it by stepping aside. He turned then swiftly, opening his mouth very wide as if to shout something after the engineer, but seemed to think better of it.

Always — as he was ready to confess — on the lookout for an opening to get on, it had become an instinct with him to watch the conduct of his immediate superiors for something "that one could lay hold of." It was his belief that no skipper in the world would keep his command for a day if only the owners could be "made to know." This romantic and naive theory had led him into trouble more than once, but he remained incorrigible; and his character was so instinctively disloyal that whenever he joined a ship the intention of ousting his commander out of the berth and taking his place was always present at the back of his head, as a matter of course. It filled the leisure of his waking hours with the reveries of careful plans and compromising discoveries — the dreams of his sleep with images of lucky turns and favorable accidents. Skippers had been known to sicken and die at sea, than which nothing could be better to give a smart mate a chance of showing what he's made of. They also would tumble overboard sometimes: he had heard of one or two such cases. Others again . . . But, as it were constitutionally, he was faithful to the belief that the conduct of no single one of them would stand the test of careful watching by a man who "knew what's what" and who kept his eyes "skinned pretty well" all the time.

After he had gained a permanent footing on board the Sofala he allowed his perennial hope to rise high. To begin with, it was a great advantage to

have an old man for captain: the sort of man besides who in the nature of things was likely to give up the job before long from one cause or another. Sterne was greatly chagrined, however, to notice that he did not seem anyway near being past his work yet. Still, these old men go to pieces all at once sometimes. Then there was the owner-engineer close at hand to be impressed by his zeal and steadiness. Sterne never for a moment doubted the obvious nature of his own merits (he was really an excellent officer); only, nowadays, professional merit alone does not take a man along fast enough. A chap must have some push in him, and must keep his wits at work too to help him forward. He made up his mind to inherit the charge of this steamer if it was to be done at all; not indeed estimating the command of the *Sofala* as a very great catch, but for the reason that, out East especially, to make a start is everything, and one command leads to another.

He began by promising himself to behave with great circumspection; Massy's somber and fantastic humors intimidated him as being outside one's usual sea experience; but he was quite intelligent enough to realize almost from the first that he was there in the presence of an exceptional situation. His peculiar prying imagination penetrated it quickly; the feeling that there was in it an element which eluded his grasp exasperated his impatience to get on. And so one trip came to an end, then another, and he had begun his third before he saw an opening by which he could step in with any sort of effect. It had all been very queer and very obscure; something had been going on near him, as if separated by a chasm from the common life and the working routine of the ship, which was exactly like the life and the routine of any other coasting steamer of that class.

Then one day he made his discovery.

It came to him after all these weeks of watchful observation and puzzled surmises, suddenly, like the long-sought solution of a riddle that suggests itself to the mind in a flash. Not with the same authority, however. Great heavens! Could it be that? And after remaining thunderstruck for a few seconds he tried to shake it off with self-contumely, as though it had been the product of an unhealthy bias towards the Incredible, the Inexplicable, the Unheard-of — the Mad!

This — the illuminating moment — had occurred the trip before, on the return passage. They had just left a place of call on the mainland called Pangu; they were steaming straight out of a bay. To the east a massive headland closed the view, with the tilted edges of the rocky strata showing

through its ragged clothing of rank bushes and thorny creepers. The wind had begun to sing in the rigging; the sea along the coast, green and as if swollen a little above the line of the horizon, seemed to pour itself over, time after time, with a slow and thundering fall, into the shadow of the leeward cape; and across the wide opening the nearest of a group of small islands stood enveloped in the hazy yellow light of a breezy sunrise; still farther out the hummocky tops of other islets peeped out motionless above the water of the channels between, scoured tumultuously by the breeze.

The usual track of the Sofala both going and returning on every trip led her for a few miles along this reefinfested region. She followed a broad lane of water, dropping astern, one after another, these crumbs of the earth's crust resembling a squadron of dismasted hulks run in disorder upon a foul ground of rocks and shoals. Some of these fragments of land appeared, indeed, no bigger than a stranded ship; others, quite flat, lay awash like anchored rafts, like ponderous, black rafts of stone; several, heavily timbered and round at the base, emerged in squat domes of deep green foliage that shuddered darkly all over to the flying touch of cloud shadows driven by the sudden gusts of the squally season. The thunderstorms of the coast broke frequently over that cluster; it turned then shadowy in its whole extent; it turned more dark, and as if more still in the play of fire; as if more impenetrably silent in the peals of thunder; its blurred shapes vanished — dissolving utterly at times in the thick rain — to reappear clear-cut and black in the stormy light against the gray sheet of the cloud — scattered on the slaty round table of the sea. Unscathed by storms, resisting the work of years, unfretted by the strife of the world, there it lay unchanged as on that day, four hundred years ago, when first beheld by Western eyes from the deck of a high-pooped caravel.

It was one of these secluded spots that may be found on the busy sea, as on land you come sometimes upon the clustered houses of a hamlet untouched by men's restlessness, untouched by their need, by their thought, and as if forgotten by time itself. The lives of uncounted generations had passed it by, and the multitudes of seafowl, urging their way from all the points of the horizon to sleep on the outer rocks of the group, unrolled the converging evolutions of their flight in long somber streamers upon the glow of the sky. The palpitating cloud of their wings soared and stooped over the pinnacles of the rocks, over the rocks slender like spires, squat like martello towers; over the pyramidal heaps like fallen ruins, over the lines of



bald boulders showing like a wall of stones battered to pieces and scorched by lightning — with the sleepy, clear glimmer of water in every breach. The noise of their continuous and violent screaming filled the air.

This great noise would meet the Sofala coming up from Batu Beru; it would meet her on quiet evenings, a pitiless and savage clamor enfeebled by distance, the clamor of seabirds settling to rest, and struggling for a footing at the end of the day. No one noticed it especially on board; it was the voice of their ship's unerring landfall, ending the steady stretch of a hundred miles. She had made good her course, she had run her distance till the punctual islets began to emerge one by one, the points of rocks, the hummocks of earth . . . and the cloud of birds hovered — the restless cloud emitting a strident and cruel uproar, the sound of the familiar scene, the living part of the broken land beneath, of the outspread sea, and of the high sky without a flaw.

But when the Sofala happened to close with the land after sunset she would find everything very still there under the mantle of the night. All would be still, dumb, almost invisible — but for the blotting out of the low constellations occulted in turns behind the vague masses of the islets whose true outlines eluded the eye amongst the dark spaces of the heaven: and the ship's three lights, resembling three stars — the red and the green with the white above — her three lights, like three companion stars wandering on the earth, held their unswerving course for the passage at the southern end of the group. Sometimes there were human eyes open to watch them come nearer, traveling smoothly in the somber void; the eyes of a naked fisherman in his canoe floating over a reef. He thought drowsily: "Ha! The fire-ship that once in every moon goes in and comes out of Pangu bay." More he did not know of her. And just as he had detected the faint rhythm of the propeller beating the calm water a mile and a half away, the time would come for the Sofala to alter her course, the lights would swing off him their triple beam — and disappear.

A few miserable, half-naked families, a sort of outcast tribe of long-haired, lean, and wild-eyed people, strove for their living in this lonely wilderness of islets, lying like an abandoned outwork of the land at the gates of the bay. Within the knots and loops of the rocks the water rested more transparent than crystal under their crooked and leaky canoes, scooped out of the trunk of a tree: the forms of the bottom undulated slightly to the dip of a paddle; and the men seemed to hang in the air, they

seemed to hang inclosed within the fibers of a dark, sodden log, fishing patiently in a strange, unsteady, pellucid, green air above the shoals.

Their bodies stalked brown and emaciated as if dried up in the sunshine; their lives ran out silently; the homes where they were born, went to rest, and died — flimsy sheds of rushes and coarse grass eked out with a few ragged mats — were hidden out of sight from the open sea. No glow of their household fires ever kindled for a seaman a red spark upon the blind night of the group: and the calms of the coast, the flaming long calms of the equator, the unbreathing, concentrated calms like the deep introspection of a passionate nature, brooded awfully for days and weeks together over the unchangeable inheritance of their children; till at last the stones, hot like live embers, scorched the naked sole, till the water clung warm, and sickly, and as if thickened, about the legs of lean men with girded loins, wading thigh-deep in the pale blaze of the shallows. And it would happen now and then that the Sofala, through some delay in one of the ports of call, would heave in sight making for Pangu bay as late as noonday.

Only a blurring cloud at first, the thin mist of her smoke would arise mysteriously from an empty point on the clear line of sea and sky. The taciturn fishermen within the reefs would extend their lean arms towards the offing; and the brown figures stooping on the tiny beaches, the brown figures of men, women, and children grubbing in the sand in search of turtles' eggs, would rise up, crooked elbow aloft and hand over the eyes, to watch this monthly apparition glide straight on, swerve off — and go by. Their ears caught the panting of that ship; their eyes followed her till she passed between the two capes of the mainland going at full speed as though she hoped to make her way unchecked into the very bosom of the earth.

On such days the luminous sea would give no sign of the dangers lurking on both sides of her path. Everything remained still, crushed by the overwhelming power of the light; and the whole group, opaque in the sunshine, — the rocks resembling pinnacles, the rocks resembling spires, the rocks resembling ruins; the forms of islets resembling beehives, resembling mole-hills, the islets recalling the shapes of haystacks, the contours of ivy-clad towers, — would stand reflected together upside down in the unwrinkled water, like carved toys of ebony disposed on the silvered plate-glass of a mirror.

The first touch of blowing weather would envelop the whole at once in the spume of the windward breakers, as if in a sudden cloudlike burst of

steam; and the clear water seemed fairly to boil in all the passages. The provoked sea outlined exactly in a design of angry foam the wide base of the group; the submerged level of broken waste and refuse left over from the building of the coast near by, projecting its dangerous spurs, all awash, far into the channel, and bristling with wicked long spits often a mile long: with deadly spits made of froth and stones.

And even nothing more than a brisk breeze — as on that morning, the voyage before, when the *Sofala* left Pangu bay early, and Mr. Sterne's discovery was to blossom out like a flower of incredible and evil aspect from the tiny seed of instinctive suspicion, — even such a breeze had enough strength to tear the placid mask from the face of the sea. To Sterne, gazing with indifference, it had been like a revelation to behold for the first time the dangers marked by the hissing livid patches on the water as distinctly as on the engraved paper of a chart. It came into his mind that this was the sort of day most favorable for a stranger attempting the passage: a clear day, just windy enough for the sea to break on every ledge, buoying, as it were, the channel plainly to the sight; whereas during a calm you had nothing to depend on but the compass and the practiced judgment of your eye. And yet the successive captains of the *Sofala* had had to take her through at night more than once. Nowadays you could not afford to throw away six or seven hours of a steamer's time. That you couldn't. But then use is everything, and with proper care . . . The channel was broad and safe enough; the main point was to hit upon the entrance correctly in the dark — for if a man got himself involved in that stretch of broken water over yonder he would never get out with a whole ship — if he ever got out at all.

This was Sterne's last train of thought independent of the great discovery. He had just seen to the securing of the anchor, and had remained forward idling away a moment or two. The captain was in charge on the bridge. With a slight yawn he had turned away from his survey of the sea and had leaned his shoulders against the fish davit.

These, properly speaking, were the very last moments of ease he was to know on board the *Sofala*. All the instants that came after were to be pregnant with purpose and intolerable with perplexity. No more idle, random thoughts; the discovery would put them on the rack, till sometimes he wished to goodness he had been fool enough not to make it at all. And yet, if his chance to get on rested on the discovery of "something wrong," he could not have hoped for a greater stroke of luck.

## X

The knowledge was too disturbing, really. There was “something wrong” with a vengeance, and the moral certitude of it was at first simply frightful to contemplate. Sterne had been looking aft in a mood so idle, that for once he was thinking no harm of anyone. His captain on the bridge presented himself naturally to his sight. How insignificant, how casual was the thought that had started the train of discovery — like an accidental spark that suffices to ignite the charge of a tremendous mine!

Caught under by the breeze, the awnings of the foredeck bellied upwards and collapsed slowly, and above their heavy flapping the gray stuff of Captain Whalley’s roomy coat fluttered incessantly around his arms and trunk. He faced the wind in full light, with his great silvery beard blown forcibly against his chest; the eyebrows overhung heavily the shadows whence his glance appeared to be staring ahead piercingly. Sterne could just detect the twin gleam of the whites shifting under the shaggy arches of the brow. At short range these eyes, for all the man’s affable manner, seemed to look you through and through. Sterne never could defend himself from that feeling when he had occasion to speak with his captain. He did not like it. What a big heavy man he appeared up there, with that little shrimp of a Serang in close attendance — as was usual in this extraordinary steamer! Confounded absurd custom that. He resented it. Surely the old fellow could have looked after his ship without that loafing native at his elbow. Sterne wriggled his shoulders with disgust. What was it? Indolence or what?

That old skipper must have been growing lazy for years. They all grew lazy out East here (Sterne was very conscious of his own unimpaired activity); they got slack all over. But he towered very erect on the bridge; and quite low by his side, as you see a small child looking over the edge of a table, the battered soft hat and the brown face of the Serang peeped over the white canvas screen of the rail.

No doubt the Malay was standing back, nearer to the wheel; but the great disparity of size in close association amused Sterne like the observation of a bizarre fact in nature. They were as queer fish out of the sea as any in it.

He saw Captain Whalley turn his head quickly to speak to his Serang; the wind whipped the whole white mass of the beard sideways. He would be directing the chap to look at the compass for him, or what not. Of course.

Too much trouble to step over and see for himself. Sterne's scorn for that bodily indolence which overtakes white men in the East increased on reflection. Some of them would be utterly lost if they hadn't all these natives at their beck and call; they grew perfectly shameless about it too. He was not of that sort, thank God! It wasn't in him to make himself dependent for his work on any shriveled-up little Malay like that. As if one could ever trust a silly native for anything in the world! But that fine old man thought differently, it seems. There they were together, never far apart; a pair of them, recalling to the mind an old whale attended by a little pilot-fish.

The fancifulness of the comparison made him smile. A whale with an inseparable pilot-fish! That's what the old man looked like; for it could not be said he looked like a shark, though Mr. Massy had called him that very name. But Mr. Massy did not mind what he said in his savage fits. Sterne smiled to himself — and gradually the ideas evoked by the sound, by the imagined shape of the word pilot-fish; the ideas of aid, of guidance needed and received, came uppermost in his mind: the word pilot awakened the idea of trust, of dependence, the idea of welcome, clear-eyed help brought to the seaman groping for the land in the dark: groping blindly in fogs: feeling their way in the thick weather of the gales that, filling the air with a salt mist blown up from the sea, contract the range of sight on all sides to a shrunk horizon that seems within reach of the hand.

A pilot sees better than a stranger, because his local knowledge, like a sharper vision, completes the shapes of things hurriedly glimpsed; penetrates the veils of mist spread over the land by the storms of the sea; defines with certitude the outlines of a coast lying under the pall of fog, the forms of landmarks half buried in a starless night as in a shallow grave. He recognizes because he already knows. It is not to his far-reaching eye but to his more extensive knowledge that the pilot looks for certitude; for this certitude of the ship's position on which may depend a man's good fame and the peace of his conscience, the justification of the trust deposited in his hands, with his own life too, which is seldom wholly his to throw away, and the humble lives of others rooted in distant affections, perhaps, and made as weighty as the lives of kings by the burden of the awaiting mystery. The pilot's knowledge brings relief and certitude to the commander of a ship; the Serang, however, in his fanciful suggestion of a pilot-fish attending a whale, could not in any way be credited with a superior knowledge. Why should he have it? These two men had come on that run together — the

white and the brown — on the same day: and of course a white man would learn more in a week than the best native would in a month. He was made to stick to the skipper as though he were of some use — as the pilot-fish, they say, is to the whale. But how — it was very marked — how? A pilot-fish — a pilot — a . . . But if not superior knowledge then . . .

Sterne's discovery was made. It was repugnant to his imagination, shocking to his ideas of honesty, shocking to his conception of mankind. This enormity affected one's outlook on what was possible in this world: it was as if for instance the sun had turned blue, throwing a new and sinister light on men and nature. Really in the first moment he had felt sickish, as though he had got a blow below the belt: for a second the very color of the sea seemed changed — appeared queer to his wandering eye; and he had a passing, unsteady sensation in all his limbs as though the earth had started turning the other way.

A very natural incredulity succeeding this sense of upheaval brought a measure of relief. He had gasped; it was over. But afterwards during all that day sudden paroxysms of wonder would come over him in the midst of his occupations. He would stop and shake his head. The revolt of his incredulity had passed away almost as quick as the first emotion of discovery, and for the next twenty-four hours he had no sleep. That would never do. At meal-times (he took the foot of the table set up for the white men on the bridge) he could not help losing himself in a fascinated contemplation of Captain Whalley opposite. He watched the deliberate upward movements of the arm; the old man put his food to his lips as though he never expected to find any taste in his daily bread, as though he did not know anything about it. He fed himself like a somnambulist. "It's an awful sight," thought Sterne; and he watched the long period of mournful, silent immobility, with a big brown hand lying loosely closed by the side of the plate, till he noticed the two engineers to the right and left looking at him in astonishment. He would close his mouth in a hurry then, and lowering his eyes, wink rapidly at his plate. It was awful to see the old chap sitting there; it was even awful to think that with three words he could blow him up sky-high. All he had to do was to raise his voice and pronounce a single short sentence, and yet that simple act seemed as impossible to attempt as moving the sun out of its place in the sky. The old chap could eat in his terrific mechanical way; but Sterne, from mental excitement, could not — not that evening, at any rate.

He had had ample time since to get accustomed to the strain of the meal-hours. He would never have believed it. But then use is everything; only the very potency of his success prevented anything resembling elation. He felt like a man who, in his legitimate search for a loaded gun to help him on his way through the world, chances to come upon a torpedo — upon a live torpedo with a shattering charge in its head and a pressure of many atmospheres in its tail. It is the sort of weapon to make its possessor careworn and nervous. He had no mind to be blown up himself; and he could not get rid of the notion that the explosion was bound to damage him too in some way.

This vague apprehension had restrained him at first. He was able now to eat and sleep with that fearful weapon by his side, with the conviction of its power always in mind. It had not been arrived at by any reflective process; but once the idea had entered his head, the conviction had followed overwhelmingly in a multitude of observed little facts to which before he had given only a languid attention. The abrupt and faltering intonations of the deep voice; the taciturnity put on like an armor; the deliberate, as if guarded, movements; the long immobilities, as if the man he watched had been afraid to disturb the very air: every familiar gesture, every word uttered in his hearing, every sigh overheard, had acquired a special significance, a confirmatory import.

Every day that passed over the *Sofala* appeared to Sterne simply crammed full with proofs — with incontrovertible proofs. At night, when off duty, he would steal out of his cabin in pyjamas (for more proofs) and stand a full hour, perhaps, on his bare feet below the bridge, as absolutely motionless as the awning stanchion in its deck socket near by. On the stretches of easy navigation it is not usual for a coasting captain to remain on deck all the time of his watch. The *Serang* keeps it for him as a matter of custom; in open water, on a straight course, he is usually trusted to look after the ship by himself. But this old man seemed incapable of remaining quietly down below. No doubt he could not sleep. And no wonder. This was also a proof. Suddenly in the silence of the ship panting upon the still, dark sea, Sterne would hear a low voice above him exclaiming nervously —

“*Serang!*”

“*Tuan!*”

“You are watching the compass well?”

“Yes, I am watching, *Tuan*.”

“The ship is making her course?”

“She is, Tuan. Very straight.”

“It is well; and remember, Serang, that the order is that you are to mind the helmsmen and keep a lookout with care, the same as if I were not on deck.”

Then, when the Serang had made his answer, the low tones on the bridge would cease, and everything round Sterne seemed to become more still and more profoundly silent. Slightly chilled and with his back aching a little from long immobility, he would steal away to his room on the port side of the deck. He had long since parted with the last vestige of incredulity; of the original emotions, set into a tumult by the discovery, some trace of the first awe alone remained. Not the awe of the man himself — he could blow him up sky-high with six words — rather it was an awestruck indignation at the reckless perversity of avarice (what else could it be?), at the mad and somber resolution that for the sake of a few dollars more seemed to set at naught the common rule of conscience and pretended to struggle against the very decree of Providence.

You could not find another man like this one in the whole round world — thank God. There was something devilishly dauntless in the character of such a deception which made you pause.

Other considerations occurring to his prudence had kept him tongue-tied from day to day. It seemed to him now that it would yet have been easier to speak out in the first hour of discovery. He almost regretted not having made a row at once. But then the very monstrosity of the disclosure . . . Why! He could hardly face it himself, let alone pointing it out to somebody else. Moreover, with a desperado of that sort one never knew. The object was not to get him out (that was as well as done already), but to step into his place. Bizarre as the thought seemed he might have shown fight. A fellow up to working such a fraud would have enough cheek for anything; a fellow that, as it were, stood up against God Almighty Himself. He was a horrid marvel — that’s what he was: he was perfectly capable of brazening out the affair scandalously till he got him (Sterne) kicked out of the ship and everlastingly damaged his prospects in this part of the East. Yet if you want to get on something must be risked. At times Sterne thought he had been unduly timid of taking action in the past; and what was worse, it had come to this, that in the present he did not seem to know what action to take.



Massy's savage moroseness was too disconcerting. It was an incalculable factor of the situation. You could not tell what there was behind that insulting ferocity. How could one trust such a temper; it did not put Sterne in bodily fear for himself, but it frightened him exceedingly as to his prospects.

Though of course inclined to credit himself with exceptional powers of observation, he had by now lived too long with his discovery. He had gone on looking at nothing else, till at last one day it occurred to him that the thing was so obvious that no one could miss seeing it. There were four white men in all on board the *Sofala*. Jack, the second engineer, was too dull to notice anything that took place out of his engine-room. Remained Massy — the owner — the interested person — nearly going mad with worry. Sterne had heard and seen more than enough on board to know what ailed him; but his exasperation seemed to make him deaf to cautious overtures. If he had only known it, there was the very thing he wanted. But how could you bargain with a man of that sort? It was like going into a tiger's den with a piece of raw meat in your hand. He was as likely as not to rend you for your pains. In fact, he was always threatening to do that very thing; and the urgency of the case, combined with the impossibility of handling it with safety, made Sterne in his watches below toss and mutter open-eyed in his bunk, for hours, as though he had been burning with fever.

Occurrences like the crossing of the bar just now were extremely alarming to his prospects. He did not want to be left behind by some swift catastrophe. Massy being on the bridge, the old man had to brace himself up and make a show, he supposed. But it was getting very bad with him, very bad indeed, now. Even Massy had been emboldened to find fault this time; Sterne, listening at the foot of the ladder, had heard the other's whimpering and artless denunciations. Luckily the beast was very stupid and could not see the why of all this. However, small blame to him; it took a clever man to hit upon the cause. Nevertheless, it was high time to do something. The old man's game could not be kept up for many days more.

"I may yet lose my life at this fooling — let alone my chance," Sterne mumbled angrily to himself, after the stooping back of the chief engineer had disappeared round the corner of the skylight. Yes, no doubt — he thought; but to blurt out his knowledge would not advance his prospects. On the contrary, it would blast them utterly as likely as not. He dreaded another failure. He had a vague consciousness of not being much liked by

his fellows in this part of the world; inexplicably enough, for he had done nothing to them. Envy, he supposed. People were always down on a clever chap who made no bones about his determination to get on. To do your duty and count on the gratitude of that brute Massy would be sheer folly. He was a bad lot. Unmanly! A vicious man! Bad! Bad! A brute! A brute without a spark of anything human about him; without so much as simple curiosity even, or else surely he would have responded in some way to all these hints he had been given. . . . Such insensibility was almost mysterious. Massy's state of exasperation seemed to Sterne to have made him stupid beyond the ordinary silliness of shipowners.

Sterne, meditating on the embarrassments of that stupidity, forgot himself completely. His stony, unwinking stare was fixed on the planks of the deck.

The slight quiver agitating the whole fabric of the ship was more perceptible in the silent river, shaded and still like a forest path. The Sofala, gliding with an even motion, had passed beyond the coast-belt of mud and mangroves. The shores rose higher, in firm sloping banks, and the forest of big trees came down to the brink. Where the earth had been crumbled by the floods it showed a steep brown cut, denuding a mass of roots intertwined as if wrestling underground; and in the air, the interlaced boughs, bound and loaded with creepers, carried on the struggle for life, mingled their foliage in one solid wall of leaves, with here and there the shape of an enormous dark pillar soaring, or a ragged opening, as if torn by the flight of a cannonball, disclosing the impenetrable gloom within, the secular inviolable shade of the virgin forest. The thump of the engines reverberated regularly like the strokes of a metronome beating the measure of the vast silence, the shadow of the western wall had fallen across the river, and the smoke pouring backwards from the funnel eddied down behind the ship, spread a thin dusky veil over the somber water, which, checked by the flood-tide, seemed to lie stagnant in the whole straight length of the reaches.

Sterne's body, as if rooted on the spot, trembled slightly from top to toe with the internal vibration of the ship; from under his feet came sometimes a sudden clang of iron, the noisy burst of a shout below; to the right the leaves of the tree-tops caught the rays of the low sun, and seemed to shine with a golden green light of their own shimmering around the highest boughs which stood out black against a smooth blue sky that seemed to droop over the bed of the river like the roof of a tent. The passengers for

Batu Beru, kneeling on the planks, were engaged in rolling their bedding of mats busily; they tied up bundles, they snapped the locks of wooden chests. A pockmarked peddler of small wares threw his head back to drain into his throat the last drops out of an earthenware bottle before putting it away in a roll of blankets. Knots of traveling traders standing about the deck conversed in low tones; the followers of a small Rajah from down the coast, broad-faced, simple young fellows in white drawers and round white cotton caps with their colored sarongs twisted across their bronze shoulders, squatted on their hams on the hatch, chewing betel with bright red mouths as if they had been tasting blood. Their spears, lying piled up together within the circle of their bare toes, resembled a casual bundle of dry bamboos; a thin, livid Chinaman, with a bulky package wrapped up in leaves already thrust under his arm, gazed ahead eagerly; a wandering Kling rubbed his teeth with a bit of wood, pouring over the side a bright stream of water out of his lips; the fat Rajah dozed in a shabby deck-chair, — and at the turn of every bend the two walls of leaves reappeared running parallel along the banks, with their impenetrable solidity fading at the top to a vaporous mistiness of countless slender twigs growing free, of young delicate branches shooting from the topmost limbs of hoary trunks, of feathery heads of climbers like delicate silver sprays standing up without a quiver. There was not a sign of a clearing anywhere; not a trace of human habitation, except when in one place, on the bare end of a low point under an isolated group of slender tree-ferns, the jagged, tangled remnants of an old hut on piles appeared with that peculiar aspect of ruined bamboo walls that look as if smashed with a club. Farther on, half hidden under the drooping bushes, a canoe containing a man and a woman, together with a dozen green cocoanuts in a heap, rocked helplessly after the Sofala had passed, like a navigating contrivance of venturesome insects, of traveling ants; while two glassy folds of water streaming away from each bow of the steamer across the whole width of the river ran with her up stream smoothly, fretting their outer ends into a brown whispering tumble of froth against the miry foot of each bank.

“I must,” thought Sterne, “bring that brute Massy to his bearings. It’s getting too absurd in the end. Here’s the old man up there buried in his chair — he may just as well be in his grave for all the use he’ll ever be in the world — and the Serang’s in charge. Because that’s what he is. In charge. In

the place that's mine by rights. I must bring that savage brute to his bearings. I'll do it at once, too . . ."

When the mate made an abrupt start, a little brown half-naked boy, with large black eyes, and the string of a written charm round his neck, became panic-struck at once. He dropped the banana he had been munching, and ran to the knee of a grave dark Arab in flowing robes, sitting like a Biblical figure, incongruously, on a yellow tin trunk corded with a rope of twisted rattan. The father, unmoved, put out his hand to pat the little shaven poll protectingly.

## XI

Sterne crossed the deck upon the track of the chief engineer. Jack, the second, retreating backwards down the engine-room ladder, and still wiping his hands, treated him to an incomprehensible grin of white teeth out of his grimy hard face; Massy was nowhere to be seen. He must have gone straight into his berth. Sterne scratched at the door softly, then, putting his lips to the rose of the ventilator, said —

"I must speak to you, Mr. Massy. Just give me a minute or two."

"I am busy. Go away from my door."

"But pray, Mr. Massy . . ."

"You go away. D'you hear? Take yourself off altogether — to the other end of the ship — quite away . . ." The voice inside dropped low. "To the devil."

Sterne paused: then very quietly —

"It's rather pressing. When do you think you will be at liberty, sir?"

The answer to this was an exasperated "Never"; and at once Sterne, with a very firm expression of face, turned the handle.

Mr. Massy's stateroom — a narrow, one-berth cabin — smelt strongly of soap, and presented to view a swept, dusted, unadorned neatness, not so much bare as barren, not so much severe as starved and lacking in humanity, like the ward of a public hospital, or rather (owing to the small size) like the clean retreat of a desperately poor but exemplary person. Not a single photograph frame ornamented the bulkheads; not a single article of clothing, not as much as a spare cap, hung from the brass hooks. All the inside was painted in one plain tint of pale blue; two big sea-chests in sailcloth covers and with iron padlocks fitted exactly in the space under the

bunk. One glance was enough to embrace all the strip of scrubbed planks within the four unconcealed corners. The absence of the usual settee was striking; the teak-wood top of the washing-stand seemed hermetically closed, and so was the lid of the writing-desk, which protruded from the partition at the foot of the bed-place, containing a mattress as thin as a pancake under a threadbare blanket with a faded red stripe, and a folded mosquito-net against the nights spent in harbor. There was not a scrap of paper anywhere in sight, no boots on the floor, no litter of any sort, not a speck of dust anywhere; no traces of pipe-ash even, which, in a heavy smoker, was morally revolting, like a manifestation of extreme hypocrisy; and the bottom of the old wooden arm-chair (the only seat there), polished with much use, shone as if its shabbiness had been waxed. The screen of leaves on the bank, passing as if unrolled endlessly in the round opening of the port, sent a wavering network of light and shade into the place.

Sterne, holding the door open with one hand, had thrust in his head and shoulders. At this amazing intrusion Massy, who was doing absolutely nothing, jumped up speechless.

“Don’t call names,” murmured Sterne hurriedly. “I won’t be called names. I think of nothing but your good, Mr. Massy.”

A pause as of extreme astonishment followed. They both seemed to have lost their tongues. Then the mate went on with a discreet glibness.

“You simply couldn’t conceive what’s going on on board your ship. It wouldn’t enter your head for a moment. You are too good — too — too upright, Mr. Massy, to suspect anybody of such a . . . It’s enough to make your hair stand on end.”

He watched for the effect: Massy seemed dazed, uncomprehending. He only passed the palm of his hand on the coal-black wisps plastered across the top of his head. In a tone suddenly changed to confidential audacity Sterne hastened on.

“Remember that there’s only six weeks left to run . . .” The other was looking at him stonily . . . “so anyhow you shall require a captain for the ship before long.”

Then only, as if that suggestion had scarified his flesh in the manner of red-hot iron, Massy gave a start and seemed ready to shriek. He contained himself by a great effort.

“Require a captain,” he repeated with scathing slowness. “Who requires a captain? You dare to tell me that I need any of you humbugging sailors to

run my ship. You and your likes have been fattening on me for years. It would have hurt me less to throw my money overboard. Pam — pe — red us — e — less f-f-f-frauds. The old ship knows as much as the best of you.” He snapped his teeth audibly and growled through them, “The silly law requires a captain.”

Sterne had taken heart of grace meantime.

“And the silly insurance people too, as well,” he said lightly. “But never mind that. What I want to ask is: Why shouldn’t I do, sir? I don’t say but you could take a steamer about the world as well as any of us sailors. I don’t pretend to tell you that it is a very great trick . . .” He emitted a short, hollow guffaw, familiarly . . . “I didn’t make the law — but there it is; and I am an active young fellow! I quite hold with your ideas; I know your ways by this time, Mr. Massy. I wouldn’t try to give myself airs like that — that — er lazy specimen of an old man up there.”

He put a marked emphasis on the last sentence, to lead Massy away from the track in case . . . but he did not doubt of now holding his success. The chief engineer seemed nonplused, like a slow man invited to catch hold of a whirligig of some sort.

“What you want, sir, is a chap with no nonsense about him, who would be content to be your sailing-master. Quite right, too. Well, I am fit for the work as much as that Serang. Because that’s what it amounts to. Do you know, sir, that a dam’ Malay like a monkey is in charge of your ship — and no one else. Just listen to his feet pit-patting above us on the bridge — real officer in charge. He’s taking her up the river while the great man is wallowing in the chair — perhaps asleep; and if he is, that would not make it much worse either — take my word for it.”

He tried to thrust himself farther in. Massy, with lowered forehead, one hand grasping the back of the arm-chair, did not budge.

“You think, sir, that the man has got you tight in his agreement . . .” Massy raised a heavy snarling face at this . . . “Well, sir, one can’t help hearing of it on board. It’s no secret. And it has been the talk on shore for years; fellows have been making bets about it. No, sir! It’s you who have got him at your mercy. You will say that you can’t dismiss him for indolence. Difficult to prove in court, and so on. Why, yes. But if you say the word, sir, I can tell you something about his indolence that will give you the clear right to fire him out on the spot and put me in charge for the rest of this very trip — yes, sir, before we leave Batu Beru — and make him pay a

dollar a day for his keep till we get back, if you like. Now, what do you think of that? Come, sir. Say the word. It's really well worth your while, and I am quite ready to take your bare word. A definite statement from you would be as good as a bond."

His eyes began to shine. He insisted. A simple statement, — and he thought to himself that he would manage somehow to stick in his berth as long as it suited him. He would make himself indispensable; the ship had a bad name in her port; it would be easy to scare the fellows off. Massy would have to keep him.

"A definite statement from me would be enough," Massy repeated slowly.

"Yes, sir. It would." Sterne stuck out his chin cheerily and blinked at close quarters with that unconscious impudence which had the power to enrage Massy beyond anything.

The engineer spoke very distinctly.

"Listen well to me, then, Mr. Sterne: I wouldn't — d'ye hear? — I wouldn't promise you the value of two pence for anything you can tell me."

He struck Sterne's arm away with a smart blow, and catching hold of the handle pulled the door to. The terrific slam darkened the cabin instantaneously to his eye as if after the flash of an explosion. At once he dropped into the chair. "Oh, no! You don't!" he whispered faintly.

The ship had in that place to shave the bank so close that the gigantic wall of leaves came gliding like a shutter against the port; the darkness of the primeval forest seemed to flow into that bare cabin with the odor of rotting leaves, of sodden soil — the strong muddy smell of the living earth steaming uncovered after the passing of a deluge. The bushes swished loudly alongside; above there was a series of crackling sounds, with a sharp rain of small broken branches falling on the bridge; a creeper with a great rustle snapped on the head of a boat davit, and a long, luxuriant green twig actually whipped in and out of the open port, leaving behind a few torn leaves that remained suddenly at rest on Mr. Massy's blanket. Then, the ship sheering out in the stream, the light began to return but did not augment beyond a subdued clearness: for the sun was very low already, and the river, wending its sinuous course through a multitude of secular trees as if at the bottom of a precipitous gorge, had been already invaded by a deepening gloom — the swift precursor of the night.

“Oh, no, you don’t!” murmured the engineer again. His lips trembled almost imperceptibly; his hands too, a little: and to calm himself he opened the writing-desk, spread out a sheet of thin grayish paper covered with a mass of printed figures and began to scan them attentively for the twentieth time this trip at least.

With his elbows propped, his head between his hands, he seemed to lose himself in the study of an abstruse problem in mathematics. It was the list of the winning numbers from the last drawing of the great lottery which had been the one inspiring fact of so many years of his existence. The conception of a life deprived of that periodical sheet of paper had slipped away from him entirely, as another man, according to his nature, would not have been able to conceive a world without fresh air, without activity, or without affection. A great pile of flimsy sheets had been growing for years in his desk, while the *Sofala*, driven by the faithful Jack, wore out her boilers in tramping up and down the Straits, from cape to cape, from river to river, from bay to bay; accumulating by that hard labor of an overworked, starved ship the blackened mass of these documents. Massy kept them under lock and key like a treasure. There was in them, as in the experience of life, the fascination of hope, the excitement of a half-penetrated mystery, the longing of a half-satisfied desire.

For days together, on a trip, he would shut himself up in his berth with them: the thump of the toiling engines pulsated in his ear; and he would weary his brain poring over the rows of disconnected figures, bewildering by their senseless sequence, resembling the hazards of destiny itself. He nourished a conviction that there must be some logic lurking somewhere in the results of chance. He thought he had seen its very form. His head swam; his limbs ached; he puffed at his pipe mechanically; a contemplative stupor would soothe the fretfulness of his temper, like the passive bodily quietude procured by a drug, while the intellect remains tensely on the stretch. Nine, nine, aught, four, two. He made a note. The next winning number of the great prize was forty-seven thousand and five. These numbers of course would have to be avoided in the future when writing to Manilla for the tickets. He mumbled, pencil in hand . . . “and five. Hm . . . hm.” He wetted his finger: the papers rustled. Ha! But what’s this? Three years ago, in the September drawing, it was number nine, aught, four, two that took the first prize. Most remarkable. There was a hint there of a definite rule! He was afraid of missing some recondite principle in the overwhelming wealth of



his material. What could it be? and for half an hour he would remain dead still, bent low over the desk, without twitching a muscle. At his back the whole berth would be thick with a heavy body of smoke, as if a bomb had burst in there, unnoticed, unheard.

At last he would lock up the desk with the decision of unshaken confidence, jump and go out. He would walk swiftly back and forth on that part of the foredeck which was kept clear of the lumber and of the bodies of the native passengers. They were a great nuisance, but they were also a source of profit that could not be disdained. He needed every penny of profit the *Sofala* could make. Little enough it was, in all conscience! The incertitude of chance gave him no concern, since he had somehow arrived at the conviction that, in the course of years, every number was bound to have his winning turn. It was simply a matter of time and of taking as many tickets as he could afford for every drawing. He generally took rather more; all the earnings of the ship went that way, and also the wages he allowed himself as chief engineer. It was the wages he paid to others that he begrudged with a reasoned and at the same time a passionate regret. He scowled at the lascars with their deck brooms, at the quartermasters rubbing the brass rails with greasy rags; he was eager to shake his fist and roar abuse in bad Malay at the poor carpenter — a timid, sickly, opium-fuddled Chinaman, in loose blue drawers for all costume, who invariably dropped his tools and fled below, with streaming tail and shaking all over, before the fury of that “devil.” But it was when he raised up his eyes to the bridge where one of these sailor frauds was always planted by law in charge of his ship that he felt almost dizzy with rage. He abominated them all; it was an old feud, from the time he first went to sea, an unlicked cub with a great opinion of himself, in the engine-room. The slights that had been put upon him. The persecutions he had suffered at the hands of skippers — of absolute nobodies in a steamship after all. And now that he had risen to be a shipowner they were still a plague to him: he had absolutely to pay away precious money to the conceited useless loafers: — As if a fully qualified engineer — who was the owner as well — were not fit to be trusted with the whole charge of a ship. Well! he made it pretty warm for them; but it was a poor consolation. He had come in time to hate the ship too for the repairs she required, for the coal-bills he had to pay, for the poor beggarly freights she earned. He would clench his hand as he walked and hit the rail a sudden blow, viciously, as though she could be made to feel pain. And yet

he could not do without her; he needed her; he must hang on to her tooth and nail to keep his head above water till the expected flood of fortune came sweeping up and landed him safely on the high shore of his ambition.

It was now to do nothing, nothing whatever, and have plenty of money to do it on. He had tasted of power, the highest form of it his limited experience was aware of — the power of shipowning. What a deception! Vanity of vanities! He wondered at his folly. He had thrown away the substance for the shadow. Of the gratification of wealth he did not know enough to excite his imagination with any visions of luxury. How could he — the child of a drunken boiler-maker — going straight from the workshop into the engine-room of a north-country collier! But the notion of the absolute idleness of wealth he could very well conceive. He reveled in it, to forget his present troubles; he imagined himself walking about the streets of Hull (he knew their gutters well as a boy) with his pockets full of sovereigns. He would buy himself a house; his married sisters, their husbands, his old workshop chums, would render him infinite homage. There would be nothing to think of. His word would be law. He had been out of work for a long time before he won his prize, and he remembered how Carlo Mariani (commonly known as Paunchy Charley), the Maltese hotel-keeper at the slummy end of Denham Street, had cringed joyfully before him in the evening, when the news had come. Poor Charley, though he made his living by ministering to various abject vices, gave credit for their food to many a piece of white wreckage. He was naively overjoyed at the idea of his old bills being paid, and he reckoned confidently on a spell of festivities in the cavernous grog-shop downstairs. Massy remembered the curious, respectful looks of the “trashy” white men in the place. His heart had swelled within him. Massy had left Charley’s infamous den directly he had realized the possibilities open to him, and with his nose in the air. Afterwards the memory of these adulations was a great sadness.

This was the true power of money, — and no trouble with it, nor any thinking required either. He thought with difficulty and felt vividly; to his blunt brain the problems offered by any ordered scheme of life seemed in their cruel toughness to have been put in his way by the obvious malevolence of men. As a shipowner everyone had conspired to make him a nobody. How could he have been such a fool as to purchase that accursed ship. He had been abominably swindled; there was no end to this swindling; and as the difficulties of his improvident ambition gathered thicker round

him, he really came to hate everybody he had ever come in contact with. A temper naturally irritable and an amazing sensitiveness to the claims of his own personality had ended by making of life for him a sort of inferno — a place where his lost soul had been given up to the torment of savage brooding.

But he had never hated anyone so much as that old man who had turned up one evening to save him from an utter disaster, — from the conspiracy of the wretched sailors. He seemed to have fallen on board from the sky. His footsteps echoed on the empty steamer, and the strange deep-toned voice on deck repeating interrogatively the words, “Mr. Massy, Mr. Massy there?” had been startling like a wonder. And coming up from the depths of the cold engine-room, where he had been pottering dismally with a candle amongst the enormous shadows, thrown on all sides by the skeleton limbs of machinery, Massy had been struck dumb by astonishment in the presence of that imposing old man with a beard like a silver plate, towering in the dusk rendered lurid by the expiring flames of sunset.

“Want to see me on business? What business? I am doing no business. Can’t you see that this ship is laid up?” Massy had turned at bay before the pursuing irony of his disaster. Afterwards he could not believe his ears. What was that old fellow getting at? Things don’t happen that way. It was a dream. He would presently wake up and find the man vanished like a shape of mist. The gravity, the dignity, the firm and courteous tone of that athletic old stranger impressed Massy. He was almost afraid. But it was no dream. Five hundred pounds are no dream. At once he became suspicious. What did it mean? Of course it was an offer to catch hold of for dear life. But what could there be behind?

Before they had parted, after appointing a meeting in a solicitor’s office early on the morrow, Massy was asking himself, What is his motive? He spent the night in hammering out the clauses of the agreement — a unique instrument of its sort whose tenor got bruited abroad somehow and became the talk and wonder of the port.

Massy’s object had been to secure for himself as many ways as possible of getting rid of his partner without being called upon at once to pay back his share. Captain Whalley’s efforts were directed to making the money secure. Was it not Ivy’s money — a part of her fortune whose only other asset was the time-defying body of her old father? Sure of his forbearance in the strength of his love for her, he accepted, with stately serenity,

Massy's stupidly cunning paragraphs against his incompetence, his dishonesty, his drunkenness, for the sake of other stringent stipulations. At the end of three years he was at liberty to withdraw from the partnership, taking his money with him. Provision was made for forming a fund to pay him off. But if he left the Sofala before the term, from whatever cause (barring death), Massy was to have a whole year for paying. "Illness?" the lawyer had suggested: a young man fresh from Europe and not overburdened with business, who was rather amused. Massy began to whine unctuously, "How could he be expected? . . ."

"Let that go," Captain Whalley had said with a superb confidence in his body. "Acts of God," he added. In the midst of life we are in death, but he trusted his Maker with a still greater fearlessness — his Maker who knew his thoughts, his human affections, and his motives. His Creator knew what use he was making of his health — how much he wanted it . . . "I trust my first illness will be my last. I've never been ill that I can remember," he had remarked. "Let it go."

But at this early stage he had already awakened Massy's hostility by refusing to make it six hundred instead of five. "I cannot do that," was all he had said, simply, but with so much decision that Massy desisted at once from pressing the point, but had thought to himself, "Can't! Old curmudgeon. Won't He must have lots of money, but he would like to get hold of a soft berth and the sixth part of my profits for nothing if he only could."

And during these years Massy's dislike grew under the restraint of something resembling fear. The simplicity of that man appeared dangerous. Of late he had changed, however, had appeared less formidable and with a lessened vigor of life, as though he had received a secret wound. But still he remained incomprehensible in his simplicity, fearlessness, and rectitude. And when Massy learned that he meant to leave him at the end of the time, to leave him confronted with the problem of boilers, his dislike blazed up secretly into hate.

It had made him so clear-eyed that for a long time now Mr. Sterne could have told him nothing he did not know. He had much ado in trying to terrorize that mean sneak into silence; he wanted to deal alone with the situation; and — incredible as it might have appeared to Mr. Sterne — he had not yet given up the desire and the hope of inducing that hated old man to stay. Why! there was nothing else to do, unless he were to abandon his

chances of fortune. But now, suddenly, since the crossing of the bar at Batu Beru things seemed to be coming rapidly to a point. It disquieted him so much that the study of the winning numbers failed to soothe his agitation: and the twilight in the cabin deepened, very somber.

He put the list away, muttering once more, "Oh, no, my boy, you don't. Not if I know it." He did not mean the blinking, eavesdropping humbug to force his action. He took his head again into his hands; his immobility confined in the darkness of this shut-up little place seemed to make him a thing apart infinitely removed from the stir and the sounds of the deck.

He heard them: the passengers were beginning to jabber excitedly; somebody dragged a heavy box past his door. He heard Captain Whalley's voice above —

"Stations, Mr. Sterne." And the answer from somewhere on deck forward

—  
"Ay, ay, sir."

"We shall moor head up stream this time; the ebb has made."

"Head up stream, sir."

"You will see to it, Mr. Sterne."

The answer was covered by the autocratic clang on the engine-room gong. The propeller went on beating slowly: one, two, three; one, two, three — with pauses as if hesitating on the turn. The gong clanged time after time, and the water churned this way and that by the blades was making a great noisy commotion alongside. Mr. Massy did not move. A shore-light on the other bank, a quarter of a mile across the river, drifted, no bigger than a tiny star, passing slowly athwart the circle of the port. Voices from Mr. Van Wyk's jetty answered the hails from the ship; ropes were thrown and missed and thrown again; the swaying flame of a torch carried in a large sampan coming to fetch away in state the Rajah from down the coast cast a sudden ruddy glare into his cabin, over his very person. Mr. Massy did not move. After a few last ponderous turns the engines stopped, and the prolonged clanging of the gong signified that the captain had done with them. A great number of boats and canoes of all sizes boarded the off-side of the Sofala. Then after a time the tumult of splashing, of cries, of shuffling feet, of packages dropped with a thump, the noise of the native passengers going away, subsided slowly. On the shore, a voice, cultivated, slightly authoritative, spoke very close alongside —

"Brought any mail for me this time?"

“Yes, Mr. Van Wyk.” This was from Sterne, answering over the rail in a tone of respectful cordiality. “Shall I bring it up to you?”

But the voice asked again —

“Where’s the captain?”

“Still on the bridge, I believe. He hasn’t left his chair. Shall I . . .”

The voice interrupted negligently.

“I will come on board.”

“Mr. Van Wyk,” Sterne suddenly broke out with an eager effort, “will you do me the favor . . .”

The mate walked away quickly towards the gangway. A silence fell. Mr. Massy in the dark did not move.

He did not move even when he heard slow shuffling footsteps pass his cabin lazily. He contented himself to bellow out through the closed door —

“You — Jack!”

The footsteps came back without haste; the door handle rattled, and the second engineer appeared in the opening, shadowy in the sheen of the skylight at his back, with his face apparently as black as the rest of his figure.

“We have been very long coming up this time,” Mr. Massy growled, without changing his attitude.

“What do you expect with half the boiler tubes plugged up for leaks.” The second defended himself loquaciously.

“None of your lip,” said Massy.

“None of your rotten boilers — I say,” retorted his faithful subordinate without animation, huskily. “Go down there and carry a head of steam on them yourself — if you dare. I don’t.”

“You aren’t worth your salt then,” Massy said. The other made a faint noise which resembled a laugh but might have been a snarl.

“Better go slow than stop the ship altogether,” he admonished his admired superior. Mr. Massy moved at last. He turned in his chair, and grinding his teeth —

“Dam’ you and the ship! I wish she were at the bottom of the sea. Then you would have to starve.”

The trusty second engineer closed the door gently.

Massy listened. Instead of passing on to the bathroom where he should have gone to clean himself, the second entered his cabin, which was next

door. Mr. Massy jumped up and waited. Suddenly he heard the lock snap in there. He rushed out and gave a violent kick to the door.

“I believe you are locking yourself up to get drunk,” he shouted.

A muffled answer came after a while.

“My own time.”

“If you take to boozing on the trip I’ll fire you out,” Massy cried.

An obstinate silence followed that threat. Massy moved away perplexed. On the bank two figures appeared, approaching the gangway. He heard a voice tinged with contempt —

“I would rather doubt your word. But I shall certainly speak to him of this.”

The other voice, Sterne’s, said with a sort of regretful formality —

“Thanks. That’s all I want. I must do my duty.”

Mr. Massy was surprised. A short, dapper figure leaped lightly on the deck and nearly bounded into him where he stood beyond the circle of light from the gangway lamp. When it had passed towards the bridge, after exchanging a hurried “Good evening,” Massy said surlily to Sterne who followed with slow steps —

“What is it you’re making up to Mr. Van Wyk for, now?”

“Far from it, Mr. Massy. I am not good enough for Mr. Van Wyk. Neither are you, sir, in his opinion, I am afraid. Captain Whalley is, it seems. He’s gone to ask him to dine up at the house this evening.”

Then he murmured to himself darkly —

“I hope he will like it.”

## XII

Mr. Van Wyk, the white man of Batu Beru, an ex-naval officer who, for reasons best known to himself, had thrown away the promise of a brilliant career to become the pioneer of tobacco-planting on that remote part of the coast, had learned to like Captain Whalley. The appearance of the new skipper had attracted his attention. Nothing more unlike all the diverse types he had seen succeeding each other on the bridge of the Sofala could be imagined.

At that time Batu Beru was not what it has become since: the center of a prosperous tobacco-growing district, a tropically suburban-looking little settlement of bungalows in one long street shaded with two rows of trees, embowered by the flowering and trim luxuriance of the gardens, with a three-mile-long carriage-road for the afternoon drives and a first-class Resident with a fat, cheery wife to lead the society of married estate-managers and unmarried young fellows in the service of the big companies.

All this prosperity was not yet; and Mr. Van Wyk prospered alone on the left bank on his deep clearing carved out of the forest, which came down above and below to the water’s edge. His lonely bungalow faced across the river the houses of the Sultan: a restless and melancholy old ruler who had done with love and war, for whom life no longer held any savor (except of evil forebodings) and time never had any value. He was afraid of death, and hoped he would die before the white men were ready to take his country from him. He crossed the river frequently (with never less than ten boats



crammed full of people), in the wistful hope of extracting some information on the subject from his own white man. There was a certain chair on the veranda he always took: the dignitaries of the court squatted on the rugs and skins between the furniture: the inferior people remained below on the grass plot between the house and the river in rows three or four deep all along the front. Not seldom the visit began at daybreak. Mr. Van Wyk tolerated these inroads. He would nod out of his bedroom window, tooth-brush or razor in hand, or pass through the throng of courtiers in his bathing robe. He appeared and disappeared humming a tune, polished his nails with attention, rubbed his shaved face with eau-de-Cologne, drank his early tea, went out to see his coolies at work: returned, looked through some papers on his desk, read a page or two in a book or sat before his cottage piano leaning back on the stool, his arms extended, fingers on the keys, his body swaying slightly from side to side. When absolutely forced to speak he gave evasive vaguely soothing answers out of pure compassion: the same feeling perhaps made him so lavishly hospitable with the aerated drinks that more than once he left himself without soda-water for a whole week. That old man had granted him as much land as he cared to have cleared: it was neither more nor less than a fortune.

Whether it was fortune or seclusion from his kind that Mr. Van Wyk sought, he could not have pitched upon a better place. Even the mail-boats of the subsidized company calling on the veriest clusters of palm-thatched hovels along the coast steamed past the mouth of Batu Beru river far away in the offing. The contract was old: perhaps in a few years' time, when it had expired, Batu Beru would be included in the service; meantime all Mr. Van Wyk's mail was addressed to Malacca, whence his agent sent it across once a month by the Sofala. It followed that whenever Massy had run short of money (through taking too many lottery tickets), or got into a difficulty about a skipper, Mr. Van Wyk was deprived of his letter and newspapers. In so far he had a personal interest in the fortunes of the Sofala. Though he considered himself a hermit (and for no passing whim evidently, since he had stood eight years of it already), he liked to know what went on in the world.

Handy on the veranda upon a walnut etagere (it had come last year by the Sofala) — everything came by the Sofala there lay, piled up under bronze weights, a pile of the Times' weekly edition, the large sheets of the Rotterdam Courant, the Graphic in its world-wide green wrappers, an

illustrated Dutch publication without a cover, the numbers of a German magazine with covers of the “Bismarck malade” color. There were also parcels of new music — though the piano (it had come years ago by the Sofala in the damp atmosphere of the forests was generally out of tune.) It was vexing to be cut off from everything for sixty days at a stretch sometimes, without any means of knowing what was the matter. And when the Sofala reappeared Mr. Van Wyk would descend the steps of the veranda and stroll over the grass plot in front of his house, down to the waterside, with a frown on his white brow.

“You’ve been laid up after an accident, I presume.”

He addressed the bridge, but before anybody could answer Massy was sure to have already scrambled ashore over the rail and pushed in, squeezing the palms of his hands together, bowing his sleek head as if gummed all over the top with black threads and tapes. And he would be so enraged at the necessity of having to offer such an explanation that his moaning would be positively pitiful, while all the time he tried to compose his big lips into a smile.

“No, Mr. Van Wyk. You would not believe it. I couldn’t get one of those wretches to take the ship out. Not a single one of the lazy beasts could be induced, and the law, you know, Mr. Van Wyk . . .”

He moaned at great length apologetically; the words conspiracy, plot, envy, came out prominently, whined with greater energy. Mr. Van Wyk, examining with a faint grimace his polished finger-nails, would say, “H’m. Very unfortunate,” and turn his back on him.

Fastidious, clever, slightly skeptical, accustomed to the best society (he had held a much-envied shore appointment at the Ministry of Marine for a year preceding his retreat from his profession and from Europe), he possessed a latent warmth of feeling and a capacity for sympathy which were concealed by a sort of haughty, arbitrary indifference of manner arising from his early training; and by a something an enemy might have called foppish, in his aspect — like a distorted echo of past elegance. He managed to keep an almost military discipline amongst the coolies of the estate he had dragged into the light of day out of the tangle and shadows of the jungle; and the white shirt he put on every evening with its stiff glossy front and high collar looked as if he had meant to preserve the decent ceremony of evening-dress, but had wound a thick crimson sash above his

hips as a concession to the wilderness, once his adversary, now his vanquished companion.

Moreover, it was a hygienic precaution. Worn wide open in front, a short jacket of some airy silken stuff floated from his shoulders. His fluffy, fair hair, thin at the top, curled slightly at the sides; a carefully arranged mustache, an ungarnished forehead, the gleam of low patent shoes peeping under the wide bottom of trowsers cut straight from the same stuff as the gossamer coat, completed a figure recalling, with its sash, a pirate chief of romance, and at the same time the elegance of a slightly bald dandy indulging, in seclusion, a taste for unorthodox costume.

It was his evening get-up. The proper time for the Sofala to arrive at Batu Beru was an hour before sunset, and he looked picturesque, and somehow quite correct too, walking at the water's edge on the background of grass slope crowned with a low long bungalow with an immensely steep roof of palm thatch, and clad to the eaves in flowering creepers. While the Sofala was being made fast he strolled in the shade of the few trees left near the landing-place, waiting till he could go on board. Her white men were not of his kind. The old Sultan (though his wistful invasions were a nuisance) was really much more acceptable to his fastidious taste. But still they were white; the periodical visits of the ship made a break in the well-filled sameness of the days without disturbing his privacy. Moreover, they were necessary from a business point of view; and through a strain of preciseness in his nature he was irritated when she failed to appear at the appointed time.

The cause of the irregularity was too absurd, and Massy, in his opinion, was a contemptible idiot. The first time the Sofala reappeared under the new agreement swinging out of the bend below, after he had almost given up all hope of ever seeing her again, he felt so angry that he did not go down at once to the landing-place. His servants had come running to him with the news, and he had dragged a chair close against the front rail of the veranda, spread his elbows out, rested his chin on his hands, and went on glaring at her fixedly while she was being made fast opposite his house. He could make out easily all the white faces on board. Who on earth was that kind of patriarch they had got there on the bridge now?

At last he sprang up and walked down the gravel path. It was a fact that the very gravel for his paths had been imported by the Sofala. Exasperated out of his quiet superciliousness, without looking at anyone right or left, he

accosted Massy straightway in so determined a manner that the engineer, taken aback, began to stammer unintelligibly. Nothing could be heard but the words: “Mr. Van Wyk . . . Indeed, Mr. Van Wyk . . . For the future, Mr. Van Wyk” — and by the suffusion of blood Massy’s vast bilious face acquired an unnatural orange tint, out of which the disconcerted coal-black eyes shone in an extraordinary manner.

“Nonsense. I am tired of this. I wonder you have the impudence to come alongside my jetty as if I had it made for your convenience alone.”

Massy tried to protest earnestly. Mr. Van Wyk was very angry. He had a good mind to ask that German firm — those people in Malacca — what was their name? — boats with green funnels. They would be only too glad of the opening to put one of their small steamers on the run. Yes; Schnitzler, Jacob Schnitzler, would in a moment. Yes. He had decided to write without delay.

In his agitation Massy caught up his falling pipe.

“You don’t mean it, sir!” he shrieked.

“You shouldn’t mismanage your business in this ridiculous manner.”

Mr. Van Wyk turned on his heel. The other three whites on the bridge had not stirred during the scene. Massy walked hastily from side to side, puffed out his cheeks, suffocated.

“Stuck up Dutchman!”

And he moaned out feverishly a long tale of griefs. The efforts he had made for all these years to please that man. This was the return you got for it, eh? Pretty. Write to Schnitzler — let in the green-funnel boats — get an old Hamburg Jew to ruin him. No, really he could laugh. . . . He laughed sobbingly. . . . Ha! ha! ha! And make him carry the letter in his own ship presumably.

He stumbled across a grating and swore. He would not hesitate to fling the Dutchman’s correspondence overboard — the whole confounded bundle. He had never, never made any charge for that accommodation. But Captain Whalley, his new partner, would not let him probably; besides, it would be only putting off the evil day. For his own part he would make a hole in the water rather than look on tamely at the green funnels overrunning his trade.

He raved aloud. The China boys hung back with the dishes at the foot of the ladder. He yelled from the bridge down at the deck, “Aren’t we going to have any chow this evening at all?” then turned violently to Captain

Whalley, who waited, grave and patient, at the head of the table, smoothing his beard in silence now and then with a forbearing gesture.

“You don’t seem to care what happens to me. Don’t you see that this affects your interests as much as mine? It’s no joking matter.”

He took the foot of the table growling between his teeth.

“Unless you have a few thousands put away somewhere. I haven’t.”

Mr. Van Wyk dined in his thoroughly lit-up bungalow, putting a point of splendor in the night of his clearing above the dark bank of the river. Afterwards he sat down to his piano, and in a pause he became aware of slow footsteps passing on the path along the front. A plank or two creaked under a heavy tread; he swung half round on the music-stool, listening with his fingertips at rest on the keyboard. His little terrier barked violently, backing in from the veranda. A deep voice apologized gravely for “this intrusion.” He walked out quickly.

At the head of the steps the patriarchal figure, who was the new captain of the Sofala apparently (he had seen a round dozen of them, but not one of that sort), towered without advancing. The little dog barked unceasingly, till a flick of Mr. Van Wyk’s handkerchief made him spring aside into silence. Captain Whalley, opening the matter, was met by a punctiliously polite but determined opposition.

They carried on their discussion standing where they had come face to face. Mr. Van Wyk observed his visitor with attention. Then at last, as if forced out of his reserve —

“I am surprised that you should intercede for such a confounded fool.”

This outbreak was almost complimentary, as if its meaning had been, “That such a man as you should intercede!” Captain Whalley let it pass by without flinching. One would have thought he had heard nothing. He simply went on to state that he was personally interested in putting things straight between them. Personally . . .

But Mr. Van Wyk, really carried away by his disgust with Massy, became very incisive —

“Indeed — if I am to be frank with you — his whole character does not seem to me particularly estimable or trustworthy . . .”

Captain Whalley, always straight, seemed to grow an inch taller and broader, as if the girth of his chest had suddenly expanded under his beard.

“My dear sir, you don’t think I came here to discuss a man with whom I am — I am — h’m — closely associated.”

A sort of solemn silence lasted for a moment. He was not used to asking favors, but the importance he attached to this affair had made him willing to try. . . . Mr. Van Wyk, favorably impressed, and suddenly mollified by a desire to laugh, interrupted —

“That’s all right if you make it a personal matter; but you can do no less than sit down and smoke a cigar with me.”

A slight pause, then Captain Whalley stepped forward heavily. As to the regularity of the service, for the future he made himself responsible for it; and his name was Whalley — perhaps to a sailor (he was speaking to a sailor, was he not?) not altogether unfamiliar. There was a lighthouse now, on an island. Maybe Mr. Van Wyk himself . . .

“Oh yes. Oh indeed.” Mr. Van Wyk caught on at once. He indicated a chair. How very interesting. For his own part he had seen some service in the last Acheen War, but had never been so far East. Whalley Island? Of course. Now that was very interesting. What changes his guest must have seen since.

“I can look further back even — on a whole half-century.”

Captain Whalley expanded a bit. The flavor of a good cigar (it was a weakness) had gone straight to his heart, also the civility of that young man. There was something in that accidental contact of which he had been starved in his years of struggle.

The front wall retreating made a square recess furnished like a room. A lamp with a milky glass shade, suspended below the slope of the high roof at the end of a slender brass chain, threw a bright round of light upon a little table bearing an open book and an ivory paper-knife. And, in the translucent shadows beyond, other tables could be seen, a number of easy-chairs of various shapes, with a great profusion of skin rugs strewn on the teakwood planking all over the veranda. The flowering creepers scented the air. Their foliage clipped out between the uprights made as if several frames of thick unstirring leaves reflecting the lamplight in a green glow. Through the opening at his elbow Captain Whalley could see the gangway lantern of the Sofala burning dim by the shore, the shadowy masses of the town beyond the open lustrous darkness of the river, and, as if hung along the straight edge of the projecting eaves, a narrow black strip of the night sky full of stars — resplendent. The famous cigar in hand he had a moment of complacency.

“A trifle. Somebody must lead the way. I just showed that the thing could be done; but you men brought up to the use of steam cannot conceive the vast importance of my bit of venturesomeness to the Eastern trade of the time. Why, that new route reduced the average time of a southern passage by eleven days for more than half the year. Eleven days! It’s on record. But the remarkable thing — speaking to a sailor — I should say was . . .”

He talked well, without egotism, professionally. The powerful voice, produced without effort, filled the bungalow even into the empty rooms with a deep and limpid resonance, seemed to make a stillness outside; and Mr. Van Wyk was surprised by the serene quality of its tone, like the perfection of manly gentleness. Nursing one small foot, in a silk sock and a patent leather shoe, on his knee, he was immensely entertained. It was as if nobody could talk like this now, and the overshadowed eyes, the flowing white beard, the big frame, the serenity, the whole temper of the man, were an amazing survival from the prehistoric times of the world coming up to him out of the sea.

Captain Whalley had been also the pioneer of the early trade in the Gulf of Pe-tchi-li. He even found occasion to mention that he had buried his “dear wife” there six-and-twenty years ago. Mr. Van Wyk, impassive, could not help speculating in his mind swiftly as to the sort of woman that would mate with such a man. Did they make an adventurous and well-matched pair? No. Very possible she had been small, frail, no doubt very feminine — or most likely commonplace with domestic instincts, utterly insignificant. But Captain Whalley was no garrulous bore, and shaking his head as if to dissipate the momentary gloom that had settled on his handsome old face, he alluded conversationally to Mr. Van Wyk’s solitude.

Mr. Van Wyk affirmed that sometimes he had more company than he wanted. He mentioned smilingly some of the peculiarities of his intercourse with “My Sultan.” He made his visits in force. Those people damaged his grass plot in front (it was not easy to obtain some approach to a lawn in the tropics) and the other day had broken down some rare bushes he had planted over there. And Captain Whalley remembered immediately that, in ‘forty-seven, the then Sultan, “this man’s grandfather,” had been notorious as a great protector of the piratical fleets of praus from farther East. They had a safe refuge in the river at Batu Beru. He financed more especially a Balinini chief called Haji Daman. Captain Whalley, nodding significantly

his bushy white eyebrows, had very good reason to know something of that. The world had progressed since that time.

Mr. Van Wyk demurred with unexpected acrimony. Progressed in what? he wanted to know.

Why, in knowledge of truth, in decency, in justice, in order — in honesty too, since men harmed each other mostly from ignorance. It was, Captain Whalley concluded quaintly, more pleasant to live in.

Mr. Van Wyk whimsically would not admit that Mr. Massy, for instance, was more pleasant naturally than the Balinini pirates.

The river had not gained much by the change. They were in their way every bit as honest. Massy was less ferocious than Haji Daman no doubt, but . . .

“And what about you, my good sir?” Captain Whalley laughed a deep soft laugh. “You are an improvement, surely.”

He continued in a vein of pleasantry. A good cigar was better than a knock on the head — the sort of welcome he would have found on this river forty or fifty years ago. Then leaning forward slightly, he became earnestly serious. It seems as if, outside their own sea-gypsy tribes, these rovers had hated all mankind with an incomprehensible, bloodthirsty hatred. Meantime their depredations had been stopped, and what was the consequence? The new generation was orderly, peaceable, settled in prosperous villages. He could speak from personal knowledge. And even the few survivors of that time — old men now — had changed so much, that it would have been unkind to remember against them that they had ever slit a throat in their lives. He had one especially in his mind’s eye: a dignified, venerable headman of a certain large coast village about sixty miles sou’west of Tampasuk. It did one’s heart good to see him — to hear that man speak. He might have been a ferocious savage once. What men wanted was to be checked by superior intelligence, by superior knowledge, by superior force too — yes, by force held in trust from God and sanctified by its use in accordance with His declared will. Captain Whalley believed a disposition for good existed in every man, even if the world were not a very happy place as a whole. In the wisdom of men he had not so much confidence. The disposition had to be helped up pretty sharply sometimes, he admitted. They might be silly, wrongheaded, unhappy; but naturally evil — no. There was at bottom a complete harmlessness at least . . .

“Is there?” Mr. Van Wyk snapped acrimoniously.



Captain Whalley laughed at the interjection, in the good humor of large, tolerating certitude. He could look back at half a century, he pointed out. The smoke oozed placidly through the white hairs hiding his kindly lips.

“At all events,” he resumed after a pause, “I am glad that they’ve had no time to do you much harm as yet.”

This allusion to his comparative youthfulness did not offend Mr. Van Wyk, who got up and wriggled his shoulders with an enigmatic half-smile. They walked out together amicably into the starry night towards the river-side. Their footsteps resounded unequally on the dark path. At the shore end of the gangway the lantern, hung low to the handrail, threw a vivid light on the white legs and the big black feet of Mr. Massy waiting about anxiously. From the waist upwards he remained shadowy, with a row of buttons gleaming up to the vague outline of his chin.

“You may thank Captain Whalley for this,” Mr. Van Wyk said curtly to him before turning away.

The lamps on the veranda flung three long squares of light between the uprights far over the grass. A bat flitted before his face like a circling flake of velvety blackness. Along the jasmine hedge the night air seemed heavy with the fall of perfumed dew; flowerbeds bordered the path; the clipped bushes uprose in dark rounded clumps here and there before the house; the dense foliage of creepers filtered the sheen of the lamplight within in a soft glow all along the front; and everything near and far stood still in a great immobility, in a great sweetness.

Mr. Van Wyk (a few years before he had had occasion to imagine himself treated more badly than anybody alive had ever been by a woman) felt for Captain Whalley’s optimistic views the disdain of a man who had once been credulous himself. His disgust with the world (the woman for a time had filled it for him completely) had taken the form of activity in retirement, because, though capable of great depth of feeling, he was energetic and essentially practical. But there was in that uncommon old sailor, drifting on the outskirts of his busy solitude, something that fascinated his skepticism. His very simplicity (amusing enough) was like a delicate refinement of an upright character. The striking dignity of manner could be nothing else, in a man reduced to such a humble position, but the expression of something essentially noble in the character. With all his trust in mankind he was no fool; the serenity of his temper at the end of so many years, since it could not obviously have been appeased by success, wore an

air of profound wisdom. Mr. Van Wyk was amused at it sometimes. Even the very physical traits of the old captain of the *Sofala*, his powerful frame, his reposeful mien, his intelligent, handsome face, the big limbs, the benign courtesy, the touch of rugged severity in the shaggy eyebrows, made up a seductive personality. Mr. Van Wyk disliked littleness of every kind, but there was nothing small about that man, and in the exemplary regularity of many trips an intimacy had grown up between them, a warm feeling at bottom under a kindly stateliness of forms agreeable to his fastidiousness.

They kept their respective opinions on all worldly matters. His other convictions Captain Whalley never intruded. The difference of their ages was like another bond between them. Once, when twitted with the uncharitableness of his youth, Mr. Van Wyk, running his eye over the vast proportions of his interlocutor, retorted in friendly banter —

“Oh. You’ll come to my way of thinking yet. You’ll have plenty of time. Don’t call yourself old: you look good for a round hundred.”

But he could not help his stinging incisiveness, and though moderating it by an almost affectionate smile, he added —

“And by then you will probably consent to die from sheer disgust.”

Captain Whalley, smiling too, shook his head. “God forbid!”

He thought that perhaps on the whole he deserved something better than to die in such sentiments. The time of course would have to come, and he trusted to his Maker to provide a manner of going out of which he need not be ashamed. For the rest he hoped he would live to a hundred if need be: other men had been known; it would be no miracle. He expected no miracles.

The pronounced, argumentative tone caused Mr. Van Wyk to raise his head and look at him steadily. Captain Whalley was gazing fixedly with a rapt expression, as though he had seen his Creator’s favorable decree written in mysterious characters on the wall. He kept perfectly motionless for a few seconds, then got his vast bulk on to his feet so impetuously that Mr. Van Wyk was startled.

He struck first a heavy blow on his inflated chest: and, throwing out horizontally a big arm that remained steady, extended in the air like the limb of a tree on a windless day —

“Not a pain or an ache there. Can you see this shake in the least?”

His voice was low, in an awing, confident contrast with the headlong emphasis of his movements. He sat down abruptly.

“This isn’t to boast of it, you know. I am nothing,” he said in his effortless strong voice, that seemed to come out as naturally as a river flows. He picked up the stump of the cigar he had laid aside, and added peacefully, with a slight nod, “As it happens, my life is necessary; it isn’t my own, it isn’t — God knows.”

He did not say much for the rest of the evening, but several times Mr. Van Wyk detected a faint smile of assurance flitting under the heavy mustache.

Later on Captain Whalley would now and then consent to dine “at the house.” He could even be induced to drink a glass of wine. “Don’t think I am afraid of it, my good sir,” he explained. “There was a very good reason why I should give it up.”

On another occasion, leaning back at ease, he remarked, “You have treated me most — most humanely, my dear Mr. Van Wyk, from the very first.”

“You’ll admit there was some merit,” Mr. Van Wyk hinted slyly. “An associate of that excellent Massy. . . . Well, well, my dear captain, I won’t say a word against him.”

“It would be no use your saying anything against him,” Captain Whalley affirmed a little moodily. “As I’ve told you before, my life — my work, is necessary, not for myself alone. I can’t choose” . . . He paused, turned the glass before him right round. . . . “I have an only child — a daughter.”

The ample downward sweep of his arm over the table seemed to suggest a small girl at a vast distance. “I hope to see her once more before I die. Meantime it’s enough to know that she has me sound and solid, thank God. You can’t understand how one feels. Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh; the very image of my poor wife. Well, she . . .”

Again he paused, then pronounced stoically the words, “She has a hard struggle.”

And his head fell on his breast, his eyebrows remained knitted, as by an effort of meditation. But generally his mind seemed steeped in the serenity of boundless trust in a higher power. Mr. Van Wyk wondered sometimes how much of it was due to the splendid vitality of the man, to the bodily vigor which seems to impart something of its force to the soul. But he had learned to like him very much.

### XIII

This was the reason why Mr. Sterne's confidential communication, delivered hurriedly on the shore alongside the dark silent ship, had disturbed his equanimity. It was the most incomprehensible and unexpected thing that could happen; and the perturbation of his spirit was so great that, forgetting all about his letters, he ran rapidly up the bridge ladder.

The portable table was being put together for dinner to the left of the wheel by two pig-tailed "boys," who as usual snarled at each other over the job, while another, a doleful, burly, very yellow Chinaman, resembling Mr. Massy, waited apathetically with the cloth over his arm and a pile of thick dinner-plates against his chest. A common cabin lamp with its globe missing, brought up from below, had been hooked to the wooden framework of the awning; the side-screens had been lowered all round; Captain Whalley filling the depths of the wicker-chair seemed to sit benumbed in a canvas tent crudely lighted, and used for the storing of nautical objects; a shabby steering-wheel, a battered brass binnacle on a stout mahogany stand, two dingy life-buoys, an old cork fender lying in a corner, dilapidated deck-lockers with loops of thin rope instead of door-handles.

He shook off the appearance of numbness to return Mr. Van Wyk's unusually brisk greeting, but relapsed directly afterwards. To accept a pressing invitation to dinner "up at the house" cost him another very visible physical effort. Mr. Van Wyk, perplexed, folded his arms, and leaning back against the rail, with his little, black, shiny feet well out, examined him covertly.

"I've noticed of late that you are not quite yourself, old friend."

He put an affectionate gentleness into the last two words. The real intimacy of their intercourse had never been so vividly expressed before.

"Tut, tut, tut!"

The wicker-chair creaked heavily.

"Irritable," commented Mr. Van Wyk to himself; and aloud, "I'll expect to see you in half an hour, then," he said negligently, moving off.

"In half an hour," Captain Whalley's rigid silvery head repeated behind him as if out of a trance.

Amidships, below, two voices, close against the engineroom, could be heard answering each other — one angry and slow, the other alert.

"I tell you the beast has locked himself in to get drunk."

“Can’t help it now, Mr. Massy. After all, a man has a right to shut himself up in his cabin in his own time.”

“Not to get drunk.”

“I heard him swear that the worry with the boilers was enough to drive any man to drink,” Sterne said maliciously.

Massy hissed out something about bursting the door in. Mr. Van Wyk, to avoid them, crossed in the dark to the other side of the deserted deck. The planking of the little wharf rattled faintly under his hasty feet.

“Mr. Van Wyk! Mr. Van Wyk!”

He walked on: somebody was running on the path. “You’ve forgotten to get your mail.”

Sterne, holding a bundle of papers in his hand, caught up with him.

“Oh, thanks.”

But, as the other continued at his elbow, Mr. Van Wyk stopped short. The overhanging eaves, descending low upon the lighted front of the bungalow, threw their black straight-edged shadow into the great body of the night on that side. Everything was very still. A tinkle of cutlery and a slight jingle of glasses were heard. Mr. Van Wyk’s servants were laying the table for two on the veranda.

“I’m afraid you give me no credit whatever for my good intentions in the matter I’ve spoken to you about,” said Sterne.

“I simply don’t understand you.”

“Captain Whalley is a very audacious man, but he will understand that his game is up. That’s all that anybody need ever know of it from me. Believe me, I am very considerate in this, but duty is duty. I don’t want to make a fuss. All I ask you, as his friend, is to tell him from me that the game’s up. That will be sufficient.”

Mr. Van Wyk felt a loathsome dismay at this queer privilege of friendship. He would not demean himself by asking for the slightest explanation; to drive the other away with contumely he did not think prudent — as yet, at any rate. So much assurance staggered him. Who could tell what there could be in it, he thought? His regard for Captain Whalley had the tenacity of a disinterested sentiment, and his practical instinct coming to his aid, he concealed his scorn.

“I gather, then, that this is something grave.”

“Very grave,” Sterne assented solemnly, delighted at having produced an effect at last. He was ready to add some effusive protestations of regret at

the “unavoidable necessity,” but Mr. Van Wyk cut him short — very civilly, however.

Once on the veranda Mr. Van Wyk put his hands in his pockets, and, straddling his legs, stared down at a black panther skin lying on the floor before a rocking-chair. “It looks as if the fellow had not the pluck to play his own precious game openly,” he thought.

This was true enough. In the face of Massy’s last rebuff Sterne dared not declare his knowledge. His object was simply to get charge of the steamer and keep it for some time. Massy would never forgive him for forcing himself on; but if Captain Whalley left the ship of his own accord, the command would devolve upon him for the rest of the trip; so he hit upon the brilliant idea of scaring the old man away. A vague menace, a mere hint, would be enough in such a brazen case; and, with a strange admixture of compassion, he thought that Batu Beru was a very good place for throwing up the sponge. The skipper could go ashore quietly, and stay with that Dutchman of his. Weren’t these two as thick as thieves together? And on reflection he seemed to see that there was a way to work the whole thing through that great friend of the old man’s. This was another brilliant idea. He had an inborn preference for circuitous methods. In this particular case he desired to remain in the background as much as possible, to avoid exasperating Massy needlessly. No fuss! Let it all happen naturally.

Mr. Van Wyk all through the dinner was conscious of a sense of isolation that invades sometimes the closeness of human intercourse. Captain Whalley failed lamentably and obviously in his attempts to eat something. He seemed overcome by a strange absentmindedness. His hand would hover irresolutely, as if left without guidance by a preoccupied mind. Mr. Van Wyk had heard him coming up from a long way off in the profound stillness of the river-side, and had noticed the irresolute character of the footfalls. The toe of his boot had struck the bottom stair as though he had come along mooning with his head in the air right up to the steps of the veranda. Had the captain of the Sofala been another sort of man he would have suspected the work of age there. But one glance at him was enough. Time — after, indeed, marking him for its own — had given him up to his usefulness, in which his simple faith would see a proof of Divine mercy. “How could I contrive to warn him?” Mr. Van Wyk wondered, as if Captain Whalley had been miles and miles away, out of sight and earshot of all evil. He was sickened by an immense disgust of Sterne. To even mention his

threat to a man like Whalley would be positively indecent. There was something more vile and insulting in its hint than in a definite charge of crime — the debasing taint of blackmailing. “What could anyone bring against him?” he asked himself. This was a limpid personality. “And for what object?” The Power that man trusted had thought fit to leave him nothing on earth that envy could lay hold of, except a bare crust of bread.

“Won’t you try some of this?” he asked, pushing a dish slightly. Suddenly it seemed to Mr. Van Wyk that Sterne might possibly be coveting the command of the Sofala. His cynicism was quite startled by what looked like a proof that no man may count himself safe from his kind unless in the very abyss of misery. An intrigue of that sort was hardly worth troubling about, he judged; but still, with such a fool as Massy to deal with, Whalley ought to and must be warned.

At this moment Captain Whalley, bolt upright, the deep cavities of the eyes overhung by a bushy frown, and one large brown hand resting on each side of his empty plate, spoke across the tablecloth abruptly — “Mr. Van Wyk, you’ve always treated me with the most humane consideration.”

“My dear captain, you make too much of a simple fact that I am not a savage.” Mr. Van Wyk, utterly revolted by the thought of Sterne’s obscure attempt, raised his voice incisively, as if the mate had been hiding somewhere within earshot. “Any consideration I have been able to show was no more than the rightful due of a character I’ve learned to regard by this time with an esteem that nothing can shake.”

A slight ring of glass made him lift his eyes from the slice of pine-apple he was cutting into small pieces on his plate. In changing his position Captain Whalley had contrived to upset an empty tumbler.

Without looking that way, leaning sideways on his elbow, his other hand shading his brow, he groped shakily for it, then desisted. Van Wyk stared blankly, as if something momentous had happened all at once. He did not know why he should feel so startled; but he forgot Sterne utterly for the moment.

“Why, what’s the matter?”

And Captain Whalley, half-averted, in a deadened, agitated voice, muttered —

“Esteem!”

“And I may add something more,” Mr. Van Wyk, very steady-eyed, pronounced slowly.

“Hold! Enough!” Captain Whalley did not change his attitude or raise his voice. “Say no more! I can make you no return. I am too poor even for that now. Your esteem is worth having. You are not a man that would stoop to deceive the poorest sort of devil on earth, or make a ship unseaworthy every time he takes her to sea.”

Mr. Van Wyk, leaning forward, his face gone pink all over, with the starched table-napkin over his knees, was inclined to mistrust his senses, his power of comprehension, the sanity of his guest.

“Where? Why? In the name of God! — what’s this? What ship? I don’t understand who . . .”

“Then, in the name of God, it is I! A ship’s unseaworthy when her captain can’t see. I am going blind.”

Mr. Van Wyk made a slight movement, and sat very still afterwards for a few seconds; then, with the thought of Sterne’s “The game’s up,” he ducked under the table to pick up the napkin which had slipped off his knees. This was the game that was up. And at the same time the muffled voice of Captain Whalley passed over him —

“I’ve deceived them all. Nobody knows.”

He emerged flushed to the eyes. Captain Whalley, motionless under the full blaze of the lamp, shaded his face with his hand.

“And you had that courage?”

“Call it by what name you like. But you are a humane man — a — a — gentleman, Mr. Van Wyk. You may have asked me what I had done with my conscience.”

He seemed to muse, profoundly silent, very still in his mournful pose.

“I began to tamper with it in my pride. You begin to see a lot of things when you are going blind. I could not be frank with an old chum even. I was not frank with Massy — no, not altogether. I knew he took me for a wealthy sailor fool, and I let him. I wanted to keep up my importance — because there was poor Ivy away there — my daughter. What did I want to trade on his misery for? I did trade on it — for her. And now, what mercy could I expect from him? He would trade on mine if he knew it. He would hunt the old fraud out, and stick to the money for a year. Ivy’s money. And I haven’t kept a penny for myself. How am I going to live for a year. A year! In a year there will be no sun in the sky for her father.”

His deep voice came out, awfully veiled, as though he had been overwhelmed by the earth of a landslide, and talking to you of the thoughts



that haunt the dead in their graves. A cold shudder ran down Mr. Van Wyk's back.

"And how long is it since you have . . .?" he began.

"It was a long time before I could bring myself to believe in this — this visitation." Captain Whalley spoke with gloomy patience from under his hand.

He had not thought he had deserved it. He had begun by deceiving himself from day to day, from week to week. He had the Serang at hand there — an old servant. It came on gradually, and when he could no longer deceive himself . . .

His voice died out almost.

"Rather than give her up I set myself to deceive you all."

"It's incredible," whispered Mr. Van Wyk. Captain Whalley's appalling murmur flowed on.

"Not even the sign of God's anger could make me forget her. How could I forsake my child, feeling my vigor all the time — the blood warm within me? Warm as yours. It seems to me that, like the blinded Samson, I would find the strength to shake down a temple upon my head. She's a struggling woman — my own child that we used to pray over together, my poor wife and I. Do you remember that day I as well as told you that I believed God would let me live to a hundred for her sake? What sin is there in loving your child? Do you see it? I was ready for her sake to live for ever. I half believed I would. I've been praying for death since. Ha! Presumptuous man — you wanted to live . . ."

A tremendous, shuddering upheaval of that big frame, shaken by a gasping sob, set the glasses jingling all over the table, seemed to make the whole house tremble to the roof-tree. And Mr. Van Wyk, whose feeling of outraged love had been translated into a form of struggle with nature, understood very well that, for that man whose whole life had been conditioned by action, there could exist no other expression for all the emotions; that, to voluntarily cease venturing, doing, enduring, for his child's sake, would have been exactly like plucking his warm love for her out of his living heart. Something too monstrous, too impossible, even to conceive.

Captain Whalley had not changed his attitude, that seemed to express something of shame, sorrow, and defiance.

“I have even deceived you. If it had not been for that word ‘esteem.’ These are not the words for me. I would have lied to you. Haven’t I lied to you? Weren’t you going to trust your property on board this very trip?”

“I have a floating yearly policy,” Mr. Van Wyk said almost unwittingly, and was amazed at the sudden cropping up of a commercial detail.

“The ship is unseaworthy, I tell you. The policy would be invalid if it were known . . .”

“We shall share the guilt, then.”

“Nothing could make mine less,” said Captain Whalley.

He had not dared to consult a doctor; the man would have perhaps asked who he was, what he was doing; Massy might have heard something. He had lived on without any help, human or divine. The very prayers stuck in his throat. What was there to pray for? and death seemed as far as ever. Once he got into his cabin he dared not come out again; when he sat down he dared not get up; he dared not raise his eyes to anybody’s face; he felt reluctant to look upon the sea or up to the sky. The world was fading before his great fear of giving himself away. The old ship was his last friend; he was not afraid of her; he knew every inch of her deck; but at her too he hardly dared to look, for fear of finding he could see less than the day before. A great incertitude enveloped him. The horizon was gone; the sky mingled darkly with the sea. Who was this figure standing over yonder? what was this thing lying down there? And a frightful doubt of the reality of what he could see made even the remnant of sight that remained to him an added torment, a pitfall always open for his miserable pretense. He was afraid to stumble inexcusably over something — to say a fatal Yes or No to a question. The hand of God was upon him, but it could not tear him away from his child. And, as if in a nightmare of humiliation, every featureless man seemed an enemy.

He let his hand fall heavily on the table. Mr. Van Wyk, arms down, chin on breast, with a gleam of white teeth pressing on the lower lip, meditated on Sterne’s “The game’s up.”

“The Serang of course does not know.”

“Nobody,” said Captain Whalley, with assurance.

“Ah yes. Nobody. Very well. Can you keep it up to the end of the trip? That is the last under the agreement with Massy.”

Captain Whalley got up and stood erect, very stately, with the great white beard lying like a silver breastplate over the awful secret of his heart. Yes;

that was the only hope there was for him of ever seeing her again, of securing the money, the last he could do for her, before he crept away somewhere — useless, a burden, a reproach to himself. His voice faltered.

“Think of it! Never see her any more: the only human being besides myself now on earth that can remember my wife. She’s just like her mother. Lucky the poor woman is where there are no tears shed over those they loved on earth and that remain to pray not to be led into temptation — because, I suppose, the blessed know the secret of grace in God’s dealings with His created children.”

He swayed a little, said with austere dignity —

“I don’t. I know only the child He has given me.”

And he began to walk. Mr. Van Wyk, jumping up, saw the full meaning of the rigid head, the hesitating feet, the vaguely extended hand. His heart was beating fast; he moved a chair aside, and instinctively advanced as if to offer his arm. But Captain Whalley passed him by, making for the stairs quite straight.

“He could not see me at all out of his line,” Van Wyk thought, with a sort of awe. Then going to the head of the stairs, he asked a little tremulously —

“What is it like — like a mist — like . . .”

Captain Whalley, half-way down, stopped, and turned round undismayed to answer.

“It is as if the light were ebbing out of the world. Have you ever watched the ebbing sea on an open stretch of sands withdrawing farther and farther away from you? It is like this — only there will be no flood to follow. Never. It is as if the sun were growing smaller, the stars going out one by one. There can’t be many left that I can see by this. But I haven’t had the courage to look of late . . .” He must have been able to make out Mr. Van Wyk, because he checked him by an authoritative gesture and a stoical —

“I can get about alone yet.”

It was as if he had taken his line, and would accept no help from men, after having been cast out, like a presumptuous Titan, from his heaven. Mr. Van Wyk, arrested, seemed to count the footsteps right out of earshot. He walked between the tables, tapping smartly with his heels, took up a paper-knife, dropped it after a vague glance along the blade; then happening upon the piano, struck a few chords again and again, vigorously, standing up before the keyboard with an attentive poise of the head like a piano-tuner; closing it, he pivoted on his heels brusquely, avoided the little terrier

sleeping trustfully on crossed forepaws, came upon the stairs next, and, as though he had lost his balance on the top step, ran down headlong out of the house. His servants, beginning to clear the table, heard him mutter to himself (evil words no doubt) down there, and then after a pause go away with a strolling gait in the direction of the wharf.

The bulwarks of the *Sofala* lying alongside the bank made a low, black wall on the undulating contour of the shore. Two masts and a funnel uprose from behind it with a great rake, as if about to fall: a solid, square elevation in the middle bore the ghostly shapes of white boats, the curves of davits, lines of rail and stanchions, all confused and mingling darkly everywhere; but low down, amidships, a single lighted port stared out on the night, perfectly round, like a small, full moon, whose yellow beam caught a patch of wet mud, the edge of trodden grass, two turns of heavy cable wound round the foot of a thick wooden post in the ground.

Mr. Van Wyk, peering alongside, heard a muzzy boastful voice apparently jeering at a person called Prendergast. It mouthed abuse thickly, choked; then pronounced very distinctly the word “Murphy,” and chuckled. Glass tinkled tremulously. All these sounds came from the lighted port. Mr. Van Wyk hesitated, stooped; it was impossible to look through unless he went down into the mud.

“Sterne,” he said, half aloud.

The drunken voice within said gladly —

“Sterne — of course. Look at him blink. Look at him! Sterne, Whalley, Massy. Massy, Whalley, Sterne. But Massy’s the best. You can’t come over him. He would just love to see you starve.”

Mr. Van Wyk moved away, made out farther forward a shadowy head stuck out from under the awnings as if on the watch, and spoke quietly in Malay, “Is the mate asleep?”

“No. Here, at your service.”

In a moment Sterne appeared, walking as noiselessly as a cat on the wharf.

“It’s so jolly dark, and I had no idea you would be down to-night.”

“What’s this horrible raving?” asked Mr. Van Wyk, as if to explain the cause of a shudder than ran over him audibly.

“Jack’s broken out on a drunk. That’s our second. It’s his way. He will be right enough by to-morrow afternoon, only Mr. Massy will keep on worrying up and down the deck. We had better get away.”

He muttered suggestively of a talk “up at the house.” He had long desired to effect an entrance there, but Mr. Van Wyk nonchalantly demurred: it would not, he feared, be quite prudent, perhaps; and the opaque black shadow under one of the two big trees left at the landing-place swallowed them up, impenetrably dense, by the side of the wide river, that seemed to spin into threads of glitter the light of a few big stars dropped here and there upon its outspread and flowing stillness.

“The situation is grave beyond doubt,” Mr. Van Wyk said. Ghost-like in their white clothes they could not distinguish each others’ features, and their feet made no sound on the soft earth. A sort of purring was heard. Mr. Sterne felt gratified by such a beginning.

“I thought, Mr. Van Wyk, a gentleman of your sort would see at once how awkwardly I was situated.”

“Yes, very. Obviously his health is bad. Perhaps he’s breaking up. I see, and he himself is well aware — I assume I am speaking to a man of sense — he is well aware that his legs are giving out.”

“His legs — ah!” Mr. Sterne was disconcerted, and then turned sulky. “You may call it his legs if you like; what I want to know is whether he intends to clear out quietly. That’s a good one, too! His legs! Pooh!”

“Why, yes. Only look at the way he walks.” Mr. Van Wyk took him up in a perfectly cool and undoubting tone. “The question, however, is whether your sense of duty does not carry you too far from your true interest. After all, I too could do something to serve you. You know who I am.”

“Everybody along the Straits has heard of you, sir.”

Mr. Van Wyk presumed that this meant something favorable. Sterne had a soft laugh at this pleasantry. He should think so! To the opening statement, that the partnership agreement was to expire at the end of this very trip, he gave an attentive assent. He was aware. One heard of nothing else on board all the blessed day long. As to Massy, it was no secret that he was in a jolly deep hole with these worn-out boilers. He would have to borrow somewhere a couple of hundred first of all to pay off the captain; and then he would have to raise money on mortgage upon the ship for the new boilers — that is, if he could find a lender at all. At best it meant loss of time, a break in the trade, short earnings for the year — and there was always the danger of having his connection filched away from him by the Germans. It was whispered about that he had already tried two firms. Neither would have anything to do with him. Ship too old, and the man too

well known in the place. . . . Mr. Sterne's final rapid winking remained buried in the deep darkness sibilating with his whispers.

"Supposing, then, he got the loan," Mr. Van Wyk resumed in a deliberate undertone, "on your own showing he's more than likely to get a mortgagee's man thrust upon him as captain. For my part, I know that I would make that very stipulation myself if I had to find the money. And as a matter of fact I am thinking of doing so. It would be worth my while in many ways. Do you see how this would bear on the case under discussion?"

"Thank you, sir. I am sure you couldn't get anybody that would care more for your interests."

"Well, it suits my interest that Captain Whalley should finish his time. I shall probably take a passage with you down the Straits. If that can be done, I'll be on the spot when all these changes take place, and in a position to look after your interests."

"Mr. Van Wyk, I want nothing better. I am sure I am infinitely . . ."

"I take it, then, that this may be done without any trouble."

"Well, sir, what risk there is can't be helped; but (speaking to you as my employer now) the thing is more safe than it looks. If anybody had told me of it I wouldn't have believed it, but I have been looking on myself. That old Serang has been trained up to the game. There's nothing the matter with his — his — limbs, sir. He's got used to doing things himself in a remarkable way. And let me tell you, sir, that Captain Whalley, poor man, is by no means useless. Fact. Let me explain to you, sir. He stiffens up that old monkey of a Malay, who knows well enough what to do. Why, he must have kept captain's watches in all sorts of country ships off and on for the last five-and-twenty years. These natives, sir, as long as they have a white man close at the back, will go on doing the right thing most surprisingly well — even if left quite to themselves. Only the white man must be of the sort to put starch into them, and the captain is just the one for that. Why, sir, he has drilled him so well that now he needs hardly speak at all. I have seen that little wrinkled ape made to take the ship out of Pangu Bay on a blowy morning and on all through the islands; take her out first-rate, sir, dodging under the old man's elbow, and in such quiet style that you could not have told for the life of you which of the two was doing the work up there. That's where our poor friend would be still of use to the ship even if — if — he could no longer lift a foot, sir. Provided the Serang does not know that there's anything wrong."

“He doesn’t.”

“Naturally not. Quite beyond his apprehension. They aren’t capable of finding out anything about us, sir.”

“You seem to be a shrewd man,” said Mr. Van Wyk in a choked mutter, as though he were feeling sick.

“You’ll find me a good enough servant, sir.”

Mr. Sterne hoped now for a handshake at least, but unexpectedly, with a “What’s this? Better not to be seen together,” Mr. Van Wyk’s white shape wavered, and instantly seemed to melt away in the black air under the roof of boughs. The mate was startled. Yes. There was that faint thumping clatter.

He stole out silently from under the shade. The lighted port-hole shone from afar. His head swam with the intoxication of sudden success. What a thing it was to have a gentleman to deal with! He crept aboard, and there was something weird in the shadowy stretch of empty decks, echoing with shouts and blows proceeding from a darker part amidships. Mr. Massy was raging before the door of the berth: the drunken voice within flowed on undisturbed in the violent racket of kicks.

“Shut up! Put your light out and turn in, you confounded swilling pig — you! D’you hear me, you beast?”

The kicking stopped, and in the pause the muzzy oracular voice announced from within —

“Ah! Massy, now — that’s another thing. Massy’s deep.”

“Who’s that aft there? You, Sterne? He’ll drink himself into a fit of horrors.” The chief engineer appeared vague and big at the corner of the engineroom.

“He will be good enough for duty to-morrow. I would let him be, Mr. Massy.”

Sterne slipped away into his berth, and at once had to sit down. His head swam with exultation. He got into his bunk as if in a dream. A feeling of profound peace, of pacific joy, came over him. On deck all was quiet.

Mr. Massy, with his ear against the door of Jack’s cabin, listened critically to a deep stertorous breathing within. This was a dead-drunk sleep. The bout was over: tranquilized on that score, he too went in, and with slow wriggles got out of his old tweed jacket. It was a garment with many pockets, which he used to put on at odd times of the day, being subject to sudden chilly fits, and when he felt warmed he would take it off

and hang it about anywhere all over the ship. It would be seen swinging on belaying-pins, thrown over the heads of winches, suspended on people's very door-handles for that matter. Was he not the owner? But his favorite place was a hook on a wooden awning stanchion on the bridge, almost against the binnacle. He had even in the early days more than one tussle on that point with Captain Whalley, who desired the bridge to be kept tidy. He had been overawed then. Of late, though, he had been able to defy his partner with impunity. Captain Whalley never seemed to notice anything now. As to the Malays, in their awe of that scowling man not one of the crew would dream of laying a hand on the thing, no matter where or what it swung from.

With an unexpectedness which made Mr. Massy jump and drop the coat at his feet, there came from the next berth the crash and thud of a headlong, jingling, clattering fall. The faithful Jack must have dropped to sleep suddenly as he sat at his revels, and now had gone over chair and all, breaking, as it seemed by the sound, every single glass and bottle in the place. After the terrific smash all was still for a time in there, as though he had killed himself outright on the spot. Mr. Massy held his breath. At last a sleepy uneasy groaning sigh was exhaled slowly on the other side of the bulkhead.

"I hope to goodness he's too drunk to wake up now," muttered Mr. Massy.

The sound of a softly knowing laugh nearly drove him to despair. He swore violently under his breath. The fool would keep him awake all night now for certain. He cursed his luck. He wanted to forget his maddening troubles in sleep sometimes. He could detect no movements. Without apparently making the slightest attempt to get up, Jack went on sniggering to himself where he lay; then began to speak, where he had left off as it were —

"Massy! I love the dirty rascal. He would like to see his poor old Jack starve — but just you look where he has climbed to." . . . He hiccupped in a superior, leisurely manner. . . . "Ship-owning it with the best. A lottery ticket you want. Ha! ha! I will give you lottery tickets, my boy. Let the old ship sink and the old chum starve — that's right. He don't go wrong — Massy don't. Not he. He's a genius — that man is. That's the way to win your money. Ship and chum must go."



“The silly fool has taken it to heart,” muttered Massy to himself. And, listening with a softened expression of face for any slight sign of returning drowsiness, he was discouraged profoundly by a burst of laughter full of joyful irony.

“Would like to see her at the bottom of the sea! Oh, you clever, clever devil! Wish her sunk, eh? I should think you would, my boy; the damned old thing and all your troubles with her. Rake in the insurance money — turn your back on your old chum — all’s well — gentleman again.”

A grim stillness had come over Massy’s face. Only his big black eyes rolled uneasily. The raving fool. And yet it was all true. Yes. Lottery tickets, too. All true. What? Beginning again? He wished he wouldn’t. . . .

But it was even so. The imaginative drunkard on the other side of the bulkhead shook off the deathlike stillness that after his last words had fallen on the dark ship moored to a silent shore.

“Don’t you dare to say anything against George Massy, Esquire. When he’s tired of waiting he will do away with her. Look out! Down she goes — chum and all. He’ll know how to . . .”

The voice hesitated, weary, dreamy, lost, as if dying away in a vast open space.

“. . . Find a trick that will work. He’s up to it — never fear . . .”

He must have been very drunk, for at last the heavy sleep gripped him with the suddenness of a magic spell, and the last word lengthened itself into an interminable, noisy, in-drawn snore. And then even the snoring stopped, and all was still.

But it seemed as though Mr. Massy had suddenly come to doubt the efficacy of sleep as against a man’s troubles; or perhaps he had found the relief he needed in the stillness of a calm contemplation that may contain the vivid thoughts of wealth, of a stroke of luck, of long idleness, and may bring before you the imagined form of every desire; for, turning about and throwing his arms over the edge of his bunk, he stood there with his feet on his favorite old coat, looking out through the round port into the night over the river. Sometimes a breath of wind would enter and touch his face, a cool breath charged with the damp, fresh feel from a vast body of water. A glimmer here and there was all he could see of it; and once he might after all suppose he had dozed off, since there appeared before his vision, unexpectedly and connected with no dream, a row of flaming and gigantic figures — three naught seven one two — making up a number such as you

may see on a lottery ticket. And then all at once the port was no longer black: it was pearly gray, framing a shore crowded with houses, thatched roof beyond thatched roof, walls of mats and bamboo, gables of carved teak timber. Rows of dwellings raised on a forest of piles lined the steely band of the river, brimful and still, with the tide at the turn. This was Batu Beru — and the day had come.

Mr. Massy shook himself, put on the tweed coat, and, shivering nervously as if from some great shock, made a note of the number. A fortunate, rare hint that. Yes; but to pursue fortune one wanted money — ready cash.

Then he went out and prepared to descend into the engine-room. Several small jobs had to be seen to, and Jack was lying dead drunk on the floor of his cabin, with the door locked at that. His gorge rose at the thought of work. Ay! But if you wanted to do nothing you had to get first a good bit of money. A ship won't save you. He cursed the Sofala. True, all true. He was tired of waiting for some chance that would rid him at last of that ship that had turned out a curse on his life.

#### XIV

The deep, interminable hoot of the steam-whistle had, in its grave, vibrating note, something intolerable, which sent a slight shudder down Mr. Van Wyk's back. It was the early afternoon; the Sofala was leaving Batu Beru for Pangu, the next place of call. She swung in the stream, scantily attended by a few canoes, and, gliding on the broad river, became lost to view from the Van Wyk bungalow.

Its owner had not gone this time to see her off. Generally he came down to the wharf, exchanged a few words with the bridge while she cast off, and waved his hand to Captain Whalley at the last moment. This day he did not even go as far as the balustrade of the veranda. "He couldn't see me if I did," he said to himself. "I wonder whether he can make out the house at all." And this thought somehow made him feel more alone than he had ever felt for all these years. What was it? six or seven? Seven. A long time.

He sat on the veranda with a closed book on his knee, and, as it were, looked out upon his solitude, as if the fact of Captain Whalley's blindness had opened his eyes to his own. There were many sorts of heartaches and

troubles, and there was no place where they could not find a man out. And he felt ashamed, as though he had for six years behaved like a peevish boy.

His thought followed the Sofala on her way. On the spur of the moment he had acted impulsively, turning to the thing most pressing. And what else could he have done? Later on he should see. It seemed necessary that he should come out into the world, for a time at least. He had money — something could be arranged; he would grudge no time, no trouble, no loss of his solitude. It weighed on him now — and Captain Whalley appeared to him as he had sat shading his eyes, as if, being deceived in the trust of his faith, he were beyond all the good and evil that can be wrought by the hands of men.

Mr. Van Wyk's thoughts followed the Sofala down the river, winding about through the belt of the coast forest, between the buttressed shafts of the big trees, through the mangrove strip, and over the bar. The ship crossed it easily in broad daylight, piloted, as it happened, by Mr. Sterne, who took the watch from four to six, and then went below to hug himself with delight at the prospect of being virtually employed by a rich man — like Mr. Van Wyk. He could not see how any hitch could occur now. He did not seem able to get over the feeling of being "fixed up at last." From six to eight, in the course of duty, the Serang looked alone after the ship. She had a clear road before her now till about three in the morning, when she would close with the Pangu group. At eight Mr. Sterne came out cheerily to take charge again till midnight. At ten he was still chirruping and humming to himself on the bridge, and about that time Mr. Van Wyk's thought abandoned the Sofala. Mr. Van Wyk had fallen asleep at last.

Massy, blocking the engine-room companion, jerked himself into his tweed jacket surlily, while the second waited with a scowl.

"Oh. You came out? You sot! Well, what have you got to say for yourself?"

He had been in charge of the engines till then. A somber fury darkened his mind: a hot anger against the ship, against the facts of life, against the men for their cheating, against himself too — because of an inward tremor of his heart.

An incomprehensible growl answered him.

"What? Can't you open your mouth now? You yelp out your infernal rot loud enough when you are drunk. What do you mean by abusing people in that way? — you old useless boozier, you!"

"Can't help it. Don't remember anything about it. You shouldn't listen."

"You dare to tell me! What do you mean by going on a drunk like this!"

"Don't ask me. Sick of the dam' boilers — you would be. Sick of life."

"I wish you were dead, then. You've made me sick of you. Don't you remember the uproar you made last night? You miserable old soaker!"

"No; I don't. Don't want to. Drink is drink."

"I wonder what prevents me from kicking you out. What do you want here?"

"Relieve you. You've been long enough down there, George."

"Don't you George me — you tippling old rascal, you! If I were to die tomorrow you would starve. Remember that. Say Mr. Massy."

"Mr. Massy," repeated the other stolidly.

Disheveled, with dull blood-shot eyes, a snuffy, grimy shirt, greasy trousers, naked feet thrust into ragged slippers, he bolted in head down directly Massy had made way for him.

The chief engineer looked around. The deck was empty as far as the taffrail. All the native passengers had left in Batu Beru this time, and no others had joined. The dial of the patent log tinkled periodically in the dark at the end of the ship. It was a dead calm, and, under the clouded sky, through the still air that seemed to cling warm, with a seaweed smell, to her slim hull, on a sea of somber gray and unwrinkled, the ship moved on an even keel, as if floating detached in empty space. But Mr. Massy slapped his forehead, tottered a little, caught hold of a belaying-pin at the foot of the mast.

"I shall go mad," he muttered, walking across the deck unsteadily. A shovel was scraping loose coal down below — a fire-door clanged. Sterne on the bridge began whistling a new tune.

Captain Whalley, sitting on the couch, awake and fully dressed, heard the door of his cabin open. He did not move in the least, waiting to recognize the voice, with an appalling strain of prudence.

A bulkhead lamp blazed on the white paint, the crimson plush, the brown varnish of mahogany tops. The white wood packing-case under the bed-place had remained unopened for three years now, as though Captain Whalley had felt that, after the Fair Maid was gone, there could be no abiding-place on earth for his affections. His hands rested on his knees; his handsome head with big eyebrows presented a rigid profile to the doorway. The expected voice spoke out at last.

“Once more, then. What am I to call you?”

Ha! Massy. Again. The weariness of it crushed his heart — and the pain of shame was almost more than he could bear without crying out.

“Well. Is it to be ‘partner’ still?”

“You don’t know what you ask.”

“I know what I want . . .”

Massy stepped in and closed the door.

“ . . . And I am going to have a try for it with you once more.”

His whine was half persuasive, half menacing.

“For it’s no manner of use to tell me that you are poor. You don’t spend anything on yourself, that’s true enough; but there’s another name for that. You think you are going to have what you want out of me for three years, and then cast me off without hearing what I think of you. You think I would have submitted to your airs if I had known you had only a beggarly five hundred pounds in the world. You ought to have told me.”

“Perhaps,” said Captain Whalley, bowing his head. “And yet it has saved you.” . . . Massy laughed scornfully. . . . “I have told you often enough since.”

“And I don’t believe you now. When I think how I let you lord it over my ship! Do you remember how you used to bullyrag me about my coat and your bridge? It was in his way. His bridge! ‘And I won’t be a party to this — and I couldn’t think of doing that.’ Honest man! And now it all comes out. ‘I am poor, and I can’t. I have only this five hundred in the world.’”

He contemplated the immobility of Captain Whalley, that seemed to present an unconquerable obstacle in his path. His face took a mournful cast.

“You are a hard man.”

“Enough,” said Captain Whalley, turning upon him. “You shall get nothing from me, because I have nothing of mine to give away now.”

“Tell that to the marines!”

Mr. Massy, going out, looked back once; then the door closed, and Captain Whalley, alone, sat as still as before. He had nothing of his own — even his past of honor, of truth, of just pride, was gone. All his spotless life had fallen into the abyss. He had said his last good-by to it. But what belonged to her, that he meant to save. Only a little money. He would take it to her in his own hands — this last gift of a man that had lasted too long. And an immense and fierce impulse, the very passion of paternity, flamed

up with all the unquenched vigor of his worthless life in a desire to see her face.

Just across the deck Massy had gone straight to his cabin, struck a light, and hunted up the note of the dreamed number whose figures had flamed up also with the fierceness of another passion. He must contrive somehow not to miss a drawing. That number meant something. But what expedient could he contrive to keep himself going?

“Wretched miser!” he mumbled.

If Mr. Sterne could at no time have told him anything new about his partner, he could have told Mr. Sterne that another use could be made of a man’s affliction than just to kick him out, and thus defer the term of a difficult payment for a year. To keep the secret of the affliction and induce him to stay was a better move. If without means, he would be anxious to remain; and that settled the question of refunding him his share. He did not know exactly how much Captain Whalley was disabled; but if it so happened that he put the ship ashore somewhere for good and all, it was not the owner’s fault — was it? He was not obliged to know that there was anything wrong. But probably nobody would raise such a point, and the ship was fully insured. He had had enough self-restraint to pay up the premiums. But this was not all. He could not believe Captain Whalley to be so confoundedly destitute as not to have some more money put away somewhere. If he, Massy, could get hold of it, that would pay for the boilers, and everything went on as before. And if she got lost in the end, so much the better. He hated her: he loathed the troubles that took his mind off the chances of fortune. He wished her at the bottom of the sea, and the insurance money in his pocket. And as, baffled, he left Captain Whalley’s cabin, he enveloped in the same hatred the ship with the worn-out boilers and the man with the dimmed eyes.

And our conduct after all is so much a matter of outside suggestion, that had it not been for his Jack’s drunken gabble he would have there and then had it out with this miserable man, who would neither help, nor stay, nor yet lose the ship. The old fraud! He longed to kick him out. But he restrained himself. Time enough for that — when he liked. There was a fearful new thought put into his head. Wasn’t he up to it after all? How that beast Jack had raved! “Find a safe trick to get rid of her.” Well, Jack was not so far wrong. A very clever trick had occurred to him. Aye! But what of the risk?

A feeling of pride — the pride of superiority to common prejudices — crept into his breast, made his heart beat fast, his mouth turn dry. Not everybody would dare; but he was Massy, and he was up to it!

Six bells were struck on deck. Eleven! He drank a glass of water, and sat down for ten minutes or so to calm himself. Then he got out of his chest a small bull's-eye lantern of his own and lit it.

Almost opposite his berth, across the narrow passage under the bridge, there was, in the iron deck-structure covering the stokehold fiddle and the boiler-space, a storeroom with iron sides, iron roof, iron-plated floor, too, on account of the heat below. All sorts of rubbish was shot there: it had a mound of scrap-iron in a corner; rows of empty oil-cans; sacks of cotton-waste, with a heap of charcoal, a deck-forge, fragments of an old hencoop, winch-covers all in rags, remnants of lamps, and a brown felt hat, discarded by a man dead now (of a fever on the Brazil coast), who had been once mate of the *Sofala*, had remained for years jammed forcibly behind a length of burst copper pipe, flung at some time or other out of the engine-room. A complete and imperious blackness pervaded that Capharnaum of forgotten things. A small shaft of light from Mr. Massy's bull's-eye fell slanting right through it.

His coat was unbuttoned; he shot the bolt of the door (there was no other opening), and, squatting before the scrap-heap, began to pack his pockets with pieces of iron. He packed them carefully, as if the rusty nuts, the broken bolts, the links of cargo chain, had been so much gold he had that one chance to carry away. He packed his side-pockets till they bulged, the breast pocket, the pockets inside. He turned over the pieces. Some he rejected. A small mist of powdered rust began to rise about his busy hands. Mr. Massy knew something of the scientific basis of his clever trick. If you want to deflect the magnetic needle of a ship's compass, soft iron is the best; likewise many small pieces in the pockets of a jacket would have more effect than a few large ones, because in that way you obtain a greater amount of surface for weight in your iron, and it's surface that tells.

He slipped out swiftly — two strides sufficed — and in his cabin he perceived that his hands were all red — red with rust. It disconcerted him, as though he had found them covered with blood: he looked himself over hastily. Why, his trowsers too! He had been rubbing his rusty palms on his legs.

He tore off the waistband button in his haste, brushed his coat, washed his hands. Then the air of guilt left him, and he sat down to wait.

He sat bolt upright and weighted with iron in his chair. He had a hard, lumpy bulk against each hip, felt the scrappy iron in his pockets touch his ribs at every breath, the downward drag of all these pounds hanging upon his shoulders. He looked very dull too, sitting idle there, and his yellow face, with motionless black eyes, had something passive and sad in its quietness.

When he heard eight bells struck above his head, he rose and made ready to go out. His movements seemed aimless, his lower lip had dropped a little, his eyes roamed about the cabin, and the tremendous tension of his will had robbed them of every vestige of intelligence.

With the last stroke of the bell the Serang appeared noiselessly on the bridge to relieve the mate. Sterne overflowed with good nature, since he had nothing more to desire.

“Got your eyes well open yet, Serang? It’s middling dark; I’ll wait till you get your sight properly.”

The old Malay murmured, looked up with his worn eyes, sidled away into the light of the binnacle, and, crossing his hands behind his back, fixed his eyes on the compass-card.

“You’ll have to keep a good look-out ahead for land, about half-past three. It’s fairly clear, though. You have looked in on the captain as you came along — eh? He knows the time? Well, then, I am off.”

At the foot of the ladder he stood aside for the captain. He watched him go up with an even, certain tread, and remained thoughtful for a moment. “It’s funny,” he said to himself, “but you can never tell whether that man has seen you or not. He might have heard me breathe this time.”

He was a wonderful man when all was said and done. They said he had had a name in his day. Mr. Sterne could well believe it; and he concluded serenely that Captain Whalley must be able to see people more or less — as himself just now, for instance — but not being certain of anybody, had to keep up that unnoticing silence of manner for fear of giving himself away. Mr. Sterne was a shrewd guesser.

This necessity of every moment brought home to Captain Whalley’s heart the humiliation of his falsehood. He had drifted into it from paternal love, from incredulity, from boundless trust in divine justice meted out to men’s feelings on this earth. He would give his poor Ivy the benefit of



another month's work; perhaps the affliction was only temporary. Surely God would not rob his child of his power to help, and cast him naked into a night without end. He had caught at every hope; and when the evidence of his misfortune was stronger than hope, he tried not to believe the manifest thing.

In vain. In the steadily darkening universe a sinister clearness fell upon his ideas. In the illuminating moments of suffering he saw life, men, all things, the whole earth with all her burden of created nature, as he had never seen them before.

Sometimes he was seized with a sudden vertigo and an overwhelming terror; and then the image of his daughter appeared. Her, too, he had never seen so clearly before. Was it possible that he should ever be unable to do anything whatever for her? Nothing. And not see her any more? Never.

Why? The punishment was too great for a little presumption, for a little pride. And at last he came to cling to his deception with a fierce determination to carry it out to the end, to save her money intact, and behold her once more with his own eyes. Afterwards — what? The idea of suicide was revolting to the vigor of his manhood. He had prayed for death till the prayers had stuck in his throat. All the days of his life he had prayed for daily bread, and not to be led into temptation, in a childlike humility of spirit. Did words mean anything? Whence did the gift of speech come? The violent beating of his heart reverberated in his head — seemed to shake his brain to pieces.

He sat down heavily in the deck-chair to keep the pretense of his watch. The night was dark. All the nights were dark now.

“Serang,” he said, half aloud.

“Ada, Tuan. I am here.”

“There are clouds on the sky?”

“There are, Tuan.”

“Let her be steered straight. North.”

“She is going north, Tuan.”

The Serang stepped back. Captain Whalley recognized Massy's footfalls on the bridge.

The engineer walked over to port and returned, passing behind the chair several times. Captain Whalley detected an unusual character as of prudent care in this prowling. The near presence of that man brought with it always a recrudescence of moral suffering for Captain Whalley. It was not remorse.

After all, he had done nothing but good to the poor devil. There was also a sense of danger — the necessity of a greater care.

Massy stopped and said —

“So you still say you must go?”

“I must indeed.”

“And you couldn’t at least leave the money for a term of years?”

“Impossible.”

“Can’t trust it with me without your care, eh?”

Captain Whalley remained silent. Massy sighed deeply over the back of the chair.

“It would just do to save me,” he said in a tremulous voice.

“I’ve saved you once.”

The chief engineer took off his coat with careful movements, and proceeded to feel for the brass hook screwed into the wooden stanchion. For this purpose he placed himself right in front of the binnacle, thus hiding completely the compass-card from the quartermaster at the wheel. “Tuan!” the lascar at last murmured softly, meaning to let the white man know that he could not see to steer.

Mr. Massy had accomplished his purpose. The coat was hanging from the nail, within six inches of the binnacle. And directly he had stepped aside the quartermaster, a middle-aged, pock-marked, Sumatra Malay, almost as dark as a negro, perceived with amazement that in that short time, in this smooth water, with no wind at all, the ship had gone swinging far out of her course. He had never known her get away like this before. With a slight grunt of astonishment he turned the wheel hastily to bring her head back north, which was the course. The grinding of the steering-chains, the chiding murmurs of the Serang, who had come over to the wheel, made a slight stir, which attracted Captain Whalley’s anxious attention. He said, “Take better care.” Then everything settled to the usual quiet on the bridge. Mr. Massy had disappeared.

But the iron in the pockets of the coat had done its work; and the Sofala, heading north by the compass, made untrue by this simple device, was no longer making a safe course for Pangu Bay.

The hiss of water parted by her stem, the throb of her engines, all the sounds of her faithful and laborious life, went on uninterrupted in the great calm of the sea joining on all sides the motionless layer of cloud over the sky. A gentle stillness as vast as the world seemed to wait upon her path,

enveloping her lovingly in a supreme caress. Mr. Massy thought there could be no better night for an arranged shipwreck.

Run up high and dry on one of the reefs east of Pangu — wait for daylight — hole in the bottom — out boats — Pangu Bay same evening. That's about it. As soon as she touched he would hasten on the bridge, get hold of the coat (nobody would notice in the dark), and shake it upside-down over the side, or even fling it into the sea. A detail. Who could guess? Coat been seen hanging there from that hook hundreds of times. Nevertheless, when he sat down on the lower step of the bridge-ladder his knees knocked together a little. The waiting part was the worst of it. At times he would begin to pant quickly, as though he had been running, and then breathe largely, swelling with the intimate sense of a mastered fate. Now and then he would hear the shuffle of the Serang's bare feet up there: quiet, low voices would exchange a few words, and lapse almost at once into silence. . . .

"Tell me directly you see any land, Serang."

"Yes, Tuan. Not yet."

"No, not yet," Captain Whalley would agree.

The ship had been the best friend of his decline. He had sent all the money he had made by and in the Sofala to his daughter. His thought lingered on the name. How often he and his wife had talked over the cot of the child in the big stern-cabin of the Condor; she would grow up, she would marry, she would love them, they would live near her and look at her happiness — it would go on without end. Well, his wife was dead, to the child he had given all he had to give; he wished he could come near her, see her, see her face once, live in the sound of her voice, that could make the darkness of the living grave ready for him supportable. He had been starved of love too long. He imagined her tenderness.

The Serang had been peering forward, and now and then glancing at the chair. He fidgeted restlessly, and suddenly burst out close to Captain Whalley —

"Tuan, do you see anything of the land?"

The alarmed voice brought Captain Whalley to his feet at once. He! See! And at the question, the curse of his blindness seemed to fall on him with a hundredfold force.

"What's the time?" he cried.

"Half-past three, Tuan."

“We are close. You must see. Look, I say. Look.”

Mr. Massy, awakened by the sudden sound of talking from a short doze on the lowest step, wondered why he was there. Ah! A faintness came over him. It is one thing to sow the seed of an accident and another to see the monstrous fruit hanging over your head ready to fall in the sound of agitated voices.

“There’s no danger,” he muttered thickly.

The horror of incertitude had seized upon Captain Whalley, the miserable mistrust of men, of things — of the very earth. He had steered that very course thirty-six times by the same compass — if anything was certain in this world it was its absolute, unerring correctness. Then what had happened? Did the Serang lie? Why lie? Why? Was he going blind too?

“Is there a mist? Look low on the water. Low down, I say.”

“Tuan, there’s no mist. See for yourself.”

Captain Whalley steadied the trembling of his limbs by an effort. Should he stop the engines at once and give himself away. A gust of irresolution swayed all sorts of bizarre notions in his mind. The unusual had come, and he was not fit to deal with it. In this passage of inexpressible anguish he saw her face — the face of a young girl — with an amazing strength of illusion. No, he must not give himself away after having gone so far for her sake. “You steered the course? You made it? Speak the truth.”

“Ya, Tuan. On the course now. Look.”

Captain Whalley strode to the binnacle, which to him made such a dim spot of light in an infinity of shapeless shadow. By bending his face right down to the glass he had been able before . . .

Having to stoop so low, he put out, instinctively, his arm to where he knew there was a stanchion to steady himself against. His hand closed on something that was not wood but cloth. The slight pull adding to the weight, the loop broke, and Mr. Massy’s coat falling, struck the deck heavily with a dull thump, accompanied by a lot of clicks.

“What’s this?”

Captain Whalley fell on his knees, with groping hands extended in a frank gesture of blindness. They trembled, these hands feeling for the truth. He saw it. Iron near the compass. Wrong course. Wreck her! His ship. Oh no. Not that.

“Jump and stop her!” he roared out in a voice not his own.

He ran himself — hands forward, a blind man, and while the clanging of the gong echoed still all over the ship, she seemed to butt full tilt into the side of a mountain.

It was low water along the north side of the strait. Mr. Massy had not reckoned on that. Instead of running aground for half her length, the Sofala butted the sheer ridge of a stone reef which would have been awash at high water. This made the shock absolutely terrific. Everybody in the ship that was standing was thrown down headlong: the shaken rigging made a great rattling to the very trucks. All the lights went out: several chain-guys, snapping, clattered against the funnel: there were crashes, pings of parted wire-rope, splintering sounds, loud cracks, the masthead lamp flew over the bows, and all the doors about the deck began to bang heavily. Then, after having hit, she rebounded, hit the second time the very same spot like a battering-ram. This completed the havoc: the funnel, with all the guys gone, fell over with a hollow sound of thunder, smashing the wheel to bits, crushing the frame of the awnings, breaking the lockers, filling the bridge with a mass of splinters, sticks, and broken wood. Captain Whalley picked himself up and stood knee-deep in wreckage, torn, bleeding, knowing the nature of the danger he had escaped mostly by the sound, and holding Mr. Massy's coat in his arms.

By this time Sterne (he had been flung out of his bunk) had set the engines astern. They worked for a few turns, then a voice bawled out, "Get out of the damned engine-room, Jack!" — and they stopped; but the ship had gone clear of the reef and lay still, with a heavy cloud of steam issuing from the broken deckpipes, and vanishing in wispy shapes into the night. Notwithstanding the suddenness of the disaster there was no shouting, as if the very violence of the shock had half-stunned the shadowy lot of people swaying here and there about her decks. The voice of the Serang pronounced distinctly above the confused murmurs —

"Eight fathom." He had heaved the lead.

Mr. Sterne cried out next in a strained pitch —

"Where the devil has she got to? Where are we?"

Captain Whalley replied in a calm bass —

"Amongst the reefs to the eastward."

"You know it, sir? Then she will never get out again."

"She will be sunk in five minutes. Boats, Sterne. Even one will save you all in this calm."

The Chinaman stokers went in a disorderly rush for the port boats. Nobody tried to check them. The Malays, after a moment of confusion, became quiet, and Mr. Sterne showed a good countenance. Captain Whalley had not moved. His thoughts were darker than this night in which he had lost his first ship.

“He made me lose a ship.”

Another tall figure standing before him amongst the litter of the smash on the bridge whispered insanely —

“Say nothing of it.”

Massy stumbled closer. Captain Whalley heard the chattering of his teeth.

“I have the coat.”

“Throw it down and come along,” urged the chattering voice. “B-b-b-b-boat!”

“You will get fifteen years for this.”

Mr. Massy had lost his voice. His speech was a mere dry rustling in his throat.

“Have mercy!”

“Had you any when you made me lose my ship? Mr. Massy, you shall get fifteen years for this!”

“I wanted money! Money! My own money! I will give you some money. Take half of it. You love money yourself.”

“There’s a justice . . .”

Massy made an awful effort, and in a strange, half choked utterance —

“You blind devil! It’s you that drove me to it.”

Captain Whalley, hugging the coat to his breast, made no sound. The light had ebbed for ever from the world — let everything go. But this man should not escape scot-free.

Sterne’s voice commanded —

“Lower away!”

The blocks rattled.

“Now then,” he cried, “over with you. This way. You, Jack, here. Mr. Massy! Mr. Massy! Captain! Quick, sir! Let’s get —

“I shall go to prison for trying to cheat the insurance, but you’ll get exposed; you, honest man, who has been cheating me. You are poor. Aren’t you? You’ve nothing but the five hundred pounds. Well, you have nothing at all now. The ship’s lost, and the insurance won’t be paid.”

Captain Whalley did not move. True! Ivy's money! Gone in this wreck. Again he had a flash of insight. He was indeed at the end of his tether.

Urgent voices cried out together alongside. Massy did not seem able to tear himself away from the bridge. He chattered and hissed despairingly —

“Give it up to me! Give it up!”

“No,” said Captain Whalley; “I could not give it up. You had better go. Don't wait, man, if you want to live. She's settling down by the head fast. No; I shall keep it, but I shall stay on board.”

Massy did not seem to understand; but the love of life, awakened suddenly, drove him away from the bridge.

Captain Whalley laid the coat down, and stumbled amongst the heaps of wreckage to the side.

“Is Mr. Massy in with you?” he called out into the night.

Sterne from the boat shouted —

“Yes; we've got him. Come along, sir. It's madness to stay longer.”

Captain Whalley felt along the rail carefully, and, without a word, cast off the painter. They were expecting him still down there. They were waiting, till a voice suddenly exclaimed —

“We are adrift! Shove off!”

“Captain Whalley! Leap! . . . pull up a little . . . leap! You can swim.”

In that old heart, in that vigorous body, there was, that nothing should be wanting, a horror of death that apparently could not be overcome by the horror of blindness. But after all, for Ivy he had carried his point, walking in his darkness to the very verge of a crime. God had not listened to his prayers. The light had finished ebbing out of the world; not a glimmer. It was a dark waste; but it was unseemly that a Whalley who had gone so far to carry a point should continue to live. He must pay the price.

“Leap as far as you can, sir; we will pick you up.”

They did not hear him answer. But their shouting seemed to remind him of something. He groped his way back, and sought for Mr. Massy's coat. He could swim indeed; people sucked down by the whirlpool of a sinking ship do come up sometimes to the surface, and it was unseemly that a Whalley, who had made up his mind to die, should be beguiled by chance into a struggle. He would put all these pieces of iron into his own pockets.

They, looking from the boat, saw the Sofala, a black mass upon a black sea, lying still at an appalling cant. No sound came from her. Then, with a great bizarre shuffling noise, as if the boilers had broken through the

bulkheads, and with a faint muffled detonation, where the ship had been there appeared for a moment something standing upright and narrow, like a rock out of the sea. Then that too disappeared.

When the Sofala failed to come back to Batu Beru at the proper time, Mr. Van Wyk understood at once that he would never see her any more. But he did not know what had happened till some months afterwards, when, in a native craft lent him by his Sultan, he had made his way to the Sofala's port of registry, where already her existence and the official inquiry into her loss was beginning to be forgotten.

It had not been a very remarkable or interesting case, except for the fact that the captain had gone down with his sinking ship. It was the only life lost; and Mr. Van Wyk would not have been able to learn any details had it not been for Sterne, whom he met one day on the quay near the bridge over the creek, almost on the very spot where Captain Whalley, to preserve his daughter's five hundred pounds intact, had turned to get a sampan which would take him on board the Sofala.

From afar Mr. Van Wyk saw Sterne blink straight at him and raise his hand to his hat. They drew into the shade of a building (it was a bank), and the mate related how the boat with the crew got into Pangu Bay about six hours after the accident, and how they had lived for a fortnight in a state of destitution before they found an opportunity to get away from that beastly place. The inquiry had exonerated everybody from all blame. The loss of the ship was put down to an unusual set of the current. Indeed, it could not have been anything else: there was no other way to account for the ship being set seven miles to the eastward of her position during the middle watch.

"A piece of bad luck for me, sir."

Sterne passed his tongue on his lips, and glanced aside. "I lost the advantage of being employed by you, sir. I can never be sorry enough. But here it is: one man's poison, another man's meat. This could not have been handier for Mr. Massy if he had arranged that shipwreck himself. The most timely total loss I've ever heard of."

"What became of that Massy?" asked Mr. Van Wyk.

"He, sir? Ha! ha! He would keep on telling me that he meant to buy another ship; but as soon as he had the money in his pocket he cleared out for Manilla by mail-boat early in the morning. I gave him chase right aboard, and he told me then he was going to make his fortune dead sure in



Manilla. I could go to the devil for all he cared. And yet he as good as promised to give me the command if I didn't talk too much."

"You never said anything . . ." Mr. Van Wyk began.

"Not I, sir. Why should I? I mean to get on, but the dead aren't in my way," said Sterne. His eyelids were beating rapidly, then drooped for an instant. "Besides, sir, it would have been an awkward business. You made me hold my tongue just a bit too long."

"Do you know how it was that Captain Whalley remained on board? Did he really refuse to leave? Come now! Or was it perhaps an accidental . . .?"

"Nothing!" Sterne interrupted with energy. "I tell you I yelled for him to leap overboard. He simply must have cast off the painter of the boat himself. We all yelled to him — that is, Jack and I. He wouldn't even answer us. The ship was as silent as a grave to the last. Then the boilers fetched away, and down she went. Accident! Not it! The game was up, sir, I tell you."

This was all that Sterne had to say.

Mr. Van Wyk had been of course made the guest of the club for a fortnight, and it was there that he met the lawyer in whose office had been signed the agreement between Massy and Captain Whalley.

"Extraordinary old man," he said. "He came into my office from nowhere in particular as you may say, with his five hundred pounds to place, and that engineer fellow following him anxiously. And now he is gone out a little inexplicably, just as he came. I could never understand him quite. There was no mystery at all about that Massy, eh? I wonder whether Whalley refused to leave the ship. It would have been foolish. He was blameless, as the court found."

Mr. Van Wyk had known him well, he said, and he could not believe in suicide. Such an act would not have been in character with what he knew of the man.

"It is my opinion, too," the lawyer agreed. The general theory was that the captain had remained too long on board trying to save something of importance. Perhaps the chart which would clear him, or else something of value in his cabin. The painter of the boat had come adrift of itself it was supposed. However, strange to say, some little time before that voyage poor Whalley had called in his office and had left with him a sealed envelope addressed to his daughter, to be forwarded to her in case of his death. Still it

was nothing very unusual, especially in a man of his age. Mr. Van Wyk shook his head. Captain Whalley looked good for a hundred years.

“Perfectly true,” assented the lawyer. “The old fellow looked as though he had come into the world full-grown and with that long beard. I could never, somehow, imagine him either younger or older — don’t you know. There was a sense of physical power about that man too. And perhaps that was the secret of that something peculiar in his person which struck everybody who came in contact with him. He looked indestructible by any ordinary means that put an end to the rest of us. His deliberate, stately courtesy of manner was full of significance. It was as though he were certain of having plenty of time for everything. Yes, there was something indestructible about him; and the way he talked sometimes you might have thought he believed it himself. When he called on me last with that letter he wanted me to take charge of, he was not depressed at all. Perhaps a shade more deliberate in his talk and manner. Not depressed in the least. Had he a presentiment, I wonder? Perhaps! Still it seems a miserable end for such a striking figure.”

“Oh yes! It was a miserable end,” Mr. Van Wyk said, with so much fervor that the lawyer looked up at him curiously; and afterwards, after parting with him, he remarked to an acquaintance —

“Queer person that Dutch tobacco-planter from Batu Beru. Know anything of him?”

“Heaps of money,” answered the bank manager. “I hear he’s going home by the next mail to form a company to take over his estates. Another tobacco district thrown open. He’s wise, I think. These good times won’t last for ever.”

In the southern hemisphere Captain Whalley’s daughter had no presentiment of evil when she opened the envelope addressed to her in the lawyer’s handwriting. She had received it in the afternoon; all the boarders had gone out, her boys were at school, her husband sat upstairs in his big arm-chair with a book, thin-faced, wrapped up in rugs to the waist. The house was still, and the grayness of a cloudy day lay against the panes of three lofty windows.

In a shabby dining-room, where a faint cold smell of dishes lingered all the year round, sitting at the end of a long table surrounded by many chairs pushed in with their backs close against the edge of the perpetually laid table-cloth, she read the opening sentence: “Most profound regret —

painful duty — your father is no more — in accordance with his instructions — fatal casualty — consolation — no blame attached to his memory. . . .”

Her face was thin, her temples a little sunk under the smooth bands of black hair, her lips remained resolutely compressed, while her dark eyes grew larger, till at last, with a low cry, she stood up, and instantly stooped to pick up another envelope which had slipped off her knees on to the floor.

She tore it open, snatched out the inclosure. . . .

“My dearest child,” it said, “I am writing this while I am able yet to write legibly. I am trying hard to save for you all the money that is left; I have only kept it to serve you better. It is yours. It shall not be lost: it shall not be touched. There’s five hundred pounds. Of what I have earned I have kept nothing back till now. For the future, if I live, I must keep back some — a little — to bring me to you. I must come to you. I must see you once more.

“It is hard to believe that you will ever look on these lines. God seems to have forgotten me. I want to see you — and yet death would be a greater favor. If you ever read these words, I charge you to begin by thanking a God merciful at last, for I shall be dead then, and it will be well. My dear, I am at the end of my tether.”

The next paragraph began with the words: “My sight is going . . .”

She read no more that day. The hand holding up the paper to her eyes fell slowly, and her slender figure in a plain black dress walked rigidly to the window. Her eyes were dry: no cry of sorrow or whisper of thanks went up to heaven from her lips. Life had been too hard, for all the efforts of his love. It had silenced her emotions. But for the first time in all these years its sting had departed, the carking care of poverty, the meanness of a hard struggle for bread. Even the image of her husband and of her children seemed to glide away from her into the gray twilight; it was her father’s face alone that she saw, as though he had come to see her, always quiet and big, as she had seen him last, but with something more august and tender in his aspect.

She slipped his folded letter between the two buttons of her plain black bodice, and leaning her forehead against a window-pane remained there till dusk, perfectly motionless, giving him all the time she could spare. Gone! Was it possible? My God, was it possible! The blow had come softened by the spaces of the earth, by the years of absence. There had been whole days

when she had not thought of him at all — had no time. But she had loved him, she felt she had loved him, after all.

## ***GASPAR RUIZ***



### **I**

A revolutionary war raises many strange characters out of the obscurity which is the common lot of humble lives in an undisturbed state of society. Certain individualities grow into fame through their vices and their virtues, or simply by their actions, which may have a temporary importance; and then they become forgotten. The names of a few leaders alone survive the end of armed strife and are further preserved in history; so that, vanishing from men's active memories, they still exist in books.

The name of General Santierra attained that cold paper-and-ink immortality. He was a South American of good family, and the books published in his lifetime numbered him amongst the liberators of that continent from the oppressive rule of Spain.

That long contest, waged for independence on one side and for dominion on the other, developed in the course of years and the vicissitudes of changing fortune the fierceness and inhumanity of a struggle for life. All feelings of pity and compassion disappeared in the growth of political hatred. And, as is usual in war, the mass of the people, who had the least to gain by the issue, suffered most in their obscure persons and their humble fortunes.

General Santierra began his service as lieutenant in the patriot army raised and commanded by the famous San Martin, afterwards conqueror of Lima and liberator of Peru. A great battle had just been fought on the banks of the river Bio-Bio. Amongst the prisoners made upon the routed Royalist troops there was a soldier called Gaspar Ruiz. His powerful build and his big head rendered him remarkable amongst his fellow-captives. The personality of the man was unmistakable. Some months before he had been missed from the ranks of Republican troops after one of the many skirmishes which preceded the great battle. And now, having been captured arms in hand amongst Royalists, he could expect no other fate but to be shot as a deserter.

Gaspar Ruiz, however, was not a deserter; his mind was hardly active enough to take a discriminating view of the advantages or perils of treachery. Why should he change sides? He had really been made a

prisoner, had suffered ill-usage and many privations. Neither side showed tenderness to its adversaries. There came a day when he was ordered, together with some other captured rebels, to march in the front rank of the Royal troops. A musket had been thrust into his hands. He had taken it. He had marched. He did not want to be killed with circumstances of peculiar atrocity for refusing to march. He did not understand heroism but it was his intention to throw his musket away at the first opportunity. Meantime he had gone on loading and firing, from fear of having his brains blown out at the first sign of unwillingness, by some non-commissioned officer of the King of Spain. He tried to set forth these elementary considerations before the sergeant of the guard set over him and some twenty other such deserters, who had been condemned summarily to be shot.

It was in the quadrangle of the fort at the back of the batteries which command the roadstead of Valparaiso. The officer who had identified him had gone on without listening to his protestations. His doom was sealed; his hands were tied very tightly together behind his back; his body was sore all over from the many blows with sticks and butts of muskets which had hurried him along on the painful road from the place of his capture to the gate of the fort. This was the only kind of systematic attention the prisoners had received from their escort during a four days' journey across a scantily watered tract of country. At the crossings of rare streams they were permitted to quench their thirst by lapping hurriedly like dogs. In the evening a few scraps of meat were thrown amongst them as they dropped down dead-beat upon the stony ground of the halting-place.

As he stood in the courtyard of the castle in the early morning, after having been driven hard all night, Gaspar Ruiz's throat was parched, and his tongue felt very large and dry in his mouth.

And Gaspar Ruiz, besides being very thirsty, was stirred by a feeling of sluggish anger, which he could not very well express, as though the vigour of his spirit were by no means equal to the strength of his body.

The other prisoners in the batch of the condemned hung their heads, looking obstinately on the ground. But Gaspar Ruiz kept on repeating: "What should I desert for to the Royalists? Why should I desert? Tell me, Estaban!"

He addressed himself to the sergeant, who happened to belong to the same part of the country as himself. But the sergeant, after shrugging his meagre shoulders once, paid no further attention to the deep murmuring

voice at his back. It was indeed strange that Gaspar Ruiz should desert. His people were in too humble a station to feel much the disadvantages of any form of government. There was no reason why Gaspar Ruiz should wish to uphold in his own person the rule of the King of Spain. Neither had he been anxious to exert himself for its subversion. He had joined the side of Independence in an extremely reasonable and natural manner. A band of patriots appeared one morning early, surrounding his father's ranche, spearing the watch-dogs and ham-stringing a fat cow all in the twinkling of an eye, to the cries of "Viva la Libertad!" Their officer discoursed of Liberty with enthusiasm and eloquence after a long and refreshing sleep. When they left in the evening, taking with them some of Ruiz, the father's, best horses to replace their own lamed animals, Gaspar Ruiz went away with them, having been invited pressingly to do so by the eloquent officer.

Shortly afterwards a detachment of Royalist troops coming to pacify the district, burnt the ranche, carried off the remaining horses and cattle, and having thus deprived the old people of all their worldly possessions, left them sitting under a bush in the enjoyment of the inestimable boon of life.

## II

Gaspar Ruiz, condemned to death as a deserter, was not thinking either of his native place or of his parents, to whom he had been a good son on account of the mildness of his character and the great strength of his limbs. The practical advantage of this last was made still more valuable to his father by his obedient disposition. Gaspar Ruiz had an acquiescent soul.

But it was stirred now to a sort of dim revolt by his dislike to die the death of a traitor. He was not a traitor. He said again to the sergeant: "You know I did not desert, Estaban. You know I remained behind amongst the trees with three others to keep the enemy back while the detachment was running away!"

Lieutenant Santierra, little more than a boy at the time, and unused as yet to the sanguinary imbecilities of a state of war, had lingered near by, as if fascinated by the sight of these men who were to be shot presently — "for an example" — as the Commandante had said.

The sergeant, without deigning to look at the prisoner, addressed himself to the young officer with a superior smile.

"Ten men would not have been enough to make him a prisoner, *mi teniente*. Moreover, the other three rejoined the detachment after dark. Why should he, unwounded and the strongest of them all, have failed to do so?"

“My strength is as nothing against a mounted man with a lasso,” Gaspar Ruiz protested, eagerly. “He dragged me behind his horse for half a mile.”

At this excellent reason the sergeant only laughed contemptuously. The young officer hurried away after the Commandante.

Presently the adjutant of the castle came by. He was a truculent, raw-boned man in a ragged uniform. His spluttering voice issued out of a flat yellow face. The sergeant learned from him that the condemned men would not be shot till sunset. He begged then to know what he was to do with them meantime.

The adjutant looked savagely round the courtyard and, pointing to the door of a small dungeon-like guardroom, receiving light and air through one heavily barred window, said: “Drive the scoundrels in there.”

The sergeant, tightening his grip upon the stick he carried in virtue of his rank, executed this order with alacrity and zeal. He hit Gaspar Ruiz, whose movements were slow, over his head and shoulders. Gaspar Ruiz stood still for a moment under the shower of blows, biting his lip thoughtfully as if absorbed by a perplexing mental process — then followed the others without haste. The door was locked, and the adjutant carried off the key.

By noon the heat of that vaulted place crammed to suffocation had become unbearable. The prisoners crowded towards the window, begging their guards for a drop of water; but the soldiers remained lying in indolent attitudes wherever there was a little shade under a wall, while the sentry sat with his back against the door smoking a cigarette, and raising his eyebrows philosophically from time to time. Gaspar Ruiz had pushed his way to the window with irresistible force. His capacious chest needed more air than the others; his big face, resting with its chin on the ledge, pressed close to the bars, seemed to support the other faces crowding up for breath. From moaned entreaties they had passed to desperate cries, and the tumultuous howling of those thirsty men obliged a young officer who was just then crossing the courtyard to shout in order to make himself heard.

“Why don’t you give some water to these prisoners?”

The sergeant, with an air of surprised innocence, excused himself by the remark that all those men were condemned to die in a very few hours.

Lieutenant Santierra stamped his foot. “They are condemned to death, not to torture,” he shouted. “Give them some water at once.”

Impressed by this appearance of anger, the soldiers bestirred themselves, and the sentry, snatching up his musket, stood to attention.



But when a couple of buckets were found and filled from the well, it was discovered that they could not be passed through the bars, which were set too close. At the prospect of quenching their thirst, the shrieks of those trampled down in the struggle to get near the opening became very heartrending. But when the soldiers who had lifted the buckets towards the window put them to the ground again helplessly, the yell of disappointment was still more terrible.

The soldiers of the army of Independence were not equipped with canteens. A small tin cup was found, but its approach to the opening caused such a commotion, such yells of rage and pain in the vague mass of limbs behind the straining faces at the window, that Lieutenant Santierra cried out hurriedly, "No, no — you must open the door, sergeant."

The sergeant, shrugging his shoulders, explained that he had no right to open the door even if he had had the key. But he had not the key. The adjutant of the garrison kept the key. Those men were giving much unnecessary trouble, since they had to die at sunset in any case. Why they had not been shot at once early in the morning he could not understand.

Lieutenant Santierra kept his back studiously to the window. It was at his earnest solicitations that the Commandante had delayed the execution. This favour had been granted to him in consideration of his distinguished family and of his father's high position amongst the chiefs of the Republican party. Lieutenant Santierra believed that the General commanding would visit the fort some time in the afternoon, and he ingenuously hoped that his naive intercession would induce that severe man to pardon some, at least, of those criminals. In the revulsion of his feeling his interference stood revealed now as guilty and futile meddling. It appeared to him obvious that the general would never even consent to listen to his petition. He could never save those men, and he had only made himself responsible for the sufferings added to the cruelty of their fate.

"Then go at once and get the key from the adjutant," said Lieutenant Santierra.

The sergeant shook his head with a sort of bashful smile, while his eyes glanced sideways at Gaspar Ruiz's face, motionless and silent, staring through the bars at the bottom of a heap of other haggard, distorted, yelling faces.

His worship the adjutant de Plaza, the sergeant murmured, was having his siesta; and supposing that he, the sergeant, would be allowed access to

him, the only result he expected would be to have his soul flogged out of his body for presuming to disturb his worship's repose. He made a deprecatory movement with his hands, and stood stock-still, looking down modestly upon his brown toes.

Lieutenant Santierra glared with indignation, but hesitated. His handsome oval face, as smooth as a girl's, flushed with the shame of his perplexity. Its nature humiliated his spirit. His hairless upper lip trembled; he seemed on the point of either bursting into a fit of rage or into tears of dismay.

Fifty years later, General Santierra, the venerable relic of revolutionary times, was well able to remember the feelings of the young lieutenant. Since he had given up riding altogether, and found it difficult to walk beyond the limits of his garden, the general's greatest delight was to entertain in his house the officers of the foreign men-of-war visiting the harbour. For Englishmen he had a preference, as for old companions in arms. English naval men of all ranks accepted his hospitality with curiosity, because he had known Lord Cochrane and had taken part, on board the patriot squadron commanded by that marvellous seaman, in the cutting out and blockading operations before Callao — an episode of unalloyed glory in the wars of Independence and of endless honour in the fighting tradition of Englishmen. He was a fair linguist, this ancient survivor of the Liberating armies. A trick of smoothing his long white beard whenever he was short of a word in French or English imparted an air of leisurely dignity to the tone of his reminiscences.

### III

"Yes, my friends," he used to say to his guests, "what would you have? A youth of seventeen summers, without worldly experience, and owing my rank only to the glorious patriotism of my father, may God rest his soul. I suffered immense humiliation, not so much from the disobedience of that subordinate, who, after all, was responsible for those prisoners; but I suffered because, like the boy I was, I myself dreaded going to the adjutant for the key. I had felt, before, his rough and cutting tongue. Being quite a common fellow, with no merit except his savage valour, he made me feel his contempt and dislike from the first day I joined my battalion in garrison at the fort. It was only a fortnight before! I would have confronted him sword in hand, but I shrank from the mocking brutality of his sneers.

"I don't remember having been so miserable in my life before or since. The torment of my sensibility was so great that I wished the sergeant to fall

dead at my feet, and the stupid soldiers who stared at me to turn into corpses; and even those wretches for whom my entreaties had procured a reprieve I wished dead also, because I could not face them without shame. A mephitic heat like a whiff of air from hell came out of that dark place in which they were confined. Those at the window who had heard what was going on jeered at me in very desperation: one of these fellows, gone mad no doubt, kept on urging me volubly to order the soldiers to fire through the window. His insane loquacity made my heart turn faint. And my feet were like lead. There was no higher officer to whom I could appeal. I had not even the firmness of spirit to simply go away.

“Benumbed by my remorse, I stood with my back to the window. You must not suppose that all this lasted a long time. How long could it have been? A minute? If you measured by mental suffering it was like a hundred years; a longer time than all my life has been since. No, certainly, it was not so much as a minute. The hoarse screaming of those miserable wretches died out in their dry throats, and then suddenly a voice spoke, a deep voice muttering calmly. It called upon me to turn round.

“That voice, senores, proceeded from the head of Gaspar Ruiz. Of his body I could see nothing. Some of his fellow-captives had clambered upon his back. He was holding them up. His eyes blinked without looking at me. That and the moving of his lips was all he seemed able to manage in his overloaded state. And when I turned round, this head, that seemed more than human size resting on its chin under a multitude of other heads, asked me whether I really desired to quench the thirst of the captives.

“I said, ‘Yes, yes!’ eagerly, and came up quite close to the window. I was like a child, and did not know what would happen. I was anxious to be comforted in my helplessness and remorse.

“‘Have you the authority, Senor teniente, to release my wrists from their bonds?’ Gaspar Ruiz’s head asked me.

“His features expressed no anxiety, no hope; his heavy eyelids blinked upon his eyes that looked past me straight into the courtyard.

“As if in an ugly dream, I spoke, stammering: ‘What do you mean? And how can I reach the bonds on your wrists?’

“‘I will try what I can do,’ he said; and then that large staring head moved at last, and all the wild faces piled up in that window disappeared, tumbling down. He had shaken his load off with one movement, so strong he was.

“And he had not only shaken it off, but he got free of the crush and vanished from my sight. For a moment there was no one at all to be seen at the window. He had swung about, butting and shouldering, clearing a space for himself in the only way he could do it with his hands tied behind his back.

“Finally, backing to the opening, he pushed out to me between the bars his wrists, lashed with many turns of rope. His hands, very swollen, with knotted veins, looked enormous and unwieldy. I saw his bent back. It was very broad. His voice was like the muttering of a bull.

“‘Cut, Senor teniente. Cut!’

“I drew my sword, my new unblunted sword that had seen no service as yet, and severed the many turns of the hide rope. I did this without knowing the why and the wherefore of my action, but as it were compelled by my faith in that man. The sergeant made as if to cry out, but astonishment deprived him of his voice, and he remained standing with his mouth open as if overtaken by sudden imbecility.

“I sheathed my sword and faced the soldiers. An air of awestruck expectation had replaced their usual listless apathy. I heard the voice of Gaspar Ruiz shouting inside, but the words I could not make out plainly. I suppose that to see him with his arms free augmented the influence of his strength: I mean by this, the spiritual influence that with ignorant people attaches to an exceptional degree of bodily vigour. In fact, he was no more to be feared than before, on account of the numbness of his arms and hands, which lasted for some time.

“The sergeant had recovered his power of speech. ‘By all the saints!’ he cried, ‘we shall have to get a cavalry man with a lasso to secure him again, if he is to be led to the place of execution. Nothing less than a good enlazador on a good horse can subdue him. Your worship was pleased to perform a very mad thing.’

“I had nothing to say. I was surprised myself, and I felt a childish curiosity to see what would happen next. But the sergeant was thinking of the difficulty of controlling Gaspar Ruiz when the time for making an example would come.

“‘Or perhaps,’ the sergeant pursued, vexedly, ‘we shall be obliged to shoot him down as he dashes out when the door is opened.’ He was going to give further vent to his anxieties as to the proper carrying out of the sentence; but he interrupted himself with a sudden exclamation, snatched a

musket from a soldier, and stood watchful with his eyes fixed on the window.”

#### IV

“Gaspar Ruiz had clambered up on the sill, and sat down there with his feet against the thickness of the wall and his knees slightly bent. The window was not quite broad enough for the length of his legs. It appeared to my crestfallen perception that he meant to keep the window all to himself. He seemed to be taking up a comfortable position. Nobody inside dared to approach him now he could strike with his hands.

“‘Por Dios!’ I heard the sergeant muttering at my elbow, ‘I shall shoot him through the head now, and get rid of that trouble. He is a condemned man.’

“At that I looked at him angrily. ‘The general has not confirmed the sentence,’ I said — though I knew well in my heart that these were but vain words. The sentence required no confirmation. ‘You have no right to shoot him unless he tries to escape,’ I added, firmly.

“‘But sangre de Dios!’ the sergeant yelled out, bringing his musket up to the shoulder, ‘he is escaping now. Look!’

“But I, as if that Gaspar Ruiz had cast a spell upon me, struck the musket upward, and the bullet flew over the roofs somewhere. The sergeant dashed his arm to the ground and stared. He might have commanded the soldiers to fire, but he did not. And if he had he would not have been obeyed, I think, just then.

“With his feet against the thickness of the wall and his hairy hands grasping the iron bar, Gaspar sat still. It was an attitude. Nothing happened for a time. And suddenly it dawned upon us that he was straightening his bowed back and contracting his arms. His lips were twisted into a snarl. Next thing we perceived was that the bar of forged iron was being bent slowly by the mightiness of his pull. The sun was beating full upon his cramped, unquivering figure. A shower of sweat-drops burst out of his forehead. Watching the bar grow crooked, I saw a little blood ooze from under his finger-nails. Then he let go. For a moment he remained all huddled up, with a hanging head, looking drowsily into the upturned palms of his mighty hands. Indeed he seemed to have dozed off. Suddenly he flung himself backwards on the sill, and setting the soles of his bare feet against the other middle bar, he bent that one, too, but in the opposite direction from the first.

“Such was his strength, which in this case relieved my painful feelings. And the man seemed to have done nothing. Except for the change of position in order to use his feet, which made us all start by its swiftness, my recollection is that of immobility. But he had bent the bars wide apart. And now he could get out if he liked; but he dropped his legs inwards, and looking over his shoulder beckoned to the soldiers. ‘Hand up the water,’ he said. ‘I will give them all a drink.’

“He was obeyed. For a moment I expected man and bucket to disappear, overwhelmed by the rush of eagerness; I thought they would pull him down with their teeth. There was a rush, but holding the bucket on his lap he repulsed the assault of those wretches by the mere swinging of his feet. They flew backwards at every kick, yelling with pain; and the soldiers laughed, gazing at the window.

“They all laughed, holding their sides, except the sergeant, who was gloomy and morose. He was afraid the prisoners would rise and break out — which would have been a bad example. But there was no fear of that, and I stood myself before the window with my drawn sword. When sufficiently tamed by the strength of Gaspar Ruiz they came up one by one, stretching their necks and presenting their lips to the edge of the bucket which the strong man tilted towards them from his knees with an extraordinary air of charity, gentleness, and compassion. That benevolent appearance was of course the effect of his care in not spilling the water and of his attitude as he sat on the sill; for, if a man lingered with his lips glued to the rim of the bucket after Gaspar Ruiz had said ‘You have had enough,’ there would be no tenderness or mercy in the shove of the foot which would send him groaning and doubled up far into the interior of the prison, where he would knock down two or three others before he fell himself. They came up to him again and again; it looked as if they meant to drink the well dry before going to their death; but the soldiers were so amused by Gaspar Ruiz’s systematic proceedings that they carried the water up to the window cheerfully.

“When the adjutant came out after his siesta there was some trouble over this affair, I can assure you. And the worst of it was that the general whom we expected never came to the castle that day.”

The guests of General Santierra unanimously expressed their regret that the man of such strength and patience had not been saved.

“He was not saved by my interference,” said the General. “The prisoners were led to execution half an hour before sunset. Gaspar Ruiz, contrary to the sergeant’s apprehensions, gave no trouble. There was no necessity to get a cavalry man with a lasso in order to subdue him, as if he were a wild bull of the campo. I believe he marched out with his arms free amongst the others who were bound. I did not see. I was not there. I had been put under arrest for interfering with the prisoner’s guard. About dusk, sitting dismally in my quarters, I heard three volleys fired, and thought that I should never hear of Gaspar Ruiz again. He fell with the others. But we were to hear of him nevertheless, though the sergeant boasted that as he lay on his face expiring or dead in the heap of the slain, he had slashed his neck with a sword. He had done this, he said, to make sure of ridding the world of a dangerous traitor.

“I confess to you, senores, that I thought of that strong man with a sort of gratitude, and with some admiration. He had used his strength honourably. There dwelt, then, in his soul no fierceness corresponding to the vigour of his body.”

## V

Gaspar Ruiz, who could with ease bend apart the heavy iron bars of the prison, was led out with others to summary execution. “Every bullet has its billet,” runs the proverb. All the merit of proverbs consists in the concise and picturesque expression. In the surprise of our minds is found their persuasiveness. In other words, we are struck and convinced by the shock.

What surprises us is the form, not the substance. Proverbs are art — cheap art. As a general rule they are not true; unless indeed they happen to be mere platitudes, as for instance the proverb, “Half a loaf is better than no bread,” or “A miss is as good as a mile.” Some proverbs are simply imbecile, others are immoral. That one evolved out of the naive heart of the great Russian people, “Man discharges the piece, but God carries the bullet,” is piously atrocious, and at bitter variance with the accepted conception of a compassionate God. It would indeed be an inconsistent occupation for the Guardian of the poor, the innocent, and the helpless, to carry the bullet, for instance, into the heart of a father.

Gaspar Ruiz was childless, he had no wife, he had never been in love. He had hardly ever spoken to a woman, beyond his mother and the ancient negress of the household, whose wrinkled skin was the colour of cinders, and whose lean body was bent double from age. If some bullets from those

muskets fired off at fifteen paces were specifically destined for the heart of Gaspar Ruiz, they all missed their billet. One, however, carried away a small piece of his ear, and another a fragment of flesh from his shoulder.

A red and unclouded sun setting into a purple ocean looked with a fiery stare upon the enormous wall of the Cordilleras, worthy witnesses of his glorious extinction. But it is inconceivable that it should have seen the ant-like men busy with their absurd and insignificant trials of killing and dying for reasons that, apart from being generally childish, were also imperfectly understood. It did light up, however, the backs of the firing party and the faces of the condemned men. Some of them had fallen on their knees, others remained standing, a few averted their heads from the levelled barrels of muskets. Gaspar Ruiz, upright, the burliest of them all, hung his big shock head. The low sun dazzled him a little, and he counted himself a dead man already.

He fell at the first discharge. He fell because he thought he was a dead man. He struck the ground heavily. The jar of the fall surprised him. "I am not dead apparently," he thought to himself, when he heard the execution platoon reloading its arms at the word of command. It was then that the hope of escape dawned upon him for the first time. He remained lying stretched out with rigid limbs under the weight of two bodies collapsed crosswise upon his back.

By the time the soldiers had fired a third volley into the slightly stirring heaps of the slain, the sun had gone out of sight, and almost immediately with the darkening of the ocean dusk fell upon the coasts of the young Republic. Above the gloom of the lowlands the snowy peaks of the Cordilleras remained luminous and crimson for a long time. The soldiers before marching back to the fort sat down to smoke.

The sergeant with a naked sword in his hand strolled away by himself along the heap of the dead. He was a humane man, and watched for any stir or twitch of limb in the merciful idea of plunging the point of his blade into any body giving the slightest sign of life. But none of the bodies afforded him an opportunity for the display of this charitable intention. Not a muscle twitched amongst them, not even the powerful muscles of Gaspar Ruiz, who, deluged with the blood of his neighbours and shamming death, strove to appear more lifeless than the others.

He was lying face down. The sergeant recognized him by his stature, and being himself a very small man, looked with envy and contempt at the



prostration of so much strength. He had always disliked that particular soldier. Moved by an obscure animosity, he inflicted a long gash across the neck of Gaspar Ruiz, with some vague notion of making sure of that strong man's death, as if a powerful physique were more able to resist the bullets. For the sergeant had no doubt that Gaspar Ruiz had been shot through in many places. Then he passed on, and shortly afterwards marched off with his men, leaving the bodies to the care of crows and vultures.

Gaspar Ruiz had restrained a cry, though it had seemed to him that his head was cut off at a blow; and when darkness came, shaking off the dead, whose weight had oppressed him, he crawled away over the plain on his hands and knees. After drinking deeply, like a wounded beast, at a shallow stream, he assumed an upright posture, and staggered on light-headed and aimless, as if lost amongst the stars of the clear night. A small house seemed to rise out of the ground before him. He stumbled into the porch and struck at the door with his fist. There was not a gleam of light. Gaspar Ruiz might have thought that the inhabitants had fled from it, as from many others in the neighbourhood, had it not been for the shouts of abuse that answered his thumping. In his feverish and enfeebled state the angry screaming seemed to him part of a hallucination belonging to the weird, dreamlike feeling of his unexpected condemnation to death, of the thirst suffered, of the volleys fired at him within fifteen paces, of his head being cut off at a blow. "Open the door!" he cried. "Open in the name of God!"

An infuriated voice from within jeered at him: "Come in, come in. This house belongs to you. All this land belongs to you. Come and take it."

"For the love of God," Gaspar Ruiz murmured.

"Does not all the land belong to you patriots?" the voice on the other side of the door screamed on. "Are you not a patriot?"

Gaspar Ruiz did not know. "I am a wounded man," he said, apathetically.

All became still inside. Gaspar Ruiz lost the hope of being admitted, and lay down under the porch just outside the door. He was utterly careless of what was going to happen to him. All his consciousness seemed to be concentrated in his neck, where he felt a severe pain. His indifference as to his fate was genuine. The day was breaking when he awoke from a feverish doze; the door at which he had knocked in the dark stood wide open now, and a girl, steadying herself with her outspread arms, leaned over the threshold. Lying on his back, he stared up at her. Her face was pale and her eyes were very dark; her hair hung down black as ebony against her white

cheeks; her lips were full and red. Beyond her he saw another head with long grey hair, and a thin old face with a pair of anxiously clasped hands under the chin.

## VI

"I knew those people by sight," General Santierra would tell his guests at the dining-table. "I mean the people with whom Gaspar Ruiz found shelter. The father was an old Spaniard, a man of property ruined by the revolution. His estates, his house in town, his money, everything he had in the world had been confiscated by proclamation, for he was a bitter foe of our independence. From a position of great dignity and influence on the Viceroy's Council he became of less importance than his own negro slaves made free by our glorious revolution. He had not even the means to flee the country, as other Spaniards had managed to do. It may be that, wandering ruined and houseless, and burdened with nothing but his life, which was left to him by the clemency of the Provisional Government, he had simply walked under that broken roof of old tiles. It was a lonely spot. There did not seem to be even a dog belonging to the place. But though the roof had holes, as if a cannon-ball or two had dropped through it, the wooden shutters were thick and tight-closed all the time.

"My way took me frequently along the path in front of that miserable rancho. I rode from the fort to the town almost every evening, to sigh at the window of a lady I was in love with, then. When one is young, you understand. . . . She was a good patriot, you may believe. Caballeros, credit me or not, political feeling ran so high in those days that I do not believe I could have been fascinated by the charms of a woman of Royalist opinions. . . ."

Murmurs of amused incredulity all round the table interrupted the General; and while they lasted he stroked his white beard gravely.

"Senores," he protested, "a Royalist was a monster to our overwrought feelings. I am telling you this in order not to be suspected of the slightest tenderness towards that old Royalist's daughter. Moreover, as you know, my affections were engaged elsewhere. But I could not help noticing her on rare occasions when with the front door open she stood in the porch.

"You must know that this old Royalist was as crazy as a man can be. His political misfortunes, his total downfall and ruin, had disordered his mind. To show his contempt for what we patriots could do, he affected to laugh at his imprisonment, at the confiscation of his lands, the burning of his houses,

and at the misery to which he and his womenfolk were reduced. This habit of laughing had grown upon him, so that he would begin to laugh and shout directly he caught sight of any stranger. That was the form of his madness.

“I, of course, disregarded the noise of that madman with that feeling of superiority the success of our cause inspired in us Americans. I suppose I really despised him because he was an old Castilian, a Spaniard born, and a Royalist. Those were certainly no reasons to scorn a man; but for centuries Spaniards born had shown their contempt of us Americans, men as well descended as themselves, simply because we were what they called colonists. We had been kept in abasement and made to feel our inferiority in social intercourse. And now it was our turn. It was safe for us patriots to display the same sentiments; and I being a young patriot, son of a patriot, despised that old Spaniard, and despising him I naturally disregarded his abuse, though it was annoying to my feelings. Others perhaps would not have been so forbearing.

“He would begin with a great yell — ‘I see a patriot. Another of them!’ long before I came abreast of the house. The tone of his senseless revilings, mingled with bursts of laughter, was sometimes piercingly shrill and sometimes grave. It was all very mad; but I felt it incumbent upon my dignity to check my horse to a walk without even glancing towards the house, as if that man’s abusive clamour in the porch were less than the barking of a cur. Always I rode by preserving an expression of haughty indifference on my face.

“It was no doubt very dignified; but I should have done better if I had kept my eyes open. A military man in war time should never consider himself off duty; and especially so if the war is a revolutionary war, when the enemy is not at the door, but within your very house. At such times the heat of passionate convictions passing into hatred, removes the restraints of honour and humanity from many men and of delicacy and fear from some women. These last, when once they throw off the timidity and reserve of their sex, become by the vivacity of their intelligence and the violence of their merciless resentment more dangerous than so many armed giants.”

The General’s voice rose, but his big hand stroked his white beard twice with an effect of venerable calmness. “Si, Senores! Women are ready to rise to the heights of devotion unattainable by us men, or to sink into the depths of abasement which amazes our masculine prejudices. I am speaking now of exceptional women, you understand. . . .”

Here one of the guests observed that he had never met a woman yet who was not capable of turning out quite exceptional under circumstances that would engage her feelings strongly. "That sort of superiority in recklessness they have over us," he concluded, "makes of them the more interesting half of mankind."

The General, who bore the interruption with gravity, nodded courteous assent. "Si. Si. Under circumstances. . . . Precisely. They can do an infinite deal of mischief sometimes in quite unexpected ways. For who could have imagined that a young girl, daughter of a ruined Royalist whose life was held only by the contempt of his enemies, would have had the power to bring death and devastation upon two flourishing provinces and cause serious anxiety to the leaders of the revolution in the very hour of its success!" He paused to let the wonder of it penetrate our minds.

"Death and devastation," somebody murmured in surprise: "how shocking!"

The old General gave a glance in the direction of the murmur and went on. "Yes. That is, war — calamity. But the means by which she obtained the power to work this havoc on our southern frontier seem to me, who have seen her and spoken to her, still more shocking. That particular thing left on my mind a dreadful amazement which the further experience of life, of more than fifty years, has done nothing to diminish." He looked round as if to make sure of our attention, and, in a changed voice: "I am, as you know, a republican, son of a Liberator," he declared. "My incomparable mother, God rest her soul, was a Frenchwoman, the daughter of an ardent republican. As a boy I fought for liberty; I've always believed in the equality of men; and as to their brotherhood, that, to my mind, is even more certain. Look at the fierce animosity they display in their differences. And what in the world do you know that is more bitterly fierce than brothers' quarrels?"

All absence of cynicism checked an inclination to smile at this view of human brotherhood. On the contrary, there was in the tone the melancholy natural to a man profoundly humane at heart who from duty, from conviction, and from necessity, had played his part in scenes of ruthless violence.

The General had seen much of fratricidal strife. "Certainly. There is no doubt of their brotherhood," he insisted. "All men are brothers, and as such know almost too much of each other. But" — and here in the old patriarchal

head, white as silver, the black eyes humorously twinkled — "if we are all brothers, all the women are not our sisters."

One of the younger guests was heard murmuring his satisfaction at the fact. But the General continued, with deliberate earnestness: "They are so different! The tale of a king who took a beggar-maid for a partner of his throne may be pretty enough as we men look upon ourselves and upon love. But that a young girl, famous for her haughty beauty and, only a short time before, the admired of all at the balls in the Viceroy's palace, should take by the hand a guasso, a common peasant, is intolerable to our sentiment of women and their love. It is madness. Nevertheless it happened. But it must be said that in her case it was the madness of hate — not of love."

After presenting this excuse in a spirit of chivalrous justice, the General remained silent for a time. "I rode past the house every day almost," he began again, "and this was what was going on within. But how it was going on no mind of man can conceive. Her desperation must have been extreme, and Gaspar Ruiz was a docile fellow. He had been an obedient soldier. His strength was like an enormous stone lying on the ground, ready to be hurled this way or that by the hand that picks it up.

"It is clear that he would tell his story to the people who gave him the shelter he needed. And he needed assistance badly. His wound was not dangerous, but his life was forfeited. The old Royalist being wrapped up in his laughing madness, the two women arranged a hiding-place for the wounded man in one of the huts amongst the fruit trees at the back of the house. That hovel, an abundance of clear water while the fever was on him, and some words of pity were all they could give. I suppose he had a share of what food there was. And it would be but little: a handful of roasted corn, perhaps a dish of beans, or a piece of bread with a few figs. To such misery were those proud and once wealthy people reduced."

## VII

General Santierra was right in his surmise. Such was the exact nature of the assistance which Gaspar Ruiz, peasant son of peasants, received from the Royalist family whose daughter had opened the door of their miserable refuge to his extreme distress. Her sombre resolution ruled the madness of her father and the trembling bewilderment of her mother.

She had asked the strange man on the doorstep, "Who wounded you?"

"The soldiers, senora," Gaspar Ruiz had answered, in a faint voice.

"Patriots?"

“Si.”

“What for?”

“Deserter,” he gasped, leaning against the wall under the scrutiny of her black eyes. “I was left for dead over there.”

She led him through the house out to a small hut of clay and reeds, lost in the long grass of the overgrown orchard. He sank on a heap of maize straw in a corner, and sighed profoundly.

“No one will look for you here,” she said, looking down at him. “Nobody comes near us. We, too, have been left for dead — here.”

He stirred uneasily on his heap of dirty straw, and the pain in his neck made him groan deliriously.

“I shall show Estaban some day that I am alive yet,” he mumbled.

He accepted her assistance in silence, and the many days of pain went by. Her appearances in the hut brought him relief and became connected with the feverish dreams of angels which visited his couch; for Gaspar Ruiz was instructed in the mysteries of his religion, and had even been taught to read and write a little by the priest of his village. He waited for her with impatience, and saw her pass out of the dark hut and disappear in the brilliant sunshine with poignant regret. He discovered that, while he lay there feeling so very weak, he could, by closing his eyes, evoke her face with considerable distinctness. And this discovered faculty charmed the long, solitary hours of his convalescence. Later on, when he began to regain his strength, he would creep at dusk from his hut to the house and sit on the step of the garden door.

In one of the rooms the mad father paced to and fro, muttering to himself with short, abrupt laughs. In the passage, sitting on a stool, the mother sighed and moaned. The daughter, in rough threadbare clothing, and her white haggard face half hidden by a coarse manta, stood leaning against the side of the door. Gaspar Ruiz, with his elbows propped on his knees and his head resting in his hands, talked to the two women in an undertone.

The common misery of destitution would have made a bitter mockery of a marked insistence on social differences. Gaspar Ruiz understood this in his simplicity. From his captivity amongst the Royalists he could give them news of people they knew. He described their appearance; and when he related the story of the battle in which he was recaptured the two women lamented the blow to their cause and the ruin of their secret hopes.

He had no feeling either way. But he felt a great devotion for that young girl. In his desire to appear worthy of her condescension, he boasted a little of his bodily strength. He had nothing else to boast of. Because of that quality his comrades treated him with as great a deference, he explained, as though he had been a sergeant, both in camp and in battle.

“I could always get as many as I wanted to follow me anywhere, *senorita*. I ought to have been made an officer, because I can read and write.”

Behind him the silent old lady fetched a moaning sigh from time to time; the distracted father muttered to himself, pacing the sala; and Gaspar Ruiz would raise his eyes now and then to look at the daughter of these people.

He would look at her with curiosity because she was alive, and also with that feeling of familiarity and awe with which he had contemplated in churches the inanimate and powerful statues of the saints, whose protection is invoked in dangers and difficulties. His difficulty was very great.

He could not remain hiding in an orchard for ever and ever. He knew also very well that before he had gone half a day's journey in any direction, he would be picked up by one of the cavalry patrols scouring the country, and brought into one or another of the camps where the patriot army destined for the liberation of Peru was collected. There he would in the end be recognized as Gaspar Ruiz — the deserter to the Royalists — and no doubt shot very effectually this time. There did not seem any place in the world for the innocent Gaspar Ruiz anywhere. And at this thought his simple soul surrendered itself to gloom and resentment as black as night.

They had made him a soldier forcibly. He did not mind being a soldier. And he had been a good soldier as he had been a good son, because of his docility and his strength. But now there was no use for either. They had taken him from his parents, and he could no longer be a soldier — not a good soldier at any rate. Nobody would listen to his explanations. What injustice it was! What injustice!

And in a mournful murmur he would go over the story of his capture and recapture for the twentieth time. Then, raising his eyes to the silent girl in the doorway, “*Si, senorita*,” he would say with a deep sigh, “injustice has made this poor breath in my body quite worthless to me and to anybody else. And I do not care who robs me of it.”

One evening, as he exhaled thus the plaint of his wounded soul, she condescended to say that, if she were a man, she would consider no life worthless which held the possibility of revenge.

She seemed to be speaking to herself. Her voice was low. He drank in the gentle, as if dreamy sound with a consciousness of peculiar delight of something warming his breast like a draught of generous wine.

“True, Senorita,” he said, raising his face up to hers slowly: “there is Estaban, who must be shown that I am not dead after all.”

The mutterings of the mad father had ceased long before; the sighing mother had withdrawn somewhere into one of the empty rooms. All was still within as well as without, in the moonlight bright as day on the wild orchard full of inky shadows. Gaspar Ruiz saw the dark eyes of Dona Erminia look down at him.

“Ah! The sergeant,” she muttered, disdainfully.

“Why! He has wounded me with his sword,” he protested, bewildered by the contempt that seemed to shine livid on her pale face.

She crushed him with her glance. The power of her will to be understood was so strong that it kindled in him the intelligence of unexpressed things.

“What else did you expect me to do?” he cried, as if suddenly driven to despair. “Have I the power to do more? Am I a general with an army at my back? — miserable sinner that I am to be despised by you at last.”

## VIII

“Senores,” related the General to his guests, “though my thoughts were of love then, and therefore enchanting, the sight of that house always affected me disagreeably, especially in the moonlight, when its close shutters and its air of lonely neglect appeared sinister. Still I went on using the bridle-path by the ravine, because it was a short cut. The mad Royalist howled and laughed at me every evening to his complete satisfaction; but after a time, as if wearied with my indifference, he ceased to appear in the porch. How they persuaded him to leave off I do not know. However, with Gaspar Ruiz in the house there would have been no difficulty in restraining him by force. It was now part of their policy in there to avoid anything which could provoke me. At least, so I suppose.

“Notwithstanding my infatuation with the brightest pair of eyes in Chile, I noticed the absence of the old man after a week or so. A few more days passed. I began to think that perhaps these Royalists had gone away somewhere else. But one evening, as I was hastening towards the city, I saw again somebody in the porch. It was not the madman; it was the girl. She stood holding on to one of the wooden columns, tall and white-faced, her big eyes sunk deep with privation and sorrow. I looked hard at her, and she



met my stare with a strange, inquisitive look. Then, as I turned my head after riding past, she seemed to gather courage for the act, and absolutely beckoned me back.

“I obeyed, senores, almost without thinking, so great was my astonishment. It was greater still when I heard what she had to say. She began by thanking me for my forbearance of her father’s infirmity, so that I felt ashamed of myself. I had meant to show disdain, not forbearance! Every word must have burnt her lips, but she never departed from a gentle and melancholy dignity which filled me with respect against my will. Senores, we are no match for women. But I could hardly believe my ears when she began her tale. Providence, she concluded, seemed to have preserved the life of that wronged soldier, who now trusted to my honour as a caballero and to my compassion for his sufferings.

“‘Wronged man,’ I observed, coldly. ‘Well, I think so, too: and you have been harbouring an enemy of your cause.’

“‘He was a poor Christian crying for help at our door in the name of God, senor,’ she answered, simply.

“I began to admire her. ‘Where is he now?’ I asked, stiffly.

“But she would not answer that question. With extreme cunning, and an almost fiendish delicacy, she managed to remind me of my failure in saving the lives of the prisoners in the guardroom, without wounding my pride. She knew, of course, the whole story. Gaspar Ruiz, she said, entreated me to procure for him a safe-conduct from General San Martin himself. He had an important communication to make to the commander-in-chief.

“Por Dios, senores, she made me swallow all that, pretending to be only the mouthpiece of that poor man. Overcome by injustice, he expected to find, she said, as much generosity in me as had been shown to him by the Royalist family which had given him a refuge.

“Ha! It was well and nobly said to a youngster like me. I thought her great. Alas! she was only implacable.

“In the end I rode away very enthusiastic about the business, without demanding even to see Gaspar Ruiz, who I was confident was in the house.

“But on calm reflection I began to see some difficulties which I had not confidence enough in myself to encounter. It was not easy to approach a commander-in-chief with such a story. I feared failure. At last I thought it better to lay the matter before my general-of-division, Robles, a friend of my family, who had appointed me his aide-de-camp lately.

“He took it out of my hands at once without any ceremony.

“‘In the house! of course he is in the house,’ he said contemptuously. ‘You ought to have gone sword in hand inside and demanded his surrender, instead of chatting with a Royalist girl in the porch. Those people should have been hunted out of that long ago. Who knows how many spies they have harboured right in the very midst of our camps? A safe-conduct from the Commander-in-Chief! The audacity of the fellow! Ha! ha! Now we shall catch him to-night, and then we shall find out, without any safe-conduct, what he has got to say, that is so very important. Ha! ha! ha!’

“General Robles, peace to his soul, was a short, thick man, with round, staring eyes, fierce and jovial. Seeing my distress he added:

“‘Come, come, chico. I promise you his life if he does not resist. And that is not likely. We are not going to break up a good soldier if it can be helped. I tell you what! I am curious to see your strong man. Nothing but a general will do for the picaro — well, he shall have a general to talk to. Ha! ha! I shall go myself to the catching, and you are coming with me, of course.’

“And it was done that same night. Early in the evening the house and the orchard were surrounded quietly. Later on the General and I left a ball we were attending in town and rode out at an easy gallop. At some little distance from the house we pulled up. A mounted orderly held our horses. A low whistle warned the men watching all along the ravine, and we walked up to the porch softly. The barricaded house in the moonlight seemed empty.

“The General knocked at the door. After a time a woman’s voice within asked who was there. My chief nudged me hard. I gasped.

“‘It is I, Lieutenant Santierra,’ I stammered out, as if choked. ‘Open the door.’

“It came open slowly. The girl, holding a thin taper in her hand, seeing another man with me, began to back away before us slowly, shading the light with her hand. Her impassive white face looked ghostly. I followed behind General Robles. Her eyes were fixed on mine. I made a gesture of helplessness behind my chief’s back, trying at the same time to give a reassuring expression to my face. None of us three uttered a sound.

“We found ourselves in a room with bare floor and walls. There was a rough table and a couple of stools in it, nothing else whatever. An old woman with her grey hair hanging loose wrung her hands when we

appeared. A peal of loud laughter resounded through the empty house, very amazing and weird. At this the old woman tried to get past us.

“‘Nobody to leave the room,’ said General Robles to me.

“I swung the door to, heard the latch click, and the laughter became faint in our ears.

“Before another word could be spoken in that room I was amazed by hearing the sound of distant thunder.

“I had carried in with me into the house a vivid impression of a beautiful clear moonlight night, without a speck of cloud in the sky. I could not believe my ears. Sent early abroad for my education, I was not familiar with the most dreaded natural phenomenon of my native land. I saw, with inexpressible astonishment, a look of terror in my chief’s eyes. Suddenly I felt giddy. The General staggered against me heavily; the girl seemed to reel in the middle of the room, the taper fell out of her hand and the light went out; a shrill cry of ‘Misericordia!’ from the old woman pierced my ears. In the pitchy darkness I heard the plaster off the walls falling on the floor. It is a mercy there was no ceiling. Holding on to the latch of the door, I heard the grinding of the roof-tiles cease above my head. The shock was over.

“‘Out of the house! The door! Fly, Santierra, fly!’ howled the General. You know, senores, in our country the bravest are not ashamed of the fear an earthquake strikes into all the senses of man. One never gets used to it. Repeated experience only augments the mastery of that nameless terror.

“It was my first earthquake, and I was the calmest of them all. I understood that the crash outside was caused by the porch, with its wooden pillars and tiled roof projection, falling down. The next shock would destroy the house, maybe. That rumble as of thunder was approaching again. The General was rushing round the room, to find the door perhaps. He made a noise as though he were trying to climb the walls, and I heard him distinctly invoke the names of several saints. ‘Out, out, Santierra!’ he yelled.

“The girl’s voice was the only one I did not hear.

“‘General,’ I cried, I cannot move the door. We must be locked in.’

“I did not recognize his voice in the shout of malediction and despair he let out. Senores, I know many men in my country, especially in the provinces most subject to earthquakes, who will neither eat, sleep, pray, nor even sit down to cards with closed doors. The danger is not in the loss of time, but in this — that the movement of the walls may prevent a door

being opened at all. This was what had happened to us. We were trapped, and we had no help to expect from anybody. There is no man in my country who will go into a house when the earth trembles. There never was — except one: Gaspar Ruiz.

“He had come out of whatever hole he had been hiding in outside, and had clambered over the timbers of the destroyed porch. Above the awful subterranean groan of coming destruction I heard a mighty voice shouting the word ‘Erminia!’ with the lungs of a giant. An earthquake is a great leveller of distinctions. I collected all my resolution against the terror of the scene. ‘She is here,’ I shouted back. A roar as of a furious wild beast answered me — while my head swam, my heart sank, and the sweat of anguish streamed like rain off my brow.

“He had the strength to pick up one of the heavy posts of the porch. Holding it under his armpit like a lance, but with both hands, he charged madly the rocking house with the force of a battering-ram, bursting open the door and rushing in, headlong, over our prostrate bodies. I and the General picking ourselves up, bolted out together, without looking round once till we got across the road. Then, clinging to each other, we beheld the house change suddenly into a heap of formless rubbish behind the back of a man, who staggered towards us bearing the form of a woman clasped in his arms. Her long black hair hung nearly to his feet. He laid her down reverently on the heaving earth, and the moonlight shone on her closed eyes.

“Senores, we mounted with difficulty. Our horses getting up plunged madly, held by the soldiers who had come running from all sides. Nobody thought of catching Gaspar Ruiz then. The eyes of men and animals shone with wild fear. My general approached Gaspar Ruiz, who stood motionless as a statue above the girl. He let himself be shaken by the shoulder without detaching his eyes from her face.

“‘Que guape!’ shouted the General in his ear. ‘You are the bravest man living. You have saved my life. I am General Robles. Come to my quarters to-morrow if God gives us the grace to see another day.’

“He never stirred — as if deaf, without feeling, insensible.

“We rode away for the town, full of our relations, of our friends, of whose fate we hardly dared to think. The soldiers ran by the side of our horses. Everything was forgotten in the immensity of the catastrophe overtaking a whole country.”

.....

Gaspar Ruiz saw the girl open her eyes. The raising of her eyelids seemed to recall him from a trance. They were alone; the cries of terror and distress from homeless people filled the plains of the coast remote and immense, coming like a whisper into their loneliness.

She rose swiftly to her feet, darting fearful glances on all sides. "What is it?" she cried out low, and peering into his face. "Where am I?"

He bowed his head sadly, without a word.

". . . Who are you?"

He knelt down slowly before her, and touched the hem of her coarse black baize skirt. "Your slave," he said.

She caught sight then of the heap of rubbish that had been the house, all misty in the cloud of dust. "Ah!" she cried, pressing her hand to her forehead.

"I carried you out from there," he whispered at her feet.

"And they?" she asked in a great sob.

He rose, and taking her by the arms, led her gently towards the shapeless ruin half overwhelmed by a landslide. "Come and listen," he said.

The serene moon saw them clambering over that heap of stones, joists and tiles, which was a grave. They pressed their ears to the interstices, listening for the sound of a groan, for a sigh of pain.

At last he said, "They died swiftly. You are alone."

She sat down on a piece of broken timber and put one arm across her face. He waited — then approaching his lips to her ear: "Let us go," he whispered.

"Never — never from here," she cried out, flinging her arms above her head.

He stooped over her, and her raised arms fell upon his shoulders. He lifted her up, steadied himself and began to walk, looking straight before him.

"What are you doing?" she asked, feebly.

"I am escaping from my enemies," he said, never once glancing at his light burden.

"With me?" she sighed, helplessly.

"Never without you," he said. "You are my strength."

He pressed her close to him. His face was grave and his footsteps steady. The conflagrations bursting out in the ruins of destroyed villages dotted the

plain with red fires; and the sounds of distant lamentations, the cries of Misericordia! Misericordia! made a desolate murmur in his ears. He walked on, solemn and collected, as if carrying something holy, fragile, and precious.

The earth rocked at times under his feet.

## IX

With movements of mechanical care and an air of abstraction old General Santierra lighted a long and thick cigar.

“It was a good many hours before we could send a party back to the ravine,” he said to his guests. “We had found one-third of the town laid low, the rest shaken up; and the inhabitants, rich and poor, reduced to the same state of distraction by the universal disaster. The affected cheerfulness of some contrasted with the despair of others. In the general confusion a number of reckless thieves, without fear of God or man, became a danger to those who from the downfall of their homes had managed to save some valuables. Crying ‘Misericordia’ louder than any at every tremor, and beating their breast with one hand, these scoundrels robbed the poor victims with the other, not even stopping short of murder.

“General Robles’ division was occupied entirely in guarding the destroyed quarters of the town from the depredations of these inhuman monsters. Taken up with my duties of orderly officer, it was only in the morning that I could assure myself of the safety of my own family. My mother and my sisters had escaped with their lives from that ballroom, where I had left them early in the evening. I remember those two beautiful young women — God rest their souls — as if I saw them this moment, in the garden of our destroyed house, pale but active, assisting some of our poor neighbours, in their soiled ball-dresses and with the dust of fallen walls on their hair. As to my mother, she had a stoical soul in her frail body. Half-covered by a costly shawl, she was lying on a rustic seat by the side of an ornamental basin whose fountain had ceased to play for ever on that night.

“I had hardly had time to embrace them all with transports of joy when my chief, coming along, dispatched me to the ravine with a few soldiers, to bring in my strong man, as he called him, and that pale girl.

“But there was no one for us to bring in. A landslide had covered the ruins of the house; and it was like a large mound of earth with only the ends of some timbers visible here and there — nothing more.

“Thus were the tribulations of the old Royalist couple ended. An enormous and unconsecrated grave had swallowed them up alive, in their unhappy obstinacy against the will of a people to be free. And their daughter was gone.

“That Gaspar Ruiz had carried her off I understood very well. But as the case was not foreseen, I had no instructions to pursue them. And certainly I had no desire to do so. I had grown mistrustful of my interference. It had never been successful, and had not even appeared creditable. He was gone. Well, let him go. And he had carried off the Royalist girl! Nothing better. Vaya con Dios. This was not the time to bother about a deserter who, justly or unjustly, ought to have been dead, and a girl for whom it would have been better to have never been born.

“So I marched my men back to the town.

“After a few days, order having been re-established, all the principal families, including my own, left for Santiago. We had a fine house there. At the same time the division of Robles was moved to new cantonments near the capital. This change suited very well the state of my domestic and amorous feelings.

“One night, rather late, I was called to my chief. I found General Robles in his quarters, at ease, with his uniform off, drinking neat brandy out of a tumbler — as a precaution, he used to say, against the sleeplessness induced by the bites of mosquitoes. He was a good soldier, and he taught me the art and practice of war. No doubt God has been merciful to his soul; for his motives were never other than patriotic, if his character was irascible. As to the use of mosquito nets, he considered it effeminate, shameful — unworthy of a soldier. I noticed at the first glance that his face, already very red, wore an expression of high good-humour.

“‘Aha! Senor teniente,’ he cried, loudly, as I saluted at the door. ‘Behold! Your strong man has turned up again.’

“He extended to me a folded letter, which I saw was superscribed ‘To the Commander-in-Chief of the Republican Armies.’

“‘This,’ General Robles went on in his loud voice, ‘was thrust by a boy into the hand of a sentry at the Quartel General, while the fellow stood there thinking of his girl, no doubt — for before he could gather his wits together the boy had disappeared amongst the market people, and he protests he could not recognize him to save his life.’

“My chief told me further that the soldier had given the letter to the sergeant of the guard, and that ultimately it had reached the hands of our generalissimo. His Excellency had deigned to take cognizance of it with his own eyes. After that he had referred the matter in confidence to General Robles.

“The letter, senores, I cannot now recollect textually. I saw the signature of Gaspar Ruiz. He was an audacious fellow. He had snatched a soul for himself out of a cataclysm, remember. And now it was that soul which had dictated the terms of his letter. Its tone was very independent. I remember it struck me at the time as noble — dignified. It was, no doubt, her letter. Now I shudder at the depth of its duplicity. Gaspar Ruiz was made to complain of the injustice of which he had been a victim. He invoked his previous record of fidelity and courage. Having been saved from death by the miraculous interposition of Providence, he could think of nothing but of retrieving his character. This, he wrote, he could not hope to do in the ranks as a discredited soldier still under suspicion. He had the means to give a striking proof of his fidelity. He had ended by proposing to the General-in-Chief a meeting at midnight in the middle of the Plaza before the Moneta. The signal would be to strike fire with flint and steel three times, which was not too conspicuous and yet distinctive enough for recognition.

“San Martin, the great Liberator, loved men of audacity and courage. Besides, he was just and compassionate. I told him as much of the man’s story as I knew, and was ordered to accompany him on the appointed night. The signals were duly exchanged. It was midnight, and the whole town was dark and silent. Their two cloaked figures came together in the centre of the vast Plaza, and, keeping discreetly at a distance, I listened for an hour or more to the murmur of their voices. Then the General motioned me to approach; and as I did so I heard San Martin, who was courteous to gentle and simple alike, offer Gaspar Ruiz the hospitality of the headquarters for the night. But the soldier refused, saying that he would be not worthy of that honour till he had done something.

“‘You cannot have a common deserter for your guest, Excellency,’ he protested with a low laugh, and stepping backwards merged slowly into the night.

“The Commander-in-Chief observed to me, as we turned away: ‘He had somebody with him, our friend Ruiz. I saw two figures for a moment. It was an unobtrusive companion.’



“I, too, had observed another figure join the vanishing form of Gaspar Ruiz. It had the appearance of a short fellow in a poncho and a big hat. And I wondered stupidly who it could be he had dared take into his confidence. I might have guessed it could be no one but that fatal girl — alas!

“Where he kept her concealed I do not know. He had — it was known afterwards — an uncle, his mother’s brother, a small shopkeeper in Santiago. Perhaps it was there that she found a roof and food. Whatever she found, it was poor enough to exasperate her pride and keep up her anger and hate. It is certain she did not accompany him on the feat he undertook to accomplish first of all. It was nothing less than the destruction of a store of war material collected secretly by the Spanish authorities in the south, in a town called Linares. Gaspar Ruiz was entrusted with a small party only, but they proved themselves worthy of San Martin’s confidence. The season was not propitious. They had to swim swollen rivers. They seemed, however, to have galloped night and day out-riding the news of their foray, and holding straight for the town, a hundred miles into the enemy’s country, till at break of day they rode into it sword in hand, surprising the little garrison. It fled without making a stand, leaving most of its officers in Gaspar Ruiz’ hands.

“A great explosion of gunpowder ended the conflagration of the magazines the raiders had set on fire without loss of time. In less than six hours they were riding away at the same mad speed, without the loss of a single man. Good as they were, such an exploit is not performed without a still better leadership.

“I was dining at the headquarters when Gaspar Ruiz himself brought the news of his success. And it was a great blow to the Royalist troops. For a proof he displayed to us the garrison’s flag. He took it from under his poncho and flung it on the table. The man was transfigured; there was something exulting and menacing in the expression of his face. He stood behind General San Martin’s chair and looked proudly at us all. He had a round blue cap edged with silver braid on his head, and we all could see a large white scar on the nape of his sunburnt neck.

“Somebody asked him what he had done with the captured Spanish officers.

“He shrugged his shoulders scornfully. ‘What a question to ask! In a partisan war you do not burden yourself with prisoners. I let them go — and here are their sword-knots.’

“He flung a bunch of them on the table upon the flag. Then General Robles, whom I was attending there, spoke up in his loud, thick voice: ‘You did! Then, my brave friend, you do not know yet how a war like ours ought to be conducted. You should have done — this.’ And he passed the edge of his hand across his own throat.

“Alas, senores! It was only too true that on both sides this contest, in its nature so heroic, was stained by ferocity. The murmurs that arose at General Robles’ words were by no means unanimous in tone. But the generous and brave San Martin praised the humane action, and pointed out to Ruiz a place on his right hand. Then rising with a full glass he proposed a toast: ‘Caballeros and comrades-in-arms, let us drink the health of Captain Gaspar Ruiz.’ And when we had emptied our glasses: ‘I intend,’ the Commander-in-Chief continued, ‘to entrust him with the guardianship of our southern frontier, while we go afar to liberate our brethren in Peru. He whom the enemy could not stop from striking a blow at his very heart will know how to protect the peaceful populations we leave behind us to pursue our sacred task.’ And he embraced the silent Gaspar Ruiz by his side.

“Later on, when we all rose from table, I approached the latest officer of the army with my congratulations. ‘And, Captain Ruiz,’ I added, ‘perhaps you do not mind telling a man who has always believed in the uprightness of your character what became of Dona Erminia on that night?’

“At this friendly question his aspect changed. He looked at me from under his eyebrows with the heavy, dull glance of a guasso — of a peasant. ‘Senor teniente,’ he said, thickly, and as if very much cast down, ‘do not ask me about the senorita, for I prefer not to think about her at all when I am amongst you.’”

“He looked, with a frown, all about the room, full of smoking and talking officers. Of course I did not insist.

“These, senores, were the last words I was to hear him utter for a long, long time. The very next day we embarked for our arduous expedition to Peru, and we only heard of Gaspar Ruiz’ doings in the midst of battles of our own. He had been appointed military guardian of our southern province. He raised a partida. But his leniency to the conquered foe displeased the Civil Governor, who was a formal, uneasy man, full of suspicions. He forwarded reports against Gaspar Ruiz to the Supreme Government; one of them being that he had married publicly, with great pomp, a woman of Royalist tendencies. Quarrels were sure to arise between these two men of

very different character. At last the Civil Governor began to complain of his inactivity and to hint at treachery, which, he wrote, would be not surprising in a man of such antecedents. Gaspar Ruiz heard of it. His rage flamed up, and the woman ever by his side knew how to feed it with perfidious words. I do not know whether really the Supreme Government ever did — as he complained afterwards — send orders for his arrest. It seems certain that the Civil Governor began to tamper with his officers, and that Gaspar Ruiz discovered the fact.

“One evening, when the Governor was giving a tertulia, Gaspar Ruiz, followed by six men he could trust, appeared riding through the town to the door of the Government House, and entered the sala armed, his hat on his head. As the Governor, displeased, advanced to meet him, he seized the wretched man round the body, carried him off from the midst of the appalled guests, as though he were a child, and flung him down the outer steps into the street. An angry hug from Gaspar Ruiz was enough to crush the life out of a giant; but in addition Gaspar Ruiz’ horsemen fired their pistols at the body of the Governor as it lay motionless at the bottom of the stairs.”

## X

“After this — as he called it — act of justice, Ruiz crossed the Rio Blanco, followed by the greater part of his band, and entrenched himself upon a hill. A company of regular troops sent out foolishly against him was surrounded, and destroyed almost to a man. Other expeditions, though better organized, were equally unsuccessful.

“It was during these sanguinary skirmishes that his wife first began to appear on horseback at his right hand. Rendered proud and self-confident by his successes, Ruiz no longer charged at the head of his partida, but presumptuously, like a general directing the movements of an army, he remained in the rear, well mounted and motionless on an eminence, sending out his orders. She was seen repeatedly at his side, and for a long time was mistaken for a man. There was much talk then of a mysterious white-faced chief, to whom the defeats of our troops were ascribed. She rode like an Indian woman, astride, wearing a broad-rimmed man’s hat and a dark poncho. Afterwards, in the day of their greatest prosperity, this poncho was embroidered in gold, and she wore then, also, the sword of poor Don Antonio de Leyva. This veteran Chilean officer, having the misfortune to be surrounded with his small force, and running short of ammunition, found

his death at the hands of the Arauco Indians, the allies and auxiliaries of Gaspar Ruiz. This was the fatal affair long remembered afterwards as the 'Massacre of the Island.' The sword of the unhappy officer was presented to her by Peneleo, the Araucanian chief; for these Indians, struck by her aspect, the deathly pallor of her face, which no exposure to the weather seemed to affect, and her calm indifference under fire, looked upon her as a supernatural being, or at least as a witch. By this superstition the prestige and authority of Gaspar Ruiz amongst these ignorant people were greatly augmented. She must have savoured her vengeance to the full on that day when she buckled on the sword of Don Antonio de Leyva. It never left her side, unless she put on her woman's clothes — not that she would or could ever use it, but she loved to feel it beating upon her thigh as a perpetual reminder and symbol of the dishonour to the arms of the Republic. She was insatiable. Moreover, on the path she had led Gaspar Ruiz upon, there is no stopping. Escaped prisoners — and they were not many — used to relate how with a few whispered words she could change the expression of his face and revive his flagging animosity. They told how after every skirmish, after every raid, after every successful action, he would ride up to her and look into her face. Its haughty calm was never relaxed. Her embrace, senores, must have been as cold as the embrace of a statue. He tried to melt her icy heart in a stream of warm blood. Some English naval officers who visited him at that time noticed the strange character of his infatuation."

At the movement of surprise and curiosity in his audience General Santierra paused for a moment.

"Yes — English naval officers," he repeated. "Ruiz had consented to receive them to arrange for the liberation of some prisoners of your nationality. In the territory upon which he ranged, from sea coast to the Cordillera, there was a bay where the ships of that time, after rounding Cape Horn, used to resort for wood and water. There, decoying the crew on shore, he captured first the whaling brig Hersalia, and afterwards made himself master by surprise of two more ships, one English and one American.

"It was rumoured at the time that he dreamed of setting up a navy of his own. But that, of course, was impossible. Still, manning the brig with part of her own crew, and putting an officer and a good many men of his own on board, he sent her off to the Spanish Governor of the island of Chiloe with a report of his exploits, and a demand for assistance in the war against the

rebels. The Governor could not do much for him; but he sent in return two light field-pieces, a letter of compliments, with a colonel's commission in the royal forces, and a great Spanish flag. This standard with much ceremony was hoisted over his house in the heart of the Arauco country. Surely on that day she may have smiled on her guasso husband with a less haughty reserve.

"The senior officer of the English squadron on our coast made representations to our Government as to these captures. But Gaspar Ruiz refused to treat with us. Then an English frigate proceeded to the bay, and her captain, doctor, and two lieutenants travelled inland under a safe-conduct. They were well received, and spent three days as guests of the partisan chief. A sort of military barbaric state was kept up at the residence. It was furnished with the loot of frontier towns. When first admitted to the principal sala, they saw his wife lying down (she was not in good health then), with Gaspar Ruiz sitting at the foot of the couch. His hat was lying on the floor, and his hands reposed on the hilt of his sword.

"During that first conversation he never removed his big hands from the sword-hilt, except once, to arrange the coverings about her, with gentle, careful touches. They noticed that whenever she spoke he would fix his eyes upon her in a kind of expectant, breathless attention, and seemingly forget the existence of the world and his own existence, too. In the course of the farewell banquet, at which she was present reclining on her couch, he burst forth into complaints of the treatment he had received. After General San Martin's departure he had been beset by spies, slandered by civil officials, his services ignored, his liberty and even his life threatened by the Chilian Government. He got up from the table, thundered execrations pacing the room wildly, then sat down on the couch at his wife's feet, his breast heaving, his eyes fixed on the floor. She reclined on her back, her head on the cushions, her eyes nearly closed.

"'And now I am an honoured Spanish officer,' he added in a calm voice.

"The captain of the English frigate then took the opportunity to inform him gently that Lima had fallen, and that by the terms of a convention the Spaniards were withdrawing from the whole continent.

"Gaspar Ruiz raised his head, and without hesitation, speaking with suppressed vehemence, declared that if not a single Spanish soldier were left in the whole of South America he would persist in carrying on the contest against Chile to the last drop of blood. When he finished that mad

tirade his wife's long white hand was raised, and she just caressed his knee with the tips of her fingers for a fraction of a second.

"For the rest of the officers' stay, which did not extend for more than half an hour after the banquet, that ferocious chieftain of a desperate partida overflowed with amiability and kindness. He had been hospitable before, but now it seemed as though he could not do enough for the comfort and safety of his visitors' journey back to their ship.

"Nothing, I have been told, could have presented a greater contrast to his late violence or the habitual taciturn reserve of his manner. Like a man elated beyond measure by an unexpected happiness, he overflowed with good-will, amiability, and attentions. He embraced the officers like brothers, almost with tears in his eyes. The released prisoners were presented each with a piece of gold. At the last moment, suddenly, he declared he could do no less than restore to the masters of the merchant vessels all their private property. This unexpected generosity caused some delay in the departure of the party, and their first march was very short.

"Late in the evening Gaspar Ruiz rode up with an escort, to their camp fires, bringing along with him a mule loaded with cases of wine. He had come, he said, to drink a stirrup cup with his English friends, whom he would never see again. He was mellow and joyous in his temper. He told stories of his own exploits, laughed like a boy, borrowed a guitar from the Englishmen's chief muleteer, and sitting cross-legged on his superfine poncho spread before the glow of the embers, sang a guasso love-song in a tender voice. Then his head dropped on his breast, his hands fell to the ground; the guitar rolled off his knees — and a great hush fell over the camp after the love-song of the implacable partisan who had made so many of our people weep for destroyed homes and for loves cut short.

"Before anybody could make a sound he sprang up from the ground and called for his horse.

"'Adios, my friends!' he cried. 'Go with God. I love you. And tell them well in Santiago that between Gaspar Ruiz, colonel of the King of Spain, and the republican carrion-crows of Chile there is war to the last breath — war! war! war!'

"With a great yell of 'War! war! war!' which his escort took up, they rode away, and the sound of hoofs and of voices died out in the distance between the slopes of the hills.

“The two young English officers were convinced that Ruiz was mad. How do you say that? — tile loose — eh? But the doctor, an observant Scotsman with much shrewdness and philosophy in his character, told me that it was a very curious case of possession. I met him many years afterwards, but he remembered the experience very well. He told me, too, that in his opinion that woman did not lead Gaspar Ruiz into the practice of sanguinary treachery by direct persuasion, but by the subtle way of awakening and keeping alive in his simple mind a burning sense of an irreparable wrong. Maybe, maybe. But I would say that she poured half of her vengeful soul into the strong clay of that man, as you may pour intoxication, madness, poison into an empty cup.

“If he wanted war he got it in earnest when our victorious army began to return from Peru. Systematic operations were planned against this blot on the honour and prosperity of our hardly won independence. General Robles commanded, with his well-known ruthless severity. Savage reprisals were exercised on both sides and no quarter was given in the field. Having won my promotion in the Peru campaign, I was a captain on the staff. Gaspar Ruiz found himself hard pressed; at the same time we heard by means of a fugitive priest who had been carried off from his village presbytery and galloped eighty miles into the hills to perform the christening ceremony, that a daughter was born to them. To celebrate the event, I suppose, Ruiz executed one or two brilliant forays clear away at the rear of our forces, and defeated the detachments sent out to cut off his retreat. General Robles nearly had a stroke of apoplexy from rage. He found another cause of insomnia than the bites of mosquitoes; but against this one, senores, tumblers of raw brandy had no more effect than so much water. He took to railing and storming at me about my strong man. And from our impatience to end this inglorious campaign I am afraid that all we young officers became reckless and apt to take undue risks on service.

“Nevertheless, slowly, inch by inch as it were, our columns were closing upon Gaspar Ruiz, though he had managed to raise all the Araucanian nation of wild Indians against us. Then a year or more later our Government became aware through its agents and spies that he had actually entered into alliance with Carreras, the so-called dictator of the so-called republic of Mendoza, on the other side of the mountains. Whether Gaspar Ruiz had a deep political intention, or whether he wished only to secure a safe retreat for his wife and child while he pursued remorselessly against us his war of

surprises and massacres, I cannot tell. The alliance, however, was a fact. Defeated in his attempt to check our advance from the sea, he retreated with his usual swiftness, and preparing for another hard and hazardous tussle, began by sending his wife with the little girl across the Pequena range of mountains, on the frontier of Mendoza.”

## XI

“Now Carreras, under the guise of politics and liberalism, was a scoundrel of the deepest dye, and the unhappy state of Mendoza was the prey of thieves, robbers, traitors, and murderers, who formed his party. He was under a noble exterior a man without heart, pity, honour, or conscience. He aspired to nothing but tyranny, and though he would have made use of Gaspar Ruiz for his nefarious designs, yet he soon became aware that to propitiate the Chilian Government would answer his purpose better. I blush to say that he made proposals to our Government to deliver up on certain conditions the wife and child of the man who had trusted to his honour, and that this offer was accepted.

“While on her way to Mendoza over the Pequena Pass she was betrayed by her escort of Carreras’ men, and given up to the officer in command of a Chilian fort on the upland at the foot of the main Cordillera range. This atrocious transaction might have cost me dear, for as a matter of fact I was a prisoner in Gaspar Ruiz’ camp when he received the news. I had been captured during a reconnaissance, my escort of a few troopers being speared by the Indians of his bodyguard. I was saved from the same fate because he recognized my features just in time. No doubt my friends thought I was dead, and I would not have given much for my life at any time. But the strong man treated me very well, because, he said, I had always believed in his innocence and had tried to serve him when he was a victim of injustice.

““And now,’ was his speech to me, ‘you shall see that I always speak the truth. You are safe.’

“I did not think I was very safe when I was called up to go to him one night. He paced up and down like a wild beast, exclaiming, ‘Betrayed! Betrayed!’

“He walked up to me clenching his fists. ‘I could cut your throat.’

““Will that give your wife back to you?’ I said as quietly as I could.

““And the child!’ he yelled out, as if mad. He fell into a chair and laughed in a frightful, boisterous manner. ‘Oh, no, you are safe.’



“I assured him that his wife’s life was safe, too; but I did not say what I was convinced of — that he would never see her again. He wanted war to the death, and the war could only end with his death.

“He gave me a strange, inexplicable look, and sat muttering blankly, ‘In their hands. In their hands.’

“I kept as still as a mouse before a cat.

“Suddenly he jumped up. ‘What am I doing here?’ he cried; and opening the door, he yelled out orders to saddle and mount. ‘What is it?’ he stammered, coming up to me. ‘The Pequena fort; a fort of palisades! Nothing. I would get her back if she were hidden in the very heart of the mountain.’ He amazed me by adding, with an effort: ‘I carried her off in my two arms while the earth trembled. And the child at least is mine. She at least is mine!’

“Those were bizarre words; but I had no time for wonder.

“‘You shall go with me,’ he said, violently. ‘I may want to parley, and any other messenger from Ruiz, the outlaw, would have his throat cut.’

“This was true enough. Between him and the rest of incensed mankind there could be no communication, according to the customs of honourable warfare.

“In less than half an hour we were in the saddle, flying wildly through the night. He had only an escort of twenty men at his quarters, but would not wait for more. He sent, however, messengers to Peneleo, the Indian chief then ranging in the foothills, directing him to bring his warriors to the uplands and meet him at the lake called the Eye of Water, near whose shores the frontier fort of Pequena was built.

“We crossed the lowlands with that untired rapidity of movement which had made Gaspar Ruiz’ raids so famous. We followed the lower valleys up to their precipitous heads. The ride was not without its dangers. A cornice road on a perpendicular wall of basalt wound itself around a buttressing rock, and at last we emerged from the gloom of a deep gorge upon the upland of Pequena.

“It was a plain of green wiry grass and thin flowering bushes; but high above our heads patches of snow hung in the folds and crevices of the great walls of rock. The little lake was as round as a staring eye. The garrison of the fort were just driving in their small herd of cattle when we appeared. Then the great wooden gates swung to, and that four-square enclosure of

broad blackened stakes pointed at the top and barely hiding the grass roofs of the huts inside seemed deserted, empty, without a single soul.

“But when summoned to surrender, by a man who at Gaspar Ruiz’ order rode fearlessly forward those inside answered by a volley which rolled him and his horse over. I heard Ruiz by my side grind his teeth. ‘It does not matter,’ he said. ‘Now you go.’

“Torn and faded as its rags were, the vestiges of my uniform were recognized, and I was allowed to approach within speaking distance; and then I had to wait, because a voice clamouring through a loophole with joy and astonishment would not allow me to place a word. It was the voice of Major Pajol, an old friend. He, like my other comrades, had thought me killed a long time ago.

““Put spurs to your horse, man!’ he yelled, in the greatest excitement; ‘we will swing the gate open for you.’

“I let the reins fall out of my hand and shook my head. ‘I am on my honour,’ I cried.

““To him!’ he shouted, with infinite disgust.

““He promises you your life.’

““Our life is our own. And do you, Santierra, advise us to surrender to that rastrero?’

““No!’ I shouted. ‘But he wants his wife and child, and he can cut you off from water.’

““Then she would be the first to suffer. You may tell him that. Look here — this is all nonsense: we shall dash out and capture you.’

““You shall not catch me alive,’ I said, firmly.

““Imbecile!’

““For God’s sake,’ I continued, hastily, ‘do not open the gate.’ And I pointed at the multitude of Peneleo’s Indians who covered the shores of the lake.

“I had never seen so many of these savages together. Their lances seemed as numerous as stalks of grass. Their hoarse voices made a vast, inarticulate sound like the murmur of the sea.

“My friend Pajol was swearing to himself. ‘Well, then — go to the devil!’ he shouted, exasperated. But as I swung round he repented, for I heard him say hurriedly, ‘Shoot the fool’s horse before he gets away.’

“He had good marksmen. Two shots rang out, and in the very act of turning my horse staggered, fell and lay still as if struck by lightning. I had

my feet out of the stirrups and rolled clear of him; but I did not attempt to rise. Neither dared they rush out to drag me in.

“The masses of Indians had begun to move upon the fort. They rode up in squadrons, trailing their long chusos; then dismounted out of musket-shot, and, throwing off their fur mantles, advanced naked to the attack, stamping their feet and shouting in cadence. A sheet of flame ran three times along the face of the fort without checking their steady march. They crowded right up to the very stakes, flourishing their broad knives. But this palisade was not fastened together with hide lashings in the usual way, but with long iron nails, which they could not cut. Dismayed at the failure of their usual method of forcing an entrance, the heathen, who had marched so steadily against the musketry fire, broke and fled under the volleys of the besieged.

“Directly they had passed me on their advance I got up and rejoined Gaspar Ruiz on a low ridge which jutted out upon the plain. The musketry of his own men had covered the attack, but now at a sign from him a trumpet sounded the ‘Cease fire.’ Together we looked in silence at the hopeless rout of the savages.

“‘It must be a siege, then,’ he muttered. And I detected him wringing his hands stealthily.

“But what sort of siege could it be? Without any need for me to repeat my friend Pajol’s message, he dared not cut the water off from the besieged. They had plenty of meat. And, indeed, if they had been short he would have been too anxious to send food into the stockade had he been able. But, as a matter of fact, it was we on the plain who were beginning to feel the pinch of hunger.

“Peneleo, the Indian chief, sat by our fire folded in his ample mantle of guanaco skins. He was an athletic savage, with an enormous square shock head of hair resembling a straw beehive in shape and size, and with grave, surly, much-lined features. In his broken Spanish he repeated, growling like a bad-tempered wild beast, that if an opening ever so small were made in the stockade his men would march in and get the senora — not otherwise.

“Gaspar Ruiz, sitting opposite him, kept his eyes fixed on the fort night and day as it were, in awful silence and immobility. Meantime, by runners from the lowlands that arrived nearly every day, we heard of the defeat of one of his lieutenants in the Maipu valley. Scouts sent afar brought news of a column of infantry advancing through distant passes to the relief of the fort. They were slow, but we could trace their toilful progress up the lower

valleys. I wondered why Ruiz did not march to attack and destroy this threatening force, in some wild gorge fit for an ambushade, in accordance with his genius for guerilla warfare. But his genius seemed to have abandoned him to his despair.

“It was obvious to me that he could not tear himself away from the sight of the fort. I protest to you, senores, that I was moved almost to pity by the sight of this powerless strong man sitting on the ridge, indifferent to sun, to rain, to cold, to wind; with his hands clasped round his legs and his chin resting on his knees, gazing — gazing — gazing.

“And the fort he kept his eyes fastened on was as still and silent as himself. The garrison gave no sign of life. They did not even answer the desultory fire directed at the loopholes.

“One night, as I strolled past him, he, without changing his attitude, spoke to me unexpectedly. ‘I have sent for a gun,’ he said. ‘I shall have time to get her back and retreat before your Robles manages to crawl up here.’

“He had sent for a gun to the plains.

“It was long in coming, but at last it came. It was a seven-pounder field gun. Dismounted and lashed crosswise to two long poles, it had been carried up the narrow paths between two mules with ease. His wild cry of exultation at daybreak when he saw the gun escort emerge from the valley rings in my ears now.

“But, senores, I have no words to depict his amazement, his fury, his despair and distraction, when he heard that the animal loaded with the gun-carriage had, during the last night march, somehow or other tumbled down a precipice. He broke into menaces of death and torture against the escort. I kept out of his way all that day, lying behind some bushes, and wondering what he would do now. Retreat was left for him, but he could not retreat.

“I saw below me his artillerist, Jorge, an old Spanish soldier, building up a sort of structure with heaped-up saddles. The gun, ready loaded, was lifted on to that, but in the act of firing the whole thing collapsed and the shot flew high above the stockade.

“Nothing more was attempted. One of the ammunition mules had been lost, too, and they had no more than six shots to fire; ample enough to batter down the gate providing the gun was well laid. This was impossible without it being properly mounted. There was no time nor means to construct a carriage. Already every moment I expected to hear Robles’ bugle-calls echo amongst the crags.

“Peneleo, wandering about uneasily, draped in his skins, sat down for a moment near me growling his usual tale.

“‘Make an entrada — a hole. If make a hole, bueno. If not make a hole, then vamos — we must go away.’

“After sunset I observed with surprise the Indians making preparations as if for another assault. Their lines stood ranged in the shadows of the mountains. On the plain in front of the fort gate I saw a group of men swaying about in the same place.

“I walked down the ridge disregarded. The moonlight in the clear air of the uplands was bright as day, but the intense shadows confused my sight, and I could not make out what they were doing. I heard the voice of Jorge, the artillerist, say in a queer, doubtful tone, ‘It is loaded, senior.’

“Then another voice in that group pronounced firmly the words, ‘Bring the riata here.’ It was the voice of Gaspar Ruiz.

“A silence fell, in which the popping shots of the besieged garrison rang out sharply. They, too, had observed the group. But the distance was too great and in the spatter of spent musket-balls cutting up the ground, the group opened, closed, swayed, giving me a glimpse of busy stooping figures in its midst. I drew nearer, doubting whether this was a weird vision, a suggestive and insensate dream.

“A strangely stifled voice commanded, ‘Haul the hitches tighter.’

“‘Si, senior,’ several other voices answered in tones of awed alacrity.

“Then the stifled voice said: ‘Like this. I must be free to breathe.’

“Then there was a concerned noise of many men together. ‘Help him up, hombres. Steady! Under the other arm.’

“That deadened voice ordered: ‘Bueno! Stand away from me, men.’

“I pushed my way through the recoiling circle, and heard once more that same oppressed voice saying earnestly: ‘Forget that I am a living man, Jorge. Forget me altogether, and think of what you have to do.’

“‘Be without fear, senior. You are nothing to me but a gun-carriage, and I shall not waste a shot.’

“I heard the spluttering of a port-fire, and smelt the saltpetre of the match. I saw suddenly before me a nondescript shape on all fours like a beast, but with a man’s head drooping below a tubular projection over the nape of the neck, and the gleam of a rounded mass of bronze on its back.

“In front of a silent semicircle of men it squatted alone, with Jorge behind it and a trumpeter motionless, his trumpet in his hand, by its side.

“Jorge, bent double, muttered, port-fire in hand: ‘An inch to the left, senor. Too much. So. Now, if you let yourself down a little by letting your elbows bend, I will . . .’

“He leaped aside, lowering his port-fire, and a burst of flame darted out of the muzzle of the gun lashed on the man’s back.

“Then Gaspar Ruiz lowered himself slowly. ‘Good shot?’ he asked.

“‘Full on, senor.’

“‘Then load again.’

“He lay there before me on his breast under the darkly glittering bronze of his monstrous burden, such as no love or strength of man had ever had to bear in the lamentable history of the world. His arms were spread out, and he resembled a prostrate penitent on the moonlit ground.

“Again I saw him raised to his hands and knees and the men stand away from him, and old Jorge stoop glancing along the gun.

“‘Left a little. Right an inch. Por Dios, senor, stop this trembling. Where is your strength?’

“The old gunner’s voice was cracked with emotion. He stepped aside, and quick as lightning brought the spark to the touch-hole.

“‘Excellent!’ he cried, tearfully; but Gaspar Ruiz lay for a long time silent, flattened on the ground.

“‘I am tired,’ he murmured at last. ‘Will another shot do it?’

“‘Without doubt,’ said Jorge, bending down to his ear.

“‘Then — load,’ I heard him utter distinctly. ‘Trumpeter!’

“‘I am here, senor, ready for your word.’

“‘Blow a blast at this word that shall be heard from one end of Chile to the other,’ he said, in an extraordinarily strong voice. ‘And you others stand ready to cut this accursed riata, for then will be the time for me to lead you in your rush. Now raise me up, and you, Jorge — be quick with your aim.’

“The rattle of musketry from the fort nearly drowned his voice. The palisade was wreathed in smoke and flame.

“‘Exert your force forward against the recoil, mi amo,’ said the old gunner, shakily. ‘Dig your fingers into the ground. So. Now!’

“A cry of exultation escaped him after the shot. The trumpeter raised his trumpet nearly to his lips and waited. But no word came from the prostrate man. I fell on one knee, and heard all he had to say then.

“‘Something broken,’ he whispered, lifting his head a little, and turning his eyes towards me in his hopelessly crushed attitude.

“‘The gate hangs only by the splinters,’ yelled Jorge.

“Gaspar Ruiz tried to speak, but his voice died out in his throat, and I helped to roll the gun off his broken back. He was insensible.

“I kept my lips shut, of course. The signal for the Indians to attack was never given. Instead, the bugle-calls of the relieving force for which my ears had thirsted so long, burst out, terrifying like the call of the Last Day to our surprised enemies.

“A tornado, senores, a real hurricane of stampeded men, wild horses, mounted Indians, swept over me as I cowered on the ground by the side of Gaspar Ruiz, still stretched out on his face in the shape of a cross. Peneleo, galloping for life, jabbed at me with his long chuso in passing — for the sake of old acquaintance, I suppose. How I escaped the flying lead is more difficult to explain. Venturing to rise on my knees too soon some soldiers of the 17th Taltal regiment, in their hurry to get at something alive, nearly bayoneted me on the spot. They looked very disappointed, too, when, some officers galloping up drove them away with the flat of their swords.

“It was General Robles with his staff. He wanted badly to make some prisoners. He, too, seemed disappointed for a moment. ‘What! Is it you?’ he cried. But he dismounted at once to embrace me, for he was an old friend of my family. I pointed to the body at our feet, and said only these two words:

“‘Gaspar Ruiz.’

“He threw his arms up in astonishment.

“‘Aha! Your strong man! Always to the last with your strong man. No matter. He saved our lives when the earth trembled enough to make the bravest faint with fear. I was frightened out of my wits. But he — no! Que guape! Where’s the hero who got the best of him? ha! ha! ha! What killed him, chico?’

“‘His own strength, General,’ I answered.”

## XII

“But Gaspar Ruiz breathed yet. I had him carried in his poncho under the shelter of some bushes on the very ridge from which he had been gazing so fixedly at the fort while unseen death was hovering already over his head.

“Our troops had bivouacked round the fort. Towards daybreak I was not surprised to hear that I was designated to command the escort of a prisoner who was to be sent down at once to Santiago. Of course the prisoner was Gaspar Ruiz’ wife.

“‘I have named you out of regard for your feelings,’ General Robles remarked. ‘Though the woman really ought to be shot for all the harm she has done to the Republic.’

“And as I made a movement of shocked protest, he continued:

“‘Now he is as well as dead, she is of no importance. Nobody will know what to do with her. However, the Government wants her.’ He shrugged his shoulders. ‘I suppose he must have buried large quantities of his loot in places that she alone knows of.’

“At dawn I saw her coming up the ridge, guarded by two soldiers, and carrying her child on her arm.

“I walked to meet her.

“‘Is he living yet?’ she asked, confronting me with that white, impassive face he used to look at in an adoring way.

“I bent my head, and led her round a clump of bushes without a word. His eyes were open. He breathed with difficulty, and uttered her name with a great effort.

“‘Erminia!’

“She knelt at his head. The little girl, unconscious of him, and with her big eyes looking about, began to chatter suddenly, in a joyous, thin voice. She pointed a tiny finger at the rosy glow of sunrise behind the black shapes of the peaks. And while that child-talk, incomprehensible and sweet to the ear, lasted, those two, the dying man and the kneeling woman, remained silent, looking into each other’s eyes, listening to the frail sound. Then the prattle stopped. The child laid its head against its mother’s breast and was still.

“‘It was for you,’ he began. ‘Forgive.’ His voice failed him. Presently I heard a mutter and caught the pitiful words: ‘Not strong enough.’

“She looked at him with an extraordinary intensity. He tried to smile, and in a humble tone, ‘Forgive me,’ he repeated. ‘Leaving you . . .’

“She bent down, dry-eyed and in a steady voice: ‘On all the earth I have loved nothing but you, Gaspar,’ she said.

“His head made a movement. His eyes revived. ‘At last!’ he sighed out. Then, anxiously, ‘But is this true . . . is this true?’

“‘As true as that there is no mercy and justice in this world,’ she answered him, passionately. She stooped over his face. He tried to raise his head, but it fell back, and when she kissed his lips he was already dead. His glazed eyes stared at the sky, on which pink clouds floated very high. But I



noticed the eyelids of the child, pressed to its mother's breast, droop and close slowly. She had gone to sleep.

"The widow of Gaspar Ruiz, the strong man, allowed me to lead her away without shedding a tear.

"For travelling we had arranged for her a sidesaddle very much like a chair, with a board swung beneath to rest her feet on. And the first day she rode without uttering a word, and hardly for one moment turning her eyes away from the little girl, whom she held on her knees. At our first camp I saw her during the night walking about, rocking the child in her arms and gazing down at it by the light of the moon. After we had started on our second day's march she asked me how soon we should come to the first village of the inhabited country.

"I said we should be there about noon.

"And will there be women there?' she inquired.

"I told her that it was a large village. 'There will be men and women there, senora,' I said, 'whose hearts shall be made glad by the news that all the unrest and war is over now.'

"Yes, it is all over now,' she repeated. Then, after a time: 'Senor officer, what will your Government do with me?'

"I do not know, senora,' I said. 'They will treat you well, no doubt. We republicans are not savages and take no vengeance on women.'

"She gave me a look at the word 'republicans' which I imagined full of undying hate. But an hour or so afterwards, as we drew up to let the baggage mules go first along a narrow path skirting a precipice, she looked at me with such a white, troubled face that I felt a great pity for her.

"Senor officer,' she said, 'I am weak, I tremble. It is an insensate fear.' And indeed her lips did tremble while she tried to smile, glancing at the beginning of the narrow path which was not so dangerous after all. 'I am afraid I shall drop the child. Gaspar saved your life, you remember. . . . Take her from me.'

"I took the child out of her extended arms. 'Shut your eyes, senora, and trust to your mule,' I recommended.

"She did so, and with her pallor and her wasted, thin face she looked deathlike. At a turn of the path where a great crag of purple porphyry closes the view of the lowlands, I saw her open her eyes. I rode just behind her holding the little girl with my right arm. 'The child is all right,' I cried encouragingly.

“‘Yes,’ she answered, faintly; and then, to my intense terror, I saw her stand up on the foot-rest, staring horribly, and throw herself forward into the chasm on our right.

“I cannot describe to you the sudden and abject fear that came over me at that dreadful sight. It was a dread of the abyss, the dread of the crags which seemed to nod upon me. My head swam. I pressed the child to my side and sat my horse as still as a statue. I was speechless and cold all over. Her mule staggered, sidling close to the rock, and then went on. My horse only pricked up his ears with a slight snort. My heart stood still, and from the depths of the precipice the stones rattling in the bed of the furious stream made me almost insane with their sound.

“Next moment we were round the turn and on a broad and grassy slope. And then I yelled. My men came running back to me in great alarm. It seems that at first I did nothing but shout, ‘She has given the child into my hands! She has given the child into my hands!’ The escort thought I had gone mad.”

General Santierra ceased and got up from the table. “And that is all, senores,” he concluded, with a courteous glance at his rising guests.

“But what became of the child. General?” we asked.

“Ah, the child, the child.”

He walked to one of the windows opening on his beautiful garden, the refuge of his old days. Its fame was great in the land. Keeping us back with a raised arm, he called out, “Erminia, Erminia!” and waited. Then his cautioning arm dropped, and we crowded to the windows.

From a clump of trees a woman had come upon the broad walk bordered with flowers. We could hear the rustle of her starched petticoats and observed the ample spread of her old-fashioned black silk skirt. She looked up, and seeing all these eyes staring at her stopped, frowned, smiled, shook her finger at the General, who was laughing boisterously, and drawing the black lace on her head so as to partly conceal her haughty profile, passed out of our sight, walking with stiff dignity.

“You have beheld the guardian angel of the old man — and her to whom you owe all that is seemly and comfortable in my hospitality. Somehow, senores, though the flame of love has been kindled early in my breast, I have never married. And because of that perhaps the sparks of the sacred fire are not yet extinct here.” He struck his broad chest. “Still alive, still

alive,” he said, with serio-comic emphasis. “But I shall not marry now. She is General Santierra’s adopted daughter and heiress.”

One of our fellow-guests, a young naval officer, described her afterwards as a “short, stout, old girl of forty or thereabouts.” We had all noticed that her hair was turning grey, and that she had very fine black eyes.

“And,” General Santierra continued, “neither would she ever hear of marrying any one. A real calamity! Good, patient, devoted to the old man. A simple soul. But I would not advise any of you to ask for her hand, for if she took yours into hers it would be only to crush your bones. Ah! she does not jest on that subject. And she is the own daughter of her father, the strong man who perished through his own strength: the strength of his body, of his simplicity — of his love!”

## ***THE INFORMER***



### **AN IRONIC TALE**

Mr. X came to me, preceded by a letter of introduction from a good friend of mine in Paris, specifically to see my collection of Chinese bronzes and porcelain.

“My friend in Paris is a collector, too. He collects neither porcelain, nor bronzes, nor pictures, nor medals, nor stamps, nor anything that could be profitably dispersed under an auctioneer’s hammer. He would reject, with genuine surprise, the name of a collector. Nevertheless, that’s what he is by temperament. He collects acquaintances. It is delicate work. He brings to it the patience, the passion, the determination of a true collector of curiosities. His collection does not contain any royal personages. I don’t think he considers them sufficiently rare and interesting; but, with that exception, he has met with and talked to everyone worth knowing on any conceivable ground. He observes them, listens to them, penetrates them, measures them, and puts the memory away in the galleries of his mind. He has schemed, plotted, and travelled all over Europe in order to add to his collection of distinguished personal acquaintances.

“As he is wealthy, well connected, and unprejudiced, his collection is pretty complete, including objects (or should I say subjects?) whose value is unappreciated by the vulgar, and often unknown to popular fame. Of trevolte of modern times. The world knows him as a revolutionary writer whose savage irony has laid bare the rottenness of the most respectable institutions. He has scalped every venerated head, and has mangled at the stake of his wit every received opinion and every recognized principle of conduct and policy. Who does not remember his flaming red revolutionary pamphlets? Their sudden swarmings used to overwhelm the powers of every Continental police like a plague of crimson gadflies. But this extreme writer has been also the active inspirer of secret societies, the mysterious unknown Number One of desperate conspiracies suspected and unsuspected, matured or baffled. And the world at large has never had an inkling of that fact! This accounts for him going about amongst us to this day, a veteran of many subterranean campaigns, standing aside now, safe

within his reputation of merely the greatest destructive publicist that ever lived.”

Thus wrote my friend, adding that Mr. X was an enlightened connoisseur of bronzes and china, and asking me to show him my collection.

X turned up in due course. My treasures are disposed in three large rooms without carpets and curtains. There is no other furniture than the etagres and the glass cases whose contents shall be worth a fortune to my heirs. I allow no fires to be lighted, for fear of accidents, and a fire-proof door separates them from the rest of the house.

It was a bitter cold day. We kept on our overcoats and hats. Middle-sized and spare, his eyes alert in a long, Roman-nosed countenance, X walked on his neat little feet, with short steps, and looked at my collection intelligently. I hope I looked at him intelligently, too. A snow-white moustache and imperial made his nutbrown complexion appear darker than it really was. In his fur coat and shiny tall hat that terrible man looked fashionable. I believe he belonged to a noble family, and could have called himself Vicomte X de la Z if he chose. We talked nothing but bronzes and porcelain. He was remarkably appreciative. We parted on cordial terms.

Where he was staying I don't know. I imagine he must have been a lonely man. Anarchists, I suppose, have no families — not, at any rate, as we understand that social relation. Organization into families may answer to a need of human nature, but in the last instance it is based on law, and therefore must be something odious and impossible to an anarchist. But, indeed, I don't understand anarchists. Does a man of that — of that — persuasion still remain an anarchist when alone, quite alone and going to bed, for instance? Does he lay his head on the pillow, pull his bedclothes over him, and go to sleep with the necessity of the chambardement general, as the French slang has it, of the general blow-up, always present to his mind? And if so how can he? I am sure that if such a faith (or such a fanaticism) once mastered my thoughts I would never be able to compose myself sufficiently to sleep or eat or perform any of the routine acts of daily life. I would want no wife, no children; I could have no friends, it seems to me; and as to collecting bronzes or china, that, I should say, would be quite out of the question. But I don't know. All I know is that Mr. X took his meals in a very good restaurant which I frequented also.

With his head uncovered, the silver top-knot of his brushed-up hair completed the character of his physiognomy, all bony ridges and sunken

hollows, clothed in a perfect impassiveness of expression. His meagre brown hands emerging from large white cuffs came and went breaking bread, pouring wine, and so on, with quiet mechanical precision. His head and body above the tablecloth had a rigid immobility. This firebrand, this great agitator, exhibited the least possible amount of warmth and animation. His voice was rasping, cold, and monotonous in a low key. He could not be called a talkative personality; but with his detached calm manner he appeared as ready to keep the conversation going as to drop it at any moment.

And his conversation was by no means commonplace. To me, I own, there was some excitement in talking quietly across a dinner-table with a man whose venomous pen-stabs had sapped the vitality of at least one monarchy. That much was a matter of public knowledge. But I knew more. I knew of him — from my friend — as a certainty what the guardians of social order in Europe had at most only suspected, or dimly guessed at.

He had had what I may call his underground life. And as I sat, evening after evening, facing him at dinner, a curiosity in that direction would naturally arise in my mind. I am a quiet and peaceable product of civilization, and know no passion other than the passion for collecting things which are rare, and must remain exquisite even if approaching to the monstrous. Some Chinese bronzes are monstrously precious. And here (out of my friend's collection), here I had before me a kind of rare monster. It is true that this monster was polished and in a sense even exquisite. His beautiful unruffled manner was that. But then he was not of bronze. He was not even Chinese, which would have enabled one to contemplate him calmly across the gulf of racial difference. He was alive and European; he had the manner of good society, wore a coat and hat like mine, and had pretty near the same taste in cooking. It was too frightful to think of.

One evening he remarked, casually, in the course of conversation, "There's no amendment to be got out of mankind except by terror and violence."

You can imagine the effect of such a phrase out of such a man's mouth upon a person like myself, whose whole scheme of life had been based upon a suave and delicate discrimination of social and artistic values. Just imagine! Upon me, to whom all sorts and forms of violence appeared as unreal as the giants, ogres, and seven-headed hydras whose activities affect, fantastically, the course of legends and fairy-tales!

I seemed suddenly to hear above the festive bustle and clatter of the brilliant restaurant the mutter of a hungry and seditious multitude.

I suppose I am impressionable and imaginative. I had a disturbing vision of darkness, full of lean jaws and wild eyes, amongst the hundred electric lights of the place. But somehow this vision made me angry, too. The sight of that man, so calm, breaking bits of white bread, exasperated me. And I had the audacity to ask him how it was that the starving proletariat of Europe to whom he had been preaching revolt and violence had not been made indignant by his openly luxurious life. "At all this," I said, pointedly, with a glance round the room and at the bottle of champagne we generally shared between us at dinner.

He remained unmoved.

"Do I feed on their toil and their heart's blood? Am I a speculator or a capitalist? Did I steal my fortune from a starving people? No! They know this very well. And they envy me nothing. The miserable mass of the people is generous to its leaders. What I have acquired has come to me through my writings; not from the millions of pamphlets distributed gratis to the hungry and the oppressed, but from the hundreds of thousands of copies sold to the well-fed bourgeoisie. You know that my writings were at one time the rage, the fashion — the thing to read with wonder and horror, to turn your eyes up at my pathos . . . or else, to laugh in ecstasies at my wit."

"Yes," I admitted. "I remember, of course; and I confess frankly that I could never understand that infatuation."

"Don't you know yet," he said, "that an idle and selfish class loves to see mischief being made, even if it is made at its own expense? Its own life being all a matter of pose and gesture, it is unable to realize the power and the danger of a real movement and of words that have no sham meaning. It is all fun and sentiment. It is sufficient, for instance, to point out the attitude of the old French aristocracy towards the philosophers whose words were preparing the Great Revolution. Even in England, where you have some common-sense, a demagogue has only to shout loud enough and long enough to find some backing in the very class he is shouting at. You, too, like to see mischief being made. The demagogue carries the amateurs of emotion with him. Amateurism in this, that, and the other thing is a delightfully easy way of killing time, and feeding one's own vanity — the silly vanity of being abreast with the ideas of the day after to-morrow. Just as good and otherwise harmless people will join you in ecstasies over your

collection without having the slightest notion in what its marvellousness really consists.”

I hung my head. It was a crushing illustration of the sad truth he advanced. The world is full of such people. And that instance of the French aristocracy before the Revolution was extremely telling, too. I could not traverse his statement, though its cynicism — always a distasteful trait — took off much of its value to my mind. However, I admit I was impressed. I felt the need to say something which would not be in the nature of assent and yet would not invite discussion.

“You don’t mean to say,” I observed, airily, “that extreme revolutionists have ever been actively assisted by the infatuation of such people?”

“I did not mean exactly that by what I said just now. I generalized. But since you ask me, I may tell you that such help has been given to revolutionary activities, more or less consciously, in various countries. And even in this country.”

“Impossible!” I protested with firmness. “We don’t play with fire to that extent.”

“And yet you can better afford it than others, perhaps. But let me observe that most women, if not always ready to play with fire, are generally eager to play with a loose spark or so.”

“Is this a joke?” I asked, smiling.

“If it is, I am not aware of it,” he said, woodenly. “I was thinking of an instance. Oh! mild enough in a way . . .”

I became all expectation at this. I had tried many times to approach him on his underground side, so to speak. The very word had been pronounced between us. But he had always met me with his impenetrable calm.

“And at the same time,” Mr. X continued, “it will give you a notion of the difficulties that may arise in what you are pleased to call underground work. It is sometimes difficult to deal with them. Of course there is no hierarchy amongst the affiliated. No rigid system.”

My surprise was great, but short-lived. Clearly, amongst extreme anarchists there could be no hierarchy; nothing in the nature of a law of precedence. The idea of anarchy ruling among anarchists was comforting, too. It could not possibly make for efficiency.

Mr. X startled me by asking, abruptly, “You know Hermione Street?”

I nodded doubtful assent. Hermione Street has been, within the last three years, improved out of any man’s knowledge. The name exists still, but not



one brick or stone of the old Hermione Street is left now. It was the old street he meant, for he said:

“There was a row of two-storied brick houses on the left, with their backs against the wing of a great public building — you remember. Would it surprise you very much to hear that one of these houses was for a time the centre of anarchist propaganda and of what you would call underground action?”

“Not at all,” I declared. Hermione Street had never been particularly respectable, as I remembered it.

“The house was the property of a distinguished government official,” he added, sipping his champagne.

“Oh, indeed!” I said, this time not believing a word of it.

“Of course he was not living there,” Mr. X continued. “But from ten till four he sat next door to it, the dear man, in his well-appointed private room in the wing of the public building I’ve mentioned. To be strictly accurate, I must explain that the house in Hermione Street did not really belong to him. It belonged to his grown-up children — a daughter and a son. The girl, a fine figure, was by no means vulgarly pretty. To more personal charm than mere youth could account for, she added the seductive appearance of enthusiasm, of independence, of courageous thought. I suppose she put on these appearances as she put on her picturesque dresses and for the same reason: to assert her individuality at any cost. You know, women would go to any length almost for such a purpose. She went to a great length. She had acquired all the appropriate gestures of revolutionary convictions — the gestures of pity, of anger, of indignation against the anti-humanitarian vices of the social class to which she belonged herself. All this sat on her striking personality as well as her slightly original costumes. Very slightly original; just enough to mark a protest against the philistinism of the overfed taskmasters of the poor. Just enough, and no more. It would not have done to go too far in that direction — you understand. But she was of age, and nothing stood in the way of her offering her house to the revolutionary workers.”

“You don’t mean it!” I cried.

“I assure you,” he affirmed, “that she made that very practical gesture. How else could they have got hold of it? The cause is not rich. And, moreover, there would have been difficulties with any ordinary house-agent, who would have wanted references and so on. The group she came in

contact with while exploring the poor quarters of the town (you know the gesture of charity and personal service which was so fashionable some years ago) accepted with gratitude. The first advantage was that Hermione Street is, as you know, well away from the suspect part of the town, specially watched by the police.

“The ground floor consisted of a little Italian restaurant, of the flyblown sort. There was no difficulty in buying the proprietor out. A woman and a man belonging to the group took it on. The man had been a cook. The comrades could get their meals there, unnoticed amongst the other customers. This was another advantage. The first floor was occupied by a shabby Variety Artists’ Agency — an agency for performers in inferior music-halls, you know. A fellow called Bomm, I remember. He was not disturbed. It was rather favourable than otherwise to have a lot of foreign-looking people, jugglers, acrobats, singers of both sexes, and so on, going in and out all day long. The police paid no attention to new faces, you see. The top floor happened, most conveniently, to stand empty then.”

X interrupted himself to attack impassively, with measured movements, a bombe glacee which the waiter had just set down on the table. He swallowed carefully a few spoonfuls of the iced sweet, and asked me, “Did you ever hear of Stone’s Dried Soup?”

“Hear of what?”

“It was,” X pursued, evenly, “a comestible article once rather prominently advertised in the dailies, but which never, somehow, gained the favour of the public. The enterprise fizzled out, as you say here. Parcels of their stock could be picked up at auctions at considerably less than a penny a pound. The group bought some of it, and an agency for Stone’s Dried Soup was started on the top floor. A perfectly respectable business. The stuff, a yellow powder of extremely unappetizing aspect, was put up in large square tins, of which six went to a case. If anybody ever came to give an order, it was, of course, executed. But the advantage of the powder was this, that things could be concealed in it very conveniently. Now and then a special case got put on a van and sent off to be exported abroad under the very nose of the policeman on duty at the corner. You understand?”

“I think I do,” I said, with an expressive nod at the remnants of the bombe melting slowly in the dish.

“Exactly. But the cases were useful in another way, too. In the basement, or in the cellar at the back, rather, two printing-presses were established. A

lot of revolutionary literature of the most inflammatory kind was got away from the house in Stone's Dried Soup cases. The brother of our anarchist young lady found some occupation there. He wrote articles, helped to set up type and pull off the sheets, and generally assisted the man in charge, a very able young fellow called Sevrin.

"The guiding spirit of that group was a fanatic of social revolution. He is dead now. He was an engraver and etcher of genius. You must have seen his work. It is much sought after by certain amateurs now. He began by being revolutionary in his art, and ended by becoming a revolutionist, after his wife and child had died in want and misery. He used to say that the bourgeoisie, the smug, overfed lot, had killed them. That was his real belief. He still worked at his art and led a double life. He was tall, gaunt, and swarthy, with a long, brown beard and deep-set eyes. You must have seen him. His name was Horne."

At this I was really startled. Of course years ago I used to meet Horne about. He looked like a powerful, rough gipsy, in an old top hat, with a red muffler round his throat and buttoned up in a long, shabby overcoat. He talked of his art with exaltation, and gave one the impression of being strung up to the verge of insanity. A small group of connoisseurs appreciated his work. Who would have thought that this man. . . . Amazing! And yet it was not, after all, so difficult to believe.

"As you see," X went on, "this group was in a position to pursue its work of propaganda, and the other kind of work, too, under very advantageous conditions. They were all resolute, experienced men of a superior stamp. And yet we became struck at length by the fact that plans prepared in Hermione Street almost invariably failed."

"Who were 'we'?" I asked, pointedly.

"Some of us in Brussels — at the centre," he said, hastily. "Whatever vigorous action originated in Hermione Street seemed doomed to failure. Something always happened to baffle the best planned manifestations in every part of Europe. It was a time of general activity. You must not imagine that all our failures are of a loud sort, with arrests and trials. That is not so. Often the police work quietly, almost secretly, defeating our combinations by clever counter-plotting. No arrests, no noise, no alarming of the public mind and inflaming the passions. It is a wise procedure. But at that time the police were too uniformly successful from the Mediterranean to the Baltic. It was annoying and began to look dangerous. At last we came

to the conclusion that there must be some untrustworthy elements amongst the London groups. And I came over to see what could be done quietly.

“My first step was to call upon our young Lady Amateur of anarchism at her private house. She received me in a flattering way. I judged that she knew nothing of the chemical and other operations going on at the top of the house in Hermione Street. The printing of anarchist literature was the only ‘activity’ she seemed to be aware of there. She was displaying very strikingly the usual signs of severe enthusiasm, and had already written many sentimental articles with ferocious conclusions. I could see she was enjoying herself hugely, with all the gestures and grimaces of deadly earnestness. They suited her big-eyed, broad-browed face and the good carriage of her shapely head, crowned by a magnificent lot of brown hair done in an unusual and becoming style. Her brother was in the room, too, a serious youth, with arched eyebrows and wearing a red necktie, who struck me as being absolutely in the dark about everything in the world, including himself. By and by a tall young man came in. He was clean-shaved with a strong bluish jaw and something of the air of a taciturn actor or of a fanatical priest: the type with thick black eyebrows — you know. But he was very presentable indeed. He shook hands at once vigorously with each of us. The young lady came up to me and murmured sweetly, ‘Comrade Sevrin.’

“I had never seen him before. He had little to say to us, but sat down by the side of the girl, and they fell at once into earnest conversation. She leaned forward in her deep armchair, and took her nicely rounded chin in her beautiful white hand. He looked attentively into her eyes. It was the attitude of love-making, serious, intense, as if on the brink of the grave. I suppose she felt it necessary to round and complete her assumption of advanced ideas, of revolutionary lawlessness, by making believe to be in love with an anarchist. And this one, I repeat, was extremely presentable, notwithstanding his fanatical black-browed aspect. After a few stolen glances in their direction, I had no doubt that he was in earnest. As to the lady, her gestures were unapproachable, better than the very thing itself in the blended suggestion of dignity, sweetness, condescension, fascination, surrender, and reserve. She interpreted her conception of what that precise sort of love-making should be with consummate art. And so far, she, too, no doubt, was in earnest. Gestures — but so perfect!

“After I had been left alone with our Lady Amateur I informed her guardedly of the object of my visit. I hinted at our suspicions. I wanted to hear what she would have to say, and half expected some perhaps unconscious revelation. All she said was, ‘That’s serious,’ looking delightfully concerned and grave. But there was a sparkle in her eyes which meant plainly, ‘How exciting!’ After all, she knew little of anything except of words. Still, she undertook to put me in communication with Horne, who was not easy to find unless in Hermione Street, where I did not wish to show myself just then.

“I met Horne. This was another kind of a fanatic altogether. I exposed to him the conclusion we in Brussels had arrived at, and pointed out the significant series of failures. To this he answered with irrelevant exaltation:

“‘I have something in hand that shall strike terror into the heart of these gorged brutes.’

“And then I learned that, by excavating in one of the cellars of the house, he and some companions had made their way into the vaults under the great public building I have mentioned before. The blowing up of a whole wing was a certainty as soon as the materials were ready.

“I was not so appalled at the stupidity of that move as I might have been had not the usefulness of our centre in Hermione Street become already very problematical. In fact, in my opinion it was much more of a police trap by this time than anything else.

“What was necessary now was to discover what, or rather who, was wrong, and I managed at last to get that idea into Horne’s head. He glared, perplexed, his nostrils working as if he were sniffing treachery in the air.

“And here comes a piece of work which will no doubt strike you as a sort of theatrical expedient. And yet what else could have been done? The problem was to find out the untrustworthy member of the group. But no suspicion could be fastened on one more than another. To set a watch upon them all was not very practicable. Besides, that proceeding often fails. In any case, it takes time, and the danger was pressing. I felt certain that the premises in Hermione Street would be ultimately raided, though the police had evidently such confidence in the informer that the house, for the time being, was not even watched. Horne was positive on that point. Under the circumstances it was an unfavourable symptom. Something had to be done quickly.

“I decided to organize a raid myself upon the group. Do you understand? A raid of other trusty comrades personating the police. A conspiracy within a conspiracy. You see the object of it, of course. When apparently about to be arrested I hoped the informer would betray himself in some way or other; either by some unguarded act or simply by his unconcerned demeanour, for instance. Of course there was the risk of complete failure and the no lesser risk of some fatal accident in the course of resistance, perhaps, or in the efforts at escape. For, as you will easily see, the Hermione Street group had to be actually and completely taken unawares, as I was sure they would be by the real police before very long. The informer was amongst them, and Horne alone could be let into the secret of my plan.

“I will not enter into the detail of my preparations. It was not very easy to arrange, but it was done very well, with a really convincing effect. The sham police invaded the restaurant, whose shutters were immediately put up. The surprise was perfect. Most of the Hermione Street party were found in the second cellar, enlarging the hole communicating with the vaults of the great public building. At the first alarm, several comrades bolted through impulsively into the aforesaid vault, where, of course, had this been a genuine raid, they would have been hopelessly trapped. We did not bother about them for the moment. They were harmless enough. The top floor caused considerable anxiety to Horne and myself. There, surrounded by tins of Stone’s Dried Soup, a comrade, nick-named the Professor (he was an ex-science student) was engaged in perfecting some new detonators. He was an abstracted, self-confident, sallow little man, armed with large round spectacles, and we were afraid that under a mistaken impression he would blow himself up and wreck the house about our ears. I rushed upstairs and found him already at the door, on the alert, listening, as he said, to ‘suspicious noises down below.’ Before I had quite finished explaining to him what was going on he shrugged his shoulders disdainfully and turned away to his balances and test-tubes. His was the true spirit of an extreme revolutionist. Explosives were his faith, his hope, his weapon, and his shield. He perished a couple of years afterwards in a secret laboratory through the premature explosion of one of his improved detonators.

“Hurrying down again, I found an impressive scene in the gloom of the big cellar. The man who personated the inspector (he was no stranger to the part) was speaking harshly, and giving bogus orders to his bogus subordinates for the removal of his prisoners. Evidently nothing

enlightening had happened so far. Horne, saturnine and swarthy, waited with folded arms, and his patient, moody expectation had an air of stoicism well in keeping with the situation. I detected in the shadows one of the Hermione Street group surreptitiously chewing up and swallowing a small piece of paper. Some compromising scrap, I suppose; perhaps just a note of a few names and addresses. He was a true and faithful ‘companion.’ But the fund of secret malice which lurks at the bottom of our sympathies caused me to feel amused at that perfectly uncalled-for performance.

“In every other respect the risky experiment, the theatrical coup, if you like to call it so, seemed to have failed. The deception could not be kept up much longer; the explanation would bring about a very embarrassing and even grave situation. The man who had eaten the paper would be furious. The fellows who had bolted away would be angry, too.

“To add to my vexation, the door communicating with the other cellar, where the printing-presses were, flew open, and our young lady revolutionist appeared, a black silhouette in a close-fitting dress and a large hat, with the blaze of gas flaring in there at her back. Over her shoulder I perceived the arched eyebrows and the red necktie of her brother.

“The last people in the world I wanted to see then! They had gone that evening to some amateur concert for the delectation of the poor people, you know; but she had insisted on leaving early, on purpose to call in Hermione Street on the way home, under the pretext of having some work to do. Her usual task was to correct the proofs of the Italian and French editions of the Alarm Bell and the Firebrand.” . . .

“Heavens!” I murmured. I had been shown once a few copies of these publications. Nothing, in my opinion, could have been less fit for the eyes of a young lady. They were the most advanced things of the sort; advanced, I mean, beyond all bounds of reason and decency. One of them preached the dissolution of all social and domestic ties; the other advocated systematic murder. To think of a young girl calmly tracking printers’ errors all along the sort of abominable sentences I remembered was intolerable to my sentiment of womanhood. Mr. X, after giving me a glance, pursued steadily.

“I think, however, that she came mostly to exercise her fascinations upon Sevrin, and to receive his homage in her queenly and condescending way. She was aware of both — her power and his homage — and enjoyed them with, I dare say, complete innocence. We have no ground in expediency or

morals to quarrel with her on that account. Charm in woman and exceptional intelligence in man are a law unto themselves. Is it not so?"

I refrained from expressing my abhorrence of that licentious doctrine because of my curiosity.

"But what happened then?" I hastened to ask.

X went on crumbling slowly a small piece of bread with a careless left hand.

"What happened, in effect," he confessed, "is that she saved the situation."

"She gave you an opportunity to end your rather sinister farce," I suggested.

"Yes," he said, preserving his impassive bearing. "The farce was bound to end soon. And it ended in a very few minutes. And it ended well. Had she not come in, it might have ended badly. Her brother, of course, did not count. They had slipped into the house quietly some time before. The printing-cellar had an entrance of its own. Not finding any one there, she sat down to her proofs, expecting Sevrin to return to his work at any moment. He did not do so. She grew impatient, heard through the door the sounds of a disturbance in the other cellar and naturally came in to see what was the matter.

"Sevrin had been with us. At first he had seemed to me the most amazed of the whole raided lot. He appeared for an instant as if paralyzed with astonishment. He stood rooted to the spot. He never moved a limb. A solitary gas-jet flared near his head; all the other lights had been put out at the first alarm. And presently, from my dark corner, I observed on his shaven actor's face an expression of puzzled, vexed watchfulness. He knitted his heavy eyebrows. The corners of his mouth dropped scornfully. He was angry. Most likely he had seen through the game, and I regretted I had not taken him from the first into my complete confidence.

"But with the appearance of the girl he became obviously alarmed. It was plain. I could see it grow. The change of his expression was swift and startling. And I did not know why. The reason never occurred to me. I was merely astonished at the extreme alteration of the man's face. Of course he had not been aware of her presence in the other cellar; but that did not explain the shock her advent had given him. For a moment he seemed to have been reduced to imbecility. He opened his mouth as if to shout, or perhaps only to gasp. At any rate, it was somebody else who shouted. This



somebody else was the heroic comrade whom I had detected swallowing a piece of paper. With laudable presence of mind he let out a warning yell.

“‘It’s the police! Back! Back! Run back, and bolt the door behind you.’

“It was an excellent hint; but instead of retreating the girl continued to advance, followed by her long-faced brother in his knickerbocker suit, in which he had been singing comic songs for the entertainment of a joyless proletariat. She advanced not as if she had failed to understand — the word ‘police’ has an unmistakable sound — but rather as if she could not help herself. She did not advance with the free gait and expanding presence of a distinguished amateur anarchist amongst poor, struggling professionals, but with slightly raised shoulders, and her elbows pressed close to her body, as if trying to shrink within herself. Her eyes were fixed immovably upon Sevrin. Sevrin the man, I fancy; not Sevrin the anarchist. But she advanced. And that was natural. For all their assumption of independence, girls of that class are used to the feeling of being specially protected, as, in fact, they are. This feeling accounts for nine tenths of their audacious gestures. Her face had gone completely colourless. Ghastly. Fancy having it brought home to her so brutally that she was the sort of person who must run away from the police! I believe she was pale with indignation, mostly, though there was, of course, also the concern for her intact personality, a vague dread of some sort of rudeness. And, naturally, she turned to a man, to the man on whom she had a claim of fascination and homage — the man who could not conceivably fail her at any juncture.”

“But,” I cried, amazed at this analysis, “if it had been serious, real, I mean — as she thought it was — what could she expect him to do for her?”

X never moved a muscle of his face.

“Goodness knows. I imagine that this charming, generous, and independent creature had never known in her life a single genuine thought; I mean a single thought detached from small human vanities, or whose source was not in some conventional perception. All I know is that after advancing a few steps she extended her hand towards the motionless Sevrin. And that at least was no gesture. It was a natural movement. As to what she expected him to do, who can tell? The impossible. But whatever she expected, it could not have come up, I am safe to say, to what he had made up his mind to do, even before that entreating hand had appealed to him so directly. It had not been necessary. From the moment he had seen her enter that cellar, he had made up his mind to sacrifice his future

usefulness, to throw off the impenetrable, solidly fastened mask it had been his pride to wear — ”

“What do you mean?” I interrupted, puzzled. “Was it Sevrin, then, who was — ”

“He was. The most persistent, the most dangerous, the craftiest, the most systematic of informers. A genius amongst betrayers. Fortunately for us, he was unique. The man was a fanatic, I have told you. Fortunately, again, for us, he had fallen in love with the accomplished and innocent gestures of that girl. An actor in desperate earnest himself, he must have believed in the absolute value of conventional signs. As to the grossness of the trap into which he fell, the explanation must be that two sentiments of such absorbing magnitude cannot exist simultaneously in one heart. The danger of that other and unconscious comedian robbed him of his vision, of his perspicacity, of his judgment. Indeed, it did at first rob him of his self-possession. But he regained that through the necessity — as it appeared to him imperiously — to do something at once. To do what? Why, to get her out of the house as quickly as possible. He was desperately anxious to do that. I have told you he was terrified. It could not be about himself. He had been surprised and annoyed at a move quite unforeseen and premature. I may even say he had been furious. He was accustomed to arrange the last scene of his betrayals with a deep, subtle art which left his revolutionist reputation untouched. But it seems clear to me that at the same time he had resolved to make the best of it, to keep his mask resolutely on. It was only with the discovery of her being in the house that everything — the forced calm, the restraint of his fanaticism, the mask — all came off together in a kind of panic. Why panic, do you ask? The answer is very simple. He remembered — or, I dare say, he had never forgotten — the Professor alone at the top of the house, pursuing his researches, surrounded by tins upon tins of Stone’s Dried Soup. There was enough in some few of them to bury us all where we stood under a heap of bricks. Sevrin, of course, was aware of that. And we must believe, also, that he knew the exact character of the man. He had gauged so many such characters! Or perhaps he only gave the Professor credit for what he himself was capable of. But, in any case, the effect was produced. And suddenly he raised his voice in authority.

“‘Get the lady away at once.’

“It turned out that he was as hoarse as a crow; result, no doubt, of the intense emotion. It passed off in a moment. But these fateful words issued

forth from his contracted throat in a discordant, ridiculous croak. They required no answer. The thing was done. However, the man personating the inspector judged it expedient to say roughly:

“‘She shall go soon enough, together with the rest of you.’

“These were the last words belonging to the comedy part of this affair.

“Oblivious of everything and everybody, Sevrin strode towards him and seized the lapels of his coat. Under his thin bluish cheeks one could see his jaws working with passion.

“‘You have men posted outside. Get the lady taken home at once. Do you hear? Now. Before you try to get hold of the man upstairs.’

“‘Oh! There is a man upstairs,’ scoffed the other, openly. ‘Well, he shall be brought down in time to see the end of this.’

“But Sevrin, beside himself, took no heed of the tone.

“‘Who’s the imbecile meddler who sent you blundering here? Didn’t you understand your instructions? Don’t you know anything? It’s incredible. Here — ’

“He dropped the lapels of the coat and, plunging his hand into his breast, jerked feverishly at something under his shirt. At last he produced a small square pocket of soft leather, which must have been hanging like a scapulary from his neck by the tape whose broken ends dangled from his fist.

“‘Look inside,’ he spluttered, flinging it in the other’s face. And instantly he turned round towards the girl. She stood just behind him, perfectly still and silent. Her set, white face gave an illusion of placidity. Only her staring eyes seemed bigger and darker.

“He spoke rapidly, with nervous assurance. I heard him distinctly promise her to make everything as clear as daylight presently. But that was all I caught. He stood close to her, never attempting to touch her even with the tip of his little finger — and she stared at him stupidly. For a moment, however, her eyelids descended slowly, pathetically, and then, with the long black eyelashes lying on her white cheeks, she looked ready to fall down in a swoon. But she never even swayed where she stood. He urged her loudly to follow him at once, and walked towards the door at the bottom of the cellar stairs without looking behind him. And, as a matter of fact, she did move after him a pace or two. But, of course, he was not allowed to reach the door. There were angry exclamations, a short, fierce scuffle. Flung away violently, he came flying backwards upon her, and fell. She threw out her

arms in a gesture of dismay and stepped aside, just clear of his head, which struck the ground heavily near her shoe.

“He grunted with the shock. By the time he had picked himself up, slowly, dazedly, he was awake to the reality of things. The man into whose hands he had thrust the leather case had extracted therefrom a narrow strip of bluish paper. He held it up above his head, and, as after the scuffle an expectant uneasy stillness reigned once more, he threw it down disdainfully with the words, ‘I think, comrades, that this proof was hardly necessary.’

“Quick as thought, the girl stooped after the fluttering slip. Holding it spread out in both hands, she looked at it; then, without raising her eyes, opened her fingers slowly and let it fall.

“I examined that curious document afterwards. It was signed by a very high personage, and stamped and countersigned by other high officials in various countries of Europe. In his trade — or shall I say, in his mission? — that sort of talisman might have been necessary, no doubt. Even to the police itself — all but the heads — he had been known only as Sevrin the noted anarchist.

“He hung his head, biting his lower lip. A change had come over him, a sort of thoughtful, absorbed calmness. Nevertheless, he panted. His sides worked visibly, and his nostrils expanded and collapsed in weird contrast with his sombre aspect of a fanatical monk in a meditative attitude, but with something, too, in his face of an actor intent upon the terrible exigencies of his part. Before him Horne declaimed, haggard and bearded, like an inspired denunciatory prophet from a wilderness. Two fanatics. They were made to understand each other. Does this surprise you? I suppose you think that such people would be foaming at the mouth and snarling at each other?”

I protested hastily that I was not surprised in the least; that I thought nothing of the kind; that anarchists in general were simply inconceivable to me mentally, morally, logically, sentimentally, and even physically. X received this declaration with his usual woodenness and went on.

“Horne had burst out into eloquence. While pouring out scornful invective, he let tears escape from his eyes and roll down his black beard unheeded. Sevrin panted quicker and quicker. When he opened his mouth to speak, everyone hung on his words.

“‘Don’t be a fool, Horne,’ he began. ‘You know very well that I have done this for none of the reasons you are throwing at me.’ And in a moment

he became outwardly as steady as a rock under the other's lurid stare. 'I have been thwarting, deceiving, and betraying you — from conviction.'

"He turned his back on Horne, and addressing the girl, repeated the words: 'From conviction.'

"It's extraordinary how cold she looked. I suppose she could not think of any appropriate gesture. There can have been few precedents indeed for such a situation.

"'Clear as daylight,' he added. 'Do you understand what that means? From conviction.'

"And still she did not stir. She did not know what to do. But the luckless wretch was about to give her the opportunity for a beautiful and correct gesture.

"'I have felt in me the power to make you share this conviction,' he protested, ardently. He had forgotten himself; he made a step towards her — perhaps he stumbled. To me he seemed to be stooping low as if to touch the hem of her garment. And then the appropriate gesture came. She snatched her skirt away from his polluting contact and averted her head with an upward tilt. It was magnificently done, this gesture of conventionally unstained honour, of an unblemished high-minded amateur.

"Nothing could have been better. And he seemed to think so, too, for once more he turned away. But this time he faced no one. He was again panting frightfully, while he fumbled hurriedly in his waistcoat pocket, and then raised his hand to his lips. There was something furtive in this movement, but directly afterwards his bearing changed. His laboured breathing gave him a resemblance to a man who had just run a desperate race; but a curious air of detachment, of sudden and profound indifference, replaced the strain of the striving effort. The race was over. I did not want to see what would happen next. I was only too well aware. I tucked the young lady's arm under mine without a word, and made my way with her to the stairs.

"Her brother walked behind us. Half-way up the short flight she seemed unable to lift her feet high enough for the steps, and we had to pull and push to get her to the top. In the passage she dragged herself along, hanging on my arm, helplessly bent like an old woman. We issued into an empty street through a half-open door, staggering like besotted revellers. At the corner we stopped a four-wheeler, and the ancient driver looked round from his box with morose scorn at our efforts to get her in. Twice during the drive I

felt her collapse on my shoulder in a half faint. Facing us, the youth in knickerbockers remained as mute as a fish, and, till he jumped out with the latch-key, sat more still than I would have believed it possible.

“At the door of their drawing-room she left my arm and walked in first, catching at the chairs and tables. She unpinned her hat, then, exhausted with the effort, her cloak still hanging from her shoulders, flung herself into a deep armchair, sideways, her face half buried in a cushion. The good brother appeared silently before her with a glass of water. She motioned it away. He drank it himself and walked off to a distant corner — behind the grand piano, somewhere. All was still in this room where I had seen, for the first time, Sevrin, the anti-anarchist, captivated and spellbound by the consummate and hereditary grimaces that in a certain sphere of life take the place of feelings with an excellent effect. I suppose her thoughts were busy with the same memory. Her shoulders shook violently. A pure attack of nerves. When it quieted down she affected firmness, ‘What is done to a man of that sort? What will they do to him?’

“‘Nothing. They can do nothing to him,’ I assured her, with perfect truth. I was pretty certain he had died in less than twenty minutes from the moment his hand had gone to his lips. For if his fanatical anti-anarchism went even as far as carrying poison in his pocket, only to rob his adversaries of legitimate vengeance, I knew he would take care to provide something that would not fail him when required.

“She drew an angry breath. There were red spots on her cheeks and a feverish brilliance in her eyes.

“‘Has ever any one been exposed to such a terrible experience? To think that he had held my hand! That man!’ Her face twitched, she gulped down a pathetic sob. ‘If I ever felt sure of anything, it was of Sevrin’s high-minded motives.’

“Then she began to weep quietly, which was good for her. Then through her flood of tears, half resentful, ‘What was it he said to me? — ”From conviction!’ It seemed a vile mockery. What could he mean by it?’

“‘That, my dear young lady,’ I said, gently, ‘is more than I or anybody else can ever explain to you.’“

Mr. X flicked a crumb off the front of his coat.

“And that was strictly true as to her. Though Horne, for instance, understood very well; and so did I, especially after we had been to Sevrin’s lodging in a dismal back street of an intensely respectable quarter. Horne

was known there as a friend, and we had no difficulty in being admitted, the slatternly maid merely remarking, as she let us in, that 'Mr Sevrin had not been home that night.' We forced open a couple of drawers in the way of duty, and found a little useful information. The most interesting part was his diary; for this man, engaged in such deadly work, had the weakness to keep a record of the most damnatory kind. There were his acts and also his thoughts laid bare to us. But the dead don't mind that. They don't mind anything.

"'From conviction.' Yes. A vague but ardent humanitarianism had urged him in his first youth into the bitterest extremity of negation and revolt. Afterwards his optimism flinched. He doubted and became lost. You have heard of converted atheists. These turn often into dangerous fanatics, but the soul remains the same. After he had got acquainted with the girl, there are to be met in that diary of his very queer politico-amorous rhapsodies. He took her sovereign grimaces with deadly seriousness. He longed to convert her. But all this cannot interest you. For the rest, I don't know if you remember — it is a good many years ago now — the journalistic sensation of the 'Hermione Street Mystery'; the finding of a man's body in the cellar of an empty house; the inquest; some arrests; many surmises — then silence — the usual end for many obscure martyrs and confessors. The fact is, he was not enough of an optimist. You must be a savage, tyrannical, pitiless, thick-and-thin optimist, like Horne, for instance, to make a good social rebel of the extreme type.

"He rose from the table. A waiter hurried up with his overcoat; another held his hat in readiness.

"But what became of the young lady?" I asked.

"Do you really want to know?" he said, buttoning himself in his fur coat carefully. "I confess to the small malice of sending her Sevrin's diary. She went into retirement; then she went to Florence; then she went into retreat in a convent. I can't tell where she will go next. What does it matter? Gestures! Gestures! Mere gestures of her class."

"He fitted on his glossy high hat with extreme precision, and casting a rapid glance round the room, full of well-dressed people, innocently dining, muttered between his teeth:

"And nothing else! That is why their kind is fated to perish."

"I never met Mr. X again after that evening. I took to dining at my club. On my next visit to Paris I found my friend all impatience to hear of the

effect produced on me by this rare item of his collection. I told him all the story, and he beamed on me with the pride of his distinguished specimen.

“‘Isn’t X well worth knowing?’ he bubbled over in great delight. ‘He’s unique, amazing, absolutely terrific.’

“His enthusiasm grated upon my finer feelings. I told him curtly that the man’s cynicism was simply abominable.

“‘Oh, abominable! abominable!’ assented my friend, effusively. ‘And then, you know, he likes to have his little joke sometimes,’ he added in a confidential tone.

“I fail to understand the connection of this last remark. I have been utterly unable to discover where in all this the joke comes in.”



# ***THE BRUTE***



## **AN INDIGNANT TALE**

Dodging in from the rain-swept street, I exchanged a smile and a glance with Miss Blank in the bar of the Three Crows. This exchange was effected with extreme propriety. It is a shock to think that, if still alive, Miss Blank must be something over sixty now. How time passes!

Noticing my gaze directed inquiringly at the partition of glass and varnished wood, Miss Blank was good enough to say, encouragingly:

“Only Mr. Jermyn and Mr. Stonor in the parlour with another gentleman I’ve never seen before.”

I moved towards the parlour door. A voice discoursing on the other side (it was but a matchboard partition), rose so loudly that the concluding words became quite plain in all their atrocity.

“That fellow Wilmot fairly dashed her brains out, and a good job, too!”

This inhuman sentiment, since there was nothing profane or improper in it, failed to do as much as to check the slight yawn Miss Blank was achieving behind her hand. And she remained gazing fixedly at the window-panes, which streamed with rain.

As I opened the parlour door the same voice went on in the same cruel strain:

“I was glad when I heard she got the knock from somebody at last. Sorry enough for poor Wilmot, though. That man and I used to be chums at one time. Of course that was the end of him. A clear case if there ever was one. No way out of it. None at all.”

The voice belonged to the gentleman Miss Blank had never seen before. He straddled his long legs on the hearthrug. Jermyn, leaning forward, held his pocket-handkerchief spread out before the grate. He looked back dismally over his shoulder, and as I slipped behind one of the little wooden tables, I nodded to him. On the other side of the fire, imposingly calm and large, sat Mr. Stonor, jammed tight into a capacious Windsor armchair. There was nothing small about him but his short, white side-whiskers. Yards and yards of extra superfine blue cloth (made up into an overcoat) reposed on a chair by his side. And he must just have brought some liner

from sea, because another chair was smothered under his black waterproof, ample as a pall, and made of three-fold oiled silk, double-stitched throughout. A man's hand-bag of the usual size looked like a child's toy on the floor near his feet.

I did not nod to him. He was too big to be nodded to in that parlour. He was a senior Trinity pilot and condescended to take his turn in the cutter only during the summer months. He had been many times in charge of royal yachts in and out of Port Victoria. Besides, it's no use nodding to a monument. And he was like one. He didn't speak, he didn't budge. He just sat there, holding his handsome old head up, immovable, and almost bigger than life. It was extremely fine. Mr. Stonor's presence reduced poor old Jermyn to a mere shabby wisp of a man, and made the talkative stranger in tweeds on the hearthrug look absurdly boyish. The latter must have been a few years over thirty, and was certainly not the sort of individual that gets abashed at the sound of his own voice, because gathering me in, as it were, by a friendly glance, he kept it going without a check.

"I was glad of it," he repeated, emphatically. "You may be surprised at it, but then you haven't gone through the experience I've had of her. I can tell you, it was something to remember. Of course, I got off scot free myself — as you can see. She did her best to break up my pluck for me tho'. She jolly near drove as fine a fellow as ever lived into a madhouse. What do you say to that — eh?"

Not an eyelid twitched in Mr. Stonor's enormous face. Monumental! The speaker looked straight into my eyes.

"It used to make me sick to think of her going about the world murdering people."

Jermyn approached the handkerchief a little nearer to the grate and groaned. It was simply a habit he had.

"I've seen her once," he declared, with mournful indifference. "She had a house — "

The stranger in tweeds turned to stare down at him, surprised.

"She had three houses," he corrected, authoritatively. But Jermyn was not to be contradicted.

"She had a house, I say," he repeated, with dismal obstinacy. "A great, big, ugly, white thing. You could see it from miles away — sticking up."

"So you could," assented the other readily. "It was old Colchester's notion, though he was always threatening to give her up. He couldn't stand

her racket any more, he declared; it was too much of a good thing for him; he would wash his hands of her, if he never got hold of another — and so on. I daresay he would have chucked her, only — it may surprise you — his missus wouldn't hear of it. Funny, eh? But with women, you never know how they will take a thing, and Mrs. Colchester, with her moustaches and big eyebrows, set up for being as strong-minded as they make them. She used to walk about in a brown silk dress, with a great gold cable flopping about her bosom. You should have heard her snapping out: 'Rubbish!' or 'Stuff and nonsense!' I daresay she knew when she was well off. They had no children, and had never set up a home anywhere. When in England she just made shift to hang out anyhow in some cheap hotel or boarding-house. I daresay she liked to get back to the comforts she was used to. She knew very well she couldn't gain by any change. And, moreover, Colchester, though a first-rate man, was not what you may call in his first youth, and, perhaps, she may have thought that he wouldn't be able to get hold of another (as he used to say) so easily. Anyhow, for one reason or another, it was 'Rubbish' and 'Stuff and nonsense' for the good lady. I overheard once young Mr. Apse himself say to her confidentially: 'I assure you, Mrs. Colchester, I am beginning to feel quite unhappy about the name she's getting for herself.' 'Oh,' says she, with her deep little hoarse laugh, 'if one took notice of all the silly talk,' and she showed Apse all her ugly false teeth at once. 'It would take more than that to make me lose my confidence in her, I assure you,' says she."

At this point, without any change of facial expression, Mr. Stonor emitted a short, sardonic laugh. It was very impressive, but I didn't see the fun. I looked from one to another. The stranger on the hearthrug had an ugly smile.

"And Mr. Apse shook both Mrs. Colchester's hands, he was so pleased to hear a good word said for their favourite. All these Apses, young and old you know, were perfectly infatuated with that abominable, dangerous —"

"I beg your pardon," I interrupted, for he seemed to be addressing himself exclusively to me; "but who on earth are you talking about?"

"I am talking of the Apse family," he answered, courteously.

I nearly let out a damn at this. But just then the respected Miss Blank put her head in, and said that the cab was at the door, if Mr. Stonor wanted to catch the eleven three up.

At once the senior pilot arose in his mighty bulk and began to struggle into his coat, with awe-inspiring upheavals. The stranger and I hurried impulsively to his assistance, and directly we laid our hands on him he became perfectly quiescent. We had to raise our arms very high, and to make efforts. It was like caparisoning a docile elephant. With a “Thanks, gentlemen,” he dived under and squeezed himself through the door in a great hurry.

We smiled at each other in a friendly way.

“I wonder how he manages to hoist himself up a ship’s side-ladder,” said the man in tweeds; and poor Jermyn, who was a mere North Sea pilot, without official status or recognition of any sort, pilot only by courtesy, groaned.

“He makes eight hundred a year.”

“Are you a sailor?” I asked the stranger, who had gone back to his position on the rug.

“I used to be till a couple of years ago, when I got married,” answered this communicative individual. “I even went to sea first in that very ship we were speaking of when you came in.”

“What ship?” I asked, puzzled. “I never heard you mention a ship.”

“I’ve just told you her name, my dear sir,” he replied. “The Apse Family. Surely you’ve heard of the great firm of Apse & Sons, shipowners. They had a pretty big fleet. There was the Lucy Apse, and the Harold Apse, and Anne, John, Malcolm, Clara, Juliet, and so on — no end of Apses. Every brother, sister, aunt, cousin, wife — and grandmother, too, for all I know — of the firm had a ship named after them. Good, solid, old-fashioned craft they were, too, built to carry and to last. None of your new-fangled, labour-saving appliances in them, but plenty of men and plenty of good salt beef and hard tack put aboard — and off you go to fight your way out and home again.”

The miserable Jermyn made a sound of approval, which sounded like a groan of pain. Those were the ships for him. He pointed out in doleful tones that you couldn’t say to labour-saving appliances: “Jump lively now, my hearties.” No labour-saving appliance would go aloft on a dirty night with the sands under your lee.

“No,” assented the stranger, with a wink at me. “The Apses didn’t believe in them either, apparently. They treated their people well — as people don’t get treated nowadays, and they were awfully proud of their ships. Nothing

ever happened to them. This last one, the Apse Family, was to be like the others, only she was to be still stronger, still safer, still more roomy and comfortable. I believe they meant her to last for ever. They had her built composite — iron, teak-wood, and greenheart, and her scantling was something fabulous. If ever an order was given for a ship in a spirit of pride this one was. Everything of the best. The commodore captain of the employ was to command her, and they planned the accommodation for him like a house on shore under a big, tall poop that went nearly to the mainmast. No wonder Mrs. Colchester wouldn't let the old man give her up. Why, it was the best home she ever had in all her married days. She had a nerve, that woman.

“The fuss that was made while that ship was building! Let's have this a little stronger, and that a little heavier; and hadn't that other thing better be changed for something a little thicker. The builders entered into the spirit of the game, and there she was, growing into the clumsiest, heaviest ship of her size right before all their eyes, without anybody becoming aware of it somehow. She was to be 2,000 tons register, or a little over; no less on any account. But see what happens. When they came to measure her she turned out 1,999 tons and a fraction. General consternation! And they say old Mr. Apse was so annoyed when they told him that he took to his bed and died. The old gentleman had retired from the firm twenty-five years before, and was ninety-six years old if a day, so his death wasn't, perhaps, so surprising. Still Mr. Lucian Apse was convinced that his father would have lived to a hundred. So we may put him at the head of the list. Next comes the poor devil of a shipwright that brute caught and squashed as she went off the ways. They called it the launch of a ship, but I've heard people say that, from the wailing and yelling and scrambling out of the way, it was more like letting a devil loose upon the river. She snapped all her checks like pack-thread, and went for the tugs in attendance like a fury. Before anybody could see what she was up to she sent one of them to the bottom, and laid up another for three months' repairs. One of her cables parted, and then, suddenly — you couldn't tell why — she let herself be brought up with the other as quiet as a lamb.

“That's how she was. You could never be sure what she would be up to next. There are ships difficult to handle, but generally you can depend on them behaving rationally. With that ship, whatever you did with her you

never knew how it would end. She was a wicked beast. Or, perhaps, she was only just insane.”

He uttered this supposition in so earnest a tone that I could not refrain from smiling. He left off biting his lower lip to apostrophize me.

“Eh! Why not? Why couldn’t there be something in her build, in her lines corresponding to — What’s madness? Only something just a tiny bit wrong in the make of your brain. Why shouldn’t there be a mad ship — I mean mad in a ship-like way, so that under no circumstances could you be sure she would do what any other sensible ship would naturally do for you. There are ships that steer wildly, and ships that can’t be quite trusted always to stay; others want careful watching when running in a gale; and, again, there may be a ship that will make heavy weather of it in every little blow. But then you expect her to be always so. You take it as part of her character, as a ship, just as you take account of a man’s peculiarities of temper when you deal with him. But with her you couldn’t. She was unaccountable. If she wasn’t mad, then she was the most evil-minded, underhand, savage brute that ever went afloat. I’ve seen her run in a heavy gale beautifully for two days, and on the third broach to twice in the same afternoon. The first time she flung the helmsman clean over the wheel, but as she didn’t quite manage to kill him she had another try about three hours afterwards. She swamped herself fore and aft, burst all the canvas we had set, scared all hands into a panic, and even frightened Mrs. Colchester down there in these beautiful stern cabins that she was so proud of. When we mustered the crew there was one man missing. Swept overboard, of course, without being either seen or heard, poor devil! and I only wonder more of us didn’t go.

“Always something like that. Always. I heard an old mate tell Captain Colchester once that it had come to this with him, that he was afraid to open his mouth to give any sort of order. She was as much of a terror in harbour as at sea. You could never be certain what would hold her. On the slightest provocation she would start snapping ropes, cables, wire hawsers, like carrots. She was heavy, clumsy, unhandy — but that does not quite explain that power for mischief she had. You know, somehow, when I think of her I can’t help remembering what we hear of incurable lunatics breaking loose now and then.”

He looked at me inquisitively. But, of course, I couldn’t admit that a ship could be mad.

“In the ports where she was known,” he went on, “they dreaded the sight of her. She thought nothing of knocking away twenty feet or so of solid stone facing off a quay or wiping off the end of a wooden wharf. She must have lost miles of chain and hundreds of tons of anchors in her time. When she fell aboard some poor unoffending ship it was the very devil of a job to haul her off again. And she never got hurt herself — just a few scratches or so, perhaps. They had wanted to have her strong. And so she was. Strong enough to ram Polar ice with. And as she began so she went on. From the day she was launched she never let a year pass without murdering somebody. I think the owners got very worried about it. But they were a stiff-necked generation all these Apse; they wouldn’t admit there could be anything wrong with the Apse Family. They wouldn’t even change her name. ‘Stuff and nonsense,’ as Mrs. Colchester used to say. They ought at least to have shut her up for life in some dry dock or other, away up the river, and never let her smell salt water again. I assure you, my dear sir, that she invariably did kill someone every voyage she made. It was perfectly well-known. She got a name for it, far and wide.”

I expressed my surprise that a ship with such a deadly reputation could ever get a crew.

“Then, you don’t know what sailors are, my dear sir. Let me just show you by an instance. One day in dock at home, while loafing on the forecastle head, I noticed two respectable salts come along, one a middle-aged, competent, steady man, evidently, the other a smart, youngish chap. They read the name on the bows and stopped to look at her. Says the elder man: ‘Apse Family. That’s the sanguinary female dog’ (I’m putting it in that way) ‘of a ship, Jack, that kills a man every voyage. I wouldn’t sign in her — not for Joe, I wouldn’t.’ And the other says: ‘If she were mine, I’d have her towed on the mud and set on fire, blame if I wouldn’t.’ Then the first man chimes in: ‘Much do they care! Men are cheap, God knows.’ The younger one spat in the water alongside. ‘They won’t have me — not for double wages.’

“They hung about for some time and then walked up the dock. Half an hour later I saw them both on our deck looking about for the mate, and apparently very anxious to be taken on. And they were.”

“How do you account for this?” I asked.

“What would you say?” he retorted. “Recklessness! The vanity of boasting in the evening to all their chums: ‘We’ve just shipped in that there

Apse Family. Blow her. She ain't going to scare us.' Sheer sailorlike perversity! A sort of curiosity. Well — a little of all that, no doubt. I put the question to them in the course of the voyage. The answer of the elderly chap was:

“‘A man can die but once.’ The younger assured me in a mocking tone that he wanted to see ‘how she would do it this time.’ But I tell you what; there was a sort of fascination about the brute.”

Jermyn, who seemed to have seen every ship in the world, broke in sulkily:

“I saw her once out of this very window towing up the river; a great black ugly thing, going along like a big hearse.”

“Something sinister about her looks, wasn't there?” said the man in tweeds, looking down at old Jermyn with a friendly eye. “I always had a sort of horror of her. She gave me a beastly shock when I was no more than fourteen, the very first day — nay, hour — I joined her. Father came up to see me off, and was to go down to Gravesend with us. I was his second boy to go to sea. My big brother was already an officer then. We got on board about eleven in the morning, and found the ship ready to drop out of the basin, stern first. She had not moved three times her own length when, at a little pluck the tug gave her to enter the dock gates, she made one of her rampaging starts, and put such a weight on the check rope — a new six-inch hawser — that forward there they had no chance to ease it round in time, and it parted. I saw the broken end fly up high in the air, and the next moment that brute brought her quarter against the pier-head with a jar that staggered everybody about her decks. She didn't hurt herself. Not she! But one of the boys the mate had sent aloft on the mizzen to do something, came down on the poop-deck — thump — right in front of me. He was not much older than myself. We had been grinning at each other only a few minutes before. He must have been handling himself carelessly, not expecting to get such a jerk. I heard his startled cry — Oh! — in a high treble as he felt himself going, and looked up in time to see him go limp all over as he fell. Ough! Poor father was remarkably white about the gills when we shook hands in Gravesend. ‘Are you all right?’ he says, looking hard at me. ‘Yes, father.’ ‘Quite sure?’ ‘Yes, father.’ ‘Well, then good-bye, my boy.’ He told me afterwards that for half a word he would have carried me off home with him there and then. I am the baby of the family — you



know,” added the man in tweeds, stroking his moustache with an ingenuous smile.

I acknowledged this interesting communication by a sympathetic murmur. He waved his hand carelessly.

“This might have utterly spoiled a chap’s nerve for going aloft, you know — utterly. He fell within two feet of me, cracking his head on a mooring-bitt. Never moved. Stone dead. Nice looking little fellow, he was. I had just been thinking we would be great chums. However, that wasn’t yet the worst that brute of a ship could do. I served in her three years of my time, and then I got transferred to the Lucy Apse, for a year. The sailmaker we had in the Apse Family turned up there, too, and I remember him saying to me one evening, after we had been a week at sea: Isn’t she a meek little ship?’ No wonder we thought the Lucy Apse a dear, meek, little ship after getting clear of that big, rampaging savage brute. It was like heaven. Her officers seemed to me the restfullest lot of men on earth. To me who had known no ship but the Apse Family, the Lucy was like a sort of magic craft that did what you wanted her to do of her own accord. One evening we got caught aback pretty sharply from right ahead. In about ten minutes we had her full again, sheets aft, tacks down, decks cleared, and the officer of the watch leaning against the weather rail peacefully. It seemed simply marvellous to me. The other would have stuck for half-an-hour in irons, rolling her decks full of water, knocking the men about — spars cracking, braces snapping, yards taking charge, and a confounded scare going on aft because of her beastly rudder, which she had a way of flapping about fit to raise your hair on end. I couldn’t get over my wonder for days.

“Well, I finished my last year of apprenticeship in that jolly little ship — she wasn’t so little either, but after that other heavy devil she seemed but a plaything to handle. I finished my time and passed; and then just as I was thinking of having three weeks of real good time on shore I got at breakfast a letter asking me the earliest day I could be ready to join the Apse Family as third mate. I gave my plate a shove that shot it into the middle of the table; dad looked up over his paper; mother raised her hands in astonishment, and I went out bare-headed into our bit of garden, where I walked round and round for an hour.

“When I came in again mother was out of the dining-room, and dad had shifted berth into his big armchair. The letter was lying on the mantelpiece.

“‘It’s very creditable to you to get the offer, and very kind of them to make it,’ he said. ‘And I see also that Charles has been appointed chief mate of that ship for one voyage.’

“There was, over leaf, a P.S. to that effect in Mr. Apse’s own handwriting, which I had overlooked. Charley was my big brother.

“I don’t like very much to have two of my boys together in one ship,’ father goes on, in his deliberate, solemn way. ‘And I may tell you that I would not mind writing Mr. Apse a letter to that effect.’

“Dear old dad! He was a wonderful father. What would you have done? The mere notion of going back (and as an officer, too), to be worried and bothered, and kept on the jump night and day by that brute, made me feel sick. But she wasn’t a ship you could afford to fight shy of. Besides, the most genuine excuse could not be given without mortally offending Apse & Sons. The firm, and I believe the whole family down to the old unmarried aunts in Lancashire, had grown desperately touchy about that accursed ship’s character. This was the case for answering ‘Ready now’ from your very death-bed if you wished to die in their good graces. And that’s precisely what I did answer — by wire, to have it over and done with at once.

“The prospect of being shipmates with my big brother cheered me up considerably, though it made me a bit anxious, too. Ever since I remember myself as a little chap he had been very good to me, and I looked upon him as the finest fellow in the world. And so he was. No better officer ever walked the deck of a merchant ship. And that’s a fact. He was a fine, strong, upstanding, sun-tanned, young fellow, with his brown hair curling a little, and an eye like a hawk. He was just splendid. We hadn’t seen each other for many years, and even this time, though he had been in England three weeks already, he hadn’t showed up at home yet, but had spent his spare time in Surrey somewhere making up to Maggie Colchester, old Captain Colchester’s niece. Her father, a great friend of dad’s, was in the sugar-broking business, and Charley made a sort of second home of their house. I wondered what my big brother would think of me. There was a sort of sternness about Charley’s face which never left it, not even when he was larking in his rather wild fashion.

“He received me with a great shout of laughter. He seemed to think my joining as an officer the greatest joke in the world. There was a difference of ten years between us, and I suppose he remembered me best in pinafores.

I was a kid of four when he first went to sea. It surprised me to find how boisterous he could be.

“‘Now we shall see what you are made of,’ he cried. And he held me off by the shoulders, and punched my ribs, and hustled me into his berth. ‘Sit down, Ned. I am glad of the chance of having you with me. I’ll put the finishing touch to you, my young officer, providing you’re worth the trouble. And, first of all, get it well into your head that we are not going to let this brute kill anybody this voyage. We’ll stop her racket.’

“I perceived he was in dead earnest about it. He talked grimly of the ship, and how we must be careful and never allow this ugly beast to catch us napping with any of her damned tricks.

“He gave me a regular lecture on special seamanship for the use of the Apse Family; then changing his tone, he began to talk at large, rattling off the wildest, funniest nonsense, till my sides ached with laughing. I could see very well he was a bit above himself with high spirits. It couldn’t be because of my coming. Not to that extent. But, of course, I wouldn’t have dreamt of asking what was the matter. I had a proper respect for my big brother, I can tell you. But it was all made plain enough a day or two afterwards, when I heard that Miss Maggie Colchester was coming for the voyage. Uncle was giving her a sea-trip for the benefit of her health.

“I don’t know what could have been wrong with her health. She had a beautiful colour, and a deuce of a lot of fair hair. She didn’t care a rap for wind, or rain, or spray, or sun, or green seas, or anything. She was a blue-eyed, jolly girl of the very best sort, but the way she cheeked my big brother used to frighten me. I always expected it to end in an awful row. However, nothing decisive happened till after we had been in Sydney for a week. One day, in the men’s dinner hour, Charley sticks his head into my cabin. I was stretched out on my back on the settee, smoking in peace.

“‘Come ashore with me, Ned,’ he says, in his curt way.

“I jumped up, of course, and away after him down the gangway and up George Street. He strode along like a giant, and I at his elbow, panting. It was confoundedly hot. ‘Where on earth are you rushing me to, Charley?’ I made bold to ask.

“‘Here,’ he says.

“‘Here’ was a jeweller’s shop. I couldn’t imagine what he could want there. It seemed a sort of mad freak. He thrusts under my nose three rings, which looked very tiny on his big, brown palm, growling out —

“‘For Maggie! Which?’

“I got a kind of scare at this. I couldn’t make a sound, but I pointed at the one that sparkled white and blue. He put it in his waistcoat pocket, paid for it with a lot of sovereigns, and bolted out. When we got on board I was quite out of breath. ‘Shake hands, old chap,’ I gasped out. He gave me a thump on the back. ‘Give what orders you like to the boatswain when the hands turn-to,’ says he; ‘I am off duty this afternoon.’

“Then he vanished from the deck for a while, but presently he came out of the cabin with Maggie, and these two went over the gangway publicly, before all hands, going for a walk together on that awful, blazing hot day, with clouds of dust flying about. They came back after a few hours looking very staid, but didn’t seem to have the slightest idea where they had been. Anyway, that’s the answer they both made to Mrs. Colchester’s question at tea-time.

“And didn’t she turn on Charley, with her voice like an old night cabman’s! ‘Rubbish. Don’t know where you’ve been! Stuff and nonsense. You’ve walked the girl off her legs. Don’t do it again.’

“It’s surprising how meek Charley could be with that old woman. Only on one occasion he whispered to me, ‘I’m jolly glad she isn’t Maggie’s aunt, except by marriage. That’s no sort of relationship.’ But I think he let Maggie have too much of her own way. She was hopping all over that ship in her yachting skirt and a red tam o’ shanter like a bright bird on a dead black tree. The old salts used to grin to themselves when they saw her coming along, and offered to teach her knots or splices. I believe she liked the men, for Charley’s sake, I suppose.

“As you may imagine, the fiendish propensities of that cursed ship were never spoken of on board. Not in the cabin, at any rate. Only once on the homeward passage Charley said, incautiously, something about bringing all her crew home this time. Captain Colchester began to look uncomfortable at once, and that silly, hard-bitten old woman flew out at Charley as though he had said something indecent. I was quite confounded myself; as to Maggie, she sat completely mystified, opening her blue eyes very wide. Of course, before she was a day older she wormed it all out of me. She was a very difficult person to lie to.

“‘How awful,’ she said, quite solemn. ‘So many poor fellows. I am glad the voyage is nearly over. I won’t have a moment’s peace about Charley now.’

“I assured her Charley was all right. It took more than that ship knew to get over a seaman like Charley. And she agreed with me.

“Next day we got the tug off Dungeness; and when the tow-rope was fast Charley rubbed his hands and said to me in an undertone —

“‘We’ve baffled her, Ned.’

“‘Looks like it,’ I said, with a grin at him. It was beautiful weather, and the sea as smooth as a millpond. We went up the river without a shadow of trouble except once, when off Hole Haven, the brute took a sudden sheer and nearly had a barge anchored just clear of the fairway. But I was aft, looking after the steering, and she did not catch me napping that time. Charley came up on the poop, looking very concerned. ‘Close shave,’ says he.

“‘Never mind, Charley,’ I answered, cheerily. ‘You’ve tamed her.’

“We were to tow right up to the dock. The river pilot boarded us below Gravesend, and the first words I heard him say were: ‘You may just as well take your port anchor inboard at once, Mr. Mate.’

“This had been done when I went forward. I saw Maggie on the forecastle head enjoying the bustle and I begged her to go aft, but she took no notice of me, of course. Then Charley, who was very busy with the head gear, caught sight of her and shouted in his biggest voice: ‘Get off the forecastle head, Maggie. You’re in the way here.’ For all answer she made a funny face at him, and I saw poor Charley turn away, hiding a smile. She was flushed with the excitement of getting home again, and her blue eyes seemed to snap electric sparks as she looked at the river. A collier brig had gone round just ahead of us, and our tug had to stop her engines in a hurry to avoid running into her.

“In a moment, as is usually the case, all the shipping in the reach seemed to get into a hopeless tangle. A schooner and a ketch got up a small collision all to themselves right in the middle of the river. It was exciting to watch, and, meantime, our tug remained stopped. Any other ship than that brute could have been coaxed to keep straight for a couple of minutes — but not she! Her head fell off at once, and she began to drift down, taking her tug along with her. I noticed a cluster of coasters at anchor within a quarter of a mile of us, and I thought I had better speak to the pilot. ‘If you let her get amongst that lot,’ I said, quietly, ‘she will grind some of them to bits before we get her out again.’

“‘Don’t I know her!’ cries he, stamping his foot in a perfect fury. And he out with his whistle to make that bothered tug get the ship’s head up again as quick as possible. He blew like mad, waving his arm to port, and presently we could see that the tug’s engines had been set going ahead. Her paddles churned the water, but it was as if she had been trying to tow a rock — she couldn’t get an inch out of that ship. Again the pilot blew his whistle, and waved his arm to port. We could see the tug’s paddles turning faster and faster away, broad on our bow.

“For a moment tug and ship hung motionless in a crowd of moving shipping, and then the terrific strain that evil, stony-hearted brute would always put on everything, tore the towing-chock clean out. The tow-rope surged over, snapping the iron stanchions of the head-rail one after another as if they had been sticks of sealing-wax. It was only then I noticed that in order to have a better view over our heads, Maggie had stepped upon the port anchor as it lay flat on the forecastle deck.

“It had been lowered properly into its hardwood beds, but there had been no time to take a turn with it. Anyway, it was quite secure as it was, for going into dock; but I could see directly that the tow-rope would sweep under the fluke in another second. My heart flew up right into my throat, but not before I had time to yell out: ‘Jump clear of that anchor!’

“But I hadn’t time to shriek out her name. I don’t suppose she heard me at all. The first touch of the hawser against the fluke threw her down; she was up on her feet again quick as lightning, but she was up on the wrong side. I heard a horrid, scraping sound, and then that anchor, tipping over, rose up like something alive; its great, rough iron arm caught Maggie round the waist, seemed to clasp her close with a dreadful hug, and flung itself with her over and down in a terrific clang of iron, followed by heavy ringing blows that shook the ship from stem to stern — because the ring stopper held!”

“How horrible!” I exclaimed.

“I used to dream for years afterwards of anchors catching hold of girls,” said the man in tweeds, a little wildly. He shuddered. “With a most pitiful howl Charley was over after her almost on the instant. But, Lord! he didn’t see as much as a gleam of her red tam o’ shanter in the water. Nothing! nothing whatever! In a moment there were half-a-dozen boats around us, and he got pulled into one. I, with the boatswain and the carpenter, let go the other anchor in a hurry and brought the ship up somehow. The pilot had

gone silly. He walked up and down the forecastle head wringing his hands and muttering to himself: 'Killing women, now! Killing women, now!' Not another word could you get out of him.

"Dusk fell, then a night black as pitch; and peering upon the river I heard a low, mournful hail, 'Ship, ahoy!' Two Gravesend watermen came alongside. They had a lantern in their wherry, and looked up the ship's side, holding on to the ladder without a word. I saw in the patch of light a lot of loose, fair hair down there."

He shuddered again.

"After the tide turned poor Maggie's body had floated clear of one of them big mooring buoys," he explained. "I crept aft, feeling half-dead, and managed to send a rocket up — to let the other searchers know, on the river. And then I slunk away forward like a cur, and spent the night sitting on the heel of the bowsprit so as to be as far as possible out of Charley's way."

"Poor fellow!" I murmured.

"Yes. Poor fellow," he repeated, musingly. "That brute wouldn't let him — not even him — cheat her of her prey. But he made her fast in dock next morning. He did. We hadn't exchanged a word — not a single look for that matter. I didn't want to look at him. When the last rope was fast he put his hands to his head and stood gazing down at his feet as if trying to remember something. The men waited on the main deck for the words that end the voyage. Perhaps that is what he was trying to remember. I spoke for him. 'That'll do, men.'"

"I never saw a crew leave a ship so quietly. They sneaked over the rail one after another, taking care not to bang their sea chests too heavily. They looked our way, but not one had the stomach to come up and offer to shake hands with the mate as is usual.

"I followed him all over the empty ship to and fro, here and there, with no living soul about but the two of us, because the old ship-keeper had locked himself up in the galley — both doors. Suddenly poor Charley mutters, in a crazy voice: 'I'm done here,' and strides down the gangway with me at his heels, up the dock, out at the gate, on towards Tower Hill. He used to take rooms with a decent old landlady in America Square, to be near his work.

"All at once he stops short, turns round, and comes back straight at me. 'Ned,' says he, I am going home.' I had the good luck to sight a four-wheeler and got him in just in time. His legs were beginning to give way. In

our hall he fell down on a chair, and I'll never forget father's and mother's amazed, perfectly still faces as they stood over him. They couldn't understand what had happened to him till I blubbered out, 'Maggie got drowned, yesterday, in the river.'

"Mother let out a little cry. Father looks from him to me, and from me to him, as if comparing our faces — for, upon my soul, Charley did not resemble himself at all. Nobody moved; and the poor fellow raises his big brown hands slowly to his throat, and with one single tug rips everything open — collar, shirt, waistcoat — a perfect wreck and ruin of a man. Father and I got him upstairs somehow, and mother pretty nearly killed herself nursing him through a brain fever."

The man in tweeds nodded at me significantly.

"Ah! there was nothing that could be done with that brute. She had a devil in her."

"Where's your brother?" I asked, expecting to hear he was dead. But he was commanding a smart steamer on the China coast, and never came home now.

Jermyn fetched a heavy sigh, and the handkerchief being now sufficiently dry, put it up tenderly to his red and lamentable nose.

"She was a ravening beast," the man in tweeds started again. "Old Colchester put his foot down and resigned. And would you believe it? Apse & Sons wrote to ask whether he wouldn't reconsider his decision! Anything to save the good name of the Apse Family.' Old Colchester went to the office then and said that he would take charge again but only to sail her out into the North Sea and scuttle her there. He was nearly off his chump. He used to be darkish iron-grey, but his hair went snow-white in a fortnight. And Mr. Lucian Apse (they had known each other as young men) pretended not to notice it. Eh? Here's infatuation if you like! Here's pride for you!

"They jumped at the first man they could get to take her, for fear of the scandal of the Apse Family not being able to find a skipper. He was a festive soul, I believe, but he stuck to her grim and hard. Wilmot was his second mate. A harum-scarum fellow, and pretending to a great scorn for all the girls. The fact is he was really timid. But let only one of them do as much as lift her little finger in encouragement, and there was nothing that could hold the beggar. As apprentice, once, he deserted abroad after a petticoat, and would have gone to the dogs then, if his skipper hadn't taken



the trouble to find him and lug him by the ears out of some house of perdition or other.

“It was said that one of the firm had been heard once to express a hope that this brute of a ship would get lost soon. I can hardly credit the tale, unless it might have been Mr. Alfred Apse, whom the family didn’t think much of. They had him in the office, but he was considered a bad egg altogether, always flying off to race meetings and coming home drunk. You would have thought that a ship so full of deadly tricks would run herself ashore some day out of sheer cussedness. But not she! She was going to last for ever. She had a nose to keep off the bottom.”

Jermyn made a grunt of approval.

“A ship after a pilot’s own heart, eh?” jeered the man in tweeds. “Well, Wilmot managed it. He was the man for it, but even he, perhaps, couldn’t have done the trick without the green-eyed governess, or nurse, or whatever she was to the children of Mr. and Mrs. Pamphilius.

“Those people were passengers in her from Port Adelaide to the Cape. Well, the ship went out and anchored outside for the day. The skipper — hospitable soul — had a lot of guests from town to a farewell lunch — as usual with him. It was five in the evening before the last shore boat left the side, and the weather looked ugly and dark in the gulf. There was no reason for him to get under way. However, as he had told everybody he was going that day, he imagined it was proper to do so anyhow. But as he had no mind after all these festivities to tackle the straits in the dark, with a scant wind, he gave orders to keep the ship under lower topsails and foresail as close as she would lie, dodging along the land till the morning. Then he sought his virtuous couch. The mate was on deck, having his face washed very clean with hard rain squalls. Wilmot relieved him at midnight.

“The Apse Family had, as you observed, a house on her poop . . .”

“A big, ugly white thing, sticking up,” Jermyn murmured, sadly, at the fire.

“That’s it: a companion for the cabin stairs and a sort of chart-room combined. The rain drove in gusts on the sleepy Wilmot. The ship was then surging slowly to the southward, close hauled, with the coast within three miles or so to windward. There was nothing to look out for in that part of the gulf, and Wilmot went round to dodge the squalls under the lee of that chart-room, whose door on that side was open. The night was black, like a barrel of coal-tar. And then he heard a woman’s voice whispering to him.

“That confounded green-eyed girl of the Pamphilius people had put the kids to bed a long time ago, of course, but it seems couldn’t get to sleep herself. She heard eight bells struck, and the chief mate come below to turn in. She waited a bit, then got into her dressing-gown and stole across the empty saloon and up the stairs into the chart-room. She sat down on the settee near the open door to cool herself, I daresay.

“I suppose when she whispered to Wilmot it was as if somebody had struck a match in the fellow’s brain. I don’t know how it was they had got so very thick. I fancy he had met her ashore a few times before. I couldn’t make it out, because, when telling the story, Wilmot would break off to swear something awful at every second word. We had met on the quay in Sydney, and he had an apron of sacking up to his chin, a big whip in his hand. A wagon-driver. Glad to do anything not to starve. That’s what he had come down to.

“However, there he was, with his head inside the door, on the girl’s shoulder as likely as not — officer of the watch! The helmsman, on giving his evidence afterwards, said that he shouted several times that the binnacle lamp had gone out. It didn’t matter to him, because his orders were to ‘sail her close.’ ‘I thought it funny,’ he said, ‘that the ship should keep on falling off in squalls, but I luffed her up every time as close as I was able. It was so dark I couldn’t see my hand before my face, and the rain came in bucketfuls on my head.’

“The truth was that at every squall the wind hauled aft a little, till gradually the ship came to be heading straight for the coast, without a single soul in her being aware of it. Wilmot himself confessed that he had not been near the standard compass for an hour. He might well have confessed! The first thing he knew was the man on the look-out shouting blue murder forward there.

“He tore his neck free, he says, and yelled back at him: ‘What do you say?’

“‘I think I hear breakers ahead, sir,’ howled the man, and came rushing aft with the rest of the watch, in the ‘awfullest blinding deluge that ever fell from the sky,’ Wilmot says. For a second or so he was so scared and bewildered that he could not remember on which side of the gulf the ship was. He wasn’t a good officer, but he was a seaman all the same. He pulled himself together in a second, and the right orders sprang to his lips without

thinking. They were too hard up with the helm and shiver the main and mizzen-topsails.

“It seems that the sails actually fluttered. He couldn’t see them, but he heard them rattling and banging above his head. ‘No use! She was too slow in going off,’ he went on, his dirty face twitching, and the damn’d carter’s whip shaking in his hand. ‘She seemed to stick fast.’ And then the flutter of the canvas above his head ceased. At this critical moment the wind hauled aft again with a gust, filling the sails and sending the ship with a great way upon the rocks on her lee bow. She had overreached herself in her last little game. Her time had come — the hour, the man, the black night, the treacherous gust of wind — the right woman to put an end to her. The brute deserved nothing better. Strange are the instruments of Providence. There’s a sort of poetical justice — ”

The man in tweeds looked hard at me.

“The first ledge she went over stripped the false keel off her. Rip! The skipper, rushing out of his berth, found a crazy woman, in a red flannel dressing-gown, flying round and round the cuddy, screeching like a cockatoo.

“The next bump knocked her clean under the cabin table. It also started the stern-post and carried away the rudder, and then that brute ran up a shelving, rocky shore, tearing her bottom out, till she stopped short, and the foremast dropped over the bows like a gangway.”

“Anybody lost?” I asked.

“No one, unless that fellow, Wilmot,” answered the gentleman, unknown to Miss Blank, looking round for his cap. “And his case was worse than drowning for a man. Everybody got ashore all right. Gale didn’t come on till next day, dead from the West, and broke up that brute in a surprisingly short time. It was as though she had been rotten at heart.” . . . He changed his tone, “Rain left off? I must get my bike and rush home to dinner. I live in Herne Bay — came out for a spin this morning.”

He nodded at me in a friendly way, and went out with a swagger.

“Do you know who he is, Jermyn?” I asked.

The North Sea pilot shook his head, dismally. “Fancy losing a ship in that silly fashion! Oh, dear! oh dear!” he groaned in lugubrious tones, spreading his damp handkerchief again like a curtain before the glowing grate.

On going out I exchanged a glance and a smile (strictly proper) with the respectable Miss Blank, barmaid of the Three Crows.



## *AN ANARCHIST*



### A DESPERATE TALE

That year I spent the best two months of the dry season on one of the estates — in fact, on the principal cattle estate — of a famous meat-extract manufacturing company.

B.O.S. Bos. You have seen the three magic letters on the advertisement pages of magazines and newspapers, in the windows of provision merchants, and on calendars for next year you receive by post in the month of November. They scatter pamphlets also, written in a sickly enthusiastic style and in several languages, giving statistics of slaughter and bloodshed enough to make a Turk turn faint. The “art” illustrating that “literature” represents in vivid and shining colours a large and enraged black bull stamping upon a yellow snake writhing in emerald-green grass, with a cobalt-blue sky for a background. It is atrocious and it is an allegory. The snake symbolizes disease, weakness — perhaps mere hunger, which last is the chronic disease of the majority of mankind. Of course everybody knows the B. O. S. Ltd., with its unrivalled products: Vinobos, Jellybos, and the latest unequalled perfection, Tribos, whose nourishment is offered to you not only highly concentrated, but already half digested. Such apparently is the love that Limited Company bears to its fellowmen — even as the love of the father and mother penguin for their hungry fledglings.

Of course the capital of a country must be productively employed. I have nothing to say against the company. But being myself animated by feelings of affection towards my fellow-men, I am saddened by the modern system of advertising. Whatever evidence it offers of enterprise, ingenuity, impudence, and resource in certain individuals, it proves to my mind the wide prevalence of that form of mental degradation which is called gullibility.

In various parts of the civilized and uncivilized world I have had to swallow B. O. S. with more or less benefit to myself, though without great pleasure. Prepared with hot water and abundantly peppered to bring out the taste, this extract is not really unpalatable. But I have never swallowed its advertisements. Perhaps they have not gone far enough. As far as I can

remember they make no promise of everlasting youth to the users of B. O. S., nor yet have they claimed the power of raising the dead for their estimable products. Why this austere reserve, I wonder? But I don't think they would have had me even on these terms. Whatever form of mental degradation I may (being but human) be suffering from, it is not the popular form. I am not gullible.

I have been at some pains to bring out distinctly this statement about myself in view of the story which follows. I have checked the facts as far as possible. I have turned up the files of French newspapers, and I have also talked with the officer who commands the military guard on the Ile Royale, when in the course of my travels I reached Cayenne. I believe the story to be in the main true. It is the sort of story that no man, I think, would ever invent about himself, for it is neither grandiose nor flattering, nor yet funny enough to gratify a perverted vanity.

It concerns the engineer of the steam-launch belonging to the Maranon cattle estate of the B. O. S. Co., Ltd. This estate is also an island — an island as big as a small province, lying in the estuary of a great South American river. It is wild and not beautiful, but the grass growing on its low plains seems to possess exceptionally nourishing and flavouring qualities. It resounds with the lowing of innumerable herds — a deep and distressing sound under the open sky, rising like a monstrous protest of prisoners condemned to death. On the mainland, across twenty miles of discoloured muddy water, there stands a city whose name, let us say, is Horta.

But the most interesting characteristic of this island (which seems like a sort of penal settlement for condemned cattle) consists in its being the only known habitat of an extremely rare and gorgeous butterfly. The species is even more rare than it is beautiful, which is not saying little. I have already alluded to my travels. I travelled at that time, but strictly for myself and with a moderation unknown in our days of round-the-world tickets. I even travelled with a purpose. As a matter of fact, I am — "Ha, ha, ha! — a desperate butterfly-slayer. Ha, ha, ha!"

This was the tone in which Mr. Harry Gee, the manager of the cattle station, alluded to my pursuits. He seemed to consider me the greatest absurdity in the world. On the other hand, the B. O. S. Co., Ltd., represented to him the acme of the nineteenth century's achievement. I believe that he slept in his leggings and spurs. His days he spent in the saddle flying over the plains, followed by a train of half-wild horsemen,

who called him Don Enrique, and who had no definite idea of the B. O. S. Co., Ltd., which paid their wages. He was an excellent manager, but I don't see why, when we met at meals, he should have thumped me on the back, with loud, derisive inquiries: "How's the deadly sport to-day? Butterflies going strong? Ha, ha, ha!" — especially as he charged me two dollars per diem for the hospitality of the B. O. S. Co., Ltd., (capital L1,500,000, fully paid up), in whose balance-sheet for that year those monies are no doubt included. "I don't think I can make it anything less in justice to my company," he had remarked, with extreme gravity, when I was arranging with him the terms of my stay on the island.

His chaff would have been harmless enough if intimacy of intercourse in the absence of all friendly feeling were not a thing detestable in itself. Moreover, his facetiousness was not very amusing. It consisted in the wearisome repetition of descriptive phrases applied to people with a burst of laughter. "Desperate butterfly-slayer. Ha, ha, ha!" was one sample of his peculiar wit which he himself enjoyed so much. And in the same vein of exquisite humour he called my attention to the engineer of the steam-launch, one day, as we strolled on the path by the side of the creek.

The man's head and shoulders emerged above the deck, over which were scattered various tools of his trade and a few pieces of machinery. He was doing some repairs to the engines. At the sound of our footsteps he raised anxiously a grimy face with a pointed chin and a tiny fair moustache. What could be seen of his delicate features under the black smudges appeared to me wasted and livid in the greenish shade of the enormous tree spreading its foliage over the launch moored close to the bank.

To my great surprise, Harry Gee addressed him as "Crocodile," in that half-jeering, half-bullying tone which is characteristic of self-satisfaction in his delectable kind:

"How does the work get on, Crocodile?"

I should have said before that the amiable Harry had picked up French of a sort somewhere — in some colony or other — and that he pronounced it with a disagreeable forced precision as though he meant to guy the language. The man in the launch answered him quickly in a pleasant voice. His eyes had a liquid softness and his teeth flashed dazzlingly white between his thin, drooping lips. The manager turned to me, very cheerful and loud, explaining:

“I call him Crocodile because he lives half in, half out of the creek. Amphibious — see? There’s nothing else amphibious living on the island except crocodiles; so he must belong to the species — eh? But in reality he’s nothing less than un citoyen anarchiste de Barcelone.”

“A citizen anarchist from Barcelona?” I repeated, stupidly, looking down at the man. He had turned to his work in the engine-well of the launch and presented his bowed back to us. In that attitude I heard him protest, very audibly:

“I do not even know Spanish.”

“Hey? What? You dare to deny you come from over there?” the accomplished manager was down on him truculently.

At this the man straightened himself up, dropping a spanner he had been using, and faced us; but he trembled in all his limbs.

“I deny nothing, nothing, nothing!” he said, excitedly.

He picked up the spanner and went to work again without paying any further attention to us. After looking at him for a minute or so, we went away.

“Is he really an anarchist?” I asked, when out of ear-shot.

“I don’t care a hang what he is,” answered the humorous official of the B. O. S. Co. “I gave him the name because it suited me to label him in that way, It’s good for the company.”

“For the company!” I exclaimed, stopping short.

“Aha!” he triumphed, tilting up his hairless pug face and straddling his thin, long legs. “That surprises you. I am bound to do my best for my company. They have enormous expenses. Why — our agent in Horta tells me they spend fifty thousand pounds every year in advertising all over the world! One can’t be too economical in working the show. Well, just you listen. When I took charge here the estate had no steam-launch. I asked for one, and kept on asking by every mail till I got it; but the man they sent out with it chucked his job at the end of two months, leaving the launch moored at the pontoon in Horta. Got a better screw at a sawmill up the river — blast him! And ever since it has been the same thing. Any Scotch or Yankee vagabond that likes to call himself a mechanic out here gets eighteen pounds a month, and the next you know he’s cleared out, after smashing something as likely as not. I give you my word that some of the objects I’ve had for engine-drivers couldn’t tell the boiler from the funnel. But this fellow understands his trade, and I don’t mean him to clear out. See?”



And he struck me lightly on the chest for emphasis. Disregarding his peculiarities of manner, I wanted to know what all this had to do with the man being an anarchist.

“Come!” jeered the manager. “If you saw suddenly a barefooted, unkempt chap slinking amongst the bushes on the sea face of the island, and at the same time observed less than a mile from the beach, a small schooner full of niggers hauling off in a hurry, you wouldn’t think the man fell there from the sky, would you? And it could be nothing else but either that or Cayenne. I’ve got my wits about me. Directly I sighted this queer game I said to myself — ‘Escaped Convict.’ I was as certain of it as I am of seeing you standing here this minute. So I spurred on straight at him. He stood his ground for a bit on a sand hillock crying out: ‘Monsieur! Monsieur! Arretez!’ then at the last moment broke and ran for life. Says I to myself, ‘I’ll tame you before I’m done with you.’ So without a single word I kept on, heading him off here and there. I rounded him up towards the shore, and at last I had him corralled on a spit, his heels in the water and nothing but sea and sky at his back, with my horse pawing the sand and shaking his head within a yard of him.

“He folded his arms on his breast then and stuck his chin up in a sort of desperate way; but I wasn’t to be impressed by the beggar’s posturing.

“Says I, ‘You’re a runaway convict.’

“When he heard French, his chin went down and his face changed.

“‘I deny nothing,’ says he, panting yet, for I had kept him skipping about in front of my horse pretty smartly. I asked him what he was doing there. He had got his breath by then, and explained that he had meant to make his way to a farm which he understood (from the schooner’s people, I suppose) was to be found in the neighbourhood. At that I laughed aloud and he got uneasy. Had he been deceived? Was there no farm within walking distance?

“I laughed more and more. He was on foot, and of course the first bunch of cattle he came across would have stamped him to rags under their hoofs. A dismounted man caught on the feeding-grounds hasn’t got the ghost of a chance.

“‘My coming upon you like this has certainly saved your life,’ I said. He remarked that perhaps it was so; but that for his part he had imagined I had wanted to kill him under the hoofs of my horse. I assured him that nothing would have been easier had I meant it. And then we came to a sort of dead stop. For the life of me I didn’t know what to do with this convict, unless I

chucked him into the sea. It occurred to me to ask him what he had been transported for. He hung his head.

“‘What is it?’ says I. ‘Theft, murder, rape, or what?’ I wanted to hear what he would have to say for himself, though of course I expected it would be some sort of lie. But all he said was —

“‘Make it what you like. I deny nothing. It is no good denying anything.’

“I looked him over carefully and a thought struck me.

“‘They’ve got anarchists there, too,’ I said. ‘Perhaps you’re one of them.’

“‘I deny nothing whatever, monsieur,’ he repeats.

“This answer made me think that perhaps he was not an anarchist. I believe those damned lunatics are rather proud of themselves. If he had been one, he would have probably confessed straight out.

“‘What were you before you became a convict?’

“‘Ouvrier,’ he says. ‘And a good workman, too.’

“At that I began to think he must be an anarchist, after all. That’s the class they come mostly from, isn’t it? I hate the cowardly bomb-throwing brutes. I almost made up my mind to turn my horse short round and leave him to starve or drown where he was, whichever he liked best. As to crossing the island to bother me again, the cattle would see to that. I don’t know what induced me to ask —

“‘What sort of workman?’

“I didn’t care a hang whether he answered me or not. But when he said at once, ‘Mecanicien, monsieur,’ I nearly jumped out of the saddle with excitement. The launch had been lying disabled and idle in the creek for three weeks. My duty to the company was clear. He noticed my start, too, and there we were for a minute or so staring at each other as if bewitched.

“‘Get up on my horse behind me,’ I told him. ‘You shall put my steam-launch to rights.’“

These are the words in which the worthy manager of the Maranon estate related to me the coming of the supposed anarchist. He meant to keep him — out of a sense of duty to the company — and the name he had given him would prevent the fellow from obtaining employment anywhere in Horta. The vaqueros of the estate, when they went on leave, spread it all over the town. They did not know what an anarchist was, nor yet what Barcelona meant. They called him Anarchisto de Barcelona, as if it were his Christian name and surname. But the people in town had been reading in their papers about the anarchists in Europe and were very much impressed. Over the

jocular addition of “de Barcelona” Mr. Harry Gee chuckled with immense satisfaction. “That breed is particularly murderous, isn’t it? It makes the sawmills crowd still more afraid of having anything to do with him — see?” he exulted, candidly. “I hold him by that name better than if I had him chained up by the leg to the deck of the steam-launch.

“And mark,” he added, after a pause, “he does not deny it. I am not wronging him in any way. He is a convict of some sort, anyhow.”

“But I suppose you pay him some wages, don’t you?” I asked.

“Wages! What does he want with money here? He gets his food from my kitchen and his clothing from the store. Of course I’ll give him something at the end of the year, but you don’t think I’d employ a convict and give him the same money I would give an honest man? I am looking after the interests of my company first and last.”

I admitted that, for a company spending fifty thousand pounds every year in advertising, the strictest economy was obviously necessary. The manager of the Maranon Estancia grunted approvingly.

“And I’ll tell you what,” he continued: “if I were certain he’s an anarchist and he had the cheek to ask me for money, I would give him the toe of my boot. However, let him have the benefit of the doubt. I am perfectly willing to take it that he has done nothing worse than to stick a knife into somebody — with extenuating circumstances — French fashion, don’t you know. But that subversive sanguinary rot of doing away with all law and order in the world makes my blood boil. It’s simply cutting the ground from under the feet of every decent, respectable, hard-working person. I tell you that the consciences of people who have them, like you or I, must be protected in some way; or else the first low scoundrel that came along would in every respect be just as good as myself. Wouldn’t he, now? And that’s absurd!”

He glared at me. I nodded slightly and murmured that doubtless there was much subtle truth in his view.

The principal truth discoverable in the views of Paul the engineer was that a little thing may bring about the undoing of a man.

“Il ne faut pas beaucoup pour perdre un homme,” he said to me, thoughtfully, one evening.

I report this reflection in French, since the man was of Paris, not of Barcelona at all. At the Maranon he lived apart from the station, in a small shed with a metal roof and straw walls, which he called *mon atelier*. He had a work-bench there. They had given him several horse-blankets and a

saddle — not that he ever had occasion to ride, but because no other bedding was used by the working-hands, who were all vaqueros — cattlemen. And on this horseman's gear, like a son of the plains, he used to sleep amongst the tools of his trade, in a litter of rusty scrap-iron, with a portable forge at his head, under the work-bench sustaining his grimy mosquito-net.

Now and then I would bring him a few candle ends saved from the scant supply of the manager's house. He was very thankful for these. He did not like to lie awake in the dark, he confessed. He complained that sleep fled from him. "*Le sommeil me fuit*," he declared, with his habitual air of subdued stoicism, which made him sympathetic and touching. I made it clear to him that I did not attach undue importance to the fact of his having been a convict.

Thus it came about that one evening he was led to talk about himself. As one of the bits of candle on the edge of the bench burned down to the end, he hastened to light another.

He had done his military service in a provincial garrison and returned to Paris to follow his trade. It was a well-paid one. He told me with some pride that in a short time he was earning no less than ten francs a day. He was thinking of setting up for himself by and by and of getting married.

Here he sighed deeply and paused. Then with a return to his stoical note:

"It seems I did not know enough about myself."

On his twenty-fifth birthday two of his friends in the repairing shop where he worked proposed to stand him a dinner. He was immensely touched by this attention.

"I was a steady man," he remarked, "but I am not less sociable than any other body."

The entertainment came off in a little cafe on the Boulevard de la Chapelle. At dinner they drank some special wine. It was excellent. Everything was excellent; and the world — in his own words — seemed a very good place to live in. He had good prospects, some little money laid by, and the affection of two excellent friends. He offered to pay for all the drinks after dinner, which was only proper on his part.

They drank more wine; they drank liqueurs, cognac, beer, then more liqueurs and more cognac. Two strangers sitting at the next table looked at him, he said, with so much friendliness, that he invited them to join the party.

He had never drunk so much in his life. His elation was extreme, and so pleasurable that whenever it flagged he hastened to order more drinks.

“It seemed to me,” he said, in his quiet tone and looking on the ground in the gloomy shed full of shadows, “that I was on the point of just attaining a great and wonderful felicity. Another drink, I felt, would do it. The others were holding out well with me, glass for glass.”

But an extraordinary thing happened. At something the strangers said his elation fell. Gloomy ideas — *des idées noires* — rushed into his head. All the world outside the cafe; appeared to him as a dismal evil place where a multitude of poor wretches had to work and slave to the sole end that a few individuals should ride in carriages and live riotously in palaces. He became ashamed of his happiness. The pity of mankind’s cruel lot wrung his heart. In a voice choked with sorrow he tried to express these sentiments. He thinks he wept and swore in turns.

The two new acquaintances hastened to applaud his humane indignation. Yes. The amount of injustice in the world was indeed scandalous. There was only one way of dealing with the rotten state of society. Demolish the whole sacree boutique. Blow up the whole iniquitous show.

Their heads hovered over the table. They whispered to him eloquently; I don’t think they quite expected the result. He was extremely drunk — mad drunk. With a howl of rage he leaped suddenly upon the table. Kicking over the bottles and glasses, he yelled: “Vive l’anarchie! Death to the capitalists!” He yelled this again and again. All round him broken glass was falling, chairs were being swung in the air, people were taking each other by the throat. The police dashed in. He hit, bit, scratched and struggled, till something crashed down upon his head. . . .

He came to himself in a police cell, locked up on a charge of assault, seditious cries, and anarchist propaganda.

He looked at me fixedly with his liquid, shining eyes, that seemed very big in the dim light.

“That was bad. But even then I might have got off somehow, perhaps,” he said, slowly.

I doubt it. But whatever chance he had was done away with by a young socialist lawyer who volunteered to undertake his defence. In vain he assured him that he was no anarchist; that he was a quiet, respectable mechanic, only too anxious to work ten hours per day at his trade. He was represented at the trial as the victim of society and his drunken shoutings as

the expression of infinite suffering. The young lawyer had his way to make, and this case was just what he wanted for a start. The speech for the defence was pronounced magnificent.

The poor fellow paused, swallowed, and brought out the statement:

“I got the maximum penalty applicable to a first offence.”

I made an appropriate murmur. He hung his head and folded his arms.

“When they let me out of prison,” he began, gently, “I made tracks, of course, for my old workshop. My patron had a particular liking for me before; but when he saw me he turned green with fright and showed me the door with a shaking hand.”

While he stood in the street, uneasy and disconcerted, he was accosted by a middle-aged man who introduced himself as an engineer’s fitter, too. “I know who you are,” he said. “I have attended your trial. You are a good comrade and your ideas are sound. But the devil of it is that you won’t be able to get work anywhere now. These bourgeois’ll conspire to starve you. That’s their way. Expect no mercy from the rich.”

To be spoken to so kindly in the street had comforted him very much. His seemed to be the sort of nature needing support and sympathy. The idea of not being able to find work had knocked him over completely. If his patron, who knew him so well for a quiet, orderly, competent workman, would have nothing to do with him now — then surely nobody else would. That was clear. The police, keeping their eye on him, would hasten to warn every employer inclined to give him a chance. He felt suddenly very helpless, alarmed and idle; and he followed the middle-aged man to the estaminet round the corner where he met some other good companions. They assured him that he would not be allowed to starve, work or no work. They had drinks all round to the discomfiture of all employers of labour and to the destruction of society.

He sat biting his lower lip.

“That is, monsieur, how I became a compagnon,” he said. The hand he passed over his forehead was trembling. “All the same, there’s something wrong in a world where a man can get lost for a glass more or less.”

He never looked up, though I could see he was getting excited under his dejection. He slapped the bench with his open palm.

“No!” he cried. “It was an impossible existence! Watched by the police, watched by the comrades, I did not belong to myself any more! Why, I could not even go to draw a few francs from my savings-bank without a

comrade hanging about the door to see that I didn't bolt! And most of them were neither more nor less than housebreakers. The intelligent, I mean. They robbed the rich; they were only getting back their own, they said. When I had had some drink I believed them. There were also the fools and the mad. Des exaltes — quoi! When I was drunk I loved them. When I got more drink I was angry with the world. That was the best time. I found refuge from misery in rage. But one can't be always drunk — n'est-ce pas, monsieur? And when I was sober I was afraid to break away. They would have stuck me like a pig."

He folded his arms again and raised his sharp chin with a bitter smile.

"By and by they told me it was time to go to work. The work was to rob a bank. Afterwards a bomb would be thrown to wreck the place. My beginner's part would be to keep watch in a street at the back and to take care of a black bag with the bomb inside till it was wanted. After the meeting at which the affair was arranged a trusty comrade did not leave me an inch. I had not dared to protest; I was afraid of being done away with quietly in that room; only, as we were walking together I wondered whether it would not be better for me to throw myself suddenly into the Seine. But while I was turning it over in my mind we had crossed the bridge, and afterwards I had not the opportunity."

In the light of the candle end, with his sharp features, fluffy little moustache, and oval face, he looked at times delicately and gaily young, and then appeared quite old, decrepit, full of sorrow, pressing his folded arms to his breast.

As he remained silent I felt bound to ask:

"Well! And how did it end?"

"Deportation to Cayenne," he answered.

He seemed to think that somebody had given the plot away. As he was keeping watch in the back street, bag in hand, he was set upon by the police. "These imbeciles," had knocked him down without noticing what he had in his hand. He wondered how the bomb failed to explode as he fell. But it didn't explode.

"I tried to tell my story in court," he continued. "The president was amused. There were in the audience some idiots who laughed."

I expressed the hope that some of his companions had been caught, too. He shuddered slightly before he told me that there were two — Simon, called also Biscuit, the middle-aged fitter who spoke to him in the street,

and a fellow of the name of Mafile, one of the sympathetic strangers who had applauded his sentiments and consoled his humanitarian sorrows when he got drunk in the cafe.

“Yes,” he went on, with an effort, “I had the advantage of their company over there on St. Joseph’s Island, amongst some eighty or ninety other convicts. We were all classed as dangerous.”

St. Joseph’s Island is the prettiest of the Iles de Salut. It is rocky and green, with shallow ravines, bushes, thickets, groves of mango-trees, and many feathery palms. Six warders armed with revolvers and carbines are in charge of the convicts kept there.

An eight-oared galley keeps up the communication in the daytime, across a channel a quarter of a mile wide, with the Ile Royale, where there is a military post. She makes the first trip at six in the morning. At four in the afternoon her service is over, and she is then hauled up into a little dock on the Ile Royale and a sentry put over her and a few smaller boats. From that time till next morning the island of St. Joseph remains cut off from the rest of the world, with the warders patrolling in turn the path from the warders’ house to the convict huts, and a multitude of sharks patrolling the waters all round.

Under these circumstances the convicts planned a mutiny. Such a thing had never been known in the penitentiary’s history before. But their plan was not without some possibility of success. The warders were to be taken by surprise and murdered during the night. Their arms would enable the convicts to shoot down the people in the galley as she came alongside in the morning. The galley once in their possession, other boats were to be captured, and the whole company was to row away up the coast.

At dusk the two warders on duty mustered the convicts as usual. Then they proceeded to inspect the huts to ascertain that everything was in order. In the second they entered they were set upon and absolutely smothered under the numbers of their assailants. The twilight faded rapidly. It was a new moon; and a heavy black squall gathering over the coast increased the profound darkness of the night. The convicts assembled in the open space, deliberating upon the next step to be taken, argued amongst themselves in low voices.

“You took part in all this?” I asked.

“No. I knew what was going to be done, of course. But why should I kill these warders? I had nothing against them. But I was afraid of the others.



Whatever happened, I could not escape from them. I sat alone on the stump of a tree with my head in my hands, sick at heart at the thought of a freedom that could be nothing but a mockery to me. Suddenly I was startled to perceive the shape of a man on the path near by. He stood perfectly still, then his form became effaced in the night. It must have been the chief warder coming to see what had become of his two men. No one noticed him. The convicts kept on quarrelling over their plans. The leaders could not get themselves obeyed. The fierce whispering of that dark mass of men was very horrible.

“At last they divided into two parties and moved off. When they had passed me I rose, weary and hopeless. The path to the warders’ house was dark and silent, but on each side the bushes rustled slightly. Presently I saw a faint thread of light before me. The chief warder, followed by his three men, was approaching cautiously. But he had failed to close his dark lantern properly. The convicts had seen that faint gleam, too. There was an awful savage yell, a turmoil on the dark path, shots fired, blows, groans: and with the sound of smashed bushes, the shouts of the pursuers and the screams of the pursued, the man-hunt, the warder-hunt, passed by me into the interior of the island. I was alone. And I assure you, monsieur, I was indifferent to everything. After standing still for a while, I walked on along the path till I kicked something hard. I stooped and picked up a warder’s revolver. I felt with my fingers that it was loaded in five chambers. In the gusts of wind I heard the convicts calling to each other far away, and then a roll of thunder would cover the soughing and rustling of the trees. Suddenly, a big light ran across my path very low along the ground. And it showed a woman’s skirt with the edge of an apron.

“I knew that the person who carried it must be the wife of the head warder. They had forgotten all about her, it seems. A shot rang out in the interior of the island, and she cried out to herself as she ran. She passed on. I followed, and presently I saw her again. She was pulling at the cord of the big bell which hangs at the end of the landing-pier, with one hand, and with the other she was swinging the heavy lantern to and fro. This is the agreed signal for the Ile Royale should assistance be required at night. The wind carried the sound away from our island and the light she swung was hidden on the shore side by the few trees that grow near the warders’ house.

“I came up quite close to her from behind. She went on without stopping, without looking aside, as though she had been all alone on the island. A

brave woman, monsieur. I put the revolver inside the breast of my blue blouse and waited. A flash of lightning and a clap of thunder destroyed both the sound and the light of the signal for an instant, but she never faltered, pulling at the cord and swinging the lantern as regularly as a machine. She was a comely woman of thirty — no more. I thought to myself, ‘All that’s no good on a night like this.’ And I made up my mind that if a body of my fellow-convicts came down to the pier — which was sure to happen soon — I would shoot her through the head before I shot myself. I knew the ‘comrades’ well. This idea of mine gave me quite an interest in life, monsieur; and at once, instead of remaining stupidly exposed on the pier, I retreated a little way and crouched behind a bush. I did not intend to let myself be pounced upon unawares and be prevented perhaps from rendering a supreme service to at least one human creature before I died myself.

“But we must believe the signal was seen, for the galley from Ile Royale came over in an astonishingly short time. The woman kept right on till the light of her lantern flashed upon the officer in command and the bayonets of the soldiers in the boat. Then she sat down and began to cry.

“She didn’t need me any more. I did not budge. Some soldiers were only in their shirt-sleeves, others without boots, just as the call to arms had found them. They passed by my bush at the double. The galley had been sent away for more; and the woman sat all alone crying at the end of the pier, with the lantern standing on the ground near her.

“Then suddenly I saw in the light at the end of the pier the red pantaloons of two more men. I was overcome with astonishment. They, too, started off at a run. Their tunics flapped unbuttoned and they were bare-headed. One of them panted out to the other, ‘Straight on, straight on!’

“Where on earth did they spring from, I wondered. Slowly I walked down the short pier. I saw the woman’s form shaken by sobs and heard her moaning more and more distinctly, ‘Oh, my man! my poor man! my poor man!’ I stole on quietly. She could neither hear nor see anything. She had thrown her apron over her head and was rocking herself to and fro in her grief. But I remarked a small boat fastened to the end of the pier.

“Those two men — they looked like sous-officiers — must have come in it, after being too late, I suppose, for the galley. It is incredible that they should have thus broken the regulations from a sense of duty. And it was a

stupid thing to do. I could not believe my eyes in the very moment I was stepping into that boat.

“I pulled along the shore slowly. A black cloud hung over the Iles de Salut. I heard firing, shouts. Another hunt had begun — the convict-hunt. The oars were too long to pull comfortably. I managed them with difficulty, though the boat herself was light. But when I got round to the other side of the island the squall broke in rain and wind. I was unable to make head against it. I let the boat drift ashore and secured her.

“I knew the spot. There was a tumbledown old hovel standing near the water. Cowering in there I heard through the noises of the wind and the falling downpour some people tearing through the bushes. They came out on the strand. Soldiers perhaps. A flash of lightning threw everything near me into violent relief. Two convicts!

“And directly an amazed voice exclaimed. ‘It’s a miracle!’ It was the voice of Simon, otherwise Biscuit.

“And another voice growled, ‘What’s a miracle?’

“‘Why, there’s a boat lying here!’

“‘You must be mad, Simon! But there is, after all. . . . A boat.’

“They seemed awed into complete silence. The other man was Mafie. He spoke again, cautiously.

“‘It is fastened up. There must be somebody here.’

“I spoke to them from within the hovel: ‘I am here.’

“They came in then, and soon gave me to understand that the boat was theirs, not mine. ‘There are two of us,’ said Mafie, ‘against you alone.’

“I got out into the open to keep clear of them for fear of getting a treacherous blow on the head. I could have shot them both where they stood. But I said nothing. I kept down the laughter rising in my throat. I made myself very humble and begged to be allowed to go. They consulted in low tones about my fate, while with my hand on the revolver in the bosom of my blouse I had their lives in my power. I let them live. I meant them to pull that boat. I represented to them with abject humility that I understood the management of a boat, and that, being three to pull, we could get a rest in turns. That decided them at last. It was time. A little more and I would have gone into screaming fits at the drollness of it.”

At this point his excitement broke out. He jumped off the bench and gesticulated. The great shadows of his arms darting over roof and walls made the shed appear too small to contain his agitation.

“I deny nothing,” he burst out. “I was elated, monsieur. I tasted a sort of felicity. But I kept very quiet. I took my turns at pulling all through the night. We made for the open sea, putting our trust in a passing ship. It was a foolhardy action. I persuaded them to it. When the sun rose the immensity of water was calm, and the Iles de Salut appeared only like dark specks from the top of each swell. I was steering then. Mafile, who was pulling bow, let out an oath and said, ‘We must rest.’

“The time to laugh had come at last. And I took my fill of it, I can tell you. I held my sides and rolled in my seat, they had such startled faces. ‘What’s got into him, the animal?’ cries Mafile.

“And Simon, who was nearest to me, says over his shoulder to him, ‘Devil take me if I don’t think he’s gone mad!’

“Then I produced the revolver. Aha! In a moment they both got the stoniest eyes you can imagine. Ha, ha! They were frightened. But they pulled. Oh, yes, they pulled all day, sometimes looking wild and sometimes looking faint. I lost nothing of it because I had to keep my eyes on them all the time, or else — crack! — they would have been on top of me in a second. I rested my revolver hand on my knee all ready and steered with the other. Their faces began to blister. Sky and sea seemed on fire round us and the sea steamed in the sun. The boat made a sizzling sound as she went through the water. Sometimes Mafile foamed at the mouth and sometimes he groaned. But he pulled. He dared not stop. His eyes became blood-shot all over, and he had bitten his lower lip to pieces. Simon was as hoarse as a crow.

“‘Comrade — ’ he begins.

“‘There are no comrades here. I am your patron.’

“‘Patron, then,’ he says, ‘in the name of humanity let us rest.’

“I let them. There was a little rainwater washing about the bottom of the boat. I permitted them to snatch some of it in the hollow of their palms. But as I gave the command, ‘En route!’ I caught them exchanging significant glances. They thought I would have to go to sleep sometime! Aha! But I did not want to go to sleep. I was more awake than ever. It is they who went to sleep as they pulled, tumbling off the thwarts head over heels suddenly, one after another. I let them lie. All the stars were out. It was a quiet world. The sun rose. Another day. Allez! En route!

“They pulled badly. Their eyes rolled about and their tongues hung out. In the middle of the forenoon Mafile croaks out: ‘Let us make a rush at him,

Simon. I would just as soon be shot at once as to die of thirst, hunger, and fatigue at the oar.'

"But while he spoke he pulled; and Simon kept on pulling too. It made me smile. Ah! They loved their life these two, in this evil world of theirs, just as I used to love my life, too, before they spoiled it for me with their phrases. I let them go on to the point of exhaustion, and only then I pointed at the sails of a ship on the horizon.

"Aha! You should have seen them revive and buckle to their work! For I kept them at it to pull right across that ship's path. They were changed. The sort of pity I had felt for them left me. They looked more like themselves every minute. They looked at me with the glances I remembered so well. They were happy. They smiled.

"'Well,' says Simon, 'the energy of that youngster has saved our lives. If he hadn't made us, we could never have pulled so far out into the track of ships. Comrade, I forgive you. I admire you.'

"And Mafile growls from forward: 'We owe you a famous debt of gratitude, comrade. You are cut out for a chief.'

"Comrade! Monsieur! Ah, what a good word! And they, such men as these two, had made it accursed. I looked at them. I remembered their lies, their promises, their menaces, and all my days of misery. Why could they not have left me alone after I came out of prison? I looked at them and thought that while they lived I could never be free. Never. Neither I nor others like me with warm hearts and weak heads. For I know I have not a strong head, monsieur. A black rage came upon me — the rage of extreme intoxication — but not against the injustice of society. Oh, no!

"'I must be free!' I cried, furiously.

"'Vive la liberte!' yells that ruffian Mafile. 'Mort aux bourgeois who send us to Cayenne! They shall soon know that we are free.'

"The sky, the sea, the whole horizon, seemed to turn red, blood red all round the boat. My temples were beating so loud that I wondered they did not hear. How is it that they did not? How is it they did not understand?

"I heard Simon ask, 'Have we not pulled far enough out now?'

"'Yes. Far enough,' I said. I was sorry for him; it was the other I hated. He hauled in his oar with a loud sigh, and as he was raising his hand to wipe his forehead with the air of a man who has done his work, I pulled the trigger of my revolver and shot him like this off the knee, right through the heart.

“He tumbled down, with his head hanging over the side of the boat. I did not give him a second glance. The other cried out piercingly. Only one shriek of horror. Then all was still.

“He slipped off the thwart on to his knees and raised his clasped hands before his face in an attitude of supplication. ‘Mercy,’ he whispered, faintly. ‘Mercy for me! — comrade.’

“‘Ah, comrade,’ I said, in a low tone. ‘Yes, comrade, of course. Well, then, shout Vive l’anarchie.’

“He flung up his arms, his face up to the sky and his mouth wide open in a great yell of despair. ‘Vive l’anarchie! Vive — ’

“He collapsed all in a heap, with a bullet through his head.

“I flung them both overboard. I threw away the revolver, too. Then I sat down quietly. I was free at last! At last. I did not even look towards the ship; I did not care; indeed, I think I must have gone to sleep, because all of a sudden there were shouts and I found the ship almost on top of me. They hauled me on board and secured the boat astern. They were all blacks, except the captain, who was a mulatto. He alone knew a few words of French. I could not find out where they were going nor who they were. They gave me something to eat every day; but I did not like the way they used to discuss me in their language. Perhaps they were deliberating about throwing me overboard in order to keep possession of the boat. How do I know? As we were passing this island I asked whether it was inhabited. I understood from the mulatto that there was a house on it. A farm, I fancied, they meant. So I asked them to put me ashore on the beach and keep the boat for their trouble. This, I imagine, was just what they wanted. The rest you know.”

After pronouncing these words he lost suddenly all control over himself. He paced to and fro rapidly, till at last he broke into a run; his arms went like a windmill and his ejaculations became very much like raving. The burden of them was that he “denied nothing, nothing!” I could only let him go on, and sat out of his way, repeating, “Calmez vous, calmez vous,” at intervals, till his agitation exhausted itself.

I must confess, too, that I remained there long after he had crawled under his mosquito-net. He had entreated me not to leave him; so, as one sits up with a nervous child, I sat up with him — in the name of humanity — till he fell asleep.

On the whole, my idea is that he was much more of an anarchist than he confessed to me or to himself; and that, the special features of his case apart, he was very much like many other anarchists. Warm heart and weak head — that is the word of the riddle; and it is a fact that the bitterest contradictions and the deadliest conflicts of the world are carried on in every individual breast capable of feeling and passion.

From personal inquiry I can vouch that the story of the convict mutiny was in every particular as stated by him.

When I got back to Horta from Cayenne and saw the “Anarchist” again, he did not look well. He was more worn, still more frail, and very livid indeed under the grimy smudges of his calling. Evidently the meat of the company’s main herd (in its unconcentrated form) did not agree with him at all.

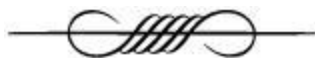
It was on the pontoon in Horta that we met; and I tried to induce him to leave the launch moored where she was and follow me to Europe there and then. It would have been delightful to think of the excellent manager’s surprise and disgust at the poor fellow’s escape. But he refused with unconquerable obstinacy.

“Surely you don’t mean to live always here!” I cried. He shook his head.

“I shall die here,” he said. Then added moodily, “Away from them.”

Sometimes I think of him lying open-eyed on his horseman’s gear in the low shed full of tools and scraps of iron — the anarchist slave of the Maranon estate, waiting with resignation for that sleep which “fled” from him, as he used to say, in such an unaccountable manner.

# *THE DUEL*



## A MILITARY TALE

### I

Napoleon I., whose career had the quality of a duel against the whole of Europe, disliked duelling between the officers of his army. The great military emperor was not a swashbuckler, and had little respect for tradition.

Nevertheless, a story of duelling, which became a legend in the army, runs through the epic of imperial wars. To the surprise and admiration of their fellows, two officers, like insane artists trying to gild refined gold or paint the lily, pursued a private contest through the years of universal carnage. They were officers of cavalry, and their connection with the high-spirited but fanciful animal which carries men into battle seems particularly appropriate. It would be difficult to imagine for heroes of this legend two officers of infantry of the line, for example, whose fantasy is tamed by much walking exercise, and whose valour necessarily must be of a more plodding kind. As to gunners or engineers, whose heads are kept cool on a diet of mathematics, it is simply unthinkable.

The names of the two officers were Feraud and D'Hubert, and they were both lieutenants in a regiment of hussars, but not in the same regiment.

Feraud was doing regimental work, but Lieut. D'Hubert had the good fortune to be attached to the person of the general commanding the division, as officier d'ordonnance. It was in Strasbourg, and in this agreeable and important garrison they were enjoying greatly a short interval of peace. They were enjoying it, though both intensely warlike, because it was a sword-sharpening, firelock-cleaning peace, dear to a military heart and undamaging to military prestige, inasmuch that no one believed in its sincerity or duration.

Under those historical circumstances, so favourable to the proper appreciation of military leisure, Lieut. D'Hubert, one fine afternoon, made his way along a quiet street of a cheerful suburb towards Lieut. Feraud's quarters, which were in a private house with a garden at the back, belonging to an old maiden lady.



His knock at the door was answered instantly by a young maid in Alsatian costume. Her fresh complexion and her long eyelashes, lowered demurely at the sight of the tall officer, caused Lieut. D'Hubert, who was accessible to esthetic impressions, to relax the cold, severe gravity of his face. At the same time he observed that the girl had over her arm a pair of hussar's breeches, blue with a red stripe.

"Lieut. Feraud in?" he inquired, benevolently.

"Oh, no, sir! He went out at six this morning."

The pretty maid tried to close the door. Lieut. D'Hubert, opposing this move with gentle firmness, stepped into the ante-room, jingling his spurs.

"Come, my dear! You don't mean to say he has not been home since six o'clock this morning?"

Saying these words, Lieut. D'Hubert opened without ceremony the door of a room so comfortably and neatly ordered that only from internal evidence in the shape of boots, uniforms, and military accoutrements did he acquire the conviction that it was Lieut. Feraud's room. And he saw also that Lieut. Feraud was not at home. The truthful maid had followed him, and raised her candid eyes to his face.

"H'm!" said Lieut. D'Hubert, greatly disappointed, for he had already visited all the haunts where a lieutenant of hussars could be found of a fine afternoon. "So he's out? And do you happen to know, my dear, why he went out at six this morning?"

"No," she answered, readily. "He came home late last night, and snored. I heard him when I got up at five. Then he dressed himself in his oldest uniform and went out. Service, I suppose."

"Service? Not a bit of it!" cried Lieut. D'Hubert. "Learn, my angel, that he went out thus early to fight a duel with a civilian."

She heard this news without a quiver of her dark eyelashes. It was very obvious that the actions of Lieut. Feraud were generally above criticism. She only looked up for a moment in mute surprise, and Lieut. D'Hubert concluded from this absence of emotion that she must have seen Lieut. Feraud since the morning. He looked around the room.

"Come!" he insisted, with confidential familiarity. "He's perhaps somewhere in the house now?"

She shook her head.

"So much the worse for him!" continued Lieut. D'Hubert, in a tone of anxious conviction. "But he has been home this morning."

This time the pretty maid nodded slightly.

“He has!” cried Lieut. D’Hubert. “And went out again? What for? Couldn’t he keep quietly indoors! What a lunatic! My dear girl — ”

Lieut. D’Hubert’s natural kindness of disposition and strong sense of comradeship helped his powers of observation. He changed his tone to a most insinuating softness, and, gazing at the hussar’s breeches hanging over the arm of the girl, he appealed to the interest she took in Lieut. Feraud’s comfort and happiness. He was pressing and persuasive. He used his eyes, which were kind and fine, with excellent effect. His anxiety to get hold at once of Lieut. Feraud, for Lieut. Feraud’s own good, seemed so genuine that at last it overcame the girl’s unwillingness to speak. Unluckily she had not much to tell. Lieut. Feraud had returned home shortly before ten, had walked straight into his room, and had thrown himself on his bed to resume his slumbers. She had heard him snore rather louder than before far into the afternoon. Then he got up, put on his best uniform, and went out. That was all she knew.

She raised her eyes, and Lieut. D’Hubert stared into them incredulously.

“It’s incredible. Gone parading the town in his best uniform! My dear child, don’t you know he ran that civilian through this morning? Clean through, as you spit a hare.”

The pretty maid heard the gruesome intelligence without any signs of distress. But she pressed her lips together thoughtfully.

“He isn’t parading the town,” she remarked in a low tone. “Far from it.”

“The civilian’s family is making an awful row,” continued Lieut. D’Hubert, pursuing his train of thought. “And the general is very angry. It’s one of the best families in the town. Feraud ought to have kept close at least — ”

“What will the general do to him?” inquired the girl, anxiously.

“He won’t have his head cut off, to be sure,” grumbled Lieut. D’Hubert. “His conduct is positively indecent. He’s making no end of trouble for himself by this sort of bravado.”

“But he isn’t parading the town,” the maid insisted in a shy murmur.

“Why, yes! Now I think of it, I haven’t seen him anywhere about. What on earth has he done with himself?”

“He’s gone to pay a call,” suggested the maid, after a moment of silence.

Lieut. D’Hubert started.

“A call! Do you mean a call on a lady? The cheek of the man! And how do you know this, my dear?”

Without concealing her woman’s scorn for the denseness of the masculine mind, the pretty maid reminded him that Lieut. Feraud had arrayed himself in his best uniform before going out. He had also put on his newest dolman, she added, in a tone as if this conversation were getting on her nerves, and turned away brusquely.

Lieut. D’Hubert, without questioning the accuracy of the deduction, did not see that it advanced him much on his official quest. For his quest after Lieut. Feraud had an official character. He did not know any of the women this fellow, who had run a man through in the morning, was likely to visit in the afternoon. The two young men knew each other but slightly. He bit his gloved finger in perplexity.

“Call!” he exclaimed. “Call on the devil!”

The girl, with her back to him, and folding the hussars breeches on a chair, protested with a vexed little laugh:

“Oh, dear, no! On Madame de Lionne.”

Lieut. D’Hubert whistled softly. Madame de Lionne was the wife of a high official who had a well-known salon and some pretensions to sensibility and elegance. The husband was a civilian, and old; but the society of the salon was young and military. Lieut. D’Hubert had whistled, not because the idea of pursuing Lieut. Feraud into that very salon was disagreeable to him, but because, having arrived in Strasbourg only lately, he had not had the time as yet to get an introduction to Madame de Lionne. And what was that swashbuckler Feraud doing there, he wondered. He did not seem the sort of man who —

“Are you certain of what you say?” asked Lieut. D’Hubert.

The girl was perfectly certain. Without turning round to look at him, she explained that the coachman of their next door neighbours knew the maitre-d’hotel of Madame de Lionne. In this way she had her information. And she was perfectly certain. In giving this assurance she sighed. Lieut. Feraud called there nearly every afternoon, she added.

“Ah, bah!” exclaimed D’Hubert, ironically. His opinion of Madame de Lionne went down several degrees. Lieut. Feraud did not seem to him specially worthy of attention on the part of a woman with a reputation for sensibility and elegance. But there was no saying. At bottom they were all

alike — very practical rather than idealistic. Lieut. D'Hubert, however, did not allow his mind to dwell on these considerations.

"By thunder!" he reflected aloud. "The general goes there sometimes. If he happens to find the fellow making eyes at the lady there will be the devil to pay! Our general is not a very accommodating person, I can tell you."

"Go quickly, then! Don't stand here now I've told you where he is!" cried the girl, colouring to the eyes.

"Thanks, my dear! I don't know what I would have done without you."

After manifesting his gratitude in an aggressive way, which at first was repulsed violently, and then submitted to with a sudden and still more repellent indifference, Lieut. D'Hubert took his departure.

He clanked and jingled along the streets with a martial swagger. To run a comrade to earth in a drawing-room where he was not known did not trouble him in the least. A uniform is a passport. His position as officier d'ordonnance of the general added to his assurance. Moreover, now that he knew where to find Lieut. Feraud, he had no option. It was a service matter.

Madame de Lionne's house had an excellent appearance. A man in livery, opening the door of a large drawing-room with a waxed floor, shouted his name and stood aside to let him pass. It was a reception day. The ladies wore big hats surcharged with a profusion of feathers; their bodies sheathed in clinging white gowns, from the armpits to the tips of the low satin shoes, looked sylph-like and cool in a great display of bare necks and arms. The men who talked with them, on the contrary, were arrayed heavily in multi-coloured garments with collars up to their ears and thick sashes round their waists. Lieut. D'Hubert made his unabashed way across the room and, bowing low before a sylph-like form reclining on a couch, offered his apologies for this intrusion, which nothing could excuse but the extreme urgency of the service order he had to communicate to his comrade Feraud. He proposed to himself to return presently in a more regular manner and beg forgiveness for interrupting the interesting conversation . . .

A bare arm was extended towards him with gracious nonchalance even before he had finished speaking. He pressed the hand respectfully to his lips, and made the mental remark that it was bony. Madame de Lionne was a blonde, with too fine a skin and a long face.

"C'est ca!" she said, with an ethereal smile, disclosing a set of large teeth. "Come this evening to plead for your forgiveness."

"I will not fail, madame."

Meantime, Lieut. Feraud, splendid in his new dolman and the extremely polished boots of his calling, sat on a chair within a foot of the couch, one hand resting on his thigh, the other twirling his moustache to a point. At a significant glance from D'Hubert he rose without alacrity, and followed him into the recess of a window.

"What is it you want with me?" he asked, with astonishing indifference. Lieut. D'Hubert could not imagine that in the innocence of his heart and simplicity of his conscience Lieut. Feraud took a view of his duel in which neither remorse nor yet a rational apprehension of consequences had any place. Though he had no clear recollection how the quarrel had originated (it was begun in an establishment where beer and wine are drunk late at night), he had not the slightest doubt of being himself the outraged party. He had had two experienced friends for his seconds. Everything had been done according to the rules governing that sort of adventures. And a duel is obviously fought for the purpose of someone being at least hurt, if not killed outright. The civilian got hurt. That also was in order. Lieut. Feraud was perfectly tranquil; but Lieut. D'Hubert took it for affectation, and spoke with a certain vivacity.

"I am directed by the general to give you the order to go at once to your quarters, and remain there under close arrest."

It was now the turn of Lieut. Feraud to be astonished. "What the devil are you telling me there?" he murmured, faintly, and fell into such profound wonder that he could only follow mechanically the motions of Lieut. D'Hubert. The two officers, one tall, with an interesting face and a moustache the colour of ripe corn, the other, short and sturdy, with a hooked nose and a thick crop of black curly hair, approached the mistress of the house to take their leave. Madame de Lionne, a woman of eclectic taste, smiled upon these armed young men with impartial sensibility and an equal share of interest. Madame de Lionne took her delight in the infinite variety of the human species. All the other eyes in the drawing-room followed the departing officers; and when they had gone out one or two men, who had already heard of the duel, imparted the information to the sylph-like ladies, who received it with faint shrieks of humane concern.

Meantime, the two hussars walked side by side, Lieut. Feraud trying to master the hidden reason of things which in this instance eluded the grasp of his intellect, Lieut. D'Hubert feeling annoyed at the part he had to play,

because the general's instructions were that he should see personally that Lieut. Feraud carried out his orders to the letter, and at once.

"The chief seems to know this animal," he thought, eyeing his companion, whose round face, the round eyes, and even the twisted-up jet black little moustache seemed animated by a mental exasperation against the incomprehensible. And aloud he observed rather reproachfully, "The general is in a devilish fury with you!"

Lieut. Feraud stopped short on the edge of the pavement, and cried in accents of unmistakable sincerity, "What on earth for?" The innocence of the fiery Gascon soul was depicted in the manner in which he seized his head in both hands as if to prevent it bursting with perplexity.

"For the duel," said Lieut. D'Hubert, curtly. He was annoyed greatly by this sort of perverse fooling.

"The duel! The . . ."

Lieut. Feraud passed from one paroxysm of astonishment into another. He dropped his hands and walked on slowly, trying to reconcile this information with the state of his own feelings. It was impossible. He burst out indignantly, "Was I to let that sauerkraut-eating civilian wipe his boots on the uniform of the 7th Hussars?"

Lieut. D'Hubert could not remain altogether unmoved by that simple sentiment. This little fellow was a lunatic, he thought to himself, but there was something in what he said.

"Of course, I don't know how far you were justified," he began, soothingly. "And the general himself may not be exactly informed. Those people have been deafening him with their lamentations."

"Ah! the general is not exactly informed," mumbled Lieut. Feraud, walking faster and faster as his choler at the injustice of his fate began to rise. "He is not exactly . . . And he orders me under close arrest, with God knows what afterwards!"

"Don't excite yourself like this," remonstrated the other. "Your adversary's people are very influential, you know, and it looks bad enough on the face of it. The general had to take notice of their complaint at once. I don't think he means to be over-severe with you. It's the best thing for you to be kept out of sight for a while."

"I am very much obliged to the general," muttered Lieut. Feraud through his teeth. "And perhaps you would say I ought to be grateful to you, too, for

the trouble you have taken to hunt me up in the drawing-room of a lady who — ”

“Frankly,” interrupted Lieut. D’Hubert, with an innocent laugh, “I think you ought to be. I had no end of trouble to find out where you were. It wasn’t exactly the place for you to disport yourself in under the circumstances. If the general had caught you there making eyes at the goddess of the temple . . . oh, my word! . . . He hates to be bothered with complaints against his officers, you know. And it looked uncommonly like sheer bravado.”

The two officers had arrived now at the street door of Lieut. Feraud’s lodgings. The latter turned towards his companion. “Lieut. D’Hubert,” he said, “I have something to say to you, which can’t be said very well in the street. You can’t refuse to come up.”

The pretty maid had opened the door. Lieut. Feraud brushed past her brusquely, and she raised her scared and questioning eyes to Lieut. D’Hubert, who could do nothing but shrug his shoulders slightly as he followed with marked reluctance.

In his room Lieut. Feraud unhooked the clasp, flung his new dolman on the bed, and, folding his arms across his chest, turned to the other hussar.

“Do you imagine I am a man to submit tamely to injustice?” he inquired, in a boisterous voice.

“Oh, do be reasonable!” remonstrated Lieut. D’Hubert.

“I am reasonable! I am perfectly reasonable!” retorted the other with ominous restraint. “I can’t call the general to account for his behaviour, but you are going to answer me for yours.”

“I can’t listen to this nonsense,” murmured Lieut. D’Hubert, making a slightly contemptuous grimace.

“You call this nonsense? It seems to me a perfectly plain statement. Unless you don’t understand French.”

“What on earth do you mean?”

“I mean,” screamed suddenly Lieut. Feraud, “to cut off your ears to teach you to disturb me with the general’s orders when I am talking to a lady!”

A profound silence followed this mad declaration; and through the open window Lieut. D’Hubert heard the little birds singing sanely in the garden. He said, preserving his calm, “Why! If you take that tone, of course I shall hold myself at your disposition whenever you are at liberty to attend to this affair; but I don’t think you will cut my ears off.”

“I am going to attend to it at once,” declared Lieut. Feraud, with extreme truculence. “If you are thinking of displaying your airs and graces to-night in Madame de Lionne’s salon you are very much mistaken.”

“Really!” said Lieut. D’Hubert, who was beginning to feel irritated, “you are an impracticable sort of fellow. The general’s orders to me were to put you under arrest, not to carve you into small pieces. Good-morning!” And turning his back on the little Gascon, who, always sober in his potations, was as though born intoxicated with the sunshine of his vine-ripening country, the Northman, who could drink hard on occasion, but was born sober under the watery skies of Picardy, made for the door. Hearing, however, the unmistakable sound behind his back of a sword drawn from the scabbard, he had no option but to stop.

“Devil take this mad Southerner!” he thought, spinning round and surveying with composure the warlike posture of Lieut. Feraud, with a bare sword in his hand.

“At once! — at once!” stuttered Feraud, beside himself.

“You had my answer,” said the other, keeping his temper very well.

At first he had been only vexed, and somewhat amused; but now his face got clouded. He was asking himself seriously how he could manage to get away. It was impossible to run from a man with a sword, and as to fighting him, it seemed completely out of the question. He waited awhile, then said exactly what was in his heart.

“Drop this! I won’t fight with you. I won’t be made ridiculous.”

“Ah, you won’t?” hissed the Gascon. “I suppose you prefer to be made infamous. Do you hear what I say? . . . Infamous! Infamous! Infamous!” he shrieked, rising and falling on his toes and getting very red in the face.

Lieut. D’Hubert, on the contrary, became very pale at the sound of the unsavoury word for a moment, then flushed pink to the roots of his fair hair. “But you can’t go out to fight; you are under arrest, you lunatic!” he objected, with angry scorn.

“There’s the garden: it’s big enough to lay out your long carcass in,” spluttered the other with such ardour that somehow the anger of the cooler man subsided.

“This is perfectly absurd,” he said, glad enough to think he had found a way out of it for the moment. “We shall never get any of our comrades to serve as seconds. It’s preposterous.”



“Seconds! Damn the seconds! We don’t want any seconds. Don’t you worry about any seconds. I shall send word to your friends to come and bury you when I am done. And if you want any witnesses, I’ll send word to the old girl to put her head out of a window at the back. Stay! There’s the gardener. He’ll do. He’s as deaf as a post, but he has two eyes in his head. Come along! I will teach you, my staff officer, that the carrying about of a general’s orders is not always child’s play.”

While thus discoursing he had unbuckled his empty scabbard. He sent it flying under the bed, and, lowering the point of the sword, brushed past the perplexed Lieut. D’Hubert, exclaiming, “Follow me!” Directly he had flung open the door a faint shriek was heard and the pretty maid, who had been listening at the keyhole, staggered away, putting the backs of her hands over her eyes. Feraud did not seem to see her, but she ran after him and seized his left arm. He shook her off, and then she rushed towards Lieut. D’Hubert and clawed at the sleeve of his uniform.

“Wretched man!” she sobbed. “Is this what you wanted to find him for?”

“Let me go,” entreated Lieut. D’Hubert, trying to disengage himself gently. “It’s like being in a madhouse,” he protested, with exasperation. “Do let me go! I won’t do him any harm.”

A fiendish laugh from Lieut. Feraud commented that assurance. “Come along!” he shouted, with a stamp of his foot.

And Lieut. D’Hubert did follow. He could do nothing else. Yet in vindication of his sanity it must be recorded that as he passed through the ante-room the notion of opening the street door and bolting out presented itself to this brave youth, only of course to be instantly dismissed, for he felt sure that the other would pursue him without shame or compunction. And the prospect of an officer of hussars being chased along the street by another officer of hussars with a naked sword could not be for a moment entertained. Therefore he followed into the garden. Behind them the girl tottered out, too. With ashy lips and wild, scared eyes, she surrendered herself to a dreadful curiosity. She had also the notion of rushing if need be between Lieut. Feraud and death.

The deaf gardener, utterly unconscious of approaching footsteps, went on watering his flowers till Lieut. Feraud thumped him on the back. Beholding suddenly an enraged man flourishing a big sabre, the old chap trembling in all his limbs dropped the watering-pot. At once Lieut. Feraud kicked it away with great animosity, and, seizing the gardener by the throat, backed

him against a tree. He held him there, shouting in his ear, "Stay here, and look on! You understand? You've got to look on! Don't dare budge from the spot!"

Lieut. D'Hubert came slowly down the walk, unclasping his dolman with unconcealed disgust. Even then, with his hand already on the hilt of his sword, he hesitated to draw till a roar, "En garde, fichtre! What do you think you came here for?" and the rush of his adversary forced him to put himself as quickly as possible in a posture of defence.

The clash of arms filled that prim garden, which hitherto had known no more warlike sound than the click of clipping shears; and presently the upper part of an old lady's body was projected out of a window upstairs. She tossed her arms above her white cap, scolding in a cracked voice. The gardener remained glued to the tree, his toothless mouth open in idiotic astonishment, and a little farther up the path the pretty girl, as if spellbound to a small grass plot, ran a few steps this way and that, wringing her hands and muttering crazily. She did not rush between the combatants: the onslaughts of Lieut. Feraud were so fierce that her heart failed her. Lieut. D'Hubert, his faculties concentrated upon defence, needed all his skill and science of the sword to stop the rushes of his adversary. Twice already he had to break ground. It bothered him to feel his foothold made insecure by the round, dry gravel of the path rolling under the hard soles of his boots. This was most unsuitable ground, he thought, keeping a watchful, narrowed gaze, shaded by long eyelashes, upon the fiery stare of his thick-set adversary. This absurd affair would ruin his reputation of a sensible, well-behaved, promising young officer. It would damage, at any rate, his immediate prospects, and lose him the good-will of his general. These worldly preoccupations were no doubt misplaced in view of the solemnity of the moment. A duel, whether regarded as a ceremony in the cult of honour, or even when reduced in its moral essence to a form of manly sport, demands a perfect singleness of intention, a homicidal austerity of mood. On the other hand, this vivid concern for his future had not a bad effect inasmuch as it began to rouse the anger of Lieut. D'Hubert. Some seventy seconds had elapsed since they had crossed blades, and Lieut. D'Hubert had to break ground again in order to avoid impaling his reckless adversary like a beetle for a cabinet of specimens. The result was that misapprehending the motive, Lieut. Feraud with a triumphant sort of snarl pressed his attack.

“This enraged animal will have me against the wall directly,” thought Lieut. D’Hubert. He imagined himself much closer to the house than he was, and he dared not turn his head; it seemed to him that he was keeping his adversary off with his eyes rather more than with his point. Lieut. Feraud crouched and bounded with a fierce tigerish agility fit to trouble the stoutest heart. But what was more appalling than the fury of a wild beast, accomplishing in all innocence of heart a natural function, was the fixity of savage purpose man alone is capable of displaying. Lieut. D’Hubert in the midst of his worldly preoccupations perceived it at last. It was an absurd and damaging affair to be drawn into, but whatever silly intention the fellow had started with, it was clear enough that by this time he meant to kill — nothing less. He meant it with an intensity of will utterly beyond the inferior faculties of a tiger.

As is the case with constitutionally brave men, the full view of the danger interested Lieut. D’Hubert. And directly he got properly interested, the length of his arm and the coolness of his head told in his favour. It was the turn of Lieut. Feraud to recoil, with a bloodcurdling grunt of baffled rage. He made a swift feint, and then rushed straight forward.

“Ah! you would, would you?” Lieut. D’Hubert exclaimed, mentally. The combat had lasted nearly two minutes, time enough for any man to get embittered, apart from the merits of the quarrel. And all at once it was over. Trying to close breast to breast under his adversary’s guard Lieut. Feraud received a slash on his shortened arm. He did not feel it in the least, but it checked his rush, and his feet slipping on the gravel he fell backwards with great violence. The shock jarred his boiling brain into the perfect quietude of insensibility. Simultaneously with his fall the pretty servant-girl shrieked; but the old maiden lady at the window ceased her scolding, and began to cross herself piously.

Beholding his adversary stretched out perfectly still, his face to the sky, Lieut. D’Hubert thought he had killed him outright. The impression of having slashed hard enough to cut his man clean in two abode with him for a while in an exaggerated memory of the right good-will he had put into the blow. He dropped on his knees hastily by the side of the prostrate body. Discovering that not even the arm was severed, a slight sense of disappointment mingled with the feeling of relief. The fellow deserved the worst. But truly he did not want the death of that sinner. The affair was ugly enough as it stood, and Lieut. D’Hubert addressed himself at once to the

task of stopping the bleeding. In this task it was his fate to be ridiculously impeded by the pretty maid. Rending the air with screams of horror, she attacked him from behind and, twining her fingers in his hair, tugged back at his head. Why she should choose to hinder him at this precise moment he could not in the least understand. He did not try. It was all like a very wicked and harassing dream. Twice to save himself from being pulled over he had to rise and fling her off. He did this stoically, without a word, kneeling down again at once to go on with his work. But the third time, his work being done, he seized her and held her arms pinned to her body. Her cap was half off, her face was red, her eyes blazed with crazy boldness. He looked mildly into them while she called him a wretch, a traitor, and a murderer many times in succession. This did not annoy him so much as the conviction that she had managed to scratch his face abundantly. Ridicule would be added to the scandal of the story. He imagined the adorned tale making its way through the garrison of the town, through the whole army on the frontier, with every possible distortion of motive and sentiment and circumstance, spreading a doubt upon the sanity of his conduct and the distinction of his taste even to the very ears of his honourable family. It was all very well for that fellow Feraud, who had no connections, no family to speak of, and no quality but courage, which, anyhow, was a matter of course, and possessed by every single trooper in the whole mass of French cavalry. Still holding down the arms of the girl in a strong grip, Lieut. D'Hubert glanced over his shoulder. Lieut. Feraud had opened his eyes. He did not move. Like a man just waking from a deep sleep he stared without any expression at the evening sky.

Lieut. D'Hubert's urgent shouts to the old gardener produced no effect — not so much as to make him shut his toothless mouth. Then he remembered that the man was stone deaf. All that time the girl struggled, not with maidenly coyness, but like a pretty, dumb fury, kicking his shins now and then. He continued to hold her as if in a vice, his instinct telling him that were he to let her go she would fly at his eyes. But he was greatly humiliated by his position. At last she gave up. She was more exhausted than appeased, he feared. Nevertheless, he attempted to get out of this wicked dream by way of negotiation.

"Listen to me," he said, as calmly as he could. "Will you promise to run for a surgeon if I let you go?"

With real affliction he heard her declare that she would do nothing of the kind. On the contrary, her sobbed out intention was to remain in the garden, and fight tooth and nail for the protection of the vanquished man. This was shocking.

“My dear child!” he cried in despair, “is it possible that you think me capable of murdering a wounded adversary? Is it. . . . Be quiet, you little wild cat, you!”

They struggled. A thick, drowsy voice said behind him, “What are you after with that girl?”

Lieut. Feraud had raised himself on his good arm. He was looking sleepily at his other arm, at the mess of blood on his uniform, at a small red pool on the ground, at his sabre lying a foot away on the path. Then he laid himself down gently again to think it all out, as far as a thundering headache would permit of mental operations.

Lieut. D’Hubert released the girl who crouched at once by the side of the other lieutenant. The shades of night were falling on the little trim garden with this touching group, whence proceeded low murmurs of sorrow and compassion, with other feeble sounds of a different character, as if an imperfectly awake invalid were trying to swear. Lieut. D’Hubert went away.

He passed through the silent house, and congratulated himself upon the dusk concealing his gory hands and scratched face from the passers-by. But this story could by no means be concealed. He dreaded the discredit and ridicule above everything, and was painfully aware of sneaking through the back streets in the manner of a murderer. Presently the sounds of a flute coming out of the open window of a lighted upstairs room in a modest house interrupted his dismal reflections. It was being played with a persevering virtuosity, and through the fioritures of the tune one could hear the regular thumping of the foot beating time on the floor.

Lieut. D’Hubert shouted a name, which was that of an army surgeon whom he knew fairly well. The sounds of the flute ceased, and the musician appeared at the window, his instrument still in his hand, peering into the street.

“Who calls? You, D’Hubert? What brings you this way?”

He did not like to be disturbed at the hour when he was playing the flute. He was a man whose hair had turned grey already in the thankless task of tying up wounds on battlefields where others reaped advancement and glory.

"I want you to go at once and see Feraud. You know Lieut. Feraud? He lives down the second street. It's but a step from here."

"What's the matter with him?"

"Wounded."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure!" cried D'Hubert. "I come from there."

"That's amusing," said the elderly surgeon. Amusing was his favourite word; but the expression of his face when he pronounced it never corresponded. He was a stolid man. "Come in," he added. "I'll get ready in a moment."

"Thanks! I will. I want to wash my hands in your room."

Lieut. D'Hubert found the surgeon occupied in unscrewing his flute, and packing the pieces methodically in a case. He turned his head.

"Water there — in the corner. Your hands do want washing."

"I've stopped the bleeding," said Lieut. D'Hubert. "But you had better make haste. It's rather more than ten minutes ago, you know."

The surgeon did not hurry his movements.

"What's the matter? Dressing came off? That's amusing. I've been at work in the hospital all day but I've been told this morning by somebody that he had come off without a scratch."

"Not the same duel probably," growled moodily Lieut. D'Hubert, wiping his hands on a coarse towel.

"Not the same. . . . What? Another. It would take the very devil to make me go out twice in one day." The surgeon looked narrowly at Lieut. D'Hubert. "How did you come by that scratched face? Both sides, too — and symmetrical. It's amusing."

"Very!" snarled Lieut. D'Hubert. "And you will find his slashed arm amusing, too. It will keep both of you amused for quite a long time."

The doctor was mystified and impressed by the brusque bitterness of Lieut. D'Hubert's tone. They left the house together, and in the street he was still more mystified by his conduct.

"Aren't you coming with me?" he asked.

"No," said Lieut. D'Hubert. "You can find the house by yourself. The front door will be standing open very likely."

"All right. Where's his room?"

"Ground floor. But you had better go right through and look in the garden first."

This astonishing piece of information made the surgeon go off without further parley. Lieut. D'Hubert regained his quarters nursing a hot and uneasy indignation. He dreaded the chaff of his comrades almost as much as the anger of his superiors. The truth was confoundingly grotesque and embarrassing, even putting aside the irregularity of the combat itself, which made it come abominably near a criminal offence. Like all men without much imagination, a faculty which helps the process of reflective thought, Lieut. D'Hubert became frightfully harassed by the obvious aspects of his predicament. He was certainly glad that he had not killed Lieut. Feraud outside all rules, and without the regular witnesses proper to such a transaction. Uncommonly glad. At the same time he felt as though he would have liked to wring his neck for him without ceremony.

He was still under the sway of these contradictory sentiments when the surgeon amateur of the flute came to see him. More than three days had elapsed. Lieut. D'Hubert was no longer officier d'ordonnance to the general commanding the division. He had been sent back to his regiment. And he was resuming his connection with the soldiers' military family by being shut up in close confinement, not at his own quarters in town, but in a room in the barracks. Owing to the gravity of the incident, he was forbidden to see any one. He did not know what had happened, what was being said, or what was being thought. The arrival of the surgeon was a most unexpected thing to the worried captive. The amateur of the flute began by explaining that he was there only by a special favour of the colonel.

"I represented to him that it would be only fair to let you have some authentic news of your adversary," he continued. "You'll be glad to hear he's getting better fast."

Lieut. D'Hubert's face exhibited no conventional signs of gladness. He continued to walk the floor of the dusty bare room.

"Take this chair, doctor," he mumbled.

The doctor sat down.

"This affair is variously appreciated — in town and in the army. In fact, the diversity of opinions is amusing."

"Is it!" mumbled Lieut. D'Hubert, tramping steadily from wall to wall. But within himself he marvelled that there could be two opinions on the matter. The surgeon continued.

"Of course, as the real facts are not known — "

“I should have thought,” interrupted D’Hubert, “that the fellow would have put you in possession of facts.”

“He said something,” admitted the other, “the first time I saw him. And, by the by, I did find him in the garden. The thump on the back of his head had made him a little incoherent then. Afterwards he was rather reticent than otherwise.”

“Didn’t think he would have the grace to be ashamed!” mumbled D’Hubert, resuming his pacing while the doctor murmured, “It’s very amusing. Ashamed! Shame was not exactly his frame of mind. However, you may look at the matter otherwise.”

“What are you talking about? What matter?” asked D’Hubert, with a sidelong look at the heavy-faced, grey-haired figure seated on a wooden chair.

“Whatever it is,” said the surgeon a little impatiently, “I don’t want to pronounce any opinion on your conduct — ”

“By heavens, you had better not!” burst out D’Hubert.

“There! — there! Don’t be so quick in flourishing the sword. It doesn’t pay in the long run. Understand once for all that I would not carve any of you youngsters except with the tools of my trade. But my advice is good. If you go on like this you will make for yourself an ugly reputation.”

“Go on like what?” demanded Lieut. D’Hubert, stopping short, quite startled. “I! — I! — make for myself a reputation. . . . What do you imagine?”

“I told you I don’t wish to judge of the rights and wrongs of this incident. It’s not my business. Nevertheless — ”

“What on earth has he been telling you?” interrupted Lieut. D’Hubert, in a sort of awed scare.

“I told you already, that at first, when I picked him up in the garden, he was incoherent. Afterwards he was naturally reticent. But I gather at least that he could not help himself.”

“He couldn’t?” shouted Lieut. D’Hubert in a great voice. Then, lowering his tone impressively, “And what about me? Could I help myself?”

The surgeon stood up. His thoughts were running upon the flute, his constant companion with a consoling voice. In the vicinity of field ambulances, after twenty-four hours’ hard work, he had been known to trouble with its sweet sounds the horrible stillness of battlefields, given over



to silence and the dead. The solacing hour of his daily life was approaching, and in peace time he held on to the minutes as a miser to his hoard.

“Of course! — of course!” he said, perfunctorily. “You would think so. It’s amusing. However, being perfectly neutral and friendly to you both, I have consented to deliver his message to you. Say that I am humouring an invalid if you like. He wants you to know that this affair is by no means at an end. He intends to send you his seconds directly he has regained his strength — providing, of course, the army is not in the field at that time.”

“He intends, does he? Why, certainly,” spluttered Lieut. D’Hubert in a passion.

The secret of his exasperation was not apparent to the visitor; but this passion confirmed the surgeon in the belief which was gaining ground outside that some very serious difference had arisen between these two young men, something serious enough to wear an air of mystery, some fact of the utmost gravity. To settle their urgent difference about that fact, those two young men had risked being broken and disgraced at the outset almost of their career. The surgeon feared that the forthcoming inquiry would fail to satisfy the public curiosity. They would not take the public into their confidence as to that something which had passed between them of a nature so outrageous as to make them face a charge of murder — neither more nor less. But what could it be?

The surgeon was not very curious by temperament; but that question haunting his mind caused him twice that evening to hold the instrument off his lips and sit silent for a whole minute — right in the middle of a tune — trying to form a plausible conjecture.

## II

He succeeded in this object no better than the rest of the garrison and the whole of society. The two young officers, of no especial consequence till then, became distinguished by the universal curiosity as to the origin of their quarrel. Madame de Lionne’s salon was the centre of ingenious surmises; that lady herself was for a time assailed by inquiries as being the last person known to have spoken to these unhappy and reckless young men before they went out together from her house to a savage encounter with swords, at dusk, in a private garden. She protested she had not observed anything unusual in their demeanour. Lieut. Feraud had been visibly annoyed at being called away. That was natural enough; no man likes to be disturbed in a conversation with a lady famed for her elegance and

sensibility. But in truth the subject bored Madame de Lionne, since her personality could by no stretch of reckless gossip be connected with this affair. And it irritated her to hear it advanced that there might have been some woman in the case. This irritation arose, not from her elegance or sensibility, but from a more instinctive side of her nature. It became so great at last that she peremptorily forbade the subject to be mentioned under her roof. Near her couch the prohibition was obeyed, but farther off in the salon the pall of the imposed silence continued to be lifted more or less. A personage with a long, pale face, resembling the countenance of a sheep, opined, shaking his head, that it was a quarrel of long standing envenomed by time. It was objected to him that the men themselves were too young for such a theory. They belonged also to different and distant parts of France. There were other physical impossibilities, too. A sub-commissary of the Intendence, an agreeable and cultivated bachelor in kerseymere breeches, Hessian boots, and a blue coat embroidered with silver lace, who affected to believe in the transmigration of souls, suggested that the two had met perhaps in some previous existence. The feud was in the forgotten past. It might have been something quite inconceivable in the present state of their being; but their souls remembered the animosity, and manifested an instinctive antagonism. He developed this theme jocularly. Yet the affair was so absurd from the worldly, the military, the honourable, or the prudential point of view, that this weird explanation seemed rather more reasonable than any other.

The two officers had confided nothing definite to any one. Humiliation at having been worsted arms in hand, and an uneasy feeling of having been involved in a scrape by the injustice of fate, kept Lieut. Feraud savagely dumb. He mistrusted the sympathy of mankind. That would, of course, go to that dandified staff officer. Lying in bed, he raved aloud to the pretty maid who administered to his needs with devotion, and listened to his horrible imprecations with alarm. That Lieut. D'Hubert should be made to "pay for it," seemed to her just and natural. Her principal care was that Lieut. Feraud should not excite himself. He appeared so wholly admirable and fascinating to the humility of her heart that her only concern was to see him get well quickly, even if it were only to resume his visits to Madame de Lionne's salon.

Lieut. D'Hubert kept silent for the immediate reason that there was no one, except a stupid young soldier servant, to speak to. Further, he was

aware that the episode, so grave professionally, had its comic side. When reflecting upon it, he still felt that he would like to wring Lieut. Feraud's neck for him. But this formula was figurative rather than precise, and expressed more a state of mind than an actual physical impulse. At the same time, there was in that young man a feeling of comradeship and kindness which made him unwilling to make the position of Lieut. Feraud worse than it was. He did not want to talk at large about this wretched affair. At the inquiry he would have, of course, to speak the truth in self-defence. This prospect vexed him.

But no inquiry took place. The army took the field instead. Lieut. D'Hubert, liberated without remark, took up his regimental duties; and Lieut. Feraud, his arm just out of the sling, rode unquestioned with his squadron to complete his convalescence in the smoke of battlefields and the fresh air of night bivouacs. This bracing treatment suited him so well, that at the first rumour of an armistice being signed he could turn without misgivings to the thoughts of his private warfare.

This time it was to be regular warfare. He sent two friends to Lieut. D'Hubert, whose regiment was stationed only a few miles away. Those friends had asked no questions of their principal. "I owe him one, that pretty staff officer," he had said, grimly, and they went away quite contentedly on their mission. Lieut. D'Hubert had no difficulty in finding two friends equally discreet and devoted to their principal. "There's a crazy fellow to whom I must give a lesson," he had declared curtly; and they asked for no better reasons.

On these grounds an encounter with duelling-swords was arranged one early morning in a convenient field. At the third set-to Lieut. D'Hubert found himself lying on his back on the dewy grass with a hole in his side. A serene sun rising over a landscape of meadows and woods hung on his left. A surgeon — not the flute player, but another — was bending over him, feeling around the wound.

"Narrow squeak. But it will be nothing," he pronounced.

Lieut. D'Hubert heard these words with pleasure. One of his seconds, sitting on the wet grass, and sustaining his head on his lap, said, "The fortune of war, mon pauvre vieux. What will you have? You had better make it up like two good fellows. Do!"

"You don't know what you ask," murmured Lieut. D'Hubert, in a feeble voice. "However, if he . . ."

In another part of the meadow the seconds of Lieut. Feraud were urging him to go over and shake hands with his adversary.

“You have paid him off now — *que diable*. It’s the proper thing to do. This D’Hubert is a decent fellow.”

“I know the decency of these generals’ pets,” muttered Lieut. Feraud through his teeth, and the sombre expression of his face discouraged further efforts at reconciliation. The seconds, bowing from a distance, took their men off the field. In the afternoon Lieut. D’Hubert, very popular as a good comrade uniting great bravery with a frank and equable temper, had many visitors. It was remarked that Lieut. Feraud did not, as is customary, show himself much abroad to receive the felicitations of his friends. They would not have failed him, because he, too, was liked for the exuberance of his southern nature and the simplicity of his character. In all the places where officers were in the habit of assembling at the end of the day the duel of the morning was talked over from every point of view. Though Lieut. D’Hubert had got worsted this time, his sword play was commended. No one could deny that it was very close, very scientific. It was even whispered that if he got touched it was because he wished to spare his adversary. But by many the vigour and dash of Lieut. Feraud’s attack were pronounced irresistible.

The merits of the two officers as combatants were frankly discussed; but their attitude to each other after the duel was criticised lightly and with caution. It was irreconcilable, and that was to be regretted. But after all they knew best what the care of their honour dictated. It was not a matter for their comrades to pry into over-much. As to the origin of the quarrel, the general impression was that it dated from the time they were holding garrison in Strasbourg. The musical surgeon shook his head at that. It went much farther back, he thought.

“Why, of course! You must know the whole story,” cried several voices, eager with curiosity. “What was it?”

He raised his eyes from his glass deliberately. “Even if I knew ever so well, you can’t expect me to tell you, since both the principals choose to say nothing.”

He got up and went out, leaving the sense of mystery behind him. He could not stay any longer, because the witching hour of flute-playing was drawing near.

After he had gone a very young officer observed solemnly, “Obviously, his lips are sealed!”

Nobody questioned the high correctness of that remark. Somehow it added to the impressiveness of the affair. Several older officers of both regiments, prompted by nothing but sheer kindness and love of harmony, proposed to form a Court of Honour, to which the two young men would leave the task of their reconciliation. Unfortunately they began by approaching Lieut. Feraud, on the assumption that, having just scored heavily, he would be found placable and disposed to moderation.

The reasoning was sound enough. Nevertheless, the move turned out unfortunate. In that relaxation of moral fibre, which is brought about by the ease of soothed vanity, Lieut. Feraud had condescended in the secret of his heart to review the case, and even had come to doubt not the justice of his cause, but the absolute sagacity of his conduct. This being so, he was disinclined to talk about it. The suggestion of the regimental wise men put him in a difficult position. He was disgusted at it, and this disgust, by a paradoxical logic, reawakened his animosity against Lieut. D'Hubert. Was he to be pestered with this fellow for ever — the fellow who had an infernal knack of getting round people somehow? And yet it was difficult to refuse point blank that mediation sanctioned by the code of honour.

He met the difficulty by an attitude of grim reserve. He twisted his moustache and used vague words. His case was perfectly clear. He was not ashamed to state it before a proper Court of Honour, neither was he afraid to defend it on the ground. He did not see any reason to jump at the suggestion before ascertaining how his adversary was likely to take it.

Later in the day, his exasperation growing upon him, he was heard in a public place saying sardonically, "that it would be the very luckiest thing for Lieut. D'Hubert, because the next time of meeting he need not hope to get off with the mere trifle of three weeks in bed."

This boastful phrase might have been prompted by the most profound Machiavellism. Southern natures often hide, under the outward impulsiveness of action and speech, a certain amount of astuteness.

Lieut. Feraud, mistrusting the justice of men, by no means desired a Court of Honour; and the above words, according so well with his temperament, had also the merit of serving his turn. Whether meant so or not, they found their way in less than four-and-twenty hours into Lieut. D'Hubert's bedroom. In consequence Lieut. D'Hubert, sitting propped up with pillows, received the overtures made to him next day by the statement that the affair was of a nature which could not bear discussion.

The pale face of the wounded officer, his weak voice which he had yet to use cautiously, and the courteous dignity of his tone had a great effect on his hearers. Reported outside all this did more for deepening the mystery than the vapourings of Lieut. Feraud. This last was greatly relieved at the issue. He began to enjoy the state of general wonder, and was pleased to add to it by assuming an attitude of fierce discretion.

The colonel of Lieut. D'Hubert's regiment was a grey-haired, weather-beaten warrior, who took a simple view of his responsibilities. "I can't," he said to himself, "let the best of my subalterns get damaged like this for nothing. I must get to the bottom of this affair privately. He must speak out if the devil were in it. The colonel should be more than a father to these youngsters." And indeed he loved all his men with as much affection as a father of a large family can feel for every individual member of it. If human beings by an oversight of Providence came into the world as mere civilians, they were born again into a regiment as infants are born into a family, and it was that military birth alone which counted.

At the sight of Lieut. D'Hubert standing before him very bleached and hollow-eyed the heart of the old warrior felt a pang of genuine compassion. All his affection for the regiment — that body of men which he held in his hand to launch forward and draw back, who ministered to his pride and commanded all his thoughts — seemed centred for a moment on the person of the most promising subaltern. He cleared his throat in a threatening manner, and frowned terribly. "You must understand," he began, "that I don't care a rap for the life of a single man in the regiment. I would send the eight hundred and forty-three of you men and horses galloping into the pit of perdition with no more compunction than I would kill a fly!"

"Yes, Colonel. You would be riding at our head," said Lieut. D'Hubert with a wan smile.

The colonel, who felt the need of being very diplomatic, fairly roared at this. "I want you to know, Lieut. D'Hubert, that I could stand aside and see you all riding to Hades if need be. I am a man to do even that if the good of the service and my duty to my country required it from me. But that's unthinkable, so don't you even hint at such a thing." He glared awfully, but his tone softened. "There's some milk yet about that moustache of yours, my boy. You don't know what a man like me is capable of. I would hide behind a haystack if . . . Don't grin at me, sir! How dare you? If this were not a private conversation I would . . . Look here! I am responsible for the

proper expenditure of lives under my command for the glory of our country and the honour of the regiment. Do you understand that? Well, then, what the devil do you mean by letting yourself be spitted like this by that fellow of the 7th Hussars? It's simply disgraceful!"

Lieut. D'Hubert felt vexed beyond measure. His shoulders moved slightly. He made no other answer. He could not ignore his responsibility.

The colonel veiled his glance and lowered his voice still more. "It's deplorable!" he murmured. And again he changed his tone. "Come!" he went on, persuasively, but with that note of authority which dwells in the throat of a good leader of men, "this affair must be settled. I desire to be told plainly what it is all about. I demand, as your best friend, to know."

The compelling power of authority, the persuasive influence of kindness, affected powerfully a man just risen from a bed of sickness. Lieut. D'Hubert's hand, which grasped the knob of a stick, trembled slightly. But his northern temperament, sentimental yet cautious and clear-sighted, too, in its idealistic way, checked his impulse to make a clean breast of the whole deadly absurdity. According to the precept of transcendental wisdom, he turned his tongue seven times in his mouth before he spoke. He made then only a speech of thanks.

The colonel listened, interested at first, then looked mystified. At last he frowned. "You hesitate? — mille tonnerres! Haven't I told you that I will condescend to argue with you — as a friend?"

"Yes, Colonel!" answered Lieut. D'Hubert, gently. "But I am afraid that after you have heard me out as a friend you will take action as my superior officer."

The attentive colonel snapped his jaws. "Well, what of that?" he said, frankly. "Is it so damnably disgraceful?"

"It is not," negatived Lieut. D'Hubert, in a faint but firm voice.

"Of course, I shall act for the good of the service. Nothing can prevent me doing that. What do you think I want to be told for?"

"I know it is not from idle curiosity," protested Lieut. D'Hubert. "I know you will act wisely. But what about the good fame of the regiment?"

"It cannot be affected by any youthful folly of a lieutenant," said the colonel, severely.

"No. It cannot be. But it can be by evil tongues. It will be said that a lieutenant of the 4th Hussars, afraid of meeting his adversary, is hiding

behind his colonel. And that would be worse than hiding behind a haystack — for the good of the service. I cannot afford to do that, Colonel.”

“Nobody would dare to say anything of the kind,” began the colonel very fiercely, but ended the phrase on an uncertain note. The bravery of Lieut. D’Hubert was well known. But the colonel was well aware that the duelling courage, the single combat courage, is rightly or wrongly supposed to be courage of a special sort. And it was eminently necessary that an officer of his regiment should possess every kind of courage — and prove it, too. The colonel stuck out his lower lip, and looked far away with a peculiar glazed stare. This was the expression of his perplexity — an expression practically unknown to his regiment; for perplexity is a sentiment which is incompatible with the rank of colonel of cavalry. The colonel himself was overcome by the unpleasant novelty of the sensation. As he was not accustomed to think except on professional matters connected with the welfare of men and horses, and the proper use thereof on the field of glory, his intellectual efforts degenerated into mere mental repetitions of profane language. “Mille tonnerres! . . . Sacre nom de nom . . .” he thought.

Lieut. D’Hubert coughed painfully, and added in a weary voice: “There will be plenty of evil tongues to say that I’ve been cowed. And I am sure you will not expect me to pass that over. I may find myself suddenly with a dozen duels on my hands instead of this one affair.”

The direct simplicity of this argument came home to the colonel’s understanding. He looked at his subordinate fixedly. “Sit down, Lieutenant!” he said, gruffly. “This is the very devil of a . . . Sit down!”

“Mon Colonel,” D’Hubert began again, “I am not afraid of evil tongues. There’s a way of silencing them. But there’s my peace of mind, too. I wouldn’t be able to shake off the notion that I’ve ruined a brother officer. Whatever action you take, it is bound to go farther. The inquiry has been dropped — let it rest now. It would have been absolutely fatal to Feraud.”

“Hey! What! Did he behave so badly?”

“Yes. It was pretty bad,” muttered Lieut. D’Hubert. Being still very weak, he felt a disposition to cry.

As the other man did not belong to his own regiment the colonel had no difficulty in believing this. He began to pace up and down the room. He was a good chief, a man capable of discreet sympathy. But he was human in other ways, too, and this became apparent because he was not capable of artifice.



“The very devil, Lieutenant,” he blurted out, in the innocence of his heart, “is that I have declared my intention to get to the bottom of this affair. And when a colonel says something . . . you see . . .”

Lieut. D’Hubert broke in earnestly: “Let me entreat you, Colonel, to be satisfied with taking my word of honour that I was put into a damnable position where I had no option; I had no choice whatever, consistent with my dignity as a man and an officer. . . . After all, Colonel, this fact is the very bottom of this affair. Here you’ve got it. The rest is mere detail. . . .”

The colonel stopped short. The reputation of Lieut. D’Hubert for good sense and good temper weighed in the balance. A cool head, a warm heart, open as the day. Always correct in his behaviour. One had to trust him. The colonel repressed manfully an immense curiosity. “H’m! You affirm that as a man and an officer. . . . No option? Eh?”

“As an officer — an officer of the 4th Hussars, too,” insisted Lieut. D’Hubert, “I had not. And that is the bottom of the affair, Colonel.”

“Yes. But still I don’t see why, to one’s colonel. . . . A colonel is a father — que diable!”

Lieut. D’Hubert ought not to have been allowed out as yet. He was becoming aware of his physical insufficiency with humiliation and despair. But the morbid obstinacy of an invalid possessed him, and at the same time he felt with dismay his eyes filling with water. This trouble seemed too big to handle. A tear fell down the thin, pale cheek of Lieut. D’Hubert.

The colonel turned his back on him hastily. You could have heard a pin drop. “This is some silly woman story — is it not?”

Saying these words the chief spun round to seize the truth, which is not a beautiful shape living in a well, but a shy bird best caught by stratagem. This was the last move of the colonel’s diplomacy. He saw the truth shining unmistakably in the gesture of Lieut. D’Hubert raising his weak arms and his eyes to heaven in supreme protest.

“Not a woman affair — eh?” growled the colonel, staring hard. “I don’t ask you who or where. All I want to know is whether there is a woman in it?”

Lieut. D’Hubert’s arms dropped, and his weak voice was pathetically broken.

“Nothing of the kind, mon Colonel.”

“On your honour?” insisted the old warrior.

“On my honour.”

“Very well,” said the colonel, thoughtfully, and bit his lip. The arguments of Lieut. D’Hubert, helped by his liking for the man, had convinced him. On the other hand, it was highly improper that his intervention, of which he had made no secret, should produce no visible effect. He kept Lieut. D’Hubert a few minutes longer, and dismissed him kindly.

“Take a few days more in bed. Lieutenant. What the devil does the surgeon mean by reporting you fit for duty?”

On coming out of the colonel’s quarters, Lieut. D’Hubert said nothing to the friend who was waiting outside to take him home. He said nothing to anybody. Lieut. D’Hubert made no confidences. But on the evening of that day the colonel, strolling under the elms growing near his quarters, in the company of his second in command, opened his lips.

“I’ve got to the bottom of this affair,” he remarked. The lieut.-colonel, a dry, brown chip of a man with short side-whiskers, pricked up his ears at that without letting a sign of curiosity escape him.

“It’s no trifle,” added the colonel, oracularly. The other waited for a long while before he murmured:

“Indeed, sir!”

“No trifle,” repeated the colonel, looking straight before him. “I’ve, however, forbidden D’Hubert either to send to or receive a challenge from Feraud for the next twelve months.”

He had imagined this prohibition to save the prestige a colonel should have. The result of it was to give an official seal to the mystery surrounding this deadly quarrel. Lieut. D’Hubert repelled by an impassive silence all attempts to worm the truth out of him. Lieut. Feraud, secretly uneasy at first, regained his assurance as time went on. He disguised his ignorance of the meaning of the imposed truce by slight sardonic laughs, as though he were amused by what he intended to keep to himself. “But what will you do?” his chums used to ask him. He contented himself by replying “*Qui vivra verra*” with a little truculent air. And everybody admired his discretion.

Before the end of the truce Lieut. D’Hubert got his troop. The promotion was well earned, but somehow no one seemed to expect the event. When Lieut. Feraud heard of it at a gathering of officers, he muttered through his teeth, “Is that so?” At once he unhooked his sabre from a peg near the door, buckled it on carefully, and left the company without another word. He walked home with measured steps, struck a light with his flint and steel, and

lit his tallow candle. Then snatching an unlucky glass tumbler off the mantelpiece he dashed it violently on the floor.

Now that D'Hubert was an officer of superior rank there could be no question of a duel. Neither of them could send or receive a challenge without rendering himself amenable to a court-martial. It was not to be thought of. Lieut. Feraud, who for many days now had experienced no real desire to meet Lieut. D'Hubert arms in hand, chafed again at the systematic injustice of fate. "Does he think he will escape me in that way?" he thought, indignantly. He saw in this promotion an intrigue, a conspiracy, a cowardly manoeuvre. That colonel knew what he was doing. He had hastened to recommend his favourite for a step. It was outrageous that a man should be able to avoid the consequences of his acts in such a dark and tortuous manner.

Of a happy-go-lucky disposition, of a temperament more pugnacious than military, Lieut. Feraud had been content to give and receive blows for sheer love of armed strife, and without much thought of advancement; but now an urgent desire to get on sprang up in his breast. This fighter by vocation resolved in his mind to seize showy occasions and to court the favourable opinion of his chiefs like a mere worldling. He knew he was as brave as any one, and never doubted his personal charm. Nevertheless, neither the bravery nor the charm seemed to work very swiftly. Lieut. Feraud's engaging, careless truculence of a beau sabreur underwent a change. He began to make bitter allusions to "clever fellows who stick at nothing to get on." The army was full of them, he would say; you had only to look round. But all the time he had in view one person only, his adversary, D'Hubert. Once he confided to an appreciative friend: "You see, I don't know how to fawn on the right sort of people. It isn't in my character."

He did not get his step till a week after Austerlitz. The Light Cavalry of the Grand Army had its hands very full of interesting work for a little while. Directly the pressure of professional occupation had been eased Captain Feraud took measures to arrange a meeting without loss of time. "I know my bird," he observed, grimly. "If I don't look sharp he will take care to get himself promoted over the heads of a dozen better men than himself. He's got the knack for that sort of thing."

This duel was fought in Silesia. If not fought to a finish, it was, at any rate, fought to a standstill. The weapon was the cavalry sabre, and the skill,

the science, the vigour, and the determination displayed by the adversaries compelled the admiration of the beholders. It became the subject of talk on both shores of the Danube, and as far as the garrisons of Gratz and Laybach. They crossed blades seven times. Both had many cuts which bled profusely. Both refused to have the combat stopped, time after time, with what appeared the most deadly animosity. This appearance was caused on the part of Captain D'Hubert by a rational desire to be done once for all with this worry; on the part of Captain Feraud by a tremendous exaltation of his pugnacious instincts and the incitement of wounded vanity. At last, dishevelled, their shirts in rags, covered with gore and hardly able to stand, they were led away forcibly by their marvelling and horrified seconds. Later on, besieged by comrades avid of details, these gentlemen declared that they could not have allowed that sort of hacking to go on indefinitely. Asked whether the quarrel was settled this time, they gave it out as their conviction that it was a difference which could only be settled by one of the parties remaining lifeless on the ground. The sensation spread from army corps to army corps, and penetrated at last to the smallest detachments of the troops cantoned between the Rhine and the Save. In the cafes in Vienna it was generally estimated, from details to hand, that the adversaries would be able to meet again in three weeks' time on the outside. Something really transcendent in the way of duelling was expected.

These expectations were brought to naught by the necessities of the service which separated the two officers. No official notice had been taken of their quarrel. It was now the property of the army, and not to be meddled with lightly. But the story of the duel, or rather their duelling propensities, must have stood somewhat in the way of their advancement, because they were still captains when they came together again during the war with Prussia. Detached north after Jena, with the army commanded by Marshal Bernadotte, Prince of Ponte Corvo, they entered Lubeck together.

It was only after the occupation of that town that Captain Feraud found leisure to consider his future conduct in view of the fact that Captain D'Hubert had been given the position of third aide-de-camp to the marshal. He considered it a great part of a night, and in the morning summoned two sympathetic friends.

"I've been thinking it over calmly," he said, gazing at them with blood-shot, tired eyes. "I see that I must get rid of that intriguing personage. Here he's managed to sneak on to the personal staff of the marshal. It's a direct

provocation to me. I can't tolerate a situation in which I am exposed any day to receive an order through him. And God knows what order, too! That sort of thing has happened once before — and that's once too often. He understands this perfectly, never fear. I can't tell you any more. Now you know what it is you have to do."

This encounter took place outside the town of Lubeck, on very open ground, selected with special care in deference to the general sentiment of the cavalry division belonging to the army corps, that this time the two officers should meet on horseback. After all, this duel was a cavalry affair, and to persist in fighting on foot would look like a slight on one's own arm of the service. The seconds, startled by the unusual nature of the suggestion, hastened to refer to their principals. Captain Feraud jumped at it with alacrity. For some obscure reason, depending, no doubt, on his psychology, he imagined himself invincible on horseback. All alone within the four walls of his room he rubbed his hands and muttered triumphantly, "Aha! my pretty staff officer, I've got you now."

Captain D'Hubert on his side, after staring hard for a considerable time at his friends, shrugged his shoulders slightly. This affair had hopelessly and unreasonably complicated his existence for him. One absurdity more or less in the development did not matter — all absurdity was distasteful to him; but, urbane as ever, he produced a faintly ironical smile, and said in his calm voice, "It certainly will do away to some extent with the monotony of the thing."

When left alone, he sat down at a table and took his head into his hands. He had not spared himself of late and the marshal had been working all his aides-de-camp particularly hard. The last three weeks of campaigning in horrible weather had affected his health. When over-tired he suffered from a stitch in his wounded side, and that uncomfortable sensation always depressed him. "It's that brute's doing, too," he thought bitterly.

The day before he had received a letter from home, announcing that his only sister was going to be married. He reflected that from the time she was nineteen and he twenty-six, when he went away to garrison life in Strasbourg, he had had but two short glimpses of her. They had been great friends and confidants; and now she was going to be given away to a man whom he did not know — a very worthy fellow no doubt, but not half good enough for her. He would never see his old Leonie again. She had a capable little head, and plenty of tact; she would know how to manage the fellow, to

be sure. He was easy in his mind about her happiness but he felt ousted from the first place in her thoughts which had been his ever since the girl could speak. A melancholy regret of the days of his childhood settled upon Captain D'Hubert, third aide-de-camp to the Prince of Ponte Corvo.

He threw aside the letter of congratulation he had begun to write as in duty bound, but without enthusiasm. He took a fresh piece of paper, and traced on it the words: "This is my last will and testament." Looking at these words he gave himself up to unpleasant reflection; a presentiment that he would never see the scenes of his childhood weighed down the equable spirits of Captain D'Hubert. He jumped up, pushing his chair back, yawned elaborately in sign that he didn't care anything for presentiments, and throwing himself on the bed went to sleep. During the night he shivered from time to time without waking up. In the morning he rode out of town between his two seconds, talking of indifferent things, and looking right and left with apparent detachment into the heavy morning mists shrouding the flat green fields bordered by hedges. He leaped a ditch, and saw the forms of many mounted men moving in the fog. "We are to fight before a gallery, it seems," he muttered to himself, bitterly.

His seconds were rather concerned at the state of the atmosphere, but presently a pale, sickly sun struggled out of the low vapours, and Captain D'Hubert made out, in the distance, three horsemen riding a little apart from the others. It was Captain Feraud and his seconds. He drew his sabre, and assured himself that it was properly fastened to his wrist. And now the seconds, who had been standing in close group with the heads of their horses together, separated at an easy canter, leaving a large, clear field between him and his adversary. Captain D'Hubert looked at the pale sun, at the dismal fields, and the imbecility of the impending fight filled him with desolation. From a distant part of the field a stentorian voice shouted commands at proper intervals: *Au pas — Au trot — Charrgez! . . .* Presentiments of death don't come to a man for nothing, he thought at the very moment he put spurs to his horse.

And therefore he was more than surprised when, at the very first set-to, Captain Feraud laid himself open to a cut over the forehead, which blinding him with blood, ended the combat almost before it had fairly begun. It was impossible to go on. Captain D'Hubert, leaving his enemy swearing horribly and reeling in the saddle between his two appalled friends, leaped the ditch again into the road and trotted home with his two seconds, who

seemed rather awestruck at the speedy issue of that encounter. In the evening Captain D'Hubert finished the congratulatory letter on his sister's marriage.

He finished it late. It was a long letter. Captain D'Hubert gave reins to his fancy. He told his sister that he would feel rather lonely after this great change in her life; but then the day would come for him, too, to get married. In fact, he was thinking already of the time when there would be no one left to fight with in Europe and the epoch of wars would be over. "I expect then," he wrote, "to be within measurable distance of a marshal's baton, and you will be an experienced married woman. You shall look out a wife for me. I will be, probably, bald by then, and a little blase. I shall require a young girl, pretty of course, and with a large fortune, which should help me to close my glorious career in the splendour befitting my exalted rank." He ended with the information that he had just given a lesson to a worrying, quarrelsome fellow who imagined he had a grievance against him. "But if you, in the depths of your province," he continued, "ever hear it said that your brother is of a quarrelsome disposition, don't you believe it on any account. There is no saying what gossip from the army may reach your innocent ears. Whatever you hear you may rest assured that your ever-loving brother is not a duellist." Then Captain D'Hubert crumpled up the blank sheet of paper headed with the words "This is my last will and testament," and threw it in the fire with a great laugh at himself. He didn't care a snap for what that lunatic could do. He had suddenly acquired the conviction that his adversary was utterly powerless to affect his life in any sort of way; except, perhaps, in the way of putting a special excitement into the delightful, gay intervals between the campaigns.

From this on there were, however, to be no peaceful intervals in the career of Captain D'Hubert. He saw the fields of Eylau and Friedland, marched and countermarched in the snow, in the mud, in the dust of Polish plains, picking up distinction and advancement on all the roads of North-eastern Europe. Meantime, Captain Feraud, despatched southwards with his regiment, made unsatisfactory war in Spain. It was only when the preparations for the Russian campaign began that he was ordered north again. He left the country of mantillas and oranges without regret.

The first signs of a not unbecoming baldness added to the lofty aspect of Colonel D'Hubert's forehead. This feature was no longer white and smooth as in the days of his youth; the kindly open glance of his blue eyes had

grown a little hard as if from much peering through the smoke of battles. The ebony crop on Colonel Feraud's head, coarse and crinkly like a cap of horsehair, showed many silver threads about the temples. A detestable warfare of ambushes and inglorious surprises had not improved his temper. The beak-like curve of his nose was unpleasantly set off by a deep fold on each side of his mouth. The round orbits of his eyes radiated wrinkles. More than ever he recalled an irritable and staring bird — something like a cross between a parrot and an owl. He was still extremely outspoken in his dislike of "intriguing fellows." He seized every opportunity to state that he did not pick up his rank in the ante-rooms of marshals. The unlucky persons, civil or military, who, with an intention of being pleasant, begged Colonel Feraud to tell them how he came by that very apparent scar on the forehead, were astonished to find themselves snubbed in various ways, some of which were simply rude and others mysteriously sardonic. Young officers were warned kindly by their more experienced comrades not to stare openly at the colonel's scar. But indeed an officer need have been very young in his profession not to have heard the legendary tale of that duel originating in a mysterious, unforgivable offence.

### III

The retreat from Moscow submerged all private feelings in a sea of disaster and misery. Colonels without regiments, D'Hubert and Feraud carried the musket in the ranks of the so-called sacred battalion — a battalion recruited from officers of all arms who had no longer any troops to lead.

In that battalion promoted colonels did duty as sergeants; the generals captained the companies; a marshal of France, Prince of the Empire, commanded the whole. All had provided themselves with muskets picked up on the road, and with cartridges taken from the dead. In the general destruction of the bonds of discipline and duty holding together the companies, the battalions, the regiments, the brigades, and divisions of an armed host, this body of men put its pride in preserving some semblance of order and formation. The only stragglers were those who fell out to give up to the frost their exhausted souls. They plodded on, and their passage did not disturb the mortal silence of the plains, shining with the livid light of snows under a sky the colour of ashes. Whirlwinds ran along the fields, broke against the dark column, enveloped it in a turmoil of flying icicles, and subsided, disclosing it creeping on its tragic way without the swing and



rhythm of the military pace. It struggled onwards, the men exchanging neither words nor looks; whole ranks marched touching elbow, day after day and never raising their eyes from the ground, as if lost in despairing reflections. In the dumb, black forests of pines the cracking of overloaded branches was the only sound they heard. Often from daybreak to dusk no one spoke in the whole column. It was like a macabre march of struggling corpses towards a distant grave. Only an alarm of Cossacks could restore to their eyes a semblance of martial resolution. The battalion faced about and deployed, or formed square under the endless fluttering of snowflakes. A cloud of horsemen with fur caps on their heads, levelled long lances, and yelled "Hurrah! Hurrah!" around their menacing immobility whence, with muffled detonations, hundreds of dark red flames darted through the air thick with falling snow. In a very few moments the horsemen would disappear, as if carried off yelling in the gale, and the sacred battalion standing still, alone in the blizzard, heard only the howling of the wind, whose blasts searched their very hearts. Then, with a cry or two of "Vive l'Empereur!" it would resume its march, leaving behind a few lifeless bodies lying huddled up, tiny black specks on the white immensity of the snows.

Though often marching in the ranks, or skirmishing in the woods side by side, the two officers ignored each other; this not so much from inimical intention as from a very real indifference. All their store of moral energy was expended in resisting the terrific enmity of nature and the crushing sense of irretrievable disaster. To the last they counted among the most active, the least demoralized of the battalion; their vigorous vitality invested them both with the appearance of an heroic pair in the eyes of their comrades. And they never exchanged more than a casual word or two, except one day, when skirmishing in front of the battalion against a worrying attack of cavalry, they found themselves cut off in the woods by a small party of Cossacks. A score of fur-capped, hairy horsemen rode to and fro, brandishing their lances in ominous silence; but the two officers had no mind to lay down their arms, and Colonel Feraud suddenly spoke up in a hoarse, growling voice, bringing his firelock to the shoulder. "You take the nearest brute, Colonel D'Hubert; I'll settle the next one. I am a better shot than you are."

Colonel D'Hubert nodded over his levelled musket. Their shoulders were pressed against the trunk of a large tree; on their front enormous snowdrifts

protected them from a direct charge. Two carefully aimed shots rang out in the frosty air, two Cossacks reeled in their saddles. The rest, not thinking the game good enough, closed round their wounded comrades and galloped away out of range. The two officers managed to rejoin their battalion halted for the night. During that afternoon they had leaned upon each other more than once, and towards the end, Colonel D'Hubert, whose long legs gave him an advantage in walking through soft snow, peremptorily took the musket of Colonel Feraud from him and carried it on his shoulder, using his own as a staff.

On the outskirts of a village half buried in the snow an old wooden barn burned with a clear and an immense flame. The sacred battalion of skeletons, muffled in rags, crowded greedily the windward side, stretching hundreds of numbed, bony hands to the blaze. Nobody had noted their approach. Before entering the circle of light playing on the sunken, glassy-eyed, starved faces, Colonel D'Hubert spoke in his turn:

“Here's your musket, Colonel Feraud. I can walk better than you.”

Colonel Feraud nodded, and pushed on towards the warmth of the fierce flames. Colonel D'Hubert was more deliberate, but not the less bent on getting a place in the front rank. Those they shouldered aside tried to greet with a faint cheer the reappearance of the two indomitable companions in activity and endurance. Those manly qualities had never perhaps received a higher tribute than this feeble acclamation.

This is the faithful record of speeches exchanged during the retreat from Moscow by Colonels Feraud and D'Hubert. Colonel Feraud's taciturnity was the outcome of concentrated rage. Short, hairy, black faced, with layers of grime and the thick sprouting of a wiry beard, a frost-bitten hand wrapped up in filthy rags carried in a sling, he accused fate of unparalleled perfidy towards the sublime Man of Destiny. Colonel D'Hubert, his long moustaches pendent in icicles on each side of his cracked blue lips, his eyelids inflamed with the glare of snows, the principal part of his costume consisting of a sheepskin coat looted with difficulty from the frozen corpse of a camp follower found in an abandoned cart, took a more thoughtful view of events. His regularly handsome features, now reduced to mere bony lines and fleshless hollows, looked out of a woman's black velvet hood, over which was rammed forcibly a cocked hat picked up under the wheels of an empty army fourgon, which must have contained at one time some general officer's luggage. The sheepskin coat being short for a man of his

inches ended very high up, and the skin of his legs, blue with the cold, showed through the tatters of his nether garments. This under the circumstances provoked neither jeers nor pity. No one cared how the next man felt or looked. Colonel D'Hubert himself, hardened to exposure, suffered mainly in his self-respect from the lamentable indecency of his costume. A thoughtless person may think that with a whole host of inanimate bodies bestrewing the path of retreat there could not have been much difficulty in supplying the deficiency. But to loot a pair of breeches from a frozen corpse is not so easy as it may appear to a mere theorist. It requires time and labour. You must remain behind while your companions march on. Colonel D'Hubert had his scruples as to falling out. Once he had stepped aside he could not be sure of ever rejoining his battalion; and the ghastly intimacy of a wrestling match with the frozen dead opposing the unyielding rigidity of iron to your violence was repugnant to the delicacy of his feelings. Luckily, one day, grubbing in a mound of snow between the huts of a village in the hope of finding there a frozen potato or some vegetable garbage he could put between his long and shaky teeth, Colonel D'Hubert uncovered a couple of mats of the sort Russian peasants use to line the sides of their carts with. These, beaten free of frozen snow, bent about his elegant person and fastened solidly round his waist, made a bell-shaped nether garment, a sort of stiff petticoat, which rendered Colonel D'Hubert a perfectly decent, but a much more noticeable figure than before.

Thus accoutred, he continued to retreat, never doubting of his personal escape, but full of other misgivings. The early buoyancy of his belief in the future was destroyed. If the road of glory led through such unforeseen passages, he asked himself — for he was reflective — whether the guide was altogether trustworthy. It was a patriotic sadness, not unmingled with some personal concern, and quite unlike the unreasoning indignation against men and things nursed by Colonel Feraud. Recruiting his strength in a little German town for three weeks, Colonel D'Hubert was surprised to discover within himself a love of repose. His returning vigour was strangely pacific in its aspirations. He meditated silently upon this bizarre change of mood. No doubt many of his brother officers of field rank went through the same moral experience. But these were not the times to talk of it. In one of his letters home Colonel D'Hubert wrote, "All your plans, my dear Leonie, for marrying me to the charming girl you have discovered in your neighbourhood, seem farther off than ever. Peace is not yet. Europe wants

another lesson. It will be a hard task for us, but it shall be done, because the Emperor is invincible.”

Thus wrote Colonel D’Hubert from Pomerania to his married sister Leonie, settled in the south of France. And so far the sentiments expressed would not have been disowned by Colonel Feraud, who wrote no letters to anybody, whose father had been in life an illiterate blacksmith, who had no sister or brother, and whom no one desired ardently to pair off for a life of peace with a charming young girl. But Colonel D’Hubert’s letter contained also some philosophical generalities upon the uncertainty of all personal hopes, when bound up entirely with the prestigious fortune of one incomparably great it is true, yet still remaining but a man in his greatness. This view would have appeared rank heresy to Colonel Feraud. Some melancholy forebodings of a military kind, expressed cautiously, would have been pronounced as nothing short of high treason by Colonel Feraud. But Leonie, the sister of Colonel D’Hubert, read them with profound satisfaction, and, folding the letter thoughtfully, remarked to herself that “Armand was likely to prove eventually a sensible fellow.” Since her marriage into a Southern family she had become a convinced believer in the return of the legitimate king. Hopeful and anxious she offered prayers night and morning, and burnt candles in churches for the safety and prosperity of her brother.

She had every reason to suppose that her prayers were heard. Colonel D’Hubert passed through Lutzen, Bautzen, and Leipsic losing no limb, and acquiring additional reputation. Adapting his conduct to the needs of that desperate time, he had never voiced his misgivings. He concealed them under a cheerful courtesy of such pleasant character that people were inclined to ask themselves with wonder whether Colonel D’Hubert was aware of any disasters. Not only his manners, but even his glances remained untroubled. The steady amenity of his blue eyes disconcerted all grumblers, and made despair itself pause.

This bearing was remarked favourably by the Emperor himself; for Colonel D’Hubert, attached now to the Major-General’s staff, came on several occasions under the imperial eye. But it exasperated the higher strung nature of Colonel Feraud. Passing through Magdeburg on service, this last allowed himself, while seated gloomily at dinner with the Commandant de Place, to say of his life-long adversary: “This man does not love the Emperor,” and his words were received by the other guests in

profound silence. Colonel Feraud, troubled in his conscience at the atrocity of the aspersion, felt the need to back it up by a good argument. "I ought to know him," he cried, adding some oaths. "One studies one's adversary. I have met him on the ground half a dozen times, as all the army knows. What more do you want? If that isn't opportunity enough for any fool to size up his man, may the devil take me if I can tell what is." And he looked around the table, obstinate and sombre.

Later on in Paris, while extremely busy reorganizing his regiment, Colonel Feraud learned that Colonel D'Hubert had been made a general. He glared at his informant incredulously, then folded his arms and turned away muttering, "Nothing surprises me on the part of that man."

And aloud he added, speaking over his shoulder, "You would oblige me greatly by telling General D'Hubert at the first opportunity that his advancement saves him for a time from a pretty hot encounter. I was only waiting for him to turn up here."

The other officer remonstrated.

"Could you think of it, Colonel Feraud, at this time, when every life should be consecrated to the glory and safety of France?"

But the strain of unhappiness caused by military reverses had spoiled Colonel Feraud's character. Like many other men, he was rendered wicked by misfortune.

"I cannot consider General D'Hubert's existence of any account either for the glory or safety of France," he snapped viciously. "You don't pretend, perhaps, to know him better than I do — I who have met him half a dozen times on the ground — do you?"

His interlocutor, a young man, was silenced. Colonel Feraud walked up and down the room.

"This is not the time to mince matters," he said. "I can't believe that that man ever loved the Emperor. He picked up his general's stars under the boots of Marshal Berthier. Very well. I'll get mine in another fashion, and then we shall settle this business which has been dragging on too long."

General D'Hubert, informed indirectly of Colonel Feraud's attitude, made a gesture as if to put aside an importunate person. His thoughts were solicited by graver cares. He had had no time to go and see his family. His sister, whose royalist hopes were rising higher every day, though proud of her brother, regretted his recent advancement in a measure, because it put on him a prominent mark of the usurper's favour, which later on could have

an adverse influence upon his career. He wrote to her that no one but an inveterate enemy could say he had got his promotion by favour. As to his career, he assured her that he looked no farther forward into the future than the next battlefield.

Beginning the campaign of France in this dogged spirit, General D'Hubert was wounded on the second day of the battle under Laon. While being carried off the field he heard that Colonel Feraud, promoted this moment to general, had been sent to replace him at the head of his brigade. He cursed his luck impulsively, not being able at the first glance to discern all the advantages of a nasty wound. And yet it was by this heroic method that Providence was shaping his future. Travelling slowly south to his sister's country home under the care of a trusty old servant, General D'Hubert was spared the humiliating contacts and the perplexities of conduct which assailed the men of Napoleonic empire at the moment of its downfall. Lying in his bed, with the windows of his room open wide to the sunshine of Provence, he perceived the undisguised aspect of the blessing conveyed by that jagged fragment of a Prussian shell, which, killing his horse and ripping open his thigh, saved him from an active conflict with his conscience. After the last fourteen years spent sword in hand in the saddle, and with the sense of his duty done to the very end, General D'Hubert found resignation an easy virtue. His sister was delighted with his reasonableness. "I leave myself altogether in your hands, my dear Leonie," he had said to her.

He was still laid up when, the credit of his brother-in-law's family being exerted on his behalf, he received from the royal government not only the confirmation of his rank, but the assurance of being retained on the active list. To this was added an unlimited convalescent leave. The unfavourable opinion entertained of him in Bonapartist circles, though it rested on nothing more solid than the unsupported pronouncement of General Feraud, was directly responsible for General D'Hubert's retention on the active list. As to General Feraud, his rank was confirmed, too. It was more than he dared to expect; but Marshal Soult, then Minister of War to the restored king, was partial to officers who had served in Spain. Only not even the marshal's protection could secure for him active employment. He remained irreconcilable, idle, and sinister. He sought in obscure restaurants the company of other half-pay officers who cherished dingy but glorious old tricolour cockades in their breast-pockets, and buttoned with the forbidden

eagle buttons their shabby uniforms, declaring themselves too poor to afford the expense of the prescribed change.

The triumphant return from Elba, an historical fact as marvellous and incredible as the exploits of some mythological demi-god, found General D'Hubert still quite unable to sit a horse. Neither could he walk very well. These disabilities, which Madame Leonie accounted most lucky, helped to keep her brother out of all possible mischief. His frame of mind at that time, she noted with dismay, became very far from reasonable. This general officer, still menaced by the loss of a limb, was discovered one night in the stables of the chateau by a groom, who, seeing a light, raised an alarm of thieves. His crutch was lying half-buried in the straw of the litter, and the general was hopping on one leg in a loose box around a snorting horse he was trying to saddle. Such were the effects of imperial magic upon a calm temperament and a pondered mind. Beset in the light of stable lanterns, by the tears, entreaties, indignation, remonstrances and reproaches of his family, he got out of the difficult situation by fainting away there and then in the arms of his nearest relatives, and was carried off to bed. Before he got out of it again, the second reign of Napoleon, the Hundred Days of feverish agitation and supreme effort, passed away like a terrifying dream. The tragic year 1815, begun in the trouble and unrest of consciences, was ending in vengeful proscriptions.

How General Feraud escaped the clutches of the Special Commission and the last offices of a firing squad he never knew himself. It was partly due to the subordinate position he was assigned during the Hundred Days. The Emperor had never given him active command, but had kept him busy at the cavalry depot in Paris, mounting and despatching hastily drilled troopers into the field. Considering this task as unworthy of his abilities, he had discharged it with no offensively noticeable zeal; but for the greater part he was saved from the excesses of Royalist reaction by the interference of General D'Hubert.

This last, still on convalescent leave, but able now to travel, had been despatched by his sister to Paris to present himself to his legitimate sovereign. As no one in the capital could possibly know anything of the episode in the stable he was received there with distinction. Military to the very bottom of his soul, the prospect of rising in his profession consoled him from finding himself the butt of Bonapartist malevolence, which pursued him with a persistence he could not account for. All the rancour of

that embittered and persecuted party pointed to him as the man who had never loved the Emperor — a sort of monster essentially worse than a mere betrayer.

General D'Hubert shrugged his shoulders without anger at this ferocious prejudice. Rejected by his old friends, and mistrusting profoundly the advances of Royalist society, the young and handsome general (he was barely forty) adopted a manner of cold, punctilious courtesy, which at the merest shadow of an intended slight passed easily into harsh haughtiness. Thus prepared, General D'Hubert went about his affairs in Paris feeling inwardly very happy with the peculiar uplifting happiness of a man very much in love. The charming girl looked out by his sister had come upon the scene, and had conquered him in the thorough manner in which a young girl by merely existing in his sight can make a man of forty her own. They were going to be married as soon as General D'Hubert had obtained his official nomination to a promised command.

One afternoon, sitting on the terrasse of the Cafe Tortoni, General D'Hubert learned from the conversation of two strangers occupying a table near his own, that General Feraud, included in the batch of superior officers arrested after the second return of the king, was in danger of passing before the Special Commission. Living all his spare moments, as is frequently the case with expectant lovers, a day in advance of reality, and in a state of bestarred hallucination, it required nothing less than the name of his perpetual antagonist pronounced in a loud voice to call the youngest of Napoleon's generals away from the mental contemplation of his betrothed. He looked round. The strangers wore civilian clothes. Lean and weather-beaten, lolling back in their chairs, they scowled at people with moody and defiant abstraction from under their hats pulled low over their eyes. It was not difficult to recognize them for two of the compulsorily retired officers of the Old Guard. As from bravado or carelessness they chose to speak in loud tones, General D'Hubert, who saw no reason why he should change his seat, heard every word. They did not seem to be the personal friends of General Feraud. His name came up amongst others. Hearing it repeated, General D'Hubert's tender anticipations of a domestic future adorned with a woman's grace were traversed by the harsh regret of his warlike past, of that one long, intoxicating clash of arms, unique in the magnitude of its glory and disaster — the marvellous work and the special possession of his own generation. He felt an irrational tenderness towards his old adversary



and appreciated emotionally the murderous absurdity their encounter had introduced into his life. It was like an additional pinch of spice in a hot dish. He remembered the flavour with sudden melancholy. He would never taste it again. It was all over. "I fancy it was being left lying in the garden that had exasperated him so against me from the first," he thought, indulgently.

The two strangers at the next table had fallen silent after the third mention of General Feraud's name. Presently the elder of the two, speaking again in a bitter tone, affirmed that General Feraud's account was settled. And why? Simply because he was not like some bigwigs who loved only themselves. The Royalists knew they could never make anything of him. He loved The Other too well.

The Other was the Man of St. Helena. The two officers nodded and touched glasses before they drank to an impossible return. Then the same who had spoken before, remarked with a sardonic laugh, "His adversary showed more cleverness."

"What adversary?" asked the younger, as if puzzled.

"Don't you know? They were two hussars. At each promotion they fought a duel. Haven't you heard of the duel going on ever since 1801?"

The other had heard of the duel, of course. Now he understood the allusion. General Baron D'Hubert would be able now to enjoy his fat king's favour in peace.

"Much good may it do to him," mumbled the elder. "They were both brave men. I never saw this D'Hubert — a sort of intriguing dandy, I am told. But I can well believe what I've heard Feraud say of him — that he never loved the Emperor."

They rose and went away.

General D'Hubert experienced the horror of a somnambulist who wakes up from a complacent dream of activity to find himself walking on a quagmire. A profound disgust of the ground on which he was making his way overcame him. Even the image of the charming girl was swept from his view in the flood of moral distress. Everything he had ever been or hoped to be would taste of bitter ignominy unless he could manage to save General Feraud from the fate which threatened so many braves. Under the impulse of this almost morbid need to attend to the safety of his adversary, General D'Hubert worked so well with hands and feet (as the French saying is), that in less than twenty-four hours he found means of obtaining an extraordinary private audience from the Minister of Police.

General Baron D'Hubert was shown in suddenly without preliminaries. In the dusk of the Minister's cabinet, behind the forms of writing-desk, chairs, and tables, between two bunches of wax candles blazing in sconces, he beheld a figure in a gorgeous coat posturing before a tall mirror. The old conventionnel Fouche, Senator of the Empire, traitor to every man, to every principle and motive of human conduct. Duke of Otranto, and the wily artizan of the second Restoration, was trying the fit of a court suit in which his young and accomplished fiancée had declared her intention to have his portrait painted on porcelain. It was a caprice, a charming fancy which the first Minister of Police of the second Restoration was anxious to gratify. For that man, often compared in wiliness of conduct to a fox, but whose ethical side could be worthily symbolized by nothing less emphatic than a skunk, was as much possessed by his love as General D'Hubert himself.

Startled to be discovered thus by the blunder of a servant, he met this little vexation with the characteristic impudence which had served his turn so well in the endless intrigues of his self-seeking career. Without altering his attitude a hair's-breadth, one leg in a silk stocking advanced, his head twisted over his left shoulder, he called out calmly, "This way, General. Pray approach. Well? I am all attention."

While General D'Hubert, ill at ease as if one of his own little weaknesses had been exposed, presented his request as shortly as possible, the Duke of Otranto went on feeling the fit of his collar, settling the lapels before the glass, and buckling his back in an effort to behold the set of the gold embroidered coat-skirts behind. His still face, his attentive eyes, could not have expressed a more complete interest in those matters if he had been alone.

"Exclude from the operations of the Special Court a certain Feraud, Gabriel Florian, General of brigade of the promotion of 1814?" he repeated, in a slightly wondering tone, and then turned away from the glass. "Why exclude him precisely?"

"I am surprised that your Excellency, so competent in the evaluation of men of his time, should have thought worth while to have that name put down on the list."

"A rabid Bonapartist!"

"So is every grenadier and every trooper of the army, as your Excellency well knows. And the individuality of General Feraud can have no more weight than that of any casual grenadier. He is a man of no mental grasp, of

no capacity whatever. It is inconceivable that he should ever have any influence.”

“He has a well-hung tongue, though,” interjected Fouche.

“Noisy, I admit, but not dangerous.”

“I will not dispute with you. I know next to nothing of him. Hardly his name, in fact.”

“And yet your Excellency has the presidency of the Commission charged by the king to point out those who were to be tried,” said General D’Hubert, with an emphasis which did not miss the minister’s ear.

“Yes, General,” he said, walking away into the dark part of the vast room, and throwing himself into a deep armchair that swallowed him up, all but the soft gleam of gold embroideries and the pallid patch of the face — “yes, General. Take this chair there.”

General D’Hubert sat down.

“Yes, General,” continued the arch-master in the arts of intrigue and betrayals, whose duplicity, as if at times intolerable to his self-knowledge, found relief in bursts of cynical openness. “I did hurry on the formation of the proscribing Commission, and I took its presidency. And do you know why? Simply from fear that if I did not take it quickly into my hands my own name would head the list of the proscribed. Such are the times in which we live. But I am minister of the king yet, and I ask you plainly why I should take the name of this obscure Feraud off the list? You wonder how his name got there! Is it possible that you should know men so little? My dear General, at the very first sitting of the Commission names poured on us like rain off the roof of the Tuileries. Names! We had our choice of thousands. How do you know that the name of this Feraud, whose life or death don’t matter to France, does not keep out some other name?”

The voice out of the armchair stopped. Opposite General D’Hubert sat still, shadowy and silent. Only his sabre clinked slightly. The voice in the armchair began again. “And we must try to satisfy the exigencies of the Allied Sovereigns, too. The Prince de Talleyrand told me only yesterday that Nesselrode had informed him officially of His Majesty the Emperor Alexander’s dissatisfaction at the small number of examples the Government of the king intends to make — especially amongst military men. I tell you this confidentially.”

“Upon my word!” broke out General D’Hubert, speaking through his teeth, “if your Excellency deigns to favour me with any more confidential information I don’t know what I will do. It’s enough to break one’s sword over one’s knee, and fling the pieces. . . .”

“What government you imagined yourself to be serving?” interrupted the minister, sharply.

After a short pause the crestfallen voice of General D’Hubert answered, “The Government of France.”

“That’s paying your conscience off with mere words, General. The truth is that you are serving a government of returned exiles, of men who have been without country for twenty years. Of men also who have just got over a very bad and humiliating fright. . . . Have no illusions on that score.”

The Duke of Otranto ceased. He had relieved himself, and had attained his object of stripping some self-respect off that man who had inconveniently discovered him posturing in a gold-embroidered court costume before a mirror. But they were a hot-headed lot in the army; it occurred to him that it would be inconvenient if a well-disposed general officer, received in audience on the recommendation of one of the Princes, were to do something rashly scandalous directly after a private interview with the minister. In a changed tone he put a question to the point: “Your relation — this Feraud?”

“No. No relation at all.”

“Intimate friend?”

“Intimate . . . yes. There is between us an intimate connection of a nature which makes it a point of honour with me to try . . .”

The minister rang a bell without waiting for the end of the phrase. When the servant had gone out, after bringing in a pair of heavy silver candelabra for the writing-desk, the Duke of Otranto rose, his breast glistening all over with gold in the strong light, and taking a piece of paper out of a drawer, held it in his hand ostentatiously while he said with persuasive gentleness: “You must not speak of breaking your sword across your knee, General. Perhaps you would never get another. The Emperor will not return this time. . . . Diable d’homme! There was just a moment, here in Paris, soon after Waterloo, when he frightened me. It looked as though he were ready to begin all over again. Luckily one never does begin all over again, really. You must not think of breaking your sword, General.”

General D'Hubert, looking on the ground, moved slightly his hand in a hopeless gesture of renunciation. The Minister of Police turned his eyes away from him, and scanned deliberately the paper he had been holding up all the time.

"There are only twenty general officers selected to be made an example of. Twenty. A round number. And let's see, Feraud. . . . Ah, he's there. Gabriel Florian. Parfaitement. That's your man. Well, there will be only nineteen examples made now."

General D'Hubert stood up feeling as though he had gone through an infectious illness. "I must beg your Excellency to keep my interference a profound secret. I attach the greatest importance to his never learning . . ."

"Who is going to inform him, I should like to know?" said Fouche, raising his eyes curiously to General D'Hubert's tense, set face. "Take one of these pens, and run it through the name yourself. This is the only list in existence. If you are careful to take up enough ink no one will be able to tell what was the name struck out. But, par exemple, I am not responsible for what Clarke will do with him afterwards. If he persists in being rabid he will be ordered by the Minister of War to reside in some provincial town under the supervision of the police."

A few days later General D'Hubert was saying to his sister, after the first greetings had been got over: "Ah, my dear Leonie! it seemed to me I couldn't get away from Paris quick enough."

"Effect of love," she suggested, with a malicious smile.

"And horror," added General D'Hubert, with profound seriousness. "I have nearly died there of . . . of nausea."

His face was contracted with disgust. And as his sister looked at him attentively he continued, "I have had to see Fouche. I have had an audience. I have been in his cabinet. There remains with one, who had the misfortune to breathe the air of the same room with that man, a sense of diminished dignity, an uneasy feeling of being not so clean, after all, as one hoped one was. . . . But you can't understand."

She nodded quickly several times. She understood very well, on the contrary. She knew her brother thoroughly, and liked him as he was. Moreover, the scorn and loathing of mankind were the lot of the Jacobin Fouche, who, exploiting for his own advantage every weakness, every virtue, every generous illusion of mankind, made dupes of his whole generation, and died obscurely as Duke of Otranto.

“My dear Armand,” she said, compassionately, “what could you want from that man?”

“Nothing less than a life,” answered General D’Hubert. “And I’ve got it. It had to be done. But I feel yet as if I could never forgive the necessity to the man I had to save.”

General Feraud, totally unable (as is the case with most of us) to comprehend what was happening to him, received the Minister of War’s order to proceed at once to a small town of Central France with feelings whose natural expression consisted in a fierce rolling of the eye and savage grinding of the teeth. The passing away of the state of war, the only condition of society he had ever known, the horrible view of a world at peace, frightened him. He went away to his little town firmly convinced that this could not last. There he was informed of his retirement from the army, and that his pension (calculated on the scale of a colonel’s rank) was made dependent on the correctness of his conduct, and on the good reports of the police. No longer in the army! He felt suddenly strange to the earth, like a disembodied spirit. It was impossible to exist. But at first he reacted from sheer incredulity. This could not be. He waited for thunder, earthquakes, natural cataclysms; but nothing happened. The leaden weight of an irremediable idleness descended upon General Feraud, who having no resources within himself sank into a state of awe-inspiring hebetude. He haunted the streets of the little town, gazing before him with lacklustre eyes, disregarding the hats raised on his passage; and people, nudging each other as he went by, whispered, “That’s poor General Feraud. His heart is broken. Behold how he loved the Emperor.”

The other living wreckage of Napoleonic tempest clustered round General Feraud with infinite respect. He, himself, imagined his soul to be crushed by grief. He suffered from quickly succeeding impulses to weep, to howl, to bite his fists till blood came, to spend days on his bed with his head thrust under the pillow; but these arose from sheer ennui, from the anguish of an immense, indescribable, inconceivable boredom. His mental inability to grasp the hopeless nature of his case as a whole saved him from suicide. He never even thought of it once. He thought of nothing. But his appetite abandoned him, and the difficulty he experienced to express the overwhelming nature of his feelings (the most furious swearing could do no justice to it) induced gradually a habit of silence — a sort of death to a southern temperament.

Great, therefore, was the sensation amongst the anciens militaires frequenting a certain little cafe; full of flies when one stuffy afternoon “that poor General Feraud” let out suddenly a volley of formidable curses.

He had been sitting quietly in his own privileged corner looking through the Paris gazettes with just as much interest as a condemned man on the eve of execution could be expected to show in the news of the day. “I’ll find out presently that I am alive yet,” he declared, in a dogmatic tone. “However, this is a private affair. An old affair of honour. Bah! Our honour does not matter. Here we are driven off with a split ear like a lot of cast troop horses — good only for a knacker’s yard. But it would be like striking a blow for the Emperor. . . . Messieurs, I shall require the assistance of two of you.”

Every man moved forward. General Feraud, deeply touched by this demonstration, called with visible emotion upon the one-eyed veteran cuirassier and the officer of the Chasseurs a Cheval who had left the tip of his nose in Russia. He excused his choice to the others.

“A cavalry affair this — you know.”

He was answered with a varied chorus of “Parfaitement, mon General . . . . C’est juste. . . . Parbleu, c’est connu. . . .” Everybody was satisfied. The three left the cafe together, followed by cries of “Bonne chance.”

Outside they linked arms, the general in the middle. The three rusty cocked hats worn en bataille with a sinister forward slant barred the narrow street nearly right across. The overheated little town of grey stones and red tiles was drowsing away its provincial afternoon under a blue sky. The loud blows of a cooper hooping a cask reverberated regularly between the houses. The general dragged his left foot a little in the shade of the walls.

“This damned winter of 1813 has got into my bones for good. Never mind. We must take pistols, that’s all. A little lumbago. We must have pistols. He’s game for my bag. My eyes are as keen as ever. You should have seen me in Russia picking off the dodging Cossacks with a beastly old infantry musket. I have a natural gift for firearms.”

In this strain General Feraud ran on, holding up his head, with owlsh eyes and rapacious beak. A mere fighter all his life, a cavalry man, a sabreur, he conceived war with the utmost simplicity, as, in the main, a massed lot of personal contests, a sort of gregarious duelling. And here he had in hand a war of his own. He revived. The shadow of peace passed away from him like the shadow of death. It was the marvellous resurrection of the named Feraud, Gabriel Florian, engage volontaire of 1793, General

of 1814, buried without ceremony by means of a service order signed by the War Minister of the Second Restoration.

#### IV

No man succeeds in everything he undertakes. In that sense we are all failures. The great point is not to fail in ordering and sustaining the effort of our life. In this matter vanity is what leads us astray. It hurries us into situations from which we must come out damaged; whereas pride is our safeguard, by the reserve it imposes on the choice of our endeavour as much as by the virtue of its sustaining power.

General D'Hubert was proud and reserved. He had not been damaged by his casual love affairs, successful or otherwise. In his war-scarred body his heart at forty remained unscratched. Entering with reserve into his sister's matrimonial plans, he had felt himself falling irremediably in love as one falls off a roof. He was too proud to be frightened. Indeed, the sensation was too delightful to be alarming.

The inexperience of a man of forty is a much more serious thing than the inexperience of a youth of twenty, for it is not helped out by the rashness of hot blood. The girl was mysterious, as young girls are by the mere effect of their guarded ingenuity; and to him the mysteriousness of that young girl appeared exceptional and fascinating. But there was nothing mysterious about the arrangements of the match which Madame Leonie had promoted. There was nothing peculiar, either. It was a very appropriate match, commending itself extremely to the young lady's mother (the father was dead) and tolerable to the young lady's uncle — an old emigre lately returned from Germany, and pervading, cane in hand, a lean ghost of the ancien regime, the garden walks of the young lady's ancestral home.

General D'Hubert was not the man to be satisfied merely with the woman and the fortune — when it came to the point. His pride (and pride aims always at true success) would be satisfied with nothing short of love. But as true pride excludes vanity, he could not imagine any reason why this mysterious creature with deep and brilliant eyes of a violet colour should have any feeling for him warmer than indifference. The young lady (her name was Adele) baffled every attempt at a clear understanding on that point. It is true that the attempts were clumsy and made timidly, because by then General D'Hubert had become acutely aware of the number of his years, of his wounds, of his many moral imperfections, of his secret unworthiness — and had incidentally learned by experience the meaning of



the word funk. As far as he could make out she seemed to imply that, with an unbounded confidence in her mother's affection and sagacity, she felt no unsurmountable dislike for the person of General D'Hubert; and that this was quite sufficient for a well-brought-up young lady to begin married life upon. This view hurt and tormented the pride of General D'Hubert. And yet he asked himself, with a sort of sweet despair, what more could he expect? She had a quiet and luminous forehead. Her violet eyes laughed while the lines of her lips and chin remained composed in admirable gravity. All this was set off by such a glorious mass of fair hair, by a complexion so marvellous, by such a grace of expression, that General D'Hubert really never found the opportunity to examine with sufficient detachment the lofty exigencies of his pride. In fact, he became shy of that line of inquiry since it had led once or twice to a crisis of solitary passion in which it was borne upon him that he loved her enough to kill her rather than lose her. From such passages, not unknown to men of forty, he would come out broken, exhausted, remorseful, a little dismayed. He derived, however, considerable comfort from the quietist practice of sitting now and then half the night by an open window and meditating upon the wonder of her existence, like a believer lost in the mystic contemplation of his faith.

It must not be supposed that all these variations of his inward state were made manifest to the world. General D 'Hubert found no difficulty in appearing wreathed in smiles. Because, in fact, he was very happy. He followed the established rules of his condition, sending over flowers (from his sister's garden and hot-houses) early every morning, and a little later following himself to lunch with his intended, her mother, and her emigre uncle. The middle of the day was spent in strolling or sitting in the shade. A watchful deference, trembling on the verge of tenderness was the note of their intercourse on his side — with a playful turn of the phrase concealing the profound trouble of his whole being caused by her inaccessible nearness. Late in the afternoon General D 'Hubert walked home between the fields of vines, sometimes intensely miserable, sometimes supremely happy, sometimes pensively sad; but always feeling a special intensity of existence, that elation common to artists, poets, and lovers — to men haunted by a great passion, a noble thought, or a new vision of plastic beauty.

The outward world at that time did not exist with any special distinctness for General D'Hubert. One evening, however, crossing a ridge from which

he could see both houses, General D'Hubert became aware of two figures far down the road. The day had been divine. The festal decoration of the inflamed sky lent a gentle glow to the sober tints of the southern land. The grey rocks, the brown fields, the purple, undulating distances harmonized in luminous accord, exhaled already the scents of the evening. The two figures down the road presented themselves like two rigid and wooden silhouettes all black on the ribbon of white dust. General D'Hubert made out the long, straight, military capotes buttoned closely right up to the black stocks, the cocked hats, the lean, carven, brown countenances — old soldiers — vieilles moustaches! The taller of the two had a black patch over one eye; the other's hard, dry countenance presented some bizarre, disquieting peculiarity, which on nearer approach proved to be the absence of the tip of the nose. Lifting their hands with one movement to salute the slightly lame civilian walking with a thick stick, they inquired for the house where the General Baron D'Hubert lived, and what was the best way to get speech with him quietly.

"If you think this quiet enough," said General D'Hubert, looking round at the vine-fields, framed in purple lines, and dominated by the nest of grey and drab walls of a village clustering around the top of a conical hill, so that the blunt church tower seemed but the shape of a crowning rock — "if you think this spot quiet enough, you can speak to him at once. And I beg you, comrades, to speak openly, with perfect confidence."

They stepped back at this, and raised again their hands to their hats with marked ceremoniousness. Then the one with the chipped nose, speaking for both, remarked that the matter was confidential enough, and to be arranged discreetly. Their general quarters were established in that village over there, where the infernal clodhoppers — damn their false, Royalist hearts! — looked remarkably cross-eyed at three unassuming military men. For the present he should only ask for the name of General D'Hubert's friends.

"What friends?" said the astonished General D'Hubert, completely off the track. "I am staying with my brother-in-law over there."

"Well, he will do for one," said the chipped veteran.

"We're the friends of General Feraud," interjected the other, who had kept silent till then, only glowering with his one eye at the man who had never loved the Emperor. That was something to look at. For even the gold-laced Judases who had sold him to the English, the marshals and princes,

had loved him at some time or other. But this man had never loved the Emperor. General Feraud had said so distinctly.

General D'Hubert felt an inward blow in his chest. For an infinitesimal fraction of a second it was as if the spinning of the earth had become perceptible with an awful, slight rustle in the eternal stillness of space. But this noise of blood in his ears passed off at once. Involuntarily he murmured, "Feraud! I had forgotten his existence."

"He's existing at present, very uncomfortably, it is true, in the infamous inn of that nest of savages up there," said the one-eyed cuirassier, drily. "We arrived in your parts an hour ago on post horses. He's awaiting our return with impatience. There is hurry, you know. The General has broken the ministerial order to obtain from you the satisfaction he's entitled to by the laws of honour, and naturally he's anxious to have it all over before the gendarmerie gets on his scent."

The other elucidated the idea a little further. "Get back on the quiet — you understand? Phitt! No one the wiser. We have broken out, too. Your friend the king would be glad to cut off our scurvy pittances at the first chance. It's a risk. But honour before everything."

General D'Hubert had recovered his powers of speech. "So you come here like this along the road to invite me to a throat-cutting match with that — that . . ." A laughing sort of rage took possession of him. "Ha! ha! ha! ha!"

His fists on his hips, he roared without restraint, while they stood before him lank and straight, as though they had been shot up with a snap through a trap door in the ground. Only four-and-twenty months ago the masters of Europe, they had already the air of antique ghosts, they seemed less substantial in their faded coats than their own narrow shadows falling so black across the white road: the military and grotesque shadows of twenty years of war and conquests. They had an outlandish appearance of two imperturbable bonzes of the religion of the sword. And General D'Hubert, also one of the ex-masters of Europe, laughed at these serious phantoms standing in his way.

Said one, indicating the laughing General with a jerk of the head: "A merry companion, that."

"There are some of us that haven't smiled from the day The Other went away," remarked his comrade.

A violent impulse to set upon and beat those unsubstantial wraiths to the ground frightened General D'Hubert. He ceased laughing suddenly. His desire now was to get rid of them, to get them away from his sight quickly before he lost control of himself. He wondered at the fury he felt rising in his breast. But he had no time to look into that peculiarity just then.

"I understand your wish to be done with me as quickly as possible. Don't let us waste time in empty ceremonies. Do you see that wood there at the foot of that slope? Yes, the wood of pines. Let us meet there to-morrow at sunrise. I will bring with me my sword or my pistols, or both if you like."

The seconds of General Feraud looked at each other.

"Pistols, General," said the cuirassier.

"So be it. Au revoir — to-morrow morning. Till then let me advise you to keep close if you don't want the gendarmerie making inquiries about you before it gets dark. Strangers are rare in this part of the country."

They saluted in silence. General D'Hubert, turning his back on their retreating forms, stood still in the middle of the road for a long time, biting his lower lip and looking on the ground. Then he began to walk straight before him, thus retracing his steps till he found himself before the park gate of his intended's house. Dusk had fallen. Motionless he stared through the bars at the front of the house, gleaming clear beyond the thickets and trees. Footsteps scrunched on the gravel, and presently a tall stooping shape emerged from the lateral alley following the inner side of the park wall.

Le Chevalier de Valmassigue, uncle of the adorable Adele, ex-brigadier in the army of the Princes, bookbinder in Altona, afterwards shoemaker (with a great reputation for elegance in the fit of ladies' shoes) in another small German town, wore silk stockings on his lean shanks, low shoes with silver buckles, a brocaded waistcoat. A long-skirted coat, a la francaise, covered loosely his thin, bowed back. A small three-cornered hat rested on a lot of powdered hair, tied in a queue.

"Monsieur le Chevalier," called General D'Hubert, softly.

"What? You here again, mon ami? Have you forgotten something?"

"By heavens! that's just it. I have forgotten something. I am come to tell you of it. No — outside. Behind this wall. It's too ghastly a thing to be let in at all where she lives."

The Chevalier came out at once with that benevolent resignation some old people display towards the fugue of youth. Older by a quarter of a century than General D'Hubert, he looked upon him in the secret of his

heart as a rather troublesome youngster in love. He had heard his enigmatical words very well, but attached no undue importance to what a mere man of forty so hard hit was likely to do or say. The turn of mind of the generation of Frenchmen grown up during the years of his exile was almost unintelligible to him. Their sentiments appeared to him unduly violent, lacking fineness and measure, their language needlessly exaggerated. He joined calmly the General on the road, and they made a few steps in silence, the General trying to master his agitation, and get proper control of his voice.

“It is perfectly true; I forgot something. I forgot till half an hour ago that I had an urgent affair of honour on my hands. It’s incredible, but it is so!”

All was still for a moment. Then in the profound evening silence of the countryside the clear, aged voice of the Chevalier was heard trembling slightly: “Monsieur! That’s an indignity.”

It was his first thought. The girl born during his exile, the posthumous daughter of his poor brother murdered by a band of Jacobins, had grown since his return very dear to his old heart, which had been starving on mere memories of affection for so many years. “It is an inconceivable thing, I say! A man settles such affairs before he thinks of asking for a young girl’s hand. Why! If you had forgotten for ten days longer, you would have been married before your memory returned to you. In my time men did not forget such things — nor yet what is due to the feelings of an innocent young woman. If I did not respect them myself, I would qualify your conduct in a way which you would not like.”

General D’Hubert relieved himself frankly by a groan. “Don’t let that consideration prevent you. You run no risk of offending her mortally.”

But the old man paid no attention to this lover’s nonsense. It’s doubtful whether he even heard. “What is it?” he asked. “What’s the nature of . . . ?” “Call it a youthful folly, Monsieur le Chevalier. An inconceivable, incredible result of . . .” He stopped short. “He will never believe the story,” he thought. “He will only think I am taking him for a fool, and get offended.” General D’Hubert spoke up again: “Yes, originating in youthful folly, it has become . . .”

The Chevalier interrupted: “Well, then it must be arranged.”

“Arranged?”

“Yes, no matter at what cost to your amour propre. You should have remembered you were engaged. You forgot that, too, I suppose. And then

you go and forget your quarrel. It's the most hopeless exhibition of levity I ever heard of."

"Good heavens, Monsieur! You don't imagine I have been picking up this quarrel last time I was in Paris, or anything of the sort, do you?"

"Eh! What matters the precise date of your insane conduct," exclaimed the Chevalier, testily. "The principal thing is to arrange it."

Noticing General D'Hubert getting restive and trying to place a word, the old emigre raised his hand, and added with dignity, "I've been a soldier, too. I would never dare suggest a doubtful step to the man whose name my niece is to bear. I tell you that entre galants hommes an affair can always be arranged."

"But saperiotte, Monsieur le Chevalier, it's fifteen or sixteen years ago. I was a lieutenant of hussars then."

The old Chevalier seemed confounded by the vehemently despairing tone of this information. "You were a lieutenant of hussars sixteen years ago," he mumbled in a dazed manner.

"Why, yes! You did not suppose I was made a general in my cradle like a royal prince."

In the deepening purple twilight of the fields spread with vine leaves, backed by a low band of sombre crimson in the west, the voice of the old ex-officer in the army of the Princes sounded collected, punctiliously civil.

"Do I dream? Is this a pleasantry? Or am I to understand that you have been hatching an affair of honour for sixteen years?"

"It has clung to me for that length of time. That is my precise meaning. The quarrel itself is not to be explained easily. We met on the ground several times during that time, of course."

"What manners! What horrible perversion of manliness! Nothing can account for such inhumanity but the sanguinary madness of the Revolution which has tainted a whole generation," mused the returned emigre in a low tone. "Who's your adversary?" he asked a little louder.

"My adversary? His name is Feraud."

Shadowy in his tricorne and old-fashioned clothes, like a bowed, thin ghost of the ancien regime, the Chevalier voiced a ghostly memory. "I can remember the feud about little Sophie Derval, between Monsieur de Brissac, Captain in the Bodyguards, and d'Anjorant (not the pock-marked one, the other — the Beau d'Anjorant, as they called him). They met three

times in eighteen months in a most gallant manner. It was the fault of that little Sophie, too, who would keep on playing . . .”

“This is nothing of the kind,” interrupted General D’Hubert. He laughed a little sardonically. “Not at all so simple,” he added. “Nor yet half so reasonable,” he finished, inaudibly, between his teeth, and ground them with rage.

After this sound nothing troubled the silence for a long time, till the Chevalier asked, without animation: “What is he — this Feraud?”

“Lieutenant of hussars, too — I mean, he’s a general. A Gascon. Son of a blacksmith, I believe.”

“There! I thought so. That Bonaparte had a special predilection for the canaille. I don’t mean this for you, D’Hubert. You are one of us, though you have served this usurper, who . . .”

“Let’s leave him out of this,” broke in General D’Hubert.

The Chevalier shrugged his peaked shoulders. “Feraud of sorts. Offspring of a blacksmith and some village troll. See what comes of mixing yourself up with that sort of people.”

“You have made shoes yourself, Chevalier.”

“Yes. But I am not the son of a shoemaker. Neither are you, Monsieur D’Hubert. You and I have something that your Bonaparte’s princes, dukes, and marshals have not, because there’s no power on earth that could give it to them,” retorted the emigre, with the rising animation of a man who has got hold of a hopeful argument. “Those people don’t exist — all these Ferauds. Feraud! What is Feraud? A va-nu-pieds disguised into a general by a Corsican adventurer masquerading as an emperor. There is no earthly reason for a D’Hubert to s’encanailler by a duel with a person of that sort. You can make your excuses to him perfectly well. And if the manant takes into his head to decline them, you may simply refuse to meet him.”

“You say I may do that?”

“I do. With the clearest conscience.”

“Monsieur le Chevalier! To what do you think you have returned from your emigration?”

This was said in such a startling tone that the old man raised sharply his bowed head, glimmering silvery white under the points of the little tricorne. For a time he made no sound.

“God knows!” he said at last, pointing with a slow and grave gesture at a tall roadside cross mounted on a block of stone, and stretching its arms of

forged iron all black against the darkening red band in the sky — "God knows! If it were not for this emblem, which I remember seeing on this spot as a child, I would wonder to what we who remained faithful to God and our king have returned. The very voices of the people have changed."

"Yes, it is a changed France," said General D'Hubert. He seemed to have regained his calm. His tone was slightly ironic. "Therefore I cannot take your advice. Besides, how is one to refuse to be bitten by a dog that means to bite? It's impracticable. Take my word for it — Feraud isn't a man to be stayed by apologies or refusals. But there are other ways. I could, for instance, send a messenger with a word to the brigadier of the gendarmerie in Senlac. He and his two friends are liable to arrest on my simple order. It would make some talk in the army, both the organized and the disbanded — especially the disbanded. All canaille! All once upon a time the companions in arms of Armand D'Hubert. But what need a D'Hubert care what people that don't exist may think? Or, better still, I might get my brother-in-law to send for the mayor of the village and give him a hint. No more would be needed to get the three 'brigands' set upon with flails and pitchforks and hunted into some nice, deep, wet ditch — and nobody the wiser! It has been done only ten miles from here to three poor devils of the disbanded Red Lancers of the Guard going to their homes. What says your conscience, Chevalier? Can a D'Hubert do that thing to three men who do not exist?"

A few stars had come out on the blue obscurity, clear as crystal, of the sky. The dry, thin voice of the Chevalier spoke harshly: "Why are you telling me all this?"

The General seized the withered old hand with a strong grip. "Because I owe you my fullest confidence. Who could tell Adele but you? You understand why I dare not trust my brother-in-law nor yet my own sister. Chevalier! I have been so near doing these things that I tremble yet. You don't know how terrible this duel appears to me. And there's no escape from it."

He murmured after a pause, "It's a fatality," dropped the Chevalier's passive hand, and said in his ordinary conversational voice, "I shall have to go without seconds. If it is my lot to remain on the ground, you at least will know all that can be made known of this affair."

The shadowy ghost of the ancien regime seemed to have become more bowed during the conversation. "How am I to keep an indifferent face this



evening before these two women?" he groaned. "General! I find it very difficult to forgive you."

General D'Hubert made no answer.

"Is your cause good, at least?"

"I am innocent."

This time he seized the Chevalier's ghostly arm above the elbow, and gave it a mighty squeeze. "I must kill him!" he hissed, and opening his hand strode away down the road.

The delicate attentions of his adoring sister had secured for the General perfect liberty of movement in the house where he was a guest. He had even his own entrance through a small door in one corner of the orangery. Thus he was not exposed that evening to the necessity of dissembling his agitation before the calm ignorance of the other inmates. He was glad of it. It seemed to him that if he had to open his lips he would break out into horrible and aimless imprecations, start breaking furniture, smashing china and glass. From the moment he opened the private door and while ascending the twenty-eight steps of a winding staircase, giving access to the corridor on which his room opened, he went through a horrible and humiliating scene in which an infuriated madman with blood-shot eyes and a foaming mouth played inconceivable havoc with everything inanimate that may be found in a well-appointed dining-room. When he opened the door of his apartment the fit was over, and his bodily fatigue was so great that he had to catch at the backs of the chairs while crossing the room to reach a low and broad divan on which he let himself fall heavily. His moral prostration was still greater. That brutality of feeling which he had known only when charging the enemy, sabre in hand, amazed this man of forty, who did not recognize in it the instinctive fury of his menaced passion. But in his mental and bodily exhaustion this passion got cleared, distilled, refined into a sentiment of melancholy despair at having, perhaps, to die before he had taught this beautiful girl to love him.

That night, General D'Hubert stretched out on his back with his hands over his eyes, or lying on his breast with his face buried in a cushion, made the full pilgrimage of emotions. Nauseating disgust at the absurdity of the situation, doubt of his own fitness to conduct his existence, and mistrust of his best sentiments (for what the devil did he want to go to Fouché for?) — he knew them all in turn. "I am an idiot, neither more nor less," he thought

— "A sensitive idiot. Because I overheard two men talking in a cafe. . . . I am an idiot afraid of lies — whereas in life it is only truth that matters."

Several times he got up and, walking in his socks in order not to be heard by anybody downstairs, drank all the water he could find in the dark. And he tasted the torments of jealousy, too. She would marry somebody else. His very soul writhed. The tenacity of that Feraud, the awful persistence of that imbecile brute, came to him with the tremendous force of a relentless destiny. General D'Hubert trembled as he put down the empty water ewer. "He will have me," he thought. General D'Hubert was tasting every emotion that life has to give. He had in his dry mouth the faint sickly flavour of fear, not the excusable fear before a young girl's candid and amused glance, but the fear of death and the honourable man's fear of cowardice.

But if true courage consists in going out to meet an odious danger from which our body, soul, and heart recoil together, General D'Hubert had the opportunity to practise it for the first time in his life. He had charged exultingly at batteries and at infantry squares, and ridden with messages through a hail of bullets without thinking anything about it. His business now was to sneak out unheard, at break of day, to an obscure and revolting death. General D'Hubert never hesitated. He carried two pistols in a leather bag which he slung over his shoulder. Before he had crossed the garden his mouth was dry again. He picked two oranges. It was only after shutting the gate after him that he felt a slight faintness.

He staggered on, disregarding it, and after going a few yards regained the command of his legs. In the colourless and pellucid dawn the wood of pines detached its columns of trunks and its dark green canopy very clearly against the rocks of the grey hillside. He kept his eyes fixed on it steadily, and sucked at an orange as he walked. That temperamental good-humoured coolness in the face of danger which had made him an officer liked by his men and appreciated by his superiors was gradually asserting itself. It was like going into battle. Arriving at the edge of the wood he sat down on a boulder, holding the other orange in his hand, and reproached himself for coming so ridiculously early on the ground. Before very long, however, he heard the swishing of bushes, footsteps on the hard ground, and the sounds of a disjointed, loud conversation. A voice somewhere behind him said boastfully, "He's game for my bag."

He thought to himself, "Here they are. What's this about game? Are they talking of me?" And becoming aware of the other orange in his hand, he thought further, "These are very good oranges. Leonie's own tree. I may just as well eat this orange now instead of flinging it away."

Emerging from a wilderness of rocks and bushes, General Feraud and his seconds discovered General D'Hubert engaged in peeling the orange. They stood still, waiting till he looked up. Then the seconds raised their hats, while General Feraud, putting his hands behind his back, walked aside a little way.

"I am compelled to ask one of you, messieurs, to act for me. I have brought no friends. Will you?"

The one-eyed cuirassier said judicially, "That cannot be refused."

The other veteran remarked, "It's awkward all the same."

"Owing to the state of the people's minds in this part of the country there was no one I could trust safely with the object of your presence here," explained General D'Hubert, urbanely.

They saluted, looked round, and remarked both together:

"Poor ground."

"It's unfit."

"Why bother about ground, measurements, and so on? Let us simplify matters. Load the two pairs of pistols. I will take those of General Feraud, and let him take mine. Or, better still, let us take a mixed pair. One of each pair. Then let us go into the wood and shoot at sight, while you remain outside. We did not come here for ceremonies, but for war — war to the death. Any ground is good enough for that. If I fall, you must leave me where I lie and clear out. It wouldn't be healthy for you to be found hanging about here after that."

It appeared after a short parley that General Feraud was willing to accept these conditions. While the seconds were loading the pistols, he could be heard whistling, and was seen to rub his hands with perfect contentment. He flung off his coat briskly, and General D'Hubert took off his own and folded it carefully on a stone.

"Suppose you take your principal to the other side of the wood and let him enter exactly in ten minutes from now," suggested General D'Hubert, calmly, but feeling as if he were giving directions for his own execution. This, however, was his last moment of weakness. "Wait. Let us compare watches first."

He pulled out his own. The officer with the chipped nose went over to borrow the watch of General Feraud. They bent their heads over them for a time.

“That’s it. At four minutes to six by yours. Seven to by mine.”

It was the cuirassier who remained by the side of General D’Hubert, keeping his one eye fixed immovably on the white face of the watch he held in the palm of his hand. He opened his mouth, waiting for the beat of the last second long before he snapped out the word, “Avancez.”

General D’Hubert moved on, passing from the glaring sunshine of the Provencal morning into the cool and aromatic shade of the pines. The ground was clear between the reddish trunks, whose multitude, leaning at slightly different angles, confused his eye at first. It was like going into battle. The commanding quality of confidence in himself woke up in his breast. He was all to his affair. The problem was how to kill the adversary. Nothing short of that would free him from this imbecile nightmare. “It’s no use wounding that brute,” thought General D’Hubert. He was known as a resourceful officer. His comrades years ago used also to call him The Strategist. And it was a fact that he could think in the presence of the enemy. Whereas Feraud had been always a mere fighter — but a dead shot, unluckily.

“I must draw his fire at the greatest possible range,” said General D’Hubert to himself.

At that moment he saw something white moving far off between the trees — the shirt of his adversary. He stepped out at once between the trunks, exposing himself freely; then, quick as lightning, leaped back. It had been a risky move but it succeeded in its object. Almost simultaneously with the pop of a shot a small piece of bark chipped off by the bullet stung his ear painfully.

General Feraud, with one shot expended, was getting cautious. Peeping round the tree, General D’Hubert could not see him at all. This ignorance of the foe’s whereabouts carried with it a sense of insecurity. General D’Hubert felt himself abominably exposed on his flank and rear. Again something white fluttered in his sight. Ha! The enemy was still on his front, then. He had feared a turning movement. But apparently General Feraud was not thinking of it. General D’Hubert saw him pass without special haste from one tree to another in the straight line of approach. With great

firmness of mind General D'Hubert stayed his hand. Too far yet. He knew he was no marksman. His must be a waiting game — to kill.

Wishing to take advantage of the greater thickness of the trunk, he sank down to the ground. Extended at full length, head on to his enemy, he had his person completely protected. Exposing himself would not do now, because the other was too near by this time. A conviction that Feraud would presently do something rash was like balm to General D'Hubert's soul. But to keep his chin raised off the ground was irksome, and not much use either. He peeped round, exposing a fraction of his head with dread, but really with little risk. His enemy, as a matter of fact, did not expect to see anything of him so far down as that. General D'Hubert caught a fleeting view of General Feraud shifting trees again with deliberate caution. "He despises my shooting," he thought, displaying that insight into the mind of his antagonist which is of such great help in winning battles. He was confirmed in his tactics of immobility. "If I could only watch my rear as well as my front!" he thought anxiously, longing for the impossible.

It required some force of character to lay his pistols down; but, on a sudden impulse, General D'Hubert did this very gently — one on each side of him. In the army he had been looked upon as a bit of a dandy because he used to shave and put on a clean shirt on the days of battle. As a matter of fact, he had always been very careful of his personal appearance. In a man of nearly forty, in love with a young and charming girl, this praiseworthy self-respect may run to such little weaknesses as, for instance, being provided with an elegant little leather folding-case containing a small ivory comb, and fitted with a piece of looking-glass on the outside. General D'Hubert, his hands being free, felt in his breeches' pockets for that implement of innocent vanity excusable in the possessor of long, silky moustaches. He drew it out, and then with the utmost coolness and promptitude turned himself over on his back. In this new attitude, his head a little raised, holding the little looking-glass just clear of his tree, he squinted into it with his left eye, while the right kept a direct watch on the rear of his position. Thus was proved Napoleon's saying, that "for a French soldier, the word impossible does not exist." He had the right tree nearly filling the field of his little mirror.

"If he moves from behind it," he reflected with satisfaction, "I am bound to see his legs. But in any case he can't come upon me unawares."

And sure enough he saw the boots of General Feraud flash in and out, eclipsing for an instant everything else reflected in the little mirror. He shifted its position accordingly. But having to form his judgment of the change from that indirect view he did not realize that now his feet and a portion of his legs were in plain sight of General Feraud.

General Feraud had been getting gradually impressed by the amazing cleverness with which his enemy was keeping cover. He had spotted the right tree with bloodthirsty precision. He was absolutely certain of it. And yet he had not been able to glimpse as much as the tip of an ear. As he had been looking for it at the height of about five feet ten inches from the ground it was no great wonder — but it seemed very wonderful to General Feraud.

The first view of these feet and legs determined a rush of blood to his head. He literally staggered behind his tree, and had to steady himself against it with his hand. The other was lying on the ground, then! On the ground! Perfectly still, too! Exposed! What could it mean? . . . The notion that he had knocked over his adversary at the first shot entered then General Feraud's head. Once there it grew with every second of attentive gazing, overshadowing every other supposition — irresistible, triumphant, ferocious.

“What an ass I was to think I could have missed him,” he muttered to himself. “He was exposed en plein — the fool! — for quite a couple of seconds.”

General Feraud gazed at the motionless limbs, the last vestiges of surprise fading before an unbounded admiration of his own deadly skill with the pistol.

“Turned up his toes! By the god of war, that was a shot!” he exulted mentally. “Got it through the head, no doubt, just where I aimed, staggered behind that tree, rolled over on his back, and died.”

And he stared! He stared, forgetting to move, almost awed, almost sorry. But for nothing in the world would he have had it undone. Such a shot! — such a shot! Rolled over on his back and died!

For it was this helpless position, lying on the back, that shouted its direct evidence at General Feraud! It never occurred to him that it might have been deliberately assumed by a living man. It was inconceivable. It was beyond the range of sane supposition. There was no possibility to guess the reason for it. And it must be said, too, that General D'Hubert's turned-up

feet looked thoroughly dead. General Feraud expanded his lungs for a stentorian shout to his seconds, but, from what he felt to be an excessive scrupulousness, refrained for a while.

“I will just go and see first whether he breathes yet,” he mumbled to himself, leaving carelessly the shelter of his tree. This move was immediately perceived by the resourceful General D’Hubert. He concluded it to be another shift, but when he lost the boots out of the field of the mirror he became uneasy. General Feraud had only stepped a little out of the line, but his adversary could not possibly have supposed him walking up with perfect unconcern. General D’Hubert, beginning to wonder at what had become of the other, was taken unawares so completely that the first warning of danger consisted in the long, early-morning shadow of his enemy falling aslant on his outstretched legs. He had not even heard a footfall on the soft ground between the trees!

It was too much even for his coolness. He jumped up thoughtlessly, leaving the pistols on the ground. The irresistible instinct of an average man (unless totally paralyzed by discomfiture) would have been to stoop for his weapons, exposing himself to the risk of being shot down in that position. Instinct, of course, is irreflective. It is its very definition. But it may be an inquiry worth pursuing whether in reflective mankind the mechanical promptings of instinct are not affected by the customary mode of thought. In his young days, Armand D’Hubert, the reflective, promising officer, had emitted the opinion that in warfare one should “never cast back on the lines of a mistake.” This idea, defended and developed in many discussions, had settled into one of the stock notions of his brain, had become a part of his mental individuality. Whether it had gone so inconceivably deep as to affect the dictates of his instinct, or simply because, as he himself declared afterwards, he was “too scared to remember the confounded pistols,” the fact is that General D’Hubert never attempted to stoop for them. Instead of going back on his mistake, he seized the rough trunk with both hands, and swung himself behind it with such impetuosity that, going right round in the very flash and report of the pistol-shot, he reappeared on the other side of the tree face to face with General Feraud. This last, completely unstrung by such a show of agility on the part of a dead man, was trembling yet. A very faint mist of smoke hung before his face which had an extraordinary aspect, as if the lower jaw had come unhinged.

“Not missed!” he croaked, hoarsely, from the depths of a dry throat.

This sinister sound loosened the spell that had fallen on General D'Hubert's senses. "Yes, missed — a bout portant," he heard himself saying, almost before he had recovered the full command of his faculties. The revulsion of feeling was accompanied by a gust of homicidal fury, resuming in its violence the accumulated resentment of a lifetime. For years General D'Hubert had been exasperated and humiliated by an atrocious absurdity imposed upon him by this man's savage caprice. Besides, General D'Hubert had been in this last instance too unwilling to confront death for the reaction of his anguish not to take the shape of a desire to kill. "And I have my two shots to fire yet," he added, pitilessly.

General Feraud snapped-to his teeth, and his face assumed an irate, undaunted expression. "Go on!" he said, grimly.

These would have been his last words if General D'Hubert had been holding the pistols in his hands. But the pistols were lying on the ground at the foot of a pine. General D'Hubert had the second of leisure necessary to remember that he had dreaded death not as a man, but as a lover; not as a danger, but as a rival; not as a foe to life, but as an obstacle to marriage. And behold! there was the rival defeated! — utterly defeated, crushed, done for!

He picked up the weapons mechanically, and, instead of firing them into General Feraud's breast, he gave expression to the thoughts uppermost in his mind, "You will fight no more duels now."

His tone of leisurely, ineffable satisfaction was too much for General Feraud's stoicism. "Don't dawdle, then, damn you for a cold-blooded staff-coxcomb!" he roared out, suddenly, out of an impassive face held erect on a rigidly still body.

General D'Hubert uncocked the pistols carefully. This proceeding was observed with mixed feelings by the other general. "You missed me twice," the victor said, coolly, shifting both pistols to one hand; "the last time within a foot or so. By every rule of single combat your life belongs to me. That does not mean that I want to take it now."

"I have no use for your forbearance," muttered General Feraud, gloomily.

"Allow me to point out that this is no concern of mine," said General D'Hubert, whose every word was dictated by a consummate delicacy of feeling. In anger he could have killed that man, but in cold blood he recoiled from humiliating by a show of generosity this unreasonable being — a fellow-soldier of the Grande Armée, a companion in the wonders and



terrors of the great military epic. "You don't set up the pretension of dictating to me what I am to do with what's my own."

General Feraud looked startled, and the other continued, "You've forced me on a point of honour to keep my life at your disposal, as it were, for fifteen years. Very well. Now that the matter is decided to my advantage, I am going to do what I like with your life on the same principle. You shall keep it at my disposal as long as I choose. Neither more nor less. You are on your honour till I say the word."

"I am! But, *sacrebleu*! This is an absurd position for a General of the Empire to be placed in!" cried General Feraud, in accents of profound and dismayed conviction. "It amounts to sitting all the rest of my life with a loaded pistol in a drawer waiting for your word. It's — it's idiotic; I shall be an object of — of — derision."

"Absurd? — idiotic? Do you think so?" queried General D'Hubert with sly gravity. "Perhaps. But I don't see how that can be helped. However, I am not likely to talk at large of this adventure. Nobody need ever know anything about it. Just as no one to this day, I believe, knows the origin of our quarrel. . . . Not a word more," he added, hastily. "I can't really discuss this question with a man who, as far as I am concerned, does not exist."

When the two duellists came out into the open, General Feraud walking a little behind, and rather with the air of walking in a trance, the two seconds hurried towards them, each from his station at the edge of the wood. General D'Hubert addressed them, speaking loud and distinctly, "Messieurs, I make it a point of declaring to you solemnly, in the presence of General Feraud, that our difference is at last settled for good. You may inform all the world of that fact."

"A reconciliation, after all!" they exclaimed together.

"Reconciliation? Not that exactly. It is something much more binding. Is it not so, General?"

General Feraud only lowered his head in sign of assent. The two veterans looked at each other. Later in the day, when they found themselves alone out of their moody friend's earshot, the cuirassier remarked suddenly, "Generally speaking, I can see with my one eye as far as most people; but this beats me. He won't say anything."

"In this affair of honour I understand there has been from first to last always something that no one in the army could quite make out," declared

the chasseur with the imperfect nose. "In mystery it began, in mystery it went on, in mystery it is to end, apparently."

General D'Hubert walked home with long, hasty strides, by no means uplifted by a sense of triumph. He had conquered, yet it did not seem to him that he had gained very much by his conquest. The night before he had grudged the risk of his life which appeared to him magnificent, worthy of preservation as an opportunity to win a girl's love. He had known moments when, by a marvellous illusion, this love seemed to be already his, and his threatened life a still more magnificent opportunity of devotion. Now that his life was safe it had suddenly lost its special magnificence. It had acquired instead a specially alarming aspect as a snare for the exposure of unworthiness. As to the marvellous illusion of conquered love that had visited him for a moment in the agitated watches of the night, which might have been his last on earth, he comprehended now its true nature. It had been merely a paroxysm of delirious conceit. Thus to this man, sobered by the victorious issue of a duel, life appeared robbed of its charm, simply because it was no longer menaced.

Approaching the house from the back, through the orchard and the kitchen garden, he could not notice the agitation which reigned in front. He never met a single soul. Only while walking softly along the corridor, he became aware that the house was awake and more noisy than usual. Names of servants were being called out down below in a confused noise of coming and going. With some concern he noticed that the door of his own room stood ajar, though the shutters had not been opened yet. He had hoped that his early excursion would have passed unperceived. He expected to find some servant just gone in; but the sunshine filtering through the usual cracks enabled him to see lying on the low divan something bulky, which had the appearance of two women clasped in each other's arms. Tearful and desolate murmurs issued mysteriously from that appearance. General D'Hubert pulled open the nearest pair of shutters violently. One of the women then jumped up. It was his sister. She stood for a moment with her hair hanging down and her arms raised straight up above her head, and then flung herself with a stifled cry into his arms. He returned her embrace, trying at the same time to disengage himself from it. The other woman had not risen. She seemed, on the contrary, to cling closer to the divan, hiding her face in the cushions. Her hair was also loose; it was admirably fair.

General D'Hubert recognized it with staggering emotion. Mademoiselle de Valmassigue! Adele! In distress!

He became greatly alarmed, and got rid of his sister's hug definitely. Madame Leonie then extended her shapely bare arm out of her peignoir, pointing dramatically at the divan. "This poor, terrified child has rushed here from home, on foot, two miles — running all the way."

"What on earth has happened?" asked General D'Hubert in a low, agitated voice.

But Madame Leonie was speaking loudly. "She rang the great bell at the gate and roused all the household — we were all asleep yet. You may imagine what a terrible shock. . . . Adele, my dear child, sit up."

General D'Hubert's expression was not that of a man who "imagines" with facility. He did, however, fish out of the chaos of surmises the notion that his prospective mother-in-law had died suddenly, but only to dismiss it at once. He could not conceive the nature of the event or the catastrophe which would induce Mademoiselle de Valmassigue, living in a house full of servants, to bring the news over the fields herself, two miles, running all the way.

"But why are you in this room?" he whispered, full of awe.

"Of course, I ran up to see, and this child . . . I did not notice it . . . she followed me. It's that absurd Chevalier," went on Madame Leonie, looking towards the divan. . . . "Her hair is all come down. You may imagine she did not stop to call her maid to dress it before she started. . . Adele, my dear, sit up. . . . He blurted it all out to her at half-past five in the morning. She woke up early and opened her shutters to breathe the fresh air, and saw him sitting collapsed on a garden bench at the end of the great alley. At that hour — you may imagine! And the evening before he had declared himself indisposed. She hurried on some clothes and flew down to him. One would be anxious for less. He loves her, but not very intelligently. He had been up all night, fully dressed, the poor old man, perfectly exhausted. He wasn't in a state to invent a plausible story. . . . What a confidant you chose there! My husband was furious. He said, 'We can't interfere now.' So we sat down to wait. It was awful. And this poor child running with her hair loose over here publicly! She has been seen by some people in the fields. She has roused the whole household, too. It's awkward for her. Luckily you are to be married next week. . . . Adele, sit up. He has come home on his own legs. . . . We expected to see you coming on a stretcher, perhaps — what do I

know? Go and see if the carriage is ready. I must take this child home at once. It isn't proper for her to stay here a minute longer."

General D'Hubert did not move. It was as though he had heard nothing. Madame Leonie changed her mind. "I will go and see myself," she cried. "I want also my cloak. — Adele — " she began, but did not add "sit up." She went out saying, in a very loud and cheerful tone: "I leave the door open."

General D'Hubert made a movement towards the divan, but then Adele sat up, and that checked him dead. He thought, "I haven't washed this morning. I must look like an old tramp. There's earth on the back of my coat and pine-needles in my hair." It occurred to him that the situation required a good deal of circumspection on his part.

"I am greatly concerned, mademoiselle," he began, vaguely, and abandoned that line. She was sitting up on the divan with her cheeks unusually pink and her hair, brilliantly fair, falling all over her shoulders — which was a very novel sight to the general. He walked away up the room, and looking out of the window for safety said, "I fear you must think I behaved like a madman," in accents of sincere despair. Then he spun round, and noticed that she had followed him with her eyes. They were not cast down on meeting his glance. And the expression of her face was novel to him also. It was, one might have said, reversed. Those eyes looked at him with grave thoughtfulness, while the exquisite lines of her mouth seemed to suggest a restrained smile. This change made her transcendental beauty much less mysterious, much more accessible to a man's comprehension. An amazing ease of mind came to the general — and even some ease of manner. He walked down the room with as much pleasurable excitement as he would have found in walking up to a battery vomiting death, fire, and smoke; then stood looking down with smiling eyes at the girl whose marriage with him (next week) had been so carefully arranged by the wise, the good, the admirable Leonie.

"Ah! mademoiselle," he said, in a tone of courtly regret, "if only I could be certain that you did not come here this morning, two miles, running all the way, merely from affection for your mother!"

He waited for an answer imperturbable but inwardly elated. It came in a demure murmur, eyelashes lowered with fascinating effect. "You must not be mechant as well as mad."

And then General D'Hubert made an aggressive movement towards the divan which nothing could check. That piece of furniture was not exactly in

the line of the open door. But Madame Leonie, coming back wrapped up in a light cloak and carrying a lace shawl on her arm for Adele to hide her incriminating hair under, had a swift impression of her brother getting up from his knees.

“Come along, my dear child,” she cried from the doorway.

The general, now himself again in the fullest sense, showed the readiness of a resourceful cavalry officer and the peremptoriness of a leader of men. “You don’t expect her to walk to the carriage,” he said, indignantly. “She isn’t fit. I shall carry her downstairs.”

This he did slowly, followed by his awed and respectful sister; but he rushed back like a whirlwind to wash off all the signs of the night of anguish and the morning of war, and to put on the festive garments of a conqueror before hurrying over to the other house. Had it not been for that, General D’Hubert felt capable of mounting a horse and pursuing his late adversary in order simply to embrace him from excess of happiness. “I owe it all to this stupid brute,” he thought. “He has made plain in a morning what might have taken me years to find out — for I am a timid fool. No self-confidence whatever. Perfect coward. And the Chevalier! Delightful old man!” General D’Hubert longed to embrace him also.

The Chevalier was in bed. For several days he was very unwell. The men of the Empire and the post-revolution young ladies were too much for him. He got up the day before the wedding, and, being curious by nature, took his niece aside for a quiet talk. He advised her to find out from her husband the true story of the affair of honour, whose claim, so imperative and so persistent, had led her to within an ace of tragedy. “It is right that his wife should be told. And next month or so will be your time to learn from him anything you want to know, my dear child.”

Later on, when the married couple came on a visit to the mother of the bride, Madame la Generale D’Hubert communicated to her beloved old uncle the true story she had obtained without any difficulty from her husband.

The Chevalier listened with deep attention to the end, took a pinch of snuff, flicked the grains of tobacco from the frilled front of his shirt, and asked, calmly, “And that’s all it was?”

“Yes, uncle,” replied Madame la Generale, opening her pretty eyes very wide. “Isn’t it funny? C’est insense — to think what men are capable of!”

“H’m!” commented the old emigre. “It depends what sort of men. That Bonaparte’s soldiers were savages. It is insense. As a wife, my dear, you must believe implicitly what your husband says.”

But to Leonie’s husband the Chevalier confided his true opinion. “If that’s the tale the fellow made up for his wife, and during the honeymoon, too, you may depend on it that no one will ever know now the secret of this affair.”

Considerably later still, General D’Hubert judged the time come, and the opportunity propitious to write a letter to General Feraud. This letter began by disclaiming all animosity. “I’ve never,” wrote the General Baron D’Hubert, “wished for your death during all the time of our deplorable quarrel. Allow me,” he continued, “to give you back in all form your forfeited life. It is proper that we two, who have been partners in so much military glory, should be friendly to each other publicly.”

The same letter contained also an item of domestic information. It was in reference to this last that General Feraud answered from a little village on the banks of the Garonne, in the following words:

“If one of your boy’s names had been Napoleon — or Joseph — or even Joachim, I could congratulate you on the event with a better heart. As you have thought proper to give him the names of Charles Henri Armand, I am confirmed in my conviction that you never loved the Emperor. The thought of that sublime hero chained to a rock in the middle of a savage ocean makes life of so little value that I would receive with positive joy your instructions to blow my brains out. From suicide I consider myself in honour debarred. But I keep a loaded pistol in my drawer.”

Madame la Generale D’Hubert lifted up her hands in despair after perusing that answer.

“You see? He won’t be reconciled,” said her husband. “He must never, by any chance, be allowed to guess where the money comes from. It wouldn’t do. He couldn’t bear it.”

“You are a brave homme, Armand,” said Madame la Generale, appreciatively.

“My dear, I had the right to blow his brains out; but as I didn’t, we can’t let him starve. He has lost his pension and he is utterly incapable of doing anything in the world for himself. We must take care of him, secretly, to the end of his days. Don’t I owe him the most ecstatic moment of my life? . . . Ha! ha! ha! Over the fields, two miles, running all the way! I couldn’t

believe my ears! . . . But for his stupid ferocity, it would have taken me years to find you out. It's extraordinary how in one way or another this man has managed to fasten himself on my deeper feelings."

## IL CONDE



### A PATHETIC TALE

*“Vedi Napoli e poi mori.”*

The first time we got into conversation was in the National Museum in Naples, in the rooms on the ground floor containing the famous collection of bronzes from Herculaneum and Pompeii: that marvellous legacy of antique art whose delicate perfection has been preserved for us by the catastrophic fury of a volcano.

He addressed me first, over the celebrated Resting Hermes which we had been looking at side by side. He said the right things about that wholly admirable piece. Nothing profound. His taste was natural rather than cultivated. He had obviously seen many fine things in his life and appreciated them: but he had no jargon of a dilettante or the connoisseur. A hateful tribe. He spoke like a fairly intelligent man of the world, a perfectly unaffected gentleman.

We had known each other by sight for some few days past. Staying in the same hotel — good, but not extravagantly up to date — I had noticed him in the vestibule going in and out. I judged he was an old and valued client. The bow of the hotel-keeper was cordial in its deference, and he acknowledged it with familiar courtesy. For the servants he was Il Conde. There was some squabble over a man’s parasol — yellow silk with white lining sort of thing — the waiters had discovered abandoned outside the dining-room door. Our gold-laced door-keeper recognized it and I heard him directing one of the lift boys to run after Il Conde with it. Perhaps he was the only Count staying in the hotel, or perhaps he had the distinction of being the Count par excellence, conferred upon him because of his tried fidelity to the house.

Having conversed at the Museo — (and by the by he had expressed his dislike of the busts and statues of Roman emperors in the gallery of marbles: their faces were too vigorous, too pronounced for him) — having conversed already in the morning I did not think I was intruding when in the evening, finding the dining-room very full, I proposed to share his little



table. Judging by the quiet urbanity of his consent he did not think so either. His smile was very attractive.

He dined in an evening waistcoat and a “smoking” (he called it so) with a black tie. All this of very good cut, not new — just as these things should be. He was, morning or evening, very correct in his dress. I have no doubt that his whole existence had been correct, well ordered and conventional, undisturbed by startling events. His white hair brushed upwards off a lofty forehead gave him the air of an idealist, of an imaginative man. His white moustache, heavy but carefully trimmed and arranged, was not unpleasantly tinted a golden yellow in the middle. The faint scent of some very good perfume, and of good cigars (that last an odour quite remarkable to come upon in Italy) reached me across the table. It was in his eyes that his age showed most. They were a little weary with creased eyelids. He must have been sixty or a couple of years more. And he was communicative. I would not go so far as to call it garrulous — but distinctly communicative.

He had tried various climates, of Abbazia, of the Riviera, of other places, too, he told me, but the only one which suited him was the climate of the Gulf of Naples. The ancient Romans, who, he pointed out to me, were men expert in the art of living, knew very well what they were doing when they built their villas on these shores, in Baiae, in Vico, in Capri. They came down to this seaside in search of health, bringing with them their trains of mimes and flute-players to amuse their leisure. He thought it extremely probable that the Romans of the higher classes were specially predisposed to painful rheumatic affections.

This was the only personal opinion I heard him express. It was based on no special erudition. He knew no more of the Romans than an average informed man of the world is expected to know. He argued from personal experience. He had suffered himself from a painful and dangerous rheumatic affection till he found relief in this particular spot of Southern Europe.

This was three years ago, and ever since he had taken up his quarters on the shores of the gulf, either in one of the hotels in Sorrento or hiring a small villa in Capri. He had a piano, a few books: picked up transient acquaintances of a day, week, or month in the stream of travellers from all Europe. One can imagine him going out for his walks in the streets and lanes, becoming known to beggars, shopkeepers, children, country people; talking amiably over the walls to the contadini — and coming back to his

rooms or his villa to sit before the piano, with his white hair brushed up and his thick orderly moustache, “to make a little music for myself.” And, of course, for a change there was Naples near by — life, movement, animation, opera. A little amusement, as he said, is necessary for health. Mimes and flute-players, in fact. Only unlike the magnates of ancient Rome, he had no affairs of the city to call him away from these moderate delights. He had no affairs at all. Probably he had never had any grave affairs to attend to in his life. It was a kindly existence, with its joys and sorrows regulated by the course of Nature — marriages, births, deaths — ruled by the prescribed usages of good society and protected by the State.

He was a widower; but in the months of July and August he ventured to cross the Alps for six weeks on a visit to his married daughter. He told me her name. It was that of a very aristocratic family. She had a castle — in Bohemia, I think. This is as near as I ever came to ascertaining his nationality. His own name, strangely enough, he never mentioned. Perhaps he thought I had seen it on the published list. Truth to say, I never looked. At any rate, he was a good European — he spoke four languages to my certain knowledge — and a man of fortune. Not of great fortune evidently and appropriately. I imagine that to be extremely rich would have appeared to him improper, outre — too blatant altogether. And obviously, too, the fortune was not of his making. The making of a fortune cannot be achieved without some roughness. It is a matter of temperament. His nature was too kindly for strife. In the course of conversation he mentioned his estate quite by the way, in reference to that painful and alarming rheumatic affection. One year, staying incautiously beyond the Alps as late as the middle of September, he had been laid up for three months in that lonely country house with no one but his valet and the caretaking couple to attend to him. Because, as he expressed it, he “kept no establishment there.” He had only gone for a couple of days to confer with his land agent. He promised himself never to be so imprudent in the future. The first weeks of September would find him on the shores of his beloved gulf.

Sometimes in travelling one comes upon such lonely men, whose only business is to wait for the unavoidable. Deaths and marriages have made a solitude round them, and one really cannot blame their endeavours to make the waiting as easy as possible. As he remarked to me, “At my time of life freedom from physical pain is a very important matter.”

It must not be imagined that he was a wearisome hypochondriac. He was really much too well-bred to be a nuisance. He had an eye for the small weaknesses of humanity. But it was a good-natured eye. He made a restful, easy, pleasant companion for the hours between dinner and bedtime. We spent three evenings together, and then I had to leave Naples in a hurry to look after a friend who had fallen seriously ill in Taormina. Having nothing to do, Il Conde came to see me off at the station. I was somewhat upset, and his idleness was always ready to take a kindly form. He was by no means an indolent man.

He went along the train peering into the carriages for a good seat for me, and then remained talking cheerily from below. He declared he would miss me that evening very much and announced his intention of going after dinner to listen to the band in the public garden, the Villa Nazionale. He would amuse himself by hearing excellent music and looking at the best society. There would be a lot of people, as usual.

I seem to see him yet — his raised face with a friendly smile under the thick moustaches, and his kind, fatigued eyes. As the train began to move, he addressed me in two languages: first in French, saying, “Bon voyage”; then, in his very good, somewhat emphatic English, encouragingly, because he could see my concern: “All will — be — well — yet!”

My friend’s illness having taken a decidedly favourable turn, I returned to Naples on the tenth day. I cannot say I had given much thought to Il Conde during my absence, but entering the dining-room I looked for him in his habitual place. I had an idea he might have gone back to Sorrento to his piano and his books and his fishing. He was great friends with all the boatmen, and fished a good deal with lines from a boat. But I made out his white head in the crowd of heads, and even from a distance noticed something unusual in his attitude. Instead of sitting erect, gazing all round with alert urbanity, he drooped over his plate. I stood opposite him for some time before he looked up, a little wildly, if such a strong word can be used in connection with his correct appearance.

“Ah, my dear sir! Is it you?” he greeted me. “I hope all is well.”

He was very nice about my friend. Indeed, he was always nice, with the niceness of people whose hearts are genuinely humane. But this time it cost him an effort. His attempts at general conversation broke down into dullness. It occurred to me he might have been indisposed. But before I could frame the inquiry he muttered:

“You find me here very sad.”

“I am sorry for that,” I said. “You haven’t had bad news, I hope?”

It was very kind of me to take an interest. No. It was not that. No bad news, thank God. And he became very still as if holding his breath. Then, leaning forward a little, and in an odd tone of awed embarrassment, he took me into his confidence.

“The truth is that I have had a very — a very — how shall I say? — abominable adventure happen to me.”

The energy of the epithet was sufficiently startling in that man of moderate feelings and toned-down vocabulary. The word unpleasant I should have thought would have fitted amply the worst experience likely to befall a man of his stamp. And an adventure, too. Incredible! But it is in human nature to believe the worst; and I confess I eyed him stealthily, wondering what he had been up to. In a moment, however, my unworthy suspicions vanished. There was a fundamental refinement of nature about the man which made me dismiss all idea of some more or less disreputable scrape.

“It is very serious. Very serious.” He went on, nervously. “I will tell you after dinner, if you will allow me.”

I expressed my perfect acquiescence by a little bow, nothing more. I wished him to understand that I was not likely to hold him to that offer, if he thought better of it later on. We talked of indifferent things, but with a sense of difficulty quite unlike our former easy, gossipy intercourse. The hand raising a piece of bread to his lips, I noticed, trembled slightly. This symptom, in regard to my reading of the man, was no less than startling.

In the smoking-room he did not hang back at all. Directly we had taken our usual seats he leaned sideways over the arm of his chair and looked straight into my eyes earnestly.

“You remember,” he began, “that day you went away? I told you then I would go to the Villa Nazionale to hear some music in the evening.”

I remembered. His handsome old face, so fresh for his age, unmarked by any trying experience, appeared haggard for an instant. It was like the passing of a shadow. Returning his steadfast gaze, I took a sip of my black coffee. He was systematically minute in his narrative, simply in order, I think, not to let his excitement get the better of him.

After leaving the railway station, he had an ice, and read the paper in a cafe. Then he went back to the hotel, dressed for dinner, and dined with a

good appetite. After dinner he lingered in the hall (there were chairs and tables there) smoking his cigar; talked to the little girl of the Primo Tenore of the San Carlo theatre, and exchanged a few words with that “amiable lady,” the wife of the Primo Tenore. There was no performance that evening, and these people were going to the Villa also. They went out of the hotel. Very well.

At the moment of following their example — it was half-past nine already — he remembered he had a rather large sum of money in his pocket-book. He entered, therefore, the office and deposited the greater part of it with the book-keeper of the hotel. This done, he took a carozella and drove to the seashore. He got out of the cab and entered the Villa on foot from the Largo di Vittoria end.

He stared at me very hard. And I understood then how really impressionable he was. Every small fact and event of that evening stood out in his memory as if endowed with mystic significance. If he did not mention to me the colour of the pony which drew the carozella, and the aspect of the man who drove, it was a mere oversight arising from his agitation, which he repressed manfully.

He had then entered the Villa Nazionale from the Largo di Vittoria end. The Villa Nazionale is a public pleasure-ground laid out in grass plots, bushes, and flower-beds between the houses of the Riviera di Chiaja and the waters of the bay. Alleys of trees, more or less parallel, stretch its whole length — which is considerable. On the Riviera di Chiaja side the electric tramcars run close to the railings. Between the garden and the sea is the fashionable drive, a broad road bordered by a low wall, beyond which the Mediterranean splashes with gentle murmurs when the weather is fine.

As life goes on late at night in Naples, the broad drive was all astir with a brilliant swarm of carriage lamps moving in pairs, some creeping slowly, others running rapidly under the thin, motionless line of electric lamps defining the shore. And a brilliant swarm of stars hung above the land humming with voices, piled up with houses, glittering with lights — and over the silent flat shadows of the sea.

The gardens themselves are not very well lit. Our friend went forward in the warm gloom, his eyes fixed upon a distant luminous region extending nearly across the whole width of the Villa, as if the air had glowed there with its own cold, bluish, and dazzling light. This magic spot, behind the black trunks of trees and masses of inky foliage, breathed out sweet sounds

mingled with bursts of brassy roar, sudden clashes of metal, and grave, vibrating thuds.

As he walked on, all these noises combined together into a piece of elaborate music whose harmonious phrases came persuasively through a great disorderly murmur of voices and shuffling of feet on the gravel of that open space. An enormous crowd immersed in the electric light, as if in a bath of some radiant and tenuous fluid shed upon their heads by luminous globes, drifted in its hundreds round the band. Hundreds more sat on chairs in more or less concentric circles, receiving unflinchingly the great waves of sonority that ebbed out into the darkness. The Count penetrated the throng, drifted with it in tranquil enjoyment, listening and looking at the faces. All people of good society: mothers with their daughters, parents and children, young men and young women all talking, smiling, nodding to each other. Very many pretty faces, and very many pretty toilettes. There was, of course, a quantity of diverse types: showy old fellows with white moustaches, fat men, thin men, officers in uniform; but what predominated, he told me, was the South Italian type of young man, with a colourless, clear complexion, red lips, jet-black little moustache and liquid black eyes so wonderfully effective in leering or scowling.

Withdrawing from the throng, the Count shared a little table in front of the cafe with a young man of just such a type. Our friend had some lemonade. The young man was sitting moodily before an empty glass. He looked up once, and then looked down again. He also tilted his hat forward. Like this —

The Count made the gesture of a man pulling his hat down over his brow, and went on:

“I think to myself: he is sad; something is wrong with him; young men have their troubles. I take no notice of him, of course. I pay for my lemonade, and go away.”

Strolling about in the neighbourhood of the band, the Count thinks he saw twice that young man wandering alone in the crowd. Once their eyes met. It must have been the same young man, but there were so many there of that type that he could not be certain. Moreover, he was not very much concerned except in so far that he had been struck by the marked, peevish discontent of that face.

Presently, tired of the feeling of confinement one experiences in a crowd, the Count edged away from the band. An alley, very sombre by contrast,

presented itself invitingly with its promise of solitude and coolness. He entered it, walking slowly on till the sound of the orchestra became distinctly deadened. Then he walked back and turned about once more. He did this several times before he noticed that there was somebody occupying one of the benches.

The spot being midway between two lamp-posts the light was faint.

The man lolled back in the corner of the seat, his legs stretched out, his arms folded and his head drooping on his breast. He never stirred, as though he had fallen asleep there, but when the Count passed by next time he had changed his attitude. He sat leaning forward. His elbows were propped on his knees, and his hands were rolling a cigarette. He never looked up from that occupation.

The Count continued his stroll away from the band. He returned slowly, he said. I can imagine him enjoying to the full, but with his usual tranquillity, the balminess of this southern night and the sounds of music softened delightfully by the distance.

Presently, he approached for the third time the man on the garden seat, still leaning forward with his elbows on his knees. It was a dejected pose. In the semi-obscurity of the alley his high shirt collar and his cuffs made small patches of vivid whiteness. The Count said that he had noticed him getting up brusquely as if to walk away, but almost before he was aware of it the man stood before him asking in a low, gentle tone whether the signore would have the kindness to oblige him with a light.

The Count answered this request by a polite "Certainly," and dropped his hands with the intention of exploring both pockets of his trousers for the matches.

"I dropped my hands," he said, "but I never put them in my pockets. I felt a pressure there — "

He put the tip of his finger on a spot close under his breastbone, the very spot of the human body where a Japanese gentleman begins the operations of the Harakiri, which is a form of suicide following upon dishonour, upon an intolerable outrage to the delicacy of one's feelings.

"I glance down," the Count continued in an awestruck voice, "and what do I see? A knife! A long knife — "

"You don't mean to say," I exclaimed, amazed, "that you have been held up like this in the Villa at half-past ten o'clock, within a stone's throw of a thousand people!"

He nodded several times, staring at me with all his might.

“The clarionet,” he declared, solemnly, “was finishing his solo, and I assure you I could hear every note. Then the band crashed fortissimo, and that creature rolled its eyes and gnashed its teeth hissing at me with the greatest ferocity, ‘Be silent! No noise or — ’“

I could not get over my astonishment.

“What sort of knife was it?” I asked, stupidly.

“A long blade. A stiletto — perhaps a kitchen knife. A long narrow blade. It gleamed. And his eyes gleamed. His white teeth, too. I could see them. He was very ferocious. I thought to myself: ‘If I hit him he will kill me.’ How could I fight with him? He had the knife and I had nothing. I am nearly seventy, you know, and that was a young man. I seemed even to recognize him. The moody young man of the cafe. The young man I met in the crowd. But I could not tell. There are so many like him in this country.”

The distress of that moment was reflected in his face. I should think that physically he must have been paralyzed by surprise. His thoughts, however, remained extremely active. They ranged over every alarming possibility. The idea of setting up a vigorous shouting for help occurred to him, too. But he did nothing of the kind, and the reason why he refrained gave me a good opinion of his mental self-possession. He saw in a flash that nothing prevented the other from shouting, too.

“That young man might in an instant have thrown away his knife and pretended I was the aggressor. Why not? He might have said I attacked him. Why not? It was one incredible story against another! He might have said anything — bring some dishonouring charge against me — what do I know? By his dress he was no common robber. He seemed to belong to the better classes. What could I say? He was an Italian — I am a foreigner. Of course, I have my passport, and there is our consul — but to be arrested, dragged at night to the police office like a criminal!”

He shuddered. It was in his character to shrink from scandal, much more than from mere death. And certainly for many people this would have always remained — considering certain peculiarities of Neapolitan manners — a deucedly queer story. The Count was no fool. His belief in the respectable placidity of life having received this rude shock, he thought that now anything might happen. But also a notion came into his head that this young man was perhaps merely an infuriated lunatic.



This was for me the first hint of his attitude towards this adventure. In his exaggerated delicacy of sentiment he felt that nobody's self-esteem need be affected by what a madman may choose to do to one. It became apparent, however, that the Count was to be denied that consolation. He enlarged upon the abominably savage way in which that young man rolled his glistening eyes and gnashed his white teeth. The band was going now through a slow movement of solemn braying by all the trombones, with deliberately repeated bangs of the big drum.

"But what did you do?" I asked, greatly excited.

"Nothing," answered the Count. "I let my hands hang down very still. I told him quietly I did not intend making a noise. He snarled like a dog, then said in an ordinary voice:

"*Vostro portofolio.*"

"So I naturally," continued the Count — and from this point acted the whole thing in pantomime. Holding me with his eyes, he went through all the motions of reaching into his inside breast pocket, taking out a pocket-book, and handing it over. But that young man, still bearing steadily on the knife, refused to touch it.

He directed the Count to take the money out himself, received it into his left hand, motioned the pocketbook to be returned to the pocket, all this being done to the sweet thrilling of flutes and clarionets sustained by the emotional drone of the hautboys. And the "young man," as the Count called him, said: "This seems very little."

"It was, indeed, only 340 or 360 lire," the Count pursued. "I had left my money in the hotel, as you know. I told him this was all I had on me. He shook his head impatiently and said:

"*Vostro orologio.*"

The Count gave me the dumb show of pulling out his watch, detaching it. But, as it happened, the valuable gold half-chronometer he possessed had been left at a watch-maker's for cleaning. He wore that evening (on a leather guard) the Waterbury fifty-franc thing he used to take with him on his fishing expeditions. Perceiving the nature of this booty, the well-dressed robber made a contemptuous clicking sound with his tongue like this, "Tse-Ah!" and waved it away hastily. Then, as the Count was returning the disdained object to his pocket, he demanded with a threateningly increased pressure of the knife on the epigastrium, by way of reminder:

"*Vostri anelli.*"

“One of the rings,” went on the Count, “was given me many years ago by my wife; the other is the signet ring of my father. I said, ‘No. That you shall not have!’”

Here the Count reproduced the gesture corresponding to that declaration by clapping one hand upon the other, and pressing both thus against his chest. It was touching in its resignation. “That you shall not have,” he repeated, firmly, and closed his eyes, fully expecting — I don’t know whether I am right in recording that such an unpleasant word had passed his lips — fully expecting to feel himself being — I really hesitate to say — being disembowelled by the push of the long, sharp blade resting murderously against the pit of his stomach — the very seat, in all human beings, of anguishing sensations.

Great waves of harmony went on flowing from the band.

Suddenly the Count felt the nightmarish pressure removed from the sensitive spot. He opened his eyes. He was alone. He had heard nothing. It is probable that “the young man” had departed, with light steps, some time before, but the sense of the horrid pressure had lingered even after the knife had gone. A feeling of weakness came over him. He had just time to stagger to the garden seat. He felt as though he had held his breath for a long time. He sat all in a heap, panting with the shock of the reaction.

The band was executing, with immense bravura, the complicated finale. It ended with a tremendous crash. He heard it unreal and remote, as if his ears had been stopped, and then the hard clapping of a thousand, more or less, pairs of hands, like a sudden hail-shower passing away. The profound silence which succeeded recalled him to himself.

A tramcar resembling a long glass box wherein people sat with their heads strongly lighted, ran along swiftly within sixty yards of the spot where he had been robbed. Then another rustled by, and yet another going the other way. The audience about the band had broken up, and were entering the alley in small conversing groups. The Count sat up straight and tried to think calmly of what had happened to him. The vileness of it took his breath away again. As far as I can make it out he was disgusted with himself. I do not mean to say with his behaviour. Indeed, if his pantomimic rendering of it for my information was to be trusted, it was simply perfect. No, it was not that. He was not ashamed. He was shocked at being the selected victim, not of robbery so much as of contempt. His tranquillity had

been wantonly desecrated. His lifelong, kindly nicety of outlook had been defaced.

Nevertheless, at that stage, before the iron had time to sink deep, he was able to argue himself into comparative equanimity. As his agitation calmed down somewhat, he became aware that he was frightfully hungry. Yes, hungry. The sheer emotion had made him simply ravenous. He left the seat and, after walking for some time, found himself outside the gardens and before an arrested tramcar, without knowing very well how he came there. He got in as if in a dream, by a sort of instinct. Fortunately he found in his trouser pocket a copper to satisfy the conductor. Then the car stopped, and as everybody was getting out he got out, too. He recognized the Piazza San Ferdinando, but apparently it did not occur to him to take a cab and drive to the hotel. He remained in distress on the Piazza like a lost dog, thinking vaguely of the best way of getting something to eat at once.

Suddenly he remembered his twenty-franc piece. He explained to me that he had that piece of French gold for something like three years. He used to carry it about with him as a sort of reserve in case of accident. Anybody is liable to have his pocket picked — a quite different thing from a brazen and insulting robbery.

The monumental arch of the Galleria Umberto faced him at the top of a noble flight of stairs. He climbed these without loss of time, and directed his steps towards the Cafe Umberto. All the tables outside were occupied by a lot of people who were drinking. But as he wanted something to eat, he went inside into the cafe, which is divided into aisles by square pillars set all round with long looking-glasses. The Count sat down on a red plush bench against one of these pillars, waiting for his risotto. And his mind reverted to his abominable adventure.

He thought of the moody, well-dressed young man, with whom he had exchanged glances in the crowd around the bandstand, and who, he felt confident, was the robber. Would he recognize him again? Doubtless. But he did not want ever to see him again. The best thing was to forget this humiliating episode.

The Count looked round anxiously for the coming of his risotto, and, behold! to the left against the wall — there sat the young man. He was alone at a table, with a bottle of some sort of wine or syrup and a carafe of iced water before him. The smooth olive cheeks, the red lips, the little jet-black moustache turned up gallantly, the fine black eyes a little heavy and

shaded by long eyelashes, that peculiar expression of cruel discontent to be seen only in the busts of some Roman emperors — it was he, no doubt at all. But that was a type. The Count looked away hastily. The young officer over there reading a paper was like that, too. Same type. Two young men farther away playing draughts also resembled —

The Count lowered his head with the fear in his heart of being everlastingly haunted by the vision of that young man. He began to eat his risotto. Presently he heard the young man on his left call the waiter in a bad-tempered tone.

At the call, not only his own waiter, but two other idle waiters belonging to a quite different row of tables, rushed towards him with obsequious alacrity, which is not the general characteristic of the waiters in the Cafe Umberto. The young man muttered something and one of the waiters walking rapidly to the nearest door called out into the Galleria: “Pasquale! O! Pasquale!”

Everybody knows Pasquale, the shabby old fellow who, shuffling between the tables, offers for sale cigars, cigarettes, picture postcards, and matches to the clients of the cafe. He is in many respects an engaging scoundrel. The Count saw the grey-haired, unshaven ruffian enter the cafe, the glass case hanging from his neck by a leather strap, and, at a word from the waiter, make his shuffling way with a sudden spurt to the young man’s table. The young man was in need of a cigar with which Pasquale served him fawningly. The old pedlar was going out, when the Count, on a sudden impulse, beckoned to him.

Pasquale approached, the smile of deferential recognition combining oddly with the cynical searching expression of his eyes. Leaning his case on the table, he lifted the glass lid without a word. The Count took a box of cigarettes and urged by a fearful curiosity, asked as casually as he could —

“Tell me, Pasquale, who is that young signore sitting over there?”

The other bent over his box confidentially.

“That, Signor Conde,” he said, beginning to rearrange his wares busily and without looking up, “that is a young Cavaliere of a very good family from Bari. He studies in the University here, and is the chief, capo, of an association of young men — of very nice young men.”

He paused, and then, with mingled discretion and pride of knowledge, murmured the explanatory word “Camorra” and shut down the lid. “A very

powerful Camorra,” he breathed out. “The professors themselves respect it greatly . . . una lira e cinquanti centesimi, Signor Conde.”

Our friend paid with the gold piece. While Pasquale was making up the change, he observed that the young man, of whom he had heard so much in a few words, was watching the transaction covertly. After the old vagabond had withdrawn with a bow, the Count settled with the waiter and sat still. A numbness, he told me, had come over him.

The young man paid, too, got up, and crossed over, apparently for the purpose of looking at himself in the mirror set in the pillar nearest to the Count’s seat. He was dressed all in black with a dark green bow tie. The Count looked round, and was startled by meeting a vicious glance out of the corners of the other’s eyes. The young Cavaliere from Bari (according to Pasquale; but Pasquale is, of course, an accomplished liar) went on arranging his tie, settling his hat before the glass, and meantime he spoke just loud enough to be heard by the Count. He spoke through his teeth with the most insulting venom of contempt and gazing straight into the mirror.

“Ah! So you had some gold on you — you old liar — you old birba — you furfante! But you are not done with me yet.”

The fiendishness of his expression vanished like lightning, and he lounged out of the cafe with a moody, impassive face.

The poor Count, after telling me this last episode, fell back trembling in his chair. His forehead broke into perspiration. There was a wanton insolence in the spirit of this outrage which appalled even me. What it was to the Count’s delicacy I won’t attempt to guess. I am sure that if he had been not too refined to do such a blatantly vulgar thing as dying from apoplexy in a cafe, he would have had a fatal stroke there and then. All irony apart, my difficulty was to keep him from seeing the full extent of my commiseration. He shrank from every excessive sentiment, and my commiseration was practically unbounded. It did not surprise me to hear that he had been in bed a week. He had got up to make his arrangements for leaving Southern Italy for good and all.

And the man was convinced that he could not live through a whole year in any other climate!

No argument of mine had any effect. It was not timidity, though he did say to me once: “You do not know what a Camorra is, my dear sir. I am a marked man.” He was not afraid of what could be done to him. His delicate conception of his dignity was defiled by a degrading experience. He

couldn't stand that. No Japanese gentleman, outraged in his exaggerated sense of honour, could have gone about his preparations for Hara-kiri with greater resolution. To go home really amounted to suicide for the poor Count.

There is a saying of Neapolitan patriotism, intended for the information of foreigners, I presume: "See Naples and then die." *Vedi Napoli e poi mori*. It is a saying of excessive vanity, and everything excessive was abhorrent to the nice moderation of the poor Count. Yet, as I was seeing him off at the railway station, I thought he was behaving with singular fidelity to its conceited spirit. *Vedi Napoli!* . . . He had seen it! He had seen it with startling thoroughness — and now he was going to his grave. He was going to it by the train de luxe of the International Sleeping Car Company, via Trieste and Vienna. As the four long, sombre coaches pulled out of the station I raised my hat with the solemn feeling of paying the last tribute of respect to a funeral cortege. Il Conde's profile, much aged already, glided away from me in stony immobility, behind the lighted pane of glass — *Vedi Napoli e poi mori!*

## *A SMILE OF FORTUNE*



### A HARBOUR STORY

Ever since the sun rose I had been looking ahead. The ship glided gently in smooth water. After a sixty days' passage I was anxious to make my landfall, a fertile and beautiful island of the tropics. The more enthusiastic of its inhabitants delight in describing it as the "Pearl of the Ocean." Well, let us call it the "Pearl." It's a good name. A pearl distilling much sweetness upon the world.

This is only a way of telling you that first-rate sugar-cane is grown there. All the population of the Pearl lives for it and by it. Sugar is their daily bread, as it were. And I was coming to them for a cargo of sugar in the hope of the crop having been good and of the freights being high.

Mr. Burns, my chief mate, made out the land first; and very soon I became entranced by this blue, pinnacled apparition, almost transparent against the light of the sky, a mere emanation, the astral body of an island risen to greet me from afar. It is a rare phenomenon, such a sight of the Pearl at sixty miles off. And I wondered half seriously whether it was a good omen, whether what would meet me in that island would be as luckily exceptional as this beautiful, dreamlike vision so very few seamen have been privileged to behold.

But horrid thoughts of business interfered with my enjoyment of an accomplished passage. I was anxious for success and I wished, too, to do justice to the flattering latitude of my owners' instructions contained in one noble phrase: "We leave it to you to do the best you can with the ship." . . . All the world being thus given me for a stage, my abilities appeared to me no bigger than a pinhead.

Meantime the wind dropped, and Mr. Burns began to make disagreeable remarks about my usual bad luck. I believe it was his devotion for me which made him critically outspoken on every occasion. All the same, I would not have put up with his humours if it had not been my lot at one time to nurse him through a desperate illness at sea. After snatching him out of the jaws of death, so to speak, it would have been absurd to throw

away such an efficient officer. But sometimes I wished he would dismiss himself.

We were late in closing in with the land, and had to anchor outside the harbour till next day. An unpleasant and unrestful night followed. In this roadstead, strange to us both, Burns and I remained on deck almost all the time. Clouds swirled down the porphyry crags under which we lay. The rising wind made a great bullying noise amongst the naked spars, with interludes of sad moaning. I remarked that we had been in luck to fetch the anchorage before dark. It would have been a nasty, anxious night to hang off a harbour under canvas. But my chief mate was uncompromising in his attitude.

“Luck, you call it, sir! Ay — our usual luck. The sort of luck to thank God it’s no worse!”

And so he fretted through the dark hours, while I drew on my fund of philosophy. Ah, but it was an exasperating, weary, endless night, to be lying at anchor close under that black coast! The agitated water made snarling sounds all round the ship. At times a wild gust of wind out of a gully high up on the cliffs struck on our rigging a harsh and plaintive note like the wail of a forsaken soul.



## CHAPTER I

By half-past seven in the morning, the ship being then inside the harbour at last and moored within a long stone's-throw from the quay, my stock of philosophy was nearly exhausted. I was dressing hurriedly in my cabin when the steward came tripping in with a morning suit over his arm.

Hungry, tired, and depressed, with my head engaged inside a white shirt irritatingly stuck together by too much starch, I desired him peevishly to "heave round with that breakfast." I wanted to get ashore as soon as possible.

"Yes, sir. Ready at eight, sir. There's a gentleman from the shore waiting to speak to you, sir."

This statement was curiously slurred over. I dragged the shirt violently over my head and emerged staring.

"So early!" I cried. "Who's he? What does he want?"

On coming in from sea one has to pick up the conditions of an utterly unrelated existence. Every little event at first has the peculiar emphasis of novelty. I was greatly surprised by that early caller; but there was no reason for my steward to look so particularly foolish.

"Didn't you ask for the name?" I inquired in a stern tone.

"His name's Jacobus, I believe," he mumbled shamefacedly.

"Mr. Jacobus!" I exclaimed loudly, more surprised than ever, but with a total change of feeling. "Why couldn't you say so at once?"

But the fellow had scuttled out of my room. Through the momentarily opened door I had a glimpse of a tall, stout man standing in the cuddy by the table on which the cloth was already laid; a "harbour" table-cloth, stainless and dazzlingly white. So far good.

I shouted courteously through the closed door, that I was dressing and would be with him in a moment. In return the assurance that there was no hurry reached me in the visitor's deep, quiet undertone. His time was my own. He dared say I would give him a cup of coffee presently.

"I am afraid you will have a poor breakfast," I cried apologetically. "We have been sixty-one days at sea, you know."

A quiet little laugh, with a "That'll be all right, Captain," was his answer. All this, words, intonation, the glimpsed attitude of the man in the cuddy, had an unexpected character, a something friendly in it — propitiatory. And my surprise was not diminished thereby. What did this

call mean? Was it the sign of some dark design against my commercial innocence?

Ah! These commercial interests — spoiling the finest life under the sun. Why must the sea be used for trade — and for war as well? Why kill and traffic on it, pursuing selfish aims of no great importance after all? It would have been so much nicer just to sail about with here and there a port and a bit of land to stretch one's legs on, buy a few books and get a change of cooking for a while. But, living in a world more or less homicidal and desperately mercantile, it was plainly my duty to make the best of its opportunities.

My owners' letter had left it to me, as I have said before, to do my best for the ship, according to my own judgment. But it contained also a postscript worded somewhat as follows:

“Without meaning to interfere with your liberty of action we are writing by the outgoing mail to some of our business friends there who may be of assistance to you. We desire you particularly to call on Mr. Jacobus, a prominent merchant and charterer. Should you hit it off with him he may be able to put you in the way of profitable employment for the ship.”

Hit it off! Here was the prominent creature absolutely on board asking for the favour of a cup of coffee! And life not being a fairy-tale the improbability of the event almost shocked me. Had I discovered an enchanted nook of the earth where wealthy merchants rush fasting on board ships before they are fairly moored? Was this white magic or merely some black trick of trade? I came in the end (while making the bow of my tie) to suspect that perhaps I did not get the name right. I had been thinking of the prominent Mr. Jacobus pretty frequently during the passage and my hearing might have been deceived by some remote similarity of sound. . . The steward might have said Antrobus — or maybe Jackson.

But coming out of my stateroom with an interrogative “Mr. Jacobus?” I was met by a quiet “Yes,” uttered with a gentle smile. The “yes” was rather perfunctory. He did not seem to make much of the fact that he was Mr. Jacobus. I took stock of a big, pale face, hair thin on the top, whiskers also thin, of a faded nondescript colour, heavy eyelids. The thick, smooth lips in repose looked as if glued together. The smile was faint. A heavy, tranquil man. I named my two officers, who just then came down to breakfast; but why Mr. Burns's silent demeanour should suggest suppressed indignation I could not understand.

While we were taking our seats round the table some disconnected words of an altercation going on in the companionway reached my ear. A stranger apparently wanted to come down to interview me, and the steward was opposing him.

“You can’t see him.”

“Why can’t I?”

“The Captain is at breakfast, I tell you. He’ll be going on shore presently, and you can speak to him on deck.”

“That’s not fair. You let — ”

“I’ve had nothing to do with that.”

“Oh, yes, you have. Everybody ought to have the same chance. You let that fellow — ”

The rest I lost. The person having been repulsed successfully, the steward came down. I can’t say he looked flushed — he was a mulatto — but he looked flustered. After putting the dishes on the table he remained by the sideboard with that lackadaisical air of indifference he used to assume when he had done something too clever by half and was afraid of getting into a scrape over it. The contemptuous expression of Mr. Burns’s face as he looked from him to me was really extraordinary. I couldn’t imagine what new bee had stung the mate now.

The Captain being silent, nobody else cared to speak, as is the way in ships. And I was saying nothing simply because I had been made dumb by the splendour of the entertainment. I had expected the usual sea-breakfast, whereas I beheld spread before us a veritable feast of shore provisions: eggs, sausages, butter which plainly did not come from a Danish tin, cutlets, and even a dish of potatoes. It was three weeks since I had seen a real, live potato. I contemplated them with interest, and Mr. Jacobus disclosed himself as a man of human, homely sympathies, and something of a thought-reader.

“Try them, Captain,” he encouraged me in a friendly undertone. “They are excellent.”

“They look that,” I admitted. “Grown on the island, I suppose.”

“Oh, no, imported. Those grown here would be more expensive.”

I was grieved at the ineptitude of the conversation. Were these the topics for a prominent and wealthy merchant to discuss? I thought the simplicity with which he made himself at home rather attractive; but what is one to talk about to a man who comes on one suddenly, after sixty-one days at sea,

out of a totally unknown little town in an island one has never seen before? What were (besides sugar) the interests of that crumb of the earth, its gossip, its topics of conversation? To draw him on business at once would have been almost indecent — or even worse: impolitic. All I could do at the moment was to keep on in the old groove.

“Are the provisions generally dear here?” I asked, fretting inwardly at my inanity.

“I wouldn’t say that,” he answered placidly, with that appearance of saving his breath his restrained manner of speaking suggested.

He would not be more explicit, yet he did not evade the subject. Eyeing the table in a spirit of complete abstemiousness (he wouldn’t let me help him to any eatables) he went into details of supply. The beef was for the most part imported from Madagascar; mutton of course was rare and somewhat expensive, but good goat’s flesh —

“Are these goat’s cutlets?” I exclaimed hastily, pointing at one of the dishes.

Posed sentimentally by the sideboard, the steward gave a start.

“Lor’, no, sir! It’s real mutton!”

Mr. Burns got through his breakfast impatiently, as if exasperated by being made a party to some monstrous foolishness, muttered a curt excuse, and went on deck. Shortly afterwards the second mate took his smooth red countenance out of the cabin. With the appetite of a schoolboy, and after two months of sea-fare, he appreciated the generous spread. But I did not. It smacked of extravagance. All the same, it was a remarkable feat to have produced it so quickly, and I congratulated the steward on his smartness in a somewhat ominous tone. He gave me a deprecatory smile and, in a way I didn’t know what to make of, blinked his fine dark eyes in the direction of the guest.

The latter asked under his breath for another cup of coffee, and nibbled ascetically at a piece of very hard ship’s biscuit. I don’t think he consumed a square inch in the end; but meantime he gave me, casually as it were, a complete account of the sugar crop, of the local business houses, of the state of the freight market. All that talk was interspersed with hints as to personalities, amounting to veiled warnings, but his pale, fleshy face remained equable, without a gleam, as if ignorant of his voice. As you may imagine I opened my ears very wide. Every word was precious. My ideas as to the value of business friendship were being favourably modified. He

gave me the names of all the disponible ships together with their tonnage and the names of their commanders. From that, which was still commercial information, he condescended to mere harbour gossip. The Hilda had unaccountably lost her figurehead in the Bay of Bengal, and her captain was greatly affected by this. He and the ship had been getting on in years together and the old gentleman imagined this strange event to be the forerunner of his own early dissolution. The Stella had experienced awful weather off the Cape — had her decks swept, and the chief officer washed overboard. And only a few hours before reaching port the baby died.

Poor Captain H- and his wife were terribly cut up. If they had only been able to bring it into port alive it could have been probably saved; but the wind failed them for the last week or so, light breezes, and . . . the baby was going to be buried this afternoon. He supposed I would attend —

“Do you think I ought to?” I asked, shrinkingly.

He thought so, decidedly. It would be greatly appreciated. All the captains in the harbour were going to attend. Poor Mrs. H- was quite prostrated. Pretty hard on H- altogether.

“And you, Captain — you are not married I suppose?”

“No, I am not married,” I said. “Neither married nor even engaged.”

Mentally I thanked my stars; and while he smiled in a musing, dreamy fashion, I expressed my acknowledgments for his visit and for the interesting business information he had been good enough to impart to me. But I said nothing of my wonder thereat.

“Of course, I would have made a point of calling on you in a day or two,” I concluded.

He raised his eyelids distinctly at me, and somehow managed to look rather more sleepy than before.

“In accordance with my owners’ instructions,” I explained. “You have had their letter, of course?”

By that time he had raised his eyebrows too but without any particular emotion. On the contrary he struck me then as absolutely imperturbable.

“Oh! You must be thinking of my brother.”

It was for me, then, to say “Oh!” But I hope that no more than civil surprise appeared in my voice when I asked him to what, then, I owed the pleasure. . . . He was reaching for an inside pocket leisurely.

“My brother’s a very different person. But I am well known in this part of the world. You’ve probably heard — ”

I took a card he extended to me. A thick business card, as I lived! Alfred Jacobus — the other was Ernest — dealer in every description of ship's stores! Provisions salt and fresh, oils, paints, rope, canvas, etc., etc. Ships in harbour victualled by contract on moderate terms —

"I've never heard of you," I said brusquely.

His low-pitched assurance did not abandon him.

"You will be very well satisfied," he breathed out quietly.

I was not placated. I had the sense of having been circumvented somehow. Yet I had deceived myself — if there was any deception. But the confounded cheek of inviting himself to breakfast was enough to deceive any one. And the thought struck me: Why! The fellow had provided all these eatables himself in the way of business. I said:

"You must have got up mighty early this morning."

He admitted with simplicity that he was on the quay before six o'clock waiting for my ship to come in. He gave me the impression that it would be impossible to get rid of him now.

"If you think we are going to live on that scale," I said, looking at the table with an irritated eye, "you are jolly well mistaken."

"You'll find it all right, Captain. I quite understand."

Nothing could disturb his equanimity. I felt dissatisfied, but I could not very well fly out at him. He had told me many useful things — and besides he was the brother of that wealthy merchant. That seemed queer enough.

I rose and told him curtly that I must now go ashore. At once he offered the use of his boat for all the time of my stay in port.

"I only make a nominal charge," he continued equably. "My man remains all day at the landing-steps. You have only to blow a whistle when you want the boat."

And, standing aside at every doorway to let me go through first, he carried me off in his custody after all. As we crossed the quarter-deck two shabby individuals stepped forward and in mournful silence offered me business cards which I took from them without a word under his heavy eye. It was a useless and gloomy ceremony. They were the touts of the other ship-chandlers, and he placid at my back, ignored their existence.

We parted on the quay, after he had expressed quietly the hope of seeing me often "at the store." He had a smoking-room for captains there, with newspapers and a box of "rather decent cigars." I left him very unceremoniously.

My consignees received me with the usual business heartiness, but their account of the state of the freight-market was by no means so favourable as the talk of the wrong Jacobus had led me to expect. Naturally I became inclined now to put my trust in his version, rather. As I closed the door of the private office behind me I thought to myself: "H'm. A lot of lies. Commercial diplomacy. That's the sort of thing a man coming from sea has got to expect. They would try to charter the ship under the market rate."

In the big, outer room, full of desks, the chief clerk, a tall, lean, shaved person in immaculate white clothes and with a shiny, closely-cropped black head on which silvery gleams came and went, rose from his place and detained me affably. Anything they could do for me, they would be most happy. Was I likely to call again in the afternoon? What? Going to a funeral? Oh, yes, poor Captain H-.

He pulled a long, sympathetic face for a moment, then, dismissing from this workaday world the baby, which had got ill in a tempest and had died from too much calm at sea, he asked me with a dental, shark-like smile — if sharks had false teeth — whether I had yet made my little arrangements for the ship's stay in port.

"Yes, with Jacobus," I answered carelessly. "I understand he's the brother of Mr. Ernest Jacobus to whom I have an introduction from my owners."

I was not sorry to let him know I was not altogether helpless in the hands of his firm. He screwed his thin lips dubiously.

"Why," I cried, "isn't he the brother?"

"Oh, yes. . . . They haven't spoken to each other for eighteen years," he added impressively after a pause.

"Indeed! What's the quarrel about?"

"Oh, nothing! Nothing that one would care to mention," he protested primly. "He's got quite a large business. The best ship-chandler here, without a doubt. Business is all very well, but there is such a thing as personal character, too, isn't there? Good-morning, Captain."

He went away mincingly to his desk. He amused me. He resembled an old maid, a commercial old maid, shocked by some impropriety. Was it a commercial impropriety? Commercial impropriety is a serious matter, for it aims at one's pocket. Or was he only a purist in conduct who disapproved of Jacobus doing his own touting? It was certainly undignified. I wondered how the merchant brother liked it. But then different countries, different

customs. In a community so isolated and so exclusively “trading” social standards have their own scale.



## CHAPTER II

I would have gladly dispensed with the mournful opportunity of becoming acquainted by sight with all my fellow-captains at once. However I found my way to the cemetery. We made a considerable group of bareheaded men in sombre garments. I noticed that those of our company most approaching to the now obsolete sea-dog type were the most moved — perhaps because they had less “manner” than the new generation. The old sea-dog, away from his natural element, was a simple and sentimental animal. I noticed one — he was facing me across the grave — who was dropping tears. They trickled down his weather-beaten face like drops of rain on an old rugged wall. I learned afterwards that he was looked upon as the terror of sailors, a hard man; that he had never had wife or chick of his own, and that, engaged from his tenderest years in deep-sea voyages, he knew women and children merely by sight.

Perhaps he was dropping those tears over his lost opportunities, from sheer envy of paternity and in strange jealousy of a sorrow which he could never know. Man, and even the sea-man, is a capricious animal, the creature and the victim of lost opportunities. But he made me feel ashamed of my callousness. I had no tears.

I listened with horribly critical detachment to that service I had had to read myself, once or twice, over childlike men who had died at sea. The words of hope and defiance, the winged words so inspiring in the free immensity of water and sky, seemed to fall wearily into the little grave. What was the use of asking Death where her sting was, before that small, dark hole in the ground? And then my thoughts escaped me altogether — away into matters of life — and no very high matters at that — ships, freights, business. In the instability of his emotions man resembles deplorably a monkey. I was disgusted with my thoughts — and I thought: Shall I be able to get a charter soon? Time’s money. . . . Will that Jacobus really put good business in my way? I must go and see him in a day or two.

Don’t imagine that I pursued these thoughts with any precision. They pursued me rather: vague, shadowy, restless, shamefaced. Theirs was a callous, abominable, almost revolting, pertinacity. And it was the presence of that pertinacious ship-chandler which had started them. He stood mournfully amongst our little band of men from the sea, and I was angry at his presence, which, suggesting his brother the merchant, had caused me to

become outrageous to myself. For indeed I had preserved some decency of feeling. It was only the mind which —

It was over at last. The poor father — a man of forty with black, bushy side-whiskers and a pathetic gash on his freshly-shaved chin — thanked us all, swallowing his tears. But for some reason, either because I lingered at the gate of the cemetery being somewhat hazy as to my way back, or because I was the youngest, or ascribing my moodiness caused by remorse to some more worthy and appropriate sentiment, or simply because I was even more of a stranger to him than the others — he singled me out. Keeping at my side, he renewed his thanks, which I listened to in a gloomy, conscience-stricken silence. Suddenly he slipped one hand under my arm and waved the other after a tall, stout figure walking away by itself down a street in a flutter of thin, grey garments:

“That’s a good fellow — a real good fellow” — he swallowed down a belated sob — ”this Jacobus.”

And he told me in a low voice that Jacobus was the first man to board his ship on arrival, and, learning of their misfortune, had taken charge of everything, volunteered to attend to all routine business, carried off the ship’s papers on shore, arranged for the funeral —

“A good fellow. I was knocked over. I had been looking at my wife for ten days. And helpless. Just you think of that! The dear little chap died the very day we made the land. How I managed to take the ship in God alone knows! I couldn’t see anything; I couldn’t speak; I couldn’t. . . . You’ve heard, perhaps, that we lost our mate overboard on the passage? There was no one to do it for me. And the poor woman nearly crazy down below there all alone with the . . . By the Lord! It isn’t fair.”

We walked in silence together. I did not know how to part from him. On the quay he let go my arm and struck fiercely his fist into the palm of his other hand.

“By God, it isn’t fair!” he cried again. “Don’t you ever marry unless you can chuck the sea first. . . . It isn’t fair.”

I had no intention to “chuck the sea,” and when he left me to go aboard his ship I felt convinced that I would never marry. While I was waiting at the steps for Jacobus’s boatman, who had gone off somewhere, the captain of the Hilda joined me, a slender silk umbrella in his hand and the sharp points of his archaic, Gladstonian shirt-collar framing a small, clean-shaved, ruddy face. It was wonderfully fresh for his age, beautifully

modelled and lit up by remarkably clear blue eyes. A lot of white hair, glossy like spun glass, curled upwards slightly under the brim of his valuable, ancient, panama hat with a broad black ribbon. In the aspect of that vivacious, neat, little old man there was something quaintly angelic and also boyish.

He accosted me, as though he had been in the habit of seeing me every day of his life from my earliest childhood, with a whimsical remark on the appearance of a stout negro woman who was sitting upon a stool near the edge of the quay. Presently he observed amiably that I had a very pretty little barque.

I returned this civil speech by saying readily:

“Not so pretty as the Hilda.”

At once the corners of his clear-cut, sensitive mouth dropped dismally.

“Oh, dear! I can hardly bear to look at her now.”

Did I know, he asked anxiously, that he had lost the figurehead of his ship; a woman in a blue tunic edged with gold, the face perhaps not so very, very pretty, but her bare white arms beautifully shaped and extended as if she were swimming? Did I? Who would have expected such a thing . . . After twenty years too!

Nobody could have guessed from his tone that the woman was made of wood; his trembling voice, his agitated manner gave to his lamentations a ludicrously scandalous flavour. . . . Disappeared at night — a clear fine night with just a slight swell — in the gulf of Bengal. Went off without a splash; no one in the ship could tell why, how, at what hour — after twenty years last October. . . . Did I ever hear! . . .

I assured him sympathetically that I had never heard — and he became very doleful. This meant no good he was sure. There was something in it which looked like a warning. But when I remarked that surely another figure of a woman could be procured I found myself being soundly rated for my levity. The old boy flushed pink under his clear tan as if I had proposed something improper. One could replace masts, I was told, or a lost rudder — any working part of a ship; but where was the use of sticking up a new figurehead? What satisfaction? How could one care for it? It was easy to see that I had never been shipmates with a figurehead for over twenty years.

“A new figurehead!” he scolded in unquenchable indignation. “Why! I’ve been a widower now for eight-and-twenty years come next May and I

would just as soon think of getting a new wife. You're as bad as that fellow Jacobus."

I was highly amused.

"What has Jacobus done? Did he want you to marry again, Captain?" I inquired in a deferential tone. But he was launched now and only grinned fiercely.

"Procure — indeed! He's the sort of chap to procure you anything you like for a price. I hadn't been moored here for an hour when he got on board and at once offered to sell me a figurehead he happens to have in his yard somewhere. He got Smith, my mate, to talk to me about it. 'Mr. Smith,' says I, 'don't you know me better than that? Am I the sort that would pick up with another man's cast-off figurehead?' And after all these years too! The way some of you young fellows talk — "

I affected great compunction, and as I stepped into the boat I said soberly:

"Then I see nothing for it but to fit in a neat fiddlehead — perhaps. You know, carved scrollwork, nicely gilt."

He became very dejected after his outburst.

"Yes. Scrollwork. Maybe. Jacobus hinted at that too. He's never at a loss when there's any money to be extracted from a sailorman. He would make me pay through the nose for that carving. A gilt fiddlehead did you say — eh? I dare say it would do for you. You young fellows don't seem to have any feeling for what's proper."

He made a convulsive gesture with his right arm.

"Never mind. Nothing can make much difference. I would just as soon let the old thing go about the world with a bare cutwater," he cried sadly. Then as the boat got away from the steps he raised his voice on the edge of the quay with comical animosity:

"I would! If only to spite that figurehead-procuring bloodsucker. I am an old bird here and don't you forget it. Come and see me on board some day!"

I spent my first evening in port quietly in my ship's cuddy; and glad enough was I to think that the shore life which strikes one as so pettily complex, discordant, and so full of new faces on first coming from sea, could be kept off for a few hours longer. I was however fated to hear the Jacobus note once more before I slept.

Mr. Burns had gone ashore after the evening meal to have, as he said, “a look round.” As it was quite dark when he announced his intention I didn’t ask him what it was he expected to see. Some time about midnight, while sitting with a book in the saloon, I heard cautious movements in the lobby and hailed him by name.

Burns came in, stick and hat in hand, incredibly vulgarised by his smart shore togs, with a jaunty air and an odious twinkle in his eye. Being asked to sit down he laid his hat and stick on the table and after we had talked of ship affairs for a little while:

“I’ve been hearing pretty tales on shore about that ship-chandler fellow who snatched the job from you so neatly, sir.”

I remonstrated with my late patient for his manner of expressing himself. But he only tossed his head disdainfully. A pretty dodge indeed: boarding a strange ship with breakfast in two baskets for all hands and calmly inviting himself to the captain’s table! Never heard of anything so crafty and so impudent in his life.

I found myself defending Jacobus’s unusual methods.

“He’s the brother of one of the wealthiest merchants in the port.” The mate’s eyes fairly snapped green sparks.

“His grand brother hasn’t spoken to him for eighteen or twenty years,” he declared triumphantly. “So there!”

“I know all about that,” I interrupted loftily.

“Do you sir? H’m!” His mind was still running on the ethics of commercial competition. “I don’t like to see your good nature taken advantage of. He’s bribed that steward of ours with a five-rupee note to let him come down — or ten for that matter. He don’t care. He will shove that and more into the bill presently.”

“Is that one of the tales you have heard ashore?” I asked.

He assured me that his own sense could tell him that much. No; what he had heard on shore was that no respectable person in the whole town would come near Jacobus. He lived in a large old-fashioned house in one of the quiet streets with a big garden. After telling me this Burns put on a mysterious air. “He keeps a girl shut up there who, they say — ”

“I suppose you’ve heard all this gossip in some eminently respectable place?” I snapped at him in a most sarcastic tone.

The shaft told, because Mr. Burns, like many other disagreeable people, was very sensitive himself. He remained as if thunderstruck, with his

mouth open for some further communication, but I did not give him the chance. "And, anyhow, what the deuce do I care?" I added, retiring into my room.

And this was a natural thing to say. Yet somehow I was not indifferent. I admit it is absurd to be concerned with the morals of one's ship-chandler, if ever so well connected; but his personality had stamped itself upon my first day in harbour, in the way you know.

After this initial exploit Jacobus showed himself anything but intrusive. He was out in a boat early every morning going round the ships he served, and occasionally remaining on board one of them for breakfast with the captain.

As I discovered that this practice was generally accepted, I just nodded to him familiarly when one morning, on coming out of my room, I found him in the cabin. Glancing over the table I saw that his place was already laid. He stood awaiting my appearance, very bulky and placid, holding a beautiful bunch of flowers in his thick hand. He offered them to my notice with a faint, sleepy smile. From his own garden; had a very fine old garden; picked them himself that morning before going out to business; thought I would like. . . . He turned away. "Steward, can you oblige me with some water in a large jar, please."

I assured him jocularly, as I took my place at the table, that he made me feel as if I were a pretty girl, and that he mustn't be surprised if I blushed. But he was busy arranging his floral tribute at the sideboard. "Stand it before the Captain's plate, steward, please." He made this request in his usual undertone.

The offering was so pointed that I could do no less than to raise it to my nose, and as he sat down noiselessly he breathed out the opinion that a few flowers improved notably the appearance of a ship's saloon. He wondered why I did not have a shelf fitted all round the skylight for flowers in pots to take with me to sea. He had a skilled workman able to fit up shelves in a day, and he could procure me two or three dozen good plants —

The tips of his thick, round fingers rested composedly on the edge of the table on each side of his cup of coffee. His face remained immovable. Mr. Burns was smiling maliciously to himself. I declared that I hadn't the slightest intention of turning my skylight into a conservatory only to keep the cabin-table in a perpetual mess of mould and dead vegetable matter.

“Rear most beautiful flowers,” he insisted with an upward glance. “It’s no trouble really.”

“Oh, yes, it is. Lots of trouble,” I contradicted. “And in the end some fool leaves the skylight open in a fresh breeze, a flick of salt water gets at them and the whole lot is dead in a week.”

Mr. Burns snorted a contemptuous approval. Jacobus gave up the subject passively. After a time he unglued his thick lips to ask me if I had seen his brother yet. I was very curt in my answer.

“No, not yet.”

“A very different person,” he remarked dreamily and got up. His movements were particularly noiseless. “Well — thank you, Captain. If anything is not to your liking please mention it to your steward. I suppose you will be giving a dinner to the office-clerks presently.”

“What for?” I cried with some warmth. “If I were a steady trader to the port I could understand it. But a complete stranger! . . . I may not turn up again here for years. I don’t see why! . . . Do you mean to say it is customary?”

“It will be expected from a man like you,” he breathed out placidly. “Eight of the principal clerks, the manager, that’s nine, you three gentlemen, that’s twelve. It needn’t be very expensive. If you tell your steward to give me a day’s notice — ”

“It will be expected of me! Why should it be expected of me? Is it because I look particularly soft — or what?”

His immobility struck me as dignified suddenly, his imperturbable quality as dangerous. “There’s plenty of time to think about that,” I concluded weakly with a gesture that tried to wave him away. But before he departed he took time to mention regretfully that he had not yet had the pleasure of seeing me at his “store” to sample those cigars. He had a parcel of six thousand to dispose of, very cheap.

“I think it would be worth your while to secure some,” he added with a fat, melancholy smile and left the cabin.

Mr. Burns struck his fist on the table excitedly.

“Did you ever see such impudence! He’s made up his mind to get something out of you one way or another, sir.”

At once feeling inclined to defend Jacobus, I observed philosophically that all this was business, I supposed. But my absurd mate, muttering broken disjointed sentences, such as: “I cannot bear! . . . Mark my words! . .

.” and so on, flung out of the cabin. If I hadn’t nursed him through that deadly fever I wouldn’t have suffered such manners for a single day.



### CHAPTER III

Jacobus having put me in mind of his wealthy brother I concluded I would pay that business call at once. I had by that time heard a little more of him. He was a member of the Council, where he made himself objectionable to the authorities. He exercised a considerable influence on public opinion. Lots of people owed him money. He was an importer on a great scale of all sorts of goods. For instance, the whole supply of bags for sugar was practically in his hands. This last fact I did not learn till afterwards. The general impression conveyed to me was that of a local personage. He was a bachelor and gave weekly card-parties in his house out of town, which were attended by the best people in the colony.

The greater, then, was my surprise to discover his office in shabby surroundings, quite away from the business quarter, amongst a lot of hovels. Guided by a black board with white lettering, I climbed a narrow wooden staircase and entered a room with a bare floor of planks littered with bits of brown paper and wisps of packing straw. A great number of what looked like wine-cases were piled up against one of the walls. A lanky, inky, light-yellow, mulatto youth, miserably long-necked and generally recalling a sick chicken, got off a three-legged stool behind a cheap deal desk and faced me as if gone dumb with fright. I had some difficulty in persuading him to take in my name, though I could not get from him the nature of his objection. He did it at last with an almost agonised reluctance which ceased to be mysterious to me when I heard him being sworn at menacingly with savage, suppressed growls, then audibly cuffed and finally kicked out without any concealment whatever; because he came back flying head foremost through the door with a stifled shriek.

To say I was startled would not express it. I remained still, like a man lost in a dream. Clapping both his hands to that part of his frail anatomy which had received the shock, the poor wretch said to me simply:

“Will you go in, please.” His lamentable self-possession was wonderful; but it did not do away with the incredibility of the experience. A preposterous notion that I had seen this boy somewhere before, a thing obviously impossible, was like a delicate finishing touch of weirdness added to a scene fit to raise doubts as to one’s sanity. I stared anxiously about me like an awakened somnambulist.

“I say,” I cried loudly, “there isn’t a mistake, is there? This is Mr. Jacobus’s office.”

The boy gazed at me with a pained expression — and somehow so familiar! A voice within growled offensively:

“Come in, come in, since you are there. . . . I didn’t know.”

I crossed the outer room as one approaches the den of some unknown wild beast; with intrepidity but in some excitement. Only no wild beast that ever lived would rouse one’s indignation; the power to do that belongs to the odiousness of the human brute. And I was very indignant, which did not prevent me from being at once struck by the extraordinary resemblance of the two brothers.

This one was dark instead of being fair like the other; but he was as big. He was without his coat and waistcoat; he had been doubtless snoozing in the rocking-chair which stood in a corner furthest from the window. Above the great bulk of his crumpled white shirt, buttoned with three diamond studs, his round face looked swarthy. It was moist; his brown moustache hung limp and ragged. He pushed a common, cane-bottomed chair towards me with his foot.

“Sit down.”

I glanced at it casually, then, turning my indignant eyes full upon him, I declared in precise and incisive tones that I had called in obedience to my owners’ instructions.

“Oh! Yes. H’m! I didn’t understand what that fool was saying. . . . But never mind! It will teach the scoundrel to disturb me at this time of the day,” he added, grinning at me with savage cynicism.

I looked at my watch. It was past three o’clock — quite the full swing of afternoon office work in the port. He snarled imperiously: “Sit down, Captain.”

I acknowledged the gracious invitation by saying deliberately:

“I can listen to all you may have to say without sitting down.”

Emitting a loud and vehement “Pshaw!” he glared for a moment, very round-eyed and fierce. It was like a gigantic tomcat spitting at one suddenly. “Look at him! . . . What do you fancy yourself to be? What did you come here for? If you won’t sit down and talk business you had better go to the devil.”

“I don’t know him personally,” I said. “But after this I wouldn’t mind calling on him. It would be refreshing to meet a gentleman.”

He followed me, growling behind my back:

“The impudence! I’ve a good mind to write to your owners what I think of you.”

I turned on him for a moment:

“As it happens I don’t care. For my part I assure you I won’t even take the trouble to mention you to them.”

He stopped at the door of his office while I traversed the littered anteroom. I think he was somewhat taken aback.

“I will break every bone in your body,” he roared suddenly at the miserable mulatto lad, “if you ever dare to disturb me before half-past three for anybody. D’ye hear? For anybody! . . . Let alone any damned skipper,” he added, in a lower growl.

The frail youngster, swaying like a reed, made a low moaning sound. I stopped short and addressed this sufferer with advice. It was prompted by the sight of a hammer (used for opening the wine-cases, I suppose) which was lying on the floor.

“If I were you, my boy, I would have that thing up my sleeve when I went in next and at the first occasion I would — ”

What was there so familiar in that lad’s yellow face? Entrenched and quaking behind the flimsy desk, he never looked up. His heavy, lowered eyelids gave me suddenly the clue of the puzzle. He resembled — yes, those thick glued lips — he resembled the brothers Jacobus. He resembled both, the wealthy merchant and the pushing shopkeeper (who resembled each other); he resembled them as much as a thin, light-yellow mulatto lad may resemble a big, stout, middle-aged white man. It was the exotic complexion and the slightness of his build which had put me off so completely. Now I saw in him unmistakably the Jacobus strain, weakened, attenuated, diluted as it were in a bucket of water — and I refrained from finishing my speech. I had intended to say: “Crack this brute’s head for him.” I still felt the conclusion to be sound. But it is no trifling responsibility to counsel parricide to any one, however deeply injured.

“Beggarly — cheeky — skippers.”

I despised the emphatic growl at my back; only, being much vexed and upset, I regret to say that I slammed the door behind me in a most undignified manner.

It may not appear altogether absurd if I say that I brought out from that interview a kindlier view of the other Jacobus. It was with a feeling resembling partisanship that, a few days later, I called at his “store.” That

long, cavern-like place of business, very dim at the back and stuffed full of all sorts of goods, was entered from the street by a lofty archway. At the far end I saw my Jacobus exerting himself in his shirt-sleeves among his assistants. The captains' room was a small, vaulted apartment with a stone floor and heavy iron bars in its windows like a dungeon converted to hospitable purposes. A couple of cheerful bottles and several gleaming glasses made a brilliant cluster round a tall, cool red earthenware pitcher on the centre table which was littered with newspapers from all parts of the world. A well-groomed stranger in a smart grey check suit, sitting with one leg flung over his knee, put down one of these sheets briskly and nodded to me.

I guessed him to be a steamer-captain. It was impossible to get to know these men. They came and went too quickly and their ships lay moored far out, at the very entrance of the harbour. Theirs was another life altogether. He yawned slightly.

"Dull hole, isn't it?"

I understood this to allude to the town.

"Do you find it so?" I murmured.

"Don't you? But I'm off to-morrow, thank goodness."

He was a very gentlemanly person, good-natured and superior. I watched him draw the open box of cigars to his side of the table, take a big cigar-case out of his pocket and begin to fill it very methodically. Presently, on our eyes meeting, he winked like a common mortal and invited me to follow his example. "They are really decent smokes." I shook my head.

"I am not off to-morrow."

"What of that? Think I am abusing old Jacobus's hospitality? Heavens! It goes into the bill, of course. He spreads such little matters all over his account. He can take care of himself! Why, it's business —"

I noted a shadow fall over his well-satisfied expression, a momentary hesitation in closing his cigar-case. But he ended by putting it in his pocket jauntily. A placid voice uttered in the doorway: "That's quite correct, Captain."

The large noiseless Jacobus advanced into the room. His quietness, in the circumstances, amounted to cordiality. He had put on his jacket before joining us, and he sat down in the chair vacated by the steamer-man, who nodded again to me and went out with a short, jarring laugh. A profound silence reigned. With his drowsy stare Jacobus seemed to be slumbering

open-eyed. Yet, somehow, I was aware of being profoundly scrutinised by those heavy eyes. In the enormous cavern of the store somebody began to nail down a case, expertly: tap-tap . . . tap-tap-tap.

Two other experts, one slow and nasal, the other shrill and snappy, started checking an invoice.

“A half-coil of three-inch manilla rope.”

“Right!”

“Six assorted shackles.”

“Right!”

“Six tins assorted soups, three of paté, two asparagus, fourteen pounds tobacco, cabin.”

“Right!”

“It’s for the captain who was here just now,” breathed out the immovable Jacobus. “These steamer orders are very small. They pick up what they want as they go along. That man will be in Samarang in less than a fortnight. Very small orders indeed.”

The calling over of the items went on in the shop; an extraordinary jumble of varied articles, paint-brushes, Yorkshire Relish, etc., etc. . . . “Three sacks of best potatoes,” read out the nasal voice.

At this Jacobus blinked like a sleeping man roused by a shake, and displayed some animation. At his order, shouted into the shop, a smirking half-caste clerk with his ringlets much oiled and with a pen stuck behind his ear, brought in a sample of six potatoes which he paraded in a row on the table.

Being urged to look at their beauty I gave them a cold and hostile glance. Calmly, Jacobus proposed that I should order ten or fifteen tons — tons! I couldn’t believe my ears. My crew could not have eaten such a lot in a year; and potatoes (excuse these practical remarks) are a highly perishable commodity. I thought he was joking — or else trying to find out whether I was an unutterable idiot. But his purpose was not so simple. I discovered that he meant me to buy them on my own account.

“I am proposing you a bit of business, Captain. I wouldn’t charge you a great price.”

I told him that I did not go in for trade. I even added grimly that I knew only too well how that sort of spec. generally ended.

He sighed and clasped his hands on his stomach with exemplary resignation. I admired the placidity of his impudence. Then waking up

somewhat:

“Won’t you try a cigar, Captain?”

“No, thanks. I don’t smoke cigars.”

“For once!” he exclaimed, in a patient whisper. A melancholy silence ensued. You know how sometimes a person discloses a certain unsuspected depth and acuteness of thought; that is, in other words, utters something unexpected. It was unexpected enough to hear Jacobus say:

“The man who just went out was right enough. You might take one, Captain. Here everything is bound to be in the way of business.”

I felt a little ashamed of myself. The remembrance of his horrid brother made him appear quite a decent sort of fellow. It was with some compunction that I said a few words to the effect that I could have no possible objection to his hospitality.

Before I was a minute older I saw where this admission was leading me. As if changing the subject, Jacobus mentioned that his private house was about ten minutes’ walk away. It had a beautiful old walled garden. Something really remarkable. I ought to come round some day and have a look at it.

He seemed to be a lover of gardens. I too take extreme delight in them; but I did not mean my compunction to carry me as far as Jacobus’s flowerbeds, however beautiful and old. He added, with a certain homeliness of tone:

“There’s only my girl there.”

It is difficult to set everything down in due order; so I must revert here to what happened a week or two before. The medical officer of the port had come on board my ship to have a look at one of my crew who was ailing, and naturally enough he was asked to step into the cabin. A fellow-shipmaster of mine was there too; and in the conversation, somehow or other, the name of Jacobus came to be mentioned. It was pronounced with no particular reverence by the other man, I believe. I don’t remember now what I was going to say. The doctor — a pleasant, cultivated fellow, with an assured manner — prevented me by striking in, in a sour tone:

“Ah! You’re talking about my respected papa-in-law.”

Of course, that sally silenced us at the time. But I remembered the episode, and at this juncture, pushed for something noncommittal to say, I inquired with polite surprise:

“You have your married daughter living with you, Mr. Jacobus?”

He moved his big hand from right to left quietly. No! That was another of his girls, he stated, ponderously and under his breath as usual. She . . . He seemed in a pause to be ransacking his mind for some kind of descriptive phrase. But my hopes were disappointed. He merely produced his stereotyped definition.

“She’s a very different sort of person.”

“Indeed. . . . And by the by, Jacobus, I called on your brother the other day. It’s no great compliment if I say that I found him a very different sort of person from you.”

He had an air of profound reflection, then remarked quaintly:

“He’s a man of regular habits.”

He might have been alluding to the habit of late siesta; but I mumbled something about “beastly habits anyhow” — and left the store abruptly.

## CHAPTER IV

My little passage with Jacobus the merchant became known generally. One or two of my acquaintances made distant allusions to it. Perhaps the mulatto boy had talked. I must confess that people appeared rather scandalised, but not with Jacobus's brutality. A man I knew remonstrated with me for my hastiness.

I gave him the whole story of my visit, not forgetting the tell-tale resemblance of the wretched mulatto boy to his tormentor. He was not surprised. No doubt, no doubt. What of that? In a jovial tone he assured me that there must be many of that sort. The elder Jacobus had been a bachelor all his life. A highly respectable bachelor. But there had never been open scandal in that connection. His life had been quite regular. It could cause no offence to any one.

I said that I had been offended considerably. My interlocutor opened very wide eyes. Why? Because a mulatto lad got a few knocks? That was not a great affair, surely. I had no idea how insolent and untruthful these half-castes were. In fact he seemed to think Mr. Jacobus rather kind than otherwise to employ that youth at all; a sort of amiable weakness which could be forgiven.

This acquaintance of mine belonged to one of the old French families, descendants of the old colonists; all noble, all impoverished, and living a narrow domestic life in dull, dignified decay. The men, as a rule, occupy inferior posts in Government offices or in business houses. The girls are almost always pretty, ignorant of the world, kind and agreeable and generally bilingual; they prattle innocently both in French and English. The emptiness of their existence passes belief.

I obtained my entry into a couple of such households because some years before, in Bombay, I had occasion to be of use to a pleasant, ineffectual young man who was rather stranded there, not knowing what to do with himself or even how to get home to his island again. It was a matter of two hundred rupees or so, but, when I turned up, the family made a point of showing their gratitude by admitting me to their intimacy. My knowledge of the French language made me specially acceptable. They had meantime managed to marry the fellow to a woman nearly twice his age, comparatively well off: the only profession he was really fit for. But it was not all cakes and ale. The first time I called on the couple she spied a little spot of grease on the poor devil's pantaloons and made him a screaming



scene of reproaches so full of sincere passion that I sat terrified as at a tragedy of Racine.

Of course there was never question of the money I had advanced him; but his sisters, Miss Angele and Miss Mary, and the aunts of both families, who spoke quaint archaic French of pre-Revolution period, and a host of distant relations adopted me for a friend outright in a manner which was almost embarrassing.

It was with the eldest brother (he was employed at a desk in my consignee's office) that I was having this talk about the merchant Jacobus. He regretted my attitude and nodded his head sagely. An influential man. One never knew when one would need him. I expressed my immense preference for the shopkeeper of the two. At that my friend looked grave.

"What on earth are you pulling that long face about?" I cried impatiently. "He asked me to see his garden and I have a good mind to go some day."

"Don't do that," he said, so earnestly that I burst into a fit of laughter; but he looked at me without a smile.

This was another matter altogether. At one time the public conscience of the island had been mightily troubled by my Jacobus. The two brothers had been partners for years in great harmony, when a wandering circus came to the island and my Jacobus became suddenly infatuated with one of the lady-riders. What made it worse was that he was married. He had not even the grace to conceal his passion. It must have been strong indeed to carry away such a large placid creature. His behaviour was perfectly scandalous. He followed that woman to the Cape, and apparently travelled at the tail of that beastly circus to other parts of the world, in a most degrading position. The woman soon ceased to care for him, and treated him worse than a dog. Most extraordinary stories of moral degradation were reaching the island at that time. He had not the strength of mind to shake himself free. . . .

The grotesque image of a fat, pushing ship-chandler, enslaved by an unholy love-spell, fascinated me; and I listened rather open-mouthed to the tale as old as the world, a tale which had been the subject of legend, of moral fables, of poems, but which so ludicrously failed to fit the personality. What a strange victim for the gods!

Meantime his deserted wife had died. His daughter was taken care of by his brother, who married her as advantageously as was possible in the circumstances.

"Oh! The Mrs. Doctor!" I exclaimed.

“You know that? Yes. A very able man. He wanted a lift in the world, and there was a good bit of money from her mother, besides the expectations. . . Of course, they don’t know him,” he added. “The doctor nods in the street, I believe, but he avoids speaking to him when they meet on board a ship, as must happen sometimes.”

I remarked that this surely was an old story by now.

My friend assented. But it was Jacobus’s own fault that it was neither forgiven nor forgotten. He came back ultimately. But how? Not in a spirit of contrition, in a way to propitiate his scandalised fellow-citizens. He must needs drag along with him a child — a girl. . . .

“He spoke to me of a daughter who lives with him,” I observed, very much interested.

“She’s certainly the daughter of the circus-woman,” said my friend. “She may be his daughter too; I am willing to admit that she is. In fact I have no doubt — ”

But he did not see why she should have been brought into a respectable community to perpetuate the memory of the scandal. And that was not the worst. Presently something much more distressing happened. That abandoned woman turned up. Landed from a mail-boat. . . .

“What! Here? To claim the child perhaps,” I suggested.

“Not she!” My friendly informant was very scornful. “Imagine a painted, haggard, agitated, desperate hag. Been cast off in Mozambique by somebody who paid her passage here. She had been injured internally by a kick from a horse; she hadn’t a cent on her when she got ashore; I don’t think she even asked to see the child. At any rate, not till the last day of her life. Jacobus hired for her a bungalow to die in. He got a couple of Sisters from the hospital to nurse her through these few months. If he didn’t marry her in extremis as the good Sisters tried to bring about, it’s because she wouldn’t even hear of it. As the nuns said: ‘The woman died impenitent.’ It was reported that she ordered Jacobus out of the room with her last breath. This may be the real reason why he didn’t go into mourning himself; he only put the child into black. While she was little she was to be seen sometimes about the streets attended by a negro woman, but since she became of age to put her hair up I don’t think she has set foot outside that garden once. She must be over eighteen now.”

Thus my friend, with some added details; such as, that he didn’t think the girl had spoken to three people of any position in the island; that an elderly

female relative of the brothers Jacobus had been induced by extreme poverty to accept the position of *gouvernante* to the girl. As to Jacobus's business (which certainly annoyed his brother) it was a wise choice on his part. It brought him in contact only with strangers of passage; whereas any other would have given rise to all sorts of awkwardness with his social equals. The man was not wanting in a certain tact — only he was naturally shameless. For why did he want to keep that girl with him? It was most painful for everybody.

I thought suddenly (and with profound disgust) of the other Jacobus, and I could not refrain from saying slyly:

"I suppose if he employed her, say, as a scullion in his household and occasionally pulled her hair or boxed her ears, the position would have been more regular — less shocking to the respectable class to which he belongs."

He was not so stupid as to miss my intention, and shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"You don't understand. To begin with, she's not a mulatto. And a scandal is a scandal. People should be given a chance to forget. I dare say it would have been better for her if she had been turned into a scullion or something of that kind. Of course he's trying to make money in every sort of petty way, but in such a business there'll never be enough for anybody to come forward."

When my friend left me I had a conception of Jacobus and his daughter existing, a lonely pair of castaways, on a desert island; the girl sheltering in the house as if it were a cavern in a cliff, and Jacobus going out to pick up a living for both on the beach — exactly like two shipwrecked people who always hope for some rescuer to bring them back at last into touch with the rest of mankind.

But Jacobus's bodily reality did not fit in with this romantic view. When he turned up on board in the usual course, he sipped the cup of coffee placidly, asked me if I was satisfied — and I hardly listened to the harbour gossip he dropped slowly in his low, voice-saving enunciation. I had then troubles of my own. My ship chartered, my thoughts dwelling on the success of a quick round voyage, I had been suddenly confronted by a shortage of bags. A catastrophe! The stock of one especial kind, called pockets, seemed to be totally exhausted. A consignment was shortly expected — it was afloat, on its way, but, meantime, the loading of my ship dead stopped, I had enough to worry about. My consignees, who had

received me with such heartiness on my arrival, now, in the character of my charterers, listened to my complaints with polite helplessness. Their manager, the old-maidish, thin man, who so prudishly didn't even like to speak about the impure Jacobus, gave me the correct commercial view of the position.

"My dear Captain" — he was retracting his leathery cheeks into a condescending, shark-like smile — "we were not morally obliged to tell you of a possible shortage before you signed the charter-party. It was for you to guard against the contingency of a delay — strictly speaking. But of course we shouldn't have taken any advantage. This is no one's fault really. We ourselves have been taken unawares," he concluded primly, with an obvious lie.

This lecture I confess had made me thirsty. Suppressed rage generally produces that effect; and as I strolled on aimlessly I bethought myself of the tall earthenware pitcher in the captains' room of the Jacobus "store."

With no more than a nod to the men I found assembled there, I poured down a deep, cool draught on my indignation, then another, and then, becoming dejected, I sat plunged in cheerless reflections. The others read, talked, smoked, bandied over my head some unsubtle chaff. But my abstraction was respected. And it was without a word to any one that I rose and went out, only to be quite unexpectedly accosted in the bustle of the store by Jacobus the outcast.

"Glad to see you, Captain. What? Going away? You haven't been looking so well these last few days, I notice. Run down, eh?"

He was in his shirt-sleeves, and his words were in the usual course of business, but they had a human note. It was commercial amenity, but I had been a stranger to amenity in that connection. I do verily believe (from the direction of his heavy glance towards a certain shelf) that he was going to suggest the purchase of Clarkson's Nerve Tonic, which he kept in stock, when I said impulsively:

"I am rather in trouble with my loading."

Wide awake under his sleepy, broad mask with glued lips, he understood at once, had a movement of the head so appreciative that I relieved my exasperation by exclaiming:

"Surely there must be eleven hundred quarter-bags to be found in the colony. It's only a matter of looking for them."

Again that slight movement of the big head, and in the noise and activity of the store that tranquil murmur:

“To be sure. But then people likely to have a reserve of quarter-bags wouldn’t want to sell. They’d need that size themselves.”

“That’s exactly what my consignees are telling me. Impossible to buy. Bosh! They don’t want to. It suits them to have the ship hung up. But if I were to discover the lot they would have to — Look here, Jacobus! You are the man to have such a thing up your sleeve.”

He protested with a ponderous swing of his big head. I stood before him helplessly, being looked at by those heavy eyes with a veiled expression as of a man after some soul-shaking crisis. Then, suddenly:

“It’s impossible to talk quietly here,” he whispered. “I am very busy. But if you could go and wait for me in my house. It’s less than ten minutes’ walk. Oh, yes, you don’t know the way.”

He called for his coat and offered to take me there himself. He would have to return to the store at once for an hour or so to finish his business, and then he would be at liberty to talk over with me that matter of quarter-bags. This programme was breathed out at me through slightly parted, still lips; his heavy, motionless glance rested upon me, placid as ever, the glance of a tired man — but I felt that it was searching, too. I could not imagine what he was looking for in me and kept silent, wondering.

“I am asking you to wait for me in my house till I am at liberty to talk this matter over. You will?”

“Why, of course!” I cried.

“But I cannot promise — ”

“I dare say not,” I said. “I don’t expect a promise.”

“I mean I can’t even promise to try the move I’ve in my mind. One must see first . . . h’m!”

“All right. I’ll take the chance. I’ll wait for you as long as you like. What else have I to do in this infernal hole of a port!”

Before I had uttered my last words we had set off at a swinging pace. We turned a couple of corners and entered a street completely empty of traffic, of semi-rural aspect, paved with cobblestones nestling in grass tufts. The house came to the line of the roadway; a single story on an elevated basement of rough-stones, so that our heads were below the level of the windows as we went along. All the jalousies were tightly shut, like eyes,

and the house seemed fast asleep in the afternoon sunshine. The entrance was at the side, in an alley even more grass-grown than the street: a small door, simply on the latch.

With a word of apology as to showing me the way, Jacobus preceded me up a dark passage and led me across the naked parquet floor of what I supposed to be the dining-room. It was lighted by three glass doors which stood wide open on to a verandah or rather loggia running its brick arches along the garden side of the house. It was really a magnificent garden: smooth green lawns and a gorgeous maze of flower-beds in the foreground, displayed around a basin of dark water framed in a marble rim, and in the distance the massed foliage of varied trees concealing the roofs of other houses. The town might have been miles away. It was a brilliantly coloured solitude, drowsing in a warm, voluptuous silence. Where the long, still shadows fell across the beds, and in shady nooks, the massed colours of the flowers had an extraordinary magnificence of effect. I stood entranced. Jacobus grasped me delicately above the elbow, impelling me to a half-turn to the left.

I had not noticed the girl before. She occupied a low, deep, wickerwork arm-chair, and I saw her in exact profile like a figure in a tapestry, and as motionless. Jacobus released my arm.

"This is Alice," he announced tranquilly; and his subdued manner of speaking made it sound so much like a confidential communication that I fancied myself nodding understandingly and whispering: "I see, I see." . . . Of course, I did nothing of the kind. Neither of us did anything; we stood side by side looking down at the girl. For quite a time she did not stir, staring straight before her as if watching the vision of some pageant passing through the garden in the deep, rich glow of light and the splendour of flowers.

Then, coming to the end of her reverie, she looked round and up. If I had not at first noticed her, I am certain that she too had been unaware of my presence till she actually perceived me by her father's side. The quickened upward movement of the heavy eyelids, the widening of the languid glance, passing into a fixed stare, put that beyond doubt.

Under her amazement there was a hint of fear, and then came a flash as of anger. Jacobus, after uttering my name fairly loud, said: "Make yourself at home, Captain — I won't be gone long," and went away rapidly. Before I had time to make a bow I was left alone with the girl — who, I

remembered suddenly, had not been seen by any man or woman of that town since she had found it necessary to put up her hair. It looked as though it had not been touched again since that distant time of first putting up; it was a mass of black, lustrous locks, twisted anyhow high on her head, with long, untidy wisps hanging down on each side of the clear sallow face; a mass so thick and strong and abundant that, nothing but to look at, it gave you a sensation of heavy pressure on the top of your head and an impression of magnificently cynical untidiness. She leaned forward, hugging herself with crossed legs; a dingy, amber-coloured, flounced wrapper of some thin stuff revealed the young supple body drawn together tensely in the deep low seat as if crouching for a spring. I detected a slight, quivering start or two, which looked uncommonly like bounding away. They were followed by the most absolute immobility.

The absurd impulse to run out after Jacobus (for I had been startled, too) once repressed, I took a chair, placed it not very far from her, sat down deliberately, and began to talk about the garden, caring not what I said, but using a gentle caressing intonation as one talks to soothe a startled wild animal. I could not even be certain that she understood me. She never raised her face nor attempted to look my way. I kept on talking only to prevent her from taking flight. She had another of those quivering, repressed starts which made me catch my breath with apprehension.

Ultimately I formed a notion that what prevented her perhaps from going off in one great, nervous leap, was the scantiness of her attire. The wicker armchair was the most substantial thing about her person. What she had on under that dingy, loose, amber wrapper must have been of the most flimsy and airy character. One could not help being aware of it. It was obvious. I felt it actually embarrassing at first; but that sort of embarrassment is got over easily by a mind not enslaved by narrow prejudices. I did not avert my gaze from Alice. I went on talking with ingratiating softness, the recollection that, most likely, she had never before been spoken to by a strange man adding to my assurance. I don't know why an emotional tenseness should have crept into the situation. But it did. And just as I was becoming aware of it a slight scream cut short my flow of urbane speech.

The scream did not proceed from the girl. It was emitted behind me, and caused me to turn my head sharply. I understood at once that the apparition in the doorway was the elderly relation of Jacobus, the companion, the

gouvernante. While she remained thunderstruck, I got up and made her a low bow.

The ladies of Jacobus's household evidently spent their days in light attire. This stumpy old woman with a face like a large wrinkled lemon, beady eyes, and a shock of iron-grey hair, was dressed in a garment of some ash-coloured, silky, light stuff. It fell from her thick neck down to her toes with the simplicity of an unadorned nightgown. It made her appear truly cylindrical. She exclaimed: "How did you get here?"

Before I could say a word she vanished and presently I heard a confusion of shrill protestations in a distant part of the house. Obviously no one could tell her how I got there. In a moment, with great outcries from two negro women following her, she waddled back to the doorway, infuriated.

"What do you want here?"

I turned to the girl. She was sitting straight up now, her hands posed on the arms of the chair. I appealed to her.

"Surely, Miss Alice, you will not let them drive me out into the street?"

Her magnificent black eyes, narrowed, long in shape, swept over me with an indefinable expression, then in a harsh, contemptuous voice she let fall in French a sort of explanation:

"C'est papa."

I made another low bow to the old woman.

She turned her back on me in order to drive away her black henchwomen, then surveying my person in a peculiar manner with one small eye nearly closed and her face all drawn up on that side as if with a twinge of toothache, she stepped out on the verandah, sat down in a rocking-chair some distance away, and took up her knitting from a little table. Before she started at it she plunged one of the needles into the mop of her grey hair and stirred it vigorously.

Her elementary nightgown-sort of frock clung to her ancient, stumpy, and floating form. She wore white cotton stockings and flat brown velvet slippers. Her feet and ankles were obtrusively visible on the foot-rest. She began to rock herself slightly, while she knitted. I had resumed my seat and kept quiet, for I mistrusted that old woman. What if she ordered me to depart? She seemed capable of any outrage. She had snorted once or twice; she was knitting violently. Suddenly she piped at the young girl in French a question which I translate colloquially:

"What's your father up to, now?"



The young creature shrugged her shoulders so comprehensively that her whole body swayed within the loose wrapper; and in that unexpectedly harsh voice which yet had a seductive quality to the senses, like certain kinds of natural rough wines one drinks with pleasure:

“It’s some captain. Leave me alone — will you!”

The chair rocked quicker, the old, thin voice was like a whistle.

“You and your father make a pair. He would stick at nothing — that’s well known. But I didn’t expect this.”

I thought it high time to air some of my own French. I remarked modestly, but firmly, that this was business. I had some matters to talk over with Mr. Jacobus.

At once she piped out a derisive “Poor innocent!” Then, with a change of tone: “The shop’s for business. Why don’t you go to the shop to talk with him?”

The furious speed of her fingers and knitting-needles made one dizzy; and with squeaky indignation:

“Sitting here staring at that girl — is that what you call business?”

“No,” I said suavely. “I call this pleasure — an unexpected pleasure. And unless Miss Alice objects — ”

I half turned to her. She flung at me an angry and contemptuous “Don’t care!” and leaning her elbow on her knees took her chin in her hand — a Jacobus chin undoubtedly. And those heavy eyelids, this black irritated stare reminded me of Jacobus, too — the wealthy merchant, the respected one. The design of her eyebrows also was the same, rigid and ill-omened. Yes! I traced in her a resemblance to both of them. It came to me as a sort of surprising remote inference that both these Jacobuses were rather handsome men after all. I said:

“Oh! Then I shall stare at you till you smile.”

She favoured me again with an even more viciously scornful “Don’t care!”

The old woman broke in blunt and shrill:

“Hear his impudence! And you too! Don’t care! Go at least and put some more clothes on. Sitting there like this before this sailor riff-raff.”

The sun was about to leave the Pearl of the Ocean for other seas, for other lands. The walled garden full of shadows blazed with colour as if the flowers were giving up the light absorbed during the day. The amazing old woman became very explicit. She suggested to the girl a corset and a

petticoat with a cynical unreserve which humiliated me. Was I of no more account than a wooden dummy? The girl snapped out: "Shan't!"

It was not the naughty retort of a vulgar child; it had a note of desperation. Clearly my intrusion had somehow upset the balance of their established relations. The old woman knitted with furious accuracy, her eyes fastened down on her work.

"Oh, you are the true child of your father! And that talks of entering a convent! Letting herself be stared at by a fellow."

"Leave off."

"Shameless thing!"

"Old sorceress," the girl uttered distinctly, preserving her meditative pose, chin in hand, and a far-away stare over the garden.

It was like the quarrel of the kettle and the pot. The old woman flew out of the chair, banged down her work, and with a great play of thick limb perfectly visible in that weird, clinging garment of hers, strode at the girl — who never stirred. I was experiencing a sort of trepidation when, as if awed by that unconscious attitude, the aged relative of Jacobus turned short upon me.

She was, I perceived, armed with a knitting-needle; and as she raised her hand her intention seemed to be to throw it at me like a dart. But she only used it to scratch her head with, examining me the while at close range, one eye nearly shut and her face distorted by a whimsical, one-sided grimace.

"My dear man," she asked abruptly, "do you expect any good to come of this?"

"I do hope so indeed, Miss Jacobus." I tried to speak in the easy tone of an afternoon caller. "You see, I am here after some bags."

"Bags! Look at that now! Didn't I hear you holding forth to that graceless wretch?"

"You would like to see me in my grave," uttered the motionless girl hoarsely.

"Grave! What about me? Buried alive before I am dead for the sake of a thing blessed with such a pretty father!" she cried; and turning to me: "You're one of these men he does business with. Well — why don't you leave us in peace, my good fellow?"

It was said in a tone — this "leave us in peace!" There was a sort of ruffianly familiarity, a superiority, a scorn in it. I was to hear it more than once, for you would show an imperfect knowledge of human nature if you

thought that this was my last visit to that house — where no respectable person had put foot for ever so many years. No, you would be very much mistaken if you imagined that this reception had scared me away. First of all I was not going to run before a grotesque and ruffianly old woman.

And then you mustn't forget these necessary bags. That first evening Jacobus made me stay to dinner; after, however, telling me loyally that he didn't know whether he could do anything at all for me. He had been thinking it over. It was too difficult, he feared. . . . But he did not give it up in so many words.

We were only three at table; the girl by means of repeated "Won't!" "Shan't!" and "Don't care!" having conveyed and affirmed her intention not to come to the table, not to have any dinner, not to move from the verandah. The old relative hopped about in her flat slippers and piped indignantly, Jacobus towered over her and murmured placidly in his throat; I joined jocularly from a distance, throwing in a few words, for which under the cover of the night I received secretly a most vicious poke in the ribs from the old woman's elbow or perhaps her fist. I restrained a cry. And all the time the girl didn't even condescend to raise her head to look at any of us. All this may sound childish — and yet that stony, petulant sullenness had an obscurely tragic flavour.

And so we sat down to the food around the light of a good many candles while she remained crouching out there, staring in the dark as if feeding her bad temper on the heavily scented air of the admirable garden.

Before leaving I said to Jacobus that I would come next day to hear if the bag affair had made any progress. He shook his head slightly at that.

"I'll haunt your house daily till you pull it off. You'll be always finding me here."

His faint, melancholy smile did not part his thick lips.

"That will be all right, Captain."

Then seeing me to the door, very tranquil, he murmured earnestly the recommendation: "Make yourself at home," and also the hospitable hint about there being always "a plate of soup." It was only on my way to the quay, down the ill-lighted streets, that I remembered I had been engaged to dine that very evening with the S- family. Though vexed with my forgetfulness (it would be rather awkward to explain) I couldn't help thinking that it had procured me a more amusing evening. And besides — business. The sacred business — .

In a barefooted negro who overtook me at a run and bolted down the landing-steps I recognised Jacobus's boatman, who must have been feeding in the kitchen. His usual "Good-night, sah!" as I went up my ship's ladder had a more cordial sound than on previous occasions.

## CHAPTER V

I kept my word to Jacobus. I haunted his home. He was perpetually finding me there of an afternoon when he popped in for a moment from the "store." The sound of my voice talking to his Alice greeted him on his doorstep; and when he returned for good in the evening, ten to one he would hear it still going on in the verandah. I just nodded to him; he would sit down heavily and gently, and watch with a sort of approving anxiety my efforts to make his daughter smile.

I called her often "Alice," right before him; sometimes I would address her as Miss "Don't Care," and I exhausted myself in nonsensical chatter without succeeding once in taking her out of her peevish and tragic self. There were moments when I felt I must break out and start swearing at her till all was blue. And I fancied that had I done so Jacobus would not have moved a muscle. A sort of shady, intimate understanding seemed to have been established between us.

I must say the girl treated her father exactly in the same way she treated me.

And how could it have been otherwise? She treated me as she treated her father. She had never seen a visitor. She did not know how men behaved. I belonged to the low lot with whom her father did business at the port. I was of no account. So was her father. The only decent people in the world were the people of the island, who would have nothing to do with him because of something wicked he had done. This was apparently the explanation Miss Jacobus had given her of the household's isolated position. For she had to be told something! And I feel convinced that this version had been assented to by Jacobus. I must say the old woman was putting it forward with considerable gusto. It was on her lips the universal explanation, the universal allusion, the universal taunt.

One day Jacobus came in early and, beckoning me into the dining-room, wiped his brow with a weary gesture and told me that he had managed to unearth a supply of quarter-bags.

"It's fourteen hundred your ship wanted, did you say, Captain?"

"Yes, yes!" I replied eagerly; but he remained calm. He looked more tired than I had ever seen him before.

"Well, Captain, you may go and tell your people that they can get that lot from my brother."

As I remained open-mouthed at this, he added his usual placid formula of assurance:

“You’ll find it correct, Captain.”

“You spoke to your brother about it?” I was distinctly awed. “And for me? Because he must have known that my ship’s the only one hung up for bags. How on earth — ”

He wiped his brow again. I noticed that he was dressed with unusual care, in clothes in which I had never seen him before. He avoided my eye.

“You’ve heard people talk, of course. . . . That’s true enough. He . . . I . . . We certainly. . . for several years . . .” His voice declined to a mere sleepy murmur. “You see I had something to tell him of, something which — ”

His murmur stopped. He was not going to tell me what this something was. And I didn’t care. Anxious to carry the news to my charterers, I ran back on the verandah to get my hat.

At the bustle I made the girl turned her eyes slowly in my direction, and even the old woman was checked in her knitting. I stopped a moment to exclaim excitedly:

“Your father’s a brick, Miss Don’t Care. That’s what he is.”

She beheld my elation in scornful surprise. Jacobus with unwonted familiarity seized my arm as I flew through the dining-room, and breathed heavily at me a proposal about “A plate of soup” that evening. I answered distractedly: “Eh? What? Oh, thanks! Certainly. With pleasure,” and tore myself away. Dine with him? Of course. The merest gratitude

But some three hours afterwards, in the dusky, silent street, paved with cobble-stones, I became aware that it was not mere gratitude which was guiding my steps towards the house with the old garden, where for years no guest other than myself had ever dined. Mere gratitude does not gnaw at one’s interior economy in that particular way. Hunger might; but I was not feeling particularly hungry for Jacobus’s food.

On that occasion, too, the girl refused to come to the table.

My exasperation grew. The old woman cast malicious glances at me. I said suddenly to Jacobus: “Here! Put some chicken and salad on that plate.” He obeyed without raising his eyes. I carried it with a knife and fork and a serviette out on the verandah. The garden was one mass of gloom, like a cemetery of flowers buried in the darkness, and she, in the chair, seemed to muse mournfully over the extinction of light and colour. Only whiffs of heavy scent passed like wandering, fragrant souls of that

departed multitude of blossoms. I talked volubly, jocularly, persuasively, tenderly; I talked in a subdued tone. To a listener it would have sounded like the murmur of a pleading lover. Whenever I paused expectantly there was only a deep silence. It was like offering food to a seated statue.

“I haven’t been able to swallow a single morsel thinking of you out here starving yourself in the dark. It’s positively cruel to be so obstinate. Think of my sufferings.”

“Don’t care.”

I felt as if I could have done her some violence — shaken her, beaten her maybe. I said:

“Your absurd behaviour will prevent me coming here any more.”

“What’s that to me?”

“You like it.”

“It’s false,” she snarled.

My hand fell on her shoulder; and if she had flinched I verily believe I would have shaken her. But there was no movement and this immobility disarmed my anger.

“You do. Or you wouldn’t be found on the verandah every day. Why are you here, then? There are plenty of rooms in the house. You have your own room to stay in — if you did not want to see me. But you do. You know you do.”

I felt a slight shudder under my hand and released my grip as if frightened by that sign of animation in her body. The scented air of the garden came to us in a warm wave like a voluptuous and perfumed sigh.

“Go back to them,” she whispered, almost pitifully.

As I re-entered the dining-room I saw Jacobus cast down his eyes. I banged the plate on the table. At this demonstration of ill-humour he murmured something in an apologetic tone, and I turned on him viciously as if he were accountable to me for these “abominable eccentricities,” I believe I called them.

“But I dare say Miss Jacobus here is responsible for most of this offensive manner,” I added loftily.

She piped out at once in her brazen, ruffianly manner:

“Eh? Why don’t you leave us in peace, my good fellow?”

I was astonished that she should dare before Jacobus. Yet what could he have done to repress her? He needed her too much. He raised a heavy,

drowsy glance for an instant, then looked down again. She insisted with shrill finality:

“Haven’t you done your business, you two? Well, then — ”

She had the true Jacobus impudence, that old woman. Her mop of iron-grey hair was parted, on the side like a man’s, raffishly, and she made as if to plunge her fork into it, as she used to do with the knitting-needle, but refrained. Her little black eyes sparkled venomously. I turned to my host at the head of the table — menacingly as it were.

“Well, and what do you say to that, Jacobus? Am I to take it that we have done with each other?”

I had to wait a little. The answer when it came was rather unexpected, and in quite another spirit than the question.

“I certainly think we might do some business yet with those potatoes of mine, Captain. You will find that — ”

I cut him short.

“I’ve told you before that I don’t trade.”

His broad chest heaved without a sound in a noiseless sigh.

“Think it over, Captain,” he murmured, tenacious and tranquil; and I burst into a jarring laugh, remembering how he had stuck to the circus-rider woman — the depth of passion under that placid surface, which even cuts with a riding-whip (so the legend had it) could never raffle into the semblance of a storm; something like the passion of a fish would be if one could imagine such a thing as a passionate fish.

That evening I experienced more distinctly than ever the sense of moral discomfort which always attended me in that house lying under the ban of all “decent” people. I refused to stay on and smoke after dinner; and when I put my hand into the thickly-cushioned palm of Jacobus, I said to myself that it would be for the last time under his roof. I pressed his bulky paw heartily nevertheless. Hadn’t he got me out of a serious difficulty? To the few words of acknowledgment I was bound, and indeed quite willing, to utter, he answered by stretching his closed lips in his melancholy, glued-together smile.

“That will be all right, I hope, Captain,” he breathed out weightily.

“What do you mean?” I asked, alarmed. “That your brother might yet — ”

“Oh, no,” he reassured me. “He . . . he’s a man of his word, Captain.”



My self-communion as I walked away from his door, trying to believe that this was for the last time, was not satisfactory. I was aware myself that I was not sincere in my reflections as to Jacobus's motives, and, of course, the very next day I went back again.

How weak, irrational, and absurd we are! How easily carried away whenever our awakened imagination brings us the irritating hint of a desire! I cared for the girl in a particular way, seduced by the moody expression of her face, by her obstinate silences, her rare, scornful words; by the perpetual pout of her closed lips, the black depths of her fixed gaze turned slowly upon me as if in contemptuous provocation, only to be averted next moment with an exasperating indifference.

Of course the news of my assiduity had spread all over the little town. I noticed a change in the manner of my acquaintances and even something different in the nods of the other captains, when meeting them at the landing-steps or in the offices where business called me. The old-maidish head clerk treated me with distant punctiliousness and, as it were, gathered his skirts round him for fear of contamination. It seemed to me that the very niggers on the quays turned to look after me as I passed; and as to Jacobus's boatman his "Good-night, sah!" when he put me on board was no longer merely cordial — it had a familiar, confidential sound as though we had been partners in some villainy.

My friend S- the elder passed me on the other side of the street with a wave of the hand and an ironic smile. The younger brother, the one they had married to an elderly shrew, he, on the strength of an older friendship and as if paying a debt of gratitude, took the liberty to utter a word of warning.

"You're doing yourself no good by your choice of friends, my dear chap," he said with infantile gravity.

As I knew that the meeting of the brothers Jacobus was the subject of excited comment in the whole of the sugary Pearl of the Ocean I wanted to know why I was blamed.

"I have been the occasion of a move which may end in a reconciliation surely desirable from the point of view of the proprieties — don't you know?"

"Of course, if that girl were disposed of it would certainly facilitate — " he mused sagely, then, inconsequential creature, gave me a light tap on the lower part of my waistcoat. "You old sinner," he cried jovially, "much you

care for proprieties. But you had better look out for yourself, you know, with a personage like Jacobus who has no sort of reputation to lose.”

He had recovered his gravity of a respectable citizen by that time and added regretfully:

“All the women of our family are perfectly scandalised.”

But by that time I had given up visiting the S- family and the D- family. The elder ladies pulled such faces when I showed myself, and the multitude of related young ladies received me with such a variety of looks: wondering, awed, mocking (except Miss Mary, who spoke to me and looked at me with hushed, pained compassion as though I had been ill), that I had no difficulty in giving them all up. I would have given up the society of the whole town, for the sake of sitting near that girl, snarling and superb and barely clad in that flimsy, dingy, amber wrapper, open low at the throat. She looked, with the wild wisps of hair hanging down her tense face, as though she had just jumped out of bed in the panic of a fire.

She sat leaning on her elbow, looking at nothing. Why did she stay listening to my absurd chatter? And not only that; but why did she powder her face in preparation for my arrival? It seemed to be her idea of making a toilette, and in her untidy negligence a sign of great effort towards personal adornment.

But I might have been mistaken. The powdering might have been her daily practice and her presence in the verandah a sign of an indifference so complete as to take no account of my existence. Well, it was all one to me.

I loved to watch her slow changes of pose, to look at her long immobilities composed in the graceful lines of her body, to observe the mysterious narrow stare of her splendid black eyes, somewhat long in shape, half closed, contemplating the void. She was like a spellbound creature with the forehead of a goddess crowned by the dishevelled magnificent hair of a gipsy tramp. Even her indifference was seductive. I felt myself growing attached to her by the bond of an unrealisable desire, for I kept my head — quite. And I put up with the moral discomfort of Jacobus’s sleepy watchfulness, tranquil, and yet so expressive; as if there had been a tacit pact between us two. I put up with the insolence of the old woman’s: “Aren’t you ever going to leave us in peace, my good fellow?” with her taunts; with her brazen and sinister scolding. She was of the true Jacobus stock, and no mistake.

Directly I got away from the girl I called myself many hard names. What folly was this? I would ask myself. It was like being the slave of some depraved habit. And I returned to her with my head clear, my heart certainly free, not even moved by pity for that castaway (she was as much of a castaway as any one ever wrecked on a desert island), but as if beguiled by some extraordinary promise. Nothing more unworthy could be imagined. The recollection of that tremulous whisper when I gripped her shoulder with one hand and held a plate of chicken with the other was enough to make me break all my good resolutions.

Her insulting taciturnity was enough sometimes to make one gnash one's teeth with rage. When she opened her mouth it was only to be abominably rude in harsh tones to the associate of her reprobate father; and the full approval of her aged relative was conveyed to her by offensive chuckles. If not that, then her remarks, always uttered in the tone of scathing contempt, were of the most appalling inanity.

How could it have been otherwise? That plump, ruffianly Jacobus old maid in the tight grey frock had never taught her any manners. Manners I suppose are not necessary for born castaways. No educational establishment could ever be induced to accept her as a pupil — on account of the proprieties, I imagine. And Jacobus had not been able to send her away anywhere. How could he have done it? Who with? Where to? He himself was not enough of an adventurer to think of settling down anywhere else. His passion had tossed him at the tail of a circus up and down strange coasts, but, the storm over, he had drifted back shamelessly where, social outcast as he was, he remained still a Jacobus — one of the oldest families on the island, older than the French even. There must have been a Jacobus in at the death of the last Dodo. . . . The girl had learned nothing, she had never listened to a general conversation, she knew nothing, she had heard of nothing. She could read certainly; but all the reading matter that ever came in her way were the newspapers provided for the captains' room of the "store." Jacobus had the habit of taking these sheets home now and then in a very stained and ragged condition.

As her mind could not grasp the meaning of any matters treated there except police-court reports and accounts of crimes, she had formed for herself a notion of the civilised world as a scene of murders, abductions, burglaries, stabbing affrays, and every sort of desperate violence. England and France, Paris and London (the only two towns of which she seemed to

have heard), appeared to her sinks of abomination, reeking with blood, in contrast to her little island where petty larceny was about the standard of current misdeeds, with, now and then, some more pronounced crime — and that only amongst the imported coolie labourers on sugar estates or the negroes of the town. But in Europe these things were being done daily by a wicked population of white men amongst whom, as that ruffianly, aristocratic old Miss Jacobus pointed out, the wandering sailors, the associates of her precious papa, were the lowest of the low.

It was impossible to give her a sense of proportion. I suppose she figured England to herself as about the size of the Pearl of the Ocean; in which case it would certainly have been reeking with gore and a mere wreck of burgled houses from end to end. One could not make her understand that these horrors on which she fed her imagination were lost in the mass of orderly life like a few drops of blood in the ocean. She directed upon me for a moment the uncomprehending glance of her narrowed eyes and then would turn her scornful powdered face away without a word. She would not even take the trouble to shrug her shoulders.

At that time the batches of papers brought by the last mail reported a series of crimes in the East End of London, there was a sensational case of abduction in France and a fine display of armed robbery in Australia. One afternoon crossing the dining-room I heard Miss Jacobus piping in the verandah with venomous animosity: “I don’t know what your precious papa is plotting with that fellow. But he’s just the sort of man who’s capable of carrying you off far away somewhere and then cutting your throat some day for your money.”

There was a good half of the length of the verandah between their chairs. I came out and sat down fiercely midway between them.

“Yes, that’s what we do with girls in Europe,” I began in a grimly matter-of-fact tone. I think Miss Jacobus was disconcerted by my sudden appearance. I turned upon her with cold ferocity:

“As to objectionable old women, they are first strangled quietly, then cut up into small pieces and thrown away, a bit here and a bit there. They vanish — ”

I cannot go so far as to say I had terrified her. But she was troubled by my truculence, the more so because I had been always addressing her with a politeness she did not deserve. Her plump, knitting hands fell slowly on her knees. She said not a word while I fixed her with severe determination.

Then as I turned away from her at last, she laid down her work gently and, with noiseless movements, retreated from the verandah. In fact, she vanished.

But I was not thinking of her. I was looking at the girl. It was what I was coming for daily; troubled, ashamed, eager; finding in my nearness to her a unique sensation which I indulged with dread, self-contempt, and deep pleasure, as if it were a secret vice bound to end in my undoing, like the habit of some drug or other which ruins and degrades its slave.

I looked her over, from the top of her dishevelled head, down the lovely line of the shoulder, following the curve of the hip, the draped form of the long limb, right down to her fine ankle below a torn, soiled flounce; and as far as the point of the shabby, high-heeled, blue slipper, dangling from her well-shaped foot, which she moved slightly, with quick, nervous jerks, as if impatient of my presence. And in the scent of the massed flowers I seemed to breathe her special and inexplicable charm, the heady perfume of the everlastingly irritated captive of the garden.

I looked at her rounded chin, the Jacobus chin; at the full, red lips pouting in the powdered, sallow face; at the firm modelling of the cheek, the grains of white in the hairs of the straight sombre eyebrows; at the long eyes, a narrowed gleam of liquid white and intense motionless black, with their gaze so empty of thought, and so absorbed in their fixity that she seemed to be staring at her own lonely image, in some far-off mirror hidden from my sight amongst the trees.

And suddenly, without looking at me, with the appearance of a person speaking to herself, she asked, in that voice slightly harsh yet mellow and always irritated:

“Why do you keep on coming here?”

“Why do I keep on coming here?” I repeated, taken by surprise. I could not have told her. I could not even tell myself with sincerity why I was coming there. “What’s the good of you asking a question like that?”

“Nothing is any good,” she observed scornfully to the empty air, her chin propped on her hand, that hand never extended to any man, that no one had ever grasped — for I had only grasped her shoulder once — that generous, fine, somewhat masculine hand. I knew well the peculiarly efficient shape — broad at the base, tapering at the fingers — of that hand, for which there was nothing in the world to lay hold of. I pretended to be playful.

“No! But do you really care to know?”

She shrugged indolently her magnificent shoulders, from which the dingy thin wrapper was slipping a little.

“Oh — never mind — never mind!”

There was something smouldering under those airs of lassitude. She exasperated me by the provocation of her nonchalance, by something elusive and defiant in her very form which I wanted to seize. I said roughly:

“Why? Don’t you think I should tell you the truth?”

Her eyes glided my way for a sidelong look, and she murmured, moving only her full, pouting lips:

“I think you would not dare.”

“Do you imagine I am afraid of you? What on earth. . . . Well, it’s possible, after all, that I don’t know exactly why I am coming here. Let us say, with Miss Jacobus, that it is for no good. You seem to believe the outrageous things she says, if you do have a row with her now and then.”

She snapped out viciously:

“Who else am I to believe?”

“I don’t know,” I had to own, seeing her suddenly very helpless and condemned to moral solitude by the verdict of a respectable community.

“You might believe me, if you chose.”

She made a slight movement and asked me at once, with an effort as if making an experiment:

“What is the business between you and papa?”

“Don’t you know the nature of your father’s business? Come! He sells provisions to ships.”

She became rigid again in her crouching pose.

“Not that. What brings you here — to this house?”

“And suppose it’s you? You would not call that business? Would you? And now let us drop the subject. It’s no use. My ship will be ready for sea the day after to-morrow.”

She murmured a distinctly scared “So soon,” and getting up quickly, went to the little table and poured herself a glass of water. She walked with rapid steps and with an indolent swaying of her whole young figure above the hips; when she passed near me I felt with tenfold force the charm of the peculiar, promising sensation I had formed the habit to seek near her. I thought with sudden dismay that this was the end of it; that after one more day I would be no longer able to come into this verandah, sit on this chair,

and taste perversely the flavour of contempt in her indolent poses, drink in the provocation of her scornful looks, and listen to the curt, insolent remarks uttered in that harsh and seductive voice. As if my innermost nature had been altered by the action of some moral poison, I felt an abject dread of going to sea.

I had to exercise a sudden self-control, as one puts on a brake, to prevent myself jumping up to stride about, shout, gesticulate, make her a scene. What for? What about? I had no idea. It was just the relief of violence that I wanted; and I lolled back in my chair, trying to keep my lips formed in a smile; that half-indulgent, half-mocking smile which was my shield against the shafts of her contempt and the insulting sallies flung at me by the old woman.

She drank the water at a draught, with the avidity of raging thirst, and let herself fall on the nearest chair, as if utterly overcome. Her attitude, like certain tones of her voice, had in it something masculine: the knees apart in the ample wrapper, the clasped hands hanging between them, her body leaning forward, with drooping head. I stared at the heavy black coil of twisted hair. It was enormous, crowning the bowed head with a crushing and disdained glory. The escaped wisps hung straight down. And suddenly I perceived that the girl was trembling from head to foot, as though that glass of iced water had chilled her to the bone.

“What’s the matter now?” I said, startled, but in no very sympathetic mood.

She shook her bowed, overweighted head and cried in a stifled voice but with a rising inflection:

“Go away! Go away! Go away!”

I got up then and approached her, with a strange sort of anxiety. I looked down at her round, strong neck, then stooped low enough to peep at her face. And I began to tremble a little myself.

“What on earth are you gone wild about, Miss Don’t Care?”

She flung herself backwards violently, her head going over the back of the chair. And now it was her smooth, full, palpitating throat that lay exposed to my bewildered stare. Her eyes were nearly closed, with only a horrible white gleam under the lids as if she were dead.

“What has come to you?” I asked in awe. “What are you terrifying yourself with?”

She pulled herself together, her eyes open frightfully wide now. The tropical afternoon was lengthening the shadows on the hot, weary earth, the abode of obscure desires, of extravagant hopes, of unimaginable terrors.

“Never mind! Don’t care!” Then, after a gasp, she spoke with such frightful rapidity that I could hardly make out the amazing words: “For if you were to shut me up in an empty place as smooth all round as the palm of my hand, I could always strangle myself with my hair.”

For a moment, doubting my ears, I let this inconceivable declaration sink into me. It is ever impossible to guess at the wild thoughts that pass through the heads of our fellow-creatures. What monstrous imaginings of violence could have dwelt under the low forehead of that girl who had been taught to regard her father as “capable of anything” more in the light of a misfortune than that of a disgrace; as, evidently, something to be resented and feared rather than to be ashamed of? She seemed, indeed, as unaware of shame as of anything else in the world; but in her ignorance, her resentment and fear took a childish and violent shape.

Of course she spoke without knowing the value of words. What could she know of death — she who knew nothing of life? It was merely as the proof of her being beside herself with some odious apprehension, that this extraordinary speech had moved me, not to pity, but to a fascinated, horrified wonder. I had no idea what notion she had of her danger. Some sort of abduction. It was quite possible with the talk of that atrocious old woman. Perhaps she thought she could be carried off, bound hand and foot and even gagged. At that surmise I felt as if the door of a furnace had been opened in front of me.

“Upon my honour!” I cried. “You shall end by going crazy if you listen to that abominable old aunt of yours — ”

I studied her haggard expression, her trembling lips. Her cheeks even seemed sunk a little. But how I, the associate of her disreputable father, the “lowest of the low” from the criminal Europe, could manage to reassure her I had no conception. She was exasperating.

“Heavens and earth! What do you think I can do?”

“I don’t know.”

Her chin certainly trembled. And she was looking at me with extreme attention. I made a step nearer to her chair.

“I shall do nothing. I promise you that. Will that do? Do you understand? I shall do nothing whatever, of any kind; and the day after to-



morrow I shall be gone.”

What else could I have said? She seemed to drink in my words with the thirsty avidity with which she had emptied the glass of water. She whispered tremulously, in that touching tone I had heard once before on her lips, and which thrilled me again with the same emotion:

“I would believe you. But what about papa — ”

“He be hanged!” My emotion betrayed itself by the brutality of my tone. “I’ve had enough of your papa. Are you so stupid as to imagine that I am frightened of him? He can’t make me do anything.”

All that sounded feeble to me in the face of her ignorance. But I must conclude that the “accent of sincerity” has, as some people say, a really irresistible power. The effect was far beyond my hopes, — and even beyond my conception. To watch the change in the girl was like watching a miracle — the gradual but swift relaxation of her tense glance, of her stiffened muscles, of every fibre of her body. That black, fixed stare into which I had read a tragic meaning more than once, in which I had found a sombre seduction, was perfectly empty now, void of all consciousness whatever, and not even aware any longer of my presence; it had become a little sleepy, in the Jacobus fashion.

But, man being a perverse animal, instead of rejoicing at my complete success, I beheld it with astounded and indignant eyes. There was something cynical in that unconcealed alteration, the true Jacobus shamelessness. I felt as though I had been cheated in some rather complicated deal into which I had entered against my better judgment. Yes, cheated without any regard for, at least, the forms of decency.

With an easy, indolent, and in its indolence supple, feline movement, she rose from the chair, so provokingly ignoring me now, that for very rage I held my ground within less than a foot of her. Leisurely and tranquil, behaving right before me with the ease of a person alone in a room, she extended her beautiful arms, with her hands clenched, her body swaying, her head thrown back a little, revelling contemptuously in a sense of relief, easing her limbs in freedom after all these days of crouching, motionless poses when she had been so furious and so afraid.

All this with supreme indifference, incredible, offensive, exasperating, like ingratitude doubled with treachery.

I ought to have been flattered, perhaps, but, on the contrary, my anger grew; her movement to pass by me as if I were a wooden post or a piece of

furniture, that unconcerned movement brought it to a head.

I won't say I did not know what I was doing, but, certainly, cool reflection had nothing to do with the circumstance that next moment both my arms were round her waist. It was an impulsive action, as one snatches at something falling or escaping; and it had no hypocritical gentleness about it either. She had no time to make a sound, and the first kiss I planted on her closed lips was vicious enough to have been a bite.

She did not resist, and of course I did not stop at one. She let me go on, not as if she were inanimate — I felt her there, close against me, young, full of vigour, of life, a strong desirable creature, but as if she did not care in the least, in the absolute assurance of her safety, what I did or left undone. Our faces brought close together in this storm of haphazard caresses, her big, black, wide-open eyes looked into mine without the girl appearing either angry or pleased or moved in any way. In that steady gaze which seemed impersonally to watch my madness I could detect a slight surprise, perhaps — nothing more. I showered kisses upon her face and there did not seem to be any reason why this should not go on for ever.

That thought flashed through my head, and I was on the point of desisting, when, all at once, she began to struggle with a sudden violence which all but freed her instantly, which revived my exasperation with her, indeed a fierce desire never to let her go any more. I tightened my embrace in time, gasping out: "No — you don't!" as if she were my mortal enemy. On her part not a word was said. Putting her hands against my chest, she pushed with all her might without succeeding to break the circle of my arms. Except that she seemed thoroughly awake now, her eyes gave me no clue whatever. To meet her black stare was like looking into a deep well, and I was totally unprepared for her change of tactics. Instead of trying to tear my hands apart, she flung herself upon my breast and with a downward, undulating, serpentine motion, a quick sliding dive, she got away from me smoothly. It was all very swift; I saw her pick up the tail of her wrapper and run for the door at the end of the verandah not very gracefully. She appeared to be limping a little — and then she vanished; the door swung behind her so noiselessly that I could not believe it was completely closed. I had a distinct suspicion of her black eye being at the crack to watch what I would do. I could not make up my mind whether to shake my fist in that direction or blow a kiss.

## CHAPTER VI

Either would have been perfectly consistent with my feelings. I gazed at the door, hesitating, but in the end I did neither. The monition of some sixth sense — the sense of guilt, maybe, that sense which always acts too late, alas! — warned me to look round; and at once I became aware that the conclusion of this tumultuous episode was likely to be a matter of lively anxiety. Jacobus was standing in the doorway of the dining-room. How long he had been there it was impossible to guess; and remembering my struggle with the girl I thought he must have been its mute witness from beginning to end. But this supposition seemed almost incredible. Perhaps that impenetrable girl had heard him come in and had got away in time.

He stepped on to the verandah in his usual manner, heavy-eyed, with glued lips. I marvelled at the girl's resemblance to this man. Those long, Egyptian eyes, that low forehead of a stupid goddess, she had found in the sawdust of the circus; but all the rest of the face, the design and the modelling, the rounded chin, the very lips — all that was Jacobus, fined down, more finished, more expressive.

His thick hand fell on and grasped with force the back of a light chair (there were several standing about) and I perceived the chance of a broken head at the end of all this — most likely. My mortification was extreme. The scandal would be horrible; that was unavoidable. But how to act so as to satisfy myself I did not know. I stood on my guard and at any rate faced him. There was nothing else for it. Of one thing I was certain, that, however brazen my attitude, it could never equal the characteristic Jacobus impudence.

He gave me his melancholy, glued smile and sat down. I own I was relieved. The perspective of passing from kisses to blows had nothing particularly attractive in it. Perhaps — perhaps he had seen nothing? He behaved as usual, but he had never before found me alone on the verandah. If he had alluded to it, if he had asked: "Where's Alice?" or something of the sort, I would have been able to judge from the tone. He would give me no opportunity. The striking peculiarity was that he had never looked up at me yet. "He knows," I said to myself confidently. And my contempt for him relieved my disgust with myself.

"You are early home," I remarked.

"Things are very quiet; nothing doing at the store to-day," he explained with a cast-down air.

“Oh, well, you know, I am off,” I said, feeling that this, perhaps, was the best thing to do.

“Yes,” he breathed out. “Day after to-morrow.”

This was not what I had meant; but as he gazed persistently on the floor, I followed the direction of his glance. In the absolute stillness of the house we stared at the high-heeled slipper the girl had lost in her flight. We stared. It lay overturned.

After what seemed a very long time to me, Jacobus hitched his chair forward, stooped with extended arm and picked it up. It looked a slender thing in his big, thick hands. It was not really a slipper, but a low shoe of blue, glazed kid, rubbed and shabby. It had straps to go over the instep, but the girl only thrust her feet in, after her slovenly manner. Jacobus raised his eyes from the shoe to look at me.

“Sit down, Captain,” he said at last, in his subdued tone.

As if the sight of that shoe had renewed the spell, I gave up suddenly the idea of leaving the house there and then. It had become impossible. I sat down, keeping my eyes on the fascinating object. Jacobus turned his daughter’s shoe over and over in his cushioned paws as if studying the way the thing was made. He contemplated the thin sole for a time; then glancing inside with an absorbed air:

“I am glad I found you here, Captain.”

I answered this by some sort of grunt, watching him covertly. Then I added: “You won’t have much more of me now.”

He was still deep in the interior of that shoe on which my eyes too were resting.

“Have you thought any more of this deal in potatoes I spoke to you about the other day?”

“No, I haven’t,” I answered curtly. He checked my movement to rise by an austere, commanding gesture of the hand holding that fatal shoe. I remained seated and glared at him. “You know I don’t trade.”

“You ought to, Captain. You ought to.”

I reflected. If I left that house now I would never see the girl again. And I felt I must see her once more, if only for an instant. It was a need, not to be reasoned with, not to be disregarded. No, I did not want to go away. I wanted to stay for one more experience of that strange provoking sensation

and of indefinite desire, the habit of which had made me — me of all people! — dread the prospect of going to sea.

“Mr. Jacobus,” I pronounced slowly. “Do you really think that upon the whole and taking various’ matters into consideration — I mean everything, do you understand? — it would be a good thing for me to trade, let us say, with you?”

I waited for a while. He went on looking at the shoe which he held now crushed in the middle, the worn point of the toe and the high heel protruding on each side of his heavy fist.

“That will be all right,” he said, facing me squarely at last.

“Are you sure?”

“You’ll find it quite correct, Captain.” He had uttered his habitual phrases in his usual placid, breath-saving voice and stood my hard, inquisitive stare sleepily without as much as a wink.

“Then let us trade,” I said, turning my shoulder to him. “I see you are bent on it.”

I did not want an open scandal, but I thought that outward decency may be bought too dearly at times. I included Jacobus, myself, the whole population of the island, in the same contemptuous disgust as though we had been partners in an ignoble transaction. And the remembered vision at sea, diaphanous and blue, of the Pearl of the Ocean at sixty miles off; the unsubstantial, clear marvel of it as if evoked by the art of a beautiful and pure magic, turned into a thing of horrors too. Was this the fortune this vaporous and rare apparition had held for me in its hard heart, hidden within the shape as of fair dreams and mist? Was this my luck?

“I think” — Jacobus became suddenly audible after what seemed the silence of vile meditation — “that you might conveniently take some thirty tons. That would be about the lot, Captain.”

“Would it? The lot! I dare say it would be convenient, but I haven’t got enough money for that.”

I had never seen him so animated.

“No!” he exclaimed with what I took for the accent of grim menace. “That’s a pity.” He paused, then, unrelenting: “How much money have you got, Captain?” he inquired with awful directness.

It was my turn to face him squarely. I did so and mentioned the amount I could dispose of. And I perceived that he was disappointed. He thought it

over, his calculating gaze lost in mine, for quite a long time before he came out in a thoughtful tone with the rapacious suggestion:

“You could draw some more from your charterers. That would be quite easy, Captain.”

“No, I couldn’t,” I retorted brusquely. “I’ve drawn my salary up to date, and besides, the ship’s accounts are closed.”

I was growing furious. I pursued: “And I’ll tell you what: if I could do it I wouldn’t.” Then throwing off all restraint, I added: “You are a bit too much of a Jacobus, Mr. Jacobus.”

The tone alone was insulting enough, but he remained tranquil, only a little puzzled, till something seemed to dawn upon him; but the unwonted light in his eyes died out instantly. As a Jacobus on his native heath, what a mere skipper chose to say could not touch him, outcast as he was. As a ship-chandler he could stand anything. All I caught of his mumble was a vague — “quite correct,” than which nothing could have been more egregiously false at bottom — to my view, at least. But I remembered — I had never forgotten — that I must see the girl. I did not mean to go. I meant to stay in the house till I had seen her once more.

“Look here!” I said finally. “I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ll take as many of your confounded potatoes as my money will buy, on condition that you go off at once down to the wharf to see them loaded in the lighter and sent alongside the ship straight away. Take the invoice and a signed receipt with you. Here’s the key of my desk. Give it to Burns. He will pay you.

He got up from his chair before I had finished speaking, but he refused to take the key. Burns would never do it. He wouldn’t like to ask him even.

“Well, then,” I said, eyeing him slightly, “there’s nothing for it, Mr. Jacobus, but you must wait on board till I come off to settle with you.”

“That will be all right, Captain. I will go at once.”

He seemed at a loss what to do with the girl’s shoe he was still holding in his fist. Finally, looking dully at me, he put it down on the chair from which he had risen.

“And you, Captain? Won’t you come along, too, just to see — ”

“Don’t bother about me. I’ll take care of myself.”

He remained perplexed for a moment, as if trying to understand; and then his weighty: “Certainly, certainly, Captain,” seemed to be the outcome of some sudden thought. His big chest heaved. Was it a sigh? As he went out to hurry off those potatoes he never looked back at me.

I waited till the noise of his footsteps had died out of the dining-room, and I waited a little longer. Then turning towards the distant door I raised my voice along the verandah:

“Alice!”

Nothing answered me, not even a stir behind the door. Jacobus’s house might have been made empty for me to make myself at home in. I did not call again. I had become aware of a great discouragement. I was mentally jaded, morally dejected. I turned to the garden again, sitting down with my elbows spread on the low balustrade, and took my head in my hands.

The evening closed upon me. The shadows lengthened, deepened, mingled together into a pool of twilight in which the flower-beds glowed like coloured embers; whiffs of heavy scent came to me as if the dusk of this hemisphere were but the dimness of a temple and the garden an enormous censer swinging before the altar of the stars. The colours of the blossoms deepened, losing their glow one by one.

The girl, when I turned my head at a slight noise, appeared to me very tall and slender, advancing with a swaying limp, a floating and uneven motion which ended in the sinking of her shadowy form into the deep low chair. And I don’t know why or whence I received the impression that she had come too late. She ought to have appeared at my call. She ought to have . . . It was as if a supreme opportunity had been missed.

I rose and took a seat close to her, nearly opposite her arm-chair. Her ever discontented voice addressed me at once, contemptuously:

“You are still here.”

I pitched mine low.

“You have come out at last.”

“I came to look for my shoe — before they bring in the lights.”

It was her harsh, enticing whisper, subdued, not very steady, but its low tremulousness gave me no thrill now. I could only make out the oval of her face, her uncovered throat, the long, white gleam of her eyes. She was mysterious enough. Her hands were resting on the arms of the chair. But where was the mysterious and provoking sensation which was like the perfume of her flower-like youth? I said quietly:

“I have got your shoe here.” She made no sound and I continued: “You had better give me your foot and I will put it on for you.”

She made no movement. I bent low down and groped for her foot under the flounces of the wrapper. She did not withdraw it and I put on the shoe,

buttoning the instep-strap. It was an inanimate foot. I lowered it gently to the floor.

“If you buttoned the strap you would not be losing your shoe, Miss Don’t Care,” I said, trying to be playful without conviction. I felt more like wailing over the lost illusion of vague desire, over the sudden conviction that I would never find again near her the strange, half-evil, half-tender sensation which had given its acrid flavour to so many days, which had made her appear tragic and promising, pitiful and provoking. That was all over.

“Your father picked it up,” I said, thinking she may just as well be told of the fact.

“I am not afraid of papa — by himself,” she declared scornfully.

“Oh! It’s only in conjunction with his disreputable associates, strangers, the ‘riff-raff of Europe’ as your charming aunt or great-aunt says — men like me, for instance — that you — ”

“I am not afraid of you,” she snapped out.

“That’s because you don’t know that I am now doing business with your father. Yes, I am in fact doing exactly what he wants me to do. I’ve broken my promise to you. That’s the sort of man I am. And now — aren’t you afraid? If you believe what that dear, kind, truthful old lady says you ought to be.”

It was with unexpected modulated softness that she affirmed:

“No. I am not afraid.” She hesitated. . . . “Not now.”

“Quite right. You needn’t be. I shall not see you again before I go to sea.” I rose and stood near her chair. “But I shall often think of you in this old garden, passing under the trees over there, walking between these gorgeous flower-beds. You must love this garden — ”

“I love nothing.”

I heard in her sullen tone the faint echo of that resentfully tragic note which I had found once so provoking. But it left me unmoved except for a sudden and weary conviction of the emptiness of all things under Heaven.

“Good-bye, Alice,” I said.

She did not answer, she did not move. To merely take her hand, shake it, and go away seemed impossible, almost improper. I stooped without haste and pressed my lips to her smooth forehead. This was the moment when I realised clearly with a sort of terror my complete detachment from that unfortunate creature. And as I lingered in that cruel self-knowledge I felt



the light touch of her arms falling languidly on my neck and received a hasty, awkward, haphazard kiss which missed my lips. No! She was not afraid; but I was no longer moved. Her arms slipped off my neck slowly, she made no sound, the deep wicker arm-chair creaked slightly; only a sense of my dignity prevented me fleeing headlong from that catastrophic revelation.

I traversed the dining-room slowly. I thought: She's listening to my footsteps; she can't help it; she'll hear me open and shut that door. And I closed it as gently behind me as if I had been a thief retreating with his ill-gotten booty. During that stealthy act I experienced the last touch of emotion in that house, at the thought of the girl I had left sitting there in the obscurity, with her heavy hair and empty eyes as black as the night itself, staring into the walled garden, silent, warm, odorous with the perfume of imprisoned flowers, which, like herself, were lost to sight in a world buried in darkness.

The narrow, ill-lighted, rustic streets I knew so well on my way to the harbour were extremely quiet. I felt in my heart that the further one ventures the better one understands how everything in our life is common, short, and empty; that it is in seeking the unknown in our sensations that we discover how mediocre are our attempts and how soon defeated! Jacobus's boatman was waiting at the steps with an unusual air of readiness. He put me alongside the ship, but did not give me his confidential "Good-evening, sah," and, instead of shoving off at once, remained holding by the ladder.

I was a thousand miles from commercial affairs, when on the dark quarter-deck Mr. Burns positively rushed at me, stammering with excitement. He had been pacing the deck distractedly for hours awaiting my arrival. Just before sunset a lighter loaded with potatoes had come alongside with that fat ship-chandler himself sitting on the pile of sacks. He was now stuck immovable in the cabin. What was the meaning of it all? Surely I did not —

"Yes, Mr. Burns, I did," I cut him short. He was beginning to make gestures of despair when I stopped that, too, by giving him the key of my desk and desiring him, in a tone which admitted of no argument, to go below at once, pay Mr. Jacobus's bill, and send him out of the ship.

"I don't want to see him," I confessed frankly, climbing the poop-ladder. I felt extremely tired. Dropping on the seat of the skylight, I gave myself up to idle gazing at the lights about the quay and at the black mass of the

mountain on the south side of the harbour. I never heard Jacobus leave the ship with every single sovereign of my ready cash in his pocket. I never heard anything till, a long time afterwards, Mr. Burns, unable to contain himself any longer, intruded upon me with his ridiculously angry lamentations at my weakness and good nature.

“Of course, there’s plenty of room in the after-hatch. But they are sure to go rotten down there. Well! I never heard . . . seventeen tons! I suppose I must hoist in that lot first thing to-morrow morning.”

“I suppose you must. Unless you drop them overboard. But I’m afraid you can’t do that. I wouldn’t mind myself, but it’s forbidden to throw rubbish into the harbour, you know.”

“That is the truest word you have said for many a day, sir — rubbish. That’s just what I expect they are. Nearly eighty good gold sovereigns gone; a perfectly clean sweep of your drawer, sir. Bless me if I understand!”

As it was impossible to throw the right light on this commercial transaction I left him to his lamentations and under the impression that I was a hopeless fool. Next day I did not go ashore. For one thing, I had no money to go ashore with — no, not enough to buy a cigarette. Jacobus had made a clean sweep. But that was not the only reason. The Pearl of the Ocean had in a few short hours grown odious to me. And I did not want to meet any one. My reputation had suffered. I knew I was the object of unkind and sarcastic comments.

The following morning at sunrise, just as our stern-fasts had been let go and the tug plucked us out from between the buoys, I saw Jacobus standing up in his boat. The nigger was pulling hard; several baskets of provisions for ships were stowed between the thwarts. The father of Alice was going his morning round. His countenance was tranquil and friendly. He raised his arm and shouted something with great heartiness. But his voice was of the sort that doesn’t carry any distance; all I could catch faintly, or rather guess at, were the words “next time” and “quite correct.” And it was only of these last that I was certain. Raising my arm perfunctorily for all response, I turned away. I rather resented the familiarity of the thing. Hadn’t I settled accounts finally with him by means of that potato bargain?

This being a harbour story it is not my purpose to speak of our passage. I was glad enough to be at sea, but not with the gladness of old days. Formerly I had no memories to take away with me. I shared in the blessed

forgetfulness of sailors, that forgetfulness natural and invincible, which resembles innocence in so far that it prevents self-examination. Now however I remembered the girl. During the first few days I was for ever questioning myself as to the nature of facts and sensations connected with her person and with my conduct.

And I must say also that Mr. Burns' intolerable fussing with those potatoes was not calculated to make me forget the part which I had played. He looked upon it as a purely commercial transaction of a particularly foolish kind, and his devotion — if it was devotion and not mere cussedness as I came to regard it before long — inspired him with a zeal to minimise my loss as much as possible. Oh, yes! He took care of those infamous potatoes with a vengeance, as the saying goes.

Everlastingly, there was a tackle over the after-hatch and everlastingly the watch on deck were pulling up, spreading out, picking over, rebagging, and lowering down again, some part of that lot of potatoes. My bargain with all its remotest associations, mental and visual — the garden of flowers and scents, the girl with her provoking contempt and her tragic loneliness of a hopeless castaway — was everlastingly dangled before my eyes, for thousands of miles along the open sea. And as if by a satanic refinement of irony it was accompanied by a most awful smell. Whiffs from decaying potatoes pursued me on the poop, they mingled with my thoughts, with my food, poisoned my very dreams. They made an atmosphere of corruption for the ship.

I remonstrated with Mr. Burns about this excessive care. I would have been well content to batten the hatch down and let them perish under the deck.

That perhaps would have been unsafe. The horrid emanations might have flavoured the cargo of sugar. They seemed strong enough to taint the very ironwork. In addition Mr. Burns made it a personal matter. He assured me he knew how to treat a cargo of potatoes at sea — had been in the trade as a boy, he said. He meant to make my loss as small as possible. What between his devotion — it must have been devotion — and his vanity, I positively dared not give him the order to throw my commercial-venture overboard. I believe he would have refused point blank to obey my lawful command. An unprecedented and comical situation would have been created with which I did not feel equal to deal.

I welcomed the coming of bad weather as no sailor had ever done. When at last I hove the ship to, to pick up the pilot outside Port Philip Heads, the after-hatch had not been opened for more than a week and I might have believed that no such thing as a potato had ever been on board.

It was an abominable day, raw, blustering, with great squalls of wind and rain; the pilot, a cheery person, looked after the ship and chatted to me, streaming from head to foot; and the heavier the lash of the downpour the more pleased with himself and everything around him he seemed to be. He rubbed his wet hands with a satisfaction, which to me, who had stood that kind of thing for several days and nights, seemed inconceivable in any non-aquatic creature.

“You seem to enjoy getting wet, Pilot,” I remarked.

He had a bit of land round his house in the suburbs and it was of his garden he was thinking. At the sound of the word garden, unheard, unspoken for so many days, I had a vision of gorgeous colour, of sweet scents, of a girlish figure crouching in a chair. Yes. That was a distinct emotion breaking into the peace I had found in the sleepless anxieties of my responsibility during a week of dangerous bad weather. The Colony, the pilot explained, had suffered from unparalleled drought. This was the first decent drop of water they had had for seven months. The root crops were lost. And, trying to be casual, but with visible interest, he asked me if I had perchance any potatoes to spare.

Potatoes! I had managed to forget them. In a moment I felt plunged into corruption up to my neck. Mr. Burns was making eyes at me behind the pilot’s back.

Finally, he obtained a ton, and paid ten pounds for it. This was twice the price of my bargain with Jacobus. The spirit of covetousness woke up in me. That night, in harbour, before I slept, the Custom House galley came alongside. While his underlings were putting seals on the storerooms, the officer in charge took me aside confidentially. “I say, Captain, you don’t happen to have any potatoes to sell.”

Clearly there was a potato famine in the land. I let him have a ton for twelve pounds and he went away joyfully. That night I dreamt of a pile of gold in the form of a grave in which a girl was buried, and woke up callous with greed. On calling at my ship-broker’s office, that man, after the usual business had been transacted, pushed his spectacles up on his forehead.

“I was thinking, Captain, that coming from the Pearl of the Ocean you may have some potatoes to sell.”

I said negligently: “Oh, yes, I could spare you a ton. Fifteen pounds.”

He exclaimed: “I say!” But after studying my face for a while accepted my terms with a faint grimace. It seems that these people could not exist without potatoes. I could. I didn’t want to see a potato as long as I lived; but the demon of lucre had taken possession of me. How the news got about I don’t know, but, returning on board rather late, I found a small group of men of the coster type hanging about the waist, while Mr. Burns walked to and fro the quarterdeck loftily, keeping a triumphant eye on them. They had come to buy potatoes.

“These chaps have been waiting here in the sun for hours,” Burns whispered to me excitedly. “They have drank the water-cask dry. Don’t you throw away your chances, sir. You are too good-natured.”

I selected a man with thick legs and a man with a cast in his eye to negotiate with; simply because they were easily distinguishable from the rest. “You have the money on you?” I inquired, before taking them down into the cabin.

“Yes, sir,” they answered in one voice, slapping their pockets. I liked their air of quiet determination. Long before the end of the day all the potatoes were sold at about three times the price I had paid for them. Mr. Burns, feverish and exulting, congratulated himself on his skilful care of my commercial venture, but hinted plainly that I ought to have made more of it.

That night I did not sleep very well. I thought of Jacobus by fits and starts, between snatches of dreams concerned with castaways starving on a desert island covered with flowers. It was extremely unpleasant. In the morning, tired and unrefreshed, I sat down and wrote a long letter to my owners, giving them a carefully-thought-out scheme for the ship’s employment in the East and about the China Seas for the next two years. I spent the day at that task and felt somewhat more at peace when it was done.

Their reply came in due course. They were greatly struck with my project; but considering that, notwithstanding the unfortunate difficulty with the bags (which they trusted I would know how to guard against in the future), the voyage showed a very fair profit, they thought it would be better to keep the ship in the sugar trade — at least for the present.

I turned over the page and read on:

“We have had a letter from our good friend Mr. Jacobus. We are pleased to see how well you have hit it off with him; for, not to speak of his assistance in the unfortunate matter of the bags, he writes us that should you, by using all possible dispatch, manage to bring the ship back early in the season he would be able to give us a good rate of freight. We have no doubt that your best endeavours . . . etc. . . etc.”

I dropped the letter and sat motionless for a long time. Then I wrote my answer (it was a short one) and went ashore myself to post it. But I passed one letter-box, then another, and in the end found myself going up Collins Street with the letter still in my pocket — against my heart. Collins Street at four o’clock in the afternoon is not exactly a desert solitude; but I had never felt more isolated from the rest of mankind as when I walked that day its crowded pavement, battling desperately with my thoughts and feeling already vanquished.

There came a moment when the awful tenacity of Jacobus, the man of one passion and of one idea, appeared to me almost heroic. He had not given me up. He had gone again to his odious brother. And then he appeared to me odious himself. Was it for his own sake or for the sake of the poor girl? And on that last supposition the memory of the kiss which missed my lips appalled me; for whatever he had seen, or guessed at, or risked, he knew nothing of that. Unless the girl had told him. How could I go back to fan that fatal spark with my cold breath? No, no, that unexpected kiss had to be paid for at its full price.

At the first letter-box I came to I stopped and reaching into my breast-pocket I took out the letter — it was as if I were plucking out my very heart — and dropped it through the slit. Then I went straight on board.

I wondered what dreams I would have that night; but as it turned out I did not sleep at all. At breakfast I informed Mr. Burns that I had resigned my command.

He dropped his knife and fork and looked at me with indignation.

“You have, sir! I thought you loved the ship.”

“So I do, Burns,” I said. “But the fact is that the Indian Ocean and everything that is in it has lost its charm for me. I am going home as passenger by the Suez Canal.”

“Everything that is in it,” he repeated angrily. “I’ve never heard anybody talk like this. And to tell you the truth, sir, all the time we have been

together I've never quite made you out. What's one ocean more than another? Charm, indeed!"

He was really devoted to me, I believe. But he cheered up when I told him that I had recommended him for my successor.

"Anyhow," he remarked, "let people say what they like, this Jacobus has served your turn. I must admit that this potato business has paid extremely well. Of course, if only you had — "

"Yes, Mr. Burns," I interrupted. "Quite a smile of fortune."

But I could not tell him that it was driving me out of the ship I had learned to love. And as I sat heavy-hearted at that parting, seeing all my plans destroyed, my modest future endangered — for this command was like a foot in the stirrup for a young man — he gave up completely for the first time his critical attitude.

"A wonderful piece of luck!" he said.

# ***THE SECRET SHARER***



AN EPISODE FROM THE COAST



## CHAPTER I

On my right hand there were lines of fishing-stakes resembling a mysterious system of half-submerged bamboo fences, incomprehensible in its division of the domain of tropical fishes, and crazy of aspect as if abandoned forever by some nomad tribe of fishermen now gone to the other end of the ocean; for there was no sign of human habitation as far as the eye could reach. To the left a group of barren islets, suggesting ruins of stone walls, towers, and blockhouses, had its foundations set in a blue sea that itself looked solid, so still and stable did it lie below my feet; even the track of light from the westering sun shone smoothly, without that animated glitter which tells of an imperceptible ripple. And when I turned my head to take a parting glance at the tug which had just left us anchored outside the bar, I saw the straight line of the flat shore joined to the stable sea, edge to edge, with a perfect and unmarked closeness, in one levelled floor half brown, half blue under the enormous dome of the sky. Corresponding in their insignificance to the islets of the sea, two small clumps of trees, one on each side of the only fault in the impeccable joint, marked the mouth of the river Meinam we had just left on the first preparatory stage of our homeward journey; and, far back on the inland level, a larger and loftier mass, the grove surrounding the great Paknam pagoda, was the only thing on which the eye could rest from the vain task of exploring the monotonous sweep of the horizon. Here and there gleams as of a few scattered pieces of silver marked the windings of the great river; and on the nearest of them, just within the bar, the tug steaming right into the land became lost to my sight, hull and funnel and masts, as though the impassive earth had swallowed her up without an effort, without a tremor. My eye followed the light cloud of her smoke, now here, now there, above the plain, according to the devious curves of the stream, but always fainter and farther away, till I lost it at last behind the mitre-shaped hill of the great pagoda. And then I was left alone with my ship, anchored at the head of the Gulf of Siam.

She floated at the starting-point of a long journey, very still in an immense stillness, the shadows of her spars flung far to the eastward by the setting sun. At that moment I was alone on her decks. There was not a sound in her — and around us nothing moved, nothing lived, not a canoe on the water, not a bird in the air, not a cloud in the sky. In this breathless pause at the threshold of a long passage we seemed to be measuring our fitness for a long and arduous enterprise, the appointed task of both our

existences to be carried out, far from all human eyes, with only sky and sea for spectators and for judges.

There must have been some glare in the air to interfere with one's sight, because it was only just before the sun left us that my roaming eyes made out beyond the highest ridge of the principal islet of the group something which did away with the solemnity of perfect solitude. The tide of darkness flowed on swiftly; and with tropical suddenness a swarm of stars came out above the shadowy earth, while I lingered yet, my hand resting lightly on my ship's rail as if on the shoulder of a trusted friend. But, with all that multitude of celestial bodies staring down at one, the comfort of quiet communion with her was gone for good. And there were also disturbing sounds by this time — voices, footsteps forward; the steward flitted along the maindeck, a busily ministering spirit; a hand-bell tinkled urgently under the poop-deck. . . .

I found my two officers waiting for me near the supper table, in the lighted cuddy. We sat down at once, and as I helped the chief mate, I said:

“Are you aware that there is a ship anchored inside the islands? I saw her mastheads above the ridge as the sun went down.”

He raised sharply his simple face, overcharged by a terrible growth of whisker, and emitted his usual ejaculations: “Bless my soul, sir! You don't say so!”

My second mate was a round-cheeked, silent young man, grave beyond his years, I thought; but as our eyes happened to meet I detected a slight quiver on his lips. I looked down at once. It was not my part to encourage sneering on board my ship. It must be said, too, that I knew very little of my officers. In consequence of certain events of no particular significance, except to myself, I had been appointed to the command only a fortnight before. Neither did I know much of the hands forward. All these people had been together for eighteen months or so, and my position was that of the only stranger on board. I mention this because it has some bearing on what is to follow. But what I felt most was my being a stranger to the ship; and if all the truth must be told, I was somewhat of a stranger to myself. The youngest man on board (barring the second mate), and untried as yet by a position of the fullest responsibility, I was willing to take the adequacy of the others for granted. They had simply to be equal to their tasks; but I wondered how far I should turn out faithful to that ideal conception of one's own personality every man sets up for himself secretly.

Meantime the chief mate, with an almost visible effect of collaboration on the part of his round eyes and frightful whiskers, was trying to evolve a theory of the anchored ship. His dominant trait was to take all things into earnest consideration. He was of a painstaking turn of mind. As he used to say, he “liked to account to himself” for practically everything that came in his way, down to a miserable scorpion he had found in his cabin a week before. The why and the wherefore of that scorpion — how it got on board and came to select his room rather than the pantry (which was a dark place and more what a scorpion would be partial to), and how on earth it managed to drown itself in the inkwell of his writing-desk — had exercised him infinitely. The ship within the islands was much more easily accounted for; and just as we were about to rise from table he made his pronouncement. She was, he doubted not, a ship from home lately arrived. Probably she drew too much water to cross the bar except at the top of spring tides. Therefore she went into that natural harbour to wait for a few days in preference to remaining in an open roadstead.

“That’s so,” confirmed the second mate, suddenly, in his slightly hoarse voice. “She draws over twenty feet. She’s the Liverpool ship *Sephora* with a cargo of coal. Hundred and twenty-three days from Cardiff.”

We looked at him in surprise.

“The tugboat skipper told me when he came on board for your letters, sir,” explained the young man. “He expects to take her up the river the day after to-morrow.”

After thus overwhelming us with the extent of his information he slipped out of the cabin. The mate observed regretfully that he “could not account for that young fellow’s whims.” What prevented him telling us all about it at once, he wanted to know.

I detained him as he was making a move. For the last two days the crew had had plenty of hard work, and the night before they had very little sleep. I felt painfully that I — a stranger — was doing something unusual when I directed him to let all hands turn in without setting an anchor-watch. I proposed to keep on deck myself till one o’clock or thereabouts. I would get the second mate to relieve me at that hour.

“He will turn out the cook and the steward at four,” I concluded, “and then give you a call. Of course at the slightest sign of any sort of wind we’ll have the hands up and make a start at once.”

He concealed his astonishment. "Very well, sir." Outside the cuddy he put his head in the second mate's door to inform him of my unheard-of caprice to take a five hours' anchor-watch on myself. I heard the other raise his voice incredulously — "What? The captain himself?" Then a few more murmurs, a door closed, then another. A few moments later I went on deck.

My strangeness, which had made me sleepless, had prompted that unconventional arrangement, as if I had expected in those solitary hours of the night to get on terms with the ship of which I knew nothing, manned by men of whom I knew very little more. Fast alongside a wharf, littered like any ship in port with a tangle of unrelated things, invaded by unrelated shore people, I had hardly seen her yet properly. Now, as she lay cleared for sea, the stretch of her maindeck seemed to me very fine under the stars. Very fine, very roomy for her size, and very inviting. I descended the poop and paced the waist, my mind picturing to myself the coming passage through the Malay Archipelago, down the Indian Ocean, and up the Atlantic. All its phases were familiar enough to me, every characteristic, all the alternatives which were likely to face me on the high seas — everything! . . . except the novel responsibility of command. But I took heart from the reasonable thought that the ship was like other ships, the men like other men, and that the sea was not likely to keep any special surprises expressly for my discomfiture.

Arrived at that comforting conclusion, I bethought myself of a cigar and went below to get it. All was still down there. Everybody at the after end of the ship was sleeping profoundly. I came out again on the quarter-deck, agreeably at ease in my sleeping-suit on that warm breathless night, barefooted, a glowing cigar in my teeth, and, going forward, I was met by the profound silence of the fore end of the ship. Only as I passed the door of the forecabin I heard a deep, quiet, trustful sigh of some sleeper inside. And suddenly I rejoiced in the great security of the sea as compared with the unrest of the land, in my choice of that untempted life presenting no disquieting problems, invested with an elementary moral beauty by the absolute straightforwardness of its appeal and by the singleness of its purpose.

The riding-light in the fore-rigging burned with a clear, untroubled, as if symbolic, flame, confident and bright in the mysterious shades of the night. Passing on my way aft along the other side of the ship, I observed that the rope side-ladder, put over, no doubt, for the master of the tug when he came

to fetch away our letters, had not been hauled in as it should have been. I became annoyed at this, for exactitude in small matters is the very soul of discipline. Then I reflected that I had myself peremptorily dismissed my officers from duty, and by my own act had prevented the anchor-watch being formally set and things properly attended to. I asked myself whether it was wise ever to interfere with the established routine of duties even from the kindest of motives. My action might have made me appear eccentric. Goodness only knew how that absurdly whiskered mate would "account" for my conduct, and what the whole ship thought of that informality of their new captain. I was vexed with myself.

Not from compunction certainly, but, as it were mechanically, I proceeded to get the ladder in myself. Now a side-ladder of that sort is a light affair and comes in easily, yet my vigorous tug, which should have brought it flying on board, merely recoiled upon my body in a totally unexpected jerk. What the devil! . . . I was so astounded by the immovableness of that ladder that I remained stock-still, trying to account for it to myself like that imbecile mate of mine. In the end, of course, I put my head over the rail.

The side of the ship made an opaque belt of shadow on the darkling glassy shimmer of the sea. But I saw at once something elongated and pale floating very close to the ladder. Before I could form a guess a faint flash of phosphorescent light, which seemed to issue suddenly from the naked body of a man, flickered in the sleeping water with the elusive, silent play of summer lightning in a night sky. With a gasp I saw revealed to my stare a pair of feet, the long legs, a broad livid back immersed right up to the neck in a greenish cadaverous glow. One hand, awash, clutched the bottom rung of the ladder. He was complete but for the head. A headless corpse! The cigar dropped out of my gaping mouth with a tiny plop and a short hiss quite audible in the absolute stillness of all things under heaven. At that I suppose he raised up his face, a dimly pale oval in the shadow of the ship's side. But even then I could only barely make out down there the shape of his black-haired head. However, it was enough for the horrid, frost-bound sensation which had gripped me about the chest to pass off. The moment of vain exclamations was past, too. I only climbed on the spare spar and leaned over the rail as far as I could, to bring my eyes nearer to that mystery floating alongside.

As he hung by the ladder, like a resting swimmer, the sea-lightning played about his limbs at every stir; and he appeared in it ghastly, silvery, fish-like. He remained as mute as a fish, too. He made no motion to get out of the water, either. It was inconceivable that he should not attempt to come on board, and strangely troubling to suspect that perhaps he did not want to. And my first words were prompted by just that troubled incertitude.

“What’s the matter?” I asked in my ordinary tone, speaking down to the face upturned exactly under mine.

“Cramp,” it answered, no louder. Then slightly anxious, “I say, no need to call any one.”

“I was not going to,” I said.

“Are you alone on deck?”

“Yes.”

I had somehow the impression that he was on the point of letting go the ladder to swim away beyond my ken — mysterious as he came. But, for the moment, this being appearing as if he had risen from the bottom of the sea (it was certainly the nearest land to the ship) wanted only to know the time. I told him. And he, down there, tentatively:

“I suppose your captain’s turned in?”

“I am sure he isn’t,” I said.

He seemed to struggle with himself, for I heard something like the low, bitter murmur of doubt. “What’s the good?” His next words came out with a hesitating effort.

“Look here, my man. Could you call him out quietly?”

I thought the time had come to declare myself.

“I am the captain.”

I heard a “By Jove!” whispered at the level of the water. The phosphorescence flashed in the swirl of the water all about his limbs, his other hand seized the ladder.

“My name’s Leggatt.”

The voice was calm and resolute. A good voice. The self-possession of that man had somehow induced a corresponding state in myself. It was very quietly that I remarked:

“You must be a good swimmer.”

“Yes. I’ve been in the water practically since nine o’clock. The question for me now is whether I am to let go this ladder and go on swimming till I

sink from exhaustion, or — to come on board here.”

I felt this was no mere formula of desperate speech, but a real alternative in the view of a strong soul. I should have gathered from this that he was young; indeed, it is only the young who are ever confronted by such clear issues. But at the time it was pure intuition on my part. A mysterious communication was established already between us two — in the face of that silent, darkened tropical sea. I was young, too; young enough to make no comment. The man in the water began suddenly to climb up the ladder, and I hastened away from the rail to fetch some clothes.

Before entering the cabin I stood still, listening in the lobby at the foot of the stairs. A faint snore came through the closed door of the chief mate's room. The second mate's door was on the hook, but the darkness in there was absolutely soundless. He, too, was young and could sleep like a stone. Remained the steward, but he was not likely to wake up before he was called. I got a sleeping-suit out of my room and, coming back on deck, saw the naked man from the sea sitting on the main-hatch, glimmering white in the darkness, his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands. In a moment he had concealed his damp body in a sleeping-suit of the same grey-stripe pattern as the one I was wearing and followed me like my double on the poop. Together we moved right aft, barefooted, silent.

“What is it?” I asked in a deadened voice, taking the lighted lamp out of the binnacle, and raising it to his face.

“An ugly business.”

He had rather regular features; a good mouth; light eyes under somewhat heavy, dark eyebrows; a smooth, square forehead; no growth on his cheeks; a small, brown moustache, and a well-shaped, round chin. His expression was concentrated, meditative, under the inspecting light of the lamp I held up to his face; such as a man thinking hard in solitude might wear. My sleeping-suit was just right for his size. A well-knit young fellow of twenty-five at most. He caught his lower lip with the edge of white, even teeth.

“Yes,” I said, replacing the lamp in the binnacle. The warm, heavy tropical night closed upon his head again.

“There's a ship over there,” he murmured.

“Yes, I know. The Sephora. Did you know of us?”

“Hadn't the slightest idea. I am the mate of her — ” He paused and corrected himself. “I should say I was.”

“Aha! Something wrong?”

“Yes. Very wrong indeed. I’ve killed a man.”

“What do you mean? Just now?”

“No, on the passage. Weeks ago. Thirty-nine south. When I say a man — ”

“Fit of temper,” I suggested, confidently.

The shadowy, dark head, like mine, seemed to nod imperceptibly above the ghostly grey of my sleeping-suit. It was, in the night, as though I had been faced by my own reflection in the depths of a sombre and immense mirror.

“A pretty thing to have to own up to for a Conway boy,” murmured my double, distinctly.

“You’re a Conway boy?”

“I am,” he said, as if startled. Then, slowly . . . “Perhaps you too — ”

It was so; but being a couple of years older I had left before he joined. After a quick interchange of dates a silence fell; and I thought suddenly of my absurd mate with his terrific whiskers and the “Bless my soul — you don’t say so” type of intellect. My double gave me an inkling of his thoughts by saying:

“My father’s a parson in Norfolk. Do you see me before a judge and jury on that charge? For myself I can’t see the necessity. There are fellows that an angel from heaven — And I am not that. He was one of those creatures that are just simmering all the time with a silly sort of wickedness. Miserable devils that have no business to live at all. He wouldn’t do his duty and wouldn’t let anybody else do theirs. But what’s the good of talking! You know well enough the sort of ill-conditioned snarling cur — ”

He appealed to me as if our experiences had been as identical as our clothes. And I knew well enough the pestiferous danger of such a character where there are no means of legal repression. And I knew well enough also that my double there was no homicidal ruffian. I did not think of asking him for details, and he told me the story roughly in brusque, disconnected sentences. I needed no more. I saw it all going on as though I were myself inside that other sleeping-suit.

“It happened while we were setting a reefed foresail, at dusk. Reefed foresail! You understand the sort of weather. The only sail we had left to keep the ship running; so you may guess what it had been like for days. Anxious sort of job, that. He gave me some of his cursed insolence at the



sheet. I tell you I was overdone with this terrific weather that seemed to have no end to it. Terrific, I tell you — and a deep ship. I believe the fellow himself was half crazed with funk. It was no time for gentlemanly reproof, so I turned round and felled him like an ox. He up and at me. We closed just as an awful sea made for the ship. All hands saw it coming and took to the rigging, but I had him by the throat, and went on shaking him like a rat, the men above us yelling, “Look out! look out!” Then a crash as if the sky had fallen on my head. They say that for over ten minutes hardly anything was to be seen of the ship — just the three masts and a bit of the forecastle head and of the poop all awash driving along in a smother of foam. It was a miracle that they found us, jammed together behind the forebits. It’s clear that I meant business, because I was holding him by the throat still when they picked us up. He was black in the face. It was too much for them. It seems they rushed us aft together, gripped as we were, screaming “Murder!” like a lot of lunatics, and broke into the cuddy. And the ship running for her life, touch and go all the time, any minute her last in a sea fit to turn your hair grey only a-looking at it. I understand that the skipper, too, started raving like the rest of them. The man had been deprived of sleep for more than a week, and to have this sprung on him at the height of a furious gale nearly drove him out of his mind. I wonder they didn’t fling me overboard after getting the carcass of their precious ship-mate out of my fingers. They had rather a job to separate us, I’ve been told. A sufficiently fierce story to make an old judge and a respectable jury sit up a bit. The first thing I heard when I came to myself was the maddening howling of that endless gale, and on that the voice of the old man. He was hanging on to my bunk, staring into my face out of his sou’wester.

““Mr. Leggatt, you have killed a man. You can act no longer as chief mate of this ship.””

His care to subdue his voice made it sound monotonous. He rested a hand on the end of the skylight to steady himself with, and all that time did not stir a limb, so far as I could see. “Nice little tale for a quiet tea-party,” he concluded in the same tone.

One of my hands, too, rested on the end of the skylight; neither did I stir a limb, so far as I knew. We stood less than a foot from each other. It occurred to me that if old “Bless my soul — you don’t say so” were to put his head up the companion and catch sight of us, he would think he was

seeing double, or imagine himself come upon a scene of weird witchcraft; the strange captain having a quiet confabulation by the wheel with his own grey ghost. I became very much concerned to prevent anything of the sort. I heard the other's soothing undertone.

"My father's a parson in Norfolk," it said. Evidently he had forgotten he had told me this important fact before. Truly a nice little tale.

"You had better slip down into my stateroom now," I said, moving off stealthily. My double followed my movements; our bare feet made no sound; I let him in, closed the door with care, and, after giving a call to the second mate, returned on deck for my relief.

"Not much sign of any wind yet," I remarked when he approached.

"No, sir. Not much," he assented, sleepily, in his hoarse voice, with just enough deference, no more, and barely suppressing a yawn.

"Well, that's all you have to look out for. You have got your orders."

"Yes, sir."

I paced a turn or two on the poop and saw him take up his position face forward with his elbow in the ratlines of the mizzen-rigging before I went below. The mate's faint snoring was still going on peacefully. The cuddy lamp was burning over the table on which stood a vase with flowers, a polite attention from the ship's provision merchant — the last flowers we should see for the next three months at the very least. Two bunches of bananas hung from the beam symmetrically, one on each side of the rudder-casing. Everything was as before in the ship — except that two of her captain's sleeping-suits were simultaneously in use, one motionless in the cuddy, the other keeping very still in the captain's stateroom.

It must be explained here that my cabin had the form of the capital letter L the door being within the angle and opening into the short part of the letter. A couch was to the left, the bed-place to the right; my writing-desk and the chronometers' table faced the door. But any one opening it, unless he stepped right inside, had no view of what I call the long (or vertical) part of the letter. It contained some lockers surmounted by a bookcase; and a few clothes, a thick jacket or two, caps, oilskin coat, and such like, hung on hooks. There was at the bottom of that part a door opening into my bathroom, which could be entered also directly from the saloon. But that way was never used.

The mysterious arrival had discovered the advantage of this particular shape. Entering my room, lighted strongly by a big bulkhead lamp swung

on gimbals above my writing-desk, I did not see him anywhere till he stepped out quietly from behind the coats hung in the recessed part.

"I heard somebody moving about, and went in there at once," he whispered.

I, too, spoke under my breath.

"Nobody is likely to come in here without knocking and getting permission."

He nodded. His face was thin and the sunburn faded, as though he had been ill. And no wonder. He had been, I heard presently, kept under arrest in his cabin for nearly seven weeks. But there was nothing sickly in his eyes or in his expression. He was not a bit like me, really; yet, as we stood leaning over my bed-place, whispering side by side, with our dark heads together and our backs to the door, anybody bold enough to open it stealthily would have been treated to the uncanny sight of a double captain busy talking in whispers with his other self.

"But all this doesn't tell me how you came to hang on to our side-ladder," I inquired, in the hardly audible murmurs we used, after he had told me something more of the proceedings on board the Sephora once the bad weather was over.

"When we sighted Java Head I had had time to think all those matters out several times over. I had six weeks of doing nothing else, and with only an hour or so every evening for a tramp on the quarter-deck."

He whispered, his arms folded on the side of my bed-place, staring through the open port. And I could imagine perfectly the manner of this thinking out — a stubborn if not a steadfast operation; something of which I should have been perfectly incapable.

"I reckoned it would be dark before we closed with the land," he continued, so low that I had to strain my hearing, near as we were to each other, shoulder touching shoulder almost. "So I asked to speak to the old man. He always seemed very sick when he came to see me — as if he could not look me in the face. You know, that foresail saved the ship. She was too deep to have run long under bare poles. And it was I that managed to set it for him. Anyway, he came. When I had him in my cabin — he stood by the door looking at me as if I had the halter round my neck already — I asked him right away to leave my cabin door unlocked at night while the ship was going through Sunda Straits. There would be the Java coast

within two or three miles, off Angier Point. I wanted nothing more. I've had a prize for swimming my second year in the Conway."

"I can believe it," I breathed out.

"God only knows why they locked me in every night. To see some of their faces you'd have thought they were afraid I'd go about at night strangling people. Am I a murdering brute? Do I look it? By Jove! if I had been he wouldn't have trusted himself like that into my room. You'll say I might have chucked him aside and bolted out, there and then — it was dark already. Well, no. And for the same reason I wouldn't think of trying to smash the door. There would have been a rush to stop me at the noise, and I did not mean to get into a confounded scrimmage. Somebody else might have got killed — for I would not have broken out only to get chucked back, and I did not want any more of that work. He refused, looking more sick than ever. He was afraid of the men, and also of that old second mate of his who had been sailing with him for years — a grey-headed old humbug; and his steward, too, had been with him devil knows how long — seventeen years or more — a dogmatic sort of loafer who hated me like poison, just because I was the chief mate. No chief mate ever made more than one voyage in the Sephora, you know. Those two old chaps ran the ship. Devil only knows what the skipper wasn't afraid of (all his nerve went to pieces altogether in that hellish spell of bad weather we had) — of what the law would do to him — of his wife, perhaps. Oh, yes! she's on board. Though I don't think she would have meddled. She would have been only too glad to have me out of the ship in any way. The 'brand of Cain' business, don't you see. That's all right. I was ready enough to go off wandering on the face of the earth — and that was price enough to pay for an Abel of that sort. Anyhow, he wouldn't listen to me. 'This thing must take its course. I represent the law here.' He was shaking like a leaf. 'So you won't?' 'No!' 'Then I hope you will be able to sleep on that,' I said, and turned my back on him. 'I wonder that you can,' cries he, and locks the door.

"Well, after that, I couldn't. Not very well. That was three weeks ago. We have had a slow passage through the Java Sea; drifted about Carimata for ten days. When we anchored here they thought, I suppose, it was all right. The nearest land (and that's five miles) is the ship's destination; the consul would soon set about catching me; and there would have been no object in bolting to these islets there. I don't suppose there's a drop of

water on them. I don't know how it was, but to-night that steward, after bringing me my supper, went out to let me eat it, and left the door unlocked. And I ate it — all there was, too. After I had finished I strolled out on the quarterdeck. I don't know that I meant to do anything. A breath of fresh air was all I wanted, I believe. Then a sudden temptation came over me. I kicked off my slippers and was in the water before I had made up my mind fairly. Somebody heard the splash and they raised an awful hullabaloo. 'He's gone! Lower the boats! He's committed suicide! No, he's swimming.' Certainly I was swimming. It's not so easy for a swimmer like me to commit suicide by drowning. I landed on the nearest islet before the boat left the ship's side. I heard them pulling about in the dark, hailing, and so on, but after a bit they gave up. Everything quieted down and the anchorage became as still as death. I sat down on a stone and began to think. I felt certain they would start searching for me at daylight. There was no place to hide on those stony things — and if there had been, what would have been the good? But now I was clear of that ship, I was not going back. So after a while I took off all my clothes, tied them up in a bundle with a stone inside, and dropped them in the deep water on the outer side of that islet. That was suicide enough for me. Let them think what they liked, but I didn't mean to drown myself. I meant to swim till I sank — but that's not the same thing. I struck out for another of these little islands, and it was from that one that I first saw your riding-light. Something to swim for. I went on easily, and on the way I came upon a flat rock a foot or two above water. In the daytime, I dare say, you might make it out with a glass from your poop. I scrambled up on it and rested myself for a bit. Then I made another start. That last spell must have been over a mile."

His whisper was getting fainter and fainter, and all the time he stared straight out through the port-hole, in which there was not even a star to be seen. I had not interrupted him. There was something that made comment impossible in his narrative, or perhaps in himself; a sort of feeling, a quality, which I can't find a name for. And when he ceased, all I found was a futile whisper: "So you swam for our light?"

"Yes — straight for it. It was something to swim for. I couldn't see any stars low down because the coast was in the way, and I couldn't see the land, either. The water was like glass. One might have been swimming in a confounded thousand-feet deep cistern with no place for scrambling out

anywhere; but what I didn't like was the notion of swimming round and round like a crazed bullock before I gave out; and as I didn't mean to go back . . . No. Do you see me being hauled back, stark naked, off one of these little islands by the scruff of the neck and fighting like a wild beast? Somebody would have got killed for certain, and I did not want any of that. So I went on. Then your ladder — ”

“Why didn't you hail the ship?” I asked, a little louder.

He touched my shoulder lightly. Lazy footsteps came right over our heads and stopped. The second mate had crossed from the other side of the poop and might have been hanging over the rail, for all we knew.

“He couldn't hear us talking — could he?” My double breathed into my very ear, anxiously.

His anxiety was an answer, a sufficient answer, to the question I had put to him. An answer containing all the difficulty of that situation. I closed the port-hole quietly, to make sure. A louder word might have been overheard.

“Who's that?” he whispered then.

“My second mate. But I don't know much more of the fellow than you do.”

And I told him a little about myself. I had been appointed to take charge while I least expected anything of the sort, not quite a fortnight ago. I didn't know either the ship or the people. Hadn't had the time in port to look about me or size anybody up. And as to the crew, all they knew was that I was appointed to take the ship home. For the rest, I was almost as much of a stranger on board as himself, I said. And at the moment I felt it most acutely. I felt that it would take very little to make me a suspect person in the eyes of the ship's company.

He had turned about meantime; and we, the two strangers in the ship, faced each other in identical attitudes.

“Your ladder — ” he murmured, after a silence. “Who'd have thought of finding a ladder hanging over at night in a ship anchored out here! I felt just then a very unpleasant faintness. After the life I've been leading for nine weeks, anybody would have got out of condition. I wasn't capable of swimming round as far as your rudder-chains. And, lo and behold! there was a ladder to get hold of. After I gripped it I said to myself, ‘What's the good?’ When I saw a man's head looking over I thought I would swim away presently and leave him shouting — in whatever language it was. I

didn't mind being looked at. I — I liked it. And then you speaking to me so quietly — as if you had expected me — made me hold on a little longer. It had been a confounded lonely time — I don't mean while swimming. I was glad to talk a little to somebody that didn't belong to the Sephora. As to asking for the captain, that was a mere impulse. It could have been no use, with all the ship knowing about me and the other people pretty certain to be round here in the morning. I don't know — I wanted to be seen, to talk with somebody, before I went on. I don't know what I would have said. . . . 'Fine night, isn't it?' or something of the sort."

"Do you think they will be round here presently?" I asked with some incredulity.

"Quite likely," he said, faintly.

He looked extremely haggard all of a sudden. His head rolled on his shoulders.

"H'm. We shall see then. Meantime get into that bed," I whispered. "Want help? There."

It was a rather high bed-place with a set of drawers underneath. This amazing swimmer really needed the lift I gave him by seizing his leg. He tumbled in, rolled over on his back, and flung one arm across his eyes. And then, with his face nearly hidden, he must have looked exactly as I used to look in that bed. I gazed upon my other self for a while before drawing across carefully the two green serge curtains which ran on a brass rod. I thought for a moment of pinning them together for greater safety, but I sat down on the couch, and once there I felt unwilling to rise and hunt for a pin. I would do it in a moment. I was extremely tired, in a peculiarly intimate way, by the strain of stealthiness, by the effort of whispering and the general secrecy of this excitement. It was three o'clock by now and I had been on my feet since nine, but I was not sleepy; I could not have gone to sleep. I sat there, fagged out, looking at the curtains, trying to clear my mind of the confused sensation of being in two places at once, and greatly bothered by an exasperating knocking in my head. It was a relief to discover suddenly that it was not in my head at all, but on the outside of the door. Before I could collect myself the words "Come in" were out of my mouth, and the steward entered with a tray, bringing in my morning coffee. I had slept, after all, and I was so frightened that I shouted, "This way! I am here, steward," as though he had been miles away. He put down the tray on the table next the couch and only then said, very quietly, "I can see

you are here, sir.” I felt him give me a keen look, but I dared not meet his eyes just then. He must have wondered why I had drawn the curtains of my bed before going to sleep on the couch. He went out, hooking the door open as usual.

I heard the crew washing decks above me. I knew I would have been told at once if there had been any wind. Calm, I thought, and I was doubly vexed. Indeed, I felt dual more than ever. The steward reappeared suddenly in the doorway. I jumped up from the couch so quickly that he gave a start.

“What do you want here?”

“Close your port, sir — they are washing decks.”

“It is closed,” I said, reddening.

“Very well, sir.” But he did not move from the doorway and returned my stare in an extraordinary, equivocal manner for a time. Then his eyes wavered, all his expression changed, and in a voice unusually gentle, almost coaxingly:

“May I come in to take the empty cup away, sir?”

“Of course!” I turned my back on him while he popped in and out. Then I unhooked and closed the door and even pushed the bolt. This sort of thing could not go on very long. The cabin was as hot as an oven, too. I took a peep at my double, and discovered that he had not moved, his arm was still over his eyes; but his chest heaved; his hair was wet; his chin glistened with perspiration. I reached over him and opened the port.

“I must show myself on deck,” I reflected.

Of course, theoretically, I could do what I liked, with no one to say nay to me within the whole circle of the horizon; but to lock my cabin door and take the key away I did not dare. Directly I put my head out of the companion I saw the group of my two officers, the second mate barefooted, the chief mate in long india-rubber boots, near the break of the poop, and the steward half-way down the poop-ladder talking to them eagerly. He happened to catch sight of me and dived, the second ran down on the main-deck shouting some order or other, and the chief mate came to meet me, touching his cap.

There was a sort of curiosity in his eye that I did not like. I don’t know whether the steward had told them that I was “queer” only, or downright drunk, but I know the man meant to have a good look at me. I watched him



coming with a smile which, as he got into point-blank range, took effect and froze his very whiskers. I did not give him time to open his lips.

“Square the yards by lifts and braces before the hands go to breakfast.”

It was the first particular order I had given on board that ship; and I stayed on deck to see it executed, too. I had felt the need of asserting myself without loss of time. That sneering young cub got taken down a peg or two on that occasion, and I also seized the opportunity of having a good look at the face of every foremast man as they filed past me to go to the after braces. At breakfast time, eating nothing myself, I presided with such frigid dignity that the two mates were only too glad to escape from the cabin as soon as decency permitted; and all the time the dual working of my mind distracted me almost to the point of insanity. I was constantly watching myself, my secret self, as dependent on my actions as my own personality, sleeping in that bed, behind that door which faced me as I sat at the head of the table. It was very much like being mad, only it was worse because one was aware of it.

I had to shake him for a solid minute, but when at last he opened his eyes it was in the full possession of his senses, with an inquiring look.

“All’s well so far,” I whispered. “Now you must vanish into the bathroom.”

He did so, as noiseless as a ghost, and I then rang for the steward, and facing him boldly, directed him to tidy up my stateroom while I was having my bath — “and be quick about it.” As my tone admitted of no excuses, he said, “Yes, sir,” and ran off to fetch his dust-pan and brushes. I took a bath and did most of my dressing, splashing, and whistling softly for the steward’s edification, while the secret sharer of my life stood drawn up bolt upright in that little space, his face looking very sunken in daylight, his eyelids lowered under the stern, dark line of his eyebrows drawn together by a slight frown.

When I left him there to go back to my room the steward was finishing dusting. I sent for the mate and engaged him in some insignificant conversation. It was, as it were, trifling with the terrific character of his whiskers; but my object was to give him an opportunity for a good look at my cabin. And then I could at last shut, with a clear conscience, the door of my stateroom and get my double back into the recessed part. There was nothing else for it. He had to sit still on a small folding stool, half smothered by the heavy coats hanging there. We listened to the steward

going into the bath-room out of the saloon, filling the water-bottles there, scrubbing the bath, setting things to rights, whisk, bang, clatter — out again into the saloon — turn the key — click. Such was my scheme for keeping my second self invisible. Nothing better could be contrived under the circumstances. And there we sat; I at my writing-desk ready to appear busy with some papers, he behind me, out of sight of the door. It would not have been prudent to talk in daytime; and I could not have stood the excitement of that queer sense of whispering to myself. Now and then glancing over my shoulder, I saw him far back there, sitting rigidly on the low stool, his bare feet close together, his arms folded, his head hanging on his breast — and perfectly still. Anybody would have taken him for me.

I was fascinated by it myself. Every moment I had to glance over my shoulder. I was looking at him when a voice outside the door said:

“Beg pardon, sir.”

“Well!” . . . I kept my eyes on him, and so, when the voice outside the door announced, “There’s a ship’s boat coming our way, sir,” I saw him give a start — the first movement he had made for hours. But he did not raise his bowed head.

“All right. Get the ladder over.”

I hesitated. Should I whisper something to him? But what? His immobility seemed to have been never disturbed. What could I tell him he did not know already? . . . Finally I went on deck.

## CHAPTER II

The skipper of the *Sephora* had a thin red whisker all round his face, and the sort of complexion that goes with hair of that colour; also the particular, rather smeary shade of blue in the eyes. He was not exactly a showy figure; his shoulders were high, his stature but middling — one leg slightly more bandy than the other. He shook hands, looking vaguely around. A spiritless tenacity was his main characteristic, I judged. I behaved with a politeness which seemed to disconcert him. Perhaps he was shy. He mumbled to me as if he were ashamed of what he was saying; gave his name (it was something like Archbold — but at this distance of years I hardly am sure), his ship's name, and a few other particulars of that sort, in the manner of a criminal making a reluctant and doleful confession. He had had terrible weather on the passage out — terrible — terrible — wife aboard, too.

By this time we were seated in the cabin and the steward brought in a tray with a bottle and glasses. "Thanks! No." Never took liquor. Would have some water, though. He drank two tumblerfuls. Terrible thirsty work. Ever since daylight had been exploring the islands round his ship.

"What was that for — fun?" I asked, with an appearance of polite interest.

"No!" He sighed. "Painful duty."

As he persisted in his mumbling and I wanted my double to hear every word, I hit upon the notion of informing him that I regretted to say I was hard of hearing.

"Such a young man, too!" he nodded, keeping his smeary blue, unintelligent eyes fastened upon me. What was the cause of it — some disease? he inquired, without the least sympathy and as if he thought that, if so, I'd got no more than I deserved.

"Yes; disease," I admitted in a cheerful tone which seemed to shock him. But my point was gained, because he had to raise his voice to give me his tale. It is not worth while to record that version. It was just over two months since all this had happened, and he had thought so much about it that he seemed completely muddled as to its bearings, but still immensely impressed.

"What would you think of such a thing happening on board your own ship? I've had the *Sephora* for these fifteen years. I am a well-known shipmaster."

He was densely distressed — and perhaps I should have sympathised with him if I had been able to detach my mental vision from the unsuspected sharer of my cabin as though he were my second self. There he was on the other side of the bulkhead, four or five feet from us, no more, as we sat in the saloon. I looked politely at Captain Archbold (if that was his name), but it was the other I saw, in a grey sleeping-suit, seated on a low stool, his bare feet close together, his arms folded, and every word said between us falling into the ears of his dark head bowed on his chest.

“I have been at sea now, man and boy, for seven-and-thirty years, and I’ve never heard of such a thing happening in an English ship. And that it should be my ship. Wife on board, too.”

I was hardly listening to him.

“Don’t you think,” I said, “that the heavy sea which, you told me, came aboard just then might have killed the man? I have seen the sheer weight of a sea kill a man very neatly, by simply breaking his neck.”

“Good God!” he uttered, impressively, fixing his smeary blue eyes on me. “The sea! No man killed by the sea ever looked like that.” He seemed positively scandalised at my suggestion. And as I gazed at him, certainly not prepared for anything original on his part, he advanced his head close to mine and thrust his tongue out at me so suddenly that I couldn’t help starting back.

After scoring over my calmness in this graphic way he nodded wisely. If I had seen the sight, he assured me, I would never forget it as long as I lived. The weather was too bad to give the corpse a proper sea burial. So next day at dawn they took it up on the poop, covering its face with a bit of bunting; he read a short prayer, and then, just as it was, in its oilskins and long boots, they launched it amongst those mountainous seas that seemed ready every moment to swallow up the ship herself and the terrified lives on board of her.

“That reefed foresail saved you,” I threw in.

“Under God — it did,” he exclaimed fervently. “It was by a special mercy, I firmly believe, that it stood some of those hurricane squalls.”

“It was the setting of that sail which — ” I began.

“God’s own hand in it,” he interrupted me. “Nothing less could have done it. I don’t mind telling you that I hardly dared give the order. It seemed impossible that we could touch anything without losing it, and then our last hope would have been gone.”

The terror of that gale was on him yet. I let him go on for a bit, then said, casually — as if returning to a minor subject:

“You were very anxious to give up your mate to the shore people, I believe?”

He was. To the law. His obscure tenacity on that point had in it something incomprehensible and a little awful; something, as it were, mystical, quite apart from his anxiety that he should not be suspected of “countenancing any doings of that sort.” Seven-and-thirty virtuous years at sea, of which over twenty of immaculate command, and the last fifteen in the *Sephora*, seemed to have laid him under some pitiless obligation.

“And you know,” he went on, groping shamefacedly amongst his feelings, “I did not engage that young fellow. His people had some interest with my owners. I was in a way forced to take him on. He looked very smart, very gentlemanly, and all that. But do you know — I never liked him, somehow. I am a plain man. You see, he wasn’t exactly the sort for the chief mate of a ship like the *Sephora*.”

I had become so connected in thoughts and impressions with the secret sharer of my cabin that I felt as if I, personally, were being given to understand that I, too, was not the sort that would have done for the chief mate of a ship like the *Sephora*. I had no doubt of it in my mind.

“Not at all the style of man. You understand,” he insisted, superfluously, looking hard at me.

I smiled urbanely. He seemed at a loss for a while.

“I suppose I must report a suicide.”

“Beg pardon?”

“Suicide! That’s what I’ll have to write to my owners directly I get in.”

“Unless you manage to recover him before to-morrow,” I assented, dispassionately. . . “I mean, alive.”

He mumbled something which I really did not catch, and I turned my ear to him in a puzzled manner. He fairly bawled:

“The land — I say, the mainland is at least seven miles off my anchorage.”

“About that.”

My lack of excitement, of curiosity, of surprise, of any sort of pronounced interest, began to arouse his distrust. But except for the felicitous pretence of deafness I had not tried to pretend anything. I had felt

utterly incapable of playing the part of ignorance properly, and therefore was afraid to try. It is also certain that he had brought some ready-made suspicions with him, and that he viewed my politeness as a strange and unnatural phenomenon. And yet how else could I have received him? Not heartily! That was impossible for psychological reasons, which I need not state here. My only object was to keep off his inquiries. Surlily? Yes, but surliness might have provoked a point-blank question. From its novelty to him and from its nature, punctilious courtesy was the manner best calculated to restrain the man. But there was the danger of his breaking through my defence bluntly. I could not, I think, have met him by a direct lie, also for psychological (not moral) reasons. If he had only known how afraid I was of his putting my feeling of identity with the other to the test! But, strangely enough — (I thought of it only afterward) — I believe that he was not a little disconcerted by the reverse side of that weird situation, by something in me that reminded him of the man he was seeking — suggested a mysterious similitude to the young fellow he had distrusted and disliked from the first.

However that might have been, the silence was not very prolonged. He took another oblique step.

“I reckon I had no more than a two-mile pull to your ship. Not a bit more.”

“And quite enough, too, in this awful heat,” I said.

Another pause full of mistrust followed. Necessity, they say, is mother of invention, but fear, too, is not barren of ingenious suggestions. And I was afraid he would ask me point-blank for news of my other self.

“Nice little saloon, isn’t it?” I remarked, as if noticing for the first time the way his eyes roamed from one closed door to the other. “And very well fitted out too. Here, for instance,” I continued, reaching over the back of my seat negligently and flinging the door open, “is my bath-room.”

He made an eager movement, but hardly gave it a glance. I got up, shut the door of the bath-room, and invited him to have a look round, as if I were very proud of my accommodation. He had to rise and be shown round, but he went through the business without any raptures whatever.

“And now we’ll have a look at my stateroom,” I declared, in a voice as loud as I dared to make it, crossing the cabin to the starboard side with purposely heavy steps.

He followed me in and gazed around. My intelligent double had vanished. I played my part.

“Very convenient — isn’t it?”

“Very nice. Very comfy. . . “ He didn’t finish, and went out brusquely as if to escape from some unrighteous wiles of mine. But it was not to be. I had been too frightened not to feel vengeful; I felt I had him on the run, and I meant to keep him on the run. My polite insistence must have had something menacing in it, because he gave in suddenly. And I did not let him off a single item; mate’s room, pantry, storerooms, the very sail-locker which was also under the poop — he had to look into them all. When at last I showed him out on the quarter-deck he drew a long, spiritless sigh, and mumbled dismally that he must really be going back to his ship now. I desired my mate, who had joined us, to see to the captain’s boat.

The man of whiskers gave a blast on the whistle which he used to wear hanging round his neck, and yelled, “Sephoras away!” My double down there in my cabin must have heard, and certainly could not feel more relieved than I. Four fellows came running out from somewhere forward and went over the side, while my own men, appearing on deck too, lined the rail. I escorted my visitor to the gangway ceremoniously, and nearly overdid it. He was a tenacious beast. On the very ladder he lingered, and in that unique, guiltily conscientious manner of sticking to the point:

“I say . . . you . . . you don’t think that — ”

I covered his voice loudly:

“Certainly not. . . . I am delighted. Good-bye.”

I had an idea of what he meant to say, and just saved myself by the privilege of defective hearing. He was too shaken generally to insist, but my mate, close witness of that parting, looked mystified and his face took on a thoughtful cast. As I did not want to appear as if I wished to avoid all communication with my officers, he had the opportunity to address me.

“Seems a very nice man. His boat’s crew told our chaps a very extraordinary story, if what I am told by the steward is true. I suppose you had it from the captain, sir?”

“Yes. I had a story from the captain.”

“A very horrible affair — isn’t it, sir?”

“It is.”

“Beats all these tales we hear about murders in Yankee ships.”

“I don’t think it beats them. I don’t think it resembles them in the least.”

“Bless my soul — you don’t say so! But of course I’ve no acquaintance whatever with American ships, not I, so I couldn’t go against your knowledge. It’s horrible enough for me. . . . But the queerest part is that those fellows seemed to have some idea the man was hidden aboard here. They had really. Did you ever hear of such a thing?”

“Preposterous — isn’t it?”

We were walking to and fro athwart the quarterdeck. No one of the crew forward could be seen (the day was Sunday), and the mate pursued:

“There was some little dispute about it. Our chaps took offence. ‘As if we would harbour a thing like that,’ they said. ‘Wouldn’t you like to look for him in our coal-hole?’ Quite a tiff. But they made it up in the end. I suppose he did drown himself. Don’t you, sir?”

“I don’t suppose anything.”

“You have no doubt in the matter, sir?”

“None whatever.”

I left him suddenly. I felt I was producing a bad impression, but with my double down there it was most trying to be on deck. And it was almost as trying to be below. Altogether a nerve-trying situation. But on the whole I felt less torn in two when I was with him. There was no one in the whole ship whom I dared take into my confidence. Since the hands had got to know his story, it would have been impossible to pass him off for any one else, and an accidental discovery was to be dreaded now more than ever. . . .

The steward being engaged in laying the table for dinner, we could talk only with our eyes when I first went down. Later in the afternoon we had a cautious try at whispering. The Sunday quietness of the ship was against us; the stillness of air and water around her was against us; the elements, the men were against us — everything was against us in our secret partnership; time itself — for this could not go on forever. The very trust in Providence was, I suppose, denied to his guilt. Shall I confess that this thought cast me down very much? And as to the chapter of accidents which counts for so much in the book of success, I could only hope that it was closed. For what favourable accident could be expected?

“Did you hear everything?” were my first words as soon as we took up our position side by side, leaning over my bed-place.

He had. And the proof of it was his earnest whisper, “The man told you he hardly dared to give the order.”

I understood the reference to be to that saving foresail.



“Yes. He was afraid of it being lost in the setting.”

“I assure you he never gave the order. He may think he did, but he never gave it. He stood there with me on the break of the poop after the maintopsail blew away, and whimpered about our last hope — positively whimpered about it and nothing else — and the night coming on! To hear one’s skipper go on like that in such weather was enough to drive any fellow out of his mind. It worked me up into a sort of desperation. I just took it into my own hands and went away from him, boiling, and — But what’s the use telling you? You know! . . . Do you think that if I had not been pretty fierce with them I should have got the men to do anything? Not it! The bo’s’n perhaps? Perhaps! It wasn’t a heavy sea — it was a sea gone mad! I suppose the end of the world will be something like that; and a man may have the heart to see it coming once and be done with it — but to have to face it day after day — I don’t blame anybody. I was precious little better than the rest. Only — I was an officer of that old coal-waggon, anyhow — ”

“I quite understand,” I conveyed that sincere assurance into his ear. He was out of breath with whispering; I could hear him pant slightly. It was all very simple. The same strung-up force which had given twenty-four men a chance, at least, for their lives, had, in a sort of recoil, crushed an unworthy mutinous existence.

But I had no leisure to weigh the merits of the matter — footsteps in the saloon, a heavy knock. “There’s enough wind to get under way with, sir.” Here was the call of a new claim upon my thoughts and even upon my feelings.

“Turn the hands up,” I cried through the door. “I’ll be on deck directly.”

I was going out to make the acquaintance of my ship. Before I left the cabin our eyes met — the eyes of the only two strangers on board. I pointed to the recessed part where the little camp-stool awaited him and laid my finger on my lips. He made a gesture — somewhat vague — a little mysterious, accompanied by a faint smile, as if of regret.

This is not the place to enlarge upon the sensations of a man who feels for the first time a ship move under his feet to his own independent word. In my case they were not unalloyed. I was not wholly alone with my command; for there was that stranger in my cabin. Or rather, I was not completely and wholly with her. Part of me was absent. That mental feeling of being in two places at once affected me physically as if the mood

of secrecy had penetrated my very soul. Before an hour had elapsed since the ship had begun to move, having occasion to ask the mate (he stood by my side) to take a compass bearing of the Pagoda, I caught myself reaching up to his ear in whispers. I say I caught myself, but enough had escaped to startle the man. I can't describe it otherwise than by saying that he shied. A grave, preoccupied manner, as though he were in possession of some perplexing intelligence, did not leave him henceforth. A little later I moved away from the rail to look at the compass with such a stealthy gait that the helmsman noticed it — and I could not help noticing the unusual roundness of his eyes. These are trifling instances, though it's to no commander's advantage to be suspected of ludicrous eccentricities. But I was also more seriously affected. There are to a seaman certain words, gestures, that should in given conditions come as naturally, as instinctively as the winking of a menaced eye. A certain order should spring on to his lips without thinking; a certain sign should get itself made, so to speak, without reflection. But all unconscious alertness had abandoned me. I had to make an effort of will to recall myself back (from the cabin) to the conditions of the moment. I felt that I was appearing an irresolute commander to those people who were watching me more or less critically.

And, besides, there were the scares. On the second day out, for instance, coming off the deck in the afternoon (I had straw slippers on my bare feet) I stopped at the open pantry door and spoke to the steward. He was doing something there with his back to me. At the sound of my voice he nearly jumped out of his skin, as the saying is, and incidentally broke a cup.

"What on earth's the matter with you?" I asked, astonished.

He was extremely confused. "Beg your pardon, sir. I made sure you were in your cabin."

"You see I wasn't."

"No, sir. I could have sworn I had heard you moving in there not a moment ago. It's most extraordinary . . . very sorry, sir."

I passed on with an inward shudder. I was so identified with my secret double that I did not even mention the fact in those scanty, fearful whispers we exchanged. I suppose he had made some slight noise of some kind or other. It would have been miraculous if he hadn't at one time or another. And yet, haggard as he appeared, he looked always perfectly self-controlled, more than calm — almost invulnerable. On my suggestion he remained almost entirely in the bathroom, which, upon the whole, was the

safest place. There could be really no shadow of an excuse for any one ever wanting to go in there, once the steward had done with it. It was a very tiny place. Sometimes he reclined on the floor, his legs bent, his head sustained on one elbow. At others I would find him on the camp-stool, sitting in his grey sleeping-suit and with his cropped dark hair like a patient, unmoved convict. At night I would smuggle him into my bed-place, and we would whisper together, with the regular footfalls of the officer of the watch passing and repassing over our heads. It was an infinitely miserable time. It was lucky that some tins of fine preserves were stowed in a locker in my stateroom; hard bread I could always get hold of; and so he lived on stewed chicken, paté de foie gras, asparagus, cooked oysters, sardines — on all sorts of abominable sham delicacies out of tins. My early morning coffee he always drank; and it was all I dared do for him in that respect.

Every day there was the horrible manoeuvring to go through so that my room and then the bath-room should be done in the usual way. I came to hate the sight of the steward, to abhor the voice of that harmless man. I felt that it was he who would bring on the disaster of discovery. It hung like a sword over our heads.

The fourth day out, I think (we were then working down the east side of the Gulf of Siam, tack for tack, in light winds and smooth water) — the fourth day, I say, of this miserable juggling with the unavoidable, as we sat at our evening meal, that man, whose slightest movement I dreaded, after putting down the dishes ran up on deck busily. This could not be dangerous. Presently he came down again; and then it appeared that he had remembered a coat of mine which I had thrown over a rail to dry after having been wetted in a shower which had passed over the ship in the afternoon. Sitting stolidly at the head of the table I became terrified at the sight of the garment on his arm. Of course he made for my door. There was no time to lose.

“Steward,” I thundered. My nerves were so shaken that I could not govern my voice and conceal my agitation. This was the sort of thing that made my terrifically whiskered mate tap his forehead with his forefinger. I had detected him using that gesture while talking on deck with a confidential air to the carpenter. It was too far to hear a word, but I had no doubt that this pantomime could only refer to the strange new captain.

“Yes, sir,” the pale-faced steward turned resignedly to me. It was this maddening course of being shouted at, checked without rhyme or reason,

arbitrarily chased out of my cabin, suddenly called into it, sent flying out of his pantry on incomprehensible errands, that accounted for the growing wretchedness of his expression.

“Where are you going with that coat?”

“To your room, sir.”

“Is there another shower coming?”

“I’m sure I don’t know, sir. Shall I go up again and see, sir?”

“No! never mind.”

My object was attained, as of course my other self in there would have heard everything that passed. During this interlude my two officers never raised their eyes off their respective plates; but the lip of that confounded cub, the second mate, quivered visibly.

I expected the steward to hook my coat on and come out at once. He was very slow about it; but I dominated my nervousness sufficiently not to shout after him. Suddenly I became aware (it could be heard plainly enough) that the fellow for some reason or other was opening the door of the bath-room. It was the end. The place was literally not big enough to swing a cat in. My voice died in my throat and I went stony all over. I expected to hear a yell of surprise and terror, and made a movement, but had not the strength to get on my legs. Everything remained still. Had my second self taken the poor wretch by the throat? I don’t know what I would have done next moment if I had not seen the steward come out of my room, close the door, and then stand quietly by the sideboard.

“Saved,” I thought. “But, no! Lost! Gone! He was gone!”

I laid my knife and fork down and leaned back in my chair. My head swam. After a while, when sufficiently recovered to speak in a steady voice, I instructed my mate to put the ship round at eight o’clock himself.

“I won’t come on deck,” I went on. “I think I’ll turn in, and unless the wind shifts I don’t want to be disturbed before midnight. I feel a bit seedy.”

“You did look middling bad a little while ago,” the chief mate remarked without showing any great concern.

They both went out, and I stared at the steward clearing the table. There was nothing to be read on that wretched man’s face. But why did he avoid my eyes I asked myself. Then I thought I should like to hear the sound of his voice.

“Steward!”

“Sir!” Startled as usual.

“Where did you hang up that coat?”

“In the bath-room, sir.” The usual anxious tone. “It’s not quite dry yet, sir.”

For some time longer I sat in the cuddy. Had my double vanished as he had come? But of his coming there was an explanation, whereas his disappearance would be inexplicable. . . . I went slowly into my dark room, shut the door, lighted the lamp, and for a time dared not turn round. When at last I did I saw him standing bolt-upright in the narrow recessed part. It would not be true to say I had a shock, but an irresistible doubt of his bodily existence flitted through my mind. Can it be, I asked myself, that he is not visible to other eyes than mine? It was like being haunted. Motionless, with a grave face, he raised his hands slightly at me in a gesture which meant clearly, “Heavens! what a narrow escape!” Narrow indeed. I think I had come creeping quietly as near insanity as any man who has not actually gone over the border. That gesture restrained me, so to speak.

The mate with the terrific whiskers was now putting the ship on the other tack. In the moment of profound silence which follows upon the hands going to their stations I heard on the poop his raised voice: “Hard alee!” and the distant shout of the order repeated on the maindeck. The sails, in that light breeze, made but a faint fluttering noise. It ceased. The ship was coming round slowly; I held my breath in the renewed stillness of expectation; one wouldn’t have thought that there was a single living soul on her decks. A sudden brisk shout, “Mainsail haul!” broke the spell, and in the noisy cries and rush overhead of the men running away with the main-brace we two, down in my cabin, came together in our usual position by the bed-place.

He did not wait for my question. “I heard him fumbling here and just managed to squat myself down in the bath,” he whispered to me. “The fellow only opened the door and put his arm in to hang the coat up. All the same — ”

“I never thought of that,” I whispered back, even more appalled than before at the closeness of the shave, and marvelling at that something unyielding in his character which was carrying him through so finely. There was no agitation in his whisper. Whoever was being driven distracted, it was not he. He was sane. And the proof of his sanity was continued when he took up the whispering again.

“It would never do for me to come to life again.”

It was something that a ghost might have said. But what he was alluding to was his old captain's reluctant admission of the theory of suicide. It would obviously serve his turn — if I had understood at all the view which seemed to govern the unalterable purpose of his action.

“You must maroon me as soon as ever you can get amongst these islands off the Cambodge shore,” he went on.

“Maroon you! We are not living in a boy's adventure tale,” I protested. His scornful whispering took me up.

“We aren't indeed! There's nothing of a boy's tale in this. But there's nothing else for it. I want no more. You don't suppose I am afraid of what can be done to me? Prison or gallows or whatever they may please. But you don't see me coming back to explain such things to an old fellow in a wig and twelve respectable tradesmen, do you? What can they know whether I am guilty or not — or of what I am guilty, either? That's my affair. What does the Bible say? ‘Driven off the face of the earth.’ Very well. I am off the face of the earth now. As I came at night so I shall go.”

“Impossible!” I murmured. “You can't.”

“Can't? . . . Not naked like a soul on the Day of Judgment. I shall freeze on to this sleeping-suit. The Last Day is not yet — and you have understood thoroughly. Didn't you?”

I felt suddenly ashamed of myself. I may say truly that I understood — and my hesitation in letting that man swim away from my ship's side had been a mere sham sentiment, a sort of cowardice.

“It can't be done now till next night,” I breathed out. “The ship is on the off-shore tack and the wind may fail us.”

“As long as I know that you understand,” he whispered. “But of course you do. It's a great satisfaction to have got somebody to understand. You seem to have been there on purpose.” And in the same whisper, as if we two whenever we talked had to say things to each other which were not fit for the world to hear, he added, “It's very wonderful.” We remained side by side talking in our secret way — but sometimes silent or just exchanging a whispered word or two at long intervals. And as usual he stared through the port. A breath of wind came now and again into our faces. The ship might have been moored in dock, so gently and on an even keel she slipped through the water, that did not murmur even at our passage, shadowy and silent like a phantom sea.

At midnight I went on deck, and to my mate's great surprise put the ship round on the other tack. His terrible whiskers flitted round me in silent criticism. I certainly should not have done it if it had been only a question of getting out of that sleepy gulf as quickly as possible. I believe he told the second mate, who relieved him, that it was a great want of judgment. The other only yawned. That intolerable cub shuffled about so sleepily and lolled against the rails in such a slack, improper fashion that I came down on him sharply.

"Aren't you properly awake yet?"

"Yes, sir! I am awake."

"Well, then, be good enough to hold yourself as if you were. And keep a look-out. If there's any current we'll be closing with some islands before daylight."

The east side of the gulf is fringed with islands, some solitary, others in groups. On the blue background of the high coast they seem to float on silvery patches of calm water, arid and grey, or dark green and rounded like clumps of evergreen bushes, with the larger ones, a mile or two long, showing the outlines of ridges, ribs of grey rock under the dank mantle of matted leafage. Unknown to trade, to travel, almost to geography, the manner of life they harbour is an unsolved secret. There must be villages — settlements of fishermen at least — on the largest of them, and some communication with the world is probably kept up by native craft. But all that forenoon, as we headed for them, fanned along by the faintest of breezes, I saw no sign of man or canoe in the field of the telescope I kept on pointing at the scattered group.

At noon I gave no orders for a change of course, and the mate's whiskers became much concerned and seemed to be offering themselves unduly to my notice. At last I said:

"I am going to stand right in. Quite in — as far as I can take her."

The stare of extreme surprise imparted an air of ferocity also to his eyes, and he looked truly terrific for a moment.

"We're not doing well in the middle of the gulf," I continued, casually. "I am going to look for the land breezes to-night."

"Bless my soul! Do you mean, sir, in the dark amongst the lot of all them islands and reefs and shoals?"

"Well — if there are any regular land breezes at all on this coast one must get close inshore to find them, mustn't one?"

“Bless my soul!” he exclaimed again under his breath. All that afternoon he wore a dreamy, contemplative appearance which in him was a mark of perplexity. After dinner I went into my stateroom as if I meant to take some rest. There we two bent our dark heads over a half-unrolled chart lying on my bed.

“There,” I said. “It’s got to be Koh-ring. I’ve been looking at it ever since sunrise. It has got two hills and a low point. It must be inhabited. And on the coast opposite there is what looks like the mouth of a biggish river — with some town, no doubt, not far up. It’s the best chance for you that I can see.”

“Anything. Koh-ring let it be.”

He looked thoughtfully at the chart as if surveying chances and distances from a lofty height — and following with his eyes his own figure wandering on the blank land of Cochin-China, and then passing off that piece of paper clean out of sight into uncharted regions. And it was as if the ship had two captains to plan her course for her. I had been so worried and restless running up and down that I had not had the patience to dress that day. I had remained in my sleeping-suit, with straw slippers and a soft floppy hat. The closeness of the heat in the gulf had been most oppressive, and the crew were used to see me wandering in that airy attire.

“She will clear the south point as she heads now,” I whispered into his ear. “Goodness only knows when, though, but certainly after dark. I’ll edge her in to half a mile, as far as I may be able to judge in the dark — ”

“Be careful,” he murmured, warningly — and I realised suddenly that all my future, the only future for which I was fit, would perhaps go irretrievably to pieces in any mishap to my first command.

I could not stop a moment longer in the room. I motioned him to get out of sight and made my way on the poop. That unplayful cub had the watch. I walked up and down for a while thinking things out, then beckoned him over.

“Send a couple of hands to open the two quarterdeck ports,” I said, mildly.

He actually had the impudence, or else so forgot himself in his wonder at such an incomprehensible order, as to repeat:

“Open the quarter-deck ports! What for, sir?”

“The only reason you need concern yourself about is because I tell you to do so. Have them open wide and fastened properly.”



He reddened and went off, but I believe made some jeering remark to the carpenter as to the sensible practice of ventilating a ship's quarter-deck. I know he popped into the mate's cabin to impart the fact to him because the whiskers came on deck, as it were by chance, and stole glances at me from below — for signs of lunacy or drunkenness, I suppose.

A little before supper, feeling more restless than ever, I rejoined, for a moment, my second self. And to find him sitting so quietly was surprising, like something against nature, inhuman.

I developed my plan in a hurried whisper.

"I shall stand in as close as I dare and then put her round. I shall presently find means to smuggle you out of here into the sail-locker, which communicates with the lobby. But there is an opening, a sort of square for hauling the sails out, which gives straight on the quarter-deck and which is never closed in fine weather, so as to give air to the sails. 'When the ship's way is deadened in stays and all the hands are aft at the main-braces you shall have a clear road to slip out and get overboard through the open quarter-deck port. I've had them both fastened up. Use a rope's end to lower yourself into the water so as to avoid a splash — you know. It could be heard and cause some beastly complication.'"

He kept silent for a while, then whispered, "I understand."

"I won't be there to see you go," I began with an effort. "The rest . . . I only hope I have understood, too."

"You have. From first to last" — and for the first time there seemed to be a faltering, something strained in his whisper. He caught hold of my arm, but the ringing of the supper bell made me start. He didn't, though; he only released his grip.

After supper I didn't come below again till well past eight o'clock. The faint, steady breeze was loaded with dew; and the wet, darkened sails held all there was of propelling power in it. The night, clear and starry, sparkled darkly, and the opaque, lightless patches shifting slowly against the low stars were the drifting islets. On the port bow there was a big one more distant and shadowily imposing by the great space of sky it eclipsed.

On opening the door I had a back view of my very own self looking at a chart. He had come out of the recess and was standing near the table.

"Quite dark enough," I whispered.

He stepped back and leaned against my bed with a level, quiet glance. I sat on the couch. We had nothing to say to each other. Over our heads the

officer of the watch moved here and there. Then I heard him move quickly. I knew what that meant. He was making for the companion; and presently his voice was outside my door.

“We are drawing in pretty fast, sir. Land looks rather close.”

“Very well,” I answered. “I am coming on deck directly.”

I waited till he was gone out of the cuddy, then rose. My double moved too. The time had come to exchange our last whispers, for neither of us was ever to hear each other’s natural voice.

“Look here!” I opened a drawer and took out three sovereigns. “Take this, anyhow. I’ve got six and I’d give you the lot, only I must keep a little money to buy some fruit and vegetables for the crew from native boats as we go through Sunda Straits.”

He shook his head.

“Take it,” I urged him, whispering desperately. “No one can tell what —”

He smiled and slapped meaningly the only pocket of the sleeping-jacket. It was not safe, certainly. But I produced a large old silk handkerchief of mine, and tying the three pieces of gold in a corner, pressed it on him. He was touched, I suppose, because he took it at last and tied it quickly round his waist under the jacket, on his bare skin.

Our eyes met; several seconds elapsed, till, our glances still mingled, I extended my hand and turned the lamp out. Then I passed through the cuddy, leaving the door of my room wide open. . . . “Steward!”

He was still lingering in the pantry in the greatness of his zeal, giving a rub-up to a plated cruet stand the last thing before going to bed. Being careful not to wake up the mate, whose room was opposite, I spoke in an undertone.

He looked round anxiously. “Sir!”

“Can you get me a little hot water from the galley?”

“I am afraid, sir, the galley fire’s been out for some time now.”

“Go and see.”

He fled up the stairs.

“Now,” I whispered, loudly, into the saloon — too loudly, perhaps, but I was afraid I couldn’t make a sound. He was by my side in an instant — the double captain slipped past the stairs — through a tiny dark passage . . . a sliding door. We were in the sail-locker, scrambling on our knees over the sails. A sudden thought struck me. I saw myself wandering barefooted,

bareheaded, the sun beating on my dark poll. I snatched off my floppy hat and tried hurriedly in the dark to ram it on my other self. He dodged and fended off silently. I wonder what he thought had come to me before he understood and suddenly desisted. Our hands met gropingly, lingered united in a steady, motionless clasp for a second. . . . No word was breathed by either of us when they separated.

I was standing quietly by the pantry door when the steward returned.

“Sorry, sir. Kettle barely warm. Shall I light the spirit-lamp?”

“Never mind.”

I came out on deck slowly. It was now a matter of conscience to shave the land as close as possible — for now he must go overboard whenever the ship was put in stays. Must! There could be no going back for him. After a moment I walked over to leeward and my heart flew into my mouth at the nearness of the land on the bow. Under any other circumstances I would not have held on a minute longer. The second mate had followed me anxiously.

I looked on till I felt I could command my voice. “She will weather,” I said then in a quiet tone. “Are you going to try that, sir?” he stammered out incredulously.

I took no notice of him and raised my tone just enough to be heard by the helmsman.

“Keep her good full.”

“Good full, sir.”

The wind fanned my cheek, the sails slept, the world was silent. The strain of watching the dark loom of the land grow bigger and denser was too much for me. I had shut my eyes — because the ship must go closer. She must! The stillness was intolerable. Were we standing still?

When I opened my eyes the second view started my heart with a thump. The black southern hill of Koh-ring seemed to hang right over the ship like a towering fragment of the everlasting night. On that enormous mass of blackness there was not a gleam to be seen, not a sound to be heard. It was gliding irresistibly toward us and yet seemed already within reach of the hand. I saw the vague figures of the watch grouped in the waist, gazing in awed silence.

“Are you going on, sir,” inquired an unsteady voice at my elbow.

I ignored it. I had to go on.

“Keep her full. Don’t check her way. That won’t do now,” I said, warningly.

“I can’t see the sails very well,” the helmsman answered me, in strange, quavering tones.

Was she close enough? Already she was, I won’t say in the shadow of the land, but in the very blackness of it, already swallowed up as it were, gone too close to be recalled, gone from me altogether.

“Give the mate a call,” I said to the young man who stood at my elbow as still as death. “And turn all hands up.”

My tone had a borrowed loudness reverberated from the height of the land. Several voices cried out together: “We are all on deck, sir.”

Then stillness again, with the great shadow gliding closer, towering higher, without a light, without a sound. Such a hush had fallen on the ship that she might have been a bark of the dead floating in slowly under the very gate of Erebus.

“My God! Where are we?”

It was the mate moaning at my elbow. He was thunderstruck, and as it were deprived of the moral support of his whiskers. He clapped his hands and absolutely cried out, “Lost!”

“Be quiet,” I said, sternly.

He lowered his tone, but I saw the shadowy gesture of his despair. “What are we doing here?”

“Looking for the land wind.”

He made as if to tear his hair, and addressed me recklessly.

“She will never get out. You have done it, sir. I knew it’d end in something like this. She will never weather, and you are too close now to stay. She’ll drift ashore before she’s round. O my God!”

I caught his arm as he was raising it to batter his poor devoted head, and shook it violently.

“She’s ashore already,” he wailed, trying to tear himself away.

“Is she? . . . Keep good full there!”

“Good full, sir,” cried the helmsman in a frightened, thin, child-like voice.

I hadn’t let go the mate’s arm and went on shaking it. “Ready about, do you hear? You go forward” — shake — “and stop there” — shake — “and hold your noise” — shake — “and see these head-sheets properly overhauled” — shake, shake — shake.

And all the time I dared not look toward the land lest my heart should fail me. I released my grip at last and he ran forward as if fleeing for dear life.

I wondered what my double there in the sail-locker thought of this commotion. He was able to hear everything — and perhaps he was able to understand why, on my conscience, it had to be thus close — no less. My first order “Hard alee!” re-echoed ominously under the towering shadow of Koh-ring as if I had shouted in a mountain gorge. And then I watched the land intently. In that smooth water and light wind it was impossible to feel the ship coming-to. No! I could not feel her. And my second self was making now ready to slip out and lower himself overboard. Perhaps he was gone already . . .?

The great black mass brooding over our very mastheads began to pivot away from the ship’s side silently. And now I forgot the secret stranger ready to depart, and remembered only that I was a total stranger to the ship. I did not know her. Would she do it? How was she to be handled?

I swung the mainyard and waited helplessly. She was perhaps stopped, and her very fate hung in the balance, with the black mass of Koh-ring like the gate of the everlasting night towering over her taffrail. What would she do now? Had she way on her yet? I stepped to the side swiftly, and on the shadowy water I could see nothing except a faint phosphorescent flash revealing the glassy smoothness of the sleeping surface. It was impossible to tell — and I had not learned yet the feel of my ship. Was she moving? What I needed was something easily seen, a piece of paper, which I could throw overboard and watch. I had nothing on me. To run down for it I didn’t dare. There was no time. All at once my strained, yearning stare distinguished a white object floating within a yard of the ship’s side. White on the black water. A phosphorescent flash passed under it. What was that thing? . . . I recognised my own floppy hat. It must have fallen off his head . . . and he didn’t bother.

Now I had what I wanted — the saving mark for my eyes. But I hardly thought of my other self, now gone from the ship, to be hidden forever from all friendly faces, to be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, with no brand of the curse on his sane forehead to stay a slaying hand . . . too proud to explain.

And I watched the hat — the expression of my sudden pity for his mere flesh. It had been meant to save his homeless head from the dangers of the sun. And now — behold — it was saving the ship, by serving me for a

mark to help out the ignorance of my strangeness. Ha! It was drifting forward, warning me just in time that the ship had gathered sternway.

“Shift the helm,” I said in a low voice to the seaman standing still like a statue.

The man’s eyes glistened wildly in the binnacle light as he jumped round to the other side and spun round the wheel.

I walked to the break of the poop. On the overshadowed deck all hands stood by the forebraces waiting for my order. The stars ahead seemed to be gliding from right to left. And all was so still in the world that I heard the quiet remark “She’s round,” passed in a tone of intense relief between two seamen.

“Let go and haul.”

The foreyards ran round with a great noise, amidst cheery cries. And now the frightful whisker’s made themselves heard giving various orders. Already the ship was drawing ahead. And I was alone with her. Nothing! no one in the world should stand now between us, throwing a shadow on the way of silent knowledge and mute affection, the perfect communion of a seaman with his first command.

Walking to the taffrail, I was in time to make out, on the very edge of a darkness thrown by a towering black mass like the very gateway of Erebus — yes, I was in time to catch an evanescent glimpse of my white hat left behind to mark the spot where the secret sharer of my cabin and of my thoughts, as though he were my second self, had lowered himself into the water to take his punishment: a free man, a proud swimmer striking out for a new destiny.

# ***FREYA OF THE SEVEN ISLES***



## CHAPTER I

One day — and that day was many years ago now — I received a long, chatty letter from one of my old chums and fellow-wanderers in Eastern waters. He was still out there, but settled down, and middle-aged; I imagined him — grown portly in figure and domestic in his habits; in short, overtaken by the fate common to all except to those who, being specially beloved by the gods, get knocked on the head early. The letter was of the reminiscent “do you remember” kind — a wistful letter of backward glances. And, amongst other things, “surely you remember old Nelson,” he wrote.

Remember old Nelson! Certainly. And to begin with, his name was not Nelson. The Englishmen in the Archipelago called him Nelson because it was more convenient, I suppose, and he never protested. It would have been mere pedantry. The true form of his name was Nielsen. He had come out East long before the advent of telegraph cables, had served English firms, had married an English girl, had been one of us for years, trading and sailing in all directions through the Eastern Archipelago, across and around, transversely, diagonally, perpendicularly, in semi-circles, and zigzags, and figures of eights, for years and years.

There was no nook or cranny of these tropical waters that the enterprise of old Nelson (or Nielsen) had not penetrated in an eminently pacific way. His tracks, if plotted out, would have covered the map of the Archipelago like a cobweb — all of it, with the sole exception of the Philippines. He would never approach that part, from a strange dread of Spaniards, or, to be exact, of the Spanish authorities. What he imagined they could do to him it is impossible to say. Perhaps at some time in his life he had read some stories of the Inquisition.

But he was in general afraid of what he called “authorities”; not the English authorities, which he trusted and respected, but the other two of that part of the world. He was not so horrified at the Dutch as he was at the Spaniards, but he was even more mistrustful of them. Very mistrustful indeed. The Dutch, in his view, were capable of “playing any ugly trick on a man” who had the misfortune to displease them. There were their laws and regulations, but they had no notion of fair play in applying them. It was really pitiable to see the anxious circumspection of his dealings with some official or other, and remember that this man had been known to stroll up to a village of cannibals in New Guinea in a quiet, fearless manner (and note



that he was always fleshy all his life, and, if I may say so, an appetising morsel) on some matter of barter that did not amount perhaps to fifty pounds in the end.

Remember old Nelson! Rather! Truly, none of us in my generation had known him in his active days. He was “retired” in our time. He had bought, or else leased, part of a small island from the Sultan of a little group called the Seven Isles, not far north from Banka. It was, I suppose, a legitimate transaction, but I have no doubt that had he been an Englishman the Dutch would have discovered a reason to fire him out without ceremony. In this connection the real form of his name stood him in good stead. In the character of an unassuming Dane whose conduct was most correct, they let him be. With all his money engaged in cultivation he was naturally careful not to give even the shadow of offence, and it was mostly for prudential reasons of that sort that he did not look with a favourable eye on Jasper Allen. But of that later. Yes! One remembered well enough old Nelson’s big, hospitable bungalow erected on a shelving point of land, his portly form, costumed generally in a white shirt and trousers (he had a confirmed habit of taking off his alpaca jacket on the slightest provocation), his round blue eyes, his straggly, sandy-white moustache sticking out all ways like the quills of the fretful porcupine, his propensity to sit down suddenly and fan himself with his hat. But there’s no use concealing the fact that what one remembered really was his daughter, who at that time came out to live with him — and be a sort of Lady of the Isles.

Freya Nelson (or Nielsen) was the kind of girl one remembers. The oval of her face was perfect; and within that fascinating frame the most happy disposition of line and feature, with an admirable complexion, gave an impression of health, strength, and what I might call unconscious self-confidence — a most pleasant and, as it were, whimsical determination. I will not compare her eyes to violets, because the real shade of their colour was peculiar, not so dark and more lustrous. They were of the wide-open kind, and looked at one frankly in every mood. I never did see the long, dark eyelashes lowered — I dare say Jasper Allen did, being a privileged person — but I have no doubt that the expression must have been charming in a complex way. She could — Jasper told me once with a touchingly imbecile exultation — sit on her hair. I dare say, I dare say. It was not for me to behold these wonders; I was content to admire the neat and becoming way she used to do it up so as not to conceal the good shape of her head.

And this wealth of hair was so glossy that when the screens of the west verandah were down, making a pleasant twilight there, or in the shade of the grove of fruit-trees near the house, it seemed to give out a golden light of its own.

She dressed generally in a white frock, with a skirt of walking length, showing her neat, laced, brown boots. If there was any colour about her costume it was just a bit of blue perhaps. No exertion seemed to distress her. I have seen her land from the dinghy after a long pull in the sun (she rowed herself about a good deal) with no quickened breath and not a single hair out of its place. In the morning when she came out on the verandah for the first look westward, Sumatra way, over the sea, she seemed as fresh and sparkling as a dewdrop. But a dewdrop is evanescent, and there was nothing evanescent about Freya. I remember her round, solid arms with the fine wrists, and her broad, capable hands with tapering fingers.

I don't know whether she was actually born at sea, but I do know that up to twelve years of age she sailed about with her parents in various ships. After old Nelson lost his wife it became a matter of serious concern for him what to do with the girl. A kind lady in Singapore, touched by his dumb grief and deplorable perplexity, offered to take charge of Freya. This arrangement lasted some six years, during which old Nelson (or Nielsen) "retired" and established himself on his island, and then it was settled (the kind lady going away to Europe) that his daughter should join him.

As the first and most important preparation for that event the old fellow ordered from his Singapore agent a Steyn and Ebhart's "upright grand." I was then commanding a little steamer in the island trade, and it fell to my lot to take it out to him, so I know something of Freya's "upright grand." We landed the enormous packing-case with difficulty on a flat piece of rock amongst some bushes, nearly knocking the bottom out of one of my boats in the course of that nautical operation. Then, all my crew assisting, engineers and firemen included, by the exercise of much anxious ingenuity, and by means of rollers, levers, tackles, and inclined planes of soaped planks, toiling in the sun like ancient Egyptians at the building of a pyramid, we got it as far as the house and up on to the edge of the west verandah — which was the actual drawing-room of the bungalow. There, the case being ripped off cautiously, the beautiful rosewood monster stood revealed at last. In reverent excitement we coaxed it against the wall and drew the first free breath of the day. It was certainly the heaviest movable

object on that islet since the creation of the world. The volume of sound it gave out in that bungalow (which acted as a sounding-board) was really astonishing. It thundered sweetly right over the sea. Jasper Allen told me that early of a morning on the deck of the Bonito (his wonderfully fast and pretty brig) he could hear Freya playing her scales quite distinctly. But the fellow always anchored foolishly close to the point, as I told him more than once. Of course, these seas are almost uniformly serene, and the Seven Isles is a particularly calm and cloudless spot as a rule. But still, now and again, an afternoon thunderstorm over Banka, or even one of these vicious thick squalls, from the distant Sumatra coast, would make a sudden sally upon the group, enveloping it for a couple of hours in whirlwinds and bluish-black murk of a particularly sinister aspect. Then, with the lowered rattan-screens rattling desperately in the wind and the bungalow shaking all over, Freya would sit down to the piano and play fierce Wagner music in the flicker of blinding flashes, with thunderbolts falling all round, enough to make your hair stand on end; and Jasper would remain stock still on the verandah, adoring the back view of her supple, swaying figure, the miraculous sheen of her fair head, the rapid hands on the keys, the white nape of her neck — while the brig, down at the point there, surged at her cables within a hundred yards of nasty, shiny, black rock-heads. Ugh!

And this, if you please, for no reason but that, when he went on board at night and laid his head on the pillow, he should feel that he was as near as he could conveniently get to his Freya slumbering in the bungalow. Did you ever! And, mind, this brig was the home to be — their home — the floating paradise which he was gradually fitting out like a yacht to sail his life blissfully away in with Freya. Imbecile! But the fellow was always taking chances.

One day, I remember I watched with Freya on the verandah the brig approaching the point from the northward. I suppose Jasper made the girl out with his long glass. What does he do? Instead of standing on for another mile and a half along the shoals and then tacking for the anchorage in a proper and seamanlike manner, he spies a gap between two disgusting old jagged reefs, puts the helm down suddenly, and shoots the brig through, with all her sails shaking and rattling, so that we could hear the racket on the verandah. I drew my breath through my teeth, I can tell you, and Freya swore. Yes! She clenched her capable fists and stamped with her pretty brown boot and said “Damn!” Then, looking at me with a little heightened

colour — not much — she remarked, “I forgot you were there,” and laughed. To be sure, to be sure. When Jasper was in sight she was not likely to remember that anybody else in the world was there. In my concern at this mad trick I couldn’t help appealing to her sympathetic common sense.

“Isn’t he a fool?” I said with feeling.

“Perfect idiot,” she agreed warmly, looking at me straight with her wide-open, earnest eyes and the dimple of a smile on her cheek.

“And that,” I pointed out to her, “just to save twenty minutes or so in meeting you.”

We heard the anchor go down, and then she became very resolute and threatening.

“Wait a bit. I’ll teach him.”

She went into her own room and shut the door, leaving me alone on the verandah with my instructions. Long before the brig’s sails were furled, Jasper came up three steps at a time, forgetting to say how d’ye do, and looking right and left eagerly.

“Where’s Freya? Wasn’t she here just now?”

When I explained to him that he was to be deprived of Miss Freya’s presence for a whole hour, “just to teach him,” he said I had put her up to it, no doubt, and that he feared he would have yet to shoot me some day. She and I were getting too thick together. Then he flung himself into a chair, and tried to talk to me about his trip. But the funny thing was that the fellow actually suffered. I could see it. His voice failed him, and he sat there dumb, looking at the door with the face of a man in pain. Fact. . . . And the next still funnier thing was that the girl calmly walked out of her room in less than ten minutes. And then I left. I mean to say that I went away to seek old Nelson (or Nielsen) on the back verandah, which was his own special nook in the distribution of that house, with the kind purpose of engaging him in conversation lest he should start roaming about and intrude unwittingly where he was not wanted just then.

He knew that the brig had arrived, though he did not know that Jasper was already with his daughter. I suppose he didn’t think it was possible in the time. A father naturally wouldn’t. He suspected that Allen was sweet on his girl; the fowls of the air and the fishes of the sea, most of the traders in the Archipelago, and all sorts and conditions of men in the town of Singapore were aware of it. But he was not capable of appreciating how far

the girl was gone on the fellow. He had an idea that Freya was too sensible to ever be gone on anybody — I mean to an unmanageable extent. No; it was not that which made him sit on the back verandah and worry himself in his unassuming manner during Jasper's visits. What he worried about were the Dutch "authorities." For it is a fact that the Dutch looked askance at the doings of Jasper Allen, owner and master of the brig Bonito. They considered him much too enterprising in his trading. I don't know that he ever did anything illegal; but it seems to me that his immense activity was repulsive to their stolid character and slow-going methods. Anyway, in old Nelson's opinion, the captain of the Bonito was a smart sailor, and a nice young man, but not a desirable acquaintance upon the whole. Somewhat compromising, you understand. On the other hand, he did not like to tell Jasper in so many words to keep away. Poor old Nelson himself was a nice fellow. I believe he would have shrunk from hurting the feelings even of a mop-headed cannibal, unless, perhaps, under very strong provocation. I mean the feelings, not the bodies. As against spears, knives, hatchets, clubs, or arrows, old Nelson had proved himself capable of taking his own part. In every other respect he had a timorous soul. So he sat on the back verandah with a concerned expression, and whenever the voices of his daughter and Jasper Allen reached him, he would blow out his cheeks and let the air escape with a dismal sound, like a much tried man.

Naturally I derided his fears which he, more or less, confided to me. He had a certain regard for my judgment, and a certain respect, not for my moral qualities, however, but for the good terms I was supposed to be on with the Dutch "authorities." I knew for a fact that his greatest bugbear, the Governor of Banka — a charming, peppery, hearty, retired rear-admiral — had a distinct liking for him. This consoling assurance which I used always to put forward, made old Nelson (or Nielsen) brighten up for a moment; but in the end he would shake his head doubtfully, as much as to say that this was all very well, but that there were depths in the Dutch official nature which no one but himself had ever fathomed. Perfectly ridiculous.

On this occasion I am speaking of, old Nelson was even fretty; for while I was trying to entertain him with a very funny and somewhat scandalous adventure which happened to a certain acquaintance of ours in Saigon, he exclaimed suddenly:

"What the devil he wants to turn up here for!"

Clearly he had not heard a word of the anecdote. And this annoyed me, because the anecdote was really good. I stared at him.

“Come, come!” I cried. “Don’t you know what Jasper Allen is turning up here for?”

This was the first open allusion I had ever made to the true state of affairs between Jasper and his daughter. He took it very calmly.

“Oh, Freya is a sensible girl!” he murmured absently, his mind’s eye obviously fixed on the “authorities.” No; Freya was no fool. He was not concerned about that. He didn’t mind it in the least. The fellow was just company for her; he amused the girl; nothing more.

When the perspicacious old chap left off mumbling, all was still in the house. The other two were amusing themselves very quietly, and no doubt very heartily. What more absorbing and less noisy amusement could they have found than to plan their future? Side by side on the verandah they must have been looking at the brig, the third party in that fascinating game. Without her there would have been no future. She was the fortune and the home, and the great free world for them. Who was it that likened a ship to a prison? May I be ignominiously hanged at a yardarm if that’s true. The white sails of that craft were the white wings — pinions, I believe, would be the more poetical style — well, the white pinions, of their soaring love. Soaring as regards Jasper. Freya, being a woman, kept a better hold of the mundane connections of this affair.

But Jasper was elevated in the true sense of the word ever since the day when, after they had been gazing at the brig in one of those decisive silences that alone establish a perfect communion between creatures gifted with speech, he proposed that she should share the ownership of that treasure with him. Indeed, he presented the brig to her altogether. But then his heart was in the brig since the day he bought her in Manilla from a certain middle-aged Peruvian, in a sober suit of black broadcloth, enigmatic and sententious, who, for all I know, might have stolen her on the South American coast, whence he said he had come over to the Philippines “for family reasons.” This “for family reasons” was distinctly good. No true caballero would care to push on inquiries after such a statement.

Indeed, Jasper was quite the caballero. The brig herself was then all black and enigmatical, and very dirty; a tarnished gem of the sea, or, rather, a neglected work of art. For he must have been an artist, the obscure builder who had put her body together on lovely lines out of the hardest

tropical timber fastened with the purest copper. Goodness only knows in what part of the world she was built. Jasper himself had not been able to ascertain much of her history from his sententious, saturnine Peruvian — if the fellow was a Peruvian, and not the devil himself in disguise, as Jasper jocularly pretended to believe. My opinion is that she was old enough to have been one of the last pirates, a slaver perhaps, or else an opium clipper of the early days, if not an opium smuggler.

However that may be, she was as sound as on the day she first took the water, sailed like a witch, steered like a little boat, and, like some fair women of adventurous life famous in history, seemed to have the secret of perpetual youth; so that there was nothing unnatural in Jasper Allen treating her like a lover. And that treatment restored the lustre of her beauty. He clothed her in many coats of the very best white paint so skilfully, carefully, artistically put on and kept clean by his badgered crew of picked Malays, that no costly enamel such as jewellers use for their work could have looked better and felt smoother to the touch. A narrow gilt moulding defined her elegant sheer as she sat on the water, eclipsing easily the professional good looks of any pleasure yacht that ever came to the East in those days. For myself, I must say I prefer a moulding of deep crimson colour on a white hull. It gives a stronger relief besides being less expensive; and I told Jasper so. But no, nothing less than the best gold-leaf would do, because no decoration could be gorgeous enough for the future abode of his Freya.

His feelings for the brig and for the girl were as indissolubly united in his heart as you may fuse two precious metals together in one crucible. And the flame was pretty hot, I can assure you. It induced in him a fierce inward restlessness both of activity and desire. Too fine in face, with a lateral wave in his chestnut hair, spare, long-limbed, with an eager glint in his steely eyes and quick, brusque movements, he made me think sometimes of a flashing sword-blade perpetually leaping out of the scabbard. It was only when he was near the girl, when he had her there to look at, that this peculiarly tense attitude was replaced by a grave devout watchfulness of her slightest movements and utterances. Her cool, resolute, capable, good-humoured self-possession seemed to steady his heart. Was it the magic of her face, of her voice, of her glances which calmed him so? Yet these were the very things one must believe which had set his imagination ablaze — if love begins in imagination. But I am no man to discuss such mysteries, and

it strikes me that we have neglected poor old Nelson inflating his cheeks in a state of worry on the back verandah.

I pointed out to him that, after all, Jasper was not a very frequent visitor. He and his brig worked hard all over the Archipelago. But all old Nelson said, and he said it uneasily, was:

“I hope Heemskirk won’t turn up here while the brig’s about.”

Getting up a scare about Heemskirk now! Heemskirk! . . . Really, one hadn’t the patience —



## CHAPTER II

For, pray, who was Heemskirk? You shall see at once how unreasonable this dread of Heemskirk. . . . Certainly, his nature was malevolent enough. That was obvious, directly you heard him laugh. Nothing gives away more a man's secret disposition than the unguarded ring of his laugh. But, bless my soul! if we were to start at every evil guffaw like a hare at every sound, we shouldn't be fit for anything but the solitude of a desert, or the seclusion of a hermitage. And even there we should have to put up with the unavoidable company of the devil.

However, the devil is a considerable personage, who has known better days and has moved high up in the hierarchy of Celestial Host; but in the hierarchy of mere earthly Dutchmen, Heemskirk, whose early days could not have been very splendid, was merely a naval officer forty years of age, of no particular connections or ability to boast of. He was commanding the *Neptun*, a little gunboat employed on dreary patrol duty up and down the Archipelago, to look after the traders. Not a very exalted position truly. I tell you, just a common middle-aged lieutenant of some twenty-five years' service and sure to be retired before long — that's all.

He never bothered his head very much as to what was going on in the Seven Isles group till he learned from some talk in Mintok or Palembang, I suppose, that there was a pretty girl living there. Curiosity, I presume, caused him to go poking around that way, and then, after he had once seen Freya, he made a practice of calling at the group whenever he found himself within half a day's steaming from it.

I don't mean to say that Heemskirk was a typical Dutch naval officer. I have seen enough of them not to fall into that absurd mistake. He had a big, clean-shaven face; great flat, brown cheeks, with a thin, hooked nose and a small, pursy mouth squeezed in between. There were a few silver threads in his black hair, and his unpleasant eyes were nearly black, too. He had a surly way of casting side glances without moving his head, which was set low on a short, round neck. A thick, round trunk in a dark undress jacket with gold shoulder-straps, was sustained by a straddly pair of thick, round legs, in white drill trousers. His round skull under a white cap looked as if it were immensely thick too, but there were brains enough in it to discover and take advantage maliciously of poor old Nelson's nervousness before everything that was invested with the merest shred of authority.

Heemskirk would land on the point and perambulate silently every part of the plantation as if the whole place belonged to him, before he went to the house. On the verandah he would take the best chair, and would stay for tiffin or dinner, just simply stay on, without taking the trouble to invite himself by so much as a word.

He ought to have been kicked, if only for his manner to Miss Freya. Had he been a naked savage, armed with spears and poisoned arrows, old Nelson (or Nielsen) would have gone for him with his bare fists. But these gold shoulder-straps — Dutch shoulder-straps at that — were enough to terrify the old fellow; so he let the beggar treat him with heavy contempt, devour his daughter with his eyes, and drink the best part of his little stock of wine.

I saw something of this, and on one occasion I tried to pass a remark on the subject. It was pitiable to see the trouble in old Nelson's round eyes. At first he cried out that the lieutenant was a good friend of his; a very good fellow. I went on staring at him pretty hard, so that at last he faltered, and had to own that, of course, Heemskirk was not a very genial person outwardly, but all the same at bottom. . . .

"I haven't yet met a genial Dutchman out here," I interrupted. "Geniality, after all, is not of much consequence, but don't you see —"

Nelson looked suddenly so frightened at what I was going to say that I hadn't the heart to go on. Of course, I was going to tell him that the fellow was after his girl. That just describes it exactly. What Heemskirk might have expected or what he thought he could do, I don't know. For all I can tell, he might have imagined himself irresistible, or have taken Freya for what she was not, on account of her lively, assured, unconstrained manner. But there it is. He was after that girl. Nelson could see it well enough. Only he preferred to ignore it. He did not want to be told of it.

"All I want is to live in peace and quietness with the Dutch authorities," he mumbled shamefacedly.

He was incurable. I was sorry for him, and I really think Miss Freya was sorry for her father, too. She restrained herself for his sake, and as everything she did she did it simply, unaffectedly, and even good humouredly. No small effort that, because in Heemskirk's attentions there was an insolent touch of scorn, hard to put up with. Dutchmen of that sort are over-bearing to their inferiors, and that officer of the king looked upon old Nelson and Freya as quite beneath him in every way.

I can't say I felt sorry for Freya. She was not the sort of girl to take anything tragically. One could feel for her and sympathise with her difficulty, but she seemed equal to any situation. It was rather admiration she extorted by her competent serenity. It was only when Jasper and Heemskirk were together at the bungalow, as it happened now and then, that she felt the strain, and even then it was not for everybody to see. My eyes alone could detect a faint shadow on the radiance of her personality. Once I could not help saying to her appreciatively:

"Upon my word you are wonderful."

She let it pass with a faint smile.

"The great thing is to prevent Jasper becoming unreasonable," she said; and I could see real concern lurking in the quiet depths of her frank eyes gazing straight at me. "You will help to keep him quiet, won't you?"

"Of course, we must keep him quiet," I declared, understanding very well the nature of her anxiety. "He's such a lunatic, too, when he's roused."

"He is!" she assented, in a soft tone; for it was our joke to speak of Jasper abusively. "But I have tamed him a bit. He's quite a good boy now."

"He would squash Heemskirk like a blackbeetle all the same," I remarked.

"Rather!" she murmured. "And that wouldn't do," she added quickly. "Imagine the state poor papa would get into. Besides, I mean to be mistress of the dear brig and sail about these seas, not go off wandering ten thousand miles away from here."

"The sooner you are on board to look after the man and the brig the better," I said seriously. "They need you to steady them both a bit. I don't think Jasper will ever get sobered down till he has carried you off from this island. You don't see him when he is away from you, as I do. He's in a state of perpetual elation which almost frightens me."

At this she smiled again, and then looked serious. For it could not be unpleasant to her to be told of her power, and she had some sense of her responsibility. She slipped away from me suddenly, because Heemskirk, with old Nelson in attendance at his elbow, was coming up the steps of the verandah. Directly his head came above the level of the floor his ill-natured black eyes shot glances here and there.

"Where's your girl, Nelson?" he asked, in a tone as if every soul in the world belonged to him. And then to me: "The goddess has flown, eh?"

Nelson's Cove — as we used to call it — was crowded with shipping that day. There was first my steamer, then the Neptun gunboat further out, and the Bonito, brig, anchored as usual so close inshore that it looked as if, with a little skill and judgment, one could shy a hat from the verandah on to her scrupulously holystoned quarter-deck. Her brasses flashed like gold, her white body-paint had a sheen like a satin robe. The rake of her varnished spars and the big yards, squared to a hair, gave her a sort of martial elegance. She was a beauty. No wonder that in possession of a craft like that and the promise of a girl like Freya, Jasper lived in a state of perpetual elation fit, perhaps, for the seventh heaven, but not exactly safe in a world like ours.

I remarked politely to Heemskirk that, with three guests in the house, Miss Freya had no doubt domestic matters to attend to. I knew, of course, that she had gone to meet Jasper at a certain cleared spot on the banks of the only stream on Nelson's little island. The commander of the Neptun gave me a dubious black look, and began to make himself at home, flinging his thick, cylindrical carcass into a rocking-chair, and unbuttoning his coat. Old Nelson sat down opposite him in a most unassuming manner, staring anxiously with his round eyes and fanning himself with his hat. I tried to make conversation to while the time away; not an easy task with a morose, enamoured Dutchman constantly looking from one door to another and answering one's advances either with a jeer or a grunt.

However, the evening passed off all right. Luckily, there is a degree of bliss too intense for elation. Jasper was quiet and concentrated silently in watching Freya. As we went on board our respective ships I offered to give his brig a tow out next morning. I did it on purpose to get him away at the earliest possible moment. So in the first cold light of the dawn we passed by the gunboat lying black and still without a sound in her at the mouth of the glassy cove. But with tropical swiftness the sun had climbed twice its diameter above the horizon before we had rounded the reef and got abreast of the point. On the biggest boulder there stood Freya, all in white and, in her helmet, like a feminine and martial statue with a rosy face, as I could see very well with my glasses. She fluttered an expressive handkerchief, and Jasper, running up the main rigging of the white and warlike brig, waved his hat in response. Shortly afterwards we parted, I to the northward and Jasper heading east with a light wind on the quarter, for Banjermassin and two other ports, I believe it was, that trip.

This peaceful occasion was the last on which I saw all these people assembled together; the charmingly fresh and resolute Freya, the innocently round-eyed old Nelson, Jasper, keen, long limbed, lean faced, admirably self-contained, in his manner, because inconceivably happy under the eyes of his Freya; all three tall, fair, and blue-eyed in varied shades, and amongst them the swarthy, arrogant, black-haired Dutchman, shorter nearly by a head, and so much thicker than any of them that he seemed to be a creature capable of inflating itself, a grotesque specimen of mankind from some other planet.

The contrast struck me all at once as we stood in the lighted verandah, after rising from the dinner-table. I was fascinated by it for the rest of the evening, and I remember the impression of something funny and ill-omened at the same time in it to this day.

### CHAPTER III

A few weeks later, coming early one morning into Singapore, from a journey to the southward, I saw the brig lying at anchor in all her usual symmetry and splendour of aspect as though she had been taken out of a glass case and put delicately into the water that very moment.

She was well out in the roadstead, but I steamed in and took up my habitual berth close in front of the town. Before we had finished breakfast a quarter-master came to tell me that Captain Allen's boat was coming our way.

His smart gig dashed alongside, and in two bounds he was up our accommodation-ladder and shaking me by the hand with his nervous grip, his eyes snapping inquisitively, for he supposed I had called at the Seven Isles group on my way. I reached into my pocket for a nicely folded little note, which he grabbed out of my hand without ceremony and carried off on the bridge to read by himself. After a decent interval I followed him up there, and found him pacing to and fro; for the nature of his emotions made him restless even in his most thoughtful moments.

He shook his head at me triumphantly.

"Well, my dear boy," he said, "I shall be counting the days now."

I understood what he meant. I knew that those young people had settled already on a runaway match without official preliminaries. This was really a logical decision. Old Nelson (or Nielsen) would never have agreed to give up Freya peaceably to this compromising Jasper. Heavens! What would the Dutch authorities say to such a match! It sounds too ridiculous for words. But there's nothing in the world more selfishly hard than a timorous man in a fright about his "little estate," as old Nelson used to call it in apologetic accents. A heart permeated by a particular sort of funk is proof against sense, feeling, and ridicule. It's a flint.

Jasper would have made his request all the same and then taken his own way; but it was Freya who decided that nothing should be said, on the ground that, "Papa would only worry himself to distraction." He was capable of making himself ill, and then she wouldn't have the heart to leave him. Here you have the sanity of feminine outlook and the frankness of feminine reasoning. And for the rest, Miss Freya could read "poor dear papa" in the way a woman reads a man — like an open book. His daughter once gone, old Nelson would not worry himself. He would raise a great outcry, and make no end of lamentable fuss, but that's not the same thing. The real agonies of indecision, the anguish of conflicting feelings would be

spared to him. And as he was too unassuming to rage, he would, after a period of lamentation, devote himself to his “little estate,” and to keeping on good terms with the authorities.

Time would do the rest. And Freya thought she could afford to wait, while ruling over her own home in the beautiful brig and over the man who loved her. This was the life for her who had learned to walk on a ship’s deck. She was a ship-child, a sea-girl if ever there was one. And of course she loved Jasper and trusted him; but there was a shade of anxiety in her pride. It is very fine and romantic to possess for your very own a finely tempered and trusty sword-blade, but whether it is the best weapon to counter with the common cudgel-play of Fate — that’s another question.

She knew that she had the more substance of the two — you needn’t try any cheap jokes, I am not talking of their weights. She was just a little anxious while he was away, and she had me who, being a tried confidant, took the liberty to whisper frequently “The sooner the better.” But there was a peculiar vein of obstinacy in Miss Freya, and her reason for delay was characteristic. “Not before my twenty-first birthday; so that there shall be no mistake in people’s minds as to me being old enough to know what I am doing.”

Jasper’s feelings were in such subjection that he had never even remonstrated against the decree. She was just splendid, whatever she did or said, and there was an end of it for him. I believe that he was subtle enough to be even flattered at bottom — at times. And then to console him he had the brig which seemed pervaded by the spirit of Freya, since whatever he did on board was always done under the supreme sanction of his love.

“Yes. I’ll soon begin to count the days,” he repeated. “Eleven months more. I’ll have to crowd three trips into that.”

“Mind you don’t come to grief trying to do too much,” I admonished him. But he dismissed my caution with a laugh and an elated gesture. Pooh! Nothing, nothing could happen to the brig, he cried, as if the flame of his heart could light up the dark nights of uncharted seas, and the image of Freya serve for an unerring beacon amongst hidden shoals; as if the winds had to wait on his future, the stars fight for it in their courses; as if the magic of his passion had the power to float a ship on a drop of dew or sail her through the eye of a needle — simply because it was her magnificent lot to be the servant of a love so full of grace as to make all the ways of the earth safe, resplendent, and easy.

“I suppose,” I said, after he had finished laughing at my innocent enough remark, “I suppose you will be off to-day.”

That was what he meant to do. He had not gone at daylight only because he expected me to come in.

“And only fancy what has happened yesterday,” he went on. “My mate left me suddenly. Had to. And as there’s nobody to be found at a short notice I am going to take Schultz with me. The notorious Schultz! Why don’t you jump out of your skin? I tell you I went and unearthed Schultz late last evening, after no end of trouble. ‘I am your man, captain,’ he says, in that wonderful voice of his, ‘but I am sorry to confess I have practically no clothes to my back. I have had to sell all my wardrobe to get a little food from day to day.’ What a voice that man has got. Talk about moving stones! But people seem to get used to it. I had never seen him before, and, upon my word, I felt suddenly tears rising to my eyes. Luckily it was dusk. He was sitting very quiet under a tree in a native compound as thin as a lath, and when I peered down at him all he had on was an old cotton singlet and a pair of ragged pyjamas. I bought him six white suits and two pairs of canvas shoes. Can’t clear the ship without a mate. Must have somebody. I am going on shore presently to sign him on, and I shall take him with me as I go back on board to get under way. Now, I am a lunatic — am I not? Mad, of course. Come on! Lay it on thick. Let yourself go. I like to see you get excited.”

He so evidently expected me to scold that I took especial pleasure in exaggerating the calmness of my attitude.

“The worst that can be brought up against Schultz,” I began, folding my arms and speaking dispassionately, “is an awkward habit of stealing the stores of every ship he has ever been in. He will do it. That’s really all that’s wrong. I don’t credit absolutely that story Captain Robinson tells of Schultz conspiring in Chantabun with some ruffians in a Chinese junk to steal the anchor off the starboard bow of the Bohemian Girl schooner. Robinson’s story is too ingenious altogether. That other tale of the engineers of the Nan-Shan finding Schultz at midnight in the engine-room busy hammering at the brass bearings to carry them off for sale on shore seems to me more authentic. Apart from this little weakness, let me tell you that Schultz is a smarter sailor than many who never took a drop of drink in their lives, and perhaps no worse morally than some men you and I know who have never stolen the value of a penny. He may not be a desirable



person to have on board one's ship, but since you have no choice he may be made to do, I believe. The important thing is to understand his psychology. Don't give him any money till you have done with him. Not a cent, if he begs ever so. For as sure as Fate the moment you give him any money he will begin to steal. Just remember that."

I enjoyed Jasper's incredulous surprise.

"The devil he will!" he cried. "What on earth for? Aren't you trying to pull my leg, old boy?"

"No. I'm not. You must understand Schultz's psychology. He's neither a loafer nor a cadger. He's not likely to wander about looking for somebody to stand him drinks. But suppose he goes on shore with five dollars, or fifty for that matter, in his pocket? After the third or fourth glass he becomes fuddled and charitable. He either drops his money all over the place, or else distributes the lot around; gives it to any one who will take it. Then it occurs to him that the night is young yet, and that he may require a good many more drinks for himself and his friends before morning. So he starts off cheerfully for his ship. His legs never get affected nor his head either in the usual way. He gets aboard and simply grabs the first thing that seems to him suitable — the cabin lamp, a coil of rope, a bag of biscuits, a drum of oil — and converts it into money without thinking twice about it. This is the process and no other. You have only to look out that he doesn't get a start. That's all."

"Confound his psychology," muttered Jasper. "But a man with a voice like his is fit to talk to the angels. Is he incurable do you think?"

I said that I thought so. Nobody had prosecuted him yet, but no one would employ him any longer. His end would be, I feared, to starve in some hole or other.

"Ah, well," reflected Jasper. "The Bonito isn't trading to any ports of civilisation. That'll make it easier for him to keep straight."

That was true. The brig's business was on uncivilised coasts, with obscure rajahs dwelling in nearly unknown bays; with native settlements up mysterious rivers opening their sombre, forest-lined estuaries among a welter of pale green reefs and dazzling sand-banks, in lonely straits of calm blue water all aglitter with sunshine. Alone, far from the beaten tracks, she glided, all white, round dark, frowning headlands, stole out, silent like a ghost, from behind points of land stretching out all black in the moonlight; or lay hove-to, like a sleeping sea-bird, under the shadow of some nameless

mountain waiting for a signal. She would be glimpsed suddenly on misty, squally days dashing disdainfully aside the short aggressive waves of the Java Sea; or be seen far, far away, a tiny dazzling white speck flying across the brooding purple masses of thunderclouds piled up on the horizon. Sometimes, on the rare mail tracks, where civilisation brushes against wild mystery, when the naive passengers crowding along the rail exclaimed, pointing at her with interest: "Oh, here's a yacht!" the Dutch captain, with a hostile glance, would grunt contemptuously: "Yacht! No! That's only English Jasper. A pedlar — "

"A good seaman you say," ejaculated Jasper, still in the matter of the hopeless Schultz with the wonderfully touching voice.

"First rate. Ask any one. Quite worth having — only impossible," I declared.

"He shall have his chance to reform in the brig," said Jasper, with a laugh. "There will be no temptations either to drink or steal where I am going to this time."

I didn't press him for anything more definite on that point. In fact, intimate as we were, I had a pretty clear notion of the general run of his business.

But as we are going ashore in his gig he asked suddenly: "By the way, do you know where Heemskirk is?"

I eyed him covertly, and was reassured. He had asked the question, not as a lover, but as a trader. I told him that I had heard in Palembang that the *Neptun* was on duty down about Flores and Sumbawa. Quite out of his way. He expressed his satisfaction.

"You know," he went on, "that fellow, when he gets on the Borneo coast, amuses himself by knocking down my beacons. I have had to put up a few to help me in and out of the rivers. Early this year a Celebes trader becalmed in a prau was watching him at it. He steamed the gunboat full tilt at two of them, one after another, smashing them to pieces, and then lowered a boat on purpose to pull out a third, which I had a lot of trouble six months ago to stick up in the middle of a mudflat for a tide mark. Did you ever hear of anything more provoking — eh?"

"I wouldn't quarrel with the beggar," I observed casually, yet disliking that piece of news strongly. "It isn't worth while."

"I quarrel?" cried Jasper. "I don't want to quarrel. I don't want to hurt a single hair of his ugly head. My dear fellow, when I think of Freya's

twenty-first birthday, all the world's my friend, Heemskirk included. It's a nasty, spiteful amusement, all the same."

We parted rather hurriedly on the quay, each of us having his own pressing business to attend to. I would have been very much cut up had I known that this hurried grasp of the hand with "So long, old boy. Good luck to you!" was the last of our partings.

On his return to the Straits I was away, and he was gone again before I got back. He was trying to achieve three trips before Freya's twenty-first birthday. At Nelson's Cove I missed him again by only a couple of days. Freya and I talked of "that lunatic" and "perfect idiot" with great delight and infinite appreciation. She was very radiant, with a more pronounced gaiety, notwithstanding that she had just parted from Jasper. But this was to be their last separation.

"Do get aboard as soon as you can, Miss Freya," I entreated.

She looked me straight in the face, her colour a little heightened and with a sort of solemn ardour — if there was a little catch in her voice.

"The very next day."

Ah, yes! The very next day after her twenty-first birthday. I was pleased at this hint of deep feeling. It was as if she had grown impatient at last of the self-imposed delay. I supposed that Jasper's recent visit had told heavily.

"That's right," I said approvingly. "I shall be much easier in my mind when I know you have taken charge of that lunatic. Don't you lose a minute. He, of course, will be on time — unless heavens fall."

"Yes. Unless — " she repeated in a thoughtful whisper, raising her eyes to the evening sky without a speck of cloud anywhere. Silent for a time, we let our eyes wander over the waters below, looking mysteriously still in the twilight, as if trustfully composed for a long, long dream in the warm, tropical night. And the peace all round us seemed without limits and without end.

And then we began again to talk Jasper over in our usual strain. We agreed that he was too reckless in many ways. Luckily, the brig was equal to the situation. Nothing apparently was too much for her. A perfect darling of a ship, said Miss Freya. She and her father had spent an afternoon on board. Jasper had given them some tea. Papa was grumpy. . . . I had a vision of old Nelson under the brig's snowy awnings, nursing his

unassuming vexation, and fanning himself with his hat. A comedy father. . . . As a new instance of Jasper's lunacy, I was told that he was distressed at his inability to have solid silver handles fitted to all the cabin doors. "As if I would have let him!" commented Miss Freya, with amused indignation. Incidentally, I learned also that Schultz, the nautical kleptomaniac with the pathetic voice, was still hanging on to his job, with Miss Freya's approval. Jasper had confided to the lady of his heart his purpose of straightening out the fellow's psychology. Yes, indeed. All the world was his friend because it breathed the same air with Freya.

Somehow or other, I brought Heemskirk's name into conversation, and, to my great surprise, startled Miss Freya. Her eyes expressed something like distress, while she bit her lip as if to contain an explosion of laughter. Oh! Yes. Heemskirk was at the bungalow at the same time with Jasper, but he arrived the day after. He left the same day as the brig, but a few hours later.

"What a nuisance he must have been to you two," I said feelingly.

Her eyes flashed at me a sort of frightened merriment, and suddenly she exploded into a clear burst of laughter. "Ha, ha, ha!"

I echoed it heartily, but not with the game charming tone: "Ha, ha, ha! . . . Isn't he grotesque? Ha, ha, ha!" And the ludicrousness of old Nelson's inanely fierce round eyes in association with his conciliatory manner to the lieutenant presenting itself to my mind brought on another fit.

"He looks," I spluttered, "he looks — Ha, ha, ha! — amongst you three . . . like an unhappy black-beetle. Ha, ha, ha!"

She gave out another ringing peal, ran off into her own room, and slammed the door behind her, leaving me profoundly astounded. I stopped laughing at once.

"What's the joke?" asked old Nelson's voice, half way down the steps.

He came up, sat down, and blew out his cheeks, looking inexpressibly fatuous. But I didn't want to laugh any more. And what on earth, I asked myself, have we been laughing at in this uncontrollable fashion. I felt suddenly depressed.

Oh, yes. Freya had started it. The girl's overwrought, I thought. And really one couldn't wonder at it.

I had no answer to old Nelson's question, but he was too aggrieved at Jasper's visit to think of anything else. He as good as asked me whether I wouldn't undertake to hint to Jasper that he was not wanted at the Seven

Isles group. I declared that it was not necessary. From certain circumstances which had come to my knowledge lately, I had reason to think that he would not be much troubled by Jasper Allen in the future.

He emitted an earnest "Thank God!" which nearly set me laughing again, but he did not brighten up proportionately. It seemed Heemskirk had taken special pains to make himself disagreeable. The lieutenant had frightened old Nelson very much by expressing a sinister wonder at the Government permitting a white man to settle down in that part at all. "It is against our declared policy," he had remarked. He had also charged him with being in reality no better than an Englishman. He had even tried to pick a quarrel with him for not learning to speak Dutch.

"I told him I was too old to learn now," sighed out old Nelson (or Nielsen) dismally. "He said I ought to have learned Dutch long before. I had been making my living in Dutch dependencies. It was disgraceful of me not to speak Dutch, he said. He was as savage with me as if I had been a Chinaman."

It was plain he had been viciously badgered. He did not mention how many bottles of his best claret he had offered up on the altar of conciliation. It must have been a generous libation. But old Nelson (or Nielsen) was really hospitable. He didn't mind that; and I only regretted that this virtue should be lavished on the lieutenant-commander of the Neptun. I longed to tell him that in all probability he would be relieved from Heemskirk's visitations also. I did not do so only from the fear (absurd, I admit) of arousing some sort of suspicion in his mind. As if with this guileless comedy father such a thing were possible!

Strangely enough, the last words on the subject of Heemskirk were spoken by Freya, and in that very sense. The lieutenant was turning up persistently in old Nelson's conversation at dinner. At last I muttered a half audible "Damn the lieutenant." I could see that the girl was getting exasperated, too.

"And he wasn't well at all — was he, Freya?" old Nelson went on moaning. "Perhaps it was that which made him so snappish, hey, Freya? He looked very bad when he left us so suddenly. His liver must be in a bad state, too."

"Oh, he will end by getting over it," said Freya impatiently. "And do leave off worrying about him, papa. Very likely you won't see much of him for a long time to come."

The look she gave me in exchange for my discreet smile had no hidden mirth in it. Her eyes seemed hollowed, her face gone wan in a couple of hours. We had been laughing too much. Overwrought! Overwrought by the approach of the decisive moment. After all, sincere, courageous, and self-reliant as she was, she must have felt both the passion and the compunction of her resolve. The very strength of love which had carried her up to that point must have put her under a great moral strain, in which there might have been a little simple remorse, too. For she was honest — and there, across the table, sat poor old Nelson (or Nielsen) staring at her, round-eyed and so pathetically comic in his fierce aspect as to touch the most lightsome heart.

He retired early to his room to soothe himself for a night's rest by perusing his account-books. We two remained on the verandah for another hour or so, but we exchanged only languid phrases on things without importance, as though we had been emotionally jaded by our long day's talk on the only momentous subject. And yet there was something she might have told a friend. But she didn't. We parted silently. She distrusted my masculine lack of common sense, perhaps. . . . O! Freya!

Going down the precipitous path to the landing-stage, I was confronted in the shadows of boulders and bushes by a draped feminine figure whose appearance startled me at first. It glided into my way suddenly from behind a piece of rock. But in a moment it occurred to me that it could be no one else but Freya's maid, a half-caste Malacca Portuguese. One caught fleeting glimpses of her olive face and dazzling white teeth about the house. I had observed her at times from a distance, as she sat within call under the shade of some fruit trees, brushing and plaiting her long raven locks. It seemed to be the principal occupation of her leisure hours. We had often exchanged nods and smiles — and a few words, too. She was a pretty creature. And once I had watched her approvingly make funny and expressive grimaces behind Heemskirk's back. I understood (from Jasper) that she was in the secret, like a comedy camerista. She was to accompany Freya on her irregular way to matrimony and "ever after" happiness. Why should she be roaming by night near the cove — unless on some love affair of her own — I asked myself. But there was nobody suitable within the Seven Isles group, as far as I knew. It flashed upon me that it was myself she had been lying in wait for.

She hesitated, muffled from head to foot, shadowy and bashful. I advanced another pace, and how I felt is nobody's business.

"What is it?" I asked, very low.

"Nobody knows I am here," she whispered.

"And nobody can see us," I whispered back.

The murmur of words "I've been so frightened" reached me. Just then forty feet above our head, from the yet lighted verandah, unexpected and startling, Freya's voice rang out in a clear, imperious call:

"Antonia!"

With a stifled exclamation, the hesitating girl vanished out of the path. A bush near by rustled; then silence. I waited wondering. The lights on the verandah went out. I waited a while longer then continued down the path to my boat, wondering more than ever.

I remember the occurrences of that visit especially, because this was the last time I saw the Nelson bungalow. On arriving at the Straits I found cable messages which made it necessary for me to throw up my employment at a moment's notice and go home at once. I had a desperate scramble to catch the mailboat which was due to leave next day, but I found time to write two short notes, one to Freya, the other to Jasper. Later on I wrote at length, this time to Allen alone. I got no answer. I hunted up then his brother, or, rather, half-brother, a solicitor in the city, a sallow, calm, little man who looked at me over his spectacles thoughtfully.

Jasper was the only child of his father's second marriage, a transaction which had failed to commend itself to the first, grown-up family.

"You haven't heard for ages," I repeated, with secret annoyance. "May I ask what 'for ages' means in this connection?"

"It means that I don't care whether I ever hear from him or not," retorted the little man of law, turning nasty suddenly.

I could not blame Jasper for not wasting his time in correspondence with such an outrageous relative. But why didn't he write to me — a decent sort of friend, after all; enough of a friend to find for his silence the excuse of forgetfulness natural to a state of transcendental bliss? I waited indulgently, but nothing ever came. And the East seemed to drop out of my life without an echo, like a stone falling into a well of prodigious depth.

## CHAPTER IV

I suppose praiseworthy motives are a sufficient justification almost for anything. What could be more commendable in the abstract than a girl's determination that "poor papa" should not be worried, and her anxiety that the man of her choice should be kept by any means from every occasion of doing something rash, something which might endanger the whole scheme of their happiness?

Nothing could be more tender and more prudent. We must also remember the girl's self-reliant temperament, and the general unwillingness of women — I mean women of sense — to make a fuss over matters of that sort.

As has been said already, Heemskirk turned up some time after Jasper's arrival at Nelson's Cove. The sight of the brig lying right under the bungalow was very offensive to him. He did not fly ashore before his anchor touched the ground as Jasper used to do. On the contrary, he hung about his quarter-deck mumbling to himself; and when he ordered his boat to be manned it was in an angry voice. Freya's existence, which lifted Jasper out of himself into a blissful elation, was for Heemskirk a cause of secret torment, of hours of exasperated brooding.

While passing the brig he hailed her harshly and asked if the master was on board. Schultz, smart and neat in a spotless white suit, leaned over the taffrail, finding the question somewhat amusing. He looked humorously down into Heemskirk's boat, and answered, in the most amiable modulations of his beautiful voice: "Captain Allen is up at the house, sir." But his expression changed suddenly at the savage growl: "What the devil are you grinning at?" which acknowledged that information.

He watched Heemskirk land and, instead of going to the house, stride away by another path into the grounds.

The desire-tormented Dutchman found old Nelson (or Nielsen) at his drying-sheds, very busy superintending the manipulation of his tobacco crop, which, though small, was of excellent quality, and enjoying himself thoroughly. But Heemskirk soon put a stop to this simple happiness. He sat down by the old chap, and by the sort of talk which he knew was best calculated for the purpose, reduced him before long to a state of concealed and perspiring nervousness. It was a horrid talk of "authorities," and old Nelson tried to defend himself. If he dealt with English traders it was because he had to dispose of his produce somehow. He was as conciliatory



as he knew how to be, and this very thing seemed to excite Heemskirk, who had worked himself up into a heavily breathing state of passion.

“And the worst of them all is that Allen,” he growled. “Your particular friend — eh? You have let in a lot of these Englishmen into this part. You ought never to have been allowed to settle here. Never. What’s he doing here now?”

Old Nelson (or Nielsen), becoming very agitated, declared that Jasper Allen was no particular friend of his. No friend at all — at all. He had bought three tons of rice from him to feed his workpeople on. What sort of evidence of friendship was that? Heemskirk burst out at last with the thought that had been gnawing at his vitals:

“Yes. Sell three tons of rice and flirt three days with that girl of yours. I am speaking to you as a friend, Nielsen. This won’t do. You are only on sufferance here.”

Old Nelson was taken aback at first, but recovered pretty quickly. Won’t do! Certainly! Of course, it wouldn’t do! The last man in the world. But his girl didn’t care for the fellow, and was too sensible to fall in love with any one. He was very earnest in impressing on Heemskirk his own feeling of absolute security. And the lieutenant, casting doubting glances sideways, was yet willing to believe him.

“Much you know about it,” he grunted nevertheless.

“But I do know,” insisted old Nelson, with the greater desperation because he wanted to resist the doubts arising in his own mind. “My own daughter! In my own house, and I not to know! Come! It would be a good joke, lieutenant.”

“They seem to be carrying on considerably,” remarked Heemskirk moodily. “I suppose they are together now,” he added, feeling a pang which changed what he meant for a mocking smile into a strange grimace.

The harassed Nelson shook his hand at him. He was at bottom shocked at this insistence, and was even beginning to feel annoyed at the absurdity of it.

“Pooh! Pooh! I’ll tell you what, lieutenant: you go to the house and have a drop of gin-and-bitters before dinner. Ask for Freya. I must see the last of this tobacco put away for the night, but I’ll be along presently.”

Heemskirk was not insensible to this suggestion. It answered to his secret longing, which was not a longing for drink, however. Old Nelson

shouted solicitously after his broad back a recommendation to make himself comfortable, and that there was a box of cheroots on the verandah.

It was the west verandah that old Nelson meant, the one which was the living-room of the house, and had split-rattan screens of the very finest quality. The east verandah, sacred to his own privacy, puffing out of cheeks, and other signs of perplexed thinking, was fitted with stout blinds of sailcloth. The north verandah was not a verandah at all, really. It was more like a long balcony. It did not communicate with the other two, and could only be approached by a passage inside the house. Thus it had a privacy which made it a convenient place for a maiden's meditations without words, and also for the discourses, apparently without sense, which, passing between a young man and a maid, become pregnant with a diversity of transcendental meanings.

This north verandah was embowered with climbing plants. Freya, whose room opened out on it, had furnished it as a sort of boudoir for herself, with a few cane chairs and a sofa of the same kind. On this sofa she and Jasper sat as close together as is possible in this imperfect world where neither can a body be in two places at once nor yet two bodies can be in one place at the same time. They had been sitting together all the afternoon, and I won't say that their talk had been without sense. Loving him with a little judicious anxiety lest in his elation he should break his heart over some mishap, Freya naturally would talk to him soberly. He, nervous and brusque when away from her, appeared always as if overcome by her visibility, by the great wonder of being palpably loved. An old man's child, having lost his mother early, thrown out to sea out of the way while very young, he had not much experience of tenderness of any kind.

In this private, foliage-embowered verandah, and at this late hour of the afternoon, he bent down a little, and, possessing himself of Freya's hands, was kissing them one after another, while she smiled and looked down at his head with the eyes of approving compassion. At that same moment Heemskirk was approaching the house from the north.

Antonia was on the watch on that side. But she did not keep a very good watch. The sun was setting; she knew that her young mistress and the captain of the Bonito were about to separate. She was walking to and fro in the dusky grove with a flower in her hair, and singing softly to herself, when suddenly, within a foot of her, the lieutenant appeared from behind a tree. She bounded aside like a startled fawn, but Heemskirk, with a lucid

comprehension of what she was there for, pounced upon her, and, catching her arm, clapped his other thick hand over her mouth.

“If you try to make a noise I’ll twist your neck!”

This ferocious figure of speech terrified the girl sufficiently. Heemskirk had seen plainly enough on the verandah Freya’s golden head with another head very close to it. He dragged the unresisting maid with him by a circuitous way into the compound, where he dismissed her with a vicious push in the direction of the cluster of bamboo huts for the servants.

She was very much like the faithful camerista of Italian comedy, but in her terror she bolted away without a sound from that thick, short, black-eyed man with a cruel grip of fingers like a vice. Quaking all over at a distance, extremely scared and half inclined to laugh, she saw him enter the house at the back.

The interior of the bungalow was divided by two passages crossing each other in the middle. At that point Heemskirk, by turning his head slightly to the left as he passed, secured the evidence of “carrying on” so irreconcilable with old Nelson’s assurances that it made him stagger, with a rush of blood to his head. Two white figures, distinct against the light, stood in an unmistakable attitude. Freya’s arms were round Jasper’s neck. Their faces were characteristically superimposed on each other, and Heemskirk went on, his throat choked with a sudden rising of curses, till on the west verandah he stumbled blindly against a chair and then dropped into another as though his legs had been swept from under him. He had indulged too long in the habit of appropriating Freya to himself in his thoughts. “Is that how you entertain your visitors — you . . .” he thought, so outraged that he could not find a sufficiently degrading epithet.

Freya struggled a little and threw her head back.

“Somebody has come in,” she whispered. Jasper, holding her clasped closely to his breast, and looking down into her face, suggested casually:

“Your father.”

Freya tried to disengage herself, but she had not the heart absolutely to push him away with her hands.

“I believe it’s Heemskirk,” she breathed out at him.

He, plunging into her eyes in a quiet rapture, was provoked to a vague smile by the sound of the name.

“The ass is always knocking down my beacons outside the river,” he murmured. He attached no other meaning to Heemskirk’s existence; but

Freya was asking herself whether the lieutenant had seen them.

“Let me go, kid,” she ordered in a peremptory whisper. Jasper obeyed, and, stepping back at once, continued his contemplation of her face under another angle. “I must go and see,” she said to herself anxiously.

She instructed him hurriedly to wait a moment after she was gone and then to slip on to the back verandah and get a quiet smoke before he showed himself.

“Don’t stay late this evening,” was her last recommendation before she left him.

Then Freya came out on the west verandah with her light, rapid step. While going through the doorway she managed to shake down the folds of the looped-up curtains at the end of the passage so as to cover Jasper’s retreat from the bower. Directly she appeared Heemskirk jumped up as if to fly at her. She paused and he made her an exaggerated low bow.

It irritated Freya.

“Oh! It’s you, Mr. Heemskirk. How do you do?” She spoke in her usual tone. Her face was not plainly visible to him in the dusk of the deep verandah. He dared not trust himself to speak, his rage at what he had seen was so great. And when she added with serenity: “Papa will be coming in before long,” he called her horrid names silently, to himself, before he spoke with contorted lips.

“I have seen your father already. We had a talk in the sheds. He told me some very interesting things. Oh, very — ”

Freya sat down. She thought: “He has seen us, for certain.” She was not ashamed. What she was afraid of was some foolish or awkward complication. But she could not conceive how much her person had been appropriated by Heemskirk (in his thoughts). She tried to be conversational.

“You are coming now from Palembang, I suppose?”

“Eh? What? Oh, yes! I come from Palembang. Ha, ha, ha! You know what your father said? He said he was afraid you were having a very dull time of it here.”

“And I suppose you are going to cruise in the Moluccas,” continued Freya, who wanted to impart some useful information to Jasper if possible. At the same time she was always glad to know that those two men were a few hundred miles apart when not under her eye.

Heemskirk growled angrily.

“Yes. Moluccas,” glaring in the direction of her shadowy figure. “Your father thinks it’s very quiet for you here. I tell you what, Miss Freya. There isn’t such a quiet spot on earth that a woman can’t find an opportunity of making a fool of somebody.”

Freya thought: “I mustn’t let him provoke me.” Presently the Tamil boy, who was Nelson’s head servant, came in with the lights. She addressed him at once with voluble directions where to put the lamps, told him to bring the tray with the gin and bitters, and to send Antonia into the house.

“I will have to leave you to yourself, Mr. Heemskirk, for a while,” she said.

And she went to her room to put on another frock. She made a quick change of it because she wished to be on the verandah before her father and the lieutenant met again. She relied on herself to regulate that evening’s intercourse between these two. But Antonia, still scared and hysterical, exhibited a bruise on her arm which roused Freya’s indignation.

“He jumped on me out of the bush like a tiger,” said the girl, laughing nervously with frightened eyes.

“The brute!” thought Freya. “He meant to spy on us, then.” She was enraged, but the recollection of the thick Dutchman in white trousers wide at the hips and narrow at the ankles, with his shoulder-straps and black bullet head, glaring at her in the light of the lamps, was so repulsively comical that she could not help a smiling grimace. Then she became anxious. The absurdities of three men were forcing this anxiety upon her: Jasper’s impetuosity, her father’s fears, Heemskirk’s infatuation. She was very tender to the first two, and she made up her mind to display all her feminine diplomacy. All this, she said to herself, will be over and done with before very long now.

Heemskirk on the verandah, lolling in a chair, his legs extended and his white cap reposing on his stomach, was lashing himself into a fury of an atrocious character altogether incomprehensible to a girl like Freya. His chin was resting on his chest, his eyes gazed stonily at his shoes. Freya examined him from behind the curtain. He didn’t stir. He was ridiculous. But this absolute stillness was impressive. She stole back along the passage to the east verandah, where Jasper was sitting quietly in the dark, doing what he was told, like a good boy.

“Psst,” she hissed. He was by her side in a moment.

“Yes. What is it?” he murmured.

“It’s that beetle,” she whispered uneasily. Under the impression of Heemskirk’s sinister immobility she had half a mind to let Jasper know that they had been seen. But she was by no means certain that Heemskirk would tell her father — and at any rate not that evening. She concluded rapidly that the safest thing would be to get Jasper out of the way as soon as possible.

“What has he been doing?” asked Jasper in a calm undertone.

“Oh, nothing! Nothing. He sits there looking cross. But you know how he’s always worrying papa.”

“Your father’s quite unreasonable,” pronounced Jasper judicially.

“I don’t know,” she said in a doubtful tone. Something of old Nelson’s dread of the authorities had rubbed off on the girl since she had to live with it day after day. “I don’t know. Papa’s afraid of being reduced to beggary, as he says, in his old days. Look here, kid, you had better clear out tomorrow, first thing.”

Jasper had hoped for another afternoon with Freya, an afternoon of quiet felicity with the girl by his side and his eyes on his brig, anticipating a blissful future. His silence was eloquent with disappointment, and Freya understood it very well. She, too, was disappointed. But it was her business to be sensible.

“We shan’t have a moment to ourselves with that beetle creeping round the house,” she argued in a low, hurried voice. “So what’s the good of your staying? And he won’t go while the brig’s here. You know he won’t.”

“He ought to be reported for loitering,” murmured Jasper with a vexed little laugh.

“Mind you get under way at daylight,” recommended Freya under her breath.

He detained her after the manner of lovers. She expostulated without struggling because it was hard for her to repulse him. He whispered into her ear while he put his arms round her.

“Next time we two meet, next time I hold you like this, it shall be on board. You and I, in the brig — all the world, all the life — ” And then he flashed out: “I wonder I can wait! I feel as if I must carry you off now, at once. I could run with you in my hands — down the path — without stumbling — without touching the earth — ”

She was still. She listened to the passion in his voice. She was saying to herself that if she were to whisper the faintest yes, if she were but to sigh

lightly her consent, he would do it. He was capable of doing it — without touching the earth. She closed her eyes and smiled in the dark, abandoning herself in a delightful giddiness, for an instant, to his encircling arm. But before he could be tempted to tighten his grasp she was out of it, a foot away from him and in full possession of herself.

That was the steady Freya. She was touched by the deep sigh which floated up to her from the white figure of Jasper, who did not stir.

“You are a mad kid,” she said tremulously. Then with a change of tone: “No one could carry me off. Not even you. I am not the sort of girl that gets carried off.” His white form seemed to shrink a little before the force of that assertion and she relented. “Isn’t it enough for you to know that you have — that you have carried me away?” she added in a tender tone.

He murmured an endearing word, and she continued:

“I’ve promised you — I’ve said I would come — and I shall come of my own free will. You shall wait for me on board. I shall get up the side — by myself, and walk up to you on the deck and say: ‘Here I am, kid.’ And then — and then I shall be carried off. But it will be no man who will carry me off — it will be the brig, your brig — our brig. . . . I love the beauty!”

She heard an inarticulate sound, something like a moan wrung out by pain or delight, and glided away. There was that other man on the other verandah, that dark, surly Dutchman who could make trouble between Jasper and her father, bring about a quarrel, ugly words, and perhaps a physical collision. What a horrible situation! But, even putting aside that awful extremity, she shrank from having to live for some three months with a wretched, tormented, angry, distracted, absurd man. And when the day came, the day and the hour, what should she do if her father tried to detain her by main force — as was, after all, possible? Could she actually struggle with him hand to hand? But it was of lamentations and entreaties that she was really afraid. Could she withstand them? What an odious, cruel, ridiculous position would that be!

“But it won’t be. He’ll say nothing,” she thought as she came out quickly on the west verandah, and, seeing that Heemskirk did not move, sat down on a chair near the doorway and kept her eyes on him. The outraged lieutenant had not changed his attitude; only his cap had fallen off his stomach and was lying on the floor. His thick black eyebrows were knitted by a frown, while he looked at her out of the corners of his eyes. And their sideways glance in conjunction with the hooked nose, the whole bulky,

ungainly, sprawling person, struck Freya as so comically moody that, inwardly discomposed as she was, she could not help smiling. She did her best to give that smile a conciliatory character. She did not want to provoke Heemskirk needlessly.

And the lieutenant, perceiving that smile, was mollified. It never entered his head that his outward appearance, a naval officer, in uniform, could appear ridiculous to that girl of no position — the daughter of old Nielsen. The recollection of her arms round Jasper's neck still irritated and excited him. "The hussy!" he thought. "Smiling — eh? That's how you are amusing yourself. Fooling your father finely, aren't you? You have a taste for that sort of fun — have you? Well, we shall see — " He did not alter his position, but on his pursed-up lips there also appeared a smile of surly and ill-omened amusement, while his eyes returned to the contemplation of his boots.

Freya felt hot with indignation. She sat radiantly fair in the lamplight, her strong, well-shaped hands lying one on top of the other in her lap. . . "Odious creature," she thought. Her face coloured with sudden anger. "You have scared my maid out of her senses," she said aloud. "What possessed you?"

He was thinking so deeply of her that the sound of her voice, pronouncing these unexpected words, startled him extremely. He jerked up his head and looked so bewildered that Freya insisted impatiently:

"I mean Antonia. You have bruised her arm. What did you do it for?"

"Do you want to quarrel with me?" he asked thickly, with a sort of amazement. He blinked like an owl. He was funny. Freya, like all women, had a keen sense of the ridiculous in outward appearance.

"Well, no; I don't think I do." She could not help herself. She laughed outright, a clear, nervous laugh in which Heemskirk joined suddenly with a harsh "Ha, ha, ha!"

Voices and footsteps were heard in the passage, and Jasper, with old Nelson, came out. Old Nelson looked at his daughter approvingly, for he liked the lieutenant to be kept in good humour. And he also joined sympathetically in the laugh. "Now, lieutenant, we shall have some dinner," he said, rubbing his hands cheerily. Jasper had gone straight to the balustrade. The sky was full of stars, and in the blue velvety night the cove below had a denser blackness, in which the riding-lights of the brig and of the gunboat glimmered redly, like suspended sparks. "Next time this



riding-light glimmers down there, I'll be waiting for her on the quarter-deck to come and say 'Here I am,'" Jasper thought; and his heart seemed to grow bigger in his chest, dilated by an oppressive happiness that nearly wrung out a cry from him. There was no wind. Not a leaf below him stirred, and even the sea was but a still uncomplaining shadow. Far away on the unclouded sky the pale lightning, the heat-lightning of the tropics, played tremulously amongst the low stars in short, faint, mysteriously consecutive flashes, like incomprehensible signals from some distant planet.

The dinner passed off quietly. Freya sat facing her father, calm but pale. Heemskirk affected to talk only to old Nelson. Jasper's behaviour was exemplary. He kept his eyes under control, basking in the sense of Freya's nearness, as people bask in the sun without looking up to heaven. And very soon after dinner was over, mindful of his instructions, he declared that it was time for him to go on board his ship.

Heemskirk did not look up. Ensconced in the rocking-chair, and puffing at a cheroot, he had the air of meditating surlily over some odious outbreak. So at least it seemed to Freya. Old Nelson said at once: "I'll stroll down with you." He had begun a professional conversation about the dangers of the New Guinea coast, and wanted to relate to Jasper some experience of his own "over there." Jasper was such a good listener! Freya made as if to accompany them, but her father frowned, shook his head, and nodded significantly towards the immovable Heemskirk blotting out smoke with half-closed eyes and protruded lips. The lieutenant must not be left alone. Take offence, perhaps.

Freya obeyed these signs. "Perhaps it is better for me to stay," she thought. Women are not generally prone to review their own conduct, still less to condemn it. The embarrassing masculine absurdities are in the main responsible for its ethics. But, looking at Heemskirk, Freya felt regret and even remorse. His thick bulk in repose suggested the idea of repletion, but as a matter of fact he had eaten very little. He had drunk a great deal, however. The fleshy lobes of his unpleasant big ears with deeply folded rims were crimson. They quite flamed in the neighbourhood of the flat, sallow cheeks. For a considerable time he did not raise his heavy brown eyelids. To be at the mercy of such a creature was humiliating; and Freya, who always ended by being frank with herself, thought regretfully: "If only I had been open with papa from the first! But then what an impossible life he would have led me!" Yes. Men were absurd in many ways; lovably like

Jasper, impracticably like her father, odiously like that grotesquely supine creature in the chair. Was it possible to talk him over? Perhaps it was not necessary? "Oh! I can't talk to him," she thought. And when Heemskirk, still without looking at her, began resolutely to crush his half-smoked cheroot on the coffee-tray, she took alarm, glided towards the piano, opened it in tremendous haste, and struck the keys before she sat down.

In an instant the verandah, the whole carpetless wooden bungalow raised on piles, became filled with an uproarious, confused resonance. But through it all she heard, she felt on the floor the heavy, prowling footsteps of the lieutenant moving to and fro at her back. He was not exactly drunk, but he was sufficiently primed to make the suggestions of his excited imagination seem perfectly feasible and even clever; beautifully, unscrupulously clever. Freya, aware that he had stopped just behind her, went on playing without turning her head. She played with spirit, brilliantly, a fierce piece of music, but when his voice reached her she went cold all over. It was the voice, not the words. The insolent familiarity of tone dismayed her to such an extent that she could not understand at first what he was saying. His utterance was thick, too.

"I suspected. . . . Of course I suspected something of your little goings on. I am not a child. But from suspecting to seeing — seeing, you understand — there's an enormous difference. That sort of thing. . . . Come! One isn't made of stone. And when a man has been worried by a girl as I have been worried by you, Miss Freya — sleeping and waking, then, of course. . . . But I am a man of the world. It must be dull for you here . . . I say, won't you leave off this confounded playing . . .?"

This last was the only sentence really which she made out. She shook her head negatively, and in desperation put on the loud pedal, but she could not make the sound of the piano cover his raised voice.

"Only, I am surprised that you should. . . . An English trading skipper, a common fellow. Low, cheeky lot, infesting these islands. I would make short work of such trash! While you have here a good friend, a gentleman ready to worship at your feet — your pretty feet — an officer, a man of family. Strange, isn't it? But what of that! You are fit for a prince."

Freya did not turn her head. Her face went stiff with horror and indignation. This adventure was altogether beyond her conception of what was possible. It was not in her character to jump up and run away. It seemed to her, too, that if she did move there was no saying what might

happen. Presently her father would be back, and then the other would have to leave off. It was best to ignore — to ignore. She went on playing loudly and correctly, as though she were alone, as if Heemskirk did not exist. That proceeding irritated him.

“Come! You may deceive your father,” he bawled angrily, “but I am not to be made a fool of! Stop this infernal noise . . . Freya . . . Hey! You Scandinavian Goddess of Love! Stop! Do you hear? That’s what you are — of love. But the heathen gods are only devils in disguise, and that’s what you are, too — a deep little devil. Stop it, I say, or I will lift you off that stool!”

Standing behind her, he devoured her with his eyes, from the golden crown of her rigidly motionless head to the heels of her shoes, the line of her shapely shoulders, the curves of her fine figure swaying a little before the keyboard. She had on a light dress; the sleeves stopped short at the elbows in an edging of lace. A satin ribbon encircled her waist. In an access of irresistible, reckless hopefulness he clapped both his hands on that waist — and then the irritating music stopped at last. But, quick as she was in springing away from the contact (the round music-stool going over with a crash), Heemskirk’s lips, aiming at her neck, landed a hungry, smacking kiss just under her ear. A deep silence reigned for a time. And then he laughed rather feebly.

He was disconcerted somewhat by her white, still face, the big light violet eyes resting on him stonily. She had not uttered a sound. She faced him, steadying herself on the corner of the piano with one extended hand. The other went on rubbing with mechanical persistency the place his lips had touched.

“What’s the trouble?” he said, offended. “Startled you? Look here: don’t let us have any of that nonsense. You don’t mean to say a kiss frightens you so much as all that. . . . I know better. . . . I don’t mean to be left out in the cold.”

He had been gazing into her face with such strained intentness that he could no longer see it distinctly. Everything round him was rather misty. He forgot the overturned stool, caught his foot against it, and lurched forward slightly, saying in an ingratiating tone:

“I’m not bad fun, really. You try a few kisses to begin with — ”

He said no more, because his head received a terrific concussion, accompanied by an explosive sound. Freya had swung her round, strong arm with such force that the impact of her open palm on his flat cheek turned him half round. Uttering a faint, hoarse yell, the lieutenant clapped both his hands to the left side of his face, which had taken on suddenly a dusky brick-red tinge. Freya, very erect, her violet eyes darkened, her palm still tingling from the blow, a sort of restrained determined smile showing a tiny gleam of her white teeth, heard her father's rapid, heavy tread on the path below the verandah. Her expression lost its pugnacity and became sincerely concerned. She was sorry for her father. She stooped quickly to pick up the music-stool, as if anxious to obliterate the traces. . . . But that was no good. She had resumed her attitude, one hand resting lightly on the piano, before old Nelson got up to the top of the stairs.

Poor father! How furious he will be — how upset! And afterwards, what tremors, what unhappiness! Why had she not been open with him from the first? His round, innocent stare of amazement cut her to the quick. But he was not looking at her. His stare was directed to Heemskirk, who, with his back to him and with his hands still up to his face, was hissing curses through his teeth, and (she saw him in profile) glaring at her balefully with one black, evil eye.

“What's the matter?” asked old Nelson, very much bewildered.

She did not answer him. She thought of Jasper on the deck of the brig, gazing up at the lighted bungalow, and she felt frightened. It was a mercy that one of them at least was on board out of the way. She only wished he were a hundred miles off. And yet she was not certain that she did. Had Jasper been mysteriously moved that moment to reappear on the verandah she would have thrown her consistency, her firmness, her self-possession, to the winds, and flown into his arms.

“What is it? What is it?” insisted the unsuspecting Nelson, getting quite excited. “Only this minute you were playing a tune, and — ”

Freya, unable to speak in her apprehension of what was coming (she was also fascinated by that black, evil, glaring eye), only nodded slightly at the lieutenant, as much as to say: “Just look at him!”

“Why, yes!” exclaimed old Nelson. “I see. What on earth — ”

Meantime he had cautiously approached Heemskirk, who, bursting into incoherent imprecations, was stamping with both feet where he stood. The indignity of the blow, the rage of baffled purpose, the ridicule of the

exposure, and the impossibility of revenge maddened him to a point when he simply felt he must howl with fury.

“Oh, oh, oh!” he howled, stamping across the verandah as though he meant to drive his foot through the floor at every step.

“Why, is his face hurt?” asked the astounded old Nelson. The truth dawned suddenly upon his innocent mind. “Dear me!” he cried, enlightened. “Get some brandy, quick, Freya. . . . You are subject to it, lieutenant? Fiendish, eh? I know, I know! Used to go crazy all of a sudden myself in the time. . . . And the little bottle of laudanum from the medicine-chest, too, Freya. Look sharp. . . . Don’t you see he’s got a toothache?”

And, indeed, what other explanation could have presented itself to the guileless old Nelson, beholding this cheek nursed with both hands, these wild glances, these stampings, this distracted swaying of the body? It would have demanded a preternatural acuteness to hit upon the true cause. Freya had not moved. She watched Heemskirk’s savagely inquiring, black stare directed stealthily upon herself. “Aha, you would like to be let off!” she said to herself. She looked at him unflinchingly, thinking it out. The temptation of making an end of it all without further trouble was irresistible. She gave an almost imperceptible nod of assent, and glided away.

“Hurry up that brandy!” old Nelson shouted, as she disappeared in the passage.

Heemskirk relieved his deeper feelings by a sudden string of curses in Dutch and English which he sent after her. He raved to his heart’s content, flinging to and fro the verandah and kicking chairs out of his way; while Nelson (or Nielsen), whose sympathy was profoundly stirred by these evidences of agonising pain, hovered round his dear (and dreaded) lieutenant, fussing like an old hen.

“Dear me, dear me! Is it so bad? I know well what it is. I used to frighten my poor wife sometimes. Do you get it often like this, lieutenant?”

Heemskirk shouldered him viciously out of his way, with a short, insane laugh. But his staggering host took it in good part; a man beside himself with excruciating toothache is not responsible.

“Go into my room, lieutenant,” he suggested urgently. “Throw yourself on my bed. We will get something to ease you in a minute.”

He seized the poor sufferer by the arm and forced him gently onwards to the very bed, on which Heemskirk, in a renewed access of rage, flung

himself down with such force that he rebounded from the mattress to the height of quite a foot.

“Dear me!” exclaimed the scared Nelson, and incontinently ran off to hurry up the brandy and the laudanum, very angry that so little alacrity was shown in relieving the tortures of his precious guest. In the end he got these things himself.

Half an hour later he stood in the inner passage of the house, surprised by faint, spasmodic sounds of a mysterious nature, between laughter and sobs. He frowned; then went straight towards his daughter’s room and knocked at the door.

Freya, her glorious fair hair framing her white face and rippling down a dark-blue dressing-gown, opened it partly.

The light in the room was dim. Antonia, crouching in a corner, rocked herself backwards and forwards, uttering feeble moans. Old Nelson had not much experience in various kinds of feminine laughter, but he was certain there had been laughter there.

“Very unfeeling, very unfeeling!” he said, with weighty displeasure. “What is there so amusing in a man being in pain? I should have thought a woman — a young girl — ”

“He was so funny,” murmured Freya, whose eyes glistened strangely in the semi-obscurity of the passage. “And then, you know, I don’t like him,” she added, in an unsteady voice.

“Funny!” repeated old Nelson, amazed at this evidence of callousness in one so young. “You don’t like him! Do you mean to say that, because you don’t like him, you — Why, it’s simply cruel! Don’t you know it’s about the worst sort of pain there is? Dogs have been known to go mad with it.”

“He certainly seemed to have gone mad,” Freya said with an effort, as if she were struggling with some hidden feeling.

But her father was launched.

“And you know how he is. He notices everything. He is a fellow to take offence for the least little thing — regular Dutchman — and I want to keep friendly with him. It’s like this, my girl: if that rajah of ours were to do something silly — and you know he is a sulky, rebellious beggar — and the authorities took into their heads that my influence over him wasn’t good, you would find yourself without a roof over your head — ”

She cried: “What nonsense, father!” in a not very assured tone, and discovered that he was angry, angry enough to achieve irony; yes, old

Nelson (or Nielsen), irony! Just a gleam of it.

“Oh, of course, if you have means of your own — a mansion, a plantation that I know nothing of — ” But he was not capable of sustained irony. “I tell you they would bundle me out of here,” he whispered forcibly; “without compensation, of course. I know these Dutch. And the lieutenant’s just the fellow to start the trouble going. He has the ear of influential officials. I wouldn’t offend him for anything — for anything — on no consideration whatever. . . . What did you say?”

It was only an inarticulate exclamation. If she ever had a half-formed intention of telling him everything she had given it up now. It was impossible, both out of regard for his dignity and for the peace of his poor mind.

“I don’t care for him myself very much,” old Nelson’s subdued undertone confessed in a sigh. “He’s easier now,” he went on, after a silence. “I’ve given him up my bed for the night. I shall sleep on my verandah, in the hammock. No; I can’t say I like him either, but from that to laugh at a man because he’s driven crazy with pain is a long way. You’ve surprised me, Freya. That side of his face is quite flushed.”

Her shoulders shook convulsively under his hands, which he laid on her paternally. His straggly, wiry moustache brushed her forehead in a good-night kiss. She closed the door, and went away from it to the middle of the room before she allowed herself a tired-out sort of laugh, without buoyancy.

“Flushed! A little flushed!” she repeated to herself. “I hope so, indeed! A little — ”

Her eyelashes were wet. Antonia, in her corner, moaned and giggled, and it was impossible to tell where the moans ended and the giggles began.

The mistress and the maid had been somewhat hysterical, for Freya, on fleeing into her room, had found Antonia there, and had told her everything.

“I have avenged you, my girl,” she exclaimed.

And then they had laughingly cried and cryingly laughed with admonitions — “Ssh, not so loud! Be quiet!” on one part, and interludes of “I am so frightened. . . . He’s an evil man,” on the other.

Antonia was very much afraid of Heemskirk. She was afraid of him because of his personal appearance: because of his eyes and his eyebrows, and his mouth and his nose and his limbs. Nothing could be more rational. And she thought him an evil man, because, to her eyes, he looked evil. No ground for an opinion could be sounder. In the dimness of the room, with

only a nightlight burning at the head of Freya's bed, the camerista crept out of her corner to crouch at the feet of her mistress, supplicating in whispers:

"There's the brig. Captain Allen. Let us run away at once — oh, let us run away! I am so frightened. Let us! Let us!"

"I! Run away!" thought Freya to herself, without looking down at the scared girl. "Never."

Both the resolute mistress under the mosquito-net and the frightened maid lying curled up on a mat at the foot of the bed did not sleep very well that night. The person that did not sleep at all was Lieutenant Heemskirk. He lay on his back staring vindictively in the darkness. Inflaming images and humiliating reflections succeeded each other in his mind, keeping up, augmenting his anger. A pretty tale this to get about! But it must not be allowed to get about. The outrage had to be swallowed in silence. A pretty affair! Fooled, led on, and struck by the girl — and probably fooled by the father, too. But no. Nielsen was but another victim of that shameless hussy, that brazen minx, that sly, laughing, kissing, lying . . .

"No; he did not deceive me on purpose," thought the tormented lieutenant. "But I should like to pay him off, all the same, for being such an imbecile — "

Well, some day, perhaps. One thing he was firmly resolved on: he had made up his mind to steal early out of the house. He did not think he could face the girl without going out of his mind with fury.

"Fire and perdition! Ten thousand devils! I shall choke here before the morning!" he muttered to himself, lying rigid on his back on old Nelson's bed, his breast heaving for air.

He arose at daylight and started cautiously to open the door. Faint sounds in the passage alarmed him, and remaining concealed he saw Freya coming out. This unexpected sight deprived him of all power to move away from the crack of the door. It was the narrowest crack possible, but commanding the view of the end of the verandah. Freya made for that end hastily to watch the brig passing the point. She wore her dark dressing-gown; her feet were bare, because, having fallen asleep towards the morning, she ran out headlong in her fear of being too late. Heemskirk had never seen her looking like this, with her hair drawn back smoothly to the shape of her head, and hanging in one heavy, fair tress down her back, and with that air of extreme youth, intensity, and eagerness. And at first he was



amazed, and then he gnashed his teeth. He could not face her at all. He muttered a curse, and kept still behind the door.

With a low, deep-breathed "Ah!" when she first saw the brig already under way, she reached for Nelson's long glass reposing on brackets high up the wall. The wide sleeve of the dressing-gown slipped back, uncovering her white arm as far as the shoulder. Heemskirk gripping the door-handle, as if to crush it, felt like a man just risen to his feet from a drinking bout.

And Freya knew that he was watching her. She knew. She had seen the door move as she came out of the passage. She was aware of his eyes being on her, with scornful bitterness, with triumphant contempt.

"You are there," she thought, levelling the long glass. "Oh, well, look on, then!"

The green islets appeared like black shadows, the ashen sea was smooth as glass, the clear robe of the colourless dawn, in which even the brig appeared shadowy, had a hem of light in the east. Directly Freya had made out Jasper on deck, with his own long glass directed to the bungalow, she laid hers down and raised both her beautiful white arms above her head. In that attitude of supreme cry she stood still, glowing with the consciousness of Jasper's adoration going out to her figure held in the field of his glass away there, and warmed, too, by the feeling of evil passion, the burning, covetous eyes of the other, fastened on her back. In the fervour of her love, in the caprice of her mind, and with that mysterious knowledge of masculine nature women seem to be born to, she thought:

"You are looking on — you will — you must! Then you shall see something."

She brought both her hands to her lips, then flung them out, sending a kiss over the sea, as if she wanted to throw her heart along with it on the deck of the brig. Her face was rosy, her eyes shone. Her repeated, passionate gesture seemed to fling kisses by the hundred again and again and again, while the slowly ascending sun brought the glory of colour to the world, turning the islets green, the sea blue, the brig below her white — dazzlingly white in the spread of her wings — with the red ensign streaming like a tiny flame from the peak.

And each time she murmured with a rising inflexion:

"Take this — and this — and this — " till suddenly her arms fell. She had seen the ensign dipped in response, and next moment the point below

hid the hull of the brig from her view. Then she turned away from the balustrade, and, passing slowly before the door of her father's room with her eyelids lowered, and an enigmatic expression on her face, she disappeared behind the curtain.

But instead of going along the passage, she remained concealed and very still on the other side to watch what would happen. For some time the broad, furnished verandah remained empty. Then the door of old Nelson's room came open suddenly, and Heemskirk staggered out. His hair was rumpled, his eyes bloodshot, his unshaven face looked very dark. He gazed wildly about, saw his cap on a table, snatched it up, and made for the stairs quietly, but with a strange, tottering gait, like the last effort of waning strength.

Shortly after his head had sunk below the level of the floor, Freya came out from behind the curtain, with compressed, scheming lips, and no softness at all in her luminous eyes. He could not be allowed to sneak off scot free. Never — never! She was excited, she tingled all over, she had tasted blood! He must be made to understand that she had been aware of having been watched; he must know that he had been seen slinking off shamefully. But to run to the front rail and shout after him would have been childish, crude — undignified. And to shout — what? What word? What phrase? No; it was impossible. Then how? . . . She frowned, discovered it, dashed at the piano, which had stood open all night, and made the rosewood monster growl savagery in an irritated bass. She struck chords as if firing shots after that straddling, broad figure in ample white trousers and a dark uniform jacket with gold shoulder-straps, and then she pursued him with the same thing she had played the evening before — a modern, fierce piece of love music which had been tried more than once against the thunderstorms of the group. She accentuated its rhythm with triumphant malice, so absorbed in her purpose that she did not notice the presence of her father, who, wearing an old threadbare ulster of a check pattern over his sleeping suit, had run out from the back verandah to inquire the reason of this untimely performance. He stared at her.

“What on earth? . . . Freya!” His voice was nearly drowned by the piano. “What's become of the lieutenant?” he shouted.

She looked up at him as if her soul were lost in her music, with unseeing eyes.

“Gone.”

“Wha-a-t? . . . Where?”

She shook her head slightly, and went on playing louder than before. Old Nelson’s innocently anxious gaze starting from the open door of his room, explored the whole place high and low, as if the lieutenant were something small which might have been crawling on the floor or clinging to a wall. But a shrill whistle coming somewhere from below pierced the ample volume of sound rolling out of the piano in great, vibrating waves. The lieutenant was down at the cove, whistling for the boat to come and take him off to his ship. And he seemed to be in a terrific hurry, too, for he whistled again almost directly, waited for a moment, and then sent out a long, interminable, shrill call as distressful to hear as though he had shrieked without drawing breath. Freya ceased playing suddenly.

“Going on board,” said old Nelson, perturbed by the event. “What could have made him clear out so early? Queer chap. Devilishly touchy, too! I shouldn’t wonder if it was your conduct last night that hurt his feelings? I noticed you, Freya. You as well as laughed in his face, while he was suffering agonies from neuralgia. It isn’t the way to get yourself liked. He’s offended with you.”

Freya’s hands now reposed passive on the keys; she bowed her fair head, feeling a sudden discontent, a nervous lassitude, as though she had passed through some exhausting crisis. Old Nelson (or Nielsen), looking aggrieved, was revolving matters of policy in his bald head.

“I think it would be right for me to go on board just to inquire, some time this morning,” he declared fussily. “Why don’t they bring me my morning tea? Do you hear, Freya? You have astonished me, I must say. I didn’t think a young girl could be so unfeeling. And the lieutenant thinks himself a friend of ours, too! What? No? Well, he calls himself a friend, and that’s something to a person in my position. Certainly! Oh, yes, I must go on board.”

“Must you?” murmured Freya listlessly; then added, in her thought: “Poor man!”

## CHAPTER V

In respect of the next seven weeks, all that is necessary to say is, first, that old Nelson (or Nielsen) failed in paying his politic call. The Neptun gunboat of H.M. the King of the Netherlands, commanded by an outraged and infuriated lieutenant, left the cove at an unexpectedly early hour. When Freya's father came down to the shore, after seeing his precious crop of tobacco spread out properly in the sun, she was already steaming round the point. Old Nelson regretted the circumstance for many days.

"Now, I don't know in what disposition the man went away," he lamented to his hard daughter. He was amazed at her hardness. He was almost frightened by her indifference.

Next, it must be recorded that the same day the gunboat Neptun, steering east, passed the brig Bonito becalmed in sight of Carimata, with her head to the eastward, too. Her captain, Jasper Allen, giving himself up consciously to a tender, possessive reverie of his Freya, did not get out of his long chair on the poop to look at the Neptun which passed so close that the smoke belching out suddenly from her short black funnel rolled between the masts of the Bonito, obscuring for a moment the sunlit whiteness of her sails, consecrated to the service of love. Jasper did not even turn his head for a glance. But Heemskirk, on the bridge, had gazed long and earnestly at the brig from the distance, gripping hard the brass rail in front of him, till, the two ships closing, he lost all confidence in himself, and retreating to the chartroom, pulled the door to with a crash. There, his brows knitted, his mouth drawn on one side in sardonic meditation, he sat through many still hours — a sort of Prometheus in the bonds of unholy desire, having his very vitals torn by the beak and claws of humiliated passion.

That species of fowl is not to be shooed off as easily as a chicken. Fooled, cheated, deceived, led on, outraged, mocked at — beak and claws! A sinister bird! The lieutenant had no mind to become the talk of the Archipelago, as the naval officer who had had his face slapped by a girl. Was it possible that she really loved that rascally trader? He tried not to think, but, worse than thoughts, definite impressions beset him in his retreat. He saw her — a vision plain, close to, detailed, plastic, coloured, lighted up — he saw her hanging round the neck of that fellow. And he shut his eyes, only to discover that this was no remedy. Then a piano began to play near by, very plainly; and he put his fingers to his ears with no better effect. It was not to be borne — not in solitude. He bolted out of the

chartroom, and talked of indifferent things somewhat wildly with the officer of the watch on the bridge, to the mocking accompaniment of a ghostly piano.

The last thing to be recorded is that Lieutenant Heemskirk instead of pursuing his course towards Ternate, where he was expected, went out of his way to call at Makassar, where no one was looking for his arrival. Once there, he gave certain explanations and laid a certain proposal before the governor, or some other authority, and obtained permission to do what he thought fit in these matters. Thereupon the *Neptun*, giving up Ternate altogether, steamed north in view of the mountainous coast of Celebes, and then crossing the broad straits took up her station on the low coast of virgin forests, inviolate and mute, in waters phosphorescent at night; deep blue in daytime with gleaming green patches over the submerged reefs. For days the *Neptun* could be seen moving smoothly up and down the sombre face of the shore, or hanging about with a watchful air near the silvery breaks of broad estuaries, under the great luminous sky never softened, never veiled, and flooding the earth with the everlasting sunshine of the tropics — that sunshine which, in its unbroken splendour, oppresses the soul with an inexpressible melancholy more intimate, more penetrating, more profound than the grey sadness of the northern mists.

The trading brig *Bonito* appeared gliding round a sombre forest-clad point of land on the silvery estuary of a great river. The breath of air that gave her motion would not have fluttered the flame of a torch. She stole out into the open from behind a veil of unstirring leaves, mysteriously silent, ghostly white, and solemnly stealthy in her imperceptible progress; and Jasper, his elbow in the main rigging, and his head leaning against his hand, thought of Freya. Everything in the world reminded him of her. The beauty of the loved woman exists in the beauties of Nature. The swelling outlines of the hills, the curves of a coast, the free sinuosities of a river are less suave than the harmonious lines of her body, and when she moves, gliding lightly, the grace of her progress suggests the power of occult forces which rule the fascinating aspects of the visible world.

Dependent on things as all men are, Jasper loved his vessel — the house of his dreams. He lent to her something of Freya's soul. Her deck was the foothold of their love. The possession of his brig appeased his passion in a soothing certitude of happiness already conquered.

The full moon was some way up, perfect and serene, floating in air as calm and limpid as the glance of Freya's eyes. There was not a sound in the brig.

"Here she shall stand, by my side, on evenings like this," he thought, with rapture.

And it was at that moment, in this peace, in this serenity, under the full, benign gaze of the moon propitious to lovers, on a sea without a wrinkle, under a sky without a cloud, as if all Nature had assumed its most clement mood in a spirit of mockery, that the gunboat *Neptun*, detaching herself from the dark coast under which she had been lying invisible, steamed out to intercept the trading brig *Bonito* standing out to sea.

Directly the gunboat had been made out emerging from her ambush, Schultz, of the fascinating voice, had given signs of strange agitation. All that day, ever since leaving the Malay town up the river, he had shown a haggard face, going about his duties like a man with something weighing on his mind. Jasper had noticed it, but the mate, turning away, as though he had not liked being looked at, had muttered shamefacedly of a headache and a touch of fever. He must have had it very badly when, dodging behind his captain he wondered aloud: "What can that fellow want with us?" . . . A naked man standing in a freezing blast and trying not to shiver could not have spoken with a more harshly uncertain intonation. But it might have been fever — a cold fit.

"He wants to make himself disagreeable, simply," said Jasper, with perfect good humour. "He has tried it on me before. However, we shall soon see."

And, indeed, before long the two vessels lay abreast within easy hail. The brig, with her fine lines and her white sails, looked vaporous and sylph-like in the moonlight. The gunboat, short, squat, with her stumpy dark spars naked like dead trees, raised against the luminous sky of that resplendent night, threw a heavy shadow on the lane of water between the two ships.

Freya haunted them both like an ubiquitous spirit, and as if she were the only woman in the world. Jasper remembered her earnest recommendation to be guarded and cautious in all his acts and words while he was away from her. In this quite unforeseen encounter he felt on his ear the very breath of these hurried admonitions customary to the last moment of their partings, heard the half-jesting final whisper of the "Mind, kid, I'd never

forgive you!” with a quick pressure on his arm, which he answered by a quiet, confident smile. Heemskirk was haunted in another fashion. There were no whispers in it; it was more like visions. He saw that girl hanging round the neck of a low vagabond — that vagabond, the vagabond who had just answered his hail. He saw her stealing bare-footed across a verandah with great, clear, wide-open, eager eyes to look at a brig — that brig. If she had shrieked, scolded, called names! . . . But she had simply triumphed over him. That was all. Led on (he firmly believed it), fooled, deceived, outraged, struck, mocked at. . . . Beak and claws! The two men, so differently haunted by Freya of the Seven Isles, were not equally matched.

In the intense stillness, as of sleep, which had fallen upon the two vessels, in a world that itself seemed but a delicate dream, a boat pulled by Javanese sailors crossing the dark lane of water came alongside the brig. The white warrant officer in her, perhaps the gunner, climbed aboard. He was a short man, with a rotund stomach and a wheezy voice. His immovable fat face looked lifeless in the moonlight, and he walked with his thick arms hanging away from his body as though he had been stuffed. His cunning little eyes glittered like bits of mica. He conveyed to Jasper, in broken English, a request to come on board the Neptun.

Jasper had not expected anything so unusual. But after a short reflection he decided to show neither annoyance, nor even surprise. The river from which he had come had been politically disturbed for a couple of years, and he was aware that his visits there were looked upon with some suspicion. But he did not mind much the displeasure of the authorities, so terrifying to old Nelson. He prepared to leave the brig, and Schultz followed him to the rail as if to say something, but in the end stood by in silence. Jasper getting over the side, noticed his ghastly face. The eyes of the man who had found salvation in the brig from the effects of his peculiar psychology looked at him with a dumb, beseeching expression.

“What’s the matter?” Jasper asked.

“I wonder how this will end?” said he of the beautiful voice, which had even fascinated the steady Freya herself. But where was its charming timbre now? These words had sounded like a raven’s croak.

“You are ill,” said Jasper positively.

“I wish I were dead!” was the startling statement uttered by Schultz talking to himself in the extremity of some mysterious trouble. Jasper gave him a keen glance, but this was not the time to investigate the morbid

outbreak of a feverish man. He did not look as though he were actually delirious, and that for the moment must suffice. Schultz made a dart forward.

“That fellow means harm!” he said desperately. “He means harm to you, Captain Allen. I feel it, and I — ”

He choked with inexplicable emotion.

“All right, Schultz. I won’t give him an opening.” Jasper cut him short and swung himself into the boat.

On board the *Neptun* Heemskirk, standing straddle-legs in the flood of moonlight, his inky shadow falling right across the quarter-deck, made no sign at his approach, but secretly he felt something like the heave of the sea in his chest at the sight of that man. Jasper waited before him in silence.

Brought face to face in direct personal contact, they fell at once into the manner of their casual meetings in old Nelson’s bungalow. They ignored each other’s existence — Heemskirk moodily; Jasper, with a perfectly colourless quietness.

“What’s going on in that river you’ve just come out of?” asked the lieutenant straight away.

“I know nothing of the troubles, if you mean that,” Jasper answered. “I’ve landed there half a cargo of rice, for which I got nothing in exchange, and went away. There’s no trade there now, but they would have been starving in another week — if I hadn’t turned up.”

“Meddling! English meddling! And suppose the rascals don’t deserve anything better than to starve, eh?”

“There are women and children there, you know,” observed Jasper, in his even tone.

“Oh, yes! When an Englishman talks of women and children, you may be sure there’s something fishy about the business. Your doings will have to be investigated.”

They spoke in turn, as though they had been disembodied spirits — mere voices in empty air; for they looked at each other as if there had been nothing there, or, at most, with as much recognition as one gives to an inanimate object, and no more. But now a silence fell. Heemskirk had thought, all at once: “She will tell him all about it. She will tell him while she hangs round his neck laughing.” And the sudden desire to annihilate Jasper on the spot almost deprived him of his senses by its vehemence. He



lost the power of speech, of vision. For a moment he absolutely couldn't see Jasper. But he heard him inquiring, as of the world at large:

"Am I, then, to conclude that the brig is detained?"

Heemskirk made a recovery in a flush of malignant satisfaction.

"She is. I am going to take her to Makassar in tow."

"The courts will have to decide on the legality of this," said Jasper, aware that the matter was becoming serious, but with assumed indifference.

"Oh, yes, the courts! Certainly. And as to you, I shall keep you on board here."

Jasper's dismay at being parted from his ship was betrayed by a stony immobility. It lasted but an instant. Then he turned away and hailed the brig. Mr. Schultz answered:

"Yes, sir."

"Get ready to receive a tow-rope from the gunboat! We are going to be taken to Makassar."

"Good God! What's that for, sir?" came an anxious cry faintly.

"Kindness, I suppose," Jasper, ironical, shouted with great deliberation. "We might have been — becalmed in here — for days. And hospitality. I am invited to stay — on board here."

The answer to this information was a loud ejaculation of distress. Jasper thought anxiously: "Why, the fellow's nerve's gone to pieces;" and with an awkward uneasiness of a new sort, looked intently at the brig. The thought that he was parted from her — for the first time since they came together — shook the apparently careless fortitude of his character to its very foundations, which were deep. All that time neither Heemskirk nor even his inky shadow had stirred in the least.

"I am going to send a boat's crew and an officer on board your vessel," he announced to no one in particular. Jasper, tearing himself away from the absorbed contemplation of the brig, turned round, and, without passion, almost without expression in his voice, entered his protest against the whole of the proceedings. What he was thinking of was the delay. He counted the days. Makassar was actually on his way; and to be towed there really saved time. On the other hand, there would be some vexing formalities to go through. But the thing was too absurd. "The beetle's gone mad," he thought. "I'll be released at once. And if not, Mesman must enter into a bond for me." Mesman was a Dutch merchant with whom Jasper had had many dealings, a considerable person in Makassar.

“You protest? H’m!” Heemskirk muttered, and for a little longer remained motionless, his legs planted well apart, and his head lowered as though he were studying his own comical, deeply-split shadow. Then he made a sign to the rotund gunner, who had kept at hand, motionless, like a vilely-stuffed specimen of a fat man, with a lifeless face and glittering little eyes. The fellow approached, and stood at attention.

“You will board the brig with a boat’s crew!”

“Ya, mynherr!”

“You will have one of your men to steer her all the time,” went on Heemskirk, giving his orders in English, apparently for Jasper’s edification. “You hear?”

“Ya, mynherr.”

“You will remain on deck and in charge all the time.”

“Ya, mynherr.”

Jasper felt as if, together with the command of the brig, his very heart were being taken out of his breast. Heemskirk asked, with a change of tone:

“What weapons have you on board?”

At one time all the ships trading in the China Seas had a licence to carry a certain quantity of firearms for purposes of defence. Jasper answered:

“Eighteen rifles with their bayonets, which were on board when I bought her, four years ago. They have been declared.”

“Where are they kept?”

“Fore-cabin. Mate has the key.”

“You will take possession of them,” said Heemskirk to the gunner.

“Ya, mynherr.”

“What is this for? What do you mean to imply?” cried out Jasper; then bit his lip. “It’s monstrous!” he muttered.

Heemskirk raised for a moment a heavy, as if suffering, glance.

“You may go,” he said to his gunner. The fat man saluted, and departed.

During the next thirty hours the steady towing was interrupted once. At a signal from the brig, made by waving a flag on the fore-castle, the gunboat was stopped. The badly-stuffed specimen of a warrant-officer, getting into his boat, arrived on board the *Neptun* and hurried straight into his commander’s cabin, his excitement at something he had to communicate being betrayed by the blinking of his small eyes. These two were closeted

together for some time, while Jasper at the taffrail tried to make out if anything out of the common had occurred on board the brig.

But nothing seemed to be amiss on board. However, he kept a look-out for the gunner; and, though he had avoided speaking to anybody since he had finished with Heemskirk, he stopped that man when he came out on deck again to ask how his mate was.

“He was feeling not very well when I left,” he explained.

The fat warrant-officer, holding himself as though the effort of carrying his big stomach in front of him demanded a rigid carriage, understood with difficulty. Not a single one of his features showed the slightest animation, but his little eyes blinked rapidly at last.

“Oh, ya! The mate. Ya, ya! He is very well. But, mein Gott, he is one very funny man!”

Jasper could get no explanation of that remark, because the Dutchman got into the boat hurriedly, and went back on board the brig. But he consoled himself with the thought that very soon all this unpleasant and rather absurd experience would be over. The roadstead of Makassar was in sight already. Heemskirk passed by him going on the bridge. For the first time the lieutenant looked at Jasper with marked intention; and the strange roll of his eyes was so funny — it had been long agreed by Jasper and Freya that the lieutenant was funny — so ecstatically gratified, as though he were rolling a tasty morsel on his tongue, that Jasper could not help a broad smile. And then he turned to his brig again.

To see her, his cherished possession, animated by something of his Freya’s soul, the only foothold of two lives on the wide earth, the security of his passion, the companion of adventure, the power to snatch the calm, adorable Freya to his breast, and carry her off to the end of the world; to see this beautiful thing embodying worthily his pride and his love, to see her captive at the end of a tow-rope was not indeed a pleasant experience. It had something nightmarish in it, as, for instance, the dream of a wild sea-bird loaded with chains.

Yet what else could he want to look at? Her beauty would sometimes come to his heart with the force of a spell, so that he would forget where he was. And, besides, that sense of superiority which the certitude of being loved gives to a young man, that illusion of being set above the Fates by a tender look in a woman’s eyes, helped him, the first shock over, to go

through these experiences with an amused self-confidence. For what evil could touch the elect of Freya?

It was now afternoon, the sun being behind the two vessels as they headed for the harbour. "The beetle's little joke shall soon be over," thought Jasper, without any great animosity. As a seaman well acquainted with that part of the world, a casual glance was enough to tell him what was being done. "Hallo," he thought, "he is going through Spermonde Passage. We shall be rounding Tamissa reef presently." And again he returned to the contemplation of his brig, that main-stay of his material and emotional existence which would be soon in his hands again. On a sea, calm like a millpond, a heavy smooth ripple undulated and streamed away from her bows, for the powerful Neptun was towing at great speed, as if for a wager. The Dutch gunner appeared on the forecastle of the Bonito, and with him a couple of men. They stood looking at the coast, and Jasper lost himself in a loverlike trance.

The deep-toned blast of the gunboat's steam-whistle made him shudder by its unexpectedness. Slowly he looked about. Swift as lightning he leaped from where he stood, bounding forward along the deck.

"You will be on Tamissa reef!" he yelled.

High up on the bridge Heemskirk looked back over his shoulder heavily; two seamen were spinning the wheel round, and the Neptun was already swinging rapidly away from the edge of the pale water over the danger. Ha! just in time. Jasper turned about instantly to watch his brig; and, even before he realised that — in obedience, it appears, to Heemskirk's orders given beforehand to the gunner — the tow-rope had been let go at the blast of the whistle, before he had time to cry out or to move a limb, he saw her cast adrift and shooting across the gunboat's stern with the impetus of her speed. He followed her fine, gliding form with eyes growing big with incredulity, wild with horror. The cries on board of her came to him only as a dreadful and confused murmur through the loud thumping of blood in his ears, while she held on. She ran upright in a terrible display of her gift of speed, with an incomparable air of life and grace. She ran on till the smooth level of water in front of her bows seemed to sink down suddenly as if sucked away; and, with a strange, violent tremor of her mast-heads she stopped, inclined her lofty spars a little, and lay still. She lay still on the reef, while the Neptun, fetching a wide circle, continued at full speed up Spermonde Passage, heading for the town. She lay still, perfectly still, with

something ill-omened and unnatural in her attitude. In an instant the subtle melancholy of things touched by decay had fallen on her in the sunshine; she was but a speck in the brilliant emptiness of space, already lonely, already desolate.

“Hold him!” yelled a voice from the bridge.

Jasper had started to run to his brig with a headlong impulse, as a man dashes forward to pull away with his hands a living, breathing, loved creature from the brink of destruction. “Hold him! Stick to him!” vociferated the lieutenant at the top of the bridge-ladder, while Jasper struggled madly without a word, only his head emerging from the heaving crowd of the Neptun’s seamen, who had flung themselves upon him obediently. “Hold — I would not have that fellow drown himself for anything now!”

Jasper ceased struggling.

One by one they let go of him; they fell back gradually farther and farther, in attentive silence, leaving him standing unsupported in a widened, clear space, as if to give him plenty of room to fall after the struggle. He did not even sway perceptibly. Half an hour later, when the Neptun anchored in front of the town, he had not stirred yet, had moved neither head nor limb as much as a hair’s breadth. Directly the rumble of the gunboat’s cable had ceased, Heemskirk came down heavily from the bridge.

“Call a sampan” he said, in a gloomy tone, as he passed the sentry at the gangway, and then moved on slowly towards the spot where Jasper, the object of many awed glances, stood looking at the deck, as if lost in a brown study. Heemskirk came up close, and stared at him thoughtfully, with his fingers over his lips. Here he was, the favoured vagabond, the only man to whom that infernal girl was likely to tell the story. But he would not find it funny. The story how Lieutenant Heemskirk — No, he would not laugh at it. He looked as though he would never laugh at anything in his life.

Suddenly Jasper looked up. His eyes, without any other expression but bewilderment, met those of Heemskirk, observant and sombre.

“Gone on the reef!” he said, in a low, astounded tone. “On-the-reef!” he repeated still lower, and as if attending inwardly to the birth of some awful and amazing sensation.

“On the very top of high-water, spring tides,” Heemskirk struck in, with a vindictive, exulting violence which flashed and expired. He paused, as if

weary, fixing upon Jasper his arrogant eyes, over which secret disenchantment, the unavoidable shadow of all passion, seemed to pass like a saddening cloud. "On the very top," he repeated, rousing himself in fierce reaction to snatch his laced cap off his head with a horizontal, derisive flourish towards the gangway. "And now you may go ashore to the courts, you damned Englishman!" he said.

## CHAPTER VI

The affair of the brig Bonito was bound to cause a sensation in Makassar, the prettiest, and perhaps the cleanest-looking of all the towns in the Islands; which however knows few occasions for excitement. The “front,” with its special population, was soon aware that something had happened. A steamer towing a sailing vessel had been observed far out to sea for some time, and when the steamer came in alone, leaving the other outside, attention was aroused. Why was that? Her masts only could be seen — with furled sails — remaining in the same place to the southward. And soon the rumour ran all along the crowded seashore street that there was a ship on Tamissa reef. That crowd interpreted the appearance correctly. Its cause was beyond their penetration, for who could associate a girl nine hundred miles away with the stranding of a ship on Tamissa reef, or look for the remote filiation of that event in the psychology of at least three people, even if one of them, Lieutenant Heemskirk, was at that very moment passing amongst them on his way to make his verbal report?

No; the minds on the “front” were not competent for that sort of investigation, but many hands there — brown hands, yellow hands, white hands — were raised to shade the eyes gazing out to sea. The rumour spread quickly. Chinese shopkeepers came to their doors, more than one white merchant, even, rose from his desk to go to the window. After all, a ship on Tamissa was not an everyday occurrence. And presently the rumour took a more definite shape. An English trader — detained on suspicion at sea by the Neptun — Heemskirk was towing him in to test a case, and by some strange accident —

Later on the name came out. “The Bonito — what! Impossible! Yes — yes, the Bonito. Look! You can see from here; only two masts. It’s a brig. Didn’t think that man would ever let himself be caught. Heemskirk’s pretty smart, too. They say she’s fitted out in her cabin like a gentleman’s yacht. That Allen is a sort of gentleman too. An extravagant beggar.”

A young man entered smartly Messrs. Mesman Brothers’ office on the “front,” bubbling with some further information.

“Oh, yes; that’s the Bonito for certain! But you don’t know the story I’ve heard just now. The fellow must have been feeding that river with firearms for the last year or two. Well, it seems he has grown so reckless from long impunity that he has actually dared to sell the very ship’s rifles this time. It’s a fact. The rifles are not on board. What impudence! Only, he didn’t

know that there was one of our warships on the coast. But those Englishmen are so impudent that perhaps he thought that nothing would be done to him for it. Our courts do let off these fellows too often, on some miserable excuse or other. But, at any rate, there's an end of the famous Bonito. I have just heard in the harbour-office that she must have gone on at the very top of high-water; and she is in ballast, too. No human power, they think, can move her from where she is. I only hope it is so. It would be fine to have the notorious Bonito stuck up there as a warning to others."

Mr. J. Mesman, a colonial-born Dutchman, a kind, paternal old fellow, with a clean-shaven, quiet, handsome face, and a head of fine iron-grey hair curling a little on his collar, did not say a word in defence of Jasper and the Bonito. He rose from his arm-chair suddenly. His face was visibly troubled. It had so happened that once, from a business talk of ways and means, island trade, money matters, and so on, Jasper had been led to open himself to him on the subject of Freya; and the excellent man, who had known old Nelson years before and even remembered something of Freya, was much astonished and amused by the unfolding of the tale.

"Well, well, well! Nelson! Yes; of course. A very honest sort of man. And a little child with very fair hair. Oh, yes! I have a distinct recollection. And so she has grown into such a fine girl, so very determined, so very — " And he laughed almost boisterously. "Mind, when you have happily eloped with your future wife, Captain Allen, you must come along this way, and we shall welcome her here. A little fair-headed child! I remember. I remember."

It was that knowledge which had brought trouble to his face at the first news of the wreck. He took up his hat.

"Where are you going, Mr. Mesman?"

"I am going to look for Allen. I think he must be ashore. Does anybody know?"

No one of those present knew. And Mr. Mesman went out on the "front" to make inquiries.

The other part of the town, the part near the church and the fort, got its information in another way. The first thing disclosed to it was Jasper himself, walking rapidly, as though he were pursued. And, as a matter of fact, a Chinaman, obviously a sampan man, was following him at the same headlong pace. Suddenly, while passing Orange House, Jasper swerved and went in, or, rather, rushed in, startling Gomez, the hotel clerk, very much.



But a Chinaman beginning to make an unseemly noise at the door claimed the immediate attention of Gomez. His grievance was that the white man whom he had brought on shore from the gunboat had not paid him his boat-fare. He had pursued him so far, asking for it all the way. But the white man had taken no notice whatever of his just claim. Gomez satisfied the coolie with a few coppers, and then went to look for Jasper, whom he knew very well. He found him standing stiffly by a little round table. At the other end of the verandah a few men sitting there had stopped talking, and were looking at him in silence. Two billiard-players, with cues in their hands, had come to the door of the billiard-room and stared, too.

On Gomez coming up to him, Jasper raised one hand to point at his own throat. Gomez noted the somewhat soiled state of his white clothes, then took one look at his face, and fled away to order the drink for which Jasper seemed to be asking.

Where he wanted to go — or what purpose — where he, perhaps, only imagined himself to be going, when a sudden impulse or the sight of a familiar place had made him turn into Orange House — it is impossible to say. He was steadying himself lightly with the tips of his fingers on the little table. There were on that verandah two men whom he knew well personally, but his gaze roaming incessantly as though he were looking for a way of escape, passed and repassed over them without a sign of recognition. They, on their side, looking at him, doubted the evidence of their own eyes. It was not that his face was distorted. On the contrary, it was still, it was set. But its expression, somehow, was unrecognisable. Can that be him? they wondered with awe.

In his head there was a wild chaos of clear thoughts. Perfectly clear. It was this clearness which was so terrible in conjunction with the utter inability to lay hold of any single one of them all. He was saying to himself, or to them: "Steady, steady." A China boy appeared before him with a glass on a tray. He poured the drink down his throat, and rushed out. His disappearance removed the spell of wonder from the beholders. One of the men jumped up and moved quickly to that side of the verandah from which almost the whole of the roadstead could be seen. At the very moment when Jasper, issuing from the door of the Orange House, was passing under him in the street below, he cried to the others excitedly:

"That was Allen right enough! But where is his brig?"

Jasper heard these words with extraordinary loudness. The heavens rang with them, as if calling him to account; for those were the very words Freya would have to use. It was an annihilating question; it struck his consciousness like a thunderbolt and brought a sudden night upon the chaos of his thoughts even as he walked. He did not check his pace. He went on in the darkness for another three strides, and then fell.

The good Mesman had to push on as far as the hospital before he found him. The doctor there talked of a slight heatstroke. Nothing very much. Out in three days. . . . It must be admitted that the doctor was right. In three days, Jasper Allen came out of the hospital and became visible to the town — very visible indeed — and remained so for quite a long time; long enough to become almost one of the sights of the place; long enough to become disregarded at last; long enough for the tale of his haunting visibility to be remembered in the islands to this day.

The talk on the “front” and Jasper’s appearance in the Orange House stand at the beginning of the famous Bonito case, and give a view of its two aspects — the practical and the psychological. The case for the courts and the case for compassion; that last terribly evident and yet obscure.

It has, you must understand, remained obscure even for that friend of mine who wrote me the letter mentioned in the very first lines of this narrative. He was one of those in Mr. Mesman’s office, and accompanied that gentleman in his search for Jasper. His letter described to me the two aspects and some of the episodes of the case. Heemskirk’s attitude was that of deep thankfulness for not having lost his own ship, and that was all. Haze over the land was his explanation of having got so close to Tamissa reef. He saved his ship, and for the rest he did not care. As to the fat gunner, he deposed simply that he thought at the time that he was acting for the best by letting go the tow-rope, but admitted that he was greatly confused by the suddenness of the emergency.

As a matter of fact, he had acted on very precise instructions from Heemskirk, to whom through several years’ service together in the East he had become a sort of devoted henchman. What was most amazing in the detention of the Bonito was his story how, proceeding to take possession of the firearms as ordered, he discovered that there were no firearms on board. All he found in the fore-cabin was an empty rack for the proper number of eighteen rifles, but of the rifles themselves never a single one anywhere in the ship. The mate of the brig, who looked rather ill and behaved excitedly,

as though he were perhaps a lunatic, wanted him to believe that Captain Allen knew nothing of this; that it was he, the mate, who had recently sold these rifles in the dead of night to a certain person up the river. In proof of this story he produced a bag of silver dollars and pressed it on his, the gunner's, acceptance. Then, suddenly flinging it down on the deck, he beat his own head with both his fists and started heaping shocking curses upon his own soul for an ungrateful wretch not fit to live.

All this the gunner reported at once to his commanding officer.

What Heemskirk intended by taking upon himself to detain the Bonito it is difficult to say, except that he meant to bring some trouble into the life of the man favoured by Freya. He had been looking at Jasper with a desire to strike that man of kisses and embraces to the earth. The question was: How could he do it without giving himself away? But the report of the gunner created a serious case enough. Yet Allen had friends — and who could tell whether he wouldn't somehow succeed in wriggling out of it? The idea of simply towing the brig so much compromised on to the reef came to him while he was listening to the fat gunner in his cabin. There was but little risk of being disapproved now. And it should be made to appear an accident.

Going out on deck he had gloated upon his unconscious victim with such a sinister roll of his eyes, such a queerly pursed mouth, that Jasper could not help smiling. And the lieutenant had gone on the bridge, saying to himself:

“You wait! I shall spoil the taste of those sweet kisses for you. When you hear of Lieutenant Heemskirk in the future that name won't bring a smile on your lips, I swear. You are delivered into my hands.”

And this possibility had come about without any planning, one could almost say naturally, as if events had mysteriously shaped themselves to fit the purposes of a dark passion. The most astute scheming could not have served Heemskirk better. It was given to him to taste a transcendental, an incredible perfection of vengeance; to strike a deadly blow into that hated person's heart, and to watch him afterwards walking about with the dagger in his breast.

For that is what the state of Jasper amounted to. He moved, acted, weary-eyed, keen-faced, lank and restless, with brusque movements and fierce gestures; he talked incessantly in a frenzied and fatigued voice, but within himself he knew that nothing would ever give him back the brig, just as nothing can heal a pierced heart. His soul, kept quiet in the stress of love

by the unflinching Freya's influence, was like a still but overwound string. The shock had started it vibrating, and the string had snapped. He had waited for two years in a perfectly intoxicated confidence for a day that now would never come to a man disarmed for life by the loss of the brig, and, it seemed to him, made unfit for love to which he had no foothold to offer.

Day after day he would traverse the length of the town, follow the coast, and, reaching the point of land opposite that part of the reef on which his brig lay stranded, look steadily across the water at her beloved form, once the home of an exulting hope, and now, in her inclined, desolated immobility, towering above the lonely sea-horizon, a symbol of despair.

The crew had left her in due course in her own boats which directly they reached the town were sequestered by the harbour authorities. The vessel, too, was sequestered pending proceedings; but these same authorities did not take the trouble to set a guard on board. For, indeed, what could move her from there? Nothing, unless a miracle; nothing, unless Jasper's eyes, fastened on her tensely for hours together, as though he hoped by the mere power of vision to draw her to his breast.

All this story, read in my friend's very chatty letter, dismayed me not a little. But it was really appalling to read his relation of how Schultz, the mate, went about everywhere affirming with desperate pertinacity that it was he alone who had sold the rifles. "I stole them," he protested. Of course, no one would believe him. My friend himself did not believe him, though he, of course, admired this self-sacrifice. But a good many people thought it was going too far to make oneself out a thief for the sake of a friend. Only, it was such an obvious lie, too, that it did not matter, perhaps.

I, who, in view of Schultz's psychology, knew how true that must be, admit that I was appalled. So this was how a perfidious destiny took advantage of a generous impulse! And I felt as though I were an accomplice in this perfidy, since I did to a certain extent encourage Jasper. Yet I had warned him as well.

"The man seemed to have gone crazy on this point," wrote my friend. "He went to Mesman with his story. He says that some rascally white man living amongst the natives up that river made him drunk with some gin one evening, and then jeered at him for never having any money. Then he, protesting to us that he was an honest man and must be believed, described himself as being a thief whenever he took a drop too much, and told us that

he went on board and passed the rifles one by one without the slightest compunction to a canoe which came alongside that night, receiving ten dollars apiece for them.

“Next day he was ill with shame and grief, but had not the courage to confess his lapse to his benefactor. When the gunboat stopped the brig he felt ready to die with the apprehension of the consequences, and would have died happily, if he could have been able to bring the rifles back by the sacrifice of his life. He said nothing to Jasper, hoping that the brig would be released presently. When it turned out otherwise and his captain was detained on board the gunboat, he was ready to commit suicide from despair; only he thought it his duty to live in order to let the truth be known. ‘I am an honest man! I am an honest man!’ he repeated, in a voice that brought tears to our eyes. ‘You must believe me when I tell you that I am a thief — a vile, low, cunning, sneaking thief as soon as I’ve had a glass or two. Take me somewhere where I may tell the truth on oath.’

“When we had at last convinced him that his story could be of no use to Jasper — for what Dutch court, having once got hold of an English trader, would accept such an explanation; and, indeed, how, when, where could one hope to find proofs of such a tale? — he made as if to tear his hair in handfuls, but, calming down, said: ‘Good-bye, then, gentlemen,’ and went out of the room so crushed that he seemed hardly able to put one foot before the other. That very night he committed suicide by cutting his throat in the house of a half-caste with whom he had been lodging since he came ashore from the wreck.”

That throat, I thought with a shudder, which could produce the tender, persuasive, manly, but fascinating voice which had aroused Jasper’s ready compassion and had secured Freya’s sympathy! Who could ever have supposed such an end in store for the impossible, gentle Schultz, with his idiosyncrasy of naïve pilfering, so absurdly straightforward that, even in the people who had suffered from it, it aroused nothing more than a sort of amused exasperation? He was really impossible. His lot evidently should have been a half-starved, mysterious, but by no means tragic existence as a mild-eyed, inoffensive beachcomber on the fringe of native life. There are occasions when the irony of fate, which some people profess to discover in the working out of our lives, wears the aspect of crude and savage jesting.

I shook my head over the manes of Schultz, and went on with my friend’s letter. It told me how the brig on the reef, looted by the natives from the

coast villages, acquired gradually the lamentable aspect, the grey ghastliness of a wreck; while Jasper, fading daily into a mere shadow of a man, strode brusquely all along the “front” with horribly lively eyes and a faint, fixed smile on his lips, to spend the day on a lonely spit of sand looking eagerly at her, as though he had expected some shape on board to rise up and make some sort of sign to him over the decaying bulwarks. The Mesmans were taking care of him as far as it was possible. The Bonito case had been referred to Batavia, where no doubt it would fade away in a fog of official papers. . . . It was heartrending to read all this. That active and zealous officer, Lieutenant Heemskirk, his air of sullen, darkly-pained self-importance not lightened by the approval of his action conveyed to him unofficially, had gone on to take up his station in the Moluccas. . . .

Then, at the end of the bulky, kindly-meant epistle, dealing with the island news of half a year at least, my friend wrote: “A couple of months ago old Nelson turned up here, arriving by the mail-boat from Java. Came to see Mesman, it seems. A rather mysterious visit, and extraordinarily short, after coming all that way. He stayed just four days at the Orange House, with apparently nothing in particular to do, and then caught the south-going steamer for the Straits. I remember people saying at one time that Allen was rather sweet on old Nelson’s daughter, the girl that was brought up by Mrs. Harley and then went to live with him at the Seven Isles group. Surely you remember old Nelson — ”

Remember old Nelson! Rather!

The letter went on to inform me further that old Nelson, at least, remembered me, since some time after his flying visit to Makassar he had written to the Mesmans asking for my address in London.

That old Nelson (or Nielsen), the note of whose personality was a profound, echoless irresponsiveness to everything around him, should wish to write, or find anything to write about to anybody, was in itself a cause for no small wonder. And to me, of all people! I waited with uneasy impatience for whatever disclosure could come from that naturally benighted intelligence, but my impatience had time to wear out before my eyes beheld old Nelson’s trembling, painfully-formed handwriting, senile and childish at the same time, on an envelope bearing a penny stamp and the postal mark of the Notting Hill office. I delayed opening it in order to pay the tribute of astonishment due to the event by flinging my hands above my head. So he had come home to England, to be definitely Nelson; or else

was on his way home to Denmark, where he would revert for ever to his original Nielsen! But old Nelson (or Nielsen) out of the tropics seemed unthinkable. And yet he was there, asking me to call.

His address was at a boarding-house in one of those Bayswater squares, once of leisure, which nowadays are reduced to earning their living. Somebody had recommended him there. I started to call on him on one of those January days in London, one of those wintry days composed of the four devilish elements, cold, wet, mud, and grime, combined with a particular stickiness of atmosphere that clings like an unclean garment to one's very soul. Yet on approaching his abode I saw, like a flicker far behind the soiled veil of the four elements, the wearisome and splendid glitter of a blue sea with the Seven Islets like minute specks swimming in my eye, the high red roof of the bungalow crowning the very smallest of them all. This visual reminiscence was profoundly disturbing. I knocked at the door with a faltering hand.

Old Nelson (or Nielsen) got up from the table at which he was sitting with a shabby pocket-book full of papers before him. He took off his spectacles before shaking hands. For a moment neither of us said a word; then, noticing me looking round somewhat expectantly, he murmured some words, of which I caught only "daughter" and "Hong Kong," cast his eyes down, and sighed.

His moustache, sticking all ways out, as of yore, was quite white now. His old cheeks were softly rounded, with some colour in them; strangely enough, that something childlike always noticeable in the general contour of his physiognomy had become much more marked. Like his handwriting, he looked childish and senile. He showed his age most in his unintelligently furrowed, anxious forehead and in his round, innocent eyes, which appeared to me weak and blinking and watery; or was it that they were full of tears? . . .

To discover old Nelson fully informed upon any matter whatever was a new experience. And after the first awkwardness had worn off he talked freely, with, now and then, a question to start him going whenever he lapsed into silence, which he would do suddenly, clasping his hands on his waistcoat in an attitude which would recall to me the east verandah, where he used to sit talking quietly and puffing out his cheeks in what seemed now old, very old days. He talked in a reasonable somewhat anxious tone.

“No, no. We did not know anything for weeks. Out of the way like that, we couldn’t, of course. No mail service to the Seven Isles. But one day I ran over to Banka in my big sailing-boat to see whether there were any letters, and saw a Dutch paper. But it looked only like a bit of marine news: English brig Bonito gone ashore outside Makassar roads. That was all. I took the paper home with me and showed it to her. ‘I will never forgive him!’ she cries with her old spirit. ‘My dear,’ I said, ‘you are a sensible girl. The best man may lose a ship. But what about your health?’ I was beginning to be frightened at her looks. She would not let me talk even of going to Singapore before. But, really, such a sensible girl couldn’t keep on objecting for ever. ‘Do what you like, papa,’ she says. Rather a job, that. Had to catch a steamer at sea, but I got her over all right. There, doctors, of course. Fever. Anaemia. Put her to bed. Two or three women very kind to her. Naturally in our papers the whole story came out before long. She reads it to the end, lying on the couch; then hands the newspaper back to me, whispers ‘Heemskirk,’ and goes off into a faint.”

He blinked at me for quite a long time, his eyes running full of tears again.

“Next day,” he began, without any emotion in his voice, “she felt stronger, and we had a long talk. She told me everything.”

Here old Nelson, with his eyes cast down, gave me the whole story of the Heemskirk episode in Freya’s words; then went on in his rather jerky utterance, and looking up innocently:

“‘My dear,’ I said, ‘you have behaved in the main like a sensible girl.’ ‘I have been horrid,’ she cries, ‘and he is breaking his heart over there.’ Well, she was too sensible not to see she wasn’t in a state to travel. But I went. She told me to go. She was being looked after very well. Anaemia. Getting better, they said.”

He paused.

“You did see him?” I murmured.

“Oh, yes; I did see him,” he started again, talking in that reasonable voice as though he were arguing a point. “I did see him. I came upon him. Eyes sunk an inch into his head; nothing but skin on the bones of his face, a skeleton in dirty white clothes. That’s what he looked like. How Freya . . . But she never did — not really. He was sitting there, the only live thing for miles along that coast, on a drift-log washed up on the shore. They had clipped his hair in the hospital, and it had not grown again. He stared,



holding his chin in his hand, and with nothing on the sea between him and the sky but that wreck. When I came up to him he just moved his head a bit. 'Is that you, old man?' says he — like that.

"If you had seen him you would have understood at once how impossible it was for Freya to have ever loved that man. Well, well. I don't say. She might have — something. She was lonely, you know. But really to go away with him! Never! Madness. She was too sensible . . . I began to reproach him gently. And by and by he turns on me. 'Write to you! What about? Come to her! What with? If I had been a man I would have carried her off, but she made a child, a happy child, of me. Tell her that the day the only thing I had belonging to me in the world perished on this reef I discovered that I had no power over her. . . Has she come here with you?' he shouts, blazing at me suddenly with his hollow eyes. I shook my head. Come with me, indeed! Anaemia! 'Aha! You see? Go away, then, old man, and leave me alone here with that ghost,' he says, jerking his head at the wreck of his brig.

"Mad! It was getting dusk. I did not care to stop any longer all by myself with that man in that lonely place. I was not going to tell him of Freya's illness. Anaemia! What was the good? Mad! And what sort of husband would he have made, anyhow, for a sensible girl like Freya? Why, even my little property I could not have left them. The Dutch authorities would never have allowed an Englishman to settle there. It was not sold then. My man Mahmat, you know, was looking after it for me. Later on I let it go for a tenth of its value to a Dutch half-caste. But never mind. It was nothing to me then. Yes; I went away from him. I caught the return mail-boat. I told everything to Freya. 'He's mad,' I said; 'and, my dear, the only thing he loved was his brig.'

"'Perhaps,' she says to herself, looking straight away — her eyes were nearly as hollow as his — 'perhaps it is true. Yes! I would never allow him any power over me.'"

Old Nelson paused. I sat fascinated, and feeling a little cold in that room with a blazing fire.

"So you see," he continued, "she never really cared for him. Much too sensible. I took her away to Hong Kong. Change of climate, they said. Oh, these doctors! My God! Winter time! There came ten days of cold mists and wind and rain. Pneumonia. But look here! We talked a lot together. Days and evenings. Who else had she? . . . She talked a lot to me,

my own girl. Sometimes she would laugh a little. Look at me and laugh a little — ”

I shuddered. He looked up vaguely, with a childish, puzzled moodiness.

“She would say: ‘I did not really mean to be a bad daughter to you, papa.’ And I would say: ‘Of course, my dear. You could not have meant it.’ She would lie quiet and then say: ‘I wonder?’ And sometimes, ‘I’ve been really a coward,’ she would tell me. You know, sick people they say things. And so she would say too: ‘I’ve been conceited, headstrong, capricious. I sought my own gratification. I was selfish or afraid.’ . . . But sick people, you know, they say anything. And once, after lying silent almost all day, she said: ‘Yes; perhaps, when the day came I would not have gone. Perhaps! I don’t know,’ she cried. ‘Draw the curtain, papa. Shut the sea out. It reproaches me with my folly.’” He gasped and paused.

“So you see,” he went on in a murmur. “Very ill, very ill indeed. Pneumonia. Very sudden.” He pointed his finger at the carpet, while the thought of the poor girl, vanquished in her struggle with three men’s absurdities, and coming at last to doubt her own self, held me in a very anguish of pity.

“You see yourself,” he began again in a downcast manner. “She could not have really . . . She mentioned you several times. Good friend. Sensible man. So I wanted to tell you myself — let you know the truth. A fellow like that! How could it be? She was lonely. And perhaps for a while . . . Mere nothing. There could never have been a question of love for my Freya — such a sensible girl — ”

“Man!” I cried, rising upon him wrathfully, “don’t you see that she died of it?”

He got up too. “No! no!” he stammered, as if angry. “The doctors! Pneumonia. Low state. The inflammation of the . . . They told me. Pneu — ”

He did not finish the word. It ended in a sob. He flung his arms out in a gesture of despair, giving up his ghastly pretence with a low, heartrending cry:

“And I thought that she was so sensible!”

## **PRINCE ROMAN**



“Events which happened seventy years ago are perhaps rather too far off to be dragged aptly into a mere conversation. Of course the year 1831 is for us an historical date, one of these fatal years when in the presence of the world’s passive indignation and eloquent sympathies we had once more to murmur ‘*Vo Victis*’ and count the cost in sorrow. Not that we were ever very good at calculating, either, in prosperity or in adversity. That’s a lesson we could never learn, to the great exasperation of our enemies who have bestowed upon us the epithet of Incorrigible...”

The speaker was of Polish nationality, that nationality not so much alive as surviving, which persists in thinking, breathing, speaking, hoping, and suffering in its grave, railed in by a million of bayonets and triple-sealed with the seals of three great empires.

The conversation was about aristocracy. How did this, nowadays discredited, subject come up? It is some years ago now and the precise recollection has faded. But I remember that it was not considered practically as an ingredient in the social mixture; and I verily believed that we arrived at that subject through some exchange of ideas about patriotism — a somewhat discredited sentiment, because the delicacy of our humanitarians regards it as a relic of barbarism. Yet neither the great Florentine painter who closed his eyes in death thinking of his city, nor St. Francis blessing with his last breath the town of Assisi, were barbarians. It requires a certain greatness of soul to interpret patriotism worthily — or else a sincerity of feeling denied to the vulgar refinement of modern thought which cannot understand the august simplicity of a sentiment proceeding from the very nature of things and men.

The aristocracy we were talking about was the very highest, the great families of Europe, not impoverished, not converted, not liberalized, the most distinctive and specialized class of all classes, for which even ambition itself does not exist among the usual incentives to activity and regulators of conduct.

The undisputed right of leadership having passed away from them, we judged that their great fortunes, their cosmopolitanism brought about by wide alliances, their elevated station, in which there is so little to gain and

so much to lose, must make their position difficult in times of political commotion or national upheaval. No longer born to command — which is the very essence of aristocracy — it becomes difficult for them to do aught else but hold aloof from the great movements of popular passion.

We had reached that conclusion when the remark about far-off events was made and the date of 1831 mentioned. And the speaker continued:

“I don’t mean to say that I knew Prince Roman at that remote time. I begin to feel pretty ancient, but I am not so ancient as that. In fact Prince Roman was married the very year my father was born. It was in 1828; the 19th Century was young yet and the Prince was even younger than the century, but I don’t know exactly by how much. In any case his was an early marriage. It was an ideal alliance from every point of view. The girl was young and beautiful, an orphan heiress of a great name and of a great fortune. The Prince, then an officer in the Guards and distinguished amongst his fellows by something reserved and reflective in his character, had fallen headlong in love with her beauty, her charm, and the serious qualities of her mind and heart. He was a rather silent young man; but his glances, his bearing, his whole person expressed his absolute devotion to the woman of his choice, a devotion which she returned in her own frank and fascinating manner.

“The flame of this pure young passion promised to burn for ever; and for a season it lit up the dry, cynical atmosphere of the great world of St. Petersburg. The Emperor Nicholas himself, the grandfather of the present man, the one who died from the Crimean War, the last perhaps of the Autocrats with a mystical belief in the Divine character of his mission, showed some interest in this pair of married lovers. It is true that Nicholas kept a watchful eye on all the doings of the great Polish nobles. The young people leading a life appropriate to their station were obviously wrapped up in each other; and society, fascinated by the sincerity of a feeling moving serenely among the artificialities of its anxious and fastidious agitation, watched them with benevolent indulgence and an amused tenderness.

“The marriage was the social event of 1828, in the capital. Just forty years afterwards I was staying in the country house of my mother’s brother in our southern provinces.

“It was the dead of winter. The great lawn in front was as pure and smooth as an alpine snowfield, a white and feathery level sparkling under the sun as if sprinkled with diamond-dust, declining gently to the lake — a

long, sinuous piece of frozen water looking bluish and more solid than the earth. A cold brilliant sun glided low above an undulating horizon of great folds of snow in which the villages of Ukrainian peasants remained out of sight, like clusters of boats hidden in the hollows of a running sea. And everything was very still.

“I don’t know now how I had managed to escape at eleven o’clock in the morning from the schoolroom. I was a boy of eight, the little girl, my cousin, a few months younger than myself, though hereditarily more quick-tempered, was less adventurous. So I had escaped alone; and presently I found myself in the great stone-paved hall, warmed by a monumental stove of white tiles, a much more pleasant locality than the schoolroom, which for some reason or other, perhaps hygienic, was always kept at a low temperature.

“We children were aware that there was a guest staying in the house. He had arrived the night before just as we were being driven off to bed. We broke back through the line of beaters to rush and flatten our noses against the dark window panes; but we were too late to see him alight. We had only watched in a ruddy glare the big travelling carriage on sleigh-runners harnessed with six horses, a black mass against the snow, going off to the stables, preceded by a horseman carrying a blazing ball of tow and resin in an iron basket at the end of a long stick swung from his saddle bow. Two stable boys had been sent out early in the afternoon along the snow-tracks to meet the expected guest at dusk and light his way with these road torches. At that time, you must remember, there was not a single mile of railways in our southern provinces. My little cousin and I had no knowledge of trains and engines, except from picture-books, as of things rather vague, extremely remote, and not particularly interesting unless to grownups who travelled abroad.

“Our notion of princes, perhaps a little more precise, was mainly literary and had a glamour reflected from the light of fairy tales, in which princes always appear young, charming, heroic, and fortunate. Yet, as well as any other children, we could draw a firm line between the real and the ideal. We knew that princes were historical personages. And there was some glamour in that fact, too. But what had driven me to roam cautiously over the house like an escaped prisoner was the hope of snatching an interview with a special friend of mine, the head forester, who generally came to make his report at that time of the day, I yearned for news of a certain wolf. You

know, in a country where wolves are to be found, every winter almost brings forward an individual eminent by the audacity of his misdeeds, by his more perfect wolfishness — so to speak. I wanted to hear some new thrilling tale of that wolf — perhaps the dramatic story of his death....

“But there was no one in the hall.

“Deceived in my hopes, I became suddenly very much depressed. Unable to slip back in triumph to my studies I elected to stroll spiritlessly into the billiard room where certainly I had no business. There was no one there either, and I felt very lost and desolate under its high ceiling, all alone with the massive English billiard table which seemed, in heavy, rectilinear silence, to disapprove of that small boy’s intrusion.

“As I began to think of retreat I heard footsteps in the adjoining drawing room; and, before I could turn tail and flee, my uncle and his guest appeared in the doorway. To run away after having been seen would have been highly improper, so I stood my ground. My uncle looked surprised to see me; the guest by his side was a spare man, of average stature, buttoned up in a black frock coat and holding himself very erect with a stiffly soldier-like carriage. From the folds of a soft white cambric neck-cloth peeped the points of a collar close against each shaven cheek. A few wisps of thin gray hair were brushed smoothly across the top of his bald head. His face, which must have been beautiful in its day, had preserved in age the harmonious simplicity of its lines. What amazed me was its even, almost deathlike pallor. He seemed to me to be prodigiously old. A faint smile, a mere momentary alteration in the set of his thin lips acknowledged my blushing confusion; and I became greatly interested to see him reach into the inside breastpocket of his coat. He extracted therefrom a lead pencil and a block of detachable pages, which he handed to my uncle with an almost imperceptible bow.

“I was very much astonished, but my uncle received it as a matter of course. He wrote something at which the other glanced and nodded slightly. A thin wrinkled hand — the hand was older than the face — patted my cheek and then rested on my head lightly. An un-ringing voice, a voice as colourless as the face itself, issued from his sunken lips, while the eyes, dark and still, looked down at me kindly.

““And how old is this shy little boy?”“

“Before I could answer my uncle wrote down my age on the pad. I was deeply impressed. What was this ceremony? Was this personage too great to

be spoken to? Again he glanced at the pad, and again gave a nod, and again that impersonal, mechanical voice was heard: 'He resembles his grandfather.'

"I remembered my paternal grandfather. He had died not long before. He, too, was prodigiously old. And to me it seemed perfectly natural that two such ancient and venerable persons should have known each other in the dim ages of creation before my birth. But my uncle obviously had not been aware of the fact. So obviously that the mechanical voice explained: 'Yes, yes. Comrades in '31. He was one of those who knew. Old times, my dear sir, old times....'

"He made a gesture as if to put aside an importunate ghost. And now they were both looking down at me. I wondered whether anything was expected from me. To my round, questioning eyes my uncle remarked: 'He's completely deaf.' And the unrelated, inexpressive voice said: 'Give me your hand.'

"Acutely conscious of inky fingers I put it out timidly. I had never seen a deaf person before and was rather startled. He pressed it firmly and then gave me a final pat on the head.

"My uncle addressed me weightily: 'You have shaken hands with Prince Roman S — — — — -. It's something for you to remember when you grow up.'

"I was impressed by his tone. I had enough historical information to know vaguely that the Princes S — — — — - counted amongst the sovereign Princes of Ruthenia till the union of all Ruthenian lands to the kingdom of Poland, when they became great Polish magnates, sometime at the beginning of the 15th Century. But what concerned me most was the failure of the fairy-tale glamour. It was shocking to discover a prince who was deaf, bald, meagre, and so prodigiously old. It never occurred to me that this imposing and disappointing man had been young, rich, beautiful; I could not know that he had been happy in the felicity of an ideal marriage uniting two young hearts, two great names and two great fortunes; happy with a happiness which, as in fairy tales, seemed destined to last for ever....

"But it did not last for ever. It was fated not to last very long even by the measure of the days allotted to men's passage on this earth where enduring happiness is only found in the conclusion of fairy tales. A daughter was born to them and shortly afterwards, the health of the young princess began to fail. For a time she bore up with smiling intrepidity, sustained by the

feeling that now her existence was necessary for the happiness of two lives. But at last the husband, thoroughly alarmed by the rapid changes in her appearance, obtained an unlimited leave and took her away from the capital to his parents in the country.

“The old prince and princess were extremely frightened at the state of their beloved daughter-in-law. Preparations were at once made for a journey abroad. But it seemed as if it were already too late; and the invalid herself opposed the project with gentle obstinacy. Thin and pale in the great armchair, where the insidious and obscure nervous malady made her appear smaller and more frail every day without effacing the smile of her eyes or the charming grace of her wasted face, she clung to her native land and wished to breathe her native air. Nowhere else could she expect to get well so quickly, nowhere else would it be so easy for her to die.

“She died before her little girl was two years old. The grief of the husband was terrible and the more alarming to his parents because perfectly silent and dry-eyed. After the funeral, while the immense bareheaded crowd of peasants surrounding the private chapel on the grounds was dispersing, the Prince, waving away his friends and relations, remained alone to watch the masons of the estate closing the family vault. When the last stone was in position he uttered a groan, the first sound of pain which had escaped from him for days, and walking away with lowered head shut himself up again in his apartments.

“His father and mother feared for his reason. His outward tranquillity was appalling to them. They had nothing to trust to but that very youth which made his despair so self-absorbed and so intense. Old Prince John, fretful and anxious, repeated: ‘Poor Roman should be roused somehow. He’s so young.’ But they could find nothing to rouse him with. And the old princess, wiping her eyes, wished in her heart he were young enough to come and cry at her knee.

“In time Prince Roman, making an effort, would join now and again the family circle. But it was as if his heart and his mind had been buried in the family vault with the wife he had lost. He took to wandering in the woods with a gun, watched over secretly by one of the keepers, who would report in the evening that ‘His Serenity has never fired a shot all day.’ Sometimes walking to the stables in the morning he would order in subdued tones a horse to be saddled, wait switching his boot till it was led up to him, then mount without a word and ride out of the gates at a walking pace. He would



be gone all day. People saw him on the roads looking neither to the right nor to the left, white-faced, sitting rigidly in the saddle like a horseman of stone on a living mount.

“The peasants working in the fields, the great unhedged fields, looked after him from the distance; and sometimes some sympathetic old woman on the threshold of a low, thatched hut was moved to make the sign of the cross in the air behind his back; as though he were one of themselves, a simple village soul struck by a sore affliction.

“He rode looking straight ahead seeing no one as if the earth were empty and all mankind buried in that grave which had opened so suddenly in his path to swallow up his happiness. What were men to him with their sorrows, joys, labours and passions from which she who had been all the world to him had been cut off so early?

“They did not exist; and he would have felt as completely lonely and abandoned as a man in the toils of a cruel nightmare if it had not been for this countryside where he had been born and had spent his happy boyish years. He knew it well — every slight rise crowned with trees amongst the ploughed fields, every dell concealing a village. The dammed streams made a chain of lakes set in the green meadows. Far away to the north the great Lithuanian forest faced the sun, no higher than a hedge; and to the south, the way to the plains, the vast brown spaces of the earth touched the blue sky.

“And this familiar landscape associated with the days without thought and without sorrow, this land the charm of which he felt without even looking at it soothed his pain, like the presence of an old friend who sits silent and disregarded by one in some dark hour of life.

“One afternoon, it happened that the Prince after turning his horse’s head for home remarked a low dense cloud of dark dust cutting off slantwise a part of the view. He reined in on a knoll and peered. There were slender gleams of steel here and there in that cloud, and it contained moving forms which revealed themselves at last as a long line of peasant carts full of soldiers, moving slowly in double file under the escort of mounted Cossacks.

“It was like an immense reptile creeping over the fields; its head dipped out of sight in a slight hollow and its tail went on writhing and growing shorter as though the monster were eating its way slowly into the very heart of the land.

“The Prince directed his way through a village lying a little off the track. The roadside inn with its stable, byre, and barn under one enormous thatched roof resembled a deformed, hunch-backed, ragged giant, sprawling amongst the small huts of the peasants. The innkeeper, a portly, dignified Jew, clad in a black satin coat reaching down to his heels and girt with a red sash, stood at the door stroking his long silvery beard.

“He watched the Prince approach and bowed gravely from the waist, not expecting to be noticed even, since it was well known that their young lord had no eyes for anything or anybody in his grief. It was quite a shock for him when the Prince pulled up and asked:

“‘What’s all this, Yankel?’

“‘That is, please your Serenity, that is a convoy of footsoldiers they are hurrying down to the south.’

“He glanced right and left cautiously, but as there was no one near but some children playing in the dust of the village street, he came up close to the stirrup.

“‘Doesn’t your Serenity know? It has begun already down there. All the landowners great and small are out in arms and even the common people have risen. Only yesterday the saddler from Grodek (it was a tiny market-town near by) went through here with his two apprentices on his way to join. He left even his cart with me. I gave him a guide through our neighbourhood. You know, your Serenity, our people they travel a lot and they see all that’s going on, and they know all the roads.’

“He tried to keep down his excitement, for the Jew Yankel, innkeeper and tenant of all the mills on the estate, was a Polish patriot. And in a still lower voice:

“‘I was already a married man when the French and all the other nations passed this way with Napoleon. Tse! Tse! That was a great harvest for death, nu! Perhaps this time God will help.’

“The Prince nodded. ‘Perhaps’ — and falling into deep meditation he let his horse take him home.

“That night he wrote a letter, and early in the morning sent a mounted express to the post town. During the day he came out of his taciturnity, to the great joy of the family circle, and conversed with his father of recent events — the revolt in Warsaw, the flight of the Grand Duke Constantine, the first slight successes of the Polish army (at that time there was a Polish army); the risings in the provinces. Old Prince John, moved and uneasy,

speaking from a purely aristocratic point of view, mistrusted the popular origins of the movement, regretted its democratic tendencies, and did not believe in the possibility of success. He was sad, inwardly agitated.

“I am judging all this calmly. There are secular principles of legitimacy and order which have been violated in this reckless enterprise for the sake of most subversive illusions. Though of course the patriotic impulses of the heart....’

“Prince Roman had listened in a thoughtful attitude. He took advantage of the pause to tell his father quietly that he had sent that morning a letter to St. Petersburg resigning his commission in the Guards.

“The old prince remained silent. He thought that he ought to have been consulted. His son was also ordnance officer to the Emperor and he knew that the Tsar would never forget this appearance of defection in a Polish noble. In a discontented tone he pointed out to his son that as it was he had an unlimited leave. The right thing would have been to keep quiet. They had too much tact at Court to recall a man of his name. Or at worst some distant mission might have been asked for — to the Caucasus for instance — away from this unhappy struggle which was wrong in principle and therefore destined to fail.

“‘Presently you shall find yourself without any interest in life and with no occupation. And you shall need something to occupy you, my poor boy. You have acted rashly, I fear.’

“Prince Roman murmured.

“‘I thought it better.’

“His father faltered under his steady gaze.

“‘Well, well — perhaps! But as ordnance officer to the Emperor and in favour with all the Imperial family....’

“‘Those people had never been heard of when our house was already illustrious,’ the young man let fall disdainfully.

“This was the sort of remark to which the old prince was sensible.

“‘Well — perhaps it is better,’ he conceded at last.

“The father and son parted affectionately for the night. The next day Prince Roman seemed to have fallen back into the depths of his indifference. He rode out as usual. He remembered that the day before he had seen a reptile-like convoy of soldiery, bristling with bayonets, crawling over the face of that land which was his. The woman he loved had been his, too. Death had robbed him of her. Her loss had been to him a moral shock.

It had opened his heart to a greater sorrow, his mind to a vaster thought, his eyes to all the past and to the existence of another love fraught with pain but as mysteriously imperative as that lost one to which he had entrusted his happiness.

“That evening he retired earlier than usual and rang for his personal servant.

“‘Go and see if there is light yet in the quarters of the Master-of-the-Horse. If he is still up ask him to come and speak to me.’

“While the servant was absent on this errand the Prince tore up hastily some papers, locked the drawers of his desk, and hung a medallion, containing the miniature of his wife, round his neck against his breast.

“The man the Prince was expecting belonged to that past which the death of his love had called to life. He was of a family of small nobles who for generations had been adherents, servants, and friends of the Princes S — — — —. He remembered the times before the last partition and had taken part in the struggles of the last hour. He was a typical old Pole of that class, with a great capacity for emotion, for blind enthusiasm; with martial instincts and simple beliefs; and even with the old-time habit of larding his speech with Latin words. And his kindly shrewd eyes, his ruddy face, his lofty brow and his thick, gray, pendent moustache were also very typical of his kind.

“‘Listen, Master Francis,’ the Prince said familiarly and without preliminaries. ‘Listen, old friend. I am going to vanish from here quietly. I go where something louder than my grief and yet something with a voice very like it calls me. I confide in you alone. You will say what’s necessary when the time comes.’

“The old man understood. His extended hands trembled exceedingly. But as soon as he found his voice he thanked God aloud for letting him live long enough to see the descendant of the illustrious family in its youngest generation give an example *coram Gentibus* of the love of his country and of valour in the field. He doubted not of his dear Prince attaining a place in council and in war worthy of his high birth; he saw already that *in fulgore* of family glory *affulget patride serenitas*. At the end of the speech he burst into tears and fell into the Prince’s arms.

“The Prince quieted the old man and when he had him seated in an armchair and comparatively composed he said:

“Don’t misunderstand me, Master Francis. You know how I loved my wife. A loss like that opens one’s eyes to unsuspected truths. There is no question here of leadership and glory. I mean to go alone and to fight obscurely in the ranks. I am going to offer my country what is mine to offer, that is my life, as simply as the saddler from Grodek who went through yesterday with his apprentices.’

“The old man cried out at this. That could never be. He could not allow it. But he had to give way before the arguments and the express will of the Prince. “Ha! If you say that it is a matter of feeling and conscience — so be it. But you cannot go utterly alone. Alas! that I am too old to be of any use. *Cripit verba dolor*, my dear Prince, at the thought that I am over seventy and of no more account in the world than a cripple in the church porch. It seems that to sit at home and pray to God for the nation and for you is all I am fit for. But there is my son, my youngest son, Peter. He will make a worthy companion for you. And as it happens he’s staying with me here. There has not been for ages a Prince S — — — - hazarding his life without a companion of our name to ride by his side. You must have by you somebody who knows who you are if only to let your parents and your old servant hear what is happening to you. And when does your Princely Mightiness mean to start?’

“‘In an hour,’ said the Prince; and the old man hurried off to warn his son.

“Prince Roman took up a candlestick and walked quietly along a dark corridor in the silent house. The head-nurse said afterwards that waking up suddenly she saw the Prince looking at his child, one hand shading the light from its eyes. He stood and gazed at her for some time, and then putting the candlestick on the floor bent over the cot and kissed lightly the little girl who did not wake. He went out noiselessly, taking the light away with him. She saw his face perfectly well, but she could read nothing of his purpose in it. It was pale but perfectly calm and after he turned away from the cot he never looked back at it once.

“The only other trusted person, besides the old man and his son Peter, was the Jew Yankel. When he asked the Prince where precisely he wanted to be guided the Prince answered: ‘To the nearest party.’ A grandson of the Jew, a lanky youth, conducted the two young men by little-known paths across woods and morasses, and led them in sight of the few fires of a small detachment camped in a hollow. Some invisible horses neighed, a voice in

the dark cried: 'Who goes there?'... and the young Jew departed hurriedly, explaining that he must make haste home to be in time for keeping the Sabbath.

"Thus humbly and in accord with the simplicity of the vision of duty he saw when death had removed the brilliant bandage of happiness from his eyes, did Prince Roman bring his offering to his country. His companion made himself known as the son of the Master of-the-Horse to the Princes S — — — — - and declared him to be a relation, a distant cousin from the same parts as himself and, as people presumed, of the same name. In truth no one inquired much. Two more young men clearly of the right sort had joined. Nothing more natural.

"Prince Roman did not remain long in the south. One day while scouting with several others, they were ambushed near the entrance of a village by some Russian infantry. The first discharge laid low a good many and the rest scattered in all directions. The Russians, too, did not stay, being afraid of a return in force. After some time, the peasants coming to view the scene extricated Prince Roman from under his dead horse. He was unhurt but his faithful companion had been one of the first to fall. The Prince helped the peasants to bury him and the other dead.

"Then alone, not certain where to find the body of partizans which was constantly moving about in all directions, he resolved to try and join the main Polish army facing the Russians on the borders of Lithuania. Disguised in peasant clothes, in case of meeting some marauding Cossacks, he wandered a couple of weeks before he came upon a village occupied by a regiment of Polish cavalry on outpost duty.

"On a bench, before a peasant hut of a better sort, sat an elderly officer whom he took for the colonel. The Prince approached respectfully, told his story shortly and stated his desire to enlist; and when asked his name by the officer, who had been looking him over carefully, he gave on the spur of the moment the name of his dead companion.

"The elderly officer thought to himself: Here's the son of some peasant proprietor of the liberated class. He liked his appearance.

"And can you read and write, my good fellow?'he asked.

"Yes, your honour, I can,' said the Prince.

"Good. Come along inside the hut; the regimental adjutant is there. He will enter your name and administer the oath to you.'

“The adjutant stared very hard at the newcomer but said nothing. When all the forms had been gone through and the recruit gone out, he turned to his superior officer.

““Do you know who that is?’

““Who? That Peter? A likely chap.’

““That’s Prince Roman S — — — — -.’

““Nonsense.’

“But the adjutant was positive. He had seen the Prince several times, about two years before, in the Castle in Warsaw. He had even spoken to him once at a reception of officers held by the Grand Duke.

““He’s changed. He seems much older, but I am certain of my man. I have a good memory for faces.’

“The two officers looked at each other in silence.

““He’s sure to be recognized sooner or later,’ murmured the adjutant. The colonel shrugged his shoulders.

““It’s no affair of ours — if he has a fancy to serve in the ranks. As to being recognized it’s not so likely. All our officers and men come from the other end of Poland.’

“He meditated gravely for a while, then smiled. ‘He told me he could read and write. There’s nothing to prevent me making him a sergeant at the first opportunity. He’s sure to shape all right.’

“Prince Roman as a non-commissioned officer surpassed the colonel’s expectations. Before long Sergeant Peter became famous for his resourcefulness and courage. It was not the reckless courage of a desperate man; it was a self-possessed, as if conscientious, valour which nothing could dismay; a boundless but equable devotion, unaffected by time, by reverses, by the discouragement of endless retreats, by the bitterness of waning hopes and the horrors of pestilence added to the toils and perils of war. It was in this year that the cholera made its first appearance in Europe. It devastated the camps of both armies, affecting the firmest minds with the terror of a mysterious death stalking silently between the piled-up arms and around the bivouac fires.

“A sudden shriek would wake up the harassed soldiers and they would see in the glow of embers one of themselves writhe on the ground like a worm trodden on by an invisible foot. And before the dawn broke he would be stiff and cold. Parties so visited have been known to rise like one man, abandon the fire and run off into the night in mute panic. Or a comrade

talking to you on the march would stammer suddenly in the middle of a sentence, roll affrighted eyes, and fall down with distorted face and blue lips, breaking the ranks with the convulsions of his agony. Men were struck in the saddle, on sentry duty, in the firing line, carrying orders, serving the guns. I have been told that in a battalion forming under fire with perfect steadiness for the assault of a village, three cases occurred within five minutes at the head of the column; and the attack could not be delivered because the leading companies scattered all over the fields like chaff before the wind.

“Sergeant Peter, young as he was, had a great influence over his men. It was said that the number of desertions in the squadron in which he served was less than in any other in the whole of that cavalry division. Such was supposed to be the compelling example of one man’s quiet intrepidity in facing every form of danger and terror.

“However that may be, he was liked and trusted generally. When the end came and the remnants of that army corps, hard pressed on all sides, were preparing to cross the Prussian frontier, Sergeant Peter had enough influence to rally round him a score of troopers. He managed to escape with them at night, from the hemmed-in army. He led this band through 200 miles of country covered by numerous Russian detachments and ravaged by the cholera. But this was not to avoid captivity, to go into hiding and try to save themselves. No. He led them into a fortress which was still occupied by the Poles, and where the last stand of the vanquished revolution was to be made.

“This looks like mere fanaticism. But fanaticism is human. Man has adored ferocious divinities. There is ferocity in every passion, even in love itself. The religion of undying hope resembles the mad cult of despair, of death, of annihilation. The difference lies in the moral motive springing from the secret needs and the unexpressed aspiration of the believers. It is only to vain men that all is vanity; and all is deception only to those who have never been sincere with themselves.

“It was in the fortress that my grandfather found himself together with Sergeant Peter. My grandfather was a neighbour of the S — — — — family in the country but he did not know Prince Roman, who however knew his name perfectly well. The Prince introduced himself one night as they both sat on the ramparts, leaning against a gun carriage.



“The service he wished to ask for was, in case of his being killed, to have the intelligence conveyed to his parents.

“They talked in low tones, the other servants of the piece lying about near them. My grandfather gave the required promise, and then asked frankly — for he was greatly interested by the disclosure so unexpectedly made:

“But tell me, Prince, why this request? Have you any evil forebodings as to yourself?”

“Not in the least; I was thinking of my people. They have no idea where I am,” answered Prince Roman. ‘I’ll engage to do as much for you, if you like. It’s certain that half of us at least shall be killed before the end, so there’s an even chance of one of us surviving the other.’

“My grandfather told him where, as he supposed, his wife and children were then. From that moment till the end of the siege the two were much together. On the day of the great assault my grandfather received a severe wound. The town was taken. Next day the citadel itself, its hospital full of dead and dying, its magazines empty, its defenders having burnt their last cartridge, opened its gates.

“During all the campaign the Prince, exposing his person conscientiously on every occasion, had not received a scratch. No one had recognized him or at any rate had betrayed his identity. Till then, as long as he did his duty, it had mattered nothing who he was.

“Now, however, the position was changed. As ex-guardsman and as late ordnance officer to the Emperor, this rebel ran a serious risk of being given special attention in the shape of a firing squad at ten paces. For more than a month he remained lost in the miserable crowd of prisoners packed in the casemates of the citadel, with just enough food to keep body and soul together but otherwise allowed to die from wounds, privation, and disease at the rate of forty or so a day.

“The position of the fortress being central, new parties, captured in the open in the course of a thorough pacification, were being sent in frequently. Amongst such newcomers there happened to be a young man, a personal friend of the Prince from his school days. He recognized him, and in the extremity of his dismay cried aloud: ‘My God! Roman, you here!’

“It is said that years of life embittered by remorse paid for this momentary lack of self-control. All this happened in the main quadrangle of the citadel. The warning gesture of the Prince came too late. An officer of

the gendarmes on guard had heard the exclamation. The incident appeared to him worth inquiring into. The investigation which followed was not very arduous because the Prince, asked categorically for his real name, owned up at once.

“The intelligence of the Prince S — — — — being found amongst the prisoners was sent to St. Petersburg. His parents were already there living in sorrow, incertitude, and apprehension. The capital of the Empire was the safest place to reside in for a noble whose son had disappeared so mysteriously from home in a time of rebellion. The old people had not heard from him, or of him, for months. They took care not to contradict the rumours of suicide from despair circulating in the great world, which remembered the interesting love-match, the charming and frank happiness brought to an end by death. But they hoped secretly that their son survived, and that he had been able to cross the frontier with that part of the army which had surrendered to the Prussians.

“The news of his captivity was a crushing blow. Directly, nothing could be done for him. But the greatness of their name, of their position, their wide relations and connections in the highest spheres, enabled his parents to act indirectly and they moved heaven and earth, as the saying is, to save their son from the ‘consequences of his madness,’ as poor Prince John did not hesitate to express himself. Great personages were approached by society leaders, high dignitaries were interviewed, powerful officials were induced to take an interest in that affair. The help of every possible secret influence was enlisted. Some private secretaries got heavy bribes. The mistress of a certain senator obtained a large sum of money.

“But, as I have said, in such a glaring case no direct appeal could be made and no open steps taken. All that could be done was to incline by private representation the mind of the President of the Military Commission to the side of clemency. He ended by being impressed by the hints and suggestions, some of them from very high quarters, which he received from St. Petersburg. And, after all, the gratitude of such great nobles as the Princes S — — — — was something worth having from a worldly point of view. He was a good Russian but he was also a good-natured man. Moreover, the hate of Poles was not at that time a cardinal article of patriotic creed as it became some thirty years later. He felt well disposed at first sight towards that young man, bronzed, thin-faced, worn out by months of hard campaigning, the hardships of the siege and the rigours of captivity.

“The Commission was composed of three officers. It sat in the citadel in a bare vaulted room behind a long black table. Some clerks occupied the two ends, and besides the gendarmes who brought in the Prince there was no one else there.

“Within those four sinister walls shutting out from him all the sights and sounds of liberty, all hopes of the future, all consoling illusions — alone in the face of his enemies erected for judges, who can tell how much love of life there was in Prince Roman? How much remained in that sense of duty, revealed to him in sorrow? How much of his awakened love for his native country? That country which demands to be loved as no other country has ever been loved, with the mournful affection one bears to the unforgotten dead and with the unextinguishable fire of a hopeless passion which only a living, breathing, warm ideal can kindle in our breasts for our pride, for our weariness, for our exultation, for our undoing.

“There is something monstrous in the thought of such an exaction till it stands before us embodied in the shape of a fidelity without fear and without reproach. Nearing the supreme moment of his life the Prince could only have had the feeling that it was about to end. He answered the questions put to him clearly, concisely — with the most profound indifference. After all those tense months of action, to talk was a weariness to him. But he concealed it, lest his foes should suspect in his manner the apathy of discouragement or the numbness of a crushed spirit. The details of his conduct could have no importance one way or another; with his thoughts these men had nothing to do. He preserved a scrupulously courteous tone. He had refused the permission to sit down.

“What happened at this preliminary examination is only known from the presiding officer. Pursuing the only possible course in that glaringly bad case he tried from the first to bring to the Prince’s mind the line of defence he wished him to take. He absolutely framed his questions so as to put the right answers in the culprit’s mouth, going so far as to suggest the very words: how, distracted by excessive grief after his young wife’s death, rendered irresponsible for his conduct by his despair, in a moment of blind recklessness, without realizing the highly reprehensible nature of the act, nor yet its danger and its dishonour, he went off to join the nearest rebels on a sudden impulse. And that now, penitently...

“But Prince Roman was silent. The military judges looked at him hopefully. In silence he reached for a pen and wrote on a sheet of paper he

found under his hand: 'I joined the national rising from conviction.'

"He pushed the paper across the table. The president took it up, showed it in turn to his two colleagues sitting to the right and left, then looking fixedly at Prince Roman let it fall from his hand. And the silence remained unbroken till he spoke to the gendarmes ordering them to remove the prisoner.

"Such was the written testimony of Prince Roman in the supreme moment of his life. I have heard that the Princes of the S — — — family, in all its branches, adopted the last two words: 'From conviction' for the device under the armorial bearings of their house. I don't know whether the report is true. My uncle could not tell me. He remarked only, that naturally, it was not to be seen on Prince Roman's own seal.

"He was condemned for life to Siberian mines. Emperor Nicholas, who always took personal cognizance of all sentences on Polish nobility, wrote with his own hand in the margin: 'The authorities are severely warned to take care that this convict walks in chains like any other criminal every step of the way.'

"It was a sentence of deferred death. Very few survived entombment in these mines for more than three years. Yet as he was reported as still alive at the end of that time he was allowed, on a petition of his parents and by way of exceptional grace, to serve as common soldier in the Caucasus. All communication with him was forbidden. He had no civil rights. For all practical purposes except that of suffering he was a dead man. The little child he had been so careful not to wake up when he kissed her in her cot, inherited all the fortune after Prince John's death. Her existence saved those immense estates from confiscation.

"It was twenty-five years before Prince Roman, stone deaf, his health broken, was permitted to return to Poland. His daughter married splendidly to a Polish Austrian *grand seigneur* and, moving in the cosmopolitan sphere of the highest European aristocracy, lived mostly abroad in Nice and Vienna. He, settling down on one of her estates, not the one with the palatial residence but another where there was a modest little house, saw very little of her.

"But Prince Roman did not shut himself up as if his work were done. There was hardly anything done in the private and public life of the neighbourhood, in which Prince Roman's advice and assistance were not called upon, and never in vain. It was well said that his days did not belong

to himself but to his fellow citizens. And especially he was the particular friend of all returned exiles, helping them with purse and advice, arranging their affairs and finding them means of livelihood.

“I heard from my uncle many tales of his devoted activity, in which he was always guided by a simple wisdom, a high sense of honour, and the most scrupulous conception of private and public probity. He remains a living figure for me because of that meeting in a billiard room, when, in my anxiety to hear about a particularly wolfish wolf, I came in momentary contact with a man who was preeminently a man amongst all men capable of feeling deeply, of believing steadily, of loving ardently.

“I remember to this day the grasp of Prince Roman’s bony, wrinkled hand closing on my small inky paw, and my uncle’s half-serious, half-amused way of looking down at his trespassing nephew.

“They moved on and forgot that little boy. But I did not move; I gazed after them, not so much disappointed as disconcerted by this prince so utterly unlike a prince in a fairy tale. They moved very slowly across the room. Before reaching the other door the Prince stopped, and I heard him — I seem to hear him now — saying: ‘I wish you would write to Vienna about filling up that post. He’s a most deserving fellow — and your recommendation would be decisive.’

“My uncle’s face turned to him expressed genuine wonder. It said as plainly as any speech could say: What better recommendation than a father’s can be needed? The Prince was quick at reading expressions. Again he spoke with the toneless accent of a man who has not heard his own voice for years, for whom the soundless world is like an abode of silent shades.

“And to this day I remember the very words: ‘I ask you because, you see, my daughter and my son-in-law don’t believe me to be a good judge of men. They think that I let myself be guided too much by mere sentiment.’“

# ***THE PLANTER OF MALATA***



## CHAPTER I

In the private editorial office of the principal newspaper in a great colonial city two men were talking. They were both young. The stouter of the two, fair, and with more of an urban look about him, was the editor and part-owner of the important newspaper.

The other's name was Renouard. That he was exercised in his mind about something was evident on his fine bronzed face. He was a lean, lounging, active man. The journalist continued the conversation.

"And so you were dining yesterday at old Dunster's."

He used the word old not in the endearing sense in which it is sometimes applied to intimates, but as a matter of sober fact. The Dunster in question was old. He had been an eminent colonial statesman, but had now retired from active politics after a tour in Europe and a lengthy stay in England, during which he had had a very good press indeed. The colony was proud of him.

"Yes. I dined there," said Renouard. "Young Dunster asked me just as I was going out of his office. It seemed to be like a sudden thought. And yet I can't help suspecting some purpose behind it. He was very pressing. He swore that his uncle would be very pleased to see me. Said his uncle had mentioned lately that the granting to me of the Malata concession was the last act of his official life."

"Very touching. The old boy sentimentalises over the past now and then."

"I really don't know why I accepted," continued the other. "Sentiment does not move me very easily. Old Dunster was civil to me of course, but he did not even inquire how I was getting on with my silk plants. Forgot there was such a thing probably. I must say there were more people there than I expected to meet. Quite a big party."

"I was asked," remarked the newspaper man. "Only I couldn't go. But when did you arrive from Malata?"

"I arrived yesterday at daylight. I am anchored out there in the bay — off Garden Point. I was in Dunster's office before he had finished reading his letters. Have you ever seen young Dunster reading his letters? I had a glimpse of him through the open door. He holds the paper in both hands, hunches his shoulders up to his ugly ears, and brings his long nose and his thick lips on to it like a sucking apparatus. A commercial monster."

"Here we don't consider him a monster," said the newspaper man looking at his visitor thoughtfully.

"Probably not. You are used to see his face and to see other faces. I don't know how it is that, when I come to town, the appearance of the people in the street strike me with such force. They seem so awfully expressive."

"And not charming."

"Well — no. Not as a rule. The effect is forcible without being clear. . . . I know that you think it's because of my solitary manner of life away there."

"Yes. I do think so. It is demoralising. You don't see any one for months at a stretch. You're leading an unhealthy life."

The other hardly smiled and murmured the admission that true enough it was a good eleven months since he had been in town last.

"You see," insisted the other. "Solitude works like a sort of poison. And then you perceive suggestions in faces — mysterious and forcible, that no sound man would be bothered with. Of course you do."

Geoffrey Renouard did not tell his journalist friend that the suggestions of his own face, the face of a friend, bothered him as much as the others. He detected a degrading quality in the touches of age which every day adds to a human countenance. They moved and disturbed him, like the signs of a horrible inward travail which was frightfully apparent to the fresh eye he had brought from his isolation in Malata, where he had settled after five strenuous years of adventure and exploration.

"It's a fact," he said, "that when I am at home in Malata I see no one consciously. I take the plantation boys for granted."

"Well, and we here take the people in the streets for granted. And that's sanity."

The visitor said nothing to this for fear of engaging a discussion. What he had come to seek in the editorial office was not controversy, but information. Yet somehow he hesitated to approach the subject. Solitary life makes a man reticent in respect of anything in the nature of gossip, which those to whom chatting about their kind is an everyday exercise regard as the commonest use of speech.

"You very busy?" he asked.

The Editor making red marks on a long slip of printed paper threw the pencil down.



“No. I am done. Social paragraphs. This office is the place where everything is known about everybody — including even a great deal of nobodies. Queer fellows drift in and out of this room. Waifs and strays from home, from up-country, from the Pacific. And, by the way, last time you were here you picked up one of that sort for your assistant — didn’t you?”

“I engaged an assistant only to stop your preaching about the evils of solitude,” said Renouard hastily; and the pressman laughed at the half-resentful tone. His laugh was not very loud, but his plump person shook all over. He was aware that his younger friend’s deference to his advice was based only on an imperfect belief in his wisdom — or his sagacity. But it was he who had first helped Renouard in his plans of exploration: the five-years’ programme of scientific adventure, of work, of danger and endurance, carried out with such distinction and rewarded modestly with the lease of Malata island by the frugal colonial government. And this reward, too, had been due to the journalist’s advocacy with word and pen — for he was an influential man in the community. Doubting very much if Renouard really liked him, he was himself without great sympathy for a certain side of that man which he could not quite make out. He only felt it obscurely to be his real personality — the true — and, perhaps, the absurd. As, for instance, in that case of the assistant. Renouard had given way to the arguments of his friend and backer — the argument against the unwholesome effect of solitude, the argument for the safety of companionship even if quarrelsome. Very well. In this docility he was sensible and even likeable. But what did he do next? Instead of taking counsel as to the choice with his old backer and friend, and a man, besides, knowing everybody employed and unemployed on the pavements of the town, this extraordinary Renouard suddenly and almost surreptitiously picked up a fellow — God knows who — and sailed away with him back to Malata in a hurry; a proceeding obviously rash and at the same time not quite straight. That was the sort of thing. The secretly unforgiving journalist laughed a little longer and then ceased to shake all over.

“Oh, yes. About that assistant of yours. . . .”

“What about him,” said Renouard, after waiting a while, with a shadow of uneasiness on his face.

“Have you nothing to tell me of him?”

“Nothing except. . . .” Incipient grimness vanished out of Renouard’s aspect and his voice, while he hesitated as if reflecting seriously before he changed his mind. “No. Nothing whatever.”

“You haven’t brought him along with you by chance — for a change.”

The Planter of Malata stared, then shook his head, and finally murmured carelessly: “I think he’s very well where he is. But I wish you could tell me why young Dunster insisted so much on my dining with his uncle last night. Everybody knows I am not a society man.”

The Editor exclaimed at so much modesty. Didn’t his friend know that he was their one and only explorer — that he was the man experimenting with the silk plant. . . .

“Still, that doesn’t tell me why I was invited yesterday. For young Dunster never thought of this civility before. . . .”

“Our Willie,” said the popular journalist, “never does anything without a purpose, that’s a fact.”

“And to his uncle’s house too!”

“He lives there.”

“Yes. But he might have given me a feed somewhere else. The extraordinary part is that the old man did not seem to have anything special to say. He smiled kindly on me once or twice, and that was all. It was quite a party, sixteen people.”

The Editor then, after expressing his regret that he had not been able to come, wanted to know if the party had been entertaining.

Renouard regretted that his friend had not been there. Being a man whose business or at least whose profession was to know everything that went on in this part of the globe, he could probably have told him something of some people lately arrived from home, who were amongst the guests. Young Dunster (Willie), with his large shirt-front and streaks of white skin shining unpleasantly through the thin black hair plastered over the top of his head, bore down on him and introduced him to that party, as if he had been a trained dog or a child phenomenon. Decidedly, he said, he disliked Willie — one of these large oppressive men. . . .

A silence fell, and it was as if Renouard were not going to say anything more when, suddenly, he came out with the real object of his visit to the editorial room.

“They looked to me like people under a spell.”

The Editor gazed at him appreciatively, thinking that, whether the effect of solitude or not, this was a proof of a sensitive perception of the expression of faces.

“You omitted to tell me their name, but I can make a guess. You mean Professor Moorsom, his daughter and sister — don’t you?”

Renouard assented. Yes, a white-haired lady. But from his silence, with his eyes fixed, yet avoiding his friend, it was easy to guess that it was not in the white-haired lady that he was interested.

“Upon my word,” he said, recovering his usual bearing. “It looks to me as if I had been asked there only for the daughter to talk to me.”

He did not conceal that he had been greatly struck by her appearance. Nobody could have helped being impressed. She was different from everybody else in that house, and it was not only the effect of her London clothes. He did not take her down to dinner. Willie did that. It was afterwards, on the terrace. . . .

The evening was delightfully calm. He was sitting apart and alone, and wishing himself somewhere else — on board the schooner for choice, with the dinner-harness off. He hadn’t exchanged forty words altogether during the evening with the other guests. He saw her suddenly all by herself coming towards him along the dimly lighted terrace, quite from a distance.

She was tall and supple, carrying nobly on her straight body a head of a character which to him appeared peculiar, something — well — pagan, crowned with a great wealth of hair. He had been about to rise, but her decided approach caused him to remain on the seat. He had not looked much at her that evening. He had not that freedom of gaze acquired by the habit of society and the frequent meetings with strangers. It was not shyness, but the reserve of a man not used to the world and to the practice of covert staring, with careless curiosity. All he had captured by his first, keen, instantly lowered, glance was the impression that her hair was magnificently red and her eyes very black. It was a troubling effect, but it had been evanescent; he had forgotten it almost till very unexpectedly he saw her coming down the terrace slow and eager, as if she were restraining herself, and with a rhythmic upward undulation of her whole figure. The light from an open window fell across her path, and suddenly all that mass of arranged hair appeared incandescent, chiselled and fluid, with the daring suggestion of a helmet of burnished copper and the flowing lines of molten metal. It kindled in him an astonished admiration. But he said nothing of it

to his friend the Editor. Neither did he tell him that her approach woke up in his brain the image of love's infinite grace and the sense of the inexhaustible joy that lives in beauty. No! What he imparted to the Editor were no emotions, but mere facts conveyed in a deliberate voice and in uninspired words.

"That young lady came and sat down by me. She said: 'Are you French, Mr. Renouard?'"

He had breathed a whiff of perfume of which he said nothing either — of some perfume he did not know. Her voice was low and distinct. Her shoulders and her bare arms gleamed with an extraordinary splendour, and when she advanced her head into the light he saw the admirable contour of the face, the straight fine nose with delicate nostrils, the exquisite crimson brushstroke of the lips on this oval without colour. The expression of the eyes was lost in a shadowy mysterious play of jet and silver, stirring under the red coppery gold of the hair as though she had been a being made of ivory and precious metals changed into living tissue.

". . . I told her my people were living in Canada, but that I was brought up in England before coming out here. I can't imagine what interest she could have in my history."

"And you complain of her interest?"

The accent of the all-knowing journalist seemed to jar on the Planter of Malata.

"No!" he said, in a deadened voice that was almost sullen. But after a short silence he went on. "Very extraordinary. I told her I came out to wander at large in the world when I was nineteen, almost directly after I left school. It seems that her late brother was in the same school a couple of years before me. She wanted me to tell her what I did at first when I came out here; what other men found to do when they came out — where they went, what was likely to happen to them — as if I could guess and foretell from my experience the fates of men who come out here with a hundred different projects, for hundreds of different reasons — for no reason but restlessness — who come, and go, and disappear! Preposterous. She seemed to want to hear their histories. I told her that most of them were not worth telling."

The distinguished journalist leaning on his elbow, his head resting against the knuckles of his left hand, listened with great attention, but gave no sign of that surprise which Renouard, pausing, seemed to expect.

“You know something,” the latter said brusquely. The all-knowing man moved his head slightly and said, “Yes. But go on.”

“It’s just this. There is no more to it. I found myself talking to her of my adventures, of my early days. It couldn’t possibly have interested her. Really,” he cried, “this is most extraordinary. Those people have something on their minds. We sat in the light of the window, and her father prowled about the terrace, with his hands behind his back and his head drooping. The white-haired lady came to the dining-room window twice — to look at us I am certain. The other guests began to go away — and still we sat there. Apparently these people are staying with the Dunsters. It was old Mrs. Dunster who put an end to the thing. The father and the aunt circled about as if they were afraid of interfering with the girl. Then she got up all at once, gave me her hand, and said she hoped she would see me again.”

While he was speaking Renouard saw again the sway of her figure in a movement of grace and strength — felt the pressure of her hand — heard the last accents of the deep murmur that came from her throat so white in the light of the window, and remembered the black rays of her steady eyes passing off his face when she turned away. He remembered all this visually, and it was not exactly pleasurable. It was rather startling like the discovery of a new faculty in himself. There are faculties one would rather do without — such, for instance, as seeing through a stone wall or remembering a person with this uncanny vividness. And what about those two people belonging to her with their air of expectant solicitude! Really, those figures from home got in front of one. In fact, their persistence in getting between him and the solid forms of the everyday material world had driven Renouard to call on his friend at the office. He hoped that a little common, gossipy information would lay the ghost of that unexpected dinner-party. Of course the proper person to go to would have been young Dunster, but, he couldn’t stand Willie Dunster — not at any price.

In the pause the Editor had changed his attitude, faced his desk, and smiled a faint knowing smile.

“Striking girl — eh?” he said.

The incongruity of the word was enough to make one jump out of the chair. Striking! That girl striking! Stri . . .! But Renouard restrained his feelings. His friend was not a person to give oneself away to. And, after all, this sort of speech was what he had come there to hear. As, however, he had made a movement he re-settled himself comfortably and said, with very

creditable indifference, that yes — she was, rather. Especially amongst a lot of over-dressed frumps. There wasn't one woman under forty there.

"Is that the way to speak of the cream of our society; the 'top of the basket,' as the French say," the Editor remonstrated with mock indignation.

"You aren't moderate in your expressions — you know."

"I express myself very little," interjected Renouard seriously.

"I will tell you what you are. You are a fellow that doesn't count the cost. Of course you are safe with me, but will you never learn. . . ."

"What struck me most," interrupted the other, "is that she should pick me out for such a long conversation."

"That's perhaps because you were the most remarkable of the men there."

Renouard shook his head.

"This shot doesn't seem to me to hit the mark," he said calmly. "Try again."

"Don't you believe me? Oh, you modest creature. Well, let me assure you that under ordinary circumstances it would have been a good shot. You are sufficiently remarkable. But you seem a pretty acute customer too. The circumstances are extraordinary. By Jove they are!"

He mused. After a time the Planter of Malata dropped a negligent —

"And you know them."

"And I know them," assented the all-knowing Editor, soberly, as though the occasion were too special for a display of professional vanity; a vanity so well known to Renouard that its absence augmented his wonder and almost made him uneasy as if portending bad news of some sort.

"You have met those people?" he asked.

"No. I was to have met them last night, but I had to send an apology to Willie in the morning. It was then that he had the bright idea to invite you to fill the place, from a muddled notion that you could be of use. Willie is stupid sometimes. For it is clear that you are the last man able to help."

"How on earth do I come to be mixed up in this — whatever it is?" Renouard's voice was slightly altered by nervous irritation. "I only arrived here yesterday morning."

## CHAPTER II

His friend the Editor turned to him squarely. "Willie took me into consultation, and since he seems to have let you in I may just as well tell you what is up. I shall try to be as short as I can. But in confidence — mind!"

He waited. Renouard, his uneasiness growing on him unreasonably, assented by a nod, and the other lost no time in beginning. Professor Moorsom — physicist and philosopher — fine head of white hair, to judge from the photographs — plenty of brains in the head too — all these famous books — surely even Renouard would know. . . .

Renouard muttered moodily that it wasn't his sort of reading, and his friend hastened to assure him earnestly that neither was it his sort — except as a matter of business and duty, for the literary page of that newspaper which was his property (and the pride of his life). The only literary newspaper in the Antipodes could not ignore the fashionable philosopher of the age. Not that anybody read Moorsom at the Antipodes, but everybody had heard of him — women, children, dock labourers, cabmen. The only person (besides himself) who had read Moorsom, as far as he knew, was old Dunster, who used to call himself a Moorsomian (or was it Moorsomite) years and years ago, long before Moorsom had worked himself up into the great swell he was now, in every way. . . Socially too. Quite the fashion in the highest world.

Renouard listened with profoundly concealed attention. "A charlatan," he muttered languidly.

"Well — no. I should say not. I shouldn't wonder though if most of his writing had been done with his tongue in his cheek. Of course. That's to be expected. I tell you what: the only really honest writing is to be found in newspapers and nowhere else — and don't you forget it."

The Editor paused with a basilisk stare till Renouard had conceded a casual: "I dare say," and only then went on to explain that old Dunster, during his European tour, had been made rather a lion of in London, where he stayed with the Moorsoms — he meant the father and the girl. The professor had been a widower for a long time.

"She doesn't look just a girl," muttered Renouard. The other agreed. Very likely not. Had been playing the London hostess to tip-top people ever since she put her hair up, probably.

“I don’t expect to see any girlish bloom on her when I do have the privilege,” he continued. “Those people are staying with the Dunster’s incog., in a manner, you understand — something like royalties. They don’t deceive anybody, but they want to be left to themselves. We have even kept them out of the paper — to oblige old Dunster. But we shall put your arrival in — our local celebrity.”

“Heavens!”

“Yes. Mr. G. Renouard, the explorer, whose indomitable energy, etc., and who is now working for the prosperity of our country in another way on his Malata plantation . . . And, by the by, how’s the silk plant — flourishing?”

“Yes.”

“Did you bring any fibre?”

“Schooner-full.”

“I see. To be transhipped to Liverpool for experimental manufacture, eh? Eminent capitalists at home very much interested, aren’t they?”

“They are.”

A silence fell. Then the Editor uttered slowly — “You will be a rich man some day.”

Renouard’s face did not betray his opinion of that confident prophecy. He didn’t say anything till his friend suggested in the same meditative voice

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“You ought to interest Moorsom in the affair too — since Willie has let you in.”

“A philosopher!”

“I suppose he isn’t above making a bit of money. And he may be clever at it for all you know. I have a notion that he’s a fairly practical old cove. . . . Anyhow,” and here the tone of the speaker took on a tinge of respect, “he has made philosophy pay.”

Renouard raised his eyes, repressed an impulse to jump up, and got out of the arm-chair slowly. “It isn’t perhaps a bad idea,” he said. “I’ll have to call there in any case.”

He wondered whether he had managed to keep his voice steady, its tone unconcerned enough; for his emotion was strong though it had nothing to do with the business aspect of this suggestion. He moved in the room in vague preparation for departure, when he heard a soft laugh. He spun about quickly with a frown, but the Editor was not laughing at him. He was



chuckling across the big desk at the wall: a preliminary of some speech for which Renouard, recalled to himself, waited silent and mistrustful.

“No! You would never guess! No one would ever guess what these people are after. Willie’s eyes bulged out when he came to me with the tale.”

“They always do,” remarked Renouard with disgust. “He’s stupid.”

“He was startled. And so was I after he told me. It’s a search party. They are out looking for a man. Willie’s soft heart’s enlisted in the cause.”

Renouard repeated: “Looking for a man.”

He sat down suddenly as if on purpose to stare. “Did Willie come to you to borrow the lantern,” he asked sarcastically, and got up again for no apparent reason.

“What lantern?” snapped the puzzled Editor, and his face darkened with suspicion. “You, Renouard, are always alluding to things that aren’t clear to me. If you were in politics, I, as a party journalist, wouldn’t trust you further than I could see you. Not an inch further. You are such a sophisticated beggar. Listen: the man is the man Miss Moorsom was engaged to for a year. He couldn’t have been a nobody, anyhow. But he doesn’t seem to have been very wise. Hard luck for the young lady.”

He spoke with feeling. It was clear that what he had to tell appealed to his sentiment. Yet, as an experienced man of the world, he marked his amused wonder. Young man of good family and connections, going everywhere, yet not merely a man about town, but with a foot in the two big F’s.

Renouard lounging aimlessly in the room turned round: “And what the devil’s that?” he asked faintly.

“Why Fashion and Finance,” explained the Editor. “That’s how I call it. There are the three R’s at the bottom of the social edifice and the two F’s on the top. See?”

“Ha! Ha! Excellent! Ha! Ha!” Renouard laughed with stony eyes.

“And you proceed from one set to the other in this democratic age,” the Editor went on with unperturbed complacency. “That is if you are clever enough. The only danger is in being too clever. And I think something of the sort happened here. That swell I am speaking of got himself into a mess. Apparently a very ugly mess of a financial character. You will understand that Willie did not go into details with me. They were not imparted to him with very great abundance either. But a bad mess —

something of the criminal order. Of course he was innocent. But he had to quit all the same."

"Ha! Ha!" Renouard laughed again abruptly, staring as before. "So there's one more big F in the tale."

"What do you mean?" inquired the Editor quickly, with an air as if his patent were being infringed.

"I mean — Fool."

"No. I wouldn't say that. I wouldn't say that."

"Well — let him be a scoundrel then. What the devil do I care."

"But hold on! You haven't heard the end of the story."

Renouard, his hat on his head already, sat down with the disdainful smile of a man who had discounted the moral of the story. Still he sat down and the Editor swung his revolving chair right round. He was full of unction.

"Imprudent, I should say. In many ways money is as dangerous to handle as gunpowder. You can't be too careful either as to who you are working with. Anyhow there was a mighty flashy burst up, a sensation, and — his familiar haunts knew him no more. But before he vanished he went to see Miss Moorsom. That very fact argues for his innocence — don't it? What was said between them no man knows — unless the professor had the confidence from his daughter. There couldn't have been much to say. There was nothing for it but to let him go — was there? — for the affair had got into the papers. And perhaps the kindest thing would have been to forget him. Anyway the easiest. Forgiveness would have been more difficult, I fancy, for a young lady of spirit and position drawn into an ugly affair like that. Any ordinary young lady, I mean. Well, the fellow asked nothing better than to be forgotten, only he didn't find it easy to do so himself, because he would write home now and then. Not to any of his friends though. He had no near relations. The professor had been his guardian. No, the poor devil wrote now and then to an old retired butler of his late father, somewhere in the country, forbidding him at the same time to let any one know of his whereabouts. So that worthy old ass would go up and dodge about the Moorsom's town house, perhaps waylay Miss Moorsom's maid, and then would write to 'Master Arthur' that the young lady looked well and happy, or some such cheerful intelligence. I dare say he wanted to be forgotten, but I shouldn't think he was much cheered by the news. What would you say?"

Renouard, his legs stretched out and his chin on his breast, said nothing. A sensation which was not curiosity, but rather a vague nervous anxiety, distinctly unpleasant, like a mysterious symptom of some malady, prevented him from getting up and going away.

“Mixed feelings,” the Editor opined. “Many fellows out here receive news from home with mixed feelings. But what will his feelings be when he hears what I am going to tell you now? For we know he has not heard yet. Six months ago a city clerk, just a common drudge of finance, gets himself convicted of a common embezzlement or something of that kind. Then seeing he’s in for a long sentence he thinks of making his conscience comfortable, and makes a clean breast of an old story of tampered with, or else suppressed, documents, a story which clears altogether the honesty of our ruined gentleman. That embezzling fellow was in a position to know, having been employed by the firm before the smash. There was no doubt about the character being cleared — but where the cleared man was nobody could tell. Another sensation in society. And then Miss Moorsom says: ‘He will come back to claim me, and I’ll marry him.’ But he didn’t come back. Between you and me I don’t think he was much wanted — except by Miss Moorsom. I imagine she’s used to have her own way. She grew impatient, and declared that if she knew where the man was she would go to him. But all that could be got out of the old butler was that the last envelope bore the postmark of our beautiful city; and that this was the only address of ‘Master Arthur’ that he ever had. That and no more. In fact the fellow was at his last gasp — with a bad heart. Miss Moorsom wasn’t allowed to see him. She had gone herself into the country to learn what she could, but she had to stay downstairs while the old chap’s wife went up to the invalid. She brought down the scrap of intelligence I’ve told you of. He was already too far gone to be cross-examined on it, and that very night he died. He didn’t leave behind him much to go by, did he? Our Willie hinted to me that there had been pretty stormy days in the professor’s house, but — here they are. I have a notion she isn’t the kind of everyday young lady who may be permitted to gallop about the world all by herself — eh? Well, I think it rather fine of her, but I quite understand that the professor needed all his philosophy under the circumstances. She is his only child now — and brilliant — what? Willie positively spluttered trying to describe her to me; and I could see directly you came in that you had an uncommon experience.”

Renouard, with an irritated gesture, tilted his hat more forward on his eyes, as though he were bored. The Editor went on with the remark that to be sure neither he (Renouard) nor yet Willie were much used to meet girls of that remarkable superiority. Willie when learning business with a firm in London, years before, had seen none but boarding-house society, he guessed. As to himself in the good old days, when he trod the glorious flags of Fleet Street, he neither had access to, nor yet would have cared for the swells. Nothing interested him then but parliamentary politics and the oratory of the House of Commons.

He paid to this not very distant past the tribute of a tender, reminiscent smile, and returned to his first idea that for a society girl her action was rather fine. All the same the professor could not be very pleased. The fellow if he was as pure as a lily now was just about as devoid of the goods of the earth. And there were misfortunes, however undeserved, which damaged a man's standing permanently. On the other hand, it was difficult to oppose cynically a noble impulse — not to speak of the great love at the root of it. Ah! Love! And then the lady was quite capable of going off by herself. She was of age, she had money of her own, plenty of pluck too. Moorsom must have concluded that it was more truly paternal, more prudent too, and generally safer all round to let himself be dragged into this chase. The aunt came along for the same reasons. It was given out at home as a trip round the world of the usual kind.

Renouard had risen and remained standing with his heart beating, and strangely affected by this tale, robbed as it was of all glamour by the prosaic personality of the narrator. The Editor added: "I've been asked to help in the search — you know."

Renouard muttered something about an appointment and went out into the street. His inborn sanity could not defend him from a misty creeping jealousy. He thought that obviously no man of that sort could be worthy of such a woman's devoted fidelity. Renouard, however, had lived long enough to reflect that a man's activities, his views, and even his ideas may be very inferior to his character; and moved by a delicate consideration for that splendid girl he tried to think out for the man a character of inward excellence and outward gifts — some extraordinary seduction. But in vain. Fresh from months of solitude and from days at sea, her splendour presented itself to him absolutely unconquerable in its perfection, unless by her own folly. It was easier to suspect her of this than to imagine in the

man qualities which would be worthy of her. Easier and less degrading. Because folly may be generous — could be nothing else but generosity in her; whereas to imagine her subjugated by something common was intolerable.

Because of the force of the physical impression he had received from her personality (and such impressions are the real origins of the deepest movements of our soul) this conception of her was even inconceivable. But no Prince Charming has ever lived out of a fairy tale. He doesn't walk the worlds of Fashion and Finance — and with a stumbling gait at that. Generosity. Yes. It was her generosity. But this generosity was altogether regal in its splendour, almost absurd in its lavishness — or, perhaps, divine.

In the evening, on board his schooner, sitting on the rail, his arms folded on his breast and his eyes fixed on the deck, he let the darkness catch him unawares in the midst of a meditation on the mechanism of sentiment and the springs of passion. And all the time he had an abiding consciousness of her bodily presence. The effect on his senses had been so penetrating that in the middle of the night, rousing up suddenly, wide-eyed in the darkness of his cabin, he did not create a faint mental vision of her person for himself, but, more intimately affected, he scented distinctly the faint perfume she used, and could almost have sworn that he had been awakened by the soft rustle of her dress. He even sat up listening in the dark for a time, then sighed and lay down again, not agitated but, on the contrary, oppressed by the sensation of something that had happened to him and could not be undone.

### CHAPTER III

In the afternoon he lounged into the editorial office, carrying with affected nonchalance that weight of the irremediable he had felt laid on him suddenly in the small hours of the night — that consciousness of something that could no longer be helped. His patronising friend informed him at once that he had made the acquaintance of the Moorsom party last night. At the Dunsters, of course. Dinner.

“Very quiet. Nobody there. It was much better for the business. I say . . .”

Renouard, his hand grasping the back of a chair, stared down at him dumbly.

“Phew! That’s a stunning girl. . . Why do you want to sit on that chair? It’s uncomfortable!”

“I wasn’t going to sit on it.” Renouard walked slowly to the window, glad to find in himself enough self-control to let go the chair instead of raising it on high and bringing it down on the Editor’s head.

“Willie kept on gazing at her with tears in his boiled eyes. You should have seen him bending sentimentally over her at dinner.”

“Don’t,” said Renouard in such an anguished tone that the Editor turned right round to look at his back.

“You push your dislike of young Dunster too far. It’s positively morbid,” he disapproved mildly. “We can’t be all beautiful after thirty. . . . I talked a little, about you mostly, to the professor. He appeared to be interested in the silk plant — if only as a change from the great subject. Miss Moorsom didn’t seem to mind when I confessed to her that I had taken you into the confidence of the thing. Our Willie approved too. Old Dunster with his white beard seemed to give me his blessing. All those people have a great opinion of you, simply because I told them that you’ve led every sort of life one can think of before you got struck on exploration. They want you to make suggestions. What do you think ‘Master Arthur’ is likely to have taken to?”

“Something easy,” muttered Renouard without unclenching his teeth.

“Hunting man. Athlete. Don’t be hard on the chap. He may be riding boundaries, or droving cattle, or humping his swag about the back-blocks away to the devil — somewhere. He may be even prospecting at the back of beyond — this very moment.”

“Or lying dead drunk in a roadside pub. It’s late enough in the day for that.”

The Editor looked up instinctively. The clock was pointing at a quarter to five. “Yes, it is,” he admitted. “But it needn’t be. And he may have lit out into the Western Pacific all of a sudden — say in a trading schooner. Though I really don’t see in what capacity. Still . . . “

“Or he may be passing at this very moment under this very window.”

“Not he . . . and I wish you would get away from it to where one can see your face. I hate talking to a man’s back. You stand there like a hermit on a sea-shore growling to yourself. I tell you what it is, Geoffrey, you don’t like mankind.”

“I don’t make my living by talking about mankind’s affairs,” Renouard defended himself. But he came away obediently and sat down in the arm-chair. “How can you be so certain that your man isn’t down there in the street?” he asked. “It’s neither more nor less probable than every single one of your other suppositions.”

Placated by Renouard’s docility the Editor gazed at him for a while. “Aha! I’ll tell you how. Learn then that we have begun the campaign. We have telegraphed his description to the police of every township up and down the land. And what’s more we’ve ascertained definitely that he hasn’t been in this town for the last three months at least. How much longer he’s been away we can’t tell.”

“That’s very curious.”

“It’s very simple. Miss Moorsom wrote to him, to the post office here directly she returned to London after her excursion into the country to see the old butler. Well — her letter is still lying there. It has not been called for. Ergo, this town is not his usual abode. Personally, I never thought it was. But he cannot fail to turn up some time or other. Our main hope lies just in the certitude that he must come to town sooner or later. Remember he doesn’t know that the butler is dead, and he will want to inquire for a letter. Well, he’ll find a note from Miss Moorsom.”

Renouard, silent, thought that it was likely enough. His profound distaste for this conversation was betrayed by an air of weariness darkening his energetic sun-tanned features, and by the augmented dreaminess of his eyes. The Editor noted it as a further proof of that immoral detachment from mankind, of that callousness of sentiment fostered by the unhealthy conditions of solitude — according to his own favourite theory. Aloud he

observed that as long as a man had not given up correspondence he could not be looked upon as lost. Fugitive criminals had been tracked in that way by justice, he reminded his friend; then suddenly changed the bearing of the subject somewhat by asking if Renouard had heard from his people lately, and if every member of his large tribe was well and happy.

“Yes, thanks.”

The tone was curt, as if repelling a liberty. Renouard did not like being asked about his people, for whom he had a profound and remorseful affection. He had not seen a single human being to whom he was related, for many years, and he was extremely different from them all.

On the very morning of his arrival from his island he had gone to a set of pigeon-holes in Willie Dunster’s outer office and had taken out from a compartment labelled “Malata” a very small accumulation of envelopes, a few addressed to himself, and one addressed to his assistant, all to the care of the firm, W. Dunster and Co. As opportunity offered, the firm used to send them on to Malata either by a man-of-war schooner going on a cruise, or by some trading craft proceeding that way. But for the last four months there had been no opportunity.

“You going to stay here some time?” asked the Editor, after a longish silence.

Renouard, perfunctorily, did see no reason why he should make a long stay.

“For health, for your mental health, my boy,” rejoined the newspaper man. “To get used to human faces so that they don’t hit you in the eye so hard when you walk about the streets. To get friendly with your kind. I suppose that assistant of yours can be trusted to look after things?”

“There’s the half-caste too. The Portuguese. He knows what’s to be done.”

“Aha!” The Editor looked sharply at his friend. “What’s his name?”

“Who’s name?”

“The assistant’s you picked up on the sly behind my back.”

Renouard made a slight movement of impatience.

“I met him unexpectedly one evening. I thought he would do as well as another. He had come from up country and didn’t seem happy in a town. He told me his name was Walter. I did not ask him for proofs, you know.”

“I don’t think you get on very well with him.”

“Why? What makes you think so.”



"I don't know. Something reluctant in your manner when he's in question."

"Really. My manner! I don't think he's a great subject for conversation, perhaps. Why not drop him?"

"Of course! You wouldn't confess to a mistake. Not you. Nevertheless I have my suspicions about it."

Renouard got up to go, but hesitated, looking down at the seated Editor.

"How funny," he said at last with the utmost seriousness, and was making for the door, when the voice of his friend stopped him.

"You know what has been said of you? That you couldn't get on with anybody you couldn't kick. Now, confess — is there any truth in the soft impeachment?"

"No," said Renouard. "Did you print that in your paper?"

"No. I didn't quite believe it. But I will tell you what I believe. I believe that when your heart is set on some object you are a man that doesn't count the cost to yourself or others. And this shall get printed some day."

"Obituary notice?" Renouard dropped negligently.

"Certain — some day."

"Do you then regard yourself as immortal?"

"No, my boy. I am not immortal. But the voice of the press goes on for ever. . . . And it will say that this was the secret of your great success in a task where better men than you — meaning no offence — did fail repeatedly."

"Success," muttered Renouard, pulling-to the office door after him with considerable energy. And the letters of the word PRIVATE like a row of white eyes seemed to stare after his back sinking down the staircase of that temple of publicity.

Renouard had no doubt that all the means of publicity would be put at the service of love and used for the discovery of the loved man. He did not wish him dead. He did not wish him any harm. We are all equipped with a fund of humanity which is not exhausted without many and repeated provocations — and this man had done him no evil. But before Renouard had left old Dunster's house, at the conclusion of the call he made there that very afternoon, he had discovered in himself the desire that the search might last long. He never really flattered himself that it might fail. It seemed to him that there was no other course in this world for himself, for

all mankind, but resignation. And he could not help thinking that Professor Moorsom had arrived at the same conclusion too.

Professor Moorsom, slight frame of middle height, a thoughtful keen head under the thick wavy hair, veiled dark eyes under straight eyebrows, and with an inward gaze which when disengaged and arriving at one seemed to issue from an obscure dream of books, from the limbo of meditation, showed himself extremely gracious to him. Renouard guessed in him a man whom an incurable habit of investigation and analysis had made gentle and indulgent; inapt for action, and more sensitive to the thoughts than to the events of existence. Withal not crushed, sub-ironic without a trace of acidity, and with a simple manner which put people at ease quickly. They had a long conversation on the terrace commanding an extended view of the town and the harbour.

The splendid immobility of the bay resting under his gaze, with its grey spurs and shining indentations, helped Renouard to regain his self-possession, which he had felt shaken, in coming out on the terrace, into the setting of the most powerful emotion of his life, when he had sat within a foot of Miss Moorsom with fire in his breast, a humming in his ears, and in a complete disorder of his mind. There was the very garden seat on which he had been enveloped in the radiant spell. And presently he was sitting on it again with the professor talking of her. Near by the patriarchal Dunster leaned forward in a wicker arm-chair, benign and a little deaf, his big hand to his ear with the innocent eagerness of his advanced age remembering the fires of life.

It was with a sort of apprehension that Renouard looked forward to seeing Miss Moorsom. And strangely enough it resembled the state of mind of a man who fears disenchantment more than sortilege. But he need not have been afraid. Directly he saw her in a distance at the other end of the terrace he shuddered to the roots of his hair. With her approach the power of speech left him for a time. Mrs. Dunster and her aunt were accompanying her. All these people sat down; it was an intimate circle into which Renouard felt himself cordially admitted; and the talk was of the great search which occupied all their minds. Discretion was expected by these people, but of reticence as to the object of the journey there could be no question. Nothing but ways and means and arrangements could be talked about.

By fixing his eyes obstinately on the ground, which gave him an air of reflective sadness, Renouard managed to recover his self-possession. He used it to keep his voice in a low key and to measure his words on the great subject. And he took care with a great inward effort to make them reasonable without giving them a discouraging complexion. For he did not want the quest to be given up, since it would mean her going away with her two attendant grey-heads to the other side of the world.

He was asked to come again, to come often and take part in the counsels of all these people captivated by the sentimental enterprise of a declared love. On taking Miss Moorsom's hand he looked up, would have liked to say something, but found himself voiceless, with his lips suddenly sealed. She returned the pressure of his fingers, and he left her with her eyes vaguely staring beyond him, an air of listening for an expected sound, and the faintest possible smile on her lips. A smile not for him, evidently, but the reflection of some deep and inscrutable thought.

## CHAPTER IV

He went on board his schooner. She lay white, and as if suspended, in the crepuscular atmosphere of sunset mingling with the ashy gleam of the vast anchorage. He tried to keep his thoughts as sober, as reasonable, as measured as his words had been, lest they should get away from him and cause some sort of moral disaster. What he was afraid of in the coming night was sleeplessness and the endless strain of that wearisome task. It had to be faced however. He lay on his back, sighing profoundly in the dark, and suddenly beheld his very own self, carrying a small bizarre lamp, reflected in a long mirror inside a room in an empty and unfurnished palace. In this startling image of himself he recognised somebody he had to follow — the frightened guide of his dream. He traversed endless galleries, no end of lofty halls, innumerable doors. He lost himself utterly — he found his way again. Room succeeded room. At last the lamp went out, and he stumbled against some object which, when he stooped for it, he found to be very cold and heavy to lift. The sickly white light of dawn showed him the head of a statue. Its marble hair was done in the bold lines of a helmet, on its lips the chisel had left a faint smile, and it resembled Miss Moorsom. While he was staring at it fixedly, the head began to grow light in his fingers, to diminish and crumble to pieces, and at last turned into a handful of dust, which was blown away by a puff of wind so chilly that he woke up with a desperate shiver and leaped headlong out of his bed-place. The day had really come. He sat down by the cabin table, and taking his head between his hands, did not stir for a very long time.

Very quiet, he set himself to review this dream. The lamp, of course, he connected with the search for a man. But on closer examination he perceived that the reflection of himself in the mirror was not really the true Renouard, but somebody else whose face he could not remember. In the deserted palace he recognised a sinister adaptation by his brain of the long corridors with many doors, in the great building in which his friend's newspaper was lodged on the first floor. The marble head with Miss Moorsom's face! Well! What other face could he have dreamed of? And her complexion was fairer than Parian marble, than the heads of angels. The wind at the end was the morning breeze entering through the open porthole and touching his face before the schooner could swing to the chilly gust.

Yes! And all this rational explanation of the fantastic made it only more mysterious and weird. There was something daemonic in that dream. It was one of those experiences which throw a man out of conformity with the established order of his kind and make him a creature of obscure suggestions.

Henceforth, without ever trying to resist, he went every afternoon to the house where she lived. He went there as passively as if in a dream. He could never make out how he had attained the footing of intimacy in the Dunster mansion above the bay — whether on the ground of personal merit or as the pioneer of the vegetable silk industry. It must have been the last, because he remembered distinctly, as distinctly as in a dream, hearing old Dunster once telling him that his next public task would be a careful survey of the Northern Districts to discover tracts suitable for the cultivation of the silk plant. The old man wagged his beard at him sagely. It was indeed as absurd as a dream.

Willie of course would be there in the evening. But he was more of a figure out of a nightmare, hovering about the circle of chairs in his dress-clothes like a gigantic, repulsive, and sentimental bat. “Do away with the beastly cocoons all over the world,” he buzzed in his blurred, water-logged voice. He affected a great horror of insects of all kinds. One evening he appeared with a red flower in his button-hole. Nothing could have been more disgustingly fantastic. And he would also say to Renouard: “You may yet change the history of our country. For economic conditions do shape the history of nations. Eh? What?” And he would turn to Miss Moorsom for approval, lowering protectingly his spatulous nose and looking up with feeling from under his absurd eyebrows, which grew thin, in the manner of canebrakes, out of his spongy skin. For this large, bilious creature was an economist and a sentimentalist, facile to tears, and a member of the Cobden Club.

In order to see as little of him as possible Renouard began coming earlier so as to get away before his arrival, without curtailing too much the hours of secret contemplation for which he lived. He had given up trying to deceive himself. His resignation was without bounds. He accepted the immense misfortune of being in love with a woman who was in search of another man only to throw herself into his arms. With such desperate precision he defined in his thoughts the situation, the consciousness of which traversed like a sharp arrow the sudden silences of general

conversation. The only thought before which he quailed was the thought that this could not last; that it must come to an end. He feared it instinctively as a sick man may fear death. For it seemed to him that it must be the death of him followed by a lightless, bottomless pit. But his resignation was not spared the torments of jealousy: the cruel, insensate, poignant, and imbecile jealousy, when it seems that a woman betrays us simply by this that she exists, that she breathes — and when the deep movements of her nerves or her soul become a matter of distracting suspicion, of killing doubt, of mortal anxiety.

In the peculiar condition of their sojourn Miss Moorsom went out very little. She accepted this seclusion at the Dunsters' mansion as in a hermitage, and lived there, watched over by a group of old people, with the lofty endurance of a condescending and strong-headed goddess. It was impossible to say if she suffered from anything in the world, and whether this was the insensibility of a great passion concentrated on itself, or a perfect restraint of manner, or the indifference of superiority so complete as to be sufficient to itself. But it was visible to Renouard that she took some pleasure in talking to him at times. Was it because he was the only person near her age? Was this, then, the secret of his admission to the circle?

He admired her voice as well poised as her movements, as her attitudes. He himself had always been a man of tranquil tones. But the power of fascination had torn him out of his very nature so completely that to preserve his habitual calmness from going to pieces had become a terrible effort.

He used to go from her on board the schooner exhausted, broken, shaken up, as though he had been put to the most exquisite torture. When he saw her approaching he always had a moment of hallucination. She was a misty and fair creature, fitted for invisible music, for the shadows of love, for the murmurs of waters. After a time (he could not be always staring at the ground) he would summon up all his resolution and look at her. There was a sparkle in the clear obscurity of her eyes; and when she turned them on him they seemed to give a new meaning to life. He would say to himself that another man would have found long before the happy release of madness, his wits burnt to cinders in that radiance. But no such luck for him. His wits had come unscathed through the furnaces of hot suns, of blazing deserts, of flaming angers against the weaknesses of men and the obstinate cruelties of hostile nature.

Being sane he had to be constantly on his guard against falling into adoring silences or breaking out into wild speeches. He had to keep watch on his eyes, his limbs, on the muscles of his face. Their conversations were such as they could be between these two people: she a young lady fresh from the thick twilight of four million people and the artificiality of several London seasons; he the man of definite conquering tasks, the familiar of wide horizons, and in his very repose holding aloof from these agglomerations of units in which one loses one's importance even to oneself. They had no common conversational small change. They had to use the great pieces of general ideas, but they exchanged them trivially. It was no serious commerce. Perhaps she had not much of that coin. Nothing significant came from her. It could not be said that she had received from the contacts of the external world impressions of a personal kind, different from other women. What was ravishing in her was her quietness and, in her grave attitudes, the unfailing brilliance of her femininity. He did not know what there was under that ivory forehead so splendidly shaped, so gloriously crowned. He could not tell what were her thoughts, her feelings. Her replies were reflective, always preceded by a short silence, while he hung on her lips anxiously. He felt himself in the presence of a mysterious being in whom spoke an unknown voice, like the voice of oracles, bringing everlasting unrest to the heart.

He was thankful enough to sit in silence with secretly clenched teeth, devoured by jealousy — and nobody could have guessed that his quiet deferential bearing to all these grey-heads was the supreme effort of stoicism, that the man was engaged in keeping a sinister watch on his tortures lest his strength should fail him. As before, when grappling with other forces of nature, he could find in himself all sorts of courage except the courage to run away.

It was perhaps from the lack of subjects they could have in common that Miss Moorsom made him so often speak of his own life. He did not shrink from talking about himself, for he was free from that exacerbated, timid vanity which seals so many vain-glorious lips. He talked to her in his restrained voice, gazing at the tip of her shoe, and thinking that the time was bound to come soon when her very inattention would get weary of him. And indeed on stealing a glance he would see her dazzling and perfect, her eyes vague, staring in mournful immobility, with a drooping head that made him think of a tragic Venus arising before him, not from the

foam of the sea, but from a distant, still more formless, mysterious, and potent immensity of mankind.



## CHAPTER V

One afternoon Renouard stepping out on the terrace found nobody there. It was for him, at the same time, a melancholy disappointment and a poignant relief.

The heat was great, the air was still, all the long windows of the house stood wide open. At the further end, grouped round a lady's work-table, several chairs disposed sociably suggested invisible occupants, a company of conversing shades. Renouard looked towards them with a sort of dread. A most elusive, faint sound of ghostly talk issuing from one of the rooms added to the illusion and stopped his already hesitating footsteps. He leaned over the balustrade of stone near a squat vase holding a tropical plant of a bizarre shape. Professor Moorsom coming up from the garden with a book under his arm and a white parasol held over his bare head, found him there and, closing the parasol, leaned over by his side with a remark on the increasing heat of the season. Renouard assented and changed his position a little; the other, after a short silence, administered unexpectedly a question which, like the blow of a club on the head, deprived Renouard of the power of speech and even thought, but, more cruel, left him quivering with apprehension, not of death but of everlasting torment. Yet the words were extremely simple.

"Something will have to be done soon. We can't remain in a state of suspended expectation for ever. Tell me what do you think of our chances?"

Renouard, speechless, produced a faint smile. The professor confessed in a jocular tone his impatience to complete the circuit of the globe and be done with it. It was impossible to remain quartered on the dear excellent Dunsters for an indefinite time. And then there were the lectures he had arranged to deliver in Paris. A serious matter.

That lectures by Professor Moorsom were a European event and that brilliant audiences would gather to hear them Renouard did not know. All he was aware of was the shock of this hint of departure. The menace of separation fell on his head like a thunderbolt. And he saw the absurdity of his emotion, for hadn't he lived all these days under the very cloud? The professor, his elbows spread out, looked down into the garden and went on unburdening his mind. Yes. The department of sentiment was directed by his daughter, and she had plenty of volunteered moral support; but he had to look after the practical side of life without assistance.

“I have the less hesitation in speaking to you about my anxiety, because I feel you are friendly to us and at the same time you are detached from all these sublimities — confound them.”

“What do you mean?” murmured Renouard.

“I mean that you are capable of calm judgment. Here the atmosphere is simply detestable. Everybody has knuckled under to sentiment. Perhaps your deliberate opinion could influence . . .”

“You want Miss Moorsom to give it up?” The professor turned to the young man dismally.

“Heaven only knows what I want.”

Renouard leaning his back against the balustrade folded his arms on his breast, appeared to meditate profoundly. His face, shaded softly by the broad brim of a planter’s Panama hat, with the straight line of the nose level with the forehead, the eyes lost in the depth of the setting, and the chin well forward, had such a profile as may be seen amongst the bronzes of classical museums, pure under a crested helmet — recalled vaguely a Minerva’s head.

“This is the most troublesome time I ever had in my life,” exclaimed the professor testily.

“Surely the man must be worth it,” muttered Renouard with a pang of jealousy traversing his breast like a self-inflicted stab.

Whether enervated by the heat or giving way to pent up irritation the professor surrendered himself to the mood of sincerity.

“He began by being a pleasantly dull boy. He developed into a pointlessly clever young man, without, I suspect, ever trying to understand anything. My daughter knew him from childhood. I am a busy man, and I confess that their engagement was a complete surprise to me. I wish their reasons for that step had been more naïve. But simplicity was out of fashion in their set. From a worldly point of view he seems to have been a mere baby. Of course, now, I am assured that he is the victim of his noble confidence in the rectitude of his kind. But that’s mere idealising of a sad reality. For my part I will tell you that from the very beginning I had the gravest doubts of his dishonesty. Unfortunately my clever daughter hadn’t. And now we behold the reaction. No. To be earnestly dishonest one must be really poor. This was only a manifestation of his extremely refined cleverness. The complicated simpleton. He had an awful awakening though.”

In such words did Professor Moorsom give his “young friend” to understand the state of his feelings toward the lost man. It was evident that the father of Miss Moorsom wished him to remain lost. Perhaps the unprecedented heat of the season made him long for the cool spaces of the Pacific, the sweep of the ocean’s free wind along the promenade decks, cumbered with long chairs, of a ship steaming towards the Californian coast. To Renouard the philosopher appeared simply the most treacherous of fathers. He was amazed. But he was not at the end of his discoveries.

“He may be dead,” the professor murmured.

“Why? People don’t die here sooner than in Europe. If he had gone to hide in Italy, for instance, you wouldn’t think of saying that.”

“Well! And suppose he has become morally disintegrated. You know he was not a strong personality,” the professor suggested moodily. “My daughter’s future is in question here.”

Renouard thought that the love of such a woman was enough to pull any broken man together — to drag a man out of his grave. And he thought this with inward despair, which kept him silent as much almost as his astonishment. At last he managed to stammer out a generous —

“Oh! Don’t let us even suppose. . .”

The professor struck in with a sadder accent than before —

“It’s good to be young. And then you have been a man of action, and necessarily a believer in success. But I have been looking too long at life not to distrust its surprises. Age! Age! Here I stand before you a man full of doubts and hesitation — *spe lentus, timidus futuri*.”

He made a sign to Renouard not to interrupt, and in a lowered voice, as if afraid of being overheard, even there, in the solitude of the terrace —

“And the worst is that I am not even sure how far this sentimental pilgrimage is genuine. Yes. I doubt my own child. It’s true that she’s a woman. . . .”

Renouard detected with horror a tone of resentment, as if the professor had never forgiven his daughter for not dying instead of his son. The latter noticed the young man’s stony stare.

“Ah! you don’t understand. Yes, she’s clever, open-minded, popular, and — well, charming. But you don’t know what it is to have moved, breathed, existed, and even triumphed in the mere smother and froth of life — the brilliant froth. There thoughts, sentiments, opinions, feelings, actions too, are nothing but agitation in empty space — to amuse life — a sort of

superior debauchery, exciting and fatiguing, meaning nothing, leading nowhere. She is the creature of that circle. And I ask myself if she is obeying the uneasiness of an instinct seeking its satisfaction, or is it a revulsion of feeling, or is she merely deceiving her own heart by this dangerous trifling with romantic images. And everything is possible — except sincerity, such as only stark, struggling humanity can know. No woman can stand that mode of life in which women rule, and remain a perfectly genuine, simple human being. Ah! There's some people coming out."

He moved off a pace, then turning his head: "Upon my word! I would be infinitely obliged to you if you could throw a little cold water. . . " and at a vaguely dismayed gesture of Renouard, he added: "Don't be afraid. You wouldn't be putting out a sacred fire."

Renouard could hardly find words for a protest: "I assure you that I never talk with Miss Moorsom — on — on — that. And if you, her father . . . "

"I envy you your innocence," sighed the professor. "A father is only an everyday person. Flat. Stale. Moreover, my child would naturally mistrust me. We belong to the same set. Whereas you carry with you the prestige of the unknown. You have proved yourself to be a force."

Thereupon the professor followed by Renouard joined the circle of all the inmates of the house assembled at the other end of the terrace about a tea-table; three white heads and that resplendent vision of woman's glory, the sight of which had the power to flutter his heart like a reminder of the mortality of his frame.

He avoided the seat by the side of Miss Moorsom. The others were talking together languidly. Unnoticed he looked at that woman so marvellous that centuries seemed to lie between them. He was oppressed and overcome at the thought of what she could give to some man who really would be a force! What a glorious struggle with this amazon. What noble burden for the victorious strength.

Dear old Mrs. Dunster was dispensing tea, looking from time to time with interest towards Miss Moorsom. The aged statesman having eaten a raw tomato and drunk a glass of milk (a habit of his early farming days, long before politics, when, pioneer of wheat-growing, he demonstrated the possibility of raising crops on ground looking barren enough to discourage a magician), smoothed his white beard, and struck lightly Renouard's knee with his big wrinkled hand.

“You had better come back to-night and dine with us quietly.”

He liked this young man, a pioneer, too, in more than one direction. Mrs. Dunster added: “Do. It will be very quiet. I don’t even know if Willie will be home for dinner.” Renouard murmured his thanks, and left the terrace to go on board the schooner. While lingering in the drawing-room doorway he heard the resonant voice of old Dunster uttering oracularly —

“. . . the leading man here some day. . . . Like me.”

Renouard let the thin summer portière of the doorway fall behind him. The voice of Professor Moorsom said —

“I am told that he has made an enemy of almost every man who had to work with him.”

“That’s nothing. He did his work. . . . Like me.”

“He never counted the cost they say. Not even of lives.”

Renouard understood that they were talking of him. Before he could move away, Mrs. Dunster struck in placidly —

“Don’t let yourself be shocked by the tales you may hear of him, my dear. Most of it is envy.”

Then he heard Miss Moorsom’s voice replying to the old lady —

“Oh! I am not easily deceived. I think I may say I have an instinct for truth.”

He hastened away from that house with his heart full of dread.

## CHAPTER VI

On board the schooner, lying on the settee on his back with the knuckles of his hands pressed over his eyes, he made up his mind that he would not return to that house for dinner — that he would never go back there any more. He made up his mind some twenty times. The knowledge that he had only to go up on the quarter deck, utter quietly the words: “Man the windlass,” and that the schooner springing into life would run a hundred miles out to sea before sunrise, deceived his struggling will. Nothing easier! Yet, in the end, this young man, almost ill-famed for his ruthless daring, the inflexible leader of two tragically successful expeditions, shrank from that act of savage energy, and began, instead, to hunt for excuses.

No! It was not for him to run away like an incurable who cuts his throat. He finished dressing and looked at his own impassive face in the saloon mirror scornfully. While being pulled on shore in the gig, he remembered suddenly the wild beauty of a waterfall seen when hardly more than a boy, years ago, in Menado. There was a legend of a governor-general of the Dutch East Indies, on official tour, committing suicide on that spot by leaping into the chasm. It was supposed that a painful disease had made him weary of life. But was there ever a visitation like his own, at the same time binding one to life and so cruelly mortal!

The dinner was indeed quiet. Willie, given half an hour's grace, failed to turn up, and his chair remained vacant by the side of Miss Moorsom. Renouard had the professor's sister on his left, dressed in an expensive gown becoming her age. That maiden lady in her wonderful preservation reminded Renouard somehow of a wax flower under glass. There were no traces of the dust of life's battles on her anywhere. She did not like him very much in the afternoons, in his white drill suit and planter's hat, which seemed to her an unduly Bohemian costume for calling in a house where there were ladies. But in the evening, lithe and elegant in his dress clothes and with his pleasant, slightly veiled voice, he always made her conquest afresh. He might have been anybody distinguished — the son of a duke. Falling under that charm probably (and also because her brother had given her a hint), she attempted to open her heart to Renouard, who was watching with all the power of his soul her niece across the table. She spoke to him as frankly as though that miserable mortal envelope, emptied of everything but hopeless passion, were indeed the son of a duke.

Inattentive, he heard her only in snatches, till the final confidential burst: “. . . glad if you would express an opinion. Look at her, so charming, such a great favourite, so generally admired! It would be too sad. We all hoped she would make a brilliant marriage with somebody very rich and of high position, have a house in London and in the country, and entertain us all splendidly. She’s so eminently fitted for it. She has such hosts of distinguished friends! And then — this instead! . . . My heart really aches.”

Her well-bred if anxious whisper was covered by the voice of professor Moorsom discoursing subtly down the short length of the dinner table on the Impermanency of the Measurable to his venerable disciple. It might have been a chapter in a new and popular book of Moorsomian philosophy. Patriarchal and delighted, old Dunster leaned forward a little, his eyes shining youthfully, two spots of colour at the roots of his white beard; and Renouard, glancing at the senile excitement, recalled the words heard on those subtle lips, adopted their scorn for his own, saw their truth before this man ready to be amused by the side of the grave. Yes! Intellectual debauchery in the froth of existence! Froth and fraud!

On the same side of the table Miss Moorsom never once looked towards her father, all her grace as if frozen, her red lips compressed, the faintest rosiness under her dazzling complexion, her black eyes burning motionless, and the very coppery gleams of light lying still on the waves and undulation of her hair. Renouard fancied himself overturning the table, smashing crystal and china, treading fruit and flowers under foot, seizing her in his arms, carrying her off in a tumult of shrieks from all these people, a silent frightened mortal, into some profound retreat as in the age of Cavern men. Suddenly everybody got up, and he hastened to rise too, finding himself out of breath and quite unsteady on his feet.

On the terrace the philosopher, after lighting a cigar, slipped his hand condescendingly under his “dear young friend’s” arm. Renouard regarded him now with the profoundest mistrust. But the great man seemed really to have a liking for his young friend — one of those mysterious sympathies, disregarding the differences of age and position, which in this case might have been explained by the failure of philosophy to meet a very real worry of a practical kind.

After a turn or two and some casual talk the professor said suddenly: “My late son was in your school — do you know? I can imagine that had

he lived and you had ever met you would have understood each other. He too was inclined to action."

He sighed, then, shaking off the mournful thought and with a nod at the dusky part of the terrace where the dress of his daughter made a luminous stain: "I really wish you would drop in that quarter a few sensible, discouraging words."

Renouard disengaged himself from that most perfidious of men under the pretence of astonishment, and stepping back a pace —

"Surely you are making fun of me, Professor Moorsom," he said with a low laugh, which was really a sound of rage.

"My dear young friend! It's no subject for jokes, to me. . . You don't seem to have any notion of your prestige," he added, walking away towards the chairs.

"Humbug!" thought Renouard, standing still and looking after him. "And yet! And yet! What if it were true?"

He advanced then towards Miss Moorsom. Posed on the seat on which they had first spoken to each other, it was her turn to watch him coming on. But many of the windows were not lighted that evening. It was dark over there. She appeared to him luminous in her clear dress, a figure without shape, a face without features, awaiting his approach, till he got quite near to her, sat down, and they had exchanged a few insignificant words. Gradually she came out like a magic painting of charm, fascination, and desire, glowing mysteriously on the dark background. Something imperceptible in the lines of her attitude, in the modulations of her voice, seemed to soften that suggestion of calm unconscious pride which enveloped her always like a mantle. He, sensitive like a bond slave to the moods of the master, was moved by the subtle relenting of her grace to an infinite tenderness. He fought down the impulse to seize her by the hand, lead her down into the garden away under the big trees, and throw himself at her feet uttering words of love. His emotion was so strong that he had to cough slightly, and not knowing what to talk to her about he began to tell her of his mother and sisters. All the family were coming to London to live there, for some little time at least.

"I hope you will go and tell them something of me. Something seen," he said pressingly.

By this miserable subterfuge, like a man about to part with his life, he hoped to make her remember him a little longer.



“Certainly,” she said. “I’ll be glad to call when I get back. But that ‘when’ may be a long time.”

He heard a light sigh. A cruel jealous curiosity made him ask —

“Are you growing weary, Miss Moorsom?”

A silence fell on his low spoken question.

“Do you mean heart-weary?” sounded Miss Moorsom’s voice. “You don’t know me, I see.”

“Ah! Never despair,” he muttered.

“This, Mr. Renouard, is a work of reparation. I stand for truth here. I can’t think of myself.”

He could have taken her by the throat for every word seemed an insult to his passion; but he only said —

“I never doubted the — the — nobility of your purpose.”

“And to hear the word weariness pronounced in this connection surprises me. And from a man too who, I understand, has never counted the cost.”

“You are pleased to tease me,” he said, directly he had recovered his voice and had mastered his anger. It was as if Professor Moorsom had dropped poison in his ear which was spreading now and tainting his passion, his very jealousy. He mistrusted every word that came from those lips on which his life hung. “How can you know anything of men who do not count the cost?” he asked in his gentlest tones.

“From hearsay — a little.”

“Well, I assure you they are like the others, subject to suffering, victims of spells. . . .”

“One of them, at least, speaks very strangely.”

She dismissed the subject after a short silence. “Mr. Renouard, I had a disappointment this morning. This mail brought me a letter from the widow of the old butler — you know. I expected to learn that she had heard from — from here. But no. No letter arrived home since we left.”

Her voice was calm. His jealousy couldn’t stand much more of this sort of talk; but he was glad that nothing had turned up to help the search; glad blindly, unreasonably — only because it would keep her longer in his sight — since she wouldn’t give up.

“I am too near her,” he thought, moving a little further on the seat. He was afraid in the revulsion of feeling of flinging himself on her hands, which were lying on her lap, and covering them with kisses. He was afraid. Nothing, nothing could shake that spell — not if she were ever so

false, stupid, or degraded. She was fate itself. The extent of his misfortune plunged him in such a stupor that he failed at first to hear the sound of voices and footsteps inside the drawing-room. Willie had come home — and the Editor was with him.

They burst out on the terrace babbling noisily, and then pulling themselves together stood still, surprising — and as if themselves surprised.

## CHAPTER VII

They had been feasting a poet from the bush, the latest discovery of the Editor. Such discoveries were the business, the vocation, the pride and delight of the only apostle of letters in the hemisphere, the solitary patron of culture, the Slave of the Lamp — as he subscribed himself at the bottom of the weekly literary page of his paper. He had had no difficulty in persuading the virtuous Willie (who had festive instincts) to help in the good work, and now they had left the poet lying asleep on the hearthrug of the editorial room and had rushed to the Dunster mansion wildly. The Editor had another discovery to announce. Swaying a little where he stood he opened his mouth very wide to shout the one word “Found!” Behind him Willie flung both his hands above his head and let them fall dramatically. Renouard saw the four white-headed people at the end of the terrace rise all together from their chairs with an effect of sudden panic.

“I tell you — he — is — found,” the patron of letters shouted emphatically.

“What is this!” exclaimed Renouard in a choked voice. Miss Moorsom seized his wrist suddenly, and at that contact fire ran through all his veins, a hot stillness descended upon him in which he heard the blood — or the fire — beating in his ears. He made a movement as if to rise, but was restrained by the convulsive pressure on his wrist.

“No, no.” Miss Moorsom’s eyes stared black as night, searching the space before her. Far away the Editor strutted forward, Willie following with his ostentatious manner of carrying his bulky and oppressive carcass which, however, did not remain exactly perpendicular for two seconds together.

“The innocent Arthur . . . Yes. We’ve got him,” the Editor became very business-like. “Yes, this letter has done it.”

He plunged into an inside pocket for it, slapped the scrap of paper with his open palm. “From that old woman. William had it in his pocket since this morning when Miss Moorsom gave it to him to show me. Forgot all about it till an hour ago. Thought it was of no importance. Well, no! Not till it was properly read.”

Renouard and Miss Moorsom emerged from the shadows side by side, a well-matched couple, animated yet statuesque in their calmness and in their pallor. She had let go his wrist. On catching sight of Renouard the Editor exclaimed:

“What — you here!” in a quite shrill voice.

There came a dead pause. All the faces had in them something dismayed and cruel.

“He’s the very man we want,” continued the Editor. “Excuse my excitement. You are the very man, Renouard. Didn’t you tell me that your assistant called himself Walter? Yes? Thought so. But here’s that old woman — the butler’s wife — listen to this. She writes: All I can tell you, Miss, is that my poor husband directed his letters to the name of H. Walter.”

Renouard’s violent but repressed exclamation was lost in a general murmur and shuffle of feet. The Editor made a step forward, bowed with creditable steadiness.

“Miss Moorsom, allow me to congratulate you from the bottom of my heart on the happy — er — issue. . . “

“Wait,” muttered Renouard irresolutely.

The Editor jumped on him in the manner of their old friendship. “Ah, you! You are a fine fellow too. With your solitary ways of life you will end by having no more discrimination than a savage. Fancy living with a gentleman for months and never guessing. A man, I am certain, accomplished, remarkable, out of the common, since he had been distinguished” (he bowed again) “by Miss Moorsom, whom we all admire.”

She turned her back on him.

“I hope to goodness you haven’t been leading him a dog’s life, Geoffrey,” the Editor addressed his friend in a whispered aside.

Renouard seized a chair violently, sat down, and propping his elbow on his knee leaned his head on his hand. Behind him the sister of the professor looked up to heaven and wrung her hands stealthily. Mrs. Dunster’s hands were clasped forcibly under her chin, but she, dear soul, was looking sorrowfully at Willie. The model nephew! In this strange state! So very much flushed! The careful disposition of the thin hairs across Willie’s bald spot was deplorably disarranged, and the spot itself was red and, as it were, steaming.

“What’s the matter, Geoffrey?” The Editor seemed disconcerted by the silent attitudes round him, as though he had expected all these people to shout and dance. “You have him on the island — haven’t you?”

“Oh, yes: I have him there,” said Renouard, without looking up.

“Well, then!” The Editor looked helplessly around as if begging for response of some sort. But the only response that came was very

unexpected. Annoyed at being left in the background, and also because very little drink made him nasty, the emotional Willie turned malignant all at once, and in a bibulous tone surprising in a man able to keep his balance so well —

“Aha! But you haven’t got him here — not yet!” he sneered. “No! You haven’t got him yet.”

This outrageous exhibition was to the Editor like the lash to a jaded horse. He positively jumped.

“What of that? What do you mean? We — haven’t — got — him — here. Of course he isn’t here! But Geoffrey’s schooner is here. She can be sent at once to fetch him here. No! Stay! There’s a better plan. Why shouldn’t you all sail over to Malata, professor? Save time! I am sure Miss Moorsom would prefer. . .”

With a gallant flourish of his arm he looked for Miss Moorsom. She had disappeared. He was taken aback somewhat.

“Ah! H’m. Yes. . . . Why not. A pleasure cruise, delightful ship, delightful season, delightful errand, del . . . No! There are no objections. Geoffrey, I understand, has indulged in a bungalow three sizes too large for him. He can put you all up. It will be a pleasure for him. It will be the greatest privilege. Any man would be proud of being an agent of this happy reunion. I am proud of the little part I’ve played. He will consider it the greatest honour. Geoff, my boy, you had better be stirring to-morrow bright and early about the preparations for the trip. It would be criminal to lose a single day.”

He was as flushed as Willie, the excitement keeping up the effect of the festive dinner. For a time Renouard, silent, as if he had not heard a word of all that babble, did not stir. But when he got up it was to advance towards the Editor and give him such a hearty slap on the back that the plump little man reeled in his tracks and looked quite frightened for a moment.

“You are a heaven-born discoverer and a first-rate manager. . . He’s right. It’s the only way. You can’t resist the claim of sentiment, and you must even risk the voyage to Malata. . .” Renouard’s voice sank. “A lonely spot,” he added, and fell into thought under all these eyes converging on him in the sudden silence. His slow glance passed over all the faces in succession, remaining arrested on Professor Moorsom, stony eyed, a smouldering cigar in his fingers, and with his sister standing by his side.

“I shall be infinitely gratified if you consent to come. But, of course, you will. We shall sail to-morrow evening then. And now let me leave you to your happiness.”

He bowed, very grave, pointed suddenly his finger at Willie who was swaying about with a sleepy frown. . . . “Look at him. He’s overcome with happiness. You had better put him to bed . . . “ and disappeared while every head on the terrace was turned to Willie with varied expressions.

Renouard ran through the house. Avoiding the carriage road he fled down the steep short cut to the shore, where his gig was waiting. At his loud shout the sleeping Kanakas jumped up. He leaped in. “Shove off. Give way!” and the gig darted through the water. “Give way! Give way!” She flew past the wool-clippers sleeping at their anchors each with the open unwinking eye of the lamp in the rigging; she flew past the flagship of the Pacific squadron, a great mass all dark and silent, heavy with the slumbers of five hundred men, and where the invisible sentries heard his urgent “Give way! Give way!” in the night. The Kanakas, panting, rose off the thwarts at every stroke. Nothing could be fast enough for him! And he ran up the side of his schooner shaking the ladder noisily with his rush.

On deck he stumbled and stood still.

Wherefore this haste? To what end, since he knew well before he started that he had a pursuer from whom there was no escape.

As his foot touched the deck his will, his purpose he had been hurrying to save, died out within. It had been nothing less than getting the schooner under-way, letting her vanish silently in the night from amongst these sleeping ships. And now he was certain he could not do it. It was impossible! And he reflected that whether he lived or died such an act would lay him under a dark suspicion from which he shrank. No, there was nothing to be done.

He went down into the cabin and, before even unbuttoning his overcoat, took out of the drawer the letter addressed to his assistant; that letter which he had found in the pigeon-hole labelled “Malata” in young Dunster’s outer office, where it had been waiting for three months some occasion for being forwarded. From the moment of dropping it in the drawer he had utterly forgotten its existence — till now, when the man’s name had come out so clamorously. He glanced at the common envelope, noted the shaky and laborious handwriting: H. Walter, Esqre. Undoubtedly the very last letter the old butler had posted before his illness, and in answer clearly to one

from "Master Arthur" instructing him to address in the future: "Care of Messrs. W. Dunster and Co." Renouard made as if to open the envelope, but paused, and, instead, tore the letter deliberately in two, in four, in eight. With his hand full of pieces of paper he returned on deck and scattered them overboard on the dark water, in which they vanished instantly.

He did it slowly, without hesitation or remorse. H. Walter, Esqre, in Malata. The innocent Arthur — What was his name? The man sought for by that woman who as she went by seemed to draw all the passion of the earth to her, without effort, not deigning to notice, naturally, as other women breathed the air. But Renouard was no longer jealous of her very existence. Whatever its meaning it was not for that man he had picked up casually on obscure impulse, to get rid of the tiresome expostulations of a so-called friend; a man of whom he really knew nothing — and now a dead man. In Malata. Oh, yes! He was there secure enough, untroubled in his grave. In Malata. To bury him was the last service Renouard had rendered to his assistant before leaving the island on this trip to town.

Like many men ready enough for arduous enterprises Renouard was inclined to evade the small complications of existence. This trait of his character was composed of a little indolence, some disdain, and a shrinking from contests with certain forms of vulgarity — like a man who would face a lion and go out of his way to avoid a toad. His intercourse with the meddlesome journalist was that merely outward intimacy without sympathy some young men get drawn into easily. It had amused him rather to keep that "friend" in the dark about the fate of his assistant. Renouard had never needed other company than his own, for there was in him something of the sensitiveness of a dreamer who is easily jarred. He had said to himself that the all-knowing one would only preach again about the evils of solitude and worry his head off in favour of some forlornly useless protégé of his. Also the inquisitiveness of the Editor had irritated him and had closed his lips in sheer disgust.

And now he contemplated the noose of consequences drawing tight around him.

It was the memory of that diplomatic reticence which on the terrace had stifled his first cry which would have told them all that the man sought for was not to be met on earth any more. He shrank from the absurdity of hearing the all-knowing one, and not very sober at that, turning on him with righteous reproaches —

“You never told me. You gave me to understand that your assistant was alive, and now you say he’s dead. Which is it? Were you lying then or are you lying now?” No! the thought of such a scene was not to be borne. He had sat down appalled, thinking: “What shall I do now?”

His courage had oozed out of him. Speaking the truth meant the Moorsoms going away at once — while it seemed to him that he would give the last shred of his rectitude to secure a day more of her company. He sat on — silent. Slowly, from confused sensations, from his talk with the professor, the manner of the girl herself, the intoxicating familiarity of her sudden hand-clasp, there had come to him a half glimmer of hope. The other man was dead. Then! . . . Madness, of course — but he could not give it up. He had listened to that confounded busybody arranging everything — while all these people stood around assenting, under the spell of that dead romance. He had listened scornful and silent. The glimmers of hope, of opportunity, passed before his eyes. He had only to sit still and say nothing. That and no more. And what was truth to him in the face of that great passion which had flung him prostrate in spirit at her adored feet!

And now it was done! Fatality had willed it! With the eyes of a mortal struck by the maddening thunderbolt of the gods, Renouard looked up to the sky, an immense black pall dusted over with gold, on which great shudders seemed to pass from the breath of life affirming its sway.



## CHAPTER VIII

At last, one morning, in a clear spot of a glassy horizon charged with heraldic masses of black vapours, the island grew out from the sea, showing here and there its naked members of basaltic rock through the rents of heavy foliage. Later, in the great spilling of all the riches of sunset, Malata stood out green and rosy before turning into a violet shadow in the autumnal light of the expiring day. Then came the night. In the faint airs the schooner crept on past a sturdy squat headland, and it was pitch dark when her headsails ran down, she turned short on her heel, and her anchor bit into the sandy bottom on the edge of the outer reef; for it was too dangerous then to attempt entering the little bay full of shoals. After the last solemn flutter of the mainsail the murmuring voices of the Moorsom party lingered, very frail, in the black stillness.

They were sitting aft, on chairs, and nobody made a move. Early in the day, when it had become evident that the wind was failing, Renouard, basing his advice on the shortcomings of his bachelor establishment, had urged on the ladies the advisability of not going ashore in the middle of the night. Now he approached them in a constrained manner (it was astonishing the constraint that had reigned between him and his guests all through the passage) and renewed his arguments. No one ashore would dream of his bringing any visitors with him. Nobody would even think of coming off. There was only one old canoe on the plantation. And landing in the schooner's boats would be awkward in the dark. There was the risk of getting aground on some shallow patches. It would be best to spend the rest of the night on board.

There was really no opposition. The professor smoking a pipe, and very comfortable in an ulster buttoned over his tropical clothes, was the first to speak from his long chair.

"Most excellent advice."

Next to him Miss Moorsom assented by a long silence. Then in a voice as of one coming out of a dream —

"And so this is Malata," she said. "I have often wondered . . ."

A shiver passed through Renouard. She had wondered! What about? Malata was himself. He and Malata were one. And she had wondered! She had . . .

The professor's sister leaned over towards Renouard. Through all these days at sea the man's — the found man's — existence had not been alluded

to on board the schooner. That reticence was part of the general constraint lying upon them all. She, herself, certainly had not been exactly elated by this finding — poor Arthur, without money, without prospects. But she felt moved by the sentiment and romance of the situation.

“Isn’t it wonderful,” she whispered out of her white wrap, “to think of poor Arthur sleeping there, so near to our dear lovely Felicia, and not knowing the immense joy in store for him to-morrow.”

There was such artificiality in the wax-flower lady that nothing in this speech touched Renouard. It was but the simple anxiety of his heart that he was voicing when he muttered gloomily —

“No one in the world knows what to-morrow may hold in store.”

The mature lady had a recoil as though he had said something impolite. What a harsh thing to say — instead of finding something nice and appropriate. On board, where she never saw him in evening clothes, Renouard’s resemblance to a duke’s son was not so apparent to her. Nothing but his — ah — bohemianism remained. She rose with a sort of ostentation.

“It’s late — and since we are going to sleep on board to-night . . .” she said. “But it does seem so cruel.”

The professor started up eagerly, knocking the ashes out of his pipe. “Infinitely more sensible, my dear Emma.”

Renouard waited behind Miss Moorsom’s chair.

She got up slowly, moved one step forward, and paused looking at the shore. The blackness of the island blotted out the stars with its vague mass like a low thundercloud brooding over the waters and ready to burst into flame and crashes.

“And so — this is Malata,” she repeated dreamily, moving towards the cabin door. The clear cloak hanging from her shoulders, the ivory face — for the night had put out nothing of her but the gleams of her hair — made her resemble a shining dream-woman uttering words of wistful inquiry. She disappeared without a sign, leaving Renouard penetrated to the very marrow by the sounds that came from her body like a mysterious resonance of an exquisite instrument.

He stood stock still. What was this accidental touch which had evoked the strange accent of her voice? He dared not answer that question. But he had to answer the question of what was to be done now. Had the moment

of confession come? The thought was enough to make one's blood run cold.

It was as if those people had a premonition of something. In the taciturn days of the passage he had noticed their reserve even amongst themselves. The professor smoked his pipe moodily in retired spots. Renouard had caught Miss Moorsom's eyes resting on himself more than once, with a peculiar and grave expression. He fancied that she avoided all opportunities of conversation. The maiden lady seemed to nurse a grievance. And now what had he to do?

The lights on the deck had gone out one after the other. The schooner slept.

About an hour after Miss Moorsom had gone below without a sign or a word for him, Renouard got out of his hammock slung in the waist under the midship awning — for he had given up all the accommodation below to his guests. He got out with a sudden swift movement, flung off his sleeping jacket, rolled his pyjamas up his thighs, and stole forward, unseen by the one Kanaka of the anchor-watch. His white torso, naked like a stripped athlete's, glimmered, ghostly, in the deep shadows of the deck. Unnoticed he got out of the ship over the knight-heads, ran along the back rope, and seizing the dolphin-striker firmly with both hands, lowered himself into the sea without a splash.

He swam away, noiseless like a fish, and then struck boldly for the land, sustained, embraced, by the tepid water. The gentle, voluptuous heave of its breast swung him up and down slightly; sometimes a wavelet murmured in his ears; from time to time, lowering his feet, he felt for the bottom on a shallow patch to rest and correct his direction. He landed at the lower end of the bungalow garden, into the dead stillness of the island. There were no lights. The plantation seemed to sleep, as profoundly as the schooner. On the path a small shell cracked under his naked heel.

The faithful half-caste foreman going his rounds cocked his ears at the sharp sound. He gave one enormous start of fear at the sight of the swift white figure flying at him out of the night. He crouched in terror, and then sprang up and clicked his tongue in amazed recognition.

“Tse! Tse! The master!”

“Be quiet, Luiz, and listen to what I say.”

Yes, it was the master, the strong master who was never known to raise his voice, the man blindly obeyed and never questioned. He talked low and

rapidly in the quiet night, as if every minute were precious. On learning that three guests were coming to stay Luiz clicked his tongue rapidly. These clicks were the uniform, stenographic symbols of his emotions, and he could give them an infinite variety of meaning. He listened to the rest in a deep silence hardly affected by the low, "Yes, master," whenever Renouard paused.

"You understand?" the latter insisted. "No preparations are to be made till we land in the morning. And you are to say that Mr. Walter has gone off in a trading schooner on a round of the islands."

"Yes, master."

"No mistakes — mind!"

"No, master."

Renouard walked back towards the sea. Luiz, following him, proposed to call out half a dozen boys and man the canoe.

"Imbecile!"

"Tse! Tse! Tse!"

"Don't you understand that you haven't seen me?"

"Yes, master. But what a long swim. Suppose you drown."

"Then you can say of me and of Mr. Walter what you like. The dead don't mind."

Renouard entered the sea and heard a faint "Tse! Tse! Tse!" of concern from the half-caste, who had already lost sight of the master's dark head on the overshadowed water.

Renouard set his direction by a big star that, dipping on the horizon, seemed to look curiously into his face. On this swim back he felt the mournful fatigue of all that length of the traversed road, which brought him no nearer to his desire. It was as if his love had sapped the invisible supports of his strength. There came a moment when it seemed to him that he must have swum beyond the confines of life. He had a sensation of eternity close at hand, demanding no effort — offering its peace. It was easy to swim like this beyond the confines of life looking at a star. But the thought: "They will think I dared not face them and committed suicide," caused a revolt of his mind which carried him on. He returned on board, as he had left, unheard and unseen. He lay in his hammock utterly exhausted and with a confused feeling that he had been beyond the confines of life, somewhere near a star, and that it was very quiet there.

## CHAPTER IX

Sheltered by the squat headland from the first morning sparkle of the sea the little bay breathed a delicious freshness. The party from the schooner landed at the bottom of the garden. They exchanged insignificant words in studiously casual tones. The professor's sister put up a long-handled eye-glass as if to scan the novel surroundings, but in reality searching for poor Arthur anxiously. Having never seen him otherwise than in his town clothes she had no idea what he would look like. It had been left to the professor to help his ladies out of the boat because Renouard, as if intent on giving directions, had stepped forward at once to meet the half-caste Luiz hurrying down the path. In the distance, in front of the dazzlingly sunlit bungalow, a row of dark-faced house-boys unequal in stature and varied in complexion preserved the immobility of a guard of honour.

Luiz had taken off his soft felt hat before coming within earshot. Renouard bent his head to his rapid talk of domestic arrangements he meant to make for the visitors; another bed in the master's room for the ladies and a cot for the gentleman to be hung in the room opposite where — where Mr. Walter — here he gave a scared look all round — Mr. Walter — had died.

"Very good," assented Renouard in an even undertone. "And remember what you have to say of him."

"Yes, master. Only" — he wriggled slightly and put one bare foot on the other for a moment in apologetic embarrassment — "only I — I — don't like to say it."

Renouard looked at him without anger, without any sort of expression. "Frightened of the dead? Eh? Well — all right. I will say it myself — I suppose once for all. . . ." Immediately he raised his voice very much.

"Send the boys down to bring up the luggage."

"Yes, master."

Renouard turned to his distinguished guests who, like a personally conducted party of tourists, had stopped and were looking about them.

"I am sorry," he began with an impassive face. "My man has just told me that Mr. Walter . . ." he managed to smile, but didn't correct himself . . . "has gone in a trading schooner on a short tour of the islands, to the westward."

This communication was received in profound silence.

Renouard forgot himself in the thought: "It's done!" But the sight of the string of boys marching up to the house with suit-cases and dressing-bags

rescued him from that appalling abstraction.

“All I can do is to beg you to make yourselves at home . . . with what patience you may.”

This was so obviously the only thing to do that everybody moved on at once. The professor walked alongside Renouard, behind the two ladies.

“Rather unexpected — this absence.”

“Not exactly,” muttered Renouard. “A trip has to be made every year to engage labour.”

“I see . . . And he . . . How vexingly elusive the poor fellow has become! I’ll begin to think that some wicked fairy is favouring this love tale with unpleasant attentions.”

Renouard noticed that the party did not seem weighed down by this new disappointment. On the contrary they moved with a freer step. The professor’s sister dropped her eye-glass to the end of its chain. Miss Moorsom took the lead. The professor, his lips unsealed, lingered in the open: but Renouard did not listen to that man’s talk. He looked after that man’s daughter — if indeed that creature of irresistible seductions were a daughter of mortals. The very intensity of his desire, as if his soul were streaming after her through his eyes, defeated his object of keeping hold of her as long as possible with, at least, one of his senses. Her moving outlines dissolved into a misty coloured shimmer of a woman made of flame and shadows, crossing the threshold of his house.

The days which followed were not exactly such as Renouard had feared — yet they were not better than his fears. They were accursed in all the moods they brought him. But the general aspect of things was quiet. The professor smoked innumerable pipes with the air of a worker on his holiday, always in movement and looking at things with that mysteriously sagacious aspect of men who are admittedly wiser than the rest of the world. His white head of hair — whiter than anything within the horizon except the broken water on the reefs — was glimpsed in every part of the plantation always on the move under the white parasol. And once he climbed the headland and appeared suddenly to those below, a white speck elevated in the blue, with a diminutive but statuesque effect.

Felicia Moorsom remained near the house. Sometimes she could be seen with a despairing expression scribbling rapidly in her lock-up dairy. But only for a moment. At the sound of Renouard’s footsteps she would turn towards him her beautiful face, adorable in that calm which was like a

wilful, like a cruel ignoring of her tremendous power. Whenever she sat on the verandah, on a chair more specially reserved for her use, Renouard would stroll up and sit on the steps near her, mostly silent, and often not trusting himself to turn his glance on her. She, very still with her eyes half-closed, looked down on his head — so that to a beholder (such as Professor Moorsom, for instance) she would appear to be turning over in her mind profound thoughts about that man sitting at her feet, his shoulders bowed a little, his hands listless — as if vanquished. And, indeed, the moral poison of falsehood has such a decomposing power that Renouard felt his old personality turn to dead dust. Often, in the evening, when they sat outside conversing languidly in the dark, he felt that he must rest his forehead on her feet and burst into tears.

The professor's sister suffered from some little strain caused by the instability of her own feelings toward Renouard. She could not tell whether she really did dislike him or not. At times he appeared to her most fascinating; and, though he generally ended by saying something shockingly crude, she could not resist her inclination to talk with him — at least not always. One day when her niece had left them alone on the verandah she leaned forward in her chair — speckless, resplendent, and, in her way, almost as striking a personality as her niece, who did not resemble her in the least. "Dear Felicia has inherited her hair and the greatest part of her appearance from her mother," the maiden lady used to tell people.

She leaned forward then, confidentially.

"Oh! Mr. Renouard! Haven't you something comforting to say?"

He looked up, as surprised as if a voice from heaven had spoken with this perfect society intonation, and by the puzzled profundity of his blue eyes fluttered the wax-flower of refined womanhood. She continued. "For — I can speak to you openly on this tiresome subject — only think what a terrible strain this hope deferred must be for Felicia's heart — for her nerves."

"Why speak to me about it," he muttered feeling half choked suddenly.

"Why! As a friend — a well-wisher — the kindest of hosts. I am afraid we are really eating you out of house and home." She laughed a little. "Ah! When, when will this suspense be relieved! That poor lost Arthur! I confess that I am almost afraid of the great moment. It will be like seeing a ghost."

"Have you ever seen a ghost?" asked Renouard, in a dull voice.

She shifted her hands a little. Her pose was perfect in its ease and middle-aged grace.

“Not actually. Only in a photograph. But we have many friends who had the experience of apparitions.”

“Ah! They see ghosts in London,” mumbled Renouard, not looking at her.

“Frequently — in a certain very interesting set. But all sorts of people do. We have a friend, a very famous author — his ghost is a girl. One of my brother’s intimates is a very great man of science. He is friendly with a ghost . . . Of a girl too,” she added in a voice as if struck for the first time by the coincidence. “It is the photograph of that apparition which I have seen. Very sweet. Most interesting. A little cloudy naturally. . . . Mr. Renouard! I hope you are not a sceptic. It’s so consoling to think. . . .”

“Those plantation boys of mine see ghosts too,” said Renouard grimly.

The sister of the philosopher sat up stiffly. What crudeness! It was always so with this strange young man.

“Mr. Renouard! How can you compare the superstitious fancies of your horrible savages with the manifestations . . . .”

Words failed her. She broke off with a very faint primly angry smile. She was perhaps the more offended with him because of that flutter at the beginning of the conversation. And in a moment with perfect tact and dignity she got up from her chair and left him alone.

Renouard didn’t even look up. It was not the displeasure of the lady which deprived him of his sleep that night. He was beginning to forget what simple, honest sleep was like. His hammock from the ship had been hung for him on a side verandah, and he spent his nights in it on his back, his hands folded on his chest, in a sort of half conscious, oppressed stupor. In the morning he watched with unseeing eyes the headland come out a shapeless inkblot against the thin light of the false dawn, pass through all the stages of daybreak to the deep purple of its outlined mass nimbed gloriously with the gold of the rising sun. He listened to the vague sounds of waking within the house: and suddenly he became aware of Luiz standing by the hammock — obviously troubled.

“What’s the matter?”

“Tse! Tse! Tse!”

“Well, what now? Trouble with the boys?”



“No, master. The gentleman when I take him his bath water he speak to me. He ask me — he ask — when, when, I think Mr. Walter, he come back.”

The half-caste’s teeth chattered slightly. Renouard got out of the hammock.

“And he is here all the time — eh?”

Luiz nodded a scared affirmative, but at once protested, “I no see him. I never. Not I! The ignorant wild boys say they see . . . Something! Ough!”

He clapped his teeth on another short rattle, and stood there, shrunk, blighted, like a man in a freezing blast.

“And what did you say to the gentleman?”

“I say I don’t know — and I clear out. I — I don’t like to speak of him.”

“All right. We shall try to lay that poor ghost,” said Renouard gloomily, going off to a small hut near by to dress. He was saying to himself: “This fellow will end by giving me away. The last thing that I . . . No! That mustn’t be.” And feeling his hand being forced he discovered the whole extent of his cowardice.

## CHAPTER X

That morning wandering about his plantation, more like a frightened soul than its creator and master, he dodged the white parasol bobbing up here and there like a buoy adrift on a sea of dark-green plants. The crop promised to be magnificent, and the fashionable philosopher of the age took other than a merely scientific interest in the experiment. His investments were judicious, but he had always some little money lying by, for experiments.

After lunch, being left alone with Renouard, he talked a little of cultivation and such matters. Then suddenly:

“By the way, is it true what my sister tells me, that your plantation boys have been disturbed by a ghost?”

Renouard, who since the ladies had left the table was not keeping such a strict watch on himself, came out of his abstraction with a start and a stiff smile.

“My foreman had some trouble with them during my absence. They funk working in a certain field on the slope of the hill.”

“A ghost here!” exclaimed the amused professor. “Then our whole conception of the psychology of ghosts must be revised. This island has been uninhabited probably since the dawn of ages. How did a ghost come here. By air or water? And why did it leave its native haunts. Was it from misanthropy? Was he expelled from some community of spirits?”

Renouard essayed to respond in the same tone. The words died on his lips. Was it a man or a woman ghost, the professor inquired.

“I don’t know.” Renouard made an effort to appear at ease. He had, he said, a couple of Tahitian amongst his boys — a ghost-ridden race. They had started the scare. They had probably brought their ghost with them.

“Let us investigate the matter, Renouard,” proposed the professor half in earnest. “We may make some interesting discoveries as to the state of primitive minds, at any rate.”

This was too much. Renouard jumped up and leaving the room went out and walked about in front of the house. He would allow no one to force his hand. Presently the professor joined him outside. He carried his parasol, but had neither his book nor his pipe with him. Amiably serious he laid his hand on his “dear young friend’s” arm.

“We are all of us a little strung up,” he said. “For my part I have been like sister Anne in the story. But I cannot see anything coming. Anything

that would be the least good for anybody — I mean.”

Renouard had recovered sufficiently to murmur coldly his regret of this waste of time. For that was what, he supposed, the professor had in his mind.

“Time,” mused Professor Moorsom. “I don’t know that time can be wasted. But I will tell you, my dear friend, what this is: it is an awful waste of life. I mean for all of us. Even for my sister, who has got a headache and is gone to lie down.”

He shook gently Renouard’s arm. “Yes, for all of us! One may meditate on life endlessly, one may even have a poor opinion of it — but the fact remains that we have only one life to live. And it is short. Think of that, my young friend.”

He released Renouard’s arm and stepped out of the shade opening his parasol. It was clear that there was something more in his mind than mere anxiety about the date of his lectures for fashionable audiences. What did the man mean by his confounded platitudes? To Renouard, scared by Luiz in the morning (for he felt that nothing could be more fatal than to have his deception unveiled otherwise than by personal confession), this talk sounded like encouragement or a warning from that man who seemed to him to be very brazen and very subtle. It was like being bullied by the dead and cajoled by the living into a throw of dice for a supreme stake.

Renouard went away to some distance from the house and threw himself down in the shade of a tree. He lay there perfectly still with his forehead resting on his folded arms, light-headed and thinking. It seemed to him that he must be on fire, then that he had fallen into a cool whirlpool, a smooth funnel of water swirling about with nauseating rapidity. And then (it must have been a reminiscence of his boyhood) he was walking on the dangerous thin ice of a river, unable to turn back. . . . Suddenly it parted from shore to shore with a loud crack like the report of a gun.

With one leap he found himself on his feet. All was peace, stillness, sunshine. He walked away from there slowly. Had he been a gambler he would have perhaps been supported in a measure by the mere excitement. But he was not a gambler. He had always disdained that artificial manner of challenging the fates. The bungalow came into view, bright and pretty, and all about everything was peace, stillness, sunshine. . . .

While he was plodding towards it he had a disagreeable sense of the dead man’s company at his elbow. The ghost! He seemed to be everywhere but

in his grave. Could one ever shake him off? he wondered. At that moment Miss Moorsom came out on the verandah; and at once, as if by a mystery of radiating waves, she roused a great tumult in his heart, shook earth and sky together — but he plodded on. Then like a grave song-note in the storm her voice came to him ominously.

“Ah! Mr. Renouard. . . “ He came up and smiled, but she was very serious. “I can’t keep still any longer. Is there time to walk up this headland and back before dark?”

The shadows were lying lengthened on the ground; all was stillness and peace. “No,” said Renouard, feeling suddenly as steady as a rock. “But I can show you a view from the central hill which your father has not seen. A view of reefs and of broken water without end, and of great wheeling clouds of sea-birds.”

She came down the verandah steps at once and they moved off. “You go first,” he proposed, “and I’ll direct you. To the left.”

She was wearing a short nankin skirt, a muslin blouse; he could see through the thin stuff the skin of her shoulders, of her arms. The noble delicacy of her neck caused him a sort of transport. “The path begins where these three palms are. The only palms on the island.”

“I see.”

She never turned her head. After a while she observed: “This path looks as if it had been made recently.”

“Quite recently,” he assented very low.

They went on climbing steadily without exchanging another word; and when they stood on the top she gazed a long time before her. The low evening mist veiled the further limit of the reefs. Above the enormous and melancholy confusion, as of a fleet of wrecked islands, the restless myriads of sea-birds rolled and unrolled dark ribbons on the sky, gathered in clouds, soared and stooped like a play of shadows, for they were too far for them to hear their cries.

Renouard broke the silence in low tones.

“They’ll be settling for the night presently.” She made no sound. Round them all was peace and declining sunshine. Near by, the topmost pinnacle of Malata, resembling the top of a buried tower, rose a rock, weather-worn, grey, weary of watching the monotonous centuries of the Pacific. Renouard leaned his shoulders against it. Felicia Moorsom faced him suddenly, her splendid black eyes full on his face as though she had made up her mind at

last to destroy his wits once and for all. Dazzled, he lowered his eyelids slowly.

“Mr. Renouard! There is something strange in all this. Tell me where he is?”

He answered deliberately.

“On the other side of this rock. I buried him there myself.”

She pressed her hands to her breast, struggled for her breath for a moment, then: “Ohhh! . . . You buried him! . . . What sort of man are you? . . . You dared not tell! . . . He is another of your victims? . . . You dared not confess that evening. . . . You must have killed him. What could he have done to you? . . . You fastened on him some atrocious quarrel and . . .”

Her vengeful aspect, her poignant cries left him as unmoved as the weary rock against which he leaned. He only raised his eyelids to look at her and lowered them slowly. Nothing more. It silenced her. And as if ashamed she made a gesture with her hand, putting away from her that thought. He spoke, quietly ironic at first.

“Ha! the legendary Renouard of sensitive idiots — the ruthless adventurer — the ogre with a future. That was a parrot cry, Miss Moorsom. I don’t think that the greatest fool of them all ever dared hint such a stupid thing of me that I killed men for nothing. No, I had noticed this man in a hotel. He had come from up country I was told, and was doing nothing. I saw him sitting there lonely in a corner like a sick crow, and I went over one evening to talk to him. Just on impulse. He wasn’t impressive. He was pitiful. My worst enemy could have told you he wasn’t good enough to be one of Renouard’s victims. It didn’t take me long to judge that he was drugging himself. Not drinking. Drugs.”

“Ah! It’s now that you are trying to murder him,” she cried.

“Really. Always the Renouard of shopkeepers’ legend. Listen! I would never have been jealous of him. And yet I am jealous of the air you breathe, of the soil you tread on, of the world that sees you — moving free — not mine. But never mind. I rather liked him. For a certain reason I proposed he should come to be my assistant here. He said he believed this would save him. It did not save him from death. It came to him as it were from nothing — just a fall. A mere slip and tumble of ten feet into a ravine. But it seems he had been hurt before up-country — by a horse. He ailed and ailed. No, he was not a steel-tipped man. And his poor soul seemed to have been damaged too. It gave way very soon.”

“This is tragic!” Felicia Moorsom whispered with feeling. Renouard’s lips twitched, but his level voice continued mercilessly.

“That’s the story. He rallied a little one night and said he wanted to tell me something. I, being a gentleman, he said, he could confide in me. I told him that he was mistaken. That there was a good deal of a plebeian in me, that he couldn’t know. He seemed disappointed. He muttered something about his innocence and something that sounded like a curse on some woman, then turned to the wall and — just grew cold.”

“On a woman,” cried Miss Moorsom indignantly. “What woman?”

“I wonder!” said Renouard, raising his eyes and noting the crimson of her ear-lobes against the live whiteness of her complexion, the sombre, as if secret, night-splendour of her eyes under the writhing flames of her hair. “Some woman who wouldn’t believe in that poor innocence of his. . . Yes. You probably. And now you will not believe in me — not even in me who must in truth be what I am — even to death. No! You won’t. And yet, Felicia, a woman like you and a man like me do not often come together on this earth.”

The flame of her glorious head scorched his face. He flung his hat far away, and his suddenly lowered eyelids brought out startlingly his resemblance to antique bronze, the profile of Pallas, still, austere, bowed a little in the shadow of the rock. “Oh! If you could only understand the truth that is in me!” he added.

She waited, as if too astounded to speak, till he looked up again, and then with unnatural force as if defending herself from some unspoken aspersion, “It’s I who stand for truth here! Believe in you! In you, who by a heartless falsehood — and nothing else, nothing else, do you hear? — have brought me here, deceived, cheated, as in some abominable farce!” She sat down on a boulder, rested her chin in her hands, in the pose of simple grief — mourning for herself.

“It only wanted this. Why! Oh! Why is it that ugliness, ridicule, and baseness must fall across my path.”

On that height, alone with the sky, they spoke to each other as if the earth had fallen away from under their feet.

“Are you grieving for your dignity? He was a mediocre soul and could have given you but an unworthy existence.”

She did not even smile at those words, but, superb, as if lifting a corner of the veil, she turned on him slowly.

“And do you imagine I would have devoted myself to him for such a purpose! Don’t you know that reparation was due to him from me? A sacred debt — a fine duty. To redeem him would not have been in my power — I know it. But he was blameless, and it was for me to come forward. Don’t you see that in the eyes of the world nothing could have rehabilitated him so completely as his marriage with me? No word of evil could be whispered of him after I had given him my hand. As to giving myself up to anything less than the shaping of a man’s destiny — if I thought I could do it I would abhor myself. . . .” She spoke with authority in her deep fascinating, unemotional voice. Renouard meditated, gloomy, as if over some sinister riddle of a beautiful sphinx met on the wild road of his life.

“Yes. Your father was right. You are one of these aristocrats . . .”

She drew herself up haughtily.

“What do you say? My father! . . . I an aristocrat.”

“Oh! I don’t mean that you are like the men and women of the time of armours, castles, and great deeds. Oh, no! They stood on the naked soil, had traditions to be faithful to, had their feet on this earth of passions and death which is not a hothouse. They would have been too plebeian for you since they had to lead, to suffer with, to understand the commonest humanity. No, you are merely of the topmost layer, disdainful and superior, the mere pure froth and bubble on the inscrutable depths which some day will toss you out of existence. But you are you! You are you! You are the eternal love itself — only, O Divinity, it isn’t your body, it is your soul that is made of foam.”

She listened as if in a dream. He had succeeded so well in his effort to drive back the flood of his passion that his life itself seemed to run with it out of his body. At that moment he felt as one dead speaking. But the headlong wave returning with tenfold force flung him on her suddenly, with open arms and blazing eyes. She found herself like a feather in his grasp, helpless, unable to struggle, with her feet off the ground. But this contact with her, maddening like too much felicity, destroyed its own end. Fire ran through his veins, turned his passion to ashes, burnt him out and left him empty, without force — almost without desire. He let her go before she could cry out. And she was so used to the forms of repression enveloping, softening the crude impulses of old humanity that she no longer believed in their existence as if it were an exploded legend. She did not recognise what

had happened to her. She came safe out of his arms, without a struggle, not even having felt afraid.

“What’s the meaning of this?” she said, outraged but calm in a scornful way.

He got down on his knees in silence, bent low to her very feet, while she looked down at him, a little surprised, without animosity, as if merely curious to see what he would do. Then, while he remained bowed to the ground pressing the hem of her skirt to his lips, she made a slight movement. He got up.

“No,” he said. “Were you ever so much mine what could I do with you without your consent? No. You don’t conquer a wraith, cold mist, stuff of dreams, illusion. It must come to you and cling to your breast. And then! Oh! And then!”

All ecstasy, all expression went out of his face.

“Mr. Renouard,” she said, “though you can have no claim on my consideration after having decoyed me here for the vile purpose, apparently, of gloating over me as your possible prey, I will tell you that I am not perhaps the extraordinary being you think I am. You may believe me. Here I stand for truth itself.”

“What’s that to me what you are?” he answered. “At a sign from you I would climb up to the seventh heaven to bring you down to earth for my own — and if I saw you steeped to the lips in vice, in crime, in mud, I would go after you, take you to my arms — wear you for an incomparable jewel on my breast. And that’s love — true love — the gift and the curse of the gods. There is no other.”

The truth vibrating in his voice made her recoil slightly, for she was not fit to hear it — not even a little — not even one single time in her life. It was revolting to her; and in her trouble, perhaps prompted by the suggestion of his name or to soften the harshness of expression, for she was obscurely moved, she spoke to him in French.

“Assez! J’ai horreur de tout cela,” she said.

He was white to his very lips, but he was trembling no more. The dice had been cast, and not even violence could alter the throw. She passed by him unbendingly, and he followed her down the path. After a time she heard him saying:

“And your dream is to influence a human destiny?”



“Yes!” she answered curtly, unabashed, with a woman’s complete assurance.

“Then you may rest content. You have done it.”

She shrugged her shoulders slightly. But just before reaching the end of the path she relented, stopped, and went back to him.

“I don’t suppose you are very anxious for people to know how near you came to absolute turpitude. You may rest easy on that point. I shall speak to my father, of course, and we will agree to say that he has died — nothing more.”

“Yes,” said Renouard in a lifeless voice. “He is dead. His very ghost shall be done with presently.”

She went on, but he remained standing stock still in the dusk. She had already reached the three palms when she heard behind her a loud peal of laughter, cynical and joyless, such as is heard in smoking-rooms at the end of a scandalous story. It made her feel positively faint for a moment.

## CHAPTER XI

Slowly a complete darkness enveloped Geoffrey Renouard. His resolution had failed him. Instead of following Felicia into the house, he had stopped under the three palms, and leaning against a smooth trunk had abandoned himself to a sense of an immense deception and the feeling of extreme fatigue. This walk up the hill and down again was like the supreme effort of an explorer trying to penetrate the interior of an unknown country, the secret of which is too well defended by its cruel and barren nature. Decoyed by a mirage, he had gone too far — so far that there was no going back. His strength was at an end. For the first time in his life he had to give up, and with a sort of despairing self-possession he tried to understand the cause of the defeat. He did not ascribe it to that absurd dead man.

The hesitating shadow of Luiz approached him unnoticed till it spoke timidly. Renouard started.

“Eh? What? Dinner waiting? You must say I beg to be excused. I can’t come. But I shall see them to-morrow morning, at the landing place. Take your orders from the professor as to the sailing of the schooner. Go now.”

Luiz, dumbfounded, retreated into the darkness. Renouard did not move, but hours afterwards, like the bitter fruit of his immobility, the words: “I had nothing to offer to her vanity,” came from his lips in the silence of the island. And it was then only that he stirred, only to wear the night out in restless tramping up and down the various paths of the plantation. Luiz, whose sleep was made light by the consciousness of some impending change, heard footsteps passing by his hut, the firm tread of the master; and turning on his mats emitted a faint Tse! Tse! Tse! of deep concern.

Lights had been burning in the bungalow almost all through the night; and with the first sign of day began the bustle of departure. House boys walked processionally carrying suit-cases and dressing-bags down to the schooner’s boat, which came to the landing place at the bottom of the garden. Just as the rising sun threw its golden nimbus around the purple shape of the headland, the Planter of Malata was perceived pacing bare-headed the curve of the little bay. He exchanged a few words with the sailing-master of the schooner, then remained by the boat, standing very upright, his eyes on the ground, waiting.

He had not long to wait. Into the cool, overshadowed garden the professor descended first, and came jauntily down the path in a lively cracking of small shells. With his closed parasol hooked on his forearm,

and a book in his hand, he resembled a banal tourist more than was permissible to a man of his unique distinction. He waved the disengaged arm from a distance, but at close quarters, arrested before Renouard's immobility, he made no offer to shake hands. He seemed to appraise the aspect of the man with a sharp glance, and made up his mind.

"We are going back by Suez," he began almost boisterously. "I have been looking up the sailing lists. If the zephirs of your Pacific are only moderately propitious I think we are sure to catch the mail boat due in Marseilles on the 18th of March. This will suit me excellently. . . ." He lowered his tone. "My dear young friend, I'm deeply grateful to you."

Renouard's set lips moved.

"Why are you grateful to me?"

"Ah! Why? In the first place you might have made us miss the next boat, mightn't you? . . . I don't thank you for your hospitality. You can't be angry with me for saying that I am truly thankful to escape from it. But I am grateful to you for what you have done, and — for being what you are."

It was difficult to define the flavour of that speech, but Renouard received it with an austere equivocal smile. The professor stepping into the boat opened his parasol and sat down in the stern-sheets waiting for the ladies. No sound of human voice broke the fresh silence of the morning while they walked the broad path, Miss Moorsom a little in advance of her aunt.

When she came abreast of him Renouard raised his head.

"Good-bye, Mr. Renouard," she said in a low voice, meaning to pass on; but there was such a look of entreaty in the blue gleam of his sunken eyes that after an imperceptible hesitation she laid her hand, which was ungloved, in his extended palm.

"Will you condescend to remember me?" he asked, while an emotion with which she was angry made her pale cheeks flush and her black eyes sparkle.

"This is a strange request for you to make," she said, exaggerating the coldness of her tone.

"Is it? Impudent perhaps. Yet I am not so guilty as you think; and bear in mind that to me you can never make reparation."

"Reparation? To you! It is you who can offer me no reparation for the offence against my feelings — and my person; for what reparation can be

adequate for your odious and ridiculous plot so scornful in its implication, so humiliating to my pride. No! I don't want to remember you."

Unexpectedly, with a tightening grip, he pulled her nearer to him, and looking into her eyes with fearless despair —

"You'll have to. I shall haunt you," he said firmly.

Her hand was wrenched out of his grasp before he had time to release it. Felicia Moorsom stepped into the boat, sat down by the side of her father, and breathed tenderly on her crushed fingers.

The professor gave her a sidelong look — nothing more. But the professor's sister, yet on shore, had put up her long-handle double eye-glass to look at the scene. She dropped it with a faint rattle.

"I've never in my life heard anything so crude said to a lady," she murmured, passing before Renouard with a perfectly erect head. When, a moment afterwards, softening suddenly, she turned to throw a good-bye to that young man, she saw only his back in the distance moving towards the bungalow. She watched him go in — amazed — before she too left the soil of Malata.

Nobody disturbed Renouard in that room where he had shut himself in to breathe the evanescent perfume of her who for him was no more, till late in the afternoon when the half-caste was heard on the other side of the door.

He wanted the master to know that the trader Janet was just entering the cove.

Renouard's strong voice on his side of the door gave him most unexpected instructions. He was to pay off the boys with the cash in the office and arrange with the captain of the Janet to take every worker away from Malata, returning them to their respective homes. An order on the Dunster firm would be given to him in payment.

And again the silence of the bungalow remained unbroken till, next morning, the half-caste came to report that everything was done. The plantation boys were embarking now.

Through a crack in the door a hand thrust at him a piece of paper, and the door slammed to so sharply that Luiz stepped back. Then approaching cringingly the keyhole, in a propitiatory tone he asked:

"Do I go too, master?"

"Yes. You too. Everybody."

"Master stop here alone?"

Silence. And the half-caste's eyes grew wide with wonder. But he also, like those "ignorant savages," the plantation boys, was only too glad to leave an island haunted by the ghost of a white man. He backed away noiselessly from the mysterious silence in the closed room, and only in the very doorway of the bungalow allowed himself to give vent to his feelings by a deprecatory and pained —

"Tse! Tse! Tse!"

## CHAPTER XII

The Moorsoms did manage to catch the homeward mail boat all right, but had only twenty-four hours in town. Thus the sentimental Willie could not see very much of them. This did not prevent him afterwards from relating at great length, with manly tears in his eyes, how poor Miss Moorsom — the fashionable and clever beauty — found her betrothed in Malata only to see him die in her arms. Most people were deeply touched by the sad story. It was the talk of a good many days.

But the all-knowing Editor, Renouard's only friend and crony, wanted to know more than the rest of the world. From professional incontinence, perhaps, he thirsted for a full cup of harrowing detail. And when he noticed Renouard's schooner lying in port day after day he sought the sailing master to learn the reason. The man told him that such were his instructions. He had been ordered to lie there a month before returning to Malata. And the month was nearly up. "I will ask you to give me a passage," said the Editor.

He landed in the morning at the bottom of the garden and found peace, stillness, sunshine reigning everywhere, the doors and windows of the bungalow standing wide open, no sight of a human being anywhere, the plants growing rank and tall on the deserted fields. For hours the Editor and the schooner's crew, excited by the mystery, roamed over the island shouting Renouard's name; and at last set themselves in grim silence to explore systematically the uncleared bush and the deeper ravines in search of his corpse. What had happened? Had he been murdered by the boys? Or had he simply, capricious and secretive, abandoned his plantation taking the people with him. It was impossible to tell what had happened. At last, towards the decline of the day, the Editor and the sailing master discovered a track of sandals crossing a strip of sandy beach on the north shore of the bay. Following this track fearfully, they passed round the spur of the headland, and there on a large stone found the sandals, Renouard's white jacket, and the Malay sarong of chequered pattern which the planter of Malata was well known to wear when going to bathe. These things made a little heap, and the sailor remarked, after gazing at it in silence —

"Birds have been hovering over this for many a day."

"He's gone bathing and got drowned," cried the Editor in dismay.

"I doubt it, sir. If he had been drowned anywhere within a mile from the shore the body would have been washed out on the reefs. And our boats have found nothing so far."

Nothing was ever found — and Renouard's disappearance remained in the main inexplicable. For to whom could it have occurred that a man would set out calmly to swim beyond the confines of life — with a steady stroke — his eyes fixed on a star!

Next evening, from the receding schooner, the Editor looked back for the last time at the deserted island. A black cloud hung listlessly over the high rock on the middle hill; and under the mysterious silence of that shadow Malata lay mournful, with an air of anguish in the wild sunset, as if remembering the heart that was broken there.

## ***THE PARTNER***



“And that be hanged for a silly yarn. The boatmen here in Westport have been telling this lie to the summer visitors for years. The sort that gets taken out for a row at a shilling a head — and asks foolish questions — must be told something to pass the time away. D’ye know anything more silly than being pulled in a boat along a beach? . . . It’s like drinking weak lemonade when you aren’t thirsty. I don’t know why they do it! They don’t even get sick.”

A forgotten glass of beer stood at his elbow; the locality was a small respectable smoking-room of a small respectable hotel, and a taste for forming chance acquaintances accounts for my sitting up late with him. His great, flat, furrowed cheeks were shaven; a thick, square wisp of white hairs hung from his chin; its waggling gave additional point to his deep utterance; and his general contempt for mankind with its activities and moralities was expressed in the rakish set of his big soft hat of black felt with a large rim, which he kept always on his head.

His appearance was that of an old adventurer, retired after many unholy experiences in the darkest parts of the earth; but I had every reason to believe that he had never been outside England. From a casual remark somebody dropped I gathered that in his early days he must have been somehow connected with shipping — with ships in docks. Of individuality he had plenty. And it was this which attracted my attention at first. But he was not easy to classify, and before the end of the week I gave him up with the vague definition, “an imposing old ruffian.”

One rainy afternoon, oppressed by infinite boredom, I went into the smoking-room. He was sitting there in absolute immobility, which was really fakir-like and impressive. I began to wonder what could be the associations of that sort of man, his “milieu,” his private connections, his views, his morality, his friends, and even his wife — when to my surprise he opened a conversation in a deep, muttering voice.

I must say that since he had learned from somebody that I was a writer of stories he had been acknowledging my existence by means of some vague growls in the morning.



He was essentially a taciturn man. There was an effect of rudeness in his fragmentary sentences. It was some time before I discovered that what he would be at was the process by which stories — stories for periodicals — were produced.

What could one say to a fellow like that? But I was bored to death; the weather continued impossible; and I resolved to be amiable.

“And so you make these tales up on your own. How do they ever come into your head?” he rumbled.

I explained that one generally got a hint for a tale.

“What sort of hint?”

“Well, for instance,” I said, “I got myself rowed out to the rocks the other day. My boatman told me of the wreck on these rocks nearly twenty years ago. That could be used as a hint for a mainly descriptive bit of story with some such title as ‘In the Channel,’ for instance.”

It was then that he flew out at the boatmen and the summer visitors who listen to their tales. Without moving a muscle of his face he emitted a powerful “Rot,” from somewhere out of the depths of his chest, and went on in his hoarse, fragmentary mumble. “Stare at the silly rocks — nod their silly heads [the visitors, I presume]. What do they think a man is — blown-out paper bag or what? — go off pop like that when he’s hit — Damn silly yarn — Hint indeed! . . . A lie?”

You must imagine this statuesque ruffian enhaloed in the black rim of his hat, letting all this out as an old dog growls sometimes, with his head up and staring-away eyes.

“Indeed!” I exclaimed. “Well, but even if untrue it is a hint, enabling me to see these rocks, this gale they speak of, the heavy seas, etc., etc., in relation to mankind. The struggle against natural forces and the effect of the issue on at least one, say, exalted — ”

He interrupted me by an aggressive —

“Would truth be any good to you?”

“I shouldn’t like to say,” I answered, cautiously. “It’s said that truth is stranger than fiction.”

“Who says that?” he mouthed.

“Oh! Nobody in particular.”

I turned to the window; for the contemptuous beggar was oppressive to look at, with his immovable arm on the table. I suppose my unceremonious manner provoked him to a comparatively long speech.

“Did you ever see such a silly lot of rocks? Like plums in a slice of cold pudding.”

I was looking at them — an acre or more of black dots scattered on the steel-grey shades of the level sea, under the uniform gossamer grey mist with a formless brighter patch in one place — the veiled whiteness of the cliff coming through, like a diffused, mysterious radiance. It was a delicate and wonderful picture, something expressive, suggestive, and desolate, a symphony in grey and black — a Whistler. But the next thing said by the voice behind me made me turn round. It growled out contempt for all associated notions of roaring seas with concise energy, then went on —

“I — no such foolishness — looking at the rocks out there — more likely call to mind an office — I used to look in sometimes at one time — office in London — one of them small streets behind Cannon Street Station. . . “

He was very deliberate; not jerky, only fragmentary; at times profane.

“That’s a rather remote connection,” I observed, approaching him.

“Connection? To Hades with your connections. It was an accident.”

“Still,” I said, “an accident has its backward and forward connections, which, if they could be set forth — ”

Without moving he seemed to lend an attentive ear.

“Aye! Set forth. That’s perhaps what you could do. Couldn’t you now? There’s no sea life in this connection. But you can put it in out of your head — if you like.”

“Yes. I could, if necessary,” I said. “Sometimes it pays to put in a lot out of one’s head, and sometimes it doesn’t. I mean that the story isn’t worth it. Everything’s in that.”

It amused me to talk to him like this. He reflected audibly that he guessed story-writers were out after money like the rest of the world which had to live by its wits: and that it was extraordinary how far people who were out after money would go. . . Some of them.

Then he made a sally against sea life. Silly sort of life, he called it. No opportunities, no experience, no variety, nothing. Some fine men came out of it — he admitted — but no more chance in the world if put to it than fly. Kids. So Captain Harry Dunbar. Good sailor. Great name as a skipper. Big man; short side-whiskers going grey, fine face, loud voice. A good fellow, but no more up to people’s tricks than a baby.

“That’s the captain of the Sagamore you’re talking about,” I said, confidently.

After a low, scornful “Of course” he seemed now to hold on the wall with his fixed stare the vision of that city office, “at the back of Cannon Street Station,” while he growled and mouthed a fragmentary description, jerking his chin up now and then, as if angry.

It was, according to his account, a modest place of business, not shady in any sense, but out of the way, in a small street now rebuilt from end to end. “Seven doors from the Cheshire Cat public house under the railway bridge. I used to take my lunch there when my business called me to the city. Cloete would come in to have his chop and make the girl laugh. No need to talk much, either, for that. Nothing but the way he would twinkle his spectacles on you and give a twitch of his thick mouth was enough to start you off before he began one of his little tales. Funny fellow, Cloete. C-l-o-e-t-e — Cloete.”

“What was he — a Dutchman?” I asked, not seeing in the least what all this had to do with the Westport boatmen and the Westport summer visitors and this extraordinary old fellow’s irritable view of them as liars and fools. “Devil knows,” he grunted, his eyes on the wall as if not to miss a single movement of a cinematograph picture. “Spoke nothing but English, anyway. First I saw him — comes off a ship in dock from the States — passenger. Asks me for a small hotel near by. Wanted to be quiet and have a look round for a few days. I took him to a place — friend of mine. . . Next time — in the City — Hallo! You’re very obliging — have a drink. Talks plenty about himself. Been years in the States. All sorts of business all over the place. With some patent medicine people, too. Travels. Writes advertisements and all that. Tells me funny stories. Tall, loose-limbed fellow. Black hair up on end, like a brush; long face, long legs, long arms, twinkle in his specs, jocular way of speaking — in a low voice. . . See that?”

I nodded, but he was not looking at me.

“Never laughed so much in my life. The beggar — would make you laugh telling you how he skinned his own father. He was up to that, too. A man who’s been in the patent-medicine trade will be up to anything from pitch-and-toss to wilful murder. And that’s a bit of hard truth for you. Don’t mind what they do — think they can carry off anything and talk themselves out of anything — all the world’s a fool to them. Business man, too, Cloete. Came over with a few hundred pounds. Looking for something to do — in a quiet way. Nothing like the old country, after all,

says he. . . And so we part — I with more drinks in me than I was used to. After a time, perhaps six months or so, I run up against him again in Mr. George Dunbar's office. Yes, that office. It wasn't often that I . . . However, there was a bit of his cargo in a ship in dock that I wanted to ask Mr. George about. In comes Cloete out of the room at the back with some papers in his hand. Partner. You understand?"

"Aha!" I said. "The few hundred pounds."

"And that tongue of his," he growled. "Don't forget that tongue. Some of his tales must have opened George Dunbar's eyes a bit as to what business means."

"A plausible fellow," I suggested.

"H'm! You must have it in your own way — of course. Well. Partner. George Dunbar puts his top-hat on and tells me to wait a moment. . . George always looked as though he were making a few thousands a year — a city swell. . . Come along, old man! And he and Captain Harry go out together — some business with a solicitor round the corner. Captain Harry, when he was in England, used to turn up in his brother's office regularly about twelve. Sat in a corner like a good boy, reading the paper and smoking his pipe. So they go out. . . Model brothers, says Cloete — two love-birds — I am looking after the tinned-fruit side of this cozy little show. . . Gives me that sort of talk. Then by-and-by: What sort of old thing is that Sagamore? Finest ship out — eh? I dare say all ships are fine to you. You live by them. I tell you what; I would just as soon put my money into an old stocking. Sooner!"

He drew a breath, and I noticed his hand, lying loosely on the table, close slowly into a fist. In that immovable man it was startling, ominous, like the famed nod of the Commander.

"So, already at that time — note — already," he growled.

"But hold on," I interrupted. "The Sagamore belonged to Mundy and Rogers, I've been told."

He snorted contemptuously. "Damn boatmen — know no better. Flew the firm's house-flag. That's another thing. Favour. It was like this: When old man Dunbar died, Captain Harry was already in command with the firm. George chucked the bank he was clerking in — to go on his own with what there was to share after the old chap. George was a smart man. Started warehousing; then two or three things at a time: wood-pulp,

preserved-fruit trade, and so on. And Captain Harry let him have his share to work with. . . I am provided for in my ship, he says. . . But by-and-by Mundy and Rogers begin to sell out to foreigners all their ships — go into steam right away. Captain Harry gets very upset — lose command, part with the ship he was fond of — very wretched. Just then, so it happened, the brothers came in for some money — an old woman died or something. Quite a tidy bit. Then young George says: There's enough between us two to buy the Sagamore with. . . But you'll need more money for your business, cries Captain Harry — and the other laughs at him: My business is going on all right. Why, I can go out and make a handful of sovereigns while you are trying to get your pipe to draw, old man. . . Mundy and Rogers very friendly about it: Certainly, Captain. And we will manage her for you, if you like, as if she were still our own. . . Why, with a connection like that it was good investment to buy that ship. Good! Aye, at the time."

The turning of his head slightly toward me at this point was like a sign of strong feeling in any other man.

"You'll mind that this was long before Cloete came into it at all," he muttered, warningly.

"Yes. I will mind," I said. "We generally say: some years passed. That's soon done."

He eyed me for a while silently in an unseeing way, as if engrossed in the thought of the years so easily dealt with; his own years, too, they were, the years before and the years (not so many) after Cloete came upon the scene. When he began to speak again, I discerned his intention to point out to me, in his obscure and graphic manner, the influence on George Dunbar of long association with Cloete's easy moral standards, unscrupulously persuasive gift of humour (funny fellow), and adventurously reckless disposition. He desired me anxiously to elaborate this view, and I assured him it was quite within my powers. He wished me also to understand that George's business had its ups and downs (the other brother was meantime sailing to and fro serenely); that he got into low water at times, which worried him rather, because he had married a young wife with expensive tastes. He was having a pretty anxious time of it generally; and just then Cloete ran up in the city somewhere against a man working a patent medicine (the fellow's old trade) with some success, but which, with capital, capital to the tune of thousands to be spent with both hands on advertising, could be turned into a great thing — infinitely better-paying than a gold-mine. Cloete became

excited at the possibilities of that sort of business, in which he was an expert. I understood that George's partner was all on fire from the contact with this unique opportunity.

"So he goes in every day into George's room about eleven, and sings that tune till George gnashes his teeth with rage. Do shut up. What's the good? No money. Hardly any to go on with, let alone pouring thousands into advertising. Never dare propose to his brother Harry to sell the ship. Couldn't think of it. Worry him to death. It would be like the end of the world coming. And certainly not for a business of that kind! . . . Do you think it would be a swindle? asks Cloete, twitching his mouth. . . George owns up: No — would be no better than a squeamish ass if he thought that, after all these years in business.

"Cloete looks at him hard — Never thought of selling the ship. Expected the blamed old thing wouldn't fetch half her insured value by this time. Then George flies out at him. What's the meaning, then, of these silly jeers at ship-owning for the last three weeks? Had enough of them, anyhow.

"Angry at having his mouth made to water, see. Cloete don't get excited. . . I am no squeamish ass, either, says he, very slowly. 'Tisn't selling your old Sagamore wants. The blamed thing wants tomahawking (seems the name Sagamore means an Indian chief or something. The figure-head was a half-naked savage with a feather over one ear and a hatchet in his belt). Tomahawking, says he.

"What do you mean? asks George. . . Wrecking — it could be managed with perfect safety, goes on Cloete — your brother would then put in his share of insurance money. Needn't tell him exactly what for. He thinks you're the smartest business man that ever lived. Make his fortune, too. . . George grips the desk with both hands in his rage. . . You think my brother's a man to cast away his ship on purpose. I wouldn't even dare think of such a thing in the same room with him — the finest fellow that ever lived. . . Don't make such noise; they'll hear you outside, says Cloete; and he tells him that his brother is the salted pattern of all virtues, but all that's necessary is to induce him to stay ashore for a voyage — for a holiday — take a rest — why not? . . . In fact, I have in view somebody up to that sort of game — Cloete whispers.

"George nearly chokes. . . So you think I am of that sort — you think me capable — What do you take me for? . . . He almost loses his head, while Cloete keeps cool, only gets white about the gills. . . I take you for a man

who will be most cursedly hard up before long. . . He goes to the door and sends away the clerks — there were only two — to take their lunch hour. Comes back . . . What are you indignant about? Do I want you to rob the widow and orphan? Why, man! Lloyd's a corporation, it hasn't got a body to starve. There's forty or more of them perhaps who underwrote the lines on that silly ship of yours. Not one human being would go hungry or cold for it. They take every risk into consideration. Everything I tell you. . . That sort of talk. H'm! George too upset to speak — only gurgles and waves his arms; so sudden, you see. The other, warming his back at the fire, goes on. Wood-pulp business next door to a failure. Tinned-fruit trade nearly played out. . . You're frightened, he says; but the law is only meant to frighten fools away. . . And he shows how safe casting away that ship would be. Premiums paid for so many, many years. No shadow of suspicion could arise. And, dash it all! a ship must meet her end some day.

..

"I am not frightened. I am indignant," says George Dunbar.

"Cloete boiling with rage inside. Chance of a lifetime — his chance! And he says kindly: Your wife'll be much more indignant when you ask her to get out of that pretty house of yours and pile in into a two-pair back — with kids perhaps, too. . .

"George had no children. Married a couple of years; looked forward to a kid or two very much. Feels more upset than ever. Talks about an honest man for father, and so on. Cloete grins: You be quick before they come, and they'll have a rich man for father, and no one the worse for it. That's the beauty of the thing.

"George nearly cries. I believe he did cry at odd times. This went on for weeks. He couldn't quarrel with Cloete. Couldn't pay off his few hundreds; and besides, he was used to have him about. Weak fellow, George. Cloete generous, too. . . Don't think of my little pile, says he. Of course it's gone when we have to shut up. But I don't care, he says. . . And then there was George's new wife. When Cloete dines there, the beggar puts on a dress suit; little woman liked it; . . . Mr. Cloete, my husband's partner; such a clever man, man of the world, so amusing! . . . When he dines there and they are alone: Oh, Mr. Cloete, I wish George would do something to improve our prospects. Our position is really so mediocre. . . And Cloete smiles, but isn't surprised, because he had put all these notions himself into her empty head. . . What your husband wants is enterprise, a

little audacity. You can encourage him best, Mrs. Dunbar. . . She was a silly, extravagant little fool. Had made George take a house in Norwood. Live up to a lot of people better off than themselves. I saw her once; silk dress, pretty boots, all feathers and scent, pink face. More like the Promenade at the Alhambra than a decent home, it looked to me. But some women do get a devil of a hold on a man.”

“Yes, some do,” I assented. “Even when the man is the husband.”

“My missis,” he addressed me unexpectedly, in a solemn, surprisingly hollow tone, “could wind me round her little finger. I didn’t find it out till she was gone. Aye. But she was a woman of sense, while that piece of goods ought to have been walking the streets, and that’s all I can say. . . You must make her up out of your head. You will know the sort.”

“Leave all that to me,” I said.

“H’m!” he grunted, doubtfully, then going back to his scornful tone: “A month or so afterwards the Sagamore arrives home. All very jolly at first. . . Hallo, George boy! Hallo, Harry, old man! . . . But by and by Captain Harry thinks his clever brother is not looking very well. And George begins to look worse. He can’t get rid of Cloete’s notion. It has stuck in his head. . . There’s nothing wrong — quite well. . . Captain Harry still anxious. Business going all right, eh? Quite right. Lots of business. Good business. . . Of course Captain Harry believes that easily. Starts chaffing his brother in his jolly way about rolling in money. George’s shirt sticks to his back with perspiration, and he feels quite angry with the captain. . . The fool, he says to himself. Rolling in money, indeed! And then he thinks suddenly: Why not? . . . Because Cloete’s notion has got hold of his mind.

“But next day he weakens and says to Cloete . . . Perhaps it would be best to sell. Couldn’t you talk to my brother? and Cloete explains to him over again for the twentieth time why selling wouldn’t do, anyhow. No! The Sagamore must be tomahawked — as he would call it; to spare George’s feelings, maybe. But every time he says the word, George shudders. . . I’ve got a man at hand competent for the job who will do the trick for five hundred, and only too pleased at the chance, says Cloete. . . George shuts his eyes tight at that sort of talk — but at the same time he thinks: Humbug! There can be no such man. And yet if there was such a man it would be safe enough — perhaps.

“And Cloete always funny about it. He couldn’t talk about anything without it seeming there was a great joke in it somewhere. . . Now, says he,



I know you are a moral citizen, George. Morality is mostly funk, and I think you're the funkiest man I ever came across in my travels. Why, you are afraid to speak to your brother. Afraid to open your mouth to him with a fortune for us all in sight. . . George flares up at this: no, he ain't afraid; he will speak; bangs fist on the desk. And Cloete pats him on the back. . . We'll be made men presently, he says.

"But the first time George attempts to speak to Captain Harry his heart slides down into his boots. Captain Harry only laughs at the notion of staying ashore. He wants no holiday, not he. But Jane thinks of remaining in England this trip. Go about a bit and see some of her people. Jane was the Captain's wife; round-faced, pleasant lady. George gives up that time; but Cloete won't let him rest. So he tries again; and the Captain frowns. He frowns because he's puzzled. He can't make it out. He has no notion of living away from his Sagamore. . .

"Ah!" I cried. "Now I understand."

"No, you don't," he growled, his black, contemptuous stare turning on me crushingly.

"I beg your pardon," I murmured.

"H'm! Very well, then. Captain Harry looks very stern, and George crumples all up inside. . . He sees through me, he thinks. . . Of course it could not be; but George, by that time, was scared at his own shadow. He is shirking it with Cloete, too. Gives his partner to understand that his brother has half a mind to try a spell on shore, and so on. Cloete waits, gnawing his fingers; so anxious. Cloete really had found a man for the job. Believe it or not, he had found him inside the very boarding-house he lodged in — somewhere about Tottenham Court Road. He had noticed down-stairs a fellow — a boarder and not a boarder — hanging about the dark — part of the passage mostly; sort of 'man of the house,' a slinking chap. Black eyes. White face. The woman of the house — a widow lady, she called herself — very full of Mr. Stafford; Mr. Stafford this and Mr. Stafford that. . . Anyhow, Cloete one evening takes him out to have a drink. Cloete mostly passed away his evenings in saloon bars. No drunkard, though, Cloete; for company; liked to talk to all sorts there; just habit; American fashion.

"So Cloete takes that chap out more than once. Not very good company, though. Little to say for himself. Sits quiet and drinks what's given to him, eyes always half closed, speaks sort of demure. . . I've had misfortunes, he says. The truth was they had kicked him out of a big steam-ship company

for disgraceful conduct; nothing to affect his certificate, you understand; and he had gone down quite easily. Liked it, I expect. Anything's better than work. Lived on the widow lady who kept that boarding-house."

"That's almost incredible," I ventured to interrupt. "A man with a master's certificate, do you mean?"

"I do; I've known them 'bus cads," he growled, contemptuously. "Yes. Swing on the tail-board by the strap and yell, 'tuppence all the way.' Through drink. But this Stafford was of another kind. Hell's full of such Staffords; Cloete would make fun of him, and then there would be a nasty gleam in the fellow's half-shut eye. But Cloete was generally kind to him. Cloete was a fellow that would be kind to a mangy dog. Anyhow, he used to stand drinks to that object, and now and then gave him half a crown — because the widow lady kept Mr. Stafford short of pocket-money. They had rows almost every day down in the basement. . .

"It was the fellow being a sailor that put into Cloete's mind the first notion of doing away with the Sagamore. He studies him a bit, thinks there's enough devil in him yet to be tempted, and one evening he says to him . . . I suppose you wouldn't mind going to sea again, for a spell? . . . The other never raises his eyes; says it's scarcely worth one's while for the miserable salary one gets. . . Well, but what do you say to captain's wages for a time, and a couple of hundred extra if you are compelled to come home without the ship. Accidents will happen, says Cloete. . . Oh! sure to, says that Stafford; and goes on taking sips of his drink as if he had no interest in the matter.

"Cloete presses him a bit; but the other observes, impudent and languid like: You see, there's no future in a thing like that — is there? . . Oh! no, says Cloete. Certainly not. I don't mean this to have any future — as far as you are concerned. It's a 'once for all' transaction. Well, what do you estimate your future at? he asks. . . The fellow more listless than ever — nearly asleep. — I believe the skunk was really too lazy to care. Small cheating at cards, wheedling or bullying his living out of some woman or other, was more his style. Cloete swears at him in whispers something awful. All this in the saloon bar of the Horse Shoe, Tottenham Court Road. Finally they agree, over the second sixpennyworth of Scotch hot, on five hundred pounds as the price of tomahawking the Sagamore. And Cloete waits to see what George can do.

“A week or two goes by. The other fellow loafes about the house as if there had been nothing, and Cloete begins to doubt whether he really means ever to tackle that job. But one day he stops Cloete at the door, with his downcast eyes: What about that employment you wished to give me? he asks. . . You see, he had played some more than usual dirty trick on the woman and expected awful ructions presently; and to be fired out for sure. Cloete very pleased. George had been prevaricating to him such a lot that he really thought the thing was as well as settled. And he says: Yes. It’s time I introduced you to my friend. Just get your hat and we will go now. . .

“The two come into the office, and George at his desk sits up in a sudden panic — staring. Sees a tallish fellow, sort of nasty-handsome face, heavy eyes, half shut; short drab overcoat, shabby bowler hat, very careful — like in his movements. And he thinks to himself, Is that how such a man looks! No, the thing’s impossible. . . Cloete does the introduction, and the fellow turns round to look behind him at the chair before he sits down. . . A thoroughly competent man, Cloete goes on . . . The man says nothing, sits perfectly quiet. And George can’t speak, throat too dry. Then he makes an effort: H’m! H’m! Oh yes — unfortunately — sorry to disappoint — my brother — made other arrangements — going himself.

“The fellow gets up, never raising his eyes off the ground, like a modest girl, and goes out softly, right out of the office without a sound. Cloete sticks his chin in his hand and bites all his fingers at once. George’s heart slows down and he speaks to Cloete. . . This can’t be done. How can it be? Directly the ship is lost Harry would see through it. You know he is a man to go to the underwriters himself with his suspicions. And he would break his heart over me. How can I play that on him? There’s only two of us in the world belonging to each other. . .

“Cloete lets out a horrid cuss-word, jumps up, bolts away into his room, and George hears him there banging things around. After a while he goes to the door and says in a trembling voice: You ask me for an impossibility. . . Cloete inside ready to fly out like a tiger and rend him; but he opens the door a little way and says softly: Talking of hearts, yours is no bigger than a mouse’s, let me tell you. . . But George doesn’t care — load off the heart, anyhow. And just then Captain Harry comes in. . . Hallo, George boy. I am little late. What about a chop at the Cheshire, now? . . . Right you are, old man. . . And off they go to lunch together. Cloete has nothing to eat that day.

“George feels a new man for a time; but all of a sudden that fellow Stafford begins to hang about the street, in sight of the house door. The first time George sees him he thinks he made a mistake. But no; next time he has to go out, there is the very fellow skulking on the other side of the road. It makes George nervous; but he must go out on business, and when the fellow cuts across the road-way he dodges him. He dodges him once, twice, three times; but at last he gets nabbed in his very doorway. . . What do you want? he says, trying to look fierce.

“It seems that ructions had come in the basement of that boarding-house, and the widow lady had turned on him (being jealous mad), to the extent of talking of the police. That Mr. Stafford couldn’t stand; so he cleared out like a scared stag, and there he was, chucked into the streets, so to speak. Cloete looked so savage as he went to and fro that he hadn’t the spunk to tackle him; but George seemed a softer kind to his eye. He would have been glad of half a quid, anything. . . I’ve had misfortunes, he says softly, in his demure way, which frightens George more than a row would have done. . . Consider the severity of my disappointment, he says. . .

“George, instead of telling him to go to the devil, loses his head. . . I don’t know you. What do you want? he cries, and bolts up-stairs to Cloete. . . . Look what’s come of it, he gasps; now we are at the mercy of that horrid fellow. . . Cloete tries to show him that the fellow can do nothing; but George thinks that some sort of scandal may be forced on, anyhow. Says that he can’t live with that horror haunting him. Cloete would laugh if he weren’t too weary of it all. Then a thought strikes him and he changes his tune. . . Well, perhaps! I will go down-stairs and send him away to begin with. . . He comes back. . . He’s gone. But perhaps you are right. The fellow’s hard up, and that’s what makes people desperate. The best thing would be to get him out of the country for a time. Look here, the poor devil is really in want of employment. I won’t ask you much this time: only to hold your tongue; and I shall try to get your brother to take him as chief officer. At this George lays his arms and his head on his desk, so that Cloete feels sorry for him. But altogether Cloete feels more cheerful because he has shaken the ghost a bit into that Stafford. That very afternoon he buys him a suit of blue clothes, and tells him that he will have to turn to and work for his living now. Go to sea as mate of the Sagamore. The skunk wasn’t very willing, but what with having nothing to eat and no place to sleep in, and the woman having frightened him with the talk of

some prosecution or other, he had no choice, properly speaking. Cloete takes care of him for a couple of days. . . Our arrangement still stands, says he. Here's the ship bound for Port Elizabeth; not a safe anchorage at all. Should she by chance part from her anchors in a north-east gale and get lost on the beach, as many of them do, why, it's five hundred in your pocket — and a quick return home. You are up to the job, ain't you?

“Our Mr. Stafford takes it all in with downcast eyes. . . I am a competent seaman, he says, with his sly, modest air. A ship's chief mate has no doubt many opportunities to manipulate the chains and anchors to some purpose. . . At this Cloete thumps him on the back: You'll do, my noble sailor. Go in and win. . .

“Next thing George knows, his brother tells him that he had occasion to oblige his partner. And glad of it, too. Likes the partner no end. Took a friend of his as mate. Man had his troubles, been ashore a year nursing a dying wife, it seems. Down on his luck. . . George protests earnestly that he knows nothing of the person. Saw him once. Not very attractive to look at. . . And Captain Harry says in his hearty way, That's so, but must give the poor devil a chance. . .

“So Mr. Stafford joins in dock. And it seems that he did manage to monkey with one of the cables — keeping his mind on Port Elizabeth. The riggers had all the cable ranged on deck to clean lockers. The new mate watches them go ashore — dinner hour — and sends the ship-keeper out of the ship to fetch him a bottle of beer. Then he goes to work whittling away the forelock of the forty-five-fathom shackle-pin, gives it a tap or two with a hammer just to make it loose, and of course that cable wasn't safe any more. Riggers come back — you know what riggers are: come day, go day, and God send Sunday. Down goes the chain into the locker without their foreman looking at the shackles at all. What does he care? He ain't going in the ship. And two days later the ship goes to sea. . . “

At this point I was incautious enough to breathe out another “I see,” which gave offence again, and brought on me a rude “No, you don't” — as before. But in the pause he remembered the glass of beer at his elbow. He drank half of it, wiped his mustaches, and remarked grimly —

“Don't you think that there will be any sea life in this, because there ain't. If you're going to put in any out of your own head, now's your chance. I suppose you know what ten days of bad weather in the Channel

are like? I don't. Anyway, ten whole days go by. One Monday Cloete comes to the office a little late — hears a woman's voice in George's room and looks in. Newspapers on the desk, on the floor; Captain Harry's wife sitting with red eyes and a bag on the chair near her. . . Look at this, says George, in great excitement, showing him a paper. Cloete's heart gives a jump. Ha! Wreck in Westport Bay. The Sagamore gone ashore early hours of Sunday, and so the newspaper men had time to put in some of their work. Columns of it. Lifeboat out twice. Captain and crew remain by the ship. Tugs summoned to assist. If the weather improves, this well-known fine ship may yet be saved. . . You know the way these chaps put it. . . Mrs. Harry there on her way to catch a train from Cannon Street. Got an hour to wait.

"Cloete takes George aside and whispers: Ship saved yet! Oh, damn! That must never be; you hear? But George looks at him dazed, and Mrs. Harry keeps on sobbing quietly: . . . I ought to have been with him. But I am going to him. . . We are all going together, cries Cloete, all of a sudden. He rushes out, sends the woman a cup of hot bovril from the shop across the road, buys a rug for her, thinks of everything; and in the train tucks her in and keeps on talking, thirteen to the dozen, all the way, to keep her spirits up, as it were; but really because he can't hold his peace for very joy. Here's the thing done all at once, and nothing to pay. Done. Actually done. His head swims now and again when he thinks of it. What enormous luck! It almost frightens him. He would like to yell and sing. Meantime George Dunbar sits in his corner, looking so deadly miserable that at last poor Mrs. Harry tries to comfort him, and so cheers herself up at the same time by talking about how her Harry is a prudent man; not likely to risk his crew's life or his own unnecessarily — and so on.

"First thing they hear at Westport station is that the life-boat has been out to the ship again, and has brought off the second officer, who had hurt himself, and a few sailors. Captain and the rest of the crew, about fifteen in all, are still on board. Tugs expected to arrive every moment.

"They take Mrs. Harry to the inn, nearly opposite the rocks; she bolts straight up-stairs to look out of the window, and she lets out a great cry when she sees the wreck. She won't rest till she gets on board to her Harry. Cloete soothes her all he can. . . All right; you try to eat a mouthful, and we will go to make inquiries.

“He draws George out of the room: Look here, she can’t go on board, but I shall. I’ll see to it that he doesn’t stop in the ship too long. Let’s go and find the coxswain of the life-boat. . . George follows him, shivering from time to time. The waves are washing over the old pier; not much wind, a wild, gloomy sky over the bay. In the whole world only one tug away off, heading to the seas, tossed in and out of sight every minute as regular as clockwork.

“They meet the coxswain and he tells them: Yes! He’s going out again. No, they ain’t in danger on board — not yet. But the ship’s chance is very poor. Still, if the wind doesn’t pipe up again and the sea goes down something might be tried. After some talk he agrees to take Cloete on board; supposed to be with an urgent message from the owners to the captain.

“Whenever Cloete looks at the sky he feels comforted; it looks so threatening. George Dunbar follows him about with a white face and saying nothing. Cloete takes him to have a drink or two, and by and by he begins to pick up. . . That’s better, says Cloete; dash me if it wasn’t like walking about with a dead man before. You ought to be throwing up your cap, man. I feel as if I wanted to stand in the street and cheer. Your brother is safe, the ship is lost, and we are made men.

“Are you certain she’s lost? asks George. It would be an awful blow after all the agonies I have gone through in my mind, since you first spoke to me, if she were to be got off — and — and — all this temptation to begin over again. . . For we had nothing to do with this; had we?

“Of course not, says Cloete. Wasn’t your brother himself in charge? It’s providential. . . Oh! cries George, shocked. . . Well, say it’s the devil, says Cloete, cheerfully. I don’t mind! You had nothing to do with it any more than a baby unborn, you great softy, you. . . Cloete has got so that he almost loved George Dunbar. Well. Yes. That was so. I don’t mean he respected him. He was just fond of his partner.

“They go back, you may say fairly skipping, to the hotel, and find the wife of the captain at the open window, with her eyes on the ship as if she wanted to fly across the bay over there. . . Now then, Mrs. Dunbar, cries Cloete, you can’t go, but I am going. Any messages? Don’t be shy. I’ll deliver every word faithfully. And if you would like to give me a kiss for him, I’ll deliver that too, dash me if I don’t.

“He makes Mrs. Harry laugh with his patter. . . Oh, dear Mr. Cloete, you are a calm, reasonable man. Make him behave sensibly. He’s a bit obstinate, you know, and he’s so fond of the ship, too. Tell him I am here — looking on. . . Trust me, Mrs. Dunbar. Only shut that window, that’s a good girl. You will be sure to catch cold if you don’t, and the Captain won’t be pleased coming off the wreck to find you coughing and sneezing so that you can’t tell him how happy you are. And now if you can get me a bit of tape to fasten my glasses on good to my ears, I will be going. . .

“How he gets on board I don’t know. All wet and shaken and excited and out of breath, he does get on board. Ship lying over, smothered in sprays, but not moving very much; just enough to jag one’s nerve a bit. He finds them all crowded on the deck-house forward, in their shiny oilskins, with faces like sick men. Captain Harry can’t believe his eyes. What! Mr. Cloete! What are you doing here, in God’s name? . . . Your wife’s ashore there, looking on, gasps out Cloete; and after they had talked a bit, Captain Harry thinks it’s uncommonly plucky and kind of his brother’s partner to come off to him like this. Man glad to have somebody to talk to. . . It’s a bad business, Mr. Cloete, he says. And Cloete rejoices to hear that. Captain Harry thinks he had done his best, but the cable had parted when he tried to anchor her. It was a great trial to lose the ship. Well, he would have to face it. He fetches a deep sigh now and then. Cloete almost sorry he had come on board, because to be on that wreck keeps his chest in a tight band all the time. They crouch out of the wind under the port boat, a little apart from the men. The life-boat had gone away after putting Cloete on board, but was coming back next high water to take off the crew if no attempt at getting the ship afloat could be made. Dusk was falling; winter’s day; black sky; wind rising. Captain Harry felt melancholy. God’s will be done. If she must be left on the rocks — why, she must. A man should take what God sends him standing up. . . Suddenly his voice breaks, and he squeezes Cloete’s arm: It seems as if I couldn’t leave her, he whispers. Cloete looks round at the men like a lot of huddled sheep and thinks to himself: They won’t stay. . . Suddenly the ship lifts a little and sets down with a thump. Tide rising. Everybody beginning to look out for the life-boat. Some of the men made her out far away and also two more tugs. But the gale has come on again, and everybody knows that no tug will ever dare come near the ship.



“That’s the end, Captain Harry says, very low. . . . Cloete thinks he never felt so cold in all his life. . . And I feel as if I didn’t care to live on just now, mutters Captain Harry . . . Your wife’s ashore, looking on, says Cloete . . . Yes. Yes. It must be awful for her to look at the poor old ship lying here done for. Why, that’s our home.

“Cloete thinks that as long as the Sagamore’s done for he doesn’t care, and only wishes himself somewhere else. The slightest movement of the ship cuts his breath like a blow. And he feels excited by the danger, too. The captain takes him aside. . . The life-boat can’t come near us for more than an hour. Look here, Cloete, since you are here, and such a plucky one — do something for me. . . He tells him then that down in his cabin aft in a certain drawer there is a bundle of important papers and some sixty sovereigns in a small canvas bag. Asks Cloete to go and get these things out. He hasn’t been below since the ship struck, and it seems to him that if he were to take his eyes off her she would fall to pieces. And then the men — a scared lot by this time — if he were to leave them by themselves they would attempt to launch one of the ship’s boats in a panic at some heavier thump — and then some of them bound to get drowned. . . There are two or three boxes of matches about my shelves in my cabin if you want a light, says Captain Harry. Only wipe your wet hands before you begin to feel for them. . .

“Cloete doesn’t like the job, but doesn’t like to show funk, either — and he goes. Lots of water on the main-deck, and he splashes along; it was getting dark, too. All at once, by the mainmast, somebody catches him by the arm. Stafford. He wasn’t thinking of Stafford at all. Captain Harry had said something as to the mate not being quite satisfactory, but it wasn’t much. Cloete doesn’t recognise him in his oilskins at first. He sees a white face with big eyes peering at him. . . Are you pleased, Mr. Cloete . . . ?

“Cloete is moved to laugh at the whine, and shakes him off. But the fellow scrambles on after him on the poop and follows him down into the cabin of that wrecked ship. And there they are, the two of them; can hardly see each other. . . You don’t mean to make me believe you have had anything to do with this, says Cloete. . .

“They both shiver, nearly out of their wits with the excitement of being on board that ship. She thumps and lurches, and they stagger together, feeling sick. Cloete again bursts out laughing at that wretched creature

Stafford pretending to have been up to something so desperate. . . Is that how you think you can treat me now? yells the other man all of a sudden. . .

“A sea strikes the stern, the ship trembles and groans all round them, there’s the noise of the seas about and overhead, confusing Cloete, and he hears the other screaming as if crazy. . . Ah, you don’t believe me! Go and look at the port chain. Parted? Eh? Go and see if it’s parted. Go and find the broken link. You can’t. There’s no broken link. That means a thousand pounds for me. No less. A thousand the day after we get ashore — prompt. I won’t wait till she breaks up, Mr. Cloete. To the underwriters I go if I’ve to walk to London on my bare feet. Port cable! Look at her port cable, I will say to them. I doctored it — for the owners — tempted by a low rascal called Cloete.

“Cloete does not understand what it means exactly. All he sees is that the fellow means to make mischief. He sees trouble ahead. . . Do you think you can scare me? he asks, — you poor miserable skunk. . . And Stafford faces him out — both holding on to the cabin table: No, damn you, you are only a dirty vagabond; but I can scare the other, the chap in the black coat. . .

“Meaning George Dunbar. Cloete’s brain reels at the thought. He doesn’t imagine the fellow can do any real harm, but he knows what George is; give the show away; upset the whole business he had set his heart on. He says nothing; he hears the other, what with the funk and strain and excitement, panting like a dog — and then a snarl. . . A thousand down, twenty-four hours after we get ashore; day after to-morrow. That’s my last word, Mr. Cloete. . . A thousand pounds, day after to-morrow, says Cloete. Oh yes. And to-day take this, you dirty cur. . . He hits straight from the shoulder in sheer rage, nothing else. Stafford goes away spinning along the bulk-head. Seeing this, Cloete steps out and lands him another one somewhere about the jaw. The fellow staggers backward right into the captain’s cabin through the open door. Cloete, following him up, hears him fall down heavily and roll to leeward, then slams the door to and turns the key. . . There! says he to himself, that will stop you from making trouble.”

“By Jove!” I murmured.

The old fellow departed from his impressive immobility to turn his rakishly hatted head and look at me with his old, black, lack-lustre eyes.

“He did leave him there,” he uttered, weightily, returning to the contemplation of the wall. “Cloete didn’t mean to allow anybody, let alone a thing like Stafford, to stand in the way of his great notion of making

George and himself, and Captain Harry, too, for that matter, rich men. And he didn't think much of consequences. These patent-medicine chaps don't care what they say or what they do. They think the world's bound to swallow any story they like to tell. . . He stands listening for a bit. And it gives him quite a turn to hear a thump at the door and a sort of muffled raving screech inside the captain's room. He thinks he hears his own name, too, through the awful crash as the old Sagamore rises and falls to a sea. That noise and that awful shock make him clear out of the cabin. He collects his senses on the poop. But his heart sinks a little at the black wildness of the night. Chances that he will get drowned himself before long. Puts his head down the companion. Through the wind and breaking seas he can hear the noise of Stafford's beating against the door and cursing. He listens and says to himself: No. Can't trust him now. . .

"When he gets back to the top of the deck-house he says to Captain Harry, who asks him if he got the things, that he is very sorry. There was something wrong with the door. Couldn't open it. And to tell you the truth, says he, I didn't like to stop any longer in that cabin. There are noises there as if the ship were going to pieces. . . Captain Harry thinks: Nervous; can't be anything wrong with the door. But he says: Thanks — never mind, never mind. . . All hands looking out now for the life-boat. Everybody thinking of himself rather. Cloete asks himself, will they miss him? But the fact is that Mr. Stafford had made such poor show at sea that after the ship struck nobody ever paid any attention to him. Nobody cared what he did or where he was. Pitch dark, too — no counting of heads. The light of the tug with the lifeboat in tow is seen making for the ship, and Captain Harry asks: Are we all there? . . . Somebody answers: All here, sir. . . Stand by to leave the ship, then, says Captain Harry; and two of you help the gentleman over first. . . Aye, aye, sir. . . Cloete was moved to ask Captain Harry to let him stay till last, but the life-boat drops on a grapnel abreast the fore-rigging, two chaps lay hold of him, watch their chance, and drop him into her, all safe.

"He's nearly exhausted; not used to that sort of thing, you see. He sits in the stern-sheets with his eyes shut. Don't want to look at the white water boiling all around. The men drop into the boat one after another. Then he hears Captain Harry's voice shouting in the wind to the coxswain, to hold on a moment, and some other words he can't catch, and the coxswain yelling back: Don't be long, sir. . . What is it? Cloete asks feeling faint. . .

Something about the ship's papers, says the coxswain, very anxious. It's no time to be fooling about alongside, you understand. They haul the boat off a little and wait. The water flies over her in sheets. Cloete's senses almost leave him. He thinks of nothing. He's numb all over, till there's a shout: Here he is! . . . They see a figure in the fore-rigging waiting — they slack away on the grapnel-line and get him in the boat quite easy. There is a little shouting — it's all mixed up with the noise of the sea. Cloete fancies that Stafford's voice is talking away quite close to his ear. There's a lull in the wind, and Stafford's voice seems to be speaking very fast to the coxswain; he tells him that of course he was near his skipper, was all the time near him, till the old man said at the last moment that he must go and get the ship's papers from aft; would insist on going himself; told him, Stafford, to get into the life-boat. . . He had meant to wait for his skipper, only there came this smooth of the seas, and he thought he would take his chance at once.

"Cloete opens his eyes. Yes. There's Stafford sitting close by him in that crowded life-boat. The coxswain stoops over Cloete and cries: Did you hear what the mate said, sir? . . . Cloete's face feels as if it were set in plaster, lips and all. Yes, I did, he forces himself to answer. The coxswain waits a moment, then says: I don't like it. . . And he turns to the mate, telling him it was a pity he did not try to run along the deck and hurry up the captain when the lull came. Stafford answers at once that he did think of it, only he was afraid of missing him on the deck in the dark. For, says he, the captain might have got over at once, thinking I was already in the life-boat, and you would have hauled off perhaps, leaving me behind. . . True enough, says the coxswain. A minute or so passes. This won't do, mutters the coxswain. Suddenly Stafford speaks up in a sort of hollow voice: I was by when he told Mr. Cloete here that he didn't know how he would ever have the courage to leave the old ship; didn't he, now? . . . And Cloete feels his arm being gripped quietly in the dark. . . Didn't he now? We were standing together just before you went over, Mr. Cloete? . . .

"Just then the coxswain cries out: I'm going on board to see. . . Cloete tears his arm away: I am going with you. . .

"When they get aboard, the coxswain tells Cloete to go aft along one side of the ship and he would go along the other so as not to miss the captain. . . And feel about with your hands, too, says he; he might have fallen and be lying insensible somewhere on the deck. . . When Cloete gets at last to the

cabin companion on the poop the coxswain is already there, peering down and sniffing. I detect a smell of smoke down there, says he. And he yells: Are you there, sir? . . . This is not a case for shouting, says Cloete, feeling his heart go stony, as it were. . . Down they go. Pitch dark; the inclination so sharp that the coxswain, groping his way into the captain's room, slips and goes tumbling down. Cloete hears him cry out as though he had hurt himself, and asks what's the matter. And the coxswain answers quietly that he had fallen on the captain, lying there insensible. Cloete without a word begins to grope all over the shelves for a box of matches, finds one, and strikes a light. He sees the coxswain in his cork jacket kneeling over Captain Harry. . . Blood, says the coxswain, looking up, and the match goes out. . .

"Wait a bit, says Cloete; I'll make paper spills. . . He had felt the back of books on the shelves. And so he stands lighting one spill from another while the coxswain turns poor Captain Harry over. Dead, he says. Shot through the heart. Here's the revolver. . . He hands it up to Cloete, who looks at it before putting it in his pocket, and sees a plate on the butt with H. Dunbar on it. . . His own, he mutters. . . Whose else revolver did you expect to find? snaps the coxswain. And look, he took off his long oilskin in the cabin before he went in. But what's this lot of burnt paper? What could he want to burn the ship's papers for? . . .

Cloete sees all, the little drawers drawn out, and asks the coxswain to look well into them. . . There's nothing, says the man. Cleaned out. Seems to have pulled out all he could lay his hands on and set fire to the lot. Mad — that's what it is — went mad. And now he's dead. You'll have to break it to his wife. . .

"I feel as if I were going mad myself, says Cloete, suddenly, and the coxswain begs him for God's sake to pull himself together, and drags him away from the cabin. They had to leave the body, and as it was they were just in time before a furious squall came on. Cloete is dragged into the life-boat and the coxswain tumbles in. Haul away on the grapnel, he shouts; the captain has shot himself. . .

"Cloete was like a dead man — didn't care for anything. He let that Stafford pinch his arm twice without making a sign. Most of Westport was on the old pier to see the men out of the life-boat, and at first there was a sort of confused cheery uproar when she came alongside; but after the coxswain has shouted something the voices die out, and everybody is very

quiet. As soon as Cloete has set foot on something firm he becomes himself again. The coxswain shakes hands with him: Poor woman, poor woman, I'd rather you had the job than I. . .

"Where's the mate?" asks Cloete. He's the last man who spoke to the master. . . Somebody ran along — the crew were being taken to the Mission Hall, where there was a fire and shake-downs ready for them — somebody ran along the pier and caught up with Stafford. . . Here! The owner's agent wants you. . . Cloete tucks the fellow's arm under his own and walks away with him to the left, where the fishing-harbour is. . . I suppose I haven't misunderstood you. You wish me to look after you a bit, says he. The other hangs on him rather limp, but gives a nasty little laugh: You had better, he mumbles; but mind, no tricks; no tricks, Mr. Cloete; we are on land now.

"There's a police office within fifty yards from here, says Cloete. He turns into a little public house, pushes Stafford along the passage. The landlord runs out of the bar. . . This is the mate of the ship on the rocks, Cloete explains; I wish you would take care of him a bit to-night. . . What's the matter with him? asks the man. Stafford leans against the wall in the passage, looking ghastly. And Cloete says it's nothing — done up, of course. . . I will be responsible for the expense; I am the owner's agent. I'll be round in an hour or two to see him.

And Cloete gets back to the hotel. The news had travelled there already, and the first thing he sees is George outside the door as white as a sheet waiting for him. Cloete just gives him a nod and they go in. Mrs. Harry stands at the head of the stairs, and, when she sees only these two coming up, flings her arms above her head and runs into her room. Nobody had dared tell her, but not seeing her husband was enough. Cloete hears an awful shriek. . . Go to her, he says to George.

"While he's alone in the private parlour Cloete drinks a glass of brandy and thinks it all out. Then George comes in. . . The landlady's with her, he says. And he begins to walk up and down the room, flinging his arms about and talking, disconnected like, his face set hard as Cloete has never seen it before. . . What must be, must be. Dead — only brother. Well, dead — his troubles over. But we are living, he says to Cloete; and I suppose, says he, glaring at him with hot, dry eyes, that you won't forget to wire in the morning to your friend that we are coming in for certain. . .

"Meaning the patent-medicine fellow. . . Death is death and business is business, George goes on; and look — my hands are clean, he says,

showing them to Cloete. Cloete thinks: He's going crazy. He catches hold of him by the shoulders and begins to shake him: Damn you — if you had had the sense to know what to say to your brother, if you had had the spunk to speak to him at all, you moral creature you, he would be alive now, he shouts.

“At this George stares, then bursts out weeping with a great bellow. He throws himself on the couch, buries his face in a cushion, and howls like a kid. . . That's better, thinks Cloete, and he leaves him, telling the landlord that he must go out, as he has some little business to attend to that night. The landlord's wife, weeping herself, catches him on the stairs: Oh, sir, that poor lady will go out of her mind. . .

“Cloete shakes her off, thinking to himself: Oh no! She won't. She will get over it. Nobody will go mad about this affair unless I do. It isn't sorrow that makes people go mad, but worry.

“There Cloete was wrong. What affected Mrs. Harry was that her husband should take his own life, with her, as it were, looking on. She brooded over it so that in less than a year they had to put her into a Home. She was very, very quiet; just gentle melancholy. She lived for quite a long time.

“Well, Cloete splashes along in the wind and rain. Nobody in the streets — all the excitement over. The publican runs out to meet him in the passage and says to him: Not this way. He isn't in his room. We couldn't get him to go to bed nohow. He's in the little parlour there. We've lighted him a fire. . . You have been giving him drinks too, says Cloete; I never said I would be responsible for drinks. How many? . . . Two, says the other. It's all right. I don't mind doing that much for a shipwrecked sailor. . . Cloete smiles his funny smile: Eh? Come. He paid for them. . . The publican just blinks. . . Gave you gold, didn't he? Speak up! . . . What of that! cries the man. What are you after, anyway? He had the right change for his sovereign.

“Just so, says Cloete. He walks into the parlour, and there he sees our Stafford; hair all up on end, landlord's shirt and pants on, bare feet in slippers, sitting by the fire. When he sees Cloete he casts his eyes down.

“You didn't mean us ever to meet again, Mr. Cloete, Stafford says, demurely. . . That fellow, when he had the drink he wanted — he wasn't a drunkard — would put on this sort of sly, modest air. . . But since the captain committed suicide, he says, I have been sitting here thinking it out.

All sorts of things happen. Conspiracy to lose the ship — attempted murder — and this suicide. For if it was not suicide, Mr. Cloete, then I know of a victim of the most cruel, cold-blooded attempt at murder; somebody who has suffered a thousand deaths. And that makes the thousand pounds of which we spoke once a quite insignificant sum. Look how very convenient this suicide is. . .

“He looks up at Cloete then, who smiles at him and comes quite close to the table.

“You killed Harry Dunbar, he whispers. . . The fellow glares at him and shows his teeth: Of course I did! I had been in that cabin for an hour and a half like a rat in a trap. . . Shut up and left to drown in that wreck. Let flesh and blood judge. Of course I shot him! I thought it was you, you murdering scoundrel, come back to settle me. He opens the door flying and tumbles right down upon me; I had a revolver in my hand, and I shot him. I was crazy. Men have gone crazy for less.

“Cloete looks at him without flinching. Aha! That’s your story, is it? . . . And he shakes the table a little in his passion as he speaks. . . Now listen to mine. What’s this conspiracy? Who’s going to prove it? You were there to rob. You were rifling his cabin; he came upon you unawares with your hands in the drawer; and you shot him with his own revolver. You killed to steal — to steal! His brother and the clerks in the office know that he took sixty pounds with him to sea. Sixty pounds in gold in a canvas bag. He told me where they were. The coxswain of the life-boat can swear to it that the drawers were all empty. And you are such a fool that before you’re half an hour ashore you change a sovereign to pay for a drink. Listen to me. If you don’t turn up day after to-morrow at George Dunbar’s solicitors, to make the proper deposition as to the loss of the ship, I shall set the police on your track. Day after to-morrow. . .

“And then what do you think? That Stafford begins to tear his hair. Just so. Tugs at it with both hands without saying anything. Cloete gives a push to the table which nearly sends the fellow off his chair, tumbling inside the fender; so that he has got to catch hold of it to save himself. . .

“You know the sort of man I am, Cloete says, fiercely. I’ve got to a point that I don’t care what happens to me. I would shoot you now for tuppence.

“At this the cur dodges under the table. Then Cloete goes out, and as he turns in the street — you know, little fishermen’s cottages, all dark; raining



in torrents, too — the other opens the window of the parlour and speaks in a sort of crying voice —

“You low Yankee fiend — I’ll pay you off some day.

“Cloete passes by with a damn bitter laugh, because he thinks that the fellow in a way has paid him off already, if he only knew it.”

My impressive ruffian drank what remained of his beer, while his black, sunken eyes looked at me over the rim.

“I don’t quite understand this,” I said. “In what way?”

He unbent a little and explained without too much scorn that Captain Harry being dead, his half of the insurance money went to his wife, and her trustees of course bought consols with it. Enough to keep her comfortable. George Dunbar’s half, as Cloete feared from the first, did not prove sufficient to launch the medicine well; other moneyed men stepped in, and these two had to go out of that business, pretty nearly shorn of everything.

“I am curious,” I said, “to learn what the motive force of this tragic affair was — I mean the patent medicine. Do you know?”

He named it, and I whistled respectfully. Nothing less than Parker’s Lively Lumbago Pills. Enormous property! You know it; all the world knows it. Every second man, at least, on this globe of ours has tried it.

“Why!” I cried, “they missed an immense fortune.”

“Yes,” he mumbled, “by the price of a revolver-shot.”

He told me also that eventually Cloete returned to the States, passenger in a cargo-boat from Albert Dock. The night before he sailed he met him wandering about the quays, and took him home for a drink. “Funny chap, Cloete. We sat all night drinking grogs, till it was time for him to go on board.”

It was then that Cloete, unembittered but weary, told him this story, with that utterly unconscious frankness of a patent-medicine man stranger to all moral standards. Cloete concluded by remarking that he, had “had enough of the old country.” George Dunbar had turned on him, too, in the end. Cloete was clearly somewhat disillusioned.

As to Stafford, he died, professed loafer, in some East End hospital or other, and on his last day clamoured “for a parson,” because his conscience worried him for killing an innocent man. “Wanted somebody to tell him it was all right,” growled my old ruffian, contemptuously. “He told the parson that I knew this Cloete who had tried to murder him, and so the

parson (he worked among the dock labourers) once spoke to me about it. That skunk of a fellow finding himself trapped yelled for mercy. . . Promised to be good and so on. . . Then he went crazy . . . screamed and threw himself about, beat his head against the bulkheads . . . you can guess all that — eh? . . . till he was exhausted. Gave up. Threw himself down, shut his eyes, and wanted to pray. So he says. Tried to think of some prayer for a quick death — he was that terrified. Thought that if he had a knife or something he would cut his throat, and be done with it. Then he thinks: No! Would try to cut away the wood about the lock. . . He had no knife in his pocket. . . he was weeping and calling on God to send him a tool of some kind when suddenly he thinks: Axe! In most ships there is a spare emergency axe kept in the master's room in some locker or other. . . Up he jumps. . . Pitch dark. Pulls at the drawers to find matches and, groping for them, the first thing he comes upon — Captain Harry's revolver. Loaded too. He goes perfectly quiet all over. Can shoot the lock to pieces. See? Saved! God's providence! There are boxes of matches too. Thinks he: I may just as well see what I am about.

“Strikes a light and sees the little canvas bag tucked away at the back of the drawer. Knew at once what that was. Rams it into his pocket quick. Aha! says he to himself: this requires more light. So he pitches a lot of paper on the floor, set fire to it, and starts in a hurry rummaging for more valuables. Did you ever? He told that East-End parson that the devil tempted him. First God's mercy — then devil's work. Turn and turn about.

..

“Any squirming skunk can talk like that. He was so busy with the drawers that the first thing he heard was a shout, Great Heavens. He looks up and there was the door open (Cloete had left the key in the lock) and Captain Harry holding on, well above him, very fierce in the light of the burning papers. His eyes were starting out of his head. Thieving, he thunders at him. A sailor! An officer! No! A wretch like you deserves no better than to be left here to drown.

“This Stafford — on his death-bed — told the parson that when he heard these words he went crazy again. He snatched his hand with the revolver in it out of the drawer, and fired without aiming. Captain Harry fell right in with a crash like a stone on top of the burning papers, putting the blaze out. All dark. Not a sound. He listened for a bit then dropped the revolver and scrambled out on deck like mad.”

The old fellow struck the table with his ponderous fist.

“What makes me sick is to hear these silly boat-men telling people the captain committed suicide. Pah! Captain Harry was a man that could face his Maker any time up there, and here below, too. He wasn’t the sort to slink out of life. Not he! He was a good man down to the ground. He gave me my first job as stevedore only three days after I got married.”

As the vindication of Captain Harry from the charge of suicide seemed to be his only object, I did not thank him very effusively for his material. And then it was not worth many thanks in any case.

For it is too startling even to think of such things happening in our respectable Channel in full view, so to speak, of the luxurious continental traffic to Switzerland and Monte Carlo. This story to be acceptable should have been transposed to somewhere in the South Seas. But it would have been too much trouble to cook it for the consumption of magazine readers. So here it is raw, so to speak — just as it was told to me — but unfortunately robbed of the striking effect of the narrator; the most imposing old ruffian that ever followed the unromantic trade of master stevedore in the port of London.

## ***THE INN OF THE TWO WITCHES***



### **A FIND**

This tale, episode, experience — call it how you will — was related in the fifties of the last century by a man who, by his own confession, was sixty years old at the time. Sixty is not a bad age — unless in perspective, when no doubt it is contemplated by the majority of us with mixed feelings. It is a calm age; the game is practically over by then; and standing aside one begins to remember with a certain vividness what a fine fellow one used to be. I have observed that, by an amiable attention of Providence, most people at sixty begin to take a romantic view of themselves. Their very failures exhale a charm of peculiar potency. And indeed the hopes of the future are a fine company to live with, exquisite forms, fascinating if you like, but — so to speak — naked, stripped for a run. The robes of glamour are luckily the property of the immovable past which, without them, would sit, a shivery sort of thing, under the gathering shadows.

I suppose it was the romanticism of growing age which set our man to relate his experience for his own satisfaction or for the wonder of his posterity. It could not have been for his glory, because the experience was simply that of an abominable fright — terror he calls it. You would have guessed that the relation alluded to in the very first lines was in writing.

This writing constitutes the Find declared in the sub-title. The title itself is my own contrivance, (can't call it invention), and has the merit of veracity. We will be concerned with an inn here. As to the witches that's merely a conventional expression, and we must take our man's word for it that it fits the case.

The Find was made in a box of books bought in London, in a street which no longer exists, from a second-hand bookseller in the last stage of decay. As to the books themselves they were at least twentieth-hand, and on inspection turned out not worth the very small sum of money I disbursed. It might have been some premonition of that fact which made me say: "But I must have the box too." The decayed bookseller assented by the careless, tragic gesture of a man already doomed to extinction.

A litter of loose pages at the bottom of the box excited my curiosity but faintly. The close, neat, regular handwriting was not attractive at first sight. But in one place the statement that in a.d. 1813 the writer was twenty-two years old caught my eye. Two and twenty is an interesting age in which one is easily reckless and easily frightened; the faculty of reflection being weak and the power of imagination strong.

In another place the phrase: "At night we stood in again," arrested my languid attention, because it was a sea phrase. "Let's see what it is all about," I thought, without excitement.

Oh! but it was a dull-faced MS., each line resembling every other line in their close-set and regular order. It was like the drone of a monotonous voice. A treatise on sugar-refining (the dreariest subject I can think of) could have been given a more lively appearance. "In a.d. 1813, I was twenty-two years old," he begins earnestly and goes on with every appearance of calm, horrible industry. Don't imagine, however, that there is anything archaic in my find. Diabolic ingenuity in invention though as old as the world is by no means a lost art. Look at the telephones for shattering the little peace of mind given to us in this world, or at the machine guns for letting with dispatch life out of our bodies. Now-a-days any blear-eyed old witch if only strong enough to turn an insignificant little handle could lay low a hundred young men of twenty in the twinkling of an eye.

If this isn't progress! . . . Why immense! We have moved on, and so you must expect to meet here a certain naiveness of contrivance and simplicity of aim appertaining to the remote epoch. And of course no motoring tourist can hope to find such an inn anywhere, now. This one, the one of the title, was situated in Spain. That much I discovered only from internal evidence, because a good many pages of that relation were missing — perhaps not a great misfortune after all. The writer seemed to have entered into a most elaborate detail of the why and wherefore of his presence on that coast — presumably the north coast of Spain. His experience has nothing to do with the sea, though. As far as I can make it out, he was an officer on board a sloop-of-war. There's nothing strange in that. At all stages of the long Peninsular campaign many of our men-of-war of the smaller kind were cruising off the north coast of Spain — as risky and disagreeable a station as can be well imagined.

It looks as though that ship of his had had some special service to perform. A careful explanation of all the circumstances was to be expected

from our man, only, as I've said, some of his pages (good tough paper too) were missing: gone in covers for jampots or in wadding for the fowling-pieces of his irreverent posterity. But it is to be seen clearly that communication with the shore and even the sending of messengers inland was part of her service, either to obtain intelligence from or to transmit orders or advice to patriotic Spaniards, guerilleros or secret juntas of the province. Something of the sort. All this can be only inferred from the preserved scraps of his conscientious writing.

Next we come upon the panegyric of a very fine sailor, a member of the ship's company, having the rating of the captain's coxswain. He was known on board as Cuba Tom; not because he was Cuban however; he was indeed the best type of a genuine British tar of that time, and a man-of-war's man for years. He came by the name on account of some wonderful adventures he had in that island in his young days, adventures which were the favourite subject of the yarns he was in the habit of spinning to his shipmates of an evening on the forecastle head. He was intelligent, very strong, and of proved courage. Incidentally we are told, so exact is our narrator, that Tom had the finest pigtail for thickness and length of any man in the Navy. This appendage, much cared for and sheathed tightly in a porpoise skin, hung half way down his broad back to the great admiration of all beholders and to the great envy of some.

Our young officer dwells on the manly qualities of Cuba Tom with something like affection. This sort of relation between officer and man was not then very rare. A youngster on joining the service was put under the charge of a trustworthy seaman, who slung his first hammock for him and often later on became a sort of humble friend to the junior officer. The narrator on joining the sloop had found this man on board after some years of separation. There is something touching in the warm pleasure he remembers and records at this meeting with the professional mentor of his boyhood.

We discover then that, no Spaniard being forthcoming for the service, this worthy seaman with the unique pigtail and a very high character for courage and steadiness had been selected as messenger for one of these missions inland which have been mentioned. His preparations were not elaborate. One gloomy autumn morning the sloop ran close to a shallow cove where a landing could be made on that iron-bound shore. A boat was lowered, and pulled in with Tom Corbin (Cuba Tom) perched in the bow,

and our young man (Mr. Edgar Byrne was his name on this earth which knows him no more) sitting in the stern sheets.

A few inhabitants of a hamlet, whose grey stone houses could be seen a hundred yards or so up a deep ravine, had come down to the shore and watched the approach of the boat. The two Englishmen leaped ashore. Either from dullness or astonishment the peasants gave no greeting, and only fell back in silence.

Mr. Byrne had made up his mind to see Tom Corbin started fairly on his way. He looked round at the heavy surprised faces.

"There isn't much to get out of them," he said. "Let us walk up to the village. There will be a wine shop for sure where we may find somebody more promising to talk to and get some information from."

"Aye, aye, sir," said Tom falling into step behind his officer. "A bit of palaver as to courses and distances can do no harm; I crossed the broadest part of Cuba by the help of my tongue tho' knowing far less Spanish than I do now. As they say themselves it was 'four words and no more' with me, that time when I got left behind on shore by the *Blanche*, frigate."

He made light of what was before him, which was but a day's journey into the mountains. It is true that there was a full day's journey before striking the mountain path, but that was nothing for a man who had crossed the island of Cuba on his two legs, and with no more than four words of the language to begin with.

The officer and the man were walking now on a thick sodden bed of dead leaves, which the peasants thereabouts accumulate in the streets of their villages to rot during the winter for field manure. Turning his head Mr. Byrne perceived that the whole male population of the hamlet was following them on the noiseless springy carpet. Women stared from the doors of the houses and the children had apparently gone into hiding. The village knew the ship by sight, afar off, but no stranger had landed on that spot perhaps for a hundred years or more. The cocked hat of Mr. Byrne, the bushy whiskers and the enormous pigtail of the sailor, filled them with mute wonder. They pressed behind the two Englishmen staring like those islanders discovered by Captain Cook in the South Seas.

It was then that Byrne had his first glimpse of the little cloaked man in a yellow hat. Faded and dingy as it was, this covering for his head made him noticeable.

The entrance to the wine shop was like a rough hole in a wall of flints. The owner was the only person who was not in the street, for he came out from the darkness at the back where the inflated forms of wine skins hung on nails could be vaguely distinguished. He was a tall, one-eyed Asturian with scrubby, hollow cheeks; a grave expression of countenance contrasted enigmatically with the roaming restlessness of his solitary eye. On learning that the matter in hand was the sending on his way of that English mariner toward a certain Gonzales in the mountains, he closed his good eye for a moment as if in meditation. Then opened it, very lively again.

“Possibly, possibly. It could be done.”

A friendly murmur arose in the group in the doorway at the name of Gonzales, the local leader against the French. Inquiring as to the safety of the road Byrne was glad to learn that no troops of that nation had been seen in the neighbourhood for months. Not the smallest little detachment of these impious polizones. While giving these answers the owner of the wine-shop busied himself in drawing into an earthenware jug some wine which he set before the heretic English, pocketing with grave abstraction the small piece of money the officer threw upon the table in recognition of the unwritten law that none may enter a wine-shop without buying drink. His eye was in constant motion as if it were trying to do the work of the two; but when Byrne made inquiries as to the possibility of hiring a mule, it became immovably fixed in the direction of the door which was closely besieged by the curious. In front of them, just within the threshold, the little man in the large cloak and yellow hat had taken his stand. He was a diminutive person, a mere homunculus, Byrne describes him, in a ridiculously mysterious, yet assertive attitude, a corner of his cloak thrown cavalierly over his left shoulder, muffling his chin and mouth; while the broad-brimmed yellow hat hung on a corner of his square little head. He stood there taking snuff, repeatedly.

“A mule,” repeated the wine-seller, his eyes fixed on that quaint and snuffy figure. . . “No, señor officer! Decidedly no mule is to be got in this poor place.”

The coxswain, who stood by with the true sailor’s air of unconcern in strange surroundings, struck in quietly —

“If your honour will believe me Shank’s pony’s the best for this job. I would have to leave the beast somewhere, anyhow, since the captain has told me that half my way will be along paths fit only for goats.”



The diminutive man made a step forward, and speaking through the folds of the cloak which seemed to muffle a sarcastic intention —

“Si, señor. They are too honest in this village to have a single mule amongst them for your worship’s service. To that I can bear testimony. In these times it’s only rogues or very clever men who can manage to have mules or any other four-footed beasts and the wherewithal to keep them. But what this valiant mariner wants is a guide; and here, señor, behold my brother-in-law, Bernardino, wine-seller, and alcade of this most Christian and hospitable village, who will find you one.”

This, Mr. Byrne says in his relation, was the only thing to do. A youth in a ragged coat and goat-skin breeches was produced after some more talk. The English officer stood treat to the whole village, and while the peasants drank he and Cuba Tom took their departure accompanied by the guide. The diminutive man in the cloak had disappeared.

Byrne went along with the coxswain out of the village. He wanted to see him fairly on his way; and he would have gone a greater distance, if the seaman had not suggested respectfully the advisability of return so as not to keep the ship a moment longer than necessary so close in with the shore on such an unpromising looking morning. A wild gloomy sky hung over their heads when they took leave of each other, and their surroundings of rank bushes and stony fields were dreary.

“In four days’ time,” were Byrne’s last words, “the ship will stand in and send a boat on shore if the weather permits. If not you’ll have to make it out on shore the best you can till we come along to take you off.”

“Right you are, sir,” answered Tom, and strode on. Byrne watched him step out on a narrow path. In a thick pea-jacket with a pair of pistols in his belt, a cutlass by his side, and a stout cudgel in his hand, he looked a sturdy figure and well able to take care of himself. He turned round for a moment to wave his hand, giving to Byrne one more view of his honest bronzed face with bushy whiskers. The lad in goatskin breeches looking, Byrne says, like a faun or a young satyr leaping ahead, stopped to wait for him, and then went off at a bound. Both disappeared.

Byrne turned back. The hamlet was hidden in a fold of the ground, and the spot seemed the most lonely corner of the earth and as if accursed in its uninhabited desolate barrenness. Before he had walked many yards, there appeared very suddenly from behind a bush the muffled up diminutive Spaniard. Naturally Byrne stopped short.

The other made a mysterious gesture with a tiny hand peeping from under his cloak. His hat hung very much at the side of his head. "Señor," he said without any preliminaries. "Caution! It is a positive fact that one-eyed Bernardino, my brother-in-law, has at this moment a mule in his stable. And why he who is not clever has a mule there? Because he is a rogue; a man without conscience. Because I had to give up the macho to him to secure for myself a roof to sleep under and a mouthful of olla to keep my soul in this insignificant body of mine. Yet, señor, it contains a heart many times bigger than the mean thing which beats in the breast of that brute connection of mine of which I am ashamed, though I opposed that marriage with all my power. Well, the misguided woman suffered enough. She had her purgatory on this earth — God rest her soul."

Byrne says he was so astonished by the sudden appearance of that sprite-like being, and by the sardonic bitterness of the speech, that he was unable to disentangle the significant fact from what seemed but a piece of family history fired out at him without rhyme or reason. Not at first. He was confounded and at the same time he was impressed by the rapid forcible delivery, quite different from the frothy excited loquacity of an Italian. So he stared while the homunculus letting his cloak fall about him, aspired an immense quantity of snuff out of the hollow of his palm.

"A mule," exclaimed Byrne seizing at last the real aspect of the discourse. "You say he has got a mule? That's queer! Why did he refuse to let me have it?"

The diminutive Spaniard muffled himself up again with great dignity.

"Quien sabe," he said coldly, with a shrug of his draped shoulders. "He is a great politico in everything he does. But one thing your worship may be certain of — that his intentions are always rascally. This husband of my defunta sister ought to have been married a long time ago to the widow with the wooden legs."

"I see. But remember that, whatever your motives, your worship countenanced him in this lie."

The bright unhappy eyes on each side of a predatory nose confronted Byrne without wincing, while with that testiness which lurks so often at the bottom of Spanish dignity —

"No doubt the señor officer would not lose an ounce of blood if I were stuck under the fifth rib," he retorted. "But what of this poor sinner here?" Then changing his tone. "Señor, by the necessities of the times I live here

in exile, a Castilian and an old Christian, existing miserably in the midst of these brute Asturians, and dependent on the worst of them all, who has less conscience and scruples than a wolf. And being a man of intelligence I govern myself accordingly. Yet I can hardly contain my scorn. You have heard the way I spoke. A caballero of parts like your worship might have guessed that there was a cat in there.”

“What cat?” said Byrne uneasily. “Oh, I see. Something suspicious. No, señor. I guessed nothing. My nation are not good guessers at that sort of thing; and, therefore, I ask you plainly whether that wine-seller has spoken the truth in other particulars?”

“There are certainly no Frenchmen anywhere about,” said the little man with a return to his indifferent manner.

“Or robbers — ladrones?”

“Ladrones en grande — no! Assuredly not,” was the answer in a cold philosophical tone. “What is there left for them to do after the French? And nobody travels in these times. But who can say! Opportunity makes the robber. Still that mariner of yours has a fierce aspect, and with the son of a cat rats will have no play. But there is a saying, too, that where honey is there will soon be flies.”

This oracular discourse exasperated Byrne. “In the name of God,” he cried, “tell me plainly if you think my man is reasonably safe on his journey.”

The homunculus, undergoing one of his rapid changes, seized the officer’s arm. The grip of his little hand was astonishing.

“Señor! Bernardino had taken notice of him. What more do you want? And listen — men have disappeared on this road — on a certain portion of this road, when Bernardino kept a meson, an inn, and I, his brother-in-law, had coaches and mules for hire. Now there are no travellers, no coaches. The French have ruined me. Bernardino has retired here for reasons of his own after my sister died. They were three to torment the life out of her, he and Erminia and Lucilla, two aunts of his — all affiliated to the devil. And now he has robbed me of my last mule. You are an armed man. Demand the macho from him, with a pistol to his head, señor — it is not his, I tell you — and ride after your man who is so precious to you. And then you shall both be safe, for no two travellers have been ever known to disappear together in these days. As to the beast, I, its owner, I confide it to your honour.”

They were staring hard at each other, and Byrne nearly burst into a laugh at the ingenuity and transparency of the little man's plot to regain possession of his mule. But he had no difficulty to keep a straight face because he felt deep within himself a strange inclination to do that very extraordinary thing. He did not laugh, but his lip quivered; at which the diminutive Spaniard, detaching his black glittering eyes from Byrne's face, turned his back on him brusquely with a gesture and a fling of the cloak which somehow expressed contempt, bitterness, and discouragement all at once. He turned away and stood still, his hat aslant, muffled up to the ears. But he was not offended to the point of refusing the silver duro which Byrne offered him with a non-committal speech as if nothing extraordinary had passed between them.

"I must make haste on board now," said Byrne, then.

"Vaya usted con Dios," muttered the gnome. And this interview ended with a sarcastic low sweep of the hat which was replaced at the same perilous angle as before.

Directly the boat had been hoisted the ship's sails were filled on the off-shore tack, and Byrne imparted the whole story to his captain, who was but a very few years older than himself. There was some amused indignation at it — but while they laughed they looked gravely at each other. A Spanish dwarf trying to beguile an officer of his majesty's navy into stealing a mule for him — that was too funny, too ridiculous, too incredible. Those were the exclamations of the captain. He couldn't get over the grotesqueness of it.

"Incredible. That's just it," murmured Byrne at last in a significant tone.

They exchanged a long stare. "It's as clear as daylight," affirmed the captain impatiently, because in his heart he was not certain. And Tom the best seaman in the ship for one, the good-humouredly deferential friend of his boyhood for the other, was becoming endowed with a compelling fascination, like a symbolic figure of loyalty appealing to their feelings and their conscience, so that they could not detach their thoughts from his safety. Several times they went up on deck, only to look at the coast, as if it could tell them something of his fate. It stretched away, lengthening in the distance, mute, naked, and savage, veiled now and then by the slanting cold shafts of rain. The westerly swell rolled its interminable angry lines of foam and big dark clouds flew over the ship in a sinister procession.

“I wish to goodness you had done what your little friend in the yellow hat wanted you to do,” said the commander of the sloop late in the afternoon with visible exasperation.

“Do you, sir?” answered Byrne, bitter with positive anguish. “I wonder what you would have said afterwards? Why! I might have been kicked out of the service for looting a mule from a nation in alliance with His Majesty. Or I might have been battered to a pulp with flails and pitch-forks — a pretty tale to get abroad about one of your officers — while trying to steal a mule. Or chased ignominiously to the boat — for you would not have expected me to shoot down unoffending people for the sake of a mangy mule. . . And yet,” he added in a low voice, “I almost wish myself I had done it.”

Before dark those two young men had worked themselves up into a highly complex psychological state of scornful scepticism and alarmed credulity. It tormented them exceedingly; and the thought that it would have to last for six days at least, and possibly be prolonged further for an indefinite time, was not to be borne. The ship was therefore put on the inshore tack at dark. All through the gusty dark night she went towards the land to look for her man, at times lying over in the heavy puffs, at others rolling idle in the swell, nearly stationary, as if she too had a mind of her own to swing perplexed between cool reason and warm impulse.

Then just at daybreak a boat put off from her and went on tossed by the seas towards the shallow cove where, with considerable difficulty, an officer in a thick coat and a round hat managed to land on a strip of shingle.

“It was my wish,” writes Mr. Byrne, “a wish of which my captain approved, to land secretly if possible. I did not want to be seen either by my aggrieved friend in the yellow hat, whose motives were not clear, or by the one-eyed wine-seller, who may or may not have been affiliated to the devil, or indeed by any other dweller in that primitive village. But unfortunately the cove was the only possible landing place for miles; and from the steepness of the ravine I couldn’t make a circuit to avoid the houses.”

“Fortunately,” he goes on, “all the people were yet in their beds. It was barely daylight when I found myself walking on the thick layer of sodden leaves filling the only street. No soul was stirring abroad, no dog barked. The silence was profound, and I had concluded with some wonder that apparently no dogs were kept in the hamlet, when I heard a low snarl, and

from a noisome alley between two hovels emerged a vile cur with its tail between its legs. He slunk off silently showing me his teeth as he ran before me, and he disappeared so suddenly that he might have been the unclean incarnation of the Evil One. There was, too, something so weird in the manner of its coming and vanishing, that my spirits, already by no means very high, became further depressed by the revolting sight of this creature as if by an unlucky presage.”

He got away from the coast unobserved, as far as he knew, then struggled manfully to the west against wind and rain, on a barren dark upland, under a sky of ashes. Far away the harsh and desolate mountains raising their scarped and denuded ridges seemed to wait for him menacingly. The evening found him fairly near to them, but, in sailor language, uncertain of his position, hungry, wet, and tired out by a day of steady tramping over broken ground during which he had seen very few people, and had been unable to obtain the slightest intelligence of Tom Corbin’s passage. “On! on! I must push on,” he had been saying to himself through the hours of solitary effort, spurred more by incertitude than by any definite fear or definite hope.

The lowering daylight died out quickly, leaving him faced by a broken bridge. He descended into the ravine, forded a narrow stream by the last gleam of rapid water, and clambering out on the other side was met by the night which fell like a bandage over his eyes. The wind sweeping in the darkness the broadside of the sierra worried his ears by a continuous roaring noise as of a maddened sea. He suspected that he had lost the road. Even in daylight, with its ruts and mud-holes and ledges of outcropping stone, it was difficult to distinguish from the dreary waste of the moor interspersed with boulders and clumps of naked bushes. But, as he says, “he steered his course by the feel of the wind,” his hat rammed low on his brow, his head down, stopping now and again from mere weariness of mind rather than of body — as if not his strength but his resolution were being overtaxed by the strain of endeavour half suspected to be vain, and by the unrest of his feelings.

In one of these pauses borne in the wind faintly as if from very far away he heard a sound of knocking, just knocking on wood. He noticed that the wind had lulled suddenly.

His heart started beating tumultuously because in himself he carried the impression of the desert solitudes he had been traversing for the last six

hours — the oppressive sense of an uninhabited world. When he raised his head a gleam of light, illusory as it often happens in dense darkness, swam before his eyes. While he peered, the sound of feeble knocking was repeated — and suddenly he felt rather than saw the existence of a massive obstacle in his path. What was it? The spur of a hill? Or was it a house! Yes. It was a house right close, as though it had risen from the ground or had come gliding to meet him, dumb and pallid; from some dark recess of the night. It towered loftily. He had come up under its lee; another three steps and he could have touched the wall with his hand. It was no doubt a posada and some other traveller was trying for admittance. He heard again the sound of cautious knocking.

Next moment a broad band of light fell into the night through the opened door. Byrne stepped eagerly into it, whereupon the person outside leaped with a stifled cry away into the night. An exclamation of surprise was heard too, from within. Byrne, flinging himself against the half closed door, forced his way in against some considerable resistance.

A miserable candle, a mere rushlight, burned at the end of a long deal table. And in its light Byrne saw, staggering yet, the girl he had driven from the door. She had a short black skirt, an orange shawl, a dark complexion — and the escaped single hairs from the mass, sombre and thick like a forest and held up by a comb, made a black mist about her low forehead. A shrill lamentable howl of: “Misericordia!” came in two voices from the further end of the long room, where the fire-light of an open hearth played between heavy shadows. The girl recovering herself drew a hissing breath through her set teeth.

It is unnecessary to report the long process of questions and answers by which he soothed the fears of two old women who sat on each side of the fire, on which stood a large earthenware pot. Byrne thought at once of two witches watching the brewing of some deadly potion. But all the same, when one of them raising forward painfully her broken form lifted the cover of the pot, the escaping steam had an appetising smell. The other did not budge, but sat hunched up, her head trembling all the time.

They were horrible. There was something grotesque in their decrepitude. Their toothless mouths, their hooked noses, the meagreness of the active one, and the hanging yellow cheeks of the other (the still one, whose head trembled) would have been laughable if the sight of their dreadful physical degradation had not been appalling to one’s eyes, had not

gripped one's heart with poignant amazement at the unspeakable misery of age, at the awful persistency of life becoming at last an object of disgust and dread.

To get over it Byrne began to talk, saying that he was an Englishman, and that he was in search of a countryman who ought to have passed this way. Directly he had spoken the recollection of his parting with Tom came up in his mind with amazing vividness: the silent villagers, the angry gnome, the one-eyed wine-seller, Bernardino. Why! These two unspeakable frights must be that man's aunts — affiliated to the devil.

Whatever they had been once it was impossible to imagine what use such feeble creatures could be to the devil, now, in the world of the living. Which was Lucilla and which was Erminia? They were now things without a name. A moment of suspended animation followed Byrne's words. The sorceress with the spoon ceased stirring the mess in the iron pot, the very trembling of the other's head stopped for the space of breath. In this infinitesimal fraction of a second Byrne had the sense of being really on his quest, of having reached the turn of the path, almost within hail of Tom.

"They have seen him," he thought with conviction. Here was at last somebody who had seen him. He made sure they would deny all knowledge of the Ingles; but on the contrary they were eager to tell him that he had eaten and slept the night in the house. They both started talking together, describing his appearance and behaviour. An excitement quite fierce in its feebleness possessed them. The doubled-up sorceress flourished aloft her wooden spoon, the puffy monster got off her stool and screeched, stepping from one foot to the other, while the trembling of her head was accelerated to positive vibration. Byrne was quite disconcerted by their excited behaviour. . . Yes! The big, fierce Ingles went away in the morning, after eating a piece of bread and drinking some wine. And if the caballero wished to follow the same path nothing could be easier — in the morning.

"You will give me somebody to show me the way?" said Byrne.

"Si, señor. A proper youth. The man the caballero saw going out."

"But he was knocking at the door," protested Byrne. "He only bolted when he saw me. He was coming in."

"No! No!" the two horrid witches screamed out together. "Going out. Going out!"



After all it may have been true. The sound of knocking had been faint, elusive, reflected Byrne. Perhaps only the effect of his fancy. He asked —

“Who is that man?”

“Her novio.” They screamed pointing to the girl. “He is gone home to a village far away from here. But he will return in the morning. Her novio! And she is an orphan — the child of poor Christian people. She lives with us for the love of God, for the love of God.”

The orphan crouching on the corner of the hearth had been looking at Byrne. He thought that she was more like a child of Satan kept there by these two weird haridans for the love of the Devil. Her eyes were a little oblique, her mouth rather thick, but admirably formed; her dark face had a wild beauty, voluptuous and untamed. As to the character of her steadfast gaze attached upon him with a sensuously savage attention, “to know what it was like,” says Mr. Byrne, “you have only to observe a hungry cat watching a bird in a cage or a mouse inside a trap.”

It was she who served him the food, of which he was glad; though with those big slanting black eyes examining him at close range, as if he had something curious written on his face, she gave him an uncomfortable sensation. But anything was better than being approached by these blear-eyed nightmarish witches. His apprehensions somehow had been soothed; perhaps by the sensation of warmth after severe exposure and the ease of resting after the exertion of fighting the gale inch by inch all the way. He had no doubt of Tom’s safety. He was now sleeping in the mountain camp having been met by Gonzales’ men.

Byrne rose, filled a tin goblet with wine out of a skin hanging on the wall, and sat down again. The witch with the mummy face began to talk to him, ramblingly of old times; she boasted of the inn’s fame in those better days. Great people in their own coaches stopped there. An archbishop slept once in the casa, a long, long time ago.

The witch with the puffy face seemed to be listening from her stool, motionless, except for the trembling of her head. The girl (Byrne was certain she was a casual gipsy admitted there for some reason or other) sat on the hearth stone in the glow of the embers. She hummed a tune to herself, rattling a pair of castanets slightly now and then. At the mention of the archbishop she chuckled impiously and turned her head to look at Byrne, so that the red glow of the fire flashed in her black eyes and on her

white teeth under the dark cowl of the enormous overmantel. And he smiled at her.

He rested now in the ease of security. His advent not having been expected there could be no plot against him in existence. Drowsiness stole upon his senses. He enjoyed it, but keeping a hold, so he thought at least, on his wits; but he must have been gone further than he thought because he was startled beyond measure by a fiendish uproar. He had never heard anything so pitilessly strident in his life. The witches had started a fierce quarrel about something or other. Whatever its origin they were now only abusing each other violently, without arguments; their senile screams expressed nothing but wicked anger and ferocious dismay. The gipsy girl's black eyes flew from one to the other. Never before had Byrne felt himself so removed from fellowship with human beings. Before he had really time to understand the subject of the quarrel, the girl jumped up rattling her castanets loudly. A silence fell. She came up to the table and bending over, her eyes in his —

“Señor,” she said with decision, “You shall sleep in the archbishop's room.”

Neither of the witches objected. The dried-up one bent double was propped on a stick. The puffy faced one had now a crutch.

Byrne got up, walked to the door, and turning the key in the enormous lock put it coolly in his pocket. This was clearly the only entrance, and he did not mean to be taken unawares by whatever danger there might have been lurking outside.

When he turned from the door he saw the two witches “affiliated to the Devil” and the Satanic girl looking at him in silence. He wondered if Tom Corbin took the same precaution last night. And thinking of him he had again that queer impression of his nearness. The world was perfectly dumb. And in this stillness he heard the blood beating in his ears with a confused rushing noise, in which there seemed to be a voice uttering the words: “Mr. Byrne, look out, sir.” Tom's voice. He shuddered; for the delusions of the senses of hearing are the most vivid of all, and from their nature have a compelling character.

It seemed impossible that Tom should not be there. Again a slight chill as of stealthy draught penetrated through his very clothes and passed over all his body. He shook off the impression with an effort.

It was the girl who preceded him upstairs carrying an iron lamp from the naked flame of which ascended a thin thread of smoke. Her soiled white stockings were full of holes.

With the same quiet resolution with which he had locked the door below, Byrne threw open one after another the doors in the corridor. All the rooms were empty except for some nondescript lumber in one or two. And the girl seeing what he would be at stopped every time, raising the smoky light in each doorway patiently. Meantime she observed him with sustained attention. The last door of all she threw open herself.

“You sleep here, señor,” she murmured in a voice light like a child’s breath, offering him the lamp.

“Buenos noches, senorita,” he said politely, taking it from her.

She didn’t return the wish audibly, though her lips did move a little, while her gaze black like a starless night never for a moment wavered before him. He stepped in, and as he turned to close the door she was still there motionless and disturbing, with her voluptuous mouth and slanting eyes, with the expression of expectant sensual ferocity of a baffled cat. He hesitated for a moment, and in the dumb house he heard again the blood pulsating ponderously in his ears, while once more the illusion of Tom’s voice speaking earnestly somewhere near by was specially terrifying, because this time he could not make out the words.

He slammed the door in the girl’s face at last, leaving her in the dark; and he opened it again almost on the instant. Nobody. She had vanished without the slightest sound. He closed the door quickly and bolted it with two heavy bolts.

A profound mistrust possessed him suddenly. Why did the witches quarrel about letting him sleep here? And what meant that stare of the girl as if she wanted to impress his features for ever in her mind? His own nervousness alarmed him. He seemed to himself to be removed very far from mankind.

He examined his room. It was not very high, just high enough to take the bed which stood under an enormous baldaquin-like canopy from which fell heavy curtains at foot and head; a bed certainly worthy of an archbishop. There was a heavy table carved all round the edges, some arm-chairs of enormous weight like the spoils of a grandee’s palace; a tall shallow wardrobe placed against the wall and with double doors. He tried them. Locked. A suspicion came into his mind, and he snatched the lamp to make

a closer examination. No, it was not a disguised entrance. That heavy, tall piece of furniture stood clear of the wall by quite an inch. He glanced at the bolts of his room door. No! No one could get at him treacherously while he slept. But would he be able to sleep? he asked himself anxiously. If only he had Tom there — the trusty seaman who had fought at his right hand in a cutting out affair or two, and had always preached to him the necessity to take care of himself. “For it’s no great trick,” he used to say, “to get yourself killed in a hot fight. Any fool can do that. The proper pastime is to fight the Frenchies and then live to fight another day.”

Byrne found it a hard matter not to fall into listening to the silence. Somehow he had the conviction that nothing would break it unless he heard again the haunting sound of Tom’s voice. He had heard it twice before. Odd! And yet no wonder, he argued with himself reasonably, since he had been thinking of the man for over thirty hours continuously and, what’s more, inconclusively. For his anxiety for Tom had never taken a definite shape. “Disappear,” was the only word connected with the idea of Tom’s danger. It was very vague and awful. “Disappear!” What did that mean?

Byrne shuddered, and then said to himself that he must be a little feverish. But Tom had not disappeared. Byrne had just heard of him. And again the young man felt the blood beating in his ears. He sat still expecting every moment to hear through the pulsating strokes the sound of Tom’s voice. He waited straining his ears, but nothing came. Suddenly the thought occurred to him: “He has not disappeared, but he cannot make himself heard.”

He jumped up from the arm-chair. How absurd! Laying his pistol and his hanger on the table he took off his boots and, feeling suddenly too tired to stand, flung himself on the bed which he found soft and comfortable beyond his hopes.

He had felt very wakeful, but he must have dozed off after all, because the next thing he knew he was sitting up in bed and trying to recollect what it was that Tom’s voice had said. Oh! He remembered it now. It had said: “Mr. Byrne! Look out, sir!” A warning this. But against what?

He landed with one leap in the middle of the floor, gasped once, then looked all round the room. The window was shuttered and barred with an iron bar. Again he ran his eyes slowly all round the bare walls, and even looked up at the ceiling, which was rather high. Afterwards he went to the door to examine the fastenings. They consisted of two enormous iron bolts

sliding into holes made in the wall; and as the corridor outside was too narrow to admit of any battering arrangement or even to permit an axe to be swung, nothing could burst the door open — unless gunpowder. But while he was still making sure that the lower bolt was pushed well home, he received the impression of somebody's presence in the room. It was so strong that he spun round quicker than lightning. There was no one. Who could there be? And yet . . .

It was then that he lost the decorum and restraint a man keeps up for his own sake. He got down on his hands and knees, with the lamp on the floor, to look under the bed, like a silly girl. He saw a lot of dust and nothing else. He got up, his cheeks burning, and walked about discontented with his own behaviour and unreasonably angry with Tom for not leaving him alone. The words: "Mr. Byrne! Look out, sir," kept on repeating themselves in his head in a tone of warning.

"Hadn't I better just throw myself on the bed and try to go to sleep," he asked himself. But his eyes fell on the tall wardrobe, and he went towards it feeling irritated with himself and yet unable to desist. How he could explain to-morrow the burglarious misdeed to the two odious witches he had no idea. Nevertheless he inserted the point of his hanger between the two halves of the door and tried to prize them open. They resisted. He swore, sticking now hotly to his purpose. His mutter: "I hope you will be satisfied, confound you," was addressed to the absent Tom. Just then the doors gave way and flew open.

He was there.

He — the trusty, sagacious, and courageous Tom was there, drawn up shadowy and stiff, in a prudent silence, which his wide-open eyes by their fixed gleam seemed to command Byrne to respect. But Byrne was too startled to make a sound. Amazed, he stepped back a little — and on the instant the seaman flung himself forward headlong as if to clasp his officer round the neck. Instinctively Byrne put out his faltering arms; he felt the horrible rigidity of the body and then the coldness of death as their heads knocked together and their faces came into contact. They reeled, Byrne hugging Tom close to his breast in order not to let him fall with a crash. He had just strength enough to lower the awful burden gently to the floor — then his head swam, his legs gave way, and he sank on his knees, leaning over the body with his hands resting on the breast of that man once full of generous life, and now as insensible as a stone.

“Dead! my poor Tom, dead,” he repeated mentally. The light of the lamp standing near the edge of the table fell from above straight on the stony empty stare of these eyes which naturally had a mobile and merry expression.

Byrne turned his own away from them. Tom’s black silk neckerchief was not knotted on his breast. It was gone. The murderers had also taken off his shoes and stockings. And noticing this spoliation, the exposed throat, the bare up-turned feet, Byrne felt his eyes run full of tears. In other respects the seaman was fully dressed; neither was his clothing disarranged as it must have been in a violent struggle. Only his checked shirt had been pulled a little out the waistband in one place, just enough to ascertain whether he had a money belt fastened round his body. Byrne began to sob into his handkerchief.

It was a nervous outburst which passed off quickly. Remaining on his knees he contemplated sadly the athletic body of as fine a seaman as ever had drawn a cutlass, laid a gun, or passed the weather earring in a gale, lying stiff and cold, his cheery, fearless spirit departed — perhaps turning to him, his boy chum, to his ship out there rolling on the grey seas off an iron-bound coast, at the very moment of its flight.

He perceived that the six brass buttons of Tom’s jacket had been cut off. He shuddered at the notion of the two miserable and repulsive witches busying themselves ghoulishly about the defenceless body of his friend. Cut off. Perhaps with the same knife which . . . The head of one trembled; the other was bent double, and their eyes were red and bleared, their infamous claws unsteady. . . It must have been in this very room too, for Tom could not have been killed in the open and brought in here afterwards. Of that Byrne was certain. Yet those devilish crones could not have killed him themselves even by taking him unawares — and Tom would be always on his guard of course. Tom was a very wide awake wary man when engaged on any service. . . And in fact how did they murder him? Who did? In what way?

Byrne jumped up, snatched the lamp off the table, and stooped swiftly over the body. The light revealed on the clothing no stain, no trace, no spot of blood anywhere. Byrne’s hands began to shake so that he had to set the lamp on the floor and turn away his head in order to recover from this agitation.

Then he began to explore that cold, still, and rigid body for a stab, a gunshot wound, for the trace of some killing blow. He felt all over the skull anxiously. It was whole. He slipped his hand under the neck. It was unbroken. With terrified eyes he peered close under the chin and saw no marks of strangulation on the throat.

There were no signs anywhere. He was just dead.

Impulsively Byrne got away from the body as if the mystery of an incomprehensible death had changed his pity into suspicion and dread. The lamp on the floor near the set, still face of the seaman showed it staring at the ceiling as if despairingly. In the circle of light Byrne saw by the undisturbed patches of thick dust on the floor that there had been no struggle in that room. "He has died outside," he thought. Yes, outside in that narrow corridor, where there was hardly room to turn, the mysterious death had come to his poor dear Tom. The impulse of snatching up his pistols and rushing out of the room abandoned Byrne suddenly. For Tom, too, had been armed — with just such powerless weapons as he himself possessed — pistols, a cutlass! And Tom had died a nameless death, by incomprehensible means.

A new thought came to Byrne. That stranger knocking at the door and fleeing so swiftly at his appearance had come there to remove the body. Aha! That was the guide the withered witch had promised would show the English officer the shortest way of rejoining his man. A promise, he saw it now, of dreadful import. He who had knocked would have two bodies to deal with. Man and officer would go forth from the house together. For Byrne was certain now that he would have to die before the morning — and in the same mysterious manner, leaving behind him an unmarked body.

The sight of a smashed head, of a throat cut, of a gaping gunshot wound, would have been an inexpressible relief. It would have soothed all his fears. His soul cried within him to that dead man whom he had never found wanting in danger. "Why don't you tell me what I am to look for, Tom? Why don't you?" But in rigid immobility, extended on his back, he seemed to preserve an austere silence, as if disdaining in the finality of his awful knowledge to hold converse with the living.

Suddenly Byrne flung himself on his knees by the side of the body, and dry-eyed, fierce, opened the shirt wide on the breast, as if to tear the secret forcibly from that cold heart which had been so loyal to him in life! Nothing! Nothing! He raised the lamp, and all the sign vouchsafed to him

by that face which used to be so kindly in expression was a small bruise on the forehead — the least thing, a mere mark. The skin even was not broken. He stared at it a long time as if lost in a dreadful dream. Then he observed that Tom's hands were clenched as though he had fallen facing somebody in a fight with fists. His knuckles, on closer view, appeared somewhat abraded. Both hands.

The discovery of these slight signs was more appalling to Byrne than the absolute absence of every mark would have been. So Tom had died striking against something which could be hit, and yet could kill one without leaving a wound — by a breath.

Terror, hot terror, began to play about Byrne's heart like a tongue of flame that touches and withdraws before it turns a thing to ashes. He backed away from the body as far as he could, then came forward stealthily casting fearful glances to steal another look at the bruised forehead. There would perhaps be such a faint bruise on his own forehead — before the morning.

"I can't bear it," he whispered to himself. Tom was for him now an object of horror, a sight at once tempting and revolting to his fear. He couldn't bear to look at him.

At last, desperation getting the better of his increasing horror, he stepped forward from the wall against which he had been leaning, seized the corpse under the armpits, and began to lug it over to the bed. The bare heels of the seaman trailed on the floor noiselessly. He was heavy with the dead weight of inanimate objects. With a last effort Byrne landed him face downwards on the edge of the bed, rolled him over, snatched from under this stiff passive thing a sheet with which he covered it over. Then he spread the curtains at head and foot so that joining together as he shook their folds they hid the bed altogether from his sight.

He stumbled towards a chair, and fell on it. The perspiration poured from his face for a moment, and then his veins seemed to carry for a while a thin stream of half, frozen blood. Complete terror had possession of him now, a nameless terror which had turned his heart to ashes.

He sat upright in the straight-backed chair, the lamp burning at his feet, his pistols and his hanger at his left elbow on the end of the table, his eyes turning incessantly in their sockets round the walls, over the ceiling, over the floor, in the expectation of a mysterious and appalling vision. The thing which could deal death in a breath was outside that bolted door. But Byrne



believed neither in walls nor bolts now. Unreasoning terror turning everything to account, his old time boyish admiration of the athletic Tom, the undaunted Tom (he had seemed to him invincible), helped to paralyse his faculties, added to his despair.

He was no longer Edgar Byrne. He was a tortured soul suffering more anguish than any sinner's body had ever suffered from rack or boot. The depth of his torment may be measured when I say that this young man, as brave at least as the average of his kind, contemplated seizing a pistol and firing into his own head. But a deadly, chilly, langour was spreading over his limbs. It was as if his flesh had been wet plaster stiffening slowly about his ribs. Presently, he thought, the two witches will be coming in, with crutch and stick — horrible, grotesque, monstrous — affiliated to the devil — to put a mark on his forehead, the tiny little bruise of death. And he wouldn't be able to do anything. Tom had struck out at something, but he was not like Tom. His limbs were dead already. He sat still, dying the death over and over again; and the only part of him which moved were his eyes, turning round and round in their sockets, running over the walls, the floor, the ceiling, again and again till suddenly they became motionless and stony — starting out of his head fixed in the direction of the bed.

He had seen the heavy curtains stir and shake as if the dead body they concealed had turned over and sat up. Byrne, who thought the world could hold no more terrors in store, felt his hair stir at the roots. He gripped the arms of the chair, his jaw fell, and the sweat broke out on his brow while his dry tongue clove suddenly to the roof of his mouth. Again the curtains stirred, but did not open. "Don't, Tom!" Byrne made effort to shout, but all he heard was a slight moan such as an uneasy sleeper may make. He felt that his brain was going, for, now, it seemed to him that the ceiling over the bed had moved, had slanted, and came level again — and once more the closed curtains swayed gently as if about to part.

Byrne closed his eyes not to see the awful apparition of the seaman's corpse coming out animated by an evil spirit. In the profound silence of the room he endured a moment of frightful agony, then opened his eyes again. And he saw at once that the curtains remained closed still, but that the ceiling over the bed had risen quite a foot. With the last gleam of reason left to him he understood that it was the enormous baldaquin over the bed which was coming down, while the curtains attached to it swayed softly, sinking gradually to the floor. His drooping jaw snapped to — and half

rising in his chair he watched mutely the noiseless descent of the monstrous canopy. It came down in short smooth rushes till lowered half way or more, when it took a run and settled swiftly its turtle-back shape with the deep border piece fitting exactly the edge of the bedstead. A slight crack or two of wood were heard, and the overpowering stillness of the room resumed its sway.

Byrne stood up, gasped for breath, and let out a cry of rage and dismay, the first sound which he is perfectly certain did make its way past his lips on this night of terrors. This then was the death he had escaped! This was the devilish artifice of murder poor Tom's soul had perhaps tried from beyond the border to warn him of. For this was how he had died. Byrne was certain he had heard the voice of the seaman, faintly distinct in his familiar phrase, "Mr. Byrne! Look out, sir!" and again uttering words he could not make out. But then the distance separating the living from the dead is so great! Poor Tom had tried. Byrne ran to the bed and attempted to lift up, to push off the horrible lid smothering the body. It resisted his efforts, heavy as lead, immovable like a tombstone. The rage of vengeance made him desist; his head buzzed with chaotic thoughts of extermination, he turned round the room as if he could find neither his weapons nor the way out; and all the time he stammered awful menaces. . .

A violent battering at the door of the inn recalled him to his soberer senses. He flew to the window pulled the shutters open, and looked out. In the faint dawn he saw below him a mob of men. Ha! He would go and face at once this murderous lot collected no doubt for his undoing. After his struggle with nameless terrors he yearned for an open fray with armed enemies. But he must have remained yet bereft of his reason, because forgetting his weapons he rushed downstairs with a wild cry, unbarred the door while blows were raining on it outside, and flinging it open flew with his bare hands at the throat of the first man he saw before him. They rolled over together. Byrne's hazy intention was to break through, to fly up the mountain path, and come back presently with Gonzales' men to exact an exemplary vengeance. He fought furiously till a tree, a house, a mountain, seemed to crash down upon his head — and he knew no more.

Here Mr. Byrne describes in detail the skilful manner in which he found his broken head bandaged, informs us that he had lost a great deal of blood, and ascribes the preservation of his sanity to that circumstance. He sets

down Gonzales' profuse apologies in full too. For it was Gonzales who, tired of waiting for news from the English, had come down to the inn with half his band, on his way to the sea. "His excellency," he explained, "rushed out with fierce impetuosity, and, moreover, was not known to us for a friend, and so we . . . etc., etc. When asked what had become of the witches, he only pointed his finger silently to the ground, then voiced calmly a moral reflection: "The passion for gold is pitiless in the very old, señor," he said. "No doubt in former days they have put many a solitary traveller to sleep in the archbishop's bed."

"There was also a gipsy girl there," said Byrne feebly from the improvised litter on which he was being carried to the coast by a squad of guerilleros.

"It was she who winched up that infernal machine, and it was she too who lowered it that night," was the answer.

"But why? Why?" exclaimed Byrne. "Why should she wish for my death?"

"No doubt for the sake of your excellency's coat buttons," said politely the saturnine Gonzales. "We found those of the dead mariner concealed on her person. But your excellency may rest assured that everything that is fitting has been done on this occasion."

Byrne asked no more questions. There was still another death which was considered by Gonzales as "fitting to the occasion." The one-eyed Bernardino stuck against the wall of his wine-shop received the charge of six escopettas into his breast. As the shots rang out the rough bier with Tom's body on it went past carried by a bandit-like gang of Spanish patriots down the ravine to the shore, where two boats from the ship were waiting for what was left on earth of her best seaman.

Mr. Byrne, very pale and weak, stepped into the boat which carried the body of his humble friend. For it was decided that Tom Corbin should rest far out in the bay of Biscay. The officer took the tiller and, turning his head for the last look at the shore, saw on the grey hillside something moving, which he made out to be a little man in a yellow hat mounted on a mule — that mule without which the fate of Tom Corbin would have remained mysterious for ever.

## ***BECAUSE OF THE DOLLARS***



## CHAPTER I

While we were hanging about near the water's edge, as sailors idling ashore will do (it was in the open space before the Harbour Office of a great Eastern port), a man came towards us from the "front" of business houses, aiming obliquely at the landing steps. He attracted my attention because in the movement of figures in white drill suits on the pavement from which he stepped, his costume, the usual tunic and trousers, being made of light grey flannel, made him noticeable.

I had time to observe him. He was stout, but he was not grotesque. His face was round and smooth, his complexion very fair. On his nearer approach I saw a little moustache made all the fairer by a good many white hairs. And he had, for a stout man, quite a good chin. In passing us he exchanged nods with the friend I was with and smiled.

My friend was Hollis, the fellow who had so many adventures and had known so many queer people in that part of the (more or less) gorgeous East in the days of his youth. He said: "That's a good man. I don't mean good in the sense of smart or skilful in his trade. I mean a really good man."

I turned round at once to look at the phenomenon. The "really good man" had a very broad back. I saw him signal a sampan to come alongside, get into it, and go off in the direction of a cluster of local steamers anchored close inshore.

I said: "He's a seaman, isn't he?"

"Yes. Commands that biggish dark-green steamer: 'Sissie — Glasgow.' He has never commanded anything else but the 'Sissie — Glasgow,' only it wasn't always the same Sissie. The first he had was about half the length of this one, and we used to tell poor Davidson that she was a size too small for him. Even at that time Davidson had bulk. We warned him he would get callosities on his shoulders and elbows because of the tight fit of his command. And Davidson could well afford the smiles he gave us for our chaff. He made lots of money in her. She belonged to a portly Chinaman resembling a mandarin in a picture-book, with goggles and thin drooping moustaches, and as dignified as only a Celestial knows how to be.

"The best of Chinamen as employers is that they have such gentlemanly instincts. Once they become convinced that you are a straight man, they give you their unbounded confidence. You simply can't do wrong, then. And they are pretty quick judges of character, too. Davidson's Chinaman was the first to find out his worth, on some theoretical principle. One day

in his counting-house, before several white men he was heard to declare: 'Captain Davidson is a good man.' And that settled it. After that you couldn't tell if it was Davidson who belonged to the Chinaman or the Chinaman who belonged to Davidson. It was he who, shortly before he died, ordered in Glasgow the new Sissie for Davidson to command."

We walked into the shade of the Harbour Office and leaned our elbows on the parapet of the quay.

"She was really meant to comfort poor Davidson," continued Hollis. "Can you fancy anything more naïvely touching than this old mandarin spending several thousand pounds to console his white man? Well, there she is. The old mandarin's sons have inherited her, and Davidson with her; and he commands her; and what with his salary and trading privileges he makes a lot of money; and everything is as before; and Davidson even smiles — you have seen it? Well, the smile's the only thing which isn't as before."

"Tell me, Hollis," I asked, "what do you mean by good in this connection?"

"Well, there are men who are born good just as others are born witty. What I mean is his nature. No simpler, more scrupulously delicate soul had ever lived in such a — a — comfortable envelope. How we used to laugh at Davidson's fine scruples! In short, he's thoroughly humane, and I don't imagine there can be much of any other sort of goodness that counts on this earth. And as he's that with a shade of particular refinement, I may well call him a 'really good man.'"

I knew from old that Hollis was a firm believer in the final value of shades. And I said: "I see" — because I really did see Hollis's Davidson in the sympathetic stout man who had passed us a little while before. But I remembered that at the very moment he smiled his placid face appeared veiled in melancholy — a sort of spiritual shadow. I went on.

"Who on earth has paid him off for being so fine by spoiling his smile?"

"That's quite a story, and I will tell it to you if you like. Confound it! It's quite a surprising one, too. Surprising in every way, but mostly in the way it knocked over poor Davidson — and apparently only because he is such a good sort. He was telling me all about it only a few days ago. He said that when he saw these four fellows with their heads in a bunch over the table, he at once didn't like it. He didn't like it at all. You mustn't suppose that Davidson is a soft fool. These men —

“But I had better begin at the beginning. We must go back to the first time the old dollars had been called in by our Government in exchange for a new issue. Just about the time when I left these parts to go home for a long stay. Every trader in the islands was thinking of getting his old dollars sent up here in time, and the demand for empty French wine cases — you know the dozen of vermouth or claret size — was something unprecedented. The custom was to pack the dollars in little bags of a hundred each. I don’t know how many bags each case would hold. A good lot. Pretty tidy sums must have been moving afloat just then. But let us get away from here. Won’t do to stay in the sun. Where could we — ? I know! let us go to those tiffin-rooms over there.”

We moved over accordingly. Our appearance in the long empty room at that early hour caused visible consternation amongst the China boys. But Hollis led the way to one of the tables between the windows screened by rattan blinds. A brilliant half-light trembled on the ceiling, on the whitewashed walls, bathed the multitude of vacant chairs and tables in a peculiar, stealthy glow.

“All right. We will get something to eat when it’s ready,” he said, waving the anxious Chinaman waiter aside. He took his temples touched with grey between his hands, leaning over the table to bring his face, his dark, keen eyes, closer to mine.

“Davidson then was commanding the steamer Sissie — the little one which we used to chaff him about. He ran her alone, with only the Malay serang for a deck officer. The nearest approach to another white man on board of her was the engineer, a Portuguese half-caste, as thin as a lath and quite a youngster at that. For all practical purposes Davidson was managing that command of his single-handed; and of course this was known in the port. I am telling you of it because the fact had its influence on the developments you shall hear of presently.

“His steamer, being so small, could go up tiny creeks and into shallow bays and through reefs and over sand-banks, collecting produce, where no other vessel but a native craft would think of venturing. It is a paying game, often. Davidson was known to visit in her places that no one else could find and that hardly anybody had ever heard of.

“The old dollars being called in, Davidson’s Chinaman thought that the Sissie would be just the thing to collect them from small traders in the less frequented parts of the Archipelago. It’s a good business. Such cases of

dollars are dumped aft in the ship's lazarette, and you get good freight for very little trouble and space.

"Davidson, too, thought it was a good idea; and together they made up a list of his calls on his next trip. Then Davidson (he had naturally the chart of his voyages in his head) remarked that on his way back he might look in at a certain settlement up a mere creek, where a poor sort of white man lived in a native village. Davidson pointed out to his Chinaman that the fellow was certain to have some rattans to ship.

"'Probably enough to fill her forward,' said Davidson. 'And that'll be better than bringing her back with empty holds. A day more or less doesn't matter.'

"This was sound talk, and the Chinaman owner could not but agree. But if it hadn't been sound it would have been just the same. Davidson did what he liked. He was a man that could do no wrong. However, this suggestion of his was not merely a business matter. There was in it a touch of Davidsonian kindness. For you must know that the man could not have continued to live quietly up that creek if it had not been for Davidson's willingness to call there from time to time. And Davidson's Chinaman knew this perfectly well, too. So he only smiled his dignified, bland smile, and said: 'All right, Captain. You do what you like.'

"I will explain presently how this connection between Davidson and that fellow came about. Now I want to tell you about the part of this affair which happened here — the preliminaries of it.

"You know as well as I do that these tiffin-rooms where we are sitting now have been in existence for many years. Well, next day about twelve o'clock, Davidson dropped in here to get something to eat.

"And here comes the only moment in this story where accident — mere accident — plays a part. If Davidson had gone home that day for tiffin, there would be now, after twelve years or more, nothing changed in his kindly, placid smile.

"But he came in here; and perhaps it was sitting at this very table that he remarked to a friend of mine that his next trip was to be a dollar-collecting trip. He added, laughing, that his wife was making rather a fuss about it. She had begged him to stay ashore and get somebody else to take his place for a voyage. She thought there was some danger on account of the dollars. He told her, he said, that there were no Java-sea pirates nowadays except in boys' books. He had laughed at her fears, but he was very sorry,



too; for when she took any notion in her head it was impossible to argue her out of it. She would be worrying herself all the time he was away. Well, he couldn't help it. There was no one ashore fit to take his place for the trip.

"This friend of mine and I went home together in the same mail-boat, and he mentioned that conversation one evening in the Red Sea while we were talking over the things and people we had just left, with more or less regret.

"I can't say that Davidson occupied a very prominent place. Moral excellence seldom does. He was quietly appreciated by those who knew him well; but his more obvious distinction consisted in this, that he was married. Ours, as you remember, was a bachelor crowd; in spirit anyhow, if not absolutely in fact. There might have been a few wives in existence, but if so they were invisible, distant, never alluded to. For what would have been the good? Davidson alone was visibly married.

"Being married suited him exactly. It fitted him so well that the wildest of us did not resent the fact when it was disclosed. Directly he had felt his feet out here, Davidson sent for his wife. She came out (from West Australia) in the Somerset, under the care of Captain Ritchie — you know, Monkey-face Ritchie — who couldn't praise enough her sweetness, her gentleness, and her charm. She seemed to be the heaven-born mate for Davidson. She found on arrival a very pretty bungalow on the hill, ready for her and the little girl they had. Very soon he got for her a two-wheeled trap and a Burmah pony, and she used to drive down of an evening to pick up Davidson, on the quay. When Davidson, beaming, got into the trap, it would become very full all at once.

"We used to admire Mrs. Davidson from a distance. It was a girlish head out of a keepsake. From a distance. We had not many opportunities for a closer view, because she did not care to give them to us. We would have been glad to drop in at the Davidson bungalow, but we were made to feel somehow that we were not very welcome there. Not that she ever said anything ungracious. She never had much to say for herself. I was perhaps the one who saw most of the Davidsons at home. What I noticed under the superficial aspect of vapid sweetness was her convex, obstinate forehead, and her small, red, pretty, ungenerous mouth. But then I am an observer with strong prejudices. Most of us were fetched by her white, swan-like neck, by that drooping, innocent profile. There was a lot of latent devotion to Davidson's wife hereabouts, at that time, I can tell you. But my idea was that she repaid it by a profound suspicion of the sort of men we were; a

mistrust which extended — I fancied — to her very husband at times. And I thought then she was jealous of him in a way; though there were no women that she could be jealous about. She had no women's society. It's difficult for a shipmaster's wife unless there are other shipmasters' wives about, and there were none here then. I know that the dock manager's wife called on her; but that was all. The fellows here formed the opinion that Mrs. Davidson was a meek, shy little thing. She looked it, I must say. And this opinion was so universal that the friend I have been telling you of remembered his conversation with Davidson simply because of the statement about Davidson's wife. He even wondered to me: 'Fancy Mrs. Davidson making a fuss to that extent. She didn't seem to me the sort of woman that would know how to make a fuss about anything.'

"I wondered, too — but not so much. That bumpy forehead — eh? I had always suspected her of being silly. And I observed that Davidson must have been vexed by this display of wifely anxiety.

"My friend said: 'No. He seemed rather touched and distressed. There really was no one he could ask to relieve him; mainly because he intended to make a call in some God-forsaken creek, to look up a fellow of the name of Bamtz who apparently had settled there.'

"And again my friend wondered. 'Tell me,' he cried, 'what connection can there be between Davidson and such a creature as Bamtz?'

"I don't remember now what answer I made. A sufficient one could have been given in two words: 'Davidson's goodness.' That never boggled at unworthiness if there was the slightest reason for compassion. I don't want you to think that Davidson had no discrimination at all. Bamtz could not have imposed on him. Moreover, everybody knew what Bamtz was. He was a loafer with a beard. When I think of Bamtz, the first thing I see is that long black beard and a lot of propitiatory wrinkles at the corners of two little eyes. There was no such beard from here to Polynesia, where a beard is a valuable property in itself. Bamtz's beard was valuable to him in another way. You know how impressed Orientals are by a fine beard. Years and years ago, I remember, the grave Abdullah, the great trader of Sambir, unable to repress signs of astonishment and admiration at the first sight of that imposing beard. And it's very well known that Bamtz lived on Abdullah off and on for several years. It was a unique beard, and so was the bearer of the same. A unique loafer. He made a fine art of it, or rather a sort of craft and mystery. One can understand a fellow living by cadging

and small swindles in towns, in large communities of people; but Bamtz managed to do that trick in the wilderness, to loaf on the outskirts of the virgin forest.

“He understood how to ingratiate himself with the natives. He would arrive in some settlement up a river, make a present of a cheap carbine or a pair of shoddy binoculars, or something of that sort, to the Rajah, or the head-man, or the principal trader; and on the strength of that gift, ask for a house, posing mysteriously as a very special trader. He would spin them no end of yarns, live on the fat of the land, for a while, and then do some mean swindle or other — or else they would get tired of him and ask him to quit. And he would go off meekly with an air of injured innocence. Funny life. Yet, he never got hurt somehow. I’ve heard of the Rajah of Dongala giving him fifty dollars’ worth of trade goods and paying his passage in a prau only to get rid of him. Fact. And observe that nothing prevented the old fellow having Bamtz’s throat cut and the carcase thrown into deep water outside the reefs; for who on earth would have inquired after Bamtz?

“He had been known to loaf up and down the wilderness as far north as the Gulf of Tonkin. Neither did he disdain a spell of civilisation from time to time. And it was while loafing and cadging in Saigon, bearded and dignified (he gave himself out there as a bookkeeper), that he came across Laughing Anne.

“The less said of her early history the better, but something must be said. We may safely suppose there was very little heart left in her famous laugh when Bamtz spoke first to her in some low café. She was stranded in Saigon with precious little money and in great trouble about a kid she had, a boy of five or six.

“A fellow I just remember, whom they called Pearler Harry, brought her out first into these parts — from Australia, I believe. He brought her out and then dropped her, and she remained knocking about here and there, known to most of us by sight, at any rate. Everybody in the Archipelago had heard of Laughing Anne. She had really a pleasant silvery laugh always at her disposal, so to speak, but it wasn’t enough apparently to make her fortune. The poor creature was ready to stick to any half-decent man if he would only let her, but she always got dropped, as it might have been expected.

“She had been left in Saigon by the skipper of a German ship with whom she had been going up and down the China coast as far as Vladivostok for

near upon two years. The German said to her: 'This is all over, mein Taubchen. I am going home now to get married to the girl I got engaged to before coming out here.' And Anne said: 'All right, I'm ready to go. We part friends, don't we?'

"She was always anxious to part friends. The German told her that of course they were parting friends. He looked rather glum at the moment of parting. She laughed and went ashore.

"But it was no laughing matter for her. She had some notion that this would be her last chance. What frightened her most was the future of her child. She had left her boy in Saigon before going off with the German, in the care of an elderly French couple. The husband was a doorkeeper in some Government office, but his time was up, and they were returning to France. She had to take the boy back from them; and after she had got him back, she did not like to part with him any more.

"That was the situation when she and Bamtz got acquainted casually. She could not have had any illusions about that fellow. To pick up with Bamtz was coming down pretty low in the world, even from a material point of view. She had always been decent, in her way; whereas Bamtz was, not to mince words, an abject sort of creature. On the other hand, that bearded loafer, who looked much more like a pirate than a bookkeeper, was not a brute. He was gentle — rather — even in his cups. And then, despair, like misfortune, makes us acquainted with strange bed-fellows. For she may well have despaired. She was no longer young — you know.

"On the man's side this conjunction is more difficult to explain, perhaps. One thing, however, must be said of Bamtz; he had always kept clear of native women. As one can't suspect him of moral delicacy, I surmise that it must have been from prudence. And he, too, was no longer young. There were many white hairs in his valuable black beard by then. He may have simply longed for some kind of companionship in his queer, degraded existence. Whatever their motives, they vanished from Saigon together. And of course nobody cared what had become of them.

"Six months later Davidson came into the Mirrah Settlement. It was the very first time he had been up that creek, where no European vessel had ever been seen before. A Javanese passenger he had on board offered him fifty dollars to call in there — it must have been some very particular business — and Davidson consented to try. Fifty dollars, he told me, were neither here nor there; but he was curious to see the place, and the little

Sissie could go anywhere where there was water enough to float a soup-plate.

“Davidson landed his Javanese plutocrat, and, as he had to wait a couple of hours for the tide, he went ashore himself to stretch his legs.

“It was a small settlement. Some sixty houses, most of them built on piles over the river, the rest scattered in the long grass; the usual pathway at the back; the forest hemming in the clearing and smothering what there might have been of air into a dead, hot stagnation.

“All the population was on the river-bank staring silently, as Malays will do, at the Sissie anchored in the stream. She was almost as wonderful to them as an angel’s visit. Many of the old people had only heard vaguely of fire-ships, and not many of the younger generation had seen one. On the back path Davidson strolled in perfect solitude. But he became aware of a bad smell and concluded he would go no farther.

“While he stood wiping his forehead, he heard from somewhere the exclamation: ‘My God! It’s Davy!’

“Davidson’s lower jaw, as he expressed it, came unhooked at the crying of this excited voice. Davy was the name used by the associates of his young days; he hadn’t heard it for many years. He stared about with his mouth open and saw a white woman issue from the long grass in which a small hut stood buried nearly up to the roof.

“Try to imagine the shock: in that wild place that you couldn’t find on a map, and more squalid than the most poverty-stricken Malay settlement had a right to be, this European woman coming swishing out of the long grass in a fanciful tea-gown thing, dingy pink satin, with a long train and frayed lace trimmings; her eyes like black coals in a pasty-white face. Davidson thought that he was asleep, that he was delirious. From the offensive village mudhole (it was what Davidson had sniffed just before) a couple of filthy buffaloes uprose with loud snorts and lumbered off crashing through the bushes, panic-struck by this apparition.

“The woman came forward, her arms extended, and laid her hands on Davidson’s shoulders, exclaiming: ‘Why! You have hardly changed at all. The same good Davy.’ And she laughed a little wildly.

“This sound was to Davidson like a galvanic shock to a corpse. He started in every muscle. ‘Laughing Anne,’ he said in an awe-struck voice.

“‘All that’s left of her, Davy. All that’s left of her.’

“Davidson looked up at the sky; but there was to be seen no balloon from which she could have fallen on that spot. When he brought his distracted gaze down, it rested on a child holding on with a brown little paw to the pink satin gown. He had run out of the grass after her. Had Davidson seen a real hobgoblin his eyes could not have bulged more than at this small boy in a dirty white blouse and ragged knickers. He had a round head of tight chestnut curls, very sunburnt legs, a freckled face, and merry eyes. Admonished by his mother to greet the gentleman, he finished off Davidson by addressing him in French.

“‘Bonjour.’

“Davidson, overcome, looked up at the woman in silence. She sent the child back to the hut, and when he had disappeared in the grass, she turned to Davidson, tried to speak, but after getting out the words, ‘That’s my Tony,’ burst into a long fit of crying. She had to lean on Davidson’s shoulder. He, distressed in the goodness of his heart, stood rooted to the spot where she had come upon him.

“What a meeting — eh? Bamtz had sent her out to see what white man it was who had landed. And she had recognised him from that time when Davidson, who had been pearling himself in his youth, had been associating with Harry the Pearler and others, the quietest of a rather rowdy set.

“Before Davidson retraced his steps to go on board the steamer, he had heard much of Laughing Anne’s story, and had even had an interview, on the path, with Bamtz himself. She ran back to the hut to fetch him, and he came out lounging, with his hands in his pockets, with the detached, casual manner under which he concealed his propensity to cringe. Ya-a-as-as. He thought he would settle here permanently — with her. This with a nod at Laughing Anne, who stood by, a haggard, tragically anxious figure, her black hair hanging over her shoulders.

“‘No more paint and dyes for me, Davy,’ she struck in, ‘if only you will do what he wants you to do. You know that I was always ready to stand by my men — if they had only let me.’

“Davidson had no doubt of her earnestness. It was of Bamtz’s good faith that he was not at all sure. Bamtz wanted Davidson to promise to call at Mirrah more or less regularly. He thought he saw an opening to do business with rattans there, if only he could depend on some craft to bring out trading goods and take away his produce.

“‘I have a few dollars to make a start on. The people are all right.’

“He had come there, where he was not known, in a native prau, and had managed, with his sedate manner and the exactly right kind of yarn he knew how to tell to the natives, to ingratiate himself with the chief man.

“‘The Orang Kaya has given me that empty house there to live in as long as I will stay,’ added Bamtz.

“‘Do it, Davy,’ cried the woman suddenly. ‘Think of that poor kid.’

“‘Seen him? ‘Cute little customer,’ said the reformed loafer in such a tone of interest as to surprise Davidson into a kindly glance.

“‘I certainly can do it,’ he declared. He thought of at first making some stipulation as to Bamtz behaving decently to the woman, but his exaggerated delicacy and also the conviction that such a fellow’s promises were worth nothing restrained him. Anne went a little distance down the path with him talking anxiously.

“‘It’s for the kid. How could I have kept him with me if I had to knock about in towns? Here he will never know that his mother was a painted woman. And this Bamtz likes him. He’s real fond of him. I suppose I ought to thank God for that.’

“Davidson shuddered at any human creature being brought so low as to have to thank God for the favours or affection of a Bamtz.

“‘And do you think that you can make out to live here?’ he asked gently.

“‘Can’t I? You know I have always stuck to men through thick and thin till they had enough of me. And now look at me! But inside I am as I always was. I have acted on the square to them all one after another. Only they do get tired somehow. Oh, Davy! Harry ought not to have cast me off. It was he that led me astray.’

“Davidson mentioned to her that Harry the Pearler had been dead now for some years. Perhaps she had heard?

“She made a sign that she had heard; and walked by the side of Davidson in silence nearly to the bank. Then she told him that her meeting with him had brought back the old times to her mind. She had not cried for years. She was not a crying woman either. It was hearing herself called Laughing Anne that had started her sobbing like a fool. Harry was the only man she had loved. The others —

“She shrugged her shoulders. But she prided herself on her loyalty to the successive partners of her dismal adventures. She had never played any tricks in her life. She was a pal worth having. But men did get tired. They did not understand women. She supposed it had to be.

“Davidson was attempting a veiled warning as to Bamtz, but she interrupted him. She knew what men were. She knew what this man was like. But he had taken wonderfully to the kid. And Davidson desisted willingly, saying to himself that surely poor Laughing Anne could have no illusions by this time. She wrung his hand hard at parting.

“‘It’s for the kid, Davy — it’s for the kid. Isn’t he a bright little chap?’



## CHAPTER II

“All this happened about two years before the day when Davidson, sitting in this very room, talked to my friend. You will see presently how this room can get full. Every seat’ll be occupied, and as you notice, the tables are set close, so that the backs of the chairs are almost touching. There is also a good deal of noisy talk here about one o’clock.

“I don’t suppose Davidson was talking very loudly; but very likely he had to raise his voice across the table to my friend. And here accident, mere accident, put in its work by providing a pair of fine ears close behind Davidson’s chair. It was ten to one against, the owner of the same having enough change in his pockets to get his tiffin here. But he had. Most likely had rooked somebody of a few dollars at cards overnight. He was a bright creature of the name of Fector, a spare, short, jumpy fellow with a red face and muddy eyes. He described himself as a journalist, as certain kind of women give themselves out as actresses in the dock of a police-court.

“He used to introduce himself to strangers as a man with a mission to track out abuses and fight them whenever found. He would also hint that he was a martyr. And it’s a fact that he had been kicked, horsewhipped, imprisoned, and hounded with ignominy out of pretty well every place between Ceylon and Shanghai, for a professional blackmailer.

“I suppose, in that trade, you’ve got to have active wits and sharp ears. It’s not likely that he overheard every word Davidson said about his dollar collecting trip, but he heard enough to set his wits at work.

“He let Davidson go out, and then hastened away down to the native slums to a sort of lodging-house kept in partnership by the usual sort of Portuguese and a very disreputable Chinaman. Macao Hotel, it was called, but it was mostly a gambling den that one used to warn fellows against. Perhaps you remember?

“There, the evening before, Fector had met a precious couple, a partnership even more queer than the Portuguese and the Chinaman. One of the two was Niclaus — you know. Why! the fellow with a Tartar moustache and a yellow complexion, like a Mongolian, only that his eyes were set straight and his face was not so flat. One couldn’t tell what breed he was. A nondescript beggar. From a certain angle you would think a very bilious white man. And I daresay he was. He owned a Malay prau and called himself The Nakhoda, as one would say: The Captain. Aha!

Now you remember. He couldn't, apparently, speak any other European language than English, but he flew the Dutch flag on his prau.

"The other was the Frenchman without hands. Yes. The very same we used to know in '79 in Sydney, keeping a little tobacco shop at the lower end of George Street. You remember the huge carcass hunched up behind the counter, the big white face and the long black hair brushed back off a high forehead like a bard's. He was always trying to roll cigarettes on his knee with his stumps, telling endless yarns of Polynesia and whining and cursing in turn about 'mon malheur.' His hands had been blown away by a dynamite cartridge while fishing in some lagoon. This accident, I believe, had made him more wicked than before, which is saying a good deal.

"He was always talking about 'resuming his activities' some day, whatever they were, if he could only get an intelligent companion. It was evident that the little shop was no field for his activities, and the sickly woman with her face tied up, who used to look in sometimes through the back door, was no companion for him.

"And, true enough, he vanished from Sydney before long, after some trouble with the Excise fellows about his stock. Goods stolen out of a warehouse or something similar. He left the woman behind, but he must have secured some sort of companion — he could not have shifted for himself; but whom he went away with, and where, and what other companions he might have picked up afterwards, it is impossible to make the remotest guess about.

"Why exactly he came this way I can't tell. Towards the end of my time here we began to hear talk of a maimed Frenchman who had been seen here and there. But no one knew then that he had foregathered with Niclaus and lived in his prau. I daresay he put Niclaus up to a thing or two. Anyhow, it was a partnership. Niclaus was somewhat afraid of the Frenchman on account of his tempers, which were awful. He looked then like a devil; but a man without hands, unable to load or handle a weapon, can at best go for one only with his teeth. From that danger Niclaus felt certain he could always defend himself.

"The couple were alone together loafing in the common-room of that infamous hotel when Fector turned up. After some beating about the bush, for he was doubtful how far he could trust these two, he repeated what he had overheard in the tiffin-rooms.

“His tale did not have much success till he came to mention the creek and Bamtz’s name. Niclaus, sailing about like a native in a prau, was, in his own words, ‘familiar with the locality.’ The huge Frenchman, walking up and down the room with his stumps in the pockets of his jacket, stopped short in surprise. ‘Comment? Bamtz! Bamtz!’

“He had run across him several times in his life. He exclaimed: ‘Bamtz! Mais je ne connais que ca!’ And he applied such a contemptuously indecent epithet to Bamtz that when, later, he alluded to him as ‘une chiffé’ (a mere rag) it sounded quite complimentary. ‘We can do with him what we like,’ he asserted confidently. ‘Oh, yes. Certainly we must hasten to pay a visit to that — ’ (another awful descriptive epithet quite unfit for repetition). ‘Devil take me if we don’t pull off a coup that will set us all up for a long time.’

“He saw all that lot of dollars melted into bars and disposed of somewhere on the China coast. Of the escape after the coup he never doubted. There was Niclaus’s prau to manage that in.

“In his enthusiasm he pulled his stumps out of his pockets and waved them about. Then, catching sight of them, as it were, he held them in front of his eyes, cursing and blaspheming and bewailing his misfortune and his helplessness, till Niclaus quieted him down.

“But it was his mind that planned out the affair and it was his spirit which carried the other two on. Neither of them was of the bold buccaneer type; and Fector, especially, had never in his adventurous life used other weapons than slander and lies.

“That very evening they departed on a visit to Bamtz in Niclaus’s prau, which had been lying, emptied of her cargo of cocoanuts, for a day or two under the canal bridge. They must have crossed the bows of the anchored Sissie, and no doubt looked at her with interest as the scene of their future exploit, the great haul, le grand coup!

“Davidson’s wife, to his great surprise, sulked with him for several days before he left. I don’t know whether it occurred to him that, for all her angelic profile, she was a very stupidly obstinate girl. She didn’t like the tropics. He had brought her out there, where she had no friends, and now, she said, he was becoming inconsiderate. She had a presentiment of some misfortune, and notwithstanding Davidson’s painstaking explanations, she could not see why her presentiments were to be disregarded. On the very

last evening before Davidson went away she asked him in a suspicious manner:

“‘Why is it that you are so anxious to go this time?’

“‘I am not anxious,’ protested the good Davidson. ‘I simply can’t help myself. There’s no one else to go in my place.’

“‘Oh! There’s no one,’ she said, turning away slowly.

“She was so distant with him that evening that Davidson from a sense of delicacy made up his mind to say good-bye to her at once and go and sleep on board. He felt very miserable and, strangely enough, more on his own account than on account of his wife. She seemed to him much more offended than grieved.

“Three weeks later, having collected a good many cases of old dollars (they were stowed aft in the lazarette with an iron bar and a padlock securing the hatch under his cabin-table), yes, with a bigger lot than he had expected to collect, he found himself homeward bound and off the entrance of the creek where Bamtz lived and even, in a sense, flourished.

“It was so late in the day that Davidson actually hesitated whether he should not pass by this time. He had no regard for Bamtz, who was a degraded but not a really unhappy man. His pity for Laughing Anne was no more than her case deserved. But his goodness was of a particularly delicate sort. He realised how these people were dependent on him, and how they would feel their dependence (if he failed to turn up) through a long month of anxious waiting. Prompted by his sensitive humanity, Davidson, in the gathering dusk, turned the Sissie’s head towards the hardly discernible coast, and navigated her safety through a maze of shallow patches. But by the time he got to the mouth of the creek the night had come.

“The narrow waterway lay like a black cutting through the forest. And as there were always grounded snaggs in the channel which it would be impossible to make out, Davidson very prudently turned the Sissie round, and with only enough steam on the boilers to give her a touch ahead if necessary, let her drift up stern first with the tide, silent and invisible in the impenetrable darkness and in the dumb stillness.

“It was a long job, and when at the end of two hours Davidson thought he must be up to the clearing, the settlement slept already, the whole land of forests and rivers was asleep.

“Davidson, seeing a solitary light in the massed darkness of the shore, knew that it was burning in Bamtz’s house. This was unexpected at this time of the night, but convenient as a guide. By a turn of the screw and a touch of the helm he sheered the Sissie alongside Bamtz’s wharf — a miserable structure of a dozen piles and a few planks, of which the ex-vagabond was very proud. A couple of Kalashes jumped down on it, took a turn with the ropes thrown to them round the posts, and the Sissie came to rest without a single loud word or the slightest noise. And just in time too, for the tide turned even before she was properly moored.

“Davidson had something to eat, and then, coming on deck for a last look round, noticed that the light was still burning in the house.

“This was very unusual, but since they were awake so late, Davidson thought that he would go up to say that he was in a hurry to be off and to ask that what rattans there were in store should be sent on board with the first sign of dawn.

“He stepped carefully over the shaky planks, not being anxious to get a sprained ankle, and picked his way across the waste ground to the foot of the house ladder. The house was but a glorified hut on piles, unfenced and lonely.

“Like many a stout man, Davidson is very lightfooted. He climbed the seven steps or so, stepped across the bamboo platform quietly, but what he saw through the doorway stopped him short.

“Four men were sitting by the light of a solitary candle. There was a bottle, a jug and glasses on the table, but they were not engaged in drinking. Two packs of cards were lying there too, but they were not preparing to play. They were talking together in whispers, and remained quite unaware of him. He himself was too astonished to make a sound for some time. The world was still, except for the sibilation of the whispering heads bunched together over the table.

“And Davidson, as I have quoted him to you before, didn’t like it. He didn’t like it at all.

“The situation ended with a scream proceeding from the dark, interior part of the room. ‘O Davy! you’ve given me a turn.’

“Davidson made out beyond the table Anne’s very pale face. She laughed a little hysterically, out of the deep shadows between the gloomy mat walls. ‘Ha! ha! ha!’

“The four heads sprang apart at the first sound, and four pairs of eyes became fixed stonily on Davidson. The woman came forward, having little more on her than a loose chintz wrapper and straw slippers on her bare feet. Her head was tied up Malay fashion in a red handkerchief, with a mass of loose hair hanging under it behind. Her professional, gay, European feathers had literally dropped off her in the course of these two years, but a long necklace of amber beads hung round her uncovered neck. It was the only ornament she had left; Bamtz had sold all her poor-enough trinkets during the flight from Saigon — when their association began.

“She came forward, past the table, into the light, with her usual groping gesture of extended arms, as though her soul, poor thing! had gone blind long ago, her white cheeks hollow, her eyes darkly wild, distracted, as Davidson thought. She came on swiftly, grabbed him by the arm, dragged him in. ‘It’s heaven itself that sends you to-night. My Tony’s so bad — come and see him. Come along — do!’

“Davidson submitted. The only one of the men to move was Bamtz, who made as if to get up but dropped back in his chair again. Davidson in passing heard him mutter confusedly something that sounded like ‘poor little beggar.’

“The child, lying very flushed in a miserable cot knocked up out of gincases, stared at Davidson with wide, drowsy eyes. It was a bad bout of fever clearly. But while Davidson was promising to go on board and fetch some medicines, and generally trying to say reassuring things, he could not help being struck by the extraordinary manner of the woman standing by his side. Gazing with despairing expression down at the cot, she would suddenly throw a quick, startled glance at Davidson and then towards the other room.

““Yes, my poor girl,’ he whispered, interpreting her distraction in his own way, though he had nothing precise in his mind. ‘I’m afraid this bodes no good to you. How is it they are here?’

“She seized his forearm and breathed out forcibly: ‘No good to me! Oh, no! But what about you! They are after the dollars you have on board.’

“Davidson let out an astonished ‘How do they know there are any dollars?’

“She clapped her hands lightly, in distress. ‘So it’s true! You have them on board? Then look out for yourself.’

“They stood gazing down at the boy in the cot, aware that they might be observed from the other room.

“‘We must get him to perspire as soon as possible,’ said Davidson in his ordinary voice. ‘You’ll have to give him hot drink of some kind. I will go on board and bring you a spirit-kettle amongst other things.’ And he added under his breath: ‘Do they actually mean murder?’

“She made no sign, she had returned to her desolate contemplation of the boy. Davidson thought she had not heard him even, when with an unchanged expression she spoke under her breath.

“‘The Frenchman would, in a minute. The others shirk it — unless you resist. He’s a devil. He keeps them going. Without him they would have done nothing but talk. I’ve got chummy with him. What can you do when you are with a man like the fellow I am with now. Bamtz is terrified of them, and they know it. He’s in it from funk. Oh, Davy! take your ship away — quick!’

“‘Too late,’ said Davidson. ‘She’s on the mud already.’

“‘If the kid hadn’t been in this state I would have run off with him — to you — into the woods — anywhere. Oh, Davy! will he die?’ she cried aloud suddenly.

“Davidson met three men in the doorway. They made way for him without actually daring to face his glance. But Bamtz was the only one who looked down with an air of guilt. The big Frenchman had remained lolling in his chair; he kept his stumps in his pockets and addressed Davidson.

“‘Isn’t it unfortunate about that child! The distress of that woman there upsets me, but I am of no use in the world. I couldn’t smooth the sick pillow of my dearest friend. I have no hands. Would you mind sticking one of those cigarettes there into the mouth of a poor, harmless cripple? My nerves want soothing — upon my honour, they do.’

“Davidson complied with his naturally kind smile. As his outward placidity becomes only more pronounced, if possible, the more reason there is for excitement; and as Davidson’s eyes, when his wits are hard at work, get very still and as if sleepy, the huge Frenchman might have been justified in concluding that the man there was a mere sheep — a sheep ready for slaughter. With a ‘merci bien’ he uplifted his huge carcass to reach the light of the candle with his cigarette, and Davidson left the house.

“Going down to the ship and returning, he had time to consider his position. At first he was inclined to believe that these men (Niclaus — the

white Nakhoda — was the only one he knew by sight before, besides Bamtz) were not of the stamp to proceed to extremities. This was partly the reason why he never attempted to take any measures on board. His pacific Kalashes were not to be thought of as against white men. His wretched engineer would have had a fit from fright at the mere idea of any sort of combat. Davidson knew that he would have to depend on himself in this affair if it ever came off.

“Davidson underestimated naturally the driving power of the Frenchman’s character and the force of the actuating motive. To that man so hopelessly crippled these dollars were an enormous opportunity. With his share of the robbery he would open another shop in Vladivostok, Haiphong, Manila — somewhere far away.

“Neither did it occur to Davidson, who is a man of courage, if ever there was one, that his psychology was not known to the world at large, and that to this particular lot of ruffians, who judged him by his appearance, he appeared an unsuspecting, inoffensive, soft creature, as he passed again through the room, his hands full of various objects and parcels destined for the sick boy.

“All the four were sitting again round the table. Bamtz not having the pluck to open his mouth, it was Niclaus who, as a collective voice, called out to him thickly to come out soon and join in a drink.

“‘I think I’ll have to stay some little time in there, to help her look after the boy,’ Davidson answered without stopping.

“This was a good thing to say to allay a possible suspicion. And, as it was, Davidson felt he must not stay very long.

“He sat down on an old empty nail-keg near the improvised cot and looked at the child; while Laughing Anne, moving to and fro, preparing the hot drink, giving it to the boy in spoonfuls, or stopping to gaze motionless at the flushed face, whispered disjointed bits of information. She had succeeded in making friends with that French devil. Davy would understand that she knew how to make herself pleasant to a man.

“And Davidson nodded without looking at her.

“The big beast had got to be quite confidential with her. She held his cards for him when they were having a game. Bamtz! Oh! Bamtz in his funk was only too glad to see the Frenchman humoured. And the Frenchman had come to believe that she was a woman who didn’t care what she did. That’s how it came about they got to talk before her openly. For a



long time she could not make out what game they were up to. The new arrivals, not expecting to find a woman with Bamtz, had been very startled and annoyed at first, she explained.

“She busied herself in attending to the boy; and nobody looking into that room would have seen anything suspicious in those two people exchanging murmurs by the sick-bedside.

“‘But now they think I am a better man than Bamtz ever was,’ she said with a faint laugh.

“The child moaned. She went down on her knees, and, bending low, contemplated him mournfully. Then raising her head, she asked Davidson whether he thought the child would get better. Davidson was sure of it. She murmured sadly: ‘Poor kid. There’s nothing in life for such as he. Not a dog’s chance. But I couldn’t let him go, Davy! I couldn’t.’

“Davidson felt a profound pity for the child. She laid her hand on his knee and whispered an earnest warning against the Frenchman. Davy must never let him come to close quarters. Naturally Davidson wanted to know the reason, for a man without hands did not strike him as very formidable under any circumstances.

“‘Mind you don’t let him — that’s all,’ she insisted anxiously, hesitated, and then confessed that the Frenchman had got her away from the others that afternoon and had ordered her to tie a seven-pound iron weight (out of the set of weights Bamtz used in business) to his right stump. She had to do it for him. She had been afraid of his savage temper. Bamtz was such a craven, and neither of the other men would have cared what happened to her. The Frenchman, however, with many awful threats had warned her not to let the others know what she had done for him. Afterwards he had been trying to cajole her. He had promised her that if she stood by him faithfully in this business he would take her with him to Haïphong or some other place. A poor cripple needed somebody to take care of him — always.

“Davidson asked her again if they really meant mischief. It was, he told me, the hardest thing to believe he had run up against, as yet, in his life. Anne nodded. The Frenchman’s heart was set on this robbery. Davy might expect them, about midnight, creeping on board his ship, to steal anyhow — to murder, perhaps. Her voice sounded weary, and her eyes remained fastened on her child.

“And still Davidson could not accept it somehow; his contempt for these men was too great.

“‘Look here, Davy,’ she said. ‘I’ll go outside with them when they start, and it will be hard luck if I don’t find something to laugh at. They are used to that from me. Laugh or cry — what’s the odds. You will be able to hear me on board on this quiet night. Dark it is too. Oh! it’s dark, Davy! — it’s dark!’

“‘Don’t you run any risks,’ said Davidson. Presently he called her attention to the boy, who, less flushed now, had dropped into a sound sleep. ‘Look. He’ll be all right.’

“She made as if to snatch the child up to her breast, but restrained herself. Davidson prepared to go. She whispered hurriedly:

“‘Mind, Davy! I’ve told them that you generally sleep aft in the hammock under the awning over the cabin. They have been asking me about your ways and about your ship, too. I told them all I knew. I had to keep in with them. And Bamtz would have told them if I hadn’t — you understand?’

“He made a friendly sign and went out. The men about the table (except Bamtz) looked at him. This time it was Fector who spoke. ‘Won’t you join us in a quiet game, Captain?’

“Davidson said that now the child was better he thought he would go on board and turn in. Fector was the only one of the four whom he had, so to speak, never seen, for he had had a good look at the Frenchman already. He observed Fector’s muddy eyes, his mean, bitter mouth. Davidson’s contempt for those men rose in his gorge, while his placid smile, his gentle tones and general air of innocence put heart into them. They exchanged meaning glances.

“‘We shall be sitting late over the cards,’ Fector said in his harsh, low voice.

“‘Don’t make more noise than you can help.’

“‘Oh! we are a quiet lot. And if the invalid shouldn’t be so well, she will be sure to send one of us down to call you, so that you may play the doctor again. So don’t shoot at sight.’

“‘He isn’t a shooting man,’ struck in Niclaus.

“‘I never shoot before making sure there’s a reason for it — at any rate,’ said Davidson.

“Bamtz let out a sickly snigger. The Frenchman alone got up to make a bow to Davidson’s careless nod. His stumps were stuck immovably in his pockets. Davidson understood now the reason.

“He went down to the ship. His wits were working actively, and he was thoroughly angry. He smiled, he says (it must have been the first grim smile of his life), at the thought of the seven-pound weight lashed to the end of the Frenchman’s stump. The ruffian had taken that precaution in case of a quarrel that might arise over the division of the spoil. A man with an unsuspected power to deal killing blows could take his own part in a sudden scrimmage round a heap of money, even against adversaries armed with revolvers, especially if he himself started the row.

““He’s ready to face any of his friends with that thing. But he will have no use for it. There will be no occasion to quarrel about these dollars here,” thought Davidson, getting on board quietly. He never paused to look if there was anybody about the decks. As a matter of fact, most of his crew were on shore, and the rest slept, stowed away in dark corners.

“He had his plan, and he went to work methodically.

“He fetched a lot of clothing from below and disposed it in his hammock in such a way as to distend it to the shape of a human body; then he threw over all the light cotton sheet he used to draw over himself when sleeping on deck. Having done this, he loaded his two revolvers and clambered into one of the boats the Sissie carried right aft, swung out on their davits. Then he waited.

“And again the doubt of such a thing happening to him crept into his mind. He was almost ashamed of this ridiculous vigil in a boat. He became bored. And then he became drowsy. The stillness of the black universe wearied him. There was not even the lapping of the water to keep him company, for the tide was out and the Sissie was lying on soft mud. Suddenly in the breathless, soundless, hot night an argus pheasant screamed in the woods across the stream. Davidson started violently, all his senses on the alert at once.

“The candle was still burning in the house. Everything was quiet again, but Davidson felt drowsy no longer. An uneasy premonition of evil oppressed him.

““Surely I am not afraid,” he argued with himself.

“The silence was like a seal on his ears, and his nervous inward impatience grew intolerable. He commanded himself to keep still. But all the same he was just going to jump out of the boat when a faint ripple on the immensity of silence, a mere tremor in the air, the ghost of a silvery laugh, reached his ears.

“Illusion!

“He kept very still. He had no difficulty now in emulating the stillness of the mouse — a grimly determined mouse. But he could not shake off that premonition of evil unrelated to the mere danger of the situation. Nothing happened. It had been an illusion!

“A curiosity came to him to learn how they would go to work. He wondered and wondered, till the whole thing seemed more absurd than ever.

“He had left the hanging lamp in the cabin burning as usual. It was part of his plan that everything should be as usual. Suddenly in the dim glow of the skylight panes a bulky shadow came up the ladder without a sound, made two steps towards the hammock (it hung right over the skylight), and stood motionless. The Frenchman!

“The minutes began to slip away. Davidson guessed that the Frenchman’s part (the poor cripple) was to watch his (Davidson’s) slumbers while the others were no doubt in the cabin busy forcing off the lazarette hatch.

“What was the course they meant to pursue once they got hold of the silver (there were ten cases, and each could be carried easily by two men) nobody can tell now. But so far, Davidson was right. They were in the cabin. He expected to hear the sounds of breaking-in every moment. But the fact was that one of them (perhaps Fector, who had stolen papers out of desks in his time) knew how to pick a lock, and apparently was provided with the tools. Thus while Davidson expected every moment to hear them begin down there, they had the bar off already and two cases actually up in the cabin out of the lazarette.

“In the diffused faint glow of the skylight the Frenchman moved no more than a statue. Davidson could have shot him with the greatest ease — but he was not homicidally inclined. Moreover, he wanted to make sure before opening fire that the others had gone to work. Not hearing the sounds he expected to hear, he felt uncertain whether they all were on board yet.

“While he listened, the Frenchman, whose immobility might have but cloaked an internal struggle; moved forward a pace, then another. Davidson, entranced, watched him advance one leg, withdraw his right stump, the armed one, out of his pocket, and swinging his body to put greater force into the blow, bring the seven-pound weight down on the hammock where the head of the sleeper ought to have been.

“Davidson admitted to me that his hair stirred at the roots then. But for Anne, his unsuspecting head would have been there. The Frenchman’s surprise must have been simply overwhelming. He staggered away from the lightly swinging hammock, and before Davidson could make a movement he had vanished, bounding down the ladder to warn and alarm the other fellows.

“Davidson sprang instantly out of the boat, threw up the skylight flap, and had a glimpse of the men down there crouching round the hatch. They looked up scared, and at that moment the Frenchman outside the door bellowed out ‘Trahison — trahison!’ They bolted out of the cabin, falling over each other and swearing awfully. The shot Davidson let off down the skylight had hit no one; but he ran to the edge of the cabin-top and at once opened fire at the dark shapes rushing about the deck. These shots were returned, and a rapid fusillade burst out, reports and flashes, Davidson dodging behind a ventilator and pulling the trigger till his revolver clicked, and then throwing it down to take the other in his right hand.

“He had been hearing in the din the Frenchman’s infuriated yells ‘Tuez-le! tuez-le!’ above the fierce cursing of the others. But though they fired at him they were only thinking of clearing out. In the flashes of the last shots Davidson saw them scrambling over the rail. That he had hit more than one he was certain. Two different voices had cried out in pain. But apparently none of them were disabled.

“Davidson leaned against the bulwark reloading his revolver without haste. He had not the slightest apprehension of their coming back. On the other hand, he had no intention of pursuing them on shore in the dark. What they were doing he had no idea. Looking to their hurts probably. Not very far from the bank the invisible Frenchman was blaspheming and cursing his associates, his luck, and all the world. He ceased; then with a sudden, vengeful yell, ‘It’s that woman! — it’s that woman that has sold us,’ was heard running off in the night.

“Davidson caught his breath in a sudden pang of remorse. He perceived with dismay that the stratagem of his defence had given Anne away. He did not hesitate a moment. It was for him to save her now. He leaped ashore. But even as he landed on the wharf he heard a shrill shriek which pierced his very soul.

“The light was still burning in the house. Davidson, revolver in hand, was making for it when another shriek, away to his left, made him change

his direction.

“He changed his direction — but very soon he stopped. It was then that he hesitated in cruel perplexity. He guessed what had happened. The woman had managed to escape from the house in some way, and now was being chased in the open by the infuriated Frenchman. He trusted she would try to run on board for protection.

“All was still around Davidson. Whether she had run on board or not, this silence meant that the Frenchman had lost her in the dark.

“Davidson, relieved, but still very anxious, turned towards the river-side. He had not made two steps in that direction when another shriek burst out behind him, again close to the house.

“He thinks that the Frenchman had lost sight of the poor woman right enough. Then came that period of silence. But the horrible ruffian had not given up his murderous purpose. He reasoned that she would try to steal back to her child, and went to lie in wait for her near the house.

“It must have been something like that. As she entered the light falling about the house-ladder, he had rushed at her too soon, impatient for vengeance. She had let out that second scream of mortal fear when she caught sight of him, and turned to run for life again.

“This time she was making for the river, but not in a straight line. Her shrieks circled about Davidson. He turned on his heels, following the horrible trail of sound in the darkness. He wanted to shout ‘This way, Anne! I am here!’ but he couldn’t. At the horror of this chase, more ghastly in his imagination than if he could have seen it, the perspiration broke out on his forehead, while his throat was as dry as tinder. A last supreme scream was cut short suddenly.

“The silence which ensued was even more dreadful. Davidson felt sick. He tore his feet from the spot and walked straight before him, gripping the revolver and peering into the obscurity fearfully. Suddenly a bulky shape sprang from the ground within a few yards of him and bounded away. Instinctively he fired at it, started to run in pursuit, and stumbled against something soft which threw him down headlong.

“Even as he pitched forward on his head he knew it could be nothing else but Laughing Anne’s body. He picked himself up and, remaining on his knees, tried to lift her in his arms. He felt her so limp that he gave it up. She was lying on her face, her long hair scattered on the ground. Some of it was wet. Davidson, feeling about her head, came to a place where the

crushed bone gave way under his fingers. But even before that discovery he knew that she was dead. The pursuing Frenchman had flung her down with a kick from behind, and, squatting on her back, was battering in her skull with the weight she herself had fastened to his stump, when the totally unexpected Davidson loomed up in the night and scared him away.

“Davidson, kneeling by the side of that woman done so miserably to death, was overcome by remorse. She had died for him. His manhood was as if stunned. For the first time he felt afraid. He might have been pounced upon in the dark at any moment by the murderer of Laughing Anne. He confesses to the impulse of creeping away from that pitiful corpse on his hands and knees to the refuge of the ship. He even says that he actually began to do so. . .

“One can hardly picture to oneself Davidson crawling away on all fours from the murdered woman — Davidson unmanned and crushed by the idea that she had died for him in a sense. But he could not have gone very far. What stopped him was the thought of the boy, Laughing Anne’s child, that (Davidson remembered her very words) would not have a dog’s chance.

“This life the woman had left behind her appeared to Davidson’s conscience in the light of a sacred trust. He assumed an erect attitude and, quaking inwardly still, turned about and walked towards the house.

“For all his tremors he was very determined; but that smashed skull had affected his imagination, and he felt very defenceless in the darkness, in which he seemed to hear faintly now here, now there, the prowling footsteps of the murderer without hands. But he never faltered in his purpose. He got away with the boy safely after all. The house he found empty. A profound silence encompassed him all the time, except once, just as he got down the ladder with Tony in his arms, when a faint groan reached his ears. It seemed to come from the pitch-black space between the posts on which the house was built, but he did not stop to investigate.

“It’s no use telling you in detail how Davidson got on board with the burden Anne’s miserably cruel fate had thrust into his arms; how next morning his scared crew, after observing from a distance the state of affairs on board, rejoined with alacrity; how Davidson went ashore and, aided by his engineer (still half dead with fright), rolled up Laughing Anne’s body in a cotton sheet and brought it on board for burial at sea later. While busy with this pious task, Davidson, glancing about, perceived a huge heap of white clothes huddled up against the corner-post of the house. That it was

the Frenchman lying there he could not doubt. Taking it in connection with the dismal groan he had heard in the night, Davidson is pretty sure that his random shot gave a mortal hurt to the murderer of poor Anne.

“As to the others, Davidson never set eyes on a single one of them. Whether they had concealed themselves in the scared settlement, or bolted into the forest, or were hiding on board Niclaus’s prau, which could be seen lying on the mud a hundred yards or so higher up the creek, the fact is that they vanished; and Davidson did not trouble his head about them. He lost no time in getting out of the creek directly the Sissie floated. After steaming some twenty miles clear of the coast, he (in his own words) ‘committed the body to the deep.’ He did everything himself. He weighted her down with a few fire-bars, he read the service, he lifted the plank, he was the only mourner. And while he was rendering these last services to the dead, the desolation of that life and the atrocious wretchedness of its end cried aloud to his compassion, whispered to him in tones of self-reproach.

“He ought to have handled the warning she had given him in another way. He was convinced now that a simple display of watchfulness would have been enough to restrain that vile and cowardly crew. But the fact was that he had not quite believed that anything would be attempted.

“The body of Laughing Anne having been ‘committed to the deep’ some twenty miles S.S.W. from Cape Selatan, the task before Davidson was to commit Laughing Anne’s child to the care of his wife. And there poor, good Davidson made a fatal move. He didn’t want to tell her the whole awful story, since it involved the knowledge of the danger from which he, Davidson, had escaped. And this, too, after he had been laughing at her unreasonable fears only a short time before.

“‘I thought that if I told her everything,’ Davidson explained to me, ‘she would never have a moment’s peace while I was away on my trips.’

“He simply stated that the boy was an orphan, the child of some people to whom he, Davidson, was under the greatest obligation, and that he felt morally bound to look after him. Some day he would tell her more, he said, and meantime he trusted in the goodness and warmth of her heart, in her woman’s natural compassion.

“He did not know that her heart was about the size of a parched pea, and had the proportional amount of warmth; and that her faculty of compassion was mainly directed to herself. He was only startled and disappointed at the



air of cold surprise and the suspicious look with which she received his imperfect tale. But she did not say much. She never had much to say. She was a fool of the silent, hopeless kind.

“What story Davidson’s crew thought fit to set afloat in Malay town is neither here nor there. Davidson himself took some of his friends into his confidence, besides giving the full story officially to the Harbour Master.

“The Harbour Master was considerably astonished. He didn’t think, however, that a formal complaint should be made to the Dutch Government. They would probably do nothing in the end, after a lot of trouble and correspondence. The robbery had not come off, after all. Those vagabonds could be trusted to go to the devil in their own way. No amount of fuss would bring the poor woman to life again, and the actual murderer had been done justice to by a chance shot from Davidson. Better let the matter drop.

“This was good common sense. But he was impressed.

“‘Sounds a terrible affair, Captain Davidson.’

“‘Aye, terrible enough,’ agreed the remorseful Davidson. But the most terrible thing for him, though he didn’t know it yet then, was that his wife’s silly brain was slowly coming to the conclusion that Tony was Davidson’s child, and that he had invented that lame story to introduce him into her pure home in defiance of decency, of virtue — of her most sacred feelings.

“Davidson was aware of some constraint in his domestic relations. But at the best of times she was not demonstrative; and perhaps that very coldness was part of her charm in the placid Davidson’s eyes. Women are loved for all sorts of reasons and even for characteristics which one would think repellent. She was watching him and nursing her suspicions.

“Then, one day, Monkey-faced Ritchie called on that sweet, shy Mrs. Davidson. She had come out under his care, and he considered himself a privileged person — her oldest friend in the tropics. He posed for a great admirer of hers. He was always a great chatterer. He had got hold of the story rather vaguely, and he started chattering on that subject, thinking she knew all about it. And in due course he let out something about Laughing Anne.

“‘Laughing Anne,’ says Mrs. Davidson with a start. ‘What’s that?’

“Ritchie plunged into circumlocution at once, but she very soon stopped him. ‘Is that creature dead?’ she asks.

“‘I believe so,’ stammered Ritchie. ‘Your husband says so.’

“‘But you don’t know for certain?’

“‘No! How could I, Mrs. Davidson!’

“‘That’s all wanted to know,’ says she, and goes out of the room.

“When Davidson came home she was ready to go for him, not with common voluble indignation, but as if trickling a stream of cold clear water down his back. She talked of his base intrigue with a vile woman, of being made a fool of, of the insult to her dignity.

“Davidson begged her to listen to him and told her all the story, thinking that it would move a heart of stone. He tried to make her understand his remorse. She heard him to the end, said ‘Indeed!’ and turned her back on him.

“‘Don’t you believe me?’ he asked, appalled.

“She didn’t say yes or no. All she said was, ‘Send that brat away at once.’

“‘I can’t throw him out into the street,’ cried Davidson. ‘You don’t mean it.’

“‘I don’t care. There are charitable institutions for such children, I suppose.’

“‘That I will never do,’ said Davidson.

“‘Very well. That’s enough for me.’

“Davidson’s home after this was like a silent, frozen hell for him. A stupid woman with a sense of grievance is worse than an unchained devil. He sent the boy to the White Fathers in Malacca. This was not a very expensive sort of education, but she could not forgive him for not casting the offensive child away utterly. She worked up her sense of her wifely wrongs and of her injured purity to such a pitch that one day, when poor Davidson was pleading with her to be reasonable and not to make an impossible existence for them both, she turned on him in a chill passion and told him that his very sight was odious to her.

“Davidson, with his scrupulous delicacy of feeling, was not the man to assert his rights over a woman who could not bear the sight of him. He bowed his head; and shortly afterwards arranged for her to go back to her parents. That was exactly what she wanted in her outraged dignity. And then she had always disliked the tropics and had detested secretly the people she had to live amongst as Davidson’s wife. She took her pure, sensitive, mean little soul away to Fremantle or somewhere in that direction. And of course the little girl went away with her too. What could

poor Davidson have done with a little girl on his hands, even if she had consented to leave her with him — which is unthinkable.

“This is the story that has spoiled Davidson’s smile for him — which perhaps it wouldn’t have done so thoroughly had he been less of a good fellow.”

Hollis ceased. But before we rose from the table I asked him if he knew what had become of Laughing Anne’s boy.

He counted carefully the change handed him by the Chinaman waiter, and raised his head.

“Oh! that’s the finishing touch. He was a bright, taking little chap, as you know, and the Fathers took very special pains in his bringing up. Davidson expected in his heart to have some comfort out of him. In his placid way he’s a man who needs affection. Well, Tony has grown into a fine youth — but there you are! He wants to be a priest; his one dream is to be a missionary. The Fathers assure Davidson that it is a serious vocation. They tell him he has a special disposition for mission work, too. So Laughing Anne’s boy will lead a saintly life in China somewhere; he may even become a martyr; but poor Davidson is left out in the cold. He will have to go downhill without a single human affection near him because of these old dollars.”

## ***THE WARRIOR'S SOUL***



The old officer with long white moustaches gave rein to his indignation.

“Is it possible that you youngsters should have no more sense than that! Some of you had better wipe the milk off your upper lip before you start to pass judgment on the few poor stragglers of a generation which has done and suffered not a little in its time.”

His hearers having expressed much compunction the ancient warrior became appeased. But he was not silenced.

“I am one of them — one of the stragglers, I mean,” he went on patiently. “And what did we do? What have we achieved? He — the great Napoleon — started upon us to emulate the Macedonian Alexander, with a ruck of nations at his back. We opposed empty spaces to French impetuosity, then we offered them an interminable battle so that their army went at last to sleep in its positions lying down on the heaps of its own dead. Then came the wall of fire in Moscow. It toppled down on them.

“Then began the long rout of the Grand Army. I have seen it stream on, like the doomed flight of haggard, spectral sinners across the innermost frozen circle of Dante’s Inferno, ever widening before their despairing eyes.

“They who escaped must have had their souls doubly riveted inside their bodies to carry them out of Russia through that frost fit to split rocks. But to say that it was our fault that a single one of them got away is mere ignorance. Why! Our own men suffered nearly to the limit of their strength. Their Russian strength!

“Of course our spirit was not broken; and then our cause was good — it was holy. But that did not temper the wind much to men and horses.

“The flesh is weak. Good or evil purpose, Humanity has to pay the price. Why! In that very fight for that little village of which I have been telling you we were fighting for the shelter of those old houses as much as victory. And with the French it was the same.

“It wasn’t for the sake of glory, or for the sake of strategy. The French knew that they would have to retreat before morning and we knew perfectly well that they would go. As far as the war was concerned there was nothing to fight about. Yet our infantry and theirs fought like wild cats, or like heroes if you like that better, amongst the houses — hot work enough — -

while the supports out in the open stood freezing in a tempestuous north wind which drove the snow on earth and the great masses of clouds in the sky at a terrific pace. The very air was inexpressibly sombre by contrast with the white earth. I have never seen God's creation look more sinister than on that day.

"We, the cavalry (we were only a handful), had not much to do except turn our backs to the wind and receive some stray French round shot. This, I may tell you, was the last of the French guns and it was the last time they had their artillery in position. Those guns never went away from there either. We found them abandoned next morning. But that afternoon they were keeping up an infernal fire on our attacking column; the furious wind carried away the smoke and even the noise but we could see the constant flicker of the tongues of fire along the French front. Then a driving flurry of snow would hide everything except the dark red flashes in the white swirl.

"At intervals when the line cleared we could see away across the plain to the right a sombre column moving endlessly; the great rout of the Grand Army creeping on and on all the time while the fight on our left went on with a great din and fury. The cruel whirlwind of snow swept over that scene of death and desolation. And then the wind fell as suddenly as it had arisen in the morning.

"Presently we got orders to charge the retreating column; I don't know why unless they wanted to prevent us from getting frozen in our saddles by giving us something to do. We changed front half right and got into motion at a walk to take that distant dark line in flank. It might have been half-past two in the afternoon.

"You must know that so far in this campaign my regiment had never been on the main line of Napoleon's advance. All these months since the invasion the army we belonged to had been wrestling with Oudinot in the north. We had only come down lately, driving him before us to the Beresina.

"This was the first occasion, then, that I and my comrades had a close view of Napoleon's Grand Army. It was an amazing and terrible sight. I had heard of it from others; I had seen the stragglers from it: small bands of marauders, parties of prisoners in the distance. But this was the very column itself! A crawling, stumbling, starved, half-demented mob. It issued from the forest a mile away and its head was lost in the murk of the fields. We rode into it at a trot, which was the most we could get out of our horses,

and we stuck in that human mass as if in a moving bog. There was no resistance. I heard a few shots, half a dozen perhaps. Their very senses seemed frozen within them. I had time for a good look while riding at the head of my squadron. Well, I assure you, there were men walking on the outer edge so lost to everything but their misery that they never turned their heads to look at our charge. Soldiers!

“My horse pushed over one of them with his chest. The poor wretch had a dragoon’s blue cloak, all torn and scorched, hanging from his shoulders and he didn’t even put his hand out to snatch at my bridle and save himself. He just went down. Our troopers were pointing and slashing; well, and of course at first I myself... What would you have! An enemy’s an enemy. Yet a sort of sickening awe crept into my heart. There was no tumult — only a low deep murmur dwelt over them interspersed with louder cries and groans while that mob kept on pushing and surging past us, sightless and without feeling. A smell of scorched rags and festering wounds hung in the air. My horse staggered in the eddies of swaying men. But it was like cutting down galvanized corpses that didn’t care. Invaders! Yes... God was already dealing with them.

“I touched my horse with the spurs to get clear. There was a sudden rush and a sort of angry moan when our second squadron got into them on our right. My horse plunged and somebody got hold of my leg. As I had no mind to get pulled out of the saddle I gave a back-handed slash without looking. I heard a cry and my leg was let go suddenly.

“Just then I caught sight of the subaltern of my troop at some little distance from me. His name was Tomassov. That multitude of resurrected bodies with glassy eyes was seething round his horse as if blind, growling crazily. He was sitting erect in his saddle, not looking down at them and sheathing his sword deliberately.

“This Tomassov, well, he had a beard. Of course we all had beards then. Circumstances, lack of leisure, want of razors, too. No, seriously, we were a wild-looking lot in those unforgotten days which so many, so very many of us did not survive. You know our losses were awful, too. Yes, we looked wild. *Des Russes sauvages* — what!

“So he had a beard — this Tomassov I mean; but he did not look *sauvage*. He was the youngest of us all. And that meant real youth. At a distance he passed muster fairly well, what with the grime and the particular stamp of that campaign on our faces. But directly you were near enough to

have a good look into his eyes, that was where his lack of age showed, though he was not exactly a boy.

“Those same eyes were blue, something like the blue of autumn skies, dreamy and gay, too — innocent, believing eyes. A topknot of fair hair decorated his brow like a gold diadem in what one would call normal times.

“You may think I am talking of him as if he were the hero of a novel. Why, that’s nothing to what the adjutant discovered about him. He discovered that he had a ‘lover’s lips’ — whatever that may be. If the adjutant meant a nice mouth, why, it was nice enough, but of course it was intended for a sneer. That adjutant of ours was not a very delicate fellow. ‘Look at those lover’s lips,’ he would exclaim in a loud tone while Tomassov was talking.

“Tomassov didn’t quite like that sort of thing. But to a certain extent he had laid himself open to banter by the lasting character of his impressions which were connected with the passion of love and, perhaps, were not of such a rare kind as he seemed to think them. What made his comrades tolerant of his rhapsodies was the fact that they were connected with France, with Paris!

“You of the present generation, you cannot conceive how much prestige there was then in those names for the whole world. Paris was the centre of wonder for all human beings gifted with imagination. There we were, the majority of us young and well connected, but not long out of our hereditary nests in the provinces; simple servants of God; mere rustics, if I may say so. So we were only too ready to listen to the tales of France from our comrade Tomassov. He had been attached to our mission in Paris the year before the war. High protections very likely — or maybe sheer luck.

“I don’t think he could have been a very useful member of the mission because of his youth and complete inexperience. And apparently all his time in Paris was his own. The use he made of it was to fall in love, to remain in that state, to cultivate it, to exist only for it in a manner of speaking.

“Thus it was something more than a mere memory that he had brought with him from France. Memory is a fugitive thing. It can be falsified, it can be effaced, it can be even doubted. Why! I myself come to doubt sometimes that I, too, have been in Paris in my turn. And the long road there with battles for its stages would appear still more incredible if it were not for a certain musket ball which I have been carrying about my person ever since

a little cavalry affair which happened in Silesia at the very beginning of the Leipsic campaign.

“Passages of love, however, are more impressive perhaps than passages of danger. You don’t go affronting love in troops as it were. They are rarer, more personal and more intimate. And remember that with Tomassov all that was very fresh yet. He had not been home from France three months when the war began.

“His heart, his mind were full of that experience. He was really awed by it, and he was simple enough to let it appear in his speeches. He considered himself a sort of privileged person, not because a woman had looked at him with favour, but simply because, how shall I say it, he had had the wonderful illumination of his worship for her, as if it were heaven itself that had done this for him.

“Oh yes, he was very simple. A nice youngster, yet no fool; and with that, utterly inexperienced, unsuspicious, and unthinking. You will find one like that here and there in the provinces. He had some poetry in him too. It could only be natural, something quite his own, not acquired. I suppose Father Adam had some poetry in him of that natural sort. For the rest un Russe sauvage as the French sometimes call us, but not of that kind which, they maintain, eats tallow candle for a delicacy. As to the woman, the French woman, well, though I have also been in France with a hundred thousand Russians, I have never seen her. Very likely she was not in Paris then. And in any case hers were not the doors that would fly open before simple fellows of my sort, you understand. Gilded salons were never in my way. I could not tell you how she looked, which is strange considering that I was, if I may say so, Tomassov’s special confidant.

“He very soon got shy of talking before the others. I suppose the usual camp-fire comments jarred his fine feelings. But I was left to him and truly I had to submit. You can’t very well expect a youngster in Tomassov’s state to hold his tongue altogether; and I — I suppose you will hardly believe me — I am by nature a rather silent sort of person.

“Very likely my silence appeared to him sympathetic. All the month of September our regiment, quartered in villages, had come in for an easy time. It was then that I heard most of that — you can’t call it a story. The story I have in my mind is not in that. Outpourings, let us call them.

“I would sit quite content to hold my peace, a whole hour perhaps, while Tomassov talked with exaltation. And when he was done I would still hold



my peace. And then there would be produced a solemn effect of silence which, I imagine, pleased Tomassov in a way.

“She was of course not a woman in her first youth. A widow, maybe. At any rate I never heard Tomassov mention her husband. She had a salon, something very distinguished; a social centre in which she queened it with great splendour.

“Somehow, I fancy her court was composed mostly of men. But Tomassov, I must say, kept such details out of his discourses wonderfully well. Upon my word I don’t know whether her hair was dark or fair, her eyes brown or blue; what was her stature, her features, or her complexion. His love soared above mere physical impressions. He never described her to me in set terms; but he was ready to swear that in her presence everybody’s thoughts and feelings were bound to circle round her. She was that sort of woman. Most wonderful conversations on all sorts of subjects went on in her salon: but through them all there flowed unheard like a mysterious strain of music the assertion, the power, the tyranny of sheer beauty. So apparently the woman was beautiful. She detached all these talking people from their life interests, and even from their vanities. She was a secret delight and a secret trouble. All the men when they looked at her fell to brooding as if struck by the thought that their lives had been wasted. She was the very joy and shudder of felicity and she brought only sadness and torment to the hearts of men.

“In short, she must have been an extraordinary woman, or else Tomassov was an extraordinary young fellow to feel in that way and to talk like this about her. I told you the fellow had a lot of poetry in him and observed that all this sounded true enough. It would be just about the sorcery a woman very much out of the common would exercise, you know. Poets do get close to truth somehow — there is no denying that.

“There is no poetry in my composition, I know, but I have my share of common shrewdness, and I have no doubt that the lady was kind to the youngster, once he did find his way inside her salon. His getting in is the real marvel. However, he did get in, the innocent, and he found himself in distinguished company there, amongst men of considerable position. And you know, what that means: thick waists, bald heads, teeth that are not — as some satirist puts it. Imagine amongst them a nice boy, fresh and simple, like an apple just off the tree; a modest, good-looking, impressionable, adoring young barbarian. My word! What a change! What a relief for jaded

feelings! And with that, having, in his nature that, dose; of poetry which saves even a simpleton from being a fool.

“He became an artlessly, unconditionally devoted slave. He was rewarded by being smiled on and in time admitted to the intimacy of the house. It may be that the unsophisticated young barbarian amused the exquisite lady. Perhaps — since he didn’t feed on tallow candles — he satisfied some need of tenderness in the woman. You know, there are many kinds of tenderness highly civilized women are capable of. Women with heads and imagination, I mean, and no temperament to speak of, you understand. But who is going to fathom their needs or their fancies? Most of the time they themselves don’t know much about their innermost moods, and blunder out of one into another, sometimes with catastrophic results. And then who is more surprised than they? However, Tomassov’s case was in its nature quite idyllic. The fashionable world was amused. His devotion made for him a kind of social success. But he didn’t care. There was his one divinity, and there was the shrine where he was permitted to go in and out without regard for official reception hours.

“He took advantage of that privilege freely. Well, he had no official duties, you know. The Military Mission was supposed to be more complimentary than anything else, the head of it being a personal friend of our Emperor Alexander; and he, too, was laying himself out for successes in fashionable life exclusively — as it seemed. As it seemed.

“One afternoon Tomassov called on the mistress of his thoughts earlier than usual. She was not alone. There was a man with her, not one of the thick-waisted, bald-headed personages, but a somebody all the same, a man over thirty, a French officer who to some extent was also a privileged intimate. Tomassov was not jealous of him. Such a sentiment would have appeared presumptuous to the simple fellow.

“On the contrary he admired that officer. You have no idea of the French military men’s prestige in those days, even with us Russian soldiers who had managed to face them perhaps better than the rest. Victory had marked them on the forehead — it seemed for ever. They would have been more than human if they had not been conscious of it; but they were good comrades and had a sort of brotherly feeling for all who bore arms, even if it was against them.

“And this was quite a superior example, an officer of the major-general’s staff, and a man of the best society besides. He was powerfully built, and

thoroughly masculine, though he was as carefully groomed as a woman. He had the courteous self-possession of a man of the world. His forehead, white as alabaster, contrasted impressively with the healthy colour of his face.

“I don’t know whether he was jealous of Tomassov, but I suspect that he might have been a little annoyed at him as at a sort of walking absurdity of the sentimental order. But these men of the world are impenetrable, and outwardly he condescended to recognize Tomassov’s existence even more distinctly than was strictly necessary. Once or twice he had offered him some useful worldly advice with perfect tact and delicacy. Tomassov was completely conquered by that evidence of kindness under the cold polish of the best society.

“Tomassov, introduced into the petit salon, found these two exquisite people sitting on a sofa together and had the feeling of having interrupted some special conversation. They looked at him strangely, he thought; but he was not given to understand that he had intruded. After a time the lady said to the officer — his name was De Castel — ‘I wish you would take the trouble to ascertain the exact truth as to that rumour.’

“‘It’s much more than a mere rumour,’ remarked the officer. But he got up submissively and went out. The lady turned to Tomassov and said: ‘You may stay With me.’

“This express command made him supremely happy, though as a matter of fact he had had no idea of going.

“She regarded him with her kindly glances, which made something glow and expand within his chest. It was a delicious feeling, even though it did cut one’s breath short now and then. Ecstatically he drank in the sound of her tranquil, seductive talk full of innocent gaiety and of spiritual quietude. His passion appeared to him to flame up and envelop her in blue fiery tongues from head to foot and over her head, while her soul reposed in the centre like a big white rose....

“H’m, good this. He told me many other things like that. But this is the one I remember. He himself remembered everything because these were the last memories of that woman. He was seeing her for the last time though he did not know it then.

“M. De Castel returned, breaking into that atmosphere of enchantment Tomassov had been drinking in even to complete unconsciousness of the external world. Tomassov could not help being struck by the distinction of

his movements, the ease of his manner, his superiority to all the other men he knew, and he suffered from it. It occurred to him that these two brilliant beings on the sofa were made for each other.

“De Castel sitting down by the side of the lady murmured to her discreetly, ‘There is not the slightest doubt that it’s true,’ and they both turned their eyes to Tomassov. Roused thoroughly from his enchantment he became self-conscious; a feeling of shyness came over him. He sat smiling faintly at them.

“The lady without taking her eyes off the blushing Tomassov said with a dreamy gravity quite unusual to her:

“‘I should like to know that your generosity can be supreme — without a flaw. Love at its highest should be the origin of every perfection.’

“Tomassov opened his eyes wide with admiration at this, as though her lips had been dropping real pearls. The sentiment, however, was not uttered for the primitive Russian youth but for the exquisitely accomplished man of the world, De Castel.

“Tomassov could not see the effect it produced because the French officer lowered his head and sat there contemplating his admirably polished boots. The lady whispered in a sympathetic tone:

“‘You have scruples?’

“De Castel, without looking up, murmured: ‘It could be turned into a nice point of honour.’

“She said vivaciously: ‘That surely is artificial. I am all for natural feelings. I believe in nothing else. But perhaps your conscience...’

“He interrupted her: ‘Not at all. My conscience is not childish. The fate of those people is of no military importance to us. What can it matter? The fortune of France is invincible.’

“‘Well then...’ she uttered, meaningly, and rose from the couch. The French officer stood up, too. Tomassov hastened to follow their example. He was pained by his state of utter mental darkness. While he was raising the lady’s white hand to his lips he heard the French officer say with marked emphasis:

“‘If he has the soul of a warrior (at that time, you know, people really talked in that way), if he has the soul of a warrior he ought to fall at your feet in gratitude.’

“Tomassov felt himself plunged into even denser darkness than before. He followed the French officer out of the room and out of the house; for he

had a notion that this was expected of him.

“It was getting dusk, the weather was very bad, and the street was quite deserted. The Frenchman lingered in it strangely. And Tomassov lingered, too, without impatience. He was never in a hurry to get away from the house in which she lived. And besides, something wonderful had happened to him. The hand he had reverently raised by the tips of its fingers had been pressed against his lips. He had received a secret favour! He was almost frightened. The world had reeled — and it had hardly steadied itself yet. De Castel stopped short at the corner of the quiet street.

“‘I don’t care to be seen too much with you in the lighted thoroughfares, M. Tomassov,’ he said in a strangely grim tone.

“‘Why?’ asked the young man, too startled to be offended.

“‘From prudence,’ answered the other curtly. ‘So we will have to part here; but before we part I’ll disclose to you something of which you will see at once the importance.’

“This, please note, was an evening in late March of the year 1812. For a long time already there had been talk of a growing coolness between Russia and France. The word war was being whispered in drawing rooms louder and louder, and at last was heard in official circles. Thereupon the Parisian police discovered that our military envoy had corrupted some clerks at the Ministry of War and had obtained from them some very important confidential documents. The wretched men (there were two of them) had confessed their crime and were to be shot that night. To-morrow all the town would be talking of the affair. But the worst was that the Emperor Napoleon was furiously angry at the discovery, and had made up his mind to have the Russian envoy arrested.

“Such was De Castel’s disclosure; and though he had spoken in low tones Tomassov was stunned as by a great crash.

“‘Arrested,’ he murmured, desolately.

“‘Yes, and kept as a state prisoner — with everybody belonging to him....’

“The French officer seized Tomassov’s arm above the elbow and pressed it hard.

“‘And kept in France,’ he repeated into Tomassov’s very ear, and then letting him go stepped back a space and remained silent.

“‘And it’s you, you, who are telling me this!’ cried Tomassov in an extremity of gratitude that was hardly greater than his admiration for the

generosity of his future foe. Could a brother have done for him more! He sought to seize the hand of the French officer, but the latter remained wrapped up closely in his cloak. Possibly in the dark he had not noticed the attempt. He moved back a bit and in his self-possessed voice of a man of the world, as though he were speaking across a card table or something of the sort, he called Tomassov's attention to the fact that if he meant to make use of the warning the moments were precious.

“‘Indeed they are,’ agreed the awed Tomassov. ‘Good-bye then. I have no word of thanks to equal your generosity; but if ever I have an opportunity, I swear it, you may command my life....’

“But the Frenchman retreated, had already vanished in the dark lonely street. Tomassov was alone, and then he did not waste any of the precious minutes of that night.

“See how people's mere gossip and idle talk pass into history. In all the memoirs of the time if you read them you will find it stated that our envoy had a warning from some highly placed woman who was in love with him. Of course it's known that he had successes with women, and in the highest spheres, too, but the truth is that the person who warned him was no other than our simple Tomassov — an altogether different sort of lover from himself.

“This then is the secret of our Emperor's representative's escape from arrest. He and all his official household got out of France all right — as history records.

“And amongst that household there was our Tomassov of course. He had, in the words of the French officer, the soul of a warrior. And what more desolate prospect for a man with such a soul than to be imprisoned on the eve of war; to be cut off from his country in danger, from his military family, from his duty, from honour, and — well — from glory, too.

“Tomassov used to shudder at the mere thought of the moral torture he had escaped; and he nursed in his heart a boundless gratitude to the two people who had saved him from that cruel ordeal. They were wonderful! For him love and friendship were but two aspects of exalted perfection. He had found these fine examples of it and he vowed them indeed a sort of cult. It affected his attitude towards Frenchmen in general, great patriot as he was. He was naturally indignant at the invasion of his country, but this indignation had no personal animosity in it. His was fundamentally a fine nature. He grieved at the appalling amount of human suffering he saw

around him. Yes, he was full of compassion for all forms of mankind's misery in a manly way.

"Less fine natures than his own did not understand this very well. In the regiment they had nicknamed him the Humane Tomassov.

"He didn't take offence at it. There is nothing incompatible between humanity and a warrior's soul. People without compassion are the civilians, government officials, merchants and such like. As to the ferocious talk one hears from a lot of decent people in war time — well, the tongue is an unruly member at best and when there is some excitement going on there is no curbing its furious activity.

"So I had not been very surprised to see our Tomassov sheathe deliberately his sword right in the middle of that charge, you may say. As we rode away after it he was very silent. He was not a chatterer as a rule, but it was evident that this close view of the Grand Army had affected him deeply, like some sight not of this earth. I had always been a pretty tough individual myself — well, even I... and there was that fellow with a lot of poetry in his nature! You may imagine what he made of it to himself. We rode side by side without opening our lips. It was simply beyond words.

"We established our bivouac along the edge of the forest so as to get some shelter for our horses. However, the boisterous north wind had dropped as quickly as it had sprung up, and the great winter stillness lay on the land from the Baltic to the Black Sea. One could almost feel its cold, lifeless immensity reaching up to the stars.

"Our men had lighted several fires for their officers and had cleared the snow around them. We had big logs of wood for seats; it was a very tolerable bivouac upon the whole, even without the exultation of victory. We were to feel that later, but at present we were oppressed by our stern and arduous task.

"There were three of us round my fire. The third one was that adjutant. He was perhaps a well-meaning chap but not so nice as he might have been had he been less rough in manner and less crude in his perceptions. He would reason about people's conduct as though a man were as simple a figure as, say, two sticks laid across each other; whereas a man is much more like the sea whose movements are too complicated to explain, and whose depths may bring up God only knows what at any moment.

"We talked a little about that charge. Not much. That sort of thing does not lend itself to conversation. Tomassov muttered a few words about a

mere butchery. I had nothing to say. As I told you I had very soon let my sword hang idle at my wrist. That starving mob had not even tried to defend itself. Just a few shots. We had two men wounded. Two!... and we had charged the main column of Napoleon's Grand Army.

"Tomassov muttered wearily: 'What was the good of it?' I did not wish to argue, so I only just mumbled: 'Ah, well!' But the adjutant struck in unpleasantly:

"'Why, it warmed the men a bit. It has made me warm. That's a good enough reason. But our Tomassov is so humane! And besides he has been in love with a French woman, and thick as thieves with a lot of Frenchmen, so he is sorry for them. Never mind, my boy, we are on the Paris road now and you shall soon see her!' This was one of his usual, as we believed them, foolish speeches. None of us but believed that the getting to Paris would be a matter of years — of years. And lo! less than eighteen months afterwards I was rooked of a lot of money in a gambling hell in the Palais Royal.

"Truth, being often the most senseless thing in the world, is sometimes revealed to fools. I don't think that adjutant of ours believed in his own words. He just wanted to tease Tomassov from habit. Purely from habit. We of course said nothing, and so he took his head in his hands and fell into a doze as he sat on a log in front of the fire.

"Our cavalry was on the extreme right wing of the army, and I must confess that we guarded it very badly. We had lost all sense of insecurity by this time; but still we did keep up a pretence of doing it in a way. Presently a trooper rode up leading a horse and Tomassov mounted stiffly and went off on a round of the outposts. Of the perfectly useless outposts.

"The night was still, except for the crackling of the fires. The raging wind had lifted far above the earth and not the faintest breath of it could be heard. Only the full moon swam out with a rush into the sky and suddenly hung high and motionless overhead. I remember raising my hairy face to it for a moment. Then, I verily believe, I dozed off, too, bent double on my log with my head towards the fierce blaze.

"You know what an impermanent thing such slumber is. One moment you drop into an abyss and the next you are back in the world that you would think too deep for any noise but the trumpet of the Last Judgment. And then off you go again. Your very soul seems to slip down into a bottomless black pit. Then up once more into a startled consciousness. A mere plaything of cruel sleep one is, then. Tormented both ways.



“However, when my orderly appeared before me, repeating: ‘Won’t your Honour be pleased to eat?... Won’t your Honour be pleased to eat?...’ I managed to keep my hold of it — I mean that gaping consciousness. He was offering me a sooty pot containing some grain boiled in water with a pinch of salt. A wooden spoon was stuck in it.

“At that time these were the only rations we were getting regularly. Mere chicken food, confound it! But the Russian soldier is wonderful. Well, my fellow waited till I had feasted and then went away carrying off the empty pot.

“I was no longer sleepy. Indeed, I had become awake with an exaggerated mental consciousness of existence extending beyond my immediate surroundings. Those are but exceptional moments with mankind, I am glad to say. I had the intimate sensation of the earth in all its enormous expanse wrapped in snow, with nothing showing on it but trees with their straight stalk-like trunks and their funeral verdure; and in this aspect of general mourning I seemed to hear the sighs of mankind falling to die in the midst of a nature without life. They were Frenchmen. We didn’t hate them; they did not hate us; we had existed far apart — and suddenly they had come rolling in with arms in their hands, without fear of God, carrying with them other nations, and all to perish together in a long, long trail of frozen corpses. I had an actual vision of that trail: a pathetic multitude of small dark mounds stretching away under the moonlight in a clear, still, and pitiless atmosphere — a sort of horrible peace.

“But what other peace could there be for them? What else did they deserve? I don’t know by what connection of emotions there came into my head the thought that the earth was a pagan planet and not a fit abode for Christian virtues.

“You may be surprised that I should remember all this so well. What is a passing emotion or half-formed thought to last in so many years of a man’s changing, inconsequential life? But what has fixed the emotion of that evening in my recollection so that the slightest shadows remain indelible was an event of strange finality, an event not likely to be forgotten in a lifetime — as you shall see.

“I don’t suppose I had been entertaining those thoughts more than five minutes when something induced me to look over my shoulder. I can’t think it was a noise; the snow deadened all the sounds. Something it must have been, some sort of signal reaching my consciousness. Anyway, I turned my

head, and there was the event approaching me, not that I knew it or had the slightest premonition. All I saw in the distance were two figures approaching in the moonlight. One of them was our Tomassov. The dark mass behind him which moved across my sight were the horses which his orderly was leading away. Tomassov was a very familiar appearance, in long boots, a tall figure ending in a pointed hood. But by his side advanced another figure. I mistrusted my eyes at first. It was amazing! It had a shining crested helmet on its head and was muffled up in a white cloak. The cloak was not as white as snow. Nothing in the world is. It was white more like mist, with an aspect that was ghostly and martial to an extraordinary degree. It was as if Tomassov had got hold of the God of War himself. I could see at once that he was leading this resplendent vision by the arm. Then I saw that he was holding it up. While I stared and stared, they crept on — for indeed they were creeping — and at last they crept into the light of our bivouac fire and passed beyond the log I was sitting on. The blaze played on the helmet. It was extremely battered and the frost-bitten face, full of sores, under it was framed in bits of mangy fur. No God of War this, but a French officer. The great white cuirassier's cloak was torn, burnt full of holes. His feet were wrapped up in old sheepskins over remnants of boots. They looked monstrous and he tottered on them, sustained by Tomassov who lowered him most carefully on to the log on which I sat.

“My amazement knew no bounds.

“‘You have brought in a prisoner,’ I said to Tomassov, as if I could not believe my eyes.

“‘You must understand that unless they surrendered in large bodies we made no prisoners. What would have been the good? Our Cossacks either killed the stragglers or else let them alone, just as it happened. It came really to the same thing in the end.

“Tomassov turned to me with a very troubled look.

“‘He sprang up from the ground somewhere as I was leaving the outpost,’ he said. ‘I believe he was making for it, for he walked blindly into my horse. He got hold of my leg and of course none of our chaps dared touch him then.’

“‘He had a narrow escape,’ I said.

“‘He didn’t appreciate it,’ said Tomassov, looking even more troubled than before. ‘He came along holding to my stirrup leather. That’s what made me so late. He told me he was a staff officer; and then talking in a

voice such, I suppose, as the damned alone use, a croaking of rage and pain, he said he had a favour to beg of me. A supreme favour. Did I understand him, he asked in a sort of fiendish whisper.

“Of course I told him that I did. I said: oui, je vous comprends.’

“Then,’ said he, ‘do it. Now! At once — in the pity of your heart.’

“Tomassov ceased and stared queerly at me above the head of the prisoner.

“I said, ‘What did he mean?’

“That’s what I asked him,’ answered Tomassov in a dazed tone, ‘and he said that he wanted me to do him the favour to blow his brains out. As a fellow soldier he said. ‘As a man of feeling — as — as a humane man.’

“The prisoner sat between us like an awful gashed mummy as to the face, a martial scarecrow, a grotesque horror of rags and dirt, with awful living eyes, full of vitality, full of unquenchable fire, in a body of horrible affliction, a skeleton at the feast of glory. And suddenly those shining unextinguishable eyes of his became fixed upon Tomassov. He, poor fellow, fascinated, returned the ghastly stare of a suffering soul in that mere husk of a man. The prisoner croaked at him in French.

“I recognize, you know. You are her Russian youngster. You were very grateful. I call on you to pay the debt. Pay it, I say, with one liberating shot. You are a man of honour. I have not even a broken sabre. All my being recoils from my own degradation. You know me.’

“Tomassov said nothing.

“Haven’t you got the soul of a warrior?’ the Frenchman asked in an angry whisper, but with something of a mocking intention in it.

“I don’t know,’ said poor Tomassov.

“What a look of contempt that scarecrow gave him out of his unquenchable eyes. He seemed to live only by the force of infuriated and impotent despair. Suddenly he gave a gasp and fell forward writhing in the agony of cramp in all his limbs; a not unusual effect of the heat of a camp-fire. It resembled the application of some horrible torture. But he tried to fight against the pain at first. He only moaned low while we bent over him so as to prevent him rolling into the fire, and muttered feverishly at intervals: ‘Tuez moi, tuez moi...’ till, vanquished by the pain, he screamed in agony, time after time, each cry bursting out through his compressed lips.

“The adjutant woke up on the other side of the fire and started swearing awfully at the beastly row that Frenchman was making.

“‘What’s this? More of your infernal humanity, Tomassov,’ he yelled at us. ‘Why don’t you have him thrown out of this to the devil on the snow?’

“As we paid no attention to his shouts, he got up, cursing shockingly, and went away to another fire. Presently the French officer became easier. We propped him up against the log and sat silent on each side of him till the bugles started their call at the first break of day. The big flame, kept up all through the night, paled on the livid sheet of snow, while the frozen air all round rang with the brazen notes of cavalry trumpets. The Frenchman’s eyes, fixed in a glassy stare, which for a moment made us hope that he had died quietly sitting there between us two, stirred slowly to right and left, looking at each of our faces in turn. Tomassov and I exchanged glances of dismay. Then De Castel’s voice, unexpected in its renewed strength and ghastly self-possession, made us shudder inwardly.

“‘Bonjour, Messieurs.’

“His chin dropped on his breast. Tomassov addressed me in Russian.

“‘It is he, the man himself...’ I nodded and Tomassov went on in a tone of anguish: ‘Yes, he! Brilliant, accomplished, envied by men, loved by that woman — this horror — this miserable thing that cannot die. Look at his eyes. It’s terrible.’

“I did not look, but I understood what Tomassov meant. We could do nothing for him. This avenging winter of fate held both the fugitives and the pursuers in its iron grip. Compassion was but a vain word before that unrelenting destiny. I tried to say something about a convoy being no doubt collected in the village — but I faltered at the mute glance Tomassov gave me. We knew what those convoys were like: appalling mobs of hopeless wretches driven on by the butts of Cossacks’ lances, back to the frozen inferno, with their faces set away from their homes.

“Our two squadrons had been formed along the edge of the forest. The minutes of anguish were passing. The Frenchman suddenly struggled to his feet. We helped him almost without knowing what we were doing.

“‘Come,’ he said, in measured tones. ‘This is the moment.’ He paused for a long time, then with the same distinctness went on: ‘On my word of honour, all faith is dead in me.’

“His voice lost suddenly its self-possession. After waiting a little while he added in a murmur: ‘And even my courage.... Upon my honour.’

“Another long pause ensued before, with a great effort, he whispered hoarsely: ‘Isn’t this enough to move a heart of stone? Am I to go on my

knees to you?’

“Again a deep silence fell upon the three of us. Then the French officer flung his last word of anger at Tomassov.

“‘Milkso!’

“Not a feature of the poor fellow moved. I made up my mind to go and fetch a couple of our troopers to lead that miserable prisoner away to the village. There was nothing else for it. I had not moved six paces towards the group of horses and orderlies in front of our squadron when... but you have guessed it. Of course. And I, too, I guessed it, for I give you my word that the report of Tomassov’s pistol was the most insignificant thing imaginable. The snow certainly does absorb sound. It was a mere feeble pop. Of the orderlies holding our horses I don’t think one turned his head round.

“Yes. Tomassov had done it. Destiny had led that De Castel to the man who could understand him perfectly. But it was poor Tomassov’s lot to be the predestined victim. You know what the world’s justice and mankind’s judgment are like. They fell heavily on him with a sort of inverted hypocrisy. Why! That brute of an adjutant, himself, was the first to set going horrified allusions to the shooting of a prisoner in cold blood! Tomassov was not dismissed from the service of course. But after the siege of Dantzic he asked for permission to resign from the army, and went away to bury himself in the depths of his province, where a vague story of some dark deed clung to him for years.

“Yes. He had done it. And what was it? One warrior’s soul paying its debt a hundredfold to another warrior’s soul by releasing it from a fate worse than death — the loss of all faith and courage. You may look on it in that way. I don’t know. And perhaps poor Tomassov did not know himself. But I was the first to approach that appalling dark group on the snow: the Frenchman extended rigidly on his back, Tomassov kneeling on one knee rather nearer to the feet than to the Frenchman’s head. He had taken his cap off and his hair shone like gold in the light drift of flakes that had begun to fall. He was stooping over the dead in a tenderly contemplative attitude. And his young, ingenuous face, with lowered eyelids, expressed no grief, no sternness, no horror — but was set in the repose of a profound, as if endless and endlessly silent, meditation.”

## THE TALE



Outside the large single window the crepuscular light was dying out slowly in a great square gleam without colour, framed rigidly in the gathering shades of the room.

It was a long room. The irresistible tide of the night ran into the most distant part of it, where the whispering of a man's voice, passionately interrupted and passionately renewed, seemed to plead against the answering murmurs of infinite sadness.

At last no answering murmur came. His movement when he rose slowly from his knees by the side of the deep, shadowy couch holding the shadowy suggestion of a reclining woman revealed him tall under the low ceiling, and sombre all over except for the crude discord of the white collar under the shape of his head and the faint, minute spark of a brass button here and there on his uniform.

He stood over her a moment, masculine and mysterious in his immobility, before he sat down on a chair near by. He could see only the faint oval of her upturned face and, extended on her black dress, her pale hands, a moment before abandoned to his kisses and now as if too weary to move.

He dared not make a sound, shrinking as a man would do from the prosaic necessities of existence. As usual, it was the woman who had the courage. Her voice was heard first — almost conventional while her being vibrated yet with conflicting emotions.

"Tell me something," she said.

The darkness hid his surprise and then his smile. Had he not just said to her everything worth saying in the world — and that not for the first time!

"What am I to tell you?" he asked, in a voice creditably steady. He was beginning to feel grateful to her for that something final in her tone which had eased the strain.

"Why not tell me a tale?"

"A tale!" He was really amazed.

"Yes. Why not?"

These words came with a slight petulance, the hint of a loved woman's capricious will, which is capricious only because it feels itself to to be a

law, embarrassing sometimes and always difficult to elude.

“Why not?” he repeated, with a slightly mocking accent, as though he had been asked to give her the moon. But now he was feeling a little angry with her for that feminine mobility that slips out of an emotion as easily as out of a splendid gown.

He heard her say, a little unsteadily with a sort of fluttering intonation which made him think suddenly of a butterfly’s flight:

“You used to tell — your — your simple and — and professional — tales very well at one time. Or well enough to interest me. You had a — a sort of art — in the days — the days before the war.”

“Really?” he said, with involuntary gloom. “But now, you see, the war is going on,” he continued in such a dead, equable tone that she felt a slight chill fall over her shoulders. And yet she persisted. For there’s nothing more unswerving in the world than a woman’s caprice.

“It could be a tale not of this world,” she explained.

“You want a tale of the other, the better world?” he asked, with a matter-of-fact surprise. “You must evoke for that task those who have already gone there.”

“No. I don’t mean that. I mean another — some other — world. In the universe — not in heaven.”

“I am relieved. But you forget that I have only five days’ leave.”

“Yes. And I’ve also taken a five days’ leave from — from my duties.”

“I like that word.”

“What word?”

“Duty.”

“It is horrible — sometimes.”

“Oh, that’s because you think it’s narrow. But it isn’t. It contains infinities, and — and so — — — ”

“What is this jargon?”

He disregarded the interjected scorn. “An infinity of absolution, for instance,” he continued. “But as to this another world’ — who’s going to look for it and for the tale that is in it?”

“You,” she said, with a strange, almost rough, sweetness of assertion.

He made a shadowy movement of assent in his chair, the irony of which not even the gathered darkness could render mysterious.

“As you will. In that world, then, there was once upon a time a Commanding Officer and a Northman. Put in the capitals, please, because

they had no other names. It was a world of seas and continents and islands  
— — — ”

“Like the earth,” she murmured, bitterly.

“Yes. What else could you expect from sending a man made of our common, tormented clay on a voyage of discovery? What else could he find? What else could you understand or care for, or feel the existence of even? There was comedy in it, and slaughter.”

“Always like the earth,” she murmured. “Always. And since I could find in the universe only what was deeply rooted in the fibres of my being there was love in it, too. But we won’t talk of that.”

“No. We won’t,” she said, in a neutral tone which concealed perfectly her relief — or her disappointment. Then after a pause she added: “It’s going to be a comic story.”

“Well — — — ” he paused, too. “Yes. In a way. In a very grim way. It will be human, and, as you know, comedy is but a matter of the visual angle. And it won’t be a noisy story. All the long guns in it will be dumb — as dumb as so many telescopes.”

“Ah, there are guns in it, then! And may I ask — where?”

“Afloat. You remember that the world of which we speak had its seas. A war was going on in it. It was a funny work! and terribly in earnest. Its war was being carried on over the land, over the water, under the water, up in the air, and even under the ground. And many young men in it, mostly in wardrooms and mess-rooms, used to say to each other — pardon the unparliamentary word — they used to say, ‘It’s a damned bad war, but it’s better than no war at all.’ Sounds flippant, doesn’t it.”

He heard a nervous, impatient sigh in the depths of the couch while he went on without a pause.

“And yet there is more in it than meets the eye. I mean more wisdom. Flippancy, like comedy, is but a matter of visual first impression. That world was not very wise. But there was in it a certain amount of common working sagacity. That, however, was mostly worked by the neutrals in diverse ways, public and private, which had to be watched; watched by acute minds and also by actual sharp eyes. They had to be very sharp indeed, too, I assure you.”

“I can imagine,” she murmured, appreciatively.

“What is there that you can’t imagine?” he pronounced, soberly. “You have the world in you. But let us go back to our commanding officer, who,



of course, commanded a ship of a sort. My tales if often professional (as you remarked just now) have never been technical. So I'll just tell you that the ship was of a very ornamental sort once, with lots of grace and elegance and luxury about her. Yes, once! She was like a pretty woman who had suddenly put on a suit of sackcloth and stuck revolvers in her belt. But she floated lightly, she moved nimbly, she was quite good enough."

"That was the opinion of the commanding officer?" said the voice from the couch.

"It was. He used to be sent out with her along certain coasts to see — what he could see. Just that. And sometimes he had some preliminary information to help him, and sometimes he had not. And it was all one, really. It was about as useful as information trying to convey the locality and intentions of a cloud, of a phantom taking shape here and there and impossible to seize, would have been.

"It was in the early days of the war. What at first used to amaze the commanding officer was the unchanged face of the waters, with its familiar expression, neither more friendly nor more hostile. On fine days the sun strikes sparks upon the blue; here and there a peaceful smudge of smoke hangs in the distance, and it is impossible to believe that the familiar clear horizon traces the limit of one great circular ambush.

"Yes, it is impossible to believe, till some day you see a ship not your own ship (that isn't so impressive), but some ship in company, blow up all of a sudden and plop under almost before you know what has happened to her. Then you begin to believe. Henceforth you go out for the work to see — what you can see, and you keep on at it with the conviction that some day you will die from something you have not seen. One envies the soldiers at the end of the day, wiping the sweat and blood from their faces, counting the dead fallen to their hands, looking at the devastated fields, the torn earth that seems to suffer and bleed with them. One does, really. The final brutality of it — the taste of primitive passion — the ferocious frankness of the blow struck with one's hand — the direct call and the straight response. Well, the sea gave you nothing of that, and seemed to pretend that there was nothing the matter with the world."

She interrupted, stirring a little.

"Oh, yes. Sincerity — frankness — passion — three words of your gospel. Don't I know them!"

“Think! Isn’t it ours — believed in common?” he asked, anxiously, yet without expecting an answer, and went on at once: “Such were the feelings of the commanding officer. When the night came trailing over the sea, hiding what looked like the hypocrisy of an old friend, it was a relief. The night blinds you frankly — and there are circumstances when the sunlight may grow as odious to one as falsehood itself. Night is all right.

“At night the commanding officer could let his thoughts get away — I won’t tell you where. Somewhere where there was no choice but between truth and death. But thick weather, though it blinded one, brought no such relief. Mist is deceitful, the dead luminosity of the fog is irritating. It seems that you ought to see.

“One gloomy, nasty day the ship was steaming along her beat in sight of a rocky, dangerous coast that stood out intensely black like an India-ink drawing on gray paper. Presently the second in command spoke to his chief. He thought he saw something on the water, to seaward. Small wreckage, perhaps.

“‘But there shouldn’t be any wreckage here, sir,’ he remarked.

“‘No,’ said the commanding officer. ‘The last reported submarined ships were sunk a long way to the westward. But one never knows. There may have been others since then not reported nor seen. Gone with all hands.’

“That was how it began. The ship’s course was altered to pass the object close; for it was necessary to have a good look at what one could see. Close, but without touching; for it was not advisable to come in contact with objects of any form whatever floating casually about. Close, but without stopping or even diminishing speed; for in those times it was not prudent to linger on any particular spot, even for a moment. I may tell you at once that the object was not dangerous in itself. No use in describing it. It may have been nothing more remarkable than, say, a barrel of a certain shape and colour. But it was significant.

“The smooth bow-wave hove it up as if for a closer inspection, and then the ship, brought again to her course, turned her back on it with indifference, while twenty pairs of eyes on her deck stared in all directions trying to see — what they could see.

“The commanding officer and his second in command discussed the object with understanding. It appeared to them to be not so much a proof of the sagacity as of the activity of certain neutrals. This activity had in many cases taken the form of replenishing the stores of certain submarines at sea.

This was generally believed, if not absolutely known. But the very nature of things in those early days pointed that way. The object, looked at closely and turned away from with apparent indifference, put it beyond doubt that something of the sort had been done somewhere in the neighbourhood.

“The object in itself was more than suspect. But the fact of its being left in evidence roused other suspicions. Was it the result of some deep and devilish purpose? As to that all speculation soon appeared to be a vain thing. Finally the two officers came to the conclusion that it was left there most likely by accident, complicated possibly by some unforeseen necessity; such, perhaps, as the sudden need to get away quickly from the spot, or something of that kind.

“Their discussion had been carried on in curt, weighty phrases, separated by long, thoughtful silences. And all the time their eyes roamed about the horizon in an everlasting, almost mechanical effort of vigilance. The younger man summed up grimly:

“‘Well, it’s evidence. That’s what this is. Evidence of what we were pretty certain of before. And plain, too.’

“‘And much good it will do to us,’ retorted the commanding officer. ‘The parties are miles away; the submarine, devil only knows where, ready to kill; and the noble neutral slipping away to the eastward, ready to lie!’

“The second in command laughed a little at the tone. But he guessed that the neutral wouldn’t even have to lie very much. Fellows like that, unless caught in the very act, felt themselves pretty safe. They could afford to chuckle. That fellow was probably chuckling to himself. It’s very possible he had been before at the game and didn’t care a rap for the bit of evidence left behind. It was a game in which practice made one bold and successful, too.

“And again he laughed faintly. But his commanding officer was in revolt against the murderous stealthiness of methods and the atrocious callousness of complicities that seemed to taint the very source of men’s deep emotions and noblest activities; to corrupt their imagination which builds up the final conceptions of life and death. He suffered — — — -”

The voice from the sofa interrupted the narrator.

“How well I can understand that in him!”

He bent forward slightly.

“Yes. I, too. Everything should be open in love and war. Open as the day, since both are the call of an ideal which it is so easy, so terribly easy, to

degrade in the name of Victory.”

He paused; then went on: I don’t know that the commanding officer delved so deep as that into his feelings. But he did suffer from them — a sort of disenchanted sadness. It is possible, even, that he suspected himself of folly. Man is various. But he had no time for much introspection, because from the southwest a wall of fog had advanced upon his ship. Great convolutions of vapours flew over, swirling about masts and funnel, which looked as if they were beginning to melt. Then they vanished.

“The ship was stopped, all sounds ceased, and the very fog became motionless, growing denser and as if solid in its amazing dumb immobility. The men at their stations lost sight of each other. Footsteps sounded stealthy; rare voices, impersonal and remote, died out without resonance. A blind white stillness took possession of the world.

“It looked, too, as if it would last for days. I don’t mean to say that the fog did not vary a little in its density. Now and then it would thin out mysteriously, revealing to the men a more or less ghostly presentment of their ship. Several times the shadow of the coast itself swam darkly before their eyes through the fluctuating opaque brightness of the great white cloud clinging to the water.

“Taking advantage of these moments, the ship had been moved cautiously nearer the shore. It was useless to remain out in such thick weather. Her officers knew every nook and cranny of the coast along their beat. They thought that she would be much better in a certain cove. It wasn’t a large place, just ample room for a ship to swing at her anchor. She would have an easier time of it till the fog lifted up.

“Slowly, with infinite caution and patience, they crept closer and closer, seeing no more of the cliffs than an evanescent dark loom with a narrow border of angry foam at its foot. At the moment of anchoring the fog was so thick that for all they could see they might have been a thousand miles out in the open sea. Yet the shelter of the land could be felt. There was a peculiar quality in the stillness of the air. Very faint, very elusive, the wash of the ripple against the encircling land reached their ears, with mysterious sudden pauses.

“The anchor dropped, the leads were laid in. The commanding officer went below into his cabin. But he had not been there very long when a voice outside his door requested his presence on deck. He thought to

himself: 'What is it now?' He felt some impatience at being called out again to face the wearisome fog.

"He found that it had thinned again a little and had taken on a gloomy hue from the dark cliffs which had no form, no outline, but asserted themselves as a curtain of shadows all round the ship, except in one bright spot, which was the entrance from the open sea. Several officers were looking that way from the bridge. The second in command met him with the breathlessly whispered information that there was another ship in the cove.

"She had been made out by several pairs of eyes only a couple of minutes before. She was lying at anchor very near the entrance — a mere vague blot on the fog's brightness. And the commanding officer by staring in the direction pointed out to him by eager hands ended by distinguishing it at last himself. Indubitably a vessel of some sort.

"'It's a wonder we didn't run slap into her when coming in,' observed the second in command.

"'Send a boat on board before she vanishes,' said the commanding officer. He surmised that this was a coaster. It could hardly be anything else. But another thought came into his head suddenly. 'It is a wonder,' he said to his second in command, who had rejoined him after sending the boat away.

"By that time both of them had been struck by the fact that the ship so suddenly discovered had not manifested her presence by ringing her bell.

"'We came in very quietly, that's true,' concluded the younger officer. 'But they must have heard our leadsmen at least. We couldn't have passed her more than fifty yards off. The closest shave! They may even have made us out, since they were aware of something coming in. And the strange thing is that we never heard a sound from her. The fellows on board must have been holding their breath.'

"'Aye,' said the commanding officer, thoughtfully.

"In due course the boarding-boat returned, appearing suddenly alongside, as though she had burrowed her way under the fog. The officer in charge came up to make his report, but the commanding officer didn't give him time to begin. He cried from a distance:

"'Coaster, isn't she?'

"'No, sir. A stranger — a neutral,' was the answer.

"'No. Really! Well, tell us all about it. What is she doing here?'

“The young man stated then that he had been told a long and complicated story of engine troubles. But it was plausible enough from a strictly professional point of view and it had the usual features: disablement, dangerous drifting along the shore, weather more or less thick for days, fear of a gale, ultimately a resolve to go in and anchor anywhere on the coast, and so on. Fairly plausible.

“‘Engines still disabled?’ inquired the commanding officer.

“‘No, sir. She has steam on them.’

“The commanding officer took his second aside. ‘By Jove!’ he said, ‘you were right! They were holding their breaths as we passed them. They were.’

“But the second in command had his doubts now.

“‘A fog like this does muffle small sounds, sir,’ he remarked. ‘And what could his object be, after all?’

“‘To sneak out unnoticed,’ answered the commanding officer.

“‘Then why didn’t he? He might have done it, you know. Not exactly unnoticed, perhaps. I don’t suppose he could have slipped his cable without making some noise. Still, in a minute or so he would have been lost to view — clean gone before we had made him out fairly. Yet he didn’t.’

“They looked at each other. The commanding officer shook his head. Such suspicions as the one which had entered his head are not defended easily. He did not even state it openly. The boarding officer finished his report. The cargo of the ship was of a harmless and useful character. She was bound to an English port. Papers and everything in perfect order. Nothing suspicious to be detected anywhere.

“Then passing to the men, he reported the crew on deck as the usual lot. Engineers of the well-known type, and very full of their achievement in repairing the engines. The mate surly. The master rather a fine specimen of a Northman, civil enough, but appeared to have been drinking. Seemed to be recover-ing from a regular bout of it.

“‘I told him I couldn’t give him permission to proceed. He said he wouldn’t dare to move his ship her own length out in such weather as this, permission or no permission. I left a man on board, though.’

“‘Quite right.’

“The commanding officer, after communing with his suspicions for a time, called his second aside.

“‘What if she were the very ship which had been feeding some infernal submarine or other?’ he said in an undertone.

“The other started. Then, with conviction:

“‘She would get off scot-free. You couldn’t prove it, sir.’

“‘I want to look into it myself.’

“‘From the report we’ve heard I am afraid you couldn’t even make a case for reasonable suspicion, sir.’

“‘I’ll go on board all the same.’

“He had made up his mind. Curiosity is the great motive power of hatred and love. What did he expect to find? He could not have told anybody — not even himself.

“What he really expected to find there was the atmosphere, the atmosphere of gratuitous treachery, which in his view nothing could excuse; for he thought that even a passion of unrighteousness for its own sake could not excuse that. But could he detect it? Sniff it? Taste it? Receive some mysterious communication which would turn his invincible suspicions into a certitude strong enough to provoke action with all its risks?

“The master met him on the after-deck, looming up in the fog amongst the blurred shapes of the usual snip’s fittings. He was a robust Northman, bearded, and in the force of his age. A round leather cap fitted his head closely. His hands were rammed deep into the pockets of his short leather jacket. He kept them there while lie explained that at sea he lived in the chart-room, and led the way there, striding carelessly. Just before reaching the door under the bridge he staggered a little, recovered himself, flung it open, and stood aside, leaning his shoulder as if involuntarily against the side of the house, and staring vaguely into the fog-filled space. But he followed the commanding officer at once, flung the door to, snapped on the electric light, and hastened to thrust his hands back into his pockets, as though afraid of being seized by them either in friendship or in hostility.

“The place was stuffy and hot. The usual chart-rack overhead was full, and the chart on the table was kept unrolled by an empty cup standing on a saucer half-full of some spilt dark liquid. A slightly nibbled biscuit reposed on the chronometer-case. There were two settees, and one of them had been made up into a bed with a pillow and some blankets, which were now very much tumbled. The Northman let himself fall on it, his hands still in his pockets.

“‘Well, here I am,’ he said, with a curious air of being surprised at the sound of his own voice.

“The commanding officer from the other settee observed the handsome, flushed face. Drops of fog hung on the yellow beard and moustaches of the Northman. The much darker eyebrows ran together in a puzzled frown, and suddenly he jumped up.

“‘What I mean is that I don’t know where I am. I really don’t,’ he burst out, with extreme earnestness. ‘Hang it all! I got turned around somehow. The fog has been after me for a week. More than a week. And then my engines broke down. I will tell you how it was.’

“He burst out into loquacity. It was not hurried, but it was insistent. It was not continuous for all that. It was broken by the most queer, thoughtful pauses. Each of these pauses lasted no more than a couple of seconds, and each had the profundity of an endless meditation. When he began again nothing betrayed in him the slightest consciousness of these intervals. There was the same fixed glance, the same unchanged earnestness of tone. He didn’t know. Indeed, more than one of these pauses occurred in the middle of a sentence.

“The commanding officer listened to the tale. It struck him as more plausible than simple truth is in the habit of being. But that, perhaps, was prejudice. All the time the Northman was speaking the commanding officer had been aware of an inward voice, a grave murmur in the depth of his very own self, telling another tale, as if on purpose to keep alive in him his indignation and his anger with that baseness of greed or of mere outlook which lies often at the root of simple ideas.

“It was the story that had been already told to the boarding officer an hour or so before. The commanding officer nodded slightly at the Northman from time to time. The latter came to an end and turned his eyes away. He added, as an afterthought:

“‘Wasn’t it enough to drive a man out of his mind with worry? And it’s my first voyage to this part, too. And the ship’s my own. Your officer has seen the papers. She isn’t much, as you can see for yourself. Just an old cargo-boat. Bare living for my family.’

“He raised a big arm to point at a row of photographs plastering the bulkhead. The movement was ponderous, as if the arm had been made of lead. The commanding officer said, carelessly:

“‘You will be making a fortune yet for your family with this old ship.’

“‘Yes, if I don’t lose her,’ said the Northman, gloomily.

“‘I mean — out of this war,’ added the commanding officer.



“The Northman stared at him in a curiously unseeing and at the same time interested manner, as only eyes of a particular blue shade can stare.

“‘And you wouldn’t be angry at it,’ he said, ‘would you? You are too much of a gentleman. We didn’t bring this on you. And suppose we sat down and cried. What good would that be? Let those cry who made the trouble,’ he concluded, with energy. ‘Time’s money, you say. Well — this time is money. Oh! isn’t it!’

“The commanding officer tried to keep under the feeling of immense disgust. He said to himself that it was unreasonable. Men were like that — moral cannibals feeding on each other’s misfortunes. He said aloud:

“‘You have made it perfectly plain how it is that you are here. Your log-book confirms you very minutely. Of course, a log-book may be cooked. Nothing easier.’

“The Northman never moved a muscle. He was gazing at the floor; he seemed not to have heard. He raised his head after a while.

“‘But you can’t suspect me of anything,’ he muttered, negligently.

“The commanding officer thought: ‘Why should he say this?’

“Immediately afterwards the man before him added: ‘My cargo is for an English port.’

“His voice had turned husky for the moment. The commanding officer reflected: ‘That’s true. There can be nothing. I can’t suspect him. Yet why was he lying with steam up in this fog — and then, hearing us come in, why didn’t he give some sign of life? Why? Could it be anything else but a guilty conscience? He could tell by the leadsmen that this was a man-of-war.’

“Yes — why? The commanding officer went on thinking: ‘Suppose I ask him and then watch his face. He will betray himself in some way. It’s perfectly plain that the fellow has been drinking. Yes, he has been drinking; but he will have a lie ready all the same.’ The commanding officer was one of those men who are made morally and almost physically uncomfortable by the mere thought of having to beat down a lie. He shrank from the act in scorn and disgust, which were invincible because more temperamental than moral.

“So he went out on deck instead and had the crew mustered formally for his inspection. He found them very much what the report of the boarding officer had led him to expect. And from their answers to his questions he could discover no flaw in the log-book story.

“He dismissed them. His impression of them was — a picked lot; have been promised a fistful of money each if this came off; all slightly anxious, but not frightened. Not a single one of them likely to give the show away. They don’t feel in danger of their life. They know England and English ways too well!

“He felt alarmed at catching himself thinking as if his vaguest suspicions were turning into a certitude. For, indeed, there was no shadow of reason for his inferences. There was nothing to give away.

“He returned to the chart-room. The Northman had lingered behind there; and something subtly different in his bearing, more bold in his blue, glassy stare, induced the commanding officer to conclude that the fellow had snatched at the opportunity to take another swig at the bottle he must have had concealed somewhere.

“He noticed, too, that the Northman on meeting his eyes put on an elaborately surprised expression. At least, it seemed elaborated. Nothing could be trusted. And the Englishman felt himself with astonishing conviction faced by an enormous lie, solid like a wall, with no way round to get at the truth, whose ugly murderous face he seemed to see peeping over at him with a cynical grin.

“‘I dare say,’ he began, suddenly, ‘you are wondering at my proceedings, though I am not detaining you, am I? You wouldn’t dare to move in this fog?’

“‘I don’t know where I am,’ the Northman ejaculated, earnestly. ‘I really don’t.’

“He looked around as if the very chart-room fittings were strange to him. The commanding officer asked him whether he had not seen any unusual objects floating about while he was at sea.

“‘Objects! What objects? We were groping blind in the fog for days.’

“‘We had a few clear intervals’ said the commanding officer. ‘And I’ll tell you what we have seen and the conclusion I’ve come to about it.’

“He told him in a few words. He heard the sound of a sharp breath indrawn through closed teeth. The Northman with his hand on the table stood absolutely motionless and dumb. He stood as if thunderstruck. Then he produced a fatuous smile.

“Or at least so it appeared to the commanding officer. Was this significant, or of no meaning whatever? He didn’t know, he couldn’t tell.

All the truth had departed out of the world as if drawn in, absorbed in this monstrous villainy this man was — or was not — guilty of.

“‘Shooting’s too good for people that conceive neutrality in this pretty way,’ remarked the commanding officer, after a silence.

“‘Yes, yes, yes,’ the Northman assented, hurriedly — then added an unexpected and dreamy-voiced ‘Perhaps.’

“‘Was he pretending to be drunk, or only trying to appear sober? His glance was straight, but it was somewhat glazed. His lips outlined themselves firmly under his yellow moustache. But they twitched. Did they twitch? And why was he drooping like this in his attitude?

“‘There’s no perhaps about it,’ pronounced the commanding officer sternly.

“The Northman had straightened himself. And unexpectedly he looked stern, too.

“‘No. But what about the tempters? Better kill that lot off. There’s about four, five, six million of them,’ he said, grimly; but in a moment changed into a whining key. ‘But I had better hold my tongue. You have some suspicions.’

“‘No, I’ve no suspicions,’ declared the commanding officer.

“He never faltered. At that moment he had the certitude. The air of the chart-room was thick with guilt and falsehood braving the discovery, defying simple right, common decency, all humanity of feeling, every scruple of conduct.

“The Northman drew a long breath. ‘Well, we know that you English are gentlemen. But let us speak the truth. Why should we love you so very much? You haven’t done anything to be loved. We don’t love the other people, of course. They haven’t done anything for that either. A fellow comes along with a bag of gold... I haven’t been in Rotterdam my last voyage for nothing.’

“‘You may be able to tell something interesting, then, to our people when you come into port,’ interjected the officer.

“I might. But you keep some people in your pay at Rotterdam. Let them report. I am a neutral — am I not?... Have you ever seen a poor man on one side and a bag of gold on the other? Of course, I couldn’t be tempted. I haven’t the nerve for it. Really I haven’t. It’s nothing to me. I am just talking openly for once.’

“‘Yes. And I am listening to you,’ said the commanding officer, quietly.

“The Northman leaned forward over the table. ‘Now that I know you have no suspicions, I talk. You don’t know what a poor man is. I do. I am poor myself. This old ship, she isn’t much, and she is mortgaged, too. Bare living, no more. Of course, I wouldn’t have the nerve. But a man who has nerve! See. The stuff he takes aboard looks like any other cargo — packages, barrels, tins, copper tubes — what not. He doesn’t see it work. It isn’t real to him. But he sees the gold. That’s real. Of course, nothing could induce me. I suffer from an internal disease. I would either go crazy from anxiety — or — or — take to drink or something. The risk is too great. Why — ruin!’

“‘It should be death.’ The commanding officer got up, after this curt declaration, which the other received with a hard stare oddly combined with an uncertain smile. The officer’s gorge rose at the atmosphere of murderous complicity which surrounded him, denser, more impenetrable, more acrid than the fog outside.

“‘It’s nothing to me,’ murmured the Northman, swaying visibly.

“‘Of course not,’ assented the commanding officer, with a great effort to keep his voice calm and low. The certitude was strong within him. ‘But I am going to clear all you fellows off this coast at once. And I will begin with you. You must leave in half an hour.’

“By that time the officer was walking along the deck with the Northman at his elbow.

“‘What! In this fog?’ the latter cried out, huskily.

“‘Yes, you will have to go in this fog.’

“‘But I don’t know where I am. I really don’t.’

“The commanding officer turned round. A sort of fury possessed him. The eyes of the two men met. Those of the Northman expressed a profound amazement.

“‘Oh, you don’t know how to get out.’ The commanding officer spoke with composure, but his heart was beating with anger and dread. ‘I will give you your course. Steer south-by-east-half-east for about four miles and then you will be clear to haul to the eastward for your port. The weather will clear up before very long.’

“‘Must I? What could induce me? I haven’t the nerve.’

“‘And yet you must go. Unless you want to — — —’

“‘I don’t want to,’ panted the Northman. ‘I’ve enough of it.’

“The commanding officer got over the side. The Northman remained still as if rooted to the deck. Before his boat reached his ship the commanding officer heard the steamer beginning to pick up her anchor. Then, shadowy in the fog, she steamed out on the given course.

“‘Yes,’ he said to his officers, ‘I let him go.’“

The narrator bent forward towards the couch, where no movement betrayed the presence of a living person.

“Listen,” he said, forcibly. “That course would lead the Northman straight on a deadly ledge of rock. And the commanding officer gave it to him. He steamed out — ran on it — and went down. So he had spoken the truth. He did not know where he was. But it proves nothing. Nothing either way. It may have been the only truth in all his story. And yet... He seems to have been driven out by a menacing stare — nothing more.”

He abandoned all pretence.

“Yes, I gave that course to him. It seemed to me a supreme test. I believe — no, I don’t believe. I don’t know. At the time I was certain. They all went down; and I don’t know whether I have done stern retribution — or murder; whether I have added to the corpses that litter the bed of the unreadable sea the bodies of men completely innocent or basely guilty. I don’t know. I shall never know.”

He rose. The woman on the couch got up and threw her arms round his neck. Her eyes put two gleams in the deep shadow of the room. She knew his passion for truth, his horror of deceit, his humanity.

“Oh, my poor, poor — — —”

“I shall never know,” he repeated, sternly, disengaged himself, pressed her hands to his lips, and went out.

# The Memoirs



*Pent Farm, Hythe, Kent — Conrad's home from 1898-1907*

# ***THE MIRROR OF THE SEA***



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## I.

“And shippes by the brinke comen and gon,  
And in swich forme endure a day or two.”  
*The Frankeleyn's Tale.*

Landfall and Departure mark the rhythmical swing of a seaman's life and of a ship's career. From land to land is the most concise definition of a ship's earthly fate.

A “Departure” is not what a vain people of landmen may think. The term “Landfall” is more easily understood; you fall in with the land, and it is a matter of a quick eye and of a clear atmosphere. The Departure is not the ship's going away from her port any more than the Landfall can be looked upon as the synonym of arrival. But there is this difference in the Departure: that the term does not imply so much a sea event as a definite act entailing a process — the precise observation of certain landmarks by means of the compass card.

Your Landfall, be it a peculiarly-shaped mountain, a rocky headland, or a stretch of sand-dunes, you meet at first with a single glance. Further recognition will follow in due course; but essentially a Landfall, good or bad, is made and done with at the first cry of “Land ho!” The Departure is distinctly a ceremony of navigation. A ship may have left her port some time before; she may have been at sea, in the fullest sense of the phrase, for days; but, for all that, as long as the coast she was about to leave remained in sight, a southern-going ship of yesterday had not in the sailor's sense begun the enterprise of a passage.

The taking of Departure, if not the last sight of the land, is, perhaps, the last professional recognition of the land on the part of a sailor. It is the technical, as distinguished from the sentimental, “good-bye.” Henceforth he has done with the coast astern of his ship. It is a matter personal to the man. It is not the ship that takes her departure; the seaman takes his Departure by means of cross-bearings which fix the place of the first tiny pencil-cross on the white expanse of the track-chart, where the ship's position at noon shall be marked by just such another tiny pencil cross for every day of her passage. And there may be sixty, eighty, any number of these crosses on the ship's track from land to land. The greatest number in

my experience was a hundred and thirty of such crosses from the pilot station at the Sand Heads in the Bay of Bengal to the Scilly's light. A bad passage. . .

A Departure, the last professional sight of land, is always good, or at least good enough. For, even if the weather be thick, it does not matter much to a ship having all the open sea before her bows. A Landfall may be good or bad. You encompass the earth with one particular spot of it in your eye. In all the devious tracings the course of a sailing-ship leaves upon the white paper of a chart she is always aiming for that one little spot — maybe a small island in the ocean, a single headland upon the long coast of a continent, a lighthouse on a bluff, or simply the peaked form of a mountain like an ant-heap afloat upon the waters. But if you have sighted it on the expected bearing, then that Landfall is good. Fogs, snowstorms, gales thick with clouds and rain — those are the enemies of good Landfalls.

## II.

Some commanders of ships take their Departure from the home coast sadly, in a spirit of grief and discontent. They have a wife, children perhaps, some affection at any rate, or perhaps only some pet vice, that must be left behind for a year or more. I remember only one man who walked his deck with a springy step, and gave the first course of the passage in an elated voice. But he, as I learned afterwards, was leaving nothing behind him, except a welter of debts and threats of legal proceedings.

On the other hand, I have known many captains who, directly their ship had left the narrow waters of the Channel, would disappear from the sight of their ship's company altogether for some three days or more. They would take a long dive, as it were, into their state-room, only to emerge a few days afterwards with a more or less serene brow. Those were the men easy to get on with. Besides, such a complete retirement seemed to imply a satisfactory amount of trust in their officers, and to be trusted displeases no seaman worthy of the name.

On my first voyage as chief mate with good Captain MacW- I remember that I felt quite flattered, and went blithely about my duties, myself a commander for all practical purposes. Still, whatever the greatness of my illusion, the fact remained that the real commander was there, backing up my self-confidence, though invisible to my eyes behind a maple-wood veneered cabin-door with a white china handle.

That is the time, after your Departure is taken, when the spirit of your commander communes with you in a muffled voice, as if from the sanctum sanctorum of a temple; because, call her a temple or a "hell afloat" — as some ships have been called — the captain's state-room is surely the august place in every vessel.

The good MacW- would not even come out to his meals, and fed solitarily in his holy of holies from a tray covered with a white napkin. Our steward used to bend an ironic glance at the perfectly empty plates he was bringing out from there. This grief for his home, which overcomes so many married seamen, did not deprive Captain MacW- of his legitimate appetite. In fact, the steward would almost invariably come up to me, sitting in the captain's chair at the head of the table, to say in a grave murmur, "The

captain asks for one more slice of meat and two potatoes.” We, his officers, could hear him moving about in his berth, or lightly snoring, or fetching deep sighs, or splashing and blowing in his bath-room; and we made our reports to him through the keyhole, as it were. It was the crowning achievement of his amiable character that the answers we got were given in a quite mild and friendly tone. Some commanders in their periods of seclusion are constantly grumpy, and seem to resent the mere sound of your voice as an injury and an insult.

But a grumpy recluse cannot worry his subordinates: whereas the man in whom the sense of duty is strong (or, perhaps, only the sense of self-importance), and who persists in airing on deck his moroseness all day — and perhaps half the night — becomes a grievous infliction. He walks the poop darting gloomy glances, as though he wished to poison the sea, and snaps your head off savagely whenever you happen to blunder within earshot. And these vagaries are the harder to bear patiently, as becomes a man and an officer, because no sailor is really good-tempered during the first few days of a voyage. There are regrets, memories, the instinctive longing for the departed idleness, the instinctive hate of all work. Besides, things have a knack of going wrong at the start, especially in the matter of irritating trifles. And there is the abiding thought of a whole year of more or less hard life before one, because there was hardly a southern-going voyage in the yesterday of the sea which meant anything less than a twelvemonth. Yes; it needed a few days after the taking of your departure for a ship’s company to shake down into their places, and for the soothing deep-water ship routine to establish its beneficent sway.

It is a great doctor for sore hearts and sore heads, too, your ship’s routine, which I have seen soothe — at least for a time — the most turbulent of spirits. There is health in it, and peace, and satisfaction of the accomplished round; for each day of the ship’s life seems to close a circle within the wide ring of the sea horizon. It borrows a certain dignity of sameness from the majestic monotony of the sea. He who loves the sea loves also the ship’s routine.

Nowhere else than upon the sea do the days, weeks and months fall away quicker into the past. They seem to be left astern as easily as the light air-bubbles in the swirls of the ship’s wake, and vanish into a great silence in which your ship moves on with a sort of magical effect. They pass away, the days, the weeks, the months. Nothing but a gale can disturb the orderly

life of the ship; and the spell of unshaken monotony that seems to have fallen upon the very voices of her men is broken only by the near prospect of a Landfall.

Then is the spirit of the ship's commander stirred strongly again. But it is not moved to seek seclusion, and to remain, hidden and inert, shut up in a small cabin with the solace of a good bodily appetite. When about to make the land, the spirit of the ship's commander is tormented by an unconquerable restlessness. It seems unable to abide for many seconds together in the holy of holies of the captain's state-room; it will out on deck and gaze ahead, through straining eyes, as the appointed moment comes nearer. It is kept vigorously upon the stretch of excessive vigilance. Meantime the body of the ship's commander is being enfeebled by want of appetite; at least, such is my experience, though "enfeebled" is perhaps not exactly the word. I might say, rather, that it is spiritualized by a disregard for food, sleep, and all the ordinary comforts, such as they are, of sea life. In one or two cases I have known that detachment from the grosser needs of existence remain regrettably incomplete in the matter of drink.

But these two cases were, properly speaking, pathological cases, and the only two in all my sea experience. In one of these two instances of a craving for stimulants, developed from sheer anxiety, I cannot assert that the man's seaman-like qualities were impaired in the least. It was a very anxious case, too, the land being made suddenly, close-to, on a wrong bearing, in thick weather, and during a fresh onshore gale. Going below to speak to him soon after, I was unlucky enough to catch my captain in the very act of hasty cork-drawing. The sight, I may say, gave me an awful scare. I was well aware of the morbidly sensitive nature of the man. Fortunately, I managed to draw back unseen, and, taking care to stamp heavily with my sea-boots at the foot of the cabin stairs, I made my second entry. But for this unexpected glimpse, no act of his during the next twenty-four hours could have given me the slightest suspicion that all was not well with his nerve.

### III.

Quite another case, and having nothing to do with drink, was that of poor Captain B-. He used to suffer from sick headaches, in his young days, every time he was approaching a coast. Well over fifty years of age when I knew him, short, stout, dignified, perhaps a little pompous, he was a man of a singularly well-informed mind, the least sailor-like in outward aspect, but certainly one of the best seamen whom it has been my good luck to serve under. He was a Plymouth man, I think, the son of a country doctor, and both his elder boys were studying medicine. He commanded a big London ship, fairly well known in her day. I thought no end of him, and that is why I remember with a peculiar satisfaction the last words he spoke to me on board his ship after an eighteen months' voyage. It was in the dock in Dundee, where we had brought a full cargo of jute from Calcutta. We had been paid off that morning, and I had come on board to take my sea-chest away and to say good-bye. In his slightly lofty but courteous way he inquired what were my plans. I replied that I intended leaving for London by the afternoon train, and thought of going up for examination to get my master's certificate. I had just enough service for that. He commended me for not wasting my time, with such an evident interest in my case that I was quite surprised; then, rising from his chair, he said:

"Have you a ship in view after you have passed?"

I answered that I had nothing whatever in view.

He shook hands with me, and pronounced the memorable words:

"If you happen to be in want of employment, remember that as long as I have a ship you have a ship, too."

In the way of compliment there is nothing to beat this from a ship's captain to his second mate at the end of a voyage, when the work is over and the subordinate is done with. And there is a pathos in that memory, for the poor fellow never went to sea again after all. He was already ailing when we passed St. Helena; was laid up for a time when we were off the Western Islands, but got out of bed to make his Landfall. He managed to keep up on deck as far as the Downs, where, giving his orders in an exhausted voice, he anchored for a few hours to send a wire to his wife and take aboard a North Sea pilot to help him sail the ship up the east coast. He

had not felt equal to the task by himself, for it is the sort of thing that keeps a deep-water man on his feet pretty well night and day.

When we arrived in Dundee, Mrs. B- was already there, waiting to take him home. We travelled up to London by the same train; but by the time I had managed to get through with my examination the ship had sailed on her next voyage without him, and, instead of joining her again, I went by request to see my old commander in his home. This is the only one of my captains I have ever visited in that way. He was out of bed by then, "quite convalescent," as he declared, making a few tottering steps to meet me at the sitting-room door. Evidently he was reluctant to take his final cross-bearings of this earth for a Departure on the only voyage to an unknown destination a sailor ever undertakes. And it was all very nice — the large, sunny room; his deep, easy-chair in a bow window, with pillows and a footstool; the quiet, watchful care of the elderly, gentle woman who had borne him five children, and had not, perhaps, lived with him more than five full years out of the thirty or so of their married life. There was also another woman there in a plain black dress, quite gray-haired, sitting very erect on her chair with some sewing, from which she snatched side-glances in his direction, and uttering not a single word during all the time of my call. Even when, in due course, I carried over to her a cup of tea, she only nodded at me silently, with the faintest ghost of a smile on her tight-set lips. I imagine she must have been a maiden sister of Mrs. B- come to help nurse her brother-in-law. His youngest boy, a late-comer, a great cricketer it seemed, twelve years old or thereabouts, chattered enthusiastically of the exploits of W. G. Grace. And I remember his eldest son, too, a newly-fledged doctor, who took me out to smoke in the garden, and, shaking his head with professional gravity, but with genuine concern, muttered: "Yes, but he doesn't get back his appetite. I don't like that — I don't like that at all." The last sight of Captain B- I had was as he nodded his head to me out of the bow window when I turned round to close the front gate.

It was a distinct and complete impression, something that I don't know whether to call a Landfall or a Departure. Certainly he had gazed at times very fixedly before him with the Landfall's vigilant look, this sea-captain seated incongruously in a deep-backed chair. He had not then talked to me of employment, of ships, of being ready to take another command; but he had discoursed of his early days, in the abundant but thin flow of a wilful invalid's talk. The women looked worried, but sat still, and I learned more



of him in that interview than in the whole eighteen months we had sailed together. It appeared he had “served his time” in the copper-ore trade, the famous copper-ore trade of old days between Swansea and the Chilian coast, coal out and ore in, deep-loaded both ways, as if in wanton defiance of the great Cape Horn seas — a work, this, for staunch ships, and a great school of staunchness for West-Country seamen. A whole fleet of copper-bottomed barques, as strong in rib and planking, as well-found in gear, as ever was sent upon the seas, manned by hardy crews and commanded by young masters, was engaged in that now long defunct trade. “That was the school I was trained in,” he said to me almost boastfully, lying back amongst his pillows with a rug over his legs. And it was in that trade that he obtained his first command at a very early age. It was then that he mentioned to me how, as a young commander, he was always ill for a few days before making land after a long passage. But this sort of sickness used to pass off with the first sight of a familiar landmark. Afterwards, he added, as he grew older, all that nervousness wore off completely; and I observed his weary eyes gaze steadily ahead, as if there had been nothing between him and the straight line of sea and sky, where whatever a seaman is looking for is first bound to appear. But I have also seen his eyes rest fondly upon the faces in the room, upon the pictures on the wall, upon all the familiar objects of that home, whose abiding and clear image must have flashed often on his memory in times of stress and anxiety at sea. Was he looking out for a strange Landfall, or taking with an untroubled mind the bearings for his last Departure?

It is hard to say; for in that voyage from which no man returns Landfall and Departure are instantaneous, merging together into one moment of supreme and final attention. Certainly I do not remember observing any sign of faltering in the set expression of his wasted face, no hint of the nervous anxiety of a young commander about to make land on an uncharted shore. He had had too much experience of Departures and Landfalls! And had he not “served his time” in the famous copper-ore trade out of the Bristol Channel, the work of the staunchest ships afloat, and the school of staunch seamen?

## IV.

Before an anchor can ever be raised, it must be let go; and this perfectly obvious truism brings me at once to the subject of the degradation of the sea language in the daily press of this country.

Your journalist, whether he takes charge of a ship or a fleet, almost invariably “casts” his anchor. Now, an anchor is never cast, and to take a liberty with technical language is a crime against the clearness, precision, and beauty of perfected speech.

An anchor is a forged piece of iron, admirably adapted to its end, and technical language is an instrument wrought into perfection by ages of experience, a flawless thing for its purpose. An anchor of yesterday (because nowadays there are contrivances like mushrooms and things like claws, of no particular expression or shape — just hooks) — an anchor of yesterday is in its way a most efficient instrument. To its perfection its size bears witness, for there is no other appliance so small for the great work it has to do. Look at the anchors hanging from the cat-heads of a big ship! How tiny they are in proportion to the great size of the hull! Were they made of gold they would look like trinkets, like ornamental toys, no bigger in proportion than a jewelled drop in a woman’s ear. And yet upon them will depend, more than once, the very life of the ship.

An anchor is forged and fashioned for faithfulness; give it ground that it can bite, and it will hold till the cable parts, and then, whatever may afterwards befall its ship, that anchor is “lost.” The honest, rough piece of iron, so simple in appearance, has more parts than the human body has limbs: the ring, the stock, the crown, the flukes, the palms, the shank. All this, according to the journalist, is “cast” when a ship arriving at an anchorage is brought up.

This insistence in using the odious word arises from the fact that a particularly benighted landsman must imagine the act of anchoring as a process of throwing something overboard, whereas the anchor ready for its work is already overboard, and is not thrown over, but simply allowed to fall. It hangs from the ship’s side at the end of a heavy, projecting timber called the cat-head, in the bight of a short, thick chain whose end link is suddenly released by a blow from a top-maul or the pull of a lever when the

order is given. And the order is not “Heave over!” as the paragraphist seems to imagine, but “Let go!”

As a matter of fact, nothing is ever cast in that sense on board ship but the lead, of which a cast is taken to search the depth of water on which she floats. A lashed boat, a spare spar, a cask or what not secured about the decks, is “cast adrift” when it is untied. Also the ship herself is “cast to port or starboard” when getting under way. She, however, never “casts” her anchor.

To speak with severe technicality, a ship or a fleet is “brought up” — the complementary words unpronounced and unwritten being, of course, “to an anchor.” Less technically, but not less correctly, the word “anchored,” with its characteristic appearance and resolute sound, ought to be good enough for the newspapers of the greatest maritime country in the world. “The fleet anchored at Spithead”: can anyone want a better sentence for brevity and seamanlike ring? But the “cast-anchor” trick, with its affectation of being a sea-phrase — for why not write just as well “threw anchor,” “flung anchor,” or “shied anchor”? — is intolerably odious to a sailor’s ear. I remember a coasting pilot of my early acquaintance (he used to read the papers assiduously) who, to define the utmost degree of lubberliness in a landsman, used to say, “He’s one of them poor, miserable ‘cast-anchor’ devils.”

## V.

From first to last the seaman's thoughts are very much concerned with his anchors. It is not so much that the anchor is a symbol of hope as that it is the heaviest object that he has to handle on board his ship at sea in the usual routine of his duties. The beginning and the end of every passage are marked distinctly by work about the ship's anchors. A vessel in the Channel has her anchors always ready, her cables shackled on, and the land almost always in sight. The anchor and the land are indissolubly connected in a sailor's thoughts. But directly she is clear of the narrow seas, heading out into the world with nothing solid to speak of between her and the South Pole, the anchors are got in and the cables disappear from the deck. But the anchors do not disappear. Technically speaking, they are "secured in-board"; and, on the forecastle head, lashed down to ring-bolts with ropes and chains, under the straining sheets of the head-sails, they look very idle and as if asleep. Thus bound, but carefully looked after, inert and powerful, those emblems of hope make company for the look-out man in the night watches; and so the days glide by, with a long rest for those characteristically shaped pieces of iron, reposing forward, visible from almost every part of the ship's deck, waiting for their work on the other side of the world somewhere, while the ship carries them on with a great rush and splutter of foam underneath, and the sprays of the open sea rust their heavy limbs.

The first approach to the land, as yet invisible to the crew's eyes, is announced by the brisk order of the chief mate to the boatswain: "We will get the anchors over this afternoon" or "first thing to-morrow morning," as the case may be. For the chief mate is the keeper of the ship's anchors and the guardian of her cable. There are good ships and bad ships, comfortable ships and ships where, from first day to last of the voyage, there is no rest for a chief mate's body and soul. And ships are what men make them: this is a pronouncement of sailor wisdom, and, no doubt, in the main it is true.

However, there are ships where, as an old grizzled mate once told me, "nothing ever seems to go right!" And, looking from the poop where we both stood (I had paid him a neighbourly call in dock), he added: "She's one of them." He glanced up at my face, which expressed a proper professional

sympathy, and set me right in my natural surmise: “Oh no; the old man’s right enough. He never interferes. Anything that’s done in a seamanlike way is good enough for him. And yet, somehow, nothing ever seems to go right in this ship. I tell you what: she is naturally unhandy.”

The “old man,” of course, was his captain, who just then came on deck in a silk hat and brown overcoat, and, with a civil nod to us, went ashore. He was certainly not more than thirty, and the elderly mate, with a murmur to me of “That’s my old man,” proceeded to give instances of the natural unhandiness of the ship in a sort of deprecatory tone, as if to say, “You mustn’t think I bear a grudge against her for that.”

The instances do not matter. The point is that there are ships where things *do* go wrong; but whatever the ship — good or bad, lucky or unlucky — it is in the forepart of her that her chief mate feels most at home. It is emphatically *his* end of the ship, though, of course, he is the executive supervisor of the whole. There are *his* anchors, *his* headgear, his foremast, his station for manoeuvring when the captain is in charge. And there, too, live the men, the ship’s hands, whom it is his duty to keep employed, fair weather or foul, for the ship’s welfare. It is the chief mate, the only figure of the ship’s afterguard, who comes bustling forward at the cry of “All hands on deck!” He is the satrap of that province in the autocratic realm of the ship, and more personally responsible for anything that may happen there.

There, too, on the approach to the land, assisted by the boatswain and the carpenter, he “gets the anchors over” with the men of his own watch, whom he knows better than the others. There he sees the cable ranged, the windlass disconnected, the compressors opened; and there, after giving his own last order, “Stand clear of the cable!” he waits attentive, in a silent ship that forges slowly ahead towards her picked-out berth, for the sharp shout from aft, “Let go!” Instantly bending over, he sees the trusty iron fall with a heavy plunge under his eyes, which watch and note whether it has gone clear.

For the anchor “to go clear” means to go clear of its own chain. Your anchor must drop from the bow of your ship with no turn of cable on any of its limbs, else you would be riding to a foul anchor. Unless the pull of the cable is fair on the ring, no anchor can be trusted even on the best of holding ground. In time of stress it is bound to drag, for implements and men must be treated fairly to give you the “virtue” which is in them. The

anchor is an emblem of hope, but a foul anchor is worse than the most fallacious of false hopes that ever lured men or nations into a sense of security. And the sense of security, even the most warranted, is a bad councillor. It is the sense which, like that exaggerated feeling of well-being ominous of the coming on of madness, precedes the swift fall of disaster. A seaman labouring under an undue sense of security becomes at once worth hardly half his salt. Therefore, of all my chief officers, the one I trusted most was a man called B-. He had a red moustache, a lean face, also red, and an uneasy eye. He was worth all his salt.

On examining now, after many years, the residue of the feeling which was the outcome of the contact of our personalities, I discover, without much surprise, a certain flavour of dislike. Upon the whole, I think he was one of the most uncomfortable shipmates possible for a young commander. If it is permissible to criticise the absent, I should say he had a little too much of the sense of insecurity which is so invaluable in a seaman. He had an extremely disturbing air of being everlastingly ready (even when seated at table at my right hand before a plate of salt beef) to grapple with some impending calamity. I must hasten to add that he had also the other qualification necessary to make a trustworthy seaman — that of an absolute confidence in himself. What was really wrong with him was that he had these qualities in an unrestful degree. His eternally watchful demeanour, his jerky, nervous talk, even his, as it were, determined silences, seemed to imply — and, I believe, they did imply — that to his mind the ship was never safe in my hands. Such was the man who looked after the anchors of a less than five-hundred-ton barque, my first command, now gone from the face of the earth, but sure of a tenderly remembered existence as long as I live. No anchor could have gone down foul under Mr. B-'s piercing eye. It was good for one to be sure of that when, in an open roadstead, one heard in the cabin the wind pipe up; but still, there were moments when I detested Mr. B- exceedingly. From the way he used to glare sometimes, I fancy that more than once he paid me back with interest. It so happened that we both loved the little barque very much. And it was just the defect of Mr. B-'s inestimable qualities that he would never persuade himself to believe that the ship was safe in my hands. To begin with, he was more than five years older than myself at a time of life when five years really do count, I being twenty-nine and he thirty-four; then, on our first leaving port (I don't see why I should make a secret of the fact that it was Bangkok), a bit of

manoeuvring of mine amongst the islands of the Gulf of Siam had given him an unforgettable scare. Ever since then he had nursed in secret a bitter idea of my utter recklessness. But upon the whole, and unless the grip of a man's hand at parting means nothing whatever, I conclude that we did like each other at the end of two years and three months well enough.

The bond between us was the ship; and therein a ship, though she has female attributes and is loved very unreasonably, is different from a woman. That I should have been tremendously smitten with my first command is nothing to wonder at, but I suppose I must admit that Mr. B-'s sentiment was of a higher order. Each of us, of course, was extremely anxious about the good appearance of the beloved object; and, though I was the one to glean compliments ashore, B- had the more intimate pride of feeling, resembling that of a devoted handmaiden. And that sort of faithful and proud devotion went so far as to make him go about flicking the dust off the varnished teak-wood rail of the little craft with a silk pocket-handkerchief — a present from Mrs. B-, I believe.

That was the effect of his love for the barque. The effect of his admirable lack of the sense of security once went so far as to make him remark to me: "Well, sir, you *are* a lucky man!"

It was said in a tone full of significance, but not exactly offensive, and it was, I suppose, my innate tact that prevented my asking, "What on earth do you mean by that?"

Later on his meaning was illustrated more fully on a dark night in a tight corner during a dead on-shore gale. I had called him up on deck to help me consider our extremely unpleasant situation. There was not much time for deep thinking, and his summing-up was: "It looks pretty bad, whichever we try; but, then, sir, you always do get out of a mess somehow."

## VI.

It is difficult to disconnect the idea of ships' anchors from the idea of the ship's chief mate — the man who sees them go down clear and come up sometimes foul; because not even the most unremitting care can always prevent a ship, swinging to winds and tide, from taking an awkward turn of the cable round stock or fluke. Then the business of "getting the anchor" and securing it afterwards is unduly prolonged, and made a weariness to the chief mate. He is the man who watches the growth of the cable — a sailor's phrase which has all the force, precision, and imagery of technical language that, created by simple men with keen eyes for the real aspect of the things they see in their trade, achieves the just expression seizing upon the essential, which is the ambition of the artist in words. Therefore the sailor will never say, "cast anchor," and the ship-master aft will hail his chief mate on the forecastle in impressionistic phrase: "How does the cable grow?" Because "grow" is the right word for the long drift of a cable emerging aslant under the strain, taut as a bow-string above the water. And it is the voice of the keeper of the ship's anchors that will answer: "Grows right ahead, sir," or "Broad on the bow," or whatever concise and deferential shout will fit the case.

There is no order more noisily given or taken up with lustier shouts on board a homeward-bound merchant ship than the command, "Man the windlass!" The rush of expectant men out of the forecastle, the snatching of hand-spikes, the tramp of feet, the clink of the pawls, make a stirring accompaniment to a plaintive up-anchor song with a roaring chorus; and this burst of noisy activity from a whole ship's crew seems like a voiceful awakening of the ship herself, till then, in the picturesque phrase of Dutch seamen, "lying asleep upon her iron."

For a ship with her sails furled on her squared yards, and reflected from truck to water-line in the smooth gleaming sheet of a landlocked harbour, seems, indeed, to a seaman's eye the most perfect picture of slumbering repose. The getting of your anchor was a noisy operation on board a merchant ship of yesterday — an inspiring, joyous noise, as if, with the emblem of hope, the ship's company expected to drag up out of the depths, each man all his personal hopes into the reach of a securing hand — the



hope of home, the hope of rest, of liberty, of dissipation, of hard pleasure, following the hard endurance of many days between sky and water. And this noisiness, this exultation at the moment of the ship's departure, make a tremendous contrast to the silent moments of her arrival in a foreign roadstead — the silent moments when, stripped of her sails, she forges ahead to her chosen berth, the loose canvas fluttering softly in the gear above the heads of the men standing still upon her decks, the master gazing intently forward from the break of the poop. Gradually she loses her way, hardly moving, with the three figures on her forecastle waiting attentively about the cat-head for the last order of, perhaps, full ninety days at sea: "Let go!"

This is the final word of a ship's ended journey, the closing word of her toil and of her achievement. In a life whose worth is told out in passages from port to port, the splash of the anchor's fall and the thunderous rumbling of the chain are like the closing of a distinct period, of which she seems conscious with a slight deep shudder of all her frame. By so much is she nearer to her appointed death, for neither years nor voyages can go on for ever. It is to her like the striking of a clock, and in the pause which follows she seems to take count of the passing time.

This is the last important order; the others are mere routine directions. Once more the master is heard: "Give her forty-five fathom to the water's edge," and then he, too, is done for a time. For days he leaves all the harbour work to his chief mate, the keeper of the ship's anchor and of the ship's routine. For days his voice will not be heard raised about the decks, with that curt, austere accent of the man in charge, till, again, when the hatches are on, and in a silent and expectant ship, he shall speak up from aft in commanding tones: "Man the windlass!"

## VII.

The other year, looking through a newspaper of sound principles, but whose staff *will* persist in “casting” anchors and going to sea “on” a ship (ough!), I came across an article upon the season’s yachting. And, behold! it was a good article. To a man who had but little to do with pleasure sailing (though all sailing is a pleasure), and certainly nothing whatever with racing in open waters, the writer’s strictures upon the handicapping of yachts were just intelligible and no more. And I do not pretend to any interest in the enumeration of the great races of that year. As to the 52-foot linear raters, praised so much by the writer, I am warmed up by his approval of their performances; but, as far as any clear conception goes, the descriptive phrase, so precise to the comprehension of a yachtsman, evokes no definite image in my mind.

The writer praises that class of pleasure vessels, and I am willing to endorse his words, as any man who loves every craft afloat would be ready to do. I am disposed to admire and respect the 52-foot linear raters on the word of a man who regrets in such a sympathetic and understanding spirit the threatened decay of yachting seamanship.

Of course, yacht racing is an organized pastime, a function of social idleness ministering to the vanity of certain wealthy inhabitants of these isles nearly as much as to their inborn love of the sea. But the writer of the article in question goes on to point out, with insight and justice, that for a great number of people (20,000, I think he says) it is a means of livelihood — that it is, in his own words, an industry. Now, the moral side of an industry, productive or unproductive, the redeeming and ideal aspect of this bread-winning, is the attainment and preservation of the highest possible skill on the part of the craftsmen. Such skill, the skill of technique, is more than honesty; it is something wider, embracing honesty and grace and rule in an elevated and clear sentiment, not altogether utilitarian, which may be called the honour of labour. It is made up of accumulated tradition, kept alive by individual pride, rendered exact by professional opinion, and, like the higher arts, it spurred on and sustained by discriminating praise.

This is why the attainment of proficiency, the pushing of your skill with attention to the most delicate shades of excellence, is a matter of vital

concern. Efficiency of a practically flawless kind may be reached naturally in the struggle for bread. But there is something beyond — a higher point, a subtle and unmistakable touch of love and pride beyond mere skill; almost an inspiration which gives to all work that finish which is almost art — which *is* art.

As men of scrupulous honour set up a high standard of public conscience above the dead-level of an honest community, so men of that skill which passes into art by ceaseless striving raise the dead-level of correct practice in the crafts of land and sea. The conditions fostering the growth of that supreme, alive excellence, as well in work as in play, ought to be preserved with a most careful regard lest the industry or the game should perish of an insidious and inward decay. Therefore I have read with profound regret, in that article upon the yachting season of a certain year, that the seamanship on board racing yachts is not now what it used to be only a few, very few, years ago.

For that was the gist of that article, written evidently by a man who not only knows but *understands* — a thing (let me remark in passing) much rarer than one would expect, because the sort of understanding I mean is inspired by love; and love, though in a sense it may be admitted to be stronger than death, is by no means so universal and so sure. In fact, love is rare — the love of men, of things, of ideas, the love of perfected skill. For love is the enemy of haste; it takes count of passing days, of men who pass away, of a fine art matured slowly in the course of years and doomed in a short time to pass away too, and be no more. Love and regret go hand in hand in this world of changes swifter than the shifting of the clouds reflected in the mirror of the sea.

To penalize a yacht in proportion to the fineness of her performance is unfair to the craft and to her men. It is unfair to the perfection of her form and to the skill of her servants. For we men are, in fact, the servants of our creations. We remain in everlasting bondage to the productions of our brain and to the work of our hands. A man is born to serve his time on this earth, and there is something fine in the service being given on other grounds than that of utility. The bondage of art is very exacting. And, as the writer of the article which started this train of thought says with lovable warmth, the sailing of yachts is a fine art.

His contention is that racing, without time allowances for anything else but tonnage — that is, for size — has fostered the fine art of sailing to the

pitch of perfection. Every sort of demand is made upon the master of a sailing-yacht, and to be penalized in proportion to your success may be of advantage to the sport itself, but it has an obviously deteriorating effect upon the seamanship. The fine art is being lost.

## VIII.

The sailing and racing of yachts has developed a class of fore-and-aft sailors, men born and bred to the sea, fishing in winter and yachting in summer; men to whom the handling of that particular rig presents no mystery. It is their striving for victory that has elevated the sailing of pleasure craft to the dignity of a fine art in that special sense. As I have said, I know nothing of racing and but little of fore-and-aft rig; but the advantages of such a rig are obvious, especially for purposes of pleasure, whether in cruising or racing. It requires less effort in handling; the trimming of the sail-planes to the wind can be done with speed and accuracy; the unbroken spread of the sail-area is of infinite advantage; and the greatest possible amount of canvas can be displayed upon the least possible quantity of spars. Lightness and concentrated power are the great qualities of fore-and-aft rig.

A fleet of fore-and-afters at anchor has its own slender graciousness. The setting of their sails resembles more than anything else the unfolding of a bird's wings; the facility of their evolutions is a pleasure to the eye. They are birds of the sea, whose swimming is like flying, and resembles more a natural function than the handling of man-invented appliances. The fore-and-aft rig in its simplicity and the beauty of its aspect under every angle of vision is, I believe, unapproachable. A schooner, yawl, or cutter in charge of a capable man seems to handle herself as if endowed with the power of reasoning and the gift of swift execution. One laughs with sheer pleasure at a smart piece of manoeuvring, as at a manifestation of a living creature's quick wit and graceful precision.

Of those three varieties of fore-and-aft rig, the cutter — the racing rig *par excellence* — is of an appearance the most imposing, from the fact that practically all her canvas is in one piece. The enormous mainsail of a cutter, as she draws slowly past a point of land or the end of a jetty under your admiring gaze, invests her with an air of lofty and silent majesty. At anchor a schooner looks better; she has an aspect of greater efficiency and a better balance to the eye, with her two masts distributed over the hull with a swaggering rake aft. The yawl rig one comes in time to love. It is, I should think, the easiest of all to manage.

For racing, a cutter; for a long pleasure voyage, a schooner; for cruising in home waters, the yawl; and the handling of them all is indeed a fine art. It requires not only the knowledge of the general principles of sailing, but a particular acquaintance with the character of the craft. All vessels are handled in the same way as far as theory goes, just as you may deal with all men on broad and rigid principles. But if you want that success in life which comes from the affection and confidence of your fellows, then with no two men, however similar they may appear in their nature, will you deal in the same way. There may be a rule of conduct; there is no rule of human fellowship. To deal with men is as fine an art as it is to deal with ships. Both men and ships live in an unstable element, are subject to subtle and powerful influences, and want to have their merits understood rather than their faults found out.

It is not what your ship will *not* do that you want to know to get on terms of successful partnership with her; it is, rather, that you ought to have a precise knowledge of what she will do for you when called upon to put forth what is in her by a sympathetic touch. At first sight the difference does not seem great in either line of dealing with the difficult problem of limitations. But the difference is great. The difference lies in the spirit in which the problem is approached. After all, the art of handling ships is finer, perhaps, than the art of handling men.

And, like all fine arts, it must be based upon a broad, solid sincerity, which, like a law of Nature, rules an infinity of different phenomena. Your endeavour must be single-minded. You would talk differently to a coal-heaver and to a professor. But is this duplicity? I deny it. The truth consists in the genuineness of the feeling, in the genuine recognition of the two men, so similar and so different, as your two partners in the hazard of life. Obviously, a humbug, thinking only of winning his little race, would stand a chance of profiting by his artifices. Men, professors or coal-heavers, are easily deceived; they even have an extraordinary knack of lending themselves to deception, a sort of curious and inexplicable propensity to allow themselves to be led by the nose with their eyes open. But a ship is a creature which we have brought into the world, as it were on purpose to keep us up to the mark. In her handling a ship will not put up with a mere pretender, as, for instance, the public will do with Mr. X, the popular statesman, Mr. Y, the popular scientist, or Mr. Z, the popular — what shall we say? — anything from a teacher of high morality to a bagman

— who have won their little race. But I would like (though not accustomed to betting) to wager a large sum that not one of the few first-rate skippers of racing yachts has ever been a humbug. It would have been too difficult. The difficulty arises from the fact that one does not deal with ships in a mob, but with a ship as an individual. So we may have to do with men. But in each of us there lurks some particle of the mob spirit, of the mob temperament. No matter how earnestly we strive against each other, we remain brothers on the lowest side of our intellect and in the instability of our feelings. With ships it is not so. Much as they are to us, they are nothing to each other. Those sensitive creatures have no ears for our blandishments. It takes something more than words to cajole them to do our will, to cover us with glory. Luckily, too, or else there would have been more shoddy reputations for first-rate seamanship. Ships have no ears, I repeat, though, indeed, I think I have known ships who really seemed to have had eyes, or else I cannot understand on what ground a certain 1,000-ton barque of my acquaintance on one particular occasion refused to answer her helm, thereby saving a frightful smash to two ships and to a very good man's reputation. I knew her intimately for two years, and in no other instance either before or since have I known her to do that thing. The man she had served so well (guessing, perhaps, at the depths of his affection for her) I have known much longer, and in bare justice to him I must say that this confidence-shattering experience (though so fortunate) only augmented his trust in her. Yes, our ships have no ears, and thus they cannot be deceived. I would illustrate my idea of fidelity as between man and ship, between the master and his art, by a statement which, though it might appear shockingly sophisticated, is really very simple. I would say that a racing-yacht skipper who thought of nothing else but the glory of winning the race would never attain to any eminence of reputation. The genuine masters of their craft — I say this confidently from my experience of ships — have thought of nothing but of doing their very best by the vessel under their charge. To forget one's self, to surrender all personal feeling in the service of that fine art, is the only way for a seaman to the faithful discharge of his trust.

Such is the service of a fine art and of ships that sail the sea. And therein I think I can lay my finger upon the difference between the seamen of yesterday, who are still with us, and the seamen of to-morrow, already entered upon the possession of their inheritance. History repeats itself, but

the special call of an art which has passed away is never reproduced. It is as utterly gone out of the world as the song of a destroyed wild bird. Nothing will awaken the same response of pleasurable emotion or conscientious endeavour. And the sailing of any vessel afloat is an art whose fine form seems already receding from us on its way to the overshadowed Valley of Oblivion. The taking of a modern steamship about the world (though one would not minimize its responsibilities) has not the same quality of intimacy with nature, which, after all, is an indispensable condition to the building up of an art. It is less personal and a more exact calling; less arduous, but also less gratifying in the lack of close communion between the artist and the medium of his art. It is, in short, less a matter of love. Its effects are measured exactly in time and space as no effect of an art can be. It is an occupation which a man not desperately subject to sea-sickness can be imagined to follow with content, without enthusiasm, with industry, without affection. Punctuality is its watchword. The incertitude which attends closely every artistic endeavour is absent from its regulated enterprise. It has no great moments of self-confidence, or moments not less great of doubt and heart-searching. It is an industry which, like other industries, has its romance, its honour and its rewards, its bitter anxieties and its hours of ease. But such sea-going has not the artistic quality of a single-handed struggle with something much greater than yourself; it is not the laborious absorbing practice of an art whose ultimate result remains on the knees of the gods. It is not an individual, temperamental achievement, but simply the skilled use of a captured force, merely another step forward upon the way of universal conquest.



## IX.

Every passage of a ship of yesterday, whose yards were braced round eagerly the very moment the pilot, with his pockets full of letters, had got over the side, was like a race — a race against time, against an ideal standard of achievement outstripping the expectations of common men. Like all true art, the general conduct of a ship and her handling in particular cases had a technique which could be discussed with delight and pleasure by men who found in their work, not bread alone, but an outlet for the peculiarities of their temperament. To get the best and truest effect from the infinitely varying moods of sky and sea, not pictorially, but in the spirit of their calling, was their vocation, one and all; and they recognised this with as much sincerity, and drew as much inspiration from this reality, as any man who ever put brush to canvas. The diversity of temperaments was immense amongst those masters of the fine art.

Some of them were like Royal Academicians of a certain kind. They never startled you by a touch of originality, by a fresh audacity of inspiration. They were safe, very safe. They went about solemnly in the assurance of their consecrated and empty reputation. Names are odious, but I remember one of them who might have been their very president, the P.R.A. of the sea-craft. His weather-beaten and handsome face, his portly presence, his shirt-fronts and broad cuffs and gold links, his air of bluff distinction, impressed the humble beholders (stevedores, tally clerks, tide-waiters) as he walked ashore over the gangway of his ship lying at the Circular Quay in Sydney. His voice was deep, hearty, and authoritative — the voice of a very prince amongst sailors. He did everything with an air which put your attention on the alert and raised your expectations, but the result somehow was always on stereotyped lines, unsuggestive, empty of any lesson that one could lay to heart. He kept his ship in apple-pie order, which would have been seamanlike enough but for a finicking touch in its details. His officers affected a superiority over the rest of us, but the boredom of their souls appeared in their manner of dreary submission to the fads of their commander. It was only his apprenticed boys whose irrepressible spirits were not affected by the solemn and respectable mediocrity of that artist. There were four of these youngsters: one the son

of a doctor, another of a colonel, the third of a jeweller; the name of the fourth was Twentyman, and this is all I remember of his parentage. But not one of them seemed to possess the smallest spark of gratitude in his composition. Though their commander was a kind man in his way, and had made a point of introducing them to the best people in the town in order that they should not fall into the bad company of boys belonging to other ships, I regret to say that they made faces at him behind his back, and imitated the dignified carriage of his head without any concealment whatever.

This master of the fine art was a personage and nothing more; but, as I have said, there was an infinite diversity of temperament amongst the masters of the fine art I have known. Some were great impressionists. They impressed upon you the fear of God and Immensity — or, in other words, the fear of being drowned with every circumstance of terrific grandeur. One may think that the locality of your passing away by means of suffocation in water does not really matter very much. I am not so sure of that. I am, perhaps, unduly sensitive, but I confess that the idea of being suddenly spilt into an infuriated ocean in the midst of darkness and uproar affected me always with a sensation of shrinking distaste. To be drowned in a pond, though it might be called an ignominious fate by the ignorant, is yet a bright and peaceful ending in comparison with some other endings to one's earthly career which I have mentally quaked at in the intervals or even in the midst of violent exertions.

But let that pass. Some of the masters whose influence left a trace upon my character to this very day, combined a fierceness of conception with a certitude of execution upon the basis of just appreciation of means and ends which is the highest quality of the man of action. And an artist is a man of action, whether he creates a personality, invents an expedient, or finds the issue of a complicated situation.

There were masters, too, I have known, whose very art consisted in avoiding every conceivable situation. It is needless to say that they never did great things in their craft; but they were not to be despised for that. They were modest; they understood their limitations. Their own masters had not handed the sacred fire into the keeping of their cold and skilful hands. One of those last I remember specially, now gone to his rest from that sea which his temperament must have made a scene of little more than a peaceful pursuit. Once only did he attempt a stroke of audacity, one early morning, with a steady breeze, entering a crowded roadstead. But he was

not genuine in this display which might have been art. He was thinking of his own self; he hankered after the meretricious glory of a showy performance.

As, rounding a dark, wooded point, bathed in fresh air and sunshine, we opened to view a crowd of shipping at anchor lying half a mile ahead of us perhaps, he called me aft from my station on the forecastle head, and, turning over and over his binoculars in his brown hands, said: "Do you see that big, heavy ship with white lower masts? I am going to take up a berth between her and the shore. Now do you see to it that the men jump smartly at the first order."

I answered, "Ay, ay, sir," and verily believed that this would be a fine performance. We dashed on through the fleet in magnificent style. There must have been many open mouths and following eyes on board those ships — Dutch, English, with a sprinkling of Americans and a German or two — who had all hoisted their flags at eight o'clock as if in honour of our arrival. It would have been a fine performance if it had come off, but it did not. Through a touch of self-seeking that modest artist of solid merit became untrue to his temperament. It was not with him art for art's sake: it was art for his own sake; and a dismal failure was the penalty he paid for that greatest of sins. It might have been even heavier, but, as it happened, we did not run our ship ashore, nor did we knock a large hole in the big ship whose lower masts were painted white. But it is a wonder that we did not carry away the cables of both our anchors, for, as may be imagined, I did not stand upon the order to "Let go!" that came to me in a quavering, quite unknown voice from his trembling lips. I let them both go with a celerity which to this day astonishes my memory. No average merchantman's anchors have ever been let go with such miraculous smartness. And they both held. I could have kissed their rough, cold iron palms in gratitude if they had not been buried in slimy mud under ten fathoms of water. Ultimately they brought us up with the jibboom of a Dutch brig poking through our spanker — nothing worse. And a miss is as good as a mile.

But not in art. Afterwards the master said to me in a shy mumble, "She wouldn't luff up in time, somehow. What's the matter with her?" And I made no answer.

Yet the answer was clear. The ship had found out the momentary weakness of her man. Of all the living creatures upon land and sea, it is

ships alone that cannot be taken in by barren pretences, that will not put up with bad art from their masters.

## X.

From the main truck of the average tall ship the horizon describes a circle of many miles, in which you can see another ship right down to her water-line; and these very eyes which follow this writing have counted in their time over a hundred sail becalmed, as if within a magic ring, not very far from the Azores — ships more or less tall. There were hardly two of them heading exactly the same way, as if each had meditated breaking out of the enchanted circle at a different point of the compass. But the spell of the calm is a strong magic. The following day still saw them scattered within sight of each other and heading different ways; but when, at last, the breeze came with the darkling ripple that ran very blue on a pale sea, they all went in the same direction together. For this was the homeward-bound fleet from the far-off ends of the earth, and a Falmouth fruit-schooner, the smallest of them all, was heading the flight. One could have imagined her very fair, if not divinely tall, leaving a scent of lemons and oranges in her wake.

The next day there were very few ships in sight from our mast-heads — seven at most, perhaps, with a few more distant specks, hull down, beyond the magic ring of the horizon. The spell of the fair wind has a subtle power to scatter a white-winged company of ships looking all the same way, each with its white fillet of tumbling foam under the bow. It is the calm that brings ships mysteriously together; it is your wind that is the great separator.

The taller the ship, the further she can be seen; and her white tallness breathed upon by the wind first proclaims her size. The tall masts holding aloft the white canvas, spread out like a snare for catching the invisible power of the air, emerge gradually from the water, sail after sail, yard after yard, growing big, till, under the towering structure of her machinery, you perceive the insignificant, tiny speck of her hull.

The tall masts are the pillars supporting the balanced planes that, motionless and silent, catch from the air the ship's motive-power, as it were a gift from Heaven vouchsafed to the audacity of man; and it is the ship's tall spars, stripped and shorn of their white glory, that incline themselves before the anger of the clouded heaven.

When they yield to a squall in a gaunt and naked submission, their tallness is brought best home even to the mind of a seaman. The man who has looked upon his ship going over too far is made aware of the preposterous tallness of a ship's spars. It seems impossible but that those gilt trucks which one had to tilt one's head back to see, now falling into the lower plane of vision, must perforce hit the very edge of the horizon. Such an experience gives you a better impression of the loftiness of your spars than any amount of running aloft could do. And yet in my time the royal yards of an average profitable ship were a good way up above her decks.

No doubt a fair amount of climbing up iron ladders can be achieved by an active man in a ship's engine-room, but I remember moments when even to my supple limbs and pride of nimbleness the sailing-ship's machinery seemed to reach up to the very stars.

For machinery it is, doing its work in perfect silence and with a motionless grace, that seems to hide a capricious and not always governable power, taking nothing away from the material stores of the earth. Not for it the unerring precision of steel moved by white steam and living by red fire and fed with black coal. The other seems to draw its strength from the very soul of the world, its formidable ally, held to obedience by the frailest bonds, like a fierce ghost captured in a snare of something even finer than spun silk. For what is the array of the strongest ropes, the tallest spars and the stoutest canvas against the mighty breath of the infinite, but thistle stalks, cobwebs and gossamer?

## XI.

Indeed, it is less than nothing, and I have seen, when the great soul of the world turned over with a heavy sigh, a perfectly new, extra-stout foresail vanish like a bit of some airy stuff much lighter than gossamer. Then was the time for the tall spars to stand fast in the great uproar. The machinery must do its work even if the soul of the world has gone mad.

The modern steamship advances upon a still and overshadowed sea with a pulsating tremor of her frame, an occasional clang in her depths, as if she had an iron heart in her iron body; with a thudding rhythm in her progress and the regular beat of her propeller, heard afar in the night with an august and plodding sound as of the march of an inevitable future. But in a gale, the silent machinery of a sailing-ship would catch not only the power, but the wild and exulting voice of the world's soul. Whether she ran with her tall spars swinging, or breasted it with her tall spars lying over, there was always that wild song, deep like a chant, for a bass to the shrill pipe of the wind played on the sea-tops, with a punctuating crash, now and then, of a breaking wave. At times the weird effects of that invisible orchestra would get upon a man's nerves till he wished himself deaf.

And this recollection of a personal wish, experienced upon several oceans, where the soul of the world has plenty of room to turn over with a mighty sigh, brings me to the remark that in order to take a proper care of a ship's spars it is just as well for a seaman to have nothing the matter with his ears. Such is the intimacy with which a seaman had to live with his ship of yesterday that his senses were like her senses, that the stress upon his body made him judge of the strain upon the ship's masts.

I had been some time at sea before I became aware of the fact that hearing plays a perceptible part in gauging the force of the wind. It was at night. The ship was one of those iron wool-clippers that the Clyde had floated out in swarms upon the world during the seventh decade of the last century. It was a fine period in ship-building, and also, I might say, a period of over-masting. The spars rigged up on the narrow hulls were indeed tall then, and the ship of which I think, with her coloured-glass skylight ends bearing the motto, "Let Glasgow Flourish," was certainly one of the most heavily-sparred specimens. She was built for hard driving, and

unquestionably she got all the driving she could stand. Our captain was a man famous for the quick passages he had been used to make in the old *Tweed*, a ship famous the world over for her speed. The *Tweed* had been a wooden vessel, and he brought the tradition of quick passages with him into the iron clipper. I was the junior in her, a third mate, keeping watch with the chief officer; and it was just during one of the night watches in a strong, freshening breeze that I overheard two men in a sheltered nook of the main deck exchanging these informing remarks. Said one:

“Should think ‘twas time some of them light sails were coming off her.”

And the other, an older man, uttered grumpily: “No fear! not while the chief mate’s on deck. He’s that deaf he can’t tell how much wind there is.”

And, indeed, poor P-, quite young, and a smart seaman, was very hard of hearing. At the same time, he had the name of being the very devil of a fellow for carrying on sail on a ship. He was wonderfully clever at concealing his deafness, and, as to carrying on heavily, though he was a fearless man, I don’t think that he ever meant to take undue risks. I can never forget his naive sort of astonishment when remonstrated with for what appeared a most dare-devil performance. The only person, of course, that could remonstrate with telling effect was our captain, himself a man of dare-devil tradition; and really, for me, who knew under whom I was serving, those were impressive scenes. Captain S- had a great name for sailor-like qualities — the sort of name that compelled my youthful admiration. To this day I preserve his memory, for, indeed, it was he in a sense who completed my training. It was often a stormy process, but let that pass. I am sure he meant well, and I am certain that never, not even at the time, could I bear him malice for his extraordinary gift of incisive criticism. And to hear *him* make a fuss about too much sail on the ship seemed one of those incredible experiences that take place only in one’s dreams.

It generally happened in this way: Night, clouds racing overhead, wind howling, royals set, and the ship rushing on in the dark, an immense white sheet of foam level with the lee rail. Mr. P-, in charge of the deck, hooked on to the windward mizzen rigging in a state of perfect serenity; myself, the third mate, also hooked on somewhere to windward of the slanting poop, in a state of the utmost preparedness to jump at the very first hint of some sort of order, but otherwise in a perfectly acquiescent state of mind. Suddenly, out of the companion would appear a tall, dark figure, bareheaded, with a



short white beard of a perpendicular cut, very visible in the dark — Captain S-, disturbed in his reading down below by the frightful bounding and lurching of the ship. Leaning very much against the precipitous incline of the deck, he would take a turn or two, perfectly silent, hang on by the compass for a while, take another couple of turns, and suddenly burst out:

“What are you trying to do with the ship?”

And Mr. P-, who was not good at catching what was shouted in the wind, would say interrogatively:

“Yes, sir?”

Then in the increasing gale of the sea there would be a little private ship’s storm going on in which you could detect strong language, pronounced in a tone of passion and exculpatory protestations uttered with every possible inflection of injured innocence.

“By Heavens, Mr. P-! I used to carry on sail in my time, but — ”

And the rest would be lost to me in a stormy gust of wind.

Then, in a lull, P-’s protesting innocence would become audible:

“She seems to stand it very well.”

And then another burst of an indignant voice:

“Any fool can carry sail on a ship — ”

And so on and so on, the ship meanwhile rushing on her way with a heavier list, a noisier splutter, a more threatening hiss of the white, almost blinding, sheet of foam to leeward. For the best of it was that Captain S-seemed constitutionally incapable of giving his officers a definite order to shorten sail; and so that extraordinarily vague row would go on till at last it dawned upon them both, in some particularly alarming gust, that it was time to do something. There is nothing like the fearful inclination of your tall spars overloaded with canvas to bring a deaf man and an angry one to their senses.

## XII.

So sail did get shortened more or less in time even in that ship, and her tall spars never went overboard while I served in her. However, all the time I was with them, Captain S- and Mr. P- did not get on very well together. If P- carried on "like the very devil" because he was too deaf to know how much wind there was, Captain S- (who, as I have said, seemed constitutionally incapable of ordering one of his officers to shorten sail) resented the necessity forced upon him by Mr. P-'s desperate goings on. It was in Captain S-'s tradition rather to reprove his officers for not carrying on quite enough — in his phrase "for not taking every ounce of advantage of a fair wind." But there was also a psychological motive that made him extremely difficult to deal with on board that iron clipper. He had just come out of the marvellous *Tweed*, a ship, I have heard, heavy to look at but of phenomenal speed. In the middle sixties she had beaten by a day and a half the steam mail-boat from Hong Kong to Singapore. There was something peculiarly lucky, perhaps, in the placing of her masts — who knows? Officers of men-of-war used to come on board to take the exact dimensions of her sail-plan. Perhaps there had been a touch of genius or the finger of good fortune in the fashioning of her lines at bow and stern. It is impossible to say. She was built in the East Indies somewhere, of teak-wood throughout, except the deck. She had a great sheer, high bows, and a clumsy stern. The men who had seen her described her to me as "nothing much to look at." But in the great Indian famine of the seventies that ship, already old then, made some wonderful dashes across the Gulf of Bengal with cargoes of rice from Rangoon to Madras.

She took the secret of her speed with her, and, unsightly as she was, her image surely has its glorious place in the mirror of the old sea.

The point, however, is that Captain S-, who used to say frequently, "She never made a decent passage after I left her," seemed to think that the secret of her speed lay in her famous commander. No doubt the secret of many a ship's excellence does lie with the man on board, but it was hopeless for Captain S- to try to make his new iron clipper equal the feats which made the old *Tweed* a name of praise upon the lips of English-speaking seamen. There was something pathetic in it, as in the endeavour of an artist in his

old age to equal the masterpieces of his youth — for the *Tweed's* famous passages were Captain S-'s masterpieces. It was pathetic, and perhaps just the least bit dangerous. At any rate, I am glad that, what between Captain S-'s yearning for old triumphs and Mr. P-'s deafness, I have seen some memorable carrying on to make a passage. And I have carried on myself upon the tall spars of that Clyde shipbuilder's masterpiece as I have never carried on in a ship before or since.

The second mate falling ill during the passage, I was promoted to officer of the watch, alone in charge of the deck. Thus the immense leverage of the ship's tall masts became a matter very near my own heart. I suppose it was something of a compliment for a young fellow to be trusted, apparently without any supervision, by such a commander as Captain S-; though, as far as I can remember, neither the tone, nor the manner, nor yet the drift of Captain S-'s remarks addressed to myself did ever, by the most strained interpretation, imply a favourable opinion of my abilities. And he was, I must say, a most uncomfortable commander to get your orders from at night. If I had the watch from eight till midnight, he would leave the deck about nine with the words, "Don't take any sail off her." Then, on the point of disappearing down the companion-way, he would add curtly: "Don't carry anything away." I am glad to say that I never did; one night, however, I was caught, not quite prepared, by a sudden shift of wind.

There was, of course, a good deal of noise — running about, the, shouts of the sailors, the thrashing of the sails — enough, in fact, to wake the dead. But S- never came on deck. When I was relieved by the chief mate an hour afterwards, he sent for me. I went into his stateroom; he was lying on his couch wrapped up in a rug, with a pillow under his head.

"What was the matter with you up there just now?" he asked.

"Wind flew round on the lee quarter, sir," I said.

"Couldn't you see the shift coming?"

"Yes, sir, I thought it wasn't very far off."

"Why didn't you have your courses hauled up at once, then?" he asked in a tone that ought to have made my blood run cold.

But this was my chance, and I did not let it slip.

"Well, sir," I said in an apologetic tone, "she was going eleven knots very nicely, and I thought she would do for another half-hour or so."

He gazed at me darkly out of his head, lying very still on the white pillow, for a time.

“Ah, yes, another half-hour. That’s the way ships get dismasted.”

And that was all I got in the way of a wiggling. I waited a little while and then went out, shutting carefully the door of the state-room after me.

Well, I have loved, lived with, and left the sea without ever seeing a ship’s tall fabric of sticks, cobwebs and gossamer go by the board. Sheer good luck, no doubt. But as to poor P-, I am sure that he would not have got off scot-free like this but for the god of gales, who called him away early from this earth, which is three parts ocean, and therefore a fit abode for sailors. A few years afterwards I met in an Indian port a man who had served in the ships of the same company. Names came up in our talk, names of our colleagues in the same employ, and, naturally enough, I asked after P-. Had he got a command yet? And the other man answered carelessly:

“No; but he’s provided for, anyhow. A heavy sea took him off the poop in the run between New Zealand and the Horn.”

Thus P- passed away from amongst the tall spars of ships that he had tried to their utmost in many a spell of boisterous weather. He had shown me what carrying on meant, but he was not a man to learn discretion from. He could not help his deafness. One can only remember his cheery temper, his admiration for the jokes in *Punch*, his little oddities — like his strange passion for borrowing looking-glasses, for instance. Each of our cabins had its own looking-glass screwed to the bulkhead, and what he wanted with more of them we never could fathom. He asked for the loan in confidential tones. Why? Mystery. We made various surmises. No one will ever know now. At any rate, it was a harmless eccentricity, and may the god of gales, who took him away so abruptly between New Zealand and the Horn, let his soul rest in some Paradise of true seamen, where no amount of carrying on will ever dismast a ship!

### XIII.

There has been a time when a ship's chief mate, pocket-book in hand and pencil behind his ear, kept one eye aloft upon his riggers and the other down the hatchway on the stevedores, and watched the disposition of his ship's cargo, knowing that even before she started he was already doing his best to secure for her an easy and quick passage.

The hurry of the times, the loading and discharging organization of the docks, the use of hoisting machinery which works quickly and will not wait, the cry for prompt despatch, the very size of his ship, stand nowadays between the modern seaman and the thorough knowledge of his craft.

There are profitable ships and unprofitable ships. The profitable ship will carry a large load through all the hazards of the weather, and, when at rest, will stand up in dock and shift from berth to berth without ballast. There is a point of perfection in a ship as a worker when she is spoken of as being able to *sail* without ballast. I have never met that sort of paragon myself, but I have seen these paragons advertised amongst ships for sale. Such excess of virtue and good-nature on the part of a ship always provoked my mistrust. It is open to any man to say that his ship will sail without ballast; and he will say it, too, with every mark of profound conviction, especially if he is not going to sail in her himself. The risk of advertising her as able to sail without ballast is not great, since the statement does not imply a warranty of her arriving anywhere. Moreover, it is strictly true that most ships will sail without ballast for some little time before they turn turtle upon the crew.

A shipowner loves a profitable ship; the seaman is proud of her; a doubt of her good looks seldom exists in his mind; but if he can boast of her more useful qualities it is an added satisfaction for his self-love.

The loading of ships was once a matter of skill, judgment, and knowledge. Thick books have been written about it. "Stevens on Stowage" is a portly volume with the renown and weight (in its own world) of Coke on Littleton. Stevens is an agreeable writer, and, as is the case with men of talent, his gifts adorn his sterling soundness. He gives you the official teaching on the whole subject, is precise as to rules, mentions illustrative events, quotes law cases where verdicts turned upon a point of stowage. He

is never pedantic, and, for all his close adherence to broad principles, he is ready to admit that no two ships can be treated exactly alike.

Stevedoring, which had been a skilled labour, is fast becoming a labour without the skill. The modern steamship with her many holds is not loaded within the sailor-like meaning of the word. She is filled up. Her cargo is not stowed in any sense; it is simply dumped into her through six hatchways, more or less, by twelve winches or so, with clatter and hurry and racket and heat, in a cloud of steam and a mess of coal-dust. As long as you keep her propeller under water and take care, say, not to fling down barrels of oil on top of bales of silk, or deposit an iron bridge-girder of five ton or so upon a bed of coffee-bags, you have done about all in the way of duty that the cry for prompt despatch will allow you to do.

## XIV.

The sailing-ship, when I knew her in her days of perfection, was a sensible creature. When I say her days of perfection, I mean perfection of build, gear, seaworthy qualities and case of handling, not the perfection of speed. That quality has departed with the change of building material. No iron ship of yesterday ever attained the marvels of speed which the seamanship of men famous in their time had obtained from their wooden, copper-sheeted predecessors. Everything had been done to make the iron ship perfect, but no wit of man had managed to devise an efficient coating composition to keep her bottom clean with the smooth cleanness of yellow metal sheeting. After a spell of a few weeks at sea, an iron ship begins to lag as if she had grown tired too soon. It is only her bottom that is getting foul. A very little affects the speed of an iron ship which is not driven on by a merciless propeller. Often it is impossible to tell what inconsiderate trifle puts her off her stride. A certain mysteriousness hangs around the quality of speed as it was displayed by the old sailing-ships commanded by a competent seaman. In those days the speed depended upon the seaman; therefore, apart from the laws, rules, and regulations for the good preservation of his cargo, he was careful of his loading, — or what is technically called the trim of his ship. Some ships sailed fast on an even keel, others had to be trimmed quite one foot by the stern, and I have heard of a ship that gave her best speed on a wind when so loaded as to float a couple of inches by the head.

I call to mind a winter landscape in Amsterdam — a flat foreground of waste land, with here and there stacks of timber, like the huts of a camp of some very miserable tribe; the long stretch of the Handelskade; cold, stone-faced quays, with the snow-sprinkled ground and the hard, frozen water of the canal, in which were set ships one behind another with their frosty mooring-ropes hanging slack and their decks idle and deserted, because, as the master stevedore (a gentle, pale person, with a few golden hairs on his chin and a reddened nose) informed me, their cargoes were frozen-in up-country on barges and schuyts. In the distance, beyond the waste ground, and running parallel with the line of ships, a line of brown, warm-toned houses seemed bowed under snow-laden roofs. From afar at the end of Tsar

Peter Straat, issued in the frosty air the tinkle of bells of the horse tramcars, appearing and disappearing in the opening between the buildings, like little toy carriages harnessed with toy horses and played with by people that appeared no bigger than children.

I was, as the French say, biting my fists with impatience for that cargo frozen up-country; with rage at that canal set fast, at the wintry and deserted aspect of all those ships that seemed to decay in grim depression for want of the open water. I was chief mate, and very much alone. Directly I had joined I received from my owners instructions to send all the ship's apprentices away on leave together, because in such weather there was nothing for anybody to do, unless to keep up a fire in the cabin stove. That was attended to by a snuffy and mop-headed, inconceivably dirty, and weirdly toothless Dutch ship-keeper, who could hardly speak three words of English, but who must have had some considerable knowledge of the language, since he managed invariably to interpret in the contrary sense everything that was said to him.

Notwithstanding the little iron stove, the ink froze on the swing-table in the cabin, and I found it more convenient to go ashore stumbling over the arctic waste-land and shivering in glazed tramcars in order to write my evening letter to my owners in a gorgeous café in the centre of the town. It was an immense place, lofty and gilt, upholstered in red plush, full of electric lights and so thoroughly warmed that even the marble tables felt tepid to the touch. The waiter who brought me my cup of coffee bore, by comparison with my utter isolation, the dear aspect of an intimate friend. There, alone in a noisy crowd, I would write slowly a letter addressed to Glasgow, of which the gist would be: There is no cargo, and no prospect of any coming till late spring apparently. And all the time I sat there the necessity of getting back to the ship bore heavily on my already half-congealed spirits — the shivering in glazed tramcars, the stumbling over the snow-sprinkled waste ground, the vision of ships frozen in a row, appearing vaguely like corpses of black vessels in a white world, so silent, so lifeless, so soulless they seemed to be.

With precaution I would go up the side of my own particular corpse, and would feel her as cold as ice itself and as slippery under my feet. My cold berth would swallow up like a chilly burial niche my bodily shivers and my mental excitement. It was a cruel winter. The very air seemed as hard and trenchant as steel; but it would have taken much more than this to



extinguish my sacred fire for the exercise of my craft. No young man of twenty-four appointed chief mate for the first time in his life would have let that Dutch tenacious winter penetrate into his heart. I think that in those days I never forgot the fact of my elevation for five consecutive minutes. I fancy it kept me warm, even in my slumbers, better than the high pile of blankets, which positively crackled with frost as I threw them off in the morning. And I would get up early for no reason whatever except that I was in sole charge. The new captain had not been appointed yet.

Almost each morning a letter from my owners would arrive, directing me to go to the charterers and clamour for the ship's cargo; to threaten them with the heaviest penalties of demurrage; to demand that this assortment of varied merchandise, set fast in a landscape of ice and windmills somewhere up-country, should be put on rail instantly, and fed up to the ship in regular quantities every day. After drinking some hot coffee, like an Arctic explorer setting off on a sledge journey towards the North Pole, I would go ashore and roll shivering in a tramcar into the very heart of the town, past clean-faced houses, past thousands of brass knockers upon a thousand painted doors glimmering behind rows of trees of the pavement species, leafless, gaunt, seemingly dead for ever.

That part of the expedition was easy enough, though the horses were painfully glistening with icicles, and the aspect of the tram-conductors' faces presented a repulsive blending of crimson and purple. But as to frightening or bullying, or even wheedling some sort of answer out of Mr. Hudig, that was another matter altogether. He was a big, swarthy Netherlander, with black moustaches and a bold glance. He always began by shoving me into a chair before I had time to open my mouth, gave me cordially a large cigar, and in excellent English would start to talk everlastingly about the phenomenal severity of the weather. It was impossible to threaten a man who, though he possessed the language perfectly, seemed incapable of understanding any phrase pronounced in a tone of remonstrance or discontent. As to quarrelling with him, it would have been stupid. The weather was too bitter for that. His office was so warm, his fire so bright, his sides shook so heartily with laughter, that I experienced always a great difficulty in making up my mind to reach for my hat.

At last the cargo did come. At first it came dribbling in by rail in trucks, till the thaw set in; and then fast, in a multitude of barges, with a great rush

of unbound waters. The gentle master stevedore had his hands very full at last; and the chief mate became worried in his mind as to the proper distribution of the weight of his first cargo in a ship he did not personally know before.

Ships do want humouring. They want humouring in handling; and if you mean to handle them well, they must have been humoured in the distribution of the weight which you ask them to carry through the good and evil fortune of a passage. Your ship is a tender creature, whose idiosyncrasies must be attended to if you mean her to come with credit to herself and you through the rough-and-tumble of her life.

## XV.

So seemed to think the new captain, who arrived the day after we had finished loading, on the very eve of the day of sailing. I first beheld him on the quay, a complete stranger to me, obviously not a Hollander, in a black bowler and a short drab overcoat, ridiculously out of tone with the winter aspect of the waste-lands, bordered by the brown fronts of houses with their roofs dripping with melting snow.

This stranger was walking up and down absorbed in the marked contemplation of the ship's fore and aft trim; but when I saw him squat on his heels in the slush at the very edge of the quay to peer at the draught of water under her counter, I said to myself, "This is the captain." And presently I descried his luggage coming along — a real sailor's chest, carried by means of rope-beckets between two men, with a couple of leather portmanteaus and a roll of charts sheeted in canvas piled upon the lid. The sudden, spontaneous agility with which he bounded aboard right off the rail afforded me the first glimpse of his real character. Without further preliminaries than a friendly nod, he addressed me: "You have got her pretty well in her fore and aft trim. Now, what about your weights?"

I told him I had managed to keep the weight sufficiently well up, as I thought, one-third of the whole being in the upper part "above the beams," as the technical expression has it. He whistled "Phew!" scrutinizing me from head to foot. A sort of smiling vexation was visible on his ruddy face.

"Well, we shall have a lively time of it this passage, I bet," he said.

He knew. It turned out he had been chief mate of her for the two preceding voyages; and I was already familiar with his handwriting in the old log-books I had been perusing in my cabin with a natural curiosity, looking up the records of my new ship's luck, of her behaviour, of the good times she had had, and of the troubles she had escaped.

He was right in his prophecy. On our passage from Amsterdam to Samarang with a general cargo, of which, alas! only one-third in weight was stowed "above the beams," we had a lively time of it. It was lively, but not joyful. There was not even a single moment of comfort in it, because no seaman can feel comfortable in body or mind when he has made his ship uneasy.

To travel along with a cranky ship for ninety days or so is no doubt a nerve-trying experience; but in this case what was wrong with our craft was this: that by my system of loading she had been made much too stable.

Neither before nor since have I felt a ship roll so abruptly, so violently, so heavily. Once she began, you felt that she would never stop, and this hopeless sensation, characterizing the motion of ships whose centre of gravity is brought down too low in loading, made everyone on board weary of keeping on his feet. I remember once over-hearing one of the hands say: "By Heavens, Jack! I feel as if I didn't mind how soon I let myself go, and let the blamed hooker knock my brains out if she likes." The captain used to remark frequently: "Ah, yes; I dare say one-third weight above beams would have been quite enough for most ships. But then, you see, there's no two of them alike on the seas, and she's an uncommonly ticklish jade to load."

Down south, running before the gales of high latitudes, she made our life a burden to us. There were days when nothing would keep even on the swing-tables, when there was no position where you could fix yourself so as not to feel a constant strain upon all the muscles of your body. She rolled and rolled with an awful dislodging jerk and that dizzily fast sweep of her masts on every swing. It was a wonder that the men sent aloft were not flung off the yards, the yards not flung off the masts, the masts not flung overboard. The captain in his armchair, holding on grimly at the head of the table, with the soup-tureen rolling on one side of the cabin and the steward sprawling on the other, would observe, looking at me: "That's your one-third above the beams. The only thing that surprises me is that the sticks have stuck to her all this time."

Ultimately some of the minor spars did go — nothing important: spanker-booms and such-like — because at times the frightful impetus of her rolling would part a fourfold tackle of new three-inch Manilla line as if it were weaker than pack-thread.

It was only poetic justice that the chief mate who had made a mistake — perhaps a half-excusable one — about the distribution of his ship's cargo should pay the penalty. A piece of one of the minor spars that did carry away flew against the chief mate's back, and sent him sliding on his face for quite a considerable distance along the main deck. Thereupon followed various and unpleasant consequences of a physical order — "queer symptoms," as the captain, who treated them, used to say; inexplicable

periods of powerlessness, sudden accesses of mysterious pain; and the patient agreed fully with the regretful mutters of his very attentive captain wishing that it had been a straightforward broken leg. Even the Dutch doctor who took the case up in Samarang offered no scientific explanation. All he said was: "Ah, friend, you are young yet; it may be very serious for your whole life. You must leave your ship; you must quite silent be for three months — quite silent."

Of course, he meant the chief mate to keep quiet — to lay up, as a matter of fact. His manner was impressive enough, if his English was childishly imperfect when compared with the fluency of Mr. Hudig, the figure at the other end of that passage, and memorable enough in its way. In a great airy ward of a Far Eastern hospital, lying on my back, I had plenty of leisure to remember the dreadful cold and snow of Amsterdam, while looking at the fronds of the palm-trees tossing and rustling at the height of the window. I could remember the elated feeling and the soul-gripping cold of those tramway journeys taken into town to put what in diplomatic language is called pressure upon the good Hudig, with his warm fire, his armchair, his big cigar, and the never-failing suggestion in his good-natured voice: "I suppose in the end it is you they will appoint captain before the ship sails?" It may have been his extreme good-nature, the serious, unsmiling good-nature of a fat, swarthy man with coal-black moustache and steady eyes; but he might have been a bit of a diplomatist, too. His enticing suggestions I used to repel modestly by the assurance that it was extremely unlikely, as I had not enough experience. "You know very well how to go about business matters," he used to say, with a sort of affected moodiness clouding his serene round face. I wonder whether he ever laughed to himself after I had left the office. I dare say he never did, because I understand that diplomatists, in and out of the career, take themselves and their tricks with an exemplary seriousness.

But he had nearly persuaded me that I was fit in every way to be trusted with a command. There came three months of mental worry, hard rolling, remorse, and physical pain to drive home the lesson of insufficient experience.

Yes, your ship wants to be humoured with knowledge. You must treat with an understanding consideration the mysteries of her feminine nature, and then she will stand by you faithfully in the unceasing struggle with forces wherein defeat is no shame. It is a serious relation, that in which a

man stands to his ship. She has her rights as though she could breathe and speak; and, indeed, there are ships that, for the right man, will do anything but speak, as the saying goes.

A ship is not a slave. You must make her easy in a seaway, you must never forget that you owe her the fullest share of your thought, of your skill, of your self-love. If you remember that obligation, naturally and without effort, as if it were an instinctive feeling of your inner life, she will sail, stay, run for you as long as she is able, or, like a sea-bird going to rest upon the angry waves, she will lay out the heaviest gale that ever made you doubt living long enough to see another sunrise.

## XVI.

Often I turn with melancholy eagerness to the space reserved in the newspapers under the general heading of "Shipping Intelligence." I meet there the names of ships I have known. Every year some of these names disappear — the names of old friends. "Tempi passati!"

The different divisions of that kind of news are set down in their order, which varies but slightly in its arrangement of concise headlines. And first comes "Speakings" — reports of ships met and signalled at sea, name, port, where from, where bound for, so many days out, ending frequently with the words "All well." Then come "Wrecks and Casualties" — a longish array of paragraphs, unless the weather has been fair and clear, and friendly to ships all over the world.

On some days there appears the heading "Overdue" — an ominous threat of loss and sorrow trembling yet in the balance of fate. There is something sinister to a seaman in the very grouping of the letters which form this word, clear in its meaning, and seldom threatening in vain.

Only a very few days more — appallingly few to the hearts which had set themselves bravely to hope against hope — three weeks, a month later, perhaps, the name of ships under the blight of the "Overdue" heading shall appear again in the column of "Shipping Intelligence," but under the final declaration of "Missing."

"The ship, or barque, or brig So-and-so, bound from such a port, with such and such cargo, for such another port, having left at such and such a date, last spoken at sea on such a day, and never having been heard of since, was posted to-day as missing." Such in its strictly official eloquence is the form of funeral orations on ships that, perhaps wearied with a long struggle, or in some unguarded moment that may come to the readiest of us, had let themselves be overwhelmed by a sudden blow from the enemy.

Who can say? Perhaps the men she carried had asked her to do too much, had stretched beyond breaking-point the enduring faithfulness which seems wrought and hammered into that assemblage of iron ribs and plating, of wood and steel and canvas and wire, which goes to the making of a ship — a complete creation endowed with character, individuality, qualities and defects, by men whose hands launch her upon the water, and that other men

shall learn to know with an intimacy surpassing the intimacy of man with man, to love with a love nearly as great as that of man for woman, and often as blind in its infatuated disregard of defects.

There are ships which bear a bad name, but I have yet to meet one whose crew for the time being failed to stand up angrily for her against every criticism. One ship which I call to mind now had the reputation of killing somebody every voyage she made. This was no calumny, and yet I remember well, somewhere far back in the late seventies, that the crew of that ship were, if anything, rather proud of her evil fame, as if they had been an utterly corrupt lot of desperadoes glorying in their association with an atrocious creature. We, belonging to other vessels moored all about the Circular Quay in Sydney, used to shake our heads at her with a great sense of the unblemished virtue of our own well-loved ships.

I shall not pronounce her name. She is “missing” now, after a sinister but, from the point of view of her owners, a useful career extending over many years, and, I should say, across every ocean of our globe. Having killed a man for every voyage, and perhaps rendered more misanthropic by the infirmities that come with years upon a ship, she had made up her mind to kill all hands at once before leaving the scene of her exploits. A fitting end, this, to a life of usefulness and crime — in a last outburst of an evil passion supremely satisfied on some wild night, perhaps, to the applauding clamour of wind and wave.

How did she do it? In the word “missing” there is a horrible depth of doubt and speculation. Did she go quickly from under the men’s feet, or did she resist to the end, letting the sea batter her to pieces, start her butts, wrench her frame, load her with an increasing weight of salt water, and, dismasted, unmanageable, rolling heavily, her boats gone, her decks swept, had she wearied her men half to death with the unceasing labour at the pumps before she sank with them like a stone?

However, such a case must be rare. I imagine a raft of some sort could always be contrived; and, even if it saved no one, it would float on and be picked up, perhaps conveying some hint of the vanished name. Then that ship would not be, properly speaking, missing. She would be “lost with all hands,” and in that distinction there is a subtle difference — less horror and a less appalling darkness.



## XVII.

The unholy fascination of dread dwells in the thought of the last moments of a ship reported as “missing” in the columns of the *Shipping Gazette*. Nothing of her ever comes to light — no grating, no lifebuoy, no piece of boat or branded oar — to give a hint of the place and date of her sudden end. The *Shipping Gazette* does not even call her “lost with all hands.” She remains simply “missing”; she has disappeared enigmatically into a mystery of fate as big as the world, where your imagination of a brother-sailor, of a fellow-servant and lover of ships, may range unchecked.

And yet sometimes one gets a hint of what the last scene may be like in the life of a ship and her crew, which resembles a drama in its struggle against a great force bearing it up, formless, ungraspable, chaotic and mysterious, as fate.

It was on a gray afternoon in the lull of a three days’ gale that had left the Southern Ocean tumbling heavily upon our ship, under a sky hung with rags of clouds that seemed to have been cut and hacked by the keen edge of a sou’-west gale.

Our craft, a Clyde-built barque of 1,000 tons, rolled so heavily that something aloft had carried away. No matter what the damage was, but it was serious enough to induce me to go aloft myself with a couple of hands and the carpenter to see the temporary repairs properly done.

Sometimes we had to drop everything and cling with both hands to the swaying spars, holding our breath in fear of a terribly heavy roll. And, wallowing as if she meant to turn over with us, the barque, her decks full of water, her gear flying in bights, ran at some ten knots an hour. We had been driven far south — much farther that way than we had meant to go; and suddenly, up there in the slings of the foreyard, in the midst of our work, I felt my shoulder gripped with such force in the carpenter’s powerful paw that I positively yelled with unexpected pain. The man’s eyes stared close in my face, and he shouted, “Look, sir! look! What’s this?” pointing ahead with his other hand.

At first I saw nothing. The sea was one empty wilderness of black and white hills. Suddenly, half-concealed in the tumult of the foaming rollers I

made out awash, something enormous, rising and falling — something spread out like a burst of foam, but with a more bluish, more solid look.

It was a piece of an ice-floe melted down to a fragment, but still big enough to sink a ship, and floating lower than any raft, right in our way, as if ambushed among the waves with murderous intent. There was no time to get down on deck. I shouted from aloft till my head was ready to split. I was heard aft, and we managed to clear the sunken floe which had come all the way from the Southern ice-cap to have a try at our unsuspecting lives. Had it been an hour later, nothing could have saved the ship, for no eye could have made out in the dusk that pale piece of ice swept over by the white-crested waves.

And as we stood near the taffrail side by side, my captain and I, looking at it, hardly discernible already, but still quite close-to on our quarter, he remarked in a meditative tone:

“But for the turn of that wheel just in time, there would have been another case of a ‘missing’ ship.”

Nobody ever comes back from a “missing” ship to tell how hard was the death of the craft, and how sudden and overwhelming the last anguish of her men. Nobody can say with what thoughts, with what regrets, with what words on their lips they died. But there is something fine in the sudden passing away of these hearts from the extremity of struggle and stress and tremendous uproar — from the vast, unrestful rage of the surface to the profound peace of the depths, sleeping untroubled since the beginning of ages.

## XVIII.

But if the word “missing” brings all hope to an end and settles the loss of the underwriters, the word “overdue” confirms the fears already born in many homes ashore, and opens the door of speculation in the market of risks.

Maritime risks, be it understood. There is a class of optimists ready to reinsure an “overdue” ship at a heavy premium. But nothing can insure the hearts on shore against the bitterness of waiting for the worst.

For if a “missing” ship has never turned up within the memory of seamen of my generation, the name of an “overdue” ship, trembling as it were on the edge of the fatal heading, has been known to appear as “arrived.”

It must blaze up, indeed, with a great brilliance the dull printer’s ink expended on the assemblage of the few letters that form the ship’s name to the anxious eyes scanning the page in fear and trembling. It is like the message of reprieve from the sentence of sorrow suspended over many a home, even if some of the men in her have been the most homeless mortals that you may find among the wanderers of the sea.

The reinsurer, the optimist of ill-luck and disaster, slaps his pocket with satisfaction. The underwriter, who had been trying to minimize the amount of impending loss, regrets his premature pessimism. The ship has been stauncher, the skies more merciful, the seas less angry, or perhaps the men on board of a finer temper than he has been willing to take for granted.

“The ship So-and-so, bound to such a port, and posted as ‘overdue,’ has been reported yesterday as having arrived safely at her destination.”

Thus run the official words of the reprieve addressed to the hearts ashore lying under a heavy sentence. And they come swiftly from the other side of the earth, over wires and cables, for your electric telegraph is a great alleviator of anxiety. Details, of course, shall follow. And they may unfold a tale of narrow escape, of steady ill-luck, of high winds and heavy weather, of ice, of interminable calms or endless head-gales; a tale of difficulties overcome, of adversity defied by a small knot of men upon the great loneliness of the sea; a tale of resource, of courage — of helplessness, perhaps.

Of all ships disabled at sea, a steamer who has lost her propeller is the most helpless. And if she drifts into an unpopulated part of the ocean she may soon become overdue. The menace of the "overdue" and the finality of "missing" come very quickly to steamers whose life, fed on coals and breathing the black breath of smoke into the air, goes on in disregard of wind and wave. Such a one, a big steamship, too, whose working life had been a record of faithful keeping time from land to land, in disregard of wind and sea, once lost her propeller down south, on her passage out to New Zealand.

It was the wintry, murky time of cold gales and heavy seas. With the snapping of her tail-shaft her life seemed suddenly to depart from her big body, and from a stubborn, arrogant existence she passed all at once into the passive state of a drifting log. A ship sick with her own weakness has not the pathos of a ship vanquished in a battle with the elements, wherein consists the inner drama of her life. No seaman can look without compassion upon a disabled ship, but to look at a sailing-vessel with her lofty spars gone is to look upon a defeated but indomitable warrior. There is defiance in the remaining stumps of her masts, raised up like maimed limbs against the menacing scowl of a stormy sky; there is high courage in the upward sweep of her lines towards the bow; and as soon as, on a hastily-rigged spar, a strip of canvas is shown to the wind to keep her head to sea, she faces the waves again with an unsubdued courage.

## XIX.

The efficiency of a steamship consists not so much in her courage as in the power she carries within herself. It beats and throbs like a pulsating heart within her iron ribs, and when it stops, the steamer, whose life is not so much a contest as the disdainful ignoring of the sea, sickens and dies upon the waves. The sailing-ship, with her unthrobbing body, seemed to lead mysteriously a sort of unearthly existence, bordering upon the magic of the invisible forces, sustained by the inspiration of life-giving and death-dealing winds.

So that big steamer, dying by a sudden stroke, drifted, an unwieldy corpse, away from the track of other ships. And she would have been posted really as "overdue," or maybe as "missing," had she not been sighted in a snowstorm, vaguely, like a strange rolling island, by a whaler going north from her Polar cruising ground. There was plenty of food on board, and I don't know whether the nerves of her passengers were at all affected by anything else than the sense of interminable boredom or the vague fear of that unusual situation. Does a passenger ever feel the life of the ship in which he is being carried like a sort of honoured bale of highly sensitive goods? For a man who has never been a passenger it is impossible to say. But I know that there is no harder trial for a seaman than to feel a dead ship under his feet.

There is no mistaking that sensation, so dismal, so tormenting and so subtle, so full of unhappiness and unrest. I could imagine no worse eternal punishment for evil seamen who die unrepentant upon the earthly sea than that their souls should be condemned to man the ghosts of disabled ships, drifting for ever across a ghostly and tempestuous ocean.

She must have looked ghostly enough, that broken-down steamer, rolling in that snowstorm — a dark apparition in a world of white snowflakes to the staring eyes of that whaler's crew. Evidently they didn't believe in ghosts, for on arrival into port her captain unromantically reported having sighted a disabled steamer in latitude somewhere about 50 degrees S. and a longitude still more uncertain. Other steamers came out to look for her, and ultimately towed her away from the cold edge of the world into a harbour with docks and workshops, where, with many blows of hammers, her

pulsating heart of steel was set going again to go forth presently in the renewed pride of its strength, fed on fire and water, breathing black smoke into the air, pulsating, throbbing, shouldering its arrogant way against the great rollers in blind disdain of winds and sea.

The track she had made when drifting while her heart stood still within her iron ribs looked like a tangled thread on the white paper of the chart. It was shown to me by a friend, her second officer. In that surprising tangle there were words in minute letters — "gales," "thick fog," "ice" — written by him here and there as memoranda of the weather. She had interminably turned upon her tracks, she had crossed and recrossed her haphazard path till it resembled nothing so much as a puzzling maze of pencilled lines without a meaning. But in that maze there lurked all the romance of the "overdue" and a menacing hint of "missing."

"We had three weeks of it," said my friend, "just think of that!"

"How did you feel about it?" I asked.

He waved his hand as much as to say: It's all in the day's work. But then, abruptly, as if making up his mind:

"I'll tell you. Towards the last I used to shut myself up in my berth and cry."

"Cry?"

"Shed tears," he explained briefly, and rolled up the chart.

I can answer for it, he was a good man — as good as ever stepped upon a ship's deck — but he could not bear the feeling of a dead ship under his feet: the sickly, disheartening feeling which the men of some "overdue" ships that come into harbour at last under a jury-rig must have felt, combated, and overcome in the faithful discharge of their duty.

## XX.

It is difficult for a seaman to believe that his stranded ship does not feel as unhappy at the unnatural predicament of having no water under her keel as he is himself at feeling her stranded.

Stranding is, indeed, the reverse of sinking. The sea does not close upon the water-logged hull with a sunny ripple, or maybe with the angry rush of a curling wave, erasing her name from the roll of living ships. No. It is as if an invisible hand had been stealthily uplifted from the bottom to catch hold of her keel as it glides through the water.

More than any other event does stranding bring to the sailor a sense of utter and dismal failure. There are strandings and strandings, but I am safe to say that 90 per cent. of them are occasions in which a sailor, without dishonour, may well wish himself dead; and I have no doubt that of those who had the experience of their ship taking the ground, 90 per cent. did actually for five seconds or so wish themselves dead.

“Taking the ground” is the professional expression for a ship that is stranded in gentle circumstances. But the feeling is more as if the ground had taken hold of her. It is for those on her deck a surprising sensation. It is as if your feet had been caught in an imponderable snare; you feel the balance of your body threatened, and the steady poise of your mind is destroyed at once. This sensation lasts only a second, for even while you stagger something seems to turn over in your head, bringing uppermost the mental exclamation, full of astonishment and dismay, “By Jove! she’s on the ground!”

And that is very terrible. After all, the only mission of a seaman’s calling is to keep ships’ keels off the ground. Thus the moment of her stranding takes away from him every excuse for his continued existence. To keep ships afloat is his business; it is his trust; it is the effective formula of the bottom of all these vague impulses, dreams, and illusions that go to the making up of a boy’s vocation. The grip of the land upon the keel of your ship, even if nothing worse comes of it than the wear and tear of tackle and the loss of time, remains in a seaman’s memory an indelibly fixed taste of disaster.

“Stranded” within the meaning of this paper stands for a more or less excusable mistake. A ship may be “driven ashore” by stress of weather. It is a catastrophe, a defeat. To be “run ashore” has the littleness, poignancy, and bitterness of human error.



## XXI.

That is why your “strandings” are for the most part so unexpected. In fact, they are all unexpected, except those heralded by some short glimpse of the danger, full of agitation and excitement, like an awakening from a dream of incredible folly.

The land suddenly at night looms up right over your bows, or perhaps the cry of “Broken water ahead!” is raised, and some long mistake, some complicated edifice of self-delusion, over-confidence, and wrong reasoning is brought down in a fatal shock, and the heart-searing experience of your ship’s keel scraping and scrunching over, say, a coral reef. It is a sound, for its size, far more terrific to your soul than that of a world coming violently to an end. But out of that chaos your belief in your own prudence and sagacity reasserts itself. You ask yourself, Where on earth did I get to? How on earth did I get there? with a conviction that it could not be your own act, that there has been at work some mysterious conspiracy of accident; that the charts are all wrong, and if the charts are not wrong, that land and sea have changed their places; that your misfortune shall for ever remain inexplicable, since you have lived always with the sense of your trust, the last thing on closing your eyes, the first on opening them, as if your mind had kept firm hold of your responsibility during the hours of sleep.

You contemplate mentally your mischance, till little by little your mood changes, cold doubt steals into the very marrow of your bones, you see the inexplicable fact in another light. That is the time when you ask yourself, How on earth could I have been fool enough to get there? And you are ready to renounce all belief in your good sense, in your knowledge, in your fidelity, in what you thought till then was the best in you, giving you the daily bread of life and the moral support of other men’s confidence.

The ship is lost or not lost. Once stranded, you have to do your best by her. She may be saved by your efforts, by your resource and fortitude bearing up against the heavy weight of guilt and failure. And there are justifiable strandings in fogs, on uncharted seas, on dangerous shores, through treacherous tides. But, saved or not saved, there remains with her commander a distinct sense of loss, a flavour in the mouth of the real,

abiding danger that lurks in all the forms of human existence. It is an acquisition, too, that feeling. A man may be the better for it, but he will not be the same. Damocles has seen the sword suspended by a hair over his head, and though a good man need not be made less valuable by such a knowledge, the feast shall not henceforth have the same flavour.

Years ago I was concerned as chief mate in a case of stranding which was not fatal to the ship. We went to work for ten hours on end, laying out anchors in readiness to heave off at high water. While I was still busy about the decks forward I heard the steward at my elbow saying: "The captain asks whether you mean to come in, sir, and have something to eat to-day."

I went into the cuddy. My captain sat at the head of the table like a statue. There was a strange motionlessness of everything in that pretty little cabin. The swing-table which for seventy odd days had been always on the move, if ever so little, hung quite still above the soup-tureen. Nothing could have altered the rich colour of my commander's complexion, laid on generously by wind and sea; but between the two tufts of fair hair above his ears, his skull, generally suffused with the hue of blood, shone dead white, like a dome of ivory. And he looked strangely untidy. I perceived he had not shaved himself that day; and yet the wildest motion of the ship in the most stormy latitudes we had passed through, never made him miss one single morning ever since we left the Channel. The fact must be that a commander cannot possibly shave himself when his ship is aground. I have commanded ships myself, but I don't know; I have never tried to shave in my life.

He did not offer to help me or himself till I had coughed markedly several times. I talked to him professionally in a cheery tone, and ended with the confident assertion:

"We shall get her off before midnight, sir."

He smiled faintly without looking up, and muttered as if to himself:

"Yes, yes; the captain put the ship ashore and we got her off."

Then, raising his head, he attacked grumpily the steward, a lanky, anxious youth with a long, pale face and two big front teeth.

"What makes this soup so bitter? I am surprised the mate can swallow the beastly stuff. I'm sure the cook's ladled some salt water into it by mistake."

The charge was so outrageous that the steward for all answer only dropped his eyelids bashfully.

There was nothing the matter with the soup. I had a second helping. My heart was warm with hours of hard work at the head of a willing crew. I was elated with having handled heavy anchors, cables, boats without the slightest hitch; pleased with having laid out scientifically bower, stream, and kedge exactly where I believed they would do most good. On that occasion the bitter taste of a stranding was not for my mouth. That experience came later, and it was only then that I understood the loneliness of the man in charge.

It's the captain who puts the ship ashore; it's we who get her off.

## XXII.

It seems to me that no man born and truthful to himself could declare that he ever saw the sea looking young as the earth looks young in spring. But some of us, regarding the ocean with understanding and affection, have seen it looking old, as if the immemorial ages had been stirred up from the undisturbed bottom of ooze. For it is a gale of wind that makes the sea look old.

From a distance of years, looking at the remembered aspects of the storms lived through, it is that impression which disengages itself clearly from the great body of impressions left by many years of intimate contact.

If you would know the age of the earth, look upon the sea in a storm. The grayness of the whole immense surface, the wind furrows upon the faces of the waves, the great masses of foam, tossed about and waving, like matted white locks, give to the sea in a gale an appearance of hoary age, lustreless, dull, without gleams, as though it had been created before light itself.

Looking back after much love and much trouble, the instinct of primitive man, who seeks to personify the forces of Nature for his affection and for his fear, is awakened again in the breast of one civilized beyond that stage even in his infancy. One seems to have known gales as enemies, and even as enemies one embraces them in that affectionate regret which clings to the past.

Gales have their personalities, and, after all, perhaps it is not strange; for, when all is said and done, they are adversaries whose wiles you must defeat, whose violence you must resist, and yet with whom you must live in the intimacies of nights and days.

Here speaks the man of masts and sails, to whom the sea is not a navigable element, but an intimate companion. The length of passages, the growing sense of solitude, the close dependence upon the very forces that, friendly to-day, without changing their nature, by the mere putting forth of their might, become dangerous to-morrow, make for that sense of fellowship which modern seamen, good men as they are, cannot hope to know. And, besides, your modern ship which is a steamship makes her passages on other principles than yielding to the weather and humouring the

sea. She receives smashing blows, but she advances; it is a slogging fight, and not a scientific campaign. The machinery, the steel, the fire, the steam, have stepped in between the man and the sea. A modern fleet of ships does not so much make use of the sea as exploit a highway. The modern ship is not the sport of the waves. Let us say that each of her voyages is a triumphant progress; and yet it is a question whether it is not a more subtle and more human triumph to be the sport of the waves and yet survive, achieving your end.

In his own time a man is always very modern. Whether the seamen of three hundred years hence will have the faculty of sympathy it is impossible to say. An incorrigible mankind hardens its heart in the progress of its own perfectability. How will they feel on seeing the illustrations to the sea novels of our day, or of our yesterday? It is impossible to guess. But the seaman of the last generation, brought into sympathy with the caravels of ancient time by his sailing-ship, their lineal descendant, cannot look upon those lumbering forms navigating the naïve seas of ancient woodcuts without a feeling of surprise, of affectionate derision, envy, and admiration. For those things, whose unmanageableness, even when represented on paper, makes one gasp with a sort of amused horror, were manned by men who are his direct professional ancestors.

No; the seamen of three hundred years hence will probably be neither touched nor moved to derision, affection, or admiration. They will glance at the photogravures of our nearly defunct sailing-ships with a cold, inquisitive and indifferent eye. Our ships of yesterday will stand to their ships as no lineal ancestors, but as mere predecessors whose course will have been run and the race extinct. Whatever craft he handles with skill, the seaman of the future shall be, not our descendant, but only our successor.

## XXIII.

And so much depends upon the craft which, made by man, is one with man, that the sea shall wear for him another aspect. I remember once seeing the commander — officially the master, by courtesy the captain — of a fine iron ship of the old wool fleet shaking his head at a very pretty brigantine. She was bound the other way. She was a taut, trim, neat little craft, extremely well kept; and on that serene evening when we passed her close she looked the embodiment of coquettish comfort on the sea. It was somewhere near the Cape — *The Cape* being, of course, the Cape of Good Hope, the Cape of Storms of its Portuguese discoverer. And whether it is that the word “storm” should not be pronounced upon the sea where the storms dwell thickly, or because men are shy of confessing their good hopes, it has become the nameless cape — the Cape *tout court*. The other great cape of the world, strangely enough, is seldom if ever called a cape. We say, “a voyage round the Horn”; “we rounded the Horn”; “we got a frightful battering off the Horn”; but rarely “Cape Horn,” and, indeed, with some reason, for Cape Horn is as much an island as a cape. The third stormy cape of the world, which is the Leeuwin, receives generally its full name, as if to console its second-rate dignity. These are the capes that look upon the gales.

The little brigantine, then, had doubled the Cape. Perhaps she was coming from Port Elizabeth, from East London — who knows? It was many years ago, but I remember well the captain of the wool-clipper nodding at her with the words, “Fancy having to go about the sea in a thing like that!”

He was a man brought up in big deep-water ships, and the size of the craft under his feet was a part of his conception of the sea. His own ship was certainly big as ships went then. He may have thought of the size of his cabin, or — unconsciously, perhaps — have conjured up a vision of a vessel so small tossing amongst the great seas. I didn’t inquire, and to a young second mate the captain of the little pretty brigantine, sitting astride a camp stool with his chin resting on his hands that were crossed upon the rail, might have appeared a minor king amongst men. We passed her within earshot, without a hail, reading each other’s names with the naked eye.

Some years later, the second mate, the recipient of that almost involuntary mutter, could have told his captain that a man brought up in big ships may yet take a peculiar delight in what we should both then have called a small craft. Probably the captain of the big ship would not have understood very well. His answer would have been a gruff, "Give me size," as I heard another man reply to a remark praising the handiness of a small vessel. It was not a love of the grandiose or the prestige attached to the command of great tonnage, for he continued, with an air of disgust and contempt, "Why, you get flung out of your bunk as likely as not in any sort of heavy weather."

I don't know. I remember a few nights in my lifetime, and in a big ship, too (as big as they made them then), when one did not get flung out of one's bed simply because one never even attempted to get in; one had been made too weary, too hopeless, to try. The expedient of turning your bedding out on to a damp floor and lying on it there was no earthly good, since you could not keep your place or get a second's rest in that or any other position. But of the delight of seeing a small craft run bravely amongst the great seas there can be no question to him whose soul does not dwell ashore. Thus I well remember a three days' run got out of a little barque of 400 tons somewhere between the islands of St. Paul and Amsterdam and Cape Otway on the Australian coast. It was a hard, long gale, gray clouds and green sea, heavy weather undoubtedly, but still what a sailor would call manageable. Under two lower topsails and a reefed foresail the barque seemed to race with a long, steady sea that did not becalm her in the troughs. The solemn thundering combers caught her up from astern, passed her with a fierce boiling up of foam level with the bulwarks, swept on ahead with a swish and a roar: and the little vessel, dipping her jib-boom into the tumbling froth, would go on running in a smooth, glassy hollow, a deep valley between two ridges of the sea, hiding the horizon ahead and astern. There was such fascination in her pluck, nimbleness, the continual exhibition of unfailing seaworthiness, in the semblance of courage and endurance, that I could not give up the delight of watching her run through the three unforgettable days of that gale which my mate also delighted to extol as "a famous shove."

And this is one of those gales whose memory in after-years returns, welcome in dignified austerity, as you would remember with pleasure the noble features of a stranger with whom you crossed swords once in knightly

encounter and are never to see again. In this way gales have their physiognomy. You remember them by your own feelings, and no two gales stamp themselves in the same way upon your emotions. Some cling to you in woebegone misery; others come back fiercely and weirdly, like ghouls bent upon sucking your strength away; others, again, have a catastrophic splendour; some are unvenerated recollections, as of spiteful wild-cats clawing at your agonized vitals; others are severe, like a visitation; and one or two rise up draped and mysterious, with an aspect of ominous menace. In each of them there is a characteristic point at which the whole feeling seems contained in one single moment. Thus there is a certain four o'clock in the morning in the confused roar of a black and white world when coming on deck to take charge of my watch I received the instantaneous impression that the ship could not live for another hour in such a raging sea.

I wonder what became of the men who silently (you couldn't hear yourself speak) must have shared that conviction with me. To be left to write about it is not, perhaps, the most enviable fate; but the point is that this impression resumes in its intensity the whole recollection of days and days of desperately dangerous weather. We were then, for reasons which it is not worth while to specify, in the close neighbourhood of Kerguelen Land; and now, when I open an atlas and look at the tiny dots on the map of the Southern Ocean, I see as if engraved upon the paper the enraged physiognomy of that gale.

Another, strangely, recalls a silent man. And yet it was not din that was wanting; in fact, it was terrific. That one was a gale that came upon the ship swiftly, like a *parnpero*, which last is a very sudden wind indeed. Before we knew very well what was coming all the sails we had set had burst; the furled ones were blowing loose, ropes flying, sea hissing — it hissed tremendously — wind howling, and the ship lying on her side, so that half of the crew were swimming and the other half clawing desperately at whatever came to hand, according to the side of the deck each man had been caught on by the catastrophe, either to leeward or to windward. The shouting I need not mention — it was the merest drop in an ocean of noise — and yet the character of the gale seems contained in the recollection of one small, not particularly impressive, sallow man without a cap and with a very still face. Captain Jones — let us call him Jones — had been caught unawares. Two orders he had given at the first sign of an utterly unforeseen onset; after that the magnitude of his mistake seemed to have overwhelmed



him. We were doing what was needed and feasible. The ship behaved well. Of course, it was some time before we could pause in our fierce and laborious exertions; but all through the work, the excitement, the uproar, and some dismay, we were aware of this silent little man at the break of the poop, perfectly motionless, soundless, and often hidden from us by the drift of sprays.

When we officers clambered at last upon the poop, he seemed to come out of that numbed composure, and shouted to us down wind: "Try the pumps." Afterwards he disappeared. As to the ship, I need not say that, although she was presently swallowed up in one of the blackest nights I can remember, she did not disappear. In truth, I don't fancy that there had ever been much danger of that, but certainly the experience was noisy and particularly distracting — and yet it is the memory of a very quiet silence that survives.

## XXIV.

For, after all, a gale of wind, the thing of mighty sound, is inarticulate. It is man who, in a chance phrase, interprets the elemental passion of his enemy. Thus there is another gale in my memory, a thing of endless, deep, humming roar, moonlight, and a spoken sentence.

It was off that other cape which is always deprived of its title as the Cape of Good Hope is robbed of its name. It was off the Horn. For a true expression of dishevelled wildness there is nothing like a gale in the bright moonlight of a high latitude.

The ship, brought-to and bowing to enormous flashing seas, glistened wet from deck to trucks; her one set sail stood out a coal-black shape upon the gloomy blueness of the air. I was a youngster then, and suffering from weariness, cold, and imperfect oilskins which let water in at every seam. I craved human companionship, and, coming off the poop, took my place by the side of the boatswain (a man whom I did not like) in a comparatively dry spot where at worst we had water only up to our knees. Above our heads the explosive booming gusts of wind passed continuously, justifying the sailor's saying "It blows great guns." And just from that need of human companionship, being very close to the man, I said, or rather shouted:

"Blows very hard, boatswain."

His answer was:

"Ay, and if it blows only a little harder things will begin to go. I don't mind as long as everything holds, but when things begin to go it's bad."

The note of dread in the shouting voice, the practical truth of these words, heard years ago from a man I did not like, have stamped its peculiar character on that gale.

A look in the eyes of a shipmate, a low murmur in the most sheltered spot where the watch on duty are huddled together, a meaning moan from one to the other with a glance at the windward sky, a sigh of weariness, a gesture of disgust passing into the keeping of the great wind, become part and parcel of the gale. The olive hue of hurricane clouds presents an aspect peculiarly appalling. The inky ragged wrack, flying before a nor'-west wind, makes you dizzy with its headlong speed that depicts the rush of the invisible air. A hard sou'-wester startles you with its close horizon and its

low gray sky, as if the world were a dungeon wherein there is no rest for body or soul. And there are black squalls, white squalls, thunder squalls, and unexpected gusts that come without a single sign in the sky; and of each kind no one of them resembles another.

There is infinite variety in the gales of wind at sea, and except for the peculiar, terrible, and mysterious moaning that may be heard sometimes passing through the roar of a hurricane — except for that unforgettable sound, as if the soul of the universe had been goaded into a mournful groan — it is, after all, the human voice that stamps the mark of human consciousness upon the character of a gale.

## XXV.

There is no part of the world of coasts, continents, oceans, seas, straits, capes, and islands which is not under the sway of a reigning wind, the sovereign of its typical weather. The wind rules the aspects of the sky and the action of the sea. But no wind rules unchallenged his realm of land and water. As with the kingdoms of the earth, there are regions more turbulent than others. In the middle belt of the earth the Trade Winds reign supreme, undisputed, like monarchs of long-settled kingdoms, whose traditional power, checking all undue ambitions, is not so much an exercise of personal might as the working of long-established institutions. The intertropical kingdoms of the Trade Winds are favourable to the ordinary life of a merchantman. The trumpet-call of strife is seldom borne on their wings to the watchful ears of men on the decks of ships. The regions ruled by the north-east and south-east Trade Winds are serene. In a southern-going ship, bound out for a long voyage, the passage through their dominions is characterized by a relaxation of strain and vigilance on the part of the seamen. Those citizens of the ocean feel sheltered under the aegis of an uncontested law, of an undisputed dynasty. There, indeed, if anywhere on earth, the weather may be trusted.

Yet not too implicitly. Even in the constitutional realm of Trade Winds, north and south of the equator, ships are overtaken by strange disturbances. Still, the easterly winds, and, generally speaking, the easterly weather all the world over, is characterized by regularity and persistence.

As a ruler, the East Wind has a remarkable stability; as an invader of the high latitudes lying under the tumultuous sway of his great brother, the Wind of the West, he is extremely difficult to dislodge, by the reason of his cold craftiness and profound duplicity.

The narrow seas around these isles, where British admirals keep watch and ward upon the marches of the Atlantic Ocean, are subject to the turbulent sway of the West Wind. Call it north-west or south-west, it is all one — a different phase of the same character, a changed expression on the same face. In the orientation of the winds that rule the seas, the north and south directions are of no importance. There are no North and South Winds of any account upon this earth. The North and South Winds are but small

princes in the dynasties that make peace and war upon the sea. They never assert themselves upon a vast stage. They depend upon local causes — the configuration of coasts, the shapes of straits, the accidents of bold promontories round which they play their little part. In the polity of winds, as amongst the tribes of the earth, the real struggle lies between East and West.

## XXVI.

The West Wind reigns over the seas surrounding the coasts of these kingdoms; and from the gateways of the channels, from promontories as if from watch-towers, from estuaries of rivers as if from postern gates, from passage-ways, inlets, straits, firths, the garrison of the Isle and the crews of the ships going and returning look to the westward to judge by the varied splendours of his sunset mantle the mood of that arbitrary ruler. The end of the day is the time to gaze at the kingly face of the Westerly Weather, who is the arbiter of ships' destinies. Benignant and splendid, or splendid and sinister, the western sky reflects the hidden purposes of the royal mind. Clothed in a mantle of dazzling gold or draped in rags of black clouds like a beggar, the might of the Westerly Wind sits enthroned upon the western horizon with the whole North Atlantic as a footstool for his feet and the first twinkling stars making a diadem for his brow. Then the seamen, attentive courtiers of the weather, think of regulating the conduct of their ships by the mood of the master. The West Wind is too great a king to be a dissembler: he is no calculator plotting deep schemes in a sombre heart; he is too strong for small artifices; there is passion in all his moods, even in the soft mood of his serene days, in the grace of his blue sky whose immense and unfathomable tenderness reflected in the mirror of the sea embraces, possesses, lulls to sleep the ships with white sails. He is all things to all oceans; he is like a poet seated upon a throne — magnificent, simple, barbarous, pensive, generous, impulsive, changeable, unfathomable — but when you understand him, always the same. Some of his sunsets are like pageants devised for the delight of the multitude, when all the gems of the royal treasure-house are displayed above the sea. Others are like the opening of his royal confidence, tinged with thoughts of sadness and compassion in a melancholy splendour meditating upon the short-lived peace of the waters. And I have seen him put the pent-up anger of his heart into the aspect of the inaccessible sun, and cause it to glare fiercely like the eye of an implacable autocrat out of a pale and frightened sky.

He is the war-lord who sends his battalions of Atlantic rollers to the assault of our seaboard. The compelling voice of the West Wind musters up to his service all the might of the ocean. At the bidding of the West Wind

there arises a great commotion in the sky above these Islands, and a great rush of waters falls upon our shores. The sky of the westerly weather is full of flying clouds, of great big white clouds coming thicker and thicker till they seem to stand welded into a solid canopy, upon whose gray face the lower wrack of the gale, thin, black and angry-looking, flies past with vertiginous speed. Denser and denser grows this dome of vapours, descending lower and lower upon the sea, narrowing the horizon around the ship. And the characteristic aspect of westerly weather, the thick, gray, smoky and sinister tone sets in, circumscribing the view of the men, drenching their bodies, oppressing their souls, taking their breath away with booming gusts, deafening, blinding, driving, rushing them onwards in a swaying ship towards our coasts lost in mists and rain.

The caprice of the winds, like the wilfulness of men, is fraught with the disastrous consequences of self-indulgence. Long anger, the sense of his uncontrolled power, spoils the frank and generous nature of the West Wind. It is as if his heart were corrupted by a malevolent and brooding rancour. He devastates his own kingdom in the wantonness of his force. South-west is the quarter of the heavens where he presents his darkened brow. He breathes his rage in terrific squalls, and overwhelms his realm with an inexhaustible welter of clouds. He strews the seeds of anxiety upon the decks of scudding ships, makes the foam-stripped ocean look old, and sprinkles with gray hairs the heads of ship-masters in the homeward-bound ships running for the Channel. The Westerly Wind asserting his sway from the south-west quarter is often like a monarch gone mad, driving forth with wild imprecations the most faithful of his courtiers to shipwreck, disaster, and death.

The south-westerly weather is the thick weather *par excellence*. It is not the thickness of the fog; it is rather a contraction of the horizon, a mysterious veiling of the shores with clouds that seem to make a low-vaulted dungeon around the running ship. It is not blindness; it is a shortening of the sight. The West Wind does not say to the seaman, "You shall be blind"; it restricts merely the range of his vision and raises the dread of land within his breast. It makes of him a man robbed of half his force, of half his efficiency. Many times in my life, standing in long sea-boots and streaming oilskins at the elbow of my commander on the poop of a homeward-bound ship making for the Channel, and gazing ahead into the

gray and tormented waste, I have heard a weary sigh shape itself into a studiously casual comment:

“Can’t see very far in this weather.”

And have made answer in the same low, perfunctory tone

“No, sir.”

It would be merely the instinctive voicing of an ever-present thought associated closely with the consciousness of the land somewhere ahead and of the great speed of the ship. Fair wind, fair wind! Who would dare to grumble at a fair wind? It was a favour of the Western King, who rules masterfully the North Atlantic from the latitude of the Azores to the latitude of Cape Farewell. A famous shove this to end a good passage with; and yet, somehow, one could not muster upon one’s lips the smile of a courtier’s gratitude. This favour was dispensed to you from under an overbearing scowl, which is the true expression of the great autocrat when he has made up his mind to give a battering to some ships and to hunt certain others home in one breath of cruelty and benevolence, equally distracting.

“No, sir. Can’t see very far.”

Thus would the mate’s voice repeat the thought of the master, both gazing ahead, while under their feet the ship rushes at some twelve knots in the direction of the lee shore; and only a couple of miles in front of her swinging and dripping jib-boom, carried naked with an upward slant like a spear, a gray horizon closes the view with a multitude of waves surging upwards violently as if to strike at the stooping clouds.

Awful and threatening scowls darken the face of the West Wind in his clouded, south-west mood; and from the King’s throne-hall in the western board stronger gusts reach you, like the fierce shouts of raving fury to which only the gloomy grandeur of the scene imparts a saving dignity. A shower pelts the deck and the sails of the ship as if flung with a scream by an angry hand; and when the night closes in, the night of a south-westerly gale, it seems more hopeless than the shade of Hades. The south-westerly mood of the great West Wind is a lightless mood, without sun, moon, or stars, with no gleam of light but the phosphorescent flashes of the great sheets of foam that, boiling up on each side of the ship, fling bluish gleams upon her dark and narrow hull, rolling as she runs, chased by enormous seas, distracted in the tumult.

There are some bad nights in the kingdom of the West Wind for homeward-bound ships making for the Channel; and the days of wrath



dawn upon them colourless and vague like the timid turning up of invisible lights upon the scene of a tyrannical and passionate outbreak, awful in the monotony of its method and the increasing strength of its violence. It is the same wind, the same clouds, the same wildly racing seas, the same thick horizon around the ship. Only the wind is stronger, the clouds seem denser and more overwhelming, the waves appear to have grown bigger and more threatening during the night. The hours, whose minutes are marked by the crash of the breaking seas, slip by with the screaming, pelting squalls overtaking the ship as she runs on and on with darkened canvas, with streaming spars and dripping ropes. The down-pours thicken. Preceding each shower a mysterious gloom, like the passage of a shadow above the firmament of gray clouds, filters down upon the ship. Now and then the rain pours upon your head in streams as if from spouts. It seems as if your ship were going to be drowned before she sank, as if all atmosphere had turned to water. You gasp, you splutter, you are blinded and deafened, you are submerged, obliterated, dissolved, annihilated, streaming all over as if your limbs, too, had turned to water. And every nerve on the alert you watch for the clearing-up mood of the Western King, that shall come with a shift of wind as likely as not to whip all the three masts out of your ship in the twinkling of an eye.

## XXVII.

Heralded by the increasing fierceness of the squalls, sometimes by a faint flash of lightning like the signal of a lighted torch waved far away behind the clouds, the shift of wind comes at last, the crucial moment of the change from the brooding and veiled violence of the south-west gale to the sparkling, flashing, cutting, clear-eyed anger of the King's north-westerly mood. You behold another phase of his passion, a fury bejewelled with stars, mayhap bearing the crescent of the moon on its brow, shaking the last vestiges of its torn cloud-mantle in inky-black squalls, with hail and sleet descending like showers of crystals and pearls, bounding off the spars, drumming on the sails, pattering on the oilskin coats, whitening the decks of homeward-bound ships. Faint, ruddy flashes of lightning flicker in the starlight upon her mastheads. A chilly blast hums in the taut rigging, causing the ship to tremble to her very keel, and the soaked men on her decks to shiver in their wet clothes to the very marrow of their bones. Before one squall has flown over to sink in the eastern board, the edge of another peeps up already above the western horizon, racing up swift, shapeless, like a black bag full of frozen water ready to burst over your devoted head. The temper of the ruler of the ocean has changed. Each gust of the clouded mood that seemed warmed by the heat of a heart flaming with anger has its counterpart in the chilly blasts that seem blown from a breast turned to ice with a sudden revulsion of feeling. Instead of blinding your eyes and crushing your soul with a terrible apparatus of cloud and mists and seas and rain, the King of the West turns his power to contemptuous pelting of your back with icicles, to making your weary eyes water as if in grief, and your worn-out carcass quake pitifully. But each mood of the great autocrat has its own greatness, and each is hard to bear. Only the north-west phase of that mighty display is not demoralizing to the same extent, because between the hail and sleet squalls of a north-westerly gale one can see a long way ahead.

To see! to see! — this is the craving of the sailor, as of the rest of blind humanity. To have his path made clear for him is the aspiration of every human being in our beclouded and tempestuous existence. I have heard a reserved, silent man, with no nerves to speak of, after three days of hard

running in thick south-westerly weather, burst out passionately: "I wish to God we could get sight of something!"

We had just gone down below for a moment to commune in a battened-down cabin, with a large white chart lying limp and damp upon a cold and clammy table under the light of a smoky lamp. Sprawling over that seaman's silent and trusted adviser, with one elbow upon the coast of Africa and the other planted in the neighbourhood of Cape Hatteras (it was a general track-chart of the North Atlantic), my skipper lifted his rugged, hairy face, and glared at me in a half-exasperated, half-appealing way. We have seen no sun, moon, or stars for something like seven days. By the effect of the West Wind's wrath the celestial bodies had gone into hiding for a week or more, and the last three days had seen the force of a south-west gale grow from fresh, through strong, to heavy, as the entries in my log-book could testify. Then we separated, he to go on deck again, in obedience to that mysterious call that seems to sound for ever in a shipmaster's ears, I to stagger into my cabin with some vague notion of putting down the words "Very heavy weather" in a log-book not quite written up-to-date. But I gave it up, and crawled into my bunk instead, boots and hat on, all standing (it did not matter; everything was soaking wet, a heavy sea having burst the poop skylights the night before), to remain in a nightmarish state between waking and sleeping for a couple of hours of so-called rest.

The south-westerly mood of the West Wind is an enemy of sleep, and even of a recumbent position, in the responsible officers of a ship. After two hours of futile, light-headed, inconsequent thinking upon all things under heaven in that dark, dank, wet and devastated cabin, I arose suddenly and staggered up on deck. The autocrat of the North Atlantic was still oppressing his kingdom and its outlying dependencies, even as far as the Bay of Biscay, in the dismal secrecy of thick, very thick, weather. The force of the wind, though we were running before it at the rate of some ten knots an hour, was so great that it drove me with a steady push to the front of the poop, where my commander was holding on.

"What do you think of it?" he addressed me in an interrogative yell.

What I really thought was that we both had had just about enough of it. The manner in which the great West Wind chooses at times to administer his possessions does not commend itself to a person of peaceful and law-abiding disposition, inclined to draw distinctions between right and wrong in the face of natural forces, whose standard, naturally, is that of might

alone. But, of course, I said nothing. For a man caught, as it were, between his skipper and the great West Wind silence is the safest sort of diplomacy. Moreover, I knew my skipper. He did not want to know what I thought. Shipmasters hanging on a breath before the thrones of the winds ruling the seas have their psychology, whose workings are as important to the ship and those on board of her as the changing moods of the weather. The man, as a matter of fact, under no circumstances, ever cared a brass farthing for what I or anybody else in his ship thought. He had had just about enough of it, I guessed, and what he was at really was a process of fishing for a suggestion. It was the pride of his life that he had never wasted a chance, no matter how boisterous, threatening, and dangerous, of a fair wind. Like men racing blindfold for a gap in a hedge, we were finishing a splendidly quick passage from the Antipodes, with a tremendous rush for the Channel in as thick a weather as any I can remember, but his psychology did not permit him to bring the ship to with a fair wind blowing — at least not on his own initiative. And yet he felt that very soon indeed something would have to be done. He wanted the suggestion to come from me, so that later on, when the trouble was over, he could argue this point with his own uncompromising spirit, laying the blame upon my shoulders. I must render him the justice that this sort of pride was his only weakness.

But he got no suggestion from me. I understood his psychology. Besides, I had my own stock of weaknesses at the time (it is a different one now), and amongst them was the conceit of being remarkably well up in the psychology of the Westerly weather. I believed — not to mince matters — that I had a genius for reading the mind of the great ruler of high latitudes. I fancied I could discern already the coming of a change in his royal mood. And all I said was:

“The weather’s bound to clear up with the shift of wind.”

“Anybody knows that much!” he snapped at me, at the highest pitch of his voice.

“I mean before dark!” I cried.

This was all the opening he ever got from me. The eagerness with which he seized upon it gave me the measure of the anxiety he had been labouring under.

“Very well,” he shouted, with an affectation of impatience, as if giving way to long entreaties. “All right. If we don’t get a shift by then we’ll take that foresail off her and put her head under her wing for the night.”

I was struck by the picturesque character of the phrase as applied to a ship brought-to in order to ride out a gale with wave after wave passing under her breast. I could see her resting in the tumult of the elements like a sea-bird sleeping in wild weather upon the raging waters with its head tucked under its wing. In imaginative precision, in true feeling, this is one of the most expressive sentences I have ever heard on human lips. But as to taking the foresail off that ship before we put her head under her wing, I had my grave doubts. They were justified. That long enduring piece of canvas was confiscated by the arbitrary decree of the West Wind, to whom belong the lives of men and the contrivances of their hands within the limits of his kingdom. With the sound of a faint explosion it vanished into the thick weather bodily, leaving behind of its stout substance not so much as one solitary strip big enough to be picked into a handful of lint for, say, a wounded elephant. Torn out of its bolt-ropes, it faded like a whiff of smoke in the smoky drift of clouds shattered and torn by the shift of wind. For the shift of wind had come. The unveiled, low sun glared angrily from a chaotic sky upon a confused and tremendous sea dashing itself upon a coast. We recognised the headland, and looked at each other in the silence of dumb wonder. Without knowing it in the least, we had run up alongside the Isle of Wight, and that tower, tinged a faint evening red in the salt wind-haze, was the lighthouse on St. Catherine's Point.

My skipper recovered first from his astonishment. His bulging eyes sank back gradually into their orbits. His psychology, taking it all round, was really very creditable for an average sailor. He had been spared the humiliation of laying his ship to with a fair wind; and at once that man, of an open and truthful nature, spoke up in perfect good faith, rubbing together his brown, hairy hands — the hands of a master-craftsman upon the sea:

“Humph! that's just about where I reckoned we had got to.”

The transparency and ingenuousness, in a way, of that delusion, the airy tone, the hint of already growing pride, were perfectly delicious. But, in truth, this was one of the greatest surprises ever sprung by the clearing up mood of the West Wind upon one of the most accomplished of his courtiers.

## XXVIII.

The winds of North and South are, as I have said, but small princes amongst the powers of the sea. They have no territory of their own; they are not reigning winds anywhere. Yet it is from their houses that the reigning dynasties which have shared between them the waters of the earth are sprung. All the weather of the world is based upon the contest of the Polar and Equatorial strains of that tyrannous race. The West Wind is the greatest king. The East rules between the Tropics. They have shared each ocean between them. Each has his genius of supreme rule. The King of the West never intrudes upon the recognised dominion of his kingly brother. He is a barbarian, of a northern type. Violent without craftiness, and furious without malice, one may imagine him seated masterfully with a double-edged sword on his knees upon the painted and gilt clouds of the sunset, bowing his shock head of golden locks, a flaming beard over his breast, imposing, colossal, mighty-limbed, with a thundering voice, distended cheeks and fierce blue eyes, urging the speed of his gales. The other, the East king, the king of blood-red sunrises, I represent to myself as a spare Southerner with clear-cut features, black-browed and dark-eyed, gray-robed, upright in sunshine, resting a smooth-shaven cheek in the palm of his hand, impenetrable, secret, full of wiles, fine-drawn, keen — meditating aggressions.

The West Wind keeps faith with his brother, the King of the Easterly weather. "What we have divided we have divided," he seems to say in his gruff voice, this ruler without guile, who hurls as if in sport enormous masses of cloud across the sky, and flings the great waves of the Atlantic clear across from the shores of the New World upon the hoary headlands of Old Europe, which harbours more kings and rulers upon its seamed and furrowed body than all the oceans of the world together. "What we have divided we have divided; and if no rest and peace in this world have fallen to my share, leave me alone. Let me play at quoits with cyclonic gales, flinging the discs of spinning cloud and whirling air from one end of my dismal kingdom to the other: over the Great Banks or along the edges of pack-ice — this one with true aim right into the bight of the Bay of Biscay, that other upon the fiords of Norway, across the North Sea where the

fishermen of many nations look watchfully into my angry eye. This is the time of kingly sport.”

And the royal master of high latitudes sighs mightily, with the sinking sun upon his breast and the double-edged sword upon his knees, as if wearied by the innumerable centuries of a strenuous rule and saddened by the unchangeable aspect of the ocean under his feet — by the endless vista of future ages where the work of sowing the wind and reaping the whirlwind shall go on and on till his realm of living waters becomes a frozen and motionless ocean. But the other, crafty and unmoved, nursing his shaven chin between the thumb and forefinger of his slim and treacherous hand, thinks deep within his heart full of guile: “Aha! our brother of the West has fallen into the mood of kingly melancholy. He is tired of playing with circular gales, and blowing great guns, and unrolling thick streamers of fog in wanton sport at the cost of his own poor, miserable subjects. Their fate is most pitiful. Let us make a foray upon the dominions of that noisy barbarian, a great raid from Finisterre to Hatteras, catching his fishermen unawares, baffling the fleets that trust to his power, and shooting sly arrows into the livers of men who court his good graces. He is, indeed, a worthless fellow.” And forthwith, while the West Wind meditates upon the vanity of his irresistible might, the thing is done, and the Easterly weather sets in upon the North Atlantic.

The prevailing weather of the North Atlantic is typical of the way in which the West Wind rules his realm on which the sun never sets. North Atlantic is the heart of a great empire. It is the part of the West Wind’s dominions most thickly populated with generations of fine ships and hardy men. Heroic deeds and adventurous exploits have been performed there, within the very stronghold of his sway. The best sailors in the world have been born and bred under the shadow of his sceptre, learning to manage their ships with skill and audacity before the steps of his stormy throne. Reckless adventurers, toiling fishermen, admirals as wise and brave as the world has ever known, have waited upon the signs of his westerly sky. Fleets of victorious ships have hung upon his breath. He has tossed in his hand squadrons of war-scarred three-deckers, and shredded out in mere sport the bunting of flags hallowed in the traditions of honour and glory. He is a good friend and a dangerous enemy, without mercy to unseaworthy ships and faint-hearted seamen. In his kingly way he has taken but little account of lives sacrificed to his impulsive policy; he is a king with a

double-edged sword bared in his right hand. The East Wind, an interloper in the dominions of Westerly weather, is an impassive-faced tyrant with a sharp poniard held behind his back for a treacherous stab.

In his forays into the North Atlantic the East Wind behaves like a subtle and cruel adventurer without a notion of honour or fair play. Veiling his clear-cut, lean face in a thin layer of a hard, high cloud, I have seen him, like a wizened robber sheik of the sea, hold up large caravans of ships to the number of three hundred or more at the very gates of the English Channel. And the worst of it was that there was no ransom that we could pay to satisfy his avidity; for whatever evil is wrought by the raiding East Wind, it is done only to spite his kingly brother of the West. We gazed helplessly at the systematic, cold, gray-eyed obstinacy of the Easterly weather, while short rations became the order of the day, and the pinch of hunger under the breast-bone grew familiar to every sailor in that held-up fleet. Every day added to our numbers. In knots and groups and straggling parties we flung to and fro before the closed gate. And meantime the outward-bound ships passed, running through our humiliated ranks under all the canvas they could show. It is my idea that the Easterly Wind helps the ships away from home in the wicked hope that they shall all come to an untimely end and be heard of no more. For six weeks did the robber sheik hold the trade route of the earth, while our liege lord, the West Wind, slept profoundly like a tired Titan, or else remained lost in a mood of idle sadness known only to frank natures. All was still to the westward; we looked in vain towards his stronghold: the King slumbered on so deeply that he let his foraging brother steal the very mantle of gold-lined purple clouds from his bowed shoulders. What had become of the dazzling hoard of royal jewels exhibited at every close of day? Gone, disappeared, extinguished, carried off without leaving a single gold band or the flash of a single sunbeam in the evening sky! Day after day through a cold streak of heavens as bare and poor as the inside of a rifled safe a rayless and despoiled sun would slink shamefacedly, without pomp or show, to hide in haste under the waters. And still the King slept on, or mourned the vanity of his might and his power, while the thin-lipped intruder put the impress of his cold and implacable spirit upon the sky and sea. With every daybreak the rising sun had to wade through a crimson stream, luminous and sinister, like the spilt blood of celestial bodies murdered during the night.



In this particular instance the mean interloper held the road for some six weeks on end, establishing his particular administrative methods over the best part of the North Atlantic. It looked as if the easterly weather had come to stay for ever, or, at least, till we had all starved to death in the held-up fleet — starved within sight, as it were, of plenty, within touch, almost, of the bountiful heart of the Empire. There we were, dotting with our white dry sails the hard blueness of the deep sea. There we were, a growing company of ships, each with her burden of grain, of timber, of wool, of hides, and even of oranges, for we had one or two belated fruit schooners in company. There we were, in that memorable spring of a certain year in the late seventies, dodging to and fro, baffled on every tack, and with our stores running down to sweepings of bread-lockers and scrapings of sugar-casks. It was just like the East Wind's nature to inflict starvation upon the bodies of unoffending sailors, while he corrupted their simple souls by an exasperation leading to outbursts of profanity as lurid as his blood-red sunrises. They were followed by gray days under the cover of high, motionless clouds that looked as if carved in a slab of ash-coloured marble. And each mean starved sunset left us calling with imprecations upon the West Wind even in its most veiled misty mood to wake up and give us our liberty, if only to rush on and dash the heads of our ships against the very walls of our unapproachable home.

## XXIX.

In the atmosphere of the Easterly weather, as pellucid as a piece of crystal and refracting like a prism, we could see the appalling numbers of our helpless company, even to those who in more normal conditions would have remained invisible, sails down under the horizon. It is the malicious pleasure of the East Wind to augment the power of your eyesight, in order, perhaps, that you should see better the perfect humiliation, the hopeless character of your captivity. Easterly weather is generally clear, and that is all that can be said for it — almost supernaturally clear when it likes; but whatever its mood, there is something uncanny in its nature. Its duplicity is such that it will deceive a scientific instrument. No barometer will give warning of an easterly gale, were it ever so wet. It would be an unjust and ungrateful thing to say that a barometer is a stupid contrivance. It is simply that the wiles of the East Wind are too much for its fundamental honesty. After years and years of experience the most trusty instrument of the sort that ever went to sea screwed on to a ship's cabin bulkhead will, almost invariably, be induced to rise by the diabolic ingenuity of the Easterly weather, just at the moment when the Easterly weather, discarding its methods of hard, dry, impassive cruelty, contemplates drowning what is left of your spirit in torrents of a peculiarly cold and horrid rain. The sleet-and-hail squalls following the lightning at the end of a westerly gale are cold and benumbing and stinging and cruel enough. But the dry, Easterly weather, when it turns to wet, seems to rain poisoned showers upon your head. It is a sort of steady, persistent, overwhelming, endlessly driving downpour, which makes your heart sick, and opens it to dismal forebodings. And the stormy mood of the Easterly weather looms black upon the sky with a peculiar and amazing blackness. The West Wind hangs heavy gray curtains of mist and spray before your gaze, but the Eastern interloper of the narrow seas, when he has mustered his courage and cruelty to the point of a gale, puts your eyes out, puts them out completely, makes you feel blind for life upon a lee-shore. It is the wind, also, that brings snow.

Out of his black and merciless heart he flings a white blinding sheet upon the ships of the sea. He has more manners of villainy, and no more

conscience than an Italian prince of the seventeenth century. His weapon is a dagger carried under a black cloak when he goes out on his unlawful enterprises. The mere hint of his approach fills with dread every craft that swims the sea, from fishing-smacks to four-masted ships that recognise the sway of the West Wind. Even in his most accommodating mood he inspires a dread of treachery. I have heard upwards of ten score of windlasses spring like one into clanking life in the dead of night, filling the Downs with a panic-struck sound of anchors being torn hurriedly out of the ground at the first breath of his approach. Fortunately, his heart often fails him: he does not always blow home upon our exposed coast; he has not the fearless temper of his Westerly brother.

The natures of those two winds that share the dominions of the great oceans are fundamentally different. It is strange that the winds which men are prone to style capricious remain true to their character in all the various regions of the earth. To us here, for instance, the East Wind comes across a great continent, sweeping over the greatest body of solid land upon this earth. For the Australian east coast the East Wind is the wind of the ocean, coming across the greatest body of water upon the globe; and yet here and there its characteristics remain the same with a strange consistency in everything that is vile and base. The members of the West Wind's dynasty are modified in a way by the regions they rule, as a Hohenzollern, without ceasing to be himself, becomes a Roumanian by virtue of his throne, or a Saxe-Coburg learns to put the dress of Bulgarian phrases upon his particular thoughts, whatever they are.

The autocratic sway of the West Wind, whether forty north or forty south of the Equator, is characterized by an open, generous, frank, barbarous recklessness. For he is a great autocrat, and to be a great autocrat you must be a great barbarian. I have been too much moulded to his sway to nurse now any idea of rebellion in my heart. Moreover, what is a rebellion within the four walls of a room against the tempestuous rule of the West Wind? I remain faithful to the memory of the mighty King with a double-edged sword in one hand, and in the other holding out rewards of great daily runs and famously quick passages to those of his courtiers who knew how to wait watchfully for every sign of his secret mood. As we deep-water men always reckoned, he made one year in three fairly lively for anybody having business upon the Atlantic or down there along the "forties" of the Southern Ocean. You had to take the bitter with the sweet; and it cannot be denied he

played carelessly with our lives and fortunes. But, then, he was always a great king, fit to rule over the great waters where, strictly speaking, a man would have no business whatever but for his audacity.

The audacious should not complain. A mere trader ought not to grumble at the tolls levied by a mighty king. His mightiness was sometimes very overwhelming; but even when you had to defy him openly, as on the banks of the Agulhas homeward bound from the East Indies, or on the outward passage round the Horn, he struck at you fairly his stinging blows (full in the face, too), and it was your business not to get too much staggered. And, after all, if you showed anything of a countenance, the good-natured barbarian would let you fight your way past the very steps of his throne. It was only now and then that the sword descended and a head fell; but if you fell you were sure of impressive obsequies and of a roomy, generous grave.

Such is the king to whom Viking chieftains bowed their heads, and whom the modern and palatial steamship defies with impunity seven times a week. And yet it is but defiance, not victory. The magnificent barbarian sits enthroned in a mantle of gold-lined clouds looking from on high on great ships gliding like mechanical toys upon his sea and on men who, armed with fire and iron, no longer need to watch anxiously for the slightest sign of his royal mood. He is disregarded; but he has kept all his strength, all his splendour, and a great part of his power. Time itself, that shakes all the thrones, is on the side of that king. The sword in his hand remains as sharp as ever upon both its edges; and he may well go on playing his royal game of quoits with hurricanes, tossing them over from the continent of republics to the continent of kingdoms, in the assurance that both the new republics and the old kingdoms, the heat of fire and the strength of iron, with the untold generations of audacious men, shall crumble to dust at the steps of his throne, and pass away, and be forgotten before his own rule comes to an end.

### XXX.

The estuaries of rivers appeal strongly to an adventurous imagination. This appeal is not always a charm, for there are estuaries of a particularly dispiriting ugliness: lowlands, mud-flats, or perhaps barren sandhills without beauty of form or amenity of aspect, covered with a shabby and scanty vegetation conveying the impression of poverty and uselessness. Sometimes such an ugliness is merely a repulsive mask. A river whose estuary resembles a breach in a sand rampart may flow through a most fertile country. But all the estuaries of great rivers have their fascination, the attractiveness of an open portal. Water is friendly to man. The ocean, a part of Nature furthest removed in the unchangeableness and majesty of its might from the spirit of mankind, has ever been a friend to the enterprising nations of the earth. And of all the elements this is the one to which men have always been prone to trust themselves, as if its immensity held a reward as vast as itself.

From the offing the open estuary promises every possible fruition to adventurous hopes. That road open to enterprise and courage invites the explorer of coasts to new efforts towards the fulfilment of great expectations. The commander of the first Roman galley must have looked with an intense absorption upon the estuary of the Thames as he turned the beaked prow of his ship to the westward under the brow of the North Foreland. The estuary of the Thames is not beautiful; it has no noble features, no romantic grandeur of aspect, no smiling geniality; but it is wide open, spacious, inviting, hospitable at the first glance, with a strange air of mysteriousness which lingers about it to this very day. The navigation of his craft must have engrossed all the Roman's attention in the calm of a summer's day (he would choose his weather), when the single row of long sweeps (the galley would be a light one, not a trireme) could fall in easy cadence upon a sheet of water like plate-glass, reflecting faithfully the classic form of his vessel and the contour of the lonely shores close on his left hand. I assume he followed the land and passed through what is at present known as Margate Roads, groping his careful way along the hidden sandbanks, whose every tail and spit has its beacon or buoy nowadays. He must have been anxious, though no doubt he had collected beforehand on

the shores of the Gauls a store of information from the talk of traders, adventurers, fishermen, slave-dealers, pirates — all sorts of unofficial men connected with the sea in a more or less reputable way. He would have heard of channels and sandbanks, of natural features of the land useful for sea-marks, of villages and tribes and modes of barter and precautions to take: with the instructive tales about native chiefs dyed more or less blue, whose character for greediness, ferocity, or amiability must have been expounded to him with that capacity for vivid language which seems joined naturally to the shadiness of moral character and recklessness of disposition. With that sort of spiced food provided for his anxious thought, watchful for strange men, strange beasts, strange turns of the tide, he would make the best of his way up, a military seaman with a short sword on thigh and a bronze helmet on his head, the pioneer post-captain of an imperial fleet. Was the tribe inhabiting the Isle of Thanet of a ferocious disposition, I wonder, and ready to fall with stone-studded clubs and wooden lances hardened in the fire, upon the backs of unwary mariners?

Amongst the great commercial streams of these islands, the Thames is the only one, I think, open to romantic feeling, from the fact that the sight of human labour and the sounds of human industry do not come down its shores to the very sea, destroying the suggestion of mysterious vastness caused by the configuration of the shore. The broad inlet of the shallow North Sea passes gradually into the contracted shape of the river; but for a long time the feeling of the open water remains with the ship steering to the westward through one of the lighted and buoyed passage-ways of the Thames, such as Queen's Channel, Prince's Channel, Four-Fathom Channel; or else coming down the Swin from the north. The rush of the yellow flood-tide hurries her up as if into the unknown between the two fading lines of the coast. There are no features to this land, no conspicuous, far-famed landmarks for the eye; there is nothing so far down to tell you of the greatest agglomeration of mankind on earth dwelling no more than five and twenty miles away, where the sun sets in a blaze of colour flaming on a gold background, and the dark, low shores trend towards each other. And in the great silence the deep, faint booming of the big guns being tested at Shoeburyness hangs about the Nore — a historical spot in the keeping of one of England's appointed guardians.

## XXXI.

The Nore sand remains covered at low-water, and never seen by human eye; but the Nore is a name to conjure with visions of historical events, of battles, of fleets, of mutinies, of watch and ward kept upon the great throbbing heart of the State. This ideal point of the estuary, this centre of memories, is marked upon the steely gray expanse of the waters by a lightship painted red that, from a couple of miles off, looks like a cheap and bizarre little toy. I remember how, on coming up the river for the first time, I was surprised at the smallness of that vivid object — a tiny warm speck of crimson lost in an immensity of gray tones. I was startled, as if of necessity the principal beacon in the water-way of the greatest town on earth should have presented imposing proportions. And, behold! the brown sprit-sail of a barge hid it entirely from my view.

Coming in from the eastward, the bright colouring of the lightship marking the part of the river committed to the charge of an Admiral (the Commander-in-Chief at the Nore) accentuates the dreariness and the great breadth of the Thames Estuary. But soon the course of the ship opens the entrance of the Medway, with its men-of-war moored in line, and the long wooden jetty of Port Victoria, with its few low buildings like the beginning of a hasty settlement upon a wild and unexplored shore. The famous Thames barges sit in brown clusters upon the water with an effect of birds floating upon a pond. On the imposing expanse of the great estuary the traffic of the port where so much of the world's work and the world's thinking is being done becomes insignificant, scattered, streaming away in thin lines of ships stringing themselves out into the eastern quarter through the various navigable channels of which the Nore lightship marks the divergence. The coasting traffic inclines to the north; the deep-water ships steer east with a southern inclination, on through the Downs, to the most remote ends of the world. In the widening of the shores sinking low in the gray, smoky distances the greatness of the sea receives the mercantile fleet of good ships that London sends out upon the turn of every tide. They follow each other, going very close by the Essex shore. Such as the beads of a rosary told by business-like shipowners for the greater profit of the world they slip one by one into the open: while in the offing the inward-

bound ships come up singly and in bunches from under the sea horizon closing the mouth of the river between Orfordness and North Foreland. They all converge upon the Nore, the warm speck of red upon the tones of drab and gray, with the distant shores running together towards the west, low and flat, like the sides of an enormous canal. The sea-reach of the Thames is straight, and, once Sheerness is left behind, its banks seem very uninhabited, except for the cluster of houses which is Southend, or here and there a lonely wooden jetty where petroleum ships discharge their dangerous cargoes, and the oil-storage tanks, low and round with slightly-domed roofs, peep over the edge of the fore-shore, as it were a village of Central African huts imitated in iron. Bordered by the black and shining mud-flats, the level marsh extends for miles. Away in the far background the land rises, closing the view with a continuous wooded slope, forming in the distance an interminable rampart overgrown with bushes.

Then, on the slight turn of the Lower Hope Reach, clusters of factory chimneys come distinctly into view, tall and slender above the squat ranges of cement works in Grays and Greenhithe. Smoking quietly at the top against the great blaze of a magnificent sunset, they give an industrial character to the scene, speak of work, manufactures, and trade, as palm-groves on the coral strands of distant islands speak of the luxuriant grace, beauty and vigour of tropical nature. The houses of Gravesend crowd upon the shore with an effect of confusion as if they had tumbled down haphazard from the top of the hill at the back. The flatness of the Kentish shore ends there. A fleet of steam-tugs lies at anchor in front of the various piers. A conspicuous church spire, the first seen distinctly coming from the sea, has a thoughtful grace, the serenity of a fine form above the chaotic disorder of men's houses. But on the other side, on the flat Essex side, a shapeless and desolate red edifice, a vast pile of bricks with many windows and a slate roof more inaccessible than an Alpine slope, towers over the bend in monstrous ugliness, the tallest, heaviest building for miles around, a thing like an hotel, like a mansion of flats (all to let), exiled into these fields out of a street in West Kensington. Just round the corner, as it were, on a pier defined with stone blocks and wooden piles, a white mast, slender like a stalk of straw and crossed by a yard like a knitting-needle, flying the signals of flag and balloon, watches over a set of heavy dock-gates. Mast-heads and funnel-tops of ships peep above the ranges of corrugated iron



roofs. This is the entrance to Tilbury Dock, the most recent of all London docks, the nearest to the sea.

Between the crowded houses of Gravesend and the monstrous red-brick pile on the Essex shore the ship is surrendered fairly to the grasp of the river. That hint of loneliness, that soul of the sea which had accompanied her as far as the Lower Hope Reach, abandons her at the turn of the first bend above. The salt, acrid flavour is gone out of the air, together with a sense of unlimited space opening free beyond the threshold of sandbanks below the Nore. The waters of the sea rush on past Gravesend, tumbling the big mooring buoys laid along the face of the town; but the sea-freedom stops short there, surrendering the salt tide to the needs, the artifices, the contrivances of toiling men. Wharves, landing-places, dock-gates, waterside stairs, follow each other continuously right up to London Bridge, and the hum of men's work fills the river with a menacing, muttering note as of a breathless, ever-driving gale. The water-way, so fair above and wide below, flows oppressed by bricks and mortar and stone, by blackened timber and grimed glass and rusty iron, covered with black barges, whipped up by paddles and screws, overburdened with craft, overhung with chains, overshadowed by walls making a steep gorge for its bed, filled with a haze of smoke and dust.

This stretch of the Thames from London Bridge to the Albert Docks is to other watersides of river ports what a virgin forest would be to a garden. It is a thing grown up, not made. It recalls a jungle by the confused, varied, and impenetrable aspect of the buildings that line the shore, not according to a planned purpose, but as if sprung up by accident from scattered seeds. Like the matted growth of bushes and creepers veiling the silent depths of an unexplored wilderness, they hide the depths of London's infinitely varied, vigorous, seething life. In other river ports it is not so. They lie open to their stream, with quays like broad clearings, with streets like avenues cut through thick timber for the convenience of trade. I am thinking now of river ports I have seen — of Antwerp, for instance; of Nantes or Bordeaux, or even old Rouen, where the night-watchmen of ships, elbows on rail, gaze at shop-windows and brilliant cafés, and see the audience go in and come out of the opera-house. But London, the oldest and greatest of river ports, does not possess as much as a hundred yards of open quays upon its river front. Dark and impenetrable at night, like the face of a forest, is the London waterside. It is the waterside of watersides,

where only one aspect of the world's life can be seen, and only one kind of men toils on the edge of the stream. The lightless walls seem to spring from the very mud upon which the stranded barges lie; and the narrow lanes coming down to the foreshore resemble the paths of smashed bushes and crumbled earth where big game comes to drink on the banks of tropical streams.

Behind the growth of the London waterside the docks of London spread out unsuspected, smooth, and placid, lost amongst the buildings like dark lagoons hidden in a thick forest. They lie concealed in the intricate growth of houses with a few stalks of mastheads here and there overtopping the roof of some four-story warehouse.

It is a strange conjunction this of roofs and mastheads, of walls and yard-arms. I remember once having the incongruity of the relation brought home to me in a practical way. I was the chief officer of a fine ship, just docked with a cargo of wool from Sydney, after a ninety days' passage. In fact, we had not been in more than half an hour and I was still busy making her fast to the stone posts of a very narrow quay in front of a lofty warehouse. An old man with a gray whisker under the chin and brass buttons on his pilot-cloth jacket, hurried up along the quay hailing my ship by name. He was one of those officials called berthing-masters — not the one who had berthed us, but another, who, apparently, had been busy securing a steamer at the other end of the dock. I could see from afar his hard blue eyes staring at us, as if fascinated, with a queer sort of absorption. I wondered what that worthy sea-dog had found to criticise in my ship's rigging. And I, too, glanced aloft anxiously. I could see nothing wrong there. But perhaps that superannuated fellow-craftsman was simply admiring the ship's perfect order aloft, I thought, with some secret pride; for the chief officer is responsible for his ship's appearance, and as to her outward condition, he is the man open to praise or blame. Meantime the old salt ("ex-coasting skipper" was writ large all over his person) had hobbled up alongside in his bumpy, shiny boots, and, waving an arm, short and thick like the flipper of a seal, terminated by a paw red as an uncooked beef-steak, addressed the poop in a muffled, faint, roaring voice, as if a sample of every North-Sea fog of his life had been permanently lodged in his throat: "Haul 'em round, Mr. Mate!" were his words. "If you don't look sharp, you'll have your topgallant yards through the windows of that 'ere warehouse presently!" This was the only cause of his interest in the ship's beautiful spars. I own

that for a time I was struck dumb by the bizarre associations of yard-arms and window-panes. To break windows is the last thing one would think of in connection with a ship's topgallant yard, unless, indeed, one were an experienced berthing-master in one of the London docks. This old chap was doing his little share of the world's work with proper efficiency. His little blue eyes had made out the danger many hundred yards off. His rheumatically feet, tired with balancing that squat body for many years upon the decks of small coasters, and made sore by miles of tramping upon the flagstones of the dock side, had hurried up in time to avert a ridiculous catastrophe. I answered him pettishly, I fear, and as if I had known all about it before.

“All right, all right! can't do everything at once.”

He remained near by, muttering to himself till the yards had been hauled round at my order, and then raised again his foggy, thick voice:

“None too soon,” he observed, with a critical glance up at the towering side of the warehouse. “That's a half-sovereign in your pocket, Mr. Mate. You should always look first how you are for them windows before you begin to breast in your ship to the quay.”

It was good advice. But one cannot think of everything or foresee contacts of things apparently as remote as stars and hop-poles.

## XXXII.

The view of ships lying moored in some of the older docks of London has always suggested to my mind the image of a flock of swans kept in the flooded backyard of grim tenement houses. The flatness of the walls surrounding the dark pool on which they float brings out wonderfully the flowing grace of the lines on which a ship's hull is built. The lightness of these forms, devised to meet the winds and the seas, makes, by contrast with the great piles of bricks, the chains and cables of their moorings appear very necessary, as if nothing less could prevent them from soaring upwards and over the roofs. The least puff of wind stealing round the corners of the dock buildings stirs these captives fettered to rigid shores. It is as if the soul of a ship were impatient of confinement. Those masted hulls, relieved of their cargo, become restless at the slightest hint of the wind's freedom. However tightly moored, they range a little at their berths, swaying imperceptibly the spire-like assemblages of cordage and spars. You can detect their impatience by watching the sway of the mastheads against the motionless, the soulless gravity of mortar and stones. As you pass alongside each hopeless prisoner chained to the quay, the slight grinding noise of the wooden fenders makes a sound of angry muttering. But, after all, it may be good for ships to go through a period of restraint and repose, as the restraint and self-communion of inactivity may be good for an unruly soul — not, indeed, that I mean to say that ships are unruly; on the contrary, they are faithful creatures, as so many men can testify. And faithfulness is a great restraint, the strongest bond laid upon the self-will of men and ships on this globe of land and sea.

This interval of bondage in the docks rounds each period of a ship's life with the sense of accomplished duty, of an effectively played part in the work of the world. The dock is the scene of what the world would think the most serious part in the light, bounding, swaying life of a ship. But there are docks and docks. The ugliness of some docks is appalling. Wild horses would not drag from me the name of a certain river in the north whose narrow estuary is inhospitable and dangerous, and whose docks are like a nightmare of dreariness and misery. Their dismal shores are studded thickly with scaffold-like, enormous timber structures, whose lofty heads

are veiled periodically by the infernal gritty night of a cloud of coal-dust. The most important ingredient for getting the world's work along is distributed there under the circumstances of the greatest cruelty meted out to helpless ships. Shut up in the desolate circuit of these basins, you would think a free ship would droop and die like a wild bird put into a dirty cage. But a ship, perhaps because of her faithfulness to men, will endure an extraordinary lot of ill-usage. Still, I have seen ships issue from certain docks like half-dead prisoners from a dungeon, bedraggled, overcome, wholly disguised in dirt, and with their men rolling white eyeballs in black and worried faces raised to a heaven which, in its smoky and soiled aspect, seemed to reflect the sordidness of the earth below. One thing, however, may be said for the docks of the Port of London on both sides of the river: for all the complaints of their insufficient equipment, of their obsolete rules, of failure (they say) in the matter of quick despatch, no ship need ever issue from their gates in a half-fainting condition. London is a general cargo port, as is only proper for the greatest capital of the world to be. General cargo ports belong to the aristocracy of the earth's trading places, and in that aristocracy London, as it is its way, has a unique physiognomy.

The absence of picturesqueness cannot be laid to the charge of the docks opening into the Thames. For all my unkind comparisons to swans and backyards, it cannot be denied that each dock or group of docks along the north side of the river has its own individual attractiveness. Beginning with the cosy little St. Katherine's Dock, lying overshadowed and black like a quiet pool amongst rocky crags, through the venerable and sympathetic London Docks, with not a single line of rails in the whole of their area and the aroma of spices lingering between its warehouses, with their far-famed wine-cellars — down through the interesting group of West India Docks, the fine docks at Blackwall, on past the Galleons Reach entrance of the Victoria and Albert Docks, right down to the vast gloom of the great basins in Tilbury, each of those places of restraint for ships has its own peculiar physiognomy, its own expression. And what makes them unique and attractive is their common trait of being romantic in their usefulness.

In their way they are as romantic as the river they serve is unlike all the other commercial streams of the world. The cosiness of the St. Katherine's Dock, the old-world air of the London Docks, remain impressed upon the memory. The docks down the river, abreast of Woolwich, are imposing by their proportions and the vast scale of the ugliness that forms their

surroundings — ugliness so picturesque as to become a delight to the eye. When one talks of the Thames docks, “beauty” is a vain word, but romance has lived too long upon this river not to have thrown a mantle of glamour upon its banks.

The antiquity of the port appeals to the imagination by the long chain of adventurous enterprises that had their inception in the town and floated out into the world on the waters of the river. Even the newest of the docks, the Tilbury Dock, shares in the glamour conferred by historical associations. Queen Elizabeth has made one of her progresses down there, not one of her journeys of pomp and ceremony, but an anxious business progress at a crisis of national history. The menace of that time has passed away, and now Tilbury is known by its docks. These are very modern, but their remoteness and isolation upon the Essex marsh, the days of failure attending their creation, invested them with a romantic air. Nothing in those days could have been more striking than the vast, empty basins, surrounded by miles of bare quays and the ranges of cargo-sheds, where two or three ships seemed lost like bewitched children in a forest of gaunt, hydraulic cranes. One received a wonderful impression of utter abandonment, of wasted efficiency. From the first the Tilbury Docks were very efficient and ready for their task, but they had come, perhaps, too soon into the field. A great future lies before Tilbury Docks. They shall never fill a long-felt want (in the sacramental phrase that is applied to railways, tunnels, newspapers, and new editions of books). They were too early in the field. The want shall never be felt because, free of the trammels of the tide, easy of access, magnificent and desolate, they are already there, prepared to take and keep the biggest ships that float upon the sea. They are worthy of the oldest river port in the world.

And, truth to say, for all the criticisms flung upon the heads of the dock companies, the other docks of the Thames are no disgrace to the town with a population greater than that of some commonwealths. The growth of London as a well-equipped port has been slow, while not unworthy of a great capital, of a great centre of distribution. It must not be forgotten that London has not the backing of great industrial districts or great fields of natural exploitation. In this it differs from Liverpool, from Cardiff, from Newcastle, from Glasgow; and therein the Thames differs from the Mersey, from the Tyne, from the Clyde. It is an historical river; it is a romantic stream flowing through the centre of great affairs, and for all the criticism

of the river's administration, my contention is that its development has been worthy of its dignity. For a long time the stream itself could accommodate quite easily the oversea and coasting traffic. That was in the days when, in the part called the Pool, just below London Bridge, the vessels moored stem and stern in the very strength of the tide formed one solid mass like an island covered with a forest of gaunt, leafless trees; and when the trade had grown too big for the river there came the St. Katherine's Docks and the London Docks, magnificent undertakings answering to the need of their time. The same may be said of the other artificial lakes full of ships that go in and out upon this high road to all parts of the world. The labour of the imperial waterway goes on from generation to generation, goes on day and night. Nothing ever arrests its sleepless industry but the coming of a heavy fog, which clothes the teeming stream in a mantle of impenetrable stillness.

After the gradual cessation of all sound and movement on the faithful river, only the ringing of ships' bells is heard, mysterious and muffled in the white vapour from London Bridge right down to the Nore, for miles and miles in a decrescendo tinkling, to where the estuary broadens out into the North Sea, and the anchored ships lie scattered thinly in the shrouded channels between the sand-banks of the Thames' mouth. Through the long and glorious tale of years of the river's strenuous service to its people these are its only breathing times.

## XXXIII.

A ship in dock, surrounded by quays and the walls of warehouses, has the appearance of a prisoner meditating upon freedom in the sadness of a free spirit put under restraint. Chain cables and stout ropes keep her bound to stone posts at the edge of a paved shore, and a berthing-master, with brass buttons on his coat, walks about like a weather-beaten and ruddy gaoler, casting jealous, watchful glances upon the moorings that fetter a ship lying passive and still and safe, as if lost in deep regrets of her days of liberty and danger on the sea.

The swarm of renegades — dock-masters, berthing-masters, gatemen, and such like — appear to nurse an immense distrust of the captive ship's resignation. There never seem chains and ropes enough to satisfy their minds concerned with the safe binding of free ships to the strong, muddy, enslaved earth. "You had better put another bight of a hawser astern, Mr. Mate," is the usual phrase in their mouth. I brand them for renegades, because most of them have been sailors in their time. As if the infirmities of old age — the gray hair, the wrinkles at the corners of the eyes, and the knotted veins of the hands — were the symptoms of moral poison, they prowl about the quays with an underhand air of gloating over the broken spirit of noble captives. They want more fenders, more breasting-ropes; they want more springs, more shackles, more fetters; they want to make ships with volatile souls as motionless as square blocks of stone. They stand on the mud of pavements, these degraded sea-dogs, with long lines of railway-trucks clanking their couplings behind their backs, and run malevolent glances over your ship from headgear to taffrail, only wishing to tyrannize over the poor creature under the hypocritical cloak of benevolence and care. Here and there cargo cranes looking like instruments of torture for ships swing cruel hooks at the end of long chains. Gangs of dock-labourers swarm with muddy feet over the gangways. It is a moving sight this, of so many men of the earth, earthy, who never cared anything for a ship, trampling unconcerned, brutal and hob-nailed upon her helpless body.

Fortunately, nothing can deface the beauty of a ship. That sense of a dungeon, that sense of a horrible and degrading misfortune overtaking a



creature fair to see and safe to trust, attaches only to ships moored in the docks of great European ports. You feel that they are dishonestly locked up, to be hunted about from wharf to wharf on a dark, greasy, square pool of black water as a brutal reward at the end of a faithful voyage.

A ship anchored in an open roadstead, with cargo-lighters alongside and her own tackle swinging the burden over the rail, is accomplishing in freedom a function of her life. There is no restraint; there is space: clear water around her, and a clear sky above her mastheads, with a landscape of green hills and charming bays opening around her anchorage. She is not abandoned by her own men to the tender mercies of shore people. She still shelters, and is looked after by, her own little devoted band, and you feel that presently she will glide between the headlands and disappear. It is only at home, in dock, that she lies abandoned, shut off from freedom by all the artifices of men that think of quick despatch and profitable freights. It is only then that the odious, rectangular shadows of walls and roofs fall upon her decks, with showers of soot.

To a man who has never seen the extraordinary nobility, strength, and grace that the devoted generations of ship-builders have evolved from some pure nooks of their simple souls, the sight that could be seen five-and-twenty years ago of a large fleet of clippers moored along the north side of the New South Dock was an inspiring spectacle. Then there was a quarter of a mile of them, from the iron dockyard-gates guarded by policemen, in a long, forest-like perspective of masts, moored two and two to many stout wooden jetties. Their spars dwarfed with their loftiness the corrugated-iron sheds, their jibbooms extended far over the shore, their white-and-gold figure-heads, almost dazzling in their purity, overhung the straight, long quay above the mud and dirt of the wharfside, with the busy figures of groups and single men moving to and fro, restless and grimy under their soaring immobility.

At tide-time you would see one of the loaded ships with battened-down hatches drop out of the ranks and float in the clear space of the dock, held by lines dark and slender, like the first threads of a spider's web, extending from her bows and her quarters to the mooring-posts on shore. There, graceful and still, like a bird ready to spread its wings, she waited till, at the opening of the gates, a tug or two would hurry in noisily, hovering round her with an air of fuss and solicitude, and take her out into the river, tending, shepherding her through open bridges, through dam-like gates

between the flat pier-heads, with a bit of green lawn surrounded by gravel and a white signal-mast with yard and gaff, flying a couple of dingy blue, red, or white flags.

This New South Dock (it was its official name), round which my earlier professional memories are centred, belongs to the group of West India Docks, together with two smaller and much older basins called Import and Export respectively, both with the greatness of their trade departed from them already. Picturesque and clean as docks go, these twin basins spread side by side the dark lustre of their glassy water, sparsely peopled by a few ships laid up on buoys or tucked far away from each other at the end of sheds in the corners of empty quays, where they seemed to slumber quietly remote, untouched by the bustle of men's affairs — in retreat rather than in captivity. They were quaint and sympathetic, those two homely basins, unfurnished and silent, with no aggressive display of cranes, no apparatus of hurry and work on their narrow shores. No railway-lines cumbered them. The knots of labourers trooping in clumsily round the corners of cargo-sheds to eat their food in peace out of red cotton handkerchiefs had the air of picnicking by the side of a lonely mountain pool. They were restful (and I should say very unprofitable), those basins, where the chief officer of one of the ships involved in the harassing, strenuous, noisy activity of the New South Dock only a few yards away could escape in the dinner-hour to stroll, unhampered by men and affairs, meditating (if he chose) on the vanity of all things human. At one time they must have been full of good old slow West Indiamen of the square-stern type, that took their captivity, one imagines, as stolidly as they had faced the buffeting of the waves with their blunt, honest bows, and disgorged sugar, rum, molasses, coffee, or logwood sedately with their own winch and tackle. But when I knew them, of exports there was never a sign that one could detect; and all the imports I have ever seen were some rare cargoes of tropical timber, enormous baulks roughed out of iron trunks grown in the woods about the Gulf of Mexico. They lay piled up in stacks of mighty boles, and it was hard to believe that all this mass of dead and stripped trees had come out of the flanks of a slender, innocent-looking little barque with, as likely as not, a homely woman's name — Ellen this or Annie that — upon her fine bows. But this is generally the case with a discharged cargo. Once spread at large over the quay, it looks the most impossible bulk to have all come there out of that ship along-side.

They were quiet, serene nooks in the busy world of docks, these basins where it has never been my good luck to get a berth after some more or less arduous passage. But one could see at a glance that men and ships were never hustled there. They were so quiet that, remembering them well, one comes to doubt that they ever existed — places of repose for tired ships to dream in, places of meditation rather than work, where wicked ships — the cranky, the lazy, the wet, the bad sea boats, the wild steerers, the capricious, the pig-headed, the generally ungovernable — would have full leisure to take count and repent of their sins, sorrowful and naked, with their rent garments of sailcloth stripped off them, and with the dust and ashes of the London atmosphere upon their mastheads. For that the worst of ships would repent if she were ever given time I make no doubt. I have known too many of them. No ship is wholly bad; and now that their bodies that had braved so many tempests have been blown off the face of the sea by a puff of steam, the evil and the good together into the limbo of things that have served their time, there can be no harm in affirming that in these vanished generations of willing servants there never has been one utterly unredeemable soul.

In the New South Dock there was certainly no time for remorse, introspection, repentance, or any phenomena of inner life either for the captive ships or for their officers. From six in the morning till six at night the hard labour of the prison-house, which rewards the valiance of ships that win the harbour went on steadily, great slings of general cargo swinging over the rail, to drop plumb into the hatchways at the sign of the gangway-tender's hand. The New South Dock was especially a loading dock for the Colonies in those great (and last) days of smart wool-clippers, good to look at and — well — exciting to handle. Some of them were more fair to see than the others; many were (to put it mildly) somewhat overmasted; all were expected to make good passages; and of all that line of ships, whose rigging made a thick, enormous network against the sky, whose brasses flashed almost as far as the eye of the policeman at the gates could reach, there was hardly one that knew of any other port amongst all the ports on the wide earth but London and Sydney, or London and Melbourne, or London and Adelaide, perhaps with Hobart Town added for those of smaller tonnage. One could almost have believed, as her gray-whiskered second mate used to say of the old *Duke of S-*, that they knew the road to the Antipodes better than their own skippers, who, year in, year out,

took them from London — the place of captivity — to some Australian port where, twenty-five years ago, though moored well and tight enough to the wooden wharves, they felt themselves no captives, but honoured guests.

## XXXIV.

These towns of the Antipodes, not so great then as they are now, took an interest in the shipping, the running links with "home," whose numbers confirmed the sense of their growing importance. They made it part and parcel of their daily interests. This was especially the case in Sydney, where, from the heart of the fair city, down the vista of important streets, could be seen the wool-clippers lying at the Circular Quay — no walled prison-house of a dock that, but the integral part of one of the finest, most beautiful, vast, and safe bays the sun ever shone upon. Now great steam-liners lie at these berths, always reserved for the sea aristocracy — grand and imposing enough ships, but here to-day and gone next week; whereas the general cargo, emigrant, and passenger clippers of my time, rigged with heavy spars, and built on fine lines, used to remain for months together waiting for their load of wool. Their names attained the dignity of household words. On Sundays and holidays the citizens trooped down, on visiting bent, and the lonely officer on duty solaced himself by playing the cicerone — especially to the citizenesses with engaging manners and a well-developed sense of the fun that may be got out of the inspection of a ship's cabins and state-rooms. The tinkle of more or less untuned cottage pianos floated out of open stern-ports till the gas-lamps began to twinkle in the streets, and the ship's night-watchman, coming sleepily on duty after his unsatisfactory day slumbers, hauled down the flags and fastened a lighted lantern at the break of the gangway. The night closed rapidly upon the silent ships with their crews on shore. Up a short, steep ascent by the King's Head pub., patronized by the cooks and stewards of the fleet, the voice of a man crying "Hot saveloys!" at the end of George Street, where the cheap eating-houses (sixpence a meal) were kept by Chinamen (Sun-kum-on's was not bad), is heard at regular intervals. I have listened for hours to this most pertinacious pedlar (I wonder whether he is dead or has made a fortune), while sitting on the rail of the old *Duke of S-* (she's dead, poor thing! a violent death on the coast of New Zealand), fascinated by the monotony, the regularity, the abruptness of the recurring cry, and so exasperated at the absurd spell, that I wished the fellow would choke himself to death with a mouthful of his own infamous wares.

A stupid job, and fit only for an old man, my comrades used to tell me, to be the night-watchman of a captive (though honoured) ship. And generally the oldest of the able seamen in a ship's crew does get it. But sometimes neither the oldest nor any other fairly steady seaman is forthcoming. Ships' crews had the trick of melting away swiftly in those days. So, probably on account of my youth, innocence, and pensive habits (which made me sometimes dilatory in my work about the rigging), I was suddenly nominated, in our chief mate Mr. B-'s most sardonic tones, to that enviable situation. I do not regret the experience. The night humours of the town descended from the street to the waterside in the still watches of the night: larrikins rushing down in bands to settle some quarrel by a stand-up fight, away from the police, in an indistinct ring half hidden by piles of cargo, with the sounds of blows, a groan now and then, the stamping of feet, and the cry of "Time!" rising suddenly above the sinister and excited murmurs; night-prowlers, pursued or pursuing, with a stifled shriek followed by a profound silence, or slinking stealthily along-side like ghosts, and addressing me from the quay below in mysterious tones with incomprehensible propositions. The cabmen, too, who twice a week, on the night when the A.S.N. Company's passenger-boat was due to arrive, used to range a battalion of blazing lamps opposite the ship, were very amusing in their way. They got down from their perches and told each other impolite stories in racy language, every word of which reached me distinctly over the bulwarks as I sat smoking on the main-hatch. On one occasion I had an hour or so of a most intellectual conversation with a person whom I could not see distinctly, a gentleman from England, he said, with a cultivated voice, I on deck and he on the quay sitting on the case of a piano (landed out of our hold that very afternoon), and smoking a cigar which smelt very good. We touched, in our discourse, upon science, politics, natural history, and operatic singers. Then, after remarking abruptly, "You seem to be rather intelligent, my man," he informed me pointedly that his name was Mr. Senior, and walked off — to his hotel, I suppose. Shadows! Shadows! I think I saw a white whisker as he turned under the lamp-post. It is a shock to think that in the natural course of nature he must be dead by now. There was nothing to object to in his intelligence but a little dogmatism maybe. And his name was Senior! Mr. Senior!

The position had its drawbacks, however. One wintry, blustering, dark night in July, as I stood sleepily out of the rain under the break of the poop

something resembling an ostrich dashed up the gangway. I say ostrich because the creature, though it ran on two legs, appeared to help its progress by working a pair of short wings; it was a man, however, only his coat, ripped up the back and flapping in two halves above his shoulders, gave him that weird and fowl-like appearance. At least, I suppose it was his coat, for it was impossible to make him out distinctly. How he managed to come so straight upon me, at speed and without a stumble over a strange deck, I cannot imagine. He must have been able to see in the dark better than any cat. He overwhelmed me with panting entreaties to let him take shelter till morning in our fore-castle. Following my strict orders, I refused his request, mildly at first, in a sterner tone as he insisted with growing impudence.

“For God’s sake let me, matey! Some of ‘em are after me — and I’ve got hold of a ticker here.”

“You clear out of this!” I said.

“Don’t be hard on a chap, old man!” he whined pitifully.

“Now then, get ashore at once. Do you hear?”

Silence. He appeared to cringe, mute, as if words had failed him through grief; then — bang! came a concussion and a great flash of light in which he vanished, leaving me prone on my back with the most abominable black eye that anybody ever got in the faithful discharge of duty. Shadows! Shadows! I hope he escaped the enemies he was fleeing from to live and flourish to this day. But his fist was uncommonly hard and his aim miraculously true in the dark.

There were other experiences, less painful and more funny for the most part, with one amongst them of a dramatic complexion; but the greatest experience of them all was Mr. B-, our chief mate himself.

He used to go ashore every night to foregather in some hotel’s parlour with his crony, the mate of the barque *Cicero*, lying on the other side of the Circular Quay. Late at night I would hear from afar their stumbling footsteps and their voices raised in endless argument. The mate of the *Cicero* was seeing his friend on board. They would continue their senseless and muddled discourse in tones of profound friendship for half an hour or so at the shore end of our gangway, and then I would hear Mr. B- insisting that he must see the other on board his ship. And away they would go, their voices, still conversing with excessive amity, being heard moving all round the harbour. It happened more than once that they would thus perambulate three or four times the distance, each seeing the other on board his ship out

of pure and disinterested affection. Then, through sheer weariness, or perhaps in a moment of forgetfulness, they would manage to part from each other somehow, and by-and-by the planks of our long gangway would bend and creak under the weight of Mr. B- coming on board for good at last.

On the rail his burly form would stop and stand swaying.

“Watchman!”

“Sir.”

A pause.

He waited for a moment of steadiness before negotiating the three steps of the inside ladder from rail to deck; and the watchman, taught by experience, would forbear offering help which would be received as an insult at that particular stage of the mate’s return. But many times I trembled for his neck. He was a heavy man.

Then with a rush and a thump it would be done. He never had to pick himself up; but it took him a minute or so to pull himself together after the descent.

“Watchman!”

“Sir.”

“Captain aboard?”

“Yes, sir.”

Pause.

“Dog aboard?”

“Yes, sir.”

Pause.

Our dog was a gaunt and unpleasant beast, more like a wolf in poor health than a dog, and I never noticed Mr. B- at any other time show the slightest interest in the doings of the animal. But that question never failed.

“Let’s have your arm to steady me along.”

I was always prepared for that request. He leaned on me heavily till near enough the cabin-door to catch hold of the handle. Then he would let go my arm at once.

“That’ll do. I can manage now.”

And he could manage. He could manage to find his way into his berth, light his lamp, get into his bed — ay, and get out of it when I called him at half-past five, the first man on deck, lifting the cup of morning coffee to his lips with a steady hand, ready for duty as though he had virtuously slept ten solid hours — a better chief officer than many a man who had never tasted



grog in his life. He could manage all that, but could never manage to get on in life.

Only once he failed to seize the cabin-door handle at the first grab. He waited a little, tried again, and again failed. His weight was growing heavier on my arm. He sighed slowly.

“D-n that handle!”

Without letting go his hold of me he turned about, his face lit up bright as day by the full moon.

“I wish she were out at sea,” he growled savagely.

“Yes, sir.”

I felt the need to say something, because he hung on to me as if lost, breathing heavily.

“Ports are no good — ships rot, men go to the devil!”

I kept still, and after a while he repeated with a sigh.

“I wish she were at sea out of this.”

“So do I, sir,” I ventured.

Holding my shoulder, he turned upon me.

“You! What’s that to you where she is? You don’t — drink.”

And even on that night he “managed it” at last. He got hold of the handle. But he did not manage to light his lamp (I don’t think he even tried), though in the morning as usual he was the first on deck, bull-necked, curly-headed, watching the hands turn-to with his sardonic expression and unflinching gaze.

I met him ten years afterwards, casually, unexpectedly, in the street, on coming out of my consignee office. I was not likely to have forgotten him with his “I can manage now.” He recognised me at once, remembered my name, and in what ship I had served under his orders. He looked me over from head to foot.

“What are you doing here?” he asked.

“I am commanding a little barque,” I said, “loading here for Mauritius.” Then, thoughtlessly, I added: “And what are you doing, Mr. B-?”

“I,” he said, looking at me unflinchingly, with his old sardonic grin — “I am looking for something to do.”

I felt I would rather have bitten out my tongue. His jet-black, curly hair had turned iron-gray; he was scrupulously neat as ever, but frightfully threadbare. His shiny boots were worn down at heel. But he forgave me, and we drove off together in a hansom to dine on board my ship. He went

over her conscientiously, praised her heartily, congratulated me on my command with absolute sincerity. At dinner, as I offered him wine and beer he shook his head, and as I sat looking at him interrogatively, muttered in an undertone:

“I’ve given up all that.”

After dinner we came again on deck. It seemed as though he could not tear himself away from the ship. We were fitting some new lower rigging, and he hung about, approving, suggesting, giving me advice in his old manner. Twice he addressed me as “My boy,” and corrected himself quickly to “Captain.” My mate was about to leave me (to get married), but I concealed the fact from Mr. B-. I was afraid he would ask me to give him the berth in some ghastly jocular hint that I could not refuse to take. I was afraid. It would have been impossible. I could not have given orders to Mr. B-, and I am sure he would not have taken them from me very long. He could not have managed that, though he had managed to break himself from drink — too late.

He said good-bye at last. As I watched his burly, bull-necked figure walk away up the street, I wondered with a sinking heart whether he had much more than the price of a night’s lodging in his pocket. And I understood that if that very minute I were to call out after him, he would not even turn his head. He, too, is no more than a shadow, but I seem to hear his words spoken on the moonlit deck of the old *Duke* — :

“Ports are no good — ships rot, men go to the devil!”

## XXXV.

“Ships!” exclaimed an elderly seaman in clean shore togs. “Ships” — and his keen glance, turning away from my face, ran along the vista of magnificent figure-heads that in the late seventies used to overhang in a serried rank the muddy pavement by the side of the New South Dock — “ships are all right; it’s the men in ‘em. . .”

Fifty hulls, at least, moulded on lines of beauty and speed — hulls of wood, of iron, expressing in their forms the highest achievement of modern ship-building — lay moored all in a row, stem to quay, as if assembled there for an exhibition, not of a great industry, but of a great art. Their colours were gray, black, dark green, with a narrow strip of yellow moulding defining their sheer, or with a row of painted ports decking in warlike decoration their robust flanks of cargo-carriers that would know no triumph but of speed in carrying a burden, no glory other than of a long service, no victory but that of an endless, obscure contest with the sea. The great empty hulls with swept holds, just out of dry-dock, with their paint glistening freshly, sat high-sided with ponderous dignity alongside the wooden jetties, looking more like unmovable buildings than things meant to go afloat; others, half loaded, far on the way to recover the true sea-physiognomy of a ship brought down to her load-line, looked more accessible. Their less steeply slanting gangways seemed to invite the strolling sailors in search of a berth to walk on board and try “for a chance” with the chief mate, the guardian of a ship’s efficiency. As if anxious to remain unperceived amongst their overtopping sisters, two or three “finished” ships floated low, with an air of straining at the leash of their level headfasts, exposing to view their cleared decks and covered hatches, prepared to drop stern first out of the labouring ranks, displaying the true comeliness of form which only her proper sea-trim gives to a ship. And for a good quarter of a mile, from the dockyard gate to the farthest corner, where the old housed-in hulk, the *President* (drill-ship, then, of the Naval Reserve), used to lie with her frigate side rubbing against the stone of the quay, above all these hulls, ready and unready, a hundred and fifty lofty masts, more or less, held out the web of their rigging like an immense net,

in whose close mesh, black against the sky, the heavy yards seemed to be entangled and suspended.

It was a sight. The humblest craft that floats makes its appeal to a seaman by the faithfulness of her life; and this was the place where one beheld the aristocracy of ships. It was a noble gathering of the fairest and the swiftest, each bearing at the bow the carved emblem of her name, as in a gallery of plaster-casts, figures of women with mural crowns, women with flowing robes, with gold fillets on their hair or blue scarves round their waists, stretching out rounded arms as if to point the way; heads of men helmeted or bare; full lengths of warriors, of kings, of statesmen, of lords and princesses, all white from top to toe; with here and there a dusky turbaned figure, bedizened in many colours, of some Eastern sultan or hero, all inclined forward under the slant of mighty bowsprits as if eager to begin another run of 11,000 miles in their leaning attitudes. These were the fine figure-heads of the finest ships afloat. But why, unless for the love of the life those effigies shared with us in their wandering impassivity, should one try to reproduce in words an impression of whose fidelity there can be no critic and no judge, since such an exhibition of the art of shipbuilding and the art of figure-head carving as was seen from year's end to year's end in the open-air gallery of the New South Dock no man's eye shall behold again? All that patient, pale company of queens and princesses, of kings and warriors, of allegorical women, of heroines and statesmen and heathen gods, crowned, helmeted, bare-headed, has run for good off the sea stretching to the last above the tumbling foam their fair, rounded arms; holding out their spears, swords, shields, tridents in the same unwearied, striving forward pose. And nothing remains but lingering perhaps in the memory of a few men, the sound of their names, vanished a long time ago from the first page of the great London dailies; from big posters in railway-stations and the doors of shipping offices; from the minds of sailors, dockmasters, pilots, and tugmen; from the hail of gruff voices and the flutter of signal flags exchanged between ships closing upon each other and drawing apart in the open immensity of the sea.

The elderly, respectable seaman, withdrawing his gaze from that multitude of spars, gave me a glance to make sure of our fellowship in the craft and mystery of the sea. We had met casually, and had got into contact as I had stopped near him, my attention being caught by the same peculiarity he was looking at in the rigging of an obviously new ship, a ship

with her reputation all to make yet in the talk of the seamen who were to share their life with her. Her name was already on their lips. I had heard it uttered between two thick, red-necked fellows of the semi-nautical type at the Fenchurch Street Railway-station, where, in those days, the everyday male crowd was attired in jerseys and pilot-cloth mostly, and had the air of being more conversant with the times of high-water than with the times of the trains. I had noticed that new ship's name on the first page of my morning paper. I had stared at the unfamiliar grouping of its letters, blue on white ground, on the advertisement-boards, whenever the train came to a standstill alongside one of the shabby, wooden, wharf-like platforms of the dock railway-line. She had been named, with proper observances, on the day she came off the stocks, no doubt, but she was very far yet from "having a name." Untried, ignorant of the ways of the sea, she had been thrust amongst that renowned company of ships to load for her maiden voyage. There was nothing to vouch for her soundness and the worth of her character, but the reputation of the building-yard whence she was launched headlong into the world of waters. She looked modest to me. I imagined her diffident, lying very quiet, with her side nestling shyly against the wharf to which she was made fast with very new lines, intimidated by the company of her tried and experienced sisters already familiar with all the violences of the ocean and the exacting love of men. They had had more long voyages to make their names in than she had known weeks of carefully tended life, for a new ship receives as much attention as if she were a young bride. Even crabbed old dock-masters look at her with benevolent eyes. In her shyness at the threshold of a laborious and uncertain life, where so much is expected of a ship, she could not have been better heartened and comforted, had she only been able to hear and understand, than by the tone of deep conviction in which my elderly, respectable seaman repeated the first part of his saying, "Ships are all right . . ."

His civility prevented him from repeating the other, the bitter part. It had occurred to him that it was perhaps indelicate to insist. He had recognised in me a ship's officer, very possibly looking for a berth like himself, and so far a comrade, but still a man belonging to that sparsely-peopled after-end of a ship, where a great part of her reputation as a "good ship," in seaman's parlance, is made or marred.

"Can you say that of all ships without exception?" I asked, being in an idle mood, because, if an obvious ship's officer, I was not, as a matter of

fact, down at the docks to “look for a berth,” an occupation as engrossing as gambling, and as little favourable to the free exchange of ideas, besides being destructive of the kindly temper needed for casual intercourse with one’s fellow-creatures.

“You can always put up with ‘em,” opined the respectable seaman judicially.

He was not averse from talking, either. If he had come down to the dock to look for a berth, he did not seem oppressed by anxiety as to his chances. He had the serenity of a man whose estimable character is fortunately expressed by his personal appearance in an unobtrusive, yet convincing, manner which no chief officer in want of hands could resist. And, true enough, I learned presently that the mate of the *Hyperion* had “taken down” his name for quarter-master. “We sign on Friday, and join next day for the morning tide,” he remarked, in a deliberate, careless tone, which contrasted strongly with his evident readiness to stand there yarning for an hour or so with an utter stranger.

“*Hyperion*,” I said. “I don’t remember ever seeing that ship anywhere. What sort of a name has she got?”

It appeared from his discursive answer that she had not much of a name one way or another. She was not very fast. It took no fool, though, to steer her straight, he believed. Some years ago he had seen her in Calcutta, and he remembered being told by somebody then, that on her passage up the river she had carried away both her hawse-pipes. But that might have been the pilot’s fault. Just now, yarning with the apprentices on board, he had heard that this very voyage, brought up in the Downs, outward bound, she broke her sheer, struck adrift, and lost an anchor and chain. But that might have occurred through want of careful tending in a tideway. All the same, this looked as though she were pretty hard on her ground-tackle. Didn’t it? She seemed a heavy ship to handle, anyway. For the rest, as she had a new captain and a new mate this voyage, he understood, one couldn’t say how she would turn out. . . .

In such marine shore-talk as this is the name of a ship slowly established, her fame made for her, the tale of her qualities and of her defects kept, her idiosyncrasies commented upon with the zest of personal gossip, her achievements made much of, her faults glossed over as things that, being without remedy in our imperfect world, should not be dwelt upon too much by men who, with the help of ships, wrest out a bitter living from the rough

grasp of the sea. All that talk makes up her “name,” which is handed over from one crew to another without bitterness, without animosity, with the indulgence of mutual dependence, and with the feeling of close association in the exercise of her perfections and in the danger of her defects.

This feeling explains men’s pride in ships. “Ships are all right,” as my middle-aged, respectable quartermaster said with much conviction and some irony; but they are not exactly what men make them. They have their own nature; they can of themselves minister to our self-esteem by the demand their qualities make upon our skill and their shortcomings upon our hardiness and endurance. Which is the more flattering exaction it is hard to say; but there is the fact that in listening for upwards of twenty years to the sea-talk that goes on afloat and ashore I have never detected the true note of animosity. I won’t deny that at sea, sometimes, the note of profanity was audible enough in those chiding interpellations a wet, cold, weary seaman addresses to his ship, and in moments of exasperation is disposed to extend to all ships that ever were launched — to the whole everlastingly exacting brood that swims in deep waters. And I have heard curses launched at the unstable element itself, whose fascination, outlasting the accumulated experience of ages, had captured him as it had captured the generations of his forebears.

For all that has been said of the love that certain natures (on shore) have professed to feel for it, for all the celebrations it had been the object of in prose and song, the sea has never been friendly to man. At most it has been the accomplice of human restlessness, and playing the part of dangerous abettor of world-wide ambitions. Faithful to no race after the manner of the kindly earth, receiving no impress from valour and toil and self-sacrifice, recognising no finality of dominion, the sea has never adopted the cause of its masters like those lands where the victorious nations of mankind have taken root, rocking their cradles and setting up their gravestones. He — man or people — who, putting his trust in the friendship of the sea, neglects the strength and cunning of his right hand, is a fool! As if it were too great, too mighty for common virtues, the ocean has no compassion, no faith, no law, no memory. Its fickleness is to be held true to men’s purposes only by an undaunted resolution and by a sleepless, armed, jealous vigilance, in which, perhaps, there has always been more hate than love. *Odi et amo* may well be the confession of those who consciously or blindly have surrendered their existence to the fascination of the sea. All the

tempestuous passions of mankind's young days, the love of loot and the love of glory, the love of adventure and the love of danger, with the great love of the unknown and vast dreams of dominion and power, have passed like images reflected from a mirror, leaving no record upon the mysterious face of the sea. Impenetrable and heartless, the sea has given nothing of itself to the suitors for its precarious favours. Unlike the earth, it cannot be subjugated at any cost of patience and toil. For all its fascination that has lured so many to a violent death, its immensity has never been loved as the mountains, the plains, the desert itself, have been loved. Indeed, I suspect that, leaving aside the protestations and tributes of writers who, one is safe in saying, care for little else in the world than the rhythm of their lines and the cadence of their phrase, the love of the sea, to which some men and nations confess so readily, is a complex sentiment wherein pride enters for much, necessity for not a little, and the love of ships — the untiring servants of our hopes and our self-esteem — for the best and most genuine part. For the hundreds who have reviled the sea, beginning with Shakespeare in the line

“More fell than hunger, anguish, or the sea,”

down to the last obscure sea-dog of the “old model,” having but few words and still fewer thoughts, there could not be found, I believe, one sailor who has ever coupled a curse with the good or bad name of a ship. If ever his profanity, provoked by the hardships of the sea, went so far as to touch his ship, it would be lightly, as a hand may, without sin, be laid in the way of kindness on a woman.



## XXXVI.

The love that is given to ships is profoundly different from the love men feel for every other work of their hands — the love they bear to their houses, for instance — because it is untainted by the pride of possession. The pride of skill, the pride of responsibility, the pride of endurance there may be, but otherwise it is a disinterested sentiment. No seaman ever cherished a ship, even if she belonged to him, merely because of the profit she put in his pocket. No one, I think, ever did; for a ship-owner, even of the best, has always been outside the pale of that sentiment embracing in a feeling of intimate, equal fellowship the ship and the man, backing each other against the implacable, if sometimes dissembled, hostility of their world of waters. The sea — this truth must be confessed — has no generosity. No display of manly qualities — courage, hardihood, endurance, faithfulness — has ever been known to touch its irresponsible consciousness of power. The ocean has the conscienceless temper of a savage autocrat spoiled by much adulation. He cannot brook the slightest appearance of defiance, and has remained the irreconcilable enemy of ships and men ever since ships and men had the unheard of audacity to go afloat together in the face of his frown. From that day he has gone on swallowing up fleets and men without his resentment being glutted by the number of victims — by so many wrecked ships and wrecked lives. To-day, as ever, he is ready to beguile and betray, to smash and to drown the incorrigible optimism of men who, backed by the fidelity of ships, are trying to wrest from him the fortune of their house, the dominion of their world, or only a dole of food for their hunger. If not always in the hot mood to smash, he is always stealthily ready for a drowning. The most amazing wonder of the deep is its unfathomable cruelty.

I felt its dread for the first time in mid-Atlantic one day, many years ago, when we took off the crew of a Danish brig homeward bound from the West Indies. A thin, silvery mist softened the calm and majestic splendour of light without shadows — seemed to render the sky less remote and the ocean less immense. It was one of the days, when the might of the sea appears indeed lovable, like the nature of a strong man in moments of quiet intimacy. At sunrise we had made out a black speck to the westward,

apparently suspended high up in the void behind a stirring, shimmering veil of silvery blue gauze that seemed at times to stir and float in the breeze which fanned us slowly along. The peace of that enchanting forenoon was so profound, so untroubled, that it seemed that every word pronounced loudly on our deck would penetrate to the very heart of that infinite mystery born from the conjunction of water and sky. We did not raise our voices. "A water-logged derelict, I think, sir," said the second officer quietly, coming down from aloft with the binoculars in their case slung across his shoulders; and our captain, without a word, signed to the helmsman to steer for the black speck. Presently we made out a low, jagged stump sticking up forward — all that remained of her departed masts.

The captain was expatiating in a low conversational tone to the chief mate upon the danger of these derelicts, and upon his dread of coming upon them at night, when suddenly a man forward screamed out, "There's people on board of her, sir! I see them!" in a most extraordinary voice — a voice never heard before in our ship; the amazing voice of a stranger. It gave the signal for a sudden tumult of shouts. The watch below ran up the forecastle head in a body, the cook dashed out of the galley. Everybody saw the poor fellows now. They were there! And all at once our ship, which had the well-earned name of being without a rival for speed in light winds, seemed to us to have lost the power of motion, as if the sea, becoming viscous, had clung to her sides. And yet she moved. Immensity, the inseparable companion of a ship's life, chose that day to breathe upon her as gently as a sleeping child. The clamour of our excitement had died out, and our living ship, famous for never losing steerage way as long as there was air enough to float a feather, stole, without a ripple, silent and white as a ghost, towards her mutilated and wounded sister, come upon at the point of death in the sunlit haze of a calm day at sea.

With the binoculars glued to his eyes, the captain said in a quavering tone: "They are waving to us with something aft there." He put down the glasses on the skylight brusquely, and began to walk about the poop. "A shirt or a flag," he ejaculated irritably. "Can't make it out. . . Some damn rag or other!" He took a few more turns on the poop, glancing down over the rail now and then to see how fast we were moving. His nervous footsteps rang sharply in the quiet of the ship, where the other men, all looking the same way, had forgotten themselves in a staring immobility.

“This will never do!” he cried out suddenly. “Lower the boats at once! Down with them!”

Before I jumped into mine he took me aside, as being an inexperienced junior, for a word of warning:

“You look out as you come alongside that she doesn’t take you down with her. You understand?”

He murmured this confidentially, so that none of the men at the falls should overhear, and I was shocked. “Heavens! as if in such an emergency one stopped to think of danger!” I exclaimed to myself mentally, in scorn of such cold-blooded caution.

It takes many lessons to make a real seaman, and I got my rebuke at once. My experienced commander seemed in one searching glance to read my thoughts on my ingenuous face.

“What you’re going for is to save life, not to drown your boat’s crew for nothing,” he growled severely in my ear. But as we shoved off he leaned over and cried out: “It all rests on the power of your arms, men. Give way for life!”

We made a race of it, and I would never have believed that a common boat’s crew of a merchantman could keep up so much determined fierceness in the regular swing of their stroke. What our captain had clearly perceived before we left had become plain to all of us since. The issue of our enterprise hung on a hair above that abyss of waters which will not give up its dead till the Day of Judgment. It was a race of two ship’s boats matched against Death for a prize of nine men’s lives, and Death had a long start. We saw the crew of the brig from afar working at the pumps — still pumping on that wreck, which already had settled so far down that the gentle, low swell, over which our boats rose and fell easily without a check to their speed, welling up almost level with her head-rails, plucked at the ends of broken gear swinging desolately under her naked bowsprit.

We could not, in all conscience, have picked out a better day for our regatta had we had the free choice of all the days that ever dawned upon the lonely struggles and solitary agonies of ships since the Norse rovers first steered to the westward against the run of Atlantic waves. It was a very good race. At the finish there was not an oar’s length between the first and second boat, with Death coming in a good third on the top of the very next smooth swell, for all one knew to the contrary. The scuppers of the brig gurgled softly all together when the water rising against her sides subsided

sleepily with a low wash, as if playing about an immovable rock. Her bulwarks were gone fore and aft, and one saw her bare deck low-lying like a raft and swept clean of boats, spars, houses — of everything except the ringbolts and the heads of the pumps. I had one dismal glimpse of it as I braced myself up to receive upon my breast the last man to leave her, the captain, who literally let himself fall into my arms.

It had been a weirdly silent rescue — a rescue without a hail, without a single uttered word, without a gesture or a sign, without a conscious exchange of glances. Up to the very last moment those on board stuck to their pumps, which spouted two clear streams of water upon their bare feet. Their brown skin showed through the rents of their shirts; and the two small bunches of half-naked, tattered men went on bowing from the waist to each other in their back-breaking labour, up and down, absorbed, with no time for a glance over the shoulder at the help that was coming to them. As we dashed, unregarded, alongside a voice let out one, only one hoarse howl of command, and then, just as they stood, without caps, with the salt drying gray in the wrinkles and folds of their hairy, haggard faces, blinking stupidly at us their red eyelids, they made a bolt away from the handles, tottering and jostling against each other, and positively flung themselves over upon our very heads. The clatter they made tumbling into the boats had an extraordinarily destructive effect upon the illusion of tragic dignity our self-esteem had thrown over the contests of mankind with the sea. On that exquisite day of gently breathing peace and veiled sunshine perished my romantic love to what men's imagination had proclaimed the most august aspect of Nature. The cynical indifference of the sea to the merits of human suffering and courage, laid bare in this ridiculous, panic-tainted performance extorted from the dire extremity of nine good and honourable seamen, revolted me. I saw the duplicity of the sea's most tender mood. It was so because it could not help itself, but the awed respect of the early days was gone. I felt ready to smile bitterly at its enchanting charm and glare viciously at its furies. In a moment, before we shoved off, I had looked coolly at the life of my choice. Its illusions were gone, but its fascination remained. I had become a seaman at last.

We pulled hard for a quarter of an hour, then laid on our oars waiting for our ship. She was coming down on us with swelling sails, looking delicately tall and exquisitely noble through the mist. The captain of the brig, who sat in the stern sheets by my side with his face in his hands, raised

his head and began to speak with a sort of sombre volubility. They had lost their masts and sprung a leak in a hurricane; drifted for weeks, always at the pumps, met more bad weather; the ships they sighted failed to make them out, the leak gained upon them slowly, and the seas had left them nothing to make a raft of. It was very hard to see ship after ship pass by at a distance, “as if everybody had agreed that we must be left to drown,” he added. But they went on trying to keep the brig afloat as long as possible, and working the pumps constantly on insufficient food, mostly raw, till “yesterday evening,” he continued monotonously, “just as the sun went down, the men’s hearts broke.”

He made an almost imperceptible pause here, and went on again with exactly the same intonation:

“They told me the brig could not be saved, and they thought they had done enough for themselves. I said nothing to that. It was true. It was no mutiny. I had nothing to say to them. They lay about aft all night, as still as so many dead men. I did not lie down. I kept a look-out. When the first light came I saw your ship at once. I waited for more light; the breeze began to fail on my face. Then I shouted out as loud as I was able, ‘Look at that ship!’ but only two men got up very slowly and came to me. At first only we three stood alone, for a long time, watching you coming down to us, and feeling the breeze drop to a calm almost; but afterwards others, too, rose, one after another, and by-and-by I had all my crew behind me. I turned round and said to them that they could see the ship was coming our way, but in this small breeze she might come too late after all, unless we turned to and tried to keep the brig afloat long enough to give you time to save us all. I spoke like that to them, and then I gave the command to man the pumps.”

He gave the command, and gave the example, too, by going himself to the handles, but it seems that these men did actually hang back for a moment, looking at each other dubiously before they followed him. “He! he! he!” He broke out into a most unexpected, imbecile, pathetic, nervous little giggle. “Their hearts were broken so! They had been played with too long,” he explained apologetically, lowering his eyes, and became silent.

Twenty-five years is a long time — a quarter of a century is a dim and distant past; but to this day I remember the dark-brown feet, hands, and faces of two of these men whose hearts had been broken by the sea. They were lying very still on their sides on the bottom boards between the

thwarts, curled up like dogs. My boat's crew, leaning over the looms of their oars, stared and listened as if at the play. The master of the brig looked up suddenly to ask me what day it was.

They had lost the date. When I told him it was Sunday, the 22nd, he frowned, making some mental calculation, then nodded twice sadly to himself, staring at nothing.

His aspect was miserably unkempt and wildly sorrowful. Had it not been for the unquenchable candour of his blue eyes, whose unhappy, tired glance every moment sought his abandoned, sinking brig, as if it could find rest nowhere else, he would have appeared mad. But he was too simple to go mad, too simple with that manly simplicity which alone can bear men unscathed in mind and body through an encounter with the deadly playfulness of the sea or with its less abominable fury.

Neither angry, nor playful, nor smiling, it enveloped our distant ship growing bigger as she neared us, our boats with the rescued men and the dismantled hull of the brig we were leaving behind, in the large and placid embrace of its quietness, half lost in the fair haze, as if in a dream of infinite and tender clemency. There was no frown, no wrinkle on its face, not a ripple. And the run of the slight swell was so smooth that it resembled the graceful undulation of a piece of shimmering gray silk shot with gleams of green. We pulled an easy stroke; but when the master of the brig, after a glance over his shoulder, stood up with a low exclamation, my men feathered their oars instinctively, without an order, and the boat lost her way.

He was steadying himself on my shoulder with a strong grip, while his other arm, flung up rigidly, pointed a denunciatory finger at the immense tranquillity of the ocean. After his first exclamation, which stopped the swing of our oars, he made no sound, but his whole attitude seemed to cry out an indignant "Behold!" . . . I could not imagine what vision of evil had come to him. I was startled, and the amazing energy of his immobilized gesture made my heart beat faster with the anticipation of something monstrous and unsuspected. The stillness around us became crushing.

For a moment the succession of silky undulations ran on innocently. I saw each of them swell up the misty line of the horizon, far, far away beyond the derelict brig, and the next moment, with a slight friendly toss of our boat, it had passed under us and was gone. The lulling cadence of the rise and fall, the invariable gentleness of this irresistible force, the great

charm of the deep waters, warmed my breast deliciously, like the subtle poison of a love-potion. But all this lasted only a few soothing seconds before I jumped up too, making the boat roll like the veriest landlubber.

Something startling, mysterious, hastily confused, was taking place. I watched it with incredulous and fascinated awe, as one watches the confused, swift movements of some deed of violence done in the dark. As if at a given signal, the run of the smooth undulations seemed checked suddenly around the brig. By a strange optical delusion the whole sea appeared to rise upon her in one overwhelming heave of its silky surface, where in one spot a smother of foam broke out ferociously. And then the effort subsided. It was all over, and the smooth swell ran on as before from the horizon in uninterrupted cadence of motion, passing under us with a slight friendly toss of our boat. Far away, where the brig had been, an angry white stain undulating on the surface of steely-gray waters, shot with gleams of green, diminished swiftly, without a hiss, like a patch of pure snow melting in the sun. And the great stillness after this initiation into the sea's implacable hate seemed full of dread thoughts and shadows of disaster.

"Gone!" ejaculated from the depths of his chest my bowman in a final tone. He spat in his hands, and took a better grip on his oar. The captain of the brig lowered his rigid arm slowly, and looked at our faces in a solemnly conscious silence, which called upon us to share in his simple-minded, marvelling awe. All at once he sat down by my side, and leaned forward earnestly at my boat's crew, who, swinging together in a long, easy stroke, kept their eyes fixed upon him faithfully.

"No ship could have done so well," he addressed them firmly, after a moment of strained silence, during which he seemed with trembling lips to seek for words fit to bear such high testimony. "She was small, but she was good. I had no anxiety. She was strong. Last voyage I had my wife and two children in her. No other ship could have stood so long the weather she had to live through for days and days before we got dismasted a fortnight ago. She was fairly worn out, and that's all. You may believe me. She lasted under us for days and days, but she could not last for ever. It was long enough. I am glad it is over. No better ship was ever left to sink at sea on such a day as this."

He was competent to pronounce the funereal oration of a ship, this son of ancient sea-folk, whose national existence, so little stained by the excesses

of manly virtues, had demanded nothing but the merest foothold from the earth. By the merits of his sea-wise forefathers and by the artlessness of his heart, he was made fit to deliver this excellent discourse. There was nothing wanting in its orderly arrangement — neither piety nor faith, nor the tribute of praise due to the worthy dead, with the edifying recital of their achievement. She had lived, he had loved her; she had suffered, and he was glad she was at rest. It was an excellent discourse. And it was orthodox, too, in its fidelity to the cardinal article of a seaman's faith, of which it was a single-minded confession. "Ships are all right." They are. They who live with the sea have got to hold by that creed first and last; and it came to me, as I glanced at him sideways, that some men were not altogether unworthy in honour and conscience to pronounce the funereal eulogium of a ship's constancy in life and death.

After this, sitting by my side with his loosely-clasped hands hanging between his knees, he uttered no word, made no movement till the shadow of our ship's sails fell on the boat, when, at the loud cheer greeting the return of the victors with their prize, he lifted up his troubled face with a faint smile of pathetic indulgence. This smile of the worthy descendant of the most ancient sea-folk whose audacity and hardihood had left no trace of greatness and glory upon the waters, completed the cycle of my initiation. There was an infinite depth of hereditary wisdom in its pitying sadness. It made the hearty bursts of cheering sound like a childish noise of triumph. Our crew shouted with immense confidence — honest souls! As if anybody could ever make sure of having prevailed against the sea, which has betrayed so many ships of great "name," so many proud men, so many towering ambitions of fame, power, wealth, greatness!

As I brought the boat under the falls my captain, in high good-humour, leaned over, spreading his red and freckled elbows on the rail, and called down to me sarcastically, out of the depths of his cynic philosopher's beard:

"So you have brought the boat back after all, have you?"

Sarcasm was "his way," and the most that can be said for it is that it was natural. This did not make it lovable. But it is decorous and expedient to fall in with one's commander's way. "Yes. I brought the boat back all right, sir," I answered. And the good man believed me. It was not for him to discern upon me the marks of my recent initiation. And yet I was not exactly the same youngster who had taken the boat away — all impatience for a race against death, with the prize of nine men's lives at the end.



Already I looked with other eyes upon the sea. I knew it capable of betraying the generous ardour of youth as implacably as, indifferent to evil and good, it would have betrayed the basest greed or the noblest heroism. My conception of its magnanimous greatness was gone. And I looked upon the true sea — the sea that plays with men till their hearts are broken, and wears stout ships to death. Nothing can touch the brooding bitterness of its heart. Open to all and faithful to none, it exercises its fascination for the undoing of the best. To love it is not well. It knows no bond of plighted troth, no fidelity to misfortune, to long companionship, to long devotion. The promise it holds out perpetually is very great; but the only secret of its possession is strength, strength — the jealous, sleepless strength of a man guarding a coveted treasure within his gates.

## XXXVII.

The cradle of oversea traffic and of the art of naval combats, the Mediterranean, apart from all the associations of adventure and glory, the common heritage of all mankind, makes a tender appeal to a seaman. It has sheltered the infancy of his craft. He looks upon it as a man may look at a vast nursery in an old, old mansion where innumerable generations of his own people have learned to walk. I say his own people because, in a sense, all sailors belong to one family: all are descended from that adventurous and shaggy ancestor who, bestriding a shapeless log and paddling with a crooked branch, accomplished the first coasting-trip in a sheltered bay ringing with the admiring howls of his tribe. It is a matter of regret that all those brothers in craft and feeling, whose generations have learned to walk a ship's deck in that nursery, have been also more than once fiercely engaged in cutting each other's throats there. But life, apparently, has such exigencies. Without human propensity to murder and other sorts of unrighteousness there would have been no historical heroism. It is a consoling reflection. And then, if one examines impartially the deeds of violence, they appear of but small consequence. From Salamis to Actium, through Lepanto and the Nile to the naval massacre of Navarino, not to mention other armed encounters of lesser interest, all the blood heroically spilt into the Mediterranean has not stained with a single trail of purple the deep azure of its classic waters.

Of course, it may be argued that battles have shaped the destiny of mankind. The question whether they have shaped it well would remain open, however. But it would be hardly worth discussing. It is very probable that, had the Battle of Salamis never been fought, the face of the world would have been much as we behold it now, fashioned by the mediocre inspiration and the short-sighted labours of men. From a long and miserable experience of suffering, injustice, disgrace and aggression the nations of the earth are mostly swayed by fear — fear of the sort that a little cheap oratory turns easily to rage, hate, and violence. Innocent, guileless fear has been the cause of many wars. Not, of course, the fear of war itself, which, in the evolution of sentiments and ideas, has come to be regarded at last as a half-mystic and glorious ceremony with certain fashionable rites

and preliminary incantations, wherein the conception of its true nature has been lost. To apprehend the true aspect, force, and morality of war as a natural function of mankind one requires a feather in the hair and a ring in the nose, or, better still, teeth filed to a point and a tattooed breast. Unfortunately, a return to such simple ornamentation is impossible. We are bound to the chariot of progress. There is no going back; and, as bad luck would have it, our civilization, which has done so much for the comfort and adornment of our bodies and the elevation of our minds, has made lawful killing frightfully and needlessly expensive.

The whole question of improved armaments has been approached by the governments of the earth in a spirit of nervous and unreflecting haste, whereas the right way was lying plainly before them, and had only to be pursued with calm determination. The learned vigils and labours of a certain class of inventors should have been rewarded with honourable liberality as justice demanded; and the bodies of the inventors should have been blown to pieces by means of their own perfected explosives and improved weapons with extreme publicity as the commonest prudence dictated. By this method the ardour of research in that direction would have been restrained without infringing the sacred privileges of science. For the lack of a little cool thinking in our guides and masters this course has not been followed, and a beautiful simplicity has been sacrificed for no real advantage. A frugal mind cannot defend itself from considerable bitterness when reflecting that at the Battle of Actium (which was fought for no less a stake than the dominion of the world) the fleet of Octavianus Caesar and the fleet of Antonius, including the Egyptian division and Cleopatra's galley with purple sails, probably cost less than two modern battleships, or, as the modern naval book-jargon has it, two capital units. But no amount of lubberly book-jargon can disguise a fact well calculated to afflict the soul of every sound economist. It is not likely that the Mediterranean will ever behold a battle with a greater issue; but when the time comes for another historical fight its bottom will be enriched as never before by a quantity of jagged scrap-iron, paid for at pretty nearly its weight of gold by the deluded populations inhabiting the isles and continents of this planet.

## XXXVIII.

Happy he who, like Ulysses, has made an adventurous voyage; and there is no such sea for adventurous voyages as the Mediterranean — the inland sea which the ancients looked upon as so vast and so full of wonders. And, indeed, it was terrible and wonderful; for it is we alone who, swayed by the audacity of our minds and the tremors of our hearts, are the sole artisans of all the wonder and romance of the world.

It was for the Mediterranean sailors that fair-haired sirens sang among the black rocks seething in white foam and mysterious voices spoke in the darkness above the moving wave — voices menacing, seductive, or prophetic, like that voice heard at the beginning of the Christian era by the master of an African vessel in the Gulf of Syrta, whose calm nights are full of strange murmurs and flitting shadows. It called him by name, bidding him go and tell all men that the great god Pan was dead. But the great legend of the Mediterranean, the legend of traditional song and grave history, lives, fascinating and immortal, in our minds.

The dark and fearful sea of the subtle Ulysses' wanderings, agitated by the wrath of Olympian gods, harbouring on its isles the fury of strange monsters and the wiles of strange women; the highway of heroes and sages, of warriors, pirates, and saints; the workaday sea of Carthaginian merchants and the pleasure lake of the Roman Caesars, claims the veneration of every seaman as the historical home of that spirit of open defiance against the great waters of the earth which is the very soul of his calling. Issuing thence to the west and south, as a youth leaves the shelter of his parental house, this spirit found the way to the Indies, discovered the coasts of a new continent, and traversed at last the immensity of the great Pacific, rich in groups of islands remote and mysterious like the constellations of the sky.

The first impulse of navigation took its visible form in that tideless basin freed from hidden shoals and treacherous currents, as if in tender regard for the infancy of the art. The steep shores of the Mediterranean favoured the beginners in one of humanity's most daring enterprises, and the enchanting inland sea of classic adventure has led mankind gently from headland to headland, from bay to bay, from island to island, out into the promise of world-wide oceans beyond the Pillars of Hercules.



## XXXIX.

The charm of the Mediterranean dwells in the unforgettable flavour of my early days, and to this hour this sea, upon which the Romans alone ruled without dispute, has kept for me the fascination of youthful romance. The very first Christmas night I ever spent away from land was employed in running before a Gulf of Lions gale, which made the old ship groan in every timber as she skipped before it over the short seas until we brought her to, battered and out of breath, under the lee of Majorca, where the smooth water was torn by fierce cat's-paws under a very stormy sky.

We — or, rather, they, for I had hardly had two glimpses of salt water in my life till then — kept her standing off and on all that day, while I listened for the first time with the curiosity of my tender years to the song of the wind in a ship's rigging. The monotonous and vibrating note was destined to grow into the intimacy of the heart, pass into blood and bone, accompany the thoughts and acts of two full decades, remain to haunt like a reproach the peace of the quiet fireside, and enter into the very texture of respectable dreams dreamed safely under a roof of rafters and tiles. The wind was fair, but that day we ran no more.

The thing (I will not call her a ship twice in the same half-hour) leaked. She leaked fully, generously, overflowing, all over — like a basket. I took an enthusiastic part in the excitement caused by that last infirmity of noble ships, without concerning myself much with the why or the wherefore. The surmise of my maturer years is that, bored by her interminable life, the venerable antiquity was simply yawning with ennui at every seam. But at the time I did not know; I knew generally very little, and least of all what I was doing in that *galère*.

I remember that, exactly as in the comedy of Molière, my uncle asked the precise question in the very words — not of my confidential valet, however, but across great distances of land, in a letter whose mocking but indulgent turn ill concealed his almost paternal anxiety. I fancy I tried to convey to him my (utterly unfounded) impression that the West Indies awaited my coming. I had to go there. It was a sort of mystic conviction — something in the nature of a call. But it was difficult to state intelligibly the grounds of this belief to that man of rigorous logic, if of infinite charity.

The truth must have been that, all unversed in the arts of the wily Greek, the deceiver of gods, the lover of strange women, the evoker of bloodthirsty shades, I yet longed for the beginning of my own obscure Odyssey, which, as was proper for a modern, should unroll its wonders and terrors beyond the Pillars of Hercules. The disdainful ocean did not open wide to swallow up my audacity, though the ship, the ridiculous and ancient *galère* of my folly, the old, weary, disenchanted sugar-waggon, seemed extremely disposed to open out and swallow up as much salt water as she could hold. This, if less grandiose, would have been as final a catastrophe.

But no catastrophe occurred. I lived to watch on a strange shore a black and youthful Nausicaa, with a joyous train of attendant maidens, carrying baskets of linen to a clear stream overhung by the heads of slender palm-trees. The vivid colours of their draped raiment and the gold of their earrings invested with a barbaric and regal magnificence their figures, stepping out freely in a shower of broken sunshine. The whiteness of their teeth was still more dazzling than the splendour of jewels at their ears. The shaded side of the ravine gleamed with their smiles. They were as unabashed as so many princesses, but, alas! not one of them was the daughter of a jet-black sovereign. Such was my abominable luck in being born by the mere hair's breadth of twenty-five centuries too late into a world where kings have been growing scarce with scandalous rapidity, while the few who remain have adopted the uninteresting manners and customs of simple millionaires. Obviously it was a vain hope in 187- to see the ladies of a royal household walk in chequered sunshine, with baskets of linen on their heads, to the banks of a clear stream overhung by the starry fronds of palm-trees. It was a vain hope. If I did not ask myself whether, limited by such discouraging impossibilities, life were still worth living, it was only because I had then before me several other pressing questions, some of which have remained unanswered to this day. The resonant, laughing voices of these gorgeous maidens scared away the multitude of humming-birds, whose delicate wings wreathed with the mist of their vibration the tops of flowering bushes.

No, they were not princesses. Their unrestrained laughter filling the hot, fern-clad ravine had a soulless limpidity, as of wild, inhuman dwellers in tropical woodlands. Following the example of certain prudent travellers, I withdrew unseen — and returned, not much wiser, to the Mediterranean, the sea of classic adventures.





## XL.

It was written that there, in the nursery of our navigating ancestors, I should learn to walk in the ways of my craft and grow in the love of the sea, blind as young love often is, but absorbing and disinterested as all true love must be. I demanded nothing from it — not even adventure. In this I showed, perhaps, more intuitive wisdom than high self-denial. No adventure ever came to one for the asking. He who starts on a deliberate quest of adventure goes forth but to gather dead-sea fruit, unless, indeed, he be beloved of the gods and great amongst heroes, like that most excellent cavalier Don Quixote de la Mancha. By us ordinary mortals of a mediocre animus that is only too anxious to pass by wicked giants for so many honest windmills, adventures are entertained like visiting angels. They come upon our complacency unawares. As unbidden guests are apt to do, they often come at inconvenient times. And we are glad to let them go unrecognised, without any acknowledgment of so high a favour. After many years, on looking back from the middle turn of life's way at the events of the past, which, like a friendly crowd, seem to gaze sadly after us hastening towards the Cimmerian shore, we may see here and there, in the gray throng, some figure glowing with a faint radiance, as though it had caught all the light of our already crepuscular sky. And by this glow we may recognise the faces of our true adventures, of the once unbidden guests entertained unawares in our young days.

If the Mediterranean, the venerable (and sometimes atrociously ill-tempered) nurse of all navigators, was to rock my youth, the providing of the cradle necessary for that operation was entrusted by Fate to the most casual assemblage of irresponsible young men (all, however, older than myself) that, as if drunk with Provençal sunshine, frittered life away in joyous levity on the model of Balzac's "Histoire des Treize" qualified by a dash of romance *de cape et d'épée*.

She who was my cradle in those years had been built on the River of Savona by a famous builder of boats, was rigged in Corsica by another good man, and was described on her papers as a 'tartane' of sixty tons. In reality, she was a true balancelle, with two short masts raking forward and two curved yards, each as long as her hull; a true child of the Latin lake,

with a spread of two enormous sails resembling the pointed wings on a sea-bird's slender body, and herself, like a bird indeed, skimming rather than sailing the seas.

Her name was the *Tremolino*. How is this to be translated? The *Quiverer*? What a name to give the pluckiest little craft that ever dipped her sides in angry foam! I had felt her, it is true, trembling for nights and days together under my feet, but it was with the high-strung tenseness of her faithful courage. In her short, but brilliant, career she has taught me nothing, but she has given me everything. I owe to her the awakened love for the sea that, with the quivering of her swift little body and the humming of the wind under the foot of her lateen sails, stole into my heart with a sort of gentle violence, and brought my imagination under its despotic sway. The *Tremolino*! To this day I cannot utter or even write that name without a strange tightening of the breast and the gasp of mingled delight and dread of one's first passionate experience.

## XLI.

We four formed (to use a term well understood nowadays in every social sphere) a “syndicate” owning the *Tremolino*: an international and astonishing syndicate. And we were all ardent Royalists of the snow-white Legitimist complexion — Heaven only knows why! In all associations of men there is generally one who, by the authority of age and of a more experienced wisdom, imparts a collective character to the whole set. If I mention that the oldest of us was very old, extremely old — nearly thirty years old — and that he used to declare with gallant carelessness, “I live by my sword,” I think I have given enough information on the score of our collective wisdom. He was a North Carolinian gentleman, J. M. K. B. were the initials of his name, and he really did live by the sword, as far as I know. He died by it, too, later on, in a Balkanian squabble, in the cause of some Serbs or else Bulgarians, who were neither Catholics nor gentlemen — at least, not in the exalted but narrow sense he attached to that last word.

Poor J. M. K. B., *Américain, Catholique, et gentilhomme*, as he was disposed to describe himself in moments of lofty expansion! Are there still to be found in Europe gentlemen keen of face and elegantly slight of body, of distinguished aspect, with a fascinating drawing-room manner and with a dark, fatal glance, who live by their swords, I wonder? His family had been ruined in the Civil War, I fancy, and seems for a decade or so to have led a wandering life in the Old World. As to Henry C-, the next in age and wisdom of our band, he had broken loose from the unyielding rigidity of his family, solidly rooted, if I remember rightly, in a well-to-do London suburb. On their respectable authority he introduced himself meekly to strangers as a “black sheep.” I have never seen a more guileless specimen of an outcast. Never.

However, his people had the grace to send him a little money now and then. Enamoured of the South, of Provence, of its people, its life, its sunshine and its poetry, narrow-chested, tall and short-sighted, he strode along the streets and the lanes, his long feet projecting far in advance of his body, and his white nose and gingery moustache buried in an open book: for he had the habit of reading as he walked. How he avoided falling into precipices, off the quays, or down staircases is a great mystery. The sides

of his overcoat bulged out with pocket editions of various poets. When not engaged in reading Virgil, Homer, or Mistral, in parks, restaurants, streets, and suchlike public places, he indited sonnets (in French) to the eyes, ears, chin, hair, and other visible perfections of a nymph called Thérèse, the daughter, honesty compels me to state, of a certain Madame Leonore who kept a small café for sailors in one of the narrowest streets of the old town.

No more charming face, clear-cut like an antique gem, and delicate in colouring like the petal of a flower, had ever been set on, alas! a somewhat squat body. He read his verses aloud to her in the very café with the innocence of a little child and the vanity of a poet. We followed him there willingly enough, if only to watch the divine Thérèse laugh, under the vigilant black eyes of Madame Leonore, her mother. She laughed very prettily, not so much at the sonnets, which she could not but esteem, as at poor Henry's French accent, which was unique, resembling the warbling of birds, if birds ever warbled with a stuttering, nasal intonation.

Our third partner was Roger P. de la S-, the most Scandinavian-looking of Provençal squires, fair, and six feet high, as became a descendant of sea-roving Northmen, authoritative, incisive, wittily scornful, with a comedy in three acts in his pocket, and in his breast a heart blighted by a hopeless passion for his beautiful cousin, married to a wealthy hide and tallow merchant. He used to take us to lunch at their house without ceremony. I admired the good lady's sweet patience. The husband was a conciliatory soul, with a great fund of resignation, which he expended on "Roger's friends." I suspect he was secretly horrified at these invasions. But it was a Carlist salon, and as such we were made welcome. The possibility of raising Catalonia in the interest of the *Rey netto*, who had just then crossed the Pyrenees, was much discussed there.

Don Carlos, no doubt, must have had many queer friends (it is the common lot of all Pretenders), but amongst them none more extravagantly fantastic than the *Tremolino* Syndicate, which used to meet in a tavern on the quays of the old port. The antique city of Massilia had surely never, since the days of the earliest Phoenicians, known an odder set of ship-owners. We met to discuss and settle the plan of operations for each voyage of the *Tremolino*. In these operations a banking-house, too, was concerned — a very respectable banking-house. But I am afraid I shall end by saying too much. Ladies, too, were concerned (I am really afraid I am saying too

much) — all sorts of ladies, some old enough to know better than to put their trust in princes, others young and full of illusions.

One of these last was extremely amusing in the imitations, she gave us in confidence, of various highly-placed personages she was perpetually rushing off to Paris to interview in the interests of the cause — *Por el Rey!* For she was a Carlist, and of Basque blood at that, with something of a lioness in the expression of her courageous face (especially when she let her hair down), and with the volatile little soul of a sparrow dressed in fine Parisian feathers, which had the trick of coming off disconcertingly at unexpected moments.

But her imitations of a Parisian personage, very highly placed indeed, as she represented him standing in the corner of a room with his face to the wall, rubbing the back of his head and moaning helplessly, “Rita, you are the death of me!” were enough to make one (if young and free from cares) split one’s sides laughing. She had an uncle still living, a very effective Carlist, too, the priest of a little mountain parish in Guipuzcoa. As the sea-going member of the syndicate (whose plans depended greatly on Doña Rita’s information), I used to be charged with humbly affectionate messages for the old man. These messages I was supposed to deliver to the Arragonese muleteers (who were sure to await at certain times the *Tremolino* in the neighbourhood of the Gulf of Rosas), for faithful transportation inland, together with the various unlawful goods landed secretly from under the *Tremolino*’s hatches.

Well, now, I have really let out too much (as I feared I should in the end) as to the usual contents of my sea-cradle. But let it stand. And if anybody remarks cynically that I must have been a promising infant in those days, let that stand, too. I am concerned but for the good name of the *Tremolino*, and I affirm that a ship is ever guiltless of the sins, transgressions, and follies of her men.

## XLII.

It was not *Tremolino's* fault that the syndicate depended so much on the wit and wisdom and the information of Doña Rita. She had taken a little furnished house on the Prado for the good of the cause — *Por el Rey!* She was always taking little houses for somebody's good, for the sick or the sorry, for broken-down artists, cleaned-out gamblers, temporarily unlucky speculators — *vieux amis* — old friends, as she used to explain apologetically, with a shrug of her fine shoulders.

Whether Don Carlos was one of the "old friends," too, it's hard to say. More unlikely things have been heard of in smoking-rooms. All I know is that one evening, entering incautiously the salon of the little house just after the news of a considerable Carlist success had reached the faithful, I was seized round the neck and waist and whirled recklessly three times round the room, to the crash of upsetting furniture and the humming of a valse tune in a warm contralto voice.

When released from the dizzy embrace, I sat down on the carpet — suddenly, without affectation. In this unpretentious attitude I became aware that J. M. K. B. had followed me into the room, elegant, fatal, correct and severe in a white tie and large shirt-front. In answer to his politely sinister, prolonged glance of inquiry, I overheard Doña Rita murmuring, with some confusion and annoyance, "*Vous êtes bête mon cher. Voyons! Ça n'a aucune conséquence.*" Well content in this case to be of no particular consequence, I had already about me the elements of some worldly sense.

Rearranging my collar, which, truth to say, ought to have been a round one above a short jacket, but was not, I observed felicitously that I had come to say good-bye, being ready to go off to sea that very night with the *Tremolino*. Our hostess, slightly panting yet, and just a shade dishevelled, turned tartly upon J. M. K. B., desiring to know when *he* would be ready to go off by the *Tremolino*, or in any other way, in order to join the royal headquarters. Did he intend, she asked ironically, to wait for the very eve of the entry into Madrid? Thus by a judicious exercise of tact and asperity we re-established the atmospheric equilibrium of the room long before I left them a little before midnight, now tenderly reconciled, to walk down to the harbour and hail the *Tremolino* by the usual soft whistle from the edge of

the quay. It was our signal, invariably heard by the ever-watchful Dominic, the *padrone*.

He would raise a lantern silently to light my steps along the narrow, springy plank of our primitive gangway. "And so we are going off," he would murmur directly my foot touched the deck. I was the harbinger of sudden departures, but there was nothing in the world sudden enough to take Dominic unawares. His thick black moustaches, curled every morning with hot tongs by the barber at the corner of the quay, seemed to hide a perpetual smile. But nobody, I believe, had ever seen the true shape of his lips. From the slow, imperturbable gravity of that broad-chested man you would think he had never smiled in his life. In his eyes lurked a look of perfectly remorseless irony, as though he had been provided with an extremely experienced soul; and the slightest distension of his nostrils would give to his bronzed face a look of extraordinary boldness. This was the only play of feature of which he seemed capable, being a Southerner of a concentrated, deliberate type. His ebony hair curled slightly on the temples. He may have been forty years old, and he was a great voyager on the inland sea.

Astute and ruthless, he could have rivalled in resource the unfortunate son of Laertes and Anticlea. If he did not pit his craft and audacity against the very gods, it is only because the Olympian gods are dead. Certainly no woman could frighten him. A one-eyed giant would not have had the ghost of a chance against Dominic Cervoni, of Corsica, not Ithaca; and no king, son of kings, but of very respectable family — authentic Caporali, he affirmed. But that is as it may be. The Caporali families date back to the twelfth century.

For want of more exalted adversaries Dominic turned his audacity fertile in impious stratagems against the powers of the earth, as represented by the institution of Custom-houses and every mortal belonging thereto — scribes, officers, and guardacostas afloat and ashore. He was the very man for us, this modern and unlawful wanderer with his own legend of loves, dangers, and bloodshed. He told us bits of it sometimes in measured, ironic tones. He spoke Catalanian, the Italian of Corsica and the French of Provence with the same easy naturalness. Dressed in shore-togs, a white starched shirt, black jacket, and round hat, as I took him once to see Doña Rita, he was extremely presentable. He could make himself interesting by a tactful and

rugged reserve set off by a grim, almost imperceptible, playfulness of tone and manner.

He had the physical assurance of strong-hearted men. After half an hour's interview in the dining-room, during which they got in touch with each other in an amazing way, Rita told us in her best *grande dame* manner: "*Mais il esi parfait, cet homme.*" He was perfect. On board the *Tremolino*, wrapped up in a black *caban*, the picturesque cloak of Mediterranean seamen, with those massive moustaches and his remorseless eyes set off by the shadow of the deep hood, he looked piratical and monkish and darkly initiated into the most awful mysteries of the sea.



## XLIII.

Anyway, he was perfect, as Doña Rita had declared. The only thing unsatisfactory (and even inexplicable) about our Dominic was his nephew, Cesar. It was startling to see a desolate expression of shame veil the remorseless audacity in the eyes of that man superior to all scruples and terrors.

“I would never have dared to bring him on board your balancelle,” he once apologized to me. “But what am I to do? His mother is dead, and my brother has gone into the bush.”

In this way I learned that our Dominic had a brother. As to “going into the bush,” this only means that a man has done his duty successfully in the pursuit of a hereditary vendetta. The feud which had existed for ages between the families of Cervoni and Brunaschi was so old that it seemed to have smouldered out at last. One evening Pietro Brunaschi, after a laborious day amongst his olive-trees, sat on a chair against the wall of his house with a bowl of broth on his knees and a piece of bread in his hand. Dominic’s brother, going home with a gun on his shoulder, found a sudden offence in this picture of content and rest so obviously calculated to awaken the feelings of hatred and revenge. He and Pietro had never had any personal quarrel; but, as Dominic explained, “all our dead cried out to him.” He shouted from behind a wall of stones, “O Pietro! Behold what is coming!” And as the other looked up innocently he took aim at the forehead and squared the old vendetta account so neatly that, according to Dominic, the dead man continued to sit with the bowl of broth on his knees and the piece of bread in his hand.

This is why — because in Corsica your dead will not leave you alone — Dominic’s brother had to go into the *maquis*, into the bush on the wild mountain-side, to dodge the gendarmes for the insignificant remainder of his life, and Dominic had charge of his nephew with a mission to make a man of him.

No more unpromising undertaking could be imagined. The very material for the task seemed wanting. The Cervonis, if not handsome men, were good sturdy flesh and blood. But this extraordinarily lean and livid youth seemed to have no more blood in him than a snail.

“Some cursed witch must have stolen my brother’s child from the cradle and put that spawn of a starved devil in its place,” Dominic would say to me. “Look at him! Just look at him!”

To look at Cesar was not pleasant. His parchment skin, showing dead white on his cranium through the thin wisps of dirty brown hair, seemed to be glued directly and tightly upon his big bones. Without being in any way deformed, he was the nearest approach which I have ever seen or could imagine to what is commonly understood by the word “monster.” That the source of the effect produced was really moral I have no doubt. An utterly, hopelessly depraved nature was expressed in physical terms, that taken each separately had nothing positively startling. You imagined him clammy cold to the touch, like a snake. The slightest reproof, the most mild and justifiable remonstrance, would be met by a resentful glare and an evil shrinking of his thin dry upper lip, a snarl of hate to which he generally added the agreeable sound of grinding teeth.

It was for this venomous performance rather than for his lies, impudence, and laziness that his uncle used to knock him down. It must not be imagined that it was anything in the nature of a brutal assault. Dominic’s brawny arm would be seen describing deliberately an ample horizontal gesture, a dignified sweep, and Cesar would go over suddenly like a ninepin — which was funny to see. But, once down, he would writhe on the deck, gnashing his teeth in impotent rage — which was pretty horrible to behold. And it also happened more than once that he would disappear completely — which was startling to observe. This is the exact truth. Before some of these majestic cuffs Cesar would go down and vanish. He would vanish heels overhead into open hatchways, into scuttles, behind up-ended casks, according to the place where he happened to come into contact with his uncle’s mighty arm.

Once — it was in the old harbour, just before the *Tremolino*’s last voyage — he vanished thus overboard to my infinite consternation. Dominic and I had been talking business together aft, and Cesar had sneaked up behind us to listen, for, amongst his other perfections, he was a consummate eavesdropper and spy. At the sound of the heavy plop alongside horror held me rooted to the spot; but Dominic stepped quietly to the rail and leaned over, waiting for his nephew’s miserable head to bob up for the first time.

“Ohé, Cesar!” he yelled contemptuously to the spluttering wretch. “Catch hold of that mooring hawser — *charogne!*”

He approached me to resume the interrupted conversation.

"What about Cesar?" I asked anxiously.

"Canallia! Let him hang there," was his answer. And he went on talking over the business in hand calmly, while I tried vainly to dismiss from my mind the picture of Cesar steeped to the chin in the water of the old harbour, a decoction of centuries of marine refuse. I tried to dismiss it, because the mere notion of that liquid made me feel very sick. Presently Dominic, hailing an idle boatman, directed him to go and fish his nephew out; and by-and-by Cesar appeared walking on board from the quay, shivering, streaming with filthy water, with bits of rotten straws in his hair and a piece of dirty orange-peel stranded on his shoulder. His teeth chattered; his yellow eyes squinted balefully at us as he passed forward. I thought it my duty to remonstrate.

"Why are you always knocking him about, Dominic?" I asked. Indeed, I felt convinced it was no earthly good — a sheer waste of muscular force.

"I must try to make a man of him," Dominic answered hopelessly.

I restrained the obvious retort that in this way he ran the risk of making, in the words of the immortal Mr. Mantalini, "a demnition damp, unpleasant corpse of him."

"He wants to be a locksmith!" burst out Cervoni. "To learn how to pick locks, I suppose," he added with sardonic bitterness.

"Why not let him be a locksmith?" I ventured.

"Who would teach him?" he cried. "Where could I leave him?" he asked, with a drop in his voice; and I had my first glimpse of genuine despair. "He steals, you know, alas! *Par ta Madonne!* I believe he would put poison in your food and mine — the viper!"

He raised his face and both his clenched fists slowly to heaven. However, Cesar never dropped poison into our cups. One cannot be sure, but I fancy he went to work in another way.

This voyage, of which the details need not be given, we had to range far afield for sufficient reasons. Coming up from the South to end it with the important and really dangerous part of the scheme in hand, we found it necessary to look into Barcelona for certain definite information. This appears like running one's head into the very jaws of the lion, but in reality it was not so. We had one or two high, influential friends there, and many others humble but valuable because bought for good hard cash. We were in no danger of being molested; indeed, the important information reached us

promptly by the hands of a Custom-house officer, who came on board full of showy zeal to poke an iron rod into the layer of oranges which made the visible part of our cargo in the hatchway.

I forgot to mention before that the *Tremolino* was officially known as a fruit and cork-wood trader. The zealous officer managed to slip a useful piece of paper into Dominic's hand as he went ashore, and a few hours afterwards, being off duty, he returned on board again athirst for drinks and gratitude. He got both as a matter of course. While he sat sipping his liqueur in the tiny cabin, Dominic plied him with questions as to the whereabouts of the guardacostas. The preventive service afloat was really the one for us to reckon with, and it was material for our success and safety to know the exact position of the patrol craft in the neighbourhood. The news could not have been more favourable. The officer mentioned a small place on the coast some twelve miles off, where, unsuspecting and unready, she was lying at anchor, with her sails unbent, painting yards and scraping spars. Then he left us after the usual compliments, smirking reassuringly over his shoulder.

I had kept below pretty close all day from excess of prudence. The stake played on that trip was big.

"We are ready to go at once, but for Cesar, who has been missing ever since breakfast," announced Dominic to me in his slow, grim way.

Where the fellow had gone, and why, we could not imagine. The usual surmises in the case of a missing seaman did not apply to Cesar's absence. He was too odious for love, friendship, gambling, or even casual intercourse. But once or twice he had wandered away like this before.

Dominic went ashore to look for him, but returned at the end of two hours alone and very angry, as I could see by the token of the invisible smile under his moustache being intensified. We wondered what had become of the wretch, and made a hurried investigation amongst our portable property. He had stolen nothing.

"He will be back before long," I said confidently.

Ten minutes afterwards one of the men on deck called out loudly:

"I can see him coming."

Cesar had only his shirt and trousers on. He had sold his coat, apparently for pocket-money.

"You knave!" was all Dominic said, with a terrible softness of voice. He restrained his choler for a time. "Where have you been, vagabond?" he

asked menacingly.

Nothing would induce Cesar to answer that question. It was as if he even disdained to lie. He faced us, drawing back his lips and gnashing his teeth, and did not shrink an inch before the sweep of Dominic's arm. He went down as if shot, of course. But this time I noticed that, when picking himself up, he remained longer than usual on all fours, baring his big teeth over his shoulder and glaring upwards at his uncle with a new sort of hate in his round, yellow eyes. That permanent sentiment seemed pointed at that moment by especial malice and curiosity. I became quite interested. If he ever manages to put poison in the dishes, I thought to myself, this is how he will look at us as we sit at our meal. But I did not, of course, believe for a moment that he would ever put poison in our food. He ate the same things himself. Moreover, he had no poison. And I could not imagine a human being so blinded by cupidity as to sell poison to such an atrocious creature.

## XLIV.

We slipped out to sea quietly at dusk, and all through the night everything went well. The breeze was gusty; a southerly blow was making up. It was fair wind for our course. Now and then Dominic slowly and rhythmically struck his hands together a few times, as if applauding the performance of the *Tremolino*. The balancelle hummed and quivered as she flew along, dancing lightly under our feet.

At daybreak I pointed out to Dominic, amongst the several sail in view running before the gathering storm, one particular vessel. The press of canvas she carried made her loom up high, end-on, like a gray column standing motionless directly in our wake.

"Look at this fellow, Dominic," I said. "He seems to be in a hurry."

The Padrone made no remark, but, wrapping his black cloak close about him, stood up to look. His weather-tanned face, framed in the hood, had an aspect of authority and challenging force, with the deep-set eyes gazing far away fixedly, without a wink, like the intent, merciless, steady eyes of a sea-bird.

"*Chi va piano va sano*," he remarked at last, with a derisive glance over the side, in ironic allusion to our own tremendous speed.

The *Tremolino* was doing her best, and seemed to hardly touch the great burst of foam over which she darted. I crouched down again to get some shelter from the low bulwark. After more than half an hour of swaying immobility expressing a concentrated, breathless watchfulness, Dominic sank on the deck by my side. Within the monkish cowl his eyes gleamed with a fierce expression which surprised me. All he said was:

"He has come out here to wash the new paint off his yards, I suppose."

"What?" I shouted, getting up on my knees. "Is she the guardacosta?"

The perpetual suggestion of a smile under Dominic's piratical moustaches seemed to become more accentuated — quite real, grim, actually almost visible through the wet and uncurled hair. Judging by that symptom, he must have been in a towering rage. But I could also see that he was puzzled, and that discovery affected me disagreeably. Dominic puzzled! For a long time, leaning against the bulwark, I gazed over the

stern at the gray column that seemed to stand swaying slightly in our wake always at the same distance.

Meanwhile Dominic, black and cowled, sat cross-legged on the deck, with his back to the wind, recalling vaguely an Arab chief in his burnuss sitting on the sand. Above his motionless figure the little cord and tassel on the stiff point of the hood swung about inanely in the gale. At last I gave up facing the wind and rain, and crouched down by his side. I was satisfied that the sail was a patrol craft. Her presence was not a thing to talk about, but soon, between two clouds charged with hail-showers, a burst of sunshine fell upon her sails, and our men discovered her character for themselves. From that moment I noticed that they seemed to take no heed of each other or of anything else. They could spare no eyes and no thought but for the slight column-shape astern of us. Its swaying had become perceptible. For a moment she remained dazzlingly white, then faded away slowly to nothing in a squall, only to reappear again, nearly black, resembling a post stuck upright against the slaty background of solid cloud. Since first noticed she had not gained on us a foot.

“She will never catch the *Tremolino*,” I said exultingly.

Dominic did not look at me. He remarked absently, but justly, that the heavy weather was in our pursuer’s favour. She was three times our size. What we had to do was to keep our distance till dark, which we could manage easily, and then haul off to seaward and consider the situation. But his thoughts seemed to stumble in the darkness of some not-solved enigma, and soon he fell silent. We ran steadily, wing-and-wing. Cape San Sebastian nearly ahead seemed to recede from us in the squalls of rain, and come out again to meet our rush, every time more distinct between the showers.

For my part I was by no means certain that this *gabelou* (as our men alluded to her opprobriously) was after us at all. There were nautical difficulties in such a view which made me express the sanguine opinion that she was in all innocence simply changing her station. At this Dominic condescended to turn his head.

“I tell you she is in chase,” he affirmed moodily, after one short glance astern.

I never doubted his opinion. But with all the ardour of a neophyte and the pride of an apt learner I was at that time a great nautical casuist.

“What I can’t understand,” I insisted subtly, “is how on earth, with this wind, she has managed to be just where she was when we first made her out. It is clear that she could not, and did not, gain twelve miles on us during the night. And there are other impossibilities. . . .”

Dominic had been sitting motionless, like an inanimate black cone posed on the stern deck, near the rudder-head, with a small tassel fluttering on its sharp point, and for a time he preserved the immobility of his meditation. Then, bending over with a short laugh, he gave my ear the bitter fruit of it. He understood everything now perfectly. She was where we had seen her first, not because she had caught us up, but because we had passed her during the night while she was already waiting for us, hove-to, most likely, on our very track.

“Do you understand — already?” Dominic muttered in a fierce undertone. “Already! You know we left a good eight hours before we were expected to leave, otherwise she would have been in time to lie in wait for us on the other side of the Cape, and” — he snapped his teeth like a wolf close to my face — ”and she would have had us like — that.”

I saw it all plainly enough now. They had eyes in their heads and all their wits about them in that craft. We had passed them in the dark as they jogged on easily towards their ambush with the idea that we were yet far behind. At daylight, however, sighting a balancelle ahead under a press of canvas, they had made sail in chase. But if that was so, then —

Dominic seized my arm.

“Yes, yes! She came out on an information — do you see, it? — on information. . . . We have been sold — betrayed. Why? How? What for? We always paid them all so well on shore. . . . No! But it is my head that is going to burst.”

He seemed to choke, tugged at the throat button of the cloak, jumped up open-mouthed as if to hurl curses and denunciation, but instantly mastered himself, and, wrapping up the cloak closer about him, sat down on the deck again as quiet as ever.

“Yes, it must be the work of some scoundrel ashore,” I observed.

He pulled the edge of the hood well forward over his brow before he muttered:

“A scoundrel. . . . Yes. . . . It’s evident.”

“Well,” I said, “they can’t get us, that’s clear.”

“No,” he assented quietly, “they cannot.”



We shaved the Cape very close to avoid an adverse current. On the other side, by the effect of the land, the wind failed us so completely for a moment that the *Tremolino's* two great lofty sails hung idle to the masts in the thundering uproar of the seas breaking upon the shore we had left behind. And when the returning gust filled them again, we saw with amazement half of the new mainsail, which we thought fit to drive the boat under before giving way, absolutely fly out of the bolt-ropes. We lowered the yard at once, and saved it all, but it was no longer a sail; it was only a heap of soaked strips of canvas cumbering the deck and weighting the craft. Dominic gave the order to throw the whole lot overboard.

I would have had the yard thrown overboard, too, he said, leading me aft again, "if it had not been for the trouble. Let no sign escape you," he continued, lowering his voice, "but I am going to tell you something terrible. Listen: I have observed that the roping stitches on that sail have been cut! You hear? Cut with a knife in many places. And yet it stood all that time. Not enough cut. That flap did it at last. What matters it? But look! there's treachery seated on this very deck. By the horns of the devil! seated here at our very backs. Do not turn, signorine."

We were facing aft then.

"What's to be done?" I asked, appalled.

"Nothing. Silence! Be a man, signorine."

"What else?" I said.

To show I could be a man, I resolved to utter no sound as long as Dominic himself had the force to keep his lips closed. Nothing but silence becomes certain situations. Moreover, the experience of treachery seemed to spread a hopeless drowsiness over my thoughts and senses. For an hour or more we watched our pursuer surging out nearer and nearer from amongst the squalls that sometimes hid her altogether. But even when not seen, we felt her there like a knife at our throats. She gained on us frightfully. And the *Tremolino*, in a fierce breeze and in much smoother water, swung on easily under her one sail, with something appallingly careless in the joyous freedom of her motion. Another half-hour went by. I could not stand it any longer.

"They will get the poor barky," I stammered out suddenly, almost on the verge of tears.

Dominic stirred no more than a carving. A sense of catastrophic loneliness overcame my inexperienced soul. The vision of my companions

passed before me. The whole Royalist gang was in Monte Carlo now, I reckoned. And they appeared to me clear-cut and very small, with affected voices and stiff gestures, like a procession of rigid marionettes upon a toy stage. I gave a start. What was this? A mysterious, remorseless whisper came from within the motionless black hood at my side.

*“Il faut la tuer.”*

I heard it very well.

“What do you say, Dominic?” I asked, moving nothing but my lips.

And the whisper within the hood repeated mysteriously, “She must be killed.”

My heart began to beat violently.

“That’s it,” I faltered out. “But how?”

“You love her well?”

“I do.”

“Then you must find the heart for that work too. You must steer her yourself, and I shall see to it that she dies quickly, without leaving as much as a chip behind.”

“Can you?” I murmured, fascinated by the black hood turned immovably over the stern, as if in unlawful communion with that old sea of magicians, slave-dealers, exiles and warriors, the sea of legends and terrors, where the mariners of remote antiquity used to hear the restless shade of an old wanderer weep aloud in the dark.

“I know a rock,” whispered the initiated voice within the hood secretly. “But — caution! It must be done before our men perceive what we are about. Whom can we trust now? A knife drawn across the fore halyards would bring the foresail down, and put an end to our liberty in twenty minutes. And the best of our men may be afraid of drowning. There is our little boat, but in an affair like this no one can be sure of being saved.”

The voice ceased. We had started from Barcelona with our dinghy in tow; afterwards it was too risky to try to get her in, so we let her take her chance of the seas at the end of a comfortable scope of rope. Many times she had seemed to us completely overwhelmed, but soon we would see her bob up again on a wave, apparently as buoyant and whole as ever.

“I understand,” I said softly. “Very well, Dominic. When?”

“Not yet. We must get a little more in first,” answered the voice from the hood in a ghostly murmur.

## XLV.

It was settled. I had now the courage to turn about. Our men crouched about the decks here and there with anxious, crestfallen faces, all turned one way to watch the chaser. For the first time that morning I perceived Cesar stretched out full length on the deck near the foremast and wondered where he had been skulking till then. But he might in truth have been at my elbow all the time for all I knew. We had been too absorbed in watching our fate to pay attention to each other. Nobody had eaten anything that morning, but the men had been coming constantly to drink at the water-butt.

I ran down to the cabin. I had there, put away in a locker, ten thousand francs in gold of whose presence on board, so far as I was aware, not a soul, except Dominic had the slightest inkling. When I emerged on deck again Dominic had turned about and was peering from under his cowl at the coast. Cape Creux closed the view ahead. To the left a wide bay, its waters torn and swept by fierce squalls, seemed full of smoke. Astern the sky had a menacing look.

Directly he saw me, Dominic, in a placid tone, wanted to know what was the matter. I came close to him and, looking as unconcerned as I could, told him in an undertone that I had found the locker broken open and the money-belt gone. Last evening it was still there.

“What did you want to do with it?” he asked me, trembling violently.

“Put it round my waist, of course,” I answered, amazed to hear his teeth chattering.

“Cursed gold!” he muttered. “The weight of the money might have cost you your life, perhaps.” He shuddered. “There is no time to talk about that now.”

“I am ready.”

“Not yet. I am waiting for that squall to come over,” he muttered. And a few leaden minutes passed.

The squall came over at last. Our pursuer, overtaken by a sort of murky whirlwind, disappeared from our sight. The *Tremolino* quivered and bounded forward. The land ahead vanished, too, and we seemed to be left alone in a world of water and wind.

*“Prenez la barre, monsieur,”* Dominic broke the silence suddenly in an austere voice. “Take hold of the tiller.” He bent his hood to my ear. “The balancelle is yours. Your own hands must deal the blow. I — I have yet another piece of work to do.” He spoke up loudly to the man who steered. “Let the signorino take the tiller, and you with the others stand by to haul the boat alongside quickly at the word.”

The man obeyed, surprised, but silent. The others stirred, and pricked up their ears at this. I heard their murmurs. “What now? Are we going to run in somewhere and take to our heels? The Padrone knows what he is doing.”

Dominic went forward. He paused to look down at Cesar, who, as I have said before, was lying full length face down by the foremast, then stepped over him, and dived out of my sight under the foresail. I saw nothing ahead. It was impossible for me to see anything except the foresail open and still, like a great shadowy wing. But Dominic had his bearings. His voice came to me from forward, in a just audible cry:

“Now, signorino!”

I bore on the tiller, as instructed before. Again I heard him faintly, and then I had only to hold her straight. No ship ran so joyously to her death before. She rose and fell, as if floating in space, and darted forward, whizzing like an arrow. Dominic, stooping under the foot of the foresail, reappeared, and stood steadying himself against the mast, with a raised forefinger in an attitude of expectant attention. A second before the shock his arm fell down by his side. At that I set my teeth. And then —

Talk of splintered planks and smashed timbers! This shipwreck lies upon my soul with the dread and horror of a homicide, with the unforgettable remorse of having crushed a living, faithful heart at a single blow. At one moment the rush and the soaring swing of speed; the next a crash, and death, stillness — a moment of horrible immobility, with the song of the wind changed to a strident wail, and the heavy waters boiling up menacing and sluggish around the corpse. I saw in a distracting minute the foreyard fly fore and aft with a brutal swing, the men all in a heap, cursing with fear, and hauling frantically at the line of the boat. With a strange welcoming of the familiar I saw also Cesar amongst them, and recognised Dominic’s old, well-known, effective gesture, the horizontal sweep of his powerful arm. I recollect distinctly saying to myself, “Cesar must go down, of course,” and then, as I was scrambling on all fours, the swinging tiller I had let go caught me a crack under the ear, and knocked me over senseless.

I don't think I was actually unconscious for more than a few minutes, but when I came to myself the dinghy was driving before the wind into a sheltered cove, two men just keeping her straight with their oars. Dominic, with his arm round my shoulders, supported me in the stern-sheets.

We landed in a familiar part of the country. Dominic took one of the boat's oars with him. I suppose he was thinking of the stream we would have presently to cross, on which there was a miserable specimen of a punt, often robbed of its pole. But first of all we had to ascend the ridge of land at the back of the Cape. He helped me up. I was dizzy. My head felt very large and heavy. At the top of the ascent I clung to him, and we stopped to rest.

To the right, below us, the wide, smoky bay was empty. Dominic had kept his word. There was not a chip to be seen around the black rock from which the *Tremolino*, with her plucky heart crushed at one blow, had slipped off into deep water to her eternal rest. The vastness of the open sea was smothered in driving mists, and in the centre of the thinning squall, phantom-like, under a frightful press of canvas, the unconscious guardacosta dashed on, still chasing to the northward. Our men were already descending the reverse slope to look for that punt which we knew from experience was not always to be found easily. I looked after them with dazed, misty eyes. One, two, three, four.

"Dominic, where's Cesar?" I cried.

As if repulsing the very sound of the name, the Padrone made that ample, sweeping, knocking-down gesture. I stepped back a pace and stared at him fearfully. His open shirt uncovered his muscular neck and the thick hair on his chest. He planted the oar upright in the soft soil, and rolling up slowly his right sleeve, extended the bare arm before my face.

"This," he began, with an extreme deliberation, whose superhuman restraint vibrated with the suppressed violence of his feelings, "is the arm which delivered the blow. I am afraid it is your own gold that did the rest. I forgot all about your money." He clasped his hands together in sudden distress. "I forgot, I forgot," he repeated disconsolately.

"Cesar stole the belt?" I stammered out, bewildered.

"And who else? *Canallia*! He must have been spying on you for days. And he did the whole thing. Absent all day in Barcelona. *Traditore*! Sold his jacket — to hire a horse. Ha! ha! A good affair! I tell you it was he who set him at us. . . ."

Dominic pointed at the sea, where the guardacosta was a mere dark speck. His chin dropped on his breast.

“. . . On information,” he murmured, in a gloomy voice. “A Cervoni! Oh! my poor brother! . . .”

“And you drowned him,” I said feebly.

“I struck once, and the wretch went down like a stone — with the gold. Yes. But he had time to read in my eyes that nothing could save him while I was alive. And had I not the right — I, Dominic Cervoni, Padrone, who brought him aboard your fellucca — my nephew, a traitor?”

He pulled the oar out of the ground and helped me carefully down the slope. All the time he never once looked me in the face. He punted us over, then shouldered the oar again and waited till our men were at some distance before he offered me his arm. After we had gone a little way, the fishing hamlet we were making for came into view. Dominic stopped.

“Do you think you can make your way as far as the houses by yourself?” he asked me quietly.

“Yes, I think so. But why? Where are you going, Dominic?”

“Anywhere. What a question! Signorino, you are but little more than a boy to ask such a question of a man having this tale in his family. Ah! *Traditore!* What made me ever own that spawn of a hungry devil for our own blood! Thief, cheat, coward, liar — other men can deal with that. But I was his uncle, and so . . . I wish he had poisoned me — *charogne!* But this: that I, a confidential man and a Corsican, should have to ask your pardon for bringing on board your vessel, of which I was Padrone, a Cervoni, who has betrayed you — a traitor! — that is too much. It is too much. Well, I beg your pardon; and you may spit in Dominic’s face because a traitor of our blood taints us all. A theft may be made good between men, a lie may be set right, a death avenged, but what can one do to atone for a treachery like this? . . . Nothing.”

He turned and walked away from me along the bank of the stream, flourishing a vengeful arm and repeating to himself slowly, with savage emphasis: “Ah! *Canaille! Canaille! Canaille!* . . .” He left me there trembling with weakness and mute with awe. Unable to make a sound, I gazed after the strangely desolate figure of that seaman carrying an oar on his shoulder up a barren, rock-strewn ravine under the dreary leaden sky of *Tremolino’s* last day. Thus, walking deliberately, with his back to the sea, Dominic vanished from my sight.

With the quality of our desires, thoughts, and wonder proportioned to our infinite littleness, we measure even time itself by our own stature. Imprisoned in the house of personal illusions, thirty centuries in mankind's history seem less to look back upon than thirty years of our own life. And Dominic Cervoni takes his place in my memory by the side of the legendary wanderer on the sea of marvels and terrors, by the side of the fatal and impious adventurer, to whom the evoked shade of the soothsayer predicted a journey inland with an oar on his shoulder, till he met men who had never set eyes on ships and oars. It seems to me I can see them side by side in the twilight of an arid land, the unfortunate possessors of the secret lore of the sea, bearing the emblem of their hard calling on their shoulders, surrounded by silent and curious men: even as I, too, having turned my back upon the sea, am bearing those few pages in the twilight, with the hope of finding in an inland valley the silent welcome of some patient listener.

## XLVI.

“A fellow has now no chance of promotion unless he jumps into the muzzle of a gun and crawls out of the touch-hole.”

He who, a hundred years ago, more or less, pronounced the above words in the uneasiness of his heart, thirsting for professional distinction, was a young naval officer. Of his life, career, achievements, and end nothing is preserved for the edification of his young successors in the fleet of to-day — nothing but this phrase, which, sailor-like in the simplicity of personal sentiment and strength of graphic expression, embodies the spirit of the epoch. This obscure but vigorous testimony has its price, its significance, and its lesson. It comes to us from a worthy ancestor. We do not know whether he lived long enough for a chance of that promotion whose way was so arduous. He belongs to the great array of the unknown — who are great, indeed, by the sum total of the devoted effort put out, and the colossal scale of success attained by their insatiable and steadfast ambition. We do not know his name; we only know of him what is material for us to know — that he was never backward on occasions of desperate service. We have this on the authority of a distinguished seaman of Nelson’s time. Departing this life as Admiral of the Fleet on the eve of the Crimean War, Sir Thomas Byam Martin has recorded for us amongst his all too short autobiographical notes these few characteristic words uttered by one young man of the many who must have felt that particular inconvenience of a heroic age.

The distinguished Admiral had lived through it himself, and was a good judge of what was expected in those days from men and ships. A brilliant frigate captain, a man of sound judgment, of dashing bravery and of serene mind, scrupulously concerned for the welfare and honour of the navy, he missed a larger fame only by the chances of the service. We may well quote on this day the words written of Nelson, in the decline of a well-spent life, by Sir T. B. Martin, who died just fifty years ago on the very anniversary of Trafalgar.

“Nelson’s nobleness of mind was a prominent and beautiful part of his character. His foibles — faults if you like — will never be dwelt upon in any memorandum of mine,” he declares, and goes on — “he whose splendid and matchless achievements will be remembered with admiration



while there is gratitude in the hearts of Britons, or while a ship floats upon the ocean; he whose example on the breaking out of the war gave so chivalrous an impulse to the younger men of the service that all rushed into rivalry of daring which disdained every warning of prudence, and led to acts of heroic enterprise which tended greatly to exalt the glory of our nation.”

These are his words, and they are true. The dashing young frigate captain, the man who in middle age was nothing loth to give chase single-handed in his seventy-four to a whole fleet, the man of enterprise and consummate judgment, the old Admiral of the Fleet, the good and trusted servant of his country under two kings and a queen, had felt correctly Nelson’s influence, and expressed himself with precision out of the fulness of his seaman’s heart.

“Exalted,” he wrote, not “augmented.” And therein his feeling and his pen captured the very truth. Other men there were ready and able to add to the treasure of victories the British navy has given to the nation. It was the lot of Lord Nelson to exalt all this glory. Exalt! the word seems to be created for the man.

## XLVII.

The British navy may well have ceased to count its victories. It is rich beyond the wildest dreams of success and fame. It may well, rather, on a culminating day of its history, cast about for the memory of some reverses to appease the jealous fates which attend the prosperity and triumphs of a nation. It holds, indeed, the heaviest inheritance that has ever been entrusted to the courage and fidelity of armed men.

It is too great for mere pride. It should make the seamen of to-day humble in the secret of their hearts, and indomitable in their unspoken resolution. In all the records of history there has never been a time when a victorious fortune has been so faithful to men making war upon the sea. And it must be confessed that on their part they knew how to be faithful to their victorious fortune. They were exalted. They were always watching for her smile; night or day, fair weather or foul, they waited for her slightest sign with the offering of their stout hearts in their hands. And for the inspiration of this high constancy they were indebted to Lord Nelson alone. Whatever earthly affection he abandoned or grasped, the great Admiral was always, before all, beyond all, a lover of Fame. He loved her jealously, with an inextinguishable ardour and an insatiable desire — he loved her with a masterful devotion and an infinite trustfulness. In the plenitude of his passion he was an exacting lover. And she never betrayed the greatness of his trust! She attended him to the end of his life, and he died pressing her last gift (nineteen prizes) to his heart. “Anchor, Hardy — anchor!” was as much the cry of an ardent lover as of a consummate seaman. Thus he would hug to his breast the last gift of Fame.

It was this ardour which made him great. He was a flaming example to the wooers of glorious fortune. There have been great officers before — Lord Hood, for instance, whom he himself regarded as the greatest sea officer England ever had. A long succession of great commanders opened the sea to the vast range of Nelson’s genius. His time had come; and, after the great sea officers, the great naval tradition passed into the keeping of a great man. Not the least glory of the navy is that it understood Nelson. Lord Hood trusted him. Admiral Keith told him: “We can’t spare you either as Captain or Admiral.” Earl St. Vincent put into his hands, untrammelled

by orders, a division of his fleet, and Sir Hyde Parker gave him two more ships at Copenhagen than he had asked for. So much for the chiefs; the rest of the navy surrendered to him their devoted affection, trust, and admiration. In return he gave them no less than his own exalted soul. He breathed into them his own ardour and his own ambition. In a few short years he revolutionized, not the strategy or tactics of sea-warfare, but the very conception of victory itself. And this is genius. In that alone, through the fidelity of his fortune and the power of his inspiration, he stands unique amongst the leaders of fleets and sailors. He brought heroism into the line of duty. Verily he is a terrible ancestor.

And the men of his day loved him. They loved him not only as victorious armies have loved great commanders; they loved him with a more intimate feeling as one of themselves. In the words of a contemporary, he had “a most happy way of gaining the affectionate respect of all who had the felicity to serve under his command.”

To be so great and to remain so accessible to the affection of one's fellow-men is the mark of exceptional humanity. Lord Nelson's greatness was very human. It had a moral basis; it needed to feel itself surrounded by the warm devotion of a band of brothers. He was vain and tender. The love and admiration which the navy gave him so unreservedly soothed the restlessness of his professional pride. He trusted them as much as they trusted him. He was a seaman of seamen. Sir T. B. Martin states that he never conversed with any officer who had served under Nelson “without hearing the heartiest expressions of attachment to his person and admiration of his frank and conciliatory manner to his subordinates.” And Sir Robert Stopford, who commanded one of the ships with which Nelson chased to the West Indies a fleet nearly double in number, says in a letter: “We are half-starved and otherwise inconvenienced by being so long out of port, but our reward is that we are with Nelson.”

This heroic spirit of daring and endurance, in which all public and private differences were sunk throughout the whole fleet, is Lord Nelson's great legacy, triply sealed by the victorious impress of the Nile, Copenhagen, and Trafalgar. This is a legacy whose value the changes of time cannot affect. The men and the ships he knew how to lead lovingly to the work of courage and the reward of glory have passed away, but Nelson's uplifting touch remains in the standard of achievement he has set for all time. The principles of strategy may be immutable. It is certain they have been, and

shall be again, disregarded from timidity, from blindness, through infirmity of purpose. The tactics of great captains on land and sea can be infinitely discussed. The first object of tactics is to close with the adversary on terms of the greatest possible advantage; yet no hard-and-fast rules can be drawn from experience, for this capital reason, amongst others — that the quality of the adversary is a variable element in the problem. The tactics of Lord Nelson have been amply discussed, with much pride and some profit. And yet, truly, they are already of but archaic interest. A very few years more and the hazardous difficulties of handling a fleet under canvas shall have passed beyond the conception of seamen who hold in trust for their country Lord Nelson's legacy of heroic spirit. The change in the character of the ships is too great and too radical. It is good and proper to study the acts of great men with thoughtful reverence, but already the precise intention of Lord Nelson's famous memorandum seems to lie under that veil which Time throws over the clearest conceptions of every great art. It must not be forgotten that this was the first time when Nelson, commanding in chief, had his opponents under way — the first time and the last. Had he lived, had there been other fleets left to oppose him, we would, perhaps, have learned something more of his greatness as a sea officer. Nothing could have been added to his greatness as a leader. All that can be affirmed is, that on no other day of his short and glorious career was Lord Nelson more splendidly true to his genius and to his country's fortune.

## XLVIII.

And yet the fact remains that, had the wind failed and the fleet lost steerage way, or, worse still, had it been taken aback from the eastward, with its leaders within short range of the enemy's guns, nothing, it seems, could have saved the headmost ships from capture or destruction. No skill of a great sea officer would have availed in such a contingency. Lord Nelson was more than that, and his genius would have remained undiminished by defeat. But obviously tactics, which are so much at the mercy of irremediable accident, must seem to a modern seaman a poor matter of study. The Commander-in-Chief in the great fleet action that will take its place next to the Battle of Trafalgar in the history of the British navy will have no such anxiety, and will feel the weight of no such dependence. For a hundred years now no British fleet has engaged the enemy in line of battle. A hundred years is a long time, but the difference of modern conditions is enormous. The gulf is great. Had the last great fight of the English navy been that of the First of June, for instance, had there been no Nelson's victories, it would have been wellnigh impassable. The great Admiral's slight and passion-worn figure stands at the parting of the ways. He had the audacity of genius, and a prophetic inspiration.

The modern naval man must feel that the time has come for the tactical practice of the great sea officers of the past to be laid by in the temple of august memories. The fleet tactics of the sailing days have been governed by two points: the deadly nature of a raking fire, and the dread, natural to a commander dependent upon the winds, to find at some crucial moment part of his fleet thrown hopelessly to leeward. These two points were of the very essence of sailing tactics, and these two points have been eliminated from the modern tactical problem by the changes of propulsion and armament. Lord Nelson was the first to disregard them with conviction and audacity sustained by an unbounded trust in the men he led. This conviction, this audacity and this trust stand out from amongst the lines of the celebrated memorandum, which is but a declaration of his faith in a crushing superiority of fire as the only means of victory and the only aim of sound tactics. Under the difficulties of the then existing conditions he strove for that, and for that alone, putting his faith into practice against

every risk. And in that exclusive faith Lord Nelson appears to us as the first of the moderns.

Against every risk, I have said; and the men of to-day, born and bred to the use of steam, can hardly realize how much of that risk was in the weather. Except at the Nile, where the conditions were ideal for engaging a fleet moored in shallow water, Lord Nelson was not lucky in his weather. Practically it was nothing but a quite unusual failure of the wind which cost him his arm during the Teneriffe expedition. On Trafalgar Day the weather was not so much unfavourable as extremely dangerous.

It was one of these covered days of fitful sunshine, of light, unsteady winds, with a swell from the westward, and hazy in general, but with the land about the Cape at times distinctly visible. It has been my lot to look with reverence upon the very spot more than once, and for many hours together. All but thirty years ago, certain exceptional circumstances made me very familiar for a time with that bight in the Spanish coast which would be enclosed within a straight line drawn from Faro to Spartel. My well-remembered experience has convinced me that, in that corner of the ocean, once the wind has got to the northward of west (as it did on the 20th, taking the British fleet aback), appearances of westerly weather go for nothing, and that it is infinitely more likely to veer right round to the east than to shift back again. It was in those conditions that, at seven on the morning of the 21st, the signal for the fleet to bear up and steer east was made. Holding a clear recollection of these languid easterly sighs rippling unexpectedly against the run of the smooth swell, with no other warning than a ten-minutes' calm and a queer darkening of the coast-line, I cannot think, without a gasp of professional awe, of that fateful moment. Perhaps personal experience, at a time of life when responsibility had a special freshness and importance, has induced me to exaggerate to myself the danger of the weather. The great Admiral and good seaman could read aright the signs of sea and sky, as his order to prepare to anchor at the end of the day sufficiently proves; but, all the same, the mere idea of these baffling easterly airs, coming on at any time within half an hour or so, after the firing of the first shot, is enough to take one's breath away, with the image of the rearmost ships of both divisions falling off, unmanageable, broadside on to the westerly swell, and of two British Admirals in desperate jeopardy. To this day I cannot free myself from the impression that, for some forty minutes, the fate of the great battle hung upon a breath of wind

such as I have felt stealing from behind, as it were, upon my cheek while engaged in looking to the westward for the signs of the true weather.

Never more shall British seamen going into action have to trust the success of their valour to a breath of wind. The God of gales and battles favouring her arms to the last, has let the sun of England's sailing-fleet and of its greatest master set in unclouded glory. And now the old ships and their men are gone; the new ships and the new men, many of them bearing the old, auspicious names, have taken up their watch on the stern and impartial sea, which offers no opportunities but to those who know how to grasp them with a ready hand and an undaunted heart.

## XLIX.

This the navy of the Twenty Years' War knew well how to do, and never better than when Lord Nelson had breathed into its soul his own passion of honour and fame. It was a fortunate navy. Its victories were no mere smashing of helpless ships and massacres of cowed men. It was spared that cruel favour, for which no brave heart had ever prayed. It was fortunate in its adversaries. I say adversaries, for on recalling such proud memories we should avoid the word "enemies," whose hostile sound perpetuates the antagonisms and strife of nations, so irremediable perhaps, so fateful — and also so vain. War is one of the gifts of life; but, alas! no war appears so very necessary when time has laid its soothing hand upon the passionate misunderstandings and the passionate desires of great peoples. "Le temps," as a distinguished Frenchman has said, "est un galant homme." He fosters the spirit of concord and justice, in whose work there is as much glory to be reaped as in the deeds of arms.

One of them disorganized by revolutionary changes, the other rusted in the neglect of a decayed monarchy, the two fleets opposed to us entered the contest with odds against them from the first. By the merit of our daring and our faithfulness, and the genius of a great leader, we have in the course of the war augmented our advantage and kept it to the last. But in the exulting illusion of irresistible might a long series of military successes brings to a nation the less obvious aspect of such a fortune may perchance be lost to view. The old navy in its last days earned a fame that no belittling malevolence dare cavil at. And this supreme favour they owe to their adversaries alone.

Deprived by an ill-starred fortune of that self-confidence which strengthens the hands of an armed host, impaired in skill but not in courage, it may safely be said that our adversaries managed yet to make a better fight of it in 1797 than they did in 1793. Later still, the resistance offered at the Nile was all, and more than all, that could be demanded from seamen, who, unless blind or without understanding, must have seen their doom sealed from the moment that the *Goliath*, bearing up under the bows of the *Guerrier*, took up an inshore berth. The combined fleets of 1805, just come out of port, and attended by nothing but the disturbing memories of



reverses, presented to our approach a determined front, on which Captain Blackwood, in a knightly spirit, congratulated his Admiral. By the exertions of their valour our adversaries have but added a greater lustre to our arms. No friend could have done more, for even in war, which severs for a time all the sentiments of human fellowship, this subtle bond of association remains between brave men — that the final testimony to the value of victory must be received at the hands of the vanquished.

Those who from the heat of that battle sank together to their repose in the cool depths of the ocean would not understand the watchwords of our day, would gaze with amazed eyes at the engines of our strife. All passes, all changes: the animosity of peoples, the handling of fleets, the forms of ships; and even the sea itself seems to wear a different and diminished aspect from the sea of Lord Nelson's day. In this ceaseless rush of shadows and shades, that, like the fantastic forms of clouds cast darkly upon the waters on a windy day, fly past us to fall headlong below the hard edge of an implacable horizon, we must turn to the national spirit, which, superior in its force and continuity to good and evil fortune, can alone give us the feeling of an enduring existence and of an invincible power against the fates.

Like a subtle and mysterious elixir poured into the perishable clay of successive generations, it grows in truth, splendour, and potency with the march of ages. In its incorruptible flow all round the globe of the earth it preserves from the decay and forgetfulness of death the greatness of our great men, and amongst them the passionate and gentle greatness of Nelson, the nature of whose genius was, on the faith of a brave seaman and distinguished Admiral, such as to "Exalt the glory of our nation."

# ***A PERSONAL RECORD***



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*Conrad at his Kent home, 1912*

## A FAMILIAR PREFACE

As a general rule we do not want much encouragement to talk about ourselves; yet this little book is the result of a friendly suggestion, and even of a little friendly pressure. I defended myself with some spirit; but, with characteristic tenacity, the friendly voice insisted, “You know, you really must.”

It was not an argument, but I submitted at once. If one must! . . .

You perceive the force of a word. He who wants to persuade should put his trust not in the right argument, but in the right word. The power of sound has always been greater than the power of sense. I don’t say this by way of disparagement. It is better for mankind to be impressionable than reflective. Nothing humanely great — great, I mean, as affecting a whole mass of lives — has come from reflection. On the other hand, you cannot fail to see the power of mere words; such words as Glory, for instance, or Pity. I won’t mention any more. They are not far to seek. Shouted with perseverance, with ardour, with conviction, these two by their sound alone have set whole nations in motion and upheaved the dry, hard ground on which rests our whole social fabric. There’s “virtue” for you if you like! . . . Of course the accent must be attended to. The right accent. That’s very important. The capacious lung, the thundering or the tender vocal chords. Don’t talk to me of your Archimedes’ lever.

He was an absent-minded person with a mathematical imagination. Mathematics commands all my respect, but I have no use for engines. Give me the right word and the right accent and I will move the world.

What a dream for a writer! Because written words have their accent, too. Yes! Let me only find the right word! Surely it must be lying somewhere among the wreckage of all the complaints and all the exultations poured out aloud since the first day when hope, the undying, came down on earth. It may be there, close by, disregarded, invisible, quite at hand. But it’s no good. I believe there are men who can lay hold of a needle in a pottle of hay at the first try. For myself, I have never had such luck. And then there is that accent. Another difficulty. For who is going to tell whether the accent is right or wrong till the word is shouted, and fails to be heard, perhaps, and goes down-wind, leaving the world unmoved? Once upon a time there lived

an emperor who was a sage and something of a literary man. He jotted down on ivory tablets thoughts, maxims, reflections which chance has preserved for the edification of posterity. Among other sayings — I am quoting from memory — I remember this solemn admonition: “Let all thy words have the accent of heroic truth.” The accent of heroic truth! This is very fine, but I am thinking that it is an easy matter for an austere emperor to jot down grandiose advice. Most of the working truths on this earth are humble, not heroic; and there have been times in the history of mankind when the accents of heroic truth have moved it to nothing but derision.

Nobody will expect to find between the covers of this little book words of extraordinary potency or accents of irresistible heroism. However humiliating for my self esteem, I must confess that the counsels of Marcus Aurelius are not for me. They are more fit for a moralist than for an artist. Truth of a modest sort I can promise you, and also sincerity. That complete, praise worthy sincerity which, while it delivers one into the hands of one’s enemies, is as likely as not to embroil one with one’s friends.

“Embroid” is perhaps too strong an expression. I can’t imagine among either my enemies or my friends a being so hard up for something to do as to quarrel with me. “To disappoint one’s friends” would be nearer the mark. Most, almost all, friend ships of the writing period of my life have come to me through my books; and I know that a novelist lives in his work. He stands there, the only reality in an invented world, among imaginary things, happenings, and people. Writing about them, he is only writing about himself. But the disclosure is not complete. He remains, to a certain extent, a figure behind the veil; a suspected rather than a seen presence — a movement and a voice behind the draperies of fiction. In these personal notes there is no such veil. And I cannot help thinking of a passage in the “Imitation of Christ” where the ascetic author, who knew life so profoundly, says that “there are persons esteemed on their reputation who by showing themselves destroy the opinion one had of them.” This is the danger incurred by an author of fiction who sets out to talk about himself without disguise.

While these reminiscent pages were appearing serially I was remonstrated with for bad economy; as if such writing were a form of self-indulgence wasting the substance of future volumes. It seems that I am not sufficiently literary. Indeed, a man who never wrote a line for print till he

was thirty-six cannot bring himself to look upon his existence and his experience, upon the sum of his thoughts, sensations, and emotions, upon his memories and his regrets, and the whole possession of his past, as only so much material for his hands. Once before, some three years ago, when I published "The Mirror of the Sea," a volume of impressions and memories, the same remarks were made to me. Practical remarks. But, truth to say, I have never understood the kind of thrift they recommend. I wanted to pay my tribute to the sea, its ships and its men, to whom I remain indebted for so much which has gone to make me what I am. That seemed to me the only shape in which I could offer it to their shades. There could not be a question in my mind of anything else. It is quite possible that I am a bad economist; but it is certain that I am incorrigible.

Having matured in the surroundings and under the special conditions of sea life, I have a special piety toward that form of my past; for its impressions were vivid, its appeal direct, its demands such as could be responded to with the natural elation of youth and strength equal to the call. There was nothing in them to perplex a young conscience. Having broken away from my origins under a storm of blame from every quarter which had the merest shadow of right to voice an opinion, removed by great distances from such natural affections as were still left to me, and even estranged, in a measure, from them by the totally unintelligible character of the life which had seduced me so mysteriously from my allegiance, I may safely say that through the blind force of circumstances the sea was to be all my world and the merchant service my only home for a long succession of years. No wonder, then, that in my two exclusively sea books — "The Nigger of the Narcissus," and "The Mirror of the Sea" (and in the few short sea stories like "Youth" and "Typhoon") — I have tried with an almost filial regard to render the vibration of life in the great world of waters, in the hearts of the simple men who have for ages traversed its solitudes, and also that something sentient which seems to dwell in ships — the creatures of their hands and the objects of their care.

One's literary life must turn frequently for sustenance to memories and seek discourse with the shades, unless one has made up one's mind to write only in order to reprove mankind for what it is, or praise it for what it is not, or — generally — to teach it how to behave. Being neither quarrelsome, nor a flatterer, nor a sage, I have done none of these things, and I am prepared to put up serenely with the insignificance which attaches to persons who are

not meddlesome in some way or other. But resignation is not indifference. I would not like to be left standing as a mere spectator on the bank of the great stream carrying onward so many lives. I would fain claim for myself the faculty of so much insight as can be expressed in a voice of sympathy and compassion.

It seems to me that in one, at least, authoritative quarter of criticism I am suspected of a certain unemotional, grim acceptance of facts — of what the French would call *secheresse du coeur*. Fifteen years of unbroken silence before praise or blame testify sufficiently to my respect for criticism, that fine flower of personal expression in the garden of letters. But this is more of a personal matter, reaching the man behind the work, and therefore it may be alluded to in a volume which is a personal note in the margin of the public page. Not that I feel hurt in the least. The charge — if it amounted to a charge at all — was made in the most considerate terms; in a tone of regret.

My answer is that if it be true that every novel contains an element of autobiography — and this can hardly be denied, since the creator can only express himself in his creation — then there are some of us to whom an open display of sentiment is repugnant.

I would not unduly praise the virtue of restraint. It is often merely temperamental. But it is not always a sign of coldness. It may be pride. There can be nothing more humiliating than to see the shaft of one's emotion miss the mark of either laughter or tears. Nothing more humiliating! And this for the reason that should the mark be missed, should the open display of emotion fail to move, then it must perish unavoidably in disgust or contempt. No artist can be reproached for shrinking from a risk which only fools run to meet and only genius dare confront with impunity. In a task which mainly consists in laying one's soul more or less bare to the world, a regard for decency, even at the cost of success, is but the regard for one's own dignity which is inseparably united with the dignity of one's work.

And then — it is very difficult to be wholly joyous or wholly sad on this earth. The comic, when it is human, soon takes upon itself a face of pain; and some of our griefs (some only, not all, for it is the capacity for suffering which makes man August in the eyes of men) have their source in weaknesses which must be recognized with smiling compassion as the

common inheritance of us all. Joy and sorrow in this world pass into each other, mingling their forms and their murmurs in the twilight of life as mysterious as an over shadowed ocean, while the dazzling brightness of supreme hopes lies far off, fascinating and still, on the distant edge of the horizon.

Yes! I, too, would like to hold the magic wand giving that command over laughter and tears which is declared to be the highest achievement of imaginative literature. Only, to be a great magician one must surrender oneself to occult and irresponsible powers, either outside or within one's breast. We have all heard of simple men selling their souls for love or power to some grotesque devil. The most ordinary intelligence can perceive without much reflection that anything of the sort is bound to be a fool's bargain. I don't lay claim to particular wisdom because of my dislike and distrust of such transactions. It may be my sea training acting upon a natural disposition to keep good hold on the one thing really mine, but the fact is that I have a positive horror of losing even for one moving moment that full possession of my self which is the first condition of good service. And I have carried my notion of good service from my earlier into my later existence. I, who have never sought in the written word anything else but a form of the Beautiful — I have carried over that article of creed from the decks of ships to the more circumscribed space of my desk, and by that act, I suppose, I have become permanently imperfect in the eyes of the ineffable company of pure esthetes.

As in political so in literary action a man wins friends for himself mostly by the passion of his prejudices and by the consistent narrowness of his outlook. But I have never been able to love what was not lovable or hate what was not hateful out of deference for some general principle. Whether there be any courage in making this admission I know not. After the middle turn of life's way we consider dangers and joys with a tranquil mind. So I proceed in peace to declare that I have always suspected in the effort to bring into play the extremities of emotions the debasing touch of insincerity. In order to move others deeply we must deliberately allow ourselves to be carried away beyond the bounds of our normal sensibility — innocently enough, perhaps, and of necessity, like an actor who raises his voice on the stage above the pitch of natural conversation — but still we have to do that. And surely this is no great sin. But the danger lies in the writer becoming the victim of his own exaggeration, losing the exact notion



of sincerity, and in the end coming to despise truth itself as something too cold, too blunt for his purpose — as, in fact, not good enough for his insistent emotion. From laughter and tears the descent is easy to snivelling and giggles.

These may seem selfish considerations; but you can't, in sound morals, condemn a man for taking care of his own integrity. It is his clear duty. And least of all can you condemn an artist pursuing, however humbly and imperfectly, a creative aim. In that interior world where his thought and his emotions go seeking for the experience of imagined adventures, there are no policemen, no law, no pressure of circumstance or dread of opinion to keep him within bounds. Who then is going to say Nay to his temptations if not his conscience?

And besides — this, remember, is the place and the moment of perfectly open talk — I think that all ambitions are lawful except those which climb upward on the miseries or credulities of mankind. All intellectual and artistic ambitions are permissible, up to and even beyond the limit of prudent sanity. They can hurt no one. If they are mad, then so much the worse for the artist. Indeed, as virtue is said to be, such ambitions are their own reward. Is it such a very mad presumption to believe in the sovereign power of one's art, to try for other means, for other ways of affirming this belief in the deeper appeal of one's work? To try to go deeper is not to be insensible. A historian of hearts is not a historian of emotions, yet he penetrates further, restrained as he may be, since his aim is to reach the very fount of laughter and tears. The sight of human affairs deserves admiration and pity. They are worthy of respect, too. And he is not insensible who pays them the undemonstrative tribute of a sigh which is not a sob, and of a smile which is not a grin. Resignation, not mystic, not detached, but resignation open-eyed, conscious, and informed by love, is the only one of our feelings for which it is impossible to become a sham.

Not that I think resignation the last word of wisdom. I am too much the creature of my time for that. But I think that the proper wisdom is to will what the gods will without, perhaps, being certain what their will is — or even if they have a will of their own. And in this matter of life and art it is not the Why that matters so much to our happiness as the How. As the Frenchman said, "*Il y a toujours la maniere.*" Very true. Yes. There is the manner. The manner in laughter, in tears, in irony, in indignations and enthusiasms, in judgments — and even in love. The manner in which, as in

the features and character of a human face, the inner truth is foreshadowed for those who know how to look at their kind.

Those who read me know my conviction that the world, the temporal world, rests on a few very simple ideas; so simple that they must be as old as the hills. It rests notably, among others, on the idea of Fidelity. At a time when nothing which is not revolutionary in some way or other can expect to attract much attention I have not been revolutionary in my writings. The revolutionary spirit is mighty convenient in this, that it frees one from all scruples as regards ideas. Its hard, absolute optimism is repulsive to my mind by the menace of fanaticism and intolerance it contains. No doubt one should smile at these things; but, imperfect Esthete, I am no better Philosopher.

All claim to special righteousness awakens in me that scorn and danger from which a philosophical mind should be free. . . .

I fear that trying to be conversational I have only managed to be unduly discursive. I have never been very well acquainted with the art of conversation — that art which, I understand, is supposed to be lost now. My young days, the days when one's habits and character are formed, have been rather familiar with long silences. Such voices as broke into them were anything but conversational. No. I haven't got the habit. Yet this discursiveness is not so irrelevant to the handful of pages which follow. They, too, have been charged with discursiveness, with disregard of chronological order (which is in itself a crime), with unconventionality of form (which is an impropriety). I was told severely that the public would view with displeasure the informal character of my recollections. "Alas!" I protested, mildly. "Could I begin with the sacramental words, 'I was born on such a date in such a place'? The remoteness of the locality would have robbed the statement of all interest. I haven't lived through wonderful adventures to be related seriatim. I haven't known distinguished men on whom I could pass fatuous remarks. I haven't been mixed up with great or scandalous affairs. This is but a bit of psychological document, and even so, I haven't written it with a view to put forward any conclusion of my own."

But my objector was not placated. These were good reasons for not writing at all — not a defense of what stood written already, he said.

I admit that almost anything, anything in the world, would serve as a good reason for not writing at all. But since I have written them, all I want to say in their defense is that these memories put down without any regard

for established conventions have not been thrown off without system and purpose. They have their hope and their aim. The hope that from the reading of these pages there may emerge at last the vision of a personality; the man behind the books so fundamentally dissimilar as, for instance, "Almayer's Folly" and "The Secret Agent," and yet a coherent, justifiable personality both in its origin and in its action. This is the hope. The immediate aim, closely associated with the hope, is to give the record of personal memories by presenting faithfully the feelings and sensations connected with the writing of my first book and with my first contact with the sea.

In the purposely mingled resonance of this double strain a friend here and there will perhaps detect a subtle accord.

J. C. K.

# I

Books may be written in all sorts of places. Verbal inspiration may enter the berth of a mariner on board a ship frozen fast in a river in the middle of a town; and since saints are supposed to look benignantly on humble believers, I indulge in the pleasant fancy that the shade of old Flaubert — who imagined himself to be (among other things) a descendant of Vikings — might have hovered with amused interest over the docks of a 2,000-ton steamer called the Adowa, on board of which, gripped by the inclement winter alongside a quay in Rouen, the tenth chapter of “Almayer’s Folly” was begun. With interest, I say, for was not the kind Norman giant with enormous mustaches and a thundering voice the last of the Romantics? Was he not, in his unworldly, almost ascetic, devotion to his art, a sort of literary, saint-like hermit?

“‘It has set at last,’ said Nina to her mother, pointing to the hills behind which the sun had sunk.” . . . These words of Almayer’s romantic daughter I remember tracing on the gray paper of a pad which rested on the blanket of my bed-place. They referred to a sunset in Malayan Isles and shaped themselves in my mind, in a hallucinated vision of forests and rivers and seas, far removed from a commercial and yet romantic town of the northern hemisphere. But at that moment the mood of visions and words was cut short by the third officer, a cheerful and casual youth, coming in with a bang of the door and the exclamation: “You’ve made it jolly warm in here.”

It was warm. I had turned on the steam heater after placing a tin under the leaky water-cock — for perhaps you do not know that water will leak where steam will not. I am not aware of what my young friend had been doing on deck all that morning, but the hands he rubbed together vigorously were very red and imparted to me a chilly feeling by their mere aspect. He has remained the only banjoist of my acquaintance, and being also a younger son of a retired colonel, the poem of Mr. Kipling, by a strange aberration of associated ideas, always seems to me to have been written with an exclusive view to his person. When he did not play the banjo he loved to sit and look at it. He proceeded to this sentimental inspection, and after meditating a while over the strings under my silent scrutiny inquired, airily:

“What are you always scribbling there, if it’s fair to ask?”

It was a fair enough question, but I did not answer him, and simply turned the pad over with a movement of instinctive secrecy: I could not have told him he had put to flight the psychology of Nina Almayer, her opening speech of the tenth chapter, and the words of Mrs. Almayer's wisdom which were to follow in the ominous oncoming of a tropical night. I could not have told him that Nina had said, "It has set at last." He would have been extremely surprised and perhaps have dropped his precious banjo. Neither could I have told him that the sun of my sea-going was setting, too, even as I wrote the words expressing the impatience of passionate youth bent on its desire. I did not know this myself, and it is safe to say he would not have cared, though he was an excellent young fellow and treated me with more deference than, in our relative positions, I was strictly entitled to.

He lowered a tender gaze on his banjo, and I went on looking through the port-hole. The round opening framed in its brass rim a fragment of the quays, with a row of casks ranged on the frozen ground and the tail end of a great cart. A red-nosed carter in a blouse and a woollen night-cap leaned against the wheel. An idle, strolling custom house guard, belted over his blue capote, had the air of being depressed by exposure to the weather and the monotony of official existence. The background of grimy houses found a place in the picture framed by my port-hole, across a wide stretch of paved quay brown with frozen mud. The colouring was sombre, and the most conspicuous feature was a little cafe with curtained windows and a shabby front of white woodwork, corresponding with the squalor of these poorer quarters bordering the river. We had been shifted down there from another berth in the neighbourhood of the Opera House, where that same port-hole gave me a view of quite another sort of cafe — the best in the town, I believe, and the very one where the worthy Bovary and his wife, the romantic daughter of old Pere Renault, had some refreshment after the memorable performance of an opera which was the tragic story of Lucia di Lammermoor in a setting of light music.

I could recall no more the hallucination of the Eastern Archipelago which I certainly hoped to see again. The story of "Almayer's Folly" got put away under the pillow for that day. I do not know that I had any occupation to keep me away from it; the truth of the matter is that on board that ship we were leading just then a contemplative life. I will not say anything of my

privileged position. I was there “just to oblige,” as an actor of standing may take a small part in the benefit performance of a friend.

As far as my feelings were concerned I did not wish to be in that steamer at that time and in those circumstances. And perhaps I was not even wanted there in the usual sense in which a ship “wants” an officer. It was the first and last instance in my sea life when I served ship-owners who have remained completely shadowy to my apprehension. I do not mean this for the well-known firm of London ship-brokers which had chartered the ship to the, I will not say short-lived, but ephemeral Franco-Canadian Transport Company. A death leaves something behind, but there was never anything tangible left from the F. C. T. C. It flourished no longer than roses live, and unlike the roses it blossomed in the dead of winter, emitted a sort of faint perfume of adventure, and died before spring set in. But indubitably it was a company, it had even a house-flag, all white with the letters F. C. T. C. artfully tangled up in a complicated monogram. We flew it at our mainmast head, and now I have come to the conclusion that it was the only flag of its kind in existence. All the same we on board, for many days, had the impression of being a unit of a large fleet with fortnightly departures for Montreal and Quebec as advertised in pamphlets and prospectuses which came aboard in a large package in Victoria Dock, London, just before we started for Rouen, France. And in the shadowy life of the F. C. T. C. lies the secret of that, my last employment in my calling, which in a remote sense interrupted the rhythmical development of Nina Almayer’s story.

The then secretary of the London Shipmasters’ Society, with its modest rooms in Fenchurch Street, was a man of indefatigable activity and the greatest devotion to his task. He is responsible for what was my last association with a ship. I call it that because it can hardly be called a sea-going experience. Dear Captain Froud — it is impossible not to pay him the tribute of affectionate familiarity at this distance of years — had very sound views as to the advancement of knowledge and status for the whole body of the officers of the mercantile marine. He organized for us courses of professional lectures, St. John ambulance classes, corresponded industriously with public bodies and members of Parliament on subjects touching the interests of the service; and as to the oncoming of some inquiry or commission relating to matters of the sea and to the work of seamen, it was a perfect godsend to his need of exerting himself on our corporate behalf. Together with this high sense of his official duties he had

in him a vein of personal kindness, a strong disposition to do what good he could to the individual members of that craft of which in his time he had been a very excellent master. And what greater kindness can one do to a seaman than to put him in the way of employment? Captain Froud did not see why the Shipmasters' Society, besides its general guardianship of our interests, should not be unofficially an employment agency of the very highest class.

"I am trying to persuade all our great ship-owning firms to come to us for their men. There is nothing of a trade-union spirit about our society, and I really don't see why they should not," he said once to me. "I am always telling the captains, too, that, all things being equal, they ought to give preference to the members of the society. In my position I can generally find for them what they want among our members or our associate members."

In my wanderings about London from west to east and back again (I was very idle then) the two little rooms in Fenchurch Street were a sort of resting-place where my spirit, hankering after the sea, could feel itself nearer to the ships, the men, and the life of its choice — nearer there than on any other spot of the solid earth. This resting-place used to be, at about five o'clock in the afternoon, full of men and tobacco smoke, but Captain Froud had the smaller room to himself and there he granted private interviews, whose principal motive was to render service. Thus, one murky November afternoon he beckoned me in with a crooked finger and that peculiar glance above his spectacles which is perhaps my strongest physical recollection of the man.

"I have had in here a shipmaster, this morning," he said, getting back to his desk and motioning me to a chair, "who is in want of an officer. It's for a steamship. You know, nothing pleases me more than to be asked, but, unfortunately, I do not quite see my way . . ."

As the outer room was full of men I cast a wondering glance at the closed door; but he shook his head.

"Oh, yes, I should be only too glad to get that berth for one of them. But the fact of the matter is, the captain of that ship wants an officer who can speak French fluently, and that's not so easy to find. I do not know anybody myself but you. It's a second officer's berth and, of course, you would not care . . . would you now? I know that it isn't what you are looking for."

It was not. I had given myself up to the idleness of a haunted man who looks for nothing but words wherein to capture his visions. But I admit that outwardly I resembled sufficiently a man who could make a second officer for a steamer chartered by a French company. I showed no sign of being haunted by the fate of Nina and by the murmurs of tropical forests; and even my intimate intercourse with Almayer (a person of weak character) had not put a visible mark upon my features. For many years he and the world of his story had been the companions of my imagination without, I hope, impairing my ability to deal with the realities of sea life. I had had the man and his surroundings with me ever since my return from the eastern waters — some four years before the day of which I speak.

It was in the front sitting-room of furnished apartments in a Pimlico square that they first began to live again with a vividness and poignancy quite foreign to our former real intercourse. I had been treating myself to a long stay on shore, and in the necessity of occupying my mornings Almayer (that old acquaintance) came nobly to the rescue.

Before long, as was only proper, his wife and daughter joined him round my table, and then the rest of that Pantai band came full of words and gestures. Unknown to my respectable landlady, it was my practice directly after my breakfast to hold animated receptions of Malays, Arabs, and half-castes. They did not clamour aloud for my attention. They came with a silent and irresistible appeal — and the appeal, I affirm here, was not to my self-love or my vanity. It seems now to have had a moral character, for why should the memory of these beings, seen in their obscure, sun-bathed existence, demand to express itself in the shape of a novel, except on the ground of that mysterious fellowship which unites in a community of hopes and fears all the dwellers on this earth?

I did not receive my visitors with boisterous rapture as the bearers of any gifts of profit or fame. There was no vision of a printed book before me as I sat writing at that table, situated in a decayed part of Belgravia. After all these years, each leaving its evidence of slowly blackened pages, I can honestly say that it is a sentiment akin to pity which prompted me to render in words assembled with conscientious care the memory of things far distant and of men who had lived.

But, coming back to Captain Froud and his fixed idea of never disappointing ship owners or ship-captains, it was not likely that I should fail him in his ambition — to satisfy at a few hours' notice the unusual



demand for a French-speaking officer. He explained to me that the ship was chartered by a French company intending to establish a regular monthly line of sailings from Rouen, for the transport of French emigrants to Canada. But, frankly, this sort of thing did not interest me very much. I said gravely that if it were really a matter of keeping up the reputation of the Shipmasters' Society I would consider it. But the consideration was just for form's sake. The next day I interviewed the captain, and I believe we were impressed favourably with each other. He explained that his chief mate was an excellent man in every respect and that he could not think of dismissing him so as to give me the higher position; but that if I consented to come as second officer I would be given certain special advantages — and so on.

I told him that if I came at all the rank really did not matter.

"I am sure," he insisted, "you will get on first rate with Mr. Paramor."

I promised faithfully to stay for two trips at least, and it was in those circumstances that what was to be my last connection with a ship began. And after all there was not even one single trip. It may be that it was simply the fulfilment of a fate, of that written word on my forehead which apparently for bade me, through all my sea wanderings, ever to achieve the crossing of the Western Ocean — using the words in that special sense in which sailors speak of Western Ocean trade, of Western Ocean packets, of Western Ocean hard cases. The new life attended closely upon the old, and the nine chapters of "Almayer's Folly" went with me to the Victoria Dock, whence in a few days we started for Rouen. I won't go so far as saying that the engaging of a man fated never to cross the Western Ocean was the absolute cause of the Franco-Canadian Transport Company's failure to achieve even a single passage. It might have been that of course; but the obvious, gross obstacle was clearly the want of money. Four hundred and sixty bunks for emigrants were put together in the 'tween decks by industrious carpenters while we lay in the Victoria Dock, but never an emigrant turned up in Rouen — of which, being a humane person, I confess I was glad. Some gentlemen from Paris — I think there were three of them, and one was said to be the chairman — turned up, indeed, and went from end to end of the ship, knocking their silk hats cruelly against the deck beams. I attended them personally, and I can vouch for it that the interest they took in things was intelligent enough, though, obviously, they had never seen anything of the sort before. Their faces as they went ashore wore a cheerfully inconclusive expression. Notwithstanding that this inspecting

ceremony was supposed to be a preliminary to immediate sailing, it was then, as they filed down our gangway, that I received the inward monition that no sailing within the meaning of our charter party would ever take place.

It must be said that in less than three weeks a move took place. When we first arrived we had been taken up with much ceremony well toward the centre of the town, and, all the street corners being placarded with the tricolor posters announcing the birth of our company, the petit bourgeois with his wife and family made a Sunday holiday from the inspection of the ship. I was always in evidence in my best uniform to give information as though I had been a Cook's tourists' interpreter, while our quartermasters reaped a harvest of small change from personally conducted parties. But when the move was made — that move which carried us some mile and a half down the stream to be tied up to an altogether muddier and shabbier quay — then indeed the desolation of solitude became our lot. It was a complete and soundless stagnation; for as we had the ship ready for sea to the smallest detail, as the frost was hard and the days short, we were absolutely idle — idle to the point of blushing with shame when the thought struck us that all the time our salaries went on. Young Cole was aggrieved because, as he said, we could not enjoy any sort of fun in the evening after loafing like this all day; even the banjo lost its charm since there was nothing to prevent his strumming on it all the time between the meals. The good Paramor — he was really a most excellent fellow — became unhappy as far as was possible to his cheery nature, till one dreary day I suggested, out of sheer mischief, that he should employ the dormant energies of the crew in hauling both cables up on deck and turning them end for end.

For a moment Mr. Paramor was radiant. "Excellent idea!" but directly his face fell. "Why . . . Yes! But we can't make that job last more than three days," he muttered, discontentedly. I don't know how long he expected us to be stuck on the riverside outskirts of Rouen, but I know that the cables got hauled up and turned end for end according to my satanic suggestion, put down again, and their very existence utterly forgotten, I believe, before a French river pilot came on board to take our ship down, empty as she came, into the Havre roads. You may think that this state of forced idleness favoured some advance in the fortunes of Almayer and his daughter. Yet it was not so. As if it were some sort of evil spell, my banjoist cabin mate's interruption, as related above, had arrested them short at the point of that

fateful sunset for many weeks together. It was always thus with this book, begun in '89 and finished in '94 — with that shortest of all the novels which it was to be my lot to write. Between its opening exclamation calling Almayer to his dinner in his wife's voice and Abdullah's (his enemy) mental reference to the God of Islam — "The Merciful, the Compassionate" — which closes the book, there were to come several long sea passages, a visit (to use the elevated phraseology suitable to the occasion) to the scenes (some of them) of my childhood and the realization of childhood's vain words, expressing a light-hearted and romantic whim.

It was in 1868, when nine years old or thereabouts, that while looking at a map of Africa of the time and putting my finger on the blank space then representing the unsolved mystery of that continent, I said to myself, with absolute assurance and an amazing audacity which are no longer in my character now:

"When I grow up I shall go *there*."

And of course I thought no more about it till after a quarter of a century or so an opportunity offered to go there — as if the sin of childish audacity were to be visited on my mature head. Yes. I did go there: *there* being the region of Stanley Falls, which in '68 was the blankest of blank spaces on the earth's figured surface. And the MS. of "Almayer's Folly," carried about me as if it were a talisman or a treasure, went *there*, too. That it ever came out of *there* seems a special dispensation of Providence, because a good many of my other properties, infinitely more valuable and useful to me, remained behind through unfortunate accidents of transportation. I call to mind, for instance, a specially awkward turn of the Congo between Kinchassa and Leopoldsville — more particularly when one had to take it at night in a big canoe with only half the proper number of paddlers. I failed in being the second white man on record drowned at that interesting spot through the upsetting of a canoe. The first was a young Belgian officer, but the accident happened some months before my time, and he, too, I believe, was going home; not perhaps quite so ill as myself — but still he was going home. I got round the turn more or less alive, though I was too sick to care whether I did or not, and, always with "Almayer's Folly" among my diminishing baggage, I arrived at that delectable capital, Boma, where, before the departure of the steamer which was to take me home, I had the time to wish myself dead over and over again with perfect sincerity. At that date there were in existence only seven chapters of "Almayer's Folly," but

the chapter in my history which followed was that of a long, long illness and very dismal convalescence. Geneva, or more precisely the hydropathic establishment of Champel, is rendered forever famous by the termination of the eighth chapter in the history of Almayer's decline and fall. The events of the ninth are inextricably mixed up with the details of the proper management of a waterside warehouse owned by a certain city firm whose name does not matter. But that work, undertaken to accustom myself again to the activities of a healthy existence, soon came to an end. The earth had nothing to hold me with for very long. And then that memorable story, like a cask of choice Madeira, got carried for three years to and fro upon the sea. Whether this treatment improved its flavour or not, of course I would not like to say. As far as appearance is concerned it certainly did nothing of the kind. The whole MS. acquired a faded look and an ancient, yellowish complexion. It became at last unreasonable to suppose that anything in the world would ever happen to Almayer and Nina. And yet something most unlikely to happen on the high seas was to wake them up from their state of suspended animation.

What is it that Novalis says: "It is certain my conviction gains infinitely the moment an other soul will believe in it." And what is a novel if not a conviction of our fellow-men's existence strong enough to take upon itself a form of imagined life clearer than reality and whose accumulated verisimilitude of selected episodes puts to shame the pride of documentary history. Providence which saved my MS. from the Congo rapids brought it to the knowledge of a helpful soul far out on the open sea. It would be on my part the greatest ingratitude ever to forget the sallow, sunken face and the deep-set, dark eyes of the young Cambridge man (he was a "passenger for his health" on board the good ship *Torrens* outward bound to Australia) who was the first reader of "*Almayer's Folly*" — the very first reader I ever had.

"Would it bore you very much in reading a MS. in a handwriting like mine?" I asked him one evening, on a sudden impulse at the end of a longish conversation whose subject was Gibbon's History.

Jacques (that was his name) was sitting in my cabin one stormy dog-watch below, after bring me a book to read from his own travelling store.

"Not at all," he answered, with his courteous intonation and a faint smile. As I pulled a drawer open his suddenly aroused curiosity gave him a

watchful expression. I wonder what he expected to see. A poem, maybe. All that's beyond guessing now.

He was not a cold, but a calm man, still more subdued by disease — a man of few words and of an unassuming modesty in general intercourse, but with something uncommon in the whole of his person which set him apart from the undistinguished lot of our sixty passengers. His eyes had a thoughtful, introspective look. In his attractive reserved manner and in a veiled sympathetic voice he asked:

“What is this?” “It is a sort of tale,” I answered, with an effort. “It is not even finished yet. Nevertheless, I would like to know what you think of it.” He put the MS. in the breast-pocket of his jacket; I remember perfectly his thin, brown fingers folding it lengthwise. “I will read it to-morrow,” he remarked, seizing the door handle; and then watching the roll of the ship for a propitious moment, he opened the door and was gone. In the moment of his exit I heard the sustained booming of the wind, the swish of the water on the decks of the *Torrens*, and the subdued, as if distant, roar of the rising sea. I noted the growing disquiet in the great restlessness of the ocean, and responded professionally to it with the thought that at eight o'clock, in another half hour or so at the farthest, the topgallant sails would have to come off the ship.

Next day, but this time in the first dog watch, Jacques entered my cabin. He had a thick woollen muffler round his throat, and the MS. was in his hand. He tendered it to me with a steady look, but without a word. I took it in silence. He sat down on the couch and still said nothing. I opened and shut a drawer under my desk, on which a filled-up log-slate lay wide open in its wooden frame waiting to be copied neatly into the sort of book I was accustomed to write with care, the ship's log-book. I turned my back squarely on the desk. And even then Jacques never offered a word. “Well, what do you say?” I asked at last. “Is it worth finishing?” This question expressed exactly the whole of my thoughts.

“Distinctly,” he answered, in his sedate, veiled voice, and then coughed a little.

“Were you interested?” I inquired further, almost in a whisper.

“Very much!”

In a pause I went on meeting instinctively the heavy rolling of the ship, and Jacques put his feet upon the couch. The curtain of my bed-place swung to and fro as if it were a punkah, the bulkhead lamp circled in its

gimbals, and now and then the cabin door rattled slightly in the gusts of wind. It was in latitude 40 south, and nearly in the longitude of Greenwich, as far as I can remember, that these quiet rites of Almayer's and Nina's resurrection were taking place. In the prolonged silence it occurred to me that there was a good deal of retrospective writing in the story as far as it went. Was it intelligible in its action, I asked myself, as if already the storyteller were being born into the body of a seaman. But I heard on deck the whistle of the officer of the watch and remained on the alert to catch the order that was to follow this call to attention. It reached me as a faint, fierce shout to "Square the yards." "Aha!" I thought to myself, "a westerly blow coming on." Then I turned to my very first reader, who, alas! was not to live long enough to know the end of the tale.

"Now let me ask you one more thing: is the story quite clear to you as it stands?"

He raised his dark, gentle eyes to my face and seemed surprised.

"Yes! Perfectly."

This was all I was to hear from his lips concerning the merits of "Almayer's Folly." We never spoke together of the book again. A long period of bad weather set in and I had no thoughts left but for my duties, while poor Jacques caught a fatal cold and had to keep close in his cabin. When we arrived in Adelaide the first reader of my prose went at once up-country, and died rather suddenly in the end, either in Australia or it may be on the passage while going home through the Suez Canal. I am not sure which it was now, and I do not think I ever heard precisely; though I made inquiries about him from some of our return passengers who, wandering about to "see the country" during the ship's stay in port, had come upon him here and there. At last we sailed, homeward bound, and still not one line was added to the careless scrawl of the many pages which poor Jacques had had the patience to read with the very shadows of Eternity gathering already in the hollows of his kind, steadfast eyes.

The purpose instilled into me by his simple and final "Distinctly" remained dormant, yet alive to await its opportunity. I dare say I am compelled — unconsciously compelled — now to write volume after volume, as in past years I was compelled to go to sea voyage after voyage. Leaves must follow upon one another as leagues used to follow in the days gone by, on and on to the appointed end, which, being Truth itself, is One — one for all men and for all occupations.

I do not know which of the two impulses has appeared more mysterious and more wonderful to me. Still, in writing, as in going to sea, I had to wait my opportunity. Let me confess here that I was never one of those wonderful fellows that would go afloat in a wash-tub for the sake of the fun, and if I may pride myself upon my consistency, it was ever just the same with my writing. Some men, I have heard, write in railway carriages, and could do it, perhaps, sitting crossed-legged on a clothes-line; but I must confess that my sybaritic disposition will not consent to write without something at least resembling a chair. Line by line, rather than page by page, was the growth of "Almayer's Folly."

And so it happened that I very nearly lost the MS., advanced now to the first words of the ninth chapter, in the Friedrichstrasse Poland, or more precisely to Ukraine. On an early, sleepy morning changing trains in a hurry I left my Gladstone bag in a refreshment-room. A worthy and intelligent Koffertrager rescued it. Yet in my anxiety I was not thinking of the MS., but of all the other things that were packed in the bag.

In Warsaw, where I spent two days, those wandering pages were never exposed to the light, except once to candle-light, while the bag lay open on the chair. I was dressing hurriedly to dine at a sporting club. A friend of my childhood (he had been in the Diplomatic Service, but had turned to growing wheat on paternal acres, and we had not seen each other for over twenty years) was sitting on the hotel sofa waiting to carry me off there.

"You might tell me something of your life while you are dressing," he suggested, kindly.

I do not think I told him much of my life story either then or later. The talk of the select little party with which he made me dine was extremely animated and embraced most subjects under heaven, from big-game shooting in Africa to the last poem published in a very modernist review, edited by the very young and patronized by the highest society. But it never touched upon "Almayer's Folly," and next morning, in uninterrupted obscurity, this inseparable companion went on rolling with me in the southeast direction toward the government of Kiev.

At that time there was an eight hours' drive, if not more, from the railway station to the country-house which was my destination.

"Dear boy" (these words were always written in English), so ran the last letter from that house received in London — "Get yourself driven to the only inn in the place, dine as well as you can, and some time in the evening

my own confidential servant, factotum and majordomo, a Mr. V. S. (I warn you he is of noble extraction), will present himself before you, reporting the arrival of the small sledge which will take you here on the next day. I send with him my heaviest fur, which I suppose with such overcoats as you may have with you will keep you from freezing on the road.”

Sure enough, as I was dining, served by a Hebrew waiter, in an enormous barn-like bedroom with a freshly painted floor, the door opened and, in a travelling costume of long boots, big sheepskin cap, and a short coat girt with a leather belt, the Mr. V. S. (of noble extraction), a man of about thirty-five, appeared with an air of perplexity on his open and mustached countenance. I got up from the table and greeted him in Polish, with, I hope, the right shade of consideration demanded by his noble blood and his confidential position. His face cleared up in a wonderful way. It appeared that, notwithstanding my uncle’s earnest assurances, the good fellow had remained in doubt of our understanding each other. He imagined I would talk to him in some foreign language.

I was told that his last words on getting into the sledge to come to meet me shaped an anxious exclamation:

“Well! Well! Here I am going, but God only knows how I am to make myself understood to our master’s nephew.”

We understood each other very well from the first. He took charge of me as if I were not quite of age. I had a delightful boyish feeling of coming home from school when he muffled me up next morning in an enormous bearskin travelling-coat and took his seat protectively by my side. The sledge was a very small one, and it looked utterly insignificant, almost like a toy behind the four big bays harnessed two and two. We three, counting the coachman, filled it completely. He was a young fellow with clear blue eyes; the high collar of his livery fur coat framed his cheery countenance and stood all round level with the top of his head.

“Now, Joseph,” my companion addressed him, “do you think we shall manage to get home before six?” His answer was that we would surely, with God’s help, and providing there were no heavy drifts in the long stretch between certain villages whose names came with an extremely familiar sound to my ears. He turned out an excellent coachman, with an instinct for keeping the road among the snow-covered fields and a natural gift of getting the best out of his horses.



“He is the son of that Joseph that I suppose the Captain remembers. He who used to drive the Captain’s late grandmother of holy memory,” remarked V. S., busy tucking fur rugs about my feet.

I remembered perfectly the trusty Joseph who used to drive my grandmother. Why! he it was who let me hold the reins for the first time in my life and allowed me to play with the great four-in-hand whip outside the doors of the coach-house.

“What became of him?” I asked. “He is no longer serving, I suppose.”

“He served our master,” was the reply. “But he died of cholera ten years ago now — that great epidemic that we had. And his wife died at the same time — the whole houseful of them, and this is the only boy that was left.”

The MS. of “*Almayer’s Folly*” was reposing in the bag under our feet.

I saw again the sun setting on the plains as I saw it in the travels of my childhood. It set, clear and red, dipping into the snow in full view as if it were setting on the sea. It was twenty-three years since I had seen the sun set over that land; and we drove on in the darkness which fell swiftly upon the livid expanse of snows till, out of the waste of a white earth joining a bestarred sky, surged up black shapes, the clumps of trees about a village of the Ukrainian plain. A cottage or two glided by, a low interminable wall, and then, glimmering and winking through a screen of fir-trees, the lights of the master’s house.

That very evening the wandering MS. of “*Almayer’s Folly*” was unpacked and unostentatiously laid on the writing-table in my room, the guest-room which had been, I was informed in an affectionately careless tone, awaiting me for some fifteen years or so. It attracted no attention from the affectionate presence hovering round the son of the favourite sister.

“You won’t have many hours to yourself while you are staying with me, brother,” he said — this form of address borrowed from the speech of our peasants being the usual expression of the highest good humour in a moment of affectionate elation. “I shall be always coming in for a chat.”

As a matter of fact, we had the whole house to chat in, and were everlastingly intruding upon each other. I invaded the retirement of his study where the principal feature was a colossal silver inkstand presented to him on his fiftieth year by a subscription of all his wards then living. He had been guardian of many orphans of land-owning families from the three southern provinces — ever since the year 1860. Some of them had been my school fellows and playmates, but not one of them, girls or boys, that I

know of has ever written a novel. One or two were older than myself — considerably older, too. One of them, a visitor I remember in my early years, was the man who first put me on horseback, and his four-horse bachelor turnout, his perfect horsemanship and general skill in manly exercises, was one of my earliest admirations. I seem to remember my mother looking on from a colonnade in front of the dining-room windows as I was lifted upon the pony, held, for all I know, by the very Joseph — the groom attached specially to my grandmother's service — who died of cholera. It was certainly a young man in a dark-blue, tailless coat and huge Cossack trousers, that being the livery of the men about the stables. It must have been in 1864, but reckoning by another mode of calculating time, it was certainly in the year in which my mother obtained permission to travel south and visit her family, from the exile into which she had followed my father. For that, too, she had had to ask permission, and I know that one of the conditions of that favour was that she should be treated exactly as a condemned exile herself. Yet a couple of years later, in memory of her eldest brother, who had served in the Guards and dying early left hosts of friends and a loved memory in the great world of St. Petersburg, some influential personages procured for her this permission — it was officially called the "Highest Grace" — of a four months' leave from exile.

This is also the year in which I first begin to remember my mother with more distinctness than a mere loving, wide-browed, silent, protecting presence, whose eyes had a sort of commanding sweetness; and I also remember the great gathering of all the relations from near and far, and the gray heads of the family friends paying her the homage of respect and love in the house of her favourite brother, who, a few years later, was to take the place for me of both my parents.

I did not understand the tragic significance of it all at the time, though, indeed, I remember that doctors also came. There were no signs of invalidism about her — but I think that already they had pronounced her doom unless perhaps the change to a southern climate could re-establish her declining strength. For me it seems the very happiest period of my existence. There was my cousin, a delightful, quick-tempered little girl, some months younger than myself, whose life, lovingly watched over as if she were a royal princess, came to an end with her fifteenth year. There were other children, too, many of whom are dead now, and not a few whose very names I have forgotten. Over all this hung the oppressive shadow of

the great Russian empire — the shadow lowering with the darkness of a new-born national hatred fostered by the Moscow school of journalists against the Poles after the ill-omened rising of 1863.

This is a far cry back from the MS. of “*Almayer’s Folly*,” but the public record of these formative impressions is not the whim of an uneasy egotism. These, too, are things human, already distant in their appeal. It is meet that something more should be left for the novelist’s children than the colours and figures of his own hard-won creation. That which in their grown-up years may appear to the world about them as the most enigmatic side of their natures and perhaps must remain forever obscure even to themselves, will be their unconscious response to the still voice of that inexorable past from which his work of fiction and their personalities are remotely derived.

Only in men’s imagination does every truth find an effective and undeniable existence. Imagination, not invention, is the supreme master of art as of life. An imaginative and exact rendering of authentic memories may serve worthily that spirit of piety toward all things human which sanctions the conceptions of a writer of tales, and the emotions of the man reviewing his own experience.

## II

As I have said, I was unpacking my luggage after a journey from London into Ukraine. The MS. of "Almayer's Folly" — my companion already for some three years or more, and then in the ninth chapter of its age — was deposited unostentatiously on the writing-table placed between two windows. It didn't occur to me to put it away in the drawer the table was fitted with, but my eye was attracted by the good form of the same drawer's brass handles. Two candelabra, with four candles each, lighted up festally the room which had waited so many years for the wandering nephew. The blinds were down.

Within five hundred yards of the chair on which I sat stood the first peasant hut of the village — part of my maternal grandfather's estate, the only part remaining in the possession of a member of the family; and beyond the village in the limitless blackness of a winter's night there lay the great unfenced fields — not a flat and severe plain, but a kindly bread-giving land of low rounded ridges, all white now, with the black patches of timber nestling in the hollows. The road by which I had come ran through the village with a turn just outside the gates closing the short drive. Somebody was abroad on the deep snow track; a quick tinkle of bells stole gradually into the stillness of the room like a tuneful whisper.

My unpacking had been watched over by the servant who had come to help me, and, for the most part, had been standing attentive but unnecessary at the door of the room. I did not want him in the least, but I did not like to tell him to go away. He was a young fellow, certainly more than ten years younger than myself; I had not been — I won't say in that place, but within sixty miles of it, ever since the year '67; yet his guileless physiognomy of the open peasant type seemed strangely familiar. It was quite possible that he might have been a descendant, a son, or even a grandson, of the servants whose friendly faces had been familiar to me in my early childhood. As a matter of fact he had no such claim on my consideration. He was the product of some village near by and was there on his promotion, having learned the service in one or two houses as pantry boy. I know this because I asked the worthy V — — next day. I might well have spared the question. I discovered before long that all the faces about the house and all the faces in the village: the grave faces with long mustaches of the heads of families,

the downy faces of the young men, the faces of the little fair-haired children, the handsome, tanned, wide-browed faces of the mothers seen at the doors of the huts, were as familiar to me as though I had known them all from childhood and my childhood were a matter of the day before yesterday.

The tinkle of the traveller's bells, after growing louder, had faded away quickly, and the tumult of barking dogs in the village had calmed down at last. My uncle, lounging in the corner of a small couch, smoked his long Turkish chibouk in silence.

"This is an extremely nice writing-table you have got for my room," I remarked.

"It is really your property," he said, keeping his eyes on me, with an interested and wistful expression, as he had done ever since I had entered the house. "Forty years ago your mother used to write at this very table. In our house in Oratow, it stood in the little sitting-room which, by a tacit arrangement, was given up to the girls — I mean to your mother and her sister who died so young. It was a present to them jointly from your uncle Nicholas B. when your mother was seventeen and your aunt two years younger. She was a very dear, delightful girl, that aunt of yours, of whom I suppose you know nothing more than the name. She did not shine so much by personal beauty and a cultivated mind in which your mother was far superior. It was her good sense, the admirable sweetness of her nature, her exceptional facility and ease in daily relations, that endeared her to every body. Her death was a terrible grief and a serious moral loss for us all. Had she lived she would have brought the greatest blessings to the house it would have been her lot to enter, as wife, mother, and mistress of a household. She would have created round herself an atmosphere of peace and content which only those who can love unselfishly are able to evoke. Your mother — of far greater beauty, exceptionally distinguished in person, manner, and intellect — had a less easy disposition. Being more brilliantly gifted, she also expected more from life. At that trying time especially, we were greatly concerned about her state. Suffering in her health from the shock of her father's death (she was alone in the house with him when he died suddenly), she was torn by the inward struggle between her love for the man whom she was to marry in the end and her knowledge of her dead father's declared objection to that match. Unable to bring herself to disregard that cherished memory and that judgment she had always

respected and trusted, and, on the other hand, feeling the impossibility to resist a sentiment so deep and so true, she could not have been expected to preserve her mental and moral balance. At war with herself, she could not give to others that feeling of peace which was not her own. It was only later, when united at last with the man of her choice, that she developed those uncommon gifts of mind and heart which compelled the respect and admiration even of our foes. Meeting with calm fortitude the cruel trials of a life reflecting all the national and social misfortunes of the community, she realized the highest conceptions of duty as a wife, a mother, and a patriot, sharing the exile of her husband and representing nobly the ideal of Polish womanhood. Our uncle Nicholas was not a man very accessible to feelings of affection. Apart from his worship for Napoleon the Great, he loved really, I believe, only three people in the world: his mother — your great-grandmother, whom you have seen but cannot possibly remember; his brother, our father, in whose house he lived for so many years; and of all of us, his nephews and nieces grown up around him, your mother alone. The modest, lovable qualities of the youngest sister he did not seem able to see. It was I who felt most profoundly this unexpected stroke of death falling upon the family less than a year after I had become its head. It was terribly unexpected. Driving home one wintry afternoon to keep me company in our empty house, where I had to remain permanently administering the estate and at tending to the complicated affairs — (the girls took it in turn week and week about) — driving, as I said, from the house of the Countess Tekla Potocka, where our invalid mother was staying then to be near a doctor, they lost the road and got stuck in a snow drift. She was alone with the coachman and old Valery, the personal servant of our late father. Impatient of delay while they were trying to dig themselves out, she jumped out of the sledge and went to look for the road herself. All this happened in '51, not ten miles from the house in which we are sitting now.

“The road was soon found, but snow had begun to fall thickly again, and they were four more hours getting home. Both the men took off their sheepskin lined greatcoats and used all their own rugs to wrap her up against the cold, notwithstanding her protests, positive orders, and even struggles, as Valery afterward related to me. ‘How could I,’ he remonstrated with her, ‘go to meet the blessed soul of my late master if I let any harm come to you while there’s a spark of life left in my body?’ When they reached home at last the poor old man was stiff and speechless from

exposure, and the coachman was in not much better plight, though he had the strength to drive round to the stables himself. To my reproaches for venturing out at all in such weather, she answered, characteristically, that she could not bear the thought of abandoning me to my cheerless solitude. It is incomprehensible how it was that she was allowed to start. I suppose it had to be! She made light of the cough which came on next day, but shortly afterward inflammation of the lungs set in, and in three weeks she was no more! She was the first to be taken away of the young generation under my care. Behold the vanity of all hopes and fears! I was the most frail at birth of all the children. For years I remained so delicate that my parents had but little hope of bringing me up; and yet I have survived five brothers and two sisters, and many of my contemporaries; I have outlived my wife and daughter, too — and from all those who have had some knowledge at least of these old times you alone are left. It has been my lot to lay in an early grave many honest hearts, many brilliant promises, many hopes full of life.”

He got up briskly, sighed, and left me saying, “We will dine in half an hour.”

Without moving, I listened to his quick steps resounding on the waxed floor of the next room, traversing the anteroom lined with bookshelves, where he paused to put his chibouk in the pipe-stand before passing into the drawing-room (these were all en suite), where he became inaudible on the thick carpet. But I heard the door of his study-bedroom close. He was then sixty-two years old and had been for a quarter of a century the wisest, the firmest, the most indulgent of guardians, extending over me a paternal care and affection, a moral support which I seemed to feel always near me in the most distant parts of the earth.

As to Mr. Nicholas B., sub-lieutenant of 1808, lieutenant of 1813 in the French army, and for a short time *Officier d’Ordonnance* of Marshal Marmont; afterward captain in the 2d Regiment of Mounted Rifles in the Polish army — such as it existed up to 1830 in the reduced kingdom established by the Congress of Vienna — I must say that from all that more distant past, known to me traditionally and a little *de visu*, and called out by the words of the man just gone away, he remains the most incomplete figure. It is obvious that I must have seen him in ‘64, for it is certain that he would not have missed the opportunity of seeing my mother for what he must have known would be the last time. From my early boyhood to this day, if I try to call up his image, a sort of mist rises before my eyes, mist in

which I perceive vaguely only a neatly brushed head of white hair (which is exceptional in the case of the B. family, where it is the rule for men to go bald in a becoming manner before thirty) and a thin, curved, dignified nose, a feature in strict accordance with the physical tradition of the B. family. But it is not by these fragmentary remains of perishable mortality that he lives in my memory. I knew, at a very early age, that my granduncle Nicholas B. was a Knight of the Legion of Honour and that he had also the Polish Cross for *valour Virtuti Militari*. The knowledge of these glorious facts inspired in me an admiring veneration; yet it is not that sentiment, strong as it was, which resumes for me the force and the significance of his personality. It is over borne by another and complex impression of awe, compassion, and horror. Mr. Nicholas B. remains for me the unfortunate and miserable (but heroic) being who once upon a time had eaten a dog.

It is a good forty years since I heard the tale, and the effect has not worn off yet. I believe this is the very first, say, realistic, story I heard in my life; but all the same I don't know why I should have been so frightfully impressed. Of course I know what our village dogs look like — but still. . . . No! At this very day, recalling the horror and compassion of my childhood, I ask myself whether I am right in disclosing to a cold and fastidious world that awful episode in the family history. I ask myself — is it right? — especially as the B. family had always been honourably known in a wide countryside for the delicacy of their tastes in the matter of eating and drinking. But upon the whole, and considering that this gastronomical degradation overtaking a gallant young officer lies really at the door of the Great Napoleon, I think that to cover it up by silence would be an exaggeration of literary restraint. Let the truth stand here. The responsibility rests with the Man of St. Helena in view of his deplorable levity in the conduct of the Russian campaign. It was during the memorable retreat from Moscow that Mr. Nicholas B., in company of two brother officers — as to whose morality and natural refinement I know nothing — bagged a dog on the outskirts of a village and subsequently devoured him. As far as I can remember the weapon used was a cavalry sabre, and the issue of the sporting episode was rather more of a matter of life and death than if it had been an encounter with a tiger. A picket of Cossacks was sleeping in that village lost in the depths of the great Lithuanian forest. The three sportsmen had observed them from a hiding-place making themselves very much at home among the huts just before the early winter darkness set in at four



o'clock. They had observed them with disgust and, perhaps, with despair. Late in the night the rash counsels of hunger overcame the dictates of prudence. Crawling through the snow they crept up to the fence of dry branches which generally encloses a village in that part of Lithuania. What they expected to get and in what manner, and whether this expectation was worth the risk, goodness only knows.

However, these Cossack parties, in most cases wandering without an officer, were known to guard themselves badly and often not at all. In addition, the village lying at a great distance from the line of French retreat, they could not suspect the presence of stragglers from the Grand Army. The three officers had strayed away in a blizzard from the main column and had been lost for days in the woods, which explains sufficiently the terrible straits to which they were reduced. Their plan was to try and attract the attention of the peasants in that one of the huts which was nearest to the enclosure; but as they were preparing to venture into the very jaws of the lion, so to speak, a dog (it is mighty strange that there was but one), a creature quite as formidable under the circumstances as a lion, began to bark on the other side of the fence. . . .

At this stage of the narrative, which I heard many times (by request) from the lips of Captain Nicholas B.'s sister-in-law, my grandmother, I used to tremble with excitement.

The dog barked. And if he had done no more than bark, three officers of the Great Napoleon's army would have perished honourably on the points of Cossacks' lances, or perchance escaping the chase would have died decently of starvation. But before they had time to think of running away that fatal and revolting dog, being carried away by the excess of the zeal, dashed out through a gap in the fence. He dashed out and died. His head, I understand, was severed at one blow from his body. I understand also that later on, within the gloomy solitudes of the snow-laden woods, when, in a sheltering hollow, a fire had been lit by the party, the condition of the quarry was discovered to be distinctly unsatisfactory. It was not thin — on the contrary, it seemed unhealthily obese; its skin showed bare patches of an unpleasant character. However, they had not killed that dog for the sake of the pelt. He was large. . . . He was eaten. . . . The rest is silence. . . .

A silence in which a small boy shudders and says firmly:

"I could not have eaten that dog."

And his grandmother remarks with a smile:

“Perhaps you don’t know what it is to be hungry.”

I have learned something of it since. Not that I have been reduced to eat dog. I have fed on the emblematical animal, which, in the language of the volatile Gauls, is called *la vache enragee*; I have lived on ancient salt junk, I know the taste of shark, of trepang, of snake, of nondescript dishes containing things without a name — but of the Lithuanian village dog — never! I wish it to be distinctly understood that it is not I, but my granduncle Nicholas, of the Polish landed gentry, Chevalier de la Legion d’Honneur, etc., who in his young days, had eaten the Lithuanian dog.

I wish he had not. The childish horror of the deed clings absurdly to the grizzled man. I am perfectly helpless against it. Still, if he really had to, let us charitably remember that he had eaten him on active service, while bearing up bravely against the greatest military disaster of modern history, and, in a manner, for the sake of his country. He had eaten him to appease his hunger, no doubt, but also for the sake of an unappeasable and patriotic desire, in the glow of a great faith that lives still, and in the pursuit of a great illusion kindled like a false beacon by a great man to lead astray the effort of a brave nation.

*Pro patria!*

Looked at in that light, it appears a sweet and decorous meal.

And looked at in the same light, my own diet of *la vache enragee* appears a fatuous and extravagant form of self-indulgence; for why should I, the son of a land which such men as these have turned up with their plowshares and bedewed with their blood, undertake the pursuit of fantastic meals of salt junk and hardtack upon the wide seas? On the kindest view it seems an unanswerable question. Alas! I have the conviction that there are men of unstained rectitude who are ready to murmur scornfully the word desertion. Thus the taste of innocent adventure may be made bitter to the palate. The part of the inexplicable should be allowed for in appraising the conduct of men in a world where no explanation is final. No charge of faithlessness ought to be lightly uttered. The appearances of this perishable life are deceptive, like everything that falls under the judgment of our imperfect senses. The inner voice may remain true enough in its secret counsel. The fidelity to a special tradition may last through the events of an unrelated existence, following faithfully, too, the traced way of an inexplicable impulse.

It would take too long to explain the intimate alliance of contradictions in human nature which makes love itself wear at times the desperate shape of betrayal. And perhaps there is no possible explanation. Indulgence — as somebody said — is the most intelligent of all the virtues. I venture to think that it is one of the least common, if not the most uncommon of all. I would not imply by this that men are foolish — or even most men. Far from it. The barber and the priest, backed by the whole opinion of the village, condemned justly the conduct of the ingenious hidalgo, who, sallying forth from his native place, broke the head of the muleteer, put to death a flock of inoffensive sheep, and went through very doleful experiences in a certain stable. God forbid that an unworthy churl should escape merited censure by hanging on to the stirrup-leather of the sublime caballero. His was a very noble, a very unselfish fantasy, fit for nothing except to raise the envy of baser mortals. But there is more than one aspect to the charm of that exalted and dangerous figure. He, too, had his frailties. After reading so many romances he desired naively to escape with his very body from the intolerable reality of things. He wished to meet, eye to eye, the valorous giant Brandabarbaran, Lord of Arabia, whose armour is made of the skin of a dragon, and whose shield, strapped to his arm, is the gate of a fortified city. Oh, amiable and natural weakness! Oh, blessed simplicity of a gentle heart without guile! Who would not succumb to such a consoling temptation? Nevertheless, it was a form of self-indulgence, and the ingenious hidalgo of La Mancha was not a good citizen. The priest and the barber were not unreasonable in their strictures. Without going so far as the old King Louis-Philippe, who used to say in his exile, “The people are never in fault” — one may admit that there must be some righteousness in the assent of a whole village. Mad! Mad! He who kept in pious meditation the ritual vigil-of-arms by the well of an inn and knelt reverently to be knighted at daybreak by the fat, sly rogue of a landlord has come very near perfection. He rides forth, his head encircled by a halo — the patron saint of all lives spoiled or saved by the irresistible grace of imagination. But he was not a good citizen.

Perhaps that and nothing else was meant by the well-remembered exclamation of my tutor.

It was in the jolly year 1873, the very last year in which I have had a jolly holiday. There have been idle years afterward, jolly enough in a way and not altogether without their lesson, but this year of which I speak was the

year of my last school-boy holiday. There are other reasons why I should remember that year, but they are too long to state formally in this place. Moreover, they have nothing to do with that holiday. What has to do with the holiday is that before the day on which the remark was made we had seen Vienna, the Upper Danube, Munich, the Falls of the Rhine, the Lake of Constance, — in fact, it was a memorable holiday of travel. Of late we had been tramping slowly up the Valley of the Reuss. It was a delightful time. It was much more like a stroll than a tramp. Landing from a Lake of Lucerne steamer in Fluelen, we found ourselves at the end of the second day, with the dusk overtaking our leisurely footsteps, a little way beyond Hospenthal. This is not the day on which the remark was made: in the shadows of the deep valley and with the habitations of men left some way behind, our thoughts ran not upon the ethics of conduct, but upon the simpler human problem of shelter and food. There did not seem anything of the kind in sight, and we were thinking of turning back when suddenly, at a bend of the road, we came upon a building, ghostly in the twilight.

At that time the work on the St. Gothard Tunnel was going on, and that magnificent enterprise of burrowing was directly responsible for the unexpected building, standing all alone upon the very roots of the mountains. It was long, though not big at all; it was low; it was built of boards, without ornamentation, in barrack-hut style, with the white window-frames quite flush with the yellow face of its plain front. And yet it was a hotel; it had even a name, which I have forgotten. But there was no gold laced doorkeeper at its humble door. A plain but vigorous servant-girl answered our inquiries, then a man and woman who owned the place appeared. It was clear that no travellers were expected, or perhaps even desired, in this strange hostelry, which in its severe style resembled the house which surmounts the unseaworthy-looking hulls of the toy Noah's Arks, the universal possession of European childhood. However, its roof was not hinged and it was not full to the brim of slab-sided and painted animals of wood. Even the live tourist animal was nowhere in evidence. We had something to eat in a long, narrow room at one end of a long, narrow table, which, to my tired perception and to my sleepy eyes, seemed as if it would tilt up like a see saw plank, since there was no one at the other end to balance it against our two dusty and travel-stained figures. Then we hastened up stairs to bed in a room smelling of pine planks, and I was fast asleep before my head touched the pillow.

In the morning my tutor (he was a student of the Cracow University) woke me up early, and as we were dressing remarked: "There seems to be a lot of people staying in this hotel. I have heard a noise of talking up till eleven o'clock." This statement surprised me; I had heard no noise whatever, having slept like a top.

We went down-stairs into the long and narrow dining-room with its long and narrow table. There were two rows of plates on it. At one of the many curtained windows stood a tall, bony man with a bald head set off by a bunch of black hair above each ear, and with a long, black beard. He glanced up from the paper he was reading and seemed genuinely astonished at our intrusion. By and by more men came in. Not one of them looked like a tourist. Not a single woman appeared. These men seemed to know each other with some intimacy, but I cannot say they were a very talkative lot. The bald-headed man sat down gravely at the head of the table. It all had the air of a family party. By and by, from one of the vigorous servant-girls in national costume, we discovered that the place was really a boarding house for some English engineers engaged at the works of the St. Gothard Tunnel; and I could listen my fill to the sounds of the English language, as far as it is used at a breakfast-table by men who do not believe in wasting many words on the mere amenities of life.

This was my first contact with British mankind apart from the tourist kind seen in the hotels of Zurich and Lucerne — the kind which has no real existence in a workaday world. I know now that the bald-headed man spoke with a strong Scotch accent. I have met many of his kind ashore and afloat. The second engineer of the steamer Mavis, for instance, ought to have been his twin brother. I cannot help thinking that he really was, though for some reason of his own he assured me that he never had a twin brother. Anyway, the deliberate, bald-headed Scot with the coal-black beard appeared to my boyish eyes a very romantic and mysterious person.

We slipped out unnoticed. Our mapped-out route led over the Furca Pass toward the Rhone Glacier, with the further intention of following down the trend of the Hasli Valley. The sun was already declining when we found ourselves on the top of the pass, and the remark alluded to was presently uttered.

We sat down by the side of the road to continue the argument begun half a mile or so before. I am certain it was an argument, because I remember perfectly how my tutor argued and how without the power of reply I

listened, with my eyes fixed obstinately on the ground. A stir on the road made me look up — and then I saw my unforgettable Englishman. There are acquaintances of later years, familiars, shipmates, whom I remember less clearly. He marched rapidly toward the east (attended by a hang-dog Swiss guide), with the mien of an ardent and fearless traveller. He was clad in a knickerbocker suit, but as at the same time he wore short socks under his laced boots, for reasons which, whether hygienic or conscientious, were surely imaginative, his calves, exposed to the public gaze and to the tonic air of high altitudes, dazzled the beholder by the splendour of their marble-like condition and their rich tone of young ivory. He was the leader of a small caravan. The light of a headlong, exalted satisfaction with the world of men and the scenery of mountains illumined his clean-cut, very red face, his short, silver-white whiskers, his innocently eager and triumphant eyes. In passing he cast a glance of kindly curiosity and a friendly gleam of big, sound, shiny teeth toward the man and the boy sitting like dusty tramps by the roadside, with a modest knapsack lying at their feet. His white calves twinkled sturdily, the uncouth Swiss guide with a surly mouth stalked like an unwilling bear at his elbow; a small train of three mules followed in single file the lead of this inspiring enthusiast. Two ladies rode past, one behind the other, but from the way they sat I saw only their calm, uniform backs, and the long ends of blue veils hanging behind far down over their identical hat-brims. His two daughters, surely. An industrious luggage-mule, with unstarched ears and guarded by a slouching, sallow driver, brought up the rear. My tutor, after pausing for a look and a faint smile, resumed his earnest argument.

I tell you it was a memorable year! One does not meet such an Englishman twice in a lifetime. Was he in the mystic ordering of common events the ambassador of my future, sent out to turn the scale at a critical moment on the top of an Alpine pass, with the peaks of the Bernese Oberland for mute and solemn witnesses? His glance, his smile, the unextinguishable and comic ardour of his striving-forward appearance, helped me to pull myself together. It must be stated that on that day and in the exhilarating atmosphere of that elevated spot I had been feeling utterly crushed. It was the year in which I had first spoken aloud of my desire to go to sea. At first like those sounds that, ranging outside the scale to which men's ears are attuned, remain inaudible to our sense of hearing, this declaration passed unperceived. It was as if it had not been. Later on, by

trying various tones, I managed to arouse here and there a surprised momentary attention — the “What was that funny noise?” — sort of inquiry. Later on it was: “Did you hear what that boy said? What an extraordinary outbreak!” Presently a wave of scandalized astonishment (it could not have been greater if I had announced the intention of entering a Carthusian monastery) ebbing out of the educational and academical town of Cracow spread itself over several provinces. It spread itself shallow but far-reaching. It stirred up a mass of remonstrance, indignation, pitying wonder, bitter irony, and downright chaff. I could hardly breathe under its weight, and certainly had no words for an answer. People wondered what Mr. T. B. would do now with his worrying nephew and, I dare say, hoped kindly that he would make short work of my nonsense.

What he did was to come down all the way from Ukraine to have it out with me and to judge by himself, unprejudiced, impartial, and just, taking his stand on the ground of wisdom and affection. As far as is possible for a boy whose power of expression is still unformed I opened the secret of my thoughts to him, and he in return allowed me a glimpse into his mind and heart; the first glimpse of an inexhaustible and noble treasure of clear thought and warm feeling, which through life was to be mine to draw upon with a never-deceived love and confidence. Practically, after several exhaustive conversations, he concluded that he would not have me later on reproach him for having spoiled my life by an unconditional opposition. But I must take time for serious reflection. And I must think not only of myself but of others; weigh the claims of affection and conscience against my own sincerity of purpose. “Think well what it all means in the larger issues — my boy,” he exhorted me, finally, with special friendliness. “And meantime try to get the best place you can at the yearly examinations.”

The scholastic year came to an end. I took a fairly good place at the exams, which for me (for certain reasons) happened to be a more difficult task than for other boys. In that respect I could enter with a good conscience upon that holiday which was like a long visit *pour prendre conge* of the mainland of old Europe I was to see so little of for the next four-and-twenty years. Such, however, was not the avowed purpose of that tour. It was rather, I suspect, planned in order to distract and occupy my thoughts in other directions. Nothing had been said for months of my going to sea. But my attachment to my young tutor and his influence over me were so well known that he must have received a confidential mission to talk me out of

my romantic folly. It was an excellently appropriate arrangement, as neither he nor I had ever had a single glimpse of the sea in our lives. That was to come by and by for both of us in Venice, from the outer shore of Lido. Meantime he had taken his mission to heart so well that I began to feel crushed before we reached Zurich. He argued in railway trains, in lake steamboats, he had argued away for me the obligatory sunrise on the Righi, by Jove! Of his devotion to his unworthy pupil there can be no doubt. He had proved it already by two years of unrelenting and arduous care. I could not hate him. But he had been crushing me slowly, and when he started to argue on the top of the Furca Pass he was perhaps nearer a success than either he or I imagined. I listened to him in despairing silence, feeling that ghostly, unrealized, and desired sea of my dreams escape from the unnerved grip of my will.

The enthusiastic old Englishman had passed — and the argument went on. What reward could I expect from such a life at the end of my years, either in ambition, honour, or conscience? An unanswerable question. But I felt no longer crushed. Then our eyes met and a genuine emotion was visible in his as well as in mine. The end came all at once. He picked up the knapsack suddenly and got onto his feet.

“You are an incorrigible, hopeless Don Quixote. That’s what you are.”

I was surprised. I was only fifteen and did not know what he meant exactly. But I felt vaguely flattered at the name of the immortal knight turning up in connection with my own folly, as some people would call it to my face. Alas! I don’t think there was anything to be proud of. Mine was not the stuff of protectors of forlorn damsels, the redressers of this world’s wrong are made of; and my tutor was the man to know that best. Therein, in his indignation, he was superior to the barber and the priest when he flung at me an honoured name like a reproach.

I walked behind him for full five minutes; then without looking back he stopped. The shadows of distant peaks were lengthening over the Furca Pass. When I came up to him he turned to me and in full view of the Finster Aarhorn, with his band of giant brothers rearing their monstrous heads against a brilliant sky, put his hand on my shoulder affectionately.

“Well! That’s enough. We will have no more of it.”

And indeed there was no more question of my mysterious vocation between us. There was to be no more question of it at all, no where or with any one. We began the descent of the Furca Pass conversing merrily.



Eleven years later, month for month, I stood on Tower Hill on the steps of the St. Katherine's Dockhouse, a master in the British Merchant Service. But the man who put his hand on my shoulder at the top of the Furca Pass was no longer living.

That very year of our travels he took his degree of the Philosophical Faculty — and only then his true vocation declared itself. Obedient to the call, he entered at once upon the four-year course of the Medical Schools. A day came when, on the deck of a ship moored in Calcutta, I opened a letter telling me of the end of an enviable existence. He had made for himself a practice in some obscure little town of Austrian Galicia. And the letter went on to tell me how all the bereaved poor of the district, Christians and Jews alike, had mobbed the good doctor's coffin with sobs and lamentations at the very gate of the cemetery.

How short his years and how clear his vision! What greater reward in ambition, honour, and conscience could he have hoped to win for himself when, on the top of the Furca Pass, he bade me look well to the end of my opening life?

### III

The devouring in a dismal forest of a luckless Lithuanian dog by my granduncle Nicholas B. in company of two other military and famished scarecrows, symbolized, to my childish imagination, the whole horror of the retreat from Moscow, and the immorality of a conqueror's ambition. An extreme distaste for that objectionable episode has tinged the views I hold as to the character and achievements of Napoleon the Great. I need not say that these are unfavourable. It was morally reprehensible for that great captain to induce a simple-minded Polish gentleman to eat dog by raising in his breast a false hope of national independence. It has been the fate of that credulous nation to starve for upward of a hundred years on a diet of false hopes and — well — dog. It is, when one thinks of it, a singularly poisonous regimen. Some pride in the national constitution which has survived a long course of such dishes is really excusable.

But enough of generalizing. Returning to particulars, Mr. Nicholas B. confided to his sister-in-law (my grandmother) in his misanthropically laconic manner that this supper in the woods had been nearly "the death of him." This is not surprising. What surprises me is that the story was ever heard of; for granduncle Nicholas differed in this from the generality of military men of Napoleon's time (and perhaps of all time) that he did not like to talk of his campaigns, which began at Friedland and ended some where in the neighbourhood of Bar-le-Duc. His admiration of the great Emperor was unreserved in everything but expression. Like the religion of earnest men, it was too profound a sentiment to be displayed before a world of little faith. Apart from that he seemed as completely devoid of military anecdotes as though he had hardly ever seen a soldier in his life. Proud of his decorations earned before he was twenty-five, he refused to wear the ribbons at the buttonhole in the manner practised to this day in Europe and even was unwilling to display the insignia on festive occasions, as though he wished to conceal them in the fear of appearing boastful.

"It is enough that I have them," he used to mutter. In the course of thirty years they were seen on his breast only twice — at an auspicious marriage in the family and at the funeral of an old friend. That the wedding which was thus honoured was not the wedding of my mother I learned only late in life, too late to bear a grudge against Mr. Nicholas B., who made amends at

my birth by a long letter of congratulation containing the following prophecy: "He will see better times." Even in his embittered heart there lived a hope. But he was not a true prophet.

He was a man of strange contradictions. Living for many years in his brother's house, the home of many children, a house full of life, of animation, noisy with a constant coming and going of many guests, he kept his habits of solitude and silence. Considered as obstinately secretive in all his purposes, he was in reality the victim of a most painful irresolution in all matters of civil life. Under his taciturn, phlegmatic behaviour was hidden a faculty of short-lived passionate anger. I suspect he had no talent for narrative; but it seemed to afford him sombre satisfaction to declare that he was the last man to ride over the bridge of the river Elster after the battle of Leipsic. Lest some construction favourable to his valour should be put on the fact he condescended to explain how it came to pass. It seems that shortly after the retreat began he was sent back to the town where some divisions of the French army (and among them the Polish corps of Prince Joseph Poniatowski), jammed hopelessly in the streets, were being simply exterminated by the troops of the Allied Powers. When asked what it was like in there, Mr. Nicholas B. muttered only the word "Shambles." Having delivered his message to the Prince he hastened away at once to render an account of his mission to the superior who had sent him. By that time the advance of the enemy had enveloped the town, and he was shot at from houses and chased all the way to the river-bank by a disorderly mob of Austrian Dragoons and Prussian Hussars. The bridge had been mined early in the morning, and his opinion was that the sight of the horsemen converging from many sides in the pursuit of his person alarmed the officer in command of the sappers and caused the premature firing of the charges. He had not gone more than two hundred yards on the other side when he heard the sound of the fatal explosions. Mr. Nicholas B. concluded his bald narrative with the word "Imbecile," uttered with the utmost deliberation. It testified to his indignation at the loss of so many thousands of lives. But his phlegmatic physiognomy lighted up when he spoke of his only wound, with something resembling satisfaction. You will see that there was some reason for it when you learn that he was wounded in the heel. "Like his Majesty the Emperor Napoleon himself," he reminded his hearers, with assumed indifference. There can be no doubt that the indifference was assumed, if one thinks what a very distinguished sort of wound it was. In all the history

of warfare there are, I believe, only three warriors publicly known to have been wounded in the heel — Achilles and Napoleon — demigods indeed — to whom the familial piety of an unworthy descendant adds the name of the simple mortal, Nicholas B.

The Hundred Days found Mr. Nicholas B. staying with a distant relative of ours, owner of a small estate in Galicia. How he got there across the breadth of an armed Europe, and after what adventures, I am afraid will never be known now. All his papers were destroyed shortly before his death; but if there was among them, as he affirmed, a concise record of his life, then I am pretty sure it did not take up more than a half sheet of foolscap or so. This relative of ours happened to be an Austrian officer who had left the service after the battle of Austerlitz. Unlike Mr. Nicholas B., who concealed his decorations, he liked to display his honourable discharge in which he was mentioned as *un schreckbar* (fearless) before the enemy. No conjunction could seem more unpromising, yet it stands in the family tradition that these two got on very well together in their rural solitude.

When asked whether he had not been sorely tempted during the Hundred Days to make his way again to France and join the service of his beloved Emperor, Mr. Nicholas B. used to mutter: “No money. No horse. Too far to walk.”

The fall of Napoleon and the ruin of national hopes affected adversely the character of Mr. Nicholas B. He shrank from returning to his province. But for that there was also another reason. Mr. Nicholas B. and his brother — my maternal grand father — had lost their father early, while they were quite children. Their mother, young still and left very well off, married again a man of great charm and of an amiable disposition, but without a penny. He turned out an affectionate and careful stepfather; it was unfortunate, though, that while directing the boys’ education and forming their character by wise counsel, he did his best to get hold of the fortune by buying and selling land in his own name and investing capital in such a manner as to cover up the traces of the real ownership. It seems that such practices can be successful if one is charming enough to dazzle one’s own wife permanently, and brave enough to defy the vain terrors of public opinion. The critical time came when the elder of the boys on attaining his majority, in the year 1811, asked for the accounts and some part at least of the inheritance to begin life upon. It was then that the stepfather declared with calm finality that there were no accounts to render and no property to

inherit. The whole fortune was his very own. He was very good-natured about the young man's misapprehension of the true state of affairs, but, of course, felt obliged to maintain his position firmly. Old friends came and went busily, voluntary mediators appeared travelling on most horrible roads from the most distant corners of the three provinces; and the Marshal of the Nobility (ex-officio guardian of all well-born orphans) called a meeting of landowners to "ascertain in a friendly way how the misunderstanding between X and his stepsons had arisen and devise proper measures to remove the same." A deputation to that effect visited X, who treated them to excellent wines, but absolutely refused his ear to their remonstrances. As to the proposals for arbitration he simply laughed at them; yet the whole province must have been aware that fourteen years before, when he married the widow, all his visible fortune consisted (apart from his social qualities) in a smart four-horse turnout with two servants, with whom he went about visiting from house to house; and as to any funds he might have possessed at that time their existence could only be inferred from the fact that he was very punctual in settling his modest losses at cards. But by the magic power of stubborn and constant assertion, there were found presently, here and there, people who mumbled that surely "there must be some thing in it." However, on his next name-day (which he used to celebrate by a great three days' shooting party), of all the invited crowd only two guests turned up, distant neighbours of no importance; one notoriously a fool, and the other a very pious and honest person, but such a passionate lover of the gun that on his own confession he could not have refused an invitation to a shooting party from the devil himself. X met this manifestation of public opinion with the serenity of an unstained conscience. He refused to be crushed. Yet he must have been a man of deep feeling, because, when his wife took openly the part of her children, he lost his beautiful tranquillity, proclaimed himself heartbroken, and drove her out of the house, neglecting in his grief to give her enough time to pack her trunks.

This was the beginning of a lawsuit, an abominable marvel of chicane, which by the use of every legal subterfuge was made to last for many years. It was also the occasion for a display of much kindness and sympathy. All the neighbouring houses flew open for the reception of the homeless. Neither legal aid nor material assistance in the prosecution of the suit was ever wanting. X, on his side, went about shedding tears publicly over his stepchildren's ingratitude and his wife's blind infatuation; but as at the same

time he displayed great cleverness in the art of concealing material documents (he was even suspected of having burned a lot of historically interesting family papers) this scandalous litigation had to be ended by a compromise lest worse should befall. It was settled finally by a surrender, out of the disputed estate, in full satisfaction of all claims, of two villages with the names of which I do not intend to trouble my readers. After this lame and impotent conclusion neither the wife nor the stepsons had anything to say to the man who had presented the world with such a successful example of self-help based on character, determination, and industry; and my great-grandmother, her health completely broken down, died a couple of years later in Carlsbad. Legally secured by a decree in the possession of his plunder, X regained his wonted serenity, and went on living in the neighbourhood in a comfortable style and in apparent peace of mind. His big shoots were fairly well attended again. He was never tired of assuring people that he bore no grudge for what was past; he protested loudly of his constant affection for his wife and stepchildren. It was true, he said, that they had tried to strip him as naked as a Turkish saint in the decline of his days; and because he had defended himself from spoliation, as anybody else in his place would have done, they had abandoned him now to the horrors of a solitary old age. Nevertheless, his love for them survived these cruel blows.

And there might have been some truth in his protestations. Very soon he began to make overtures of friendship to his eldest stepson, my maternal grandfather; and when these were peremptorily rejected he went on renewing them again and again with characteristic obstinacy. For years he persisted in his efforts at reconciliation, promising my grandfather to execute a will in his favour if he only would be friends again to the extent of calling now and then (it was fairly close neighbourhood for these parts, forty miles or so), or even of putting in an appearance for the great shoot on the name-day. My grandfather was an ardent lover of every sport. His temperament was as free from hardness and animosity as can be imagined. Pupil of the liberal-minded Benedictines who directed the only public school of some standing then in the south, he had also read deeply the authors of the eighteenth century. In him Christian charity was joined to a philosophical indulgence for the failings of human nature. But the memory of those miserably anxious early years, his young man's years robbed of all generous illusions by the cynicism of the sordid lawsuit, stood in the way of

forgiveness. He never succumbed to the fascination of the great shoot; and X, his heart set to the last on reconciliation, with the draft of the will ready for signature kept by his bedside, died intestate.

The fortune thus acquired and augmented by a wise and careful management passed to some distant relatives whom he had never seen and who even did not bear his name.

Meantime the blessing of general peace descended upon Europe. Mr. Nicholas B., bidding good-bye to his hospitable relative, the “fearless” Austrian officer, departed from Galicia, and without going near his native place, where the odious lawsuit was still going on, proceeded straight to Warsaw and entered the army of the newly constituted Polish kingdom under the sceptre of Alexander I, Autocrat of all the Russias.

This kingdom, created by the Vienna Congress as an acknowledgment to a nation of its former independent existence, included only the central provinces of the old Polish patrimony. A brother of the Emperor, the Grand Duke Constantine (Pavlovitch), its Viceroy and Commander-in-Chief, married morganatically to a Polish lady to whom he was fiercely attached, extended this affection to what he called “My Poles” in a capricious and savage manner. Sallow in complexion, with a Tartar physiognomy and fierce little eyes, he walked with his fists clenched, his body bent forward, darting suspicious glances from under an enormous cocked hat. His intelligence was limited, and his sanity itself was doubtful. The hereditary taint expressed itself, in his case, not by mystic leanings as in his two brothers, Alexander and Nicholas (in their various ways, for one was mystically liberal and the other mystically autocratic), but by the fury of an uncontrollable temper which generally broke out in disgusting abuse on the parade ground. He was a passionate militarist and an amazing drill-master. He treated his Polish army as a spoiled child treats a favourite toy, except that he did not take it to bed with him at night. It was not small enough for that. But he played with it all day and every day, delighting in the variety of pretty uniforms and in the fun of incessant drilling. This childish passion, not for war, but for mere militarism, achieved a desirable result. The Polish army, in its equipment, in its armament, and in its battle-field efficiency, as then understood, became, by the end of the year 1830, a first-rate tactical instrument. Polish peasantry (not serfs) served in the ranks by enlistment, and the officers belonged mainly to the smaller nobility. Mr. Nicholas B., with his Napoleonic record, had no difficulty in obtaining a lieutenancy, but

the promotion in the Polish army was slow, because, being a separate organization, it took no part in the wars of the Russian Empire against either Persia or Turkey. Its first campaign, against Russia itself, was to be its last. In 1831, on the outbreak of the Revolution, Mr. Nicholas B. was the senior captain of his regiment. Some time before he had been made head of the remount establishment quartered outside the kingdom in our southern provinces, whence almost all the horses for the Polish cavalry were drawn. For the first time since he went away from home at the age of eighteen to begin his military life by the battle of Friedland, Mr. Nicholas B. breathed the air of the "Border," his native air. Unkind fate was lying in wait for him among the scenes of his youth. At the first news of the rising in Warsaw all the remount establishment, officers, "vets.," and the very troopers, were put promptly under arrest and hurried off in a body beyond the Dnieper to the nearest town in Russia proper. From there they were dispersed to the distant parts of the empire. On this occasion poor Mr. Nicholas B. penetrated into Russia much farther than he ever did in the times of Napoleonic invasion, if much less willingly. Astrakan was his destination. He remained there three years, allowed to live at large in the town, but having to report himself every day at noon to the military commandant, who used to detain him frequently for a pipe and a chat. It is difficult to form a just idea of what a chat with Mr. Nicholas B. could have been like. There must have been much compressed rage under his taciturnity, for the commandant communicated to him the news from the theatre of war, and this news was such as it could be — that is, very bad for the Poles. Mr. Nicholas B. received these communications with outward phlegm, but the Russian showed a warm sympathy for his prisoner. "As a soldier myself I understand your feelings. You, of course, would like to be in the thick of it. By heavens! I am fond of you. If it were not for the terms of the military oath I would let you go on my own responsibility. What difference could it make to us, one more or less of you?"

At other times he wondered with simplicity.

"Tell me, Nicholas Stepanovitch" (my great-grandfather's name was Stephen, and the commandant used the Russian form of polite address) — "tell me why is it that you Poles are always looking for trouble? What else could you expect from running up against Russia?"

He was capable, too, of philosophical reflections.



“Look at your Napoleon now. A great man. There is no denying it that he was a great man as long as he was content to thrash those Germans and Austrians and all those nations. But no! He must go to Russia looking for trouble, and what’s the consequence? Such as you see me; I have rattled this sabre of mine on the pavements of Paris.”

After his return to Poland Mr. Nicholas B. described him as a “worthy man but stupid,” whenever he could be induced to speak of the conditions of his exile. Declining the option offered him to enter the Russian army, he was retired with only half the pension of his rank. His nephew (my uncle and guardian) told me that the first lasting impression on his memory as a child of four was the glad excitement reigning in his parents’ house on the day when Mr. Nicholas B. arrived home from his detention in Russia.

Every generation has its memories. The first memories of Mr. Nicholas B. might have been shaped by the events of the last partition of Poland, and he lived long enough to suffer from the last armed rising in 1863, an event which affected the future of all my generation and has coloured my earliest impressions. His brother, in whose house he had sheltered for some seventeen years his misanthropical timidity before the commonest problems of life, having died in the early fifties, Mr. Nicholas B. had to screw his courage up to the sticking-point and come to some decision as to the future. After a long and agonizing hesitation he was persuaded at last to become the tenant of some fifteen hundred acres out of the estate of a friend in the neighbourhood.

The terms of the lease were very advantageous, but the retired situation of the village and a plain, comfortable house in good repair were, I fancy, the greatest inducements. He lived there quietly for about ten years, seeing very few people and taking no part in the public life of the province, such as it could be under an arbitrary bureaucratic tyranny. His character and his patriotism were above suspicion; but the organizers of the rising in their frequent journeys up and down the province scrupulously avoided coming near his house. It was generally felt that the repose of the old man’s last years ought not to be disturbed. Even such intimates as my paternal grandfather, comrade-in-arms during Napoleon’s Moscow campaign, and later on a fellow officer in the Polish army, refrained from visiting his crony as the date of the outbreak approached. My paternal grandfather’s two sons and his only daughter were all deeply involved in the revolutionary work; he himself was of that type of Polish squire whose only ideal of patriotic

action was to “get into the saddle and drive them out.” But even he agreed that “dear Nicholas must not be worried.” All this considerate caution on the part of friends, both conspirators and others, did not prevent Mr. Nicholas B. being made to feel the misfortunes of that ill-omened year.

Less than forty-eight hours after the beginning of the rebellion in that part of the country, a squadron of scouting Cossacks passed through the village and invaded the homestead. Most of them remained, formed between the house and the stables, while several, dismounting, ransacked the various outbuildings. The officer in command, accompanied by two men, walked up to the front door. All the blinds on that side were down. The officer told the servant who received him that he wanted to see his master. He was answered that the master was away from home, which was perfectly true.

I follow here the tale as told afterward by the servant to my granduncle’s friends and relatives, and as I have heard it repeated.

On receiving this answer the Cossack officer, who had been standing in the porch, stepped into the house.

“Where is the master gone, then?”

“Our master went to J — — ” (the government town some fifty miles off) “the day before yesterday.”

“There are only two horses in the stables. Where are the others?”

“Our master always travels with his own horses” (meaning: not by post). “He will be away a week or more. He was pleased to mention to me that he had to attend to some business in the Civil Court.”

While the servant was speaking the officer looked about the hall.

There was a door facing him, a door to the right, and a door to the left. The officer chose to enter the room on the left, and ordered the blinds to be pulled up. It was Mr. Nicholas B.’s study, with a couple of tall bookcases, some pictures on the walls, and so on. Besides the big centre-table, with books and papers, there was a quite small writing-table, with several drawers, standing between the door and the window in a good light; and at this table my granduncle usually sat either to read or write.

On pulling up the blind the servant was startled by the discovery that the whole male population of the village was massed in front, trampling down the flower-beds. There were also a few women among them. He was glad to observe the village priest (of the Orthodox Church) coming up the drive.

The good man in his haste had tucked up his cassock as high as the top of his boots.

The officer had been looking at the backs of the books in the bookcases. Then he perched himself on the edge of the centre table and remarked easily:

“Your master did not take you to town with him, then?”

“I am the head servant, and he leaves me in charge of the house. It’s a strong, young chap that travels with our master. If — God forbid — there was some accident on the road, he would be of much more use than I.”

Glancing through the window, he saw the priest arguing vehemently in the thick of the crowd, which seemed subdued by his interference. Three or four men, however, were talking with the Cossacks at the door.

“And you don’t think your master has gone to join the rebels maybe — eh?” asked the officer.

“Our master would be too old for that, surely. He’s well over seventy, and he’s getting feeble, too. It’s some years now since he’s been on horseback, and he can’t walk much, either, now.”

The officer sat there swinging his leg, very quiet and indifferent. By that time the peasants who had been talking with the Cossack troopers at the door had been permitted to get into the hall. One or two more left the crowd and followed them in. They were seven in all, and among them the blacksmith, an ex-soldier. The servant appealed deferentially to the officer.

“Won’t your honour be pleased to tell the people to go back to their homes? What do they want to push themselves into the house like this for? It’s not proper for them to behave like this while our master’s away and I am responsible for everything here.”

The officer only laughed a little, and after a while inquired:

“Have you any arms in the house?”

“Yes. We have. Some old things.”

“Bring them all here, onto this table.”

The servant made another attempt to obtain protection.

“Won’t your honour tell these chaps. . . ?”

But the officer looked at him in silence, in such a way that he gave it up at once and hurried off to call the pantry-boy to help him collect the arms. Meantime, the officer walked slowly through all the rooms in the house, examining them attentively but touching nothing. The peasants in the hall fell back and took off their caps when he passed through. He said nothing

whatever to them. When he came back to the study all the arms to be found in the house were lying on the table. There was a pair of big, flint-lock holster pistols from Napoleonic times, two cavalry swords, one of the French, the other of the Polish army pattern, with a fowling-piece or two.

The officer, opening the window, flung out pistols, swords, and guns, one after another, and his troopers ran to pick them up. The peasants in the hall, encouraged by his manner, had stolen after him into the study. He gave not the slightest sign of being conscious of their existence, and, his business being apparently concluded, strode out of the house without a word. Directly he left, the peasants in the study put on their caps and began to smile at each other.

The Cossacks rode away, passing through the yards of the home farm straight into the fields. The priest, still arguing with the peasants, moved gradually down the drive and his earnest eloquence was drawing the silent mob after him, away from the house. This justice must be rendered to the parish priests of the Greek Church that, strangers to the country as they were (being all drawn from the interior of Russia), the majority of them used such influence as they had over their flocks in the cause of peace and humanity. True to the spirit of their calling, they tried to soothe the passions of the excited peasantry, and opposed rapine and violence, whenever they could, with all their might. And this conduct they pursued against the express wishes of the authorities. Later on some of them were made to suffer for this disobedience by being removed abruptly to the far north or sent away to Siberian parishes.

The servant was anxious to get rid of the few peasants who had got into the house. What sort of conduct was that, he asked them, toward a man who was only a tenant, had been invariably good and considerate to the villagers for years, and only the other day had agreed to give up two meadows for the use of the village herd? He reminded them, too, of Mr. Nicholas B.'s devotion to the sick in time of cholera. Every word of this was true, and so far effective that the fellows began to scratch their heads and look irresolute. The speaker then pointed at the window, exclaiming: "Look! there's all your crowd going away quietly, and you silly chaps had better go after them and pray God to forgive you your evil thoughts."

This appeal was an unlucky inspiration.

In crowding clumsily to the window to see whether he was speaking the truth, the fellows overturned the little writing-table. As it fell over a chink

of loose coin was heard. "There's money in that thing," cried the blacksmith. In a moment the top of the delicate piece of furniture was smashed and there lay exposed in a drawer eighty half imperials. Gold coin was a rare sight in Russia even at that time; it put the peasants beside themselves. "There must be more of that in the house, and we shall have it," yelled the ex-soldier blacksmith. "This is war-time." The others were already shouting out of the window, urging the crowd to come back and help. The priest, abandoned suddenly at the gate, flung his arms up and hurried away so as not to see what was going to happen.

In their search for money that bucolic mob smashed everything in the house, ripping with knives, splitting with hatchets, so that, as the servant said, there were no two pieces of wood holding together left in the whole house. They broke some very fine mirrors, all the windows, and every piece of glass and china. They threw the books and papers out on the lawn and set fire to the heap for the mere fun of the thing, apparently. Absolutely the only one solitary thing which they left whole was a small ivory crucifix, which remained hanging on the wall in the wrecked bedroom above a wild heap of rags, broken mahogany, and splintered boards which had been Mr. Nicholas B.'s bedstead. Detecting the servant in the act of stealing away with a japanned tin box, they tore it from him, and because he resisted they threw him out of the dining-room window. The house was on one floor, but raised well above the ground, and the fall was so serious that the man remained lying stunned till the cook and a stable-boy ventured forth at dusk from their hiding-places and picked him up. But by that time the mob had departed, carrying off the tin box, which they supposed to be full of paper money. Some distance from the house, in the middle of a field, they broke it open. They found in side documents engrossed on parchment and the two crosses of the Legion of Honour and For Valour. At the sight of these objects, which, the blacksmith explained, were marks of honour given only by the Tsar, they became extremely frightened at what they had done. They threw the whole lot away into a ditch and dispersed hastily.

On learning of this particular loss Mr. Nicholas B. broke down completely. The mere sacking of his house did not seem to affect him much. While he was still in bed from the shock, the two crosses were found and returned to him. It helped somewhat his slow convalescence, but the tin box and the parchments, though searched for in all the ditches around, never turned up again. He could not get over the loss of his Legion of Honour

Patent, whose preamble, setting forth his services, he knew by heart to the very letter, and after this blow volunteered sometimes to recite, tears standing in his eyes the while. Its terms haunted him apparently during the last two years of his life to such an extent that he used to repeat them to himself. This is confirmed by the remark made more than once by his old servant to the more intimate friends. "What makes my heart heavy is to hear our master in his room at night walking up and down and praying aloud in the French language."

It must have been somewhat over a year afterward that I saw Mr. Nicholas B. — or, more correctly, that he saw me — for the last time. It was, as I have already said, at the time when my mother had a three months' leave from exile, which she was spending in the house of her brother, and friends and relations were coming from far and near to do her honour. It is inconceivable that Mr. Nicholas B. should not have been of the number. The little child a few months old he had taken up in his arms on the day of his home-coming, after years of war and exile, was confessing her faith in national salvation by suffering exile in her turn. I do not know whether he was present on the very day of our departure.

I have already admitted that for me he is more especially the man who in his youth had eaten roast dog in the depths of a gloomy forest of snow-loaded pines. My memory cannot place him in any remembered scene. A hooked nose, some sleek white hair, an unrelated evanescent impression of a meagre, slight, rigid figure militarily buttoned up to the throat, is all that now exists on earth of Mr. Nicholas B.; only this vague shadow pursued by the memory of his grandnephew, the last surviving human being, I suppose, of all those he had seen in the course of his taciturn life.

But I remember well the day of our departure back to exile. The elongated, bizarre, shabby travelling-carriage with four post-horses, standing before the long front of the house with its eight columns, four on each side of the broad flight of stairs. On the steps, groups of servants, a few relations, one or two friends from the nearest neighbourhood, a perfect silence; on all the faces an air of sober concentration; my grandmother, all in black, gazing stoically; my uncle giving his arm to my mother down to the carriage in which I had been placed already; at the top of the flight my little cousin in a short skirt of a tartan pattern with a deal of red in it, and like a small princess attended by the women of her own household; the head gouvernante, our dear, corpulent Francesca (who had been for thirty years

in the service of the B. family), the former nurse, now outdoor attendant, a handsome peasant face wearing a compassionate expression, and the good, ugly Mlle. Durand, the governess, with her black eyebrows meeting over a short, thick nose, and a complexion like pale-brown paper. Of all the eyes turned toward the carriage, her good-natured eyes only were dropping tears, and it was her sobbing voice alone that broke the silence with an appeal to me: "*N'oublie pas ton francais, mon cheri.*" In three months, simply by playing with us, she had taught me not only to speak French, but to read it as well. She was indeed an excellent playmate. In the distance, half-way down to the great gates, a light, open trap, harnessed with three horses in Russian fashion, stood drawn up on one side, with the police captain of the district sitting in it, the vizor of his flat cap with a red band pulled down over his eyes.

It seems strange that he should have been there to watch our going so carefully. Without wishing to treat with levity the just timidities of Imperialists all the world over, I may allow myself the reflection that a woman, practically condemned by the doctors, and a small boy not quite six years old, could not be regarded as seriously dangerous, even for the largest of conceivable empires saddled with the most sacred of responsibilities. And this good man I believe did not think so, either.

I learned afterward why he was present on that day. I don't remember any outward signs; but it seems that, about a month before, my mother became so unwell that there was a doubt whether she could be made fit to travel in the time. In this uncertainty the Governor-General in Kiev was petitioned to grant her a fortnight's extension of stay in her brother's house. No answer whatever was returned to this prayer, but one day at dusk the police captain of the district drove up to the house and told my uncle's valet, who ran out to meet him, that he wanted to speak with the master in private, at once. Very much impressed (he thought it was going to be an arrest), the servant, "more dead than alive with fright," as he related afterward, smuggled him through the big drawing-room, which was dark (that room was not lighted every evening), on tiptoe, so as not to attract the attention of the ladies in the house, and led him by way of the orangery to my uncle's private apartments.

The policeman, without any preliminaries, thrust a paper into my uncle's hands.

“There. Pray read this. I have no business to show this paper to you. It is wrong of me. But I can’t either eat or sleep with such a job hanging over me.”

That police captain, a native of Great Russia, had been for many years serving in the district.

My uncle unfolded and read the document. It was a service order issued from the Governor-General’s secretariat, dealing with the matter of the petition and directing the police captain to disregard all remonstrances and explanations in regard to that illness either from medical men or others, “and if she has not left her brother’s house” — it went on to say — “on the morning of the day specified on her permit, you are to despatch her at once under escort, direct” (underlined) “to the prison-hospital in Kiev, where she will be treated as her case demands.”

“For God’s sake, Mr. B., see that your sister goes away punctually on that day. Don’t give me this work to do with a woman — and with one of your family, too. I simply cannot bear to think of it.”

He was absolutely wringing his hands. My uncle looked at him in silence.

“Thank you for this warning. I assure you that even if she were dying she would be carried out to the carriage.”

“Yes — indeed — and what difference would it make — travel to Kiev or back to her husband? For she would have to go — death or no death. And mind, Mr. B., I will be here on the day, not that I doubt your promise, but because I must. I have got to. Duty. All the same my trade is not fit for a dog since some of you Poles will persist in rebelling, and all of you have got to suffer for it.”

This is the reason why he was there in an open three-horse trap pulled up between the house and the great gates. I regret not being able to give up his name to the scorn of all believers in the right of conquest, as a reprehensibly sensitive guardian of Imperial greatness. On the other hand, I am in a position to state the name of the Governor-General who signed the order with the marginal note “to be carried out to the letter” in his own handwriting. The gentleman’s name was Bezak. A high dignitary, an energetic official, the idol for a time of the Russian patriotic press.

Each generation has its memories.



## IV

It must not be supposed that, in setting forth the memories of this half-hour between the moment my uncle left my room till we met again at dinner, I am losing sight of "Almayer's Folly." Having confessed that my first novel was begun in idleness — a holiday task — I think I have also given the impression that it was a much-delayed book. It was never dismissed from my mind, even when the hope of ever finishing it was very faint. Many things came in its way: daily duties, new impressions, old memories. It was not the outcome of a need — the famous need of self-expression which artists find in their search for motives. The necessity which impelled me was a hidden, obscure necessity, a completely masked and unaccountable phenomenon. Or perhaps some idle and frivolous magician (there must be magicians in London) had cast a spell over me through his parlour window as I explored the maze of streets east and west in solitary leisurely walks without chart and compass. Till I began to write that novel I had written nothing but letters, and not very many of these. I never made a note of a fact, of an impression, or of an anecdote in my life. The conception of a planned book was entirely outside my mental range when I sat down to write; the ambition of being an author had never turned up among those gracious imaginary existences one creates fondly for oneself at times in the stillness and immobility of a day-dream: yet it stands clear as the sun at noonday that from the moment I had done blackening over the first manuscript page of "Almayer's Folly" (it contained about two hundred words and this proportion of words to a page has remained with me through the fifteen years of my writing life), from the moment I had, in the simplicity of my heart and the amazing ignorance of my mind, written that page the die was cast. Never had Rubicon been more blindly forded without invocation to the gods, without fear of men.

That morning I got up from my breakfast, pushing the chair back, and rang the bell violently, or perhaps I should say resolutely, or perhaps I should say eagerly — I do not know. But manifestly it must have been a special ring of the bell, a common sound made impressive, like the ringing of a bell for the raising of the curtain upon a new scene. It was an unusual thing for me to do. Generally, I dawdled over my breakfast and I seldom took the trouble to ring the bell for the table to be cleared away; but on that

morning, for some reason hidden in the general mysteriousness of the event, I did not dawdle. And yet I was not in a hurry. I pulled the cord casually, and while the faint tinkling somewhere down in the basement went on, I charged my pipe in the usual way and I looked for the match-box with glances distraught indeed, but exhibiting, I am ready to swear, no signs of a fine frenzy. I was composed enough to perceive after some considerable time the match-box lying there on the mantelpiece right under my nose. And all this was beautifully and safely usual. Before I had thrown down the match my landlady's daughter appeared with her calm, pale face and an inquisitive look, in the doorway. Of late it was the landlady's daughter who answered my bell. I mention this little fact with pride, because it proves that during the thirty or forty days of my tenancy I had produced a favourable impression. For a fortnight past I had been spared the unattractive sight of the domestic slave. The girls in that Bessborough Gardens house were often changed, but whether short or long, fair or dark, they were always untidy and particularly bedraggled, as if in a sordid version of the fairy tale the ash-bin cat had been changed into a maid. I was infinitely sensible of the privilege of being waited on by my landlady's daughter. She was neat if anemic.

"Will you please clear away all this at once?" I addressed her in convulsive accents, being at the same time engaged in getting my pipe to draw. This, I admit, was an unusual request. Generally, on getting up from breakfast I would sit down in the window with a book and let them clear the table when they liked; but if you think that on that morning I was in the least impatient, you are mistaken. I remember that I was perfectly calm. As a matter of fact I was not at all certain that I wanted to write, or that I meant to write, or that I had anything to write about. No, I was not impatient. I lounged between the mantelpiece and the window, not even consciously waiting for the table to be cleared. It was ten to one that before my landlady's daughter was done I would pick up a book and sit down with it all the morning in a spirit of enjoyable indolence. I affirm it with assurance, and I don't even know now what were the books then lying about the room. What ever they were, they were not the works of great masters, where the secret of clear thought and exact expression can be found. Since the age of five I have been a great reader, as is not perhaps wonderful in a child who was never aware of learning to read. At ten years of age I had read much of Victor Hugo and other romantics. I had read in Polish and in French,

history, voyages, novels; I knew “Gil Blas” and “Don Quixote” in abridged editions; I had read in early boyhood Polish poets and some French poets, but I cannot say what I read on the evening before I began to write myself. I believe it was a novel, and it is quite possible that it was one of Anthony Trollope’s novels. It is very likely. My acquaintance with him was then very recent. He is one of the English novelists whose works I read for the first time in English. With men of European reputation, with Dickens and Walter Scott and Thackeray, it was otherwise. My first introduction to English imaginative literature was “Nicholas Nickleby.” It is extraordinary how well Mrs. Nickleby could chatter disconnectedly in Polish and the sinister Ralph rage in that language. As to the Crummles family and the family of the learned Squeers it seemed as natural to them as their native speech. It was, I have no doubt, an excellent translation. This must have been in the year ‘70. But I really believe that I am wrong. That book was not my first introduction to English literature. My first acquaintance was (or were) the “Two Gentlemen of Verona,” and that in the very MS. of my father’s translation. It was during our exile in Russia, and it must have been less than a year after my mother’s death, because I remember myself in the black blouse with a white border of my heavy mourning. We were living together, quite alone, in a small house on the outskirts of the town of T — — . That afternoon, instead of going out to play in the large yard which we shared with our landlord, I had lingered in the room in which my father generally wrote. What emboldened me to clamber into his chair I am sure I don’t know, but a couple of hours afterward he discovered me kneeling in it with my elbows on the table and my head held in both hands over the MS. of loose pages. I was greatly confused, expecting to get into trouble. He stood in the doorway looking at me with some surprise, but the only thing he said after a moment of silence was:

“Read the page aloud.”

Luckily the page lying before me was not overblotted with erasures and corrections, and my father’s handwriting was otherwise extremely legible. When I got to the end he nodded, and I flew out-of-doors, thinking myself lucky to have escaped reproof for that piece of impulsive audacity. I have tried to discover since the reason for this mildness, and I imagine that all unknown to myself I had earned, in my father’s mind, the right to some latitude in my relations with his writing-table. It was only a month before — or perhaps it was only a week before — that I had read to him aloud

from beginning to end, and to his perfect satisfaction, as he lay on his bed, not being very well at the time, the proofs of his translation of Victor Hugo's "Toilers of the Sea." Such was my title to consideration, I believe, and also my first introduction to the sea in literature.

If I do not remember where, how, and when I learned to read, I am not likely to forget the process of being trained in the art of reading aloud. My poor father, an admirable reader himself, was the most exacting of masters. I reflect proudly that I must have read that page of "Two Gentlemen of Verona" tolerably well at the age of eight. The next time I met them was in a 5s. one-volume edition of the dramatic works of William Shakespeare, read in Falmouth, at odd moments of the day, to the noisy accompaniment of calkers' mallets driving oakum into the deck-seams of a ship in dry-dock. We had run in, in a sinking condition and with the crew refusing duty after a month of weary battling with the gales of the North Atlantic. Books are an integral part of one's life, and my Shakespearian associations are with that first year of our bereavement, the last I spent with my father in exile (he sent me away to Poland to my mother's brother directly he could brace himself up for the separation), and with the year of hard gales, the year in which I came nearest to death at sea, first by water and then by fire.

Those things I remember, but what I was reading the day before my writing life began I have forgotten. I have only a vague notion that it might have been one of Trollope's political novels. And I remember, too, the character of the day. It was an autumn day with an opaline atmosphere, a veiled, semi-opaque, lustrous day, with fiery points and flashes of red sunlight on the roofs and windows opposite, while the trees of the square, with all their leaves gone, were like the tracings of India ink on a sheet of tissue-paper. It was one of those London days that have the charm of mysterious amenity, of fascinating softness. The effect of opaline mist was often repeated at Bessborough Gardens on account of the nearness to the river.

There is no reason why I should remember that effect more on that day than on any other day, except that I stood for a long time looking out of the window after the landlady's daughter was gone with her spoil of cups and saucers. I heard her put the tray down in the passage and finally shut the door; and still I remained smoking, with my back to the room. It is very clear that I was in no haste to take the plunge into my writing life, if as plunge this first attempt may be described. My whole being was steeped

deep in the indolence of a sailor away from the sea, the scene of never-ending labour and of unceasing duty. For utter surrender to in indolence you cannot beat a sailor ashore when that mood is on him — the mood of absolute irresponsibility tasted to the full. It seems to me that I thought of nothing whatever, but this is an impression which is hardly to be believed at this distance of years. What I am certain of is that I was very far from thinking of writing a story, though it is possible and even likely that I was thinking of the man Almayer.

I had seen him for the first time, some four years before, from the bridge of a steamer moored to a rickety little wharf forty miles up, more or less, a Bornean river. It was very early morning, and a slight mist — an opaline mist as in Bessborough Gardens, only without the fiery flicks on roof and chimney-pot from the rays of the red London sun — promised to turn presently into a woolly fog. Barring a small dug-out canoe on the river there was nothing moving within sight. I had just come up yawning from my cabin. The serang and the Malay crew were overhauling the cargo chains and trying the winches; their voices sounded subdued on the deck below, and their movements were languid. That tropical daybreak was chilly. The Malay quartermaster, coming up to get something from the lockers on the bridge, shivered visibly. The forests above and below and on the opposite bank looked black and dank; wet dripped from the rigging upon the tightly stretched deck awnings, and it was in the middle of a shuddering yawn that I caught sight of Almayer. He was moving across a patch of burned grass, a blurred, shadowy shape with the blurred bulk of a house behind him, a low house of mats, bamboos, and palm leaves, with a high-pitched roof of grass.

He stepped upon the jetty. He was clad simply in flapping pajamas of cretonne pattern (enormous flowers with yellow petals on a disagreeable blue ground) and a thin cotton singlet with short sleeves. His arms, bare to the elbow, were crossed on his chest. His black hair looked as if it had not been cut for a very long time, and a curly wisp of it strayed across his forehead. I had heard of him at Singapore; I had heard of him on board; I had heard of him early in the morning and late at night; I had heard of him at tiffin and at dinner; I had heard of him in a place called Pulo Laut from a half-caste gentleman there, who described himself as the manager of a coal-mine; which sounded civilized and progressive till you heard that the mine could not be worked at present because it was haunted by some particularly atrocious ghosts. I had heard of him in a place called Dongola, in the Island

of Celebes, when the Rajah of that little-known seaport (you can get no anchorage there in less than fifteen fathom, which is extremely inconvenient) came on board in a friendly way, with only two attendants, and drank bottle after bottle of soda-water on the after-sky light with my good friend and commander, Captain C — — . At least I heard his name distinctly pronounced several times in a lot of talk in Malay language. Oh, yes, I heard it quite distinctly — Almayer, Almayer — and saw Captain C — — smile, while the fat, dingy Rajah laughed audibly. To hear a Malay Rajah laugh outright is a rare experience, I can assure you. And I overheard more of Almayer's name among our deck passengers (mostly wandering traders of good repute) as they sat all over the ship — each man fenced round with bundles and boxes — on mats, on pillows, on quilts, on billets of wood, conversing of Island affairs. Upon my word, I heard the mutter of Almayer's name faintly at midnight, while making my way aft from the bridge to look at the patent taffrail-log tinkling its quarter miles in the great silence of the sea. I don't mean to say that our passengers dreamed aloud of Almayer, but it is indubitable that two of them at least, who could not sleep, apparently, and were trying to charm away the trouble of insomnia by a little whispered talk at that ghostly hour, were referring in some way or other to Almayer. It was really impossible on board that ship to get away definitely from Almayer; and a very small pony tied up forward and whisking its tail inside the galley, to the great embarrassment of our Chinaman cook, was destined for Almayer. What he wanted with a pony goodness only knows, since I am perfectly certain he could not ride it; but here you have the man, ambitious, aiming at the grandiose, importing a pony, whereas in the whole settlement at which he used to shake daily his impotent fist there was only one path that was practicable for a pony: a quarter of a mile at most, hedged in by hundreds of square leagues of virgin forest. But who knows? The importation of that Bali pony might have been part of some deep scheme, of some diplomatic plan, of some hopeful intrigue. With Almayer one could never tell. He governed his conduct by considerations removed from the obvious, by incredible assumptions, which rendered his logic impenetrable to any reasonable person. I learned all this later. That morning, seeing the figure in pajamas moving in the mist, I said to myself, "That's the man."

He came quite close to the ship's side and raised a harassed countenance, round and flat, with that curl of black hair over the forehead and a heavy,

pained glance.

“Good morning.”

“Good morning.”

He looked hard at me: I was a new face, having just replaced the chief mate he was accustomed to see; and I think that this novelty inspired him, as things generally did, with deep-seated mistrust.

“Didn’t expect you till this evening,” he remarked, suspiciously.

I didn’t know why he should have been aggrieved, but he seemed to be. I took pains to explain to him that, having picked up the beacon at the mouth of the river just before dark and the tide serving, Captain C — — was enabled to cross the bar and there was nothing to prevent him going up the river at night.

“Captain C — — knows this river like his own pocket,” I concluded, discursively, trying to get on terms.

“Better,” said Almayer.

Leaning over the rail of the bridge, I looked at Almayer, who looked down at the wharf in aggrieved thought. He shuffled his feet a little; he wore straw slippers with thick soles. The morning fog had thickened considerably. Everything round us dripped — the derricks, the rails, every single rope in the ship — as if a fit of crying had come upon the universe.

Almayer again raised his head and, in the accents of a man accustomed to the buffets of evil fortune, asked, hardly audibly:

“I suppose you haven’t got such a thing as a pony on board?”

I told him, almost in a whisper, for he attuned my communications to his minor key, that we had such a thing as a pony, and I hinted, as gently as I could, that he was confoundedly in the way, too. I was very anxious to have him landed before I began to handle the cargo. Almayer remained looking up at me for a long while, with incredulous and melancholy eyes, as though it were not a safe thing to believe in my statement. This pathetic mistrust in the favourable issue of any sort of affair touched me deeply, and I added:

“He doesn’t seem a bit the worse for the passage. He’s a nice pony, too.”

Almayer was not to be cheered up; for all answer he cleared his throat and looked down again at his feet. I tried to close with him on another tack.

“By Jove!” I said. “Aren’t you afraid of catching pneumonia or bronchitis or some thing, walking about in a singlet in such a wet fog?”

He was not to be propitiated by a show of interest in his health.

His answer was a sinister “No fear,” as much as to say that even that way of escape from inclement fortune was closed to him.

“I just came down . . .” he mumbled after a while.

“Well, then, now you’re here I will land that pony for you at once, and you can lead him home. I really don’t want him on deck. He’s in the way.”

Almayer seemed doubtful. I insisted:

“Why, I will just swing him out and land him on the wharf right in front of you. I’d much rather do it before the hatches are off. The little devil may jump down the hold or do some other deadly thing.”

“There’s a halter?” postulated Almayer.

“Yes, of course there’s a halter.” And without waiting any more I leaned over the bridge rail.

“Serang, land Tuan Almayer’s pony.”

The cook hastened to shut the door of the galley, and a moment later a great scuffle began on deck. The pony kicked with extreme energy, the kalashes skipped out of the way, the serang issued many orders in a cracked voice. Suddenly the pony leaped upon the fore-hatch. His little hoofs thundered tremendously; he plunged and reared. He had tossed his mane and his forelock into a state of amazing wildness, he dilated his nostrils, bits of foam flecked his broad little chest, his eyes blazed. He was something under eleven hands; he was fierce, terrible, angry, warlike; he said ha! ha! distinctly; he raged and thumped — and sixteen able-bodied kalashes stood round him like disconcerted nurses round a spoiled and passionate child. He whisked his tail incessantly; he arched his pretty neck; he was perfectly delightful; he was charmingly naughty. There was not an atom of vice in that performance; no savage baring of teeth and laying back of ears. On the contrary, he pricked them forward in a comically aggressive manner. He was totally unmoral and lovable; I would have liked to give him bread, sugar, carrots. But life is a stern thing and the sense of duty the only safe guide. So I steeled my heart, and from my elevated position on the bridge I ordered the men to fling themselves upon him in a body.

The elderly serang, emitting a strange, inarticulate cry, gave the example. He was an excellent petty officer — very competent, indeed, and a moderate opium-smoker. The rest of them in one great rush smothered that pony. They hung on to his ears, to his mane, to his tail; they lay in piles across his back, seventeen in all. The carpenter, seizing the hook of the cargo-chain, flung himself on the top of them. A very satisfactory petty



officer, too, but he stuttered. Have you ever heard a light-yellow, lean, sad, earnest Chinaman stutter in Pidgin-English? It's very weird, indeed. He made the eighteenth. I could not see the pony at all; but from the swaying and heaving of that heap of men I knew that there was something alive inside.

From the wharf Almayer hailed, in quavering tones:

"Oh, I say!"

Where he stood he could not see what was going on on deck, unless, perhaps, the tops of the men's heads; he could only hear the scuffle, the mighty thuds, as if the ship were being knocked to pieces. I looked over: "What is it?"

"Don't let them break his legs," he entreated me, plaintively.

"Oh, nonsense! He's all right now. He can't move."

By that time the cargo-chain had been hooked to the broad canvas belt round the pony's body; the kalashes sprang off simultaneously in all directions, rolling over each other; and the worthy serang, making a dash behind the winch, turned the steam on.

"Steady!" I yelled, in great apprehension of seeing the animal snatched up to the very head of the derrick.

On the wharf Almayer shuffled his straw slippers uneasily. The rattle of the winch stopped, and in a tense, impressive silence that pony began to swing across the deck.

How limp he was! Directly he felt himself in the air he relaxed every muscle in a most wonderful manner. His four hoofs knocked together in a bunch, his head hung down, and his tail remained pendent in a nerveless and absolute immobility. He reminded me vividly of the pathetic little sheep which hangs on the collar of the Order of the Golden Fleece. I had no idea that anything in the shape of a horse could be so limp as that, either living or dead. His wild mane hung down lumpily, a mere mass of inanimate horsehair; his aggressive ears had collapsed, but as he went swaying slowly across the front of the bridge I noticed an astute gleam in his dreamy, half-closed eye. A trustworthy quartermaster, his glance anxious and his mouth on the broad grin, was easing over the derrick watchfully. I superintended, greatly interested.

"So! That will do."

The derrick-head stopped. The kalashes lined the rail. The rope of the halter hung perpendicular and motionless like a bell-pull in front of

Almayer. Everything was very still. I suggested amicably that he should catch hold of the rope and mind what he was about. He extended a provokingly casual and superior hand.

“Look out, then! Lower away!”

Almayer gathered in the rope intelligently enough, but when the pony’s hoofs touched the wharf he gave way all at once to a most foolish optimism. Without pausing, without thinking, almost without looking, he disengaged the hook suddenly from the sling, and the cargo-chain, after hitting the pony’s quarters, swung back against the ship’s side with a noisy, rattling slap. I suppose I must have blinked. I know I missed something, because the next thing I saw was Almayer lying flat on his back on the jetty. He was alone.

Astonishment deprived me of speech long enough to give Almayer time to pick himself up in a leisurely and painful manner. The kalashes lining the rail all had their mouths open. The mist flew in the light breeze, and it had come over quite thick enough to hide the shore completely.

“How on earth did you manage to let him get away?” I asked, scandalized.

Almayer looked into the smarting palm of his right hand, but did not answer my inquiry.

“Where do you think he will get to?” I cried. “Are there any fences anywhere in this fog? Can he bolt into the forest? What’s to be done now?”

Almayer shrugged his shoulders.

“Some of my men are sure to be about. They will get hold of him sooner or later.”

“Sooner or later! That’s all very fine, but what about my canvas sling? — he’s carried it off. I want it now, at once, to land two Celebes cows.”

Since Dongola we had on board a pair of the pretty little island cattle in addition to the pony. Tied up on the other side of the fore-deck they had been whisking their tails into the other door of the galley. These cows were not for Almayer, however; they were invoiced to Abdullah bin Selim, his enemy. Almayer’s disregard of my requirements was complete.

“If I were you I would try to find out where he’s gone,” I insisted. “Hadn’t you better call your men together or something? He will throw himself down and cut his knees. He may even break a leg, you know.”

But Almayer, plunged in abstracted thought, did not seem to want that pony any more. Amazed at this sudden indifference, I turned all hands out

on shore to hunt for him on my own account, or, at any rate, to hunt for the canvas sling which he had round his body. The whole crew of the steamer, with the exception of firemen and engineers, rushed up the jetty, past the thoughtful Almayer, and vanished from my sight. The white fog swallowed them up; and again there was a deep silence that seemed to extend for miles up and down the stream. Still taciturn, Almayer started to climb on board, and I went down from the bridge to meet him on the after-deck.

“Would you mind telling the captain that I want to see him very particularly?” he asked me, in a low tone, letting his eyes stray all over the place.

“Very well. I will go and see.”

With the door of his cabin wide open, Captain C — — , just back from the bath-room, big and broad-chested, was brushing his thick, damp, iron-gray hair with two large brushes.

“Mr. Almayer told me he wanted to see you very particularly, sir.”

Saying these words, I smiled. I don’t know why I smiled, except that it seemed absolutely impossible to mention Almayer’s name without a smile of a sort. It had not to be necessarily a mirthful smile. Turning his head toward me, Captain C — — smiled, too, rather joylessly.

“The pony got away from him — eh?”

“Yes, sir. He did.”

“Where is he?”

“Goodness only knows.”

“No. I mean Almayer. Let him come along.”

The captain’s stateroom opening straight on deck under the bridge, I had only to beckon from the doorway to Almayer, who had remained aft, with downcast eyes, on the very spot where I had left him. He strolled up moodily, shook hands, and at once asked permission to shut the cabin door.

“I have a pretty story to tell you,” were the last words I heard.

The bitterness of tone was remarkable.

I went away from the door, of course. For the moment I had no crew on board; only the Chinaman carpenter, with a canvas bag hung round his neck and a hammer in his hand, roamed about the empty decks, knocking out the wedges of the hatches and dropping them into the bag conscientiously. Having nothing to do I joined our two engineers at the door of the engine-room. It was near breakfast-time.

“He’s turned up early, hasn’t he?” commented the second engineer, and smiled indifferently. He was an abstemious man, with a good digestion and a placid, reasonable view of life even when hungry.

“Yes,” I said. “Shut up with the old man. Some very particular business.”

“He will spin him a damned endless yarn,” observed the chief engineer.

He smiled rather sourly. He was dyspeptic, and suffered from gnawing hunger in the morning. The second smiled broadly, a smile that made two vertical folds on his shaven cheeks. And I smiled, too, but I was not exactly amused. In that man, whose name apparently could not be uttered anywhere in the Malay Archipelago without a smile, there was nothing amusing whatever. That morning he breakfasted with us silently, looking mostly into his cup. I informed him that my men came upon his pony capering in the fog on the very brink of the eight-foot-deep well in which he kept his store of guttah. The cover was off, with no one near by, and the whole of my crew just missed going heels over head into that beastly hole. Jurumudi Itam, our best quartermaster, deft at fine needlework, he who mended the ship’s flags and sewed buttons on our coats, was disabled by a kick on the shoulder.

Both remorse and gratitude seemed foreign to Almayer’s character.

He mumbled:

“Do you mean that pirate fellow?”

“What pirate fellow? The man has been in the ship eleven years,” I said, indignantly.

“It’s his looks,” Almayer muttered, for all apology.

The sun had eaten up the fog. From where we sat under the after-awning we could see in the distance the pony tied up, in front of Almayer’s house, to a post of the veranda. We were silent for a long time. All at once Almayer, alluding evidently to the subject of his conversation in the captain’s cabin, exclaimed anxiously across the table:

“I really don’t know what I can do now!”

Captain C — — only raised his eyebrows at him, and got up from his chair. We dispersed to our duties, but Almayer, half dressed as he was in his cretonne pajamas and the thin cotton singlet, remained on board, lingering near the gangway, as though he could not make up his mind whether to go home or stay with us for good.

Our Chinamen boys gave him side glances as they went to and fro; and Ah Sing, our chief steward, the handsomest and most sympathetic of

Chinamen, catching my eye, nodded knowingly at his burly back. In the course of the morning I approached him for a moment.

“Well, Mr. Almayer,” I addressed him, easily, “you haven’t started on your letters yet.”

We had brought him his mail, and he had held the bundle in his hand ever since we got up from breakfast. He glanced at it when I spoke, and for a moment it looked as if he were on the point of opening his fingers and letting the whole lot fall overboard. I believe he was tempted to do so. I shall never forget that man afraid of his letters.

“Have you been long out from Europe?” he asked me.

“Not very. Not quite eight months,” I told him. “I left a ship in Samarang with a hurt back, and have been in the hospital in Singapore some weeks.”

He sighed.

“Trade is very bad here.”

“Indeed!”

“Hopeless! . . . See these geese?”

With the hand holding the letters he pointed out to me what resembled a patch of snow creeping and swaying across the distant part of his compound. It disappeared behind some bushes.

“The only geese on the East Coast,” Almayer informed me, in a perfunctory mutter without a spark of faith, hope, or pride. Thereupon, with the same absence of any sort of sustaining spirit, he declared his intention to select a fat bird and send him on board for us not later than next day.

I had heard of these largesses before. He conferred a goose as if it were a sort of court decoration given only to the tried friends of the house. I had expected more pomp in the ceremony. The gift had surely its special quality, multiple and rare. From the only flock on the East Coast! He did not make half enough of it. That man did not understand his opportunities. However, I thanked him at some length.

“You see,” he interrupted, abruptly, in a very peculiar tone, “the worst of this country is that one is not able to realize . . . it’s impossible to realize. . . .” His voice sank into a languid mutter. “And when one has very large interests . . . very important interests . . .” he finished, faintly . . . “up the river.”

We looked at each other. He astonished me by giving a start and making a very queer grimace.

“Well, I must be off,” he burst out, hurriedly. “So long!”

At the moment of stepping over the gang way he checked himself, though, to give me a mumbled invitation to dine at his house that evening with my captain, an invitation which I accepted. I don't think it could have been possible for me to refuse.

I like the worthy folk who will talk to you of the exercise of free-will, "at any rate for practical purposes." Free, is it? For practical purposes! Bosh! How could I have refused to dine with that man? I did not refuse, simply because I could not refuse. Curiosity, a healthy desire for a change of cooking, common civility, the talk and the smiles of the previous twenty days, every condition of my existence at that moment and place made irresistibly for acceptance; and, crowning all that, there was the ignorance — the ignorance, I say — the fatal want of fore knowledge to counterbalance these imperative conditions of the problem. A refusal would have appeared perverse and insane. Nobody, unless a surly lunatic, would have refused. But if I had not got to know Almayer pretty well it is almost certain there would never have been a line of mine in print.

I accepted then — and I am paying yet the price of my sanity. The possessor of the only flock of geese on the East Coast is responsible for the existence of some fourteen volumes, so far. The number of geese he had called into being under adverse climatic conditions was considerably more than fourteen. The tale of volumes will never overtake the counting of heads, I am safe to say; but my ambitions point not exactly that way, and whatever the pangs the toil of writing has cost me I have always thought kindly of Almayer.

I wonder, had he known anything of it, what his attitude would have been? This is something not to be discovered in this world.

But if we ever meet in the Elysian Fields — where I cannot depict him to myself otherwise than attended in the distance by his flock of geese (birds sacred to Jupiter) — and he addresses me in the stillness of that passionless region, neither light nor darkness, neither sound nor silence, and heaving endlessly with billowy mists from the impalpable multitudes of the swarming dead, I think I know what answer to make.

I would say, after listening courteously to the unvibrating tone of his measured remonstrances, which should not disturb, of course, the solemn eternity of stillness in the least — I would say something like this:

"It is true, Almayer, that in the world below I have converted your name to my own uses. But that is a very small larceny. What's in a name, O

Shade? If so much of your old mortal weakness clings to you yet as to make you feel aggrieved (it was the note of your earthly voice, Almayer), then, I entreat you, seek speech without delay with our sublime fellow-Shade — with him who, in his transient existence as a poet, commented upon the smell of the rose. He will comfort you. You came to me stripped of all prestige by men's queer smiles and the disrespectful chatter of every vagrant trader in the Islands. Your name was the common property of the winds; it, as it were, floated naked over the waters about the equator. I wrapped round its unhonoured form the royal mantle of the tropics, and have essayed to put into the hollow sound the very anguish of paternity — feats which you did not demand from me — but remember that all the toil and all the pain were mine. In your earthly life you haunted me, Almayer. Consider that this was taking a great liberty. Since you were always complaining of being lost to the world, you should remember that if I had not believed enough in your existence to let you haunt my rooms in Bessborough Gardens, you would have been much more lost. You affirm that had I been capable of looking at you with a more perfect detachment and a greater simplicity, I might have perceived better the inward marvellousness which, you insist, attended your career upon that tiny pin-point of light, hardly visible far, far below us, where both our graves lie. No doubt! But reflect, O complaining Shade! that this was not so much my fault as your crowning misfortune. I believed in you in the only way it was possible for me to believe. It was not worthy of your merits? So be it. But you were always an unlucky man, Almayer. Nothing was ever quite worthy of you. What made you so real to me was that you held this lofty theory with some force of conviction and with an admirable consistency."

It is with some such words translated into the proper shadowy expressions that I am prepared to placate Almayer in the Elysian Abode of Shades, since it has come to pass that, having parted many years ago, we are never to meet again in this world.

## V

In the career of the most unliterary of writers, in the sense that literary ambition had never entered the world of his imagination, the coming into existence of the first book is quite an inexplicable event. In my own case I cannot trace it back to any mental or psychological cause which one could point out and hold to. The greatest of my gifts being a consummate capacity for doing nothing, I cannot even point to boredom as a rational stimulus for taking up a pen. The pen, at any rate, was there, and there is nothing wonderful in that. Everybody keeps a pen (the cold steel of our days) in his rooms, in this enlightened age of penny stamps and halfpenny post-cards. In fact, this was the epoch when by means of postcard and pen Mr. Gladstone had made the reputation of a novel or two. And I, too, had a pen rolling about somewhere — the seldom-used, the reluctantly taken-up pen of a sailor ashore, the pen rugged with the dried ink of abandoned attempts, of answers delayed longer than decency permitted, of letters begun with infinite reluctance, and put off suddenly till next day — till next week, as like as not! The neglected, uncared-for pen, flung away at the slightest provocation, and under the stress of dire necessity hunted for without enthusiasm, in a perfunctory, grumpy worry, in the “Where the devil is the beastly thing gone to?” ungracious spirit. Where, indeed! It might have been reposing behind the sofa for a day or so. My landlady’s anemic daughter (as Ollendorff would have expressed it), though commendably neat, had a lordly, careless manner of approaching her domestic duties. Or it might even be resting delicately poised on its point by the side of the table-leg, and when picked up show a gaping, inefficient beak which would have discouraged any man of literary instincts. But not me! “Never mind. This will do.”

O days without guile! If anybody had told me then that a devoted household, having a generally exaggerated idea of my talents and importance, would be put into a state of tremor and flurry by the fuss I would make because of a suspicion that somebody had touched my sacrosanct pen of authorship, I would have never deigned as much as the contemptuous smile of unbelief. There are imaginings too unlikely for any kind of notice, too wild for indulgence itself, too absurd for a smile. Perhaps, had that seer of the future been a friend, I should have been



secretly saddened. “Alas!” I would have thought, looking at him with an unmoved face, “the poor fellow is going mad.”

I would have been, without doubt, saddened; for in this world where the journalists read the signs of the sky, and the wind of heaven itself, blowing where it listeth, does so under the prophetic management of the meteorological office, but where the secret of human hearts cannot be captured by prying or praying, it was infinitely more likely that the sanest of my friends should nurse the germ of incipient madness than that I should turn into a writer of tales.

To survey with wonder the changes of one’s own self is a fascinating pursuit for idle hours. The field is so wide, the surprises so varied, the subject so full of unprofitable but curious hints as to the work of unseen forces, that one does not weary easily of it. I am not speaking here of megalomaniacs who rest uneasy under the crown of their unbounded conceit — who really never rest in this world, and when out of it go on fretting and fuming on the straitened circumstances of their last habitation, where all men must lie in obscure equality. Neither am I thinking of those ambitious minds who, always looking forward to some aim of aggrandizement, can spare no time for a detached, impersonal glance upon them selves.

And that’s a pity. They are unlucky. These two kinds, together with the much larger band of the totally unimaginative, of those unfortunate beings in whose empty and unseeing gaze (as a great French writer has put it) “the whole universe vanishes into blank nothingness,” miss, perhaps, the true task of us men whose day is short on this earth, the abode of conflicting opinions. The ethical view of the universe involves us at last in so many cruel and absurd contradictions, where the last vestiges of faith, hope, charity, and even of reason itself, seem ready to perish, that I have come to suspect that the aim of creation cannot be ethical at all. I would fondly believe that its object is purely spectacular: a spectacle for awe, love, adoration, or hate, if you like, but in this view — and in this view alone — never for despair! Those visions, delicious or poignant, are a moral end in themselves. The rest is our affair — the laughter, the tears, the tenderness, the indignation, the high tranquillity of a steeled heart, the detached curiosity of a subtle mind — that’s our affair! And the unwearied self-forgetful attention to every phase of the living universe reflected in our consciousness may be our appointed task on this earth — a task in which

fate has perhaps engaged nothing of us except our conscience, gifted with a voice in order to bear true testimony to the visible wonder, the haunting terror, the infinite passion, and the illimitable serenity; to the supreme law and the abiding mystery of the sublime spectacle.

Chi lo sa? It may be true. In this view there is room for every religion except for the inverted creed of impiety, the mask and cloak of arid despair; for every joy and every sorrow, for every fair dream, for every charitable hope. The great aim is to remain true to the emotions called out of the deep encircled by the firmament of stars, whose infinite numbers and awful distances may move us to laughter or tears (was it the Walrus or the Carpenter, in the poem, who “wept to see such quantities of sand”?), or, again, to a properly steeled heart, may matter nothing at all.

The casual quotation, which had suggested itself out of a poem full of merit, leads me to remark that in the conception of a purely spectacular universe, where inspiration of every sort has a rational existence, the artist of every kind finds a natural place; and among them the poet as the seer par excellence. Even the writer of prose, who in his less noble and more toilsome task should be a man with the steeled heart, is worthy of a place, providing he looks on with undimmed eyes and keeps laughter out of his voice, let who will laugh or cry. Yes! Even he, the prose artist of fiction, which after all is but truth often dragged out of a well and clothed in the painted robe of imagined phrases — even he has his place among kings, demagogues, priests, charlatans, dukes, giraffes, cabinet ministers, Fabians, bricklayers, apostles, ants, scientists, Kafirs, soldiers, sailors, elephants, lawyers, dandies, microbes, and constellations of a universe whose amazing spectacle is a moral end in itself.

Here I perceive (without speaking offense) the reader assuming a subtle expression, as if the cat were out of the bag. I take the novelist’s freedom to observe the reader’s mind formulating the exclamation: “That’s it! The fellow talks *pro domo*.”

Indeed it was not the intention! When I shouldered the bag I was not aware of the cat inside. But, after all, why not? The fair courtyards of the House of Art are thronged by many humble retainers. And there is no retainer so devoted as he who is allowed to sit on the doorstep. The fellows who have got inside are apt to think too much of themselves. This last remark, I beg to state, is not malicious within the definition of the law of libel. It’s fair comment on a matter of public interest. But never mind. *Pro*

*domo*. So be it. For his house *tant que vous voudrez*. And yet in truth I was by no means anxious to justify my existence. The attempt would have been not only needless and absurd, but almost inconceivable, in a purely spectacular universe, where no such disagreeable necessity can possibly arise. It is sufficient for me to say (and I am saying it at some length in these pages): *J'ai vecu*. I have existed, obscure among the wonders and terrors of my time, as the Abbe Sieyes, the original utterer of the quoted words, had managed to exist through the violences, the crimes, and the enthusiasms of the French Revolution. *J'ai vecu*, as I apprehend most of us manage to exist, missing all along the varied forms of destruction by a hair's-breadth, saving my body, that's clear, and perhaps my soul also, but not without some damage here and there to the fine edge of my conscience, that heirloom of the ages, of the race, of the group, of the family, colourable and plastic, fashioned by the words, the looks, the acts, and even by the silences and abstentions surrounding one's childhood; tinged in a complete scheme of delicate shades and crude colours by the inherited traditions, beliefs, or prejudices — unaccountable, despotic, persuasive, and often, in its texture, romantic.

And often romantic! . . . The matter in hand, however, is to keep these reminiscences from turning into confessions, a form of literary activity discredited by Jean Jacques Rousseau on account of the extreme thoroughness he brought to the work of justifying his own existence; for that such was his purpose is palpably, even grossly, visible to an unprejudiced eye. But then, you see, the man was not a writer of fiction. He was an artless moralist, as is clearly demonstrated by his anniversaries being celebrated with marked emphasis by the heirs of the French Revolution, which was not a political movement at all, but a great outburst of morality. He had no imagination, as the most casual perusal of "Emile" will prove. He was no novelist, whose first virtue is the exact understanding of the limits traced by the reality of his time to the play of his invention. Inspiration comes from the earth, which has a past, a history, a future, not from the cold and immutable heaven. A writer of imaginative prose (even more than any other sort of artist) stands confessed in his works. His conscience, his deeper sense of things, lawful and unlawful, gives him his attitude before the world. Indeed, everyone who puts pen to paper for the reading of strangers (unless a moralist, who, generally speaking, has no conscience except the one he is at pains to produce for the use of others)

can speak of nothing else. It is M. Anatole France, the most eloquent and just of French prose-writers, who says that we must recognize at last that, “failing the resolution to hold our peace, we can only talk of ourselves.”

This remark, if I remember rightly, was made in the course of a sparring match with the late Ferdinand Brunetiere over the principles and rules of literary criticism. As was fitting for a man to whom we owe the memorable saying, “The good critic is he who relates the adventures of his soul among masterpieces,” M. Anatole France maintained that there were no rules and no principles. And that may be very true. Rules, principles, and standards die and vanish every day. Perhaps they are all dead and vanished by this time. These, if ever, are the brave, free days of destroyed landmarks, while the ingenious minds are busy inventing the forms of the new beacons which, it is consoling to think, will be set up presently in the old places. But what is interesting to a writer is the possession of an inward certitude that literary criticism will never die, for man (so variously defined) is, before everything else, a critical animal. And as long as distinguished minds are ready to treat it in the spirit of high adventure literary criticism shall appeal to us with all the charm and wisdom of a well-told tale of personal experience.

For Englishmen especially, of all the races of the earth, a task, any task, undertaken in an adventurous spirit acquires the merit of romance. But the critics as a rule exhibit but little of an adventurous spirit. They take risks, of course — one can hardly live with out that. The daily bread is served out to us (however sparingly) with a pinch of salt. Otherwise one would get sick of the diet one prays for, and that would be not only improper, but impious. From impiety of that or any other kind — save us! An ideal of reserved manner, adhered to from a sense of proprieties, from shyness, perhaps, or caution, or simply from weariness, induces, I suspect, some writers of criticism to conceal the adventurous side of their calling, and then the criticism becomes a mere “notice,” as it were, the relation of a journey where nothing but the distances and the geology of a new country should be set down; the glimpses of strange beasts, the dangers of flood and field, the hairbreadth escapes, and the sufferings (oh, the sufferings, too! I have no doubt of the sufferings) of the traveller being carefully kept out; no shady spot, no fruitful plant being ever mentioned either; so that the whole performance looks like a mere feat of agility on the part of a trained pen running in a desert. A cruel spectacle — a most deplorable adventure!

“Life,” in the words of an immortal thinker of, I should say, bucolic origin, but whose perishable name is lost to the worship of posterity — “life is not all beer and skittles.” Neither is the writing of novels. It isn’t, really. Je vous donne ma parole d’honneur that it — is — not. Not *all*. I am thus emphatic because some years ago, I remember, the daughter of a general. . . .

Sudden revelations of the profane world must have come now and then to hermits in their cells, to the cloistered monks of middle ages, to lonely sages, men of science, reformers; the revelations of the world’s superficial judgment, shocking to the souls concentrated upon their own bitter labour in the cause of sanctity, or of knowledge, or of temperance, let us say, or of art, if only the art of cracking jokes or playing the flute. And thus this general’s daughter came to me — or I should say one of the general’s daughters did. There were three of these bachelor ladies, of nicely graduated ages, who held a neighbouring farm-house in a united and more or less military occupation. The eldest warred against the decay of manners in the village children, and executed frontal attacks upon the village mothers for the conquest of courtesies. It sounds futile, but it was really a war for an idea. The second skirmished and scouted all over the country; and it was that one who pushed a reconnaissance right to my very table — I mean the one who wore stand-up collars.

She was really calling upon my wife in the soft spirit of afternoon friendliness, but with her usual martial determination. She marched into my room swinging her stick . . . but no — I mustn’t exaggerate. It is not my specialty. I am not a humoristic writer. In all soberness, then, all I am certain of is that she had a stick to swing.

No ditch or wall encompassed my abode. The window was open; the door, too, stood open to that best friend of my work, the warm, still sunshine of the wide fields. They lay around me infinitely helpful, but, truth to say, I had not known for weeks whether the sun shone upon the earth and whether the stars above still moved on their appointed courses. I was just then giving up some days of my allotted span to the last chapters of the novel “Nostromo,” a tale of an imaginary (but true) seaboard, which is still mentioned now and again, and indeed kindly, sometimes in connection with the word “failure” and sometimes in conjunction with the word “astonishing.” I have no opinion on this discrepancy. It’s the sort of difference that can never be settled. All I know is that, for twenty months, neglecting the common joys of life that fall to the lot of the humblest on this

earth, I had, like the prophet of old, “wrestled with the Lord” for my creation, for the headlands of the coast, for the darkness of the Placid Gulf, the light on the snows, the clouds in the sky, and for the breath of life that had to be blown into the shapes of men and women, of Latin and Saxon, of Jew and Gentile. These are, perhaps, strong words, but it is difficult to characterize other wise the intimacy and the strain of a creative effort in which mind and will and conscience are engaged to the full, hour after hour, day after day, away from the world, and to the exclusion of all that makes life really lovable and gentle — something for which a material parallel can only be found in the everlasting sombre stress of the westward winter passage round Cape Horn. For that, too, is the wrestling of men with the might of their Creator, in a great isolation from the world, without the amenities and consolations of life, a lonely struggle under a sense of overmatched littleness, for no reward that could be adequate, but for the mere winning of a longitude. Yet a certain longitude, once won, cannot be disputed. The sun and the stars and the shape of your earth are the witnesses of your gain; whereas a handful of pages, no matter how much you have made them your own, are at best but an obscure and questionable spoil. Here they are. “Failure” — ”Astonishing”: take your choice; or perhaps both, or neither — a mere rustle and flutter of pieces of paper settling down in the night, and undistinguishable, like the snowflakes of a great drift destined to melt away in sunshine.

“How do you do?”

It was the greeting of the general’s daughter. I had heard nothing — no rustle, no footsteps. I had felt only a moment before a sort of premonition of evil; I had the sense of an inauspicious presence — just that much warning and no more; and then came the sound of the voice and the jar as of a terrible fall from a great height — a fall, let us say, from the highest of the clouds floating in gentle procession over the fields in the faint westerly air of that July afternoon. I picked myself up quickly, of course; in other words, I jumped up from my chair stunned and dazed, every nerve quivering with the pain of being uprooted out of one world and flung down into another — perfectly civil.

“Oh! How do you do? Won’t you sit down?”

That’s what I said. This horrible but, I assure you, perfectly true reminiscence tells you more than a whole volume of confessions à la Jean Jacques Rousseau would do. Observe! I didn’t howl at her, or start up

setting furniture, or throw myself on the floor and kick, or allow myself to hint in any other way at the appalling magnitude of the disaster. The whole world of Costaguana (the country, you may remember, of my seaboard tale), men, women, headlands, houses, mountains, town, campo (there was not a single brick, stone, or grain of sand of its soil I had not placed in position with my own hands); all the history, geography, politics, finance; the wealth of Charles Gould's silver-mine, and the splendour of the magnificent Capataz de Cargadores, whose name, cried out in the night (Dr. Monygham heard it pass over his head — in Linda Viola's voice), dominated even after death the dark gulf containing his conquests of treasure and love — all that had come down crashing about my ears.

I felt I could never pick up the pieces — and in that very moment I was saying, "Won't you sit down?"

The sea is strong medicine. Behold what the quarter-deck training even in a merchant ship will do! This episode should give you a new view of the English and Scots seamen (a much-caricatured folk) who had the last say in the formation of my character. One is nothing if not modest, but in this disaster I think I have done some honour to their simple teaching. "Won't you sit down?" Very fair; very fair, indeed. She sat down. Her amused glance strayed all over the room.

There were pages of MS. on the table and under the table, a batch of typed copy on a chair, single leaves had fluttered away into distant corners; there were there living pages, pages scored and wounded, dead pages that would be burned at the end of the day — the litter of a cruel battle-field, of a long, long, and desperate fray. Long! I suppose I went to bed sometimes, and got up the same number of times. Yes, I suppose I slept, and ate the food put before me, and talked connectedly to my household on suitable occasions. But I had never been aware of the even flow of daily life, made easy and noiseless for me by a silent, watchful, tireless affection. Indeed, it seemed to me that I had been sitting at that table surrounded by the litter of a desperate fray for days and nights on end. It seemed so, because of the intense weariness of which that interruption had made me aware — the awful disenchantment of a mind realizing suddenly the futility of an enormous task, joined to a bodily fatigue such as no ordinary amount of fairly heavy physical labour could ever account for. I have carried bags of wheat on my back, bent almost double under a ship's deck-beams, from six

in the morning till six in the evening (with an hour and a half off for meals), so I ought to know.

And I love letters. I am jealous of their honour and concerned for the dignity and comeliness of their service. I was, most likely, the only writer that neat lady had ever caught in the exercise of his craft, and it distressed me not to be able to remember when it was that I dressed myself last, and how. No doubt that would be all right in essentials. The fortune of the house included a pair of gray-blue watchful eyes that would see to that. But I felt, somehow, as grimy as a Costaguana lepero after a day's fighting in the streets, rumpled all over and dishevelled down to my very heels. And I am afraid I blinked stupidly. All this was bad for the honour of letters and the dignity of their service. Seen indistinctly through the dust of my collapsed universe, the good lady glanced about the room with a slightly amused serenity. And she was smiling. What on earth was she smiling at? She remarked casually:

“I am afraid I interrupted you.”

“Not at all.”

She accepted the denial in perfect good faith. And it was strictly true. Interrupted — indeed! She had robbed me of at least twenty lives, each infinitely more poignant and real than her own, because informed with passion, possessed of convictions, involved in great affairs created out of my own substance for an anxiously meditated end.

She remained silent for a while, then said, with a last glance all round at the litter of the fray:

“And you sit like this here writing your — your . . .”

“I — what? Oh, yes! I sit here all day.”

“It must be perfectly delightful.”

I suppose that, being no longer very young, I might have been on the verge of having a stroke; but she had left her dog in the porch, and my boy's dog, patrolling the field in front, had espied him from afar. He came on straight and swift like a cannon-ball, and the noise of the fight, which burst suddenly upon our ears, was more than enough to scare away a fit of apoplexy. We went out hastily and separated the gallant animals. Afterward I told the lady where she would find my wife — just round the corner, under the trees. She nodded and went off with her dog, leaving me appalled before the death and devastation she had lightly made — and with the awfully instructive sound of the word “delightful” lingering in my ears.



Nevertheless, later on, I duly escorted her to the field gate. I wanted to be civil, of course (what are twenty lives in a mere novel that one should be rude to a lady on their account?), but mainly, to adopt the good, sound Ollendorffian style, because I did not want the dog of the general's daughter to fight again (*encore*) with the faithful dog of my infant son (*mon petit garcon*). — Was I afraid that the dog of the general's daughter would be able to overcome (*vaincre*) the dog of my child? — No, I was not afraid. . . . But away with the Ollendorff method. How ever appropriate and seemingly unavoidable when I touch upon anything appertaining to the lady, it is most unsuitable to the origin, character, and history of the dog; for the dog was the gift to the child from a man for whom words had anything but an Ollendorffian value, a man almost childlike in the impulsive movements of his untutored genius, the most single-minded of verbal impressionists, using his great gifts of straight feeling and right expression with a fine sincerity and a strong if, perhaps, not fully conscious conviction. His art did not obtain, I fear, all the credit its unsophisticated inspiration deserved. I am alluding to the late Stephen Crane, the author of "The Red Badge of Courage," a work of imagination which found its short moment of celebrity in the last decade of the departed century. Other books followed. Not many. He had not the time. It was an individual and complete talent which obtained but a grudging, somewhat supercilious recognition from the world at large. For himself one hesitates to regret his early death. Like one of the men in his "Open Boat," one felt that he was of those whom fate seldom allows to make a safe landing after much toil and bitterness at the oar. I confess to an abiding affection for that energetic, slight, fragile, intensely living and transient figure. He liked me, even before we met, on the strength of a page or two of my writing, and after we had met I am glad to think he liked me still. He used to point out to me with great earnestness, and even with some severity, that "a boy *ought* to have a dog." I suspect that he was shocked at my neglect of parental duties.

Ultimately it was he who provided the dog. Shortly afterward, one day, after playing with the child on the rug for an hour or so with the most intense absorption, he raised his head and declared firmly, "I shall teach your boy to ride." That was not to be. He was not given the time.

But here is the dog — an old dog now. Broad and low on his bandy paws, with a black head on a white body and a ridiculous black spot at the other end of him, he provokes, when he walks abroad, smiles not altogether

unkind. Grotesque and engaging in the whole of his appearance, his usual attitudes are meek, but his temperament discloses itself unexpectedly pugnacious in the presence of his kind. As he lies in the firelight, his head well up, and a fixed, far away gaze directed at the shadows of the room, he achieves a striking nobility of pose in the calm consciousness of an unstained life. He has brought up one baby, and now, after seeing his first charge off to school, he is bringing up another with the same conscientious devotion, but with a more deliberate gravity of manner, the sign of greater wisdom and riper experience, but also of rheumatism, I fear. From the morning bath to the evening ceremonies of the cot, you attend the little two-legged creature of your adoption, being yourself treated in the exercise of your duties with every possible regard, with infinite consideration, by every person in the house — even as I myself am treated; only you deserve it more.

The general's daughter would tell you that it must be "perfectly delightful."

Aha! old dog. She never heard you yelp with acute pain (it's that poor left ear) the while, with incredible self-command, you preserve a rigid immobility for fear of overturning the little two-legged creature. She has never seen your resigned smile when the little two-legged creature, interrogated, sternly, "What are you doing to the good dog?" answers, with a wide, innocent stare: "Nothing. Only loving him, mamma dear!"

The general's daughter does not know the secret terms of self-imposed tasks, good dog, the pain that may lurk in the very rewards of rigid self-command. But we have lived together many years. We have grown older, too; and though our work is not quite done yet we may indulge now and then in a little introspection before the fire — meditate on the art of bringing up babies and on the perfect delight of writing tales where so many lives come and go at the cost of one which slips imperceptibly away.

## VI

In the retrospect of a life which had, besides its preliminary stage of childhood and early youth, two distinct developments, and even two distinct elements, such as earth and water, for its successive scenes, a certain amount of naiveness is unavoidable. I am conscious of it in these pages. This remark is put forward in no apologetic spirit. As years go by and the number of pages grows steadily, the feeling grows upon one, too, that one can write only for friends. Then why should one put them to the necessity of protesting (as a friend would do) that no apology is necessary, or put, perchance, into their heads the doubt of one's discretion? So much as to the care due to those friends whom a word here, a line there, a fortunate page of just feeling in the right place, some happy simplicity, or even some lucky subtlety, has drawn from the great multitude of fellow beings even as a fish is drawn from the depths of the sea. Fishing is notoriously (I am talking now of the deep sea) a matter of luck. As to one's enemies, they will take care of themselves.

There is a gentleman, for instance, who, metaphorically speaking, jumps upon me with both feet. This image has no grace, but it is exceedingly apt to the occasion — to the several occasions. I don't know precisely how long he has been indulging in that intermittent exercise, whose seasons are ruled by the custom of the publishing trade. Somebody pointed him out (in printed shape, of course) to my attention some time ago, and straightway I experienced a sort of reluctant affection for that robust man. He leaves not a shred of my substance untrodden: for the writer's substance is his writing; the rest of him is but a vain shadow, cherished or hated on uncritical grounds. Not a shred! Yet the sentiment owned to is not a freak of affectation or perversity. It has a deeper, and, I venture to think, a more estimable origin than the caprice of emotional lawlessness. It is, indeed, lawful, in so much that it is given (reluctantly) for a consideration, for several considerations. There is that robustness, for instance, so often the sign of good moral balance. That's a consideration. It is not, indeed, pleasant to be stamped upon, but the very thoroughness of the operation, implying not only a careful reading, but some real insight into work whose qualities and defects, whatever they may be, are not so much on the surface, is something to be thankful for in view of the fact that it may happen to

one's work to be condemned without being read at all. This is the most fatuous adventure that can well happen to a writer venturing his soul among criticisms. It can do one no harm, of course, but it is disagreeable. It is disagreeable in the same way as discovering a three-card-trick man among a decent lot of folk in a third-class compartment. The open impudence of the whole transaction, appealing insidiously to the folly and credulity of man kind, the brazen, shameless patter, proclaiming the fraud openly while insisting on the fairness of the game, give one a feeling of sickening disgust. The honest violence of a plain man playing a fair game fairly — even if he means to knock you over — may appear shocking, but it remains within the pale of decency. Damaging as it may be, it is in no sense offensive. One may well feel some regard for honesty, even if practised upon one's own vile body. But it is very obvious that an enemy of that sort will not be stayed by explanations or placated by apologies. Were I to advance the plea of youth in excuse of the naiveness to be found in these pages, he would be likely to say "Bosh!" in a column and a half of fierce print. Yet a writer is no older than his first published book, and, not withstanding the vain appearances of decay which attend us in this transitory life, I stand here with the wreath of only fifteen short summers on my brow.

With the remark, then, that at such tender age some naiveness of feeling and expression is excusable, I proceed to admit that, upon the whole, my previous state of existence was not a good equipment for a literary life. Perhaps I should not have used the word literary. That word presupposes an intimacy of acquaintance with letters, a turn of mind, and a manner of feeling to which I dare lay no claim. I only love letters; but the love of letters does not make a literary man, any more than the love of the sea makes a seaman. And it is very possible, too, that I love the letters in the same way a literary man may love the sea he looks at from the shore — a scene of great endeavour and of great achievements changing the face of the world, the great open way to all sorts of undiscovered countries. No, perhaps I had better say that the life at sea — and I don't mean a mere taste of it, but a good broad span of years, something that really counts as real service — is not, upon the whole, a good equipment for a writing life. God forbid, though, that I should be thought of as denying my masters of the quarter-deck. I am not capable of that sort of apostasy. I have confessed my attitude of piety toward their shades in three or four tales, and if any man on

earth more than another needs to be true to himself as he hopes to be saved, it is certainly the writer of fiction.

What I meant to say, simply, is that the quarter-deck training does not prepare one sufficiently for the reception of literary criticism. Only that, and no more. But this defect is not without gravity. If it be permissible to twist, invert, adapt (and spoil) Mr. Anatole France's definition of a good critic, then let us say that the good author is he who contemplates without marked joy or excessive sorrow the adventures of his soul among criticisms. Far be from me the intention to mislead an attentive public into the belief that there is no criticism at sea. That would be dishonest, and even impolite. Everything can be found at sea, according to the spirit of your quest — strife, peace, romance, naturalism of the most pronounced kind, ideals, boredom, disgust, inspiration — and every conceivable opportunity, including the opportunity to make a fool of yourself, exactly as in the pursuit of literature. But the quarter-deck criticism is somewhat different from literary criticism. This much they have in common, that before the one and the other the answering back, as a general rule, does not pay.

Yes, you find criticism at sea, and even appreciation — I tell you everything is to be found on salt water — criticism generally impromptu, and always *viva voce*, which is the outward, obvious difference from the literary operation of that kind, with consequent freshness and vigour which may be lacking in the printed word. With appreciation, which comes at the end, when the critic and the criticised are about to part, it is otherwise. The sea appreciation of one's humble talents has the permanency of the written word, seldom the charm of variety, is formal in its phrasing. There the literary master has the superiority, though he, too, can in effect but say — and often says it in the very phrase — "I can highly recommend." Only usually he uses the word "We," there being some occult virtue in the first person plural which makes it specially fit for critical and royal declarations. I have a small handful of these sea appreciations, signed by various masters, yellowing slowly in my writing-table's left hand drawer, rustling under my reverent touch, like a handful of dry leaves plucked for a tender memento from the tree of knowledge. Strange! It seems that it is for these few bits of paper, headed by the names of a few Scots and English shipmasters, that I have faced the astonished indignations, the mockeries, and the reproaches of a sort hard to bear for a boy of fifteen; that I have been charged with the want of patriotism, the want of sense, and the want of heart, too; that I went

through agonies of self-conflict and shed secret tears not a few, and had the beauties of the Furca Pass spoiled for me, and have been called an “incorrigible Don Quixote,” in allusion to the book-born madness of the knight. For that spoil! They rustle, those bits of paper — some dozen of them in all. In that faint, ghostly sound there live the memories of twenty years, the voices of rough men now no more, the strong voice of the everlasting winds, and the whisper of a mysterious spell, the murmur of the great sea, which must have somehow reached my inland cradle and entered my unconscious ear, like that formula of Mohammedan faith the Mussulman father whispers into the ear of his new-born infant, making him one of the faithful almost with his first breath. I do not know whether I have been a good seaman, but I know I have been a very faithful one. And, after all, there is that handful of “characters” from various ships to prove that all these years have not been altogether a dream. There they are, brief, and monotonous in tone, but as suggestive bits of writing to me as any inspired page to be found in literature. But then, you see, I have been called romantic. Well, that can’t be helped. But stay. I seem to remember that I have been called a realist, also. And as that charge, too, can be made out, let us try to live up to it, at whatever cost, for a change. With this end in view, I will confide to you coyly, and only because there is no one about to see my blushes by the light of the midnight lamp, that these suggestive bits of quarter-deck appreciation, one and all, contain the words “strictly sober.”

Did I overhear a civil murmur, “That’s very gratifying, to be sure?” Well, yes, it is gratifying — thank you. It is at least as gratifying to be certified sober as to be certified romantic, though such certificates would not qualify one for the secretaryship of a temperance association or for the post of official troubadour to some lordly democratic institution such as the London County Council, for instance. The above prosaic reflection is put down here only in order to prove the general sobriety of my judgment in mundane affairs. I make a point of it because a couple of years ago, a certain short story of mine being published in a French translation, a Parisian critic — I am almost certain it was M. Gustave Kahn in the “Gil Blas” — giving me a short notice, summed up his rapid impression of the writer’s quality in the words *un puissant reveur*. So be it! Who could cavil at the words of a friendly reader? Yet perhaps not such an unconditional dreamer as all that. I will make bold to say that neither at sea nor ashore have I ever lost the sense of responsibility. There is more than one sort of intoxication. Even

before the most seductive reveries I have remained mindful of that sobriety of interior life, that asceticism of sentiment, in which alone the naked form of truth, such as one conceives it, such as one feels it, can be rendered without shame. It is but a maudlin and indecent verity that comes out through the strength of wine. I have tried to be a sober worker all my life — all my two lives. I did so from taste, no doubt, having an instinctive horror of losing my sense of full self-possession, but also from artistic conviction. Yet there are so many pitfalls on each side of the true path that, having gone some way, and feeling a little battered and weary, as a middle-aged traveller will from the mere daily difficulties of the march, I ask myself whether I have kept always, always faithful to that sobriety where in there is power and truth and peace.

As to my sea sobriety, that is quite properly certified under the sign-manual of several trustworthy shipmasters of some standing in their time. I seem to hear your polite murmur that “Surely this might have been taken for granted.” Well, no. It might not have been. That August academical body, the Marine Department of the Board of Trade, takes nothing for granted in the granting of its learned degrees. By its regulations issued under the first Merchant Shipping Act, the very word *sober* must be written, or a whole sackful, a ton, a mountain of the most enthusiastic appreciation will avail you nothing. The door of the examination rooms shall remain closed to your tears and entreaties. The most fanatical advocate of temperance could not be more pitilessly fierce in his rectitude than the Marine Department of the Board of Trade. As I have been face to face at various times with all the examiners of the Port of London in my generation, there can be no doubt as to the force and the continuity of my abstemiousness. Three of them were examiners in seamanship, and it was my fate to be delivered into the hands of each of them at proper intervals of sea service. The first of all, tall, spare, with a perfectly white head and mustache, a quiet, kindly manner, and an air of benign intelligence, must, I am forced to conclude, have been unfavourably impressed by something in my appearance. His old, thin hands loosely clasped resting on his crossed legs, he began by an elementary question, in a mild voice, and went on, went on. . . . It lasted for hours, for hours. Had I been a strange microbe with potentialities of deadly mischief to the Merchant Service I could not have been submitted to a more microscopic examination. Greatly reassured by his apparent benevolence, I had been at first very alert in my answers.

But at length the feeling of my brain getting addled crept upon me. And still the passionless process went on, with a sense of untold ages having been spent already on mere preliminaries. Then I got frightened. I was not frightened of being plucked; that eventuality did not even present itself to my mind. It was something much more serious and weird. "This ancient person," I said to myself, terrified, "is so near his grave that he must have lost all notion of time. He is considering this examination in terms of eternity. It is all very well for him. His race is run. But I may find myself coming out of this room into the world of men a stranger, friendless, forgotten by my very landlady, even were I able after this endless experience to remember the way to my hired home." This statement is not so much of a verbal exaggeration as may be supposed. Some very queer thoughts passed through my head while I was considering my answers; thoughts which had nothing to do with seamanship, nor yet with anything reasonable known to this earth. I verily believe that at times I was light-headed in a sort of languid way. At last there fell a silence, and that, too, seemed to last for ages, while, bending over his desk, the examiner wrote out my pass-slip slowly with a noiseless pen. He extended the scrap of paper to me without a word, inclined his white head gravely to my parting bow. . . .

When I got out of the room I felt limply flat, like a squeezed lemon, and the doorkeeper in his glass cage, where I stopped to get my hat and tip him a shilling, said:

"Well! I thought you were never coming out."

"How long have I been in there?" I asked, faintly.

He pulled out his watch.

"He kept you, sir, just under three hours. I don't think this ever happened with any of the gentlemen before."

It was only when I got out of the building that I began to walk on air. And the human animal being averse from change and timid before the unknown, I said to myself that I really would not mind being examined by the same man on a future occasion. But when the time of ordeal came round again the doorkeeper let me into another room, with the now familiar paraphernalia of models of ships and tackle, a board for signals on the wall, a big, long table covered with official forms and having an unrigged mast fixed to the edge. The solitary tenant was unknown to me by sight, though not by reputation, which was simply execrable. Short and sturdy, as far as I



could judge, clad in an old brown morning-suit, he sat leaning on his elbow, his hand shading his eyes, and half averted from the chair I was to occupy on the other side of the table. He was motionless, mysterious, remote, enigmatical, with something mournful, too, in the pose, like that statue of Giugliano (I think) de Medici shading his face on the tomb by Michael Angelo, though, of course, he was far, far from being beautiful. He began by trying to make me talk nonsense. But I had been warned of that fiendish trait, and contradicted him with great assurance. After a while he left off. So far good. But his immobility, the thick elbow on the table, the abrupt, unhappy voice, the shaded and averted face grew more and more impressive. He kept inscrutably silent for a moment, and then, placing me in a ship of a certain size, at sea, under conditions of weather, season, locality, etc. — all very clear and precise — ordered me to execute a certain manoeuvre. Before I was half through with it he did some material damage to the ship. Directly I had grappled with the difficulty he caused another to present itself, and when that, too, was met he stuck another ship before me, creating a very dangerous situation. I felt slightly outraged by this ingenuity in piling trouble upon a man.

“I wouldn’t have got into that mess,” I suggested, mildly. “I could have seen that ship before.”

He never stirred the least bit.

“No, you couldn’t. The weather’s thick.”

“Oh! I didn’t know,” I apologized blankly.

I suppose that after all I managed to stave off the smash with sufficient approach to verisimilitude, and the ghastly business went on. You must understand that the scheme of the test he was applying to me was, I gathered, a homeward passage — the sort of passage I would not wish to my bitterest enemy. That imaginary ship seemed to labour under a most comprehensive curse. It’s no use enlarging on these never-ending misfortunes; suffice it to say that long before the end I would have welcomed with gratitude an opportunity to exchange into the Flying Dutchman. Finally he shoved me into the North Sea (I suppose) and provided me with a lee shore with outlying sand-banks — the Dutch coast, presumably. Distance, eight miles. The evidence of such implacable animosity deprived me of speech for quite half a minute.

“Well,” he said — for our pace had been very smart, indeed, till then.

“I will have to think a little, sir.”

“Doesn’t look as if there were much time to think,” he muttered, sardonically, from under his hand.

“No, sir,” I said, with some warmth. “Not on board a ship, I could see. But so many accidents have happened that I really can’t remember what there’s left for me to work with.”

Still half averted, and with his eyes concealed, he made unexpectedly a grunting remark.

“You’ve done very well.”

“Have I the two anchors at the bow, sir?” I asked.

“Yes.”

I prepared myself then, as a last hope for the ship, to let them both go in the most effectual manner, when his infernal system of testing resourcefulness came into play again.

“But there’s only one cable. You’ve lost the other.”

It was exasperating.

“Then I would back them, if I could, and tail the heaviest hawser on board on the end of the chain before letting go, and if she parted from that, which is quite likely, I would just do nothing. She would have to go.”

“Nothing more to do, eh?”

“No, sir. I could do no more.”

He gave a bitter half-laugh.

“You could always say your prayers.”

He got up, stretched himself, and yawned slightly. It was a sallow, strong, unamiable face. He put me, in a surly, bored fashion, through the usual questions as to lights and signals, and I escaped from the room thank fully — passed! Forty minutes! And again I walked on air along Tower Hill, where so many good men had lost their heads because, I suppose, they were not resourceful enough to save them. And in my heart of hearts I had no objection to meeting that examiner once more when the third and last ordeal became due in another year or so. I even hoped I should. I knew the worst of him now, and forty minutes is not an unreasonable time. Yes, I distinctly hoped. . . .

But not a bit of it. When I presented my self to be examined for master the examiner who received me was short, plump, with a round, soft face in gray, fluffy whiskers, and fresh, loquacious lips.

He commenced operations with an easy going “Let’s see. H’m. Suppose you tell me all you know of charter-parties.” He kept it up in that style all

through, wandering off in the shape of comment into bits out of his own life, then pulling himself up short and returning to the business in hand. It was very interesting. "What's your idea of a jury-rudder now?" he queried, suddenly, at the end of an instructive anecdote bearing upon a point of stowage.

I warned him that I had no experience of a lost rudder at sea, and gave him two classical examples of makeshifts out of a text-book. In exchange he described to me a jury-rudder he had invented himself years before, when in command of a three-thousand-ton steamer. It was, I declare, the cleverest contrivance imaginable. "May be of use to you some day," he concluded. "You will go into steam presently. Everybody goes into steam."

There he was wrong. I never went into steam — not really. If I only live long enough I shall become a bizarre relic of a dead barbarism, a sort of monstrous antiquity, the only seaman of the dark ages who had never gone into steam — not really.

Before the examination was over he imparted to me a few interesting details of the transport service in the time of the Crimean War.

"The use of wire rigging became general about that time, too," he observed. "I was a very young master then. That was before you were born."

"Yes, sir. I am of the year of 1857."

"The Mutiny year," he commented, as if to himself, adding in a louder tone that his ship happened then to be in the Gulf of Bengal, employed under a government charter.

Clearly the transport service had been the making of this examiner, who so unexpectedly had given me an insight into his existence, awakening in me the sense of the continuity of that sea life into which I had stepped from outside; giving a touch of human intimacy to the machinery of official relations. I felt adopted. His experience was for me, too, as though he had been an ancestor.

Writing my long name (it has twelve letters) with laborious care on the slip of blue paper, he remarked:

"You are of Polish extraction."

"Born there, sir."

He laid down the pen and leaned back to look at me as it were for the first time.

“Not many of your nationality in our service, I should think. I never remember meeting one either before or after I left the sea. Don’t remember ever hearing of one. An inland people, aren’t you?”

I said yes — very much so. We were remote from the sea not only by situation, but also from a complete absence of indirect association, not being a commercial nation at all, but purely agricultural. He made then the quaint reflection that it was “a long way for me to come out to begin a sea life”; as if sea life were not precisely a life in which one goes a long way from home.

I told him, smiling, that no doubt I could have found a ship much nearer my native place, but I had thought to myself that if I was to be a seaman, then I would be a British seaman and no other. It was a matter of deliberate choice.

He nodded slightly at that; and, as he kept on looking at me interrogatively, I enlarged a little, confessing that I had spent a little time on the way in the Mediterranean and in the West Indies. I did not want to present myself to the British Merchant Service in an altogether green state. It was no use telling him that my mysterious vocation was so strong that my very wild oats had to be sown at sea. It was the exact truth, but he would not have understood the somewhat exceptional psychology of my sea-going, I fear.

“I suppose you’ve never come across one of your countrymen at sea. Have you, now?”

I admitted I never had. The examiner had given himself up to the spirit of gossiping idleness. For myself, I was in no haste to leave that room. Not in the least. The era of examinations was over. I would never again see that friendly man who was a professional ancestor, a sort of grandfather in the craft. Moreover, I had to wait till he dismissed me, and of that there was no sign. As he remained silent, looking at me, I added:

“But I have heard of one, some years ago. He seems to have been a boy serving his time on board a Liverpool ship, if I am not mistaken.”

“What was his name?”

I told him.

“How did you say that?” he asked, puckering up his eyes at the uncouth sound.

I repeated the name very distinctly.

“How do you spell it?”

I told him. He moved his head at the impracticable nature of that name, and observed:

“It’s quite as long as your own — isn’t it?”

There was no hurry. I had passed for master, and I had all the rest of my life before me to make the best of it. That seemed a long time. I went leisurely through a small mental calculation, and said:

“Not quite. Shorter by two letters, sir.”

“Is it?” The examiner pushed the signed blue slip across the table to me, and rose from his chair. Somehow this seemed a very abrupt ending of our relations, and I felt almost sorry to part from that excellent man, who was master of a ship before the whisper of the sea had reached my cradle. He offered me his hand and wished me well. He even made a few steps toward the door with me, and ended with good-natured advice.

“I don’t know what may be your plans, but you ought to go into steam. When a man has got his master’s certificate it’s the proper time. If I were you I would go into steam.”

I thanked him, and shut the door behind me definitely on the era of examinations. But that time I did not walk on air, as on the first two occasions. I walked across the hill of many beheadings with measured steps. It was a fact, I said to myself, that I was now a British master mariner beyond a doubt. It was not that I had an exaggerated sense of that very modest achievement, with which, however, luck, opportunity, or any extraneous influence could have had nothing to do. That fact, satisfactory and obscure in itself, had for me a certain ideal significance. It was an answer to certain outspoken scepticism and even to some not very kind aspersions. I had vindicated myself from what had been cried upon as a stupid obstinacy or a fantastic caprice. I don’t mean to say that a whole country had been convulsed by my desire to go to sea. But for a boy between fifteen and sixteen, sensitive enough, in all conscience, the commotion of his little world had seemed a very considerable thing indeed. So considerable that, absurdly enough, the echoes of it linger to this day. I catch myself in hours of solitude and retrospect meeting arguments and charges made thirty-five years ago by voices now forever still; finding things to say that an assailed boy could not have found, simply because of the mysteriousness of his impulses to himself. I understood no more than the people who called upon me to explain myself. There was no precedent. I verily believe mine was the only case of a boy of my nationality and

antecedents taking a, so to speak, standing jump out of his racial surroundings and associations. For you must understand that there was no idea of any sort of “career” in my call. Of Russia or Germany there could be no question. The nationality, the antecedents, made it impossible. The feeling against the Austrian service was not so strong, and I dare say there would have been no difficulty in finding my way into the Naval School at Pola. It would have meant six months’ extra grinding at German, perhaps; but I was not past the age of admission, and in other respects I was well qualified. This expedient to palliate my folly was thought of — but not by me. I must admit that in that respect my negative was accepted at once. That order of feeling was comprehensible enough to the most inimical of my critics. I was not called upon to offer explanations; but the truth is that what I had in view was not a naval career, but the sea. There seemed no way open to it but through France. I had the language, at any rate, and of all the countries in Europe it is with France that Poland has most connection. There were some facilities for having me a little looked after, at first. Letters were being written, answers were being received, arrangements were being made for my departure for Marseilles, where an excellent fellow called Solary, got at in a round about fashion through various French channels, had promised good-naturedly to put *le jeune homme* in the way of getting a decent ship for his first start if he really wanted a taste of *ce metier de chien*.

I watched all these preparations gratefully, and kept my own counsel. But what I told the last of my examiners was perfectly true. Already the determined resolve that “if a seaman, then an English seaman” was formulated in my head, though, of course, in the Polish language. I did not know six words of English, and I was astute enough to understand that it was much better to say nothing of my purpose. As it was I was already looked upon as partly insane, at least by the more distant acquaintances. The principal thing was to get away. I put my trust in the good-natured Solary’s very civil letter to my uncle, though I was shocked a little by the phrase about the *metier de chien*.

This Solary (Baptistin), when I beheld him in the flesh, turned out a quite young man, very good-looking, with a fine black, short beard, a fresh complexion, and soft, merry black eyes. He was as jovial and good natured as any boy could desire. I was still asleep in my room in a modest hotel near the quays of the old port, after the fatigues of the journey via Vienna,

Zurich, Lyons, when he burst in, flinging the shutters open to the sun of Provence and chiding me boisterously for lying abed. How pleasantly he startled me by his noisy objurgations to be up and off instantly for a “three years’ campaign in the South Seas!” O magic words! “*Une campagne de trois ans dans les mers du sud*” — that is the French for a three years’ deep-water voyage.

He gave me a delightful waking, and his friendliness was unwearied; but I fear he did not enter upon the quest for a ship for me in a very solemn spirit. He had been at sea himself, but had left off at the age of twenty-five, finding he could earn his living on shore in a much more agreeable manner. He was related to an incredible number of Marseilles well-to-do families of a certain class. One of his uncles was a ship-broker of good standing, with a large connection among English ships; other relatives of his dealt in ships’ stores, owned sail-lofts, sold chains and anchors, were master-stevedores, calkers, shipwrights.

His grandfather (I think) was a dignitary of a kind, the Syndic of the Pilots. I made acquaintances among these people, but mainly among the pilots. The very first whole day I ever spent on salt water was by invitation, in a big half-decked pilot-boat, cruising under close reefs on the lookout, in misty, blowing weather, for the sails of ships and the smoke of steamers rising out there, beyond the slim and tall Planier lighthouse cutting the line of the wind-swept horizon with a white perpendicular stroke. They were hospitable souls, these sturdy Provencal seamen. Under the general designation of *le petit ami de Baptistin* I was made the guest of the corporation of pilots, and had the freedom of their boats night or day. And many a day and a night, too, did I spend cruising with these rough, kindly men, under whose auspices my intimacy with the sea began. Many a time “the little friend of Baptistin” had the hooded cloak of the Mediterranean sailor thrown over him by their honest hands while dodging at night under the lee of Chateau daft on the watch for the lights of ships. Their sea tanned faces, whiskered or shaved, lean or full, with the intent, wrinkled sea eyes of the pilot breed, and here and there a thin gold hoop at the lobe of a hairy ear, bent over my sea infancy. The first operation of seamanship I had an opportunity of observing was the boarding of ships at sea, at all times, in all states of the weather. They gave it to me to the full. And I have been invited to sit in more than one tall, dark house of the old town at their hospitable board, had the bouillabaisse ladled out into a thick plate by their high-

voiced, broad-browed wives, talked to their daughters — thick-set girls, with pure profiles, glorious masses of black hair arranged with complicated art, dark eyes, and dazzlingly white teeth.

I had also other acquaintances of quite a different sort. One of them, Madame Delestang, an imperious, handsome lady in a statuesque style, would carry me off now and then on the front seat of her carriage to the Prado, at the hour of fashionable airing. She belonged to one of the old aristocratic families in the south. In her haughty weariness she used to make me think of Lady Dedlock in Dickens's "Bleak House," a work of the master for which I have such an admiration, or rather such an intense and unreasoning affection, dating from the days of my childhood, that its very weaknesses are more precious to me than the strength of other men's work. I have read it innumerable times, both in Polish and in English; I have read it only the other day, and, by a not very surprising inversion, the Lady Dedlock of the book reminded me strongly of the "belle Madame Delestang."

Her husband (as I sat facing them both), with his thin, bony nose and a perfectly bloodless, narrow physiognomy clamped together, as it were, by short, formal side whiskers, had nothing of Sir Leicester Dedlock's "grand air" and courtly solemnity. He belonged to the haute bourgeoisie only, and was a banker, with whom a modest credit had been opened for my needs. He was such an ardent — no, such a frozen-up, mummified Royalist that he used in current conversation turns of speech contemporary, I should say, with the good Henri Quatre; and when talking of money matters, reckoned not in francs, like the common, godless herd of post-Revolutionary Frenchmen, but in obsolete and forgotten ecus — ecus of all money units in the world! — as though Louis Quatorze were still promenading in royal splendour the gardens of Versailles, and Monsieur de Colbert busy with the direction of maritime affairs. You must admit that in a banker of the nineteenth century it was a quaint idiosyncrasy. Luckily, in the counting-house (it occupied part of the ground floor of the Delestang town residence, in a silent, shady street) the accounts were kept in modern money, so that I never had any difficulty in making my wants known to the grave, low-voiced, decorous, Legitimist (I suppose) clerks, sitting in the perpetual gloom of heavily barred windows behind the sombre, ancient counters, beneath lofty ceilings with heavily molded cornices. I always felt, on going out, as though I had been in the temple of some very dignified but



completely temporal religion. And it was generally on these occasions that under the great carriage gateway Lady Ded — I mean Madame Delestang — catching sight of my raised hat, would beckon me with an amiable imperiousness to the side of the carriage, and suggest with an air of amused nonchalance, “*Venez donc faire un tour avec nous,*” to which the husband would add an encouraging “*C’est ca. Allons, montez, jeune homme.*” He questioned me some times, significantly but with perfect tact and delicacy, as to the way I employed my time, and never failed to express the hope that I wrote regularly to my “honoured uncle.” I made no secret of the way I employed my time, and I rather fancy that my artless tales of the pilots and so on entertained Madame Delestang so far as that ineffable woman could be entertained by the prattle of a youngster very full of his new experience among strange men and strange sensations. She expressed no opinions, and talked to me very little; yet her portrait hangs in the gallery of my intimate memories, fixed there by a short and fleeting episode. One day, after putting me down at the corner of a street, she offered me her hand, and detained me, by a slight pressure, for a moment. While the husband sat motionless and looking straight before him, she leaned forward in the carriage to say, with just a shade of warning in her leisurely tone: “*Il faut, cependant, faire attention a ne pas gater sa vie.*” I had never seen her face so close to mine before. She made my heart beat and caused me to remain thoughtful for a whole evening. Certainly one must, after all, take care not to spoil one’s life. But she did not know — nobody could know — how impossible that danger seemed to me.

## VII

Can the transports of first love be calmed, checked, turned to a cold suspicion of the future by a grave quotation from a work on political economy? I ask — is it conceivable? Is it possible? Would it be right? With my feet on the very shores of the sea and about to embrace my blue-eyed dream, what could a good-natured warning as to spoiling one's life mean to my youthful passion? It was the most unexpected and the last, too, of the many warnings I had received. It sounded to me very bizarre — and, uttered as it was in the very presence of my enchantress, like the voice of folly, the voice of ignorance. But I was not so callous or so stupid as not to recognize there also the voice of kindness. And then the vagueness of the warning — because what can be the meaning of the phrase: to spoil one's life? — arrested one's attention by its air of wise profundity. At any rate, as I have said before, the words of *la belle Madame Delestang* made me thoughtful for a whole evening. I tried to understand and tried in vain, not having any notion of life as an enterprise that could be *mi* managed. But I left off being thoughtful shortly before midnight, at which hour, haunted by no ghosts of the past and by no visions of the future, I walked down the quay of the Vieux Port to join the pilot-boat of my friends. I knew where she would be waiting for her crew, in the little bit of a canal behind the fort at the entrance of the harbour. The deserted quays looked very white and dry in the moonlight, and as if frostbound in the sharp air of that December night. A prowler or two slunk by noiselessly; a custom-house guard, soldier-like, a sword by his side, paced close under the bowsprits of the long row of ships moored bows on opposite the long, slightly curved, continuous flat wall of the tall houses that seemed to be one immense abandoned building with innumerable windows shuttered closely. Only here and there a small, dingy cafe for sailors cast a yellow gleam on the bluish sheen of the flagstones. Passing by, one heard a deep murmur of voices inside — nothing more. How quiet everything was at the end of the quays on the last night on which I went out for a service cruise as a guest of the Marseilles pilots! Not a footstep, except my own, not a sigh, not a whispering echo of the usual revelry going on in the narrow, unspeakable lanes of the Old Town reached my ear — and suddenly, with a terrific jingling rattle of iron and glass, the omnibus of the Joliette on its last journey swung around the corner of the

dead wall which faces across the paved road the characteristic angular mass of the Fort St. Jean. Three horses trotted abreast, with the clatter of hoofs on the granite setts, and the yellow, uproarious machine jolted violently behind them, fantastic, lighted up, perfectly empty, and with the driver apparently asleep on his swaying perch above that amazing racket. I flattened myself against the wall and gasped. It was a stunning experience. Then after staggering on a few paces in the shadow of the fort, casting a darkness more intense than that of a clouded night upon the canal, I saw the tiny light of a lantern standing on the quay, and became aware of muffled figures making toward it from various directions. Pilots of the Third Company hastening to embark. Too sleepy to be talkative, they step on board in silence. But a few low grunts and an enormous yawn are heard. Somebody even ejaculates: “*Ah! Coquin de sort!*” and sighs wearily at his hard fate.

The patron of the Third Company (there were five companies of pilots at that time, I believe) is the brother-in-law of my friend Solary (Baptistin), a broad-shouldered, deep chested man of forty, with a keen, frank glance which always seeks your eyes.

He greets me by a low, hearty “*He, l’ami. Comment va?*” With his clipped mustache and massive open face, energetic and at the same time placid in expression, he is a fine specimen of the southerner of the calm type. For there is such a type in which the volatile southern passion is transmuted into solid force. He is fair, but no one could mistake him for a man of the north even by the dim gleam of the lantern standing on the quay. He is worth a dozen of your ordinary Normans or Bretons, but then, in the whole immense sweep of the Mediterranean shores, you could not find half a dozen men of his stamp.

Standing by the tiller, he pulls out his watch from under a thick jacket and bends his head over it in the light cast into the boat. Time’s up. His pleasant voice commands, in a quiet undertone, “*Larguez.*” A suddenly projected arm snatches the lantern off the quay — and, warped along by a line at first, then with the regular tug of four heavy sweeps in the bow, the big half-decked boat full of men glides out of the black, breathless shadow of the fort. The open water of the avant-port glitters under the moon as if sown over with millions of sequins, and the long white break water shines like a thick bar of solid silver. With a quick rattle of blocks and one single silky swish, the sail is filled by a little breeze keen enough to have come straight down from the frozen moon, and the boat, after the clatter of the

hauled-in sweeps, seems to stand at rest, surrounded by a mysterious whispering so faint and unearthly that it may be the rustling of the brilliant, overpowering moon rays breaking like a rain-shower upon the hard, smooth, shadowless sea.

I may well remember that last night spent with the pilots of the Third Company. I have known the spell of moonlight since, on various seas and coasts — coasts of forests, of rocks, of sand dunes — but no magic so perfect in its revelation of unsuspected character, as though one were allowed to look upon the mystic nature of material things. For hours I suppose no word was spoken in that boat. The pilots, seated in two rows facing each other, dozed, with their arms folded and their chins resting upon their breasts. They displayed a great variety of caps: cloth, wool, leather, peaks, ear-flaps, tassels, with a picturesque round beret or two pulled down over the brows; and one grandfather, with a shaved, bony face and a great beak of a nose, had a cloak with a hood which made him look in our midst like a cowed monk being carried off goodness knows where by that silent company of seamen — quiet enough to be dead.

My fingers itched for the tiller, and in due course my friend, the patron, surrendered it to me in the same spirit in which the family coachman lets a boy hold the reins on an easy bit of road.

There was a great solitude around us; the islets ahead, Monte Cristo and the Chateau daft in full light, seemed to float toward us — so steady, so imperceptible was the progress of our boat. “Keep her in the furrow of the moon,” the patron directed me, in a quiet murmur, sitting down ponderously in the stern-sheets and reaching for his pipe.

The pilot station in weather like this was only a mile or two to the westward of the islets; and presently, as we approached the spot, the boat we were going to relieve swam into our view suddenly, on her way home, cutting black and sinister into the wake of the moon under a sable wing, while to them our sail must have been a vision of white and dazzling radiance. Without altering the course a hair’s breadth we slipped by each other within an oar’s length. A drawling, sardonic hail came out of her. Instantly, as if by magic, our dozing pilots got on their feet in a body. An incredible babel of bantering shouts burst out, a jocular, passionate, voluble chatter, which lasted till the boats were stern to stern, theirs all bright now, and, with a shining sail to our eyes, we turned all black to their vision, and drew away from them under a sable wing. That extraordinary uproar died

away almost as suddenly as it had begun; first one had enough of it and sat down, then another, then three or four together; and when all had left off with mutters and growling half-laughs the sound of hearty chuckling became audible, persistent, unnoticed. The cowed grandfather was very much entertained somewhere within his hood.

He had not joined in the shouting of jokes, neither had he moved the least bit. He had remained quietly in his place against the foot of the mast. I had been given to understand long before that he had the rating of a second-class able seaman (*matelot leger*) in the fleet which sailed from Toulon for the conquest of Algeria in the year of grace 1830. And, indeed, I had seen and examined one of the buttons of his old brown, patched coat, the only brass button of the miscellaneous lot, flat and thin, with the words *Equipages de ligne* engraved on it. That sort of button, I believe, went out with the last of the French Bourbons.

“I preserved it from the time of my navy service,” he explained, nodding rapidly his frail, vulture-like head. It was not very likely that he had picked up that relic in the street. He looked certainly old enough to have fought at Trafalgar — or, at any rate, to have played his little part there as a powder monkey. Shortly after we had been introduced he had informed me in a Franco-Provencal jargon, mumbling tremulously with his toothless jaws, that when he was a “shaver no higher than that” he had seen the Emperor Napoleon returning from Elba. It was at night, he narrated vaguely, without animation, at a spot between Frejus and Antibes, in the open country. A big fire had been lit at the side of the cross-roads. The population from several villages had collected there, old and young — down to the very children in arms, because the women had refused to stay at home. Tall soldiers wearing high, hairy caps stood in a circle, facing the people silently, and their stern eyes and big mustaches were enough to make everybody keep at a distance. He, “being an impudent little shaver,” wriggled out of the crowd, creeping on his hands and knees as near as he dared to the grenadiers’ legs, and peeping through discovered, standing perfectly still in the light of the fire, “a little fat fellow in a three-cornered hat, buttoned up in a long straight coat, with a big, pale face inclined on one shoulder, looking something like a priest. His hands were clasped behind his back. . . . It appears that this was the Emperor,” the ancient commented, with a faint sigh. He was staring from the ground with all his might, when “my poor father,” who had been

searching for his boy frantically every where, pounced upon him and hauled him away by the ear.

The tale seems an authentic recollection. He related it to me many times, using the very same words. The grandfather honoured me by a special and somewhat embarrassing predilection. Extremes touch. He was the oldest member by a long way in that company, and I was, if I may say so, its temporarily adopted baby. He had been a pilot longer than any man in the boat could remember; thirty — forty years. He did not seem certain himself, but it could be found out, he suggested, in the archives of the Pilot-office. He had been pensioned off years before, but he went out from force of habit; and, as my friend the patron of the company once confided to me in a whisper, “the old chap did no harm. He was not in the way.” They treated him with rough deference. One and another would address some insignificant remark to him now and again, but nobody really took any notice of what he had to say. He had survived his strength, his usefulness, his very wisdom. He wore long, green, worsted stockings pulled up above the knee over his trousers, a sort of woollen nightcap on his hairless cranium, and wooden clogs on his feet. Without his hooded cloak he looked like a peasant. Half a dozen hands would be extended to help him on board, but afterward he was left pretty much to his own thoughts. Of course he never did any work, except, perhaps, to cast off some rope when hailed, “*He, l’Ancien!* let go the halyards there, at your hand” — or some such request of an easy kind.

No one took notice in any way of the chuckling within the shadow of the hood. He kept it up for a long time with intense enjoyment. Obviously he had preserved intact the innocence of mind which is easily amused. But when his hilarity had exhausted itself, he made a professional remark in a self-assertive but quavering voice:

“Can’t expect much work on a night like this.”

No one took it up. It was a mere truism. Nothing under canvas could be expected to make a port on such an idle night of dreamy splendour and spiritual stillness. We would have to glide idly to and fro, keeping our station within the appointed bearings, and, unless a fresh breeze sprang up with the dawn, we would land before sunrise on a small islet that, within two miles of us, shone like a lump of frozen moonlight, to “break a crust and take a pull at the wine bottle.” I was familiar with the procedure. The stout boat emptied of her crowd would nestle her buoyant, capable side

against the very rock — such is the perfectly smooth amenity of the classic sea when in a gentle mood. The crust broken and the mouthful of wine swallowed — it was literally no more than that with this abstemious race — the pilots would pass the time stamping their feet on the slabs of sea-salted stone and blowing into their nipped fingers. One or two misanthropists would sit apart, perched on boulders like manlike sea-fowl of solitary habits; the sociably disposed would gossip scandalously in little gesticulating knots; and there would be perpetually one or another of my hosts taking aim at the empty horizon with the long, brass tube of the telescope, a heavy, murderous-looking piece of collective property, everlastingly changing hands with brandishing and levelling movements. Then about noon (it was a short turn of duty — the long turn lasted twenty-four hours) another boatful of pilots would relieve us — and we should steer for the old Phoenician port, dominated, watched over from the ridge of a dust-gray, arid hill by the red-and-white striped pile of the Notre Dame de la Garde.

All this came to pass as I had foreseen in the fullness of my very recent experience. But also something not foreseen by me did happen, something which causes me to remember my last outing with the pilots. It was on this occasion that my hand touched, for the first time, the side of an English ship.

No fresh breeze had come with the dawn, only the steady little draught got a more keen edge on it as the eastern sky became bright and glassy with a clean, colourless light. It was while we were all ashore on the islet that a steamer was picked up by the telescope, a black speck like an insect posed on the hard edge of the offing. She emerged rapidly to her water-line and came on steadily, a slim hull with a long streak of smoke slanting away from the rising sun. We embarked in a hurry, and headed the boat out for our prey, but we hardly moved three miles an hour.

She was a big, high-class cargo-steamer of a type that is to be met on the sea no more — black hull, with low, white superstructures, powerfully rigged with three masts and a lot of yards on the fore; two hands at her enormous wheel — steam steering-gear was not a matter of course in these days — and with them on the bridge three others, bulky in thick blue jackets, ruddy-faced, muffled up, with peak caps — I suppose all her officers. There are ships I have met more than once and known well by sight whose names I have forgotten; but the name of that ship seen once so

many years ago in the clear flush of a cold, pale sunrise I have not forgotten. How could I — the first English ship on whose side I ever laid my hand! The name — I read it letter by letter on the bow — was James Westoll. Not very romantic, you will say. The name of a very considerable, well-known, and universally respected North country ship-owner, I believe. James Westoll! What better name could an honourable hard-working ship have? To me the very grouping of the letters is alive with the romantic feeling of her reality as I saw her floating motionless and borrowing an ideal grace from the austere purity of the light.

We were then very near her and, on a sudden impulse, I volunteered to pull bow in the dinghy which shoved off at once to put the pilot on board while our boat, fanned by the faint air which had attended us all through the night, went on gliding gently past the black, glistening length of the ship. A few strokes brought us alongside, and it was then that, for the very first time in my life, I heard myself addressed in English — the speech of my secret choice, of my future, of long friendships, of the deepest affections, of hours of toil and hours of ease, and of solitary hours, too, of books read, of thoughts pursued, of remembered emotions — of my very dreams! And if (after being thus fashioned by it in that part of me which cannot decay) I dare not claim it aloud as my own, then, at any rate, the speech of my children. Thus small events grow memorable by the passage of time. As to the quality of the address itself I cannot say it was very striking. Too short for eloquence and devoid of all charm of tone, it consisted precisely of the three words “Look out there!” growled out huskily above my head.

It proceeded from a big fat fellow (he had an obtrusive, hairy double chin) in a blue woollen shirt and roomy breeches pulled up very high, even to the level of his breastbone, by a pair of braces quite exposed to public view. As where he stood there was no bulwark, but only a rail and stanchions, I was able to take in at a glance the whole of his voluminous person from his feet to the high crown of his soft black hat, which sat like an absurd flanged cone on his big head. The grotesque and massive aspect of that deck hand (I suppose he was that — very likely the lamp-trimmer) surprised me very much. My course of reading, of dreaming, and longing for the sea had not prepared me for a sea brother of that sort. I never met again a figure in the least like his except in the illustrations to Mr. W. W. Jacobs’s most entertaining tales of barges and coasters; but the inspired talent of Mr. Jacobs for poking endless fun at poor, innocent sailors in a



prose which, however extravagant in its felicitous invention, is always artistically adjusted to observed truth, was not yet. Perhaps Mr. Jacobs himself was not yet. I fancy that, at most, if he had made his nurse laugh it was about all he had achieved at that early date.

Therefore, I repeat, other disabilities apart, I could not have been prepared for the sight of that husky old porpoise. The object of his concise address was to call my attention to a rope which he incontinently flung down for me to catch. I caught it, though it was not really necessary, the ship having no way on her by that time. Then everything went on very swiftly. The dinghy came with a slight bump against the steamer's side; the pilot, grabbing for the rope ladder, had scrambled half-way up before I knew that our task of boarding was done; the harsh, muffled clanging of the engine-room telegraph struck my ear through the iron plate; my companion in the dinghy was urging me to "shove off — push hard"; and when I bore against the smooth flank of the first English ship I ever touched in my life, I felt it already throbbing under my open palm.

Her head swung a little to the west, pointing toward the miniature lighthouse of the Joliette breakwater, far away there, hardly distinguishable against the land. The dinghy danced a squashy, splashy jig in the wash of the wake; and, turning in my seat, I followed the James Westoll with my eyes. Before she had gone in a quarter of a mile she hoisted her flag, as the harbour regulations prescribe for arriving and departing ships. I saw it suddenly flicker and stream out on the flag staff. The Red Ensign! In the pellucid, colourless atmosphere bathing the drab and gray masses of that southern land, the livid islets, the sea of pale, glassy blue under the pale, glassy sky of that cold sunrise, it was, as far as the eye could reach, the only spot of ardent colour — flame-like, intense, and presently as minute as the tiny red spark the concentrated reflection of a great fire kindles in the clear heart of a globe of crystal. The Red Ensign — the symbolic, protecting, warm bit of bunting flung wide upon the seas, and destined for so many years to be the only roof over my head.

# The Essays



*'Oswalds' in Bishopsbourne, near Canterbury, where Conrad moved to in 1918 and remained for the rest of his life*

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

I don't know whether I ought to offer an apology for this collection which has more to do with life than with letters. Its appeal is made to orderly minds. This, to be frank about it, is a process of tidying up, which, from the nature of things, cannot be regarded as premature. The fact is that I wanted to do it myself because of a feeling that had nothing to do with the considerations of worthiness or unworthiness of the small (but unbroken) pieces collected within the covers of this volume. Of course it may be said that I might have taken up a broom and used it without saying anything about it. That, certainly, is one way of tidying up.

But it would have been too much to have expected me to treat all this matter as removable rubbish. All those things had a place in my life. Whether any of them deserve to have been picked up and ranged on the shelf — this shelf — I cannot say, and, frankly, I have not allowed my mind to dwell on the question. I was afraid of thinking myself into a mood that would hurt my feelings; for those pieces of writing, whatever may be the comment on their display, appertain to the character of the man.

And so here they are, dusted, which was but a decent thing to do, but in no way polished, extending from the year '98 to the year '20, a thin array (for such a stretch of time) of really innocent attitudes: Conrad literary, Conrad political, Conrad reminiscent, Conrad controversial. Well, yes! A one-man show — or is it merely the show of one man?

The only thing that will not be found amongst those Figures and Things that have passed away, will be Conrad *en pantoufles*. It is a constitutional inability. *Schlafröck und pantoffeln*! Not that! Never! . . . I don't know whether I dare boast like a certain South American general who used to say that no emergency of war or peace had ever found him "with his boots off"; but I may say that whenever the various periodicals mentioned in this book called on me to come out and blow the trumpet of personal opinions or strike the pensive lute that speaks of the past, I always tried to pull on my boots first. I didn't want to do it, God knows! Their Editors, to whom I beg to offer my thanks here, made me perform mainly by kindness but partly by bribery. Well, yes! Bribery? What can you expect? I never pretended to be better than the people in the next street, or even in the same street.

This volume (including these embarrassed introductory remarks) is as near as I shall ever come to *dêshabillé* in public; and perhaps it will do something to help towards a better vision of the man, if it gives no more than a partial view of a piece of his back, a little dusty (after the process of tidying up), a little bowed, and receding from the world not because of weariness or misanthropy but for other reasons that cannot be helped: because the leaves fall, the water flows, the clock ticks with that horrid pitiless solemnity which you must have observed in the ticking of the hall clock at home. For reasons like that. Yes! It recedes. And this was the chance to afford one more view of it — even to my own eyes.

The section within this volume called Letters explains itself, though I do not pretend to say that it justifies its own existence. It claims nothing in its defence except the right of speech which I believe belongs to everybody outside a Trappist monastery. The part I have ventured, for shortness' sake, to call Life, may perhaps justify itself by the emotional sincerity of the feelings to which the various papers included under that head owe their origin. And as they relate to events of which everyone has a date, they are in the nature of sign-posts pointing out the direction my thoughts were compelled to take at the various cross-roads. If anybody detects any sort of consistency in the choice, this will be only proof positive that wisdom had nothing to do with it. Whether right or wrong, instinct alone is invariable; a fact which only adds a deeper shade to its inherent mystery. The appearance of intellectuality these pieces may present at first sight is merely the result of the arrangement of words. The logic that may be found there is only the logic of the language. But I need not labour the point. There will be plenty of people sagacious enough to perceive the absence of all wisdom from these pages. But I believe sufficiently in human sympathies to imagine that very few will question their sincerity. Whatever delusions I may have suffered from I have had no delusions as to the nature of the facts commented on here. I may have misjudged their import: but that is the sort of error for which one may expect a certain amount of toleration.

The only paper of this collection which has never been published before is the Note on the Polish Problem. It was written at the request of a friend to be shown privately, and its "Protectorate" idea, sprung from a strong sense of the critical nature of the situation, was shaped by the actual circumstances of the time. The time was about a month before the entrance of Roumania into the war, and though, honestly, I had seen already the

shadow of coming events I could not permit my misgivings to enter into and destroy the structure of my plan. I still believe that there was some sense in it. It may certainly be charged with the appearance of lack of faith and it lays itself open to the throwing of many stones; but my object was practical and I had to consider warily the preconceived notions of the people to whom it was implicitly addressed, and also their unjustifiable hopes. They were unjustifiable, but who was to tell them that? I mean who was wise enough and convincing enough to show them the inanity of their mental attitude? The whole atmosphere was poisoned with visions that were not so much false as simply impossible. They were also the result of vague and unconfessed fears, and that made their strength. For myself, with a very definite dread in my heart, I was careful not to allude to their character because I did not want the Note to be thrown away unread. And then I had to remember that the impossible has sometimes the trick of coming to pass to the confusion of minds and often to the crushing of hearts.

Of the other papers I have nothing special to say. They are what they are, and I am by now too hardened a sinner to feel ashamed of insignificant indiscretions. And as to their appearance in this form I claim that indulgence to which all sinners against themselves are entitled.

J. C.  
1920.

## **PART I — LETTERS**



## BOOKS — 1905.

### I.

“I have not read this author’s books, and if I have read them I have forgotten what they were about.”

These words are reported as having been uttered in our midst not a hundred years ago, publicly, from the seat of justice, by a civic magistrate. The words of our municipal rulers have a solemnity and importance far above the words of other mortals, because our municipal rulers more than any other variety of our governors and masters represent the average wisdom, temperament, sense and virtue of the community. This generalisation, it ought to be promptly said in the interests of eternal justice (and recent friendship), does not apply to the United States of America. There, if one may believe the long and helpless indignations of their daily and weekly Press, the majority of municipal rulers appear to be thieves of a particularly irrepressible sort. But this by the way. My concern is with a statement issuing from the average temperament and the average wisdom of a great and wealthy community, and uttered by a civic magistrate obviously without fear and without reproach.

I confess I am pleased with his temper, which is that of prudence. “I have not read the books,” he says, and immediately he adds, “and if I have read them I have forgotten.” This is excellent caution. And I like his style: it is unartificial and bears the stamp of manly sincerity. As a reported piece of prose this declaration is easy to read and not difficult to believe. Many books have not been read; still more have been forgotten. As a piece of civic oratory this declaration is strikingly effective. Calculated to fall in with the bent of the popular mind, so familiar with all forms of forgetfulness, it has also the power to stir up a subtle emotion while it starts a train of thought — and what greater force can be expected from human speech? But it is in naturalness that this declaration is perfectly delightful, for there is nothing more natural than for a grave City Father to forget what the books he has read once — long ago — in his giddy youth maybe — were about.

And the books in question are novels, or, at any rate, were written as novels. I proceed thus cautiously (following my illustrious example)

because being without fear and desiring to remain as far as possible without reproach, I confess at once that I have not read them.

I have not; and of the million persons or more who are said to have read them, I never met one yet with the talent of lucid exposition sufficiently developed to give me a connected account of what they are about. But they are books, part and parcel of humanity, and as such, in their ever increasing, jostling multitude, they are worthy of regard, admiration, and compassion.

Especially of compassion. It has been said a long time ago that books have their fate. They have, and it is very much like the destiny of man. They share with us the great incertitude of ignominy or glory — of severe justice and senseless persecution — of calumny and misunderstanding — the shame of undeserved success. Of all the inanimate objects, of all men's creations, books are the nearest to us, for they contain our very thought, our ambitions, our indignations, our illusions, our fidelity to truth, and our persistent leaning towards error. But most of all they resemble us in their precarious hold on life. A bridge constructed according to the rules of the art of bridge-building is certain of a long, honourable and useful career. But a book as good in its way as the bridge may perish obscurely on the very day of its birth. The art of their creators is not sufficient to give them more than a moment of life. Of the books born from the restlessness, the inspiration, and the vanity of human minds, those that the Muses would love best lie more than all others under the menace of an early death. Sometimes their defects will save them. Sometimes a book fair to see may — to use a lofty expression — have no individual soul. Obviously a book of that sort cannot die. It can only crumble into dust. But the best of books drawing sustenance from the sympathy and memory of men have lived on the brink of destruction, for men's memories are short, and their sympathy is, we must admit, a very fluctuating, unprincipled emotion.

No secret of eternal life for our books can be found amongst the formulas of art, any more than for our bodies in a prescribed combination of drugs. This is not because some books are not worthy of enduring life, but because the formulas of art are dependent on things variable, unstable and untrustworthy; on human sympathies, on prejudices, on likes and dislikes, on the sense of virtue and the sense of propriety, on beliefs and theories that, indestructible in themselves, always change their form — often in the lifetime of one fleeting generation.

## II.

Of all books, novels, which the Muses should love, make a serious claim on our compassion. The art of the novelist is simple. At the same time it is the most elusive of all creative arts, the most liable to be obscured by the scruples of its servants and votaries, the one pre-eminently destined to bring trouble to the mind and the heart of the artist. After all, the creation of a world is not a small undertaking except perhaps to the divinely gifted. In truth every novelist must begin by creating for himself a world, great or little, in which he can honestly believe. This world cannot be made otherwise than in his own image: it is fated to remain individual and a little mysterious, and yet it must resemble something already familiar to the experience, the thoughts and the sensations of his readers. At the heart of fiction, even the least worthy of the name, some sort of truth can be found — if only the truth of a childish theatrical ardour in the game of life, as in the novels of Dumas the father. But the fair truth of human delicacy can be found in Mr. Henry James's novels; and the comical, appalling truth of human rapacity let loose amongst the spoils of existence lives in the monstrous world created by Balzac. The pursuit of happiness by means lawful and unlawful, through resignation or revolt, by the clever manipulation of conventions or by solemn hanging on to the skirts of the latest scientific theory, is the only theme that can be legitimately developed by the novelist who is the chronicler of the adventures of mankind amongst the dangers of the kingdom of the earth. And the kingdom of this earth itself, the ground upon which his individualities stand, stumble, or die, must enter into his scheme of faithful record. To encompass all this in one harmonious conception is a great feat; and even to attempt it deliberately with serious intention, not from the senseless prompting of an ignorant heart, is an honourable ambition. For it requires some courage to step in calmly where fools may be eager to rush. As a distinguished and successful French novelist once observed of fiction, "C'est un art *trop* difficile."

It is natural that the novelist should doubt his ability to cope with his task. He imagines it more gigantic than it is. And yet literary creation being only one of the legitimate forms of human activity has no value but on the condition of not excluding the fullest recognition of all the more distinct forms of action. This condition is sometimes forgotten by the man

of letters, who often, especially in his youth, is inclined to lay a claim of exclusive superiority for his own amongst all the other tasks of the human mind. The mass of verse and prose may glimmer here and there with the glow of a divine spark, but in the sum of human effort it has no special importance. There is no justificative formula for its existence any more than for any other artistic achievement. With the rest of them it is destined to be forgotten, without, perhaps, leaving the faintest trace. Where a novelist has an advantage over the workers in other fields of thought is in his privilege of freedom — the freedom of expression and the freedom of confessing his innermost beliefs — which should console him for the hard slavery of the pen.

### III.

Liberty of imagination should be the most precious possession of a novelist. To try voluntarily to discover the fettering dogmas of some romantic, realistic, or naturalistic creed in the free work of its own inspiration, is a trick worthy of human perverseness which, after inventing an absurdity, endeavours to find for it a pedigree of distinguished ancestors. It is a weakness of inferior minds when it is not the cunning device of those who, uncertain of their talent, would seek to add lustre to it by the authority of a school. Such, for instance, are the high priests who have proclaimed Stendhal for a prophet of Naturalism. But Stendhal himself would have accepted no limitation of his freedom. Stendhal's mind was of the first order. His spirit above must be raging with a peculiarly Stendhalesque scorn and indignation. For the truth is that more than one kind of intellectual cowardice hides behind the literary formulas. And Stendhal was pre-eminently courageous. He wrote his two great novels, which so few people have read, in a spirit of fearless liberty.

It must not be supposed that I claim for the artist in fiction the freedom of moral Nihilism. I would require from him many acts of faith of which the first would be the cherishing of an undying hope; and hope, it will not be contested, implies all the piety of effort and renunciation. It is the God-sent form of trust in the magic force and inspiration belonging to the life of this earth. We are inclined to forget that the way of excellence is in the intellectual, as distinguished from emotional, humility. What one feels so hopelessly barren in declared pessimism is just its arrogance. It seems as if the discovery made by many men at various times that there is much evil in the world were a source of proud and unholy joy unto some of the modern writers. That frame of mind is not the proper one in which to approach seriously the art of fiction. It gives an author — goodness only knows why — an elated sense of his own superiority. And there is nothing more dangerous than such an elation to that absolute loyalty towards his feelings and sensations an author should keep hold of in his most exalted moments of creation.

To be hopeful in an artistic sense it is not necessary to think that the world is good. It is enough to believe that there is no impossibility of its being made so. If the flight of imaginative thought may be allowed to rise

superior to many moralities current amongst mankind, a novelist who would think himself of a superior essence to other men would miss the first condition of his calling. To have the gift of words is no such great matter. A man furnished with a long-range weapon does not become a hunter or a warrior by the mere possession of a fire-arm; many other qualities of character and temperament are necessary to make him either one or the other. Of him from whose armoury of phrases one in a hundred thousand may perhaps hit the far-distant and elusive mark of art I would ask that in his dealings with mankind he should be capable of giving a tender recognition to their obscure virtues. I would not have him impatient with their small failings and scornful of their errors. I would not have him expect too much gratitude from that humanity whose fate, as illustrated in individuals, it is open to him to depict as ridiculous or terrible. I would wish him to look with a large forgiveness at men's ideas and prejudices, which are by no means the outcome of malevolence, but depend on their education, their social status, even their professions. The good artist should expect no recognition of his toil and no admiration of his genius, because his toil can with difficulty be appraised and his genius cannot possibly mean anything to the illiterate who, even from the dreadful wisdom of their evoked dead, have, so far, culled nothing but inanities and platitudes. I would wish him to enlarge his sympathies by patient and loving observation while he grows in mental power. It is in the impartial practice of life, if anywhere, that the promise of perfection for his art can be found, rather than in the absurd formulas trying to prescribe this or that particular method of technique or conception. Let him mature the strength of his imagination amongst the things of this earth, which it is his business to cherish and know, and refrain from calling down his inspiration ready-made from some heaven of perfections of which he knows nothing. And I would not grudge him the proud illusion that will come sometimes to a writer: the illusion that his achievement has almost equalled the greatness of his dream. For what else could give him the serenity and the force to hug to his breast as a thing delightful and human, the virtue, the rectitude and sagacity of his own City, declaring with simple eloquence through the mouth of a Conscript Father: "I have not read this author's books, and if I have read them I have forgotten . . ."

## HENRY JAMES — AN APPRECIATION — 1905

The critical faculty hesitates before the magnitude of Mr. Henry James's work. His books stand on my shelves in a place whose accessibility proclaims the habit of frequent communion. But not all his books. There is no collected edition to date, such as some of "our masters" have been provided with; no neat rows of volumes in buckram or half calf, putting forth a hasty claim to completeness, and conveying to my mind a hint of finality, of a surrender to fate of that field in which all these victories have been won. Nothing of the sort has been done for Mr. Henry James's victories in England.

In a world such as ours, so painful with all sorts of wonders, one would not exhaust oneself in barren marvelling over mere bindings, had not the fact, or rather the absence of the material fact, prominent in the case of other men whose writing counts, (for good or evil) — had it not been, I say, expressive of a direct truth spiritual and intellectual; an accident of — I suppose — the publishing business acquiring a symbolic meaning from its negative nature. Because, emphatically, in the body of Mr. Henry James's work there is no suggestion of finality, nowhere a hint of surrender, or even of probability of surrender, to his own victorious achievement in that field where he is a master. Happily, he will never be able to claim completeness; and, were he to confess to it in a moment of self-ignorance, he would not be believed by the very minds for whom such a confession naturally would be meant. It is impossible to think of Mr. Henry James becoming "complete" otherwise than by the brutality of our common fate whose finality is meaningless — in the sense of its logic being of a material order, the logic of a falling stone.

I do not know into what brand of ink Mr. Henry James dips his pen; indeed, I heard that of late he had been dictating; but I know that his mind is steeped in the waters flowing from the fountain of intellectual youth. The thing — a privilege — a miracle — what you will — is not quite hidden from the meanest of us who run as we read. To those who have the grace to stay their feet it is manifest. After some twenty years of attentive acquaintance with Mr. Henry James's work, it grows into absolute conviction which, all personal feeling apart, brings a sense of happiness into one's artistic existence. If gratitude, as someone defined it, is a lively sense

of favours to come, it becomes very easy to be grateful to the author of *The Ambassadors* — to name the latest of his works. The favours are sure to come; the spring of that benevolence will never run dry. The stream of inspiration flows brimful in a predetermined direction, unaffected by the periods of drought, untroubled in its clearness by the storms of the land of letters, without languor or violence in its force, never running back upon itself, opening new visions at every turn of its course through that richly inhabited country its fertility has created for our delectation, for our judgment, for our exploring. It is, in fact, a magic spring.

With this phrase the metaphor of the perennial spring, of the inextinguishable youth, of running waters, as applied to Mr. Henry James's inspiration, may be dropped. In its volume and force the body of his work may be compared rather to a majestic river. All creative art is magic, is evocation of the unseen in forms persuasive, enlightening, familiar and surprising, for the edification of mankind, pinned down by the conditions of its existence to the earnest consideration of the most insignificant tides of reality.

Action in its essence, the creative art of a writer of fiction may be compared to rescue work carried out in darkness against cross gusts of wind swaying the action of a great multitude. It is rescue work, this snatching of vanishing phases of turbulence, disguised in fair words, out of the native obscurity into a light where the struggling forms may be seen, seized upon, endowed with the only possible form of permanence in this world of relative values — the permanence of memory. And the multitude feels it obscurely too; since the demand of the individual to the artist is, in effect, the cry, "Take me out of myself!" meaning really, out of my perishable activity into the light of imperishable consciousness. But everything is relative, and the light of consciousness is only enduring, merely the most enduring of the things of this earth, imperishable only as against the short-lived work of our industrious hands.

When the last aqueduct shall have crumbled to pieces, the last airship fallen to the ground, the last blade of grass have died upon a dying earth, man, indomitable by his training in resistance to misery and pain, shall set this undiminished light of his eyes against the feeble glow of the sun. The artistic faculty, of which each of us has a minute grain, may find its voice in some individual of that last group, gifted with a power of expression and courageous enough to interpret the ultimate experience of mankind in terms



of his temperament, in terms of art. I do not mean to say that he would attempt to beguile the last moments of humanity by an ingenious tale. It would be too much to expect — from humanity. I doubt the heroism of the hearers. As to the heroism of the artist, no doubt is necessary. There would be on his part no heroism. The artist in his calling of interpreter creates (the clearest form of demonstration) because he must. He is so much of a voice that, for him, silence is like death; and the postulate was, that there is a group alive, clustered on his threshold to watch the last flicker of light on a black sky, to hear the last word uttered in the stilled workshop of the earth. It is safe to affirm that, if anybody, it will be the imaginative man who would be moved to speak on the eve of that day without to-morrow — whether in austere exhortation or in a phrase of sardonic comment, who can guess?

For my own part, from a short and cursory acquaintance with my kind, I am inclined to think that the last utterance will formulate, strange as it may appear, some hope now to us utterly inconceivable. For mankind is delightful in its pride, its assurance, and its indomitable tenacity. It will sleep on the battlefield among its own dead, in the manner of an army having won a barren victory. It will not know when it is beaten. And perhaps it is right in that quality. The victories are not, perhaps, so barren as it may appear from a purely strategical, utilitarian point of view. Mr. Henry James seems to hold that belief. Nobody has rendered better, perhaps, the tenacity of temper, or known how to drape the robe of spiritual honour about the drooping form of a victor in a barren strife. And the honour is always well won; for the struggles Mr. Henry James chronicles with such subtle and direct insight are, though only personal contests, desperate in their silence, none the less heroic (in the modern sense) for the absence of shouted watchwords, clash of arms and sound of trumpets. Those are adventures in which only choice souls are ever involved. And Mr. Henry James records them with a fearless and insistent fidelity to the *péripéties* of the contest, and the feelings of the combatants.

The fiercest excitements of a romance *de cape et d'épée*, the romance of yard-arm and boarding pike so dear to youth, whose knowledge of action (as of other things) is imperfect and limited, are matched, for the quickening of our maturer years, by the tasks set, by the difficulties presented, to the sense of truth, of necessity — before all, of conduct — of Mr. Henry James's men and women. His mankind is delightful. It is

delightful in its tenacity; it refuses to own itself beaten; it will sleep on the battlefield. These warlike images come by themselves under the pen; since from the duality of man's nature and the competition of individuals, the life-history of the earth must in the last instance be a history of a really very relentless warfare. Neither his fellows, nor his gods, nor his passions will leave a man alone. In virtue of these allies and enemies, he holds his precarious dominion, he possesses his fleeting significance; and it is this relation in all its manifestations, great and little, superficial or profound, and this relation alone, that is commented upon, interpreted, demonstrated by the art of the novelist in the only possible way in which the task can be performed: by the independent creation of circumstance and character, achieved against all the difficulties of expression, in an imaginative effort finding its inspiration from the reality of forms and sensations. That a sacrifice must be made, that something has to be given up, is the truth engraved in the innermost recesses of the fair temple built for our edification by the masters of fiction. There is no other secret behind the curtain. All adventure, all love, every success is resumed in the supreme energy of an act of renunciation. It is the uttermost limit of our power; it is the most potent and effective force at our disposal on which rest the labours of a solitary man in his study, the rock on which have been built commonwealths whose might casts a dwarfing shadow upon two oceans. Like a natural force which is obscured as much as illuminated by the multiplicity of phenomena, the power of renunciation is obscured by the mass of weaknesses, vacillations, secondary motives and false steps and compromises which make up the sum of our activity. But no man or woman worthy of the name can pretend to anything more, to anything greater. And Mr. Henry James's men and women are worthy of the name, within the limits his art, so clear, so sure of itself, has drawn round their activities. He would be the last to claim for them Titanic proportions. The earth itself has grown smaller in the course of ages. But in every sphere of human perplexities and emotions, there are more greatnesses than one — not counting here the greatness of the artist himself. Wherever he stands, at the beginning or the end of things, a man has to sacrifice his gods to his passions, or his passions to his gods. That is the problem, great enough, in all truth, if approached in the spirit of sincerity and knowledge.

In one of his critical studies, published some fifteen years ago, Mr. Henry James claims for the novelist the standing of the historian as the only

adequate one, as for himself and before his audience. I think that the claim cannot be contested, and that the position is unassailable. Fiction is history, human history, or it is nothing. But it is also more than that; it stands on firmer ground, being based on the reality of forms and the observation of social phenomena, whereas history is based on documents, and the reading of print and handwriting — on second-hand impression. Thus fiction is nearer truth. But let that pass. A historian may be an artist too, and a novelist is a historian, the preserver, the keeper, the expounder, of human experience. As is meet for a man of his descent and tradition, Mr. Henry James is the historian of fine consciences.

Of course, this is a general statement; but I don't think its truth will be, or can be questioned. Its fault is that it leaves so much out; and, besides, Mr. Henry James is much too considerable to be put into the nutshell of a phrase. The fact remains that he has made his choice, and that his choice is justified up to the hilt by the success of his art. He has taken for himself the greater part. The range of a fine conscience covers more good and evil than the range of conscience which may be called, roughly, not fine; a conscience, less troubled by the nice discrimination of shades of conduct. A fine conscience is more concerned with essentials; its triumphs are more perfect, if less profitable, in a worldly sense. There is, in short, more truth in its working for a historian to detect and to show. It is a thing of infinite complication and suggestion. None of these escapes the art of Mr. Henry James. He has mastered the country, his domain, not wild indeed, but full of romantic glimpses, of deep shadows and sunny places. There are no secrets left within his range. He has disclosed them as they should be disclosed — that is, beautifully. And, indeed, ugliness has but little place in this world of his creation. Yet, it is always felt in the truthfulness of his art; it is there, it surrounds the scene, it presses close upon it. It is made visible, tangible, in the struggles, in the contacts of the fine consciences, in their perplexities, in the sophism of their mistakes. For a fine conscience is naturally a virtuous one. What is natural about it is just its fineness, an abiding sense of the intangible, ever-present, right. It is most visible in their ultimate triumph, in their emergence from miracle, through an energetic act of renunciation. Energetic, not violent: the distinction is wide, enormous, like that between substance and shadow.

Through it all Mr. Henry James keeps a firm hold of the substance, of what is worth having, of what is worth holding. The contrary opinion has

been, if not absolutely affirmed, then at least implied, with some frequency. To most of us, living willingly in a sort of intellectual moonlight, in the faintly reflected light of truth, the shadows so firmly renounced by Mr. Henry James's men and women, stand out endowed with extraordinary value, with a value so extraordinary that their rejection offends, by its uncalled-for scrupulousness, those business-like instincts which a careful Providence has implanted in our breasts. And, apart from that just cause of discontent, it is obvious that a solution by rejection must always present a certain lack of finality, especially startling when contrasted with the usual methods of solution by rewards and punishments, by crowned love, by fortune, by a broken leg or a sudden death. Why the reading public which, as a body, has never laid upon a story-teller the command to be an artist, should demand from him this sham of Divine Omnipotence, is utterly incomprehensible. But so it is; and these solutions are legitimate inasmuch as they satisfy the desire for finality, for which our hearts yearn with a longing greater than the longing for the loaves and fishes of this earth. Perhaps the only true desire of mankind, coming thus to light in its hours of leisure, is to be set at rest. One is never set at rest by Mr. Henry James's novels. His books end as an episode in life ends. You remain with the sense of the life still going on; and even the subtle presence of the dead is felt in that silence that comes upon the artist-creation when the last word has been read. It is eminently satisfying, but it is not final. Mr. Henry James, great artist and faithful historian, never attempts the impossible.

## ALPHONSE DAUDET — 1898

It is sweet to talk decorously of the dead who are part of our past, our indisputable possession. One must admit regretfully that to-day is but a scramble, that to-morrow may never come; it is only the precious yesterday that cannot be taken away from us. A gift from the dead, great and little, it makes life supportable, it almost makes one believe in a benevolent scheme of creation. And some kind of belief is very necessary. But the real knowledge of matters infinitely more profound than any conceivable scheme of creation is with the dead alone. That is why our talk about them should be as decorous as their silence. Their generosity and their discretion deserve nothing less at our hands; and they, who belong already to the unchangeable, would probably disdain to claim more than this from a mankind that changes its loves and its hates about every twenty-five years — at the coming of every new and wiser generation.

One of the most generous of the dead is Daudet, who, with a prodigality approaching magnificence, gave himself up to us without reserve in his work, with all his qualities and all his faults. Neither his qualities nor his faults were great, though they were by no means imperceptible. It is only his generosity that is out of the common. What strikes one most in his work is the disinterestedness of the toiler. With more talent than many bigger men, he did not preach about himself, he did not attempt to persuade mankind into a belief of his own greatness. He never posed as a scientist or as a seer, not even as a prophet; and he neglected his interests to the point of never propounding a theory for the purpose of giving a tremendous significance to his art, alone of all things, in a world that, by some strange oversight, has not been supplied with an obvious meaning. Neither did he affect a passive attitude before the spectacle of life, an attitude which in gods — and in a rare mortal here and there — may appear godlike, but assumed by some men, causes one, very unwillingly, to think of the melancholy quietude of an ape. He was not the wearisome expounder of this or that theory, here to-day and spurned to-morrow. He was not a great artist, he was not an artist at all, if you like — but he was Alphonse Daudet, a man as naively clear, honest, and vibrating as the sunshine of his native land; that regrettably indiscriminating sunshine which matures grapes and

pumpkins alike, and cannot, of course, obtain the commendation of the very select who look at life from under a parasol.

Naturally, being a man from the South, he had a rather outspoken belief in himself, but his small distinction, worth many a greater, was in not being in bondage to some vanishing creed. He was a worker who could not compel the admiration of the few, but who deserved the affection of the many; and he may be spoken of with tenderness and regret, for he is not immortal — he is only dead. During his life the simple man whose business it ought to have been to climb, in the name of Art, some elevation or other, was content to remain below, on the plain, amongst his creations, and take an eager part in those disasters, weaknesses, and joys which are tragic enough in their droll way, but are by no means so momentous and profound as some writers — probably for the sake of Art — would like to make us believe. There is, when one thinks of it, a considerable want of candour in the august view of life. Without doubt a cautious reticence on the subject, or even a delicately false suggestion thrown out in that direction is, in a way, praiseworthy, since it helps to uphold the dignity of man — a matter of great importance, as anyone can see; still one cannot help feeling that a certain amount of sincerity would not be wholly blamable. To state, then, with studied moderation a belief that in unfortunate moments of lucidity is irresistibly borne in upon most of us — the blind agitation caused mostly by hunger and complicated by love and ferocity does not deserve either by its beauty, or its morality, or its possible results, the artistic fuss made over it. It may be consoling — for human folly is very *bizarre* — but it is scarcely honest to shout at those who struggle drowning in an insignificant pool: You are indeed admirable and great to be the victims of such a profound, of such a terrible ocean!

And Daudet was honest; perhaps because he knew no better — but he was very honest. If he saw only the surface of things it is for the reason that most things have nothing but a surface. He did not pretend — perhaps because he did not know how — he did not pretend to see any depths in a life that is only a film of unsteady appearances stretched over regions deep indeed, but which have nothing to do with the half-truths, half-thoughts, and whole illusions of existence. The road to these distant regions does not lie through the domain of Art or the domain of Science where well-known voices quarrel noisily in a misty emptiness; it is a path of toilsome silence

upon which travel men simple and unknown, with closed lips, or, maybe, whispering their pain softly — only to themselves.

But Daudet did not whisper; he spoke loudly, with animation, with a clear felicity of tone — as a bird sings. He saw life around him with extreme clearness, and he felt it as it is — thinner than air and more elusive than a flash of lightning. He hastened to offer it his compassion, his indignation, his wonder, his sympathy, without giving a moment of thought to the momentous issues that are supposed to lurk in the logic of such sentiments. He tolerated the little foibles, the small ruffianisms, the grave mistakes; the only thing he distinctly would not forgive was hardness of heart. This unpractical attitude would have been fatal to a better man, but his readers have forgiven him. Withal he is chivalrous to exiled queens and deformed sempstresses, he is pityingly tender to broken-down actors, to ruined gentlemen, to stupid Academicians; he is glad of the joys of the commonplace people in a commonplace way — and he never makes a secret of all this. No, the man was not an artist. What if his creations are illumined by the sunshine of his temperament so vividly that they stand before us infinitely more real than the dingy illusions surrounding our everyday existence? The misguided man is for ever pottering amongst them, lifting up his voice, dotting his i's in the wrong places. He takes Tartarin by the arm, he does not conceal his interest in the Nabob's cheques, his sympathy for an honest Academician *plus bête que nature*, his hate for an architect *plus mauvais que la gale*; he is in the thick of it all. He feels with the Duc de Mora and with Felicia Ruys — and he lets you see it. He does not sit on a pedestal in the hieratic and imbecile pose of some cheap god whose greatness consists in being too stupid to care. He cares immensely for his Nabobs, his kings, his book-keepers, his Colettes, and his Saphos. He vibrates together with his universe, and with lamentable simplicity follows M. de Montpavon on that last walk along the Boulevards.

“Monsieur de Montpavon marche à la mort,” and the creator of that unlucky *gentilhomme* follows with stealthy footsteps, with wide eyes, with an impressively pointing finger. And who wouldn't look? But it is hard; it is sometimes very hard to forgive him the dotted i's, the pointing finger, this making plain of obvious mysteries. “Monsieur de Montpavon marche à la mort,” and presently, on the crowded pavement, takes off his hat with punctilious courtesy to the doctor's wife, who, elegant and unhappy, is bound on the same pilgrimage. This is too much! We feel we cannot

forgive him such meetings, the constant whisper of his presence. We feel we cannot, till suddenly the very *naïveté* of it all touches us with the revealed suggestion of a truth. Then we see that the man is not false; all this is done in transparent good faith. The man is not melodramatic; he is only picturesque. He may not be an artist, but he comes as near the truth as some of the greatest. His creations are seen; you can look into their very eyes, and these are as thoughtless as the eyes of any wise generation that has in its hands the fame of writers. Yes, they are *seen*, and the man who is not an artist is seen also commiserating, indignant, joyous, human and alive in their very midst. Inevitably they *marchent à la mort* — and they are very near the truth of our common destiny: their fate is poignant, it is intensely interesting, and of not the slightest consequence.

**GUY DE MAUPASSANT — 1904 {1}**

To introduce Maupassant to English readers with apologetic explanations as though his art were recondite and the tendency of his work immoral would be a gratuitous impertinence.

Maupassant's conception of his art is such as one would expect from a practical and resolute mind; but in the consummate simplicity of his technique it ceases to be perceptible. This is one of its greatest qualities, and like all the great virtues it is based primarily on self-denial.

To pronounce a judgment upon the general tendency of an author is a difficult task. One could not depend upon reason alone, nor yet trust solely to one's emotions. Used together, they would in many cases traverse each other, because emotions have their own unanswerable logic. Our capacity for emotion is limited, and the field of our intelligence is restricted. Responsiveness to every feeling, combined with the penetration of every intellectual subterfuge, would end, not in judgment, but in universal absolution. *Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner*. And in this benevolent neutrality towards the warring errors of human nature all light would go out from art and from life.

We are at liberty then to quarrel with Maupassant's attitude towards our world in which, like the rest of us, he has that share which his senses are able to give him. But we need not quarrel with him violently. If our feelings (which are tender) happen to be hurt because his talent is not exercised for the praise and consolation of mankind, our intelligence (which is great) should let us see that he is a very splendid sinner, like all those who in this valley of compromises err by over-devotion to the truth that is



in them. His determinism, barren of praise, blame and consolation, has all the merit of his conscientious art. The worth of every conviction consists precisely in the steadfastness with which it is held.

Except for his philosophy, which in the case of so consummate an artist does not matter (unless to the solemn and naive mind), Maupassant of all writers of fiction demands least forgiveness from his readers. He does not require forgiveness because he is never dull.

The interest of a reader in a work of imagination is either ethical or that of simple curiosity. Both are perfectly legitimate, since there is both a moral and an excitement to be found in a faithful rendering of life. And in Maupassant's work there is the interest of curiosity and the moral of a point of view consistently preserved and never obtruded for the end of personal gratification. The spectacle of this immense talent served by exceptional faculties and triumphing over the most thankless subjects by an unswerving singleness of purpose is in itself an admirable lesson in the power of artistic honesty, one may say of artistic virtue. The inherent greatness of the man consists in this, that he will let none of the fascinations that beset a writer working in loneliness turn him away from the straight path, from the vouchsafed vision of excellence. He will not be led into perdition by the seductions of sentiment, of eloquence, of humour, of pathos; of all that splendid pageant of faults that pass between the writer and his probity on the blank sheet of paper, like the glittering cortège of deadly sins before the austere anchorite in the desert air of Thebaïde. This is not to say that Maupassant's austerity has never faltered; but the fact remains that no tempting demon has ever succeeded in hurling him down from his high, if narrow, pedestal.

It is the austerity of his talent, of course, that is in question. Let the discriminating reader, who at times may well spare a moment or two to the consideration and enjoyment of artistic excellence, be asked to reflect a little upon the texture of two stories included in this volume: "A Piece of String," and "A Sale." How many openings the last offers for the gratuitous display of the author's wit or clever buffoonery, the first for an unmeasured display of sentiment! And both sentiment and buffoonery could have been made very good too, in a way accessible to the meanest intelligence, at the cost of truth and honesty. Here it is where Maupassant's austerity comes in. He refrains from setting his cleverness against the eloquence of the facts. There is humour and pathos in these stories; but such is the greatness

of his talent, the refinement of his artistic conscience, that all his high qualities appear inherent in the very things of which he speaks, as if they had been altogether independent of his presentation. Facts, and again facts are his unique concern. That is why he is not always properly understood. His facts are so perfectly rendered that, like the actualities of life itself, they demand from the reader the faculty of observation which is rare, the power of appreciation which is generally wanting in most of us who are guided mainly by empty phrases requiring no effort, demanding from us no qualities except a vague susceptibility to emotion. Nobody has ever gained the vast applause of a crowd by the simple and clear exposition of vital facts. Words alone strung upon a convention have fascinated us as worthless glass beads strung on a thread have charmed at all times our brothers the unsophisticated savages of the islands. Now, Maupassant, of whom it has been said that he is the master of the *mot juste*, has never been a dealer in words. His wares have been, not glass beads, but polished gems; not the most rare and precious, perhaps, but of the very first water of their kind.

That he took trouble with his gems, taking them up in the rough and polishing each facet patiently, the publication of the two posthumous volumes of short stories proves abundantly. I think it proves also the assertion made here that he was by no means a dealer in words. On looking at the first feeble drafts from which so many perfect stories have been fashioned, one discovers that what has been matured, improved, brought to perfection by unwearied endeavour is not the diction of the tale, but the vision of its true shape and detail. Those first attempts are not faltering or uncertain in expression. It is the conception which is at fault. The subjects have not yet been adequately seen. His proceeding was not to group expressive words, that mean nothing, around misty and mysterious shapes dear to muddled intellects and belonging neither to earth nor to heaven. His vision by a more scrupulous, prolonged and devoted attention to the aspects of the visible world discovered at last the right words as if miraculously impressed for him upon the face of things and events. This was the particular shape taken by his inspiration; it came to him directly, honestly in the light of his day, not on the tortuous, dark roads of meditation. His realities came to him from a genuine source, from this universe of vain appearances wherein we men have found everything to make us proud, sorry, exalted, and humble.

Maupassant's renown is universal, but his popularity is restricted. It is not difficult to perceive why. Maupassant is an intensely national writer. He is so intensely national in his logic, in his clearness, in his æsthetic and moral conceptions, that he has been accepted by his countrymen without having had to pay the tribute of flattery either to the nation as a whole, or to any class, sphere or division of the nation. The truth of his art tells with an irresistible force; and he stands excused from the duty of patriotic posturing. He is a Frenchman of Frenchmen beyond question or cavil, and with that he is simple enough to be universally comprehensible. What is wanting to his universal success is the mediocrity of an obvious and appealing tenderness. He neglects to qualify his truth with the drop of facile sweetness; he forgets to strew paper roses over the tombs. The disregard of these common decencies lays him open to the charges of cruelty, cynicism, hardness. And yet it can be safely affirmed that this man wrote from the fulness of a compassionate heart. He is merciless and yet gentle with his mankind; he does not rail at their prudent fears and their small artifices; he does not despise their labours. It seems to me that he looks with an eye of profound pity upon their troubles, deceptions and misery. But he looks at them all. He sees — and does not turn away his head. As a matter of fact he is courageous.

Courage and justice are not popular virtues. The practice of strict justice is shocking to the multitude who always (perhaps from an obscure sense of guilt) attach to it the meaning of mercy. In the majority of us, who want to be left alone with our illusions, courage inspires a vague alarm. This is what is felt about Maupassant. His qualities, to use the charming and popular phrase, are not lovable. Courage being a force will not masquerade in the robes of affected delicacy and restraint. But if his courage is not of a chivalrous stamp, it cannot be denied that it is never brutal for the sake of effect. The writer of these few reflections, inspired by a long and intimate acquaintance with the work of the man, has been struck by the appreciation of Maupassant manifested by many women gifted with tenderness and intelligence. Their more delicate and audacious souls are good judges of courage. Their finer penetration has discovered his genuine masculinity without display, his virility without a pose. They have discerned in his faithful dealings with the world that enterprising and fearless temperament, poor in ideas but rich in power, which appeals most to the feminine mind.

It cannot be denied that he thinks very little. In him extreme energy of perception achieves great results, as in men of action the energy of force and desire. His view of intellectual problems is perhaps more simple than their nature warrants; still a man who has written *Yvette* cannot be accused of want of subtlety. But one cannot insist enough upon this, that his subtlety, his humour, his grimness, though no doubt they are his own, are never presented otherwise but as belonging to our life, as found in nature, whose beauties and cruelties alike breathe the spirit of serene unconsciousness.

Maupassant's philosophy of life is more temperamental than rational. He expects nothing from gods or men. He trusts his senses for information and his instinct for deductions. It may seem that he has made but little use of his mind. But let me be clearly understood. His sensibility is really very great; and it is impossible to be sensible, unless one thinks vividly, unless one thinks correctly, starting from intelligible premises to an unsophisticated conclusion.

This is literary honesty. It may be remarked that it does not differ very greatly from the ideal honesty of the respectable majority, from the honesty of law-givers, of warriors, of kings, of bricklayers, of all those who express their fundamental sentiment in the ordinary course of their activities, by the work of their hands.

The work of Maupassant's hands is honest. He thinks sufficiently to concrete his fearless conclusions in illuminative instances. He renders them with that exact knowledge of the means and that absolute devotion to the aim of creating a true effect — which is art. He is the most accomplished of narrators.

It is evident that Maupassant looked upon his mankind in another spirit than those writers who make haste to submerge the difficulties of our holding-place in the universe under a flood of false and sentimental assumptions. Maupassant was a true and dutiful lover of our earth. He says himself in one of his descriptive passages: “*Nous autres que séduit la terre . . .*” It was true. The earth had for him a compelling charm. He looks upon her august and furrowed face with the fierce insight of real passion. His is the power of detecting the one immutable quality that matters in the changing aspects of nature and under the ever-shifting surface of life. To say that he could not embrace in his glance all its magnificence and all its misery is only to say that he was human. He lays claim to nothing that his

matchless vision has not made his own. This creative artist has the true imagination; he never condescends to invent anything; he sets up no empty pretences. And he stoops to no littleness in his art — least of all to the miserable vanity of a catching phrase.

# **ANATOLE FRANCE — 1904**

## I. — "CRAINQUEBILLE"

The latest volume of M. Anatole France purports, by the declaration of its title-page, to contain several profitable narratives. The story of Crainquebille's encounter with human justice stands at the head of them; a tale of a well-bestowed charity closes the book with the touch of playful irony characteristic of the writer on whom the most distinguished amongst his literary countrymen have conferred the rank of Prince of Prose.

Never has a dignity been better borne. M. Anatole France is a good prince. He knows nothing of tyranny but much of compassion. The detachment of his mind from common errors and current superstitions befits the exalted rank he holds in the Commonwealth of Literature. It is just to suppose that the clamour of the tribes in the forum had little to do with his elevation. Their elect are of another stamp. They are such as their need of precipitate action requires. He is the Elect of the Senate — the Senate of Letters — whose Conscript Fathers have recognised him as *primus inter pares*; a post of pure honour and of no privilege.

It is a good choice. First, because it is just, and next, because it is safe. The dignity will suffer no diminution in M. Anatole France's hands. He is worthy of a great tradition, learned in the lessons of the past, concerned with the present, and as earnest as to the future as a good prince should be in his public action. It is a Republican dignity. And M. Anatole France, with his sceptical insight into all forms of government, is a good Republican. He is indulgent to the weaknesses of the people, and perceives that political institutions, whether contrived by the wisdom of the few or the ignorance of the many, are incapable of securing the happiness of mankind. He perceives this truth in the serenity of his soul and in the elevation of his mind. He expresses his convictions with measure, restraint and harmony, which are indeed princely qualities. He is a great analyst of illusions. He searches and probes their innermost recesses as if they were realities made of an eternal substance. And therein consists his humanity; this is the expression of his profound and unalterable compassion. He will flatter no tribe no section in the forum or in the market-place. His lucid thought is not beguiled into false pity or into the common weakness of affection. He feels that men born in ignorance as in the house of an enemy, and condemned to struggle with error and passions through endless centuries,

should be spared the supreme cruelty of a hope for ever deferred. He knows that our best hopes are unrealisable; that it is the almost incredible misfortune of mankind, but also its highest privilege, to aspire towards the impossible; that men have never failed to defeat their highest aims by the very strength of their humanity which can conceive the most gigantic tasks but leaves them disarmed before their irremediable littleness. He knows this well because he is an artist and a master; but he knows, too, that only in the continuity of effort there is a refuge from despair for minds less clear-seeing and philosophic than his own. Therefore he wishes us to believe and to hope, preserving in our activity the consoling illusion of power and intelligent purpose. He is a good and politic prince.

“The majesty of justice is contained entire in each sentence pronounced by the judge in the name of the sovereign people. Jérôme Crainquebille, hawker of vegetables, became aware of the august aspect of the law as he stood indicted before the tribunal of the higher Police Court on a charge of insulting a constable of the force.” With this exposition begins the first tale of M. Anatole France’s latest volume.

The bust of the Republic and the image of the Crucified Christ appear side by side above the bench occupied by the President Bourriche and his two Assessors; all the laws divine and human are suspended over the head of Crainquebille.

From the first visual impression of the accused and of the court the author passes by a characteristic and natural turn to the historical and moral significance of those two emblems of State and Religion whose accord is only possible to the confused reasoning of an average man. But the reasoning of M. Anatole France is never confused. His reasoning is clear and informed by a profound erudition. Such is not the case of Crainquebille, a street hawker, charged with insulting the constituted power of society in the person of a policeman. The charge is not true, nothing was further from his thoughts; but, amazed by the novelty of his position, he does not reflect that the Cross on the wall perpetuates the memory of a sentence which for nineteen hundred years all the Christian peoples have looked upon as a grave miscarriage of justice. He might well have challenged the President to pronounce any sort of sentence, if it were merely to forty-eight hours of simple imprisonment, in the name of the Crucified Redeemer.



He might have done so. But Crainquebille, who has lived pushing every day for half a century his hand-barrow loaded with vegetables through the streets of Paris, has not a philosophic mind. Truth to say he has nothing. He is one of the disinherited. Properly speaking, he has no existence at all, or, to be strictly truthful, he had no existence till M. Anatole France's philosophic mind and human sympathy have called him up from his nothingness for our pleasure, and, as the title-page of the book has it, no doubt for our profit also.

Therefore we behold him in the dock, a stranger to all historical, political or social considerations which can be brought to bear upon his case. He remains lost in astonishment. Penetrated with respect, overwhelmed with awe, he is ready to trust the judge upon the question of his transgression. In his conscience he does not think himself culpable; but M. Anatole France's philosophical mind discovers for us that he feels all the insignificance of such a thing as the conscience of a mere street-hawker in the face of the symbols of the law and before the ministers of social repression. Crainquebille is innocent; but already the young advocate, his defender, has half persuaded him of his guilt.

On this phrase practically ends the introductory chapter of the story which, as the author's dedication states, has inspired an admirable draughtsman and a skilful dramatist, each in his art, to a vision of tragic grandeur. And this opening chapter without a name — consisting of two and a half pages, some four hundred words at most — is a masterpiece of insight and simplicity, resumed in M. Anatole France's distinction of thought and in his princely command of words.

It is followed by six more short chapters, concise and full, delicate and complete like the petals of a flower, presenting to us the Adventure of Crainquebille — Crainquebille before the justice — An Apology for the President of the Tribunal — Of the Submission of Crainquebille to the Laws of the Republic — Of his Attitude before the Public Opinion, and so on to the chapter of the Last Consequences. We see, created for us in his outward form and innermost perplexity, the old man degraded from his high estate of a law-abiding street-hawker and driven to insult, really this time, the majesty of the social order in the person of another police-constable. It is not an act of revolt, and still less of revenge. Crainquebille is too old, too resigned, too weary, too guileless to raise the black standard of insurrection. He is cold and homeless and starving. He remembers the

warmth and the food of the prison. He perceives the means to get back there. Since he has been locked up, he argues with himself, for uttering words which, as a matter of fact he did not say, he will go forth now, and to the first policeman he meets will say those very words in order to be imprisoned again. Thus reasons Crainquebille with simplicity and confidence. He accepts facts. Nothing surprises him. But all the phenomena of social organisation and of his own life remain for him mysterious to the end. The description of the policeman in his short cape and hood, who stands quite still, under the light of a street lamp at the edge of the pavement shining with the wet of a rainy autumn evening along the whole extent of a long and deserted thoroughfare, is a perfect piece of imaginative precision. From under the edge of the hood his eyes look upon Crainquebille, who has just uttered in an uncertain voice the sacramental, insulting phrase of the popular slang — *Mort aux vaches!* They look upon him shining in the deep shadow of the hood with an expression of sadness, vigilance, and contempt.

He does not move. Crainquebille, in a feeble and hesitating voice, repeats once more the insulting words. But this policeman is full of philosophic superiority, disdain, and indulgence. He refuses to take in charge the old and miserable vagabond who stands before him shivering and ragged in the drizzle. And the ruined Crainquebille, victim of a ridiculous miscarriage of justice, appalled at this magnanimity, passes on hopelessly down the street full of shadows where the lamps gleam each in a ruddy halo of falling mist.

M. Anatole France can speak for the people. This prince of the Senate is invested with the tribunitian power. M. Anatole France is something of a Socialist; and in that respect he seems to depart from his sceptical philosophy. But as an illustrious statesman, now no more, a great prince too, with an ironic mind and a literary gift, has sarcastically remarked in one of his public speeches: "We are all Socialists now." And in the sense in which it may be said that we all in Europe are Christians that is true enough. To many of us Socialism is merely an emotion. An emotion is much and is also less than nothing. It is the initial impulse. The real Socialism of to-day is a religion. It has its dogmas. The value of the dogma does not consist in its truthfulness, and M. Anatole France, who loves truth, does not love dogma. Only, unlike religion, the cohesive strength of Socialism lies not in its dogmas but in its ideal. It is perhaps a

too materialistic ideal, and the mind of M. Anatole France may not find in it either comfort or consolation. It is not to be doubted that he suspects this himself; but there is something reposeful in the finality of popular conceptions. M. Anatole France, a good prince and a good Republican, will succeed no doubt in being a good Socialist. He will disregard the stupidity of the dogma and the unlovely form of the ideal. His art will find its own beauty in the imaginative presentation of wrongs, of errors, and miseries that call aloud for redress. M. Anatole France is humane. He is also human. He may be able to discard his philosophy; to forget that the evils are many and the remedies are few, that there is no universal panacea, that fatality is invincible, that there is an implacable menace of death in the triumph of the humanitarian idea. He may forget all that because love is stronger than truth.

Besides "Crainquebille" this volume contains sixteen other stories and sketches. To define them it is enough to say that they are written in M. Anatole France's prose. One sketch entitled "Riquet" may be found incorporated in the volume of *Monsieur Bergeret à Paris*. "Putois" is a remarkable little tale, significant, humorous, amusing, and symbolic. It concerns the career of a man born in the utterance of a hasty and untruthful excuse made by a lady at a loss how to decline without offence a very pressing invitation to dinner from a very tyrannical aunt. This happens in a provincial town, and the lady says in effect: "Impossible, my dear aunt. Tomorrow I am expecting the gardener." And the garden she glances at is a poor garden; it is a wild garden; its extent is insignificant and its neglect seems beyond remedy. "A gardener! What for?" asks the aunt. "To work in the garden." And the poor lady is abashed at the transparency of her evasion. But the lie is told, it is believed, and she sticks to it. When the masterful old aunt inquires, "What is the man's name, my dear?" she answers brazenly, "His name is Putois." "Where does he live?" "Oh, I don't know; anywhere. He won't give his address. One leaves a message for him here and there." "Oh! I see," says the other; "he is a sort of ne'er do well, an idler, a vagabond. I advise you, my dear, to be careful how you let such a creature into your grounds; but I have a large garden, and when you do not want his services I shall find him some work to do, and see he does it too. Tell your Putois to come and see me." And thereupon Putois is born; he stalks abroad, invisible, upon his career of vagabondage and crime, stealing melons from gardens and tea-spoons from pantries, indulging his

licentious proclivities; becoming the talk of the town and of the countryside; seen simultaneously in far-distant places; pursued by gendarmes, whose brigadier assures the uneasy householders that he “knows that scamp very well, and won’t be long in laying his hands upon him.” A detailed description of his person collected from the information furnished by various people appears in the columns of a local newspaper. Putois lives in his strength and malevolence. He lives after the manner of legendary heroes, of the gods of Olympus. He is the creation of the popular mind. There comes a time when even the innocent originator of that mysterious and potent evil-doer is induced to believe for a moment that he may have a real and tangible presence. All this is told with the wit and the art and the philosophy which is familiar to M. Anatole France’s readers and admirers. For it is difficult to read M. Anatole France without admiring him. He has the princely gift of arousing a spontaneous loyalty, but with this difference, that the consent of our reason has its place by the side of our enthusiasm. He is an artist. As an artist he awakens emotion. The quality of his art remains, as an inspiration, fascinating and inscrutable; but the proceedings of his thought compel our intellectual admiration.

In this volume the trifle called “The Military Manoeuvres at Montil,” apart from its far-reaching irony, embodies incidentally the very spirit of automobilism. Somehow or other, how you cannot tell, the flight over the country in a motor-car, its sensations, its fatigue, its vast topographical range, its incidents down to the bursting of a tyre, are brought home to you with all the force of high imaginative perception. It would be out of place to analyse here the means by which the true impression is conveyed so that the absurd rushing about of General Decuir, in a 30-horse-power car, in search of his cavalry brigade, becomes to you a more real experience than any day-and-night run you may ever have taken yourself. Suffice it to say that M. Anatole France had thought the thing worth doing and that it becomes, in virtue of his art, a distinct achievement. And there are other sketches in this book, more or less slight, but all worthy of regard — the childhood’s recollections of Professor Bergeret and his sister Zoé; the dialogue of the two upright judges and the conversation of their horses; the dream of M. Jean Marteau, aimless, extravagant, apocalyptic, and of all the dreams one ever dreamt, the most essentially dreamlike. The vision of M. Anatole France, the Prince of Prose, ranges over all the extent of his realm, indulgent and penetrating, disillusioned and curious, finding treasures of

truth and beauty concealed from less gifted magicians. Contemplating the exactness of his images and the justice of his judgment, the freedom of his fancy and the fidelity of his purpose, one becomes aware of the futility of literary watchwords and the vanity of all the schools of fiction. Not that M. Anatole France is a wild and untrammelled genius. He is not that. Issued legitimately from the past, he is mindful of his high descent. He has a critical temperament joined to creative power. He surveys his vast domain in a spirit of princely moderation that knows nothing of excesses but much of restraint.

## II. — "L'ÎLE DES PINGOUINS"

M. Anatole France, historian and adventurer, has given us many profitable histories of saints and sinners, of Roman procurators and of officials of the Third Republic, of *grandes dames* and of dames not so very grand, of ornate Latinists and of inarticulate street hawkers, of priests and generals — in fact, the history of all humanity as it appears to his penetrating eye, serving a mind marvellously incisive in its scepticism, and a heart that, of all contemporary hearts gifted with a voice, contains the greatest treasure of charitable irony. As to M. Anatole France's adventures, these are well-known. They lie open to this prodigal world in the four volumes of the *Vie Littéraire*, describing the adventures of a choice soul amongst masterpieces. For such is the romantic view M. Anatole France takes of the life of a literary critic. History and adventure, then, seem to be the chosen fields for the magnificent evolutions of M. Anatole France's prose; but no material limits can stand in the way of a genius. The latest book from his pen — which may be called golden, as the lips of an eloquent saint once upon a time were acclaimed golden by the faithful — this latest book is, up to a certain point, a book of travel.

I would not mislead a public whose confidence I court. The book is not a record of globe-trotting. I regret it. It would have been a joy to watch M. Anatole France pouring the clear elixir compounded of his Pyrrhonic philosophy, his Benedictine erudition, his gentle wit and most humane irony into such an unpromising and opaque vessel. He would have attempted it in a spirit of benevolence towards his fellow men and of compassion for that life of the earth which is but a vain and transitory illusion. M. Anatole France is a great magician, yet there seem to be tasks which he dare not face. For he is also a sage.

It is a book of ocean travel — not, however, as understood by Herr Ballin of Hamburg, the Machiavel of the Atlantic. It is a book of exploration and discovery — not, however, as conceived by an enterprising journal and a shrewdly philanthropic king of the nineteenth century. It is nothing so recent as that. It dates much further back; long, long before the dark age when Krupp of Essen wrought at his steel plates and a German Emperor condescendingly suggested the last improvements in ships' dining-tables. The best idea of the inconceivable antiquity of that enterprise I can give you

is by stating the nature of the explorer's ship. It was a trough of stone, a vessel of hollowed granite.

The explorer was St. Maël, a saint of Armorica. I had never heard of him before, but I believe now in his arduous existence with a faith which is a tribute to M. Anatole France's pious earnestness and delicate irony. St. Maël existed. It is distinctly stated of him that his life was a progress in virtue. Thus it seems that there may be saints that are not progressively virtuous. St. Maël was not of that kind. He was industrious. He evangelised the heathen. He erected two hundred and eighteen chapels and seventy-four abbeys. Indefatigable navigator of the faith, he drifted casually in the miraculous trough of stone from coast to coast and from island to island along the northern seas. At the age of eighty-four his high stature was bowed by his long labours, but his sinewy arms preserved their vigour and his rude eloquence had lost nothing of its force.

A nautical devil tempting him by the worldly suggestion of fitting out his desultory, miraculous trough with mast, sail, and rudder for swifter progression (the idea of haste has sprung from the pride of Satan), the simple old saint lent his ear to the subtle arguments of the progressive enemy of mankind.

The venerable St. Maël fell away from grace by not perceiving at once that a gift of heaven cannot be improved by the contrivances of human ingenuity. His punishment was adequate. A terrific tempest snatched the rigged ship of stone in its whirlwinds, and, to be brief, the dazed St. Maël was stranded violently on the Island of Penguins.

The saint wandered away from the shore. It was a flat, round island whence rose in the centre a conical mountain capped with clouds. The rain was falling incessantly — a gentle, soft rain which caused the simple saint to exclaim in great delight: "This is the island of tears, the island of contrition!"

Meantime the inhabitants had flocked in their tens of thousands to an amphitheatre of rocks; they were penguins; but the holy man, rendered deaf and purblind by his years, mistook excusably the multitude of silly, erect, and self-important birds for a human crowd. At once he began to preach to them the doctrine of salvation. Having finished his discourse he lost no time in administering to his interesting congregation the sacrament of baptism.

If you are at all a theologian you will see that it was no mean adventure to happen to a well-meaning and zealous saint. Pray reflect on the magnitude of the issues! It is easy to believe what M. Anatole France says, that, when the baptism of the Penguins became known in Paradise, it caused there neither joy nor sorrow, but a profound sensation.

M. Anatole France is no mean theologian himself. He reports with great casuistical erudition the debates in the saintly council assembled in Heaven for the consideration of an event so disturbing to the economy of religious mysteries. Ultimately the baptised Penguins had to be turned into human beings; and together with the privilege of sublime hopes these innocent birds received the curse of original sin, with the labours, the miseries, the passions, and the weaknesses attached to the fallen condition of humanity.

At this point M. Anatole France is again an historian. From being the Hakluyt of a saintly adventurer he turns (but more concisely) into the Gibbon of Imperial Penguins. Tracing the development of their civilisation, the absurdity of their desires, the pathos of their folly and the ridiculous littleness of their quarrels, his golden pen lightens by relevant but unpuritanical anecdotes the austerity of a work devoted to a subject so grave as the Polity of Penguins. It is a very admirable treatment, and I hasten to congratulate all men of receptive mind on the feast of wisdom which is theirs for the mere plucking of a book from a shelf.

**TURGENEV {2} — 1917**

Dear Edward,

I am glad to hear that you are about to publish a study of Turgenev, that fortunate artist who has found so much in life for us and no doubt for himself, with the exception of bare justice. Perhaps that will come to him, too, in time. Your study may help the consummation. For his luck persists after his death. What greater luck an artist like Turgenev could wish for than to find in the English-speaking world a translator who has missed none of the most delicate, most simple beauties of his work, and a critic who has known how to analyse and point out its high qualities with perfect sympathy and insight.

After twenty odd years of friendship (and my first literary friendship too) I may well permit myself to make that statement, while thinking of your wonderful Prefaces as they appeared from time to time in the volumes of Turgenev's complete edition, the last of which came into the light of public indifference in the ninety-ninth year of the nineteenth century.



With that year one may say, with some justice, that the age of Turgenev had come to an end too; yet work so simple and human, so independent of the transitory formulas and theories of art, belongs as you point out in the Preface to *Smoke* “to all time.”

Turgenev’s creative activity covers about thirty years. Since it came to an end the social and political events in Russia have moved at an accelerated pace, but the deep origins of them, in the moral and intellectual unrest of the souls, are recorded in the whole body of his work with the unerring lucidity of a great national writer. The first stirrings, the first gleams of the great forces can be seen almost in every page of the novels, of the short stories and of *A Sportsman’s Sketches* — those marvellous landscapes peopled by unforgettable figures.

Those will never grow old. Fashions in monsters do change, but the truth of humanity goes on for ever, unchangeable and inexhaustible in the variety of its disclosures. Whether Turgenev’s art, which has captured it with such mastery and such gentleness, is for “all time” it is hard to say. Since, as you say yourself, he brings all his problems and characters to the test of love, we may hope that it will endure at least till the infinite emotions of love are replaced by the exact simplicity of perfected Eugenics. But even by then, I think, women would not have changed much; and the women of Turgenev who understood them so tenderly, so reverently and so passionately — they, at least, are certainly for all time.

Women are, one may say, the foundation of his art. They are Russian of course. Never was a writer so profoundly, so whole-souledly national. But for non-Russian readers, Turgenev’s Russia is but a canvas on which the incomparable artist of humanity lays his colours and his forms in the great light and the free air of the world. Had he invented them all and also every stick and stone, brook and hill and field in which they move, his personages would have been just as true and as poignant in their perplexed lives. They are his own and also universal. Any one can accept them with no more question than one accepts the Italians of Shakespeare.

In the larger, non-Russian view, what should make Turgenev sympathetic and welcome to the English-speaking world, is his essential humanity. All his creations, fortunate and unfortunate, oppressed and oppressors, are human beings, not strange beasts in a menagerie or damned souls knocking themselves to pieces in the stuffy darkness of mystical contradictions. They are human beings, fit to live, fit to suffer, fit to struggle, fit to win, fit to

lose, in the endless and inspiring game of pursuing from day to day the ever-receding future.

I began by calling him lucky, and he was, in a sense. But one ends by having some doubts. To be so great without the slightest parade and so fine without any tricks of “cleverness” must be fatal to any man’s influence with his contemporaries.

Frankly, I don’t want to appear as qualified to judge of things Russian. It wouldn’t be true. I know nothing of them. But I am aware of a few general truths, such as, for instance, that no man, whatever may be the loftiness of his character, the purity of his motives and the peace of his conscience — no man, I say, likes to be beaten with sticks during the greater part of his existence. From what one knows of his history it appears clearly that in Russia almost any stick was good enough to beat Turgenev with in his latter years. When he died the characteristically chicken-hearted Autocracy hastened to stuff his mortal envelope into the tomb it refused to honour, while the sensitive Revolutionists went on for a time flinging after his shade those jeers and curses from which that impartial lover of *all* his countrymen had suffered so much in his lifetime. For he, too, was sensitive. Every page of his writing bears its testimony to the fatal absence of callousness in the man.

And now he suffers a little from other things. In truth it is not the convulsed terror-haunted Dostoievski but the serene Turgenev who is under a curse. For only think! Every gift has been heaped on his cradle: absolute sanity and the deepest sensibility, the clearest vision and the quickest responsiveness, penetrating insight and unfailing generosity of judgment, an exquisite perception of the visible world and an unerring instinct for the significant, for the essential in the life of men and women, the clearest mind, the warmest heart, the largest sympathy — and all that in perfect measure. There’s enough there to ruin the prospects of any writer. For you know very well, my dear Edward, that if you had Antinous himself in a booth of the world’s fair, and killed yourself in protesting that his soul was as perfect as his body, you wouldn’t get one per cent. of the crowd struggling next door for a sight of the Double-headed Nightingale or of some weak-kneed giant grinning through a horse collar.

J. C.

## STEPHEN CRANE — A NOTE WITHOUT DATES — 1919

My acquaintance with Stephen Crane was brought about by Mr. Pawling, partner in the publishing firm of Mr. William Heinemann.

One day Mr. Pawling said to me: "Stephen Crane has arrived in England. I asked him if there was anybody he wanted to meet and he mentioned two names. One of them was yours." I had then just been reading, like the rest of the world, Crane's *Red Badge of Courage*. The subject of that story was war, from the point of view of an individual soldier's emotions. That individual (he remains nameless throughout) was interesting enough in himself, but on turning over the pages of that little book which had for the moment secured such a noisy recognition I had been even more interested in the personality of the writer. The picture of a simple and untried youth becoming through the needs of his country part of a great fighting machine was presented with an earnestness of purpose, a sense of tragic issues, and an imaginative force of expression which struck me as quite uncommon and altogether worthy of admiration.

Apparently Stephen Crane had received a favourable impression from the reading of the *Nigger of the Narcissus*, a book of mine which had also been published lately. I was truly pleased to hear this.

On my next visit to town we met at a lunch. I saw a young man of medium stature and slender build, with very steady, penetrating blue eyes, the eyes of a being who not only sees visions but can brood over them to some purpose.

He had indeed a wonderful power of vision, which he applied to the things of this earth and of our mortal humanity with a penetrating force that seemed to reach, within life's appearances and forms, the very spirit of life's truth. His ignorance of the world at large — he had seen very little of it — did not stand in the way of his imaginative grasp of facts, events, and picturesque men.

His manner was very quiet, his personality at first sight interesting, and he talked slowly with an intonation which on some people, mainly Americans, had, I believe, a jarring effect. But not on me. Whatever he said had a personal note, and he expressed himself with a graphic simplicity which was extremely engaging. He knew little of literature, either of his

own country or of any other, but he was himself a wonderful artist in words whenever he took a pen into his hand. Then his gift came out — and it was seen then to be much more than mere felicity of language. His impressionism of phrase went really deeper than the surface. In his writing he was very sure of his effects. I don't think he was ever in doubt about what he could do. Yet it often seemed to me that he was but half aware of the exceptional quality of his achievement.

This achievement was curtailed by his early death. It was a great loss to his friends, but perhaps not so much to literature. I think that he had given his measure fully in the few books he had the time to write. Let me not be misunderstood: the loss was great, but it was the loss of the delight his art could give, not the loss of any further possible revelation. As to himself, who can say how much he gained or lost by quitting so early this world of the living, which he knew how to set before us in the terms of his own artistic vision? Perhaps he did not lose a great deal. The recognition he was accorded was rather languid and given him grudgingly. The worthiest welcome he secured for his tales in this country was from Mr. W. Henley in the *New Review* and later, towards the end of his life, from the late Mr. William Blackwood in his magazine. For the rest I must say that during his sojourn in England he had the misfortune to be, as the French say, *mal entouré*. He was beset by people who understood not the quality of his genius and were antagonistic to the deeper fineness of his nature. Some of them have died since, but dead or alive they are not worth speaking about now. I don't think he had any illusions about them himself: yet there was a strain of good-nature and perhaps of weakness in his character which prevented him from shaking himself free from their worthless and patronising attentions, which in those days caused me much secret irritation whenever I stayed with him in either of his English homes. My wife and I like best to remember him riding to meet us at the gate of the Park at Brede. Born master of his sincere impressions, he was also a born horseman. He never appeared so happy or so much to advantage as on the back of a horse. He had formed the project of teaching my eldest boy to ride, and meantime, when the child was about two years old, presented him with his first dog.

I saw Stephen Crane a few days after his arrival in London. I saw him for the last time on his last day in England. It was in Dover, in a big hotel, in a bedroom with a large window looking on to the sea. He had been very

ill and Mrs. Crane was taking him to some place in Germany, but one glance at that wasted face was enough to tell me that it was the most forlorn of all hopes. The last words he breathed out to me were: "I am tired. Give my love to your wife and child." When I stopped at the door for another look I saw that he had turned his head on the pillow and was staring wistfully out of the window at the sails of a cutter yacht that glided slowly across the frame, like a dim shadow against the grey sky.

Those who have read his little tale, "Horses," and the story, "The Open Boat," in the volume of that name, know with what fine understanding he loved horses and the sea. And his passage on this earth was like that of a horseman riding swiftly in the dawn of a day fated to be short and without sunshine.

## TALES OF THE SEA — 1898

It is by his irresistible power to reach the adventurous side in the character, not only of his own, but of all nations, that Marryat is largely human. He is the enslaver of youth, not by the literary artifices of presentation, but by the natural glamour of his own temperament. To his young heroes the beginning of life is a splendid and warlike lark, ending at last in inheritance and marriage. His novels are not the outcome of his art, but of his character, like the deeds that make up his record of naval service. To the artist his work is interesting as a completely successful expression of an unartistic nature. It is absolutely amazing to us, as the disclosure of the spirit animating the stirring time when the nineteenth century was young. There is an air of fable about it. Its loss would be irreparable, like the curtailment of national story or the loss of an historical document. It is the beginning and the embodiment of an inspiring tradition.

To this writer of the sea the sea was not an element. It was a stage, where was displayed an exhibition of valour, and of such achievement as the world had never seen before. The greatness of that achievement cannot be pronounced imaginary, since its reality has affected the destinies of nations; nevertheless, in its grandeur it has all the remoteness of an ideal. History preserves the skeleton of facts and, here and there, a figure or a name; but it is in Marryat's novels that we find the mass of the nameless, that we see them in the flesh, that we obtain a glimpse of the everyday life and an insight into the spirit animating the crowd of obscure men who knew how to build for their country such a shining monument of memories.

Marryat is really a writer of the Service. What sets him apart is his fidelity. His pen serves his country as well as did his professional skill and his renowned courage. His figures move about between water and sky, and the water and the sky are there only to frame the deeds of the Service. His novels, like amphibious creatures, live on the sea and frequent the shore, where they flounder deplorably. The loves and the hates of his boys are as primitive as their virtues and their vices. His women, from the beautiful Agnes to the witch-like mother of Lieutenant Vanslyperken, are, with the exception of the sailors' wives, like the shadows of what has never been. His Silvas, his Ribieras, his Shriftens, his Delmars remind us of people we have heard of somewhere, many times, without ever believing in their

existence. His morality is honourable and conventional. There is cruelty in his fun and he can invent puns in the midst of carnage. His naïveties are perpetrated in a lurid light. There is an endless variety of types, all surface, with hard edges, with memorable eccentricities of outline, with a childish and heroic effect in the drawing. They do not belong to life; they belong exclusively to the Service. And yet they live; there is a truth in them, the truth of their time; a headlong, reckless audacity, an intimacy with violence, an unthinking fearlessness, and an exuberance of vitality which only years of war and victories can give. His adventures are enthralling; the rapidity of his action fascinates; his method is crude, his sentimentality, obviously incidental, is often factitious. His greatness is undeniable.

It is undeniable. To a multitude of readers the navy of to-day is Marryat's navy still. He has created a priceless legend. If he be not immortal, yet he will last long enough for the highest ambition, because he has dealt manfully with an inspiring phase in the history of that Service on which the life of his country depends. The tradition of the great past he has fixed in his pages will be cherished for ever as the guarantee of the future. He loved his country first, the Service next, the sea perhaps not at all. But the sea loved him without reserve. It gave him his professional distinction and his author's fame — a fame such as not often falls to the lot of a true artist.

At the same time, on the other side of the Atlantic, another man wrote of the sea with true artistic instinct. He is not invincibly young and heroic; he is mature and human, though for him also the stress of adventure and endeavour must end fatally in inheritance and marriage. For James Fenimore Cooper nature was not the frame-work, it was an essential part of existence. He could hear its voice, he could understand its silence, and he could interpret both for us in his prose with all that felicity and sureness of effect that belong to a poetical conception alone. His fame, as wide but less brilliant than that of his contemporary, rests mostly on a novel which is not of the sea. But he loved the sea and looked at it with consummate understanding. In his sea tales the sea inter-penetrates with life; it is in a subtle way a factor in the problem of existence, and, for all its greatness, it is always in touch with the men, who, bound on errands of war or gain, traverse its immense solitudes. His descriptions have the magistral ampleness of a gesture indicating the sweep of a vast horizon. They embrace the colours of sunset, the peace of starlight, the aspects of calm

and storm, the great loneliness of the waters, the stillness of watchful coasts, and the alert readiness which marks men who live face to face with the promise and the menace of the sea.

He knows the men and he knows the sea. His method may be often faulty, but his art is genuine. The truth is within him. The road to legitimate realism is through poetical feeling, and he possesses that — only it is expressed in the leisurely manner of his time. He has the knowledge of simple hearts. Long Tom Coffin is a monumental seaman with the individuality of life and the significance of a type. It is hard to believe that Manual and Borroughcliffe, Mr. Marble of Marble-Head, Captain Tuck of the packet-ship *Montauk*, or Daggett, the tenacious commander of the *Sea Lion* of Martha's Vineyard, must pass away some day and be utterly forgotten. His sympathy is large, and his humour is as genuine — and as perfectly unaffected — as is his art. In certain passages he reaches, very simply, the heights of inspired vision.

He wrote before the great American language was born, and he wrote as well as any novelist of his time. If he pitches upon episodes redounding to the glory of the young republic, surely England has glory enough to forgive him, for the sake of his excellence, the patriotic bias at her expense. The interest of his tales is convincing and unflagging; and there runs through his work a steady vein of friendliness for the old country which the succeeding generations of his compatriots have replaced by a less definite sentiment.

Perhaps no two authors of fiction influenced so many lives and gave to so many the initial impulse towards a glorious or a useful career. Through the distances of space and time those two men of another race have shaped also the life of the writer of this appreciation. Life is life, and art is art — and truth is hard to find in either. Yet in testimony to the achievement of both these authors it may be said that, in the case of the writer at least, the youthful glamour, the headlong vitality of the one and the profound sympathy, the artistic insight of the other — to which he had surrendered — have withstood the brutal shock of facts and the wear of laborious years. He has never regretted his surrender.

### **AN OBSERVER IN MALAYA {3} — 1898**

In his new volume, Mr. Hugh Clifford, at the beginning of the sketch entitled “At the Heels of the White Man,” expresses his anxiety as to the state of England's account in the Day-Book of the Recording Angel “for the good and the bad we have done — both with the most excellent



intentions.” The intentions will, no doubt, count for something, though, of course, every nation’s conquests are paved with good intentions; or it may be that the Recording Angel, looking compassionately at the strife of hearts, may disdain to enter into the Eternal Book the facts of a struggle which has the reward of its righteousness even on this earth — in victory and lasting greatness, or in defeat and humiliation.

And, also, love will count for much. If the opinion of a looker-on from afar is worth anything, Mr. Hugh Clifford’s anxiety about his country’s record is needless. To the Malays whom he governs, instructs, and guides he is the embodiment of the intentions, of the conscience and might of his race. And of all the nations conquering distant territories in the name of the most excellent intentions, England alone sends out men who, with such a transparent sincerity of feeling, can speak, as Mr. Hugh Clifford does, of the place of toil and exile as “the land which is very dear to me, where the best years of my life have been spent” — and where (I would stake my right hand on it) his name is pronounced with respect and affection by those brown men about whom he writes.

All these studies are on a high level of interest, though not all on the same level. The descriptive chapters, results of personal observation, seem to me the most interesting. And, indeed, in a book of this kind it is the author’s personality which awakens the greatest interest; it shapes itself before one in the ring of sentences, it is seen between the lines — like the progress of a traveller in the jungle that may be traced by the sound of the *parang* chopping the swaying creepers, while the man himself is glimpsed, now and then, indistinct and passing between the trees. Thus in his very vagueness of appearance, the writer seen through the leaves of his book becomes a fascinating companion in a land of fascination.

It is when dealing with the aspects of nature that Mr. Hugh Clifford is most convincing. He looks upon them lovingly, for the land is “very dear to him,” and he records his cherished impressions so that the forest, the great flood, the jungle, the rapid river, and the menacing rock dwell in the memory of the reader long after the book is closed. He does not say anything, in so many words, of his affection for those who live amid the scenes he describes so well, but his humanity is large enough to pardon us if we suspect him of such a rare weakness. In his preface he expresses the regret at not having the gifts (whatever they may be) of the kailyard school, or — looking up to a very different plane — the genius of Mr. Barrie. He

has, however, gifts of his own, and his genius has served his country and his fortunes in another direction. Yet it is when attempting what he professes himself unable to do, in telling us the simple story of Ūmat, the punkah-puller, with unaffected simplicity and half-concealed tenderness, that he comes nearest to artistic achievement.

Each study in this volume presents some idea, illustrated by a fact told without artifice, but with an elective sureness of knowledge. The story of *Tukang Burok's* love, related in the old man's own words, conveys the very breath of Malay thought and speech. In "His Little Bill," the coolie, Lim Teng Wah, facing his debtor, stands very distinct before us, an insignificant and tragic victim of fate with whom he had quarrelled to the death over a matter of seven dollars and sixty-eight cents. The story of "The Schooner with a Past" may be heard, from the Straits eastward, with many variations. Out in the Pacific the schooner becomes a cutter, and the pearl-divers are replaced by the Black-birds of the Labour Trade. But Mr. Hugh Clifford's variation is very good. There is a passage in it — a trifle — just the diver as seen coming up from the depths, that in its dozen lines or so attains to distinct artistic value. And, scattered through the book, there are many other passages of almost equal descriptive excellence.

Nevertheless, to apply artistic standards to this book would be a fundamental error in appreciation. Like faith, enthusiasm, or heroism, art veils part of the truth of life to make the rest appear more splendid, inspiring, or sinister. And this book is only truth, interesting and futile, truth unadorned, simple and straightforward. The Resident of Pahang has the devoted friendship of Ūmat, the punkah-puller, he has an individual faculty of vision, a large sympathy, and the scrupulous consciousness of the good and evil in his hands. He may as well rest content with such gifts. One cannot expect to be, at the same time, a ruler of men and an irreproachable player on the flute.

## A HAPPY WANDERER — 1910

Converts are interesting people. Most of us, if you will pardon me for betraying the universal secret, have, at some time or other, discovered in ourselves a readiness to stray far, ever so far, on the wrong road. And what did we do in our pride and our cowardice? Casting fearful glances and waiting for a dark moment, we buried our discovery discreetly, and kept on in the old direction, on that old, beaten track we have not had courage enough to leave, and which we perceive now more clearly than before to be but the arid way of the grave.

The convert, the man capable of grace (I am speaking here in a secular sense), is not discreet. His pride is of another kind; he jumps gladly off the track — the touch of grace is mostly sudden — and facing about in a new direction may even attain the illusion of having turned his back on Death itself.

Some converts have, indeed, earned immortality by their exquisite indiscretion. The most illustrious example of a convert, that Flower of chivalry, Don Quixote de la Mancha, remains for all the world the only genuine immortal hidalgo. The delectable Knight of Spain became converted, as you know, from the ways of a small country squire to an imperative faith in a tender and sublime mission. Forthwith he was beaten with sticks and in due course shut up in a wooden cage by the Barber and the Priest, the fit ministers of a justly shocked social order. I do not know if it has occurred to anybody yet to shut up Mr. Luffmann in a wooden cage. {4}. I do not raise the point because I wish him any harm. Quite the contrary. I am a humane person. Let him take it as the highest praise — but I must say that he richly deserves that sort of attention.

On the other hand I would not have him unduly puffed up with the pride of the exalted association. The grave wisdom, the admirable amenity, the serene grace of the secular patron-saint of all mortals converted to noble visions are not his. Mr. Luffmann has no mission. He is no Knight sublimely Errant. But he is an excellent Vagabond. He is full of merit. That peripatetic guide, philosopher and friend of all nations, Mr. Roosevelt, would promptly excommunicate him with a big stick. The truth is that the ex-autocrat of all the States does not like rebels against the sullen order of our universe. Make the best of it or perish — he cries. A sane lineal

successor of the Barber and the Priest, and a sagacious political heir of the incomparable Sancho Panza (another great Governor), that distinguished littérateur has no mercy for dreamers. And our author happens to be a man of (you may trace them in his books) some rather fine reveries.

Every convert begins by being a rebel, and I do not see myself how any mercy can possibly be extended to Mr. Luffmann. He is a convert from the creed of strenuous life. For this renegade the body is of little account; to him work appears criminal when it suppresses the demands of the inner life; while he was young he did grind virtuously at the sacred handle, and now, he says, he has fallen into disgrace with some people because he believes no longer in toil without end. Certain respectable folk hate him — so he says — because he dares to think that “poetry, beauty, and the broad face of the world are the best things to be in love with.” He confesses to loving Spain on the ground that she is “the land of to-morrow, and holds the gospel of never-mind.” The universal striving to push ahead he considers mere vulgar folly. Didn’t I tell you he was a fit subject for the cage?

It is a relief (we are all humane, are we not?) to discover that this desperate character is not altogether an outcast. Little girls seem to like him. One of them, after listening to some of his tales, remarked to her mother, “Wouldn’t it be lovely if what he says were true!” Here you have Woman! The charming creatures will neither strain at a camel nor swallow a gnat. Not publicly. These operations, without which the world they have such a large share in could not go on for ten minutes, are left to us — men. And then we are chided for being coarse. This is a refined objection but does not seem fair. Another little girl — or perhaps the same little girl — wrote to him in Cordova, “I hope Poste-Restante is a nice place, and that you are very comfortable.” Woman again! I have in my time told some stories which are (I hate false modesty) both true and lovely. Yet no little girl ever wrote to me in kindly terms. And why? Simply because I am not enough of a Vagabond. The dear despots of the fireside have a weakness for lawless characters. This is amiable, but does not seem rational.

Being Quixotic, Mr. Luffmann is no Impressionist. He is far too earnest in his heart, and not half sufficiently precise in his style to be that. But he is an excellent narrator. More than any Vagabond I have ever met, he knows what he is about. There is not one of his quiet days which is dull. You will find in them a love-story not made up, the *coup-de-foudre*, the lightning-stroke of Spanish love; and you will marvel how a spell so sudden and

vehement can be at the same time so tragically delicate. You will find there landladies devoured with jealousy, astute housekeepers, delightful boys, wise peasants, touchy shopkeepers, all the *cosas de España* — and, in addition, the pale girl Rosario. I recommend that pathetic and silent victim of fate to your benevolent compassion. You will find in his pages the humours of starving workers of the soil, the vision among the mountains of an exulting mad spirit in a mighty body, and many other visions worthy of attention. And they are exact visions, for this idealist is no visionary. He is in sympathy with suffering mankind, and has a grasp on real human affairs. I mean the great and pitiful affairs concerned with bread, love, and the obscure, unexpressed needs which drive great crowds to prayer in the holy places of the earth.

But I like his conception of what a “quiet” life is like! His quiet days require no fewer than forty-two of the forty-nine provinces of Spain to take their ease in. For his unquiet days, I presume, the seven — or is it nine? — crystal spheres of Alexandrian cosmogony would afford, but a wretchedly straitened space. A most unconventional thing is his notion of quietness. One would take it as a joke; only that, perchance, to the author of *Quiet Days in Spain* all days may seem quiet, because, a courageous convert, he is now at peace with himself.

How better can we take leave of this interesting Vagabond than with the road salutation of passing wayfarers: “And on you be peace! . . . You have chosen your ideal, and it is a good choice. There’s nothing like giving up one’s life to an unselfish passion. Let the rich and the powerful of this globe preach their sound gospel of palpable progress. The part of the ideal you embrace is the better one, if only in its illusions. No great passion can be barren. May a world of gracious and poignant images attend the lofty solitude of your renunciation!”

## THE LIFE BEYOND — 1910

You have no doubt noticed that certain books produce a sort of physical effect on one — mostly an audible effect. I am not alluding here to Blue books or to books of statistics. The effect of these is simply exasperating and no more. No! the books I have in mind are just the common books of commerce you and I read when we have five minutes to spare, the usual hired books published by ordinary publishers, printed by ordinary printers, and censored (when they happen to be novels) by the usual circulating libraries, the guardians of our firesides, whose names are household words within the four seas.

To see the fair and the brave of this free country surrendering themselves with unbounded trust to the direction of the circulating libraries is very touching. It is even, in a sense, a beautiful spectacle, because, as you know, humility is a rare and fragrant virtue; and what can be more humble than to surrender your morals and your intellect to the judgment of one of your tradesmen? I suppose that there are some very perfect people who allow the Army and Navy Stores to censor their diet. So much merit, however, I imagine, is not frequently met with here below. The flesh, alas! is weak, and — from a certain point of view — so important!

A superficial person might be rendered miserable by the simple question: What would become of us if the circulating libraries ceased to exist? It is a horrid and almost indelicate supposition, but let us be brave and face the truth. On this earth of ours nothing lasts. *Tout passe, tout casse, tout lasse*. Imagine the utter wreck overtaking the morals of our beautiful country-houses should the circulating libraries suddenly die! But pray do not shudder. There is no occasion.

Their spirit shall survive. I declare this from inward conviction, and also from scientific information received lately. For observe: the circulating libraries are human institutions. I beg you to follow me closely. They are human institutions, and being human, they are not animal, and, therefore, they are spiritual. Thus, any man with enough money to take a shop, stock his shelves, and pay for advertisements shall be able to evoke the pure and censorious spectre of the circulating libraries whenever his own commercial spirit moves him.

For, and this is the information alluded to above, Science, having in its infinite wanderings run up against various wonders and mysteries, is apparently willing now to allow a spiritual quality to man and, I conclude, to all his works as well.

I do not know exactly what this “Science” may be; and I do not think that anybody else knows; but that is the information stated shortly. It is contained in a book reposing under my thoughtful eyes. {5}. I know it is not a censored book, because I can see for myself that it is not a novel. The author, on his side, warns me that it is not philosophy, that it is not metaphysics, that it is not natural science. After this comprehensive warning, the definition of the book becomes, you will admit, a pretty hard nut to crack.

But meantime let us return for a moment to my opening remark about the physical effect of some common, hired books. A few of them (not necessarily books of verse) are melodious; the music some others make for you as you read has the disagreeable emphasis of a barrel-organ; the tinkling-cymbals book (it was not written by a humorist) I only met once. But there is infinite variety in the noises books do make. I have now on my shelves a book apparently of the most valuable kind which, before I have read half-a-dozen lines, begins to make a noise like a buzz-saw. I am inconsolable; I shall never, I fear, discover what it is all about, for the buzzing covers the words, and at every try I am absolutely forced to give it up ere the end of the page is reached.

The book, however, which I have found so difficult to define, is by no means noisy. As a mere piece of writing it may be described as being breathless itself and taking the reader’s breath away, not by the magnitude of its message but by a sort of anxious volubility in the delivery. The constantly elusive argument and the illustrative quotations go on without a single reflective pause. For this reason alone the reading of that work is a fatiguing process.

The author himself (I use his own words) “suspects” that what he has written “may be theology after all.” It may be. It is not my place either to allay or to confirm the author’s suspicion of his own work. But I will state its main thesis: “That science regarded in the gross dictates the spirituality of man and strongly implies a spiritual destiny for individual human beings.” This means: Existence after Death — that is, Immortality.

To find out its value you must go to the book. But I will observe here that an Immortality liable at any moment to betray itself fatuously by the forcible incantations of Mr. Stead or Professor Crookes is scarcely worth having. Can you imagine anything more squalid than an Immortality at the beck and call of Eusapia Palladino? That woman lives on the top floor of a Neapolitan house, and gets our poor, pitiful, august dead, flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone, spirit of our spirit, who have loved, suffered and died, as we must love, suffer, and die — she gets them to beat tambourines in a corner and protrude shadowy limbs through a curtain. This is particularly horrible, because, if one had to put one's faith in these things one could not even die safely from disgust, as one would long to do.

And to believe that these manifestations, which the author evidently takes for modern miracles, will stay our tottering faith; to believe that the new psychology has, only the other day, discovered man to be a "spiritual mystery," is really carrying humility towards that universal provider, Science, too far.

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We moderns have complicated our old perplexities to the point of absurdity; our perplexities older than religion itself. It is not for nothing that for so many centuries the priest, mounting the steps of the altar, murmurs, "Why art thou sad, my soul, and why dost thou trouble me?" Since the day of Creation two veiled figures, Doubt and Melancholy, are pacing endlessly in the sunshine of the world. What humanity needs is not the promise of scientific immortality, but compassionate pity in this life and infinite mercy on the Day of Judgment.

And, for the rest, during this transient hour of our pilgrimage, we may well be content to repeat the Invocation of Sar Peladan. Sar Peladan was an occultist, a seer, a modern magician. He believed in astrology, in the spirits of the air, in elves; he was marvellously and deliciously absurd. Incidentally he wrote some incomprehensible poems and a few pages of harmonious prose, for, you must know, "a magician is nothing else but a great harmonist." Here are some eight lines of the magnificent Invocation. Let me, however, warn you, strictly between ourselves, that my translation is execrable. I am sorry to say I am no magician.

"O Nature, indulgent Mother, forgive! Open your arms to the son, prodigal and weary.



“I have attempted to tear asunder the veil you have hung to conceal from us the pain of life, and I have been wounded by the mystery. . . . Œdipus, half way to finding the word of the enigma, young Faust, regretting already the simple life, the life of the heart, I come back to you repentant, reconciled, O gentle deceiver!”

## THE ASCENDING EFFORT — 1910

Much good paper has been lamentably wasted to prove that science has destroyed, that it is destroying, or, some day, may destroy poetry. Meantime, unblushing, unseen, and often unheard, the guileless poets have gone on singing in a sweet strain. How they dare do the impossible and virtually forbidden thing is a cause for wonder but not for legislation. Not yet. We are at present too busy reforming the silent burglar and planning concerts to soothe the savage breast of the yelling hooligan. As somebody — perhaps a publisher — said lately: “Poetry is of no account now-a-days.”

But it is not totally neglected. Those persons with gold-rimmed spectacles whose usual occupation is to spy upon the obvious have remarked audibly (on several occasions) that poetry has so far not given to science any acknowledgment worthy of its distinguished position in the popular mind. Except that Tennyson looked down the throat of a foxglove, that Erasmus Darwin wrote *The Loves of the Plants* and a scoffer *The Loves of the Triangles*, poets have been supposed to be indecorously blind to the progress of science. What tribute, for instance, has poetry paid to electricity? All I can remember on the spur of the moment is Mr. Arthur Symons’ line about arc lamps: “Hung with the globes of some unnatural fruit.”

Commerce and Manufacture praise on every hand in their not mute but inarticulate way the glories of science. Poetry does not play its part. Behold John Keats, skilful with the surgeon’s knife; but when he writes poetry his inspiration is not from the operating table. Here I am reminded, though, of a modern instance to the contrary in prose. Mr. H. G. Wells, who, as far as I know, has never written a line of verse, was inspired a few years ago to write a short story, *Under the Knife*. Out of a clock-dial, a brass rod, and a whiff of chloroform, he has conjured for us a sensation of space and eternity, evoked the face of the Unknowable, and an awesome, august voice, like the voice of the Judgment Day; a great voice, perhaps the voice of science itself, uttering the words: “There shall be no more pain!” I advise you to look up that story, so human and so intimate, because Mr. Wells, the writer of prose whose amazing inventiveness we all know, remains a poet even in his most perverse moments of scorn for things as they are. His poetic imagination is sometimes even greater than his

inventiveness, I am not afraid to say. But, indeed, imaginative faculty would make any man a poet — were he born without tongue for speech and without hands to seize his fancy and fasten her down to a wretched piece of paper.

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The book {6} which in the course of the last few days I have opened and shut several times is not imaginative. But, on the other hand, it is not a dumb book, as some are. It has even a sort of sober and serious eloquence, reminding us that not poetry alone is at fault in this matter. Mr. Bourne begins his *Ascending Effort* with a remark by Sir Francis Galton upon Eugenics that “if the principles he was advocating were to become effective they must be introduced into the national conscience, like a new religion.” “Introduced” suggests compulsory vaccination. Mr. Bourne, who is not a theologian, wishes to league together not science and religion, but science and the arts. “The intoxicating power of art,” he thinks, is the very thing needed to give the desired effect to the doctrines of science. In uninspired phrase he points to the arts playing once upon a time a part in “popularising the Christian tenets.” With painstaking fervour as great as the fervour of prophets, but not so persuasive, he foresees the arts some day popularising science. Until that day dawns, science will continue to be lame and poetry blind. He himself cannot smooth or even point out the way, though he thinks that “a really prudent people would be greedy of beauty,” and their public authorities “as careful of the sense of comfort as of sanitation.”

As the writer of those remarkable rustic note-books, *The Bettesworth Book* and *Memoirs of a Surrey Labourer*, the author has a claim upon our attention. But his seriousness, his patience, his almost touching sincerity, can only command the respect of his readers and nothing more. He is obsessed by science, haunted and shadowed by it, until he has been bewildered into awe. He knows, indeed, that art owes its triumphs and its subtle influence to the fact that it issues straight from our organic vitality, and is a movement of life-cells with their matchless unintellectual knowledge. But the fact that poetry does not seem obviously in love with science has never made him doubt whether it may not be an argument against his haste to see the marriage ceremony performed amid public rejoicings.

Many a man has heard or read and believes that the earth goes round the sun; one small blob of mud among several others, spinning ridiculously with a waggling motion like a top about to fall. This is the Copernican system, and the man believes in the system without often knowing as much about it as its name. But while watching a sunset he sheds his belief; he sees the sun as a small and useful object, the servant of his needs and the witness of his ascending effort, sinking slowly behind a range of mountains, and then he holds the system of Ptolemy. He holds it without knowing it. In the same way a poet hears, reads, and believes a thousand undeniable truths which have not yet got into his blood, nor will do after reading Mr. Bourne's book; he writes, therefore, as if neither truths nor book existed. Life and the arts follow dark courses, and will not turn aside to the brilliant arc-lights of science. Some day, without a doubt, — and it may be a consolation to Mr. Bourne to know it — fully informed critics will point out that Mr. Davies's poem on a dark woman combing her hair must have been written after the invasion of appendicitis, and that Mr. Yeats's "Had I the heaven's embroidered cloths" came before radium was quite unnecessarily dragged out of its respectable obscurity in pitchblende to upset the venerable (and comparatively naive) chemistry of our young days.

There are times when the tyranny of science and the cant of science are alarming, but there are other times when they are entertaining — and this is one of them. "Many a man prides himself" says Mr. Bourne, "on his piety or his views of art, whose whole range of ideas, could they be investigated, would be found ordinary, if not base, because they have been adopted in compliance with some external persuasion or to serve some timid purpose instead of proceeding authoritatively from the living selection of his hereditary taste." This extract is a fair sample of the book's thought and of its style. But Mr. Bourne seems to forget that "persuasion" is a vain thing. The appreciation of great art comes from within.

It is but the merest justice to say that the transparent honesty of Mr. Bourne's purpose is undeniable. But the whole book is simply an earnest expression of a pious wish; and, like the generality of pious wishes, this one seems of little dynamic value — besides being impracticable.

Yes, indeed. Art has served Religion; artists have found the most exalted inspiration in Christianity; but the light of Transfiguration which has illuminated the profoundest mysteries of our sinful souls is not the light of the generating stations, which exposes the depths of our infatuation where

our mere cleverness is permitted for a while to grope for the unessential among invincible shadows.

## THE CENSOR OF PLAYS — AN APPRECIATION — 1907

A couple of years ago I was moved to write a one-act play — and I lived long enough to accomplish the task. We live and learn. When the play was finished I was informed that it had to be licensed for performance. Thus I learned of the existence of the Censor of Plays. I may say without vanity that I am intelligent enough to have been astonished by that piece of information: for facts must stand in some relation to time and space, and I was aware of being in England — in the twentieth-century England. The fact did not fit the date and the place. That was my first thought. It was, in short, an improper fact. I beg you to believe that I am writing in all seriousness and am weighing my words scrupulously.

Therefore I don't say inappropriate. I say improper — that is: something to be ashamed of. And at first this impression was confirmed by the obscurity in which the figure embodying this after all considerable fact had its being. The Censor of Plays! His name was not in the mouths of all men. Far from it. He seemed stealthy and remote. There was about that figure the scent of the far East, like the peculiar atmosphere of a Mandarin's back yard, and the mustiness of the Middle Ages, that epoch when mankind tried to stand still in a monstrous illusion of final certitude attained in morals, intellect and conscience.

It was a disagreeable impression. But I reflected that probably the censorship of plays was an inactive monstrosity; not exactly a survival, since it seemed obviously at variance with the genius of the people, but an heirloom of past ages, a bizarre and imported curiosity preserved because of that weakness one has for one's old possessions apart from any intrinsic value; one more object of exotic *virtù*, an Oriental *potiche*, a *magot chinois* conceived by a childish and extravagant imagination, but allowed to stand in stolid impotence in the twilight of the upper shelf.

Thus I quieted my uneasy mind. Its uneasiness had nothing to do with the fate of my one-act play. The play was duly produced, and an exceptionally intelligent audience stared it coldly off the boards. It ceased to exist. It was a fair and open execution. But having survived the freezing atmosphere of that auditorium I continued to exist, labouring under no sense of wrong. I was not pleased, but I was content. I was content to

accept the verdict of a free and independent public, judging after its conscience the work of its free, independent and conscientious servant — the artist.

Only thus can the dignity of artistic servitude be preserved — not to speak of the bare existence of the artist and the self-respect of the man. I shall say nothing of the self-respect of the public. To the self-respect of the public the present appeal against the censorship is being made and I join in it with all my heart.

For I have lived long enough to learn that the monstrous and outlandish figure, the *magot chinois* whom I believed to be but a memorial of our forefathers' mental aberration, that grotesque *potiche*, works! The absurd and hollow creature of clay seems to be alive with a sort of (surely) unconscious life worthy of its traditions. It heaves its stomach, it rolls its eyes, it brandishes a monstrous arm: and with the censorship, like a Bravo of old Venice with a more carnal weapon, stabs its victim from behind in the twilight of its upper shelf. Less picturesque than the Venetian in cloak and mask, less estimable, too, in this, that the assassin plied his moral trade at his own risk deriving no countenance from the powers of the Republic, it stands more malevolent, inasmuch that the Bravo striking in the dusk killed but the body, whereas the grotesque thing nodding its mandarin head may in its absurd unconsciousness strike down at any time the spirit of an honest, of an artistic, perhaps of a sublime creation.

This Chinese monstrosity, disguised in the trousers of the Western Barbarian and provided by the State with the immortal Mr. Stiggins's plug hat and umbrella, is with us. It is an office. An office of trust. And from time to time there is found an official to fill it. He is a public man. The least prominent of public men, the most unobtrusive, the most obscure if not the most modest.

But however obscure, a public man may be told the truth if only once in his life. His office flourishes in the shade; not in the rustic shade beloved of the violet but in the muddled twilight of mind, where tyranny of every sort flourishes. Its holder need not have either brain or heart, no sight, no taste, no imagination, not even bowels of compassion. He needs not these things. He has power. He can kill thought, and incidentally truth, and incidentally beauty, providing they seek to live in a dramatic form. He can do it, without seeing, without understanding, without feeling anything; out of mere stupid suspicion, as an irresponsible Roman Cæsar could kill a

senator. He can do that and there is no one to say him nay. He may call his cook (Molière used to do that) from below and give her five acts to judge every morning as a matter of constant practice and still remain the unquestioned destroyer of men's honest work. He may have a glass too much. This accident has happened to persons of unimpeachable morality — to gentlemen. He may suffer from spells of imbecility like Clodius. He may . . . what might he not do! I tell you he is the Cæsar of the dramatic world. There has been since the Roman Principate nothing in the way of irresponsible power to compare with the office of the Censor of Plays.

Looked at in this way it has some grandeur, something colossal in the odious and the absurd. This figure in whose power it is to suppress an intellectual conception — to kill thought (a dream for a mad brain, my masters!) — seems designed in a spirit of bitter comedy to bring out the greatness of a Philistine's conceit and his moral cowardice.

But this is England in the twentieth century, and one wonders that there can be found a man courageous enough to occupy the post. It is a matter for meditation. Having given it a few minutes I come to the conclusion in the serenity of my heart and the peace of my conscience that he must be either an extreme megalomaniac or an utterly unconscious being.

He must be unconscious. It is one of the qualifications for his magistracy. Other qualifications are equally easy. He must have done nothing, expressed nothing, imagined nothing. He must be obscure, insignificant and mediocre — in thought, act, speech and sympathy. He must know nothing of art, of life — and of himself. For if he did he would not dare to be what he is. Like that much questioned and mysterious bird, the phoenix, he sits amongst the cold ashes of his predecessor upon the altar of morality, alone of his kind in the sight of wondering generations.

And I will end with a quotation reproducing not perhaps the exact words but the true spirit of a lofty conscience.

"Often when sitting down to write the notice of a play, especially when I felt it antagonistic to my canons of art, to my tastes or my convictions, I hesitated in the fear lest my conscientious blame might check the development of a great talent, my sincere judgment condemn a worthy mind. With the pen poised in my hand I hesitated, whispering to myself 'What if I were perchance doing my part in killing a masterpiece.'"

Such were the lofty scruples of M. Jules Lemaître — dramatist and dramatic critic, a great citizen and a high magistrate in the Republic of



Letters; a Censor of Plays exercising his august office openly in the light of day, with the authority of a European reputation. But then M. Jules Lemaître is a man possessed of wisdom, of great fame, of a fine conscience — not an obscure hollow Chinese monstrosity ornamented with Mr. Stiggins's plug hat and cotton umbrella by its anxious grandmother — the State.

Frankly, is it not time to knock the improper object off its shelf? It has stood too long there. Hatched in Peking (I should say) by some Board of Respectable Rites, the little caravan monster has come to us by way of Moscow — I suppose. It is outlandish. It is not venerable. It does not belong here. Is it not time to knock it off its dark shelf with some implement appropriate to its worth and status? With an old broom handle for instance.

## **PART II — LIFE**

## AUTOCRACY AND WAR — 1905

From the firing of the first shot on the banks of the Sha-ho, the fate of the great battle of the Russo-Japanese war hung in the balance for more than a fortnight. The famous three-day battles, for which history has reserved the recognition of special pages, sink into insignificance before the struggles in Manchuria engaging half a million men on fronts of sixty miles, struggles lasting for weeks, flaming up fiercely and dying away from sheer exhaustion, to flame up again in desperate persistence, and end — as we have seen them end more than once — not from the victor obtaining a crushing advantage, but through the mortal weariness of the combatants.

We have seen these things, though we have seen them only in the cold, silent, colourless print of books and newspapers. In stigmatising the printed word as cold, silent and colourless, I have no intention of putting a slight upon the fidelity and the talents of men who have provided us with words to read about the battles in Manchuria. I only wished to suggest that in the nature of things, the war in the Far East has been made known to us, so far, in a grey reflection of its terrible and monotonous phases of pain, death, sickness; a reflection seen in the perspective of thousands of miles, in the dim atmosphere of official reticence, through the veil of inadequate words. Inadequate, I say, because what had to be reproduced is beyond the common experience of war, and our imagination, luckily for our peace of mind, has remained a slumbering faculty, notwithstanding the din of humanitarian talk and the real progress of humanitarian ideas. Direct vision of the fact, or the stimulus of a great art, can alone make it turn and open its eyes heavy with blessed sleep; and even there, as against the testimony of the senses and the stirring up of emotion, that saving callousness which reconciles us to the conditions of our existence, will assert itself under the guise of assent to fatal necessity, or in the enthusiasm of a purely æsthetic admiration of the rendering. In this age of knowledge our sympathetic imagination, to which alone we can look for the ultimate triumph of concord and justice, remains strangely impervious to information, however correctly and even picturesquely conveyed. As to the vaunted eloquence of a serried array of figures, it has all the futility of precision without force. It is the exploded superstition of enthusiastic statisticians. An over-worked horse falling in front of our windows, a man writhing under a cart-wheel in

the streets awaken more genuine emotion, more horror, pity, and indignation than the stream of reports, appalling in their monotony, of tens of thousands of decaying bodies tainting the air of the Manchurian plains, of other tens of thousands of maimed bodies groaning in ditches, crawling on the frozen ground, filling the field hospitals; of the hundreds of thousands of survivors no less pathetic and even more tragic in being left alive by fate to the wretched exhaustion of their pitiful toil.

An early Victorian, or perhaps a pre-Victorian, sentimentalist, looking out of an upstairs window, I believe, at a street — perhaps Fleet Street itself — full of people, is reported, by an admiring friend, to have wept for joy at seeing so much life. These arcadian tears, this facile emotion worthy of the golden age, comes to us from the past, with solemn approval, after the close of the Napoleonic wars and before the series of sanguinary surprises held in reserve by the nineteenth century for our hopeful grandfathers. We may well envy them their optimism of which this anecdote of an amiable wit and sentimentalist presents an extreme instance, but still, a true instance, and worthy of regard in the spontaneous testimony to that trust in the life of the earth, triumphant at last in the felicity of her children. Moreover, the psychology of individuals, even in the most extreme instances, reflects the general effect of the fears and hopes of its time. Wept for joy! I should think that now, after eighty years, the emotion would be of a sterner sort. One could not imagine anybody shedding tears of joy at the sight of much life in a street, unless, perhaps, he were an enthusiastic officer of a general staff or a popular politician, with a career yet to make. And hardly even that. In the case of the first tears would be unprofessional, and a stern repression of all signs of joy at the provision of so much food for powder more in accord with the rules of prudence; the joy of the second would be checked before it found issue in weeping by anxious doubts as to the soundness of these electors' views upon the question of the hour, and the fear of missing the consensus of their votes.

No! It seems that such a tender joy would be misplaced now as much as ever during the last hundred years, to go no further back. The end of the eighteenth century was, too, a time of optimism and of dismal mediocrity in which the French Revolution exploded like a bombshell. In its lurid blaze the insufficiency of Europe, the inferiority of minds, of military and administrative systems, stood exposed with pitiless vividness. And there is but little courage in saying at this time of the day that the glorified French

Revolution itself, except for its destructive force, was in essentials a mediocre phenomenon. The parentage of that great social and political upheaval was intellectual, the idea was elevated; but it is the bitter fate of any idea to lose its royal form and power, to lose its “virtue” the moment it descends from its solitary throne to work its will among the people. It is a king whose destiny is never to know the obedience of his subjects except at the cost of degradation. The degradation of the ideas of freedom and justice at the root of the French Revolution is made manifest in the person of its heir; a personality without law or faith, whom it has been the fashion to represent as an eagle, but who was, in truth, more like a sort of vulture preying upon the body of a Europe which did, indeed, for some dozen of years, very much resemble a corpse. The subtle and manifold influence for evil of the Napoleonic episode as a school of violence, as a sower of national hatreds, as the direct provocator of obscurantism and reaction, of political tyranny and injustice, cannot well be exaggerated.

The nineteenth century began with wars which were the issue of a corrupted revolution. It may be said that the twentieth begins with a war which is like the explosive ferment of a moral grave, whence may yet emerge a new political organism to take the place of a gigantic and dreaded phantom. For a hundred years the ghost of Russian might, overshadowing with its fantastic bulk the councils of Central and Western Europe, sat upon the gravestone of autocracy, cutting off from air, from light, from all knowledge of themselves and of the world, the buried millions of Russian people. Not the most determined cockney sentimentalist could have had the heart to weep for joy at the thought of its teeming numbers! And yet they were living, they are alive yet, since, through the mist of print, we have seen their blood freezing crimson upon the snow of the squares and streets of St. Petersburg; since their generations born in the grave are yet alive enough to fill the ditches and cover the fields of Manchuria with their torn limbs; to send up from the frozen ground of battlefields a chorus of groans calling for vengeance from Heaven; to kill and retreat, or kill and advance, without intermission or rest for twenty hours, for fifty hours, for whole weeks of fatigue, hunger, cold, and murder — till their ghastly labour, worthy of a place amongst the punishments of Dante’s Inferno, passing through the stages of courage, of fury, of hopelessness, sinks into the night of crazy despair.

It seems that in both armies many men are driven beyond the bounds of sanity by the stress of moral and physical misery. Great numbers of soldiers and regimental officers go mad as if by way of protest against the peculiar sanity of a state of war: mostly among the Russians, of course. The Japanese have in their favour the tonic effect of success; and the innate gentleness of their character stands them in good stead. But the Japanese grand army has yet another advantage in this nerve-destroying contest, which for endless, arduous toil of killing surpasses all the wars of history. It has a base for its operations; a base of a nature beyond the concern of the many books written upon the so-called art of war, which, considered by itself, purely as an exercise of human ingenuity, is at best only a thing of well-worn, simple artifices. The Japanese army has for its base a reasoned conviction; it has behind it the profound belief in the right of a logical necessity to be appeased at the cost of so much blood and treasure. And in that belief, whether well or ill founded, that army stands on the high ground of conscious assent, shouldering deliberately the burden of a long-tried faithfulness. The other people (since each people is an army nowadays), torn out from a miserable quietude resembling death itself, hurled across space, amazed, without starting-point of its own or knowledge of the aim, can feel nothing but a horror-stricken consciousness of having mysteriously become the plaything of a black and merciless fate.

The profound, the instructive nature of this war is resumed by the memorable difference in the spiritual state of the two armies; the one forlorn and dazed on being driven out from an abyss of mental darkness into the red light of a conflagration, the other with a full knowledge of its past and its future, "finding itself" as it were at every step of the trying war before the eyes of an astonished world. The greatness of the lesson has been dwarfed for most of us by an often half-conscious prejudice of race-difference. The West having managed to lodge its hasty foot on the neck of the East, is prone to forget that it is from the East that the wonders of patience and wisdom have come to a world of men who set the value of life in the power to act rather than in the faculty of meditation. It has been dwarfed by this, and it has been obscured by a cloud of considerations with whose shaping wisdom and meditation had little or nothing to do; by the weary platitudes on the military situation which (apart from geographical conditions) is the same everlasting situation that has prevailed since the times of Hannibal and Scipio, and further back yet, since the beginning of

historical record — since prehistoric times, for that matter; by the conventional expressions of horror at the tale of maiming and killing; by the rumours of peace with guesses more or less plausible as to its conditions. All this is made legitimate by the consecrated custom of writers in such time as this — the time of a great war. More legitimate in view of the situation created in Europe are the speculations as to the course of events after the war. More legitimate, but hardly more wise than the irresponsible talk of strategy that never changes, and of terms of peace that do not matter.

And above it all — unaccountably persistent — the decrepit, old, hundred years old, spectre of Russia's might still faces Europe from across the teeming graves of Russian people. This dreaded and strange apparition, bristling with bayonets, armed with chains, hung over with holy images; that something not of this world, partaking of a ravenous ghoul, of a blind Djinn grown up from a cloud, and of the Old Man of the Sea, still faces us with its old stupidity, with its strange mystical arrogance, stamping its shadowy feet upon the gravestone of autocracy already cracked beyond repair by the torpedoes of Togo and the guns of Oyama, already heaving in the blood-soaked ground with the first stirrings of a resurrection.

Never before had the Western world the opportunity to look so deep into the black abyss which separates a soulless autocracy posing as, and even believing itself to be, the arbiter of Europe, from the benighted, starved souls of its people. This is the real object-lesson of this war, its unforgettable information. And this war's true mission, disengaged from the economic origins of that contest, from doors open or shut, from the fields of Korea for Russian wheat or Japanese rice, from the ownership of ice-free ports and the command of the waters of the East — its true mission was to lay a ghost. It has accomplished it. Whether Kuropatkin was incapable or unlucky, whether or not Russia issuing next year, or the year after next, from behind a rampart of piled-up corpses will win or lose a fresh campaign, are minor considerations. The task of Japan is done, the mission accomplished; the ghost of Russia's might is laid. Only Europe, accustomed so long to the presence of that portent, seems unable to comprehend that, as in the fables of our childhood, the twelve strokes of the hour have rung, the cock has crowed, the apparition has vanished — never to haunt again this world which has been used to gaze at it with vague dread and many misgivings.

It was a fascination. And the hallucination still lasts as inexplicable in its persistence as in its duration. It seems so unaccountable, that the doubt arises as to the sincerity of all that talk as to what Russia will or will not do, whether it will raise or not another army, whether it will bury the Japanese in Manchuria under seventy millions of sacrificed peasants' caps (as her Press boasted a little more than a year ago) or give up to Japan that jewel of her crown, Saghalien, together with some other things; whether, perchance, as an interesting alternative, it will make peace on the Amur in order to make war beyond the Oxus.

All these speculations (with many others) have appeared gravely in print; and if they have been gravely considered by only one reader out of each hundred, there must be something subtly noxious to the human brain in the composition of newspaper ink; or else it is that the large page, the columns of words, the leaded headings, exalt the mind into a state of feverish credulity. The printed page of the Press makes a sort of still uproar, taking from men both the power to reflect and the faculty of genuine feeling; leaving them only the artificially created need of having something exciting to talk about.

The truth is that the Russia of our fathers, of our childhood, of our middle-age; the testamentary Russia of Peter the Great — who imagined that all the nations were delivered into the hand of Tsardom — can do nothing. It can do nothing because it does not exist. It has vanished for ever at last, and as yet there is no new Russia to take the place of that ill-omened creation, which, being a fantasy of a madman's brain, could in reality be nothing else than a figure out of a nightmare seated upon a monument of fear and oppression.

The true greatness of a State does not spring from such a contemptible source. It is a matter of logical growth, of faith and courage. Its inspiration springs from the constructive instinct of the people, governed by the strong hand of a collective conscience and voiced in the wisdom and counsel of men who seldom reap the reward of gratitude. Many States have been powerful, but, perhaps, none have been truly great — as yet. That the position of a State in reference to the moral methods of its development can be seen only historically, is true. Perhaps mankind has not lived long enough for a comprehensive view of any particular case. Perhaps no one will ever live long enough; and perhaps this earth shared out amongst our clashing ambitions by the anxious arrangements of statesmen will come to



an end before we attain the felicity of greeting with unanimous applause the perfect fruition of a great State. It is even possible that we are destined for another sort of bliss altogether: that sort which consists in being perpetually duped by false appearances. But whatever political illusion the future may hold out to our fear or our admiration, there will be none, it is safe to say, which in the magnitude of anti-humanitarian effect will equal that phantom now driven out of the world by the thunder of thousands of guns; none that in its retreat will cling with an equally shameless sincerity to more unworthy supports: to the moral corruption and mental darkness of slavery, to the mere brute force of numbers.

This very ignominy of infatuation should make clear to men's feelings and reason that the downfall of Russia's might is unavoidable. Spectral it lived and spectral it disappears without leaving a memory of a single generous deed, of a single service rendered — even involuntarily — to the polity of nations. Other despotisms there have been, but none whose origin was so grimly fantastic in its baseness, and the beginning of whose end was so gruesomely ignoble. What is amazing is the myth of its irresistible strength which is dying so hard.

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Considered historically, Russia's influence in Europe seems the most baseless thing in the world; a sort of convention invented by diplomatists for some dark purpose of their own, one would suspect, if the lack of grasp upon the realities of any given situation were not the main characteristic of the management of international relations. A glance back at the last hundred years shows the invariable, one may say the logical, powerlessness of Russia. As a military power it has never achieved by itself a single great thing. It has been indeed able to repel an ill-considered invasion, but only by having recourse to the extreme methods of desperation. In its attacks upon its specially selected victim this giant always struck as if with a withered right hand. All the campaigns against Turkey prove this, from Potemkin's time to the last Eastern war in 1878, entered upon with every advantage of a well-nursed prestige and a carefully fostered fanaticism. Even the half-armed were always too much for the might of Russia, or, rather, of the Tsardom. It was victorious only against the practically disarmed, as, in regard to its ideal of territorial expansion, a glance at a map will prove sufficiently. As an ally, Russia has been always unprofitable,

taking her share in the defeats rather than in the victories of her friends, but always pushing her own claims with the arrogance of an arbiter of military success. She has been unable to help to any purpose a single principle to hold its own, not even the principle of authority and legitimism which Nicholas the First had declared so haughtily to rest under his special protection; just as Nicholas the Second has tried to make the maintenance of peace on earth his own exclusive affair. And the first Nicholas was a good Russian; he held the belief in the sacredness of his realm with such an intensity of faith that he could not survive the first shock of doubt. Rightly envisaged, the Crimean war was the end of what remained of absolutism and legitimism in Europe. It threw the way open for the liberation of Italy. The war in Manchuria makes an end of absolutism in Russia, whoever has got to perish from the shock behind a rampart of dead ukases, manifestoes, and rescripts. In the space of fifty years the self-appointed Apostle of Absolutism and the self-appointed Apostle of Peace, the Augustus and the Augustulus of the *régime* that was wont to speak contemptuously to European Foreign Offices in the beautiful French phrases of Prince Gorchakov, have fallen victims, each after his kind, to their shadowy and dreadful familiar, to the phantom, part ghoul, part Djinn, part Old Man of the Sea, with beak and claws and a double head, looking greedily both east and west on the confines of two continents.

That nobody through all that time penetrated the true nature of the monster it is impossible to believe. But of the many who must have seen, all were either too modest, too cautious, perhaps too discreet, to speak; or else were too insignificant to be heard or believed. Yet not all.

In the very early sixties, Prince Bismarck, then about to leave his post of Prussian Minister in St. Petersburg, called — so the story goes — upon another distinguished diplomatist. After some talk upon the general situation, the future Chancellor of the German Empire remarked that it was his practice to resume the impressions he had carried out of every country where he had made a long stay, in a short sentence, which he caused to be engraved upon some trinket. “I am leaving this country now, and this is what I bring away from it,” he continued, taking off his finger a new ring to show to his colleague the inscription inside: “La Russie, c’est le néant.”

Prince Bismarck had the truth of the matter and was neither too modest nor too discreet to speak out. Certainly he was not afraid of not being believed. Yet he did not shout his knowledge from the house-tops. He

meant to have the phantom as his accomplice in an enterprise which has set the clock of peace back for many a year.

He had his way. The German Empire has been an accomplished fact for more than a third of a century — a great and dreadful legacy left to the world by the ill-omened phantom of Russia's might.

It is that phantom which is disappearing now — unexpectedly, astonishingly, as if by a touch of that wonderful magic for which the East has always been famous. The pretence of belief in its existence will no longer answer anybody's purposes (now Prince Bismarck is dead) unless the purposes of the writers of sensational paragraphs as to this *Néant* making an armed descent upon the plains of India. That sort of folly would be beneath notice if it did not distract attention from the real problem created for Europe by a war in the Far East.

For good or evil in the working out of her destiny, Russia is bound to remain a *Néant* for many long years, in a more even than a Bismarckian sense. The very fear of this spectre being gone, it behoves us to consider its legacy — the fact (no phantom that) accomplished in Central Europe by its help and connivance.

The German Empire may feel at bottom the loss of an old accomplice always amenable to the confidential whispers of a bargain; but in the first instance it cannot but rejoice at the fundamental weakening of a possible obstacle to its instincts of territorial expansion. There is a removal of that latent feeling of restraint which the presence of a powerful neighbour, however implicated with you in a sense of common guilt, is bound to inspire. The common guilt of the two Empires is defined precisely by their frontier line running through the Polish provinces. Without indulging in excessive feelings of indignation at that country's partition, or going so far as to believe — with a late French politician — in the “immanente justice des choses,” it is clear that a material situation, based upon an essentially immoral transaction, contains the germ of fatal differences in the temperament of the two partners in iniquity — whatever the iniquity is. Germany has been the evil counsellor of Russia on all the questions of her Polish problem. Always urging the adoption of the most repressive measures with a perfectly logical duplicity, Prince Bismarck's Empire has taken care to couple the neighbourly offers of military assistance with merciless advice. The thought of the Polish provinces accepting a frank reconciliation with a humanised Russia and bringing the weight of

homogeneous loyalty within a few miles of Berlin, has been always intensely distasteful to the arrogant Germanising tendencies of the other partner in iniquity. And, besides, the way to the Baltic provinces leads over the Niemen and over the Vistula.

And now, when there is a possibility of serious internal disturbances destroying the sort of order autocracy has kept in Russia, the road over these rivers is seen wearing a more inviting aspect. At any moment the pretext of armed intervention may be found in a revolutionary outbreak provoked by Socialists, perhaps — but at any rate by the political immaturity of the enlightened classes and by the political barbarism of the Russian people. The throes of Russian resurrection will be long and painful. This is not the place to speculate upon the nature of these convulsions, but there must be some violent break-up of the lamentable tradition, a shattering of the social, of the administrative — certainly of the territorial — unity.

Voices have been heard saying that the time for reforms in Russia is already past. This is the superficial view of the more profound truth that for Russia there has never been such a time within the memory of mankind. It is impossible to initiate a rational scheme of reform upon a phase of blind absolutism; and in Russia there has never been anything else to which the faintest tradition could, after ages of error, go back as to a parting of ways.

In Europe the old monarchical principle stands justified in its historical struggle with the growth of political liberty by the evolution of the idea of nationality as we see it concreted at the present time; by the inception of that wider solidarity grouping together around the standard of monarchical power these larger, agglomerations of mankind. This service of unification, creating close-knit communities possessing the ability, the will, and the power to pursue a common ideal, has prepared the ground for the advent of a still larger understanding: for the solidarity of Europeanism, which must be the next step towards the advent of Concord and Justice; an advent that, however delayed by the fatal worship of force and the errors of national selfishness, has been, and remains, the only possible goal of our progress.

The conceptions of legality, of larger patriotism, of national duties and aspirations have grown under the shadow of the old monarchies of Europe, which were the creations of historical necessity. There were seeds of wisdom in their very mistakes and abuses. They had a past and a future; they were human. But under the shadow of Russian autocracy nothing

could grow. Russian autocracy succeeded to nothing; it had no historical past, and it cannot hope for a historical future. It can only end. By no industry of investigation, by no fantastic stretch of benevolence, can it be presented as a phase of development through which a Society, a State, must pass on the way to the full consciousness of its destiny. It lies outside the stream of progress. This despotism has been utterly un-European. Neither has it been Asiatic in its nature. Oriental despotisms belong to the history of mankind; they have left their trace on our minds and our imagination by their splendour, by their culture, by their art, by the exploits of great conquerors. The record of their rise and decay has an intellectual value; they are in their origins and their course the manifestations of human needs, the instruments of racial temperament, of catastrophic force, of faith and fanaticism. The Russian autocracy as we see it now is a thing apart. It is impossible to assign to it any rational origin in the vices, the misfortunes, the necessities, or the aspirations of mankind. That despotism has neither an European nor an Oriental parentage; more, it seems to have no root either in the institutions or the follies of this earth. What strikes one with a sort of awe is just this something inhuman in its character. It is like a visitation, like a curse from Heaven falling in the darkness of ages upon the immense plains of forest and steppe lying dumbly on the confines of two continents: a true desert harbouring no Spirit either of the East or of the West.

This pitiful fate of a country held by an evil spell, suffering from an awful visitation for which the responsibility cannot be traced either to her sins or her follies, has made Russia as a nation so difficult to understand by Europe. From the very first ghastly dawn of her existence as a State she had to breathe the atmosphere of despotism; she found nothing but the arbitrary will of an obscure autocrat at the beginning and end of her organisation. Hence arises her impenetrability to whatever is true in Western thought. Western thought, when it crosses her frontier, falls under the spell of her autocracy and becomes a noxious parody of itself. Hence the contradictions, the riddles of her national life, which are looked upon with such curiosity by the rest of the world. The curse had entered her very soul; autocracy, and nothing else in the world, has moulded her institutions, and with the poison of slavery drugged the national temperament into the apathy of a hopeless fatalism. It seems to have gone into the blood, tainting every mental activity in its source by a half-mystical, insensate, fascinating

assertion of purity and holiness. The Government of Holy Russia, arrogating to itself the supreme power to torment and slaughter the bodies of its subjects like a God-sent scourge, has been most cruel to those whom it allowed to live under the shadow of its dispensation. The worst crime against humanity of that system we behold now crouching at bay behind vast heaps of mangled corpses is the ruthless destruction of innumerable minds. The greatest horror of the world — madness — walked faithfully in its train. Some of the best intellects of Russia, after struggling in vain against the spell, ended by throwing themselves at the feet of that hopeless despotism as a giddy man leaps into an abyss. An attentive survey of Russia's literature, of her Church, of her administration and the cross-currents of her thought, must end in the verdict that the Russia of to-day has not the right to give her voice on a single question touching the future of humanity, because from the very inception of her being the brutal destruction of dignity, of truth, of rectitude, of all that is faithful in human nature has been made the imperative condition of her existence. The great governmental secret of that imperium which Prince Bismarck had the insight and the courage to call *Le Néant*, has been the extirpation of every intellectual hope. To pronounce in the face of such a past the word Evolution, which is precisely the expression of the highest intellectual hope, is a gruesome pleasantry. There can be no evolution out of a grave. Another word of less scientific sound has been very much pronounced of late in connection with Russia's future, a word of more vague import, a word of dread as much as of hope — Revolution.

In the face of the events of the last four months, this word has sprung instinctively, as it were, on grave lips, and has been heard with solemn forebodings. More or less consciously, Europe is preparing herself for a spectacle of much violence and perhaps of an inspiring nobility of greatness. And there will be nothing of what she expects. She will see neither the anticipated character of the violence, nor yet any signs of generous greatness. Her expectations, more or less vaguely expressed, give the measure of her ignorance of that *Néant* which for so many years had remained hidden behind this phantom of invincible armies.

*Néant*! In a way, yes! And yet perhaps Prince Bismarck has let himself be led away by the seduction of a good phrase into the use of an inexact form. The form of his judgment had to be pithy, striking, engraved within a ring. If he erred, then, no doubt, he erred deliberately. The saying was near

enough the truth to serve, and perhaps he did not want to destroy utterly by a more severe definition the prestige of the sham that could not deceive his genius. Prince Bismarck has been really complimentary to the useful phantom of the autocratic might. There is an awe-inspiring idea of infinity conveyed in the word *Néant* — and in Russia there is no idea. She is not a *Néant*, she is and has been simply the negation of everything worth living for. She is not an empty void, she is a yawning chasm open between East and West; a bottomless abyss that has swallowed up every hope of mercy, every aspiration towards personal dignity, towards freedom, towards knowledge, every ennobling desire of the heart, every redeeming whisper of conscience. Those that have peered into that abyss, where the dreams of Panslavism, of universal conquest, mingled with the hate and contempt for Western ideas, drift impotently like shapes of mist, know well that it is bottomless; that there is in it no ground for anything that could in the remotest degree serve even the lowest interests of mankind — and certainly no ground ready for a revolution. The sin of the old European monarchies was not the absolutism inherent in every form of government; it was the inability to alter the forms of their legality, grown narrow and oppressive with the march of time. Every form of legality is bound to degenerate into oppression, and the legality in the forms of monarchical institutions sooner, perhaps, than any other. It has not been the business of monarchies to be adaptive from within. With the mission of uniting and consolidating the particular ambitions and interests of feudalism in favour of a larger conception of a State, of giving self-consciousness, force and nationality to the scattered energies of thought and action, they were fated to lag behind the march of ideas they had themselves set in motion in a direction they could neither understand nor approve. Yet, for all that, the thrones still remain, and what is more significant, perhaps, some of the dynasties, too, have survived. The revolutions of European States have never been in the nature of absolute protests *en masse* against the monarchical principle; they were the uprising of the people against the oppressive degeneration of legality. But there never has been any legality in Russia; she is a negation of that as of everything else that has its root in reason or conscience. The ground of every revolution had to be intellectually prepared. A revolution is a short cut in the rational development of national needs in response to the growth of world-wide ideals. It is conceivably possible for a monarch of genius to put himself at the head of a revolution without ceasing to be the

king of his people. For the autocracy of Holy Russia the only conceivable self-reform is — suicide.

The same relentless fate holds in its grip the all-powerful ruler and his helpless people. Wielders of a power purchased by an unspeakable baseness of subjection to the Khans of the Tartar horde, the Princes of Russia who, in their heart of hearts had come in time to regard themselves as superior to every monarch of Europe, have never risen to be the chiefs of a nation. Their authority has never been sanctioned by popular tradition, by ideas of intelligent loyalty, of devotion, of political necessity, of simple expediency, or even by the power of the sword. In whatever form of upheaval autocratic Russia is to find her end, it can never be a revolution fruitful of moral consequences to mankind. It cannot be anything else but a rising of slaves. It is a tragic circumstance that the only thing one can wish to that people who had never seen face to face either law, order, justice, right, truth about itself or the rest of the world; who had known nothing outside the capricious will of its irresponsible masters, is that it should find in the approaching hour of need, not an organiser or a law-giver, with the wisdom of a Lycurgus or a Solon for their service, but at least the force of energy and desperation in some as yet unknown Spartacus.

A brand of hopeless mental and moral inferiority is set upon Russian achievements; and the coming events of her internal changes, however appalling they may be in their magnitude, will be nothing more impressive than the convulsions of a colossal body. As her boasted military force that, corrupt in its origin, has ever struck no other but faltering blows, so her soul, kept benumbed by her temporal and spiritual master with the poison of tyranny and superstition, will find itself on awakening possessed of no language, a monstrous full-grown child having first to learn the ways of living thought and articulate speech. It is safe to say tyranny, assuming a thousand protean shapes, will remain clinging to her struggles for a long time before her blind multitudes succeed at last in trampling her out of existence under their millions of bare feet.

That would be the beginning. What is to come after? The conquest of freedom to call your soul your own is only the first step on the road to excellence. We, in Europe, have gone a step or two further, have had the time to forget how little that freedom means. To Russia it must seem everything. A prisoner shut up in a noisome dungeon concentrates all his hope and desire on the moment of stepping out beyond the gates. It appears



to him pregnant with an immense and final importance; whereas what is important is the spirit in which he will draw the first breath of freedom, the counsels he will hear, the hands he may find extended, the endless days of toil that must follow, wherein he will have to build his future with no other material but what he can find within himself.

It would be vain for Russia to hope for the support and counsel of collective wisdom. Since 1870 (as a distinguished statesman of the old tradition disconsolately exclaimed) “il n’y a plus d’Europe!” There is, indeed, no Europe. The idea of a Europe united in the solidarity of her dynasties, which for a moment seemed to dawn on the horizon of the Vienna Congress through the subsiding dust of Napoleonic alarums and excursions, has been extinguished by the larger glamour of less restraining ideals. Instead of the doctrines of solidarity it was the doctrine of nationalities much more favourable to spoliations that came to the front, and since its greatest triumphs at Sadowa and Sedan there is no Europe. Meanwhile till the time comes when there will be no frontiers, there are alliances so shamelessly based upon the exigencies of suspicion and mistrust that their cohesive force waxes and wanes with every year, almost with the event of every passing month. This is the atmosphere Russia will find when the last rampart of tyranny has been beaten down. But what hands, what voices will she find on coming out into the light of day? An ally she has yet who more than any other of Russia’s allies has found that it had parted with lots of solid substance in exchange for a shadow. It is true that the shadow was indeed the mightiest, the darkest that the modern world had ever known — and the most overbearing. But it is fading now, and the tone of truest anxiety as to what is to take its place will come, no doubt, from that and no other direction, and no doubt, also, it will have that note of generosity which even in the moments of greatest aberration is seldom wanting in the voice of the French people.

Two neighbours Russia will find at her door. Austria, traditionally unaggressive whenever her hand is not forced, ruled by a dynasty of uncertain future, weakened by her duality, can only speak to her in an uncertain, bilingual phrase. Prussia, grown in something like forty years from an almost pitiful dependant into a bullying friend and evil counsellor of Russia’s masters, may, indeed, hasten to extend a strong hand to the weakness of her exhausted body, but if so it will be only with the intention of tearing away the long-coveted part of her substance.

Pan-Germanism is by no means a shape of mists, and Germany is anything but a *Néant* where thought and effort are likely to lose themselves without sound or trace. It is a powerful and voracious organisation, full of unscrupulous self-confidence, whose appetite for aggrandisement will only be limited by the power of helping itself to the severed members of its friends and neighbours. The era of wars so eloquently denounced by the old Republicans as the peculiar blood guilt of dynastic ambitions is by no means over yet. They will be fought out differently, with lesser frequency, with an increased bitterness and the savage tooth-and-claw obstinacy of a struggle for existence. They will make us regret the time of dynastic ambitions, with their human absurdity moderated by prudence and even by shame, by the fear of personal responsibility and the regard paid to certain forms of conventional decency. For, if the monarchs of Europe have been derided for addressing each other as “brother” in autograph communications, that relationship was at least as effective as any form of brotherhood likely to be established between the rival nations of this continent, which, we are assured on all hands, is the heritage of democracy. In the ceremonial brotherhood of monarchs the reality of blood-ties, for what little it is worth, acted often as a drag on unscrupulous desires of glory or greed. Besides, there was always the common danger of exasperated peoples, and some respect for each other’s divine right. No leader of a democracy, without other ancestry but the sudden shout of a multitude, and debarred by the very condition of his power from even thinking of a direct heir, will have any interest in calling brother the leader of another democracy — a chief as fatherless and heirless as himself.

The war of 1870, brought about by the third Napoleon’s half-generous, half-selfish adoption of the principle of nationalities, was the first war characterised by a special intensity of hate, by a new note in the tune of an old song for which we may thank the Teutonic thoroughness. Was it not that excellent bourgeoisie, Princess Bismarck (to keep only to great examples), who was so righteously anxious to see men, women and children — emphatically the children, too — of the abominable French nation massacred off the face of the earth? This illustration of the new war-temper is artlessly revealed in the prattle of the amiable Busch, the Chancellor’s pet “reptile” of the Press. And this was supposed to be a war for an idea! Too much, however, should not be made of that good wife’s and mother’s sentiments any more than of the good First Emperor William’s

tears, shed so abundantly after every battle, by letter, telegram, and otherwise, during the course of the same war, before a dumb and shamefaced continent. These were merely the expressions of the simplicity of a nation which more than any other has a tendency to run into the grotesque. There is worse to come.

To-day, in the fierce grapple of two nations of different race, the short era of national wars seems about to close. No war will be waged for an idea. The “noxious idle aristocracies” of yesterday fought without malice for an occupation, for the honour, for the fun of the thing. The virtuous, industrious democratic States of to-morrow may yet be reduced to fighting for a crust of dry bread, with all the hate, ferocity, and fury that must attach to the vital importance of such an issue. The dreams sanguine humanitarians raised almost to ecstasy about the year fifty of the last century by the moving sight of the Crystal Palace — crammed full with that variegated rubbish which it seems to be the bizarre fate of humanity to produce for the benefit of a few employers of labour — have vanished as quickly as they had arisen. The golden hopes of peace have in a single night turned to dead leaves in every drawer of every benevolent theorist’s writing table. A swift disenchantment overtook the incredible infatuation which could put its trust in the peaceful nature of industrial and commercial competition.

Industrialism and commercialism — wearing high-sounding names in many languages (*Welt-politik* may serve for one instance) picking up coins behind the severe and disdainful figure of science whose giant strides have widened for us the horizon of the universe by some few inches — stand ready, almost eager, to appeal to the sword as soon as the globe of the earth has shrunk beneath our growing numbers by another ell or so. And democracy, which has elected to pin its faith to the supremacy of material interests, will have to fight their battles to the bitter end, on a mere pittance — unless, indeed, some statesman of exceptional ability and overwhelming prestige succeeds in carrying through an international understanding for the delimitation of spheres of trade all over the earth, on the model of the territorial spheres of influence marked in Africa to keep the competitors for the privilege of improving the nigger (as a buying machine) from flying prematurely at each other’s throats.

This seems the only expedient at hand for the temporary maintenance of European peace, with its alliances based on mutual distrust, preparedness

for war as its ideal, and the fear of wounds, luckily stronger, so far, than the pinch of hunger, its only guarantee. The true peace of the world will be a place of refuge much less like a beleaguered fortress and more, let us hope, in the nature of an Inviolable Temple. It will be built on less perishable foundations than those of material interests. But it must be confessed that the architectural aspect of the universal city remains as yet inconceivable — that the very ground for its erection has not been cleared of the jungle.

Never before in history has the right of war been more fully admitted in the rounded periods of public speeches, in books, in public prints, in all the public works of peace, culminating in the establishment of the Hague Tribunal — that solemnly official recognition of the Earth as a House of Strife. To him whose indignation is qualified by a measure of hope and affection, the efforts of mankind to work its own salvation present a sight of alarming comicality. After clinging for ages to the steps of the heavenly throne, they are now, without much modifying their attitude, trying with touching ingenuity to steal one by one the thunderbolts of their Jupiter. They have removed war from the list of Heaven-sent visitations that could only be prayed against; they have erased its name from the supplication against the wrath of war, pestilence, and famine, as it is found in the litanies of the Roman Catholic Church; they have dragged the scourge down from the skies and have made it into a calm and regulated institution. At first sight the change does not seem for the better. Jove's thunderbolt looks a most dangerous plaything in the hands of the people. But a solemnly established institution begins to grow old at once in the discussion, abuse, worship, and execration of men. It grows obsolete, odious, and intolerable; it stands fatally condemned to an unhonoured old age.

Therein lies the best hope of advanced thought, and the best way to help its prospects is to provide in the fullest, frankest way for the conditions of the present day. War is one of its conditions; it is its principal condition. It lies at the heart of every question agitating the fears and hopes of a humanity divided against itself. The succeeding ages have changed nothing except the watchwords of the armies. The intellectual stage of mankind being as yet in its infancy, and States, like most individuals, having but a feeble and imperfect consciousness of the worth and force of the inner life, the need of making their existence manifest to themselves is determined in the direction of physical activity. The idea of ceasing to grow in territory, in strength, in wealth, in influence — in anything but wisdom and self-

knowledge — is odious to them as the omen of the end. Action, in which is to be found the illusion of a mastered destiny, can alone satisfy our uneasy vanity and lay to rest the haunting fear of the future — a sentiment concealed, indeed, but proving its existence by the force it has, when invoked, to stir the passions of a nation. It will be long before we have learned that in the great darkness before us there is nothing that we need fear. Let us act lest we perish — is the cry. And the only form of action open to a State can be of no other than aggressive nature.

There are many kinds of aggressions, though the sanction of them is one and the same — the magazine rifle of the latest pattern. In preparation for or against that form of action the States of Europe are spending now such moments of uneasy leisure as they can snatch from the labours of factory and counting-house.

Never before has war received so much homage at the lips of men, and reigned with less disputed sway in their minds. It has harnessed science to its gun-carriages, it has enriched a few respectable manufacturers, scattered doles of food and raiment amongst a few thousand skilled workmen, devoured the first youth of whole generations, and reaped its harvest of countless corpses. It has perverted the intelligence of men, women, and children, and has made the speeches of Emperors, Kings, Presidents, and Ministers monotonous with ardent protestations of fidelity to peace. Indeed, war has made peace altogether its own, it has modelled it on its own image: a martial, overbearing, war-lord sort of peace, with a mailed fist, and turned-up moustaches, ringing with the din of grand manoeuvres, eloquent with allusions to glorious feats of arms; it has made peace so magnificent as to be almost as expensive to keep up as itself. It has sent out apostles of its own, who at one time went about (mostly in newspapers) preaching the gospel of the mystic sanctity of its sacrifices, and the regenerating power of spilt blood, to the poor in mind — whose name is legion.

It has been observed that in the course of earthly greatness a day of culminating triumph is often paid for by a morrow of sudden extinction. Let us hope it is so. Yet the dawn of that day of retribution may be a long time breaking above a dark horizon. War is with us now; and, whether this one ends soon or late, war will be with us again. And it is the way of true wisdom for men and States to take account of things as they are.

Civilisation has done its little best by our sensibilities for whose growth it is responsible. It has managed to remove the sights and sounds of

battlefields away from our doorsteps. But it cannot be expected to achieve the feat always and under every variety of circumstance. Some day it must fail, and we shall have then a wealth of appallingly unpleasant sensations brought home to us with painful intimacy. It is not absurd to suppose that whatever war comes to us next it will *not* be a distant war waged by Russia either beyond the Amur or beyond the Oxus.

The Japanese armies have laid that ghost for ever, because the Russia of the future will not, for the reasons explained above, be the Russia of to-day. It will not have the same thoughts, resentments and aims. It is even a question whether it will preserve its gigantic frame unaltered and unbroken. All speculation loses itself in the magnitude of the events made possible by the defeat of an autocracy whose only shadow of a title to existence was the invincible power of military conquest. That autocratic Russia will have a miserable end in harmony with its base origin and inglorious life does not seem open to doubt. The problem of the immediate future is posed not by the eventual manner but by the approaching fact of its disappearance.

The Japanese armies, in laying the oppressive ghost, have not only accomplished what will be recognised historically as an important mission in the world's struggle against all forms of evil, but have also created a situation. They have created a situation in the East which they are competent to manage by themselves; and in doing this they have brought about a change in the condition of the West with which Europe is not well prepared to deal. The common ground of concord, good faith and justice is not sufficient to establish an action upon; since the conscience of but very few men amongst us, and of no single Western nation as yet, will brook the restraint of abstract ideas as against the fascination of a material advantage. And eagle-eyed wisdom alone cannot take the lead of human action, which in its nature must for ever remain short-sighted. The trouble of the civilised world is the want of a common conservative principle abstract enough to give the impulse, practical enough to form the rallying point of international action tending towards the restraint of particular ambitions. Peace tribunals instituted for the greater glory of war will not replace it. Whether such a principle exists — who can say? If it does not, then it ought to be invented. A sage with a sense of humour and a heart of compassion should set about it without loss of time, and a solemn prophet full of words and fire ought to be given the task of preparing the minds. So far there is no trace of such a

principle anywhere in sight; even its plausible imitations (never very effective) have disappeared long ago before the doctrine of national aspirations. *Il n'y a plus d'Europe* — there is only an armed and trading continent, the home of slowly maturing economical contests for life and death and of loudly proclaimed world-wide ambitions. There are also other ambitions not so loud, but deeply rooted in the envious acquisitive temperament of the last corner amongst the great Powers of the Continent, whose feet are not exactly in the ocean — not yet — and whose head is very high up — in Pomerania, the breeding place of such precious Grenadiers that Prince Bismarck (whom it is a pleasure to quote) would not have given the bones of one of them for the settlement of the old Eastern Question. But times have changed, since, by way of keeping up, I suppose, some old barbaric German rite, the faithful servant of the Hohenzollerns was buried alive to celebrate the accession of a new Emperor.

Already the voice of surmises has been heard hinting tentatively at a possible re-grouping of European Powers. The alliance of the three Empires is supposed possible. And it may be possible. The myth of Russia's power is dying very hard — hard enough for that combination to take place — such is the fascination that a discredited show of numbers will still exercise upon the imagination of a people trained to the worship of force. Germany may be willing to lend its support to a tottering autocracy for the sake of an undisputed first place, and of a preponderating voice in the settlement of every question in that south-east of Europe which merges into Asia. No principle being involved in such an alliance of mere expediency, it would never be allowed to stand in the way of Germany's other ambitions. The fall of autocracy would bring its restraint automatically to an end. Thus it may be believed that the support Russian despotism may get from its once humble friend and client will not be stamped by that thoroughness which is supposed to be the mark of German superiority. Russia weakened down to the second place, or Russia eclipsed altogether during the throes of her regeneration, will answer equally well the plans of German policy — which are many and various and often incredible, though the aim of them all is the same: aggrandisement of territory and influence, with no regard to right and justice, either in the East or in the West. For that and no other is the true note of your *Welt-politik* which desires to live.

The German eagle with a Prussian head looks all round the horizon, not so much for something to do that would count for good in the records of the earth, as simply for something good to get. He gazes upon the land and upon the sea with the same covetous steadiness, for he has become of late a maritime eagle, and has learned to box the compass. He gazes north and south, and east and west, and is inclined to look intemperately upon the waters of the Mediterranean when they are blue. The disappearance of the Russian phantom has given a foreboding of unwonted freedom to the *Welt-politik*. According to the national tendency this assumption of Imperial impulses would run into the grotesque were it not for the spikes of the *pickelhaubes* peeping out grimly from behind. Germany's attitude proves that no peace for the earth can be found in the expansion of material interests which she seems to have adopted exclusively as her only aim, ideal, and watchword. For the use of those who gaze half-unbelieving at the passing away of the Russian phantom, part Ghoul, part Djinn, part Old Man of the Sea, and wait half-doubting for the birth of a nation's soul in this age which knows no miracles, the once-famous saying of poor Gambetta, tribune of the people (who was simple and believed in the "immanent justice of things"), may be adapted in the shape of a warning that, so far as a future of liberty, concord, and justice is concerned: "Le Prussianisme — voilà l'ennemi!"



## THE CRIME OF PARTITION — 1919

At the end of the eighteenth century, when the partition of Poland had become an accomplished fact, the world qualified it at once as a crime. This strong condemnation proceeded, of course, from the West of Europe; the Powers of the Centre, Prussia and Austria, were not likely to admit that this spoliation fell into the category of acts morally reprehensible and carrying the taint of anti-social guilt. As to Russia, the third party to the crime, and the originator of the scheme, she had no national conscience at the time. The will of its rulers was always accepted by the people as the expression of an omnipotence derived directly from God. As an act of mere conquest the best excuse for the partition lay simply in the fact that it happened to be possible; there was the plunder and there was the opportunity to get hold of it. Catherine the Great looked upon this extension of her dominions with a cynical satisfaction. Her political argument that the destruction of Poland meant the repression of revolutionary ideas and the checking of the spread of Jacobinism in Europe was a characteristically impudent pretence. There may have been minds here and there amongst the Russians that perceived, or perhaps only felt, that by the annexation of the greater part of the Polish Republic, Russia approached nearer to the comity of civilised nations and ceased, at least territorially, to be an Asiatic Power.

It was only after the partition of Poland that Russia began to play a great part in Europe. To such statesmen as she had then that act of brigandage must have appeared inspired by great political wisdom. The King of Prussia, faithful to the ruling principle of his life, wished simply to aggrandise his dominions at a much smaller cost and at much less risk than he could have done in any other direction; for at that time Poland was perfectly defenceless from a material point of view, and more than ever, perhaps, inclined to put its faith in humanitarian illusions. Morally, the Republic was in a state of ferment and consequent weakness, which so often accompanies the period of social reform. The strength arrayed against her was just then overwhelming; I mean the comparatively honest (because open) strength of armed forces. But, probably from innate inclination towards treachery, Frederick of Prussia selected for himself the part of falsehood and deception. Appearing on the scene in the character of a

friend he entered deliberately into a treaty of alliance with the Republic, and then, before the ink was dry, tore it up in brazen defiance of the commonest decency, which must have been extremely gratifying to his natural tastes.

As to Austria, it shed diplomatic tears over the transaction. They cannot be called crocodile tears, insomuch that they were in a measure sincere. They arose from a vivid perception that Austria's allotted share of the spoil could never compensate her for the accession of strength and territory to the other two Powers. Austria did not really want an extension of territory at the cost of Poland. She could not hope to improve her frontier in that way, and economically she had no need of Galicia, a province whose natural resources were undeveloped and whose salt mines did not arouse her cupidity because she had salt mines of her own. No doubt the democratic complexion of Polish institutions was very distasteful to the conservative monarchy; Austrian statesmen did see at the time that the real danger to the principle of autocracy was in the West, in France, and that all the forces of Central Europe would be needed for its suppression. But the movement towards a *partage* on the part of Russia and Prussia was too definite to be resisted, and Austria had to follow their lead in the destruction of a State which she would have preferred to preserve as a possible ally against Prussian and Russian ambitions. It may be truly said that the destruction of Poland secured the safety of the French Revolution. For when in 1795 the crime was consummated, the Revolution had turned the corner and was in a state to defend itself against the forces of reaction.

In the second half of the eighteenth century there were two centres of liberal ideas on the continent of Europe: France and Poland. On an impartial survey one may say without exaggeration that then France was relatively every bit as weak as Poland; even, perhaps, more so. But France's geographical position made her much less vulnerable. She had no powerful neighbours on her frontier; a decayed Spain in the south and a conglomeration of small German Principalities on the east were her happy lot. The only States which dreaded the contamination of the new principles and had enough power to combat it were Prussia, Austria, and Russia, and they had another centre of forbidden ideas to deal with in defenceless Poland, unprotected by nature, and offering an immediate satisfaction to their cupidity. They made their choice, and the untold sufferings of a nation which would not die was the price exacted by fate for the triumph of revolutionary ideals.

Thus even a crime may become a moral agent by the lapse of time and the course of history. Progress leaves its dead by the way, for progress is only a great adventure as its leaders and chiefs know very well in their hearts. It is a march into an undiscovered country; and in such an enterprise the victims do not count. As an emotional outlet for the oratory of freedom it was convenient enough to remember the Crime now and then: the Crime being the murder of a State and the carving of its body into three pieces. There was really nothing to do but to drop a few tears and a few flowers of rhetoric upon the grave. But the spirit of the nation refused to rest therein. It haunted the territories of the Old Republic in the manner of a ghost haunting its ancestral mansion where strangers are making themselves at home; a calumniated, ridiculed, and pooh-pooh'd ghost, and yet never ceasing to inspire a sort of awe, a strange uneasiness, in the hearts of the unlawful possessors. Poland deprived of its independence, of its historical continuity, with its religion and language persecuted and repressed, became a mere geographical expression. And even that, itself, seemed strangely vague, had lost its definite character, was rendered doubtful by the theories and the claims of the spoliators who, by a strange effect of uneasy conscience, while strenuously denying the moral guilt of the transaction, were always trying to throw a veil of high rectitude over the Crime. What was most annoying to their righteousness was the fact that the nation, stabbed to the heart, refused to grow insensible and cold. That persistent and almost uncanny vitality was sometimes very inconvenient to the rest of Europe also. It would intrude its irresistible claim into every problem of European politics, into the theory of European equilibrium, into the question of the Near East, the Italian question, the question of Schleswig-Holstein, and into the doctrine of nationalities. That ghost, not content with making its ancestral halls uncomfortable for the thieves, haunted also the Cabinets of Europe, waved indecently its bloodstained robes in the solemn atmosphere of Council-rooms, where congresses and conferences sit with closed windows. It would not be exorcised by the brutal jeers of Bismarck and the fine railleries of Gorchakov.

As a Polish friend observed to me some years ago: "Till the year '48 the Polish problem has been to a certain extent a convenient rallying-point for all manifestations of liberalism. Since that time we have come to be regarded simply as a nuisance. It's very disagreeable."

I agreed that it was, and he continued: "What are we to do? We did not create the situation by any outside action of ours. Through all the centuries of its existence Poland has never been a menace to anybody, not even to the Turks, to whom it has been merely an obstacle."

Nothing could be more true. The spirit of aggressiveness was absolutely foreign to the Polish temperament, to which the preservation of its institutions and its liberties was much more precious than any ideas of conquest. Polish wars were defensive, and they were mostly fought within Poland's own borders. And that those territories were often invaded was but a misfortune arising from its geographical position. Territorial expansion was never the master-thought of Polish statesmen. The consolidation of the territories of the *sérénissime* Republic, which made of it a Power of the first rank for a time, was not accomplished by force. It was not the consequence of successful aggression, but of a long and successful defence against the raiding neighbours from the East. The lands of Lithuanian and Ruthenian speech were never conquered by Poland. These peoples were not compelled by a series of exhausting wars to seek safety in annexation. It was not the will of a prince or a political intrigue that brought about the union. Neither was it fear. The slowly-matured view of the economical and social necessities and, before all, the ripening moral sense of the masses were the motives that induced the forty three representatives of Lithuanian and Ruthenian provinces, led by their paramount prince, to enter into a political combination unique in the history of the world, a spontaneous and complete union of sovereign States choosing deliberately the way of peace. Never was strict truth better expressed in a political instrument than in the preamble of the first Union Treaty (1413). It begins with the words: "This Union, being the outcome not of hatred, but of love" — words that Poles have not heard addressed to them politically by any nation for the last hundred and fifty years.

This union being an organic, living thing capable of growth and development was, later, modified and confirmed by two other treaties, which guaranteed to all the parties in a just and eternal union all their rights, liberties, and respective institutions. The Polish State offers a singular instance of an extremely liberal administrative federalism which, in its Parliamentary life as well as its international politics, presented a complete unity of feeling and purpose. As an eminent French diplomatist remarked many years ago: "It is a very remarkable fact in the history of the Polish

State, this invariable and unanimous consent of the populations; the more so that, the King being looked upon simply as the chief of the Republic, there was no monarchical bond, no dynastic fidelity to control and guide the sentiment of the nations, and their union remained as a pure affirmation of the national will.” The Grand Duchy of Lithuania and its Ruthenian Provinces retained their statutes, their own administration, and their own political institutions. That those institutions in the course of time tended to assimilation with the Polish form was not the result of any pressure, but simply of the superior character of Polish civilisation.

Even after Poland lost its independence this alliance and this union remained firm in spirit and fidelity. All the national movements towards liberation were initiated in the name of the whole mass of people inhabiting the limits of the old Republic, and all the Provinces took part in them with complete devotion. It is only in the last generation that efforts have been made to create a tendency towards separation, which would indeed serve no one but Poland’s common enemies. And, strangely enough, it is the internationalists, men who professedly care nothing for race or country, who have set themselves this task of disruption, one can easily see for what sinister purpose. The ways of the internationalists may be dark, but they are not inscrutable.

From the same source no doubt there will flow in the future a poisoned stream of hints of a reconstituted Poland being a danger to the races once so closely associated within the territories of the Old Republic. The old partners in “the Crime” are not likely to forgive their victim its inconvenient and almost shocking obstinacy in keeping alive. They had tried moral assassination before and with some small measure of success, for, indeed, the Polish question, like all living reproaches, had become a nuisance. Given the wrong, and the apparent impossibility of righting it without running risks of a serious nature, some moral alleviation may be found in the belief that the victim had brought its misfortunes on its own head by its own sins. That theory, too, had been advanced about Poland (as if other nations had known nothing of sin and folly), and it made some way in the world at different times, simply because good care was taken by the interested parties to stop the mouth of the accused. But it has never carried much conviction to honest minds. Somehow, in defiance of the cynical point of view as to the Force of Lies and against all the power of falsified evidence, truth often turns out to be stronger than calumny. With the course

of years, however, another danger sprang up, a danger arising naturally from the new political alliances dividing Europe into two armed camps. It was the danger of silence. Almost without exception the Press of Western Europe in the twentieth century refused to touch the Polish question in any shape or form whatever. Never was the fact of Polish vitality more embarrassing to European diplomacy than on the eve of Poland's resurrection.

When the war broke out there was something gruesomely comic in the proclamations of emperors and archdukes appealing to that invincible soul of a nation whose existence or moral worth they had been so arrogantly denying for more than a century. Perhaps in the whole record of human transactions there have never been performances so brazen and so vile as the manifestoes of the German Emperor and the Grand Duke Nicholas of Russia; and, I imagine, no more bitter insult has been offered to human heart and intelligence than the way in which those proclamations were flung into the face of historical truth. It was like a scene in a cynical and sinister farce, the absurdity of which became in some sort unfathomable by the reflection that nobody in the world could possibly be so abjectly stupid as to be deceived for a single moment. At that time, and for the first two months of the war, I happened to be in Poland, and I remember perfectly well that, when those precious documents came out, the confidence in the moral turpitude of mankind they implied did not even raise a scornful smile on the lips of men whose most sacred feelings and dignity they outraged. They did not deign to waste their contempt on them. In fact, the situation was too poignant and too involved for either hot scorn or a coldly rational discussion. For the Poles it was like being in a burning house of which all the issues were locked. There was nothing but sheer anguish under the strange, as if stony, calmness which in the utter absence of all hope falls on minds that are not constitutionally prone to despair. Yet in this time of dismay the irrepressible vitality of the nation would not accept a neutral attitude. I was told that even if there were no issue it was absolutely necessary for the Poles to affirm their national existence. Passivity, which could be regarded as a craven acceptance of all the material and moral horrors ready to fall upon the nation, was not to be thought of for a moment. Therefore, it was explained to me, the Poles *must* act. Whether this was a counsel of wisdom or not it is very difficult to say, but there are crises of the soul which are beyond the reach of wisdom. When there is

apparently no issue visible to the eyes of reason, sentiment may yet find a way out, either towards salvation or to utter perdition, no one can tell — and the sentiment does not even ask the question. Being there as a stranger in that tense atmosphere, which was yet not unfamiliar to me, I was not very anxious to parade my wisdom, especially after it had been pointed out in answer to my cautious arguments that, if life has its values worth fighting for, death, too, has that in it which can make it worthy or unworthy.

Out of the mental and moral trouble into which the grouping of the Powers at the beginning of war had thrown the counsels of Poland there emerged at last the decision that the Polish Legions, a peace organisation in Galicia directed by Pilsudski (afterwards given the rank of General, and now apparently the Chief of the Government in Warsaw), should take the field against the Russians. In reality it did not matter against which partner in the “Crime” Polish resentment should be directed. There was little to choose between the methods of Russian barbarism, which were both crude and rotten, and the cultivated brutality tinged with contempt of Germany’s superficial, grinding civilisation. There was nothing to choose between them. Both were hateful, and the direction of the Polish effort was naturally governed by Austria’s tolerant attitude, which had connived for years at the semi-secret organisation of the Polish Legions. Besides, the material possibility pointed out the way. That Poland should have turned at first against the ally of Western Powers, to whose moral support she had been looking for so many years, is not a greater monstrosity than that alliance with Russia which had been entered into by England and France with rather less excuse and with a view to eventualities which could perhaps have been avoided by a firmer policy and by a greater resolution in the face of what plainly appeared unavoidable.

For let the truth be spoken. The action of Germany, however cruel, sanguinary, and faithless, was nothing in the nature of a stab in the dark. The Germanic Tribes had told the whole world in all possible tones carrying conviction, the gently persuasive, the coldly logical; in tones Hegelian, Nietzschean, warlike, pious, cynical, inspired, what they were going to do to the inferior races of the earth, so full of sin and all unworthiness. But with a strange similarity to the prophets of old (who were also great moralists and invokers of might) they seemed to be crying in a desert. Whatever might have been the secret searching of hearts, the Worthless Ones would not take heed. It must also be admitted that the conduct of the

menaced Governments carried with it no suggestion of resistance. It was no doubt, the effect of neither courage nor fear, but of that prudence which causes the average man to stand very still in the presence of a savage dog. It was not a very politic attitude, and the more reprehensible in so far that it seemed to arise from the mistrust of their own people's fortitude. On simple matters of life and death a people is always better than its leaders, because a people cannot argue itself as a whole into a sophisticated state of mind out of deference for a mere doctrine or from an exaggerated sense of its own cleverness. I am speaking now of democracies whose chiefs resemble the tyrant of Syracuse in this, that their power is unlimited (for who can limit the will of a voting people?) and who always see the domestic sword hanging by a hair above their heads.

Perhaps a different attitude would have checked German self-confidence, and her overgrown militarism would have died from the excess of its own strength. What would have been then the moral state of Europe it is difficult to say. Some other excess would probably have taken its place, excess of theory, or excess of sentiment, or an excess of the sense of security leading to some other form of catastrophe; but it is certain that in that case the Polish question would not have taken a concrete form for ages. Perhaps it would never have taken form! In this world, where everything is transient, even the most reproachful ghosts end by vanishing out of old mansions, out of men's consciences. Progress of enlightenment, or decay of faith? In the years before the war the Polish ghost was becoming so thin that it was impossible to get for it the slightest mention in the papers. A young Pole coming to me from Paris was extremely indignant, but I, indulging in that detachment which is the product of greater age, longer experience, and a habit of meditation, refused to share that sentiment. He had gone begging for a word on Poland to many influential people, and they had one and all told him that they were going to do no such thing. They were all men of ideas and therefore might have been called idealists, but the notion most strongly anchored in their minds was the folly of touching a question which certainly had no merit of actuality and would have had the appalling effect of provoking the wrath of their old enemies and at the same time offending the sensibilities of their new friends. It was an unanswerable argument. I couldn't share my young friend's surprise and indignation. My practice of reflection had also



convinced me that there is nothing on earth that turns quicker on its pivot than political idealism when touched by the breath of practical politics.

It would be good to remember that Polish independence as embodied in a Polish State is not the gift of any kind of journalism, neither is it the outcome even of some particularly benevolent idea or of any clearly apprehended sense of guilt. I am speaking of what I know when I say that the original and only formative idea in Europe was the idea of delivering the fate of Poland into the hands of Russian Tsarism. And, let us remember, it was assumed then to be a victorious Tsarism at that. It was an idea talked of openly, entertained seriously, presented as a benevolence, with a curious blindness to its grotesque and ghastly character. It was the idea of delivering the victim with a kindly smile and the confident assurance that “it would be all right” to a perfectly unrepentant assassin, who, after sawing furiously at its throat for a hundred years or so, was expected to make friends suddenly and kiss it on both cheeks in the mystic Russian fashion. It was a singularly nightmarish combination of international polity, and no whisper of any other would have been officially tolerated. Indeed, I do not think in the whole extent of Western Europe there was anybody who had the slightest mind to whisper on that subject. Those were the days of the dark future, when Benckendorf put down his name on the Committee for the Relief of Polish Populations driven by the Russian armies into the heart of Russia, when the Grand Duke Nicholas (the gentleman who advocated a St. Bartholomew’s Night for the suppression of Russian liberalism) was displaying his “divine” (I have read the very word in an English newspaper of standing) strategy in the great retreat, where Mr. Iswolsky carried himself haughtily on the banks of the Seine; and it was beginning to dawn upon certain people there that he was a greater nuisance even than the Polish question.

But there is no use in talking about all that. Some clever person has said that it is always the unexpected that happens, and on a calm and dispassionate survey the world does appear mainly to one as a scene of miracles. Out of Germany’s strength, in whose purpose so many people refused to believe, came Poland’s opportunity, in which nobody could have been expected to believe. Out of Russia’s collapse emerged that forbidden thing, the Polish independence, not as a vengeful figure, the retributive shadow of the crime, but as something much more solid and more difficult to get rid of — a political necessity and a moral solution. Directly it

appeared its practical usefulness became undeniable, and also the fact that, for better or worse, it was impossible to get rid of it again except by the unthinkable way of another carving, of another partition, of another crime.

Therein lie the strength and the future of the thing so strictly forbidden no farther back than two years or so, of the Polish independence expressed in a Polish State. It comes into the world morally free, not in virtue of its sufferings, but in virtue of its miraculous rebirth and of its ancient claim for services rendered to Europe. Not a single one of the combatants of all the fronts of the world has died consciously for Poland's freedom. That supreme opportunity was denied even to Poland's own children. And it is just as well! Providence in its inscrutable way had been merciful, for had it been otherwise the load of gratitude would have been too great, the sense of obligation too crushing, the joy of deliverance too fearful for mortals, common sinners with the rest of mankind before the eye of the Most High. Those who died East and West, leaving so much anguish and so much pride behind them, died neither for the creation of States, nor for empty words, nor yet for the salvation of general ideas. They died neither for democracy, nor leagues, nor systems, nor yet for abstract justice, which is an unfathomable mystery. They died for something too deep for words, too mighty for the common standards by which reason measures the advantages of life and death, too sacred for the vain discourses that come and go on the lips of dreamers, fanatics, humanitarians, and statesmen. They died . . . .

Poland's independence springs up from that great immolation, but Poland's loyalty to Europe will not be rooted in anything so trenchant and burdensome as the sense of an immeasurable indebtedness, of that gratitude which in a worldly sense is sometimes called eternal, but which lies always at the mercy of weariness and is fatally condemned by the instability of human sentiments to end in negation. Polish loyalty will be rooted in something much more solid and enduring, in something that could never be called eternal, but which is, in fact, life-enduring. It will be rooted in the national temperament, which is about the only thing on earth that can be trusted. Men may deteriorate, they may improve too, but they don't change. Misfortune is a hard school which may either mature or spoil a national character, but it may be reasonably advanced that the long course of adversity of the most cruel kind has not injured the fundamental characteristics of the Polish nation which has proved its vitality against the most demoralising odds. The various phases of the Polish sense of self-

preservation struggling amongst the menacing forces and the no less threatening chaos of the neighbouring Powers should be judged impartially. I suggest impartiality and not indulgence simply because, when appraising the Polish question, it is not necessary to invoke the softer emotions. A little calm reflection on the past and the present is all that is necessary on the part of the Western world to judge the movements of a community whose ideals are the same, but whose situation is unique. This situation was brought vividly home to me in the course of an argument more than eighteen months ago. "Don't forget," I was told, "that Poland has got to live in contact with Germany and Russia to the end of time. Do you understand the force of that expression: 'To the end of time'? Facts must be taken into account, and especially appalling facts, such as this, to which there is no possible remedy on earth. For reasons which are, properly speaking, physiological, a prospect of friendship with Germans or Russians even in the most distant future is unthinkable. Any alliance of heart and mind would be a monstrous thing, and monsters, as we all know, cannot live. You can't base your conduct on a monstrous conception. We are either worth or not worth preserving, but the horrible psychology of the situation is enough to drive the national mind to distraction. Yet under a destructive pressure, of which Western Europe can have no notion, applied by forces that were not only crushing but corrupting, we have preserved our sanity. Therefore there can be no fear of our losing our minds simply because the pressure is removed. We have neither lost our heads nor yet our moral sense. Oppression, not merely political, but affecting social relations, family life, the deepest affections of human nature, and the very fount of natural emotions, has never made us vengeful. It is worthy of notice that with every incentive present in our emotional reactions we had no recourse to political assassination. Arms in hand, hopeless or hopefully, and always against immeasurable odds, we did affirm ourselves and the justice of our cause; but wild justice has never been a part of our conception of national manliness. In all the history of Polish oppression there was only one shot fired which was not in battle. Only one! And the man who fired it in Paris at the Emperor Alexander II. was but an individual connected with no organisation, representing no shade of Polish opinion. The only effect in Poland was that of profound regret, not at the failure, but at the mere fact of the attempt. The history of our captivity is free from that stain; and whatever follies in the eyes of the world we may have perpetrated, we have

neither murdered our enemies nor acted treacherously against them, nor yet have been reduced to the point of cursing each other.”

I could not gainsay the truth of that discourse, I saw as clearly as my interlocutor the impossibility of the faintest sympathetic bond between Poland and her neighbours ever being formed in the future. The only course that remains to a reconstituted Poland is the elaboration, establishment, and preservation of the most correct method of political relations with neighbours to whom Poland's existence is bound to be a humiliation and an offence. Calmly considered it is an appalling task, yet one may put one's trust in that national temperament which is so completely free from aggressiveness and revenge. Therein lie the foundations of all hope. The success of renewed life for that nation whose fate is to remain in exile, ever isolated from the West, amongst hostile surroundings, depends on the sympathetic understanding of its problems by its distant friends, the Western Powers, which in their democratic development must recognise the moral and intellectual kinship of that distant outpost of their own type of civilisation, which was the only basis of Polish culture.

Whatever may be the future of Russia and the final organisation of Germany, the old hostility must remain unappeased, the fundamental antagonism must endure for years to come. The Crime of the Partition was committed by autocratic Governments which were the Governments of their time; but those Governments were characterised in the past, as they will be in the future, by their people's national traits, which remain utterly incompatible with the Polish mentality and Polish sentiment. Both the German submissiveness (idealistic as it may be) and the Russian lawlessness (fed on the corruption of all the virtues) are utterly foreign to the Polish nation, whose qualities and defects are altogether of another kind, tending to a certain exaggeration of individualism and, perhaps, to an extreme belief in the Governing Power of Free Assent: the one invariably vital principle in the internal government of the Old Republic. There was never a history more free from political bloodshed than the history of the Polish State, which never knew either feudal institutions or feudal quarrels. At the time when heads were falling on the scaffolds all over Europe there was only one political execution in Poland — only one; and as to that there still exists a tradition that the great Chancellor who democratised Polish institutions, and had to order it in pursuance of his political purpose, could not settle that matter with his conscience till the day of his death. Poland,

too, had her civil wars, but this can hardly be made a matter of reproach to her by the rest of the world. Conducted with humanity, they left behind them no animosities and no sense of repression, and certainly no legacy of hatred. They were but a recognised argument in political discussion and tended always towards conciliation.

I cannot imagine, whatever form of democratic government Poland elaborates for itself, that either the nation or its leaders would do anything but welcome the closest scrutiny of their renewed political existence. The difficulty of the problem of that existence will be so great that some errors will be unavoidable, and one may be sure that they will be taken advantage of by its neighbours to discredit that living witness to a great historical crime. If not the actual frontiers, then the moral integrity of the new State is sure to be assailed before the eyes of Europe. Economical enmity will also come into play when the world's work is resumed again and competition asserts its power. Charges of aggression are certain to be made, especially as related to the small States formed of the territories of the Old Republic. And everybody knows the power of lies which go about clothed in coats of many colours, whereas, as is well known, Truth has no such advantage, and for that reason is often suppressed as not altogether proper for everyday purposes. It is not often recognised, because it is not always fit to be seen.

Already there are innuendoes, threats, hints thrown out, and even awful instances fabricated out of inadequate materials, but it is historically unthinkable that the Poland of the future, with its sacred tradition of freedom and its hereditary sense of respect for the rights of individuals and States, should seek its prosperity in aggressive action or in moral violence against that part of its once fellow-citizens who are Ruthenians or Lithuanians. The only influence that cannot be restrained is simply the influence of time, which disengages truth from all facts with a merciless logic and prevails over the passing opinions, the changing impulses of men. There can be no doubt that the moral impulses and the material interests of the new nationalities, which seem to play now the game of disintegration for the benefit of the world's enemies, will in the end bring them nearer to the Poland of this war's creation, will unite them sooner or later by a spontaneous movement towards the State which had adopted and brought them up in the development of its own humane culture — the offspring of the West.

## A NOTE ON THE POLISH PROBLEM — 1916

We must start from the assumption that promises made by proclamation at the beginning of this war may be binding on the individuals who made them under the stress of coming events, but cannot be regarded as binding the Governments after the end of the war.

Poland has been presented with three proclamations. Two of them were in such contrast with the avowed principles and the historic action for the last hundred years (since the Congress of Vienna) of the Powers concerned, that they were more like cynical insults to the nation's deepest feelings, its memory and its intelligence, than state papers of a conciliatory nature.

The German promises awoke nothing but indignant contempt; the Russian a bitter incredulity of the most complete kind. The Austrian proclamation, which made no promises and contented itself with pointing out the Austro-Polish relations for the last forty-five years, was received in silence. For it is a fact that in Austrian Poland alone Polish nationality was recognised as an element of the Empire, and individuals could breathe the air of freedom, of civil life, if not of political independence.

But for Poles to be Germanophile is unthinkable. To be Russophile or Austrophile is at best a counsel of despair in view of a European situation which, because of the grouping of the powers, seems to shut from them every hope, expressed or unexpressed, of a national future nursed through more than a hundred years of suffering and oppression.

Through most of these years, and especially since 1830, Poland (I use this expression since Poland exists as a spiritual entity to-day as definitely as it ever existed in her past) has put her faith in the Western Powers. Politically it may have been nothing more than a consoling illusion, and the nation had a half-consciousness of this. But what Poland was looking for from the Western Powers without discouragement and with unbroken confidence was moral support.

This is a fact of the sentimental order. But such facts have their positive value, for their idealism derives from perhaps the highest kind of reality. A sentiment asserts its claim by its force, persistence and universality. In Poland that sentimental attitude towards the Western Powers is universal. It extends to all classes. The very children are affected by it as soon as they begin to think.

The political value of such a sentiment consists in this, that it is based on profound resemblances. Therefore one can build on it as if it were a material fact. For the same reason it would be unsafe to disregard it if one proposed to build solidly. The Poles, whom superficial or ill-informed theorists are trying to force into the social and psychological formula of Slavonism, are in truth not Slavonic at all. In temperament, in feeling, in mind, and even in unreason, they are Western, with an absolute comprehension of all Western modes of thought, even of those which are remote from their historical experience.

That element of racial unity which may be called Polonism, remained compressed between Prussian Germanism on one side and the Russian Slavonism on the other. For Germanism it feels nothing but hatred. But between Polonism and Slavonism there is not so much hatred as a complete and ineradicable incompatibility.

No political work of reconstructing Poland either as a matter of justice or expediency could be sound which would leave the new creation in dependence to Germanism or to Slavonism.

The first need not be considered. The second must be — unless the Powers elect to drop the Polish question either under the cover of vague assurances or without any disguise whatever.

But if it is considered it will be seen at once that the Slavonic solution of the Polish Question can offer no guarantees of duration or hold the promise of security for the peace of Europe.

The only basis for it would be the Grand Duke's Manifesto. But that Manifesto, signed by a personage now removed from Europe to Asia, and by a man, moreover, who if true to himself, to his conception of patriotism and to his family tradition could not have put his hand to it with any sincerity of purpose, is now divested of all authority. The forcible vagueness of its promises, its startling inconsistency with the hundred years of ruthlessly denationalising oppression permit one to doubt whether it was ever meant to have any authority.

But in any case it could have had no effect. The very nature of things would have brought to nought its professed intentions.

It is impossible to suppose that a State of Russia's power and antecedents would tolerate a privileged community (of, to Russia, unnational complexion) within the body of the Empire. All history shows that such an arrangement, however hedged in by the most solemn treaties and

declarations, cannot last. In this case it would lead to a tragic issue. The absorption of Polonism is unthinkable. The last hundred years of European History proves it undeniably. There remains then extirpation, a process of blood and iron; and the last act of the Polish drama would be played then before a Europe too weary to interfere, and to the applause of Germany.

It would not be just to say that the disappearance of Polonism would add any strength to the Slavonic power of expansion. It would add no strength, but it would remove a possibly effective barrier against the surprises the future of Europe may hold in store for the Western Powers.

Thus the question whether Polonism is worth saving presents itself as a problem of politics with a practical bearing on the stability of European peace — as a barrier or perhaps better (in view of its detached position) as an outpost of the Western Powers placed between the great might of Slavonism which has not yet made up its mind to anything, and the organised Germanism which has spoken its mind with no uncertain voice, before the world.

Looked at in that light alone Polonism seems worth saving. That it has lived so long on its trust in the moral support of the Western Powers may give it another and even stronger claim, based on a truth of a more profound kind. Polonism had resisted the utmost efforts of Germanism and Slavonism for more than a hundred years. Why? Because of the strength of its ideals conscious of their kinship with the West. Such a power of resistance creates a moral obligation which it would be unsafe to neglect. There is always a risk in throwing away a tool of proved temper.

In this profound conviction of the practical and ideal worth of Polonism one approaches the problem of its preservation with a very vivid sense of the practical difficulties derived from the grouping of the Powers. The uncertainty of the extent and of the actual form of victory for the Allies will increase the difficulty of formulating a plan of Polish regeneration at the present moment.

Poland, to strike its roots again into the soil of political Europe, will require a guarantee of security for the healthy development and for the untrammelled play of such institutions as she may be enabled to give to herself.

Those institutions will be animated by the spirit of Polonism, which, having been a factor in the history of Europe and having proved its vitality under oppression, has established its right to live. That spirit, despised and



hated by Germany and incompatible with Slavonism because of moral differences, cannot avoid being (in its renewed assertion) an object of dislike and mistrust.

As an unavoidable consequence of the past Poland will have to begin its existence in an atmosphere of enmities and suspicions. That advanced outpost of Western civilisation will have to hold its ground in the midst of hostile camps: always its historical fate.

Against the menace of such a specially dangerous situation the paper and ink of public Treaties cannot be an effective defence. Nothing but the actual, living, active participation of the two Western Powers in the establishment of the new Polish commonwealth, and in the first twenty years of its existence, will give the Poles a sufficient guarantee of security in the work of restoring their national life.

An Anglo-French protectorate would be the ideal form of moral and material support. But Russia, as an ally, must take her place in it on such a footing as will allay to the fullest extent her possible apprehensions and satisfy her national sentiment. That necessity will have to be formally recognised.

In reality Russia has ceased to care much for her Polish possessions. Public recognition of a mistake in political morality and a voluntary surrender of territory in the cause of European concord, cannot damage the prestige of a powerful State. The new spheres of expansion in regions more easily assimilable, will more than compensate Russia for the loss of territory on the Western frontier of the Empire.

The experience of Dual Controls and similar combinations has been so unfortunate in the past that the suggestion of a Triple Protectorate may well appear at first sight monstrous even to unprejudiced minds. But it must be remembered that this is a unique case and a problem altogether exceptional, justifying the employment of exceptional means for its solution. To those who would doubt the possibility of even bringing such a scheme into existence the answer may be made that there are psychological moments when any measure tending towards the ends of concord and justice may be brought into being. And it seems that the end of the war would be the moment for bringing into being the political scheme advocated in this note.

Its success must depend on the singleness of purpose in the contracting Powers, and on the wisdom, the tact, the abilities, the good-will of men entrusted with its initiation and its further control. Finally it may be pointed

out that this plan is the only one offering serious guarantees to all the parties occupying their respective positions within the scheme.

If her existence as a state is admitted as just, expedient and necessary, Poland has the moral right to receive her constitution not from the hand of an old enemy, but from the Western Powers alone, though of course with the fullest concurrence of Russia.

This constitution, elaborated by a committee of Poles nominated by the three Governments, will (after due discussion and amendment by the High Commissioners of the Protecting Powers) be presented to Poland as the initial document, the charter of her new life, freely offered and unreservedly accepted.

It should be as simple and short as a written constitution can be — establishing the Polish Commonwealth, settling the lines of representative institutions, the form of judicature, and leaving the greatest measure possible of self-government to the provinces forming part of the re-created Poland.

This constitution will be promulgated immediately after the three Powers had settled the frontiers of the new State, including the town of Danzig (free port) and a proportion of seaboard. The legislature will then be called together and a general treaty will regulate Poland's international portion as a protected state, the status of the High Commissioners and such-like matters. The legislature will ratify, thus making Poland, as it were, a party in the establishment of the protectorate. A point of importance.

Other general treaties will define Poland's position in the Anglo-Franco-Russian alliance, fix the numbers of the army, and settle the participation of the Powers in its organisation and training.

# **POLAND REVISITED — 1915**

## I.

I have never believed in political assassination as a means to an end, and least of all in assassination of the dynastic order. I don't know how far murder can ever approach the perfection of a fine art, but looked upon with the cold eye of reason it seems but a crude expedient of impatient hope or hurried despair. There are few men whose premature death could influence human affairs more than on the surface. The deeper stream of causes depends not on individuals who, like the mass of mankind, are carried on by a destiny which no murder has ever been able to placate, divert, or arrest.

In July of last year I was a stranger in a strange city in the Midlands and particularly out of touch with the world's politics. Never a very diligent reader of newspapers, there were at that time reasons of a private order which caused me to be even less informed than usual on public affairs as presented from day to day in that necessarily atmosphereless, perspectiveless manner of the daily papers, which somehow, for a man possessed of some historic sense, robs them of all real interest. I don't think I had looked at a daily for a month past.

But though a stranger in a strange city I was not lonely, thanks to a friend who had travelled there out of pure kindness to bear me company in a conjuncture which, in a most private sense, was somewhat trying.

It was this friend who, one morning at breakfast, informed me of the murder of the Archduke Ferdinand.

The impression was mediocre. I was barely aware that such a man existed. I remembered only that not long before he had visited London. The recollection was rather of a cloud of insignificant printed words his presence in this country provoked.

Various opinions had been expressed of him, but his importance was Archducal, dynastic, purely accidental. Can there be in the world of real men anything more shadowy than an Archduke? And now he was no more; removed with an atrocity of circumstances which made one more sensible of his humanity than when he was in life. I connected that crime with Balkanic plots and aspirations so little that I had actually to ask where it had happened. My friend told me it was in Serajevo, and wondered what would be the consequences of that grave event. He asked me what I thought would happen next.

It was with perfect sincerity that I answered “Nothing,” and having a great repugnance to consider murder as a factor of politics, I dismissed the subject. It fitted with my ethical sense that an act cruel and absurd should be also useless. I had also the vision of a crowd of shadowy Archdukes in the background, out of which one would step forward to take the place of that dead man in the light of the European stage. And then, to speak the whole truth, there was no man capable of forming a judgment who attended so little to the march of events as I did at that time. What for want of a more definite term I must call my mind was fixed upon my own affairs, not because they were in a bad posture, but because of their fascinating holiday-promising aspect. I had been obtaining my information as to Europe at second hand, from friends good enough to come down now and then to see us. They arrived with their pockets full of crumpled newspapers, and answered my queries casually, with gentle smiles of scepticism as to the reality of my interest. And yet I was not indifferent; but the tension in the Balkans had become chronic after the acute crisis, and one could not help being less conscious of it. It had wearied out one’s attention. Who could have guessed that on that wild stage we had just been looking at a miniature rehearsal of the great world-drama, the reduced model of the very passions and violences of what the future held in store for the Powers of the Old World? Here and there, perhaps, rare minds had a suspicion of that possibility, while they watched Old Europe stage-managing fussily by means of notes and conferences, the prophetic reproduction of its awaiting fate. It was wonderfully exact in the spirit; same roar of guns, same protestations of superiority, same words in the air; race, liberation, justice — and the same mood of trivial demonstrations. One could not take to-day a ticket for Petersburg. “You mean Petrograd,” would say the booking clerk. Shortly after the fall of Adrianople a friend of mine passing through Sophia asked for some *café turc* at the end of his lunch.

“Monsieur veut dire Café balkanique,” the patriotic waiter corrected him austere.

I will not say that I had not observed something of that instructive aspect of the war of the Balkans both in its first and in its second phase. But those with whom I touched upon that vision were pleased to see in it the evidence of my alarmist cynicism. As to alarm, I pointed out that fear is natural to man, and even salutary. It has done as much as courage for the preservation of races and institutions. But from a charge of cynicism I have always

shrunk instinctively. It is like a charge of being blind in one eye, a moral disablement, a sort of disgraceful calamity that must be carried off with a jaunty bearing — a sort of thing I am not capable of. Rather than be thought a mere jaunty cripple I allowed myself to be blinded by the gross obviousness of the usual arguments. It was pointed out to me that these Eastern nations were not far removed from a savage state. Their economics were yet at the stage of scratching the earth and feeding the pigs. The highly-developed material civilisation of Europe could not allow itself to be disturbed by a war. The industry and the finance could not allow themselves to be disorganised by the ambitions of an idle class, or even the aspirations, whatever they might be, of the masses.

Very plausible all this sounded. War does not pay. There had been a book written on that theme — an attempt to put pacificism on a material basis. Nothing more solid in the way of argument could have been advanced on this trading and manufacturing globe. War was “bad business!” This was final.

But, truth to say, on this July day I reflected but little on the condition of the civilised world. Whatever sinister passions were heaving under its splendid and complex surface, I was too agitated by a simple and innocent desire of my own, to notice the signs or interpret them correctly. The most innocent of passions will take the edge off one’s judgment. The desire which possessed me was simply the desire to travel. And that being so it would have taken something very plain in the way of symptoms to shake my simple trust in the stability of things on the Continent. My sentiment and not my reason was engaged there. My eyes were turned to the past, not to the future; the past that one cannot suspect and mistrust, the shadowy and unquestionable moral possession the darkest struggles of which wear a halo of glory and peace.

In the preceding month of May we had received an invitation to spend some weeks in Poland in a country house in the neighbourhood of Cracow, but within the Russian frontier. The enterprise at first seemed to me considerable. Since leaving the sea, to which I have been faithful for so many years, I have discovered that there is in my composition very little stuff from which travellers are made. I confess that my first impulse about a projected journey is to leave it alone. But the invitation received at first with a sort of dismay ended by rousing the dormant energy of my feelings. Cracow is the town where I spent with my father the last eighteen months

of his life. It was in that old royal and academical city that I ceased to be a child, became a boy, had known the friendships, the admirations, the thoughts and the indignations of that age. It was within those historical walls that I began to understand things, form affections, lay up a store of memories and a fund of sensations with which I was to break violently by throwing myself into an unrelated existence. It was like the experience of another world. The wings of time made a great dusk over all this, and I feared at first that if I ventured bodily in there I would discover that I who have had to do with a good many imaginary lives have been embracing mere shadows in my youth. I feared. But fear in itself may become a fascination. Men have gone, alone and trembling, into graveyards at midnight — just to see what would happen. And this adventure was to be pursued in sunshine. Neither would it be pursued alone. The invitation was extended to us all. This journey would have something of a migratory character, the invasion of a tribe. My present, all that gave solidity and value to it, at any rate, would stand by me in this test of the reality of my past. I was pleased with the idea of showing my companions what Polish country life was like; to visit the town where I was at school before the boys by my side should grow too old, and gaining an individual past of their own, should lose their unsophisticated interest in mine. It is only in the short instants of early youth that we have the faculty of coming out of ourselves to see dimly the visions and share the emotions of another soul. For youth all is reality in this world, and with justice, since it apprehends so vividly its images behind which a longer life makes one doubt whether there is any substance. I trusted to the fresh receptivity of these young beings in whom, unless Heredity is an empty word, there should have been a fibre which would answer to the sight, to the atmosphere, to the memories of that corner of the earth where my own boyhood had received its earliest independent impressions.

The first days of the third week in July, while the telegraph wires hummed with the words of enormous import which were to fill blue books, yellow books, white books, and to arouse the wonder of mankind, passed for us in light-hearted preparations for the journey. What was it but just a rush through Germany, to get across as quickly as possible?

Germany is the part of the earth's solid surface of which I know the least. In all my life I had been across it only twice. I may well say of it *vidi tantum*; and the very little I saw was through the window of a railway

carriage at express speed. Those journeys of mine had been more like pilgrimages when one hurries on towards the goal for the satisfaction of a deeper need than curiosity. In this last instance, too, I was so incurious that I would have liked to have fallen asleep on the shores of England and opened my eyes, if it were possible, only on the other side of the Silesian frontier. Yet, in truth, as many others have done, I had “sensed it” — that promised land of steel, of chemical dyes, of method, of efficiency; that race planted in the middle of Europe, assuming in grotesque vanity the attitude of Europeans amongst effete Asiatics or barbarous niggers; and, with a consciousness of superiority freeing their hands from all moral bonds, anxious to take up, if I may express myself so, the “perfect man’s burden.” Meantime, in a clearing of the Teutonic forest, their sages were rearing a Tree of Cynical Wisdom, a sort of Upas tree, whose shade may be seen now lying over the prostrate body of Belgium. It must be said that they laboured openly enough, watering it with the most authentic sources of all madness, and watching with their be-spectacled eyes the slow ripening of the glorious blood-red fruit. The sincerest words of peace, words of menace, and I verily believe words of abasement, even if there had been a voice vile enough to utter them, would have been wasted on their ecstasy. For when the fruit ripens on a branch it must fall. There is nothing on earth that can prevent it.



## II.

For reasons which at first seemed to me somewhat obscure, that one of my companions whose wishes are law decided that our travels should begin in an unusual way by the crossing of the North Sea. We should proceed from Harwich to Hamburg. Besides being thirty-six times longer than the Dover-Calais passage this rather unusual route had an air of adventure in better keeping with the romantic feeling of this Polish journey which for so many years had been before us in a state of a project full of colour and promise, but always retreating, elusive like an enticing mirage.

And, after all, it had turned out to be no mirage. No wonder they were excited. It's no mean experience to lay your hands on a mirage. The day of departure had come, the very hour had struck. The luggage was coming downstairs. It was most convincing. Poland then, if erased from the map, yet existed in reality; it was not a mere *pays du rêve*, where you can travel only in imagination. For no man, they argued, not even father, an habitual pursuer of dreams, would push the love of the novelist's art of make-believe to the point of burdening himself with real trunks for a voyage *au pays du rêve*.

As we left the door of our house, nestling in, perhaps, the most peaceful nook in Kent, the sky, after weeks of perfectly brazen serenity, veiled its blue depths and started to weep fine tears for the refreshment of the parched fields. A pearly blur settled over them, and a light sifted of all glare, of everything unkindly and searching that dwells in the splendour of unveiled skies. All unconscious of going towards the very scenes of war, I carried off in my eye, this tiny fragment of Great Britain; a few fields, a wooded rise; a clump of trees or two, with a short stretch of road, and here and there a gleam of red wall and tiled roof above the darkening hedges wrapped up in soft mist and peace. And I felt that all this had a very strong hold on me as the embodiment of a beneficent and gentle spirit; that it was dear to me not as an inheritance, but as an acquisition, as a conquest in the sense in which a woman is conquered — by love, which is a sort of surrender.

These were strange, as if disproportionate thoughts to the matter in hand, which was the simplest sort of a Continental holiday. And I am certain that my companions, near as they are to me, felt no other trouble but the suppressed excitement of pleasurable anticipation. The forms and the spirit

of the land before their eyes were their inheritance, not their conquest — which is a thing precarious, and, therefore, the most precious, possessing you if only by the fear of unworthiness rather than possessed by you. Moreover, as we sat together in the same railway carriage, they were looking forward to a voyage in space, whereas I felt more and more plainly, that what I had started on was a journey in time, into the past; a fearful enough prospect for the most consistent, but to him who had not known how to preserve against his impulses the order and continuity of his life — so that at times it presented itself to his conscience as a series of betrayals — still more dreadful.

I down here these thoughts so exclusively personal, to explain why there was no room in my consciousness for the apprehension of a European war. I don't mean to say that I ignored the possibility; I simply did not think of it. And it made no difference; for if I had thought of it, it could only have been in the lame and inconclusive way of the common uninitiated mortals; and I am sure that nothing short of intellectual certitude — obviously unattainable by the man in the street — could have stayed me on that journey which now that I had started on it seemed an irrevocable thing, a necessity of my self-respect.

London, the London before the war, flaunting its enormous glare, as of a monstrous conflagration up into the black sky — with its best Venice-like aspect of rainy evenings, the wet asphalted streets lying with the sheen of sleeping water in winding canals, and the great houses of the city towering all dark, like empty palaces, above the reflected lights of the glistening roadway.

Everything in the subdued incomplete night-life around the Mansion House went on normally with its fascinating air of a dead commercial city of sombre walls through which the inextinguishable activity of its millions streamed East and West in a brilliant flow of lighted vehicles.

In Liverpool Street, as usual too, through the double gates, a continuous line of taxi-cabs glided down the inclined approach and up again, like an endless chain of dredger-buckets, pouring in the passengers, and dipping them out of the great railway station under the inexorable pallid face of the clock telling off the diminishing minutes of peace. It was the hour of the boat-trains to Holland, to Hamburg, and there seemed to be no lack of people, fearless, reckless, or ignorant, who wanted to go to these places. The station was normally crowded, and if there was a great flutter of

evening papers in the multitude of hands there were no signs of extraordinary emotion on that multitude of faces. There was nothing in them to distract me from the thought that it was singularly appropriate that I should start from this station on the retraced way of my existence. For this was the station at which, thirty-seven years before, I arrived on my first visit to London. Not the same building, but the same spot. At nineteen years of age, after a period of probation and training I had imposed upon myself as ordinary seaman on board a North Sea coaster, I had come up from Lowestoft — my first long railway journey in England — to “sign on” for an Antipodean voyage in a deep-water ship. Straight from a railway carriage I had walked into the great city with something of the feeling of a traveller penetrating into a vast and unexplored wilderness. No explorer could have been more lonely. I did not know a single soul of all these millions that all around me peopled the mysterious distances of the streets. I cannot say I was free from a little youthful awe, but at that age one’s feelings are simple. I was elated. I was pursuing a clear aim, I was carrying out a deliberate plan of making out of myself, in the first place, a seaman worthy of the service, good enough to work by the side of the men with whom I was to live; and in the second place, I had to justify my existence to myself, to redeem a tacit moral pledge. Both these aims were to be attained by the same effort. How simple seemed the problem of life then, on that hazy day of early September in the year 1878, when I entered London for the first time.

From that point of view — Youth and a straightforward scheme of conduct — it was certainly a year of grace. All the help I had to get in touch with the world I was invading was a piece of paper not much bigger than the palm of my hand — in which I held it — torn out of a larger plan of London for the greater facility of reference. It had been the object of careful study for some days past. The fact that I could take a conveyance at the station never occurred to my mind, no, not even when I got out into the street, and stood, taking my anxious bearings, in the midst, so to speak, of twenty thousand hansoms. A strange absence of mind or unconscious conviction that one cannot approach an important moment of one’s life by means of a hired carriage? Yes, it would have been a preposterous proceeding. And indeed I was to make an Australian voyage and encircle the globe before ever entering a London hansom.

Another document, a cutting from a newspaper, containing the address of an obscure shipping agent, was in my pocket. And I needed not to take it out. That address was as if graven deep in my brain. I muttered its words to myself as I walked on, navigating the sea of London by the chart concealed in the palm of my hand; for I had vowed to myself not to inquire my way from anyone. Youth is the time of rash pledges. Had I taken a wrong turning I would have been lost; and if faithful to my pledge I might have remained lost for days, for weeks, have left perhaps my bones to be discovered bleaching in some blind alley of the Whitechapel district, as it had happened to lonely travellers lost in the bush. But I walked on to my destination without hesitation or mistake, showing there, for the first time, some of that faculty to absorb and make my own the imaged topography of a chart, which in later years was to help me in regions of intricate navigation to keep the ships entrusted to me off the ground. The place I was bound to was not easy to find. It was one of those courts hidden away from the charted and navigable streets, lost among the thick growth of houses like a dark pool in the depths of a forest, approached by an inconspicuous archway as if by secret path; a Dickensian nook of London, that wonder city, the growth of which bears no sign of intelligent design, but many traces of freakishly sombre phantasy the Great Master knew so well how to bring out by the magic of his understanding love. And the office I entered was Dickensian too. The dust of the Waterloo year lay on the panes and frames of its windows; early Georgian grime clung to its sombre wainscoting.

It was one o'clock in the afternoon, but the day was gloomy. By the light of a single gas-jet depending from the smoked ceiling I saw an elderly man, in a long coat of black broadcloth. He had a grey beard, a big nose, thick lips, and heavy shoulders. His curly white hair and the general character of his head recalled vaguely a burly apostle in the *barocco* style of Italian art. Standing up at a tall, shabby, slanting desk, his silver-rimmed spectacles pushed up high on his forehead, he was eating a mutton-chop, which had been just brought to him from some Dickensian eating-house round the corner.

Without ceasing to eat he turned to me his florid, *barocco* apostle's face with an expression of inquiry.

I produced elaborately a series of vocal sounds which must have borne sufficient resemblance to the phonetics of English speech, for his face broke

into a smile of comprehension almost at once. — "Oh, it's you who wrote a letter to me the other day from Lowestoft about getting a ship."

I had written to him from Lowestoft. I can't remember a single word of that letter now. It was my very first composition in the English language. And he had understood it, evidently, for he spoke to the point at once, explaining that his business, mainly, was to find good ships for young gentlemen who wanted to go to sea as premium apprentices with a view of being trained for officers. But he gathered that this was not my object. I did not desire to be apprenticed. Was that the case?

It was. He was good enough to say then, "Of course I see that you are a gentleman. But your wish is to get a berth before the mast as an Able Seaman if possible. Is that it?"

It was certainly my wish; but he stated doubtfully that he feared he could not help me much in this. There was an Act of Parliament which made it penal to procure ships for sailors. "An Act-of-Parliament. A law," he took pains to impress it again and again on my foreign understanding, while I looked at him in consternation.

I had not been half an hour in London before I had run my head against an Act of Parliament! What a hopeless adventure! However, the *barocco* apostle was a resourceful person in his way, and we managed to get round the hard letter of it without damage to its fine spirit. Yet, strictly speaking, it was not the conduct of a good citizen; and in retrospect there is an unfilial flavour about that early sin of mine. For this Act of Parliament, the Merchant Shipping Act of the Victorian era, had been in a manner of speaking a father and mother to me. For many years it had regulated and disciplined my life, prescribed my food and the amount of my breathing space, had looked after my health and tried as much as possible to secure my personal safety in a risky calling. It isn't such a bad thing to lead a life of hard toil and plain duty within the four corners of an honest Act of Parliament. And I am glad to say that its seventies have never been applied to me.

In the year 1878, the year of "Peace with Honour," I had walked as lone as any human being in the streets of London, out of Liverpool Street Station, to surrender myself to its care. And now, in the year of the war waged for honour and conscience more than for any other cause, I was there again, no longer alone, but a man of infinitely dear and close ties grown

since that time, of work done, of words written, of friendships secured. It was like the closing of a thirty-six-year cycle.

All unaware of the War Angel already awaiting, with the trumpet at his lips, the stroke of the fatal hour, I sat there, thinking that this life of ours is neither long nor short, but that it can appear very wonderful, entertaining, and pathetic, with symbolic images and bizarre associations crowded into one half-hour of retrospective musing.

I felt, too, that this journey, so suddenly entered upon, was bound to take me away from daily life's actualities at every step. I felt it more than ever when presently we steamed out into the North Sea, on a dark night fitful with gusts of wind, and I lingered on deck, alone of all the tale of the ship's passengers. That sea was to me something unforgettable, something much more than a name. It had been for some time the schoolroom of my trade. On it, I may safely say, I had learned, too, my first words of English. A wild and stormy abode, sometimes, was that confined, shallow-water academy of seamanship from which I launched myself on the wide oceans. My teachers had been the sailors of the Norfolk shore; coast men, with steady eyes, mighty limbs, and gentle voice; men of very few words, which at least were never bare of meaning. Honest, strong, steady men, sobered by domestic ties, one and all, as far as I can remember.

That is what years ago the North Sea I could hear growling in the dark all round the ship had been for me. And I fancied that I must have been carrying its voice in my ear ever since, for nothing could be more familiar than those short, angry sounds I was listening to with a smile of affectionate recognition.

I could not guess that before many days my old schoolroom would be desecrated by violence, littered with wrecks, with death walking its waves, hiding under its waters. Perhaps while I am writing these words the children, or maybe the grandchildren, of my pacific teachers are out in trawlers, under the Naval flag, dredging for German submarine mines.

### III.

I have said that the North Sea was my finishing school of seamanship before I launched myself on the wider oceans. Confined as it is in comparison with the vast stage of this water-girt globe, I did not know it in all its parts. My class-room was the region of the English East Coast which, in the year of Peace with Honour, had long forgotten the war episodes belonging to its maritime history. It was a peaceful coast, agricultural, industrial, the home of fishermen. At night the lights of its many towns played on the clouds, or in clear weather lay still, here and there, in brilliant pools above the ink-black outline of the land. On many a night I have hauled at the braces under the shadow of that coast, envying, as sailors will, the people on shore sleeping quietly in their beds within sound of the sea. I imagine that not one head on those envied pillows was made uneasy by the slightest premonition of the realities of naval war the short lifetime of one generation was to bring so close to their homes.

Though far away from that region of kindly memories and traversing a part of the North Sea much less known to me, I was deeply conscious of the familiarity of my surroundings. It was a cloudy, nasty day: and the aspects of Nature don't change, unless in the course of thousands of years — or, perhaps, centuries. The Phoenicians, its first discoverers, the Romans, the first imperial rulers of that sea, had experienced days like this, so different in the wintry quality of the light, even on a July afternoon, from anything they had ever known in their native Mediterranean. For myself, a very late comer into that sea, and its former pupil, I accorded amused recognition to the characteristic aspect so well remembered from my days of training. The same old thing. A grey-green expanse of smudgy waters grinning angrily at one with white foam-ridges, and over all a cheerless, unglowing canopy, apparently made of wet blotting-paper. From time to time a flurry of fine rain blew along like a puff of smoke across the dots of distant fishing boats, very few, very scattered, and tossing restlessly on an ever dissolving, ever re-forming sky-line.

Those flurries, and the steady rolling of the ship, accounted for the emptiness of the decks, favouring my reminiscent mood. It might have been a day of five and thirty years ago, when there were on this and every other sea more sails and less smoke-stacks to be seen. Yet, thanks to the

unchangeable sea I could have given myself up to the illusion of a revised past, had it not been for the periodical transit across my gaze of a German passenger. He was marching round and round the boat deck with characteristic determination. Two sturdy boys gambolled round him in his progress like two disorderly satellites round their parent planet. He was bringing them home, from their school in England, for their holiday. What could have induced such a sound Teuton to entrust his offspring to the unhealthy influences of that effete, corrupt, rotten and criminal country I cannot imagine. It could hardly have been from motives of economy. I did not speak to him. He trod the deck of that decadent British ship with a scornful foot while his breast (and to a large extent his stomach, too) appeared expanded by the consciousness of a superior destiny. Later I could observe the same truculent bearing, touched with the racial grotesqueness, in the men of the *Landwehr* corps, that passed through Cracow to reinforce the Austrian army in Eastern Galicia. Indeed, the haughty passenger might very well have been, most probably was, an officer of the *Landwehr*; and perhaps those two fine active boys are orphans by now. Thus things acquire significance by the lapse of time. A citizen, a father, a warrior, a mote in the dust-cloud of six million fighting particles, an unconsidered trifle for the jaws of war, his humanity was not consciously impressed on my mind at the time. Mainly, for me, he was a sharp tapping of heels round the corner of the deck-house, a white yachting cap and a green overcoat getting periodically between my eyes and the shifting cloud-horizon of the ashy-grey North Sea. He was but a shadowy intrusion and a disregarded one, for, far away there to the West, in the direction of the Dogger Bank, where fishermen go seeking their daily bread and sometimes find their graves, I could behold an experience of my own in the winter of '81, not of war, truly, but of a fairly lively contest with the elements which were very angry indeed.

There had been a troublesome week of it, including one hateful night — or a night of hate (it isn't for nothing that the North Sea is also called the German Ocean) — when all the fury stored in its heart seemed concentrated on one ship which could do no better than float on her side in an unnatural, disagreeable, precarious, and altogether intolerable manner. There were on board, besides myself, seventeen men all good and true, including a round enormous Dutchman who, in those hours between sunset and sunrise, managed to lose his blown-out appearance somehow, became as it were



deflated, and thereafter for a good long time moved in our midst wrinkled and slack all over like a half-collapsed balloon. The whimpering of our deck-boy, a skinny, impressionable little scarecrow out of a training-ship, for whom, because of the tender immaturity of his nerves, this display of German Ocean frightfulness was too much (before the year was out he developed into a sufficiently cheeky young ruffian), his desolate whimpering, I say, heard between the gusts of that black, savage night, was much more present to my mind and indeed to my senses than the green overcoat and the white cap of the German passenger circling the deck indefatigably, attended by his two gyrating children.

“That’s a very nice gentleman.” This information, together with the fact that he was a widower and a regular passenger twice a year by the ship, was communicated to me suddenly by our captain. At intervals through the day he would pop out of the chart-room and offer me short snatches of conversation. He owned a simple soul and a not very entertaining mind, and he was without malice and, I believe, quite unconsciously, a warm Germanophil. And no wonder! As he told me himself, he had been fifteen years on that run, and spent almost as much of his life in Hamburg as in Harwich.

“Wonderful people they are,” he repeated from time to time, without entering into particulars, but with many nods of sagacious obstinacy. What he knew of them, I suppose, were a few commercial travellers and small merchants, most likely. But I had observed long before that German genius has a hypnotising power over half-baked souls and half-lighted minds. There is an immense force of suggestion in highly organised mediocrity. Had it not hypnotised half Europe? My man was very much under the spell of German excellence. On the other hand, his contempt for France was equally general and unbounded. I tried to advance some arguments against this position, but I only succeeded in making him hostile. “I believe you are a Frenchman yourself,” he snarled at last, giving me an intensely suspicious look; and forthwith broke off communications with a man of such unsound sympathies.

Hour by hour the blotting-paper sky and the great flat greenish smudge of the sea had been taking on a darker tone, without any change in their colouring and texture. Evening was coming on over the North Sea. Black uninteresting hummocks of land appeared, dotting the duskiness of water and clouds in the Eastern board: tops of islands fringing the German shore.

While I was looking at their antics amongst the waves — and for all their solidity they were very elusive things in the failing light — another passenger came out on deck. This one wore a dark overcoat and a grey cap. The yellow leather strap of his binocular case crossed his chest. His elderly red cheeks nourished but a very thin crop of short white hairs, and the end of his nose was so perfectly round that it determined the whole character of his physiognomy. Indeed nothing else in it had the slightest chance to assert itself. His disposition, unlike the widower's, appeared to be mild and humane. He offered me the loan of his glasses. He had a wife and some small children concealed in the depths of the ship, and he thought they were very well where they were. His eldest son was about the decks somewhere.

“We are Americans,” he remarked weightily, but in a rather peculiar tone. He spoke English with the accent of our captain's “wonderful people,” and proceeded to give me the history of the family's crossing the Atlantic in a White Star liner. They remained in England just the time necessary for a railway journey from Liverpool to Harwich. His people (those in the depths of the ship) were naturally a little tired.

At that moment a young man of about twenty, his son, rushed up to us from the fore-deck in a state of intense elation. “Hurrah,” he cried under his breath. “The first German light! Hurrah!”

And those two American citizens shook hands on it with the greatest fervour, while I turned away and received full in the eyes the brilliant wink of the Borkum lighthouse squatting low down in the darkness. The shade of the night had settled on the North Sea.

I do not think I have ever seen before a night so full of lights. The great change of sea life since my time was brought home to me. I had been conscious all day of an interminable procession of steamers. They went on and on as if in chase of each other, the Baltic trade, the trade of Scandinavia, of Denmark, of Germany, pitching heavily into a head sea and bound for the gateway of Dover Straits. Singly, and in small companies of two and three, they emerged from the dull, colourless, sunless distances ahead as if the supply of rather roughly finished mechanical toys were inexhaustible in some mysterious cheap store away there, below the grey curve of the earth. Cargo steam vessels have reached by this time a height of utilitarian ugliness which, when one reflects that it is the product of human ingenuity, strikes hopeless awe into one. These dismal creations

look still uglier at sea than in port, and with an added touch of the ridiculous. Their rolling waddle when seen at a certain angle, their abrupt clockwork nodding in a sea-way, so unlike the soaring lift and swing of a craft under sail, have in them something caricatural, a suggestion of a low parody directed at noble predecessors by an improved generation of dull, mechanical toilers, conceited and without grace.

When they switched on (each of these unlovely cargo tanks carried tame lightning within its slab-sided body), when they switched on their lamps they spangled the night with the cheap, electric, shop-glitter, here, there, and everywhere, as of some High Street, broken up and washed out to sea. Later, Heligoland cut into the overhead darkness with its powerful beam, infinitely prolonged out of unfathomable night under the clouds.

I remained on deck until we stopped and a steam pilot-boat, so overlighted amidships that one could not make out her complete shape, glided across our bows and sent a pilot on board. I fear that the oar, as a working implement, will become presently as obsolete as the sail. The pilot boarded us in a motor-dinghy. More and more is mankind reducing its physical activities to pulling levers and twirling little wheels. Progress! Yet the older methods of meeting natural forces demanded intelligence too; an equally fine readiness of wits. And readiness of wits working in combination with the strength of muscles made a more complete man.

It was really a surprisingly small dinghy and it ran to and fro like a water-insect fussing noisily down there with immense self-importance. Within hail of us the hull of the Elbe lightship floated all dark and silent under its enormous round, service lantern; a faithful black shadow watching the broad estuary full of lights.

Such was my first view of the Elbe approached under the wings of peace ready for flight away from the luckless shores of Europe. Our visual impressions remain with us so persistently that I find it extremely difficult to hold fast to the rational belief that now everything is dark over there, that the Elbe lightship has been towed away from its post of duty, the triumphant beam of Heligoland extinguished, and the pilot-boat laid up, or turned to warlike uses for lack of its proper work to do. And obviously it must be so.

Any trickle of oversea trade that passes yet that way must be creeping along cautiously with the unlighted, war-blighted black coast close on one hand, and sudden death on the other. For all the space we steamed through

that Sunday evening must now be one great minefield, sown thickly with the seeds of hate; while submarines steal out to sea, over the very spot perhaps where the insect-dinghy put a pilot on board of us with so much fussy importance. Mines; Submarines. The last word in sea-warfare! Progress — impressively disclosed by this war.

There have been other wars! Wars not inferior in the greatness of the stake and in the fierce animosity of feelings. During that one which was finished a hundred years ago it happened that while the English Fleet was keeping watch on Brest, an American, perhaps Fulton himself, offered to the Maritime Prefect of the port and to the French Admiral, an invention which would sink all the unsuspecting English ships one after another — or, at any rate most of them. The offer was not even taken into consideration; and the Prefect ends his report to the Minister in Paris with a fine phrase of indignation: “It is not the sort of death one would deal to brave men.”

And behold, before history had time to hatch another war of the like proportions in the intensity of aroused passions and the greatness of issues, the dead flavour of archaism descended on the manly sentiment of those self-denying words. Mankind has been demoralised since by its own mastery of mechanical appliances. Its spirit is apparently so weak now, and its flesh has grown so strong, that it will face any deadly horror of destruction and cannot resist the temptation to use any stealthy, murderous contrivance. It has become the intoxicated slave of its own detestable ingenuity. It is true, too, that since the Napoleonic time another sort of war-doctrine has been inculcated in a nation, and held out to the world.

## IV.

On this journey of ours, which for me was essentially not a progress, but a retracing of footsteps on the road of life, I had no beacons to look for in Germany. I had never lingered in that land which, on the whole, is so singularly barren of memorable manifestations of generous sympathies and magnanimous impulses. An ineradicable, invincible, provincialism of envy and vanity clings to the forms of its thought like a frowsy garment. Even while yet very young I turned my eyes away from it instinctively as from a threatening phantom. I believe that children and dogs have, in their innocence, a special power of perception as far as spectral apparitions and coming misfortunes are concerned.

I let myself be carried through Germany as if it were pure space, without sights, without sounds. No whispers of the war reached my voluntary abstraction. And perhaps not so very voluntary after all! Each of us is a fascinating spectacle to himself, and I had to watch my own personality returning from another world, as it were, to revisit the glimpses of old moons. Considering the condition of humanity, I am, perhaps, not so much to blame for giving myself up to that occupation. We prize the sensation of our continuity, and we can only capture it in that way. By watching.

We arrived in Cracow late at night. After a scrambly supper, I said to my eldest boy, "I can't go to bed. I am going out for a look round. Coming?"

He was ready enough. For him, all this was part of the interesting adventure of the whole journey. We stepped out of the portal of the hotel into an empty street, very silent and bright with moonlight. I was, indeed, revisiting the glimpses of the moon. I felt so much like a ghost that the discovery that I could remember such material things as the right turn to take and the general direction of the street gave me a moment of wistful surprise.

The street, straight and narrow, ran into the great Market Square of the town, the centre of its affairs and of the lighter side of its life. We could see at the far end of the street a promising widening of space. At the corner an unassuming (but armed) policeman, wearing ceremoniously at midnight a pair of white gloves which made his big hands extremely noticeable, turned his head to look at the grizzled foreigner holding forth in a strange tongue to a youth on whose arm he leaned.

The Square, immense in its solitude, was full to the brim of moonlight. The garland of lights at the foot of the houses seemed to burn at the bottom of a bluish pool. I noticed with infinite satisfaction that the unnecessary trees the Municipality insisted upon sticking between the stones had been steadily refusing to grow. They were not a bit bigger than the poor victims I could remember. Also, the paving operations seemed to be exactly at the same point at which I left them forty years before. There were the dull, torn-up patches on that bright expanse, the piles of paving material looking ominously black, like heads of rocks on a silvery sea. Who was it that said that Time works wonders? What an exploded superstition! As far as these trees and these paving stones were concerned, it had worked nothing. The suspicion of the unchangeableness of things already vaguely suggested to my senses by our rapid drive from the railway station was agreeably strengthened within me.

“We are now on the line A.B.,” I said to my companion, importantly.

It was the name bestowed in my time on one of the sides of the Square by the senior students of that town of classical learning and historical relics. The common citizens knew nothing of it, and, even if they had, would not have dreamed of taking it seriously. He who used it was of the initiated, belonged to the Schools. We youngsters regarded that name as a fine jest, the invention of a most excellent fancy. Even as I uttered it to my boy I experienced again that sense of my privileged initiation. And then, happening to look up at the wall, I saw in the light of the corner lamp, a white, cast-iron tablet fixed thereon, bearing an inscription in raised black letters, thus: “Line A.B.” Heavens! The name had been adopted officially! Any town urchin, any guttersnipe, any herb-selling woman of the market-place, any wandering Boeotian, was free to talk of the line A.B., to walk on the line A.B., to appoint to meet his friends on the line A.B. It had become a mere name in a directory. I was stunned by the extreme mutability of things. Time could work wonders, and no mistake. A Municipality had stolen an invention of excellent fancy, and a fine jest had turned into a horrid piece of cast-iron.

I proposed that we should walk to the other end of the line, using the profaned name, not only without gusto, but with positive distaste. And this, too, was one of the wonders of Time, for a bare minute had worked that change. There was at the end of the line a certain street I wanted to look at, I explained to my companion.

To our right the unequal massive towers of St. Mary's Church soared aloft into the ethereal radiance of the air, very black on their shaded sides, glowing with a soft phosphorescent sheen on the others. In the distance the Florian Gate, thick and squat under its pointed roof, barred the street with the square shoulders of the old city wall. In the narrow, brilliantly pale vista of bluish flagstones and silvery fronts of houses, its black archway stood out small and very distinct.

There was not a soul in sight, and not even the echo of a footstep for our ears. Into this coldly illuminated and dumb emptiness there issued out of my aroused memory, a small boy of eleven, wending his way, not very fast, to a preparatory school for day-pupils on the second floor of the third house down from the Florian Gate. It was in the winter months of 1868. At eight o'clock of every morning that God made, sleet or shine, I walked up Florian Street. But of that, my first school, I remember very little. I believe that one of my co-sufferers there has become a much appreciated editor of historical documents. But I didn't suffer much from the various imperfections of my first school. I was rather indifferent to school troubles. I had a private gnawing worm of my own. This was the time of my father's last illness. Every evening at seven, turning my back on the Florian Gate, I walked all the way to a big old house in a quiet narrow street a good distance beyond the Great Square. There, in a large drawing-room, panelled and bare, with heavy cornices and a lofty ceiling, in a little oasis of light made by two candles in a desert of dusk, I sat at a little table to worry and ink myself all over till the task of my preparation was done. The table of my toil faced a tall white door, which was kept closed; now and then it would come ajar and a nun in a white coif would squeeze herself through the crack, glide across the room, and disappear. There were two of these noiseless nursing nuns. Their voices were seldom heard. For, indeed, what could they have had to say? When they did speak to me it was with their lips hardly moving, in a claustral, clear whisper. Our domestic matters were ordered by the elderly housekeeper of our neighbour on the second floor, a Canon of the Cathedral, lent for the emergency. She, too, spoke but seldom. She wore a black dress with a cross hanging by a chain on her ample bosom. And though when she spoke she moved her lips more than the nuns, she never let her voice rise above a peacefully murmuring note. The air around me was all piety, resignation, and silence.

I don't know what would have become of me if I had not been a reading boy. My prep. finished I would have had nothing to do but sit and watch the awful stillness of the sick room flow out through the closed door and coldly enfold my scared heart. I suppose that in a futile childish way I would have gone crazy. But I was a reading boy. There were many books about, lying on consoles, on tables, and even on the floor, for we had not had time to settle down. I read! What did I not read! Sometimes the elder nun, gliding up and casting a mistrustful look on the open pages, would lay her hand lightly on my head and suggest in a doubtful whisper, "Perhaps it is not very good for you to read these books." I would raise my eyes to her face mutely, and with a vague gesture of giving it up she would glide away.

Later in the evening, but not always, I would be permitted to tip-toe into the sick room to say good-night to the figure prone on the bed, which often could not acknowledge my presence but by a slow movement of the eyes, put my lips dutifully to the nerveless hand lying on the coverlet, and tip-toe out again. Then I would go to bed, in a room at the end of the corridor, and often, not always, cry myself into a good sound sleep.

I looked forward to what was coming with an incredulous terror. I turned my eyes from it sometimes with success, and yet all the time I had an awful sensation of the inevitable. I had also moments of revolt which stripped off me some of my simple trust in the government of the universe. But when the inevitable entered the sick room and the white door was thrown wide open, I don't think I found a single tear to shed. I have a suspicion that the Canon's housekeeper looked on me as the most callous little wretch on earth.

The day of the funeral came in due course and all the generous "Youth of the Schools," the grave Senate of the University, the delegations of the Trade-guilds, might have obtained (if they cared) *de visu* evidence of the callousness of the little wretch. There was nothing in my aching head but a few words, some such stupid sentences as, "It's done," or, "It's accomplished" (in Polish it is much shorter), or something of the sort, repeating itself endlessly. The long procession moved out of the narrow street, down a long street, past the Gothic front of St. Mary's under its unequal towers, towards the Florian Gate.

In the moonlight-flooded silence of the old town of glorious tombs and tragic memories, I could see again the small boy of that day following a hearse; a space kept clear in which I walked alone, conscious of an



enormous following, the clumsy swaying of the tall black machine, the chanting of the surpliced clergy at the head, the flames of tapers passing under the low archway of the gate, the rows of bared heads on the pavements with fixed, serious eyes. Half the population had turned out on that fine May afternoon. They had not come to honour a great achievement, or even some splendid failure. The dead and they were victims alike of an unrelenting destiny which cut them off from every path of merit and glory. They had come only to render homage to the ardent fidelity of the man whose life had been a fearless confession in word and deed of a creed which the simplest heart in that crowd could feel and understand.

It seemed to me that if I remained longer there in that narrow street I should become the helpless prey of the Shadows I had called up. They were crowding upon me, enigmatic and insistent in their clinging air of the grave that tasted of dust and of the bitter vanity of old hopes.

“Let’s go back to the hotel, my boy,” I said. “It’s getting late.”

It will be easily understood that I neither thought nor dreamt that night of a possible war. For the next two days I went about amongst my fellow men, who welcomed me with the utmost consideration and friendliness, but unanimously derided my fears of a war. They would not believe in it. It was impossible. On the evening of the second day I was in the hotel’s smoking room, an irrationally private apartment, a sanctuary for a few choice minds of the town, always pervaded by a dim religious light, and more hushed than any club reading-room I have ever been in. Gathered into a small knot, we were discussing the situation in subdued tones suitable to the genius of the place.

A gentleman with a fine head of white hair suddenly pointed an impatient finger in my direction and apostrophised me.

“What I want to know is whether, should there be war, England would come in.”

The time to draw a breath, and I spoke out for the Cabinet without faltering.

“Most assuredly. I should think all Europe knows that by this time.”

He took hold of the lapel of my coat, and, giving it a slight jerk for greater emphasis, said forcibly:

“Then, if England will, as you say, and all the world knows it, there can be no war. Germany won’t be so mad as that.”

On the morrow by noon we read of the German ultimatum. The day after came the declaration of war, and the Austrian mobilisation order. We were fairly caught. All that remained for me to do was to get my party out of the way of eventual shells. The best move which occurred to me was to snatch them up instantly into the mountains to a Polish health resort of great repute — which I did (at the rate of one hundred miles in eleven hours) by the last civilian train permitted to leave Cracow for the next three weeks.

And there we remained amongst the Poles from all parts of Poland, not officially interned, but simply unable to obtain the permission to travel by train, or road. It was a wonderful, a poignant two months. This is not the time, and, perhaps, not the place, to enlarge upon the tragic character of the situation; a whole people seeing the culmination of its misfortunes in a final catastrophe, unable to trust anyone, to appeal to anyone, to look for help from any quarter; deprived of all hope and even of its last illusions, and unable, in the trouble of minds and the unrest of consciences, to take refuge in stoical acceptance. I have seen all this. And I am glad I have not so many years left me to remember that appalling feeling of inexorable fate, tangible, palpable, come after so many cruel years, a figure of dread, murmuring with iron lips the final words: Ruin — and Extinction.

But enough of this. For our little band there was the awful anguish of incertitude as to the real nature of events in the West. It is difficult to give an idea how ugly and dangerous things looked to us over there. Belgium knocked down and trampled out of existence, France giving in under repeated blows, a military collapse like that of 1870, and England involved in that disastrous alliance, her army sacrificed, her people in a panic! Polish papers, of course, had no other but German sources of information. Naturally, we did not believe all we read, but it was sometimes excessively difficult to react with sufficient firmness.

We used to shut our door, and there, away from everybody, we sat weighing the news, hunting up discrepancies, scenting lies, finding reasons for hopefulness, and generally cheering each other up. But it was a beastly time. People used to come to me with very serious news and ask, “What do you think of it?” And my invariable answer was: “Whatever has happened, or is going to happen, whoever wants to make peace, you may be certain that England will not make it, not for ten years, if necessary.”“

But enough of this, too. Through the unremitting efforts of Polish friends we obtained at last the permission to travel to Vienna. Once there, the wing

of the American Eagle was extended over our uneasy heads. We cannot be sufficiently grateful to the American Ambassador (who, all along, interested himself in our fate) for his exertions on our behalf, his invaluable assistance and the real friendliness of his reception in Vienna. Owing to Mr. Penfield's action we obtained the permission to leave Austria. And it was a near thing, for his Excellency has informed my American publishers since that a week later orders were issued to have us detained till the end of the war. However, we effected our hair's-breadth escape into Italy; and, reaching Genoa, took passage in a Dutch mail steamer, homeward-bound from Java with London as a port of call.

On that sea-route I might have picked up a memory at every mile if the past had not been eclipsed by the tremendous actuality. We saw the signs of it in the emptiness of the Mediterranean, the aspect of Gibraltar, the misty glimpse in the Bay of Biscay of an outward-bound convoy of transports, in the presence of British submarines in the Channel. Innumerable drifters flying the Naval flag dotted the narrow waters, and two Naval officers coming on board off the South Foreland, piloted the ship through the Downs.

The Downs! There they were, thick with the memories of my sea-life. But what were to me now the futilities of an individual past? As our ship's head swung into the estuary of the Thames, a deep, yet faint, concussion passed through the air, a shock rather than a sound, which missing my ear found its way straight into my heart. Turning instinctively to look at my boys, I happened to meet my wife's eyes. She also had felt profoundly, coming from far away across the grey distances of the sea, the faint boom of the big guns at work on the coast of Flanders — shaping the future.

## FIRST NEWS — 1918

Four years ago, on the first day of August, in the town of Cracow, Austrian Poland, nobody would believe that the war was coming. My apprehensions were met by the words: "We have had these scares before." This incredulity was so universal amongst people of intelligence and information, that even I, who had accustomed myself to look at the inevitable for years past, felt my conviction shaken. At that time, it must be noted, the Austrian army was already partly mobilised, and as we came through Austrian Silesia we had noticed all the bridges being guarded by soldiers.

"Austria will back down," was the opinion of all the well-informed men with whom I talked on the first of August. The session of the University was ended and the students were either all gone or going home to different parts of Poland, but the professors had not all departed yet on their respective holidays, and amongst them the tone of scepticism prevailed generally. Upon the whole there was very little inclination to talk about the possibility of a war. Nationally, the Poles felt that from their point of view there was nothing to hope from it. "Whatever happens," said a very distinguished man to me, "we may be certain that it's our skins which will pay for it as usual." A well-known literary critic and writer on economical subjects said to me: "War seems a material impossibility, precisely because it would mean the complete ruin of all material interests."

He was wrong, as we know; but those who said that Austria as usual would back down were, as a matter of fact perfectly right. Austria did back down. What these men did not foresee was the interference of Germany. And one cannot blame them very well; for who could guess that, when the balance stood even, the German sword would be thrown into the scale with nothing in the open political situation to justify that act, or rather that crime — if crime can ever be justified? For, as the same intelligent man said to me: "As it is, those people" (meaning Germans) "have very nearly the whole world in their economic grip. Their prestige is even greater than their actual strength. It can get for them practically everything they want. Then why risk it?" And there was no apparent answer to the question put in that way. I must also say that the Poles had no illusions about the strength of Russia. Those illusions were the monopoly of the Western world.

Next day the librarian of the University invited me to come and have a look at the library which I had not seen since I was fourteen years old. It was from him that I learned that the greater part of my father's MSS. was preserved there. He confessed that he had not looked them through thoroughly yet, but he told me that there was a lot of very important letters bearing on the epoch from '60 to '63, to and from many prominent Poles of that time: and he added: "There is a bundle of correspondence that will appeal to you personally. Those are letters written by your father to an intimate friend in whose papers they were found. They contain many references to yourself, though you couldn't have been more than four years old at the time. Your father seems to have been extremely interested in his son." That afternoon I went to the University, taking with me *my* eldest son. The attention of that young Englishman was mainly attracted by some relics of Copernicus in a glass case. I saw the bundle of letters and accepted the kind proposal of the librarian that he should have them copied for me during the holidays. In the range of the deserted vaulted rooms lined with books, full of august memories, and in the passionless silence of all this enshrined wisdom, we walked here and there talking of the past, the great historical past in which lived the inextinguishable spark of national life; and all around us the centuries-old buildings lay still and empty, composing themselves to rest after a year of work on the minds of another generation.

No echo of the German ultimatum to Russia penetrated that academical peace. But the news had come. When we stepped into the street out of the deserted main quadrangle, we three, I imagine, were the only people in the town who did not know of it. My boy and I parted from the librarian (who hurried home to pack up for his holiday) and walked on to the hotel, where we found my wife actually in the car waiting for us to take a run of some ten miles to the country house of an old school-friend of mine. He had been my greatest chum. In my wanderings about the world I had heard that his later career both at school and at the University had been of extraordinary brilliance — in classics, I believe. But in this, the iron-grey moustache period of his life, he informed me with badly concealed pride that he had gained world fame as the Inventor — no, Inventor is not the word — Producer, I believe would be the right term — of a wonderful kind of beetroot seed. The beet grown from this seed contained more sugar to the square inch — or was it to the square root? — than any other kind of beet.

He exported this seed, not only with profit (and even to the United States), but with a certain amount of glory which seemed to have gone slightly to his head. There is a fundamental strain of agriculturalist in a Pole which no amount of brilliance, even classical, can destroy. While we were having tea outside, looking down the lovely slope of the gardens at the view of the city in the distance, the possibilities of the war faded from our minds. Suddenly my friend's wife came to us with a telegram in her hand and said calmly: "General mobilisation, do you know?" We looked at her like men aroused from a dream. "Yes," she insisted, "they are already taking the horses out of the ploughs and carts." I said: "We had better go back to town as quick as we can," and my friend assented with a troubled look: "Yes, you had better." As we passed through villages on our way back we saw mobs of horses assembled on the commons with soldiers guarding them, and groups of villagers looking on silently at the officers with their note-books checking deliveries and writing out receipts. Some old peasant women were already weeping aloud.

When our car drew up at the door of the hotel, the manager himself came to help my wife out. In the first moment I did not quite recognise him. His luxuriant black locks were gone, his head was closely cropped, and as I glanced at it he smiled and said: "I shall sleep at the barracks to-night."

I cannot reproduce the atmosphere of that night, the first night after mobilisation. The shops and the gateways of the houses were of course closed, but all through the dark hours the town hummed with voices; the echoes of distant shouts entered the open windows of our bedroom. Groups of men talking noisily walked in the middle of the roadway escorted by distressed women: men of all callings and of all classes going to report themselves at the fortress. Now and then a military car tooting furiously would whisk through the streets empty of wheeled traffic, like an intensely black shadow under the great flood of electric lights on the grey pavement.

But what produced the greatest impression on my mind was a gathering at night in the coffee-room of my hotel of a few men of mark whom I was asked to join. It was about one o'clock in the morning. The shutters were up. For some reason or other the electric light was not switched on, and the big room was lit up only by a few tall candles, just enough for us to see each other's faces by. I saw in those faces the awful desolation of men whose country, torn in three, found itself engaged in the contest with no will of its own, and not even the power to assert itself at the cost of life. All the

past was gone, and there was no future, whatever happened; no road which did not seem to lead to moral annihilation. I remember one of those men addressing me after a period of mournful silence compounded of mental exhaustion and unexpressed forebodings.

“What do you think England will do? If there is a ray of hope anywhere it is only there.”

I said: “I believe I know what England will do” (this was before the news of the violation of Belgian neutrality arrived), “though I won’t tell you, for I am not absolutely certain. But I can tell you what I am absolutely certain of. It is this: If England comes into the war, then, no matter who may want to make peace at the end of six months at the cost of right and justice, England will keep on fighting for years if necessary. You may reckon on that.”

“What, even alone?” asked somebody across the room.

I said: “Yes, even alone. But if things go so far as that England will not be alone.”

I think that at that moment I must have been inspired.

**WELL DONE — 1918**



## I.

It can be safely said that for the last four years the seamen of Great Britain have done well. I mean that every kind and sort of human being classified as seaman, steward, foremast hand, fireman, lamp-trimmer, mate, master, engineer, and also all through the innumerable ratings of the Navy up to that of Admiral, has done well. I don't say marvellously well or miraculously well or wonderfully well or even very well, because these are simply over-statements of undisciplined minds. I don't deny that a man may be a marvellous being, but this is not likely to be discovered in his lifetime, and not always even after he is dead. Man's marvellousness is a hidden thing, because the secrets of his heart are not to be read by his fellows. As to a man's work, if it is done well it is the very utmost that can be said. You can do well, and you can do no more for people to see. In the Navy, where human values are thoroughly understood, the highest signal of commendation complimenting a ship (that is, a ship's company) on some achievements consists exactly of those two simple words "Well done," followed by the name of the ship. Not marvellously done, astonishingly done, wonderfully done — no, only just:

"Well done, so-and-so."

And to the men it is a matter of infinite pride that somebody should judge it proper to mention aloud, as it were, that they have done well. It is a memorable occurrence, for in the sea services you are expected professionally and as a matter of course to do well, because nothing less will do. And in sober speech no man can be expected to do more than well. The superlatives are mere signs of uninformed wonder. Thus the official signal which can express nothing but a delicate share of appreciation becomes a great honour.

Speaking now as a purely civil seaman (or, perhaps, I ought to say civilian, because politeness is not what I have in my mind) I may say that I have never expected the Merchant Service to do otherwise than well during the war. There were people who obviously did not feel the same confidence, nay, who even confidently expected to see the collapse of merchant seamen's courage. I must admit that such pronouncements did arrest my attention. In my time I have never been able to detect any faint hearts in the ships' companies with whom I have served in various

capacities. But I reflected that I had left the sea in '94, twenty years before the outbreak of the war that was to apply its severe test to the quality of modern seamen. Perhaps they had deteriorated, I said unwillingly to myself. I remembered also the alarmist articles I had read about the great number of foreigners in the British Merchant Service, and I didn't know how far these lamentations were justified.

In my time the proportion of non-Britishers in the crews of the ships flying the red ensign was rather under one-third, which, as a matter of fact, was less than the proportion allowed under the very strict French navigation laws for the crews of the ships of that nation. For the strictest laws aiming at the preservation of national seamen had to recognise the difficulties of manning merchant ships all over the world. The one-third of the French law seemed to be the irreducible minimum. But the British proportion was even less. Thus it may be said that up to the date I have mentioned the crews of British merchant ships engaged in deep water voyages to Australia, to the East Indies and round the Horn were essentially British. The small proportion of foreigners which I remember were mostly Scandinavians, and my general impression remains that those men were good stuff. They appeared always able and ready to do their duty by the flag under which they served. The majority were Norwegians, whose courage and straightness of character are matters beyond doubt. I remember also a couple of Finns, both carpenters, of course, and very good craftsmen; a Swede, the most scientific sailmaker I ever met; another Swede, a steward, who really might have been called a British seaman since he had sailed out of London for over thirty years, a rather superior person; one Italian, an everlastingly smiling but a pugnacious character; one Frenchman, a most excellent sailor, tireless and indomitable under very difficult circumstances; one Hollander, whose placid manner of looking at the ship going to pieces under our feet I shall never forget, and one young, colourless, muscularly very strong German, of no particular character. Of non-European crews, lascars and Kalashes, I have had very little experience, and that was only in one steamship and for something less than a year. It was on the same occasion that I had my only sight of Chinese firemen. Sight is the exact word. One didn't speak to them. One saw them going along the decks, to and fro, characteristic figures with rolled-up pigtaails, very dirty when coming off duty and very clean-faced when going on duty. They never looked at anybody, and one never had occasion to

address them directly. Their appearances in the light of day were very regular, and yet somewhat ghostlike in their detachment and silence.

But of the white crews of British ships and almost exclusively British in blood and descent, the immediate predecessors of the men whose worth the nation has discovered for itself to-day, I have had a thorough experience. At first amongst them, then with them, I have shared all the conditions of their very special life. For it was very special. In my early days, starting out on a voyage was like being launched into Eternity. I say advisedly Eternity instead of Space, because of the boundless silence which swallowed up one for eighty days — for one hundred days — for even yet more days of an existence without echoes and whispers. Like Eternity itself! For one can't conceive a vocal Eternity. An enormous silence, in which there was nothing to connect one with the Universe but the incessant wheeling about of the sun and other celestial bodies, the alternation of light and shadow, eternally chasing each other over the sky. The time of the earth, though most carefully recorded by the half-hourly bells, did not count in reality.

It was a special life, and the men were a very special kind of men. By this I don't mean to say they were more complex than the generality of mankind. Neither were they very much simpler. I have already admitted that man is a marvellous creature, and no doubt those particular men were marvellous enough in their way. But in their collective capacity they can be best defined as men who lived under the command to do well, or perish utterly. I have written of them with all the truth that was in me, and with an impartiality of which I was capable. Let me not be misunderstood in this statement. Affection can be very exacting, and can easily miss fairness on the critical side. I have looked upon them with a jealous eye, expecting perhaps even more than it was strictly fair to expect. And no wonder — since I had elected to be one of them very deliberately, very completely, without any looking back or looking elsewhere. The circumstances were such as to give me the feeling of complete identification, a very vivid comprehension that if I wasn't one of them I was nothing at all. But what was most difficult to detect was the nature of the deep impulses which these men obeyed. What spirit was it that inspired the unfailing manifestations of their simple fidelity? No outward cohesive force of compulsion or discipline was holding them together or had ever shaped their unexpressed standards. It was very mysterious. At last I came to the conclusion that it

must be something in the nature of the life itself; the sea-life chosen blindly, embraced for the most part accidentally by those men who appeared but a loose agglomeration of individuals toiling for their living away from the eyes of mankind. Who can tell how a tradition comes into the world? We are children of the earth. It may be that the noblest tradition is but the offspring of material conditions, of the hard necessities besetting men's precarious lives. But once it has been born it becomes a spirit. Nothing can extinguish its force then. Clouds of greedy selfishness, the subtle dialectics of revolt or fear, may obscure it for a time, but in very truth it remains an immortal ruler invested with the power of honour and shame.

## II.

The mysteriously born tradition of sea-craft commands unity in a body of workers engaged in an occupation in which men have to depend upon each other. It raises them, so to speak, above the frailties of their dead selves. I don't wish to be suspected of lack of judgment and of blind enthusiasm. I don't claim special morality or even special manliness for the men who in my time really lived at sea, and at the present time live at any rate mostly at sea. But in their qualities as well as in their defects, in their weaknesses as well as in their "virtue," there was indubitably something apart. They were never exactly of the earth earthly. They couldn't be that. Chance or desire (mostly desire) had set them apart, often in their very childhood; and what is to be remarked is that from the very nature of things this early appeal, this early desire, had to be of an imaginative kind. Thus their simple minds had a sort of sweetness. They were in a way preserved. I am not alluding here to the preserving qualities of the salt in the sea. The salt of the sea is a very good thing in its way; it preserves for instance one from catching a beastly cold while one remains wet for weeks together in the "roaring forties." But in sober unpoetical truth the sea-salt never gets much further than the seaman's skin, which in certain latitudes it takes the opportunity to encrust very thoroughly. That and nothing more. And then, what is this sea, the subject of so many apostrophes in verse and prose addressed to its greatness and its mystery by men who had never penetrated either the one or the other? The sea is uncertain, arbitrary, featureless, and violent. Except when helped by the varied majesty of the sky, there is something inane in its serenity and something stupid in its wrath, which is endless, boundless, persistent, and futile — a grey, hoary thing raging like an old ogre uncertain of its prey. Its very immensity is wearisome. At any time within the navigating centuries mankind might have addressed it with the words: "What are you, after all? Oh, yes, we know. The greatest scene of potential terror, a devouring enigma of space. Yes. But our lives have been nothing if not a continuous defiance of what you can do and what you may hold; a spiritual and material defiance carried on in our plucky cockleshells on and on beyond the successive provocations of your unreadable horizons."

Ah, but the charm of the sea! Oh, yes, charm enough. Or rather a sort of unholy fascination as of an elusive nymph whose embrace is death, and a Medusa's head whose stare is terror. That sort of charm is calculated to keep men morally in order. But as to sea-salt, with its particular bitterness like nothing else on earth, that, I am safe to say, penetrates no further than the seamen's lips. With them the inner soundness is caused by another kind of preservative of which (nobody will be surprised to hear) the main ingredient is a certain kind of love that has nothing to do with the futile smiles and the futile passions of the sea.

Being love this feeling is naturally naive and imaginative. It has also in it that strain of fantasy that is so often, nay almost invariably, to be found in the temperament of a true seaman. But I repeat that I claim no particular morality for seamen. I will admit without difficulty that I have found amongst them the usual defects of mankind, characters not quite straight, uncertain tempers, vacillating wills, capriciousness, small meannesses; all this coming out mostly on the contact with the shore; and all rather naive, peculiar, a little fantastic. I have even had a downright thief in my experience. One.

This is indeed a minute proportion, but it might have been my luck; and since I am writing in eulogy of seamen I feel irresistibly tempted to talk about this unique specimen; not indeed to offer him as an example of morality, but to bring out certain characteristics and set out a certain point of view. He was a large, strong man with a guileless countenance, not very communicative with his shipmates, but when drawn into any sort of conversation displaying a very painstaking earnestness. He was fair and candid-eyed, of a very satisfactory smartness, and, from the officer-of-the-watch point of view, — altogether dependable. Then, suddenly, he went and stole. And he didn't go away from his honourable kind to do that thing to somebody on shore; he stole right there on the spot, in proximity to his shipmates, on board his own ship, with complete disregard for old Brown, our night watchman (whose fame for trustworthiness was utterly blasted for the rest of the voyage) and in such a way as to bring the profoundest possible trouble to all the blameless souls animating that ship. He stole eleven golden sovereigns, and a gold pocket chronometer and chain. I am really in doubt whether the crime should not be entered under the category of sacrilege rather than theft. Those things belonged to the captain! There was certainly something in the nature of the violation of a sanctuary, and of

a particularly impudent kind, too, because he got his plunder out of the captain's state-room while the captain was asleep there. But look, now, at the fantasy of the man! After going through the pockets of the clothes, he did not hasten to retreat. No. He went deliberately into the saloon and removed from the sideboard two big heavy, silver-plated lamps, which he carried to the fore-end of the ship and stood symmetrically on the knight-heads. This, I must explain, means that he took them away as far as possible from the place where they belonged. These were the deeds of darkness. In the morning the bo'sun came along dragging after him a hose to wash the foc'sle head, and, beholding the shiny cabin lamps, resplendent in the morning light, one on each side of the bowsprit, he was paralysed with awe. He dropped the nozzle from his nerveless hands — and such hands, too! I happened along, and he said to me in a distracted whisper: "Look at that, sir, look." "Take them back aft at once yourself," I said, very amazed, too. As we approached the quarterdeck we perceived the steward, a prey to a sort of sacred horror, holding up before us the captain's trousers.

Bronzed men with brooms and buckets in their hands stood about with open mouths. "I have found them lying in the passage outside the captain's door," the steward declared faintly. The additional statement that the captain's watch was gone from its hook by the bedside raised the painful sensation to the highest pitch. We knew then we had a thief amongst us. Our thief! Behold the solidarity of a ship's company. He couldn't be to us like any other thief. We all had to live under the shadow of his crime for days; but the police kept on investigating, and one morning a young woman appeared on board swinging a parasol, attended by two policemen, and identified the culprit. She was a barmaid of some bar near the Circular Quay, and knew really nothing of our man except that he looked like a respectable sailor. She had seen him only twice in her life. On the second occasion he begged her nicely as a great favour to take care for him of a small solidly tied-up paper parcel for a day or two. But he never came near her again. At the end of three weeks she opened it, and, of course, seeing the contents, was much alarmed, and went to the nearest police-station for advice. The police took her at once on board our ship, where all hands were mustered on the quarterdeck. She stared wildly at all our faces, pointed suddenly a finger with a shriek, "That's the man," and incontinently went off into a fit of hysterics in front of thirty-six seamen. I must say that never in my life did I see a ship's company look so frightened. Yes, in this tale of

guilt, there was a curious absence of mere criminality, and a touch of that fantasy which is often a part of a seaman's character. It wasn't greed that moved him, I think. It was something much less simple: boredom, perhaps, or a bet, or the pleasure of defiance.

And now for the point of view. It was given to me by a short, black-bearded A.B. of the crew, who on sea passages washed my flannel shirts, mended my clothes and, generally, looked after my room. He was an excellent needleman and washerman, and a very good sailor. Standing in this peculiar relation to me, he considered himself privileged to open his mind on the matter one evening when he brought back to my cabin three clean and neatly folded shirts. He was profoundly pained. He said: "What a ship's company! Never seen such a crowd! Liars, cheats, thieves. . . "

It was a needlessly jaundiced view. There were in that ship's company three or four fellows who dealt in tall yarns, and I knew that on the passage out there had been a dispute over a game in the foc'sle once or twice of a rather acute kind, so that all card-playing had to be abandoned. In regard to thieves, as we know, there was only one, and he, I am convinced, came out of his reserve to perform an exploit rather than to commit a crime. But my black-bearded friend's indignation had its special morality, for he added, with a burst of passion: "And on board our ship, too — a ship like this. . . "

Therein lies the secret of the seamen's special character as a body. The ship, this ship, our ship, the ship we serve, is the moral symbol of our life. A ship has to be respected, actually and ideally; her merit, her innocence, are sacred things. Of all the creations of man she is the closest partner of his toil and courage. From every point of view it is imperative that you should do well by her. And, as always in the case of true love, all you can do for her adds only to the tale of her merits in your heart. Mute and compelling, she claims not only your fidelity, but your respect. And the supreme "Well done!" which you may earn is made over to her.



### III.

It is my deep conviction, or, perhaps, I ought to say my deep feeling born from personal experience, that it is not the sea but the ships of the sea that guide and command that spirit of adventure which some say is the second nature of British men. I don't want to provoke a controversy (for intellectually I am rather a Quietist) but I venture to affirm that the main characteristic of the British men spread all over the world, is not the spirit of adventure so much as the spirit of service. I think that this could be demonstrated from the history of great voyages and the general activity of the race. That the British man has always liked his service to be adventurous rather than otherwise cannot be denied, for each British man began by being young in his time when all risk has a glamour. Afterwards, with the course of years, risk became a part of his daily work; he would have missed it from his side as one misses a loved companion.

The mere love of adventure is no saving grace. It is no grace at all. It lays a man under no obligation of faithfulness to an idea and even to his own self. Roughly speaking, an adventurer may be expected to have courage, or at any rate may be said to need it. But courage in itself is not an ideal. A successful highwayman showed courage of a sort, and pirate crews have been known to fight with courage or perhaps only with reckless desperation in the manner of cornered rats. There is nothing in the world to prevent a mere lover or pursuer of adventure from running at any moment. There is his own self, his mere taste for excitement, the prospect of some sort of gain, but there is no sort of loyalty to bind him in honour to consistent conduct. I have noticed that the majority of mere lovers of adventure are mightily careful of their skins; and the proof of it is that so many of them manage to keep it whole to an advanced age. You find them in mysterious nooks of islands and continents, mostly red-nosed and watery-eyed, and not even amusingly boastful. There is nothing more futile under the sun than a mere adventurer. He might have loved at one time — which would have been a saving grace. I mean loved adventure for itself. But if so, he was bound to lose this grace very soon. Adventure by itself is but a phantom, a dubious shape without a heart. Yes, there is nothing more futile than an adventurer; but nobody can say that the adventurous activities

of the British race are stamped with the futility of a chase after mere emotions.

The successive generations that went out to sea from these Isles went out to toil desperately in adventurous conditions. A man is a worker. If he is not that he is nothing. Just nothing — like a mere adventurer. Those men understood the nature of their work, but more or less dimly, in various degrees of imperfection. The best and greatest of their leaders even had never seen it clearly, because of its magnitude and the remoteness of its end. This is the common fate of mankind, whose most positive achievements are born from dreams and visions followed loyally to an unknown destination. And it doesn't matter. For the great mass of mankind the only saving grace that is needed is steady fidelity to what is nearest to hand and heart in the short moment of each human effort. In other and in greater words, what is needed is a sense of immediate duty, and a feeling of impalpable constraint. Indeed, seamen and duty are all the time inseparable companions. It has been suggested to me that this sense of duty is not a patriotic sense or a religious sense, or even a social sense in a seaman. I don't know. It seems to me that a seaman's duty may be an unconscious compound of these three, something perhaps smaller than either, but something much more definite for the simple mind and more adapted to the humbleness of the seaman's task. It has been suggested also to me that the impalpable constraint is put upon the nature of a seaman by the Spirit of the Sea, which he serves with a dumb and dogged devotion.

Those are fine words conveying a fine idea. But this I do know, that it is very difficult to display a dogged devotion to a mere spirit, however great. In everyday life ordinary men require something much more material, effective, definite and symbolic on which to concentrate their love and their devotion. And then, what is it, this Spirit of the Sea? It is too great and too elusive to be embraced and taken to a human breast. All that a guileless or guileful seaman knows of it is its hostility, its exaction of toil as endless as its ever-renewed horizons. No. What awakens the seaman's sense of duty, what lays that impalpable constraint upon the strength of his manliness, what commands his not always dumb if always dogged devotion, is not the spirit of the sea but something that in his eyes has a body, a character, a fascination, and almost a soul — it is his ship.

There is not a day that has passed for many centuries now without the sun seeing scattered over all the seas groups of British men whose material

and moral existence is conditioned by their loyalty to each other and their faithful devotion to a ship.

Each age has sent its contingent, not of sons (for the great mass of seamen have always been a childless lot) but of loyal and obscure successors taking up the modest but spiritual inheritance of a hard life and simple duties; of duties so simple that nothing ever could shake the traditional attitude born from the physical conditions of the service. It was always the ship, bound on any possible errand in the service of the nation, that has been the stage for the exercise of seamen's primitive virtues. The dimness of great distances and the obscurity of lives protected them from the nation's admiring gaze. Those scattered distant ships' companies seemed to the eyes of the earth only one degree removed (on the right side, I suppose) from the other strange monsters of the deep. If spoken of at all they were spoken of in tones of half-contemptuous indulgence. A good many years ago it was my lot to write about one of those ships' companies on a certain sea, under certain circumstances, in a book of no particular length.

That small group of men whom I tried to limn with loving care, but sparing none of their weaknesses, was characterised by a friendly reviewer as a lot of engaging ruffians. This gave me some food for thought. Was it, then, in that guise that they appeared through the mists of the sea, distant, perplexed, and simple-minded? And what on earth is an "engaging ruffian"? He must be a creature of literary imagination, I thought, for the two words don't match in my personal experience. It has happened to me to meet a few ruffians here and there, but I never found one of them "engaging." I consoled myself, however, by the reflection that the friendly reviewer must have been talking like a parrot, which so often seems to understand what it says.

Yes, in the mists of the sea, and in their remoteness from the rest of the race, the shapes of those men appeared distorted, uncouth and faint — so faint as to be almost invisible. It needed the lurid light of the engines of war to bring them out into full view, very simple, without worldly graces, organised now into a body of workers by the genius of one of themselves, who gave them a place and a voice in the social scheme; but in the main still apart in their homeless, childless generations, scattered in loyal groups over all the seas, giving faithful care to their ships and serving the nation,

which, since they are seamen, can give them no reward but the supreme  
“Well Done.”

## TRADITION — 1918

“Work is the law. Like iron that lying idle degenerates into a mass of useless rust, like water that in an unruffled pool sickens into a stagnant and corrupt state, so without action the spirit of men turns to a dead thing, loses its force, ceases prompting us to leave some trace of ourselves on this earth.” The sense of the above lines does not belong to me. It may be found in the note-books of one of the greatest artists that ever lived, Leonardo da Vinci. It has a simplicity and a truth which no amount of subtle comment can destroy.

The Master who had meditated so deeply on the rebirth of arts and sciences, on the inward beauty of all things, — ships’ lines, women’s faces — and on the visible aspects of nature was profoundly right in his pronouncement on the work that is done on the earth. From the hard work of men are born the sympathetic consciousness of a common destiny, the fidelity to right practice which makes great craftsmen, the sense of right conduct which we may call honour, the devotion to our calling and the idealism which is not a misty, winged angel without eyes, but a divine figure of terrestrial aspect with a clear glance and with its feet resting firmly on the earth on which it was born.

And work will overcome all evil, except ignorance, which is the condition of humanity and, like the ambient air, fills the space between the various sorts and conditions of men, which breeds hatred, fear, and contempt between the masses of mankind, and puts on men’s lips, on their innocent lips, words that are thoughtless and vain.

Thoughtless, for instance, were the words that (in all innocence, I believe) came on the lips of a prominent statesman making in the House of Commons an eulogistic reference to the British Merchant Service. In this name I include men of diverse status and origin, who live on and by the sea, by it exclusively, outside all professional pretensions and social formulas, men for whom not only their daily bread but their collective character, their personal achievement and their individual merit come from the sea. Those words of the statesman were meant kindly; but, after all, this is not a complete excuse. Rightly or wrongly, we expect from a man of national importance a larger and at the same time a more scrupulous precision of

speech, for it is possible that it may go echoing down the ages. His words were:

“It is right when thinking of the Navy not to forget the men of the Merchant Service, who have shown — and it is more surprising because they have had no traditions towards it — courage as great,” etc., etc.

And then he went on talking of the execution of Captain Fryatt, an event of undying memory, but less connected with the permanent, unchangeable conditions of sea service than with the wrong view German minds delight in taking of Englishmen’s psychology. The enemy, he said, meant by this atrocity to frighten our sailors away from the sea.

“What has happened?” he goes on to ask. “Never at any time in peace have sailors stayed so short a time ashore or shown such a readiness to step again into a ship.”

Which means, in other words, that they answered to the call. I should like to know at what time of history the English Merchant Service, the great body of merchant seamen, had failed to answer the call. Noticed or unnoticed, ignored or commanded, they have answered invariably the call to do their work, the very conditions of which made them what they are. They have always served the nation’s needs through their own invariable fidelity to the demands of their special life; but with the development and complexity of material civilisation they grew less prominent to the nation’s eye among all the vast schemes of national industry. Never was the need greater and the call to the services more urgent than to-day. And those inconspicuous workers on whose qualities depends so much of the national welfare have answered it without dismay, facing risk without glory, in the perfect faithfulness to that tradition which the speech of the statesman denies to them at the very moment when he thinks fit to praise their courage . . . and mention his surprise!

The hour of opportunity has struck — not for the first time — for the Merchant Service; and if I associate myself with all my heart in the admiration and the praise which is the greatest reward of brave men I must be excused from joining in any sentiment of surprise. It is perhaps because I have not been born to the inheritance of that tradition, which has yet fashioned the fundamental part of my character in my young days, that I am so consciously aware of it and venture to vindicate its existence in this outspoken manner.

Merchant seamen have always been what they are now, from their earliest days, before the Royal Navy had been fashioned out of the material they furnished for the hands of kings and statesmen. Their work has made them, as work undertaken with single-minded devotion makes men, giving to their achievements that vitality and continuity in which their souls are expressed, tempered and matured through the succeeding generations. In its simplest definition the work of merchant seamen has been to take ships entrusted to their care from port to port across the seas; and, from the highest to the lowest, to watch and labour with devotion for the safety of the property and the lives committed to their skill and fortitude through the hazards of innumerable voyages.

That was always the clear task, the single aim, the simple ideal, the only problem for an unselfish solution. The terms of it have changed with the years, its risks have worn different aspects from time to time. There are no longer any unexplored seas. Human ingenuity has devised better means to meet the dangers of natural forces. But it is always the same problem. The youngsters who were growing up at sea at the end of my service are commanding ships now. At least I have heard of some of them who do. And whatever the shape and power of their ships the character of the duty remains the same. A mine or a torpedo that strikes your ship is not so very different from a sharp, uncharted rock tearing her life out of her in another way. At a greater cost of vital energy, under the well-nigh intolerable stress of vigilance and resolution, they are doing steadily the work of their professional forefathers in the midst of multiplied dangers. They go to and fro across the oceans on their everlasting task: the same men, the same stout hearts, the same fidelity to an exacting tradition created by simple toilers who in their time knew how to live and die at sea.

Allowed to share in this work and in this tradition for something like twenty years, I am bold enough to think that perhaps I am not altogether unworthy to speak of it. It was the sphere not only of my activity but, I may safely say, also of my affections; but after such a close connection it is very difficult to avoid bringing in one's own personality. Without looking at all at the aspects of the Labour problem, I can safely affirm that I have never, never seen British seamen refuse any risk, any exertion, any effort of spirit or body up to the extremest demands of their calling. Years ago — it seems ages ago — I have seen the crew of a British ship fight the fire in the cargo for a whole sleepless week and then, with her decks blown up, I have seen

them still continue the fight to save the floating shell. And at last I have seen them refuse to be taken off by a vessel standing by, and this only in order "to see the last of our ship," at the word, at the simple word, of a man who commanded them, a worthy soul indeed, but of no heroic aspect. I have seen that. I have shared their days in small boats. Hard days. Ages ago. And now let me mention a story of to-day.

I will try to relate it here mainly in the words of the chief engineer of a certain steamship which, after bunkering, left Lerwick, bound for Iceland. The weather was cold, the sea pretty rough, with a stiff head wind. All went well till next day, about 1.30 p.m., then the captain sighted a suspicious object far away to starboard. Speed was increased at once to close in with the Faroes and good lookouts were set fore and aft. Nothing further was seen of the suspicious object, but about half-past three without any warning the ship was struck amidships by a torpedo which exploded in the bunkers. None of the crew was injured by the explosion, and all hands, without exception, behaved admirably.

The chief officer with his watch managed to lower the No. 3 boat. Two other boats had been shattered by the explosion, and though another lifeboat was cleared and ready, there was no time to lower it, and "some of us jumped while others were washed overboard. Meantime the captain had been busy handing lifebelts to the men and cheering them up with words and smiles, with no thought of his own safety." The ship went down in less than four minutes. The captain was the last man on board, going down with her, and was sucked under. On coming up he was caught under an upturned boat to which five hands were clinging. "One lifeboat," says the chief engineer, "which was floating empty in the distance was cleverly manoeuvred to our assistance by the steward, who swam off to her pluckily. Our next endeavour was to release the captain, who was entangled under the boat. As it was impossible to right her, we set-to to split her side open with the boat hook, because by awful bad luck the head of the axe we had flew off at the first blow and was lost. The rescue took thirty minutes, and the extricated captain was in a pitiable condition, being badly bruised and having swallowed a lot of salt water. He was unconscious. While at that work the submarine came to the surface quite close and made a complete circle round us, the seven men that we counted on the conning tower laughing at our efforts.



“There were eighteen of us saved. I deeply regret the loss of the chief officer, a fine fellow and a kind shipmate showing splendid promise. The other men lost — one A.B., one greaser, and two firemen — were quiet, conscientious, good fellows.”

With no restoratives in the boat, they endeavoured to bring the captain round by means of massage. Meantime the oars were got out in order to reach the Faroes, which were about thirty miles dead to windward, but after about nine hours' hard work they had to desist, and, putting out a sea-anchor, they took shelter under the canvas boat-cover from the cold wind and torrential rain. Says the narrator: “We were all very wet and miserable, and decided to have two biscuits all round. The effects of this and being under the shelter of the canvas warmed us up and made us feel pretty well contented. At about sunrise the captain showed signs of recovery, and by the time the sun was up he was looking a lot better, much to our relief.”

After being informed of what had been done the revived captain “dropped a bombshell in our midst,” by proposing to make for the Shetlands, which were *only* one hundred and fifty miles off. “The wind is in our favour,” he said. “I promise to take you there. Are you all willing?” This — comments the chief engineer — “from a man who but a few hours previously had been hauled back from the grave!” The captain's confident manner inspired the men, and they all agreed. Under the best possible conditions a boat-run of one hundred and fifty miles in the North Atlantic and in winter weather would have been a feat of no mean merit, but in the circumstances it required uncommon nerve and skill to carry out such a promise. With an oar for a mast and the boat-cover cut down for a sail they started on their dangerous journey, with the boat compass and the stars for their guide. The captain's undaunted serenity buoyed them all up against despondency. He told them what point he was making for. It was Ronas Hill, “and we struck it as straight as a die.”

The chief engineer commends also the ship steward for the manner in which he made the little food they had last, the cheery spirit he manifested, and the great help he was to the captain by keeping the men in good humour. That trusty man had “his hands cruelly chafed with the rowing, but it never damped his spirits.”

They made Ronas Hill (as straight as a die), and the chief engineer cannot express their feelings of gratitude and relief when they set their feet on the shore. He praises the unbounded kindness of the people in

Hillswick. "It seemed to us all like Paradise regained," he says, concluding his letter with the words:

"And there was our captain, just his usual self, as if nothing had happened, as if bringing the boat that hazardous journey and being the means of saving eighteen souls was to him an everyday occurrence."

Such is the chief engineer's testimony to the continuity of the old tradition of the sea, which made by the work of men has in its turn created for them their simple ideal of conduct.

**CONFIDENCE — 1919**

## I.

The seamen hold up the Edifice. They have been holding it up in the past and they will hold it up in the future, whatever this future may contain of logical development, of unforeseen new shapes, of great promises and of dangers still unknown.

It is not an unpardonable stretching of the truth to say that the British Empire rests on transportation. I am speaking now naturally of the sea, as a man who has lived on it for many years, at a time, too, when on sighting a vessel on the horizon of any of the great oceans it was perfectly safe to bet any reasonable odds on her being a British ship — with the certitude of making a pretty good thing of it at the end of the voyage.

I have tried to convey here in popular terms the strong impression remembered from my young days. The Red Ensign prevailed on the high seas to such an extent that one always experienced a slight shock on seeing some other combination of colours blow out at the peak or flag-pole of any chance encounter in deep water. In the long run the persistence of the visual fact forced upon the mind a half-unconscious sense of its inner significance. We have all heard of the well-known view that trade follows the flag. And that is not always true. There is also this truth that the flag, in normal conditions, represents commerce to the eye and understanding of the average man. This is a truth, but it is not the whole truth. In its numbers and in its unfailing ubiquity, the British Red Ensign, under which naval actions too have been fought, adventures entered upon and sacrifices offered, represented in fact something more than the prestige of a great trade.

The flutter of that piece of red bunting showered sentiment on the nations of the earth. I will not venture to say that in every case that sentiment was of a friendly nature. Of hatred, half concealed or concealed not at all, this is not the place to speak; and indeed the little I have seen of it about the world was tainted with stupidity and seemed to confess in its very violence the extreme poorness of its case. But generally it was more in the nature of envious wonder qualified by a half-concealed admiration.

That flag, which but for the Union Jack in the corner might have been adopted by the most radical of revolutions, affirmed in its numbers the stability of purpose, the continuity of effort and the greatness of Britain's

opportunity pursued steadily in the order and peace of the world: that world which for twenty-five years or so after 1870 may be said to have been living in holy calm and hushed silence with only now and then a slight clink of metal, as if in some distant part of mankind's habitation some restless body had stumbled over a heap of old armour.

## II.

We who have learned by now what a world-war is like may be excused for considering the disturbances of that period as insignificant brawls, mere hole-and-corner scuffles. In the world, which memory depicts as so wonderfully tranquil all over, it was the sea yet that was the safest place. And the Red Ensign, commercial, industrial, historic, pervaded the sea! Assertive only by its numbers, highly significant, and, under its character of a trade — emblem, nationally expressive, it was symbolic of old and new ideas, of conservatism and progress, of routine and enterprise, of drudgery and adventure — and of a certain easy-going optimism that would have appeared the Father of Sloth itself if it had not been so stubbornly, so everlastingly active.

The unimaginative, hard-working men, great and small, who served this flag afloat and ashore, nursed dumbly a mysterious sense of its greatness. It sheltered magnificently their vagabond labours under the sleepless eye of the sun. It held up the Edifice. But it crowned it too. This is not the extravagance of a mixed metaphor. It is the sober expression of a not very complex truth. Within that double function the national life that flag represented so well went on in safety, assured of its daily crust of bread for which we all pray and without which we would have to give up faith, hope and charity, the intellectual conquests of our minds and the sanctified strength of our labouring arms. I may permit myself to speak of it in these terms because as a matter of fact it was on that very symbol that I had founded my life and (as I have said elsewhere in a moment of outspoken gratitude) had known for many years no other roof above my head.

In those days that symbol was not particularly regarded. Superficially and definitely it represented but one of the forms of national activity rather remote from the close-knit organisations of other industries, a kind of toil not immediately under the public eye. It was of its Navy that the nation, looking out of the windows of its world-wide Edifice, was proudly aware. And that was but fair. The Navy is the armed man at the gate. An existence depending upon the sea must be guarded with a jealous, sleepless vigilance, for the sea is but a fickle friend.

It had provoked conflicts, encouraged ambitions, and had lured some nations to destruction — as we know. He — man or people — who,

boasting of long years of familiarity with the sea, neglects the strength and cunning of his right hand is a fool. The pride and trust of the nation in its Navy so strangely mingled with moments of neglect, caused by a particularly thick-headed idealism, is perfectly justified. It is also very proper: for it is good for a body of men conscious of a great responsibility to feel themselves recognised, if only in that fallible, imperfect and often irritating way in which recognition is sometimes offered to the deserving.

But the Merchant Service had never to suffer from that sort of irritation. No recognition was thrust on it offensively, and, truth to say, it did not seem to concern itself unduly with the claims of its own obscure merit. It had no consciousness. It had no words. It had no time. To these busy men their work was but the ordinary labour of earning a living; their duties in their ever-recurring round had, like the sun itself, the commonness of daily things; their individual fidelity was not so much united as merely co-ordinated by an aim that shone with no spiritual lustre. They were everyday men. They were that, eminently. When the great opportunity came to them to link arms in response to a supreme call they received it with characteristic simplicity, incorporating self-sacrifice into the texture of their common task, and, as far as emotion went, framing the horror of mankind's catastrophic time within the rigid rules of their professional conscience. And who can say that they could have done better than this?

Such was their past both remote and near. It has been stubbornly consistent, and as this consistency was based upon the character of men fashioned by a very old tradition, there is no doubt that it will endure. Such changes as came into the sea life have been for the main part mechanical and affecting only the material conditions of that inbred consistency. That men don't change is a profound truth. They don't change because it is not necessary for them to change even if they could accomplish that miracle. It is enough for them to be infinitely adaptable — as the last four years have abundantly proved.

### III.

Thus one may await the future without undue excitement and with unshaken confidence. Whether the hues of sunrise are angry or benign, gorgeous or sinister, we shall always have the same sky over our heads. Yet by a kindly dispensation of Providence the human faculty of astonishment will never lack food. What could be more surprising for instance, than the calm invitation to Great Britain to discard the force and protection of its Navy? It has been suggested, it has been proposed — I don't know whether it has been pressed. Probably not much. For if the excursions of audacious folly have no bounds that human eye can see, reason has the habit of never straying very far away from its throne.

It is not the first time in history that excited voices have been heard urging the warrior still panting from the fray to fling his tried weapons on the altar of peace, for they would be needed no more! And such voices have been, in undying hope or extreme weariness, listened to sometimes. But not for long. After all every sort of shouting is a transitory thing. It is the grim silence of facts that remains.

The British Merchant Service has been challenged in its supremacy before. It will be challenged again. It may be even asked menacingly in the name of some humanitarian doctrine or some empty ideal to step down voluntarily from that place which it has managed to keep for so many years. But I imagine that it will take more than words of brotherly love or brotherly anger (which, as is well known, is the worst kind of anger) to drive British seamen, armed or unarmed, from the seas. Firm in this indestructible if not easily explained conviction, I can allow myself to think placidly of that long, long future which I shall not see.

My confidence rests on the hearts of men who do not change, though they may forget many things for a time and even forget to be themselves in a moment of false enthusiasm. But of that I am not afraid. It will not be for long. I know the men. Through the kindness of the Admiralty (which, let me confess here in a white sheet, I repaid by the basest ingratitude) I was permitted during the war to renew my contact with the British seamen of the merchant service. It is to their generosity in recognising me under the shore rust of twenty-five years as one of themselves that I owe one of the deepest emotions of my life. Never for a moment did I feel among them



like an idle, wandering ghost from a distant past. They talked to me seriously, openly, and with professional precision, of facts, of events, of implements, I had never heard of in my time; but the hands I grasped were like the hands of the generation which had trained my youth and is now no more. I recognised the character of their glances, the accent of their voices. Their moving tales of modern instances were presented to me with that peculiar turn of mind flavoured by the inherited humour and sagacity of the sea. I don't know what the seaman of the future will be like. He may have to live all his days with a telephone tied up to his head and bristle all over with scientific antennæ like a figure in a fantastic tale. But he will always be the man revealed to us lately, immutable in his slight variations like the closed path of this planet of ours on which he must find his exact position once, at the very least, in every twenty-four hours.

The greatest desideratum of a sailor's life is to be "certain of his position." It is a source of great worry at times, but I don't think that it need be so at this time. Yet even the best position has its dangers on account of the fickleness of the elements. But I think that, left untrammelled to the individual effort of its creators and to the collective spirit of its servants, the British Merchant Service will manage to maintain its position on this restless and watery globe.

## FLIGHT — 1917

To begin at the end, I will say that the “landing” surprised me by a slight and very characteristically “dead” sort of shock.

I may fairly call myself an amphibious creature. A good half of my active existence has been passed in familiar contact with salt water, and I was aware, theoretically, that water is not an elastic body: but it was only then that I acquired the absolute conviction of the fact. I remember distinctly the thought flashing through my head: “By Jove! it isn’t elastic!” Such is the illuminating force of a particular experience.

This landing (on the water of the North Sea) was effected in a Short biplane after one hour and twenty minutes in the air. I reckon every minute like a miser counting his hoard, for, if what I’ve got is mine, I am not likely now to increase the tale. That feeling is the effect of age. It strikes me as I write that, when next time I leave the surface of this globe, it won’t be to soar bodily above it in the air. Quite the contrary. And I am not thinking of a submarine either. . . .

But let us drop this dismal strain and go back logically to the beginning. I must confess that I started on that flight in a state — I won’t say of fury, but of a most intense irritation. I don’t remember ever feeling so annoyed in my life.

It came about in this way. Two or three days before, I had been invited to lunch at an R.N.A.S. station, and was made to feel very much at home by the nicest lot of quietly interesting young men it had ever been my good fortune to meet. Then I was taken into the sheds. I walked respectfully round and round a lot of machines of all kinds, and the more I looked at them the more I felt somehow that for all the effect they produced on me they might have been so many land-vehicles of an eccentric design. So I said to Commander O., who very kindly was conducting me: “This is all very fine, but to realise what one is looking at, one must have been up.”

He said at once: “I’ll give you a flight to-morrow if you like.”

I postulated that it should be none of those “ten minutes in the air” affairs. I wanted a real business flight. Commander O. assured me that I would get “awfully bored,” but I declared that I was willing to take that risk. “Very well,” he said. “Eleven o’clock to-morrow. Don’t be late.”

I am sorry to say I was about two minutes late, which was enough, however, for Commander O. to greet me with a shout from a great distance: "Oh! You are coming, then!"

"Of course I am coming," I yelled indignantly.

He hurried up to me. "All right. There's your machine, and here's your pilot. Come along."

A lot of officers closed round me, rushed me into a hut: two of them began to button me into the coat, two more were ramming a cap on my head, others stood around with goggles, with binoculars. . . I couldn't understand the necessity of such haste. We weren't going to chase Fritz. There was no sign of Fritz anywhere in the blue. Those dear boys did not seem to notice my age — fifty-eight, if a day — nor my infirmities — a gouty subject for years. This disregard was very flattering, and I tried to live up to it, but the pace seemed to me terrific. They galloped me across a vast expanse of open ground to the water's edge.

The machine on its carriage seemed as big as a cottage, and much more imposing. My young pilot went up like a bird. There was an idle, able-bodied ladder loafing against a shed within fifteen feet of me, but as nobody seemed to notice it, I recommended myself mentally to Heaven and started climbing after the pilot. The close view of the real fragility of that rigid structure startled me considerably, while Commander O. discomposed me still more by shouting repeatedly: "Don't put your foot there!" I didn't know where to put my foot. There was a slight crack; I heard some swear-words below me, and then with a supreme effort I rolled in and dropped into a basket-chair, absolutely winded. A small crowd of mechanics and officers were looking up at me from the ground, and while I gasped visibly I thought to myself that they would be sure to put it down to sheer nervousness. But I hadn't breath enough in my body to stick my head out and shout down to them:

"You know, it isn't that at all!"

Generally I try not to think of my age and infirmities. They are not a cheerful subject. But I was never so angry and disgusted with them as during that minute or so before the machine took the water. As to my feelings in the air, those who will read these lines will know their own, which are so much nearer the mind and the heart than any writings of an unprofessional can be. At first all my faculties were absorbed and as if neutralised by the sheer novelty of the situation. The first to emerge was

the sense of security so much more perfect than in any small boat I've ever been in; the, as it were, material, stillness, and immobility (though it was a bumpy day). I very soon ceased to hear the roar of the wind and engines — unless, indeed, some cylinders missed, when I became acutely aware of that. Within the rigid spread of the powerful planes, so strangely motionless I had sometimes the illusion of sitting as if by enchantment in a block of suspended marble. Even while looking over at the aeroplane's shadow running prettily over land and sea, I had the impression of extreme slowness. I imagine that had she suddenly nose-dived out of control, I would have gone to the final smash without a single additional heartbeat. I am sure I would not have known. It is doubtless otherwise with the man in control.

But there was no dive, and I returned to earth (after an hour and twenty minutes) without having felt "bored" for a single second. I descended (by the ladder) thinking that I would never go flying again. No, never any more — lest its mysterious fascination, whose invisible wing had brushed my heart up there, should change to unavailing regret in a man too old for its glory.

## SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE LOSS OF THE TITANIC — 1912

It is with a certain bitterness that one must admit to oneself that the late S.S. *Titanic* had a “good press.” It is perhaps because I have no great practice of daily newspapers (I have never seen so many of them together lying about my room) that the white spaces and the big lettering of the headlines have an incongruously festive air to my eyes, a disagreeable effect of a feverish exploitation of a sensational God-send. And if ever a loss at sea fell under the definition, in the terms of a bill of lading, of Act of God, this one does, in its magnitude, suddenness and severity; and in the chastening influence it should have on the self-confidence of mankind.

I say this with all the seriousness the occasion demands, though I have neither the competence nor the wish to take a theological view of this great misfortune, sending so many souls to their last account. It is but a natural *reflection*. Another one flowing also from the phraseology of bills of lading (a bill of lading is a shipping document limiting in certain of its clauses the liability of the carrier) is that the “King’s Enemies” of a more or less overt sort are not altogether sorry that this fatal mishap should strike the prestige of the greatest Merchant Service of the world. I believe that not a thousand miles from these shores certain public prints have betrayed in gothic letters their satisfaction — to speak plainly — by rather ill-natured comments.

In what light one is to look at the action of the American Senate is more difficult to say. From a certain point of view the sight of the august senators of a great Power rushing to New York and beginning to bully and badger the luckless “Yamsi” — on the very quay-side so to speak — seems to furnish the Shakespearian touch of the comic to the real tragedy of the fatuous drowning of all these people who to the last moment put their trust in mere bigness, in the reckless affirmations of commercial men and mere technicians and in the irresponsible paragraphs of the newspapers booming these ships! Yes, a grim touch of comedy. One asks oneself what these men are after, with this very provincial display of authority. I beg my friends in the United States pardon for calling these zealous senators men. I don’t wish to be disrespectful. They may be of the stature of demi-gods for all I know, but at that great distance from the shores of effete Europe and in the presence of so many guileless dead, their size seems diminished from

this side. What are they after? What is there for them to find out? We know what had happened. The ship scraped her side against a piece of ice, and sank after floating for two hours and a half, taking a lot of people down with her. What more can they find out from the unfair badgering of the unhappy “Yamsi,” or the ruffianly abuse of the same.

“Yamsi,” I should explain, is a mere code address, and I use it here symbolically. I have seen commerce pretty close. I know what it is worth, and I have no particular regard for commercial magnates, but one must protest against these Bumble-like proceedings. Is it indignation at the loss of so many lives which is at work here? Well, the American railroads kill very many people during one single year, I dare say. Then why don’t these dignitaries come down on the presidents of their own railroads, of which one can’t say whether they are mere means of transportation or a sort of gambling game for the use of American plutocrats. Is it only an ardent and, upon the whole, praiseworthy desire for information? But the reports of the inquiry tell us that the august senators, though raising a lot of questions testifying to the complete innocence and even blankness of their minds, are unable to understand what the second officer is saying to them. We are so informed by the press from the other side. Even such a simple expression as that one of the look-out men was stationed in the “eyes of the ship” was too much for the senators of the land of graphic expression. What it must have been in the more recondite matters I won’t even try to think, because I have no mind for smiles just now. They were greatly exercised about the sound of explosions heard when half the ship was under water already. Was there one? Were there two? They seemed to be smelling a rat there! Has not some charitable soul told them (what even schoolboys who read sea stories know) that when a ship sinks from a leak like this, a deck or two is always blown up; and that when a steamship goes down by the head, the boilers may, and often do break adrift with a sound which resembles the sound of an explosion? And they may, indeed, explode, for all I know. In the only case I have seen of a steamship sinking there was such a sound, but I didn’t dive down after her to investigate. She was not of 45,000 tons and declared unsinkable, but the sight was impressive enough. I shall never forget the muffled, mysterious detonation, the sudden agitation of the sea round the slowly raised stern, and to this day I have in my eye the propeller, seen perfectly still in its frame against a clear evening sky.

But perhaps the second officer has explained to them by this time this and a few other little facts. Though why an officer of the British merchant service should answer the questions of any king, emperor, autocrat, or senator of any foreign power (as to an event in which a British ship alone was concerned, and which did not even take place in the territorial waters of that power) passes my understanding. The only authority he is bound to answer is the Board of Trade. But with what face the Board of Trade, which, having made the regulations for 10,000 ton ships, put its dear old bald head under its wing for ten years, took it out only to shelve an important report, and with a dreary murmur, “Unsinkable,” put it back again, in the hope of not being disturbed for another ten years, with what face it will be putting questions to that man who has done his duty, as to the facts of this disaster and as to his professional conduct in it — well, I don’t know! I have the greatest respect for our established authorities. I am a disciplined man, and I have a natural indulgence for the weaknesses of human institutions; but I will own that at times I have regretted their — how shall I say it? — their imponderability. A Board of Trade — what is it? A Board of . . . I believe the Speaker of the Irish Parliament is one of the members of it. A ghost. Less than that; as yet a mere memory. An office with adequate and no doubt comfortable furniture and a lot of perfectly irresponsible gentlemen who exist packed in its equable atmosphere softly, as if in a lot of cotton-wool, and with no care in the world; for there can be no care without personal responsibility — such, for instance, as the seamen have — those seamen from whose mouths this irresponsible institution can take away the bread — as a disciplinary measure. Yes — it’s all that. And what more? The name of a politician — a party man! Less than nothing; a mere void without as much as a shadow of responsibility cast into it from that light in which move the masses of men who work, who deal in things and face the realities — not the words — of this life.

Years ago I remember overhearing two genuine shellbacks of the old type commenting on a ship’s officer, who, if not exactly incompetent, did not commend himself to their severe judgment of accomplished sailor-men. Said one, resuming and concluding the discussion in a funnily judicial tone:

“The Board of Trade must have been drunk when they gave him his certificate.”

I confess that this notion of the Board of Trade as an entity having a brain which could be overcome by the fumes of strong liquor charmed me exceedingly. For then it would have been unlike the limited companies of which some exasperated wit has once said that they had no souls to be saved and no bodies to be kicked, and thus were free in this world and the next from all the effective sanctions of conscientious conduct. But, unfortunately, the picturesque pronouncement overheard by me was only a characteristic sally of an annoyed sailor. The Board of Trade is composed of bloodless departments. It has no limbs and no physiognomy, or else at the forthcoming inquiry it might have paid to the victims of the *Titanic* disaster the small tribute of a blush. I ask myself whether the Marine Department of the Board of Trade did really believe, when they decided to shelve the report on equipment for a time, that a ship of 45,000 tons, that *any* ship, could be made practically indestructible by means of water-tight bulkheads? It seems incredible to anybody who had ever reflected upon the properties of material, such as wood or steel. You can't, let builders say what they like, make a ship of such dimensions as strong proportionately as a much smaller one. The shocks our old whalers had to stand amongst the heavy floes in Baffin's Bay were perfectly staggering, notwithstanding the most skilful handling, and yet they lasted for years. The *Titanic*, if one may believe the last reports, has only scraped against a piece of ice which, I suspect, was not an enormously bulky and comparatively easily seen berg, but the low edge of a floe — and sank. Leisurely enough, God knows — and here the advantage of bulkheads comes in — for time is a great friend, a good helper — though in this lamentable case these bulkheads served only to prolong the agony of the passengers who could not be saved. But she sank, causing, apart from the sorrow and the pity of the loss of so many lives, a sort of surprised consternation that such a thing should have happened at all. Why? You build a 45,000 tons hotel of thin steel plates to secure the patronage of, say, a couple of thousand rich people (for if it had been for the emigrant trade alone, there would have been no such exaggeration of mere size), you decorate it in the style of the Pharaohs or in the Louis Quinze style — I don't know which — and to please the aforesaid fatuous handful of individuals, who have more money than they know what to do with, and to the applause of two continents, you launch that mass with two thousand people on board at twenty-one knots across the sea — a perfect exhibition of the modern blind trust in mere material and



appliances. And then this happens. General uproar. The blind trust in material and appliances has received a terrible shock. I will say nothing of the credulity which accepts any statement which specialists, technicians and office-people are pleased to make, whether for purposes of gain or glory. You stand there astonished and hurt in your profoundest sensibilities. But what else under the circumstances could you expect?

For my part I could much sooner believe in an unsinkable ship of 3,000 tons than in one of 40,000 tons. It is one of those things that stand to reason. You can't increase the thickness of scantling and plates indefinitely. And the mere weight of this bigness is an added disadvantage. In reading the reports, the first reflection which occurs to one is that, if that luckless ship had been a couple of hundred feet shorter, she would have probably gone clear of the danger. But then, perhaps, she could not have had a swimming bath and a French café. That, of course, is a serious consideration. I am well aware that those responsible for her short and fatal existence ask us in desolate accents to believe that if she had hit end on she would have survived. Which, by a sort of coy implication, seems to mean that it was all the fault of the officer of the watch (he is dead now) for trying to avoid the obstacle. We shall have presently, in deference to commercial and industrial interests, a new kind of seamanship. A very new and "progressive" kind. If you see anything in the way, by no means try to avoid it; smash at it full tilt. And then — and then only you shall see the triumph of material, of clever contrivances, of the whole box of engineering tricks in fact, and cover with glory a commercial concern of the most unmitigated sort, a great Trust, and a great ship-building yard, justly famed for the super-excellence of its material and workmanship. Unsinkable! See? I told you she was unsinkable, if only handled in accordance with the new seamanship. Everything's in that. And, doubtless, the Board of Trade, if properly approached, would consent to give the needed instructions to its examiners of Masters and Mates. Behold the examination-room of the future. Enter to the grizzled examiner a young man of modest aspect: "Are you well up in modern seamanship?" "I hope so, sir." "H'm, let's see. You are at night on the bridge in charge of a 150,000 tons ship, with a motor track, organ-loft, etc., etc., with a full cargo of passengers, a full crew of 1,500 café waiters, two sailors and a boy, three collapsible boats as per Board of Trade regulations, and going at your three-quarter speed of, say, about forty knots. You perceive suddenly right ahead, and close to,

something that looks like a large ice-floe. What would you do?” “Put the helm amidships.” “Very well. Why?” “In order to hit end on.” “On what grounds should you endeavour to hit end on?” “Because we are taught by our builders and masters that the heavier the smash, the smaller the damage, and because the requirements of material should be attended to.”

And so on and so on. The new seamanship: when in doubt try to ram fairly — whatever’s before you. Very simple. If only the *Titanic* had rammed that piece of ice (which was not a monstrous berg) fairly, every puffing paragraph would have been vindicated in the eyes of the credulous public which pays. But would it have been? Well, I doubt it. I am well aware that in the eighties the steamship *Arizona*, one of the “greyhounds of the ocean” in the jargon of that day, did run bows on against a very unmistakable iceberg, and managed to get into port on her collision bulkhead. But the *Arizona* was not, if I remember rightly, 5,000 tons register, let alone 45,000, and she was not going at twenty knots per hour. I can’t be perfectly certain at this distance of time, but her sea-speed could not have been more than fourteen at the outside. Both these facts made for safety. And, even if she had been engined to go twenty knots, there would not have been behind that speed the enormous mass, so difficult to check in its impetus, the terrific weight of which is bound to do damage to itself or others at the slightest contact.

I assure you it is not for the vain pleasure of talking about my own poor experiences, but only to illustrate my point, that I will relate here a very unsensational little incident I witnessed now rather more than twenty years ago in Sydney, N.S.W. Ships were beginning then to grow bigger year after year, though, of course, the present dimensions were not even dreamt of. I was standing on the Circular Quay with a Sydney pilot watching a big mail steamship of one of our best-known companies being brought alongside. We admired her lines, her noble appearance, and were impressed by her size as well, though her length, I imagine, was hardly half that of the *Titanic*.

She came into the Cove (as that part of the harbour is called), of course very slowly, and at some hundred feet or so short of the quay she lost her way. That quay was then a wooden one, a fine structure of mighty piles and stringers bearing a roadway — a thing of great strength. The ship, as I have said before, stopped moving when some hundred feet from it. Then her engines were rung on slow ahead, and immediately rung off again. The propeller made just about five turns, I should say. She began to move,

stealing on, so to speak, without a ripple; coming alongside with the utmost gentleness. I went on looking her over, very much interested, but the man with me, the pilot, muttered under his breath: "Too much, too much." His exercised judgment had warned him of what I did not even suspect. But I believe that neither of us was exactly prepared for what happened. There was a faint concussion of the ground under our feet, a groaning of piles, a snapping of great iron bolts, and with a sound of ripping and splintering, as when a tree is blown down by the wind, a great strong piece of wood, a baulk of squared timber, was displaced several feet as if by enchantment. I looked at my companion in amazement. "I could not have believed it," I declared. "No," he said. "You would not have thought she would have cracked an egg — eh?"

I certainly wouldn't have thought that. He shook his head, and added: "Ah! These great, big things, they want some handling."

Some months afterwards I was back in Sydney. The same pilot brought me in from sea. And I found the same steamship, or else another as like her as two peas, lying at anchor not far from us. The pilot told me she had arrived the day before, and that he was to take her alongside to-morrow. I reminded him jocularly of the damage to the quay. "Oh!" he said, "we are not allowed now to bring them in under their own steam. We are using tugs."

A very wise regulation. And this is my point — that size is to a certain extent an element of weakness. The bigger the ship, the more delicately she must be handled. Here is a contact which, in the pilot's own words, you wouldn't think could have cracked an egg; with the astonishing result of something like eighty feet of good strong wooden quay shaken loose, iron bolts snapped, a baulk of stout timber splintered. Now, suppose that quay had been of granite (as surely it is now) — or, instead of the quay, if there had been, say, a North Atlantic fog there, with a full-grown iceberg in it awaiting the gentle contact of a ship groping its way along blindfold? Something would have been hurt, but it would not have been the iceberg.

Apparently, there is a point in development when it ceases to be a true progress — in trade, in games, in the marvellous handiwork of men, and even in their demands and desires and aspirations of the moral and mental kind. There is a point when progress, to remain a real advance, must change slightly the direction of its line. But this is a wide question. What I wanted to point out here is — that the old *Arizona*, the marvel of her day,

was proportionately stronger, handier, better equipped, than this triumph of modern naval architecture, the loss of which, in common parlance, will remain the sensation of this year. The clatter of the presses has been worthy of the tonnage, of the preliminary pæans of triumph round that vanished hull, of the reckless statements, and elaborate descriptions of its ornate splendour. A great babble of news (and what sort of news too, good heavens!) and eager comment has arisen around this catastrophe, though it seems to me that a less strident note would have been more becoming in the presence of so many victims left struggling on the sea, of lives miserably thrown away for nothing, or worse than nothing: for false standards of achievement, to satisfy a vulgar demand of a few moneyed people for a banal hotel luxury — the only one they can understand — and because the big ship pays, in one way or another: in money or in advertising value.

It is in more ways than one a very ugly business, and a mere scrape along the ship's side, so slight that, if reports are to be believed, it did not interrupt a card party in the gorgeously fitted (but in chaste style) smoking-room — or was it in the delightful French café? — is enough to bring on the exposure. All the people on board existed under a sense of false security. How false, it has been sufficiently demonstrated. And the fact which seems undoubted, that some of them actually were reluctant to enter the boats when told to do so, shows the strength of that falsehood. Incidentally, it shows also the sort of discipline on board these ships, the sort of hold kept on the passengers in the face of the unforgiving sea. These people seemed to imagine it an optional matter: whereas the order to leave the ship should be an order of the sternest character, to be obeyed unquestioningly and promptly by every one on board, with men to enforce it at once, and to carry it out methodically and swiftly. And it is no use to say it cannot be done, for it can. It has been done. The only requisite is manageableness of the ship herself and of the numbers she carries on board. That is the great thing which makes for safety. A commander should be able to hold his ship and everything on board of her in the hollow of his hand, as it were. But with the modern foolish trust in material, and with those floating hotels, this has become impossible. A man may do his best, but he cannot succeed in a task which from greed, or more likely from sheer stupidity, has been made too great for anybody's strength.

The readers of *The English Review*, who cast a friendly eye nearly six years ago on my *Reminiscences*, and know how much the merchant service,

ships and men, has been to me, will understand my indignation that those men of whom (speaking in no sentimental phrase, but in the very truth of feeling) I can't even now think otherwise than as brothers, have been put by their commercial employers in the impossibility to perform efficiently their plain duty; and this from motives which I shall not enumerate here, but whose intrinsic unworthiness is plainly revealed by the greatness, the miserable greatness, of that disaster. Some of them have perished. To die for commerce is hard enough, but to go under that sea we have been trained to combat, with a sense of failure in the supreme duty of one's calling is indeed a bitter fate. Thus they are gone, and the responsibility remains with the living who will have no difficulty in replacing them by others, just as good, at the same wages. It was their bitter fate. But I, who can look at some arduous years when their duty was my duty too, and their feelings were my feelings, can remember some of us who once upon a time were more fortunate.

It is of them that I would talk a little, for my own comfort partly, and also because I am sticking all the time to my subject to illustrate my point, the point of manageableness which I have raised just now. Since the memory of the lucky *Arizona* has been evoked by others than myself, and made use of by me for my own purpose, let me call up the ghost of another ship of that distant day whose less lucky destiny inculcates another lesson making for my argument. The *Douro*, a ship belonging to the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company, was rather less than one-tenth the measurement of the *Titanic*. Yet, strange as it may appear to the ineffable hotel exquisites who form the bulk of the first-class Cross-Atlantic Passengers, people of position and wealth and refinement did not consider it an intolerable hardship to travel in her, even all the way from South America; this being the service she was engaged upon. Of her speed I know nothing, but it must have been the average of the period, and the decorations of her saloons were, I dare say, quite up to the mark; but I doubt if her birth had been boastfully paragraphed all round the Press, because that was not the fashion of the time. She was not a mass of material gorgeously furnished and upholstered. She was a ship. And she was not, in the apt words of an article by Commander C. Crutchley, R.N.R., which I have just read, "run by a sort of hotel syndicate composed of the Chief Engineer, the Purser, and the Captain," as these monstrous Atlantic ferries are. She was really commanded, manned, and equipped as a ship meant to keep the sea: a ship

first and last in the fullest meaning of the term, as the fact I am going to relate will show.

She was off the Spanish coast, homeward bound, and fairly full, just like the *Titanic*; and further, the proportion of her crew to her passengers, I remember quite well, was very much the same. The exact number of souls on board I have forgotten. It might have been nearly three hundred, certainly not more. The night was moonlit, but hazy, the weather fine with a heavy swell running from the westward, which means that she must have been rolling a great deal, and in that respect the conditions for her were worse than in the case of the *Titanic*. Some time either just before or just after midnight, to the best of my recollection, she was run into amidships and at right angles by a large steamer which after the blow backed out, and, herself apparently damaged, remained motionless at some distance.

My recollection is that the *Douro* remained afloat after the collision for fifteen minutes or thereabouts. It might have been twenty, but certainly something under the half-hour. In that time the boats were lowered, all the passengers put into them, and the lot shoved off. There was no time to do anything more. All the crew of the *Douro* went down with her, literally without a murmur. When she went she plunged bodily down like a stone. The only members of the ship's company who survived were the third officer, who was from the first ordered to take charge of the boats, and the seamen told off to man them, two in each. Nobody else was picked up. A quartermaster, one of the saved in the way of duty, with whom I talked a month or so afterwards, told me that they pulled up to the spot, but could neither see a head nor hear the faintest cry.

But I have forgotten. A passenger was drowned. She was a lady's maid who, frenzied with terror, refused to leave the ship. One of the boats waited near by till the chief officer, finding himself absolutely unable to tear the girl away from the rail to which she dung with a frantic grasp, ordered the boat away out of danger. My quartermaster told me that he spoke over to them in his ordinary voice, and this was the last sound heard before the ship sank.

The rest is silence. I daresay there was the usual official inquiry, but who cared for it? That sort of thing speaks for itself with no uncertain voice; though the papers, I remember, gave the event no space to speak of: no large headlines — no headlines at all. You see it was not the fashion at the time. A seaman-like piece of work, of which one cherishes the old memory

at this juncture more than ever before. She was a ship commanded, manned, equipped — not a sort of marine Ritz, proclaimed unsinkable and sent adrift with its casual population upon the sea, without enough boats, without enough seamen (but with a Parisian café and four hundred of poor devils of waiters) to meet dangers which, let the engineers say what they like, lurk always amongst the waves; sent with a blind trust in mere material, light-heartedly, to a most miserable, most fatuous disaster.

And there are, too, many ugly developments about this tragedy. The rush of the senatorial inquiry before the poor wretches escaped from the jaws of death had time to draw breath, the vituperative abuse of a man no more guilty than others in this matter, and the suspicion of this aimless fuss being a political move to get home on the M.T. Company, into which, in common parlance, the United States Government has got its knife, I don't pretend to understand why, though with the rest of the world I am aware of the fact. Perhaps there may be an excellent and worthy reason for it; but I venture to suggest that to take advantage of so many pitiful corpses, is not pretty. And the exploiting of the mere sensation on the other side is not pretty in its wealth of heartless inventions. Neither is the welter of Marconi lies which has not been sent vibrating without some reason, for which it would be nauseous to inquire too closely. And the calumnious, baseless, gratuitous, circumstantial lie charging poor Captain Smith with desertion of his post by means of suicide is the vilest and most ugly thing of all in this outburst of journalistic enterprise, without feeling, without honour, without decency.

But all this has its moral. And that other sinking which I have related here and to the memory of which a seaman turns with relief and thankfulness has its moral too. Yes, material may fail, and men, too, may fail sometimes; but more often men, when they are given the chance, will prove themselves truer than steel, that wonderful thin steel from which the sides and the bulkheads of our modern sea-leviathans are made.

# CERTAIN ASPECTS OF THE ADMIRABLE INQUIRY INTO THE LOSS OF THE TITANIC — 1912

I have been taken to task by a friend of mine on the “other side” for my strictures on Senator Smith’s investigation into the loss of the *Titanic*, in the number of *The English Review* for May, 1912. I will admit that the motives of the investigation may have been excellent, and probably were; my criticism bore mainly on matters of form and also on the point of efficiency. In that respect I have nothing to retract. The Senators of the Commission had absolutely no knowledge and no practice to guide them in the conduct of such an investigation; and this fact gave an air of unreality to their zealous exertions. I think that even in the United States there is some regret that this zeal of theirs was not tempered by a large dose of wisdom. It is fitting that people who rush with such ardour to the work of putting questions to men yet gasping from a narrow escape should have, I wouldn’t say a tincture of technical information, but enough knowledge of the subject to direct the trend of their inquiry. The newspapers of two continents have noted the remarks of the President of the Senatorial Commission with comments which I will not reproduce here, having a scant respect for the “organs of public opinion,” as they fondly believe themselves to be. The absolute value of their remarks was about as great as the value of the investigation they either mocked at or extolled. To the United States Senate I did not intend to be disrespectful. I have for that body, of which one hears mostly in connection with tariffs, as much reverence as the best of Americans. To manifest more or less would be an impertinence in a stranger. I have expressed myself with less reserve on our Board of Trade. That was done under the influence of warm feelings. We were all feeling warmly on the matter at that time. But, at any rate, our Board of Trade Inquiry, conducted by an experienced President, discovered a very interesting fact on the very second day of its sitting: the fact that the water-tight doors in the bulkheads of that wonder of naval architecture could be opened down below by any irresponsible person. Thus the famous closing apparatus on the bridge, paraded as a device of greater safety, with its



attachments of warning bells, coloured lights, and all these pretty-pretties, was, in the case of this ship, little better than a technical farce.

It is amusing, if anything connected with this stupid catastrophe can be amusing, to see the secretly crestfallen attitude of technicians. They are the high priests of the modern cult of perfected material and of mechanical appliances, and would fain forbid the profane from inquiring into its mysteries. We are the masters of progress, they say, and you should remain respectfully silent. And they take refuge behind their mathematics. I have the greatest regard for mathematics as an exercise of mind. It is the only manner of thinking which approaches the Divine. But mere calculations, of which these men make so much, when unassisted by imagination and when they have gained mastery over common sense, are the most deceptive exercises of intellect. Two and two are four, and two are six. That is immutable; you may trust your soul to that; but you must be certain first of your quantities. I know how the strength of materials can be calculated away, and also the evidence of one's senses. For it is by some sort of calculation involving weights and levels that the technicians responsible for the *Titanic* persuaded themselves that a ship *not divided* by water-tight compartments could be "unsinkable." Because, you know, she was not divided. You and I, and our little boys, when we want to divide, say, a box, take care to procure a piece of wood which will reach from the bottom to the lid. We know that if it does not reach all the way up, the box will not be divided into two compartments. It will be only partly divided. The *Titanic* was only partly divided. She was just sufficiently divided to drown some poor devils like rats in a trap. It is probable that they would have perished in any case, but it is a particularly horrible fate to die boxed up like this. Yes, she was sufficiently divided for that, but not sufficiently divided to prevent the water flowing over.

Therefore to a plain man who knows something of mathematics but is not bemused by calculations, she was, from the point of view of "unsinkability," not divided at all. What would you say of people who would boast of a fireproof building, an hotel, for instance, saying, "Oh, we have it divided by fireproof bulkheads which would localise any outbreak," and if you were to discover on closer inspection that these bulkheads closed no more than two-thirds of the openings they were meant to close, leaving above an open space through which draught, smoke, and fire could rush from one end of the building to the other? And, furthermore, that those

partitions, being too high to climb over, the people confined in each menaced compartment had to stay there and become asphyxiated or roasted, because no exits to the outside, say to the roof, had been provided! What would you think of the intelligence or candour of these advertising people? What would you think of them? And yet, apart from the obvious difference in the action of fire and water, the cases are essentially the same.

It would strike you and me and our little boys (who are not engineers yet) that to approach — I won't say attain — somewhere near absolute safety, the divisions to keep out water should extend from the bottom right up to the uppermost deck of *the hull*. I repeat, the *hull*, because there are above the hull the decks of the superstructures of which we need not take account. And further, as a provision of the commonest humanity, that each of these compartments should have a perfectly independent and free access to that uppermost deck: that is, into the open. Nothing less will do. Division by bulkheads that really divide, and free access to the deck from every water-tight compartment. Then the responsible man in the moment of danger and in the exercise of his judgment could close all the doors of these water-tight bulkheads by whatever clever contrivance has been invented for the purpose, without a qualm at the awful thought that he may be shutting up some of his fellow creatures in a death-trap; that he may be sacrificing the lives of men who, down there, are sticking to the posts of duty as the engine-room staffs of the Merchant Service have never failed to do. I know very well that the engineers of a ship in a moment of emergency are not quaking for their lives, but, as far as I have known them, attend calmly to their duty. We all must die; but, hang it all, a man ought to be given a chance, if not for his life, then at least to die decently. It's bad enough to have to stick down there when something disastrous is going on and any moment may be your last; but to be drowned shut up under deck is too bad. Some men of the *Titanic* died like that, it is to be feared. Compartmented, so to speak. Just think what it means! Nothing can approach the horror of that fate except being buried alive in a cave, or in a mine, or in your family vault.

So, once more: continuous bulkheads — a clear way of escape to the deck out of each water-tight compartment. Nothing less. And if specialists, the precious specialists of the sort that builds "unsinkable ships," tell you that it cannot be done, don't you believe them. It can be done, and they are quite clever enough to do it too. The objections they will raise, however

disguised in the solemn mystery of technical phrases, will not be technical, but commercial. I assure you that there is not much mystery about a ship of that sort. She is a tank. She is a tank ribbed, joisted, stayed, but she is no greater mystery than a tank. The *Titanic* was a tank eight hundred feet long, fitted as an hotel, with corridors, bed-rooms, halls, and so on (not a very mysterious arrangement truly), and for the hazards of her existence I should think about as strong as a Huntley and Palmer biscuit-tin. I make this comparison because Huntley and Palmer biscuit-tins, being almost a national institution, are probably known to all my readers. Well, about that strong, and perhaps not quite so strong. Just look at the side of such a tin, and then think of a 50,000 ton ship, and try to imagine what the thickness of her plates should be to approach anywhere the relative solidity of that biscuit-tin. In my varied and adventurous career I have been thrilled by the sight of a Huntley and Palmer biscuit-tin kicked by a mule sky-high, as the saying is. It came back to earth smiling, with only a sort of dimple on one of its cheeks. A proportionately severe blow would have burst the side of the *Titanic* or any other “triumph of modern naval architecture” like brown paper — I am willing to bet.

I am not saying this by way of disparagement. There is reason in things. You can't make a 50,000 ton ship as strong as a Huntley and Palmer biscuit-tin. But there is also reason in the way one accepts facts, and I refuse to be awed by the size of a tank bigger than any other tank that ever went afloat to its doom. The people responsible for her, though disconcerted in their hearts by the exposure of that disaster, are giving themselves airs of superiority — priests of an Oracle which has failed, but still must remain the Oracle. The assumption is that they are ministers of progress. But the mere increase of size is not progress. If it were, elephantiasis, which causes a man's legs to become as large as tree-trunks, would be a sort of progress, whereas it is nothing but a very ugly disease. Yet directly this very disconcerting catastrophe happened, the servants of the silly Oracle began to cry: “It's no use! You can't resist progress. The big ship has come to stay.” Well, let her stay on, then, in God's name! But she isn't a servant of progress in any sense. She is the servant of commercialism. For progress, if dealing with the problems of a material world, has some sort of moral aspect — if only, say, that of conquest, which has its distinct value since man is a conquering animal. But bigness is mere exaggeration. The men responsible for these big ships have been moved by considerations of profit

to be made by the questionable means of pandering to an absurd and vulgar demand for banal luxury — the seaside hotel luxury. One even asks oneself whether there was such a demand? It is inconceivable to think that there are people who can't spend five days of their life without a suite of apartments, cafés, bands, and such-like refined delights. I suspect that the public is not so very guilty in this matter. These things were pushed on to it in the usual course of trade competition. If to-morrow you were to take all these luxuries away, the public would still travel. I don't despair of mankind. I believe that if, by some catastrophic miracle all ships of every kind were to disappear off the face of the waters, together with the means of replacing them, there would be found, before the end of the week, men (millionaires, perhaps) cheerfully putting out to sea in bath-tubs for a fresh start. We are all like that. This sort of spirit lives in mankind still uncorrupted by the so-called refinements, the ingenuity of tradesmen, who look always for something new to sell, offers to the public.

Let her stay, — I mean the big ship — since she has come to stay. I only object to the attitude of the people, who, having called her into being and having romanced (to speak politely) about her, assume a detached sort of superiority, goodness only knows why, and raise difficulties in the way of every suggestion — difficulties about boats, about bulkheads, about discipline, about davits, all sorts of difficulties. To most of them the only answer would be: "Where there's a will there's a way" — the most wise of proverbs. But some of these objections are really too stupid for anything. I shall try to give an instance of what I mean.

This Inquiry is admirably conducted. I am not alluding to the lawyers representing "various interests," who are trying to earn their fees by casting all sorts of mean aspersions on the characters of all sorts of people not a bit worse than themselves. It is honest to give value for your wages; and the "bravos" of ancient Venice who kept their stilettos in good order and never failed to deliver the stab bargained for with their employers, considered themselves an honest body of professional men, no doubt. But they don't compel my admiration, whereas the conduct of this Inquiry does. And as it is pretty certain to be attacked, I take this opportunity to deposit here my nickel of appreciation. Well, lately, there came before it witnesses responsible for the designing of the ship. One of them was asked whether it would not be advisable to make each coal-bunker of the ship a water-tight compartment by means of a suitable door.

The answer to such a question should have been, "Certainly," for it is obvious to the simplest intelligence that the more water-tight spaces you provide in a ship (consistently with having her workable) the nearer you approach safety. But instead of admitting the expediency of the suggestion, this witness at once raised an objection as to the possibility of closing tightly the door of a bunker on account of the slope of coal. This with the true expert's attitude of "My dear man, you don't know what you are talking about."

Now would you believe that the objection put forward was absolutely futile? I don't know whether the distinguished President of the Court perceived this. Very likely he did, though I don't suppose he was ever on terms of familiarity with a ship's bunker. But I have. I have been inside; and you may take it that what I say of them is correct. I don't wish to be wearisome to the benevolent reader, but I want to put his finger, so to speak, on the inanity of the objection raised by the expert. A bunker is an enclosed space for holding coals, generally located against the ship's side, and having an opening, a doorway in fact, into the stokehold. Men called trimmers go in there, and by means of implements called slices make the coal run through that opening on to the floor of the stokehold, where it is within reach of the stokers' (firemen's) shovels. This being so, you will easily understand that there is constantly a more or less thick layer of coal generally shaped in a slope lying in that doorway. And the objection of the expert was: that because of this obstruction it would be impossible to close the water-tight door, and therefore that the thing could not be done. And that objection was inane. A water-tight door in a bulkhead may be defined as a metal plate which is made to close a given opening by some mechanical means. And if there were a law of Medes and Persians that a water-tight door should always slide downwards and never otherwise, the objection would be to a great extent valid. But what is there to prevent those doors to be fitted so as to move upwards, or horizontally, or slantwise? In which case they would go through the obstructing layer of coal as easily as a knife goes through butter. Anyone may convince himself of it by experimenting with a light piece of board and a heap of stones anywhere along our roads. Probably the joint of such a door would weep a little — and there is no necessity for its being hermetically tight — but the object of converting bunkers into spaces of safety would be attained. You

may take my word for it that this could be done without any great effort of ingenuity. And that is why I have qualified the expert's objection as inane.

Of course, these doors must not be operated from the bridge because of the risk of trapping the coal-trimmers inside the bunker; but on the signal of all other water-tight doors in the ship being closed (as would be done in case of a collision) they too could be closed on the order of the engineer of the watch, who would see to the safety of the trimmers. If the rent in the ship's side were within the bunker itself, that would become manifest enough without any signal, and the rush of water into the stokehold could be cut off directly the doorplate came into its place. Say a minute at the very outside. Naturally, if the blow of a right-angled collision, for instance, were heavy enough to smash through the inner bulkhead of the bunker, why, there would be then nothing to do but for the stokers and trimmers and everybody in there to clear out of the stoke-room. But that does not mean that the precaution of having water-tight doors to the bunkers is useless, superfluous, or impossible. {Z}.

And talking of stokeholds, firemen, and trimmers, men whose heavy labour has not a single redeeming feature; which is unhealthy, uninspiring, arduous, without the reward of personal pride in it; sheer, hard, brutalising toil, belonging neither to earth nor sea, I greet with joy the advent for marine purposes of the internal combustion engine. The disappearance of the marine boiler will be a real progress, which anybody in sympathy with his kind must welcome. Instead of the unthrifty, unruly, nondescript crowd the boilers require, a crowd of men *in* the ship but not *of* her, we shall have comparatively small crews of disciplined, intelligent workers, able to steer the ship, handle anchors, man boats, and at the same time competent to take their place at a bench as fitters and repairers; the resourceful and skilled seamen — mechanics of the future, the legitimate successors of these seamen — sailors of the past, who had their own kind of skill, hardihood, and tradition, and whose last days it has been my lot to share.

One lives and learns and hears very surprising things — things that one hardly knows how to take, whether seriously or jocularly, how to meet — with indignation or with contempt? Things said by solemn experts, by exalted directors, by glorified ticket-sellers, by officials of all sorts. I suppose that one of the uses of such an inquiry is to give such people enough rope to hang themselves with. And I hope that some of them won't neglect to do so. One of them declared two days ago that there was

“nothing to learn from the catastrophe of the *Titanic*.” That he had been “giving his best consideration” to certain rules for ten years, and had come to the conclusion that nothing ever happened at sea, and that rules and regulations, boats and sailors, were unnecessary; that what was really wrong with the *Titanic* was that she carried too many boats.

No; I am not joking. If you don’t believe me, pray look back through the reports and you will find it all there. I don’t recollect the official’s name, but it ought to have been Pooh-Bah. Well, Pooh-Bah said all these things, and when asked whether he really meant it, intimated his readiness to give the subject more of “his best consideration” — for another ten years or so apparently — but he believed, oh yes! he was certain, that had there been fewer boats there would have been more people saved. Really, when reading the report of this admirably conducted inquiry one isn’t certain at times whether it is an Admirable Inquiry or a felicitous *opéra-bouffe* of the Gilbertian type — with a rather grim subject, to be sure.

Yes, rather grim — but the comic treatment never fails. My readers will remember that in the number of *The English Review* for May, 1912, I quoted the old case of the *Arizona*, and went on from that to prophesy the coming of a new seamanship (in a spirit of irony far removed from fun) at the call of the sublime builders of unsinkable ships. I thought that, as a small boy of my acquaintance says, I was “doing a sarcasm,” and regarded it as a rather wild sort of sarcasm at that. Well, I am blessed (excuse the vulgarity) if a witness has not turned up who seems to have been inspired by the same thought, and evidently longs in his heart for the advent of the new seamanship. He is an expert, of course, and I rather believe he’s the same gentleman who did not see his way to fit water-tight doors to bunkers. With ludicrous earnestness he assured the Commission of his intense belief that had only the *Titanic* struck end-on she would have come into port all right. And in the whole tone of his insistent statement there was suggested the regret that the officer in charge (who is dead now, and mercifully outside the comic scope of this inquiry) was so ill-advised as to try to pass clear of the ice. Thus my sarcastic prophecy, that such a suggestion was sure to turn up, receives an unexpected fulfilment. You will see yet that in deference to the demands of “progress” the theory of the new seamanship will become established: “Whatever you see in front of you — ram it fair. . .” The new seamanship! Looks simple, doesn’t it? But it will be a very exact art indeed. The proper handling of an unsinkable ship, you

see, will demand that she should be made to hit the iceberg very accurately with her nose, because should you perchance scrape the bluff of the bow instead, she may, without ceasing to be as unsinkable as before, find her way to the bottom. I congratulate the future Transatlantic passengers on the new and vigorous sensations in store for them. They shall go bounding across from iceberg to iceberg at twenty-five knots with precision and safety, and a “cheerful bumpy sound” — as the immortal poem has it. It will be a teeth-loosening, exhilarating experience. The decorations will be Louis-Quinze, of course, and the café shall remain open all night. But what about the priceless Sèvres porcelain and the Venetian glass provided for the service of Transatlantic passengers? Well, I am afraid all that will have to be replaced by silver goblets and plates. Nasty, common, cheap silver. But those who *will* go to sea must be prepared to put up with a certain amount of hardship.

And there shall be no boats. Why should there be no boats? Because Pooh-Bah has said that the fewer the boats, the more people can be saved; and therefore with no boats at all, no one need be lost. But even if there was a flaw in this argument, pray look at the other advantages the absence of boats gives you. There can’t be the annoyance of having to go into them in the middle of the night, and the unpleasantness, after saving your life by the skin of your teeth, of being hauled over the coals by irreproachable members of the Bar with hints that you are no better than a cowardly scoundrel and your wife a heartless monster. Less Boats. No boats! Great should be the gratitude of passage-selling Combines to Pooh-Bah; and they ought to cherish his memory when he dies. But no fear of that. His kind never dies. All you have to do, O Combine, is to knock at the door of the Marine Department, look in, and beckon to the first man you see. That will be he, very much at your service — prepared to affirm after “ten years of my best consideration” and a bundle of statistics in hand, that: “There’s no lesson to be learned, and that there is nothing to be done!”

On an earlier day there was another witness before the Court of Inquiry. A mighty official of the White Star Line. The impression of his testimony which the Report gave is of an almost scornful impatience with all this fuss and pother. Boats! Of course we have crowded our decks with them in answer to this ignorant clamour. Mere lumber! How can we handle so many boats with our davits? Your people don’t know the conditions of the problem. We have given these matters our best consideration, and we have



done what we thought reasonable. We have done more than our duty. We are wise, and good, and impeccable. And whoever says otherwise is either ignorant or wicked.

This is the gist of these scornful answers which disclose the psychology of commercial undertakings. It is the same psychology which fifty or so years ago, before Samuel Plimsoll uplifted his voice, sent overloaded ships to sea. “Why shouldn’t we cram in as much cargo as our ships will hold? Look how few, how very few of them get lost, after all.”

Men don’t change. Not very much. And the only answer to be given to this manager who came out, impatient and indignant, from behind the plate-glass windows of his shop to be discovered by this inquiry, and to tell us that he, they, the whole three million (or thirty million, for all I know) capital Organisation for selling passages has considered the problem of boats — the only answer to give him is: that this is not a problem of boats at all. It is the problem of decent behaviour. If you can’t carry or handle so many boats, then don’t cram quite so many people on board. It is as simple as that — this problem of right feeling and right conduct, the real nature of which seems beyond the comprehension of ticket-providers. Don’t sell so many tickets, my virtuous dignitary. After all, men and women (unless considered from a purely commercial point of view) are not exactly the cattle of the Western-ocean trade, that used some twenty years ago to be thrown overboard on an emergency and left to swim round and round before they sank. If you can’t get more boats, then sell less tickets. Don’t drown so many people on the finest, calmest night that was ever known in the North Atlantic — even if you have provided them with a little music to get drowned by. Sell less tickets! That’s the solution of the problem, your Mercantile Highness.

But there would be a cry, “Oh! This requires consideration!” (Ten years of it — eh?) Well, no! This does not require consideration. This is the very first thing to do. At once. Limit the number of people by the boats you can handle. That’s honesty. And then you may go on fumbling for years about these precious davits which are such a stumbling-block to your humanity. These fascinating patent davits. These davits that refuse to do three times as much work as they were meant to do. Oh! The wickedness of these davits!

One of the great discoveries of this admirable Inquiry is the fascination of the davits. All these people positively can’t get away from them. They

shuffle about and groan around their davits. Whereas the obvious thing to do is to eliminate the man-handled davits altogether. Don't you think that with all the mechanical contrivances, with all the generated power on board these ships, it is about time to get rid of the hundred-years-old, man-power appliances? Cranes are what is wanted; low, compact cranes with adjustable heads, one to each set of six or nine boats. And if people tell you of insuperable difficulties, if they tell you of the swing and spin of spanned boats, don't you believe them. The heads of the cranes need not be any higher than the heads of the davits. The lift required would be only a couple of inches. As to the spin, there is a way to prevent that if you have in each boat two men who know what they are about. I have taken up on board a heavy ship's boat, in the open sea (the ship rolling heavily), with a common cargo derrick. And a cargo derrick is very much like a crane; but a crane devised *ad hoc* would be infinitely easier to work. We must remember that the loss of this ship has altered the moral atmosphere. As long as the *Titanic* is remembered, an ugly rush for the boats may be feared in case of some accident. You can't hope to drill into perfect discipline a casual mob of six hundred firemen and waiters, but in a ship like the *Titanic* you can keep on a permanent trustworthy crew of one hundred intelligent seamen and mechanics who would know their stations for abandoning ship and would do the work efficiently. The boats could be lowered with sufficient dispatch. One does not want to let rip one's boats by the run all at the same time. With six boat-cranes, six boats would be simultaneously swung, filled, and got away from the side; and if any sort of order is kept, the ship could be cleared of the passengers in a quite short time. For there must be boats enough for the passengers and crew, whether you increase the number of boats or limit the number of passengers, irrespective of the size of the ship. That is the only honest course. Any other would be rather worse than putting sand in the sugar, for which a tradesman gets fined or imprisoned. Do not let us take a romantic view of the so-called progress. A company selling passages is a tradesman; though from the way these people talk and behave you would think they are benefactors of mankind in some mysterious way, engaged in some lofty and amazing enterprise.

All these boats should have a motor-engine in them. And, of course, the glorified tradesman, the mummified official, the technicians, and all these secretly disconcerted hangers-on to the enormous ticket-selling enterprise, will raise objections to it with every air of superiority. But don't believe

them. Doesn't it strike you as absurd that in this age of mechanical propulsion, of generated power, the boats of such ultra-modern ships are fitted with oars and sails, implements more than three thousand years old? Old as the siege of Troy. Older! . . . And I know what I am talking about. Only six weeks ago I was on the river in an ancient, rough, ship's boat, fitted with a two-cylinder motor-engine of 7.5 h.p. Just a common ship's boat, which the man who owns her uses for taking the workmen and stevedores to and from the ships loading at the buoys off Greenhithe. She would have carried some thirty people. No doubt has carried as many daily for many months. And she can tow a twenty-five ton water barge — which is also part of that man's business.

It was a boisterous day, half a gale of wind against the flood tide. Two fellows managed her. A youngster of seventeen was cox (and a first-rate cox he was too); a fellow in a torn blue jersey, not much older, of the usual riverside type, looked after the engine. I spent an hour and a half in her, running up and down and across that reach. She handled perfectly. With eight or twelve oars out she could not have done anything like as well. These two youngsters at my request kept her stationary for ten minutes, with a touch of engine and helm now and then, within three feet of a big, ugly mooring buoy over which the water broke and the spray flew in sheets, and which would have holed her if she had bumped against it. But she kept her position, it seemed to me, to an inch, without apparently any trouble to these boys. You could not have done it with oars. And her engine did not take up the space of three men, even on the assumption that you would pack people as tight as sardines in a box.

Not the room of three people, I tell you! But no one would want to pack a boat like a sardine-box. There must be room enough to handle the oars. But in that old ship's boat, even if she had been desperately overcrowded, there was power (manageable by two riverside youngsters) to get away quickly from a ship's side (very important for your safety and to make room for other boats), the power to keep her easily head to sea, the power to move at five to seven knots towards a rescuing ship, the power to come safely alongside. And all that in an engine which did not take up the room of three people.

A poor boatman who had to scrape together painfully the few sovereigns of the price had the idea of putting that engine into his boat. But all these designers, directors, managers, constructors, and others whom we may

include in the generic name of Yamsi, never thought of it for the boats of the biggest tank on earth, or rather on sea. And therefore they assume an air of impatient superiority and make objections — however sick at heart they may be. And I hope they are; at least, as much as a grocer who has sold a tin of imperfect salmon which destroyed only half a dozen people. And you know, the tinning of salmon was “progress” as much at least as the building of the *Titanic*. More, in fact. I am not attacking shipowners. I care neither more nor less for Lines, Companies, Combines, and generally for Trade arrayed in purple and fine linen than the Trade cares for me. But I am attacking foolish arrogance, which is fair game; the offensive posture of superiority by which they hide the sense of their guilt, while the echoes of the miserably hypocritical cries along the alley-ways of that ship: “Any more women? Any more women?” linger yet in our ears.

I have been expecting from one or the other of them all bearing the generic name of Yamsi, something, a sign of some sort, some sincere utterance, in the course of this Admirable Inquiry, of manly, of genuine compunction. In vain. All trade talk. Not a whisper — except for the conventional expression of regret at the beginning of the yearly report — which otherwise is a cheerful document. Dividends, you know. The shop is doing well.

And the Admirable Inquiry goes on, punctuated by idiotic laughter, by paid-for cries of indignation from under legal wigs, bringing to light the psychology of various commercial characters too stupid to know that they are giving themselves away — an admirably laborious inquiry into facts that speak, nay shout, for themselves.

I am not a soft-headed, humanitarian faddist. I have been ordered in my time to do dangerous work; I have ordered, others to do dangerous work; I have never ordered a man to do any work I was not prepared to do myself. I attach no exaggerated value to human life. But I know it has a value for which the most generous contributions to the Mansion House and “Heroes” funds cannot pay. And they cannot pay for it, because people, even of the third class (excuse my plain speaking), are not cattle. Death has its sting. If Yamsi’s manager’s head were forcibly held under the water of his bath for some little time, he would soon discover that it has. Some people can only learn from that sort of experience which comes home to their own dear selves.

I am not a sentimentalist; therefore it is not a great consolation to me to see all these people breveted as “Heroes” by the penny and halfpenny Press. It is no consolation at all. In extremity, in the worst extremity, the majority of people, even of common people, will behave decently. It’s a fact of which only the journalists don’t seem aware. Hence their enthusiasm, I suppose. But I, who am not a sentimentalist, think it would have been finer if the band of the *Titanic* had been quietly saved, instead of being drowned while playing — whatever tune they were playing, the poor devils. I would rather they had been saved to support their families than to see their families supported by the magnificent generosity of the subscribers. I am not consoled by the false, written-up, Drury Lane aspects of that event, which is neither drama, nor melodrama, nor tragedy, but the exposure of arrogant folly. There is nothing more heroic in being drowned very much against your will, off a holed, helpless, big tank in which you bought your passage, than in dying of colic caused by the imperfect salmon in the tin you bought from your grocer.

And that’s the truth. The unsentimental truth stripped of the romantic garment the Press has wrapped around this most unnecessary disaster.

### **PROTECTION OF OCEAN LINERS {8} — 1914**

The loss of the *Empress of Ireland* awakens feelings somewhat different from those the sinking of the *Titanic* had called up on two continents. The grief for the lost and the sympathy for the survivors and the bereaved are the same; but there is not, and there cannot be, the same undercurrent of indignation. The good ship that is gone (I remember reading of her launch something like eight years ago) had not been ushered in with beat of drum as the chief wonder of the world of waters. The company who owned her had no agents, authorised or unauthorised, giving boastful interviews about her unsinkability to newspaper reporters ready to swallow any sort of trade statement if only sensational enough for their readers — readers as ignorant as themselves of the nature of all things outside the commonest experience of the man in the street.

No; there was nothing of that in her case. The company was content to have as fine, staunch, seaworthy a ship as the technical knowledge of that time could make her. In fact, she was as safe a ship as nine hundred and ninety-nine ships out of any thousand now afloat upon the sea. No; whatever sorrow one can feel, one does not feel indignation. This was not an accident of a very boastful marine transportation; this was a real casualty

of the sea. The indignation of the New South Wales Premier flashed telegraphically to Canada is perfectly uncalled-for. That statesman, whose sympathy for poor mates and seamen is so suspect to me that I wouldn't take it at fifty per cent. discount, does not seem to know that a British Court of Marine Inquiry, ordinary or extraordinary, is not a contrivance for catching scapegoats. I, who have been seaman, mate and master for twenty years, holding my certificate under the Board of Trade, may safely say that none of us ever felt in danger of unfair treatment from a Court of Inquiry. It is a perfectly impartial tribunal which has never punished seamen for the faults of shipowners — as, indeed, it could not do even if it wanted to. And there is another thing the angry Premier of New South Wales does not know. It is this: that for a ship to float for fifteen minutes after receiving such a blow by a bare stem on her bare side is not so bad.

She took a tremendous list which made the minutes of grace vouchsafed her of not much use for the saving of lives. But for that neither her owners nor her officers are responsible. It would have been wonderful if she had not listed with such a hole in her side. Even the *Aquitania* with such an opening in her outer hull would be bound to take a list. I don't say this with the intention of disparaging this latest "triumph of marine architecture" — to use the consecrated phrase. The *Aquitania* is a magnificent ship. I believe she would bear her people unscathed through ninety-nine per cent. of all possible accidents of the sea. But suppose a collision out on the ocean involving damage as extensive as this one was, and suppose then a gale of wind coming on. Even the *Aquitania* would not be quite seaworthy, for she would not be manageable.

We have been accustoming ourselves to put our trust in material, technical skill, invention, and scientific contrivances to such an extent that we have come at last to believe that with these things we can overcome the immortal gods themselves. Hence when a disaster like this happens, there arises, besides the shock to our humane sentiments, a feeling of irritation, such as the hon. gentleman at the head of the New South Wales Government has discharged in a telegraphic flash upon the world.

But it is no use being angry and trying to hang a threat of penal servitude over the heads of the directors of shipping companies. You can't get the better of the immortal gods by the mere power of material contrivances. There will be neither scapegoats in this matter nor yet penal servitude for anyone. The Directors of the Canadian Pacific Railway Company did not

sell “safety at sea” to the people on board the *Empress of Ireland*. They never in the slightest degree pretended to do so. What they did was to sell them a sea-passage, giving very good value for the money. Nothing more. As long as men will travel on the water, the sea-gods will take their toll. They will catch good seamen napping, or confuse their judgment by arts well known to those who go to sea, or overcome them by the sheer brutality of elemental forces. It seems to me that the resentful sea-gods never do sleep, and are never weary; wherein the seamen who are mere mortals condemned to unending vigilance are no match for them.

And yet it is right that the responsibility should be fixed. It is the fate of men that even in their contests with the immortal gods they must render an account of their conduct. Life at sea is the life in which, simple as it is, you can’t afford to make mistakes.

With whom the mistake lies here, is not for me to say. I see that Sir Thomas Shaughnessy has expressed his opinion of Captain Kendall’s absolute innocence. This statement, premature as it is, does him honour, for I don’t suppose for a moment that the thought of the material issue involved in the verdict of the Court of Inquiry influenced him in the least. I don’t suppose that he is more impressed by the writ of two million dollars nailed (or more likely pasted) to the foremast of the Norwegian than I am, who don’t believe that the *Storstad* is worth two million shillings. This is merely a move of commercial law, and even the whole majesty of the British Empire (so finely invoked by the Sheriff) cannot squeeze more than a very moderate quantity of blood out of a stone. Sir Thomas, in his confident pronouncement, stands loyally by a loyal and distinguished servant of his company.

This thing has to be investigated yet, and it is not proper for me to express my opinion, though I have one, in this place and at this time. But I need not conceal my sympathy with the vehement protestations of Captain Andersen. A charge of neglect and indifference in the matter of saving lives is the cruellest blow that can be aimed at the character of a seaman worthy of the name. On the face of the facts as known up to now the charge does not seem to be true. If upwards of three hundred people have been, as stated in the last reports, saved by the *Storstad*, then that ship must have been at hand and rendering all the assistance in her power.

As to the point which must come up for the decision of the Court of Inquiry, it is as fine as a hair. The two ships saw each other plainly enough

before the fog closed on them. No one can question Captain Kendall's prudence. He has been as prudent as ever he could be. There is not a shadow of doubt as to that.

But there is this question: Accepting the position of the two ships when they saw each other as correctly described in the very latest newspaper reports, it seems clear that it was the *Empress of Ireland's* duty to keep clear of the collier, and what the Court will have to decide is whether the stopping of the liner was, under the circumstances, the best way of keeping her clear of the other ship, which had the right to proceed cautiously on an unchanged course.

This, reduced to its simplest expression, is the question which the Court will have to decide.

And now, apart from all problems of manoeuvring, of rules of the road, of the judgment of the men in command, away from their possible errors and from the points the Court will have to decide, if we ask ourselves what it was that was needed to avert this disaster costing so many lives, spreading so much sorrow, and to a certain point shocking the public conscience — if we ask that question, what is the answer to be?

I hardly dare set it down. Yes; what was it that was needed, what ingenious combinations of ship-building, what transverse bulkheads, what skill, what genius — how much expense in money and trained thinking, what learned contriving, to avert that disaster?

To save that ship, all these lives, so much anguish for the dying, and so much grief for the bereaved, all that was needed in this particular case in the way of science, money, ingenuity, and seamanship was a man, and a cork-fender.

Yes; a man, a quartermaster, an able seaman that would know how to jump to an order and was not an excitable fool. In my time at sea there was no lack of men in British ships who could jump to an order and were not excitable fools. As to the so-called cork-fender, it is a sort of soft balloon made from a net of thick rope rather more than a foot in diameter. It is such a long time since I have indented for cork-fenders that I don't remember how much these things cost apiece. One of them, hung judiciously over the side at the end of its lanyard by a man who knew what he was about, might perhaps have saved from destruction the ship and upwards of a thousand lives.



Two men with a heavy rope-fender would have been better, but even the other one might have made all the difference between a very damaging accident and downright disaster. By the time the cork-fender had been squeezed between the liner's side and the bluff of the *Storstad's* bow, the effect of the latter's reversed propeller would have been produced, and the ships would have come apart with no more damage than bulged and started plates. Wasn't there lying about on that liner's bridge, fitted with all sorts of scientific contrivances, a couple of simple and effective cork-fenders — or on board of that Norwegian either? There must have been, since one ship was just out of a dock or harbour and the other just arriving. That is the time, if ever, when cork-fenders are lying about a ship's decks. And there was plenty of time to use them, and exactly in the conditions in which such fenders are effectively used. The water was as smooth as in any dock; one ship was motionless, the other just moving at what may be called dock-speed when entering, leaving, or shifting berths; and from the moment the collision was seen to be unavoidable till the actual contact a whole minute elapsed. A minute, — an age under the circumstances. And no one thought of the homely expedient of dropping a simple, unpretending rope-fender between the destructive stern and the defenceless side!

I appeal confidently to all the seamen in the still United Kingdom, from his Majesty the King (who has been really at sea) to the youngest intelligent A.B. in any ship that will dock next tide in the ports of this realm, whether there was not a chance there. I have followed the sea for more than twenty years; I have seen collisions; I have been involved in a collision myself; and I do believe that in the case under consideration this little thing would have made all that enormous difference — the difference between considerable damage and an appalling disaster.

Many letters have been written to the Press on the subject of collisions. I have seen some. They contain many suggestions, valuable and otherwise; but there is only one which hits the nail on the head. It is a letter to the *Times* from a retired Captain of the Royal Navy. It is printed in small type, but it deserved to be printed in letters of gold and crimson. The writer suggests that all steamers should be obliged by law to carry hung over their stern what we at sea call a "pudding."

This solution of the problem is as wonderful in its simplicity as the celebrated trick of Columbus's egg, and infinitely more useful to mankind. A "pudding" is a thing something like a bolster of stout rope-net stuffed

with old junk, but thicker in the middle than at the ends. It can be seen on almost every tug working in our docks. It is, in fact, a fixed rope-fender always in a position where presumably it would do most good. Had the *Storstad* carried such a “pudding” proportionate to her size (say, two feet diameter in the thickest part) across her stern, and hung above the level of her hawse-pipes, there would have been an accident certainly, and some repair-work for the nearest ship-yard, but there would have been no loss of life to deplore.

It seems almost too simple to be true, but I assure you that the statement is as true as anything can be. We shall see whether the lesson will be taken to heart. We shall see. There is a Commission of learned men sitting to consider the subject of saving life at sea. They are discussing bulkheads, boats, davits, manning, navigation, but I am willing to bet that not one of them has thought of the humble “pudding.” They can make what rules they like. We shall see if, with that disaster calling aloud to them, they will make the rule that every steamship should carry a permanent fender across her stern, from two to four feet in diameter in its thickest part in proportion to the size of the ship. But perhaps they may think the thing too rough and unsightly for this scientific and æsthetic age. It certainly won’t look very pretty but I make bold to say it will save more lives at sea than any amount of the Marconi installations which are being forced on the shipowners on that very ground — the safety of lives at sea.

We shall see!

\* \* \* \* \*

To the Editor of the *Daily Express*.

SIR,

As I fully expected, this morning’s post brought me not a few letters on the subject of that article of mine in the *Illustrated London News*. And they are very much what I expected them to be.

I shall address my reply to Captain Littlehales, since obviously he can speak with authority, and speaks in his own name, not under a pseudonym. And also for the reason that it is no use talking to men who tell you to shut your head for a confounded fool. They are not likely to listen to you.

But if there be in Liverpool anybody not too angry to listen, I want to assure him or them that my exclamatory line, “Was there no one on board either of these ships to think of dropping a fender — etc.,” was not uttered

in the spirit of blame for anyone. I would not dream of blaming a seaman for doing or omitting to do anything a person sitting in a perfectly safe and unsinkable study may think of. All my sympathy goes to the two captains; much the greater share of it to Captain Kendall, who has lost his ship and whose load of responsibility was so much heavier! I may not know a great deal, but I know how anxious and perplexing are those nearly end-on approaches, so infinitely more trying to the men in charge than a frank right-angle crossing.

I may begin by reminding Captain Littlehales that I, as well as himself, have had to form my opinion, or rather my vision, of the accident, from printed statements, of which many must have been loose and inexact and none could have been minutely circumstantial. I have read the reports of the *Times* and the *Daily Telegraph*, and no others. What stands in the columns of these papers is responsible for my conclusion — or perhaps for the state of my feelings when I wrote the *Illustrated London News* article.

From these sober and unsensational reports, I derived the impression that this collision was a collision of the slowest sort. I take it, of course, that both the men in charge speak the strictest truth as to preliminary facts. We know that the *Empress of Ireland* was for a time lying motionless. And if the captain of the *Storstad* stopped his engines directly the fog came on (as he says he did), then taking into account the adverse current of the river, the *Storstad*, by the time the two ships sighted each other again, must have been barely moving *over the ground*. The “over the ground” speed is the only one that matters in this discussion. In fact, I represented her to myself as just creeping on ahead — no more. This, I contend, is an imaginative view (and we can form no other) not utterly absurd for a seaman to adopt.

So much for the imaginative view of the sad occurrence which caused me to speak of the fender, and be chided for it in unmeasured terms. Not by Captain Littlehales, however, and I wish to reply to what he says with all possible deference. His illustration borrowed from boxing is very apt, and in a certain sense makes for my contention. Yes. A blow delivered with a boxing-glove will draw blood or knock a man out; but it would not crush in his nose flat or break his jaw for him — at least, not always. And this is exactly my point.

Twice in my sea life I have had occasion to be impressed by the preserving effect of a fender. Once I was myself the man who dropped it over. Not because I was so very clever or smart, but simply because I

happened to be at hand. And I agree with Captain Littlehales that to see a steamer's stern coming at you at the rate of only two knots is a staggering experience. The thing seems to have power enough behind it to cut half through the terrestrial globe.

And perhaps Captain Littlehales is right? It may be that I am mistaken in my appreciation of circumstances and possibilities in this case — or in any such case. Perhaps what was really wanted there was an extraordinary man and an extraordinary fender. I care nothing if possibly my deep feeling has betrayed me into something which some people call absurdity.

Absurd was the word applied to the proposal for carrying “enough boats for all” on board the big liners. And my absurdity can affect no lives, break no bones — need make no one angry. Why should I care, then, as long as out of the discussion of my absurdity there will emerge the acceptance of the suggestion of Captain F. Papillon, R.N., for the universal and compulsory fitting of very heavy collision fenders on the stems of all mechanically propelled ships?

An extraordinary man we cannot always get from heaven on order, but an extraordinary fender that will do its work is well within the power of a committee of old boatswains to plan out, make, and place in position. I beg to ask, not in a provocative spirit, but simply as to a matter of fact which he is better qualified to judge than I am — Will Captain Littlehales affirm that if the *Storstad* had carried, slung securely across the stem, even nothing thicker than a single bale of wool (an ordinary, hand-pressed, Australian wool-bale), it would have made no difference?

If scientific men can invent an air cushion, a gas cushion, or even an electricity cushion (with wires or without), to fit neatly round the stems and bows of ships, then let them go to work, in God's name and produce another “marvel of science” without loss of time. For something like this has long been due — too long for the credit of that part of mankind which is not absurd, and in which I include, among others, such people as marine underwriters, for instance.

Meanwhile, turning to materials I am familiar with, I would put my trust in canvas, lots of big rope, and in large, very large quantities of old junk.

It sounds awfully primitive, but if it will mitigate the mischief in only fifty per cent. of cases, is it not well worth trying? Most collisions occur at slow speeds, and it ought to be remembered that in case of a big liner's loss,

involving many lives, she is generally sunk by a ship much smaller than herself.

JOSEPH CONRAD.

## A FRIENDLY PLACE

Eighteen years have passed since I last set foot in the London Sailors' Home. I was not staying there then; I had gone in to try to find a man I wanted to see. He was one of those able seamen who, in a watch, are a perfect blessing to a young officer. I could perhaps remember here and there among the shadows of my sea-life a more daring man, or a more agile man, or a man more expert in some special branch of his calling — such as wire splicing, for instance; but for all-round competence, he was unequalled. As character he was sterling stuff. His name was Anderson. He had a fine, quiet face, kindly eyes, and a voice which matched that something attractive in the whole man. Though he looked yet in the prime of life, shoulders, chest, limbs untouched by decay, and though his hair and moustache were only iron-grey, he was on board ship generally called Old Andy by his fellows. He accepted the name with some complacency.

I made my enquiry at the highly-glazed entry office. The clerk on duty opened an enormous ledger, and after running his finger down a page, informed me that Anderson had gone to sea a week before, in a ship bound round the Horn. Then, smiling at me, he added: "Old Andy. We know him well, here. What a nice fellow!"

I, who knew what a "good man," in a sailor sense, he was, assented without reserve. Heaven only knows when, if ever, he came back from that voyage, to the Sailors' Home of which he was a faithful client.

I went out glad to know he was safely at sea, but sorry not to have seen him; though, indeed, if I had, we would not have exchanged more than a score of words, perhaps. He was not a talkative man, Old Andy, whose affectionate ship-name clung to him even in that Sailors' Home, where the staff understood and liked the sailors (those men without a home) and did its duty by them with an unobtrusive tact, with a patient and humorous sense of their idiosyncrasies, to which I hasten to testify now, when the very existence of that institution is menaced after so many years of most useful work.

Walking away from it on that day eighteen years ago, I was far from thinking it was for the last time. Great changes have come since, over land and sea; and if I were to seek somebody who knew Old Andy it would be (of all people in the world) Mr. John Galsworthy. For Mr. John Galsworthy,

Andy, and myself have been shipmates together in our different stations, for some forty days in the Indian Ocean in the early nineties. And, but for us two, Old Andy's very memory would be gone from this changing earth.

Yes, things have changed — the very sky, the atmosphere, the light of judgment which falls on the labours of men, either splendid or obscure. Having been asked to say a word to the public on behalf of the Sailors' Home, I felt immensely flattered — and troubled. Flattered to have been thought of in that connection; troubled to find myself in touch again with that past so deeply rooted in my heart. And the illusion of nearness is so great while I trace these lines that I feel as if I were speaking in the name of that worthy Sailor-Shade of Old Andy, whose faithfully hard life seems to my vision a thing of yesterday.

\* \* \* \* \*

But though the past keeps firm hold on one, yet one feels with the same warmth that the men and the institutions of to-day have their merit and their claims. Others will know how to set forth before the public the merit of the Sailors' Home in the eloquent terms of hard facts and some few figures. For myself, I can only bring a personal note, give a glimpse of the human side of the good work for sailors ashore, carried on through so many decades with a perfect understanding of the end in view. I have been in touch with the Sailors' Home for sixteen years of my life, off and on; I have seen the changes in the staff and I have observed the subtle alterations in the physiognomy of that stream of sailors passing through it, in from the sea and out again to sea, between the years 1878 and 1894. I have listened to the talk on the decks of ships in all latitudes, when its name would turn up frequently, and if I had to characterise its good work in one sentence, I would say that, for seamen, the Well Street Home was a friendly place.

It was essentially just that; quietly, unobtrusively, with a regard for the independence of the men who sought its shelter ashore, and with no ulterior aims behind that effective friendliness. No small merit this. And its claim on the generosity of the public is derived from a long record of valuable public service. Since we are all agreed that the men of the merchant service are a national asset worthy of care and sympathy, the public could express this sympathy no better than by enabling the Sailors' Home, so useful in the past, to continue its friendly offices to the seamen of future generations.

## *LAST ESSAYS*



*Conrad's study, Museum of Canterbury*



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# INTRODUCTION

Most of the contents of this volume were written subsequent to the publication of "Notes on Life and Letters" in 1921 and these two books together may be said to contain practically all Conrad's miscellaneous writings. There are, it is true, a few short prefaces and some interesting letters to newspapers which might have been included here, but they are of no particular importance, and twenty separate pieces gathered between these covers are indeed the last essays of Joseph Conrad. But there remains a chance that some of his early essays and reviews may still rest undiscovered in the files of old newspapers and weeklies. Conrad had a very uncertain memory for his own work, and I recall that when the material for "Notes on Life and Letters" was being collected, he was frequently quite vague as to what he had written and where it had appeared. In proof of this, it may be mentioned that the essay entitled "John Galsworthy" in this volume was omitted from the previous one only through Conrad's forgetfulness of its existence. Therefore, as I say, discoveries may yet be made.

In the latter years of his life Conrad occasionally found relief from the toil and exhaustion of more creative work in writing of reminiscent essays, and some of these rank, decidedly, among his finest efforts in this direction. "Last Essays" is just as remarkable a book as "Notes on Life and Letters"; it contains passages of extraordinary charm, serenity, and eloquence. And particular care has been taken to avoid any respect of absolute completeness, as though a dead author's desk had been ransacked for every fragment: all the articles included in this volume have been included for very definite reasons. Nothing has been printed merely for the purpose of adding to the bulk.

For some time Conrad had had the idea of writing a pendent volume to "The Mirror of the Sea," and the unfinished article, "Legends," on which he was at work the day before he died, was, he told me, to have formed part of such a book. And I suspect that "The Torrens," "Christmas Day at Sea," "Ocean Travel," "Outside Literature." and part, at least, of "Geography and Some Explorers,"

would also have been incorporated in this book, and therefore I have placed them all together at the beginning of the volume. They form, as it were, the shadowy nucleus of projected work.

“Geography and Some Explorers,” the second longest essay in this collection, was written as a general introduction to a serial work called “Countries of the World.” It appeared as “The Romance of Travel” in the first number, February, 1924, and was reprinted under its proper title in *The National Geographic Magazine*, March, 1924. In this fascinating essay, Conrad, after discussing the feats of some of the early navigators and explorers, gives a memorable account of a passage he made in 1888 (when in command of the *Otago*) through the Torres Straits on a voyage from Sydney to Mauritius.

“The *Torrens*: A Personal Tribute,” was published in *The Blue Peter*, October, 1923. In the early ‘nineties Conrad had been chief officer of this ship — he joined her on November 2, 1891, and left her on October 15, 1893 — and he made two journeys from England to Australia and back in that capacity. For her he always retained a warm affection, and when, in the September *Blue Peter* of 1923, there was issued a coloured illustration of the *Torrens*, he willingly consented to give a personal remembrance of her in the next number. The last words, in which he describes her end upon the shores of the Mediterranean, possess a rare and pensive beauty, which I recover in the following paragraphs:

“But in the end her body of iron and wood, so fair to look upon, had to be broken up — I hope with fitting reverence; and as I sit here, thirty years, almost to a day, since I last set eyes on her, I love to think that her perfect form found a merciful end on shores of the Sunlit Sea of my boyhood’s dreams, and that her fine spirit has returned to dwell in the regions of the great winds, the inspirers and companions of her swift, renowned, sea-tossed life which I, too, have been permitted to share for a little while.”

“Christmas Day at Sea” was published in the *London Daily Mail* on December 24, 1923. It was concerned largely with an episode on one Christmas Day during Conrad’s first voyage to Australia in the *Duke of Sutherland* in 1879, where he served as an A.B.

“Ocean Travel” made its first appearance in the *London Evening News* of May 15, 1923, where it was named “My Hotel in Mid-Atlantic.” It was written during Conrad’s voyage to America in the *Tuscania* in the spring of that year, and was posted to me the moment he arrived in New York. It

compares the old and the new life at sea, and needless to say, the vote of affection is given for the old.

“Outside Literature,” short essay dealing with the subject of notices to mariners, appeared under the title “Notices to Mariners” in the Manchester Guardian of December 4, 1922, and under its proper title in the American Bookman of February, 1923.

“Legends,” as I have mentioned, was the last article Conrad ever wrote; it was left unfinished upon his desk. It tells, with a strain of melancholy, of the breed of seamen who have disappeared with the disappearance of sailing ships, and was printed, less than a fortnight after Conrad’s death, in the London Daily Mail of August 15, 1924.

Next follow two essays which have the war at sea as background. “The Unlighted Coast” recalls Conrad’s experiences in the North Sea during his ten days’ cruise in the Ready in 1917 — a full account of this cruise is to be found in Captain Sutherland’s “At Sea with Joseph Conrad” — and was written for the Admiralty. For some reason or other they never used it and it first saw the light in the London Times of August 18, 1925.

“The Dover Patrol,” written at the request of the late Lord Northcliffe, was published in the London Times on July 27, 1921, the day on which the Prince of Wales unveiled the Dover Patrol Memorial. It is glowing tribute to “the physical endurance, the inborn seamanship, the matter-of-fact, industrious, indefatigable enthusiasm” of the men who guarded unsleepingly and at extreme hazard the entrance to the Channel.

The “Memorandum on the Scheme for Fitting Out a Sailing Ship” is here first printed. Written in 1919 for the Holt Steamship Company, who had proposed to fit out a sailing ship for the training of boys destined for the Mercantile Marine, it is an example of Conrad’s intense and practical interest in such subjects. It is exactly what it purports to be — a memorandum, precise, technical, full of

his accumulated experience and long-pondered ideas. Nothing came of the scheme: as Mr. Lawrence Holt wrote to me, it was “abandoned owing to the depression of trade which set in soon after my conversation with Mr. Conrad.” The document from then to now has been in Mr. Holt’s possession, and cordial thanks are due to him for his permission to use it here.

“The Loss of the Daigonaf is a further example of Conrad’s interest in questions of seamanship. Indeed, I print it solely for that reason, because, in

itself, it but refers to the contents of an article from another pen. It appeared, as a letter to the editor, in the London Mercury of December, 1921, and was called forth by a paper in the September issue entitled "A True Story: Log and Record of the Wreck of the Snip Dalgonaro\ Liverpool, bound from Callao to Taltal." This paper described the wreck of the barque Loire, which happened in October, 1913; and Conrad's letter, while correcting some obvious mistakes in the narrative as printed, is a testimony to the gallantry and efficiency of the officers and crew.

The essay called "Travel" was written, I am proud to think, out of friendship for myself and formed the preface to a book by me, "Into the East: Notes on Burma and Malaya," 1923. The effort to finish "The Rover" held up the writing of this preface for about a year, but it seems to me that in its evocation of the great travellers of old and of times that have gone for ever it reaches the highest beauty and distinction. Let me quote one paragraph:

"And those things, which stand as if imperishable in the pages of old books of travel, are all blown away; have vanished as utterly as the smoke of the travellers' camp fires in the icy night air of the Gobi Desert, as the smell of incense burned in the temples of strange gods, as the voices of Asiatic statesmen speculating with the cruel wisdom of past ages on matters of peace and war."

"Stephen Crane," the longest and most elaborate essay in the book, was written as an introduction to Mr. Thomas Beer's "Stephen Crane, a Study in American Letters," 1923. Conrad, as is generally known, was a close friend of Crane during the last years of that meteoric life, when Crane was frequently a neighbour of his in southern England. In all, he wrote three essays on Crane and his

work. One appeared in "Notes on Life and Letters," two are printed in this volume, and all breathe a spirit of affectionate admiration. This essay is a study in biographical sidelights and is undoubtedly the most personal and the most delightful of all reminiscences of Crane.

The short essay, "His War Book," which follows, was composed specifically as a preface to a new edition of Crane's best-known work, "The Red Badge of Courage" — the new edition came out at last in 1925 — and it gives clear indication of Conrad's feeling for the artist who could observe so truly and create with such economy.

“John Galsworthy,” as I have said, was only accidentally omitted from the previous volume of Conrad’s essays. It was composed as a review of “A Man of Property,” contained in a wider study of the author, and was published in the London Outlook on March 31, 1906, under the title of “A Middle Class Family.” A few years before he died, Conrad rectified, as far as he could, his oversight by privately printing about fifty copies of this essay, and he would certainly have included it in any future volume of essays.

The next piece, “A Glance at Two Books,” dealing with Galsworthy’s “The Island Pharisees” and Hudson’s “Green Mansions,” dates from even earlier and was done in 1904. Written obviously in answer to an editorial request, it was, for reasons unknown, never used, and the typescript, being found among Conrad’s papers, was first printed in T.P.’s and Cassell’s Weekly of August 1, 1925.

A “Preface to his Shorter Tales” was written at the instigation of his American publishers to introduce “The Shorter Tales of Joseph Conrad,” and the essay, like the selection, has never appeared in England. It was one of his last completed pieces — the volume was issued after his death in 1924 — and it throws a reminiscent glance upon the ideas that animated his work and upon his writing life.

The little not, “Cookery” charming in its playful fancy, was a send-off to his wife’s book, “A Handbook of Cookery for a Small House,” 1922. I include it here for the sake of its association and for the unique quality of its tone.

The next two pieces, both of them letters, give glimpses of

Conrad’s abiding interest in international questions and the affairs of Europe. He was always a student of foreign politics, a student fortified by an impressive historical sense and by a great knowledge of continental problems throughout the centuries and these two letters, with their combined eloquence and hold upon reality, throw light upon an aspect of Conrad’s mind of which few people are aware.

The first letter, an appeal for a free Constantinople under the protection of the Powers, was published in the London Times of November 7, 1912, when the Balkan States were at war with Turkey and their armies already within striking distance of her capital.

The second letter, written evidently a few days later to an untraceable correspondent — a typescript only was found — who had criticized his

printed observations, is an amplification of the previous letter.

Finally comes "The Congo Diary," a reprint of the diary kept by Conrad in the Congo in 1890, which was first published in *The Blue Peter*; October, 1925, and then in *The Yale Review*, January, 1926. This diary calls for its own introduction and a series of explanatory notes, and these will be found with it at the end of the book.

Here, then, are the twenty pieces which compose this volume of "Last Essays." They show as clearly as did the contents of "Notes on Life and Letters" the rich diversity of Conrad's mind, his powers of cogent argument, of found memory, and of noble expression. His mastery over his chosen material never flagged and these essays are a last witness to his consummate gifts.

RICHARD CURLE.

# GEOGRAPHY AND SOME EXPLORERS

It is safe to say that for the majority of mankind the superiority of geography over geometry lies in the appeal of its figures. It may be an effect of the incorrigible frivolity inherent in human nature, but most of us will agree that a map is more fascinating to look at than a figure in a treatise on conic sections — at any rate for the simple minds which are all the equipment of the majority of the dwellers on this earth.

No doubt a trigonometrical survey may be a romantic undertaking, striding over deserts and leaping over valleys never before trodden by the foot of civilized man; but its accurate operations can never have for us the fascination of the first hazardous steps of a venturesome, often lonely, explorer jotting down by the light of his camp fire the thoughts, the impressions, and the toil of his day.

For a long time yet a few suggestive words grappling with things seen will have the advantage over a long array of precise, no doubt interesting, and even profitable figures. The earth is a stage, and though it may be an advantage, even to the right comprehension of the play, to know its exact configuration, it is the drama of human endeavour that will be the thing, with a ruling passion expressed by outward action marching perhaps blindly to success or failure, which themselves are often undistinguishable from each other at first.

Of all the sciences, geography finds its origin in action, and what is more, in adventurous action of the kind that appeals to sedentary people who like to dream of arduous adventure in the manner of prisoners dreaming behind bars of all the hardships and hazards of liberty dear to the heart of man.

Descriptive geography, like any other kind of science, has been built on the experience of certain phenomena and on experiments prompted by that unappeasable curiosity of men which their intelligence has elevated into a quite respectable passion for acquiring knowledge. Like other sciences it has fought its way to truth through a long errors. It has suffered from the love of the marvellous, from our credulity, from rash and unwarrantable assumptions, from the play of unbridled fancy.

Geography had its phase of circumstantially extravagant speculation which had nothing to do with the pursuit of truth, but has given us a curious



glimpse of the mediaeval mind playing in its ponderous childish way with the problems of our earth's shape, its size, its character, its products, its inhabitants. Cartography was almost as pictorial then as are some modern newspapers. It crowded its map with pictures of strange pageants, strange trees, strange beasts, drawn with amazing precision in the midst of theoretically conceived continents. It delineated imaginary kingdoms of Monomotapa and of Prester John, the regions infested by lions or haunted by unicorns, inhabited by men with reversed feet, or eyes in the middle of their breasts.

All this might have been amusing if the mediaeval gravity in the absurd had not been in itself a wearisome thing. But what of that! Has not the key science of modern chemistry passed through its dishonest phase of Alchemy (a portentous development of the confidence trick), and our knowledge of the starry sky been arrived at through the superstitious idealism of Astrology looking for men's fate in the depths of the infinite? Mere megalomania on a colossal scale. Yet, solemn fooling for solemn fooling of the scientific order, I prefer the kind that does not lay itself out to thrive on the fears and the cupidities of men.

From that point of view geography is the most blameless of sciences. Its fabulous phase never aimed at cheating simple mortals (who are a multitude) out of their peace of mind or their money. At the most it has enticed some of them away from their homes; to death may be, now and then to a little disputed glory, not seldom to contumely, never to high fortune. The greatest of them all, who has presented modern geography with a new world to work upon, was at one time loaded with chains and thrown into prison. Columbus remains a pathetic figure, not a sufferer in the cause of geography, but a victim of the imperfections of jealous human hearts, accepting his fate with resignation. Among explorers he appears lofty in his troubles and like a man of a kingly nature. His contribution to the knowledge of the earth was certainly royal. And if the discovery of America was the occasion of the greatest

outburst of reckless cruelty and greed known to history we may say this at least for it, that the gold of Mexico and Peru, unlike the gold of alchemists, was really there, palpable, yet, as ever, the most elusive of the Fata Morgana that lure men away from their homes, as a moment of reflection will convince any one. For nothing is more certain than that there

will never be enough gold to go round, as the Conquistadores found out by experience.

I suppose it is not very charitable of me, but I must say that to this day I feel a malicious pleasure at the many disappointments of those pertinacious searchers for El Dorado who climbed mountains, pushed through forests, swam rivers, floundered in bogs, without giving a single thought to the science of geography. Not for them the serene joys of scientific research, but infinite toil, in hunger, thirst: sickness, battle; with broken heads, unseemly squabbles, and empty pockets in the end. I cannot help thinking it served them right. It is an ugly tale, which has not much to do with the service of geography. The geographical knowledge of our day is of the kind that would have been beyond the conception of the hardy followers of Cortes and Pizarro; and of that most estimable of Conquerors who was called Cabeza de Vaca, who was high-minded and dealt humanely with the heathen nations whose territories he traversed in search of one more El Dorado. It is said they loved him greatly, but now the very memory of those nations is gone from the earth, while their territories, which they could not take with them, are being traversed many times every twenty-four hours by the trains of the Southern Pacific railroad.

The discovery of the New World marks the end of the fabulous geography, and it must be owned that the history of the Conquest contains at least one great moment — I mean a geographically great moment — when Vasco Nunez de Balboa, while crossing the Isthmus of Panama, set his eyes for the first time upon the ocean, the immensity of which he did not suspect, and which in his elation he named the Pacific. It is anything but that; but the privileged Conquistador cannot be blamed for surrendering to his first impression.

The Gulf of Panama, which is what he really saw with that first glance, is one of the calmest spots on the waters of the globe. Too calm. The old navigators dreaded it as a dangerous region where one might be caught and lie becalmed for weeks with one's crew dying slowly of thirst under a cloudless sky. The worst of fates, this, to feel yourself die in a long and helpless agony. How much preferable a region of storms where man and ship can at least put up a fight and remain defiant almost to the last.

I must not be understood to mean that a tempest at sea is a delightful experience, but I would rather face the fiercest tempest than a gulf pacific even to deadliness, a prison-house for incautious caravels and a place of

torture for their crews. But Balboa was charmed with its serene aspect. He did not know where he was. He probably thought himself within a stone's throw, as it were, of the Indies and Cathay. Or did he perhaps, like a man touched with grace, have a moment of exalted vision, the awed feeling that what he was looking at was an abyss of waters comparable in its extent to the view of the unfathomable firmament, and sown all over with groups of islands resembling the constellations of the sky?

But whatever spiritual glimpse of the truth he might have had, Balboa could not possibly know that this great moment of his life had added suddenly thousands of miles to the circumference of the globe, had opened an immense theatre for the human drama of adventure and exploration, a field for the missionary labours of, mainly, Protestant churches, and spread an enormous canvas on which armchair geographers could paint the most fanciful variants of their pet theory of a great southern continent.

I will not quarrel with the post-Columbian cartographers for their wild but, upon the whole, interesting inventions. The provocation to let one's self go was considerable. Geography militant, which had succeeded the geography fabulous, did not seem able to accept the idea that there was much more water than land on this globe. Nothing could satisfy their sense of the fitness of things but an enormous extent of solid earth which they placed in that region of the South where, as a matter of fact, the great white-crested seas of stormy latitudes will be free to chase each other all round the globe to the end of time. I suppose their landsmen's temperament stood in the

way of their recognition that the world of geography, so far as the apportioning of space goes, seems to have been planned mostly for the convenience of fishes.

What is surprising to me is that the seaman of the time should have really believed that the large continents to the north of the Equator demanded, as a matter of good art or else of sound science, to be balanced by corresponding masses of land in the southern hemisphere. They were simple souls. The chorus of armchair people all singing the same tune made them blind to the many plain signs of a great open sea. Every bit of coast-line discovered, every mountain-top glimpsed in the distance, had to be dragged loyally into the scheme of the *Terra Australis Incognita*.

Even Tasman, the best seaman of them all before James Cook, the most, accomplished of seventeenth-century explorers and navigators that went

forth to settle the geography of the Pacific — even Tasman, after coming unexpectedly upon the North Island of New Zealand, and lingering long enough there to chart roughly a bit of the coast and lose a boat's crew in a sudden affray with the Maoris, seemed to take it for granted that this was the western limit of an enormous continent extending away towards the point of South America.

Mighty is the power of theory, especially if based on such a common-sense notion as the balance of continents. And it must be remembered that it is difficult for us now to realize not only the navigational dangers of unknown seas, but the awful geographical incertitudes of the first explorers in that new world of waters.

Tasman's journal, which was published not so very long ago, gives us some idea of their perplexing difficulties. The early navigators had no means of ascertaining their exact position on the globe. They could calculate their latitude, but the problem of longitude was a matter which bewildered their minds and often falsified their judgment. It had to be a matter of pure guesswork. Tasman and his officers, when they met on board the *Heemskirk*; anchored in Murderers' Bay, to consider their further course in the light of their instructions, did not know where any of the problematic places named in their instructions were, neither did they know where they themselves were.

Tasman might have sailed north or east, but in the end he decided to sail between the two, and, circling about, returned to Batavia, where he was received coldly by his employers, the honourable governor-general and the council in Batavia. Their final judgment was that Abel Tasman was a skilful navigator, but that he had himself "remiss" in his investigations, and that he had been guilty of leaving certain problems unsolved.

We are told that Tasman did not expect this armchair criticism; and indeed, even now, it seems surprising to an unprejudiced mind. It was the voyage during which, among other things, Tasman discovered the island by which his names lives on the charts, took first contact with New Zealand (which was not seen again till 130 years afterwards), sailed over many thousands of miles of uncharted seas, bringing back with him a journal which was of much value afterwards for his exploring successors.

It may be he was hurt by the verdict of the honourable council, but he does not seem to have been cast down by it, for it appears that shortly afterwards he asked for a rise of salary — and, what is still more

significant, he got it. He was obviously a valuable servant, but I am sorry to say that this character as a man not of the kind to cause governors and councils to treat him with particular consideration. Except in professional achievement he is not comparable to Captain Cook, a humble son of the soil like himself, but a modest man of genius, the familiar associate of the most learned in the land, medallist of the Royal Society, and a captain in the Royal Navy.

But there was a taint of an unscrupulous adventurer in Tasman. It is certain that at various times his patron, the Governor Anthony van Diemen, and the honourable council in Batavia, had employed him in some shady transactions of their own, connected with the Japan trade. There is also no doubt that once he had, on his own responsibility, kidnapped an influential Chinaman who stood in the way of some business negotiation Tasman was conducting with the Sultan of Achin.

The Chinaman may have been a worthless person, but one wonders what happened to him in the end; and, in any case, the proceeding is open to criticism. Then in his old age he got into some disreputable scrape which caused the congregation with which he worshipped to ask him to resign his membership. Even the honourable council was startled, and dismissed him from his employment, though characteristically enough not actually from their service. This action of the council fixes the character of the man better than any scandalous story. He was valuable, but compromising.

All these regrettable details came to my knowledge quite recently in a very amusing and interesting book, but I must confess that my early admiration for Tasman as one of the early fathers of militant geography has not been affected very much by it. Remiss or not, he had in the course of his voyages mapped 8,000 miles of an island which by common consent is called now a continent, a geologically very old continent indeed, but which is now the home of a very young commonwealth with all the possibilities of material and intellectual splendour still hidden in its future.

I like to think that in that portion of the Elysian Fields set apart for great navigators, James Cook would not refuse to acknowledge the civilities of Abel Tasman, a fellow seaman who had first reported the existence of New Zealand in the perplexed, bewildered way of those times, 130 years before Captain Cook on his second voyage laid for ever the ghost of the Terra

Australis Incognita and added New Zealand to the scientific domain of the geography triumphant of our day.

No shade of remissness nor doubtful motive rests upon the achievements of Captain Cook, who came out of a labourer's cottage to take his place at the head of the masters of maritime exploration who worked at the great geographical problem of the Pacific. Endeavour was the name of the ship which carried him on his first voyage, and it was also the watchword of his professional life. Resolution was the name of the ship he commanded himself on his second expedition, and it was the determining quality of his soul. I will not say that it was the greatest, because he had all the other manly qualities of a great man.

The voyages of the early explorers were prompted by an acquisitive spirit, the idea of lucre in some form, the desire of trade or the desire of loot, disguised in more or less fine words. But Cook's three voyages are free from any taint of that sort. His aims needed no disguise. They were scientific. His deeds speak for themselves with the masterly simplicity of a hard-won success. In that respect he seems to belong to the single-minded explorers of the nineteenth century, the late fathers of militant geography whose only object was the search for truth. Geography is a science of facts, and they devoted themselves to the discovery of facts in the configuration and features of the main continents.

It was the century of landmen investigators. In saying this I do not forget the polar explorers, whose aims were certainly as pure as the air of those high latitudes where not a few of them laid down their lives for the advancement of geography. Seaman, men of science, it is difficult to speak of them without admiring emotion. The dominating figure among the seaman explorers of the first half of the nineteenth century is that of another good man, Sir John Franklin, whose fame rests not only on the extent of his discoveries, but on professional prestige and high personal character. This great navigator, who never returned home, served geography even in his death. The persistent efforts extending over ten years to ascertain his fate advanced greatly our knowledge of the polar regions.

As gradually revealed to the world this fate appeared the more tragic in this, that for the first two years the way of the Erebus and Terror expedition seemed to be the way of the desired and important success, while in truth it was all the time the way of death, the end of the darkest drama perhaps played behind the curtain of Arctic mystery.

The last words unveiling the mystery of the Erebus and Terror expedition were brought home and disclosed to the world by Sir Leopold McClintock, in his book, "The Voyage of the Far in the Arctic Seas." It is a little book, but it records with manly simplicity the tragic ending of a great tale. It so happened that I was born in the year of its publication. Therefore, I may be excused for not getting hold of it till ten years afterwards. I can only account for it falling into my hands by the fact that the fate of Sir John Franklin

was a matter of European interest, and that Sir Leopold McClintock's book was translated, I believe, into every language of the white races.

My copy was probably in French. But I have read the work many times since. I have now on my shelves a copy of a popular edition got up exactly as I remember my first one. It contains the touching facsimile of the printed form filled in with a summary record of the two ships' work, the name of "Sir John Franklin commanding the expedition" written in ink, and the pathetic underlined entry "All well." It was found by Sir Leopold McClintock under a cairn and it is dated just a year before the two ships had to be abandoned in their deadly ice-trap, and their crews' long and desperate struggle for life began.

There could hardly have been imagined a better book for letting in the breath of the stern romance of polar exploration into the existence of a boy whose knowledge of the poles of the earth had been till then of an abstract formal kind as mere imaginary ends of the imaginary axis upon which the earth turns. The great spirit of the realities of the story sent me off on the romantic explorations of my inner self; to the discovery of the taste of poring over maps; and revealed to me the existence of a latent devotion to geography which interfered with my devotion (such as it was) to my other schoolwork.

Unfortunately, the marks awarded for that subject were almost as few as the hours apportioned to it in the school curriculum by persons of no romantic sense for the real, ignorant of the great possibilities of active life; with no desire for struggle, no notion of the wide spaces of the world — mere bored professors, in fact, who were not only middle-aged but looked to me as if they had never been young. And their geography was very much like themselves, a bloodless thing with a dry skin covering a repulsive armature of uninteresting bones.

I would be ashamed of my warmth in digging up a hatchet which has been buried now for nearly fifty years if those fellows had not tried so often to take my scalp at the yearly examinations. There are things that one does not forget. And besides, the geography which I had discovered for myself was the geography of open spaces

and wide horizons built up on men's devoted work in the open air, the geography still militant but already conscious of its approaching end with the death of the last great explorer. The antagonism was radical.

Thus it happened that I got no marks at all for my first and only paper on Arctic geography, which I wrote at the age of thirteen. I still think that for my tender years it was an erudite performance. I certainly did know something of Arctic geography, but what I was after really, I suppose, was the history of Arctic exploration. My knowledge had considerable gaps but I managed to compress my enthusiasm into just two pages, which in itself was a sort of merit. Yet I got no marks. For one thing it was not a set subject. I believe the only comment made about it to my private tutor was that I seemed to have been wasting my time in reading books of travel instead of attending to my studies. I tell you, those fellows were always trying to take my scalp. On another occasion I just saved it by proficiency in map-drawing. It must have been good, I suppose; but all I remember about it is that it was done in a loving spirit.

I have no doubt that star-gazing is a fine occupation, for it leads you within the borders of the unattainable. But map-gazing to which I became addicted so early, brings the problems of the great spaces of the earth into stimulating and directing contact with same curiosity and gives an honest precision to one's imaginative faculty. And the honest maps of the nineteenth century nourished in me a passionate interest in the truth of geographical facts and a desire for precise knowledge which was extended later to other subjects.

For a change had come over the spirit of cartographers. From the middle of the eighteenth century on the business of map-marking had been growing into an honest occupation, registering the hard-won knowledge, but also in a scientific spirit recording the geographical ignorance of its time. And it was Africa, the continent out of which the Romans used to say some new thing was always coming, that got cleared of the dull imaginary wonders of the dark age, which were replaced by exciting spaces of white paper. Regions unknown! My imagination could depict to itself there worthy,



adventurous and devoted men, nibbling at the edges, attacking from north and south

and east and west, conquering a bit of truth here and a bit of truth there, and sometimes swallowed up by the mystery their hearts were so persistently set on unveiling.

Among them Mungo Park, of western Sudan and Bruce, of Abyssinia, were, I believe, the first friends I made when I began to take notice — I mean geographical notice — of the continents of the world into which I was born. The fame of these two had already been for a long time European, and their figures had become historical by then. But their story was a very novel thing to me, for the very latest geographical news that could have been whispered to me in my cradle was that of the expedition of Burton and Speke, the news of the existence of Tanganyika and of Victoria Nyanza.

I stand here confessed as a contemporary of the Great Lakes. Yes, I could have heard of their discovery in my cradle, and it was only right that, grown to a boy's estate, I should have in the later sixties done my first bit of map-drawing and paid my first homage to the prestige of their first explorers. It consisted in entering labouriously in pencil the outline of Tanganyika on my beloved old atlas, which, having been published in 1852, knew nothing, of course, of the Great Lakes. The heart of its Africa was white and big.

Surely it could have been nothing but a romantic impulse which prompted the idea of bringing it up to date with all the accuracy of which I was capable. Thus I could imagine myself stepping in the very footprints of geographical discovery. And it was not all wasted time. As a bit of prophetic practice it was not bad for me. Many years afterwards, as second officer in the Merchant *Sen/ice*, it was my duty to correct and bring up to date the charts of more than one ship, according to the Admiralty notices. I did this work conscientiously and with a sense of responsibility; but it was not in the nature of things that I should ever recapture the excitement of that entry of Tanganyika on the bank of my old atlas.

It must not be supposed that I gave up my interest in the polar regions. My heart and my warm participation swung from the frigid to the torrid zone, fascinated by the problems of each, no doubt, but more yet by the men who, like masters of a great art, worked each according to his temperament to complete the picture of the earth.

Almost each day of my schoolboy life had its hour given up to their company. And to this day I think that it was a very good company.

Not the least interesting part in the study of geographical discovery lies in the insight it gives one into the characters of that special kind of men who devoted the best part of their lives to the exploration of land and sea. In the world of mentality and imagination which I was entering it was they and not the characters of famous fiction who were my first friends. Of some of them I had soon formed for myself an image indissolubly connected with certain parts of the world. For instance, western Sudan, of which I could draw the rivers and principal features from memory even now, means for me an episode in Mungo Park's life.

It means for me the vision of a young, emaciated, fair-haired man, clad simply in a tattered shirt and worn-out breeches, gasping painfully for breath and lying on the ground in the shade of an enormous African tree (species unknown), while from a neighbouring village of grass huts a charitable black-skinned woman is approaching him with a calabash full of pure cold water, a simple draught which, according to himself, seems to have effected a miraculous cure. The central Sudan, on the other hand, is represented to me by a very different picture, that of a self-confident and keen-eyed person in a long cloak and wearing a turban on his head, riding slowly towards a gate in the mud walls of an African city, from which an excited population is streaming out to behold the wonder — Doctor Barth, the protege of Lord Palmerston, and subsidized by the British Foreign Office, approaching Kano, which no European eye had seen till then, but where forty years later my friend Sir Hugh Clifford, the Governor of Nigeria, travelled in state in order to open a college.

I must confess that I read that bit of news and inspected the many pictures in the illustrated papers without any particular elation. Education is a great thing, but Doctor Barth gets in the way. Neither will the monuments left by all sorts of empire builders suppress for me the memory of David Livingstone. The words "Central Africa" bring before my eyes an old man with a rugged, kind face and a clipped, gray moustache, pacing wearily at the head of a few black followers along the reed-fringed lakes towards the dark native hut

on the Congo headwaters in which he died, clinging in his very last hour to his heart's unappeased desire for the sources of the Nile.

That passion had changed him in his last days from a great explorer into a restless wanderer refusing to go home any more. From his exalted place among the blessed of militant geography and with his memory enshrined in

Westminster Abbey, he can well afford to smile without bitterness at the fatal delusion of his exploring days, a notable European figure and the most venerated perhaps of all objects of my early geographical enthusiasm.

Once only did that enthusiasm expose me to the derision of my schoolboy chums. One day, putting my finger on a spot in the very middle of the then white heart of Africa, I declared that some day I would go there. My chums' chaffing was perfectly justifiable. I myself was ashamed of having been betrayed into mere vapouring. Nothing was further from my wildest hopes. Yet it is a fact that, about eighteen years afterwards, a wretched little stern-wheel steamboat I commanded lay moored to the bank of an African river.

Everything was dark under the stars. Every other white man on board was asleep. I was glad to be alone on deck, smoking the pipe of peace after an anxious day. The subdued thundering mutter of the Stanley Falls hung in the heavy night air of the last navigable reach of the Upper Congo, while no more than ten miles away, in Reshid's camp just above the Falls, the yet unbroken power of the Congo Arabs slumbered uneasily. Their day was over. Away in the middle of the stream, on a little island nestling all back in the foam of the broken water, a solitary little light glimmered feebly, and I said to myself with awe, 'This is the very spot of my boyish boast.'

A great melancholy descended on me. Yes, this was the very spot. But there was no shadowy friend to stand by my side in the night of the enormous wilderness, no great haunting memory, but only the unholy recollection of a prosaic newspaper "stunt" and the distasteful knowledge of the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience and geographical exploration. What an end to the idealized realities of a boy's daydreams! I wondered what I was doing there, for indeed it was only an unforeseen episode, hard to believe in now, in my seaman's life. Still, the fact, remains

that I have smoked a pipe of peace at midnight in the very heart of the African continent, and felt very lonely there.

But never so at sea. There I never felt lonely, because there I never lacked company. The company of great navigators, the first grown-up friends of my early boyhood. The unchangeable sea preserves for one the sense of its past, the memory of things accomplished by wisdom and daring among its restless waves. It was those things that commanded my profoundest loyalty, and perhaps it is by the professional favour of the great navigators ever

present to my memory that, neither explorer nor scientific navigator, I have been permitted to sail through the very heart of the old Pacific mystery, a region which even in my time remained very imperfectly charted and still remote from the knowledge of men.

It was in 1888, when in command of a ship loading in Sydney a mixed cargo for Mauritius, that, one day, all of a sudden, all the deep-lying historic sense of the exploring adventures in the Pacific surged up to surface of my being. Almost without reflection I sat down and wrote a letter to my owners suggesting that, instead of the usual southern route, I should take the ship to Mauritius by way of Torres Strait. I ought to have received a severe rap on the knuckles, if only for wasting their time in submitting such an unheard-of proposition.

I must say I awaited with some trepidation. It came in due course, but instead of beginning with the chiding words, "We fail to understand," etc., etc., it simply called my attention in the first paragraph to the fact that "there would be an additional insurance premium to pay for that route," and so on, and so on. And it ended like this: "Upon the whole, however, we have no objection to your taking the ship through Torres Strait if you are certain that the season is not too far advanced to endanger the success of your passage by the calms which, as you know, prevail at times in the Arafura Sea."

I read, and in my heart I felt compunctious. The season was somewhat advanced. I had not been scrupulously honest in my argumentation. Perhaps it was because I never expected it to be effective. And here it was all felt to my responsibility. My letter must

have struck a lucky day in Messrs. H. Simpson & Sons' offices — a romantic day. I won't pretend that I regret my lapse from strict honesty, for what would the memory of my sea life have been for me if it had not included a passage through Torres Strait, in its fullest extent, from the mouth of the great Fly River right on along the track of the early navigators.

The season being advanced, I insisted on leaving Sydney during a heavy southeast gale. Both the pilot and the tug-master were scandalized by my obstinacy, and they hastened to leave me to my own devices while still inside Sydney Heads. The fierce southeaster caught me up on its wings, and no later than the ninth day I was outside the entrance of Torres Strait, named after the undaunted and reticent Spaniard who, in the seventeenth century, first sailed that way without knowing where he was, without

suspecting he had New Guinea on one side of him and the whole solid Australian continent on the other — he thought he was passing through an archipelago — the Strait whose existence for a century and a half had been doubted, argued about, squabbled over by geographers, and even denied by the disreputable but skilful navigator, Abel Tasman, who thought it was a large bay, and whose true contours were first laid down on the map by James Cook, the navigator without fear and without reproach, the greatest in achievement and character of the later seamen fathers of militant geography. If the dead haunt the scenes of their earthly exploits, then I must have been attended benevolently by those three shades — the inflexible Spaniard of such lofty spirit that in his report he disdains to say a single word about the appalling hardships and dangers of his passages; the pigheaded Hollander who, having made up his mind that there was no passage there, missed the truth by only fifty miles or so; and the great Englishman, a son of the soil, a great commander and a great professional seaman, who solved that question among many others and left no unsolved problems of the Pacific behind him. Great shades! All friends of my youth!

It was not without a certain emotion that, commanding very likely the first, and certainly the last, merchant ship that carried a cargo that way — from Sydney to Mauritius — I put her head at

daybreak for Bligh's Entrance, and packed on her every bit of canvas she could carry. Windswept, sunlit empty waters were all around me, half-veiled by a brilliant haze. The first thing that caught my eye upon the play of green whitecapped waves was a black marking conveniently the end of low sandbank. It looked like the wreck of some small vessel.

I altered the course slightly in order to pass close, with the hope of being able to read the letters on her stern. They were already faded. Her name was Honolulu. The name of the port I could not make out. The story of her life is known by now to God alone, and the winds must have drifted long ago around her remains a quiet grave of the very sand on which she had died. Thirtysix hours afterwards, of which about nine were spent at anchor, approaching the other end of the Strait, I sighted a gaunt, gray wreck of a big American ship lying high and dry on the southernmost of the Warrior Reefs. She had been there for years. I had heard of her. She was legendary. She loomed up, a sinister and enormous memento mori raised by the refraction of this serene afternoon above the far-away line of the horizon drawn under the sinking sun.

And thus I passed out of Torres Strait before the dusk settled on its waters. Just as a clear sun sank ahead of my ship I took a bearing of a little island for a fresh departure, an insignificant crumb of dark earth, lonely, like an advanced sentinel of that mass of broken land and water, to watch the approaches from the side of the Arafura Sea. But to me it was a hallowed spot, for I knew that the Endeavour had been hove to off it in the year 1762 for her captain, whose name was James Cook, to go ashore for half an hour. What he could possibly want to do I cannot imagine. Perhaps only to be alone with his thoughts for a moment. The dangers and the triumphs of exploration and discovery were over for that voyage. All that remained to do was to go home, and perhaps his great and equable soul, tempered in the incessant perils of a long exploration, wanted to commune with itself at the end of its task. It may be that on this dry crumb of the earth's crust which I was setting by compass he had tasted a moment of perfect peace. I could depict to myself the

famous seaman navigator, a lonely figure in a three-cornered hat and square-skirted laced coat, pacing to and fro slowly on the rocky shore, while in the ship's boat, lying off on her oars, the coxswain kept his eyes open for the slightest sign of the captain's hand.

Thus the sea has been for me a hallowed ground, thanks to those books of travel and discovery which have peopled it with unforgettable shades of the masters in the calling which, in a humble way, was to be mine, too; men great in their endeavour and in hard-won success of militant geography: men who went forth each according to his lights and with varied motives, laudable or sinful, but each bearing in his breast a spark of the sacred fire.

## THE TORRENS: A PERSONAL TRIBUTE

It is one of the pleasant surprises of my accumulated years to be still here when the shade of that beautiful ship is being evoked for a moment by a sea-travel magazine before the eyes of a public which does its sea travelling under very different conditions. Personally I cannot help thinking them not so much improved as needlessly sophisticated. However, that opinion of mine may be wildly wrong. I am not familiar with the demands of the spirit of the age. And, besides, I know next to nothing of sea travel. Even of the people who do that thing I know but few. My two years in the Torrens is my only professional experience of passengers; and though we — officers brought up in strenuous Indiamen and famous wool clippers- — did not think much of passengers, regarding them as derogatory nuisances with delicate feelings which prevented one driving one's ship till all was blue, I will confess that this experience was most fortunate from every point of view, marking the end of my sea life with pleasant memories, new impressions, and precious friendships. The pleasant memories include the excellent ship's companies it was my luck to work with on each of my two voyages. But the Torrens had a fame which attracted the right kind of sailor, and when engaging her crew her chief officer had always a large and promising crowd to pick and choose from. There was in it always a certain proportion of men who had served in her before and were anxious to join again; for apart from her more brilliant qualities, such as her speed and her celebrated good looks (which by them-selves go a long way with a sailor), she was regarded as a "comfortable ship" in a strictly professional sense, which means that she was known to handle easily and to be a good sea boat in heavy weather. I cannot say that during my time in her we ever experienced really heavy weather; but we had the usual assortment of winds, up to M very strong gales" (logbook style), from various directions; and I can testify that, on every point of sailing, the way that ship had of letting big seas slip under her did one's heart good to watch. It resembled so much an exhibition of intelligent grace and unerring skill that it could fascinate even the least seamanlike of our

passengers. A passage under sail brings out in the course of days whatever there may be of sea love and sea sense in any individual whose soul is not indissolubly wedded to the pedestrian shore.

There are, of course, degrees of landsmanism — even to the incurable. A gentleman whom we had on board on my first voyage presented an extreme instance of it. It however, trenched upon the morbid in its excessive sea fright, which had its pathetic as well as comic moments. We had not been more than ten days out from Plymouth when he took it into his head that his shattered constitution could not stand the voyage. Note that he had not had as much as an hour of seasickness. He maintained, however, that a few more days at sea would certainly kill him. He was absolutely certain of it, and he pleaded day after day with a persistent agonized earnestness to be put ashore on the first convenient bit of land, which in this case would have been Teneriffe. But it is not so easy for a sailing ship to make an unexpected call without losing much time. Any deviation from a direct course of the voyage ( unless in case of actual distress) would have invalidated the ship's insurance. It was not to be thought of, especially as the man looked fit enough and the doctor had reported that he could not find the slightest evidence of organic disease of any sort. I was sorry for my captain. He could not refuse to listen to the man. Neither could he accede to his request. It was absurd. And yet!... who could tell? It became worse when he began to offer progressive bribes up to £300 or more. I don't know why I was called to one of those awful conferences. The even, low flow of argument from those trembling lips impressed me. He exhibited to us his bank passbook to prove that he had the means to buy his life from us. Our doctor stood by in grim silence. The captain looked dead-trying, but kept his temper wonderfully under the implication of callous heartlessness. It was I who could not stand the inconclusive anguish of the situation. It was not so long since I had been neurasthenic myself. At the very next pause I remarked in a loud and cheery tone, "I suppose I had better get the anchors ready first thing tomorrow." The captain glared at me speechlessly, as well he might. But the effect of the hopeful word "anchors" had an instantaneous soothing effect on our passenger.

As if satisfied that there was at last somebody on his side he was willing to leave it at that. He went out.

I need not say that next day the anchors were not touched. But we sighted Teneriffe at thirty miles off, to windward — a towering and majestic shadow against the sky. Our passenger spent the day leaning over the rail, watching it till it melted away in the dusk. It was the confirmation of a death sentence for him, I suppose. He took it very well.



He gave me the opportunity to admire for many days an exhibition of consistent stoicism. He never repined. He withdrew within himself. Though civil enough when addressed directly, he had very few words to give to anybody — as though his fund of speech had been expended while pleading in vain for his life. But his heart was burning with indignant anger. He went ashore unreadable but unforgiving, without taking notice of any one in the ship. I was the only exception. Poor futile creature as I was, he remembered that I at least had seemed to be “on his side.” If I may take an Irishman’s privilege, I will say that if he had really died he could not have abhorred the ship and everyone in her more. To have been exposed to live for seventy days under a sentence of death was a soul-searing outrage, and he very properly resented it to the last.

I must say that, in general, our passengers would begin very soon to look thoroughly at home in the ship. Its life was homely enough and far removed from the ideals of the Ritz Hotel. The monotony of the sea is easier to bear than the boredom of the shore, if only because there is no visible remedy and no contrasts at hand to keep discontent alive. The world contains, or contained then, some people who could put up with a sense of peace for three months. The feeling of close confinement in a sailing ship, with her propelling power working in the open air, and with her daily life going on in public sight, and presenting the varied interests of human character and individual exertion, is always less oppressive than in a steamer even many times her size. Besides, in a sailing ship there are neither vibration nor mechanical noises to grow actively wearisome. Another advantage was that the sailing passenger ships of that epoch were never crowded. The cabins of the *Torrenshad* two berths each, but

they were roomy and not overfurnished with all sorts of inadequate contrivances for comfort, so-called. I have seen the cabins of a modern passenger steamship with three or four berths (their very couches being numbered) which were no half as big as ours. Not half as big — in fact, some of our passengers, who seized the opportunity of learning to dance the hornpipe from our boatswain (an agile professor), could pursue their studies in their own rooms. And that art requires for its practice more space than the proverbial swinging of a cat, I can assure you. Much more.

The *Torrens* was launched in 1875, only a few months after I had managed, after lots of trouble, to launch myself on the waters of the Mediterranean. Thus we began our careers about the same time. From the

professional point of view hers was by far the greater success. It began early, and went on growing for fifteen years under the command of Captain H.R. Angell, whose own long career as a ship master was the greatest success of the three. He left her in

1890, and people said that he took his ship's luck away with him. The Torrens certainly lost some of her masts the very next voyage, by one of those sudden accidents for which no man can be made responsible. I joined her a year afterwards, on the 2d of November,

1891, in London, and I ceased to "belong to her," as the saying is (it was a wrench), on the 15th of October, 1893, when, in London Dock, I took a long look from the quay at that last of ships I ever had under my care, and, stepping round the corner of a tall warehouse, parted from her for ever, and at the same time stepped (in merciful ignorance) out of my sea life altogether.

I owed the opportunity of my close association with my famous contemporary to any acquaintance with Captain W.H.Cope, who succeeded Captain H.R. Angell. I had known him some years before, but only slightly, in a social way. I knew that he had been a Conway boy, that he had much varied service in mail boats and in the Hooghly pilot steamer before the command of the Torrens came in his way. But I had no reason to believe that he remembered me particularly. However, on hearing from his brother that I was ashore, he sent me word that the Torrens wanted a chief officer, as a matter that might interest me. I was then recovering slowly from a bad breakdown,

after a most unpleasant and persistent tropical disease which I had caught in Africa while commanding a steamer on the River Congo. Yet the temptation was great. I confessed to him by doubts of my fitness for the post, from the point of view of health. But he said that moping ashore never did any one any good, and was very encouraging. It was clear that, as the saying goes, "my looks did not pity me," for he argued that, so far as appearance went, there did not seem to be anything the matter with me. And I suppose I could never have been half as neurasthenic as our poor passenger who wanted to be put ashore, for I lasted out for two voyages, as my discharge prove, though Mr. Basil Lubbock, in his book, "The Colonial Clippers," credits me with only one. But in the end I had to go (and even stay) ashore. Thus my famous contemporary outlived me at sea by many years, and if she had perhaps a harder life of it than I, it was at least

untinged with unavailing regrets; and she escaped the ignominious fate of being laid up as a coal hulk, which so many of her sisters had to suffer. Mr. Lubbock, who can put so much interesting knowledge and right feeling into his studies of our merchant ships, calls her "The Wonderful Torrens." She was! Her fascinations and virtues have made their marks on the hearts of men. Only last year I received a letter from a young able seaman, whom I remembered having in my watch, invoking confidently her unforgotten name. "I feel sure you must be Mr. Conrad, the chief officer, in whose watch I was when serving in the Torrens 'xw 1891, and so I venture to write to you. ..." A friendly, quiet, middle-aged seaman's letter, which gave me the greatest pleasure. And I know of a retired sailor (a Britisher, I suppose), in Massachusetts, who is making a model in loving memory of her who, all her life, was so worthy of men's loyal service. I am sorry I had no time to go to see him, and to gaze at the pious work of his hands.

It is touching to read in Mr. Lubbock's book that, after her transfer to the Italian flag, when she was taken to Genoa to be broken up, the Genoese shipwrights were so moved by the beauty of her lines and the perfections of her build that they had no heart to break her up. They went to work instead to preserve her life for a few more years. A true labour of love, if ever there was one!

But in the end her body of iron and wood, so fair to look upon, had to be broken up — I hope with fitting reverence; and as I sit here, thirty years, almost to a day, since I last set eyes on her, I love to think that her perfect form found a merciful end on the shores of the sunlit sea of my boyhood's dreams, and that her fine spirit has returned to dwell in the regions of the great winds, the inspirers and the companions of her swift, renowned, sea-tossed life, which I, too, have been permitted to share for a little while.

## CHRISTMAS DAY AT SEA

Theologically Christmas Day is the greatest occasion for rejoicing offered to sinful mankind; but this aspect of it is so august and so great that the human mind refuses to contemplate it steadily, perhaps because of its own littleness, for which of course it is in no way to blame. It prefers to concentrate its attention on ceremonial observances, expressive generally of good will and festivity, such, for instance, as giving presents and eating plum-puddings. It may be said at once here that from that conventional point of view the spirit of Christmas Day at sea appears distinctly weak. The opportunities, the materials too, are lacking. Of course, the ship's company get a plum-pudding of some sort, and when the captain appears on deck for the first time the officer of the morning watch greets him with a "Merry Christmas, sir," in a tone only moderately effusive. Anything more would be, owing to the difference in station, not correct. Normally he may expect a return for this in the shape of a "The same to you" of a nicely graduated heartiness. He does not get it always, however.

One Christmas morning, many years ago (I was young then and anxious to do the correct thing), my conventional greeting was met by a grimly scathing "Look like it, doesn't it?" from my captain. Nothing more. A three-days' more or less thick weather had turned frankly into a dense fog, and I had him called according to orders. We were in the chops of the Channel, with the Scilly Islands on a vague bearing within thirty miles of us, and not a breath of wind anywhere. There the ship remained wrapped up in a damp blanket and as motionless as a post stuck right in the way of the wretched steamboats groping blindly in and out of the Channel. I felt I had behaved tactlessly; yet how rude it would have been to have withheld the season's greetings from my captain!

It is very difficult to know what is the right thing to do when one is young. I suffered exceedingly from my gaucherie; but imagine my disgust when in less than half an hour we had the narrowest possible escape from a collision with a steamer which, without the slightest warning sound, appeared like a vague dark blot in the fog

on our bow. She only took on the shape of a ship as she passed within twenty yards of the end of our jibboom, terrifying us with the furious screeching of her whistle. Her form melted into nothing, long before the

end of the beastly noise, but I hope that her people heard the simultaneous yell of execration from thirty-six throats which we sent after her by way of a Christmas greeting. Nothing more at variance with the spirit of peace and good will could be imagined; and I must add that I never saw a whole ship's company get so much affected by one of the "close calls" of the sea. We remained jumpy all the morning and consumed our Christmas puddings at noon with restless eyes and straining ears as if under the shadow of some impending marine calamity or other.

On shore, of course, a calamity at Christmas time would hardly take any other shape than that of an avalanche — avalanche of unpaid bills. I think that it is the absence of that kind of danger which makes Christmas at sea agreeable on the whole. An additional charm consists in there being no worry about presents. Presents ought to be unexpected things. The giving and receiving of presents at appointed times seems to me a hypocritical ceremony, like exchanging gifts of Dead Sea fruit in proof of sham good-fellowship. But the sea of which I write here is a live sea; the fruits one chances to gather on it may be salt as tears or bitter as death, but they never taste like ashes in the mouth.

In all my twenty years of wandering over the restless waters of the globe I can only remember one Christmas Day celebrated by a present given and received. It was, in my view, a proper live-sea transaction, no offering of Dead Sea fruit; and in its unexpectedness perhaps worth recording. Let me tell you first that it happened in the year 1879, long before there was any thought of wireless message, and when an inspired person trying to prophesy broadcasting would have been regarded as a particularly offensive nuisance and probably sent to a rest-cure home. We used to call them madhouses then, in our rude, cave-man way.

The daybreak of Christmas Day in the year 1879 was fine. The sun began to shine sometimes about four o'clock over the sombre expanse of the Southern Ocean in latitude 51; and shortly afterwards

a sail was sighted ahead. The wind was light, but a heavy swell was running. Presently, I wished a "Merry Christmas" to my captain. He looked still sleepy, but amiable. I reported the distant sail to him and ventured the opinion that there was something wrong with her. He said, "Wrong?" in an incredulous tone. I pointed out that she had all her upper sails furled and that she was brought to the wind, which, in that region of the world, could not be accounted for on any other theory. He took the glasses from me,

directed them towards her stripped masts resembling three Swedish safety matches, flying up and down and wagging to and fro ridiculously in that heaving and austere wilderness of countless water-hills, and returned them to me without a word. He only yawned. This marked display of callousness gave me a shock. In those days I was generally inexperienced and still a comparative stranger in that particular region of the world of waters.

The captain, as is a captain's way, disappeared from the decks; and after a time our carpenter came up the poop ladder carrying an empty small wooden keg, of the sort in which certain ship's provisions are packed. I said, surprised, "What do you mean by lugging this thing up here, Chips?" — "Captain's orders, sir," he explained shortly.

I did not like to question him further, and so we only exchanged Christmas greetings and he went away. The next person to speak to me was the steward. He came running up the companion stairs: "Have you any old newspapers in your room, sir?"

We had left Sydney, N.S.W., eighteen days before. There were several old Sydney Heralds, Telegraphs, Bulletins in my cabin, besides a few new home papers received by the last mail. "Why do you ask, steward?" I inquired naturally. "The captain would like to have them," he said.

And even then I did not understand the inwardness of these eccentricities. I was only lost in astonishment at them. It was eight o'clock before we had closed with that ship, which, under her short canvas and heading nowhere in particular, seemed to be loafing aimlessly on the very threshold of the gloomy home of storms. But long before that hour I had learned from the number of the boats she carried that this nonchalant ship was a whaler. She was the first

whaler I had ever seen. She had hoisted the Stars and Stripes at her peak, and her signal flags had told us already that her name was: "Alaska — two years out from New York — east from Honolulu — two hundred and fifteen days on the cruising ground."

We passed, sailing slowly, within a hundred yards of her; and just as our steward started ringing the breakfast bell the captain and I had aloft, in good view of the figures watching us over her stern, the keg, properly headed up and containing, besides an enormous bundle of old newspaper, two boxes of figs in honour of the day. We flung it far out over the rail. Instantly our ship, sliding down the slope of a high swell, left it far behind in our wake. On board the Alaska a man in a fur cap flourished an arm; another, a much a

be-whiskered person, ran forward suddenly. I never saw anything so ready and so smart as the way that whaler, rolling desperately all the time, lowered one of her boats. The Southern Ocean went on tossing the two ships like a juggler his gilt balls, and the microscopic white speck of the boat seemed to come into the game instantly, as if shot out from a catapult on the enormous and lonely stage. That Yankee whaler lost not a moment in picking up her Christmas present from the English wool clipper.

Before we had increased the distance very much she dipped her ensign in thanks and asked to be reported "All well, a catch of three fish." I suppose it paid them for two hundred and fifteen days of risk and toil, away from the sounds and sights of the inhabited world, like outcasts devoted, beyond the confines of mankind's life, to some enchanted and lonely penance.

Christmas Days at sea are of varied character, fair to middling and down to plainly atrocious. In this statement I do not include Christmas Days on board passenger ships. A passenger is, of course, a brother (or sister), and quite a nice person in a way, but his Christmas Days are, I suppose, what he wants them to be: the conventional festivities of an expensive hotel included in the price of his ticket.

## OCEAN TRAVEL

The one statement that can safely be advanced about travelling at sea is that it is not what is used to be. It is different now elementally. It is not so much a matter of changed propelling power; it is something more. In the old days, under the machinery of sails, the distinguished and the undistinguished travellers (of whom there were not so very many) were wafted to distant parts of the world by the movement of variable air currents. Now the travelling multitudes are taken to their destination because of the invariable resistance of water to the screwing motion of the propeller, with which fire (that other element) has a lot to do. The whole affair of progress the seas has become much more complicated and much more precise on its physical side. It has grown also into a marvel.

But a marvellous achievement is not necessarily interesting. It may render life more tame than perhaps it should be. I do not mean that any marvel of applied science can tame the wild spirit that lurks in all men, and of which the proofs are not far to seek. It only makes the condition of our pilgrimage less exciting.

The whole psychology of sea travel is changed. Formerly a man setting out of a sea voyage broke away from shore conditions and found in the ship a new kind of home. This applied even to such comparatively short passages as across the Atlantic. But now a man (especially if setting out for the United States) brings the conditions of shore life with him on board, and finds in his ship the usual sort of hotel, with its attempts at all kinds of sham comforts, all the disadvantages of gregarious life, with the added worry of not being able to get away from it for a certain number of days. The only comfort is to be found in the assurance that the number of days is not great and that, barring accidents, it is fixed. There is a definite date to look forward to — the date of release from that more or less luxurious prison any ship must be to any passenger.

That every passenger (even in the biggest and most hotel-like Atlantic ferries with their territorial names) wishes to escape there can be not the slightest doubt. He may say what he likes, it is a fact of human nature. He looks forward to his release much as any prisoner.

The modern traveller has never the time to get into an acquiescent mood. The sham shore conditions which the shipping companies try to create for



him stand in the way, too. The hold of the land (which is his natural element) is on him all through the passage, and he suffers from a subtle disharmony between his natural tastes and his surroundings.

It was otherwise with the old-time traveller under sail: he had to become acclimatized to that moral atmosphere of ship life which he was fated to breathe for so many days. He was no dweller in an unpleasantly unsteady imitation of a Ritz Hotel. He would before long begin to feel himself a citizen of a small community in special conditions and with special interests which gradually ceased to be secret to him, and in the end secured his sympathies. The machinery of his propulsion, the picturesque activities of the men of the sea, lay open to his sight and appealed to his sympathies.

In the course of my sea life, a time when it never occurred to me that I myself might be a passenger some day, I was for a couple of years officer of a sailing passenger ship out of the Port of London. This gave me the opportunity to watch that process of acclimatization of which I have spoken, in a group of about sixty persons of various ages and temperaments, some travelling for their health and others only for rest — which they indubitably secured in our passages that averaged about eighty days. Part of our passengers, those from the Midlands generally, used to come on board in London Dock, while others, those from the South and from London itself preferred to join the ship in Plymouth, where we had to call in order to embark the live stock for the voyage. Of that feathered and four-footed company the most important item was the milch-cow which joined the ship mainly “for the benefit of the children,” as the advertisements had it. It was the last living that came on board, already boxed and in its travelling stall, and displaying a most praiseworthy composure even while spinning in midair at the foreyard arm before being landed on the foredeck against the mast, to which its straitened habitation was secured for the passage with lashings of chain and rope fit to withstand the heaviest weather we were likely to encounter.

There, on fine mornings (and there are more fine mornings at sea than have ever been dreamt of in a landsman’s philosophy), the ship’s children, some controlled by nursemaids, others running loose, trooped forward to pay a visit to their cow, which looked with mild big eyes at the small citizens of our sea community with the air of knowing all there was to know about them.

All this may sound very primitive, but it had a charm and an intimacy of a settled existence no modern steamship with its long barren alleyways swept by the wind and decorated with the name of promenade decks can give. The modern passenger may be able to walk a good many miles in his ship in the course of the day, but this is the only thing which differentiates him from the bales of goods carried in the hold — this, and the power of swallowing the food which is presented to him at regular intervals. He is carried along swiftly and fed delicately, but the other lived the life of his ship, that sort of life which is not sustained on bread (and supreme *au volaille*) alone, depends for its interest on enlarged sympathies and awakened perceptions of nature and men.

I have seen old maiden ladies develop, during a passage nice discrimination in the matter of steering. They had their favourite helmsmen. Elderly business men would become good judges of the set of the sails and acquire a seaman's eye for the aspects of the weather — and almost all, men and women, became reconciled to the vast solitude of the sea untroubled by the sound of the world's mechanical contrivances and the noise of its endless controversies. The silence of the Universe would lie very close to the sailing ship, with her freight of lives from which the daily stresses and anxieties had been removed, as if the circle of the horizon had been a magic ring laid on the sea. No doubt the days thus enchanted were empty, but they were not so tedious as people may imagine. They passed quickly, and, if they brought no profit or excitement, I cannot help thinking that they were not wasted. No! They were not wasted.

## OUTSIDE LITERATURE

Having been prompted by a certain literary suggestion to reflect upon the nature of Notices to Mariners, I fell to examining some of my old feeling and impressions which, strictly professional as they were, have yet contributed in the end towards the existence of a certain amount of literature; or at any rate of pages of prose. The Notices to Mariners are good prose but I think no critic would admit them into the body of literature. And it is only as compositions in prose that I believe myself competent to speak of them. And first let me thank God that they do not belong to imaginative literature. It would be dreadful if they did. An imaginatively written Notice to Mariners would be a deadly thing. I mean it literally. It would be sure to kill a number of people before its imaginative quality had been appreciated and suppressed. That their style must be clear and concise, and the punctuation of the ordinary kind, would not necessarily militate against their being regarded as literature. The Maxims of La Rochefoucauld are concise enough. But they open horizons; they plumb the depths; they make us squirm, shudder, smile in turn; and even sigh — at times; whereas the prose of the Notices to Mariners must do nothing of the kind.

And it doesn't. A mariner detected shuddering or sighing over a Notice to Mariners would simply (to speak in unliterary language) be not fit for his job. All means of acting on man's spiritual side are forbidden to that prose. In those compositions which are read as earnestly as anything that ever came from printing press, all suggestion of Love, of Adventure, of Romance, of Speculation, of all that decorated and ennobles life, except Responsibility, is barred. What we expect from them is not suggestion but information of an ideal accuracy, such as you do not find in the prose of works on science, which is mainly imaginative and often solemnly mystifying. That is why some quite decent men are moved to smile as they read it. But there is no mystification in the language of truth contained in the Notices to Mariners. You would not want to smile at them. No decent man would. Even Mr. Punch, to whom as a great burlesque poet nothing is supposed to be sacred, and who has been seen

lately taking liberties with the explosive atom, would not dream of making fun out of Notices to Mariners. Mr. Punch knows better. He knows that for an inspired poet who sees the mystic relations of sublunary matters,

Notices to Mariners are things to be read reverently. They are like declarations of a minutely careful Providence. They can be imagined as directed in a quiet voice by the angel who, in the words of the songs, sits aloft to watch over poor Jack. They belong to a prose which, if certainly not immortal, is revelatory to its own generation.

Addressed to a special, public, limited to a very definite special subject, having no connection with the intellectual culture of mankind, and yet of some importance to a civilization which is founded on the protection of life and property, that prose has only one ideal to attain, to hold on to: the ideal of perfect accuracy. You would say that such an ideal may easily be captured by a steady, prosaic mind devoting itself for a few minutes (the Notices to Mariners are short) every day to the task of composition. Why, yes! But what about misprints — the bane of authors?

And then the absences. I mean the absences of mind. It is a fact that the most pedestrian mind will sometimes take a flight from the office where it works (I suppose Notices to Mariners are written in some sort of office) toward subjects of poetic fancy, its children, its lady love, its glass of beer, and such other things interesting to its mortal envelope. I often wondered what the author of Notices to Mariners looks like. I have tried to represent him to yourself as a monk, a man who has renounced the vanities of the world, and for preference belonging to the order of Trappists who are bidden to remember death — *memento mori* — and nothing else. A sobering thought! Just suppose the author of Notices to Mariners acquiring convivial habits and sitting down to write a Notice in that happy frame of mind when nothing matters much and one letter of the alphabet is as good as another. For myself — who am not convivial in that sense and have written a varied lot of prose a quite ridiculous scrupulosity and an absurd seriousness — I don't mind confessing that if I were told to write a Notice to Mariners I would not pray perhaps — for I have my own convictions about the abuse of prayer

— but I would certainly fast. I would fast in the evening and get up to write my Notice to Mariners at four o'clock in the morning for fear of accidents. One letter is so soon written for another — with fatal results.

It happened to me many years ago to endanger the course of my humble career at sea simply by writing the letter W instead of the letter E at the bottom of a page full of figures. It was an examination and I ought to have been plucked mercilessly. But in consideration, I believe, of all my other

answers being correct I was handed that azimuth paper back by the examiner's assistant, with the calm remark, "You have fourteen minutes yet." I looked at the face of the clock; it was round like the moon, white as a ghost, unfeeling, idiotic. I sat down under it with the conviction of the crushing materiality of time, and calling in my mind the assistant examiner a sarcastic brute. For no man could have gone over all those figures in fourteen minutes. I hope my exasperated consternation at this check could not be detected. It was funny even to myself. Then, just at the moment when my sinking heart had touched bottom, I saw the error staring at me, enormous, gross, palpable. I traced hastily a capital E over the W and went back to the desk with my sheet of blue paper in a still shaky hand. The assistant hardly glanced at it before he let it drop, and I saw then that in my lack of comprehension it was I who had been an unqualified brute. For in his remark about the fourteen he had clearly tried to give me a hint. He was a charming young man, obviously poor, with an intelligent, as if suffering, face. Not exactly sickly, but delicate. A sea voyage would have done him good. But it was I who went to sea — this time bound to Calcutta.

And it was in Calcutta, a few months afterwards, that one morning my captain on going ashore saw me busy about the decks and beckoned to me in that way ship masters have, or used to have. I mean ship masters who commanded their ships from truck to keelson as it were, technically and spiritually, in motion and at rest, and through every moment of their life, when the seaman's calling was by the mere force of its conditions more vocational than it can be at the present day. My ship master had that way of beckoning. What way?" Well-all I can say of it is that one dropped everything. I can't describe it better. So I dropped whatever I was doing and he said: "You will find a Notice on the cabin table. Go in and enter it on the proper Admiralty sheet. Do it now." Which I hastened to do.

That examination, the issue of which had hung on a capital letter, had caused me to be officially certified as fit to undertake that particular duty: and ever since then my familiarity with Notices to Mariners, which are not literature, went on growing through a course of years, up to the moment when stepping ashore for the last time I lost all touch with the most trusted kind of printed prose. Henceforth I had to begin (while totally unprovided with Notices to Authors) to write prose myself; and the pains I took with it only my Maker knows! And yet I never learned to trust it. I can't trust it to

this day. We who write prose which is not that of *Notices to Mariners* are forgotten by Providence. No angel watches us at our toil. A dreadful doubt hangs over the whole achievement of literature; I mean that of its greatest and its humblest men. Wasn't it "Papa Augier" who, being given a copy of "Hamlet," glanced through it expertly and then dropped it with the dry remark: "I/bus appelezga unepidce, vous?" The whole tragedy of art lies in the nutshell of this terrifying anecdote. But it never will occur to anybody to question the prosaic force of the author of *Notices to Mariners*, which are not literature, and his fidelity to his honourable ideal — the ideal of perfect accuracy.

# LEGENDS

To watch the growth of a legend is a sad occupation. It is not so much because legends deal with people and things finished and done with; that they spring, as it were, from amongst the bones of dead men. Flowers (as I have seen myself) will do that too. That's all in the order of nature, and both flowers and legends are upon the whole decorative, which all to the good.

I have nothing against a legend twining its tendrils fancifully about the facts of history or the tables of statistics (which can be fanciful too, though they can never be made very decorative). They spring from noble soil, they are a form of memory which we all like to leave behind us, that lingers about the achievement of men who have had their day and the vanished forms of things which have served the needs of their time.

One could welcome that fine form of imaginative recognition of the past with nothing worse than the gentle melancholy which the passage of time brings in its train if it were not disfigured by touches of fatuity of which no legend is wholly free, because I suspect that those who record its tales as picked out on the lips of men are doing it in a spirit of love. And that is only right and proper. But love is uncritical. It is an enthusiastic state seeing romance in what may be not true to the spirit of its subject, so to speak. And thus the false which is often fatuous also creeps into a worthy or even noble story.

Or even into a holy story. The Golden Legend itself. The legend of saints and their miracles is an awful example of the danger — as any one who turns over a few pages of it may see. Saintliness is made absurd by the presentation of the miraculous facts themselves. It lacks spirituality in a surprising way.

Yes, fatuity lurks in all legends fatally by the effect of our common credulity. However, the legend I have in my mind has nothing to do with saints — but with beings at first sight infinitely different, but whose lives were hard (no saint, I take it, ever slept on a bed of roses) if not exactly ascetic, and if not hermit-like, yet as far removed from the commonest amenities and the simplest

affections which make life sweet, and as much removed from the material interest of this world as the most complete spiritual renunciation could make it.

Perhaps nobody could guess from what precedes that I have sailors in my mind. I do not mean to be irreverent if I insist that in a temporal sense there was much that was edifying in their lives. They did not work miracles, to be sure, but I have seen them repeatedly do all that men can do for their faith — if it was only the faith in their own manhood. And that is something, surely. But there was something more in it, something larger — a fidelity to the demands of their calling which I verily believe was for all of them I knew, both afloat and ashore, vocational quite as much in its way as any spiritual call a man's nature has ever responded to. And all that for no perceptible reward in the praise of man and the favour of gods — I mean the sea gods, an indigent, pitiless lot, who had nothing to offer to servants at their shrine but a ward in some hospital on shore or a sudden wedding with death in a great uproar, but with no gilding of fine words about it. *La mort sans phrases*.

In all this there is material for a fine legend, if not of saintly virtues, then of a consistent display of manhood. And the legend will not be long, for the last days of sailing ships were short if one thinks of the countless ages since the first sail of leather or rudely woven rushes was displayed to the wind. Stretching the period both ways to the utmost, it lasted from 1850 to 1910. Just sixty years. Two generations. The winking of an eye. Hardly the time to drop a prophetic tear. For the pathos of that era lies in the fact that when the sailing ships and the art of sailing them reached their perfection, they were already doomed. It was a swift doom, but it is consoling to know that there was no decadence.

That era has, however, had its historians, such as Mr. Basil Lubbock, for instance, whose devotion to the glory of the ships and the merits of the men has the character of one of those romantic passions that last a lifetime. He is now of the brotherhood initiated with all the awful ceremonies of a Cape Horn passage. He speaks with much knowledge. And there is Miss C. Fox-Smith, in whom I verily believe the quintessence of the collective soul of the latter-

day seaman has found its last resting-place and a poignant voice before taking its flight for ever from the earth. Truth itself speaks in her verse — I can safely say, since I (surprising thought) have one foot, at least, in that irrecoverable phase of old sea life for which their piety and their talents have done so much.



It is on that ground that I would remonstrate with Mr. Lubbock against the admission into one of his books of sea chronicles of a tale which would degrade the character of any legend. The facts of a legend need not be literally true. But they ought to be credible and they must be in a sort of fundamental accord with the nature of the life they record, that is with the character of their subject matter. The subject of the Golden Legend is, in fact, the celebration of a miracle-working holiness, and the subject of any sea legend must consummate seamanship — an era that seems as distant now as the age of miracles.

The history of the latter days of clipper ships and their men may bQ said to begin with the Marco Polo and the man who commanded her. His name was Forbes, and he is not a figure to stand at the head of a sea legend. He lacked balance in his character. Luck alone made him, and at the first adversity he collapsed. But without going into the details of his short career, I am sure I am doing good service to his memory by trying to purge his record of the most fatuous tale that ever cropped up in any legend of the sea.

As adopted, alas! (but the best of us may err) by Mr. Basil Lubbock, it runs that Forbes used to padlock the sheets of the Marco Polo's sails — one reviewer explaining kindly “to guard against the timid members of a crew,” a priceless phrase, whatever it may mean. What is a “timid member” and how do you recognize him? Anyhow, I am sure he is a fitting person to play his part in that padlock story.

I wonder who was the man to tell it? He must have been an ironmonger trying for a new outlet for his wares. And to what sort of audience? Personally I would have been afraid to tell it to the Horse-Marines — that mysterious corps which is famed for its capacity to swallow anything in the way of a yarn.

[This article was left unfinished at Conrad's death.]

## THE UNLIGHTED COAST

I came ashore bringing with me strongest of all, and most persistent, the impression of a great darkness. ( do not mean darkness in a symbolic or spiritual sense. Indeed, one couldn't come from contact with the watches of that darkness, and the workers therein, otherwise than spiritually strengthened. What I mean is the fact itself, the fact of darkness spread over the land and water of old civilization such as wrapped up early mariners' landfalls on their voyages of exploration. To him who had been accustomed to behold after long sea passages the shadowy contours of the English coast illuminated festally, interminably, unfailingly, as if for a sleepless feast or for sleepless toil, the impression was very powerful — like a revelation of some deeper truth. Fires in the night are the sign of mankind's life to an eye at sea. There were no such signs anywhere. Not a gleam. And yet life had never before perhaps in the history of that unlighted island known such an intense consciousness of itself. No! Life had not departed that sombre shore. It was only its old sense of security that was no longer there.

It had a strange air of finality. The land had turned to a shadow. Of all scourges and visitations against which mankind prays to Heaven, it was not pestilence that had smitten that shore dark; it was war; with sudden death, another of that dreaded company, full of purpose, in the air, on the water, and under the water. Breathing the calm air of the night, looking at this placid sea gleaming faintly, here and there, as still water will do in the dark, it was as hard to believe in the existence of this prowling death as in the dauntless, tense life of that obscured land. That mere shadow — big with fate.

One seemed to have one's being in the very centre of illusory appearance. The very silence, so profound around us as to seem boundless, and harmonizing marvellously with the spirit of the hour, was not true to the usual meaning it conveys to a human mind, that of being cut off from communication with its kind.

For just as I was remarking to the officer by my side that surely neither Caesar's galleys nor the ships of the Danish rovers had ever found on their approach this land so absolutely and

scrupulously lightless as this — just then a voice behind us was heard: "I've here two message I have just picked up."

It was our wireless man. That shadow emitting no sound waves, no waves of light, was talking to its watchers at sea; filling the silence with words pregnant with the truth, the naked, ugly truth of the situation.

And the man with two white pieces of paper very noticeable in his hand said: "It's our station at X speaking."

For reasons which had nothing to do with its efficiency we could not use our wireless installation very often, and he was immensely pleased at having picked up something for the first time in two days. We went below to decode the messages. The little cabin, in contrast with the variously shaded and toned darkness we had left, seemed scandalously over-lighted.

Although I helped to decode these messages I don't remember the exact words of their concise phrases; but the first was an inquiry, apparently directed at large into space, relating to a hostile submarine seen off the coast not many hours before. The other was a request addressed by name to a ship at sea for a report on some floating mines discovered in a certain position within the last twenty-four hours. The great motionless shadow was talking to its watchers, small shadows flitting here and there on the obscure gleams of the smooth sea veiled in the unmoral night that from its very nature favours aggression rather than vigilance, without regard to the merits of the case.

These were good samples of the talk that flows on unheard in sunshine, in straight, under the clouds. War talk. But how different from the war talk we hear on the lips of men (and even great men) which often seems but talk round the war, obscuring the one and only question: To be or not be — the great alternative of an appeal to arms. The other, the grouped-letters war talk, almost without sound and altogether without fury, is full of sense, of meaning, and single-minded purpose; inquiries, information, orders, reports. Words, too. But words in direct relation to things and facts, with the feeling at the back of it all of the correct foresight that planned and of the determination which carries on the protective work.

We all know that a true defence is at the point of the sword; but the shield has its part to play too in defensive work. This work had been planned by the navy in anticipation of the conditions that would arise. I know that praise often is but more or less conscious impertinence. But, after all, this is seaman's work, and half a lifetime at sea may perhaps justify me in expressing the highest possible sense of the navy's clear-eyed foresight in planning, and the judgment, resolution, tact, and knowledge of men in

getting the planned system to work, from the first critical days to its full development of today, steadily, without haste, yet with that speed which is inherent in the force, unswerving purpose, and in the resolute handling of any problem under the sun.

It is mainly the officers and men of the various branches of the R.N.R. who, under the high command of naval officers, have been entrusted with the manifold duties of that simple work of protection and watchfulness. It was the navy who trained them to it, and as the period had in each case to be short the general efficiency with which the work is done speaks well for the naval method. But it is also a high testimony to the capacity, adaptability, and the whole-souled earnestness of the officers of the Merchant Service who hastened to join, some called up, others volunteering without hesitation from all the points of the compass and from the uttermost ends of the Empire.

Much has been said already of these men and of their activities; of the circumstances, the conditions, the incidents of the task. I may perhaps later say something too, more in the nature of a personal impression than of detailed description. As to the work itself, all I want to point out now is that seen from outside it presents in its various branches the aspect of a nervestraining drudgery. And in that outward aspect there is a proportion of truth. From its very nature it must be work without glamour. No great moments can be expected in it. Yet, rare as drops of rain in a desert, such moments have been vouchsafed to some of the faithful. As I trace these words I have in my mind the most unexpected, the most unforeseen instance of the kind. An enormous drop in a parched and stressful monotony of duty.

On the morning I heard the tale, the pier at one of our "bases," with its central line of neat shed-like buildings and the great signal bridge at the end (recalling the superstructure of a battleship), had been for a moment swept clean of all life by a rain squall as effectually as by a point-blank broadside of shrapnel shell.

My companion and I took cover in the wardroom, a good-sized apartment lined with vanished match-boarding. A heavy table occupied the middle. The officer of the watch, a silent, detached figure, sat at a writing desk reading a note, while a young bluejacket, cap in hand, waited for the answer. Two R.N.R. officers smoking by the fire greeted us. Another sat at

some distance on a chair placed against the wall near a window. He took no notice of our arrival.

But the officer with me murmured with a nod in his direction: "This is our Zeppelin-strafer."

I said: "No! Have you that, too, in your lot?"

"Yes. He'll tell you all about it."

I was introduced with a word or two of comment to "our Zeppelin-strafer." There was no halo around his head. He was young, so young that he must have belonged to the third generation of those who had gone to sea since my time; one of those who began that life after 1900. A seaman of the twentieth century! And yet he was no stranger to me. The memories of my twenty sea years crowded upon me, memories of faces, of temperaments, of expressions. And looking at him, all I could say to myself was: — How like! We sat down side by side near the window. He was in no haste to begin. He belonged to the shy, silent type — and how like!

It's an odious thing to have write in "descriptive" fashion to men with whom one talked like a friend and had found acceptance as one of themselves. If he sees these lines I hope he will forgive me. It's very likely that my impressions set down truthfully are altogether untrue. We were but half an hour together, and when we parted and he closed the door of that room behind him I felt that he was as utterly gone from me as though he had stepped out in the middle of the Pacific.

He began to talk to me with a sort of reluctance, hesitatingly, till I mentioned to him that I had been to sea much longer than

himself, if not so recently. He knew I was some sort of writing man, and was ready to civil, but after that remark of mine his articulation became easier. Not much, though. He looked down on the ground, glancing at me only now and again, and spoke in a low tone with unexpected pauses. The best way in which I can characterize that narrative is by saying that he delivered it to me with the aspect, the bearing of a man who broods over the event in silence.

He was making his way on a foggy day back to his base after a spell of duty outside. His craft mounted one gun; and without going into unnecessary description I may best give an idea of the size of his command by saying that, when he was reposing, the breech of the gun was within four feet of his head as it lay on his pillow. For reasons that need not be stated, his vessel did not move then more than about three knots through the water

— which was smooth. There's seldom much wind with thick weather. On that occasion there was a very light breeze, enough to help the fog at its usual pranks of thinning and thickening, opening and shutting, lifting in patches and closing down suddenly — quicker than a wink, sometimes.

He was walking up and down his vast deck when, turning aft, he saw the fore-end of a Zeppelin emerge into misty view out of an apparently thicker layer of fog. From then on for succeeding minutes he moved no more than a ship's timber. The apparition took him completely unawares because he had not heard any noise in the air before. Directly, however, he caught sight of the Zeppelin he heard the noise of the engine very plainly.

As soon as he regained the power of speech he uttered the words "Action ... Zeppelin ... Astern," in a cautious whisper. An unnecessary precaution. But he told me that at first the "enormous thing seemed right on top of us!" In fact, it was not anything so near as that. It was coming up astern but a little on one side and, he noticed, steering a course which would cross obliquely his wake and bring the monster very close indeed — within 500 yards perhaps.

For whatever reason, it was flying low, so low that he did not need to throw his head up much to watch its steady progress. And there followed for him such moments of unforgettable anguish,

something like the anguish of a man whose eternal salvation would depend on the soundness of his judgment.

The problem was how to deal with this gigantic piece of luck. For if he opened fire too soon the chances were that the German would swerve and get away, or, climbing overhead, would descend on him as low as he pleased and bomb him out of existence. His gun was a very good weapon of its kind, but it was not an antiaircraft gun and had only a limited amount of elevation. And there was also the possibility that, utterly unconscious of the tiny speck lost in the shimmer of the thin fog layer below, the Zeppelin would alter its course at any moment for some purpose of its own.

What worried and discomposed him was the insistent whispering of his skipper, who had crept to his elbow and was entreating hoarsely not to waste a moment, "to let the beggar have it now, sir. Let him have it." The German meantime held on. Ordering the skipper away he had the fortitude, though his heart was in his mouth all the time, to hold out till the Zeppelin crossed his wake and exposed the greater part of its side. ... "And then," he

said, "we started to plug it into him as fast as we could load. And every shot was a hit."

He looked at me with strangely troubled eyes. "It was impossible to miss ... you know," he added in a lowered voice.

Whether conscious or unconscious before of the microscopic strafe below, Fritz must have had the surprise of his life. The record shock of Zeppelin history. His dismay was boundless, something very like panic up there became visible to the eyes below.

... "I could see three or four of them running along," went on the low voice. "I saw them quite plainly. If I had half-a-dozen men with rifles on my deck we could have got every single one of them."

The Zeppelin swung off wide and with its engines working noisily, made off without more ado. Its own speed or the drift of denser fog blowing over turned it into a mere dark blur swiftly. As long as the faintest shadow of it remained visible the fire was kept up. Then it ceased. A profound silence ensued. It was all over. He was gone.

It was, however, possible that he might return overhead and take his revenge. But before the strafers on deck had the time to exchange glances of wonder, apprehension or inquiry, while they were still, in fact, staring into the upper fog, the shadow reappeared nearer than before aslant in the white space, sliding downwards stern first, its nose tilted up at a perilous angle.

"Of course we opened on him instantly," he went on. "And do you know what he did then?"

At this point he looked at me again, and after a little gasp went on, as if unwillingly, "he dumped all his bombs overboard. The whole lot of them at once."

The resulting explosion was something terrific. He felt as if his little were blown clean out of the water and at the same time hit by a tidal wave. And in the awful commotion, uproar, and black smoke the Zeppelin shot up and vanished for good.

"You must have made him very sick," I said.

"He looked very sick indeed," said the young strafe quietly.

"I wonder what became of him?"

Hard to say. There was a report in the papers some time afterwards.... Damaged Zeppelin coming to the ground in Norway. ...I sometimes think..."

He did not finish the sentence. He had been eighteen months of long days and longer nights at his protecting work, out and in, fair or foul, never seeing anything to reward his strained, hopeful vigilance, and sometimes for days seeing nothing at all. For the North Sea is a big place, as our coasters say: so big that there may be half-a-dozen ships out looking for you because you are a little late in returning (as it happened to a man), and you will come in innocently, having seen no one, unseen by anybody — which is vexing for the anxious searchers.

Eighteen patient, unfaltering months, and then this ten gloriously crowded minutes — is that much? The whole affair probably did not last so long.

Rare, like drops of water in a desert, are such opportunities for the watcher of the lightless shore. And to this one Fortune had not been fickle, but simply outrageous. The drop had merely brushed past his lips so unskilled in speech. He had talked to me in all

friendliness, for which I am duly grateful; yet he left me with the impression that had he been permitted to taste the full flavour, his official report would have remained, of his own choice, his first and last utterance. I fancy, somehow, that rather than talk to luck so immense that there could be no fit words for it in the world, he would have preferred to brood over it in adequate silence.



## THE DOVER PATROL

The worth of a sentiment lies in the sacrifices men will make for its sake. All ideals are built on the ground of solid achievement, which in a given profession creates in the course of time a certain tradition, or, in other words, a standard of conduct. The existence of a standard of conduct in its turn makes the most improbable achievement possible, by augmenting the power of endurance and of self-sacrifice amongst men who look to the past for their lessons and or their inspiration.

The story of the achievement of the Dover patrol is merged in the greater proud record of the navy's protective part played with simplicity and self-sacrifice in the Great War of the twentieth century; yet that story has its own features, its own particular atmosphere, and its own importance.

The opening years of the nineteenth century had their Great War, too. Longer in its duration, it was carried on with less animosity. It was less in the nature of a struggle for dear life, and, except in its spirit, it was less intensely national. It did not involve in its toils the whole population. It did not involve in its toils the whole population. The issues at stake were as great, perhaps, but did not appear in such definite shapes to the great mass of the people which suffered its hardship and gave up its sons to its struggles. In its most obvious aspects that war, like the one of our day, was waged against an attempt at universal dominion. But it must be admitted that it was also a war against the revolt of newborn ideas represented by a great and dominant figure issued from a revolution and taking its own fatally conquering way amongst the imperfectly awakened nations of Europe. It was a struggle of the old certitudes against a man embodying the new force of subversive beliefs. It ran its course, as momentous, if less ruthless, than the deadly struggle in which the Dover Patrol has played its part. When it ended it left the world as weary, indeed, as it is today, but much less unsettled in its thoughts and emotions about the spiritual value of its monstrous experience. Men's ideas were simpler then, their sentiments less complex. Their desires and hopes, as poignant perhaps, remained

still obscure. The instinctive reaction against all the cruel negations a war imposes on humanity had a less resentful character; and men's judgment of the attained issue was less embittered by the effort they had been called upon to make. Yet their personal feelings were much like our own.

When the hour of peace struck in 1815 there must have been on board the King's ships anchored in the Downs, patrolling in the Channel, in the squadrons on distant stations, and in others cruising off nearly every port of northern Europe — there must have been the feeling that there never would be such a war again; a feeling of relief, mingled, no doubt, with a half-acknowledged sense of regret for the occupation that was gone. The great question arising at the end of every prolonged effort made by mankind — And now — what next? asked without misgivings in the consciousness of an accomplished duty — was not free from a certain uneasiness as to the days that would follow in other and unknown conditions. For a whole generation had grown from boyhood to maturity with no knowledge of peace conditions, and unperturbed by moral doubts of its warlike achievement.

Amongst the men of the Dover Patrol assembled to see the unveiling of the memorial to their own unforgettable dead there will be also a feeling of regret for those days that are past, regret of the strenuous life with its earnest purpose, its continuity of risk, its sense of professional efficiency, its community of desperate toil; regret even of those moments of extreme bodily fatigue associated with that feeling of spiritual exaltation which enabled them each in his station, from the Admiral commanding to the youngest member of a small drifter's crew, to defy the enmity of nature and the hostility of men.

Nobody would dream of apportioning shares of importance in the great task of the navy, so varied in its unity, so diverse in its singleness of aim and its invariable purpose. But it is a fact that amongst all those activities directed to the same end, exposed to the same risk, making the same appeal, and entered upon with the same courage, the work of the Dover Patrol was very special work. The Dover Patrol held the southern exit of the North Sea in the

same way in which the Grand Fleet may be said to have held its northern entrance; and the greatness of its responsibility may be appreciated from the one dominant fact: that on that Patrol rested the safety of our communications with the army in France, and that one of its achievements was the safe passage across the Channel of about seven million men without a single instance of failure, in the presence of a superior enemy established in force within easy distance on the flank of the line; an enemy superior in numbers and material, holding in his hands every element of

successful attack except for just a portion, an ever so small portion, of that sea spirit animating the others and men of the Dover command who stood in his way — including the very workers on shore in repair workshops and fitting-out sheds.

There was never a greater accord of fearless executive energy and skilled hard work than in the Dover Patrol. From the point of view of its spiritual harmony it was worthy to hold the extreme right wing of the great sea defence. Of its material success we all know by now; we have all heard of the millions of men transported to and fro across the Straits, of miles of nets laid along the coasts and kept in repair in defiance of heavy seas and long-range batteries, of mines swept along routes equalling in length twelve times the circumference of the globe, of merchant fleets of a hundred ships and more shepherded every day through the Downs. The eloquence of arithmetical figures as applied to the merits of the Dover Patrol is overwhelming indeed; but no figure of rhetoric can render justice to the quiet resolution of the men making up for the inadequacy of the means, the unavoidable inadequacy of the means for which only the force of circumstances was responsible, for which no past government can be blamed, since no one could have guessed the enormous scale of material requirements.

The means were inadequate, woefully inadequate; and thus the only trumps the Admiral of the Dover Patrol held in his hand at every turn of the dreadful game were the physical endurance, the inborn seamanship, the matter-of-fact, industrious, indefatigable enthusiasm with which every one under his orders threw his very soul into his appointed task. Threw it in and kept it there. It was no

momentary effort. For the anxious days of the Dover Patrol were to be many, its nights full of dangers, its problems exacting, its duty calls incessant, and its men after all but the flesh and blood of our common humanity. Their souls were the only trumps in the desperate game, as he who was in command must have felt at every moment of night and day. It was a great and successful game, but it must be confessed that for more than half the time it was a game of bluff. It came off at every deal, England's usual luck, that this time, too, has not failed her at the hour of need! And England may well be proud of her traditional luck in the character of her children serving her at sea, on shore, and in the air.

The activities of the Dover Patrol were of many kinds, but there were three imperative duties to which all its energies had to be devoted: the safety of the troop-transport service, the protection of merchant shipping, the closing of the Channel exit against the German submarines. One need not insist on their vital importance for the army and the nation or on the deadly danger of even a temporary failure. The work had to be carried out with the slenderest conceivable means, with obsolete torpedo destroyers, and with unarmed drifters, in the presence of an enemy of superior force and possessing an infinite advantage in his power to choose his own time for an attack of the most deadly kind. Those three purely naval problems required incessant hard work, incessant risk, and incessant vigilance. The routine of the Dover Patrol included the boarding of ships, the regulation of traffic along the cleared war lane, the laying of net and mine barrages on the Belgian coast and across the Channel, their guard and maintenance in all weathers and in all circumstances, with always present in all minds the sense of numerical inferiority in a mission the failure of which might have well brought about something not very far from national disaster. In such conditions the stress put upon the fortitude of every individual was bound to be very great.

The Dover Patrol was equal to it. Its devotion, expressed in a plodding, dogged perseverance, stood the test of frequent severe losses in men and ships, and of continuous severe strain on its mental and physical faculties as a whole. The tale of the Dover

Patrol is the tale of a small nucleus of ships and crews of the Royal Navy, and round it of a great number of other men and other vessels, mostly fisher-folk and fishercraft, with the addition of merchant Seamen and of R.N.R. and R.N.V.R. officers and ratings. Though, properly speaking, not belonging to the fighting service, all those men lived up to their old tradition and were found sufficient for the trust reposed in them.

They were found sufficient. No praise could be more adequately expressed, when one looks at the magnitude of the trust and the arduous character of the operations it imposed upon the men and the ships of the Dover command. Originating in the simple Downs Boarding Flotilla, under the orders of the naval officer commanding at Harwich, the Dover Patrol developed an independent existence and by the establishment of fortified German naval bases on the coast of Flanders acquired an importance in the

scheme of naval defence which cannot well be exaggerated. The reinforcements and supplies for the army, the food for the country, demanded the safety of the Straits. Had the enemy probed the weakness of the Dover Patrol and broken with his overwhelming force through that thin defence to invade the waters of the Channel, it would have been a disaster, the fatal consequences of which imagination even now shrinks from contemplating.

The great sailor-like qualities of the Dover Patrol, the consummate seamanship displayed in the planning and execution of its incessant operations, its steady manner of meeting deadly emergencies, its cool vigilance in the presence of an ever-menacing situation, may well compel the admiration of any man who knows something, however little, of the demands of sea service. To the risks of actual warfare the crews of the drifters watching over the barrage nets were often helplessly exposed. But nothing could dismay either the naval or the auxiliary branches of the Dover Patrol. These men were concerned about the perfection of their work, but the sudden flash of German guns in the night troubled them not at all. As, indeed, why should it? In their early days some of them had but a single rifle on board to meet the three four inch guns of German destroyers. Unable to put a fight and without speed to get away,

they made a sacrifice of their lives every time they went out for a turn of duty; they concentrated their valour on the calm, seamanlike execution of their work amongst the exploding mines and bursting shells. It was their conception of their honour, and they carried it out of this war unblemished by a single display of weakness, by the slightest moment of hesitation in the long tale of dangerous service.

In this simple way these seamen, professional and unprofessional, naval and civilian, have earned for themselves the memorial erected to their faithful labours. The record of the Dover Patrol's work contains a great moral and a good many professional lessons for their children and their successors; the incalculable value of a steady front, the perfecting of nets, the exact process of laying barrages in a tideway, the evolving of an ingenious method for night bombardments, and of a system of long-range firing — a whole great store of new ideas and new practice laid up for future use. But in truth that which in the last instance kept the German forces from breaking disastrously on any dark night into the Channel, and jeopardizing the very foundations of our resisting power, was not the

wonderfully planned and executed defences of nets and mines, but the indomitable hearts of the men of the Dover Patrol.

# **MEMORANDUM ON THE SCHEME FOR FITTING OUT A SAILING SHIP FOR THE PURPOSE OF PERFECTING THE TRAINING OF MERCHANT SERVICES OFFICERS BELONGING TO THE PORT OF LIVERPOOL**

Assuming that the generous public spirit of the Liverpool shipowners will find the capital necessary for the building and equipping a southern-going sailing ship to perfect the training of the officers of the Mercantile Marine, I conceive that the cost of running such a ship — that is: wages, upkeep, repairs, general surveys and insurance — ought to be covered by what she may earn as a cargo carrier on the training voyages which will be planned for her.

Here I will submit to the originators of the scheme that a voyage to an Australian port (including New Zealand) out by the Cape and round by the Horn would be the best for such a purpose. My reasons are: the healthy climate of that part of the world, the number of the meteorological regions traversed which will develop sound judgment as to weather, the comparative facility of the voyage, combined with a great variety of general experience which a round trip of that sort will offer. The length of passages need not be an objection; the complete training of a young seaman ought to include the experience of many together at sea between water and sky. It would have a spiritual and practical value for him even if he is destined never to be out of sight of land for more than a few days in his future professional life.

I

Assuming then that the ship would be expected to be self-supporting (and no more) it is my deliberate opinion that her size should be limited strictly to the tonnage which will enable her under modern conditions to pay her expenses. I venture to suggest (however shocking it may appear to the minds of men who own and manage fleets of large steamships) fourteen to fifteen hundred tons, or as

near thereto as is consistent with the earning of her expenses, as the proper tonnage for the ship. I admit that I don't know that the best freight-carrying capacity of a ship is at the present time; but I beg the Committee

charged with the elaboration of the scheme to allow me to expose my reasons for what I advance in support of the above opinion. I must premise here that in all that i am going to say I will be drawing on my own experience as a seaman trained to his duties under the British flag and, in regard to the performance of such duties, having a good record for more than sixteen years of sea life, both in sail and steam.

My contention is that for sea-going qualities, ease of handling, quickness is manoeuvring, and even in point of actual safety, if caught in a bad position, nothing can beat a, say, 1400-ton ship, designed so as to have a dead weight carrying capacity of about once and a half her registered tonnage. The same remark may be applied to the comfort in bad weather when, it must be remembered, the men managing her propelling machinery must remain exposed on the deck instead of being sheltered under it. The latest big sailing ship (in so far as she still exists) is generally in that respect what the sailors graphically describe as a mere "bathing-machine," her enormous main deck, especially when running before a heavy sea, being always full of water and extremely uncomfortable, besides being dangerous for that very reason. Also, the great length necessarily given to those big ships of three thousand tons and over masks them clumsy to handle, anything but quick in manoeuvre, and renders them rather helpless, from their very size, in case of any serious damage either aloft or about the rudder. It is also to be remarked that a ship's quick response in manoeuvring develops a corresponding activity and smartness in her crew.

I beg the gentlemen concerned with this scheme to understand that I am not speaking as a literary person indulging his fancy but as the usual sort of Merchant Service officer who has served in all sorts of ships and draws upon his ordinary experience; with this advantage, only, that he had time to think about it and meditate over its lessons. Pursuing the matter further, I wish also to touch on the question of the ship's appearance. In a steamship the increase of

size certainly makes for good looks, adding to the inherent beauty of the lines an expression of power and dignity which arouses one's admiration. It is not so with a sailing vessel. Hardly any ship of over 2000 tons I have ever seen escaped giving an impression which may be best defined by the word "overgrown"; and I have a good many in my memory to whom nothing but the sailors' graphic phrase "a big, clumsy brute" could in justice be applied. Now, in view of the end which the Liverpool shipowners have in equipping



a sailing ship, that is to perfect the training of officers for their fleets, certain ideal elements must be taken into consideration. It is very necessary that those boys should grow attached to their ship (an easy thing for a sailor to do), be proud of her individual appearance, of her sea qualities, of their association with her; and that they should remember their period of training, not as a horrible grind in discomfort and without personal gratification of any kind, but as a great time in their lives; an experience it has been their privilege as seamen of the Port of Liverpool to go through; a time to be remembered with pleasure and pride, somewhat as an old public-school boy looks back at his old school, the beauty of its old buildings and the prestige of its traditions. The greatest achievements of Merchant Seamen have been performed in ships of between 900 to 1600 tons, in the way of record passages (which were then the exclusive merit of seamen), of feats in clever handling and in the bringing in of disabled ships to port by their own seamanship and determination without any outside assistance. And if the objection is made that I am advocating things hopelessly out of date, then my answer will be that in this scheme of perfected training associated so closely with men's morale and with old traditions, the out-of-date argument does not apply. On the practical side that objection may be met by pointing out that those boys are not to be trained for officers of modern sailing ships, but to be perfected as future officers of the finest modern steamships. Therefore, what is important is to give them for their training not the most modern sailing ship (which in any case is doomed and need not be taken into consideration at all), but to select for them the best period of sailing-ship practice and service.

One more consideration I want to present to the originators of the scheme, which is this: that in a very large sailing ship there is always a tendency to supply her (on account of the difficulty of manning her effectively) with a lot of labour-saving appliances. This brings me to the second postulate which, after the size of the ship I am most anxious to submit for consideration. And it is this:

## II

That there should be no labour-saving appliances in the shape of steam winches and so on; and that the hoisting of the sails, the working of the boats, and the general physical work of the sailor's calling should be done by man power, of which, of course, the cadets on board would be the principal part. A vertical boiler, mainly for the purpose of heaving up the

anchors, may be advisable; but the windless should be of the kind which can be also worked by the crew by means of a capstan on the forecandle-head.

My reasons for this insistence on the use of man power are as follows: First of all, there is no necessity for anything else. With forty boys out of any given batch on board (Mr. Holt mentions eighty as the number and on that point I will offer a remark later) of an advanced physical development and certain weight of body, together with a ship's crew of, say, twelve A.B.'s, four officers, and some other ratings, the officers ought to be able to handle a ship, of the size and rig I am thinking of, like a plaything. Secondly, it may be laid down as an axiom that no labour done on board ship in the way of duty is either too hard or in any way unworthy of the best effort and attention or, so to speak, beneath the dignity of any youngster wishing to fit himself to be a good officer. Thirdly, there is undoubtedly something elevating in physical work into which one puts all one's heart in association with others and for a clearly understood purpose. Apart from that it will bring these youths into a more intimate contact with the propelling machinery of the ship and they will, so to speak, learn the feel of it. It mustn't be forgotten that seamen's work was never looked upon or had the character of mere slavish toil, as some branches of labour on shore tend to become. In its essence

life at sea has been always a healthy life, and part of that was owing to the very nature of the physical exertions required. I affirm with profound conviction that sailing-ship life is an excellent physical developer. I have repeatedly seen a delicate youngster brought on board by an anxious relative change out of all knowledge into a stout youth during a twelve month's voyage. I have never seen an apparently delicate boy break down under the conditions of the sea life of my time. They all improved. Moreover, any physical work intelligently done develops a special mentality; in this case it would be the sailor mentality; surely a valuable acquisition for a sea officer either in sail or steam.

### III

The sailing ship, then, I have in my eye (something very much like the Liverpool Sierras which were afloat between '80 and '90) would be a hull of between 1400 and 1500 tons register with a dead weight capacity of over 2000 tons, in which case it would be sufficient for her to have three square-rigged masts. If the tonnage of the ship is raised to 2000 tons register then

there must be four masts, of which the aftermost one would be rigged fore and aft. In any case, I would advocate for the training ship a long poop and a very roomy forecastle head; the poop, if the vessel is three-masted, extending as far as the main rigging; and the object being to reduce the area of the main deck as much as possible. This would tend to make the ship much more comfortable. Ships with long poops are always the driest in all weathers and safest for the individuals having to move about the decks in heavy weather. The main deck would have on it a deck house in the space between the forecoaming of the main hatch and the foremast; leaving a clear passage across at each end and foremast; leaving a clear passage across at each end and having wide alleyways on each side. The house would contain the vertical boiler for raising steam for the windlass; the accommodation for the ship's crew and the berths of the ship's petty officers. Under the forecastle there would be space at the sides for various storerooms, or the electric light plant, if carried, could be installed on one side

and the storerooms on the other. All that, however, may be left to the skill and ingenuity of the designer, once the actual size of the ship and the number of people she had to carry, all told, has been decided upon.

In this matter I have a certain competence because I was for 2 years chief officer of a sailing passenger ship running between London and Adelaide and I believe the very last of her kind, with the exception perhaps of the Macquarrie (later training ship for New Zealand merchant cadets), where the experience of a comparatively large number of persons on board ship could be obtained by the sailing-ship officer. She was only 1270 tons register and the greater number of people I had on board of her was 113 all told. She had room for 50 passengers when full and we had perforce to carry a lot of live stock, a milk cow for the children and so on; yet her space was not inconveniently crowded, and no passenger ever complained of cramped accommodation, and generally they made the round trip in her. She carried outwards a general cargo and in Adelaide loaded the usual Australian cargo, for the most part wool. Her poop was 78 over all; under that we carried eleven double passenger cabins on each side, two cabins for the mates, a large pantry amidships and a doctor's berth and surgery. The accommodation for the captain consisted of two stern cabins, both very roomy, of which one was his staterooms and the other was planned and furnished as a sitting room, which he never used at sea, sharing the saloon with the passengers. This saloon contained two long tables at which all the

people berthed under the poop deck could sit down to meals. I think that this arrangement could be adopted with advantage in the cadet ship under contemplation. The artificial lighting of the Torrens being oil and candles required extreme vigilance, but assuming the Liverpool cadets berthed in cabins as above, if electric light is to be introduced the lamps could be set in the partitions between them, so that each lamp would light two cabins. The long saloon would be the common room for navigational studies and meals, the electric lighting of that space, however economically applied, would be always better than the lamp-lighting of that ship which was sufficient for the passengers to read, write, or play their games in the evening. There

were never any complaints on that score. The captain of a training ship would probably use all his accommodation at sea too, messing by himself. Apart from that it seems to me that the man entrusted with the responsible position of commanding such a training ship would wish to keep in as close touch with the boys as conformable with the preservation of proper merchant-ship discipline; and that he would not find the nearness of his cabin to the bulk of them either inconvenient or irksome.

The accommodation on the poop, being sufficient only for about 44 cadets, could be duplicated to a certain extent below, aft, on the twin deck, and be made accessible by means of the after hatch, fitted with a proper companionway. There may be some difficulty with the supply of daylight down there and in that respect the berths below would be inferior, but as there would be no doubt different grades among the boys in the way of seniority and ratings, a boy would be moved by seniority or on promotion from below to above at some time or other in the course of his training. This would be something to look forward to; and in this connection I would remark that the comfort of the boys should be care for strictly within the limits of due regard for their health, physical development and opportunity for study, and no more. The greatest simplicity in such arrangements compatible with health and self-respect should be the note; and I believe that no boy properly constituted and wishing to be a seaman will resent such a system.

I suppose that as regards the boys, at least, a three-watch system will be introduced; though I must confess that I have never seen a boy hurt by the watch and watch duty which in my time all of them had to go through during the four years of their apprenticeship. In that case, however, the utmost vigilance and alertness in the time of duty should be exacted by the

officer of the watch from the cadets at their various stations, whether at the lee helm with the helmsmen, or on the lookout with an A.B. of the ship's crew, or about the decks at the different sheets, tacks and braces they may be specially told off to. The disadvantage of the three-watch system is that the cadet will be always on duty at the same hours. Some system of shifts should be introduced if only to change

the boys in rotation from one watch to another; for the habit of wakefulness is also a matter of training, and the boys should be accustomed to keep their alertness at all periods of the night. I would suggest that the senior cadets (especially those who had obtained the rating of cadet petty officer) should be employed as assistants to the officer of the watch to the fullest possible extent; and when sufficiently advanced be entrusted with the trimming of the yards, the taking in or setting of light sails in manageable weather, and so on. The progression of stations will be, I imagine, from waist-cadets to mizzen-topman, through main and fore to forecastlemen, which last would be selected from the strongest and the most advanced, during the training course of eighteen months. I imagine that the training ship with some luck in her weather and with quick dispatch at either end, could do two round voyages in that time. The *Torrens*, a fast ship, could have done it with ease, though as a matter of fact she made one voyage every eleven months, but then she would lie for weeks on the berth, both in London and Port Adelaide.

That ship carried four anchors, that is, three bowers and one stream, besides one big and one small kedge, and this is the number that would be sufficient for the training ship. Of course, the anchors would be stock anchors. In this connection I wish to remark that if the anchor is hove up by steam the catting and fishing should be done by hand under all circumstances with the help of the fore-castle-head capstan. As to the sails, I assume that she would carry (unless she is to be really a very big ship) six topsails, three topgallantsails, three royals four or three headsails, the usual number of staysails; and, I suggest, two courses. The crossjack course may be done away with. In my first year on board the *Torrens* we abolished that sail mainly out of regard for the feelings of the passengers who had their chairs placed all about the mizzenmast; and it made no difference whatever to the speed of the ship. The fair weather mizzen staysail, which was a particularly big sail, replaced it perfectly at all trims, from sharp up to two

points abaft the beam. With the wind aft the crossjack was merely a nuisance.

I advocate the ship carrying single topgallantsails as a matter of traditional practice and training. For the same reason I would suggest that the clew lines of the upper sails and the clew-garnets of the courses should be led to the quarters of the yard and not to the yardarm. The proper furling of a sail, with a smooth bunt and tightly rolled yardarms, was a great point in the habits of smartness and proper merchant-ship discipline. It was also a matter of correct seamanship, because a sail that was not properly furled in bad weather was likely to free itself and blow away from the yard. The shifting of clew lines to the yardarms was really a dodge of undermanning, since it is obvious that with no bunt to the sail less men are required to make some sort of furl of it. The training ship, however, will be anything but undermanned, and unless she were very big there would be plenty of hands in her to furl the three topgallantsails together. I have repeatedly seen the four boys of the *Torrens* with the addition of one able seaman furl the main topgallantsail of that ship in a stiff breeze. In a ship of 1600 tons six boys and two able seamen ought to master a topgallantsail in almost any weather. When I joined the *Torrens* the then master of her, Captain Cope (an old Conway boy), fell in at once with my suggestion to shift the clew lines back to the quarters of the yard, on the ground that the ship was manned well enough to do things properly.

In regard to boats, I will again refer to my experience of the *Torrens* (a sailing ship with a hundred souls on board). We carried in her, aft, two quarter-boats on davits abreast the mizzen rigging. They were well above water, toggled-in against a spar so as to be disengaged by one single jerk on a lanyard (their tackle falls beings always coiled clear on deck), and in other respects were ready for lowering instantly. Owing to the shortness of a merchantman's crew the orders as to these boats were that in an emergency the nearest men (up to four) were to get into her at once, the officer of the watch and the midshipman of the watch attending to the falls. The only real test of quickness we had happened in the daytime and in light weather, when the ship was luffed up till the sails lifted and one of the quarter-boats was lowered to pick up a parrot which had flown overboard. Not having been on deck at the time I don't know how

long all this took, but the parrot survived the experience; so we must have been quick enough to have saved child, for instance, of which we

always had several on board.

On the skids abaft the mainmast we carried two bigger spare boats bottom up and not ready for lowering. But the principal boats of the ship were two very roomy lifeboats, carried on skids forward, just abaft the fore rigging. They stood in chocks and their<sup>^</sup> davits were fore-and -afted at sea, but the lowering tackles were always hooked and the fails coiled in tubs secured on the top of the deck house, of which I have spoken before. Those lifeboats were fitted out ready to "abandon ship," with sea anchors, oil bags, oars, mast and sail, blue lights, water beakers and ship's bread in tins. Their chocks were held in position by a bolt in the usual way and the ship's carpenter was instructed when making his report to me in the morning to report: "Davits and bolts free." When the bolt was knocked out a lift of three inches was all that was necessary to swing out those lifeboats. Now and again I had a test, generally at eight o'clock in the morning at the change of watches, and I managed to bring things to a point when the whole operation took seven minutes from the time of the order: "Both watches. Out lifeboats," to the moment when they were swung back and landed again in their chocks; the second mate taking charge of the starboard and the senior apprentice (acting third of the port side. This for a merchant ship was quite as good as could be expected and would have, met almost any emergency short of sudden disaster. In the Channel and between the chops of the Channel and the Western Islands (either homeward or outward bound), on the first appearance of thick weather with a moderate sea, it was a standing order that the officer of the watch immediately after calling the captain was to swing these boats outboard ready for lowering. In that position they remained, weather permitting, till the fog cleared.

I have entered into those details because from the nature of things there can be very few sailing-ship officers left now who have had the experience of the care of upwards of a hundred people on board a 1300 ton ship. How far the boys should be given an insight into the stowage on a large single hold I am not prepared to say. The

proper stowage of a sailing ship was an extremely important part of her preparation for sea, affecting her sailing powers, the comfort of everybody on board, and even her absolute safety. The stowage of a subdivided hold of a large steamship is from the very nature of things a much less nice matter. It is also different in its nature, since the order of the ports of call is a paramount consideration in the disposition of a steamship's cargo. But an

insight into the old conditions cannot do any harm and may be found useful on occasion.

Next I venture to offer the suggestion that the ship should have no auxiliary propulsion of any kind. Let her be a sailing ship. I don't exactly know how this may affect the rate of insurance, but I assure you that a very few years ago, well within the life of the man who is addressing you now, nobody thought a sailing ship less safe than a steamship. A ship's safety, apart from the "Act of God," rests in the hands of the men who are aboard of her, from the highest to the lowest in their different degrees. Machinery, perse, will not make a ship more safe, and the saved space would be useful for other purposes.

The ship will have, of course, to make use of tugs at the end of her passages. This will afford the cadets an opportunity to get an insight into the various points of seamanship connected with the operations of towage. The mere handling of steel and other kinds of hawsers will by itself give them valuable practice.

General Remarks: Finally I beg leave to touch upon the actual number of people on board. Mr. Laurence Holt's letter speaks of 60 to 80 cadets. I should suggest that the lesser number should be adopted. And even less than 60 if possible. What I have in my mind is the possibility of some accidents (which may happen to the best ship afloat) and its effect on the public mind. Regard ought to be paid also to the facility of getting a lesser number of people cut a sinking ship or saving them all in case of a shipwreck.

I have assumed that the period of training would be eighteen months. This «s the case of a Conway boy would work out his apprenticeship as follows: One year sea service allowed for Conway training; one year and in half in the sailing ship; the last year and a half as apprentice or cadet in a steamship.

In case of boys joining straight from a school on shore I suppose they would be kept for two and a half years on board the sailing vessel and finish their time in steam.

I don't touch on the point of navigational studies, for which no doubt a provision will be made. I will only remark that the greatest care and accuracy should be required from the cadets acting as assistant officers of the watch (and generally from ail senior boys) in keeping the ship's dead reckoning. This is a point of seamanship rather than navigation.



The ship, whether at anchor or alongside the quay, ought to offer that aspect of finished smartness alow and aloft that a training ship should have. It must be remembered that wherever she goes she will be representing the entire maritime community of the Port of Liverpool, employers and employed, shipowners and seamen.

The cadets going ashore on leave should always wear the ship's uniform, unless specifically invited to play games. The ship will no doubt have a football team and a cricket eleven.

A harbour watch (as distinguished from anchor watch), composed of one senior and two junior cadets, should be kept. And, generally, a proper amount of formality should be observed in the ship's routine both at sea and in port. It is conducive to self-respect in all ranks.

## THE LOSS OF THE DALGONAR

To the Editor of the London Mercury SIR,

Since you have invited comments from nautical readers on a certain obscure passage in the ‘True Story’ printed in your September number, I will refer here to the point raised by Mr. L.C. Gane and to some other mistakes of minor importance. Not that I think they matter in the least for your readers, who, in any case, would have perceived the great quality of the narrative.

The passage queried by Mr. L.C. Gane, quite justifiably, runs as follows:

“At noon wore ship ... 7 p.m. wind and sea increasing, took in the mizzen fore upper topsail. 11 p.m. wind and sea still increasing, took in the mizzen and main upper topsails.”

The italicized words have, nautically speaking, no sense; the first four absolutely, the second five in relation to the first statement; since it is obvious that the mizzen upper topsail could not have been taken in twice.

These are obviously slips of the pen or errors of transcription. The first statement evidently was meant for: ‘Took in the mizzen and fore upper topsails,’ the word missing in your text being the “and” after the word “mizzen.” The ship then was carrying her foresail, lower fore-topsail, lower and upper main-topsail and lower mizzen-topsail. At 11 p.m., the gale still increasing, the sails taken in were the “mizzen lower and main upper topsails,” the word missing in the phrase as it stands in the text being the word “lower” after the word “mizzen.” Thus, at 11 p.m. the ship was reduced down to her foresail and the fore and main lower topsails, which was a possible and seamanlike canvas for her to carry in then state of the weather. I cannot, however, defend myself from the impression conveyed by the narrative and also from what happened afterwards, that the foresail was carried on her too long. That large piece of canvas must have had the effect (at least at times) of forcing the ship one and a half or perhaps two knots through the water — for no object

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that I can see. And there was the danger. But it is easy to be wise after the event!

The paragraph queried by Mr. Gane contains also a printing error: the plural usM should come out of the word “foresails.” A ship has got only

one foresail.

As to other minor corrections, the words “main draft” in the opening paragraph of the story should be 1mean draft, “as is obvious from the inspection of the figures. The draught of water is a formal logbook entry in any ship about to proceed to sea. Another misprint (on page 483) consists in a superfluous letter. The line runs: “and tve/?squared-in the main and crossjack yards, etc., etc.” The “b” got in there by mistake. It should, of course, run: “and we squared-in the main, etc.,” in what is a correct description of wearing ship, which was the last manoeuvre attempted before the Dalgonarbecame unmanageable.

On the next page the meaningless word printed as “nil” should, of course, be “rail.”

I agree with all my heart with the editorial note heading the story. There can be nothing finer or more simple. The crew of the Daigonarbehaved as well as I have ever seen the crew of a British merchant ship behave in a critical situation, and they deserve fully the encomiums and blessings Mr. Mull, the Chief Officer, gives to them in his report written on board the Loire. A tribute of admiration is due, too, to the captain of the French ship for his humane determination to save those men, and for the display of seamanlike resolution and skill in maintaining his ship in position for so long in such desperate weather. Nobody but a seaman can appreciate the risks and the difficulty of the task, and the severe strain put on the endurance of the crew and officers of the Loire in sheer physical exertions, in unremitting vigilance and plucky seamanship, which enabled them to remain by and finally to take off the crew of the Daigonar.

Yours, etc., Joseph Conrad.

# TRAVEL

## A PREFACE TO RICHARD CURLE'S "INTO THE EAST"

There is no fate so uncertain as the fate of books of travel. They are the most assailable of all men's literary productions. The man who writes a travel book delivers himself more than any other into the hand of his enemies. The popularizing scientific writer's position is much more secure. His very subject is, properly speaking, marvellous in itself, and for that reason the intelligent multitude swallows it eagerly, or at least receives it with open mouth, and forms its own amazing conclusions. A writer of fiction — well! — he romances all the time, and the truth he has in him being disguised in various garments, from gold mantles to rags, is almost beyond the reach of criticism. All really he has got to attend to is grammar and punctuation. Metaphysics, of course, are simply intoxicating for those who like that way of killing our appointed time in this valley of tears. But as to those whose fancy leads them to investigate more or less profoundly that same valley... !

But after all a traveller is very much to be envied. He is to be envied for the instinct that prompts him, for the courage that sustains him. He is to be admired for enduring a spectacle almost intolerably gorgeous and varied, but with only hints, here and there, of dramatic scenes, with, practically, no star actors in it, with the knowledge that the curtain will not fall for months an months to come; and that he must play the exacting part of a spectator of those human characteristics and activities, in their picturesque, ugly, or savage settings, without, so to speak, the prospect of going home to bed presently. Imagine a lover of drama and of stage effects forced to sleep in his very stall, and every day, opening his eyes upon a never-ceasing performance. The taste for that sort of thing may well be envied as evidence of capacity for mental and physical resistance, not only against the strain of all the "things that seem to be," but against one's own weakness. Perhaps that is the reason why the Arabs, racially great travellers and great lovers of wonders, invented the proverb, "Travelling is victory," which stands as the motto of this

book. It expresses, indeed, a romantic conception. But there is a soberness of temperament in the Arab race which has prevented it from

rushing exultingly into the writing of travel books. Of course, I am an ignorant person, from circumstances which it would not be to my advantage to disclose, but I can only call to mind one Arab traveller who has written a book; and surely if there had been shoals of them I would have heard of another.

Those people did much of their travelling sword in hand and with the name of the One God on their lips. But theirs were personally conducted parties, as destructive to the peace and the spiritual character of places they visited as any crowd from a tourist agency invading the shades of Vallombrosa. Let us forget the Arabs as well as their successors who are achieving victory every year at the price of so many pounds per head for a certain number of days. They demand neither our admiration nor our pity.

Nowadays many people encompass the globe. That kind of victory became to a certain extent fashionable for some years after the piercing of the Isthmus of Suez. Multitudes rushed through that short cut with blank minds and, alas, also blank notebooks where the megalomania, from which we ail more or less suffer, got recorded in the shape of "Impressions." The inanity of the mass of travel books the Suez Canal is responsible for took the proportions of an enormous and melancholy joke. For it was a mournful sight to see so many people giving themselves away. Their books covered private shelves and the tables of cabinets de lecture in a swarm more devastating to the world's freshness of impression than a swarm of locusts in a field of young corn. When that visitation began I was quite a boy and in my innocence I read them all, or, at least, all I could lay my hands on. Women, single or in pairs, fashionable couples, professors of intense gravity, facetious business men — I read all their travel books, including even Baron Hubner's "Voyage Round the World," which, I should think, remains unequalled to this day.

That category of travellers with their parrot-like remarks, their strange attempts at being funny, and their lamentable essays in seriousness has apparently passed away. Or perhaps they only print

their books for circulation amongst friends. I suspect, however, they have ceased to write simply because there are too many of them. They do not appear as travellers even to the most naive minds and perhaps even to their own minds. They are simply an enormous company of people who go round the world for a change and rest, either suffering from overwork (whatever that may mean) or from neurasthenia. And I am sure my best wishes go

with them for an easy and radical recovery. Steamship companies love them.

Sporting travellers form a class by themselves. They mostly write for other sportsmen, though I must confess that their books hold for me even now some fascination. They are apt to grow monotonous in the descriptive statistics of slaughter and as to the shortcomings of their "boys." Also in their admiration for their trackers, who seem all to have been made from the same pattern. I have noticed them adopting of late years a half-apologetic tone about their exploits; whereas the men of twenty-five years ago, with their much less perfect weapons and their big records, were frankly exulting. Frankness is a virtue I like. I would respect the modern attitude more if I were sure of its absolute genuineness. Moderation in game killing is enforced now by many regulations; but on considering how easy it is not to shoot an antelope one becomes slightly doubtfully of the perfect candour of men who travel thousands of miles in dreary steamboats and uncomfortable primitive trains for sport. On the other hand, I admit that a sportsman who would consistently miss every antelope would be an extremely uninteresting person. The world of explorers and discoverers, the heroes of my boyhood, has vanished almost to nothing in the nineteenth century. Some of them wrote the classics of travel, but no passage of years can dim my admiration for their selfless spirit and manly faithfulness to their task pursued in solitude or with a few devoted henchmen, persevered in through numberless day with death only a pace behind, but with a calm mind and a steady heart.

What about mere wanderers? — those individuals that one meets in various fairly well-known localities, but who come upon one round unexpected corners, often shabby and depressed, sometimes haggard and jaunty; with tales in their mouths of the

flattest description or of a comic quality bordering on tears; with, now and then, a story that would frighten you to death if you were one of those men who don't know how to smile in time. I would class them as an outcast tribe if it did not sound so rude. And I would not be rude for anything to people capable of starting on their travels with their hands, and very little else besides, in their pockets. I have known amongst them men of ruffianly mental complexion, cultivating a truculent manner and a cold steady stare, who, if it were possible to bluff one's own destiny, might have been sitting in high places. And I ask myself, in my half-reluctant partiality for the

class, whether some of them have not achieved it. But success disguises them at once and contemporary history gives them other names.

In my review of the categories of men who move about the earth I come now to the real travellers who wrote books, the protagonists of the modern travellers, in the same way, I may say, in which Hannon may be looked upon as a protagonist of the discoverers and the circumnavigators of the globe. Only the *Periplus* was probably a dreary official report. At any rate it has not come down to us. The outstanding figure amongst those men who dedicated their books of travel to popes and emperors is Marco Polo, with his meticulous descriptive gift, his cautious credulity, his eye for splendour and his historian's rather than a traveller's temperament. He gave his readers what the readers of that day wanted, historical facts in a foreign and gorgeous atmosphere. But the time for such books of travel is past on this earth girt about with cables, with an atmosphere made restless by the waves of ether, lighted by that sun of the twentieth century under which there is nothing new left now, and but very little of what may still be called obscure.

The day of many-volumed "Journeys, through or to," of "Relations of this or that" (and much charm and ability some of them had), the days of heroic travel are gone; unless, of course, in the newspaper sense, in which heroism like everything else in the world becomes as common if not as nourishing as our daily bread. There would be always a lady or a gentleman ready to discover with considerable fuss a bit of territory of, say, ten square miles, resembling exactly the surrounding and already explored lands; or

interview some new ruler, like a reflection in a dim and tarnished mirror of some real chieftain in the books of a hundred years ago; or marvel at a disagreeable fish of atrocious habits which had been described already in some old-tirre, simply worded, unsensational "Relation." But even this is a game which is losing its interest, and in a very little time will have come to an end. Presently there will be no backyard left in the heart of Central Africa that has not been peeped into by some person more or less commissioned for the purpose. The Nigeria of Barth, of Dhenham, of Clapperton, of Mungo Park, of other infinitely curious and profoundly inspired men, will be bristling with police posts, colleges, tramway poles, and all those improving things triumphantly recorded, and always with the romantic addition that, within twenty miles, the hills, or the forests, or the holes in the sand, or the depths of the jungle (that blessed word) are swarming with cannibal tribes miraculously restrained by one white man

with two black soldiers and his native cook for all company. And the great cloud of fatuous daily photographs and even more fatuous descriptive chatter, under whose shadow no traveller could live, will brood over those seldom-visited places of the world that, despoiled of their old black soul of mystery, have not yet acquired its substitute, which will be marvellously piebald when it comes.

This moment of ill-humour with “thing as they are becoming” is of course perfectly unreasonably and even perverse, which is worse: It would not deserve to be tolerated except for its inherent piety. As a matter of fact I have been thinking for a moment of the dead, of the great and good travellers loved in my boyhood, as I laid aside the MS. of this modern traveller who by publishing it has delivered himself to his enemies. He is very modern, for he is fashioned by the conditions of an explored earth in which the latitudes and longitudes having been recorded once for all have become things of no importance, in the sense that they can no longer appeal to the spirit of adventure, inflame no imagination, lead no one up to the very gates of mortal danger.

These basic facts of geography having been ascertained by the observations of heavenly bodies, the glance of the modern traveller contemplating the much-surveyed earth beholds in fact a

world in a state of transition; very different in this from the writers, of travel books of Marco Polo’s time, who in their conscientious narratives seem to progress amongst immutable wonders, to feed their curiosity on a consistency of the splendid and the bizarre, presented to their eyes to stare at, to their minds to moralize upon.

And those things, which stand as if imperishable in the pages of old books of travel, are all blown away, have vanished as utterly as the smoke of the travellers’ camp fires in the icy night air of the Gobi Desert, as the smell of incense burned in the temples of strange gods, as the voices of Asiatic statesmen speculating with the cruel wisdom of past ages on matters of peace and war.

Nothing obviously strange remains for our eyes now. The Khan of Tartary’s court ceremonies were certainly marvellous in quite a different sense from the procedure followed at Kuala Kangsar two years ago when the Sultan of Perak was invested with the K.C.M.G. by the Governor of the Straits Settlements. This modern traveller describes it all in less words than Marco Polo would have used paragraphs on such a striking occasion. It was



curious for him to watch under the formal routine of official compliments the Malay prince? play up to British etiquette, while grafting it on their own ideas of politeness, and wearing, he thought, a slightly ironical smile on their dark faces. And to think that only fifty years ago, after a certain amount of jungle and stockade fighting, the Sultan of Perak, or perhaps his brother ruler next door in Selangor, having listened attentively to a lecture from a British Admiral on the heinousness of a certain notable case of piracy, turned round quickly to his attending chiefs and to the silent throng of his Malay subjects, exclaiming, "Hear now, my people! Don't let us have any more of this little game." Those words ought to have been engraved in letters of gold on a marble monument at the mouth of the Jugra River; for from the moment they were pronounced dates the era of security for the poor folks of the coast, for the fishermen and traders in the Straits of Malacca. The downfall of local piracy in fact. The world in transition!

Our very curiosities have changed, growing more subtle amongst the vanishing mysteries of the earth. Very appropriately

this modern traveller reclining on the verandah of the State Rest-house, after having watched the ceremonies of installation in the blaring of trumpets and the gorgeous bright colours of the throng, recalls the strong impression of, one might say, indifferent and rather contemptuous good-will between brown and white, and gives himself up to the vain (as he himself observes) occupation of speculating on the future of countries. But he does it not in the spirit of a statesman looking for political truth, but in the doubting mood of a traveller of our day who on the very threshold of the East has questioned himself as to the ultimate truth of travel; whether purchase it was more than the mastery of first impression; showed in the sanity of our outlook on the world modern traveller revolt against its facts but in the fiered himself to his whole, or in the conformity ... he is fashioned by the and the mental reexplored earth in which the latitudes. It is this mood which men recorded once for all have inner promptings suggested by travel, which informs the felicitous rendering of his visual impressions. This it is that forces him, while looking out into the night from the deck of an Irrawaddy flotilla steamer, to admit to himself man's secret antagonism to the wilderness; or during his few hours' stay in Bhamo, a town on the very frontier of the Chinese enigma, where caravans incessantly come and go through mysterious valleys and where people live on rumours from day to day, to absorb its spirit of secrecy and waiting and hear suddenly around

him “the whisper of innumerable hills passing on one to another the restless murmur of men’s hearts.” Very modern in impressions, in appreciations, in curiosities, and in his very love of the mother earth, of whose children he has written subtly and tenderly in some three volumes of characteristic tales; a traveller of our day, condemned to make his discoveries on beaten tracks, he looks on, sensitive, meditative, with delicate perceptions and a gift for expression, alive to the saving grace of human and historical associations; and while pursuing amongst the men busy with ascertained facts the riddles presented by a world in transition, he seems to have captured for us the spirit of modern travel itself.

## STEPHEN CRANE

In truth I had never expected the biography of Stephen Crane to appear in my lifetime. My immense pleasure was affected by the devastating touch of time which like a muddy flood covers under a mass of daily trivialities things of value: moments of affectionate communion with kindred spirits, words spoken with the careless freedom of perfect confidence, the deepest emotions of joy and sorrow

— together with such things of merely historical importance as the recollection of dates, for instance. After hearing from Mr. Beer of his difficulties in fixing certain dates in the history of Stephen Crane's life. I discovered that I was unable to remember with any kind of precision the initial date of our friendship. Indeed, life is but a dream

— especially for those of us who have never kept a diary or possessed a notebook in our lives.

In this extremity. I had recourse to another friend of Stephen Crane, who had appreciated him intuitively almost as soon as I did myself and who is woman of excellent memory. My wife's recollection is that Crane and I met in London in October, 1897, and that he came to see us for the first time in our Essex home in the following November.

I have mentioned in a short paper written two years ago that it was Mr. S.S. Pawling, partner in the publishing firm of Mr. Heinemann, who brought us together. It was done at Stephen Crane's. At that time the facts we knew about each other were that we both had the same publisher in England. The only other fact I knew about Stephen Crane was that he was quite a young man. I had, of course, read his "Red Badge of Courage," of which people were writing and talking at that time. I certainly did not know that he had the slightest notion of my existence, or that he had seen a single line (there were not many of them then) of my writing. I can safely say that I earned this precious friendship by something like ten months of strenuous work with my pen. It took me just that time to write "The Nigger of the Narcissus," working at what I always considered a very high pressure. It was on the ground of the authorship of that book that Crane wanted to meet me. Nothing could have been more flattering

than to discover that the author of "The Red Badge of Courage" appreciated my effort to present a group of men held together by a common

loyalty and a common perplexity in a struggle not with human enemies, but with the hostile conditions testing their faithfulness to the conditions of their own calling.

Apart from the imaginative analysis of his own temperament tried by the emotions of a battlefield, Stephen Crane dealt in his book with the psychology of the mass — the army; while I — in mine — had been dealing with the same subject on a much smaller scale and in more specialized conditions — the crew of a merchant ship, brought to the test of what I may venture to call the moral problem of conduct. This may be thought a very remote connection between these two works and the idea may seem too far-fetched to be mentioned here; but that was my undoubted feeling at the time. It is a fact that I considered Crane, by virtue of his creative experience with “The Red Badge of Courage,” as eminently fit to pronounce a judgment on my first consciously planned attempt to render the truth of a phase of life in the terms of my own temperament with all the sincerity of which I was capable.

I had, of course, my own opinion as to what I had done; but I doubted whether anything of my ambitiously comprehensive aim would be understood. I was wrong there; but my doubt was excusable, since I myself would have been hard put to it if requested to give my complex intentions the form of a concise and definite statement. In that period of misgivings which so often follows an accomplished task I would often ask myself, who in the world could be interested in such a thing? It was after reading “The Red Badge,” which came into my hands directly after its publication in England, that I said to myself: “Here’s a man who may understand — if he ever sees the book; though of course that would not mean that he would like it.” I do not mean to say that I looked towards the author of “The Red Badge” as the only man in the world. It would have been stupid and ungrateful. I had the moral support of one or two intimate friends and the solid fact of Mr. W.E. Henley’s acceptance of my tale for serial publication in the *New Review* gave me confidence, while I awaited the larger verdict.

It seems to me that in trying to recall my memories of Stephen Crane I have been talking so far about myself; but that is unavoidable, since this Introduction, which I am privileged to write, can only trace what is left on earth of our personal intercourse, which was even more short and fleeting than it may appear from the record of dates. October, 1897 — May, 1900.

And out of that beggarly tale of months must be deducted the time of his absence from England during the Spanish-American War, and of his visit to the United States shortly before the beginning of his last illness. Even when he was in England our intercourse was not so close and frequent as the warmth of our friendship would have wished it to be. We both lived in the country and, though not very far from each other, in different countries. I had my work to do, always in conditions which made it a matter of urgency. He had his own tasks and his own visions to attend to. I do not think that he had more friendships to claim him than I, but he certainly had more acquaintances and more calls on his time.

This was only natural. It must be remembered that as an author he was my senior, as I used to remind him now and then with affected humility which always provoked his smiles. He had a quiet smile that charmed and frightened one. It made you pause by something revelatory it cast over his whole physiognomy, not like a ray but like a shadow. I often asked myself what it could be, that quality that checked one's care-free mood, and now I think I have had my answer. It was the smile of a man who knows that his time will not be long on this earth.

I would not for a moment wish to convey the impression of melancholy in connection with my memories of Stephen Crane. I saw his smile first over the tablecloth in a restaurant. We shook hands with intense gravity and a direct stare at each other, after the manner of two children told to make friends. It was under the encouraging gaze of Sydney Pawling, who, a much bigger man than either of us and possessed of a deep voice, looked like a grownup person entertaining two strange small boys — protecting and slightly anxious as to the experiment. He knew very little of either of us. I was a new author and Crane was a new arrival. It was the meeting of *The Red Badge* and *'The Nigger'* in the presence of

their publisher; but as far as our personalities went we were three strangers breaking bread together for the first time. Yet it was as pleasantly easy a meal as any I can remember. Crane talked in his characteristic deliberate manner about Greece at war. I had already sensed the man's intense earnestness underlying his quiet surface. Every time he raised his eyes, that secret quality (for his voice was careless) of his soul was betrayed in a clear flash. Most of the true Stephen Crane was in his eyes, most of his strength at any rate, though it was apparent also in his other features, as, for

instance, in the structure of his forehead, the deep solid arches under the fair eyebrows.

Some people saw traces of weakness in the lower part of his face. What I could see there was a hint of the delicacy of sentiment, of the inborn fineness of nature which this man, whose life had been anything but a stroll through a rose-garden, had managed to preserve like a sacred heritage. I say heritage, not acquisition, for it was not and could not have been acquired. One could depend on it on all occasions; whereas the cultivated kind is apt to show ugly gaps under very slight provocation. The coarseness of the professedly delicate must be very amusing to the misanthrope. But Crane was no enemy of his kind. That sort of thing did not amuse him. As to his own temper, it was proof against anger and scorn, as I can testify, having seen him both angry and scornful, always, quietly, on fitting occasions. Contempt and indignation never broke the surface of his moderation, simply because he had no surface. He was all through of the same material, incapable of affectation of any kind, of any pitiful failure of generosity for the sake of personal advantage, or even from sheer exasperation which must find its relief.

Many people imagined him a fiery individuality. Certainly he was not cold-blooded. But his was an equable glow, morally and temperamentally. I would have said the same of his creative power (I have seen him sit down before a blank sheet of paper, dip his pen, write the first line at once and go on without haste and without pause for a couple of hours), had he not confined to me that his mentality did flag at times. I do not think it was more than every writer is familiar with at times. Another man would have talked of his “failing

inspiration.” It is very characteristic of Crane that I have never heard him use that word when talking about his work.

His phraseology was generally of a very modest cast. That unique and exquisite faculty, which Edward Garnett, another of his friends, found in his writing — “of disclosing an individual scene by an odd simile” — was not apparent in his conversation. It was interesting, of course, but its charm consisted mainly in the freshness of his impressions, set off by an acute simplicity of view and expressed with an amusing deliberation. Superabundance of words was not his failing when communing with those he liked and felt he could trust. With the other kind of “friends” he followed the method of a sort of suspended silence. On a certain occasion (it was at

Brede Place), after two amazingly conceited idiots had gone away, I said to him, "Stevie, you brood like a distant thundercloud." He had retired early to the other end of the room, and from there had sent out, now and then, a few words, more like the heavy drops of rain that precede the storm than growls of thunder. Poor Crane, it he could took black enough at times, never thundered; though I have no doubt he could been dangerous if he had liked. There always seemed to be something (not timidity) which restrained him, not from within but, I could not help fancying, from outside, with an effect as of a whispered memento morim the ear of a reveller not lost to the sense of grace.

That of course was a later impression. It must be stated clearly that I know very little of Stephen Crane's life. We did not feel the need to tell each other formally the story of our lives. That did not prevent us from being very intimate and also very open with each other from the first. Our affection would have been "everlasting," as he himself qualified it, had not the jealous death intervened with her cruel capriciousness by striking down the younger man. Our intimacy was really too close to admit of indiscretions; not that he did not speak amusingly of his experiences and of his hardships, and warmly of the men that helped him in his early days, like Mr. Hamlin Garland for instance, or men kindly encouraging to him, like Mr. Howells. Many other names he used to utter lovingly have been forgotten by me after so many years.

It is fact that I heard more of his adventures than of his trials; privations, and difficulties. I know he had many. He was the least recriminatory of men (though one of the most sensitive, I should say), but, in any case, nothing I could have learned would have shaken the independent judgment I had formed for myself of his trust worthiness as a man and a friend. Though the word is discredited now and may sound pretentious, I will say that there was in Crane a strain of chivalry which made him safe to trust with one's life. To be recognizably a man of honour carries no immunity against human weaknesses, but comports more rigid limitations in personal relations than the status of an "honourable man," however recognizable that too may be. Some men are "honourable" by courtesy, others by the office they hold, or simply by belonging to some popular assembly, the election to which is not generally secured by a dignified accuracy of statement and a scrupulous regard for the feelings of others. Many remain honourably (because of their great circumspection in the conduct of their affairs)

without holding within themselves any of these restraints which are inherent in the character of a man of honour, however weak or luckless he may be.

I do not know everything about the strength of Crane's circumspection, but I am not afraid of what the biography which follows may disclose to us; though I am convinced that it will be free from hypocritical reservations. I think I have understood Stephen Crane, and from my too short acquaintance with his biographer I am confident he will receive the most humane and sympathetic treatment. What I discovered very early in our acquaintance was that Crane had not the face of a lucky man. That certitude came to me at our first meeting while I sat opposite him listening to his simple tales of Greece, while S.S. Pawling presided at the initiatory feast — friendly and debonair, looking solidly anchored in the stream of life, and very reassuring, like a big, prosperous ship to the sides of which we two in our tossing little barks could hook on for safety. He was interested in the tales too; and the best proof of it is that when he looked at his watch and jumped up, saying, "I must leave you two now," it was very near four o'clock. Nearly a whole afternoon wasted, for an English business man.

No such consideration of waste or duty agitated Crane and myself. The sympathy that, even in regard of the very few years allotted to our friendship, may be said to have sprung up instantaneously between us, was the most undemonstrative case of that sort in the last century. We not only did not tell each other of it (which would have been missish), but even without entering formally into a previous agreement to remain together, we went out and began to walk side by side in the manner of two tramps without home, occupation, or care for the next night's shelter. We certainly paid no heed to direction. The first thing I noticed were the Green Park railings, when to my remark that he had seen no war before he went to Greece, Crane made answer: "No. But The Red Badge' is all right." I assured him that I never had doubted it; and, since the title of the work had been pronounced for the first time, feeling I must do something to show I had read it, I said shyly: "I like your General." He knew at once what I was alluding to, but said not a word. Nothing could have been more tramp-like than our silent pacing, elbow to elbow, till, after we had left Hyde Park Corner behind us, Crane uttered with his quiet earnestness the words: "I like your young man — I can just see him." Nothing could have been more characteristic of the depth of our three-hour-old intimacy than that each of



us should have selected for praise the merest by the way vignette of a minor character.

This was positively the only allusion we made that afternoon to our immortal works. Indeed we talked very little of them at any time, and then always selecting some minor point for particular mention; which, after all, is not a bad way of showing an affectionate appreciation of a piece of work done by a friend. A stranger would have expected more, but, in a manner of speaking, Crane and I had never been strangers. We took each other's work for granted from the very first, I mean from the moment we had exchanged those laudatory remarks alongside the Green Park railings. Henceforth mutual recognition kept to the standard. It consisted often of an approving grunt, sometimes of the mention of some picked-out paragraph, or of a line or only of a few words that had caught our fancy and would, for a time, be applied more or less aptly to the

turns of our careless, or even serious, talks.

Thus, for instance, there was a time when I persecuted poor Crane with the words "barbarously abrupt." They occur in that marvellous story, 'The Open Boat,' and are applied by him to the waves of the sea (as seen by men tossing in a small dinghy) with an inspired audacity of epithet which was one of Crane's gifts that gave me most delight. How amazingly apt these words are where they stand, anybody can see by looking at that story, which is altogether a big thing, and has remained an object of my confirmed admiration. I was always telling Crane that this or that was "barbarously abrupt," or begging him not to be so "barbarously abrupt" himself, with a keen enjoyment of the incongruity; for no human being could be less abrupt than Crane. As to his humanity (in contradistinction to barbarity), it was a shining thing without a flaw. It is possible that he may have grown at length weary of my little joke, but he invariably received it with a smile, thus proving his consistent humanity towards his kind. But, after all, he too liked that story of his, of four men in a very small boat, which by the deep and simple humanity of presentation seems somehow to illustrate the essentials of life itself, like a symbolic tale. It opens with a phrase that anybody could have uttered, but which, in relation to what is to follow, acquires the poignancy of a meaning almost universal. Once, much later in our acquaintance, I made use of it to him. He came on a flying visit to Pent Farm where we were living then. I noticed that he looked harassed. I, too, was feeling for the moment as if things were getting too much for me. He

lay on the couch and I sat on a chair opposite. After a longish silence, in which we both could have felt how uncertain was the issue of life envisaged as a deadly adventure in which we were both engaged like two men trying to keep afloat in a small boat, I said suddenly across the width of the mantelpiece:

“None of them knew the colour of the sky.”

He raised himself sharply. The words had struck him as familiar, though I believe he failed to place them at first. “Don’t you know that quotation?” I asked. (These words form the opening sentence of his tale.) The startled expression passed off his face. “Oh, yes,” he

said quietly, and lay down again. Truth to say, it was a time when neither he nor I had the leisure to look up idly at the sky. The waves just then were too “barbarously abrupt.”

I do not mean to say that it was always so. Now and then we were permitted to snatch a glance at the colour of the sky. But it is a fact that in the history of our essentially undemonstrative friendship (which is nearly as difficult to recapture as a dream) that first long afternoon is the most care-free instant, and the only one that had a character of enchantment about it. It was spread out over a large portion of central London. After the Green Park the next thing I remember are the Kensington Gardens, where under the lofty and historical trees I was vouchsafed a glimpse of the low mesquite bush overspreading the plum-coloured infinities of the great Taxes plains. Then after a long tramp amongst an orderly multitude of grimy brick house — from which the only things I carried off were the impressions of the coloured rocks of Mexico (or was it Arizona?), and my first knowledge of a locality called the Painted Desert — there came suddenly Oxford Street. I don’t know whether the inhabitants of London were keeping indoors or had gone into the country that afternoon, but I don’t remember seeing any people in the streets except for a figure, now and then, unreal, too, was stopped; yet, it seems, not entirely, because I remember Crane seizing my arm and jerking me back on the pavement with the calm remark: “you will get run over.” I love to think that the dear fellow had saved my life and that it seemed to amuse him. As to London’s enormous volume of business, all I know is that one A.B.C. shop had remained open. We went through the depressing ceremony of having tea there; but our interest in each other mitigated its inherent horrors and gave me a good idea of Crane’s stoicism. At least I suppose we had tea, otherwise they would not have let us sit there

so long. To be left alone was all we wanted. Neither of us had then a club to entertain the other in. It will give a good notion of our indomitable optimism (on that afternoon) when I say that it was there, in those dismal surroundings, we reached the conclusion that though the world had grown old and weary, yet the scheme of creation remained as obscure as ever, and (from our own particular point of view) there was still

much that was interesting to expect from gods and men.

As if intoxicated by this draught of hope we rolled out of that A.B.C. shop, but I kept my head sufficiently to guess what was coming and to send a warning telegram to my wife in our Essex home. Crane then was, I believe, staying temporarily in London. But he seemed to have no care in the world; and so we resumed our trampling — east and north and south again, steering through uncharted mazes the streets, forgetting to think of dinner but taking a rest here and there, till we found ourselves, standing in the middle of Piccadilly Circus, blinking at the lights like two authentic nightbirds. By that time we had been (in Tottenham Court Road) joined by Balzac. How he came in I have no idea. Crane was not given to literary curiosities of that kind. Somebody he knew, or something he had read, must have attracted lately his attention to Balzac. And now suddenly at ten o'clock in the evening he demanded insistently to be told in particular detail all about the “Comédie Humaine,” its contents, its scope, its plan, and its general significance, together with a critical description of Balzac's style. I told him hastily that it was just black on white; and for the rest, I said, he would have to wait till we got across to Monico's and had eaten some supper. I hoped he would forget Balzac and his “Comédie.” But not a bit of it; and I had no option but to hold forth over the remnants of a meal, in the rush of hundreds of waiters and the clatter of tons of crockery, caring not what I said (for what could Stephen want with Balzac?), in the comfortable assurance that the Monstrous Shade, even if led by some strange caprice to haunt the long room of Monico's, did not know enough English to understand a single word I said. (wonder what Crane made of it all. He did not look bored, and it was eleven o'clock before we parted at the foot of that monumentally heavy abode of frivolity, the Pavilion, with just a handshake and a goodnight — no more — without making any arrangements for meeting again, as though we had lived in the same town from childhood and were sure to run across each other next day.

It struck me directly I left him that we had not even exchanged addresses; but I was not uneasy. Sure enough, before the month was out there arrived a post card (from Ravensbrook) asking whether

he might come to see us. He came, was received as an old friend, and before the end of the day conquered my wife's sympathy, as undemonstrative and sincere as his own ancient friendship that sprang up between them was confirmed by the interest Crane displayed in our first child, a boy who came on the scene not quite two months afterwards. How strong was that interest on the part of Stephen Crane and his wife in the boy is evidenced by the fact that at the age of six weeks he was invited to come for a long visit to Ravensbrook. He was in fact impatiently expected there. He arrived in state, bringing with him not only his parents but also a young aunt, and was welcomed like a prince. This visit, during which I suffered from a sense of temporary extinction, is commemorated by a group photograph taken by an artist summoned with his engine (regardless of expense) to Ravensbrook. Though the likenesses are not bad, it is a very awful thing. Nobody looks like him or herself in it. The best yet are the Crane dogs, a very important part of the establishment and quite conscious of it, belonging apparently to some order of outlandish animals I have ever met. They pervaded, populated, and filled the whole house. Whichever way one looked at any time, down the passage, up the stairs, into the drawing room, there was always a dog in sight. Had I been asked on the first day how many there were, I would have guessed about thirty. As a matter of fact there were only three, but I think they never sat down, except in Crane's study, where they had their entree at all hours.

A scratching would be heard at the door, Crane would drop his pen with alacrity to throw it open — and the dogs would enter sedately in single, taking a lot of time about it, too. Then the room would resound for a while with grunts, sniffs, yawns, heavy flops, followed by as much perhaps as three whole minutes of silence. Then the dogs would get up, one after another, never all together, and direct their footsteps to the door in an impressive and ominous manner. The first arrival waited considerably for the others before trying to attract attention by means of scratching on the bottom panel. Then, never before, Crane would raise his head, go meekly to the door — and the procession would file out at the slowest possible pace. The recurrent sedateness of the proceedings, the utter unconsciousness

of the dogs, dear. Stephen's absurd gravity while playing his part in those ceremonies, without ever a muscle of his face moving, were irresistibly, exasperatingly funny. I tried to preserve my gravity (or at least to keep calm), with fair success. Only one afternoon on the fifth or sixth repetition I could not help bursting into a loud interminable laugh, and then the dear fellow asked me in all innocence what was the matter. I managed to conceal my nervous irritation from him, and he never learned the secret of that laugh in which there was a beginning of hysteria.

If the definition that man is a laughing animal be true, then

Crane was neither one nor the other; indeed he was but a hurried visitor on this earth on which he had so little reason to be joyous.

I might say that I never heard him laugh, except in connection with the baby. He loved children; but his friendship with our child was of the kind that put our mutual sentiment, by comparison, somewhere within the arctic region. The two could not be compared; at least I have never detected Crane stretched full length and sustained on his elbows on a grass plot, in order to gaze at me; on the other hand, this was his usual attitude of communion with the small child — with

him who was called the Boy and whose destiny it was to see more war before he came of age than the author of "The Red Badge" had time to see in all the allotted days of his life. In the gravity of its disposition the baby came quite up to Crane; yet those two would sometimes find something to laugh at in each other. Then there would be silence, and glancing out of the low window of my room I would see them, very still, staring at each other with a solemn understanding that needed no words, or perhaps was beyond words altogether. I could not object on any ground to their profound intimacy, but I do not see why Crane should have developed such an unreasonable suspicion as to my paternal efficiency. He seemed to be everlastingly taking the boy's part. I could not see that the baby was being oppressed, hectored over, or in any way deprived of its rights, or ever wounded in its feeling by me; but Crane seemed always to nurse some vague unexpressed grievance as to my conduct. I was inconsiderate. For instance — why could I not get a dog for the boy? One day he made quite a scene about it. He

seemed to imply I should drop everything and go look for a dog. I sat under the storm and said nothing. At last an appeal to first principles, but

for an answer I pointed at the windows and said: "Behold the boy." ... He was sitting on a rug spread on the grass, with his little red stocking-cap very much over one eye (a fact of which he seemed unaware), and propped round with many pillows on account of his propensity to roll over on his side helplessly. My answer was irresistible. This is one of the few occasions on which I heard Stephen Crane laugh outright. He dropped his preaching on the dog theme and went out to the boy while I went on with my work. But he was strangely incorrigible. When he came back after an hour or so, his first words were. "Joseph, I will teach your boy to ride." I closed the offer at once — but it was not to be. He was not given the time.

The happiest mental picture my wife and I preserve of Crane is on the occasion of our first visit to Brede Place when he rode to meet us at the Park gate. He looked at his best on horseback. On that day he must have been feeling well. As usual, he was happy in the saddle. As he went on trotting by the side of the open trap I said to him: "If you give the boy your seat I will be perfectly satisfied." I knew this would please him; and indeed this face remained wreathed in smiles all the way to the front door. He looked about him at that bit of the world, down the green slopes and up the brown fields, with an appreciative serenity and the confident bearing of a man who is feeling very sure of the present and of the future. All because he was looking at life from the saddle, with a good morning's work behind him. Nothing more is needed to give a man a blessed moment of illusion. The more I think of that morning, the more I believe it was just that; that it had been really been given me to see Crane perfectly happy for a couple of hours; and that it was under this spell that directly we arrived he led me impatiently to the room in which he worked when at Brede. After we got there he said to me, "Joseph, I will give you something." I had no idea what it would be, till I saw him sit down to write an inscription in a very slim volume. He presented it to me with averted head. It was "The Black Riders." He had never spoken to me of his verse before. It was while

holding the book in my hand that I learned that they were written years before in America. I expressed my appreciation of them that afternoon in the usual half a dozen or dozen, words which we allowed ourselves when completely pleased with each other's work. When the pleasure was not so complete the words would be many. And that was a great waste of breath and time. I must confess that we were no critics, I mean temperamentally. Crane was even less of a critic than myself. Criticism is very much a matter

of a vocabulary, very consciously used; with us it was the intonation that mattered. The tone of a grunt could convey as infinity of meaning between us.

The articulate literary conscience at our elbow was Edward Garnett. He, of course, was worth listening to. His analytical appreciation (or appreciative analysis) of Crane's art, in the London Academy of 17th December, 1898,<sup>1</sup> goes to the root of the matter with Edward's almost uncanny insight, and a well-balanced sympathy with the blind, pathetic striving of the artist towards a complete realization of his individual gift. How highly Edward Garnett rated Crane's gift is recorded in the conclusions of that admirable and, within the limits of its space, masterly article of some two columns, where at the end are down such affirmative phrases as: The chief impressionist of the age."... "Mr. Crane's talent is unique"... and where he hails him as "the creator of fresh rhythms and phrases," while the very last words state confidently that: "Undoubtedly, of the young school it is Mr. Crane who is the genius — the others have their talents."

My part here being not that of critic but of private friend, all I will say is that I agreed warmly at the time with that article, which from the quoted phrases might be supposed a merely enthusiastic pronouncement, but on reading will be found to be based on that calm sagacity which Edward Garnett, for all his fiery zeal in the cause of letters, could always summon for the judgment of matters emotional — as all response to the various forms of art must be in the main. I had occasion to re-read it last year in its expanded form in a collection of literary essays of great, now almost historical, interest in the record of American and English imaginative literature. I found there a passage or two, not bearing precisely on Crane's

work but giving a view of his temperament, on which of course his art was based; and of the conditions, moral and material, under which he had to put forth his creative faculties and his power of steady composition. Of those matters, as a man who had the opportunity to look at Crane's life in England. I wish to offer a few remarks before closing my contribution to the memory of my friend.

I do not know that he was ever dunned for money and had to work under a threat of legal proceedings. I don't think he was ever dunned in the sense in which such a phrase is used about a spendthrift unscrupulous in incurring debts. No doubt he was sometimes pressed for money. He lived by his pen,

and the prices he obtained were not great. Personally he was not extravagant; and I will not quarrel with him for not choosing to live in a garret. The tenancy of Brede Place was held by him at a nominal rent. That glorious old place was not restored then, and the greatest part of it was uninhabitable. The Cranes had furnished in a modest way six or seven of the least dilapidated rooms, which even then looked bare and half empty. Certainly there was a horse, and at one time even two, but that luxury was not so very expensive at that time. One man looked after them. Riding was the only exercise open the Crane; and if he did work so hard, surely he was entitled to some relaxation, if only for the preservation of his unique talent.

His greatest extravagance was hospitality, of which I, too, had my share; often in the company, I am sorry to say, of men who after sitting at his board chose to speak of him and of his wife slightly. Having some rudimentary sense of decency, their behaviour while actually under the Cranes' roof often produced on me a disagreeable impression. Once I ventured to say to him, "You are too good-natured, Stephen." He gave me one of his quiet smiles, that seemed to hint so poignantly at the vanity of all things, and after a period of silence remarked: "I am glad those Indians are gone." He was surrounded by men who, secretly envious, hostile to the real quality of his genius (and a little afraid of it), were also in antagonism with the essential fineness of his nature. But enough of them. *Pu/vi et umbra sunt*. I mean even those that may be alive yet. They were ever hardly anything else; one would have forgotten them if were not for the

legend (if one may dignify perfidious and contemptible gossip by that name) they created in order to satisfy that same obscure instinct of base humanity, which in the past would often bring against any exceptional man the charge of consorting with the devil. It was just as vague, just as senseless, and in its implications just as lying as the mediaeval kind. I have heard one of these "friends" hint before several other Philistines that Crane could not write his tales without getting drunk!

Putting aside the gross palpable stupidity of such a statement — which the creature' gave out as an instance of the artistic temperament — I am in a position to disclose what may have been the foundation of this piece of gossip. I have seen repeatedly Crane at work. A small jug of still smaller ale would be brought into the study at about then o'clock; Crane would pour out some of it into a glass and settle himself at the long table at which he used to write in Brede Place. I would take a book and settle myself at the



other end of the same table, with my back to him; and for two hours or so not a sound would be heard in that room. At the end of that time Crane would say suddenly: "I won't do any more now, Joseph." He would have covered three of his large sheets with his regular, legible, perfectly controlled handwriting, with no more than a half-a-dozen erasures — mostly single words — in the whole lot. It seemed to me always a perfect miracle in the way of mastery over material and expression. Most of the ale would be still in the glass, and how flat by that time I don't like to think! The most amusing part was to see Crane, as if moved by some obscure sense of duty, drain the last drop of that untempting remnant before we left the room to stroll to and fro in front of the house while waiting for lunch. Such is the origin of some of these gleeful whispers making up the Crane legend of "unrestrained temperament." I have known various sorts of temperaments — some perfidious and some lying — but "unrestrained temperament" is mere parrot talk. It has no meaning. But it was suggestive. It was founded on Crane's visits to town, during which I more than once met him there. We used to spend afternoons and evenings together, and I did not see any of his supposed revels in progress; nor yet have I ever detected any after

effects of them on any occasion. Neither have I ever seen anybody who would own to having been a partner in those excesses — if only to the extent of standing by charitably — which would have been a noble part to play. I daresay all those "excesses" amounted to very little more than the one in which he asked me to join him in the following letter. It is the only note I have kept from the very few which we exchanged. The reader will see why it is one of my most carefully preserved possessions.

Ravensbrook, Oxted, March 17 (1899).

My Dear Conrad:

I am enclosing you a bit of MS. under the supposition that you might like to keep it in remembrance of my warm and endless friendship for you. I am still hoping that you will consent to Stokes' invitation to come to that you will consent to Stokes' invitation to come to the Savage on Saturday night. Cannot you endure it? Give my affectionate remembrances to Mrs. Conrad and my love to the boy.

Yours always,  
Stephen Crane.

P.S. You must accept says Cora — and I — our invitation to come home with me on Sat. night.

I joined him. We had a very amusing time with the Savages. Afterwards Crane refused to go home till the last train. Evidence of what somebody has called his “unrestrained temperament,” no doubt. So we went and sat at Gatti’s, I believe — unless it was in a Bodega which existed then in that neighbourhood — and talked. I have a vivid memory of this awful debauch because it was on that evening that Crane told me of a subject for a story — a very exceptional thing for him to do. He called it “The Predecessor.” I could not recall now by what capricious turns and odd associations of thought he reached the enthusiastic conclusion that it would make a good play, and that we must do it together. He wanted me to share in a certain success — “a dead sure thing,” he said. His was an unrestrainedly generous temperament. But let that pass. I must have been specially

predisposed because I caught the infection at once. There and then we began to build up the masterpiece, interrupting each other eagerly, for, I don’t know how it was, the air around us had suddenly grown thick with felicitous suggestions. We carried on this collaboration as far as the railway time-table would let us, and then made a break for the last train. Afterwards we did talk of our collaboration now and then, but no attempt at it was ever made. Crane had other stories to write; I was immersed deeply in “Lord Jim,” of which I had to keep up the instalments in Blackwood’s, difficulties in presenting the subject on the stage rose one after another before our experience. The general subject consisted in a man personating his “predecessor” (who had died) in the hope of winning a girl’s heart. The scenes were to include a ranch at the foot of the Rocky Mountains, I remember, and the action, I fear, would have been frankly melodramatic. Crane insisted that one of the situations should present the man and the girl on a boundless plain standing by their dead ponies after a furious ride a truly Crane touch). I made some objections. A boundless plain in the light of a sunset could be got into back-cloth. I admitted; but I doubted whether we could induce the management of any London theatre to deposit two stuffed horses on its stage.

Recalling now those earnestly fantastic discussions, it occurs to me that Crane and I must have been unconsciously penetrated by a prophetic sense of the technique and of the very spirit of film-plays, of which even the name was unknown then to the world. But if gifted with prophetic sense, we must

have been strangely ignorant of ourselves, since it must be obvious to any one who has read a page of our writings that a collaboration between us two could never have come to anything in the end — could never even have been begun. The project was merely the expression of our affection for each other. We were fascinated for a moment by the will-of-the-wisp of close artistic communion. It would in no case have led us into a bog. I flatter myself we both had too much regard for each other's gifts not to be clear-eyed about them. We would not have followed the lure very far. At the same time it cannot be denied that there were profound , if not extensive, similitudes in our temperaments which could create for a moment that fascinating illusion. It is not

to be regretted, for it had, at any rate, given us some of the most light-hearted moments in the clear but sober atmosphere of our intimacy. From the force of circumstances there could not be much sunshine in it. "None of them saw the colour of the sky!" And alas, it stood already written that it was the younger man who would fail to make a landing through the surf. So I am glad to have that episode to remember, a brotherly serio-comic interlude, played under the shadow of coming events. But I would not have alluded to it at all if it had not come out in the course of my most interesting talk with the author of this biography, that Crane had thought it worth while to mention it in his correspondence, whether seriously or humorously, I know not. So here it is without the charm which it had for me, but which cannot be reproduced in the mere relation of its outward characteristics: a clear gleam on us two, succeeded by the Spanish-American War into which Crane disappeared like a wilful man walking into the depths of an ominous twilight.

The cloudy afternoon when we two went rushing all over London together was for him the beginning of the end. The problem was to find £60 that day, before the sun set, before dinner, before the "six-forty" train to Oxted, at once, that instant — lest peace should be declared and the opportunity or seeing a war be missed. I had not £60 to lend him. Sixty shillings was nearer my mark. We tried various offices but had no luck, or rather we had the usual luck of money-hunting enterprises. The man was either gone out to see about a dog, or would take no interest in the Spanish-American War. In one place the man wanted to know what was the hurry? He would have like to have forty-eight hours to think the matter over. As we came downstairs, Crane's white-faced excitement frightened me. Finally

it occurred to me take him to Messrs. William Blackwoods & Sons' London office. There he was received in a most friendly way. Presently I escorted him to Charing Cross, where he took the train for home with the assurance that he would have the means to start "for the war" next day. That is the reason I cannot to this day read his tale, 'The Price of the Harness,' without a pang. It has done nothing more deadly than pay his debt to Messrs. Blackwood; yet now and then I feel as though that afternoon I had led him by the

hand to his doom. But, indeed, I was only the blind agent of the fate that had him in her grip! Nothing could have held him back. He was ready to swim the ocean.

Thirteen years afterwards I made use, half consciously of the shadow of the primary idea of 'The Predecessor' in one of my short tales which were serialized in the Metropolitan Magazine. But in that tale the dead man in background is not a Predecessor but merely an assistant on a lonely plantation; and instead of the ranch, the mountains, and the plains, there is a cloud-capped island, a bird-haunted reef, and the sea. All this the mere distorted shadow of what we two used to talk about in a fantastic mood; but now and then, as I wrote, I had the feeling that he had the right to come and look over my shoulder. But he never came. I received no suggestions from him, subtly conveyed without words. There will never by any collaboration for us now. But I wonder, were he alive, whether he would be pleased with the tale. I don't know. Perhaps not. Or, perhaps, after picking up the volume with that detached air I remember so well and turning over page after page in silence, he would suddenly read aloud a line or two and then, looking straight into my eyes as was his wont on such occasions, say with all the intense earnestness of affection that was in him: "I — like — that, Joseph."

# HIS WAR BOOK

A Preface to Stephen Crane's "The Red Badge of Courage"

One of the most enduring memories of my literary life is the sensation produced by the appearance in 1895 of Crane's "Red Badge of Courage" in a small volume belonging to Mr. Heinemann's Pioneer Series of Modern Fiction — very modern fiction of that time, and upon the whole not devoid of merit. I have an idea the series was meant to give us shocks, and as far as my recollection goes there were, to use a term made familiar to all by another war, no "duds" in that small and lively bombardment. But Crane's work detonated on the mild din of that attack on our literary sensibilities with the impact and force of a twelve-inch shell charged with a very high explosive. Unexpected it fell amongst us; and its fall was followed by a great outcry.

Not of consternation. The energy of that projectile hurt nothing and no one (such was its good fortune), and delighted a good many. It delighted soldiers, men of letters, men in the street; it was welcomed by all lovers of personal expression as a genuine revelation, satisfying the curiosity of a word in which war and love have been subjects of song and story ever since the beginning of articulate speech.

Here we had an artist, a man not of experience but a man inspired, a seer with a gift for rendering the significant on the surface of things and with an incomparable insight into primitive emotions, who, in order to give us the image of war, had looked profound into his own breast. We welcomed him. As if the whole vocabulary of praise had been blown up sky-high by this missile from across the Atlantic, a rain of words descended on our heads, words well or ill chosen, chunks of pedantic praise and warm appreciation, clever words, and words of real understanding, platitudes, and felicities of criticism, but all as sincere in their response as the striking piece of work which set so many critical pens scurrying over the paper.

One of the most interesting, if not the most valuable, of printed criticisms was perhaps that of Mr. George Wyndham, soldier, man

of the world, and in a sense a man of letters. He went into the whole question of war literature, at any rate during the nineteenth century, evoking comparisons with the Mémoires of General Marbot and the famous Diary of a Cavalry Officer as records of a personal experience. He rendered justice to

the interest of what soldiers themselves could tell us, but confessed that to gratify the curiosity of the potential combatant who lurks in most men as to the picturesque aspects and emotional reactions of a battle we must go to the artist with his Heaven-given faculty of words at the service of his divination as to what the truth of things is and must be. He comes to the conclusion that:

“Mr. Crane has contrived a masterpiece.”

“Contrived” — that word of disparaging sound is the last word I would have used in connection with any piece of work by Stephen Crane. Who in his art (as indeed in his private life) was the least “Contriving” of men. But as to “masterpiece,” there is no doubt that “The Red Badge of Courage” is that, if only because of the marvellous accord of the vivid impressionistic description of action on that woodland battlefield, and the imaged style of the analysis of the emotions in the inward moral struggle going on in the breast of one individual — the Young Soldier of the book, the protagonist of the monodrama presented to us in an effortless succession of graphic and coloured phrases.

Stephen Crane places his young Soldier in an untried regiment. And this is well contrived — if any contrivance there be in a spontaneous piece of work which seems to spurt and flow like a tapped stream from the depths of the writer’s being. In order that the revelation should be complete, the Young Soldier has to be deprived of the moral support which he would have found in a tried body of men matured in achievement to the consciousness of its worth. His regiment had been tried by nothing but days of waiting for the order to move; so many days that it and the Youth within it have come to think of themselves as merely “a part of a vast blue demonstration.” The army had been lying camped near a river, idle and fretting, till the moment when Stephen Crane lays hold of it at dawn with masterly simplicity:” The cold passed reluctantly from the earth. ...” These

are the first words of the war book which was to give him his crumb of fame.

The whole of that opening paragraph is wonderful in the homely dignity of the indicated lines of the landscape, and the shivering awakening of the army at the break of the day before the battle. In the next, with a most effective change to racy colloquialism of narrative, the action which motivates, sustains and feeds the inner drama forming the subject of the book, begins with the Tall Soldier going down to the river to wash his shirt.

He returns waving his garment above his head. He had heard at fifth-hand from somebody that the army is going to move tomorrow. The only immediate effect of this piece of news is that a Negro teamster, who had been dancing a jig on a wooden box in a ring of laughing soldiers, finds himself suddenly deserted. He sits down mournfully. For the rest, the Tall Soldier's excitement is met by blank disbelief, profane grumbling, an invincible incredulity. But the regiment is somehow sobered. One feels it, though no symptoms can be noticed. It does not know what a battle is, neither does the Young Soldier. He retires from the babbling throng into what seems a rather comfortable dugout and lies down with his hands over his eyes to think. Thus the drama begins.

He perceives suddenly that he had looked upon wars as historical phenomenons of the past. He had never believed in war in his own country. It had been a sort of play affair. He had been drilled, inspected, marched for months, till he has despaired "of ever seeing a Greek-like struggle. Such were no more. Men were better or more timid. Secular and religious education had effaced the throat-grappling instinct, or else firm finance held in check the passions."

Very modern this touch. We can remember thoughts like these round about the year 1914. That Young Soldier is representative of mankind in more ways than one, and first of all in his ignorance. His regiment had listened to the tales of veterans, "tales of gray bewhiskered hordes chewing tobacco with unspeakable valour and sweeping along like the Huns." Still, he cannot put his faith in veterans' tales. Recruits were their prey. They talked of blood, fire, and sudden death, but much of it might have been lies. They were in no wise

to be trusted. And the question arises in no wise to be trusted. And the question arises before him whether he will or will not "run from a battle"? He does not know. He cannot know. A little panic fear enters his mind. He jumps up and asks himself aloud. "Good Lord, what's the matter with me?" This is the first time his words are quoted, on this day before the battle. He dreads not danger, but fear itself. He stands before the unknown. He would like to prove to himself by some reasoning process that he will not "run from the battle." And in his unblooded regiment he can find no help. He is alone with the problem of courage.

In this he stands for the symbol of all untried men.

Some critics have estimated him a morbid case. I cannot agree to that. The abnormal cases are of the extremes; of those who crumple up at the first sight of danger, and of those of whom their fellows say "He doesn't know what fear is." Neither will I forget the rare favourites of the gods whose fiery spirit is only soothed by the fury and clamour of a battle. Of such was General Picton of Peninsular fame. But the lot of the mass of mankind is to know fear, the decent fear of disgrace. Of such is the Young Soldier of "The Red Badge of Courage." He only seems exceptional because he has got inside of him Stephen Crane's imagination, and is presented to us with the insight and the power of expression of an artist whom a just and severe critic, on a review of all his work, has called the foremost impressionist of his time; as Sterne was the greatest impressionist, but in a different way, of his age.

This is a generalized, fundamental judgment. More superficially both Zola's "La Debacle" and Tolstoi's "War and Peace" were mentioned by critics in connection with Crane's war book. But Zola's main concern was with the downfall of the imperial regime he fancied he was portraying; and in Tolstoi's book the subtle presentation of Rostov's squadron under fire for the first time is a mere episode lost in a mass of other matter, like a handful of pebbles in a heap of sand. I could not see the relevancy. Crane was concerned with elemental truth only; and in any case I think that as an artist he is non-comparable. He dealt with what is enduring, and was the most detached of men.

That is why his book is short. Not quite two hundred pages. Gems are small. This monodrama, which happy inspiration or unerring instinct has led him to put before us in narrative form, is contained between the opening words I have already quoted and a phrase on page 194 of the English edition, which runs: "He had been to touch the great death, and found that, after all, it was but the great death. He was a man."

On these words the action ends. We are only given one glimpse of the victorious army at dusk, under the falling rain, "a procession of weary soldiers became a bedraggled train, despondent and muttering, marching with churning effort in a trough of liquid brown mud under a low wretched sky ...", while the last ray of the sun falls on the river through a break in the leaden clouds.

This war book, so virile and so full of gentle sympathy, in which not single declamatory sentiment defaces the genuine verbal felicity, welding



analysis and description in a continuous fascination of individual style, had been hailed by the critics as the herald of a brilliant career. Crane himself very seldom alluded to it, and always with a wistful smile. Perhaps he was conscious that, like the mortally wounded Tall Soldier of his book, who, snatching at the air, staggers out into a field to meet his appointed death on the first day of battle

— while the terrified Youth and the kind Tattered Soldier stand by silent, watching with awe “these ceremonies a the place of meeting”

— it was his fate, too, to fall early in the fray.

## JOHN GALSWORTHY

When in the family's assembly at Timothy Forsyte's house there arose a discussion of Francie Forsyte's verses, Aunt Hester expressed her preference for the poetry of Shelly, Byron and Wordsworth, on the ground that, after reading works of these poets, "one felt that one had read a book." And the reader of Mr. Galsworthy's latest volume of fiction, whether in accord or in difference with the author's view of his subject, would feel that he had read a book.

Beyond that impression one perceives how difficult it is to get critical hold of Mr. Galsworthy's work. He gives you to opening. Defending no obvious thesis, setting up no theory, offering no cheap panacea, appealing to no naked sentiment, the author of "The Man of Property" disdains also the effective device of attacking insidiously the actors of his own drama, or rather of his dramatic comedy. This is because he does not write for effect, though his writing will be found effective enough for all that. This book is of a disconcerting honesty, backed by a discouraging skill. There is not a single phrase in it written for the sake of its cleverness. Not one. Light of touch, though weighty in feeling, it gives the impression of verbal austerity, or a willed moderation of thought. The passages of high literary merit, so uniformity sustained as to escape the notice of the reader, expose the natural and logical development of the story with a purposeful progression which is primarily satisfying to the intelligence, and ends by stirring the emotions. In the essentials of matter and treatment it is a book of today. Its critical spirit and its impartial method are meant for a humanity which has outgrown the stage of fairy tales, realistic, romantic or even epic.

For the fairy tale, be it not ungratefully said, has walked the earth in many unchallenged disguises, and lingers amongst us to this day wearing, sometimes, amazingly heavy clothes. It lingers; and even it lingers with some assurance. Mankind has come of age, but the successive generations still demand artlessly to be amazed, moved and amused. Certain forms of innocent fun will never grow old, I suppose. But the secret of the long life of the fairy tale consists mainly in this, I suspect: that it is amusing to the writer thereof.

Whatever public wants its supplies, it ministers first of all to his vanity in an intimate and delightful way. The pride of fanciful invention; the pride of

that invention which soars (on goose's wings) into the empty blue is like the intoxication of an elixir sent by the gods above. And whether it is that the gods are unduly generous, or simply because the sight of human folly amuses their idle malice, that sort of felicity is easier attained pen is hand than the sober pride, always mingled with misgivings, of a single-minded observer and conscientious interpreter of reality. This is why the fairy tale, in its various disguises of optimism, pessimism, romanticism, naturalism and what not, will always be with us. And, indeed, that is very comprehensible, the seduction of irresponsible freedom is very great; and to be tied to the earth (even as the hewers of wood and drawers of water are tied to the earth) in the exercise of one's imagination, by every scruple of conscience and honour, may be considered a lot hard enough not to be lightly embraced. This is why novelists are comparatively rare. But we must not exaggerate. This world, even if one is tied fast to its earthy foundations by the subtle and tyrannical bonds of artistic conviction, is not such a bad place to write fiction in. At any rate, we can know of no other; an excellent reason for us to try to think as well as possible of the world we do know.

In the world, whose realities are discovered, interpreted, commented on, criticized and exposed on works of fiction, Mr. Galsworthy selects for the subject-matter of his book *The Family*, an institution which has been with us as long, I should think, as the oldest and the least venerable pattern of fairy tale. As Mr. Galsworthy, however, is no theorist but an observer, it is a definite kind of family that falls under his observation. It is the middle-class family; and even with more precision, as we are warned in the sub-title, an upper middle-class family anywhere at large in space and time, but a family, if not exactly of today, then of only last evening, so to say. Thus at the outset we are far removed from the vagueness of the traditional "once upon a time in a far country there was a king," which somehow always manages to peep through the solemn disguises of fairy tales masquerading as novels with and without purpose. The Forsytes walk the pavement of London and own some of London's houses.

They wish to own more; they wish to own them all. And maybe they will. Time is on their side. The Forsytes never die — so Mr. Galsworthy tells us, while we watch them assembling in old Jolyson Forsyte's drawing room on the occasion of June Forsyte's engagement of Mr. Bosinney, incidentally an architect and an artist, but, by the only definition that matters, a man of no property whatever.

A family is not at first sight an alarming phenomenon. But Mr. Galsworthy looks at the Forsytes with the individual vision of a novelist seeking his inspiration amongst the realities of this earth. He points out to us this family's formidable character as unit of society, as a reproduction in miniature of society itself. It is made formidable, he says, by the cohesion of its members (between whom there need not exist either affection or even sympathy) upon a concrete point, the possession of property.

The solidity of the foundation laid by Mr. Galsworthy for his fine piece of imaginative work becomes at once apparent. For whichever came first, family or property, in the beginnings of social organization, or whether they came together and were indeed at first scarcely distinguishable from each other, it is clear that in the close alliance of these two institutions society has found the way of its development and nurses the hope of its security. In their sense of property the Forsytes establish the consciousness of their right and the promise of their duration. It is an instinct, a primitive instinct. The practical faculty of the Forsytes has erected it into a principle; their idealism has expanded it into a sort of religion which has shaped their notions of happiness and decency, their prejudices, their piety, such thoughts as they happen to have and the very course of their passions. Life as a whole has come to be perceptible to them exclusively in terms of property. Preservation, acquisition — acquisition, preservation. Their laws, their morality, their art and their science appear to them, justifiably enough, consecrated to that double and unique end. It is the formula of their virtue.

In this world of Forsytes (who never die) organized in view of acquiring and preserving property, Mr. Galsworthy (who is no inventor of didactic fairy tales) places with the sure instinct of a novelist a man and a woman who are no Forsytes, it is true, but whom he

presents as in no sense the declared adversaries of the great principle of property. They only happen to disregard it. And this is a crime. They are simply two people to whom life speaks imperatively in terms of love. And this is enough to establish their irreconcilable antagonism and to precipitate their unavoidable fate. Deprived naturally and suddenly of the support of laws and morality, of all human countenance, and even, in a manner of speaking, of the consolations of religion, they find themselves miserably crushed, both the woman and the man. And the principle of property is vindicated. The woman being the weaker, it is in her case vindicated with consummate cruelty. For a peculiar cowardice is one of the characteristics

of this great and living principle. Strong in the worship of so many thousands and the possession of so many millions, it starts with affright at the slightest challenge, it trembles before mere indifference, it directs its heaviest blows at the disinherited who should appear weakest in its sight. Irene's fate is made unspeakably atrocious, no less — but nothing more. Mr. Galsworthy's instinct and observation serve him well here. In Soames Forsyte's town house, whose front door stands wide open for half an hour or so on a certain foggy night, there is no room for tragedy. It is one of the temples of property, of a sort of unholy religion whose fundamental dogma, public ceremonies and awful secret rites, forming the subject matter of this remarkable novel, take no account of human dignity. Irene, as last seen crushed and alive within the hopeless portals, remains for us a poignantly pitiful figure and nothing more.

This then, roughly and summarily, is the book in its general suggestion. Going on to particulars which make up the intrinsic value of a work of art, it rests upon the subtle and interdependent relation of Mr. Galsworthy's intellect and feelings which from his temperament, and reveals Mr. Galsworthy's very considerable talent as a writer — a talent so considerable that it commands at once our respectful attention. The foundation of this talent, it seems to me, lies in a remarkable power of ironic insight combined with an extremely keen and faithful eye for all the phenomena on the surface of the life he observes. These are the purveyors of his imagination, whose servant is style clear, direct, sane, illumined by a perfectly unaffected sincerity. It is the style of a man whose sympathy with mankind is too genuine to allow him the smallest gratification of his vanity at the cost of his fellow creatures. In its moderation it is a style sufficiently pointed to carry deep his remorseless irony and grave enough to be the dignified vehicle of his profound compassion. Its sustained harmony is never interrupted by those bursts of cymbals and fifes which some deaf people acclaim for brilliance. Before all, it is a style well under control, and therefore it never betrays this tender and ironic writer into an odious cynicism of laughter or tears. For there are two kinds of cynicism, the cynicism of the hyena and the cynicism of the crocodile, which last, by the way, commands all sorts of respects from the inhabitants of these Isles. Mr. Galsworthy remains always a man, whether he is amused or moved.

I am afraid that my unavowed intention in writing about this book (of which I have talked so much and said so little) has been discovered by now.

Therefore I confess. Confession — public, I mean — is good for one's conscience. Such is my intention. And it would be easier to carry out if I only knew exactly the motives which prompt people to read novels. But I do not know them all. Some of us, I understand, take up a novel to gratify a natural malevolence, the author being supposed to hold the mirror up to the odiously ridiculous nature of our next-door neighbour. From laboriously collected information I am, however, led to believe that most people read novels for amusement. This is as it should be. But, whatever be their motives, I entertain towards all novel-readers (for reasons which must remain concealed from the readers of this paper) the feelings of warm and respectful affection. I would not try to deceive them for worlds. Never! This being understood, I go on to declare, in the peace of my heart and the serenity of my conscience, that if they want amusement they will find it between the covers of this book. They will find plenty of it in this episode in the history of the Forsytes, where the reconciliation of a father and son, the dramatic and poignant comedy of Soames Forsyte's marital relations, and the tragedy of Bosinney's failure are exposed to our gaze with the remorseless yet sympathetic irony of Mr. Galsworthy's art, in the light of the unquenchable fire burning on the alter of property. They

will find amusement, and perhaps also something more lasting — if they care for it. I say this with all the reserves and qualifications which strict truth requires around every statement of opinion. Mr. Galsworthy may possibly be found disappointing by some, but he will never be found futile by any one, and never uninteresting by the most exacting. I myself, for instance, am not so sure of Bosinney's tragedy. But this hesitation of my mind, for which the author may not be wholly responsible after all, need only be mentioned and no more, in the face of his considerable achievement.

## A GLANCE AT TWO BOOKS

The national English novelist seldom regards his work — the exercise of his Art — as an achievement of active life by which he will produce certain definite effects life by which he will produce certain definite effects upon the emotions of his readers, but simply as an instinctive, often unreasoned, out pouring of his own emotions. He does not go about building up his book with a precise intention and a steady mind. It never occurs to him that a book is a dead, that the writing of it is an enterprise as much as the conquest of a colony. He has no such clear conception of his craft. Writing from a full heart, he liberates his soul for the satisfaction of his own sentiment; and when he has finished the scene he is at liberty to strike his forehead and exclaim: “This is genius!”

Thackeray is reported to have done this, and there is no reason why any novelist of his type should not. He is, as a matter of fact, writing lyrically (a lyric is the expression of a mood); he is expressing his own moods: I take what the gods give me — he says in all humility, and when the godhead inspires him with what seems goods to his heart, to his imagination, to his tenderness or to his indignation, he may say, and use the words literally, ‘This is genius!’

It is. And it is probably the reason why the distinctively English novelist is always at his best in denunciations of institutions, of types or of conventionalized society.

It is comparatively easy for us, when we are really moved by the clearness of our vision, to convince an audience that Messrs. A., B. and C. are callous, ferocious or cowardly. We should have to use much more conscious art to give a permanent impression of those gentlemen as purely altruist.

Thus Mr. Osborne, the hard merchant, father of Captain Osborne, is more definite and flawless than many of Thackeray’s so called good characters; and thus Mr. Pecksniff is, through scorn and dislike, rendered more memorable than the brothers Cheeryble. It is not perhaps so much that these distinguished writers were completely incapable of loving their fellow men simply as men, exposed to suffering, temptation and affliction, as that, neglecting

the one indispensable thing, neglecting to use their powers of selection and observation, they emotionally excelled in rendering the disagreeable. And that is easy. To find beauty, grace, charm in the bitterness of truth is a graver task.

Thackeray, we imagine, did not love his gentle heroines. He did not love them. He was in love with the sentiments they represented. He was, in fact, in love with what does not exist — and that is why Amelia Osborne does not exist, either in colour, in shape, in grace, in goodness. Turgenev probably did not love his Lisa, a most pathetic, pure, charming and profound creation, for what she was, in her creator's mind. He loved her disinterestedly, as it were, out of pure warmth of heart, as a human being in the tumult and hazard of life. And that is why we must feel, suffer and live with that wonderful creation. That is why she is as real to us as her stupid mother, as the men of the story, as the sombre Varvard, and all the others that may be called the unpleasant characters in 'The House of Gentlefolk.'

I have been reading two books in English which have attracted a good deal of intelligent attention, but neither seems to have been considered as attentively as they might have been from this point of view. The one, 'The Island Pharisees,' by Mr. John Galsworthy, is a very good example of the national novel; the other, 'Green Mansions,' by Mr. W.H. Hudson, is a proof that love, the pure love of rendering the external aspects of things, can exist side by side with the national novel in English letters.

Mr. Galsworthy's hero in 'The Island Pharisees,' during his pilgrimage right across the English social system, asks himself: "Why? Why is not the world better? Why are we all humbugs? Why is the social system so out of order?" And he gets no answer to his questions, for, indeed, in his mood no answer is possible, neither is an answer needed for the absolute value of the book. Shelton is dissatisfied with his own people, who are good people, with artists, whose "at homes" he drops into, with marriage settlements and wedding services, with cosmopolitan vagabonds, with Oxford dons, with policemen — with himself and his love.

The exposition of all the characters in the book is done with an almost unerring touch, with a touch indeed that recalls the sureness and the delicacy of Turgenev's handling. They all live — and Mr. Galsworthy — or rather his hero, John Shelton, finds them all Pharisaic. It is as if he were championing against all these "good" people some intangible lost cause, some altruism, some higher truth that for ever seems



to soar out of his grasp. It is not exactly that Shelton is made to uphold the bitter morality of the cosmopolitan vagabond; for Mr. Galsworthy is too good an artist and too good a philosopher to make his Louis Ferrand impossibly attractive or even possibly cynical.

Shelton upholds, not so much the fact as the ideal of honest revolt; he is the knight errant of a general idea. Therein he ceases to resemble the other heroes of English fiction who are the champions of particular ideas, tilting sometimes of windmills (for the human power of self-deception is great), but with a particular foe always in their eye. Shelton distinctly does not couch his lance against a windmill. He is a knight errant, disarmed and faithful, riding forlorn to an inevitable defeat; his adversary is a giant of a thousand heads and a thousand arms, a monster at once perfectly human and altogether soulless. Though nobody dies in the book, it is really the record of a long and tragic adventure, whose tragedy is not so much in the event as in the very atmosphere, in the cold moral dusk in which the hero moves as if impelled by some fatal whisper, without a sword, corselet or helmet.

Amadis de Gaul would have struck a head off and counted it a doughty deed; Dickens would have flung himself upon pen and paper and made a caricature of the monster, would have flung at him an enormous joke vibrating with the stress of cheap emotions; Shelton, no legendary knight and being no humorist (but, like many simpler men, impelled by the destiny he carries within his breast), goes forth to be delivered, bound hand and foot, to the monster by his charming and limited Antonia. He is classed as an outsider by men in the best clubs, and his prospective mother-in-law tells him not to talk about things. He comes to grief socially, because in a world, which everyone is interested to go on calling the best of all possible worlds, he has insisted upon touching in challenge all the

shields hung before all the comfortable tents; the immaculate shield of his fiancée, of his mother-in-law, of the best men in the best clubs. He gets himself called and thought of as Unsound; and there in his social world the monster has made an end of him.

This is the end of the book; and with it there comes into the world of letters the beginning of Mr. Galsworthy as a novelist. For, paradoxically, a society that could not stand a Hamlet in the flesh at any price will read about him and welcome him on the stage to the end of its own incorrigible existence. This book, where each page lives with an interest of its own, has

for its only serious artistic defect that of not being long enough, and for its greatest quality that of a sincere feeling of compassionate regard for mankind expressed nationally through a fine indignation. Of the promise of its method, of the accomplished felicity of its phrasing, I have left myself no room to speak.

The innermost heart of “Green Mansions,” which are the forests of Mr. Hudson’s book, is tender, is tranquil, is stepped in that pure love of the external beauty of things that seems to breathe upon us from the pages of Turgeniev’s work. The charming quietness of the style soothes the hard irritation of our daily life in the presence of a fine and sincere, of a deep and pellucid personality. If the other book’s gift is lyric, “Green Mansions” comes to us with the tone of the elegy. There are the voices of the birds, the shadows of the forest leaves, the Indians gliding through them armed with their blowpipes, the monkeys peering sadly from above, the very spiders! The birds search for insects; spiders hunt their prey.

“Now as I sat looking down on the leaves and the small dancing shadow, scarcely thinking of what I was looking at, I noticed a small spider with a flat body and short legs creep cautiously out on to the upper surface of a small leaf. Its pale red colour, barred with velvet black, first drew my attention to it; for it was beautiful to eye....”

“It was beautiful to the eye,” so it drew the attention of Mr. Hudson’s hero. In that phrase dwells the very souls of the book whose voice is soothing like a soft voice speaking steadily amongst the vivid changes of a dream. Only you must note that the spider had come to hunt its prey, having mistaken the small dancing shadow

for fly, because it is there in the fundamental difference of vision lies the difference between book and book. The other type of novelist might say: “It attracted my attention because it was savage and cruel and beautiful only to the eye. And I have written of it here so that it may be hated and laughed at for ever. For of course being greedy and rapacious it was stupid also, mistaking a shadow for substance, like certain evil men, we have heard of, that go about crying up the excellence of the world.”

## PREFACE

To "The Shorter Tales of Joseph Conrad"

The idea of publishing a volume of selected stories has not been received without a good deal of hesitation on my part. So much in fact as to drive me into the dangerous attempt to disclose the state of the feelings with which I approach this explanatory preface. My hesitation was, I may say, of a private character; private in the sense of being rooted deep in my personality, and not easily explainable even to such good friends as it has been my fortune to find in the American public. The deep, complex (and at times even contradictory) feelings which make up the very essence of an author's attitude to his own creation are real enough, yet they may be, often are, but shapes of cherished illusions. Frail plants, you will admit, and fit only for the shade of solitary thought. Precious — perhaps? Yes. But by their very nature precious to only one man, to him in whose mind — or is it the heart? — they are rooted.

That consideration would seem to me conclusive against any one writing any preface whatever, if it were not for my ineradicable suspicion that in this world, which some philosophers have defined merely as a series of "vain appearances," our very illusions must have a practical meaning. Are they not as characteristic of an individual as his opinions, for instance, or the features of his face? In fact, being less controllable they must be even more dangerously revelatory. This is an alarming consideration. But whether because of a strain of native impudence, acquired callousness, or inborn trust in the goodness of human nature, it has not prevented me during the last few years writing a good many revelatory prefaces, for which I have not been, so far, called to account. At any rate, no incensed man with a shotgun has yet called here to invite me to desist. Thus encouraged, here I am again volunteering yet one more of these sincere confessions.

To begin with. I may venture to affirm that, however spontaneous the initial impulse, not one of the stories from which those included in this volume have been selected was achieved without much

conscious thought bearing not only on the problems of their style but upon their relation to life as I have known it, and on the nature of my reactions to the particular instances as well as to the general tenor of my

personal experience. This gave to each of the successive tales, composed at various times and in varied mental conditions, a characteristic tone of its own. At least I thought so. Later, when I had to consider my past work in detail, in order to write the Author's Notes for my first collected edition, I was confirmed in my impression that each of my short story volumes had a consistent unity of outlook covering the mingled subjects of civilization and wilderness, of land life and life on the sea.

It would not be too much to say that this trait would be apparent to the least critical of readers, in, for instance, the "Tales of Unrest." No story from that volume is included in this collection for a reason which will become apparent later to the patient reader of this Preface. It is the very collection of short stories I ever published, with a range of scene including the Malaya Archipelago, rustic Brittany, Central Africa, and the interior of an upper middle-class house in a residential street of London. It also seems to me perfectly clear on the face of it, that volume called "A Set of Six" — from which one story has been selected for this book — is very different from any other volume of short stories which I have published before or after. Yet, in Time, it covers almost the whole of the nineteenth century; and in Space it moves from South America through England and Russia to end in the south of Italy. A benevolent critic has remarked to me privately that it was the least atmospheric of all my works; and from my point of view I accepted this as a tribute to that inner consistency which I would claim for every set of my shorter tales. In the same way in the case of the volume "Within the Tides" I take the opinion expressed by one of the reviewers: "that the whole of the book seemed to produce the impression of being greater than its component parts" as a confirmation of my sentiment of having welded the diversities of subject and treatment into a consistency characteristic, in its nature, of a certain period of my literary production.

The friendly reader will understand how, holding that belief on the subject of my shorter productions, I would recoil at first from

taking any of my stories out of their appointed places in the group to which they originally belonged. And this the more because their grouping belonged. And this the more because their grouping was never the result of a preconceived plan. It "just happened." And things that "just happen" in one's work seem impressive and valuable because they spring from profounder than the logic of a deliberate theory suggestive by acquiring learning, let us say, or by lessons drawn from analysed practice. And no one

need quarrel for such a view with an artist for whom self-expression must, by definition, be the principal object, if not the only *raison d'être*, of his existence. He will naturally take for his own, for better or worse, all the characteristics of his work; since all of them, intended or not intended, make up the individuality of his self-expression.

I suspect there are moments when what a man most values in his work — I mean even a man of action — is precisely the part the general mystery of things plays in its shaping: the discovery of those qualities that have “just happened” in that obscure region where honest success or honourable failure is unconsciously elaborated. But there are moments too when one’s idealism (for idealism is practical and sane and the enemy of things that “just happen” and suchlike mysteries) prompts one to take up a different, more precise view of one’s achievement — whatever it may be.

I must have been in one of those moments that the suggestion of a selected volume of my shorter stories came before me from my old friend and publisher, Mr. F.N. Doubleday, who is an idealist and who would simply hate to let anything “just happen” in his business. His business, to my mind, consists, mainly, in being the intermediary between certain men’s reveries and the wide-awake brain of the rest of the world. Stated like this it seems a strangely fantastic occupation; yet his ways of carrying it on are always of a practical sort. I have learned to trust his conclusions implicitly on that ground. Also, for reasons of a deeper personal kind, having nothing to do with business, his words have great weight with me. But in order to reconcile my own idealism to the notion of taking the stories out of their natural surroundings, out of their native atmosphere as it were, some principle of selection had to be found. The only one that offered

itself with any chance of being acceptable was the principle of classification by subject; one that, whatever its disadvantages, has at least the advantage of being immune from the infection of illusions.

But I soon found that for a writer whose simple purpose had ever been the sincere rendering of his own deeper and more sympathetic emotions in the face of his belief in men and things — the philosopher’s “Vain appearances” which yet have endured, poignant or amusing, for so many ages, moving processionally towards the End of the World, which when it comes will be the vainest thing of all — the principle was not so easy in its application as it seemed to be at first sight. Though I have been often classed as a writer of the sea I have always felt that I had no specialty in

that or any other specific subject. It is true that I have found a full text of life on the sea, long before I thought of writing a line or even felt the faintest stirring towards self-expression by means of the printed word. Sea life had been my life. It had been my own self-sufficient, self-satisfying possession. When the change came over the spirit of my dream (Calderon said that "Life is a Dream") my past had, by the very force of my work, become one of the sources of what I may call, for want of a better word, my inspiration — of the inner force which sets the pen in motion. I would add here "for better or worse," if those words did not sound horribly ungrateful after so many proofs of sympathy from the public for which this particular Preface is destined.

As a matter of fact I have written of the sea very little if the pages were counted. It has been the scene, but very seldom the aim, of my endeavour. It is too late after all those years to try to keep back the truth; so I will confess here that when I launched my first paper boats in the days of my literary childhood, I aimed at an element as restless, as dangerous, as changeable as the sea, and even more vast; — the unappeasable ocean of human life. I trust this grandiloquent image will be accepted with an indulgent smile of the kind that is accorded to the lofty ambitions of well-meaning beginners. Much time has passed since, and I can assure my readers that I have never felt more humble than I do today while I sit tracing these words and that I see now, more clearly than ever before, that

indeed those were but paper boats, freighted with a grown-up child's dreams and launched innocently upon that terrible sea that, unlike the honest salt water of my early life, knows no hope of changing horizons but lies within the circle of an Eternal Shadow.

Approaching the problem of selection for this book in the full consciousness of my feelings, my concern was to give it some sort of unity, or in other words, its own character. Looking over the directive impulses of my writing life I discovered my guide in the one that had prompted me so often to deal with men whose existence was, so to speak, cast early upon the waters. Thus the characteristic trait of the stories included in this volume consists in the central figure of each being a seaman presented either in the relations of his professional life with his own kind, or in contact with landsmen and women, and embroiled in the affairs of that larger part of mankind which dwells on solid earth.

It would have been misleading to label those productions as sea tales. They deal with feelings of universal import, such, for instance, as the sustaining and inspiring sense of youth, or the support given by a stolid courage which confronts the unmeasurable force of an elemental fury simply as a thing that has got to be met and lived through with professional constancy. Of course, there is something more than mere ideas in those stories. I modestly hope that there are human beings in them, and also the articulate appeal of their humanity so strangely constructed from inertia and restlessness, from weakness and from strength and many other interesting contradictions which affect their conduct, and in a certain sense are meant to give a colouring to the actual events of the tale, and even to the response which is expected from the reader. To call them "studies of seamen" would have been pretentious and even misleading, in view of the obscurity of the individuals and the private character of the incidents. "Shorter Tales" is yet the best title I can think of for this collection. It commends itself to me by its noncommittal character, which will neither raise false hopes nor awaken blind antagonisms.

Why a volume aiming at unity should be wilfully divided into two parts is explained by my desire to give prominence to the stories

which begin them: "Youth," which is certainly a piece of autobiography ("emotions remembered in tranquillity"), and "Typhoon," which, defined from, a purely descriptive point of view, is the shorter of the two storm-pieces which I have written at different times.

From another point of view, the "guiding" point of view (that is of each story being concerned with a man who is also a seaman), the first Part deals with younger and the second with older men. I hardly need say that in the arrangement of those two parts there has been no attempt at chronological order.

Therefore let neither friend nor enemy look for the development of the writer's literary faculty in this collection. As far as that is concerned, the book is a jumble. The unity of purpose lies elsewhere. In part First, "Youth" speaks for itself, both in its triumphant feeling and in its wistful regrets. The second story deals with what may be called the "esprit de corps,"\* the deep fellowship of two young seamen meeting for the first time. Those two tales may be regarded as purely professional. Of the other two in Part First, one, it must be confessed, is written round a ship rather than round a seaman.

The last, trying to render the effect of the fascination of a roving life, has the hard lot of a woman for its principal interest.

Part Two deals with men of a more mature age. There is no denying that in the typhoon which is being wrestled with by Captain Mc Whirr, it is typhoon the takes on almost a symbolic figure. The next story is the story of a married seaman, badly married I admit, whose humanity to a pathetic waif spoils his life for him. The third is the story of a swindle, to be frank, planned on shore, but the sympathetic person is a seaman all right. The last may be looked upon as a story of a seaman's love for a very silent girl; but what I tried partly to suggest there was the existence of certain straightforward characters combining a natural ruthlessness with an unexpected depth of moral delicacy. Falk obeys the law of self-preservation pitilessly; but at the crucial moment of his bizarre love story he will not condescend to dodge the truth — the horrid truth! Finally, let me say that with the exception of "Youth" none of these stories is a record of experience in the absolute sense of the word. As I have said before in another preface, they are all authentic

because they are the product of twenty years of life — my own life. Deliberate invention had little to do with their existence — if they do exist. In each there lurks more than one intention. The facts gleaned from hearsay or experience in the various parts of the globe were but opportunities offered to the writer. What he has done with them is matter for a verdict which must be left to the individual consciences of the readers.



# COOKERY

A Preface to "A Handbook for Cookery for a Small House," By Jessie Conrad

Of all the books produced since the most remote ages by human talents and industry those only that treat of cooking are, from a moral point of view, above suspicion. The intention of every other piece of prose may be discussed and even mistrusted; but the purpose of a cookery book is one and unmistakable. Its object can conceivably be no other than to increase the happiness of mankind.

This general consideration, and also a feeling of affectionate interest with which I am accustomed to view all the actions of the writer, prompt me to set down these few words of introduction for her book. Without making myself responsible for her teaching (I own that I find it impossible to read through a cookery book), I come forward modestly but gratefully as a Living Example of her practice. That practice I dare pronounce most successful. It has been for many priceless years adding to the sum of my daily happiness.

Good cooking is a moral agent. By good cooking I mean the conscientious preparation of the simple food of everyday life, not the more or less skilful concoction of idle feasts and rare dishes. Conscientious cookery is an enemy to gluttony. The trained delicacy of the palate, like a cultivated delicacy of sentiment, stands in the way of unseemly excesses. The decency of our life is for a great part a matter of good taste, of the correct appreciation of what is fine in simplicity. The intimate influence of conscientious cooking by rendering easy the processes of digestion promotes the serenity of mind, the graciousness of thought, and that indulgent view of our neighbours' failings which is the only genuine form of optimism. Those are its titles to our reverence.

A great authority upon North American Indians accounted for the sombre and excessive ferocity characteristic of these

savages by the theory that as a race they suffered from perpetual indigestion. The noble Red Man was a mighty hunter but his wives had not mastered the art of conscientious cookery. And the consequences were deplorable. The Seven Nations around the Great Lakes and the Horse-tribes of the Plains were but one vast prey to raging dyspepsia. The Noble Red Men were great warriors, great orators, great masters of outdoor pursuits;

but the domestic life of their wigwams was coloured by the morose irritability which follows the consumptions of ill-cooked food. The gluttony of their indigestible feasts was a direct incentive to counsels of unreasonable violence. Victims of gloomy imaginings, they lived in abject submission to the wiles of a multitude of fraudulent medicine men — quacks — who haunted their existence with vain promises and false nostrums from the cradle to the grave.

It is to be remarked that the quack of modern civilization, the vendor of patent medicine, preys mainly upon the races of Anglo-Saxon stock who are also great warriors, great orators, mighty hunters, great masters of outdoor pursuits. No virtues will avail for happiness if the righteous art of cooking be neglected by the national conscience. We owe much to the fruitful meditations of our sages, but a sane view of life is, after all, elaborated mainly in the kitchen — the kitchen of the small house, the abode of the preponderant majority of the people. And a sane view of life excludes the belief in patent medicine. The conscientious cook is the natural enemy of the quack without a conscience; and thus his labours make for the honesty, and favour the amenity, of our existence. For a sane view of life can be no other than kindly and joyous, but a believer in patent medicine is steeped in the gloom of vague fears, the sombre attendants of disordered digestion.

Strong in this conviction, I introduce this little book to the inhabitants of the little houses who are the arbiters of the nation's destiny. Ignorant of the value of its methods, I have no doubt whatever as to its intension. It is highly moral. There cannot be the slightest question as to that; for is it not a cookery book?

— the only product of the human mind altogether above suspicion.

In that respect no more need, or indeed can, be said. As regards the practical, intention, I gather that no more than the clear and concise exposition of elementary principles has been the author's aim. And this too is laudable, because modesty is a becoming virtue in an artist. It remains for me only to express the hope that by correctness of practice and soundness of precept this little book will be able to add to the cheerfulness of nations.

# THE FUTURE OF CONSTANTINOPLE

To the Editor of The Times, November 7, 1912.

Sir,

How long the last, Asiatic, phase of the history of the Turks — Sultanate of Damascus or Caliphate of Baghdad — may last, no one can say. That its European chapter is closed few only can doubt. But nobody will deny that a fierce scramble for Constantinople amongst the victors would be a most unseemly and disturbing complication.

The Serbs and Bulgars have no definite historical claim to advance. Greece has that, of course, But it must go very far back, to Byzantium — the old obscure colony. And really I cannot imagine this most democratic of kingdoms desiring a capital other than Athens — the very cradle of democracy, matchless in the wonders of its life and vicissitudes of its history.

The Constantinople of which I think is not the Greek colony. It is the Imperial and symbolic city, one of the refuges of European civilization and the fit object of Europe's care. It should rest at last under the joint guarantee of all the Powers, after its infinitely varied, stormy, and tragic existence of august dominion, desperate wars, and abject slavery. It should find a dignified peace as an independent city, with a small territory, governed by an elected Senate (in which all the races of its population would be represented) and by — I won't call him its Burgomaster — let us say its Patrician, as the executive head. The Balkan Powers might be co-jointly entrusted with his nomination. This would, to a certain extent, secure the share of Slavonic influence, since in the Senate the Greeks, I imagine, would predominate.

The independent Constantinople of my vision would be the splendid spiritual capital of the Balkan Peninsula naturally; its intellectual capital almost certainly. Commercially, too, as a free port, it would have all the chances, though Salonika may turn out a serious competitor. The various capitals of the Balkan States, residences of Courts and centres of political life, need not be jealous

of the unique city which has done so much for the organization of mankind.

From its geographical position the Powers could easily give effective protection to that small municipal state. This plan, of course, implies free Dardanelles (but that seems already certain) and neutralized Bosphorus.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant

J. Conrad.

November, 1912.

Perhaps you will allow me to expand a little the idea thrown out in my letter to The Times. Of its reception at large I know nothing — and perhaps it does not merit any sort of reception. Of course, when one puts down anything in the shape of a proposal one does think over the objections. I am not inclined to believe a notion right and feasible simply because it has occurred to me. I am not of that happy temperament. Still, when the first man who read my letter turned upon me with the words, “So you too, I see, have joined the ideologues,” I believe my cheek blanched.

This was a pretty heavy charge to bring against a man conscious of being guilty of no worse crime than a little imagination. But it was not the severity of the indictment nor yet the knowledge that “ideologue” was the term of utmost scorn in the mouth of Napoleon I which disturbed me. I was not frightened or angry. I was extremely surprised. Ideologue! And I had meant my suggestion to be eminently practical. Practical — that is, strictly in accordance with the fitness of things.

For to any one with a little historical sense of it is not in the fitness of things that Constantinople should become the capital of a Bulgarian kingdom. I do not wish to hurt youthful susceptibilities but frankly the city of the Bosphorus is too great, too illustrious for that fate. The crash of its fall reechoed ominously from one end of Christendom to the other. Its liberation will send a mournful whisper of angry dismay through the Mussulman world. And the event at which we look is historically too momentous for anything but the

indestructible city itself, the jewel of the Balkans and once the only luminous spot through nearly five centuries of European night, to be its commemorative monument.

If this be mere ideology then I am safe to say it has its inciting cause in a perfectly clear view of possible eventualities. Let us piously hope that the dawn of peace for the Peninsula will succeed this lurid conflagration. The waned Crescent is setting for ever; but to a calm observer the dawn seems a

long way yet below the horizon. There will be many questions to be settled between themselves by the Balkan Children of the Cross — not to speak of some other outside Christians with views of their own. And what if amongst other things we were to see before many years a war between Greece and Bulgaria for the possession of Constantinople?

For in fact, historically and racially, Greece alone has a claim to Constantinople. But who is going to hand it over to her now? The Bulgarians are nearer, and, we are given to understand, intoxicated with their success.

But in this success they are not alone; and you cannot cut the crown of victory into four pieces and present each combatant with one fourth of immortal glory. The only sane way is to leave the Imperial City outside the field of dispute by guaranteed agreement. There will be spoil enough — whether cut and dried already or likely to turn out an awkward morsel to carve — to repay the blood and treasure. For as to risks taken, there were none to be proud of in this enterprise.

As to the difficulty of staying the conquering army, that is only the lofty verbiage of elation. A disciplined army can always be stayed. The Russian army was stayed at San Stefano, and its victory, if not so swift and more dearly bought, was quite as complete. And indeed I would not deny to any of the combatants the satisfaction of triumphal entry. It is what comes after that will count.

Let us be sincere in this matter. This game was played for unequal stakes. For Turkey was staking her very head, while the Allies risked no more than a more or less severe blood-letting. We know that if the fortune of war had gone the other way, unanimous

Europe would have stopped it with the status quo declaration and the hand of Turkey would have been stayed. This fact, of which not a single Balkanian of them all ever had the slightest doubt, should make them amenable to reason in the final settlement.

Nobody wishes to rob them of what is won. Constantinople would remain a joint possession, but with a life and dignity of its own, till — till another Eastern Empire comes into being. And I think it would be a rational arrangement. The same objector, while I was trying to parry the charge of being an ideologue, lunged at me with the affirmation that this was “working for Russia.” I confess that I don’t understand that thrust. I think

that for some time the possession of Constantinople has ceased to be one of the immediate aims of Russian policy. But even so, I don't see how I am serving any such dark purpose. It would be certainly easier to make war on Bulgaria and take Constantinople from it than to lay violent hands on a defenceless free town under a European guarantee, to which Russia herself would be a party. Not to mention the fact that such an aggression would be considered a *casus bellino*X only by one but by all the Balkan powers (including Greece), the joint guardians of the city under Europe's sanction.

But as far as Russia's desire of an open Black Sea is concerned, the plan should certainly meet with her approval. I don't think that Russia would like to see numerous batteries of Bulgarian guns on the heights behind the town, sealing up the Bosphorus most effectually even without the help of the Turks on the other side. Indeed, I don't believe Russia would contemplate such a possibility for a moment. And how would Bulgaria (or Greece for that matter) like the obligation of an unarmed capital and the limitations of her sovereign rights in the matter of defence?

A neutralized Bosphorus and a free Constantinople would arouse no envy, no jealousies, and give no offence. Constantinople, a religious and intellectual capital — a common possession, giving no umbrage to any one — a holy city of infinite prestige and incomparable beauty. And I am even thinking here of the Mohammedans. There will be, no doubt, many Muslims left in the peninsula, industrious and peaceable citizens of the Christian states.

To them also Constantinople shall be a holy city; for the religious head of Mohammedans in Europe would be residing there, nominated by the Caliph in Asia, subject to confirmation by the Balkan powers.

It seems to me too that such a solution of the Constantinople problem would soothe to a certain extent the grief and unrest of Mussulmans all the world over. A consideration worth the notice of the European States which have become by conquest masters of Mohammedan territories.

The details of organization, in which all the races of the peninsula would be justly represented, cannot be a matter of insuperable difficulty. Every Bulgarian, Greek, Serb, or Montenegrin entering Constantinople should be able to say: "I am at home here. This ground on which I stand has been liberated by me and my brothers and this Imperial City, free to us all and subject to no one, is the splendid monument of our victory."

# THE CONGO DIARY

## INTRODUCTION

The diary kept by Joseph Conrad in the Congo in 1890, or such of it as has survived (for there is no saying whether there was more or not), is contained in two small black penny notebooks, and is written in pencil. One carries his initials, J.C.K. — Joseph Conrad Korzeniowski. The first entry is dated June 13, 1890, but in the second notebook dates are practically discarded, and it is impossible to say when the last entry was made. And names of places, also, are practically discarded in the second notebook, while abounding in the first, so that, though we can see that the diary was begun at Matadi, we cannot discover where it was ended. The last place mentioned is Lulunga, far up the great sweep of the Congo River to the north of the Equator, but there remain some twenty-four pages of the diary beyond that entry in which no name whatsoever appears. It must, indeed, have been continued into the very heart of that immense darkness where the crisis of his story, "Heart of Darkness," is unfolded. We know from "A Personal Record" that he reached ultimately somewhere to the neighboured of Stanley Falls; and Stanley Falls are farther from Lulunga than Lulunga is from Stanley Pool.

And it is in this same book that we can read how the Polish boy, when nine years of age, looking upon a map of Africa, had put his finger upon its unexplored centre, and had said to himself, "When I grow up I shall go there," Go there he did, and these notebooks are the first expression of his fulfilled resolve.

The map will enable the reader to plot out, with reasonable accuracy, the exact route followed by Conrad on his overland journey, from, Matadi, which is about one hundred miles above the mouth of the Congo, to Nselemba, on or near the southeast corner of Stanley Pool — a distance of probably more than two hundred and fifty miles from Matadi — where it was that he joined the Roides Beiges, as second in command, for the up-river voyage. The places and streams alluded to on this overland journey have been given on the

map in Conrad's own spelling, even where their names have been altered (unless beyond recognition, which may have happened in certain instances)

in existing atlases, many of which have been examined, or can only be placed approximately, owing to their not being mentioned at all. The mapping of the Congo is not in a very advanced state, and, what with the paucity of the entries and the contradictory, nature of the information, precise accuracy is not attainable. All the same, it is easy enough to trace the general line of his march, which lay much nearer the banks of the Congo than lies the railway which now runs between Matadi and Kinshasa of Stanley Pool.

The following is a reproduction of the first notebook alone — not, however, of the list of names, persons, books, stores, and the calculations that fill the last pages — consisting of thirty-two manuscript pages, not all of which are full, and twelve of which are further curtailed by Conrad's sectional drawings of the day's march. The given spelling and abbreviations have been adhered to throughout — they help to heighten its true flavour — but the paragraphing and the punctuation have been freely altered.

I may mention that these two notebooks are now preserved in the library of Harvard University, and that when I was in America in 1925 I saw them again in their new and permanent home and checked the text once more.

As to the appended footnotes, their chief purpose has been to show how closely some of the earlier pages of "Heart of Darkness" are a recollection of Conrad's own Congo journey. This story was serialized in Blackwood's Magazine between February and April, 1899, and I remember Conrad telling me that its 40,000 words occupied only about a month in writing. When we consider the painful, slow labour with which he usually composed, we can perceive how intensely vivid his memories of this experience must have been, and, to judge from the parallel passages, how intensely actual. But then the notebook only goes to prove the almost self-evident contention that much of Conrad's work is founded upon autobiographical remembrance. Conrad himself wrote of this story in his Author's Note to the new edition

of the "Youth" volume in which it appeared: "'Heart of Darkness' is quite as authentic in fundamentals as 'Youth' ...it is experience pushed a little (and only a little) beyond the actual facts of the case." If only he had kept a diary of his meeting and association with Kurtz!

The pages of The Concord Edition of "Youth" — the edition always referred to in the notes — which bear direct reference to the first volume of



the diary, are only three, 70-72, but in these few pages there are an astonishing number of touches strongly reminiscent of the diary. One would argue, indeed, that he must have consulted the diary when writing the story, but Mrs. Conrad assures me that it was not so. Twice had she saved it from the wastepaper basket, and probably by the time "Heart of Darkness" came to be written Conrad had forgotten all about it, or did not dream that it had survived. He never spoke to me of it, and I never heard of its existence until after his death.

The second notebook, which is an entirely technical account of Congo navigation, written, no doubt, in relation to the then river charts, is not printed here, simply because it has no personal or literary interest. It is much longer than the first notebook, and is contained on seventy-nine pages, apart from several pages of rough outline maps. I reproduce a portion of one page, in order to show a sample:

"11. N. (A) Long reach to a curved point. Great quantity of dangerous snags along the stard shore. Follow the slight bend of the shore with caution. The Middle of the Channel is a S — B — [sand bank] always covered. The more northerly of the two islands has its lower end bare of trees covered with grass and light green low bushes, then a low flat, and the upper end is timbered with light trees of a darker green tint."

It will be seen from this passage, which, though typical, is less technical than most, that the second notebook is not really, like the first, so much in the nature of a diary as of a specific aid to navigation. But those who recall the river journey in "Heart of Darkness," with its dangers and its difficulties, will perceive how this notebook, too, has played its special and impersonal

part in the construction of the story.

The title-page of the first note book is almost all torn out, but the title-page of the second reads, "Up-river Book, commenced 3 August 1890, S.S. Roi des Beiges." Long ago, when I was making, from Conrad's dictation, a list of the ship he sailed in, he wrote opposite Roi des Beiges — "Heart of Darkness," "Out-post." And in truth, hints for "Heart of Darkness," reminders of Heart of Darkness, lie thick upon the pages of the first note book, though "An Outpost of Progress" — "the lightest pat of the loot I carried off from Central Africa," to quote his Author's Note to "Tales of Unrest," in which it was published — is only visible in the diary by the implication of the tropical African atmosphere.

No other diary of Conrad's is extant, and I am very sceptical as to whether he ever kept another. He was not at all that type of man, and his piercing memory for essentials was quite sufficient for him to recreate powerfully vanished scenes and figures for the purposes of his work. In 1890, of course, he had published nothing, and though we know that the unfinished MS. (seven chapters) of "Almayer's Folly" accompanied him on his Congo journey — "A Personal Record" describes how it was nearly lost on the river — yet it is doubtful whether he seriously envisaged its appearance in print at a future date. It was largely the breakdown of Conrad's health, due to this very trip, that caused him finally to abandon the sea, and if he had not abandoned the sea, how could he have become a novelist in the accepted sense? Unless we assume that genius must always find means of full expression — a big assumption and quite beyond proof — we owe it really to an accident that Conrad adopted writing as a career. Without this journey, and, therefore, without this diary, where would have been the great Conrad novels?

Thirty-four years to a day from beginning the second notebook, Conrad died — August 3, 1924. Reading it again, I find, as I am continually finding, how many things there are which I would have liked to ask him and never did ask him, and how much I want to know, which I never now can know. Well, that is

always what happens when our friends depart. This diary is only a strange, tantalizing fragment and must eternally remain so. Yet it has a value of its own, both real and romantic, and I am glad to be able to give it to the world.

Richard Curle.

The Diary

Arrived at Matadi<sup>1</sup> on the 13th of June, 1890.

Mr. Gosse, chief of the station (O.K.) retaining us for some reason of his own.

Made the acquaintance of Mr. Roger Casement,<sup>2</sup> which I should consider as a great pleasure under any circumstances and now it becomes a positive piece of luck. Thinks, speaks well, most intelligent and very sympathetic..

Feel considerably in doubt about the future. Think just now that my life amongst the people (white) around here cannot be very comfortable. Intend avoid acquaintances as much as possible.

Through Mr. R.C. have made the acquaintance<sup>80</sup> of Mr. Underwood, the Manager of the English Factory (Hatton & Cookson) in Kalla Kalla. Avfle com” — - hearty and kind. Lunched there on the 21st.

24th. Gosse and R.C. gone with a large lot of ivory down to Boma. On G. [‘s] return intend to start up the river. Have been myself busy packing ivory in casks. Idiotic employment. Health good up to now.

1On his voyage from Europe presumably.

•2Afterwards the notorious Sir Roger Casement, who was hanged for treason on August 3, 1916 — the very date of which Conrad died eight years later. At this Casement was in the economy of a commercial firm in the Congo. In 1898 he became British Consul in the Congo Free State.

Wrote to Simpson, to Gov. B., to Purd.,<sup>1</sup> to Hope,<sup>2</sup> to Capt. Froud,<sup>3</sup> and to Mar.<sup>4</sup> Prominent characteristic of the social life here; people speaking ill of each other.<sup>5</sup>

Saturday, 28th June. Left Matadi with Mr. Harou<sup>6</sup> and a caravan of 31 men.<sup>7</sup> Parted with Casement in a very friendly manner. Mr. Gosse saw us off as far as the State station. First halt, M’poso. 2 Danes in Company.<sup>8</sup> Sunday], 29th. Ascent of Pataballa sufficiently fatiguing. Camped at 11 a.m. at Nsoke river. Mosquitos [always spelt thus].

Monday, 30th. To Congo da Lemba after passing black rocks. Long ascent. Harou giving up.<sup>9</sup> Bother, Camp bad. Water far. Dirty. At night Harou better.

Tuesday 1st July. Left early in a heavy mist, marching towards Lufu river. Part route through forest on the sharp slope

‘Probably Captain Purely, an acquaintance of Conrad.

2Conrad’s old friend, now living in Esser, Mr. G.F.W. Hope. In 1900 Conrad dedicated “Lord Jim” to Mr. and Mrs. Hope,” with grateful affection after many years of friendship.”

^he then Secretary of the London Ship-Master’s Society. See “A Personal Record” (Concord Edition), p.7. “Dear Captain Froud — it is impossible not to pay him the tribute of affectionate familiarity at this distance of years — had very sound views as to the advancement of knowledge and status for the whole body of the officers of the mercantile marine.”

4Probably Marguerite Poradowska, his aunt.

sThis was also a failing of the white men at the “Central Station” in “Heart of Darkness.”

“Harou was an official of the Etat Independant du Congo Beige.

‘Compare “Heart of Darkness,” p.70: “Next day I left that station at last with a caravan of 60 men for a 200-mile tramp.” On 13 out of the 19 travelling days taken by Conrad on this overland journey he kept a record of the distance covered, and it totals 197<sup>^</sup> miles.

‘Curiously enough, the identity of these two Danes was discovered by Monsieur G. Jean-Aubry in Brussels early in 1925. Not knowing that they were mentioned in the diary, he omitted to take names of particulars.

“He seems to have been constantly unwell and one may compare “Heart of Darkness,” p.71: “I had a white companion too, not a bad chap, but rather too fleshly, and with the exasperating habit of fainting on the hot hillsides, miles away from the least bit of shade or water.”

of a high mountain. Very long descent. Then market place from where short walk to the bridge (good) and camp. V.G. Bath. Clear river. Feel well. Harou all right. 1st chicken, 2 p. [m.] No sunshine to-day.

Wednesday, 2nd July. Started at 5:30 after a sleepless night. Country more open. Gently undulating hills. Road good, in perfect order. (District of Lukungu.) Great market at 9.30. Bought eggs and chickens. Feel not well to-day. Heavy cold in the head. Arrived at 11 at Banza Manteka. Camped on the market place. Not well enough to call on the missionary. Water scarce and bad. Camp<sup>9</sup> place dirty. 2 Danes still in Company.

Thursday, 3rd July. Left at 6 a.m. after a good night’s rest. Crossed a low range of hills and entered a broad, valley, or rather plain, with a break in the middle. Met an offer of the State inspecting. A few minutes afterwards saw at a camp<sup>3</sup> place the dead body of a Backongo. Shot?<sup>1</sup> Horrid smell.

Crossed a range of mountains, running N.W. — S.E. by a low pass. Another broad flat valley with a deep ravine through the centre. Clay and gravel. Another range parallel to the first mentioned, with a chain of low foothills running close to it. Between the two came to camp on the banks of the Luinzono river. Camp<sup>9</sup> place clean. River clear. Gov<sup>1</sup> Zanzibari<sup>2</sup> with register. Canoe. 2 Danes camp<sup>3</sup> on the other bank. Health good.

General tone of landscape gray-yellowish (dry grass) with reddish patches (soil) and clumps of dark green vegetation scattered sparsely about. Mostly in steep gorges between the high mountains or in ravines cutting the plain.<sup>3</sup>

‘Compare “Heart of Darkness,” p.71: “Once a white man in an unbuttoned uniform camping on the path ... was looking after the upkeep of the road, he declared. Can’t say I saw any road or any upkeep, unless the

body of a middle-aged negro with a bullet-hole in the forehead, upon which I absolutely stumbled three miles further on, may be considered as a permanent improvement."

2Compare "Heart of Darkness," p.71, in which he mentioned his meeting with a white man, who was accompanied by "an armed escort of lank Zanzibaris."

3In "Heart of Darkness," p.70, the country of the march is described as "a stamped-in network of paths spreading over the empty land, through long grass, through burnt grass, thickets, down and up hilly ravines, up and down stony hills ablaze with heat."

Noticed Palma Christi — Oil Palm. Very straight, tall and thick trees in some places. Name not known to me. Villages quite invisible. Infer their existence from calabashes [s/c] suspended to palm trees for the "Malafu." Good many caravans and travellers. No women, unless on the market place.

Bird notes charming. One especially a flute-like note. Another, kind of "boom" resembling [s/c] the very distant baying of a bound. Saw only pigeons and a few green parroquets. Very small and not many. No birds of prey seen by me.<sup>1</sup>

Up to 9 a.m. sky clouded and calm. Afterwards gentle breeze from the Nn generally and sky clearing. Nights damp and cool. White mists on the hills up about half way. Water effects very beautiful this morning. Mists generally raising before sky clears.

Distance 15 miles. General direction N.N.E. — S.S.W. Friday, 4th July Left camp at 6.a.m. after a very unpleasant night. Marching across a chain of hills and then in a maze of hills. At 8:15 opened out into an undulating plain. Took bearings of a break in the chain of mountains on the other side. Bearing N.N.E. Road passes through that. Sharp ascents up very steep hills not very high. The higher mountains recede sharply and show a low hilly country. At 9:30 market place. At 10 passed R. Lukanga and at 10:30 camped on the Mpwe R.

To-day's march. Direction N.N. E.1/2 — N. Dist<sup>®</sup> 13 miles. Saw another dead body lying by the path in an attitude of meditative repose.<sup>2</sup>

In the evening three women, of whom one albino, passed our camp; horrid chalky white with pink blotches; red eyes; red hair; features very negroid and ugly. Mosquitos. At night when the moon rose heard shouts and drumming in distant villages.<sup>3</sup> Passed a bad night.

‘These natural history observations are curious, as Conrad practically never should the slightest interest in such subjects.

‘The most “Conradesque” phrase in the diary.

3Compare “Heart of Darkness,” p.71: “Perhaps so some quiet night the tremor of far-off drums, sinking, swelling, a tremor vast, faint; a sound weird, appealing, suggestive, and wild — and perhaps with as profound a meaning as the sound of bells in a Christian country.”

Saturday, 5th July. Left at 6:15. Morning cool, even cold, and very damp. Sky densely overcast. Gentle breeze from N.E. Road through a narrow plain up to R. Kwilu. Swift flowing and deep, 50 yds. wide. Passed in canoes. After\* up and down very steep hills interested by deep ravines. Mains chain of heights running mostly N.W. — S.E. or W. and E. at times. Stopped at Manyamba Camp3 place bad — in a hollow — water very indifferent. Tent set at 10:15. N.N.E. Dist00 12 m.

Today fell into a muddy puddle — beastly! The fault of the man that carried me. After camp® went to small stream, bathed and washed clothes. Getting jolly well sick of this fun.

Tomorrow expect a long march to get to Nsona, 2 days from Manyanga. No sunshine to-day.

Sunday 6th July. Started at 5:40. The route at first hilly, then, after a sharp descent, traversing a broad plain. At the end of it a large market place. At 10 sun came out. After leaving the market passed another plain, then, walking on the crest of a chain of hills, passed 2 villages and at 11 arrived at Nsona. Village invisible.

Direction about N.N.E. Distance 18 miles.

In this camp (Nsona) there is a good camp9 place. Shady, water far and not very good. This night no mosquitos owing to large fires, all round our tent. Afternoon very close; night clear and starry.

Monday 7th July. Left at 6, after a good night’s rest, on the road to Inkandu, which is some distance past Lukunga Govt, station. Route very accidented.1 Succession of round steep hills. At times walking along the crest of a chain of hills. Just before Lukunga our carriers took a wide sweep to the southward till the station bore N\*. Walking through long grass for Vh hours. Crossed a broad river about 100 feet wide and 4 deep.

After another V2 hour’s walk through manioc plantations in good order rejoined our route to the Ed of the Lukunga sta00, walking along an

undulating plain towards the Inkandu market on a hill. Hot, thirsty and tired. At 11 arrived on the m1"1 place. About 200 people. Business

'An odd Gallicism. Conrad knew French long before he knew English; moreover, he was naturally talking much French at this time.

brisk. No water; no campfl place. After remaining for one hour left in search of a resting place. Row with carriers. No water. At last about 1 vfe p.m. camped on an exposed hill side near a muddy creek. No shade. Tent on a slope. Sun heavy. Wretched.

Direction N.E. by N. — Distance 22 miles.

Night miserably cold. No sleep. Mosquitos.

Tuesday, 8th July. Left at 6 a.m. About ten minutes from camp left main Gov1 path for the Manyanga track. Sky overcast. Rode up and down all the time, passing a couple of villages. The country presents a confused wilderness of hills, landships on their sides showing red. Fine effect of red hill covered in places by dark green vegetation. hour before beginning the descent got a glimpse of the Congo. Sky clouded.

To-day's march — 3 h. General direction N. by E. DisP 9M> miles.

Arrived at Manyanga at 9 a.m. Received most kindly by Messrs. Heyn and Jaeger. Most comfortable and pleasant halt.

Stayed here till the 25. Both have been sick. Most kindly care taken of us. Leave with sincere regrets.

Friday the 25th July, 1890. Left Manyanga at 21/a p.m. with plenty of hammock carriers. H. lame and not in very good form. Myself ditto but not lame. Walked as far as Mafiela and camped — 2 h.

Saturday 26th. Left very early. Road ascending all the time. Passed villages. Country seems thickly inhabited. At 11 arrived at large market place. Left at noon and camped at 1.p.m.

General direction E Yz N-W1/2 S. Sun visible at 8 a.m. Very hot. Distance 18 miles.

Sunday, 27th. Left at 8.a.m. Sent luggage carriers straight on to Luasi, and went ourselves round by the Mission of Sutili. Hospitable reception by Mrs. Comber. All the missio, absent. The looks of the whole establishment eminently civilized and very refreshing to see after the lots of tumbled down hovels in which the State & Company agents are content to live. Fine buildings. Position on a hill. Rather breezy.

Left at 3.p.m. At the first heavy ascent met Mr. Davis, Miss.,

returning from a preaching trip. Rev. Bentley away in the south with his wife. This being off the road, no section given.<sup>1</sup>

Distance traversed about 15 miles. Gen. direction E. N. E.

At Luasi we get on again on to the gov<sup>1</sup> road.

Camped at 41A p. m. With Mr. Heche in company. To-day no sunshine. Wind remarkably cold. Gloomy day.

Monday, 28th. Left camp at 6:30 after breakfasting with Heche. Road at first hilly. Then walking along the ridges of hill chains with valleys on both sides. The country more open and there is much more trees<sup>2</sup> growing in large clumps in the ravines.

Passed Nzungi and camped, 11, on the right bank of the Ngoma, a rapid little river with rocky bed. Village on a hill to the right.

General direction E. N. E. — Distance 14 miles.

No sunshine. Gloomy cold day. Squalls.

Tuesday 29th Left camp at 7, after a good night's rest. Continuous ascent; rather easy at first. Crossed wooded ravines and the river Lunzadi by a very decent bridge. At 9 met Mr. Louette escorting a sick agent of the compy back to Matadi. Looking very well. Bad news from up the river. All the steamers disabled - one wrecked.<sup>3</sup> Country wooded. At 10:30 camped at Inkissi.

General direction E. N. E. — Dist<sup>4</sup> 15 miles.

Sun visible at 6:30. Very warm day.

Inkissi River very rapid; is about 100 yards broad. Passage in canoes. Banks wooded very densely, and valley of the river rather deep, but very narrow.

To-day did not set the tent, but put up in Gov: shimbek.

'Sections of the day's marches, with numerous names on them, were given under the following dates: July 3rd. 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th. 25th, 28th, 29th, 30th, 31st, August 1st.

'One of the few un-English phrases in the diary. By 1890 Conrad had been a British subject for six years, but he never learnt the language until he was grown up.

<sup>4</sup>Compare "Heart of Darkness," p.72: "One of them [the white men at the Central Station] . . . informed me with great volubility and many digressions ... that my steamer was at the bottom of the river."

Zanzibar!<sup>1</sup> in charge — very obliging. Met ripe pineapple for the first time. On the road to-day passed a skeleton tied up to a post. Also white



man's grave — no name — heap of stones in the form of a cross. Health good now.

Wednesday, 30th. Left at 6 a.m. intending to camp at Kinfumu. Two hours sharp walk brought me to Nsona na Nsefe. Market. V2 hour after Harou arrived very ill with billious [s/c\ attack and fever. Laid him down in Gov'-shimbek.

Does of ipeca. Vomiting bile in enormous quantities. At 11 gave him 1 gramme of quinine and lots of hot tea. Hot fit ending in heavy perspiration. At 2 p.m. put him in hammock and started for Kinfumu. Row. with carriers all the way.<sup>2</sup> Harou suffering much through the jerks of the hammock. Camped at a small stream. At 4 harou better; fever gone.

General direction N.E. by E. V2 E. Distance 13 miles.

Up till noon sky clouded and strong N.W. wind very chilling. From 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. sky clear and a very hot day. Expect lots of bother with carriers tomorrow. Had them all called and made a speech, which they did not understand.<sup>3</sup> They promise good behaviour.

Thursday, 31st. Left at 6. Sent harou ahead, and followed in V2 an hour.<sup>4</sup>

Road presents several sharp ascents, and a few others easier but rather long. Notice in places sandy surface soil instead of hard clay as heretofore; think however that the layer of sand is not very thick and that the clay would be found under it. Great difficulty in carrying Harou. Too heavy — bother.<sup>5</sup> Made two

See note, p.163.

<sup>2</sup>Compare "Heart of Darkness," p.71: "Then he [the white man with him] got fever, and had to be carried in a hammock slung under a pole. As he weighed sixteen stone I had no end of rows with the carriers."

'Compare "Heart of Darkness," p.7:"... one evening, I made a speech in English with gestures, not one of which was lost to the sixty pairs of eyes before me."

'Compare "Heart of Darkness," pp.71-2:"... the next morning I started the hammock off in front all right."

<sup>5</sup>Compare "Heart of Darkness," p.71: "... he [the white man with him] weighed sixteen stone..."

long halts to rest the carriers. Country wooded in valleys and on many of the ridges.

At 2:30 p.m. reached Luila at last, and camped on right bank. Breeze from S.W.

General direction of march about N.E. Vz E. distance, es^ 16 miles.

Congo very narrow and rapid. Kinzilu rushing in. A short distance up from the mouth, fine waterfall. Sun rose red. From 9 a.m. infernally hot day. Harou very little better. Self rather seedy. Bathed. Luila about 60 feet wide. Shallow.

Friday, 1st of August, 1890. Left at 6:30 a.m. after a very indifferently passed night. Cold, heavy mists. Road in long ascents and sharp dips all the way to Mfumu Mbe. After leaving there, a long and painful climb up a very steep hill; then a long descent to Mfumu Kono, where a long halt was made. Left at 12:30 p.m. towards Nselemba. Many ascents. The aspect of the country entirely changed. Wooded hills with openings. Path almost all the afternoon thro'a forest of light trees with dense undergrowth.

After a halt on a wooded hillside, reached Nselemba at 4:10 p.m. Put up at Gov1 shanty. Row between the carriers and a man, stating himself in gov! employ, about a mat. Blows with sticks raining hard. Stopped it.

Chief came with a youth about 13 suffering from gun-shot wound in the head. Bullet entered about an inch above the right eyebrow, and came out a little inside the roots of the hair, fairly in the middle of the brow in a line with the bridge of the nose. Bone not damaged apparently. Gave him a little glycerine to put on the wound made by the bullet on coming out.

Harou not very well. Mosquitos — frogs — beastly! Glad to see the end of this stupid tramp. Feel rather seedy. Sun rose red. Very hot day. Wind S\*.

General direction of march N.E. by N. Distance about 17 miles.<sup>1</sup>

'The Journey from Matadi to this point by Stanley Pool took nineteen travelling days. Compare "Heart of Darkness," p.72: "On the fifteen day I came in sight of the big river [Congo] again and hobbled into the Central Station."



*Canterbury Cemetery, Kent — Conrad's final resting place*



Conrad's grave

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